



ART. I.—*Excavations at Skelmore Heads near Ulverston, 1957 and 1959.* By T. G. E. POWELL, F.S.A., with contributions by CLARE I. FELL, F.S.A., JOHN X. W. P. CORCORAN, F.S.A., and F. BARNES, F.S.A.

*Read at Seascale, July 13th, 1962.*

### Part I. Introduction.

THE excavations described in this report were the result of an attempt to come to some understanding of the prehistoric settlement of Low Furness which has been little known except for chance finds, and largely unrecorded diggings in times past. The elongated tumulus and suspected hill-top earthwork were first shown to me by Miss Fell in 1956, and it was agreed that Skelmore Heads provided the most likely site in the whole area for controlled excavations. In the event, apart from establishing the general nature of the tumulus and the earthwork, the results were largely negative so that it is to be hoped that some new approach to the field archaeology of this potentially important region may yet be developed.

Two seasons' work were undertaken, and financed, by the Department of Prehistoric Archaeology in the University of Liverpool. In the summer of 1957, the tumulus was examined, and one exploratory section was cut through the bank and ditch of the hill-top earthwork. In 1959, the hill-top earthworks were examined in greater detail, but resources did not allow anything like the large scale excavation that would have been necessary to elucidate all points at issue. A further short expedition in March 1960 only emphasised the difficulties presented by the terrain for small scale selective excavation.

In the following sections, Miss Fell reviews the general

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archaeological and geographical setting of Skelmore Heads, and the potential importance of the Low Furness region in prehistoric times. Dr Corcoran describes and discusses the hill-fort, and the present writer gives an account of the sadly mutilated tumulus. T.G.E.P.

### Part II. The Archaeological Environment.

Skelmore Heads is an isolated, flat-topped hill, lying to the north-west of the carboniferous limestone ridge known as Birkrigg Common. To the north, the ground undulates gently downward till it meets the higher land of Kirkby Moor and the hills beyond Pennington and Ulverston, which form the junction of the carboniferous series with the Bannside Beds of the Upper Silurian. To the south, beyond Urswick, the limestone area continues till it meets the St Bees Red Sandstone of the Trias in the vicinity of Gleaston. This southern tip of the Furness peninsula, bounded on the east by the Crake and Leven Sands and on the west by the Duddon estuary, is rich in finds attributable to prehistoric man (fig. 1a).

An early survey of Furness by H. S. Cowper<sup>1</sup> gives reference to all sites and finds known at the time, while inventories by the same author in collaboration with Chancellor Ferguson,<sup>2</sup> and later by W. G. Collingwood,<sup>3</sup> record sites and numerous stray finds, particularly of roughed-out and polished stone axes and perforated stone axe-hammers. Subsequent additions to these inventories and reports on newly found sites have been made from time to time in the current series of *Transactions*.

These emphasise the preference for limestone and sandstone soils for early settlement, one of the most important discoveries being the sandhills settlements on Walney Island and at Sandscale and Roanhead, in particular the site at North End Haws, Walney Island, discovered by

<sup>1</sup> *Archaeologia* liii (1893), "The ancient settlements, cemeteries and earthworks of Furness" 389-426.

<sup>2</sup> *Archaeologia* liii 485-538.

<sup>3</sup> CW2 xxvi 36-55.

the late Hon. M. Cross in 1936,<sup>4</sup> more recent work there being carried out by Mr F. Barnes, F.S.A., Librarian and Curator, Barrow-in-Furness. There, flint and stone tools and pottery range from Secondary Neolithic<sup>5</sup> and Class B, Beaker wares,<sup>6</sup> to Early Iron Age<sup>7</sup> and more recent times. When the new school was being built at the corner of Black Butts Lane and Central Drive, Walney, in 1957, Mr J. H. Macdonald found a microlithic flint industry, as yet unpublished, which suggests that settlement may have begun in Furness in the Mesolithic period.

The concentration of occupation in the Birkrigg, Bay-cliff, Scales, Urswick, Stainton areas is very marked. Little recorded work has been done on the two enclosures at Appleby Slack, Birkrigg,<sup>8</sup> though cairns<sup>9</sup> and the small double stone circle, known locally as "the Druid's Circle",<sup>10</sup> have yielded material attributable to various stages of the Bronze Age. Holme Bank Settlement, or Foula, was partly investigated by the North Lonsdale Field Club in 1927/28, but no plan of their work has been published. Urswick Stone Walls received rather more careful attention in 1906, but before the present advance in excavation technique. A fragment of engraved bronze found there was dated to 1st or 2nd century B.C. by Mr Reginald Smith of the British Museum.<sup>11</sup> Stone Close, Stainton, another homestead with enclosing wall, is now almost entirely blown away by the Devonshire Quarry, but finds including roughed-out and polished stone axes, a bronze palstave and bronze socketed axe, both saddle and rotary querns, suggest that the site was occupied over a long period from Neolithic to Early Iron Age times, or even later.<sup>12</sup> Around Skelmore Heads itself

<sup>4</sup> CW2 xxxviii 160-163.

<sup>5</sup> CW2 l 16, fig. 1, 3; CW2 lv 1-16 and figs.

<sup>6</sup> CW2 l 15-16, fig. 1, 4.

<sup>7</sup> CW2 lv 14-15.

<sup>8</sup> CW2 xxxvi 150 and footnote.

<sup>9</sup> CW2 xiv 466-479; xxvii 100-109; xxxvi 151-157.

<sup>10</sup> CW2 xii 262-274; xxii 346-352.

<sup>11</sup> CW2 vii 72-99.

<sup>12</sup> CW2 xii 277-284.

a number of finds have been made — six socketed bronze axes at Little Cow Close in 1902; a roughed-out stone axe west of Flat Woods,<sup>13</sup> in 1906; a saddle quern at Skelmore Heads in 1926;<sup>14</sup> a roughed-out stone axe between High Carley and Skelmore Heads in 1956; and four roughed-out stone axes in a crevice in the limestone at Skelmore Heads in 1959. More details of these latter finds are given by Mr F. Barnes in the Appendix.

About half a mile west-south-west of Skelmore Heads, in 1958, Mr E. G. Holland and a group of young men exploring a fissure in the limestone at Heaning Wood, south of Stone Dyke Lane, Great Urswick (SD(34)/268748), found a fragment of a collared urn of Middle Bronze Age type, a worked knife of volcanic ash, or tuff and a quantity of human and animal bones. Subsequent work was carried out by Mr F. Barnes and the staff of the Barrow-in-Furness Library and Museum by permission of the owners, Mr and Mrs H. Myers.

Although the long cairn and part of the hill-top site at Skelmore Heads had received the attentions of the North Lonsdale Field Club in 1927/28 no adequate report had been published and it was hoped that some elucidation of the structures might be obtained by careful excavation.

C.I.F.

### Part III. The Hill-fort.

*The Site* (Nat. Grid Ref.: SD/274752).

The hill-top enclosure occupies the summit of a low flat hill (325 ft. O.D.) with extensive views in all directions, obstructed only by the higher ground of Birkrigg Common 1,500 yds. to the south-east. To the east and south the shallow waters, and the Cartmel and Ulverston Sands, of Morecambe Bay are visible. To the west much of Low Furness may be seen, while the upland peaks of Furness Fells dominate the northern horizon.

<sup>13</sup> CW2 vii 310.

<sup>14</sup> North Lonsdale Field Club Report, 1927/28.

