

STOKELEIGH IRON AGE CAMP

Leigh Woods, North Somerset

A Site Introduction

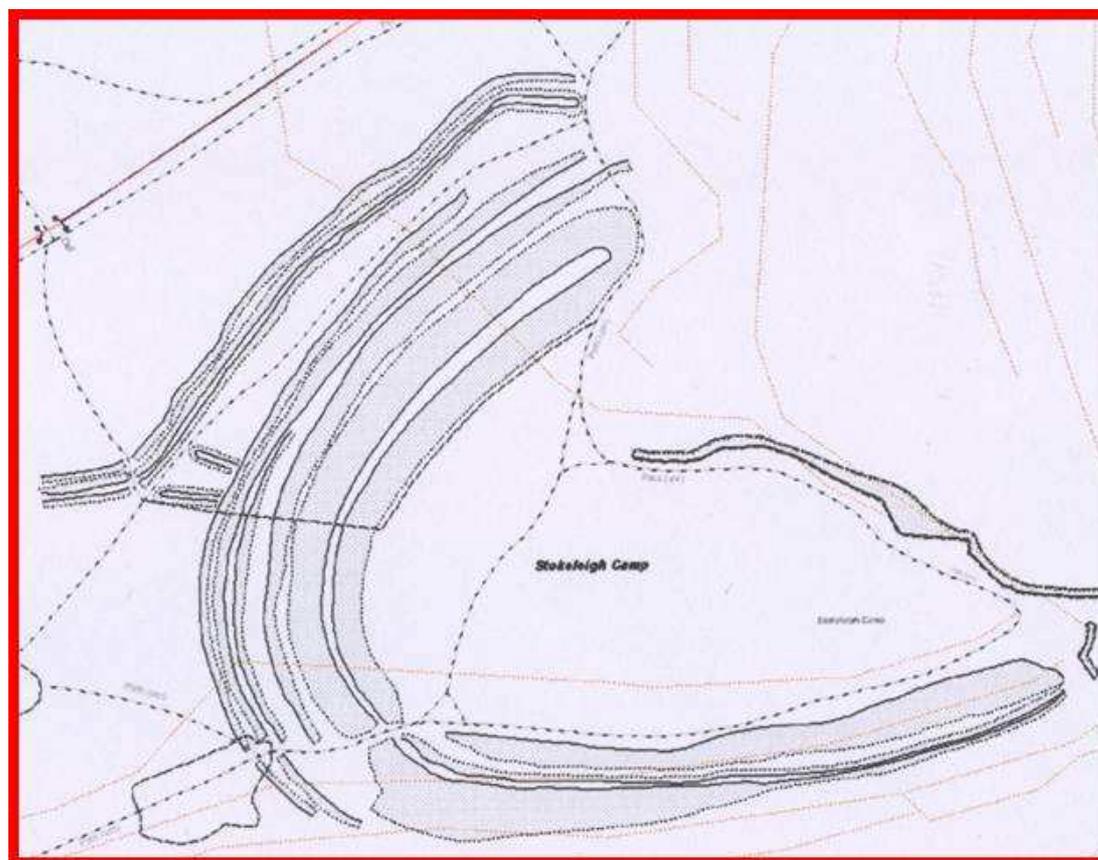


Fig 1 Reproduced as a Section from the Stokeleigh OS Map 2005 1:2500
Courtesy of the National Trust (Wessex Region), Leigh Woods Office, Bristol

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There is an extensive number of diverse hillforts scattered across the West of England. The phased National Mapping Programme is currently pinpointing even more of these. Stokeleigh is the classic example of one type of hillfort construction popular during the first millennium BC, a 'promontory' fort. It is particularly significant in that its sturdy defences are still fairly well-preserved. What is even more remarkable about this impressive site is not only that it remains relatively unscathed

but that so little is known or has been written about it.

As a result, the National Trust in collaboration with English Heritage and Natural England has recently taken the welcome decision to restore its original profile. Particular credit must go to Mr Bill Morris, Head Warden at the NT Office in Leigh Woods and his team, for the tremendous work done in clearing the camp of its overgrowth, not to mention his own support for this project. It has been a pleasure to watch the site 'unfold'. It has made possible the kind of accompanying photographic evidence here as never before. We can now for the first time begin to catch a glimpse of the hillfort's former character, 'the finished product'. This should provide a unique opportunity for the necessary archaeological investigation which previous generations have never been able to take advantage of. It is true that the extent and significance of the work ahead may well defy any premature judgements here. However an important new incentive has now been provided into uncovering and decoding what will in time demonstrate Stokeleigh to be the fine site which it is.*

*All photographs displayed in these pages are taken by courtesy of the above

Stokeleigh Camp (GR: 559733) is dramatically situated on a promontory high over the Avon Gorge. Extending over some 7.5 acres, it stands at its southern end over 300 feet above the river. This flat outcrop of carboniferous limestone, with its steep or scarped slopes around the perimeter, offers a superb vantage point and impressive natural defences. Its precipitous cliffs to the east may have significantly eroded over time into the gully below, but in their day they made the northern end of the camp more defensible. The southern edge is protected by the steep contours of Nightingale Valley. Together with its strong fortifications, there is a certain magnanimity to the siting, the design and the scale of Stokeleigh, all of which not only assist in dating it but invite admiration. This is still the case today and would certainly be even more so then. Above all, the fort displays a striking military integrity and reminds us of its former importance. Well might William Barrett (1789) conclude that ***“Art and nature joined to render it a most impregnable fortress..”*** (P18)



Fig 2 The two Main Ramparts - Western side.

