

Note on Accompanied Site Inspection 21 May 2019

TR010025

Barry Garwood

Point A. We met at Amesbury car park at 9.30 for briefings and introductions prior to a 10 am start.

Point B. Hill Farm Cottages

The main point of this visit seemed to be that it was a convenient point to produce photo-montages of the Western Portal and Approach that were hardly visible from here.

Point C. AONB off Berwick Down

We had panoramic views showing fast moving traffic at high levels where the 70 mph speed limit applies.

Point D. Cherry Lodge

This gave us a view of productive farmland and nature reserve that would be largely obliterated by the dumping of tunnel excavation material, creating raised embankments for the proposed Winterbourne Stoke bypass, with the remaining material to be dumped on the surrounding land, creating a barren Chalk landscape that would take many years to even begin to recover any value to wildlife and nature.

Point E. Foredown House

Concern was expressed by the landowners about the new road bisecting the farm and taking land from it.

Point F. A360 and Longbarrow Cross Roads Roundabout

This was a drive by only with no stopping.

Point G. Stonehenge Visitor Centre

It was a hot day and there was no shade in the car park. The admission charge of between £19 and £23.30 for adults gave access to an exhibition, a bus to the stone circle and allowed visitors to go inside the barbed wire fence around Stonehenge, but not to go up to the monument.

Point H. Byway 12

This route is used by visitors not wanting the Heritage Industry experience, including those visiting for spiritual reasons and disabled visitors who may not be able to use the bus, as well as people with pets who are unable to leave them in vehicles at the visitor centre.

The route is also used by trail riders, 4x4 drivers and agricultural traffic. There seemed to be no real conflict between the various user groups at the time of visiting.

Attention was drawn to the location of the Mesolithic Post Holes and Tree Throw that were discovered during the construction of the old visitor centre car park.

The presence of Larkhill army camp and associated development overlooking the site was also noted.

Point I. Winterbourne Stoke Barrow Group

This is the best and most diverse barrow group in the country and probably anywhere in Europe.

The Western Tunnel Portal and approach will seriously impede on the setting of this unique asset, detracting from the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the World Heritage Site (WHS).

The constructional compound to the west would be likely to destroy the archaeology rich area and the adjoining slurry treatment plant for tunnel excavation material would surely destroy any archaeological evidence.

It was noted that the Longbarrow Cross Roads is a place of convergence of the line of barrows, the historic routes of the A303 and A360. There is also an historic ditch system that aligns with it to the south-east.

This really does not seem the right place.

Points J and K. Byway 11 and Normanton Down

Not visited, but will be visited at a later date.

Point L. Countess Farm

Concern was expressed about any changes to groundwater level, which is very close to the surface here.

There are also two splendid listed barns that will be very close to the proposed Countess flyover.

Point M. Coneybury King Barrow

There were panoramic views over the Stonehenge landscape, with little intrusion from the A303. Many important barrow groups were visible.

It was noted that a second barrow adjacent is no longer visible, except with geophysics.

As we returned I questioned whether Larkhill had been chosen as home to the Royal Artillery because there were so many mounds as handy targets. The consensus seemed to be that there had probably been many more barrows in the past.

Smoke from military firing was visible on the horizon to the north-west.

Older maps certainly seem to show more barrows and mounds than modern ones. Both farming and military activity could be reasons for this.

Point N. Amesbury Abbey

We walked through the grounds and an adjoining property that would be seriously overlooked by vehicles on the proposed Countess flyover.

We stopped to look at the old bridge over the Avon between Countess and Amesbury. A Highways England representative considered it to be probably of little historic value

We walked to Blick Mead Mesolithic site, adjacent to the A303. Highways England appeared to have no clue about the new hydrology monitor, installed without the knowledge of Amesbury Abbey, as a representative immediately started taking pictures and making phone calls when he was shown it.

We walked up onto the ramparts of Vespasian's Camp. The best preserved section of the earthworks, said to date from 2500 years ago, will look down on and be overlooked by the Eastern Tunnel Portal, to the point that headlights will be shining virtually straight at it as vehicles emerge from the tunnel. This would be especially noticeable in winter, with little leaf cover on the surrounding trees.

We then walked to Amesbury Abbey Sacred Warm Springs. The water from the springs is said to flow at a constant 11-14 C year round.

As well as providing a water supply for people at the end of the Ice Age, it would have attracted wild animals. Abundant flint is to be seen around the grounds, which would have provided tools to butcher the meat.

The availability of water and food here led to early occupation of the area. It is the cradle of our civilisation and a very special place.