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# THE MIDDLE DOWN DROVE PROJECT

## Fieldwalking, Test Pitting and Excavation
## Cheddar, Somerset 1997-9

by

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## ABSTRACT

Three seasons of fieldwork at Middle Down Drove, Cheddar in the Mendip Hills, Somerset (centred on ST 485 526) are reported on. The work involved the investigation of a previously known flint scatter, further fieldwalking and the partial excavation of a round barrow. Geophysical surveys were also undertaken, revealing a possible prehistoric field system that incorporated the round barrow. Although fairly limited in scope, the project uncovered new information about prehistoric activity dating from the Mesolithic to the Bronze Age in this area.

## INTRODUCTION

Three seasons of fieldwork at Middle Down Drove, Cheddar, Somerset were undertaken as part of PhD research by Jodie Lewis into the Neolithic and Bronze Age of northern Somerset. The project was jointly directed by David Mullin and assisted by undergraduate students from the Department of Archaeology, University of Bristol, as part of their annual fieldwork project at Carscliffe Farm, Cheddar. The Middle Down Drove project was primarily based around the investigation of lithic scatters and had three main aims:

- Investigation by test pitting of a lithic scatter, discovered during fieldwalking by R.G.J. Williams (Williams, 1982).
- Fieldwalking in a ploughed field to the west of the above scatter.
- Limited excavation of a round barrow ditch, located by geophysics, to obtain environmental and dating evidence.

### *Location*

Middle Down Drove lies on the southern edge of the west Mendip plateau, c. 256 m AOD. The name Middle Down Drove has been used here to apply to the small, self-contained part of the Mendip plateau that the drove traverses. To the south and west the plateau drops down towards the settlements of Rodney Stoke and Cheddar, whilst to the north lies Cheddar Gorge and Cheddar Head. The Mendip plateau stretches away to the east. This illustrates that, on three sides at least, this section of the plateau is contained by significant natural boundaries making a convenient area for study. Four fields were examined in total: the field where Williams located the original flint scatter in 1981 (Field 1), the two fields south of this (Fields 2 and 3) and another field across the drove to the north (Field 4) (see Figure 1). Fields 1 (ST 4915 5276) and 2 (ST 4900 5270) rise gently to the south west where they form a "lip" in Field 2 before running down into Field 3 (ST 4890 5255). Field 3 lies in a hollow, bounded to the south-west by limestone outcrops, with several large swallet holes in the south-east part of the

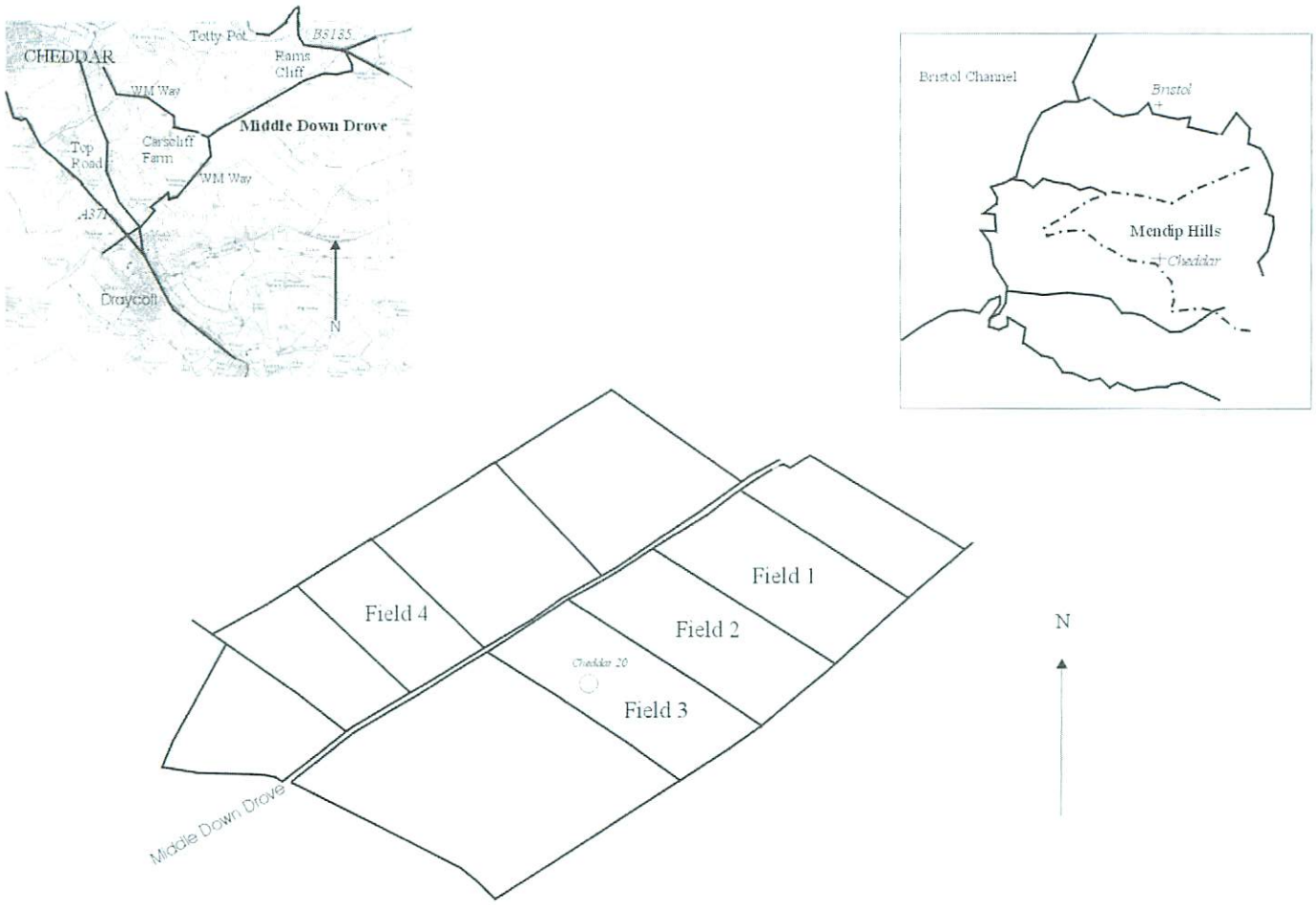


**Figure 1.** *Location of Middle Down Drove.*

field. There are also many small depressions in Fields 1 and 2, some of which may be natural, others man-made. Field 4 (ST 4840 5267) lies to the north of Field 3, at the head of a steep sided dry valley which runs north west, ultimately to Bradley Cross.

