

## Field Work, 1933

BY E. K. TRATMAN, M.D.S.

During the first half of September, 1933, several flights were taken over Bristol and its immediate environments and as far afield as the Mendip Hills. The flights were made at different times of the day and were undertaken with several objects in view.

Firstly, to determine what archæological sites an amateur observer could detect from the air in a limestone area which comprised cultivated land, grass land, and heath land. The last-named has either never been under the plough or has not been ploughed for many years.

Secondly, to determine the best time of day and the best height at which observations could be made.

Thirdly, to determine how much or how little of the details of known sites could be seen and if this particular time of year was suitable for observations from the air.

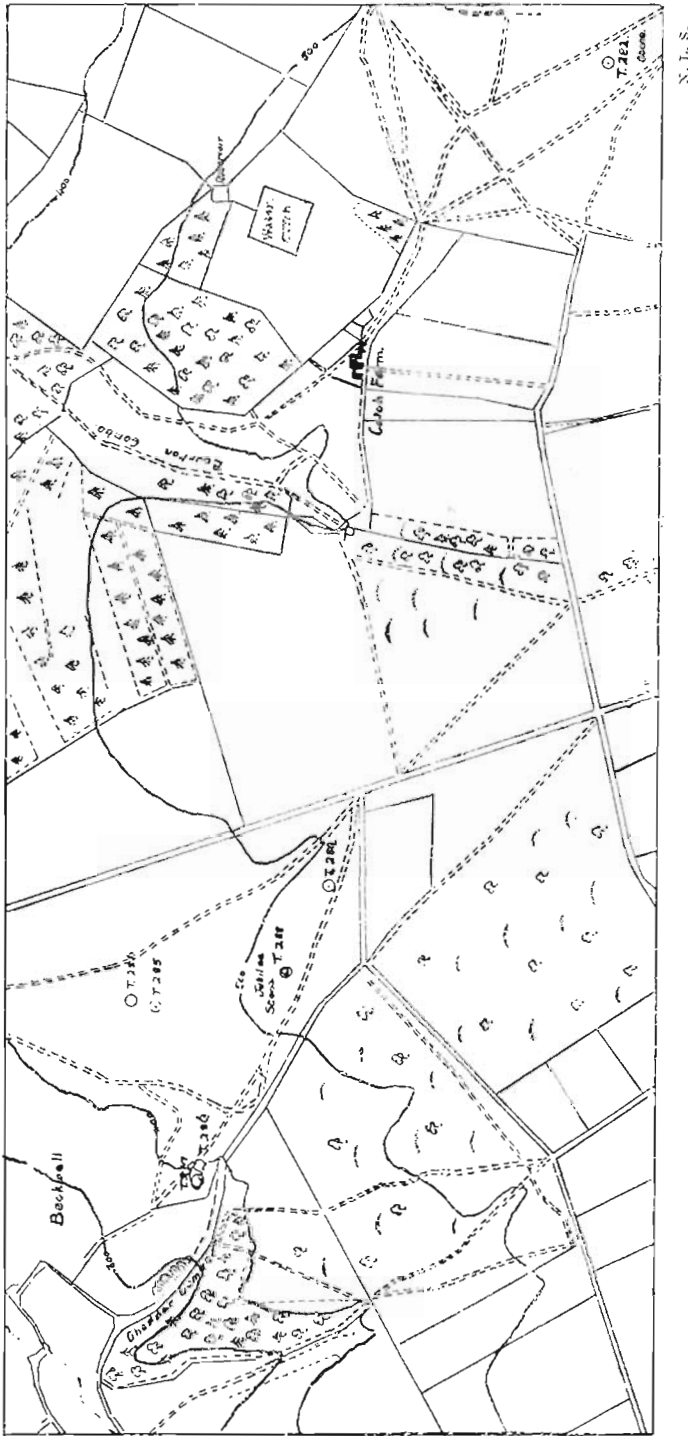
The aeroplane was flown at 2000 to 3000 feet above sea level, being brought lower to observe any particular site. The preliminary observations were made round about noon and proved to be anything but satisfactory; even known sites such as the circular earthworks of Kings Weston Hill<sup>1</sup> were scarcely visible in the rough grass surroundings.

