Windermere Reflections

The fourth and final phase of Reflections on History has been completed. Phase 4 focused on surveying 4 bloomeries (iron smelting sites) in the catchment, Ghyll Head on the eastern side of Lake Windermere, Cinder Nab and High Stott Park, near Stott Park and Blelham Tarn near Wray Castle.

Ghyll Head, Cinder Nab and High Stott Park were all subject to topographical and geophysical surveys. The results revealed that all three were typical hand powered medieval bloomery sites and the location of each the furnaces were found through the geophysical survey. We also cleaned an eroded section of the bloomery at Cinder Nab. Thick deposits of black ash, slag, gravel and burnt clay, which may have been derived from the destroyed furnaces were exposed on the lake shore. The charcoal samples have been radiocarbon dated and the results have come back dated to 1274 -1391 AD.

The Blelham Tarn bloomery was subject to topographical and geophysical survey and also a small excavation. Four trenches were excavated across the site. The first targeted the suspected wheel pit which would have powered the bellows for the furnace and the site of the possible furnace and hearth. The edge of the furnace was revealed and an area of a hard deposit of hammerscale, derived from hammering an iron bloom. Trench 2 was excavated across the tail race, confirming the presence of this feature, which had been cut through deposits of slag, indicating the bloomery had been in use some time before it started using water power. Trench 3 was positioned across what the geophysical survey had identified as a possible building. Unfortunately, no remains of a building were discovered and this feature turned out to be the remains of two stone drains. Trench 4 was placed across another possible building identified on the geophysical survey. Deposits of slag, stone, burnt clay and furnace lining were all found in the trench.

The excavation provided a rare opportunity to obtain accurate dating for the iron working activity, by radiocarbon dating fragments of charcoal. These included a layer of charcoal and iron working waste close to the furnace, which produced a date range of AD 1307 – 1429. Two further dates from similar layers of c AD 1450 and AD 1317 – 1437 demonstrate that the bloomery was in operation during the early fifteenth century and probably had been established by the fourteenth century.

We have produced three MP3 audio trails which will enable visitors to appreciate and understand some of the sites we surveyed during the project. They can be downloaded from the LDNPA website: http://www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/learning/archaeologyhistory/reflections-on-history-audio-trails

These are the first MP3 audio trails we have produced, so we would really appreciate your feedback.

We have also produced a booklet on all four phases of the work (seen left). For those involved in the field work you should have received your free copy. If not or you would like to purchase one (only £5), please do not hesitate to contact us.

email: archvol@lakedistrict.gov.uk
Romans in Ravenglass

In Trench 1 we continued to excavate the remains of a large Roman strip building which was at first thought to face directly onto a road running through this part of the settlement. However we did not find the edge of the road and we now think that the strip building ran parallel to it. The investigation of the Roman road confirmed that the core comprised a number of large dumps of large stone rubble and metal-working waste.

Excavation in trench one, left, and a guided tour led by one of the members of the outreach team, right

In the southern end of Trench 2, an extensive layer of burnt deposits seem to represent prolonged industrial metal-working activity and metal mould fragments were also found. Another interesting feature within this trench was the base of an amphora set in a shallow pit. It is possible this contained water and was used for quenching as part of the metal-working process. In Trench 3, the remains of a building were excavated and within this was the base of an oven which was full of charcoal. Excavation in the southern end of the trench uncovered evidence of burning and cobbles similar to metal working activity in trench 2.

For the duration of the 4 week excavation we arranged a programme of guided tours and events for visitors which was based in a tent near the entrance to the site. A group of volunteers was given training and information which they used to take visitors around the site and to explain what was being revealed by the excavation.

In addition to this the site tours we held three open days. Two were planned to coincide with the National Heritage Open days and we had one during the final weekend of the project. During these open days an additional 4th trench was open for children to have a go at digging. Staff from the Portable Antiquities Scheme were on site for people to have archaeological finds from the area identified. People could also handle Roman finds and view the material from the 1970 excavation of the fort. On the final open day we had a Roman reenactor on site who used practical demonstrations to explain about life in the civilian settlement.

