



National
Trust

Wessex hillforts, a visitor's guide





Top Sunrise at White Sheet Hill
Above Green woodpecker
Right Horseshoe vetch
Far right Cley Hill



Wessex hillforts, a visitor's guide

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Wessex hillforts

This guide introduces you to the Iron Age hillforts of Wessex, in the care of the National Trust. Many were built more than 2,000 years ago. All significant landmarks, it is easy to understand why our ancestors chose these places in which to live and defend themselves.

Now the hillforts are home to very special nature and wildlife. Enjoy and explore these beautiful wild places, and all they have to offer.

[Right Park Hill Camp, Stourhead](#)



Hillfort archaeology

The Iron Age hillfort is one of the most impressive earthworks of the Wessex landscape. It reflects the organisational and engineering skill, as well as the defensive mastery, of its maker. Theories differ as to why they were built. They may have been created as a defence against hostile neighbours or as a status symbol for a local chief. But what is certain is that the construction of these massive earthworks demanded a co-ordinated physical effort by many people.

Right Hambleton Hill seen from the air





Hillfort archaeology

Some hillforts had a single bank (termed rampart) and ditch, known as univallate. Those with two or more banks and ditches are described as multivallate hillforts. Park Hill Camp is a hillfort constructed in two phases. The first structure was a large external defence followed by an internal ditch and bank to strengthen the network of defences. The gateways to hillforts were the weakest part of the defence and they were often defended by complicated earthworks, built to confuse and impress, forcing hostile warriors to weave between ramparts before reaching the gates.

The hillforts featured in this guide were built about 2,500 years ago and many were lived in until the Roman conquest in AD 43. It is through archaeological research and investigation that we learn about them. The only things that usually survive in the ground are durable artefacts made of pottery, metal,

stone, bone and shell. The find of a rapier, dug up within Figsbury Ring in 1704, is such an example of earlier occupation. Dating from the very end of the Bronze Age, about 800 BC, it was found broken in two. It is the kind of deliberate killing of an object often seen in ritual deposits in this period, and adds to the sense of enigma surrounding ancient Figsbury.

There are also clues as to where people lived. Inside the inner ramparts you will see circular hollows terraced into the hillslope, thought to be the remains of Iron Age roundhouses.

We know, too, that many of these prominent sites were used by people long before the hillforts were constructed. White Sheet Hill is an example of considerable interest. With Neolithic enclosures dating from 3,600 BC and 3,000 BC, Bronze Age barrows and banks all predate the Iron Age hillfort. Similarly,

Above left
Reconstruction of Badbury Rings
Right Reconstruction of Hod Hill with Roman fort, winter AD 44
Far right
Reconstruction of Park Hill Camp



Bronze Age burial mounds built 2,300–1,500 BC are found within the ramparts of Pilsdon Pen, Eggardon Hill and Badbury Rings.

We imagine that hillforts were of strategic significance, enabling the occupants to control access to territory and routeways. Some hillforts, such as Coney's Castle and Lambert's Castle, Hambledon Hill and Hod Hill, may have been built in pairs for this purpose, though their relative importance may have changed over time. To get a feel for what these places would have been like, imagine these hill tops as they were then, crowded with people and their livestock.

The great timber gates through the massive defences were linked by tracks lined with thatched roundhouses.

People with a wide range of skills and occupations would have lived there. However, the beliefs, legends and stories of their occupants have been lost because theirs was an oral tradition.

In winter, when the vegetation is short and there is a touch of frost on the ground, it is possible to see the footprint of the roundhouses on these sites, especially at Hod Hill. Lidar and aerial photography of the areas around Badbury Rings, Eggardon Hill, Hod Hill and Park Hill Camp show traces of field systems and farmsteads, revealing how much of the land was cultivated 2,000 years ago. After the Iron Age, some hillforts like Hod Hill were used as bases and camps by the Roman army; at others, for example at Badbury Rings, temples were built or retained.

Mesolithic	Neolithic	Bronze Age	Iron Age	Roman	Anglo-Saxon/Viking	Medieval	21st Century
around 10,000 to 6,000 years ago	around 6,000 to 4,000 years ago	around 4,000 to 2,800 years ago	around 2,800 to 1,950 years ago	around 1,950 to 1,550 years ago	around 1,550 to 1,000 years ago	around 1,000 to 500 years ago	

Hillforts occupied

BC/AD

Hillfort nature

The places in this guide are rich in wildlife. The layout of the hillforts with their steep ramparts and ditches mean that they have never been intensively farmed. These ancient landscapes have, by virtue of their formation and position, evolved into outstanding habitats supporting rare, beautiful wildflowers, butterflies and birds. They are our living textbooks, detailing the natural and cultural footprint of our ancestors.

Right Yellowhammer





Hillfort nature

Chalk downland

Hillforts in this group include Badbury Rings, Eggardon Hill, Hod Hill and White Sheet Hill. The chalk soils on the steep rampart slopes are thin and infertile and provide ideal conditions for fine grasses, sedges and an astonishing variety of flowering plants.

Typical flowers, in order of flowering from May to September, include cowslip, milkwort, horseshoe vetch, rockrose, fairy flax, kidney vetch, thyme, dropwort, small scabious, clustered bellflower, knapweed, devil's bit scabious, betony and saw-wort. There are also large populations of orchids including the common spotted, fragrant, autumn ladies' tresses and pyramidal, with smaller numbers of early purple and bee orchid.

These plants support many butterflies including Marsh Fritillary, which breeds on devil's bit scabious, and Adonis Blue, which breeds on horseshoe vetch. Other significant butterflies are Chalkhill Blue, Brown Argus, Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper and Green Hairstreak.

Acid heathland

The hillforts of Coney's Castle, Lambert's Castle, Lewesdon Hill and Pilsdon Pen are built on the acid greens and hills of West Dorset. The ramparts, where they are not wooded, support dwarf shrub species such as ling, bell heather, western gorse, bilberry, tormentil, heath bedstraw, milkwort, catsear, sheep's bit and local climbing corydalis. Coney's Castle

Above Adonis Blue butterfly



and Park Hill Camp are especially striking for bluebells at the beginning of May.

At the foot of these steep hills, gault clay forms a water-proof layer and a spring line where bog pimpernel, bog asphodel, lousewort, lesser skullcap, sundew and the occasional heath spotted orchid grow.

Species

A wide variety of birds can be seen at each site. Buzzards, kestrels and ravens hover overhead. Woodpeckers and willow warblers can be seen in the woodland, while the distinctive song of the skylark can be heard, delivered in hovering flight above the ground. Listen out for nuthatches and long-tail tits. Mammals include roe deer, foxes, badgers, stoats, weasels and dormice.

Left Skylark Below Yellowhammer on gorse Bottom left Lady's bedstraw Bottom right Devil's bit scabious



Hillfort management

In managing hillforts, the aim is to strike a balance that protects the buried archaeological stratigraphy and make space for nature recovery, where everyone is welcome. All in this guide are scheduled monuments of national significance. Our hillforts are of high nature conservation interest too, many with designations, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserve (NNR).

We achieve this by carrying out condition monitoring surveys for archaeology and nature on a three-year cycle, usually done by our hillfort hero volunteers. This data then informs the detailed management plans for each hillfort, which are looked after by our ranger teams.

Right Cattle grazing on Hod Hill





Hillfort management

Grazing

Grasslands on hillforts have long supported grazing animals. The different patterns of foraging by sheep and cattle are the key to sustaining species-rich grassland. Cattle forage across the hill, while sheep graze on the steeper slopes encouraging a short, tight turf. Grazing limits the unwanted spread of trees and scrub, and stops vigorous grasses smothering the finer grasses and wildflowers. The tight grassland cover binds the soil together, protecting the archaeological remains from erosion. Grazing levels are flexible in response to ground and weather conditions.