The second set of observations was made in the late afternoon on clear days, when the slanting sun rays showed up many features extraordinarily clearly. Notes on the various sites observed are given below, and from these certain facts will emerge. The sites are dealt with according to the sheet numbers of the 6-in. ordnance survey maps. To the air observations are added observations made on the ground.

### SOMERSET V S.E.

Several rather indefinite structures, possibly tumuli, were observed on the golf course south-east of the village of Backwell. Subsequent investigations of the area on foot revealed the presence of no less than six possible tumuli and an ancient enclosure or camp in the wood on the north side of Cheston Combe (Fig. 1).

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings, University of Bristol Spæological Society*, Vol. II, No. 1, p. 76.



TRACING SOMERSET SHEET V S.E.

FIG. 1. Sketch map based on the Ordnance Survey map, with the sanction of the Controller, H.M. Stationery Office.

## BACKWELL CAMP.

This is the name suggested for this enclosure since it is difficult to think of a more accurate term. The camp is roughly triangular in form but is defended by artificial works on two sides only. The base rests on the nearly vertical north side, which is here about 75 feet high, of Cheston Combe, and no further defence was apparently considered necessary. The eastern defence consists of a single strong bank in-curved slightly at the south-east corner to meet the cliff face; this bank runs nearly north for roughly 60 yards and rises up to 7 feet above the level of the ground outside and 4 feet above the level inside. Then there is a sharp turn and the bank runs roughly south-west for 60 yards with its end in-turned to meet the cliff edge; on this side there is a very definite ditch, almost silted up and now only 1 to 2 feet deep and 10 feet wide, with a possible outer bank, but it is impossible definitely to trace this second bank owing to the very dense undergrowth in this area; both banks are built of stone and a part of the original dry stone walling can be seen on the north-west side. The banks are about 30 feet wide across their bases and enclose an area of approximately half an acre. No entrance is observable unless the slight depression, the site of a modern footpath, in the south-east bank near the turn, is the remains of one. It seems that the entrance must have been either directly over the bank or by a winding and difficult path up the nearly vertical face of the combe; the enclosure is therefore definitely of a defensive nature rather than a simple cattle enclosure. The approximate centre of the camp is Lat.  $51^{\circ} 24' 22''$  N., and Long.  $2^{\circ} 43' 7''$  W.

No similar work exists on the south side of Cheston Combe. It is a structure of unknown date, but from its appearance almost certainly prehistoric, and if it is considered in conjunction with Cleeve Hill Camp,<sup>2</sup> Cleeve Toot Camp,<sup>3</sup> and Tap's Combe Camp,<sup>4</sup> it represents yet one more of this series of works defending the various valleys leading up to the high land from the low land bordering the Bristol Channel; the group may, therefore, represent defensive attempts by the indigenous population against sea-borne invaders, who might possibly be correlated with the builders of the lake villages of Somerset.

<sup>2</sup> *Proceedings, University of Bristol Speleological Society*, Vol. II, p. 280-281, and Fig. 3; *Proceedings, Clifton Antiquarian Club*, Vol. III, part 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 281-282, and Fig. 4; *Proceedings, Clifton Antiquarian Club*, Vol. III, part 2; Rutter, *Delineations of N.W. Somerset*, p. 68.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 279-280, and Fig. 2.

## NOTES ON TUMULI. SOM. V S.E.

## T. 286 AND T. 287.

These are two mounds<sup>5</sup> nearly touching each other close to the east side of the wood on the north of Cheston Combe. They are on sloping ground and their height therefore varies from a minimum of 4 feet to a maximum of 8 feet. The third green of the golf course is partly built into their sides. Both are built of stone, are steep-sided, and have a flat depressed area on their summits. Local tradition is that they are the spoil heaps from mine workings nearby, but their form is quite unlike other mounds in the area; there is no large shaft anywhere near from which the material could have come: their shape is not that of a tip, and it is unlikely that spoil from a pit or pits would have been brought up hill when there are more readily accessible and suitable tipping places nearer the shafts. The evidence for their antiquity is strengthened by the neighbourhood of the ancient enclosure, described above. However, some doubt as to their antiquity must remain, and excavation will decide the matter.

## T. 288.

This is a tumulus built of stones and of a peculiar shape, being closely comparable to T. 5, a barrow of the Beaker period<sup>6</sup> on Blackdown, Mendip Hills. The tumulus consists of a ring mound of stones 2 feet high, 6 feet wide at the base, and 30 feet in diameter. Inside this is a central mound of stones 3 feet high and 14 feet in diameter and joined by necks to the ring on the north-west and south-east. There is an apparent gap in the ring some 3 feet wide, on the north.

