

## **EARTHWATCH INSTITUTE FIELD REPORT**

**Project Title:** England's Hidden Kingdom

**Principal Investigator (s):** Dr Roger Martlew

**Position/Affiliations:** Lecturer in Archaeology, School of Continuing Education, The University of Leeds

**Research Site(s):**

Chapel House Wood, Conistone-with-Kilnsey, North Yorkshire UK;

National Grid Reference SD 975653; Lat. 54 deg. 5 min. North, Long. 2deg. 3min. West.

**Local Management Status of the Research Site(s):** National Park; Scheduled Ancient Monument

**Key Research Objectives:**

- Further recording of earthworks in the field system at Chapel House Wood
- Excavation of specific features within the field system in order to identify function and chronology
- Further detailed recording of the settlement area
- Investigation of the depositional history of sediment in a glacial meltwater gully

### **Data Collection and Results**

a) Give a concise account of the data you have collected during the past field season.

Accurate scaled plans of the field system were extended, covering an additional area of approximately 1500 square metres of field banks and building platforms. Fully documented excavation at specific sites recovered large quantities of charcoal, some animal bone, worked flint, metal artefacts and pottery. Sediment samples were collected from six test pits in the gully that crosses the research area.

b) What progress have you made towards achieving your original objectives?

This season has added significant and surprising information in support of the project objectives. We expect to be able to confirm our original suspicions that there is a much greater chronological depth to this area than had previously been recognised. Surprising evidence requires the complete re-interpretation of one site in the research area, with exciting wider implications.

Some issues, however, remained unresolved. In particular, the examination of part of the settlement complex made only slight progress towards the identification of its function –

but it may be that the lack of artefactual evidence from this area is significant, rather than merely the result of poor preservation. Preliminary investigations in the gully that crosses the research area suggest that further work is needed to assess the balance between natural and human influences on deposition in this feature.

c) Please provide a summary of your results (even if they are preliminary).

The settlement and field system at Chapel House Wood had previously been ascribed to the Romano-British period. Our work has now recovered evidence to extend this to both earlier and later periods. We have demonstrated that a feature in the field system thought to be a limekiln is a wood-drying kiln, which may relate to Medieval or even post-Medieval management of woodland in the research area. We have also demonstrated that what was thought to be a hut-circle is a late prehistoric ritual site, belonging perhaps to the Iron Age or early Roman period. It is the first example of this type of structure to be identified in the Pennine region, and is comparable to sites in the Lake District of Cumbria about sixty miles to the north-west.

A significant natural feature crossing the research area is a glacial meltwater gully, a dry valley that descends the hillside in a series of steps. Our investigation this year has shown that at least one of these steps is an artificial feature, resulting from the construction of a substantial stone revetment. The precise purpose of this has yet to be determined, and laboratory analysis over the winter will help to determine the nature and origins of the sediments that accumulated behind it.

Continuing work on the settlement complex has yet to confirm the function of the enclosures under investigation. The few artefacts found this year complement the assemblage from 2003 – heavily abraded fragments of pottery of the Roman period and some iron nails. The impression is that we are dealing with the farmyard area of the settlement, with scraps of garbage that have been cleaned out from domestic areas. Detailed survey work has identified and recorded potential house sites, which on the surface are comparable with excavated examples dating to the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, and these will provide the focus for next year's work.

The investigation of the settlement complex continues to suggest that we are dealing with a late Roman farmstead that may have both earlier and later usage; evidence from the field system backs this up. The hypothesis to be tested next year is that the settlement actually did continue into the post-Roman period – the so-called 'Dark Age' that is the primary focus of this research project.

### **Significance/Benefits of Research**

a) What is/are the significance/benefits of your research at the following levels?

- local (in the area of the research site)

After at least 60 years of neglect the archaeology of the local area is finally being brought into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We can almost guarantee that any investigation using current techniques is going to bring surprises, and this year's work is no exception.

- national

Archaeological research in the upland areas of Britain is always challenging, and rarely possible with current development-related funding. The opportunity to investigate a complex archaeological landscape on this scale is therefore unique in England.

- international

The historic landscapes of the Yorkshire Dales are among some of the best preserved in Europe, but due to the lack of recent research they are poorly understood, inaccessible and inadequately presented to wider audiences. Our work is significantly improving levels of understanding, and contributing to the development of management strategies for limestone uplands where archaeological remains provide an important environmental asset.

b) How do your findings contribute to issues of sustainability?

Issues of sustainability have risen to the top of the agenda following the Foot and Mouth outbreak a few years ago. Hill farming has been the main industry in the area, but tourism is now taking the lead as agriculture comes under increasing economic pressure. Our research project is collaborating with the Yorkshire Dales Landscape Research Trust, which is actively developing plans to promote the unique heritage of the Dales to support sustainable diversification.

### **Dissemination of Results**

The research project is at a relatively early stage, so results are being disseminated through interim reports to bodies such as the Council for British Archaeology (primarily through its regional newsletter *Forum*), the Yorkshire Archaeological Society and local interest groups. I have been invited to give a presentation at a conference organised by the Yorkshire Dales National Park, with an expected audience of c. 200.