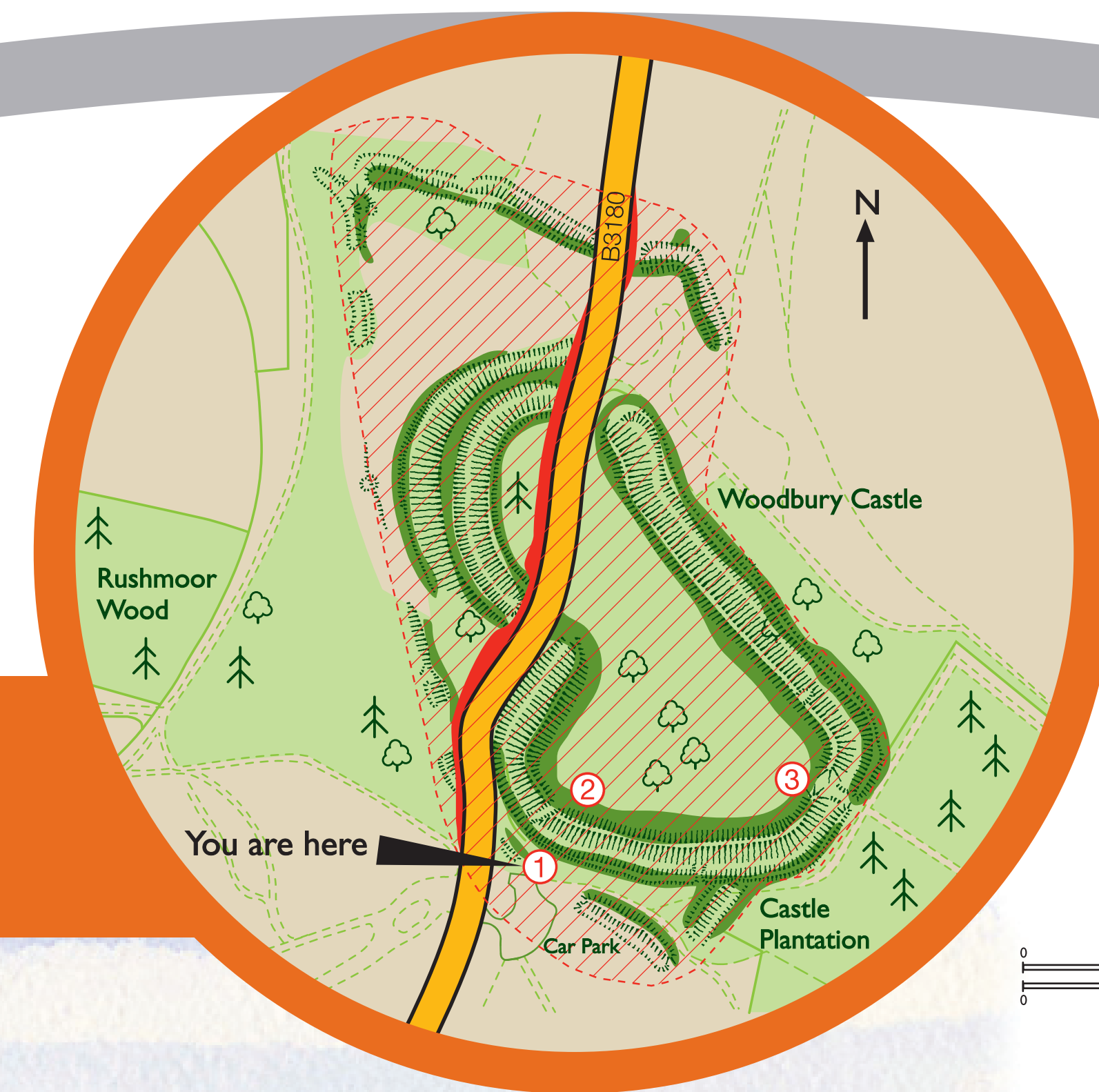
