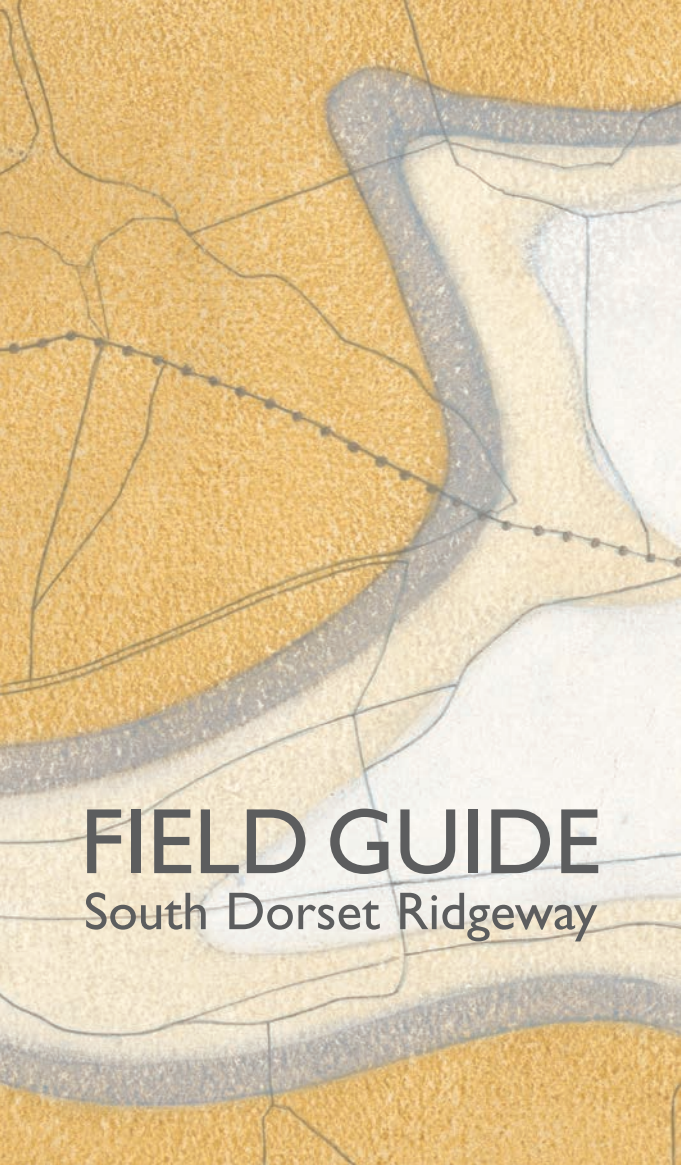

FIELD GUIDE

South Dorset Ridgeway

This guide and accompanying maps have been produced by Dorset based artist Amanda Wallwork. Amanda describes herself as "primarily a painter, my practice is concerned with archaeology, geology and a continuing enquiry into landscape."

Amanda was commissioned to undertake this work by the South Dorset Ridgeway Landscape Partnership Scheme. This Scheme is led by the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Dorset AONB) and is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Arts Council England has supported the engagement of artists in this project.

The Dorset AONB is one of a family of protected landscapes in the UK, working to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of these special landscapes.

FIELD GUIDE
South Dorset Ridgeway

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THE SOUTH DORSET RIDGEWAY

The South Dorset Ridgeway area is defined by a world-class ceremonial landscape bearing the marks of continuous human occupation through 6,000 years to the present day. It holds an incomparable density of Bronze Age round barrows - the single most defining feature - but is also home to Neolithic henges, spectacular Iron Age hillforts, Roman villas and defence sites, Celtic field systems and Medieval villages.

The varied and detailed geology of the South Dorset Ridgeway means there is a remarkable diversity of habitats in a relatively small area. Combine this with the geographical location; Dorset is at a juncture between the ranges of northern Arctic species and southern Mediterranean species creating a hotspot of wildlife richness that the South Dorset Ridgeway runs right through.

It is a farmed landscape now; it has been a farmed landscape for 6,000 years. The agricultural landscape is characterised by open arable and grassland fields on the shallower slopes bordered by hedges or stone walls, ribbons of semi-natural grassland on the steeper slopes and pockets of woodland.

The South Dorset Ridgeway provides an introduction to the best that the British countryside has to offer. This guide and accompanying maps aim to help you explore and better understand this fascinating landscape.

DEEP TIME

Rocks of the Ridgeway

Geology underpins everything about our landscape yet the rocks below our feet are largely hidden, and the natural processes that have shaped the land operate on timescales that we find difficult to imagine. It is these rocks that have determined the landscape we see today - they in turn formed from previous landscapes millions of years ago.

"Viewed in cuttings and old quarries, rocks are the physical manifestations of ancient worlds - shallow seas, shelly beaches and sticky swamps, green forests and quiet lagoons."

Sam Scriven

The rocks are sedimentary, formed over a span of 125 million years, mostly when this area was underwater - a series of shallow seas, lagoons and swamps. Formed from particles of other rocks and of decaying life, gradually accumulating in layers and slowly compressed, each one encapsulates a record of the environment at the time of its deposition.

