

Site No 127

Ian Paterson & Tam Ward

Introduction

The site was originally recorded as:

263 **Site 127** Cairn with charcoal NS 95068 09521

The Laying on the west end of a narrow natural terrace measuring 30m across the hill by c20m deep and on the southern flank of Coom Rig a cairn was evidently truncated by the forest plough. The visible stones consisted of relatively small flat shale rocks and in the adjoining west furrow charcoal and burnt stones were noted. The peat and turf combined to a depth of 0.4m.

The original strategy was to excavate the furrow where the cairn had been truncated in order to establish if any deposits lay below. In the event, while this was being done, it was realised that the site extended further to the west where charcoal was noted in the furrow on that side, this was followed and revealed a smaller satellite cairn in the adjoining baulk of unploughed ground.

It serves as a salutary lesson which has been realised several times in this project, in that archaeological deposits could lie with a short distance from the areas which were excavated. Had the charcoal not existed in the furrow here, this small cairn would not have been discovered.

A total area of about 29 square metres was excavated.

The cairns

The larger dome shaped cairn measured 4.5m in diameter and was 0.5m high. It consisted for the most part of small stones up to 0.3m but with larger boulders below. They formed a typical jumble of stones in no particular order and a scatter of small stones lay around the cairn, presumably having been dislodged from it. The ground had not been cleared of soil prior to making the cairn; it lay directly on the podsol which was a creamy/grey clayey texture. The clay content almost certainly being derived from the leached greywacke stone of the cairn. The ogs was devoid of any charcoal, finds or features.

Stones were initially cleared arbitrarily from the furrow exposure and then a formal section was taken through the full body of the cairn on the east side. The matrix was a jumble of stones, mostly small flat ones with only occasional larger boulders. The cairn lay on the ogs which was a clayey podsol, and while some charcoal was noted on the lower sides of the cairn, none was seen below it. A further section was taken beyond the highest part of the cairn body and this revealed a few larger stones set into the clayey ground, nothing of an archaeological nature was found.

The smaller discrete cairn was 2.5m in diameter and only 0.4m high as it consisted of only about two layers of stone. Charcoal and burnt stone were evident around and in the matrix of the pile and upon removal of stones it was shown that a fireplace of about 1m in diameter existed and where a moderately hot fire had taken place, causing discolouration of some stones. However, burning had not been intense enough to affect the stones or the podsol below. Charcoal lay within the fire zone and a denser charcoal spread lay all around it.

Between the two cairns and intermixed with the edging stones of both was a thin lens of charcoal which was sampled in two places (S2 – S3). The spread of charcoal around the fire place and a deposit below the centre of the cairn was also sampled (S1 & S4). Upon excavating into the till below the fireplace a chert microlith was found, verifying what was already known; that a residual scatter of Mesolithic material can be found over much of the hill.

Charcoal retrieved. 'Handpicked' was from the flots.

127	S1	60	1mm > larger handpicked
127	S1	n/a	1mm> 'middle size + grit
127	S1	n/a	1 mm>smallest size + grit
127	S2	<1gm	1mm> larger handpicked
127	S3	18	1mm> larger handpicked
127	S4	13	1mm> larger handpicked

Discussion

The larger cairn is now interpreted as a field clearance pile and since it lay on ground devoid of any charcoal it clearly pre dates the fireplace activity which caused a spread of charcoal to encroach over the lower edges of the cairn.

The fireplace was easy to interpret by the presence of heat reddened burnt stone including a flat slab occupying the centre of the feature, and the abundance of charcoal within the fire site and around it. It appears that the fire site was then covered with a layer of flat stones laid over a cold surface since they were not heat affected.

Particular attention was paid for the presence of burnt bone but none was found on site or in the soil samples taken for retrieval of charcoal. The purpose of the fire is therefore unknown and furthermore why it should have been carefully covered with a layer of stone is similarly a mystery.

Cairns with smaller satellite cairns are known in Upper Clydesdale. Two good examples were at Crawford (Ward 1992) and where one site (No 78 below) was excavated on the line of the then new M74 motorway (Banks 1995) and revealed Bronze Age cremation burials and grave goods below both the larger cairn and the two smaller cairns in that instance.

Given the presence of charcoal here it was suspected that a cremation burial may have been present, however, although a fire place existed and certainly pre dating the smaller cairn and post dating the larger, no explanation is provable for why the site was created. The larger cairn may simply be the product of field clearance and the smaller pile could be a fire place being covered by using stones from a pre existing pile.

