Chapter 14: The White Horse and Its Landscape

by Alistair Barclay, Anne Marie Cromarty, Chris Gosden, Gary Lock, David Miles, Simon Palmer and Mark Robinson

It is altogether a place you won't forget, a place to open a man's soul ... as he looks down on the great Vale spread out ... before him, and wave on wave of mysterious Downs behind

Thomas Hughes (1889)

INTRODUCTION

Like the thousands of people who visit Uffington Castle each year archaeologists were drawn to the site by the enigmatic chalk figure of the White Horse, to try to make sense of the Horse and the other features on the hilltop. The reasons and methods employed were based on current archaeological investigation and scientific techniques in an attempt to add to the understanding of this place. As the site is used by varying groups from contemporary society it was felt that the research should not impose a single narrative. Other archaeologists have investigated the site, as Martin-Atkins had dug into the barrows and hillfort some 140 years earlier, and current research into the archives revealed that Grimes had excavated part of the Horse in the 1950s during its restoration. Whilst other features of the hilltop had been investigated by archaeological excavation, the approach to the chalk figure of the Horse had always been based on art history and documentary research. The questions asked of the Horse, *Who, When and Why?*, needed to be addressed, the same that had concerned Marples (1949) and many other individuals. However, there were also other questions to be asked in order to place the Horse within its local setting, so research extended to the other sites and monuments that constitute the White Horse Hill complex.

The discussion in this chapter integrates the results of the current investigations and attempts to place the Horse in its immediate context, but then sets these results against knowledge of the prehistory and early history of the Berkshire Downs more generally. While the shape of the Horse has remained fossilised over the last 3000 years the surrounding landscape and the hilltop have been transformed and reworked. Episodically people lived upon the hilltop and at times they also chose this place to bury their dead, they built and used enclosures and they cleared woodland and farmed the land. To endure, the Horse must have been kept *alive* by cleaning and scouring similar to what was described by Thomas Hughes in his account of *The Scouring of the White Horse* (1889) and this process represents remarkable continuity over 3000 years or 120 human generations. Regardless of what the Horse has meant to different peoples through this length of time, and this will never be known for sure, it is likely that one of its strongest attractions has been connections with an increasingly distant past.

THE WHITE HORSE AND ITS MONUMENTS

The White Horse

The unique shape of the White Horse makes it the most distinctive of all the monuments of this complex, and has been subject to many interpretations over the years. Many of these interpretations were based on assumptions about the figure as a symbol or artistic work rather than an archaeological monument, due to a lack of an appreciation of its exact nature. This research was designed to investigate the structure of the Horse, any possible changes in the shape over time and the date of its initial construction. This was achieved by employing a combination of non-intrusive techniques and small trenches around the edges of the figure to cause minimum damage.

The construction of the figure

These excavations confirmed the findings of the earlier unpublished excavation by Grimes in 1953 and the comments of Defoe (1725, 51) concerning the construction of the monument. Despite this early comment and the knowledge of the figure that the earlier scourers must have had, it was not generally appreciated prior to the current study that the figure was not merely formed by an exposure of the natural bedrock. Even if this may have been the initial method of construction, which is not certain, the Horse has its own type of stratigraphy. As described the surface of the Horse is thought to have tilted back as a result of several thousand years of erosion, repair and downslope accumulation. This is important because while its shape may have remained virtually the same the extent to which its image was visible has altered.

A Bronze Age or Iron Age Horse?

That the Horse was of great antiquity was without doubt, but its actual date has always been uncertain. Some like Piggott favoured an Iron Age date (1931a), while others such as Woolner (1965) argued for an Anglo-Saxon date linking the figure with King Alfred and the great battle of Ashdown.

A date for the initial construction of the White Horse was obtained using OSL. These dated

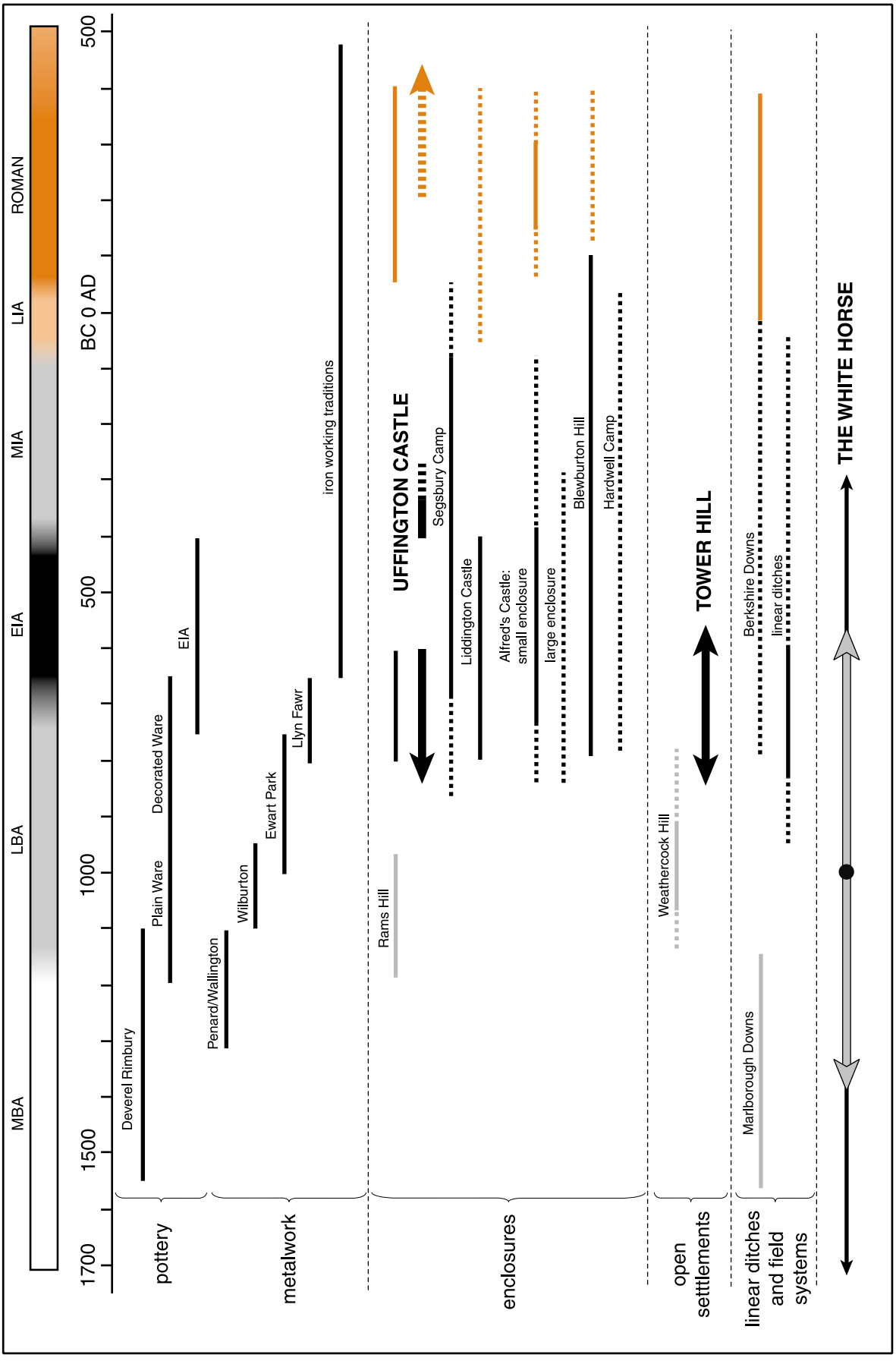

Figure 14.1 Timechart showing chronology of artefacts and sites referred to in the text.

sediments accumulated directly above and below the earliest puddled chalk surface identified in section beneath the lower edge of the figure. This suggested that the initial construction took place between 1740 and 210 BC with only a 2.5% chance of it having been constructed later than 210 BC. The error margins involved with this technique are broad, but this date is sufficiently accurate to confirm that the figure was earlier than Anglo-Saxon in origin disproving one of the long held theories. It also suggests that the initial construction could have been of the same date as, or earlier than, the late Iron Age date suggested by stylistic comparisons to Celtic coins and metalwork (Piggott 1931a).

The geophysical survey and excavations showed that little fundamental change had occurred to the shape of the figure. Piggott and others, from Aubrey (1665–93) onwards, sought parallels focused on the beak rather than the whole figure, and excavation proved that the beak was an ancient feature of the figure. However, the flowing shape has also been proved through excavation to be ancient and not the result of simplification over repeated scourings. The OSL dates receive some tentative support, therefore, on stylistic grounds that the origins of the Horse might lie in the late Bronze Age or early Iron Age.

This places it in the same period as the construction and first phase of use of the hillfort (Fig. 14.1). It is impossible to say which may have been constructed first, or if they were exactly contemporaneous. What is certain is that both were facets of a wider change in the activity on the Downs between the late Bronze and early Iron Ages.

Why a chalk figure?

Nobody can be certain now why the monument was originally constructed but the findings of these investigations may give some indications. Ritual and symbolism were integral components of everyday life during both the late Bronze Age and the Iron Age, and it is likely that the monument was closely associated with either or both. A symbol of the size and visibility of the White Horse would have been particularly strong. It may have been to do with signalling the presence and wealth of the inhabitants of the ridge top, or to mark the presence of a site of special significance to the wider population, but there could also have been rituals associated with the Horse and its cleaning.

Archaeological evidence from Britain and elsewhere, together with ethnographic parallels, show that animals were often used in symbolic display or ritual practices. Such use included marking sacred places, warding off evil spirits and in rites concerned with fertility (Wilson 1999; Grant 1984b) and the White Horse could have been associated with any of these.

Human and animal representation feature in so-called rock art of mostly Bronze Age date in Atlantic Europe and Britain, and much of this is abstract in character. Representational art depicting animals does occur and is a tradition that can be traced before the Neolithic period but is on the whole rare. The tradition of turf-cut figures appears to have its origins in later prehistory and what divides this from other forms of art is the scale and subject depicted. It is not known exactly what set of messages was being sent by the Horse, but it is clear that the effort put into the Horse's construction meant that there was a strongly felt social need to communicate something and that this location was seen as an important one from which to communicate (Bradley 1997).

The other feature that distinguishes chalk figures from rock carvings is the need for continuous effort to maintain them. As it has been shown, the Horse needs to be scoured at least every decade or so and this has been carried out without a break for 3000 years. Scouring is best performed by a group and the maintenance of the Horse has been the focus for group action over a very long period. Although its significance has changed over that time, the need to maintain it has not diminished. As shown in more detail below, many of the features of the landscape created at the end of the Bronze Age and beginning of the Iron Age, needed work on them to maintain them in a socially active state, so that the Horse is one of many sites, like the linear ditches and the enclosures, that needed to be maintained. A whole range of sites was used and reused over long time periods, but none in any way matches the longevity of the Horse and its three millennia of maintenance. The Horse represents a long thread of continuity against which changes can be matched and measured.

Having emphasised the difference between chalk figures and rock art, there is one intriguing similarity between the two which derives from a consideration of the recent work of Bradley (1997). Rock art in Britain is confined to northern areas of England and Scotland and mainly dates from the Neolithic to the middle Bronze Age. All these features of geography and time seem to distance rock art from the Uffington chalk figure. However, Bradley (1997, 88; 1993, 23) points out that rock art was often placed at vantage points in the landscape and some of it along paths and trails. On White Horse Hill the chalk figure was positioned on one of the most visible spots on the landscape and which lies right next to the Ridgeway, a route running along the edge of the chalk.

White Horse Hill is a place from which to see and that can also be seen. The route of the Ridgeway, possibly established by this period, would have brought people along the edge of the chalk, in addition to those who lived in the area, and would have increased White Horse Hill's position as a focal point. Furthermore, if White Horse Hill was kept fully cleared throughout the Bronze Age, this would have helped mark it out as a distinct location for travellers seeing the Downs from the Vale. The Horse would have been an extra marker and would have enhanced a spot that had been long picked out as somewhere special. Features of art in the landscape can only make sense in terms of movement and visibility within that landscape (Bradley 1997, 154),

and as this is only a single instance of an art object with which to make this point, it is impossible to define a pattern. However, similar forces affected the siting of the hillfort at Uffington and others along the Ridgeway, and therefore these also illustrate arguments about visibility and movement.

Why a Horse?

Horses may have been particularly important in the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age period. Domestic horses had been reintroduced into Western Europe from the Near East during the early Bronze Age and were beginning to become more important in Britain by the late Bronze Age. Deposits of horse bones and riding equipment are known from late Bronze Age sites in southern England (Needham 1993, 65) and it is during this period that riding of horses seems to have become more important. Horse bones have been found at a number of locations on the Berkshire Downs, but also in recent excavations at Watchfield (Birbeck 2001) in the Vale of the White Horse. Horse bones were also found at Uffington (Chapter 10) and Tower Hill (Chapter 13). The late Bronze Age Tower Hill hoard contained several items of bronzes which may be horse gear and others that might be associated with carts or wagons. Finds of horse bones on sites of this period are not unusual and the characteristics of bone assemblages seem to support their use as transport and pack animals (Maltby 1996).

Much of the evidence for symbolic display or ritual practices (Wilson 1999; Grant 1984b) in this period is concerned with the deposition of animal bones or carcasses, often of horses or dogs. At the late Bronze Age site of Runnymede, area 6, the burial of a dismembered horse, probably sited around an upright post, was found alongside a smaller pit containing horse manure (Needham 1993, 63). Over the horse burial charcoal and burnt clay was deposited, possibly representing an inverted hearth. After recutting of this pit an antler blank, possibly for making a cheek-piece for a horse harness, was placed within it. Posts then encircled the pit. In area 14 of Runnymede a similarly encircled pit contained an antler cheek-piece and an antler horse fitting pressed against the walls, together with two unusual pottery saucers and a blue glass bead. No domestic activity can be linked to such deposits indicating that the pits represented shrines or places of veneration, in which the horse associations played an important and symbolic part.

