



Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

B2



Area



Theme



Supplementary



Method

Background

Historic Environment Action Plans

Background 2: Description of the
Archaeology of the AONB
by Time Period










This document forms part of a suite of documents which together comprise the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB Historic Environment Action Plans.

The HEAPs provide a summary of the key characteristics of the historic environment of the AONB at a landscape scale, they then set out the significance, condition and forces for change affecting the historic fabric and character of this special landscape and identify proactive actions to conserve and enhance these special characteristics. These summaries are divided into two groups:

1. Summaries of the historic environment of the AONB by area
2. Summaries of the historic environment of the AONB by theme

These core documents are accompanied by documents which provide background information, supplementary information and detail on the methodologies used to create these documents.

A series of icons help you navigate this suite of documents:

-  **Background** - Provides an introduction to the AONB Historic Environment Action Plans and provides background information on the history and archaeology of the landscape **(B1 to B10)**
-  **Area** - Summarises key characteristics of discrete geographical areas within the AONB, they then set out the significance, condition and forces for change affecting the historic fabric and character of each area and identify proactive actions to conserve and enhance its characteristics **(A1 to A12)**
-  **Theme** - Summarises key characteristics of historic environment themes, each document then sets out the significance, condition and forces for change affecting the historic fabric and character of each theme and identify proactive actions to conserve and enhance its characteristics **(T1 to T14)**
-  **Supplementary** - A series of documents which explore supplementary issues of relevance to the Historic Environment Action Plans **(S1 to S2)**
-  **Method** - Introduces the methodology behind the production of the Historic Environment Action Plans **(M1 to M3)**

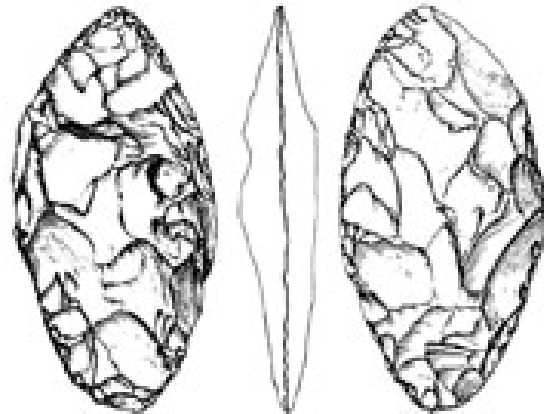
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Palaeolithic

700,000 – 8,000 BC

The earliest evidence of human activity in the landscape of the AONB dates from the Palaeolithic period. The Palaeolithic period traditionally begins with the first use of stone tools by hominins (the ancestors of modern humans). 700,000 BC is the date of the earliest evidence of this activity in the UK. Our ancestors developed during this period anatomically (physically evolving the features we associate with modern humans), behaviourally and culturally. The main evidence of their activity which survives in the AONB is the stone tools they used and which are recovered as single finds in the landscape. These tend to be flint hand axes. These finds suggest that valley locations upstream from Salisbury were a focus of activity. From these finds and using evidence from elsewhere we know that our ancestors led a nomadic existence sometimes using temporary camps or shelters. They were hunter gatherers living off wild plants and animals. They developed in cultural sophistication through time, and during the Upper Palaeolithic we have the first evidence of burial practices and the creation of art in the south west.



Typical Palaeolithic Hand Axe from the area

More Detail.....

In general the Palaeolithic archaeology of the south west is poorly known. However river deposits from the most recent period of repeated glaciations (known as the Pleistocene) in the upper reaches of the extinct Solent River, and its western tributaries in Dorset and Wiltshire provide a key context for Lower and Middle Palaeolithic archaeology. The Solent River basin gradually widened and deepened to become the Solent channel between the Isle of Wight and the mainland. Collection of artefacts in these areas has been extensive. More recent Upper Palaeolithic evidence is much scarcer.

The **Lower and Middle Palaeolithic** (500,000 to 38,000 BC) archaeology of the AONB is dominated by open-landscape findspots within the Wiltshire Avon and its tributaries. The pattern of the Nadder and Wylye valleys is of a general scarcity of find spots associated with the gravels, with sparse discoveries of hand axes associated with terrace deposits and a small number of surface sites fringing the valley (on the chalk and clay with flints). It is possible to use these finds to study phases of occupation and abandonment of the landscape (Harding: 2007).

This is in stark comparison with the lower reaches of the Avon. Two key sites just outside the AONB are Bemerton (between the Avon and the Nadder Rivers) and Milford Hill (between the Avon and the Winterbourne Rivers). The patterns of findspots around Salisbury suggest that this was a key focus of hominin activity though artefacts from Milford Hill may have been transported by the action of rivers suggesting that valley locations upstream from Salisbury may also have been the target for hominin activity.

The evidence for activity in the **Upper Palaeolithic** in the AONB (38,000 BC to 8000 BC) is much scarcer and there is a minor archaeological presence for this period.

Environmental Evidence - The study of the environmental sequences of the Allen Valley identified some areas of floodplain peat and palaeochannels dating from the Upper Palaeolithic (French et.al. 2007). Pollen analysis identified open herb communities with scattered juniper and possibly birch scrub radiocarbon dated to 11,360 – 10890 cal BC. This is the only direct evidence of the prehistoric flora of the last glaciation, known as the Devensian, in the Dorset Chalklands so it is not known how typical it is.

Further Reading

A useful introduction to the Palaeolithic period can be found in *The Palaeolithic Societies of Europe* by Clive Gamble (2000) published by the Cambridge University Press.

The study of the environmental sequences of the Allen Valley are available in *Prehistoric Landscape development and human impact in the Upper Allen Valley, Cranborne Chase, Dorset* by Charley French and colleagues (2007) published by McDonald Institute Monographs: Cambridge.

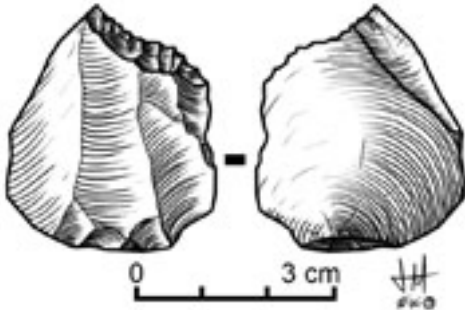
Phil Harding has produced a reanalysis of Palaeolithic Hand Axes in the *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* (2007 Vol 100: 65-73) entitled Palaeolithic Hand Axes from Warminster, Pewsey and Dinton: their place in the early re-colonisation of the upper Salisbury Avon Valley.

