

ART. II.—*Cairns in the Birker Fell and Ulpha Fell area.*

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INTERESTING features of the South-West Cumberland fells are the groups of cairns, mostly lying between the 600-ft. and 1,000-ft. contours on gently sloping ground, many of which are likely to cover early burials. During 1958/59 I decided to survey in detail the cairns situated on the Birker and Ulpha Fells in the broad saddle rising to 800 ft. which links Eskdale with Dunnerdale. Mention has already been made of some of these cairns in CW1 iii by J. Ward and in CW2 xxiii in W. G. Collingwood's survey. A summary of the results of my survey is given below. The area discussed is covered by 6-in. O.S. map, Sheets S.D. 19 NE, S.D. 19 SE. Each group of cairns has been given a site number for easy reference to the plan (fig. 1). Sites no. 1, 2, 6, and 8 are already recorded on the 2½-in. O.S. maps.

Site 1. Devoke Water. Contours 775-800 ft. No. of cairns 70.

Situated at the western end of Devoke Water these are marked on the Ordnance map, and there is a note by Ward in CW1 iii 251. The largest cairn is 55 ft. in diameter, the remainder being between 12 and 30 ft. There are two cairns on the slope across Linbeck Gill.

Site 2. Water Crag. Contours 875-950 ft. No. of cairns 84.

Mentioned by Ward in CW1 iii 251 and later by Collingwood in CW2 xxiii 266. This group is larger than indicated on the Ordnance map, stretching over half the distance towards Rough Crag. The larger cairns are well defined mounds of stone with not much vegetation cover. They are 25 ft. in diameter and 2 to 3 ft. high. The

remainder of the circular cairns are between 10 and 20 ft. in diameter. In addition there are five longer cairns 25 to 35 ft. in length and about 10 ft. wide.

Site 2a. Contours 800-850 ft. No. of cairns 31.

Situated about 300 ft. below site 2 on a gentle slope, this group is not recorded on the 25-in. Ordnance plan. The distribution of size and shape is similar to the previous group. One is composed of rather small stones, whilst another is built against a large rock. The site ends about 300 ft. from the lake.

Site 3. Pike How. Contours 825-875 ft. No. of cairns 100.

Probably the group referred to by Ward in CW1 iii 251 when he observed that "cairns may be seen in plenty between Devoke Water and High Ground".

Situated 2/5ths of a mile north-east of Devoke Water, they appear to be in two distinct groups, those nearer to the lake being smaller and almost completely covered with vegetation. All are circular with the exception of two near the junction of the Devoke Water track with the main road. One of these is 30 ft. by 15 ft., whilst the other is a definite triangle of 20 ft. side. The overall size of the cairns varies between 12 and 20 ft. in diameter, and at least one shows definite signs of excavation. The site ends by the remains of a stone enclosure, marked on the 25-in. plan map as "Old Sheepfold".

There appear to be a few cairns scattered almost to the shores of Devoke Water, but the terrain here is rough, and identification difficult.

Site 4. Hall Beck. Contours 825-900 ft. No. of cairns 20.

On the south-east side of Devoke Water there is a number of scattered cairns, stretching from the west of Rigg Beck to the Woodend track. In addition there are placed stones which could be the remains of old enclos-

ures. One of these on the east side of Rigg Beck seems to have been levelled. On a spur of dry ground by the track to Woodend Farm are two cairns of about 25 ft. diameter and a few somewhat smaller.

Site 5. High Ground. Contours 750-800 ft. No. of cairns 40-50.

This group lies in the angle formed by the Stanley Force and Ulpha roads. The ground is bracken covered and boulder strewn, with some evidence of walling making identification difficult, especially at the upper end of the site. The mounds are more easily identifiable as one goes further down the slope. As the group lies below an old quarry situated on the main road, it is possible that some of the mounds at that end of the site are formed from quarry waste. There are two or three more cairns just below the main road in the direction of Ulpha.

Site 6. Birkerthwaite. Contours 775-800 ft. No. of cairns 21.

Mentioned by Collingwood in CW2 xxiii 266 and recorded on the Ordnance Survey map. This group is on the north side of Smallstone Beck, $\frac{1}{2}$ mile east of Birkerthwaite Farm. Some of the cairns are well defined and larger than the general size noted on this contour level. All are circular and vary in size from 15 to 30 ft. in diameter.

Site 6a. Contours 775-800 ft. No. of cairns 20.

On the south side of Smallstone Beck, about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile from the previous group, are about 20 cairns. These seem rougher in construction than those of site 6, and less covered with vegetation. Three of the group lie apart from the main body towards the east.

Site 7. Ladder Crag. Contour 820 ft. No. of cairns 20.

There is a group of small cairns not far from the foot of Ladder Crag on an area of gently sloping dry ground. They are all circular and about 10 or 12 ft. in diameter.

