The Rock-Art Landscapes of Rombalds Moor, West Yorkshire

Standing on Holy Ground

Vivien Deacon
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Preface and Acknowledgements

This volume is the published version of my PhD (Deacon 2018), with a number of relatively minor changes. I have reduced and simplified the Appendices somewhat. I have also taken this opportunity to clarify some points in the text, particularly around the impact of vegetation on views, and the changing of vegetation over time. I have added or changed some maps, both to improve the visual presentation of the results, and to show the key areas of Rombalds Moor discussed in the text. I have also clarified the discussion of Large Locales, including the discussion of how Geographic Information Systems technology (GIS) is used to present Large Locales visually. GIS is a very useful tool for presenting results visually, and allows the construction of maps incorporating the fieldwork data, but it is not easy to work with, and was a major challenge, a very complex and difficult area. I am particularly grateful for discussions about GIS with Helen Goodchild, and also with Tom Fitton, Neil Gevaux, Robert Johnston and my supervisors Mark Edmonds and Kevin Walsh; any failings are mine alone. Joy Bannister’s work on the environments of Rombalds Moor has never been repeated; for the review of her work presented here, the radiocarbon dates, done in the 1980s, required conversion to cal BC. In the dissertation I used CalPal Online, but I have here recalculated all the dates using the OxCal Online Manual (n.d.). In the in-text citations and bibliography, I have removed electronic sources which can no longer be found, replacing them where possible. I have had to remove the original Preface, as it was unfortunately not possible to obtain permission to print Tauhindalí’s verses ‘A rock, a stone’, as the copyright holder could not be identified.

For the illustrations, I have done my best to locate all copyright holders and where this has not been possible, I have in some cases replaced images with others that would similarly illustrate my point; for others, no real substitute was available, but full provenance information has been given in the caption. Many of the copyright holders of images used here very kindly provided higher-resolution images along with their permissions to publish, so I have been able to retain the original illustrations but replace them with higher-quality versions. Thus I am grateful to Peter Faris, who allowed me to use an image from his website, and particularly grateful to the following, who both gave permissions for images to be used, and very kindly gave me high-resolution copies: Tiina Äikäs and Anssi Malinen, Tim Bayliss-Smith; Keith Boughley; Chris Collyer; Daniel C. Dey; Neil Gevaux; Richard Jones; Göran Larsson of the Archive of Gustaf Hallström, Umeå University Library; Ismo Luukkonen; Trond Lødaen; Aron Mazel; Gerhard Milstreu of the Tanum Rock Art Museum Underslöts; Cezary Namirski; Gavin Parry; Svala Ragnarsdóttir & Bryndís Björgvinsdóttir; Kate Sharpe; David Shepherd; Mike Short; Blaise Vyner; Clive Waddington; Aaron Watson; Xandlinathry of The Megalithic Portal. I also thank Hugo Lamdin-Whymark (now Anderson-Whymark), Frank Jolley and Morten Kutschera for allowing images of them to be used.

I came to Archaeology rather late, from a career in NHS Mental Health Services. In retrospect, this is curiously similar to Archaeology, in that the key skills involve listening to people talking about their lives and experiences, and trying to understand them in their own terms, from their own point of view, and not my own. In Archaeology, it is the remains of material culture that become the discourse, and invite us to understand people in the past in their own terms, and not our own.

In 2009, I came to the University of York as a mature student to do a BA in Archaeology; the environment was both intellectually exciting and personally supportive and welcoming. I am particularly grateful to Penny Spikins, whose book Prehistoric People of the Pennines inspired me to apply to York in the first place, and to all my teachers, especially Steve Ashby, Geoff Bailey, Mark Edmonds, Kate Giles, Aleks McClain, Nicky Milner, Terry O’Connor, and Kevin Walsh, who taught me to write an essay and have an opinion, not at all encouraged in medical training. For my Dissertation topic, I chose to investigate the rock-art on the hills above the Washburn Valley, north of Wharfedale, and learned a lot from not doing it very well, partly because the sample size was too small, and I don’t think I was asking the right questions. It was all so much fun, in a deeply serious way, that I went on to postgraduate work, initially a Masters by Research, which with my supervisors’ support, transmuted into a doctoral research project, and in turn into this published volume.

