ENGLISH HERITAGE

BELLSHIEL LAW
Northumberland

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SURVEY REPORT

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION SERIES
6/2004

ENGLISH HERITAGE

BELLSHIEL LAW LONG CAIRN

ISSN 1478-7008
Archaeological Investigation Report Series AI/6/2004

County:	Northumberland
District:	Tynedale
Parish:	Rochester
NGR:	NT 8131 0117
NMR No:	NT 80 SW 5
SAM/ RSM No:	20919
Date of survey:	January 2002 & June 2003
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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE SITE

During the winters of 2001 and 2003, English Heritage carried out a field investigation of the long cairn on Bellshiel Law, near Otterburn in Northumberland. The site lies 3km to the north-west of the village of Rochester in the parish of the same name and the district of Tynedale, and the cairn on which the investigation focused is centred at National Grid Reference NT 8131 0117 (Fig 1). It lies within the Bellshiel Demolition Range which is part of the Otterburn Military Training Area, itself included within the Northumberland National Park.

The analytical field survey was undertaken as part of the first phase of work associated with the Cursus Enclosures and Bank Barrows: Britain and Beyond project (CEBAB). The aim of this is to 'better the understanding of the nature of the specific monument type' (Exploring Our Past, 1998, 35), in particular cursus enclosures, but also bank barrows which present an obviously shared morphology. The project is aimed at providing a research and interpretation based overview of these allied and poorly understood monument classes and addresses a wide variety of related issues including monument condition, vulnerability, management and protection. As well as this, the project will support the work of the English Heritage Characterisation Programme (formerly MPP) by providing data that will help to define and refine constraint areas for scheduling and future management.

The principal monument under review here is the cairn on Bellshiel Law. This is clearly a complex multi-period monument and seems to comprise two main parts: one round barrow/cairn on the east with a tail of stone rubble extending westwards. It is listed in the National Monuments Record as NT 80 SW 5 and is protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument, number 20919. Numerous circular and rectilinear structures and other declivities have been constructed into the body of the mound and a sheepfold lies along its southern flank. In addition, there are a number of other low clearance or burial cairns in the immediate vicinity, as well as the extensive remains of surface quarrying.

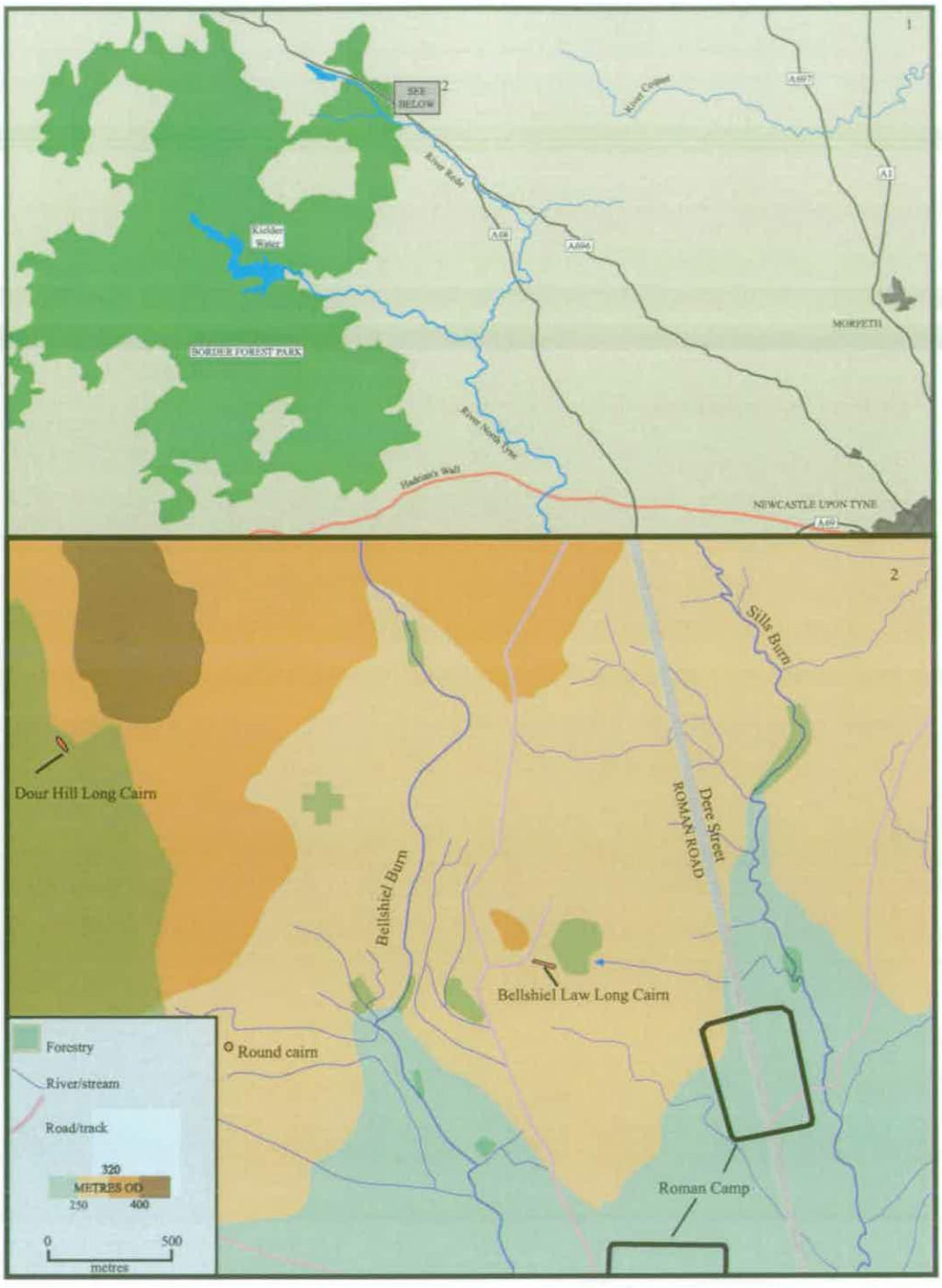

Figure 1: General plan showing the location of the Bellshiel Law long cairn.

2. GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY AND LAND USE

The Bellshiel Law long cairn sits on level ground at 310m above Ordnance Datum. Ground level falls away gently to the north but much more steeply on the south and east, and when viewed from these areas it is clear that the cairn has been constructed on the southern edge of a natural terrace, and carefully situated immediately above the break of slope (Plate 1). This terrace is the most southerly of a number of natural platforms that shelve out from the plateau and which give the terrain here a stepped appearance. The long cairn does not occupy the highest point in the surrounding landscape and is, indeed, overlooked by higher ground some 200m away on the north-west. Here, the crest of the knoll rises to a height of 326m above Ordnance Datum from which there are excellent views of the cairn and wider landscape.

Plate 1: Bellshiel Law viewed from the north-west. Other 'natural ' terraces can be seen to the south.

Bellshiel Law is located within the Anglo-Scottish border country to the east of the Solway Basin and to the west of the Cheviot Hills. The landscape is best characterised as consisting of high rolling and undulating plateaux with broad expanses of sweeping moorland, pierced by shallow, often steep-sided, river valleys. Higher land reaching above 410m Ordnance Datum dominates the backdrop to the cairn on the north and on the south, beyond the Rede valley, the Pennine Massif forms a distinctive horizon. The whole area is now relatively sparsely populated which adds to its remoteness, and the main belt of population resides in the villages along the valley floor of the main river that cuts through the area, the Rede (Plate 2).

The area is underlain by sedimentary rocks of Carboniferous age and these rocks give the landscape its familiar profile of steep-sided valleys and dissected plateaux. The geological sequence is typified by, in ascending order, the Cementstones Group, The

Fell Sandstone Group, the Scremerston Coal Group and a number of Limestone Groups. During the last ice age, thick layers of boulder clay and glacial till were deposited on these hills and consequently the developed soil profile is poor and not well suited to cultivation, unless heavily improved. There are, clearly, significant deposits of peat close to the site, particularly on the ledges and level areas to the north. These have developed in hollows on the old land surface of the glacial deposits.

Plate 2: View looking south from the long cairn. The Rede valley slices across the photograph close to the centre point and beyond this, the Pennine massif can be seen.

Exposed moorland areas are heavily grazed by sheep and characterised by small areas of improved ground surrounded by larger tracts of unimproved moorland, occasionally with patches of heather. It is a largely tree-less environment and those that do survive are mainly species planted within the last century or so, either as part of cover for game birds, as shelter belt plantations for isolated farms on the hilltops or as cover for troop manoeuvres on the Otterburn Ranges, the largest single firing range in the UK. The establishment of the military training estate here in 1911, has ensured that the area immediately surrounding the cairn has retained its open moorland character in marked contrast to heavily afforested areas close by.

The current land use is controlled by and dependent upon its use as part of an active military training estate but ordinarily the agricultural regime in this *pays* is typified by open, semi-improved pasture and rough windswept grazing. Modern field boundaries, both stone walls and wire fences, are visible and these define large paddocks that occasionally extend over several hectares in area. Less frequently there are more heavily improved in-bye fields and pasture close to the farms and in sheltered valleys.

It is a wet environment with streams and burns most commonly flowing in a north to south network. Two major watercourses lie close to the site. The Bellshiel Burn, which flows in a north-south direction some 300m to the west of the site, runs south to join with the main riverine artery in this area, the River Rede, itself a tributary of the North Tyne. Another tributary of the Rede, the Sills Burn, lies 800m to the east of Bellshiel Law, and a small stream which rises close to the cairn feeds into this. A shallow pool 125m to the east of the cairn marks the springline for this stream. In

addition to these, there are numerous minor burns and water channels on the slopes to the south and east.

3. HISTORY OF RESEARCH

The site has been described traditionally as a long cairn; a form of monument whose current standardised description is particularly vague – '*rectangular or trapezoidal non-megalithic stony mound of Neolithic date, with human remains in cists rather than a large chamber. Mound construction and associated features vary considerably in type and complexity.*' (RCHME 1995, 180). Masters (1984) sought to differentiate these sorts of monuments from others more commonly related to field clearance or generally associated with natural activities such as fluvio-glacial deposition. In doing so he identified a minimum length requirement of 15m with a trapezoidal or rectangular outline often with a raised or wider terminal but with no evidence for internal structures such as chambers. Masters rightly pointed out that stone-robbing and the growth of vegetation on and round these monuments can often hinder an assessment of the morphological classification (ibid, 54).

Antiquarian and Previous Research

Bellshiel Law is the largest of the long cairns in northern England. Masters noted a potential 33 similar sites in his survey of 1984 which incorporated cairns throughout southern Scotland and northern England (ibid, 55). However, only two other monuments, that at Trainford Brow in Cumbria (NMR No: NY 52 SW 1), and Caverton Hillhead (NMRS No: NT 72 NW 9) come close in terms of size and scale. The earliest depiction of the long cairn on Bellshiel Law is that of MacLauchlan in 1852. The site is marked on Sheet VI of his 'Survey of Watling Street' though it is unclear if the accompanying notation describing '*remains*' relates to the cairn or the numerous later structures including the well-preserved sheepfold that abut it. In 1881 it was described by Arkle as being 112 yards (102.4m) long, 12 yards (10.97m) wide and between 2 and 3 yards (1.83 and 2.74m) in height (Masters 1984, 55). Craw (1932, 358) provides slightly greater dimensions with an overall width of 123 yards (112.47m). At this time the east end was recorded as 52 feet (15.8m) wide and the mound had an overall height of 6 feet (1.82m), furthermore, it was suggested that the cairn may have had a horned forecourt on the east.