The area of Middle Down Drove under discussion is located in one of the twenty or so 'closed basins' found on the Mendip plateau (Barrington and Stanton, 1976, Williams, 1982). Geologically, the fields lie on Carboniferous Limestone and the soils are the brown earths of the Nordrach series (Findlay, 1965, 38, 48). The nearest source of water is a spring near Carscliffe Farm, 1.5 km to the west of the site. During the life of the project, Fields 1 and 3 were being used for grass silage, while Field 2 was used for grazing livestock. All three of these fields have been ploughed and improved in the past, attested by the presence of slag in the soil. During 1999, Field 4, formerly pasture, was brought into cultivation and was fieldwalked immediately after ploughing.

Sites of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age date are known in the Middle Down Drove area, six round barrows lie within 1 kilometre, the closest being actually in the centre of Field 3 (CHEDDAR 20 [Grinsell, 1971]). As well as the flint scatter found by Williams in Field 1 (Williams, 1982), chance flint finds are also recorded; Vince Russett found three flints in the two fields north of Field 4 (Somerset SMR: 11579) and the local farmer has picked up flint in the fields either side of the Drove. Fourteen pieces of flint, including a broken blade, a core fragment and waste flakes, have also been unsystematically collected from the field centred on ST 4930 5260 (Will Ridley, *pers com.*). Totty Pot, in which were found artefacts dating from the Mesolithic to the Bronze Age (Chris Hawkes, *pers com.*), lies less than a kilometre to the north of Field 4.

## FLINT SCATTERS ON MENDIP

Flint collecting has been a popular activity on Mendip for at least the last two hundred years and large collections exist in both public and private hands. With the exception of some poor quality derived deposits flint does not occur naturally in Somerset, all finds thus represent deliberate imports. Many of the diagnostic pieces found appear to be Neolithic and Bronze Age in date, although earlier and later industries are known. Work by Lewis (2001) has identified forty two lithic scatters of Neolithic/Bronze Age date from West Mendip. The criteria for the selection of these scatters was that they must contain over fifty items and have a known provenance; all forty-two have eight figure National Grid References. The Middle Down Drove assemblage was chosen for further investigation as the material had been collected and recorded systematically by Williams, thus allowing trenches to be placed over 'concentrations'. In addition, it is a "typical" Mendip flint scatter, in terms of the size of the assemblage (c.300 items) and the range of items represented (Lewis, 2001).

In recent years the issue of surface flint scatters has been subject to intense scrutiny by the archaeological world (Schofield, 1991a, Brown and Edmonds, 1987, Haselgrove, Millet and Smith, 1985) and the results of research indicate the complex nature of this area of study. Archaeologists have to consider not only the varied taphonomic processes that may have affected a site but also the different biases involved in the collection of surface material. Nonetheless, it has still proved possible to address the meanings of some flint scatters. There is a tendency in British archaeology to regard all flint scatters as evidence of settlement, although recent research shows that it is sometimes possible to differentiate between certain kinds of activity, for example, domestic, industrial, ritual and even refuse disposal, and isolate these from the general background 'noise'. There can also be a correlation between surface finds and

sub-surface features, although this is by no means always the case. With these caveats in mind, the site of Middle Down Drove was chosen to investigate what information could be gained from the limited excavation of one 'typical' flint scatter.

This report is divided into four main sections. Section 1 details the excavation and test-pitting, carried out in Fields 1, 2 and 3. Section 2 presents the results of fieldwalking in Field 4. Section 3 reports on the results of the excavations at the round barrow Cheddar 20 (Grinsell, 1971). Finally, Section 4 considers the significance of a geophysical survey at the aforementioned round barrow. All four sections are then drawn together in the final discussion.

## 1: INVESTIGATION OF THE R.G.J. WILLIAMS FLINT SCATTER

Between 22 April and 9 May 1997, a series of small excavations were carried out to examine the nature and extent of a flint scatter known to exist in a field, centred at NGR ST 4915 5276. 271 items including arrowheads, scrapers, a large number of worked and utilised flakes, burnt flint and cores were collected from this field by R.G.J. Williams after it had been ploughed in 1981 (Williams, 1982). Williams concluded that the assemblage might have represented a temporary settlement of late Neolithic date in the general area; a complete breakdown of the assemblage is given in his article (Williams, 1982, 66-67).

