



**Report on a Programme of Archaeological Works on
Farncombe Down Gallops, Baydon Road, Lambourn,
West Berkshire**

September 2019

NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

This document sets out the results from a programme of archaeological works carried out by West Sussex Archaeology Ltd on behalf of the owner on Farncombe Down Gallops, Baydon Road, Lambourn, West Berkshire.

The works were carried out in July 2019 and involved the excavation of a single trench across a prehistoric ditch known to cross the line of a proposed new gallop. The results confirmed the existence of the ditch and provided a further characterisation of its dimensions and infilling deposits, but failed to recover any dating evidence to add to that produced by the two previous sections across its line.

BACKGROUND

Topographical Background



Figure 1 Site location. ©Crown copyright. All rights reserved. License number: AL100036068

1. Farncombe Down lies on the south-western edge of the Lambourn Downs, in West Berkshire, c.2.5km to the west of the village of Lambourn. To the west, on the spine of the downland, lies the M4, following at this point approximately the line of Roman Ermin Street. (see Figs.1). The site itself sits at 200m aOD and is centred at OS grid reference SU 29630 77985. The underlying geology of the site is the Seaford Chalk Formation.

Project Background

1. The landowner has received planning permission from West Berkshire Council for the creation of an additional all-weather gallop (19/00913/FUL). Condition 3 of that permission stated that: “No development shall take place within the application area until the applicant has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of

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investigation which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter the development shall incorporate and be undertaken in accordance with the approved statement.” West Sussex Archaeology Ltd was appointed by the landowner to write and submit such a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSA 2019) and carry out the ensuing archaeological works.

2. This report details the results of that archaeological work, which was carried out from the 2nd – 4th July 2019 by George Anelay of West Sussex Archaeology Ltd.

Historical Background

1. The proposed new gallop lies within a wider area of prehistoric-Roman features including boundaries, barrows and field systems on the Lambourn Downs (WB HER No. MWB 1652 & 1656). Many of these once upstanding earthworks have been levelled during the course of the 20th century as a result of agriculture and other developments, such as the existing gallops to the north and south. In addition a Scheduled, but ploughed-down, ditched Bronze Age bowl barrow lies to north-west of the gallops (SM No.93/30455/1015804 & WB HER No.MWB1653).
2. Of particular relevance to this project, the proposed gallop crosses the line of a probable Late Bronze Age ranch boundary, consisting of ditch flanked by a bank to the east, which runs through the site from south to north, before turning to the west in Thornslait Plantation, (WB HER Nos. MWB 1644, 1646, 1647, 1648 & 16360). The northern portion is a Scheduled Monument (SM No. WB91/1006977). The ditch has twice been trenched in modern times: first by Ford in 1982 on its northern arm (Ford 1982); and secondly by Wessex Archaeology in 1991 to the south of the proposed new gallop (Walker & Smith 1991) (see Fig.7).

RESULTS

1. A trench was excavated spanning the full width of the proposed gallop, c.6m across, for a distance of c.9m. Within this, a two metre wide section across the exposed ranch boundary ditch was excavated, central to the trench, and on the line of the 0.5m wide drainage channel to be cut as part of the scheme (see Figs.2 & 7).
2. Below the modern topsoil (7), which was c.0.15m thick, was a grey/brown subsoil (8), again c.0.15m thick, containing abundant chalk fragments, sitting directly above the natural chalk (9). Overlying the subsoil (8) within the upper part of the ditch was a layer of soil and chalk rubble (1), c.0.65m thick, containing frequent brick rubble and occasional fragments of blue print pottery and an enamelled iron pot, suggesting a date for deposition no earlier than the late 19th or early 20th century. It is probable that this layer was laid down to infill the

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depression of the ditch when the gallops were first established on the Down. Below this soil and chalk rubble (1) was a layer of smooth dark brown silt (2), c.0.3m thick, also overlying the subsoil (8), and containing occasional chalk fragments. Artefacts from this layer were restricted to a struck flint flake, retouched for use as a piercer of probable Early Neolithic date, and a large pebble (241g).

