DISCUSSION

Early Prehistoric, by Timothy Darvill

The pair of parallel ditches and associated features in Area A provide a challenge to interpretation as numerous possibilities exist given the recorded ground-plan, the eroded nature of the interior surface, which may have led to the loss of significant and distinctive features, and the relative poverty of dateable material. The primary silts and lowest fills are undated, allowing the possibility that in origin they are rather earlier than the date suggested by the finds and mid-2nd millennium BC radiocarbon date from midway up the sequence of fills (which indeed might have been within a recut). Three possible interpretations are considered plausible, of which the first seems most likely.

First, that these are the quarry ditches of a medium-sized plough-levelled long barrow; the stones in the lower ditch fills being the remains of a central mound. While numerous stone-built long barrows are known on the Cotswold uplands (Darvill 2004) no certain examples are known in the lower Severn Valley or upper Thames Valley and it is unclear whether long barrows in these areas might look like. A pair of ditches broadly similar to those at Rudgeway Lane was recognised during excavations at Cleveland Farm, Ashton Keynes, Wiltshire (Powell et al. 2008, 23) although they are slightly shorter, at 22m, and rather narrower with a tapering plan some 4m apart at the northwest end and 5.5m apart at the southeast. Much the same was found at Wasperton, Warwickshire (Hughes and Crawford 1995, 9) where the pair of roughly parallel ditches are 15.5m and 13m long respectively and up to 5m apart. At Raunds, Northamptonshire, a pair of parallel ditches each about 20m long and set 10m apart cut into the top of a turf mound and were perhaps quarries for a low linear mound. The feature was dated to 3750–3620 BC (Harding and Healy 2008, 70–3). Larger and more widely spaced parallel ditches are well known among earthen long barrows in Wessex as, for example at South Street, Wiltshire, where the ditches were 45m long and about 28m apart. There was no evidence of a chamber within that barrow and apart from stakesholes representing the lines of hurdlework fences subdividing the barrow mound there were rather few sub-surface features (Ashbee et al. 1979, 250–98). Long barrow ditches are often non-symmetrical, as here, and are sometimes recut or their part-silted hollows become repositories for cultural debris in later prehistory.

A second possibility is that these ditches form two edges of a roughly square enclosure, the other two sides being either left open or closed by a light fence or hedge without a flanking ditch. Superficially similar features are known at Gwithian, Cornwall (Megaw 1976, fig. 4.1), although the linear boundaries east and west of the settlement area are probably best considered elements of a field system.

A third possibility focuses on land boundaries defining units within field systems. At Perry Oaks, Middlesex, for example, short lengths of parallel ditch appear to have formed extensions to more substantial co-axial systems. The land-units were generally 30–40m wide and ditch segments less than 100m in length were fairly common (Framework Archaeology 2006, fig. 3.11). Against this interpretation is the apparent absence of a co-axial field system in the area and the size of the ditches, which are rather large for the boundaries/drainage ditches of typical prehistoric field systems.

Iron Age and Roman Periods

While the settlement of the Iron Age was confined to Sites I and II on the hilltop and Sites 3, 5 and 6 at the nature of later Iron Age and Roman sites in the Severn Valley. Preservation of the archaeological record and the fauna and human skeletons was not high.

The earliest activity is in the form of a possible ditched enclosure, c. 300 BC (Fig. 1; Fig. 20). No evidence for recutting on the site, and it appears that this may also have been used for primary cultivation. More evidence for Late Iron Age activity is found in the excavations of Site 6, where the site was used for a later c. 2nd century BC period in which there was farmland use and a south-facing boundary which may have been a possible enclosure or field boundary. Evidence for this period at the site is limited, however, and there is no sign of a later Iron Age ditched enclosure.

There can be no doubt that the site was occupied in the Roman Period 3, or whether the site was in use until the 1st century AD. There is evidence for recutting on the site, and it appears that this may also have been used for primary cultivation. More evidence for Late Iron Age activity is found in the excavations of Site 6, where the site was used for a later c. 2nd century BC period in which there was farmland use and a south-facing boundary which may have been a possible enclosure or field boundary. Evidence for this period at the site is limited, however, and there is no sign of a later Iron Age ditched enclosure.

In the 2nd century AD, a possible ditched enclosure...