

**THE RIDGEWAY
BETWEEN AVEBURY AND OVERTON DOWNS:
A REPORT AND ASSESSMENT**

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Abbreviations:

AM - Ancient Monument

AP - Aerial Photography

NGR - National Grid Reference

OS - Ordnance Survey

PPG - Planning Policy Guideline

RCHME - Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England

SAM - Scheduled Ancient Monuments

SMR - Sites and Monuments Record

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

WCC - Wiltshire County Council

WHS - World Heritage Site

Executive summary

The Ridgeway in its present form is a formalisation between fences, largely during the 20th century, of what may well have been an ancient route SW-NE across southern England. Any such route would not have been confined to narrow limits, so the present line is unlikely to be prehistoric in any proper sense except by chance and in short stretches. Today's Ridgeway therefore represents an old cross-country route which, over time and not necessarily continuously, followed many different tracks.

Throughout, the Ridgeway cuts across a complex, older landscape which had fallen out of use by the middle of the 1st millennium AD. During the next centuries, an estate boundary line developed along its line. In the 10th century, land charters referred to the 'Herepath' ('army road' or 'highway'), the earliest firm evidence for the existence of any sort of 'way'. A millennium later, it is still a parish boundary. It is also a byway and National Trail, used for local access and for recreation.

The length of Ridgeway examined here forms 4.5 kms. of the Trail, from the northern end of Overton Down (SU125724) the Ridgeway's intersection with the A4 (SU119680). It also lies entirely within the Avebury World Heritage Site. This accolade for the area was earned for its archaeological and cultural values, of which the Ridgeway is undoubtedly an expression. Part of this length passes through a conservation landscape managed in the public interest by respectively English Nature and The National Trust. English Heritage has a responsibility for the area as a World Heritage Site, and is directly responsible for numerous Scheduled Ancient Monuments near the Ridgeway. The whole area also lies in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

A new map based on air photography is at the core of this archaeological and historical appraisal. It authoritatively documents, and significantly changes perception of, the cultural landscape. The quality of what is on and in the ground; the historical significance of the area; and the sensitivity of the whole to a range of interests and pressures are beyond doubt. The length of Ridgeway in question is in effect a continuous archaeological site existing as a corridor lying on and cutting through an extensive cultural landscape of undoubted international significance. That landscape is now documented, demonstrable and to a considerable degree explicable.

Any change involving land disturbance on or adjacent to the Ridgeway has a high probability - indeed a near certainty, - of raising archaeological implications. On archaeological and historical grounds, wise and well-informed management of this length of Ridgeway would positively seek to avoid any disturbance to or alongside it, especially in the context of the World Heritage Convention (1972). For alternative courses, archaeological mitigation to current criteria and professional standards is essential, although costs could be in the region of £100,000 per Ridgeway kilometre.

1. The occasion and nature of this assessment

- 1.1. On Monday 5 June, 1995, contractors began work for Wiltshire County Council on the Ridgeway immediately south of its intersection with Green Street on Overton Down, 2.5 kms. east of Avebury. The contract was to lay c. 700 m. of limestone hardcore in a mechanically-dug trench 3.2 m. wide and c. 0.25 m. deep. The work was stopped, uncompleted, on Thursday 8 June, to allow time for further consideration of the operation and its implications by interested parties. This report and assessment is a contribution to that further consideration.
- 1.2. The authors of this report, members of staff of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, are working on a contract between the University and English Heritage to prepare for publication and accessible archive the results of a long-term field archaeology project studying the landscape of the parishes of Fyfield and West Overton 3 kms east of Avebury. This team currently has a great deal of data about the Ridgeway area, especially that part within the World Heritage Site and particularly for the downland of Fyfield and Overton Downs. The intensive fieldwork and major archaeological excavations with which the FYFOD team is concerned, have a direct relevance to the archaeology of the Ridgeway.
- 1.3. As well as the area east of the Ridgeway and the Ridgeway itself, the area to its west above Avebury was already in the course of archaeological appraisal by June 1995. In particular an air photographic cartographic analysis of the whole area, including the 'corridor' of the Ridgeway from Wick Farm to the River Kennet had already been commissioned from the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England.
- 1.4. The Director of the FYFOD project therefore offered, subject to English Heritage's agreement, to divert temporarily his team's efforts in order to make the project's information and landscape understanding available to all those concerned with the Ridgeway. His offer was accepted at a meeting of interested parties on 20 June, 1995.
- 1.5. The brief provided by English Heritage for the assessment set out a number of tasks and conditions which can be summarised as follows:
 - A To assess an area within the direct confines of, and within a zone 400m wide centred on, the Ridgeway, from Green Street to the Sanctuary, and the rest of the WHS if time permits.
 - B To compile and assess the data from the SMR, previous archaeological work, AP's, and historic maps etc.
 - C To identify further archaeological features and to check the data from the desk-top sources.

- D To comment on current management prescriptions and provide a short management statement and recommendation for all monuments within the Ridgeway and visible in the 400m zone.
- E To note the state of, and any damage to, archaeological features.
- F To examine accessibility to the Ridgeway and monuments in its vicinity
- G To examine the major archaeological elements within the wider landscape, including those clearly visible from the Ridgeway.
- H To provide a bibliography of all publications relating to this part of the Ridgeway.