Scrub management

Scrub is made up of a variety of attractive shrubs including hawthorn, spindle, wayfaring tree and bramble, all providing cover and home to many kinds of insects, birds and small animals. Annually, blocks of scrub are coppiced and cut back on a three-to-five-yearly cycle to control height and spread, protecting the archaeological stratigraphy. Whenever practical, hillfort interiors are managed to be clear of trees and scrub. This work, programmed between September and February to protect breeding birds, is carried out by rangers and our volunteer rangers.

Above Erosion repairs, Hambledon Hill



Clockwise from left Volunteers surveying hillfort, mechanical robo flail in action, volunteers repairing fence Hambledon Hill, and scrub coppicing



Everyone welcome

The hillforts offer a host of walking routes, each one unique across a range of prominent terrains. Panoramic views are breathtaking on clear days. While the walks are suitable for all, some feature a steep ascent. Routes are outlined in this guide, but to find out more, visit the individual site websites. Leave only footprints, take only memories.

Dog walking

Dogs are welcome if **always** kept under control and on a short lead whenever cattle and sheep are grazing, or when ground-nesting birds are present. Kindly always pick up after your dog, to protect the fragile soils and flora.





Park Hill Camp

The hidden hillfort.



Park Hill Camp, Stourhead

How to get there

Park Hill Camp can be accessed on foot from the main car park at Stourhead visitor reception, grid ref: ST778340, and from King Alfred's Tower.

By road: At Stourton, off B3092, 3 miles (5km) north-west of Mere (A303), 8 miles (13km) south of Frome (A361). Stourhead, Stourton, Warminster, Wiltshire, BA12 6QD.

The hidden hillfort

Park Hill Camp is the central hillfort of a line of three, located on the summits of high ridge tops within the Stourhead estate landscape.

This concentration of hillforts may be due to the local significance of water here. Within this landscape, the rivers Stour, Wylde, Frome and Brue all have their sources in close proximity. The sources of the Stour lie in the valleys on either side of Park Hill Camp.

None have been excavated, so there is no way of telling whether they were all built and occupied at the same time. The three hillforts may have been first constructed about 2,500 years ago and, subsequently, enlarged in the later Iron Age.

Park Hill Camp has become hidden by timber plantations over the last 300 years

Above Reconstruction of Park Hill Camp
Far right top Foxglove
Far right bottom Gatekeeper butterfly



What to do

A hike on the wild side

Take a circular hike on the wild side, starting at Stourhead visitor centre, rising to Park Hill Camp, and returning along the Six Wells valley. Great adventure for families along this 3-mile route.

and, currently, it is hard to appreciate its ridge-top setting within the local landscape. Recent woodland clearance has uncovered its ramparts and ditches, revealing two main phases of the hillfort's construction.

The opposing entrances of both phases follow the alignment of the ridge top. The south-east outer entrance was offset east of the inner entrance. This would force any attacker who broke through the outer gate to be exposed to attack from the inner rampart before reaching the inner gateway.



The north-west gateway took a more direct route through the two sets of ramparts and ditches. Future geophysical survey and archaeological research may discover evidence of occupation within the ramparts.

A haven for nature

This is a perfect location to sit and just be with nature. In spring the bluebell carpet here is breathtaking. And in summer the meadow buzzes with the hum of bees.



White Sheet Hill

Occupied from early civilisation
to modern time.



White Sheet Hill, Stourhead

How to get there

White Sheet Hill can be accessed on foot from the main car park at Stourhead visitor reception, grid ref: ST778340, and from small car park at the hillfort.

By road: At Stourton, off B3092, 3 miles (5km) north-west of Mere (A303), 8 miles (13km) south of Frome (A361). Stourhead, Stourton, Warminster, Wiltshire, BA12 6QD.

Occupied from early civilisation to modern time

The archaeological timeline here stretches between a Neolithic meeting place and a 1950s nuclear-fallout monitoring station. Spaced 500m apart along the crest of this curving hilltop are three ancient earthwork enclosures, each 200–300m in diameter.

The middle enclosure is the oldest, dated by excavation to over 5,600 years ago. Here, some of the earliest British farming families gathered, perhaps for ceremonies and to prepare their dead for burial. These sites are known as ‘causewayed enclosures’, because their boundaries were built as a series of ditches interrupted by gaps or causeways.

This site was later cut by a medieval cattle drove, still used as a routeway. Across this track to the north is a rare type of circular enclosure. It was probably built about 5,000 years ago, contemporary with the earthwork surrounding Stonehenge. Along the southern edge of the causewayed enclosure are four Bronze Age burial mounds, built 4,300–3,500 years ago.

Above Views from White Sheet Hill
Right Small Blue butterfly
Bottom right Winter sunrise at White Sheet Hill



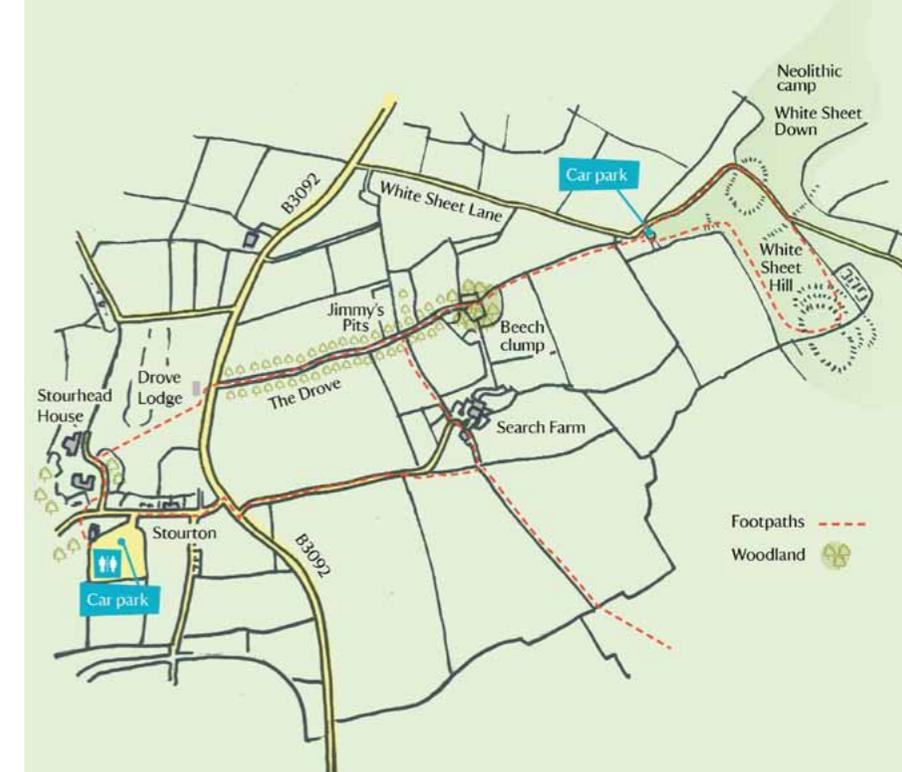
The southern enclosure, on the far side of the hill, is an Iron Age hillfort, built on land already separated from the rest of White Sheet Hill by an earlier form of defence known as a ‘cross-ridge dyke’. These are typical of the Late Bronze Age, constructed 3,000–2,800 years ago.

The hillfort was probably built about 2,500 years ago as a single rampart and ditch. Later, two more lines of defence were added to the north, where the ground is level and more vulnerable to attack. Traces of Iron Age round houses show that people once lived within the hillfort.

What to do

Watching the Wildlife

Summertime on White Sheet hill, from dawn through to sunset, is a wonderful time; look out for butterflies such as the Chalkhill Blue and the Adonis Blue. Listen to the song of the skylark soaring high above. See if you can spot Stourhead House in the valley, and King Alfred’s Tower in the distance.





Cley Hill

The curious hillfort.



Cley Hill

How to get there

By road: From Warminster, exit A36 onto A362. The car park is in just over a mile, towards Frome.

Parking: Small National Trust car park with unmarked bays approximately 350m from the base of the hill path.

