

## Ingleborough Archaeology Group

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

#### Keld Bank Neolithic long cairn

Yvonne Luke

The oldest visible site currently identified within the survey area is the Neolithic long cairn on Keld Bank and its associated structures.<sup>1</sup> The main cairn (ING 097) is about 24m long by 14m wide, an egg-shaped structure orientated just a few degrees off north-south, with the wider end, usually termed the proximal end of a long mound, to the south on the Ingleborough side. Its height and the depth of the archaeological deposits vary considerably due to its curious position, as it straddles the northern slope of a grassy limestone terrace. It was deliberately placed over a natural curving bank which crosses diagonally underneath it, with its southern end on the higher terrace, the northern end resting about 1.5m beneath on the terrace below. The site has been excavated at least once and possibly twice: the north end of the cairn is made up of reconfigured stones and the southern half shows evidence of excavations which have subsequently grassed over and are likely to predate the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

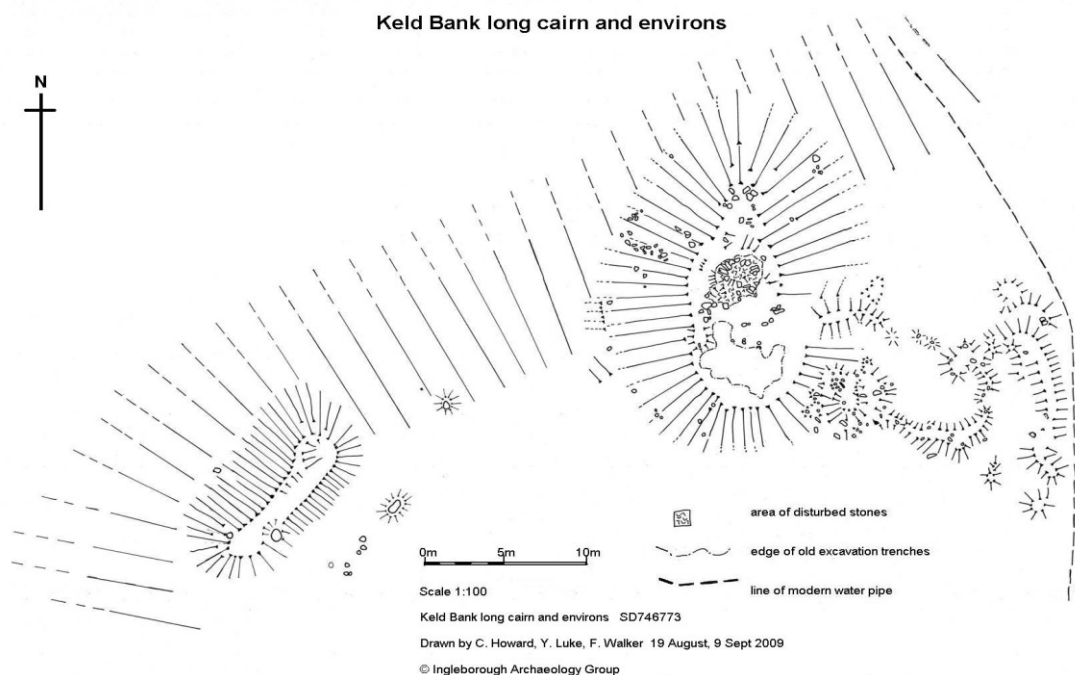


Fig.1 Keld Bank Neolithic long cairn and associated structures ING 097 (right) and ING 139 (left)

It is found in close association with another probable long cairn which lies about fifteen metres to the south-west (ING 139). This one is much smaller at around 14.5m x 6m x 1m, and has a different shape being more of a long *sub-rectangle*. It includes a prominent though

<sup>1</sup> ING 097 parts (1) (2) and (3) and ING 139; SD7465 7739 and SD7462 7748

relatively small sandstone boulder two-thirds along its length towards the south-west end; otherwise the dominant material of both cairns appears to be limestone. Just like its larger neighbour it straddles the edge of the bank, though in this case it lies along it rather than across it, with its eastern side higher than the other. However, as the *stratigraphy* of the two structures does not overlap, the chronological association remains hypothetical rather than proven and hinges on their similar situation vis-à-vis the bank and their close proximity. A round cairn is also to be found in association with these two structures, over the wall to the north in the adjacent field, just outside our current survey area.



