

A Survey of Burntridge Moor, Hexhamshire, Northumberland, 2002-3

Basil Butcher and Margaret Maddison

Before the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in 2001 had closed access to this part of the Northumberland countryside, a group of NAG members walked Burntridge Moor to visit the stone circle which had been recorded in 1983 by Taylor and Peel. (Taylor & Peel, 1983). During this walk a cup-marked stone and a few flint waste flakes were chanced upon. Taylor and Peel's plan of the stone circle is reproduced in Moir, 2016, figure 4.

The authors decided to take a further look at the moor in 2002 when one of us (BB) acquired a handheld GPS receiver. As the moor is lacking in easily visible reference points it is difficult to locate sites by estimation using a map; so it seemed an ideal case in which to try out the benefits of GPS (the Global Positioning System). Although GPS surveying was well-established among professional surveyors by this date, such relatively inexpensive handheld receivers made the technique newly available to individual amateurs. Before 2000 civilian GPS devices had been restricted by what was called selective availability, which meant that in practice they were less than completely accurate. In 2000 this restriction was removed. In the case of this survey accuracy was to about 15 metres. This was almost certainly a far greater accuracy than could have been achieved by estimation, especially in the case of closely sited features.

BURNTRIDGE MOOR

The underlying geology is sandstone of the Millstone Grit Series, cut by streams draining to east and west. Most of this rock is overlain by shallow peat and covered in heather. Two public bridleways cross the moor east-west, and a shooting track crosses it from south-west to north-east. Burntridge Moor is used as a grouse moor, so heather cover is in patches at various stages of growth. The survey was conducted over two seasons with a later visit to check certain features; consequently it is quite possible that some cairns, for example, may have been hidden by mature heather. However, as it stands this survey does give an indication of the usage of the moor in prehistoric and later times. The area surveyed lies between 270 and 380m above Ordnance Datum; it was limited to the moorland between grid eastings NY 85 and 90, and between northing NY 55 and the Whapweasel Burn.

We are grateful to the owners Stublick Estates Ltd, through the kind offices of their agent Mr A.J. Fitzherbert-Brockholes of Davis & Bowring for permission to survey. The agent also asked us whether the Foot and Mouth Disease pyre to the south of Burntridge had damaged the archaeological features in any way. We were able to identify its location and confirm that this was unlikely.

THE SURVEY RESULTS

Probably the earliest features of note are the stone circle and associated standing stone. These stones are all very modest in size, but are typical of the surface stones which occur naturally close to this area. Clearly it was either impossible or thought unnecessary to quarry larger stones. This area is fairly stone free, but overlooks the possible cup-marked stones, which are sited not far away on similar-sized rocks, within a spread of such rocks. It is possible that these cups may be natural rather than man-made. As they are quite weathered it is difficult to be certain.

The survey revealed a scattering of cairns, especially numerous in the western part of the survey, and distant from the stone circle. Some cairns seem suggestive of being burial monuments as they are more prominently sited and at least one has the suggestion of a kerb. A few grey flint flakes found by us near Hunters Ford (just outside the survey area, beyond the Whapweasel Burn), at about NY 8776 5688 may belong to this period of use.

There seems to be a lack of evidence for use of the moor for a long period after the prehistoric, but this may simply mean that it was used in ways that leave little trace (e.g. hunting, pasturage, or heather gathering).

Several hollow ways can be traced. These may be associated with mining in the area. There is evidence for possible ironworking in the form of slag and a putative kiln. There are also several small pits of unknown purpose, as well as a quarry which probably provided stone for nearby walls.

A small enclosure which may have been for settlement or some other purpose lies near the Whapweasel Burn. Two large enclosures of quite different style are formed by low banks with external ditches. Within these are traces of straight broad ridge and furrow. More enclosures like these can be seen to the north across the Whapweasel Burn, outside the survey area. This type of field seems to be associated with what were probably short-lived attempts in the eighteenth century to bring moorland into cultivation.

A rifle range is shown on the second edition Ordnance Survey map revised in 1895 (but not on the first edition surveyed 1859); it extended from NY 8554 5585 to 8633 5628, but could no longer be traced on the ground. A series of abandoned and ruined shooting butts demonstrate that the moor has been a shooting preserve for some time. They have been replaced by more modern butts on a different line.

