

Till-Tweed Fieldwalking

Phase 2 Summary

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The second phase of the Till-Tweed fieldwork took place during October 2004 and was focused on the Lower Tweed valley. Clusters of fields around Groathaugh, Norham and Horncliffe were targeted, although availability of ploughed fields ultimately decided which fields could be surveyed. A total of 23 fields were fieldwalked at 5m intervals covering a combined area of 218.4 ha. In total 582 lithics were recovered together with 49 sherds of pottery and 2 pieces of slag. The lithics ranged in date from the Mesolithic, Neolithic and Early Bronze Age and also included some pieces that could potentially be Late Upper Palaeolithic and Early Mesolithic. The ceramics included sherds ranging in date from early medieval, medieval and post-medieval. The average lithic density per hectare from this survey is 2.7. However, when this figure is adjusted to give a notional 100% coverage density (i.e. multiplying by 2.5, based on the assumption that walking at 5m intervals provides a 40% coverage) the lithic density per hectare is 6.8. A number of diagnostic tool types were recovered by the survey including platform cores, multi-platform cores, flake cores, pebble cores and bi-polar cores, microliths, barbed and tanged arrowheads, end scrapers, tiny scrapers, thumbnail scrapers, awls, burins and knives as well as a large number of retouched and utilised flakes and blades, many of which were broken, that could have been part of more typical tools.

In addition, 20 1m square test pits were excavated over the lithic concentration on St Cuthbert's Farm in field 33 to test whether there was any surviving Mesolithic structural deposits underlying the highest density lithic scatter so far found in Northumberland. The entire contents of each pit were sieved through a 5mm mesh. A slot feature, thought to be a timber stain, was found at the base of test pit 2 and part of the ditch fill from a rectilinear enclosure was observed in the bases of pits 10 and 18. A total of 128 lithics were recovered from the test pits, providing an average count of 6.4 lithics per pit.

The fieldwork also provided an opportunity to develop a fuller understanding of the landscape. This opportunity to inspect crop-mark sites and fieldwalking areas on the ground has led to many useful observations including the pattern of promontory 'forts' being situated on steep bluffs immediately above the Tweed; the selection of local high spots on kamiform features for both enclosures and Stone Age activity, the avoidance of the low, wet areas between the pro-glacial features and the focus of prehistoric and medieval activity at and around natural bridging points of the Tweed. There is also emerging evidence for there being a previously unsuspected Bronze Age burial landscape along the rich, fertile land of the Tweed, as suggested by the barrow at Tweedmouth and the find of a plough-damaged, but otherwise pristine, barbed and tanged arrowhead from next to a stream immediately above the banks of the Tweed in what would have been a wet and perennially flooded area of terrace.