This sequential layering of deposited material created strata in a vertical timeline with younger rocks at the top and older rocks the further down you go. However, earth movements have interfered with this logical sequence - lifting, tilting and exposing older rocks to the surface, subjecting them to erosion and further deposition and altering the sequence in places.

The result is a land surface of many differing types of rock. Each with its own properties which dictate how it behaves as a material and influencing the shape of the landforms and formation of the soil and the habitats it supports.

And so the cycle continues - the creatures, plants, processes, landscapes of the past making the rocks that in turn make the soil to support plant and animal life. All, in time, becoming part of the next layer of deposition.

Whilst much of the geology is unseen, the Ridgeway landscape offers visual clues to what's beneath and presents plenty of opportunities to get up close and look back into 'deep time' and see what this landscape is really made of.

Signs on the Surface

The variety of different rock types with varying texture, colour, hardness and porosity, can be seen in the stone used for buildings and the walls of fields.

Small quarries and pits were once common across this area, providing local building stone which has given villages their unique and distinctive character. This is very noticeable in Abbotsbury and Portesham, where the grey Purbeck Limestone of Portesham contrasts with the glowing rusty oranges of the Corallian stone used for most buildings in Abbotsbury only a mile away.

There is a gravel pit near the Hardy Monument at Black Down [MAP 4] where tumbling golden nuggets cascade into a hollow, surrounded by paths meandering through the heathers and gorse. You can see here the peaty acid soil that is formed in these areas and the plants it sustains.

Limekilns

Limekilns are associated with many of the pits and quarries. These were once used for burning limestone or chalk to produce lime for use as a soil improver or to make plaster, mortar and concrete. Bishop's Limekiln [MAP 2] has recently been restored.

Sinkholes

Look out for sinkholes, sometimes referred to as swallow holes, shakeholes or dolines. These circular depressions in the ground are formed where acid gravels overlie the alkaline chalk. Water percolating through the gravel gradually dissolves the underlying chalk, creating a hollow into which the surface ground collapses [MAP 4].

Springs

The many springs in the area are an indication of where permeable rocks above meet impervious clay below. Rainwater, unable to percolate any further, escapes to the surface. [MAP 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6]

Rocks of the Ridgeway

Gravel

The most recent layer of deposition are the gravels, laid down about 42 million years ago by rivers that flowed from the west across what was at the time the flat but eastward tilting surface of the chalk. Later as the land surface eroded the gravel was left as a topping on higher ground. Amongst these gravels can be found pebbles of quartz known to have come from Dartmoor.

Sarsen

In a few places, conditions resulted in some of these sands and pebbles cementing together to form a hard conglomerate rock known as sarsen. Up close these rocks can look very similar to a modern day concrete mix.

Although glaciers didn't extend this far south in the last ice age, the ground was subject to a pattern of freeze and thaw which weathered these hard blocks of sarsen on the hilltops from where they gradually moved to the valleys below.

A spectacular example of a sarsen boulder train can be seen in the Valley of Stones [MAP 3].

Sarsen stones can also be seen at the roadside and built into the walls and buildings in the Portesham area [MAP 2]. This readily available source of stone lying on the surface was taken advantage of by the builders of the stone circles and chambered tombs of the area which are all sited nearby [MAP 2 + 3].

Chalk

The higher ground of the Ridgeway is predominately Chalk. This soft white stone formed 90 - 100 million years ago from the microscopic skeletons of plankton and other tiny sea creatures during a period when the sea level was much higher and this area was a vast tropical sea.

Flint

Found within the Chalk and lying profusely scattered across the land are nodules of flint.

Pick up a piece and think of it as a sponge and imagine the landscape you are now walking as a seascape.

These knobbly white lumps with their contrasting translucent, glassy inner core were formed by the crystalisation of silica from the skeletons of sea sponges and other microscopic organisms. They often formed around and within the burrows of crustaceans within the chalk sediment, leading to their distinctive nodular shape.

Flint was a very important material prior to the discovery and use of metal. It is very hard and its broken edge very sharp, and was used extensively for fashioning tools such as axes, knives and arrowheads. Examples of flint tools are on display at Dorset County Museum.

Upper Greensand

The layer below the chalk is Upper Greensand - a sandstone formed 100 - 113 million years ago when sea levels began to rise, flooding much of the land.

Tilting of the rocks has exposed this layer in places. It can be seen as craggy outcrops on the slopes above Abbotsbury and at Eggardon Hill where it forms a narrow strip of level land or 'bench' between steeper slopes above and below. Look closely at a freshly exposed piece of rock and you will notice small flecks of a green mineral called glauconite [MAP 1 + 2].

