

# THE PREHISTORIC CAIRNFIELD AT HIGHLOW BANK, HIGHLOW, DERBYSHIRE:

A SURVEY OF ALL REMAINS AND EXCAVATION OF ONE OF THE CAIRNS, 1988

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with a palynological report by

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## SUMMARY

In response to recent damage to the extensive cairnfield at Highlow Bank, a detailed recording was made of all features as an aid to future management, and one cairn which had been partially demolished was totally excavated. The survey identified between 46 and 84 ancient structures, mostly comprising small cairns, but including larger barrows and linear clearance. There was also a large number of later features, in the form of hollow ways, marker stones, quarries, a leat and drains. The excavation, of Cairn 63, revealed a simple heap of stones with no identifiable deposits underneath. The cairn was associated with a probable later lynchet and with a possible earlier fence line. Palynological analysis revealed a complex land-use sequence. Attached to one side of Cairn 63 was a small, carefully built, sub-rectangular platform, of a design similar to others found occasionally in the Peak District and shown to cover bronze age funerary deposits. However, the only find at the Highlow Bank example was a burnt flint flake. It is argued below that the excavated structures, and those in the cairnfield as a whole, functioned in both ceremonial and agricultural contexts.

## INTRODUCTION

### **Location, topography and vegetation** (Figs 1, 2)

The prehistoric cairnfield on Highlow Bank comprises many small cairns, three larger barrows and several probable linear boundaries. The sites are centred at SK 213802 and cover c.0.1 square kilometre. They lie within post-medieval enclosure, on partially improved land at the eastern end of Highlow Moor. This enclosure occupies a broad, gently shelving spur, lying at 305-325 metres O.D., that is defined on three sides by steep slopes to valleys below, with plantations to north and south. To the west is a drystone wall with open moorland beyond. The cairnfield covers much of the flat land of the spur. In the western areas, which are poorly drained in parts, coarse grasses and bracken predominate. Further east, as altitude decreases slightly, the quality of pasture improves and the eastern half of the spur has grasses consistent with the majority of enclosures on the gritstone upland which are regularly used for livestock. Eighteenth- or nineteenth-century drains were identified during the survey in this area, and further improvements to the pasture were made in the 1940s and/or 1950s, when the more favourable areas of Highlow Bank were ploughed, re-seeded and dressed with fertilisers (T. C. Wain, *pers. comm.*). No cairns have been identified on the heather-covered moorland immediately to the west of the area surveyed. The open moor is largely boulder strewn here, which presumably inhibited early agricultural activity in this direction. Thus the present area of the cairnfield must be substantially co-terminous with its original extent, given that the moorland is unlikely to have suffered wholesale removal of stone structures, and the boundary slopes in other directions are prohibitively steep.

The Highlow Bank cairnfield is one of several in the vicinity (Barnatt, 1986; 1989a; 1989b; 1990), all of which occupy the more favourable portions of this high moorland plateau, each

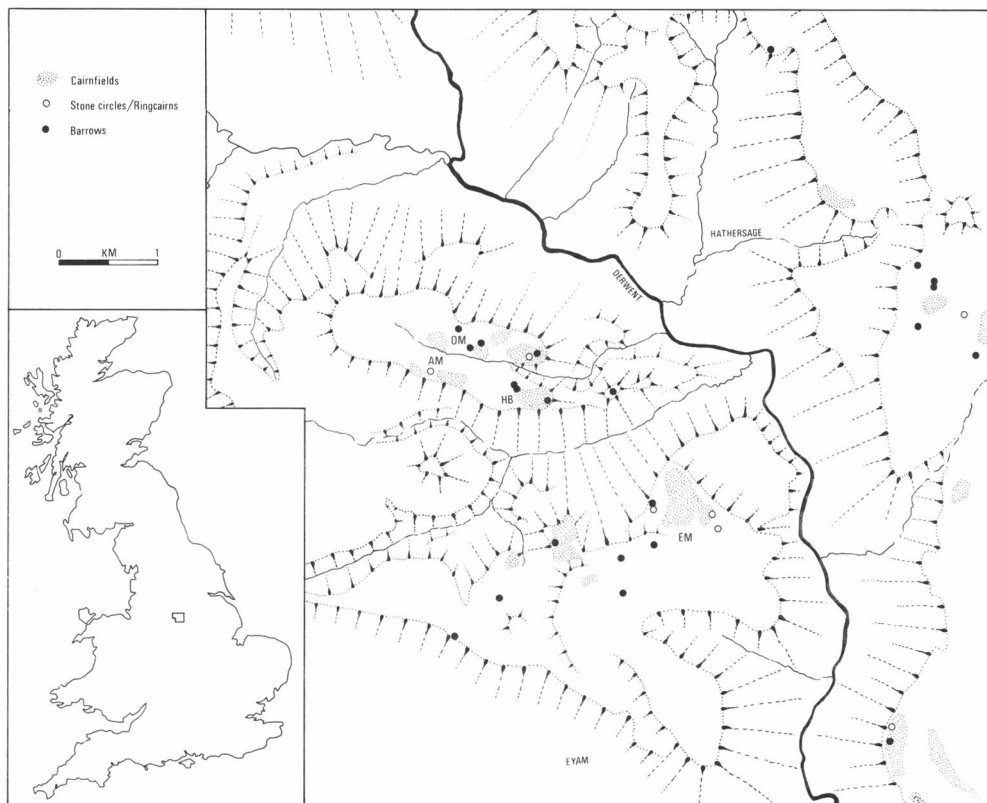


Fig. 1 Highlow Bank survey and excavation: location of Highlow Bank, and of other cairnfields in its vicinity (HB: Highlow Bank, AM: Abney Moor, OM: Offerton Moor, EM: Eyam Moor).

separated by narrow areas of unsuitable land. A short distance north of Highlow Bank, those on Offerton Moor are each of comparable extent and include a robbed embanked stone circle, and four large barrows. To the west, on Abney Moor, is a further cairnfield, again with an embanked stone circle. South of Highlow Brook, the cairnfields on Eyam Moor and on shelves further west are more extensive, but otherwise are of similar character. East of the Derwent cairnfields frequently occur. However, unlike the sites noted above, those occupying more favourable locations often display well developed field boundaries (Hart, 1981; Beswick and Merrills, 1983; Barnatt, 1986; 1987).

#### Previous description and excavation (Fig. 3)

The prehistoric remains on Highlow Bank have been known for some time, but have remained largely unpublished. The earliest known documentation is by Hayman Rooke. In his late-eighteenth century notebooks (Rooke, n.d.), he recorded that at “the east end of Highlow Moor” was a large robbed barrow, together with five small barrows further east. His description of the large barrow, as having been robbed at the centre and to one side, suggests this may be identified as Cairn 1 (see below). Around 1840 the Ordnance Survey also recorded five barrows on the first edition of its one-inch map, one to the west (Cairn 1), and four at the eastern end of the spur (Cairn 70 and three others nearby — perhaps 65-67). The demolition of a further cairn, a short distance to the east of Highlow Bank on the hill behind Highlow Hall (SK 221802), was recorded in the

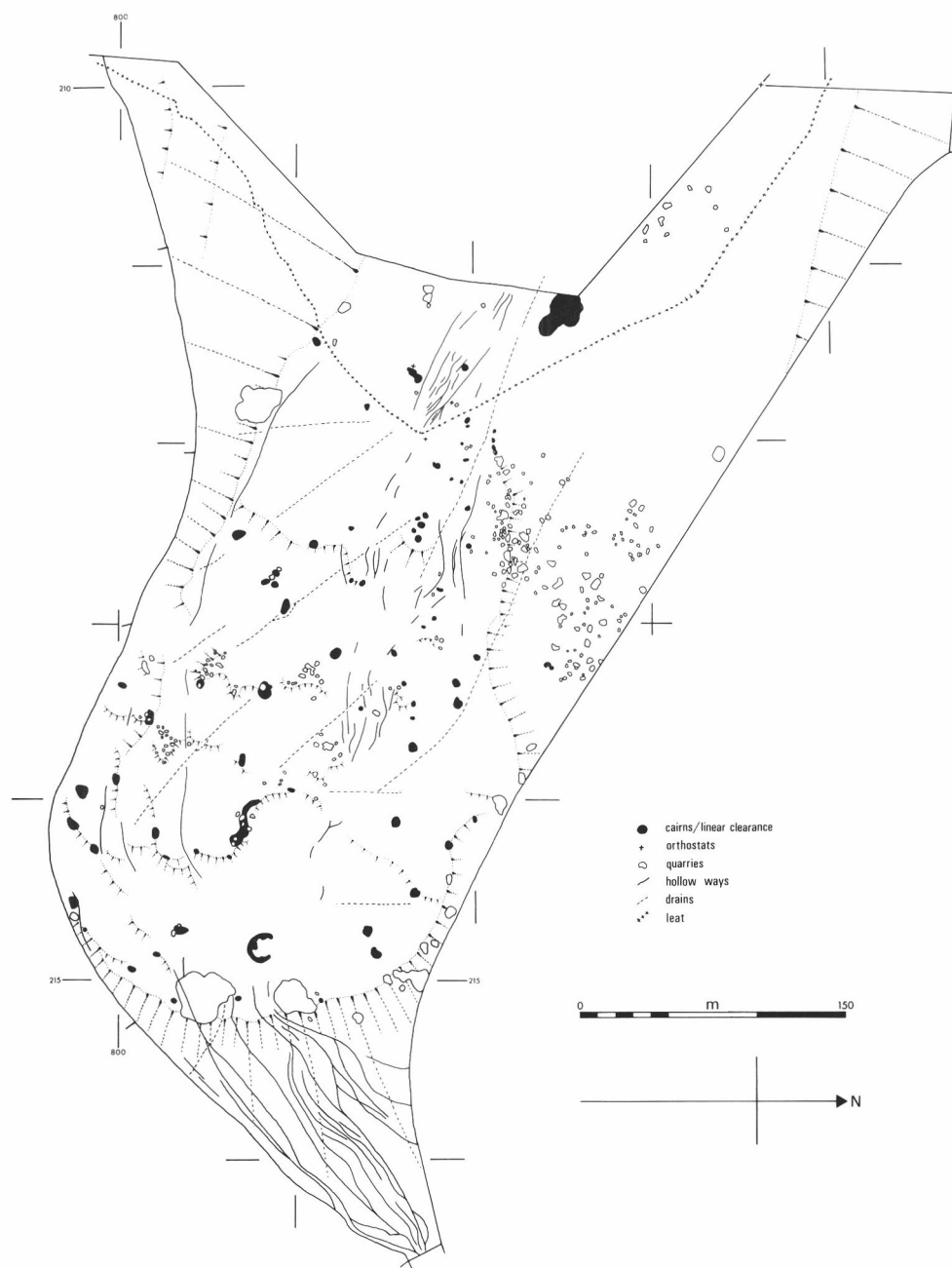


Fig. 2 Highlow Bank survey: all archaeological features.