Mesolithic

8,000 – 4,000 BC

Mesolithic means 'Middle Stone Age'. The Mesolithic period is a period of transition from the way people were living during the Palaeolithic period as hunter-gatherers to the development of farming in the Neolithic period. The stone tools that people used changed with the development of specialised stone tool kits, which often included very small worked blades called microliths. The evidence for human activity in the Mesolithic

period within the AONB is mostly restricted to scatters of flint tools with clear concentrations on the clay with flints on the Cranborne Chase.



Typical Mesolithic stone tool

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More Detail...

Evidence from the stone tools recovered from within the AONB through fieldwalking and through comparison with sites excavated elsewhere in the South west suggests that there are two clear phases of stone tool use in this period.

- The **Early Mesolithic** 8000 – 6500 BC which is characterised by stone tools, with broad blade assemblages with microliths of non-geometric form.
- The **Later Mesolithic** 6500 – 4000 BC which is characterised by stone tools with narrow blade assemblages featuring microliths

The Mesolithic records of Wiltshire and Dorset are relatively rich with a mixture of minor artefact find spots and a small number of significant assemblages. Cranborne Chase has long seen intensive investigation most recently by Martin Green. His finds demonstrate that there was a substantial presence in the landscape throughout the Mesolithic. There is a strikingly consistent distribution concentrated on patches of clay-with-flints in the north of the Chase with other sites in the Reading Beds and round the headwaters of the river Allen further south. Finds of Mesolithic Microliths in the Fir Tree Shaft, Down Farm suggest that the Mesolithic traditions within this area continued into the end of the fifth millennium BC and the transition to Neolithic practices was fairly rapid.

Environmental Evidence - Few studies of landscape change in Dorset and Wiltshire have used pollen analysis as pollen preservation tends to be poor due to the underlying chalk geology. One exception to this trend is the Cranborne Chase Project which used pollen analysis and identified an Early Mesolithic expansion of juniper followed by birch then pine, elm and hazel. It appears that the percentage of scrub and hazel woodland remained higher than elsewhere in southern England. The survival of herb and scrub communities into the Early Mesolithic at a time when elsewhere woodland has become dominant has been attributed, by Scaife (forthcoming) in information provided to the Southwest Archaeological Research Framework, to the survival of refugia of the Late Devensian chalk flora, from which the herbaceous species were able to expand in the late prehistoric period. Mollusc data recovered from an intrusive Mesolithic deposit within the Neolithic Dorset Cursus analysed by Mike Allen (French et.al. 2003) provides a rare glimpse of a Mesolithic Chalkland environment of deciduous woodland with some large clearings. Different Mollusc species have very different and specific habitat requirements and this kind of evidence is very useful in providing information on the local environment in the past.

Further reading

A synthesis of Mesolithic Societies in Europe can be found in the *Mesolithic Societies of Europe* (2008) by Geoff Bailey and Penny Spikins published by the Cambridge University Press

The study of the environmental sequences of the Allen Valley are available in *Prehistoric Landscape development and human impact in the Upper Allen Valley, Cranborne Chase, Dorset* by Charley French and colleagues (2007) published by McDonald Institute Monographs: Cambridge. These are supplemented by details reported in the *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* (2003 Vol 69: 201-234). Scaife (forthcoming) is preparing a *Southern Pollen Review* which will be made available via the English Heritage website.

Overviews of the evidence for Mesolithic activity in the Cranborne Chase are available from Martin Greens description of the Down Farm landscape in *A Landscape Revealed 10'000 years on a Chalkland Farm* (2000) published by Tempus, and in *Landscape, monuments and society, The prehistory of Cranborne Chase* (1991) describing research undertaken on the Prehistoric landscape by Martin Green, John Barrett and Richard Bradley and published by the Cambridge University Press.

Neolithic

4,000 – 2500 BC

The Neolithic period in the AONB is marked by the first origins of farming and the introduction of domesticated animals and plants. The most striking features from this period are the great ceremonial monuments which were constructed throughout the AONB. These include the great Dorset Cursus, the longest of its kind in the country, where parallel ditches and banks cross part of the region for a distance of over 10 kilometres. It is likely that this monumental earthwork became a focus for seasonal ceremonial gatherings both during and long after its construction.



Neolithic Long Barrow on Bokerley Down.
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Other important features include Neolithic Long Barrows, communally burial places for the dead often placed in prominent positions; Causewayed Enclosures, concentric rings of banks with external ditches with regular breaks or causeways; and Henges, circular banks with internal ditches with one or more entrances.

More Detail:

Evidence for the transition from the Mesolithic to the Neolithic Period is provided by deposits within the Fir Tree Shaft which was excavated on Down Farm on the Cranborne Chase. The natural shaft within the chalk slowly silted up and excavation

has revealed deposition from the Mesolithic onwards. As well as natural silting it appears to have been a focus point for human activity in the landscape. Within the shaft a well dated Mesolithic deposit was uncovered dating to late 5th or early 4th millennium BC. This was below a hearth associated with Neolithic bowl pottery, and domesticated cattle bone with a radiocarbon date closest in age to the deposit of 3960-3710 cal BC. This evidence has been used to suggest a rapid transition from the Mesolithic to the Neolithic.

The Neolithic period sees the introduction of pottery, domesticated livestock and cereal cultivation. However agrarian landscapes were later to develop and there is no evidence for Neolithic field systems within the AONB.

For much of the Neolithic and indeed the Early Bronze Age, evidence for settlement and sedentism (living permanently in one place) is lacking. Evidence for settlement on the chalk lands of Wessex is insubstantial consisting of flint scatters, pits, hearths and stake holes suggesting varying degrees of mobility and longevity. However it must also be remembered that there may not have been a clear cut division between the ceremonial and the domestic and many monuments bear traces of occasional occupation or gatherings. There are dense concentrations of flint scatters on the chalk downland which is partly due to the amount of fieldwork undertaken here.

Research by Field (2004) suggests movement of people between Chalkland and adjacent lower lying areas. There are multi-period concentrations of worked flints at pinch points in the Tisbury-Dinton area of West Wiltshire (between the Chalk and the Blackmore vale) and Warminster area (where the Wylde valley links Salisbury plain with the fringes of the Somerset plain). In general 4th millennium BC scatters (Early Neolithic) are small and localised and pottery does not tend to survive outside sealed deposits. On the Cranborne Chase, Middle and Late Neolithic lithics are concentrated on the clay with flints to the north of the Dorset Cursus and nearby later monuments. There are also secondary concentrations of scatters close to the Cursus, containing high proportions of polished lithics.

