

Submission to the A303 Consultation

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This submission is in response to the Secretary of State for Transport's request of 16th July 2020 for comments relating to the discovery of a circle of Neolithic Pits around Durrington Walls by the Stonehenge Hidden Landscapes Project.

I carried out an analysis of the pit locations from the point of view of someone walking the line of the Stonehenge Avenue from the River Avon at West Amesbury Henge towards King Barrow Ridge.

This was performed in Google Earth by plotting the pit locations, placing markers at these sites (and other key features) and then viewing the landscape from ground level.



The line of the Avenue (the blue lines in the image above) was taken from the Stonehenge Riverside Project's Google Earth .kml file "Seeing Beneath Stonehenge", and the location of the Eastern Portal from the A303 Project Documentation.

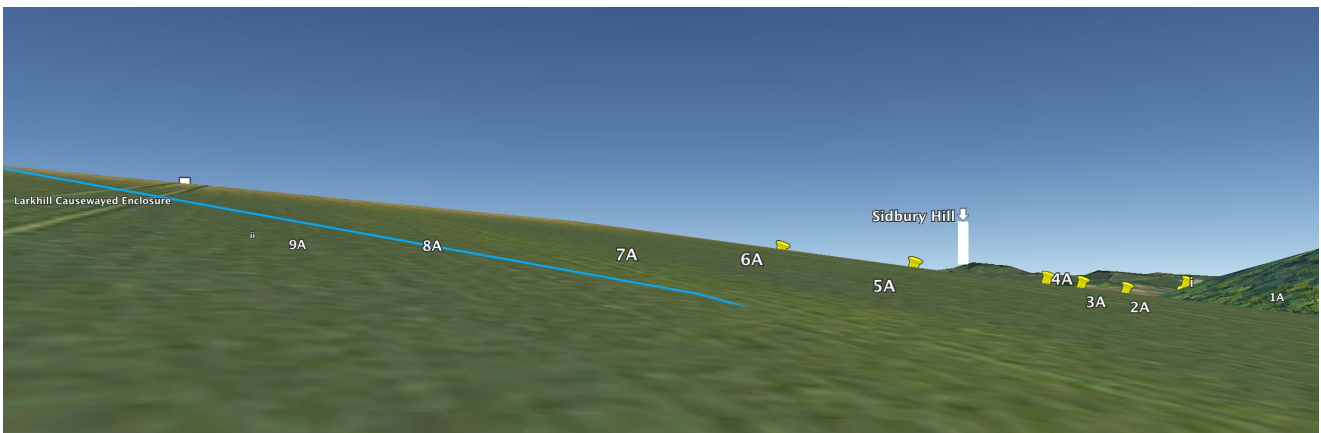
Analysis

The arc of pits beginning at 1A and working clockwise around to iii and iv bracket, or frame, a section of the horizon from Larkhill Causewayed Enclosure via Sidbury Hill to the ridgeline immediately north of Beacon Hill.

The features that are framed all had a crucial significance to the people of the Neolithic and Bronze Age, which suggests that there may have been an intent to memorialise the view for those walking along the Avenue.

The first glimpse of the horizon east of the Avon comes as the walker approaches a minor rise along the Avenue from West Amesbury Henge. Framed by the near horizon and by Vespasian's Camp/Blick Mead, Sidbury Hill appears in view.

Note that because of the way Google Earth operates, pit and other marker location labels (the white text) that are below the horizon in these images are still displayed. Also note that the terrain does not show all upstanding features (e.g. barrow mounds, trees, etc).



Sidbury Hill lies exactly on the Stonehenge summer solstice alignment from the stone circle, and appears to have been important as a source of a particular kind of flint associated with dozens of neolithic pits and a flint working industry discovered during the Army Rebasing Housing Development at Bulford.

Those pits contained an odd assortment of apparently deliberately deposited artefacts, and next to them was an unusual "double henge". Opposite the housing development is the Bulford Stone - a natural sarsen boulder which was erected next to where it originally formed on top of the chalk, and beside it is a prehistoric grave which contained significant and unique grave goods.