In 1912, during the removal of stones from the east end of the cairn for roadmaking, an iron spearhead was found. The spearhead is 7-8 inches (0.16m) in length and was found approximately on the long axis of the cairn, on the natural soil beneath the stones. It had been broken in two and when found was in a very bad condition with all of the socket missing. Newbigin regarded it as being Roman in date (1936, 112) but there is no evidence which would confirm this.

The most detailed investigations are those of Newbigin who excavated on the long cairn and in a number of nearby mounds in September 1935 (Newbigin 1936). Newbigin noted potential affinities between the site and other long cairns in south-west Scotland and the excavations sought to assess this morphological relationship. Other aims included the establishment of a chronological link between the long cairn and the Neolithic 'A' pottery of eastern Northumberland as well as with the horned cairns of Northern Ireland, with which Bellshiel Law shared a number of similarities. She noted that the cairn was 367 feet (111.5m) in length, with roughly parallel sides 35 to 40 feet (10.7 to 12.2m) apart that widen to 60 feet (18.3m) at the eastern end; the western end was conversely narrower at 29 feet (8.8m). The maximum height above ground level,

where tested by excavation, was only 4 feet (1.2m). The cairn appeared, at this stage, to be fairly undisturbed apart from the eastern end which had been robbed in 1912 to provide material for local road-building. The robbing had, falsely, given the impression that this end of the cairn consisted of a forecourt flanked by horns. Newbigin's investigations revealed this not to be the case, finding the full extent of the wide terminal. It was apparent through her work, that the long cairn had little formal structure to it apart from hints of edging along the flanks. It was observed that the main body consisted of large rough boulders piled in a haphazard manner but flanked by groups of flat stones set on edge or overlapping in a tile-like fashion. The excavations did not produce any evidence for a sequence in the construction of the mound and apart from the presence of many voids in the stone matrix, no internal structures were noted.

The excavations concentrated on two areas; a large area at the eastern end of the cairn and a cross-section close to the midpoint that included ground to the north and south. The former extended over a large area and revealed the outer kerb of the cairn. This kerb was seen to consist of large boulders embedded in the natural bedrock and upon which other lesser stones were piled occasionally in a slab formation. The south-eastern corner was, by way of contrast, much more formally built of well-made flat oblong slabs set into the natural ground surface along a gently curving arc. The kerb was less well formed on the east and appeared to fade out into a straggle of small stones which Newbigin ascribed to the rising natural rock profile and the subsequent shallowness of the soil here. The line of the kerb on the north-east was again well laid out but without the monumentality of its south-eastern counterpart. The appearance, however, was of a rudimentary horn. The northern cairn edge was formed of small stones, hardly a kerb, but aligned neatly so as to form a definite edge to the mound – little material had spread beyond this. She noted, in fact, that it was only at the east end, in particular close to the 'horns', that there was any structure to the cairn edge reminiscent of a kerb. The excavations here had revealed a natural crack in the bedrock aligned roughly north to south. Above this the mound had been built up but sealed beneath it was a hollow cut into the natural surface, full of thick black earth and peat. On emptying, the hollow was shown to be oblong in outline 6 feet (1.82m) long by 3 feet 6 inches (1.06m) wide and 2 feet (0.6m) deep, with flat rock-cut east, west and south sides; the north side was formed by rubble that had infilled the crack. Newbigin regarded the hollow as a grave cut but apart from a single worked flint flake, there were no supporting discoveries. Chemical analysis of the soil from the hollow suggested a high phosphoric acid content supporting the burial hypothesis and Newbigin suggested that this formed the primary deposit at the eastern end of the cairn. Pollen analysis of the cist soil indicated the presence of hazel and birch as well as heather and ferns. A few feet to the east of the hollow it was noted that the line of the kerb swerved eastwards in an arc away from the hollow and this was associated with a splinter of burnt flint. Newbigin's trench along the central axis of the cairn produced no evidence of formal structures and suggested that the main body of the cairn comprised an ill-formed heap of rubble with large voids. The lowest level of stones was embedded in the old land surface beneath the cairn.

No signs, either, of side ditches were noted during these early excavations. On the north a thin veneer of peat was uncovered and on the south bedrock lay very close to the surface. Newbigin commented that the superficial surface appearance of a ditch was due to a combination of slope and natural topography. Newbigin opened a large transverse trench (Plate 1) close to the midpoint of the cairn at a section that appeared relatively intact and in good condition. Again, no convincing evidence of a formal structure was observed. Instead, the rough and haphazardly built mound was flanked by simple kerbs of larger stones lacking in the regularity exhibited elsewhere around

the periphery of the monument. A substantial layer of peat was noted at the base of the mound on top of the natural bedrock and pollen analysis of this produced only one grain of tree pollen (*Pinus*). Newbigin was clearly disappointed in the results of the excavation:

'*...there was not a single find, not a single structural feature of definite type – no cists, no chambers, no ditches, no revetment, no internal structures, no secondary burials, no forecourt, no real horns...It is a monster of degeneracy.*' (ibid., 304).

Newbigin's attention also turned to the provenance and date of a sandstone pebble found at the south-eastern limit of the cairn. This pebble had obviously been used as a strike-a-light or polishing stone and is more suited to a first millennium BC (and, indeed, beyond) date. The excavator could not be sure that it was a secondary intrusion and admitted that the whole date of the cairn was uncertain.

Masters survey of *Neolithic Long Cairns of Cumbria and Northumberland* (1984) noted that these monuments lacked 'the glamour' of Neolithic burial monuments in other parts of Britain in that there were few differences in mound form and they are devoid of chambers. The cairn is illustrated and recorded as being 109m in length, 3m shorter than that noted earlier by Newbigin. Masters regarded Bellshiel Law as a reasonably certain long cairn, one of three in the county – the other two being the Devil's Lapful and Dod Hill. He admits that the results of the excavation were disappointing but adds that with only a small area of the cairn exposed, the location of formal mortuary structures may remain hidden within the body of the mound (ibid., 70). Masters does, however, suggest that the mound incorporated a small standing stone and that this was visible c. 20m from the eastern end of the cairn (ibid., 57).

