

ART. I. – *Prehistoric Habitation Sites in West Cumbria. Part V: Eskmeals to Haverigg.*

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THE purpose of this paper is to complete our reports of the evidence for prehistoric occupation of West Cumbria¹ which we have discovered during our survey of ploughed fields and erosion scars along the coastal strip from Eskmeals to Haverigg, which lies at the mouth of the river Duddon just to the south of the town of Millom (Fig. 1).

South of Eskmeals the coastal plain narrows sharply and becomes little more than a broad shelf skirting the foot of Black Combe, which rises steeply in the east to a height of 600 m, dominating the coast for some 6 km from the village of Bootle southwards to the Whicham Valley. The western slopes of the Combe are drained by a number of small becks feeding the river Annas which discharges its waters into the sea at Selker, west of Bootle. Hologill beck which rises on the highest part of Black Combe feeds into a small tarn at Barfield, south of Bootle, before joining the river Annas near Holmegate farm.

South of the Annas the main feature of the coastline is a boulder-clay ridge which falls away to the east to a band of wetter ground before rising up the steeply sloping western side of Black Combe. To the west of the ridge there are cliffs formed by the erosion of the boulder-clay by the sea, and although a bank of shingle protects parts of the coast-line to some extent, there has been serious erosion during the past few years at The Tarn farm, north of Selker, where the raised beach is rapidly disappearing, and at Gutterby, where the southern end of a trackway which used to run northwards along the cliff top towards Annaside has completely disappeared. Beyond the southern edge of Black Combe at Silecroft, the topography changes, the boulder-clay ridge ends and a small coastal plain begins to develop, with the ground to the east, rising less steeply to a height of about 150 m. The western edge of the coastal strip is increasingly overlain by sand to the south and at the estuary of the river Duddon sand-dunes occur, comparable with those at the mouth of the Esk, although not so large or extensive. Across the estuary lie the sand-hills of Roanhead and the north end of Walney Island, which has yielded so much prehistoric material.²

Although we have recorded a number of significant concentrations of flint artefacts, one or two flints were found in isolation in several of the fields on the higher ground between Gutterby and Silecroft. Map references are all taken from Sheet SD 18.

SELKER AREA

Between Stub Place at Eskmeals and The Tarn farm, which lies on the southern edge of Tarn Bay, ploughing was relatively rare and only a few nondescript flakes of pebble flint were found; most of these were picked up in a small field directly opposite Stub Place, to the south of the road.

THE TARN. Map reference: 3077 4897. Height O.D.: 7 metres

To the south-west of The Tarn farm, in a field adjacent to the farmyard, we picked

