

A303 UPGRADING, AMESBURY TO BERWICK DOWN
Archaeological assessment, Stage II

Trench investigations: North Kite and Wilsford Down

Report No. W636

Prepared by

WESSEX ARCHAEOLOGY

for

on behalf of

***John Samuels Archaeological
Consultants***
6 Old North Road, Cromwell
NEWARK
Nottinghamshire NG23 6JE

Sir William Halcrow & Partners Ltd
Burderop Park,
SWINDON,
Wiltshire SN4 0QD

© Copyright The Trust for Wessex Archaeology Limited 1993, *all rights reserved*

The Trust for Wessex Archaeology Limited is a Registered Charity, No 287786.

SUMMARY

The Department of Transport are considering options for upgrading the A303 London to Penzance Trunk Road between Amesbury and Berwick Down in Wiltshire. Part of the route corridor passes through the Stonehenge/Avebury World Heritage Site, immediately adjacent to Stonehenge itself. Sir William Halcrow & Partners, the Consulting Engineers, have commissioned John Samuels Archaeological Consultants to compile archaeological impact assessments for the various route options being considered. For agricultural, environmental and planning reasons, the archaeological assessment is being conducted in stages. This report presents the results of a delayed segment of the second stage; trench investigations of two sets of earthworks to the south of the present route which are known from aerial photographic and other evidence, and which would fall within one of the route options. The project background and archaeological setting of the work have been detailed in previous reports, which should be read in conjunction with this text.

Three trenches were excavated entirely by hand: one adjacent to the Scheduled Monument known as the North Kite, to investigate its possible continuation to the north; and two across linear earthwork systems on Wilsford Down visible on aerial photographs. The work demonstrated that all three survive as sub-surface features cut into the underlying chalk with large amounts of flint working debris, and some tools, in the immediate vicinity. Detailed analysis of the flint indicates that much of it is *in situ*, as originally knapped, having survived beneath the ploughzone.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work was possible only with the understanding and support of Mr A.M. Hosier, the landowner, and Wessex Archaeology are particularly grateful for his interest and encouragement. The work was commissioned by The Department of Transport via Sir William Halcrow & Partners and their archaeological consultant John Samuels Archaeological Consultants. Wessex Archaeology are grateful for the assistance and co-operation of Mr Ed Bradley (Department of Transport), Mr Gary Hodge (Sir William Halcrow & Partners) and Dr John Samuels (John Samuels Archaeological Consultants). The work was carried out by Philip Harding assisted by Richard May and Joe Whelan under the management of Michael Heaton, this report compiled by Philip Harding, Michael Heaton and Liz James.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Proposed upgrading of the A303 London to Penzance Trunk road between Amesbury and Berwick Down in Wiltshire is being considered along a range of potential route options (DTp consultation document 1993). As most pass through the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site within the immediate vicinity of Stonehenge itself, consideration of route options is taking account of archaeological sensitivity by way of archaeological assessment of the proposed alternative routes. This report deals with supplementary work along the 'Grey route', which passes some distance to the south of the current route of the A303 (Wessex Archaeology 1993, Report W540, Figure 1) crossing a number of archaeological features recorded on the Wiltshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record (WCC SMR). Previous investigations on the Grey route are reported in Wessex Archaeology reports Nos. W540 and W580 (all revisions).
- 1.2 As part of a 'rolling' programme of work, Wessex Archaeology were commissioned by Sir William Halcrow and Partners Ltd., through their archaeological consultant Dr. John Samuels to examine the integrity and preservation of two known archaeological features where they fall within the Grey route: the presumed northern extension of the North Kite, a Scheduled enclosure which survives to the south of the route as an extant earthwork partially levelled by post war agricultural improvements; and linear cropmarks visible on aerial photographs of Wilsford Down (Figure 1). These areas have already been the subject of geophysical and surface artefact collection surveys, (Wessex Archaeology *ibid*).
- 1.3 The work had been programmed to take place during the spring of 1993, but was postponed to avoid disturbing rare Stone Curlews nesting in the area. The rearranged schedule agreed that the work should be conducted in September 1993. The three trenches were to be excavated and backfilled by hand.
- 1.4 The three sites are situated within a dry combe, aligned east - west, which forms a tributary to the Stonehenge Bottom valley. The combe is overlooked by the Normanton Down Barrow cemetery to the north and the Lake Group to the south. The area is mapped as Upper chalk by the British Geological Survey and was under arable cultivation at the time of the excavation with a germinated leaf crop visible.

