

Thursley Common, Surrey: survey of eastern mound (SU 9107 4093)

Background

Two sub-circular mounds, approximately 180m apart, are situated on the south side of Thursley bog in Surrey and at the base of a ridge that rises behind them to the south. In December 2005 the eastern of the two mounds on Thursley Common was surveyed following concern at the erosion being caused by heavy use of the monument by birdwatchers.

The two mounds, which are mentioned in 18th century court records describing a parish boundary (Graham 2001, 338–9), were visited by L V Grinsell in 1932 and were included in his subsequent paper 'An analysis and list of Surrey barrows' (Grinsell 1934). The eastern mound (Grinsell's Thursley Common No 2) is described as a bowl barrow with a ditch '7 or 8 feet wide and 1½ feet deep'. The mounds, originally Scheduled Ancient Monuments, were descheduled following excavations in 1959, when the excavator claimed that both were actually sand dunes (Corcoran 1961). However, following doubts about this conclusion, the western mound was trial trenched in 1995 and found clearly to be man-made, having a loose turf stack core (Graham *et al* 2004). The palynological evidence dated the mound to the Bronze Age, so by analogy it seems probable that the eastern mound is similar in nature and also of Bronze Age date.

The Survey

The survey was carried out using a total station taking approximately 800 readings within a rectangular area centred on the mound. The results have been plotted as a contour map and sections and also as a digital terrain map looking from the south-west.

As can be seen the mound has been heavily disturbed in the past most notably by a large – probably antiquarian – trench visibly cutting the mound from the south boundary to the centre. Spoil from this excavation seems to have been dumped on either side of the trench at the centre of the mound – hence the two peaks on the survey and on the north, south, south-west and south-east sides of the mound – as well as partially being used to backfill the original cut. This has resulted in much of the original outline of the mound being obscured and in the visible loss of the surrounding ditch except on the eastern, and less clearly, on the southern and western sides. To the west, where the ditch is best preserved, it has a still-surviving external bank.

There are two military foxholes cut on the south-western edge of the mound and evidence for a number of other holes elsewhere – some caused by human activity and others by burrowing animals. More recently the two paths leading up the mound have started to erode into the underlying sand and damage has occurred in front of a fallen tree at the top used as a seat by birdwatchers.

Conclusion

In 1932, Grinsell observed that the mound was 8–9 feet high (*c* 2.6m) while it now measures *c* 2m high, implying a degree of erosion over the intervening period. The surrounding ditch has obviously suffered infilling at various times but still remains visible in places together with an external bank.

