

## II

# The Rock Art at Millstone Burn, Northumberland

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### INTRODUCTION

NORTHUMBERLAND is one of the main areas where great concentrations of the enigmatic prehistoric cup and ring art are found. Although some isolated sites occur, most of this rock art is found in groups. One of such clusters is found at either side of the Millstone Burn. This group cannot boast to have special designs or elaborately carved rocks but still is worthy of a complete review.

Accurate surveys in July 1986 and 1987 by the author established the presence of more than 60 carved rocks, some of which had not been previously recorded. Earlier reports are rather confusing as some of the (unnumbered) rocks have been misleadingly named.

In this paper all rocks that were examined have been assigned an individual number, so that with both an eight-figure grid reference and several location maps it will not be very difficult to locate these stones. A number of rocks, illustrated in previous reports (Beckensall, 1983, pp. 192–4) could not after several searches be traced and may either be overgrown or be part of surfaces described here.

### LOCATION AND ENVIRONMENT

The Millstone Burn group is found some 11 km SW of Alnwick, and 4·5 km NNW of Longframlington (fig. 1). The area is bisected by the A697 Morpeth–Wooler trunk-road that follows a low pass through the first of the Fell Sandstone ridges that encircle the Cheviot dome. The majority of the stones are on the SE-facing slopes of the low hills that rise to 308 m at nearby Shirlaw Pike, some 2 km to the SW.

The carved stones are found between the 175 m and 240 m contours, although there are some outlying stones at a lower level. The relief in the area is rather simple. The lower parts of the hill rise gently to 150 m. From there the slopes become more steep and rocky outcrop ridges and slabs emerge, giving the area a somewhat terraced appearance in places. The top of the hill crest, where the boundary fence is, consists of rather level ground, sloping to the E and falling steeply away when the burn is reached. Here the little stream has cut a deep gorge-like little valley into the hill-slope. There are three main ridge systems. Two, west of the road and on top of the hill-shoulder, run parallel to each other and stretch in a NW–SE direction. The other, at Snook Bank, opposite the valley, is a long and more complex ridge, much quarried, which runs NNE–SSW. There are many more minor ridges and outcrops and many small and huge boulders scattered about.

### THE ROCK ART

The cluster of rock art at Millstone Burn is not really an isolated group as it forms part of a band of sites stretching from Lordenshaw, where 32 sites are reported, via the moors north of Rothbury, with 8 sites, to Millstone Burn. Further north some isolated sites connect this southern Northumbrian concentration with the large group near Wooler in the north. One of these intermediate sites has recently been discovered by the author at Caller's Crag, only 1·8 km north of Millstone Burn and a description of it is included in this paper.