From the period over which the original research, which this book stems from, took place I have many people to thank, as I could not possibly have done this on my own. My husband Phil, and my children, Eleanor, David and Rosy, have seen many stones in fields over many years, and though they may not have been very impressed, they have been immensely supportive. I particularly thank Eleanor Deacon, spreadsheet queen, for help with making the Recording Sheets and making and managing the Excel spreadsheets. My husband Phil Deacon was my field companion throughout, and managed and maintained the photos; I could not have done this without him.
Keith Boughey is the co-author, along with Ed Vickerman, of the most frequently cited work in this thesis, and the champion of the rock-art of Rombalds Moor for this generation. His teaching and guidance on recognising rock-art were invaluable, and I am also very grateful for his personal interest in this thesis. I am also very grateful to Joy Bannister, whom I have never met, whose sterling but unpublished work on the environments and archaeology of Rombalds Moor deserves to be better known. Like me, she seems to have tramped around the Moor with her husband, working largely on her own, developing a relationship with the Moor as a singular but ever-changing entity.

Louise Brown co-led the Stanbury Hill work, and then moved on to head up the Rombalds Moor Carved Stones Investigation (CSI), and I am very grateful for her interest in this project, and in making available the preliminary results of the CSI work.

I am also very grateful to David Brown, Senior Forest Manager, Tilhill Forestry Ltd, for access to Rivock, and to Richard Stroud, independent rock-art researcher, who told me that you can see Coniston Old Man from Rivock Nose.

At York, thanks are due to Tom Fitton for help in setting up the mapping software on my laptop. I am particularly grateful to Helen Goodchild for her help with understanding and using GIS, ArcMap, Digimaps and the Edina system. Thanks are due also to Penny Spikins, Chair of my Thesis Advisory Panel.

I am particularly grateful to both my Supervisors, Mark Edmonds and Kevin Walsh. Kevin began as my co-supervisor rather later, as I changed this work from a Masters by Research to a PhD, and has been particularly helpful around concepts of landscape and theoretical underpinnings of mapping.

Mark supervised the original thesis from the outset, and came out to the Moor one brisk autumn day early on, as my ideas about natural monuments were just developing. He subsequently left York, and continued to supervise from his home on Orkney via Skype and email, reading and commenting at length on the chapters and their repeated revisions, over the six years that this work has taken. His own work on the Neolithic and Neolithic landscapes has been inspirational, his constant good humour, support and advice have been invaluable, and I am very grateful.
Background to the Study

The study of British rock-art is now very much focused on examining rock-art within its landscape context. Bradley, perhaps the first to bring this approach into prominence, was very critical of studies that concentrated only on details of motifs, saying that the study of rock-art should be part of an archaeological approach that illuminates how people in prehistory inhabited their landscapes (Bradley 1997: 5, 8).

Chippindale and Nash (2004), discussing studies worldwide, say that the landscape context of rock-art is a key part of any interpretation, and Waddington (2007a), reviewing rock-art studies in Britain, agrees. Jones, a key figure in British rock-art studies, says that the people who made rock-art saw their landscape, including their rock-art, as a unity, and as animate (e.g. Jones 2001, 2012; Jones, Freedman, O’Connor et al. 2011). The interpretive studies carried out by Bradley (1997), and by Jones et al. (Jones, Freedman, O’Connor et al. 2011) have the landscape position of rock-art at their heart. Bradley’s study (1997) mostly concerned Argyll and Northumberland, though it does touch on Rombalds Moor (1997, 95), and more recently, Jones and colleagues’ work examined rock-art in its landscapes in Argyll (Jones, Freedman, O’Connor et al. 2011). Both these studies consider, amongst other things, views from and of rock-art sites.

They did not, however, consider the views from and of all the carved stones in their respective study areas; the Australian rock-art scholar Robert Bednarik has criticised as unscientific many landscape-based studies for this reason (e.g. Bednarik 1990, 2000). This study, then, was conceived as an examination of all the extant rock-art within the study area, looking at the views from and of the rock-art sites. This generated a key statement:

*British curvilinear rock-art, though probably not all of it, was made in relation to its position within the landscape, particularly in connection with views, both from and of rock-art sites.*

A fieldwork-based methodology was developed to interrogate this central statement, based on visiting all the stones in the study area, and recording the views. This study then became almost a journey from the simple original statement into hypotheses and research questions concerning relationships at four different spatial scales of landscape. The question as to whether or not views were even possible required careful exploration. The interpretation of the results led to a number of insights, and also led to a consideration of the physicality of carving and the embodied engagement of the carver with the rock, which have not, to my knowledge, previously been explored for British rock-art.

