

CASTLERIGG ROMAN CAMP, KESWICK, CUMBRIA:
REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION
WEST CUMBRIA ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY.

Grid Reference: NY 2882 2311.

Jan Walker.

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SUMMARY.

The Bassenthwaites Reflections team of field workers located by magnetometry what appeared from shape and size to be a Roman military camp. Consequently a small group of volunteers from the West Cumbria Archaeological Society excavated two trenches with the aim of establishing the existence of the ditch (trench A) and to investigate a strong anomaly in the north west corner of the field. (Trench B) The ditch was confirmed and had a typical Roman military 'anklebreaker' section. The anomaly proved to be caused by stone clearance of the field. No dating evidence was found from the ditch; finds from the stone clearance heap trench B included a nineteenth century iron fitting for a clog.

1. INTRODUCTION.

This Report has been prepared by Jan Walker, archaeological contractor, who directed the excavations. The excavations were carried out according to the Code of Conduct and appropriate Standards and Guidance issued by the Institute of Archaeologists, and was designed to follow best practice.

2. PROCEDURE.

2.1 The excavations were aimed at investigating the magnetometry results, and establishing their nature and date. Two trenches were dug, one in the north west of the field to investigate a strong anomaly shown in the geophysical results, and one to the south east of the field to investigate the possible ditch showing in the geophysical results.

2.2 The work took place on 8th March 2009 using volunteers from the West Cumbria Archaeological Society.

3. SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION.

See main report.

4. DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT.

See main report.

5. RESULTS.

5.1 TRENCH A.

The trench was located to give a north – south section across the ditch and measured 8m. east - west and 1m. north - south.

The turf and topsoil was removed manually. The topsoil consisted of medium brown loam with pebbles 5-10cms.

Below the topsoil the ditch was visible running east - west. The upper fill (102) was medium brown loam with fewer pebbles than the topsoil. Below this was sandy brown grey loam with patches of clay and specks of charcoal (104) Below this the ditch fill was medium dark brown sandy loam with the occasional pebble. (105) Below this, in the ‘anklebreaker’ section of the ditch, the fill was dark brown black sandy loam.

The ditch was cut on the south side by a field drain. (103)

Fig.1.

CASTLERIGG ROMAN CAMP: SECTION ACROSS DITCH
SCALE: 1:20

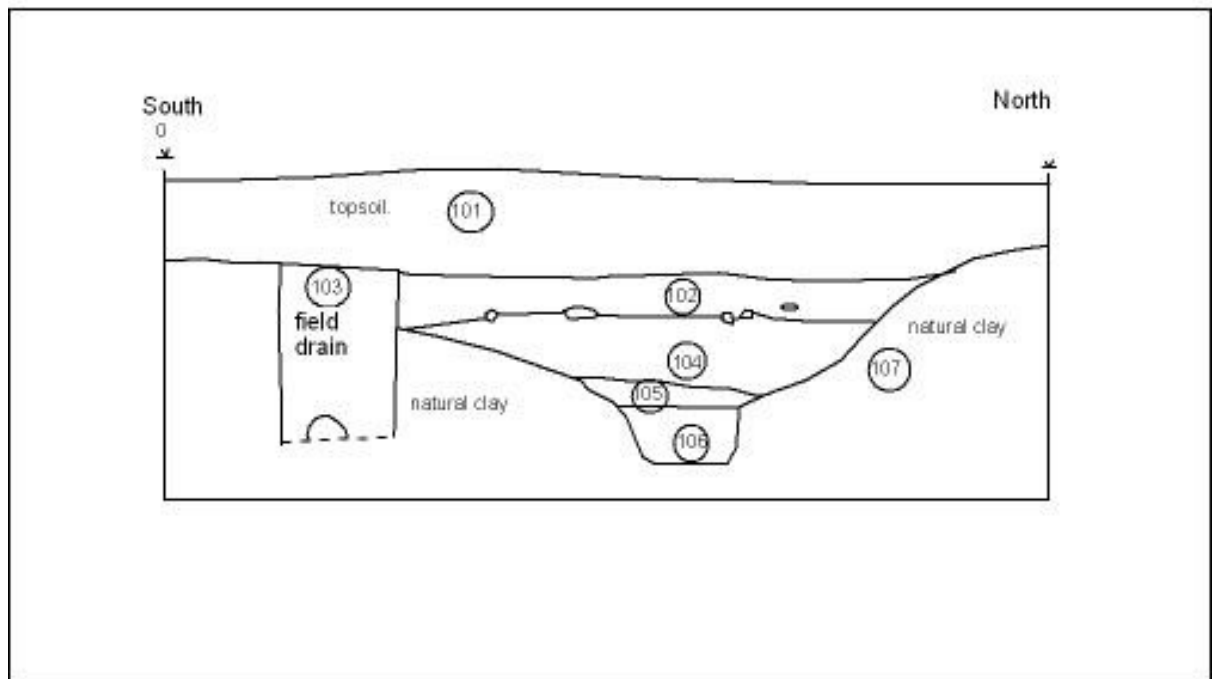


Plate 1. Section through ditch trench A looking West.



5.2 TRENCH B.

An area 3m. square was opened in the north west of the field, to investigate a strong anomaly on the geophysical survey.

