

# Battlebury Hillfort

## A BACAS excursion to a Hillfort on Salisbury Plain

A walk on this Wiltshire hill fort (ST898456) was arranged for a Sunday afternoon in May when we hoped to see, in addition to archaeology, some splendid orchids. However, it could have been October as the weather was wet and windy. Richard Osgood, the senior historic advisor to the Ministry of Defence in the Salisbury Plain area, was our guide for the afternoon.

### Jackie Thompson

The Salisbury Plain military training area is about the size of the Isle of Wight and has not been under intensive cultivation for the past hundred years, making it a well protected landscape. The chalk grassland is an artificial feature, the product of livestock grazing which continues to the present day, and extends for 30km to the east, with Battlebury lying at its western edge. There are 5 hillforts and 307 scheduled monuments on the Plain including Neolithic long barrows and Bronze Age round barrows.

Battlebury is a bivallate hillfort and encloses an area of 23.5 acres. Three round barrows were preserved during its construction, the ramparts being built around them. Sir Richard Colt Hoare recorded digging one of them in the 1820s, finding a female skeleton with a glass bead. We walked around its perimeter, beginning at the West gate and moving round to the South, overlooking the army camp which houses the Yorkshire Regiment. A modern bench sits on the edge of the ramparts looking down on the camp, a memorial to six soldiers of the regiment who were all killed together in Afghanistan in March 2012.

Further along to the South-East, the view is of another hill fort, Scratchbury Hill, which is approximately 1.5km away with Middle Hill between them. On Middle Hill is a round barrow, well defined strip lynchets and a clump of trees which are thought to show arborglyphs or bark carvings possibly made by American soldiers posted in the area during the Second World War.

The soldier poet Siegfried Sassoon wrote of Scratchbury Camp in 1915; his family lived nearby in Heytesbury. Although Battlebury and Scratchbury are close together, it is not known whether they were constructed at the same time; a similar situation to the hillforts of Hod Hill and Hambledon Hill in Dorset. Had the visibility been better we might have seen long barrows in the distance – they are certainly there.

Moving round to the North-East, the dominant feature below is a wide tank road made to protect the landscape, cutting across the countryside. Prior to its construction, as with all modern building work, an archaeological survey had to be undertaken and evidence of Late Bronze Age and Iron Age round houses with post holes and hearths was found. On the far side of this road the military have

for decades undertaken shooting practice into the rising ground.

This completed the circuit. The hill fort is accessible to the public and on a fine clear day I can confirm it is, as Sassoon thought, a glorious place to be.



**Figure 1**  
Battlebury, a bivallate hillfort enclosing an area of 23.5 acres