2 Methodology

- 2.1 The project brief and excavation methodology were prepared in conjunction with John Samuels Archaeological Consultants, presented in a specification document by Wessex Archaeology in advance of the initial field work (ref T1309.b). Three trenches were to be excavated by hand: one across the levelled components of the North Kite, one across two parallel linear ditches (SMR 970 and 61S) and a third across curving feature visible as a crop mark

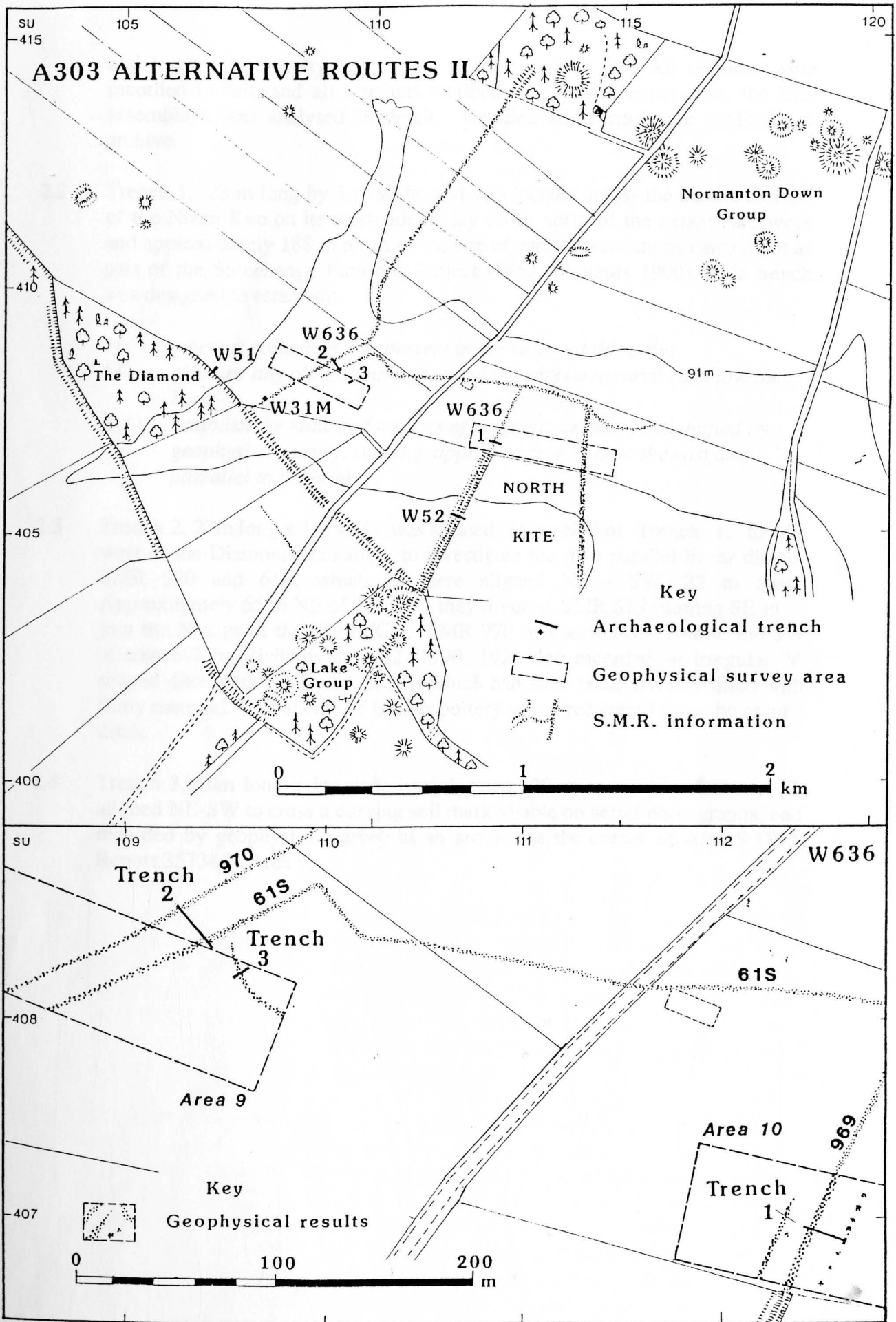


Fig.1: Site and trench location

and located by geophysical survey (Figure 1, area 9). All deposits were recorded in full, and all artefacts retained. Following excavation, the flint assemblage was analysed in detail. Detailed site records are available in archive.

2.2 Trench 1, 23 m long by 1 m wide, and was located across the bank and ditch of the North Kite on its west side. It lay 33 m north of the extant earthwork and approximately 188 m north of the site of earlier excavations carried out as part of the Stonehenge Environs Project (W52, Richards 1990). This trench was designed to establish:

