

The brigantia archaeological practice



ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY
In connection with a
PROPOSED NEW TRACKWAY on
BOLLIHOPE COMMON, WEARDALE

A report to Savills



8th April 2006

THE BRIGANTIA ARCHAEOLOGICAL PRACTICE

BRITANNIA CHAMBERS
18a HORSEMARKET
BARNARD CASTLE
Co DURHAM DL12 8LZ



Tel./fax: 01833 630125 Email: enquiries@brigantiaarchaeology.co.uk

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WEARDALE, Co DURHAM

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Fieldwork: Percival Turnbull & Deborah Walsh

Report: Percival Turnbull

7th April 2006

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY of the ROUTE
Of a PROPOSED TRACKWAY on BOLLIHOPE COMMON,
FROSTERLEY, WEARDALE

INTRODUCTION

1. On instructions from Savills Ltd, the agents for the Bollihope estate, an archaeological survey was carried out along the line of a proposed trackway on Bollihope Common, Frosterley, Weardale. Work was carried out according to a specification prepared by the office of the County Archaeologist and dated August 2005.
2. The purpose of the proposed trackway is to give access for shooting parties and maintenance to the higher land along the Smithy Burn and on Harnisha Carrs. The route may be traced from east to west, starting at Washpool Craggs (NY 9875 3511) and following the southern side of the Bollihope Burn, along the contours between approximately 330 and 370 m.a.O.D., to the Bollihope Burn's junction with the Smithy Burn, turning there to the south to follow the eastern side of Smithy Burn to a final destination at East Grains (NY 9645 3326).
3. The route of the proposed track follows that of an existing, less formal track which has clearly been in use for many years.

METHODS

4. Prior to the commencement of fieldwork, a rapid desk-top survey was carried out. This relied primarily on sources in the Durham County Sites and Monuments Record, and on published material. Much was gained, also, from conversation with Dr Rob Young, who knows the archaeology of the area intimately.
5. Fieldwork was carried out, according to suitable weather, during February and March 2006. The whole of the route was walked a total of three times, under a variety of conditions. Two persons walked the route each time, spaced so as to cover the area 10 metres each side of the existing track. In practice, it was possible to be confident that a total corridor of *circa* 50 metres had been satisfactorily covered. Vegetation cover, often an obstacle to upland archaeological survey, was very low, and conditions generally highly conducive to the identification of archaeological remains.

RESULTS of the SURVEY

6. Archaeologically, the results of this survey were entirely negative: not a single site or feature of possible archaeological interest was found on or in the immediate vicinity of the track. Possible reasons for this are discussed later in this report.
7. The area has changed hardly at all since the first edition of the Ordnance Survey in 1861 (Fig. 1); the main difference is the metalling and formalisation of the Eggleston-Stanhope road. The most significant man-made feature remains Peg's

House, a large square dry-stone enclosure which is probably of 18th century date. The line of the track may be seen in Figs 2 and 3.

8. The eastern end of the existing track is very well-defined, and quite deeply eroded by the wheels of vehicles tackling the considerable initial slope (Fig. 4). The physical nature of Bollihope Common is here made plain; there is a very thin turf over the rather clayey, eroded surface of the underlying bedrock. In places the rock outcrops entirely. There is rather a lot of surface stone, some of it derived from the local outcrops and some representing glacial clitter. Generally, the area lies on the Carboniferous limestones which characterise the wider area; to the south towards Harnisha Carrs, the Millstone Grit locally predominates.

9. For the first kilometre or so the track continues very easy to follow, and in places quite deeply rutted (Fig 5); there is a hush from lead-mining days about 100 metres to the south. Shortly after the crossing of a narrow sike (Fig. 6) the track becomes less well-defined, and at some points can be difficult to follow. Shortly after this point the track passes about 50 metres to the south of a ruined sheep fold (Fig. 7). This is attached to a small enclosure: the fold or bield itself seems to have been rebuilt at some time as a shelter or, possibly, as a butt. This fold seems to be too far north, and too close to the rather sharp valley of the Bollihope Burn, to be the Vicar's Fold shown on the map of 1861: there are, however, several other ruined folds in the general vicinity.

10. West of the sheep fold, the track becomes increasingly difficult to follow (Fig. 8). A short way above the conjunction of the Bollihope and Smithy Burns, however, it turns to the south and is again easily visible, running close to the eastern edge of the distinctly abrupt drop into the Smithy Burn (Fig. 9). Because of the name of the watercourse, a particular search was made in this area for the remains of possible bloomery sites of the type known to exist north of the Bollihope Burn; none, however, could be found. The only man-made features visible are a line of ruined shooting butts, aligned roughly north-south and some 40 metres to the east of the track (Fig. 10). The most southerly stretch of the track continues well-defined (Fig. 11), becoming rather vague again only at its southern *terminus* near Harnisha Carrs (Fig. 12).