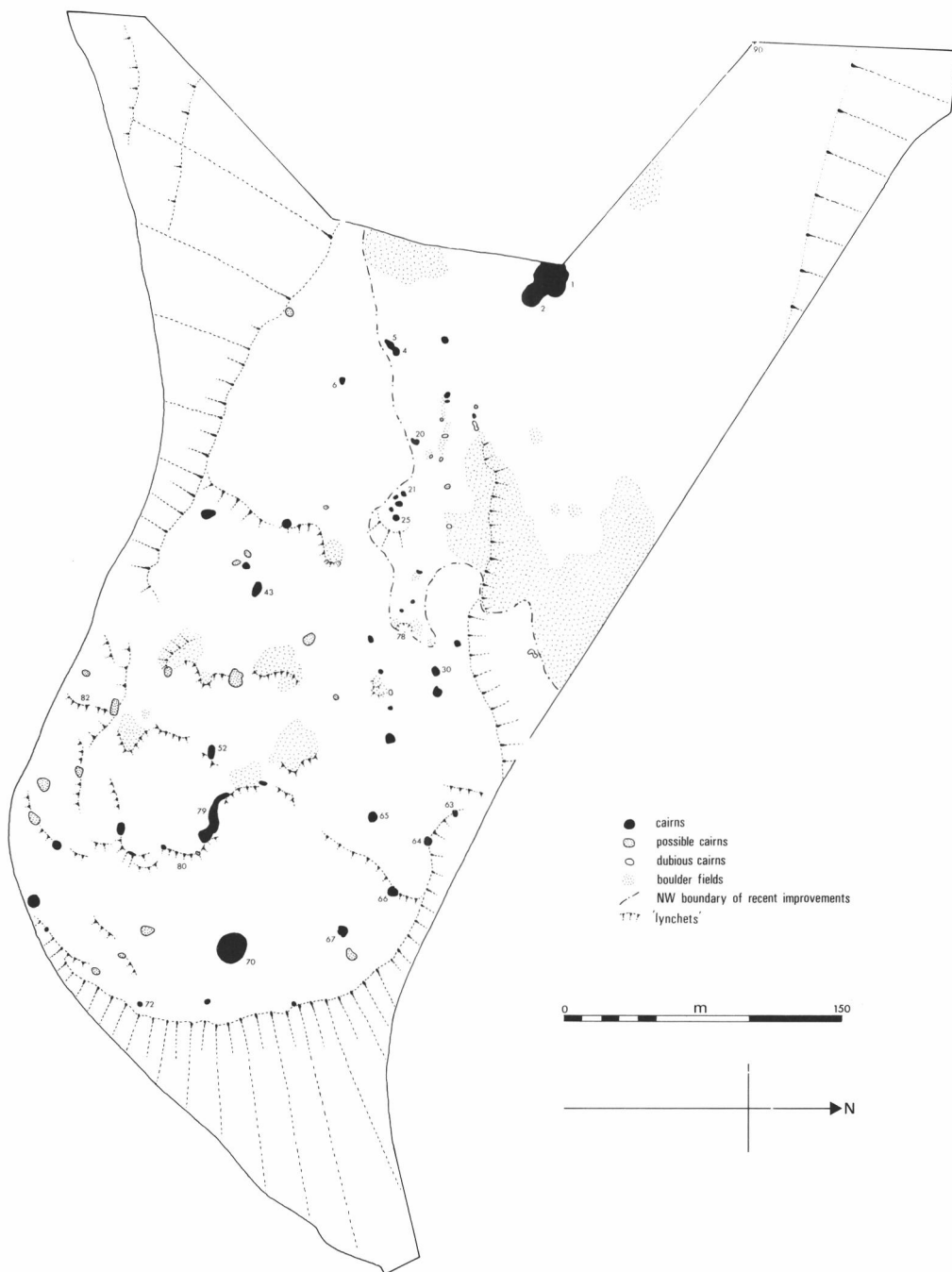


Fig. 3 Highlow Bank survey: cairnfield.



mid- nineteenth century. It was noted that around 1863, burnt bones, sherds and two decorated bronze flat axes were recovered by the workmen (Jewitt, 1864; Pennington, 1877: 5).

Early excavations of the cairns within the survey area are so vaguely documented that it is impossible to ascribe the details set out in particular accounts to specific mounds (Barnatt, 1989a: sites 30:5-7, 22, 29). Samuel Mitchell recorded that he opened "some barrows at Highlow without success" early in the nineteenth century: "I discovered too late that Major Rooke and Pegge had been before me" (Mitchell, 1842; Bateman, 1848: 26). The only surviving contemporary account which may throw light on the earlier excavations is by Rooke, who noted that on Offerton, Abney and Highlow Moors, in "those lesser tumuli or lows scattered over this tract human bones have often been discovered . . . In some of the largest have been found urns, sometimes singly, and sometimes four in a row. Besides the urns, beads and rings have been found which show that they were British" (Rooke, 1785: 177; Bateman, 1848: 26). Pegge notes that rings and beads were found by Oxley in a barrow on Leam Moor, which may suggest that the latter part of Rooke's account just cited does not apply to Highlow (Pegge, 1785: 138). Another early excavation took place in 1831, when stone diggers opened "a place of ancient sepulture" at Highlow, finding "urns, artificial gems and other toys" (Anon., 1831).

The extensive nature of the remains on Highlow Bank appear to have first been fully recognised (but not surveyed) by Leslie Butcher in the 1950s (Butcher, 1963). The site was also noted by Marsden in his review of Sites and Monuments Record data (Marsden, 1977: Highlow 2-5). In 1981 the majority of the more obvious cairns were planned at 1:1000 by Roddie Perrett for the Hunter Archaeological Society (Perrett, 1981). Further features were recognised and sketch-planned in 1982 (Barnatt, 1986: cairnfield 44).

### **Recent damage, and the response**

Late in 1987, Roddie Perrett reported that several features of the Highlow Bank cairnfield were being unwittingly damaged: forestry workers were crossing the cairnfield with heavy plant to fell and remove timber from Dunge Wood, a plantation on the steep bank immediately to the north. As three of the cairns were scheduled monuments, the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (HBMCE) commissioned a detailed survey of the cairnfield as a whole, in order to monitor the site during further felling operations. Total excavation was undertaken for the Peak Park Joint Planning Board at the most severely damaged cairn, which was subsequently restored. Other damaged cairns were reconstituted. Further damage to the monuments was avoided by marking safe routes across the site.

The survey and excavation record has been placed in the Archaeological Archive at the Peak Park Joint Planning Board office, Bakewell, and copies of the survey are also held by HBMCE. The small finds and soil samples have been deposited in Buxton Museum. The original survey and excavation context numbers are retained throughout the archive and in this report.

## **THE SURVEY**

### **Introduction**

A detailed survey at 1:100 of all extant archaeological remains on Highlow Bank was undertaken in March 1988. This identified a wide variety of sites in a complex palimpsest, with over 500 individual features being planned (Fig. 2).

### **The cairnfield and ceremonial monuments**

Of the 46-84 features which are likely to be ancient, 43-74 are small cairns, whose mean diameters range between 1.8 and 7.2 metres, the majority being between 2.5 and 6.0 metres. They are usually under 0.5 metre high. However, in some cases an illusion of greater downslope height is created by siting on moderate slopes. The majority are sub-circular or oval in plan, and none has any visible formal characteristics such as kerbs or cists (but see Cairn 63 below). Only c.35% of sites display any visible signs of disturbance, and this is often only minor and probably

represents stone robbing that took place either when parts of Highlow Bank were quarried, or later, when enclosure walls were built.

A representative selection of small cairns is illustrated in Fig. 4. Typical examples are sub-circular with varying amounts of visible stone (Sites 21-25, 30, 65, 66); probing demonstrated that they are all predominantly of a stony make-up. Site 72, together with two others also adjacent to the spur's eastern edge, stand out as having relatively little peat/soil cover. This lack of cover is probably simply explained as the result of erosion due to their exposed siting. There is a trend for cairns to be distinctly oval (e.g. Sites 6, 43), and this reaches extreme form at Site 52, a structure which may be better described as linear clearance rather than a cairn (cf. Barnatt, 1986; 1987). At other cairns (e.g. Sites 4, 5, 20, 67), the cairn plan and/or profile is complex, and this may be explained as a result of multiphasing rather than of later disturbance. Sites 21-25 atypically create a tight cluster of five mounds at the crest of a low knoll.

The Highlow Bank cairnfield contains an unusually high number of sites that cannot be interpreted with certainty as small cairns. While 43 cairns can be identified with confidence, there are a further 31 features of less definite character. Eight of these are of very dubious interpretation as cairns, being likely natural features, but have been recorded so that further investigation can take place should they face destruction. The other 23 are more equivocal. As with most other Peak District cairnfields, there is a number of particularly small mounds which may be fortuitous. However, at Highlow Bank the situation is further complicated by the micro-topography of the area, which contains a series of low, 'lynchet-like' scarps and natural knolls formed by outcropping sandstone beds. In several instances, particularly to the south-east, it is impossible in the absence of excavation to determine with confidence the extent to which these natural features have been enhanced by clearance or the superimposition of cairns. Preliminary surveys of Highlow Bank have planned significantly fewer cairns than those presented here (Perrett, 1981: 19 sites; Barnatt, 1986: 31-33 sites). This is partly explained by initial exclusion of the 'knoll-like' features, and partly but also by the overlooking of several cairns on the cairnfield periphery which are obscured by luxuriant bracken in summer.