The south face of Coom Rig certainly has a series of small cairns and with one exception (Site No --) all the examples investigated have proved negative as far as funerary purpose is concerned. One larger cairn which was found in the earlier survey of Daer valley (Ward--) was marked for preservation prior to ploughing taking place here, it survives within the general scatter of small cairns on the southern flank of the hill, where it may be assumed that the ground was under cultivation in the Bronze Age.

Banks I 1995. The excavation of three cairns at Stonyburn Farm, Crawford, Lanarkshire, 1991. Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland Vol 125 (1995) (pp 289 – 343).

Ward T 1992. Upper Clydesdale Through The Ages, The M74 Project. Biggar Museum Trust 1992. (Site No's 75 & 78, pages 164 & 167 respectively). (Site No 90) and (Ward, Report No 5, Site 29)

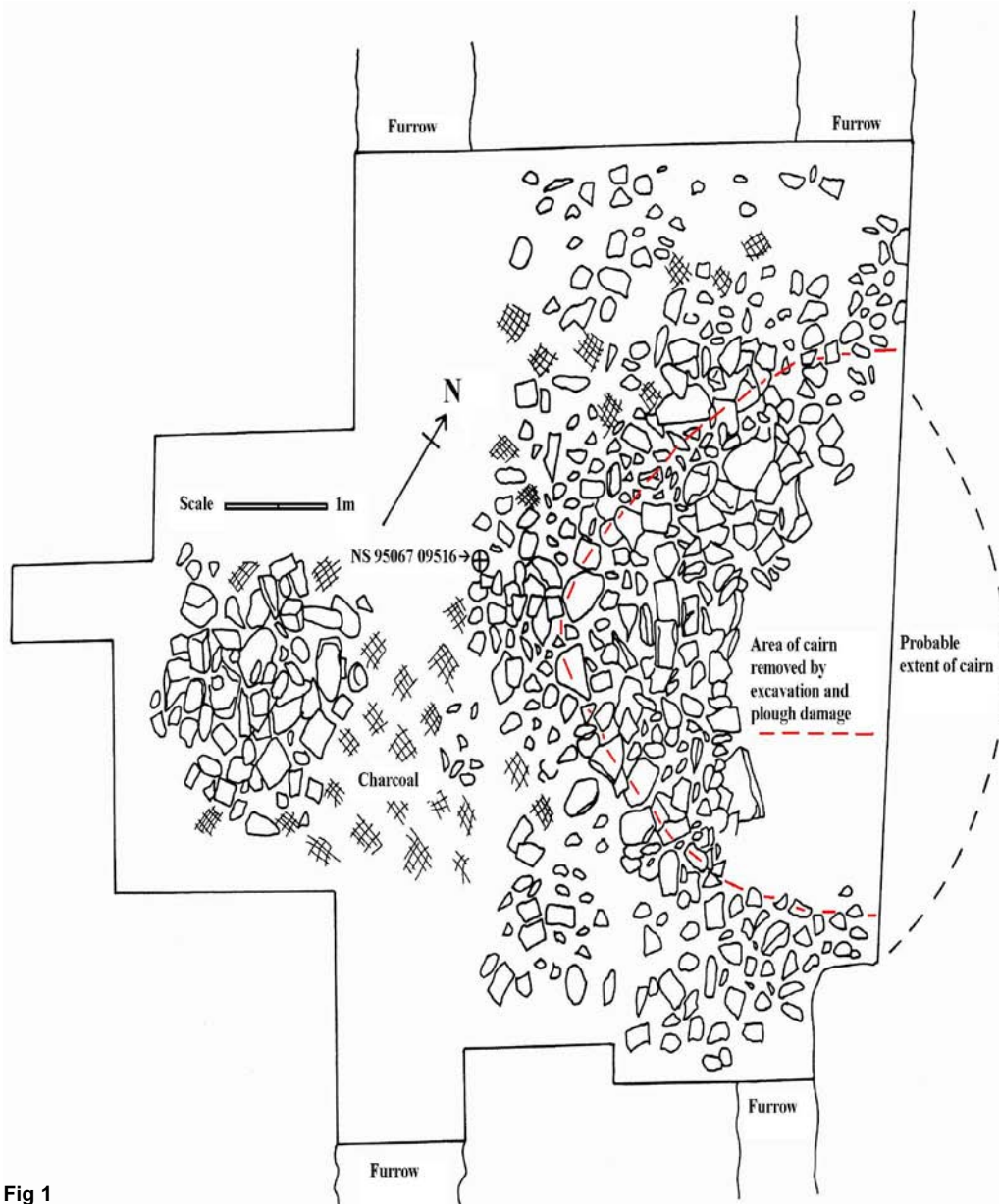


Fig 1



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3

Site No 128

Ian Paterson & Tam Ward

Introduction

The site was originally recorded as:

264 **Site 128** Boulders in furrow NS 95103 09562

The site lies of the south facing flank of Coom Rig at c350m OD.

