

ART. I – *Prehistoric Habitation Sites in West Cumbria: Part III, The Drigg and Ravenglass Areas.*

By J. CHERRY, B.SC. AND P. J. CHERRY, B.A.

OUR final reports of the prehistoric habitation of West Cumbria between St. Bees and Drigg have already been published in the *Transactions* of this Society.¹ This paper provides a similar record for the area between Drigg and Ravenglass, and although most of the finds were made along the coastal strip we have also included evidence from further inland, in the parishes of Irton, Muncaster and Waberthwaite. The sand-dune sites at Drigg have already been reported in some detail² and passing reference only will be made to these in order to record significant finds made since 1965, therefore, as far as these sites are concerned this paper should be read in conjunction with the earlier reports.

For the purpose of this report, the expression "chalk flint" will be used to describe flint which does not originate from the beach pebbles or glacial drift of West Cumbria, but has all the appearance of flint removed from its natural chalk matrix. A map of the area covered by the survey is given in Fig. 1.

DRIGG

Site numbers as in the 1965 Report

1. Map reference: 3048 4986 SD/09. Height OD: 15 metres (SITE I 1965)

Since 1965, further erosion has yielded flints which differ from the main microlithic assemblage in that they are only lightly patinated and include several flake-cores with no clearly defined prepared striking platforms. This type of core is typical of the coastal Bronze-Age flint industry and these flints are likely to be associated with the farming episode which occurred in the area round about 2000 b.c., the date of which was determined by carbon dating of charcoal from a hearth exposed in a band of organic material in the sea-cliff about fifty metres west of Site I.³ A flake-core of a similar type was found at the same level as the hearth during an examination of the organic layer by the late Professor T. G. E. Powell in 1967.⁴

2. Map reference: 3053 4984 SD/09. Height OD: 22 metres

On high ground on the seaward edge of a ploughed field to the east of Site II we found a scatter of flints. This scatter, about four hundred metres from the shore, marks the eastern edge of the flint knapping sites.

3. Map reference: 3051 4982 SD/09. Height OD: 19 metres

Between Sites II and III of the 1965 report, in a small area of erosion among the stabilised dunes we found several flakes of flint and a flake of volcanic tuff worked along two edges bordering a point, Fig. 2, 12. The latter has been snapped at its base and the

