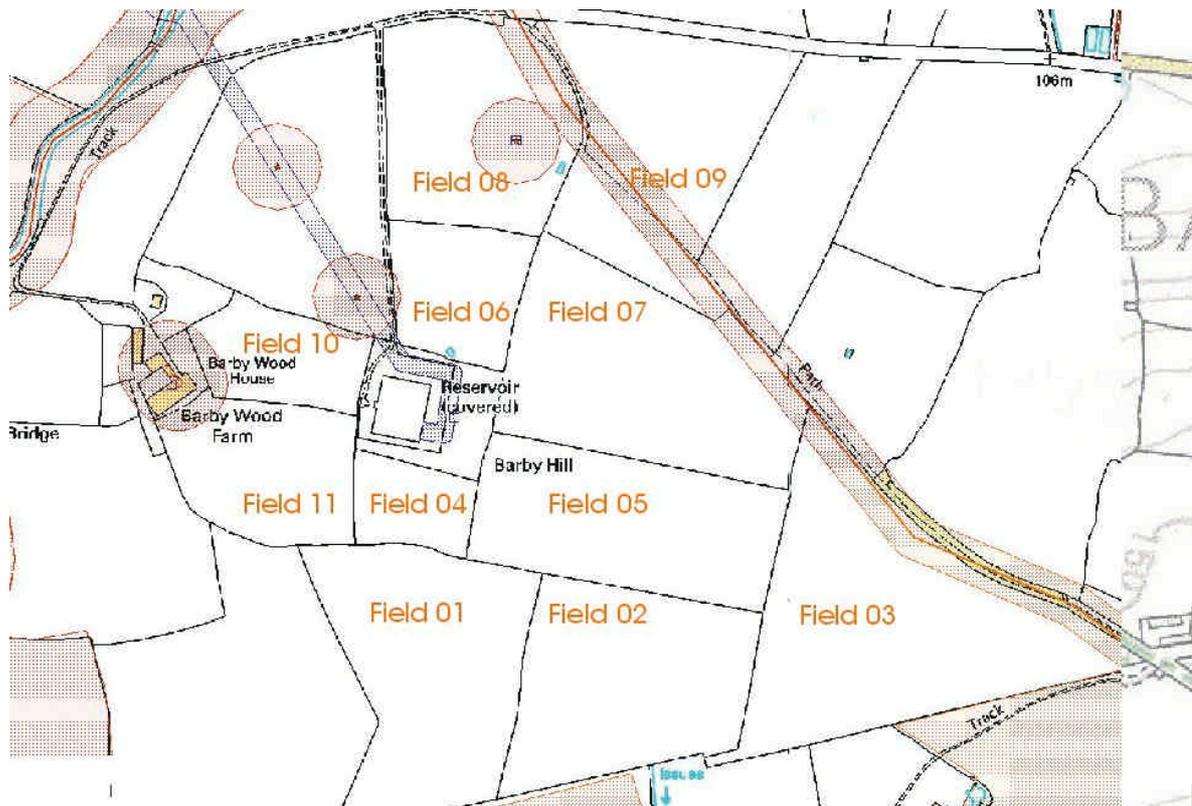


Archaeology at Barby Hill: part 2

Back in July, I described events leading up to the realisation that there was an Iron Age community on Barby Hill before the Romans arrived in Britain, long before the present village of Barby was founded. I spoke of the initial work to gain practical support and financial backing from around the whole county for exploring the hilltop's prehistory, and mentioned that work on site would commence in September.

This initial phase is a broad survey covering the whole western tip of the hilltop – a huge area of almost 100 acres (Fig.1). The aim is to identify areas of interest that can be examined in detail in later stages of the project, perhaps extending over several years.



Initial Survey

The initial survey involves a mixture of field-walking, metal-detecting and magnetometer survey (geophysics). Most of the land is protected under a national heritage scheme, so no excavation can take place in the protected areas without specific permission – and hard evidence will be required as a basis for this.

The first work on site took place in September and October in the arable fields, each consisting of three days of combined fieldwalking and metal-detection, covering Fields 1, 2, 6 and 8 above – about 35 acres of ploughland. The timing of this part of the work is governed by the crop cycle – it can only commence after harvest time, and before the next crop has started to show. There were two basic aims:

- **Fieldwalking:** to examine the surface of the soil, and collect any items turned up by the plough.
- **Metal-detection:** to examine the sub-soil to a depth of about 20-30cm, and collect any metallic items.



These two types of work were combined, with teams of field-walkers scanning the surface slowly and carefully, followed by skilled metal-detectorists; in total, about 30 people volunteered for the work, from CLASP and NARC (see previous article) and from Barby and Kilsby, and beginners were paired with experienced volunteers so that training took place at the same time as achieving solid results.



Each field was first carefully surveyed, and a grid of posts was set out at 20-metre intervals. The searchers walked across the field along each 20m line collecting finds within 1m on either side of it. In this way, a 2m-wide strip was examined every 20m across the field – in other words, a 10% sample of the field. This is sufficient to detect any concentrations of finds, and any such areas are earmarked for later detailed survey.



As I write this article, I am sitting in my study looking at the 3 boxes of finds recovered from the arable fields. The next tasks are to wash, identify and mark each find carefully, sorting out modern post-industrial pottery from medieval pottery, identifying coins, buttons and other

miscellaneous metal artefacts, and gradually gaining an understanding of their distribution across the landscape. I did not expect to find vast quantities of material in this early reconnaissance, but there were one or two interesting finds – nothing earlier than medieval as yet, but these are still early days.

Geophysics

Further exciting work lies ahead, as we enlist modern science to examine the ground below the surface with a magnetometer (which readers will have seen in use on “Time Team”). This will be used in the pasture areas, where we are not permitted to dig – and I hope we shall find traces of the roundhouses that we are certain are up there.

The equipment – a magnetic gradiometer – is hired from CLASP. It is delicate and expensive, and requires considerable skill to use. Training sessions were therefore organised for some of the local volunteers, supervised by professional archaeologists, and we are now preparing to carry out our first magnetometer trials on Barby Hill in late November (weather permitting!). I will be up on the hill again with the team next week, surveying and laying out search grids – we must survey and record our work accurately, so that we can reproduce the search grids later on to an accuracy within about 15-20cm; a demanding task over such a large area, calling for skills in surveying (and the ability to ignore the British weather!).

It is even harder to interpret magnetometer recordings than it is to gather them, so we will need to spend a lot of time examining the resulting images on computer screens, and making comparisons with aerial close-up photographs of the hilltop. We know that Iron Age roundhouses were discovered beneath the site of the reservoir on the hilltop, and I am hopeful that our magnetometer work over the winter will provide the evidence needed to take this work to the next stage ...

... so there may be further information for me to pass on in the next issue of the Kronickle; we will have to wait and see!

Gren Hatton,

November 2011

PS: For more about archaeology at Crick and Barby Nortoft, visit the **West Northants Local History** website, <http://www.westnorthantshistory.co.uk/introduction>