



# THE FOB NEWS

ISSUE 1 JANUARY 2015

Berrv Castle Iron Age Hillfort

## WELCOME TO OUR FIRST NEWSLETTER

We are delighted to introduce this first edition of THE FOB NEWS. We intend to make it a regular publication that will keep you in touch with news and developments relating to Berry Castle. In this and future editions, we shall be updating you with plans to increase our understanding of the site and its preservation.

Berry Castle is an Iron Age hillfort that lies in Huntshaw Wood on the borders with Weare Giffard and Torrington. It is a designated scheduled monument that is estimated to be 2,600 years old. The feature is at risk of erosion and damage from vegetation and in February 2014 sustained serious damage from uprooted trees caused by Atlantic storms. In order to preserve Berry Castle and to raise its profile we are establishing a "Friends of Berry" group (FOB). Through FOB we will seek to find out more about why Berry Castle was built and what it was used for. We will also improve access to the site enabling people to enjoy the wonderful wildlife, flowers and plants that Berry has to offer.

### *In this issue:*

- Welcome
- FOB inaugural meeting
- 'Friends of Berry Castle' (FOB)
- An autumn walk
- A personal perspective
- The role of LIDAR
- A brief history of Berry Castle
- Who were the Iron Age people of Torridge?

**If you would like to get involved with the preservation of Berry Castle** then we would love to hear from you. As a FOBBER you will be able to help in a variety of ways having as little or as much input as you wish. For example:- keeping an eye on the site (maybe while walking the dog?), helping to clear vegetation – either high energy or low energy jobs!, helping with hosting visiting groups such as schools and history societies, recording wildlife, plants and trees, helping with the newsletter – collation, distribution (and maybe writing an article or two?), non 'hands-on' roles such as looking after funds or typing or even getting stuck in with real archaeology (helping with digs, first one planned for this year, and a project involving ground penetrating radar). Or any other role that we have not thought of that you would like to fulfil!!

**The FOB inaugural meeting** will take place at **7:30 pm**, Thursday, **19<sup>th</sup> February** 2015 in The **Black Horse Pub**, Torrington Square. A steering committee will be formed (nominations for offices already received so don't worry you will not be coerced onto a committee!) and plans for 2015 will be discussed. **Further information on this meeting will follow.**

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## A circular walk around Huntshaw Wood

On Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> October around 35 of us worked off our Sunday lunches by undertaking a walk around Huntshaw Wood. It was a warm, sunny day with a firm but pleasant breeze. The woods welcomed us with the vibrant colours and rich smells of autumn. A similar walk had taken place on a slightly damp Saturday afternoon in September when 18 of us braved the showers to explore the beautiful surroundings.

The hardy walkers came from Huntshaw, Weare Giffard and Torrington as well as further afield. Ages ranged from eight months (well done Esme) up to grand (and undisclosed) ages. The



afternoon concluded with a tour of Berry Castle where walkers were informed of the results of recent research into the site. Audrey Alimo explained that north Devon has many hillforts and that little is known about them. She proposed that Berry Castle was built by the people of Torridge as a defensive fort in times of tribal warfare. Or it served as a farmstead occupied by farming families and their animals. Alternatively it was a centre for ritual and worship, in

other words an Iron Age church. Or it was the home to a local chieftain who wanted to demonstrate his wealth and status. Keith Hughes then described his research undertaken earlier this by Weare Giffard History Project for Oxford University's proposed 'Atlas of Iron Age Hill Forts of the British Isles'. The whole site was measured, including the height and depths of banks and ditches. External features were also recorded, including the two mysterious external banks and ditches in the NE corner of the site; water supplies; and nearby similar settlements. The final report was dispatched to Oxford in May, and an 'absolutely tremendous' personal thank you was received. Both Keith and Audrey concluded that more research into the site is required in order to answer many unanswered questions that remain.

### **"A personal perspective of the Weare Giffard History Society Survey" Derek Newport (Volunteer Surveyor)**

Last year Keith Hughes made it known that he was looking for some volunteer help to complete a survey of Berry Castle for Oxford University's proposed Atlas of Iron Age Forts. It sounded like an interesting and worthwhile project, and, although I had no previous archaeological experience, I volunteered myself, and was taken on together with a small number of other volunteers to help with the project. I had vaguely heard about Berry Castle, but like many other local people, had no idea of its history or condition. The work of the survey was mostly centred around mapping and measuring the whole site, which was not made any easier by brambles and brushwood underfoot, plus a significant number of trees that had sadly been uprooted in the winter storms. For me, one of the most interesting aspects of this project was to try to imagine what could have been the original purpose for constructing these fascinating earthworks at a time when implements and tools would have been very rudimentary. .... I feel that it is very important to conserve this site for posterity. The information now gathered by Keith and Audrey Alimo will be vital for any future research into, and conservation of, this historical site.

### **The role of LiDAR (Light detection and ranging)**

No one has ever seen an aerial photograph of Berry, but LiDAR could do this for us. The site is scanned from an aircraft, whose exact position is known by GPS, by the use of a laser scanner which pulses a series of beams to the ground. By measuring the time taken for each scan, at different depths, to return to the aircraft, software eventually can remove each layer – for example in our case Berry's tree cover – and reveal for the first time a photograph of the site. We are working on this but desperately need more technical help, so if anyone has these computing skills, PLEASE we need your help. In the whole expanse of history YOU will be the first person to see Berry from the skies.



LiDAR in operation. The Iron Age hillfort at Welshbury in the Forest of Dean is invisible in the aerial photograph (left). In the LiDAR image (right) the trees have been stripped away revealing the earthworks.

Adapted from Renfrew and Bahn (2012) *Archaeology: Theories, Methods and Practice*, p. 87

### **Who were the Iron Age people of Torridge?**

They were probably a peaceful cooperative of small tribes who were resourceful and hardworking farmers. They lived in small farmsteads scattered through the region. Their houses were round with walls made of clay, twigs and animal dung. They lived close to their sheep, cows and pigs and when pressures arose due to population growth they diversified into crop cultivation using a newly invented iron-tipped plough. The transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age occurred around 800-700 BC. At this time there was no 'Devon' as Devon and Cornwall were united in a region called Dumnonia. The Dumnonii (translated as valley dwellers) consisted of many individual tribes who produced elegant pottery and their own style of art. Widespread trading with Europe was taking place with the export of metals and grain and the import of luxuries such as wine and jewellery. Their lives were influenced by deep cultural and ritual rules.



## A Brief History of Berry Castle



Conjectural reconstruction drawing of Hen Gaer Iron Age hillfort, Bow Street, near Aberystwyth

<http://education.gtj.org.uk/en/blowup1/435>

Berry Castle is a single rampart, promontory fort located on a hillside in Huntshaw Wood. It has a strongly defended north-west corner and the remains of an external ditch can still be seen. The main entrance is in the western bank with a smaller opening in the eastern bank. It lies at 94 metres above OD and is a relatively small feature with an internal surface area of 0.7 ha. Berry castle was designated a scheduled ancient monument in 1923 giving it the highest level of protection. The earliest

written records are found in the Victoria County History for Devonshire (1906) when it was described as a defensive fort. However, it could have been a large farmstead or have had a ritual function. Little research has been conducted into Berry Castle and many intriguing questions remain unanswered. So we are hoping to conduct archaeological digs in 2015 and 2016 in the hope of finding out more about the origins and purpose of Berry Castle. We are also liaising with English Heritage about conducting a ground penetrating radar survey of the site. The drawing above shows how Berry Castle may have looked in its heyday.

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