Site Summary Report

White Horse Stone, Aylesford, evaluation

The Oxford Archaeological Unit was commissioned by Union Railways Ltd to conduct a field evaluation at land adjacent to the White Horse Stone, Aylesford (NGR TQ75226041), as part of a programme of archaeological investigations along the route of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. The evaluation investigated a dry valley at the foot of the North Downs escarpment, located adjacent to two reputed megalithic monuments. The White Horse Stone and Smythes' Megalith are usually included in a group of megalithic chambered tombs, assumed to be of Neolithic date, known as the 'Medway Megaliths'. The evaluation discovered no evidence of Neolithic activity associated with these monuments.

A thick, localised deposit of flint gravel, sealing a single sherd of Neolithic pottery was identified close to the reported position of Smythes' Megalith. Although it was interpreted in the field as a possible burial mound, subsequent assessment of the composition and location of the deposit suggest that it is likely to be a product of soil erosion.

Thick hillwash deposits were present in the bottom of the valley, becoming deeper towards the southern end, where they were banked up against a boundary bank or geological formation followed by the 'Pilgrims' Way' prehistoric track. There was no evidence that any of the numerous sarsen boulders discovered in the valley bottom had been utilised, although many may have been visible features in the prehistoric landscape.

An extensive buried soil horizon, cut by ditches and a large, shallow pit, was identified at the southern end of the dry valley, sealed beneath up to 1.2m of hillwash. Although the archaeological features were undated, both the buried soil horizon through which they were cut, and the overlying hillwash, yielded small quantities of pottery of late Bronze Age or early Iron Age date.

A high proportion of the pottery from the colluvium and archaeological features is flint-tempered and could be either Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age in date. Sand-tempered fabrics (either quartz, glauconite or a mixture of the two), which are more likely to be of Iron Age date, are also present. However, the small groups of material from individual contexts, the general lack of both featured sherds, decorated sherds and relatively complete profiles makes dating with any great precision difficult.

A deliberate deposit of animal bone and pottery was found in an oval pit, on top of the chalk spur forming the western side of the dry valley. The deposit included the bones of at least two foetal or new-born lambs, adult sheep bones, and the remains of a small, Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age vessel. Other features containing Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age pottery included four ditches, identified at the northern end of the dry valley.

The evaluation investigated the possible line of the Roman Road between Rochester and Hastings, but discovered no evidence to support or disprove the identification. A single ditch of Roman or later date was recorded in the upper valley bottom.

An assessment of molluscs and plant macrofossils from the colluvial deposits and buried soil indicates a change from woodland to open country, perhaps as a result of human activity in the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age.