

ART. I.—*Some cairns in High Furness.* By C. I. FELL,
F.S.A.

Read at Penrith, September 6th, 1963.

WHEN walking in the Blawith Fells above Beacon Tarn on 2 September 1962 I noticed a group of small cairns on the saddle of a ridge just north-west of Wool Knott. The area is now covered with heather from which we had the pleasure of putting up a splendid blackcock. The lower slopes of the hillside are clad in bracken. The cairns are not shown on the 6-inch O.S. map of the area and Mr C. W. Phillips, Archaeology Officer to the Ordnance Survey, tells me that they were not recorded by the Survey's field team who recently resurveyed monuments in Lancashire-North-of-the-Sands. The map reference of the spot height, 678 ft., which lies within the group of cairns is SD(34)/271897.¹

On subsequent visits a rough survey was made by Mr L. S. H. Jackson and myself with prismatic compass, linen tape and pacing, bearings being taken from four stations (Fig. 1):

1. The point where the beck from the Peat Mosses enters the west side of Beacon Tarn.
2. A cairn lying in the shallow valley leading to the saddle of the ridge.
3. A large boulder, containing much quartz, just above Bench Mark, 648.9 ft.
4. The highest point on the saddle, which was taken to be the spot height, 678 ft.

The contouring on the accompanying plan was put in by eye from 6-inch O.S. sheet, Lancashire VII. NW.

¹ The cairns are probably those marked with a ? under *Blawith* in CW2 xxvi 46.

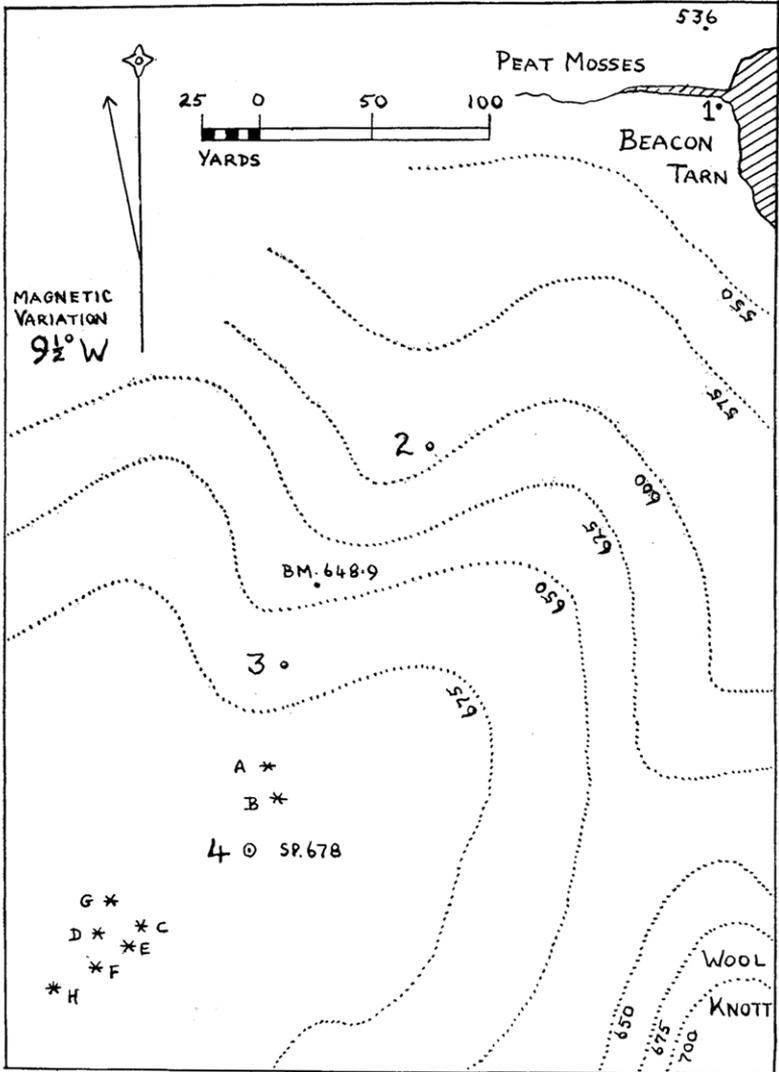


FIG. 1.—Based on 6-inch O.S. map Lancashire VII N.W. with the sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office. Crown Copyright reserved.