The rock art of the group is rather simple

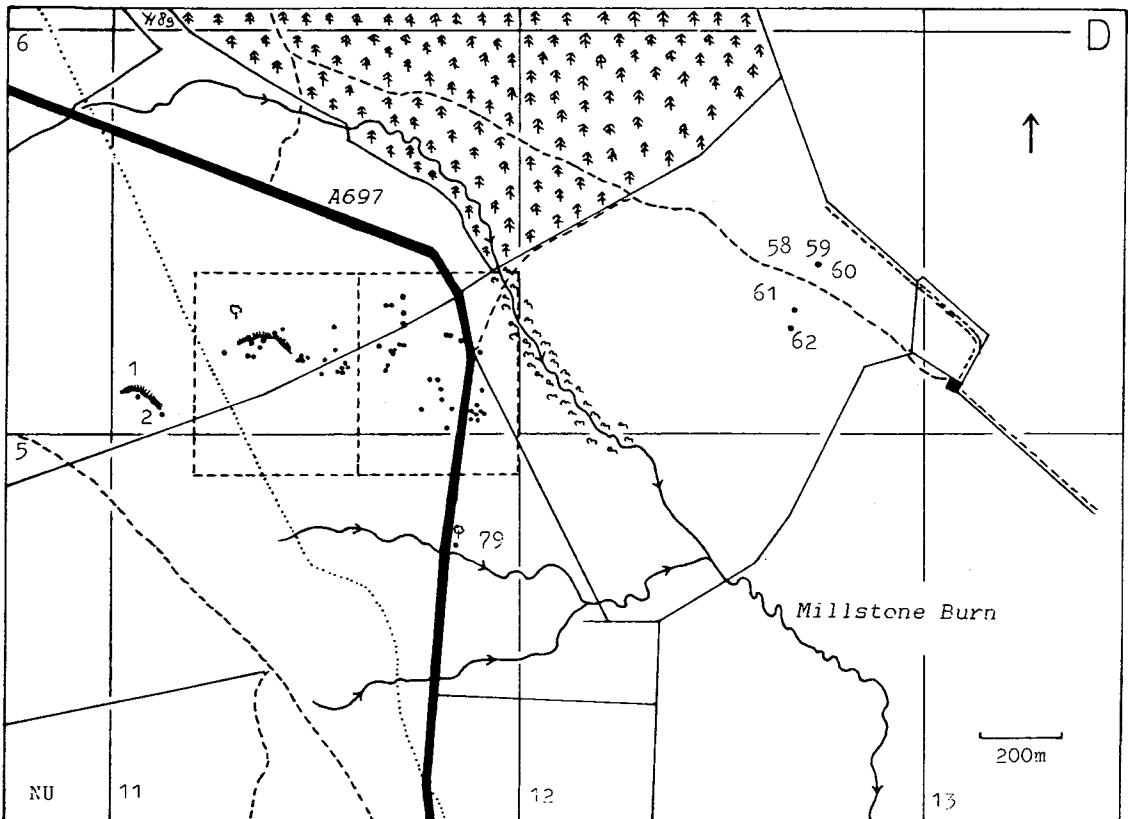
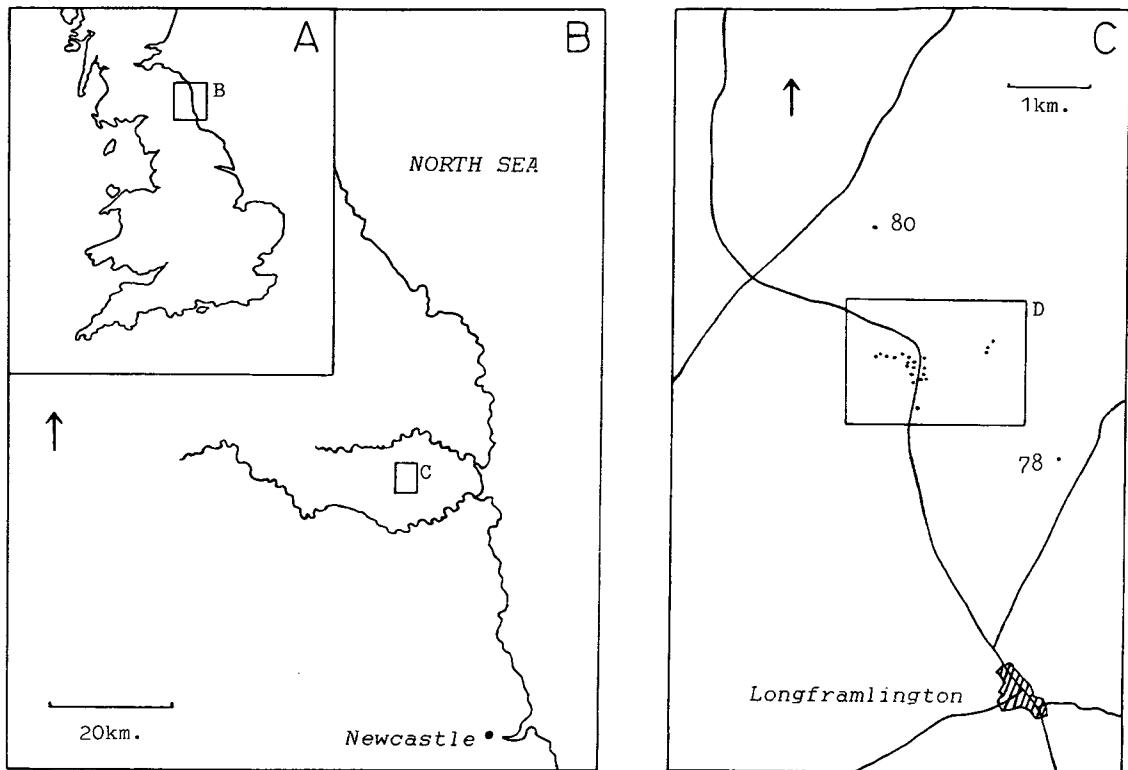