11. It might be noted that, in walking the track from its eastern end, one has at all times the valley of one or other Burn on one's right hand side. Towards the eastern part of the Bollihope Burn section, and for all of the Smithy Burn section, the drop is both close and sharp; this terrain makes it unlikely that early settlement or cultivation would have existed on that side of the track.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND: ANCIENT WEARDALE

12. Despite the paucity of documented evidence directly concerning the area of the proposed trackway, Weardale generally is relatively well-understood, in terms of the history of the landscape and of its exploitation by previous societies.

(a) ARCHAEOENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE. There are now sufficient archaeoenviromental data from County Durham to present a consistent picture of the

vegetational history of the area (e.g., Bartley *et al.*, 1976; Chambers, 1974; Donaldson and Turner, 1977). Evidence from across the County confirms that more-or-less extensive clearance of natural woodland had been made by, at latest, the early- to mid- Bronze Age. On the Magnesian Limestone of the eastern part of Durham, the landscape may have been almost as open as it is now: the degree of clearance in Weardale and Teesdale appears less, but is nonetheless very significant.

Surprisingly, there is little appearance of cereal pollen to accompany the fall in arboreal pollen, a fact which has led most workers to consider the prehistoric economy of the area as basically pastoral. This is, however, somewhat at odds with the archaeological evidence, which includes clearance cairns and other indicators of arable cultivation (including a saddle-quern from Crawley Edge, north of Stanhope). Young (1992) has therefore convincingly dissented from the pastoral orthodoxy, arguing that the lack of cereal pollen is a result, at least in part, of the depositional circumstances, and making a strong case for arable agriculture in Weardale at least by the mid-second millennium BC and at least around an altitude of 300 metres. Later vegetational history is complex, comprising a long series of periods of regeneration and of renewed clearance. There is somewhat ambiguous evidence for an intensification of clearance and associated activity around the Roman period (this is common in the North of England and is usually seen as the native response to the demands of the Roman army and economy, though it seems, interestingly, to begin rather earlier than that): a second peak of activity comes in the early mediaeval period (and might owe as much to the felling of timber for industrial purposes as to clearance for agriculture).

(b) EARLY PREHISTORY. There is no palaeolithic material from Weardale (indeed, there is no indisputable palaeolithic material from County Durham), confirming the fully glaciated nature of the local landscape. Two finds of alleged Acheulian (Lower Palaeolithic) material from near Stanhope are certainly *falsa*, misidentified by Trechmann (there is one site in Teesdale which has produced some flintwork which might be seen as of Cresswellian, Late Upper Palaeolithic, type (T. Laurie, *pers. comm.*), though this identification is far from secure). The first real archaeological evidence in the Durham Dales takes the form of flint-sites of the mesolithic period (typically, finds of the 'narrow blade' microliths of the Pennine later mesolithic), representing, according to most interpretations, camp sites which were seasonally occupied by itinerant groups of hunter-gatherers (although some work elsewhere, such as on the North York Moors, is suggesting that such sites may sometimes have had a more complex function, with a greater consequent environmental impact than is generally thought). A perforated pebble macehead from Westgate is also of this period. These mesolithic sites are known entirely as surface collections of flint: there is no non-lithic material (at least, none locally) and no structural evidence is known from the sites. They are common in the area: the distribution of known sites certainly reflects to some degree the very uneven nature of previous archaeological fieldwork in Weardale. A reasonably consistent pattern does emerge, however, and it is generally true that most known sites lie within the enclosed fields, below the level of the high open moorland but above the ill-drained valley bottom: in this respect, at least, the northern half of the proposed development site may be seen as typical of the areas within such finds are made.