The curious hillfort

Cley Hill is a dramatic landscape feature, and its flying-saucer-shaped profile is crowned by a Bronze Age burial mound. This domed chalk hill lies next to the town of Warminster on the edge of Salisbury Plain.

The prominence of the hill seems always to have made local people aware of its strangeness, hence the legend that Cley was a stone thrown by the devil which fell short of its target.

Certainly, this was a prominent place for a funerary monument. At its central and highest point, about 4,000 years ago, two round barrows were built. Cley Hill lost its symmetry in the 19th century, when chalk for lime mortar was dug away from its south side.

In the 1800s, Richard Colt Hoare of Stourhead and William Cunnington of Heytesbury dug shafts down through

Left Cley Hill ramparts
Right top Cattle on Cley Hill
Right bottom Chalkhill Blue butterfly



What to do

Springtime wildflowers and panoramc

The site boasts botanically rich chalk grassland which supports scarce plants and animals, including the early gentian, which is unique to Britain, and over 20 species of butterfly, including the Adonis Blue. The site is grazed with cattle in summer, which helps to maintain this special habitat.

Cley Hill is a brilliant hillfort for guaranteed butterfly sightings in the summer.

each mound. They found nothing in the large barrow and a disturbed cremation in the other. The ancient graves had already been robbed. The hollows from their backfilled excavations can still be seen.

Around Cley Hill, there are faint traces of banks and ditches, perhaps marking the positions of Iron Age defences levelled when medieval farmers built agricultural terraces, known as strip lynchets. These follow the steep contours of the hillside, created in a time of land hunger when even steep slopes were ploughed.



Figsbury Ring

The mysterious hillfort.



Figsbury Ring

How to get there

By road: Located north of A30, about 2 miles (3km) east of the junction with Figsbury Ring car park just off the A30 (between Pitton and Firsdown turnings – nearest postcode SP4 6DT).

The mysterious hillfort

The 11ha (27 acres) circular earthworks of Figsbury Ring were constructed in prehistory at the end of a spur of chalk downland. It now overlooks the medieval city of Salisbury, with the spire of the famous cathedral rising from the valley 5km to the west.

Figsbury is a strange hillfort. On the outside it looks quite normal, with an outer ditch concentric with a high rampart, but inside the ground is level. The defences of most hillforts enclose a domed hill, allowing the surrounding landscape to be seen from the hillfort's interior. Within Figsbury, the ground is level – once you are inside, the outside world is hidden.

Wiltshire archaeologists Ben and Maud Cunington dug some trenches here in 1924 and found the outer ditch was dug in the Iron Age, about 2,500 years ago, but the inner ditch was Neolithic, about 2,000 years older.

Above Reconstruction of Figsbury Ring
Top right Figsbury Ring ramparts
Bottom right Small scabious



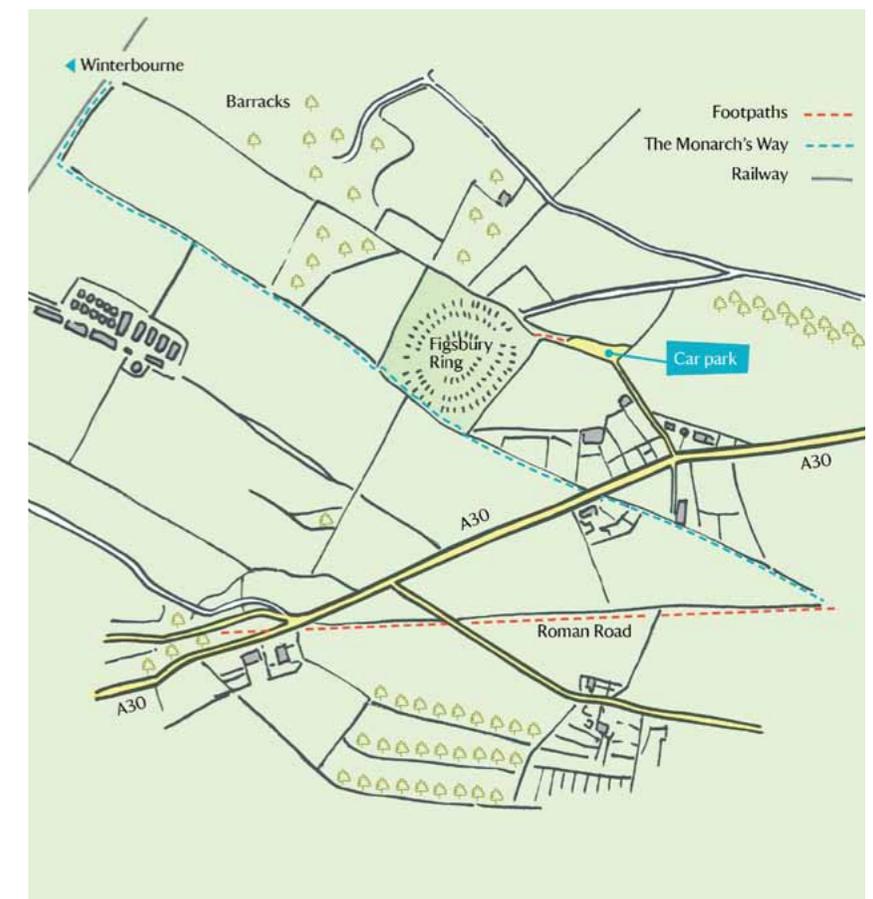
What to do

Carpets of wildflowers and a sky full of larks

The site is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest to protect the species-rich chalk grassland. The highlights are the Adonis Blue butterfly which can be seen in late May and late August, the display of wild orchids in June and the song of the skylarks in spring and summer.

Inspiration for celebrated writers

Novelist Edward Morgan Forster regularly holidayed at Salisbury, and his visits to Figsbury Ring led to him using it as the basis for Cadbury Rings in *The Longest Journey* (1907). His friend William Golding, who taught in Salisbury, experimented with his pupils during a school visit to the site, experiences which formed the basis of his novel *The Lord of the Flies* (1954).



How curious that the Iron Age people decided to leave this inner ditch open. Perhaps they decided to encircle somewhere they valued as an ancient, sacred place.



A photograph of a dirt path winding through a forest. The path is covered in a dense carpet of purple bluebells. The trees are large and have thick, moss-covered trunks. The foliage is lush green, and the overall scene is vibrant and serene.

Coney's Castle

A hidden gem, with an extraordinary
bluebell carpet in the spring.



Coney's Castle

How to get there

By road: from Lambert's Castle continue along the B3165 for 300m. Turn left to Fishpond's Bottom. At Fishpond's take the third turning to Wootton Fitzpaine. This road passes through the centre of Coney's Castle. The car park (SY372976) is on the left, just before the road cuts through the hillfort.