- 1) *whether colluvium was present in the valley at this point*
- 11) *examine any old ground surface which may have survived below the bank*
- 111) *establish the nature of a series of magnetic anomalies identified by geophysical survey, running approximately 14 m to the east and parrallel to the bank.*

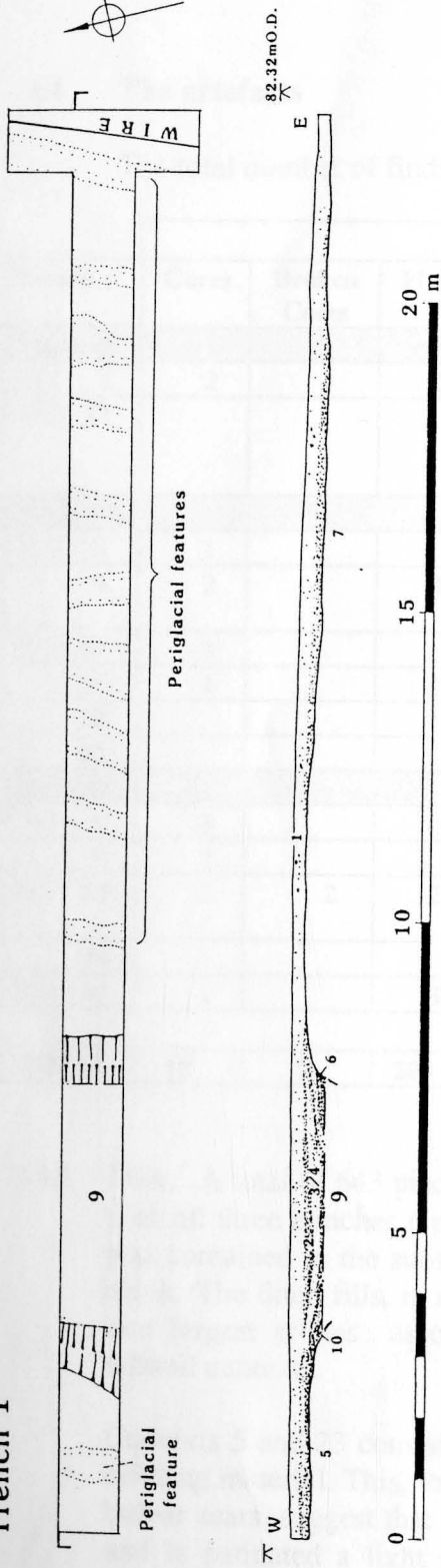
2.3 Trench 2, 27m long x 1m wide was located 350m NW of Trench 1, to the west of the Diamond plantation, to investigate the two parallel linear ditches SMR 970 and 61S, which are here aligned NE - SW, 22 m apart. Approximately 65 m NE of Trench 2 they diverge, SMR 61S running SE to join the N edge of the North Kite. SMR 970 was sectioned 170m to the SW of trench 2 by Richards in 1982 (1990, 192) who recorded an irregular 'V' shaped ditch with chalky lower fills which had been recut and had silted with flinty material. Two sherds of Beaker pottery were recovered from the recut ditch.

