

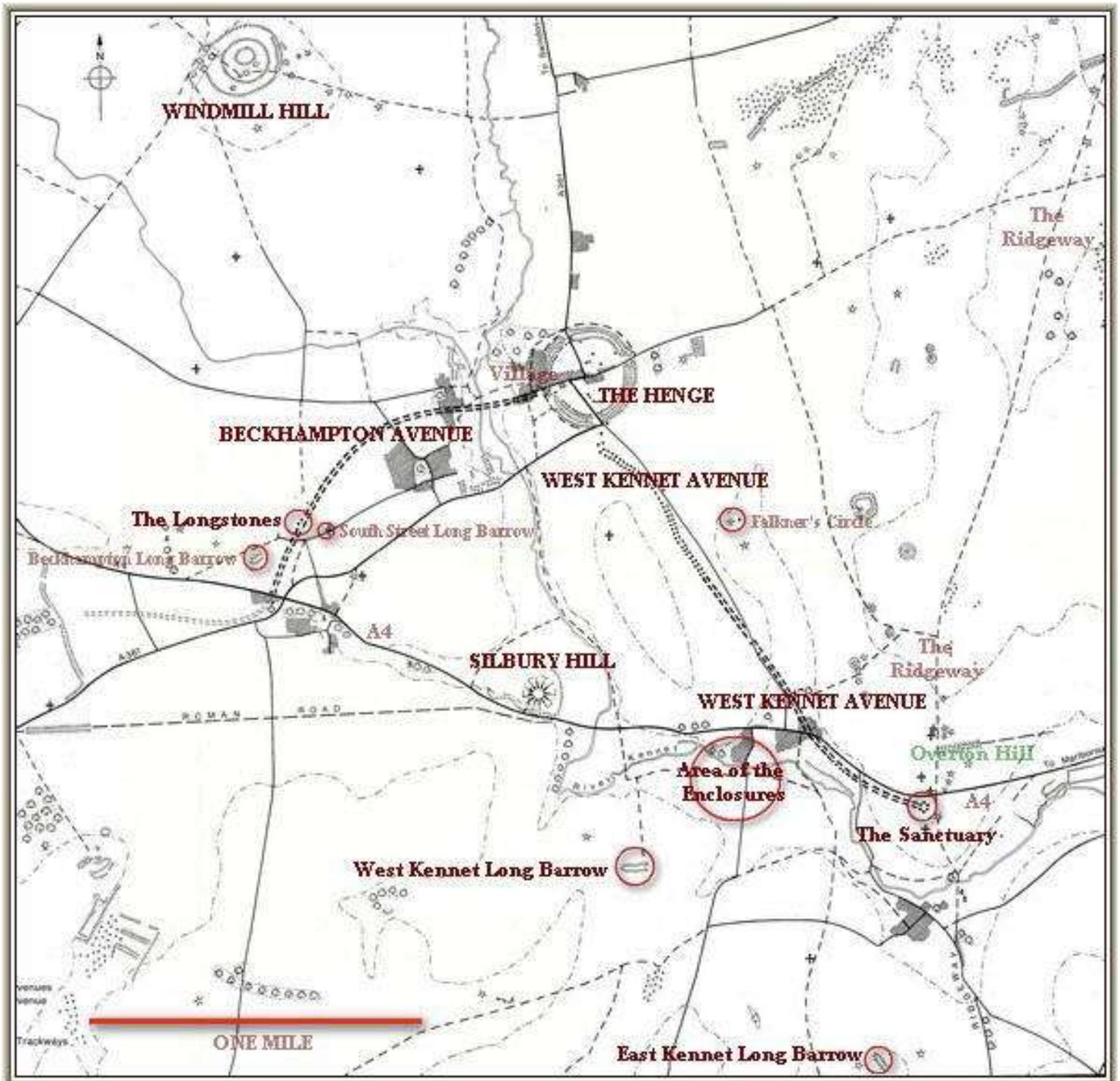
Discovering the Avebury Landscape

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This involved a three hour guided walk around the wider landscape of Avebury – with features being pointed out to us enroute and when we stopped for information. As with Stonehenge, the most famous monument presents only part of a much larger pre-historic landscape. The stone circle is the largest in the world and had two smaller circles within it. It is surrounded by an earlier very large henge.