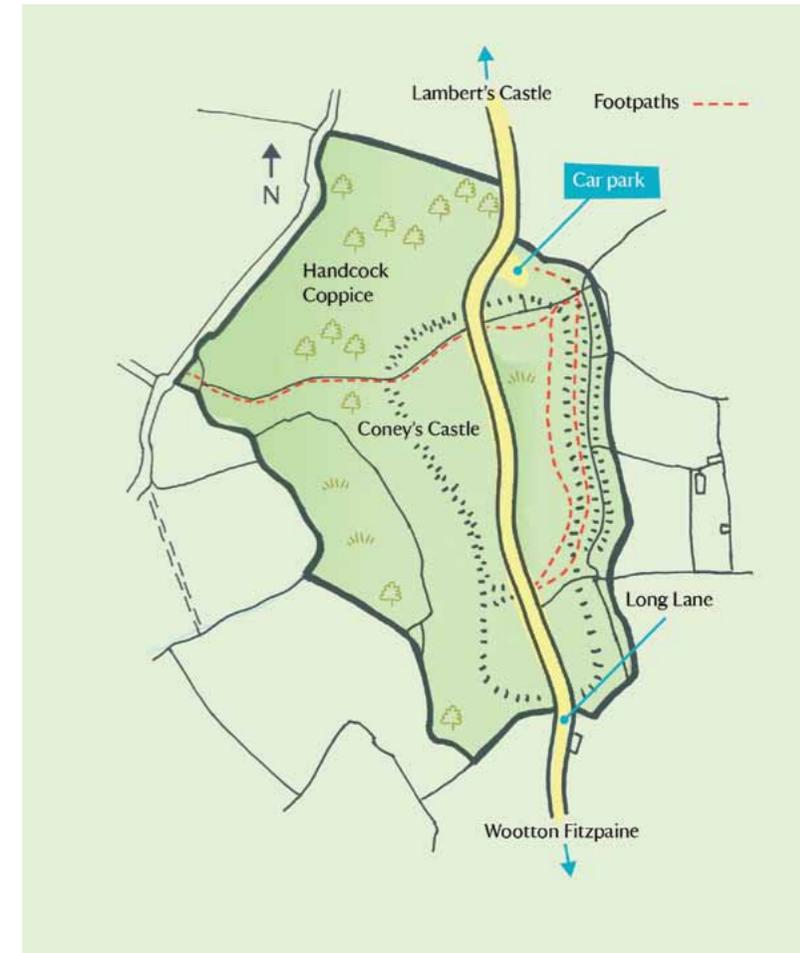
Ancient form and natural beauty

Coney's Castle is one of the smaller hillforts looked after by the National Trust. Defences

along the western edge were light due to the extremely steep natural slope, and the east, north and south sides are composed of steep ditches and ramparts. Much of the inner rampart has disappeared due to cultivation and ploughing. A special feature of this hillfort is the majestic woodland with many fine, ancient, gnarled oak and beech trees.

Coney's Castle is unusual as it is now divided by a minor road, and is split into two areas, with the southern enclosure being a quarter of the size of the northern one.

Above Lady's smock at Coney's Castle
Right top Veteran beech trees in winter
Right middle Meadow buttercup
Right bottom Red campion



What to do

Tune into nature

This is a tranquil place to walk and experience nature in tune with the elements. The bluebell carpet, widespread throughout the site, is to be enjoyed in spring. It's an ideal location for a short walk, with views across the Marshwood Vale to the east and Devon to the west.





Lambert's Castle

Layers of history in a landscape.



Lambert's Castle

How to get there

By road: A35 eastbound from Axminster, bear left onto B3165 at Raymond's Hill, signed Marshwood. Continue for about 3 miles (5km) then bear right onto Lambert's Track to the small National Trust car park (SY365987).

Both Iron Age hillfort and Victorian fair

The hillfort sits at the centre of a surprisingly complex landscape, for its variety of habitats and for its patchwork of ancient field

boundaries, registered common, plantation woodland and agriculturally improved land. When a tree was blown over in the storm of January 1990, its roots tore up the ground, exposing a stone-faced rampart and allowing us to glimpse the hillfort's construction.

We have good knowledge of the historical uses of the hillfort in the last 300 years. It was the site of a fair from 1709 to 1954 following a grant from Queen Anne. The earthwork remains of market stalls and a fair house can be seen, as well as the brick and stone livestock stalls built into the rampart

Top right Reconstruction of Lambert's Castle as it may have looked in the early 19th century, summer **Right** Bell heather **Far right** Yellowhammer



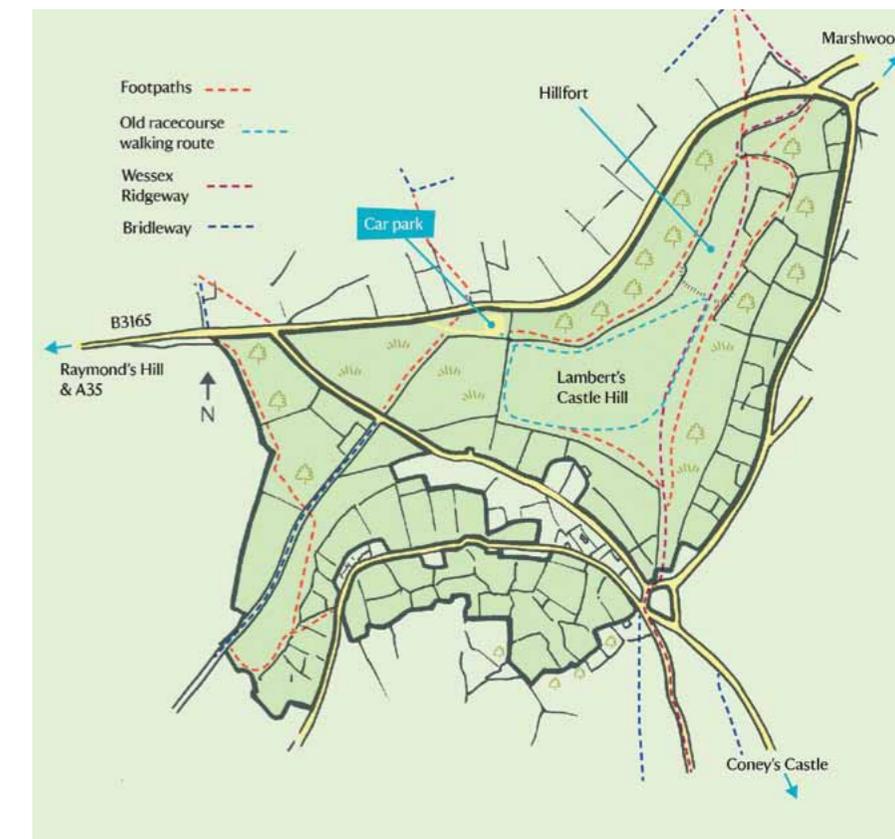
in the south-west corner. While the fair existed, there was a horse-racing track in use adjacent to the hillfort.

You can also see the sites of two 1840s cottages; crab apple trees and ridges where potatoes have been planted can be seen in their gardens. In 1806, during the Napoleonic Wars, an Admiralty telegraph relay station was located here to send messages warning of a French invasion, as part of a chain between Plymouth and London.

What to do

Walks with stunning views of the countryside

This is a relatively level site offering sweeping views across the Marshwood Vale and out to sea. It's a great location for easy walking with family and friends. See how many other forts you can spot to the east. Look for nectar-loving insects on the purple-pink flowers of the bell heather in summer.





Pilsdon Pen

Pilsdon Pen and Lewesdon Hill, known as the Cow and Calf to sailors, were used as a navigation aid.



Pilsdon Pen

How to get there

By road: 3 miles (5km) south-west of Broadwindsor on B3164. Parking: lay-by at the bottom of the hillfort (SY414009).

A long history

Pilsdon Pen has a long history of occupation. Flint tools over 10,000 years old and two Bronze Age burial mounds confirm that

the site was used long before the hillfort was built. From 1964 to 1971, Peter Gelling of Birmingham University and a team of volunteers excavated here each summer. They uncovered and recorded the remains of 14 roundhouses near the centre of the hillfort.