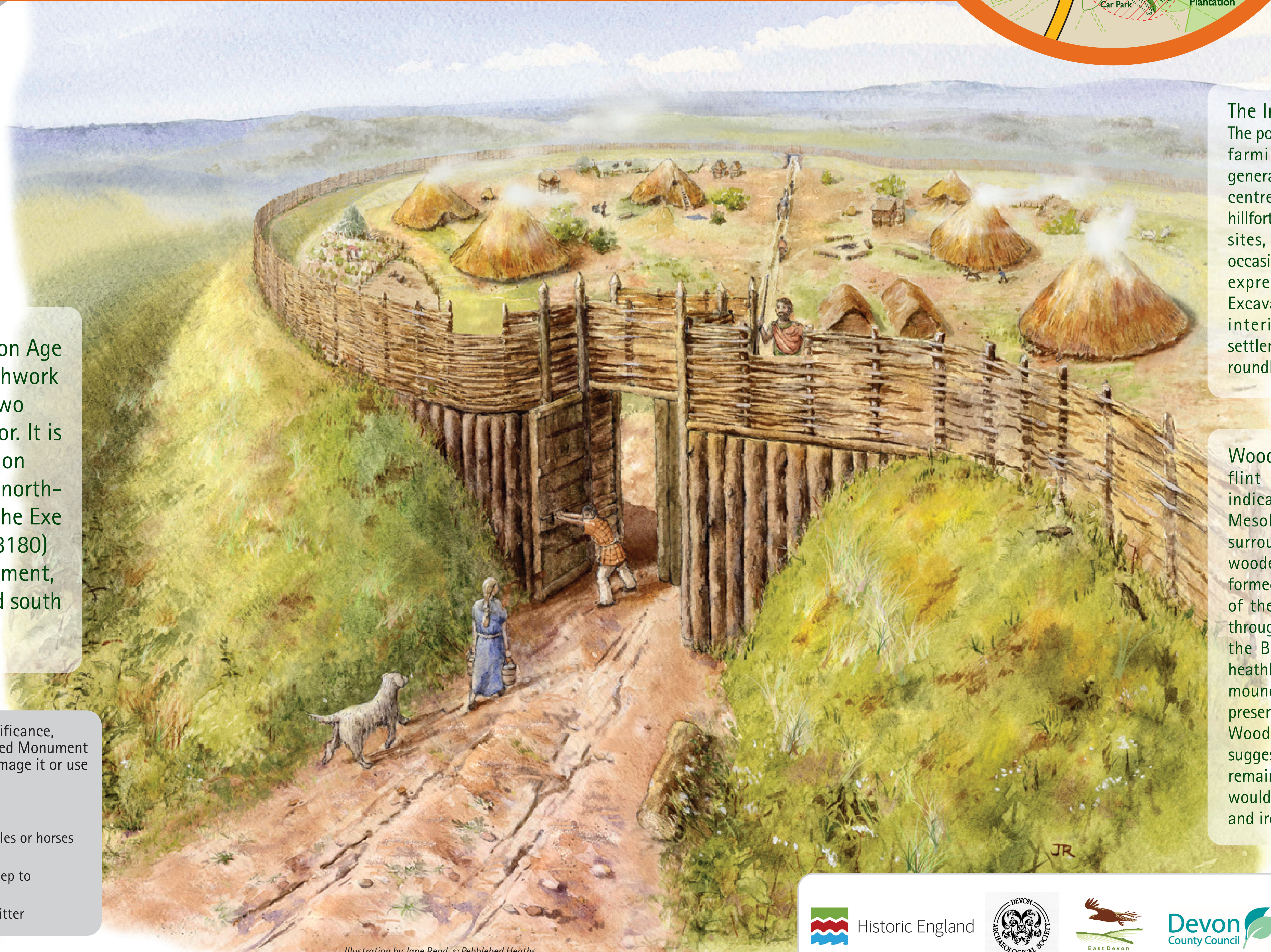