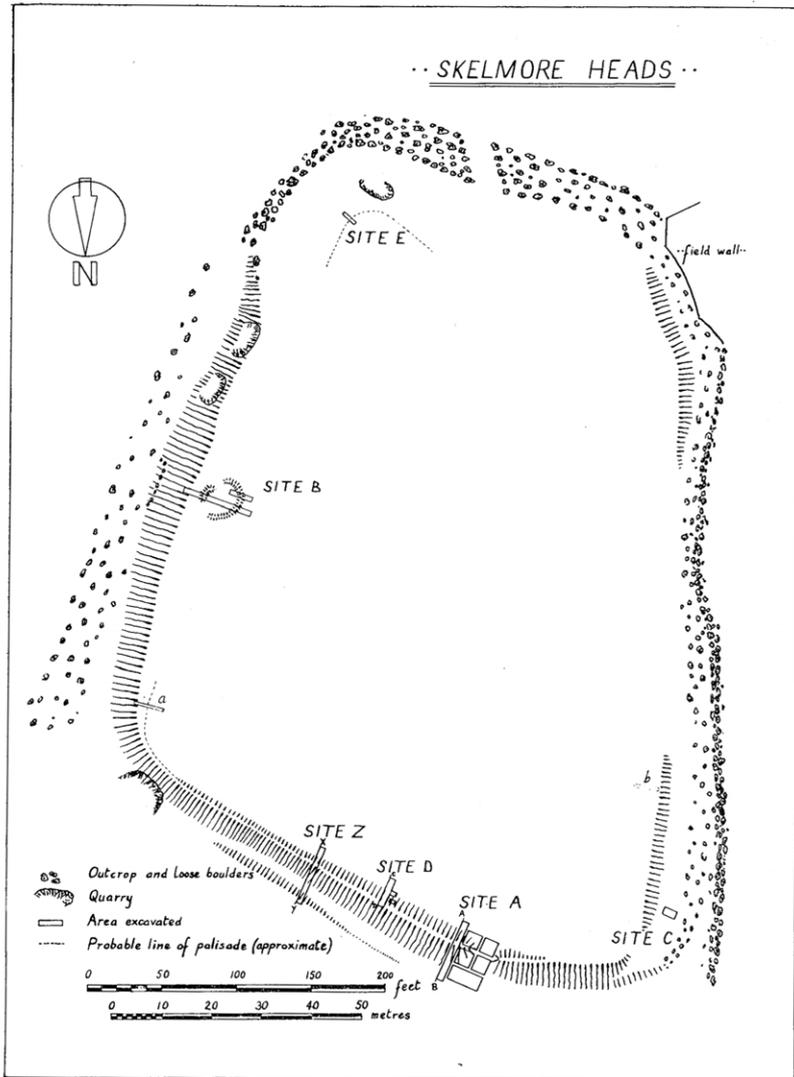


FIG. 2.—Skelmore Heads: Plan of the hill-fort.

The enclosure is sub-rectangular in plan measuring approximately 470 ft. from north to south, 350 ft. from east to west at its widest part and enclosing an area of about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  acres (fig. 2). The eastern, southern and western edges are apparently unprotected by any bank and ditch but the flat top of the hill drops sharply to the east and west providing a natural defence with numerous large outcrops of limestone and boulders offering an almost natural *chevaux de frise*. A line of outcrop running across the less steeply sloped southern edge limits the enclosed area. The northern limits are marked by a bank and ditch in the absence of natural obstacles as the ground here slopes away from the hill-top in a gentle gradient. Excavation proved that a gap in the bank was the original entrance placed rather to the west of centre. From this entrance the bank stretches for approximately 220 ft. to the east and 80 ft. to the western corner where the rampart is well marked. Within this north-western angle other ridges are visible but appear to be the results of more recent ploughing in an area where hill-wash may have collected against the inner side of the bank. Before excavation the ditch was not prominent but it was quite clear in certain lights when viewed from a distance, as from the road lower down the hill to the north. Although the site as revealed by excavation could only have been of limited tactical value in any form of warfare, it enjoys a good strategic position with the possibility in clear weather of virtually uninterrupted observation of wide areas. The flat top of the hill is a landmark for some considerable distance and the different finds of prehistoric date from and around the site demonstrate its attraction from the Neolithic period onwards.

*Excavation* (Plates I-IV, figs. 2-7).

*Site Z.*

In 1957 a trial section was cut through the bank and ditch in an attempt to define their nature and relationship



PLATE I.—Skelmore Heads showing earthworks across northern slope.

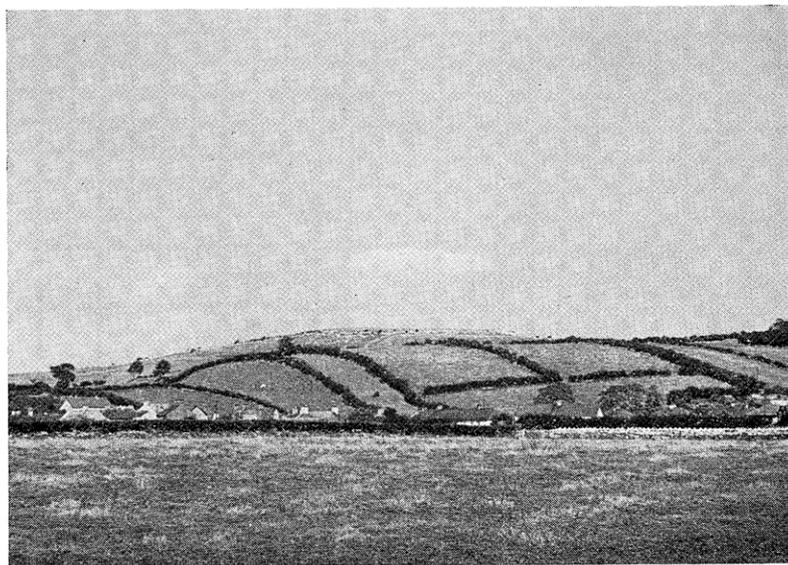


PLATE II.—Skelmore Heads from the south showing limestone outcrop encircling the brow of the hill.

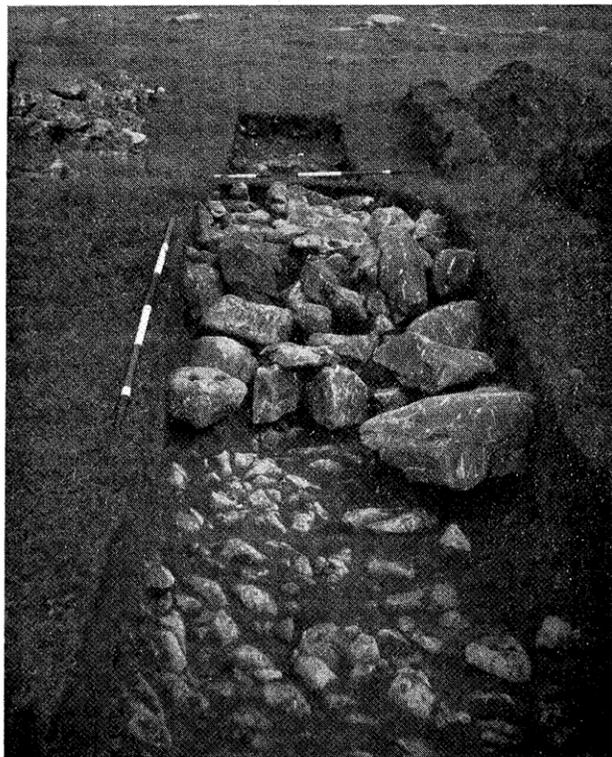


PLATE III.—Skelmore Heads: Site Z. The bank from within the enclosure.

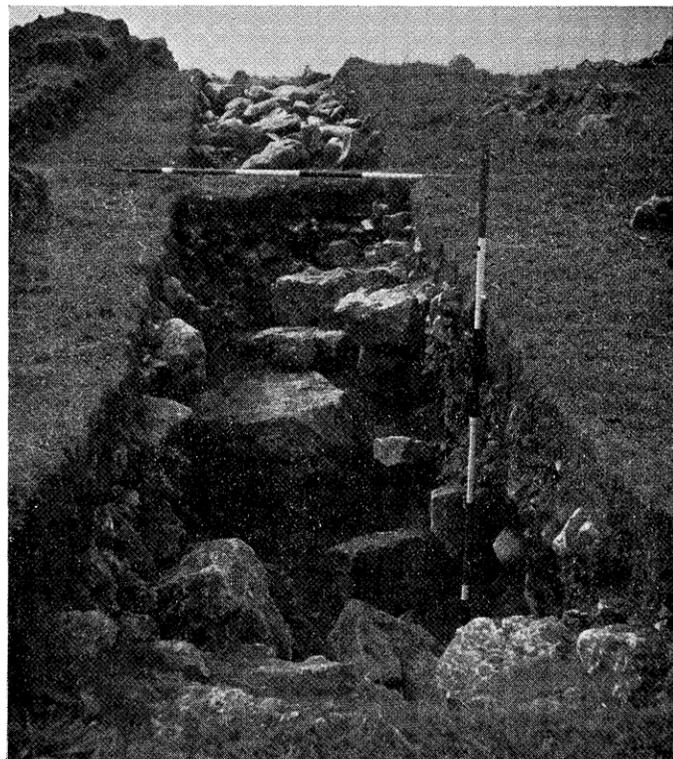


PLATE IV.—Skelmore Heads: Site Z. The ditch with tumble from the bank behind.

