A GPS FIELD SURVEY at BLACK BECK, near SKEGGLES WATER
The Bronze Age Revisited

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Introduction

This project started out to record the structures found at the relatively isolated site at Black Beck near Skeggles Water, Kentmere. Once the practical recording work was done, it was then necessary to do some background research. This new research confirmed some of the hypotheses in my last occasional paper[1], but more importantly gives an unexpected insight into the potentially contentious issue of the Lake District's Stone Pairs.

Black Beck Survey

Most of the surrounding habitat is currently heather on top of peat. We must be grateful that this large tract of heather heathland was preserved and maintained by the owners for grouse shooting. The site at Black Beck rises above the heathland and has better grazing and water.

Only the footings of the wall lines are now visible and they do not produce a very good photograph. The walls were constructed in an unconfined environment. A circular wall in an empty space provides the maximum amount of area, for the minimum amount of wall. The concave side of the walls represents the interior of the field and the convex side, the exterior. However it looks like this field system was extended organically over a period of time, with new fields being added to the existing fields.

Enclosures 1 and 2 have low rough walls and are almost identical in size and structure. They occupy sheltered positions. Enclosure 1 has no easily discernible internal structures. It is possible that uneven ground inside the walls may be due to the degradation of the internal structures. Internally, Enclosure 1 measures 8.9m x 6.2m.

Enclosure 1

Enclosure 2 does have a small enclosed area set against an overhanging boulder of the outer wall, which can be seen in the centre of the photo. Internally, Enclosure 2 measures 9.2m x 5.4m.

Enclosure 2

The nearest comparable structure, is just below the top of Nan Bield pass on the Kentmere side (NY 453 094). This is remarkably similar in size and structure to the enclosures at Black Beck.

Cairn 1 occupies a prominent open position on a minor headland, with a panoramic view of the Kentmere and Longsleddale fells. Cairn 2 is not so large and is in a less prominent position.

Cairn 1

When recording the site (Platform, below) I was originally thinking of it as a very small dwelling, perhaps deceived by the grassy interior. Having subsequently discovered Cairn 1, I am now more inclined to think of it as a cairn. Being located in a reasonably prominent open position and its relatively small size as a dwelling, make this latter contention more likely.

Platform

What were these structures for and how old are they? I don't know. It may be possible to obtain samples from underneath the wall foundations, which would provide dating evidence. The lack of any recent structures in the area at least eliminates any easy dismissal. The isolation of the site on the fringe of the heather heathland, gives hope that we are looking at the survival of an ancient site. The shape and size of the fields may be indicative, but not conclusive.

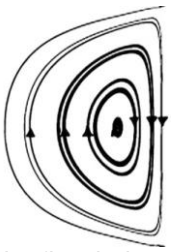
Cupmarks

One major distraction to be aware of in this area, is the prevalence of a large number of spectacular 'cupmarks' and grooves. They cover a large area and are noted in C.W.Dymond's survey of the Hugill curvilinear settlement[2].

Unfortunately, from the evidence on hand, it is clear that these are natural phenomena occurring in the local Greywacke rock, due to the effect of accumulative water erosion on the relatively soft, relatively homogenous stone. This produces forms, which are beautifully symmetric, but entirely natural.

Cupmarks

The circular flow of the water is the determining factor in the shapes formed, given the absence of any irregularities in the hardness of the rock. Once a hole starts, the flow of water completes the process.



Vertical circular flow induced in a cavity

Different types of flow can generate different forms. A horizontal whirlpool flow (possibly combined with grit) generates a circular cupmark, which has a characteristic indentation in the base of the cup. Flow across a line of weakness in the rock, at first generates a line of cavities, which then join up to become an elongated groove along the line of weakness.

Approaching the gods

This title is taken from Chapter 8 of Barry Cunliffe's *Iron Age Britain*[3]. The following paragraphs have been abstracted:

One vitally important concept was that of time. Animals, human or otherwise, are conscious of the passage of time and it is in the nature of human beings that they should wish to 'control' time by containing it within a system of measurement. This becomes even more practically important as the growing of crops begins to play an increasingly central part in the subsistence economy. By the Iron Age the passage of time - the year with its seasons demarcated - was rigorously controlled with a calendar.