Fig. 1. Location maps of the Millstone Burn area.

compared with areas such as Wooler, Gallo-  
way and Argyll. Some 32 rocks bear cups only;  
a few rocks have simple grooves, mostly con-  
necting cupmarks; and only 20 rocks bear cup  
and rings, the maximum of rings being three.  
Designs more complex than (tailed) cup and  
rings are very rare, although some fine designs  
occur, especially at the main site at Snook  
Bank.

It has proved to be most convenient to form  
eight groups of carved rocks, according to their  
distribution in the area. All the rocks (those  
examined by the author: nos: 1 to 63 and 79  
and 80) will be briefly described in the Gazetteer  
below and illustrations are given in Figs. 3  
and 4. The larger arrow with these diagrams  
indicates the magnetic South (1986), whereas  
the North on the map represents the grid  
North. On the maps solid dots are cupmarked  
rocks; circles represent rocks with cups and

grooves and dots in circles show the position of  
cup and ring rocks.

Slopes of carved surfaces have been mea-  
sured in degrees from horizontal and are  
indicated by little arrows. They have been  
accurately measured with a clinometre but may  
have an error of  $\pm 1^\circ$ . If no slope arrow is  
shown the rock is horizontal (=H in the text).  
The diagrams show 50 cm scales. Being much  
reduced it proved to be difficult to distinguish  
between distinct carvings and faint or doubtful  
engravings, especially as most of the rocks are  
quite worn.

The description starts with the Grid Refer-  
ence, all having the prefix NU; then follows the  
altitude; between brackets the rocktype  
(B = boulder, O = outcrop) plus the slope of  
the carved surface; then a short description of  
the carvings.

## THE GAZETTEER

### *Group I.* (See fig. 1D for location.)

This area consists of a long irregular ridge with steep scarps facing NE and N. Cup and rings are reported to exist here (Beckensall, 1974 p. 65), but after several searches only some single cupmarks could be found on two parts of the ridge.

1. 1125-0515; 240 m. (O; H): 2 cups; another cup on SE slope.
2. 1135-0514; 239 m. (Outcrop; Horizontal): 2 cups.

### *Group II.* (See fig. 2 for location.)

Further E from Group I and on a lower level is a flat area with scarps facing N and E. Large and small boulders are scattered about. There also are some smooth, (sometimes rough) outcrops, level with the ground surface.

3. 1130-1519; 227 m. (B; 13°SE): 12 cups, 2 with 1 ring; 2 grooves.
4. 1135-0519; 228 m. (B; H): 22 Cups; 4 grooves.
5. 1135-0519; 228 m. (B; 24°SW): 4 or 6 cups, 1 with 1 ring.
6. 1135-0522; 229 m. (O; H, 10°SW, 5°SE): 38 cups, 6 with ring.
7. 1136-0521; 231 m. (Probable boulder; H): 1 possible cupmark.
8. 1136-0522; 230 m. (Large smooth outcrop; 4°S): 3 cups.
9. 1137-0522; 228 m. (Loose boulder; 9°NW): row of 4 cups.
10. 1138-0523; 227 m. (Boulder; 15°SE): 2 cups, 1 doubtful.
11. 1142-0519; 227 m. (Outcrop; 7°SE): 6 cups; 1 large oval cup.
12. 1142-0519; 227 m. (Outcrop; 8°SE): 1 possible cup.
13. 1142-0519; 227 m. (Boulder; 13°S): 4 cups.
14. 1142-0518; 227 m. (B; 20°E, disturbed?): 2 cups, 1 doubtful.
15. 1143-0518; 227 m. (O; 15°SE): 35 cups, 10 with rings; 4 grooves.