Many publications in British rock-art studies focus on fully recording both known and newly discovered rock-art sites, but do not offer much interpretation. This work is of course extremely valuable, indeed essential, for rock-art is being lost by processes of erosion, overgrowth of vegetation, field clearance, development and other practices.

Unfortunately, in general, the study of rock-art has always been rather marginalised in British archaeology, although it is both abundant and accessible. Because it cannot be directly dated, and is often quite isolated from other archaeology, it is perhaps seen as lacking in context and inherently unreliable. Yet today, much of it stands in largely undeveloped upland, exactly where it was made in prehistory, in a landscape whose topography is probably not much altered; and something of its environments can be recovered. Many of the spatial relationships which existed in prehistory, between sites and other sites, monuments, settlements, or natural features in the landscape are still there, although rock-art is a more vulnerable resource than it might seem. Rock-art in its landscapes can indeed tell us something of how people lived in prehistory, if we ask the right questions.

This project grew out of a study carried out for my BA Dissertation, examining rock-art on the hills west of the River Washburn, a northern tributary of the River Wharfe; it raised more questions than it answered (Deacon 2012). The study reported here began as a project for an MA by Research, but after a year, this transmuted into a doctoral research project on all the rock-art on Rombalds Moor, over 250 sites, adopting a landscape archaeology approach.

Rombalds Moor is a circumscribed and relatively small area, a rock-art landscape which has been widely studied, in terms of its environment (e.g. Bannister 1985; Berg 2001; Boughhey and Vickerman 2003: 6-9;
Yarwood 1981), its prehistoric and later archaeology (e.g. Couling 1946; Keighley 1981; Vyner 2008), and specifically its rock-art (e.g. Boughey and Vickerman 2003, 2013; Brown, Boughey et al. 2013; CSI Rombalds Moor, n.d.; ERA England’s Rock Art; Hedges 1986).

As well as a discussion of rock-art studies and Rombalds Moor itself, Boughey and Vickerman’s two publications (2003, 2013) include gazetteers of all sites known at that time, and those works made this project possible. Their work covers not just Rombalds Moor but the whole of the old West Riding of Yorkshire, with a discussion of all the sites and motifs, environments, other archaeology, and landscapes of rock-art (Boughey and Vickerman 2003: 1-46).

During the time the fieldwork for this project was being carried out, the Rombalds Moor Carved Stones Investigation group (CSI) completed and reported their survey of the sites and panels using more modern techniques than had been available earlier (CSI Rombalds Moor n.d.); their work is available on the England’s Rock Art website (ERA England’s Rock Art n.d.). Their brief did not cover any interpretative work (Louise Brown 2014 pers. comm.).

There are no recent environmental studies of Rombalds Moor. However, the comprehensive reviews of West Yorkshire’s prehistoric environments (Keighley 1981) and its prehistory (Yarwood 1981), cover Rombalds Moor; and Bannister’s unpublished PhD dissertation (1985) on the vegetational and archaeological history of the Moor includes the prehistoric period. Rombalds Moor can also be compared to other upland areas where similar work has been carried out, such as the south Pennines (e.g. Spikins 1999), and the North York Moors (e.g. Simmons 1990; Simmons and Innes 1996).

**Terminology**

Words may come with their own baggage, and it is important to be aware of this, so as to avoid perhaps unconscious assumptions. Such terms include ‘marginal land’, ‘settled landscape’ and ‘fertile areas’, which are used in much of the interpretive work on British rock-art, and further terms such as ‘shamanism’ and ‘vision quest’. These are scrutinised very carefully herein, as they may be reflecting modern understandings rather more than they reflect attitudes held in prehistory.

In western USA, some rock-art sites were gendered: some places, especially high places, were reserved for men to make rock-art, with other sites, especially lower places in valleys, being reserved for women (Whitley 1998). In Britain, though, we do not know if women made rock-art, indeed we do not know that men made rock-art either, as there is no specific evidence about the gender of either the carvers or audiences of British rock-art. I have therefore avoided gendered language, and used ‘they’ and ‘themself’ as singular pronouns. Hyphens, joining strings of words together, have been used to emphasise that a term is different from the sum of its parts, thus rock-art and cup-and-ring.

