

## People of the Heath



### Understanding and Conserving Petersfield's Prehistoric Barrows

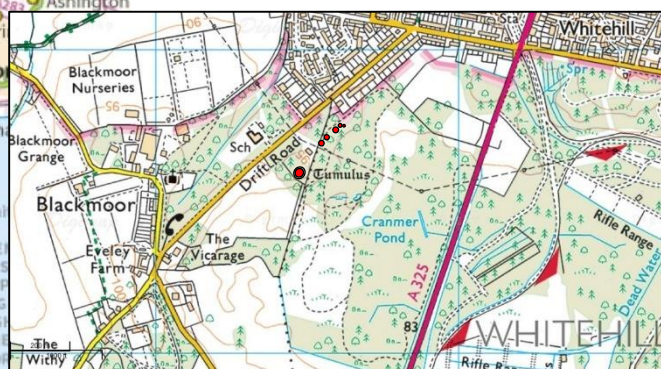


## Cranmer Pond, Whitehill, Hampshire: a new Bronze Age barrow group in the Woolmer/Longmoor complex

### Location



Figure 1: People of the Heath survey area (outlined in red) with detail of Cranmer Pond and, below, location of the new barrow cemetery, © Crown Copyright and Database Right [3/9/15]. Ordnance Survey (Digimap Licence, University of Winchester, order 367236



### General Project Background

A new small barrow cemetery has been discovered in the course of regular field surveys undertaken by the Regional Barrows Team working within the *People of the Heath* project. The project is run by Petersfield Museum (2014 – 2018). The objective of the field surveys is to re-assess and characterise in varied ways the complete distribution of Bronze Age barrows in the Rother Valley and its environs. New measurements and descriptions are made, condition is recorded, and their positioning within the landscape is assessed. Our current work does not extend to detailed contour plans.

As well as covering all known Bronze Age monuments in the study area (Fig 1), using Hampshire and Chichester District HER records, historic OS maps and Historic England Past-escape records, hitherto unrecognised sites are sought using LiDAR images and on the ground. LiDAR DTM 1m resolution 1km grid squares downloaded from the open access Environment Agency data portal are proving particularly helpful for discovering potential prehistoric sites such those reported on here.

### A new barrow cemetery at Cranmer Pond and its setting

The study area for the project is centred on the Rother valley which runs from Whitehill, Hampshire, to its confluence with the Arun, east of Fittleworth, West Sussex. Extant barrows along the length of

the valley are situated on heathlands supported by an underlying geology of Folkestone beds of the Lower Greensand series. The new cemetery overlooking Cranmer Pond, Whitehill, is no exception to this general rule (Fig 2). It lies within a large heathland zone known as Woolmer Forest, which occupies the watershed between the headwaters of the south-flowing River Rother and the north-flowing River Wey catchment (Anon, 2006 p.26). A number of streams spring from various geological interfaces in this zone characterised by podsolised soils, iron-pan formation and consequent localised waterlogging and ponding. Cranmer Pond was shown as about 80m long N-S on the Ordnance Survey six-inch map 1872 edition, but has since been drained. Nevertheless, the basin it occupied still has numerous waterlogged areas some with open water. The land on which the cemetery stands is privately owned and is managed for conservation purposes by the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust.