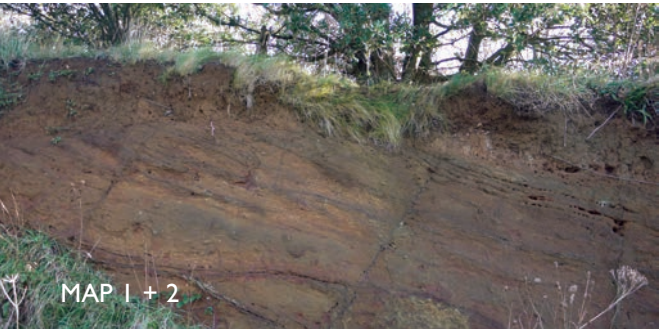
Purbeck and Portland Limestone

Look further back in time at Rocket Quarry near Portesham [MAP 2] where the layers of Purbeck and Portland Limestone have been left exposed. Purbeck Limestone was formed 140 - 145 million years ago in an environment of successive fluctuating forests, swamps and lagoons, each depositing different layers of mud or shell, gradually compacting to form a hard, pale grey limestone. At the lowest level of this quarry you can see Portland Limestone which formed 145 - 148 million years ago in shallow warm sub-tropical seas close to land and contains fossils from trees and plants as well as sea creatures such as ammonites.

Dry stone walling, rather than hedges, is common in areas where the Purbeck Limestone was easily accessible [MAP 2 + 4].

Kimmeridge Clay

Forming broad sweeping vales and deeper valleys below the limestone ridges and chalk escarpment are clays, formed from very tiny particles and largely impervious to water. Much of this is Kimmeridge Clay, laid down 148 - 157 million years ago during a time of rising sea levels.



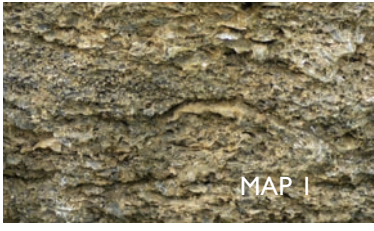
Abbotsbury Ironstone

A dark rusty red rock formed at the base of the Kimmeridge Clay but which only occurs in certain places where there was a very high concentration of iron. Iron ore extraction was once considered a commercial possibility and a railway link from Abbotsbury to Weymouth was built in anticipation. However the venture was abandoned due to too many impurities in the stone. The former rail line follows a route naturally eroded in the Kimmeridge Clay and is now part of the walk route on MAP 2.

Corallian

Look closely at the Corallian stone used in buildings in Abbotsbury and you will see it is composed of small spherical grains cemented together. These were formed when fragments of rock and broken shell, rolling around in the tidal currents close to shore gradually accumulated a coating of calcite from the water forming small round beads known as ooliths. This rock was formed 160 - 163 million years ago from sediment deposited when this area was a warm shallow sea. Its red colour comes from the high iron content.

Forest Marble



The oldest rock formed in the Ridgeway area is Forest Marble. This hard shelly limestone was formed 165 million years ago in shallow water when smashed up shells accumulated in banks on the seabed and became compacted into a very hard and impermeable rock. This makes it a very useful stone for building foundations, damp courses and basements.

HABITATS

The rocks below have a direct relationship to the soils and plants that cover them. Small particles eroded from the surface layer of rock mix with organic matter from dead plants and animals, combine with air, water and living organisms to create soil. The resulting chemical make-up, nutrients, water retention properties and depth of this soil dictate the kinds of plants and habitats it sustains, supporting different wildlife and influencing how we use the land.

Early humans responded to their environment as they found it, moving from place to place in search of food sources. Gradually the idea of settling in one place and farming the land took hold - clearing land, growing crops and breeding livestock. Like the rest of Britain, this area was once densely wooded. However the proximity to the coast and exposure to the strong south westerly winds meant it was likely that the high ground and south facing slopes were naturally much clearer of trees and most attractive to early settlers.

Over time, increased knowledge led to the improvement of soil and the development of land management systems to increase production. This was most evident from Medieval times but increased in intensity from the mid 1900s. Mechanisation and the widespread use of herbicides and pesticides have had a profound influence on the landscape and habitats for wildlife.

Chalk and Limestone Grassland

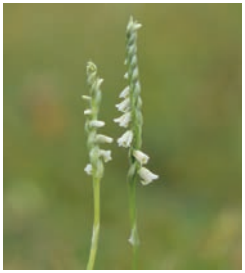
The Ridgeway landscape is dominated by the chalk. On chalk uplands the soil is shallow, stony and dry and plants are typically short and hardy. As farming moved down the valleys, the upper slopes were left undisturbed and used mainly for sheep grazing. As less productive land it was also left longer before being claimed and enclosed and supports a huge diversity of plant life.

Although much of the Ridgeway is cultivated, there are still many areas of semi-natural chalk and limestone 'calcareous' (alkaline) grassland supporting a fantastic range of wild flowers and insects, particularly butterflies.

The bright, electric blue **Adonis butterfly** is one of the more remarkable species found on the Ridgeway but is very limited to where it can thrive. The butterfly and its caterpillars need plenty of warm sun, some bare ground and no shading from taller grasses, just like their only food plant - horseshoe vetch.

Horseshoe vetch is so well suited to poor soils it can establish on bare chalk! It contains a toxin to put off herbivores (except certain caterpillars) and can survive grazing and trampling.

Harebell
This plant can actually tolerate a wide range of different soil conditions, including varying pH and moisture. However it can't compete with more vigorously growing plants and so needs the low nutrient conditions, such as the chalk downland, to thrive.



Autumn Lady's Tresses
An orchid found at the eastern end of the Ridgeway [MAP 6]. It takes years before the flower forms, during this time the earliest stage of the plant exists in a symbiotic relationship with fungi, unable to access moisture or nutrient by itself.

