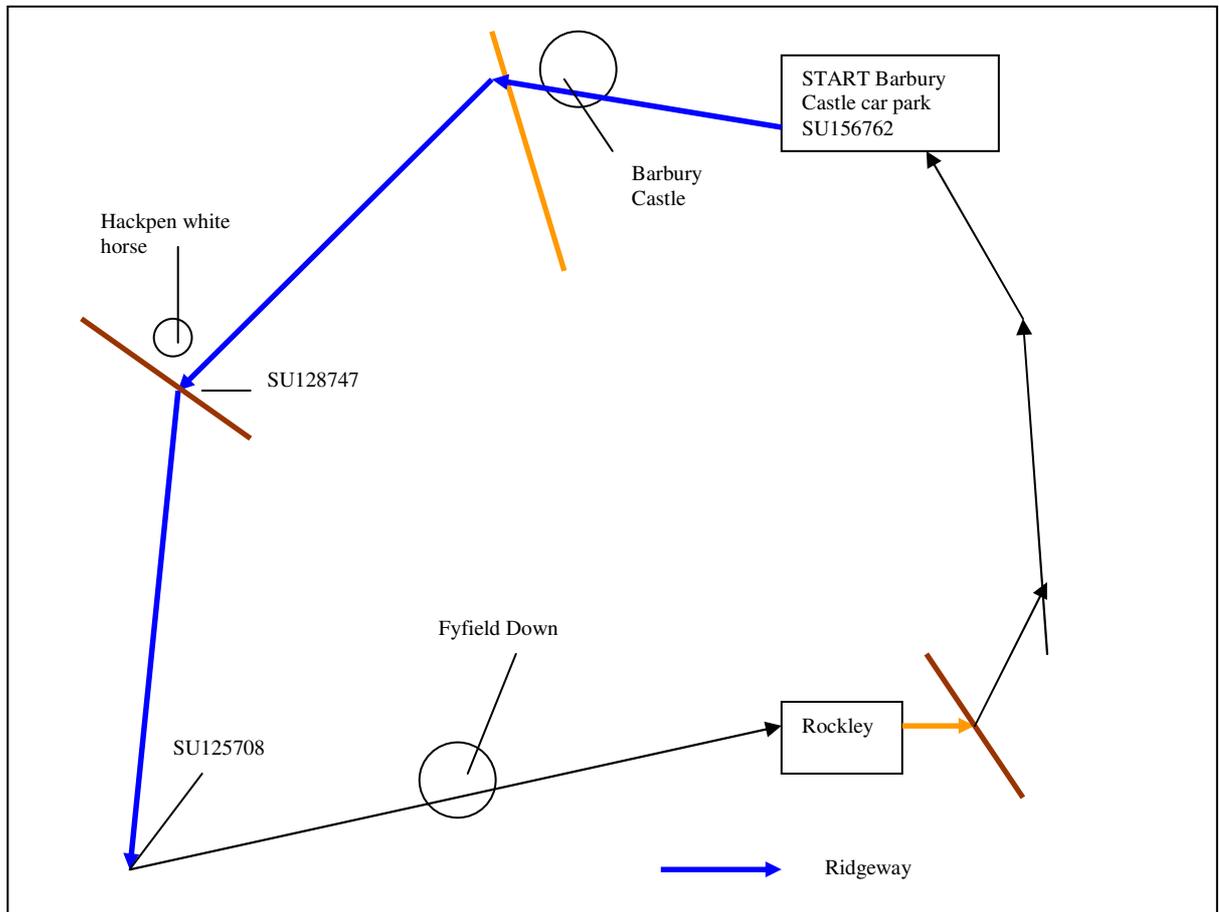


## The Ridgeway. Part 25 from Barbury Castle car park to Fyfield Down crossroads. 16 September 2011

Map OS Explorer 157. This section gives a second chance to appreciate Barbury Castle from where it follows the Ridgeway southwards past the Hackpen white horse to SU125708, the crossroads where paths lead off to Avebury (W) and Fyfield Down (E). From here the return heads in an easterly direction, across the Down, to Rockley and then heads N to return to the car park. 13.5 km.



The starting point for this penultimate leg is the car park with panoramic views at Barbury Castle (SU159762). This is on the Ridgeway which we follow through the hillfort (much bleaker today as the high pressure is pushed E). The Ridgeway curves SE, with early views



back towards the Castle, and reaches a crossroads at SU128747 where it is worth taking a short detour to visit Hackpen white horse. This was cut into the chalk in 1837 by the Parish Clerk to commemorate Queen Victoria's coronation. It is a pale shadow of its Uffington cousin but nonetheless perhaps a noble tribute from a loyal subject.

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Soon you will start to see grey wether (wethers are castrated male sheep which look remarkably like the stones from a distance) or sarsen stones in the fields, and, indeed,

alongside the path. Sarsen stones seem to be patches of locally cemented Tertiary sands (the Tertiary lasted from 65 to 2.6 million years ago). This could have been brought about by evaporation of water drawn up through the sands by capillary action and the crystallization of the dissolved silica. They contain fossil root channels that show that plants were growing above them as they formed. Erosion has now exposed the grey lumps.



**Bloody-nosed beetle**



**Red campion**



*Coprinus plicatilis*



**Michaelmas daisy**

This section follows the Ridgeway to SU125708 where the track to Fyfield Down NNR leads E and is the start of the return loop. This stretch of the walk is surely the highlight. The sarsen stones protect a rich chalkland habitat and a burst of sunshine brought forth a fluttering cloud of small heath butterflies above their caterpillars' fescue grass food plant..



**Black face sheep and sarsen stone**



**Small heath**



**Lawn funnel cap**



**Mosaic puffball**

Crustose lichens have colonized and started the long slow process of reducing the stones to soil. There were some surprising toadstools amongst the sarsens, including fairy ring champignons, puffballs and parasols. No doubt they found the abundant decomposing sheep dung an attractive habitat. A pair of ravens (almost certain!) flapped and croaked as they got out of our way.



**Sarsen stones with crustose lichen**



This section of the walk is a *herepath* or Saxon army road and it heads NE to an unmarked junction at SU152716. At this point the return takes the path which leads NE to the hamlet of Rockley with its 18<sup>th</sup> Century manor and a church converted to a dwelling. The route follows the lane E through the hamlet (where a busy thatcher was toiling) to meet the B-road at SU166717. Across this road a bridleway climbs steeply uphill and crosses a gallop before



**Parasol mushroom (*Macrolepiota procera*)**

joining the byway heading N. This is the path that leads back to the start point and gives great views to the W and E – some of the route of walk 24 is plainly visible. Buzzards and red kites command the heights and were very much in evidence on this section. Eventually Smeathe's Ridge comes into view on the right and arrival at the Barbury Castle car park is imminent.