

GREAT ASBY SCAR ARCHAEOLOGY SURVEY

Summary Report



WESTMORLAND DALES



**HERITAGE
FUND**

PROJECT

The Westmorland Dales Landscape Partnership Scheme aims to unlock and reveal the hidden heritage of the Westmorland Dales, which lies to the north of the Howgill Fells in Cumbria within the Yorkshire Dales National Park. This four year scheme is primarily funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, and involves 21 different projects, that focus on exploring the area's natural and cultural heritage.

One of these projects is the Great Asby Scar Archaeology Survey. The aim of this project was to carry out a community based landscape survey of the 11km² area that makes up Great Asby Scar (3km south-west of Great Asby and 2km north-east of Orton). We knew there was great archaeological potential in this upland landscape. Detailed surveys on neighbouring Little Asby Common had revealed that much of the area's heritage had been overlooked and certainly unrecorded compared to the rest of the National Park. This project aimed to start correcting this imbalance. Previously there were 59 known sites on this area of upland. Now, there are 1,218 known features!

The results of this survey will be used to enhance the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority's Historic Environment Record. The results will contribute to a greater understanding of the area's historic development and are indicative of much of the rest of this upland area which has largely been unsurveyed and unrecorded.

As well as the significance of the results, the community based nature of this project was also integral to its success. While uncovering a lot of the "hidden" heritage of the area, the volunteers also learnt surveying skills. They were trained in how to 'read the landscape' and identify evidence of past human activity across the Scar, as well as learning how to set up a field survey and the methods used to record sites.

The survey was carried out in two parts, led by two different groups. Northern Archaeological Associates (NAA) were contracted to lead a survey of half the area with volunteers and YDNPA apprentices. The other half, predominantly the areas with large expanses of limestone pavement, was surveyed by members of Lunesdale Archaeology Society (LAS). It commenced in autumn 2019 and was completed in summer 2021.

The level 1 survey involved the volunteers walking a series of 'transects' – they were spaced about 10-20m apart and walked across Great Asby Scar following a bearing and keeping an eye out for any possible features. When a feature was discovered the group came together to record it. They then returned to their transect lines and continued surveying. This method was not possible where there was lots of limestone pavement. Instead the area was walked over from a number of different directions, so the features could be spotted.



RESULTS

The surveys undertaken by NAA and LAS both produced detailed reports which are available separately. This is a simple overview of the results from a chronological perspective and in terms of the types of features identified. It is the later which is the focus of the two reports as it is difficult to date many of the features without more detailed survey.

Evidence of human activity on the Scar dates back to the Bronze Age with many burial mounds (a mound of earth and stones raised over a grave or graves) present across the Scar. Some placed stones and field boundaries, potentially relating to settlement and agriculture, may date from this time too. Later, in the Iron Age and Romano-British period, settlements on the north flanks of the scar show extensive signs of habitation. In subsequent centuries, settlement appears to have continued on at least a temporary basis with fields cleared, pens built and boundaries constructed, for both livestock and cultivation. In medieval times much of this became common land split between the parishes of Great Asby, Crosby Ravensworth and Orton. It would have primarily been used as pastureland for the livestock of the nearby settlements. Evidence of significant agricultural infrastructure is present on the Scar from this period with multiple possible shielings (a roughly constructed hut used while pasturing animals) dotting the area. These were often accompanied by associated livestock enclosures.



Figure 1 Volunteers surveying one of the shielings

In the late medieval period until the 19th century, the land on the Scar was slowly enclosed. This process caused a significant change in the landscape with the erection of countless dry stone walls to separate land parcels. The construction of such walls required large quantities of stone. Stone was extracted locally, evidenced by the presence of numerous quarries, many of which lie near dry stone walls. Accompanying this movement was a move toward greater agricultural efficiency and lime kilns were built locally to create quicklime which was used to improve the soil.

In the late 18th and mid-19th centuries, copper was extracted from the north slopes of the Scar. Significant evidence of mining can still be found with adits (a horizontal passage leading into a mine for the purposes of access or drainage) and several bell pits (surviving as doughnut-shaped earthworks, they occur when mineral that lies near the surface is extracted) still present. Turf cutting was also an important industry with examples found on the Scar.