2.4 Trench 3, 10m long x 1m wide, was located 20 m to the SE of Trench 2, aligned NE-SW to cross a curving soil mark visible on aerial photographs, and recorded by geophysical survey as an arc across the corner of Area 9 (WA Report 35734.b, Area 9)

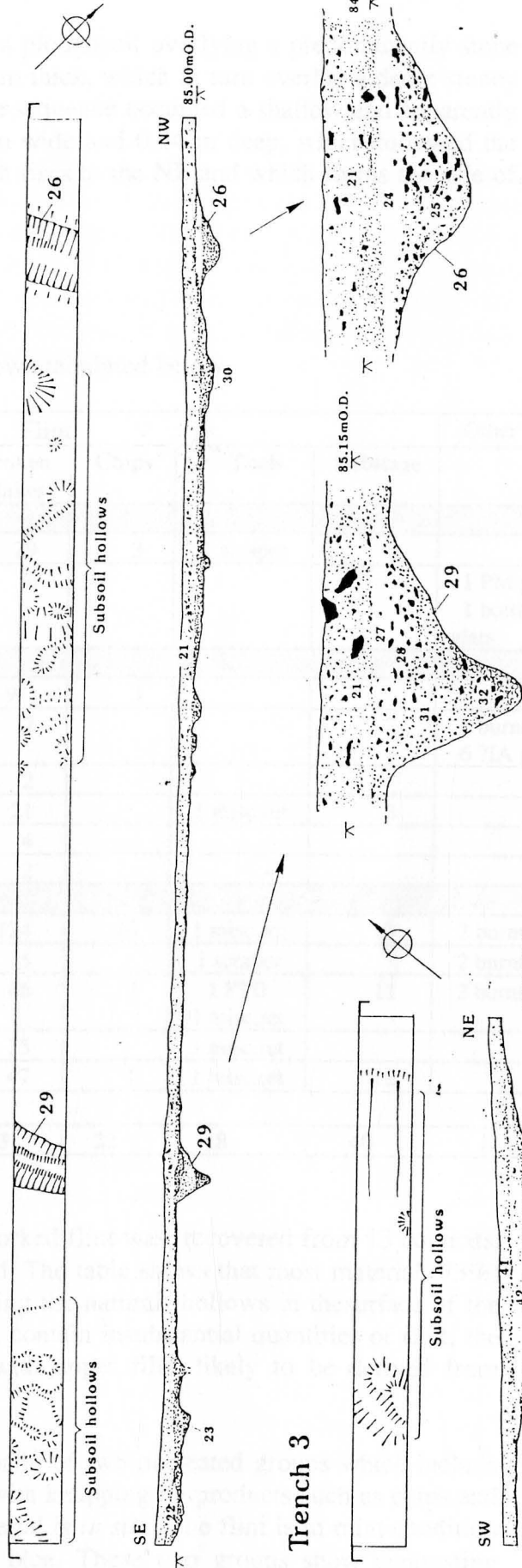
3 Results (Figure 2)