(c) NEOLITHIC/ EARLY BRONZE AGE. Neolithic settlement sites and field monuments are not well-represented in County Durham, and there are particularly few

distinctly neolithic sites known in Weardale. This may, however, be a problem of archaeological visibility: loose finds of the period are sufficiently common to indicate a substantial level of activity, and there is something of a cluster of these finds along the axis of the Wear Valley (suggesting the possibility of a route through to the culturally and economically dynamic neolithic population of Cumbria. Polished stone axes of this period have been found at Stanhope and Westgate, fairly close to the development proposals, as well as elsewhere in Weardale: they are of petrological Group VI, originating in Langdale in the Lake District. Clack and Gosling (1976,21) have pointed out that the distributions of mesolithic and of neolithic material do not closely correspond, and this raises the possibility that, in areas like Weardale with an abundance of earlier sites but fewer of the neolithic, new stone technologies and economic practices were gradually adopted by the existing mesolithic communities. The growing corpus of dates available for the earlier neolithic in northern England indicates origins before 3,000 BC, and there is every reason to anticipate the presence of at least some neolithic settlements, burials or other sites in Weardale. Activity in the later neolithic (say, the early second millennium BC) is attested by finds of worked flint dateable, rather loosely, to the Late Neolithic/ Early Bronze Age (LN/EBA) horizon and exemplified by material from around Stanhope and from Horsely Park and Westernhope Bum, Eastgate. A cycle of continuing small-scale clearance and regeneration seems to be the local environmental consequence of human activity during this period.

(d) THE BRONZE AGE AND IRON AGE. The archaeology of Weardale shows considerable evidence for settlement and economic activity during the Bronze Age. Many of the LN/EBA flint sites noted above are probably of the mid- to late- second millennium BC. More distinctly, the period sees the appearance of round cairns of stone, many of which have been identified as clearance piles created during the preparation of land for farming, though the presence in cairns at Crawley Edge, Stanhope, of cremated burials with Collared Urn associations (Young, 1992) must undermine the traditional distinction between clearance and burial cairns: other cairns in the area may have been intended primarily as burial mounds Ce.g., those at Horsley Hall and Horsely Burn Farm, Eastgate). Associated with the cairns are field systems and enclosures, including settlement sites: these are largely on the unenclosed moorlands similar to those of the southern part of the proposed development site. There can be no doubt that a settled and active Bronze Age community farmed large areas of Weardale: Dr Robert Young, continuing work begun by him with the University of Leicester (Young, *pers. comm.*) is identifying an increasingly coherent prehistoric landscape around Bollihope Common, immediately across the Bollihope Burn from the area of the proposed trackway. Two important hoards of Bronze Age metalwork are known from the immediate vicinity, one from Eastgate (close to the northern side of the present proposals) and one from the (now destroyed) cave of Heathery Burn, Stanhope, where a large and important assemblage included material of Halstatt type indicating close continental contacts at the very end of the British Bronze Age. The absence locally of significant material of distinctive early Iron Age type is a general problem in the north-east, and probably largely explicable by a high degree of cultural and economic continuity in the early first millennium BC (though possible Iron Age pottery has been found at Bull Run, Eastgate). A hut circle with associated field walls at Brian's Folds, Bollihope Common (a short distance to the east of the area of the proposed trackway), excavated by Young, appears to be originally of pre-Roman Iron Age date, with evidence for continuity into a period when some

Roman pottery was locally available. The evidence in parts of the north-east for an intensification of woodland clearance at this time probably indicates increasing and continuing settlement by Iron Age and Romano-British farmers.

(e) THE ROMAN PERIOD. The B6278 road which connects Weardale and Teesdale and which passes immediately to the south of the area of the proposed trackway is generally believed to be of Roman origin (Margery 1973 437-8), though the matter is not entirely beyond doubt. It is certainly a well-engineered road which follows a route of some antiquity; traces of earlier courses of the road are visible at some points. The question must be asked, however, of which points were connected by this road in the Roman period, and it is difficult satisfactorily to answer this. A possible alternative would be that the road follows a traditional route of very early date, but that its present form is basically of the 18th century.

Certainly, there is evidence for some sort of Roman military presence in the form of two inscribed altars, one from Eastgate, and one from Bollihope Common (commemorating the successful hunting of a huge boar): both were probably, and the latter was certainly, dedicated by a Roman officer. No fort is known in the Dale above Binchester, so the presence of this individual is slightly puzzling. There are three separate finds of Roman coins from Stanhope, and two hoards of coins from Westgate: none of these, of course, necessarily means a military presence, and all could have been deposited by local British inhabitants. Many of the enclosure and settlement sites, such as the one at Brian's Folds, Bollihope Common, are probably of Romano-British date, even if many probably have earlier origins. One new type of activity encountered in this period seems to be the exploitation on a considerable scale of surface deposits of iron, illustrated by numbers of small bloomery sites and piles of slag along the banks of the small slacks and gills which feed the Bollihope Burn. Generally, however, the impression is of the continuity of the life of the pre-Roman period, with the introduction of some new material and with a considerable impetus given to the economy (still principally agricultural) by the appearance of Roman markets.