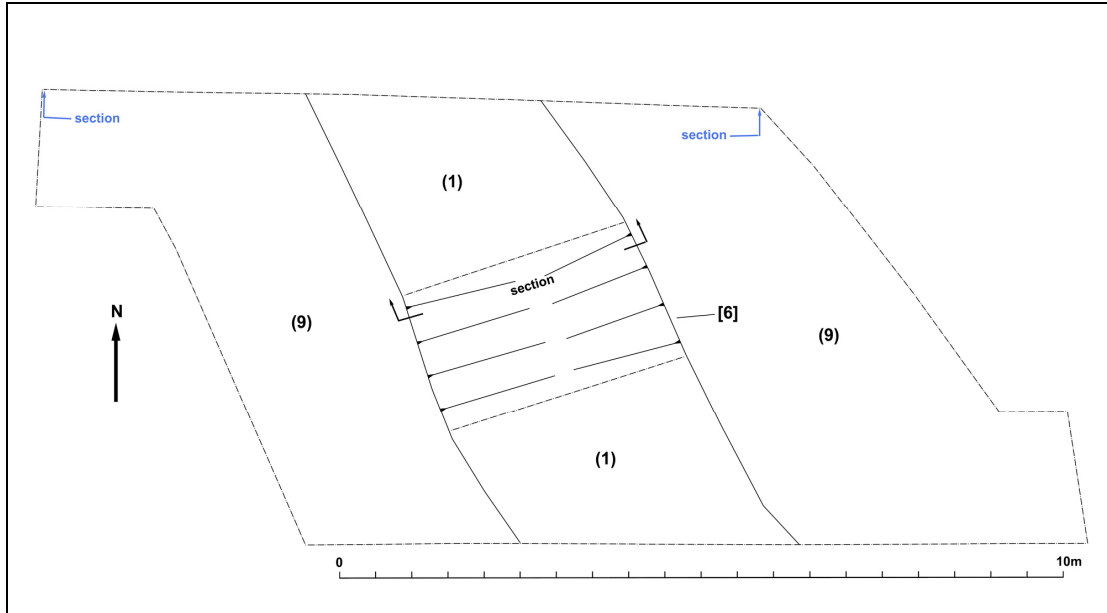


Figure 2 Plan of trench across the ditch



Figure 3 The excavated trench, with the ditch crossing it, looking north-west

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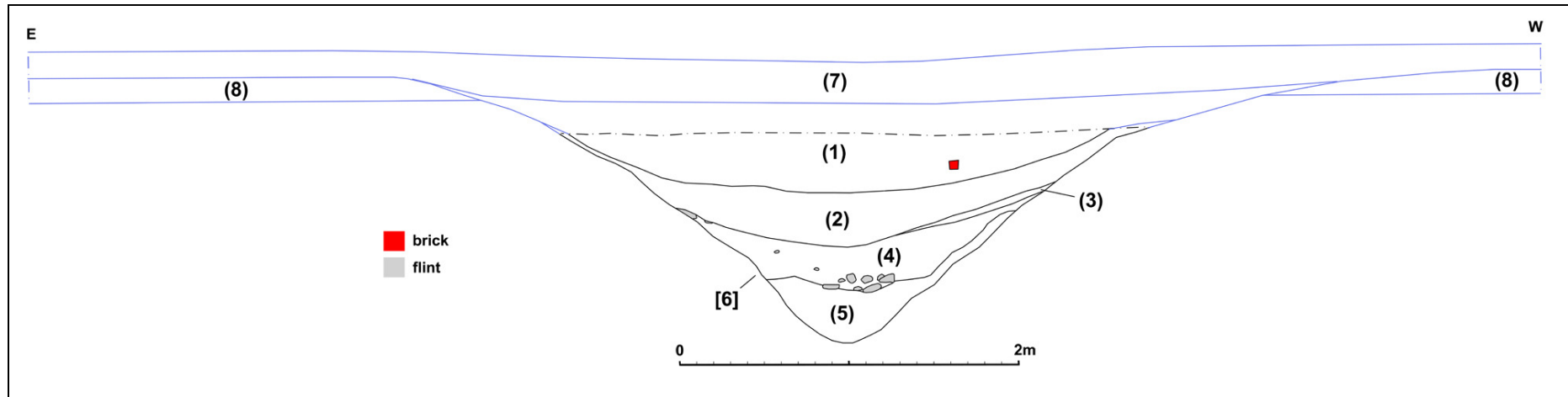