- 1.6. Although this assessment has substantially complied with these tasks, due to time constraints, all eight tasks were not accomplished to the fullest extent hoped for. Further examination of current and future management recommendations (Task D) is required, as is a more thorough examination of the Ridgeway as a component of, and in, the wider landscape (Task G).
- 1.7. The methodology built on a large amount of information and materials already to hand (see Bibliography and Appendix 5). The key to our appraisal is, however, the RCHM air photographic map which was tested in the field over two days and not found wanting. All intersections between lines on the AP map and the Ridgeway (*below* 3.9 & 3.10) and, as far as possible, the archaeology c. 200 m to either side were examined (Figs. 3 and 5). Land within the Ridgeway fences on both sides, where possible, of the actual track was checked, as were all documented boundary stones and mounds (Fig. 6). During the survey, the archaeology visible from the Ridgeway was recorded (Fig. A1-6) and land-use, the state of archaeological monuments and physical access to and from the Ridgeway were noted.
- 1.8. The ArcInfo Geographical Information System (GIS) software has been used to demonstrate the visual access to the Ridgeway, as well as from it. This technology remained under exploited due to time constraints, although clearly it offers an efficient method of assessing the entire landscape (Appendix 4).
- 1.9. Although we have been helped by various institutions and individuals, particularly Wiltshire County Council, RCHM and the National Trust in providing access to, and use of, information, we have not been consulted by others about this report or the policy and political issues behind it; nor have we held any discussions about such issues, or indeed about the archaeology, with third parties while working on this report.

2. Introduction to the Ridgeway

- 2.1. The Ridgeway is a supposedly 'ancient track' or 'prehistoric road' running diagonally SW-NE across central southern England from Salisbury Plain to the Thames at Goring (Figs. 1 & 2). There it becomes 'The Icknield Way' (one of the several names given to the Wiltshire 'Ridgeway' in the 19th century) and continues NE along the foot of The Chilterns. '*The Oldest Road*' (Anderson & Godwin 1975) is thought to have connected the Wessex chalklands with East Anglia and more specifically Stonehenge with flint mines such as Grimes Graves in the Brandon area of Suffolk. If it existed as such a cross-country through-way with such purposes, then its origins lie in the 4th millennium BC.
- 2.2. The Ridgeway's prehistoric nature is further adduced by the presence of visible ancient monuments along its route. They include most obviously long barrows (burial mounds/ceremonial places) such as the megalithic ones of Waylands Smithy and Adam's Grave overlooking the Vale of Pewsey, dating from 3000 BC and earlier. Round barrows broadly of the period 2500-1500BC also border the Ridgeway, none better than the magnificent group of them on Overton (or Seven Barrow) Hill at the southern end of the 'Ridgeway corridor' studied in this report. In the 1st millennium BC, hill-forts like Barbury Castle, the core of a Country Park, also mark the line of Ridgeway as it follows the western and northern crest of the Wessex downland.
- 2.3. The Ridgeway is also a contemporary track, used by local farmers for access to land on both sides of it. Furthermore, it is designated both a Byway for legal 'Highways' purposes and, under the aegis of the Countryside Commission, a National Trail (Fig. 1 shows the Trail route E of Barbury Castle; Fig. 2 shows the supposedly 'ancient' route). Both designations allow for a through or long-distance function. Indeed, the Trail status is intended to encourage people to walk or ride both locally and cross-country around the Marlborough Downs, along the high, northern lip of the Berkshire Downs and then along The Chilterns as far as Ivinghoe Beacon and even beyond.
- 2.4. This study is concerned only with one small length of the Ridgeway near Avebury in Wiltshire (Fig. 2). This is specifically the length within the Avebury World Heritage Site, a concept explained in Appendix 3. Topographically, the 4.5kms. of Ridgeway reviewed run southwards from the northern end of Overton Down where it meets the east end of Monkton Down just below the 265 m. contour (SU125724) to the Ridgeway's intersection with the A4 on Seven Barrow Hill on the 170 m. contour (SU119680). The drop of 95 m. over that length is nowhere steep, its characteristic slope being 2-3° southwards; but it is not an even slope, there being somewhat steeper lengths down to both Green Street and Seven Barrow Hill.

