

**GIBBIE'S KNOWE  
PREHISTORIC ENCLOSURE**

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY REPORT**

by Keith Blood

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**GIBBIE'S KNOWE  
PREHISTORIC ENCLOSURE**

**TYNEDALE  
NORTHUMBERLAND**

**NMR No: NY 69 NW 4**

**NGR: NY 6474 9507**

**SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENT No: RSM No: 25191**

Surveyed: December 1998  
Surveyed by K. Blood and Amy Lax  
Report by K. Blood  
Drawings by K. Blood

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## **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO SURVEY**

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At the request of Forest Enterprise and English Heritage, the RCHME have undertaken a survey of scheduled ancient monuments in the Kielder Forest area (Kielder Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMS) Survey). The purpose of this survey is to inform management plans for this group of monuments and also to increase the currency of the National Monuments Record (NMR) for this area. The earthwork described below is a form of prehistoric enclosure situated at NY 6474 9507 on a knoll named Gibbie's Knowe.

## **GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY AND LAND USE**

The solid geology for the whole of Kielder Forest comprises alternate layers of sandstone, shale and limestone. This is covered by glacial drift to varying depth; this mantle is very clayey which accounts for the poor drainage pertaining in much of the forest.

Gibbie's Knowe is a rounded knoll situated at about 245m above Ordnance Datum high above a broad bend in the Kielder Burn, some 30m below, which curves around the north-east, north-west and south-west sides of the knowe at a distance of between 100m and 200m. The natural slopes are steep towards the river and also to a tributary to the south. The only easy line of approach to the summit is by a relatively gentle ascent of 5.8m from a low saddle on the south-east side. The earthwork itself does not encircle the summit but is sited mainly on the upper west and north-facing slopes with only the south-eastern arc straddling the top of the hill, so that the highest point, the entrance (marked A on the RCHME plan) is some 17.0m above the lowest point in the west (marked D on plan). There is no evidence that the work has ever been planted and it survives in a clearing surrounded on all sides by mature conifers at a distance of between 2.0m and 8.0m from the rampart. The trees were planted in 1950 (Forest Enterprise Felling Plan, 1:10000) with the customary hand-cut trenches, 4.5m-6.0m apart, but these have not encroached upon the earthwork which remains in fair condition albeit obscured by thick heather, rough grass and moss. Despite the fact that the earthwork occupies sloping ground it is somewhat ill-drained and marshy in places.

## HISTORY OF RESEARCH

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The earthwork has been depicted as a hachured enclosure and annotated 'Camp' on both the Ordnance Survey (OS) 1st edition 6" map published in 1866 (Ordnance Survey 1866) and the 2nd edition 6" published 1899 (Ordnance Survey 1899). The name 'Gibbie's Knowe' pertaining to the knoll appears on all OS maps from the 1st edition onwards.

It was first described in some detail by MacLauchlan in 1867 (1867, 63) as an earthwork in the shape of an irregular oval, measuring 90 yards by 65 yards; no surrounding ditch was observed. On the highest part of the work was an entrance with, to the east of it, a stone foundation, possibly a dwelling. He named the work 'Gibbe's or Gilbert's Knowe'. According to MacLauchlan about 150 yards to the south-east of the earthwork were some foundations; here an artificial cutting seemed to have been made to conduct water, and may also have served as a protective ditch.

Dodds (1940, 56) lists the feature under Prehistoric Section - Forts on High Ground as type B2, Hogg (1947-50, 166) lists it as a single-bank, irregular earthwork (naming it Gibbie's Knowe), and Jobey (1965, 62) notes it as a pre-Roman Iron Age univallate construction in the section forts, settlements and enclosures.

OS field investigators have made two visits to the site (Emsley, 27-August-1970 and Ainsworth, 11-April-1977), both since the creation of Kielder Forest. Emsley described an outward-facing scarp under thick heather cover, about 2.0m high, which he considered to be the remains of what was originally a substantial earth and rubble bank, some 3.0m to 4.0m wide. This, according to Emsley, was consistent with the local type of non-defensive Iron Age enclosure, as are the proportions and general aspect of the work.

