The Iron Age of The Chilterns and its hillforts: what do we know and what should we do?

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What do we know?

- relatively little compared with other regions with a high density of hillforts (e.g. Wessex, Marches)
- no major excavations or research projects in the past 50 years
- Hillforts Atlas project has started the redress the balance and provided an impetus for further work
What next? Some suggestions for future research and survey themes to follow-on from the Atlas Project:

- Developing a sound chronological framework
- Research and survey of Chilterns hillforts within their landscape context:
  - local landscape, temporal and spatial relationships
  - patterns in the wider landscape
  - Chilterns hillforts in the late Iron Age/early Roman period
- Considering the evidence of hillforts as part of a Chilterns cultural package in the Iron Age
Chronology

- a high priority, but probably a long-term process to address
- carefully targeted excavations + the opportunities provided by rabbits, badgers and tree throws
- general consensus:
  - main period of hillfort construction and use between 800BC and 100BC, with most between 600BC and 100BC
  - a period of relative insularity/low levels of contact with the continent sandwiched between two periods of very high continental contact and influence
  - hillforts increasingly viewed as multifunctional, communal monuments
  - replaced some of the social role of bronze in the late Bronze Age
Local landscape: evidence of earlier, later and contemporary relationships

Early Neolithic occupation/causewayed enclosure at Maiden Bower, Dunstable
Whiteley Hill, nr Royston
Multi-period local landscape west of Wilbury Hill
The wider landscape: hillforts and multiple dykes of the Northern Chilterns
Therfield Heath
A (northern ) Chilterns Iron Age signature?
What happened in the late Iron Age?

Major Late Iron Age Sites

- **Hillforts**
- Shillington

Cow Roast/Ashridge

Verlamion

Weathampstead

River Lea

River Gade

River Ver

River Colne

River Ivel

River Iza

River Beane

River Rib

River Ash

River Start

River Lea

Baldock

Braughing

Essendon

Harlow
Shillington

A hoard of 123 gold and 7 silver Roman coins.
Don’t ignore the natural landscape