

## SSARG Visit to Compton Dundon Hillfort and Hood Monument



Stormy winds and the threat of rain did not deter a good group meeting at the Castlebrook Inn at Compton Dundon on Saturday morning 13th October. The lias villages of Compton and Dundon (the place at the valley by the hill) straddle the Street-Somerton road and are now generally known as Compton Dundon. After the all important matter of ordering lunch, we then proceeded to drive up to the car park for access to the hillfort. Church Path – the connecting route from village to church, paved with lias to keep people out of the mud when in their Sunday best, led us to the steep climb up a rocky access path to the fort.





The entrance breach in the bank of this univallate early Iron Age construction is not thought to be the original way in – this could possibly have been on the eastern or maybe western side and might well have been destroyed by quarrying. The hill itself is a survival of lias rock which has eroded down to the valley. We could see across to Lollover Hill and Nigel pointed out there was also a direct sight line to Park where our recent geophysics and excavations have indicated a possible cursus or mortuary enclosure and aerial photography by a SSARG member has added to the number of known ring works in what may be a ceremonial landscape along the foot of the hill.



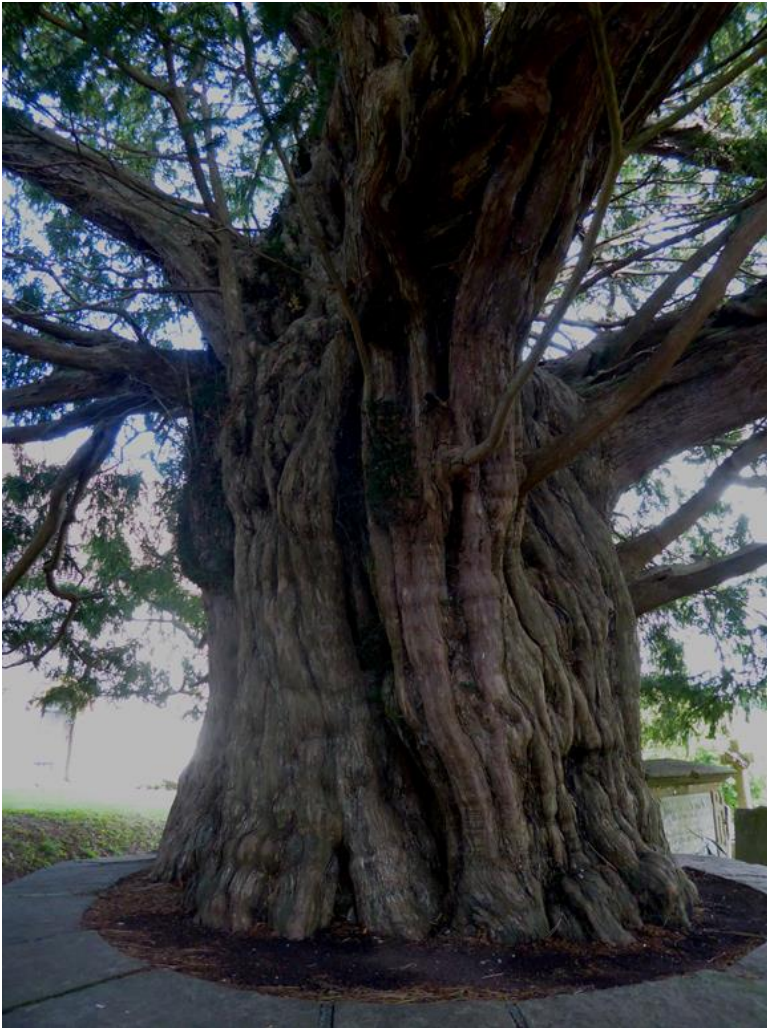
*View of the Tor from the hillfort (NH)*

As we walked around the rampart, it seemed that it may originally have been overlaid with lias stone. A few badger burrows had thrown up several pieces which are maddeningly similar to pottery fragments. Arthur Bulleid in 1916 found flint flakes, a core and scrapers and some pieces of Bronze Age pottery. There is much potential for further investigation. We were escorted much of the way during our exploration by small black ponies, tugging occasionally at our pockets for treats. The area is now run by the Somerset Wildlife Trust and is a reserve for both flora and fauna and includes ancient oak woodland.



We paused at Dundon Beacon (see above) where there is evidence of recent ceremonies including a circular fire pit. The Beacon had been excavated by Hasell around 1831, who found a cist enclosing an inhumation in the kneeling posture plus an urn of penannular possibly tin rings. The Beacon may also have been a motte at some point and it has been possible to confirm from the Royal Commission survey that it forms an intrusion into earlier ramparts. Several lynchets have also been recorded on the slopes of the hill.





We paid a quick visit to St Andrew's Church with its 1,700 year old yew tree (left) and unusual 17th Century swallow's nest wooden pulpit.

Then after a very welcome and excellent lunch back at the Castlebrook Inn, we proceeded to Butleigh Wood and walked for about half an hour – still in strong winds - to the Hood monument. Admiral Hood had been born at Butleigh into a family that produced several famous naval heroes. He rose to become one of Nelson's Vice Admirals and distinguished himself at the Battle of the Nile leading the attack at Aboukir Bay which destroyed most of the French fleet. In spite of losing his right arm in subsequent actions, he continued in service and died in Madras in 1814 where he is buried. The monument is early 19th Century and is of Ham Stone in the form of a Doric column on an ashlar base, which is crowned by a feature of sails and sterns of men-o'-war. It stands in a commanding position looking across toward the Mendips in the north and with good views of Glastonbury Tor.



*Nigel allegedly on point duty during the tour – getting to know the locals*

The day was organised and led by Peter Wright and we owe him thanks for his efforts which created a really interesting day out and exploration of this part of Somerset.

Polly Corbishley