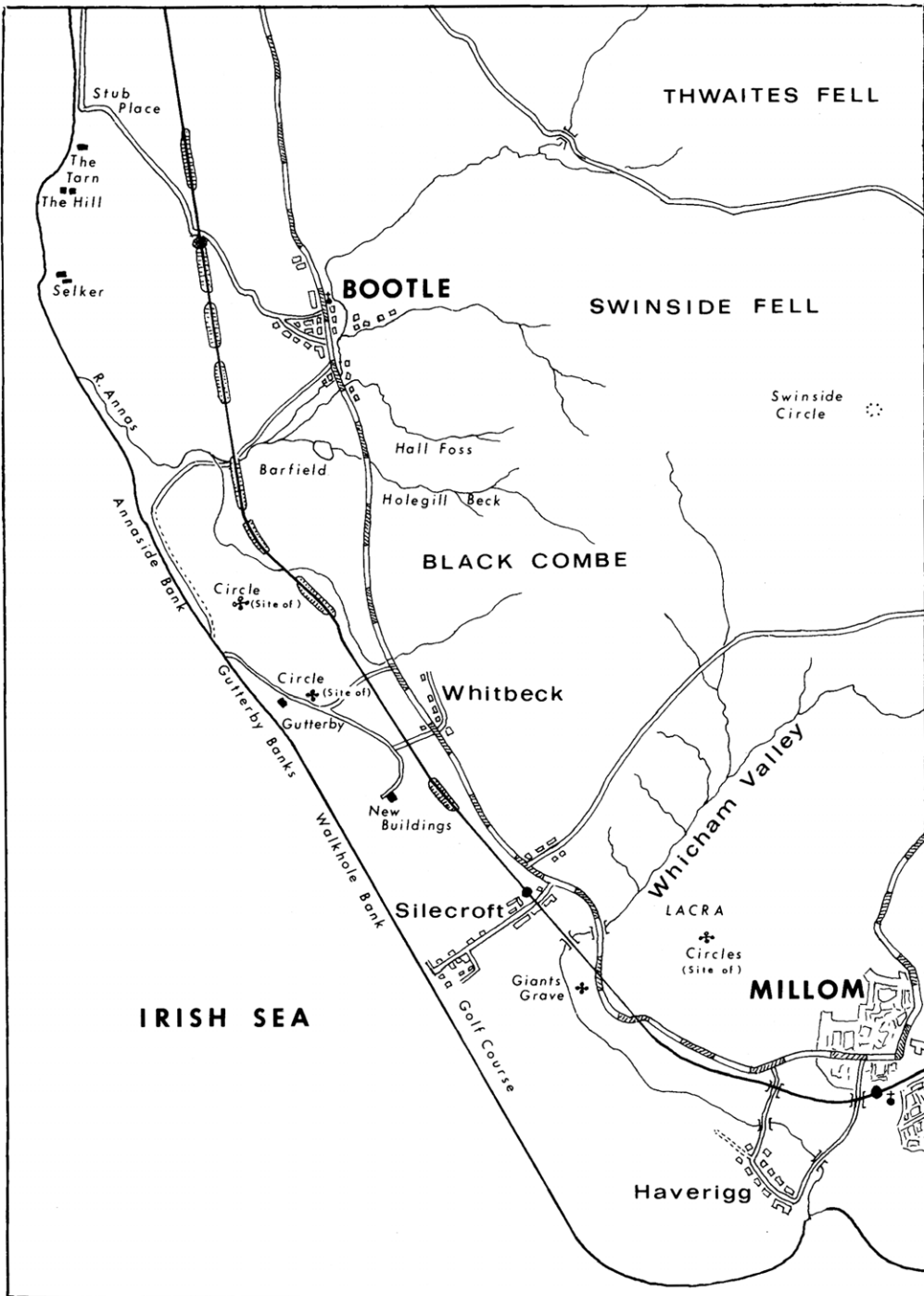


FIG. 1 – Sketch map of the area between Bootle and Millom, covered in the report.

up a utilized flake of yellow pebble flint. The field lies on the raised beach along a short, eroding stretch of shoreline. From the upper face of the low sea-cliff between The Tarn and Selker farms we have extracted 20 flint artefacts, including a core, a blade, two scrapers, Fig. 2.4, and a retouched fragment which is probably from a *petit tranchet* derivative arrowhead, Fig 2.21. In addition to the flints we also found two large flakes and a core of volcanic tuff, none of which show any signs of polishing.

THE HILL. Map reference: 3076 4894. Height O.D.: 10 metres

On the surface of a sloping field adjacent to the north wall of The Hill farm, we picked up 15 pieces of flint, including a core, a utilized flake and three heat damaged flakes. In the field adjoining the farm to the south (Map reference: 3078 4892), we found two flakes of flint, a core and a small round scraper similar to Fig. 2.4.

ANNASIDE

ANNASIDE BANKS. Map reference: 3096 4856. Height O.D.: 26 metres

On a field on the eastern slope of the clay ridge above Annaside Banks, we found a concentration of 30 flints, including a scraper, an awl and four utilized flakes. In a field to the south of Annaside farm, we found a core of pebble flint and to the north of the farm, on a south facing slope above the river Annas, we picked up a small pebble core with a single striking platform and broad blade scars. The field was ridged for potatoes and searching was difficult, so that this field cannot be said to have been thoroughly walked.

GUTTERBY

GUTTERBY FARM. Map reference: 3101 4849. Height O.D.: 35 metres

To the north of Gutterby farm, we picked up 16 flints, including a scraper, a core, three utilized flakes and a heat damaged fragment. The farmer, Mr Fell, was harvesting potatoes at the time, so that the surface of the field was in a far from ideal state for our purpose.

