SEGSBURY CAMP

An Iron Age Hillfort in Oxfordshire

Key Stage 2

Education Pack

Acknowledgements

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The project has been delivered in partnership with:

- Warborough Farm
- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- The Ridgeway National Trail
- Oxfordshire County Council
- Historic England

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Contents

Introduction

Explore Segsbury Camp with this educational pack designed for teachers working with Key Stage 2 (KS2) students. The pack offers a variety of activity ideas and resources to help teachers engage children with Segsbury Camp, an Iron Age hillfort, and its rich history.

Segsbury Camp, also known as Letcombe Castle, is a remarkable and notable feature in the landscape, dating back to the Early Iron Age. Located on the Ridgeway overlooking the village of Letcombe Regis in Oxfordshire, this ancient hillfort is an extraordinary part of our heritage.

The site is on private land, but a permissive route allows the public to walk around the perimeter of the hillfort, including its impressive ramparts. As a Scheduled Monument, Segsbury Camp is of national importance, preserving a vital piece of history and offering a unique glimpse into the past.

This educational pack aims to celebrate the significance of Segsbury Camp and provides a range of activities to engage children with its fascinating and rich history.

Image credit: Jennie Anderson

How to use this resource

This schools' education pack is designed around five key themes related to Segsbury Camp, an Iron Age hillfort located on the Ridgeway, by the village of Letcombe Regis, Oxfordshire. Each theme includes a variety of activities and supporting resources to help children explore and discover different aspects of the site.

While the content is primarily aimed at KS2 pupils, it can be adapted for both younger and older children. The lessons can be taught in sequence or as standalone sessions. Some activities are designed for use on a visit to the hillfort, others are for the classroom, and some can be carried out in either location, offering flexibility for teachers.

The activities are aligned with the Objective, focusing on the History programme of study, with additional links to Science, Geography, Art and Design, and English. Specific curriculum links are included in the activity plans.

Teachers' notes are provided to offer a brief overview of the site's history and to support the teaching of the activities.

Photo credit: Hedley Thorne

Visiting Segsbury Camp

Segsbury Camp is free to access, and people are welcome to visit the hillfort. The land is privately owned, but the landowner allows visitors to walk on a path around the edge of the hillfort on the impressive ramparts. Schools are encouraged to visit the site, where students can connect with the historic environment and explore a place that was significant to people living during the Iron Age.

Site location

Segsbury Camp, Letcombe Regis, Wantage OX12 9LG

What3words/////pots.admiral.piglets

Grid reference: SU 38497 84478

There is limited parking in a lay-by on the road that cuts through the hillfort.

What is there to see?

Segsbury Camp has no surviving buildings, but its impressive earthworks are still clearly visible. A large rampart (earth bank) and deep ditch encircle the hillfort, and you can still see the location of the original eastern entrance. While other features lie hidden beneath the soil, the site's stunning setting and sweeping views make it a fascinating place to visit. With a bit of imagination, you can picture the hillfort as it once was — a thriving hub of activity in the Iron Age.

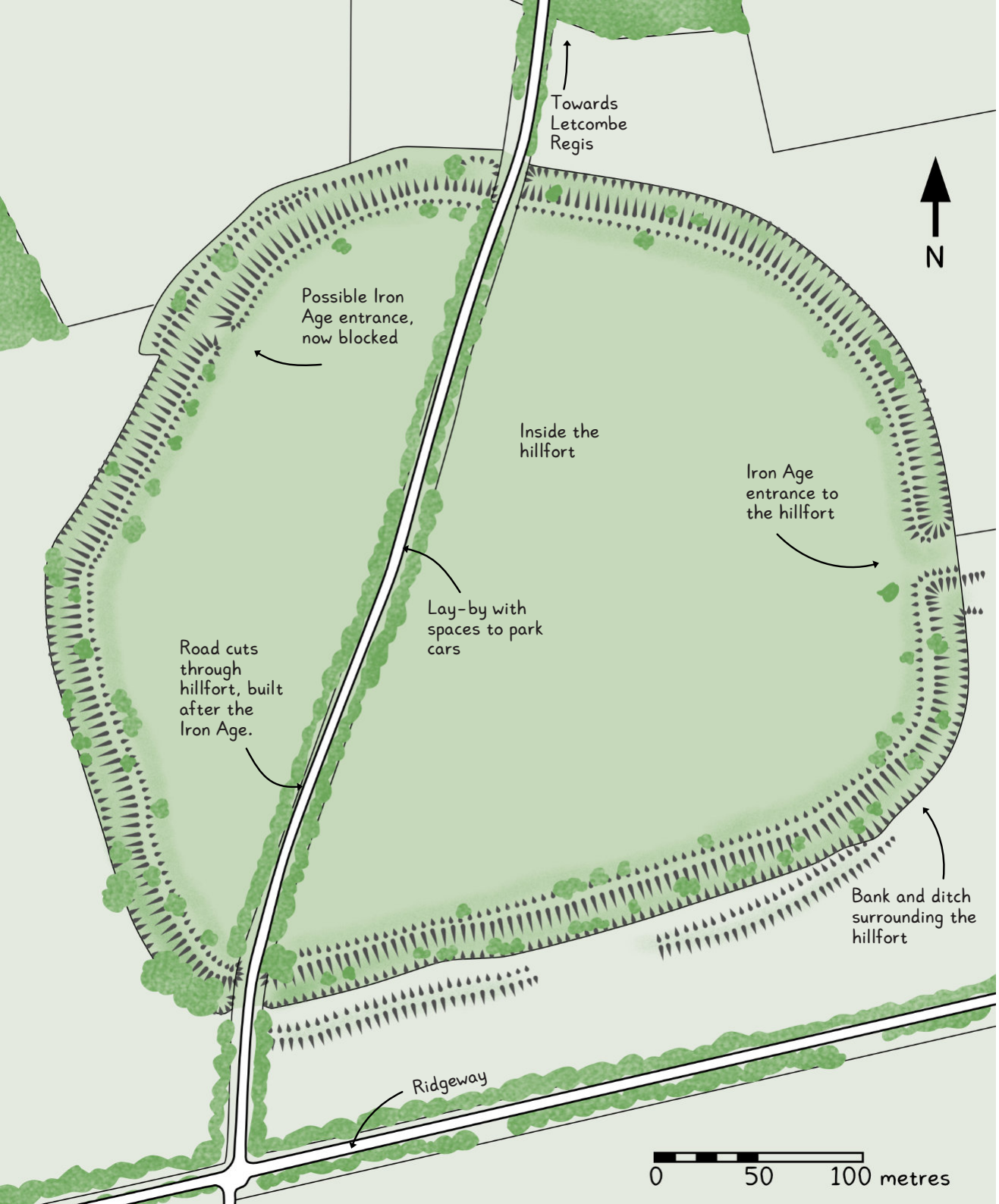
Wildlife

Segsbury Camp is home to diverse grassland habitats including Lowland Meadow and Lowland Calcareous Grassland. These areas support a rich variety of native grasses and wildflowers, such as ox-eye daisy, lady's bedstraw, and bird's-foot trefoil. Careful grazing management helps maintain the ecological balance and species diversity. Visit in spring or early summer to see the flowers in bloom.

Please note

- The hillfort is accessible to members of the public but please stick to the path.
- The ditches and banks are steep in some locations and care must be taken.
- There are no facilities at the site.
- Please leave nothing behind and follow the countryside code when visiting.

The site is designated by Historic England as a Scheduled Monument which means it is of national importance and is protected by law. No digging, fire lighting, metal detecting or other activities which may disturb the ground are allowed.



Segsbury Camp site map

Key

- Sloping ground showing the ditches and banks
- Trackway or road
- Fence line
- Trees and vegetation

Map created based on Ordnance Survey plan SU3884-3984, 1:2500 scale map, 1971. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.

Teacher notes: an overview of Segsbury Camp

Segsbury Camp, also known as Letcombe Castle, is an important Iron Age hillfort located in the parish of Letcombe Regis, Oxfordshire. It stands along the Ridgeway, an ancient trackway used for thousands of years. Positioned on the northern edge of the chalk downs, it offers far-reaching views.

Segsbury is the largest hillfort in Oxfordshire, enclosing an area of 11 hectares (27 acres) within a single massive rampart and outer ditch. It is classified as a univallate enclosure, meaning it is defended by a single line of earthworks. While the ramparts and ditch remain visible today, no internal structures have survived.

Construction and Use

Segsbury Camp was built around 600 BC during the early Iron Age and remained in use until approximately 150 BC. Excavations in the 1990s by the University of Oxford revealed that its fortifications underwent five distinct phases of development, with gradual modifications and expansions.

The earliest defences consisted of a wooden palisade, later replaced by a more substantial chalk-rubble rampart. By the final phase, the rampart had grown to about 12 metres wide, with a deeper V-shaped ditch cut into the chalk bedrock. The main entrance, located on the eastern side, likely featured large wooden gates and possibly a timber-lined passageway leading into the interior. A second entrance may have existed on the western side, but this was later blocked, similar to what is seen at Uffington and Liddington hillforts.

Hundreds of people would have been involved in constructing and maintaining the fort, using basic tools to dig the ditches and shape the earthworks.

Community and Activities

While hillforts were once thought to be primarily defensive, modern research suggests they functioned more as communal gathering places. People from surrounding farmsteads likely met at Segsbury for trade, feasting, and religious ceremonies rather than living there permanently.

Archaeological evidence suggests seasonal occupation. Fewer than 20 roundhouses have been identified within the enclosure, each associated with a cluster of pits. One excavated roundhouse, measuring approximately 12 metres in diameter, had a foundation trench marking its walls, with internal post holes suggesting internal divisions. The walls were likely made of wattle and daub, with a thatched roof.

Finds from excavations, including pottery, tools, and food remains, provide insight into daily life. The presence of wheat and barley suggests that agriculture played a significant role, while the large number of sheep bones points to livestock farming.

Storage pits containing sheep and cattle remains indicate that Segsbury may have been a centre for livestock trade. Some pits also contained human remains, possibly left as ritual offerings, in keeping with Iron Age religious practices.

Pottery found at the site suggests that people travelled to Segsbury from as far away as Wiltshire, likely using the Ridgeway as a trade route.

Decline and Abandonment

By the late 4th century BC, the hillfort's ramparts were expanded, and archaeological evidence suggests an increase in activity. However, by around 150 BC, Segsbury was abandoned. Unlike nearby Uffington Castle, which saw later reuse during the Roman period, there is no evidence of continued occupation at Segsbury. This may be due to changes in farming practices, as the focus shifted from sheep herding to arable farming, making the site less relevant.

Today, Segsbury Camp remains an impressive feature of the landscape and an important archaeological site. It provides valuable insights into Iron Age society, shedding light on how people gathered, traded, and adapted to their environment thousands of years ago.

A selection of Iron Age artefacts found during archaeological excavations at Segsbury Camp. Clockwise from top left: pottery; penannular brooch; spindle whorl; fragment of a bone comb.

Scheduled Monument

Segsbury Camp is protected as a Scheduled Monument due to its national historical and archaeological significance. It remains an essential part of the region's heritage and offers key insights into life during the Iron Age.

Further Information

More information about Segsbury Camp can be found in:

- *Segsbury Camp. Excavations in 1996 and 1997 at an Iron Age hillfort on the Oxfordshire Ridgeway* by G. Lock, C. Gosden and P. Daly, 2005 (Oxford University School of Archaeology Monograph 61).
- *The Wessex Hillforts Project. Extensive Survey of Hillforts in Central Southern England* by A. Payne, M. Corney, and B. Cunliffe, 2006. London: English Heritage, 89-96. https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/wessex-hillforts-project/
- *Atlas of Hillforts of Britain and Ireland* Information on over 4,000 hillforts in Britain and Ireland can be found in the online Atlas of Hillforts. https://hillforts.arch.ox.ac.uk

What is a hillfort?

Hillforts are fortified settlements, typically located on elevated terrain and surrounded by one or more banks and ditches. Built between 900–100 BC, they were primarily used in the Iron Age, though some have evidence of earlier or later occupation.

Archaeological research on hillforts has evolved over 150 years. Initially, studies focused on defensive structures, but more recent excavations have explored internal features, revealing evidence of domestic, agricultural, and ritual activities. Hillforts vary greatly in size, form, and function, with some developing from earlier enclosures.

The construction and use of hillforts varies from simple single ditch and bank enclosures (univallate), such as Segsbury, to more complex designs with many ditches and banks (multivallate), such as Danebury. Some were abandoned in the late Iron Age, while others were used by the Romans or saw even later reuse as medieval castles, religious sites, and even 20th–century military installations. The study of hillforts provides valuable insight into prehistoric communities, their social structures, and their interactions with the wider landscape.

Iron Age hillfort at Uffington
Photo credit: Hedley Thorne

Segsbury Camp

Lesson Plans

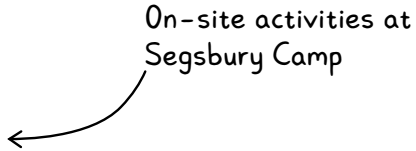
Lesson themes

Outlined below are the five lesson themes. They can be taught in sequence or as standalone sessions. Each lesson includes a range of activities using resources from the Activity Resources (page 29) section of this education pack. Depending on the time available and the age of your pupils, you may wish to select the most suitable activity for each lesson.

Lesson 2, “Connecting with the Land,” features activities designed for a visit to Segsbury Camp. For site details, see page 7. It is suggested that pupils are introduced to Segsbury using the activities in Lesson 1 before the visit. Alternatively, the site visit can follow the full series or take place at any point that fits your schedule.

You can also explore the resources in Activity Resources section and mix and match activities to create your own tailored lessons!

Lesson themes



Lesson 1	Timeline travellers: introducing Segsbury Camp
Lesson 2	Connecting with the land: visiting Segsbury Camp
Lesson 3	Aerial views: Segsbury Camp from above
Lesson 4	Digging deeper: uncovering Iron Age artefacts
Lesson 5	Echoes of the Iron Age: creative responses to Segsbury

Lesson overviews

1)Timeline travellers: introducing Segsbury Camp

In this lesson, students will explore Segsbury Camp, an Iron Age hillfort, through images and reconstruction drawings. They will generate questions about the site and learn how timelines help understand history. Students will create a timeline of Segsbury Camp's history and learn about archaeological periods, sequencing events to understand the site's past and its significance.

2) Connecting with the land: visiting Segsbury Camp

Segsbury Camp offers enriching outdoor learning and is open to the public. For site access details, see page 7. Through these activities, pupils explore an ancient Iron Age hillfort via observation, imagination, and nature discovery, connecting with Segsbury's history, environment, and how the landscape has changed over time.

3) Aerial views: Segsbury Camp from above

This lesson introduces archaeology and the role of the archaeologist. It explores how archaeologists can use evidence from above the ground, using clues from the landscape, to explore the past. Pupils investigate Segsbury Camp through aerial images, maps, and surveys and apply this new knowledge by identifying features and creating their own site maps.

4) Digging deeper: uncovering Iron Age artefacts

This lesson focuses on the archaeological finds discovered during excavations at Segsbury Camp. Students will explore the types of materials that survive in the ground and how archaeologists use artefacts to learn about past societies. By investigating the Iron Age objects, students will discover what these artefacts can reveal about life at the hillfort and the people who lived there.

5) Echoes of the Iron Age: creative responses to Segsbury

In Echoes of the Iron Age: creative responses to Segsbury, students will engage with history through three creative activities. They will design and create Iron Age-inspired pottery, reconstruct or re-interpret Segsbury Camp, and craft and perform oral stories based on the camp's past. These activities foster creativity, historical understanding, and connection to the Iron Age through hands-on learning.

Lesson 1 Timeline travellers: introducing Segsbury Camp

In this lesson, students will explore Segsbury Camp, an Iron Age hillfort, through images and reconstruction drawings. They will generate questions about the site and learn how timelines help understand history. Students will create a timeline of Segsbury Camp's history and learn about archaeological periods, sequencing events to understand the site's past and its significance.

Objective 1.1

> Students will be able to identify key features of Segsbury Camp, ask relevant questions about its history, and gain an understanding of the Iron Age settlement through analysis and discussion.

National Curriculum links

> History: Chronological understanding: Understand historical periods and place events in time. Knowledge and understanding of events, people, and changes: Learn about the Iron Age and how people lived. Historical enquiry: Ask and answer questions about the past using sources and evidence.

Resources

> R.1 Aerial image of Segsbury Camp
>
> R.2 Reconstruction drawings of Segsbury Camp
>
> R.3 The Iron Age in Southern Britain
>
> R.4 Segsbury Camp: an Iron Age hillfort
>
> R.5 Fact or fiction?
>
> Google Earth

Activity 1: Introducing Segsbury Camp

- Start by showing an aerial image of Segsbury Camp (R.1) or explore the site using Google Earth. Explain that, although it's now open countryside, it was once a busy, active settlement.

