



Hello from Past Participate CIC

Hello and Happy Christmas. Welcome to all of you who are new to our Past Participate community.

As many of you know much of our archaeological research has been focused around Tenants Hill and the Valley of Stones, near [Abbotsbury](#) in Dorset. *Digging for Britain* joined us this year and our project is due to be featured on BBC2 on the 10th January at 8pm.

However, they will not be featuring a discovery that was made this summer when we excavated around the polissoir site (a neolithic polishing stone - for more info see www.pastparticipate.co.uk/blog). We were trowelling carefully around lots of flint pebbles that filled the gaps between sarsen boulders. We were finding a spectrum of archaeological artefacts when an eagle-eye identified a chunk of a polished flint axe! It is only the butt (end) of the axe, but this is still more than we expected to find (although we had had our fingers crossed)! Stone axes were important in the Neolithic, and a lot of effort and went into their production. Raw materials were gathered in one place, flaking may have taken place in several locations, and polishing happened in another, before they were used all over the place. They would have been valuable because of the effort expended in manufacture and their capacity to clear woodland. Did this one break whilst being polished?

We were hoping to bring you the results of our large funding application in this newsletter, however we are still yet to hear. We're on tenterhooks waiting, and the outcome will determine the free programme of activities that we can put on. Therefore, I am holding off with the forthcoming diary for now, but please keep your eyes open for an email in the New Year, when we should know more: I hope it will be positive. In the meantime, however, we are advertising a human remains course: see page 6 for more information. The rest of this newsletter is an update from Historic England on their research in the Valley of Stones.

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An update from Historic England on the Valley of Stones

Earlier this year we – Becca, Katy and our colleague Olaf Bayer, specialists in researching and recording remnants of historic landscapes – were lucky to meet many of you in the Valley of Stones.

You may know some of us already as friends of Past Participate from previous years helping at Tenants Hill and on the Sarsen Survey, but for the Valley of Stones we are also involved in an official partner project on behalf of Historic England. This is to help record and understand the rich multi-period archaeological landscape of the valley, revealed by surviving features such as field systems, stone settings and earthwork enclosures, all of which form the continuing story of the site from the polissoir (and perhaps before) to the present. The research and records produced by Past Participate, Historic England and yourselves will provide valuable information for future appreciation and management of the archaeology.

In June-July we joined you in the field. As well as mucking in at the trenches (which we loved!), we ran a series of survey training days beginning with an overview of how to start looking for visible clues in the valley and then focusing on the rectangular enclosure known as 'Littlebredy 5a' in the re-entrant valley to the north of Crow Hill (Fig. 1). Volunteers learned how to produce detailed measured drawings of the earthworks using traditional survey methods: tapes to create baselines, right angles and off-sets, and sharp pencils paired with scale rules to draw up the results. We also took our GNSS (Global Satellite Navigation System, aka 'GPS') receivers out to record some of the less complex parts of the site (Fig. 2).

We were rather hampered by the unexpected long grass (kindly trimmed at speed for us by Rob and Will of Natural England), and so progress was a little slower than we had planned, but it gave us time to have a good long look and think. Thank you for your enthusiasm, insight and patience – we really enjoyed working with you and look forward to heading back there to take another look.

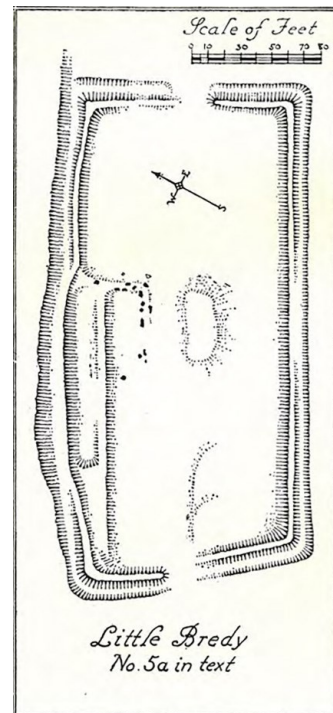


Figure 1: RCHME's 1952 plan of enclosure 5a.



