

The Atlas of Hillforts of Britain and Ireland Hillfort survey (v2 October 2013)

Important information:

This form must be used with the accompanying Notes for Guidance which are downloadable from the Project website (<http://www.arch.ox.ac.uk/hillforts-atlas.html>). Please read the notes before attempting to fill in this form.

Once completed this form can be either posted or emailed to us, alternatively you can transcribe the information into the web-based form and submit electronically – see the Notes for details.

Access to sites and Health and Safety:

The project and its host Institutions bear no responsibility for any access or health and safety issues that may arise during your participation in this project.

Disclaimer:

The Co-directors of this project and their institutions are not responsible for issues of access to sites and health and safety of participants in the survey. By taking part in this survey you are acknowledging that access and health and safety are your responsibility.

Section 1.

Introductory comments

Thank you for taking part in this survey, by doing so you are agreeing that all information provided can be used and published by the project. You will remain anonymous unless you indicate here that you want to be named on the project website:

1.1. YES – Name to be used: C.L.A.S.P.
(Gren Hatton, Rob Close)

Basic information about you

1.2. Your name: Community Landscape Archaeology Survey Project (CLASP)

1.3. Contact phone number: c/o G.W. Hatton, 01788 822411

1.4. email address: c/o ghatton@toucansurf.com

1.5. Did you visit this site as part of an archaeological society/group, if so which one:
See answers to 1.1 and 1.2 above

Section 2.

Basic information about the site

2.1. Name of the site:	Arbury Hill
2.2. Alternative name of the site:	Arbury Hill Camp
2.3. National Grid Reference:	SP 5407 5874
2.4. Any known reference numbers:	Northants HER reference MNN125829
2.5. Current county/Unitary authority:	Northamptonshire
2.6. When did you visit the site (month/year):	23 April 2014

Landscape setting of the site

2.7. Altitude (metres):	220m (measured by GIS; RCHME gives 217m)
2.8. Topographic position: [you can tick more than 1]	
HILL TOP	X
COASTAL PROMONTORY	.
INLAND PROMONTORY	.
VALLEY BOTTOM	.
KNOLL/HILLOCK	.
OUTCROP	.
RIDGE	.
PLATEAU/CLIFF-EDGE	.
HILLSLOPE	.
LOWLAND (E.G. MARSH)	.
OTHER	.
Comments on topographic position:	Midway between sources of R. Leam & R. Nene
ASPECT (if slope)	.

2.9. Maximum visibility/view:

NE: [tick 1 only]	
LONG	X
MEDIUM	.
SHORT	.
SE: [tick 1 only]	
LONG	X
MEDIUM	.
SHORT	.
SW: [tick 1 only]	
LONG	X
MEDIUM	.
SHORT	.
NW: [tick 1 only]	
LONG	X
MEDIUM	.
SHORT	.
Comments:	The viewshed in all directions is excellent. The chosen morning was overcast following overnight rain; yet despite the slightly misty

conditions, distant points could be detected with ease. In terms of sheer distance, to the north landmarks in Rugby (eg the cement works, at 18km) were clearly distinguishable.

In terms of other nearby hilltops with BA/IA significance; to the north-east, the whole of Borough Hill (Daventry 7km) is visible; to the east, the hilltops at Everdon Hill (5km) and Farthingstone (8km) can be seen —and also in this direction, it is important to note that the line of the Nene Valley is outstandingly clear; to the south, Charwelton Hill (4km) is clearly visible (this last item has possible significance in terms of long-distance communication with the hillforts to the south at Chipping Warden and Rainsborough Camp (Aynho), which cannot be seen from Borough Hill Daventry.

2.10. Water source inside: [you can tick more than 1]

SPRING	.
STREAM	.
POOL	.
CISTERN	.
OTHER (details):	Nothing now visible, and no record of any internal source.

2.11. Water source nearby:

1933 OS 6" map shows a spring source within 50m of the eastern edge of the hilltop.

2.12. Current land category (over whole site footprint) (you can tick more than 1)

WOODLAND	X (i.e. lines of trees along fields on N, W and S)
COMMERCIAL FORESTRY PLANTATION	.
PARKLAND	.
PASTURE (GRAZED)	X (but documentary evidence of earlier ploughing)
ARABLE	.
SCRUB/BRACKEN	.
ROCKY OUTCROPS	.
HEATHER/MOORLAND	.
HEATH	.
BUILT-UP	.