  Next, display the reconstruction drawing of the Iron Age hillfort (R.2). Use the 'I see, I think, I wonder' technique to encourage observation and critical thinking. Ask the class or small groups to generate a list of questions about the site based on the reconstruction drawing (e.g., When was it built? Did people live there?). Record these questions.

  Share the information in R.4 Segsbury Camp: an Iron Age hillfort, with the class. Discuss as a group or have students review independently. Does the information answer any of their questions? What additional questions do they still have?

Extra Activity

- If the students have not yet studied the Iron Age, consider providing the general introduction to the Iron Age in Southern Britain from (R.3). You can also use R.5 to play a 'Fact or Fiction' game with statements, helping to assess their understanding of the Iron Age.

Objective 1.2

Students will learn how to create and use timelines to understand the sequence of events in history. They will practise ordering archaeological time periods and explore Segsbury Camp's history developing an understanding of how history is organised into specific time periods.

National Curriculum links

History: Pupils should understand chronology, recognise historical periods, and understand the significance of key events. They should use timelines to sequence events and periods, and discuss how history is divided into different eras. The activity supports the development of understanding historical terminology like BC/AD and BCE/CE.

Resources

R.6 Archaeological time periods

R.7 Archaeological time periods (with dates)

R.8 Timeline cards

Chalk or string

Activity 2: Timelines

- Introduce the concept of a timeline and explain its usefulness in history. Timelines help us understand the sequence of events, show how things have changed over time, and connect different events. Discuss how history is divided into time periods, each with its own name.

Ordering Archaeological Time Periods

- Provide children with jigsaw pieces (R.6) of different archaeological time periods. Ask them to arrange the pieces in chronological order, adding the start and end dates for each period. Alternatively, use pre-labeled pieces (R.7) for additional support. For a more interactive approach, give each child a piece and ask them to move around, organising themselves into the correct order. Once the timeline is complete, review key terminology, such as BC/AD and BCE/CE, and explain why certain periods (e.g., Tudor, Georgian, Victorian) are used for more recent history due to the availability of written records.

Create a Segsbury Camp Timeline

- Take the activity outside if possible. On the playground, create a 26-metre timeline using chalk or string, with each metre representing a 100-year interval, going back to 600 BC when Segsbury Camp was built. Use timeline cards (R.8) to map out key events in Segsbury Camp's history, helping children understand the span of time. Encourage students to add other important historical events they know about, broadening their understanding of history. Alternatively, have students create personal paper timelines, with each centimetre representing one century. Provide timeline cards for them to place key events from Segsbury Camp in order.

  Bring the class together. Who would find this timeline useful? What other events could we add or remove? Explain that timelines are tailored to different audiences depending on the relevance of the information.

Lesson 2 Connecting with the land: visiting Segsbury Camp

Segsbury Camp offers enriching outdoor learning and is open to the public. For site access details, see page 7. Through these activities, pupils explore the ancient Iron Age hillfort via observation, imagination, and nature discovery, connecting with Segsbury's history, environment, and how the landscape has changed over time.

Objective 2.1

Students will explore Segsbury Hillfort to understand its historical significance, identify key features of the Iron Age site, and develop their fieldwork skills by observing and comparing the landscape then and now.

National Curriculum links

History: A local history study, Chronological understanding — exploring the Iron Age, Segsbury Hillfort, and comparing life then and now.

Geography: Human and physical geography, Geographical skills and fieldwork — investigating physical features and developing fieldwork skills through the walking tour.

Resources

R.2 A Reconstruction drawings of Segsbury Camp

R.9 Segsbury Camp walking tour

Activity 1: Self-led tour of the Iron Age hillfort

Use R.9 as a guide to explore Segsbury Hillfort with your class. Explain that during the walk, pupils will uncover the history of this ancient Iron Age site. Although little remains visible today, it was once a large, fortified settlement. Show them the reconstruction drawings (R.2) to help them visualise how the hillfort looked in the past, with its defensive banks, ditches, palisades, and gates. Inside, people cooked, made tools, wove cloth, and kept animals in enclosures.

As you walk, encourage pupils to look closely at the site and see if they can find any evidence of the hillfort's past. Use the Segsbury Hillfort walking tour to guide their investigation and explore the features that once made this location a thriving community. By the end of the tour, pupils will gain a deeper understanding of the hillfort's role and its significance in the Iron Age.

Objective 2.2

Pupils will observe and describe a landscape from a high point, identifying and classifying features as natural, man-made, or both. They will consider how the landscape may have changed over time. Pupils will record their observations through sketches, labelling different elements of the scene.

National Curriculum links

History: Study of local history and changes over time, focusing on Segsbury Camp and how the landscape has changed from the Iron Age to today.

Geography: Understanding human and physical geography by identifying natural and man-made features, developing locational knowledge, and practicing geographical skills through observation and fieldwork.

Resources

R.11 Framing the view: a changing landscape.

Activity 2: Framing the view: a changing landscape

From a high point at the hillfort, ask pupils to observe the view, weather permitting. Encourage them to focus on different shapes and colours they spot in the landscape. Guide them in identifying which features are natural and which are man-made. Use the Venn diagram on R.11 to record their observations:

- Natural features (e.g., hills, trees, clouds)
- Man-made features (e.g., roads, buildings, pylons)
- A mix of both (e.g., fields, hedgerows)

Encourage pupils to think about how the landscape has changed over time. Ask them to imagine what the view might have looked like to someone in the Iron Age — without modern buildings or roads, just small settlements and pockets of farmland.

Allow time for pupils to sketch the view and label the features as natural, man-made, or a mix.

To finish, have pupils share their sketches and explain why they classified features as they have. Discuss how the landscape may have changed over time and what it might have looked like in the past.

Objective 2.3

Pupils will explore how the sensory experience of Segsbury Hillfort has changed over time by listening to and smelling their surroundings. They will compare this with what people might have experienced in the Iron Age.

National Curriculum links

History: Pupils study local history, exploring changes in Segsbury Hillfort and comparing life in the Iron Age with today.

Geography: Pupils engage in fieldwork, observing human and physical geography, and considering how human activities impact the environment.

English: Pupils develop speaking and listening skills by discussing their sensory observations and expressing their thoughts clearly.

Resources

R.2 Reconstruction drawing of Segsbury Camp

R.4 Segsbury Camp: an Iron Age hillfort

R.12 Sounds and scents of the past

Activity 3: Sounds and scents of the past

Explain that landscapes don't just change in appearance — they also change in sound and scent.

Ask pupils: What does Segsbury Hillfort feel like today? (Calm, quiet, open, peaceful?) What might it have felt like in the past? (Busy, noisy, full of activity?)

Choose one (or more) locations and sit quietly for one minute.

Ask pupils to focus on what they can hear and smell — they may want to close their eyes. Encourage them to list sounds (e.g., birds, wind, distant machinery) and scents (e.g., grass, earth, flowers). Record observations using R.12 or discuss as a group.

Imagining the Iron Age. Show the reconstruction drawing (R.2) and refer to R.4 for descriptions of activities that took place at the hillfort.

Ask: What sounds and smells might have existed here in the past? (Sounds: Fires crackling, children playing, sheep baaing, people digging and building, tools being sharpened etc.) (Scents: Woodsmoke, cooked food, farm animals etc.)

Comparing past and present. Discuss as a group: How is the hillfort different now? Which past sounds and smells do we still experience today? What does this tell us about how life has changed?

Objective 2.4

Students will explore Segsbury Camp's wildflower meadow, observing local wildlife and developing skills in nature observation. They will identify different plants, animals, and insects, and capture their discoveries through sketches, notes, or photos.

National Curriculum links

Science: Identify and classify living things (plants, animals, insects) based on their features.

Science: Observe changes over time in the environment, including seasons and habitats.

Geography: Understand how physical features (e.g., wildflower meadows) influence wildlife.

Art: Use sketching to describe the natural environment and its features.

Resources

R.13 Wildflower meadow

R.14 Nature explorer

Activity 4: Exploring nature at Segsbury Camp

- Begin by explaining to the class that Segsbury Camp is home to a wildflower meadow where many plants and animals thrive. The area is no longer ploughed to protect the archaeology beneath the ground, but animals are grazed here to help manage the meadow.

  Show images of some of the wildflowers found at Segsbury Camp (R.13). If visiting when the flowers are in bloom, challenge the class to identify some of them. Use R.13 as a spotting sheet to tick off flowers they've found, or bring other identification books to identify additional species. Depending on the class's experience, talk through the process of identifying plants (e.g., looking at leaf shape, flower head size, number of petals, colour, etc.). Remind students to look closely to match and identify the flowers.

  Extension: challenge them to find and sketch at least three flowers, describing their colours and shapes.

  Bring the class together and discus: why do wildflowers thrive here?

Nature Discovery Challenge

- Introduce the Nature Discovery Challenge (see R.14). Discuss some of the plants, insects, and animals that can be spotted at Segsbury Camp and read through the challenges they need to complete. Ask: Which items do they think will be easiest to find? Are there any they think they won't find due to the season or weather?

  Split the class into groups or have them work together to see how many items they can spot.

  Regroup and discuss: What did they find? Why is Segsbury Camp a good place for wildlife?

  Could the area be improved for wildlife?

Lesson 3 Aerial views: Segsbury Camp from above

This lesson introduces archaeology and the role of the archaeologist. It explores how archaeologists can use evidence from above the ground, using clues from the landscape, to explore the past. Pupils investigate Segsbury Camp through aerial images, maps, and surveys and apply this new knowledge by identifying features and creating their own site maps.

Objective 3.1

> Students will understand what archaeology is, describe the role of an archaeologist, and explain how different sources of evidence, like maps and aerial images, are used to reconstruct sites such as Segsbury Camp.

National Curriculum links

> History: Understand methods of historical enquiry, including the use of primary and secondary sources.

Resources

> R.15 What is archaeology?
>
> R.34 Key vocabulary

Activity 1: What is archaeology?

- How to do we know what Segsbury Camp looked like in the Iron Age?

  Start by showing the reconstruction drawing of Segsbury Camp. Ask the class: How do we know what Segsbury Camp looked like in the Iron Age?

  Explain that the drawing is based on archaeological research. Ask the class to consider how archaeologists find out what the past looked like. Encourage students to share their thoughts on what archaeology is and what archaeologists do. Ask them to draw a picture or write a definition of an archaeologist.

  Share the information in R.15 and R.34, explaining what archaeology is and how archaeologist use various sources to understand the past. Compare students' definitions and drawings to the information. Discuss any differences and clarify any misunderstandings.

  Emphasise that archaeologists use many sources, not just digging, to uncover the past.

  Explain that the rest of the activities in this lesson uses the sources that archaeologists look at before they excavate (maps, aerial images, crop marks, geophysical surveys etc).

Objective 3.2

Students will how archaeologists use maps, aerial images, and surveys to investigate landscapes and create site maps, focusing on evidence from Segsbury Camp.

National Curriculum links

History: Understand how knowledge of the past is constructed from a range of sources; develop skills in historical enquiry.

Geography: Use maps, aerial photographs, and other geographical sources to observe, measure, and record features of the landscape. Understand how physical and human processes shape the environment over time.

Resources

R.16 Historic mapping

R.17 LiDAR

R.18 Aerial image of Segsbury Camp (Google Earth)

R.19 Why do archaeologists look at aerial photographs?

R.20 What is a geophysical survey?

R.21 Sketch location map

R.22 Mapping the past: what can you spot?

R.23 Geophysical survey: greyscale plot

R.24 Geophysical survey: interpretation

Activity 2: Segsbury Camp from above

- Explain that Britain's landscape has been shaped by human activity for thousands of years. Clues from the past can still be seen in today's landscape. Archaeologists investigate these clues using tools such as aerial photographs and historic maps.

  Explore Segsbury Camp from above using aerial images (Google Earth or R.18) and compare them with historic maps from the National Library of Scotland website or R.16. Is the hillfort easy to spot? Why?

Historic mapping activity

- Use R.16 to study the historic maps and answer the questions in R.22 to investigate further.

  Explain that archaeologists also use cropmarks in aerial photos (see R.19 for an explanation) and LiDAR (R.17) to uncover hidden features. At Segsbury Camp, cropmarks and LiDAR reveal faint Iron Age and Roman fields outside the hillfort, but there are few clues about what was happening inside the hillfort from the aerial images or LiDAR.

  To learn more, archaeologists carried out a geophysical survey (explain using R.20) to investigate activity inside the hillfort. Show the greyscale survey results (R. 23).

Geophysical survey challenge

- Using R.23, ask pupils to identify interesting features (e.g., circles or straight lines) that may represent buried structures. Where would they choose to excavate? Have pupils pick seven spots, then compare their choices with the actual excavation areas (R.24 – shown in red).

Mapping activity

- Using R.21, pupils create a sketch map of Segsbury Camp. What should they include (north arrow, key, roads, hillfort outline)?

  Sharing: Compare maps in small groups and discuss improvements.

Lesson 4 Digging deeper: uncovering Iron Age artefacts

This lesson focuses on the archaeological finds discovered during excavations at Segsbury Camp. Students will explore the types of materials that survive in the ground and how archaeologists use artefacts to learn about past societies. By investigating the Iron Age objects, students will discover what these artefacts can reveal about life at the hillfort and the people who lived there.

Objective 4.1

> Students will identify materials that survive in the ground and analyse how artefacts made from materials such as pottery, bone, and wood provide clues about the history of Segsbury Camp.

National Curriculum links

> History: Understand methods of historical enquiry, including the use of primary and secondary sources. Science: Materials and their properties.

Resources

> R.25 Excavation at Segsbury
>
> R.26 What would survive in the ground?

Activity 1: Exploring what survives in the ground

- Show images of the excavation at Segsbury Camp (R.25), highlighting the picture of the archaeologist excavating a pit. Ask students: What might archaeologists find in these pits? Explain that archaeologists typically find the "rubbish" that was discarded and left behind.

  Discuss how "rubbish" can tell us a lot about people. Use a classroom bin as an example: What does the rubbish in the bin tell us about the people in the classroom? Expand the discussion to think about where the items were made and what this might reveal about international trade and society.

What Materials Survive?

- Ask: What materials would survive underground for thousands of years? Present a variety of items made from different materials (pottery, iron, bronze, wood, food, wool, bone, basketry, glass, leather, etc.) and sort them into two groups: those that would survive and those that would decay. Discuss which materials (e.g., pottery, stone) would survive and which (e.g., wood, food) would decay (mainly organic materials, although bone typically survives). If including modern items like plastic, remind students that these materials weren't available in the Iron Age.

  Show pictures of replica Iron Age items (R.26) and ask which would survive, which would leave no trace, and which might leave partial remains (e.g., you'd find the clay spindle whorl but not the wooden spindle or wool). Summarise how material evidence helps archaeologists piece together history, even though it's never a complete picture.

Objective 4.2

Students will investigate Iron Age artefacts from Segsbury Camp, using archaeological techniques to analyse and interpret objects. By examining images and discussing their findings, pupils will gain a deeper understanding of daily life at the hillfort, exploring what these artefacts reveal about the people who lived there.

National Curriculum links

History: Historical enquiry. Pupils should be taught how to ask historically valid questions and use evidence to build an understanding of the past. Use a range of sources of evidence to support historical claims.

Resources

R.27 Archaeological finds

R.28 Investigating archaeological finds

Exploring the artefacts

Explain to the class that during the archaeological excavations at Segsbury Camp, many different artefacts from the Iron Age were discovered. These artefacts help us understand what life might have been like at the hillfort during that time.

Challenge the children to investigate these artefacts just as archaeologists would. Divide the class into small groups and give each group a selection of finds image cards (R.27). Explain that these artefacts were found at Segsbury Camp and date back to the Iron Age.

Ask each group to place a finds card face up (showing only the image, not the written information) in the centre of R.28 and discuss the questions. These are the types of questions archaeologists ask when they try to interpret objects. Can the children answer any of these questions? Not every question will apply to every object (please note that the spelt grain and snails are environmental finds and many of the questions do not apply to these). Turn over the card to read more about the artefact.

Ask: Did they manage to answer any of the questions correctly? Does the information help them answer any of the questions? What else would they like to know about the artefact?

Whole-Class Discussion

Ask: What do these artefacts tell us about life at Segsbury Camp during the Iron Age?

Go through each artefact together. For example:

Decorative horse fittings show they used horses and valued them enough to decorate them. Patterns on pottery suggest they liked to decorate everyday objects. Charred grain and a quern stone show what they ate and how they made flour. A spindle whorl suggests they spent time spinning fibres into thread.

Does everyone agree with these interpretations?

Could there be other ways to understand these artefacts?

Lesson 5 Echoes of the Iron Age: creative responses to Segsbury

In Echoes of the Iron Age: creative responses to Segsbury, students will engage with history through three creative activities. They will design and create Iron Age-inspired pottery, reconstruct or re-interpret Segsbury Camp, and craft and perform oral stories based on the camp's past. These activities foster creativity, historical understanding, and connection to the Iron Age through hands-on learning.