There are eight cairns in this skyline position, A—H on the plan, though G and H lay on the line of the outcrop and seemed doubtful. All were small and roughly circular, composed of loose stones and not rising more than a foot above the heather. No distinct curb of larger stones was noticed and none seem to have been disturbed. The measurements, without stripping back the heather, are as follows:

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| A. 8 ft. 6 in. diameter. | E. 8 ft. 6 in. x 8 ft. 9 in. |
| B. 13 ft. x 11 ft. | F. 9 ft. diameter. |
| C. 15 ft. x 14 ft. | G. 8 ft. x 10 ft. |
| D. 11 ft. 9 in. diameter. | H. 11 ft. x 10 ft. |

The cairn at station 2 is 15 ft. 10 in. x 12 ft. and has been disturbed in the middle. The underlying rock belongs to the Bannisdale Beds of the Silurian formation.

The abundance of cairns in the part of High Furness to the west of the river Crake and Coniston Water, many of them lying between 500 and 1,000 ft. above O.D., was noted by H. Swainson Cowper,² though little has survived from early explorations. Mr C. W. Phillips suggests that in hilly areas small cairns often represent field clearance, as is likely the truth in respect of many of the numerous cairns below the settlement on Heathwaite Fell, near Woodland. The skyline position of the group now recorded seems to me to rule out the field clearance theory and make it likely that these are burial cairns, probably of Bronze Age date.³

Cairns above Torver on Bleaberry Haws⁴ and a ring cairn on Bannside Moor, Coniston,⁵ were proved to belong to the Bronze Age. It is unfortunate that the pottery and flints from certain cairns in the former group have not survived among the rest of Mr Swainson Cowper's collection now in the Lancaster Museum. A

² *Archaeologia* liii 389-426.

³ For recent discussions of cairnfields in Scotland and Wales see PSAScot. xc (1956/7) 7-23; *Archaeologia Cambrensis* ciii (1954) 80 f.

⁴ CW1 ix 497-504.

⁵ CW2 x 342-353.

large cairn on Hawkshead Hall Moor,⁶ excavated by him in 1883, contained a cremation burial accompanied by a flint knife. The knife is now in the Lancaster Museum (registration No. LM. 437B), and I am indebted to Mr G. L. Shearer for allowing me to draw and publish it (Fig. 2). It is of plano-convex type, greyish-white and opaque from contact with fire. Its maximum length is

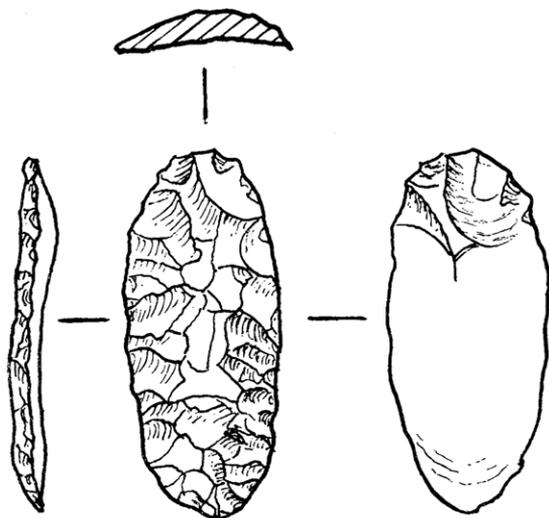


FIG. 2.—Plano-convex knife from cairn in Hawkshead Hall Park
(Scale 1 : 1).

4.8 cms. and maximum width 2.4 cms. The convex surface is covered with fine pressure flaking, the flat side is a primary flake surface. The edges appear to retain a gloss from use. A larger knife of this kind was found by Canon Greenwell in Barrow CLXIV at Castle Carrock, Cumberland,⁷ associated with a cremation. The mound of stones and earth covering it was 8 ft. in diameter. Canon Greenwell noted that the knife had not been

⁶ CWI ix 202, 497-498.

⁷ Greenwell, *British barrows*, 379-380, fig. 153.

touched by fire as was true of all others of the type which he found with cremation burials. Plano-convex knives have been studied by Professor J. G. D. Clark⁸ who showed that they occur most frequently with Food Vessel burials, a few being found with Collared Urns. Some of the latter belong to the recently identified primary series.⁹ Their association with burials emphasises their ritual significance and importance as personal equipment, possibly being razors, to accompany the dead.¹⁰

We know that the central hills of the Lake District were explored in Neolithic times when the stone-axe factories developed a wide export trade towards the end on the 3rd millenium B.C.¹¹ However, there is little evidence of other than seasonal occupation in this upland area until the Bronze Age was fully developed and climate conditions most favourable to life on the higher ground. I hope that Dr W. Tutin's present pollen analytical work on the high tarns of the Lake District will throw light on the forest clearance and agricultural activities of this early settlement.

⁸ *Antiquaries Journal* xii 2 (1932) 158-162.

⁹ *Proc. Prehistoric Soc.* xxvii (1961) 304-305.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* xii (1946) 122-126.

¹¹ *Ibid.* xxxviii (1962) 234.