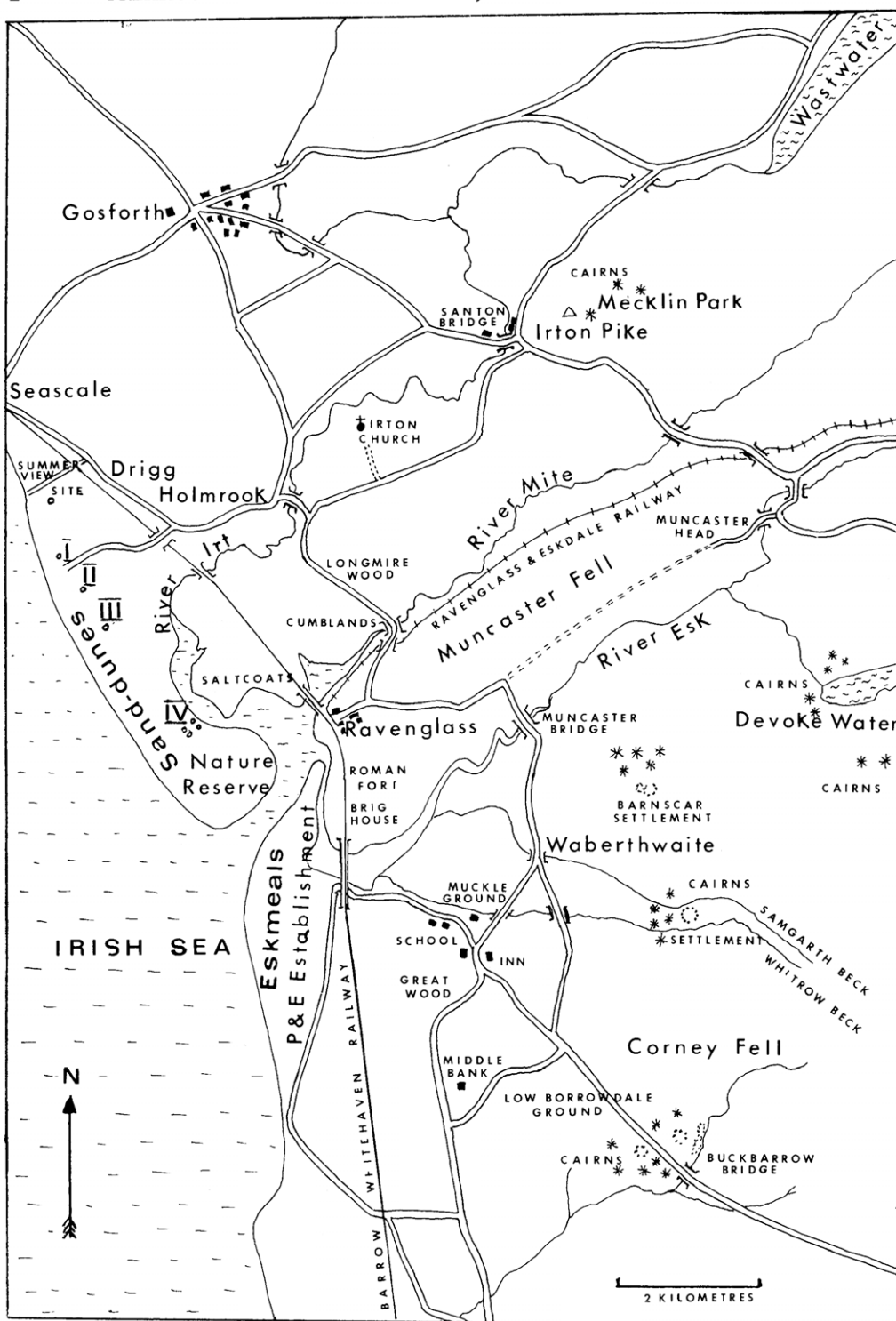


FIG. 1 – A sketch map of the Drigg and Ravenglass area covered in this report.

line of the fracture passes through the flake scars along each edge, so that this artefact must have been part of a larger implement.

