



## Blackstone Iron Age site, near Bewdley

### Summary

Aerial photography in 1957 resulted in the discovery of a sub-rectangular double-ditched promontory enclosure of 0.68ha near Bewdley, overlooking the River Severn floodplain to the west (see location plan above).

Greater detail about this site emerged in the 1970s, when excavation took place in advance of gravel extraction. This provided limited evidence of Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age activity prior to a major phase of occupation in the later Iron Age, when an enclosure was constructed. The enclosure was formed by a ditch and bank, and later added to with a palisade and ditch, with single and double entrances. Rectangular and circular buildings were found. Pottery and salt containers indicated trading links with the wider region, and especially with potteries in west and north Worcestershire, and the Droitwich salt industry. The site was abandoned some years before the Roman conquest.

Its location was advantageous for fortification but the scale of this may suggest it was more for show. The proximity of the river and of a potential fording point may have been even more important, as they would have attracted traders and travellers to the site if it had offered facilities, perhaps signifying that it was a trading post. The community was certainly likely to also be deriving a living from agriculture in common with other rural settlements in the Iron Age.

### The site



This view shows the centre of the enclosure under excavation in 1973. There are many features, some of which produced only worked flint (the waste material from tools), and so they can be regarded as evidence for activity of an earlier

date than Iron Age. However, the most noticeable features are large pits in the centre of the photograph dating to the Iron Age, and these produced charred cereals showing they had probably been used by the inhabitants to store grain over the winter.

The site was probably occupied for only a few generations judging by the quantities of finds and their date range. The enclosure seems to have been defensive in character, though it would not have been defensible for long against any larger scale assault. Perhaps the main purpose of the banks and ditches around the settlement was, therefore, the assertion of higher social status. In which case this was where the local chief was resident.



Certainly the defences show signs of considerable reworking and periodic maintenance, indicating they remained of concern to the inhabitants long after they were first established. The enclosure was entered through a gate in its east side, which was wide enough to drive a small cart through. The plan (at end of text) shows the positions of the post-holes relating to the timber structure of the gateway.

## Artefacts



There was a range of Iron Age artefacts from the site which included pottery sherds, stone querns, and iron objects. These attest the domestic nature of the occupation as the pottery would have been used to cook and serve food, and the querns to mill cereals, while the iron objects include two brooches worn to show off the valuable new metal (iron). The ironwork also included some iron strips which were probably from the so-called 'currency bars' mentioned by Julius Caesar in a contemporary reference where he describes the life-style of the native population. All of these artefacts denote trade and/or exchange across the region.

See below for pottery illustrations.

## Overview of the site

This is a rare example of a site that was only occupied for a relatively short time and that has survived in good condition to be discovered through archaeology. Since sites with a similar plan are known elsewhere in Worcestershire, for instance in the Broadway area, Blackstone has presented a valuable opportunity to date this type of enclosure and to explore its function.

The presence of imported artefacts showed how much the site relied on the region for its supplies, and the movement of goods around the region would suggest that there were well-used trade routes possibly with facilities for traders at key points. While deriving some of its wealth from farming the surrounding countryside, Blackstone may also have been able to derive benefit from being a secure compound where traders and travellers could have rested close to a likely ancient crossing point on the River Severn.

This work in 2007-8 has been made possible by a grant from the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund (ALSF) administered through English Heritage. It is intended that a full report will be made available in due course.