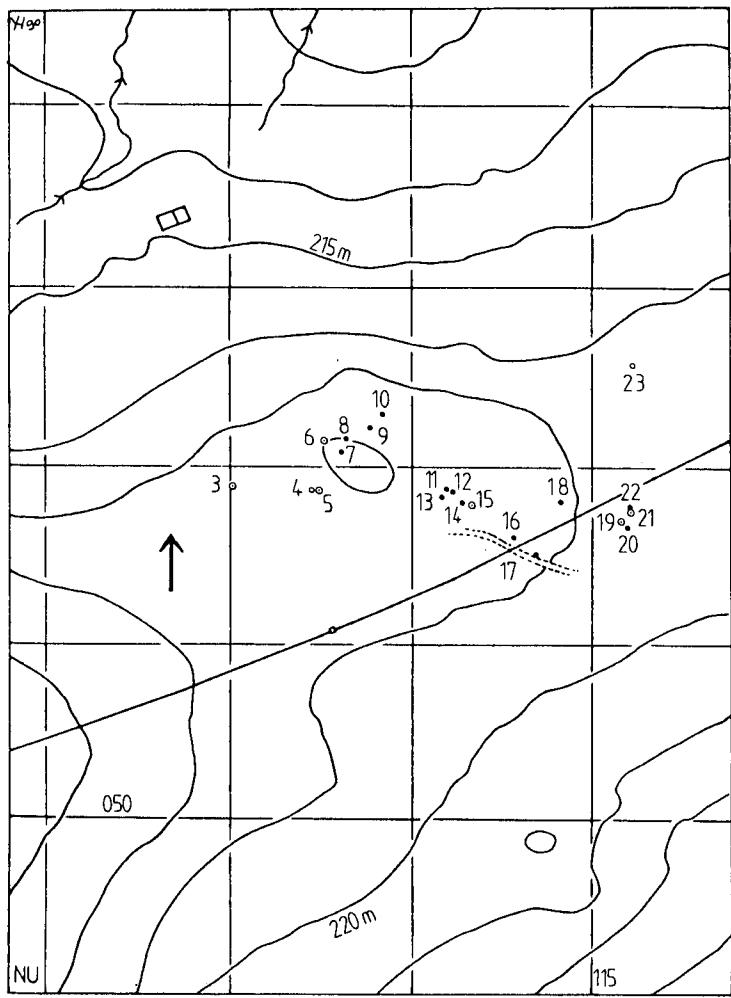


Fig. 2. Detail maps of Millstone Burn No's 3 to 57. 100 m grid shown.

16. 1146-0516; 226 m. (Boulder; H top): 1 cup; 1 doubtful cup. Some 2 m N is a possible standing stone,  $\pm 50$  cm high/240° Azimuth.
17. 1147-0515; 225 m. (Boulder; 12°SE, disturbed ?): 7 cups.
18. 1149-0518; 225 m. (B; moved): 1 cup and tail; 1 natural oval.
19. 1152-0517; 224 m. (O; H, 8°S): 68 cups, 9 with rings; 8 grooves.
20. 1152-0517; 224 m. (Outcrop; 3°E): 5 cups; 3 doubtful cups.
21. 1152-0517; 224 m. (O; 5°E, 7°SE, 20°S): 42 cups, 1 with ring, 1 groove.
22. 1152-1518; 224 m. (Outcrop; 3°-10°NE): 5 cups.
23. 1152-0526; 222 m. (B; H top, 11°E, 22°N): 9 or 10 cups; 5 grooves.

