

MID FELL CAIRN

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY REPORT

by **Keith Blood**





**MID FELL
CAIRN**

**TYNEDALE
NORTHUMBERLAND**

NMR No: NY 69 NW 1

NGR: NY 6364 9842

SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENT No: SM 25108

Surveyed: September 1998
Surveyed by K. Blood
Report by K. Blood
Drawings by K. Blood

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO SURVEY

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 it is to inform management plans for this group of antiquities and also to increase the currency of the National Monuments Record (NMR) for this area. The monument described below (SM 25108) is a prehistoric round cairn situated at a ridge summit known as Mid Fell at NY 6364 9842. It was surveyed entirely by graphic methods (tapes and offsets) at 1:250 scale in September 1998 (Figure 1).

GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY AND LAND USE

As an element in the development plan for Kielder Forest large tracts of land were left unplanted. One such area is a high, prominent ridge, covered in heather and rough grass, which incorporates three distinct summits separated by shallow saddlebacks. These are named, from south to north, Deadwater Fell at 569m above OD, Mid Fell at 561m above OD and Peel Fell, straddling the Anglo-Scottish Border at 602m above OD. The round cairn is situated on the plateau of Mid Fell some 65m to the south-west of the absolute true summit and about 0.4m below it; nevertheless it commands extensive views in all directions.

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

HISTORY OF RESEARCH

Research into the cairn has been entirely limited to field visits; no archaeological excavations are known to have taken place and there is no evidence for any on the ground. The cairn has been depicted and annotated as a cairn in Old English type on the Ordnance Survey (OS) 1st edition map (Ordnance Survey, 1866), the 2nd edition (Ordnance Survey, 1899) and all subsequent maps to the present day. The site was examined by the OS Archaeology Division field investigators on 22-AUG-1956 (NMR No. NY 69 NW 1: F.D.Colquoun), on 26-AUG-1970 (R.Emsley) when it was surveyed at 1:10,560 scale, and on 13-April-1977 (Stewart Ainsworth), when a survey was completed at 1:10,000 scale. Colquoun noted that it measured 14.5m in diameter and 2.2m high with one modern currick together with three smaller examples constructed within the cairn. Ainsworth suggested a diameter of 13.0m and a maximum height of 2.0m for the cairn; he described a small rectangular pen built from cairn stones and noted that the four curricks had been destroyed. Both sources recorded that the cairn was composed entirely of large stones.

In 1988 the site was examined by B.Long, who was employed at that time by the Forestry Commission as custodian at Kielder Castle (Long, 1988). Little is added to the descriptions provided by the OS field investigators apart from the reinstatement of the one large and three smaller "curricks".

The fullest description of the cairn has been given by English Heritage (English Heritage, 1994) who affirmed its scheduling. The dimensions of 14.5m in diameter and 2.2m in height are confirmed as is the composition of large angular stones. It is noted that the central area of the cairn has been rearranged to form a small rectangular sheep pen but despite this it was considered that the cairn has survived reasonably well with significant archaeological deposits remaining.

RCHME ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD SURVEY 1998

The profile of this cairn has been drastically modified by the later construction of a shelter which has been inserted into it. Superficially the cairn resembles a mound of bare stones, 2.0m in height, with an unusually sharp profile apparently situated on a platform, 0.2m-0.3m high, but this outline is caused largely by the removal of cairn stones to form the shelter and the deposition of these stones around the structure to enhance the height of the cairn and to give it a 'fresh' appearance. However, the overall dimensions have not been affected by the mutilation; though there is no trace of a retaining kerb around the cairn, its margins are fairly well-defined indicating a diameter of between 13.4m and 14.2m. The cairn stones are quite uniform in size the largest being about 0.5m by 0.35m by 0.15m.

The shelter is in the shape of an axe head, 3.1m from east to west by 2.8m wide at the west end narrowing to about 1.6m in the east, within a retaining wall, some 1.5m high, which has been manufactured from cairn stones. This wall is in good condition and the floor of the chamber is relatively clear of stones and is about 0.8m above the natural ground surface around the cairn. The chamber is entered from the south-east by a passage, 3.2m long and about 1.1m wide, but its wall has mainly collapsed and the floor of this passage is choked with stone debris. On the margin of the cairn in the south a later enclosure has been built utilising stones from the cairn. It measures 3.5m by approximately 2.0m within a wall about 0.5m wide reduced to its footings and partly overgrown with vegetation.

DISCUSSION

This appears to be a straightforward round cairn and the 'platform effect' seems to have been caused, possibly exclusively, by the building of the shelter. The latter is quite sophisticated in its design with a passage forming a wind-break of sorts suggesting a use as a shepherd's bothy rather than a sheep pen; this is presumably the largest of the 'curricks' noted by previous authorities. As the floor of the shelter is about 0.8m higher than the base of the cairn it is possible that the central primary burial is undisturbed.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

English Heritage, 1994, scheduling amendment of 15-NOV-1994.

Long, B. 1988, List of Ancient Monuments-The Kielder Forest (unpublished-Forestry Commission).

Ordnance Survey, 1866, County Series 1:10560, Northumberland Sheet 49. Surveyed 1862.

Ordnance Survey, 1899, County Series 1:10560, Northumberland Sheet 49/NW. Revised 1896.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

RCHME wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Messrs Bill Burlton and Jonathan Farries for comment on the management history of the site. The text was edited by Stewart Ainsworth of RCHME York.

APPENDICES

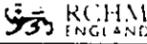
Appendix 1: List of figures

Figure 1. Copy of 1:250 survey.

Appendix 2: Table of NMR numbers linked to the site

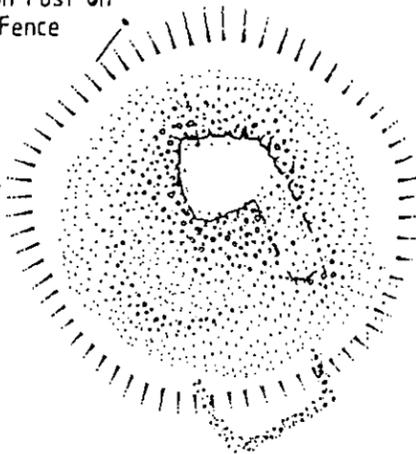
SITE NAME	COUNTY	DISTRICT	PARISH
Mid Fell Cairn	Northumberland	Tynedale	Kielder

NMR no	Unique Identifier	NGR	Site Name
NY 69 NW 1	14458	NY 6364 9842	Mid Fell Cairn

 ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE HISTORICAL MONUMENTS OF ENGLAND				
OFFICE OF ORIGIN YORK	COUNTY NORTHUMBERLAND	SCALE OF SURVEY 1:250	METHOD GRAPHIC	OS MAP No NY 69 NW
PROJECT NAME KIELDER SAMS	DISTRICT TYNE DALE	DATE OF SURVEY 21-SEP-1998	ASSOCIATED PLANS FIELD PLOT (PENCIL)	NAH No 1
SITE NAME MID FELL CAIRN	PARISH KIELDER	SURVEYOR(S) KB		SAM No SM 25108
DOCUMENT STATUS	NGR NY 6364 9842	© RCHME Crown Copyright	SHEET	CATALOGUE No



Braced Iron Post on
corner of Old Fence



In direction of OS trig pillar
on Deadwater Fell (NY 626 972)

