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**THE DEVIL'S LAPFUL  
NORTHUMBERLAND**

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**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY REPORT**

by Amy Lax

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**THE DEVIL'S LAPFUL**  
**TYNEDALE**  
**NORTHUMBERLAND**

**NMR No: NY 69 SW 7**

**NGR: NY 6419 9285**

**SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENT No: NORTHUM 245b**

**RSM No: 25106**

Surveyed: July 1997  
Surveyed by A. Lax & M. Home  
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## **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO SURVEY**

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At the request of Forest Enterprise and English Heritage, the RCHME have undertaken a survey of all scheduled monuments in the Kielder Forest area (Kielder Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs) Survey). The purpose of this survey is to inform management plans of this group of monuments and also to increase the currency of the National Monuments Record (NMR) for this area. The monument described below (NMR No. NY 69 SW 7; English Heritage National Scheduled Monument (RSM) No. 25106) is included in this project and was surveyed at 1:500 scale in July 1997.

The Devil's Lapful is a Neolithic long cairn situated at NY 6419 9285, 1.3km south-east of Kielder, Northumberland. It is one of only four such definite long cairns in the county. The monument is relatively well-preserved although part of the cairn has been heavily robbed of stone for a sheepfold now attached to its north-western edge.

## **GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY AND LAND USE**

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The Devil's Lapful lies along the upper reaches of the valley of the North Tyne, at what is now the head of Kielder reservoir. It is situated at 310m above OD, on a broad, valley slope of the carboniferous Cementstone group which is characterised by shales with sandstones and occasional limestones (Wilson and Leathart 1982, 30; Geological Survey of Great Britain 1950).

The cairn, which is oriented NNE-SSW, lies across the contours on the south-west slope of Castle Hill. Since the monument now lies within the confines of Kielder Forest it is impossible to fully appreciate its setting from the ground at present. However, Newbigin (1935-36, 166) describes the outlook of the site as 'looking SW towards the North Tyne ...; it lies in a slight hollow a little below the highest point, so that it has a wide prospect, without being itself a prominent object'.

The land upon which the greater part of Kielder Forest was created upon, including the area around the Devil's Lapful, was purchased by the Forestry Commission in 1930 from the Duke of Northumberland, at which date the large scale programme of afforestation commenced (Wilson and Leathart 1982, 11). The very stony nature of the cairn appears to have deterred planting on top of the monument itself but it is evident from the present remains and from air photographs (RAF 1948) that previously there has been afforestation right up to its perimeter on all sides; this point was also noted by Newbigin (1935-36, 166) who apparently visited the site shortly after planting. The cairn now lies on the south-eastern edge of a small clearing in the forest but it remains closely edged by trees for much of its length. In addition, a number of self-seeded conifers have managed to establish themselves on the cairn recently. The site is easily accessible from a forestry track passing its north-eastern end and is marked by a sign.

## HISTORY OF RESEARCH

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There are no known antiquarian descriptions of the Devil's Lapful but the appearance of the cairn on early Ordnance Survey (OS) maps, and the name attributed to it combine to suggest that the site was a well known local landmark prior to archaeological interest in the 20th century.

The cairn is depicted on the 1st edition OS 25-inch map of 1866 as a stony mound adjacent to the sheepfold, the location being named as 'Devil's Lapful' (Ordnance Survey 1866). It is interesting to note that the cairn (with its attached sheepfold) was then at the site of a crossroads in the paths across the moor, continuing to serve as a focal point in the landscape. On the 2nd edition of 1897 (Ordnance Survey 1897) the cairn itself is not shown although the name and the depiction of the sheepfold remain the same. On the later edition of 1922 (Ordnance Survey 1922) the long cairn was reinserted and the position of two curricks (cairns) are marked upon it, one in the centre and one at the south-western end of the cairn. At this date the surrounding land was still rough grassland, which had been enclosed as out-bye pasture at some time between 1866 and 1897.

The Devil's Lapful was first recorded archaeologically by OGS Crawford in 1935 who identified it as a 'mutilated long barrow' (Ancient Monuments Committee, Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle 1935, 113), and also noted the three 'pointed modern cairns made upon it', the robbing of the northern end and the presence of the sheepfold (NMR No. NY 69 SW 7; authority 2).

Following Crawford's visit a more detailed description was provided by Newbigin (1935-6, 166-7) which was accompanied by two sketch views. Newbigin noted the disturbance to the surface of the cairn and the presence of three curricks on the top of the monument. She also suggested that the northern end of the cairn might have been 'horned' but admitted that certainty was impossible given the disturbance caused by the construction of the sheepfold.

Ordnance Survey Field Investigators photographed The Devil's Lapful on two occasions, in 1956 and in 1970 (Ordnance Survey 1956; 1970). Those photographs taken during 1970 show the cairn covered by brash and felled trees which the OS Field Investigator's report of 1977 confirmed was still the case (NMR No. NY 69 SW 7; authority 6).

The Devil's Lapful is included in Masters' inventory of long cairns in Northumberland (Masters 1984, 59-60) which includes the only previously made plan.

### **The long cairn**

The cairn is at least 54m long; the precise extent of its north-eastern end is uncertain because of the robbing that has occurred there in order to provide stone for the sheepfold. At its south-western end it is a maximum of 14m wide, while at the opposite end it is approximately 11m. Again, this latter dimension has been distorted by the presence of the sheepfold which has been partly inserted into the side of the cairn. The mound appears to parallel-sided, rather than trapezoidal, in its present form.