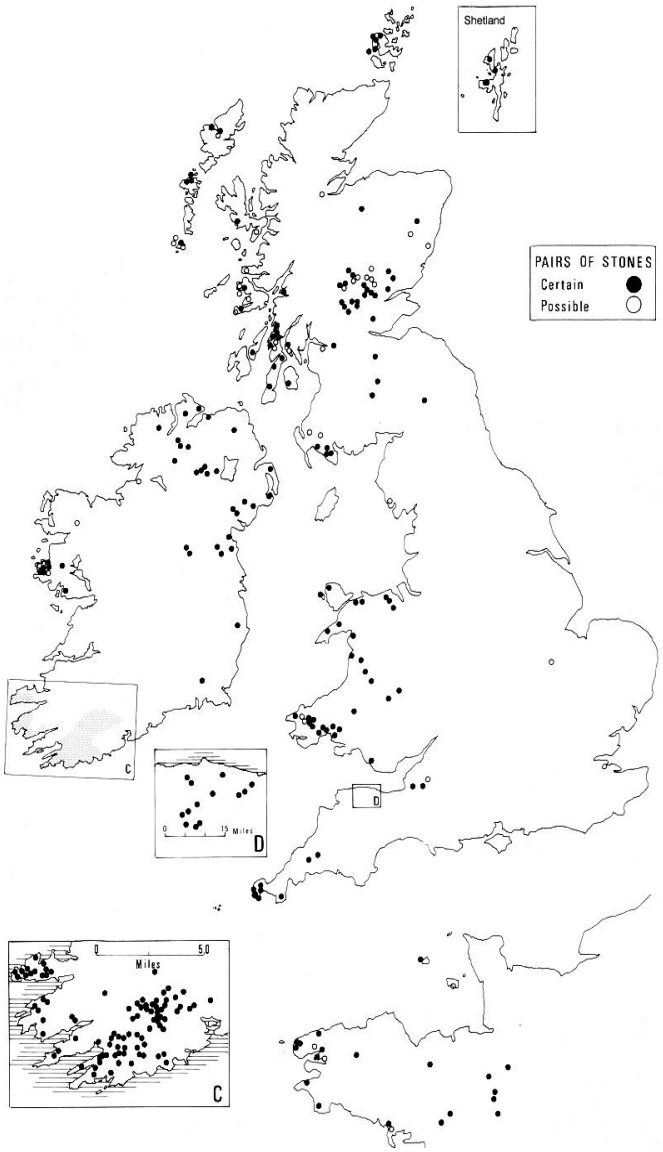
Remarkable evidence of this was found at Coligny near Bourg, in France, in the form of fragments of an actual bronze calendar dating to the end of the first century BC.

The calendar is also inscribed with the position of two of the four great seasonal festivals - Beltane (1 May) and Lugnasad (1 August). Beltane marked the beginning of the warm season when cattle would be turned out to open grazing, while Lugnasad, named after the god Lug, seems to have been connected with rituals to ensure the ripening of the crops. The two other festivals of the Celtic year were Samain (1 November) and Imbolc (1 February), both known from Irish vernacular sources of the first millennium AD but nonetheless likely to have been practised in the earlier prehistoric period.

The dark half of the year began on 1 November with the feast of Samain when, in Irish tradition, the tribal god Dagda mated with the earth mother goddess Morrigan, their successful union ensuring universal fertility and general well-being in the year to come.

Perhaps here and in particular in the Irish pairing of Dagda and Morrigan we are able to glimpse the underlying structure of the Iron Age belief system - a simple pairing of opposites: male/sky/tribal/all-competent with female/earth/universal/all-fertile. If this is so, then the great variety of male deities simply reflects the different tribal gods, while the many female deities are manifestations of the one earth mother seen in various local guises.

As Barry Cunliffe says himself, the religious practices involved were *likely to have been practised in the earlier prehistoric period.* The implications for understanding our Stone Pairs are clear and it is something that I thought we would never know. We can now reasonably give the stones their proper names, Dagda and Morrigan.



Distribution of Stone Pairs[4]