- 2.5. Throughout this length the Ridgeway crosses Upper Chalk subsoil, with occasional patches of Clay-with-Flints. The northernmost, and highest, part of the study length is bounded by Clay-with-Flints on its east.
- 2.6. For the whole of this length, the Ridgeway runs down the central zone of a long 'finger' of downland between the upper reaches of the river Kennet or Winterbourne to the west and, to the east, a rolling landscape of dry valleys. They intrude NW from the Kennet Valley proper after it has turned eastwards at Silbury Hill. The route commands fine open views for many kilometres to W and S., with Oldbury Castle and East Wansdyke effectively closing the horizons, but on clear days the Cotswolds can clearly be seen. The middle distance view to the SE is closed by Martinsell Hill, while to the E and NE the view opens and closes to short and longer distances depending where one is on the Ridgeway (see 5.9 and Appendix 4).
- 2.7. The landscape hereabouts is almost exclusively either arable or pasture. Arable lines the Ridgeway throughout the length examined except for a short length of old grassland and a small recent plantation at the NW corner, the old grassland of the Fyfield Down National Nature Reserve either side of Green Street E of the Ridgeway and the new grassland on National Trust land on Overton Hill. Woodland is absent except for plantations in the middle distance: some three dozen tree-clumps looking SW from the Ridgeway, and Totterdown, Delling and Wroughton Copse to the east, with West Woods to the SE. A little further away lies Savernake Forest. From 2-3 kms. away and 70 m. higher, Avebury is visible as a sudden patch of deciduous woodland rather than a major earthwork. Thorn trees and a few other shrubs grow in places along the Ridgeway and patches of scrub occur on little Clay-with-Flint peaks on Overton Down.
- 2.8. The Ridgeway is mostly defined along its length by fencing. The standard width between fences is 40ft. A further edge exists along much of the way defined by near-continuous sarsen stones, some of them quite large (2-3 m. in width), on one or both sides. The majority come from field clearance, although a considerable number may (also) be boundary markers (4.4). In mid-summer, this modern 'megalithic' edge to the Ridgeway is mostly invisible in thick vegetation
- 2.9. The actual surface of the Ridgeway varies considerably from a 'traditional' one of two shallow ruts floored with flints, with downland sward between and wide verges to either side to badly rutted with multiple ruts across much of its width, especially south of where the 'June works' occurred. However, nowhere was it unwalkable, and the people encountered during fieldwork seemed to be expecting a bit of rough ground which offered them a bit of challenge.

3. From the past: archaeology

- 3.1. There is no single archaeological or historical study of the Ridgeway or this particular stretch. Anderson and Godwin (1975) provide a readable guide, with some interesting ideas, but their work is a personal synthesis rather than an original or scientific account. Grinsell (1958, 296-98) and Smith (1885) are useful.
- 3.2. The archaeological context of the Ridgeway above Avebury is completely changed by the new RCHM air photographic map. Prepared by the Air Photographic Unit of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, the complete map is schematically summarised in Fig. 4. A 500 metre-wide 'corridor' is extracted from the original to constitute Fig. 5. Details of the sources for this original piece of air photographic research, cartographically presented, are provided in Appendix 2.
- 3.3. The original map, plotted at a scale of 1:10 000, shows overall a remarkably complete 'ancient' landscape in remarkable detail. The detail comes from very well-preserved earthworks in the old grassland of Fyfield and Overton Downs and from 80 years of accumulated air photography. This priceless archive shows many archaeological features when they were still earthworks earlier this century; it also records the land-use changes this century as more and more downland was converted to arable. Most importantly for present purposes, in an area where so much has now been flattened by modern cultivation, air photography has revealed the extent and detail of a 'lost landscape', shown principally as crop and soil marks. Thus we can now see that the well-preserved remains on Overton and Fyfield Downs are complemented by cognate evidence west of the Ridgeway; and indeed that the Ridgeway passes over a landscape of which it was unaware and of which it is no part.
- 3.5. The map overall delineates a landscape of large blocks of arable fields and 'blank areas', presumably pasture. Through it threads a skein of trackways, the local country lanes of 2000 and more years ago (shown on Fig. 4). Dotted among, but particularly around the edges of the fields, are the settlement and the burial sites. The round barrows, often in groups, are possibly clustered around sacred points.
- 3.6. This pre-Ridgeway landscape is the result of two processes. First came a long, probably intermittent process of landscape development over some four millennia, which began to become organised in the 2nd millennium BC. Land came to be allotted and permanent field systems were created. The long ditch at the top of Fig. 4 (AM466), for example, divided arable fields along its western part and fields from pasture to the east on Totterdown. It also blocked the line of the Ridgeway, had such a route existed earlier. **This illustrates that no Ridgeway ran through this area of downland during this intensive phase of occupation and farming over the two thousand years (c.1500 BC -**

500 AD). If the Ridgeway is 'ancient', it has to be earlier than 2000-1500 BC.

- 3.7. Secondly, after that landscape had matured by the early Roman period, the system it supported collapsed (or the landscape collapsed and, with it, the system it supported). Thus we are presented on our air photographic map with a landscape of dereliction fossilised at its moment of abandonment, apparently in the later Roman period (the maps here omit medieval and later fields)
- 3.8. Nevertheless, the present Ridgeway encloses within its width a long transect through this extensive and old landscape. There appears to be no significant structure north of the W-E Bronze Age ditch (Fig. 4), though a well-developed prehistoric field system which lies to the NW around New Barn in Winterbourne Monkton looks as if it could have extended up the slopes towards the Ridgeway. The ditch, with a low bank on its southern side, is much cut by tracks in the Ridgeway width, but it exists as a low earthwork. It is well-preserved to the E where it was sectioned in an archaeological excavation in the 1960s. This provided details of its shape and size and indicated its original date as in the 2nd millennium BC. It was later used as a trackway, in early Roman times and probably more recently.
- 3.9. The AP map shows 50 intersections of the Ridgeway and specific archaeological features between that bank and ditch and Overton Hill (including the bank and ditch in the count). Examination of every single such intersection twice produced the following quantitative result:

