# **Recent Discovery and Recording of Prehistoric Rock Motifs in the North**

#### Stan Beckensall

The work of recording all the known prehistoric rock motifs of Northumberland and Cumbria was recently completed with the private publication of three books (Beckensall, 1991, 1992a, 1992b). These supplement and update an earlier but important archival book containing large photographs and detailed text (Beckensall, 1983).

The fieldwork and research for this work has absorbed much time for over 20 years. Each marked rock surface was recorded with rubbings, and each plan was drawn after several visits to the sites, and with reference to photographs and video.

This article is an extension of the archive, and includes all new sites discovered and recorded since the publication of the above-mentioned books. It is essential to the rapidly increasing number of researchers in this field to have the data at their fingertips. There is now a growing professional involvement in the study of rock motifs, although in Britain we are well behind some other countries in the interest and resources given to it. The abstract symbolism and lack of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figures has perhaps deterred some archaeologists, but it has increasingly attracted anthropologists, artists and poets. However, the involvement of Reading University in projects directed by Professor Richard Bradley and Colin Burgess' attention to the chronology of cup-and-ring marks have very recently given the study some of the impetus it needs. Ian Hewitt's research at Bournemouth University (a longterm project) will deal with the north of England and areas of southern Scotland in detail. Essentially, his work will build upon a thesis submitted by him in 1991. Ian has contributed considerably to work in Northumberland, continues to do so, and I owe him a debt of gratitude for the help that he gives to me.

My contribution has been to reveal and record many new sites, to encourage others to take an interest and report more, and to convey the delight and fascination that have never left me since I saw my first rock at Old Bewick. Richard Bradley has used his team to plot precisely the position of marked rocks in the landscape. He sees them as being used by a people who practised a nomadic way of life. As he said at a recent conference in Sheffield, 'We commit ourselves to a vision of stable, mixed farming at a much earlier date than much of our evidence allows, and in doing this we forget the vital importance of mobility'. Mobile people have territories, which are marked in different ways, and rock markings are one way of conveying different messages to the people using the landscape. His research has been concerned with trying to understand the rules by which they were made; and he has made a comparison with Galicia, where there is a clear gradient from simple cups to complex motifs that combine animals with abstract symbols. His questions are ones which can be answered by fieldwork: 'Are the carvings located in a predictable fashion or are they distributed at random? Do the simpler designs have a different distribution from the more complex patterns of rock art? And is one group easier to find than another?' If these questions can be answered then we can proceed with a more ambitious analysis.

We look forward to the completion of his two-year sabbatical which will address in depth these and other questions, applied to Britain and northern Europe. Meanwhile, the search for more sites involves a strong sense of knowing where to look, but there is always an element of chance. The discoveries listed here demonstrate both.

## The technique of recording

I use dotted shading to show that not all markings are of equal prominence on the same rock, and that some designs are unfinished or tentative. There is a danger that the eye fills in a continuation that does not exist. Thick lines that fill in grooves can obscure the way in which grooves cross one another, and I avoid drawings that look like pin-men equivalents.

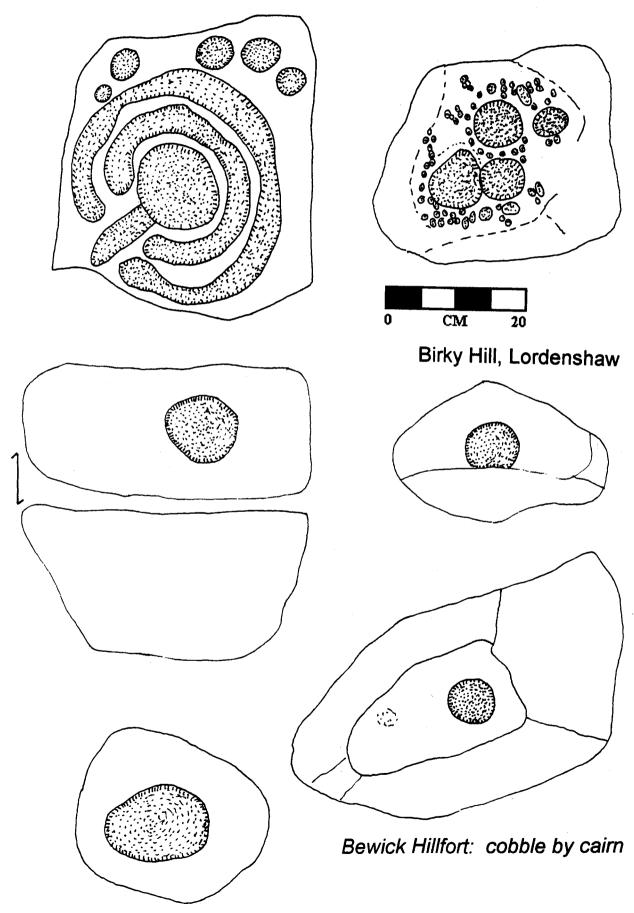
Substances such as chalk should not be added to enhance the pattern, because chemicals may damage the rock, and impose a pattern that may not be there. For photographs, although the addition of water has been banned as an enhancement to rock art (in arid areas, for example), north British weather provides a helpful quantity of water from clouds, to sharpen the images.

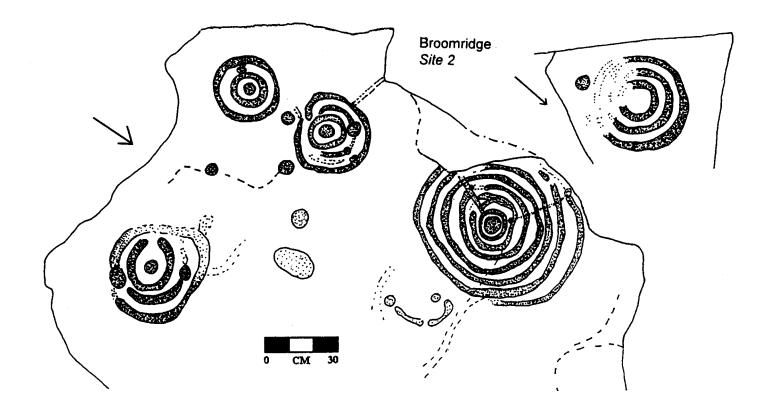
### The future?