(f) THE MIDDLE AGES AND LATER. Despite the alleged existence of a Saxon bridge at Stanhope, there is little evidence in this part of Weardale for the early post-Roman centuries. By the early Norman period however, a motte and bailey castle had been established (now the site of the late eighteenth century mansion, known as Stanhope Castle) at the centre of the modern settlement of Stanhope. To the west of the castle at the crossing point of Stanhope Beck is the mediaeval Stanhope Hall. Stanhope church is also of mediaeval date. A mediaeval bridge later spanned the Wear approximately half a kilometre upstream on the same site as the supposed Saxon bridge. On the south side of the Wear, beside the present ford, is the house of Unthank, much altered in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but originally a Hall house of mediaeval origin. Stanhope was also furnished with a mediaeval corn-drying kiln to the north west of the settlement at Allerton Burn. During the Middle Ages, upper Weardale was dominated by the great hunting forest of the Bishops of Durham, who had a hunting lodge at Westernhopeburn, north-west of the proposed development (Eastgate was the eastern limit of the actual hunting park, as Westgate was the western). This fact seems to have been a considerable constraint on settlement expansion, which was largely confined to the valley bottom: it is during this period that there developed the traditional pattern of land-use, still to be seen, by which

farmsteads along the line of the Wear had access to arable land and meadow below the 400 metre contour, with grazing on higher land, the unenclosed high moor being used on a common basis, probably originally seasonally. There is little likelihood of significant mediaeval settlement being located above the limit of the 'infield' system, though some stock enclosures seem to survive. Increasingly, mines and quarries became important, and remains of early industry are widespread and abundant. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw an increase in this industrial activity, as well as of agriculture, as the pattern of land-use became consolidated. The first edition of the Ordnance Survey map, published in the 1850's, shows a landscape little different from that of today (with the exception of the growth of major settlements such as Stanhope and the large-scale development of the Eastgate quarry).

KNOWN ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE IMMEDIATE AREA

13. A number of archaeological sites and find-spots are known from the immediate vicinity of the proposed trackway, and are entered in the Durham County Sites and Monuments Record. By far the greater number of these are situated to the north of the Bollihope Burn; the differences between this area and that south of the Burn (where the proposed track is situated) are very evident from this distribution.

The sites known to the SMR are listed here, ordered by the Primary Record Number

- 510 NY 9770 3490 Cairn, 3.5 m dia. x 40 cms ht. Large boulder in centre and possible kerb.
- 560 NY 9760 5350 Hut circle, of double skin construction, 9 m dia. Probably of Romano-British type.
- 561 NY 9760 3530 Sub-circular 'hut circle', 8.5 x 7.6 m.
- 562 NY 9760 3530 Sub-circular 'hut circle' 7.15 x 5.8 m. 20 metres to the south of no 561.
- 563 NY 9780 3530 'Sub-rectangular structure oriented E-W. 15.65 x 8 m. Much collapse in interior'.
- 973 NY 9870 3330 A small and very worn fragment of a Bronze Age dirk found here and identified by Colin Burgess. The find-spot is close to the motor road and a considerable distance from the area of the proposed trackway.
- 2338 NY 9780 3530 Brian's Folds Romano-British settlement and 'hut circles'. This record is largely a duplicate of 563, and refers to the settlement complex excavated by Young and recorded as 5054.
- 2475 NY 9820 3520 Earthwork enclosure at Peg's House; sub-circular, banked-and-ditched. Dr R. Young considers this probably to be of Anglo-Saxon (10th century?) date.

3277 NY 9640 3430 Hollow-based chert arrowhead of Neolithic type found. This is the only prehistoric site south of the Bollihope Burn, and may easily be dismissed as a casual hunting loss rather than as an indicator of nearby settlement.

5054 NY 9780 3530 This record refers to Dr R Young's excavations at Brian's Folds (see 563 and 2338). The main components are an Iron Age/ Romano-British house, a cairn, and associated walls and minor features.

5055 NY 978 353 This refers to a university dissertation written in 1998 by Margaret Manchester, and comprising a review of Peg's House and associated features. Her central thesis, that there is evidence for a Roman fort at Peg's House, is not really tenable.

5680 NY 9770 3530 Traces of mediaeval lead smelting.

6480 NY 9771 3517 The record refers to an analysis of mediaeval slag found at this spot.

6482 NY 9758 3533 Bollihope Bale mediaeval lead smelting site.

6483 NY 9755 3507 Charcoal burning platform. Mediaeval?

6484 NY 9746 3506 Remains of the dam associated with Bollihope Hush.

6485 NY 9757 3492 Bollihope Hush: a feature created by early lead mining and prospection, involving the damming and sudden release of water.