These outreach elements of this project were a great way to tell people who were not directly associated with the project about the Roman Heritage at Ravenglass. We will be producing a film about the results of the two years of excavation and also what happens during the post excavation process. This film will be available to watch in early Spring 2015. Other outputs include a new interpretation panel and permanent display of Roman finds from the excavation at Muncaster Castle and a leaflet about the project.
Read about Jeremy Rowan Robinson's experience of an online archaeology course

A little knowledge…

It was John’s idea. “If you want to be an archaeology volunteer supervisor, you might think”, he suggested, “about enrolling for a course to get some context for what you will be doing”.

So I went online to see what was available. There was an exciting range on offer from the ambitious ‘World Archaeology’ at one extreme to the more manageable ‘Roman Britain’ at the other with the intriguing sounding ‘Archaeology’s Dirty Little Secrets’ somewhere in between. I eventually settled on the more prosaic but potentially useful ‘Archaeology in Practice’ offered by Oxford University as an online 10 week course.

This was the first online course I had signed up for and, being technically challenged, I was a little nervous. However, the mechanics of the course were relatively painless. I was introduced to the course tutor from the Archaeology Department of the University and given a password which gave me access to instructions and to the course materials. The course was divided into 10 units, one per week. The units were: (1) What is archaeology? (2) Non-invasive techniques, (3) Excavation techniques, (4) Types of sites and features, (5) Artefacts (6) Archaeological dating, (7) Archaeological science, (8) Burial archaeology, (9) Interpretation, (10) Whose archaeology?

Each unit was made up of 8 sub-units with reading material and a number of individual, group and optional activities to be undertaken during each week. Individual activities included reading an example of a field walking report, dipping into a database of artefacts and getting to grips with stratification through a Harris matrix. Group activities (there were 34 students doing the course) involved responding through an online forum to issues raised by the tutor on such questions as: ‘Is all archaeological excavation destruction?’, ‘Is archaeology largely rubbish?’, ‘Is archaeology a science?’ and so on. Optional activities generally took the form of additional reading or viewing of videos about such things as ‘Otzi the iceman’, underwater archaeology, and Pliny the Younger’s eye witness account of the burial of Pompeii.

Jeremy Rowan Robinson, left, undertaking a Level 1 walkover surveys in Spring 2014

The course took up about 10 hours a week, rather more than I had intended but necessary if I was to get the most out of the reading and the exercises. Relating the (limited) reading on archaeological theory to practice was a particular challenge. Marxist archaeology, processualism, ethnoarchaeology and post processualism all seemed far removed from the trowel and wellies.

The course was assessed partly through the contributions to the group activities and partly through two written assignments. The first was on the role of non-invasive techniques in improving strategies for excavation; the second involved a choice and I opted to answer the question ‘How far can we reconstruct the past from grave goods?’ Successful completion of the course resulted in the award of 10 CAT points towards any certificate, diploma or degree I might subsequently embark on - you must be joking!

The downside? The course cost £220; but worth almost every penny.
Walking over the old packhorse track that crosses the hummocky area of moraine known as Cotra, to the south of Dunmail Raise, a few years ago I noticed a number of earth-grown cairns on the plateau; an area that had not seen any modern agricultural development. As you drive over Dunmail Raise when the bracken is down you can also see some clearance cairns to the west of Raise Beck. Given its axial position in relation to route-ways through the Cumbrian Fells it seemed likely a systematic survey would produce some interesting archaeology here; allied with the fact that the neighbouring valley of Greenburn also had a few prehistoric features identified by Pete Rodgers.

So in spring of 2013 a survey was undertaken of these two locales to establish the extent of any prehistoric and historic archaeology in the area; with a few archaeology students from UCLan I set about this task. That year the LDNPA Archaeology Volunteer Network had just been set up so we were joined for a couple of days by Geoff and Joe.

This is part of my research to put the Neolithic Axe Factories of the Central Fells in context with other archaeology from the period found here. Both these valleys are in the catchment of the River Rothay which, it has become apparent, was a focus of prehistoric activity in that period. This is demonstrated by a number of Langdale roughed-out and polished stone axes found in the area and recently no fewer than eleven prehistoric cup marked sites have been confirmed, with three in Grasmere village.

This survey was a Level 1 reconnaissance field survey which involved four elements; identification, photography, description and finally mapping. This as many of you know involves walking across the landscape repeatedly in parallel, like lost souls, looking for any humps and bumps, structures or hollows; whilst trying to avoid stepping knee-deep in a bog; falling down crags all this in the Cumbrian spring weather!

