Two Unrecorded Long Barrows on Cranborne Chase, Dorset

Michael Gill, November 2026

The chalk downs of Cranborne Chase host a dense concentration of Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments and were clearly an area of significant prehistoric activity. The richness of the associated archaeology has attracted the close attention of antiquarians and scholars for the last few hundred years, initially investigating the upstanding archaeology, but later using remote sensing techniques to reveal a rich fabric of monuments and remains. The region was part of the comprehensive Royal Commission survey of the monuments of Dorset (RCHME 1975), and also subject to more localised studies such as that of the region of Bokerley Dyke (Bowen 1990). Barrett, Bradley and Green (1991) amalgamated much previous research and integrated it into a detailed synthesis of the monuments and society of prehistoric Cranborne Chase. This latter study included an in-depth analysis of the long barrows and how they relate to the Dorset Cursus(Barrett *et al.* 1991: ch. 2). For such an intensely studied area, it might be thought that most major monuments have already been discovered, particularly the larger and more noticeable monuments such as long barrows. However, the recent discovery of two unrecorded long barrows, each about 3km from Tarrant Hinton, demonstrates that the vagaries of the site detection through cropmarks can lead to sites still being revealed when the conditions are favourable.

These two new discoveries sit close to a concentration of long barrows associated with the Dorset Cursus, as shown in Figure 1.

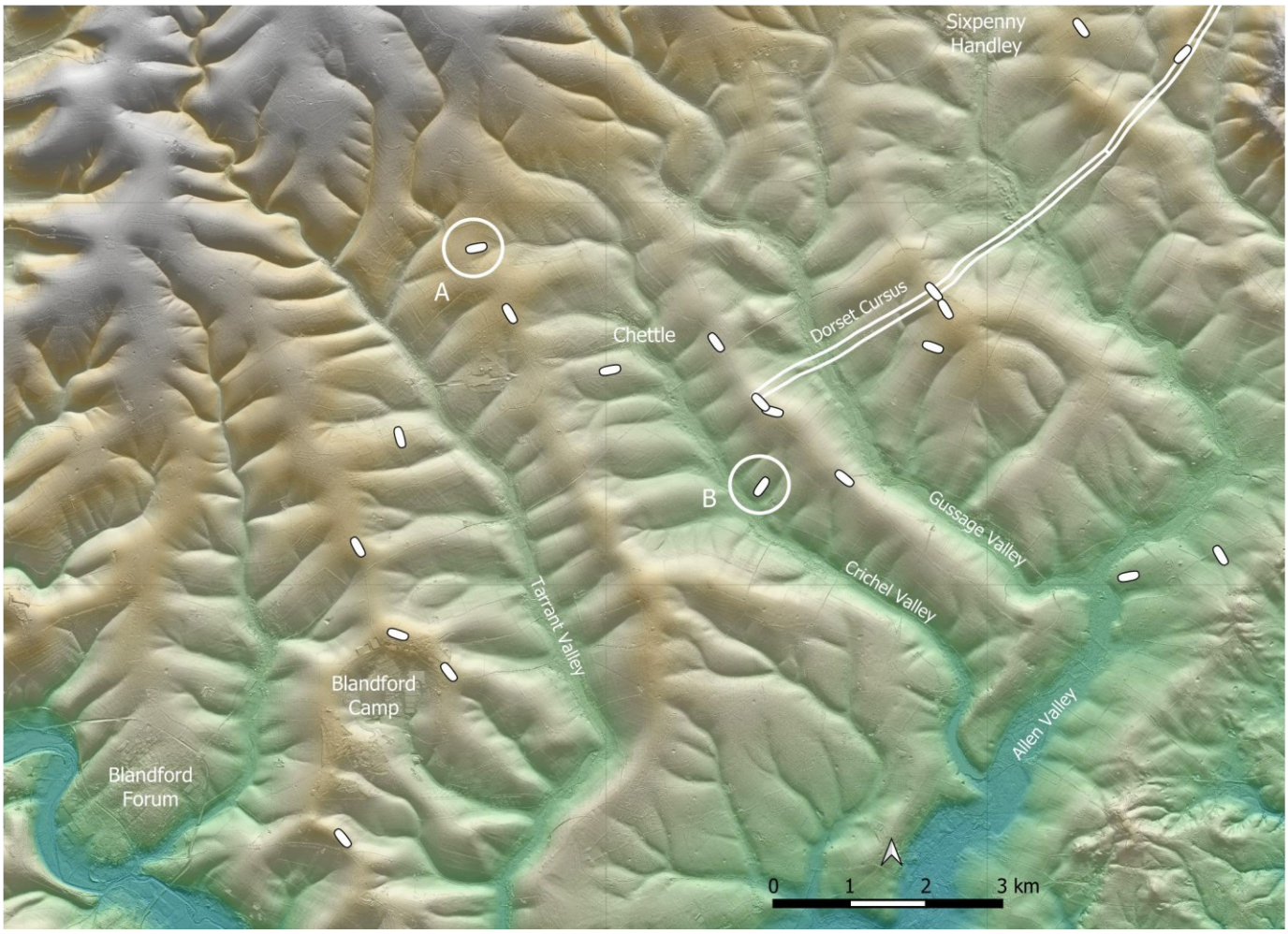

Figure 1: Overview of the location of the two unrecorded long barrows. A: Tarrant Gunville long barrow. B: Long Crichel long barrow. The Dorset Cursus is shown as two parallel white lines. Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.