6486 NY 9739 3492 Early iron bloomery site.

6487 NY 9768 3499 Early iron bloomery site.

14. Some other features are shown on various editions of the Ordnance Survey, but do not appear in the Sites and Monuments Record. Particularly, there are various sheep folds and fields; the hush south of Washpool Crag; and the remains of a coal mine, a shaft with associated spoil heaps, on the moor several hundred metres to the south of the proposed trackway. None of these features is in any way likely to be affected by the proposed works.

DISCUSSION

15. The absolute absence of archaeological remains along the line of the track is very clear, but is at first sight rather surprising, especially in the light of the pattern of activity known from the other side of the valley, north of the Bollihope Burn. Here, as we have seen, there is evidence (in the form of surface finds of flints) for activity in the late Neolithic/ early Bronze Age period; settlement archaeology of the Iron Age/ Romano-British period; and evidence for Romano-British and mediaeval working of lead and of iron. Effectively, only post-mediaeval mining and pastoralism are attested south of the Burn.

16. The main obvious difference between the areas north and south of Bollihope Burn is that of aspect; the south-facing slope which is home to the settlement at Brian's Folds certainly receives marginally more sunlight and shelter. This difference was apparent during the final fieldwork trip, when the thin coating of snow still clinging to the area of the tracks was entirely absent from the slightly warmer south-facing slope. It is difficult to be sure how significant might be the small differences attributable to aspect; in an area as marginal as this for cultivation and settlement, small average differences in temperature and sunlight could well be critical. The difference may be exacerbated by a slight geological difference between the two sides of the Burn; as noted, there is an outcrop of Millstone Grit south of the Burn, and the resultant extra acidity and poorer drainage are likely to have been significant.

RECOMMENDATIONS

17. It is recommended

that there is no archaeological obstacle to the proposed creation of a formal trackway,
and

that no further archaeological intervention in this matter is necessary.

