

Ingleborough Archaeology Group

A survey of the north-west flanks of Ingleborough 2007-2011

Cairns and Cairnfields

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The features we classified as cairns in our survey can be broadly separated into three categories:

- Burial/Ceremonial
- Clearance
- Marker

We have recorded 68 cairns in total of which we have classified 52 as being either burial or ceremonial, one as clearance, eight as marker and seven as being either burial/ceremonial or marker. Although some of the burial/ceremonial cairns show evidence of at least partial excavation, there are few records to assist our investigation forcing us to rely on our own observations and fieldwork. Hence our conclusions are frequently qualified by 'possible' and 'probable'.

By far the largest burial/ceremonial cairns we identified are long cairns dating back to the Neolithic period (ING 097:1 and ING 139) and these are described in detail in the essay 'Keld Bank Neolithic Long Cairns'



Fig.1 ING 007 A possible ring cairn

There is just one example of a possible ring cairn (ING 007 Fig.1). It is situated on the edge of a terrace and has been almost entirely robbed out. Having planned it in detail on a scale of 1:20, we assigned it to the Late Bronze Age, basing our conclusions on the size of the stones used in its construction, its regular shape and the size of the base. Its situation would have made it strikingly prominent with spectacular views down the valley.

The remainder of the burial/ceremonial cairns tend to be small composite cairns of earth and stone, turf covered and of a reasonably regular shape probably dating back to the Bronze Age. Although small, they would be large enough to contain cremations or interments within a cist, the whole being enclosed by a subcircular or ovoid mound. By far the largest concentration of this type of cairn is in an area we referred to as the cairnfield where 33 such cairns were identified. The remainder are generally situated in prominent positions on the edge of the terraces or scattered across the limestone pavement.

We expected to find clearance cairns on the pastures and grassed terraces where there is evidence of field clearance in the form of linear banks, but without excavation it proved difficult to identify mounds now covered with turf or soil. There are many small low heaps of shattered limestone scattered across the terraces, but these could be natural features. The only pile of stones which we did classify as a possible clearance cairn is ING 071 (Fig.2). It is



Fig.2 ING 071 A possible clearance cairn

regular in shape but there are no visible banks and it appears to consist solely of shattered limestone.

Rather than build true cairns, the stone may have been simply thrown to the back of the terrace, already littered with the debris from the rock face above. It is also possible that when stones were cleared from the terraces some were thrown under hedgerows, which could have been used to enclose the area, giving us the linear earth and stone banks which run across the terraces today.

The eight marker cairns identified are typically just a pile of stones and they tend to be prominently sited on natural features, on the false skylines created by the edges of the terraces and along old tracks through the limestone. They are relatively easy to identify but it is difficult to place them within a defined period. We classified three as modern walkers' cairns (Fig.3) but for the others we chose the simple classification of pre and post medieval as offering the clearest guidance our evidence allowed. Two marker cairns are associated with the stone working areas and we classified these as post medieval.



Fig.3 ING 026 A modern walkers' cairn



Fig.4 ING 001 A large sandstone cairn adjacent to the large enclosure ING 003:1

ING 001 (Fig.4) and ING 002 could be either burial or marker cairns adjacent to and apparently associated with the enhanced natural enclosure ING 003:1. Measuring 7m x 5m at its base, ING 001 is one of the largest cairns in the survey area excluding the Neolithic short long cairns. It is composed entirely of sandstone which could have come from ING 002 - a low scatter of sandstone which we have interpreted as being the base of a robbed-out cairn. Together they form the most striking of the upstanding features along the limestone pavement. They appear to have been deliberately placed at a point of high visibility in a direct line of

vision from the north-west entrance of the enclosure. It was decided to complete a measured survey of ING 002 as it is particularly vulnerable to disturbance.

In addition to the eight marker cairns we identified a further seven cairns as being either marker or burial/ceremonial (Fig.5). Each of these cairns is represented by a pile of stones – obviously not modern due to the extensive growth of moss and lichens – situated in prominent positions on the terraces but also



Fig.5 ING 165 A possible burial or marker cairn

associated with an underlying rise in ground level which could be natural or man-made or a combination of the two.

