

Bathampton Down Stone Circles

The full report on the search for the Bathampton Down Stone Circles is available on the BACAS website

The presence of a stone circle on Bathampton Down was first clearly reported by the Reverend Prebendary Scarth in 1857. He wrote that the remains of the stone circles were 'similar in appearance to those of Stanton Drew' but that about 30 had been removed, in living memory, to parks or gardens. Tratman, a famous Bristol prehistoric archaeologist and spelaeologist, reviewing the lost stone circles of North Somerset, suggested their site location on Bathampton Down. And then a dowser, Mr Paul Daw, claimed to have found two circles which was the stimulus to one of the authors, John Oswin, to carry out a geophysical survey.

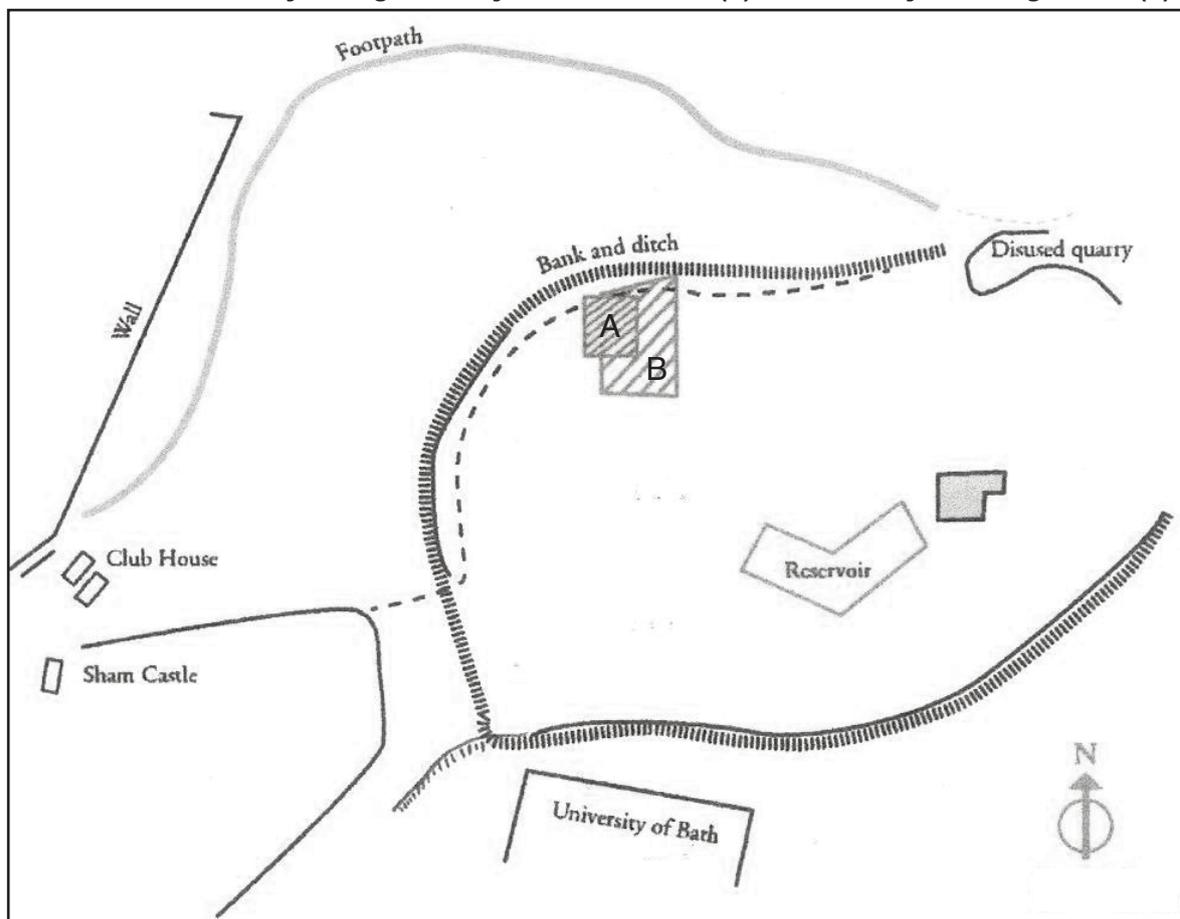
Rod Thomas and John Oswin

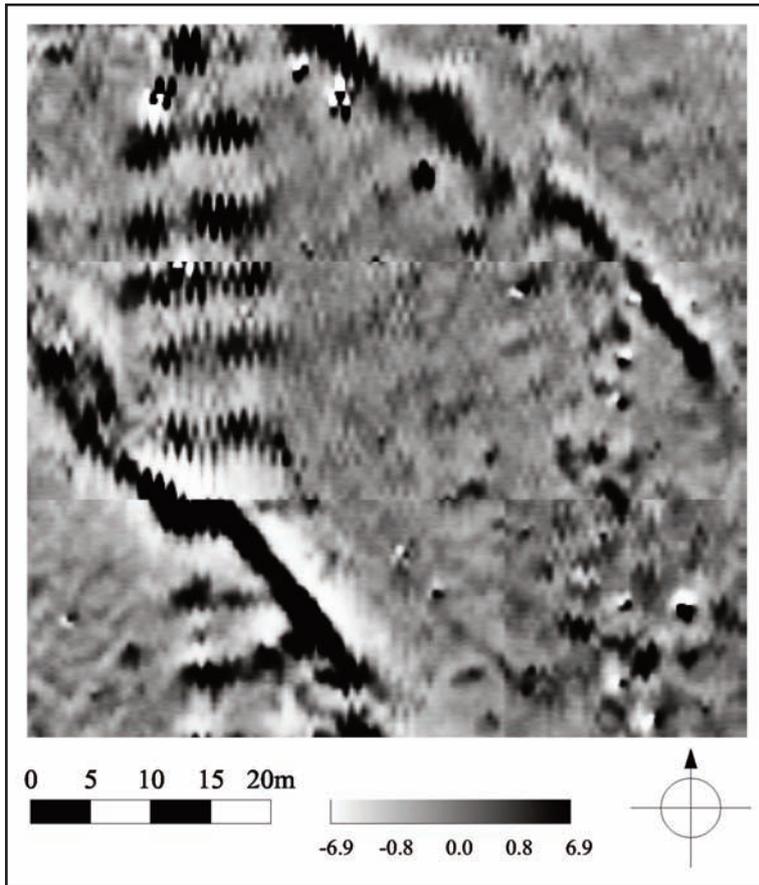
The position is inside the large early Iron Age hilltop enclosure, on a field used for haymaking and close to the practice area of the Golf Club, who own most of the Down. It is a site for nesting skylarks and so it is out of bounds in the Spring and Summer. Also, because the enclosure is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, we should have obtained a licence from English Heritage; we have apologised for this, and they have accepted. The position of the survey is shown in Figure 1.

The Geophysical Survey

The survey was begun in November 2010, but because of freezing weather it was not completed until February 2011. Magnetometry was undertaken in a 60m grid, and with the loan of a golf buggy from Bath Golf Club for the equipment. Resistance was carried out in a 40m square, and then because of the findings it was extended to an area of about one hectare. Resistivity profiles were taken to obtain depth information, and the Society's Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) was used in a 40m square.

Figure 1
Sketch of the area surveyed. Magnetometry in the small block (A) and resistivity in the larger block (B).





The magnetometry showed the boundaries of the prehistoric field system, which cover much of the Down (see Figure 2). There was a possible line of post holes and a very interesting localised area of disturbance in the southeast corner of the grid which was reminiscent of that previously obtained in the South West Circle at Stanton Drew. The first 40m square of resistance survey strongly suggested a group of large stones in an oval shape, in the area of this disturbance. It also confirmed the field boundaries and showed possible rectangular enclosures or buildings (see Figure 3). The resistance survey was extended to look for a similar pattern but this was not found. There were some large amorphous areas suggestive of underlying rock strata close to the surface.

Figure 2
Results of the magnetometer survey area (A).