Objective 5.1

> Students will design and craft their own patterned pottery, drawing inspiration from the decorated pots found at Segsbury Camp and the natural materials around them.

National Curriculum links

> Art and Design: use a range of materials creatively to design and make products. Improve their mastery of art and design techniques, including drawing, painting, and sculpture. Explore and evaluate a range of natural and man-made patterns, using these to influence their own artwork.

Resources

> R.29 Archaeological finds from Segsbury Camp
>
> R.30 Iron Age pottery outlines

Activity 1: Clay Impressions

Inspired by the decorated pottery sherds found at Segsbury Camp (R.29), students will step into the shoes of Iron Age potters and pattern-makers. Using the Iron Age pottery outline worksheet (R.30), they will begin by sketching and planning their own designs, imagining the simple tools Iron Age people might have used — such as twigs, cords, fingernails, or shells — to decorate their pots.

Once their designs are complete, students will gather natural materials like pinecones, leaves, shells, and sticks to experiment with texture. By pressing these materials into clay or playdough, they will bring their designs to life, recreating patterns similar to those found at Segsbury Camp.

As an extension, students can set up a mini museum display, exhibiting their pottery alongside their sketches. They will reflect on how their planning influenced the final pieces and consider what their creations might reveal to archaeologists thousands of years from now.

Reflective questions:

Why do you think people decorated their pottery instead of leaving it plain?

What does pattern-making tell us about creativity in the past?

How would you feel if someone found your pottery 2,000 years from now?

Objective 5.2

Students will use archaeological evidence and their imagination to design and create a 2D or 3D representation of Segsbury Camp, developing skills in map interpretation, spatial awareness, and creative construction.

National Curriculum links

History: Understand how archaeologists use evidence to reconstruct the past.

Art and Design: Use a range of materials creatively to design and make models. Develop skills in planning, designing, and building three-dimensional structures.

Geography: Use maps and aerial images to interpret physical features and settlements.

Design and Technology: Select and use tools and materials to create functional models. Develop problem-solving skills through model-making and teamwork.

Resources

R.24 Geophysical survey: interpretation
R.31 Outline of Segsbury Camp

R.32 Segsbury Camp rampart and ditches

Activity 2: Rebuilding Segsbury Camp

Using the provided worksheets featuring the outline of Segsbury Camp (R.31 or R.32), students will use the map to create either an accurate reconstruction or an imaginative reinterpretation of what Segsbury Camp may have looked like during the Iron Age.

1. The Archaeologist's Eye (accurate reconstruction):

Students use the worksheet outline alongside the geophysical survey results (R24, showing evidence of hut circles, pits, and other features) to carefully position key elements like roundhouses, storage pits, or pathways inside the hillfort. They will aim to reconstruct what life might have been like based on archaeological evidence. Encourage them to add details such as fences, animal enclosures, or work areas based on what we know about Iron Age settlements.

2. The Storyteller's Vision (imaginative version):

Students let their imaginations run wild! What if Segsbury Camp was a trading hub, a warrior's stronghold, or even a magical hillfort with mythical creatures? They can design their own version, adding fantastical elements like hidden chambers, ceremonial spaces, or lookout towers.

3. 3D Maker Challenge:

Take it further by inviting students (individually or in teams) to bring their designs to life using recycled materials, clay, natural resources, or craft supplies to build a 3D model of their hillfort based on either their accurate or imaginative plan. Students could use sticks for ramparts, string for fences, pebbles for roundhouses, and so on.

Objective 5.3

Students will create and perform an oral story based on Segsbury Camp, using storytelling techniques such as voice, gesture, and drama, to understand how oral traditions were used to preserve history and culture in the Iron Age.

National Curriculum links

Students will develop their speaking and listening skills by responding to peers, justifying answers, and using relevant strategies to engage listeners. They will articulate and perform their own stories, using voice, gesture, and drama to enhance understanding and demonstrate creativity.

Resources

R.33 Oral stories

Activity 3: Echoes of the past: oral storytelling

In the Iron Age, stories were passed down by word of mouth. These oral tales carried forward the history, beliefs, and warnings of the people who lived here. In this activity, students will step into the role of Iron Age storytellers, crafting and performing their own legends set at Segsbury Camp.

Setting the Scene.

Start by sharing Rev. John Wilson's account of Segsbury Camp (R.33): "There is a tradition that the shrieks and cries of women and children are heard here..." Ask: Who were these voices? What might have happened at the camp to cause such a haunting legend? What kinds of stories would Iron Age people have told about this place? Encourage them to imagine the camp at night, with a roaring fire and a storyteller captivating their clan.

The Challenge: Create an Oral Tale

Students work individually or in small groups to create an oral story based on Segsbury Camp. It could be a mythical tale explaining the haunting sounds, a historical legend about a chieftain or sacred event, or a warning tale passed down to keep children away from danger. Explain the oral tradition rules: no writing it down! Students can create story maps and actions, but the story must be shared orally, just like Iron Age storytellers. Remind them to use voice, gestures, and drama to engage listeners. Consider adding a "ritual" opening or closing phrase (e.g., "Long ago, when the winds spoke louder than words…").

The Story Circle:

Gather the class in a circle (indoors or outside for extra atmosphere) and invite each group to share their story aloud, passing the oral tradition around the circle.

Optional Extensions: Link to literacy by later writing down or illustrating their stories, exploring how oral stories eventually became written legends.

Segsbury Camp

Activity resources

Aerial image of Segsbury Camp

Aerial image of Segsbury Camp, looking south.

Photo credit: Hedley Thorne

Reconstruction drawing of Segsbury Camp during the Iron Age

Image credit: Jennie Anderson

The Iron Age in Southern Britain

The Iron Age in Southern Britain lasted from around 800 BC to AD 43, ending when the Romans invaded. It is the last of three prehistoric periods: the Stone Age, the Bronze Age, and finally the Iron Age. An important change in the Iron Age was the discovery and widespread use of iron, which was much stronger and harder than bronze. This allowed people to create better tools, weapons, and farming equipment.

Hillforts

During the Iron Age, people lived in communities or clans. These communities worked together to build hillforts, which were large, enclosed areas, typically located on hilltops. The hillforts had high earth banks and deep ditches, which might have helped protect the people inside. There is, however, debate among historians about whether hillforts were primarily built for defensive purposes. Some believe they were used for defence, while others argue that they served other purposes, like acting as centres for trade, religious gatherings, or social and political activities. Segsbury Camp is an example of an Iron Age hillfort.

Roundhouses

People in the Iron Age lived in roundhouses, which were circular buildings made from wood, mud, and thatch. The roundhouses had thick walls to keep them warm, and a central fire was used for cooking and heating. Inside, people kept animals and stored food.

A modern reconstruction of an Iron Age roundhouse

Farming and trade

Most Iron Age people lived by farming. They grew crops like wheat, barley, and oats and raised animals like cows, sheep, and pigs. Iron Age people also traded goods, such as salt and pottery, with other tribes both in Britain and across Europe. Materials like glass and fine pottery were often imported from places like France and Spain.

What we know about the Iron Age

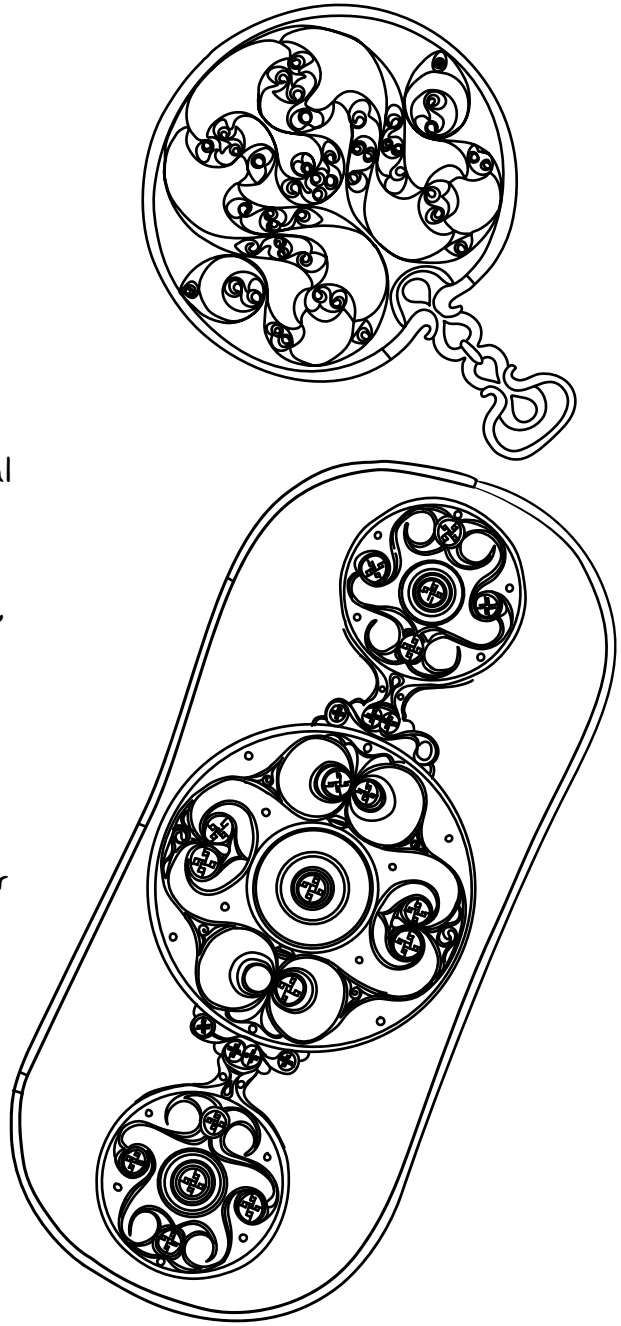
One of the biggest challenges in studying the Iron Age is that Iron Age people did not write down their history. This means that we don't have written records from the time. Instead, what we know comes from archaeological discoveries, such as tools, pottery, weapons, and jewellery found in excavations, and from what the Romans wrote about the people of Britain. The Romans often described the Iron Age Britons as "barbarians," which is how they saw people who did not follow Roman ways of life.

Celtic art

The Celtic style of art is another important part of Iron Age culture. La Tène art, named after an archaeological site in Switzerland, is known for its intricate designs of swirls, circles, and stylised animals. Many Iron Age objects, including weapons and jewellery, were decorated with these patterns.

The end of the Iron Age

The Iron Age ended in AD 43 when the Romans invaded Britain and began their conquest of the country.



Illustrations of the intricate designs found on Iron Age objects. Top: the back of a mirror. Bottom: the front of a shield.

Segsbury Camp: an Iron Age hillfort

Segsbury Camp, also called Letcombe Castle, is the biggest hillfort in Oxfordshire. It has a huge earth wall (called a rampart) and a deep ditch around it, covering 27 acres! A team of archaeologists from the University of Oxford excavated in 1996 and 1997 to learn more about it.

Segsbury Camp sits on high ground so people long ago could see far across the land. Other hillforts nearby, like Uffington Castle and Liddington Castle, were built the same way. They were placed near an ancient path called the Ridgeway, which made it easy for people and animals to travel between places.

When was it built?

People built Segsbury Camp around 600 BC (over 2,600 years ago) during the Iron Age. It was used for about 450 years and then abandoned. Unlike Uffington Castle, no one used the hillfort during Roman times.

How was the hillfort built?

The rampart and ditches of the hillfort were extremely large. They were built and rebuilt in five phases, getting bigger each time. The first rampart was a wooden wall (called a palisade) made of large wooden posts. Later, they used chalk and stone to pack behind the large wooden palisade. The final version was even larger. The ditch was dug deeper to 5 m deep and the rampart widened from 8 to 12 m and made strong by packed earth and stone.

There was an impressive main entrance on the eastern side. A break in the rampart and a causeway across the ditch are evidence of this. People entering the hillfort would have been met by a pair of massive inner and outer wooden gates. There may have been another entrance on the western side which was later blocked off.

What was inside?

Even though Segsbury Camp was big, people didn't live there all the time. There were fewer than 20 roundhouses, which were simple homes with thatched roofs and walls made of wood, clay, and straw (called wattle and daub). Near the houses, people dug deep pits to store food or bury special objects. These pits held broken pottery, animal bones, and even human bones!

What was it used for?

At first, modern people thought hillforts were built to protect against attacks. But now, experts believe they were gathering places where people met for special events. They might have come for religious ceremonies, feasts, weddings, or to trade goods. People probably visited Segsbury Camp at important times of the year, like harvest season.

What happened to it?

By the end of the Iron Age, Segsbury Camp was abandoned. When the Romans came, they didn't use it, maybe because they focused more on farming wheat and barley instead of raising sheep, which had been important to the people who once used the hillfort.

Even though Segsbury Camp is over 2,500 years old, you can still see its ramparts and ditches today!

Aerial image of Segsbury Camp, looking west. Credit: Hedley Thorne

Fact or fiction?

Iron Age people used plastic to make tools.

Hillforts, like Segsbury Camp, may have been used for trade, social gatherings, and defence.

The Iron Age in England began around 800 BC and ended in AD 43 when the Romans invaded.

People in the Iron Age grew crops like wheat, barley, and oats and raised animals such as cows, sheep, and pigs.

People in the Iron Age used iron to make tools, weapons, and farming equipment.

People in the Iron Age lived in roundhouses made from wood, mud, and thatch.

Iron Age people lived alone in small villages, with no connection to other groups.

Iron Age people used electricity for lighting and powering their homes.

The people of the Iron Age wrote down their history, which is how we know so much about them today.

Hillforts were only ever used as military bases to fight off invaders.

Iron Age people passed down their knowledge through storytelling and oral traditions.

Hillforts were mainly built on low ground to avoid detection by enemies.

The Iron Age came after the Stone Age and the Bronze Age.

Iron Age people mainly lived in cities with stone houses and paved roads.

Pottery was traded by people in the Iron Age.

Iron was weaker and less useful than bronze, which is why it was rarely used.

Hillforts were normally built on hilltops and surrounded by earth banks and ditches.

Much of what we know about the Iron Age comes from archaeological evidence.

Iron Age people only traded with nearby tribes and never with people outside Britain.

All archaeologists agree that hillforts were built only for defence.

The Romans saw the Iron Age Britons as "barbarians."

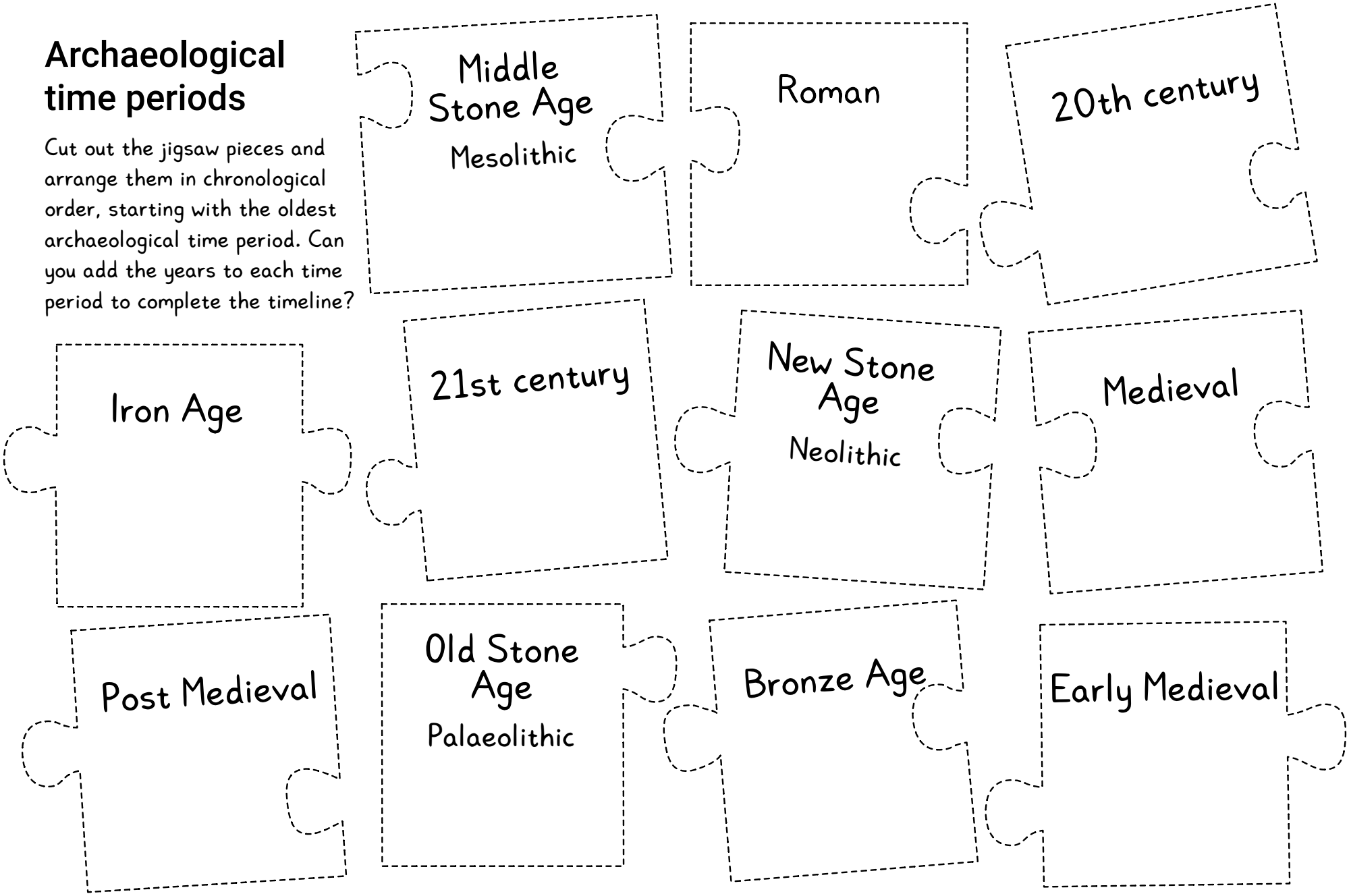
Roundhouses were square and made from bricks and tiles.