The linear feature ING 005 appears to be aligned on and terminates close to the small subcircular cairn ING 006 and has a small ovoid cairn integral to it. The cairn ING 004 is unusual in that it is square and in good condition, hence our suggestion that it is later, possibly medieval. ING 013:2 appears as a simple low mound, 4.2m x 3.9m, but it is interesting as an attendant feature adjacent to the small circle of boulders on the upper terrace.

The cairns built directly onto the bedrock of the limestone pavements may represent only a tiny fraction of the original number as they are so vulnerable to exploitation for walling and rockeries. Certainly there is clear evidence of extensive limestone robbing within the survey area over a long period.

Douk Cave Pasture Cairnfield

The largest grouping of prehistoric cairns recorded in our survey was in and around Douk Cave Pasture and collectively these cairns are referred to in this report as 'the cairnfield'.

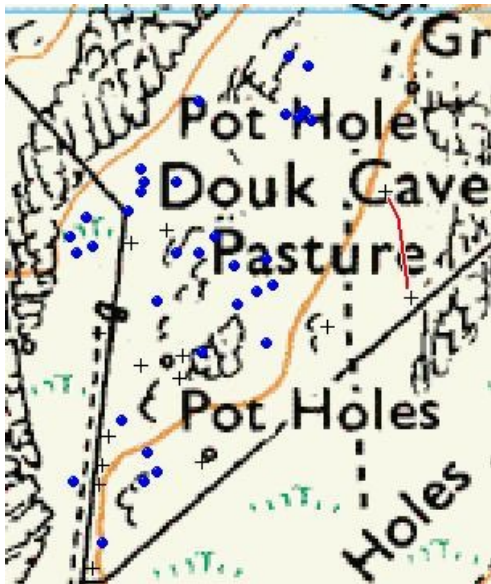


Fig.6 The location of 33 recorded prehistoric cairns (blue dots) in and adjacent to Douk Cave Pasture plus other recorded features (black crosses)

Generally speaking a cairnfield is a group of cairns which share a locality i.e. are grouped together in a relatively dense fashion and are of similar size, shape and appearance. Cairnfields can be found lying within field systems, embankments and enclosures; others lie outside, often above and beyond field systems. The example in Douk Cave Pasture belongs to the latter category. Other cairnfields of a similar nature have been identified in the valley of Chapel le Dale, including one associated with a Bronze Age ring cairn higher up the valley (Capstick, King and Simpson 1996; Mackay 1988, 6-8). They are all made up of clusters of small cairns, often with what appear to be natural mounds in their midst, and built on pockets of limestone pasture frequently surrounded by glacial till and patches of limestone pavement.

The area covered by the Douk Cave Pasture cairnfield is approximately seven hectares and it is not confined by the modern field boundaries as a number of the cairns were also recorded in an adjacent compartment (Fig.6). A total of 33 prehistoric cairns were recorded in the cairnfield along with a number of other features. None of these cairns had previously been recorded in detail although they have been noted by a number of archaeologists over the years and they are referred to in the Farm Conservation Scheme Archaeological Survey of 1996 (Capstick, King and Simpson).

The cairnfield is situated on open access land and a permissive footpath runs along the eastern edge in a north-south direction. It is situated on a limestone terrace at an elevation

of 350m and limestone pavements also lie to the west and east. To the south-east boulder clays and glacial drift cover the underlying geology, and these carry different vegetation.

Lying directly between the summits of Ingleborough (724m) and Whernside (736m), the significance of its situation can best be appreciated when standing on the summit of Ingleborough looking towards Whernside. The cairnfield lies directly below in the line of sight. It would have been a clear feature within an imposing landscape.



Fig.7 An entrance to the Hardrawkin cave system situated in the middle of the cairnfield

Another landscape feature of great significance is Great Douk Cave just to the north of the cairnfield, which is at the bottom of a spectacular sink hole approximately 25m deep and up to 80m across the top. Hardrawkin cave system also runs beneath the cairnfield in an east-west direction with quite dramatic entrances at either side and another access point in the middle of Douk Cave Pasture (Fig.7). Both of these cave systems are associated with running water and their dramatic natural features are likely to have had a strong influence on prehistoric people. It is also worth noting that during the survey a piece of worked grey flint (ING 061)

was found near to one of the entrances to Hardrawkin.