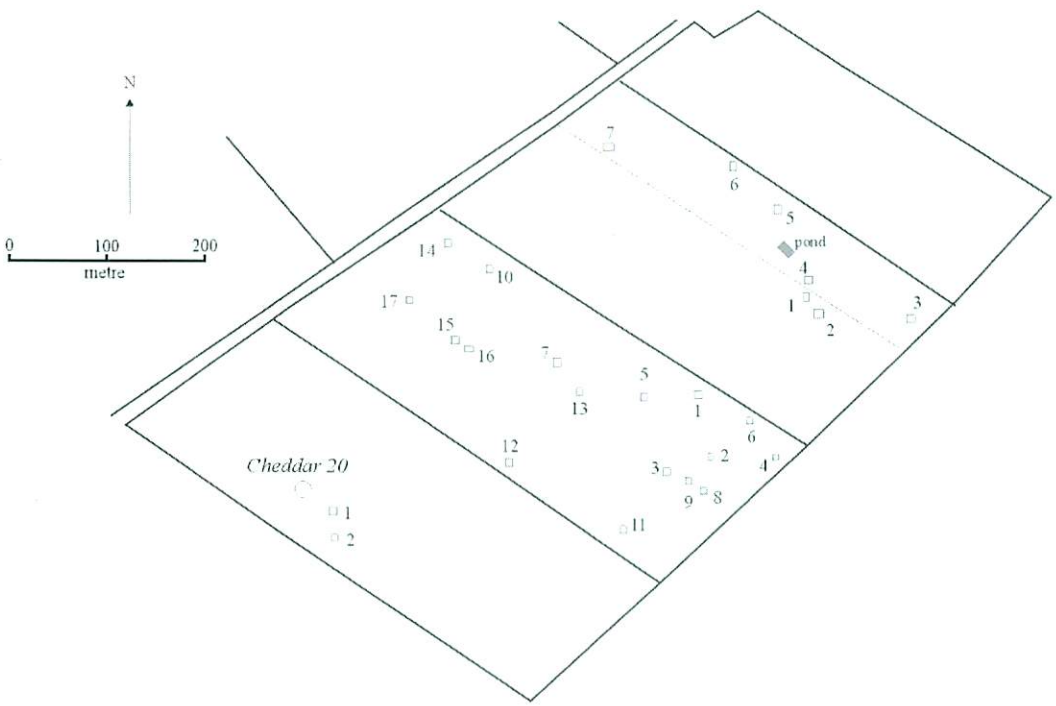


**Figure 2.** *Location of Test Pits.*

*Methodology*

It was originally planned that a series of trenches would be excavated in Field 1, located over concentrations of material identified from Williams' fieldwalking results. Unfortunately excavation of only two 2 x 2m trenches was possible as, at a late date, the farmer decided that disturbance should be minimised due to the silage crop. However, it was agreed that limited work could also go ahead in Fields 2 and 3, and it was decided to use this opportunity to test whether the flint scatter detected in Field 1 continued into Fields 2 and 3. Field 2 was tested for the occurrence of flint by excavating a single 1 x 1 metre trench and opening sixteen randomly placed 50 x 50 cm shovel pits. Field 3 also had a silage crop and thus excavation was again restricted to two 2 x 2 metres trenches. At the end of the excavation it proved possible to return to the north eastern half of Field 1 and open a further five 50 x 50 cm shovel pits. Thus in total, some twenty-six areas were opened: four 2 x 2m trenches, one 1 x 1m trench and twenty one test-pits (see Figure 2). The trenches were excavated by hand, in 5 cm spits, and all the spoil was sieved. The test-pits were dug using shovels and the spoil sieved back into the holes.

All finds were given individual find numbers and recorded three dimensionally. Slag was encountered at all levels in all trenches, basic slag having been spread on the surface of fields in the past to improve soils (Vince Russett, *pers com*). It was decided to record and weigh the slag from each spit in Trenches 1 and 2, Field 1 to give an indication of the volume of material but to ignore it in all other trenches.

*The Excavation*

The two 2 x 2m trenches in Field 1 were located in an area identified by Williams as having a more dense concentration of flint than the rest of the field. This area was centred on a small depression towards the south east of the field. Trench 1 was located at the bottom of this depression and Trench 2 at its top. No archaeological features were located in either trench and excavation continued until the undisturbed natural clay was reached.

The single 1 x 1m trench in Field 2 was located close to the wall between Fields 1 and 2. A further sixteen 50 x 50 cm shovel pits were placed randomly throughout the field. No archaeological features were recorded from any of these pits, all of which were excavated to bedrock.

In Field 3, the two 2 x 2 metre trenches were opened between the round barrow and the large swallets in the south east of the field. No archaeological features were located in either trench and excavation was continued until the natural undisturbed clay was reached.

The stratification of all the excavated trenches was similar with topsoil averaging 10-15 cm in depth above a light brown silty layer, never more than 15 cm deep (Context 2). Below this was an orange/red silty clay (Context 3) which rested directly upon limestone or the natural undisturbed clay. None of the trenches were excavated to more than 50 cm deep.

*The Finds*

The finds recovered from the excavations and test-pits from all fields are detailed below:

Slag:
A total of 6.3 kg of slag was recovered from Trench 1 in Field 1 and a total of 3.0 kg from Trench 2 in the same field.
Sandstone:

A roughly oval piece of sandstone was excavated in Trench 1, Field 3. It would appear to be a whetstone, measuring 172 mm long by 73 mm wide with a smooth, slightly pitted surface. A similar but smaller example was found by Williams on the surface of Field 1 in 1981 (Williams 1982).

Chert:
In total four pieces of chert were found, all from Trench 1 in Field 1 and all from Context 2, the light brown silty soil. The chert appears to be from the Blackdown Hills in Somerset, 55 km to the south west. The pieces consist of two secondary waste flakes, a tertiary flake and a large core trimming piece.

Flint:
124 pieces of flint were recovered from the excavations. In addition, 4 pieces of flint waste were found on the surface of the fields. The entire assemblage is dominated by waste with no implements and only 3 cores being found. The flints found fit into the following categories:

| | |
|---|---|
| Cores | 3 |
| Broken Blades | 17 |
| Complete Waste Flakes | 55 |
| Edge Damaged Flakes | 5 |
| Broken Waste/Chips | 44 |

| FIELD | TRENCH | No. OF FLINTS | COMMENTS |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | 19 | |
| | 2 | 52 | includes 2 cores |
| | 7 | 1 | |
| | | | |
| 2 | 1 | 2 | |
| | 2 | 1 | |
| | 3 | 1 | |
| | 4 | 4 | |
| | 5 | 1 | |
| | 9 | 1 | |
| | 10 | 3 | |
| | 14 | 2 | includes 1 core |
| | 17 | 1 | |
| | | | |
| 3 | 1 | 26 | |
| | 2 | 5 | |
| | | | |

**Table 1**. *Breakdown of flint items by field and trench.*

Two small waste pieces of flint were found in a mole hill on the barrow in Field 3 and a single broken waste flake was found on the ground near to the gate leading from Field 1 into Field 2. After fieldwalking in 1999, the farmer donated a fine discoidal scraper from Field 1, found at about ST 492 529.

In Field 2, all of the shovel pits in which flint was found occurred to the north east of the rocky outcrop which runs north west/south east across the field.

*Analysis of the Flint*

The lack of diagnostic tool types and the overwhelming dominance of waste flakes is a problem encountered on many flint scatter sites. Only two categories of flint from the excavated assemblage at Middle Down Drove can be subject to a more detailed analysis, the cores and the waste flakes.

Cores:

Only three cores were recovered during excavation, two from Field 1 and one from Field 2.

| FIELD | TRENCH | CONTEXT | CLASS |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 2 | B3 |
| 1 | 2 | 2 | C |
| 2 | 14 | n/a test pit | B3 |

**Table 2.** *Classification of the flint cores, after Clarke (1960).*

All three cores have narrow flake facets present.

Waste Flakes:

Initially, it was thought that a metrical analysis of the waste material would be useful in establishing a date for the assemblage. However, the fragmentary nature and small number of the waste flakes meant that metrical analysis would not be statistically valid and hence was not carried out.