The first is located in the parish of Tarrant Gunville, about 1.5km north north-east of the village of the same name, centred at ST 93304 14398. It shows as a U-shaped cropmark on satellite imagery shown in Apple Maps (accessed on 24th October 2026) as shown in Figure 2. The cropmark is about 33m long and 21m wide at its widest point. A more detailed view of this cropmark is shown in Figure 3.



Figure 2: Overview of cropmarks of a long barrow at Tarrant Gunville. ©Apple Maps. Accessed 24th October 2026.



Figure 3: Detailed view of the cropmarks of a long barrow at Tarrant Gunville. ©Apple Maps. Accessed 24th October 2026.



Figure 4: Tarrant Gunville long barrow - cropmarks showing traces of an irregular ditch. Google Earth imagery dated 6th July 2018. ©Google.

The presence of a ditch at the western end of the barrow is partially obscured by a line in the crop in Figure 3. However, an epoch of Google Earth imagery, dated 6th July 2018 and shown in Figure 4, shows traces of the full line of the U-shaped ditch. In this case the cropmark is irregular, perhaps suggesting that the original ditch was dug as a series of connected pits or segments, a feature commonly seen in Neolithic ditches. The characteristics of the cropmark traces of the ditch in Figure 4 and the lack of any remaining mound could be suggestive that the monument is a long enclosure, traditionally called a mortuary enclosure, rather than a long barrow. However, soil marks in another aerial image, this time from 1972 and shown in Figure 5, indicate a light chalky area within the ditch, suggesting the presence of a former mound that has now been ploughed flat.

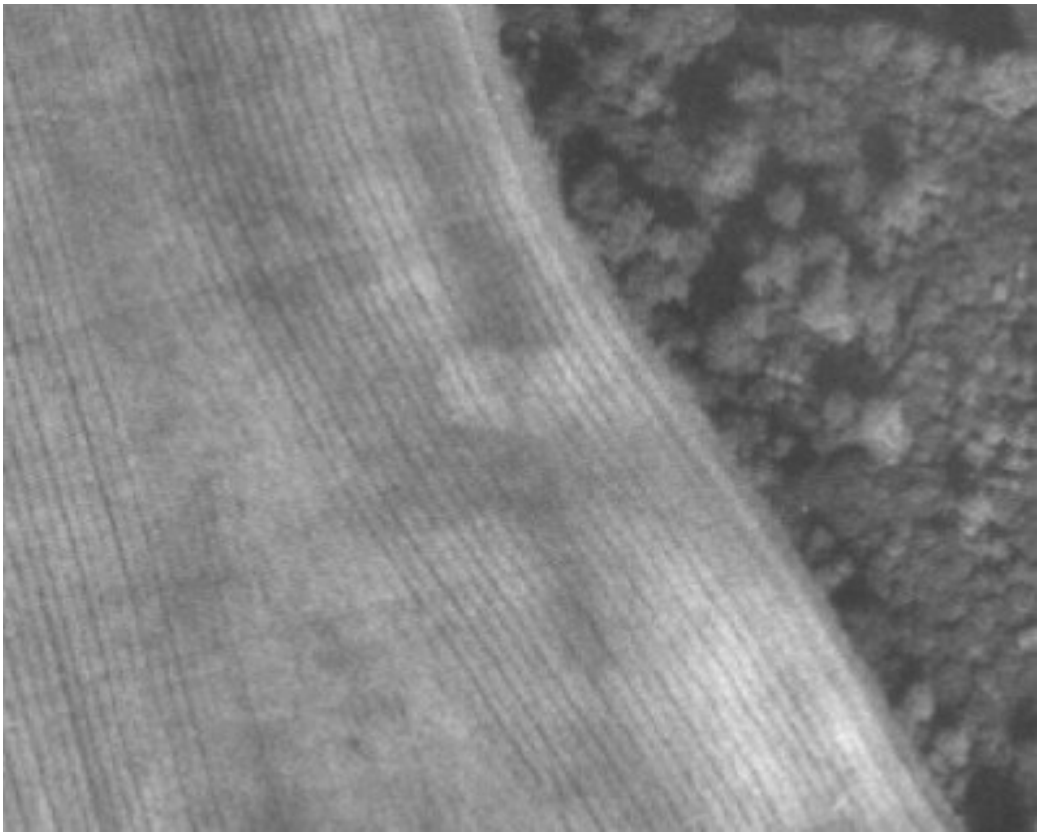

Figure 5: Tarrant Gunville long barrow - soil mark shown on Dorset Explorer Historic Aerial Imagery Layer for 1972.