Heathland and Acid Grassland

On the highest ridges of the uplands, the superficial deposits of sands and gravels overlying the chalk bedrock has created nutrient poor acid soils. These support heathland and acid grassland and very different plants and wildlife than the alkaline chalk soils. This can be seen distinctly at Black Down [MAP 4] where the pattern of ground cover of bracken and heather almost exactly follows the capping of gravels.

Heather is well suited to these conditions and is *the* plant of the heathland. The heather's canopy provides a combination of thick, protective cover and patches of bare ground, which together with the loose, sandy soil for burrowing, makes it an ideal habitat for reptiles.

Bilberry is found on Black Down - it flowers in April, bears berries in July and is loved by bees and birds [MAP 4].

Some of the sands and silt have been washed down the slopes, influencing soils across a wider area and leading to areas of acid grassland and scrubland. Here gorse and bracken are common. There are two types of gorse, giving the impression it is continuously flowering. Common gorse flowers in late winter and spring whereas Western gorse flowers in summer and autumn and is slightly lower in stature.

Bluebells can be seen in late spring as a glorious haze across areas of Black Down and the slopes of the Valley of Stones. Usually associated with woodland, the bracken here provides cover [MAPS 3 + 4].

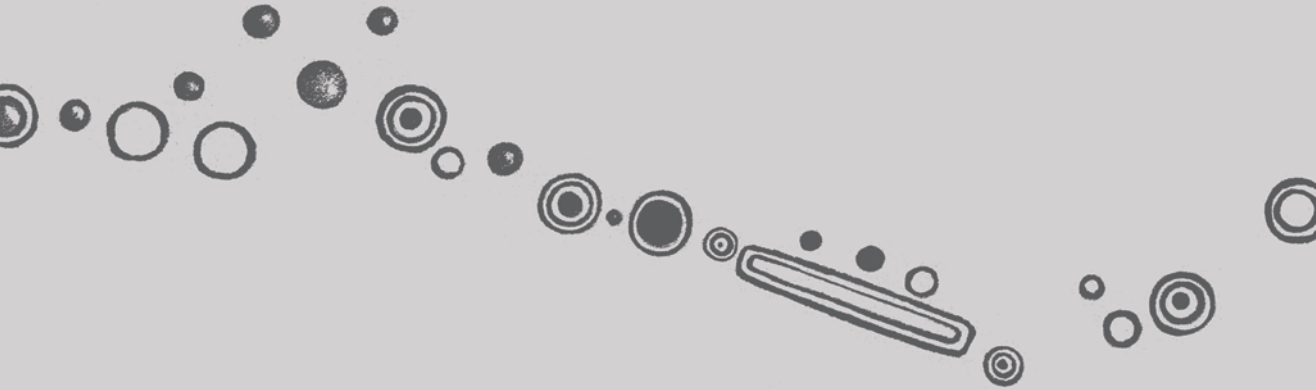
Most of the lower slopes and valleys of silt and clay have been cultivated and the soil structure changed - here the margins of fields and hedgerows are important wildlife habitats.

Wetlands

Several wetland habitats are found in the Ridgeway, including chalk stream, coastal, wet woodland and the internationally important South Winterbourne. The clay vales have been significantly modified by people - cleared, drained and ploughed to exploit soils fertile for agriculture. Streams have also been constrained and the winterbourne straightened. In places where the water was retained not drained, wet woodland was developed as withy beds growing willow for basket making and were once widespread before plastics became prevalent.

The walk on MAP 1 includes coastal shingle where Frome and fullers earth clays slope to the sea, forming the base of Chesil Beach.

Yellow horned poppy is a relative of the common poppy that has adapted to the salty windswept environment by forming thick, leathery, wax coated leaves. It produces large (up to a foot long) seed pods, hence the name. Sea kale and sea campion also thrive in these harsh coastal conditions.



EARTHWORKS

Mounds, banks, ditches and stones

The Ridgeway demonstrates remarkable evidence of the earliest manipulation of our landscape. At a time when environment and natural resources dictated lives more directly and profoundly than they do today, this landscape offered good access to desirable materials and locations for settlement and ceremonial use.

It's no coincidence that the prehistoric stone monuments in this area are sited close to where there are easily accessible sources of sarsen, naturally distributed on the surface with no need for quarrying or to transport far. Flint too was readily available, easy to pick up and turn into sharp durable tools for hunting and clearance of the land for cultivation. Combined with a good reliable water supply from the numerous clear springs, communities were able to settle in one place, gradually clearing more land and developing methods of farming to use land effectively.

The shape of the landscape too has influenced how it has been used. The ancient trackway that follows the high ridge is lined with the earth and stone monuments of prehistoric peoples making statements about life and death at a time when ritual, religion and everyday life were likely more entwined. Positioned for impact in the landscape, they should be considered as part of a wider ceremonial landscape context, their relationship to other landmarks significant, the view from them may be as important as the view of them.

The remains of these past lives proliferate this landscape, some are clearly visible others less discernable - best to catch these when the sun is low and the shadows are long, throwing any humps in the earth into sharp relief.