The AONB, and especially the Cranborne Chase, is well known for the concentration of Neolithic 'monuments'. These consist of areas in the landscape which were the foci of burial or symbolic activity that cannot be simply identified as domestic. Though of course a straight forward division between the domestic and the religious or ritualistic may simply not have existed at this point in time

In simplistic terms the Early Neolithic is associated with long barrows and early 4th millennium BC linear constructions such as the Dorset Cursus. These have a relationship with the early Neolithic enclosures on Hambledon Hill to the west of the AONB boundary.

The 3rd millennium BC is in contrast notable for henges, avenues, large mounds as at Knowlton and localised regional traditions which includes the pit circle henges of the chase.

In more specific terms the construction of major monuments in the AONB occurred between 3800 and 2000 BC with possible horizons of more intensive activity c3650-3400 BC and 2900-2500 BC.

Long Barrows are some of the earliest monumental features forming communal burial places for often disarticulated bone from multiple individuals. There are 39 long barrows known within the AONB. Few of the long barrows in the AONB have been excavated but they commonly have a chamber in one end the earliest forms being earthen while later chambers of stone were constructed. The mounds themselves often have flanking ditches and they can be associated with the remains of secondary wooden structures often interpreted as mortuary houses. The mounds are carefully sited and those in the Wylde Valley, for example, are consistently sited with views into the valley (Allen and Gardiner 2004). They commonly date from the first half of the 4th millennium but could have been in use for many centuries. They can be elaborated over time as with the construction of the possible bank barrow at the western end of the Dorset Cursus. Towards the end of the Neolithic, burial practices began to change with the introduction of round barrows as in the vicinity of Wor Barrow.

The Dorset Cursus with a date of around 3,300 BC incorporated several Long Barrows into its length and several long barrows were subsequently constructed with respect to it. It is a nationally important Neolithic monument consisting of a pair of parallel banks (1.5 m tall) running about 82 m apart, with external ditches. It runs for approximately 10 km. It remains enigmatic but the first phase Gussage terminal is aligned on the Midwinter sunset.

Another key monument type is Causewayed Enclosures. These are often located on hilltop sites, encircled by one to four segmented concentric ditches, with an internal bank that is also segmented. There is one causewayed enclosure on the AONB on the spur of Whitesheet Hill. A ditch profile of this monument was excavated by Piggott in 1952 and was investigated again by Wessex Archaeology in 1989 when a pipeline was laid through the monument. The monument has an early Neolithic date and the ceramic assemblage suggests a greater affinity with the area to the south and west than the north and south. Useful parallels may therefore be drawn with the well researched and published Causewayed Enclosure on Hambledon Hill which lies just outside the AONB boundary.

A similarly nationally important complex of monuments in the AONB includes the late Neolithic Monument complex at Knowlton which has recently been the focus of a research project by Bournemouth University. This consists primarily of massive earthwork enclosures (henges) up to 220m across and often associated with other Late Neolithic monuments such as timber circles and monumental mounds. The importance of these complexes is demonstrated by their continued role in the Early Bronze Age when they became the focus for round barrow cemeteries. Another complex of monuments including two long barrows has also been recently discovered at Damerham.

Other notable sites excavated on the Cranborne Chase include 16 pits associated with Grooved Ware on Down Farm, Henge monuments on Wyke Down and the unique "Pit Henge" complex excavated at Monkton Up Wimborne.

Environmental Evidence - The environment of the Wessex chalklands has been more intensively studied than in other areas. Palaeoenvironmental reconstruction has largely been based on the study of sub-fossil mollusc shells. This evidence suggests that the Early Neolithic Monuments at Cranborne Chase were built in woodland, including the Handley Down mortuary enclosure built somewhere between 3700-3000 BC. Here the

evidence is for small-scale clearance of woodland which was allowed to regenerate once the site had fallen into disuse. Evidence from the Dorset Cursus, 3650-2900 cal BC, suggests woodland clearance was on a much larger scale but that some regeneration occurred during the life of the Cursus. These monuments are located on topographic high points which seemed to be more heavily vegetated than the surrounding lowlands. Mollusc shells from Fir tree shaft suggest the surrounding dense woodland was locally cleared at c.4240-3970cal BC.

The general pattern seems to be that clearance of the woodland of the Wessex Chalkland occurred earlier in lowland locations than on the tops of the downs. The hilltops remaining wooded except where clearance took place to construct causewayed enclosures and the combes and river valleys were cleared to create pasture. There is some suggestion that lower areas were partially cleared in the Mesolithic or did not support mixed deciduous woodland at this point. Early Neolithic clearance seems to have been primarily for pasture although pollen evidence suggests cereal cultivation was carried out though on a small scale. By the Late Neolithic the area of pasture had been expanded and there is limited evidence for corresponding expansion of arable agriculture.

By 3000BC the Wessex chalklands were intensively exploited and Late Neolithic monuments were associated with grassland. In addition soil resulting from cultivation begins to accumulate in dry valleys.

Further Reading

The wider context of the sites is provided in *Prehistoric Dorset* (2003) by John Gale published by Tempus.

An overview of the Neolithic archaeology of the Cranborne Chase is available from Martin Greens description of the Down Farm landscape in *A Landscape Revealed 10'000 years on a Chalkland Farm* (2000) published by Tempus. This book also provides details on the environmental evidence and the excavations of the Wyke Down Henges, the Monkton up Wimborne ceremonial complex and the Fir Tree Shaft. The Shaft is further discussed by Allen and Green (1998) in the *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History Society* 120: 25-37.

Landscape, monuments and society, The prehistory of Cranborne Chase (1991) and its companion volume *Papers on the Prehistoric archaeology of Cranborne Chase* (1991) details 10 years of survey and excavation focusing on the prehistoric landscapes of the Cranborne Chase including the Dorset Cursus by Barrett, Bradley and Green. The Dorset Cursus is discussed further by Martin Green in available from the AONB.

Details of survey and excavation of the Knowlton Prehistoric Complex has been published in the *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History Society* 117: 131-2, and details of the newly initiated research project on the prehistoric complex at Damerham is available from www.damerhamarchaeology.org.

The Long Barrows of the Wylve Valley and the Corton Long Barrow, in particular, are discussed in a paper in the *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* 97: 63-67 from 2004.

The Causewayed Enclosure on Whitesheet Hill was originally excavated by Stuart Piggott in 1952 and is written up in the *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine 54: 404-10*. The subsequent investigations following the laying of a water pipeline across the monument are recorded in the same publication in 2004, volume 97: 144-96.