Intersection with earthwork remains in Ridgeway width	27
Possible earthwork remains	10
Not visible	6
Cut by June '95 works	7
Total	50

- 3.10. The intersections are between the modern Ridgeway and field boundaries and trackways belonging to the Roman and prehistoric landscape. Taking together the 37 certain and possible survivals of earthworks in the Ridgeway width:

29	are field boundaries
6	make up the two sides of 3 trackways
1	is a prehistoric linear ditch and later trackway
1	is a Roman road

- 3.11. Details of the fieldwork data are on file and need not encumber this report. In general, the earthworks within the Ridgeway fences are slight, the banks typically some 5 m. across and less than 25 cms. high. The ditches are minor concavities of similar size. Most had been noted earlier during the FYFOD fieldwork, although, without their context their initial significance was unclear. They only become visually

and archaeologically significant in relation to their context in the overall 'ancient' landscape depicted on the AP map.

- 3.12. These slight, undramatic and superficially unimportant remains of people's activities 1500 and more years ago can be afforded further significance in the light of adjacent excavations on Fyfield and Overton Downs. In particular, apparently 'minor earthworks' forming field boundaries have been shown to cover and contain environmental evidence about the history of the landscape in post-glacial times up to the present, as well as containing dating evidence for different phases of land-use and of structure, notably prehistoric fences and field walls of sarsen stone. Indeed, the sarsen stones displaced without record from their context in the June work on the Ridgeway were very probably parts of such field boundaries laid out either around 900 BC or 100 AD.
- 3.13. Nearby excavations have also indicated a range of other evidence which can lie under, in or on top of such apparently mundane things as early fields. One small area of ancient fields on Overton Down, for example, visible from the Ridgeway and superficially indistinguishable from the evidence on the Ridgeway itself, contained a small cemetery of c. 2000 BC, parts of a field system, part of a settlement of c. 900 BC, a settlement of c. 700 BC with circular timber buildings, parts of a field system and plentiful evidence of Roman activity, a long period of use as pasture, medieval cultivation in strips, sheep pasture and finally evidence of Second World War military activity. In addition, excavation showed the surface of the Chalk subsoil to be widely scored by the actual marks made by early ploughs, evidence from which it is possible to deduce much about how the land was worked. Early medieval evidence, pagan Saxon burials for example, has also been recorded in the immediate surroundings.
- 3.14. Structures apart, this sort of landscape is also likely to contain buried soils and stratified deposits, in the accumulation of soils at prehistoric field edges, for example. Their significance often lies in their contained environmental evidence.
- 3.15. Underlying much of this Ridgeway area too is a layer of flints at the bottom of the topsoil, a layer plentiful in artefactual evidence. It, and other deposits elsewhere, contain many worked flint implements and the waste from their manufacture. In general, they represent some of the best evidence for activity over the centuries between the 4th and mid-2nd millennia BC, before farming became organised into systematic land allotments. They have been recorded in their hundreds from adjacent excavations and are apparent along the Ridgeway track and on recently upcast soils, for example from the recently dug drainage channels.
- 3.16. There is, incidentally, a close correlation in places between particularly 'busy' parts of the archaeological landscape and lengths of the

Ridgeway track which, from another perspective, are in poor condition requiring 'maintenance'. This is so, for example, c. 600 m south of the Green Street cross-roads and about the same distance north of the Roman road intersection (SU119682).

- 3.17. Any or all of such evidence could occur anywhere within the ancient landscape now known to exist and largely mapped. That generalisation includes the whole length of the Ridgeway under discussion south from the linear ditch (AM466) to The Sanctuary.

4. From the past: history

- 4.1. The maps presented in Figs. 6a and 6b are composite ones, produced by amalgamating information obtained from the sources detailed in **References** .
- 4.2. Discussion of the Saxon charters
 - 4.2.1. The data in hand-written form gives an indication of the nature of The Ridgeway Assessment Area in the tenth century, as inferred from the Saxon Charters detailed in Appendix 5.
 - 4.2.2. It is evident from the location map (Fig. 2) that The Ridgeway acts as part of the boundary of several of the parishes on Marlborough Downs. S.224, a charter of 922 or 972 AD talks of the eastern side of the village of Winterbourne as continuing up to the '*mearce*', or common boundary. This may refer to 'not merely a boundary, but a breadth of land on the boundary' (Grundy 1920, 24), possibly indicating that today's Ridgeway may have occupied a strip of land in the tenth century much as it does today. It remains to be determined, however, whether the Ridgeway was already in existence and was thus chosen as a 'natural' boundary which the parishes backed up to when they were formed, or whether the Ridgeway kept to the edges of estates so as to reduce the necessity of directly crossing land belonging to many owners.
 - 4.2.3. These pre-Conquest charters provide a clear picture of how the landscape was exploited and from the nomenclature used in these charters, it is possible to gain an indication of the political, social and economic conditions of the period. Although the landscape has evolved over the millennium since these boundaries were first secured in a written form, the boundaries themselves are still reflected more or less exactly in the late 20th century parish and tithing limits of West (and East) Overton, Fyfield, Avebury and Winterbourne Monkton. Whether they reflect pre-Saxon land divisions is, however, unclear (see Bonney 1966 & 1972, Goodier 1984).
 - 4.2.4. The West Overton Charter, 972 AD (S.784) notes a '*straetford*', probably where the Ridgeway crosses the Kennet at SU119676. '*Straet*' indicates that the track which crossed the East Kennet ford, possibly on the same line as today's Ridgeway, was metalled in some way.