Horses, together with dogs, also seem to have had special status for Iron Age peoples, when they were regarded as close in status to humans. Deposits of dog bones in and around an Iron Age ritual enclosure have been found on settlement sites (Charles *et al.* 2000, 160). These animals were seen to be on the boundary between wild and domesticated animals, and between nature and culture (Hill 1995, 62). There is some evidence from Iron Age sites to suggest that horses may have been left to roam wild at this time and only rounded up for breaking when two or three years old (Davis 1987, 181). Horse bones are present on late Bronze Age sites in Britain, and these practices and ideas may have begun during this period. The hillfort at Uffington had bones of both horse and dog, in what might be placed deposits from the Iron Age and Romano-British periods, and this suggests that these animals had an importance to people's view of the world and themselves. It is difficult to explore further the meanings of such animal associations on the basis of the evidence available.

Why Uffington?

Even without the White Horse to mark this site out as special it has a considerable natural appeal due to the configuration of the landscape, and this may also have played a part in the evolution of the distinctive monument complex. This appeal is largely due to the juxtaposition of a relatively high hill with a very steep sided valley below, in an otherwise gently undulating landscape. This naturally dramatic landscape has been enhanced by the clearance from the Neolithic period, which has allowed it to stand out from a distance and provide broad open panoramas from the top. There is also the artificially shaped natural mound that is known as Dragon Hill. The hill is assumed to be of natural chalk but without investigation this remains uncertain. Similarly the date at which the hill was modified is unknown so that its place within the sequence is also uncertain. One reason for levelling the top of this hill would be to create a platform from which aspects of the hilltop and the wider landscape could be viewed. Most of the horse is visible from here. The shaping of the hill could then be as old as the Horse and the use of the two sites could have been linked through ritual and ceremony. One parallel for this type of platform mound would be the great mound of Silbury Hill at Avebury, although here the structure was completely artificial and of later Neolithic date (Whittle 1997).

The choice of setting is part of a broader pattern, as other similarly dramatic natural places appear to have attracted ritual monuments and activities (Bradley 1993, 26). However, the appeal may only have worked once sufficient areas of the natural woodland had been cleared from the hilltop and the Vale; a process that appears to have had its origins with the construction of the long mound. Bradley (ibid.) lists other examples of natural settings, and in this region the Sinodun Hills dominate the relatively flat landscape around Dorchester-on-Thames (Loveday 1999). This place, like Uffington, appears to have been a site of special importance, a possible cult centre or sacred landscape that evolved from the Neolithic through to the historic period. At both these sites the natural settings consisted of distinct hills to which hilltop enclosures were added.

The White Horse Hill complex

The White Horse is only part of a complex of monuments on White Horse Hill. These investigations have set the Horse in context and provided information on the use of this dramatic hilltop from early prehistory through to the modern day. There is evidence of its environment and human use from the Late Glacial period onwards. An understanding of long-term changes is provided, but the main focus is on the time from the late Bronze Age to the end of the Romano-British period, to which date the majority of the monuments in this complex belong. This section provides an initial summary of the findings and discusses these in a broader context in the final section of this chapter.

Before the Horse – initial clearance

Analysis of the molluscan columns taken from the sediment accumulations in the bottom of the Manger and the hill slope below the White Horse confirmed the interpretation of the geomorphology of the Manger. The area experienced a cold tundra environment during the last glaciation, lying just beyond the southern limit of glacial ice. During periods of thaw the slopes were unstable and failure created the Giant's Stairs as well as contributing to the build up of deposits in the Manger floor.

Following the end of deglaciation the area experienced a long period of stability in the early Flandrian, during which it is likely that the woodland cultivation and succession occurred, though no undisturbed soils or sediments relating to this period were recovered from these excavations. Evidence of woodland clearance was recovered from soils beneath the long mound, and this may date to the Neolithic period. Residual snail shells in the prehistoric ploughsoil above the Late Glacial sediments in the Manger also suggested that clearance of well established woodland had taken place shortly before the cultivation had begun though these deposits could not be dated with any certainty. The only finds recovered from these soils were Neolithic or early Bronze Age worked flint, though given the nature of the deposit these cannot be used to date it.

Equally uncertain is whether any woodland regeneration occurred at the long mound. Molluscs from the fills of the nearby round barrow and ring ditch indicate that these monuments were set in open grassland and it may be that the area had remained open since the early clearance. Certainly no regeneration occurred in the Manger, and there is therefore a sequence in which clearance of trees occurred in the Neolithic and White Horse Hill and its immediate surrounds might have remained an open landscape throughout prehistory. As will be seen, this may have contrasted with other areas of the downland, which might have seen periodic regrowth of woodland or scrub.

The Neolithic long mound

After this initial clearance the long mound was set on a false crest of the hill and this is considered to be of earlier Neolithic date, although as yet there is no archaeological evidence to support this interpretation. The interpretation is based on the surviving form and dimensions of the mound, which are in keeping with other Neolithic barrows in the vicinity and it is clearly distinct from the other round barrows on this hilltop. However, it is known that not all long mounds covered mortuary deposits and some were simply earthworks. Little is known of the form of the associated ditch and nothing of the presence or absence of a façade or mortuary structure. This is not surprising given the limited scope of the 1993 excavations of this barrow and the multiple phases of reuse and excavation that had preceded these excavations. There is little evidence for contemporaneous activity on the site other than flintwork, none of which was especially diagnostic, but given the limited scale of modern excavations on the hilltop this does not rule out the possibility of use during this period.

Early Bronze Age barrows

It is not certain whether there was any woodland regeneration in the vicinity of the long mound, but by the next phase of barrow building on the hilltop during the early Bronze Age stable grassland conditions prevailed. It is possible that the area was kept open after the initial clearance and no regeneration occurred.

Again very little of the original barrows survived to confirm this dating, but this date is suggested by the form of these mounds and supported by the other evidence of activity on the hilltop of this date. Small quantities of late Neolithic, Beaker and other early Bronze Age pottery were recovered during the excavations of the long and round barrows, the hillfort and the enclosure. When taken together with the worked flint recovered from this surface and elsewhere on the site, these are suggestive of some occupation on the hilltop during this period. The occupation could have been domestic but there was a strong funerary element to activity on the site at this time.

Activity seems likely to have continued on the hilltop throughout the rest of the early and middle Bronze Age although at a low and sporadic level. Conditions remained open throughout and there are suggestions of grazing around the ring ditch. Three middle Bronze Age sherds from these excavations were recovered from the interior of the hillfort. Though these sherds were clearly residual within later contexts they are indicative of some activity in the vicinity during this period.

The barrows continued in use through this period with 18 of the 20 sherds of middle Bronze Age date being recovered from the excavation of the barrows. Many of these are likely to have derived from

secondary cremation burials inserted into the pre-existing barrows and subsequently disturbed by activity in the Roman and post-Roman periods. The cremation urn found by Martin-Atkins within a stone built cist at the centre of the long barrow (Davis and Thurnam 1865), almost certainly dated to this period, though the item itself is now lost.

The period from the Neolithic to the end of the middle Bronze Age sees a tradition of intermittent monument construction and internment on White Horse Hill, prior to the construction of the Horse and the hillfort and the re-ordering of the landscape that occurred in the late Bronze Age.

Later Bronze Age and early Iron Age

The use of the Hill changed in character and increased in intensity markedly around the later Bronze Age/early Iron Age transition with the lack of use of the barrows for interment, the construction of a large chalk hill figure and hillfort. A substantial land boundary in the form of the linear ditch running south from the south-eastern corner of the hillfort may also be associated with this increase of activity on the Hill (Fig. 14.1).

The linear ditch

Uffington is one of a number of hillforts in the area with a linear ditch running up to it from the south. This was a ditch dug into the chalk bedrock to a depth of over a metre with a bank alongside made from the rock and earth removed from the ditch. The traditional view of this feature is that it dates from the late Bronze Age period based on the interpretations of other similar features in the vicinity, but these excavations provided no direct evidence of this. Though the relationship of this ditch to the hillfort was not confirmed by excavation, the fact that it runs up to the hillfort ditch and did not continue into the interior of the enclosure suggests that it is contemporary with, or later than, the hillfort.

OSL dating of the primary fill of the ditch confirmed that it was no older than early-middle Iron Age, while the maximum age obtained for the upper fill was late Bronze Age. The actual dates are probably much later than this, and on the evidence of the small sherds of pottery recovered from the primary fill of the ditch these might be as late as the Romano-British period. Dating of ditch fills does not date the origins of the ditch. It is possible that the ditch was regularly cleaned out after construction. If the ditch was originally dug in the late Bronze Age and only finally filled in the Romano-British period, this would mean that the ditch was actively cleaned for over a thousand years, which does seem extraordinary. The other possibility is that the ditch was constructed later in the Iron Age or the Romano-British period and post-dates the enclosure. This would indicate that the ditches on the Berkshire Downs were not all the same date and that the landscape was divided up a number of different times for varying reasons.

The Ridgeway

It is difficult to be precise about the Ridgeway, both in terms of its origins and its location at different times in the past. Richards (1978, 41) suggests its development as a recognised route could have taken place after initial clearance early in the Neolithic and that its importance was partly due to the lack of useful waterways on the Berkshire Downs. Difficulties with the Ridgeway's precise route are illustrated by Gingell (1992, 38) who describes a choice of routes further south between Barbury and Liddington hillforts. He also comments on the association of monuments, especially round barrows, with the Ridgeway, a long-standing argument used to date the route to at least Neolithic times.

Computer simulation work carried out as part of a wider landscape investigation (Bell and Lock 2000) discussed in detail in Chapter 7, suggests that the approximate route of the Ridgeway could originate earlier than the Neolithic as an animal trackway and was later utilised by humans. By the late Bronze Age, therefore, it was probably well established and exerted an influence on the location of hillforts and the White Horse as discussed below.

The hillfort

It has been shown earlier (Chapters 1 and 6) that it is impossible to understand hillforts in terms of modern thinking. Such sites are no longer seen as primarily practical, as centres of local agricultural regimes and forms of craft production or as strictly ritual, in which the deliberate deposition of bones and artefacts in pits and ditches signalled complex sets of activities linking people to cosmological forces. People carried out a series of activities which had practical effects in producing food and the objects needed to live, but within a set of logics which are foreign. The task of the archaeologists is not to attempt to understand how Iron Age people thought, as this is impossible, but to look at the long term trends in the way in which people shaped the landscape and the sites within it and the logics which underlay these long lasting patterns of action. It is necessary to try to distinguish patterns of action which were long repeated, as these were presumably most important and distinguish these from ephemeral or short-term acts, whilst acknowledging the limitation that not all past actions will leave equal traces in the archaeological record.

The questions asked at Uffington hillfort are concerned with how the site was linked to other features of the hilltop, which provide a history from the Neolithic onwards. So, it is necessary to enquire how was the siting of the enclosure influenced by questions of visibility and movement within the landscape, what was the nature of the activity within the enclosure and how can this be linked

to the history of construction and maintenance of the enclosure. With the answers to these questions it should be possible to avoid judging whether the hillfort was a functional or a sacred site, which is a question deriving from a modern view of the world. It should be possible to look as openly as possible at the changing role the hillfort played within the long term history of this part of the Berkshire Downs.

Construction, use and transformation of the hillfort

Uffington hillfort was first constructed during the 8th century BC at a time when All Cannings Cross style pottery was in general use (Fig. 14.1). This pottery (named after a site in Wiltshire) is a well-decorated and haematite-coated style of pottery found broadly distributed across southern Britain in 8th to 6th centuries BC. At this time a single timber-framed box rampart was constructed with an outer ditch, two opposing entrances and there was also internal use of the hillfort. There may have been a period of disuse and decay of the rampart, which was then remodelled as a dump rampart. It is uncertain when this remodelling occurred, but it might have been within the early Iron Age and no later than 400 BC. At this time the eastern entrance was blocked, leaving only the western entrance open and this would have had profound implications for movement into or through the site. The other possibility, for which there is no direct evidence, but should be raised due to the date of dump ramparts elsewhere, is that the Uffington dump rampart was constructed around 400 BC or later, in the middle Iron Age (Avery 1993). There is no reason to feel that the sequence found elsewhere should hold on the Berkshire Downs, but a later date for the rampart would make sense of the small amount of use of the enclosure interior during the middle Iron Age.

Whatever the date for the construction of the dump rampart, there are interesting questions about the material used to block the gateway at the eastern end of the enclosure. Layers within the dump rampart contained All Cannings Cross fine wares in some numbers which had been heavily burnt. This material could be residual, although it could suggest deliberate use of material to block the entrance. This would have been pottery which had been carefully kept and burnt in order to maintain a connection with those ancestors who originally constructed the wall-and-fill rampart and the eastern gate. As shown below, the 8th and 7th centuries during which early All Cannings Cross pottery was in use, represent a period of important change on the Berkshire Downs and elsewhere. Material associated with those who carried out those changes may have retained some importance and become part of the chain of ancestral connections woven across White Horse Hill.

There was a very small amount of use of the interior in the middle Iron Age period, but none at all for the late Iron Age and early Romano-British periods. The next real evidence of use of the interior is in the late Romano-British period in the late 3rd and 4th centuries AD. Once again the nature of the activities on the site is enigmatic, with no evidence of occupation, but rather indications of sporadic use leading to the deposition of a range of artefacts, the infilling of the early Iron Age pits and the creation of some features, most notably a bread oven. Thereafter, there is very little evidence of use of the hillfort itself, although it is known from other evidence that people were active on the hilltop from the Anglo-Saxon period to the present.

