

The Scales Moor Cairns Survey

Methodology

This section of the survey was undertaken by the team of Sheila Gordon, Carol Howard and Pat Ormerod supported by Chris Bonsall and David Johnson.

As this type of research is still in its infancy we had few records to guide us and, without the evidence provided by excavation, we were forced to fall back on the old qualifications of 'possible' and 'probable'. The recent publication 'Neolithic Long Mounds of the Yorkshire Dales' by Yvonne Luke tackles this difficulty directly. Her work touching on the three Little Hard Rigg long cairns (our spreadsheet references C030, C114 and C082) proved especially helpful in establishing a methodology to identify and categorise the many and varied types of cairn scattered over the moor.

Extensive damage has been done to the limestone pavements on Scales Moor by the large scale, almost industrial, exploitation of the beds of weathered rock. Amorphous piles of limestone were discounted as 'cairns' as they lacked any meaning save as the detritus of a short-lived but highly lucrative industry.

As on the Ingleborough terraces we found that the cairns could be broadly separated into three categories:

- Burial/Ceremonial
- Clearance
- Marker

We were selective in carrying forward examples of the obviously modern, short lived walkers' cairns. Our basic criteria had to be the credibility of the record and the requirements of the HER. We also defined a separate category unique to our survey which does not appear on the HER- 'Boulder Features'. Scales Moor is dotted with large limestone boulders which form a distinct landscape feature. These seem to lie where they were naturally deposited but their size and relationship to the surrounding rocks and underlying limestone pavement suggest they are worth further investigation. They are not however cairns and show no convincing archaeological evidence of human activity, although some may have been enhanced and others may be associated with other features and will be included in the relevant site descriptions for example C081. Click [here](#) to see the spreadsheet and photos for the Boulder Features.

Scales Moor: Location and historical background.

Scales Moor occupies the high plateau that runs NE to SW beneath Whernside. Much of the surface is turf covered broken by extensive pavements of limestone, although pockets of glacial till give rise to areas of coarse grass and moss right across the moor. There are also significant scatterings of sandstone erratics. The eastern edge faces across the valley floor towards Ingleborough and Simon Fell and is characterised by a series of limestone terraces which afford good grazing on the narrow pastures backed by high limestone crags.

The marginal uplands throughout Craven and the North West are attracting increasing attention as their wealth of archaeological evidence becomes clear. Scales Moor is typical of this type of archaeological landscape imprinted with the agricultural and cultural activities of the indigenous people.

The survey area lies within the Parish of Ingleton and historically formed part of the Manor of Twisleton-and-Ellerbeck. Relations between the local family of Twisleton and the monks of Furness Abbey, with their Southerscales estate, were strained and in 1303 a plea was entered at York before the King's justiciars to determine whether the brothers of Furness had unjustly deprived William of Twyselton "of the common of his pasture over eighty acres of woodland, a

thousand acres of moor and pasture in which he used to have rights of common with all kinds of his animals through the whole year.....”¹

The judgement went in William’s favour and although Scales Moor is not mentioned as such, it is likely to have been included in the reference to the thousand acres.

During the medieval period the moor lay within the Chase of Ingleborough, later re-named the free chase of Burton in Lonsdale, the bounds of which were set out in some detail in 1307 (Higham 2007). The King’s right of forest was a legal not a topographical term and could extend over the lands of the most powerful subjects, in this case the Mowbray family with their castle in Burton in Lonsdale.

In 1625 the rights of the Lord of the Manor of Twisleton-and-Ellerbeck were defined by decree following disputes between Richard Shireborne of Twisleton and a group of husbandmen including John Greenbank of Twisleton and Leonard Wetherhead of Scales. Richard Shireborne as Lord of the Manor held 90 acres of improved and enclosed land for his own use and 190 acres which was to be improved and enclosed by the tenants. The tenants were to have and hold their tenements together with a proportional part of the new improved ground and stones and moss and turbary “as hath heretofore been used and enjoyed with customary inheritance from heir to heir” (Balderston nd.) The open fell was common pasture.

Scales Moor was converted into a stinted pasture in 1810 and is included in the Ingleborough Fell Stint Book (Johnson 2008). The system was reviewed in 1842 when it was agreed that the common was capable of supporting 800 sheep (Rodgers et al 2011).

The Long Cairns of Little Hard Rigg

Possibly the earliest cairns on Scales Moor form a group of three in the area known as Little Hard Rigg . They are detailed on the spreadsheet as C030, C114 and C116 and are described in detail and analysed by Yvonne Luke in her interim report ‘Neolithic Long Mounds of the Yorkshire Dales’ pages 31 to 35.