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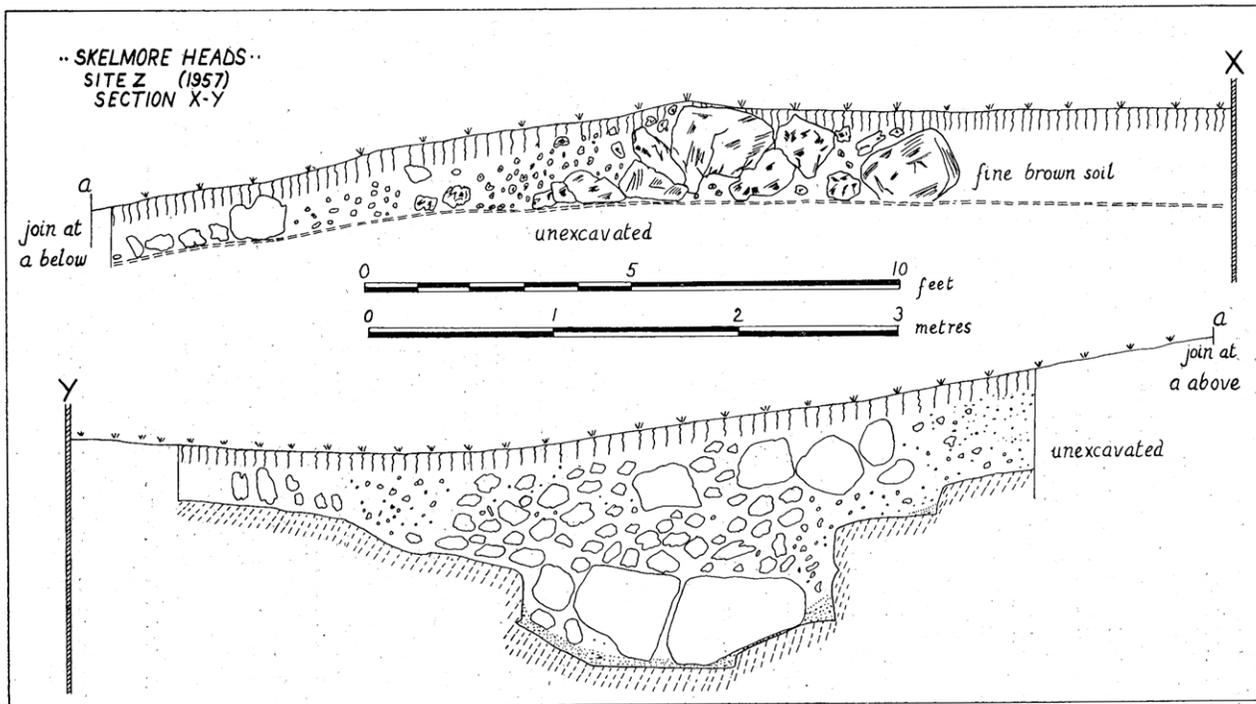


FIG. 3.—Skelmore Heads: Site Z section.

one to the other and to find any evidence for date of construction.<sup>15</sup> The section revealed a bank apparently composed of earth and heaped stones, some of them of considerable size, and fronted by a deep flat-bottomed rock-cut ditch (fig. 3). In the ditch there were several large boulders which had apparently tumbled from the bank at some date subsequent to its construction. From the position of these fallen stones relative to the slight evidence of silting and the natural infilling of the disused ditch subsequent to the collapse of the bank, it might be assumed that no great period of time elapsed between construction and collapse.

This preliminary examination suggested that the bank was of dump construction, built of earth and stones of various sizes, some as much as  $2\frac{1}{2}$  ft. by 2 ft. by  $1\frac{1}{2}$  ft. The bank appeared to be approximately 12 ft. wide at its base and was separated by a berm of 6 ft. from the ditch. The latter was 11 ft. wide from lip to lip,  $5\frac{1}{2}$  ft. wide at its base and 3 to 4 ft. deep. It had a broad U-shaped section. There was no evidence of date but small fragments of animal bones lay amongst the tumbled stones, and may easily have worked down in relatively modern times. During 1957 no evidence either of post-holes or of palisade trenches was found.

As a result of this examination it was decided to resume excavation in 1959 with three main aims. The first was the location of the original entrance through the bank and ditch thought to be visible prior to excavation. Secondly, at least one cutting was to be made through the bank and ditch to compare it with the section derived from the trial trench of 1957. The third objective was the examination of a circular depression on the eastern side of the enclosure. This had the appearance of a hut-circle built against what appeared before excavation to be a low bank.

<sup>15</sup> Preliminary notice in *PPS* xxiv (1958) 216.

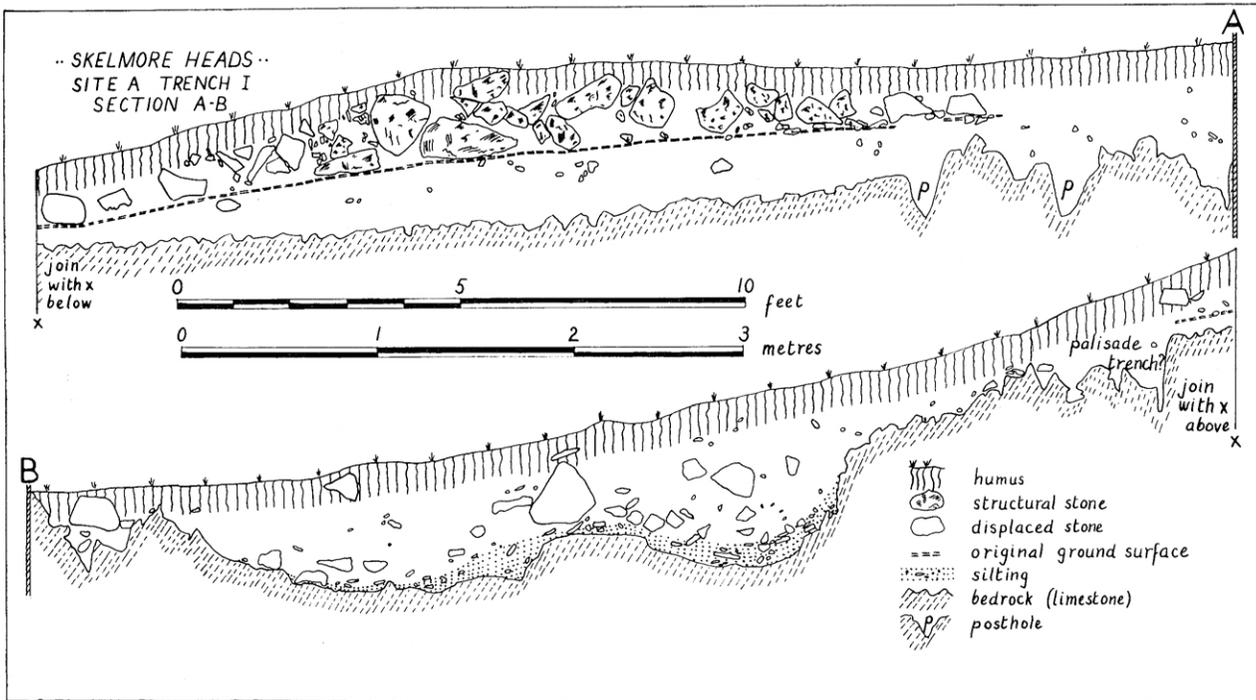


FIG. 4.—Skelmore Heads: Site A section.

*Site A.*

Trench I, 44 ft. in length and 4 ft. wide, was cut across the bank and ditch 6 ft. to the east of the assumed entrance (figs. 4 and 5). Within a short depth below the surface large stones forming part of the bank were found to resemble closely the arrangement at site Z. The ditch was subsequently located, but although it lay in a similar relationship to the bank as at site Z it was both shallower and narrower. The bank in trench I was 14 ft. wide and built of dump construction. Some attempt appears to have been made to stabilize both the front and rear by placing larger boulders in those positions with smaller stones and earth as infilling. Large stones of comparable size, fallen into the ditch both in this section and at site Z, may have belonged to upper courses at the front of the bank. The ditch in trench I is 11 ft. wide from lip to lip, 7 ft. wide at its base, and only 3 ft. deep. The shallower depth when compared with that of site Z suggested that the floor of the ditch might rise towards the entrance, but the irregularity of the quarrying may indicate uncompleted work.