The turf and topsoil were removed manually. The topsoil consisted of medium brown loam. Below this, a band of yellow-white clay with the occasional cobble ran north – west, south east across the site, which was probably a field drain though there was insufficient time to determine this. (104). There were three cobble and clay patches c. 50 cms. across in the south-west (103), north - east (106) and south east(105)corners of the trench. To the south of the trench, in the centre and running under the southern baulk, there was an area of broken stone in a pit. This was identified by the British Geological Survey as ‘basic andesic lava, much altered. It seems to contain green altered pyroxene but could be chlorite. It is from the Birker Fell Formation. (BVG) In the lower part of the pit was a single flat stone identified by Dr. Alan Smith as Borrowdale Volcanic- a basaltic brecciated lava flow, which is commonly present in the area, probably transported by ice. The pit, which was 1m. 35cms. wide, was excavated to a depth of 1m05cms. narrowing to 60cms. when excavation halted. The stones were in grey brown clayey loam and waterlogged. (102)

Plate 2: Pit 102, looking south



6. DISCUSSION.

The ditch in trench A is without doubt of a Roman military nature, although no artefacts were found to allow closer dating. It seems certain from the geophysics and the excavation that this is a military camp.

Trench B was rather more indeterminate; a smashed standing stone was considered to explain the stone pit 102, but it seems likely that it simply represents field clearance probably in the nineteenth century.

7. ARTEFACTS.

The only artefacts found were a few sherds of twentieth century pottery from the topsoil in Trench B and the metal toe fitting of a clog from pit 102, Trench B, which is probably nineteenth century.

Figures and Plates.

For location plan, see main report.

Figure1: Section across Ditch.

Plate 1 Section through ditch Trench A looking West.

Plate 2: Pit 102 looking South.

Bibliography. – see main report.

**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PLANT MACROFOSSILS AND OTHER ORGANIC REMAINS
FROM THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS AT CASTLERIGG, CUMBRIA**

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During the course of an archaeological watching brief and excavation 3 samples were taken. Samples were taken to extract material which may be pertinent to understanding the development of these contexts. This would include evidence of any human activity during the prehistoric or historic periods which may have left preserved archaeological material.

The methodology employed in the processing of these samples required that the whole earth samples be broken down and split into their various different components. All samples were fully processed by being manually floated and sieved through a 'Siraf' style flotation tank.

The residue from each sample was retained, described and scanned using a magnet for ferrous fragments. The flot was dried slowly and scanned at x40 magnification for charred and uncharred botanical remains. Identification of these was undertaken by comparison with modern reference material held in the Environmental Laboratory at North Pennines Archaeology. Plant taxonomic nomenclature follows Stace (1997).

The retent, like the residue from wet sieving, will contain any larger items of bone, heavy (eg waterlogged) ecofacts or artefacts. The flot or floating fraction will generally contain organic material such as plant matter, fine bones, cloth, leather and insect remains. A rapid scan at this stage was done to allow further recommendations to be made as to the potential for further study by entomologists or palaeobotanists, with a view to retrieving vital economic information from the samples. The retent samples were also scanned with a hand magnet to retrieve forms of magnetic material.

Favourable preservation conditions can lead to the retrieval of organic remains that may produce a valuable suite of information, in respect of the depositional environment of the material, thus enabling assessment of anthropogenic activity, seasonality and climate and elements of the economy associated with the features from which the samples are removed. In this case the sandy, well drained, base rich nature of the soil would be suitable for the preservation of charred plant remains and bone (should mineral replacement occur to offset the leeching of calcium from deposited bones material).

Sample numbers appear in brackets thus < >, whilst context numbers appear in brackets thus () for all analysis and discussion below. Results will be presented by Plot number numerically. Reference to seeds in the text is made using the richness scale of 1 = present, 2 = frequent and 3 = abundant, as seen in the tabular results attached.

Results for Castlerigg

Sample **(102) <1>** contained no material in the heavy residue which could be ascribed to cultural activity. A very low amount of magnetic material recovered was all naturally magnetic minerals, such as haematite. The flot matrix consisted of modern roots with some low amounts of charcoal. Low numbers of seeds of a *Poa* species (true grasses), a *Chenopodium* species (goosefoot), a *Silene* species and a *Galeopsis* species (hemp-nettle) were recovered.

Sample **(104) <2>** contained no material in the heavy residue which could be ascribed to cultural activity. A very low amount of magnetic material recovered was all naturally magnetic minerals, such as haematite. The flot matrix consisted of modern roots with some low amounts of charcoal. Moderate amounts of seeds of a Brassica species with low numbers of seeds of a Galium species (bedstraw), a *Chenopodium* species (goosefoot) and a *Silene* species (campion) were recovered.

Sample **(106) <3>** contained no material in the heavy residue which could be ascribed to cultural activity. A very low amount of magnetic material recovered was all naturally magnetic minerals, such as haematite. The flot matrix consisted of charcoal. Very high numbers of *Brassica* seeds (mustard/cabbage family) were recovered along with lower numbers of seeds of an *Urtica* species nettle and a *Rumex* species (docks or sorrels).

Conclusions

Cereals

No cereal grains were recovered from the processed samples, either in the heavy residue or in the flots.

Other plant remains

All seeds recovered reflect open grassland or arable environments.

The high numbers of *Brassica* seeds recovered in sample (106) <1> is notable. These seeds were present in very high densities within the sample.

SOURCES

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