Most of the flint raw material was unpatinated and black or grey in colour, with a few light brown and honey coloured pieces. The black and grey material appears to be flint derived from chalk deposits (also suggested by the nature of the cortex) with the light brown flint possibly being from derived deposits. The nearest chalk-flint deposits are the Marlborough Downs, Wiltshire, some 60 km to the east of the site, with a second source at Beer Head in Devon, c.70 km to the south west. As mentioned above, derived flint deposits are available locally, from the coast and river gravels.

*Discussion*

The flint assemblage found during excavation and test-pitting at Middle Down Drove consists almost entirely of waste pieces, with some broken blades, a few edge damaged flakes and three cores. There is a lack of diagnostic pieces but the narrowness of the blades and waste flakes possibly suggests a Late Mesolithic or Early Neolithic date. This is also supported by the narrow flake facets present on the cores.

No flints were recovered south of the rocky outcrop in Field 2, suggesting that this might be the southern limit of the scatter concentrated in Field 1. If this is correct, the 31 flints found in Field 3 possibly relate to a separate phase of activity and are perhaps even contemporary with the nearby round barrow. The small number of complete waste flakes in Field 3 meant that they could not be subject to any valid statistical analysis and hence a date cannot be indicated by this method.

The nature of the site at Middle Down Drove is not immediately apparent. Schofield, (1991b, 119) suggests that industrial areas have high proportions of primary waste and low proportions of tools and cores, whereas settlement sites have high proportions of tools and cores and little primary waste. Excavations at Middle Down Drove revealed no tools and little primary waste and would therefore seem to fall somewhere between the two. However, as there is no naturally occurring flint on Mendip, all flint would have to brought to the area by human agency. If flint was imported in a pre-dressed form, with most of the cortex already removed, this would account for the low proportion of primary waste. A similar conclusion was reached by Taylor and Smart (1983, 10) about a flint scatter excavated near Lower Pitts Farm, Priddy. Here, intensive fieldwork over eight years recovered only one undressed flint nodule. Thus, it may be that cortex removal occurred at the quarry site before importation or at another, perhaps more local, site where primary dressing took place.

The Middle Down Drove assemblage is dominated by working debris probably from pre-dressed nodules. Archaeological and ethnographic evidence suggests that it is unlikely that flint working would have taken place directly within a settlement area, discard locations are often discrete but located close to the main habitation area. The site at Middle Down Drove may represent a Late Mesolithic or Earlier Neolithic flint working area, where imported dressed nodules were manufactured into tools before removal to a nearby settlement.

It is interesting to compare the excavated assemblage from Middle Down Drove with the flints collected by Williams from Field 1. Although Williams found many more actual tools and edge-damaged/retouched pieces, they still comprise no more than 18% of his total assemblage. Using Schofield's criteria (1991b), this would fall into the industrial site category. Some of the pieces, such as the oblique arrowhead and several of the scrapers, are Later Neolithic/Early Bronze Age in origin, in contrast to the possible early date from the excavated sample.

In summary, it is suggested that at least two phases of activity are represented by the flints from Middle Down Drove, a primary phase dating to the Later Mesolithic or Earlier Neolithic followed by a Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age phase. Both seem to relate to the knapping of imported, pre-dressed nodules of flint, the products being removed from the site for use elsewhere. No evidence of settlement was uncovered, but considering the small area excavated and the notoriously ephemeral nature of Neolithic habitation sites this is not surprising. Knapping sites tend to be associated with settlements, but their spatial relationships are relatively unexplored. Thus a habitation site could exist somewhere near the flint scatter, but could be anywhere between a few metres and a few kilometres distant.

## 2: FIELDWALKING IN FIELD 4

During the 1999 season, the opportunity arose to carry out fieldwalking in Field 4. This field was formerly pasture, in common with most of the fields besides the Drove. Several flints, including a large steep-angled flint scraper and two waste flakes, had been found in the two fields to the north by Vince Russett (Somerset SMR: 11579), but no record existed of any finds from Field 4.