## STANDING STONE.

On Barrow Hill is a large upright limestone monolith, 7 feet high, and 4 feet by 2 feet. This has the appearance of antiquity, but one face has been roughly dressed to a smooth surface and an inscription commemorating Queen Victoria's Jubilee incised thereon. The stone stands in a very slight hollow and there are numerous small stones in the ground around. The site, Lat.  $51^{\circ} 24' 6''$  N., and Long.  $2^{\circ} 41' 52''$  W., is marked as "stone" on the 6-in. ordnance survey map, 1882, revised 1930. Nearby is an irregularly shaped mound, T. 282, possibly a tumulus, while not far away on Sheet XI N.E., are T. 22 and T. 23.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> For definitions of these terms as here used see *Proceedings, University of Bristol Spelæological Society*, Vol. II, p. 275.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 65 et seq.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 277.

## SOMERSET XI S.E.

The twin round tumuli, T. 28 and T. 29, and their ditch showed up very well from the air, but the long tumulus, T. 26, was not visible among the long bracken covering that part of Felton Hill. No mound or ditch was observable in connection with the Water Stone Dolmen, T. 25A, near Corner Pool Farm.

The three tumuli, T. 33, T. 34, and T. 35, were all visible from the air and showed as light circular areas in the ploughed surface of the field. In the next field to the east in the northern half of the field appeared a lighter, circular patch of a similar nature to the others, but examination on the ground failed to reveal anything in the nature of a mound. However, this patch almost certainly represents the ploughed-out barrow, T. 35A, and in this connection it is of interest to note that T. 33 and T. 34 have been very much reduced in height by this means since they were first located in 1926.

## T. 290 and T. 291. (Fig. 2.)

About 300 yards north of Butcombe Farm are two circular enclosures, which were first observed by Dr. C. Bruce Perry. Both lie on the edge of the steep slope to the valley, at approximately 350 feet above sea level. Both are divided into northern and southern halves by a hedge running east and west, and both have the southern half planted with beech trees.

In the case of T. 290 the part north of the hedge is ploughed out, but the bank is traceable through the hedge and for a few feet into the field on the north. The original extent is clearly marked on the map by the sudden semicircular detour of the parish boundary to the north from its east and west line along the hedge line just north of Round Wood.

In the case of T. 291 the part north of the hedge is largely ploughed out but is still traceable, and now is clearly marked (like T. 290) on the map by the sudden detour of the parish boundary.

Both consist of an outer ditch with a ring mound inside: any central mound there may have been in either case has been destroyed by the hedge.

The measurements are:—

T. 290. Ditch: 4 feet 6 inches wide and 1 foot deep.

Bank: 1 foot 6 inches high, 4 feet wide at the base, and diameter 100 feet.

T. 291. Ditch: 5 feet wide and 1 foot deep.

Bank: 1 foot 6 inches high, 4 feet wide at base, and diameter 85 feet.