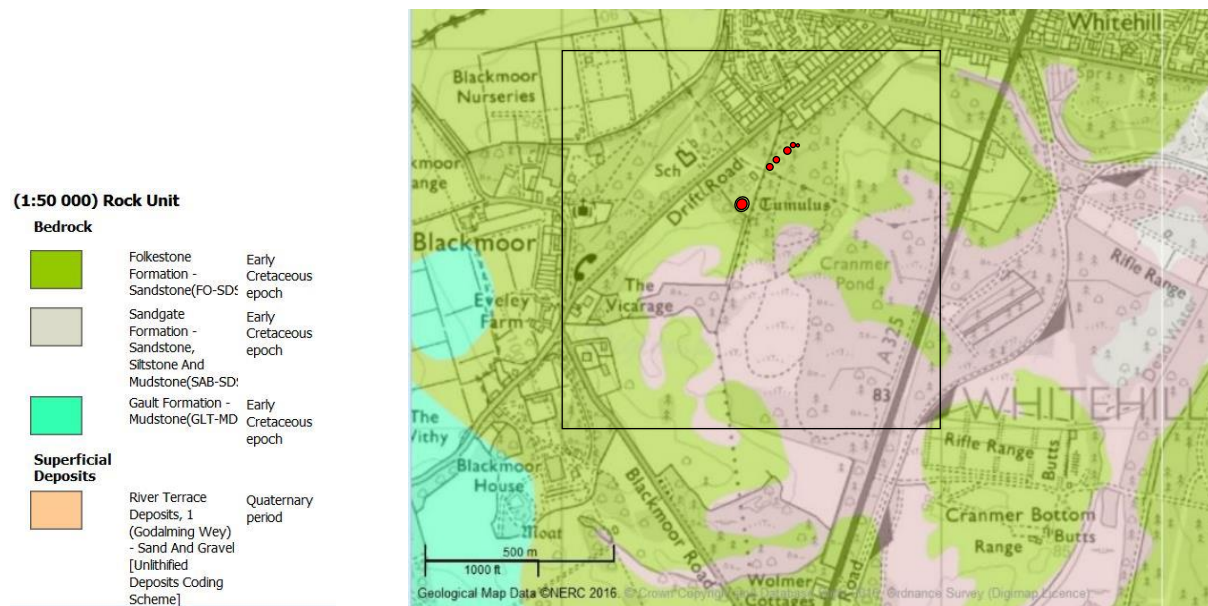


Figure 2: Cranmer Pond barrow cemetery in relation to geology. © Crown Copyright and Database Right [3/9/15]. Ordnance Survey (Digimap Licence, University of Winchester, order 367236)

The area of Woolmer Forest, which includes Cranmer Pond, is recognised as the most important heathland area in the Weald (Natural England, 1994). It is a designated SSSI and Natura 2000 site, the latter combining designated Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protected Areas (SPA). As such it is managed according to Natural England’s Site Improvement Plan (SIP) (Site Improvement Plan Wealden Heaths Woolmer Forest, 2014). Barrows have survived well on these heathlands due to historic land-use factors such as the low agricultural utility of poor sandy soils. The Woolmer Forest/Longmoor area has an impressive distribution of barrows, mostly set in small groups, or cemeteries, but it is still rather surprising to find a totally unreported cemetery in the region. Other important evidence for the Bronze Age comes from metalwork finds, and in particular the nationally important Blackmoor hoard found barely a kilometre to the north of Cranmer Pond (Colquhoun 1979).

Having visited and recorded most barrows to the south, attention moved to a long-known barrow at SU 78470 33590 known as 'Gunsite'. Studying the SU 7833 LiDAR grid square while preparing for field survey, a number of further circular raised areas were noticed on a ridge to the northeast. They lie within 'Unit 1' of the Woolmer Forest SSSI. When visited on the ground, 29 March 2016, four relatively well preserved circular mounds were found in a linear alignment. Our assessment, detailed below, is that these are round barrows, most probably of Early Bronze Age date. A fifth mound, not

initially noticed on the LiDAR, is much smaller and abuts the most northeasterly of the line; it is less certainly a barrow in its own right, but still might be an ancient feature. Enquiries of David Hopkins, principal Archaeologist of Hampshire County Council Planning Department confirmed the 'Cranmer Pond' barrow group as previously unrecorded.

The new barrows and 'Gunsite' can be treated together as the gap between the latter and its nearest neighbour is only 100m; moreover they all occupy a low ridge running northeast-southwest. At 'Gunsite' there is a kink in the ridge as it dog-legs a little to the west before continuing southwestwards (Fig 3). Consequently, whereas most of the group overlook a wetland basin to the southeast, 'Gunsite' also overlooks low ground to its southwest. At 'Gunsite' and southwards the ridge is just over 95mOD, but it descends to 90mOD a little north-east of the cemetery. The basin alongside sinks to a minimum of 80m OD or just above.