Katy and Becca will return

Katy and Becca have offered to come back and to contribute. We hope to build this into a new programme of activities for you to join in with. We hope more details on this will be forthcoming in early 2024.



Figure 2: Using differential GNSS equipment along the enclosure's southern bank.
© Becca Pullen

Aerial investigation

Since our summer stint in the field with you, aerial investigation and mapping of a 4km square study area encompassing the Valley of Stones has been completed by Katy. We can share an initial image of the archaeological features that have been recorded from all the available aerial sources (Fig. 4 overleaf). heading back to Dorset to think about questions raised by our previous visits and the mapping results.



Figure 3: Using traditional recording methods. © Becca Pullen

Revealing the Hidden Heritage of West Dorset

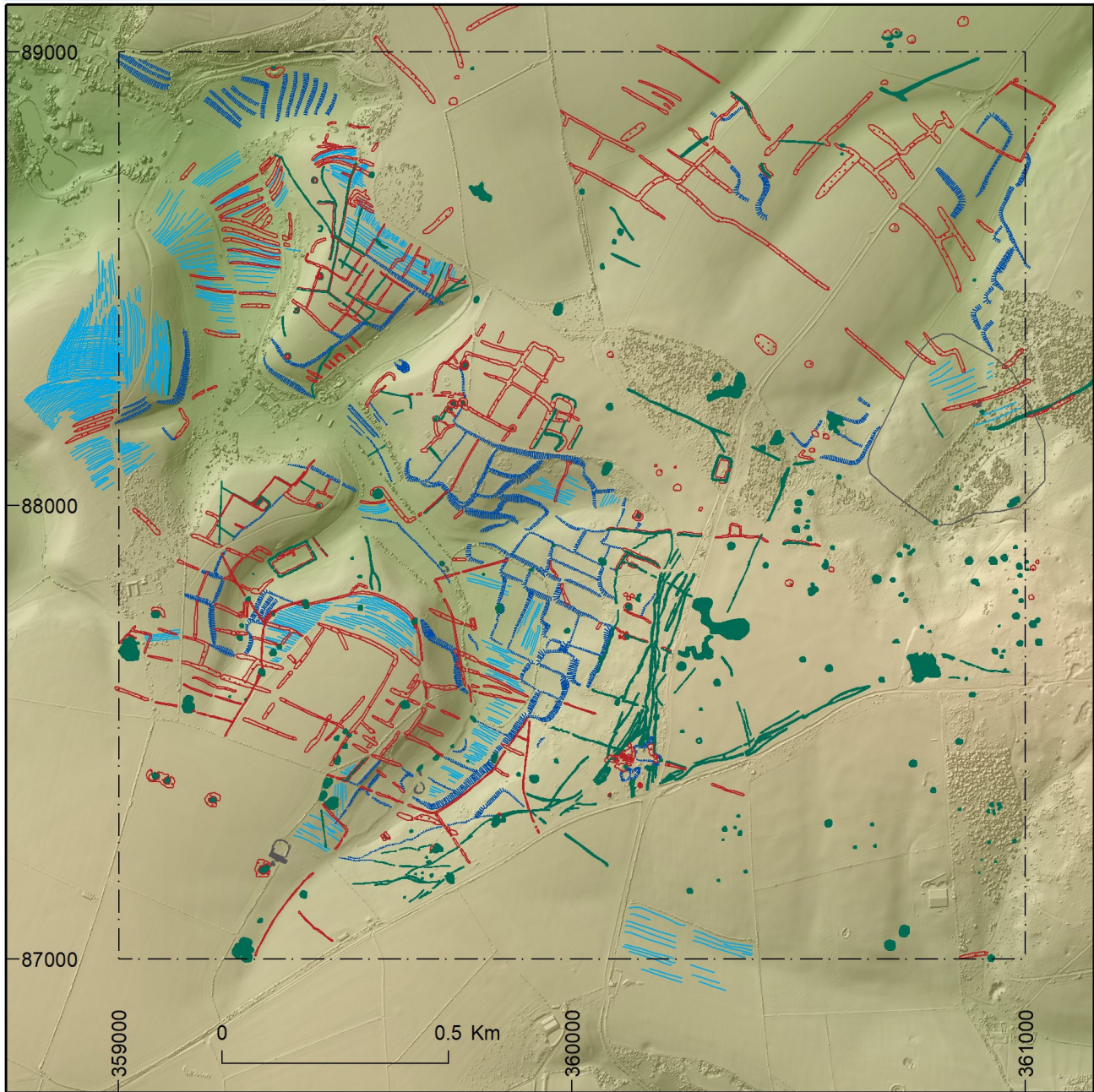
If you want to know more about our research Anne is giving a talk at the Dorset Museum and Art Gallery on the 6th February.