Field's discussion of mobility during the Neolithic period is available from an unpublished PhD thesis (2004) held at the University of Reading entitled *Use of Land in Central Southern England during the Neolithic and Bronze Age*.

The study of the environmental sequences of the Allen Valley are available in *Prehistoric Landscape development and human impact in the Upper Allen Valley, Cranborne Chase, Dorset* by Charley French and colleagues published by McDonald Institute Monographs: Cambridge in 2007. New research on the nature of woodlands on the chalk downland of Wessex is available in an edited volume entitled *Land and People: Papers in Memory of John G. Evans* published by the Prehistoric Society in 2009.

Bronze Age

2500 - 700 BC

The Bronze Age of the AONB is marked by the beginnings of metal working in Copper, Gold and Bronze. The early Bronze Age also sees the introduction of new burial practices with single inhumations placed beneath mounds of earth called Round Barrows often associated with grave goods including metal objects. The Bronze Age in the AONB is also characterised by a shift to sedentism (permanent living in one location) marked by large scale cultivation and clearly defined settlements. By the Middle Bronze Age the landscape of the AONB was defined and bounded by extensive field systems.

Bronze Age barrow in woodland



More detail...

The **Early Bronze Age** is split into 4 distinct periods in Wessex

Period 1 (2500-2300 BC) - Earliest phase of metalworking still associated with the occurrence of Late Neolithic Pottery and early Beakers. Simple ornaments of gold and tanged copper knives are found in graves. These are of a style that is distinct to the British Isles (often referred to as insular)

Period 2 (2300-2050 BC) – There is a swift transition to the use of alloys of Bronze. Graves with flexed inhumations, where the body is on its side with the hip and knee joints bent, become common. These are often accompanied with Beakers and other grave goods. Beaker pottery is found at this time throughout

Western Europe; it is well-made, usually red or red-brown in colour, and ornamented with horizontal bands of incised, excised or impressed patterns. The pottery found in funerary contexts is often a distinctive inverted-bell shape, though simpler forms are also found in domestic contexts.

Period 3 (2050-1700 BC) – New diverse pottery traditions and the introduction of the urned cremation burial rite, where the cremation is placed with a pot, and inhumation graves often under Round Barrows with an increase in metal objects.

Period 4 (1700-1500 BC) – The rich inhumation burials evolve into cremation dominated burials. Beakers fade from use and Deverel Rimbury urns start to appear alongside those continuing from Period 3. This distinctive form of pottery often bucket shaped is found across southern England but there is a distinctive local style within the Cranborne Chase.

Cultivation appears to be carried out on a large scale in the Early Bronze Age after which notable volumes of colluvium began to accumulate in dry valleys. This becomes a more widespread change around 2000 BC with subsistence becoming increasingly based on cereal cultivation. Open country species come to dominate the environmental evidence. Ploughing appears for the first time as an agent of landscape change and often precedes the establishment of settlement and field boundaries.

There is some evidence for Beaker settlements but settlement in the full Early Bronze Age, 2050-1500 BC, before the emergence of the Deverel Rimbury pottery tradition, is invisible.

The Round Barrows of the AONB demonstrate a complex history. Round Barrows at Crichel Down and Launceston Down were excavated by Piggott (1944) and more recently a ploughed out cemetery at Hinton Martell has been the focus of a research excavation by Bournemouth University (2009). The earliest beaker barrows are quite small. Evidence from a Barrow at Sutton Veny suggests the inhumation was placed in a coffin.

The **Middle Bronze Age 1500-1000 BC** sees the creation of a domesticated landscape. Substantial round houses appear and the wider landscape was defined and bounded by field systems. Burials were sometimes placed in barrow cemeteries or flat cemeteries associated with Deverel Rimbury pottery or else contracted inhumations were placed in the ditches of older Round Barrows as at Down Farm. Cremation becomes more common. Towards the end of the second millennium BC a timber circle and avenue was constructed at Ogden Down.

The pattern of settlement in the AONB is mixed with a range of settlement types present. There are both enclosed and unenclosed forms of settlement, with multiple round houses or single dwellings.

The classic Middle Bronze Age type site of settlement was excavated at South Lodge in Cranborne Chase, initially by Pitt Rivers in the 19th Century and revisited by Barrett, Bradley and Green (1991). It comprised of several circular buildings accompanied by ancillary buildings, and fence lines. Here the area around the settlement had undergone sufficient ploughing to generate lynchets. These types of settlements are

often associated with Deverel Rimbury pottery and there is often a recurring pairing of a main round house with an ancillary building. Similar examples have been investigated at Angle Ditch, Down Farm, Ryall's Farm and Martin Down.

Flint tools are much more utilitarian in the Middle Bronze Age but there is a thriving metal tradition

The archaeological evidence from the **Late Bronze Age 1000 – 700 BC**, is much less well known and is defined primarily in relation to metalwork, with an increase in the number of hoards. Some evidence for settlement has been uncovered and there is some evidence for the reorganisation of the landscape with "Wessex linear ditches" cutting across Middle Bronze Age fields.

Environment Evidence – There is a lack of pollen evidence and our knowledge of the environment of the Bronze Age is derived from soil and mollusc studies. This suggests that the chalk downland was cleared of secondary woodland by the Middle Bronze Age and large scale mixed farmland established on the downland. There seems to be an increase in arable crops through until the Middle Iron Age.

Further Reading

An overview of the Bronze Age archaeology of the Cranborne Chase is available from Martin Greens description of the Down Farm landscape in *A Landscape Revealed 10'000 years on a Chalkland Farm* (2000) published by Tempus. This book also provides details on the Down Farm settlement, and the Ogden Down Ceremonial complex. This also provides discussion on the environmental evidence for the Bronze Age by Mike Allen.

Landscape Monuments and Society - The prehistory of Cranborne Chase (1991) describing research undertaken on the Prehistoric landscape by Martin Green, John Barrett and Richard Bradley and published by the Cambridge University Press and includes details of excavations of the Down Farm Pond Barrow, South Lodge Field Lynchets and Enclosure, and Down Farm Enclosure.

