

Whalebone Arch

North Berwick Law

East Lothian

Archaeological Recording: report

July 2007

East Lothian Council Archaeology Service
for

Historic Scotland



1.0 Executive Summary

For health and safety reasons East Lothian Council decided to take down the whalebone arch on top of North Berwick Law. East Lothian Council Archaeology Service recorded the holes, once the whalebones had been removed. No archaeological remains were identified.

2.0 Introduction

In 2006, after a number of years of monitoring, it became increasingly apparent that the whalebone arch on top of North Berwick Law was becoming a potential danger to the public. The bones had splintered at the base and the arch was in danger of falling over and leaving sharp splintered remains exposed. A decision was made by East Lothian Council Property Services to remove the arch. The arch was dismantled (2005) and after receiving Scheduled Monument Consent from Historic Scotland, the stumps of the arch were dug out by hand (2006). The whalebone arch and stumps are now being stored at St Joseph's School (the ELC Store), Meadowmill.

3.0 Site Location

The Whalebone arch is located at the top of North Berwick Law (NT 5564 8424) overlooking the early 19th century Observation Post (NT 5563 8425) and the WW1/WW2 Observation Post (NT 5561 8423).

4.0 Archaeological Background

A set of whale's jawbones, forming an arch, have existed on the summit of North Berwick Law since at least as early as 1709 (Redman 2006). These are reported to have been replaced by Sir Hew Dalrymple eighty years later. The 1789 set, in turn, were replaced around the middle of the 19th century but these were blown down in 1933 and superceded by the present jawbones, which were erected in 1935.

North Berwick Law is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. It is known primarily as the site of an Iron Age hill fort, however, the Law has seen a lengthy history of settlement and use from the Bronze Age through to more recent times.

5.0 Aims and Objectives

- 5.1. To appraise the holes (once the whalebone stumps had been removed), in order to determine whether any archaeological remains were present and/or had been disturbed/destroyed when the whalebone arch had been erected;
- 5.2. To record the holes;
- 5.3 To record any subsequently exposed archaeological remains, and;
- 5.4 To determine whether there were any archaeological implications for erecting a new arch in the same two holes.

6.0 Methodology

Although the eastern most stump was removed without an archaeologist being present, subsequent recording of the hole (28th August 2006) determined that there was no need to maintain a watching brief of the remaining stump (the western stump) being removed. This hole was recorded on 24th July 2007 after the stump had been dug out.

7.0 Results

When the whalebone arch was erected, two substantial holes were dug to accommodate and secure the two ends of the arch. These holes were 5 metres apart and occupied a rocky knoll (the natural geology protruding above this knoll by at least 0.60 metres) north of the summit of the Law, overlooking the still present 19th century Observation Post and 20th century Observation Post/s.

7.1 Eastern hole

The eastern hole measured 1.40 metres (N-S) by 1.10 metres (E-W) and was irregular in plan. It was at least 1.0 metre deep but the sides had partially collapsed, filling the bottom of the hole. Approximately 0.40 m of turf (01) overlay a 0.15 m band of humic topsoil (02). This in turn overlay a 0.25 m layer of shattered bedrock within a topsoil matrix (03), which overlay natural bedrock (04). No archaeological features, deposits or artefacts were identified.

7.2 Western hole

The western hole measured 1.40 metres (N-S) by 1.0 metre (E-W) and was also irregular in shape. It was at least 1.0 metre deep but the sides had partially collapsed, filling the bottom of the hole. Approximately 0.25 m of turf (01) overlay a 0.15 m of shattered bedrock with in a dark brown clay-rich, humic topsoil (05). This in turn overlay bedrock (04). No archaeological features, deposits or artefacts were identified.

8.0 Discussion

The two holes, which accommodated the whalebone arch footings, appear to have been dug through natural bedrock and upper deposits, which did not contain any archaeological remains.

9.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

No archaeological remains have been disturbed by removing the two whalebone arch stumps. If an arch is to be reinstated into these two holes, there will be no archaeological implications. If the two holes need to be widened or deepened to accommodate the new structure, then the likelihood of encountering any archaeological remains is minimal.

10.0 Bibliography

Redman, N. 2006 *North Berwick Law*, East Lothian Life, issue 55 spring

11.0 Appendices

11.1 Contexts List

Context No.	Hole	Description
01	E	Turf line
02	E	Dark brown clay rich, humic top soil
03	E	Large angular fragments of shattered bedrock within a (02) matrix
04	E	Natural bedrock
05	W	Large angular fragments of shattered bedrock within a (02) matrix

11.2 Finds List

No finds were identified

11.3 Environmental Samples List

No environmental samples were taken.

11.4 Photographic List

Colour Digital

Photo No.	Taken From	Description
1	SW	Aerial view looking down into excavated eastern hole
2	SW	General, fenced area that used to contain the whale bone arch
3	S	General view of eastern hole
4	S	Aerial view looking down into excavated eastern hole
5	SSW	Aerial view looking down into excavated western hole
6	SSE	Eastern hole being excavated