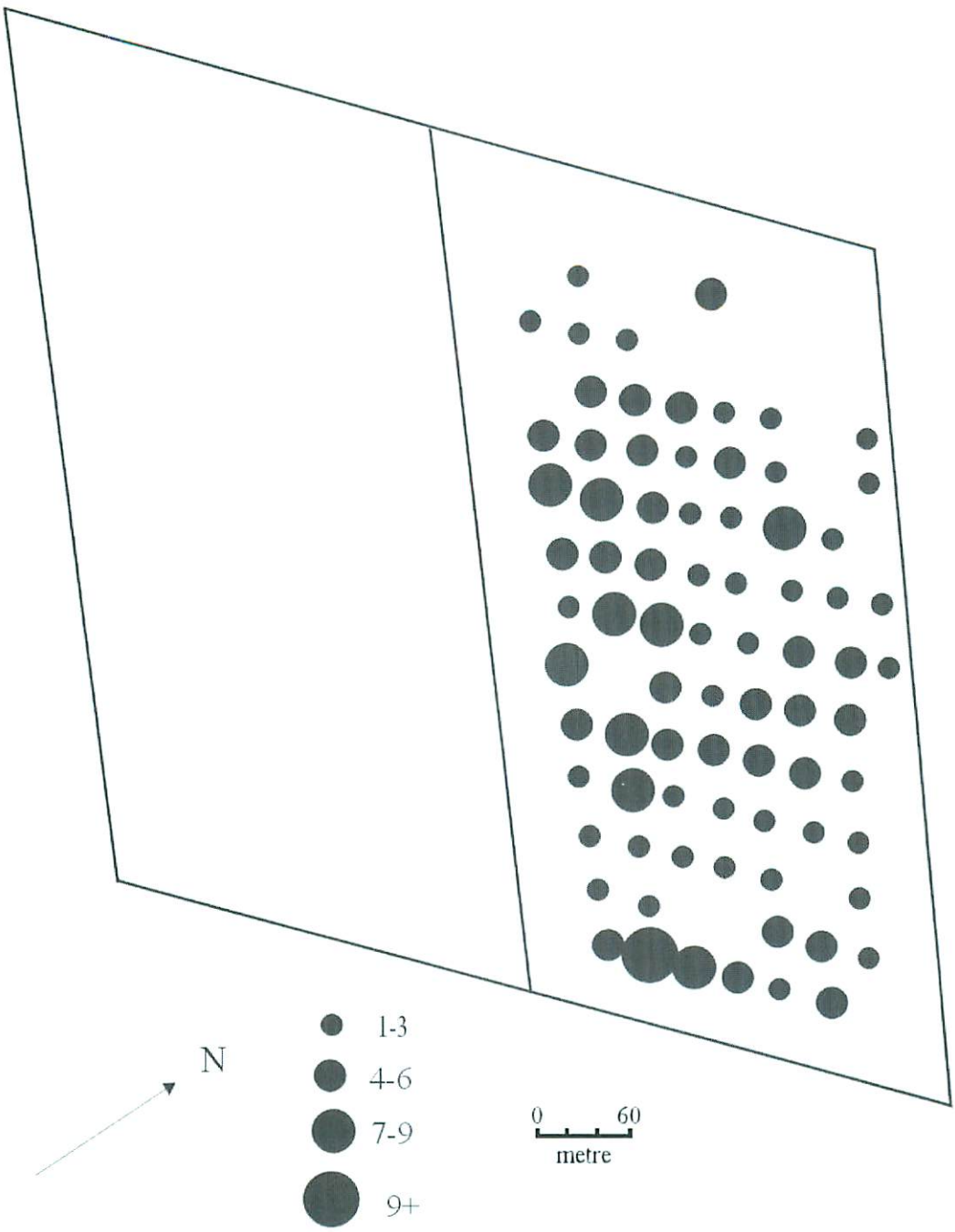


**Figure 3.** *Fieldwalking Distribution from Field 4.*

*Methodology*

Field 4 was divided into 20 x 20 metre grids and each grid walked for 25 minutes with total collection carried out. A total of 89 grids were walked and finds were plotted on a distribution map at the centre of their respective grids (see Figure 3).

*Results*

A total of 291 flints were recovered from Field 4 and are classified below:

| Flint Classification | Amount |
|---|---|
| Primary flakes | 6 |
| Secondary flakes | 36 |
| Tertiary flakes | 88 |
| Chips | 46 |
| Chunks | 5 |
| End scrapers | 7 |
| Side scrapers | 3 |
| End and side scrapers | 2 |
| Knives | 1 |
| PTD arrowheads | 1 |
| Retouched flakes | 8 |
| Retouched blades | 1 |
| Misc. retouched | 1 |
| Edge-damaged flakes | 4 |
| Serrated flakes | 3 |
| Blades | 11 |
| Broken blades | 10 |
| Burnt flints | 25 |
| Microliths | 2 |
| Complete cores | 6 |
| Core fragments | 10 |
| Core rejuvenation | 4 |
| Core trimming | 11 |
| | |

**Table 3.** *Fieldwalking Results for Field 4.*

The distribution of the finds (Figure 3) shows a concentration on the western side of Field 4, which exists within an extensive "background" scatter. This concentration contained the highest proportion of both scrapers and burnt flint and also contained waste material, the knife and the PTD. It may also be noteworthy that very few finds were made in the northern part of Field 4; perhaps owing to colluviation processes as this part of the field forms the head of a dry valley.

*Discussion*

The assemblage from Field 4 is dominated by waste, with 62% of the total being classified as such. The waste is dominated by chips and tertiary flakes, suggesting a late stage in the core reduction process. Cores and core related pieces represent 8% of the assemblage, but the low number of primary flakes suggests that these cores had their outer, cortical surfaces removed elsewhere. Retouched items make up 9% of the assemblage, with the only diagnostic pieces being the broken petit-tranchet derivative arrowhead from Grid B6 and the knife from

Grid B5. These items are likely to be Late Neolithic, but the relatively high quantities of blades and the microliths suggest an earlier component to the assemblage. The blades may be either Mesolithic or Early Neolithic but the microliths are definitely Mesolithic in date. The presence of serrated flakes and retouched flakes, together forming 4% of the total, are indicative of an Early Neolithic presence (Lewis 2001). Thus, the assemblage would appear to be multi-period, though it is possible that one single episode of activity could be responsible for the majority of the items. This episode may have taken place on the western edge of Field 4, the area with the highest concentration of scrapers and burnt flint.

| Description | Williams field walk | Field 4 field walk | Excavation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Waste (including flakes, chips, chunks etc) | 67% | 63% | 81% |
| Retouched items | 6% | 9% | - |
| Cores & related | 13% | 8% | 2% |
| Blades (including broken blades | 6% | 8% | 13% |
| Edge damaged items | 4% | 3% | 4% |
| Burnt | 10% | 9% | - |

**Table 4.** *Comparison of lithics found during fieldwalking and excavation at Middle Down Drove*

## 3: EXCAVATIONS AT THE ROUND BARROW CHEDDAR 20

A geophysical survey (both resistivity and magnetometry) of the round barrow, Cheddar 20 (Grinsell 1971) was carried out by Richard Tabor as part of a teaching exercise for the MA in Landscape Archaeology at Bristol University. The results of the survey appeared to show a ditch encircling the barrow. Few round barrows on Mendip have been excavated under modern conditions and there is a dearth of dating evidence for their construction. This is coupled with an absence of environmental evidence and an almost complete lack of understanding of the prehistoric environment of the Mendip plateau. Of a total of 27 barrows excavated in the 20th Century, ditches were only actively looked for in 12 excavations and only found in 3 cases (Tynings South, West and Central, see Appendix 1). It was thus decided to excavate a small section of the ditch detected by geophysics at Cheddar 20 to obtain samples for environmental reconstruction and to obtain dating material for the barrow.