Kinnes restates earlier accounts with the added suggestion that the mound might consist of a boulder core capped by small stones and earth defined by a rough boulder kerb with a convex eastern façade (1992, 45-6). His survey of the visible limit of the cairn (ibid, 206), highlights the haphazard nature of the surviving deposits but does not show the sheepfold or any of the other more recent disturbances. Kinnes also depicts the outer line of stones noted in Newbigin's excavations and labels them here as a 'stone kerb'.

4. THE MONUMENTS

The monumental complex consists of a long cairn oriented approximately east–west that possibly incorporates a circular cairn at its eastern end. There are a number of later features cutting into the body of the cairn, likely 'sheiling-type' structures and/or shooting butts, and there are suggestions that the mound may have been heavily robbed of stone in recent times, perhaps as part of the campaign of early 20th-century road building noted by various commentators. Midway along the southern side of the long cairn there is a low-walled enclosure associated with at least one rectangular building. A low rectangular turf-walled structure lies to the west of the enclosure (Fig 2).

The Long Cairn

Plate 3: View of the long cairn from the west. The irregular nature of the monument is clear and it can be seen to consist of a low vegetation covered mound and areas of exposed rubble.

The long cairn has been constructed on a ledge flanked on the south by a pronounced natural scarp. It extends for a distance of 113m in length and, in cross-section, it is apparent that the south-facing side is higher than that on the north, reflecting, perhaps, a desire to level-up the monument on a ground surface that tilts very slightly to the south. In plan the cairn is superficially wedge-shaped, tapering slightly from east to west (Plate 3). On closer inspection, however, it is apparent that the mound is relatively straight-sided and averages a width of 10 to 12m for most of its length, only thickening some 25m from its eastern terminal. Here, the mound widens out substantially to create a swollen eastern terminal that achieves a maximum diameter of 18m. The form of the mound at this point is very clearly circular, even after the impact of stone-robbing and excavation, and suggests that there is some degree of structural complexity to this component of the cairn.

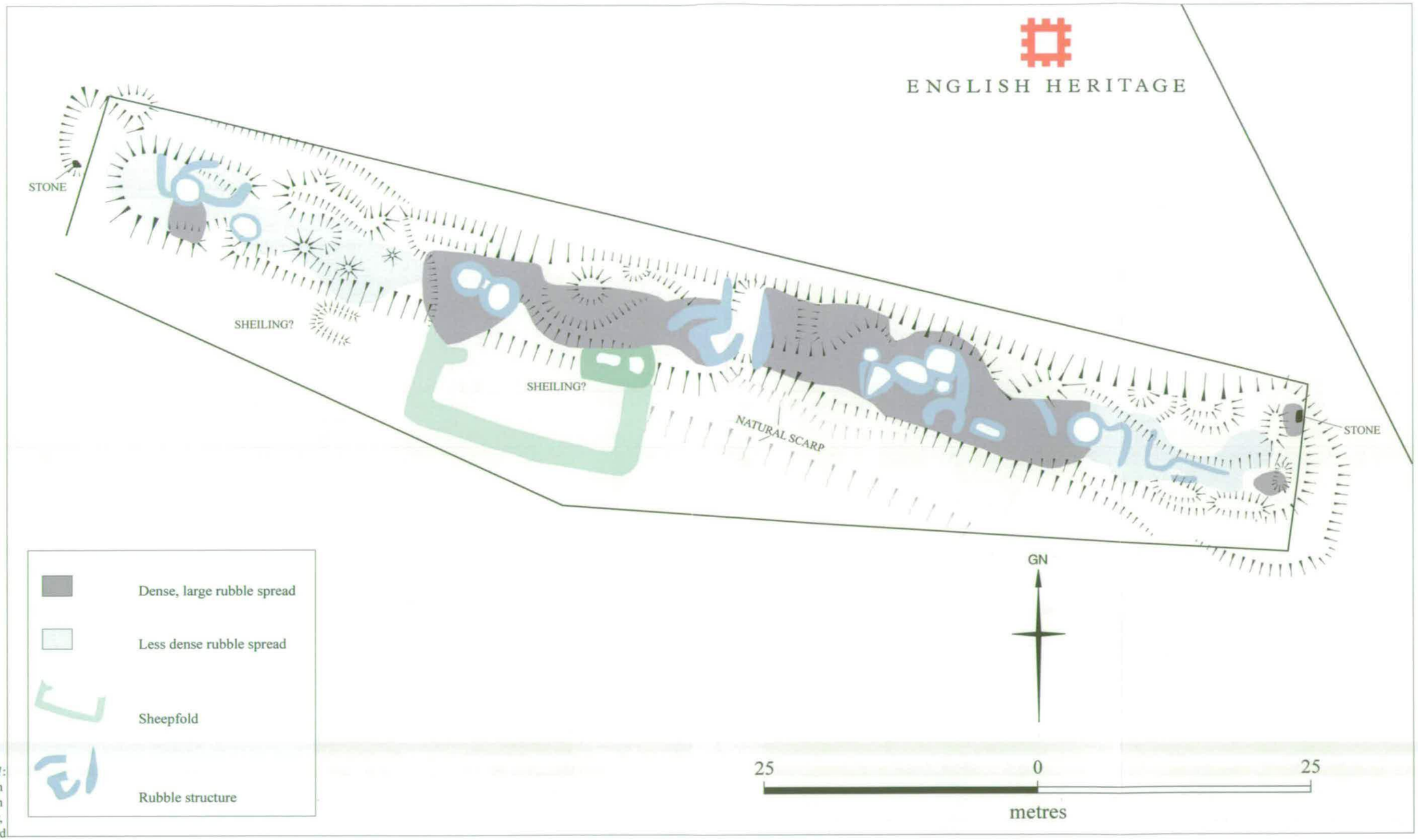

Figure 1: Hachured plan of the long cairn on Bellshiel Law, Northumberland

Viewed from a distance the line of the mound curves or bows out on the south side. This visual impression arises from the varied nature of the monument itself which appears to consist of a number of component parts of which two are particularly prominent. The most substantial of these is a low linear mound that is largely grassed over and overlying this are lengths of exposed stone rubble (Plate 4). The former is most visible along the northern flank of the cairn and on the south-west too. Here, vegetation has grown over the rubble core and the resulting bank is fairly steep-sided, rising to a height varying between 0.5m and 1.0m. The grass-covered rubble core survives less well on the southern side, due mainly to the impact of robbing and other later activities, but nonetheless, it stands to a height of at best, 1.3m.

