

## Dowsing Survey of Berry Castle Encampment (Iron Age Hill Fort) on Thurs 18<sup>th</sup> Aug 2016

Berry Castle is an Iron Age hillfort that lies in woodland in Huntshaw Woods, North Devon. It is a scheduled monument and until recently was one of the area's best kept secrets with few people visiting it or even being aware of it. In July 2016 Devon Dowzers were invited by the Friends Group to attend their first ever Open Day to help build the hillfort's profile and about 300 people attended (with a large number trying their hands at dowsing).

There were 14 of us at the Open Day but 3 of us attending agreed we should do a more intensive survey to map out the layout of the site. (Gwynn Paulett, Nigel Twinn and myself). We set a date of 18<sup>th</sup> August and our first task was to choose a time or period to dowse that was typical of its usage, because with such a long duration of occupation we could well imagine the layout and huts changing from the start, a to be totally different one after say 1000 years.

Our initial dowsing established that the Berry Castle was constructed about 2760 years ago and took about 7 years to build the ditch and mound; and although some huts may have been constructed whilst building the perimeter we decided to dowse for the way its owners intended it to be, at the start, and so we agreed to confine our dowsing to the first 50 years of usage. (For example, as families grew they might alter size and position of their dwelling, or indeed they might swap roundhouses, moving into larger ones when children were born, or back to smaller ones when just say grandparents etc., plus it's not inconceivable that with wooden huts and fires inside they might burn down and need re-constructing alongside).



A general shot showing our reference line (with Nigel off in the distance)

We soon realised we had to be 'specific' with our questions. When first asking for numbers of 'inhabited huts' and 'continuous use' we soon found that not all huts were occupied all of the year round. The best we came up with was 60% in use during the whole year, but the settlement was continuously occupied by someone. Clearly some families were 'working away' from Berry for months at a time, but we felt that some (eg the elderly) would be resident all of the year on site.

Our dowsing also showed that there was some form of habitation well before the construction of the mounded site and before Open day we had already established via map dowsing an old trackway from Berry along the ridge to/and through Foxes Cross dating back 4300 years. We also found that its last continuous use as a settlement was into late Saxon times of 900AD. (Again at Open Day we had already found a Square building located in the middle on the inside of the North Bund dating from medieval times made of a mixture of wood, stone and mud).

So, with the first 50 years in mind, we dowsed and established that various families coming together built 30 or 31 dwellings or roundhouses. Our game-plan was to establish first the layout and then ask the more 'cultural questions' later based on what we found. To do this I'd brought along 5 sets of gazebo poles to act as ranging rods, and as shown in the picture we set up an East/West line of sight upon which I could resurrect my 40 year old training in Survey work (if I could remember!), of chaining "down the line" and then measuring the offset at right angles from that line.

Numbering each round house (R1, R2, etc.) we then dowsed and pinned them out in different colours on the ground, photographed each one, and then marked the results up on a 1:50 plan. (eg in R1's photo below we used yellow flags marking inside/outside of wall, green flag for the entrance and a white one for the hearth). We started our work at 10am and the weather thankfully was kind to us. However, we found tramping in and around the existing tree stumps quite exhausting, and by 5pm we had only managed R1 to R23 of the 30 or 31 huts, two of these being enclosures. As shown on the plan we probably have only covered two-thirds of the area, leaving the Southern slope to be finished another time.

What we were surprised with was the intensity of the placing of huts, sometimes being only a few feet apart. Also the majority had a hearth in, usually towards the middle; but surprisingly the entrances were at any angle (marked with an "E→") rather than away from the prevailing south-westerly wind or towards sunrise. (Entrances seemed on the whole to face the stockade: perhaps in the early days the thoughts were not to be caught napping on the blind side in case of a breach of the stockade). We also noted that the huts at the East end were much smaller than those at the West end.



Partway through the day, with the huts flagged out, we decided to dowsed how many lived in each one, and this we found quite startling: taking R1 for example, (in the adjacent photo), which is only 3.5m in diameter; we found two families with 8 to 9 people sleeping within at night. Considering there was a fireplace in the middle this was quite a small area, but perhaps they had bunks!

In the larger huts commonly we would find 3 families with a total of 14 to 16 sleeping, and sometimes with dogs too (up to

3). Generally we found/felt these families were closely related ... e.g. if Mum/Dad had 2 or three children, then the children who later 'married' would also live there with their young children. (See separate list for the first 11 huts).