GUTTERBY BANKS. Map reference: 3096 4849. Height O.D.: 13 metres

According to the 6" to the mile Ordnance Survey of 1867 (Sheet LXXXVII), a road ran from Whitbeck, via Gutterby farm to Annaside, northwards along the high ground above Annaside Banks. At the point where the road from Gutterby reached the southern end of Annaside Banks, about 180m of trackway have disappeared due to sea erosion and this is shown on the Ordnance Survey map published in 1952 (Sheet SD 18). The erosion has cut through a kettle hole about half way along the eroded length, and in the cliff face at the lowest point of the hole we found what appears to be the barb from a large barbed and tanged, or *petit tranchet* derivative, arrowhead, Fig. 2.9.

SAND PIT. Map reference: 3105 4842. Height O.D.: 37 metres

Just beyond the western edge of a small sand pit which lies about 200m south-east of Gutterby farm we found 238 flints confined within an area of about 100sq. m. These include 16 cores, five utilized flakes, six retouched fragments, one knife, four scrapers,

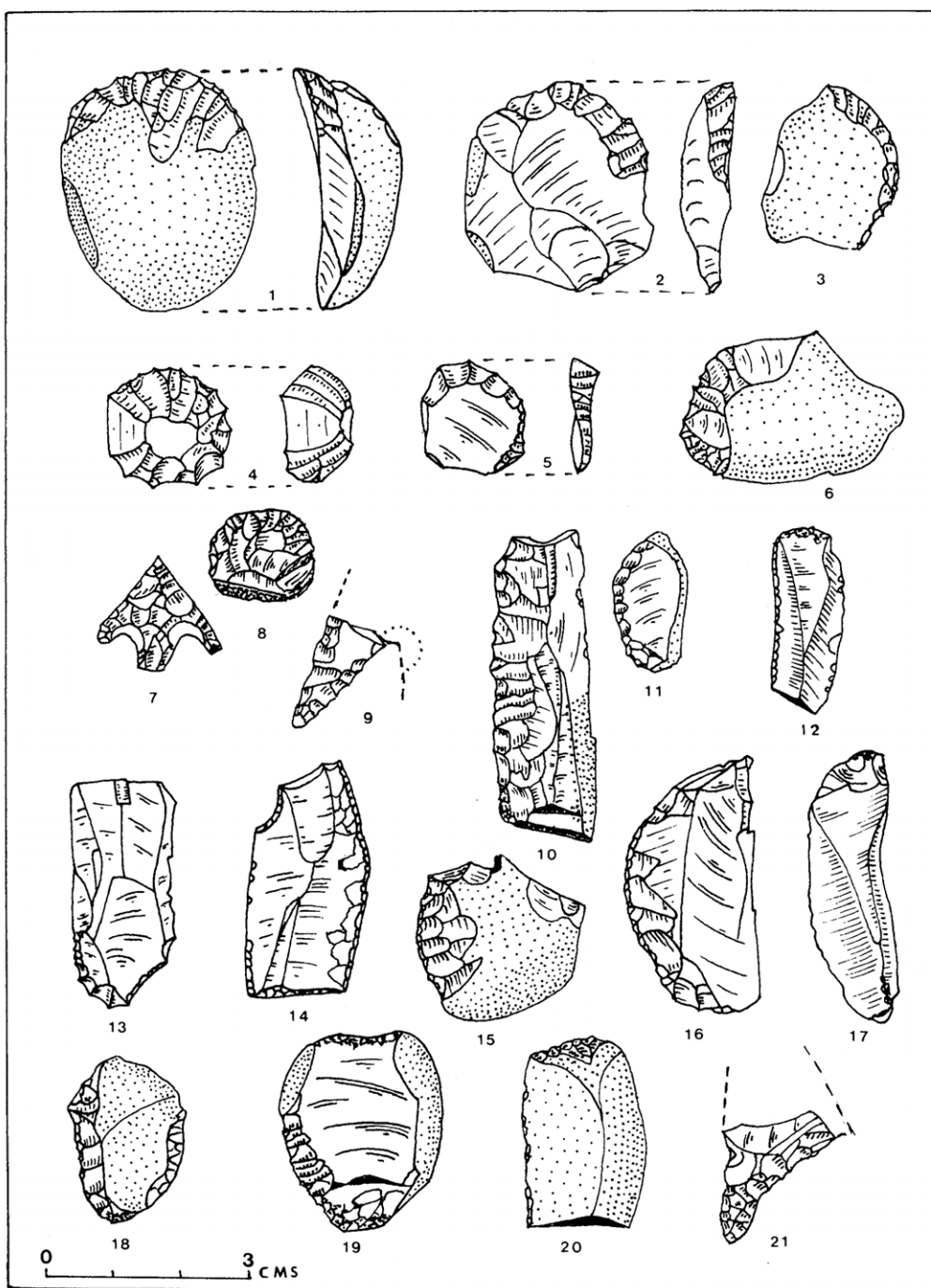


FIG 2. – A selection of artefacts found on the coastal strip between Eskmeals and Haverigg.