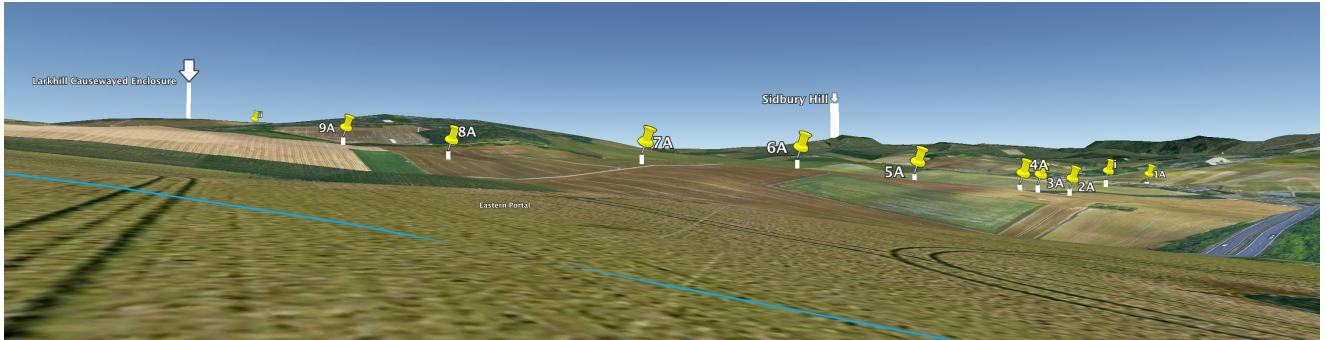
Phil Harding (recognised as the leading expert on prehistoric flint working) regards the Bulford pits and double henge discovery as one of the most significant for decades.

Sidbury Hill seems to have been of pre-eminent importance and focus to these neolithic people, and also to those who came later because three long Bronze Age linear ditches converge at Sidbury Hill - one from the west, one from the north and one from the east.

As the walk continues, more of the horizon reveals itself. Sidbury Hill occupies a central position in the frame. The ridgeline north of Beacon Hill marks the right hand edge, and Larkhill Causewayed

Enclosure the left hand edge

Larkhill's enclosure pre-dated the Durrington Walls pits by almost 1000 years yet it is included in their circuit. Later Beaker period inhumations at the enclosure's entrance, together with a post-hole alignment pointing off towards Barrow Clump and Sidbury Hill suggest strongly that this site retained its significance for countless generations



"Monuments may have formalised or commemorated movements and gatherings of different scale, though the emphasis on localised patterns of visual perception perhaps relates to movements around the landscape at a community scale."

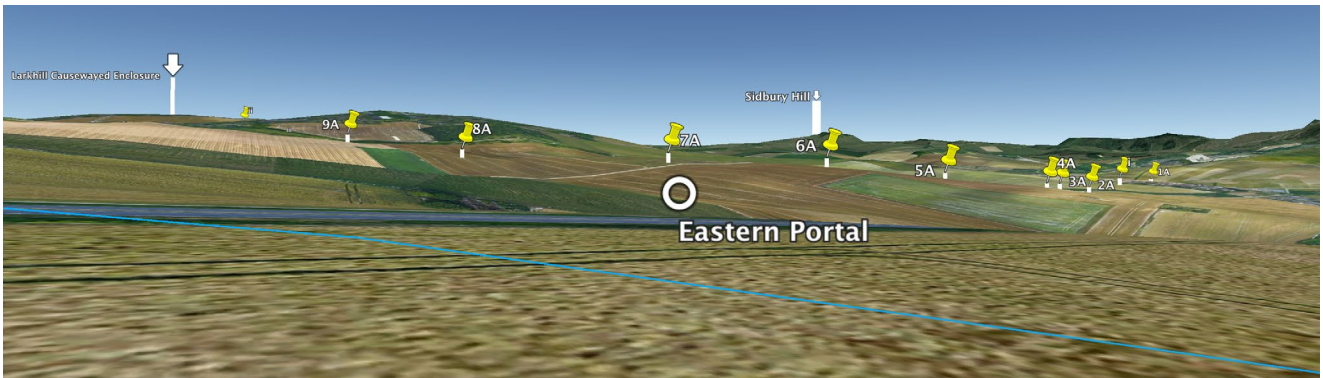
From <https://intarch.ac.uk/journal/issue47/7/5-6.html> (discussing the Larkhill and Robin Hood's Ball Causewayed Enclosures)

The ridge leading to Beacon Hill has been cited as a possible target for the alignment of the Stonehenge Greater Cursus (dated to c.3600 BCE). Although the Cursus earthwork monument runs roughly west-east, it is not accurately aligned on the equinox sunrise and set. Instead, it seems to be drawing attention to the eastern horizon, particularly the area immediately north of the summit of Beacon Hill.

