

ART. XIII.—*Ancient Corduroy Roads near Gilpin Bridge.*  
By J. A. BARNES.

*Read on the Site, June 25th, 1903.*

A FRAGMENT of Corduroy road was brought to light in 1897 or 1898, when the peat cutters commenced operations on an isolated strip of peat moss which had previously been long undisturbed. This is the part of Stakes Moss (so called, perhaps, from earlier discoveries of these "stakes" in the ground) north of the road leading from Gilpin Bridge toward Grange and Cartmel and south of the farmhouse called Rawson.

In the map annexed this fragment of road is marked *A*, and the double dotted line shows its probable continuation north west and south east, through ground which, formerly moss, is now cleared of peat and drained. Such land, in the map, is shown by broken horizontal shading; the continuous horizontal shading represents the present extent of peat.

Since the discovery of the road several feet have been sliced off each year; and this year, through the courtesy of Mr. John Mason, who was getting the peats, I was present when the slice was cut off, and was able to examine the details of its construction.

It consists of cross timbers laid side by side on three lines of supporting logs parallel to the direction of the road. The larger timbers, some of them 2 feet 6 inches thick, had been split and laid face downwards; the smaller ones were left entire. At short intervals along each side of the road, pointed stakes had been driven deep into the peat to keep the supports from slipping outwards. We dug out one intact, and the point was 3 feet below the

level of the road. No nails, whether of iron or wood, were observed. The material is mostly birch, easily identified by the silver bark, but I noticed also one piece of ash. When freshly got out it has almost the consistency and appearance of gingerbread, and may be cut easily with a spade, but it shrinks and hardens when exposed to the air. It is not rotten, but, as it were, *pickled* in the juices of the peat.

If the trees had been growing on the moss around, we should have expected to find remains of fallen trunks in the same state of preservation at this depth in the bog, but such is not the case. At the present time birch and other trees only grow where the moss has been drained too dry for sphagnum to flourish. It is therefore probable that the trees were cut and split on the hillsides that slope down to the bog, and then dragged to the spot.

Axe marks were distinctly visible on many of the logs both at the ends and also on the split face, where it had been necessary to help out the wedge. The tool used had been about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches wide, much narrower and less effective than a modern wood-cutter's axe. Unfortunately, the marks are spoiled by the splitting and warping of the wood in the process of drying. The timbers appeared to be slightly worn and frayed on the upper surface, like the sleepers at a level crossing. A few broken nutshells were clinging to them, probably brought by human agency, as hazels would not grow in the bog, and squirrels would not be likely to frequent it. The road is from 15 to 16 feet wide and the length of the surviving fragment is 50 yards. The timbers are visible at both edges of the peat and may be traced across the intervening distance by pushing in an iron rod. The thickness of peat on the top of the road is about 3 feet at the edge where the section is exposed, but it reaches 4 feet in the middle, the difference being due to the draining out of the water and consequent subsidence near the edge. Owing to the narrowness of this strip it has probably been shrinking in thickness for the greater



THE CORDUROY ROAD NEAR GILPIN BRIDGE.

*Photo. by Mr. E. Stabler.*

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part of a century, and the depth of the road below the surface may formerly have been double what it is to-day. It has been suggested that the road has been pushed down into its present position by the weight of traffic going over it; but there seems no reason to believe so. Nor can we say at what rate the peat formed in this particular site.

Half a mile further south there is another fragment (*B*) of similar construction, about 180 yards in length. I remember when quite a child hearing mention made of a wooden road buried in the peat moss, and when the piece before us was discovered I imagined it was the one I had heard of before. But on making further enquiries I found they were wide apart, and after considerable grovelling in bramble-grown ditches I discovered traces of the other piece on both edges of the moss. It is not a continuation of this piece, but the two if produced would meet at an angle of perhaps  $60^\circ$  near the river Gilpin. They were probably branches of a single road from the east which forked after crossing the Gilpin, one branch going north-west towards Lyth and Bowness, the other towards Witherslack and Furness. It is easy to see that this piece would reach the hard land at one end of Whitbarrow Scar, and the other branch avoids the opposite end of the same barrier. As the whole plain would be one great morass when the road was made, it probably extended from side to side of the valley.

An ancient causeway, locally known as the "Carsar," runs in a curve from Levens Church to Bridge Row and thence to Whitbarrow, bisecting approximately the angle between the two fragments of corduroy road. It follows the track of the old packhorse route, the continuation of which may still be traced along the foot of Whitbarrow, through Witherslack, to Newton.

The only relics found near either piece of corduroy road (so far as I am aware) are a bronze spearhead (or dagger) which has been for fifty years past in the Kendal Museum,

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and a small perforated whetstone found in 1895 by Mr. John Mason. Both were at a lower depth than the road. A flint arrowhead, ploughed up in a field between this point and the Gilpin, is probably to be associated with the river rather than the road. (These implements have been mentioned in these *Transactions*, N.S., iii., p. 411.)

The problem of date can only be discussed on conjectural grounds at present, and the statement of it may be deferred in the hope that sooner or later some relic may be discovered which would fix the period beyond dispute.