

# THE DORSET DIGGER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE DORSET DIGGERS COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP

No 44 February 2017

## AGM

Dorset Diggers are now 4 years old we held our AGM on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> January in Dorchester. The committee is now;

David Northam – chairman [djnortham@hotmail.com](mailto:djnortham@hotmail.com)

Alison Williams- secretary [alison.williams@talktalk.net](mailto:alison.williams@talktalk.net)

Joanna Graham – treasurer [joannakgraham@gmail.com](mailto:joannakgraham@gmail.com)

Chris Tripp- technical advisor [tripp.chris60@gmail.com](mailto:tripp.chris60@gmail.com)

Judith Young – events organiser [diggerjudith@icloud.com](mailto:diggerjudith@icloud.com)

Subscriptions are now due. If you haven't already paid please send a £15 cheque to Joanna Graham, 12 Hilda Road, Parkstone, Poole BH12 2HW  
Cheques payable to “Dorset Diggers Community Archaeology Group”

## Knowlton

Some of us visited this intriguing site last year. Martin Green will be talking about the latest finds there on Friday 17<sup>th</sup> Feb at Dorchester Museum (7.30)



## Bath

We will be visiting the roman baths on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> February, including a “behind-the-scenes” tunnel tour with the curator.

## **Military Roads built during the Roman Invasion of West Dorset**

### **Richard Hood 2017**

After 43 AD, Titus Flavius Vespasianus, better known as Vespasian, led 10,000 troops of the 2nd Augusta Legion west into Dorset. After taking a number of hillforts of the local Durotriges tribe a 41.5 acre legionary fort was built at Lake Farm near Wimborne. Part of the army then travelled to Maiden Castle and at Dorchester built a vexillation fort, before moving west towards Exeter. The military road they built is traceable as far as Eggardon hillfort, from where a number of routes may have been taken out of Dorset. Various people have attempted to find the route west to Exeter including the Dorset Roman Roads Group, Norman H Field and Richard Whaley and I am in debt to them for their published work. This document argues the case for a northern route from Eggardon, partly surveyed by the above people.

Travelling west from Winterbourne Abbas the A35 may not have been an early Roman road. It is particularly hilly with in its modern alignment requiring deep cuttings in places and the present day road, beyond Winterbourne Abbas, is still prone to flooding today. The route through Bridport would have had a major problem in ancient times as the three rivers that converge there would have been tidal. With none of the modern engineering work of weirs and sluices that control river levels and with water levels higher 2000 years ago, Spring tides would have reached inland. This would have resulted in a bog, difficult to cross by an army and its supply train.

The Roman army would have remembered the battle of Teutoburg Forest in Germany in around 10AD where three legions were lured into a trap in boggy forests and annihilated. They would want to avoid such terrain where possible. The northern route had many advantages, avoiding all stream crossings and where possible followed ridges. It also ringed Marshwood Vale allowing for control of the Durotriges trapped there. There have been no Roman Villas discovered along the route which may indicate that within a few years of the completion of the invasion, much of the route was fallow. Waddon Hill fort appears to have been abandoned by 53AD. Later Roman roads built during peace time may have followed more direct routes including the modern A35.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Legion's orders must have been to take control of the Durotrigian hillforts, the main contender for this west of Eggardon being Pilsdon Pen. This hillfort was reworked, some time before the Roman invasion, from an, as built, univallate fort, to multivallate with an unfinished northerly entrance. The finding of a Roman ballista bolt during excavations may indicate that some fighting took place here.

Having secured Eggardon, the Roman army's intention would be to take the small hill fort at Abbotsbury, with a new road built passing the camp/signal station at Black Down. A group may also have travelled to take control of Chilcombe hillfort two miles south of Eggardon. The proposed route to Pilsdon Pen starts at Two Gates junction near Eggardon and follows the course of Barrowland Lane north. The road crosses a stream by the disused railway bridge, then climbs to the Mount Pleasant five road junction. From here the route passes Knight's in the Bottom before climbing Warren Hill. The route crosses the B3163 near Dirty Gate, aiming, via Hillbrow, to the Wessex Ridgeway. The Wessex Ridgeway, a road, that may be a pre Roman, follows the ridge west above Buckham Down. The modern road leaves the straight alignment

at the tunnel on the Beaminster to Mosterton road, though a track continues towards Broadwindsor. A path leaves this track heading south crossing the Broadwindsor to Beaminster road on a ridge, before reaching the site of Waddon Hill Roman fort. Remains of an agger can be seen in places along this path.