CONCLUSIONS

Within the limitations of an amateur GPS handheld receiver, it can be seen that a simple but useful survey was possible. It confirms the use of Burntridge Moor in prehistoric times, as well as later.

Burntridge Moor is a small part of an upland landscape, much of which has not been intensively surveyed. Not far to the east, on similar moorland, we had previously discovered Bronze Age settlements and field systems at Burntshieldhaugh (around NY 929 535); these were partially surveyed by NAG members in 1989, and later surveyed by Northern Archaeological Associates as part of a wider landscape survey of the Lord

Crewe Estate. In addition to amateur use of GPS, the aerial views now accessible to everyone through Google Earth are a tool which amateur archaeologists can find useful as an aid to surveys of moorland areas, for example, in confirming the widespread nature of moorland cultivation here and nearby. There may be potential for further amateur survey work on Hexhamshire Common using these techniques together.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Moir, G., 2016. 'A note on some Northumbrian Stone Circles' *Northern Archaeology*, 22, 59-64.

Taylor, M. & Peel, D., 1983, 'Preliminary report of a possible stone circle revealed by recent heather burning on Long Rigg, Burnt Ridge Moor, Hexhamshire Common, altitude 1000 ft., OS NY88055630', CBA Group 3 Newsbulletin 3 ser. no.22 (1983), 8.

BURNTRIGE MOOR GAZETTEER

NY 85734 55685 cairn

Cairn c 3 m x 4 m in size. Elevation 341 m.

NY 86030 55622 quarry

Small quarry. Elev. 353 m.

NY 86090 55604 cairn

Cairn c 5 m diameter in an area lacking much stone. Elev. 358 m.

NY 86163 55712 cairn

Cairn 2.4 m diameter, with other smaller cairns nearby. Elev. 350 m.

NY 86165 55721 cairnfield

In a cairnfield overlooking a flat area, a cairn c 2.2 m diameter; other smaller possible cairns nearby not measured. Elev. 347 m.

NY 86173 55735 cairn

Cairn c 3.7 m diameter, with other possible cairns nearby. Elev. 351 m.

NY 86182 55746 cairn

Cairn c 3.6 m diameter. Elev. 348 m.

NY 86216 55658 cairn

A small cairn cut through by the track, on natural outcrop. Elev. 347 m.

NY 86288 55745 cairn

Large cairn on a knoll overlooking a very flat area. Other possible cairns nearby. Elev. 339 m.

NY 86466 55536 pits, shale

Shale in a cutting formed by running water, running c 20° NNE to 200° SSW. Area to the W shows signs of disturbance and possible pits. Elev. 364 m.

NY 86688 55570 cairn

Small cairn. Possibly Bronze Age or earlier. 5 large stones visible.

NY 86689 55822 cairn

Cairn on Crawberry Hill, c 5 m diameter. Elev. 362 m.

NY 86696 55885 cairn

Large cairn of stone, c 4.1 m diameter, on same flattish hilltop. Elev. 358 m.

NY 86698 55938 cairn

Cairn, c 4 m diameter. Elev. 362.

NY 86704 55484 pit

Circular pit or hollow with mound adjacent. Other similar hollows nearby.

NY 86704 55999 cairn

Cairn, c 5 m diameter. Elev. 358 m.

NY 86712 55481 pit

Pit or hollow of uncertain origin, c 3 m wide x 0.7 m deep, visible as a grassy area in heather. Elev. 377 m.

NY 86716 56176 cairn

Cairn on same ridge as NY 86704 55999, with possible smaller cairns around it (not recorded individually). Elev. 349 m.

NY 86791 55928 cairn

Cairn formed by a prominent boulder around which stones have been piled. Cups on the boulder are probably natural weathering. Elev. 364 m.

NY 86799 55897 cairn

Cairn in smooth area of Crawberry Hill. Elev. 362 m.

NY 86875 55631 cairns

Series of small cairns (and possible pits). Elev. 362 m.

NY 86899 55594 bank

Possible bank running approximately E - W, ends hidden in deep heather. Elev. 364 m.

NY 86970 56083 shooting butt

Decayed shooting butt of stone (probably originally with turf topping). There are others in a line, running almost N - S. Elev. 350 m.

NY 87147 55592 hollow ways

Hollow ways crossing a burn. Elev. 364 m.