In its construction the hillfort itself was very similar in this phase to others along the crest of the escarpment built at the same time, with a single timber-framed box rampart and outer ditch enclosing the hilltop, but may have differed in its role from other sites. It is not clear whether the hillfort is earlier or later than the Horse given the uncertainty over the precise date of the latter, but they certainly could have existed at the same time. Certainly, one would have enhanced the visibility of the other irrespective of which was constructed first, although the Horse could be earlier than the enclosure. The building of the ramparts may well have been more to do with display, power and status rather than defence (Collis 1996, 88–9). If the rampart was faced with split timber or perhaps lime-washed then this would have increased its visibility, and this in turn may have enhanced the Horse. The need to enclose was also a motivation and to signal a difference between those inside and those out, suggesting that the nature of the community needed defining and perhaps defending at this time.

In its earliest phase, the enclosure had two entrances, east and west, on an alignment similar to the present day Ridgeway. As discussed below, there is evidence that the Ridgeway immediately south of the enclosure did not reach its present position until the Romano-British period, when the linear ditch running up to the enclosure was deliberately filled. This raises the possibility that the Ridgeway appeared in the Romano-British period, or that it had a different route across the hilltop prior to that time. The latter seems more likely, again based on the computer simulation (Bell and Lock 2000, and Chapter 7) and because the edge of the chalk provided better visibility than travel through the Vale. It is also suggested (ibid.) that some of the Ridgeway hillforts were built on the route of the existing trackway because the simulated route deviates from the modern route to pass through the two entrances and the enclosure itself at Liddington, Hardwell Camp and Rams Hill (Fig. 7.7). Liddington certainly has a blocked entrance, one has been suggested for Rams Hill although it is uncertain and nothing is known of Hardwell. This could also be the case at Barbury Castle further to the west on the Marlborough Downs (Gingell 1992, fig. 95). A possible trackway or surface running east to west through the middle of Uffington hillfort was identified (trench H2), but its extent was not traced.

It is interesting that there was some similarity of the fine incised-decorated sandy wares from Uffington with pottery from north Wiltshire and it is uncertain whether pottery was traded from there or whether potters in the Uffington area copied the pots from the western area. This type of pottery is also present on sites located on the river terraces in the Upper Thames Valley but on the whole is quite rare. In either case long distance connections are possible and the Ridgeway would have been a prime route for such connections. The construction of Uffington hillfort appears to have been influenced by its visibility from the Vale, although the same computer simulation work (Bell and Lock 2000) shows that it does not display strong visual characteristics from the viewpoint of movement along the Ridgeway itself. The hillfort may appear a static feature but was only really appreciated through movement and visibility across the wider landscape. It may well have had a role in the region as a whole, rather than being the residence of a single community and this accords with the internal evidence from the site.

The nature of the use and occupation of the hillfort enclosure in the middle Iron Age is uncertain. It may be that the dump rampart was constructed at this time, although there is no direct evidence for this, which is puzzling given the general intensification and the larger amounts of pots produced in the middle Iron Age. This would make it more likely that datable evidence will be found from this period if there was activity of any major kind. Three pits could be dated to this phase, but it is not certain that any of them was actually dug in the middle Iron Age period, as all three also contain early Iron Age material. One probable storage pit inside the eastern end of the hillfort was reused to inter a dog. This could have been a special deposit similar to examples at other hillforts, for example Danebury (Grant 1984a), as this almost complete skeleton was the only articulated animal bone found on the site and this was clearly not the usual method of disposing of dead animals. It seems certain that activity within the enclosure was more limited during the middle Iron Age. The decorated globular bowl from a pit within the hillfort is of a type that is found on sites in the Upper Thames Valley (Harding 1972, pl. 67; Lambrick 1984, 172 and figs 11.3, 11.5) and demonstrates a link with this area during this time.

Use and repair of the hillfort

Use of the hillfort enclosure appears to have been light and out of keeping with the effort required to build and maintain it. No house structures were identified by geophysical survey or excavation, though this may have been a result of the small size of the trenches and the low percentage (2.3%) of the interior that was dug overall. Identified structures include possible 4- or 6-post structures, while pit digging appears in at least two phases, perhaps of the same date as the construction and remodelling of the ramparts. A number of the pits contained what could be considered as placed votive offerings, which ranged from a dog burial, to individual or groups of artefacts (see Chapter 6). Whilst much of this material could be considered as everyday rubbish, its deposition may have involved some form of ritual practice perhaps tied to ideas concerned with fertility or regeneration (Hill 1995, 112; Brück 1995, 255).

Most of the activities usually associated with hillforts, including crop processing and storage, and textile production, are represented at Uffington although at much lower levels than might be expected for a hillfort of this size. On the present evidence, it does not seem likely that large numbers of people lived inside the enclosure and it does not seem to have been a centre of the agricultural economy or of craft production. It is possible that there was some limited occupation of the enclosure, but possibly not even at the level of occupation at Tower Hill. The best explanation of the earliest evidence is that there was sporadic use connected with a range of activities carried out on the hilltop and with people moving along the Ridgeway. What these activities were is not certain, although cleaning the Horse might have been one. The construction of the rampart and the digging of the ditch would have been far more time-consuming than any of the activities evidenced in the interior. Such a large project could only have been undertaken by a large number of people, far more than indicated by the evidence of the excavations in the interior of the hillfort. This may indicate that the construction of the enclosure was a major reason for its being there and was carried out either by one community who lived elsewhere, or from people drawn regularly from other communities.

Sharples (1991) felt that Maiden Castle had seen a continuous sequence of construction over a period of three centuries, with perhaps annual work on the ramparts, rather than maintenance when it was needed. If this view is correct, the ramparts of Maiden Castle became an end in themselves rather than an element of the enclosure mainly connected with defence. There is no evidence of continuous work on the ramparts at Uffington but a similar idea may be valid that the construction of the ramparts and digging of the ditch at Uffington might have served a dual role in the life of the community. The hillfort created an obvious and visible site and was also a focus of communal action which bound people together in a manner, that otherwise would not have happened. These community ties may have been far more important than any internal use.

A comparison can be made with the contemporary open settlement at Tower Hill (Chapter 8), where there was evidence of post-built roundhouses, pits and 4-post structures. This was a habitation in a way that the more impressive site of Uffington does not, on present evidence, appear to have been. The pottery from the two sites is identical and both contained special deposits in pits. At Tower Hill two

of the houses were directly associated with special pit deposits, one of which contained smashed up sarsen blocks that included a saddle quern and another that contained a hoard of bronze work. The large amount of bronze at Tower Hill also throws light on the possible defensive role of Uffington. A functionalist interpretation of hillforts sees them as means of protecting the wealth of the community. However, there was an unenclosed and undefended site on Tower Hill with a major hoard, near an apparently defended site at Uffington with little evidence of metalwork. This is a further indication that present day logic linking wealth and defence did not necessarily apply in the late Bronze Age and Iron Age.

The pottery of the second phase of the hillfort indicates that it lasted no longer than the first phase had and probably much less than a hundred years. The hillfort was then abandoned again, possibly around 400 BC and not reused until the Romano-British period. Though there is no material evidence for use of the Hill in the rest of the Iron Age, it could not have been completely deserted as again the White Horse continued to be maintained.

Romano-British use of the hilltop

The next phase of activity on the hilltop beyond maintenance of the Horse occurred in the Romano-British period. There was substantial disturbance on the slopes of the Hill and reuse of many of the earlier monuments on the top for domestic, funerary and possibly other purposes.

The hillfort interior

The hillfort enclosure became a centre of activity again in this period, but its function at this time is uncertain. Entranceways were opened through the ramparts at the south-east and north-east of the enclosure, creating much more access with easy contact between the hillfort interior and possibly also to the Ridgeway to the south, and to the cemetery in the long mound and White Horse to the north. The rectangular enclosure was constructed outside the western entrance on a very visible shoulder of land. Together, these features argue for regular use of the site, and the excavated evidence from the interior further supports this.

Indications of Romano-British activity were found throughout the hillfort interior. Though only one of the excavated cut features in the interior could be dated to this period with any certainty, relatively large assemblages of coins, pottery, glass, metalwork and animal bone were yielded by the 1994 and 1995 excavations. The small oven structure just inside the western entrance is interpreted as a domestic oven although no evidence was found for it being within a building of any kind. Analysis of the charred plant remains from this structure showed that it contained evidence of the use of spelt wheat and six-row hulled barley (Chapter 10). There were also suggestions of pea cultivation in the area, supporting the agricultural use of the Hill suggested by the colluvial build up in the Manger at this time.

The site does not seem to have been a formal ritual centre during the Romano-British period as there is no evidence of a shrine or temple, and although there is evidence for ploughing nearby the use of the hilltop does not seem to be connected with purely practical activities. The date range of the coins found on the hilltop was very restricted and suggests that activity there was limited in time. Over a third of this coin assemblage was found within the one Romano-British cut feature and may have been deposited as a hoard, although the rest were very widely spread within Romano-British contexts possibly indicating that it had been scattered by Romano-British ploughing rather than merely by recent ploughing. The nature of the pottery assemblage is also inconsistent with the pattern seen at other formal shrines or temples, but is difficult to characterise as either sacred or profane.

Burials were being made in the nearby long barrow; activities were being carried out within the enclosure to the west. In addition, the Horse was being maintained, so possibly the actions being carried out within the enclosure were most likely related to monuments outside it, to movements along the Ridgeway, and also to the agricultural activity probably taking place around the fort. It could be, therefore, that the hilltop existed as a special place with links to the past within an agricultural landscape but was never developed into a 'formal' ritual site. It was a significant place for burial and other activities which involved the baking of bread and resulted in the intentional or accidental deposition of artefacts within the enclosure.

The Manger, evidence for cultivation

The main post-glacial accumulation in the Manger was a deep deposit of plough-derived colluvium. Much belonged to the Romano-British period (Chapter 4). Colluviation of this sort is indicative of the ground being broken up on the slopes from which the sediment is derived. That several separate layers in the colluvial build up could be distinguished in the Manger sequence suggests that this occurred repeatedly. The most likely cause is repeated cultivation of the steep slopes of the hill, though little evidence of this was recovered from the hilltop itself during the course of these excavations. Ploughing around, and possibly within, the hillfort would sit well with the pattern of activity on the surrounding Downs (see below).

The barrows, evidence for burial

Both the long mound and the ring ditch seem to have been reused for interment during the Roman period (Chapter 4). While this is not unknown, it is

somewhat uncommon for a prehistoric barrow to be reused to the extent of a full cemetery (at least 49 graves) as found within the long mound on White Horse Hill. The burials within the other barrow were much less numerous. Only one inhumation was recovered from the ring ditch but it is possible that others had been destroyed by ploughing.

The enclosure

This enclosure was linked to the Ridgeway by a ditched trackway and other enclosures and field systems known on the surrounding Downs. The 1995 excavation did not investigate the trackway and the enclosure ditch was only picked up in one of the excavated trenches. The ditch was badly truncated by ploughing but Roman pottery and burnt clay were recovered from the fills. No cut features in the interior of the enclosure survived beyond the ring ditch and Romano-British inhumation mentioned in Chapter 4. As a result it is very difficult to determine the function of the enclosure. The earlier barrow may still have been visible at this time and the ditched enclosure may have been associated with the reuse of this feature for inhumation. There is a Roman regional tradition of burial in small enclosures, though this is rare and generally restricted to cremation burials.

The Anglo-Saxon period

Following the end of the late Roman period White Horse Hill ceased to be a centre of activity and was eventually divided between two separate estates in the 10th century (Chapter 3). This did not mean the area was neglected and the White Horse continued to be maintained as it had throughout despite it not being regarded as a sufficiently permanent monument to define the boundary in the clauses attached to the charters detailing the Woolstone and Uffington grants.

The burials

The only other use of the Hill was the reuse of the round barrow and possibly Dragon Hill for inhumation. The barrow is one of the markers used to define the boundary between the Woolstone and Uffington estates in the 10th century and this may not be coincidental. Barrows are often associated with Anglo-Saxon burials and the knowledge that this barrow was the burial place of their ancestors might have influenced the choice of marker by those laying out the boundary.

Three unaccompanied skeletons found interred in the side of Dragon Hill in the 19th century (Chapter 4) could also be of Anglo-Saxon date. This dating is not certain but would fit comfortably with the Anglo-Saxon view of the feature as an earlier barrow and the practice of reusing such mounds. Dragon Hill was also used as a marker of the same boundary, perhaps the relatively recent burials in the mound increased the natural prominence of this feature in the minds of the boundary makers.

Later activity

There is fairly sparse archaeological evidence of activity on White Horse Hill after the Anglo-Saxon period, though it is clear from other sources that its importance to local communities never diminished. Indeed it is clear from documentary and even place name sources that it was central to the identity of the place and the local inhabitants in the Vale below. The White Horse distinguished the hill, and by extension the whole vicinity and the local people who maintained the figure, from all others.

The results of the investigations from White Horse Hill have now been summarised. However, a single place in the landscape cannot be understood in isolation however important it might be and the results from the Berkshire Downs provide a vital context to White Horse Hill. Similar chronological divisions used in the account of White Horse Hill are also employed for this landscape.

THE LANDSCAPE OF THE BERKSHIRE DOWNS

Before the White Horse

Little is known of the Mesolithic in this area, although its absence is probably more illusory than real, a product of the limited excavation that has occurred in the area. The first real activities for the region as a whole, as for White Horse Hill, date to the Neolithic (Holgate 1988).

The occurrence of woodland snails in a tree-throw hole at Rams Hill (Evans 1975), the soil above the Late Glacial sediments in the Manger and in the soil beneath the Neolithic long mound on White Horse Hill confirms that the Berkshire Downs were indeed wooded prior to agricultural activity from the Neolithic. However, there is no indication of the composition of the pre-clearance woodland.

The Neolithic archaeology of the Berkshire Downs may appear to indicate low density use, given the relative paucity of sites other than long barrows. However, there is some evidence for early Neolithic clearance and much of the mass of flintwork recovered (Gaffney and Tingle 1989; Tingle 1991) probably dates to the Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age demonstrating a greater intensity of use than that revealed by excavation. Turf had been used in the construction of the Lambourn barrow where a very early radiocarbon date was given by charcoal from the ditch, 4555 to 3760 cal BC (Wymer 1970) although this has recently been shown to be residual material and a later range of 3760 to 3645 cal BC established from new accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS) dates (Schulting 2000). Open-country molluscs predominated in the east ditch of Wayland's Smithy I prior to the construction of the extended long barrow of Wayland's Smithy II (Kerney 1991). An open country element was also present in the disturbed soil beneath the long mound on White Horse Hill.