*Group III.* (See fig. 2 for location.)

Further E is the last group of large outcrops at this side of the road. Smaller outcrops and a few boulders also occur.

24. 1164-0524; 223 m. (O; 7°NE): 7 cups, 4 with 1 ring; 7 grooves.
25. 1165-0520; 222 m. (Probable outcrop; 6°SE): 1 cup.
26. 1165-0520; 222 m. (O; 4°SE): 20 cups; 2 with 2 rings; 3 grooves.
27. 1167-0523; 221 m. (O; 10°S): 37 cups, 6 with rings; 2 grooves.
28. 1167-0523; 221 m. (B; detached outcrop ?; 14°SE): 1 cup and ring.
29. 1167-0523; 221 m. (O; H): 5 or 7 cups, 2 with 2 rings.
30. 1168-0523; 119 m. (O; 3°-13°SE): 4 or 6 cups.
31. 1169-0523; 119 m. (O; H, 7°E, 15°SE, 10°S, 23°W): 23 cups; 2 natural depressions: 1 with unfinished oval; 1 with 3 rings.

*Group IV.* (See fig. 2 for location.)

This extensive group is situated lower down the slope of the hill and mainly consists of boulders, mostly of small dimensions. The trunk-road cuts through the group and possibly the building of the road destroyed some rocks.

32. 1177-0519; 212 m. (Boulder: 15°E): 1 cup; 1 possible cup.
33. 1779-0518; 208 m. (Boulder; H): 1 cup.
34. 1181-0516; 205 m. (B; 5°W): 3 cups; 1 with rings; 1 natural groove ?
35. 1183-0516; 203 m. (Boulder; H): 2 possible cups.
36. 1184-0513; 198 m. (Boulder; 15°SW): 3 or 4 cups.
37. 1184-0512; 198 m. (B; 10°SW): 2 extremely faint curved grooves.
38. 1178-0509; 203 m. (B; disturbed; H, 35°N): 14 cups, 3 with tails.
39. 1185-0509; 196 m. (Boulder; disturbed; 10°SE): 1 possible cup.
40. 1184-0501; 193 m. (B; H, 35°W, 28°N, 40°SSW): 10 cups; 8 grooves.
41. 1188-0509; 194 m. (Boulder; disturbed; 14°E): 1 cup.
42. 1188-0510; 194 m. (Boulder; 18°SE, 21°NW, 30°E): 9 or 11 cups.
43. 1189-0509; 193 m. (B; disturbed; 12°NW, 15°N, 22°NE): 13 or 15 cups.
44. 1189-0512; 194 m. (B; disturbed ?; 12°W): 4 or 5 cups, 2 with ring.
45. 1189-0512; 193 m. (Boulder; 9°NE): 1 cup.
46. 1189-0512; 193 m. (B; lost ?, 15°SE): 19 cups, 3 with rings; grooves.
47. 1190-0512; 193 m. (B; 15°E, 28°NW): 19 cups, 1 with ring ?
48. 1190-0516; 193 m. (B; H top, 10°W): 8 cups, 1 with 1 ring ?

*Group V.* (See fig. 2 for location.)

This group forms a rather ill-defined band of carved rocks running more or less parallel to groups III and IV. It mainly comprises boulders. Near the higher sites are two disused pits.



Fig. 3. Individual art on rocks Millstone Burn No's 1 to 31.