Figure 4 North facing section across the ditch, that part in blue is brought forward from the south baulk of the trench



Figure 5 North facing section across the ditch



Figure 6 South facing section across the ditch

3. Separating the smooth silt layer (2) from that below (4) was a thin lens, c.0.03m thick, of flint gravel and chalk (3), present only on the western slope of the ditch, perhaps relating to the absence of a bank on this side. This sealed a fill of grey/brown silt (4), c.0.25m thick with frequent chalk fragments and flints. At the base of this layer the flints became larger and more concentrated. Artefacts recovered included ten fragments of bone from a sheep or similar sized animal, the majority being from ribs, and five pebbles, ranging in size from 2g to 65g. Below this layer (4) was the primary fill (5), c.0.3m thick, consisting of chalk rubble in a grey brown silt. No artefacts were recovered from within it.
4. The ditch [6] itself, which extended across the full width of the trench, was c.3.5m wide, where it cut the surface of the chalk (9), and c.1.25m deep. It had a flattish base, c.0.2m wide, with its eastern side sloping at c.45°, while its western side sloped more gently at c.40°. The angles of the original sides of the ditch are likely to have been steeper, since the chalk rubble (5) at the base almost certainly eroded from its edges. This layer (5) would have accumulated relatively rapidly, with those above ((4), (3) & (2)) representing the more gradual increase of the succeeding millennia. The sharp distinction between Layers (4) and (2) must reflect a change in land-use in the immediate vicinity, perhaps that from cultivation (Layer (4)) to pasture (Layer (2)), although the date of this transition cannot be determined from the paucity of artefacts recovered. No trace was observed of the bank found elsewhere on the eastern side of the ditch, but given the evidence for levelling within the ditch fills, it is probable that the ditch was removed when the gallops were created.

CONCLUSION

1. In total three sections have now been excavated across the presumed Late Bronze Age ranch boundary on Farncombe Down: the Ford section across its northern arm, and the Wessex and WSA sections through its eastern section (see Figs. 7 & 8). Comparison between the three is hampered by the limitations of the available reports, with Ford's appearing in a synthesis of a wider project, with the detail of each excavation relegated to microfiche (Ford 1982), and the Wessex report containing no photographs (Walker & Smith 1991). However, the ditch in all three sections would appear to have been broadly similar in dimensions and form.
2. Ford identified five ditch fills (nos. 2-6): including the primary silts (no.6); secondary silts (no.4); and a "Roman plough-soil slip" (no.3) (Ford, p.14). The molluscan evidence gathered from samples taken from these three layers pointed to open grassland, possibly sheep-grazed, but not intensively cultivated (Ford, p.14). A single sherd of prehistoric pottery was recovered from the lower fills (WB HER No. MWB1644).