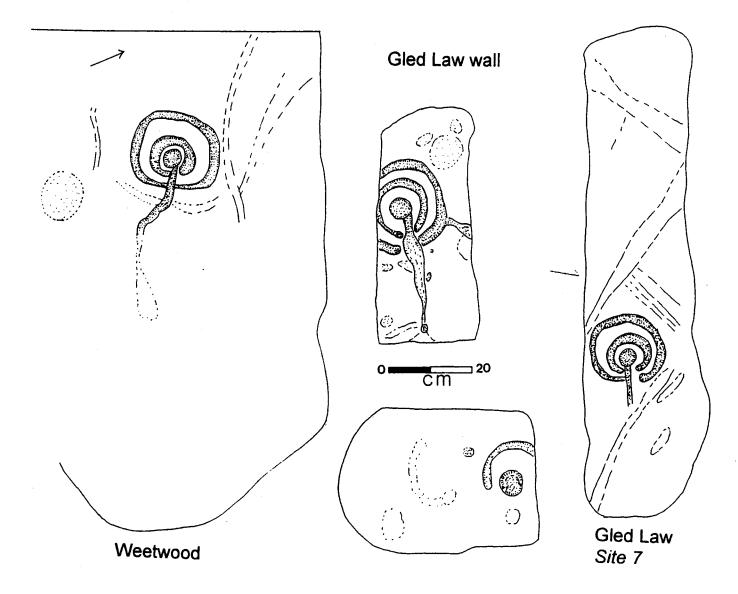
The conservation of exposed rock art is something which demands an immediate national policy. The conflicts of protection and public access must be reconciled by developing an imaginative and well thought out approach. There are many marked rock surfaces that are flaking off, and on which animals are allowed to roam, and time is against us.

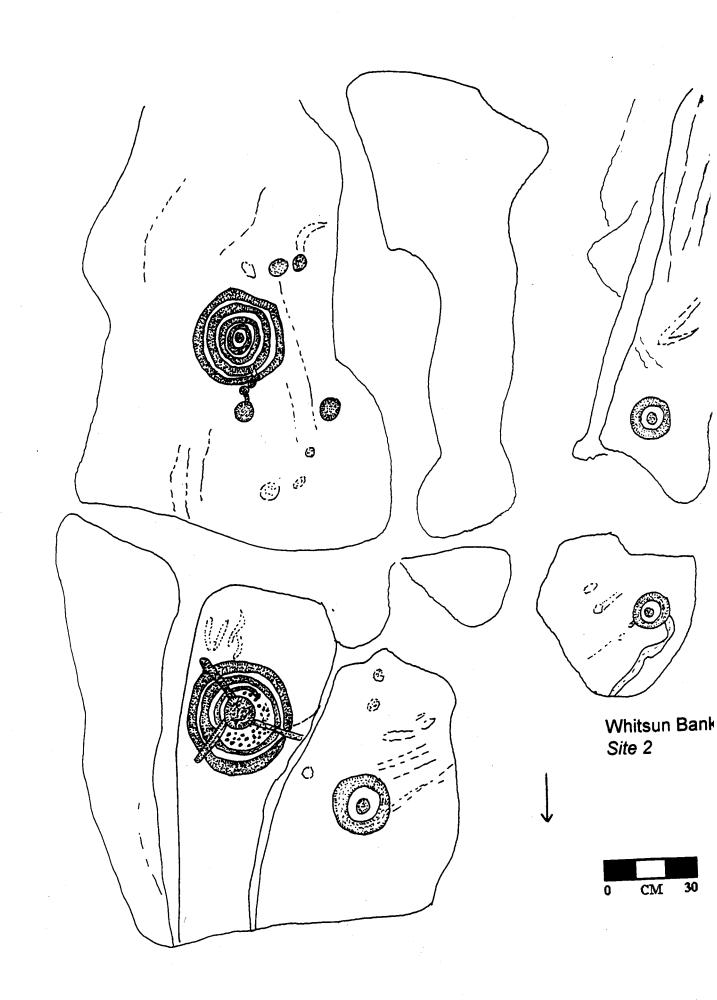
Ord Stone built into a wall, and two portables.

Lilburn wall









## THE SITES

Each site is given a national database number, allocated by Ian Hewitt, and prefaced by the acronym HELICS. Grid references, descriptive details, and bibliographical references are other features of this recording method.

Listed here are newly-discovered sites, sites of which I have not given details in my previous work, and re-drawn motifs.

## NORTHUMBERLAND

Ord, Berwick H00400

NT 9645 5035

A wall between Longridge Towers and East Ord farm is the location of three marked rocks.

i) H00400 Reported before (Dixon-Johnson, 1956, 24), but now drawn accurately; this sandstone is built into the wall.

ii) A small stone still lies in the base of the wall, east.

iii) H00400b A portable (mobiliary) is now at Berwick Museum.

#### **The Duddo Stones**

#### NT 931 437

The circle of stones at Duddo, probably once surrounding a small area of cremation, is impressive because the stones are dramatically shaped by erosion. There are some large natural cups and fluting, but the bases of some of the stones appear to have been shaped.

There is a row of man-made cups on the large stone that faces east (illustrated).

#### Broomridge 2 H00404

#### NT 9719 3778

Motifs on the sandstone outcrop ridges have already been documented, but there are three additions (Beckensall, 1991, 6-8).

Site 2 is the westerly outcrop that has large millstones at various stages of cutting, cups, and cupsand-rings. Three new sets of concentric circles around a cup have been discovered, two of which have emerged as a result of someone pulling off turf. The third has remained unobserved until low winter sunlight revealed it in 1994. The faintness of the motifs is either due to erosion or to the original picking being light.

#### Lilburn H00529a

#### NU 0195 2608

Found by Ian and Irene Hewitt in a farm wall, this mobiliary has already been reported (Hewitt, 1993, 51,54), but the drawing is included here to show the scatter of pick marks around the cups.

#### Gled Law 7 H00455

#### NU 009 309

Collingwood Bruce originally found and recorded this

motif (Bruce, 1869, plate 13). It lies on one of many patches of outcrop rock that show through thin grass overlooking site 2. Close by is a modern field clearance cairn SW of the site. The rock is plough-scarred.

#### Gled Law wall

Found by Irene Hewitt, this stone was quarried for wallbuilding, and is now at Weetwood Hill Farm.

#### Weetwood Moor 8 H00516

NU 0230 2875

The site was an old walled coppice, containing some outcrop and disturbed sandstone. Among this is:

i) A marking on outcrop found by M. Van Hoek (pers. comm.),

ii) A boulder, plough-scratched, dumped from field clearance.

#### Whitsun Bank 2 H00517

NU 018 279

West of Fowberry Plantation, north of the public track, is a knoll that has been partly quarried. The outcrop slopes away gently to the north, close to the public trackway, and is divided by natural cracks in which grass now grows. This very important rock was reported in 1984 by M. Van Hoek (pers. comm.). He recorded some of the motifs, which were not to be seen at the time of the excavations at Fowberry and Weetwood mounds, so the exposure is recent. Sheep have been responsible for removing more of the thin grass cover since 1984, exposing more motifs. There are other possible cups that are too tenuous to record.