Three larger barrows were identified on Highlow Bank, located at the two ends of the cairnfield. To the west-north-west is a prominent cairn, currently 19.3 x 19.7 metres in diameter and c.1.7 metres high (Site 1: Figs 3, 4). The site is severely mutilated, having had much of its interior and western side removed. The western edge is truncated by a drystone wall; elsewhere the edges have spread by up to 1.5 metres. Originally it would have measured c. 20.0 x 16.5 metres in diameter, and been in excess of 2.0 metres high. Attached to the south-eastern side of this mound is a second, lower barrow (Site 2). This measures 11.8 x 9.2 metres in diameter, and is c. 0.6 metre high, and also has a robbed centre. The most likely interpretation of these two sites is as abutting round barrows. However, an alternative explanation — as a long cairn with a large round cairn superimposed on the north-western end — cannot be fully discounted. Several sites are known in the Peak District which are morphologically similar (Barnatt *et al.*, 1980; Hart, 1986; Barnatt, 1989a). However, all certain examples are found on the central limestone plateau: such an interpretation of the Highlow Bank example is rendered less plausible by the general paucity of earlier neolithic sites and artefacts on the gritstone moors.

At the opposite end of the cairnfield from Sites 1 and 2 is a third large barrow (Site 70: Figs 3, 4). This is even more severely robbed: only its rim survives, c.18.0 x 16.0 metres in diameter, and c.0.7 metre high on the downslope side. Unlike the other two barrows noted above, Site 70 has had its interior fully removed, which has led to its previous interpretation as a ringcairn (Marsden, 1977; Perrett, 1981). This interpretation seems highly unlikely given the contrast between the regular outer edge of the rim and the inner edge, which is irregular and appears to be the result of robbing.

A large undated orthostat lies on the parish boundary, 155 metres to the north-west of Sites 1 and 2 (Site 90: Fig. 3). This upright slab, set at the junction of later drystone walls, stands 1.2 metres high. It is marked on both faces with simple crosses, one of which appears from the

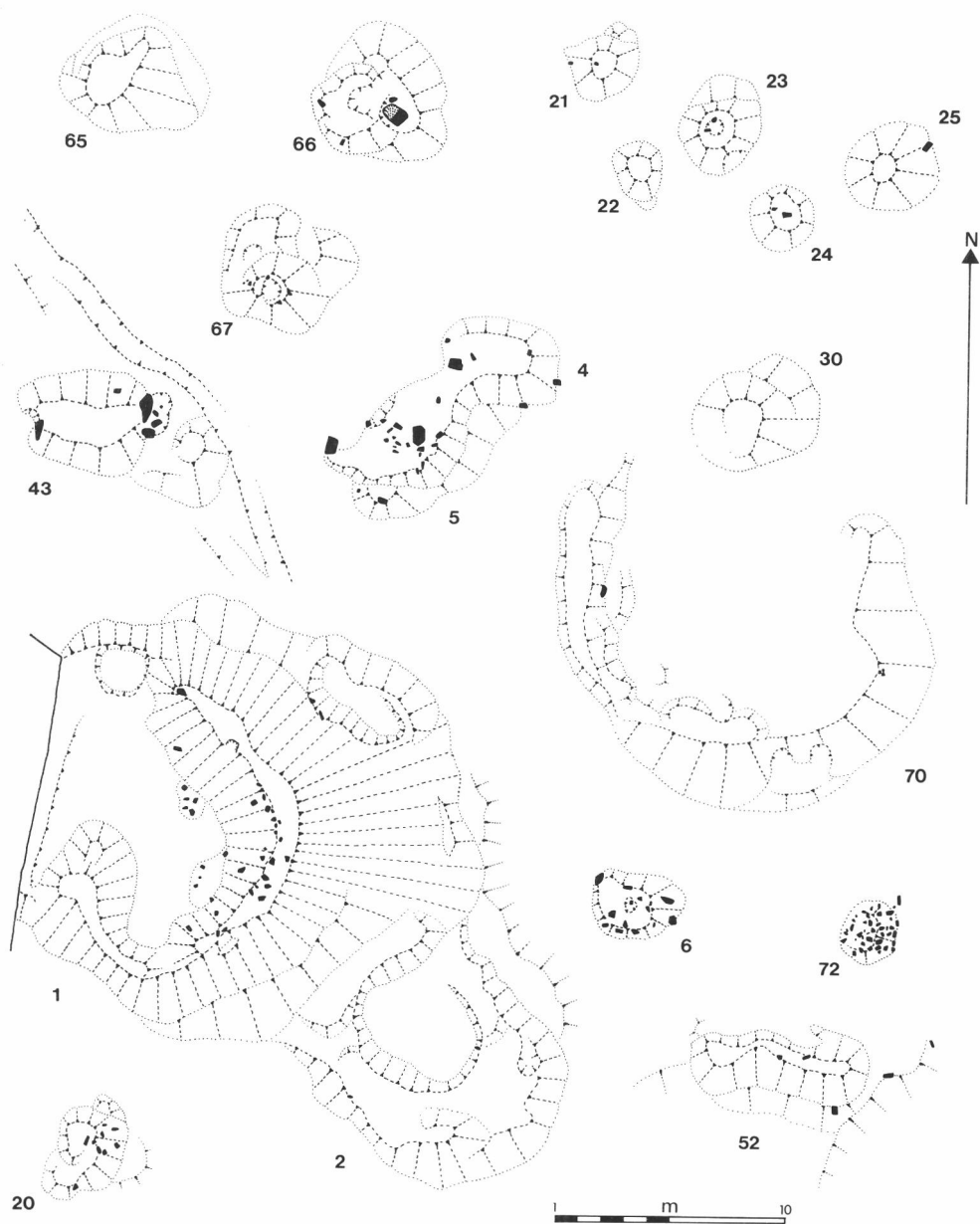


Fig. 4 Highlow Bank survey: selection of cairns.

amount of erosion to be of some age. The stone may have been set up in the medieval/early post-medieval period to mark the boundary between Highlow and Abney. Alternatively, the crosses may have been carved into a prehistoric orthostat, which served as a point of reference when the exact position of the boundary was determined.

Several linear features suggestive of early cultivation exist on Highlow Bank. The most certain of these is Site 79 (Fig. 3), which comprises a stone bank on the crest of a natural 'lynchet'. The bank is 33 metres long, has an irregular width of between 3.0 and 5.0 metres, and is up to 0.6 metre high. Nearby is the much shorter linear feature (Site 52) commented on above. Both these structures are likely to have been built as clearance heaps, the builders piling surface stones at the nearest convenient places along field boundaries. In the central and eastern portions of Highlow Bank there is a series of 'lynchets' (Fig. 3), the majority of which may well have natural origins, being the product of outcropping beds of relatively hard sandstone. However, some are particularly pronounced, and have every appearance of being artificially enhanced. The results of the excavation at Cairn 63 give support to this hypothesis (see below). In the area to the south of Site 79 the 'lynchets' are numerous and their divergent orientations is a strong indication that not all can be explained as natural features. This is particularly true of Lynchet 82, which has a regular profile and is up to c.1.0 metre high. Lynchet 80 is also worthy of note: while it may follow a rock outcrop, it again has a regular profile, stands up to c.3.0 metres high and extends from Site 79 (noted above).

The only identifiable feature which may mark the site of a building comprises a short, low lynchet (Site 78: Fig. 3), defining one side of a flat, sub-circular area measuring c.7.0 metres across. Similar, but more convincing, features have recently been identified at several East Moor cairnfields and these are morphologically comparable to more thoroughly investigated Bronze Age, Iron Age and Romano-British house platforms in the northern Pennines and southern Scotland (P. Everson and S. Ainsworth, *pers. comm.*). However, the Peak District examples have yet to be tested by excavation; and Site 78 on Highlow Bank is open to alternative, and perhaps more likely, interpretation as either a natural feature or the edge of modern ploughing.

### Medieval and post-medieval features

Many other minor archaeological features were identified during the survey, all of which are likely to belong to the medieval or post-medieval periods, although none can be closely dated with certainty. Highlow Bank was probably enclosed in the eighteenth or early-nineteenth centuries: the western drystone wall which separates the survey area from Highlow Moor is shown on the first edition one-inch Ordnance Survey map of c.1840, as are the plantations to north and south. The western wall provides the earliest available *terminus ante quem* for the remains here; several features can be shown to pre-date its construction. Conspicuous amongst these is the extensive series of hollow ways which rise up the steep slopes to the east and follow the spur crest to the western wall, which runs unbroken across them (Fig. 2). The width of this braided packhorse route tells of its former importance. To the west, on its line, are one or two low orthostats, erected as route-markers. Further hollow ways, running parallel to the main system along the southern edge of the spur, may represent a later migration of the route as one of these was still in use c.1840. This ran to a point near the south-western corner of Highlow Bank and formed the main through-route between Highlow and Abney before the present road on the valley-side below was developed.

A further feature which may pre-date the western wall by a short period is a water-leat. This follows the contour from Siney Sitch to the north-west, then drops down the southern slope to Oaks Farm just beyond the survey area to the south-west (Fig. 2). At its change of angle, the leat is crossed by a clapper bridge, comprising a single broad slab. That this bridge lies on the line of the main packhorse route indicates that the leat must have been in existence before the construction of the wall, since the track fell out of use after the wall was built. However, the fact that the leat itself cuts many of the hollow ways, and there is no indication of a consequent funnelling of extensive traffic to the bridge, suggests that the route may already have been in decline.

Three boundary stones were found, each incised with simple crosses. One of these, the large orthostatic slab mentioned above (Site 90), lies on the current parish boundary. The other two lie slightly further east, indicating a slight adjustment of the boundary when the western wall was built.

Many of the sandstone outcrops on Highlow Bank are covered with extensive but shallow stone pits, where surface stone has been removed. Three larger quarries are also to be found. Much of this quarrying is undatable, but it must have begun prior to enclosure as the northern wall overlies several pits. Other, somewhat larger, pits are spaced at regular intervals along this wall and are probably associated with its construction. Much of the stone taken from the pits was probably used for building-stone, as the bedrock is often thinly bedded and unsuitable for large dressed items such as troughs and gateposts; no such items were found.