*Fig.2 The smaller long cairn (ING 139) looking along its length from its south-western end; the large long cairn is seen in profile centre right*



*Fig.3 The round cairn in the adjacent field; the top of the large long cairn can be seen peeping over the wall in the centre of the photograph*



*Fig.4 The large cairn ING 097 showing the western end of the overlying enclosure midway down the right hand side, the doughnut-shaped cairn bottom right, and two areas of probable excavation in the centre of the mound*

At some stage after the completion of the large oval cairn a small sub-rectangular enclosure of c.8m x 11m (long axis east-west) with an open side on the cairn itself was added to its eastern side; another smaller enclosure (long axis north-south) was subsequently built onto the eastern edge of the first one. The southernmost part of the latter is barely discernible and elsewhere, even when visible, the remaining banks are exceedingly slight and slightly irregular. They are best viewed in low winter light, or when light snow or a heavy frost settles in their lee and highlights the structures. The larger of the two enclosures is visible as a thin line of lighter vegetation on the aerial photograph section of Bing maps.<sup>2</sup> However, there is

<sup>2</sup> [www.bing.com/map](http://www.bing.com/map)

no doubt that the remains of the first enclosure overlie the cairn itself and therefore postdate it. Their function is unknown but we thought it likely that they are associated with funerary activities and have therefore provisionally identified them as a form of mortuary enclosure.



*Fig.5 The long cairn from the east. The line of snow in the foreground is the line of the modern water pipe, which runs just outside the bank of the outer enclosure. The metre rule is visible just beneath the bank of the inner enclosure. Beyond it are two snow patches which define the area within which the doughnut shaped cairn sits. Above it a grassy raised area defines the outer limits of an antiquarian investigation. Rearranged stones mark the northern apex of the cairn.*

Overlying the southernmost bank of the inner enclosure and overlapping the long cairn itself is a low doughnut-shaped cairn, about 6m north-south, 5m east-west. It is difficult, given the unique sequence of structures and their *morphologies*, together with the general lack of knowledge about the development of cairns in the Dales, to be sure about exact chronologies but a sensible estimate is that this small flat cairn is likely to be late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age, and unlikely to be much later than 2000-1500BC. It suggests that the whole site may have been used and developed over a long period of time.

In the immediate vicinity of the long cairns, all over Keld Bank, lie complex archaeological remains which appear to be associated with a variety of later uses. These include what appear to be late prehistoric field enclosures with integral hut circles and a linear field boundary which cuts diagonally between the long cairns and the round cairn, dividing the earlier site. There are also possible medieval enclosures and a post-medieval *bieid*. An unusual large oval enclosure can be seen 30m to the south, but its exact relationship to the cairn is not clear and it may well date to a later period. Just clipping the edge of the Neolithic

complex to the east is the line of a modern water pipe taking water from a spring several hundred metres south. It runs just outside the bank of the easternmost enclosure, and we had to consider whether or not the adjacent bank had been caused by upcast and was not prehistoric. As this bank does not exist anywhere else along the line of the water pipe, we came to the conclusion it must be largely original.

The first modern reference to the main oval long cairn and round cairn dates to 1996, when they were briefly described and measured in *The Farm Conservation Scheme* by Alan King and flagged up as Neolithic or Bronze Age, of probable man-made origin, and possible passage grave form.<sup>3</sup> The small 'satellite' cairn was noted, though neither its doughnut shape, nor the overlapping enclosures, nor the adjacent 14m long cairn were recorded.

Excavations over the last 200 years throughout the country have demonstrated the complexity of these early prehistoric funerary and ritual sites. Sealed beneath the original ground surface of numerous Neolithic long mounds are the remains of pits with associated deposits, scatters of flint, postholes and artificial pavements, wooden mortuary structures and facades, evidence of burning and fragments of bones, both animal and human. Similar traces are to be expected here.



*Fig.6 Keld Bank long cairn viewed from the north*

One of the most exciting aspects of the site, however, is the special alignment of the long axis of the large long cairn on the summit of Ingleborough. If you stand at the bottom of the north end of the cairn on the lower terrace, and look back along its length the huge bulk of Ingleborough towers above the mound. Other potential long cairns have been identified in the area over the last few years. Arthur and Anita Batty identified one near Rowten Pot, Kingsdale in addition to a pair on Scales Moor on the other side of the valley. These are all

---

<sup>3</sup> Some of the extensive archaeology found here is roughly measured and recorded in Ingleborough Archaeological Projects (Capstick B., King A., Simpson M.) 1996 *Farm Conservation Scheme Archaeological (sic) Survey 1996 Part Two* (unpaginated). The current survey has not identified any elements which can be identified as 'passage grave form'.

smaller and slighter than the large long cairn at Keld Bank and have fewer or no associated structures, but two of them are similarly aligned on Ingleborough.

