

## THE PRIDDY LONG BARROW, MENDIP HILLS, SOMERSET

By

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NGR ST 51425091 Ph. Priddy. UBSS Cat. No. T105

[*Note.* This barrow was partially excavated in 1928. A report submitted by C.W.P. for publication in 1929 was "found" in 1950 and immediately referred to H.T. In 1970 the report was obtained from H.T. together with the field notebooks, the drawings and his comments upon the report. Both authors have been consulted. C.W.P. has suggested that his original report should be published with our minor editorial amendments but that H.T.'s comments should be added. C.W.P. agrees that there may be laterally placed structures remaining undiscovered. The few finds made and all the photographic records were destroyed in 1940. Only the notebooks and drawings survive and are in the society's library. We emphasise that the excavation was made and the report written over 40 years ago; while standards have changed since then, the following is published primarily as a record of contemporary observations. Eds.]

### ABSTRACT

The Priddy Long Barrow was partially excavated in 1928. It had been previously disturbed. Its main structure was a cairn orientated approximately N-S with the higher and wider end at the south. Primary and secondary features were found. No objects by which these features could be dated came to light. The date of its construction is an enigma. From its form and structure a late Neolithic date may be presumed (Eds).

Report by C. W. Phillips

Priddy Long Barrow stands about 850 ft above sea level, on a gentle slope facing northeast, about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile from Priddy Green, on Mendip. It measures *c.* 70 ft long by 36 ft wide and 6 ft high and its main axis points roughly north and south. Before excavation it was fairly regular in shape except for a depression [9] 10 ft across and 2 ft deep near the south end where the surface disturbance had evidently taken place. Skinner records having dug a pit to rock bottom. Apparently no old name for it [the barrow] survives.

Before excavation, the mound was marked out in 6 ft squares by means of pegs and carefully surveyed in order that an accurate 1 ft contour map might be drawn. [Fig. 9, redrawn and lettered, etc., from C.W.P.'s original plan.]

The main excavation consisted of a trench 7 ft wide and sometimes as much as 7 ft deep extending from end to end of the barrow and some 12 ft beyond its southern boundary. It showed that the barrow proper consisted of stones built upon a very slightly raised earth foundation [see note 9 below]. It will be convenient to discuss this earth foundation before dealing with the barrow proper.

**PRIDDY  
LONG  
BARROW**

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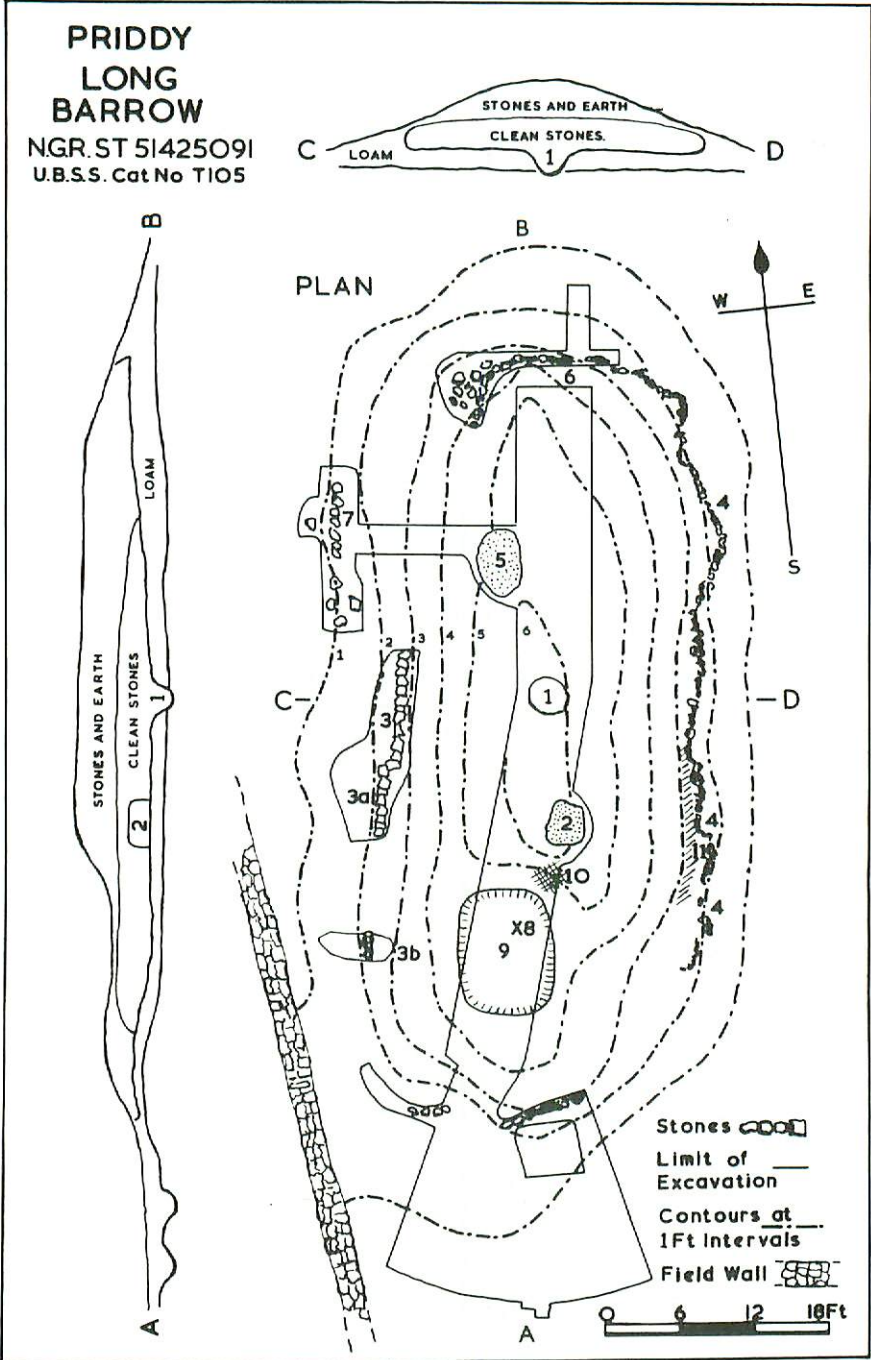