People in the Iron Age grew bananas, sugar cane, and rice.

Iron Age people lived in clans and worked together to build hillforts.

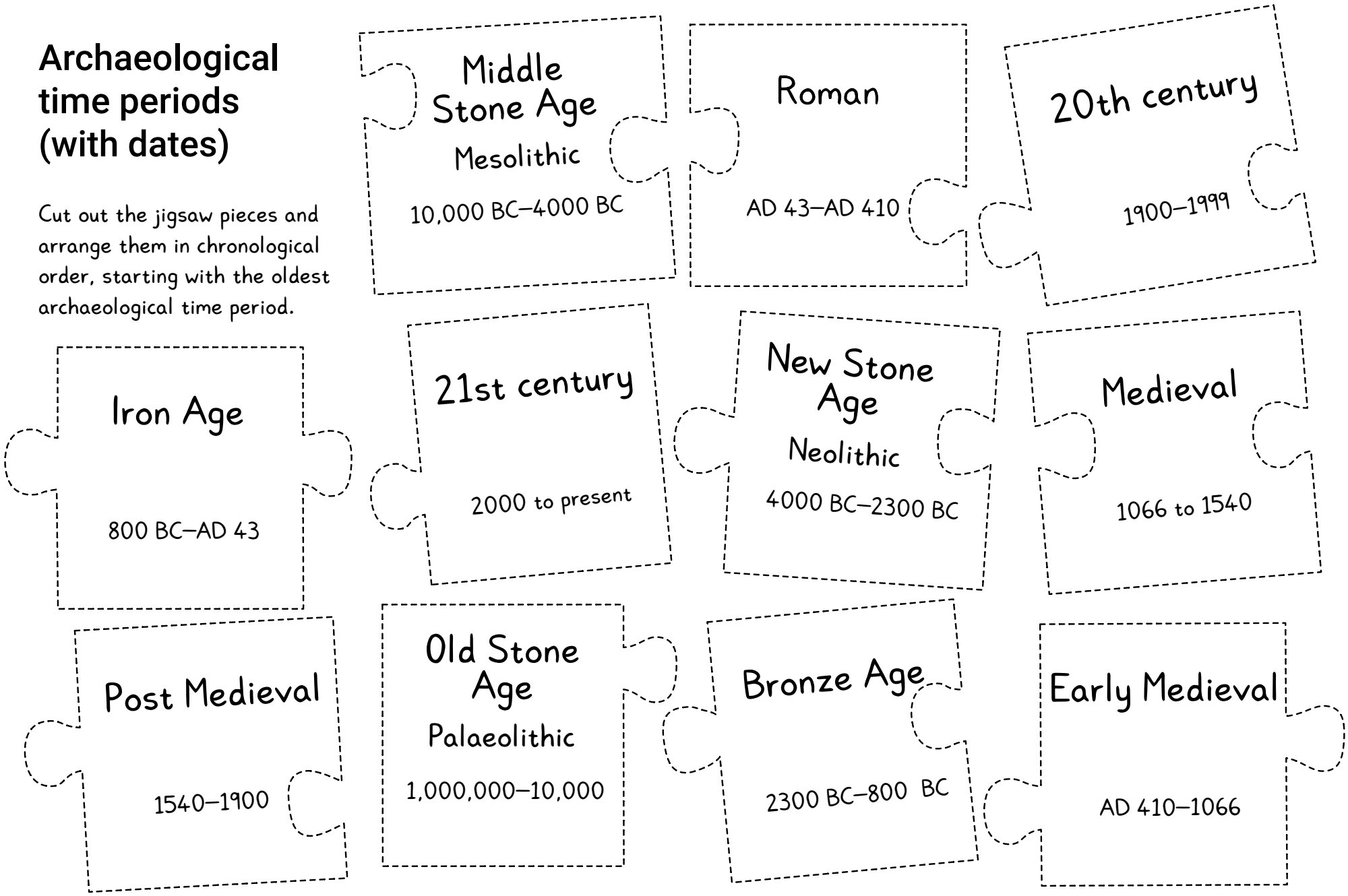
Archaeological time periods

Cut out the jigsaw pieces and arrange them in chronological order, starting with the oldest archaeological time period. Can you add the years to each time period to complete the timeline?



Archaeological time periods (with dates)

Cut out the jigsaw pieces and arrange them in chronological order, starting with the oldest archaeological time period.



Timeline cards

These cards show the history of Segsbury Camp, where the hillfort was built during the Iron Age. The yellow-topped cards show when the hillfort was used.

Cut out the cards and use them to create a timeline of Segsbury Camp's history.

Stone Age
1,000,000 BC–2300 BC

During the Stone Age, people lived in the land around Segsbury Camp, but archaeologists have not found evidence that they lived on the hill where the hillfort was later built.

Bronze Age
2300 BC–800 BC

Archaeologists have found Bronze Age artefacts around Segsbury Camp, showing that the area was well used by people during the Bronze Age. However, they had not yet started building the hillfort.

Early Iron Age
800 BC–300 BC

The hillfort was built around 600 BC and was bigger than other hillforts in the area. It was probably used as a meeting place for people living in farmsteads in the surrounding countryside.

Middle Iron Age
300 BC–100 BC

The hillfort was in use for over 400 years. Roundhouses were built, and the ramparts and ditches were made larger over time. However, it seems to have stopped being used around 150 BC.

Cut

Late Iron Age
100 BC–AD 43

After the hillfort was abandoned, it was no longer looked after. This is different from some other hillforts, which continued to be used through the late Iron Age and then during Roman period.

Roman
AD 43–AD 410

During the Roman period, people did not use the hillfort but there is lots of evidence of people living and farming in the countryside around the it.

Early Medieval
AD 410–1066

A Saxon burial cist (a stone-lined grave) was found on the southern side of the rampart. This suggests that the hillfort was used again at some point during the early Medieval period.

Medieval to 1900

The hillfort was used as farmland. Over many years, ploughing made the ramparts lower and smaller. The road was built through the hillfort (although the date for this is unknown).

20th century

In 1935, the site was recognised as a nationally important historical place and was given legal protection as a Scheduled Monument.

21st century

The site is no longer ploughed and is now carefully managed to protect the ancient remains under the ground.

Segsbury Camp walking tour

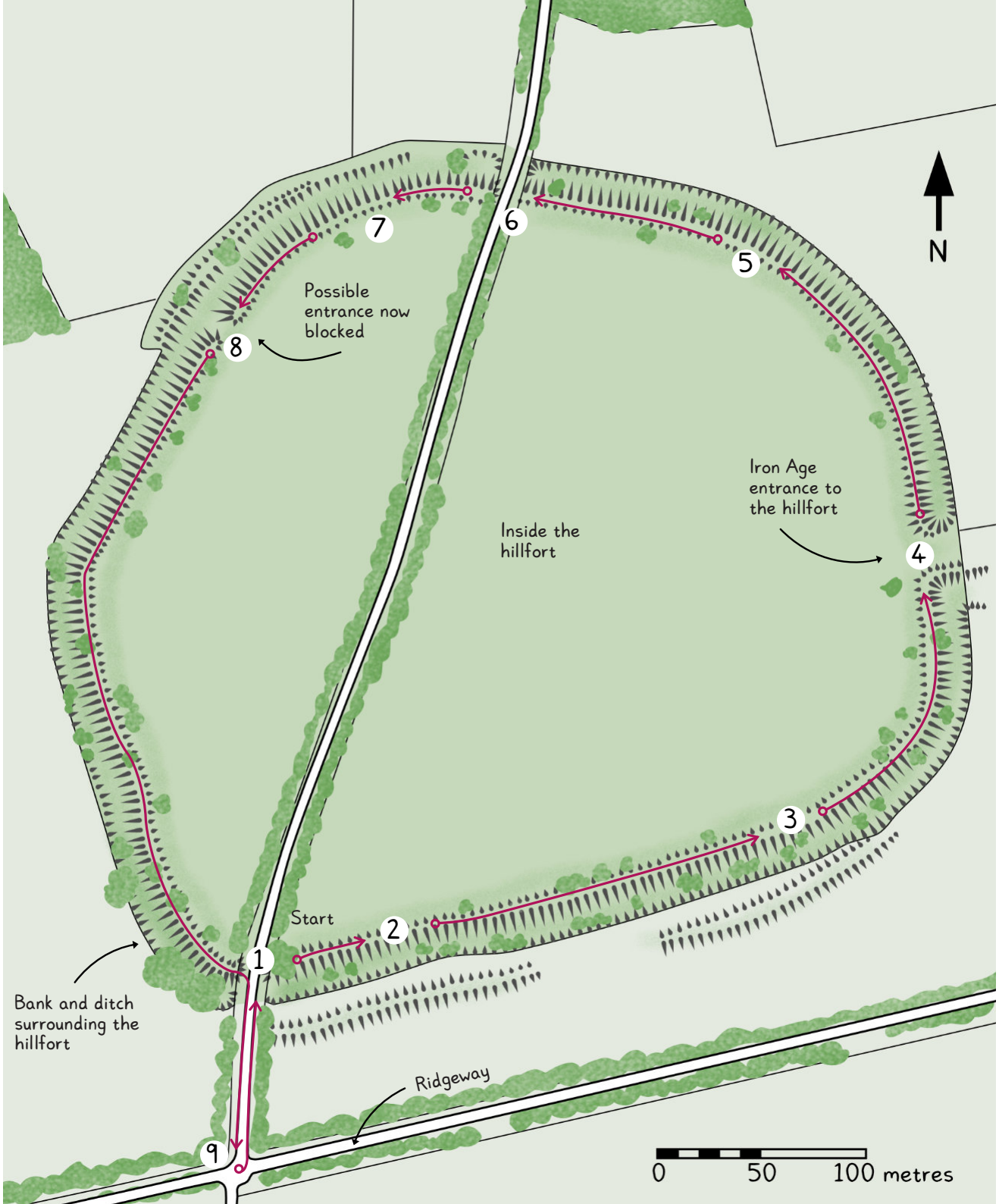
Follow this trail to walk around the edge of the hillfort and discover the history of this ancient Iron Age site.

Start the walking tour at number one and travel anti-clockwise around the hillfort.

Please stick to the path and do not enter the inside area of the hillfort.

Key

- Trail route
- Sloping ground showing the ditches and banks
- Trackway or road
- Fence line
- Trees and vegetation



Map created based on Ordnance Survey plan SU3884-3984, 1:2500 scale map, 1971. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.

1 START

Begin your walking tour here. Step over the stile and make your way up the bank.

2

You are now standing on the rampart – the defensive wall – of an Iron Age hillfort built around 2,600 years ago. Segsbury Camp is the largest hillfort in Oxfordshire, covering 11 hectares (about 16 football pitches!). It was used for over 400 years before being abandoned around 150 BC.

Illustrations of Iron Age pottery discovered during archaeological excavations at Segsbury Camp.

3

Look to your right – you'll see a deep ditch running alongside the bank. This was part of the hillfort's defences and was originally 5 metres deep. The soil and chalk dug out were used to build the huge banks, which were once topped with a tall wooden fence called a palisade. Imagine how much work it would have taken to dig these ditches and build the walls – all without modern machines! Hundreds of people would have worked together to create this impressive hillfort.

4

Here you'll notice a gap in the ramparts, this was the main Iron Age entrance and where people would have come in and out of the hillfort. There would have been big wooden gates and fences to control who entered.

Imagine walking up to this entrance 2,500 years ago. You might be bringing animals inside, carrying goods to trade, or coming to a big gathering!

5

Stop and look at the inside area of the hillfort. Now it is a wildflower meadow, but in the Iron Age it was a busy and important place. While people once thought hillforts were built mainly for defence, experts now believe they were more like community gathering sites. Farmers from nearby settlements came here to trade goods, take part in festivals, and celebrate important events.

Picture the crackling of fires, the scent of food cooking, and the sounds of people talking, trading, and sharing stories. Roundhouses, made from wooden frames with wattle-and-daub walls and thatched roofs, were dotted throughout the area. Each had a central hearth that provided warmth and was used for cooking.

Archaeologists have discovered deep storage pits – some used for keeping food, others possibly for religious or ritual purposes. They have also found

pottery, iron tools, and even human remains, suggesting that important ceremonies took place here. The hillfort was not just a place of protection but a centre of social, economic, and spiritual life in the Iron Age.

6

Cross over the road and climb the bank on the other side. This road wasn't here in the Iron Age – it was built long after Segsbury Camp was abandoned, but no one knows exactly when.

7

Look around – can you see for miles? The hillfort's high position gave people a great view of the land around them. What can you see today that wouldn't have been here in the Iron Age?

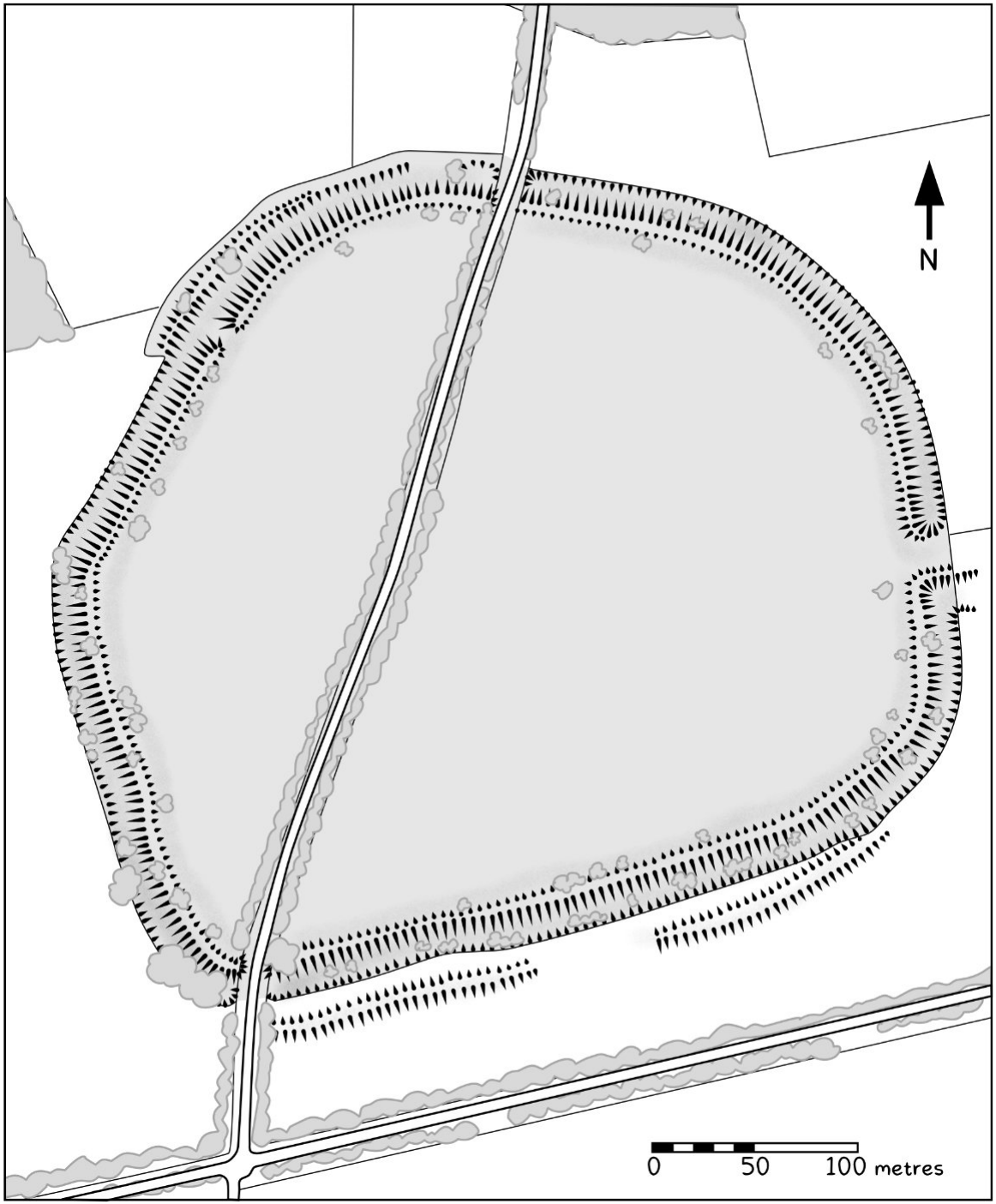
8

At this location, some archaeologists believe there may have been a second entrance on the western side of the hillfort, which was later blocked. This is similar to other local hillforts, such as Uffington and Liddington.