Ainsworth stated that the enclosure on Gibbie's Knowe measured 78.0m north-east to south-west by 66.0m transversely between the centres of a stone-faced wall of rubble, now collapsed and turf-covered, with an average width of 3.0m to 4.0m and a maximum height of 2.2m. Two entrances were identified; the largest in the east is 8.0m wide and the other in the south is 3.0m wide and flanked by large boulders. The east entrance may have been robbed and enlarged during the construction of a later rectangular building, measuring 15.0m by 4.0m, which was built onto the outside of the enclosure wall immediately to the north of the gap. This building, though poorly defined, was thought to be stone founded and subdivided. To the south of this entrance a length of the wall, 25.0m long, appeared to have been robbed and spread and it was considered that this was misinterpreted by MacLauchlan as the 'ruins of three buildings'. Neither Emsley nor Ainsworth observed any identifiable internal remains, apart from the later field wall noted by MacLauchlan, and there was no trace of the outlying foundations seen by MacLauchlan and these were assumed to have been destroyed by afforestation.

The site was visited by Long (1988) who reported no change. A further examination took place on 29-April-1996 when the earthwork was scheduled (English Heritage, 1996). Their report described the monument as a defended settlement of Iron Age date; otherwise it substantially repeats the reports produced by the OS field investigators except that the rampart is described as constructed mainly of stone with turf facing.

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The earthwork comprising a single rampart with no ditch is D-shaped with the flattened side facing south-south-east; it measures about 75.0m from the east-north-east to the west-south-west by 65.0m transversely and encloses an area of some 0.28 hectares. Though the rampart is heavily obscured by vegetation, mainly heather, there are numerous boulders and large stones protruding through the mantle and others detectable by probing; these occur in sufficient quantities to indicate strongly that the rampart was built mainly, if not entirely, of stone. Around the south-east half where the rampart crosses the hill summit and extends down the natural slope it survives as a bank, 3.0m to 4.0m wide and up to 0.8m high on both sides; on the north-west half where it occupies a fairly steep natural gradient, it is visible generally as an outward-facing stony scarp, up to 3.4m high, with a minimal inner scarp, not more than 0.4m high. Some of the boulders, earthfast by their very size, are almost certainly incorporated into the face of the rampart wall, but the only convincing evidence of a built wall face, in this case the outer, is in the extreme west arc (marked D on the RCHME plan), where there is a length of walling, about 1.7m long and 0.8m high. This face is either strongly battered, or deformed, or a combination of both. It is crudely made of stones of variable sizes which are not graded from bottom to top; the construction is 'loose' with sizable gaps between the stones, and has been roughly chocked.

Despite the isolated situation of the earthwork it has been quite severely robbed and mutilated in places, probably in the construction of a later building (C on plan) and field banks (see below). One of the field banks (marked X-Y on plan) crosses the east side of the work; at the two places where it meets the rampart, the latter has been destroyed down to its foundations presumably to provide at least some material for the later bank. Apart from the two breaks for bank X-Y there are two others, marked A and B on plan, at either end of the flattened south-south-east side. The gap at A on the highest point around the perimeter of the work, is 7.0m wide and represents the original entrance though it has undoubtedly been enlarged and robbed probably for the later building C which adjoins the north side of it. Superficially the gap appears to be 'clean' but several stones are encountered in probing. The other gap (B) is less convincing as an entrance than A; it is 3.0m wide and sharply defined on the north-west side by boulders. There is a distinct area of stones, well covered with vegetation, immediately outside this gap which is probably the residue of stones pulled off the rampart. From the entrance southwards to the later bank X-Y, two banks are evident but the outer is probably spoil from the inner 'true' rampart which has been mutilated and distorted at a more recent date. In the vicinity of D, are three 'holes' in the stone rampart which look to be a result of minor unauthorised explorations of uncertain antiquity.

Except for the later field bank X-Y, there is no trace of internal constructions. Such is the density of the vegetation that the more ephemeral features would be unlikely to be visible. Also the sloping nature of the site would reduce the area suitable for occupation particularly in the west (see Discussion below).