Comments: Though nominally pasture, the hilltop precincts have been used for at least the last 10 years as a grass-track racing course for motor-cycles etc. (see aerial photograph from Google Maps, Fig.3 in the Appendix). Some degradation has been caused – though in view of the probable geological explanation of this site, this is not felt to be a problem.

2.13. Pre-hillfort activity:

Possible Neolithic activity on the hilltop has been noted (HER refs: unstratified Neolithic finds, MNN330, MNN26404, MNN18471)

2.14. Post-hillfort activity:

The site is mentioned in Saxon charters, and forms the meeting point of 3 parishes established during that period.

Surface morphology of the site

Note (see the Notes for guidance document): from this section onwards we are assuming that you are working with a plan of the site. If it is a published plan then we do not expect you to record every item, only those which are different/additional to the plan you are working with. If you are drawing your own plan you can annotate details on it.

2.15. Which plan are you using:

The site has never been rigorously examined archaeologically, other than as reported in:

RCHME 1981, 8-9
RCHMA 1999 (A.Kidd)

The main guides used in this survey were the RCHME survey (1985) supplemented by the 1933 OS 6" map.

2.16. Have you used any other sources of information (tick any that apply):

HER	X
NMR	X
PUBLISHED SOURCE (details):	.
OTHER (details):	OS 6" map

2.17. Is there an annex (see diagram in Notes for Guidance):

YES	.
NO	X

Note: Sections 3 and 5 are for every site, section 4 only applies to sites with an annex.

Section 3. Enclosed area

3.1 General overall shape of enclosed area: [you can tick more than 1]

CIRCULAR	.
SUB-CIRCULAR/OVAL	.
RECTANGULAR	X
SUB-RECTANGULAR	.
POLYGONAL	.
IRREGULAR	X
COMPLEX (MORE THAN ONE ENCLOSURE)	.

Comments: There are "rampart-like" discontinuities at the NW, NE and SW extremities of the main enclosure, and a fourth discontinuity in the east side of the enclosure, adjacent to the nearby spring source (see Fig. 1 in the Appendix).
Prior to the site visit, it was already clear from the RCHME survey that the semblance of manmade fortifications around the hilltop is almost certainly NOT artificial, but merely due to the effects of geological and climatic weathering and landslip on a discontinuity in surface geology – the majority of the hill is covered in glacial Upper Lias clay, but the tip is Northamptonshire Sandstone. This interpretation was confirmed by the visit

3.2. Maximum dimensions of internal area (see diagram in Notes for Guidance):

1. 275 m (NE-SW corners)
2. 270 m (NW-SE corners)

Comments: Measured from HER data in MapInfo, checked via Google Earth.

3.3. Maximum dimensions of whole site footprint (see diagram in Notes for Guidance):

1. 385 m (NE-SW corners)
2. 350 m (NW-SE corners)

Comments: Northants HER classifies the features as "possible landslips rather than archaeological". This is entirely consistent with the RCHME survey, and with the observations made on this visit.
The degradation to the hilltop banks caused in a few places by the current use of the hill as a motocross circuit allowed close observation of the sub-structure of the so-called "ramparts" – and no sign could be seen of any manmade construction; on the contrary, the observations on this visit merely served to confirm the interpretation offered in the RCHME survey.
(NB: There is also an HER report that "WW1 practice trenches" were constructed just below the north face of the hilltop. These were not examined.)

Entrances

3.4. Number of breaks/entrances through the rampart by position: [give a number for each]

N .
NE .
E .
SE .
S .
SW .
W .
NW .

Comments: See earlier comments; this site cannot be considered as a hillfort, and therefore no further entries will be made in Section 3. However, the possibility cannot be excluded that the hilltop may have had early significance as a place of veneration, see later comments in Section 5.

3.5. How many are apparently secondary breaks: [give a number for each]

N .
NE .
E .
SE .
S .
SW .
W .
NW .

Comments: .

3.6. (see diagram in Notes for Guidance):

For each entrance that is not a simple gap, is it most like any of the following (e.g. in-turned), if so record which position it is in:

IN-TURNED: [you can tick more than 1]

N .
NE .
E .
SE .
S .
SW .
W .
NW .

OUT-TURNED: [you can tick more than 1]

N .
NE .
E .
SE .
S .
SW .
W .
NW .

