



## Living Amongst the Sarsens



We have some good news to announce, in fact it's brilliant news.

We have been awarded funding by Dorset National Landscape (Farming in Protected Landscapes) in order to do a sarsen survey in the Valley of Stones. Not only is that great news but it has also enabled us to unlock a much bigger grant.

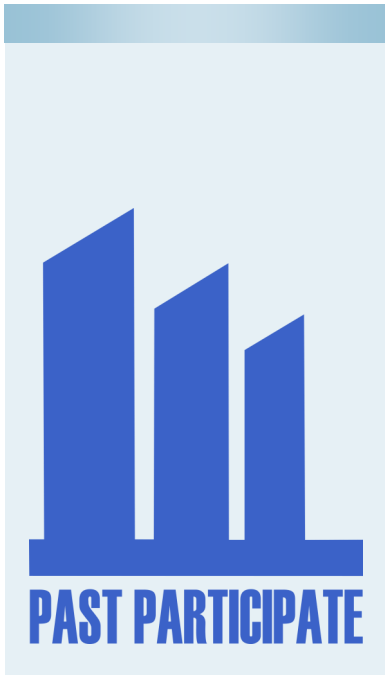
We did it!! We're thrilled to announce that The National Lottery Heritage Fund has awarded us £249,344 to run a programme of events for the next four years. We have called this project *Living Amongst the Sarsens*. This £275,844 project is 90% funded by the NLHF with additional support from FiPL, and we will be fundraising for the shortfall through other grants, sponsorship, and activities.

Thanks to National Lottery players, we will be able to learn more about the archaeology of the Valley of Stones and to help you and others learn about it too. We will provide a suite of activities from lectures and guided walks, through to excavation and other field-based research. We will be engaging an artist and writer to encourage creative interaction with the landscape, and commissioning new, permanent interpretation panels and a digital map.

Thank you so much to everyone who provided feedback, wrote references, filled in our surveys and forms. We hope that this project is a true reflection of everyone's preferences and that you will all get involved in whatever way suits you best. We are also very grateful to Natural England, who have partnered with us on this project and who manage the Valley of Stones, to Gorwell Farm who have provided us with accommodation and access to their land, Richard and Christine Smith at LKR farms where we have been excavating since 2018, EuCan who contributed towards the application, and all the rest of our loyal participants. We hope to see you soon.

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## The Valley of Stones in the present

The Valley of Stones is located south of the A35, between Littlebredy and Portesham. It is a National Nature Reserve managed by Natural England, who have partnered with us on this project.

The Valley of Stones is named after the sarsen stones, which form a train along the dry valley. These sarsens probably formed around 55 million years ago when sands and gravels deposited by a large river channel, the Poole Formation of the Bracklesham Group, were cemented by a silica-rich solution. Gravity

gradually pulled these boulders off the hilltops during sludgy periglacial episodes that were part of the sequence of ice ages that have taken place over the last 2 to 3 million years.

These stones sit within unimproved chalk grassland, which is host to rare flowers, butterflies and lichens that like the stones! The nature reserve is used for grazing and footpaths pass through the site. A guide to access can be found here:

[https://dorset-nl.org.uk/location/valley\\_of\\_stones/](https://dorset-nl.org.uk/location/valley_of_stones/)

*“As first-time amateurs in our 70s we found the whole experience to be both entertaining and educative, learning so much more about the local area from experts in the field”*

### Sponsor a Sarsen

Thank you to everyone who has donated to our ‘Sponsor a Sarsen’ appeal. We still need to raise some additional match funding and are welcoming donations (suggested amount £25).

In return for Sponsoring a Sarsen we will name a sarsen stone after you in our survey results.

You can either donate via the website or straight into our account– email me for the details.

[www.pastparticipate.co.uk](http://www.pastparticipate.co.uk)

## The Valley of Stones in the past

The earliest archaeological feature that has been identified in the Valley of Stones is a polissoir. This dates to the Neolithic time period and would have been used for polishing stone axe heads. Stone axes were an important tool during this time period, when significant swathes of the landscape were being cleared of trees.