A grid of twelve 5-ft. squares was laid out immediately to the west of trench I. This was subsequently modified to a pattern of six 10-ft. squares arranged in two rows of three in an approximately north-south direction, the northern pair finally modified to form a cutting 22 ft. by 10 ft. (fig. 5). This pattern revealed the main features of the entrance.<sup>16</sup>

On either side of the entrance the ditch ended in a semicircular cutting, leaving a causeway of undisturbed bedrock underlying the top-soil. The bank was similarly interrupted by a gap, but in its present ruined state it was not possible to reconstruct its original appearance. On the western side of the entrance the bank had been extensively robbed. A tumble of stones running in a line

<sup>16</sup> In removing the top-soil from the southerly part of this grid system, a stray find of a small flint scraper was made (fig. 7).

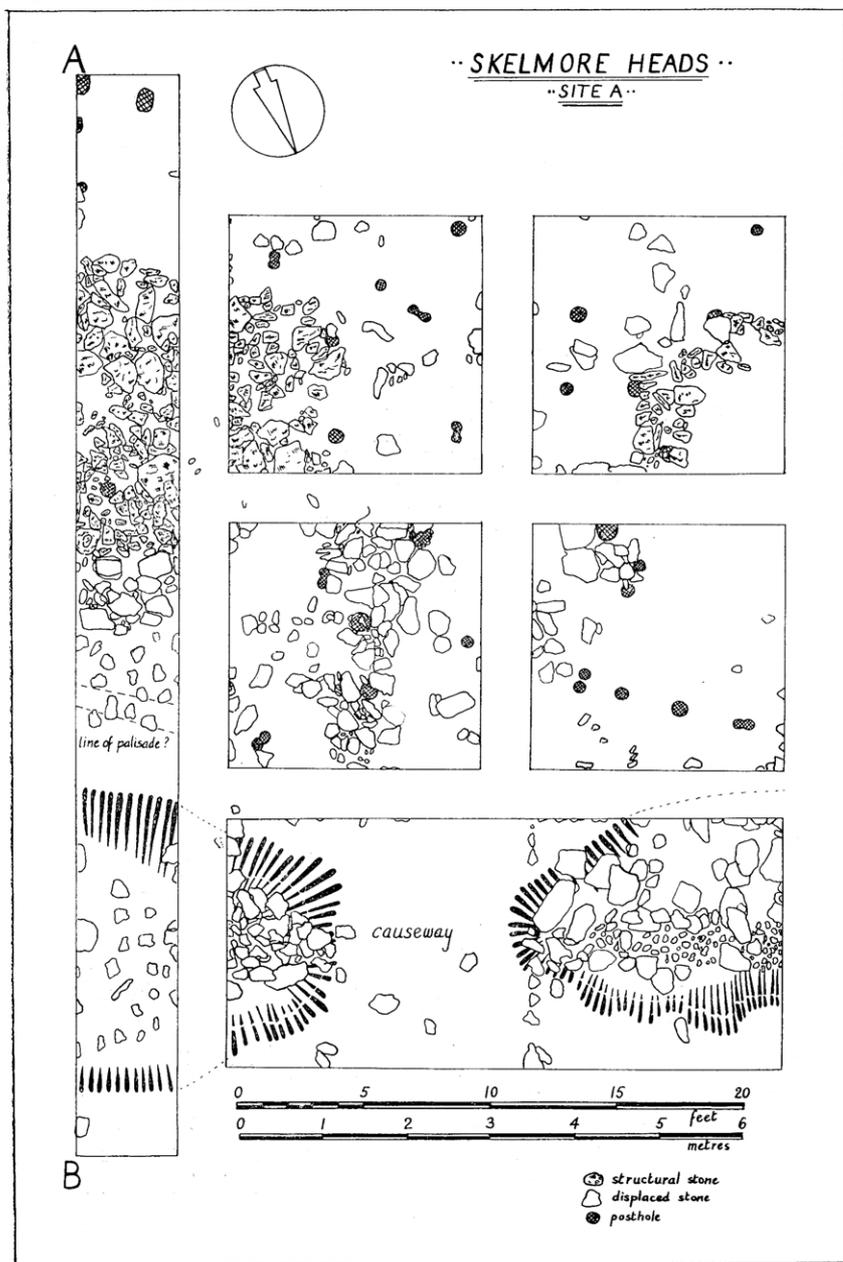


FIG. 5.—Skelmore Heads: Site A. Plan of entrance area.

northwards from the eastern limit of the bank proper is paralleled less markedly on the western side. It is possible that these may be the remains of an out-turned entrance, although the stones *in situ* in this position are generally smaller than those in the bank proper. The material of a collapsed wall in the immediate entrance area would not have been able to fall into the ditch as the causeway intervened. For these reasons the larger stones in this position have not been marked as structural on the plan although the possibility of an out-turned entrance cannot be entirely denied.

During excavation of the entrance area small hollows, some of inverted conical shape and approximately 8 in. in diameter and 10 to 14 in. deep, were noticed in the surface of the underlying limestone. It was thought at first that all were post-holes, but observation of similar hollows in outcrops of limestone beyond the limits of the hill-top enclosure demonstrated the possibility that some, if not all, of these holes might be of natural origin. As more of the entrance area was uncovered, however, these holes appeared to be arranged in some sort of regular pattern and to define the limits of the entrance. In addition, some of them were unmistakable post-holes, having small blocking-stones still in position and being filled with fine light soil, best interpreted as decayed wood from a post. As it was impossible to distinguish between naturally formed hollows and post-holes proper, should the distinction be drawn, all these hollows are marked on the plan of the entrance area. The ramming of a pointed stake into the relatively soft limestone would form a hollow of similar shape and size to those miniature pot-holes formed by water action. It must be remembered that these hollows were originally overlain by 12 to 18 in. of top-soil and that almost all lie in areas covered by the bank. The regular arrangement of these hollows suggests that the majority were post-holes and that wooden posts had been erected around the limits of the

bank to secure its relatively unstable dump construction. In addition, some of the larger hollows situated at opposite sides of the entrance are best interpreted as the post-holes for some form of gate structure. The position of some of these hollows, too, is not inconsistent with the suggestion that there may have been an out-turned entrance of a construction similar to that of the bank proper.

A row of hollows running parallel to the front of the bank and the southern lip of the ditch and approximately halfway between them at the western side of the entrance cannot be fitted into this scheme. An alternative purpose is suggested below in connection with a palisade trench of an earlier phase of structural activity.

In trench I similar hollows were recognised and their identification in section emphasised their pointed base. In section it could be seen that the original ground surface had been disturbed immediately above them. At approximately 4 ft. from the southern lip of the ditch in this trench a large post-hole was identified in both the east and west sections. These appeared at first to be connected in some way with the line of post-holes arranged in a similar position on the western side of the entrance, but subsequent excavation on other parts of the site prompted another interpretation which is discussed below.

The entrance, therefore, as revealed by excavation at site A was marked by a causeway across the ditch little more than 7 ft. wide. This fronted a possibly gated gap in the bank of similar dimensions with the further possibility of a short out-turned entrance. The bank was of dump construction probably strengthened at its edges by vertical timbers.

#### *Site D.*

A short section, 20 ft. in length and 4 ft. wide, was cut through the bank 50 ft. to the east of trench I to con-

firm whether or not the construction of the bank at this point was similar to that at sites A and Z (fig. 6). The dump construction was identical and overall dimensions were similar. Hollows which may be post-holes were located at the front and rear of the bank, but of greater significance was the recognition of a palisade trench of rectangular section cut 8 in. into bed-rock and 15 in. wide. It lay 4 ft. approximately to the north of the face of the bank in a position comparable to that of the line of post-holes fronting the bank at either side of the entrance.