There are several indicators of attempts to improve the quality of pasture on Highlow Bank in recent times. The earliest of these, excluding the cairnfield remains, is a series of drains (Fig. 2). Several of these run parallel to each other across the south- and east-facing portions of the spur-top, and were probably laid at the same time. Though others display different orientations, this does not preclude the possibility that they are contemporary with the rest, as their siting is largely determined by the lie of the land. The western wall was found to overlie one of these drains, which could be traced onto the moor for several metres. This relationship indicates that improvement started before enclosure, but there is nothing to suggest a wide disparity in dates, and it may be that enclosure resulted directly from the success of the drainage operations. In the central area of the shelf there are several indications of ploughing that ran parallel to the drains. However, given the survival of so many earlier features, not destroyed by such modern activity, this is likely to represent an early (in a modern context) and short-lived phenomenon, perhaps only a single ploughing and re-seeding (see below). It is known that extensive areas of Highlow Bank were ploughed and re-seeded during the 1939-45 war (to the east) and in subsequent years (to the south-west). This activity involved a single ploughing (T. C. Wain, *pers. comm.*). However, the visible indicators of ploughing under discussion here are unlikely to date from this improvement episode, as no drainage was undertaken at this time (T. C. Wain, *pers. comm.*), and it is unlikely that an exact congruence in orientation would be achieved by chance. Thus, it seems likely that ploughing also took place in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries.

Differences in vegetation and smoother surface profiles generally enabled identification of areas of post-medieval ploughing on Highlow Bank to be identified with some precision. Within these areas, as indicated on Fig. 3, the rocky outcrops were left unploughed.

During the survey, the extent and degree of disturbance which the cairnfield had sustained during forestry operations in 1987 was plotted. This was largely confined to the north-eastern quadrant, where Cairn 63 had been partially demolished and Cairns 64-66 and 70 had suffered more minor damage. This took the form of turf removal and compaction of underlying structures caused by heavy machinery running either across them (70), or round their edges (64-66). In the general vicinity of these cairns, wide areas of turf and the underlying peat had also been badly damaged. A search failed to identify any artefacts (which, as excavation at Cairn 63 suggests, if present are likely to remain undisturbed at lower levels). The damaged areas of Cairns 64, 66 and 70 were filled with soil and re-turfed. At the time of fieldwork, Cairn 65 lay beneath a large pile of logs, which hindered accurate survey and made restoration impossible. Its edges were damaged and the turf broken in places, but the underlying cairn appeared to be substantially intact.

## THE EXCAVATION

### The site

Cairn 63 lies close to the northern drystone wall at SK 2141180200, at c.314 metres O.D., near the western end of a north-east facing break of slope. Prior to 1987, it was planned as a grass-covered mound, c.4.0 x 2.0 metres in diameter and c.0.25 metre high (Perrett, 1981). Late in 1987, forestry workers bulldozed its top, which was spread downslope, immediately to the north. At commencement of excavation there was at the centre of the cairn a flat area, 2.2 x 1.6 metres in plan, of exposed rubble and peat (Context 5). Elsewhere the turf was disturbed, either broken

or compacted by the driving of heavy machinery over much of the site. The only perceptible rise in height was from the east.

Upon excavation in Spring 1988 the cairn proved to be a two-part structure, comprising a main cairn (7) and a sub-rectangular platform (15) attached to its eastern side (Figs 5, 6). The cairn had been built on the crest and upper parts of a slight break of slope which ran across the trench from north-west to south-east. The platform was on the downslope side. Both cairn and platform were overlain by peat, which beyond the cairn was found to be between 0.25 and 0.15 metre thick (including churned basal disturbance layers — see below). At the cairn edges, and everywhere beyond, both the peat and upper layers of the buried soil beneath it had been disturbed by ploughing in the 1939-45 war. Frequent surviving roots indicated that the mound and its environs had been covered by bracken prior to this date.

### The cairn

The main cairn proved to be of simple construction, comprising a stone cairn, two to three stones high (before damage, three to five stones at its centre), with a well defined edge but with no formal definition (i.e. in the sense of a kerb of any description). In plan it measured c. 2.4 x 2.6 metres, and was c.0.2 metre high. The amount of material displaced from the centre in 1987 indicates that originally the cairn centre was about 0.4 metre high. The lower layers of the cairn were largely undisturbed by the 1987 activity, except for the cracking of stones near the surface. The stones of the cairn were somewhat worn, but angular, sandstones, a state consistent with their having been acquired from surface collection or from within topsoil during cultivation. The majority were relatively small, with an average size of c.0.25 x 0.15 x 0.10 metres, and were placed at all angles, although there was a tendency for near-horizontal stones to predominate. Three substantially larger slabs were found *in situ* at the base of the cairn, including one at the approximate centre. However, none of these covered any convincing feature and no deposits were found beneath them. The only possible feature was a shallow scoop under the western half of the north-western stone. However, this is most plausibly interpreted as the product of root disturbance at the iron pan level; its fill was identical to the buried soil elsewhere in its vicinity. Four further large sandstones, which must have been high in the cairn profile, were removed in 1987. One of these measured 0.97 x 0.50 x 0.45 metres, and would have taken at least three people to lift it (unless it was levered into position once the cairn had stabilised).

The interstices between the stones of the cairn were filled with peat which was consistent with gradual accumulation after construction. At the base of the cairn the lowest stones had in places been compressed into the soft buried soils beneath by up to 0.05 metre.

The edge of the cairn to the south (16) and north-west (20) had been robbed, leaving only a scatter of smaller stones, except to the south, where some basal stones also remained. This robbing was possibly carried out when the drystone wall nearby was built; the discarded small stones suggest that only larger stones suitable for wall building were removed. Neither of these disturbances penetrated the buried soils beneath the cairn.

### The platform

The platform was sub-rectangular in shape, measuring 1.50 x 1.05 metres, carefully constructed and defined on three sides by a low drystone wall of small slabs. This wall was two courses high, with the slabs slanting downwards into the interior, and was c.0.15 metre high at its outer edge. It had been disturbed by the 1939-45 ploughing on its eastern side, where some slabs had been knocked out of alignment and others completely displaced and moved to a point nearby to the south. The western side, which abutted the main cairn in its southern half, comprised three vertically-set slabs, at least one of which had been put in place after the platform interior had been laid. The one slab which abutted the main cairn leaned against stones of the latter, suggesting that the platform was built subsequent to the cairn. There is space for at least one other vertical slab on the western side, but such a stone was not recognisable due to collapse of the main cairn at this point. The interior of the platform consisted of a single layer of roughly horizontal slabs,



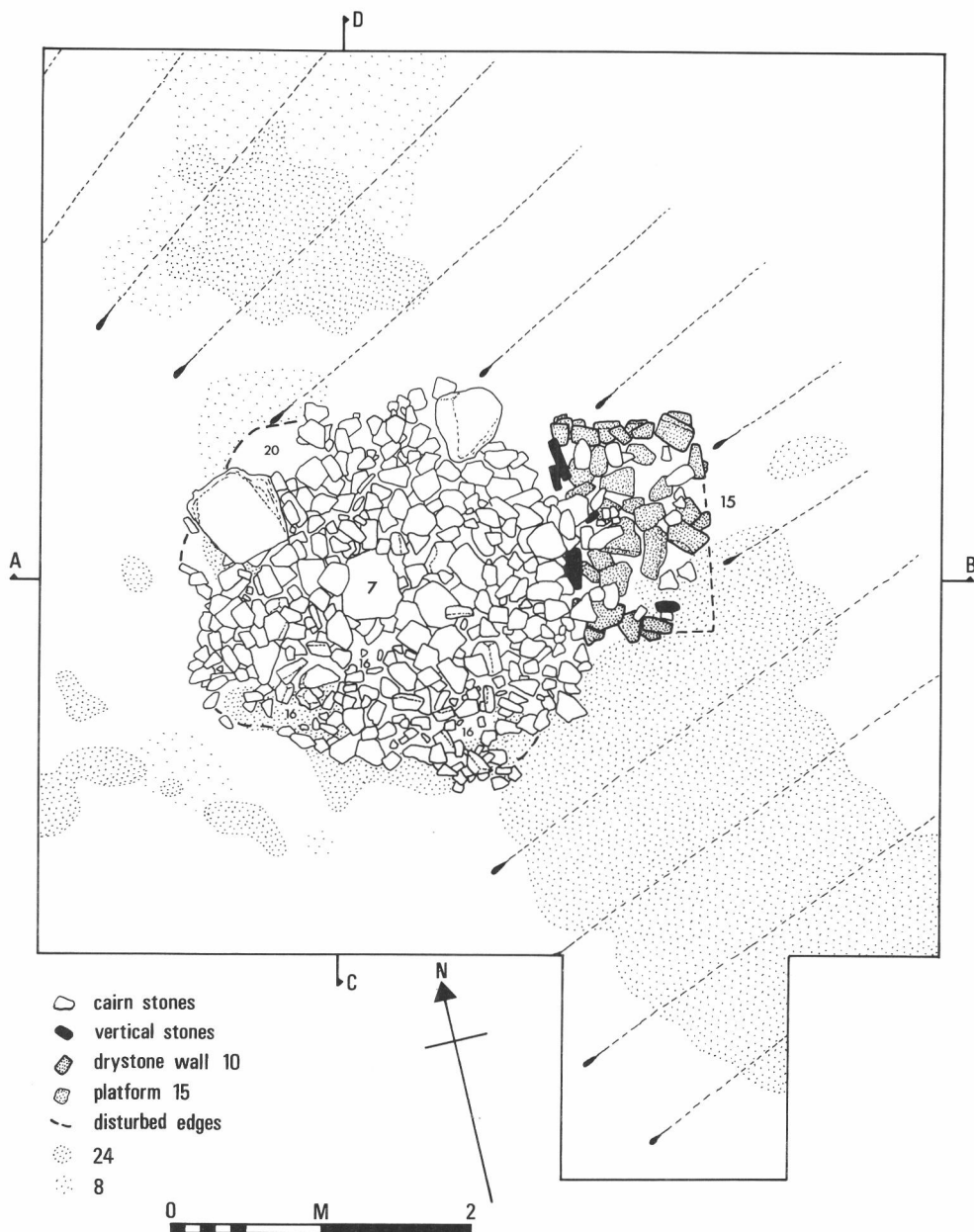


Fig. 5 Highlow Bank excavation: Cairn 63 after removal of peat and plough-damaged contexts.

the tops of which were approximately level with the top of the drystone wall (the few stones overlying these slabs are to be interpreted as tumble from the main cairn rather than an upper layer of the platform). To the east, again, two or three of the platform slabs had been removed by the plough. As with the main cairn, the interstices of the platform were filled with peat, and only minor compaction into the soils below had taken place.