The Spreadsheet

We recorded 117 cairns in total, 30 of which are, with a high level of probability, marker cairns. Distinguishing between burial and clearance cairns was more difficult, there were 18 examples which could equally well be placed in either category. We were satisfied we had identified 17 examples of burial cairns and 12 examples of clearance cairns but 26 burial cairns remained only ‘possible’, as did 5 examples of marker cairns. We identified one possible ring cairn (C076) but on surface evidence alone, it could equally well be a hut circle. The rest we categorised as ‘indeterminate’.

Marker Cairns

These were related either to trackways or to the edge of the terrace, for example C107 refers to a related pair placed diagonally opposite each other on an important route through the escarpment. Some are still important features of the landscape, for example C089, a circular limestone cairn sited above the SW end of Twisleton Scars and clearly related to an enclosure complex. C018 still stands 2.2m high. It is well built of limestone, tapering, almost circular, in good order and standing on an older base. It is obviously related to the large communal sheepfold close by (SD7174 7651) but is also one of a series of marker cairns along the eastern edge of the moor. Where the shape has been retained, the cairns tend to be circular or sub-circular but there is one example of a virtually

¹ Extract from the *Coucher Book of Furness Abbey* transcribed by David Bishop. Unpublished.

square cairn (C111) and C096 – a well built triangular cairn associated with two sub-circular cairns. Several show evidence of rebuilding with a base clearly predating the finished structure but without further investigation the date must remain speculative.

Clearance Cairns

Probably the largest category especially if supplemented by linear clearance. It proved very difficult to distinguish between burial and clearance cairns, especially as many of the piles of limestone surmount mounds of earth that could well represent earlier burials rather than natural features in the landscape. Some sandstone is mixed in with the limestone.

There is a distinctive cairn field on High Scales Rigg and clusters of cairns along the pastures amongst the terraces. The cairn field lies between an extensive limestone outcrop and the glacial drift area to the NE with its rank grass and moss. With the cluster of early medieval farmsteads on Brows Pasture (Johnson 2013) in close proximity and the banks and enclosures of prehistoric settlement sites clearly visible in the valley below, it appears that the excellent summer grazing provided by this cleared area was exploited over many hundreds of years. A pattern of extensive banks or linear features appear to be associated with the cairn field and invite further investigation.

Burial Cairns

With no extant excavation records this category proved the most difficult to identify. Apart from the three possible Neolithic cairns on Little Hard Rigg (see above) most appear to belong to the period of the Bronze Age. There was considerable variation in size but most fell into two groups; the larger cairns averaging 6.0m x 7.0m and the more numerous smaller examples (including the burial/clearance category) averaging 5.0m x 4.0m.

C081 is probably the largest example on the moor of a large sub-circular burial cairn, measuring approximately 18.0m x 20.0m, standing on the edge of the limestone pavement. The crest is now obscured by a large bield built from the limestone and sandstone of the cairn but it is still impressive. Other interesting exceptions to the above are: C020 (9.0m x 7.8m) C035 (9.5m x 7.0m) C055 (10.1m x 4.4m) C109 (8.8m x 9.0m) C112 (8.9m x 9.0m) and the possible ring cairn C076 (8.2m x 8.2m).

The criteria used in designating a cairn as burial, 'possible' or 'probable', was an earth and stone mound, evidence of a kerb or a regular base line and some particular feature in the placing of the stones or boulders used. Of those likely to be burial, as distinct from other categories, 15 were circular or sub-circular and 19 ovoid. The orientation varied but with the massifs of Ingleborough and Whernside dominating the sky-line to the east and west, the alignment was almost of necessity on one or the other. Of 19 ovoid cairns 10 were orientated NE/SW and 4 E/W. Only C084 and C085 were aligned N/S and 3 others, C003, C071 and C108, aligned NW/SE. The emotive power of Ingleborough and to a lesser extent of Whernside as seen from the moor is apparent to any keen observer and was most probably of cultural significance to the indigenous population.

Distribution.

Although the cairns are scattered across the moor, they are concentrated in four main areas; below Twisleton Scars, on the SW extremity above Twisleton Scar End, to the west of High Scales and in the area of Hurreys. There is also an important scatter across Little Hard Rigg. There is however an extensive area where cairns are absent, from Ewes Top in the SW across Ewes Top Moss and Rantree Moss to the north of Hard Rigg Moss. The acid soils here create a contrasting vegetation that deters invasion. There are also extensive areas of limestone pavement that remain clear.

Conclusion

The similarities between the archaeological landscapes of Scales Moor and the north-west flanks of Ingleborough are self-evident but there is nothing on the moor to compare with the cairnfield on Ingleborough². The moor itself is dominated by the summit of Ingleborough in a way that the flanks of Ingleborough are not. The survey is continuing; further spreadsheets are in preparation and they will be made available on our website.

References

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² Luke 2012 pp35-38