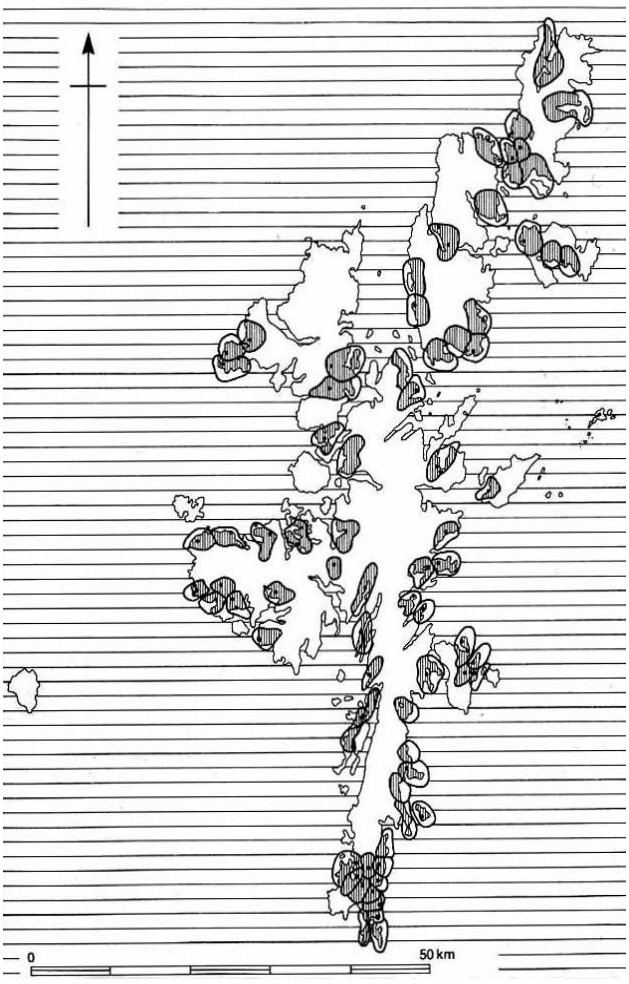
The Iron Age achievement: a longer perspective

This title is also taken from Barry Cunliffe's *Iron Age Britain*, Chapter 9. The following paragraphs have been abstracted:

Over the seven centuries or so of the Iron Age, life in Britain had changed out of all recognition. Two trends in particular stand out. The first is the density and permanence of the settlement pattern. New settlements were being created throughout the country and the majority, once established, continued in use. By the first century BC, over great tracts of Britain, it would have been impossible to have looked out across a landscape without seeing dozens of farmsteads. This phenomenon was specifically remarked upon by Julius Caesar.

The second dominating trend is one of intensification of production. Quite simply the quantity and variety of artefacts in circulation by the last years of the pre-Roman era had increased phenomenally compared with the beginning of the period seven centuries earlier, and this is true even if the comparison is made with the period before the contact with the Roman world had begun c. 100 BC. The implication must be that an increasing part of society's energy was being devoted to the extraction of raw materials and to manufacture.

This section has been included to demonstrate the profound agricultural, industrial and social changes, which took place in the Iron Age. At the beginning of the Iron Age, nothing much had changed since the start of the Bronze Age, 1800 years earlier, especially in the relatively remote region of the Lake District. It was these changes, which led to the later pattern of Iron Age habitation, and which can still be seen in Kentmere today. The map on the right shows the corresponding Iron Age habitation pattern in Shetland.



Iron Age settlements on Shetland and their supposed territories[3]