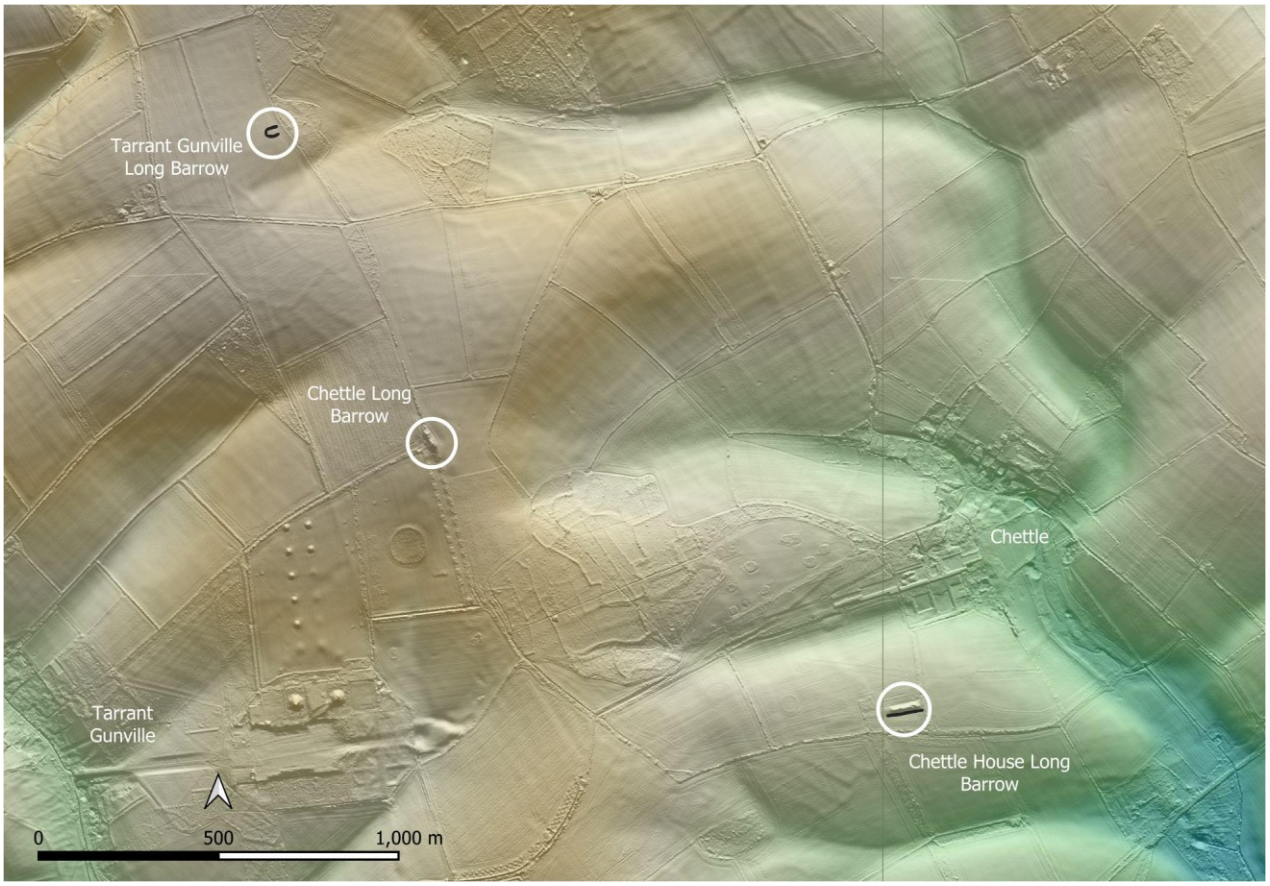

Figure 6: Topographic position of the Tarrant Gunville long barrow in relation to other nearby long barrows. Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.

The topographic position of the long barrow can be seen in Figure 6. It is located on a ridge at the head of a dry valley. Its position mirrors that of the Chettle long barrow, located just one kilometre to the south and on the same

ridge. Another long barrow in the vicinity, the Chettle House long barrow, has a slightly different topographic location, sitting on a ridge between two dry valleys just to the south-east. Each of these dry valleys branches from the upper reaches of the Crichel valley. This area was clearly a focus for monumental funerary architecture, marking it as an area of importance in the Neolithic period.