Several excavations of Round Barrows in the AONB have been published including by Piggott in 1944 of the barrows at Crichel and Launceston Downs in *Archaeologia* 90: 47-80; by Proudfoot in 1959 of a barrow at Edmonsham *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 29: 395-425; and by Johnson in 1980 of a barrow at Sutton Veny in *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* 72/73: 29-50. The excavations of Round Barrows at Hinton Martell is discussed by John Gale in *The Chase, the Hart and the Park. An exploration of the historic landscapes of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB* (2009) available from the AONB Office, and in volumes 126: 160-166 and 128: 100-106 of the *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History Society*

Iron Age

700 BC – AD 43

The start of the Iron Age is traditionally marked by the first use of Iron for tools, weapons and ornaments. Initially there is a continuation of Late Bronze Age settlement

forms, but gradually Iron Age Hillforts appear in the landscape; these imposing earthworks often placed in prominent positions on the edge of escarpments are commonly comprised of one or more earthwork banks with a corresponding ditch on the outside. They sometimes contain dwellings and pits within their interiors. Although, obviously designed to make an impact on the landscape, modern interpretations see these earthworks playing a domestic role (settlement, trade, agriculture) rather than being purely for defence. These Hillforts appear alongside a range of rural settlements set within large field systems. The Iron Age is the first time that we also get an idea of ethnicity or identity of people within the AONB with the coinage of the Durotrigies, representing a grouping that was present in this area. Spiritual life is represented by the Iron Age Shrine on Cold Kitchen Hill which was the focus of large numbers of Votive offerings but which was unfortunately poorly excavated in the 1920's.

More Detail...

The **Early Iron Age dates from 700BC to 400BC**. The most visually recognisable and iconic features from this period are the Hillforts. There are twenty-one Iron Age hillforts in the AONB often positioned in prominent positions for example Winkelbury Camp is located on the edge of the chalk escarpment. At least one of the hillforts within the AONB on Whitesheet Hill follows a common pattern as it is associated with an earlier Neolithic Causewayed Enclosure. None of the hillforts in the AONB has seen systematic archaeological investigation, although both the hillforts of Hod Hill and Hambledon Hill located just outside the western boundary of the AONB have been the subject of more detailed survey.



Iron Age Hillfort on Whitesheet Hill seen from the air

In contrast Iron Age settlements within the AONB have seen a long history of research and excavation starting with the work of Pitt Rivers at Woodcutts and Rotherley in the 19th century. This was followed by excavation at Fifield Bavant (1924) and Swallowcliffe (1925) by R. Clay. The first open area excavation of an Iron Age Site at Little Woodbury just outside the eastern edge of the AONB boundary was undertaken by Bersu in 1940, with subsequent investigations in the following decades. This is considered a classic 'type' site of Iron Age Settlement which can be compared with the comprehensive excavation undertaken at Gussage All Saints (Wainright 1979), excavations at Tollard Royal (Wainright 1968), Pimperne (Harding et.al 1993) and Longbridge Cow Down (Hawkes 1994). In addition small scale excavation was undertaken at Whitesheet Hill during the laying of a pipeline.

These have revealed a pattern of different settlement types (enclosed, unenclosed), and sizes (single and multiple dwelling), with the classic pattern of round houses

associated with ancillary dwellings. The settlements are set within large scale field systems. However although many of the well preserved field systems on the Chalkland are Iron Age in date it can not be assumed all are.



Earthworks at the Iron Age settlement at Woodcutts

The Later Iron Age 400BC to AD43 is the period when most of the smaller Iron Age Hillforts went out of use, probably including many of the forts in the AONB, and the focus was placed on more ostentatiously defended Forts. Settlements changed to generally becoming smaller and more defended.

The area of the AONB in the Late Iron Age is associated with the pre Roman coinage of Durotrigian origin though this does not necessarily reflect a rigid political or

economic situation or entity. The area is also associated with Durotrigian ceramic styles and with distinctive nucleated settlements.

These form multiple ditch systems frequently

shaped with banjo enclosures. Banjo enclosures are curvilinear in outline, with the central enclosure being bounded by an earthwork comprising a bank and internal ditch. Excavated examples are often associated with occupation evidence. Notable concentrations of these nucleated settlements can be found associated with Great Ridge and Grovely Wood on the West Wiltshire Downs including sites at Ebsbury, Hamshill Ditches, Hanging Langford Camp and Stockton Earthworks (Corney 2001), and in the Gussages (Corney 1991). These represent highly ordered landscapes with enclosed and unenclosed settlements continuing in usage through the Romano-British period.

Burial practices in the Iron Age changed from the Bronze Age burial. Child burials were often located within settlement contexts as at Woodcutts. Adult burials show a range of practices including insertion into Bronze Age burial mounds as on Lamb Down, and burial in shallow pits as at Teffont. The religious practices of the Iron Age are represented by the shrine on Cold Kitchen Hill which is discussed further in the Romano-British section but at which a large number of Iron Age brooches were deposited possibly as offerings.

Further Reading

An overview of the Iron Age archaeology of the Cranborne Chase is available from Martin Greens description of the Down Farm landscape in *A Landscape Revealed 10'000 years on a Chalkland Farm* (2000) published by Tempus.

Landscape, Monuments and Society - The prehistory of Cranborne Chase (1991) describing research undertaken on the Prehistoric landscape by Martin Green, John Barrett and Richard Bradley and published by the Cambridge University Press also provides an overview.

There have been several excavation reports of Iron Age Settlements including those by Clay of Fifield and Swallowcliffe Down in the *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* 1924 vol 42: 457-96 and 1925 vol 43 59-23 respectively; Wainwright's excavations of Berwick Down (1968) in *The Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* vol 34: 102-47 and his report (1979) *Gussage All Saints An Iron Age Settlement* as a stand alone report by the Department of the Environment; and Hawkes' excavation at Longbridge Cow Down is published in the *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 13: 49-69. Harding's excavation at Pimperne was published by the University of Edinburgh 1993 as *An Iron Age Settlement in Dorset – Excavation and Reconstruction* D W Harding, I M Blake, and P J Reynolds.

The Late Iron Age sites of the AONB and the evidence for Durotrigian coinage and ceramic styles is discussed by Mark Corney in a paper on 'The Romano-British nucleated Settlements of Wiltshire in *Roman Wiltshire and After* (2001) published by the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Museum. The same volume also contains a paper by Paul Robinson on *Religion in Roman Wiltshire* which discusses the Iron Age evidence from the shrine on Cold Kitchen Hills. Nan Kivell's brief report on the original excavations of the site are published in the *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* 1925 vol 43: 180-191, 1926 vol 43: 327-32, 389-94 and 1928 vol 44: 138-42.

Romano-British

AD 43 – AD 410



Rockbourne Roman Villa

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That start of Roman Britain in the South West region is traditionally dated to AD 43. The archaeology of the next 300 years is associated with the imposition of Roman culture into Britain, ultimately deriving from the expansion of the Roman Empire out of Rome. This includes new settlement forms such as Rockbourne Villa, and new infrastructure such as Roads. However evidence from the Late Iron Age sites on the West Wiltshire Downs suggests a relatively smooth transition to Roman Rule and the continuation of settlement in this area.