9

Here you are standing on the ancient Ridgeway, a trackway that has been used by people for thousands of years. Archaeologists have found pottery from as far away as Wiltshire, showing that people traveled long distances along the Ridgeway to visit Segsbury Camp.

Return to number one on the map to complete the tour.



Segsbury Camp map

Use this map to create your own walking tour around Segsbury Camp.

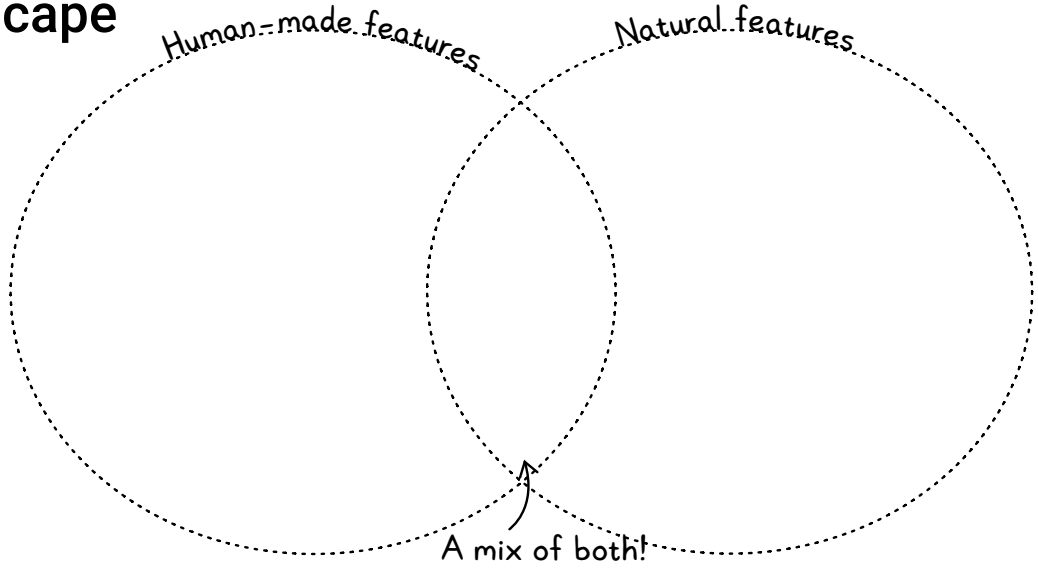
Map created based on Ordnance Survey plan SU3884-3984, 1:2500 scale map, 1971. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.

Framing the view: a changing landscape

Segsbury Camp sits at the top of a hill, offering wide, far-reaching views.

Look closely. What can you see? List human-made features, natural features, and any that are a mix of both (such as hedgerows).

How might the landscape have looked in the Iron Age? Which features would not have existed? What would have stayed the same?



Sketch the view and label the natural and human-made features.

Sounds and scents of the past

The landscape is always changing: not only in the way it looks, but also in the way it sounds... and smells!

Sit quietly and listen to what you can hear at Segsbury Camp today. Can you hear the wind, wildlife, or distant machinery? What does the air smell like?

Record what you hear and smell below.

The sounds and smells would have been different in the Iron Age. Look at the drawing of how Segsbury Camp might have looked in the past. Imagine what it was like. The hillfort would have been full of people: some building, others making tools or crafting objects. Fires would have been burning for cooking, and animals would have been tended. Stories might have been told, and children would have played or helped their families.

Sit and imagine the sounds and smells of the past.
Record them below.

Sounds and smells today.

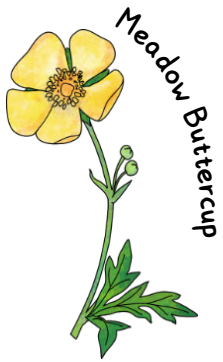
Sounds and smells of the Iron Age.

How do they compare? What are the similarities and differences?

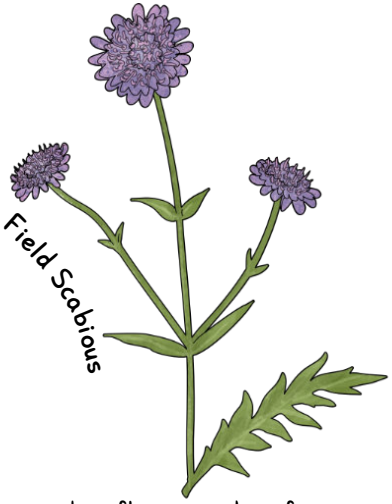
Wildflower meadow

The inside of Segsbury Camp is a wildflower meadow. The area is no longer ploughed to protect the archaeology beneath the soil, but grazing by animals helps the meadow grow and flourish.

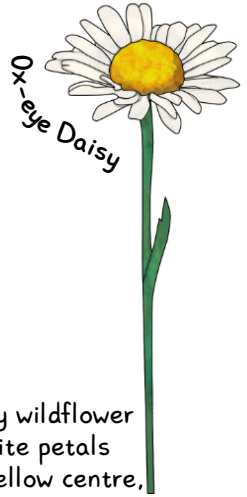
Here are some of the wildflowers that grow at Segsbury Camp. Can you spot any of these, or find others?



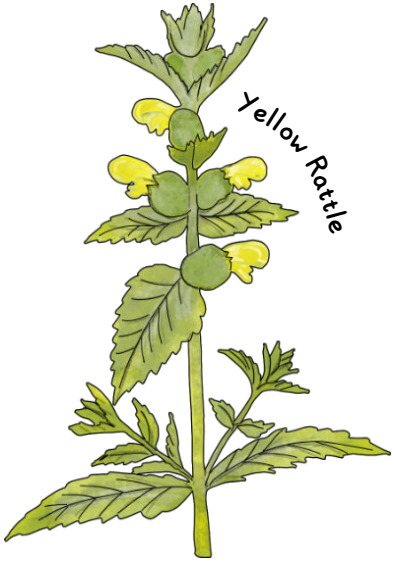
Features shiny yellow petals and is commonly found in meadows and grasslands.



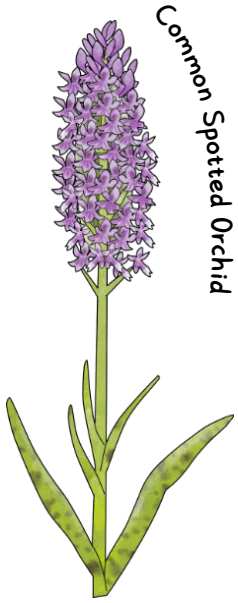
A meadow flower with soft purple-blue petals and a rounded, pincushion-like centre.



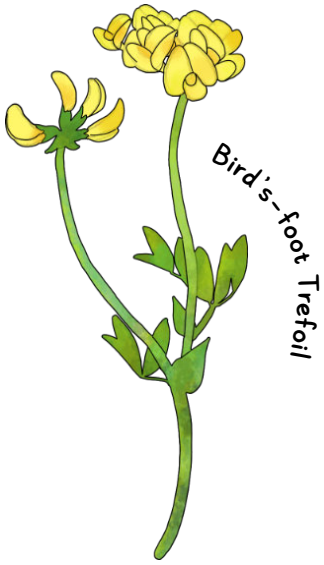
A sturdy wildflower with white petals and a yellow centre, like a classic daisy.



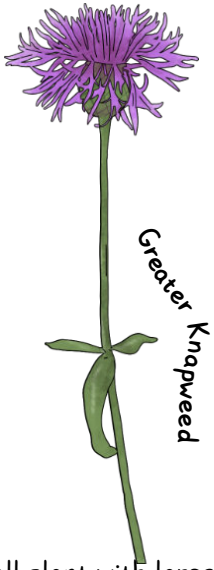
Known for its bright yellow, hooded flowers and distinctive seed pods that rattle when dry.



A striking wildflower with purple-pink flowers and spotted leaves.



A low-growing plant with bright yellow pea-like flowers, sometimes tinged with red.



A tall plant with large, thistle-like purple flowers, loved by bees and butterflies.

Has clusters of small, drooping yellow flowers that grow on tall stems.

Nature explorer

Wildflowers, insects, and animals all thrive here. As you explore, watch for birds in the sky, insects on the ground, and signs of other creatures.

Here are a few examples of wildlife spotted at Segsbury Camp. Can you spot any of them? What else can you find? Capture your discoveries with a camera, note them down, or sketch them.

Nature Discovery Challenge

As you explore Segsbury Camp, look for the items listed below and tick off anything you find.

- ○ A rough or bumpy rock
- ○ A leaf with jagged edges
- ○ A leaf with smooth edges
- ○ A plant with tiny flowers
- ○ A tree with rough bark
- ○ A hole or burrow made by an animal
- ○ A tree with twisted branches
- ○ A bird soaring high in the sky
- ○ A place where the wind sounds the loudest
- ○ Animal tracks or footprints (in grass or soft earth)
- ○ A sign of an insect (like a web or nibbled leaf)
- ○ Something with lichen or moss growing on it
- ○ A flower with more than five petals
- ○ A bird perched on a tree or fence

What is archaeology?

Archaeology is the study of the past through the things people have left behind. Archaeologists act like detectives, searching for clues in the landscape, artefacts, and other evidence to uncover how people lived long ago.

What do archaeologist do?

Archaeologists explore the past by studying objects, structures, and environmental evidence. There are many types of archaeologist, each focusing on different areas. For example:

- Field archaeologists investigate sites by surveying or excavating.
- Finds specialists analyse artefacts to learn more about how they were made and used.
- Environmental archaeologists study ancient plants, pollen, and animal remains to understand past environments.

How do archaeologists find out about the past?

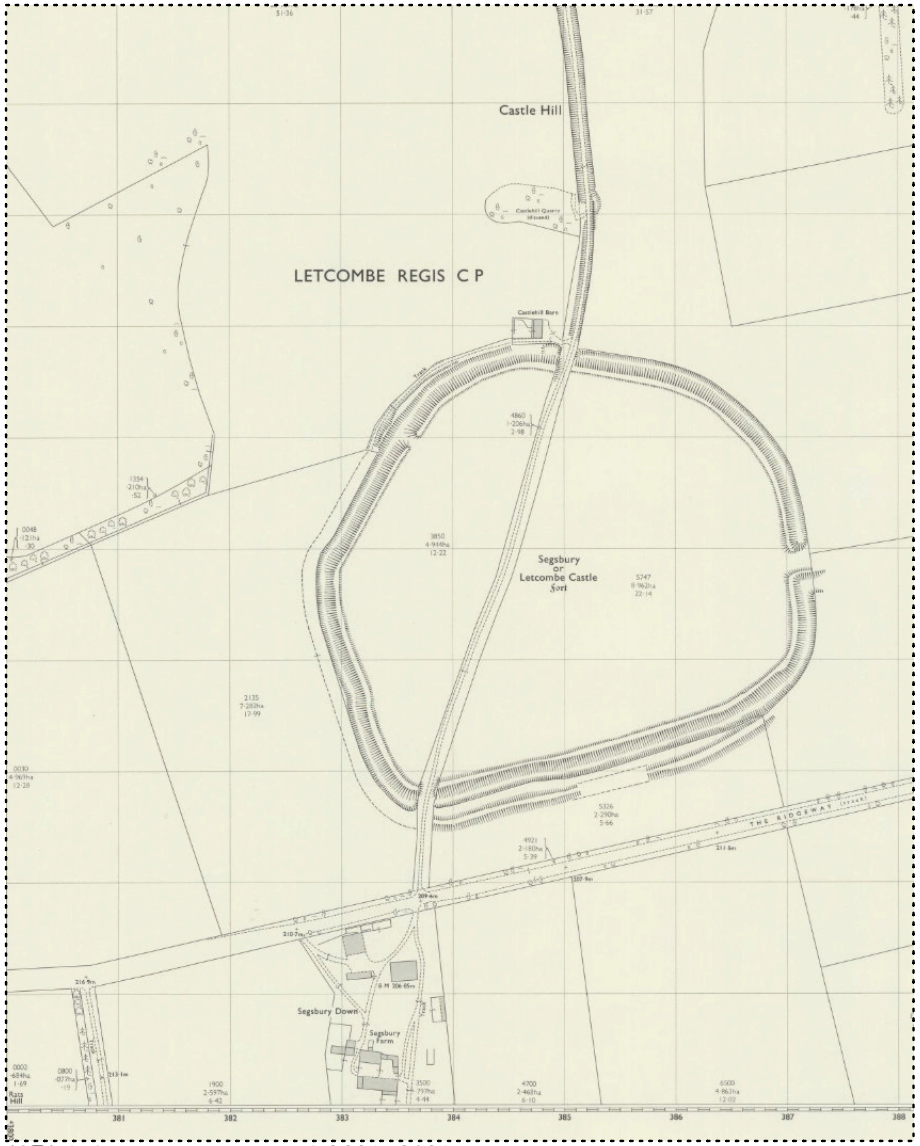
Uncovering the past is like solving a mystery. Archaeologists gather clues from different sources and piece them together to build a picture of history.

There are many ways to investigate the past. Here are some key methods:

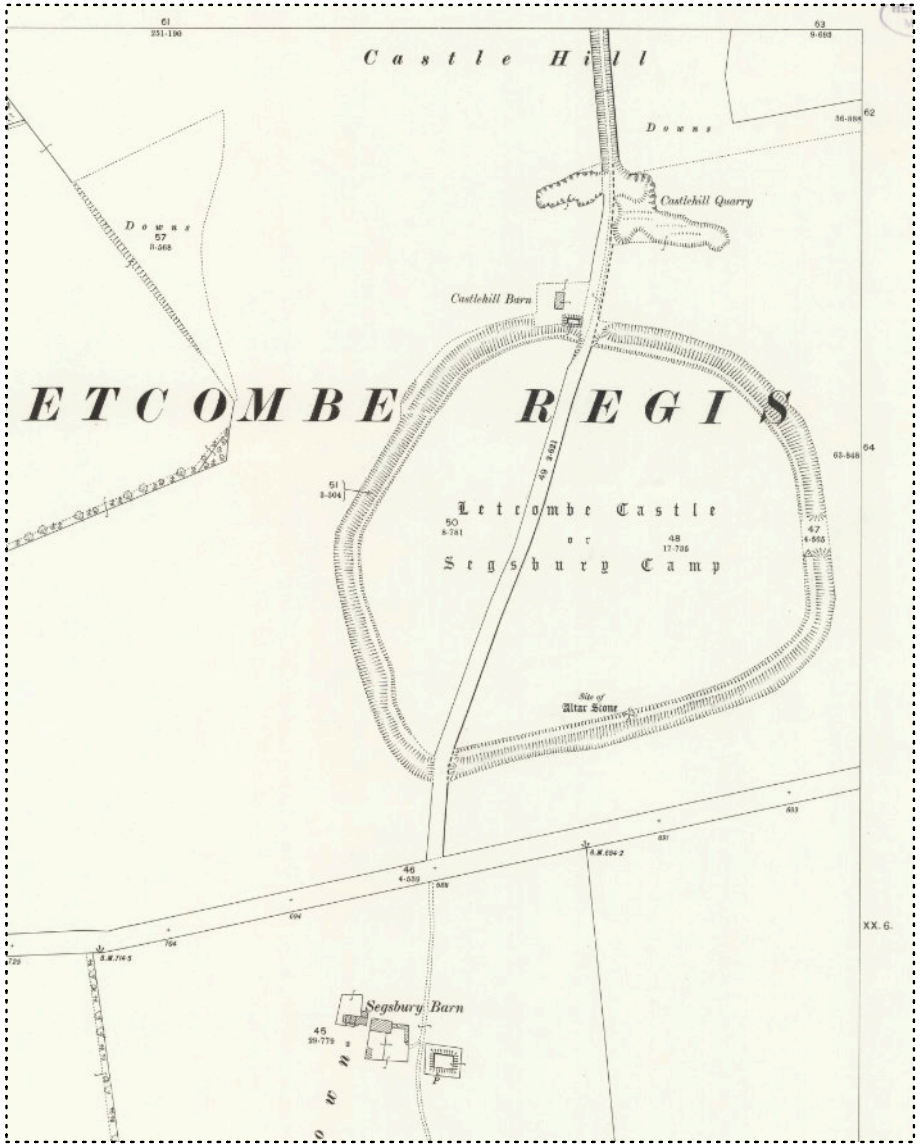
- Aerial photography and geophysical surveys help identify buried archaeological sites.
- Excavation reveals artefacts people used and the remains of buildings, pits, roads, and other structures from the past.
- Artefacts help archaeologists understand how people lived by showing what they made, used, and valued. They can also be dated based on their style (typology) and material.
- Human skeletons reveal details such as a person's age, height, and health.
- Ancient DNA analysis can tell us about a person's appearance, including hair and eye colour.
- Animal bones and preserved plant remains show what people ate.
- Pollen and plant remains give clues about what the landscape looked like in the past.
- Radiocarbon dating helps determine the age of organic materials, like wood, bones, and charcoal.

