



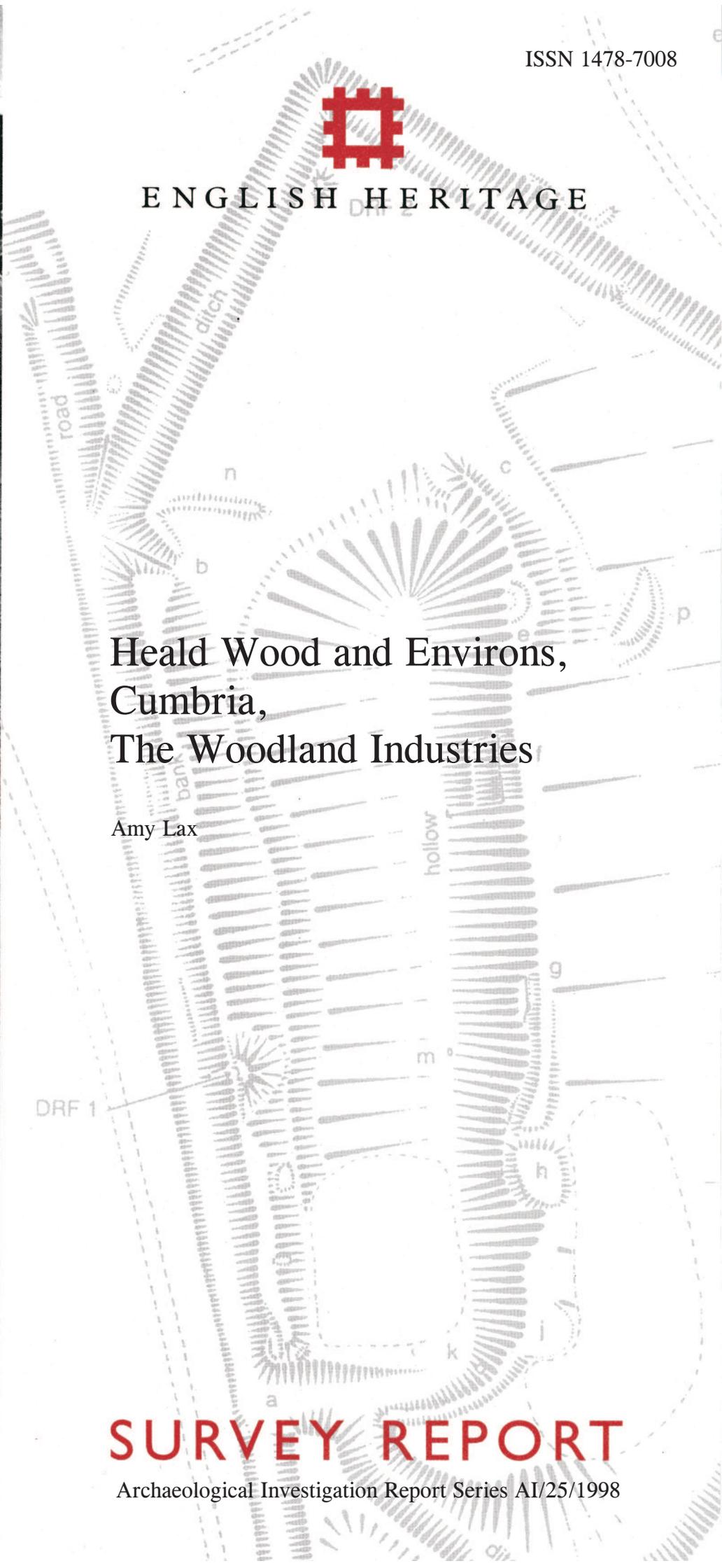
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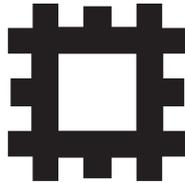
Heald Wood and Environs,
Cumbria,
The Woodland Industries

Amy Lax

SURVEY REPORT

Archaeological Investigation Report Series AI/25/1998





**Heald Wood and Environs
Claife
South Lakeland
Cumbria**

**NMR No: SD 39 NE 31-8
NGRs: SD 385 975 (centre)**

Surveyed March 1998
Surveyed by A.Lax and C.J.Dunn
Report by A.Lax
Drawings by A.Lax

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**HEALD WOOD and ENVIRONS, CUMBRIA: THE
WOODLAND INDUSTRIES**