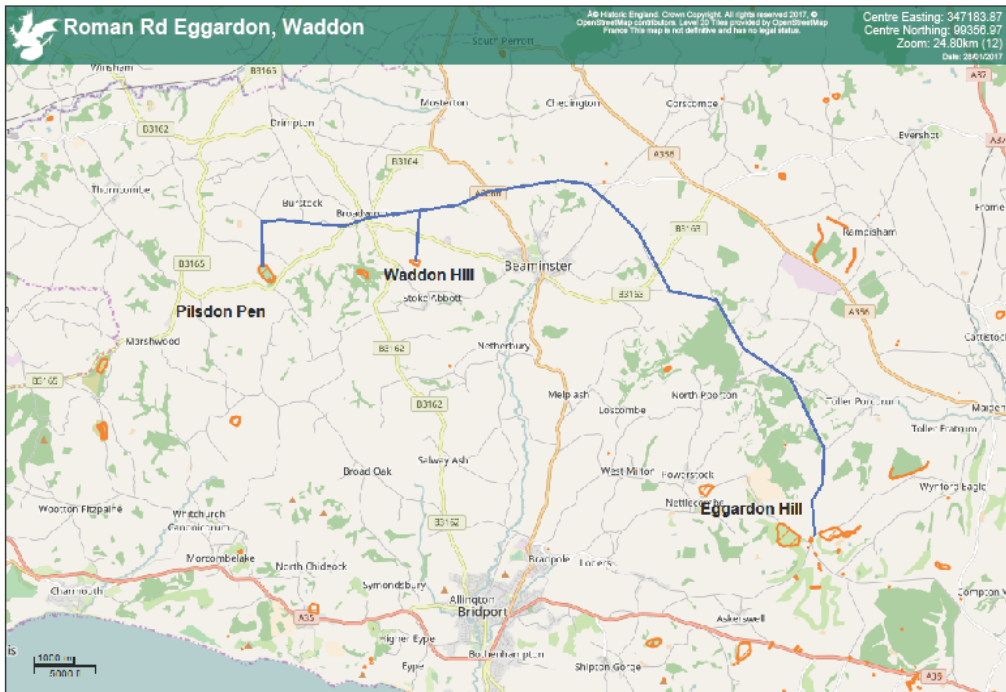
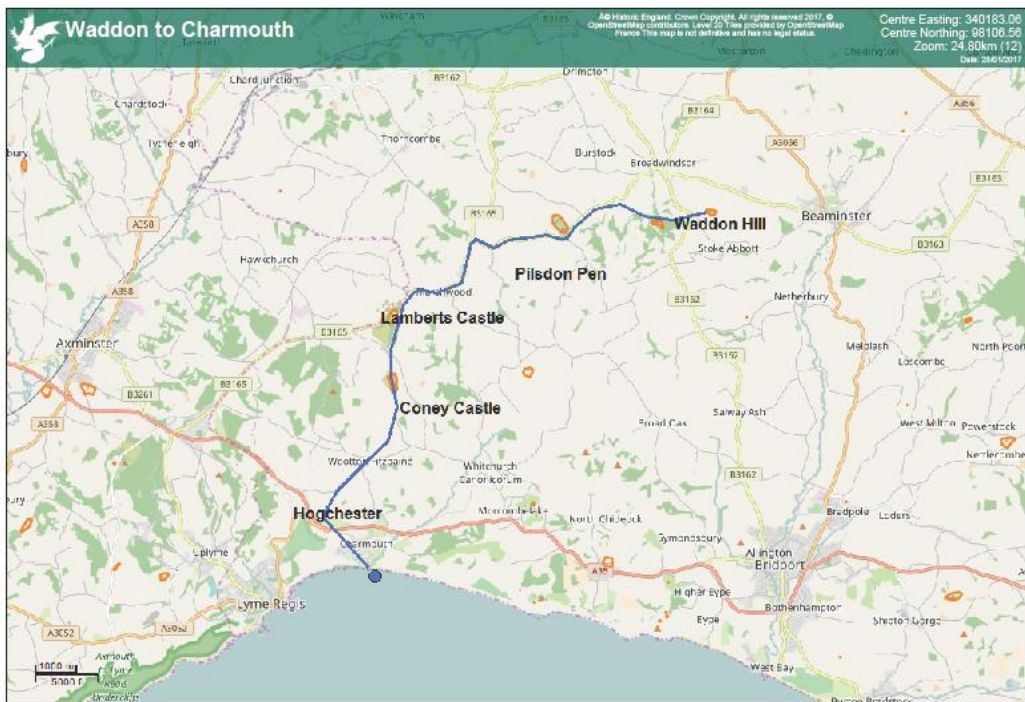
Pilsdon Pen, is defended on the south, east and western sides by its steep slopes with banks and ditches. The north of the hillfort, where the unfinished main entrance can be seen, opens onto the long flat top of the hill. The hillfort takes up about a third of this space. It is my premis that the Roman troops travelled from the point where their new road diverged south to Waddon Hill fort, passed through what is now Broadwindsor and followed the valley in the direction of Coles Cross. At some point on this route the army climbed the northern end of Pilsdon hill out of site of the Durotriges in their hillfort. The Roman solders then had time to erect their Ballista catapult and following a softening up barrage, attack the entrance. Though the Durotriges may have put up a fight, ultimately the survivors were chased out over their defences down into Marshwood Vale.

