


The logo for the Biggar Archaeology Group is located in the top left corner. It consists of a dark brown square with a white border. Inside the square, the text "Biggar Archaeology group" is written in white. Below the square, the tagline "Bringing the past to the present" is written in a smaller font.

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Bringing the past to the present

The Upper Tweed Project

A photograph of an archaeological excavation site. The image shows a rectangular pit dug into the ground, with several large, flat stones lining the walls and the bottom. The soil inside the pit is dark brown and appears to be rich in pebbles and small stones. The surrounding ground is covered with green grass and some small plants. The overall scene suggests a well-preserved ancient structure or feature.

Excavations at Woodend Mossfennan Farm by Broughton, Tweedsmuir, Borders Region

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Abstract

A series of test pits were opened on a gravelly ridge (Site No 1) to test the hypothesis that Early Christian archaeology may have been present. The results were inconclusive but did reveal that some pre historic activity had taken place involving a flint scraper and a few flakes of radiolarian chert and burnt stone. A further ridge (Site No 2) was also investigated and here two small cists were revealed and which by their size are assumed to be Bronze Age children's graves.

Introduction.

Site 1. Fig 1 & 2

The first site lies immediately on the eastern side of the A701 Edinburgh to Moffat road and it is approximately 4.25km south of Broughton village in Borders Region, OS map sheet; Landranger No 72 Upper Clyde Valley (1:50,000). The site is centred at NT 12092 31531 and is part of Mossfennan Farm and is 200m OD being on the eastern side of the River Tweed flood plain.



Fig.1



Plate 1

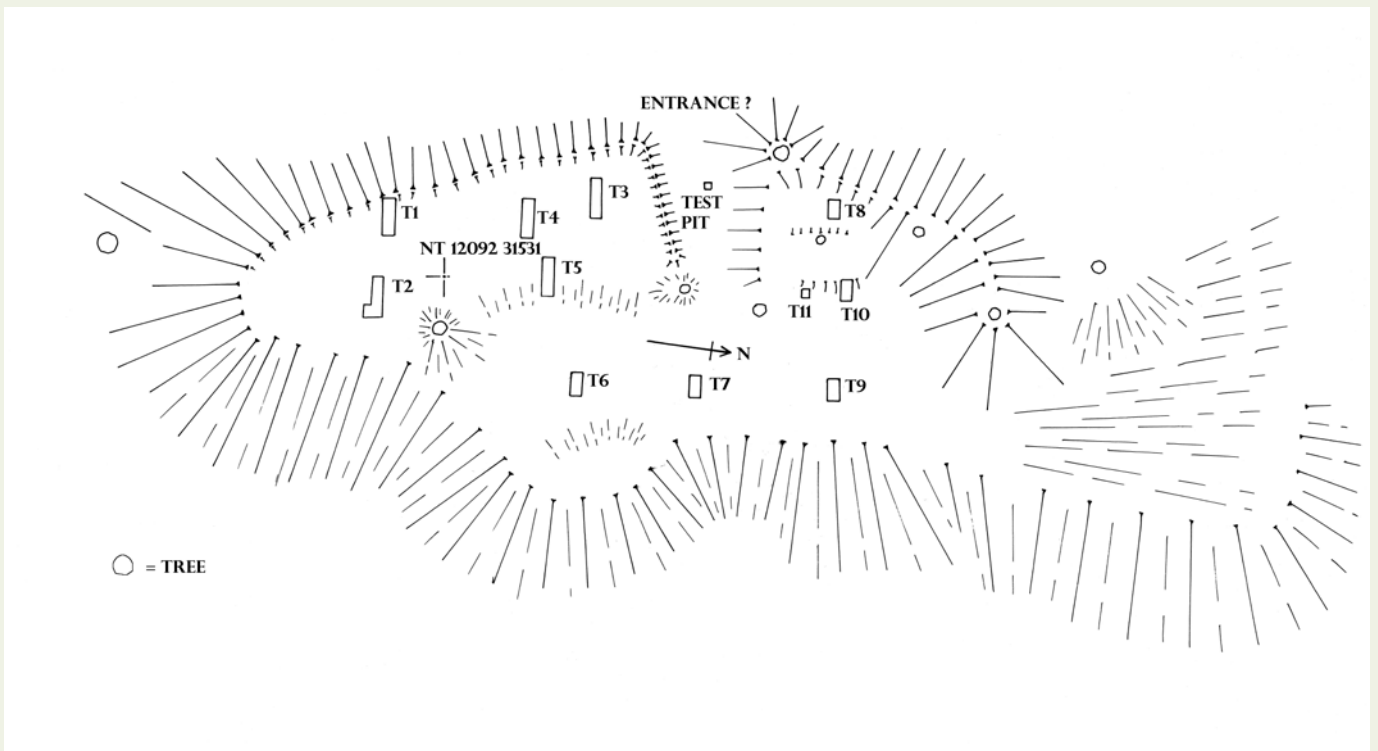


Fig. 2

The Ridge.

