

The logo for Biggar Archaeology group, featuring the text 'Biggar Archaeology group' in white on a dark brown, textured rectangular background. Above the text is a horizontal brushstroke in shades of green and yellow.

Biggar
Archaeology
group

Bringing the past to the present



Harehill Knowe near Broughton, Peeblesshire, Scottish Borders, survey and excavation report.

Tam Ward. 2015.

As part of a larger research project, itself originating from a programme of survey work in Upper Tweeddale by Biggar Archaeology Group, a trial trench was opened on a prominent isolated mound near Broughton and which is known as Harehill Knowe. The limited work showed that the feature was probably for the most part natural but with anthropogenic additions of a surrounding dyke, plantation and a capping of stone covering the overall mound.

Introduction

The mound was surveyed by Biggar Archaeology Group (BAG) during their survey of Upper Tweeddale (Ward 2004) and the survey report is given below. Subsequently a trial excavation of two small trenches was carried out, T1 lies approximately in the centre of the mound and in a location free of tree cover and T2 lies on the perimeter of the mound and on the east side.



Fig 1

Survey Report

Site No 311

Mound NT 13 SW

NT 1140 3420

207m OD

The prominent mound (Figs 1 & 2) known as Harehill Knowe and given by RCAHMS/NT 13 SW/1 was inspected. Victorians suspected the site as being a 'tumulus' with archaeological significance; however subsequent visual inspections by archaeologists have not substantiated the true nature of the mound.



Fig 2

The mound (PI 1) is covered in mature trees; for the most part pine, but sycamore and elm and various rotted stumps (marked s, e and x on Fig 2) are present. The mound dimensions are 37m on a N/S alignment and 30m on the E/W line, it is 2.75m high, it has sides rising at a gentle angle to a rather flat summit. The edges for most of the circuit are covered with a loose layer of small boulders and cobble sized stones, this scatter reaches from the base to about 4m up the slopes of the mound, probing of the summit established that other stones exist. These perimeter stones may be the remains of an enclosing dyke which would have given protection to the plantation when the trees were first planted. It is possible that the stones are the product of field clearance being dumped on the mound or the stones may be a deliberate attempt to cover the hillock. Despite close examination of rabbit damaged areas around the perimeter it was not possible to establish if the mound consists of gravel, which, if so, would probably confirm that the feature is a natural one, being the product of glacial melt waters, such deposits are visible in the vicinity, for example at nearby Wrae Farm cottage. However, the mound is entirely different in character to any other local deposits of sands and gravels both in its regular form; if slightly oblong, and its apparent isolation within its setting; this gives rise to speculation that the feature may be man made or partially so. The base of the mound never appears to have been truncated by ploughing despite its isolation within the arable field.



Plate 1

Excavation evidence

Trench No 1 Plates 2 - 4

A central trench of 2m square was opened on the summit of the mound and in an area free of tree cover. Immediately below the turf which measured up to 0.2m deep a layer of cobble sized stone was encountered and which covered the entire area of the trench.

The uniformity of size of rounded stone lying on the upper surface was evident (PI 2); however this gave way to about 50% of more angular and slightly larger stones (PI 3) which continued to the base of the deposit which was about 0.5m deep. The stones lay directly on a gravelly till (PI 4) of an appearance which is seen throughout the district and is evidently a natural glacial deposit. No features or finds were made in the trench which was backfilled with the original material.



Plate 2



Plate 4



Plate 3

Trench No 2

The smaller trench at the edge of the mound (PI 5) measured 1m by 0.5m and upon removal of the slightly deeper turf at 0.3m, only the natural till, the same as in T1 was seen. No finds or features were discovered.

Discussion/conclusion

The work shows that part of the mound is the product of natural deposition of glacial deposits of till, being at least 2m high above the fairly level field, however, it is clear the feature has been covered in a layer of stones and this has been done by the hand of man. The limited work at T1 suggests selection of smaller round stones as the uppermost cover and it was seen that the stone cover did not extend down the sides of the mound, rather they respected what may have been a low wall or revetment of the same type of stones (PI 6), and this was placed around the mound at a higher level than its base in the field. The upper surface of the mound has therefore been carefully covered with a layer of stones.



Plate 5



Plate 6

Despite the lack of firm evidence regarding the use of the mound, it would seem that the stones are not simply the product of field clearance, since a certain size of stone appears to have been selected, e.g. no small stones are evident in either Trench 1 nor in the visible exposures of the surrounding edges. The only stones lying further down the mound sides have clearly tumbled from above (see Plate 6).

A pre-historic burial mound cannot be ruled out as a function of the site since the invasive work carried out was extremely limited. The tree cover is typical of 19th century estate improvements which were done for aesthetic reasons, and the trees certainly post date the stone deposition.

The area of the Upper Tweed valley abounds in Bronze Age monuments which include unenclosed platform settlements, burnt mounds, burial sites, small cairn groups and larger cairns, Harehope Knowe is therefore considered to have a probability of lying in that period as a funerary monument, However, only recourse to further investigation could establish its true nature.

References

Ward T 2004. Upper Tweed Survey. www.biggararchaeology.org.uk

Acknowledgment

Permission to excavate was given by the site owner Mr John Marshall of Kilbucho Place.

The excavation team comprised of Fiona Christison, Brenda Dreghorn, Joyce Durham, Richard Gillanders, John Goodie, Andy Hendry, Jim Ness, Ian Paterson, Alison Whyte and Tam Ward who directed and recorded the entire project.