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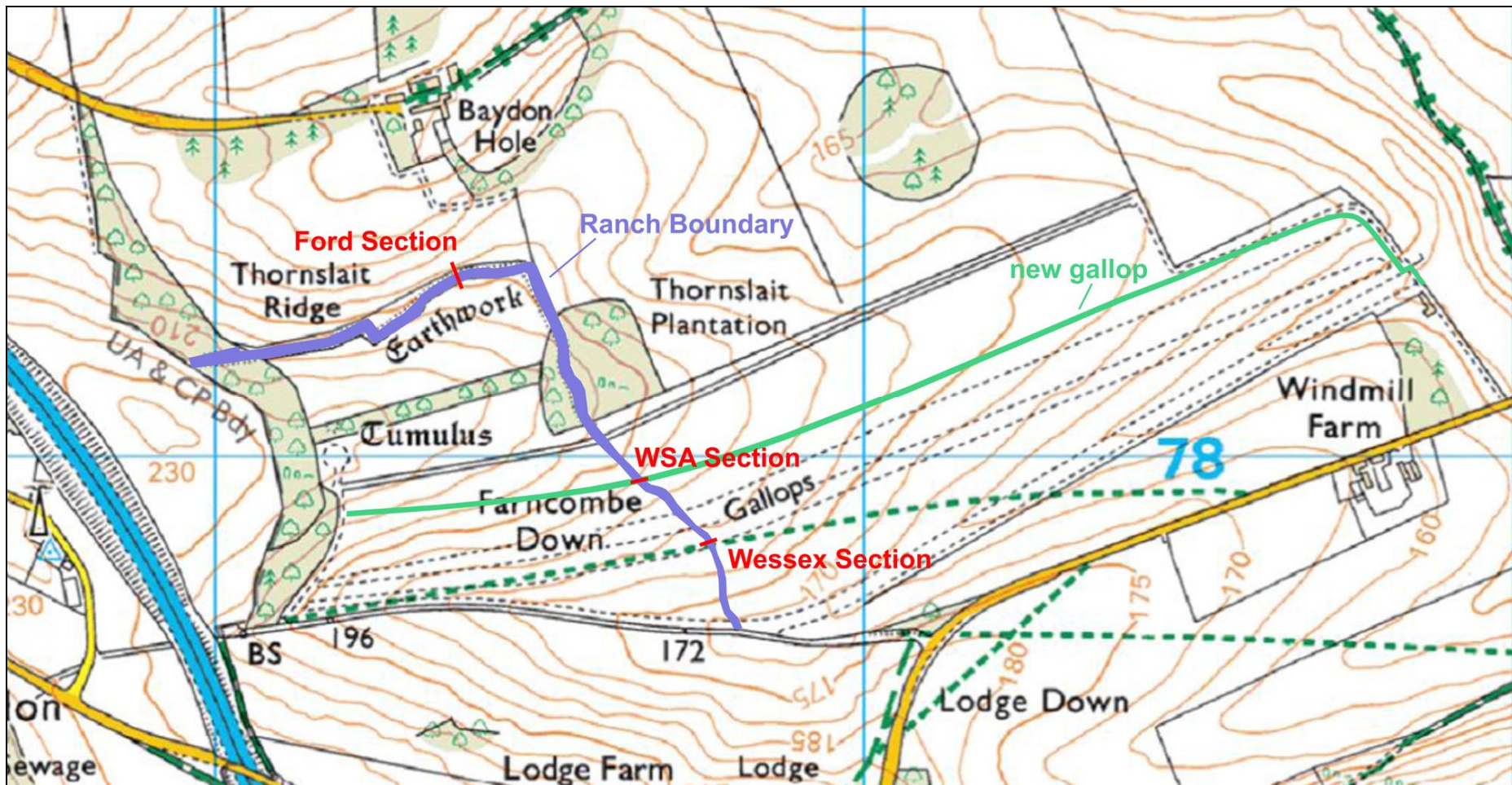


Figure 7 Location plan showing the new gallop (in green), the range boundary (in blue) and the three sections (in red). ©Crown copyright. All rights reserved. License number: AL100036068