At its western end, and some 330 yards (est.) back from the forward cliff spur, the promontory at Stokeleigh was cordoned off *'at the neck'*. Initially this may have meant only a 'barricade and a trench'. More robust defences would subsequently be built across this vulnerable landward side from which massed attack might come. These took the form of a series of defensive lines, two fully concentric sets of earthworks or ramparts, each with accompanying ditches. A further one also briefly accompanies the others south from the northern end, before turning westwards and ending sharply. The fort is therefore *multivallate*. In appearance, these defences describe the outer perimeter of a crescent or ark lending the whole camp a characteristic half moon aspect. (Fig 3)

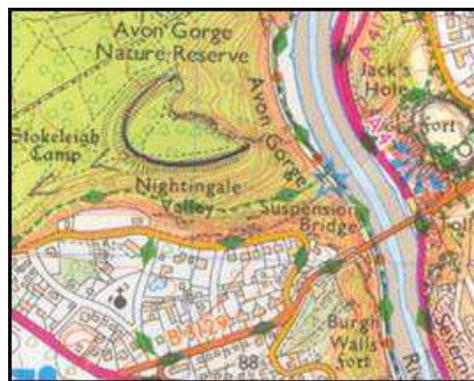


Fig 3 OS Map 154, 2005, 1:25000

Doubtless in use on a makeshift basis as far back as Neolithic times, Stokeleigh comes into focus as a fort sometime 'after the late third century BC' (J.Haldane, 1975,P61) during the late Pre-Roman Iron Age. In an earlier, wilder era, the site may have functioned in its own right and operated as a raiding post. Those were treacherous times and much of Iron Age England was fraught with petty warfare. To be effective, the hillfort would have required a great deal of labour and time to build. Certainly the first rampart would take several intensive years initially. Progressively, fortifications would become more sophisticated until by the 2nd century BC some of the latest building ideas would have been incorporated. Increasingly the fort would have served both as a settlement and typically as a military refuge point in times of danger. Local tribesfolk from the immediate area would have crowded in with their cattle when threatened by marauding bands.

At some stage, Stokeleigh may have become the stronghold of some hereditary clan chief. He would look to the tribal leadership, initially *Durotrigian*, whose regional capital may have been one of the larger camps nearby, as at *Dolebury* (GR 450590) a little further south. As one in a series of similar outlying forts in the vicinity, Stokeleigh's role would never only have been narrowly defensive but also strategic. It may have served as an advance look-out post or even as a 'command and control centre' for wider military operations (Fig 4).

In this way, local or confederate tribal agreements, like major alliances today, would serve to keep the peace. When this was the case, then together with *Burwalls* (GR: 563729) immediately south and its 'twin' on the other side of the Gorge, *the Clifton Iron Age Camp* (GR: 566733), *Stokeleigh*, the largest and best preserved of the three, would conveniently monitor and dominate access through the Avon at a critical point.(Figs 3 & 4) When not a rival, then this would normally also have made *Cadbury Camp* (GR:454725) just a few miles along the ridge, another likely military partner. Its own high position also gave it a key strategic significance. It stood guard over the approaches to the Avon, the Severn Estuary and the seaborne threat from the fierce *Silures* of South Wales; as also over the North Somerset levels and the Mendips. Needless to say the frequency of these forts in our area serves as one indication that it was fairly populous and that such defensive measures were necessary. (Figs 4 & 5)



Fig 4 OS Map 'Ancient Britain' 2005 1:625000

From the 1st century BC onwards, there was growing tension between the native *Durotriges* of Somerset and Dorset, and the encroaching *Belgae* (Fig 5). These represented 'the English before the English', a latest wave of continental incursion. At Stokeleigh, Haldane (1975) notes from his excavations that there is artefactual evidence for both tribes, pottery in particular. However Belgic influences clearly predominate as we move into the 1st century AD. (P62). This might, of course, indicate a connection with

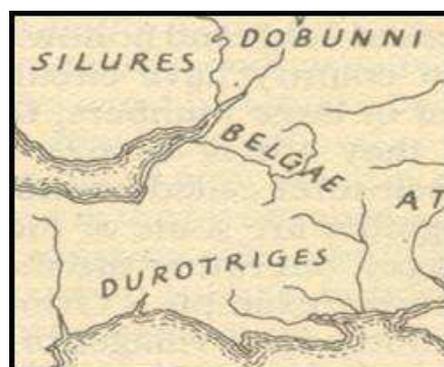


Fig 5 Local Iron Age Tribes around the Severn Estuary during the 1st Century BC.