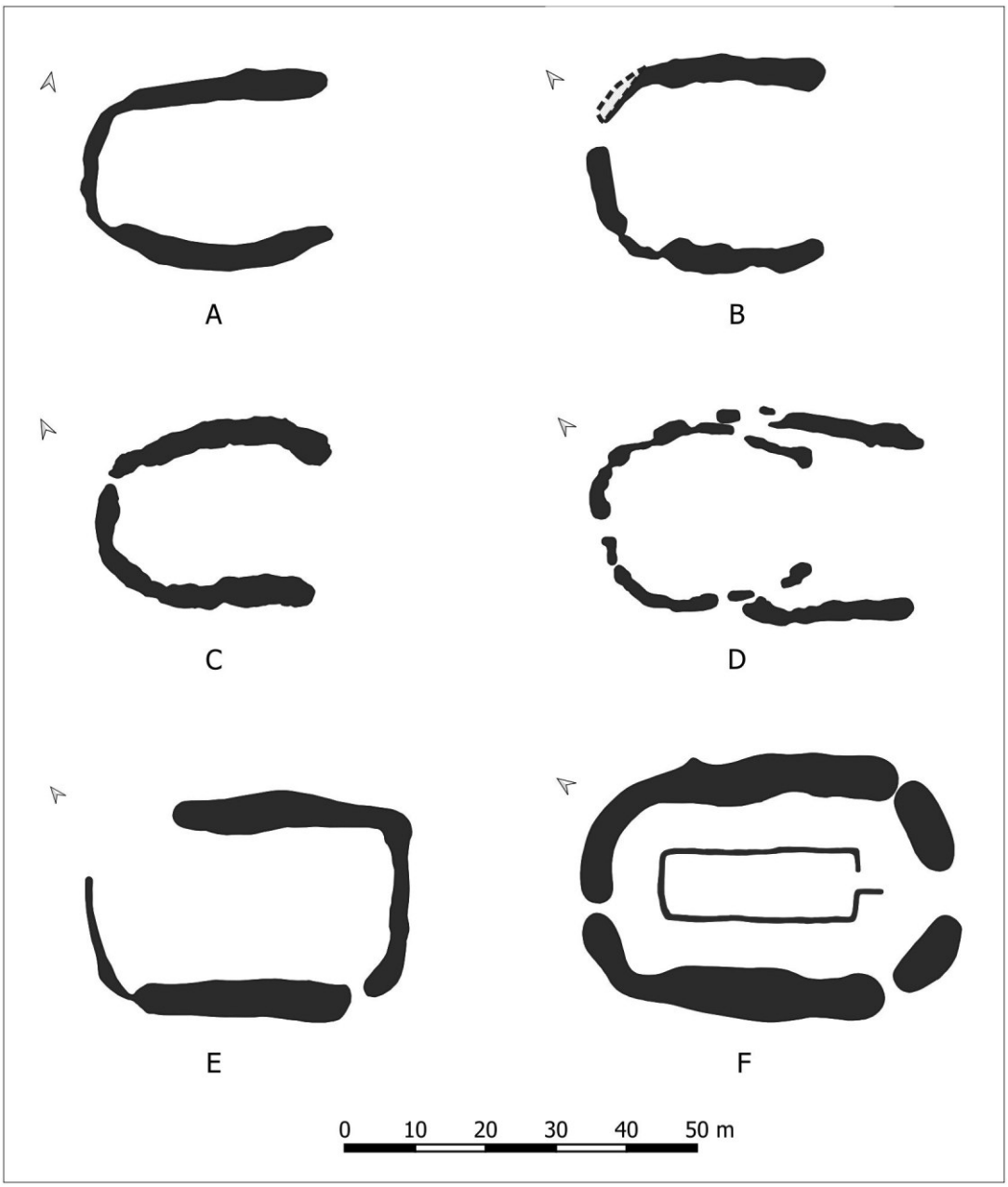

Figure 7: Comparison of the plans of Cranborne Chase long barrows with U-shaped ditches. A: Tarrant Gunville (cropmarks). B: Gussage St Michael 10 (geophysical survey) (after Gill 2020: fig. 6)). C: Gussage St Michael 12, Thickthorn Down (excavation) (after Drew & Piggott 1936: Plate XVI). D: Gussage St Michael 11 (geophysical survey) (after Gill 2024: fig. 26). E: Pentridge 26 (geophysical survey) (after Gill 2025a: fig. 8). F: Wor Barrow (excavation) (after Pitt-Rivers 1898: Plate 249).

The nearby Chettle and Chettle House long barrows are very different in character to the Tarrant Gunville example, both possessing substantial and very long mounds with flanking rather than U-shaped ditches (Gill 2021). The Tarrant Gunville ditches can however be compared with other 'Cranborne Chase' type long barrows with U-shaped ditches, as shown in Figure 7. It is clear that the Tarrant Gunville example (A in Figure 7) is very similar in size and shape to the Gussage St Michael 10 (B) and Gussage St Michael 12 (C) long barrows, as well as the first phase of the Gussage St Michael 11 long barrow (D). All of these Gussage St Michael long barrows are on the ridge to the east of the Crichel valley (Figure 8), just downstream from the Tarrant Gunville long barrow which sits at the head of this valley.

The Tarrant Gunville long barrow was first reported to the Dorset Historic Environment Record (HER) in August 2025, but it did not get added to the record at that point. It has recently been re-reported.