Of the 33 prehistoric cairns identified in the cairnfield fifteen are circular or sub-circular and eighteen oval. Fourteen of the eighteen oval cairns are roughly aligned north-south with the long axis pointing towards the summit of Ingleborough. The most obvious exception to this is one of the largest cairns, ING 055, which lies at the southern end of the cairnfield closest to Ingleborough.

The largest recorded dimension is 10m and the smallest 2m but most dimensions are between 3m and 6m. Although a number of cairns stood more than 1m high most were 0.5m or less. Given these relatively low profiles and the fact that the natural topography of the limestone terrace is one of small lumps and bumps, it was often difficult to distinguish between man made cairns and natural features. Only those features with a relatively high degree of certainty were recorded as cairns so in all probability the total number of cairns is an under-estimate.

Ten of the cairns had very distinctive kerb stones, which were mainly sandstone, and a further seventeen cairns had pieces of sandstone associated with them but not necessarily in the kerb. The presence of sandstone in and around some of the lower profiled cairns was of considerable help in confirming identification. Sandstone occurs naturally on this flank of Ingleborough although not at this elevation. Natural pieces of sandstone can be found scattered along all of the terraces and randomly within the limestone pavements, but to find them in specific locations or in specific arrangements was considered to be highly significant.



Fig.8 ING 093 A scatter of eight sandstone boulders (marked with an S) on the limestone pavement arranged in an approximate oval

One particularly interesting arrangement of sandstone was found on the limestone pavement which is exposed in places in the cairnfield. Eight pieces of sandstone formed an approximate oval of similar dimensions to the kerb stones around some of the cairns. We interpreted these stones as being the site of a cairn now completely eroded or robbed out and it is recorded as ING 093 (Fig.8). If it was a cairn then it suggests that the limestone pavement would not have been exposed when it was originally built.

One other cairn of note is ING 036 which, as well as having evidence of a sandstone kerb, has two large orthostats facing each other 3m apart (Fig.9). At least five of the cairns¹ showed signs of disturbance consistent with excavation (Fig.10)



Fig.9 ING 036 A very distinctive cairn with two facing orthostats 3m apart



Fig.10 ING 037 One of the larger cairns recorded in the cairnfield with sandstone kerb stones and clearly visible excavation disturbance in the middle

A number of other features were also recorded in the cairnfield, the most striking of which is ING 058 (Fig.11) a low earth and stone curvilinear bank situated near the southern end.

It measures approximately 25mx16m incorporating some sandstone. Nearby is another low subcircular earth and stone bank measuring 6.4m in diameter and again incorporating some sandstone (ING 153). It is possible that both these enclosures are contemporary with the cairns in the cairnfield as there are a number of cairns in close proximity but none of them overlaps with the enclosure banks.

¹ ING 035,036,037,038 & 039



Fig.11 ING 058 Part of the low curvilinear earth and stone enclosure bank situated in the south of the cairnfield



Fig.12 ING 034 A stone and earth bank forming a D-shaped enclosure against a natural rise

There are also two D-shaped arrangements of sandstone, ING 094 & 095, which abut the exposed face of the limestone pavement. A larger D-shaped earth and stone enclosure bank, which is backed by a natural rise, ING 034 (Fig.12), is mainly limestone with some sandstone. Again the use of sandstone and the situation of all three of these features in relation to the cairns suggest that they may be contemporary with them.

ING 092 is a small but well defined low oval earth and stone bank with a possible entrance to the west quite unlike any other feature recorded in the cairnfield. Its function and period are unknown.

Two groups of small quarries (ING 054 and ING 096) run alongside the walls and these were obviously a source of stone when the walls were built in the 19th century. One of these quarries has partially destroyed the curvilinear enclosure ING 058.

Discussion

Conclusions must be tentative at this early stage of our investigations, but a number of observations may be made. With the possible exception of clearance cairns creating cairnfields associated with field systems, little is known about cairnfields in the Yorkshire Dales and much work remains to be done to establish their distribution, main characteristics, chronology, functions and development.