local trade routes. Yet this was an age however when the capture (and recapture) of strongholds was not uncommon and such traumatic episodes did occur. *It seems reasonable to suggest therefore that Stokeleigh together with its neighbouring forts may well have succumbed to Belgic westward expansion and occupation by the time of the Claudian invasion in AD 44.*

Many native forts in the west of England were abandoned after the Roman Conquest but not apparently Stokeleigh. Haldane (1975) maintains that there is some evidence that the camp was at least intermittently occupied into the late Roman period until 'the beginning of the late 4th century AD'. He concludes that while occupation did end here for a time after the arrival of the Romans, it resumed again after the middle of the 3rd century AD. Bronze Roman coins together with pottery, characteristic of this period, have been found. It does not appear however that any 'structures of great importance' were constructed. This suggests that the site may have been occupied at this time by 'squatters' or in response to temporarily dangerous conditions (P63).

According to Barrett (P18) however, Stokeleigh would actually have been garrisoned as part of a general Roman military programme for the whole area. In this way he can comment on what he considers to be certain stone remains from the Roman era. These would constitute a line of defences and signal stations running westwards from Stokeleigh and skirting the Failand Ridge as far as Clevedon. (P19) (Fig 4)

K.S.Gardner examines the possibility of a connection between Stokeleigh and the West Wansdyke of a little further south. The Wansdyke served to divide warring tribal kingdoms or provide defence against

the Saxon invaders of the fifth century onwards. (Fig 4) The case for this connection appears uncertain.

THE INNER CAMP AND MAIN RAMPART

The actual extent of the inner camp at Stokeleigh may not be particularly large and does not qualify it as a major stronghold. Indeed the sheer scale of the surrounding fortifications makes this generally level interior plateau look modest by comparison. Its defences were designed for dangerous times and indicate something of the scale and intensity of anticipated assaults. The fort may never have enjoyed regional importance, but these defences in themselves clearly argue the existence of settlement, however limited, together with local status. Unsung short-lived generations must have been played out the human saga behind these walls. (Fig 6) Finds of worked bones, domestic pottery, bronze and iron implements, baked clay and stonework are in evidence. (Haldane,1975).



Fig 6 The Inner Camp and Main Rampart

‘The Southern Terrace’

From the inside, the inner camp is effectively contained by a single rampart, the longest, highest, and most considerable of them all. It begins at the fort’s south-eastern extremity almost at the cliff spur. (This provides the best observation and most likely signal point in the camp offering a panoramic view over the Gorge, the Avon in both directions, and terrain far beyond). It may first be observed briefly below the existing pathway and, *‘as not much more than an artificial terrace, making use,’* suggests Haldane (1966,P34), *‘of an already existing natural one, bounded on the uphill side by a slope of considerable steepness, which may have been artificially steepened.’*

Along and above the steep southern edge of Nightingale Valley, it continues as a broad even inner bank, a single line of defence. A revetment wall supports and briefly surmounts it at its outer edge. Vertical drystone walling is used, *‘similar to that found on the western side, part of which has been exposed.’* (Haldane 1966, P34) (Fig 7). It stands high in places but the existence of a large number of large stones over the slopes below suggests it stood higher. It does not compare in height with the same rampart at its western face however.

On course to the south-western gap in the bank, it gradually rises to the same level as the accompanying pathway with some evidence of laid stonework across. It flattens out after some way to an almost uniform width of about 50 feet. The whole bank was probably built up to extend the steep side of the site outwards and to shore the hillside up against erosion or landslip down the Valley.



Fig 7 'The Southern Terrace'; Revetment Wall and Bank

The Western Face

The wall briefly rises at the outer edge of the embankment as it approaches the south western gap. (see P18) The whole rampart now assumes majestic proportions as it curls round westwards and northwards in a gentle curve. Then it moves finally east to the steep edge at the other end of the promontory. S.Seyer (1821) notes, '*Between these two sides... the length (ie of the rampart)...is 225 yards.*' (P65)

Broad and solid, this massive bank has largely been constructed with local limestone boulders, rubble and earth. Along the middle of its summit, it appears to have been surmounted by ***vertical drystone walling***. No Roman mortar here. However it may not be an original feature. (Thackeray P3). This was first uncovered at two points by Lloyd Morgan and is recorded on his map of 1904. Haldane (1966, P35) after limited excavations, confirmed its existence here but not on the other ramparts. He noted that the construction of this walling at Stokeleigh appears to be unusual and uncharacteristic of what is found in other local hill-forts.

Over 2000 years ago, this whole earthwork would have been higher still, not least because the inner camp and ditch would be lower while its taller reaches have inevitably compacted. Even today, it still stands some 30 feet above the level of the interior in places, is in good condition and presents a most commanding prospect from the outside. (Figs 2,6 & 8)



Fig 8 The Main Rampart and Inner Camp

The First Ditch (Figs 9,9a,10)

Below the first rampart and occasionally running some 60 feet down its steep slope, we come to the bottom of a deep and relatively wide trench.



Figs 9 & 9a



Fig 10 A view from the top of the main rampart to the limestone bottom of the first ditch.