*Methodology*

A 2 m x 6 m trench was opened across the geophysical anomaly, running up to the edge of the barrow. This was excavated by hand with finds being recorded three dimensionally. As recovery of small finds was good, no sieving of deposits was carried out. The original

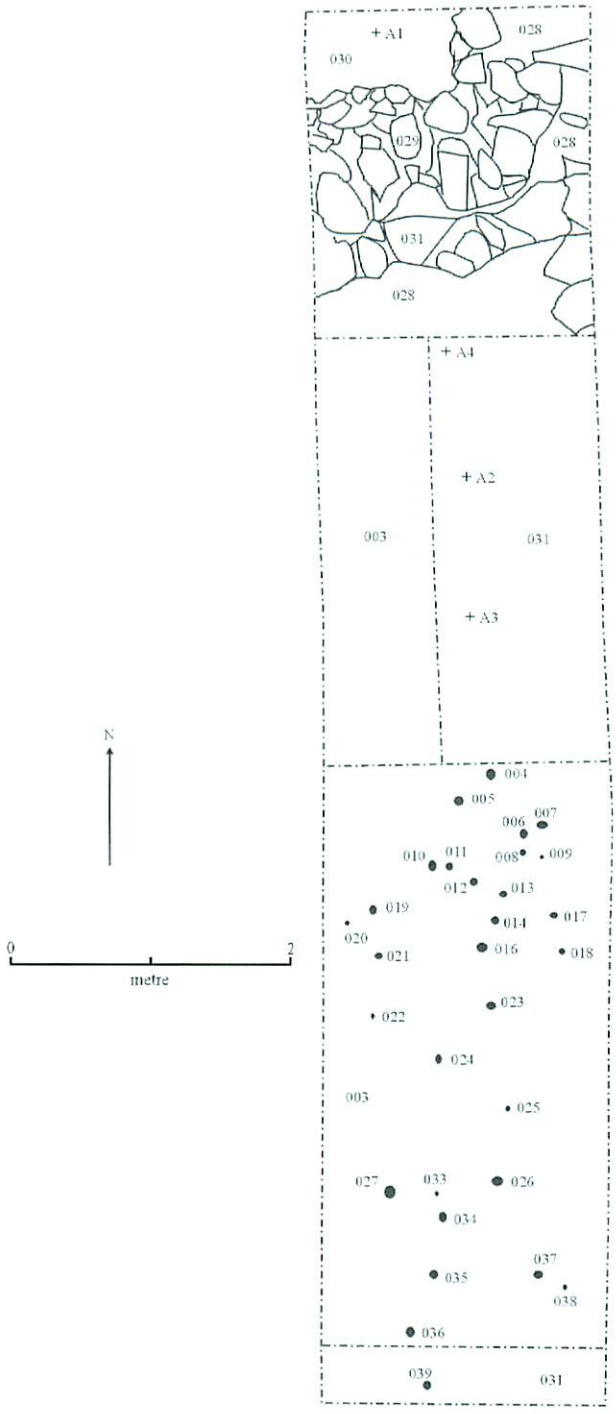


**Figure 4.** *Plan of Excavations at Cheddar 20.*

trench was extended in length by 4 m towards the barrow in order to investigate the nature of the edge of the mound and its relationship to any ditch.

*Results*

After excavating to the depth of penetration of the resistivity survey (c. 75 cm), no evidence of a ditch was detected. Beneath the topsoil was a fine dark brown loamy clay, which was very clean and free of inclusions (Context 002). Below this lay an orange/brown silty clay (Context 003) which contained many small flint flakes. This layer was cut by a series of circular features c.50 mm in diameter and filled with a loose dark brown loamy fill. There was some mole activity in the trench and initially it was thought that these holes may have been related to burrowing animals. However, the holes appeared to be straight sided and vertical and almost certainly represent stakeholes (Andy Currant, *pers com.*). A total of 30 of these features were excavated (Contexts 004 to 014, 016 to 027 and 033 to 039), mainly in the southern part of the trench. One of the features (Feature 024) was half sectioned and found to be straight-sided, tapering to a point at 20 cm deep. No real pattern could be discerned from this scatter of stakeholes, which may represent more than one phase of activity (see Figures 4 and 5). No finds were recovered from any of these features, which were truncated by the plough.

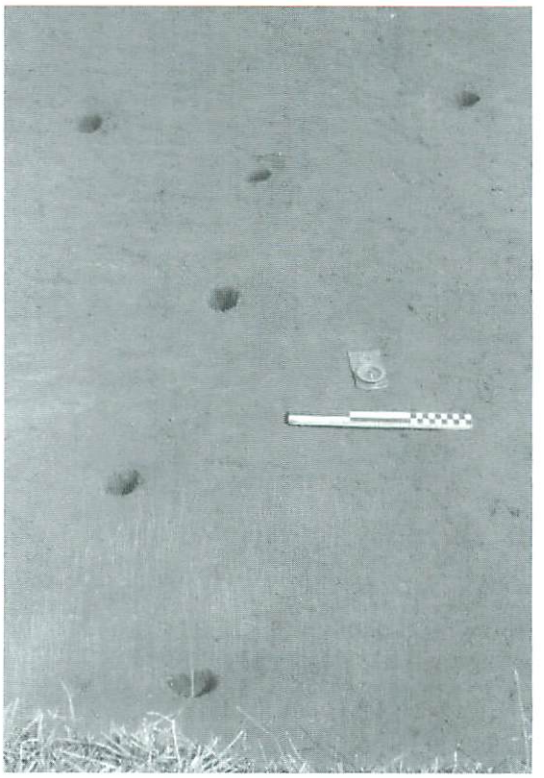

**Figure 5.** *Stakeholes at Cheddar 20, showing contexts 026, 027, 034, 035, 036 and 039 (c.f. Figure 4).*

In the northern part of the trench, again directly below the topsoil, a deposit of limestone boulders (Context 029) was uncovered running east-west across the trench. These boulders lay in a band 1.8 m wide at its widest point and were sub-rounded, well weathered limestone, up to 50 cm across. These abutted a dark brown silty deposit which was stone free and compacted (Context 028). These deposits were not excavated as they appeared to form part of the barrow material; the limestone boulders forming an outer, retaining, kerb and the compact silty deposit representing the barrow mound material. Within the limestone kerb, a small, abraded piece of prehistoric pottery was excavated, along with several small flint flakes. The "tumble" from the kerb was removed and a slot excavated in front of the kerb to ascertain if the tumble had fallen into a ditch. The deposit beneath the stones was identical to Context 028, suggesting that these outer stones were a later addition to the existing kerb material, added after there had been some slippage of barrow material. This deposit was excavated but a ditch was not detected as Context 003 continued under the slipped barrow material (Context 032).

An auger sample was taken through the exposed barrow material to assess the depth of deposits at this point and also to try and detect if a buried soil was preserved beneath the mound (see Figure 4 for auger locations, A1 to A4). At 50 cm depth (247.22 m AOD) an indistinct boundary into a more silty clay with less iron staining was detected which passed into a much more compact clay with reddish-purple discoloration at 90 cm (246.32 m AOD). A compacted layer was reached at 1.35 m, (246.37 m AOD) initially thought to be a layer of iron pan beneath the barrow, but more probably bedrock.

