

Military Badges

A military badge carved into the chalk of rolling English downland lacks the obvious charm of a white horse or a long man, and its bellicose overtones might seem out of place in such a setting. But, with their First World War connections, five of the badges etched into the hillside along the A30 near Fovant in Wiltshire have become part of the national heritage and are scheduled as ancient monuments.

Hand-dug into a back-achingly steep slope of between 20 and 40 degrees and measuring up to 150 ft across, they represent hundreds of hours of gruelling work by soldiers in 1916-1918 who were based at a training and transit camp around the villages of Fovant, Compton Chamberlayne and Sutton Mandeville. Ostensibly, the badges were done in the men's "spare time", which, at least occasionally, meant the 4am to 7am shift, but, as they were bound for the Western Front, they were probably only too happy for hard physical labour to distract their thoughts.

The cluster of carvings is said to be the largest in Europe. Unfortunately many of the badges represent military units that no longer exist or have been incorporated into other units.

The badges (which were added to in the 1950s and again in 1970) were maintained until recently by the muscle power of local volunteers, organized by the Fovant Badges Society.

Now, professional help has had to be called in, and, with the benefit of newspaper-in-industry sponsorship, a £70,000 Heritage Lottery Fund grant and other donations, a major renovation is under way, due for completion this summer. Thereafter, the Fovant Badges Society faces an ongoing campaign to raise the £15,000 a year needed for maintenance.

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Fovant Badges (Photo from [Fovant Badges](#))