Introducing the Hillfort – Woodbury Castle



- KEY:**
- ① Location of interpretation panels
 - Earthworks
 - 1971 Excavation Trench
 - Scheduled Monument area
 - Tracks



Woodbury Castle is a large Iron Age Hillfort, with significant earthwork ramparts enclosing around two hectares of the hillfort interior. It is sited at an altitude of 175m on Woodbury Common, along a north-south ridgetop, overlooking the Exe Estuary. The modern road (B3180) runs right through the monument, between the former north and south hillfort entrances.

The Iron Age in Devon (800 BC – AD 50)
The population was mainly based in scattered farming settlements but hillforts were generally sited on higher ground, serving as centres for the tribal communities. Whilst hillforts are commonly thought of as defensive sites, any warfare is likely to have been occasional and the substantial ramparts also expressed the high status of the site. Excavation evidence suggests that hillfort interiors were not densely occupied settlements, but contained only a scatter of roundhouses.

Woodbury before the Iron Age Finds of flint implements on Woodbury Common indicate human activity from at least the Mesolithic period (c 9000-4000 BC). The surrounding landscape was originally more wooded, but as trees were felled heathland formed and was managed by the first farmers of the Neolithic (4000-2500 BC) onwards, through swaling (burning) and grazing. During the Bronze Age (2500-800 BC), the open heathland ridges were often a focus for burial mound (barrow) construction, and two well-preserved Barrows survive just to the north of Woodbury Castle. Archaeological evidence suggests that by the Iron Age some woodland remained in the vicinity of the hillfort, which would have been valued as a resource for fuel and iron-working.

Because of its national archaeological significance, Woodbury Castle is protected as a Scheduled Monument (SM108275). It is a criminal offence to damage it or use a metal-detector on it.

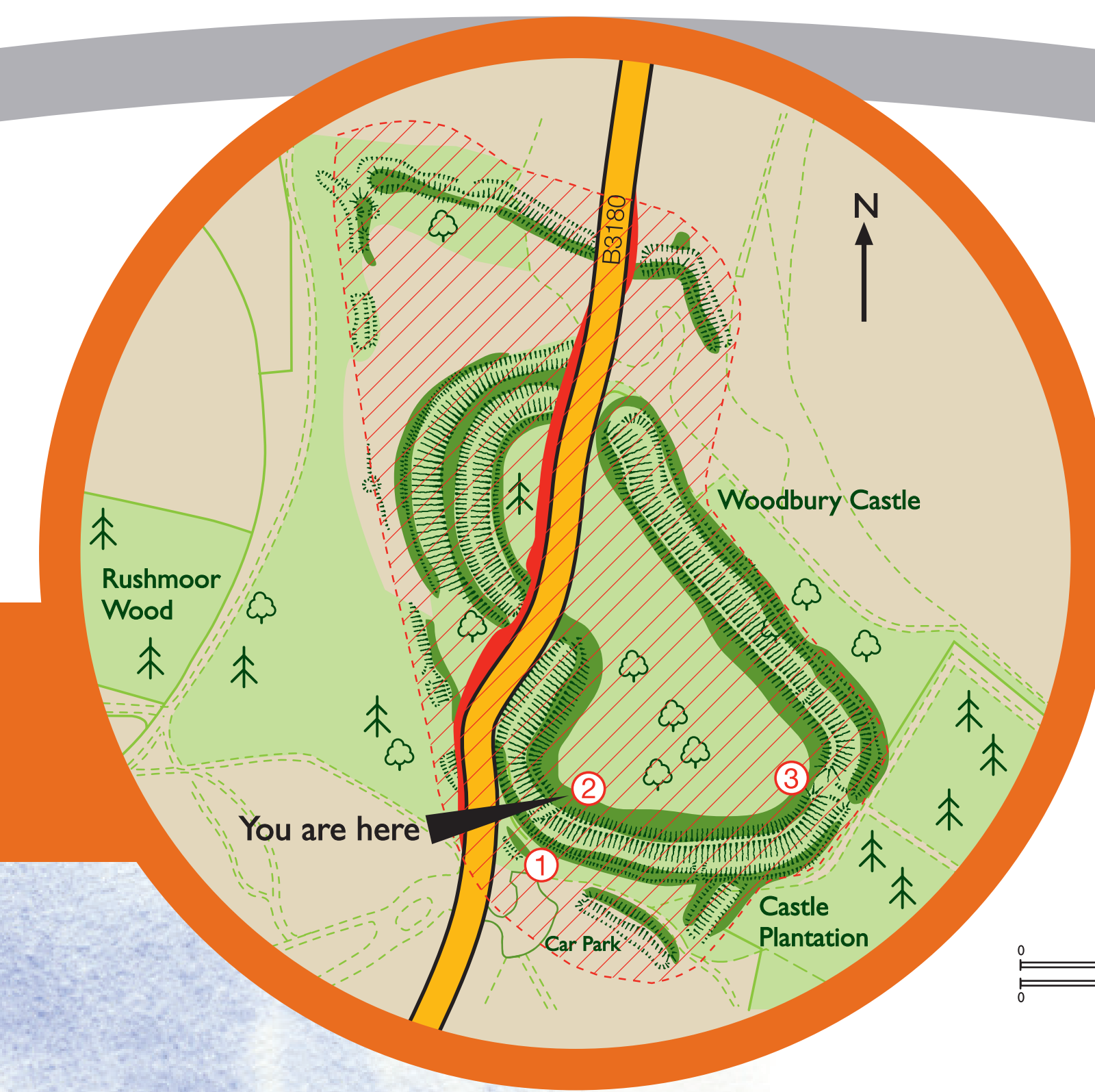
Please:

- Do not cycle or take any unauthorised vehicles or horses onto the castle
- Do not climb up and down the Ramparts, keep to the steps. The site is vulnerable to erosion
- Respect the site and pick up dog mess and litter

Illustration by Jane Read, © Pebblebed Heaths



Welcome to the Hillfort Interior



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Scale: 0 100m 200m

Woodbury Castle Rescue Excavations In 1971, the B3180 needed widening and a rescue excavation was carried out by Henrietta Quinnell for the Department of the Environment, along a 3m roadside strip through the hillfort. The excavations which were supported by the Devon Archaeological Society provided critical information about the way the hillfort was constructed and developed.

How did the hillfort develop? The first enclosure was a palisade made only of wooden posts. The later hillfort, was surrounded by several earthwork ramparts and ditches (*multivallate*), which were probably first constructed in the 5th – 4th centuries BC, (the Early Iron Age), and substantially altered at least once. The two main enclosing ramparts were built at the same time, the inner rampart being topped by a timber breastwork or *palisade*. A separate linear rampart to the north had a similar palisade. An incomplete rampart, outside the main earthworks to the south and west, hints at a more complex development.

Ramparts, Ditches and Entrances The ramparts and ditches of Woodbury Castle, are still substantial despite centuries of erosion and remain a significant, surviving feature of the site. A cross-section excavated through the inner rampart showed it was of a *glacis* construction, with layers of tamped earth and stone providing slope stability. The modern road runs through the original north and south entrances of the hillfort, probably following the alignment of a former trackway. Excavation also showed that the west side of the northern entrance was lined with substantial timbers and both north and south entrances may have had a double-leaved gate.

Welcome to the Hillfort Interior

This enclosed area is where the hillfort occupants lived, worked and sometimes gathered with people from the surrounding area. The reconstruction scene shows an Iron Age granary. In 1971, important evidence for this six-posted structure was found in the hillfort interior. The granary was raised off the ground, using stout vertical wooden posts, to keep stored grain dry and to deter mice.

A wooden paddle to move the grain is shown leaning against the *daub* walls; the roof was probably thatched. Cereals such as spelt wheat and barley were grown in the surrounding fields and ground into flour on a large concave stone, known as a saddle *quern*. The hillfort may only have been occupied intermittently and probably wasn't in use by the Roman conquest of the South West around 55 AD

