

## ARTEFACTS FROM THORPE CLOUD

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Thorpe Cloud (SK152510) is one of numerous sites in the Peak District visited by members of staff of the Trent & Peak Archaeological Trust on behalf of the National Trust in 1992, for the purpose of reporting upon the condition of selected sites in their ownership and upon the quality of their archaeological record of this region. During this visit, sixteen sherds of Romano-British pottery were collected by Giles Woodhouse. One was found in an eroding patch near the centre of the summit, the others just below it, on a footpath which mounts the south-west side of the hill. Most are mere scraps, but all bar one piece, which is Grey Ware, are recognisable as Derbyshire Ware, including one fragment of a cupped-rim jar (this being the sherd found on the summit). None is more closely datable than the mid-second to fourth centuries (as confirmed by Ruth Leary).

On an independent visit in 1994, David Walters picked up a small sherd from the plain rim of a hand-made pot, which appears appropriate equally to either the pre-Roman or the post-Roman centuries. This piece was also found a short distance below the summit, on bare ground caused by a different footpath, ascending from the north-east. It is now in Derby Museum, together with the others described above.

Records held by the National Trust (information supplied by Philip Claris) and the Peak National Park (information from Ken Smith) reveal that artefacts have been recovered previously from the rocky summit-ridge of Thorpe Cloud and on the paths leading to it. Most are Romano-British potsherds (said to be pieces of Derbyshire Ware, Grey Ware, 'Oxford-type' mortarium, and Samian, found in the 1970s by Martin Wildgoose and in the 1980s by Linda Smith), but there is also a third-century, silver denarius of Severus Alexander (*RIC* 254; identified at Sheffield City Museum in 1977). In addition, a sub-Roman penannular brooch was found by a person using a metal-detector and published in a previous volume of this journal (Alvey, 1982). Further pieces of pottery and metalwork were unearthed early this century when a Mr Matthews dug into a 'hollow' some way below the summit, apparently at the south-eastern end, to judge from the photograph featured in another volume of this journal (Bowles, 1911). The finds from that excavation included 'a spike of copper about 2½ in. long, possibly the pin of a brooch' and a 'scrap of very thin metal — brass or copper alloyed with gold — enamelled black on one side'. The evident quality of some of the artefacts from this site makes it all the more unfortunate that the present whereabouts of these items seems to be unknown.

This striking conical hill of reef-limestone, in parts barely covered by turf, rises to over 285m O.D., with a summit-ridge little over 100m long (north-west/south-east) and nowhere more than a few metres wide. It towers above the mouth of Dovedale and the alluvial basin where the Dove and the Manifold unite, some 150m below. Although less high than other limestone hills nearby to the west and north, the steepness of its flanks (c. 40°) and the narrowness of its spine ensure that Thorpe Cloud is a dominant feature of the physical landscape in the dramatic scenery of this area, close to the southern margin of the White Peak. This is an evocative location, and anyone who has scaled its dizzy height will surely share the writer's difficulty in conceiving of any secular activity by which such artefacts could have arrived at the top of Thorpe Cloud. No

apparent structural remains are now to be seen on the summit, and, apart from the scars of undatable lead-scrins, there is nothing obviously artificial about its form (*contra* National Trust's Archaeological Record, in which 'platforms' are noted, though none is convincingly man-made either to the writer or to those with whom he has visited the site: Keith Challis, Daryl Garton, David Walters and Giles Woodhouse). The possibility that certain spectacular natural places attracted attention for mystical and mythical reasons in various periods of the past has been remarked from time to time, and most recently by Bradley (1993: 25-30, 126-9). It would not be surprising if such a phenomenon were found to continue beyond the conventional limit of prehistory in some upland areas like the Peak District. Nor would it be hard to believe that we see an instance of this in Thorpe Cloud.

#### REFERENCES

- Alvey, R. C. (1982) An early Saxon brooch from Thorpe Cloud. *DAJ* 102: 87.  
Bowles, C. E. B. (1911) Editorial notes. *DAJ* 33: 240-1.  
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