More detail...

As discussed in the section on the 'Iron Age', the influence of Roman culture is felt in Britain before their physical presence on the island with for example the adoption of coinage by the indigenous tribal groupings. The transition to physical Roman rule within the AONB is hinted at by finds associated with the Roman Army, for example a scabbard mount and a ballista bolt at the Late Iron Age site of Woodcuts. This may suggest that the Roman Army was present at this site. The Romans certainly occupied Hod Hill, an Iron Age Hillfort just outside the western border of the AONB. There is also evidence for a smooth transition to Roman rule suggested by the continuation of the Late Iron Age Settlement on the West Wiltshire Downs right through until the 4th century AD. Roman military equipment is present on at least two of these sites. In the

region by AD 70, military administration had been replaced by newly created civitates (civil administrative areas), based on pre Roman tribal groupings. For instance a Civitas was created based on the former sphere of influence of Durotrigian coinage with its capital at Dorchester.

Evidence for Roman settlement in the AONB is extremely rural in character with no Roman urban centres being present. The importance of this rural area increased in the later Roman period as the southwest region as a whole prospered. There are several Roman Villas within the AONB which would have formed the centre of farming 'estates'. The Roman Villas themselves are comprised of distinctive rectangular stone buildings often associated with mosaics, under floor heating (hypercaust), and ancillary buildings including bath houses, and are often situated within extensive field systems. Two villas within the AONB have been excavated. The first at Rockbourne (often referred to as 'West Park Villa') was discovered in 1942, and was subject to a series of excavations between 1956 and 1978. The second at Tarrant Hinton demonstrated a long and complex history with pottery ranging from the 6th century BC to the mid first century AD, with a standard courtyard villa emerging in the 3rd and 4th century AD. A further series of high status buildings have been excavated by the East Dorset Antiquarian Society at Minchington near Sixpenny Handley (Sparey-Green 2007).

Another dominant landscape feature are the Roman Roads which crisscross the area, parts of which survive as extant earthworks (such as the Ackling Dyke). In other areas notably in the vicinity of the Donheads the exact course of the Roman Road is unknown but this is currently being investigated by the Archaeological Field Group of the Wiltshire Archaeology and Natural History Society.

Religious belief in the Roman period is represented in the landscape by the Roman Temple at Cold Kitchen Hill which is visible in present day aerial photographs. This was excavated extensively, but unfortunately quite poorly, between 1925 and 1927 with the different features constituting the site not identified or recorded. The finds recovered were however spectacular including a large number of brooches and votive offerings (including miniature socketed axes, and a figure of Mercury), coins and a plate brooch showing a horse and rider. The coin evidence suggests the site was in use from the late Iron Age period through until the mid 4th century AD. The aerial photographs suggest that the site consisted of a simple rectangular shrine with a large mound in one corner.

Burial tended to consist of inhumations including cemeteries at Yarnbury Castle and Teffont Quarry, and many other single inhumations. The recovery of two late 4th century strap-ends at Charlton Down, decorated with a peacock, and Monkton Deverill, decorated with a tree of life; hint at the adoption of Christianity in the area.

Roman industrial activity is hinted at by the exploitation of the Chilmark stone quarries during this period.

Environmental Evidence - There are no studies of environmental sequences within the AONB that cover the Roman Period. Studies of deposits from the Kennet Valley in northern Wiltshire were indicative of mixed farming, the arable principally being cultivation of spelt wheat.

Further Reading

An overview of Roman archaeology in Dorset is provided by Bill Putnam's *Roman Dorset* (2007) published by Tempus. The Roman Archaeology of Wiltshire is discussed in *Roman Wiltshire and After: Papers in Honour of Ken Annable* (2001) edited by P. Ellis and published by the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society. This edited volume contains papers on Romano-British settlement (by Mark Corney), The Roman Army (by N Griffiths), Roman Villas (by Bryn Walters) and Roman Religion (by Paul Robinson. The distribution and character of Roman sites on the Cranborne Chase are discussed by Martin Green in *A Landscape Revealed 10'000 Years on a Chalkland Farm* (2000). The Roman buildings excavated at Minchington are discussed in an interim report by Sparey-Green in the Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society vol 128 (2007): 53-60. Nan Kivell's brief report on the original excavations of the Roman Temple at Cold Kitchen Hill are published in the *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* 1925 vol 43: 180-191, 1926 vol 43: 327-32, 389-94 and 1928 vol 44: 138-42.

Early Medieval

AD 410 – AD 1066

With the collapse of the Roman Empire, the landscape of the AONB was initially subsumed within several self governing civitas. However throughout the 5th and 6th centuries AD the area became increasingly under the influence of Anglo-Saxon presence and culture and by the 7th century AD the Saxon conquest of the area was complete. During this time the influence of Christianity also increased with the foundation of bishoprics and mother churches. By the end of the period the landscape was divided into a series of estates often dissecting valleys to exploit a range of landscape types.



Bokerley Dyke

More detail...

The impact of the end of Roman rule in the AONB and the interpretation of the fifth century in particular is difficult because the use of coinage and the mass production of pottery died away. The identification of new 5th century settlement is particularly problematic, compounded by the use of wood and daub as the primary building material. Most Romano-British farms and hamlets were abandoned. The location of the British inhabitants being indicated by burial and stray finds enhanced by information from place names and scatters of potsherds.

The boundary of two of the civitas may be represented by the line of the east facing Bokerley Dyke between the Durotriges to the West and the Belgae to the east. Similarly 'Teffont' in the north of the AONB means 'spring on the boundary'. The limited archaeological evidence suggests that between AD 450 and AD 675 there was contact and intermingling between the indigenous population and immigrants in Wiltshire. This

evidence includes the adoption of 'generic' novel styles of buildings such as the Grubenhause (a sunken feature building) which is absent from West Wiltshire and the use of new burial customs including deposition in prehistoric barrows and the accompaniment of inhumations with distinctive Anglo-Saxon artefacts including brooches and pins.

Evidence from place names and burials can be used to chart the sphere of Saxon influence across the landscape of the AONB during the late 5th and 6th centuries. During this period Anglo-Saxon burials are evident as far west as Teffont in the Nadder and Warminster in the Wylde but absent from the extreme South West of Wiltshire going into Dorset including the Upper Wylde and the Deverill. It is possible that the existing civitas boundaries such as at Teffont or Bokerley Dyke representing the 'frontier' of Saxon influence at this period, possibly indicated by the final phase of the bank.