BOTH (IN- AND OUT-TURNED): [you can tick more than 1]

N .
NE .
E .
SE .
S .
SW .
W .
NW .

HORNWORK: [you can tick more than 1]

N .
NE .
E .
SE .
S .
SW .
W .
NW .

OVER-LAPPING: [you can tick more than 1]

N .
NE .
E .
SE .
S .
SW .
W .
NW .

OUTWORKS: [you can tick more than 1]

N .
NE .
E .
SE .
S .
SW .
W .
NW .

Comments: .

OTHER FORMS:

Comments: .

Enclosing works - ramparts/banks/walls and ditches

3.7. Number of ramparts/banks/walls per quadrant:

NE: .
SE: .
SW: .
NW: .

Comments: See earlier comments; this site cannot be considered as a hillfort, and therefore no further comments will be made in Section 3. However, the possibility cannot be excluded that the hilltop may have had early significance as a place of veneration, see later comments in Section 5.

3.8. Number of DITCHES per quadrant:

NE: .
SE: .
SW: .
NW: .

Comments: .

3.9. Form of rampart/bank/wall

Same all the way around:

Y .
N .

If yes: [tick one only]

EARTHEN BANK .
STONE WALL .
BOTH .
PALISADING .
VITRIFICATION .
OTHER BURNING .
Comments: .

If NO then by quadrant:

NE: [you can tick more than 1]
EARTHEN BANK .

STONE WALL	.
BOTH	.
PALISADING	.
VITRIFICATION	.
OTHER BURNING	.
Comments:	.
SE: [you can tick more than 1]	
EARTHEN BANK	.
STONE WALL	.
BOTH	.
PALISADING	.
VITRIFICATION	.
OTHER BURNING	.
Comments:	.
SW: [you can tick more than 1]	
EARTHEN BANK	.
STONE WALL	.
BOTH	.
PALISADING	.
VITRIFICATION	.
OTHER BURNING	.
Comments:	.
NW: [you can tick more than 1]	
EARTHEN BANK	.
STONE WALL	.
BOTH	.
PALISADING	.
VITRIFICATION	.
OTHER BURNING	.
Comments:	.

3.10. For each quadrant how many of each of the bank/wall/ditch combinations are there (see diagram in Notes for Guidance):

NE:	
BANK/WALL (NO DITCH)	.
BANK/DITCH	.
BANK/DITCH/BANK	.
OTHER	.
Comments:	.
SE:	
BANK/WALL (NO DITCH)	.
BANK/DITCH	.
BANK/DITCH/BANK	.
OTHER	.
Comments:	.
SW:	
BANK/WALL (NO DITCH)	.
BANK/DITCH	.

BANK/DITCH/BANK .
 OTHER .
 Comments: .
 NW:
 BANK/WALL (NO DITCH) .
 BANK/DITCH .
 BANK/DITCH/BANK .
 OTHER .
 Comments: .

3.11. Chevaux de Frise (tick if YES, you can tick more than 1]

NE .
 SE .
 SW .
 NW .
 Comments: .

Interior features

3.12. Tick all that are present, mark where on the plan and send to us: [you can tick more than 1]

NO APPARENT FEATURES .
 STONE STRUCTURES .
 PLATFORMS .
 QUARRY HOLLOWES .
 PITS .
 OTHER .
 Comments: .

Section 4.

If the site has an annex (see notes for definition of an annex), continue here with information about the annex, otherwise go to section 5 below:

4.1. Shape of the annex [tick only 1]

LOBATE .
 CONCENTRIC .
 CIRCULAR .
 SUB-CIRCULAR .
 RECTANGULAR .
 SUB-RECTANGULAR .
 POLYGONAL .
 IRREGULAR .
 OTHER .

4.2. Number of annex ramparts: .

4.3. Number of annex ditches: .

4.4. Number of annex entrances: .

4.5. Comments on the annex: No annex.

Section 5.

5.1. Any general comments (including comments on erosion/damage, especially if recent):

As has been stated above, there can be very little doubt that this site is NOT a hillfort – and as such, it might be considered irrelevant to include it in this survey.

However, the surveyors feel that a case can and should be made for mentioning this site as part of the section on Northamptonshire. The rationale for this suggestion is as follows:

Three major rivers rise within a very short distance of this hill (the Nene, less than 1km to the north; the Leam, less than 1km to the west; and the Cherwell, less than 1km to the south-west). This in itself may well have endowed Arbury Hill with mystical significance to early peoples.