Fig. 2.1 and 3, and a blade. Only the last exhibits a marked degree of patination. All the artefacts are derived from beach pebble flint, and are reminiscent of similar assemblages from the Drigg and Eskmeals sand-hill sites.

At about the same level in the adjoining field to the south we found a few flakes of yellow pebble flint and above this in a hollow close to the edge of the cliff we found an end scraper of yellow pebble flint with cortex still adhering along the whole of one side, Fig. 2. 20.

WHITBECK

NEW BUILDINGS A. Map reference: 3115 4833. Height O.D.: 32 metres

The term 'New Buildings' is somewhat misleading, as the name is given to a rather ruined and deserted farmstead.

On the high ground to the north-north-east of the farmstead, we picked up 37 flints, including four cores, a scraper and two fragments with some retouch. Four of the pieces of flint waste are heat damaged.

NEW BUILDINGS B. Map reference: 3113 4833. Height O.D.: 32 metres

About 370 m west of New Buildings A and at about the same height O.D., we picked up 17 nondescript flakes and fragments of flint, six of which are heat damaged.

NEW BUILDINGS C. Map reference: 3118 4831. Height O.D.: 15 to 23 metres

In 1977, on the summit of a hillock in a large field belonging to Townend Hall, Whitbeck, east-north-east of New Buildings, Professor Barri Jones photographed from the air the crop mark of a double ditched enclosure, at about the 23 m contour. This site is included as a bivallate hill-fort of later prehistory (800 b.c.-A.D. 100) in Higham, *The Northern Counties to A.D. 1000*, p. 130.

The field slopes down towards the north-west to a sandy hollow way leading to the farmstead. On the sloping ploughed ground and in the track below, we found 73 chips and flakes of flint (10 of which are heat damaged), together with four flake cores. None of the pieces show any signs of secondary retouch, although two of the flakes are edge damaged, apparently from use.

We made a careful search of the whole of the field for evidence of pre-Roman Iron Age or later occupation, but found none. A close watch was kept on the field during the season of growth after reseeding, but we were unable to identify any crop marks. The site is recorded as No. 4635 in the Sites & Monuments record for Cumbria, and is in the Civil Parish of Whicham.

NEW BUILDINGS D. Map reference: 3113 4829. Height O.D.: 22 metres

Beyond New Buildings towards the sea is a boggy hollow, bounded on the east and south by rough pasture with poor herbage cover and a number of erosion scars. During the period of our search a drainage trench was laid across the hollow and an abortive attempt was made to plough the rough pasture. Neither effort appeared to meet with any great success; however, the drainage trench revealed a hearth sealed within the peaty sediment of the bog and also yielded a small number of flints. Unfortunately, the organic

deposits contained silts washed down from the high ground to the north and were not considered suitable for pollen analysis.

From erosion scars and the rough ploughing to the south and east of the bog, we picked up 313 flints, including 13 cores, eight scrapers, Fig 2.8, 15, 16, 18 and 19, five blades (one of which shows signs of utilization, Fig 2.17), six utilized flakes, two "scalar" cores and 32 heat damaged fragments. The assemblage also includes two flakes of volcanic tuff, neither of which shows any sign of a polished surface.

Although there are no truly diagnostic pieces in this assemblage, it is likely that it is earlier than the material from Gutterby Sand Pit, which is of cruder workmanship and probably represents an early Bronze Age occupation.

NEW BUILDINGS E. Map reference: 3112 4828. Height O.D.: 28 metres

Just beyond the northern edge of the scatter of flint from New Buildings D the ground rises sharply to the 30 m contour. Towards the edge of this higher ground, immediately above Site D, we picked up a further 52 flints, including six cores, four utilized flakes and a knife. We also picked up a large flake of coarse volcanic tuff which appears to have been retouched along one edge to form a side scraper.