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY REPORT

by Amy Lax





HEALD WOOD AND ENVIRONS

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York office: RCHME, Shelley House, Acomb Road, York YO24 4HB
Tel: 01904 784411 **Fax:** 01904 795348 **e-mail:** york@rchme.gov.uk

Headquarters: RCHME, National Monuments Record Centre, Great Western Village, Kemble Drive, Swindon SN2 2GZ
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Figure 1. RCHME plan of a pitstead in Heald Wood

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO SURVEY

On the western shore of Lake Windermere, opposite the twin settlements of Windermere and Bowness-on-Windermere, are a number of woods which have been the subject of fieldwork by the RCHME. The woods in question begin 0.8km east-south-east of Far Sawrey, at Ash Landing Wood, and extend northwards for nearly 4.5km, as far as High Wray. The largest of the woods is Heald Wood which is at the centre of a number of smaller woods and former coppices.

In July 1994 field staff from the former Newcastle office of the RCHME reconnoitred the woods searching for the remains of woodland industries; this investigation was a preliminary phase of the RCHME's project on the Iron Industry and Related Woodland Industry of Furness and South-West Cumbria and its purpose was to identify sites which would be suitable for more detailed survey. During the reconnaissance field notes were made of a handful of individual features and a sketch map, marking the sites of charcoal burning platforms (pitsteads) and bark peeler's huts, was made at 1:10,000 scale. No detailed survey was carried out subsequently, with the exception of a single charcoal burning platform in Heald Wood, in March 1998, which was considered to be a typical example of those seen in the wood, and to make an interesting comparison with other platforms seen elsewhere in Furness. The following report therefore is simply a broad outline of a particular aspect of the archaeology of the woods and does not purport to be - nor should be taken as - a definitive account of the archaeological remains.

TOPOGRAPHY AND LAND USE

The woods investigated (listed from north to south) were Ash Landing Wood, Station Scar Wood, Well Head Coppice and Tanner Brow, Belt Ash Coppice, Peter Crag Coppice (Pate Crag Coppice), Heald Wood, Bell Grange Coppice, Arthur Wood and Pinstones Wood. Heald Wood is by far the largest of the group, covering an area of approximately 80ha as opposed to 10ha or less which is the average size of the remainder. Heald Wood is largely deciduous, predominantly standard oak, with some conifers present. To varying degrees, the other woods and coppices are now partly given over to coniferous plantations; where conifers were present visibility was hindered. There are quite large areas of outgrown coppice but it is by no means widespread. In Heald Wood in particular, it appears that latterly the woods were primarily producing timber rather than coppice wood.

The woods occupy the steep slopes of the glacial valley side, their western perimeters generally coinciding with a levelling out of the slope. The ground rises from 42m above OD at the lakeside to 210m at the western extremity of Heald Wood, a gradient of about 1:2. Outcropping rock and tumbled boulders are common. Bracken grows freely in many places and occasionally was found to grow so densely and to such a height that all visibility was obscured; this was the case at the eastern end of Belt Ash Coppice.

The land is owned by the National Trust and is accessible to the public.

DESCRIPTION OF THE REMAINS

The steep and often craggy slopes of the woods, with the exception of Ash Landing Wood, do not present any natural terraces or level areas which would have facilitated the construction of pitsteads. As a result the pitsteads display an unusual degree of stone revetment. The pitsteads have been made by digging a circular platform into the slope, the spoil from the rear of the platform being pushed forward to create the front half. Both the front scarp, which overlies the natural slope, and the back scarp, which is cut into the natural slope, tend to be stone-revetted, often to a considerable height.

Heald Wood (NMR No. SD 39 NE 35)

Pitsteads

About 15 pitsteads were noted in Heald Wood; they tended to be quite regularly spaced and often linked by stone-revetted tracks. A single example of a pitstead (SD 3865 9758) was surveyed at 1:100 scale (fig 1). The pitstead is 6.6m in diameter, including its backscarp. Some traces of stone revetment to the backscarp still survive although the central part has been obscured by collapse and hillwash. In its present form the scarp is 2.0m high. This front scarp is reinforced by dry stone revetment walling to a height of 1.3m. The centre of the platform is flat and stone free with the exception of a single boulder which has evidently tumbled down the slope and the slumping at the rear of the platform. The pitstead is situated approximately 10m below a well made trackway.