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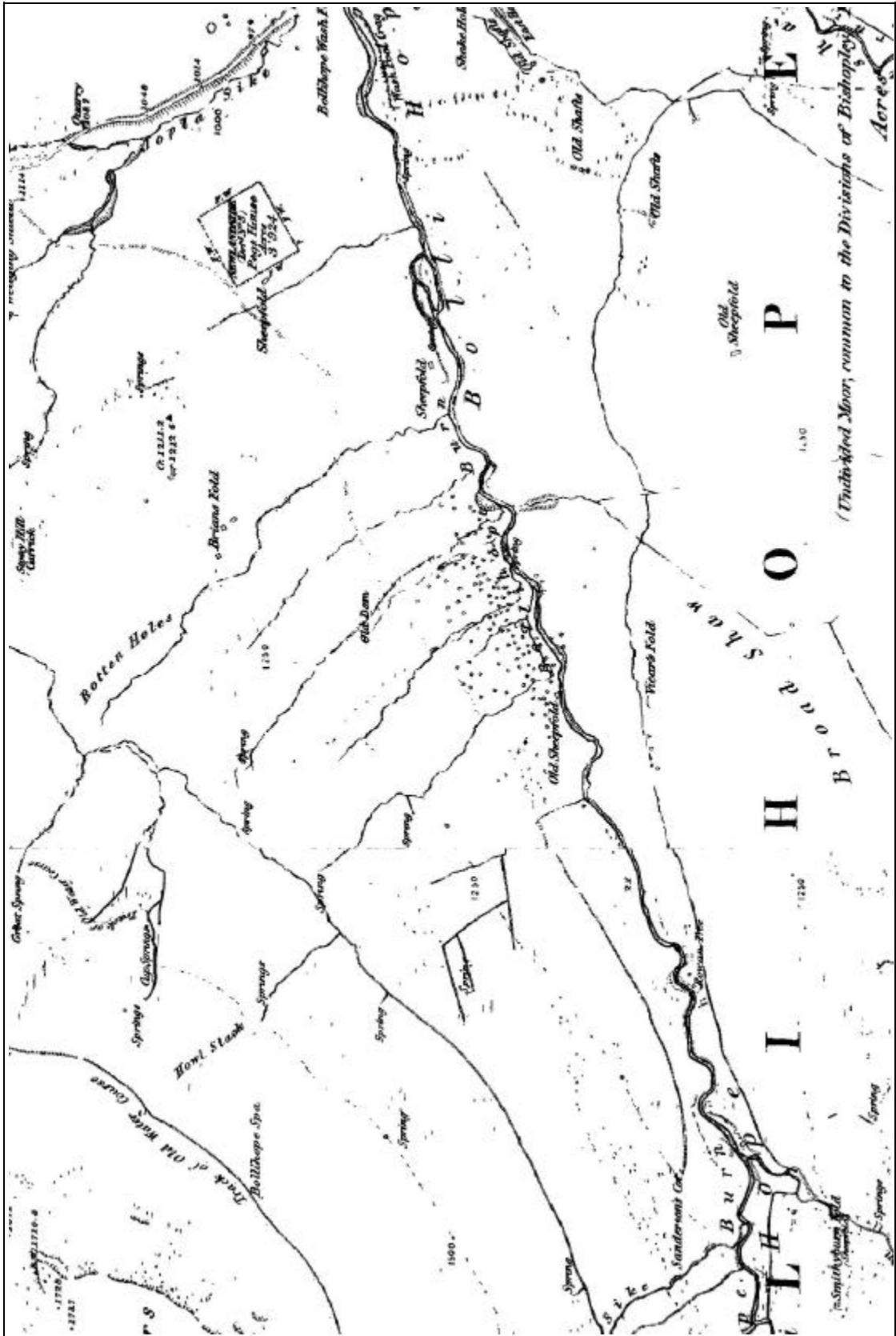
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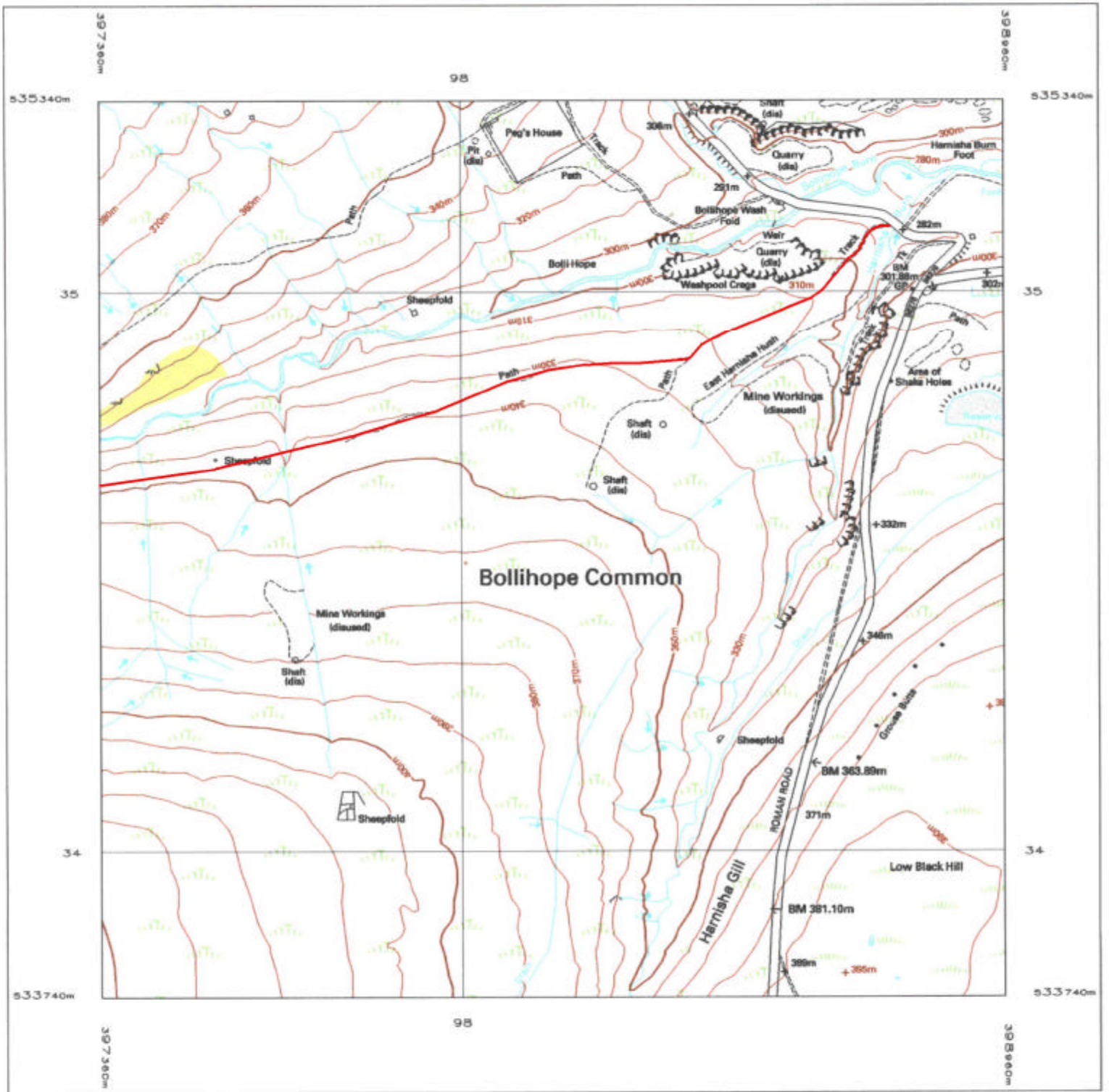
Bollihope Common