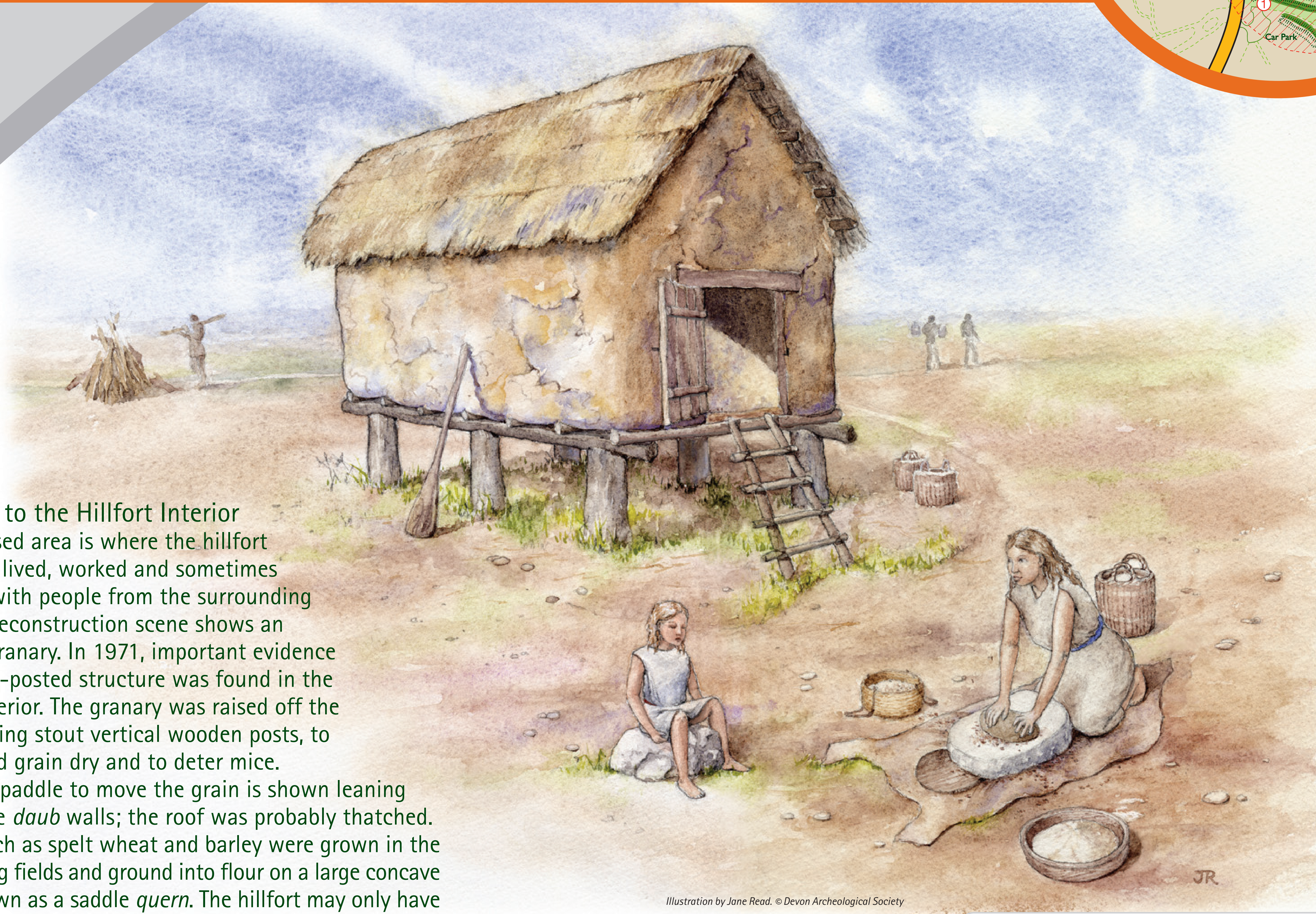