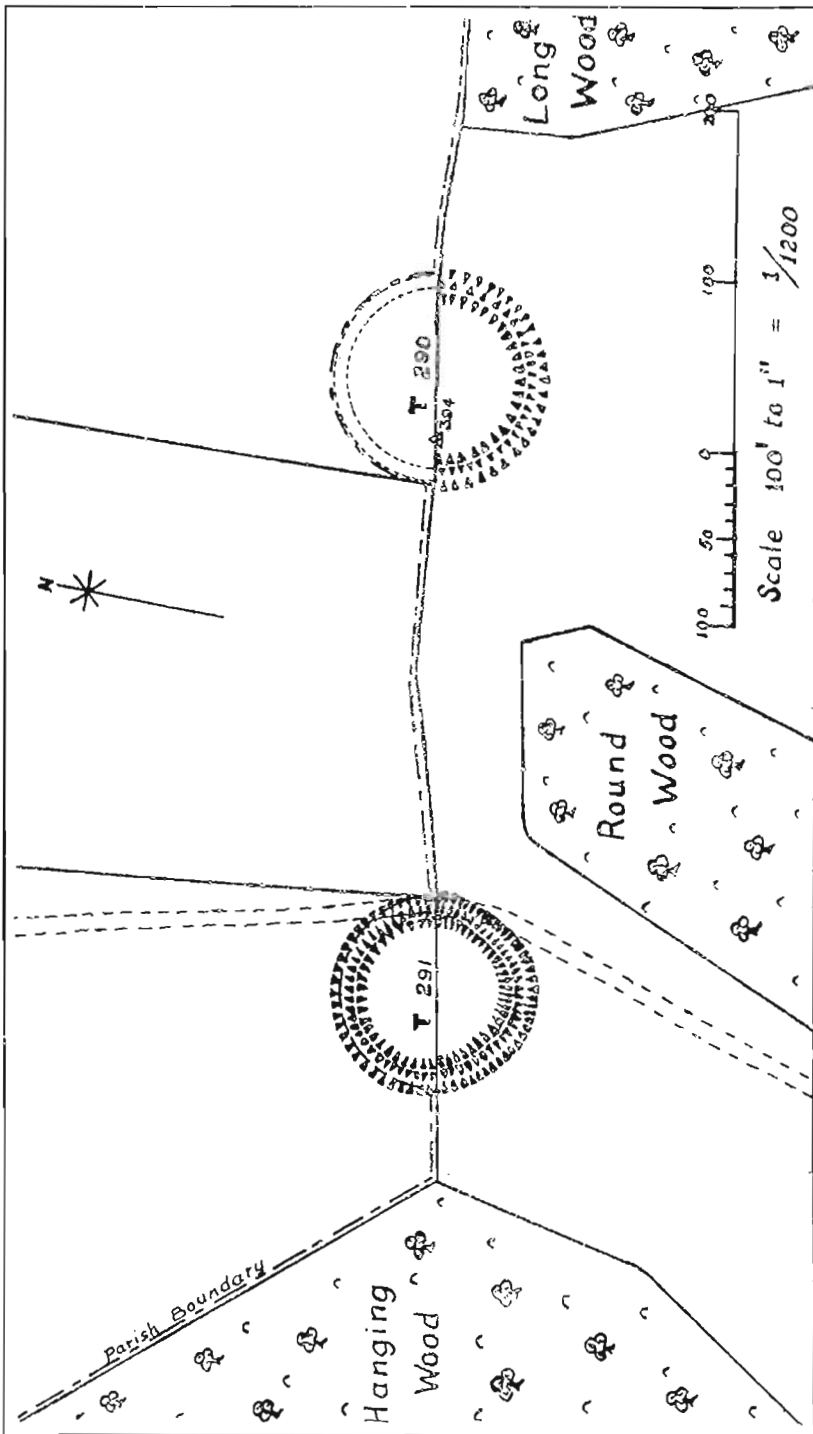


FIG. 2.—Somerset, part of XI S.E. Sketch map based on the Ordnance Survey map, with the sanction of the Controller, H.M. Stationery Office, N. S.

Though these enclosures have both been described as tumuli of the disc type there must still remain some doubt as to their antiquity, and the actual date of their construction must remain undecided pending excavations. In favour of their antiquity is the deviation of the parish boundary and their situation. On the other hand, some features of their general appearance suggest that they may possibly be of relatively recent construction.

It would be of interest to see what an air photograph might reveal in the cultivated portions of these circles.

#### SOMERSET XVII N.W.

On Sandford Hill at the western end a perfect ring mound with an external ditch was observed. Investigation on the ground revealed a ring mound of stones, T. 283, some 18 inches high and about 20 feet in diameter. In the centre the remains of a possible small cairn was observed; outside the ring was a ditch, 2 feet 6 inches wide and 9 inches deep, with well-defined edges except on the west, where the slope of the ground is downhill. The narrowness of the ditch and its sharp edges are features against the antiquity of the mound, and excavation may prove it to have been associated with the numerous and comparatively recent mine workings of the area.

When this site was visited the large quarries at the west end of the hill were also examined, and in the northern face a filled ditch cut in the rock, with a mound on the upper side, was observed; the sectional appearance of this mound and ditch was quite unlike that of the typical quarry spoil heaps and run-ways to be seen along both the north and south sides of the quarry; it is possible that this represents the last remnants of an ancient camp.<sup>8</sup> Against this supposition must be recorded the fact that this ditch and bank are farther down the slope of the hill than might be normally expected. No traces of other works are observable on the hilltop itself other than the old mine workings.

