# THE EXCAVATION OF A PREHISTORIC RANCH BOUNDARY AT QUARLEY HILL, HAMPSHIRE

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*Introduction*

The excavation of a ranch boundary was carried out by members of the Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton, in advance of the construction of a reservoir on Quarley Hill, in the parish of Quarley. The site (Fig. 16) was situated on the north-north-east side of the Iron Age hillfort, at a height of 165 m. O.D. (Grid Ref. SU 26354252). The ditch was named Ditch 3 by Hawkes during his extensive study of the complex of ditches and the hillfort at Quarley Hill (Hawkes 1939, 14), the complex perhaps forming a large enclosure between Thruxton and Quarley Hill. The date of the construction of the ditch was not proved, but it is clearly earlier than the hillfort rampart.

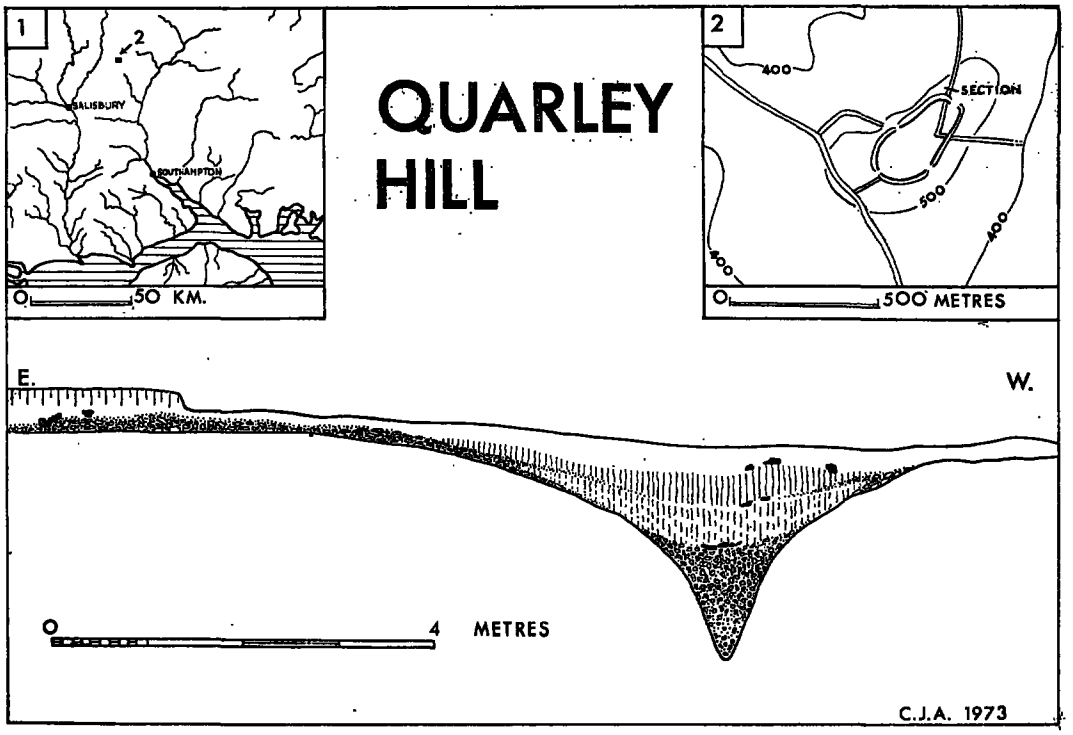


Fig. 16. Location maps and section through ditch.

*The Excavation*

A trench 11 m. by 1·5 m. was excavated across the ditch down to the undisturbed chalk. The ditch proved to be 1·90 m. deep, from level edges weathered to some 5–6 m. apart, to a narrow flat bottom 0·08 m. wide. The bottom appeared to have been graded by stepping down the hillside. The primary silt was chalk rubble, eroded from a bank which was still present in section on the eastern side, standing 0·13 m. at its highest point. Two distinct layers of dark grey-brown loam, divided by a thin band of chalk rubble eroded from the bank, were deposited above the chalk.

*The Finds*

The only finds, a poorly worked rectangular flint and a very small sherd of possibly early Roman pottery, came from the plough soil.

*The Mollusca*

A. S. Kennard's report (Hawkes 1939, 192) on the non-marine mollusca, based on the evidence of two samples of turf buried beneath the Iron Age rampart, indicated that the ground was open grassland during a warm climatic phase.

A series of samples from the section was analysed for land snails (Table 1) and the results plotted on a histogram of relative abundance (Fig. 17).