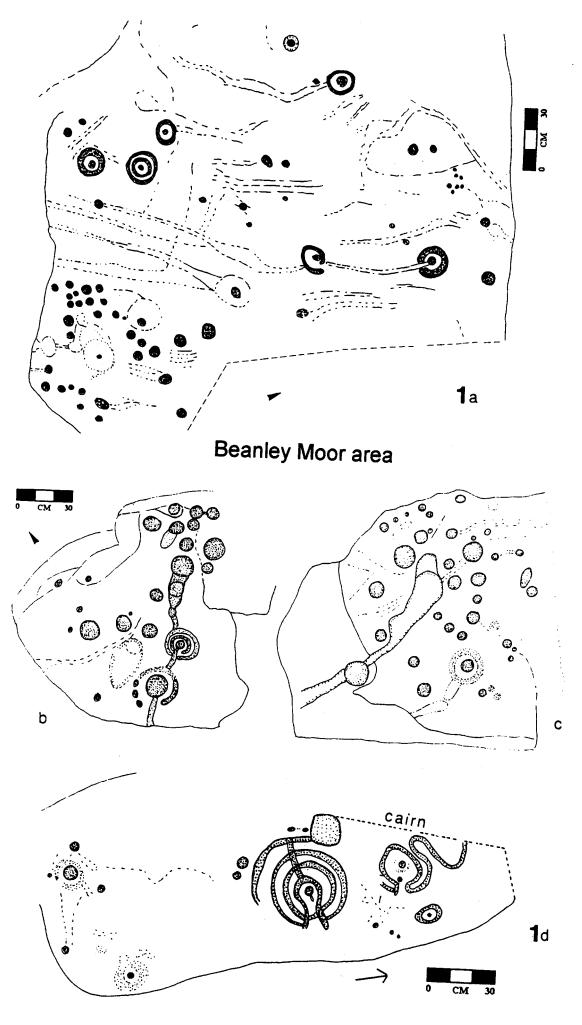
This prominent outcrop is particularly important, because the three radial grooves are similar to those on the standing stone boulder that forms part of the Weetwood mound. The motif is also used at Buttony. The recent exposure of the rock allows the pecking technique around the central cup to be seen clearly. The use of radials on outcrop and on a prominent boulder that is part of a disturbed monument built of small cobbles, including many with fresh motifs, is of great interest. The nearby Fowberry mound (with its cup-marked double kerb circle enclosing elaborately pecked motifs, all standing on similarly marked outcrop) in a wide area of some of the finest rock art in the north, indicates a special place in the landscape. This area is to be covered in further detail in a future paper (Beckensall, forthcoming).

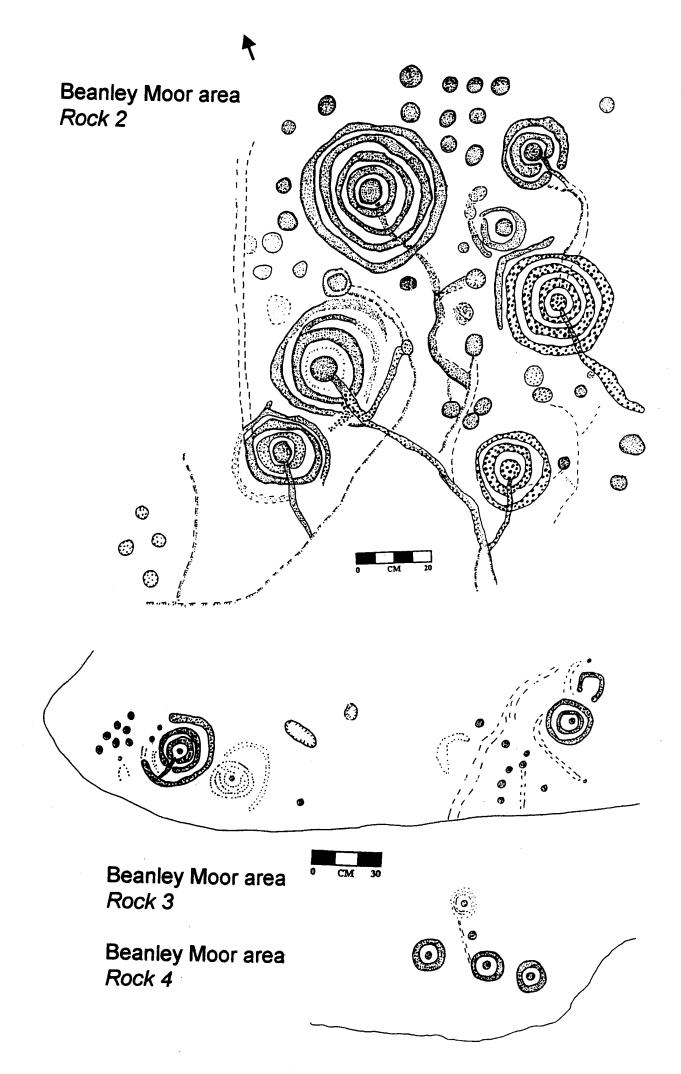
#### The South Beanley Moor area

The County Archaeologist has been given a full report on these sites, the precise locations of which are not published here, by agreement with the landowner. The complex was first noted by Tim Gates.

The marked rocks all occupy a ridge that slopes gently to the south and south-east towards a widening valley, and are distinct viewpoints. It is not only what can be seen from the rocks that accounts for their position in the landscape, but the remains of cairns built upon them that emphasises a ritual significance.

Site 1 is an outstanding outcrop on which the designs include cups of various sizes, some linked together





to form small channels; cups with rings; and a very unusual marked surface on outcrop that is placed within the kerb of a greatly disturbed cairn. In the latter, a serpentine groove presumably continues to run under the cairn kerb although this has not been excavated. The 'keyhole' entrance to the cupped centre of one figure is rare, as is the technique of linking penannulars so that they are closed. The design on the right is similar, but not completed and the curve away from the pennanular continues as a serpentine groove. The pick marks are fresh.

Site 2, higher up the hillslope to the north, has been covered with cairn material, and the freshness of the pecking suggests that much of the outcrop has been covered since the day the motifs were made. The drawing shows the difference in depth, freshness and erosion of the motifs.

Site 3 is part of the same outcrop as 2, but the markings are very faint.

Site 4 is the south-eastern edge of the outcrop, with a simple design of cups surrounded by rings.

The presence of disturbed cairns on this site relates it to others at Fowberry, Dod Law, Lordenshaw and Cartington, all of which are built upon marked outcrop rock and some of which have marked stones as part of their kerbs or marked cobbles in the structure of the cairns. The recording of these is the subject of a survey by Reading University (Bradley and Mathews, forthcoming).