A second auger sample (A2) was taken in front of the barrow kerb, through Context 031, this time to assess the depth of bedrock. This was found at a depth of 50 cm (246.32 m AOD). This depth was confirmed by two further auger samples (A3 and A4) where bedrock was found at 246.42 m AOD. The soils above the bedrock showed the classic brown earth profile of the Nordrach Series soils (Findlay, 1965)

*The Finds*

Pottery

A single, abraded sherd of pottery was recovered from the barrow kerb (Context 029). This was identified as the rim of a Late Bronze Age carinated urn dating to c.1000 BC by Professor R.J. Harrison of the University of Bristol.

Flint and chert

A total of 73 pieces of flint were recovered from the excavation of Cheddar 20. The assemblage mainly consists of small fragments and chips with no diagnostic pieces. Flint flakes were found in all contexts with Contexts 002 and 003 yielding the highest quantities, at 19 and 44 pieces respectively.

*Discussion*

No ditch was apparent at Cheddar 20 and thus it was not possible to retrieve environmental samples. The barrow appears to have been a soil and/or turf mound, retained by a kerb of limestone boulders. This kerb appears to have been renewed after a period of slippage of the barrow mound, but no secure dating evidence was available for either of these phases. The only dating material for the barrow is a Late Bronze Age sherd, from the secondary kerb of the barrow. The scatter of stakeholes excavated from in front of the barrow appear to respect the monument, perhaps representing a later phase of activity (also see Section 4). No direct dating evidence was available for any of these features. As a result of the excavations, it was decided to undertake a further, more intensive, resistivity survey to investigate the nature of the stone kerb and to re-examine the feature was that was initially identified as a ditch.

## 4: RESISTIVITY SURVEY OF CHEDDAR 20

*Methodology*

Four 20 m x 20 m grids were laid out over the mound of the barrow and these were surveyed using a Geoscan RM15 resistance meter with readings taken at 1 m intervals at traverses with 1 m separation. Results were downloaded to a computer running the Geoscan Research Geoplot program version 2.02 and printed out as both shade and dot density plots.

Filters were then applied to the data in an attempt to clarify detail. Discontinuities were removed from the data using edge matching with high pass filtering applied to enhance features

*Results*

Very clear results were obtained from the resistivity survey (Figure 6), which provided a greater insight into the putative ditch detected by Tabor in the earlier survey. The stone kerb of the barrow shows clearly as a high resistance ring that encompasses the mound. A further high resistance feature in the centre suggests a possible secondary feature inserted into the top of the barrow, and the resistivity meter probes hit stone in this area. The survey also unexpectedly revealed that the barrow appears to be surrounded by a series of high and low resistance linear features, interpreted as the remains of a field system. The location of the barrow in the corner of this field system might indicate a mid to late Bronze Age date for the latter, as round barrows are documented in such positions in excavated field systems of those dates (Bowden and Fowler, 1998; Fleming, 1988). Interestingly, work by Fowler (1978) and Russett (*pers com.*) has argued for the existence of a Bronze Age field system on the Middle Down Drove plateau between Carscliffe Farm to the south and Totty Pot to the north. The putative ditch would appear to be formed by the intersection of the field system and a possible small enclosure around the monument, which were unfortunately missed by the excavation trench that was concentrated on the area of the barrow.

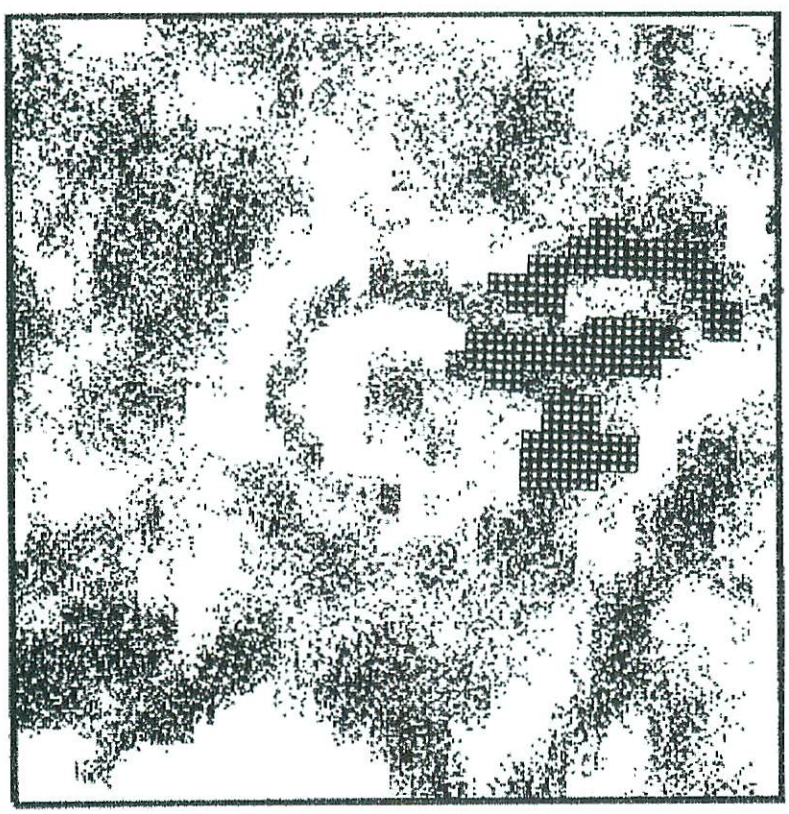

**Figure 6.** *Geophysical Survey of Cheddar 20.*

*Discussion*

The resistivity survey of the barrow clarified some details of the site. The barrow appears to sit in the corner of a possible pre-medieval field system, several of which have been noted and surveyed in the area (Richard Wykes *pers. com.*, Fowler 1978). The stakeholes discovered during the excavation of the barrow may possibly relate to this phase of activity. The barrow is encircled by a stone kerb, part of which was uncovered during excavations, which appears to be 1.8m wide and possibly of two phases. The feature misinterpreted as a ditch was in fact part of the pre-medieval field system, interpretation being confused by this unexpected feature.

## CONCLUSIONS

This project set out to investigate the nature of a "typical" flint scatter on the Mendip Hills and its relationship to its immediate landscape. Although the results have been hampered by the small area allowed for excavation, it was possible to shed a little light on prehistoric activity in the immediate area around Middle Down Drove.