The Neolithic and early Bronze Age

The Neolithic and early Bronze Age of the Berkshire Downs may seem to be dominated by the archaeology of the dead, with funerary monuments forming the bulk of the known evidence. However, on excavation these sites have been found to contain trace evidence of the other aspects of life on the Downs at this time.

The most visible monuments of the Neolithic are the small number of long barrows (Fig. 14.2), including the White Horse Hill long mound, the group at Lambourn and the most famous being Wayland's Smithy (Whittle 1991). However, the excavation of multiple inhumation burials beneath a sarsen cairn at Park Farm just 4 km south-west of the Lambourn barrow group indicates that other less monumental structures existed on the Downs (Richards 1986–90, 27).

The larger funerary monuments would have brought the otherwise scattered population together, not only for the initial construction, which would have required considerable effort in some cases, but also during their use, maintenance and remodelling. Wayland's Smithy had two phases of construction (Whittle 1991), which culminated in remodelling and enlargement, emphasising the way in which the site of an earlier barrow had remained sufficiently important for the later community to reuse it. No definite evidence was found of a Neolithic date for the White Horse Hill long mound, but it is likely that its significance as a funerary site continued through successive periods. The construction of this barrow high up on a hill and aligned on the intervisible Wayland's Smithy indicates the importance of place and position. This barrow, highlighted by its white chalk mound and position on the skyline, appears to have been intended to be seen and experienced from afar in the Vale although, like Wayland's Smithy, it is set downslope from the scarp and so is not visible from the south.

The long barrows would have remained visible for many centuries, although there is little evidence for secondary, late Neolithic, activity. An isolated Grooved Ware pit was recorded at Tower Hill (Chapter 8) and at Sparsholt (Durden 1996). It is thought that such pit deposits represent more than just the burial of domestic rubbish and the cutting of these features near the tops of chalk ridges may well have been as significant as their material contents.

The long barrows were probably linked by a network of paths to other places, features, living sites and woodland clearings. However, nothing is known of contemporaneous living sites on the Berkshire Downs and the only traces come from surface spreads on relict land surfaces preserved by later earthworks and as artefact scatters in modern ploughsoils. At both Lambourn and Wayland's Smithy traces of domestic occupation were found, some of which could predate the barrow (Whittle 1991; Wymer 1965–6). At White Horse Hill and Tower Hill there is evidence from worked flint assemblages of at least sporadic activity and this seems to be typical of the surrounding landscape during this period (Chapters 9 and 12: Gaffney and Tingle 1989; Tingle 1991). The initial trimming of cores seems to have been an important activity at White Horse Hill, and there is the possibility that flint procurement was one of the activities practised at Tower Hill.

Cereal cultivation may have been occurring in these open areas but at present the evidence is largely circumstantial except for a single grain of wheat from a late Neolithic pit on Tower Hill. At Wayland's Smithy quernstones were incorporated into the structure of the primary barrow. The soil sealed beneath the second phase of this barrow contained a fauna of open grassland but the soil was a rendzina with chalk fragments throughout the profile, which was strongly suggestive of ploughing (Evans 1971, 65; Evans 1972, 262–5). A radiocarbon date of 3950 to 3100 cal BC was obtained on charcoal from the surface of the buried soil.

Stock was also grazed on pasture. Pottery, flint and animal bone were recovered from the old ground surface beneath the second phase of Wayland's Smithy. Of the variety of animals represented some were domesticates, while cut marks noted on some of the cattle bones suggests that these remains can be associated with the artefactual evidence. Bones of sheep, which are not woodland animals, were the most numerous bones of domestic animals. The bones from Wayland's Smithy also included cattle and pig, which can be herded in woodland, and red deer, likely to have been hunted in woodland (Gardiner 1991). It is interesting that a single tooth of horse was found on the old land surface beneath Wayland's Smithy I.

The open areas had an ever-present background of woodland, ready to encroach when cultivation was abandoned or grazing reduced. The most abundant charred plant remains from the Neolithic pit at Tower Hill were hazel nutshell fragments and the snails from the pit were a mixture of woodland and open-country species. The molluscan sequence from the east ditch of Barrow II showed that after an episode of grassland, conditions became increasingly wooded (Kerney 1991). The occurrence of the old woodland species *Ena montana* might suggest the proximity of established woodland from which the colonisation could occur. This picture of temporary clearances on the Berkshire Downs was probably typical for much of Neolithic Britain. The large permanent clearances of the chalk of the Avebury area are very much the exception (Moffett *et al.* 1989).

While many areas which had been significant in the Neolithic period, such as Wayland's Smithy went out of use and experienced woodland regeneration, White Horse Hill and the Lambourn Valley remained open and were further developed as funerary centres with the addition of round barrows in the early Bronze Age period.

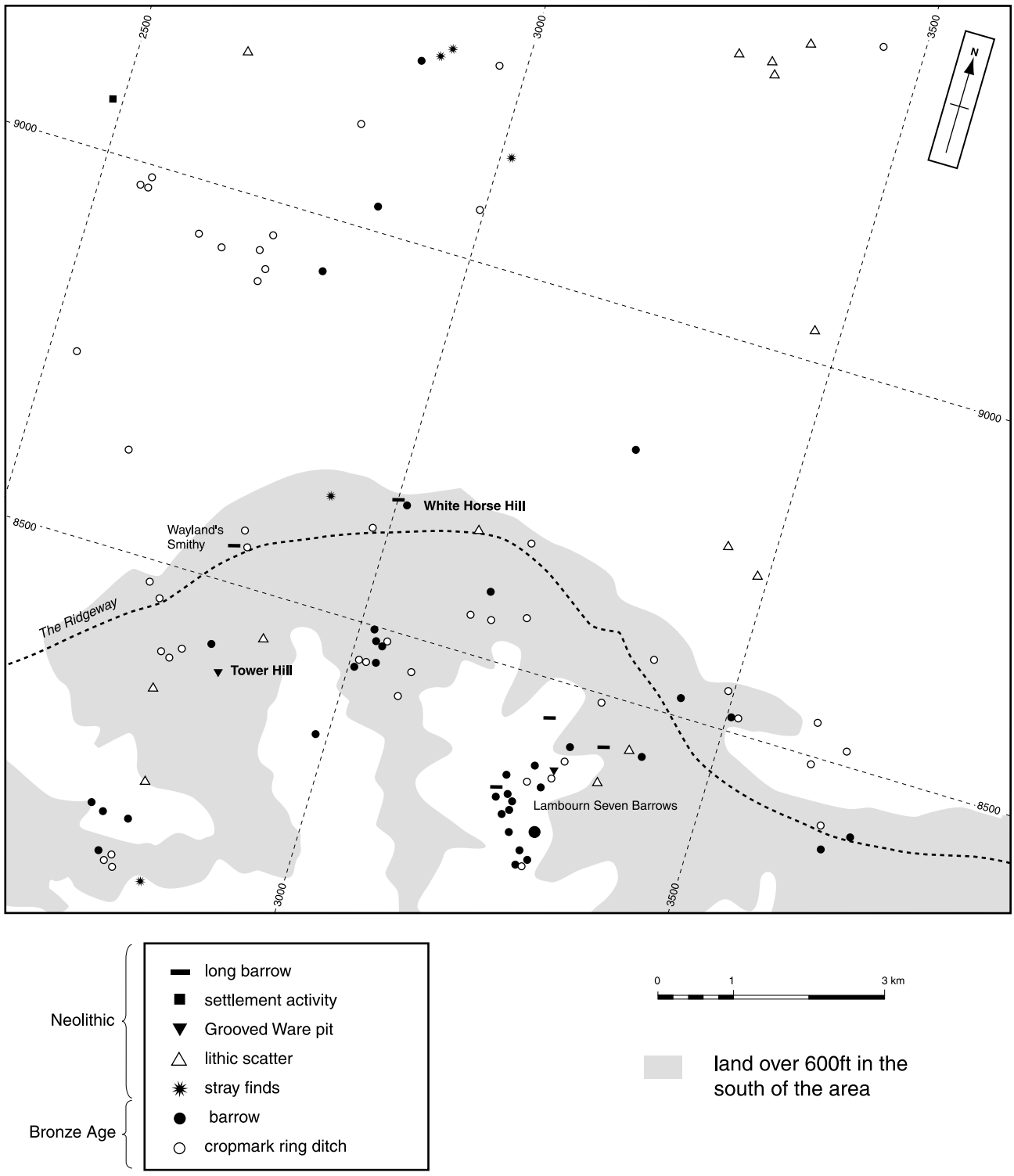

Figure 14.2 Landscape around White Horse Hill, showing sites and artefacts of the earlier prehistoric period, Neolithic and Bronze Age.

Round barrows are the most numerous monuments of the earlier prehistoric period and proliferated across the Downs. Many of these monuments can be associated with Beaker or early Bronze Age funerary deposits. Some also mask or incorporate earlier traces of activity such as flint and pottery of Neolithic date (eg Hodcott Down, Row Down, Farncombe Down and Churn, Richards 1986–90; Rahtz 1962; Peake 1931). To date there is little or no evidence of early and middle Bronze Age habitation

sites, field systems or other features from the Downs. Lambourn appears to have become the major ritual and funerary centre of the Downs. The cemetery eventually consisted of roughly 30 barrows, including an avenue of barrows constructed so as to align on the earlier Neolithic long barrow (Richards 1986–90, fig. 2). The location of the cemetery is unusual in that it lies on the floor of a shallow dry valley rather than on a ridge where it would have been more visible. This may have been counter-balanced by relatively widespread clearance, as well as the ancient significance of a site that had once been occupied by a group of long barrows.

One possibility is that habitation sites at this time were based around small open settlements that were perhaps only seasonally occupied. It can be noted that the Rams Hill enclosure (see below) followed a phase of open settlement and the site produced traces of earlier activity (Bradley and Ellison 1975). It seems likely that other areas of the Downs could also have remained as open grassland. However, it is pertinent to note here that the earliest enclosure on Rams Hill, constructed at the end of the middle Bronze Age, was placed in a landscape reverting to woodland (Evans 1975, 145).

The middle Bronze Age

Sites such as Rams Hill, Wayland's Smithy and perhaps the Manger remained wooded until the late Bronze Age demonstrating that the Berkshire Downs were not being intensively exploited during the early and middle Bronze Age. Some areas, for example White Horse Hill and parts of the Lambourn Valley, were perhaps permanently open landscapes mostly used for pasture but with some arable fields on the more gentle slopes. The molluscs from the round barrow and the ring ditch at White Horse Hill were indicative of open grazed grassland conditions and it is possible that once cleared, the hilltop remained open, as occurred in some areas at least of the Lambourn Valley. In both cases the barrows were reused by the middle Bronze Age communities. One Barrow at Lambourn contained well over a hundred such deposits and in terms of scale represents a massive cemetery within the Upper Thames region (Case 1956–7, 20). Such secondary cremation deposits in earlier Bronze Age barrows form the bulk of the scattered evidence of middle Bronze Age use of the area.

White Horse Hill and Lambourn seem to have been islands in a landscape of trees or scrub, rather different to the more open conditions of earlier and later periods. Open areas (and there may have been others) would have been linked by paths and trackways, although visibility between different areas may have been poor. The fact that Lambourn and White Horse Hill remained open attests to their importance at this time. Their subsequent histories, with little evidence of Iron Age activity in Lambourn, indicates that only White Horse Hill maintained this importance, making it the only place that seems to have been a focus of activity from the Neolithic onward. The low intensity of use of much of the Berkshire Downs at this time, contrasts considerably with the neighbouring Marlborough Downs where linear ditches, field systems and settlements were relatively common, although burial monuments in large numbers or sizes were rare (Gingell 1992).

The late Bronze Age and early Iron Age

From the end of the middle Bronze Age the situation changes. A house was constructed on Rams Hill probably in the 13th century BC (Needham and Ambers 1994, fig. 6) and this was followed by the first enclosure about a century later at the beginning of the late Bronze Age, succeeded by two more phases of enclosure over the next two centuries. In the 9th century BC there was some scrub regeneration prior to the construction of the hillfort in the early All Cannings Cross period of the 8th or 7th century, contemporary with that at Uffington. Back in the 11th or 12th centuries there was a settlement constructed on Weathercock Hill, presumably connected with clearance around it for arable and pastoral use. This was succeeded by a more major settlement starting in the 8th century at Tower Hill further along the same ridge. At the northern end of this ridge, at Wayland's Smithy, interference with the tree cover is suggested by the molluscan sequence well before the clearance in the Iron Age (Kerney 1991). From these three sites emerges a pattern of slow clearance and the establishment of settlement from the beginning of the late Bronze Age onwards. The scrub and tree landscapes of the middle Bronze Age gradually gave way to more open areas in the late Bronze Age and this may have involved new people moving onto the downland from elsewhere. It was during this period that some of the linear ditches of the area would have been laid out, possibly as boundary markers of some kind.

The late Bronze Age site at Rams Hill stands out as unusual for this region at this period, although similar sites are known from elsewhere, such as Thwing, Yorks (Manby 1980). Its method of construction was very unusual for the time and the second phase enclosure, with a wall-and-fill rampart would have required a large amount of timber. As with the later hillfort on this site and at Uffington the amount of energy that went into constructing the rampart and ditch seems to have been in excess of the interior occupation, which the excavators characterised as sparse and sporadic (Bradley and Ellison 1975, 216). No other site gives evidence of the massiveness of enclosure and the complex phases of reconstruction during the late Bronze Age found at Rams Hill. The range of pottery fabrics from this site is intriguing, indicating widespread contacts and that this was some sort of meeting place for people from a number of surrounding regions (ibid., 215–16). Such regular meetings of disparate groups may have been a part of the re-occupation of

the Downs during this period, which led to its clearance and settlement.