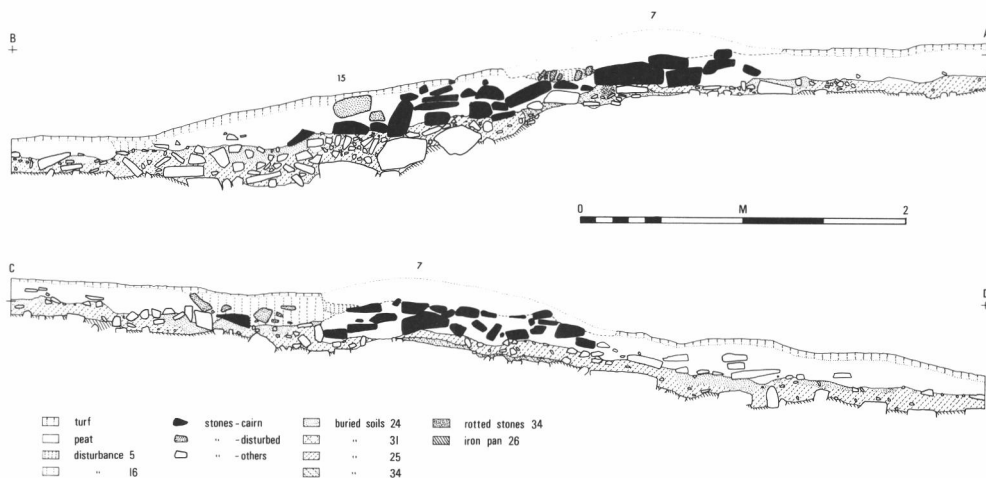


Fig. 6 Highlow Bank excavation: sections through Cairn 63 and the abutting platform.

There were no indications of features below the platform and no traces of charcoal or bone were found. The only hint of some ephemeral funerary or ceremonial deposit (if not an accidental loss, as could easily be the case) was a burnt, utilised flint flake (Finds, no. 3; Fig. 8). This was found in the buried soil beneath the north-western quadrant of the platform (Fig. 7).

### The soils and agricultural features

The thin undisturbed soils beneath the peat, both under and around the cairn were largely podzolised and somewhat varied in character. However, where undisturbed and not truncated they presented a common podzol profile, with upper and lower components to the soil, and with an iron pan below both at the surface of the subsoil.

In the areas surrounding the cairn the soils had been partially truncated by the recent ploughing, but where relatively intact had an upper layer (Ea horizon), comprising a soft mid-brown loamy sand (24), which overlay a much darker layer (Bh horizon) of grey-brown sandy loam which in parts became peaty towards the top (25, or in slightly browner form; 31). This darker layer in turn rested on a well-formed iron pan (Bf horizon: 26). The last occurred directly above the subsoil. At the base of the break of slope to the north-east, the Bh horizon increased in depth and some gleying (soil alteration due to water-logging) had taken place. The only artefacts found were two flint flakes and one of chert, all from Layer 25 (Fig. 7).

The paler soil horizon (24 or, in plough-damaged form, 8) had survived the recent ploughing only patchily, predominantly along the upper portions of the break of slope (Fig. 5). This strongly suggests that the buried soils were thicker here than elsewhere prior to 1939-45. If anything, one would have expected the soils here to have been more severely reduced than those elsewhere by such ploughing, if they were all originally of equal depth. Thus, if this hypothesis is correct, the survival of the Ea horizon soil along the crest of the slope is most plausibly explained as the truncated remains of a lynchet of slope-wash material, which ran from north-west to south-east along the top of the steeper slope below; no alternative explanations dependent on entirely natural agencies are obvious. The proposed lynchet would post-date the construction of the cairn as no such feature was found under the cairn. (The lynchet is unlikely to have been removed prior to cairn construction by de-turfing and/or levelling: see Context 34 below.)

The hypothesis of ancient cultivation and lynchet formation is given some support by contrasts between the flat area above the break of slope to the south-west and other portions of



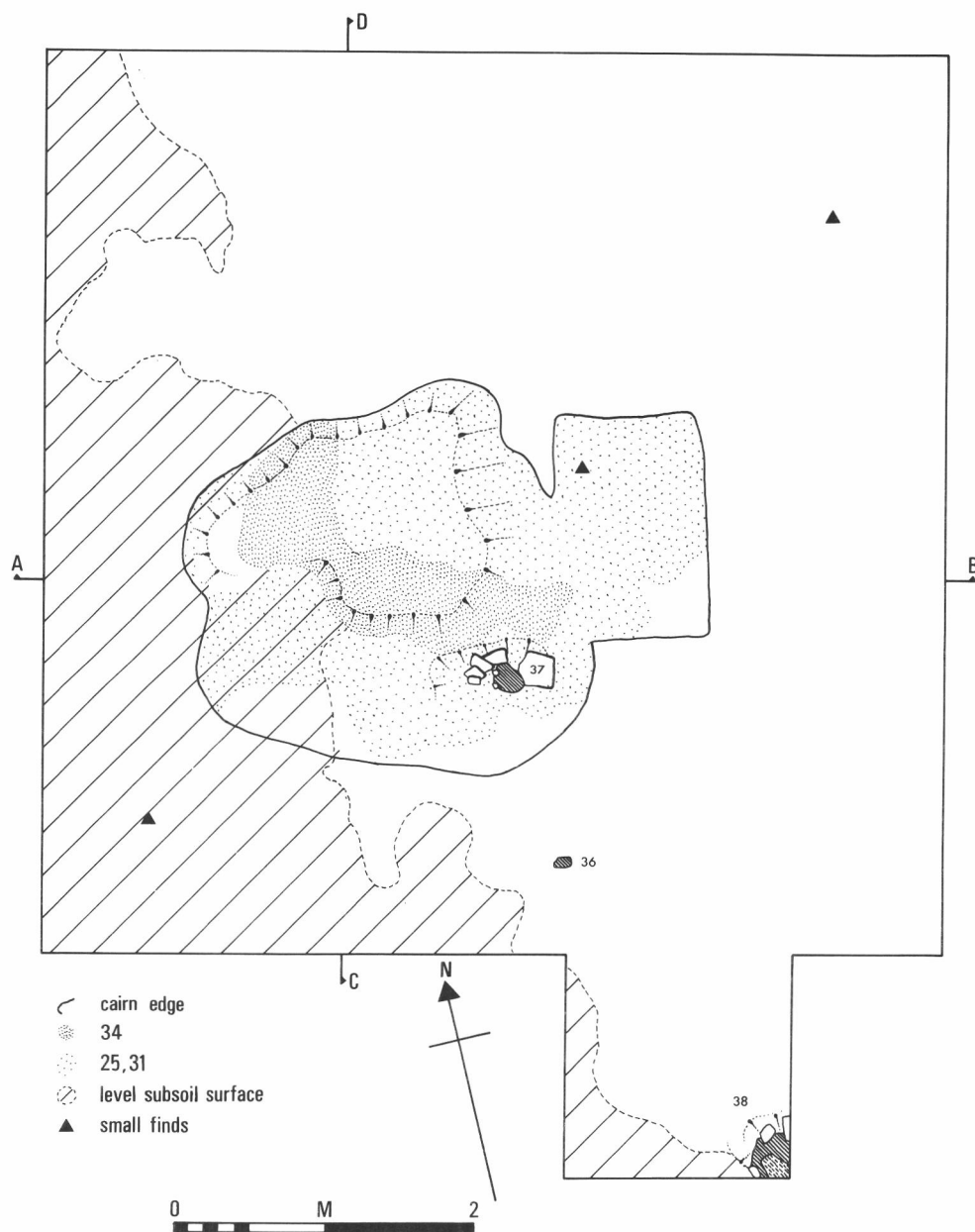


Fig. 7 Highlow Bank excavation: Cairn 63, pre-cairn soils and features.

the excavation trench. In the latter areas the buried soils had a high stone content, including many large slabs similar to those in the cairn itself. Indeed, the slope and areas below it were so stony that early cultivation is highly unlikely (unless a substantial amount of subsequent soil erosion has taken place). In contrast, the buried soils above the slope were relatively free of large stones, which might suggest that they were cleared for tillage. That this variation is natural — the result

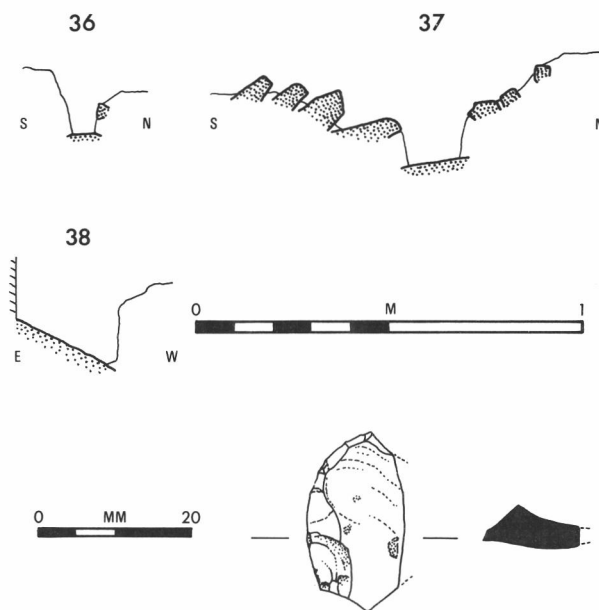


Fig. 8 Highlow Bank excavation: sections through the two possible post-holes (C37, C38) and stake-hole (C36) cutting the subsoil (natural stone shown stippled); and the flint flake from under the platform (Find 3).

of sandstone outcropping at the break of slope — seems unlikely because of a second set of contrasts that was apparent at the iron pan level. Though this layer was encountered at very irregular depths over much of the trench, to the south-west it formed a flat horizon (Fig. 7), as if formation had been governed by the base of a ploughsoil.

The soils under the cairn and platform were more complex than elsewhere (Fig. 7); a thorough examination allows further details of prehistoric land-use to be postulated. None of the usual upper paler soils (Ea horizon) existed except at the very edges of the structure; the cairn largely rested directly on dark soils (Bh horizon: 25, 31). However, in a narrow linear band at the centre, they were replaced by a dark, rich-brown sandy loam (34: Bs horizon); this was the only place on site where there was no iron pan.

Since the majority of the basal stones of the cairn rested directly on the lower (B horizon) layers, usual in an upland podzol soil-profile such as that at Cairn 63, rather than being underlain by peat or a buried turf/topsoil as would be expected, it seems likely the area under the cairn was de-turfed prior to its construction. However, it must remain equivocal whether this de-turfing was restricted to the area under the cairn, or a wider area was de-turfed, perhaps to prepare the ground for cultivation (with areas around the cairn subsequently redeveloping a full soil profile through elluviation). Though two points on the two drawn sections through the cairn (Fig. 6) show marked drops in level that superficially appear to support the hypothesis of a local de-turfing, this may well be fortuitous, as a similar drop in depth of the buried soil surface at the cairn edge was not found elsewhere.