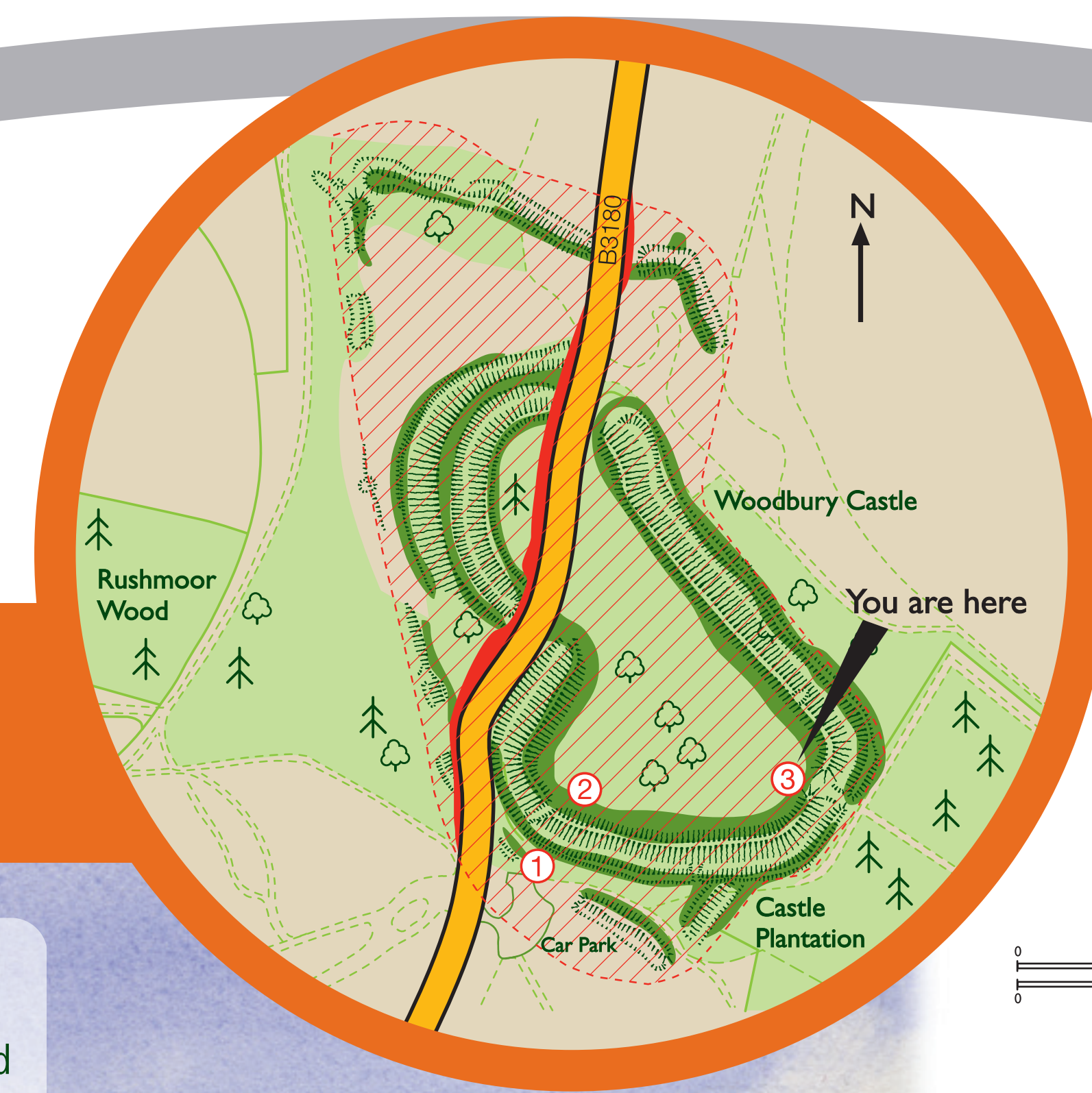


