

# Biggar Archaeology

Bringing the past to the present



## Megget Valley Landscape an Archaeological Survey

Tam Ward 2005

### Introduction

The survey of that part of the Megget Valley west of the dam wall, was undertaken as a consequence of discovering a series of pre-historic sites within the reservoir, during a period of low water level in 2004 (Ward 2004 by 2 of). The survey was completed during winter and spring of 2004/2005.



Map of Scotland



Location Map of  
Megget Valley

### **Gazetteer of sites**

Site No 1 Possible cairn NT 15730 20595

On the lower south flank of Clews Hill and c 80m north of the road there is a possible cairn. It lies on a slope and measures 3m in diameter by 0.4m high and consists of boulders. The feature may be natural however, it lies in a stone free area. It is surrounded by coarse grass.

Site No 2 Burnt mound NT 16545 21232

On the lower southeast flank of Wylies Hill and lying 5m east of a post and wire fence, there is an amorphous shaped burnt mound, which measures c2m in diameter by 0.4m high. It lies adjacent and on the east side of a spring course and within a few metres of the source of the spring. The area is part of a boulder field called Wylies Brae.

Site No 3 Cairn NT

On the lower southeast flank of Wylies Hill and lying only 3m south of the entrance to a sheep stell (given on OS) and c 50m north east of Site No 2 above, there is a small cairn, which measures 2m in diameter by 0.2m high. The cairn has a well-defined edge of boulders but the centre is filled with vegetation free cobble sized stones. The cairn may be associated with the nearby stell but it has the appearance of a possible pre-historic site.

Site No4 Bucht NT 16680 21390

On the lower southeast flank of Wylies Hill, and lying near the top of a dyked enclosure there is a sunken bucht which measures 8m long by 2m wide internally. It has been cut into the slope with the open end facing downhill to the south. Boulders have been incorporated in the sides.

Site No 4 Bucht NT 16732 21431

On the lower southeast flank of Wylies Hill and lying within a dyked enclosure there is a sunken bucht which measures 13m long by 1.5m wide internally. The scooped site is open on the east side and stones have been used in the sides.

Nearby is a small L shaped quarry measuring 2m by 2m by 1.5m.

Site No 5 Shooting butt NT 16681 21503

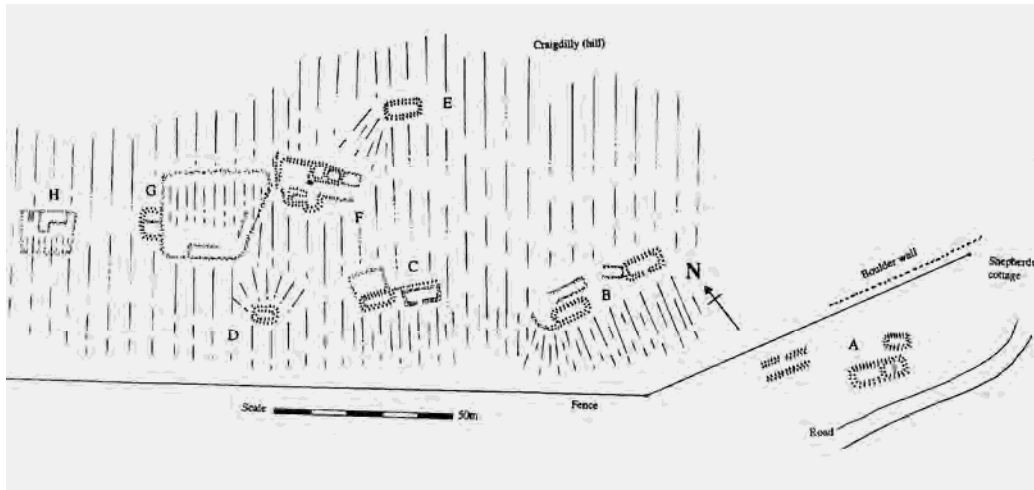
On the lower southeast flank of Wylies Hill and lying above the dyked enclosure (above) there is the lowest of a line of shooting butts (given on OS). The feature is seen as a 2m long by 1.5m wide rectangular shaped pile of stone.

Site No 6 Settlement, buchts, enclosures centred NT 18323 20326

On the lower south flank of Craigdilly (hill) and immediately west of Winterhopeburn cottage, there is a complex of stone buildings and boundary walls.

Just to the north of the main grouping of buildings at NT 18267 20348 and lying adjacent and on the east side of a fence, in a hollow area, there is a rectangular shaped enclosure consisting of massive natural boulders with others placed to form walls. The internal area of the building is 8m by 2m, there are no other features. Nearby is a shepherd's cairn of no great antiquity.