Under the northern half of the cairn the underlying soils formed a slight natural knoll which

rose to c.0.10 metre above the surrounding area (Fig. 7). This knoll may have been more pronounced and/or irregular before the preparation of the ground for cairn construction. The presence of a linear area (34), where iron pan formation had not occurred but where a thicker iron-enhanced layer (Bs horizon) took its place, suggests that a linear feature existed prior to cairn construction but was removed before the cairn was built. This linear feature appears to have been present for sufficient time to prevent soil deterioration reaching the same level as elsewhere at this horizon, and thus to permit the survival of the soil differences found. The feature may well have been on the line of some form of field boundary, although whether this took the form of a hedge or fence remains obscure, as does its relationship to Contexts 36-38 described below. The linear feature was also unusual in that it contained a large number of sandstone blocks that were more severely eroded than elsewhere on site, being either rounded with decomposing surfaces or having fully rotted. Such erosion suggests that this layer had been near the surface for a considerable time, never having had much soil above it, probably because of its position on a slight knoll. It may also be employed to argue against a pre-cairn bank at this point, and for the hedge or fence hypothesis.

Underlying the south-eastern quadrant of the cairn was a possible post-hole (37), and further to the south-south-east was a second (38), with a possible stake-hole between them (36) (Figs 7, 8). These features suggest a fence line, forming a gently curving arc which follows the top of the break of slope and which, if projected, would run towards Cairn 64, which also lies on the slope crest. However, the interpretation of these three features is open to doubt. They became apparent only because of rapid changes in depth of the iron pan, and were located in those portions of the trench where the iron pan level was anyway very irregular. Moreover, their fills were indistinguishable from the buried soils elsewhere in their vicinities (though these fills had a low stone-content, this may not be significant as the concentration of stone was elsewhere found to be subject to local variation). In their favour, on the other hand, is the lack of other vertical-sided holes in the iron pan, and their consistent relationship to the slope crest. It might also be argued that the three features are regularly spaced, if a missing stake-hole is postulated between 36 and 38. Given the irregular depth of the buried soil and the iron pan, it would not be surprising if some such features failed to penetrate the iron pan and thus remained undetectable; the same may be true to the north-west of the cairn.

'Post-hole' 37 comprised a vertical-sided lower hole with the iron pan following its sides. This was 0.14 metre deep and 0.20 x 0.16 metre across. Above this lower hole there was a much broader upper scoop, that increased the overall depth to c.0.25-0.30 metre, and contained several possible packing stones. However, only half this upper scoop was detectable at the iron pan level, which casts further doubt on its interpretation. 'Post-hole' 38 was similar, but had a natural sloping slab forming one of its sides. The lower hole was c.0.30 x 0.35 metre in plan and 0.15 metre deep; there were traces of an upper scoop. 'Stake-hole' 36 was sub-rectangular in plan and 0.16 metre deep. (See Fig. 8.)

The only analyses undertaken on the soils under and adjacent to Cairn 63 were for the pollen they contained; the results are detailed below. No charcoal was present to enable C14 dating to be undertaken. Standard phosphate analysis to examine the possibility of decomposed bone being present was not attempted, as the area has had fertiliser applied to it (T. C. Wain, *pers. comm.*).

### The finds

The only small finds were three lithic pieces which came from the buried soil (25): two from beyond the cairn and platform (Nos 1, 2), and a third from under the platform (3). (See Fig. 7.) *Not illustrated*

- 1: Core fragment? of dark brown translucent flint.
- 2: Small piece of pale grey chert with possible working on one edge.



variability of soil forming processes. Pollen assemblages from soils cannot often be interpreted as simple historical sequences of vegetation change since the interaction of several processes, including downwashing by water and bioturbation (cf. Dimbleby, 1985), may lead to the formation of assemblages containing elements of different ages. In this respect, the post-depositional processes leading to the preservation of the pollen assemblages observed at Highlow Bank are poorly understood due to the lack of extensive work on comparable soils in the region.

Evidence from other sites (summarised in Anderson and Shimwell, 1981) suggests that the early post-glacial soils of the Gritstone regions of the Peak District were originally circum-neutral. Such soils tend to be biologically active; in consequence, pollen assemblages tend to be mixed through the action of burrowing soil fauna (such as earthworms), and pollen preservation is generally poor due to the presence of bacteria (Havinga, 1984). The onset of acidification and podzolisation of such soils will lead to a reduction in biological activity and to a gradual reduction in the depth to which burrowing soil fauna will penetrate. It has been argued that this process will lead to the emergence of a crude stratification of pollen assemblages within the soil profile (Keatinge, 1983; Dimbleby, 1985). At Highlow Bank, the presence beneath Cairn 63 of a well developed podzolic soil suggests that soil acidification was under way prior to its construction, and it is therefore not unreasonable to assume that the pollen spectra in the palaeosol reflects events following the onset of podzolisation. However, any identified sequence may be modified as further mixing of the assemblages would take place at any horizon that was disturbed by tillage.

A further difficulty lies in the interpretation of the pollen catchment of the Highlow Bank site. In the absence of appropriate taphonomic information from the site it is difficult accurately to estimate the area and extent of the vegetation changes inferred from the pollen data. Nevertheless, experimental (Turner, 1964) and empirical evidence (Dimbleby, 1985) could suggest that the majority of the pollen and spores deposited in the soils at Highlow Bank were derived from plants growing within a 200 metre radius of the site (cf. Birks and Birks, 1980). The pollen sequence is thus a predominantly local one, essentially reflecting changes in the vegetation community growing upon or near the site. Regional changes may only be inferred with caution if at all. On the basis of the pollen assemblages recorded, and given the limitations noted above, it is possible to suggest the following phases of vegetation development before and after the construction of Cairn 63.

#### PRE-CAIRN PHASES

##### 1. *Mixed deciduous woodland* (Samples A1-3)

This phase is suggested by the presence at the base of the sequence of relatively high frequencies of *Quercus* (oak), Coryloid type (arguably hazel) and several other deciduous tree species including *Betula* (birch), *Alnus* (alder), *Fraxinus* (ash) and *Tilia* (lime). The assemblages suggest an initial phase of mixed deciduous woodland growth on the site. The apparent mixture of these woodland elements with open ground and agricultural elements in all three samples may suggest that the onset of podzolisation followed the initial agricultural clearance — the woodland elements being residual.

##### 2. *Clearance/cultivation* (Samples A3-7)

As noted above this phase appears to be associated with the initial stages of podzolisation of the soils at Highlow Bank. It is characterised by the presence of markedly reduced frequencies of arboreal taxa and increased frequencies of *Gramineae* (grasses), low but persistent frequencies of cereal-type pollen and relatively high frequencies of open ground herb taxa such as *Plantago lanceolata* (ribwort plantain), *Ranunculus* type ('buttercups') and *Rumex acetosela* (sheep's sorrel), together with herbs of disturbed open ground aspect such as *Urtica* type (nettles) and the *Chenopodiaceae* ('chenopods'). The presence of low frequencies of arboreal taxa and ferns may reflect the continued growth of scrub woodland

dominated by *Betula* and *Corylus* in an area close to the site.

### 3. Secondary woodland/grassland (Samples A7-9)

The presence of increased frequencies of Coryloid type, together with reduced frequencies of *Gramineae* and open ground herbs, suggest limited, possibly local, woodland regeneration following the abandonment or contraction of the cleared areas. The continued presence of relatively high frequencies of *Gramineae* and open ground herb taxa, such as *Ranunculus* and *Rumex* suggests that open grassland areas remained common and the woodland never developed beyond an open hazel scrub. The presence of increasing frequencies of *Ericaceae* (heathers) may indicate that this scrub woodland had an increasingly heathland aspect. This may reflect the continued development of an acid podzol at the site.

### 4. Heathland/grassland (Samples A9-10, B1-3)

As noted above, samples A9 and A10 and samples B1 and B3 overlap stratigraphically. The pollen assemblages from both samples are remarkably similar and may suggest contemporaneity. Both sets of samples are distinguished by increased frequencies of *Ericaceae* pollen and reduced frequencies of Coryloid type. In both cases *Gramineae* pollen are slightly reduced in incidence but remain important components of the overall assemblages. It is suggested that these assemblages reflect the development of acid heathland on a fully podzolised soil in parts of the local environment. This is further supported by a decrease in the frequency of arboreal taxa and ferns suggesting a decline in woodland growth. It is notable, however, that the frequency of *Sphagnum* (moss) does not increase and that other damp open ground taxa (such as *Ranunculus*) decline during this phase, possibly indicating a relatively dry heathland environment. It is not clear to what extent the *Ericaceae* increase relates to the cairnfield area, or alternatively to pollen brought in (by the prevailing wind) from the open land to the west. This high land beyond the cairnfield to the west contains no evidence for its ever having been farmed, and is likely to have developed heathfield conditions at a relatively early date. If the palynological data are influenced by pollen from land to the west, it could be conjectured either that the quality of pasture was maintained throughout the cairnfield area, or that the cairnfield area deteriorated due to over-grazing.

### 5. Grassland/heathland (Samples B4-5)

The pollen and spore assemblage from the gritty-sandy peat is dominated by high but declining frequencies of *Ericaceae* pollen (31-29.5%) and rising frequencies of *Gramineae* (23-29%). The assemblage is generally similar to that recorded in Phase 4, but with a slight increase in the relative proportion of grass pollen, suggesting the expansion of grassland, possibly as rough pasture.

## CAIRN CONSTRUCTION

### 6. Possible hiatus

As noted in the main report, the absence of an upper topsoil (Ea horizon) beneath the cairn suggests that the construction of the cairn was preceded by de-turfing, which possibly also included the cairn's environs. It is therefore impossible either to be certain of the vegetation present immediately preceding the cairn's construction, or to indicate the extent of any possible preceding agricultural activity. Nevertheless, the absence of agricultural indicators below the cairn does suggest that very little time elapsed between de-turfing the cairn area and its construction. The reason for the de-turfing of the cairn area may have been to prepare the ground for cultivation, or to obtain turf to use as fertiliser in other areas.

