

CAIRNS, FIELDS, AND CULTIVATION:

ARCHAEOLOGICAL LANDSCAPES OF THE LAKE DISTRICT UPLANDS

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Front cover: *The Mickleden Valley, surrounded by the Langdale mountains*
Rear Cover: *Partially reconstructed roundhouse TB 750, on Town Bank*

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Abbreviations

BP	Before Present. In terms of radiocarbon dates, present is defined as AD 1950
EDM	Electronic Distance Meter; survey equipment measuring distances between it and a reflecting prism by computing phase differences between the outgoing and returning signal of a beam of infra-red radiation
HER	Historic Environment Record, which is held by the Lake District National Park Authority, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, Cumbria, LA9 7RL
LDHER	Lake District Historic Environment Record
LDNPA	Lake District National Park Authority
LDNPS	Lake District National Park Survey
OD	Ordnance datum
OS	Ordnance Survey
RCHM(E)	Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England
SM	Scheduled Monument
SMR	Sites and Monument Record, now HER

Archaeological Date Ranges

The dates for the primary archaeological periods are based on national radiocarbon dating and known historical dates; they consequently have a varying degree of accuracy.

Mesolithic Period	10000-4000 BC
Neolithic Period	4000-2200 BC
Bronze Age	2200-700 BC
Iron Age	700 BC-AD 43
Roman Period	AD 43-410
Early Medieval Period	AD 410-1066
Medieval Period	AD 1066-1600
Post-Medieval Period	AD 1600-1900+

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Foreword

The Lake District National Park has a rich and distinctive prehistoric archaeology, which has been relatively understudied in comparison with other upland areas of England. Before the 1980s, research into the prehistory of the Lake District had been carried out by a small number of dedicated amateur archaeologists and an even smaller number of university-based academics. Various reasons can be cited for this, including a widely held view of the north of England as a backward area in prehistory, and the lack of a local university department of archaeology (except for a brief period at Lancaster University).

The exceptions to this general picture include the research by Clare Fell and others into the Neolithic stone axe-production sites in the central fells, the extensive fieldwalking activities of the Cherry family, and Winifred Pennington's work on the palaeobotany of the area. However, it was not until the creation of the Cumbria and Lancashire Archaeological Unit (later renamed the Lancaster University Archaeological Unit, now Oxford Archaeology North), and its subsequent programmes of fieldwork, that the extent and significance of the prehistoric resource in the Lake District was more widely appreciated.

The most important of the Unit's projects in this regard was the Lake District National Park Survey (LDNPS), which was designed to enhance the Sites and Monuments Record (now Historic Environment Record) for the area. The immense value of this work is rooted in its adoption of a landscape approach to recording the archaeological resource, seen particularly in the ground-breaking survey of the Neolithic stone axe-production sites (published separately) and the recording of the extensive prehistoric cairnfields, settlements, and ritual monuments over wide areas of the Lake District fells.

Some of the results of the LDNPS have already been used to good effect, both for further research and for conserving this important archaeological resource. In addition, many of the important prehistoric sites that were recorded for the first time were designated as Scheduled Monuments through English Heritage's Monuments Protection Programme in the 1990s.

Publication of this important work will bring the rich prehistoric archaeology of the Lake District to a wider audience, including local residents and visitors to the National Park. All who have been involved in this work, including the English Heritage and National Park officers who commissioned the survey in 1982, the Unit staff who laboured in the fells, and the authors of this volume, are to be congratulated in taking forward our understanding of the Lake District's prehistory and providing a solid foundation for future research and management.

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Summary

The detailed archaeological survey undertaken throughout the Lake District between 1982 and 1989 recorded some of the most remarkable field systems and settlements in England, mainly of later prehistoric date. The recording programme was set up primarily to provide for the management of these upland landscapes, and to ensure their preservation in the future. A secondary aim was to seek a greater understanding of the character of the occupation of the marginal lands of the Lake District and how this developed over an extended period.

The survey programme was targeted on areas of known archaeological potential, particularly the South-West Fells and the Western Fells of the Lake District, but, in addition, several other areas were examined within the Northern Fells, the Eastern Fells, and the Southern Fells. The survey involved the detailed recording of the landscape by means of instrument survey, and examined 78 square kilometres of uplands, recording over 10,300 monuments.

