

Prehistoric Section Report July 2008

The period since last summer has seen a great deal of activity both in Calderdale and further afield.

Four 'prehistoric walks' have been conducted, around The Ridge and around Meg Dyke and Rishworth Moor, for HBLHS, Halifax Antiquarians, South Pennine Research Group and an adult education class from Bradford University. We attended a guided walk around the rock art of Middleton and Snowden Moors led by Edward Vickerman, president of Huddersfield and District Archaeological Society and joint author of 'Prehistoric Rock Art of the West Riding'.

A short talk was delivered as part of the Mytholroyd/Hebden Bridge joint meeting. We have also attended talks on the following:

- A reinterpretation of the enclosure around the summit of Ingleborough
- The late Neolithic enclosure at Catterick
- The Hatfield trackway and platform
- Techniques of dendochronology
- The panorama Stone at Ilkley
- Crop-mark plotting in the Vale of Pickering
- Reinterpretations of Duggleby Howe
- Nepalese shamen

These have been hosted variously by the Council for British Archaeology, Halifax Scientific Society, Yorkshire Archaeological Society (Prehistoric Section) and HDAS.

We hope to be involved in an excavation of a Neolithic/Bronze Age site on Stanbury Hill below Rombalds Moor, to be directed by Keith Boughey – the other author of 'Prehistoric Rock Art of the West Riding'.

Our opinion was sought regarding a possible stone circle, alignment of standing stones and cairns above Rochdale. Sadly the field visit did not lead to our confirming the optimistic interpretation of these largely natural features.

We visited Lawrence Field in the northern Peak to examine various prehistoric features and a well-preserved assart.

Calderdale Museums Service asked for our help in producing the prehistoric component of the new display at Heptonstall museum. We provided artefacts, captions, notes, photographs and advice, and prompted the commissioning of reproduction arrows and artefacts from John Lord, the foremost practical flint expert in the UK. We were instrumental in the recovery of the Darby Collection from the Tolson Museum, and were pleased to be able to meet Paul Rawson, who originally catalogued this important assemblage. Sadly one significant item, a rare Mesolithic hand-axe, seems to be missing. We understand investigations are proceeding.

Fieldwork in and around Calderdale has continued, with a principal focus being the location of further examples of carved rocks. We are still searching for satisfactory software to make 3D digital records of these enigmatic features. The curious branching grooves we have been finding have confounded not only ourselves but also Huddersfield Geological Society, Yorkshire Geological Association and the British Geological Survey. Field visits by Neil Aitkenhead, editor of the definitive BGS commentary on the Pennines and adjacent areas, and Colin Waters, who actually compiled the geological mapping for Calderdale, have produced a partial (natural) explanation, but neither had encountered these features before. We seem to have a geological discovery on our hands and discussions are under way about how to publish this. Again, suitable 3D software would be a great help. Although the grooves are probably largely natural cup-marks are present on some examples, indicating that prehistoric people knew of them and interacted with them; some may indeed have been modified at this time.

We think we may have accounted for more or less all the rock art in the South Pennines and we are considering publication. There are issues concerning dating but it may be that around Hebden Bridge we have some of the earliest examples, perhaps extending back into the Mesolithic.

The next target is to address the need for a definitive account of the use of flint in this area. We are aware of the assemblages in museums, some of which are more accessible than others, and some private collections. We have begun an appeal for the possessors of any other flint to come forward. Obviously it is essential that we see and record as much as possible of the flint that has been recovered.

Finally, there has been a planning application to replace the small wind turbines on Ovenden Moor with a lesser number of larger ones. We have found significant Mesolithic flint in erosion patches on the moor and we are in touch with Calderdale Council Planning Department, West Yorkshire Archaeology Service and the Yorkshire Archaeological Society regarding this.