Originally this would be deeper and appears to have been cut into the limestone bedrock, still partly visible in places. It is typically hollow, and 'u' shaped, and would have provided much of the material from which the first rampart would subsequently have been constructed. (*Fig 10*)

The depth of the ditch it hosted, is particularly evident along the western face but becomes less so towards the northern end where it terminates. Existing 'causeways' lead across it up to the gaps in the main rampart in the north-west and the south west corners of the camp. These also serve to demarcate physically the trench as a ditch from the subsequent declivities (*Fig 11*) at the sharp northern and southern edges of the promontory into which water would otherwise drain away.



Fig 11 Example of a declivity at the SW gap

Sketches from the Past

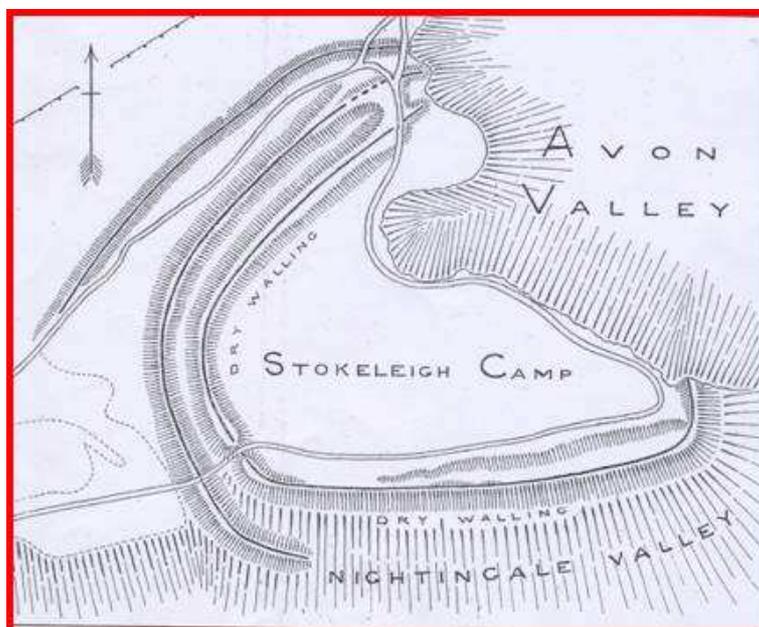


Fig 12 Reproduced from the Map of C.Lloyd Morgan , AD 1904

Given the likely amount of growth obscuring the site, the relative accuracy of these maps for their time is remarkable.

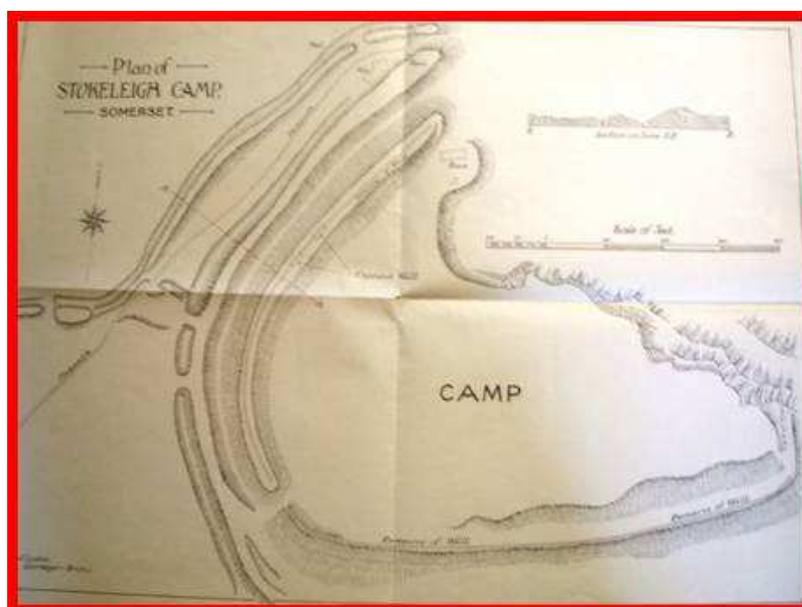


Fig 13 Reproduced from the Map of S.J. Loxton 1916 ;
 Courtesy of the National Trust (Wessex Region), Leigh Woods Office, Bristol.

THE SECOND RAMPART

At the western face, the first trench rises back up the other side on a fair slope for some 24 feet in places to *a second rampart*. This stands at a lower level to the first. (Figs 14 & 15) Here at its most impressive, the bank appears to stand about 15 feet directly above the bottom of the first ditch and between 10 to 15 feet above the level of the inner camp.

The rampart stands broader at the southern end by the declivity towards Nightingale Valley. It then narrows somewhat as it accompanies the first rampart round in concentric manner for almost 330 yards (est.) Towards the northern end, its height diminishes where it fronts a small pond, not apparently an original feature. (Thackeray, P2) It also sports its own ditch which is at its deepest along the western edge.