'*Colta Beorg*'. Colta's barrow (SMR647. SU12106937) may indicate the burial place of Colta, the barrow belonging to Colta or possibly the colts', *i.e.* young horses', barrow. In the late eighteenth century it was still a prominent boundary marker (1783/draft & map). A very slight mound is visible by the side of The Ridgeway at this point today. The '*crundel*' or pit (S.449) is probable reference to the disused pit at SU124692 whose spoils would have been shared equally between the two valley settlements.

- 4.2.5. The reference to a '*Herpoth*' in the East Overton charter (S. 449) and to '*ealdan Herepathe*' (old army-path) in the Alton Priors charter of 825 AD (S.272), may indicate that an army had crossed the Downs, probably following a similar line as The Ridgeway, at a presently unknown date. At the time the charters were written, this path was most likely to have become a 'highway' mainly for non-military use or simply the place, being a major route, where one might encounter a warband (Costen, 105). Although '*Hacan Penne*' (Hackpen Hill) is today further to the north, around SU127742, clearly the name was used in the tenth century to refer to Overton Hill. The '*Dic*' (S.449) is SMR694: Ancient Monument 466, which crosses The Ridgeway at SU126723.
- 4.2.6. There is a clear similarity between '*egelferdeston*' (S. 341) and '*Aethelferthes Stane*' (S. 449). This stone would have been located near the modern junction of the boundaries of the parishes of West Overton, Winterbourne Monkton, Fyfield and Avebury, where several large grey sarsen stones are presently visible on the edges of The Ridgeway, although these particular ones are likely to be stones cleared from adjacent fields.
- 4.2.7. The '*Hric Weges*' (S. 449) shows the Saxon boundary following the ridge on Overton Down, on the approximate line of the present footpath, alongside the western edge of the gallops, to an area believed to be at SU133701.
- 4.2.8. The '*stan ræwe*' may refer to the section of land from the parish boundary junction at SU126716 along The Ridgeway to the junction of Fyfield and West Overton parishes at SU125724. As a stone row is 'probably nothing more than [a row] of stones, placed at wide intervals, such as today exist on the downs of Wiltshire, as the boundaries of adjoining farms' (Long, 55), this implies, if the interpretation is correct, that boundary stones were placed along the '*Herpoth*', at least at the northern end of the study area, to delineate the land belonging to the settlements and no doubt to connote the limits of the path itself.
- 4.2.9. The Winterbourne Monkton Charter, of 869 AD (S.341) mentions a '*rigte Weye*'. The straight-way may be reflected in the present line of The Ridgeway along the stretch from the boundary of West Overton and Fyfield parishes at SU125724 to the ditch (AM466). Ridgeway is likely to be a derivation of '*rigte Weye*' or '*Hric Weges*'. '*Wulvesburghe*', the wolves camp is a presently unknown feature to the west of Egelferd's stone, possibly around SU124715.

- 4.3. Discussion of 18th, 19th & 20th century cartographic evidence
- 4.3.1. The data on Figs. 6a and 6b also give an indication of the nature of the Ridgeway assessment area in the 19th century, as deduced from the maps detailed in **References**. The position of every feature is as precise as possible, after reconciling different scales and cartographic techniques. This information is reproduced here to illustrate the nature and quantity of the features which delineated the parish and tithing boundaries, and which in turn delineate the boundary of The Ridgeway.
- 4.3.2. Andrew's and Dury's Map of 1773 (*frontespiece*) shows a track traversing 'Ray' or 'Bay Down' (Overton Hill). This track is unnamed and, although it follows a similar line as the track today known as The Ridgeway over Overton Hill, at SU126725 it veers off to the north-west. This section of the track is reflected in the modern footpath which continues to the north of barrows on Monkton Down (SM 12261). Travellers and traffic would at this point (SU126725) have had to take a 90° turn westwards, along what is today a strip of unploughed rough ground but which was a well-used track until the 1980s (Anderson & Godwin; 1982. Map B, 71), to join the track coming up from Totterdown Wood. Evidently, the straight, northern section of The Ridgeway from the junction of the parishes of Fyfield and West Overton to the disused pits (SU125729) has been created in the last ten years. This is not to say that this section had not been a through track at some time prior to the 1773 map.
- 4.3.4. There is no indication on the late eighteenth century maps of a track along the boundaries of the manors concerned, although the boundary stones and visible barrows are included (SMR649, SMR647; 'Colta's Barrow' and the 'Seven Barrows'; AM93). Several of what were obviously important tracks were noted on these maps, whereas one along the 'Ridgeway' was not noted. The inference is that, as a fixed track, the Ridgeway did not exist as such. A track across Overton Down to Fyfield, partly mirrored in the footpath which follows the Saxon '*Hric Weges*' (see 4.2.7.), is the only indication of a major route in the study area towards the valley settlements and the Bath road (A4).
- 4.3.5. The early nineteenth century maps and plans illustrate a similar situation to the one outlined in 4.3.4. above. The 1802 map shows a 'drove' from the Bath road down to the ford across the Kennet, although there is no indication of this droveway continuing to the north. No 'Ridgeway' is evident on the 1811, 1815/16 nor 1819 maps, whereas the Bath road, 'the ancient track called Old London Way' (Green Street) and minor farm and village tracks are. Moreover, a large number of boundary stones appear on the 1811 and 1819 maps, delineating parish boundaries which correspond to today's, yet no track was drawn alongside them. This points to there being no track following the line of The Ridgeway at this period. Clearly other