By combining these different pieces of evidence, archaeologists can bring history to life and help us understand the stories of the people who came before us.

Historic mapping



1971 Ordnance Survey map SU3884-3984
Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.

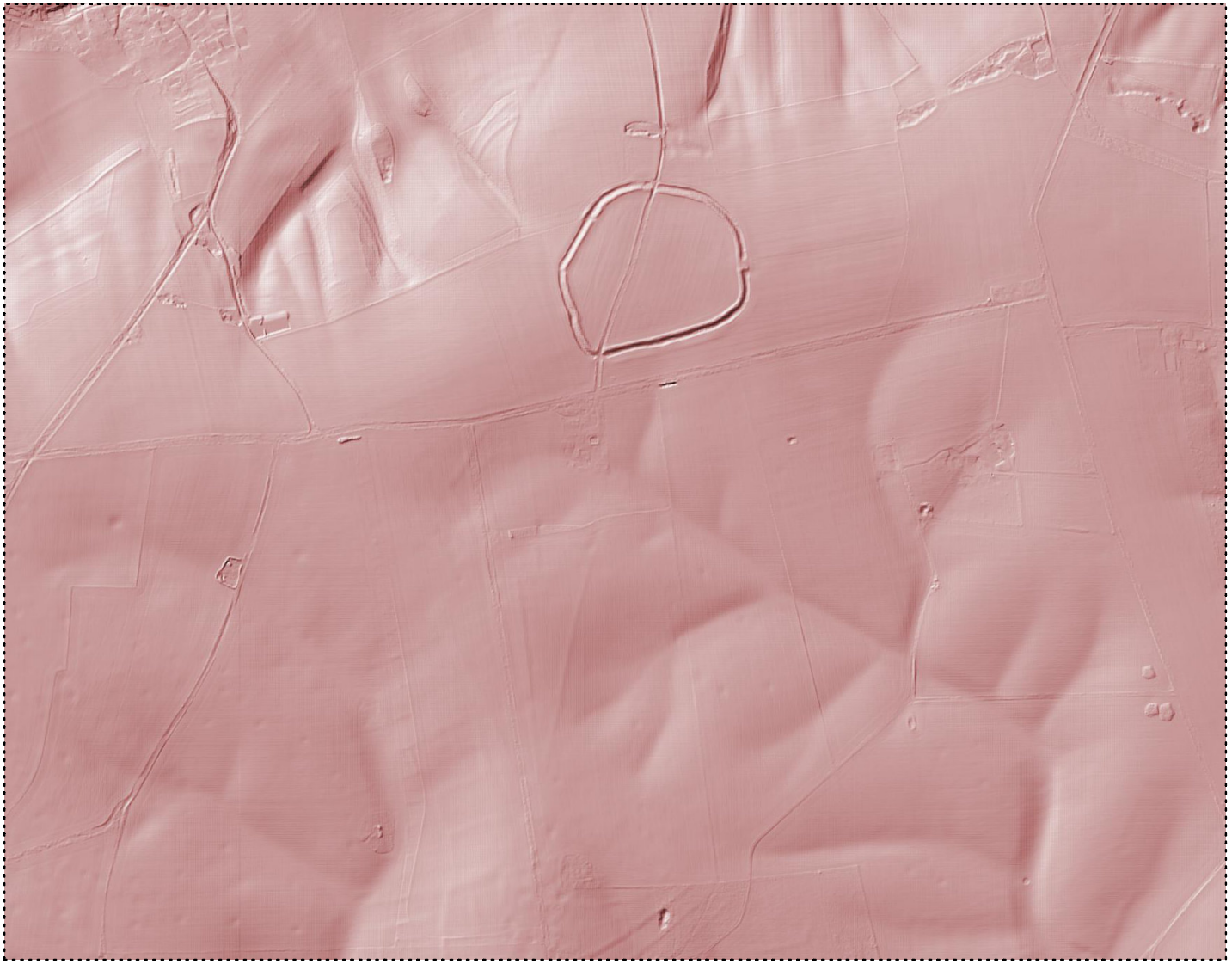


1899 Ordnance Survey map Berkshire XX.5
Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.

LiDAR of Segsbury Camp

LiDAR stands for Light Detection and Ranging.

It works by sending out laser beams (light) from above (from planes, drones, or satellites) and measuring how long it takes for the light to bounce back. This helps create a super detailed map of the land surface, even under trees or bushes. Archaeologists use it to identify hidden sites that are hard to spot on the land.



Aerial image of Segsbury Camp (Google Earth)

Credit: Google Earth 2017

Why do archaeologists look at aerial photographs?

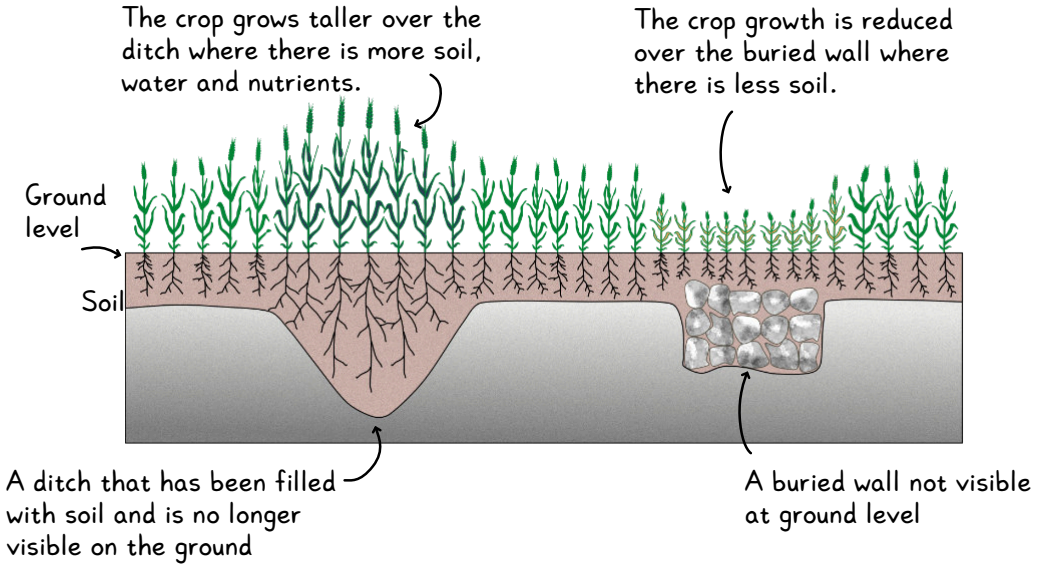
Credit: Google Earth 2022

Archaeologists look at aerial photographs because they can help reveal things hidden beneath the ground. From above, they can spot patterns in the land, such as crop marks, which might show where old buildings, walls, or other structures are buried. This helps them decide where to dig and learn more about the past.

In aerial photographs, you might notice changes in the colour of the grass, with lines or patches that could be crop marks. These differences might indicate buried archaeological features. For example, in the landscape around Segsbury Camp, archaeologists have used crop marks to identify ancient field systems.

What are crop marks?

Crop marks are patterns that appear in fields when plants grow differently above hidden archaeological features, like walls, ditches, or pits. These buried structures can affect how crops grow, causing changes in their height, colour, or density. When viewed from above, these differences create visible patterns in aerial photographs, helping archaeologists identify and map hidden sites.



What is a geophysical survey?

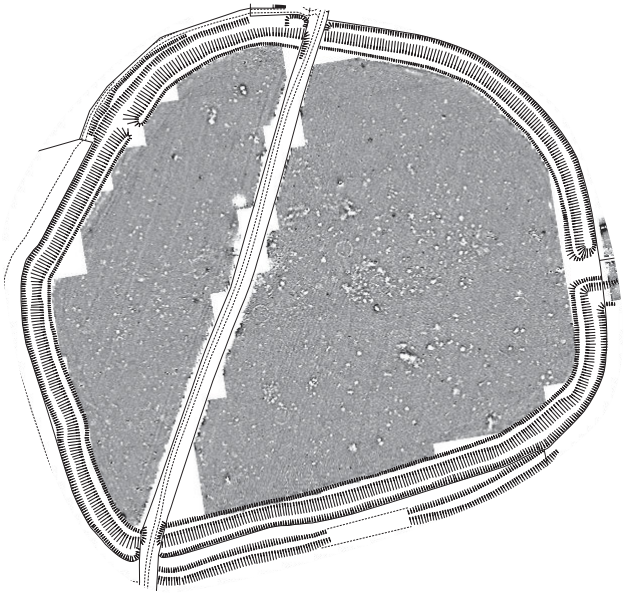
Archaeologists use geophysical surveys to discover what is hidden underground without having to excavate. These surveys help them learn important details about a site: they can show the size and location of buried archaeological features and help identify the best places to excavate.

Archaeologists use special equipment to measure things like the magnetism and electrical conductivity of the ground. By studying the information they collect, they can create detailed maps showing buried features such as ditches, pits, and walls.

Geophysical survey at Segsbury Camp

The first geophysical survey at Segsbury Camp took place in 1993. Archaeologists discovered many hidden features inside the hillfort, including ring gullies (which often mark where roundhouses once stood), pits, and possible hearths where fires were made. More surveys were carried out, and by 1996, the whole inside of the hillfort and some areas outside had been fully surveyed. The archaeologists used the information to make a greyscale plot showing what was underground.

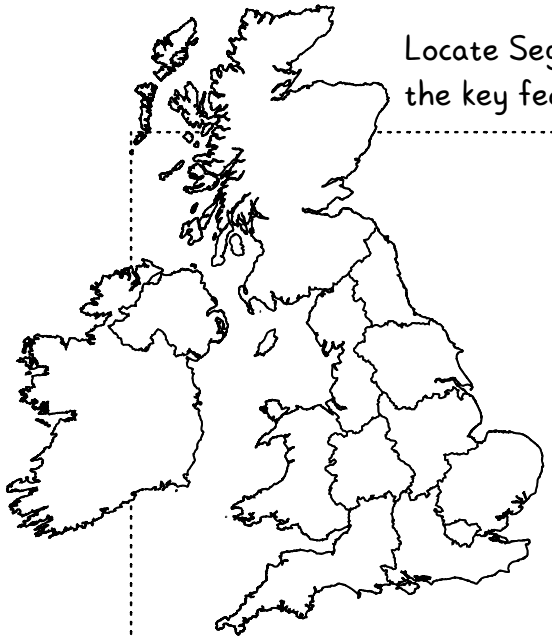
The surveys showed lots of interesting features, which helped archaeologists from Oxford University decide where to dig.



Greyscale plot showing geophysical results at Segsbury Camp. See resource R.23 for details. Credit: Historic England

Geophysical surveys help show where things are buried but cannot tell us how old they are. Excavations were needed to date the remains and to confirm when the hillfort was built, how it was used, and when it was abandoned.

Sketch location map of Segsbury Camp



Locate Segsbury Camp on the map of the United Kingdom, then draw a sketch map showing the key features of Segsbury Camp in the box below. Remember to include a key.

Mapping the past: what can you spot?

Look closely at two historic maps of Segsbury Camp and answer the questions below to discover what has stayed the same and what has changed.

Can you find two things that look the same on both maps?

Can you find something that is new or different on the newest map?

Can you find any changes in the layout of the land between the two maps?

Are there any features on the older map that are no longer visible on the newer map?

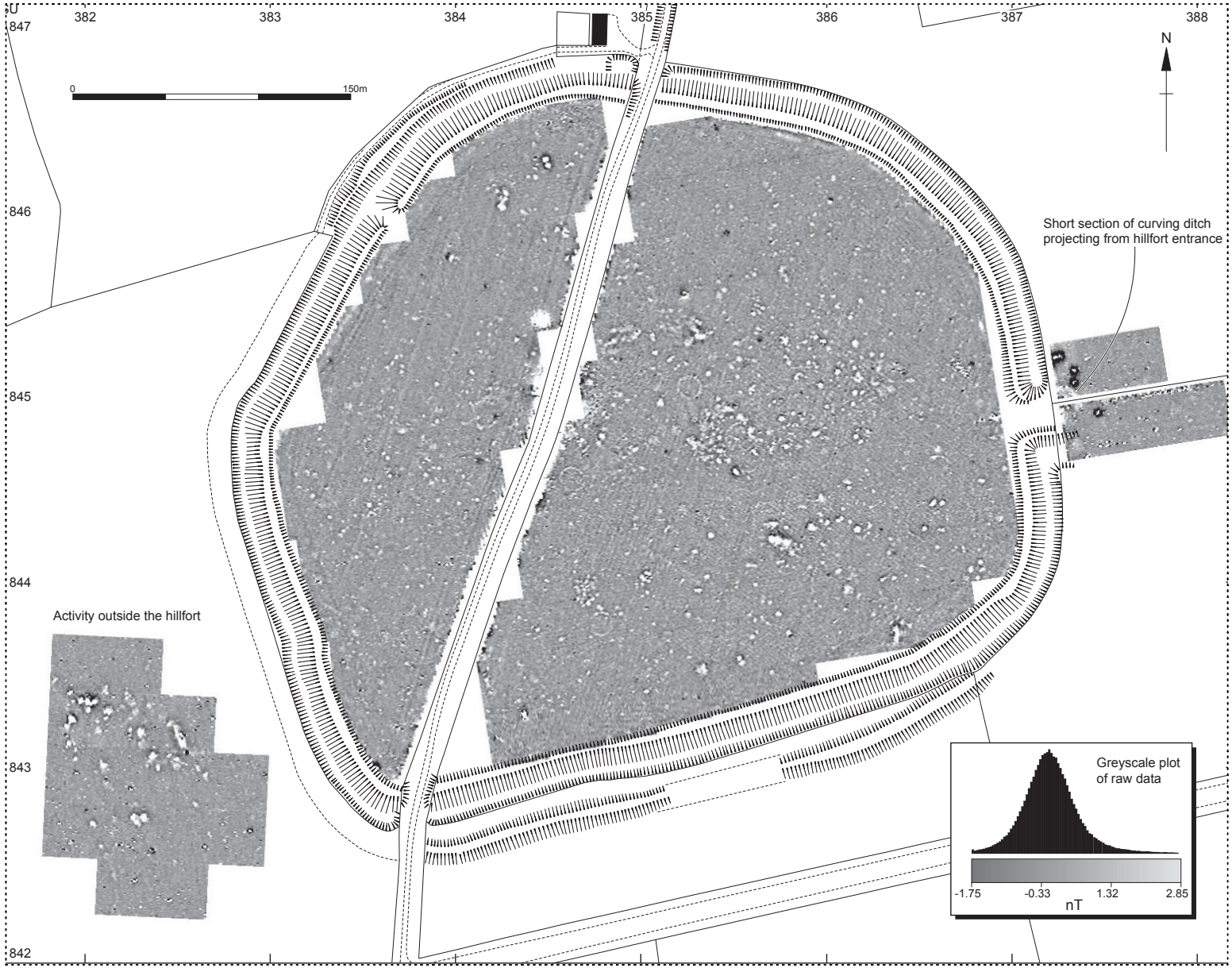
Can you spot any roads, paths, or tracks on the maps that show how people moved around the area?

Are there any signs of buildings or structures on the maps? What's different about them?

What's one thing you noticed when comparing the maps that surprised you?