The site was seen as a few boulders having been displaced by the forest plough in the furrows and the upcast (PI 1). The location is at the front of a natural terrace of c20m long by 10m deep, the stones lay on the break of slope down to the south.

A trench of about 4m (N/S) by 2.5m was opened to reveal a single layer of stones up to 0.6m in size (PI 2) and laid for the most part as a level surface. They appeared to form a slight arc but in the area as opened, they did not form any pattern.

About 6m further upslope (NS 95100 09570) further stones in the furrow were exposed to reveal a patch of boulders about 2m long by 0.75m wide and apparently set on the ground, these ones lay at the rear of the terrace (PI 3).

It is possible that the two set of stones are part of the same monument and given their proximity and situation near to the three timber structures further to the west, it is even possible that another timber structure lies here. The site was not further investigated.

Discussion

Settings of stones like these have been found on several sites on the project and in every instance nothing has been found to suggest what they were made for. Clearly the stones have been laid as an activity surface but in the absence of any dateable artefacts the undertaking remains a mystery.



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3

Site No 129

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Introduction

265 **Site 129** Stones in road section NS 94911 09418

The site was seen as a few stones in the section on the north side of the forest road on the southern flank of Coom Rig and at 360m OD. A cairn was suspected. Deturfing soon revealed a low dome shaped cairn circa 3m in diameter by 0.6m high, the stones were larger at the base being up to 0.6m long and embedded in the till, presumably having sunk through an ogs, and smaller ones on the upper surface.. The road excavation had only clipped the edge of the cairn, which was totally excavated to reveal only the clayey till below.

The small cairn is one of several now excavated on this project and which are assumed to be the product of field clearance probably in the Bronze Age



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3

Site No 130

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Introduction

This is a collective number given to a series of fire sites in close proximity, each of which were sampled for charcoal. The sites lie in the vicinity of Site No 125 and the area is the lower north flank of Hem Hill at around 360m OD, and is gently sloping.

Each of the spots showed varying amounts of charcoal and burnt stones in concentrations. However, the area for about 50m in diameter was strewn with burnt stone and sporadic flecks of charcoal, the locations given here are assumed to be fire place sites and it is likely that many more exist in the area but which are still covered in peat.

It is difficult to understand the wider scatter of this material unless it is all sourced from the known and possibly other fire sites. A large burnt mound (Site 31a) (Ward 2002) (PI 1) is located upslope but not directly above this area and it is therefore unlikely to be the source of the scatter.



Plate 1 Showing proximity to burnt mound from Site 125

It may be that all these locations and the scatter are the result of a series of undeveloped burnt mound activity, since there is a spring channel just to the east of the area, although it is currently dry, the water which must have formed it now dissipates over the sloping ground to the west of the area and now creating boggy ground. The suggestion of burnt mound activity may have some credibility given the absence of lithic from the locations apart from three where a few pieces of chert were found, however this chert may be residual material from the Mesolithic time and unconnected, and it is suspected that the fire sites are Bronze Age, a small fragment of a coal napkin ring was located at one spot.

NS 95055 08889 4grammes 1mm> handpicked from site
Only 6m down slope from Site 125.

NS 95041 08895 4grammes 1mm> handpicked from site
This was Location No 12 where a single chert was found

NS 95032 08894 2grammes 1mm> handpicked from site

NS 95038 08901 5grammes 1mm> handpicked from site

NS 95033 08918 20grammes 1mm> handpicked from site

NS 95028 08929 8grammes 1mm> handpicked from site

NS 95078 08900 8grammes 1mm> handpicked from site
This was Location No 83 where 4 chert were found

NS 95099 08872 7grammes 1mm> handpicked from site

NS 95090 08872 13grammes 1mm> handpicked from site
This spot produced chert and a napkin ring fragment

Reference

Ward T 2002, History of the Daer Valley, Draft, Biggar Museum Trust 2002