downland routes were considered more convenient and a south-north road was not needed.

4.4. Discussion of boundary markers

4.4.1. Recent field work (14-15 July 1995) observed the modern concrete boundary markers of the National Trail and recorded a number of the older boundary stones. A substantial quantity of brown, 'egg-shape' stones of various sizes were evident along the boundary line and were clearly different from the other sarsens, grey and brown, which showed signs of having been recently lifted from the ground or having been deliberately broken. Some of these 'egg-shaped' sarsens showed signs of having been shaped. Several boundary mounds, known locally as 'Dillions', were also recorded.

4.4.2. An attempt had been made to break up at least three of these brown stones at some time as splitting wedge marks, used from the mid-nineteenth century up until the 1920s (King 1968), were noted. Such evidence would therefore suggest these particular stones were broken before 1930 and broken, as was the norm, *in situ* (King, 90). This may hint at the possibly illicit practice of breaking and removing boundary stones.

4.4.3. Further evidence that at least some of these stones had been placed to mark the boundary and were not simply stones cleared from the adjacent fields, is illustrated by their position. In many instances it corresponds exactly to the positions marked on the 19th century maps. Furthermore, these brown 'egg-shaped' stones were only noted on the parish boundary side of the Ridgeway.

4.4.4. Conclusions point to the majority of stones along the edges of the Ridgeway being from field clearance in the recent past. However, clearly some stones have been carefully shaped and this would indicate their purpose is to demarcate the parish boundaries and/or the edge of the 40 foot strip of land through which the Ridgeway runs. Distinct splitting tool marks point to some stones being situated in this vicinity for at least 70 years, though early maps show evidence of stones in similar positions over 170 years ago. Whether they are of an earlier date, even Saxon (see 4.2.8.), cannot be determined at present.

4.5. The Ridgeway as a 'British Trackway'

4.5.1. There is no mention of a 'Ridgeway' or 'British Trackway' in any of the writings of Aubrey (1626-1697) nor Stukeley (1687-1765), although both were fascinated by the Avebury region and both studied, *inter alia*, Overton Hill, the Sanctuary and the 'Seven Barrows' (Long, 9, 14-15).

4.5.2. The first reference to a 'British Track way' along the line of the present Ridgeway is on an 1857 map, itself a corrected reproduction of R. C. Hoare's 1812 map from 'Ancient Wiltshire' (Long, first map). Hoare

believed the track referred to as the 'Ridgeway' in the Ashbury area was 'a collateral branch' of the Roman Ikenield Street. He comments that '[the Ridgeway/ Ikenield Street] seems to point towards the grand circle of Convention at Abury' (from Smith; 1885, 190). A series of maps from 1885 refer to a 'British Trackway' but by 1889 this track has become 'The Ridgeway' on the Ordnance Survey 6" and 25" maps. It is referred to as 'The Ridgeway or Ickniel Way' in 1900, although by 1924 it has reverted to being simply 'The Ridgeway'. The inference here is that the belief that this track was an ancient one emerged in the 1850s with The Ridgeway acquiring its present name in the 1880s.

4.6. Ridgeway enclosure

- 4.6.1. From the northernmost edge of the World Heritage Zone to the modern National Trail marker at SU126716, The Ridgeway was enclosed, on both sides, between 1900 and 1924. The section of The Ridgeway from this marker at SU126716 to the north-east corner of the land enclosed in 1816, now known as Parson's Penning, was fenced on its east side in 1960, although the western edge was not enclosed until the 1970s. From this point, The Ridgeway's was enclosed on its east side by the fence of Parson's Penning with its west side remaining unfenced until after 1960. At some time between 1900 and 1924, The Ridgeway was enclosed on both sides from the junction with Colta's Barrow (SU12106937) to the junction with the A4. This information is detailed here to demonstrate that The Ridgeway was mainly enclosed in the latter half of this century. Prior to enclosure the track would have changed course when and where necessary, uninhibited by fences on either side.