TABLE 1

| Samples/cms. below turf<br>Dry weight | 220–200<br>3 kg. | 95–75<br>3 kg. | 55–35<br>3 kg. | 25–5<br>3 kg. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Pomatius elegans* (Müller) | 2 | — | — | 3 |
| *Cochlicopa lubrica* (Porro) | 8 | 13 | 9 | 6 |
| *Pupilla muscorum* (Linné) | 217 | 249 | 196 | 118 |
| *Vallonia pulchella* (Müller) | 26 | 66 | 39 | 47 |
| *Vallonia excentrica* (Sterki) | 11 | 13 | 15 | 2 |
| *Ena obscura* (Müller) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| *Cecilioides acicula* (Müller) | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| *Retinella radiatula* (Alder) | — | — | — | 1 |
| *Retinella nitidula* (Draparnaud) | 175 | 217 | 122 | 69 |

The diagram clearly indicates that there has been little change in the environment since the silting-up of the ditch. The present environment is of a predominantly open grassland with some hawthorn growing in areas which have been less extensively cultivated. The species *Vallonia pulchella*, *V. excentrica* and *Pupilla muscorum* occur almost entirely on grassland. Though classed as woodland species, *Retinella nitidula* is common in tall grassland of Hawthorn sere. The remaining species, though poorly represented, are commonly found living in grassland.

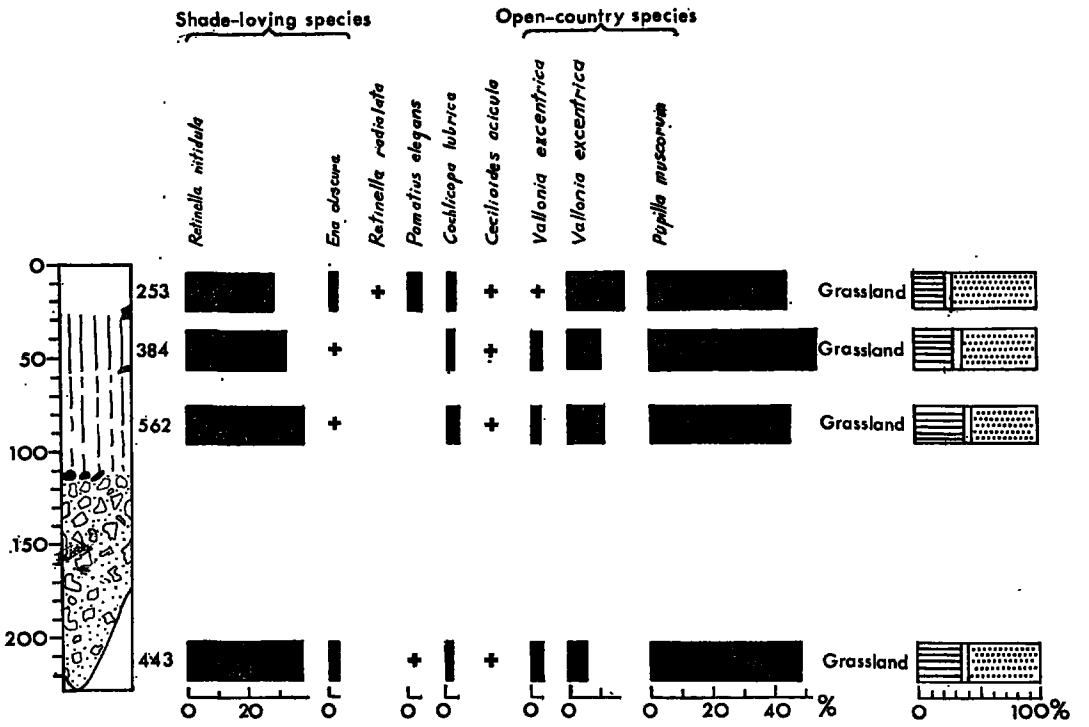


Fig. 17. Quarley Hill: histogram of land snails from ditch section.
(Note: for open-country species read *Vallonia excentrica, V. pulchella.*)

*Discussion*

The ditch appears to have silted up naturally and the section compares well with those published by Professor Hawkes. The problems of dating the digging of these ditches are very great. Though Ditch 3 clearly pre-dates the hillfort, Hawkes, through an addition to the system contemporary with the hillfort, demonstrated that the ditches were still significant boundaries during the Iron Age. At Sidbury Hill also, one ranch boundary must be contemporary with the hillfort, as at Quarley Hill. The fact that the hillfort was constructed over the ranch boundaries contributed to Hawkes' supposition that they belonged to the Late Bronze Age, although actual dating evidence was lacking. As there is evidence to show that some ranch boundaries were built quite early in the Bronze Age (Stone 1936), others late in the Iron Age (Cunliffe 1971), the ditches cannot be precisely dated on this basis. The evidence would support the idea of an increase in clearance of land for pasture during the Bronze Age and through into the Iron Age. The boundaries imply a need to regulate the grazing of the increased herds belonging to separate communities. Though it is important to establish the date of construction, the economic and social implications of the boundaries having been in use for many centuries seem to have equal interest.

*Acknowledgements*

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