#### Powburn H00590

#### NU 058 170 (present location)

A large boulder excavated by gravel extracting machinery at present lies near to the manager's office at Powburn (Frodsham, 1994, 5). A full report has been lodged with the County Archaeologist following my visit to the site.

It was apparently found at a depth of over 3m in gravel, in a hollow filled with 'black silt'. The implications of the discovery of this boulder lying at such a depth are to be weighed against the recent work of Richard Tipping (Tipping 1992 and pers. comm.) in assessing the extent of prehistoric fills in the Cheviots. The great depth of gravel now being extracted at Powburn is the result of erosion in the Breamish Valley in late prehistoric times, and the build up of these deposits in the valley had buried the boulder. The marked sandstone, therefore, could be in its original position at the entrance to the valley, covered by deposits formed later than the neolithic period.

#### **Old Bewick area**

Old Bewick receives considerable attention from archaeologists, and more rock art has been found. The principal sites have been in the pasture that adjoins the double hillfort, including the large block at NU 0781 2158, and the following are to be added to the sites known as Bewick Hill:

i) H00587a Quarry site. On the quarry edge, overlooking the valley and trackway from Old Bewick to Blawearie house, Richard Bradley located this cup-andring in strong, oblique light.

ii) H00588a Below (i), in the quarry itself, Irene Hewitt found this piece of detached outcrop rock among the rubble. It is a particularly fine specimen, with every pick mark visible, and is at present in the landowner's garden (E. Wrangham, Harehope).

iii) H00587b There are some cup-marks on the continuation of the outcrop northwards; this has also been quarried.

#### Other sites:

i) H00581 Bewick Hill 1 (cNU080 218) To the north of the wall that encloses the Bewick Hill field, where the vegetation changes to moorland, is a green low field wall, close to the wall gap, that includes a marked stone.

ii) Overlooking the Breamish valley (cNU072217), on a shelf of land lower than the double hillfort, and close to a burial cairn and enclosure, is a cobble with a single cup, embedded in grass.

#### Blawearie/Hepburn: Bewick Moor North

There are two major cairnfields in the area bounded by the Harehope valley and Hepburn Moor, with a few scattered cups, but in the more northerly cairnfield there is a cairn, either a ring cairn or round barrow with its centre dug out, that includes a standing stone in its kerb. A triangular shaped marking appears on the inner face of this stone. There is disagreement about whether this is man-made or natural.

**Bewick Moor North** H00579 A small flat outcrop rock among the cairns (in a position similar to those at Chatton Sandyford) is covered with cups, some with single rings. It was discovered by Paul Sellers. The cairnfield is at cNU098225.

A small boulder on the north edge of the same cairnfield has a cup and faint ring.

#### Cartington Moor, Rothbury area

#### 1 Crocky's Heugh H00672

NU 052 039

Ian Hewitt's research into the documentation contained in the SMR and fieldwork has now located this rock, and his full report has been deposited with the County Archaeologist.

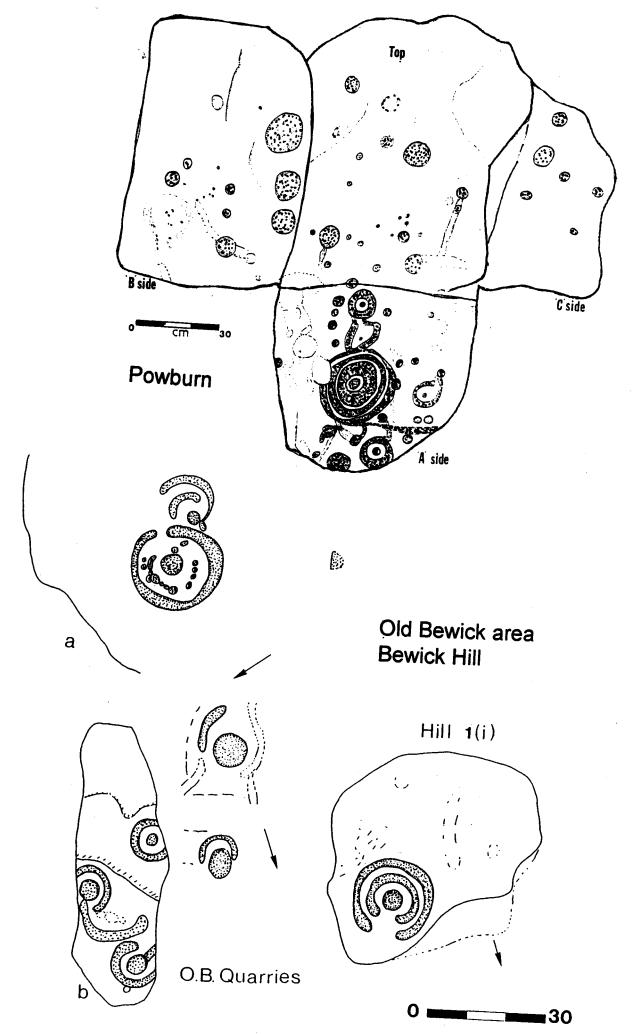
Lying c 50m west of the gravel road that leads from the Thropton-Cartington Castle road, before it joins the Cartington carriageway, the outcrop is an extensive viewpoint for the valley to the north and east. It lies in thick heather.

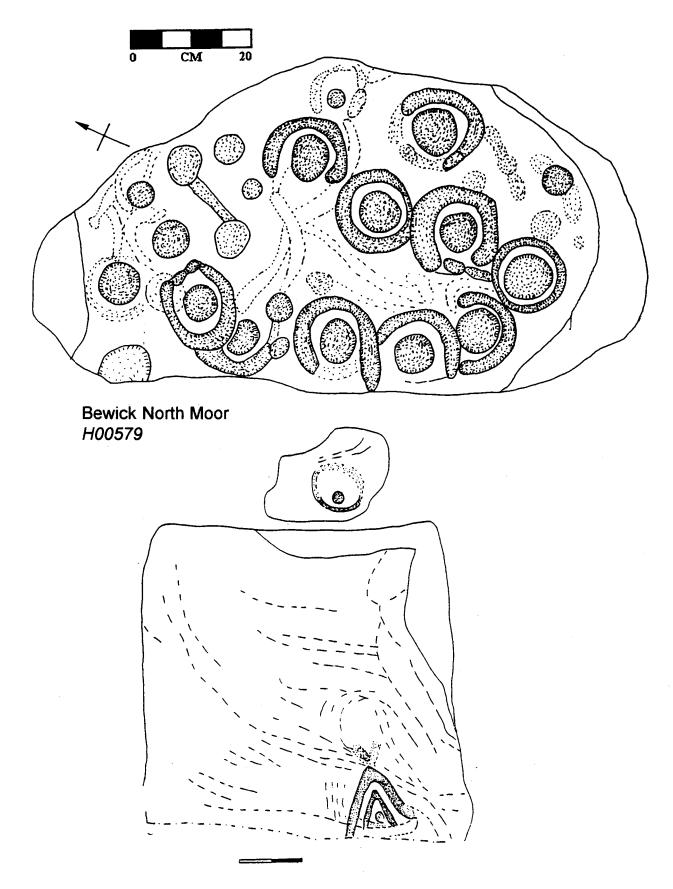
#### 2 Football Cairn

The cairn, at NU 0459 0303, is built on high outcrop, and we can now add to the motifs already recorded.

i) H00665e 160m north-east of the cairn at the edge of the high ground, and east of a sheepfold, M. Van Hoek (pers. comm.) discovered the cup and three rings that forms half of the illustration. On a rough surface, with ridges and quartz veins, the motifs flank a natural basin that seems to be incorporated in the design

ii) H00665f. A cup-marked boulder lies close by, up the slope.