SILECROFT

SUMMER HILL. Map reference: 3114 4825. Height O.D.: 25 metres

In the field to the south of the house on Summer Hill we found 14 flints, including two cores, a utilized flake and a knife.

WALKHOLE BANK. Map reference: 3117 4822. Height O.D.: 18 metres

A rough road runs from Hartrees Hill to Summer Hill and to the east of this, above Walkhole Bank, is a small pond. Around the pond, on the western, northern and eastern slopes, we found the remains of considerable prehistoric activity. Altogether we picked up 1,065 flints, including a small quantity which appear to derive from chalk flint rather than local beach pebbles. The assemblage appears to be mainly Bronze Age in character and includes a barbed and tanged arrowhead, Fig. 2.7; 11 scrapers, Fig. 2.2, 5 and 6; 10 blades, one of which, Fig. 2.13, has some secondary working on both edges at its distal end, and another, Fig. 2.14, is a patinated blade in grey flint with white inclusions (possibly chalk flint) notched at its distal end and blunted across the bulbar end to remove the bulb of percussion and at the same time produce an end scraper. Also included is a fabricator, Fig. 2.10, with triangular cross-section, which seems to be made from chalk flint. The fabricator has been truncated or broken in use and, from the percussion rings on the ventral surface, we estimate that it has been struck from a much larger flint block. Two pieces of volcanic tuff were also found, both of which exhibit traces of a polished surface, and seem to be fragments of a polished stone axe or axes.

On the west side of the pond we picked up a sandstone pebble measuring 10 cm by 8 cm and a maximum thickness of slightly less than 4 cm. The pebble has an indentation pecked into one face and exhibits resolved flaking on both faces at one end. This stone appears to have served the dual purpose of an "anvil stone" and "chopper". A table of artefacts from Walkhole Bank is given in Figure 3.

Analysis of artefacts from Walkhole Bank

<i>Waste Flakes</i>	<i>Burnt Waste</i>	<i>Cores</i>	<i>Burnt Cores</i>	<i>Utilized Pieces</i>	<i>Scrapers</i>
729†	125	142*	6	22	11
<i>Blades</i>	<i>Miscellaneous Retouch</i>	<i>B & T Arrowhead</i>	<i>Fabricator</i>	<i>Anvil Stone</i>	<i>Axe Fragments</i>
10	10	1	1	1	2

† Includes 8 pieces which appear to be chalk flint.

* Includes 5 "scalar" cores which are typically worked out Bronze Age cores and 94 struck flint beach pebbles apparently discarded as unsuitable for further use as a source of flint.

FIG. 3

In the field which lies to the west of the road which runs below the Walkhole Bank site, we picked up a core and four flakes of flint at the eastern side of the ploughed ground adjacent to the road, and it is likely that this marks the seaward edge of the main flint scatter.

COTELY LANE. Map reference: 3122 4817. Height O.D.: 11 metres

In a field adjacent to the west side of Cotely lane we picked up 73 flints including six cores (one of which is a "scalar" core), five scrapers Fig. 2.11, two blades, three utilized flakes and two fragments with secondary retouch.

COTELY BANK. Map reference: 3118 4818. Height O.D.: 17 metres

Two fields to the south of the Walkhole Bank site, about 300 m from the pond, we found nine flints, including one core. This field was ridged for potatoes and so was difficult to search. To the north of the shore road at Hartrees Hill, a large field was ploughed and although we found an area containing a large number of heat-shattered stones towards the centre of the field, there were no flints or other artefacts of prehistoric origin.

GOLF COURSE. Map reference: 3125 4803. Height O.D.: 8 metres

Just above the beach at the edge of the golf course, about 15 sq. m of turf had been removed and lying on the exposed surface were five flints including a "scalar" core. It is very likely that more flints were removed from here in the turf and that these artefacts represent the remains of a Bronze Age raised beach habitation.

HAVERIGG

We understand from Mr D. Nickson that a small quantity of flints with Mesolithic affinities were picked up by him on the coastal strip between Silecroft and Haverigg, although no microliths were found.