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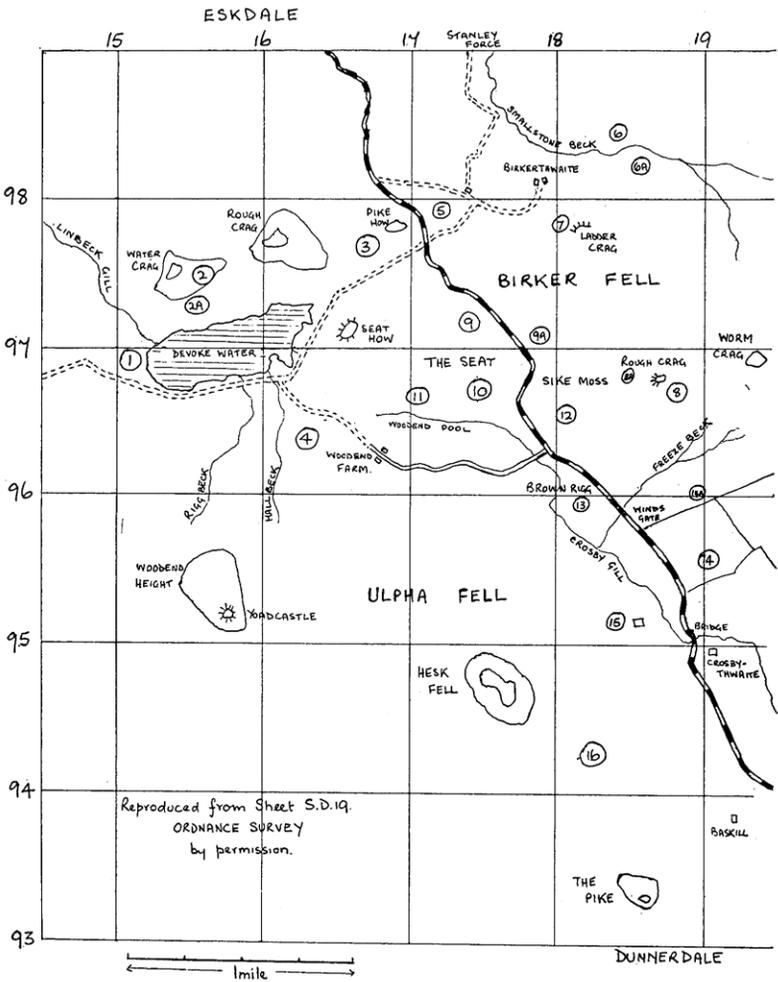


FIG. 1.—Cairns in the Birker Fell and Ulpha Fell area.

Site 8. Rough Crag. Contours 975-1,125 ft. No. of cairns 20.

These cairns are not well defined, being mainly rather flat, one or two being even slightly sunken.

One cairn, however, is different from the rest. It is 40 ft. by 50 ft. and 4 or 5 ft. high with a clearly defined edge, although the kerbstones are not particularly large. The stones are weathered, but are not rounded cobbles and there is not a great deal of vegetation on the cairn. Towards the centre there is some evidence of incomplete excavation.

Leading away from the cairn down the slope and also appearing again some distance above, is a line of almost completely buried stones, which are probably the remains of an old wall. I think that this is the group described by Ward in CWI iii 251 as "Upon Ulpha Fell, east of Sike Moss are cairns, a tumulus some 10 or 12 yds. across, and the remains of an old wall running E.30.N." They are also recorded on the Ordnance Survey map.

Site 8a. White Wall. Contour 900 ft. No. of cairns 6.

One large and several smaller cairns lie below the north-west side of Rough Crag. The larger cairn is oval, 25 ft. by 30 ft. They are separate from site 8.

Site 9. The Seat A. Contours 815-840 ft. No. of cairns 114.

This site begins opposite the 816 ft. bench mark about 2/3rds of a mile from the Devoke Water—Stanley Force tracks, and I have surveyed this site by triangulation. The cairns are mainly small and grass covered, but are larger towards the southern end. They are all circular with the exception of two which are about 30 ft. by 15 ft.

At the south-west end of the site is an old wall composed of rounded stones like those used in the cairns, and most of the remains of the wall are completely grass covered. The wall follows a rough crescent shape with a second, though shorter, wall concentric within it. In the space

between the walls are two cairns. It is noticeable that there are no cairns on two areas of wetter ground within the group. The site ends as the ground falls away to the wet and rocky ground of Woodend Pool.

Site 9a. Contours 800-820 ft. No. of cairns 58.

This site connects with the south-east end of site 9, from which it is separated by the main road. The cairns are more scattered, but resemble the previous group in type and size. Again here is the remains of an old wall which may possibly have connected with the wall on site 9 at some time. One cairn appears to have been excavated by the "trenching" method and the stones replaced.

Site 10. The Seat B. Contours 800-830 ft. No. of cairns 80.

