

SUMMARY REPORT

White Horse Stone, Pilgrim's Way and West of Boarley Farm (NGR TQ 7350 6010)

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) was commissioned by Union Railways (South) Ltd (URS) to undertake archaeological investigations on the adjacent sites of White Horse Stone, Pilgrim's Way and West of Boarley Farm, north of Maidstone, Kent. These excavations, with a combined area of 6.8 ha, formed part of an extensive programme of archaeological investigation carried out in advance of the construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

Neolithic

Major discoveries include the clearly defined traces of a longhouse, found near the bottom of the dry valley, apparently sealed by a later prehistoric palaeosol. It is thought to date from the early Neolithic (c.3750 BC), although mid-late Neolithic pottery (Grooved Ware and Peterborough Ware) was also recovered from features in the immediate vicinity, suggesting activity on the site over a long period of time. The structure was defined by a substantial array of postholes, bedding trenches, pits and hearths. Associated activity areas in the form of utilised tree throw holes, pits and ditches lay to the south and east of the building.

Early/ middle Bronze Age

A sub-rectangular posthole structure to the south-east of the Pilgrim's Way site has been tentatively ascribed to the Bronze Age on the basis of its form, and pottery retrieved from adjacent features.

Late Bronze Age/ early Iron Age

A late Bronze Age / early Iron Age settlement was found on the chalk spur forming the western side of the dry valley, on the White Horse Stone site. Patterns of postholes suggest possible roundhouses and numerous four-post structures. A number of pits contained rich deposits of pottery and animal bone suggestive of domestic refuse, and three human pit burials were also recorded. A unique cremation deposit produced an exceptional group of transitional late Bronze Age/ early Iron Age artefacts, including an iron knife, four iron awls, a whetstone, a small curved iron blade and a group of at least six pottery vessels, one of which was a large urn containing a deposit of grain. A metal-working area located on the eastern side of the settlement produced furnace bases and pits containing large quantities of slag.

A very few sherds were found that may suggest a diminishing intensity of activity extending into the middle Iron Age.

Late Iron Age/ early Romano-British

By the late Iron Age or early Roman period there seems to have been a significant settlement shift, to the south-east of the Pilgrim's Way. There is no clear evidence for a settlement of this date, but several dispersed posthole structures and alignments, cremations, pits and animal burials have been found at the Pilgrim's Way and West of Boarley Farm sites, probably indicating occupation on or near the sites.

Medieval

The medieval features consist of trackways, including the Pilgrim's Way and a plough-levelled hollow way running north-south across the Pilgrim's Way site. Other medieval features comprised a corn-drying kiln found on the Pilgrim's Way site, which utilised sarsen fragments in its construction, and possibly a human burial found next to the Pilgrim's Way. A section excavated through the Pilgrim's Way failed to identify any trackway surfaces earlier than the medieval period.

The dry valley soil sequence.

The main dry valley at White Horse Stone was in-filled with a series of late glacial solifluction deposits. Within these the remnants of a Pleistocene palaeosol were located, possibly dating from the Allerød Interstadial. These deposits were sealed by a substantial, well-preserved Holocene buried soil which is truncated by an Iron Age ploughsoil. This in turn is overlain by a deep colluvial sequence dating from the Iron Age to the present day. Initial assessment indicates that these deposits have considerable potential for environmental reconstruction.