NY 87194 55696 cairn

Cairn. Elev. 358 m.

NY 87404 55695 cairn

Cairn, about 3.5m diameter.

NY 87421 56551 cairn

Cairn, c 3 m diameter. Other possible cairns nearby on smooth plateau. Boundary stones nearby, c. 60 cm high, have no markings. Elev. 338 m.

NY 87496 55462 cairn

Cairn of large stones, c 6 m diameter. Elev. 350 m.

NY 87618 55458 cairns

Round cairn, just north of bridle path. Low heap of large stones approximately 10 m diameter. Elev. 306 m. Another smaller cairn lies about 4 m to the south, about 2 m in diameter.

NY 87618 56750 cairns

Cairn on break of slope near butts, c. 3 m diameter. Other putative cairns nearby. Elev. 334 m.

NY 87878 56288 standing stone

Putative standing stone, 0.6 m high x 0.65 m wide x 0.35m thick, on the northern edge of Sandy Sike valley. The stone circle can be seen directly to the east on the horizon. (Reported to SMR by D. Peel in 1998.)

NY 88092 56321 stone circle

Grid reference represents the centre of the circle. Nine possible stones, of which one may be broken and two are very small (and not earthfast), form a circle approximately 9 m in diameter. By far the largest stone is on the north, 0.75 m high x 0.67 m wide x 0.06 m thick (wider and thinner than the others, its widest surfaces facing north and south). The second largest stone is on the west, 0.6 m high x 0.6 m wide x 0.3 m thick. The smallest stones are on the south. The peat soil is shallow here, so the stones were not much more visible when built. On the south-facing northern edge of Sandy Sike valley, with extensive views to south and east. Elev. 323 m. (Reported in: Taylor & Peel, 1983).

NY 88340 56047 cup-marked rock

Possible cup-marked rock, with two cups. Elev. 290 m.

NY 88344 56048 cup-marked rock

Earthfast, almost flat, rock of sandstone with 4 cups. On the edge of an area of outcropping rocks with visibility to the stone circle. Elev. 231 m. (Previously reported by us to SMR at estimated grid reference NY 882 558.)

NY 88388 55685 cairns

Cairn on edge of smooth area, approximately 3.7 x 2.5 m in size. Other possible cairns in the same area, in deep vegetation at time of survey. Elev. 325 m.

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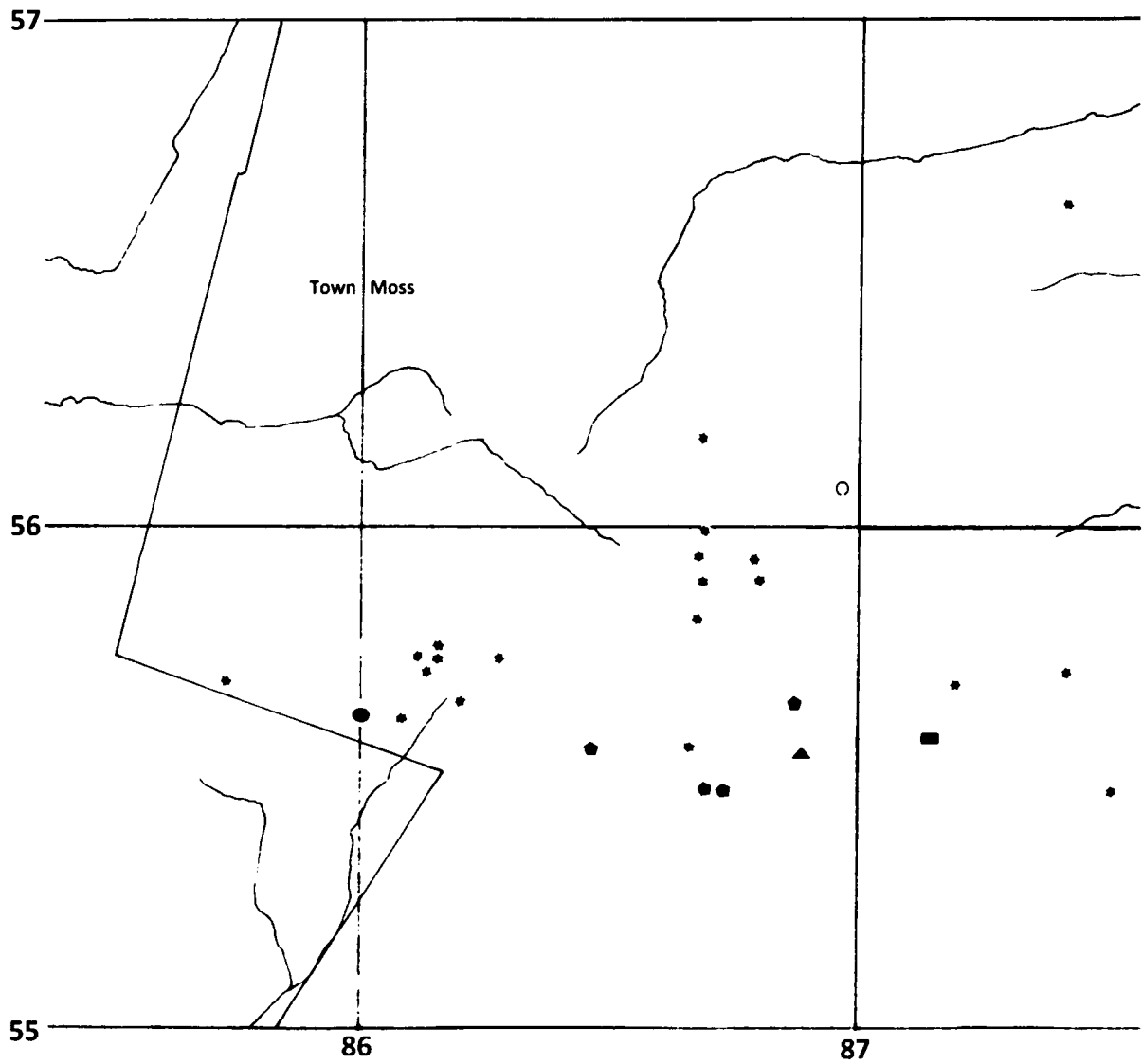