References

1. Robert Ridley, *A Prehistoric and Romano British Field Survey of Kentmere* 2009, SDHS

2. C.W.Dymond, F.S.A., *An Ancient Village in Hugill*, CWAAS Transactions, Vol XII, 6 - 14

3. Barry Cunliffe, 1995, *Iron Age Britain*, English Heritage

4. Aubrey Burl, 1993, *From Carnac to Callanish*, Yale University Press

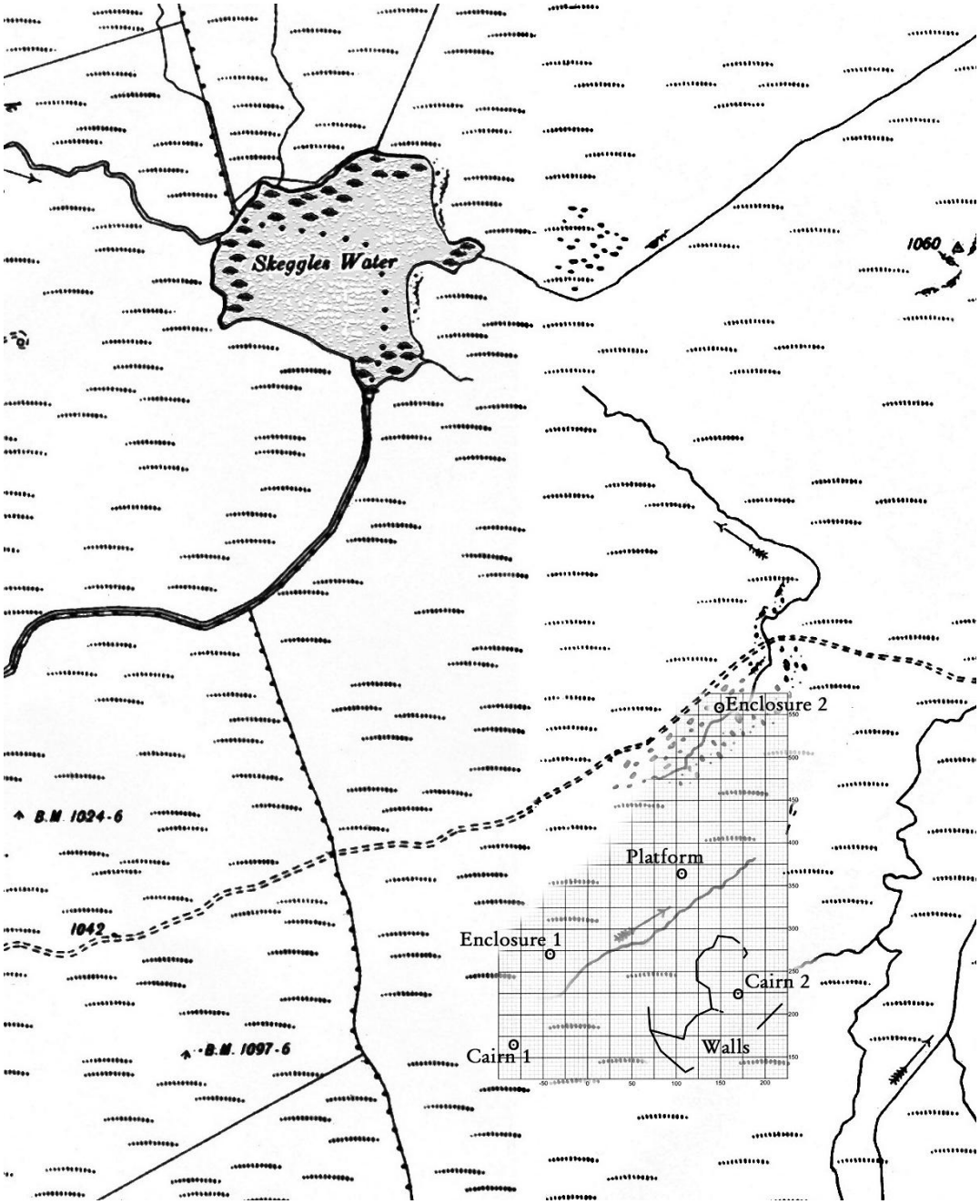
Appendices

A GPS Field Survey at Black Beck, near Skeggles Water

B Potential Bronze Age Sites in Kentmere

C Bronze Age Hut Circles and Fields Reference Site

Appendix A: GPS Field Survey at Black Beck, near Skeggles Water



Plotting data from Garmin eTrex H handheld GPS (WGS84).

Node	Longitude	X axis	(metres)	Latitude	Y axis	(metres)
Reference	W 2 48.000	0.000	0.0	N 54 24.800	0.000	0.0
Enclosure 1	W 2 48.039	-0.039	-42.2	N 54 24.946	0.146	270.9
Cairn 1	W 2 48.077	-0.077	-83.3	N 54 24.889	0.089	165.1
Enclosure 2	W 2 47.862	0.138	149.3	N 54 25.101	0.301	558.4
Platform	W 2 47.902	0.098	106.0	N 54 24.997	0.197	365.5
Cairn 2	W 2 47.843	0.157	169.9	N 54 24.921	0.121	224.5

At this latitude, one minute of longitude equates to approximately 1081.98 metres and one minute of latitude equates to approximately 1855.22 metres.

Appendix B: Potential Bronze Age Sites in Kentmere

Black Beck Fields, Enclosures and Cairns NY 483 027

Garburn Stone Pair and Scooped Unenclosed Platform NY 443 045

Skeel Gill Platform and Cairns NY 446 064

Lingmell End Hut Circles and Fields NY 441 090

Nan Bield Enclosure NY 453 094

Nan Bield Enclosure

Appendix C - Bronze Age Hut Circles and Fields Reference Site

The Bronze Age site at Leskernick Hill is shown for comparison with the fields at Black Beck. During this period, hut circles were commonly part of the field boundary walls. This ties in with the hut circle at Lingmell End, which lies on the boundary between two fields. So the conjecture that the Lingmell End site pre-dates the later Iron Age sites would seem to be justified.

Other typical Bronze Age features found in Cumbria include:

Concentric Stone Circles (nearest example Hird Wood in Troutbeck, NY 416 059)

Stone Rows (the Shap area is particularly rich in these)

Stone Pairs (Wales, Ireland, Scotland, West Country and Brittany, but not until now Cumbria)

Long Cairns (Troutbeck Park)

Cairns, with or without cists (Black Beck)

Clearance Cairns (Skeel Gill)

Bronze Age Settlement at Leskernick Hill, Altarnun, Cornwall[3]