Discussion

Although most of the flints found during our field walking to the south of Eskmeals can be ascribed to Bronze Age poverty industries based on the use of flint pebbles from the nearby beach, some of the material from New Buildings and Silecroft would fit more comfortably into a late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age context. This applies especially to those artefacts which appear to have been made from imported flint. The blunted blade from Walkhole Bank, Fig. 2.14, exhibits a marked degree of patination and the fine blunting along one edge, coupled with the blunting at the bulbar end where the bulb of percussion has been removed, can be paralleled with similar artefacts found in the late Mesolithic/Neolithic material around Williamsons Moss. Although the blade is patinated it is still possible to see that it is made from grey flint with white inclusions. It is worth noting that although Walkhole Bank yielded more flints with marked patination than the other sites, they still only amounted to less than three percent of the total from that site. The paucity of cores with well defined striking platforms and the comparatively large number of "scalar" cores confirms the poverty status of the industries and compares closely with the Bronze Age sites of the Drigg and Eskmeals sand hills. The fact that some of the larger artefacts appear to derive from imported flint rather than beach pebbles is comparable with similar finds made during our survey between St Bees and Eskmeals.³

The presence of late Neolithic/Bronze Age artefacts along this stretch of the coast-line is not surprising since there is much evidence in the form of funerary and other monuments for the occupation of the area during this period. Sites of stone circles, long since destroyed, are recorded at Hall Foss, Annaside and Gutterby along the coastal strip, and a kerbed cairn was reported in 1794 to have existed about 185 m south of the Gutterby circle.⁴ On the higher ground at Lacra, to the south of the Whicham valley, are the remains of four small stone circles, three of which were partially excavated in 1947 by J. A. Dixon and C. I. Fell.⁵ Circle D yielded a large fragment of the upper part of a collared urn. In 1872, a similar urn was found at Beck farm about 1.5 km east-south-east of Lacra farm, and this is considered to be of an earlier form than the Lacra urn.⁶ At about the 8 m contour between Silecroft and Kirksanton are the two large standing stones known as the "Giant's Grave", which are recorded as having originally formed part of a larger group.⁷ When the field in which the stones are standing was ploughed, we picked up a small flint blade which had secondary retouch on one end and down one edge, Fig. 2.12.

Stone tools have also been found in the vicinity. A polished stone axe of the narrow butted Cumbrian type is recorded from Lowscales⁸ about 1 km east-north-east of Lacra, and a small polished stone axe was found in a wall at Cross Villa, Silecroft.⁹ Two stone hammers are recorded as being found near Silecroft in 1860 and 1862,¹⁰ and it would appear that a "stone celt" reported from Silecroft in 1868 is possibly from the area near the Cotely Bank site, in which there was a large quantity of heat shattered stone but no flints.¹¹ Axe hammers have been found not far from Barfield Tarn at Sikebeck and Old Hyton, while a third is recorded in 1813 as "found at Bootle".¹²

The artefactual evidence is supported by pollen analysis of organic deposits from Eskmeals and Barfield Tarn,¹³ which shows a slight modification of the woodland at about 3700 b.c. This can be accounted for by the need of the late Mesolithic peoples to

make a clearing in which to live, to provide materials for the building of shelters and the requirements of day to day living. A similar effect was noted by Dr Donald Walker in the deposits from Ehenside Tarn.¹⁴

The first signs of the effects of Neolithic agriculture appear in the sediment profile at Barfield just before 3000 b.c., when the levels of pollen of trees and shrubs fell markedly and at the same time the pollen of cereals and weeds of cultivation was sufficiently high to suggest the clearance of forest and the beginning of farming on a significant scale. At Barfield, clearance and cultivation appears to have occurred to such an extent that the natural vegetation protection was broken up and this gave rise to soil erosion, so that boulder clay sub-soil was washed into the Tarn. This episode was succeeded by a period of partial recovery of the woodland, followed by intense agricultural activity which led to permanent and almost complete deforestation.¹⁵ This episode was noted in the post elm decline deposits exposed in the low cliffs at Drigg, where an average date of 2007 b.c. was obtained from a hearth.¹⁶ A slightly earlier date of about 2200 b.c. has been suggested by Dr Walker for this phase at Ehenside Tarn, based on a radiocarbon date from Scaleby Moss.¹⁷