The survey of Dunmail Raise found features from WW2 entrenchment to prehistoric burial cairns. We established that there had in fact been some stone clearance on Cotra to improve the pasture for grazing. Some of this is very likely to be prehistoric and the characters of the cairns suggest that there was likely to have been more than one phase of clearance here. A number of the larger cairns found towards the top of Dunmail Raise are perhaps more likely to be funary monuments dating from the Early Bronze Age.

At Greenburn Bottom we identified a ruinous ring cairn on the southern side of the valley. Whilst at the head of the valley around 10 cairns were present which again are likely to have been used for burial. We also located a splendid circular enclosure of likely Bronze Age period close to the base of the valley in a place that would have had seen some ritual associated with it. All in all 90 features were recorded of which about 70 had not previously been identified. Thanks to all involved for their help.

Peter has recently started a blog on Cumbrian Upland Archaeology:
http://mountainsofmeaning.wordpress.com/
Heritage at Risk Register

In case you haven't already seen it, the launch of this year's Heritage at Risk report, features the work that has been carried out by the Lake District Archaeology Volunteers on scheduled monuments (SMs) at risk.


The work that has been completed so far has enabled English Heritage to remove 15 SMs from the At Risk Register.

Thanks to everyone who has volunteered their time to enable this to be achieved and to the models who agreed to have their photograph taken for this - especially Floss the Border Collie!

Annual Archaeology Conference

On Sunday 2nd of November we held the 13th Archaeology Conference at the Theatre by the Lake in Keswick. The day started with an overview of the archaeological work in the Lake District by the National Park archaeologists. This was followed by a presentation from Jeremy Rowan Robinson and Mervyn Cooper who spoke about the results of the Level 1 walkover surveys that were completed by Network Volunteers in the Spring of 2014. Eleanor and Ian Miller from Oxford Archaeology North presented an interesting talk on the results of the geophysical survey of four bloomery sites and the excavation of the Blelham tarn bloomery, that were investigated as part of the Reflections on History project. Lisa Keys from Minerva Heritage reported on her role as outreach consultant from the Romans in Ravenglass project and Paul Brown highlighted some of the Rock Art finds that have recently been discovered in the Lake District. Jamie Lund from the National Trust reported on the results of the 2013 excavations which took place through the Sizergh Castle: Dig in the Park project.

Historic Environment Record - a new volunteering opportunity

We are looking for a volunteer to help us maintain the Lake District Historic Environment Record (HER). The HER is a database of all the known archaeological and historical sites within the National Park. Ideally, we are looking for someone to commit to at least 2 days a month to input new archaeological information into the database, in particular all the data from the Level 1 surveys carried out by you! An introduction to the database and full training will be given, but you must be comfortable with working on a computer and the work will have to be undertaken at our office in Kendal. If you are interested in this role please e-mail: archvol@lakedistrict.gov.uk for further information.

www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/archaeologyvolunteers email: archvol@lakedistrict.gov.uk
Forthcoming Network activities

Archaeology End of Year Roundup and Thank You Event

We will be holding the annual roundup and thank you event on Thursday 27 November at Ambleside Parish Hall between 3pm and 4pm. This will be an opportunity to review the work that has been completed during this last year. It will also be an opportunity to hear your comments on how you feel that Network has gone this year. Please make a booking if you intend to come along to this so that we know how much cake to order!

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday 25 November</td>
<td>Level 1 Walkover Survey. SW area of the National Park.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Archaeology End of Year Roundup and Thank You Event. <strong>Please make a booking if you intend to come.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday 2 December</td>
<td>Vegetation clearance at New Sedgwick Gunpowder Works. The work will be organised by Jamie Lund at the National Trust. Please e-mail: <a href="mailto:jamie.lund@nationaltrust.org.uk">jamie.lund@nationaltrust.org.uk</a> for further information and to make a booking.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday 4 December</td>
<td>Level 1 Walkover Survey. NE area of the National Park</td>
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Last year’s cake. Which archaeological theme will we have this year?

For all the forthcoming Network activities please e-mail: archvol@lakedistrict.gov.uk to make a booking, apart from where stated otherwise.