*Site B.*

A section 50 ft. long and 4 ft. wide was cut across the bank and circular area on the eastern side of the site and assumed to be the remains of a hut circle built into the rear of a structural bank. Neither feature appears to belong to that phase of activity associated with the main bank and ditch. It was suspected that there had been some disturbance in this area when a flint barbed-and-tanged arrowhead (fig. 7) was found within the circle but

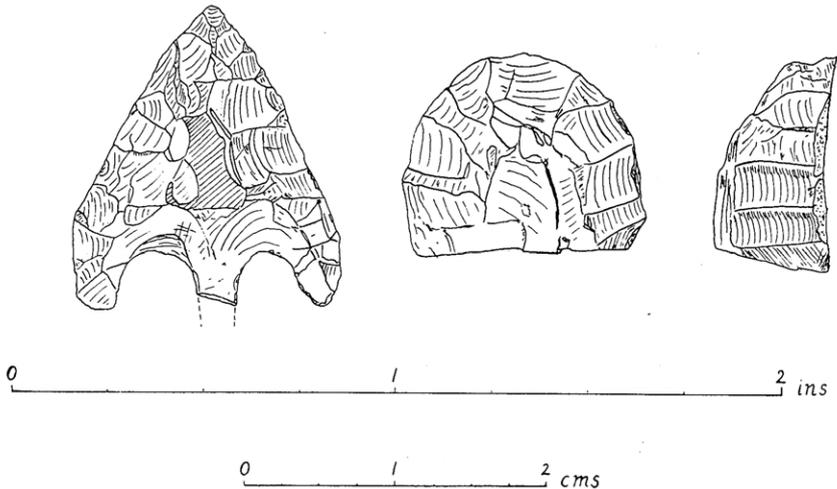


FIG. 7.—Skelmore Heads: Stray finds (2/1).

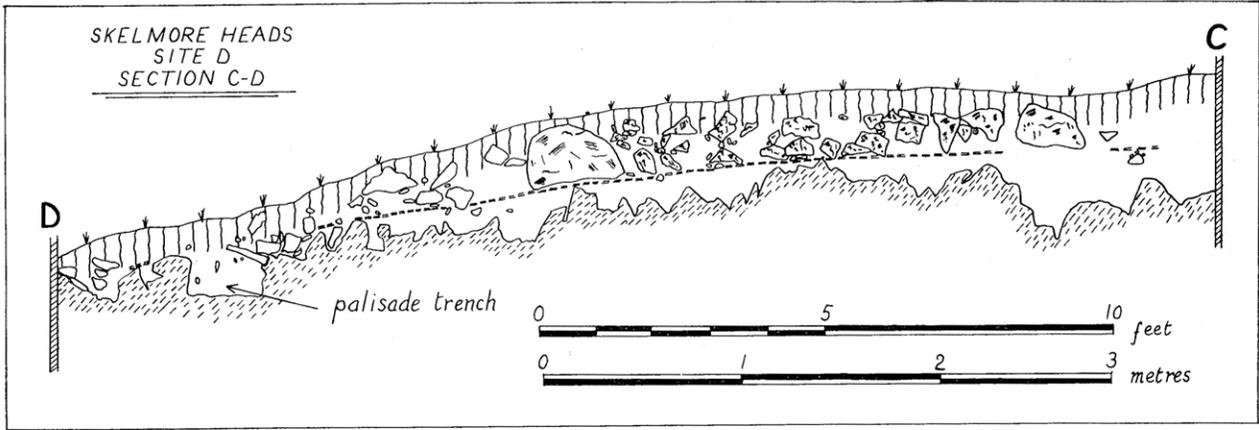


FIG. 6.—Skelmore Heads: Site D section.

only six inches below the present ground surface and at the same level as modern pottery.

The centre of the circular area was filled beneath the top-soil with loosely packed water-worn pebbles which contrasted with the natural limestone located in a trial trench dug immediately outside the circle. Modern pottery and an iron bucket-handle were found in the loose filling and this demonstrated its artificial origin. The bank and the circular limits of this hollow area proved to be of natural limestone. This site was subsequently identified as a disused *dew pond*; many such ponds having been in use to within the beginning of the present century.

#### *Site C.*

It was thought possible that among the loose boulders and outcrop on the western slopes of the hill-top enclosure there might be found evidence of some activity associated with the building of the northern defences. In a trial trench (see fig. 2) in the area of an elongated hollow, animal bones, flecks of charcoal and two fragments of abraded pottery of Bronze-Age-like texture were found. There were no signs of hearths or structures, and the deep deposit of soil, and small stones spoke for hill-wash, and earth movement due to ploughing. The bones, which were of sheep, appeared to be of no antiquity, and the two abraded potsherds had clearly been derived from some other context.

#### *Site E.*

At several points on the hill-top and well within the limits of the enclosure as defined by either natural or artificial defences, long narrow depressions of shallow depth could be identified. Where visible they ran parallel with the limits of the enclosure and resembled the paths made by cattle or sheep on sloping grazing land. At the suggestion of Mr R. W. Feachem, who visited the site, a short trial section was cut across one of these hollows

in the south-eastern corner of the hill-top. A palisade-trench was clearly visible below 8 in. of top-soil, and cut 8 in. into bed-rock, 18 in. wide and rectangular in section. Assuming that similar surface depressions mark the position of a palisade trench elsewhere on the hill, these features, where they were clearly visible in 1959, have been added to the plan (fig. 2). Further trial cuttings made in 1960, however, failed to trace any similar feature (fig. 2, cuts *a* and *b*), but this may have been due to the very stony subsoil and broken nature of the underlying rock. Only excavation on a very large scale could elucidate this problem.

#### Discussion.

It is not possible to date the hill-top enclosure at Skelmore Heads by means of associated finds. The barbed-and-tanged arrowhead and the flint scraper should date to the Early Bronze Age and the sherds from site C are not clearly associated with the occupation of the hill-top as a defended site although it is possible that such an association might be valid. Any attempt to date the defences must therefore rely on the comparative study of similar bank and ditch hill-top structures.

Lacking precise evidence of dating, it is possible only to offer an hypothetical sequence of events associated with the use of the hill-top as a defended area. Although the palisade trench has not yet been located in sufficient places to prove that it once encircled the hill-top analogy with sites in southern Scotland and elsewhere, suggests that this must at least have been intended. It also seems probable that the palisade was earlier than the bank and ditch forming the northern boundary. The location of the palisade trench in front of the bank at sites A and D to the east of the entrance and its continuation as a row of post-holes to the west of the entrance would seem superfluous if the bank and ditch had already existed. An enclosure delimited by a wooden fence appears to mark the earliest recognisable attempt to defend the hill-

top. It should be noted that the southern limits of this enclosure would have stopped short of the present line of boulders and outcrop. Comparison of the width of the gap through that line, approximately 20 ft., with the gap of 7 ft. which serves as the northern entrance, suggests that the former was made at a time when the hill-top was not regarded primarily as a defended area.

The southern gap may of course have been made within the last century or two in connection with agricultural developments.

The existence of a hill-top enclosure consisting of a wooden fence can imply either little more than pre-occupation with the safety of livestock or a simple and temporary defence erected until a more adequate structure could be built. The existence of the strong northern defence of a bank and rock-cut ditch suggests that the wooden fence was inadequate. It is possible that some period of time may have elapsed between the use of the palisade and the construction of the bank and ditch. The palisade could not have been in position along the northern edge during the construction of the bank as the upcast could not have then been thrown into position to form the bank. Whether or not it was ever intended to continue a similar construction of bank and ditch around the whole of the area to be defended cannot be proved. It is clear, however, that this structure existed only along the northern edge of the area. The natural defences of the other three sides, supplemented perhaps by the retention of the wooden fence, may have been considered adequate. There is a considerable difference between the wooden fence and the crude but massive defences along the northern edge. It may be admitted that the former was adequate enough to ensure the safety of livestock. The latter, however, is appropriate only in the context of human warfare and this interpretation is supported by the narrow entrance.

Palisaded enclosures have been recognised in Roxburgh-

shire from surface indications and aerial photography,<sup>17</sup> and one, Hayhope Knowe, has been excavated.<sup>18</sup> In Northumberland, too, palisaded enclosures were superseded by the stronger protection of a bank and ditch as at Huckhoe.<sup>19</sup> Although there was a complex of palisade trenches, and later banks and ditches, at Huckhoe both the sequence and construction of the bank and ditch resembles that at Skelmore Heads.<sup>20</sup> At Hayhope Knowe the palisaded enclosure differs from that at Skelmore Heads in that it was double and of one construction as shown by the "hair-pin" junction at the entrances.<sup>21</sup> It is not clear whether the double palisade at Huckhoe belonged to a single structural phase.