Although we have observed the area most carefully for almost 20 years, none of the fields have been ploughed on the lower, more level ground to the north, west and south of Barfield tarn. This area has always seemed to us to have been particularly suitable for prehistoric habitation. The absence of Mesolithic habitation sites can be explained by the nature of the terrain, since the opportunity to follow a hunting and gathering tradition would be very restricted, on such a narrow strip of land. It is possible that erosion of the coastline will have destroyed the evidence of any Mesolithic activity. However, the coastal erosion that we have noted over the past 30 years has always occurred where there has been easy access to the beach, usually a farm road. For many years it has been the custom for local farmers to use beach pebbles for roads and to take the larger, water worn stones for the building of turf and cobble walls, thus exposing the base of the boulder-clay cliffs and raised beaches to the effects of high-energy waves. Where access is difficult, banks of gravel protect the shore-line, and erosion is minimal. At the mouth of the Annas, a gravel bank has been formed which not only protects the shore-line but has turned the river northwards for a distance of about 1 km. The protection of the coast by gravel banks occurs at a number of places to the north, but at St Bees where gravel was used for commercial purposes, erosion has been so great that a breakwater has had to be built. It seems to us unlikely therefore that there has been sufficient erosion of the coast-line between Eskmeals and Silecroft to make a significant difference to its width. There is little doubt, however, that some evidence of post Mesolithic habitation of the raised beach has been lost from The Tarn where, by comparison with Drigg and Eskmeals, we should have expected to find a considerable scatter of flints. The wide scatter of single flints of mainly Bronze Age characteristics between the small areas of greater concentration is suggestive of movement of people following a pastoral rather than an arable farming tradition. Such people would be well situated to make use of the grazing land created by the rigorous forest clearance which began about 2000 b.c. Activity of this sort would also account for the inability of the forest to re-establish itself.

The preference of the Mesolithic hunters for the land adjacent to the estuary of the Esk, at Williamsons Moss, and their apparent avoidance of the coastal strip to the south

can be explained by the need of these people to have a hunting parish capable of supporting a sufficient number of animals to provide food for the hunting group. Such an area is available inland from Eskmeals and at the same time a further supply of food would be obtainable in the form of fish, fowl and edible plants, which can be found in an estuarine environment.

The artefacts from the coastal strip support the pollen evidence for the beginning of farming just before 3000 b.c., although much of the evidence from flint debris and funerary and other remains indicates that the greatest use of this area occurred later, beginning with the second major forest clearance of 2000 b.c. and lasting well on into the Bronze Age.

Notes and References

- ¹ J. Cherry and P. J. Cherry, "Prehistoric habitation sites in West Cumbria", CW2, lxxxiii, lxxxiv and lxxxv.
- ² M. Cross, "A prehistoric settlement on Walney Island", CW2, xxxviii, xxxix, xlii, xlv, xlvii, xlix and l; F. Barnes, "Pottery from prehistoric sites, North End, Walney Island", CW2, lv, 1; "Newly discovered flint chipping sites in the Walney Island locality", CW2, 1, 20; "Microlithic sites on Walney", CW2, lxx, 277.
- ³ J. Cherry and P. J. Cherry, *op. cit.*, lxxxiii, lxxxiv, lxxxv.
- ⁴ Hutchinson, I, 553f.
- ⁵ J. A. Dixon and C. I. Fell, "Some Bronze Age burial circles at Lacra, near Kirksanton", CW2, xlviii, 1.
- ⁶ M. Cross, "Four prehistoric objects from the Millom area", CW2, xxxix, 283.
- ⁷ Hutchinson, *op. cit.*
- ⁸ M. Cross, *op. cit.*
- ⁹ J. E. Spence, "Report of the Committee for Prehistoric Studies - 1936", CW2, xxxvii, 102.
- ¹⁰ M. Cross, "Two stone axe hammers from Silecroft", CW2, xlix, 213.
- ¹¹ J. Eccleston, "Ancient Remains at Lacra and Kirksanton", CW1, 1, 278.
- ¹² W. G. Collingwood, "An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments of Cumberland", CW2, xxiii, 269.
- ¹³ W. Pennington-Tutin, "Vegetation History of N.W. England", 67, in *Studies in the Vegetational History of the British Isles* (1970).
- ¹⁴ D. Walker, "The late Quaternary history of the Cumberland Lowland". *Phil. Trans. Roy. Soc. B*, 251.
- ¹⁵ W. Pennington-Tutin, *op. cit.*
- ¹⁶ J. Cherry, "Sea cliff erosion at Drigg, Cumbria: Evidence of Prehistoric Habitation", CW2, lxxxii, 1.
- ¹⁷ D. Walker, *op. cit.*