Craigdilly Hill settlement plan

Site No 11 Settlement. centred NT 1845 2020

On the lower south flank of Craigdilly (hill) and immediately west of Winterhopeburn shepherds cottage and ranged between the 360m and 390m contours, there is a group of rectangular shaped buildings, and enclosures composed of stone foundations. Each grouping of buildings has been built to take maximum advantage of natural terraced areas on the slope of the steep hill. They are described here with reference to those groupings and as they appear on the survey plan;

#### Group A

Lying only a few metres from the road a principal building is 15m long by 5m wide overall, the grass covered stone banks spread to about 3m and are 0.5m high, (which dimensions and description, generally holds for most of the buildings described here unless otherwise stated). There is no obvious entrance but the building has been sub divided almost equally with a secondary division in the eastern chamber.

Lying adjacent and to the north is a smaller building which is 6m by 3m overall, this is less substantial than its neighbour and equally there is no obvious entrance evident.

A short distance to the west of these are two parallel banks about 13m long, a gap appears in the centre of the northern bank and which may have been original, however there is no indication that the ends were closed.

Lying just to the north and on the other side of the fence is a peculiar line of large boulders, some up to 2m in size and forming a boundary wall. It ends upslope from the buildings described but continues east for a distance along the rear of the shepherd's cottage.

#### Group B

Lying higher up this group consists of four buildings, the most easterly is 12m by 6m overall and has a distinct entrance centrally placed on the long southern wall. Adjacent is an open ended structure measuring 7m by 4m. A few metres to the west is a similar building but measuring 11m by 4m, it is similarly open on its west end. The fourth building lies on the front of the terrace and has been created as a long hollow with stone walls, it has an obvious entrance about 1m wide on its west end, this is formed by boulders, and a short curved wall has extended from this end.

#### Group C

Lying further west but on a separate terrace are two buildings and a small yard. The wall face of the south east corner of the larger structure is visible as is the entrance on the southern long wall. The room measures c9m by 3m with walls nearly 1m thick. The second structure is less substantial and is 11m by 4.5m overall, there is no obvious entrance to it. A stony bank runs from it along the back of the other building, suggesting the bank may have existed first. A few stones protruding from the ground indicate the area of a small rectangular yard or garden, it measures 9m by 5m. It has a possible entrance on the south west corner.

#### Group D

This small building stands alone in a natural hollow area, it measures Only 6m by 4m overall and show no other specific details.

#### Group E

This single building is the highest of the entire group and occupies all of the space available on its terrace. It measures 11m by 6m overall but there are no details such as an entrance.

#### Group F

This complex has been built to occupy all of the space available on an area which slopes down to the east. One long building of 15m by 4m overall has two sub divisions forming three chambers. An open L shaped structure lies opposite and between the two is a sunken area which has formed an access to the site.

A yard of about 8m square has been built at the western side and two short stretches of possible later drystone walling over lie this end.

#### Group G

This is a sub rectangular enclosure which for the most part occupies a steep slope, at the lower end and on the level is an open ended structure which measures 8m long by 2.5m wide internally. A short section of walling has formed an avenue leading to the open end of the building. At the western side and underlying the perimeter wall, is a building of 8m by c7m and which has been sub divided by a lesser partition than the main walls.

#### Group H

This is a rectangular enclosure of 15m by 12m, the lower half of which is on a steep slope; consequently the evidence of the wall there is nearly gone. On the upper level area there is an L shaped building measuring 8m by 6m overall, and of which there are no obvious details. To the west of the building there is a distinct rectangular pile of tumbled stones.

#### Discussion

This grouping of buildings form what is certainly a settlement with associated sheep milking buchts, enclosures and other buildings, possibly byres or stores. Houses may be represented at A, B, C, E and possibly F where the most substantial buildings lie.

The buchts are certainly at B, where the two northerly examples are probably later drystone examples, the other one being sunken and with a 'catchment' wall to drive the sheep through the narrower entrance.

A further definite bucht is at G and is unusually, but not uniquely, placed within an enclosure, the 'avenue' leading to this bucht is also unusual. It is possible that the L shaped buildings are also buchts, this is especially so for the one at F, and which has an open side to it. Bucht entrances were closed by gates. The open ended structure at A is most likely to be another bucht; such examples have been recorded elsewhere.

The small yards may have been used as garden plots but there is no evidence of this, it is perhaps more likely that they are simply folding areas, used for sheep as and when required. The pile of stones at H may be a stack stand.

While features of a site like this can be interpreted, the details could only be got by further investigation such as excavation, to help with occupation and dating analyses. Occupation is assumed to be from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries on evidence from elsewhere. Certainly there are no obvious hollow ways or track ways connecting the groupings of buildings, this may indicate a shorter period of activity, however, it is judged by the nature of the complex that this was a permanent settlement.