This, and subsequent surveys, have demonstrated that the greatest concentration of prehistoric landscapes within the Lake District is on the marginal uplands in Western Cumbria, adjacent to the Cumbrian coastal plain, which has been shown, as a result of extensive fieldwalking (*eg* Cherry and Cherry 1986), to be an area of Mesolithic and Neolithic activity. This survey programme, however, was geared to recording upstanding monuments, rather than artefacts, and thus it is not surprising that the majority of the remains identified in this programme would appear to be of Bronze Age date and reflect an expansion out from the coastal plain during a period of good climatic conditions. The most common physical expression of this activity was the cairnfield, which reflects the clearance of stone as part of a programme of land improvement. A typological development of the cairnfield could be discerned, which began with a localised sub-circular cluster of cairns, perhaps implying the exploitation of a small forest clearing. From these simple beginnings, the rationalisation of the cairns into lines, reflecting the beginnings of a field system, could be traced. The more advanced stages concerned the formation of complex field systems, some of which incorporated substantial lynched boundaries, indicating the cultivation of the marginal lands.

There was not the same density of prehistoric cairnfields and field systems in the southern, central, and eastern parts of the National Park, but some significant landscapes have been identified. On Heathwaite Fell, a medieval settlement had clearly developed over earlier agricultural activity, and in the Mickleden Valley, landscape development could also be recognised. The most notable ritual landscape is on Askham Fell, where an alignment of sepulchral monuments and a stone avenue extending across a natural col between two valleys have been recorded.

There was a general dearth of Iron Age-type monuments on the marginal lands which, coupled with palynological evidence indicating some forest recovery during that period, suggests a degree of abandonment of these areas, possibly in response to a climatic decline in the earlier part of the Iron Age. At several sites, particularly on the South-West Fells, there was clear evidence of a reoccupation of the uplands during the Roman period, which may have continued into the early medieval period. At several sites across the Lake District, localised medieval settlement was also found, in some cases developing out of shieling sites, and quite often this activity was superimposed upon earlier prehistoric or Roman landscapes. Post-medieval activity within the extent of the study areas was primarily unintensified pastoral farming, represented by stock shelters and extensive Parliamentary enclosure, but also by localised industrial extraction.

The surveys have demonstrated that a series of nationally important archaeological landscapes survive on the marginal uplands of Cumbria, which form a palimpsest of many periods of activity, and provide a remarkable opportunity to understand the development of the land and its people. As a result of this programme, the archaeological landscapes are now subject to improved management and conservation, and have a significantly greater potential for survival beyond the twenty-first century.

Résumé

L'étude topographique des vestiges archéologiques effectuée dans l'ensemble du Park national de Lake District entre 1982 et 1989 a permis le relevé des plus remarquables parcellaires et habitats d'Angleterre, datant principalement de la préhistoire récente. Initialement, ce programme de relevé a été mis en place pour garantir la gestion des paysages de ces hautes terres, et pour assurer leur conservation future. Un deuxième objectif a été de mieux comprendre les caractéristiques de l'occupation de terres marginales du Lake District et la manière dont cela s'est développé sur le long terme.

Le programme d'étude ciblait des zones de potentiel archéologique, tout particulièrement les collines de South-West Fells et de Western Fells du Lake District, mais aussi plusieurs autres secteurs ont été étudiés sur les monts de Northern Fells, Eastern Fells et Southern Fells. L'étude topographique a impliqué le relevé détaillé du paysage grâce à des instruments électroniques et a examiné 78 kilomètres carrés de hautes terres permettant de répertorier 10 300 monuments.