Bewick North Moor A standing stone, part of a cairn kerb.

#### Lordenshaw 1. Birky Hill NZ 051 992

In 1992 John Steele, the National Park Ranger, had his attention drawn by a young visitor (Bryony) to a cupmarked cobble, on the edge of an earth mound at Birky Hill.

Of more general interest, Reading University has surveyed all the cairns in the area that lie on outcrop rocks with motifs, or have rock motifs incorporated in their structures. The cairn that tops the 'Horseshoe Rock', which commands such an extensive viewpoint to Cheviot, is illustrated here.

#### Morwick, Warkworth H00791 NU 2335 0445

It is extraordinary that one can miss a spiral amongst others, but a slight shift in the light can reveal something overlooked by many. This motif belongs to Group 1 on a vertical surface facing 1(a), next to 1(c). Facing the major panel, 1(b), with the river behind the viewer, this is on the right hand side (Beckensall, 1992a, 55-57).

#### Ray Burn NY 954 843

Gordon Highmoor reported a prominent stone that forms part of a prehistoric enclosure wall in the Wanneys area overlooking the Ray Burn. The grooves show signs of pecking when viewed in favourable light conditions.

#### Homer's Lane, Warden NY 9115 6825

To the west of the road from Warden to Chesters, among field clearance, this large boulder has two cup-marks on two faces. A full report has been lodged with the County Archaeologist.

#### High Shaw Farm, Staward NY 8100 5917

Reported in Archaeology in Northumberland, 1992-3, this cup-marked gatepost, leading into the derelict High Shaw Farm, is the only example of rock motifs in the Shire (Hardie, 1994, 15). The source may be a quarry to the north, c 200m away: a prominent place in the landscape.

#### Alnmouth

Overlooking the coast north of Alnmouth village is a small flat topped hill with a triangulation pillar, north of which runs a boundary wall in part obscured by high bracken, gorse and hawthorn. It is capped by a fence, and where the middle section of the wall has been broken down is replaced entirely by a fence.

The base of the wall appears much older than that built of regularly-shaped, quarried ashlar blocks of maroon coloured sandstone. Approximately thirty of the wall blocks, some in situ, others fallen, are cup-marked. Some of the cups appear in a rosette form, and there is light pecking on one fallen stone.

I have recorded only a third of the stones, as the wall would have to be cleared to reach the others satisfactorily.

The origin of the sandstone is almost certainly outcrop. As most of the boundary walls are built largely of this stone, the surface of the outcrop must have been extensive, and as some blocks have cupmarks on two faces, part of the original outcrop had an edge. It is not unusual to find cups and cup and ring marked stones in walls from destroyed outcrops or monuments. What is different about this site is that they rarely represent such an extensive expanse of rock, and are so varied in depth and size. Neither is it unusual to find outcrops on which the predominant or exclusive motifs are cups.

The coastal areas of Northumberland have produced few rock motifs, but there are examples at Beadnell, North Sunderland and Seahouses (Beckensall 1983, 180-1. Beckensall 1, 34-5), all portables and not in situ.

The credit for these discoveries belongs to Mrs Gladys Bettess during her archaeological landscape survey of Alnmouth (Arch North. Summer 1994, 11).

#### Hunters Hill

NU 071 648

South of the A69 east of a minor road to Ovington is a wide trackway east that leads past Overdean farm to the Whittle Burn, a tributary of the Tyne. The track is banked on either side by field debris which accentuates it in some places to a hollow way, and among the various stones and other rubble, among holly and hawthorn, Gary Knox discovered and photographed in 1984 a large sandstone boulder that is illustrated here.

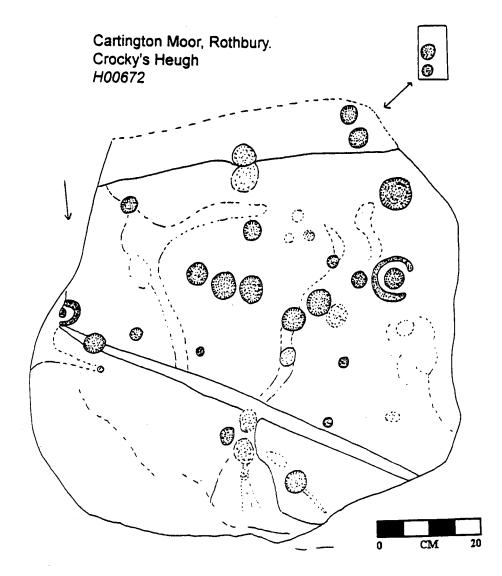
The stone has since disappeared, and conversation with Mr J Curry, the farmer at Overdean, confirms that it has probably been broken up and used for building. He had no idea that it was there.

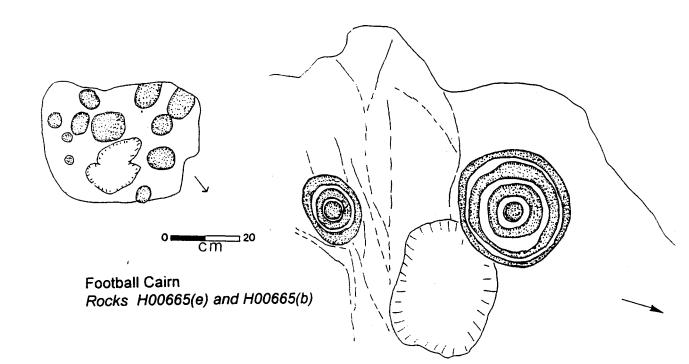
In November 1994 I examined the whole trackway. It seems likely that the boulder was a glacial erratic that may originally have been on or near Hunters Hill, a striking feature that commands views across Whittle Burn to Prudhoe and beyond. The boulder may have shared the same fate as other stones in ploughed fields, and have been moved to the sides where the trackway runs down to the burn.

