



Adam's Grave & Knap Hill

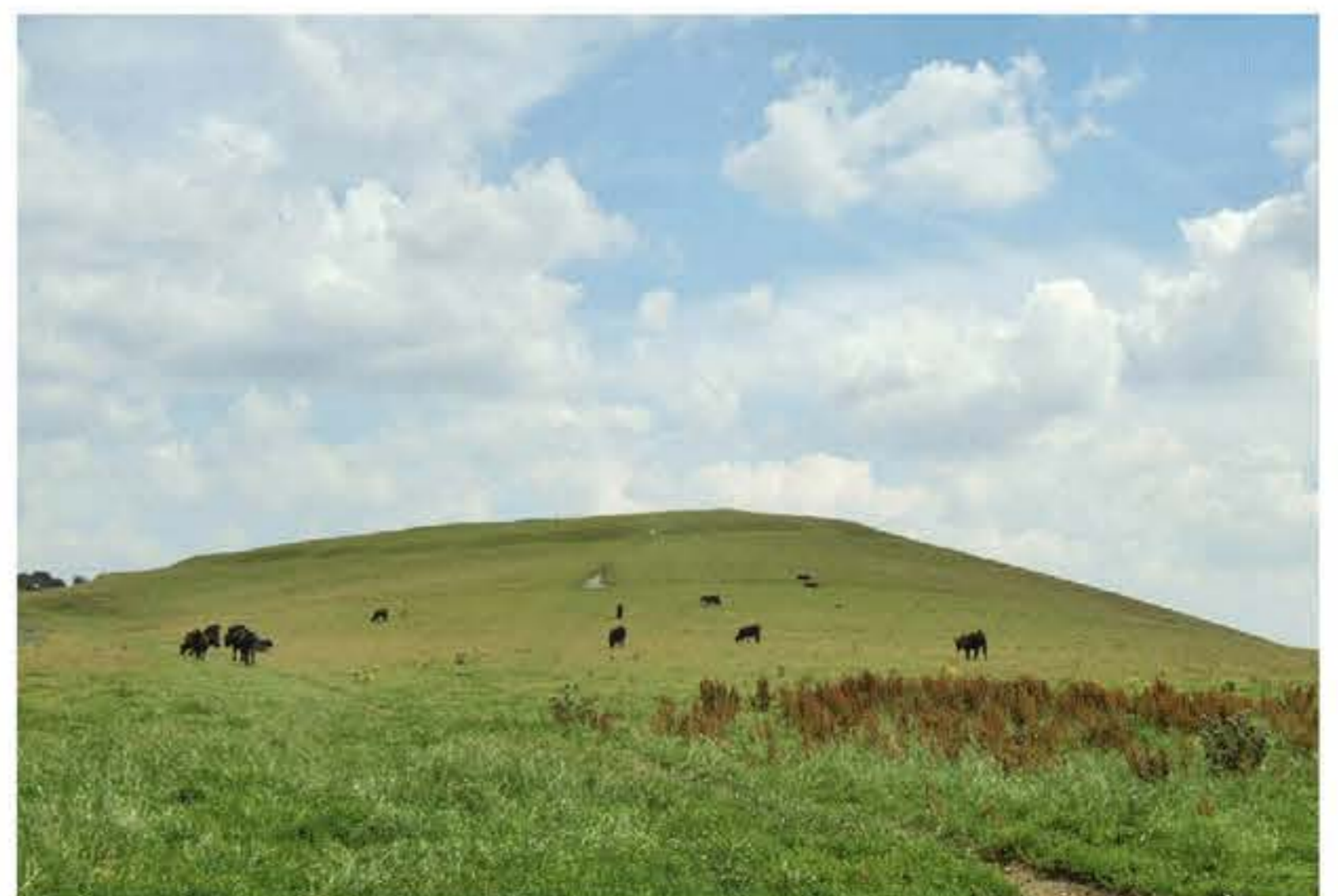


Adam's Grave is a Neolithic long barrow on the chalk downs above the Alton Barnes white horse, on the summit of Walker's Hill between Milk Hill, the highest point in Wiltshire, and the causewayed enclosure on Knap Hill. Prominent on the skyline, its constructors clearly intended the monument to be seen from afar, and from it can be enjoyed one of the finest views in the county.

A typical Severn-Cotswold tomb in an area with a high density of long barrows, most notably that at West Kennet a few kilometres to the north, it consists of a long, precisely built trapezoidal earth mound flanked by two deep ditches which presumably supplied the building material for the burial chamber. Excavated in 1860 by the local antiquarian John Thurnham, he discovered human remains within the inner chamber created by sarsen stones, together with a leaf-shaped arrowhead indicative of Neolithic flint working. Two stones known as Old Adam and Little Eve suggest the existence of a forecourt at the original entrance to the barrow. According to folklore the barrow is the grave of a giant, whose ghost has naturally been reported.

A site of strategic significance on the Ridgeway near to where it crosses the Wansdyke, in the Anglo-Saxon period battles were fought at Adam's Grave, then called 'Woden's Burg' in 592 and 715. The road in the valley running parallel to the chalk ridge was known as the Herepath, 'war road', a name that survives in Harepath Farm near Horton.

Immediately to the east of Adam's Grave is Knap Hill, the first interrupted ditch monument to be recognised in the UK. Seven distinct sections of earthworks frame but do not surround the hill top, suggesting that it was intended to be viewed from the north and west. First investigated in 1908/9, the Cunningtons established that it was a site 'of great antiquity' that had seen use throughout the Iron Age, Roman, and post-medieval periods. Revisited in 1961 by Graham Connah, the discovery of Neolithic pottery indicated a date of at least the third millennium BC, with the relative scarcity of occupational debris suggesting that it was a site for occasional, probably ceremonial, use rather than continuous occupation.



Knap Hill