The later constructions at this site include the heather-covered footings of a rectangular building (C) and some field banks. The building, set into the outer edge of the earlier rampart just north of the entrance, measures about 14.0m north-south by about 3.0m transversely within a bank, up to 0.5m high and spread to about 1.5m wide, though it appears wider where it abuts the earlier rampart. There is a slight fall of 0.6m from south to north. No stones are exposed but probing reveals a distinct stony content of the bank indicative of a wall but only excavation would reveal the true nature of its construction. The building seems to have been sub-divided into three chambers, the central one being the largest. There

are no breaks in the early rampart defining the west side of the building and it is not possible to identify any gaps in the other sides indicative of an entrance or entrances due to dense heather and wall disturbance; the most likely contender would have been in the longer east side. Outside the southern chamber to the east is a low pile of moss-covered stones, purpose unknown.

The field bank X-Y crossing the work is spread to about 2.0m wide and survives up to 0.6m high with a ditch, at best 0.3m deep, on the south-east side. The inexact science of probing with a ranging rod produced little evidence of stone and it seems probable that this is the remains of a sod dyke. This was followed north-eastwards out of the survey area and extended down the steep slope towards the Kielder Burn; southwards at a distance of about 45m from the earthwork it incorporated a small rectangular enclosure, 10.0m by 5.5m, and continued for a short distance until it faded in denser woodland. Just to the north-east of the work, a further bank meets the sod dyke and is probably associated.

## DISCUSSION

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Though the enclosing wall of this earthwork is spread and covered with vegetation, it can be seen to have been of massive construction, perhaps about 2m wide; the one remaining section of wall face (D on plan) is roughly built as described above. These factors, together with the overall size of the work leave little doubt that it is of later prehistoric date and that it is an enclosed settlement similar to many others in Northumberland. These may be surrounded by a stone wall, an earthen bank and ditch or a palisade. The proportions of the enclosing structures by their size suggest a defensive or at least protective function and the work at Gibbie's Knowe is no exception. However, what is unusual about this site is its position. It occupies the upper north-west slopes of the knoll including part of the summit; had it fully encircled the summit area, not only would it have utilised the better defensive potential of the site but it would have made available a greater amount of level or near-level ground for settlement. Instead of this, much of the enclosed land, notably on the west half appears unsuitable for dwellings due to the steepness of the slope and there is no trace of house platforms or huts of any description. It must be stated, however, that such is the depth of vegetation in the interior that any ring-groove hut or similar ephemeral structure would almost certainly remain unidentified.

The building foundations (C) almost certainly represent the remains of a farmhouse of medieval or later date which preceded afforestation. It has been sited next to the enclosed settlement in order to utilise the stones from the earlier rampart (see also Gowanburn settlement: NY 69 SW 11 and 24). The field banks and small enclosure noted above are probably associated with the building.

## **METHODOLOGY**

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The site was surveyed at 1:500 scale (RCHME level 3) by use of a Wild T1000 total stations theodolite to supply a series of control points marked with non-permanent spray paint. A computer-generated plot was produced on plastic from this data and this was taken back into the field where the ephemeral detail of the earthwork was supplied by graphic methods (tape and offset).

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## APPENDICES

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### Appendix 1: List of Figures

Figure 1. Reduced copy of 1:500 survey

### Appendix 2: Table of NMR numbers linked to the site Table of NMR numbers linked to this site

SITE NAME	COUNTY	DISTRICT	PARISH
Gibbie's Knowe	Northumberland	Tynedale	Kielder

NMR no	Unique Identifier	NGR	Site Name
NY 69 NW 4	14471	NY6474 9507	Gibbie's Knowe

RCHM ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE HISTORICAL MONUMENTS OF ENGLAND					
OFFICE OF ORIGIN YORK	COUNTY NORTHUMBERLAND	SCALE OF SHEET 1:500	METHOD EDM/GRAPHIC	OS MAP REF. NY 69 NW	
PROJECT NAME KIELDER SAMS	DISTRICT TYNEDALE	DATE OF SURVEY 1-DEC-1998	ASSOCIATED PLANS		FRAME NO. 4
SITE NAME GIBBIE'S KNOWE	PARISH KIELDER	SURVEYORS KB/AL	FIELD PLOT (PENCIL)		SAM NO. RSM 25191
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