



Location: The Bull Ring (SK 0785 7823) is adjacent to the village of Dove Holes in Derbyshire, just north of Buxton.

Main period: Neolithic–Bronze Age

Access & ownership: The site is Scheduled. At the southern end of the village, a track leads to a children's playground and to the henge, which lies on the far side of a playing field. Parking is available at the end of the track.

The Bull Ring is a henge – a large, circular earthwork with an external bank – a type of ceremonial monument that can be dated to the late Neolithic–Chalcolithic periods. Sited on the NW edge of the Derbyshire limestone plateau, it stands at the junction of three valleys and perhaps provided an accessible meeting point or trade centre for prehistoric communities in the area.

In plan and dimensions, the henge is almost identical to Arbor Low, just 17.5 km to the SW although the orientation of its entrances is different. It has an external diameter of 93–90 m, with the bank and internal ditch surrounding an oval area (Fig. 2). The rock-cut ditch measures 8–12 m across and is between 0.5 and 1 m deep. Excavations in 1949 (Alcock 1950) showed that it was originally 5–6.5 m wide and between 1.2 and 2.1 m deep. The surrounding bank is now about 1 m high and between 9 and 11 m wide; it was originally 2 m high and 5.5–7 m wide. Between the bank and ditch was a flat strip of land or 'berm', originally 5 m wide. Entrances to the N and S each have a causeway across the ditch. Nineteenth century quarrying damaged the N entrance and also, reputedly, revealed a human skeleton.

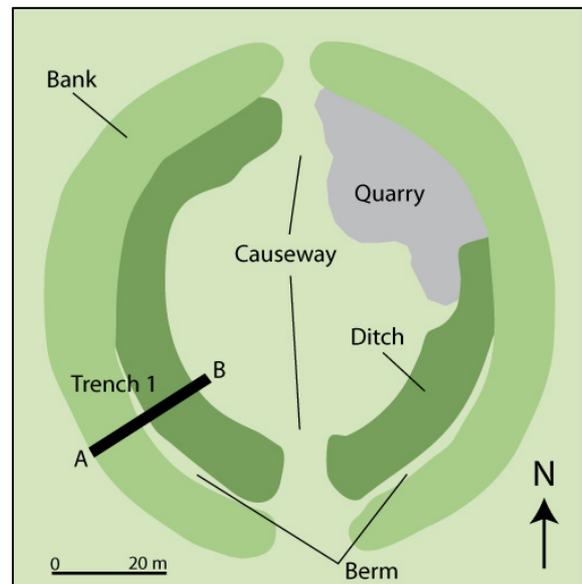


Fig. 1. Plan with location of Trench 1 (see Fig. 2). After Alcock 1950 fig. 1

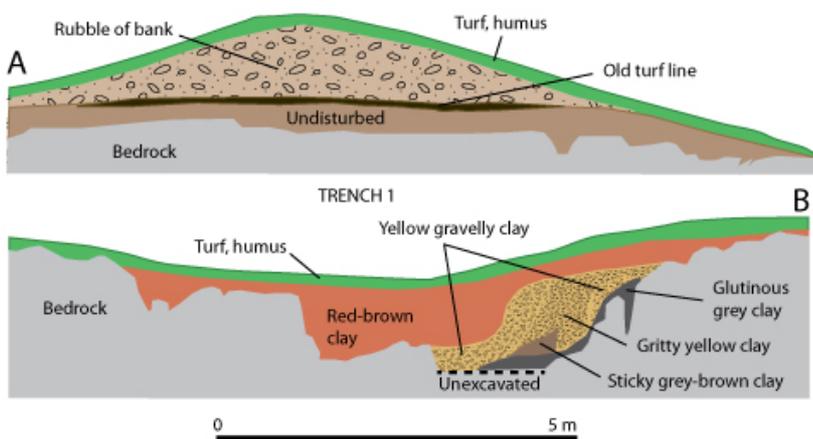


Fig. 2. Sections through the ditch and bank in Trench 1. After from Alcock 1950, fig. 2

The ditch was cut into soft limestone, already worn with deep natural channels. Red-brown clay had slipped into the ditch from the bank; the yellow gravelly and gritty clay was thought by Alcock to be a pocket of boulder clay into which the builders dug to form one side of the ditch (Fig. 2).

The bank was composed of clay and limestone rubble from the ditch. The weight of the bank had preserved the turf on which it was laid.



Fig. 4. Banks and ditches at the Bull Ring. By Dave.Dunford [CC BY-SA 3.0]

In the 18th century, the centre of the henge was ploughed and a drystone wall (since removed) was built across it. A single standing stone was recorded in the henge in 1789 by James Pilkington, potentially the remnant of a stone circle as at Arbor Low. The stone has now gone. It has been suggested that stones from the henge were used as sleepers for the Peak Forest Tramway in c. 1790.

A minor excavation was carried out in the west ditch that recovered pottery sherds and flint flakes (Turner 1902). In 1984, a larger excavation confirmed that the area south of the henge had been disturbed in the post-medieval period, but several pits and the stake-holes of a hurdle fence along the henge bank (undated) may be contemporary with the henge (Barnatt 1988). Further flint flakes and pottery were also found. Magnetometer and earth resistance surveys in 2000 did not produce conclusive results.

On the SW side of the henge, about 20 m away, is a large mound interpreted as an oval barrow, and overlain on its W end by a later bowl barrow. It is sub-rectangular in shape, measures 27 x 21 m by 2.5 m high, and is cut by a World War II slit trench. The edges have also been disturbed by ploughing, and by the construction and later removal of drystone walls on its E and N sides. No excavation of the barrow has been carried out so it cannot be precisely dated.

References and further information

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