In their reconsideration of the site Needham and Ambers (1994, 241) also stressed the lack of continuous occupation through the late Bronze Age on Rams Hill and supported the original excavators' view that this enclosure had been integrated with the rest of the Lambourn Valley into some sort of pastoral transhumance system. There are indications that the main economic basis of this system may have been pastoral, with particular emphasis on the breeding and rearing of cattle. This is consistent with what was happening outside the area during the Bronze Age.

At present the enclosure on Rams Hill remains enigmatic. There are no other enclosures of this date on the Downs or in the Vale, while in adjoining regions Deverel-Rimbury enclosed farmsteads went out of use at a time when this hill was first enclosed, while the late Bronze Age ring works of the Middle Thames Valley and eastern England are of a slightly later date still and built at a time when Rams Hill was abandoned. Its construction represents a break with tradition, as it would appear that this was the first enclosure to be built in the downland landscape. When first constructed the enclosure would have appeared novel and exotic to the inhabitants of the Downs and Vale.

However, for most of its later history the late Bronze Age enclosure at Rams Hill had at least one nearby open settlement on Weathercock Hill. Given the difficulty in locating unenclosed and relatively ephemeral settlements, which can only increase with the destructive effects of modern ploughing, it is likely that Weathercock Hill was one of a series of, as yet, undiscovered late Bronze Age settlements on the downland. A range of late Bronze Age settlement was discovered on Salisbury Plain, for instance, where it had been preserved due to lack of ploughing in the military training area (Bradley *et al.* 1994). Further fieldwork is needed to discover the extent of late Bronze Age settlement in the region. The extent of late Bronze Age settlement is hinted at by the large-scale division of the Downs through linear ditches at this time. A number of the larger linear ditches that divide the Downs may have been constructed in this period, though no clear evidence of this was found in the short stretch of Uffington linear ditch excavated as part of the current programme.

Pottery from the primary silts of the Berkshire Grim's Ditch best fits an 8th–5th-century date (Ford 1982, 35), Beedon Ditch is thought to date from the 10th-9th century BC and pottery evidence from small excavated samples suggests the Aldworth-Streatly Grim's Ditch dated to *c* 50 BC–AD 300 (Ford 1981–2, 15–16). The last is considered by Ford to be morphologically distinct from the rest of the group and as a result he does not consider that this date is a problem. He concludes from his survey of eight of the linear ditches that the most likely date for the other linear ditches is late Bronze Age/early Iron Age. This date fits well with the date inferred from the apparent relationship of the White Horse Hill linear ditch and Uffington Castle, but the presence of small sherds of Roman pottery from the primary fill of the ditch casts some doubt on it in this case. A possible late Bronze Age lynchet which predates a linear earthwork is also known at Baydon (Ford 1981–2). A brief episode of ploughing followed the final clearance at Rams Hill but a turf line containing molluscs indicative of short-grazed grassland soon developed over the in-filled Bronze Age enclosure ditch (Evans 1975).

The function of these linear earthworks is also uncertain. They were initially interpreted as having been built for stock management as parts of a change towards a more pastoral economy, and originally termed as 'ranch boundaries' (Crawford 1953). Later writers (Ford 1981–2; Bradley and Ellison 1975; Bradley *et al*. 1994) have discussed other possible interpretations. The units may be comparable to medieval strip parishes which were designed to include access to the widest variety of resources, but more likely to represent the integration of arable and pasture in a mixed economy.

Cultivation in the Manger possibly began in the late Bronze Age. Crop remains are sparse from this period although cereals, including barley, were identified from Weathercock Hill (Carruthers 1991–3). Bones from cattle slightly outnumbered sheep at both the settlement on Weathercock Hill and the Bronze Age enclosure at Rams Hill. However, pig and red deer were also well represented at Rams Hill, which was possibly a reflection of a background of woodland.

The new divisions of land and greater intensity of use may indicate a new relationship between land and the group. Whilst the concept of ownership should not be used too freely, it might be fair to say that there was a greater identification between groups of people and parcels of land, such that people's identity was tied to particular areas. While it is dangerous to stretch cross-cultural comparisons too far, Basso (1996) has provided an interesting example of how tribal identity and history can be embedded within landscape features and connected with cosmological forces through myth and story-telling. Identity would have been partly tied to land through continued work on the land and on land divisions. Linear ditches do not just need digging once, but regular maintenance is required to clear out frost shatter and other sediments from the base of the ditch. It has been pointed out (Gosden and Lock 1998) that features of the landscape may have retained a connection to those who first created them, with these connections being exercised through genealogical ties. The regular cleaning of a ditch would not just have been a physical activity, but a means of linkage with the ancestors who first created the land divisions. Physical work had social implications. This was true to an even greater extent for an enclosure like Rams Hill, which was regularly refurbished over several centuries. Although new

constructions were initiated, with the change from dump to wall-and-fill ramparts, the later were on the same circuit as the earlier, so that the new work combined change and continuity at the same time.

It was into this largely cleared landscape on the Downs that the White Horse was set and this may have helped focus attention anew onto White Horse Hill, which had remained important enough to be cleared all through the late Bronze Age. The Horse is the feature of the landscape that has been worked on for longest, providing a thread of continuity initially with remembered ancestors, but for all later periods it allowed links with a mythical past (ibid.). The changes of the late Bronze Age presaged even greater degrees of change at the beginning of the Iron Age.

The advent of early All Cannings Cross wares in the 8th century seems a crucial marker. A string of fairly large enclosures were built along the top of the escarpment during the 8th century. All were built near or on the Ridgeway and in places from which people could see the Vale below and be seen from it. This included from east to west the hillforts of Blewburton Hill (Harding 1972), Rams Hill (Bradley and Ellison 1975; Needham and Ambers 1994), Uffington Castle, and Liddington Castle (Hurst and Rahtz 1996) (Fig. 14.3). All were roughly contemporaneous, on the basis of the All Cannings Cross type pottery recovered from the first phases of each, and all were built to very similar designs. The size and shape of the enclosures varied but the nature of the ramparts was almost identical in all cases, with timber-framed wall-and-fill ramparts and outer ditch cut deep into the natural chalk. Each enclosure had two entrances in its original design (Fig. 14.4) which could have been to incorporate the early Ridgeway and define the way in which the internal space was used. In addition, the open settlement of Tower Hill started at this time and may have been accompanied by others yet to be discovered.

Many of the hillforts have long, if discontinuous, histories, although some (such as Segsbury) do not appear to have started at this time. The All Cannings Cross changes add an extra layer of history to this landscape for subsequent generations. The linear ditches are still cleaned out in the early Iron Age, and the Horse was certainly scoured. But there are signs that later generations felt a special connection to the people of the 8th and 7th centuries. Although hillforts begun in this period were later reconstructed, this was carried out on the same ground plan as earlier. Furthermore, as at Uffington, the blocking of the eastern entrance is possibly carried out using deposits containing curated and burnt All Cannings Cross pottery in some quantities, which hardly seems to have been accidental.

These hillforts were not occupied for long after their initial construction. Like Uffington, most were abandoned, or at least maintenance of the ramparts ceased for a century or more during the early Iron Age proper (and 5th century). During this period other hillforts were constructed in the area such as Alfred's Castle someway down the dip slope (Gosden and Lock 1999; 2000; Lock and Gosden 2001). This hillfort was substantially smaller (Fig. 14.4) and differed in construction from the earlier forts along the crest of the escarpment. Stone walls seem to have been used in the construction of the ramparts instead of timber lacing, making this hillfort quite distinct in form from the earlier group. Segsbury also seems to be slightly later than the All Cannings Cross period, and it is interesting to note that both Alfred's Castle and Segsbury do not have first phase box ramparts as do the earlier hillforts.

Although there is continuity, there is also change and the early to middle Iron Age evidence indicates changes in movements across the landscape in the form of blocked entrances at a number of hillforts in the region. It was suggested (Chapter 7) that the early hillforts of Liddington, perhaps Hardwell although this is a complete unknown, Uffington, and Rams Hill incorporated the existing Ridgeway into their design so that the track passed through their two entrances. This suggests connections with movement along the Ridgeway and reflects the distribution of All Cannings Cross type pottery to the west and south. It may be that the hillforts were monitoring movement along the Ridgeway in some way, which may have been related to the movement of stock and/or that they were special places along the route where certain activities were carried out. Whatever their function in terms of the Ridgeway and movement it seems to have changed in the 4th century with the blocking of entrances as shown by excavation at Liddington and Uffington, and possibly at Rams Hill and Hardwell. This does not imply that the Ridgeway itself ceased to be a means of communication and travel, only that its relationship with the early hillforts changed. The track changed course, at both Liddington and Rams Hill it now runs north of the hillforts closer to the scarp edge which was probably also the case at Uffington as the linear ditch to the south remained open until Romano-British times. Bradley and Ellison (1975, 202) suggest that the early hillforts with twin entrances worked in conjunction with linear ditches to define a territorial system which broke down with the change to single entrances.

Tower Hill

Excavations at Tower Hill (Chapter 8) have shown that unenclosed settlements existed alongside the earliest of these enclosures. Though the presence of a bronze metalwork hoard may suggest a slightly earlier date, the pottery assemblage confirms that the site is of approximately 8th-century date and contemporaneous with the construction and initial use of the hillforts ranged along the escarpment crest. Like the phase 1 occupation of Uffington Castle, the use of the site was of limited duration, probably lasting no more than a century.

This settlement consisted of at least three or four post-built roundhouse structures and several 4-post structures set around the north-east of a slight ridge

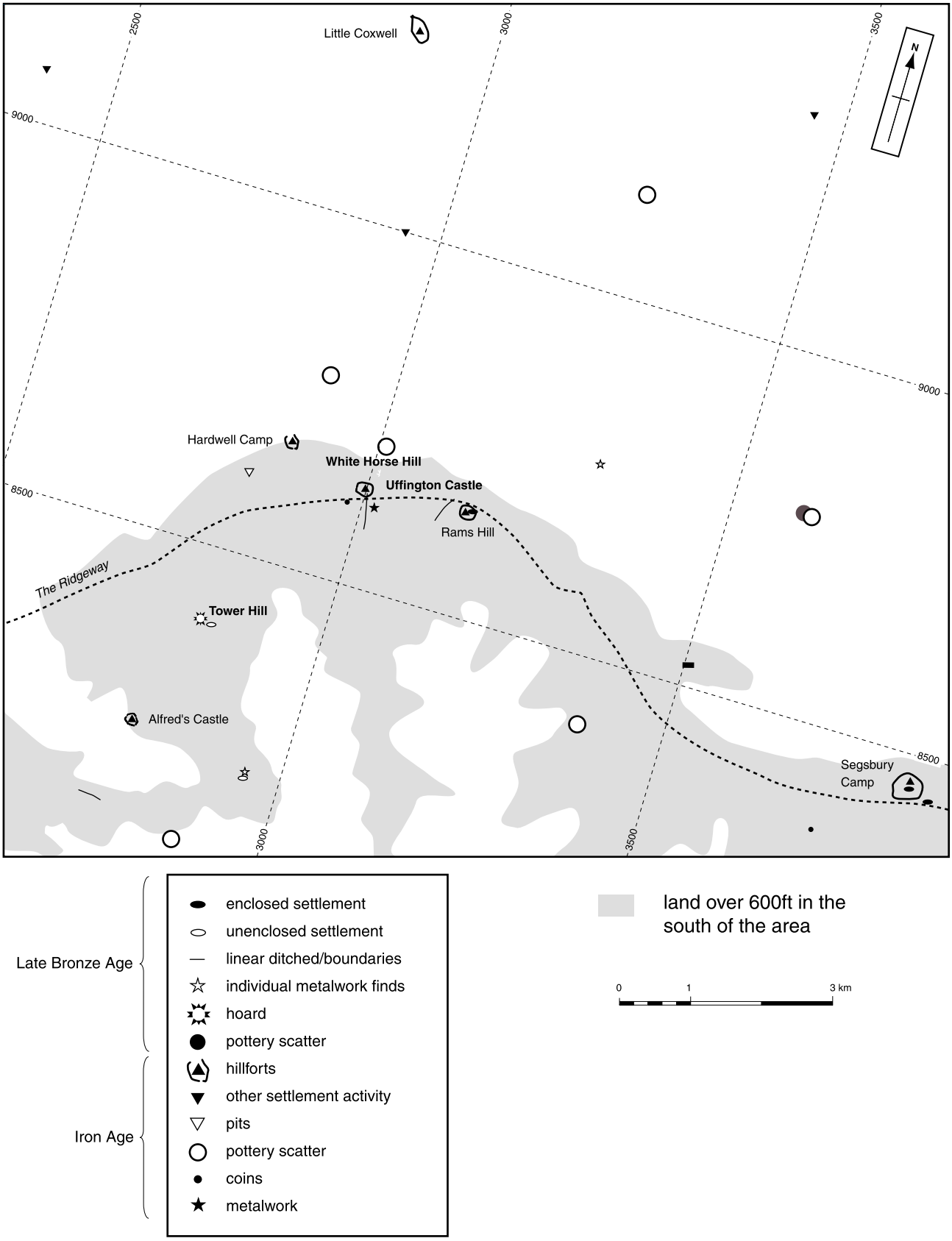

Figure 14.3 Landscape around White Horse Hill, showing sites and artefacts of the later prehistoric period, late Bronze Age and Iron Age.