R13 dowsed as being special in that it belonged to the head-man or Chief. It also had its own stockade or fence around. Also R4 and R12 were just straightforward enclosures. They had no roof nor had any hearths, although we found some partial roofing at the corners, and these were made out of tree branches. R4 distinctly dowsed for a fire material store but R12 didn't react to questioning.

We didn't find any specific stockade areas for animals (although the South side is yet to be dowsed) but we did ask for the 'purpose' or use of the settlement, and this showed (again first 50 yrs) to be for farming and a good deal of hunting was done. We found that it was never in its time used as a fort and nobody was ever killed defending it (ie over an 1800 year period). We checked for the animals they had: there were no horses, no cows, but the rods did react to sheep-like animals (!) ..... in that they weren't the type of nice white woolly sheep we know, but were more goat-like sheep, maybe 75% goat, 25% sheep.

We found that there was a plentiful supply of fish in the valley below, wild boar was hunted every day and surprisingly to a lesser extent some deer. Food was cooked individually by families, not collectively. But what struck us was the amount of food that would have been needed every day to keep a population of several hundred going. (NB – as already mentioned not all of the people were there all of the time. Livestock close by would have been brought in at night, but others may have been away in clearings, "camping out" and hence eating elsewhere).

We dowsed for the water source and found this on the outside of the mound/ditch on the NW corner. Water was easily accessible at 3 to 10 feet in depth and so just digging a small pit would have provided a constant spring of water. Also this may explain the “counter-scarp” second entrance running on the outside of the Western end of the North slope in that it could have provided water bearers some protection from wild animals when ferrying water (?)

During Open Day it was mooted that outside the scheduled area by 20/30m + to the NE there might be a second defensive mound and ditch as the ground shape was quite pronounced. But when dowsed we found it to be a natural gully, but beyond the 2<sup>nd</sup> bund (3<sup>rd</sup> incl Berry’s ) we did find a square wooden house dating to about 700 AD. Also in the gully by this house was a good supply of natural water at 5 ft. depth.

As the day wore on possibly our last and most important find in the NW corner was the position of a large standing stone measuring 12 feet tall, surrounded by a Henge made from 8 wooden posts. The Henge was about 18m in diameter and also formed a screen but had an open entrance facing East.

We had already detected that the Eastern end of the settlement was masculine and the Western feminine, and also Hut R20 had a heavy feminine influence and upon re-dowsing we found that this was the “Shaman’s” hut ..... for want of a better description (or perhaps the term “priestess” might be better) ..... and that this Shaman controlled what went on in the Henge (ie no men allowed inside and the rituals or ceremonies were greatly to do with women, eg when birthing, or possibly to do with partnering).

We found that this female Shaman/Priestess to be in control for the majority of the 50 years, but towards the end her son took over this role when she died.

Beneath the position of the standing stone are 4 blind springs, and it is the nodal point on which 10 energy lines cross and several spirals rise. The strongest of these lines goes directly through Huntshaw Mill Cottage and on up to Huxhill (approx. bearing of 344 degrees)

Interestingly if a line is drawn through this standing stone it lies on an exact dead straight line between the Iron age Hill fort at Alverdiscott 3km away to the North and Gaze Castle about 1 km to the South (on a similar bearing). Dowsing at these points would reveal if the same Earth Energy line passes through these forts too.

Incidentally we located the current position of this standing stone, and we found it was taken to be used as a lintel in the nearby Woodhouse Farm at least 400 years ago. (Perhaps we should ask for it back!)

In summary we found that Berry Castle in its day would have been a very busy place inhabited by several hundreds of people. Clearly it was the focus for the tribe (or tribes) in the locality and we found it to be a peaceful place. It wasn’t used by armies but by peaceful folk farming and living off the land, no doubt they drew themselves and animals in at night for safety from wolves and other wild animals.

It was still in use through the Roman occupation and there was some form of settlement still being used at Berry into Saxon times. What is noticeable is the amount of rock and stone on the surface. Take away a thousand years of pine needles and all that would be left is stone. It would make sense that the builders of the site not only formed the mound out of the ditch, but also scraped off any topsoil that was not eroded from the hill top also into the mound, so that on a wet Winter’s day they weren’t paddling around their huts in mud.

We found that Berry Castle was used for some form of habitation up until late the 1500’s/early 1600’s.(eg that could be just one house or shack) and thereafter it was used as farmland up to the planting of any trees.

In the near future we hope to return to complete the dowsing of the site, plus also possibly dowse later on in its occupancy to compare the layout of an ‘established’ settlement to see if it changed.