Bark peeler's hut

Only one bark peeler's hut was found during the survey and is situated approximately at SD 366 972, adjacent to a well-built track which descends the slope. The hut is slightly D-shaped in plan rather than rectangular, its maximum internal dimensions being 3.05m by 2.5m. Its stone walls are 0.6m wide and a maximum of 1.3m high where the western wall acts as revetment against the natural slope but elsewhere are 0.7m high. A chimney is built into the northern wall which consequently thickens to 1.0m in width. Its hearth is 0.6m wide and was originally topped by a stone lintel which has now fallen down and lies in the interior. The hut appears to be built upon a former pitstead with a massive a stone-revetted front scarp 1.5m high.

Belle Grange Coppice and Belle Grange Crag (NMR No. SD 39 NE 36)

Three pitsteads were located in Belle Grange Coppice and three in the vicinity of Belle Grange Crag.

Peter Crag Coppice (also called Pate Crag Coppice) (NMR No. SD 39 NE 34)

Six pitsteads were found of a similar form to those in Heald Wood.

Belt Ash Coppice (NMR No. SD 39 NE 38)

Pitsteads

Four pitsteads were found, mainly on the fringes of the wood.

Bark peeler's hut

Beside one of the pitsteads, at approximately SD 384 967, a bark peeler's hut survives, within part of a loosely spaced conifer plantation. The hut is rectangular in plan, measuring 2.8m by 2.5m internally, within stone walls 0.7m thick. There is a single entrance in the western end of the south wall, 0.55m wide. A chimney with a sloping back, contains a hearth 0.5m wide and 0.7m high. The front wall of the hut is constructed around two massive boulders.. The presence of a collapsed corrugated iron roof suggests that the hut has been re-used relatively recently.

Well Head Coppice and Tanner Brow (NMR No. SD 39 NE 38)

No pitsteads were found in Well Head Coppice, although the density of vegetation growth may partly account for this. Three pitsteads were noted in Tanner Brow.

Station Scar Wood (NMR No. SD 39 NE 37)

One pitstead was discovered.

Ash Landing Wood (NMR No. SD 39 NE 32)

Six pitsteads were found scattered throughout the wood. The natural topography is less steep in this wood hence the absence of the pronounced stone revetments seen in pitsteads in Heald Wood for example.

Pinstones Wood (NMR No. SD 39 NE 31)

Pitsteads

Three pitsteads were identified, all are located in the southern half of the wood.

Bark peeler's hut

In addition to the pitsteads there is a single bark peeler's hut at approximately SD 382 997. The interior of this stone-built hut measures 2.8m by 2.4m, within walls 0.6m wide. It has a round-backed stone chimney, 1.0m high and 1.5m, thick which contains a central hearth, 0.5m wide.

CONCLUSION

Given the cursory nature of much of the fieldwork it is necessary to be wary when making generalisations from the evidence. However, two things seem apparent: one is that the pitsteads are of a much more robust construction than is commonly seen elsewhere in the Furness Fells; and second that this probably relates to the steep nature of the natural slope. The natural terrain may also account for the apparent scarcity of bark peeler's huts, although more examples may remain to be discovered.

The dating of such remains is inevitably difficult, especially given the long history of charcoal burning in the region. However, although some may have earlier origins, most, particularly the bark peeler's huts can be ascribed a post medieval date.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The detailed survey of the pitstead in Heald Wood was carried out at 1:100 scale using the tape and offset method and the accompanying profile was surveyed using a tape and pocket level. Its position was established by graphical means also. Grid references given in the text to other features are not metrically accurate and are derived from sketch maps produced in the field.

During reconnaissance an orienteering map was used for guidance (Harvey Map Services 1986); this had a number of the pitsteads marked on it as 'platforms'.

The RCHME would like to thank Robert Maxwell of the National Trust for information about the site.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Harvey Map Services. 1986. 1:15,000, Claife Heights

APPENDIX

Table of NMR numbers linked to this site

SITE NAME	COUNTY	DISTRICT	PARISH
Heald Wood etc	Cumbria	South Lakeland	Claife

NMR no	Unique Identifier	NGR	Site Name
SD 39 NE 31	1146414	SD 381 997	Pinstones Wood
SD 39 NE 32	1146434	SD 386 953	Ash Landing Wood
SD 39 NE 33	1146491	SD 385 967	Belt Ash Coppice
SD 39 NE 34	1146573	SD 386 969	Peter Crag Coppice
SD 39 NE 35	1146591	SD 385 975	Heald Wood
SD 39 NE 36	1149293	SD 384 991	Belle Grange Coppice
SD 39 NE 37	1149331	SD 388 958	Station Scar Wood
SD 39 NE 38	1149335	SD 387 963	Tanner Brow

Figure 1