## POST-CAIRN PHASES

### 7. Open ground/cultivation (Samples B6-9)

This phase is suggested on both palynological and sedimentological grounds. With regard to the former, the presence of reduced frequencies of *Ericaceae* (14.5-16%) and increased frequencies of *Gramineae* (29-32%), including the return of cereal-type pollen and herb



taxa, is indicative of disturbed open ground conditions. Increased frequencies of degraded and indeterminate grains in samples B6 and B9, together with the very poor preservation and low pollen concentrations noted in samples B7 and B8, which precluded adequate pollen counts being reached, further indicate the presence of disturbed and biologically active open ground conditions. In respect of the latter, the presence of a layer of gritty sand (Context 24, Samples B7 and B8) may represent slope-wash deposits derived from areas of land under arable cultivation.

#### 8. *Open grassland/bracken* (Samples B10-14)

The silty peat (Context 6) overlying the gritty sand (24) is congruent with palynological Phase 8. This layer has been disturbed by infrequent ploughing (no more than twice?); there may, therefore, have been some mixing of the pollen from different dates, and thus all are treated together here. However, mixing cannot have been complete, as is illustrated by the strong presence (6%) of *Pinus* in the uppermost sample, which probably reflects the plantation of the area around Highlow Bank in the recent historic period (by 1840).

From the lower levels in the peat upwards there are increased frequencies of *Cyperaceae* (sedges), *Ranunculus* and *Sphagnum* suggesting the development of damp open ground conditions. Soon after the advent of peat formation (Sample 10) there is a marked increase in Coryloid type pollen, suggesting the development of hazel scrub and probably the abandonment of the cairnfield. There is also a marked increase in *Pteridium* (bracken) which dominates Samples 10-14 (abundant rhizomes are also present within the peat). This abundance, together with reduced frequencies of *Gramineae*, again supports abandonment.

### Dating the ancient farming on Highlow Bank

The sequence of vegetation and environmental changes inferred from the palynological data from the Highlow Bank cairn are summarised below under 'Conclusions'. This section confines itself to comparisons with other pollen data from the region, and the degree to which inferences as to the dating of the Highlow Bank sequences may safely be drawn from these.

The data on pollen changes through time at Highlow Bank are broadly comparable with several other sets of data from elsewhere in the Gritstone Peak. However, it would be very wrong to make close comparison, given the very real limitations of soil pollen data given below. Superficially, the arboreal pollen spectra from Phase 1 at Highlow Bank, although poor, are generally congruent with those reported from Godwin's 'late Zone VIIb' (Godwin, 1975) at Eyam Moor, Bradwell Moor and Longstone Moor in the Derbyshire Peak (Shimwell, 1977; Anderson and Shimwell, 1981). It should be noted that only Eyam Moor is located on gritstone rather than limestone, which makes comparison with the Highlow Bank data tenuous. In similar vein, the initial clearance at Highlow Bank (Phase 2), and possibly also the later decline (Phases 3-5) and re-cultivation (Phases 6-7: the latter having a very similar pollen spectrum to Phase 2), are comparable with pollen profiles from sites at Ringinglow Bog, Totley Moss and Leash Fen (Conway, 1947; Hicks, 1971) that relate approximately to the Zone VIIb-VIII transition (between 1000 and 600 B.C.). Peat growth after the probable abandonment of the cairnfield is consistent with a postulated trend towards increased precipitation from Zone VIII onwards (Anderson and Shimwell, 1981).

It must, however, be stressed that such comparisons, and the relatively late dating which they imply, should be treated with extreme caution. Few environmental sequences within the Peak District have been adequately dated by independent radiometric methods. Furthermore, from a local perspective demanded by analysis of soil pollen (as at Highlow Bank) rather than that from peat, there may well be significant differences in the development of heathland and/or podzolisation, dependent on altitude, rainfall and land-use. Thus generalised pollen spectra from peat cores relating to wide expanses of the gritstone upland are to be expected to disguise marked local variation. Similarity with the Zone VIIb-VIII transition (Conway, 1947; Hicks, 1971) may therefore be misleading. Indeed, the pollen spectra presented by Hicks (1971) suggest clearance

episodes of increasing magnitude on the East Moors and their surroundings from the Late Neolithic onwards. Following these arguments, the Highlow Bank clearance could date from any time in Later Prehistory. The altitude of the Highlow Bank cairnfield is relatively high in comparison with those of other cairnfields on the East Moors (Barnatt, 1986; 1987). Thus, podzolisation (and, perhaps, abandonment of the cairnfield) could have taken place well before the first millennium B.C. That there was activity on the site by the Earlier Bronze Age is indicated by the presence of large barrows here. The existence of developed heathland prior to the creation of Cairn 63 suggests that stone clearance was being undertaken relatively late in the history of the site (in Phase 7: the second main period of arable activity on Highlow Bank). Archaeological considerations (below, page 25) suggest that the cairn itself should again not be dated later than the Bronze Age. Hence, the complex sequence of phases between Phase 7 and the earlier arable phase (Phase 2) implies that Phase 2 at Highlow Bank is likely to date from the Earlier Bronze Age (if not before), rather from the late date suggested by comparison with the normative picture created by the regional pollen data.

### Conclusions

The palynological data from Highlow Bank have been interpreted to suggest that the cairn was constructed in an environment that had previously been cleared of woodland, and farmed both as arable and pasture, and which then, following the onset of podzolisation and the abandonment of arable farming, had developed into open grassland or heathland. Insufficient resolution exists within the palynological data to determine whether podzolisation was accelerated by, or indeed whether it caused the abandonment or contraction of, farming (with some scrub regeneration, but including a more restricted use of the area for exclusively pastoral farming).

The building of the cairn took place at the advent of a second phase of arable cultivation, after a gradual rise of grassland and decrease in scrub, indicating renewed importance as a farmed area. After this period, the cairnfield seems to have been abandoned, and the open landscape was dominated by bracken, with a thin peat cover of c.0.10-0.20 metre having accumulated by the time modern improvement took place.

### DISCUSSION

This discussion will be confined to interpretation of the prehistoric sites on Highlow Bank; brief note has already been made of later features.

#### The cairnfield

Implicit in all the above is that the Highlow Bank cairnfield as a whole is of prehistoric date. Most Peak District cairnfields lie on open moorland, not farmed since prehistory. However, Highlow Bank lies within a post-medieval field, which necessitates the consideration of an alternative hypothesis — that the cairnfield is a palimpsest of features of widely different dates. This hypothesis is refuted below.

No stone clearance was undertaken during the recent improvements (T. C. Wain, *pers. comm.*); and the possibility of an eighteenth- or nineteenth-century date for any of the sites seems improbable given the apparent peat cover on most cairns. In addition, some of the cairns to the north-west lie beyond the area improved in post-medieval times — except, that is, by the digging of drains. Horizontal stratigraphy indicates that the drains are among the earliest sets of features in the post-medieval sequence. Further confirmation of a pre-modern date is therefore to be found at Site 43 (Figs 2, 3, 4), the only cairn where a direct chronological relationship to other features can be observed. Cairn 43 lies directly on the line of one of the drains, which ‘fades’ as it approaches and departs from the cairn. A second drain has been dug, which by-passes the cairn on its eastern side. Despite first appearances, the relationship between cairn and drain cannot be interpreted as proof that the cairn was constructed over, and hence post-dates, the original line of the drain. The western half of the cairn has been disturbed, exposing a large



sandstone boulder which would have been difficult to remove. Thus it is probable that the drain builders started to cut the drain through Cairn 43, but changed their minds when the amount of work this entailed became apparent. This hypothesis is given confirmation by the presence of a second drain a short distance to the south-east, where an identical by-pass drain (and earlier 'fading' course) runs round a natural outcrop.

The points noted above indicate that the cairnfield is of some antiquity. The possibility of medieval activity on the site cannot be ruled out, given the disturbance of the peats that prevent detailed analysis of the upper parts of the pollen column and, in particular, the proximity of Highlow Hall at the base of the spur (a settlement first recorded in 1232: Cameron, 1959). However, there are no positive indicators of medieval cultivation on Highlow Bank. On the other hand, the presence of three large barrows, and the discovery at Cairn 63 of a rectangular platform diagnostic of the Bronze Age (see below), strongly suggest a prehistoric date for the cairnfield. In addition, the pollen spectrum from Cairn 63 is perfectly consistent with a Later Prehistoric interpretation. The Highlow Bank cairnfield is morphologically similar to other East Moor cairnfields which can often be more confidently dated to the later prehistoric period by virtue of their altitude and isolation from later farming zones, lack of subsequent disturbance, associated bronze age ceremonial monuments, as well as by occasional excavations.

The cairnfields of the gritstone moorlands of the Peak District have been reviewed recently, and that on Highlow Bank falls comfortably within the range of variability which these have been shown to display (Barnatt, 1986; 1987). These cairnfields generally manifest aspects which may be interpreted as both ceremonial and agricultural; and recent discussion has highlighted the complex interplay between such functions, and stressed the over-simplicity of interpretation that looks in just one direction or the other. Each cairnfield is likely to contain both ceremonial monuments and sites which are the product of agricultural activity. Highlow Bank is no exception here. Ceremonial sites are clearly present, as represented by the three large barrows and the rectangular platform at Cairn 63 (see below); and while it might be postulated that many of the smaller cairns also had a funerary function, it would be wrong to exclude an agricultural aspect in their interpretation. The presence of linear clearance (Sites 52, 79), and the probable lynchets are the clearest indicators of early farming on Highlow Bank. These suggest that the area was divided into a series of fields, perhaps defined by hedges or fences. Not enough remain to reconstruct their layout in any detail: many other field boundaries have no doubt disappeared without trace. However, the lynchets around Sites 52, 79, 80 and 82 suggest that the fields were small and irregular or sub-rectangular in shape. A second indicator of agricultural activity is the distribution of the small cairns themselves. These are commonly located along breaks of slope — argued above to have been utilised as field boundaries, at the edge of stony ground, and at points midway between such locations. This non-random pattern is suggestive of clearance of stone to both the edges and, where the distance to the edge was inconveniently great, to the centres of fields. While such distribution indicates that many, if not all, of the small cairns have an agricultural explanation, this does not negate the possibility that they also contain burials (cf. Barnatt, 1986; 1987); and indeed, a secondary ceremonial function is suggested below for Cairn 63, which lies at a probable field boundary.