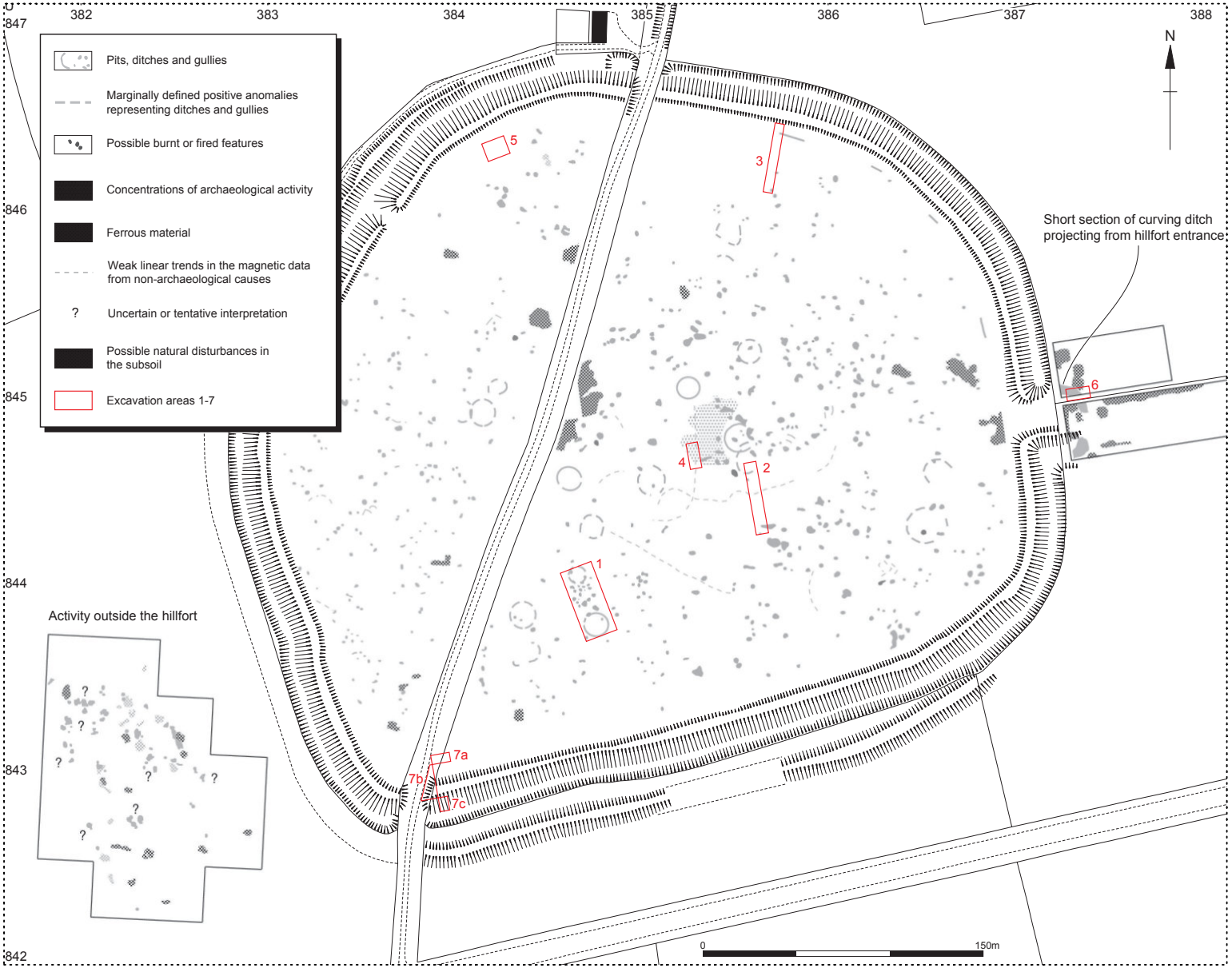
Compare the maps with a Google Earth or aerial image of Segsbury Camp. What differences can you spot? Which one — the aerial photo or the map — do you think tells you more, and why?

Geophysical survey: greyscale plot



Greyscale plot of the geophysical survey at Segsbury Camp
Credit: Historic England

Geophysical survey: interpretation



Interpretation of geophysical survey at Segsbury Camp. Credit: Historic England

Excavation at Segsbury Camp

The first known excavation at Segsbury Camp happened in 1871, led by Dr. T. Phené for the Newbury Field Club. During this dig, archaeologists found a burial in a stone box (called a cist) under a large stone known as the Altar Stone, located on the southern rampart of the hillfort. This stone is shown on some old Ordnance Survey maps.

The modern excavations at Segsbury Camp, carried out in the 1990s have, however, been of greater archaeological significance. Dr. Gary Lock and Dr. Chris Gosden from Oxford University carried out small digs between 1996 and 1997. They explored parts of the hillfort's inside area and dug into the ramparts. Much of what we know about the hillfort today comes from these excavations.

Photo credit: Gary Lock

Archaeologists excavating a pit.

Pits and roundhouse before excavation.

Rampart post holes and ard-marks underlying the rampart.

Ditch cut into the rock.

What would survive in the ground?

Basket woven from reeds

Iron shears

Bone needle

Copper-alloy penannular brooch

Wool on a wooden spindle with a clay spindle whorl

Glass beads

Here is a selection of items similar to those used in the Iron Age. If they were buried in the ground, which would survive and which would decay?

Clay spindle whorl

Wooden spoon

Clay pot

Leather pouch

Wooden bowl

Wool tunic

Archaeological finds

Illustrated on these finds cards is a small selection of finds from the excavation of Segsbury Camp by Oxford University in the 1990s.

Each picture includes a scale to show the size of the objects, as they vary in size. For example, the spelt grains are only a few millimetres long, while the pot is nearly 30 cm tall.

A brief description accompanies each find.

Cut along the dashed lines and fold the cards along the dotted lines to create the artefact cards.

Fold

Cut

Bone comb

Bone comb

Iron Age

This is a piece of a bone comb. It has a rounded end, which was a common shape for this type of object. People used combs like this to press threads into place when weaving cloth on a loom. This tells us that textile making likely happened at the site where it was found. The comb's teeth are missing, and while this one has no decoration, some other examples do.

Chisel

Chisel

Iron Age

This metal tool is made from iron. It has a long handle that becomes flat and wide at one end, like a chisel. It was probably used for cutting or carving wood, stone or other hard materials.

Pottery

Pottery

Iron Age

This is part of a jar with a curved rim. It was smoothed to make it shiny, and lines were carved into it to make patterns. It was made in Wiltshire and brought to Segsbury along the Ridgeway. It dates from the middle Iron Age (400 to 100 BC) and was found in a pit at Segsbury Camp.

Iron decoration

Iron decoration

Iron Age

This small, cone-shaped object is from the Iron Age. It was likely used as a decoration on a horse's harness, similar to the studs and discs seen on Roman harnesses. It may have been attached to leather or another material to add decoration

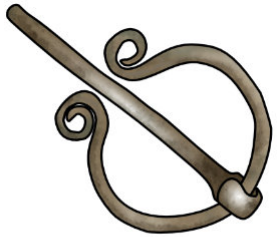
Flint flake

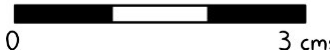
Flint flake

Iron Age

At Segsbury, flint flakes were found. These are sharp pieces of flint chipped off a larger stone, often used as a simple tool for cutting and scraping. Even though flint was still used in the Iron Age, not many proper flint tools were found at the site. This shows that metal tools had become more important for everyday jobs, as they were stronger and lasted longer than flint.

Penannular brooch



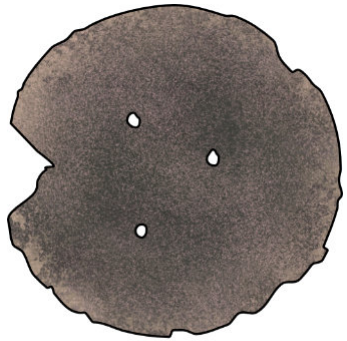


Penannular brooch

Iron Age

This small copper-alloy brooch is from the late Iron Age. Its delicate size means it was likely used to fasten light clothing at the neck rather than heavy cloaks. People used brooches like this because they didn't have buttons or zips to hold their clothes together. They were both useful and decorative.

Iron disc



Iron disc

Iron Age

This large, flat disc is from the Iron Age. It has three small holes in the centre, shaped like a triangle. People may have used it to decorate a horse's harness or sewn it onto clothing or a leather belt as a personal ornament

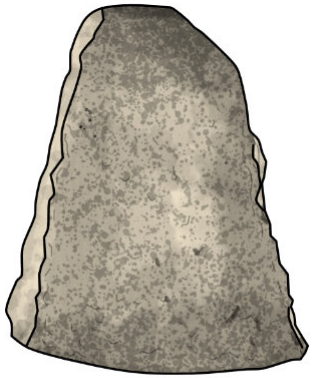
Pottery

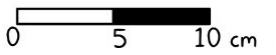
Pottery

Iron Age

This is a piece of broken pottery from an Iron Age jar. It has simple decorations made with fingernail marks around the rim and slashes on the side. The jar dates from the early Iron Age and would have been used to hold food or liquids. It was made with clay mixed with very small pieces of flint.

Quernstone



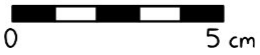


Quernstone

Iron Age

Quernstones were used in the Iron Age for grinding grain into flour. They worked by placing grain on a flat stone and rubbing it with another stone to crush it into fine flour. At Segsbury, pieces of quernstone made from different types of rock have been found. Some came from far away, showing that people traded materials.

Pottery



Pottery

Iron Age

This piece of pottery from Segsbury Camp is part of a burnished bowl with a stamped rosette design. It dates from the Early Iron Age (600–300 BC). Similar designs are found at nearby sites like Chinnor. Pottery like this was used for everyday tasks like storing food.

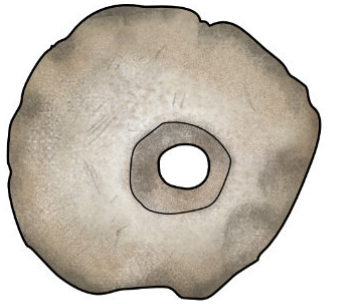
Spelt grain

Spelt grain

Iron Age

Spelt wheat found at Segsbury Hillfort helps us understand farming in the Iron Age. The grains were preserved by burning, but most were not well-preserved. They show that spelt and barley were the main crops. The lack of chaff suggests the grain was cleaned before being stored or brought to the site.

Spindle whorl

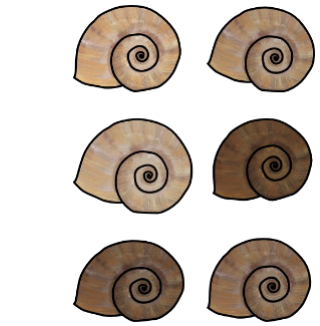


Spindle whorl

Iron Age

This spindle whorl is made from chalk and was found in an Iron Age pit. It is roughly made, similar to other spindle whorls found at places like Liddington Castle. Spindle whorls like this were used with spinning tools to twist fibres, such as wool or flax, into thread or yarn.

Snail shells



Snail shell

Iron Age

Snail shells found at Segsbury help us understand how the landscape changed. Before the hillfort was built, the area was wooded. Trees were cleared to make space, and the rampart was built on ploughed grassland. Studying snails shows how people changed the environment over time, creating open land.

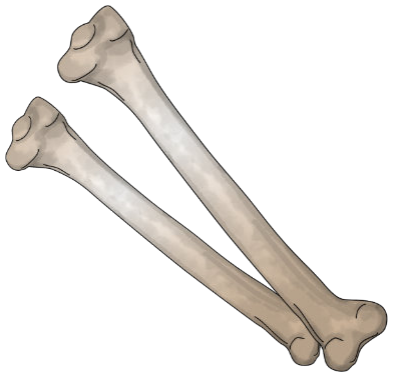
Sling stones

Sling stones

Iron Age

Many sling stones, mostly made of flint, were found at Segsbury, with a total of 643 discovered during an Oxford University excavation. Sling stones were used in slings as projectiles for hunting or defence. They have a crackled texture, caused by the stone being struck or thrown repeatedly

Animal bones



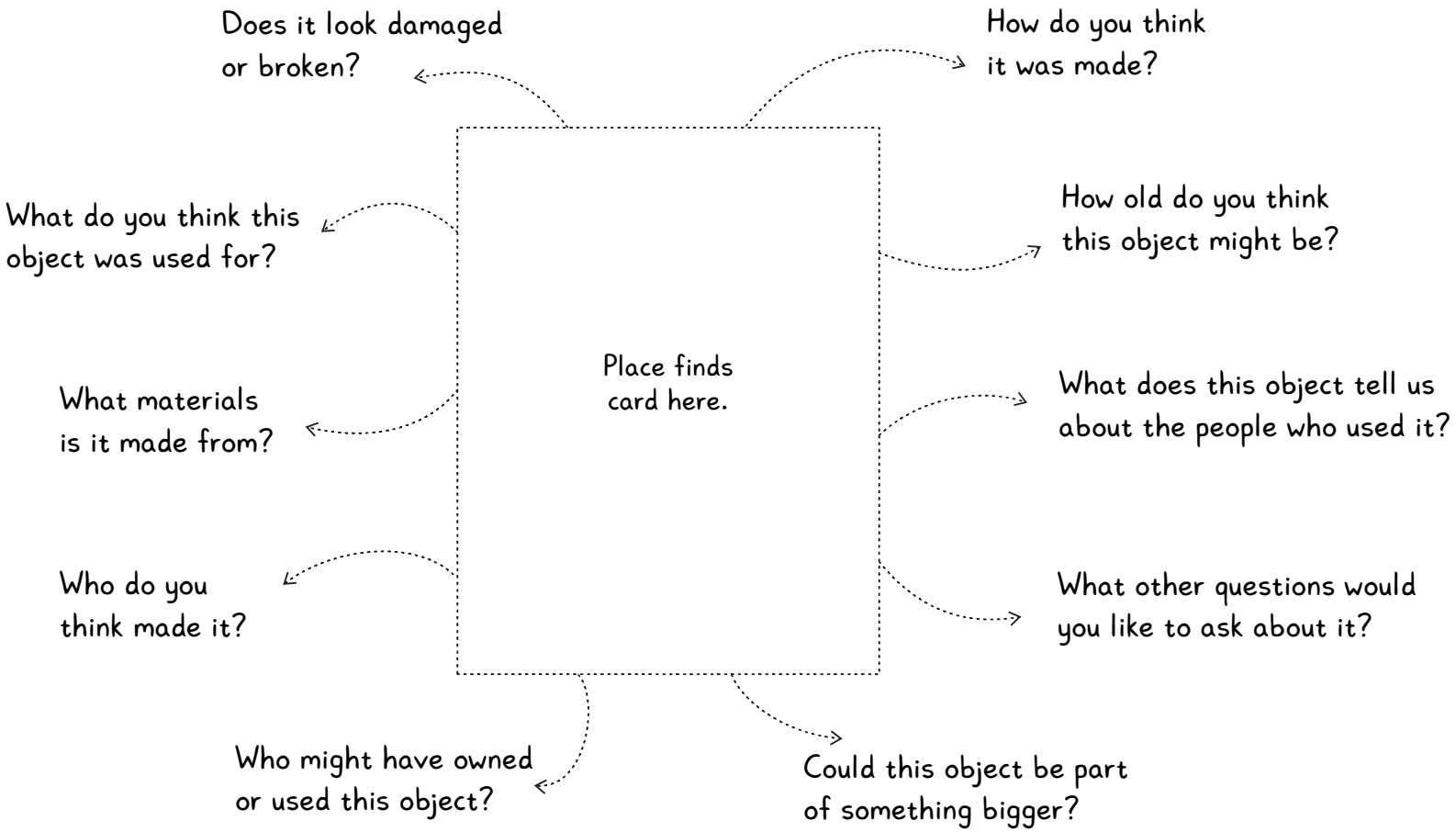
Animal bones

Iron Age

At Segsbury, animal bones tell us about Iron Age life. Sheep, cattle, and pigs were the main food animals, with sheep being especially common. The bones show how the animals were butchered and that some breeding, especially of cattle, took place on the site. Horse remains suggest they were used for work and meat. Dogs were also present.