Plate 4: View looking eastwards showing the nature of the exposed rubble on the long cairn.

The linear bands of exposed stone comprise a mixture of differently sized fragments of former bedrock. This is all locally derived and consists of sharp-edged boulders varying in size from 10cm to 50cm in maximum width, though, on occasion, larger but

narrower slab-like stones are evident. There is no evidence of smaller rounded boulders or pebbles deriving from a water-scoured source; all of the material is likely to have come from the ground surface in the vicinity of the cairn. In addition, there is no suggestion that any of the cairn material has been dressed or shaped at any stage before deposition, indeed, the material looks like the residue of straightforward clearance.

Plate 5: View looking south of Newbigin's central trench. This excavation showed that the mound was composed of an unstructured heap of stones with no apparent external kerbing.

The irregular outline of exposed rubble extends for the full length of the cairn spreading over a width of 5m to 10m. Greater amounts are evident at the eastern end of the cairn, especially to the east of Newbigin's excavation trench (Plate 5). Longitudinal profiles show that rather than the expected wedge-shape in outline, the highest point on the cairn lies c. 30m from the east terminal. From here the mound drops off sharply to the east. There is another noticeable high point to the west of Newbigin's excavation trench but further to the west there is substantial lessening in the height of the mound and along this stretch it maintains a fairly standard 0.5m to 1.0m above ground level. Generally, the rubble adds considerably to the overall stature of the monument and on the north-eastern flank the cairn stands to a height of 2.1m above ground level. Along this section, too, it is apparent that much of the exposed rubble is of a larger dimension than that seen at the western end of the mound. Some fragments to the east of Newbigin's central trench, for example, are as large as 60cm across and many are in slab form suggesting a different quarrying process or origin than the material further to the west. Approximately 21m from the eastern terminal of the mound there is a large, centrally-placed, orthostat first noted by Craw in 1932. This stone is largely exposed on the periphery of a more recently constructed hollow in the band of rubble and is at least 1m in length. It leans notably to the south (75° according to the Ordnance Survey field investigation notes), is 0.15m thick and varies in width between 0.5m at the crest to 0.7m at its base.

Stone-robbing and later alterations have impacted on the form of the mound and the whole now has a feel of being a composite monument. The boundary between the grass-covered mound and the expanses of rubble is clearly demarcated in a number of instances with the cairn material appearing to overlie the former. This may be the

result intensive robbing over a long period of time exposing previously buried material, and this is suggested by the linear depressions along the crest of the mound at the interface between the two components. It may also be the case that much of the clean and open stone detritus derives from more recent accretions to the monument building up on top of a pre-existing structure. This may explain the different nature of much of this stone – the larger slabs appearing to have been deliberately quarried to form the mound material. There are four main deposits of 'fresh' rock visible. The two most pronounced of these sit either side of the excavation trench and each extends for a distance of c. 30m and include the largest fragments of rock visible on the surface. Less well-defined spreads of rock lie to the east and west but both extremities have been severely truncated by later activity. The western end has been less disturbed and consequently the remains of a square-shaped terminal can be seen. The grassy mound and its overburden of stone at this point are well preserved and stand to a height of at least 1m above the ground level. Given that the edge of the cairn is well defined, it is almost certain that this is an original terminal. Initial observations would suggest that this terminal is mounded or, at least, separated from the main body of the cairn. More detailed investigation shows that this impression arises, again, from later activity that has interrupted and altered the mound at this point.

Plate 6: The eastern end of the long cairn. This may originally have consisted of a free-standing round cairn susbsequently incorporated into the long mound. The possible cist can be seen as a dark shadow slightly below right of centre in this photograph .

There are no accompanying side ditches. The intersection of a natural south-facing scarp with the mound on the northern side close to the western limit of the mound creates a shallow linear hollow that extends for a length of 20.0m to a depth of 0.1m and with a maximum width of 3.0m. Another pronounced natural scarp 0.3m in height, lies to the south of the mound on a roughly similar alignment but at a distance of 3m to 5m from the monument. This scarp extends beyond the area of survey and eventually becomes part of the significant rock outcrop to the south-east of the cairn. It appears, also, that the mound incorporated at least one element of the natural terracing in that a short stretch 0.4m high underlies the mound and rubble on the south side to the east of Newbigin's trench. This may be an eastwards extension of the scarp that intersected with the mound on the north-west. The shallow hollow at the western end of the mound may relate to a more recent episode of quarrying here. The interior of the

hollow, which survives to a depth of 0.2m is, however, wet and boggy and it may be that this depression marks the location of a natural spring.

The eastern end of the cairn is noticeably bulbous and reaches a maximum width of 18m on its north to south axis (Plate 6). The mound has been heavily damaged in this area due to stone-robbing and archaeological excavation and survives at best to a height of 1.2m above ground level. The far eastern limit of the terminal is marked by a low arcing scarp 0.2m high and much of the cairn material to the west of this is now absent. However, the 'cist-like' feature excavated by Newbigin is still visible as a rectangular pit 2.5m long, 1.4 wide to a depth of 0.2m. The main spread of exposed rubble bifurcates close to the eastern terminal with one arm of material extending in a shallow loop to the north of the cist; another element extends to the south and both together, superficially, resemble the façade of horned cairn. Newbigin's excavations showed this was not the case and that the edge of the cairn lay to the east of the cist and consisted of a weak line of small boulders.