At Hayhope Knowe the earthwork and ditch were not completed although the former was backed by a third palisade trench which appeared to continue for a greater distance than that of the bank.<sup>22</sup> This was interpreted as an inner revetment to the bank, as at Ingram Hill, Northumberland,<sup>23</sup> but this is not certain. It is possible that as at Skelmore Heads the palisade in this position preceded the earthwork. In southern Britain a similar structural sequence has been recognised at several hill-forts.

At present there are no surface indications of internal structures at Skelmore Heads and no attempt was made during 1957 and 1959 to locate any such remains apart from that at site B. On those parts of the hill which have been ploughed in the past it is possible that any remains that might have existed will have been destroyed. On other parts of the hill the shallow top-soil will similarly be unlikely to preserve traces of hut-circles and the like. Although it is possible to offer only this negative evidence, it seems unlikely that the hill-top was devoid of

<sup>17</sup> K. A. Steer, *PSAS* lxxxiii (1948-9) 64-67.

<sup>18</sup> C. M. Piggott, *ibid.* 45-63.

<sup>19</sup> G. Jobey, *Arch. Ael* (4) xxxvii (1959) 217-278.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 222-232.

<sup>21</sup> Piggott, *op. cit.* 53-54.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 54-57.

<sup>23</sup> A. H. A. Hogg, *Arch. Ael* (4) xx (1942) 110-133; *ibid.* xxxiv (1956) 154.

occupation during the time when the palisade was in position. Analogy with similarly defended sites in northern England and southern Scotland suggests that any occupation of this hill-top enclosure should date to the Iron Age either before or during the Roman period. The few potsherds from site C are similar to that indeterminate but Bronze-Age-like ware from the palisade trenches at Huckhoe.<sup>24</sup>

Cultural affinities with sites in Northumberland and Roxburghshire should perhaps not be over emphasised as Skelmore Heads is almost equidistant from hill-forts in Cheshire and North Wales, but in this southward region parallels seem to be no more readily available. Nor can any observations yet be ventured on the significance for Low Furness of the great hill-fort on Warton Crag, near Carnforth, which lies only fifteen miles south-east across Morecambe Bay. From Skelmore Heads both Warton Crag, and Ingleborough, can be seen on clear days, and the continuity of limestone country on which all these hill-forts stand may suggest connections with the Iron Age settlement of western Yorkshire.

J.X.W.P.C.

#### Part IV. The Tumulus.

*The Site* (Nat. Grid Ref.: SD/27437544).

The tumulus appeared as a low grass-grown mound somewhat less than 60 ft. in length east to west, and some 35 ft. in width. The ends appeared to be rounded, and the sides straight. The only external features were two large stone uprights rising from the centre of the mound near the eastern end. A hollow between them indicated disturbance, and the close proximity of a stone wall, running parallel to the tumulus along its north side, made it almost certain that the tumulus had been used as a source for walling material. The tumulus stands on the northern

<sup>24</sup> G. Jobey, *op. cit.*



PLATE V.—Skelmore Heads tumulus: The second upright showing stone packing.

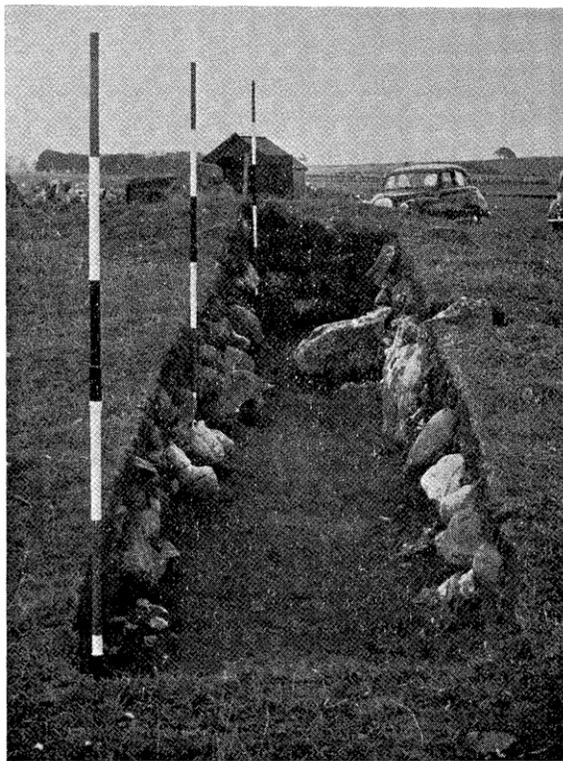


PLATE VI.—Skelmore Heads tumulus: View along west-east section showing two stone stumps (to right of second pole), and two stone uprights at eastern end (beyond second and third poles).

slope of Skelmore Heads at 270 ft. O.D. The gradient is here interrupted by a very slight terrace or levelling out, which was taken advantage of when the existing field wall was built, but the tumulus was evidently not sited so as to be conspicuous from any distance. The tumulus stands on a compact subsoil of brown earth and angular stones resulting from the weathering of the underlying limestone with hill-wash from the upper slopes. There is also some indication for a light Drift deposit which is more noticeable on the lower slopes of the hill in modern ploughland.

It was to be expected that treasure-seeking and antiquarian diggings had taken place in the mound, but there were no records of activity by any of the long established learned societies interested in the region, and local memory tended to confuse investigations on this hill with quite other work that had been done on Birk-rigg. The result of the excavations in 1957 showed that very considerable destruction had been effected in the tumulus at some previous date, and it has been more recently reported that in addition to stone robbing for wall building, digging was undertaken in the mound some thirty years ago when finds of bone and pottery were made. No notes or records of any kind were kept, and there is no information as to the fate of the finds.

*The Excavation* (Plates V and VI, figs. 8 and 9).

The plan of excavation was to cut a main longitudinal section (A-B), and a number of cross-sections (C-D, E-F, G-H) with extensions where these might help to elucidate the nature of the monument. It was found that the body of the mound consisted of large round field-stones and angular blocks, mixed with earth, and this formed a compact mass lying directly on the old turf-line. The latter could be traced under most of the mound where excavated, and showed as a stiff greyish-brown layer averaging 4 in. thick. There were some flecks of charcoal present

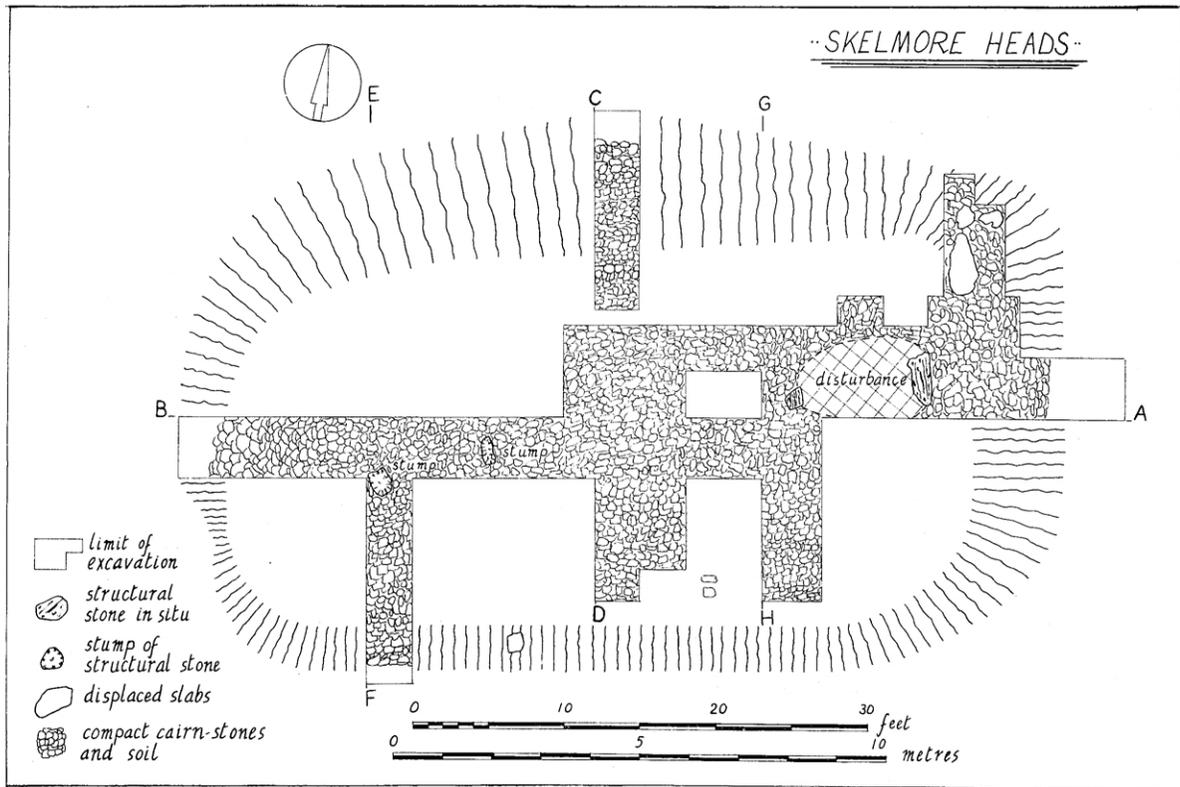


FIG. 8.—Skelmore Heads: Plan of tumulus.

in the turf-line, but no concentrations and no hearths. There were no indications of any kind of kerb or special edging for the tumulus, nor flanking ditches, and the present seemingly straight sides are likely to have been due to stone clearance, on the upper southern side, in connection with cultivation, and on the lower, northern, side for wall building. On the north-eastern shoulder of the mound, one large and two medium-sized slabs were found lying. These presumably formed some part of the tumulus structure, but it would be fruitless to guess further.