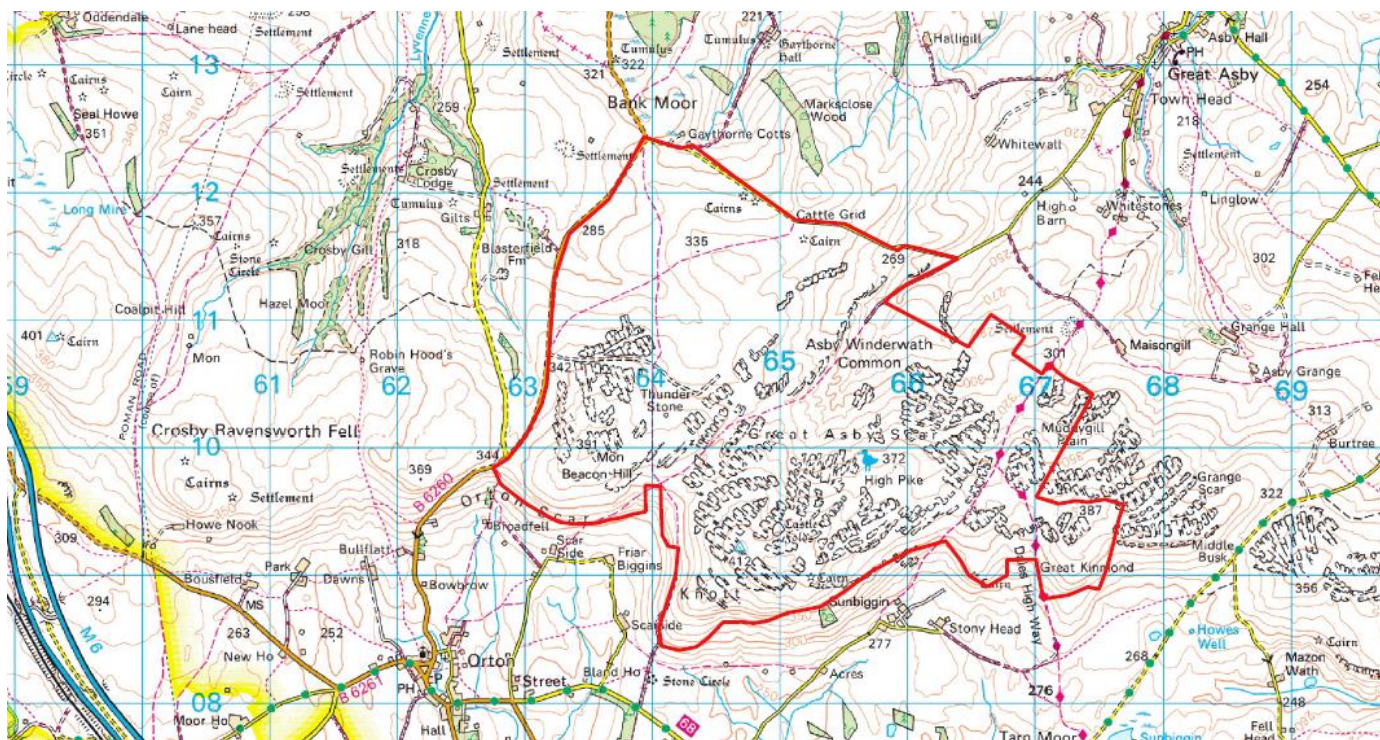
© NAA

Overall, the success of the survey has shown the validity of archaeological landscape survey in terms of increasing our understanding of both the archaeological resource of the area and the development of the landscape over time. However, there remain key areas requiring further research and archaeological investigation. In particular, several of the large shielings and settlements, as well as the mining sites, need more detailed survey. In addition there are significant parts of the Westmorland Dales which would benefit from a similar survey.



SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Type of site	Number identified	Examples include
Industrial sites	207	Mainly quarries and associated features; some mining areas, and peat cuttings
Settlements	21	Shielings, hut circles, Romano-British and other settlements
Agricultural sites	249	Sheepfolds, bields, field walls and enclosures
Cairns and way markers	315	
Burial cairns	12	
Structures of unknown use	109	
Tracks	96	
Placed stones (stone settings)	232	Upright stones wedged in place; a few horizontal and circular placements.
Water management	17	Culverts, ditches
Wall furniture	80	Gate stoops, smooths, hogg holes, stiles, etc.
Ordnance	28	Sites where WWII Ordnance has been placed or fallen



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Westmorland Dales Landscape Partnership team would like to thank all the volunteers and apprentices for taking part in this project and surveying Great Asby Scar. We are also grateful for all the time Lunesdale Archaeology Society have given to this project, and the experience that Northern Archaeological Associates provided to the volunteers. Thanks must also be extended to the Historic Environment team at the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, for the assistance they have given to this project.

The project was funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the YDNPA Sustainable Development Fund.

Please note that this summary report has been created using the reports created by NAA and LAS:

Northern Archaeological Associates, Community-based archaeological landscape survey final report (2021, unpublished report)

Lunesdale Archaeology Society, Survey of Great Asby Scar, areas O, P, Q, R, S, T, U (2021, available on their website)



CONTACT US

**Westmorland Dales Landscape
Partnership Scheme**

Unit 1b, The Sidings, Tebay,
Penrith, Cumbria. CA10 3XR

01539 756620

westmorlanddales@fld.org.uk

thewestmorlanddales.org.uk



WESTMORLAND DALES