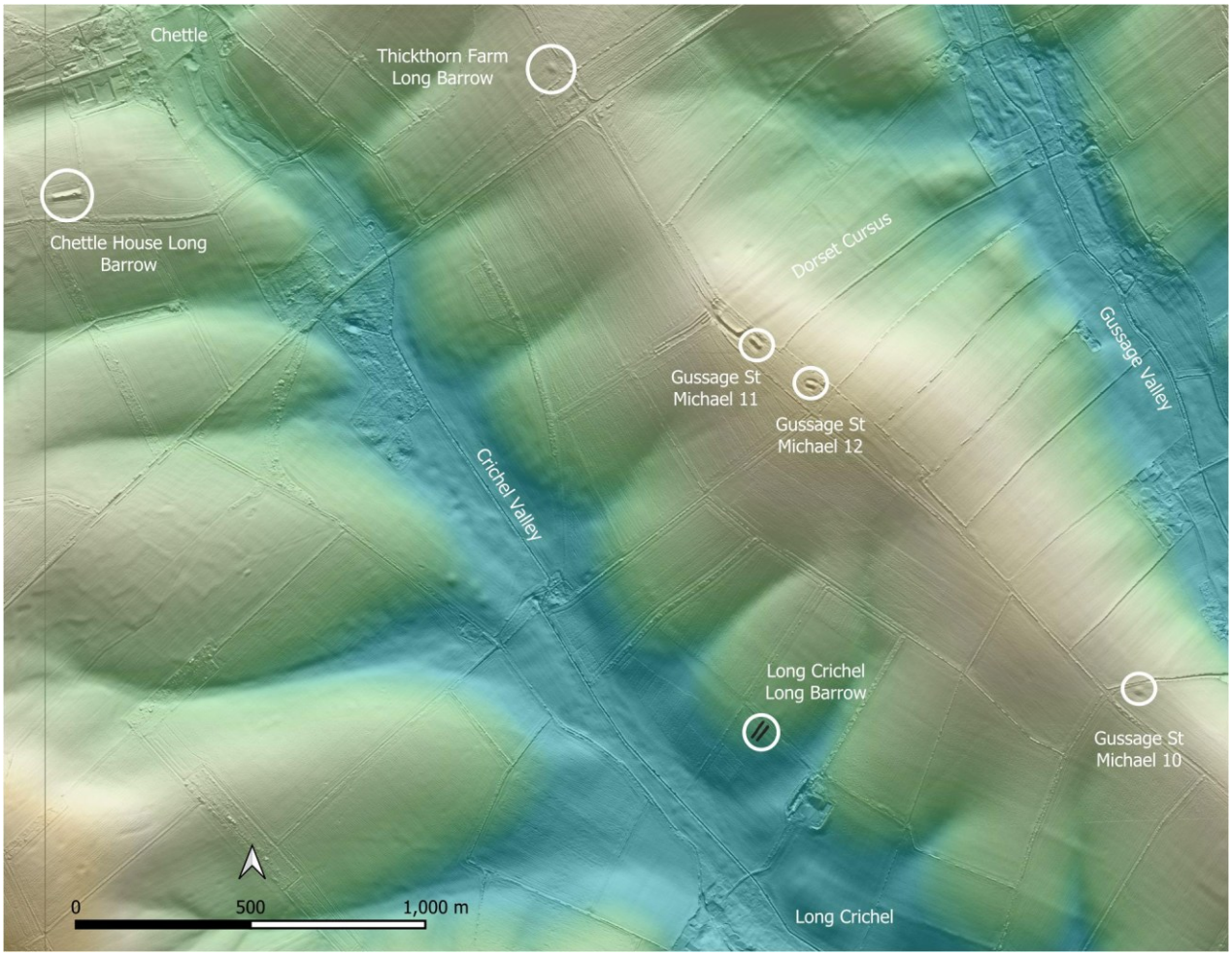

Figure 8: Topographic position of the Long Crichel long barrow. Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.

The second example of an unrecorded long barrow in this area is located 600m north north-west of the village of Long Crichel, as shown in Figure 8. It is centred at grid reference ST 97046 11267. It was first noticed on Google Earth imagery dated 6th July 2018, as shown in Figure 9, and was reported to the Dorset HER on 15th April 2021. At that time, it was not added to the HER and has recently been re-reported.

It is revealed as two parallel linear cropmarks, shown just below and to the right of centre in Figure 9. The long barrow is about 52m long and tapers from 16m wide at the north-east end to 14m at the opposite end. It is in fact within a group of ring ditches, three of which are indicated in Figure 9, the one to the north-east of the long barrow formed of two rings.



Figure 9: Overview of the cropmarks of the long barrow and unrecorded barrow cemetery at Long Crichel. Google Earth imagery dated 6th July 2018. ©Google.

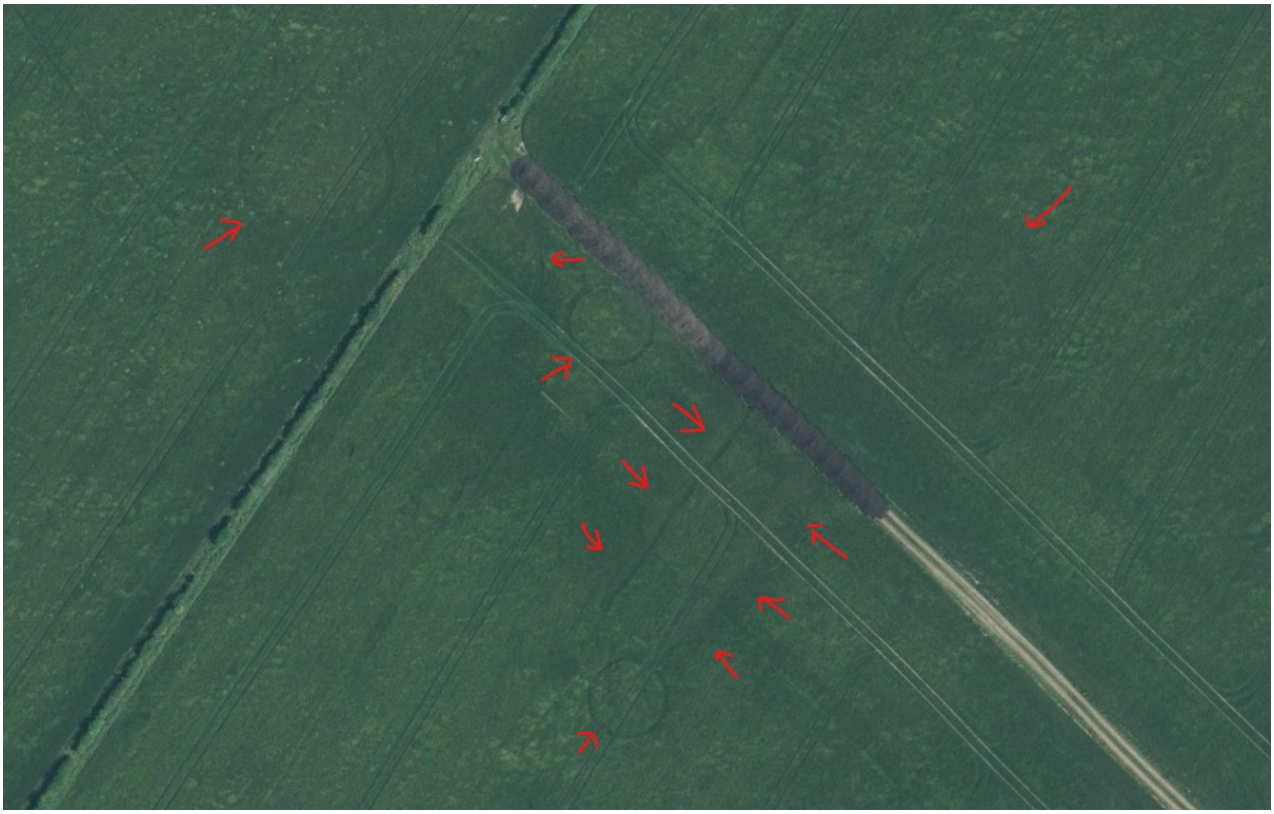

Figure 10: Overview of the cropmarks of the long barrow and barrow cemetery at Long Crichel. Imagery from the 'Latest Aerial Photography' layer on Dorset Explorer mapping website.