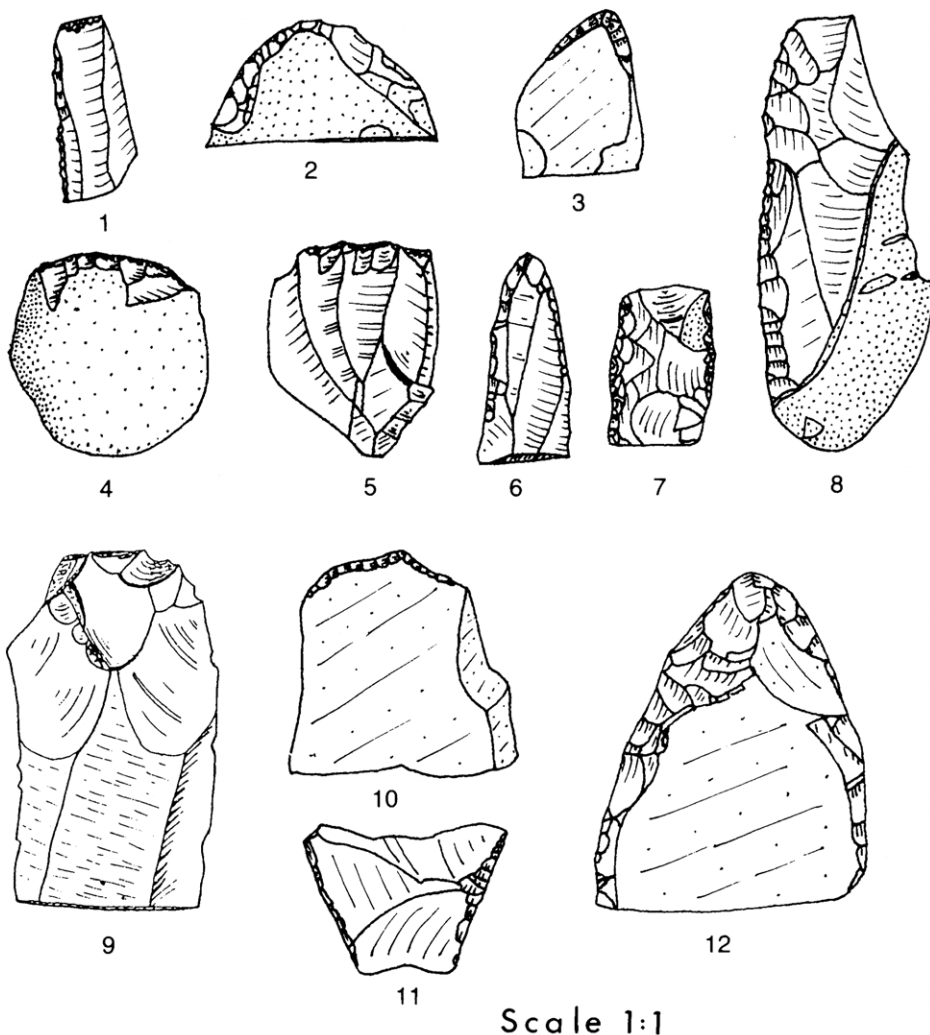


FIG. 2. – A selection of artefacts of flint and volcanic tuff from the Drigg and Ravenglass areas.

4. Map reference: 3052 4980 and 3051 4979 SD/09. Height OD: 18 metres

South of the findspot of the tuff point at the eastern edge of each of two hollows in the dunes we found the remains of small hearths associated with flint artefacts with Bronze-Age characteristics.⁵

5. Map reference: 3066 4967 SD/09. Height OD: 6 metres. (SITE IVC 1965)

In addition to the Romano-British material already reported in these *Transactions*, a small, flat, oval pebble about six centimetres in length, crudely carved in the form of a