The Roman engineers, having decided on Waddon Hill for their vexation fort, started work concurrently with the attack, probably initially building temporary structures. On completion a new road was built from the bottom of Waddon hill, up the northern flank of Lewesdon Hill and down the ridge the other side. The Roman agger can be seen on the flank of the hill drained by a culvert. At the point where the Roman road starts at the bottom Waddon Hill, under what is the modern road from Broadwindsor to Bridport, is a second larger, Roman culvert. This may have been installed to drain the road climbing Lewesdon, or as part of the building of a new Roman road south to Bridport. The current road does have the look of a Roman alignment with precise corners and straights and enters Bridport through Allington, to the west of all the rivers, avoiding the need for bridges.

From Lewesdon the route continued close to the present road to Birdsmoorgate, passing below the now Roman held Pilsdon Pen. The route turned south through what is now Marshwood Village to Lamberts and Coney Castle hillforts. Here the Romans no doubt carried out inspections to see if these old forts were occupied. The exact road route down to Charmouth remains to be identified, though it passes Hogchester farm. Hogchester, with its Saxon name for a Roman settlement, may have been founded during the invasion, though without datable evidence it could have been settled any time in the next 350 years.

It is thought that the Roman road split at this point with one branch continuing to Charmouth, a possible Roman supply port, before following the coast to Lyme Regis and possibly beyond to Seaton. The remains of this road have been lost to erosion, though it is remembered in living memory. The other branch passed west to Axminster, out of Dorset, to cross the Fosse Way and on to Exeter.

The Roman invasion of the west of England took approximately four years to complete. Vespasian returned to Rome around 47 AD, leaving the finalising of the conquest to his second in command (his brother according to Cassius Dio). By 60 AD the 2nd Augusta had left Lake Farm for Exeter and the vexalation forts were abandoned, leaving Dorchester as the only military centre in West Dorset. Vespasian went on to become a successful Emperor for 10 years after the suicide pf Nero.



- Ref. Dorset and the Second Legion. Norman H Field
- Roman Road to Exeter Richard Whaley (Internet)
- Roman Campaign Roads in Dorset Peter Laurie (Internet)
- Roman Dorset Bill Putnam