



WINDMILL HILL

Information for teachers



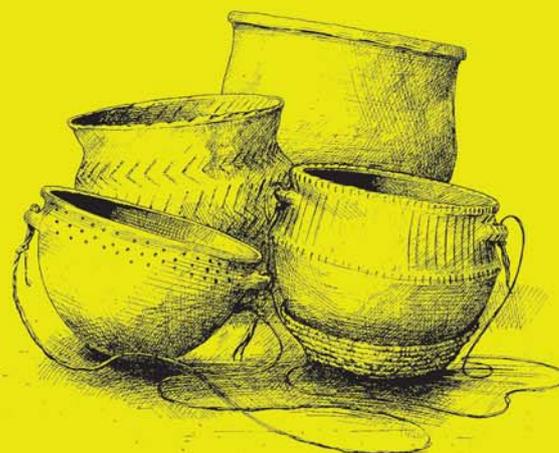
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When was Windmill Hill built?

Windmill Hill was probably the first of the monuments to be built and used at Avebury. It was begun about 3700BC and completed within a remarkably short time, about 60 years. For about 350 years it was used intensively. Although its importance declined after that, it continued to be visited and used for another 2,000 years.

What do we know about Windmill Hill?

In the 1920s the archaeologist Alexander Keiller excavated part of the site. Finds from the excavation include large numbers of flint tools, fragments of pottery and pieces of animal and human bone. You can see these on display in the Alexander Keiller Museum in Avebury. Of particular interest is an ox skull with knife cuts on it. The cuts may have come from removing the meat, but were more likely to have been made when the skull was cleaned for use as a totem.



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Artist's impression of Windmill Hill in use

WINDMILL HILL IS A CAUSEWAYED ENCLOSURE

What are causewayed enclosures?

Causewayed enclosures date from about 3700BC, some time after the beginning of the Neolithic period (4000-2200BC). They consist of a large central area surrounded by a series of ditches and banks. The ditches and banks are not continuous, and it is the spaces between them that give causewayed enclosures their name.

Windmill Hill

Windmill Hill has 3 rings of concentric ditches. It is sited on the top of a commanding hill some 3 miles north west of Avebury.

It would have required an enormous number of people working together for a number of years to construct the three rings of ditches of this causewayed enclosure. It couldn't happen unless society had become settled with a thriving, farming community able to divert considerable time and labour from food production in order to work together on a huge, long-term project.

What was Windmill Hill used for?

No one is sure why causewayed enclosures were built and what they were used for. Some people have suggested that these monumental structures were for defence, and a large number of flint arrowheads have certainly been found at one causewayed enclosure – Crickley Hill in Gloucestershire. However, the gaps in the banks and ditches would make them very difficult to defend. Others think they were a place where the dead were exposed before their bones were buried. But most archaeologists now agree that they were probably places for meetings.

Windmill Hill would have provided a place where people living in small groups could get together, exchange animals and goods, bring their stone axes and pottery to trade or give as gifts to strengthen relationships. Perhaps they came here to celebrate marriages and the passing seasons, or commemorate the dead.

Windmill Hill pottery