5. Aspects of the current situation

- 5.1. Avebury itself is becoming more popular as a place to visit as a major monument at the centre of a World Heritage Site. The extent of the designation, which so deliberately includes the Ridgeway and parts of the archaeologically-rich downlands, makes this point quite clear (Fig. 7). If that landscape was important at the time of designation in 1986, how much more valuable it is now with the increased archaeological significance.
- 5.3. The importance of World Heritage Status is outlined in the UNESCO policy document (UNESCO 1994): 'The Convention provides for the protection of those cultural and natural properties deemed to be of outstanding universal value' (*ibid*, para.6. See Appendix 3.1).
- 5.4. World Heritage designation lies outside English statutory provision but is accepted as a 'material factor' to be taken into consideration (Appendix 3). In recent years, three public enquiries have been held concerning development proposals in Avebury and its environs; one concerned a plot of land beside the extreme southern end of the Ridgeway length considered here. In each case the status of the area's World Heritage designation was taken into account; in each case, the Secretary of State for the Environment decided against the proposal.
- 5.5. The Avebury area, including the Ridgeway, already possesses an array of statements of management policy and practice from numerous bodies. Appendix 3 draws two generalisations: most of such policies, including non-archaeological ones, are based on unexceptionable, even enlightened, premises from an archaeological viewpoint, and their good intentions cannot be doubted; yet practice has so far fallen far short of objective (many of which are of course long-term) and, within the proliferation of statements, some are archaeologically in conflict with others and a few are themselves incompatible with good archaeological resource management.
- 5.7. The World Heritage sites of Stonehenge and Hadrian's Wall have their own management plans (English Heritage 1995a & 1995b) which outline their current and future management policies towards the management of these World Heritage Sites.
- 5.8. Unfortunately, a comment on the management of each individual site involved (Task D) could not satisfactorily be undertaken in the time available. An indication of condition is, however, provided for every site in the gazetteer from the SMR (Appendix 1). More generally, the areas alongside the Ridgeway are under the management regimes of the National Trust and English Nature, where monuments are both consciously preserved and made accessible (see Figs. 7 & 9), with the remaining sections under private ownership. In the National Trust and English Nature areas, visible, visitable round barrows are preserved, respectively under grass and tree-clumps. Other barrows under grass

or trees, but surrounded by arable, are not necessarily accessible. The old grassland area of the Fyfield National Nature Reserve is grazed mainly by sheep, which is excellent archaeologically, although pasturing cattle which also occurs, is a less benign land-use archaeologically. However, these two management policies are the exception, and the arable context of the Ridgeway and its archaeology in the landscape of the 1990s has to be emphasised.

- 5.9. Archaeology plays only a relatively small part in the sweeping views available from the Ridgeway, especially in the arc NW-SW. Nevertheless a lot can be seen and is indicated on the accompanying tabulation and in Appendix 4.

Aspect	Site Name	Location	Reference
NE	Overton and Fyfield Downs Celtic Fields	SU 13 70	Bowen & Fowler 1962
	Totterdown	SU 135 720	Bowen & Fowler 1962 Fowler 1967
SE	East Wansdyke	SU 122 651	Clarke 1958 Green 1971
	Martinsell hill fort	SU 177 640	Cunnington 1909 VCH, 268
	Roman Road	SU 125 684	VCH, 120 Margary 1967, 135-137
	Stoney Valley	SU 13 69	Clark & Small 1967
	West Overton Church	SU 134 681	Anon. n.d.
SW	Avebury	SU 103 700	Burl 1979 Ucko 1991
	East Kennet Long Barrow	SU 117 669	Daniel 1950, 227-28
	Easton Down Long Barrow	SU 064 661	Whittle <i>et al</i> 1993
	Kennet Avenue	SU 10 69	Keiller and Piggott 1936 Smith I F (ed) 1965
	North Down Barrow Group	SU 04 67	VCH, 157
	Silbury Hill	SU 100 686	Atkinson 1970 Burl 1979
	The Sanctuary	SU 119 679	Cunnington 1931 Malone 1989, 82-94
	West Kennet Long Barrow	SU 104 678	Piggott 1963 Whittle & Thomas 1986

	West Kennet Palisade Enclosure	SU 112 685	Whittle 1991
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NW	Monkton Down Barrow Group	SU 118 725	VCH, 200-01
	Windmill Hill	SU 087 714	Smith (ed) 1965

5.10. There is a clear implication for the Ridgeway with the growth in the number of visitors to Avebury and the policy of actively encouraging visitors to use the network of footpaths, bridleways and byways which lead to the Ridgeway. Indeed, the Ridgeway, itself a Byway and National Trail, is the goal of many of the visitors, with the public paths being used as the means of reaching that goal (Fig. 9). This is mainly to experience the views (see Appendix 4).

