

ART. III.—*A Sandhill Site at Eskmeals, West Cumberland.*
By MARY C. FAIR.

SOME years ago our member Mr. J. B. Wrigley, of Steelfield Hall, Gosforth, reported the discovery of chips of flint and a small fragment of what appeared to have been a saddle-quern amongst the sand-dunes near Drigg: he then pointed out that these strongly resembled similar finds recorded from the numerous sand-dune sites on the coast of Northern Ireland, and urged that research was needed into possible occupation of the sand-dune area of West Cumberland. In accordance with this suggestion, a careful look-out has been kept for any developments in this direction, but it was not till the summer of 1935 that a definite and very interesting series of sites in the hollows of the sand-dunes was located.

Mr. John Southward, of Newbiggin, Waberthwaite, (who for many years has taken keen interest in the antiquities and history of the district which he has known all his life) then informed the writer of iron-smelting sites amongst the dunes west of Eskmeals railway station, and he kindly acted as guide to point out the places in question (which are by no means easy to find in the desert of sand-dunes), escorting a party consisting of himself, Mrs. Preston, of Newbiggin, the Misses Markham, of Eskmeals House, Miss E. P. Hill, and the writer. Mr. Southward showed us a quantity of slag-heaps and a hearth-site with innumerable pot-boilers and heavy blocks of granite and free-stone which had been subjected to intense heat. It was fully evident that there had been considerable activity in iron-smelting operations



Photo.

ESKMEALS SANDHILLS SITES—HEARTH SITE No. 1.

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in many of the hollows of the dunes: Miss Markham searching in one of the hollows for interesting remains of slag, etc., with a spud, turned up a very beautiful worked flint, the material a semi-translucent greyish-creamy chalcedony, glossy and striking. This is the first worked flint to be recorded for West Cumberland. Mr. Southward later showed us a most interesting settlement-site with smelting-hearths and occupation traces where a few days later a worked flint of grey shade and scraper form was found by Miss Hill, while fragments of undoubted Roman pottery were also brought to light.

Still later in the summer a cloud-burst sluiced away the sand from one of the hollows, revealing a group of what appear to be small cairns, and in another place Miss Markham and her sister have discovered further beautiful worked flints and the flint-workers' chips (some of the latter the lovely chalcedonic material) pottery, some of which seems to be medieval, a flake of patinated bronze, and a leaden disc with a hole in the centre of a type recorded from several known Roman sites (as at Templeborough in Yorkshire), suggested as being spindle-whorls. In the second smelting-hearth site, the writer further turned up two melon-shaped faience blue-glazed beads of the kind frequently found on Roman and Roman-British sites, and some blobs of molten bronze.

This interesting site is the first of its type to be recorded as far as I can trace, for our archaeological area of Cumberland, Westmorland, and Lancashire-North-of-the Sands: it appears to fall into the same class as the extensive settlement at Glenluce, Wigtownshire, on the Scottish coast which is not a great distance away by sea: further north other similar settlements are known in Ayrshire, at Shewalton Sands near Irvine, where, it is said, scrapers and prickers of very fine whiteish-grey flint, almost translucent, were made. At Culbin Sands, Morayshire, there were sand-hill settlements where worked flints were

found and a most interesting fragment of an urn of burnt clay containing grains of wheat, with many other relics of various ages and types from Neolithic to a coin of Mary Queen of Scots and medieval pottery.

These sand-dune settlements are on what is known to geologists as the 25 foot Raised Beach, which is a feature of the Cumberland coast round the Solway to Eskmeals and a little further south: at Eskmeals the Raised Beach is just behind the shingle of the Storm Beach of the present shore while at Ravenglass it can be well seen below the occupation level of the Roman Fort on its west face where erosion has caused land-slides: it can also be well seen at Warborough Nook, south of Braystones, where erosion has caused extensive land-slides into the river Ehen which is here eating away the land on its western bank.

In all these settlements, that at Eskmeals, the Northern Irish examples, and those on the Scottish coasts, the character of the finds suggests that there was occupation from Neolithic to medieval times: possibly sea-wanderers in the early days of the Raised Beach landed and settled round the coasts of Scotland, north-west England, the Isle of Man and northern Ireland. In our own district at Eskmeals the Roman fort at Ravenglass is just across the river Esk and in view, and on the same side of the river as the sand-dune sites is a wide sweep of the river forming a sheltered bay where the river channel is deep, shelving to a sandy shore: this reach of the river is traditionally known as the Roman Harbour and would indeed form an excellent and safe anchorage in all weathers with good facilities for beaching vessels for repair.

The centre of the area amongst the sand-dunes where the settlements are is indicated on the 6" Ordnance Survey (Cumberland 82 S.E.), 30 chains W.N.W. of Eskmeals station, as "Roman Camp Site of": Mr. O. G. S. Crawford informs me that "Records" at the Ordnance



Photo.

ESKMEALS SANDHILLS SITES—HEARTH SITE, No. 2.

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Survey state regarding this site that above was first added to O.S. maps at the first revision in 1897, not having appeared on the original map of 1859-60. "Site of Roman Camp" situate 30 chains N.W. of Eskmeals station. This site is now marked by a circle of boulder stones about 30 links radius, and is situate in a hollow 25 ft. deep. There are no earthworks visible. The sand is continually moving and very often the stones are quite buried. No information is obtainable concerning the finding of coins, broken altars, etc."

This spot is now under a thick bed of drifted sand, and so far we have been quite unable to locate the stones: but any storm may once again clear the place, and we think from its general appearance it might be worth while examining it very carefully in that event, as it is not quite the usual form of sandhill hollows. We hope, if weather is suitable during 1936, to continue with constant research as conditions of the constantly moving sand permit, and to plot a plan of the sites amongst the dunes.

I have to thank very warmly for most generous help given in elucidating the character of the sites and finds Mr. Reginald A. Smith and Mr. Christopher Hawkes, of the British Museum, Dr. Callander, of the National Museum of Scotland, Dr. Adolf Mahr, of the National Museum of Ireland, Mr. O. G. S. Crawford, and Dr. S. E. Hollingworth, of the Geological Survey; also for much kindness and hospitality and invaluable field work the Misses Markham, Mr. John Southward; Mrs. Preston, and Miss E. P. Hill.