The natural ridge measures 75m in total length and is aligned N/S, it is c30m wide and rises from the side of the road on the west side and the flood plain of the River Tweed on the east side, the slopes of the ridge are short on the road side but vary in length and steepness on the other three sides. The summit on the southern half is fairly level while the northern part rises up slightly, old pine trees have been planted seemingly at random over it, and some of these give the impression of further raised areas.

The remains of stone wall footings may be seen to wind around the entire upper edges of the ridge and these form a low bank on the west side and which returns from that side towards the interior where it appears to indicate an entrance onto the ridge. The non quarried stones measured up to 0.4m and were totally random in their disposition although confined to the upper edge of the ridge. Thus an irregular shaped enclosure of c40 by 15m has been created on the southern part of the feature. It is also possible that access to the site was by way of the northern slope of the ridge and where the stone footings continue along the entire eastern side. A separate, smaller area may have been created on the northern end but this is less clear.

Rationale and methodology

Similar types of location along the upper reaches of the River Tweed; that is glacial ridges and knolls consisted of sand and gravels have been shown to be favourite burial places adopted in the Early Christian period and during the Bronze Age. Several sites have been discovered (RCAHMS 1967/1, Ward 2008). The ridge in question seemed to be a typical location and which was further enhanced by having a low stony bank surrounding its summit.

While graves of the Early Christian period have been found in Upper Tweeddale, neither houses nor churches of the period have been discovered in the area, so this project offered the possibility of enhancing knowledge of that time.

Trial trenches and pits were opened at arbitrary locations on the ridge to test for any archaeology and these had to be placed as far away from the living pine trees as was possible to avoid root systems.

Results

T1

Trench No1 measured 2m by 0.5m and was opened to test the nature of the 'wall' and the interior immediately beside it. Turf lay immediately over the stones which were seen to lie directly of the glacial gravel; the rest of the area was covered in 0.3m of soil and turf. One piece of burnt stone was noted. The stones appeared to have tumbled down on the interior while the summit of the bank, as seen, was entirely gravel, whether this gravel bank was the original deposit or had been heaped up was unclear.

T2

Trench No 2 also measured 2m by 0.5m but with an expanded end to examine a stone at the eastern end. Turf and soil were 0.3m deep in total and apart from the stone which was not further investigated, only two chert flakes and a burnt stone were found.

T3 **Plate 2**

Trench No 3 measured 2m by 0.5m and had soil and turf to a depth of 0.2m. There was a hint of a cobbled surface on the west half only, this was formed by small pebbles on the gravel, a burnt stone was found at the basal level. This trench was placed to examine the angle of the enclosing bank. A chert flake and a chunk of the same material were found.

T4

Trench No 4 was 2m by 0.5m and also had a few pebbles on the western side; the soil and turf were 0.2m deep. A chert chunk which may be part of a core was found.

T5

Trench No 5 was 2m by 0.5m and also had a few pebbles on its western half; several burnt stones were seen below the 0.3m depth of turf and soil. A chert flake was recovered.

T6

Trench No 6 measured 1m by 0.5m and produced nothing of note in the 0.3m depth of turf and soil.



Plate 2



Plate 3

T7

Trench No 7 was also 1m by 0.5m and was similar to T6 above apart from three stones lying in a N/S line, however, a flint scraper (PI 3), 20mm wide and 18mm in length and 5mm thick was found. It may have been a long end, and/or blade scraper as it has fine retouch around three sides including the rounded end, the opposite end is freshly broken. The flint is a mottled colour ranging from cream to orange brown.

T8

Trench No 8 was 1m by 0.5m and a total of 0.5m deep. It had some small stones in the east side with two larger rocks on the west side.

T9

Trench No 9 consisted of turf only over the gravel.

T10

Trench No 10 had 0.5m of sandy soil over a layer of angular stones up to 0.25m in size.

T11

Trench No 11 was only 0.25m square and also had angular stones in it.

Test pit

Another small test pit in the putative entrance produced only turf and soil over the gravel. This was opened to test if a formal surface had been laid as an entrance to the enclosure, the result was negative.

Discussion/Conclusion

The limited work on the site produced inconclusive results; certainly there had been some stone incorporated in a perimeter boundary but what size and form it took is uncertain. The various contents of the trenches indicate that other stone may have been used for surfaces within the enclosure, however in Trenches 8, 10 & 11 the stones were larger and angular and it may be that a cairn like feature between them is represented. The angular stones there were not laid as a surface, rather being haphazard as if simply dumped.