Valid interpretation of the current distribution of small cairns on Highlow Bank must take into account the extent to which data have been destroyed by post-medieval improvements. There is a noticeable difference between the average cairn diameter to the north-west, where no post-medieval ploughing has taken place, and elsewhere, where surviving cairns tend to be larger. This difference could be taken to suggest that smaller sites have been ploughed-out over much of the cairnfield. However, while some destruction may have taken place, it has not occurred with sufficient frequency to obscure the general pattern of preference in the siting of cairns noted above. The available evidence points only to brief episodes of ploughing for re-seeding, and these are unlikely to have resulted in major damage to the cairns. In particular, the most recent

ploughing failed to destroy drains that would have been easier to obliterate than even the smallest of cairns. In a similar way, the survival of the drains might also suggest that all but the slightest of prehistoric earthen features (such as linear banks or lynchets) have in fact survived. Comparison may here be made with the Offerton Moor cairnfield, a short distance to the north of Highlow Bank on the opposite side of Siney Sitch, which is at the same altitude on land of similar topography. Despite the absence of later disturbance, this cairnfield comprises no more small cairns than Highlow Bank, and displays a poorer development of field boundaries (Barnatt, 1986).

Another aspect of the interpretation of cairnfields emphasised in recent research is the likelihood of substantial chronological depth, particularly at those with surviving, well developed field systems (Barnatt, 1986; 1987). While the Highlow Bank field system is not as well developed as some of those in cairnfields at rather lower altitudes to the east of the Derwent, this should not be assumed to signify only a short episode of use: Highlow Bank may have taken several centuries to reach its present form. There are some indications of chronological depth here, provided by the Cairn 63 excavations (see below), and by the several cairns noted above whose profiles suggest they were enhanced over time. In addition, the palynological data suggest two well-separated periods of high agricultural activity, with a time of contraction or abandonment between.

The three large barrows on Highlow Bank were sited in non-random positions at either end of the cairnfield. Apparently deliberate planning of this kind can be paralleled at several other Peak District cairnfields (Barnatt, 1986), and is particularly developed on the block of moorland which includes Highlow Bank. For example, at Offerton Moor, just north across the stream from Highlow Bank, the eastern end of the cairnfield has a large barrow and a robbed embanked stone circle, while at the western end are two large barrows. Likewise, on Eyam Moor, the Wet Withens stone circle and an adjacent barrow lie to the west of the extensive cairnfield, while to the east there are two smaller stone circles. At the smaller cairnfields at Stanage and Jubilee Plantation there are large barrows to the west and south-west respectively. East of the Derwent, there are several instances of single or paired barrows and/or circles placed to one edge of cairnfields, while groupings at opposite ends of cairnfields occur at Stoke Flat West, Big Moor Central, Beeley Warren South, and possibly Bamford Moor South and Dennis Knoll. While these patterned sitings undoubtedly had a significance for those who established them, what this was is now obscure.

### **The excavated cairn**

Cairn 63 is only the fourth small gritstone cairn to be excavated in the Peak District (Henderson, 1963, 1979; Radley, 1969), with the exception of the many dug on Stanton Moor (Heathcote, 1930, 1936, 1939a) and several poorly documented nineteenth-century diggings (see Barnatt, 1986). Further examples have been excavated more recently, in 1989-90, on Eaglestone Flat and will be the subject of a subsequent report (Barnatt, in prep. b). The excavation of Cairn 63 has for the first time revealed the potential for the postulation of a relatively complex sequence of events. While some aspects of the site suggest agricultural activity, others suggest additional ceremonial elements. Both functions require some comment.

The main cairn (7) had no formal characteristics that are suggestive of a funerary context. Its structure, and the lack of identified funerary deposits, are consistent with its interpretation as a clearance cairn. In contrast with the main cairn, the rectangular platform (15) has been carefully designed, in a manner suggestive of ceremonial intent. However, even here there was no identifiable burial.

### **The platform**

Known rectangular platforms and barrows in the Peak District are not common (Table 1). Further sites no doubt await discovery, since those at Highlow Bank and Eaglestone Flat were

**Key**

column 1: site name — following Barnatt 1986 (and Heathcote in the case of Stanton Moor).

column 2: location (all preceded by SK).

column 3: dimensions (in metres), and shape where not sub-rectangular. Those in parenthesis are measured from a rebuilt structure or the ruined post-excavation remains.

column 4: status — E: excavated. U: uncertain examples.

column 5: deposits — BP: bronze pin. BU: biconical urn. CR: cremation. CS: clay stud.

CU: collared urn. FB: faience bead. FF: flint flake. FL: flints.

FS: flint scraper. PC: pygmy cup. US: urn sherds.

column 6: references — these are restricted to excavations, further data to be found in Barnatt 1986.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>A: Sub-Rectangular Platforms</b>					
Highlow Bank	21418020	1.50x1.05	E	FF	this report
Big Moor East	28017561	3.20x2.00	E	CR,BU	Riley 1981
Big Moor Central	27417534	c3.0x2.5	—	—	—
Eaglestone Flat	26657407	1.50+x1.35	E	—	Barnatt in prep. b
Stanton Moor 18	24896405	[c2.0x1.0]	E	—	Heathcote 1939a
Bamford Moor	21398479	c9.0x2.5	U	—	—
Birchen Edge North	28277357	c4.0x2.0	U	—	—
Stanton Moor 16	24926397	[c2.5x2.0]	U	—	Heathcote 1936
<b>B: Other Platforms</b>					
Doll Tor	23866287	5.50x3.70 polygonal	E	4CR,3BU,US, 2FB, BP,4FS	Heathcote 1939b
Stanton Moor 6	24766389	ruined	E	CR,CU	Heathcote 1936
Stanton Moor 16	24926397	[c3.3x3.0] polygonal	E	2CR,CU	Heathcote 1936
Stanton Moor 20	24936413	ruined	E	—	Heathcote 1939a
Stanton Moor 21	25016416	[c3.0x2.5] polygonal	E	CR,CU,PC,4FS	Heathcote 1939a
Stanton Moor 21	25016416	ruined	E	CR	Heathcote 1939a
Winyards Nick	25318112	?6.0x3.0 uncertain	U	—	—
Offerton Moor	20788066	c2.5x1.8 amorphous	U	—	—
Eyam Moor	23127898	c2.0x1.5 amorphous	U	—	—
Eyam Moor	22877904	c2.0x1.5 amorphous	U	—	—
<b>C: Small Sub-Rectangular Cairns</b>					
Raven Tor	27946675	2.90x1.95	E	CR,FB	Radley 1969
Raven Tor	27936677	c4.0x2.5	—	—	—
Eaglestone Flat	26677406	2.2x2.0	E	—	Barnatt in prep.b
Priddock Wood South	20768582	c2.5x2.0	—	—	—
Stanton Moor 19	24906405	[c3.5x2.5]	E/U	CR	Heathcote 1939a
<b>D: Larger Sub-Rectangular Cairns</b>					
Stanton Moor 13	24416393	[c12.5x6.5]	E	13CR,6CU,US, PC, FL,CS	Heathcote 1936
Stanton Moor 25	24666398	[c6.5x6.0]	E/U	3CU+?	Heathcote unpublished
Stanton Moor 52	24766398	[c7.5x5.5]	E/U	?	Heathcote unpublished
Stanton Moor 53	24806403	[c8.0x5.5] trapezoidal	E/U	?	Heathcote unpublished

*Table 1: Highlow Bank: secondary platforms and rectangular cairns on the East Moors.*

not obvious prior to excavation. Such structures may eventually transpire to be a relatively common structural form, as illustrated by Heathcote's work on Stanton Moor (although five of these have to be treated with caution because of the questionable quality of his restorations — P. Everson and S. Ainsworth, *pers. comm.*). This said a large enough sample exists to permit comment (Table 1). Those known are all found within cairnfields and exhibit a variety of design and size, ranging from at least one relatively large site, on Stanton Moor, to commoner small examples comparable to that on Highlow Bank. The latter are found either as independent structures or as secondary features abutting larger cairns. Secondary platforms of other shapes are also found. Thirteen of the smaller sites have been excavated, and eight have provided evidence of funerary deposits, usually datable to the Bronze Age. The absence of burial remains at the Highlow Bank example raises the possibility that such platforms were for the placing of ceremonial offerings rather than for purely funerary activities.

### **Agricultural activity around Cairn 63**

The presence of large areas of podsolized soil (25, 31) under the cairn and platform at Highlow Bank, and the long palynological sequence which pre-dates these features, indicate that they were both constructed at a time when soil deterioration was already well advanced. The interval of time that elapsed between the building of the two structures, if any, remains obscure. The palynological data suggest that these structures relate to a second period of arable activity at Highlow Bank. It may be that this late use of the cairnfield as arable land, when the soil structure was already badly degraded, quickly led to soil loss and concomitantly to stone clearance becoming more of a problem, as stone was thus nearer the surface. The accumulation of a probable lynchet along the field edge after the building of Cairn 63, despite the relatively gentle gradients here, would support the hypothesis of soil loss.

That arable activity on the site was only episodic is demonstrated by the need for de-turfing under Cairn 63 prior to its construction; even during the two periods of arable activity there may have been long periods when fields were used for pasture. The degree to which the development of heathland between the two mixed farming phases, as suggested by the palynological data, reflects either abandonment or purely pastoral farming is equivocal.

Pre-cairn features at Cairn 63, in the form of the possible fence line and the linear feature under the cairn, may well have been built during the initial cultivation of the cairnfield, given the less degraded soils in the linear feature. Field boundaries in the form of fences and hedges may have been the norm, which would explain their failure to survive to the present day. This early period of arable activity, indicated by the palynological data, is difficult to correlate with specific features elsewhere in the cairnfield. While some of the cairns presumably relate to initial clearance of the land in advance of cultivation, these cannot be distinguished from others of a later date, similar to Cairn 63. Similarly the lynchets could relate to either or both phases: there are no indications of radical changes of layout of boundaries that might have occurred if the Highlow Bank cairnfield was re-used after a period of abandonment.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The excavation of Cairn 63 proved interesting in that it uncovered a previously unknown rectangular platform, and so demonstrated the possibility that such platforms might well exist elsewhere at sites where they are not currently visible. The excavation also illustrated the possibility of an apparently simple small cairn providing data on the chronological development of, and the farming and ceremonial functions within, Peak District cairnfields. In the event, the excavation raised as many questions as it answered, largely because the excavated area was too small to elucidate uncertainties in interpretation. However, it demonstrates the need for more extensive research-orientated excavation, and the potential of such excavation in gaining access to the rich data that is available for resolving many of the uncertainties relating to such cairnfields.

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