

Chalk Map of Australia

Compton Chamberlayne



During World War 1, the Australian soldiers, belonging to the Australian Imperial Force, were based at the Military Camp at Hurdcott. In 1916, volunteer soldiers dug out an outline of Australia, with the word "Australia" inside the map, into the northern slope of Compton Down. They created this large map overlooking the Hurdcott Camp, on the ridge of Burcombe Ivers, southeast of the village of Compton Chamberlayne. On the chalk downs, above the neighbouring village of Fovant, a few miles west of Compton Chamberlayne, there were some twenty discernible military badges that had been carved into the surface of the chalk downs by the end of World War 1. Apparently a large figure of a kangaroo had also been carved into the hillside in the area.



(Photo showing Hurdcott Camp & the Map of Australia overlooking the Camp)

The map of Australia was constructed by volunteer Australian soldiers by excavating a series of shallow bedding trenches into which clean chalk rubble was inserted and compressed into place. It is believed that the work took 17 weeks to complete.

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In a letter to his family, dated 27th January, 1918, an Australian soldier named Thomas James Quinn wrote: *"I am enclosing a map of Australia on the hill here at Hurdcott. It is done with white chalk stone & is longingly watched by the troops camped here."*

An extract from the Diary of Cpl Ivor Alexander Williams, Service number 538 of 21st Battalion Australian Imperial Force, dated 13th October, 1917:

"Our camp has been shifted so today I had to find them at Fovant (about 2 miles from Dinton) Oh! The scenery is just lovely. We are in a basin with a heavy wood in the rear and enormous hills round us. These hills are of chalk and every unit that has been here has cut their badge in the side of the hill by removing the green turf and filling up with white chalk. The Australian one is built on the scale of being 1,000 times bigger than our hat badge. Then there is a map of Australia twice the area of this big badge. They are a real work of art."

Local workers from Fovant and surrounding villages, supported by Regimental Associations maintained the Badges after World War 1. During World War 2, the badges became overgrown in order to disguise landmarks, which may have assisted enemy aircraft.

After the end of World War 2, weather and time, as well as the effects of grazing animals, had caused decay to the badges at Fovant & surrounding areas, including the map of Australia. The Fovant Home Guard platoons formed themselves into an Old Comrades Association and undertook the task of restoration. It was during this period, 1948-1951, that two Wiltshire regimental badges were cut & added to the display. During the same period, as a gesture of appreciation to the Australian people for their kindness in sending food parcels during and after the war, a fund was raised locally for the restoration of the Australian badge at Fovant and also for the great map of Australia cut into the downs at Compton Chamberlayne.

In 1961, the Old Comrades Association was reformed as "The Fovant Badges Society" with redefined & more positive objectives relating to the maintenance and preservation of the Badges and later became a charitable organization. The Society was determined that "the Badges should remain an historic, fitting and truly visible memorial to the soldiers who had passed through Fovant and its neighbouring village, on their way to the Great War, many never to return."

The chalk map of Australia, 925 m southwest of Upper Hurdcott Farm, at Compton Chamberlayne was placed on the Ancient Monuments list as well as the Chalk Military Badges on Fovant Down

The Trustees, faced with a potential bill of £350,000 upwards for restoration and large annual sums for increased maintenance thereafter, realised that the task facing them had to be brought to realistic proportions. They decided, with much sadness, that the objective should be the restoration and maintenance of the military crests on Fovant Down. This inevitably meant that the Map of Australia on Compton Down and the crests of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment and the 7th Battalion, City of London Regiment on Sutton Down would continue their decline. These badges would, in addition, have posed intractable problems because of the nature of the ground and their more advanced state of decay. Also, the YMCA badge on Fovant Down would be allowed to fade away.

The chalk map of Australia has been left to grass over since 2005, due to the lack of financial support needed for the maintenance of the map. It is still somewhat visible from above, but is growing fainter.



(Aerial photo of map of Australia 2005 – courtesy of Fovant Badges Society)



(Photo by Toby 2007)

The photo above shows the situation of the map of Australia from ground level and from a distance. The outline, however, could still be seen in 2007 when walking the site. The map of Australia, if visible, should be located to the left of the tree on the horizon and in the rough area of grassland between the fence and the wood below.

A Plea to the Editor of an Australian newspaper in 1954

AUSTRALIA IN CHALK

Sir, - The huge chalk map of Australia in the Fovant Hills, outside Salisbury, which was dug by the A.I.F. when training in Salisbury during World War I, has almost disappeared. The chalk base has become covered with soil and vegetation, and all that remains is a straggling white outline re-dug from time to time by folk with more enthusiasm than knowledge of Australia.

New Zealand has an excellent memorial in the Bulford area, where N.Z. troops were stationed – a large white Kiwi dug in the chalk hillside, with “N.Z.” under it, well cared for and plainly visible.

Salisbury is an historic city, attracting thousands of overseas visitors each year. I am sure that many of my fellow Australians will join my plea that Australia restore the historic map. I suggest that the outline be pegged by a surveyor and permanently marked – say in granite – to avoid error in re-digging the chalk base; that under it “Australian Imperial Forces 1914-1918” be similarly outlined and dug, and that the whole be maintained by Australia in perpetuity.

Marjorie O'Brien London.

(The Sydney Morning Herald (NSW, Australia) Saturday, 20 November, 1954)

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