The geomorphology, erosion and weathering of the hilltop, commented upon in some detail in the RCHME survey, has left the hilltop with the appearance of a summit fortification complete with ramparts, ditches and an entrance. The illusion is quite compelling even today – and according to the historian Baker in the 1820s it was much more pronounced in his time. These features would probably have formed initially as a result of post-glacial action, long before this area was inhabited.

Thus, the first inhabitants of this area would have seen, on their arrival, what appeared to be a massive ancient fortification, already standing on a hilltop, at the focus of the headwaters of the three major rivers that have had a major influence on prehistoric territorial boundary lines in this area.

Attempting to view the situation through the mind-set of those early peoples -- they may have interpreted the hilltop as an object of superstition/veneration, along the lines "this is huge and looks man-made -- it must have been built by the giants/gods who were here before us". The close proximity of the 3 major river sources may have seemed to them extremely significant in this respect.

The hilltop is also a significant high point, suitable to function as a possible "relay station" in a line of hilltops stretching along the eastern side of the Cherwell and the Leam and the southern side of the Nene -- many of which also feature on the list of actual or suspected BA/IA hillfort sites in Northamptonshire (eg Rainsborough at Aynho; Chipping Warden; Charwelton Hill; Borough Hill Daventry; etc). Also note, in this context, the remarks in section 2.9 above.

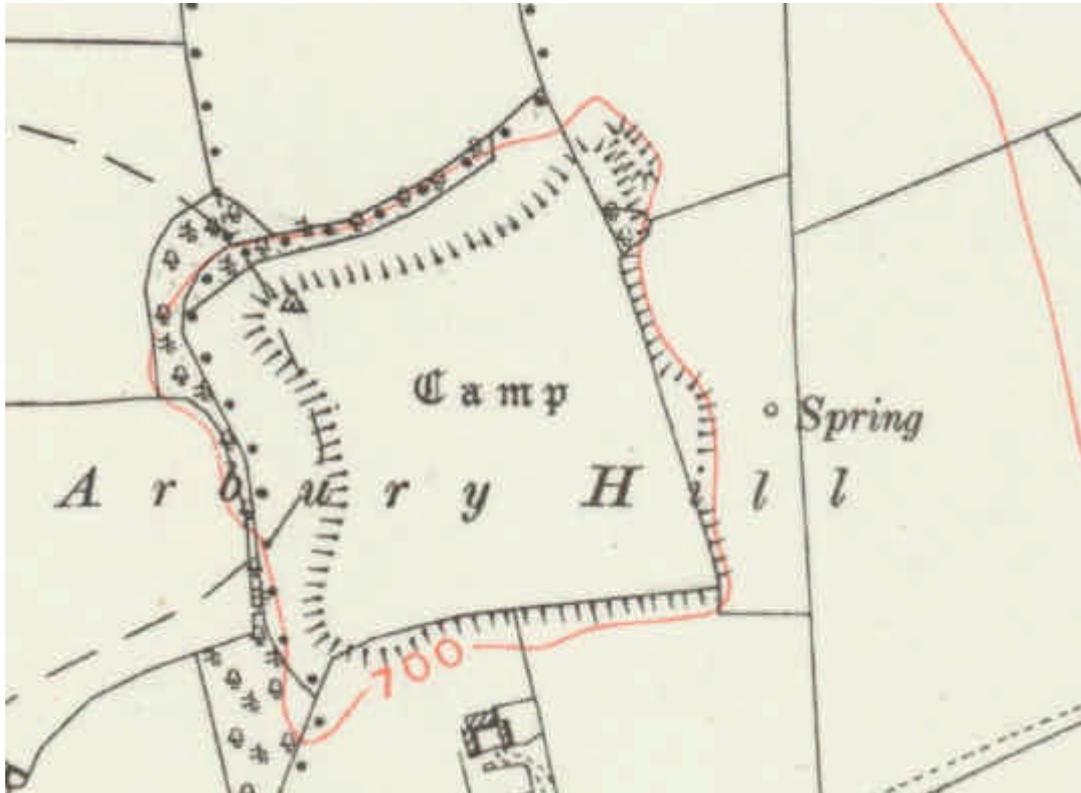
This site seems NOT to be a hillfort in the sense of "an occupied and/or fortified site" – but quite possibly it may have functioned as "a site of spiritual significance from Neolithic times onward", and also "a convenient station along a line of communication that may have been associated with territorial governance in the Bronze and Iron Ages".