Plate 7: Although no trace of a formal kerb to the mound was observed, occasional slab-like boulders were noted suggesting that a rudimentary edging may have been employed. Alternatively, these boulders may be the remnants of earlier structures such as cists, disturbed and included within the line of the long mound.

The approximate line of the cairn 'kerb' uncovered during these early excavations is now marked by a slight scarp lying 1.5m to the east of the cist; the large boulder 5m to the north of this formed part of this putative kerb. Although there is no definitive supporting evidence for the existence of a formal kerb or edging around the mound apart from that uncovered during excavation, on occasion it is apparent that larger boulders cluster along the edges of the mound (Plate 7). This is particularly noticeable on the northern side where in addition to the larger boulders there are a number of slabs, now partially collapsed but which may once have been upright and formed part of an outer fringe to the cairn.

The enlarged eastern terminal stands apart, visually, from the remainder of the cairn and there is a strong suspicion that at one stage it formed a stand-alone, circular, mound. Based on the survey evidence it would appear that this mound was ditchless and had a maximum diameter of 21m; the western arc perhaps being marked by the fallen orthostat noted within the main body of the long cairn. Stone-robbing and excavation have damaged this area of the cairn but it is likely from the surviving evidence that round mound would have stood to a height in excess of 2m.

Later Activity

The Hollows

The form of the cairn has undoubtedly changed over time due to episodes of accretion and depletion and this is evident in the nature of a range of structures built into the fabric of the monument (Plate 8).

Plate 8: The westernmost of the later circular structures built on top of the mound. This example has at least three arms of rubble radiating out from it.

At least 18 circular or sub-circular depressions can be seen along the crest of the mound and these are clustered in five main groups. The westernmost consists of two circular hollows both c. 2.5m in diameter to a maximum depth of 1.2m. They are simple constructions of single wall thickness up to 0.7m wide with no apparent access points or entranceways. The western hollow is embellished by three radiating arms of

low rubble walling extending for a maximum length of 3m and which form bays around the central hollow.

A conjoined pair of hollows lie 22m to the east of this first group. Again, they are composed of single walls each with an internal diameter of 1.0 to 1.4m to a depth of 0.6m and no apparent access point. Newbigin's excavation trench across the central section of the cairn has been re-modelled and is utilised as a passageway leading to a substantial sub-rectangular chamber at the south-western end. The chamber is defined by walls 1.5m thick and has an internal area measuring 1.8m by 2.6m. One wall of stone 0.4m high emanates north from this for a distance of 4.0m and another linear band of stone, 1.2m wide and 0.7m high, springs from this on the west.

The largest cluster of later hollows lies 10m to the east of Newbigin's central trench and consists of seven hollows of varying shape and dimension. The largest of these consists of a rectangular hollow 3.5m in length enclosed by rubble-walling 0.6m thick to a height of 0.6m. At least two other hollows of similar magnitude are located here but the remaining examples are smaller consisting of low walled circular depressions no more than 2m wide internally.

The circular hollow closer to the eastern end of the cairn has an internal diameter of 2.0m with a single thickness wall 0.7m wide, standing to a height of 1.2m and what appears to be an entrance gap on the east. A low wall 0.6m wide and 0.5m high leads off from the entrance to the south for a distance of 3.5m and a similar length of wall extends in an arc northwards from the south-western section of the circular hollow. A low looping length of wall lies to the east of this hollow and is of such similarity in form that it must be contemporary and connected in function to its near neighbour.

The Micro-cairns or Walker's cairns

Along the length of the mound there are a number of other, slighter, piles of stones, often associated with the hollows and walling discussed above. These micro-cairns are generally circular or oval in outline varying between 0.5m and 3.0m in basal diameter rising to a height of 1.3m.

The Sheepfold and associated structures (Plate 9 & 10)

A sheepfold is attached to the south side of the cairn immediately to the west of its midpoint. The rectangular enclosure measures 22.0m by 11.5m in maximum external area and is defined by a low rubble wall on average 2.5m wide and 0.3m high. Although it is now largely covered in vegetation it is clear that this walling is composed of smaller stones than those incorporated in the cairn. In addition, slight indications of outer edges can be seen on the eastern and southern sections of the enclosure suggesting that the walling may have been externally faced. A short length of internal walling attached to the western arm of the enclosure hints at some form of internal division or structure perhaps similar to that evident in the north-eastern corner at the intersection with the cairn. Here, a low rectangular pile of stones, most likely the remains of a sheiling, extends for a length of 6.5m and width of 3.8m and is constructed using material derived from the long cairn. Although heavily denuded it comprises two small cells each 1.5m in width with that to the west double the length at 2.0m.

Approximately seven metres to the west of the sheepfold there is a low U-shaped earthen banked structure with walls 1.0m thick surviving to a height of 0.1m. It is

1.2m wide internally, 2.5m in length and open to the east and is, again, likely to be a post-medieval sheiling.

Plate 9:
View of the sheepfold from the east. The low earthen and stone bank enclosing the sheepfold can be seen in the centre of the photograph.

Plate 10:
The remains of the sheiling are located within the north-eastern corner of the sheepfold - immediately to the left of the drawing board in this photograph.

5. DISCUSSION

The Morphology of the Monument and Regional Analogies

The English Heritage survey has shown that the monument on Bellshiel Law is complex, consists of at least two main phases of construction and has seen a great deal of subsequent activity. It seems most likely that the earliest monument here was a large circular cairn which was subsumed within and now forms the eastern end of the long cairn. The cairn may have been as large as 25m in diameter and stood to a height in excess of 2m and as such it would have presented a visually striking feature in the landscape. Newbigin's excavations at the eastern end of the long cairn do not throw light on any special constructional attributes of this early feature but there are hints of poorly defined kerbing on the east and north. This could, of course, belong to a later remodelled phase that included the construction of the long cairn but it is equally plausible that the earlier structure was contained within a formal kerb. The role of the large semi-recumbent orthostat noted within the body of the long cairn is intriguing. Masters (1984) has commented upon the occurrence of standing stones within the bodies of long cairns at sites such as Skelmore Heads and Raiset Pike but at Bellshiel Law it may also have formed part of a more formal kerb structure to the round cairn as it lies on its projected western arc. Alternatively, it seems plausible that this slab-like rock is a displaced capstone for a now hidden or destroyed cist within the body of the mound. At the eastern end, of course, the excavations uncovered what appeared to be a cist, empty apart from a fragment of a 'pot-boiler', a worked chert flake and a 'tracked stone'. These provide little clue as to the date of the hollow or, indeed, the mound above it other than a very general prehistoric assignation. Analysis of the soil from the cist indicated that the acid-soluble phosphoric acid content was high and potentially supports a grave hypothesis for the feature. If so, it is unlikely to be a primary deposit associated with the round cairn as it lies close to the projected periphery of the mound rather than in a more (expected) central location. In all likelihood, the cist is contemporary with the extension of the monument into its present form.