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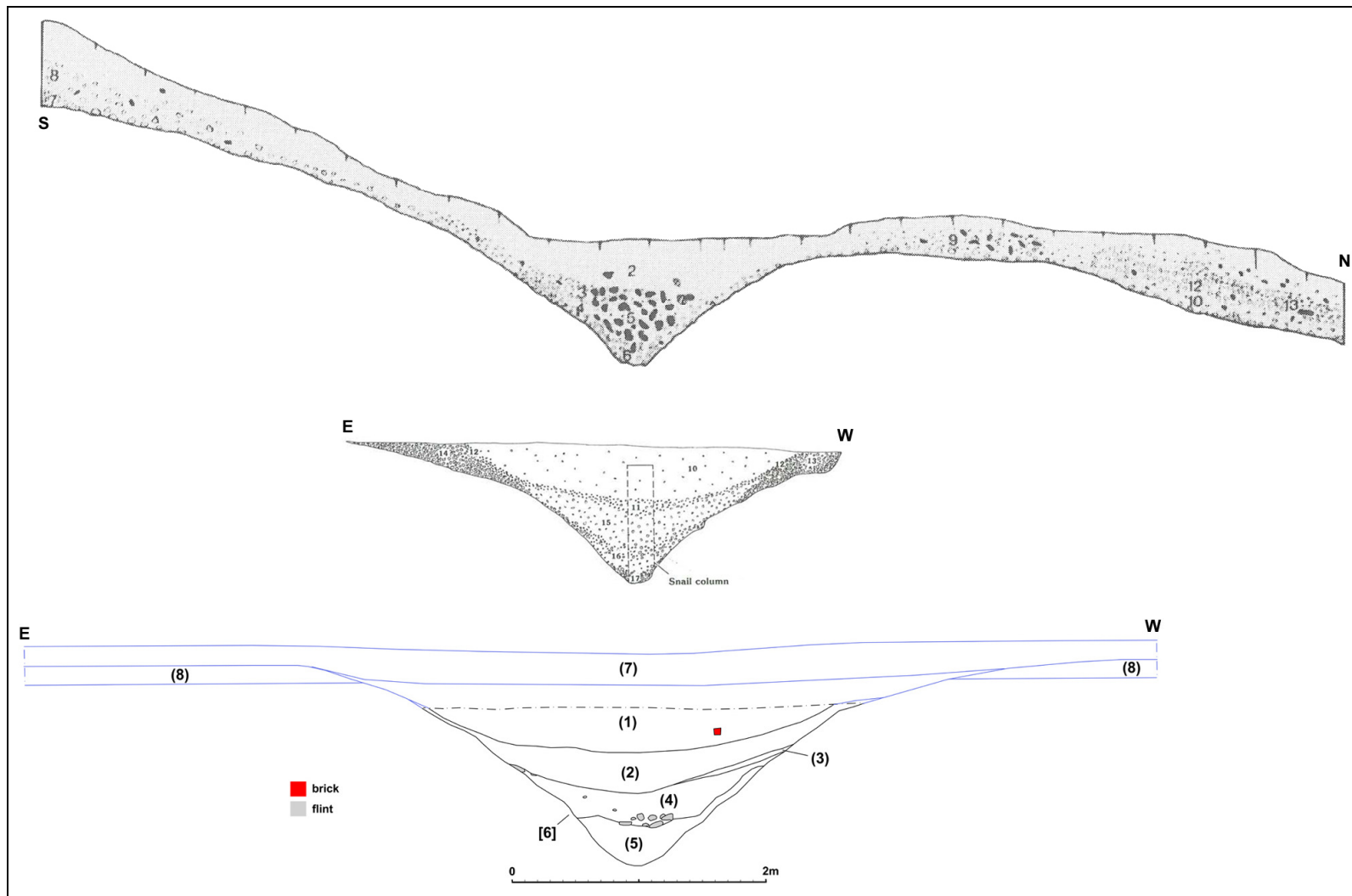


Figure 8 The three sections across the ditch: Ford (top), Wessex (middle) and WSA (bottom)

3. The Wessex excavation involved a two metre wide section across the ditch, which was found to be 3.4m wide and 1.06m deep with a “v”-profile. The fills consisted of chalk rubble (nos.11, 15, 16 & 17) sealed beneath a near chalk-free, humic, silty loam (10), presumably the equivalent to Layer 2 in the WSA trench. Artefacts recovered included worked flint, sherds of Middle or Late Bronze Age pottery from Context 11 and two Roman sherds from Context 10 (Walker & Smith, p.7). Molluscan evidence again pointed again to open grassland at the time of construction, although with the possibility of some light cultivation following, before a return to grassland (*ibid.*, p.10 & 12).
4. The lack of any further dating evidence from the WSA section leaves the date of this earthwork as still lying tentatively within the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age, although given the small sample size of the total artefact assemblage this date is to be treated with caution. The molluscan evidence, taken together with the nature of the fills, would suggest that the ditch was cut while the surrounding countryside was open grassland, but with a subsequent change to cultivation, before a return to grassland. The interval between these succeeding forms of land-use is open to question. The presence of large flints lying just above the primary fills, as recorded in the Ford and WSA sections, might suggest field clearance from an early date, possibly indicating that the ditch was cut in preparation for cultivation. At a later date it would seem that a return to pasture occurred, a change probably reflected in the humic layers seen in all three sections (no.2 in Ford, no.10 in Wessex, and no.2 in WSA), although it is not possible to state exactly when this took place. It has then remained as open grassland to the present day, with the ditch slowing infilling until levelled in much of its eastern section for its modern use as gallops.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anelay, G. 2019 ***Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Works on Farncombe Down Gallops, Baydon Road, Lambourn, West Berkshire***. Unpublished.
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- Walker, K. & Smith, R. 1991. ***Farncombe Gallops, Lambourn, Berkshire: Archaeological Survey and Watching Brief***. Wessex Archaeology No.W426. Unpublished.