The flint scatter first noticed by Williams appears to have a southern limit at the rocky outcrop in Field 2. It was not possible to test the areas to the north and east of this individual field, but the scatter would appear to be discrete, if diffuse. Although the total area of trenches and test pits in Fields 1 and 2 was less than a single 20 m x 20 m grid, almost exactly half as many flints were found in these excavations as were found by Williams in 1982. This may support Schofield's (1991b) assertion that only a small proportion of the content of the soil is present at the surface at any one time. The excavations in Fields 1 and 2 and fieldwalking in Field 4 suggest a long period of activity in the area, spanning the Mesolithic to at least the Late Neolithic. A predominance of waste material, much of it small, suggests a late stage in the reduction process of pre-dressed nodules of flint, imported to the region from some distance. The dearth of diagnostic Bronze Age material is noteworthy, although some of the side scrapers and undiagnostic waste may be of this period. Although no subsurface features were discovered during the excavations at Middle Down Drove, this may perhaps be unsurprising due to the small area excavated. This should not discount the method as a way of locating prehistoric features, or indeed the significance of flint scatters, but rather encourage larger scale excavations over a wider area as such methodologies have proved successful in other areas (e.g. Cranborne Chase [Barrett, Bradley and Green, 1991]).

Flints from the test-pits in Field 3 and from context 003 of the excavation of the barrow suggest pre-barrow activity (although this has not actually been proven). It is not possible to state if this activity took place immediately before the construction of the barrow and/or was associated with its construction, or if it precedes this by some time. The barrow itself appears to be of soil/turf construction with an external limestone kerb, which was renewed after some slippage of the barrow. This suggests maintenance of the monument, perhaps during the Late Bronze Age, as suggested by the sherd of carinated bowl from the secondary kerb. Subsequent activity at the monument is also attested to by the presence of an insertion in the top of the barrow, but this is of uncertain date. Cheddar 20 has been proven by excavation to have no ditch which suggests that the soil and turf from which it was constructed were either scraped up from the immediate area around the monument, or imported or from the surrounding area. Although no environmental data was collected during this study, this is an area which needs further investigation to assess the potential for survival of this class of evidence. A rapid and

potentially non-destructive method for this may be auger surveying of barrows to assess for buried soils (Mike Allen, *pers com.*).

The geophysics survey focused on the round barrow has shown the monument to have been incorporated into a field system, probably of prehistoric date. This is significant, as the Middle to Late Bronze Age of the region is poorly understood and few later prehistoric field systems are known from the Mendip Hills. Although not directly dated, the scatter of stakeholes which appear to respect the barrow may date from this period. This field system may form part of a larger, regular network which has been suggested as Bronze Age in date and extends southwards from Totty Pot (Fowler, 1978). The geophysical survey has shown the potential of intensive survey in revealing the nature of round barrow construction, as well as illustrating a valuable lesson that a larger area around the monument needs to be surveyed to avoid confusion over identification of features.

*Addendum*

Since this fieldwork was undertaken two further features at Middle Down Drove have been noted. The first is a mound of lime located at ST 4914 5300, which is now beginning to become grass covered and should not be confused with a round barrow. Second, a mound observed by Tratman at ST 4810 5252, which is invisible on the ground today (Somerset SMR 10350), has been noted as a ring ditch on an RAF vertical aerial photograph 3G/TUD/UK/15/24 5003 held by the UBSS. This is likely to be the site of a further round

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## APPENDIX

### TWENTIETH CENTURY ROUND BARROW EXCAVATIONS ON OR NEAR MENDIP

| *Site* | *Reference* | *Ditches?* |
|---|---|---|
| BURRINGTON 1 | Read 1924 | no |
| BURRINGTON 2 | Read 1924 | not looked for |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| BURRINGTON 3 | Read 1924 | not looked for |
| BUTCOMBE 2 | Rahtz 1958 | not looked for |
| CHEDDAR 1<br>(Tynings West) | Read 1924<br>Taylor 1951 | yes |
| CHEDDAR 2<br>(Tynings North) | Read 1925<br>Taylor 1933 | no |
| CHEDDAR 3<br>(Tynings South) | Taylor 1926<br>Taylor 1951 | two rock cut ditches, of different phases, with causeways facing in different directions. |
| CHEDDAR 4<br>(Tynings Central) | Read 1924<br>Taylor 1951 | yes |
| CHEDDAR 5<br>(Tynings East) | Taylor 1925<br>Taylor 1951 | not looked for |
| CHEDDAR 9 | Tomalin 1968 | not looked for |
| CHEDDAR 13<br>(Piney Sleight) | Read 1924 | not looked for |
| CHEWTON MENDIP 34<br>("Barrow 1") | Williams 1949 | no |
| CHEWTON MENDIP 35<br>("Barrow 3") | Williams 1949 | no |
| STON EASTON 1<br>("Barrow 2") | Williams 1949 | no |
| STON EASTON 2<br>("Barrow 6") | Williams 1949 | no |
| STON EASTON 3<br>("Barrow 5") | Williams 1949 | no |
| STON EASTON 4<br>("Barrow 4") | Williams 1949 | no |
| CHILCOMPTON 5<br>COMPTON MARTIN 6 | Radford 1956<br>Taylor 1925 | not looked for<br>not looked for |
| DOULTING 7 | Unwin 1953 (not published) | not published |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| DOULTING 7a | Unwin 1953 (not published) | not published |
| EAST HARPTREE 4 | Taylor 1925 | not looked for |
| SHEPTON MALLET 1 | Unwin 1953 (not published) | not published |
| SHEPTON MALLET 2 | Unwin 1953 (not published) | not published |
| TICKENHAM | Green 1973 | no |
| TIMSBURY 3 | Wedlake 1966 (not published) | not published |
| WEST HARPTREE 8 | Horne 1931 | no |

A total of 27 round barrows have been excavated in the 20th Century. Ditches were only actively looked for in thirteen excavations and found in three cases (Tynings South, Tynings Central and Tynings West). It is interesting to note that all of these monuments were cairns and that the ditches appear to have been used as a source for the cairn material.

That only three ditches have been excavated does not mean that they do not exist: Grinsell (1971) listed at least 36 round barrows with visible ditches and more probably await discovery.

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