Activity involving burning was evident by the burnt stone in trenches 1, 2 & 3, the greywacke stones had been subjected to intense heat altering their colour and texture from the normal grey to a pink hue, and such stones are typical of hearth stones in the area.

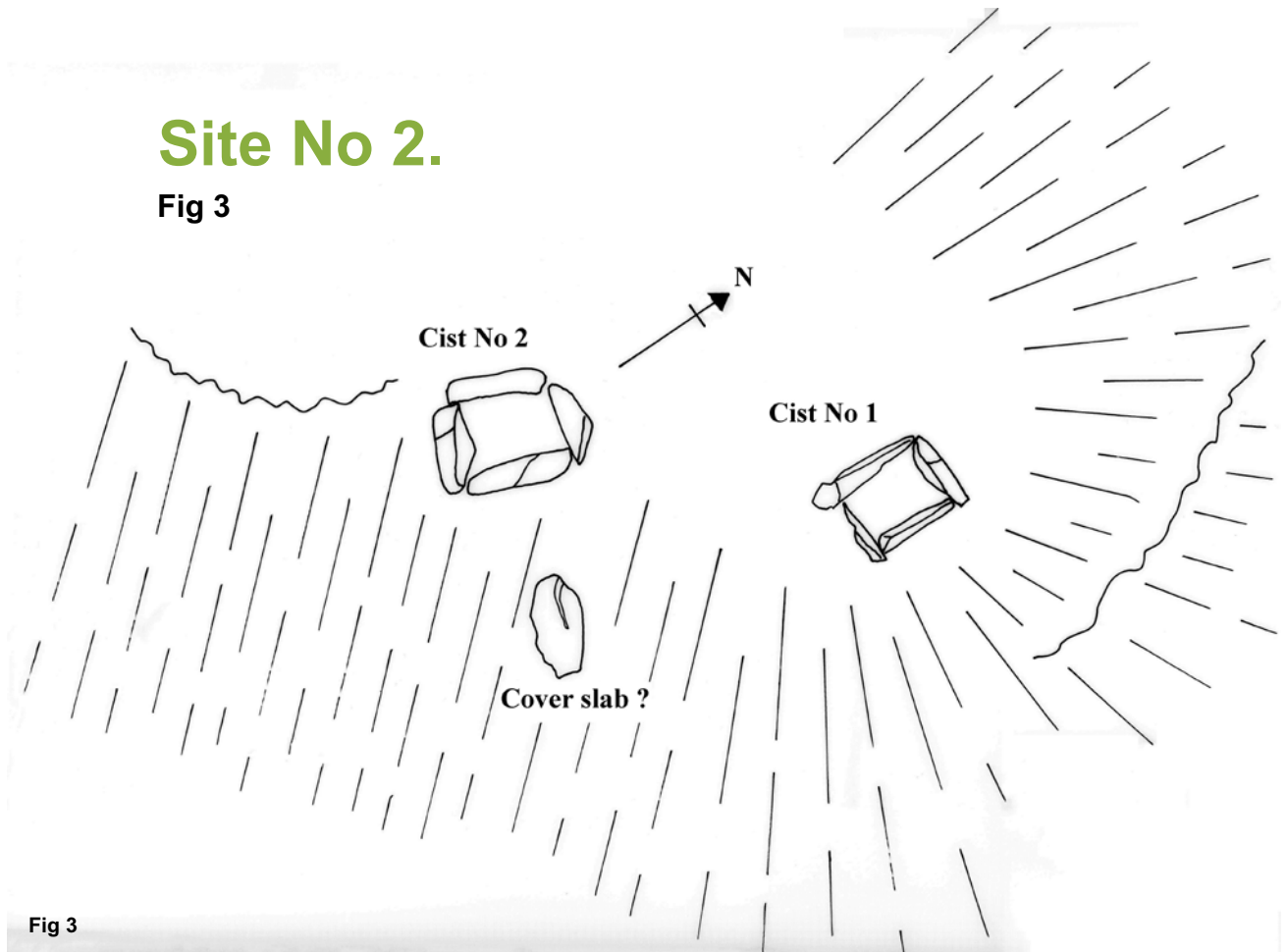
The only broadly dateable evidence is in the form of the chert flakes and flint scraper indicating pre historic activity on the site. However, such material is often found randomly in the area and too much should not be read into such finds. Nevertheless the lithic may represent Mesolithic activity, especially the possible core fragment, the scraper could easily fit in anywhere in pre history and without better contextual information may also be considered as a random loss.

Notwithstanding the rather paucity of evidence from the work, only a tiny area was opened relative to the whole, being less than 5m square from over 200 in the southern part of the site, where the enclosure is best represented. Given the presence of nearby Bronze Age cists (below) and the fact that Early Christian burials are also found in the vicinity, it is not too implausible to suggest that the site will have more archaeological importance than is shown by this work.