Fig 14 The Second Rampart West View (The first stands behind)



Fig 15 The Second Rampart West View (The first stands behind)

According to Haldane, (1966; P35), there is no conclusive evidence that this earthwork hosted drystone walling. The erection of sturdy wooden palisades here and along the third bank may have seemed a plausible alternative. The trees immediately around the camp, would have been felled to provide the timber required and at the same time provide a clearer view of possible enemy movements. Further back, new generations of surrounding trees may have been encouraged in order to provide camouflage. Caesar (*P114*) in his limited campaigns in Southern Britain of 55-54 BC had already noted that it was not an uncommon practice for local tribes to conceal their forts within woods to escape the notice of invaders.

THE THIRD RAMPART



Fig 16 The Third Rampart (North West facing)

The second ditch now leads back up on to a flat plateau. Here we meet a *third bank* which heightens briefly at its edge into a low ridge. It too stands over its own accompanying trench, sloping down some 12 feet in places to the bottom. (Figs 16, 17 & 18) Altogether ‘*a feeble affair*’ comments Haldane (1975,P29), this rampart follows the other concentric ramparts southwards from the northern edge. The width between it and the second ditch progressively broadens from the northern end until after about 250 yards (est.) both are separated by the flat plateau of over 30 yards wide.



Fig 17 The Third Rampart (North West facing)

At this point however the rampart diverges westwards away from the camp in abrupt fashion. Haldane (1966) maintains that it, ‘*appears to fork. The southern half of the fork is mentioned by Seyer(1821) as an earthwork, but it is almost certainly a natural feature, or one perhaps slightly modified. The rampart forms the northern end of this fork continuing for a short distance before temporarily disappearing, reappearing a few metres beyond. The rampart then continues for about 30m before coming to an end. The temporary disappearance of rampart and ditch suggest this portion was unfinished. The rampart and ditch have no return to Nightingale valley on the south side.*’ (P33)

INTERPRETATION OF THE THIRD RAMPART

The whole of this third bank may have been one of the more subsequent features to Stokeleigh as a camp. It does not appear integral to the immediate camp defence system, already well provided for by the existing walls. It appears as a separate and independent addition in its own right, but deliberately left ‘open’ at one end. Its existence raises several important points.

This new line was clearly designed to redress some perceived vulnerability in the existing defences.

The scale of the fortifications to the west suggests that any concerted attack would be anticipated here, but not apparently from *along* the northern edge. A third and more *dispersed* but palisaded embankment in front of the first and second ramparts would therefore be designed to counter this thrust.

Again, defences extended out this far would also place the inner camp effectively beyond range of ‘artillery fire’, those barrages of sling shot which accompanied Iron Age campaigns. Any prudent site commander would have the surrounding terrain scoured in advance for loose stones, and piled up in readiness. Even after a successful defence, the debris left around after these ‘stone-throwing contests’ must have been enormous!

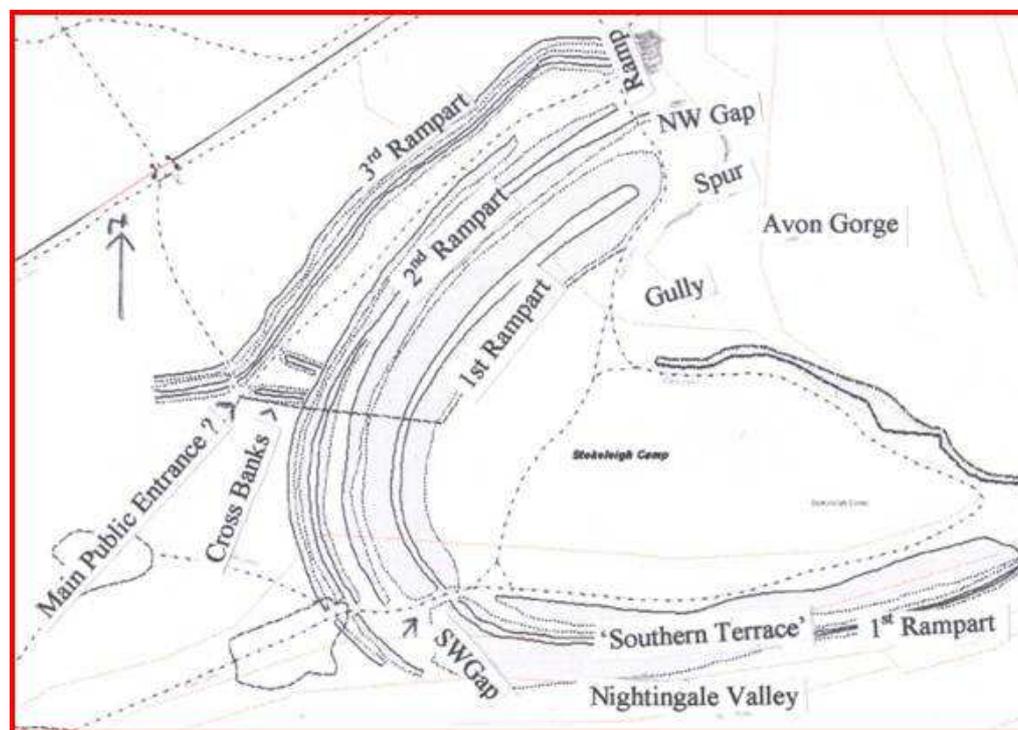


Fig 18 Section of Frontspiece OS Map 2005 + Author's Designations & Alterations.
(Courtesy of the National Trust (Wessex region), Leigh Woods Office, Bristol)

Forward Defence

A third bank may have served as a line of forward defence, *a salient*. From here back to the expanse in front of the second ditch, hefty numbers of defenders crowding in from a populous locality and reinforced by the strongest warriors could amass. Military supplies could be channelled along its length. Here the brunt of the onslaught would be taken or the campaign carried into enemy ranks. Equally the position might be relinquished where necessary on tactical grounds and defenders withdrawn progressively behind the inner ramparts.