The remainder of the mound resembles a tail that has been added to a primary feature. It is straight-sided with only a very limited and shallow tapering towards the west. This apparent uniformity perhaps indicates a fairly rapid construction of the long cairn, however, there has been so much later alteration and damage to the monument that it is clear that any evidence for a staggered constructional sequence will have been removed. The earliest component to the long cairn is represented by a, now, largely vegetation covered low mound. As far as can be ascertained from the surviving elements, it is flat-topped with steep-sided edges standing to a greater height on the south reflecting the tilting ground surface on this side of the cairn. There are no accompanying side ditches, that at the north-western end of the mound is a result of the junction between the cairn and a natural scarp on land that tilts gently to the south thus creating the illusion of a hollow. This natural scarp has been incorporated within the mound on the south and another ledge, beyond this on the same alignment, lies close by. The surface of this early mound is pitted and scarred by linear gullies and other hollows indicating that stone-robbing has been extensive and intensive. It is also, plausibly, an indication of the piecemeal nature of the mound construction which may have consisted of accreted episodes of stone deposition leading to its irregular appearance. There can be no doubt, however, that there was a preconceived form to

the monument in that the western limit is very clearly demarcated by a well-defined 'squared-off' terminal.

The exposed rubble along the line of the cairn has, again, been heavily disturbed. Some of it may be early (i.e. prehistoric) accumulations of stone that have failed to grass over or that have been exposed through stone-robbing activities in the historic period. Much of it looks, though, to be a series of accumulations on top of the earlier linear mound and at least four main depositions are evident based largely on the density of stone and individual boulder size. The most prominent deposits lie either side of Newbigin's central trench and these are flanked at either end by lesser groupings but it seems likely that, originally, the two central deposits were unified and were truncated by the excavation. If so, the form of the monument may have appeared radically different and consisted of a tripartite separation comprising a linear flat-topped mound overlain by a capping of rubble. A 50m stretch at the centre of the long cairn was augmented by a more substantial deposit of rock and the whole structure would have had a tiered appearance when viewed from a distance.

Close regional comparisons for Bellshiel are very rare indeed. Only two monuments approach the size and scale of that on Bellshiel Law and both are of questionable provenance. The first of these, Caverton Hillhead (Henshall 1972, 480) lies several kilometres to the north-west of Bellshiel and has apparently been levelled by cultivation. The only description of it is given in the Statistical Account of Scotland (1793) where it is stated that '*The tumulus measured 27 feet over; at its western extremity, where it appeared to have been dug for a small space, from side to side 33 feet. Its whole length is 342 feet; and at the eastern extremity it is 42 feet over. It lies in a direct line E and W...*'. This account indicates that the mound was composed of large stones and soil and that, although suspected as a burial mound, no human bones have been found.

The long cairn at Trainford Brow in Cumbria (Masters 1984, 63-4) extends for a length of 101m and is oriented east – west (Plate 11). It varies from 13m to 28m in width, the wider dimensions being evident at the eastern end where the mound stands to a height of nearly 4m above ground level, the height here reflecting the underlying topography that falls sharply to the east. The mound which is ditchless, seems to be composed of stoney soil as well as rounded and worn boulders and is noticeably flat-topped and level. It is also bipartite, cut at the midpoint by a substantial hollow. To the west of the hollow, the mound maintains a low profile and does appear 'barrow-like' but to the east it has a very different and more substantial character. The long cairn was first noted by CW Phillips in 1933, however, the RCHM (1936) assessment is more circumspect concluding, '*...that it is nothing more than an old spoil dump from the neighbouring road cutting.*' OGS Crawford dismissed this in 1938 and accepted the long cairn interpretation and this view has held sway since. Masters (1984, 63-4) did acknowledge concerns about interpretation but believed, on the balance of probability, that it was a long cairn. Doubts, though, do persist about its classification. The cairn sits on the eastern edge of the Lake District massif in an area where glacial outflow patterns are observably on an east to west alignment and a geological origin for this mound must still be considered. This is the implication obvious in the form of the monument, its massive scale and composition of soil and glacially worn boulders. Further corroborative evidence comes in the form of another, almost identical, mound that lies in woodland some 700m to the east of Trainford Brow (Plate 12). This mound extends for a length of just over 100m and is aligned on an east to west axis. It is wedge-shaped in outline with a pronounced eastern terminal that stands 4-5m above ground level. Like its near neighbour it is composed of soil and rounded boulders, is

level and flat-topped and sits at a point where the natural slope of the land dips sharply to the east. It is reasonable to conjecture that additional fieldwork in this area will reveal other similar structures, so it does seem fair to conclude that a non-archaeological explanation should be considered for the Trainford Brow mound.

Plate 11: The long cairn at Trainford Brow viewed from the north.

Plate 12: The newly discovered glacial mound close to Trainford Brow, seen here from the south.

A better, though lesser, monumental analogy is provided by the cairn and associated features at Dour Hill 2km to the north-west of Bellshiel Law. The complex cairn on Dour Hill is a composite monument consisting of an earlier chambered cairn subsequently extended to a length of 49m. Within the body of the cairn there are a number of potential cists as well as at least two orthostats and c. 250m to the east there is a circular cairn with a central cist burial (Waddington *et al* 1998). Although they are, in all likelihood, roughly contemporary monuments, Bellshiel Law and Dour Hill are not intervisible but both share a similar landscape setting with extensive and panoramic views to the west, south and east.