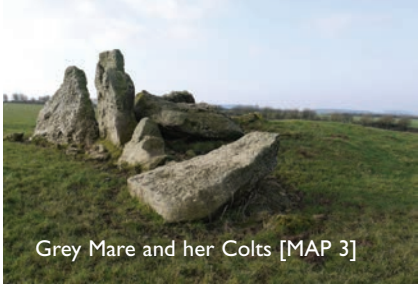
Hell Stone [MAP 2]
The stones of this long barrow have been rearranged by Antiquarians in an inaccurate attempt at reconstruction

Barrows and Circles of Earth and Stone

Although this area has been inhabited for many thousands of years, the earliest still visible evidence of permanent intervention in the landscape are the long barrows, bank barrows and earth henges of the Neolithic period, 6000 - 4000 years ago.

Long Barrows

Long barrows were built as communal tombs using massive sarsen stones to construct a series of chambers, covered with a long earthen mound. Evidence suggests they were used for the 'storage' of defleshed bones rather than complete burials. Bodies were stripped of flesh either manually or naturally through exposure to the elements - a process called excarnation - before being placed in the tomb. The bones were later used in some form of ritual or ceremonial practice. These tombs were used successively over a few hundred years before being finally sealed.



Grey Mare and her Colts [MAP 3]

There are two notable examples of chambered long barrows on the Ridgeway, built around 5500 - 4500 years ago. Several more once existed but are now destroyed or with only traces remaining.

Bank Barrows

Bank barrows are similar to long barrows but longer and with parallel sides. These do not appear to contain any burials and are thought to be territorial markers of some form.

Henges

Also constructed during the Neolithic period are circular earthwork henge monuments. Characterised by an internal ditch these sometimes feature later additions of circles of standing stones or timber posts.

There is evidence of several earth or earth and timber henges across the Ridgeway area but only one - Maumbury Rings in Dorchester - can still be seen today. It was adapted by the Romans and used as an amphitheatre and is still in use as a recreational area and arena for outdoor performance events.

Stone Circles

These belong to the Bronze Age, 4000 - 2700 years ago, when the use of metal was becoming widespread.

The Ridgeway has three surviving stone circles - Hampton [MAP 2] and Kingston Russell [MAP 3] are fairly modest circles of, now recumbent, stones but lie in prominent positions along ancient routes both close to the Valley of Stones.

A third circle of still upright stones can be seen near Winterbourne Abbas, located close to a watercourse - a common factor in the siting of many henges, circles and ceremonial places.

Hampton Stone Circle [MAP 2]

Round Barrows

Some of the most notable features you will encounter when walking the Ridgeway are the numerous round barrows that proliferate the landscape.

These "beautifully turned artificial hills, which are so copiously scattered over the downs"* are the funerary monuments of peoples that lived in this area around 4000 years ago. They appear to represent a shift in burial practice from communal tombs to individual inhumations and cremations marked by stone and earth mounds.

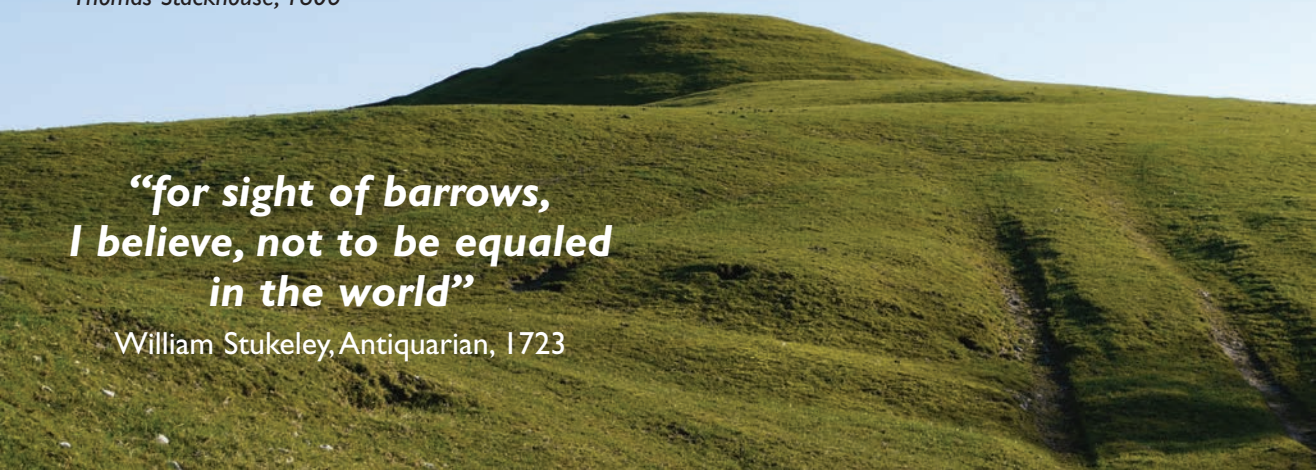
Their distinctive sculptural shapes are as impressive up close as they are when seen in silhouette against the skyline. Occurring in linear arrangements and clusters or groups, their locations are significant - positions deliberately selected in response to the landscape and how they will be seen as well as what can be seen from them.