The Valley is crisscrossed with evidence of farming from later prehistory until today. The most obvious features are the field systems. These appear as banks and ridges running across the valley in a regular pattern. They vary in scale and many probably date to the late Bronze Age or Iron Age, but some may have been constructed or altered in more recent times. There is also evidence of structures in the Valley of Stones and these vary in date and purpose. For example the Crow Hill enclosure has previously been interpreted as being Roman but Historic England have made it a focus of their recent survey work and think it might be a much later medieval farmstead.

Despite its peaceful and natural appearance the Valley of Stones has also been used for more industrial purposes- stone extraction is an obvious one and some of the sarsen stones show evidence of being split or worked. The south-east corner of the nature reserve also contains the remains of a brickworks from around 200 years ago.



Listening to Jim Rylatt talk about the polissoir © Past Participate CIC

## What we hope to achieve

Our main objective for this project is to include more people in learning about the archaeology of South Dorset. We want you to learn with us, and for that knowledge to be spread far and wide.

We hope to learn more about the archaeological features that have already been identified in the Valley of Stones and to see what else we can discover. How was this place used in the past? Why was it special then, how has it changed over time? We also hope that you will learn about the archaeological process too. How do we get to the answers we get, why do we use particular methods, why do we ask specific questions.

We are also not abandoning our Tenants Hill research (or our other projects), this autumn we will be returning to 'our' round house, but more about that in the next newsletter!



Surveying an enclosure in the Valley of Stones © Rebecca Pullen/ Historic England

## Everyone Welcome

One of our priorities for this project is to welcome new people into our community.

We will be putting on a whole suite of activities, at different times of the week, of different durations and requiring different amounts of time. Some things will be online, some indoors, some outdoors. Some more physical, some less so.

No previous experience is required, although we do greatly enjoy all the additional, non-archaeological skills our participants bring with them. If you are not already on our mailing list please get in touch [Hayley@pastparticipate.co.uk](mailto:Hayley@pastparticipate.co.uk) but also keep any eye on the website

[www.pastparticipate.co.uk/events](http://www.pastparticipate.co.uk/events)



Sharing discoveries with participants and visitors during excavation

© Past Participate CIC

## Corporate Sponsorship

We need to raise significant match funding as part of the project and have so far had significant success through our Sponsor a Sarsen campaign. We are now also looking for corporate sponsorship. Do you have any connections with a company that would like their logo on our advertising, or would be able to donate in kind resources, perhaps something we could auction or raffle, a space we could use for events or something that would allow us to reduce costs elsewhere (biscuits, toilet roll, warm clothing, and PPE etc).

For more information email [Hayley@pastparticipate.co.uk](mailto:Hayley@pastparticipate.co.uk)

## Upcoming Events. Please book online at [www.pastparticipate.co.uk/](http://www.pastparticipate.co.uk/)

### Living amongst the Sarsens Launch event

Talk from Rebecca Pullen and Katy Whittaker, Historic England.

Historic England are going to tell us about their recent research and Past Participate will tell you about our future plans.

Date: **30th April** Time: **19.30**



© Historic England/ Rebecca Pullen

### Guided Walk in the Valley of Stones

Date: **1st May** and **20th July** Time: **10.00**

This will take about 3 hours. It will include walking on rough hill terrain and some height gain.

### Pilot Sarsen Survey in Valley of Stones

Workshop date **2nd May**

We are trialling a new recording system (because there are so many stones in the Valley of Stones) and therefore we are limiting this initial survey to 10 people who have previously taken part in our sarsen surveys. Everyone will be able to get involved come the autumn once the vegetation has died down and we've ironed out any issues.



