



A Bronze Age Funeral at Bincombe Down © Jane Brayne

South Dorset Ridgeway

Prehistoric monuments are visible across much of Dorset, but across the South Dorset Ridgeway their sheer number and scale is amazing. To many people these ancient earthworks are simply 'lumps and bumps' in the ground. Over time many have been eroded by the plough and the ever constant need to farm the land.

We still know relatively little about the people who built these monuments. What we do know comes partly from the interest and excavations of the antiquarians of the 18th and 19th centuries. By today's standards their excavation methods were crude and

as a result much valuable information has been lost. Today's methods are far more sensitive and thorough. In fact new research involving aerial photography and geophysical surveys has identified many more sites that are no longer visible to the casual observer.



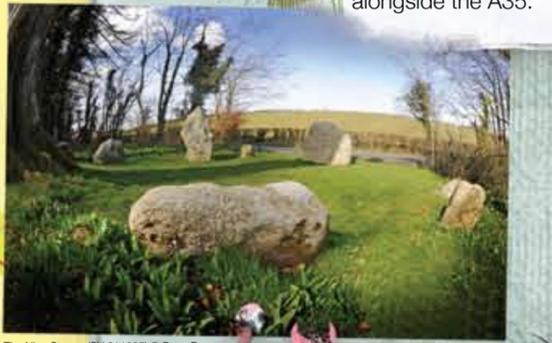
Barrows at Bincombe Down © G&S Snelgrove



The Grey Mare and her Colts (SY 584870)

Chambered Long Barrows

Long barrows are the monuments most closely associated with the Neolithic Period and there are several examples along the Ridgeway. They are elongated earth and stone mounds and contained a burial chamber. The chamber was made of wood or stone and would have contained several burials.



The Nine Stones (SY 611905) © Dave Penman

Stone Circles

There are three surviving stone circles along the Ridgeway and the Nine Stones near Winterbourne Abbas is perhaps the most famous. Constructed about 4000 years ago the stones were probably brought from The Valley of the Stones, a natural deposit of sarsens close by. You can now visit the circle by way of a footpath from a restaurant alongside the A35.

Hell Stone (SY 606867)

Another chambered long barrow but this example was heavily restored in the 19th century. As a result the stone monument takes on a strange appearance.

Round Barrows

Around 4,000 years ago people began to bury their dead in individual burials. Long barrows ceased to be used and the now familiar round barrows began to appear all along the chalky ridge. These barrows were built over a thousand year period (2600BC to 1600BC) and often include pottery and other objects buried alongside the dead. Bronkham Hill (SY 623872) is an example of a Barrow Cemetery where there are many barrows constructed over a long period of time.

Hardy Monument (SY 613876)

This distinctive landmark was erected in 1844 to commemorate the life of Admiral Sir Thomas Masterman Hardy, captain of HMS Victory at the Battle of Trafalgar who grew up below the Ridgeway.



Clandon Barrow (SY 656890)

Clandon Barrow near Martinstown is one of the area's great Bronze Age barrows. Recent research has shown that the barrow was used more than once with a later burial placed on top of an earlier one. Excavations in the 19th century discovered some unique artefacts including this gold lozenge, which must have only encouraged the digging into of other barrows in the area. The finds can now be viewed at the Dorset County Museum in Dorchester.