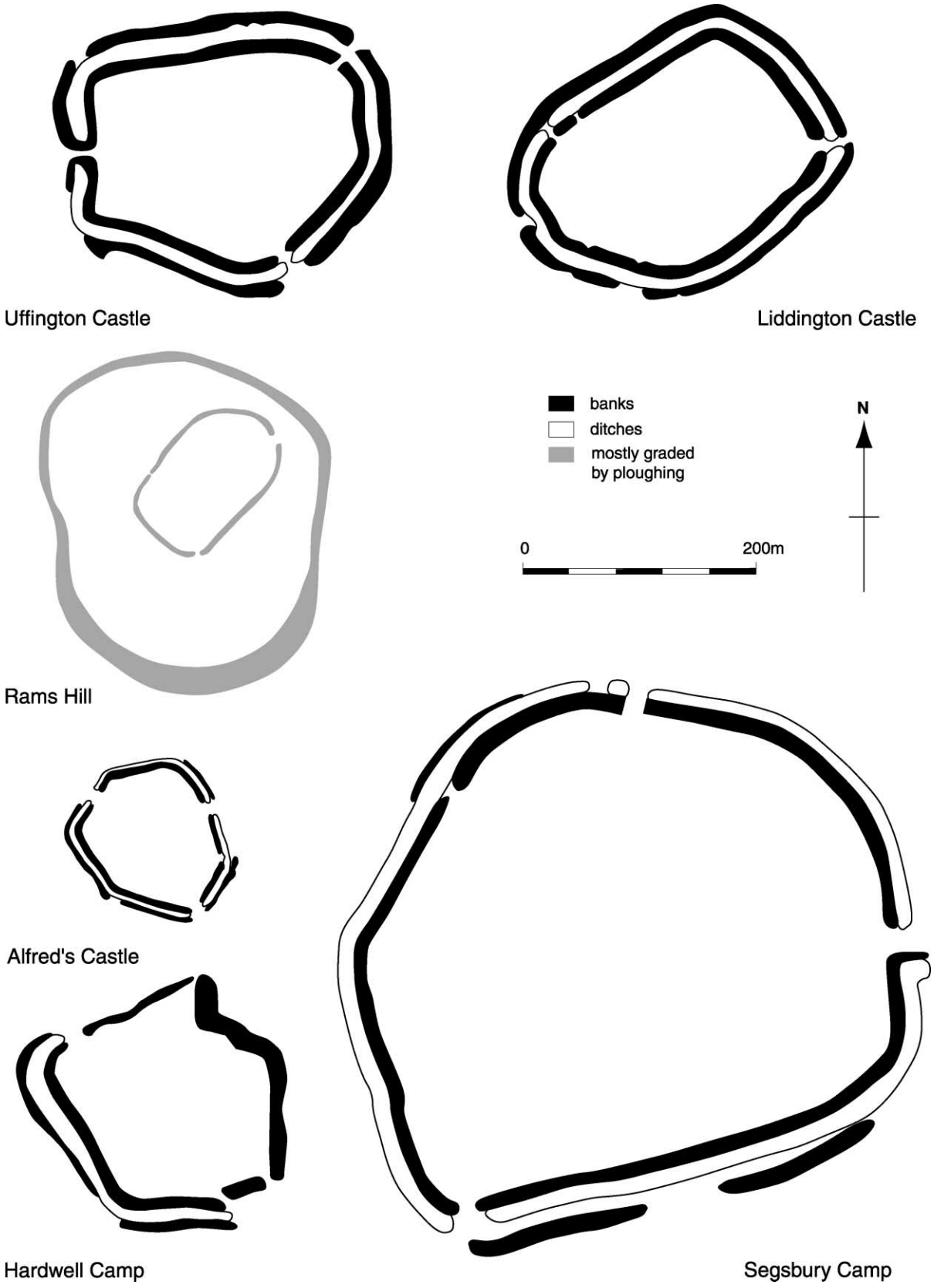

Figure 14.4 Comparative hillfort plans: composite plans from various sources, including Bradley and Ellison 1975 (Rams Hill), Hirst and Rahtz 1996 (Liddington), and OAU surveys and research (remainder).

part way down the dip slope of the Downs in an area of open country that had long been cleared. There was some suggestion that different areas of the site were associated with different activities, as has been observed in many Iron Age enclosures, though not Uffington Castle on the evidence of these excavations. The 4-post structures were all located within one area, while pits seemed to have been restricted to another.

There were no traces of this settlement evident on the surface prior to excavation beyond the metalwork brought up by ploughing. It was the presence of this metalwork alone that prompted this series of investigations. Without the hoard the site would have gone unnoticed and probably would have been completely destroyed by a few more episodes of deep ploughing. It is likely that many other small, unenclosed, settlements of this type were spread across the Downs during this period, which have yet to be discovered or may have been so badly plough damaged that they may never be recognised.

The Tower Hill hoard is an unusual and spectacular find of almost 100 bronzes, some in an as-cast condition. The presence of unfinished axes suggests that these may not have been functional and raises the idea that the hoard could also have been some kind of ritual or traditional deposit made at a special location. The Sompting type of axes found have been considered to be a product of the transitional period from the late Bronze Age to the Iron Age period, and raise interesting questions about their place, and the place of metalwork, bronze and iron, in a changing society (Thomas 1989, 273). The presence of some items which were likely to be horse gear provides an interesting link to the White Horse itself, at the time when the Horse may have been constructed. This emphasises the links across the landscape at this time, and hints at the importance of the status and prestige of the horse and its associations in the late Bronze Age society.

All late Bronze Age and early Iron Age settlements on the Downs need not have been exactly the same as Tower Hill, particularly as it may have had a specialist role. The inhabitants clearly used grain as indicated by a number of quernstones recovered from two of the pits, and suggested by the existence of possible 4-post granaries, although there was no evidence of large-scale crop processing among the charred plant remains (Chapter 13). The grain used may have been brought in from outside the settlement, in exchange for goods or services produced by the inhabitants. Exactly what these goods would have been is uncertain but the nature of the metalwork hoard strongly suggests smithing. Other settlements in the area may have had other complementary specialisms, particularly agricultural production.

The few other Iron Age settlements in the vicinity, such as the middle Iron Age farmstead recently discovered at Watchfield, (Birbeck 2001; SAM 20602), have generally only been found by excavation associated with modern development or archaeological remains of later date (Fig. 14.3). A few others are starting to come to light as cropmarks by careful examination of aerial photographs of the area as part of the National Mapping Programme of English Heritage. For example, a site located in the Vale immediately below White Horse Hill (SU 295 900) but as yet undated, looks very similar in character to other Iron Age sites in the Thames Valley area which have been excavated (eg Claydon Pike, Hingley and Miles 1984, fig.4.4). The aerial photographs show a group of small curvilinear ditches within enclosures, annexes and pits, located on a gravel island among lower lying areas which are thought to have been poorly drained and marshy before the agricultural improvements of the medieval period.

A crucial question still to be answered for the late Bronze Age to Iron Age periods is that of the links between downland and Vale. It seems likely that the Vale was occupied for much of the Iron Age period, if not before, although more fieldwork is needed to gain a fuller picture of the whole sequence. At Frilford an early Iron Age site has produced All Cannings Cross pottery (Bradford and Goodchild 1939; Hingley 1985) showing that the southern connections extended beyond the chalk Downs at this crucial period. It is apparent that there was large-scale, although shifting, occupation of the downland from the late Bronze Age onwards. It also seems likely that some of the re-occupation of the Downs at the end of the middle Bronze Age may have drawn on populations from the Vale, but it is impossible to go further at present.

Middle Iron Age – reuse of the hillforts

After some period of disuse in which the ramparts eroded and the ditches became infilled, many of the crest top hillforts were re-occupied and remodelled at the beginning of the middle Iron Age. This is not an uncommon pattern and has been observed in early hillforts elsewhere too (Avery 1993). The number of entrances were reduced, and the earlier ramparts reinstated with dump ramparts built on top of the collapsed remains of the old timber-framed banks using material from the recutting of the ditch. This sequence is the minimal view of the excavated evidence from Liddington and Uffington although the date of this remodelling has not been precisely determined at either of these sites. Datable material, such as pottery, recovered from the rampart dump could have been residual and therefore cannot provide more than a *terminus post quem* for the construction of the bank. At Liddington, as at Uffington, all the pottery was of early Iron Age date, contemporaneous with the first use of the hillfort. Early pottery could have been present in the ditch fills excavated during cutting of the second phase ditch and thus became incorporated in the new ramparts. An alternative explanation is that the remodelling occurred during the early Iron Age and that the period of disuse between the two phases of rampart was not a long one.

The Uffington evidence suggests that the hillfort was not used for any great length of time during this phase either and it is possible that some of the other hillforts in the wider area (Fig. 14.5) may have replaced them as centres of activity. Hardwell Camp, for example, sited half way down the slope below Uffington, may be later still. The enclosure differs substantially in plan from the hilltop enclosures along the Ridgeway (Fig. 14.4), but this may be a function of its location. Avery (1993) suggests that some hillforts in this sort of location may even date to end of the late Iron Age. However, no excavation or detailed survey has been made of this site in modern times to confirm or deny this. Both Alfred's Castle and Segsbury Camp have benefited from recent excavation and show evidence for middle and late Iron Age activity.

Field systems and land divisions

Field systems have been known since Crawford produced accurate plans of large groups of such features he had discovered in the Salisbury Plain area by means of aerial photographs and named them 'Celtic Fields' (Crawford 1924). Rhodes (1950) subsequently identified approximately 2979 ha (11.5 square miles) of similar fields on the Berkshire Downs and Case identified a further 22 ha (55 acres) in the valley between Sparsholt Down and Eastmanton (ibid., 22). More lynchets belonging to these systems have continued to be identified with each new survey of the aerial photographs of the area, including that undertaken as part of the Tower Hill project (Chapter 8).

The dating of these fields is uncertain. The term 'Celtic' implies a pre-Roman date, and the data from aerial photographs of the Berkshire Downs hold some support for this. Rhodes (1950, 22) concluded that many were prehistoric in date, originally laid out in the late Bronze Age or Iron Age, from consideration of the relationship of some of these fields to other features of known date such as the Iron Age enclosure known as Perborough Camp in the east of the area. There are also examples of the field systems apparently underlying linear ditches, though in other cases the systems respect or even overly similar features. On the whole the majority of the field systems are likely to have been roughly contemporary. The snails from them are open-country species, which are consistent with the view that the lynchets formed in a single major phase of cultivation. Excavation has shown that many of the lynchets contain late Iron Age/early Roman or later Roman pottery in their primary fills (Bowden *et al.* 1991–3a; Chapter 8). This suggests that the origins and use of these field systems lie somewhat later in the Roman period indicating an increase in arable use of the area.

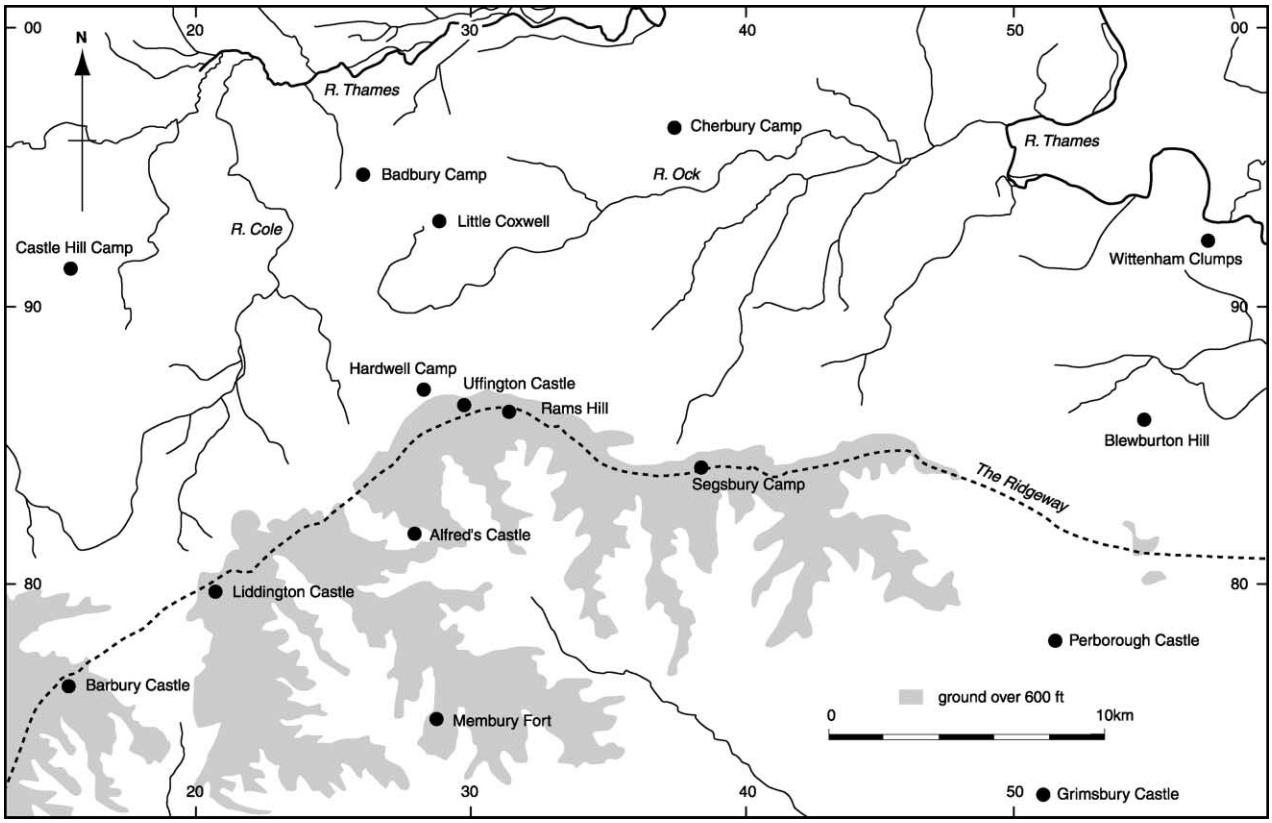

Figure 14.5 Hillfort enclosures within the area of White Horse Hill.