**Thomas Stackhouse, 1806*

There were once thousands of barrows in the South Dorset Ridgeway area but many of these have been destroyed through cultivation of the land. For all those that you can still see today there are many, many more where little visible trace remains.

Inside a Barrow

The size, design and construction methods of barrows vary but usually used materials close to hand. Typically there would be a single burial of a body in crouched position in a cut pit or stone lined box below ground level. This was covered with earth and turf scraped from the surrounding area followed by a mound of flints topped with chalk. This would sometimes be added to later or dug into for subsequent burials, usually cremations contained in pottery urns. Many barrows were used for successive internments over several centuries. Most burials were accompanied by grave goods such as jewellery, knives, tools and vessels probably containing food or drink.



"for sight of barrows, I believe, not to be equaled in the world"

William Stukeley, Antiquarian, 1723

Barrows can be seen on all of the walks but some of the most spectacular groups are along Bronkham Hill [MAP 4] and Bincombe [MAP 5].

Barrows were often positioned on the crest of the ridge to give the best visible impact from settlements lower down the valley [MAP 5].

Throughout history these barrows have attracted attention and affection and are associated with superstition and magic - bad luck befalling anyone who interfered with them.

"Some farmers were levelling another great barrow; but the people of Fordington rose in arms and prevented them with a laudable animosity."

William Stukeley, Antiquarian, 1723

Nonetheless this didn't seem to deter 'barrow digging' from becoming a bit of a craze in the 1700s and 1800s, when many of these curious mounds were opened up and dug into. Unfortunately this early interest was spurred by the hunt for treasure, relics and curiosities rather than scientific study and findings were rarely recorded accurately. Excavation methods were crude and many artefacts destroyed in the process, in some instances with urns being cracked open and smashed for sport.

Barrows were often used as markers and meeting places. Culliford Tree Barrow [off route MAP 6] came to mark the meeting place or 'moot' of the local Hundred - an early Medieval geographical administrative system.

Damage to barrows through inexpert excavation by early barrow diggers is evident in several barrows on the Ridgeway. This barrow at Bronkham has been cut in two by antiquarian excavators [MAP 4].

Most barrows contained cremations in pottery urns, such as this one found near the Hell Stone on Black Down Hill. This and other finds from barrows can be seen at the Dorset County Museum, Dorchester.

Settlements
The traces of where people lived in prehistoric times are less visible. This landscape was once thickly wooded and early settlements were on the higher clearer ground. As technological developments allowed for clearing and ploughing the more fertile but harder to work wetter clay soils of the valleys, settlements moved gradually down the slopes. Villages developed along the line of springs where there was easy access to sources of fresh water. Continuous building, cultivation, and soil build up has covered most traces of early settlements in the valleys but the remains of hut circles and farmsteads can be seen on Tenants Hill and below Crow Hill near Littlebredy [MAP 3].

Fields
The traces of early farming and field systems can be seen as earthworks on many of the hillsides. The earliest of these are the so called 'celtic' fields of the Bronze Age to Roman times. The edges of these small and rectangular fields are marked by ridges, or lynchets, of soil built up over generations of ploughing. Not to be confused with 'strip lynchets' of the Medieval period which are cultivated terraces cut into steeper slopes and follow the contours of the hillside [MAPS 1 + 2 + 3 + 5 + 6].

Hillforts
Commanding the high points are the magnificent Iron Age hillforts dating from about 2700 years ago. Massive defensive earthworks were created at vantage points, affording visibility - to see and be seen. Their physical presence in the landscape would have marked a territory - offering a community safety, a meeting and trading place. Although windy and exposed they would have afforded refuge at times of uncertainty. Abbotsbury Castle hillfort high above the village and at the western end of the ridge, is part of the walk on MAP 1. Chalbury is close to the walk on MAP 5. Others such as Eggardon, Poundbury and Maiden Castle - the most impressive of the lot for sheer sculptural magnificence - are easily accessed through the network of public footpaths across the area.

Abbotsbury Hillfort [MAP 1]

THE OLD WAYS

Roads, Tracks and Pathways

The roads and paths you will follow on these walks can reveal many things about the landscape.

Many of the public rights of way that make up the network of footpaths and bridleways we use today have their origins in routes travelled by people hundreds and thousands of years ago.

Bridleways are a useful indicator of the geology below as they tend to be on the well drained chalk whereas footpaths proliferate across the lower clay valleys, which are harder to negotiate on horseback

The high ground running the length of the Ridgeway was once an important prehistoric navigation route - making use of the safety and visibility of higher and drier ground and may have been part of a network of similar ancient routes across the country. This old route remains in use today in part as current roads and in part as public paths.

Paths were originally created by the act of walking, worn into the earth from repeated use, their meandering routes responding to terrain, territory and obstacles on route. Their courses were constantly evolving and responding to changing needs.

As time went on, routes acquired different priorities - some once main travel routes became less important and reverted to footpaths and new roads established connecting different destinations. It was only when land started to be enclosed that paths began to be more specifically designated and delineated. Space was needed between boundary walls and hedges to accommodate access.

Early roads were no more than dirt tracks and travelling would have been quite an ordeal. With traffic concentrated along one route with no room to detour they would quickly become muddy, rutted and full of potholes. With the increasing use of wheeled vehicles there was an incentive to develop schemes for road maintenance. It was generally the responsibility of a parish to look after their own paths and roads.