- 3.1 *Trench 1.* Excavation revealed a consistent depth, 0.20 m, of dark brown silty loam topsoil overlying natural chalk. A series of linear periglacial stripes crossed the natural chalk in places, particularly outside the North Kite ditch (see below). These features occasionally coalesced to form irregular subsoil hollows which had preserved pockets of the natural silty clay subsoil. A truncated stone free horizon survived only as a thin veneer below the ploughsoil but the underlying densely packed 'sorted horizon' resting on the weathered chalk surface was well preserved. A concentration of *in situ* flint knapping debris was contained within this material just west of the ditch.
- 3.1.1 There was no trace of the monuments bank *in situ* or of any old ground surface, both having been removed during the destruction of the monument in the late 1950's. The levelling had also reduced, but not totally removed, a slightly raised, upstanding chalk surface which had been preserved by the bank. This provided the only evidence of the former course of the bank.
- 3.1.2 The ditch, in accordance with the agreed methodology, was defined but was not excavated completely. The section showed a mixed chalky loam, 0.12 m thick below the modern ploughsoil, which represents the levelled bank material within the top of the ditch. The undisturbed compact dark brown stone free loam of the upper ditch fill was exposed below and was removed sufficient to establish the extent of the ditch. A similar upper fill was recorded in W52 (Richards 1990, 185).
- 3.1.3 A length of thick wire, probably the lower strand of a fence or a military field telephone cable, ran along the inside of the North Kite, in places partially buried in the natural chalk. It corresponded with the position of the intermittent series of geophysical anomalies recorded in the interior of the North Kite.
- 3.2 *Trench 2.* Excavation revealed a similar sequence to Trench 1, with ploughsoil overlying directly natural chalk. Patches of truncated natural silty clay subsoil and the flint-rich 'sorted horizon' were preserved in places in periglacial hollows. This was particularly marked at the SE end where the chalk surface showed a series of interconnecting hollows up to 0.20 m deep. Part of a nucleated cluster of *in situ* flint knapping debris was recorded from this corner of the trench in the sorted horizon.
- 3.2.1 Both ditches were revealed and investigated. Ditch 26 (SMR 970) measured 1.5 m across and 0.4 m deep with a rounded base. It was filled with a dark brown flinty silt loam, 25, which was capped by a stone free silty loam, 24. Ditch 29 (SMR 61S) was 1.2 m across and 0.65 m deep with a narrow 'V' shaped profile. It was filled with pale yellow brown silty loam with small chalk pellets derived from the periglacial soliflucted natural chalk, 31 and 32. The upper fills comprised dark brown silty loam with a sorted flint horizon below, 27 and 28. The fills showed considerable animal disturbance.

Trench 1



Trench 2



Trench 3

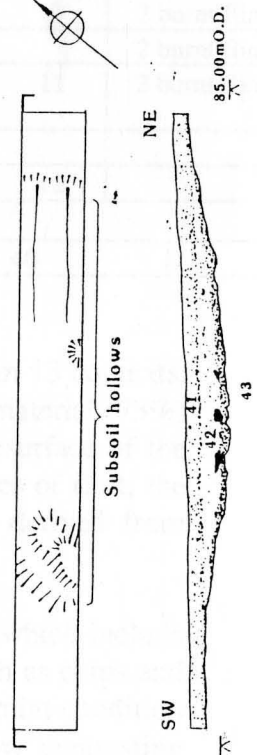


Fig.2: Trenches 1-3 plans and sections

3.3 *Trench 3.* Excavation revealed a ploughsoil overlying a predominantly stone free dark brown silty loam 0.28 m thick, which in turn overlay a dense stoney horizon 0.16 m thick. The entire sequence occupied a shallow and apparently natural trough in the chalk, 7 m wide and 0.44 m deep, which followed the base of the sloping ground which rises to the NE and which forms the side of the main valley.

3.4 The artefacts

The total number of finds are shown tabulated below.

Context	Flint							Other
	Cores	Broken Cores	Flakes	Broken Flakes	Chips	Tools	Debitage	
Topsoils								
Tr 1 1	2		27	29	3	1 scraper	2	
Tr 2 21			8	2				1 PM pot 1 bottle glass
Ditch fills								
Tr 1 2	1		1	9	1			
6	2		16	7			2	1 burnt flint 6 ?IA pot
Tr 2 10	4		1	2				
25	1		11	21		1 misc.ret	3	
27			6	4				
32			1	2				
Subsoils								
Tr 1 5	3		61	124	10	1 misc.ret	10	2 burnt flint
7	2		4	5		1 scraper		2 burnt flint
Tr 2 23	2	2	21	86	7	1 PTD 1 misc.ret	11	2 burnt flint
30			6	15		1 misc.ret		
Tr 3 43	1		37	47	1	1 misc.ret	12	
TOTAL	18	2	200	353	22	8	40	

3.4.1 *Flint.* A total of 643 pieces of worked flint was recovered from 13 contexts, with all three trenches represented. The table shows that most material (73%) was contained in the subsoils filling the natural hollows in the surface of the chalk. The ditch fills, in contrast, contain insubstantial quantities of flint; the two largest groups associated with upper fills, likely to be derived from subsoil contexts.