Further afield the chambered cairn at Great Ayton Moor in North Yorkshire shares a number of similarities. The monument here, however, consists of formal burial chamber subsequently entombed within a round cairn 18.0m in diameter and 1.2m high. The attached linear cairn at Great Ayton extends to the south-west for a distance of 150m and excavation suggested that it was kerbed, most noticeably on the southern flank.

Bellshiel Law is, therefore, reminiscent of a number of other long cairns in northern England and southern Scotland exhibiting a similar complex developmental history. This is clearly a feature of long cairns and related monuments such as bank barrows, throughout the British Isles. The bank barrows at Long Bredy, Dorset (McOmish and Tuck 2000), Broadmayne, Dorset (McOmish and Tuck, 2001) and Pentridge Down, Dorset (McOmish and Tuck 2002) all display evidence of complex constructional histories characterised by enlargements of early round mounds or long barrows. All are built in prominent locations and these are embellished at a later date by concentrations of later burial mounds. At Broadmayne round barrows have been built at either end of the bank barrow and this direct intervention on the main mound may recalls the alterations visible at Bellshiel Law.

The Long Cairn in its Setting

The long cairn on Bellshiel Law sits in an area where there is good evidence for prehistoric field systems. Work by Ford (2003) has shown that there are at least two major cairnfields on the slopes to the south and west of the long cairn (Plate 13). These cairns comprise small irregular piles of stones, no more than 10m in diameter and surviving to a height of 1m at best. Occasionally larger boulders are incorporated within them and at least one of these is decorated with two small cup marks. The long cairn lies at the northern extent of the cairnfields on these slopes and, indeed, seems to mark the northern extension of clearance here. The fields here are undated but a date in the first half of the 2nd millennium BC is most likely though an earlier genesis might be expected given the existence of the long cairn and the rock art. It is, of course, eminently plausible that much of the bare rubble on the long cairn resulted from field clearance and it is worth speculating that the creation and development of the linear mound was related to early attempts at land clearance. In some repsects it also resembles a skeuomorph of long barrows. As it developed and became established as a permanent and highly visible component of the landscape it would have carried powerful metonymical messages relating to contemporary social communities, land tenure and the exploitation of these fertile hillslopes. The apparent alterations to the fabric of the mound perhaps reflecting the episodic re-assertion of its value to the local communities.

The presence of at least one cist at the eastern end of the mound implies that burial was an important element, even if only for the earliest round cairn, but this may have helped fix this site within a kin or ancestral lineage. Subsequent developments, including

re-building or augmenting the mound, would have enabled later groups or individuals to create an explicit connection with this lineage and would have legitimised ownership,

Plate 13: Cluster of clearance cairns to the south of the long cairn.

tenure and land use, amongst other things.

Like the bank barrows of southern England, the Bellshiel Law long cairn formed an important feature in the local landscape and could be seen from a wide area. It is perhaps best viewed from the south, east and west, beyond the area of cairnfields and from here it would have constituted a notably raised outcrop on the horizon. This skyline effect is also evident when viewed from the north and the Rede valley and the Pennines form the backdrop to the monument. Its location, however, was carefully selected and it would seem that the original builders deliberately avoided the most suitable location in the landscape for display, the summit of Bellshiel Law 150m to the north. If maximum visibility was the sole intention this would have been the ideal position affording extensive views to and from the cairn.

The long cairn lies very close to the source of a stream that feeds into the Sills Burn, the source marked now by a triangular pond 150m to the east of the cairn. In addition to this there may also be a spring at the western end of the cairn. The importance of a fresh water supply to early communities is self-evident but the link between water and Neolithic social monuments is also well established. Many cursus enclosures, for instance, incorporate or are adjacent to watercourses and this juxtaposition is a deliberate entwining of the humanly constructed and natural worlds. In terms of social ritual, water is seen as having symbolic properties and is associated with ideas connected to liminality, of death and renewal and the construction of the long cairn at Bellshiel Law may have tied into these rituals.

The cairn formed the focus of later activity very much unconnected to its earlier uses. A sheepfold has been built onto its southern flank and within it there are the remains of a shepherd's hut or sheiling possibly of 16th or 17th century date which may contribute the 'shiel' element to the placename. A second shieling lies a short distance to the west of the sheepfold and the clusters of hollows along the crest of the mound might also be similar structures. At least four concentrations of these were noted and it is

possible that rather than shielings they are lambing pens contemporary with the use of the sheepfold and shepherd's hut. The earliest phases of stone robbing on the cairn may also be contemporary with this use but it is equally feasible that new building material was brought to the site from the surrounding area to provide the raw material for these structures. Their use in the 19th century as shooting butts should not be discounted (although they are unusually shallow in comparison with better documented examples elsewhere) and it may be that the nearby plantation was used as bird cover at the same time.

6. METHODOLOGY

The field investigation was undertaken by David McOmish and Cathy Tuck during winter 2002 and 2003. The measured survey of the Bellshiel Law long cairn was carried out entirely digitally by using a Leica T805 Electronic Theodolite with integral Electromagnetic Distance Measurement (EDM) from a baseline traverse of two stations. The resulting plan was plotted at 1:500 scale via Key Terrafirma, AutoCAD, CorelDraw and Adobe Illustrator software.

All of the CAD-based drawings were completed using either CorelDraw 9 or Adobe Illustrator 9 software by David McOmish and the report was prepared in Adobe PageMaker 7. The report was researched and written by David McOmish, commented upon by Cathy Tuck and edited by Peter Topping.

The site archive and copies of this report have been deposited in the archive of English Heritage at the National Monuments Record Centre, Great Western Village, Kemble Drive, Swindon, SN2 2GZ, to where applications for copyright should be made and further enquiries directed.

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