

## REPORT ON THE 1991 SEASON AT CRICKLEY HILL

The 1991 season at Crickley took place during July and August. A total of 450 diggers took part in the work, at an average of 95 diggers at any one time. Volunteers came from all around the world, and included large contingents from Spain, Italy and France, in addition to English-speaking areas. The training week was heavily subscribed, and a total of 20 people took part in it. By the end of the season all but two small areas had been completed to bedrock: all cuttings were backfilled by hand and returfed in accordance with the specifications agreed with English Nature, the County Council, and the National Trust. We are grateful to the Supervisors and the digging teams, to Mrs Grubb our cook, and Shay Withnall, camp manager, for all their hard work. We acknowledge with gratitude the support of the County Council, and that of the firms and individuals who have made us grants. The digging took place in three separate areas.

### 1. The Long Mound

The 1991 season in the area of the Long Mound concentrated on the central part of the 1990 cuttings (V and W series, numbers 97 to 99). During 1990 the layers of the mound itself had been stripped away, revealing a complex of phasing at this end of the mound, including a double series of marginal slabs, separated by a period of erosion and soil formation. During the present year work continued in the underlying strata, revealing two major periods of occupation

- A hard-packed layer of small locally-derived stones, arranged in a comparatively level platform measuring about 3.4m from SW to NE, and about 13m long in the area under investigation.
- Postholes and a road surface below this layer, overlying and cut through bedrock

The packed layer of stones equated with the stoney cairn uncovered immediately to the north during the 1983 and 1984 seasons, and like that feature was intersected by three almost parallel channels about 9cms broad and 8 cms deep, set about 80cms-1m apart, and flanked by an irregular series of grooves set at right angles. The top surface of the layer was cleaned very carefully and examined in a variety of lights and weather conditions. It was clear that the stones were both tightly-packed and worn smooth, and that the packing was what one would expect from the heavy use of an exposed surface. The wearing extended up to and across the channels, some of which showed smoothing part-way down their sides. From this it was clear that the channels could not have been used to support a series of stakes (as was conjectured in 1983), but must have been open during the life of this platform. A precise contour survey of the worn surface of the layer showed that it sloped down evenly from the SE end of the cairn towards the area which subsequently was occupied by the stone circle. At this SE end some trouble had been taken to raise the level with a foundation of larger stones, and the very end of the cairn was marked by a very large and heavily burnt hearth, surrounded by a deliberate setting of stones. During this phase the NW end of the cairn (of 1983) had simply ended in a curve of paving, from which the channels ran out into the natural. We may conjecture, therefore, that the functional end of the cairn, in its initial phase, had lain at the SE, and that it involved the burning of a fire at this end. The purpose of the channels remains extremely speculative, but they may have been intended simply for drainage. It is worth emphasizing, in view of the recent article by Loveday and Williamson in *Archaeological Journal*, that these are the grooves identified by them as elements in a warren, but that they lay at the top of the cairn, and that there

was no superincumbant bank during the period of their use: the Long Mound itself belongs to a quite separate and later phase. The next phase of the Mound area involved the cutting of a circle at the NW end of the cairn. The burnt area at the other end may then have fallen into disuse, and it and the cairn itself were subsequently buried under the earthen bank of the Long Mound, which respected the position of the circle. The latter was refurbished, and remained in use until the abandonment of the Mound at the end of site phase 1e.

Below the cairn traces were found of a paved trackway, flanked by posts and stakeholes, similar in its orientation and position to the trackway found both the north (1984) and south (1989 cutting T3). The trackway followed a distinctly curving line towards the north of the excavated area. This appeared to be in order to avoid a high-standing outcropping of bedrock, which survived to a height of no more than 30cms above the trackway (though its original height was unknown, since it had been scarped off level with the top of the subsequent cairn). At least one very large pre-cairn posthole was found to the SW of the track in direct line with this outcrop: this may well belong to the period of the track, which corresponds with Site Neolithic phase 1d. Work continues in the small area (of about 2m by 3m) around this posthole, which was left incomplete at the end of the 1991 season. The results of this year's work have been to confirm the existence of the sub-phases already suggested for the site phase 1e, and to demonstrate the great complexity of the evidence available for the periodization of the Long Mound and its underlying features.

### **The North of the Neolithic Settlement**

A series of three part-cuttings was laid out to the N of the central settlement area, which had been last excavated in 1976. The purpose of this year's work was to establish the connections between the settlement and the banks to the north of the site, which had been sectioned in 1990. We found evidence for the edge of the settlement, consisting of post-holes and scoops in the southern part of the 1991 area. Finds were normally much heavier in this zone, as is shown in plan 2, where the bulk of finds may be seen running some 12m within the bank of the Neolithic defences, leaving an area in which in general little was discovered. Within the centre of this free zone, however, we uncovered our first clear Neolithic rubbish pit, which was a shallow scoop cut at the rear of the Neolithic bank, densely packed with bone, flint and pottery. This is a significant discovery for the study of the early material from the site, since it will allow an assessment of the culture during the final Neolithic occupation (phase 1d). At the eastern part of this area (cutting O97) we uncovered about half of a square-sided house, which, from the associated fragments of pottery, is likely to have belonged to one of the Iron Age settlements.