This site is unusual in that the builders have chosen to utilise the few available spaces on the side of a steep hill, it does beg the question of what may have existed on the area where the modern shepherds house and the large farm shed now occupy. Aerial photographs and further research are required to add more details to the story of this place.

A sherd of coarse ware pottery and a piece of faceted haematite were found on molehills. The haematite is believed to have been used as a keel or colouring agent.

Site No 12 Burnt mound NT 17825 21948

On the south west flank of Craig Head (hill) and lying about 20m above the road at the point of access to the car parking area, there is a burnt mound. The grassy dome shaped mound measures 6m across the hill by 3.5m and it is 0.5m high. The spring course runs adjacent and on the east side of the mound, a few burnt stones are noted in the spring course.

A prominent mound to the west is a water tank with manhole covers.

Site No 13 Cairn group

On the south west flank of Craig Head (hill) and covering a distance of about 100m there is a group of small cairns. The cairns are dispersed along the slope immediately above the road and only a short distance from the burnt mound (Site No 12).

Dome shaped cairn 4m diameter by 1m high. NT 17850 21981

A few metres downhill from here there is a -

Crescentic shaped cairn 8m long down slope by 3m by 0.75m high

Cairn 3m diameter by 0.5m high NT 17860 22032

Cairn 4m by 3m by 0.5m high NT 17877 22018

Cairn 3m diameter by 0.5m high NT 17861 22106

Cairn 2m diameter by 0.3m high NT 17872 22115

Another possible cairn to the east of the above

Cairn, possible robbed c 4m diameter NT 17892 22102

Cairn 2m diameter by 0.3m high NT 17898 22086

#### Site No 14 Stone banks and possible cairns

On the south west flank of Craig Head (hill) and lying between the road and the reservoir there are a series of stony banks and possible cairns.

A sinuous stony bank spreading up to 3m wide by 0.5m high runs from NT 17697 21562 to NT 17652 21575 (5m from the stoll), it may have extended a further 20m or so to the east where it appears to have been quarried.

A curved bank extends from NT 17686 21628 – NT 17736 21635 – NT 17741 21624.

A bank runs from NT 17733 21609 to NT 17745 21622.

A possible circular enclosure measuring 12m in diameter is centred at NT 17747 21630. The circuit is intermittent and is not so well preserved as the other banks in the area. A bank runs from NT 17761 21606 to NT 17768 21588, this has a curved branch leading off to NT 17785 21611.

Possible cairn 3.5m in diameter by 0.3m high NT 17799 21738

Possible cairn 4m in diameter by 0.3m high NT 17805 21699

Immediately below this is a single layer of boulders c 3m in diameter.

Possible cairn 6m by 5m by 0.6m high NT 17780 21689

#### General survey discussion

Two distinct periods of sites are represented in this survey and these generally reflect the findings made within the reservoir (Ward, 2004 x 2of).

Post medieval sites which include buchts, shielings and the complex of buildings at Winterhopeburn are typical of those found in the Southern Uplands of Scotland (Ward, numerous surveys in Clydesdale, Tweeddale, Dumfriesshire, Ayrshire) and represent pastoral farming of the unimproved uplands, most especially with sheep.

The small cairns and burnt mounds are most likely to date to Bronze Age activity and these appear to be the peripheral sites to the series found within the reservoir, certainly they are higher.

The stony banks are more difficult to attribute a period of activity. Since they are fairly close to the spot at the edge of the reservoir (Site No --) where Late Neolithic pottery was found, and the fact that such boundaries have not been located in association with post medieval activity in the general area, it is possible that they are representative of Late Neolithic activity. These banks have a greater antiquity about their appearance than the usual earth banks of the post medieval period and which normally survive as less sinuous alignments.

Further research will be undertaken on the Winterhopeburn settlement.

The sites in this survey taken with those recently discovered within the reservoir now add to the corpus of pre-historic and post medieval settlement recently surveyed in Tweeddale (Ward, 2004), and indicate the potential for further survey work to the east in the St Mary's Loch area and beyond. Such a work would certainly be productive.

#### Acknowledgement

Permission to carry out the survey was given by Wemyss and March Estates, shepherds Hamish Meichie and Drew Hogg gave useful information on the ground. The following members of the archaeology group assisted with the survey: Fiona Christison, Jaquie Dryden, Richard Gillanders, Sandra Kelly, David Oxley and Jim Ness.

**References**

Ward T 2004, Upper Tweed Survey, Biggar Archaeology Group 2004

Ward T 2004 x 2of, Excavations in Megget Reservoir, Borders Region. 2004, & Megget Reservoir, an Archaeological Survey 2004, both Biggar Archaeology Group