This will recover all of our research to date in the Tenants Hill and Valley of Stones area and will be a brilliant introduction to the prehistoric archaeology of South Dorset.

To book visit <https://www.dorsetmuseum.org/event/revealing-the-hidden-heritage-of-west-dorset/>



Figure 4: Valley of Stones aerial mapping and investigation results 2023. ©Historic Eng;land



- | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
|  bank |  extent of feature |  ridge and furrow |  High : 241.253 |
|  ditch |  structure |  scarp slope edge |  Low : 74.871 |



Sarsens

The sources include visualisations of lidar data, aerial photographs from the Historic England Archive, a new aerial photo mosaic created by Historic England (using pictures that our colleague took from a small aircraft in November 2022), and other imagery. It's important to use all available imagery because things change over time: earthworks that are crisp and clear in 1940s Royal Air Force photographs can be degraded by ploughing over time, for example. Also, some features will only show up well in certain conditions and, if they are cropmarks, might only ever appear once! Katy has also mapped 1,465 sarsen stone boulders that can be seen in the new aerial photo mosaic. The data can be turned into a 'heat map' for a quick way to visualise the spread and density of the sarsens in the valley bottom and on the slopes (Fig. 5). This won't be all the boulders (some are too small to map, some sarsens are hidden under trees or one another) but should be a great starting point to plan and carry out a sarsen survey.

In the New Year we'll be heading back to Dorset to think about questions raised by our previous visits and the mapping results.