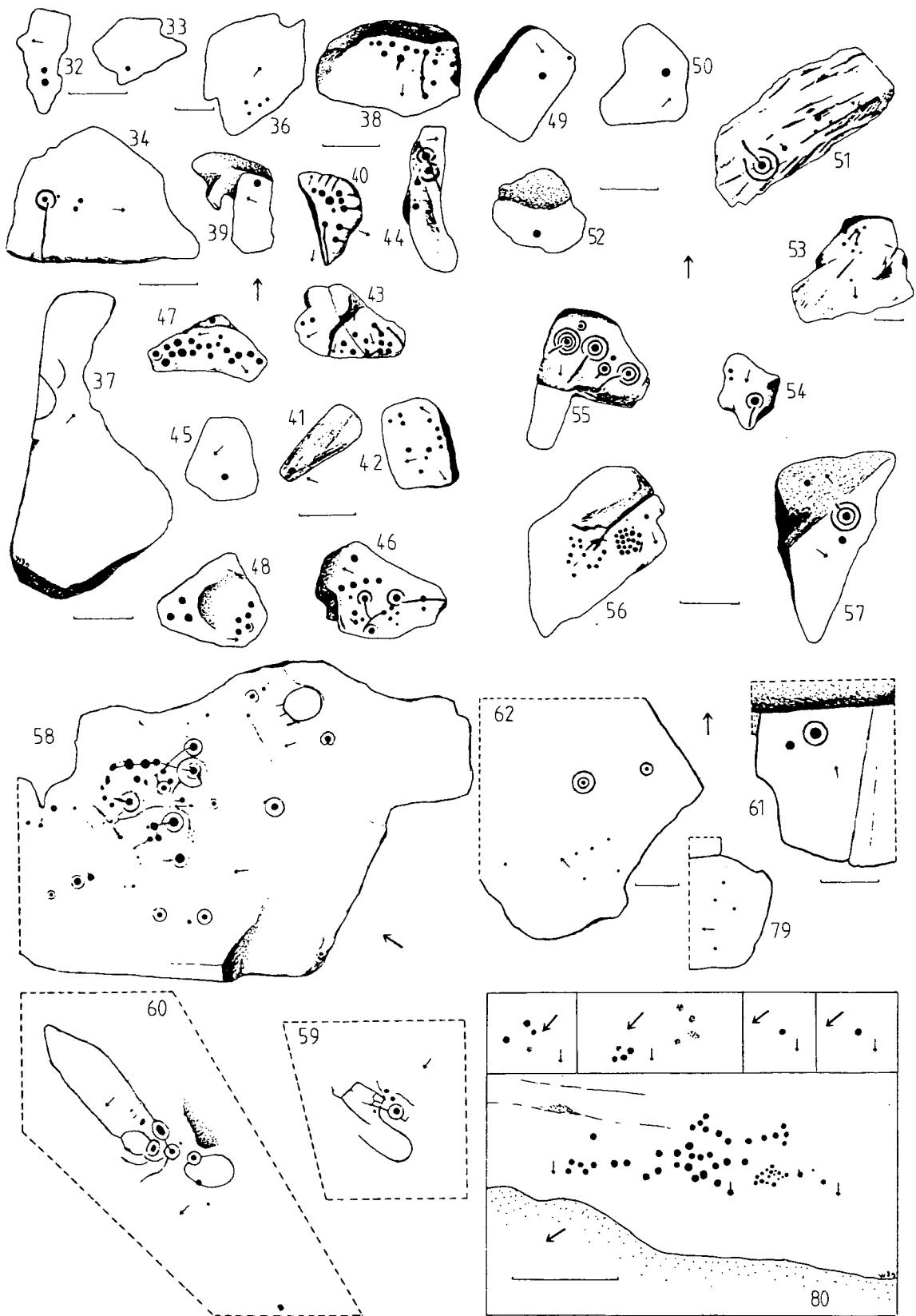


Fig. 4. Individual art on rocks Millstone Burn No's 32 to 61 and 79 and 80.