Within the body of the mound, the excavation revealed that a large area of disturbance existed between the two stone uprights already noted, but that further back in the mound the stumps of two other stone uprights existed hidden from view. Whatever may have been the nature of the burial deposit sited in the area of complete destruction, these four stone uprights must be regarded as an important element in the ritual layout of the tumulus. It will be seen from the plan (fig. 8) that these stones are all in line with each other, and that their approximate axis (ENE.-WSW.) differs by about  $15^\circ$  from the apparent axis of the tumulus. The uprights are all blocks of limestone such as are easily available in proximity to the mound. Only the easternmost upright has any claim to be regarded as a megalithic slab. It is only  $3\frac{1}{2}$  ft. wide, but its complete height is 6 ft. The second upright, standing at a distance of 7 ft. further into the tumulus, is a pillar-stone 5 ft. 5 in. high. The first stump was found a further 29 ft. WSW. of the pillar-stone, and the second stump lay 6 ft. beyond the first on the same bearing. Whatever arrangements may have existed between the two surviving uprights at the eastern end of the mound, the westerly stumps were packed around with ordinary building material of the tumulus, and no special features or associations were found. The general appearance of the two stumps suggests that they, too, had been plain

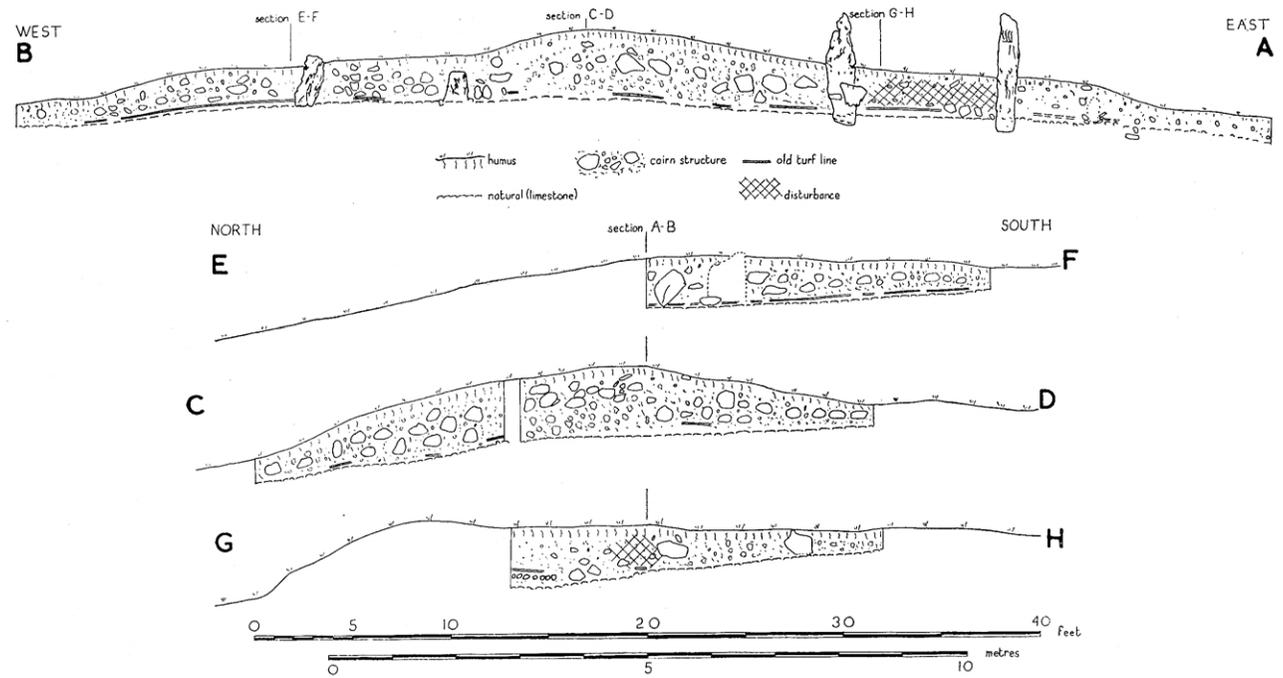


FIG. 9.—Skelmore Heads: Sections through the tumulus.

uprights of rough pillar-like character. The bases of the uprights and stumps were carefully examined, and were found to sit in very shallow sockets dug through the old turf-line into the subsoil. The main support in all cases came from the body of the tumulus around them.

An area at the eastern end of the tumulus, in front of the easternmost upright, was examined for signs of a forecourt, or ritual area, but no traces of any kind were found. The mound here consisted of the same compact upcast as elsewhere, but one small block (fig. 9: section A-B, shown in broken outline) gave the impression of having been purposely set up. Its end-on position may however have been entirely accidental, although it could have acted as a marking-out stone in delimiting this end of the tumulus when under construction.

#### **Observations.**

The excavation of this tumulus warrants few interpretative observations, and no conclusions with regard to cultural connections or chronology. It may be remarked that the burial area must have been confined to the space, subsequently ravaged, between the two stone uprights at the eastern end of the mound. Inhumation was most likely to have been the rite as some scatter of a disturbed cremation would have almost certainly survived amongst the infill or between the adjacent heaped stones. It seems unlikely that there had been any quantity of charcoal, or of earth with organic material and potsherds. If pottery was in fact found in the diggings of a generation ago, it seems likely that a broken vessel, easily recognisable as such, came to light. On these grounds it may be suggested that the burial deposit, whether single or collective, was somewhat different from that usually found in megalithic chambers around the Irish Sea. There appears to be no insular parallel for an elongated tumulus with a spinal row of standing stones, and to cite possible analogues further south, as in Brittany, would be to place

too great a strain on the evidence as it exists at present.

Any further assessment of the Skelmore Heads tumulus must await excavations elsewhere which may lead to accurate comparisons.

T.G.E.P.

#### **Acknowledgements.**

For permission to excavate on Skelmore Heads, and for many kindnesses during both seasons' work, I am indebted to Mr J. W. Wood, Bank End, Urswick. For the loan of a hut and tools, I am glad to record thanks to the Divisional Surveyor, Ulverston, Lancashire County Council, first Mr E. G. Mackareth, and then the late Mr F. L. Fisher. For a base plan of the hill-fort, and other surveying, I have to thank Mr C. W. Phillips, F.S.A., Archaeology Officer, Ordnance Survey, who made available members of his staff, and of these especially Mr F. D. Colquhoun for valuable assistance on the site. For skilled assistance, and too often for heavy labour, in one or both seasons, I thank Mr R. W. Hutchinson, F.S.A., Mr C. K. Balmforth, Miss F. Lynch, Miss S. Nicholson, Miss B. Evans, and Messrs J. S. Hallam, B. Golden, K. Lockyer, J. Ruffle, E. Agnew, I. Graham, P. Hargreaves, I. Pattison. Mr J. L. Forde-Johnston, F.S.A., assisted me during the short expedition in March 1960. For photographing the hill-fort I am indebted to Mr F. W. Cotton of the Barrow Naturalists' Field Club.

For opportunities to study the important prehistoric collection in the Barrow-in-Furness library and museum, and for much regional information, I am glad to thank Mr Barnes.

