Excavations at Clocken Syke Farm, Dairy Lane, Dacre
By Nidderdale Iron-age Archaeology community group 2015 and 2016

1 Introduction
The Nidderdale Iron-Age group and its forerunners have been investigating Clocken Syke farm for over 15 years, and it has always been an intriguing area. Work was carried out by an earlier project on the manufacture of iron on the farm in both prehistoric and medieval times. This previous work indicated there were a number of prehistoric features on this and nearby farms and a project was started to discover more about the prehistoric nature of Dacre parish. Surveys were carried out and a number of features targeted for excavation. This note describes the results of the excavations on Clocken Syke Farm.

The farm lies in Nidderdale in the centre to south area of the parish of Dacre on sloping land, which is downhill in a south-easterly direction.

The land use in the area of the farm excavated is mainly used for sheep and cattle farming. It is rough pasture. The land is private, it is a working farm with both animals and machinery present, therefore features must not be visited without express permission. All excavations have been backfilled.

The owner, Mr and Mrs Bradley, is very supportive of the group’s work in investigating the history of the landscape of the farm and the work could not have been carried out without the funding from the Heritage Lottery fund of the Prehistoric Nidderdale project.

Under the new countryside stewardship scheme the farm lies in the Pennine Dale Fringe area and the requirements of the stewardship would not restrict archaeological work even if granted.

All photos by R C Barker

2 Mansion Knoll

2.1 Overview
Mansion Knoll, on the face of it, appears to be a natural knoll of exposed Carboniferous sandstone surrounded by a crumbling drystone wall. It is thought that deposits later than this were removed by glacial and other action, but it has not been possible to determine the depth of the glaciers at various times to know if Mansion Knoll and a near-by knoll are remnants of the sculpting action of glaciers.

The forerunner of the current community archaeology group was the Dacre Pasture Project and they noted that there appeared to be a kerb edge round at least part of the base of the knoll. Later work found two cist-like structures, measuring approximately 1m by 0.5m in plan, in the mound, and exploratory work to the south-west of the surrounding wall uncovered a potential surface made up of small stones. This implies that the knoll itself could have at least been enhanced by man, maybe as early as the Bronze Age, as suggested by the form and location of the mound.

It is in the right position, off the crest of the hill but in a prominent position looking down into the valley.

The area was first surveyed and then two excavations were carried out, one on the mound itself and the other on the surrounding area.

The objective was to determine whether the knoll was natural, man-made or modified, and to obtain evidence as to the character, function and age of the knoll and any associated archaeological features in the surrounding area.

There are known Iron Age settlements/iron manufacturing sites and possible prehistoric rock carvings in adjacent fields.

There are no entrances in the surrounding wall and oral information obtained locally indicates that the knoll has been used as a rabbit warren in the second half of the twentieth century.

It is not known why or when the word ‘mansion’ was attached to the knoll.

The field in which the knoll is situated was ploughed in the 1940s as part of the war effort to produce food.
2.2 Location
The knoll itself is approximately centred on SE 18346038. Past projects have designated the knoll as field number 232, surrounded by field number 206. This numbering system is maintained by the current group. North is to the top of the figure below.

2.3 Resistivity Survey
A resistivity survey using a Geoscan RM15 was undertaken in June 2015 by Community Archaeologist Jon Kenny and the group over most of the knoll and the surrounding area. 3 20x20m squares at 1m intervals were done. The blue areas are due to having to dummy log various points. There are 3 main reasons for this:
- the remains of the wall surrounding the knoll- shown as a blue strip
- trees or exposed rock - shown as blue 'blobs' inside the wall.
- very dry areas , shown as a blue area outside the wall to the east.
The strips to the south east are likely to be evidence of the wartime ploughing.
It had been dry and hot for a period before the survey and so high resistivity reading were obtained, range from a few hundred to 1000. It was not easy to obtain readings inside the knoll or to the east
North is to the top of the picture.
The results indicated that as well as the knoll itself there were targets just to the south east of the knoll worth investigating and indicated on the picture above.

2.4 Excavation of the knoll

A 14x4m trench was put in right from the top of the knoll down to the wall area. The area was carefully cleaned down to bedrock at various points to ensure nothing had been missed. The soil was shallow apart from where there appeared to be a late dump of material at the base of knoll, ie the lower eastern end. There were no finds or features found.

As a result of this a secondary 2x2m trench was put in over the roots of a tree where there appeared to be a cist like feature, again no finds or features were found.

Photo 2 main trench down the knoll.

Photo 3 Detail of top of trench showing the tilt of the bedding plain and the fractured nature of the rock.
Photo 4 the ‘cist’ trench

What was found was highly fractured rock bedding plains, including areas where the rock had broken up into small stones but remained in place as a bed. This can give the appearance of a packed stone surface when first excavated down onto it. Because of the nature of the rock tree roots grow through the bedding plain and lift up sheets into various upstanding positions as can be seen in photo 4.