49. 1167-0532; 223 m. (Boulder; 19°NW): 1 cup; 1 possible cup.
50. 1167-0532; 223 m. (Boulder; 10°SW): 1 cup.
51. 1170-0536; 217 m. (O; H): 3 cups, 1 with 2 rings plus tail.
52. 1170-0531; 222 m. (Boulder; H): 1 cup.
53. 1170-0528; 221 m. (B; H top, 20°N): 6 or 7 cups; no grooves.
54. 1184-0526; 203 m. (O; 10°N): 3 cups, 1 with ring and groove.
55. 1184-0525; 203 m. (O; H top, 25°N): 6 cups, 5 with rings; 4 grooves.
56. 1186-0524; 198 m. (B; disturbed ?; 10°NW): 31 or 33 cups; 1 groove ?
57. 1189-0522; 194 m. (B?; 13°NW, 30°SE): 3 cups, 1 with 2 rings.

*Group VI.* (See fig. 1D for location.)

This group lies E of Millstone Burn and is usually called Snook Bank. Here many carved rocks have been reported which can no longer be traced, although the author has seen some of these before 1986. Therefore only existing sites will be mentioned here. The main site here bears the most interesting groove designs of the whole area. The Snook Bank area still is often disturbed by agricultural activities which may account for the loss of some carved rocks.

58. 1275-0545; 234 m. (O; 20°SE): 33 cups, 14 with rings; 1 oval.
59. 1275-0545; 234 m. (O; 21°SE): 3 or 4 cups, 1 with ring; grooves.
60. 1275-0545; 233 m. (O; 14°SE): 8 cups, 4 with rings; 6 grooves.
61. 1269-0530; 190 m. (O; 9°S): 2 cups, 1 with 1 complete ring.
62. 1265-0521; 180 m. (O; 6°-22°SE): 8 cups, 2 with rings.

*Group VII.*

Quite a number of decorated rocks have been reported in previous works (Beckensall, 1974 and 1983) but are untraceable at the moment. An extra problem is that the illustrations by Beckensall are not numbered, do not have an individual Grid Reference, and sometimes have been incorrectly or incompletely drawn. It may therefore be possible that the following entries represent rocks described in this paper under a different number or that some entries together form one single rock.

63. Unfinished millstone, now untraceable: 1 cup; possible ones.
64. Beckensall, 1983, p. 192: 11 cups, 1 with 1 ring; 1 groove.
65. Beckensall, 1983, p. 192: 5 cups, 2 with 1 ring; 1 groove.
66. Beckensall, 1983, p. 192: 2 cups, 1 with 1 ring and part of 2nd.
67. Beckensall, 1983, p. 192: 1 cup.
68. Beckensall, 1983, p. 192: 4 cups.
69. Beckensall, 1983, p. 193: 15 cups, 2 or 4 with rings; 2 grooves.
70. Beckensall, 1983, p. 193: 7 cups, 5 with rings; 3 grooves.
71. Beckensall, 1983, p. 193: 14 cups; 2 grooves.
72. Beckensall, 1974, p. 66; ? cups reported, now untraceable.
73. Beckensall, 1983, p. 191, No. 2: 6 cups.
74. Beckensall, 1983, p. 191, No. 4: 2 cups, 1 with ring; 1 groove.
75. Beckensall, 1983, p. 194: 5 cups; 2 grooves.
76. Beckensall, 1983, p. 194: 7 cups.
77. Beckensall, 1983, p. 195: 14 cups, 7 with rings.

*Group VIII.* (For location see figs. 1C and 1D.)

There are some outlying sites in the area, all within a two-kilometre radius from Millstone Burn. Earlier literature shows that more rock art could exist in the area.

78. 137-039; 125 m. Near Wormitlees (Beckensall, 1974, p. 66).
79. 118-044; 175 m. (O; 10 m E of the A697; 20°E): 4 cups. Some 2 m SE are the remains of an outlined millstone.
80. 1145-0691; 233 m. Caller's Crag. Main carved area (O; 25°-80°SE): 57 cups; 150 cm S, (26°SE): 1 cup; 150 cm S, (22°SE): 1 cup; 300 cm SW, (22°-34°SE): 3 or 8 cups; 160 cm SW (46°SE): 3 or 4 cups.