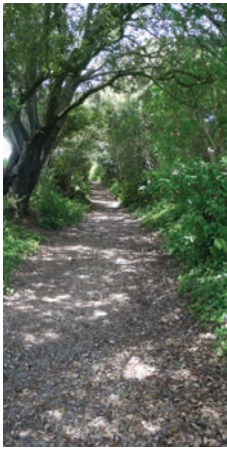
From the 17th century some roads became toll roads charging a fee, to raise funds for their upkeep. It wasn't until motorised transport became widespread that the improvement and maintenance of roads became imperative and a national responsibility.

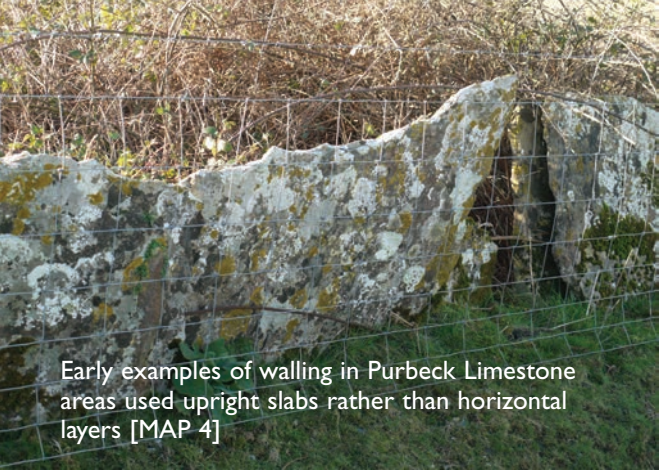
Ridgeway route at Bronkham Hill [MAP 4]

Roman Roads
During Roman times roads were built as very direct routes between significant destinations, cutting through obstacles rather than detouring around wherever possible. Their routes have been incorporated into much of our modern road system. A stretch of Roman road, now a footpath, runs parallel to part of the walk route on MAP 5.

Drove Roads
In the days before refrigeration it was imperative to keep animals destined for consumption alive until the latest point of delivery and many early roads evolved specifically for the mass movement of livestock. These routes are broad to allow for wide grass verges for grazing on route. Much of the main Ridgeway route would have been used for this purpose. You can see evidence of this at the eastern end of the Ridgeway on MAP 6 where the Ridgeway route connects with Poxwell Drove.

Holloways
These are sunken lanes eroded into the bedrock by hundreds of years of repeated use. As the track becomes deeper and the trees of the hedgerow on either side grew taller, the branches often meet forming a tunnel effect. They only occur in areas of soft rock and are numerous in the sandstone areas of Dorset, though a small one is evident in Blind Lane as it crosses the Abbotsbury Ironstone and begins to ascend the hill from Abbotsbury on MAPS 1 + 2.





Early examples of walling in Purbeck Limestone areas used upright slabs rather than horizontal layers [MAP 4]

Boundaries

The visual and physical marking of territorial and administrative boundaries was once very important. Ditches, banks, walls or hedges and stones mark many of the parish boundaries of Dorset. Rivers and streams were natural borders, the course of waterways often marking the extent of territories and dictating the route of pathways.

Field boundaries in this area of Dorset have changed very little, preserving within them patterns of past land usage. When following a map, they can be one of the most helpful and reliable clues to help orientate yourself in the landscape.

Sometimes boundaries are not where you might expect them to be. In fields separated by a ditch and hedge, the boundary is along the edge of the ditch furthest from the hedge. This arises from the assumption that the earth from digging the ditch is thrown up on the landowners side thus forming the bank upon which the hedge is planted.

Parish boundary hedge [MAP 3]

Hedges

Hedges are sometimes the remnants of woodland clearance but also evolved from the practice of using thorny sticks and branches to make stock proof enclosures and were deliberately planted. Hedges also acted as wind breaks giving shelter to livestock and preventing soil from being eroded away.

To be effective, hedges require maintenance and methods were developed to manipulate the hedgerow trees to grow horizontally instead of vertically to encourage a thicker denser hedge. With continued clearance of land they are now much needed for wildlife, providing food and safe corridors of cover between habitats.

Forest marble parish boundary wall [MAP 1]

Crossroads
The meeting point of roads, paths and boundaries are significant places and often marked by standing stones or trees. Criminals, suicides and other 'undesirables' were often buried at points where parish boundaries and paths met.

Viking Mass Grave
During construction of the Weymouth Relief Road, an old quarry pit was discovered containing the remains of over 50 decapitated bodies. Analysis determined the bones to be of mostly young men of Scandinavian origin and dated to between 970 and 1025 AD. The suggestion is this was a party of Vikings executed and then buried at a significant meeting point of roads and boundaries on the high ridge to make a statement. Although nothing remains of the site now, the walk route on MAP 5 passes close by and a display of some of the skeletons can be seen at Dorset County Museum in Dorchester.

NAMES

The names of places, fields, hills, lanes, paths, woods and farms often refer to landscape features. They evolved from the need to describe visual landmarks for navigation and negotiation and were eventually recorded on maps and documents for administrative and legal purposes.