Ceci, et les études subséquentes, ont démontré que la plus grande concentration de paysages préhistoriques dans le Lake District se trouve sur les hautes terres marginales de l'Ouest de Cumbria, adjacente à la plaine côtière cumbrienne qui, grâce à la prospection pédestre (voir Cherry and Cherry 1986), s'est avérée être une zone d'activité mésolithique et néolithique. Le programme d'étude topographique était toutefois destiné à relever les monuments en élévation, plutôt que les artefacts. Il n'est donc pas surprenant que la majorité des vestiges mise au jour dans le cadre de ce programme semble dater de l'Age du Bronze et traduise une expansion à partir de la plaine côtière à une période climatique clémente. Celle-ci se manifeste le plus souvent sous forme de cairnfield (ensemble de cairns) qui atteste le dégagement de pierres au cours d'un programme d'amélioration de la terre. On pouvait discerner un développement typologique de cairnfields, qui débute avec un regroupement de cairns quasi-circulaire, laissant peut-être supposer l'exploitation d'une petite clairière au cœur de la forêt. A partir de ces simples origines, la rationalisation des cairns en alignements qui marquent les prémices d'un parcellaire, pourrait être retracée. Les étapes les plus avancées concernent la formation de parcellaires complexes, dont les limites de certains sont matérialisées par des rideaux, indiquant la culture de terres marginales.

La même densité de cairnfields et de parcellaires préhistoriques n'existe pas dans les parties sud, central et est du Park National, mais des paysages d'un grand intérêt ont été identifiés. Sur Heathwaite Fell, il subsiste des traces nettes d'aménagement d'un habitat médiéval, surimposé à une activité agricole antérieure ; et dans la Vallée de Mickleden, on reconnaît le développement paysager. Le paysage rituel le plus remarquable se trouve sur Askham Fell, où un alignement de monuments funéraires et une allée de pierres s'étendant sur un col naturel entre deux vallées ont fait l'objet d'un relevé.

Le manque général de monument de type Age du Fer était notable sur les terres marginales qui, conjugué au témoignage palynologique indiquant quelque recouvrement de la forêt à cette période, suggère un degré d'abandon de ces zones, réponse possible au déclin climatique au premier Age du Fer. Sur plusieurs sites, particulièrement sur les South-West Fells, une nouvelle occupation des hautes terres est évidente durant la période romaine, et s'est peut-être poursuivie jusqu'au haut Moyen Age. Sur plusieurs sites de l'ensemble du Lake District, un habitat médiéval localisé a également été découvert, qui s'est développé, dans certains cas, à partir de « shieling sites » (campements saisonniers) et, assez souvent, cette activité supplantait des paysages préhistoriques ou romano-britanniques anciens. L'activité post-médiévale dans l'emprise des secteurs d'étude était principalement l'élevage peu intensif, représenté par des abris pour animaux et une importante cadastration, mais aussi par une extraction artisanale localisée.

Les études topographiques ont démontré qu'une série de paysages diachroniques d'importance nationale subsistent sur les hautes terres de Cumbria, opportunité remarquable de comprendre l'évolution de la terre et de ses peuples. Grâce à ce programme, les paysages archéologiques font à présent l'objet d'une gestion et d'une conservation améliorées et jouissent d'un potentiel de survie beaucoup plus important au-delà du XXIème siècle.

Zusammenfassung

Die detaillierte archäologische Untersuchung, die zwischen 1982 und 1989 im Lake District durchgeführt wurde, dokumentierte einige der bemerkenswertesten Feldsysteme und Siedlungen in England, welche vor allem aus der späten prähistorischen Zeit datieren. Das Dokumentationsprogramm wurde in erster Linie aufgestellt, um die Verwaltung dieser Hochebenen sicherzustellen, und deren Erhaltung für die Zukunft zu gewährleisten. Ein weiteres Ziel war, ein besseres Verständnis für die Charakteristik der Besiedlung der Randgebiete des Lake District zu erhalten, und festzustellen, wie sich diese über einen längeren Zeitraum entwickelten.

Das Programm dieser Untersuchung war auf Gebiete von bekanntem archäologischen Potential ausgerichtet, vor allem in den South-West Fells und den Western Fells des Lake District, jedoch wurde zusätzlich eine Anzahl weiterer Gebiete in den Northern Fells, den Eastern Fells, und den Southern Fells untersucht. Die Untersuchung umfasste die detaillierte Dokumentation der Landschaft durch Vermessungstechnik, wobei 78 Quadratkilometer Hochland untersucht, und über 10.300 Monumente erfasst wurden.

