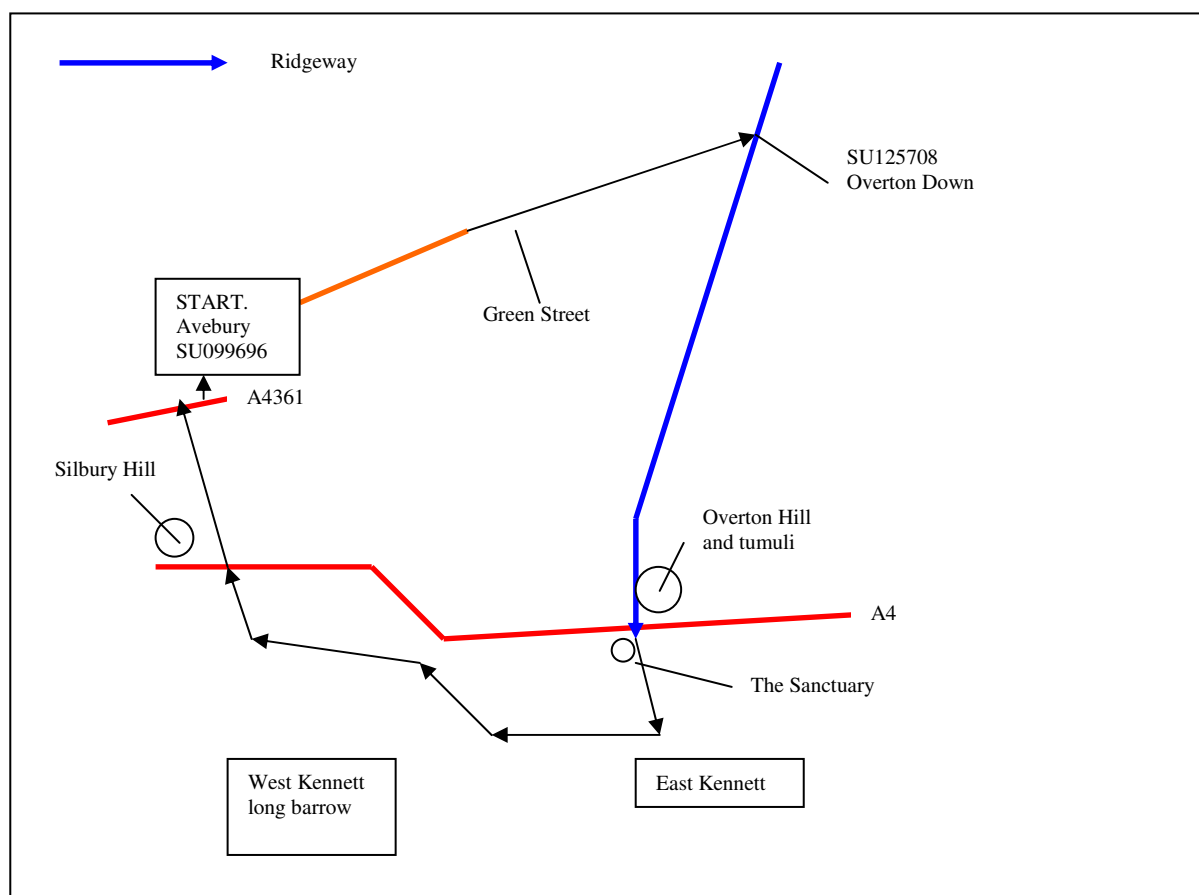


## The Ridgeway. Part 26 from Fyfield Down crossroads (SU125708) to Overton Hill. 17 September 2011

Map OS Explorer 157. The final walk starts and finishes in Avebury and gives loads of time to explore the stone circle and adjacent prehistoric wonders of this world heritage site. The route takes the Saxon army road NE to Overton Down where it joins the Ridgeway at the Fyfield Down NNR crossroads. The last stretch of the Ridgeway terminates at Overton Hill, but this walk continues to East Kennett before turning W then N to return to Avebury. 9 km.



This is perhaps the most atmospheric of the walks along the Ridgeway as it starts and finishes in Avebury with its thought provoking stone circles, deep circular ditches and high banks. The walk starts out towards the E along the Saxon army road or *herepath* – Green Street. This climbs steadily towards the Ridgeway which it joins at Overton Down and the crossroads of the track over Fyfield Down with its grey wether sarsen stones; the point reached on section 25. Unfortunately today the high pressure had pushed on E and the day was typified by black battleship clouds bringing heavy showers in a random pattern. Wet weather clothes, although a burden in the sunshine, did make us impervious to even the worst rainfall events. As this is the final stretch, it was fitting to bid farewell to the glorious flowers that had kept us company for so many miles. Among them, of course the greater knapweed and meadow cranesbill, but also less conspicuous plants like lesser stitchwort.

The Ridgeway terminates with a vaguely seedy whimper at the Overton Hill junction with the A4. This, the start of the Ridgeway for many, surely merits a more fitting presentation than the motley collection of ancient campers and associated debris. To the E side there is a collection of very fine Neolithic tumuli and a useful board explaining their construction and the graves and artefacts that have been found in them. Across the road is the site of the (today) rather disappointing Sanctuary. The stones of the rings of this ceremonial site were

still in place in the 1700s, but sadly all that remains today are concrete indicators of their former location. ‘Developers’, then as now have a lot to answer for as they greedily pursue their short-term gains at the expense of future generations. Destruction of our natural capital is the least of their concerns.



**Avebury stone circle**



**Greater knapweed**



**Meadow cranesbill**



**Lesser stitchwort**

After pondering on the origins and function of the Sanctuary we continue on the path which now heads on nearly to the River Kennett (dry as a bone at this time of the year) passing berry-laden hedges on the way. (The spindle berries being particularly gaudy, more at home perhaps in Miami rather than rural Wilts.) It turns W to pass beside the flood meadows of West Kennett and the site of the Saxon palisade constructions which also had an important ceremonial function. The site, again of rather uncertain use, was connected to the Avebury circle by the Kennett Avenue of standing sarsen stones – which also led on to the Sanctaury. From this point there is a fine view of Silbury hill and, behind you, the West Kennett long barrow. The enigmatic Silbury Hill is another late Neolithic construction, built around 2400 BC it stands 31 m high with a diameter of approximately 140 m. Its purpose remains a mystery waiting to be unfolded.



**The field of Neolithic tumuli beside the end point of the Ridgeway adds some mystery and character to this important part of the project (its end point!)**



**End of the road**



**The way back**



**Spindle**



**Silbury Hill**

The image of Silbury Hill accompanies the return to Avebury across from the dry river bed which the route follows N to meet first the A4 and then A4361 before entering the Avebury heritage site. Take some time here to soak up more of the atmosphere and, if possible, visit the Alexander Keiller (of marmalade fame) museum. This will take you through the history of the area from Neolithic to Saxon, Roman and mediaeval times. It will also show how the stones were erected with ingenuity and muscle power.



**Avebury standing stones,  
and how they were erected,  
according to the Keiller  
museum**



And so that has been the Ridgeway, some of its wildlife and most of its seasons. Not one to have missed.