## DISCUSSION

A quantitative analysis of the area clearly shows the importance of the ubiquitous cupmark (Table I). Most rocks have only single cupmarks and only few have surrounding rings or other grooves. Only the main site, at Snook Bank (Millstone Burn 58, 59 and 60) bears relatively more grooves and ringmarks which moreover seem to be of a style different from that of the rest in the area.

The number of rings around a cup is almost exclusively limited to one. Only one third have two or three rings. The largest concentration of multiple rings occurs on rock 55.

Group II, where the greatest number of carved rocks is found (21 rocks) also features the largest collection of motifs (339 motifs). Perhaps it is significant that from this group fine views of both the Cheviot and the North Sea are obtained. Yet this group, and in fact the whole area, cannot boast having specific designs, except again some of the designs at Snook Bank. No Passage Grave symbols occur in the area.

There could not be established any relation between type of symbol and altitude: simple cupmarks are found between the 190 m and the 240 m contours, whereas more complex designs occur from 194 m to 230 m. No other distribution pattern could be detected, except for the possible axes described above. The main axis proved to be rather ESE to WNW, than SW to NE as suggested in earlier works. The individual groups, though chosen rather arbitrarily, seem to confirm this (see fig. 2).

Some outlying stones do not exactly fit into this linear grouping (such as 23, 38, 40 and 48) but may once have been connected to the linear groups by rocks now covered or re-

moved. What must be quite evident however is that it can no longer be held that the bands of rock art follow the line of the District Boundary. The possible ESE-WNW axes even are no proof that ancient trackways once existed here, but the overall distribution of the rock art sites in Northumberland suggests that prehistoric migration indeed used these sandstone ridges.

The rock art of Millstone Burn as a whole may be compared to the nearby clusters N and S of Rothbury, some 5 km further W and SW. There as well single cups predominate and cup and rings are few. The art at the Millstone Burn area can hardly be compared with the important concentration near Wooler, further north, where multiple rings and special designs sometimes even outnumber simple cupmarks. The art at Millstone Burn is also more similar to the rock art at Middleton Moor, north of Ilkley, and other such groups in Yorkshire.

Individual motifs occasionally are found repeated in other areas, like the keyhole-pattern of rock 25. But this would seem to be more a matter of chance rather than such as to establish links between these areas. Another such instance is the close massing of cupmarks on rock 56. This is repeated, at a much bigger scale, at High Banks and Torrs in Galloway but this represents no proof of cultural links, although such links cannot be ruled out completely.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I am again much indebted to my wife Elles

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## LITERATURE

- S. BECKENSALL: *The Prehistoric Carved Rocks of Northumberland*; Northern History Booklets No. 57. Newcastle, 1974.  
 S. BECKENSALL: *Northumberland's Prehistoric Rock Carvings*; Rothbury, 1983.

TABLE I The quantitative aspects of the rock art at Millstone Burn.

GROUP:	I	II	III	IV	V	SUBTOTALS	VI	VII	TOTALS.	%
Cups	5	262	86	103	55	511	52	69	632	
Cups?	—	21	13	11	4	49	29	6	84	79%
Grooves	—	23	11	17	6	57	31	—	88	
Grooves?	—	6	1	—	2	9	12	2	23	12%
C/R1	—	23	11	5	3	39	18	—	60	
C/R1?	—	—	1	3	—	4	2	—	6	
C/R2	—	4	5	—	4	13	3	—	16	
C/R2?	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1	
C/R3	—	—	1	—	1	2	—	—	2	
Others	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1	9%
TOTALS	5	339	129	139	75	684	149	77	913	100%

TABLE II Rock Statistics

Outcrops	2	9	8	—	3	22	5	2	29	45%
Boulders	—	12	—	17	6	35	—	1	36	55%
Rocks	2	21	8	17	9	57	5	3	65	100%
Average	2,5	16	16	8	8	12	30	25	14	