The search for Early Christian habitations and ecclesiastical sites continues in Upper Tweeddale.

Site No 2.

Fig 3



Introduction.

The gravel deposit which constitutes Site No 2 lies about 800m south of Site No 1 and is also immediately to the east side of the A701 road. It lies at 210m OD at NT 12176 31242. Roughly equidistant between the two sites given here is another gravel mound upon which a proven Bronze Age cemetery is located (RCAHMS 1967/1 & Ward 2008 *ibid*). The location of Site No 2 is a terrace which is adjacent and level with the road, and which drops steeply down to the river flood plain below, it is similarly planted with pine trees as are the two other locations to the north.

This site was first noted during work by Biggar Archaeology Group for their survey of Upper Tweeddale (Ward 2004), it was then suspected to be the remains of two Early Christian cists protruding from the upper edge of the bank, and very similar in all respects to the manner in which the cists were found at Lyne (Ward 1998). The site in this report was described thus in 2004 "The northerly of the two is indicated by three flat slabs and the other, only two metres away is indicated by two possible in situ side slabs".

Clearly these were not simply random stones, as such flat stones and indeed large stone are entirely absent in other nearby exposures of the upper edge of the ridge, and which are caused by sheep scrapes, only the glacial gravels are seen in these exposures.

By simply removing the shallow covering of turf, two cists were revealed.

Cist No 1

The northerly of the two cists was originally seen as three flat stones lying over others and all protruding from the upper edge of the ridge, they lay within the matrix of the natural gravel which consisted of pebbles and cobbles up to 250mm in size. The apparent anomaly of the cist stones in their context of a gravel mound can be seen in Plate 4 which shows their original exposure in the gravel.

The short cist appeared to be undisturbed apart from one cover slab becoming dislodged by exposure and gravity (PI's 5 & 6), two layers of cap stones were laid over the chamber, the lower set having two stones and the upper having three, the lower two were entirely in situ. The cist (PI 7) measured 510mm by 530mm and by 400mm deep, the long axis was orientated N/S, and it was entirely filled with fine gravel which had obviously found its way through gaps in the cover stones. The gravel was removed to reveal the entire cist interior which contained no objects or traces of bone.



Plate 4



Plate 5



Plate 6



Plate 7



Plate 8



Plate 9



Plate 10

Cist No 2

The second cist, only one metre away to the south, was originally seen as two vertical stones similarly only just below the extant turf and poking out of the ridge (PI 4). A flat stone lay on the surface of the ground and just below the feature (PI 8); this was almost certainly a capstone which was eroded from its original position covering the second cist. The cist (PI 9) was shown to be 520mm by 350mm by 300mm deep and formed like the other one with four small slabs set to form the vertical sides of a typical short cist but of unusual small size. The contents were identical to Cist No 1 in that no finds were made and the consistency of the gravel fill was the same.

Discussion

The two short cists are considered to be Bronze Age in date and as mentioned above, Bronze Age cists are quite common in Peeblesshire and elsewhere in southern Scotland. This conclusion is reached because there is a distinction in size and especially shape between Bronze Age short cists and Early Christian long cists; the former being simple rectangular boxes of any orientation, while the latter are usually aligned E/W and have a distinctive narrowing east end where the lower limbs of an extended inhumation were, and since both types do occur locally, they are therefore comparable.

The small size of these cists may be taken as the graves of infants, who may have been inhumed in the normal crouched positions, since no evidence of cremation was found. Any organic remains would not survive the infiltration of the gravels into the cists, due to acidity of the local soils, and presumably the remains of tiny infants would decay rapidly upon contact with the cist fills.

It is highly possible that other cists or graves may exist in the gravelly ridge; this may be tested by non invasive methods such as resistivity or magnetometer surveys.

It is an intriguing possibility that children may have been allocated their own special areas for burial and this idea also applies to the site at Lyne (Ward 1998 *ibid*) where three small long cists were found, although it is known from elsewhere that children were buried in association with adults, and this applies to both Bronze Age and Early Christian burials.

Nearly the entire length of the River Tweed between Drumelzier in the north, to Tweedsmuir in the south has prominent glacial deposits forming ridges and mounds along the valley edges. Two further ridges to the south produced Early Christian long cists with skeletal remains in 1939 & 1958 (RCAHMS 1967/2) and a third in 1968 was also found (McLaren 1971b). Across the River Tweed and to the NE of Site No 1 above, there is a prominent mound with a Bronze Age cist cemetery (RCAHM 1967/3), this is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and is currently being eroded by the river! All these, taken with the new discovery and the other cists at Woodend (PI 10) make this a rich area for burials of both periods; it is likely that further sites will come to light in due course.

Acknowledgement

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