2.5 Excavation of the surround area.

Two 3x2m excavation trenches were put into the surrounding area, but away from the obvious plough marks picked up by the resistivity survey. One was over the area where there might be a kerb around the knoll and the other in an area of high resistivity readings to discover the cause.

As can be seen from photos 5 and 6 below both phenomena are caused by bedrock being very close to the surface.

Photo 5 trench over potential kerb area Photo 6 trench over high resistivity area

2.6 Overall conclusion

Taking the 2 excavations together the conclusion is that the features in and around the knoll are all natural and caused by glacial sculpture and the fracturing nature of the bedrock. The rock is very close to the surface, hence the high resistivity readings, and the way it breaks up can give a range of surfaces from flat and tilted slate like rocks, to close packed small stone almost metalled like surfaces. Roots growing through this rock will separate and lift the bedding plains into a variety of shapes, easily breaking through the thin top soil and can appear to be stoned lined features (eg cists).

The potential curb round the knoll is likely to be the result of war time plough, it being how close the plough came to the wall surrounding the knoll.

Whilst this is a disappointment it does answer an important question that there is not an important monument here, so there is no need to restrict farming practices. Also it confirms that the shape of other knolls are caused by glacial action.
3.1 Introduction
Previous field surveys had found a number of potential man made features in the North Western part of field 214. These included a potential round house remains, troughs and other unknown pits. In the adjacent fields to the north previous projects had found evidence of a prehistoric smithy and other iron workings from both the iron age and the medieval period when the land was owned by Fountains Abbey. This projects aim was to build on this information with the aim of seeing if the potential round house indeed a dwelling and if so of what age and to discover what the enigmatic pits were use for and their age.

3.2 Location
The area of interest is centred on SE1815 6020 and is shown in the fig below. Also shown is the relationship to mansion knoll and a stone platform found in previous years.

![Diagram showing the location of field 213 NW corner in its immediate landscape setting. Aerial photography is copyright © Google Earth 2015.](image)

3.2 Excavation of potential roundhouse.
A14x 4m trench was put in over the eastern half of the feature and close to the surface the southern end large flagstones appeared, bounded by earth fast rocks. At the northern end the area was a stone bank covered by different layers of hillwash. Both areas were cleaned up, recorded and then sections put through. The flagged area was set onto a sand and stone packing layer and had been made with some care. The stone bank area did not appear to be more than several layer of stone, although a distinct heated are was found and there was the occasional larger stone under the smaller stone bank. There was no finds or environmental samples (eg charcoal) found.

There were more upright stones similar (though smaller) just to the west of the trench and a2x2m trench was put over them. Whilst it was clear the stones had been set into the ground no flagging was found.
3.3 Conclusion
It is hard to draw any conclusions due to the lack of finds and dating evidence. The flagged area had been made with care but the platform could date from any age. The top part of the trench had been significantly amended over time and in the time available no obvious sequence could be discerned. The smaller trench might imply the flagged area had extended and flags later removed because of the position and nature of the earth fast stones. However there is another possible and more exciting conclusion. In other excavations the group has carried out in the Southwaite/Raygill/Studfold area of Nidderdale flagged floors at the entrance to or just inside roundhouses of late iron age/romano british date have been found. It is being considered that there is almost a Nidderdale and surround area type of round house. It could be that, rather than a platform for industry, the remains of a roundhouse was found. It would need more investigation over a larger area and longer time period to see if there was anything which could pin down the well-made flagged area. In addition in previous years another platform, unbounded by earth fast stones and no signs of any bank has been found in this field (marked on fig 3 above). A charcoal sample was found under this platform, unfortunately not in a very secure context, and did date to around 1000AD. Whilst it looks similar in terms of size of flags and sitting on a sandy layer it is probably unrelated.

3.4 Excavation of a trough like feature
Further to the west, near the field wall, is a hollow with an earthfast large boulder to the upslope side of it. It being below an iron-age smithy found sometime ago just the other side of the wall to the north of it, the potential roundhouse described above, it was decided to excavate it to try to discover its use and age. A 4x4m trench was put over the feature and excavated down to natural at the top and stones at the bottom.
The layers above the feature did imply that it could have been an enhanced hollow. The waterlogging and perhaps hint of clay might been it was clay lined in part. However it is highly unlikely to be prehistoric, at most a local field watering pond, and the wet weather meant the dig was abandoned once it became clear it was not of prehistoric significance. This is not to say it not worthy of further investigation in a hot dry season to see if more can be found out about it.

Photo11 trough like feature

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