To the south and east of Rose Wood, Shute Shelve Hill, were observed three perfect specimens, in line, of rectangular pillow mounds<sup>9</sup> with external ditches. The central one had had a narrow trench<sup>9</sup> dug through it at one end.

On Elborough Hill, three-quarters of a mile east of Hutton, the entrenchment first observed in 1929 was faintly visible from the air.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Dinghurst Camp*, Churchill, XVIII N.W., of which only the scantiest traces now remain as the result of quarrying operations.

<sup>9</sup> Mr. R. F. Parry, Estate Office, Cheddar, had told me of the existence of these mounds, and he informed me that Mr. H. E. Balch had dug a trench through one but had found nothing.

In the latter part of November of this year the site was visited and a rough survey made (Fig. 3).

The banks where they exist are built of stone. The defence on the north and south depended on the steep slope of the ground, strengthened, perhaps, by a palisade but not by a bank or ditch. The slope on the south is very steep and over 30 feet high above the valley bottom.

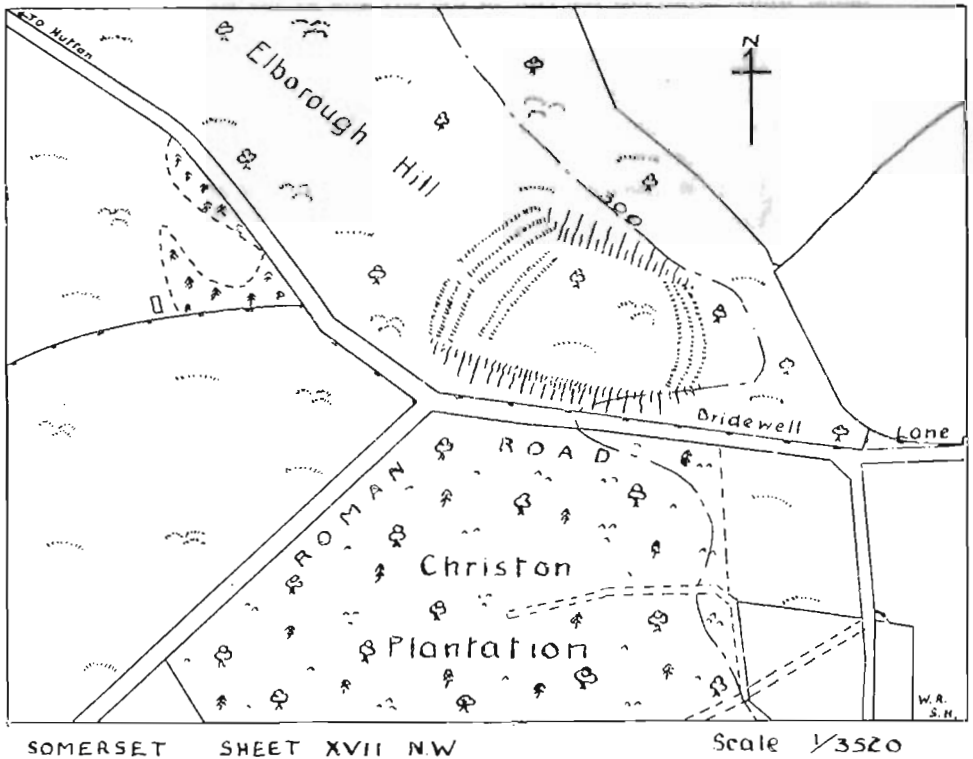


FIG. 3.—Based on the Ordnance Survey map, with the sanction of the Controller, H.M. Stationery Office.

At the east end where the slope, though considerable, is not so steep, is a bank now flattened out but still over 2 feet high in places and 25 feet wide at the base; inside or west of the bank are traces of a ditch. The bank ends on the steep southern slope and is recurved for a short distance along the north side where the natural slope may have been steepened by scarping.

At the west end the defences are stronger and straddle the crest of the hill, which rises on a gentle slope to west-north-west. The outer defence consists of a ditch 12 feet wide and still 3 feet



deep in places ; inside this is a bank 20 feet wide and 3 feet high. Both bank and ditch are recurved slightly at the north-west corner and both appear to end just short of the steep southern slope ; perhaps the entrance was here. On the other hand, there is a fairly wide gap in the defence on the crest of the hill, and though this gap may be recent the squared end of the ditch suggests that it is original. The latter suggestion is supplemented by the evidence of the inner bank, which straddles the gap to the left and at the same time has no gap in itself or ditch outside it.