## Record of Survey Data

Notation ..... d/l = distance (m) down line from start point at East > West. o/s = Offset (m) from that point L (left) or R (Right) to centre. Ø = diameter of circle (m). H = Location of Hearth. E = Entrance. Colour of Flags (flg) Gn = Green, Bl = blue, Or = orange, Wht = white etc. etc.

Round Houses noted as R1, R2, R3 etc.,.....one photo taken at each unless otherwise noted

- R1 – Yellow flags, 6m d/l, 2.5m o/s L, 3.5m Ø. Grn Entrance Wht Hearth
- R2 – Wht flags, 15m d/l, 2m o/s L, 4.6m Ø. Grn Entrance, Orange H
- R3 – Wht flgs, 26m d/l, 3.5m o/s L, Oval 7.1m x 7.8m, No Hearth and 2 entrances (hut for storage?)  
3 photos' of existing wall base daylighting, crossing survey line on angle at 16.5m d/l. Not orig but dating circa 400 yrs old .... Bearing of angle needed
- R4 – 2 photo's. Sq enclosure, no hearth. Storage area, partially rooved in corners with tree branches (bits rooved) – store for fire material.
- R5 – 7.3m d/l, 3m o/s (R) to edge. Red flags 5.3m Ø, red hearth
- R6 – 5.3m d/l, 19m o/s R, red flags 6.5m Ø, red hearth
- R7 – 16m d/l, 17m o/s R, red flgs 8m Ø
- R8 – 18.5m d/l, 7m o/s R, blue flgs 7.5m Ø
- R9 – 26.5m d/l, 15m o/s R, bl flgs, 8m Ø, blue H, picture with Gwynn in it
- R10 – 33m d/l, 5m o/s R, Oval 10m by 8m, white flgs, orange flag is corner of enclosure, Orange H, 2 grn, entrances.
- R11 – 35m d/l, 15m o/s R, Blue flags with Bl H, 8m Ø
- R12 – Enclosure 44m d/l to corner co-incident with adjoining enclosure, 57m d/l & 9m o/s to corner. 53.3m d/l o/s 15m to corner.....3 photo's
- R13 – Headman. 47m d/l 18m o/s R. 10m Ø + sq wnclosure
- R14 – 50m d/l, 3m o/s R. 8m Ø, bl flags bl H
- R15 – 63m d/l, 13m o/s L. Wte flags, part stockade around 6m Ø
- R16 – 60m d/l, 3m o/s R. 6m Ø
- R17 – 58m d/l, 18m o/s R, 8m Ø. One photo for R16 & R17
- R18 – 79m d/l, 12m o/s L, yellow flags. 7m Ø. Orange H, Grn E
- R19 – 68m d/l, 9m o/s R. 10m Ø. Red flgs. Red H. Entrance to NW
- R20 – 81m d/l, 13m o/s R. 10m Ø – photo with Gwynn, red flgs.
- R21 – 80.5m d/l, on centre-line, 10m Ø, grn flgs
- R22 – 95m d/l, 11m o/s R. 8m Ø
- R23 – 96m d/l, 2m o/s R, 9m Ø – green & white.

Circle – 118m d/l 13m o/s R to centre of 12' tall standing stone. Henge of 8 wooden posts around approx. 18 Ø or slight oval. Entrance to East. Also Entrance to whole site about 3.5m wide just touches South of Henge, and passes through what is now mound. Standing stone was removed (robbed) to nearby Woodhouse Farm & used as a lintel over door (or window?). 4 blind springs beneath. 8 to 10 then 10 firmed up energy lines crossing & several spirals.

End marker @ 126m. .... Bearing on Wind Turbine 282°. Bearing on Monkleigh ch tower 242°, on HM 344°

Zero to E/W survey line set up on 270° but then moved at E end (start) by 3.5m to edge of existing entrance = approx 1.8° or > 272°



## Numbers of families/no's people sleeping in each Round house.

In the morning Richard & Gwynn tested each dwelling to see how many people generally lived there, and dowsed for how many 'slept' at each location (for the numbers of houses flagged out at the time)

R1 – 2 families – Max sleeping 8 to 9

R2 – 1 – 2 families – Max sleeping 6 – 7

R3 – 4 families (closely related) ..... 15 no, No animals (NB this has no hearth.... Summer use only?)

R4 – Enclosure

R5 – 1 fam, max 5 sleeping (2 kids)

R6 - 2 families Max sleeping = 8, 3 dogs sleeping

R7 – 3 fam, 14 sleeping

R8 – 3 fam, 15 sleeping. 3 dogs

R9 – 2 fam, 14 sleeping

R10 – 3 fam

R11 – 3 fam 16 sleeping



A picture of Gwynn measuring out.