

ART. III. – *'Native' Settlements on the North Slopes of the Lake District.*

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DURING the summers of 1974 and 1975 Professor Barri Jones and the author began to conduct an aerial survey of the lowland areas of North Cumbria in an attempt to identify 'new' settlement sites.¹ One area examined was the slopes of the northern fells, between Cockermouth in the west, Caldbeck in the east and Keswick in the south. This fell area is typically pasture, divided by stone walls and a minority of quick hedges into substantial rectangular sheep walks. Above 700 ft. above O.D. much remains unenclosed. Traces of narrow ridge and furrow are widespread on the enclosed land, providing evidence of a past phase of agricultural activity, presumably in the modern period. The structure of the area is dominated by Skiddaw slates but, except on steep upland slopes, glacial till is the dominant surface material. There is high rainfall, and a predominance of poor quality grazing except on the restricted area of limestone.

Within the area are several known sites, some with extensive areas of associated enclosures. The Aughtertree Fell enclosure system is by far the most considerable extant 'ancient' landscape, occupying an unenclosed moorland area between 800 ft and 1,000 ft above O.D. Before modern agricultural disturbance on the enclosed land fringing Aughtertree Fell, the system was clearly more extensive, and included at least one further settlement, at Uldale (NY 256372). The three upstanding settlement sites on the Fell were noted, but not planned, in 1967,² and a plan of the sites and field system was published in 1978.³

The three settlements on the Fell are all enclosed by ditches with the remains of an earth bank and a counterscarp. Only the most easterly site has internal features and an approach way. The internal divisions suggest stockyards etc. arranged radially around a central yard with the probable habitation building opposite the wide, dyked approach way which is in places 15 m wide, and which runs away uphill for 300 m. The trackway connects the settlement site with the large, dyked enclosures and unenclosed areas further up the fell and on the south side. Most of the high enclosures are large (2–6 ha) but there is evidence of a series of small, rectilinear enclosures close to the settlements and partially downhill from them (0.2–0.6 ha) which might have been cultivated. These small enclosures have been affected particularly severely by soil erosion which has formed deep water courses that cut the field boundaries and carry streams northwards. This erosion may be significant in estimating field use, and there is a clear distinction in size and shape between enclosures close to, and those distant from the settlement sites of the north fell side.

The irregularity of the fields and the broad approach-way suggest an economy that placed an emphasis on livestock. In only a limited area do there appear to be enclosures designed for cropping (7 ha at most divided between 3 sites), in contrast to the enclosed pasturage that may have been available for haymaking or overwintering. No dating evidence has yet become available.

Only two further sites have extant enclosure systems, and both of these are on a much smaller scale. Eweclose, close to Wardhall Common above Plumbland (NY 142380) is a

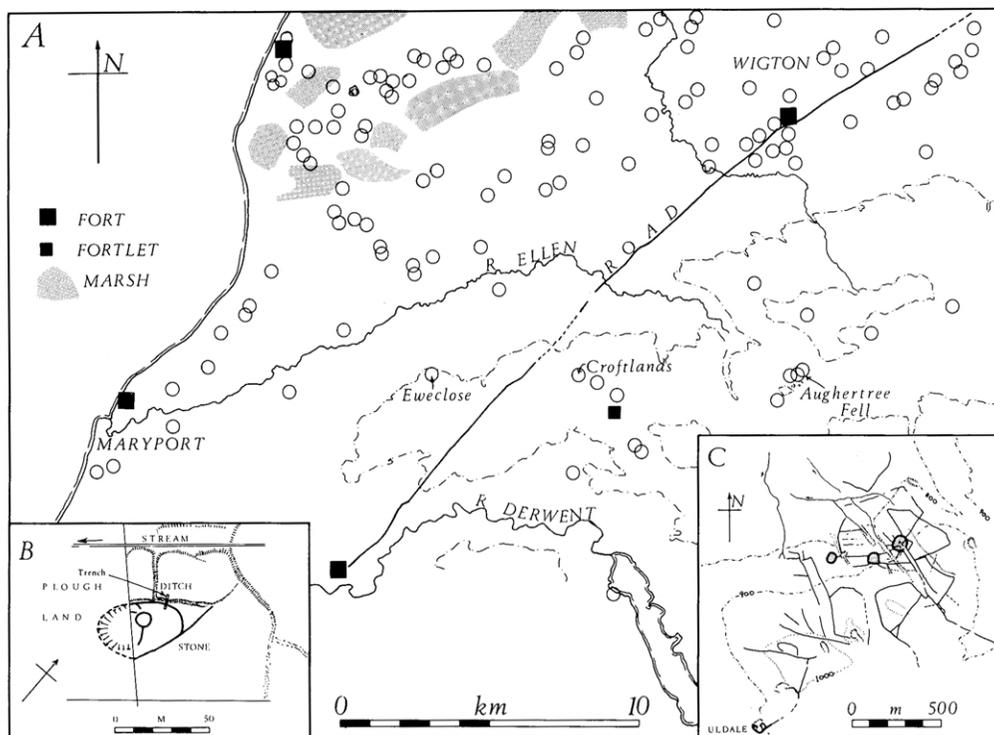


FIG. 1A. – Distribution of 'native' type sites in the Wigton/Maryport area as observed from the air, 1974-80, placed in the basic Roman military context.