Katy Whitaker & Rebecca Pullen, Autumn 2023

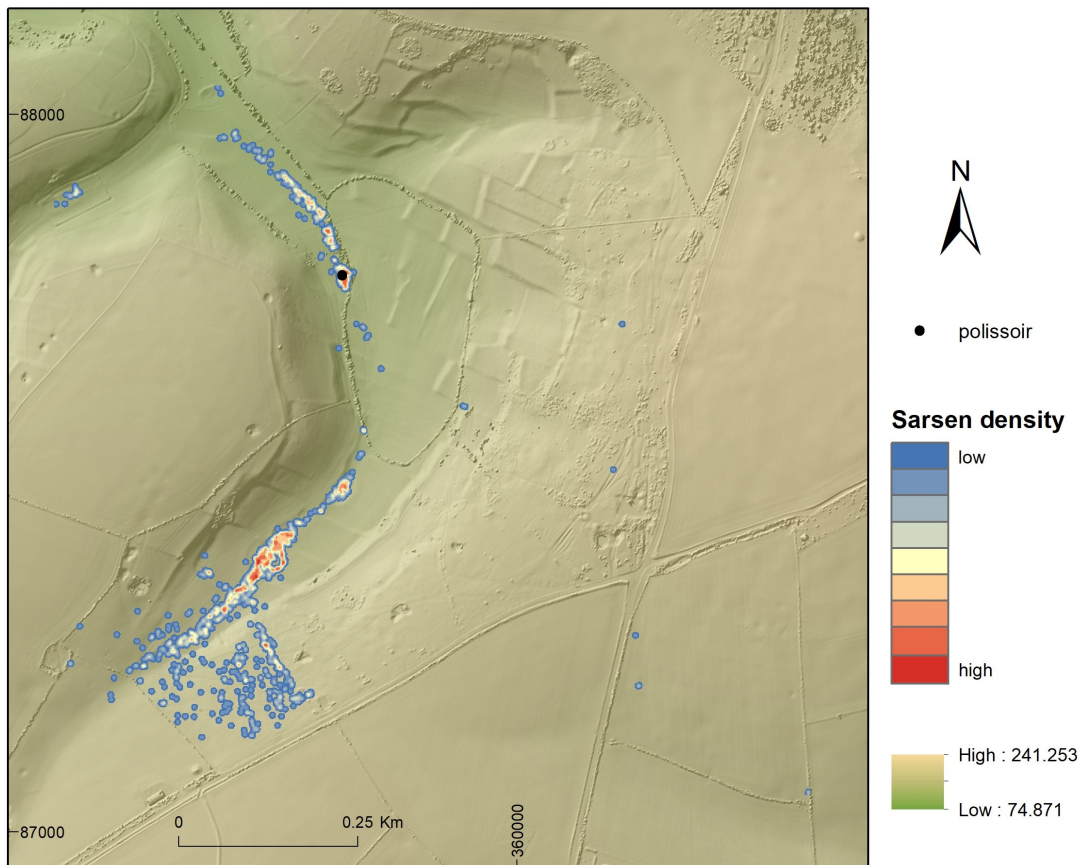
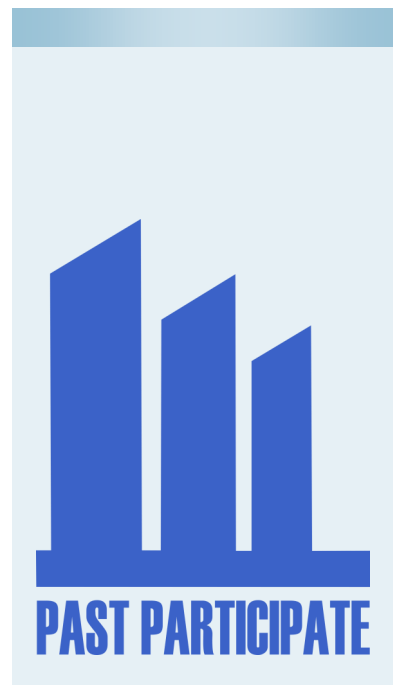


Figure 5: A 'heat map' showing sarsen boulder density in the valley. © Historic England

A Christmas present for the archaeologist in your life.

Osteology – The Bare Bones.

A short course led by Professor Andrew Chamberlain

This short course introduces participants to the study of human and animal remains that are recovered from archaeological sites. The course explains the methods that are used by osteologists to investigate skeletal remains and provides practical experience in handling and recording evidence from bones and teeth. Each session includes a lecture presentation followed by a practical class in which participants will study relevant archaeological materials and will gain experience in applying osteoarchaeological methods.

Each session will take place at the Dorford Centre, Dorchester **on Wednesday afternoons at 2– 4pm** , including a short break with refreshments. The **provisional cost** of this course is **£100 for four sessions**.

Course outline:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| 1. Introduction: Discovering the Human Skeleton | 21 st February 2024 |
| 2. Exploring Diversity: Age, Sex and Stature | 28 th February 2024 |
| 3. 'The dead don't bury themselves': Burial Practices and Taphonomy | 6 th March 2024 |
| 4. All Creatures Great and Small: Identifying Animal Bones | 13 th March 2024 |

We expect there to be high demand for this course as we can only accommodate a maximum of 12 places. Please book your place with Hayley Roberts by email hayley@pastparticipate.co.uk. A waiting list will be kept to a maximum of 5 in case of cancellations. **Cancellation policy and refunds:** A full refund will be made for cancellations up to two weeks before the start of the course. After this time, no refunds will be possible.

Andrew Chamberlain has qualifications in geology and archaeology and he completed his doctorate in biological anthropology in 1987. Until 2020 he held the position of Professor of Bioarchaeology at the University of Manchester, having previously served as Professor of Biological Anthropology at the University of Sheffield where he coordinated graduate research training in human osteoarchaeology. Andrew has broad research interests in biological anthropology, prehistoric archaeology and in the archaeology of caves. He is actively involved in archaeological fieldwork projects in Dorset, Derbyshire and Pembrokeshire.

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