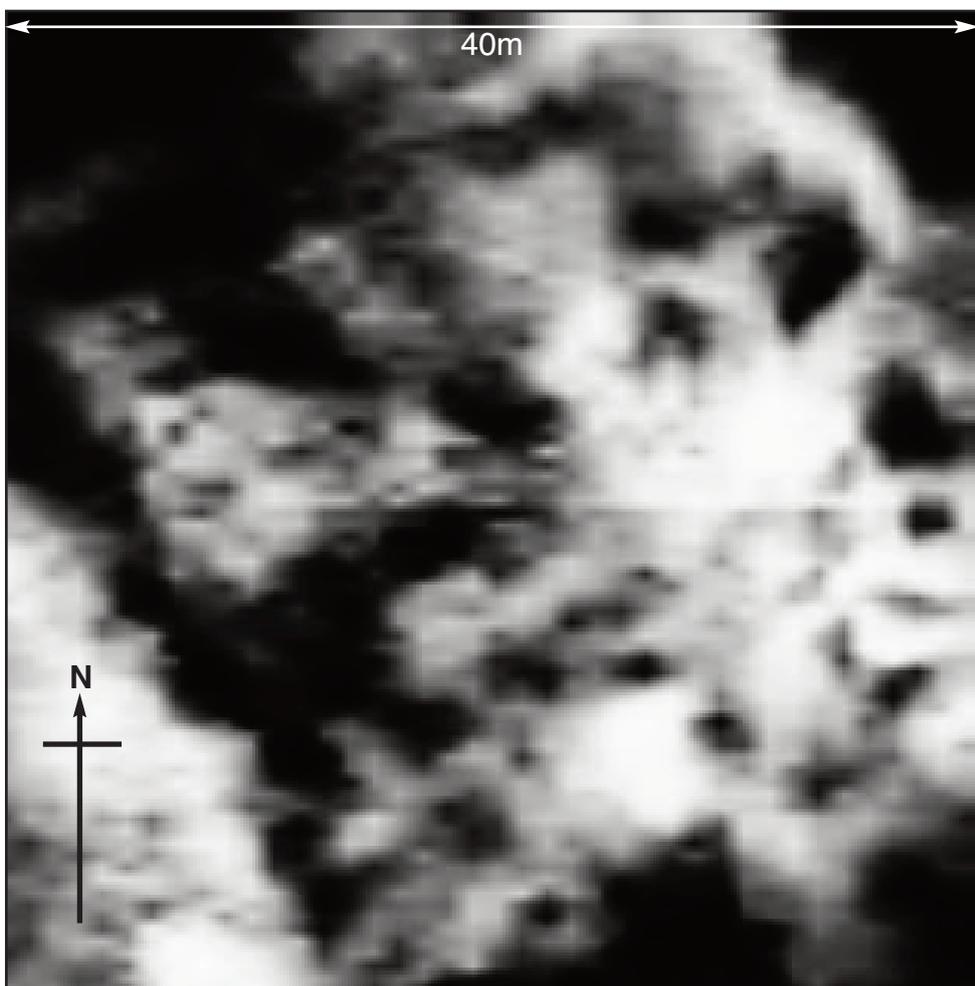


Figure 3
Results of the resistance survey of the original 40m x 40m square within area (B). The southeast part shows the group of stone signals.

Resistivity profiling, which is more time consuming, was carried out through the apparent oval pattern of stones. It appeared that two of the features were discrete stone signals. The others were probably from wall footings or underlying rock strata (see Figure 4). The GPR gave a rather cluttered picture but did show two discrete stones.

Discussion

On the basis of these findings, i.e. two deep discrete stones, we think we may have found part of the stone circle monument. However the data is not conclusive, and the dowsing results were not confirmed. The hilltop setting is uncommon for stone circles but there are other examples at Rollright, Kingston Russell and Arbor Low.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Bath Golf Club for their support, English Heritage for their forbearance, and Owen Dicker, Roger Wilkes and Lawrie Scott for their help with the survey.

Figure 4
Some of the profiles laid over the resistance plot within a 40m x 40m square and turned through 90 degrees. A colour version of this image can be found in the full report on the BACAS website.