The 944AD Saxon charter wording for the hill, the "*ealden burh aet baddanbyrig*", appears to support such an interpretation, since:

- a) *Baddan* may derive from the Saxon "*biodan*" – "offer/offering" (which comes down into modern English as "bid/bidding/bidden/etc")
- b) *Byrig* clearly derives from the Saxon "*burh*" – a hill or mound, often with the implication that it is fortified. And "*ealden*" states quite clearly that it dated from long before the Saxon era.
- c) Hence "*baddanbyrig*" would appear to mean "a place for making offerings [to the gods], on top of an ancient fortified hill".

Appendix:

1. Extract from 1924-33 OS 6" map



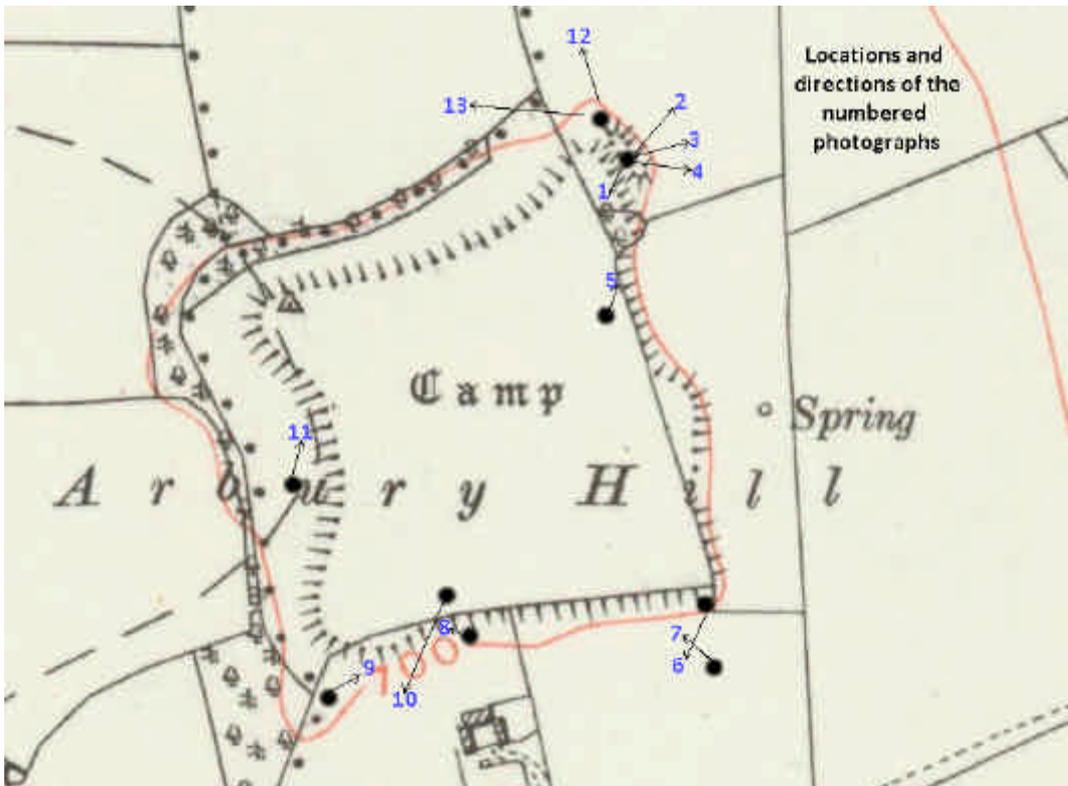
2. Extract from 1884 OS 6" map



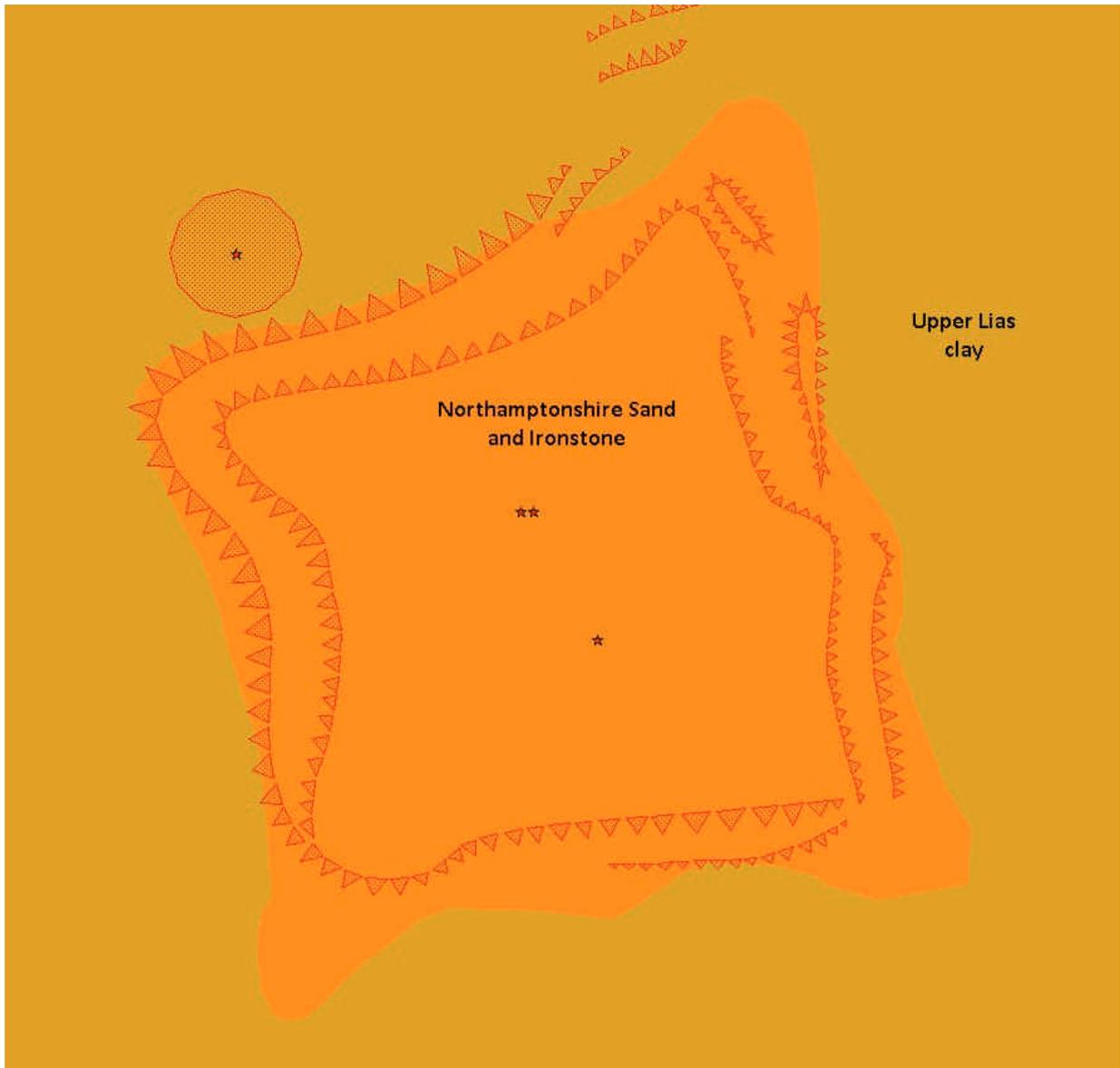
3. Aerial view from Google Maps (approx 2010)