6. Assessment

- 6.1. The section of the Ridgeway assessed in this report can be interpreted using two approaches. First, from an archaeological perspective, the Ridgeway preserves a 'corridor' of buried ancient landscape. Second, from an historical perspective, the Ridgeway has been a land unit boundary for at least the last millennium and intermittently an important trackway.
- 6.2. The line of the Ridgeway is important because of both its past history and its present cultural value. Preserved under the soil between the boundary fences lies the palimpsest of over 2500 years of prehistoric man's impact on the landscape. This includes flint scatters, burials, field boundaries, trackways and possibly settlements. During the historical period direct human impact of the landscape changed and the Ridgeway became a physical entity as both a boundary and periodically as a track. Although this historical context preserves very little physically, it is the administrative significance which must be considered. These prehistoric and historic origins are preserved in the present day as an untouched corridor through a modern arable landscape. The visual access both to and from the Ridgeway maintains a link with the past by the presence of large numbers of surviving monuments in the surrounding area. The physical state of the visual aspect varies but GIS modelling has made clear how central the line of the Ridgeway is within the present landscape (see Appendix 4).
- 6.3. The importance of the Ridgeway is enhanced and potentially threatened by a number of factors. From a physical perspective the route is threatened by the exploitation of the Ridgeway itself and the land-use in the surrounding area. While the World Heritage Status which the area holds enhances the opportunities for preservation with the potential to enforce a coherent and wide-ranging management plan. This must be seen in perspective with the local and regional management structures which also have the potential to acknowledge the archaeological and historical significance of the route.
- 6.4. The main conclusion is that any change involving land disturbance has a high probability of doing archaeological damage. On archaeological and historical grounds alone, wise and well-informed management of this length of Ridgeway would positively seek to maintain the *status quo* and go to considerable lengths to avoid any disturbance to or alongside it. Should this not be possible, or if that conclusion were to be set aside, then those who cause the disturbance must first examine the principles on which they would act in the context above all of the World Heritage Convention (1972) which the UK Government voluntarily signed.
- 6.5. If they still proceed, they must also be prepared to implement a major programme of archaeological mitigation since, World Heritage considerations apart, the length of Ridgeway in question is in effect a

continuous archaeological site existing as an archaeological corridor through an extensive cultural landscape of undoubted international significance. Any serious disturbance would contradict the national and local guidelines as expressed in Appendix 3. Full excavation is likely to be one of the mitigatory requirements.

- 6.6. The c 400 m. of mechanically excavated Ridgeway which sparked off this assessment would, for example, have cost in the region of £40 000 if it had been carried out in advance and to professional, academically-acceptable archaeological standards.
- 6.7. A working figure of c. £100 000 per Ridgeway kilometre is a useful guideline to the order of the full cost, including post-excavation, of the sort and scale of archaeological mitigation likely to be necessary on the type of cultural landscape now known to exist in this World Heritage Site.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1. Only **total** excavation can go any way towards mitigating the almost certain destruction which would be caused by any disturbance of the Ridgeway itself - where the topsoil down to the Chalk surface has, unlike its immediate surrounds, not been ploughed for 1500 years. Of immediacy, is the sieving of the spoil heaps from the drainage cuts and recent surfacing work for flints.
- 7.2. Schedule the Ridgeway strip assessed in this report on the grounds of it being a sample of an ancient landscape, not because it is an ancient road.
- 7.3. Management must accept the reality of the archaeological dimension in its plans and practices. This would involve:
 - a serious examination of all extant policies for the current and future management of the archaeology of the Avebury area,
 - the development of a management plan for the Avebury WHS as matter of urgency
 - accepting the responsibilities of a World Heritage designation which ought to take priority.
- 7.4. Return 200 m strip either side of Ridgeway to pasture. This could be done by encouraging the National Trust to cease ploughing land adjacent to the Ridgeway. Perhaps the Countryside Commission could invite private farmers to do likewise. This would immeasurably enhance the experience of the Ridgeway walk, *i.e.* of a track going through downland. Archaeologically, the more the landscape rather than just individual sites can be returned to pasture, the better.
- 7.5. Review communication mechanisms between all the interested parties, so that the breakdown which led to the June '95 work commencing will not happen again in the future.
- 7.6. Erect unintrusive interpretation panels, where appropriate, along the paths leading up to the Ridgeway and along the Ridgeway itself. Leaflets could also be made available. Such media could detail the history of the Ridgeway, indicate the visible sites of archaeological importance and inform the public of the significance of the area's designation as a World Heritage Site.
- 7.7. Encourage the RCHM to accelerate its Avebury environs project and meanwhile complete and publish AP cover for whole area;
- 7.8. Carry out a further survey of a 400m zone, centred on the Ridgeway in the light of this study, in the context of a much broader landscape appreciation. This would involve, *inter alia*, a thorough fieldwalk and search of the grassland areas either side of the Ridgeway track between the fences in order to define in a more precise manner extant

earthworks and boundary markers when vegetation levels are at a minimum.

- 7.9. Introduce staff training for all bodies involved with the aim of attaining a more holistic approach to the management of the Ridgeway.
- 7.10. GIS to be used to model uses and aid everyone's understanding of the Ridgeway and its setting in the wider landscape.
- 7.11. Management should exercise the discretion it has in its treatment of a byway and regard the Ridgeway as if it were part of the well-preserved archaeology of Fyfield and Overton Downs, rather than as a separate entity which, in recent times, has come to be a road.