Imagery has recently been added to the Dorset Explorer website which reveals more details of the long barrow ditches and the associated ring ditches, as shown in Figure 10. This shows the traces of three ring ditches to the north-west of the long barrow, one at the south-west end, and more detail for the double ring ditch to the north-east. It should be noted that neither the long barrow nor any of the ring ditches are currently recorded on the Dorset HER.



Figure 11: Detailed view of the cropmarks of the long barrow, two ring ditches and a double ring ditch at Long Crichel. Imagery from the 'Latest Aerial Photography' layer on Dorset Explorer mapping website.

A more detailed view of this imagery is shown in Figure 11. The outline of the north-west ditch of the long barrow is shown with great clarity, even indicating a narrowing and slight in-turning of the ditch at its south-west terminal. The cropmarks of the opposite ditch are more amorphous, echoing the inferior representation of this ditch in the cropmarks of the previous epoch of aerial imagery discussed above. This could result from poorer survival but is more likely to result from the ditch on this side of the barrow being more deeply buried, given that the prevailing slope is to the south-east.

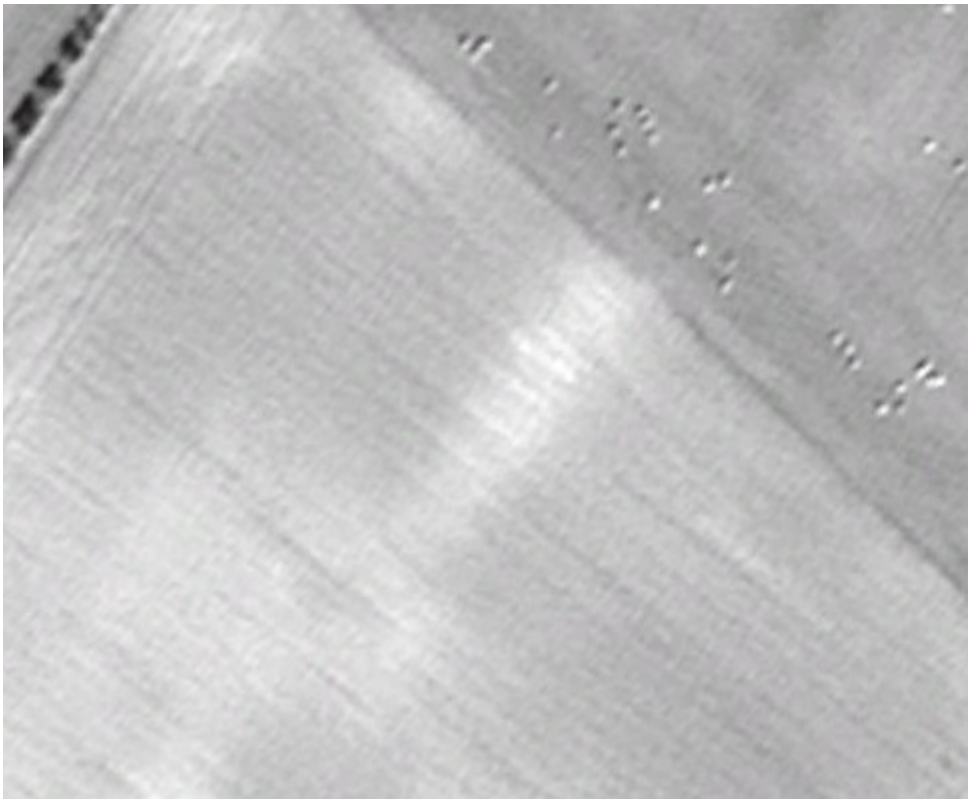

Figure 12: Chalk soil mark of the remnant mound of the long barrow. Google Earth imagery dated 13th February 2014. ©Google.