Sometimes they described the geology - Chalky Lane, White Hill, Red Lane. Many names, particularly field names, are literal and self explanatory, relating to the shape or size of a plot or the soil - look out for Eight Acres, Dry Mead, Labour in Vain Farm for example. Others are more enigmatic originating in long forgotten events or names of people.

Rivers were once much more important for travel and transport than roads and their names are generally much older than place names - many towns taking their name from the river they are sited on. Littlebredy takes its name from the River Bride meaning 'boil' or 'bubble'.

Derived from early British, Roman and Saxon words and influences many names have become corrupted over time and it's not always possible to be absolutely certain of the original reference.

Glossary of names

Our current names for places are often the combination of two words, the first part describing the landscape feature and the second the type of use or habitation, i.e. Corton - farmstead (ton) at a gap in a ridge (cor). Use this glossary to help decipher some of the names you might come across in Dorset.

Ashen – *having Ash trees*

Barton – *farm buildings, farmstead*

Batch – *ridge or small intermittent stream*

Beer – *oak and beech woodland used as pasture for swine*

Berrow / barrow – *mound*

Black – *may refer to colour of soil but frequently used for poor unproductive land*

Brake / breach / brach – *land newly broken by ploughing*

Broad – *wide*

Bury – *fort or fortified town or place*

Butts – *ploughland with short furrows due to an obstacle*

By – *village*

Came – *crest of a ridge*

Chesil – *shingle*

Cleave – *steep slope*

Close – *enclosed field*

Coomb / combe – *valley*

Cor / corf – *gap in hill, notch in a ridge pass*

Cott / cote – *house, dwelling*

Cowleaze – *cattle pasture*

Creech – *barrow*

Cross – *sometimes relates to a crucifix but more frequently used of fields where furrows ran crosswise to neighbouring land*

Culver – *wild wood dove*

Dean / dene – *little valley*

Den – *pasture, usually for pigs*

Doles – *pieces of land allotted by annual drawing of lots – generally grassland*

Don / dun – *hill*

Drong – *a passageway or lane between walls or hedges*

El – *omen, wish*

Ell – *L shaped field*

Eweleaze – *sheep pasture*

Field – *corruption of 'feld', which meant open land without trees*

Fleet – *stream*

Furlong – *a group of strips of open ploughland*

Furze – *gorse*

Garston / gaston – *grass enclosure*

Gore – *triangular piece of land*

Gratton – *small enclosure*

Gully – *ditch created by running water*

Ham – *village or enclosure*

Hanging – *sloping down a hill*

Hatch – *a form of gate used sometimes for sluice gates in weirs or streams*

Hay / hays – *hedged enclosure from open field*

Hell – *sometimes used for L shaped field or wood*

Hern – *angle or corner*

Hewish – *land held by a family*

Holm / holme – *an island of dry land surrounded by marshy land*

Holt – *wood*

Hurst – *wooded hill*

Iver – *long slope or escarpment*

Knap / knapp / nap / nappy – *a hill end*

Knowle / knoll – *a rounded hill*

Lake – *a slow flowing stream*

Landshare – *boundary*

Lawn – *a piece of land*

Leaze – *pasture or meadow*

Linhay – *open shed or lean-to in farmyard*

Ly / ley / leigh – *wood or clearing in a wood*

Leys – *meadow*

Mayne – *stone*

Mead – *near a stream*

Mere / more – *pond*

Moor – *land steeped with water – not a heath*

Over – *upper*

Ower – *bank or hillside*

Park / pleck / plock – *small enclosure*

Peak / picket – *a field with at least one markedly acute angle*

Pound – *a holding field for livestock*

Quagg – *swamp*

Quarr – *quarry*

Rix / rixon – *rushes*

Rod – *withy rod*

Shard – *a piece broken or cut off, or gap cut through fence*

Shute – *a field or road that runs downhill*

Slade – *waterlogged land*

Sleight – *a sheep pasture*

Steart / stert / sturt – *tongue of land between streams*

Strap – *strip of land beside a road*

Stroud – *a marsh*

Sted / stead – *place*

Ton – *usually a corruption of 'tun', which meant farm or hamlet*

Toothill – *a hill where watch used to be kept*

Try – *found at the end of some names try is derived from the Saxon word for tree*

Vern / verny – *fern*

Well – *spring or water source*

Worth / worthy – *enclosure or enclosed settlement, farmstead*

Winterbourne – *a stream that runs in winter*

Whit – *white*

Wick – *at beginning of name means vicinity, at the end, trading place or port*

Yate – *gate*

Yonder – *further*

This Guide offers a brief introduction to the landscape of the South Dorset Ridgeway - for more detailed information and further reading list please visit www.southdorsetridgeway.org.uk

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This Field Guide accompanies a series of six maps with walking routes that explore the remarkable landscape of the South Dorset Ridgeway.

Map 1: **Abbotsbury Castle Hillfort**

Map 2: **Hell Stone + Rocket Quarry**

Map 3: **Valley of Stones**

Map 4: **Black Down + Bronkham Hill**

Map 5: **Bincombe Bumps**

Map 6: **White Horse Hill**

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