Diese, sowie nachfolgende Untersuchungen, haben bewiesen, dass sich die größte Konzentration prähistorischer Landschaften in den äußeren Hochebenen von West Cumbria befindet, und zwar direkt an die Küstenebene Cumbrias angrenzend, welche sich durch extensives Begehen (z.B. Cherry und Cherry 1986) als ein Gebiet hoher mesolithischer und neolithischer Aktivität erwiesen hat. Dieses Untersuchungsprogramm war allerdings gezielt auf stehende Objekte statt auf Fundplätze ausgerichtet, und daher ist es nicht überraschend, dass die Mehrzahl der im Rahmen dieser Untersuchung identifizierten Überreste in die Bronzezeit zu datieren scheinen, und somit eine Ausdehnung aus der Küstenebene während einer Periode guter Klimabedingungen widerspiegelt. Der häufigste physische Ausdruck dieser Aktivität ist das so genannte Cairnfield (Cairn = Steinhäufen, Cairnfield = Gruppe von mehreren Steinhäufen, räumlich identifizierbar), welches die Abräumung von Steinen als Teil eines Programms zur Bodenverbesserung widerspiegelt. Eine typologische Entwicklung des Cairnfield konnte mittels einer lokalisierten sub-kreisförmigen Ansammlung von Steinhäufen, ermittelt werden, die vielleicht die Nutzung einer kleinen Waldlichtung widerspiegelt. Von diesen einfachen Ursprüngen konnte die Anordnung der Steinhäufen in Linien verfolgt werden, was die Anfänge eines Feldsystems beweist. Die fortgeschrittenen Stadien umfassten die Bildung komplexer Feldsysteme, von denen einige substantielle Begrenzungen mit Feldrainen aufwiesen, was auf die Kultivierung der Randgebiete hindeutete.

Die südlichen, zentralen und östlichen Teile des Nationalparks wiesen nicht die gleiche Dichte an prähistorischen Cairnfields und Feldsystemen auf, jedoch wurden einige bedeutende rituelle Landschaften identifiziert. Auf Heathwaite Fell, hatte sich eine mittelalterliche Siedlung deutlich von früherer landwirtschaftlicher Tätigkeit fortentwickelt, ausserdem war eine Entwicklung der Landschaft im Mickleden Valley erkennbar. Die bemerkenswerteste Rituellandschaft liegt auf dem Askham Fell, auf welchem eine Ausrichtung der Grabmäler sowie eine Steinallee, die sich über einen natürlichen Pass zwischen zwei Tälern erstreckt, nachgewiesen werden konnte.

Ein allgemeiner Mangel an eisenzeitlichen Monumenten in den Randgebieten wurde festgestellt, welcher zusammen mit palynologischen Hinweisen auf eine Wiederbewaldung während dieser Zeit hinweisen könnte. Dieser deutet auf eine teilweise Aufgabe dieser Gebiete, möglicherweise als Reaktion auf einen klimatischen Verfall in der ersten Hälfte der Eisenzeit, hin. An mehreren archäologischen Stätten, besonders auf den South-West Fells, gab es eindeutige Hinweise auf eine Wiederbesiedlung des Hochlands während der römischen Periode, welche sich bis ins frühe Mittelalter fortgesetzt haben könnte. An mehreren Stätten im Lake District wurden ebenfalls lokalisierte mittelalterliche Siedlungen festgestellt, die sich in einigen Fällen aus Hütten-siedlungen entwickelt haben, und häufig überlagerte diese Besiedlung frühere prähistorische und römische Landschaften. Nachmittelalterliche Aktivität in den Untersuchungsgebieten ist in erster Linie durch wenig intensive Weidewirtschaft, Tierunterstände und umfangreiche Einfriedung repräsentiert, aber auch durch lokalisierten industriellen Abbau.

Die Untersuchungen haben erwiesen, dass eine Reihe von national bedeutenden archäologischen Landschaften in den Randgebieten des Hochlandes von Cumbria überdauern und ein Palimpsest vieler Aktivitätsperioden bilden, und eine ausgezeichnete Gelegenheit bieten, die Entwicklung des Landes und seiner Menschen zu verstehen. Als Ergebnis dieses Programms unterliegen diese archäologischen Landschaften nun verbesserter Verwaltung und Erhaltung, und haben eine beträchtlich größere Chance jenseits des 21. Jahrhunderts zu überleben.