© Past Participate CIC

### Geophysical Survey Site TBD

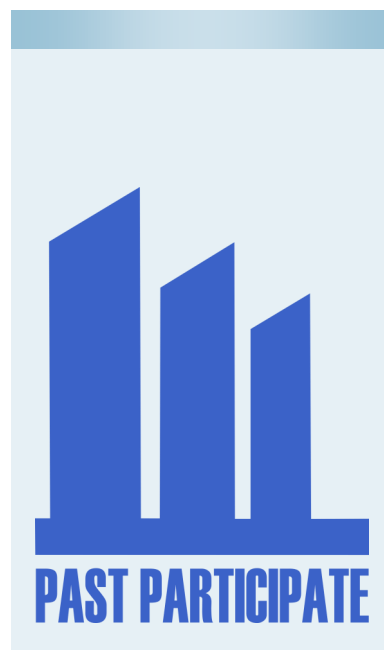
Field dates **14-21st May**

Field survey 18-22nd. This event isn't fully planned yet but please see the website to register interest and available dates.

## Gorwell Farm



Gorwell Farm House © Past Participate CIC



*"I walk regularly in Dorset so information about the landscape does enhance the enjoyment of these expeditions"*

Gorwell Farm is a gorgeous wedding venue but they also let holiday cottages. We highly recommend a peaceful stay in their private valley. We often stay in their cottages to help us reduce our carbon footprint and we have had a some truly glorious evenings sitting enjoying the Dorset countryside. Owls and bats fly around at night and during the day you share the space with birds, bees and insects. House martins nest in the eaves and solitary bees make their homes in the brick walls. For more information visit: [www.gorwellfarm.co.uk/](http://www.gorwellfarm.co.uk/)

Gorwell Farm also contains much of historic interest. The first thing you notice at the top of the drive is the Moot Stone – a large sarsen standing stone that was probably erected in prehistory and now stands on the boundary of three modern parishes; 'moot' is an Anglo-Saxon word used to indicate places where people assembled to debate local issues. The farm is perhaps best known for another prehistoric monument, the Grey Mare and her Colts, an early Neolithic chambered long barrow dating to the first half of 4th millennium BC. It would have dominated the surrounding landscape and it probably retained significance into the early Bronze Age, around 1500 years later, as at least two round barrows are located in the fields to the south.

Part of the current farm house is 17th Century in date but 'Gorewull' was mentioned in a document dated 1285, which records that it was owned by Ralph Wake. The Wake family still held the land in 1349 when a medieval deer park at 'Gorewelle' was first recorded. In the large barn (also C17th), which is now used as a wedding venue, several of the stones are marked with 'witch marks', including a daisy wheel (also known as a hexafoil) and 'Marian' marks. They are thought to have been carved to protect the building and their placement suggests that they have been salvaged from an earlier building!



The Gorwell Barn Daisy Wheel marking © Past Participate CIC

Our self guided walk takes you on public footpaths past Gorwell Farm. Download it from our website: [www.pastparticipate.co.uk/things-to-do](http://www.pastparticipate.co.uk/things-to-do)

## Archaeological videos



Must Farm is an amazing prehistoric pile dwelling settlement site that burnt down in the late Bronze Age (3000 years ago). It had some amazing preservation—textiles, wooden artefacts, and coprolites are just a few of the artefacts that have survived due to waterlogging—which helps us to visualise how the round house on Tenants Hill may have looked. The first of two monographs on the site has just been published and is free to download from The McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research. They have also produced an excellent series of videos that are available on their Facebook page.

[Cambridge Archaeological Unit | Facebook](#)

<https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/collections/5ee06f63-4c21-4ae8-b9f8-01e8ac142f2e>

Dan Snow has presented a new documentary on Stonehenge which might also be of interest. [My5 - Stonehenge: The Discovery with Dan Snow - Season NaN - Episode 1 / Stonehenge: The Discovery with Dan Snow \(channel5.com\)](#)

The eagle-eyed amongst you might spot a cheeky bit of free advertising for Past Participate!

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