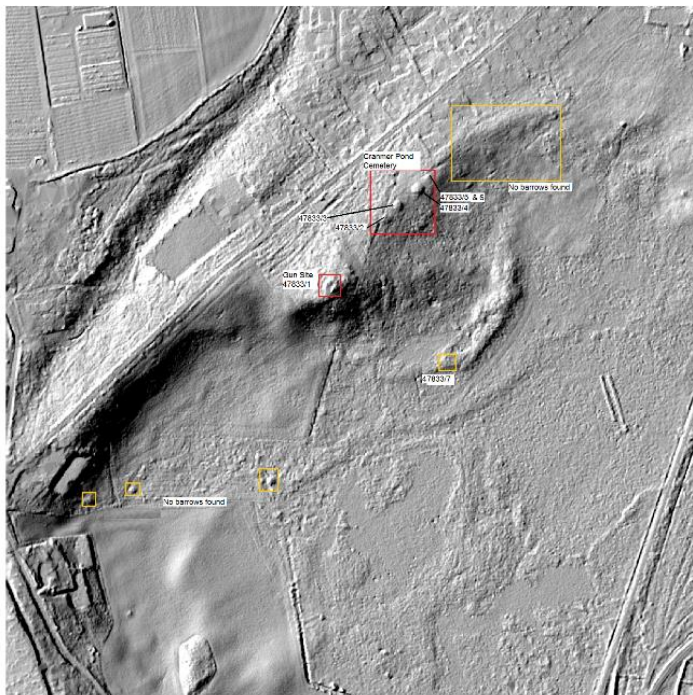


Figure 3: LiDAR image of grid square SU 7833; new barrows 2-5 can be clearly seen in the larger red box; more amorphous 'mounds' to the northeast (in the yellow box) are probably natural undulations. © Crown copyright

### Survey data

**Barrow 1** (NGR 478471 133598; People of the Heath code SU 7833-1): 'Gunsite' barrow, scheduled ancient monument number 12152, has been marked on Ordnance Survey maps since the 1872 edition of the six-inch maps. It has previously been classified as either a bell barrow or a bowl barrow encircled by a tree ring (Grinsell 1939, 354 (9<sup>th</sup> from top); Historic Environment Record number 17321; Anon, 2007). This barrow lies just over the parish boundary in the neighbouring property of the Blackmoor Estate, Selborne.

It is a slightly oval barrow (c. 29m NE-SW, 27m NW-SE), 2.1m high with moderately steep sides. The barrow is covered by mature holly, birch trees and saplings, gorse and sparse grass, bracken and piles of dead branch wood. Part of the top has been cut away from the north-east to form a trapezoidal cutting about 0.6m deep and lined with breeze block walls (Fig 5). This is believed to have been a gun-emplacement at one time, giving rise to the barrow's name (also that of the adjacent property). The calculated centre of the barrow falls within this walled cutting. Multiple humps around the cutting comprise the highest points on the mound and are likely to be up-cast spoil from it.



Figure 4: 'Gunsite' barrow from the southwest; the near ranging pole stands on the encircling bank.  
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Figure 5: The block-lined cutting in the top of 'Gunsite' barrow; this lies at the end of a long tapering garden. © People of the Heath project

The barrow is encircled by a continuous bank (also shown on maps since 1872), with a greater fall on the outside due to the slope of the hill. There are possible intermittent traces of an external ditch on the western side. The bank has been effectively levelled in the garden to the northeast of the cutting but is still visible as an ephemeral rise. The bank is largely concentric with the barrow mound, as illustrated by the measurements set out below. However, it is around four metres further out from the northeast edge. The interpretation that this bank is a later addition for the planting of a tree ring is repeated for several barrows to the south on Weaver's Down, although the added features there are of different character. The 'Gunsite' bank has quite a gentle profile and the possibility that this is a much more ancient feature should not be ruled out.