### **The Iron Age Rampart**

A final area investigated in 1991 lay to the north of the entrance passageway (C and D series, cuttings 95 and 96). Here the Iron Age rampart, turning to the north and dropping down the contour of the hill, was visible as a very shallow dip and low bank, cut at its western end by a comparatively recent quarry. A cutting undertaken in 1988 some 35m to the east had revealed a temporary termination to the first rampart, and a pronounced shrinking of the height and width of both ramparts as they got further from the entrance. Our 1991 cutting was intended to demonstrate the way in which this diminution had continued when the wall arrived at the top of the steep slope



on the northern side of the hill, and, by extension southwards, to see whether the Iron Age settlement had continued northwards beyond the 99 series of cuttings, which were the furthest so far excavated in this direction [the 98 series appeared from surface indications to have been truncated by modern quarrying]. No signs were found of structures in this southern extension, nor were there any significant concentration of artefacts: we suspect, therefore, that the northern limit of the settlement lay a little to the south of the 95 series. The rampart proved extremely interesting. In its first building (presumably equated with site phase 2) it consisted of a substantial stone wall a little over 1m thick, without any obvious lacing or postholes. It seems unlikely that this was more than a couple of metres high, and it would closely resemble a conventional Cotswold drystone wall. Subsequently (and presumably in site phase 3) the wall was thickened to over 2m thick, and some quarrying took place behind it (very likely to obtain building material, since there was no evidence of a quarry ditch on the outside of the wall). In both phases the walls showed a clear tapering towards the NW, and so demonstrated that the Iron Age rampart had either come to a complete termination in the vicinity of E94 (a spot not now preserved), or at the best had would shortly have become no larger than a modern field wall. The quarry hollow behind the wall showed a very abraded collection of finds from an Iron Age occupation, some of which had taken place after the collapse of the rear face of the final rampart.

*PWD NOVEMBER 91*

## **THE PROGRESS OF THE POST-EXCAVATION PROGRAMME**

During the current inter-season period the post-excavation programme has proceeded in several directions.

### **1. Progress towards the completion of volume one**

This volume, the report on cuttings AI - AXIX (the Iron Age Ramparts) was substantially complete in text form before the start of the past season. Some alteration and addition to it was caused by the digging of the cutting C95/6, which has revealed the likely termination of the northern rampart. The specialist reports for this volume are now coming in: the pottery report by Sheila Elsdon is now received, as is the place-name report by Dr Margaret Gelling. A supplementary geological report was commissioned from Dr R Firman; the fieldwork for this is to be completed shortly, and a report will be presented during the next few weeks, both place-names and geology to be incorporated in the preliminaries to the final report at the beginning of volume one. The metalwork report (short, since little was found in this area) is in progress, with assistance from Messers May, Kenworthy and Livens). The bone report is at present being undertaken by Dr A Legge, but will appear as part of volume two (the Iron Age Settlements), since its production will take longer than we wish to wait for the publication of the first volume. The conclusions, including a synthesis of the significance of the finds, remain to be written. This final writing is scheduled for May-June 1992, after which the report will proceed to paging, to indexing (kindly offered by Miss Cherry Lavell) and then to final paste-up. A grant sufficient for much of the printing costs has just been received from the McFarlane-Walker Trust, and so no further problems are anticipated here.

### **Volume Three: The Neolithic Defences**

During this year the phasing and analysis of about 30% of the excavated area (in the CRoman series of Neolithic cuttings) has been completed by Nick Kitchen, amounting to 20k words, together with all supporting drawings in draft form. Further work on this volume will await a suitable moment in the post-excavation programme.

### **Volume Four: The Neolithic Village**

The investigation of the structures below the Mound in the southern area (R, S, P and Q cuttings) has been completed in a study of about 14k words by Vincent Holyoak. Further work on other areas is anticipated.

### **Volume Five: The Long Mound**

The phasing and stratification of the southern part of the Long Mound has been completed by Philip Wilson, in a text and supporting drawings of some 15k words. The results of the 1990/1 work on the Long Mound still remain to be written up, together with the study of the circle itself. When this is done, the Long Mound volume may be advanced in the publication series to appear as volume three.

During the present year considerable effort has been spent on correcting and bringing up to date the database of finds, part of which was entered using the BBC programmes written by Dr Maureen Page, part by direct entry on site using PSION handheld machines, and part by keyboard entry onto dBase III+. All of these records have now been brought together in dBase IV 1.1 format (which is portable to spreadsheets and to word-processor and PageMaker programmes). Of the 23 years of digging only 3 now remain to be entered (1972, 1986, 1987), to bring the whole finds record up to date. The records have been converted, including modification of the coordinates into a single system, with the help of Dominic Powlesland, and now are separately maintained in GeoDb format. This has allowed their use in the GeoSys programme, which permits the rapid production of spatial distributions of any chosen variable, and will be a vital part of the production especially of the later volumes in the series, where distribution across thin layers rather than deep stratification is involved. The programme has already revealed striking variations in the nature and density of different distributions.

The completion of volume one will be followed by the resumption of work upon volume two (the Iron Age Villages) already partially completed by R Muir. Some digging, however, remains to be done especially in the vicinity of E95 and D-K10-14, where IA settlement extensions are anticipated.

*PWD Jan 1992*  
*modified Mar 92*