Contexts 5 and 23 consist principally of two nucleated groups which include refitting material. This, together with knapping by products such as chips and bulbar scars, suggest that the material is *in situ*. The flint is in mint condition and is patinated a light mottled blue. These two groups show contrasting technologies; context 5 contains considerable evidence of deliberate platform

abrasion while context 23 is more robust. There is an absence of platform abrasion which is accompanied by a greater proportion of broad butts. The group from context 23 also contained a PTD (chisel) arrowhead.

The excavations at W31 suggested that the technology and diagnostic tools, specifically tranchet arrowheads, with associated pottery, indicated a Late Neolithic / Early Bronze Age date. A similar conclusion may be proposed for the knapping cluster and PTD (chisel) arrowhead in context 23. The occurrence of platform abrasion in context 5 neither confirms or contradicts a similar date for this group. Platform abrasion was present at W31 but accounted for only 4.5% of the assemblage (Harding 1990, 168).

- 3.4.2 *Pottery.* Six sherds of a black, sandy fabric were recovered from layer 6 in Trench 1, part of the sorted subsoil horizon. The sherds, although too small and abraded to be diagnostic, are of a fabric type not inconsistent with a late Iron Age or early Romano-British date.

4 Conclusions

- 4.1 The excavation at the North Kite has provided sufficient evidence to indicate that colluvium is unlikely to occur in the valley. A series of transects across dry valleys by Richards, including an excavation SW of Winterbourne Stoke Crossroads, produced similar results. He was unable to provide a satisfactory explanation for this suggesting that poor soil cover, insufficient erosion by land use or subsequent water erosion may be to blame (Richards 1990). The recovery here of in situ knapping debris, in mint condition, does not suggest that erosion of the valley floor has occurred since the Neolithic / Early Bronze Age.
- 4.2 The examination of the North Kite itself has produced results which contrast markedly with those recorded during the Stonehenge Environs Project (Richards 1990). Richards located and excavated a well defined and preserved old ground surface below the bank. The present trenching has shown that this has been totally removed during the destruction of the bank. The extent of the bank now survives only as an upstanding chalk surface which corresponds with a similar chalk surface revealed beneath the Stonehenge Cursus, the so called 'compo' of Stone (1947, 15) and Christie (1963, 380).
- 4.3 The North Kite ditch was defined but was not excavated fully. The upper fills correspond closely with those recorded at W52 during the earlier Stonehenge Environs Project work (Richards 1990) where a series of localised colluvial soils were recorded.
- 4.4 The extension of the trench into the interior of the North Kite enclosure demonstrated that the intermittent magnetic anomalies identified during

geophysical survey are caused by a length of wire running partially buried beneath the surface of the natural chalk, probably an old fence line or military field telephone cable.

- 4.5 Trenches 2 and 3 through the two linear ditches on Wilsford Down indicate that both survive in a well-defined state beneath the ploughsoil, and are probably boundary ditches, although the excavations have been unable to provide any dating evidence for their construction.
- 4.6 The curving magnetic anomaly and cropmark investigated in Trench 3 would appear to be the result of preferential soil build-up at the base of the gentle slope down from Wilsford Down, rather than an archaeological feature *per se*.
- 4.7 The most consistent feature of the excavations has been to show the nature of the underlying natural chalk surface. Excavations at W31 (Richards 1990, 164) demonstrated that discrete, relatively undisturbed nucleated knapping clusters, protected from the plough, were preserved in subsoil deposits filling the periglacial hollows in the surface of the natural chalk, with an apparent cluster towards the top of the slope associated with an outcrop of flint. It was proposed that intermittent streams may have deterred activity in the valley bottom, producing a lower concentration of worked flint in the valley bottoms. The present work has demonstrated that similar clusters are equally prevalent in this area, perhaps even more so. It is possible that the solution of chalk is greater in the valley bottom and may have provided an increased opportunity for the preservation of these scatters. The differential growth of crop indicated significant variations in the depth of soil in the valley bottom.

References

- Christie, P., M., 1963 'The Stonehenge Cursus' *Wiltshire Archaeological Natur Hist Mag*, **58**, 370-82.
- Richards, J., C., 1990 *The Stonehenge Environs Project*, English Heritage Archaeological Report, No. 16.
- Stone, J., F., S., 1947 'The Stonehenge Cursus and its affinities', *Aerchaeol J.*, **104**, 7-19.