FIG. 1B. – A sketch plan of the 'native' site at Croftlands, showing the location of the trial trench.

FIG. 1C. – A sketch plan of the Aughtertree Fell settlement and enclosure complex.

single banked enclosure possibly associated with a considerable linear field bank, but the latter may be of later date. To the east of the enclosure is a small stone walled field system of narrow terraces often less than $20\text{ m} \times 6\text{ m}$, with a stone walled paddock. The whole covers about four times the area of the Eweclose enclosure, but has been severely mauled by quarrying and obscured by ridge and furrow on all sides, and was probably once far more extensive. It is possible that this stone walled area comprises a settlement site as well as enclosed fields or plots. The site is undated.

The third site with some traces of a relict field system lies at Croftlands, Bothel at NY 190380. The nucleus is a stone walled enclosure, now bisected by a modern field boundary and severely damaged on the north side by ploughing. Associated with it are a series of shallow ditches defining what were probably contemporary enclosures, now severely restricted by modern agriculture and confused also by subsurface drainage. Because of the anaerobic soil conditions and absence of erosion problems, this site was chosen for a test trench designed to obtain palaeobotanical samples contemporary with the occupation of the site. A small team of archaeologists from Manchester University were diverted from excavations on a 'native' farm site at Silloth for a few days in July

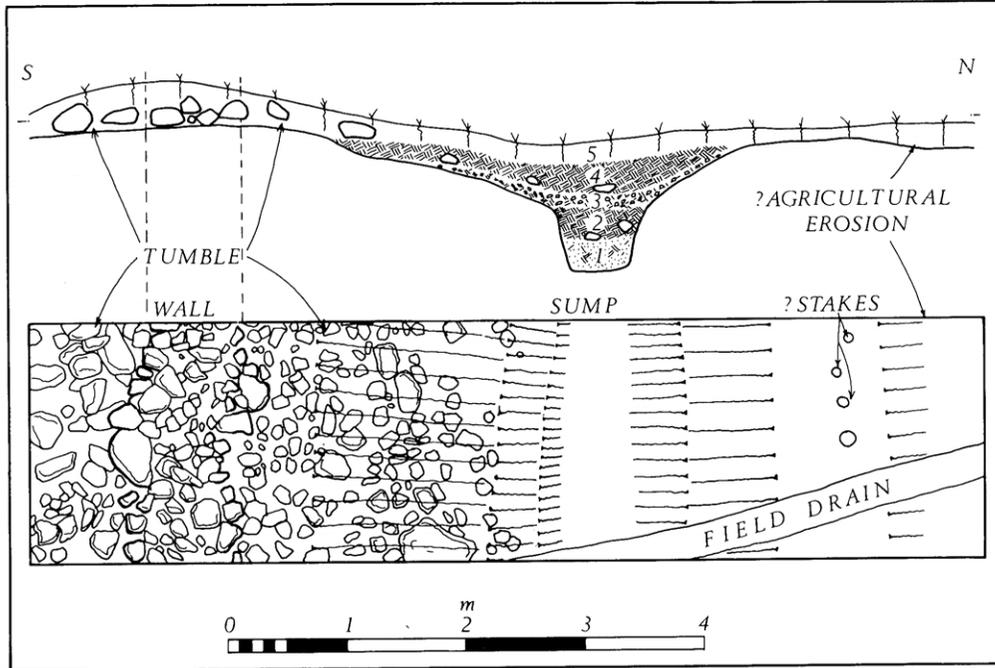


FIG. 2. - The trial trench at Croftlands, section and plan.

1. Grey clayey silt, containing Roman pottery.
2. Orange-red clay with stones from wall.
3. Fine clay with small stones.
4. Orange-red clay with stones from wall.
5. Topsoil and base of wall.

1977.⁴ A trench was dug across the nucleus enclosure wall and the ditch of an adjacent field. The wall at base was 70 cm across, constructed of undifferentiated and untrimmed stones. Extensive tumble has occurred, but the wall cannot have been defensive in character. The ditch was roughly 'U' shaped, with a wide upper profile 3 m across, and a steep sump, 50 cm across and 1.20 m below current ground surface. The interior of the 'field' was flanked by a line of possible stake holes almost parallel to the ditch, and 1 m from the lip of the ditch the subsurface clay fell away by 5 cm, possibly implying cultivation erosion of the field interior. A fragment of badly abraded Samian was found in the ditch sump, providing an approximate chronology for the collection of the primary silt material in the period broadly A.D. 90-180. Samples from this and the two subsequent deposition episodes were sent to the Durham University environmental laboratories for botanical analysis.⁵ The deposit associated with Roman pottery contained the widest range of species, including a single carbonized grain of barley, weeds of cultivated ground, waste ground and pastureland. This assemblage (see appendix) is compatible with mixed farming activity, and if it does not categorically demonstrate the growing of barley on the site, it does at least imply its storage or drying and the presence of arable