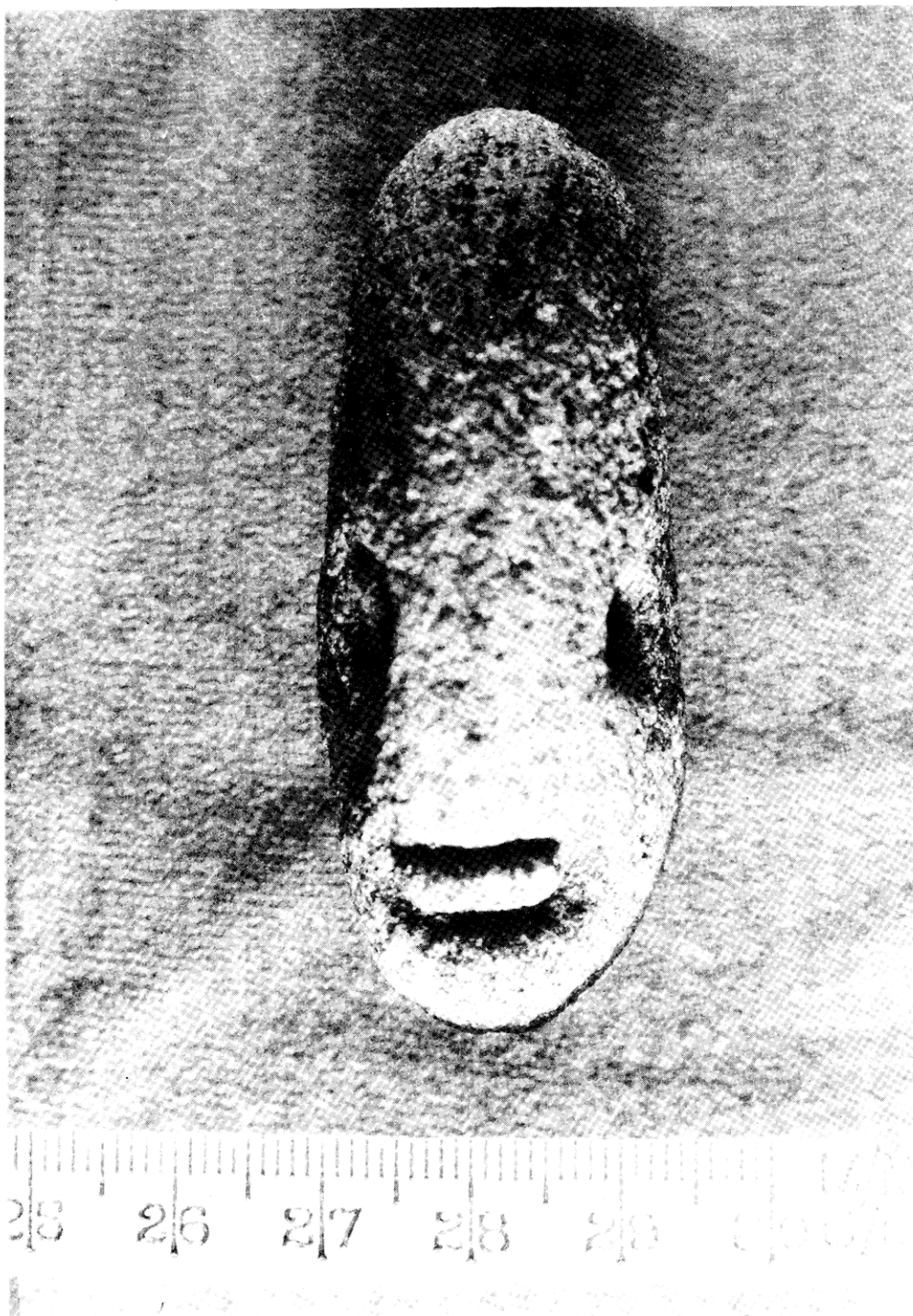


PLATE 1. - Carved "pebble" head from Drigg.

head was found by Mr J. H. Macdonald on a gravel mound at the northern edge of Site IVc, Plate 1.⁶ The mouth is cut into the edge of the pebble, with an eye cut into each side close to the edge. The pebble was considered by Dr Anne Ross to belong to the second century A.D. It is now in Carlisle Museum and Art Gallery.

Among the flint artefacts found in this area on the raised beach gravel was a *petit tranchet* derivative arrowhead made from caramel flint, class B in Professor J. G. D. Clark's classification, Fig.2, 11.⁷

6. Map reference: 3064 4985 SD/09. Height OD: 8 metres

A few flakes of flint and a single platform core were found in a scatter on the 8 metre contour, above the River Irt, south of Drigg Station and close to a ford. The scatter was diffuse and would appear to indicate a possible route for prehistoric peoples to and from the sand-dunes, rather than actual habitation.

7. Map reference: 3060 4994 SD/09. Height OD: 15 metres

A few flakes of caramel flint with no secondary working were found in a confined area of a ploughed field to the north-west of Drigg Station.

SALTCOATS

We searched a number of ploughed fields between the Rivers Irt and Mite in the triangle of land between Hall Carleton, Cumblands and Saltcoats, much of which is below the 8 metre contour. Although we found a few flint artefacts in several of the fields there was only one concentration of significance.

1. Map reference: 3075 4978 SD/09. Height OD: 7 metres

In a field to the east of the railway we picked up sixty-one flint artefacts including three blade cores, four blades (two with retouch), one awl, six scrapers, and eleven retouched or utilised pieces together with two flakes of volcanic tuff, one of which had been retouched to form a point, Fig.2, 3.

2. Map reference: 3070 4980 SD/09. Height OD: 6 metres

In a field immediately to the north of Hall Carleton we picked up a lightly patinated retouched blade, Fig. 2, 6. This field lies to the east of the ford across the Irt, mentioned earlier (Drigg 6).

3. Map reference: 3071 4976 SD/09. Height OD: 5.5 metres

The fields on either side of the road between Hall Carleton and Saltcoats are composed of raised beach material and an extensive search of the fields down to the Irt was unrewarding; only one retouched flake of fire damaged flint was found.

4. Map reference: 3077 4972 SD/09. Height OD: 5.5 metres

To the north of the coast road at Saltcoats Crossing, in a field on the raised beach we picked up a large Bronze-Age type flake core in creamy yellow flint, but although we searched the field thoroughly, nothing else was found. In a hedge bank between the

Crossing and Beach Cottage, just above the high water mark, Mr R. L. Bellhouse found a small scraper made from pebble flint.

5. Map reference: 3076 4981 SD/09. Height OD: 7 metres

In a field adjacent to the road, east of the railway, we found three nondescript flakes of flint, one of which was patinated.

6. Map reference: 3084 4977 SD/09. Height OD: 8 metres

At the bottom of a field belonging to Cumblands Farm just above the River Mite, we found two unpatinated flakes of flint.