4. Photograph locations



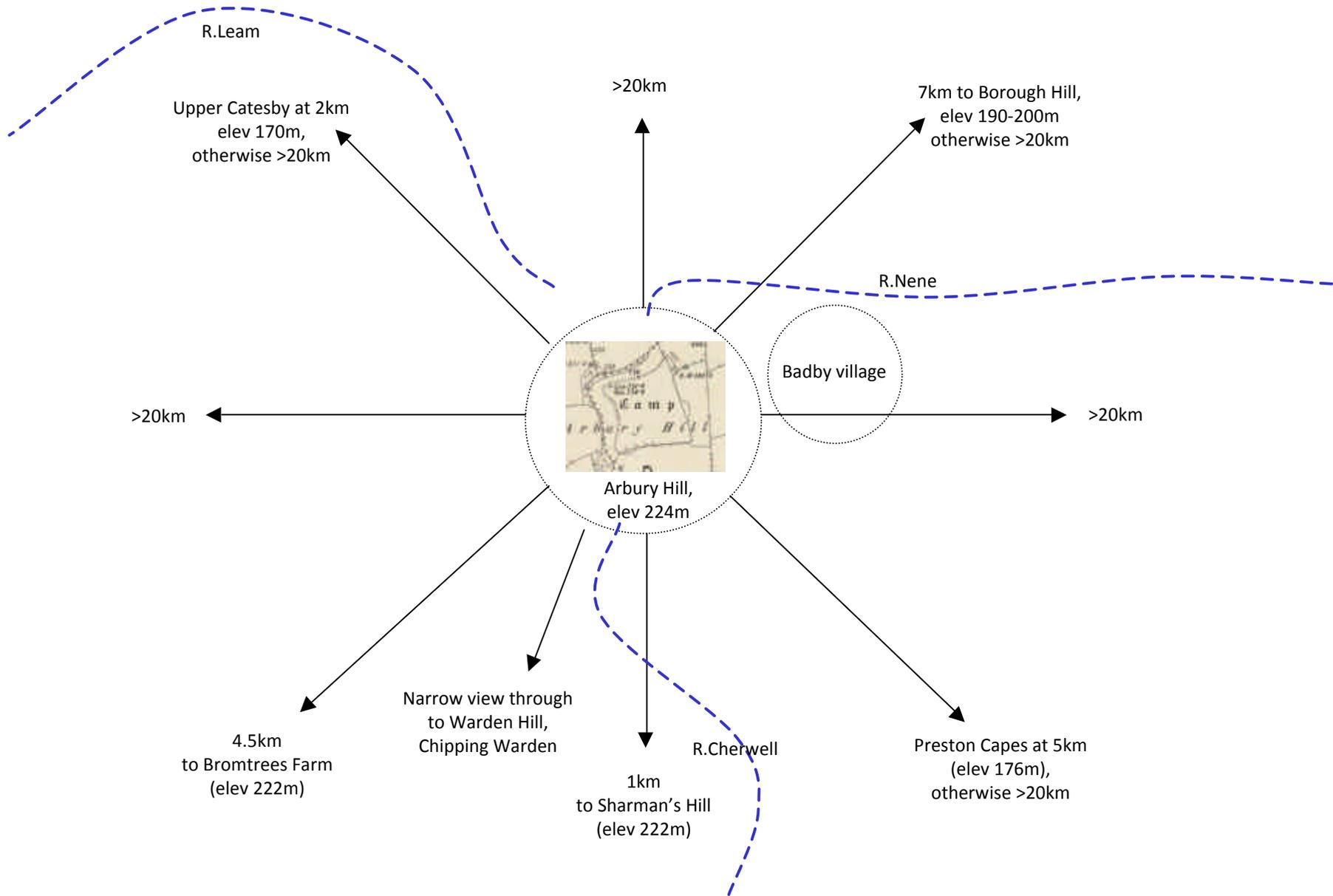
5. Geology around the summit of Arbury Hill, viewed in MapInfo (source: geological map of Northamptonshire, courtesy NCC and Northamptonshire Archaeology)



Note the abrupt change in geology at the summit of the hill —and the way in which the contours of the supposed “hillfort” mirror the precise contours of this geological change.

Moreover, the features in the east face, which give the appearance of outlying defence works around a contoured entrance, are in reality probably the result of soil creep and slippage due to the nearby spring source (see map in Fig. 4 above).

Viewshed diagram for Arbury Hill, nr. Badby



6. Photographs

1



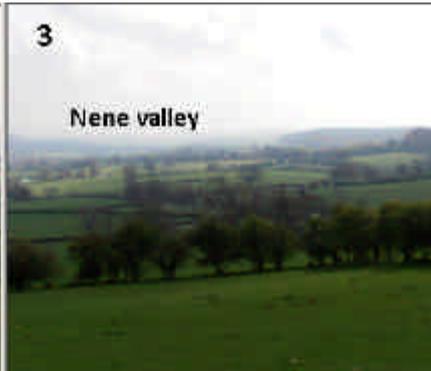
2

Borough Hill



3

Nene valley



4



5



6

Charwelton Hill
Sharman's Hill





12

Rugby



13

Catesby Hill