Illustration by Jane Read. © Devon Archeological Society



Life in the Iron Age Hillfort

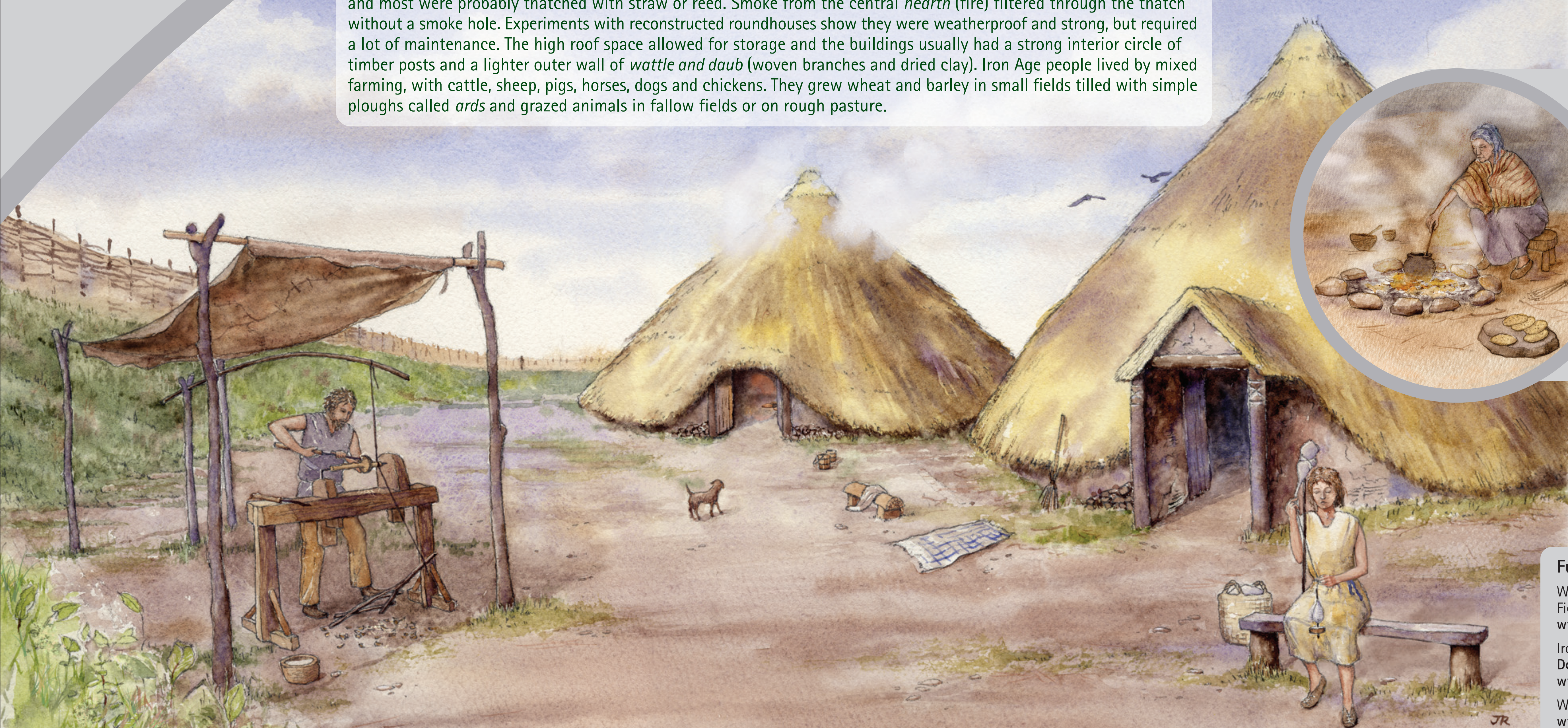
The hillfort probably did not house a large permanent population and may not have been in use for long periods. The reconstruction scene is set in the south eastern area of the hillfort Interior where recent archaeological survey has indicated the possibility of two adjacent roundhouses. In the Iron Age (800 BC – 50 AD) houses were nearly always round and most were probably thatched with straw or reed. Smoke from the central *hearth* (fire) filtered through the thatch without a smoke hole. Experiments with reconstructed roundhouses show they were weatherproof and strong, but required a lot of maintenance. The high roof space allowed for storage and the buildings usually had a strong interior circle of timber posts and a lighter outer wall of *wattle and daub* (woven branches and dried clay). Iron Age people lived by mixed farming, with cattle, sheep, pigs, horses, dogs and chickens. They grew wheat and barley in small fields tilled with simple ploughs called *ards* and grazed animals in fallow fields or on rough pasture.



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Domestic life in a Roundhouse
Most food was probably simple stews allowed to simmer over the fire and flatbread cooked on heated stones, although larger bread ovens are also known. The hearth is shown surrounded by large Pebblebed cobbles. Hearths were used for cooking and provided warmth, but little light, so many jobs had to be done outside.



Iron Age Crafts The reconstruction scene shows some of the everyday skills in use at the hillfort. Iron-working was practised throughout the Iron Age and *wrought* or beaten iron, provided good carpentry tools. Wood was also important and the man in the shelter is working a *pole-lathe*, a device which enables wood to be *turned*, trimmed and carved into neat circular shapes. Wooden vessels were probably in common use, explaining the scarcity of pottery from the excavation, and even the spokes of wheels for horse-drawn carts could be made. The lady sitting outside the roundhouse is spinning wool on a *spindle* weighted with a stone *whorl*. Wool was mainly used for cloth, and fabrics of good quality were produced on weaving looms and sometimes patterned with checks. Natural plants such as *woad*, which provided a blue dye, were also used to colour cloth.

Further Information:
Woodbury Castle, Devon Archaeological Society (DAS) Field Guide No. 2
www.devonarchaeologicalsociety.org.uk
Iron Age/historic monuments in Devon
Devon County Historic Environment Record
www.devon.gov.uk/historicenvironment
Woodbury Common and Pebblebed Heaths
www.pebblebedheaths.org.uk

Illustration by Jane Read. © Devon Archeological Society