7. Map reference: 3087 4984 SD/09. Height OD: 15 metres

In a field, south of Longmire Wood, which had been ploughed but which appeared to have been left fallow for some time and had become overgrown, we picked up a large knife in lightly patinated grey pebble flint, Fig.2, 8, a core and a flake of fire-damaged flint together with a struck flake of volcanic tuff.

IRTON WITH SANTON

1. Map reference: 3091 5005 NY/00. Height OD: 32 metres

In a field behind Irton Church on the high ground overlooking the River Irt, there was a small scatter of lightly patinated flints including a blade, a utilised flake and a flake with secondary retouch.

2. Map reference: 3123 5017 NY/10. Height OD: 195 metres

In 1959, the South West Regional Group of this Society carried out an excavation of a cairn at Mecklin Park, one hundred and forty metres north-east of the summit of Irton Pike, under the direction of Mr W. Fletcher, who was Chairman of the Group, and a report of the excavation is given later in this volume.

In 1936, a cairn at Mecklin Park was excavated by Dr J. E. Spence, and this yielded a small sherd of Beaker pottery.⁸ This cairn lies nearer to Irton Pike, in an area which is now forested.

MUNCASTER

1. Map reference: 3086 4968 SD/09. Height OD: 18 metres

North of Ravenglass, in a field between the A595 road and the Ravenglass to Eskdale Railway, we found two flakes of flint and a bifacially worked point.

2. Map reference: 3114 4963 SD/19. Height OD: 8 metres

A flint blade and four lightly patinated flakes were picked up on the river terrace, south of Muncaster Bridge.

3. Map reference: 3142 4988 SD/19. Height OD: 13 metres

During the excavation of the 17th century bloomery on an old terrace of the River Esk at Muncaster Head in 1967, a fragment of volcanic tuff, a broken scraper and a knife in caramel pebble flint were found below the bloomery occupation level, in one of the excavated squares.⁹ Unfortunately much of the excavated area had been backfilled at the time of the discovery, so that the total spread (if any) of prehistoric material could not be determined.

4. Map reference: 3101 4970 SD/19. Height OD: 110 metres

In a mole-hill in rough pasture we picked up a scraper made from a pebble of yellow flint. The field was subsequently ploughed, but nothing more was found.

RAVENGLASS

1. Map reference: 3087 4958 SD/09. Height OD: 6 metres

During the excavation of the Roman fort by Dr T. W. Potter in 1976, a scraper and two flakes of flint were found.¹⁰ Before 1976 we found two small flint blades in the face of the eroding cliff below the Roman occupation level. In the river washed gravel at the bottom of the cliff we found three flakes of flint and two flakes of volcanic tuff, one of which appears to be retouched along one edge, Fig.2, 10.

2. Map reference: 3087 4955 SD/09. Height OD: 1 metre

About four hundred metres south of the fort site is an area of sand and gravel which is submerged at high tide when the River Esk is in flood. The railway runs close to the river at this point and the embankment is eroding in places. In the gravel area and even in the river mud, we found a total of more than one hundred and sixty flints, including blade cores with well defined striking platforms, blades and utilised and retouched flakes. A large proportion of the assemblage is patinated (53%) and two pieces show evidence of fire-damage, but the flints do not show significant signs of water wear or rolling. The material was found up to a distance of twenty metres from the cliff, suggesting that this had been eroded for at least that distance, since the site, in its original form, must have been situated on higher ground. This hypothesis is confirmed by the erosion of similar magnitude which has occurred at the fort since Roman occupation, resulting in the loss of the remains of the south-western end of the fort.¹¹

3. Map reference: 3088 4954 SD/09. Height OD: 6 metres

To the west of the railway opposite Brig House farm, about one hundred metres south-east of Ravenglass 2, we found a concentration of forty flints and two struck flakes of volcanic tuff in a field overlooking the estuary. The flints were on the eastern side of the field above a point where the field has a marked edge sloping down to the south and west, suggesting the possibility of an eroded shore line. A high proportion (74%) of the artefacts are patinated and seem to belong to a late Mesolithic tradition; included are narrow bladed cores, Fig.2, 5, blades, a scraper and a core rejuvenation flake. There was also one fragment which had been removed from the distal end of a blade by the microburin technique.