The date of construction of this work is quite uncertain; but its proximity to the line of the Roman road from Charterhouse-on-Mendip to Uphill and certain features of its form suggest that it may be as late as Roman times.

The area enclosed is about one and three-quarter acres, and the approximate centre of the camp is at Lat.  $51^{\circ} 19' 11''$  N., and Long.  $2^{\circ} 54' 17''$  W.

#### SOMERSET XVIII S.W.

Only a few of the larger tumuli on the summit of Blackdown were visible from the air. Others known to exist and proved by excavations to be barrows did not show at all from the air ; however, T. 169, which has been recorded<sup>10</sup> as a mound, and possible remnants of a long barrow, looked extraordinarily like a ruined long barrow from the air.

The Tynings Farm group of barrows were clearly seen, but though it has been proved that a ditch exists round the south and west, and though the ditch has been excavated and refilled in the case of the south barrow, yet neither were observable from the air. The then current excavations of the central barrow and its ditch were clearly observed.

#### SOMERSET XVIII S.E., XXVII N.E., AND XXVIII N.W.

*Roman Road.*—It has long been known that the line of the Roman road from Charterhouse-on-Mendip south-west to Old Sarum, as recorded on the existing 6-in. map, was inaccurate.

While flying over this area the true line of the road could be readily distinguished over appreciable stretches of country. Where it showed clearest it was seen to consist of a raised bank with a narrow ditch on each side ; subsequent investigation on the ground showed it to be about 25 feet over all, but this requires to be checked by actual excavation.

<sup>10</sup> *Proceedings, University of Bristol Spelæological Society*, Vol. III, p. 33.

To start from the Charterhouse end, it was first visible on the south side of the road leading down to Cheddar Gorge from the top of Mendip at a point about half a mile south of Ubley Warren Farm. The Roman road crossed this road approximately mid-way between the recorded spot level 853 and B.M. 848.1. It was then clearly visible crossing the field to a point a few yards south-west of the extreme south-west corner of the small wood south-west of Wright's Piece. Thence it continues in a straight line to pass just north of Lodmore Farm and between this farm and B.M. 849.1; still in a straight line it continues to the south tip of the small wood immediately south of the spot level 910 on the road from Blagdon to Castle of Comfort Inn; thence it runs quite clearly to cross the road from Harptree to Wells just south of the Castle of Comfort Inn at approximately spot level 886 (Somerset XXVIII N.W.).

The road then was clearly traceable, except for small portions obliterated by mining operations, to the triangulation point 939 a quarter of a mile south-south-west of Wigmore Farm. Passing on, the Roman road crosses the road from Chewton Mendip and is traceable nearly to Bendall's Plantation, where it meets the line recorded on the existing maps.

Just before the Roman road reaches the Castle of Comfort Inn it passes through the space between the third and fourth of the line of earthen circles, banks, and ditches in this area. It is of interest to note that the gap is just sufficiently wide to have accommodated an additional circle if it had been built. Further, the ditch and bank of the destroyed portion of the fourth circle were not visible at all from the air. These points raise a further one as to the real date of these earthworks. The complete absence of a circle, though there was space for its construction, and the Roman road running through the area of the absent circle, suggests that these circles are of Roman date and not as has been generally supposed, of Bronze Age date. On the other hand, the road builders may have carefully levelled the whole of the circle, though this is unlikely; such obliteration of the structure might not now be traceable, even from the air, as witness the failure to detect the missing portion of the existing fourth circle. But again this fourth circle may never have been completed and therefore excavation alone can settle the problem.

#### SUMMARY.

Various known and unknown structures of presumably prehistoric or Roman date have been briefly mentioned and described.

The observations from the air show that the early autumn is

not a very satisfactory time of the year for such investigation of sites in the limestone area ; it is also necessary to make these observations when the sun's rays are markedly slanting.

It now remains for a similar set of observations to be carried out in the spring and summer to determine if growing crops will reveal anything. It is unfortunate that so little of the area investigated is under the plough.

Perhaps the most surprising feature of these air views is the failure to detect old ditches, now filled in, even where they are known to exist. But as all the observations of these were made on grassland it is still possible that crops may reveal their presence.