Figure 1. Plan of site locations on Burntridge Moor, western half. For key see below.

Bank		Cairn	
Cup-marked stone		Enclosure, small	
Enclosure, large		Hollow way	

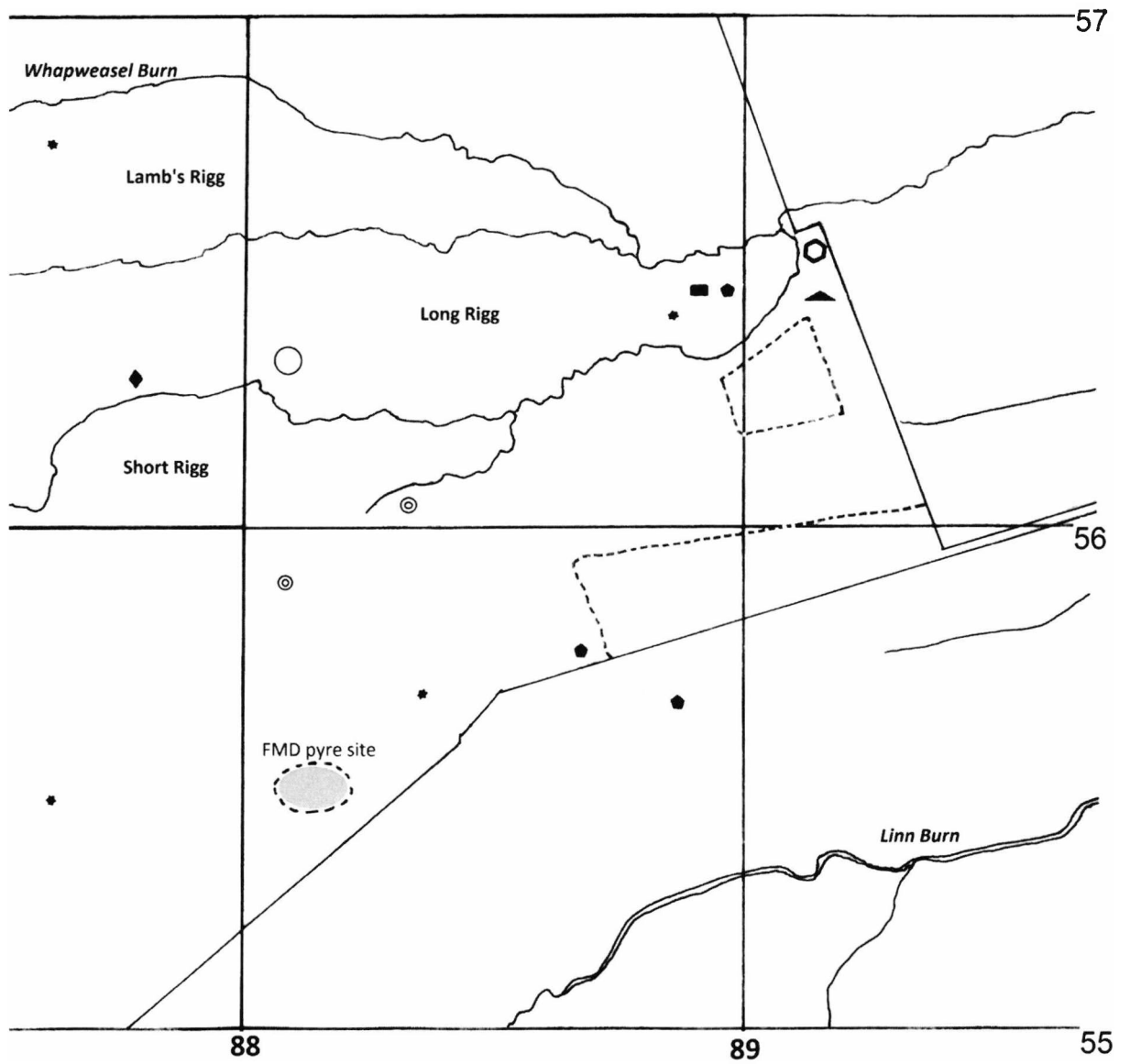








Figure 1 continued. Eastern half.

Pit		Quarry	
Shooting butt		Slag	
Standing stone		Stone circle	

NY 88659 55926 to NY 89376 56625 bank

Bank of earth and stone, about 3m wide, with possible ditches on both sides. Bank trends 340° N almost as far as the stone wall. At the corner NY 88659 55926 it curves and trends 60° E. At NY 88681 55943 it trends downslope, due E. It ends at the E field wall NY 89376 56625, where it is much slighter. Elev. 271 m.

NY 88694 55762 pits, hollow ways

Two or three pits beside a large bank. One has a tail of material to the E. Another (10 m to the S) has material spread on all sides. There are hollow ways on either side of the pits. Elev. 311m.

NY 88870 56402 cairn

Cairn, elevation 269m. (Presumably one of those reported to SMR by D. Peel, in 1998, at NY 8890 5635.)

NY 88891 55650 pit

Pit on edge of smooth area amid reed. Interior about 2.5 m wide. Elev. 300 m.

NY 88929 56455 hollow ways

At this point hollow ways, trending SW-NE across the burn, turn NW-SE. Elev. 266m.

NY 88976 56459 pit

A pit or hollow, c. 4.5 m wide. Elev. 260 m.