This group lies on the southern slope of the Seat above Woodend Pool and is distinct from site 9. Although most of the cairns are on the dry slopes, some are in the flat moist ground between the Seat and Woodend Farm. The cairns seem generally a little larger than those of 9 and 9a and not quite so well covered with vegetation, although they may be due to the nature of the terrain.

Site 11. The Seat C. Contours 800-820 ft. No. of cairns 39.

This smaller group lies opposite the end of Woodend Farm nearer to Devoke Water. It resembles the other groups on the Seat, but there is a larger proportion of longer cairns.

Although the Seat itself is a fine, dry plateau of considerable area, with contours ranging from 850 to 950 ft., I could find no trace of cairns.

There are three widely scattered cairns opposite the Devoke Water track, two of which are in boggy ground and are about 25 ft. in diameter.

Site 12. Sike Moss. Contour 800 ft. No. of cairns 44.

This group lies opposite the 795-ft. bench mark, on the east side of the main road, north-east of the road to Woodend Farm. The cairns are small and circular, and four of the group lie in wet ground on the opposite side of the road. This group almost completely covers the small area of dry ground. A tree trunk was noticed here buried in the peat.

Site 13. Brown Rigg. Contour 780 ft. No. of cairns 33.

Most of the cairns are small and rather flat with one or two exceptions. One of these is almost 40 ft. in diameter and appears to have a small secondary mound on its western circumference.

Part of the stone in the top centre has been used to make a small sheep-shelter, but there is no real evidence of serious excavation.

Several hundred feet to the north of the large cairn is the grass covered remains of a circular stone wall about 25 ft. in diameter. This lies close to a small disused quarry.

Across the main road are seven cairns and in the boggy ground to the north of these are four more. This group is mentioned by Ward in CWI iii 251, when he says "Cairns may be seen on Brown Rigg."

Site 14. Crosbythwaite. Contours 770-950 ft. No. of cairns 200-250.

This is a most complicated site. There has apparently been a farm here before the existing one, the lines of the old walls being plainly visible. It is difficult to differentiate between cairns and portions of ruined walls.

Half way across the lower field are the remains of two walls leading to two ruined enclosures.

The site begins quite close to the main road, and the cairns at the south-west end are small and well defined,

one or two being almost conical. There are so many rocks in the field that I do not think that these small cairns are field clearance heaps.

As the ground rises the cairns become larger. Within the group are well defined mounds, others are flat, circular, long, and some even triangular in shape. The triangular shape occurs amongst those cairns built on slopes; excavation would probably show that they are circular.

There appear to be several small circular enclosures in the lower field.

Site 14a. Contours 930-975 ft. No. of cairns 13.

Outside the north-east corner of the field, about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile above Winds Gate, is a further group of circular cairns. They are nearly $\frac{1}{4}$ mile from site 14 and appear to be quite separate.

Site 15. Crosby Gill. Contours 775-830 ft. No. of cairns 45-50.

On the opposite side of the valley from site 14 due west of Crosbythwaite bridge is a small rectangular enclosure containing a group of coniferous trees.

Around the northern and western sides of this wall is a number of circular cairns 12 to 15 ft. in diameter. On the southern side there is a short length of ruined wall and several more cairns. The cairn which lies furthest to the west is oval in shape.

About 100 yds. from the main group to the south-west is the shape of an almost completely grass-covered circular wall about 100 ft. in diameter, and within this are four circular cairns.

Site 16. The Pike. Contours 880-930 ft. No. of cairns 50-80.

This is a boulder-strewn area which has become covered with peat and heather, making assessment difficult. The group lies between the Pike and Hesk Fell above Horseman's Gate, below an old track leading from a disused slate quarry above Baskill towards some abandoned mine

workings on Hesk Fell. There are the remains of an old oval-shaped enclosure 250 ft. by 150 ft., and on the north and south sides of this is a group of cairns. There is only one long cairn in the area, and one of the larger circular cairns shows definite signs of a previous excavation.

Conclusions

Mr John Bromwich of St John's College, Cambridge, who made a similar survey some years ago in the Ulpha and Dunnerdale Fells, was not convinced that all the cairns he plotted were indeed burial cairns. Certain groups at approximately SD. 180938 and SD. 190954 seemed to be associated with half built and abandoned stone walls. Mr Bromwich intends to deposit the results of his work with the Archaeology Officer, Ordnance Survey.

A few miles to the west of the area under review, Dr Donald Walker's recent work on turfline dating of cairns at Barnscar, near Muncaster, may give an indication of the age of that group by pollen analysis. Two Collared urns of Middle Bronze Age type have been preserved from excavations in the Barnscar area, carried out last century by Lord Muncaster.

There appear to be between 1,100 and 1,200 cairns of all sizes in the Birker/Ulpha area under discussion. Taking into account field clearance, stone-wall building, drainage and other agricultural activities, it remains apparent that there was considerable ancient settlement in these uplands. The largest cairns and also the greatest number occur on the outer edges of the saddle above the Esk and Duddon, with the notable exceptions of sites 8 and 13.

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