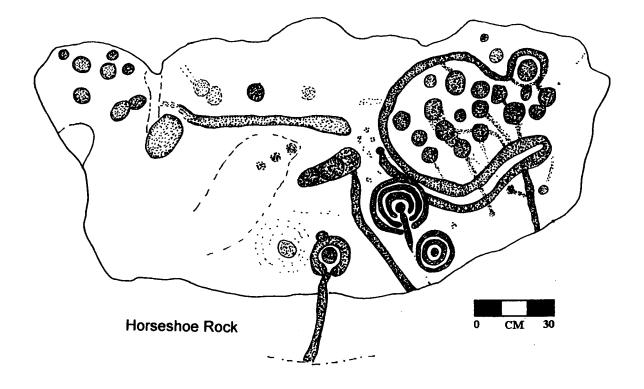
As I have only Mr Knox's good photographs to go by, I have had to base the drawing on these. There is an extraordinary arrangement of symbols to form cups linked by long, thin linear grooves, and the cup and ring motifs. It is highly possible that the sandstone is a glacial erratic, and the parallel scratches gave the idea for the design. There is nothing quite like it anywhere else in the north, as far as I know, with such a profusion of linked cups. (Rock 209 on Rombald's Moor, Yorkshire, has multiple parallel grooves, without the cups link).

Hunters Hill is the name that appears on the OS map, but the distinctive knoll at its summit is called Matt's Hill. The ploughed field from the summit to the burn belongs to Mr W Dinning, and the unploughed part is rented as horse pasture. Any ploughing in this area would repay intensive field work.

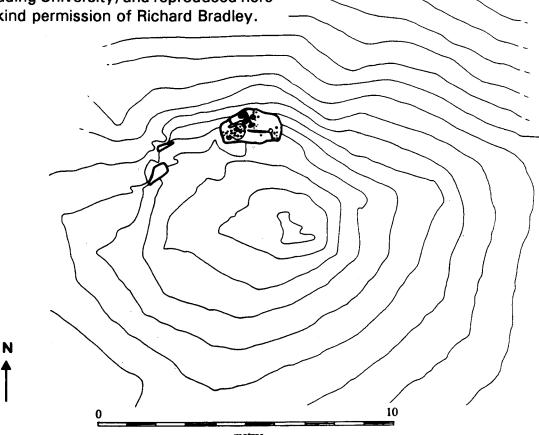
Despite the landscape interest, there is no way in which the position or purpose of the marked boulder can now be pinpointed. The nearest rock motif is at Prudhoe Castle (H00781), and due west, just over 3 miles away as the crow flies, is another displaced cup and ring stone on a field boundary at Thornborough (H00798).





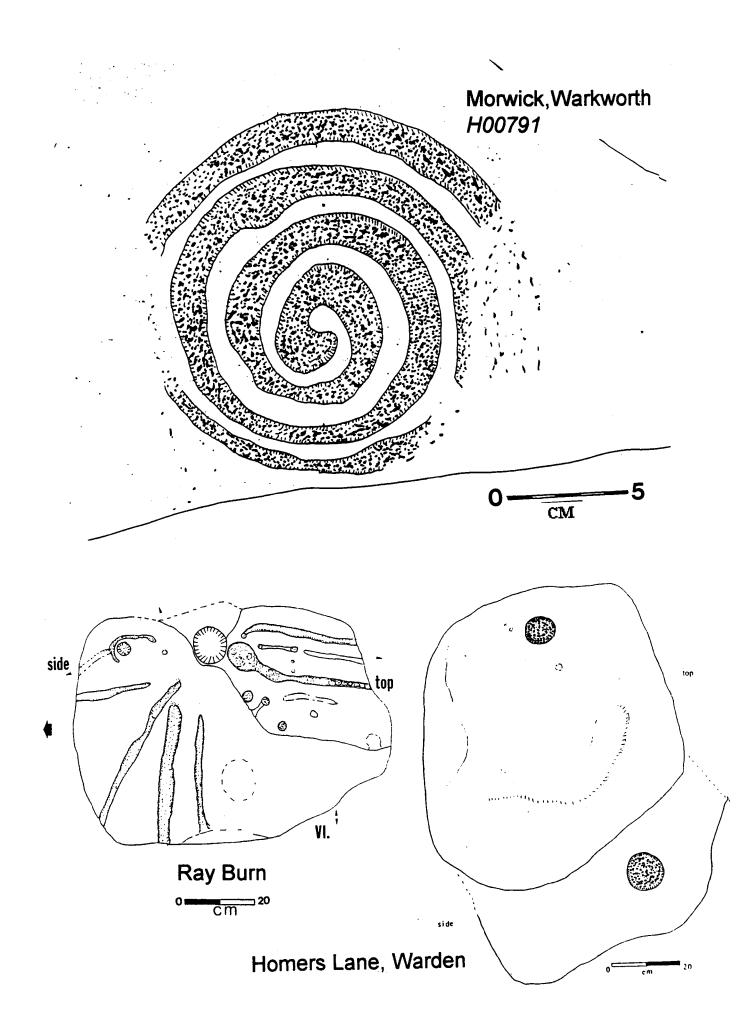


Plan of the Horseshoe Rock and associated cairn. Drawn by Margaret Mathews (Reading University) and reproduced here by kind permission of Richard Bradley.