Initially we took Green Street eastwards out of the Avebury Henge passing a “portal stone” on our left. Our route was an Anglo-Saxon Herepath which at this point passes through one of four entrances to the henge. Each such entrance would have had two portal stones. A pair remain at the closest point to the junction of the road from Beckhampton and the road from the direction of West Kennet Long Barrow (besides which lies the route of the Avenue).



Obviously Avebury was known in the past, as the village dates back to medieval times at least. However, John Aubrey was the first to draw it and to give it publicity. The henge had a ditch 9 metres deep although sediment and rubbish from the village greatly reduced this.

The roadway leads towards the Ridgeway which appears to post-date Bronze Age fields and therefore to be post 1400BC. Near the junction of the two tracks, many stone tools have recently been discovered in a field to the right. These are contemporary with the henge at Avebury. At the top of the ridge are many round barrows. At nearby Weydon Hill are at least 9 round barrows with ditches around them. [Round Barrows date from the Bronze Age which is later than long barrows.] From that point one has an excellent view both of Avebury and, beyond it, Windmill Hill which was a gathering place and selling area dating from 3060 BC. Shortly after that date it ceased to be used for that purpose but was still used for people to place objects.

West Kennet Long Barrow on the other side of the A4 also dates from the same time as Windmill Hill.



We turned right into an old track signposted (wrongly) Bath Road. We stopped to look at a natural fold in a cultivated field. Over the centuries this has filled with sediment. Badgers working on their set threw up this sediment in spoil from their burrowing and a local walker discovered some pottery within this. He took it to the museum at Avebury and they were excited to discover that it was from the early-Neolithic or mid-Bronze Age. It has rare pinprick decoration. The Museum Curator, Dr. Ros Cleal discovered that this matched exactly a find from the 1930s found in the same general area and held in the museum. The two fragments were made by the same hand and probably come from the same pot! Unfortunately (for the archaeologists) the badgers' set is protected and though farmers may plough it, man may not dig it – therefore, at the moment, they are unable to investigate further.



Continuing along the field edge we turned right in the direction of Silbury Hill (still hidden by Weydon Hill). We passed a number of round barrows which had late 18th/early 19th century tree-planting on them. Two others have been ploughed out close by. However remains may still be untouched by the ploughing. Barrows bear "G" numbers plus the parish name following extensive work by Leslie Ginsell in post-war years to map them all.

Near to us at this point (but across the A4) is the Sanctuary. This comprised 6 concentric timber circles, of which some were later replaced by stone.

Near to the A4, at the end of The Avenue, is a complex of palisaded enclosures covering several hectares. The river flows through the centre of one of these and probably had significance. The holes of huge timbers have been found and also grooved-ware pottery. The site may have been used as a settlement for the builders of Avebury.



Shortly, we arrived at The Avenue, two parallel lines of standing stones. These were largely re-erected by Alexander Keiller in the 1930s in the original post holes. Some are missing and have been marked by concrete markers. One of these markers never had a stone in it but was a midden and a mid-Neolithic settlement site. At this point have been found animal bones and pottery (pre-dating The Avenue). This site appears to have had some significance as it was incorporated into the design of The Avenue.

The Avenue may have been a processional route or could be marking a memorial. It dates from 2,500-2,400BC. The henge at Avebury is around 3,000BC (guide book says 2.600BC) with the stones being around 2,500. Silbury is around 2,400BC. The line of The Avenue changes direction at least twice but at the crest of the hill lines up with Windmill Hill.

We stopped to look at a Polissoir. This is a standing stone that had been used to sharpen stone tools. An area near the base is indented and extremely smooth where it had been worn by this use. There are also striations a little above it which have been used for a similar purpose. A researcher at Avebury has discovered that it would only, in fact, take 4 hours' sharpening to achieve the effect found on the stone – therefore it cannot be contended that many hands brought about this effect. Perhaps the stone was used by passers by to re-sharpen their tools when they arrived in the locality