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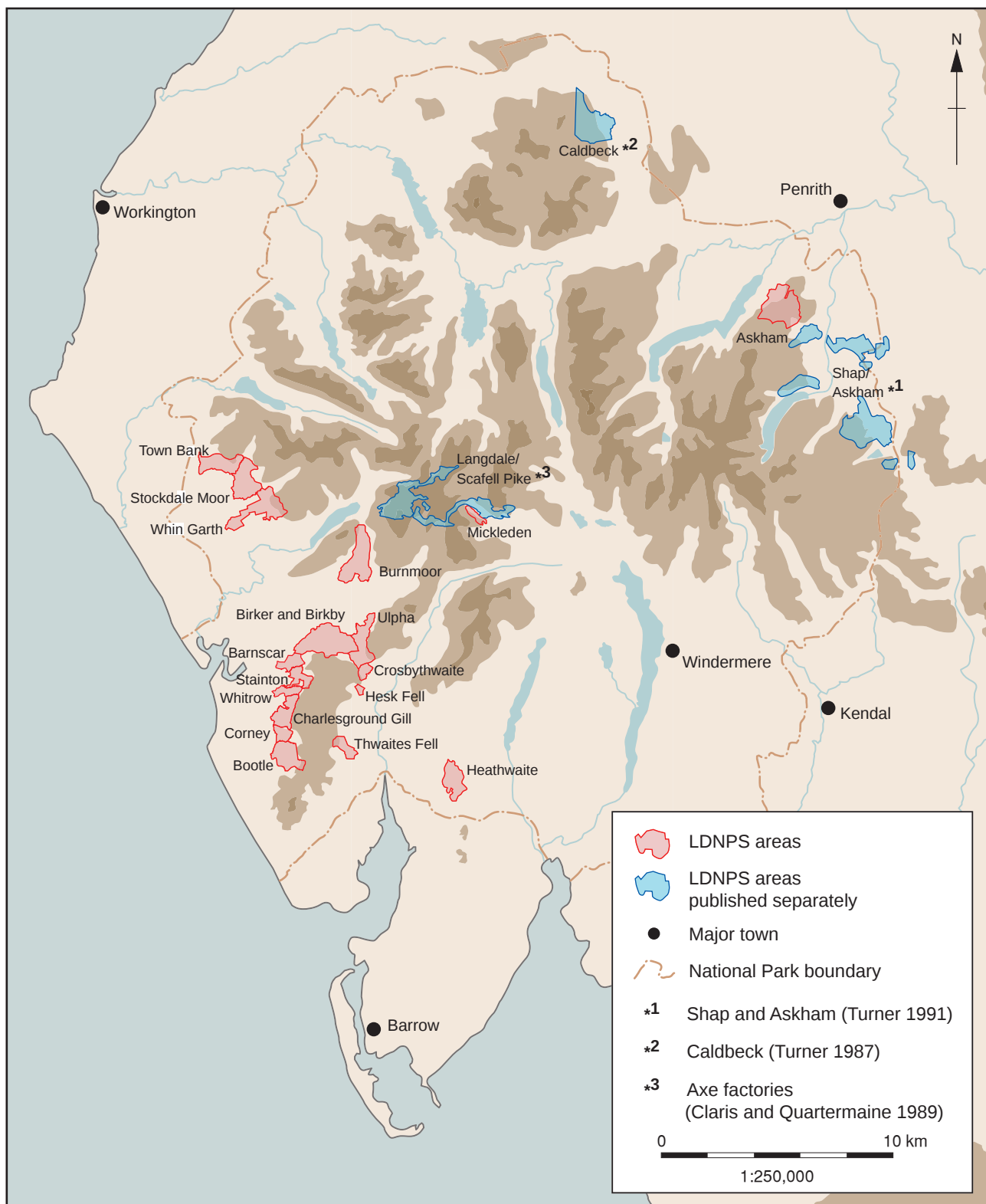


Figure 1: The areas surveyed by the LDNPS