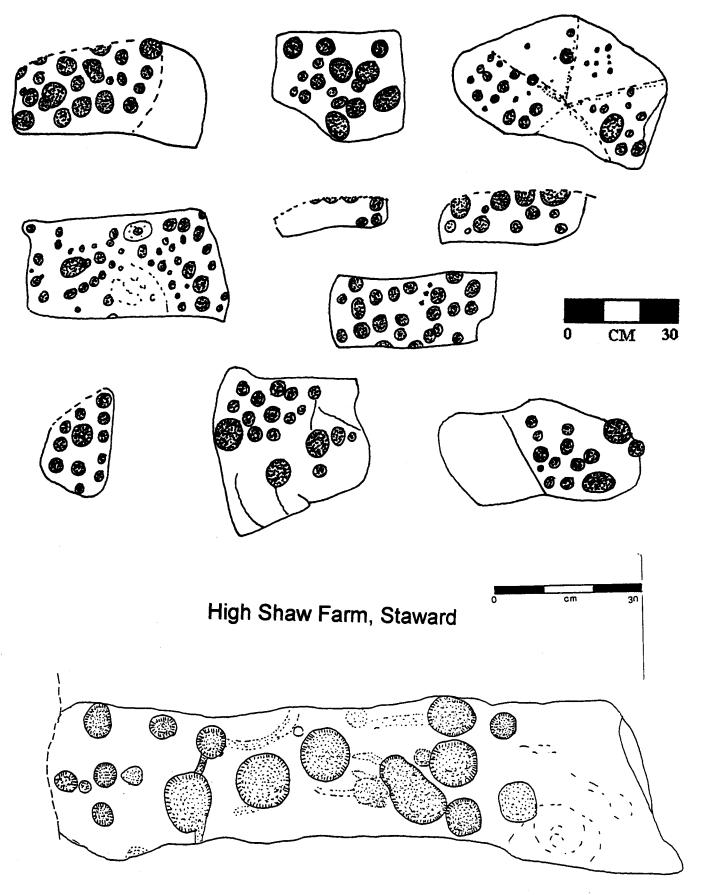


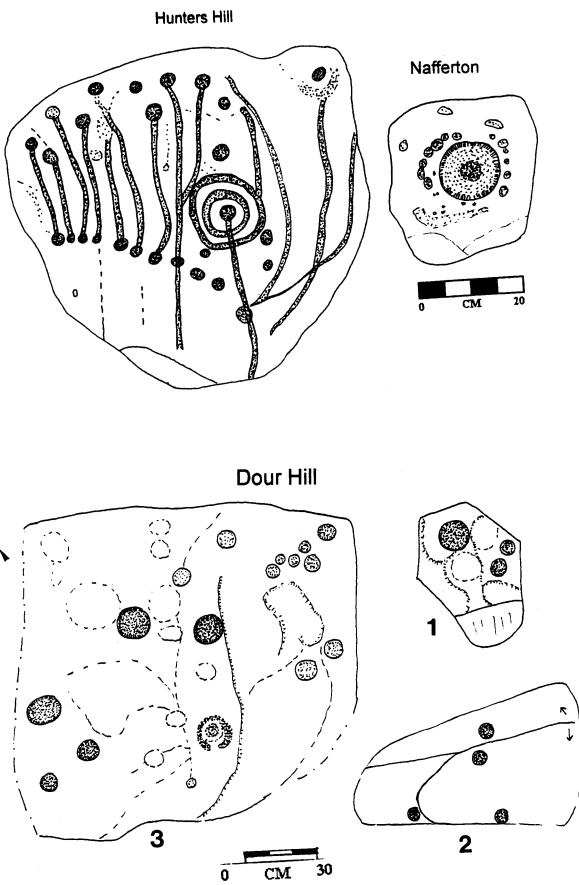
metres

21



Alnmouth Stones in a wall





CM

#### Nafferton

#### cNZ 655 060

A cup-marked stone was found by Peter Ryder in the Nafferton Farm area, NW of Hunters Hill, north of the A69 and north of the same feeder stream of the Whittle Burn. The stone has a 6cm deep cup, finely tooled and narrowing towards the bottom, in a compact heavy sandstone block. There are tool marks around the cup, which are either mis-hits or the beginnings of a ring. We do not know its original position or use.

#### **Alnham Northfield**

#### NT 9850 1167

This cup-marked stone, discovered by Margaret Maddison, is volcanic, whereas all the other known motifs in Northumberland are on sandstone. It lies amongst field clearance at the NW corner of the Northfield by the third gate on the public footpath (the Salters Road) leading north from Alnham church. The five cups have clear pick marks, and there are also single pick marks visible in the surface of the slab. Most of the field clearance stone here is of the cobble type, but there are some other volcanic slabs similar to the decorated one. Whether these are quarried, uprooted outcrop or erratics is difficult to say, but the plough-scarring on the cupmarked slab suggests that it had been buried.

#### Dour Hill Long Cairn

#### NT 792 021

The long mound at Dour Hill has been known for many years, and is assumed to be a neolithic long barrow: a very rare ocurrence in Northumberland. Three cup-marked stones have been recorded, one in the structure of the mound itself (1) where it has been disturbed, one on a block of sandstone nearby (2) and several cups on an almost vertical outcrop at the eastern approach to the mound (3).

There is often a problem in deciding what is a naturally formed cup, and what is artificial, especially when there are no pickmarkings visible, either because erosion has smoothed them, or because the cups were smoothed out artificially. It is, of course, possible that a stone with natural cup marks may be used as the 'real thing'. Fortunately, doubts arise in only a few cases. With these reservations, at least some of the markings drawn here are artificial.

#### The Lemmington Wood Runes H00643 NU 1294 1080

The site of outcrop rocks with cups and rings and a runic inscription was included in my last survey (Beckensall, 1992b, 52-53), and this note is to give an indication of what the runes may mean. To have them on outcrop rock is extremely rare in Anglo-Saxon England. I am particularly grateful to Professor Roy Page of Corpus Christi, Cambridge, for his expertise (pers. comm.).

Possible transliterations are:

l ae f if Anglo-Saxon

lafor lof if Norse.

OE verb 'laefen' = leave, leave behind OE noun 'laf' = remnant, relic ON noun 'lof' = praise or permission ON noun 'hlaf' = bread (loaf)

## **CUMBRIA**

#### Hardendale Cairn Circle H01107

NY 5965 1475

As I did not include a drawing of the cup-marked sandstone boulder among the inner circle of granite boulders of this cairn, the omission is now put right (Beckensall, 1992b, 38, 47).

#### Moor Divock Ring Cairn H01124 NY 4940 2196

This lies in one of the most visited prehistoric landscapes in Cumbria, yet no-one has recorded the large cup-andring on an inward-facing standing stone that is part of the outer circle of the cairn. I have included most of the sites on Moor Divock in my general guide 'Life and Death in the Prehistoric North' (1994).

The cairn was excavated by Simpson and Greenwell (Greenwell, 1877, 400), who found a 0.6m deep pit at the centre, with ashes and sherds of a broken vessel. A Food Vessel lay above this on sand. The cup-marked rock drawn here is still in situ in the centre of the cairn.

Were the marked stones contemporary with the cairn, or re-used? In either case, why?

Cumbrian rock art is very largely to be found in monuments, whereas most of Northumberland's is on outcrop rock.