Finally, to my collaborators in the present report I am under special obligations. To Miss Fell for unstinted help with preliminary arrangements, for making available at all times her unrivalled knowledge of the archaeology of the north-west of England, and for support of all kinds when the excavations were in progress. Dr Corcoran acted as assistant director throughout both

seasons with unfailing energy and skill, and he has also prepared all the drawings for this report.

### Appendix.

#### *Discovery of four roughed-out stone axes at Skelmore Heads, July 1959.* By F. BARNES, F.S.A.

The excavations at Skelmore Heads were visited by a party of boys from Barrow Grammar School; one boy, R. C. Coward, was interested enough to show his parents the site on 4 July 1959. Mrs Coward retrieved two roughed-out stone axes from a crevice between two stepped limestone boulders outcropping 20 yds. outside the north-western corner of the camp proper (SD(34)273753); the axes were resting on top of a small pocket of soil between the two boulders. The history master of the Grammar School, Mr Chadderton, on being shown the find contacted the Barrow Museum, and as a result the find spot was examined on 6 July by Mr Chadderton, Mr Kay (another Grammar School master) and myself, under the guidance of R. C. Coward; immediately two more rough-outs were found buried beneath the pocket of soil. It was obvious that the four axes had been thrust into the crevice as a compact bundle, larger on top, smaller below (fig. 10, 1-4).

On the find being reported in the local press, another rough-out was produced which had been ploughed up in 1956 in a field immediately below Skelmore Heads (SD(34)272758); it has been handed to the Barrow Museum by Mrs H. Sawrey of Woodside Farm, Great Urswick (Acc. no. 5287) (fig. 11).

The stone of all five specimens is identical, microscopically indistinguishable from the flinty greenish tuff of the Borrow-Volcanic Series now so familiar because of the discovery, first of the Great Langdale stone-axe factory and more recently the factory sites on Scafell Pike and other parts of the central hills of the Lake District.

As the four Skelmore Heads axes, through the kindness of Mr John Wood of Bank End Farm, Urswick, are now in the Barrow Museum (Acc. no. 5286/1-4), all five implements can be studied as a group; the dimensions are as follows:

	Length	Cutting Edge	Butt	Maximum Thickness	Weight
5286/1	10"	3 $\frac{3}{8}$ "	2 $\frac{3}{4}$ "	2"	3 lbs. 13 oz.
5186/2	9"	2 $\frac{7}{8}$ "	2 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	1 $\frac{7}{8}$ "	2 lbs. 8 oz.
5286/3	9"	2 $\frac{3}{4}$ "	1 $\frac{7}{8}$ "	1 $\frac{3}{4}$ "	2 lbs.
5286/4	7 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	2 $\frac{3}{4}$ "	2"	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	1 lb. 6 oz.
5287	8"	2 $\frac{3}{4}$ "	1 $\frac{5}{8}$ "	1 $\frac{5}{8}$ "	1 lb. 15 oz.

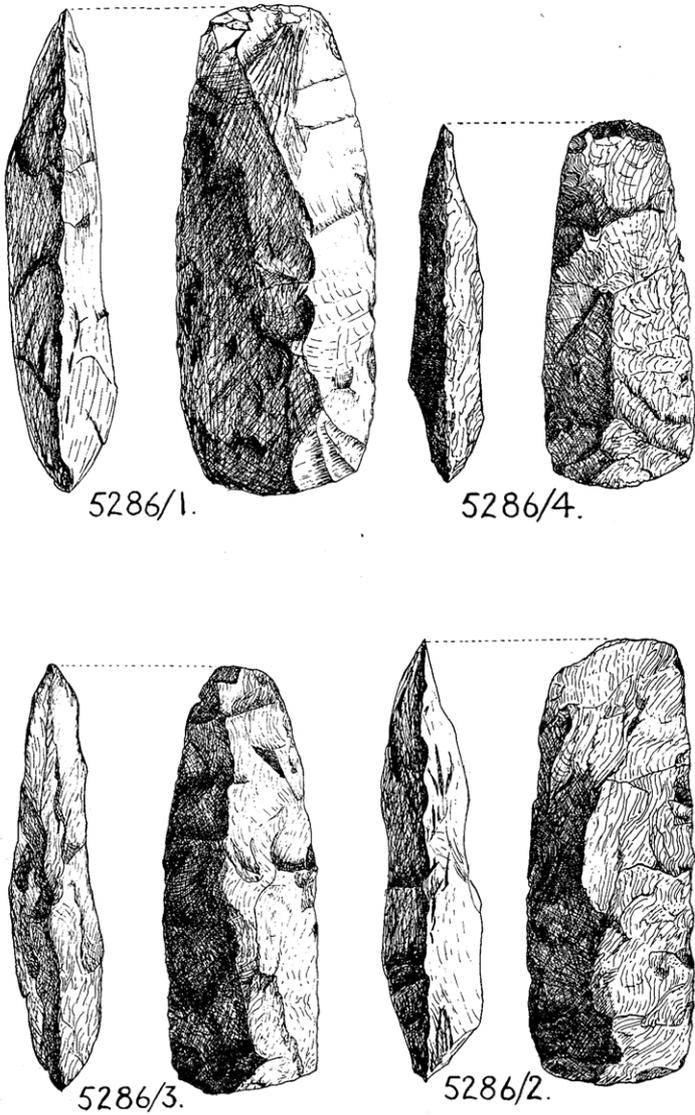
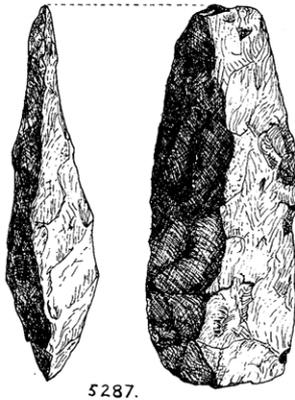


FIG. 10.—Four roughed-out stone axes from Skelmore Heads (4).

5286/3 has a thin pointed butt, the rest have broad thin butts (5287 is somewhat narrowed by recent damage). Viewed in profile, it is noticeable that one side is significantly flatter than the other at the cutting edge, suggesting that the finished implement would have been used as an adze.

Findings of roughed-out "Langdale" axes have been numerous throughout Furness, particularly in and around prehistoric sites, e.g. Stone Close, Stainton,<sup>25</sup> and High Haume, Dalton.<sup>26</sup> The majority have not been preserved for study, but the Barrow Museum has rough-outs from Dane Avenue, Barrow; Biggar; Askam; Little Urswick; Great Urswick; and Stone Close, Stainton. All are similar to the Skelmore Heads rough-outs.



5287.

FIG. 11.—Roughed-out stone axe found near Skelmore Heads (‡).

The Museum also possesses a sandstone grinding-stone from Roose Cote Moss. Our member Miss C. I. Fell and Mr Brian Bunch have postulated a traffic in roughed-out tools from the Lake District factory sites to nearby habitation sites in Furness and elsewhere where the implements were polished for trade farther afield.<sup>27</sup> The Skelmore Heads finds reinforce their suggestions.

The regular use of crevices in the limestone hags for storage or hiding-places is suggested rather strongly; in addition to the stone axes now found at Skelmore Heads and those reported found at Stainton ("... three or four in a crevice of the lime-

<sup>25</sup> CW2 xii 281.

<sup>26</sup> Jopling, *Sketch of Furness and Cartmel* (1843) 95; "... About twenty celts or stone hammers were found, in various states of preparation, some only in form, and others finely polished."

<sup>27</sup> *Proceedings of Prehistoric Society* xv (1949) pp. 13-15.

stone") two further significant finds are on record. In 1902 six socketed bronze celts were found in the limestone outcrop just outside the southern boundary of the Skelmore Heads camp (SD(34)275750) in Little Cow Close; as the edge of one  $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. thick, being straight from the mould, and two others were defective, it is safe to assume that they were a smith's stock in trade.<sup>28</sup> Three of these celts are in Barrow Museum (Acc. nos. 5045/1-3). Again, about 1829, in Long Rigg Field, about 250 yds. from Stone Walls, Little Urswick, a hoard of bronze was found in a cleft of the rock, said to consist of a spear head and four or five celts and rings.<sup>29</sup> Their present whereabouts are not known.

<sup>28</sup> CW2 iii 410

<sup>29</sup> *Barrow Naturalists' Field Club Proceedings* xvii (1909) 212-213; Bolton, *Geological Fragments* 122.