Although the date and chronology of construction of the prehistoric summit enclosure on Ingleborough are not yet known, this alignment is the clearest evidence we yet have that this magnificent hill played a crucial and highly significant role in the religion and beliefs of Neolithic people in the area. It adds considerably to the argument that the hill was special and had sacred significance to the contemporary population, probably over several millennia. The enclosure on the summit includes an internal occasionally *causewayed ditch*<sup>4</sup> and external bank, a characteristic of Neolithic enclosures and henges all over the country, and the focus of this major long cairn on the hill itself adds to the growing body of evidence that we are probably dealing with a prehistoric hilltop sanctuary whose origins lie in the cultural and ritual beliefs of Neolithic people in the area. Ingleborough appears to have been a 'sacred mountain' in its dim and distant past.

### **Future work**

Although only one of a growing number of Neolithic long cairns and barrows which are currently being identified in the Yorkshire Dales,<sup>5</sup> these particular structures on Keld Bank remain amongst the most important yet identified and it should be regarded as a key site, not just in the Ingleborough area but in the Yorkshire Dales as a whole. This is due to the size of the complex, the clear evidence for its continued ritual use over a long time span, and the importance given to the special focused alignment on Ingleborough. Although the 19<sup>th</sup> century excavation record cannot be definitely associated with the large oval cairn, it is likely to be so, and allows us a rare glimpse into the archaeological riches beneath the surface. While the descriptions given above are as accurate as possible, and an effort has been made to clearly indicate different phases of development of the large Neolithic cairn, only excavation will provide detailed information on the creation, development, use, re-use, extension and final abandonment of the monuments.

*Geophysical survey* of all the cairns, the ground between them and the surrounding area would enhance our knowledge and understanding of the archaeology and may provide an indication of the presence of the 'rude coffin of stones' referred to by Howson. Unfortunately *resistivity* is likely to be adversely affected by the presence of limestone pavement, here very close to the surface. The pavement's grid-like pattern can be clearly discerned beneath the turf, particularly on the upper terrace, though structures within the long cairns themselves may show up. *Gradiometry* may help pick up areas of burning and cut features beneath and around the visible structures. All the surrounding archaeology needs to be surveyed in detail, to put these structures in their wider context.

---

<sup>4</sup> Luke, Y.A. 2003 *Rethinking Ingleborough* Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Department of Archaeology, University of York

<sup>5</sup> Luke, Y.A. 2011 'Uncharted territories: Neolithic long cairns and barrows of the Yorkshire Dales' *Forum 2011* CBA Yorkshire (forthcoming)

## **Glossary**

<i>Bield</i>	a short stone-built wall behind which stock could seek shelter.
<i>Causewayed ditch</i>	a ditch with breaks in it, allowing people to cross over easily.
<i>Geophysical survey</i>	a form of survey which examines natural properties of the ground surface through remote sensing, recording differences in magnetic fields ( <i>Gradiometry</i> ) or electrical resistance ( <i>Resistivity</i> ). It is particularly useful because it is quick and non-invasive, no archaeology is disturbed during its use.
<i>Gradiometry</i>	the technique of recording differences in the magnetic signature of the ground surface, itself dictated by the iron content of soils and rock; it is especially sensitive to deposits and structures modified by burning, and is sensitive enough to pick up cut features, such as postholes or gullies, as topsoils frequently have a higher iron content than subsoils.
<i>Morphologies</i>	the general shape and size of archaeological structures; very few sites can or will be excavated, and the majority of known sites are understood and interpreted through their morphology.
<i>Resistivity</i>	the technique of recording differences in how fast an electrical current can pass through the ground; it relies on the varying degree of water content in the earth and is useful for picking out ditches (wetter) and banks (drier), cut features (wetter) and buried masonry (drier).
<i>Stratigraphy</i>	layers of archaeological deposits or structures lying over each other, generally the oldest underneath, more recent above.
<i>Sub-rectangular</i>	a very useful word for archaeologists, meaning a structure which is basically a rectangle but not totally regular or symmetrical in shape.