The stones used in the construction of the cairn measure on average 0.6m - 0.4m in diameter although larger stones tend to form the main body of the cairn while smaller ones occur around its perimeter. The stones were presumably gathered from the surrounding land rather than being quarried. The southerly end of the monument is rounded and stands a maximum of 2.0m high although from the south-east it is 1.15m high.

Part of the eastern perimeter of the cairn is irregular in outline, swinging inwards in an arc at (a). While this feature may simply be the result of further stone-robbing it is unusual in that it is detached from the main area of robbing and is located on what might be argued to be the 'wrong side' of the cairn to supply the sheepfold.

The north-easterly end of the cairn is marked by a series of amorphous stony scarps (b) about 0.4m high and which probably indicate the general extent of the cairn but are only the residue of stone robbing. Newbigin's suggestion of 'horning' noted above (Newbigin 1935-6) cannot be substantiated by these remains and may simply be an illusion created by the pattern of robbing.

The main body of the cairn has suffered a good deal of surface disturbance and is marked by 14 depressions situated along its spine. Most vary between 0.4m and 0.9m in depth although the circular hollow (c) beside the sheepfold is 1.4m deep. Two of the deeper hollows, (c and d), have the appearance of grouse butts but the rest are probably a mixture of small scale robbing, investigation or tree damage. There is evidence of successive phases of disturbance with some holes overlying others; for example (d) partly overlies another hollow to its east.

### **The sheepfold**

The sheepfold is a dry stone, three-compartment structure, standing within a larger curvilinear enclosure, its plan not differing from that shown on the 1st edition OS map (Ordnance Survey 1866). It comprises a broad passage running the length of the fold and a pair of smaller compartments, one rectangular, the other irregular in shape. The northern pen has a 'hogg-hole' or 'sheep-creep', measuring 0.4m square, in its external, north-western wall. Where the walls are freestanding from the cairn they survive to a maximum height of 1.1m and width of 0.8m despite being ruinous in places; the south-eastern wall, which is built into the side of the cairn, is 1.5m high. The overall internal dimensions of the fold are 14.8m by 7.9m.

The curvilinear enclosure which surrounds the sheepfold is defined by a ruinous stone wall which reaches a maximum height of 0.7m but is usually less than this.

## DISCUSSION

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The orientation and setting of the Devil's Lapful long cairn are typical of this group of monuments in northern England, which are usually assigned to the Early or Middle Neolithic. Like all three other recorded long cairns in Northumberland (Dod Hill, Wooler; Dour Hill, Tynedale; Bellshiel Law, Tynedale) it is situated above the 300m contour but below the summit of the hill. As Masters (1984, 70) has noted, the uphill end of the cairn, in this case the north-eastern, might normally be expected to be the widest part of the structure but due to the robbing whether this was originally the case cannot be properly discerned; in its present form the Devil's Lapful seems to be parallel-sided like Bellshiel Law and Dour Hill and is of similar dimensions to the latter which measures 50m by 8.5m.

It is unfortunate that the north-eastern end of the cairn has sustained such damage since it is this area that potentially would be most revealing in terms of overall shape, size and structural features. Nor do any of the hollows located along the body of the cairn show any evidence of internal structural detail suggestive of either original features or later insertions such as the Bronze Age cist inserted into the Dour Hill long cairn (NMR No. NT 70 SE 10).

Henshall (1970) has identified two-phase cairns found in eastern Scotland which comprise an earlier heel-shaped or round cairn to which has been added a long cairn type extension and furthermore has demonstrated how some of the diagnostic features of these cairns have been mistakenly identified as later disturbance (1970, 29). Even with this caveat, it seems almost certain in this instance that much of the current form of the cairn is due to later robbing and mutilation, including forestry operations. The only possible exception to this is the unusual form of the monument at (a) (see above). This raises the possibility of further complexity but the extensive disturbance means that this alone cannot be accepted as diagnostic evidence to indicate that this monument is other than a simple, single-phase structure.



## **METHODOLOGY**

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The survey, at 1:500 scale (RCHME Level 3), was executed using a Wild TC-1610 total station to establish a network of temporary control points and to record hard detail. From the survey data a computer-generated control plot was produced; the archaeological detail was then added to the plotted data using a plane table and Wild RK-1 self-reducing alidade.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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The survey was carried out by RCHME with the assistance of Martin Horne of Sheffield University Division of Continuing Adult Education.

## APPENDICES

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### APPENDIX 1: List of Figures

Figure 1: Location map of The Devil's Lapful

### APPENDIX 2: Table of NMR numbers linked to this site

SITE NAME	COUNTY	DISTRICT	PARISH
The Devil's Lapful	Northumberland	Tynedale	Kielder

NMR no	Unique Identifier	NGR	Site Name
NY 69 SW 7	14532	NY 6419 9285	The Devil's Lapful

 <b>ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE HISTORICAL MONUMENTS OF ENGLAND</b>				
OFFICE OF ORIGIN York	COUNTY Northumberland	SCALE OF SURVEY 1:500	METHOD EDM, Plane Table	OS MAP No. NY 69 SW
PROJECT NAME Kielder sams	DISTRICT Tynedale	DATE OF SURVEY July 1997	ASSOCIATED PLANS	NAR No. 7
SITE NAME The Devil's Lapful	PARISH Kielder	SURVEYOR(S) ASL / MH		SAM No. 25106
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