Most of the field systems that have been dated on the Berkshire Downs have been assigned to the Romano-British period, although it is still likely that some have earlier origins. Few Iron Age fields are known although a lynchet at Streatley Warren may have a late Iron Age origin (Richards 1986–90). However, several examples of Iron Age cultivation have been found on the Berkshire Downs. Marks of cross ploughing were discovered beneath the rampart of Segsbury Camp hillfort (Lock and Gosden 1998). Following clearance at Wayland's Smithy, ploughing continued throughout the Iron Age (Kerney 1991). Iron Age cultivation also occurred at Rams Hill (Evans 1975). At White Horse Hill, there was possibly a brief episode of cultivation prior to the construction of the rampart but thereafter the site reverted to short-turfed pasture. Down in the Manger, late prehistoric plough-induced colluviation was occurring. Few Iron Age sites have yet been investigated in detail for crop remains or animal bones. Flotation of fills from grain storage pits at Segsbury and Alfred's Castle is currently yielding high concentrations of crop remains including spelt wheat and six-row hulled barley. The quantities of charred remains from Uffington Castle were, in contrast, much lower. There was, however, one rich early Iron Age context which, in addition to emmer or spelt wheat and six-row hulled barley, also contained many seeds of goosegrass, which is characteristic of autumn-sown cereals. Bones from the usual range of domestic animals for the period, cattle, sheep, horse and pig, are present. At present, however, it is uncertain whether or not downland grazing had led to a preponderance of sheep.

It is likely that the Iron Age landscape of the Berkshire Downs was primarily put to productive use. In that way it was similar to the gravels of the Upper Thames Valley or the Hampshire Chalk (Robinson 1984). This does not mean that clearance was complete, indeed the number of timbers required for the lacing of the rampart of Uffington Castle showed that substantial woodland resources were available. However, woodland was perhaps restricted to the less fertile soils of the Clay-with-Flints and the glacial drift. Much of the remaining woodland was probably managed for the growing of timbers and coppice products. In addition to arable fields on the more gently sloping parts of the Downs, it seems very plausible that the Iron Age agricultural system also included cultivation of the good soils at the foot of the scarp.

The Romano-British period

During the Romano-British period the Downs experienced another phase of increased activity. In addition to the expansion of arable production indicated by the proliferation of field systems, there was the construction of villas such as at Maddle Farm and Starveall Farm, and renewed interest in the hillforts and other ancient monuments. It would appear that the White Horse, like the hillfort and barrows, remained as features of this landscape. To survive, the Horse must have been maintained during this period while in general White Horse Hill was reused possibly for settlement, ceremony and burial, while the existing monuments were respected. The appropriation of earlier enclosures and barrows along the Downs appears to have been a common occurrence. In contrast much of the surrounding landscape was transformed by the laying out of new field systems or the extension of older systems.

The agricultural system of the time is currently not fully understood but some indications can be gleaned from the investigations carried out to date. Both the sectioning of lynchets (Bowden *et al.* 1991–3a) and the fieldwalking of the Maddle Farm survey (Gaffney and Tingle 1989) and Tower Hill discovered extensive pottery scatters, suggesting that the fields were being manured. At Uffington, cultivation and colluviation continued in and around the Manger while the area between the White Horse and Uffington Castle remained pasture. Limited investigations have been undertaken on two Roman settlements for charred plant remains: Knighton Bushes and Maddle Farm (Carruthers 1989). Almost all the bones from the Maddle Farm sites were of domestic animals (Brown 1989), while sheep or goat predominated, followed by cattle with some horse, pig and domestic fowl.

There is at present little indication that the expansion in arable production resulted in serious environmental degradation as a result of the increase in arable cultivation marked by the proliferation of field systems. The formation of lynchets show that soil movement occurred but this does not seem to have resulted in large-scale colluviation in the dry valleys of the region apart from the Manger, unlike some other areas on the Chalk (Bell 1981). Manuring was being used to maintain soil fertility levels, but this does not mean that the soils had experienced severe nutrient depletion. The scattering of manure on cultivated fields is a sensible agricultural practice when animal dung and other refuse accumulates on settlements. It was possibly a reflection of more domestic animals being kept in stalls or over-wintered in farmyards rather than being left on pasture throughout the year. It must be assumed that any agricultural system in the area in the Roman period extended beyond the Berkshire Downs. Much more work, however, is needed before the Roman agricultural system can be fully understood, although Gaffney and Tingle (1989, 239–44) present a useful discussion for the Maddle Farm survey area. As a result of excavations at Starveall Farm villa to the west near Liddington (Phillips 1979–80), the excavator has postulated a series of villa estates each with its own system of fields probably providing a surplus of grain and animal products to enter a wider trading network.

Much of this expansion and intensification is linked to the villas known in the vicinity, which other than Maddle Farm and Starveall Farm on the Downs

include others in the adjacent Vale (Fig. 14.6). The latter group included Woolstone villa directly below White Horse Hill (SAM 251; Peake 1931); a possible example near Fawler and a further villa near East Challow (C Gosden and G Lock, pers. comm.). Some of these villas exploited the light fertile soils of the Downs for arable cultivation in preference to the heavier, wetter clay soils of the valley floor, which others may have used more for pasture. Certainly the excavated farmstead at Shrivenham Road, Ashbury at the foot of the escarpment had paddocks associated with it (C Gosden and G Lock, pers. comm.). The large stone-built structure located within Alfred's Castle during recent excavations may also have functioned as a villa (Gosden and Lock 1999; 2000; Lock and Gosden 2001).

The Romano-British period seems to be the first at which the use of the downland and the Vale were definitely integrated, with the possible villa estates linking both upland and lowland. The movement of animals between seasons may have occurred, with cattle moving to the wetter pastures of the Vale, whilst sheep were moved to the cooler downland. This would have necessitated the movement of people and other resources. The use of the landscape at this stage definitely approaches that indicated by the strip parishes of the early medieval period.

In addition to these new settlements, many of the surviving monuments of earlier periods were reused, re-occupied and/or remodelled during the Romano-British period. Traces of Romano-British activity were found at Liddington Castle (Hirst and Rahtz 1996) and the reuse of Alfred's Castle have already been mentioned. The evidence from Liddington was very limited due to the small scale of the excavations at that site, but was suggestive of reuse of the enclosure during this period, though insufficient to characterise it. Pottery found near the eastern entrance suggested that at least the ditch terminals on either side of the causeway were cleaned out during this time. Romano-British finds, including what may be roof slates, have been recovered from the interior and immediate vicinity of the hillfort. The slates may be evidence of some form of structure, but without further investigation it is impossible to comment on this more fully.

The more extensively excavated site at Rams Hill is perhaps a more useful parallel for the White Horse Hill evidence. Early excavations uncovered two adult skeletons buried alongside each other in the ditch of a rectangular enclosure abutting the eastern edge of the early Iron Age hillfort enclosure, accompanied by nine Romano-British coins (Piggott and Piggott 1940). Another unaccompanied inhumation but possibly of the same date was found in the southern ditch of the same enclosure. The fills of the rectangular enclosure ditch contained some quantity of late Iron Age and early Romano-British pottery. This might suggest that it was an earlier feature which had been partially re-excavated before these inhumations were inserted, but Bradley and Ellison (1975, 71) believe that a simpler interpretation would be that the ditch had been cut through an earlier lynchet. Though the site was extensively plough damaged several such lynchets were found across the site containing similar material during the later excavations, suggesting that the site had been subject to cultivation during the end of the Iron Age and Romano-British period, prior to the creation of the rectangular enclosure.

The rectangular enclosure was not investigated further by Bradley and Ellison (1975, 71 and 136–7), but finds from the top of one of these lynchets near to the southern entrance of the late Bronze Age enclosure may be crucial to its interpretation. These included 18 late 3rd- and 4th-century coins, a 4th-century copper alloy bracelet and part of a chalk figurine. These coins were somewhat earlier than the early 5th-century coins that accompanied the inhumations in the rectangular enclosure ditch, but both groups may relate to the function of the site. Very few other features or pottery of this date were found despite the relatively extensive proportion of the hilltop which has now been excavated, so it is suggested by Bradley and Ellison (1975, 71) that the rectangular enclosure may be the *temenos* of a late Roman hilltop shrine. Only further excavation could resolve this question, but this mix of cultivation and religious and funerary activity would be in keeping with the evidence from White Horse Hill. Evidence of all these activities, together with some domestic activity, was found side by side in a comparatively small area, as it may have been at Alfred's Castle. The excavators suggest that the large, stone built structure with multiple rooms may have combined elements of both the sacred and profane, being hard to categorise as either a temple/shrine or a villa (Gosden and Lock 1999).

Recent excavations at Segsbury Camp show a marked contrast with very little evidence for Romano-British activity. A section through the southern corner of the rampart where the modern road passes through could have been breached at sometime during the early Romano-British period although the evidence is slight (Lock and Gosden 1998). No Roman pottery or other artefacts were recovered from the interior trenches during these excavations presenting a very different situation to Uffington, although coins of Tetricus and Maximilian had previously been recovered from the surface (C Gosden and G Lock, pers. comm.).

Overall, the Romano-British evidence for the area suggests considerable agricultural intensification both on the Downs and in the Vale with the establishment of a network of villas and increased areas of field systems. The Downs and Vale were tightly integrated through social and economic links with communication routes expanded by the establishment of roads and the continuation of the Ridgeway. The spiritual life of the inhabitants was also well served with a possible shrine/temple at Rams Hill and a religious complex at Frilford in the Vale. Appreciation of the past and connections with it were maintained by various

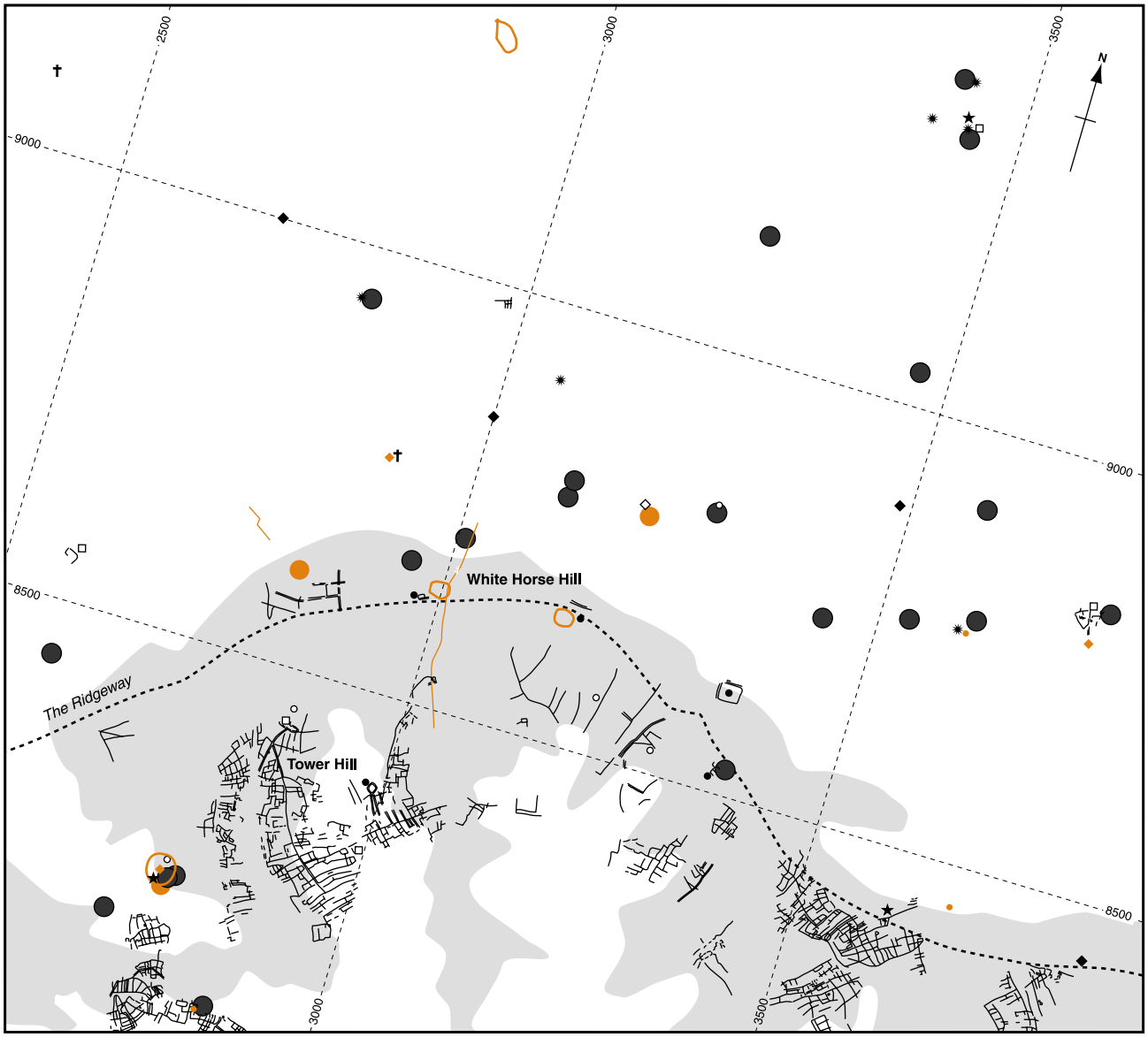

Figure 14.6 Landscape around White Horse Hill: sites and artefacts of the Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon periods.

activities on White Horse Hill where the barrows and hillfort were supporting elements to the Horse which was a unique ancient monument already a thousand years old. The importance of the Horse, and consequently the whole hilltop, is shown by the comparison with Segsbury hillfort which is only 12 km away and yet virtually ignored during the Romano-British period.

The Anglo-Saxon and medieval periods

Historically the White Horse has been linked to this period and especially to King Alfred. The use of the Hill during this period left little trace other than the insertion of a few earlier Anglo-Saxon burials into one of the barrows and possibly into Dragon Hill. However, this general lack of evidence could be interpreted as respect for an ancestral or sacred place perhaps within a landscape that was largely used for pasture. However, it also forms part of a broader pattern which sees a shift of activity from the downland to the Vale between the Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon periods.