Thomas Gerard, in the early 17th century, wrote that a lodge on Pilsdon Pen was a significant local landmark. This lodge was

Above Reconstruction of Pilsdon Pen, with cottage and rabbit warren in medieval time, summer



Above Small Heath butterfly on fern
Right Pilsdon Pen, north rampart with view to Lewesdon

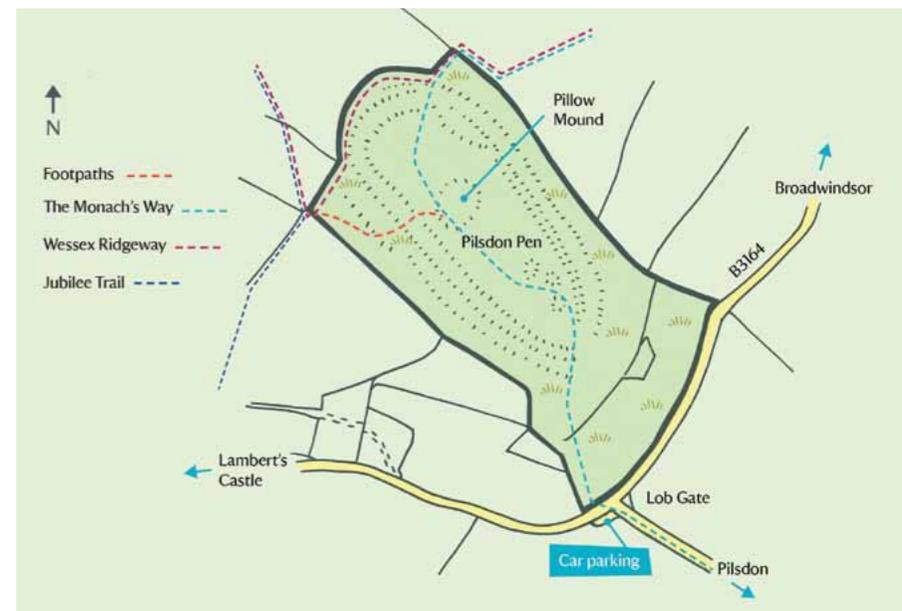


What to do

Walk

Ideal for short walks, with panoramic distant views. See if you can spot Golden Cap and the sea to the south, Hardy Monument to the east, Dartmoor and the Quantocks to the west and the Polden and Mendip hills to the north. Three long-distance walks traverse the hillfort: the Jubilee Trail, the Monarch's Way and the Wessex Ridgeway. Look out for the Small Heath butterfly on the wing from May to October.

probably occupied by a rabbit keeper since medieval times. Pilsdon's long mounds of earth, known as pillow mounds, were built as part of a warren to farm rabbits.





Lewesdon Hill

The highest, quietest and most remote place in the county.



Lewesdon Hill

How to get there

By road: 5 miles (8km) west of Beaminster, near the village of Broadwindsor off B3164. Parking: Parking in Broadwindsor village. No car park.

An Iron Age settlement

It is thought that there was some kind of settlement on Lewesdon Hill in the Iron Age, possibly a place of refuge for people

in times of threat. The site was protected from invaders by the steep natural slope on one side, and a man-made ditch and rampart on the flatter side of the hill.

Woodland wildlife

This ancient woodland has magnificent beech and oak trees, some over 200 years old. It is a great place for woodland birds, including the green and great spotted woodpeckers,

Above Wooded Lewesdon Hill
Right Amethyst deceiver fungus
Far right top Treecreeper
Far right bottom Beech trees in winter, Lewesdon Hill

What to do

Woodland wander

A place to walk on the wild side, enjoy bluebells in the spring, and spot shy birds such as the great spotted woodpecker and treecreeper.

nuthatch and treecreeper. You might glimpse roe deer at dusk. Dead trees and fallen wood are also excellent habitats for wildlife including fungi, ferns, beetles, bats and birds.





Eggardon Hill

Sweeping views across the Marshwood
Vale to the Jurassic Coast.



Eggardon Hill

How to get there

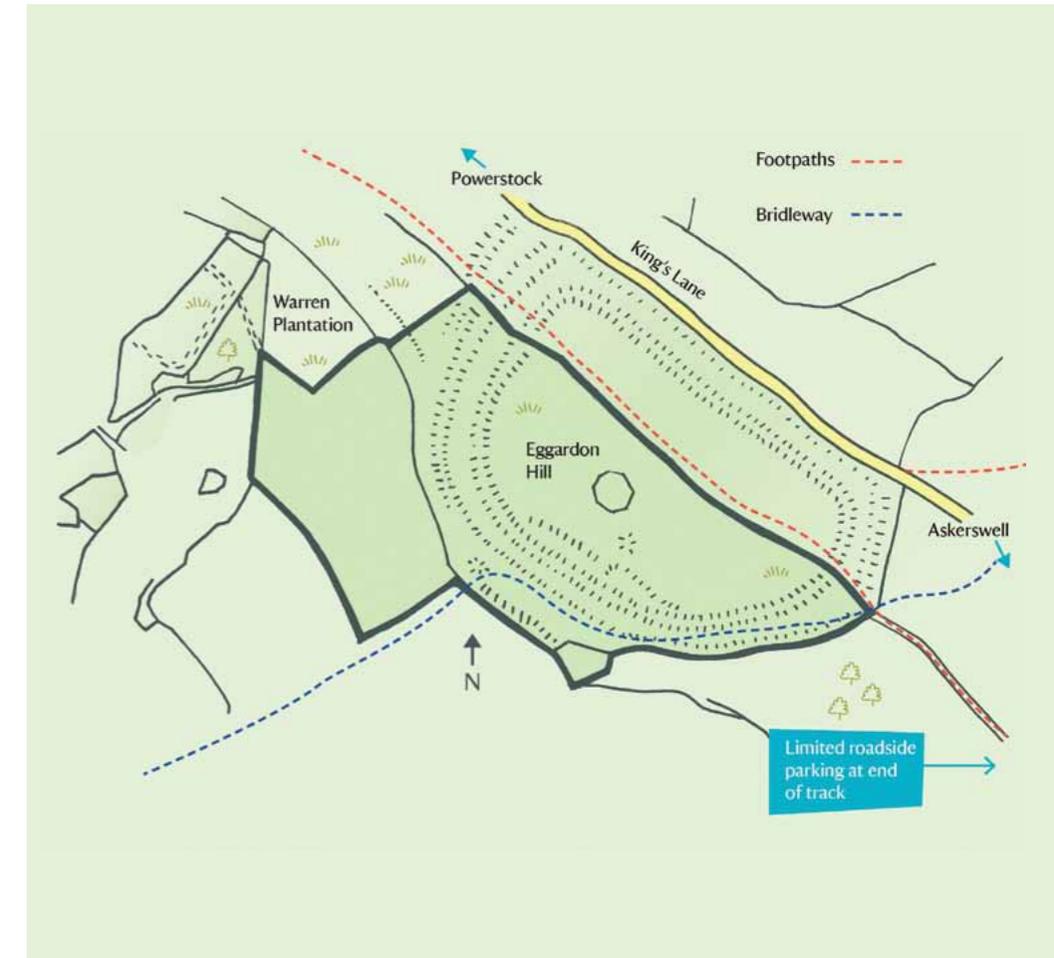
By road: from Dorchester take the A35 towards Bridport, following the Roman road. After 3 miles (5km) the main road leaves the old route and drops down into Winterbourne Abbas. The Roman road still exists as a minor road, so take this road and after another 3 miles you'll see the hillfort at a crossroads. Turn left here towards Askerswell and continue for 200m.

Parking: park in lay-by (SY545941), cross the road and take the footpath towards the southern ramparts.

Ancient landmark

As an archaeological site, its ramparts are very well preserved. The Trust's southern section, unlike the northern section, has escaped ploughing. A landslip is believed to have occurred when the fort was still in use as there is evidence of the ramparts being partially rebuilt, making this a unique site. George Rybot excavated the Bronze Age barrow, which lies against the inner rampart, in 1965. The two trenches can still be found today. He unearthed pottery and the cremated remains

Above Reconstruction of Eggardon Hill



What to do

Walk with nature

This is an ideal location for short walks, and the best place to enjoy a summer sunset. Watch out for orchids in spring, Adonis Blue butterfly in early summer, and autumn gentian.

of an adult and child buried between 3,000 and 3,500 years ago.