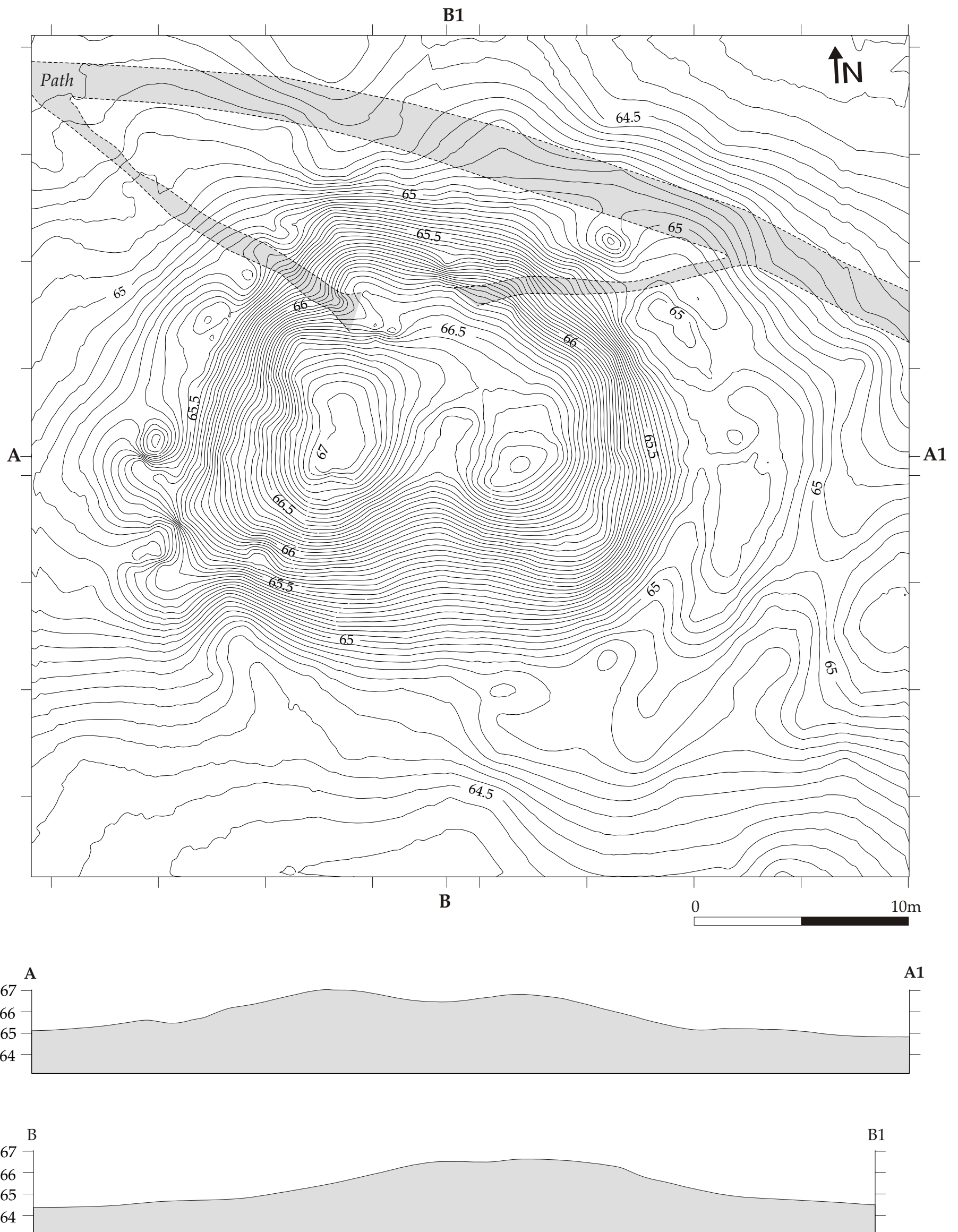
Interestingly, Corcoran's excavation in 1959 consisted of cutting a narrow north–south trench through the centre of the mound and it seems distinctly possible that his trench lay within the line of the earlier antiquarian trench. If this was the case, Corcoran was excavating backfill

and this may explain why he concluded that the mound was a sand dune. It also means that while the antiquarian trench is visible on the south slope of the mound it may originally have bisected the earthwork, but been adequately backfilled on the mound's northern slope. Again, if this is the case, it seems likely that, despite all the damage, some elements of the original construction will remain intact on the east and west sides of the central depression.