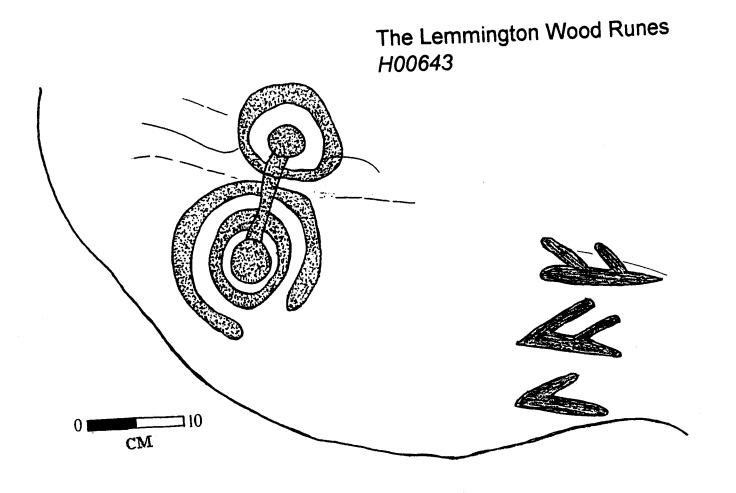
### Location of sites

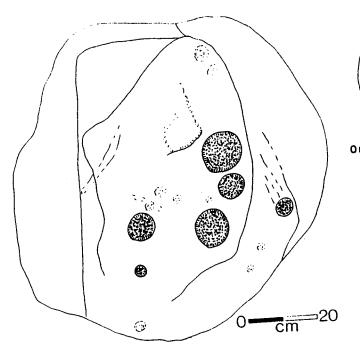
People often complain that, even with an accurate grid reference and location map, they are unable to find some of the rocks that have been recorded. This is not surprising, as I have noted that even the people who make the discoveries, including me, sometimes have difficulties in re-locating them where there are so many rock surfaces.

It is possible to look at a rock surface and not see the motifs because the light is wrong. The Moor Divock rock, for example, has been seen by hundreds of people, and included in guided tours, but it was only in strong oblique light that I found the cup-and-ring in 1993.

Even a well-known site like Roughting Linn, once it has been found (and even a famous, unsignposted site like that has defeated some visitors) will not give up its motifs if the light isn't good enough. This has led people who visit it at different times to assume that the motifs have eroded since their last visit. Meanwhile, armed with grid references and good Ordnance Survey maps, the quest is a good test of one's field-work techniques!

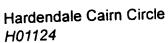
A fundamental question, and a conservation issue is: which sites, if any, should be accessible?

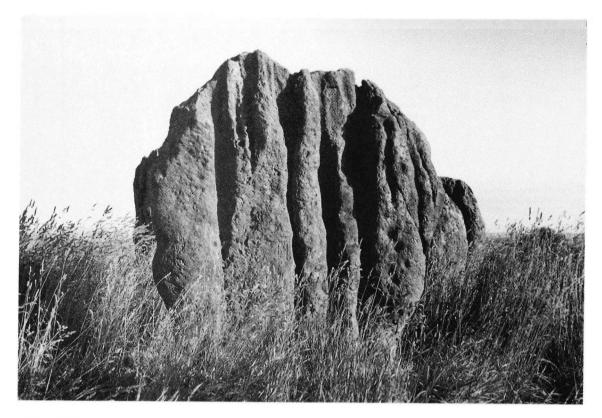




Cm 20

Moor Divock Ring Cairn H01125





Duddo One of the standing stones has small artificial cups.



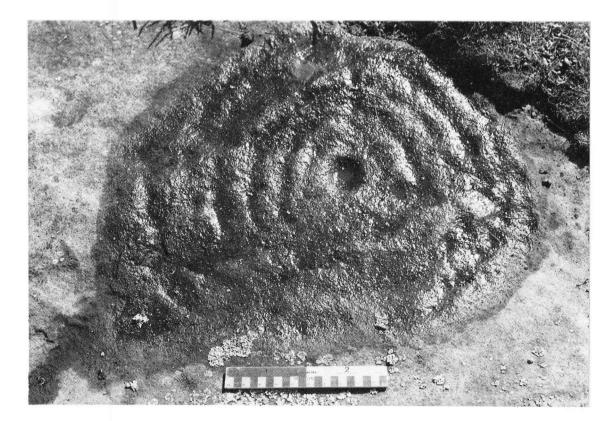
## **Old Bewick**

An old photograph of multiple concentric circles somewhere on Old Bewick Hill. The large outcrop cannot be traced, but we remain hopeful that one day it will come to light.



## Broomridge

Outcrop rock with four sets of concentric circles. The largest appears below, the eroded surface revealing more through being wet.





Whitsun Bank 2

The upper picture shows the multiple concentric circles near the quarried edge of the rock.

The lower picture shows three radiates around a central cup, inner pick marks, and two concentric circles.

The design is repeated in the Weetwood Cairn kerb stone.



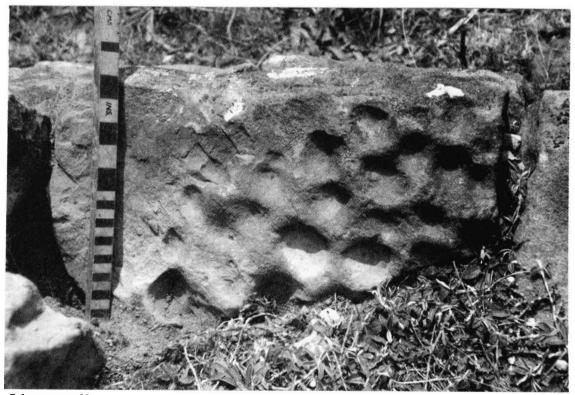


Beanley Moor area. **2** The freshness of the pick marks in some of the figures shows how much of the rock has been protected from erosion, by the cairn that topped it.

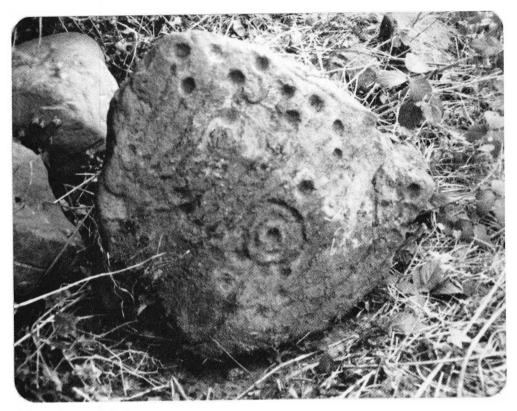




Football Cairn A natural basin, and concentric circles around a cup



Alnmouth One of at least 30 rocks that have been built into an old boundary wall



Hunters Hill Although the stone has gone, the photographic record remains of this very unusual design.



Old Bewick Hill The piece of destroyed outcrop is worked on two levels.



Moor Divock cairn circle. Part of a cairnfield.



Moor Divock A marked standing stone forms part of a cairn circle.

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#### Note

There remain a few sites in Northumberland discovered by M. van Hoek that I have not yet drawn. These include:

Chatton Law: NU 0749 2928.

Amersidelaw Moor: NU 0755 2685.

West Horton: NU 016 316 (including a spiral).

Buttony: NU 0172 3103. Another figure with central cup, four rings (one incomplete) and a diametric groove that bends at  $90^{\circ}$  down the rock. The Buttony site is increasingly inaccessible because of plantation growth.