4. Map reference: 3089 4954 SD/09. Height OD: 7 metres

To the east of the railway in a field adjoining Brig House farm we found forty six flints and a blade of volcanic tuff. Most of the artefacts were patinated (78%) and were found at the seaward edge of the field suggesting that this scatter represents the eastern limit of Ravenglass 3, and that Sites 3 and 4 were part of a much larger habitation site which has been destroyed by the building of the railway. The assemblage includes seven blade cores, three blades, four bulbar rejects and three flakes which are utilised or retouched.

WABERTHWAITE

1. Map reference: 3114 4943 SD/19. Height OD: 70 metres

In the field within the angle formed by the A595 road and the minor road to Broughton via Corney Fell at Broad Oak, we picked up three lightly patinated flakes of flint at the south side of the field.

2. Map reference: 3104 4929 SD/19. Height OD: 45 metres

In a ploughed field to the south-west of the Brown Cow Inn, above Great Wood, we found a small concentration of thirteen lightly patinated flints on the edge of high ground which slopes steeply away to the south. The assemblage includes three cores, a scraper, Fig. 2, 4, a knife, a broken fabricator, Fig. 2, 7, and two fire-damaged flakes. In addition there are three fragments of chert and a flake of volcanic tuff. The fabricator is of mottled brown colour, and seems to be chalk flint rather than beach pebble.

3. Map reference: 3102 4928 SD/19. Height OD: 51 metres

To the west of Great Wood in the field adjoining the A595 road we picked up a small blade with secondary retouch, Fig. 2, 1, and two waste flakes; all three are only lightly patinated.

4. Map reference: 3134 4939 SD/19. Height OD: 210 metres

In 1952, an excavation was carried out by Mr G. Wolstenholme of Greengarth Hostel, Holmrook, on a cairn just to the west of the Romano-British type farmstead which lies on Stainton Fell between Whitrow Beck and Samgarth Beck. Two flakes of opaque yellow flint were found on the old ground surface beneath the cairn. The larger of these exhibits an orange pebble cortex, while only the smaller shows signs of retouch. Both seem to be crudely struck, and we suspect that they are of late date, and may even be contemporary with the farmstead. In addition to the flints there were also a few pieces of charcoal and a small amount of greenish-blue residue. This was analysed by J. Cherry, and no trace of copper, tin or zinc was found. The residue was mainly composed of calcium, aluminium and silicon salts, together with a small amount of organic matter; the last could account for the colouration.

5. Map reference: 3110 4920 SD/19. Height OD: 120 metres

In the field to the north of the earthwork which lies on the high ground above Middle Bank farm at 3111 4918, we picked up fifty seven flints, most of which originate from pebble flint and are only lightly patinated, together with a number of artefacts of chert and volcanic tuff. The flint assemblage includes a leaf arrowhead,¹² a scraper, Fig. 2, 2, which seems to be made from chalk flint, two retouched and two utilised pieces together with three single platform blade cores. The chert artefacts include a large blade found at the bottom of the field within the earthwork. Among the artefacts of volcanic tuff is a large blade, Fig. 2, 9, which has a curved polished surface.

Mr R. V. Davis writes of this:

Fig. 2, 9: A piece of fine-grained tuff of typical Group VI appearance with superficial brown discolouration and small patches of iron minerals, some of which have dissolved out, leaving small cavities. There are also small veinlets of more compact green material, probably formed from the same material as the groundmass but with increased silica and epidote content.

Grinding marks occur on only one faceted surface and are discontinuous over the adjacent flaked edges, which indicates that the flake was detached from a larger tool (axe?) which already exhibited flake scratches, possibly due to use, and in which the original rough-out flake scars had not been ground smooth. The flake displays characteristic retouch.

A polished stone axe and a flint scraper have been reported at Low Borrowdale Ground farm, from a field which lies less than seven hundred metres to the south-east of Waberthwaite 5, and a stone axe was recently recorded from Whitestones farm, which lies two kilometres to the north of Low Borrowdale Ground.¹³ The tuff blade, Fig. 2, 9, is the only evidence for the possible reworking of polished stone axes that we have noted so far in West Cumbria, although we have found several sites in the limestone uplands between Shap and Kirkby Stephen, where flakes from polished stone axes occur, and it is significant that there too the axe flakes are usually associated with flint artefacts which include small leaf arrowheads.

All the artefacts found during our survey in West Cumbria will be deposited in Carlisle Museum and Art Gallery.

Acknowledgements

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