Fig. 9. Based on original drawings by C. W. Phillips. Contours are at 1 ft. intervals above surrounding ground. Actual height is about 820 ft. above O.D.

When digging was begun beyond the southern extremity of the mound, the top 18 in or so of soil was found to be quite free of stones; at this depth, however, was a layer of compact small stones, closely resembling in formation the surface of a cobbled street, covered with a very thin layer of bright red soil. Apparently this was the natural subsoil for it was wet at much the same depth throughout the length of the barrow and in the field 25 yd away; but it is perhaps worth recording that whereas the cobbled surface was fairly level beneath the barrow, it was traversed by two deep ditches at the south end. However, these were apparently not artificial, for the more pronounced one was faintly but clearly discernible for a distance of 50-60 yd toward the east.

Beneath the barrow, as in the field beyond, the cobble layer of the subsoil was covered by a layer of yellow loamy soil, quite free from stones, of a thickness varying from 9 in to nearly 3 ft but generally about 18 in. It would appear that this yellow loam was merely the original natural surface of the ground, except at one spot [1] it showed no sign of ever having been disturbed; but at a depth of about 6 in beneath the surface of the loam was an ochre-splashed band about  $\frac{1}{2}$  in thick, which appeared to mark an old turf level, a suspicion which was somewhat confirmed by the finding of two or three fragments of flint at this level [see note 9 below]. However, it would be difficult to explain the accumulation above of 6 in of earth, which was certainly compact before the stone barrow was built. Except for the few fragments of flint mentioned, nothing whatever was found in the loam beneath the barrow, though many fragments [of flint] were found in the excavation beyond the south end.

The barrow proper consisted of big stones, many weighing  $\frac{1}{2}$  cwt or more, piled indiscriminately, except at [2] where a rough cist appeared, and at places round the edge where a very poor attempt had apparently been made to build a retaining wall [3, 3a, 3b] for a distance of over 30 ft. These big stones [section A-B] were extraordinarily free from any admixture of earth. Stalactites formed or forming between them showed that they had been clean and undisturbed for a long time. Above these big clean stones, and beyond them at either end, the stones were smaller and freely mixed with earth.

Only at one spot had the earth foundation of the barrow ever been disturbed. At [1] a pit c. 2.5 ft across had been dug to the cobblestone layer beneath, and filled with biggish stones, apparently in no orderly arrangement.

Two hearths [2, 5], both on the surface of the yellow loam, were earlier than the stone barrow [see notes 7 and 8 below]. Hearth I [5] measured about 5 x 6 ft. It was thick and the more definite with a well-defined boundary; it contained a good deal of charcoal and a piece of slag. The stone barrow did not extend far enough to cover it completely. Hearth II [2] contained nothing but charcoal but immediately *upon* it

was a small roughly made cist, measuring *c.* 14 x 26 in. One wall and corner were carefully built, and the corner had evidently been roughly arched [corbelled], but the other three walls could not be traced beyond their lowest course.