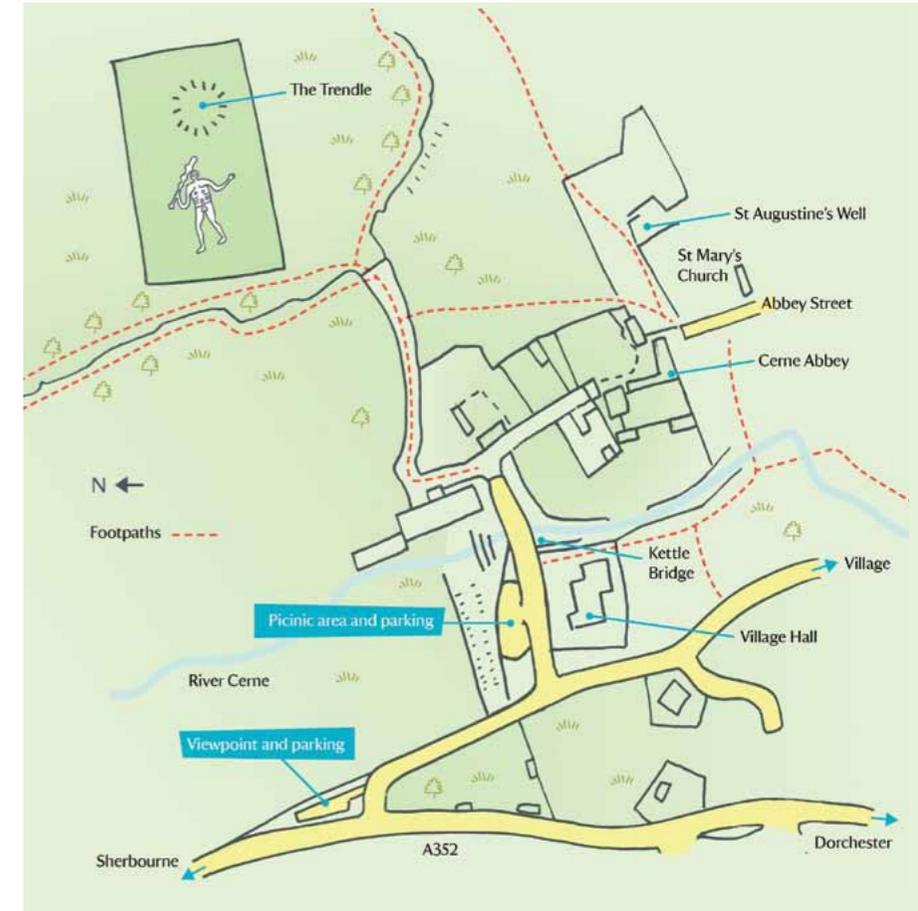
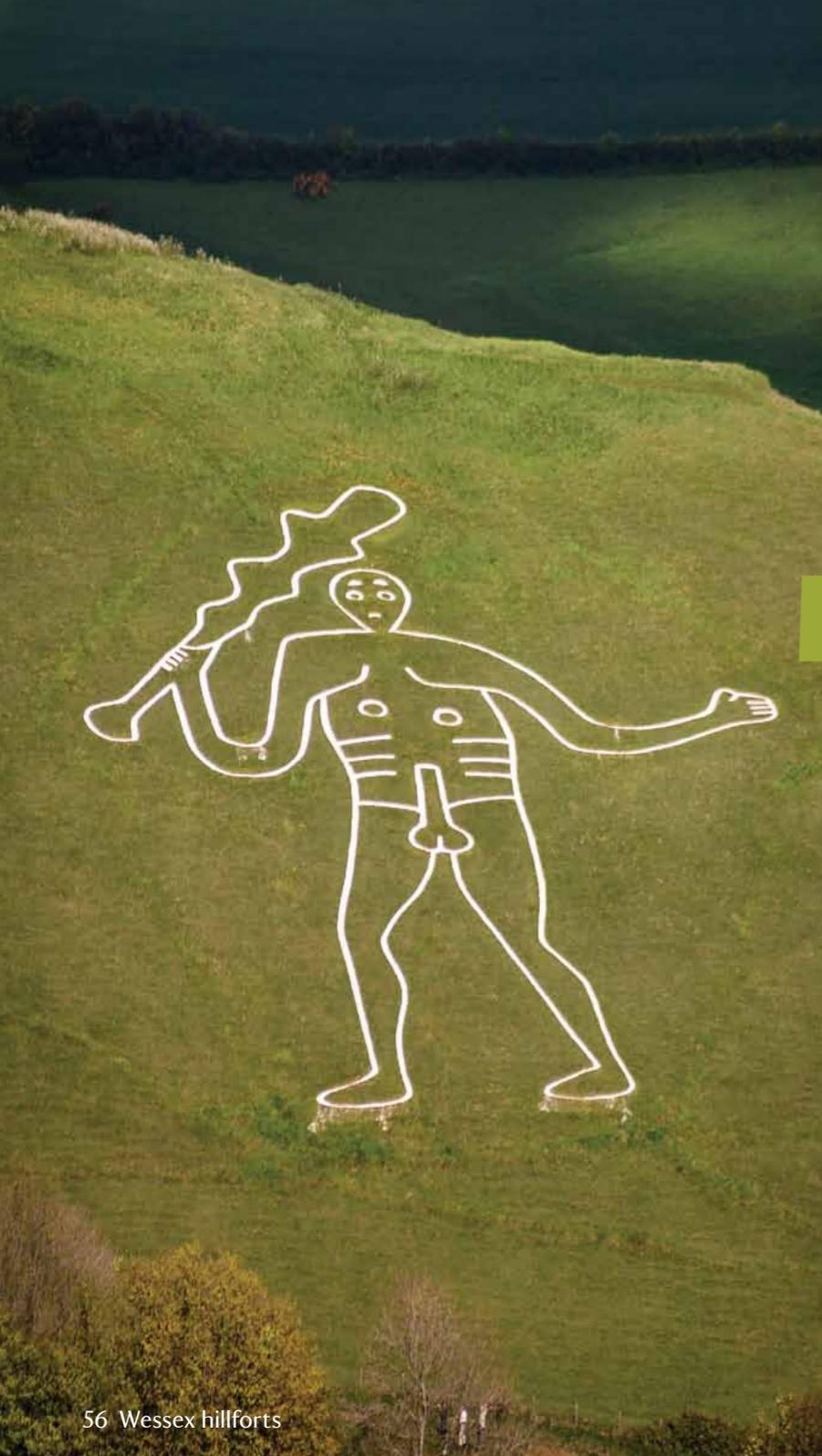
Apart from being a fine viewpoint, the hillfort is itself a prominent landmark, especially when seen from the coast and within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Through its elevated position it has a connection with smuggling, having been once owned by farmer and smuggler Isaac Gulliver. He is said to have planted a copse of trees in an octagonal enclosure, as a landmark for boats smuggling contraband between Abbotsbury and Golden Cap. The octagonal bank still remains.

Top left Adonis Blue butterfly
Left Common spotted orchids



Cerne Giant

A remarkable and most outlandish male figure sculpted into the chalk hillside above Cerne Abbas village.



Cerne Giant

How to get there

By road: signposted just off the A352, 8 miles (13km) north of Dorchester and 10 miles (16km) south of Sherborne.

Perceptions

The Giant is one of three ancient giant figures cut into the English chalk downlands. The other two are the Long Man of Wilmington in East Sussex and the Uffington White Horse in Berkshire. It is, perhaps, the most famous and controversial of the three, with its chalk outline sculpted into the hillside above Cerne Abbas representing a naked, sexually aroused, club-wielding man.

People like to speculate on his origins. Old drawings show that his shape has changed over time. In 2020, excavations dated him to the Saxon period, though he has been remade and reinterpreted regularly since the 17th century.

Chalking the Giant

During the Second World War the giant was covered to prevent him being used as a landmark. Since then he has been visible, and the white lines are re-chalked roughly on a 10-year cycle by staff and volunteers.

What to do

The Giant is best viewed from the Giant Viewing Point parking on the A352 road. Alternatively, you can walk up Giant's Hill and around the perimeter fence which protects the Giant. Try and spot a Marsh Fritillary butterfly in May, and look out for wildflowers in summer. Then drop down to explore the village.

