

4.8 Trench 24

Investigation of the feature in Tr24 revealed a ditch cut very similar in dimensions and profile to that found in Tr22. The primary ditch cut, [444], was excavated along a 4.20m long section to reveal a width of 1.80m and a depth of 1.29m (Fig 18). The sides sloped at approximately 45 degrees to a curved base. As in Tr22 the ditch in Tr24 was initially cut into natural boulder clay. However in Tr24 the depth of boulder clay was only c0.70m which meant that the lower half of [444] was cut through sandstone bedrock.

The primary fill of cut [444] was (454) a thin band of dark red silty sand lying against the bottom of the south edge of the cut (Fig 19). Above (454) was (443). This was a loose and wet light reddish brown silty clay, 0.79m wide and 0.23m deep. It is possible that these two fills represent natural silting into the ditch during its lifetime. Above fill (443) was (456) a thin lens of light brown sandy silt confined to mid point of the north edge of cut [444]. Above fill (456) and, extending across the full width of the ditch to cover fill's (454) and (443) as well, was fill (455). This was a distinctive layer of blue grey silt clay 0.25m deep. Apart from its distinctive colour fill (455) was also characterised by a spread of large sandstone fragments which mark the boundary between (455) and (443) below. The stones may have eroded out from the exposed natural sandstone layers which form the lower halves of the sides of the ditch in Tr24. However this was a far more extensive spread of stones than fill (414) in Tr22. It may be the case that they represent an early phase of deliberate backfilling into the ditch. Above (455) are two thin layers, fills (457) and (458). These seem to represent the accumulation of material into the ditch through natural process. The accumulated depth of this material suggests that this took place after the ditch had fallen out of use. The final sequence of in-filling within cut [444] was represented by fills (459) and (460). These were light brown and mid-brown sandy silts and as with fill (414) in Tr22 probably represent a deliberate backfilling of the ditch. No dating evidence was recovered from any of the fills of cut [444].

Discussion

As with previous excavations across the enclosure ditch particular attention was paid to trying to identify any evidence of a rampart or bank associated with the ditch. The situation was hampered in Tr24 by the proximity of the dry stone walls of the track way and the rubble and stone spreads associated with them. As with previous trenches the only indication that there may once have been a bank came from the backfill of the ditch. It seems unlikely that the soil representing fills (459) and (460) would have been brought any great distance in order to level up the ditch. More likely is that these represent the remnant of a bank which has simply been pushed into the ditch. Another interesting fill is layer of stones at the base of (414). Although they may simply have eroded out of the exposed sandstone in the sides of the ditch another possibility is that they were originally part of a bank.

One of the most interesting aspects of Tr24 were the waterlogged conditions encountered during excavation. This can partly be attributed to seepage from a modern field drain which cuts through the ditch in Tr22. Tr24 was the lowest point at which the enclosure ditch has been excavated and after rainfall water would stand in the excavated ditch for several days while the ditch in Tr24 would be dry. The series of ditch re cuts seen in Tr22 were not as apparent in Tr24. It is possible that fills (455) and (456) and again (457), (458) and (459) represent fills of re-cuts. However if this is the case the re-cut ditch in Tr24 would be shallower than in Tr24. This would seem unlikely if the ditch had to act as a stock enclosure were a certain overall depth would presumably be required along the entire ditch in order for it to function effectively. However, if the ditch was not required to fulfill this role and instead it acted as a boundary marker then a consistent depth would not be as important. Furthermore if as part of its function the enclosure ditch acted as a drainage channel then the prime requirement would be to maintain

a downhill gradient along the ditch. This could lead to a situation where only certain sections of the ditch may have required re-cutting in order to maintain flow. The enclosure ditch does angle down hill across Area B. It may be that as the ditch up hill from Tr22 was cut through bedrock it required less maintenance. The more mobile boulder clay of Tr22 may have caused greater silting up, removing the required gradient for drainage. This would have required continual cleaning and re-cutting. However as long as the flow of water was maintained between Tr22 and Tr24 the silting up of areas would be tolerated.