Without excavation, dating is hazardous but all of the cairns in the cairnfield and others on the terraces have been interpreted as burial/ceremonial cairns. There is much evidence to suggest a prolific growth in funerary and/or ceremonial cairns in the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age (Johnston 2000). It is also generally accepted that many cairnfields date to the second millennium B.C.(Hoaen and Loney 2007) Although burials and/or cremations are not always found when cairns like these are excavated, the current working hypothesis is that cairns of this type have a ritual function and that funerary use is likely to be an important part of that function.

Further evidence appears to support this hypothesis, although earlier origins and later re-use cannot be ruled out. The use of materials different from the local parent geology to draw

boundaries or to contain areas of ceremonial significance is well documented (Edmonds and Evans 2007). The frequency and regular shapes of the cairns, together with the obvious presence of kerb stones and the deliberate incorporation of sandstone, suggests that they are not clearance or marker cairns and are likely to have had symbolic significance.

The initial field walks over the limestone pavements surrounding the enclosure ING 003:1 reinforced the proposition that this was an area of unusual prehistoric activity. There appeared to be a significant relationship between the track ways, enclosures, cultivation ridges and cairns. In their review of the Neolithic and Bronze Ages in Yorkshire, 'a time of early agriculture', Manby, King and Vyner (2003) concluded that 'on and in the limestone terraces at altitudes from 300m to 350m is a wealth of monuments...compatible with the second clearance phase at the end of the third millennium BC'. We did not however positively identify any of the sites as hut circles; most would be too small.

In his paper 'Man and the Changing Landscape' Bernard Barnes (1982) developed the hypothesis that the climatic deterioration experienced during the Late Bronze Age was responsible for the deterioration of the upland habitat restricting tree growth and promoting the spread of *Erica* and the moorland grasses. This would explain the absence of any convincing evidence of permanent settlement on the terraces themselves or the adjacent limestone pavement. The absence of burnt mounds can be explained by the topography and a lack of surface water. The cairns situated directly on the limestone pavement could provide evidence as to whether or not the pavements had retained their natural covering into the Bronze Age, a potentially interesting research question.

A cairn very similar in size and form to those found in Douk Cave Pasture has been recorded on Gauber High Pasture – approximately 2.5km to the north of the survey area. A RCHME survey in 1988 recorded a cairn of 6m in diameter and 0.8m high as containing a rock cut cist measuring 1m by 0.6m and 0.5m deep. It is reported that A.King found a leaf shaped flint arrowhead in the cist and the cairn was subsequently dated Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age.²

Recent interpretation of the archaeological features on the summit of Ingleborough suggest that rather than being an Iron Age hillfort containing hut circles it may be an earlier ceremonial site, with ring cairns probably dating to the Bronze Age (Luke 2003; Brown 2009, 214, 215, 226). The cairnfield is in direct line of sight when looking from this possible ceremonial site on the summit of Ingleborough towards the summit of Whernside which dominates the view to the north. This alignment suggests that the features on the summit of Ingleborough and the cairnfield could well have been in use at the same time.

One of the most interesting aspects of this site and of those on the limestone terraces is the presence of a range of natural features with which they are associated. It has been suggested that prehistoric communities understood natural features as significant places possibly with mythical associations (Bradley 2000; Brown 2009, 7). The terraces command spectacular views along the valley of Chapel le Dale and across to Morecambe Bay and the Irish Sea and are impressive in their own right when viewed from below. The close proximity of the cairnfield to the quite spectacular entrance of Great Douk Cave and also to the

² English Heritage NMR Record SD 77 NE 14 and Yorkshire Dales National Park Historic Environment Record MYD 3671

dramatic entrances of the Hardrawkin cave system suggest that the area could have held very strong religious connections in prehistory. Caves are universally associated with the underworld (Brown 2009, 215).

Within the cairnfield itself are a number of natural knolls and mounds created by the underlying bedrock. Research conducted by Mark Edmonds and Helen Evans on Sizergh Fell in Cumbria has demonstrated the importance of similar natural features in the limestone landscape, and how they may have attracted the cairn builders to that particular part of the hillside (Edmonds and Evans 2007). This research in Cumbria suggests consistent relationships between cairnfields and natural features such as watercourses and summits and that these places have had long histories of ceremonial activity. Ingleborough itself is such a dominant feature in the landscape that it must have been a formidable presence in the mind of all those coming within sight of its spectacular massif.

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