The early Anglo-Saxon archaeology of the region has been considered (Evison 1981), and it has been noted the Upper Thames had been densely settled with pagan Anglo-Saxons arriving in the 5th century. The Icknield Way acted as a trade route, and possibly as an invasion route with the Thames acting as a boundary, with ethnic Saxons concentrated to the north of the Thames while Franks from northern Gaul and peoples from west of the Rhine were concentrated south of the Thames (ibid.). Hawkes elaborated this view, identifying Dorchester-on-Thames as the centre of a petty kingdom which emerged during the early 5th century, while others were founded at Blewburton Hill and East Shefford. However, this area of the Downs and the Vale, being somewhat removed from the centre of power at Dorchester, is likely to have been part of the agricultural hinterland. The quantity and quality of grave goods from the cemetery at Watchfield, near to Uffington, in particular indicate a wealthy community.

Evidence of Anglo-Saxon activity in this area is relatively sparse and comes chiefly from human remains, chance finds, later Anglo-Saxon charters and folklore (Fig. 14.6). Few monuments of the Anglo-Saxon period are known in the area and excavation of Anglo-Saxon features has not been extensive. As a result there is little evidence for the development of the landscape during this period. There was limited evidence from the ditch of Uffington Castle for a relaxation of grazing which could have been Anglo-Saxon in date. However, cultivation seems to have continued in the Manger.

There are three large groups of human remains from this area of the Downs. Mid 5th- to late 6th-century cemeteries are known at Manor Farm, East Shefford (Meaney 1964, 50), and in the bank of the Iron Age hillfort at Blewburton Hill (Dickinson 1976, 45–8). A 6th- to 7th-century cemetery occurs at Lambourn (Richards 1978, 51). Similarly, in the Vale below White Horse Hill, an Anglo-Saxon cemetery was discovered during the construction of the Shrivenham bypass to the north-east of Watchfield (Scull 1990; SAM 20602) and the remains of the Roman villa at Woolstone (C Gosden and G Lock, pers. comm.) were also used for inhumation burials during the Anglo-Saxon period (Peake 1931, 119–249). The grave goods recovered from the former site suggest that it dates from the 5th to 6th centuries and Dickinson (1976, 234) suggests the latter cemetery may be of 7th-century date.

Earlier monuments, particularly barrows or sites the Anglo-Saxons believed to be barrows, such as Dragon Hill, were frequently reused as burial sites during this period. The round barrow on White Horse Hill is only one example, but others are known in the wider area. The most spectacular example on the Downs is the burial in the Lowbury barrow (Williams 1998), with a further example provided by a burial dug into one of the barrows at Seven Barrow Down above Lambourn (Meaney 1964, 53 and 48) and an inhumation in a cist set into the southern rampart of Segsbury Camp may also date from the Anglo-Saxon period (Dickinson 1976, 198).

The settlements for which these sites were burial grounds have not been located, but material evidence of Anglo-Saxon date has been recovered from several sites in the area, probably relating to settlement. Early Anglo-Saxon stamp-decorated pottery was found on the northern edge of Lambourn (Astill 1978, 37) and other Anglo-Saxon pottery was recovered around Alfred's Castle (C Gosden and G Lock, pers. comm.) on the Downs. Stuart Piggott found a large base of black 6th century AD pottery (C Gosden and G Lock, pers. comm.) in the top of a pit containing Iron Age remains in 1926 in a chalk pit near to Hardwell Camp on the scarp. In the Vale, a scatter of Anglo-Saxon finds was discovered in the 19th century at Ashdown (MacGregor and Bolick 1993, 15) and Anglo-Saxon sherds have been recovered from the surface in Fawler Copse in Kingston Lisle further east. Finds of Roman date were also found from this last site, so there may have been continued activity in this area from that period. Such continuity of sites from the Roman to Anglo-Saxon periods is known in other parts of the Vale, for example at the Shrivenham Road site investigated by Thames Valley Archaeological Services (TVAS 1993) where a Romano-British farmstead appears to have continued in use into the early Anglo-Saxon period at least (C Gosden and G Lock, pers. comm.).

If these inhumations and pottery spreads can be accepted as indicators of the settlement, it may be possible to suggest that there was a shift in the settlement pattern during this period which was to become more marked during medieval times. This was towards a concentration in the lower less exposed areas, along the edge of the Vale and the lower slopes of the Downs. The pattern of this settlement is thought to have been fairly scattered and shifting, not beginning to stabilise until late in

the period. Later Anglo-Saxon evidence from the area suggests that a few more permanent settlements began to be established in this area. Minster churches were built at Shrivenham, Wantage and Great Faringdon.

The other parts of the area were abandoned for settlement but used intensively for other activities. Their importance is clear from the detailed attention given to these areas in the boundary clauses of the charters. The boundary clauses in the Anglo-Saxon charters examined by Hooke (1987) abound in references to arable cultivation. Soils in the area of the chalk escarpment are generally light and fertile and probably continued to be used for arable crops as they had been during the Roman period. The comparative lack of Anglo-Saxon material from the field lynchets excavated at Tower Hill and in other parts of the Downs may have been due, in part, to a discontinuation of manuring, as a means of disposing of rubbish rather than an abandonment of cultivation of these fields. There are some suggestions that the highest parts of the Downs around White Horse Hill were not cultivated, while lower down in the clay soils of the Vale much of the area appears to have been undrained marshland (Hooke 1987, 139).

Similarly there has been little excavation of medieval sites in the area and documentary sources form much of the evidence for this period. Many of the emergent trends in the Anglo-Saxon use of this area, continued into the medieval period. This rural area continued to prosper. The marshy area in the clay soils of the Vale was drained and improved, while areas of the Downs continued to be cultivated. The few finds of 11th–13th-century date recovered by excavation from Liddington Castle and the single sherd of Saxo-Norman/early medieval pottery from White Horse Hill are likely to have resulted from agricultural or pastoral use of the Hill (Hirst and Rahtz 1996, 54). The land divisions set out in the earlier charters remained substantially the same, becoming the feudal estates and ecclesiastical parishes of the medieval period.

During this period the Horse and the other features on White Horse Hill survived, although the interior of the hillfort was taken into cultivation, and remains of the ridge and furrow from this period can still be seen. Plate 14.1 shows the snow-covered area of Uffington Hill in 1995, with a good view of the Manger beyond the hillfort. At this time, there seems to have been no attempt to alter the physical image of the Horse, although the site was attached to the legend of St George and the Dragon through folklore (Woolner 1965). The same legend also has links with the naming of the adjacent long barrow site Wayland's Smithy. The common basis for such heroic stories is *a Hero, his horse, a Dragon and a Smith* (ibid., 36). Through such acts of appropriation pagan sites within the

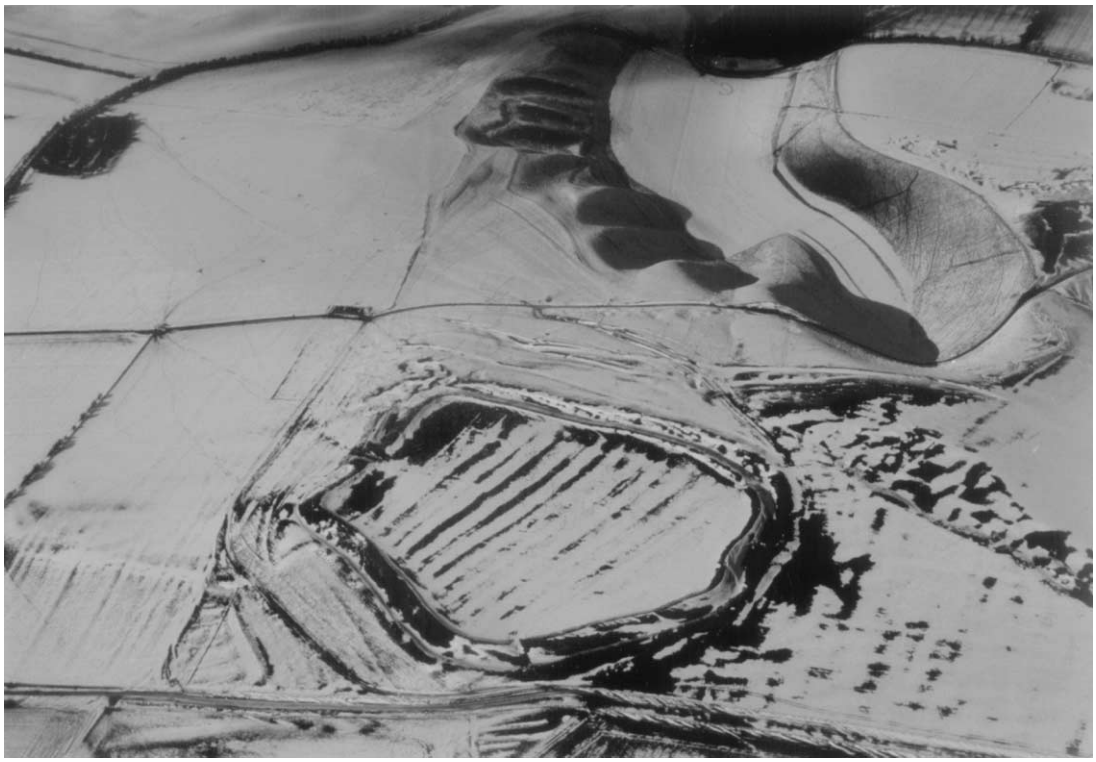

Plate 14.1 Aerial view of Uffington Hill in 1995, looking north towards the Manger, and showing the remains of medieval ridge and furrow within the hillfort (Crown copyright).

landscape were made acceptable to the Christian Church. It is interesting, however, that smithing and the horse link many of the sites discussed in this volume.

White Horse Hill and the surrounding Berkshire Downs obviously have a complex history of occupation and use from at least the Neolithic onwards. The evidence takes on a new shape at the end of the middle Bronze Age when enclosures, linear ditches, field systems, hillforts and the Horse itself were progressively imposed upon the earlier landscape. Much investigation of the area as a whole is required to confirm, add to and to contradict some of the patterns which have been detected here. It is reasonably certain, however, that since the Neolithic period White Horse Hill was a place of special significance, given even greater power by the carving of the Horse itself.

EPILOGUE

The White Horse forever! As discussed elsewhere in this volume (Finn, Appendix 6) the White Horse is a feature of immense importance and pride to local people and a source of wonderment and awe for visitors from afar. Anyone who has visited the site will know that the unique combination of the Horse, the hillfort, the topographic undulations of the Manger and Dragon Hill together with the views over the rolling Downs to the south and the Vale to the north make this a very special place. The essence of this place lies not only in its connections with the past, but in links which are made at such a basic level that they do not require archaeological knowledge merely for a person to be there.

The unusual qualities of the hilltop have attracted some people to scatter the ashes of their loved ones at this place, but the Hill also attracts other, more unconventional, modern activities associated with the connections individuals make between the site and the past. This includes the burial of the copy of *Demonology and Witchcraft* found during the 1993 excavations buried in the topsoil near the barrows (Plate 4.5). It seems very likely that this book was buried during some recent revivals of interest in the more mystical aspects of the White Horse and the surrounding area.

Some people believe the Horse possesses mystical properties, especially the eye, which is seen as the focus of the figure and particularly powerful. As well as simply wishing or placing simple offerings of flowers on the eye of the Horse for luck, as mentioned in Appendix 6, crystals are placed on the eye to be recharged by those who believe in their power. More formal rituals are also inspired by the Horse, such as that witnessed by the excavators while working on the site in 1990 (Plate 14.2). This involved the group joining hands to circle a child standing on the eye of the figure to the beating of a drum. In other years people were seen to dance on

Plate 14.2 Visitors to White Horse Hill in 1993, beating a drum and enacting rituals around the eye of the White Horse (Copyright: David Miles).

the Horse and to spin themselves around upon the Horse's eye. Whether such modern rituals are in anyway connected to the original purpose of the figure or not, can never be ascertained, but they do reflect the continuing importance of the monument in people's minds in the 21st century over three millennia after its initial construction. There were also the activities of modern archaeologists on the hilltop, which now form part of the site's history. Whilst the excavations were going on the reaction of visitors to and users of the site varied from indifferent, to generally inquisitive and in at least one case positively hostile.

The Horse still acts as a unifying symbol for the local community, both informally as a regularly occurring icon and formally with the District Council being named after it. Many local businesses, including petrol stations and turf suppliers, use the familiar flowing shape as a logo. It has appeared on television, in cinema, on the radio, in poetry (not least that by Sir John Betjeman who lived locally) and in print many times. The account for children by Rosemary Sutcliffe in *Sun Horse, Moon Horse* is particularly evocative and offers a plausible explanation of how and why the Horse was constructed.

Modern scouring of the Horse is now the responsibility of the National Trust although the occasion is remembered by the annual White Horse Show, which takes place every summer in the fields below. In June 2000 as a Lottery-funded Millennium event the villagers of Uffington reconstructed the last Pastime with tents and stalls within the hillfort, games and a scouring of the Horse. Perhaps the most powerful recent display of feeling demonstrating the importance of the Horse to local people took place in the mid 1970s when the county boundary alterations 'moved' it from Berkshire to Oxfordshire. There was great local concern that the Horse and the village of Uffington would end up in different counties, a situation that threatened the connections between the two in ways other than just the physical:

Uffington for ever!

In days of old, our forbears bold,
Carved the Horse on White Horse Hill,
And local men, long years since then,
Have kept it gleaming still;
Long may it shine, a potent sign,
Of Uffington's endeavour,
To prove that Horse and Hill combine,
With Uffington for ever!

Chorus:

The old White Horse, we'll keep it still,
For bonds that naught can sever –
Combine to bind the Horse and Hill,
With Uffington for ever!

Though passed to Oxford by decree,
Berkshire claims the Horse again,
Though they are quite resigned that we,
In exile may remain.
They'll part us not! We'll spoil their plot!
And scorn their counsels clever –
And keep that dear and sacred spot,
In Uffington, for ever!

J S Harwood 1984