Such an extension was therefore designed and deployed as an *outwork* and was probably constructed by the 2nd century BC. After this, there may have been a general cessation in building activity involving hillforts such as Stokeleigh. A.Payne (2007,P5) notes that this appears to be the case amongst the Durotriges after 100BC, but a little earlier amongst tribes further east.

'A Staggered Entrance'

In conjunction with the other two, such a bank would more importantly altogether provide a '*staggered entrance*'. This was an imitation of the *inturned* entrances built into later or more advanced constructions such as at Cadbury Camp further along the Failand Ridge, and to a greater degree at Maiden Castle in Dorset. It probably operated as a kind of 'palisaded lip', designed to monitor or impede the progress of incomers towards the main inner camp. Normally this would involve the movement of goods, livestock and locals — along the narrowing corridor and under surveillance from

both sides. Its purpose served not merely as a ‘tradesman’s entrance’ but ultimately as a defensive one.

A third such bank in this case points therefore to the likely proximity of a main entrance *into the camp* near the northern end where the separate defences all close in near the precipice. In that sense, it served as an outwork and a covering approach to the main inner gate itself, around which any successful defence of Stokeleigh would revolve, a further tier of protection.

As Haldane (1975) rightly points out, ‘*When the outer bank and ditch were made, the route of approach to the northern entrance could only have been along the flat ground between the middle ditch and the outer bank.*’ (P30)

An Outer Gate – a public entrance to the Camp?

As previously noted, the third rampart abruptly diverges westwards from the rest of the camp. Burrow (1981) notes, ‘*On the E side of the bank immediately before this change in direction, two parallel banks about 20m apart and 1.5m high, project ESE for about 30 m.*’ (P222) (Fig18, 19)



Fig 19 The cross banks converge on the corridor to the north-west gap

Each bank runs from above the ditch of the second rampart but stops, apparently uncompleted, at the existing pathway towards the north western gap. Burrow maintains that both have ditches ‘*on the N in the case of the S bank and on the S on the other.*’ (P222).

Interpretation is difficult and Haldane (1975,P29) surmises that these possibly represented ‘*an intention to make a new entrance here.*’

Equally, however, these cross banks together with the third rampart seem more likely to represent ‘part of the complex entrance arrangements.’ (Thackeray P2) They appear to offer the only clearly definable or obvious public entrance to the camp as a whole, at a key point in the camp and right under the main western walls. It may have served as a gatehouse. This would operate as a control point to the crucial corridor between the second ditch and third wall leading to the inner camp at the north-western end. In time of emergency this would be sealed off. In short, this complex feature would serve as the ‘de facto’ entrance to the whole fort. (Figs 18, 19)

ENTRANCES TO THE INNER CAMP

There has been some serious debate about the all-important question of possible entrances to the inner camp at Stokeleigh. There are currently gaps at each end of the main rampart, at the south west and the north west corners respectively (Fig 18). Previous writers such as Barrett (1789, P18) and Seyer (1821, P65) had identified *both* as entrances or gateways into the inner camp.

Manby (1802, P13) mentioned only the latter. Haldane whose careful work makes him in almost all respects, the most useful of our contributors, also accepts only a northern entrance. (1966, P34; 1975,P29). Even then he concludes his review of this issue, ‘*The position of the entrance or entrances is not well*

defined and needs further clarification by excavation.' (1966,P38) Burrow, whilst noting features of both gaps, can also maintain that *'the position of the original entrance(s) is unclear'*. (1981,P221).

While the current path over the western walls is likely to be more recent, the possibility of a path and entrance *up the gully* facing the Avon may deserve consideration. Some evidence for this however may be anecdotal, with any possible traces of it later overlaid by erosion from the cliffs above.