The numbering system for the carved stones is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five, but essentially incorporates the very different systems of both Boughey and Vickerman (2003, 2013) and CSI (ERA England’s Rock Art, nd). Many of the carved stones have well-established names, and I have used them alongside the Boughey and Vickerman and CSI numbering systems; they make the text easier to read. I have not devised names for any of the carved stones, though I refer to 355/GCS 13 Haystack 2, also sometimes called the Little Haystack, as H2 to avoid confusion with 302/PR 05 the Haystack. A single uncarved stone became salient to the discussions in Chapters Six and Seven; as an uncarved stone, it would not be appropriate to give it even a provisional number, and I have named it the Sentinel for the purposes of this study.

One previously undescribed carved stone was discovered during the fieldwork, and given a provisional number (224a/CSE 05) fitting in with the schemes used by Boughey and Vickerman (2013, 2) and by CSI to name new stones. Chapter Eight deals with small clusters of carved stones and two possible alignments. None of these had been named, so names for all of these had to be devised for this study, and are listed in Chapter Eight. All are named after the area in which they stand, or a central, already-named carved stone.

Acronyms and abbreviations are mostly avoided in the text, though occasionally used for brevity, but they are used regularly in tables and in maps (Table 1). In the maps, clarity is paramount, and compromises have to be made; many of the maps are clearer on screen than in print. No label ever covers a symbol for a carved stone, though the legend block may do so. For the sites, full numbers (Boughey and Vickerman number/CSI number, eg 110/SH 13) are used where space permits, but abbreviations are sometimes used to avoid long labels obscuring other features. The motif symbols are hierarchical (an unavoidable decision with its own difficulties, discussed in Chapter Two), and the following terms are used:
Introduction

All Stones: all carved rocks in the Study Main Database, (or other database as otherwise specified).

Cups only: all cups-only carved stones in the particular database; a stone may have grooves as well.

All CAR: all cup-and-ring carved stones in the particular database; a stone may have cups and/or grooves as well.

1-ring CAR: all carved stones in the particular database where the maximum number of rings in a cup-and-ring is one; the stone may have cups, and/or grooves as well.

2-ring CAR: all carved stones in the particular database where the maximum number of rings in a cup-and-ring is two; the stone may have 1-ring cup-and-rings, and/or cups, and/or grooves as well.

3+ring CAR: all carved stones in the particular database where the maximum number of rings in a cup-and-ring is three or more; the stone may have 2- and/or 1-ring cup-and-rings, and/or cups, and/or grooves as well.

Examination of the Ordnance Survey maps for this area show that many areas of Rombalds Moor have names, but one part of the Moor, referred to repeatedly in the text, has no name as such. It is part of Ilkley Moor, the terrace level below Green Crag Slack, and I refer to it as Ilkley Moor Lower Terrace, often abbreviated to IMLT. Similarly, several features on the Moor are unnamed. There are three very large round cairns on the Moor top; two of them are the Great and Little Skirtfuls of Stones, but the third, on the very highest part of the Moor, is so overgrown that it seems to go largely unnoticed: I refer to it as the Moortop Great Cairn.

Some anthropological and ethnographic terminology is complicated by the use of words where different scholars have used different spellings. Herein, this is notable when discussing northern Scandinavian archaeology and Sami ethnography. Here, to avoid confusion, a consistent spelling is used, though it is sometimes different from the spelling used within some of the cited works (Table 2). The spellings chosen follow the work of Inga-Maria Mulk, herself a member of the Sami people.