Orientation	Inner bank edge	Crest of bank	Outer bank edge
NW	15.5m	16.7m	18.3m
SE	15.4m	16.1m	17.6m
NE	19.2m	20.2m	21.8m
SW	15.4m	16.6m	18.0m

*Barrow 2* (NGR 478551 133697; SU 7833-2): a gently domed mound vegetated with holly saplings and mature Scot's pine. The barrow measures 18.4m NNE-SSW, but only 13m survives ESE-WNW before it is truncated by a marked boundary ditch-and-bank with associated fences; this marks the Whitehill/ Selborne parish boundary. The height as measured on three sides averaged 0.78m and is estimated to be about 0.7m overall. The edges are poorly defined and there is no sign of any encircling features. Further damage is evident in the form of marked wheel ruts running N-S across the east side. It sits on land gently sloping (c. 2°) to the northeast.



*Figure 6: Barrow 2 from the south; part has been lost to the parish boundary ditch and bank left of the fence line; the southeastern limit is marked by the right-hand ranging pole, behind which can be seen bracken covered barrow 3. © People of the heath project*

**Barrow 3** (NGR 478569 133721; SU 7833-3): a slightly oval mound (16m NE-SW, 17.7m NW-SE) 0.85m high and vegetated with bracken with some silver birches, holly and other trees. Its sides are moderately steep and it has a fairly flat top. There are no encircling features. Tyre tracks run SW-NE over the top slightly to the west of centre and there is also damage from animal holes in the southeast sector. It sits on land slightly east of the crest of the ridge which is gently sloping (c. 2°) to the east.



*Figure 7: Barrow 3 from the southwest. © People of the Heath project*

**Barrow 4** (NGR 478597 133745; SU 7833-4): a near-circular mound (19m NE-SW, 19.5m NW-SE) 1.10m high and vegetated with grass and bracken, with six mature Scots pines and two cherry trees. The sides are moderately steep and it has a fairly flat top albeit with small hummocks. There are no encircling features but a small linear, radial depression 4m long runs in from the northwest edge towards the centre; this looks likely to be the result of an unrecorded excavation trench. The mound sits on land slightly east of the crest of the ridge which is very gently sloping (c. 0.5°) to the southeast.



*Figure 8: Barrow 4 from the southwest. © People of the Heath project*

**Barrow 5** (NGR 478613 133760; SU 7833-5): a very gently domed circular mound (13m NE-SW, 12.8m NW-SE) 0.5m high and vegetated with grass, heather, low gorse, one mature cherry and two silver birches. The edges are very diffuse except to the northwest where vehicle tracks have cut down alongside the NW edge. The mound sits on level ground more-or-less astride the ridge top. A small mound (SU 7833-6) abuts on the east side.



*Figure 9: Barrow 5; the even smaller mound, no 6, lies around the pine tree behind the right-hand ranging pole. © People of the heath project*

**Mound 6** (NGR 478623 133752; SU 7833-6): a very slight domed mound (0.2m high) of small diameter (8.4m NNE-SSW, 8m ESE-WNW). It is vegetated by grass, bracken and young gorse and has a mature pine tree near the centre; it is thought unlikely, however, that the tree's root system accounts for entirety of the mound. It is confluent with barrow 5, lying on its east side where the ground is falling at about 5° to the northeast.

We did not have time to walk over the whole of the Unit 1 SSSI, but no other strong candidates for prehistoric monuments came to our attention during perambulations. A slightly raised area was noted at NGR 478712 133571 on a ridge of very low ground rising out of the wetland basin in an area considerably disturbed by heavy vehicles etc (Fig 10, open circle). It is possible that it was originally circular, a diameter or width of 14.7m being measured SW-NE, but if so, it was much disturbed and the southeast side had been destroyed. The LiDAR image does not show this feature as distinct from the surrounding, rather hummocky ground and it may not be a deliberate construction.

### Conclusions, implications and recommendations

Four of the mounds in the northwest of Unit 1 can be identified with confidence as round barrows and, as such, their most likely date is Early Bronze Age, *circa* 2200 – 1500 BC. Barrows marked the places where some members of society were buried, and they were often built on a scale that made them stand out in the landscape, sometimes being visible from a considerable distance. Although round barrows were sometimes built in other periods, the vast majority prove, when excavated, to have been constructed during this one particular phase of prehistory. The new barrows overlooking Cranmer Pond appear to be *bowl barrows* with no sign of any encircling ditches. Bowl barrows, with or without a ditch, are by far the commonest form of round barrow.