1. The South Western Gap

Haldane partially disqualifies the idea of a main gate on the north west gap of the main rampart on the grounds that *'no well-defined break is visible'* (1966, P34) between it and the path which crosses it. This is true. Yet as far as the deeper gap across the south west corner is concerned, he somehow holds it to be *'recent'* as *'it has been cut through the ramparts'* ! (1966, P35)

Burrow nevertheless adds his weight. The gap in the 'SW' corner *'would appear to be 'recent...', since the contours of the banks are still present beneath the track..'* (1981,P22)

It may be argued that such a passage could have been etched and.. hallowed by generations of casual walkers through the camp. (Fig 20)



Fig 20:The South West Gap through the Main Rampart

Seyer however had observed that close to this gap lay *'the foundations of a long narrow building, or the like'*.(1821,P65). Lloyd Morgan responding to this, pointed out that, *'These are not now definitely traceable. But near the path, just within the Camp there are some stones, apparently in line, which, in the light of Seyer's statement, may perhaps be regarded as the last remnants of this 'gatehouse''*. (1900, P21) Haldane nevertheless discounts this as improbable and effectively with it the whole idea of an entrance at this point at all.(1966,P35)

There appears then to be an absence of fuller evidence to date of any serious defensive indices attending the south west gap - such as a gatehouse, or an outwork as the north western corner offers. At present the south western gap still appears to be an unlikely Iron Age entrance into the camp.

2. The North Western Gap

The case for some kind of main entrance or gateway near the northern end of the main ramparts adjoining the precipice facing the Avon appears altogether clearer and is reasonably supported by almost all parties. Manby (1807), Seyer (1821) and Lloyd Morgan (1900) all consider it to be *'where the modern path enters the camp'*.(P20) The latter adds, *'and on the eastern side where it crosses the inner rampart, stones seem to be definitely laid parallel with the path in such a manner as to suggest a gateway.'*(P20)



Fig 20 The Path leading over the preceding two Ramparts and through the main North Western gap in the inner Rampart.

Haldane (1966) is more critical. Such stones are no longer visible. Also the height of the path through the gap stands about three feet *above* the general level of the inner camp but lies only briefly *below* the level of the main rampart at a gentle incline to it. It seems to provide no clear break as would support a substantial gate, (P34,35), unless the level of the path had subsequently been raised. He nevertheless concedes that '*this may be due to partial obliteration of the ramparts in this area*' (P34), neither of which *in their present condition* appears as formidable as on the western side. (Fig 20)

Where any such '*obliteration*' of the immediate ramparts and associated gatehouse/gateway was deliberate, then it would hardly represent a surprising tactic on the part of the victors. It was certainly standard practice with the Romans. Such a drastic demolition would constitute the normal means of 'neutralising' an enemy stronghold for the future. In this case it may have signified the final riposte to Stokeleigh's military prospects.



Fig 21 The Ramp leading up through the North West Gap to the Inner Camp from over the other ramparts.

Subsequently (1975) Haldane, without indicating exactly where, broadly clarifies his own conclusion, '*The main entrance is probably close to the northern cliffs where the middle and inner ditches were never cut and there is a broad sloping ramp..*' (P29), (Figs 18 & 21)

Citadel, Gatehouse or more recent ?

Haldane's conclusion clearly includes but preempts the remaining issue. That is whether the north-west gap at Stokeleigh might nevertheless also have been reinforced by some defensive structure a little inside the camp. This would otherwise support the case for a main entrance or gateway here.

It is true that a small but almost circular *cliff spur* projects eastward from just inside the camp at the north western end of the first rampart (Fig 18) ‘*overlooking the road of entrance*’, (Seyer, P65). The spur also hosts a pathway which descends sharply to the Avon. Immediately to the north side of this there is a clearly raised, oblong feature (Figs 18, 22).



Fig 22 The remains of a later oblong building with the surrounds of another, earlier but larger construction to the rear of the spur.

This constitutes hollow, almost rectangular, stone remains which extend 45 x 20ft. They may represent some minor redoubt or gatehouse as part of the overall defence provision of the camp at a key point. This may have been designed to buttress the north-west gap, thwart access into the camp from round the edge of the inner wall on the north side, or indeed from below. However Lloyd Morgan, Haldane and Burrow all consider this to derive from a more modern date altogether and form no part of the original complex. Various interpretations have been placed on it but inconclusively.

Today when the undergrowth is seasonally cut back, another feature is also evident, *either immediately beside, or as part of, or below the one above*. These are the limited remains of earlier walling surrounds. These appear to belong to some building of greater size altogether, stretching to the southern edge of the spur, such as Barratt (P18) and Seyer (P65) refer to. They are partly visible at the top right hand side of Fig 22 above. Both Barratt (P18) and Manby (P13) hold this to be a Roman structure – a citadel or a Praetorium. However Haldane (1966, P36) maintains that this building also is ‘*certainly not of the same date as the camp.*’

The case for a north western entrance or gateway whether *at the gap* as most agree, or simply *close to the ramp* as Haldane maintains, may therefore have to stand on its own merits regardless of the ruins close by. The ongoing debate about the exact location for the gate this still remains open.

3. An Entrance over the Western Walls ?

Two significant paths converge from outside at the cross banks where a gatehouse may once have stood. Here another lightly-etched footpath now passes directly to the right over the second and first ramparts into the inner camp. (Figs 9, 18) It should be noted however that none of the earlier sources refers to this, which suggests it to be a more recent ‘tourist trail’. Nor do recent writers consider it worth mentioning. The path itself is too slim for ‘traffic’, and however ‘convenient’ now would have had to pass through two ditches originally ! Neither is the arrival of this at the summit of the first rampart marked by any clear gap or attended by any obvious descent into the camp. As an entrance to the camp, it does not appear to offer a viable alternative to that of the NW.