Fig. 1

The area in 1861 (1st Edition O.S.)



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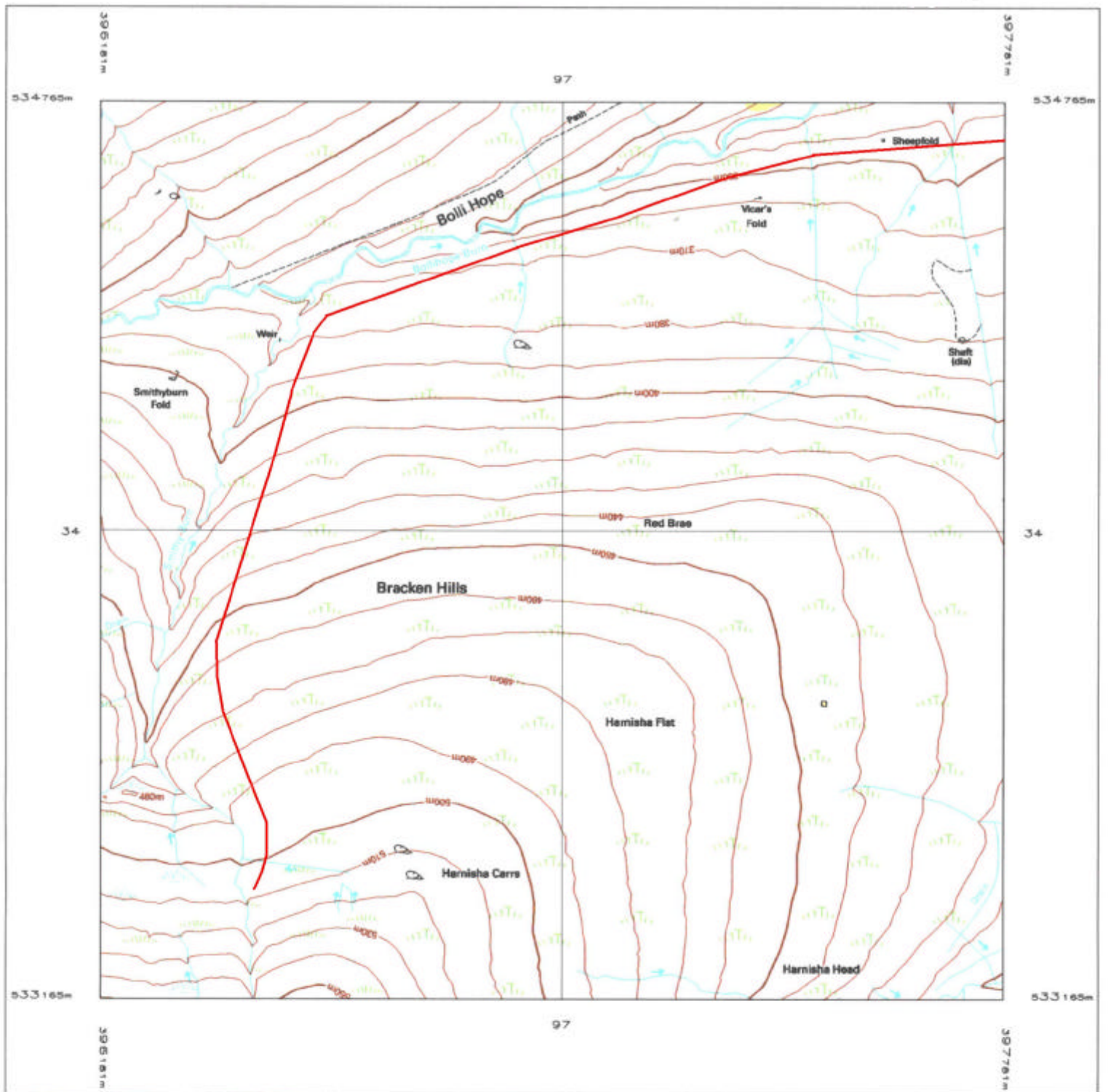
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Fig. 2