This is the section of the horizon at the right hand edge of the pit circle frame.

In alignment with and east of the Cursus, between the Cursus and the River Avon, lies the Cuckoo Stone near to Durrington Walls itself. This stone is another natural sarsen boulder which was erected next to where it formed. It seems to have retained its importance down to Romano-British times as the discovery of the square Roman "wayside temple" right next to it indicates.

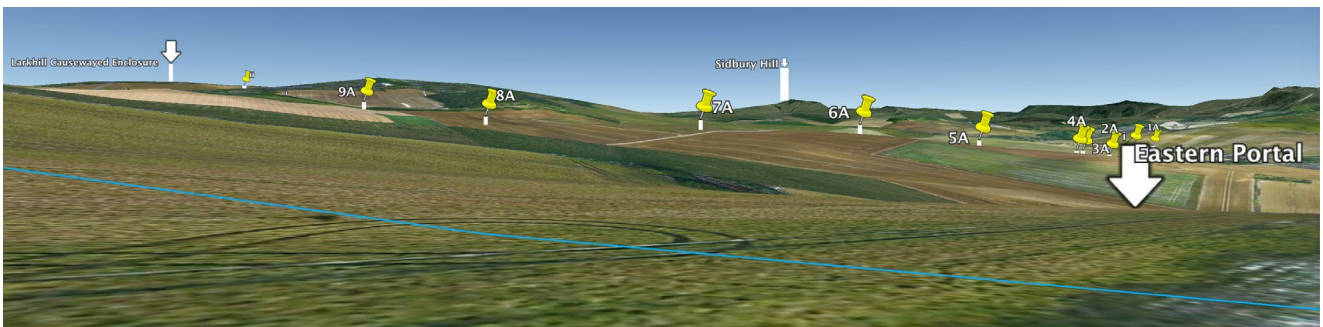
As the walker approaches the A303, the full sweep of the framed horizon becomes clear.



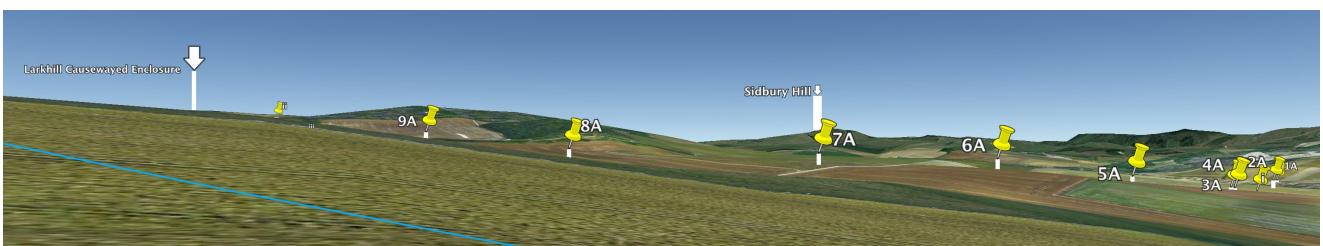
A remarkable aspect of this view is that the use of a circle (arc) of pits to form the frame serves to limit the effect of parallax in altering which section of horizon is encompassed.