(Possibly the putative kiln reported to SMR by D. Peel, in 1998, at NY 8905 5650, described as being 'a depression at the east end of a moraine', which does not fit the grid reference recorded as given in the SMR, but does fit this one.)

NY 89124 56545 enclosure / settlement

Possible settlement enclosure which is elevated above the burn. Enclosed by a bank, and cut back into the hillside, it is also subdivided by a bank. Elev. 231 m. A further enclosed area with a broad low bank is visible across the Whapweasel Burn (outside the survey area) with rigg and furrow.

NY 89153 56390 enclosure banks

At NY 89153 56390, the corner of a bank of stone and earth approximately 2 m wide with a ditch on E and N sides, trends crookedly along the contour south-westwards (230°), and straight (170°) southwards. (Elev. 249 m.) At NY 89215 56206 (Elev.269 m) the bank continues westwards. The full extent of the enclosure could not be determined due to high vegetation.

(Presumably the enclosure reported by D. Peel, in 1998, at NY 891 563.)

NY 89176 56465 slag heap

Slag heap, presumably for iron working, c 4 m diameter. Elev. 268m.

(Possibly that reported by D. Peel, in 1998, at NY 8880 5640.)

NY 89225 56334 cairns

Cairn, with other possible cairns in the vicinity. Elev. 266 m.