The linear arrangement of the group is one that is often encountered for barrows, usually being related to their topographic setting, for example being laid out along hill spurs or ridges, as is the case here (Fig 10). The alignment can be extended to the 'Gunsite' barrow, which is larger and may also be of more complex form depending on the age of the encircling bank. While there are no universal patterns in the spacing of linear barrow cemeteries, there is a possibility that other barrows

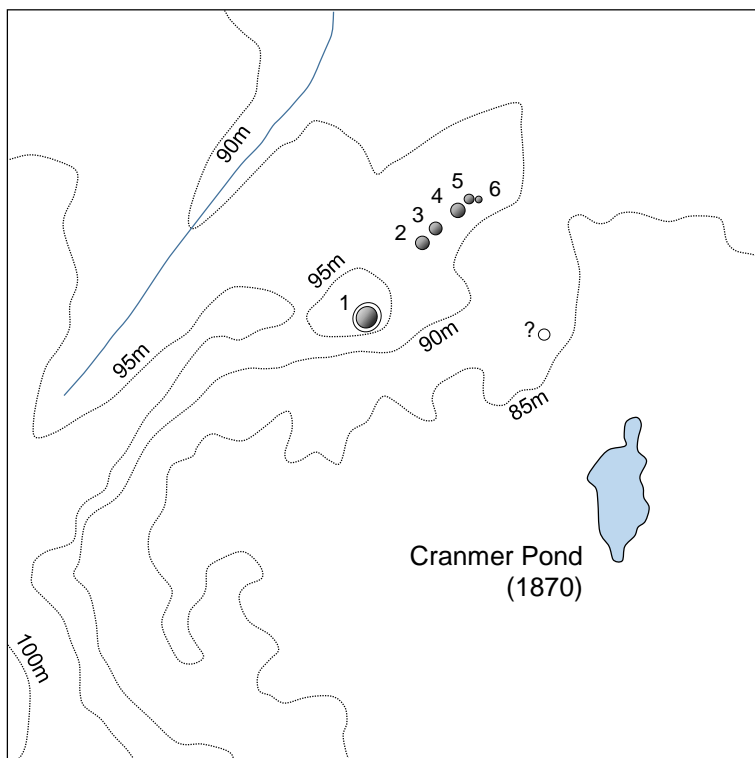


Figure 10: Cranmer Pond barrow cemetery in relation to the topography.  
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originally occupied the gap between 'Gunsite' and the Unit 1 group and that they have been destroyed in the past by parish boundary construction and landscaping in the adjacent garden.

The small mound (6) confluent with barrow 5, while less conclusive as an ancient monument in its own right, can be considered more likely than not to be a feature belonging to the barrow cemetery. Barrows themselves can be of small diameter or low elevation; moreover, there are many cases where barrows are set so closely together that they meet at their edges, or even overlap.

All five sites on the ridge in the Unit 1 SSSI are worthy of the protection that can be got relatively simply through informed and responsible land management. The raised feature noted on the lower ground might also be worth 'protecting' just to play on the safe side. In areas like this where arable agriculture and building development are exceedingly unlikely, the main threats to barrows come from the roots of trees, burrowing mammals – rabbits, foxes and badgers – and damage by heavy machinery used in logging and other necessary land management activities. Small scrub may not be very damaging, but if left to develop will result in more mature trees, whose roots are well documented to wreak havoc with the barrow's external form, internal structure and any important deposits within (burials etc.). If existing mature trees are considered to be important for ecological reasons, they can be left to run their natural life-span, meanwhile ensuring that no successor trees come to replace them.

The exclusion of animal burrowing proves to be more problematic and, while attempts have often been made, no solution has been found that is both fool-proof and aesthetically acceptable. Nevertheless, it is advisable to discourage occupation by larger animals. Machine damage can be minimised or wholly averted by the re-routing of vehicular tracks where necessary and the insertion of posts, prostrate tree trunks or other acceptable obstacles to block accidental encroachment. Any construction requiring the digging of holes needs to be kept well away from the visible monuments because of the possibility of associated sub-surface features that show no trace at ground level. Naturally, it would be advisable for an appropriate archaeologist to be consulted over any management plan.

### **Acknowledgements**

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