During the 7th century AD the sphere of Saxon influence had finally subsumed the rest of the AONB, represented by the Saxon burial barrows at Alvediston, and Maiden Bradley.

Later settlement is also hard to identify until pottery makes a reappearance in the 10th century. But many later Saxon settlements are probably overlain by modern villages. Later charters and documents indicate that the landscape was gradually divided into a series of estates.

There is also evidence for the increasing domination of not only Christianity but a parochial mother Church. There is no evidence for the survival of a pre-existing Roman Church unlike in the west of the region. This increasing importance of the Church is suggested by the establishment of a minster at Tisbury by AD 700 and a charter which indicates that Tisbury acquired a 30 hide estate near to the River Fontmell. It has also been suggested that the importance of Selwood as a boundary may be perpetuated as the boundary between the two dioceses of Wessex (Winchester and Sherborne). Sherborne was established in c. AD 700 with Aldhelm as the first bishop. The evidence surviving for early churches in existing standing church fabrics is poorly understood over most of the South West.

The division of the landscape into estates is represented in surviving boundaries for example Heytesbury and Donhead St Mary were possible Saxon mother churches sited at the centre of large estates. These Church estates were transforming into the more familiar parish system by the late 10th or 11th Century. Both these estates and their wider administrative boundaries in the form of shires also had political standing which is represented by the location of a royal manor recorded along the shire boundaries in the 1086 Domesday Book (Barker 2009). In the late Saxon period the manor of Cranborne was part of the estate known as the honour of Gloucester.

Environmental Evidence - There is a lack of environmental evidence from sites within the AONB for this period.

Further Reading

The evidence for the Early Medieval period in Dorset is discussed in a small book in the Discover Dorset series by David Hinton entitled *Saxons & Vikings* (1998). The

evidence for the transition from Roman to Saxon influence is looked at in a series of papers in *Roman Wiltshire and After: Papers in Honour of Ken Annable* (2001) edited by P. Ellis and published by the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society. The importance of the shire boundaries in the early medieval period is discussed by Katherine Barker in an article in *The Chase, The Hart and the Park* (2009) published by the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB.

Late Medieval

AD 1066 – AD 1485

The Late Medieval period traditionally begins with the conquest of England by a French speaking Norman elite, over the English speaking elite, based in castles and manor houses. The medieval landscape of the AONB was characterised by a pattern of nucleated villages, with associated manors surrounded by open fields. The Church and nobility were the major landowners and political force and the area was dominated by the establishment of Royal Hunting Forests (Selwood and Grovely) and Hunting Chases (Cranborne) which were governed by special laws that impacted on all aspects of the landscapes management.

More detail...

The aftermath of the Norman conquest of the AONB is represented by a series of Motte and Bailey castles situated in the greensand hills of the AONB. Medieval settlement in general is represented by the distribution of manor houses such as Woodyates, modern settlement with medieval centres and deserted medieval villages, for example, those located along the Tarrant Valley.

The majority of the AONB was either part of the Cranborne Chase or of Medieval hunting forests such as Selwood, or Grovely. These were codified in law and allowed the crown or magnate who had control of the rights to hunt deer over the land, restrict others activities and exploit revenue through the imposition of fines and the management of timber and grazing rights. These hunting areas had their origins in Anglo-Saxon deer enclosures, such as that which may have existed in the vicinity of Semley. These areas had woodland at their core but also enclosed great swathes of farmland and downland.



Medieval tithe barn, Tisbury

Evidence for Medieval farming in the AONB is represented by limited ridge and furrow, strip lynchets on the chalk escarpments and the fossilisation of strips in modern fields for example. These fields existed within a mixed pattern of rough grazing, open downland, common land and woodland. The expansion of agriculture is represented by the creation of these strip lynchets and the establishment of new market places such

as in the planned town of Hindon. The importance of livestock in this period is hinted at by the great drove roads which are located along the tops of the chalk escarpment and downland and allowed access to important markets such as Salisbury.

The importance of the Church in the medieval period in the AONB is represented by the great tithe barn and abbey remains at Tisbury, parish churches and smaller features such as crosses.

The impact of the nobility can also be seen in the landscape with the establishment of fortified manors and castles such as Wardour. These were associated with ancillary structures and features such as fishponds and the creation of deer parks, representing private game reserves and warrens, for the breeding of rabbits.

Environmental Evidence - There is a lack of environmental evidence from sites within the AONB for this period.

Further Reading

The Medieval Hunting areas are central to the story of the AONB in the Medieval period. *The Medieval Landscape of Wessex* an edited Volume by Mick Aston and Carenza Lewis (1994) contains a useful article by J. Bond on the *Forests, Chases, Warrens and Parks in Medieval Wessex*. The AONB has commissioned a survey of the Medieval Deer Parks within its areas by Katherine Barker and these are discussed further in the edited volume *The Chase, The Park and the Hart* published by the AONB. In a separate article in the same volume Katherine Barker also explores the potential Saxon origins to these hunting areas.

Post-Medieval

AD 1485 – AD 1800



The end of the Medieval period saw the expansion of the yeomanry and the beginnings of the enclosure of the countryside. From 1600 systems of managed water meadows appear. The great estates begin to create formalised landscapes with great parks and gardens.

Stourhead Gardens

More detail...

The post-Medieval period is defined as the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, and is marked by the transformation to a capitalist market economy. By the 16th century middle-class yeomanry and landowners were emerging in the countryside. Shifts in landownership were also exacerbated by the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s which in the AONB saw the transfer of large swathes of land from ecclesiastical powers to noble magnates. Many field systems remained little altered in some areas until the 18th

century, but elsewhere enclosure during the 15th and 16th centuries meant land use became more intensive. In some cases enclosures were informal, but in others they were forcible events dictated by Crown officials or wealthy landowners. Large areas of former arable land on the downs were converted to pasture, and increases in stock numbers led to shortages of late winter and early spring fodder.

From the 1600's, systems of managed water meadows developed in many valley bottoms. These played a crucial role in Britain's farming economy between 1600 and 1900. The early grass that could be produced by water meadows was a crucial element to the farming regimes of the chalklands of Dorset, Hampshire and Wiltshire. The meadows formed a central feature of the local sheep/corn system of agriculture. They allowed for the artificial control of the watering of meadows using a sophisticated system of hatches, weirs, channels and drains. This allowed a lush crop of grass to grow several weeks before natural grazing became available and allowed for greater flocks of sheep to be maintained and thus more farmland to be enriched with manure.