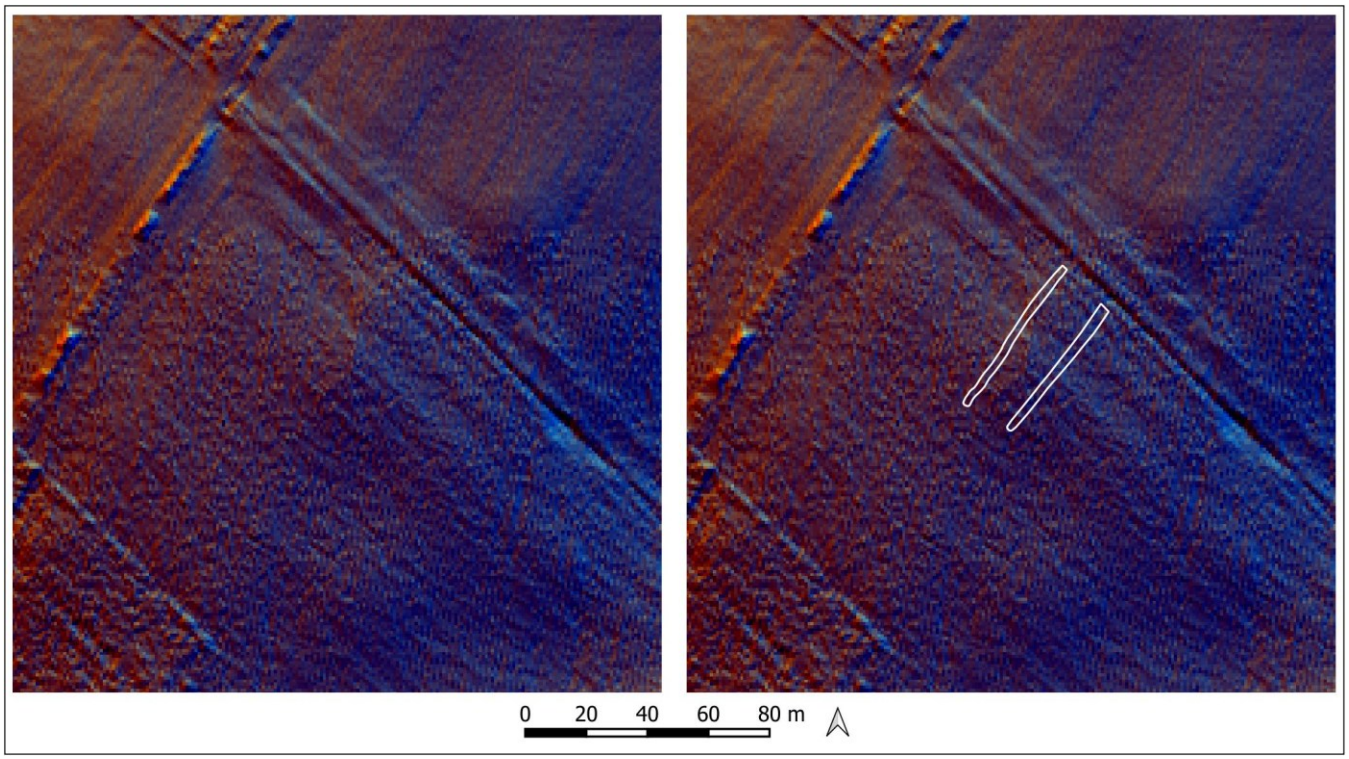

Figure 13: LiDAR showing a slight rise in the ground in the area of the long barrow, suggesting a possible remnant mound. Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.

A chalky soil mark corresponding with the long barrow can be seen in the Google Earth imagery in Figure 12, suggesting the traces of a remnant plough-eroded mound. This is supported by the LiDAR evidence, with the slight traces of a linear rise in ground level in the area between the buried ditches (Figure 13). The ploughed-out mound of the double ring ditch, to the north-east of the long barrow, is also apparent in the LiDAR image. Figure 14, Figure 15 and Figure 16 represent different epochs of Google Earth satellite imagery, all of which show traces of the long barrow ditches.



Figure 14: Cropmark traces of the long barrow ditches on Google Earth imagery dated 26th May 2017. ©Google.



Figure 15: Cropmark traces of the long barrow ditches on Google Earth imagery dated 1st January 2005. ©Google.



Figure 16: Cropmark traces of the long barrow ditches on Google Earth imagery dated 16th July 2021. ©Google.

This long barrow does not occupy the typical topographic position exhibited by nearby long barrows (Figure 8), four of which crest the ridge between the Crichel and Gussage valleys. This ridge was clearly an important focus in Neolithic times, also hosting the end of the Dorset Cursus, the terminal of which is itself monumental and argued to perhaps mirror the adjacent long barrows (Bradley 1986: 7; Barrett *et al.* 1991: 51). In contrast, the Long Crichel long barrow is on lower ground in the valley below, set on a slight spur. It is interesting to note that the long barrow is very different in form to its neighbours, the three closest long barrows (Gussage St Michael 10, 11 and 12) being U-shaped in plan or having a U-shaped phase (Figure 7).

The morphology of the Long Crichel long barrow can be compared with other long barrows with flanking ditches that are found in the Cranborne Chase area, as shown in Figure 17. The Long Crichel long barrow is annotated in that Figure as K and can be seen to be very similar in shape and size to Gussage St Michael 13 (L). The latter long barrow is only three kilometres to the north-east and, interestingly, also sits on a spur of lower ground below a main ridge that hosts two long barrows on Gussage Cow Down, one of which is within the Dorset Cursus.

In terms of length, the Long Crichel example can be seen to be of average length, sitting between some very short examples (A-E), and some longer examples (M-R). It is also clear that the flanking ditches are set fairly close together compared with many of the other examples.