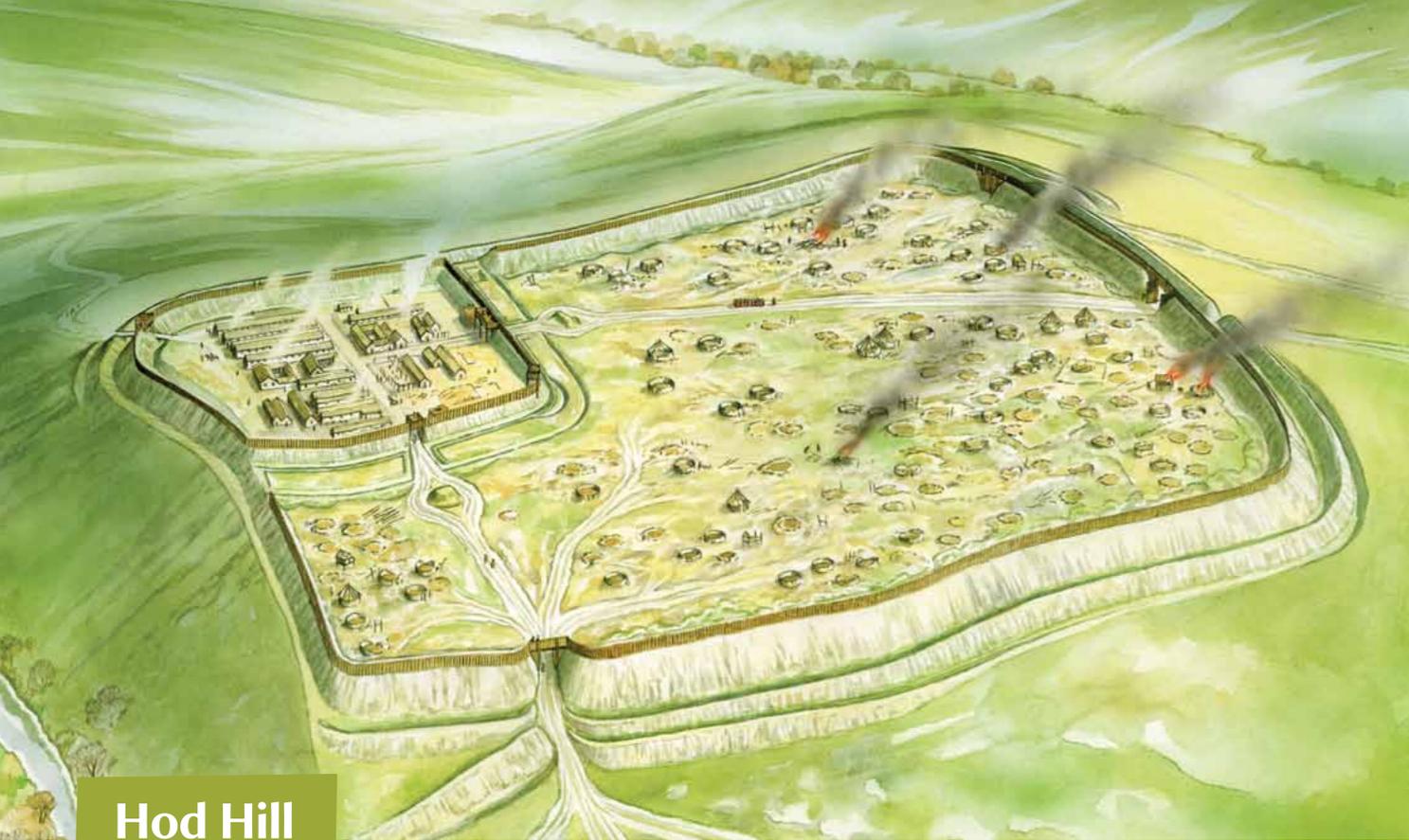
Left Cerne Giant Above right Marsh Fritillary butterfly Above Volunteers re-chalking the Giant Right Eyebright, Green Hairstreak butterfly





Hod Hill

This Iron Age hillfort was constructed sometime around 500 BC and is one of a kind.



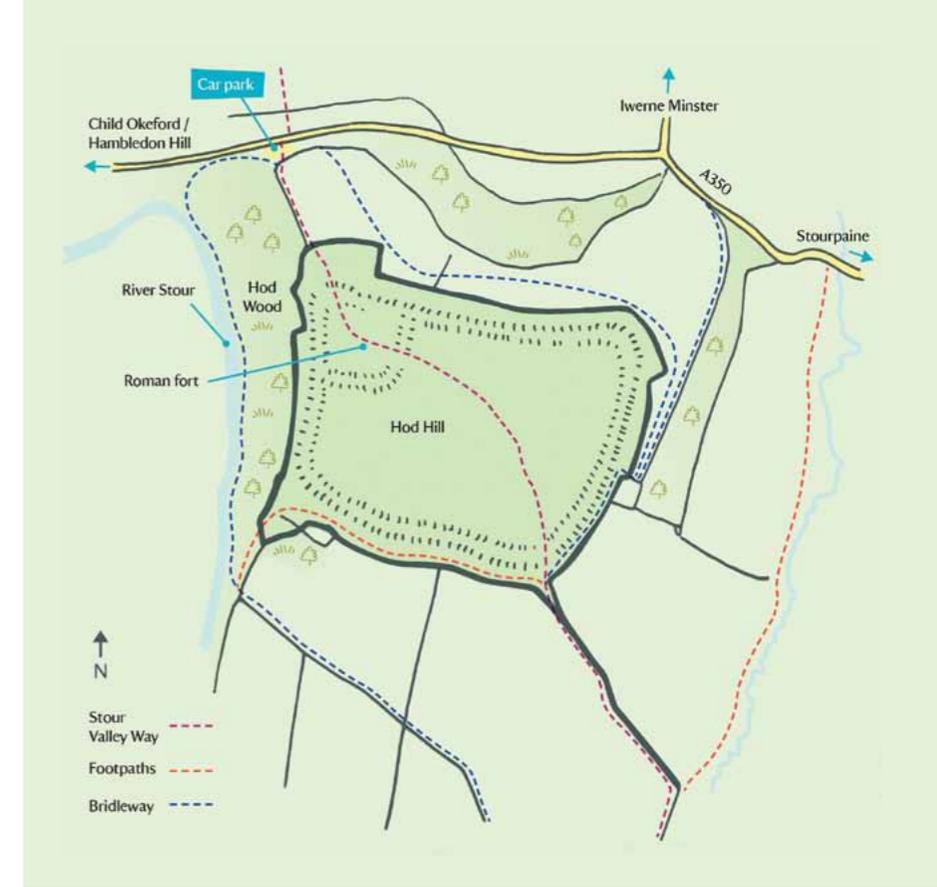
Hod Hill

How to get there

By road: from Blandford Forum take the A350 and beyond Stourpaine village turn left to Child Okeford. From Shaftesbury take the A350 and after Stepleton House turn right to Child Okeford. Parking: half a mile after turning off the A350 the private car park for Hod Hill can be found on the left (ST853112).

Rich cultural history

Hod Hill is one of the largest hillforts in Dorset and is 22 hectares in size. It is nationally important because it was reused as a military base by the conquering Roman army. The earthworks from both periods are still visible today.



What to do

Take a circuit walk of the ramparts

Perched high above a meander on the River Stour, this superb hillfort has the greatest views over rural Dorset. The carpet of cowslips nodding in the breeze in early spring is unmissable. It is a good location to see butterflies, including Adonis Blue, Grizzled Skipper and Marsh Fritillary.

As you look around the hillfort you will see five entrances through the ramparts. Two are Iron Age, two Roman and one Medieval. Traces of the Iron Age village are clearest in the south-east corner which has never been ploughed.

The Romans on Hod

The Roman fort had three gates, each with a watchtower. There was a fourth tower in the south-east corner and platforms at the east and south gates for artillery. Excavation of the barrack blocks revealed that a legionary detachment of 600 men and a cavalry unit of 250 were garrisoned here. During excavations a large hut, possibly that of the chief, was found to be surrounded by Roman ballista bolts. These spear-like missiles were fired from a machine resembling a crossbow on wheels.