This enabled much larger flocks of sheep to be sustained on downland fields, as described by Daniel Defoe in 1725

“The vast flocks of sheep, which one every where sees upon these downs, and the great number of those flocks, is a sight truly worth observation; 'tis ordinary for these flocks to contain from 3 to 5000 in a flock; and several private farmers hereabouts have two or three such flocks.”

By the 18th century informal, piecemeal enclosure had created a patchwork of small, irregularly shaped fields and winding lanes and tracks. This was especially the case in the Vale of Wardour. However large swathes of open chalk grassland remained. The process of enclosure escalated from 1750 as the downland was increasingly enclosed and converted to arable. This was formalised by Parliamentary Enclosure (often referred to as Inclosure in older documents) which occurred in England mostly in the period between 1750 and 1850. Enclosure is the process “by which land that has formerly been owned and exploited collectively is divided into separate parcels, each owner exchanging rights in part of it” (Sandell 1971: 1). The process of enclosure transformed some of the landscapes in the AONB at a stroke by imposing a new angular geometry where previously there had been winding lanes and sinuous fields. The scale of the impact, however, varies quite considerably between areas. The beginnings of the large scale enclosure of the southern downlands of the AONB was captured by Daniel Defoe in 1725

“But 'tis more remarkable still; how a great part of these downs comes by a new method of husbandry, to be not only made arable, which they never were in former days, but to bear excellent wheat, and great crops too, tho' otherwise poor barren land, and never known to our ancestors to be capable of any such thing; nay, they would perhaps have laugh'd at any one that would have gone about to plough up the wild downs and hills, where the sheep were wont to go: But experience has made the present age wiser, and more skilful in husbandry; for by only folding the sheep upon the plow'd lands, those lands, which otherwise are barren, and where the plow goes within three or four inches of the solid rock of chalk, are made fruitful, and bear very good wheat, as well as rye and barley”

From the later 18th century some areas of down pasture were converted to arable, and common woods, heaths and grasslands were also enclosed. The rectangular, regular patterns of field systems bounded by hedges on low field banks seen in many parishes today were the result of these later enclosures. They are especially evident south of the Ebble Valley and on the West Wiltshire Downs. Many of the ordinary, previously land-owning peasantry thus lost rights to common land, and became paid labourers in the employment of larger farms.

Many villages became completely deserted during the post-medieval period, as their populations continued to fall. Some early 16th and 17th century enclosure and the creation of estates for deer parks or 'polite' landscape gardens may also have contributed to this process. In some instances though, emparking was made easier because villages had long been deserted. These polite estates for the aristocracy and rural gentry were also associated with the building of new, large houses or the refurbishment of existing ones. These estates were often characterised by extensive areas of short-turfed grass, plantings of trees, including many exotic species, and the construction of a variety of follies. There was an increasing preference for more naturalistic designs, with irregular plantations and sweeping panoramic vistas. Enclosure was a prerequisite for the creation of these parks, removing the tightly bound and inter-weaved rights of landlord and tenant to communal land, and restricting access to the now private land.

During the 18th century there were further changes, partly prompted by the onset of the Napoleonic Wars. There were land improvements and drainage, new crops and breeds of cattle, sheep and pig were introduced. Chalk was often extracted and burnt in lime kilns to produce lime fertiliser. The demands of the navy and industry for timber and fuel meant that many surviving woods and copses were clear felled, or substantially reduced.

Turnpikes built during this period represent the first systematic system of 'made' roads across the country since the Roman Road. Created by Act of Parliament the turnpikes of the AONB remain as fairly legible components of the historic network. The earliest roads to be turnpiked in the AONB radiated from Warminster and were created in 1726, followed by a network of roads which stretched across the AONB.

Further Reading

An accessible introduction to changes to the agricultural landscape in the Post Medieval period is '*Farmer, Landlords and Landscapes. Rural Britain, 1720 to 1870*' by Susanna Wade Martins (2004) published by Windgather Press. The origins of the Enclosure movement are discussed in *Abstracts of Wiltshire Inclosure Awards* published by the Wiltshire Record Society in 1971. The archaeology of Water Meadows is discussed in '*Water Meadows. History, Ecology and Conservation*' by Hadrian Cook and Tom Williamson (2007) published by Windgather Press.

Early Modern and Modern

AD 1800 - PRESENT

The period of agricultural and industrial revolution has had a major impact on the landscape of the AONB, with the enclosure of land on a large scale and the

intensification of agriculture. The introduction of modern infrastructure such as new roads has also helped to transform the landscape.



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Prairie Field in the Landscape

More detail...

Following the Napoleonic Wars conditions in the countryside for the poor were dire, and town populations grew rapidly. By the end of the 19th century more people were working in industries based in towns than were working in agriculture. There were economic crises in the 1820s and 1870s, and the 'Captain Swing' riots took place across Wiltshire in 1830. Even at the beginning of the 20th century most farm labourers still lived in thatched or tiled cottages with open fires and no running water.

Shepherds often lived on their own on the downs, in wheeled huts, sometimes remaining there even in winter.

The First World War saw further woodland and scrub clearance, and large areas of open downland ploughed up for cereals. Following the end of the war there was increased mechanisation on farms, and farm labouring as a way of life declined rapidly. There were further falls in rural population, partly because so many labourers and gamekeepers had been killed during the war. The shortage of labour meant that steam ploughs were increasingly used to plough fields. Market plots for vegetables and the '3 acres and a cow' scheme were launched by the government of Lloyd George to encourage smallholders. In the 1920s however prices for wheat, cattle and milk fell, and there was further economic and social hardship as part of the Great Depression. In the 1930s transportable milking parlours were introduced onto some farms, and there were government drives to increase arable production with the threat of war. During the Second World War many areas of downland that had been under pasture for centuries were ploughed up again to maximise arable production.

Post-war intensification of agriculture continued with the ploughing of slopes and elevated downland, and the removal of hedgerows and field boundaries to create large scale fields. This resulted in loss of archaeological features and, in some instances, loss of topsoil, a decline in chalk grasslands and hedgerows, with an associated decline in wild plant, bird and insect species. Some areas are now once again improving - hedgerows are being re-planted and agri-environment schemes have started to encourage animal and plant species back to the downlands.

Version 1 December 2010. Written by Emma Rouse, HEAP Officer
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Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Historic Environment Action Plans

www.historiclandscape.co.uk

This document forms part of a suite of documents which together comprise the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB Historic Environment Action Plans, or HEAPs for short. The HEAPs provide a summary of the key characteristics of the historic environment of the AONB at a landscape scale, they then set out the significance, condition and forces for change affecting the historic fabric and character of this special landscape and identify proactive actions to conserve and enhance these special characteristics.



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