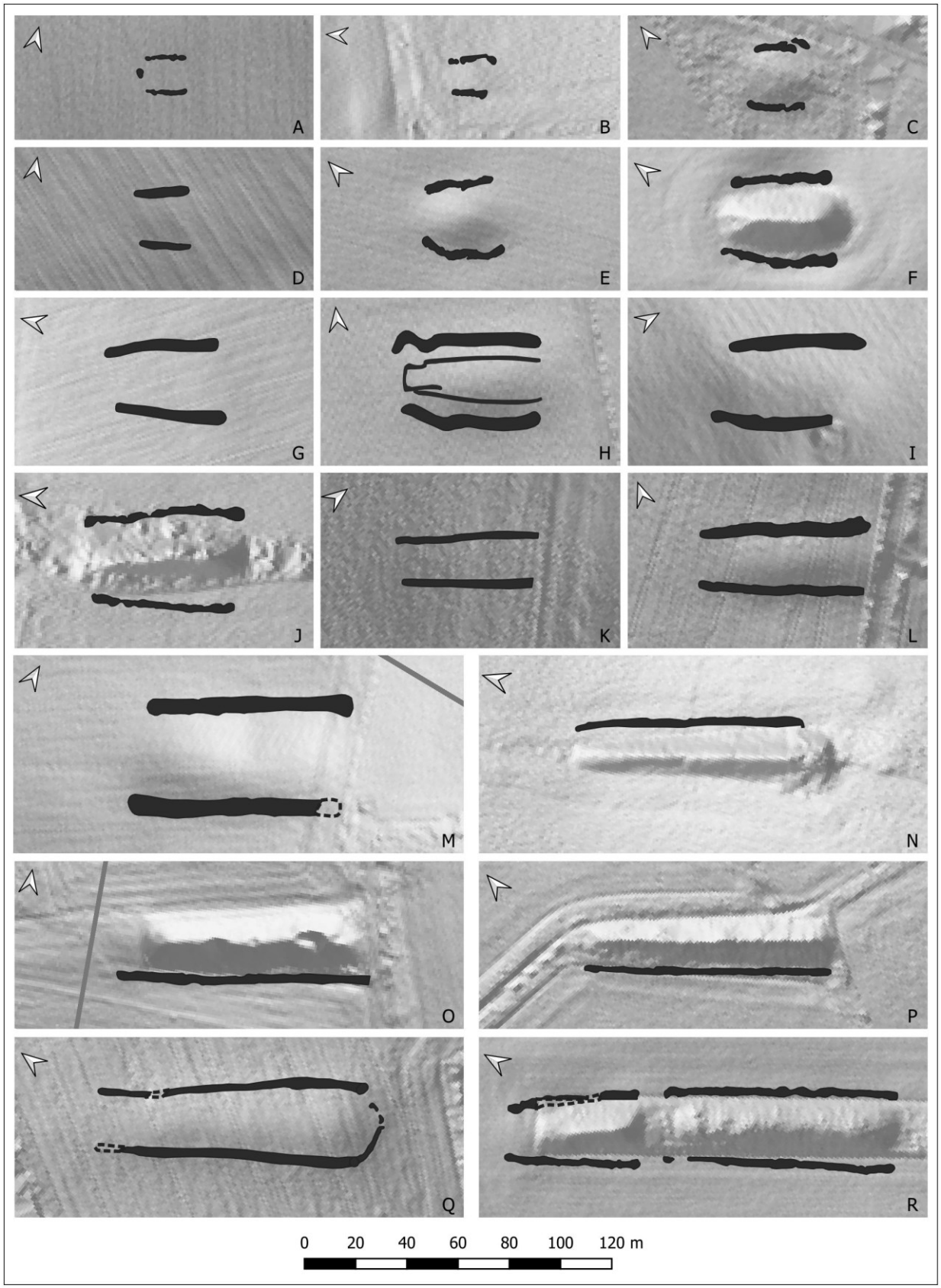

Figure 17: Comparison of the plans of long barrows on or near Cranborne Chase with flanking ditches. A: Townsend Land, Martin (geophysics). B: Pentridge 30 (geophysics) (Gill 2023: fig. 4 after). C: Thickthorn Farm (geophysics) (after Gill 2021: fig. 6). D: Knowlton (cropmarks). E: Pentridge 23 (geophysics) (after Gill 2024: fig. 8). F: Gussage St Michael 14 (after Gill 2023: fig. 19). G: Tarrant Hinton (cropmarks). H: Fordingbridge (geophysics survey by author). I: Wick Lane, Downton (geophysics survey by author). J: Gran's Barrow (geophysics) (after Gill 2025b: fig. 10). K: Long Crichel (cropmarks). L: Gussage St Michael 13 (geophysics) (after French et al. *2007: fig. A2.1). M: Dampney Long Barrow, Damerham (geophysics) (after Wickstead* et al. *2009: fig. 2). N: Pentridge 20 (geophysics) (after Gill 2023: fig. 12). O: Chettle House Long Barrow (geophysics) (after Gill 2021: fig. 15) P: Knap Barrow (geophysics) (after Gill 2025b: fig. 13) Q: East Martin (after Gill 2018: fig. 12). R: Pentridge 21 & 22 (geophysics) (after Gill 2024: fig. 15). Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.*

Together, these examples make an important contribution to our understanding of long barrows on Cranborne Chase, and their discovery shows that even in a landscape as well studied as Cranborne Chase, monuments can still be undiscovered. Their discovery can occur when there is a favourable combination of crop type, seasonal conditions and the fortunate timing of the capture of aerial or satellite imagery. The long barrows sit in a dense concentration of long barrows focused on three north-west to south-east trending valleys that cut through the chalk: the Tarrant, Crichel and Gussage valleys. The importance of this funerary landscape was further reinforced by the construction of the Dorset Cursus, an incredible ten kilometre monument that processes across the landscape at right angles to the prevailing topography, ending on a ridge that is lined with long barrows. The Long Crichel long barrow sits just below this ridge, and the Tarrant Gunville example is a short distance up the valley to the north-west. As well as adding to our understanding of the distribution of Neolithic monuments in this chalk landscape, the two new examples exhibit morphological characteristics that can be compared and contrasted with other examples local to the area. They therefore make an important contribution to the study of long barrows in this part of Cranborne Chase.

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