The eastern half of the trackway route (shown red)



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Fig. 3

The western half of the trackway route
(shown red)



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Fig. 4

The eastern end of the trackway, from the motor road



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Fig. 5

Well-defined trackway in the eastern section



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Fig. 6

**Well-defined trackway crossing a small
sike: valley of Bollihope Burn to the right**



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Fig. 7

Ruined sheepfold: Bollihope Burn beyond



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Fig. 8

Ill-defined track west of sheepfold



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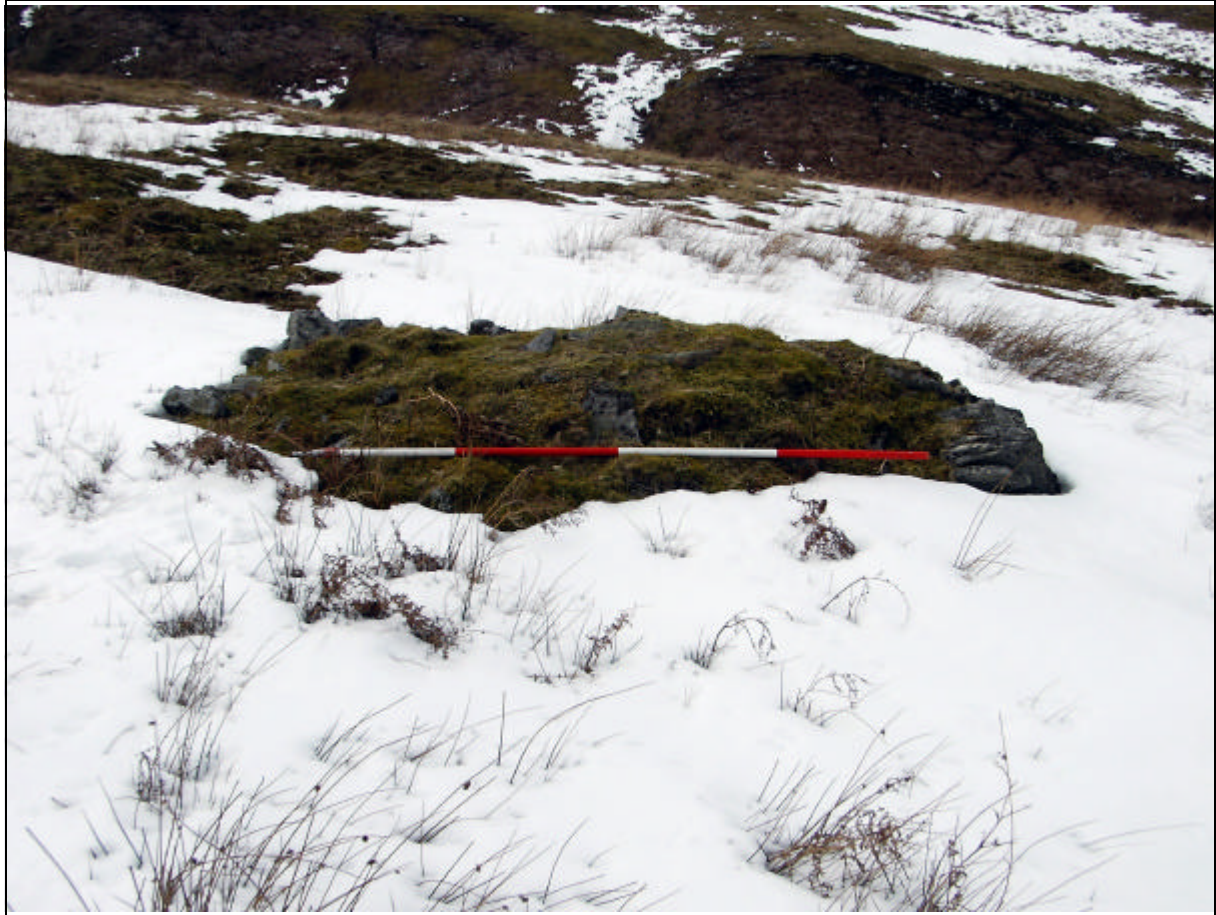
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Fig. 9

The lower part of the western section of the track: valley of Smithy Burn to right



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Fig. 10

Ruined grouse butt: Smithy Burn beyond



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Fig. 11

Well-defined track along Smithy Burn



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Fig. 12

The westernmost part of the track; the stones on Harnisha Carrs in background



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