Left Reconstruction of Hod Hill
Top Grizzled Skipper butterfly
Above Cowslip



Hambledon Hill

Dominating the surrounding landscape,
with its precious turf and ancient hillfort.



Hambleton Hill

How to get there

By road: next to Child Okeford village on a minor road off the A350. Parking: a small, unsigned roadside lay-by with parking space for four cars, south-east of the village. Alternatively, park in the village itself and follow one of the numerous footpaths up to Hambleton Hill.

Imagine life on the hill

Hambleton Hill includes archaeology dating back to the time of the earliest British farmers.

Over 5,500 years ago, high on the central spine of the hillfort, was built a Neolithic long burial mound. A thousand years later, several Bronze Age round burial mounds were created. The Iron Age hillfort itself was not built for another 1,000 years. Explore the ramparts, ditches and terraces and you'll be retracing the footsteps of people who lived, feasted, fought and were buried on this extraordinary site.

Hambleton Hill has escaped the advances of intensive agriculture over the centuries.

Above Summer sunset at Hambleton Hill
Clockwise opposite Bee orchid, singing whitethroat and White Park cattle



What to do

Take in the view from the top

From the summit of the hillfort you can see across three counties – Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire – giving a real sense of Hambleton's prehistoric strategic importance and why it's considered one of the finest Iron Age hillforts in Dorset.

Spot wildlife in the air

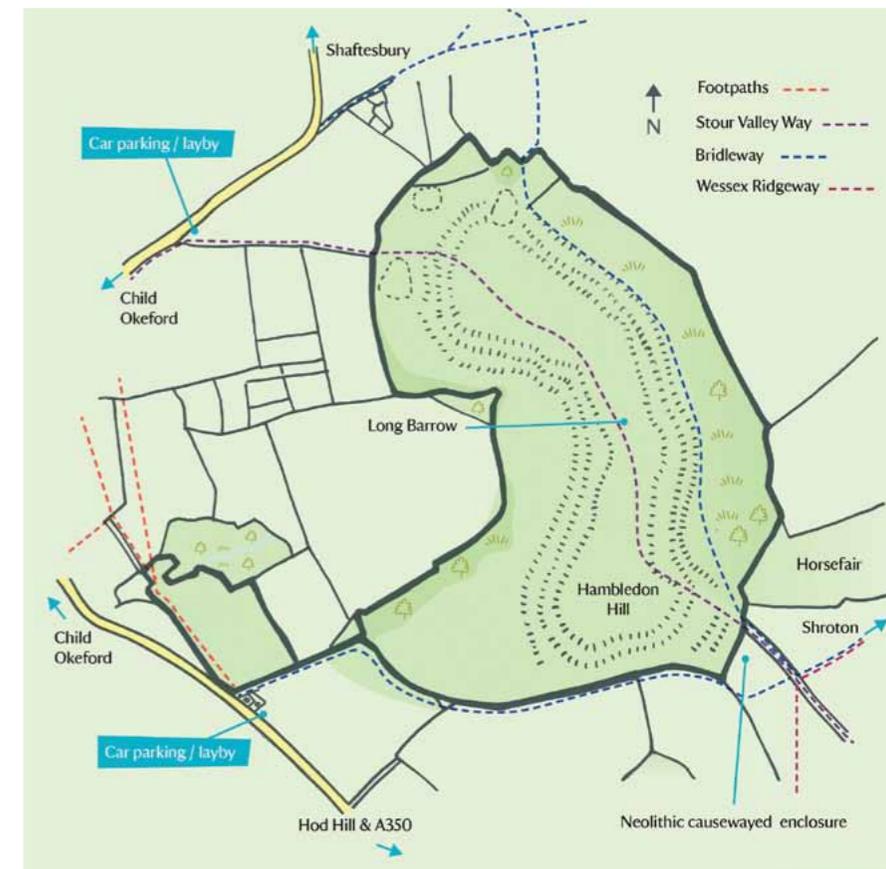
A national nature reserve, the hillfort is home to an impressive 28 species of butterfly including the Adonis Blue, Dark Green Fritillary and Green Hairstreak. Bird watchers might spot blackcaps, buzzards, chiff chaffs, kestrels, meadow pipits, skylarks, white-throats and willow warblers.

Explore nature at your feet

This chalk grassland site is home to at least five species of orchid, including the early purple, bee, pyramidal, common spotted and autumn lady's tresses. Keep an eye out for brown hares and glow worms too.

This means that the earthworks and burial features are exceptionally well preserved and clearly visible on the ground. The small circular areas show the position of Iron Age huts. Explore the Neolithic enclosure at the southern end of the hillfort.

In 1645, during the English Civil War, Hambleton was the site of the last known British battle on a hillfort. The Dorset Clubman defended the ramparts against Oliver Cromwell's army, but they were captured after a fight which included a cavalry charge against a hail of musket fire from the ramparts.





Badbury Rings

Rich in cultural history, flora and fauna, the rings sit 100 metres above sea level and offer sweeping views across Dorset.



Badbury Rings, Kingston Lacy

How to get there

By road: from Blandford: Take the B3082 towards Wimborne. Badbury Rings pay and display car park is approximately 6 miles (10km) from Blandford on your left, opposite the turning for Sturminster Marshall.

From Wimborne: take the B3082 towards Blandford. Badbury Rings pay and display car park is approximately 4 miles (6km) from Wimborne on your right.

Holding secrets from our past

Badbury Rings has three rings of ramparts and ditches; each may have been constructed at different times during the Iron Age. The outer rampart is a slighter earthwork and could have been constructed much later.

Excavation by National Trust archaeologists in 2004 found flint tools dating from the early Neolithic period, revealing that people lived here over 6,000 years ago, long before the hillfort was first built.

Above Reconstruction of Badbury Rings

In AD 44, the roundhouses were abandoned when the Roman army captured the area. It was a landmark; a Roman crossroads was created to the north and a temple built to the south. Here, local gods were worshipped for over 400 years. The hillfort was occupied again when the Roman army left Britain. It was a key location to guard against Saxon raiders from the north and east in the 5th and 6th centuries AD.

Allowance must be made for the effects of 2,000 years of erosion and silting. The ditches would have been far deeper and the ramparts much higher than they are today. Imagine large timber gateways at the entrances.

What to do

Walk in tune with nature

A walk at Badbury Rings reveals the rich history, flora and fauna of this ancient landscape.

The chalk grassland habitat is home to many nationally rare species, such as the greater butterfly orchid, fragrant orchid and frog orchid. It also supports many different butterflies, including the scarce Adonis Blue, the Chalkhill Blue, the Dingy Skipper and the Grizzled Skipper. Badbury Rings is an important feeding and breeding site for red-listed ground-nesting birds, such as the skylark and corn bunting.

Tune into the bluebells in spring, followed by the orchids. Count how many different butterflies you can see on a sunny summer's day, or a glow worm at twilight in midsummer.



Left Frog orchid
Above Corn bunting



Illustrations

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Left Hambledon Hill

Reconstruction illustrations:
Badbury Rings. Figsbury Ring, Park Hill Camp by Julia Lillo. Eggardon Hill, Hod Hill, Lambert's Castle, Pilsdon Pen by Nick Skelton.

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If you would like to find out more about hillforts, become a member or volunteer or make a donation, please telephone 0344 800 4410; write to National Trust, PO Box 574, Rotherham S63 3FH or visit our website at www.nationaltrust.org.uk

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Wessex hillforts give everyone an opportunity to step back in time and imagine the lives and livelihoods of our ancestors. Often standing in prominent isolation in the landscape, you can get a sense of the hillforts positional power whilst enjoying panoramic views across the countryside.

Hillforts are special places to visit, where you can experience and observe nature throughout the seasons. We hope this guide will inspire you to discover, explore and enjoy them.

Above Ramparts
on White Sheet Hill
seen from the air

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