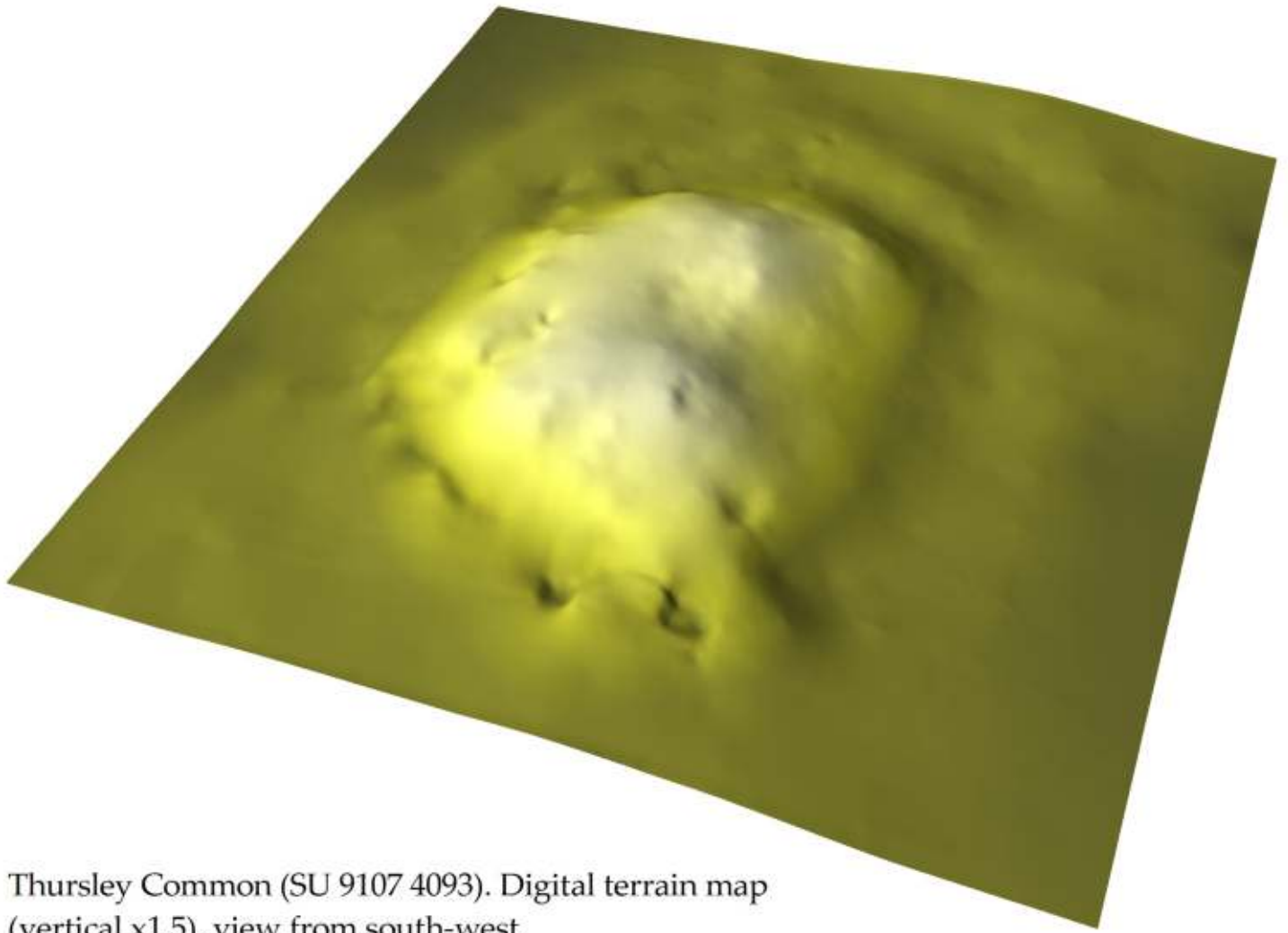
References

- Corcoran, J X W P, 1961 Excavation of two mounds on Thursley Common, *Surrey Archaeol Collect*, **58**, 87–91
- Graham, D, 2001 The Cricklestone and Thor's Stone: parish boundary markers on Thursley Common, **88**, 337–41
- Graham, D, Graham, A & Wiltshire, P, 2004 Investigation of a Bronze Age mound on Thursley Common, **91**, 151–66
- Grinsell, L V, 1934 An analysis and list of Surrey barrows, *Surrey Archaeol Collect*, **42**, 36–60

David Graham
17 January 2006



Thursley Common. Contour plan and profiles of eastern mound (SU 9107 4093).
 (Grinsell 1934, Thursley Common No 2)



Thursley Common (SU 9107 4093). Digital terrain map (vertical x1.5), view from south-west.



View of mound from north-north-east, December 2005.