Table 1. Abbreviations used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B&amp;V</td>
<td>Boughey and Vickerman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Bronze Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAR</td>
<td>cup-and-ring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSI</td>
<td>Rombalds Moor Carved Stones Investigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERA</td>
<td>England's Rock Art (website)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIS</td>
<td>Geographic Information System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCS</td>
<td>Green Crag Slack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GL</td>
<td>ground-level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HER</td>
<td>Historic Environment Record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMLT</td>
<td>Ilkley Moor Lower Terrace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meso</td>
<td>Mesolithic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo</td>
<td>Neolithic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>upstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WYAAS</td>
<td>West Yorkshire Archaeology Advisory Service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Words transcribed from languages of northern Scandinavia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spelling Variants</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Spelling used herein</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sami, Saami</td>
<td>hunter-gatherers of northern Scandinavia and north-western Russia</td>
<td>Sami</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sapmi, Saepmi</td>
<td>area of Lappland inhabited by Sami peoples</td>
<td>Sapmi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seita, sieda, sieddje, sieidi</td>
<td>a Sami shrine</td>
<td>sieddje</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Rock-Art Landscapes of Rombalds Moor, West Yorkshire

Using the bibliography: references to the ERA website

References are made not infrequently to the very large website, ERA England’s Rock Art. The ERA website, only a part of the much larger Archaeology Data Service website, contains details of the carved stones in the database here, as well as details of the Northumberland stones, and very useful background material to rock-art studies in general. It has its own internal search function for the stones, each stone occupying several webpages, and the reader should type in the stone’s CSI number, with the locale in full if possible (see Appendix 1 for list of CSI abbreviations and full locale

Figure 1. Erosion of motifs: 62/RV 18, Rivock. Left: photo taken before 1986. Right: photo taken 2013, showing obvious loss and blurring of motifs throughout. Images: Left: Photo by E. Vickerman, © K. Boughey and WYAAS. Right: Author and P. Deacon.

Figure 2. Problems due to public access. Top left: Tourists on top of 302/PR 05 the Haystack. It is quite a scramble to get up: scrapes from boots are a hazard to the rock surface. Top right: Triangular graffito on 384/WB 18, a stone with six cups, one much larger. Bottom left: Detail of the roughened surface of 212/PC 01 Piper’s Crag, which may have been ‘cleaned’ by scouring, or by chemical agents. Bottom right: Recent graffiti on 314/CC 06. Images: Author and P. Deacon.
names, eg HS 01: Hawksworth Shaw 01). To avoid a very considerable proliferation of such references, the reader is referred to the ERA homepage, and can then use the menu on the left-hand sidebar or the website’s internal search engine.

The future of British rock-art, and British rock-art research

Whilst carrying out the fieldwork, it became very clear how rapidly erosion is now damaging some of the panels. There are sometimes clear differences between recent photos and those taken less than 50 years ago, such as 62/RV18, shown in Hedges’ 1986 book (Hedges 1986: 56; ERA England’s Rock Art n.d.; Figure 1).

Conservation issues have been much considered and discussed, though earlier attempts at active conservation have unfortunately often involved techniques that either do not work, or make damage to the panels worse (Barnett and Díaz-Andreu 2005; Darvill and Fernandes 2014; Goldhahn 2008; Jefferson and Jefferson 2010). Space here allows for only a brief discussion of these important issues. Broadly speaking, threats to rock-art come from larger-scale processes including atmospheric pollution, climate change, and vegetation, as well as human behaviour at or around the carved stone itself (Giesen et al. 2014; Jefferson and Jefferson 2010; Figure 2).

Scheduling of ancient monuments, including rock-art, gives panels a degree of legal protection from deliberate destruction, development, planning applications and so forth. However, it does not protect sites from casual human interference, whether deliberate, such as graffiti, or accidental or negligent, such as allowing grazing animals in a field with ground level panels (Darvill 2014; Foster 2010; Robinson 2012).

There is also a tension between encouraging public access, and ‘hiding’ rock-art. Increasing public access may increase interest, in general a good thing, but it also exposes rock-art to the risk of being graffitied, or casually damaged, for example by people walking over panels (Darvill 2014; Sharpe 2014). Sometimes, portables are even stolen; the author is aware of two such cases, one on Rombalds Moor, where a portable has vanished from a cairn on Stanbury Hill.

There are no easy answers to these problems; moreover all stone will eventually erode away, and even reburial of panels will only slow erosion and not end it (Jefferson and Jefferson 2010). Removing panels to a museum is no answer, as it destroys the landscape context, treating a panel as simply art; as Bahn says (2010: 150), ‘this kills it’. Some workers suggest that the only realistic approach is to accept the inevitable, and fully record the panels before they are lost (Darvill and Fernandes 2014; Janik 2014). This makes ongoing research projects ever more important.