The edge of the stone core, though fairly well defined, did not appear anywhere properly walled unless carefully laid rows of stones one stone deep, may be called walls [3, 3a, 3b]. At [3] was a row of about 10 stones each measuring about 1 ft across placed in a very straight line for a distance of 9 ft, then a kink of about 1 ft and another straight line in the original direction for 6 ft [3a]. A continuation of the line was found at [3b]. The northern end of the barrow showed a straight line for about 10 ft [6] but the edge of the stones along the east side was fantastically irregular in detail [4]. However, great pains were taken to plan the exact edge of the stones as found and as there were no carefully laid rows anywhere along this side, it is likely that the edge of the stones mapped consisted of stones which had rolled down from above. At [7] another row of stones was found, 6 ft long, well beyond what was believed to be the edge of the barrow.

#### *Finds*

*Bone*: Above the pit [1] were found two human molars, part of a shaft of a humerus, part of either a radius or ulna, a fragment of mandible, and nearly 100 other fragments of bone, most being about 1 in long and all burnt. They were very scattered, and nothing more can be said about their source beyond that they were nearly all in the 1 ft of earth and stones immediately above the clay, and within a circle of *c.* 3 ft diameter. A very few tiny fragments were also found in Hearth II [2] beneath the cist.

#### *Flint*:

1. From 6 in beneath the surface of the yellow loam at [8] at what appeared to be an old turf level, was found an angular Gravette point, incompletely retouched, patinated white, comparable with implements from [the] transitional layer at King Arthur's Cave [Wye Valley].
2. Flake, patinated white, secondary working all round the edge.
3. Flake approximating to a round scraper, white patina.
4. Steep end scraper.
5. Keeled end scraper, patinated white, similar to Aurignacian.
6. Tranchet.
7. Thumbnail flake, retouched, white patina.
8. Small round scraper, comparable with Azilian.
9. Fragment with serrated edge, light grey patina.
10. About 80 other fragments were found, of which over half—including three cores—were in a small area [11] beyond and above the stone barrow; evidently some chipping had been done on this site after the erection of the barrow but long enough ago to have subsequently become buried nearly a foot deep.

*Pottery:*

1 piece of Roman, undecorated [ware] found near the surface at the south end.

On the whole the results of investigations in this barrow are disappointing. Little is certain beyond that it is an artificial mound in which some human bones were buried.

## SUMMARY OF COMMENTS BY H. TAYLOR

1. C. W. Phillips was not present at the earliest stages of excavation but "nobly stayed to complete the job [and] his was the greatest share". He did not witness the excavation of the robbed south end.

2. The south end had many large stones while the north had mainly smaller ones.

3. About 3/4ths of the stone core was not dug so there may be lateral structures and burials undiscovered.

4. The central pit [1] was primary with a cremation deposit spread over it and it may have contained another unburnt burial. The layers beneath the shallow crater in the surface above the pit were undisturbed.

5. On the east side there may be a retaining wall within the limits of the tumble.

6. The possible presence of ditches round the barrow has not been tested. There are no surface features to show that there are ditches.

7. Hearth II [2] and its cist may have been an additional primary. Perhaps an unburnt burial in the cist accompanied by a cremated one spread on the natural surface. The cist was large enough to contain an inhumation. It did not contain black earth, charcoal or calcined bone. One piece of unburnt [human] bone was found somewhere here.

8. Hearth I [5]. Perhaps a secondary cremated interment inserted from the west. [N.B. piece of slag indicates late date. Eds.] Hearth I was found when a cross trench was dug. The mound here was unstratified and consisted of mixed earth and stones.

9. The stratigraphical evidence obtained from the excavation of Mendip barrows, e.g. Tynning Farm group, after 1928 makes it possible to re-assess the stratification of the Priddy Long Barrow. The supposed earthen platform described by C.W.P. can be safely re-interpreted as a natural phenomenon and the layering, including the ochreous band, as natural.

10. The depression [9] at the south end was not due to a "superficial disturbance" but to some previous excavation. Perhaps it was here that Skinner dug to rock bottom.

11. There was a pavement of Old Red Sandstone slabs [10] south of Hearth II. It lay beneath an intact part of the barrow and was therefore not derived from some cist destroyed by an earlier excavator. [But analogies suggest themselves for structures on the site of a barrow, structures which were destroyed when the actual barrow was built. The

nearest outcrop of O.R.S. is 1.5 mile away N.E. across a valley at North Hill. Eds.]

12. The amount of earth found along the flanks of the barrow seemed to be more than could be accounted for by the weathering of the cairn. Perhaps this earth represents a later addition.