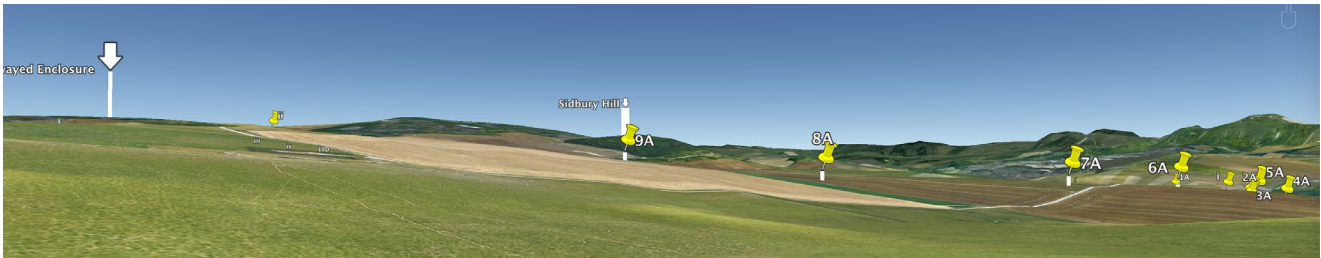
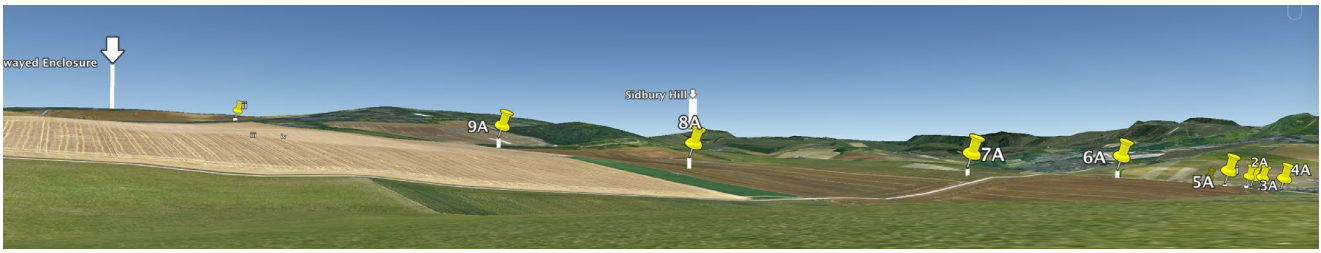
The pit locations nearest the walker are widely spaced apart (9A, 8A, 7A, 6A, 5A in the above) while those at the left and right edges appear closely in line.

As the walker continues along the Avenue the pit locations nearest to them drift rightwards across the field of view but the left and right edges are preserved.



Beyond the A303 the view remains consistent, with Sidbury Hill falling into alignment with pits 7A, 8A and 9A in turn.





Once the walker reaches King Barrow Ridge, their focus of attention switches from what has gone “before” - the significant elements of the landscape around and to the east of the Avon - to what is to come “after” - the landscape and horizon to the west, including Stonehenge.

The final view of the framed eastern horizon retains its characteristics - the left hand edge of Larkhill Causewayed Enclosure, the central position of Sidbury Hill and the right hand edge of Beacon Hill’s ridgeline.



Discussion

Over the past 40 years there has been a growing realisation amongst archaeologists and others that ancient people did not think in terms of isolated monuments, but rather that the whole landscape was significant.

Certain places, views, walks and features acquired and retained a “specialness” that was fundamental to their sense of belonging. Whether commemorated in a deliberately planned series of activities to mark out a specific aspect, or through a gradual enhancement of one spot or another, the end result is an integrated whole.

The view that is consistently and cleverly framed for walkers along the Avenue indicates an outstanding aesthetic sense and a desire to undertake "landscape engineering" on an epic scale. It shows an interconnectedness not only in space but also through immense spans of time, reinforcing a people's relationship with the land and their past.

The route of the Avenue has been a subject of controversy for a long time. It's not the easiest stone-transport route from the Avon to Stonehenge, but seems instead to have been designed (at the depths of the valley at Stonehenge Bottom) to induce a sense of expectation prior to the final approach along the solstice axis to Stonehenge. Indeed, at that final turn (the "Elbow"), Stonehenge disappears from view entirely, only re-emerging as you climb the slope towards the setting winter sun in a grand final “reveal”.

The part of the Avenue route leading from the Avon to King Barrow Ridge now seems to me to have its own crucial significance - keeping in clear view all the parts of the eastern horizon that have a meaning to those undertaking the journey.

Perhaps, given the idea that the Avenue was part of a ritualised movement from life to death from Durrington Walls to Stonehenge, this sharp focus on a particular sweep of the eastern horizon served as an act of remembrance of all those who have gone before.

And those pits don't even have to be visible for that to happen - just an understanding that they are there and that they are positioned to induce this feeling would be enough.

The proposed location for the Eastern Portal and the dual carriageway approach to it, along with embankment cuttings and ancillary fencing, will destroy this vista.

It will sever, both metaphorically and actually, the links between peoples and this landscape that have persisted for at least 10,000 years.

I urge the Secretary of State to cancel this project.