4. An Entrance up the Gully ?

There is however also the possibility of another entrance into the camp, perhaps even near the north-western gap, which deserves consideration. This would appear at some point on the ascent of a steep footpath up through the gully (Fig 18) fronting the fort and facing the Avon. There may be one or two attractive elements to this suggestion but little hard evidence.

In support of this, Haldane (1966,P34), conjectures, *'The weakest point on the northern side is the wide gully which leads at a fairly steep gradient into the main body of the camp behind all the defences. It is flanked by steep cliffs, making it easily defensible, an excellent cross-fire being possible. Not far from the foot of the defile, there is a fresh water spring. These factors favour the existence of an entrance up this gully. Little defence would be necessary at the sides, and a gate and a palisade would be sufficient at the uphill end.'*

It may be that Haldane is building on Lloyd Morgan's earlier suggestion, *"To the south of the spur is a depression running down to the Avon. Here there may have been a path to the Camp, connected with the ford described by earlier writers as crossing the Avon at the foot of the British trackway which ran down to the river on the Gloucester-side."* (P20),

Indeed, Barrett had maintained *but in general terms* that *'the old roads from the camps on Leigh-down may be still traced through an orchard at the village of Leigh, and through Leigh-wood down to the river Avon at Sea-mills'*. (P20) It seems reasonable then to suggest that one or more footpaths *might* indeed weave their way down the steep east-facing expanse beneath Stokeleigh to the river immediately below where until recently a *ford* did exist. It lay across a rock ledge in the river and was passable at low tide. If

present in pre-Roman times, it would certainly have served as a vital aspect of communication, economic relations and mutual defence in the association of Burwalls and Stokeleigh with Clifton Camp on the other side. Equally however, of *'the earlier writers'* Lloyd Morgan refers to, neither Manby nor Seyer in fact mentions his point at all; while Barrett earlier only specifies, *'A deep and hollow valley or comb alone separated the two camps on the Leigh-side, and served as a passage down to the river, for each to get water for their use, where was a vadum or communication over a shallow ford with their companions at Clifton camp; by which they had the command of both sides of the Avon'* (P17,18)

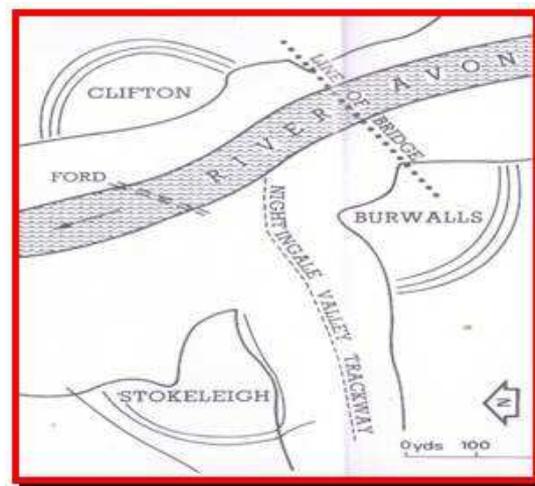


Fig 23 NCC Panel, Leigh Woods; Courtesy of the National Trust

Barrett is obviously referring to the natural passage which begins at a short level distance from the western defences of Stokeleigh. It runs down through Nightingale Valley, which separates the fort from Burwalls Camp, to the ford over the Avon just a few yards away. He does not actually refer to any

steep, sinuous but significant route from Stokeleigh down through the gully such as Haldane implies. As a result, it becomes harder to make any case for the *significance* of such a remote path or proposed entrance where the choice is already obvious.

Again, it seems hardly necessary to observe that the builders of the hillfort chose their site on grounds of its potential invulnerability. They would hardly have completed almost three tiers of earthworks in the front when the real source of danger lay with an open 'back door'. Indeed the serious erosion, so evident down the gully of today, constituted an even steeper, more precipitate and defensible prospect at its overhanging cliff edge two millennia ago when it was probably also palisaded. By comparison, the prospect of a sharp upward path coupled to some entrance, below or above, was clearly considered of altogether lesser military significance by the Camp's occupants. This may even have been on account of the reasons Haldane suggests (P22) but perhaps not least because there *was* neither serious passage nor entrance.

Economic criteria would also dictate the nature and significance of any entrance to the Camp. At Stokeleigh, the main entrance corridor appears to have stood on flat ground in front of the western walls. Here traders and domestic animals from a whole network of local paths would converge. This would also involve all those goods relayed across the Avon and up a negotiable Nightingale Valley. Any economic significance to some impractical, steep alternative entrance up the gully itself would be distinctly marginal.

In summary, both from a military and an economic perspective, it would appear that *any route or entrance* up the gully would be considered of minor significance at best. This suggestion may be further precluded by the extensive erosion from overhanging cliffs which we note today. This has effectively covered any traces of the existence of such a route. For the time being, the discussion must be left to the realm of possibility only.

The case for a main entrance into Stokeleigh inner camp therefore must rest at present with the inturned entrance in front of the western walls leading to the north western passage through the ramparts.

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