and pasture. Rushes are present in all three samples, probably deriving from plants growing in the ditch. In the undated, later deposition episodes there is a reduction in plants associated with human activity. The second assemblage is dominated by rush and nettle seeds, with traces of sedges, grasses, blackberry and chickweed, suggesting abandonment of the occupied site and, probably of the immediate vicinity. The presence of wall stones in the ditch on this level suggests dereliction. This picture is reinforced by the disappearance of all traces of vegetation except grasses and rushes by the next deposition phase, when the area had reverted to wet pastureland. The botanical record coincides with the archaeological evidence of the construction and occupation of a farm site, the enclosure of fields and the subsequent abandonment of the complex. While we cannot define the chronological limits of this occupation, it included the early Roman period. In this respect the evidence for Croftlands is consistent with that from all other excavated 'native' sites in Cumbria, none of which have yet produced evidence diagnostic of pre-Roman occupation. The general Cumbrian palaeobotanical record offers little evidence of late pre-Roman agriculture, nor for any real improvement until about 200 A.D.⁶ It is reasonable to think that the Croftlands farm falls within the context of the general quickening of agricultural activity in the Roman period.

The presence of a small Roman fort only 1.6 km from Croftlands at Caermote may have been a significant factor in the establishment of a scatter of settlements in the Bothel-Bassenthwaite area, providing a centre of social but more particularly economic importance in an area not favoured by environmental factors. Even without Caermote, markets (should these be desired) were readily available, at the far more important fort sites of Papcastle and Old Carlisle, both conveniently connected with the Bothel area by a major road which passed only 1 km to the northwest of Croftlands. Alternatively, the occupation of these upland and comparatively inhospitable terrains may simply represent the outer limits of a settlement pattern that was already well established on the dryer lowlands of the Solway, as evidenced by aerial photography,⁷ and dated to the Roman period at Brampton, Wolsty, Risehow, Jacob's Gill,⁸ Fingland Rigg,⁹ and Silloth.¹⁰ There is no evidence of permanent contemporary habitation further into the Lake District fells.

APPENDIX

Fruits and Seeds in Ditch Samples from Croftlands

By ALISON M. DONALDSON

Level	Habitat	Sample Size		
		1 4 Kg	2 2.5 Kg	3 2.25 Kg
<i>Carex</i> sp. (Sedge)	—	3	4	
<i>Chenopodium album</i> (Fat Hen)	WA	2		
<i>Cirsium</i> sp. (Thistle)	WAG	7		
<i>Gramineae</i> (Grasses)	—	5	2	27
<i>Hordeum</i> sp. (Barley)	A	1		
<i>Juncus Articulatus/acutifloris</i> (Rushes)	GH Wa	+	+++	+++

<i>Juncus effusus/conglomeratus</i> (Rushes)	GB Wa		+++	+++
<i>Polygonum persicaria</i> (persicaria)	WA Wa	1		
<i>Ranunculus acris</i> type (Buttercup)	GW	3		
<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> aggr. (Blackberry)	Wo HW		5	
<i>Rumex acetosa</i> type (Dock, Sorrel)	WAG	15		
<i>Stellaria media</i> (Chickweed)	WA	1	1	
<i>Urtica Dioica</i> (Nettle)	W Wo	43	165	

Key to habitats

W waste land; A arable land; G grassland; Wo woodland; H heath; B acid bog; Wa waterside.

Habitats are described only when the level of identification permits.

Footnotes

- ¹ N. J. Higham and G. D. B. Jones, 'Frontier, Forts and Farmers: Cumbrian Aerial Survey 1974-5' *Arch. J.* 132 (1975) 16-53.
- ² R. L. Bellhouse, 'Enclosures on Aughtertree Fell', CW2, lxvii, 26.
- ³ N. J. Higham, 'Early Field Survival in North Cumbria', in *Early Land Allotment*, eds. H. C. Bowen, P. J. Fowler, BAR 48 (1978), fig. 16.6.
- ⁴ My thanks to Susan Worthington, Mr G. Williams and Mr P. Dean, who worked on the excavation, and to Mr & Mrs D. A. Pallister for permission to excavate and for all their little kindnesses which made the experience pleasurable as well as informative.
- ⁵ My thanks to Alison M. Donaldson who carried out the analysis, the results of which are included as Appendix 1.
- ⁶ W. F. Pennington, 'Vegetation history in the north-west of England: A regional synthesis' in *The Vegetational History of the British Isles*, eds. D. Walker, R. G. West (Cambridge 1970), 72.
- ⁷ Higham and Jones, *op. cit.*, fig. 3.
- ⁸ B. Blake, 'Excavations of Native (Iron Age) sites in Cumberland', CW2, lix, 1-14.
- ⁹ G. G. S. Richardson, 'A Romano-British farmstead at Fingland', CW2, lxxvii, 53-9.
- ¹⁰ N. J. Higham and G. D. B. Jones forthcoming.