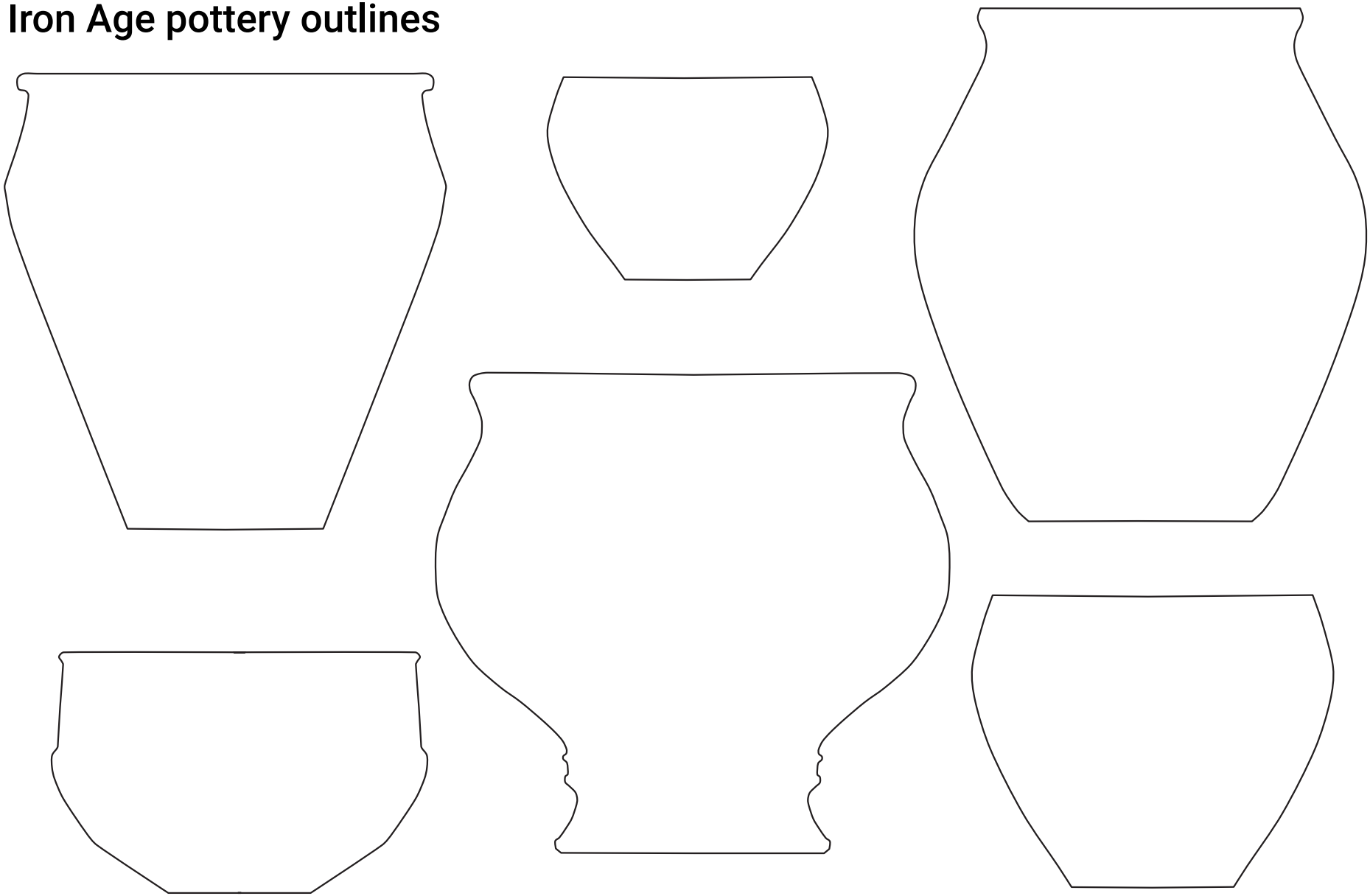
Investigating archaeological finds

When archaeologists find items, they ask lots of questions to help them discover more about the object and the people who used it. Look carefully at an object and try to answer as many of these questions as you can.

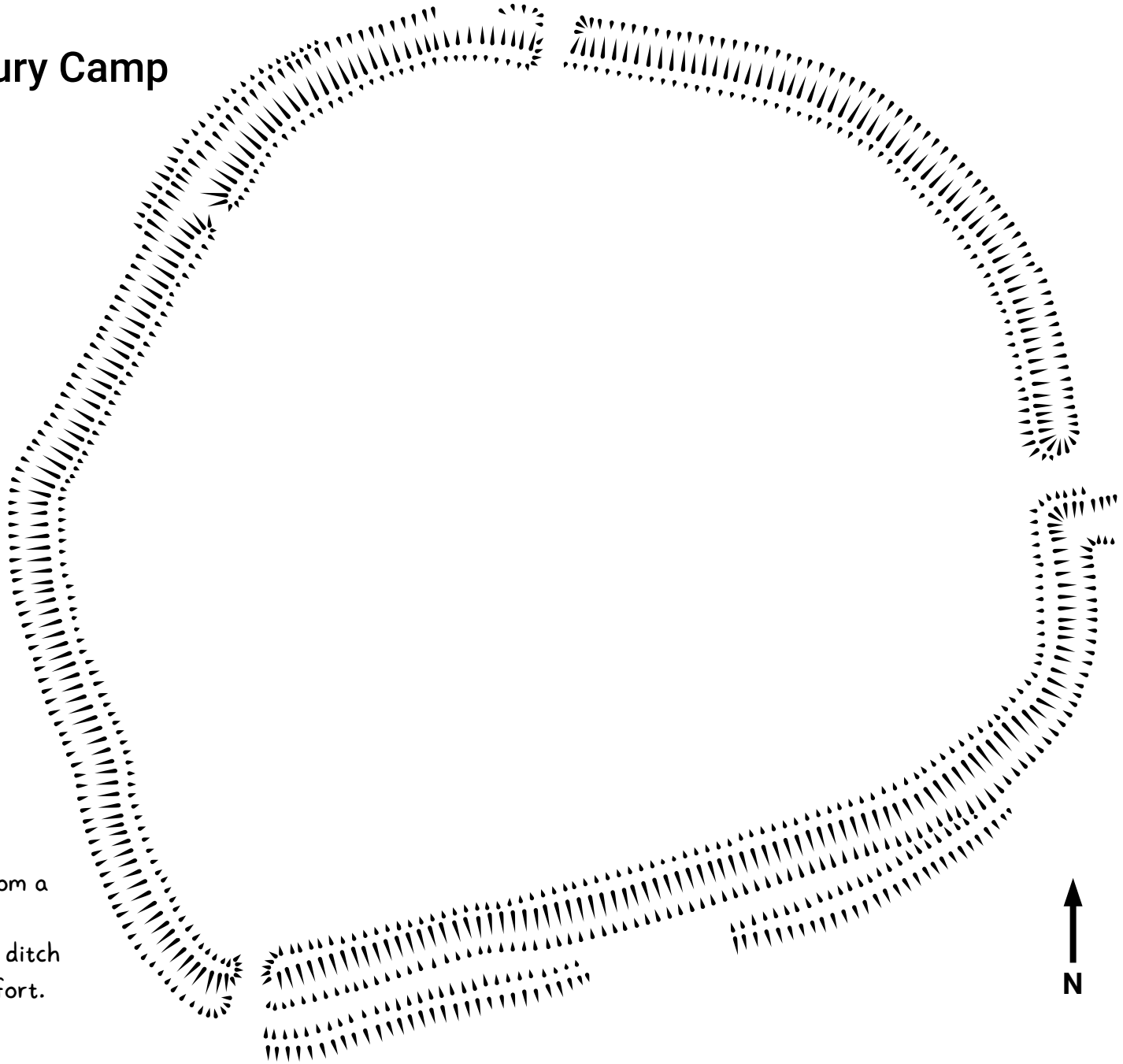


Archaeological finds from Segsbury Camp

Iron Age pottery outlines

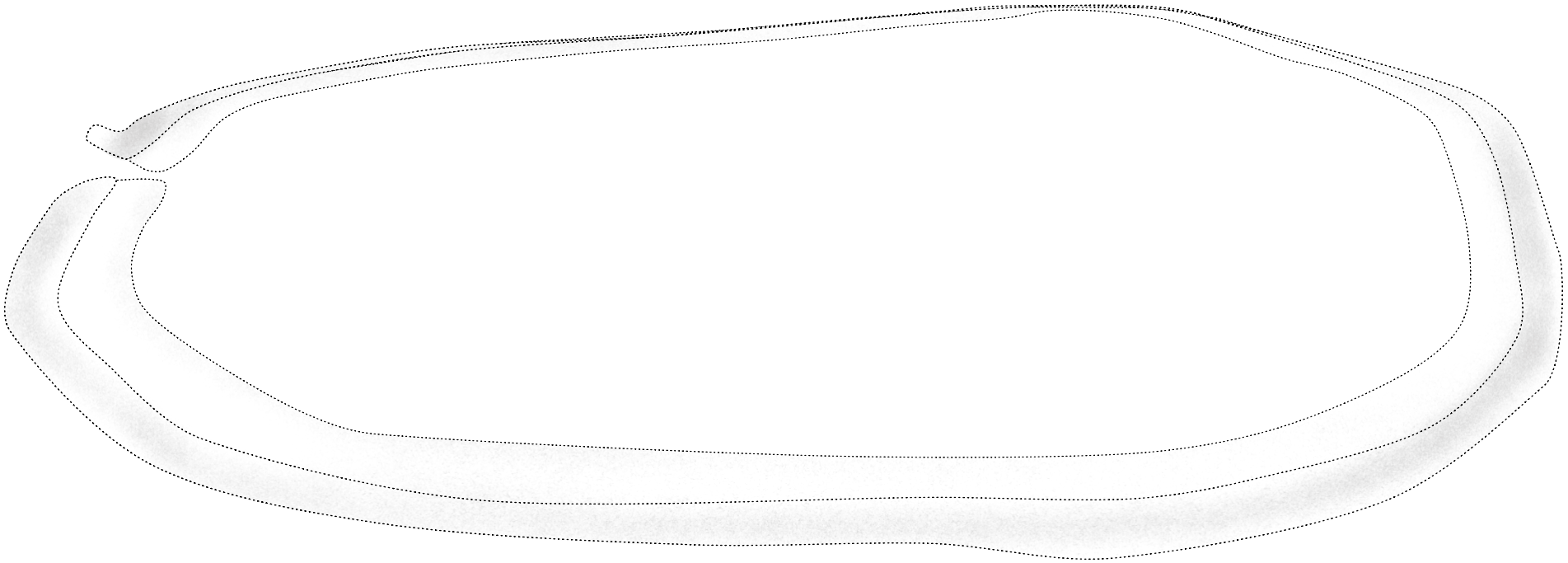


Outline of Segsbury Camp



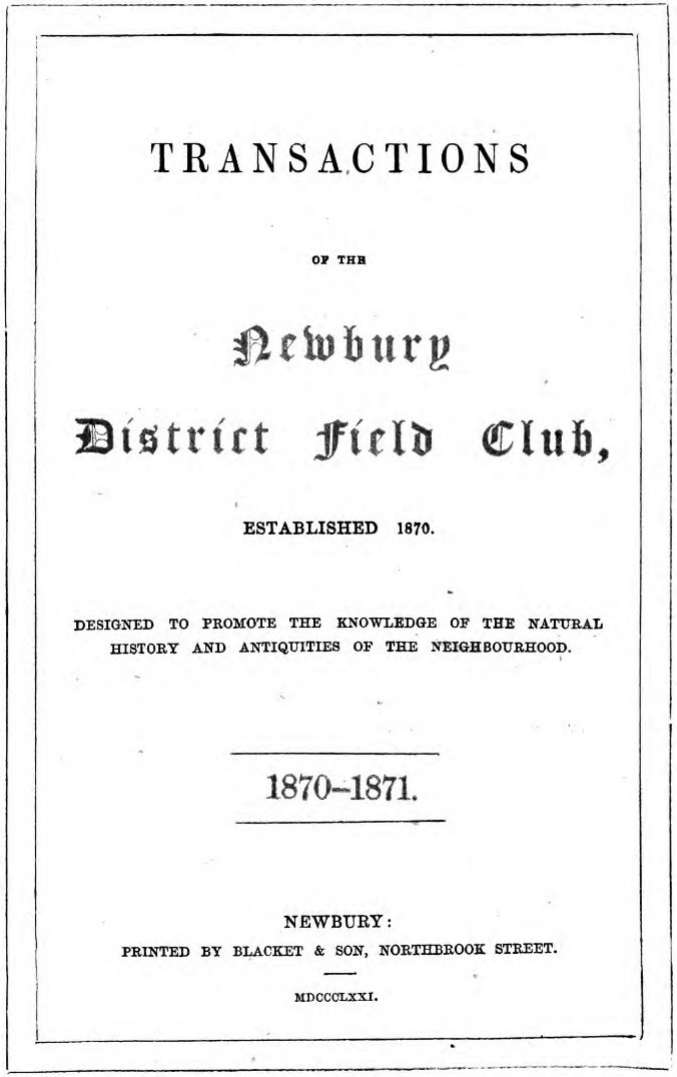
Outline of Segsbury Camp from a bird's-eye view. The hasher marks show the slope of the ditch and bank that surround the fort.

Segsbury Camp ditch and rampart



This is the outline of Segsbury Camp, seen from a slanted view looking south. The modern road has been taken away, and only the east entrance is showing, just like it might have looked in the Iron Age.

Oral stories



TRANSACTIONS

OF THE

Newbury

District Field Club,

ESTABLISHED 1870.

DESIGNED TO PROMOTE THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD.

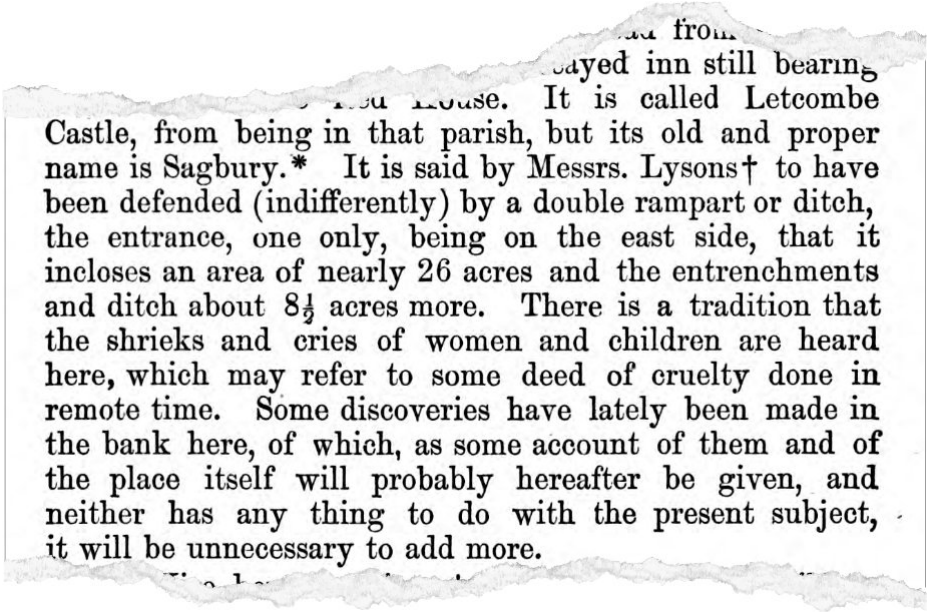
1870–1871.

NEWBURY:
PRINTED BY BLACKET & SON, NORTHBROOK STREET.

MDCCCLXXI.

Credit: Accessed via Google Books

"There is a tradition that the shrieks and cries of women and children are here..."



...ayed inn still bearing ... House. It is called Letcombe Castle, from being in that parish, but its old and proper name is Sagbury.* It is said by Messrs. Lysons† to have been defended (indifferently) by a double rampart or ditch, the entrance, one only, being on the east side, that it incloses an area of nearly 26 acres and the entrenchments and ditch about 8½ acres more. There is a tradition that the shrieks and cries of women and children are heard here, which may refer to some deed of cruelty done in remote time. Some discoveries have lately been made in the bank here, of which, as some account of them and of the place itself will probably hereafter be given, and neither has any thing to do with the present subject, it will be unnecessary to add more.

This is an extract by Rev. John Wilson from a journal called 'Transactions of the Newbury District Field Club' (written in 1870–1871). He was writing about Segsbury Camp, but here he calls it Letcombe Castle, which is another name for the site.

Key vocabulary

Archaeology	The study of people throughout history and prehistory. Archaeologists investigate the lives of people in the past through the process of excavation and the study of artefacts and other physical remains.
Archaeological finds	Objects, structures, or remains discovered during archaeological excavations that provide insights into past human societies and cultures
Artefact	An object made or used by people.
Century	A period of one hundred years.
Chronology	The arrangement of events in order of how long ago they happened.
Crop marks	Visible patterns in crop growth caused by buried archaeological features, such as walls or ditches, visible from aerial photographs.
Decay	Organic material that rots away through the action of bacteria and fungi over time.
Environmental evidence	Environmental evidence is information from the natural world, like soil, plants, or animal remains, that helps us understand how people lived in the past.
Excavation	The process of carefully digging and uncovering layers of soil at an archaeological site to reveal structures, artefacts, and other evidence of people in the past.
Features	Distinctive elements found on archaeological sites, such as walls, hearths, pits, or post holes.
Flint	A hard, fine-grained rock used by people for making tools.

Geophysical survey	A survey method used by archaeologists to study the ground using special tools, like a magnetometer, to find hidden features, such as walls or pits, without digging.
Hillfort	A fortified settlement built on a hilltop, surrounded by a large ditch and bank.
Historic environment	The physical remains that survive in the landscape today that were created by people in the past.
Iron	Iron is a strong metal that is smelted from iron ore and was first used in the Iron Age to make tools, weapons, and everyday objects.
Palisade	A defensive fence made of wood, often used to enclose a hillfort and built on top of a rampart.
Pit	A pit is a hole dug in the ground, often used by people in the past for storing things, rubbish, or for other purposes.
Post hole	A post hole is a small hole dug in the ground to hold a post, usually for building things like fences or houses.
Rampart	A defensive earthwork or bank built around a settlement or fortification for protection.
Roundhouse	A house that is round in shape and usually built with a timber frame and thatched roof.
Stratigraphy	The study of the layers of soil or rock in the ground. The deeper underground a layer is, the older it is.