

Appleby Archaeology March 2010

Mark Graham from Grampus Heritage and Training Ltd was the speaker at the March meeting of Appleby Archaeology Group. The title of the talk was *Unlocking Hidden Heritage - Archaeological survey in Bassenthwaite Water Catchment*.

He began by outlining the role of Grampus Heritage and Training Ltd, a non-profit making organisation based in Wigton. Since 1997 they have been involved in the management and promotion of European projects concerned with culture, heritage, archaeology and the environment. They provides training opportunities to UK students, recent graduates and young workers funded by the Leonardo da Vinci Training Programme. One example of training he mentioned was the European Archaeology Skills Exchange, which offers a six week placement for students to join excavations in counties such as Iceland, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Cyprus.

Mark continued by describing the Unlocking Hidden Heritage Projec. which is one of twenty two projects in Bassenthwaite Reflections which is funded by the Lottery, and which aims to celebrate the cultural landscape of the Bassenthwaite Lake water catchment area. The Hidden Heritage Project hopes to increase understanding and appreciation of the historic environment and involves a series of landscape surveys. Grampus Heritage, the Lake District National Park Authority and the National Trust consulted people in the local community and selected the areas to be surveyed, The project started in January 2007 and was originally intended to run for three years but this period has now been extended.

The project teams are made up of community groups and volunteers, archaeologists and representatives from the National Trust and the LDNP. An area of 37,000 hectares around Bassenthwaite, Thirlmere and Derwentwater was identified for surveying. The surveys involve walking specific areas to identify and record historic features and more recent evidence of man's impact on the environment. Community volunteers, who work in teams, are trained in what to look for, the use of equipment and recording methods. A programme of archival and documentary research is ongoing. Many features have been identified and added to the records. More detailed surveys, which include geophysical assessments are undertaken on specific sites.

Mark then spoke in more detail on some of the surveys. In 2007 300 hectares of woodland

around Derwentwater were surveyed and 150 features were identified. These included charcoal pits, boundary walls, track ways, cairns, sawpits, quarries and foot prints (outlines) of buildings, including a possible mill or bloom smithy, and a long house or barn as well as evidence of water and woodland management. In the same year 40-50 cairns were identified in Whittas Park. These could indicate bronze age activity but further investigation is required to confirm this.

The nearby Caermote Fort was surveyed in more detail. The fort was mentioned in the first major tourist guide to The Lakes written in 1778 by Thomas West and his description is still valid today. Interest in the site has persisted over the years. Plans were drawn in 1852, 1902 and 1957 and a number of trenches have been opened, most recently in 1955. Caermote is the site of two Roman forts, which look down the valley of Bassenthwaite Lake towards Keswick and would have been well positioned to control access to the Northern Lakes. A topographic survey was conducted to record all visible features associated with the forts (banks, ditches, pits, depressions, linear features) and a geophysical survey using a magnetometer was carried out across the scheduled site and in a small part of the surrounding area. The findings indicated an initial turf and timber fort of 1.75 hectares with four gates and four roads leading out. Further investigation will be needed to discover the routes these roads followed. A smaller Hadrianic fort of 0.5 hectares lies in the northwest corner of the larger fort. The surveys of the smaller fort showed a road running north/south with possible buildings on either side suggesting 'permanent' occupation. The fieldwork at Caermote, combined with the desk-based research, has added to our understanding of the layout of the forts at Caermote and the possible functions they served.

In 2008 surveying was undertaken along the ridge from Castlerigg and Bleaberry Fell towards High Seat and Armboth. Finds included previously unrecorded sheepfolds, incomplete enclosures, boundary markers and possible sheilings. These may be of Viking origin and are similar to some found in Iceland. More detailed surveys were carried out to find the 'lost' medieval manor at Castlerigg and a possible second stone circle but instead of a manor or stone circle the surveys revealed a Roman camp.

In 2009 the lakeside at Bassenthwaite was surveyed near a possible deserted medieval village in the vicinity of the pre-Norman church of St Begas. Trackways and signs of drainage were readily identified but there was no evidence of a medieval village, although it is possible that this evidence has been ploughed out over the centuries. Evidence of a bloomery was found on the lakeside.

The project has been extended and Mark mentioned two areas for investigation in 2010. The floods of November 2009 have exposed some archaeology and it is planned to undertake surveys around Papcastle. A possible prehistoric site, where a long trackway and several large stones were found on a flat topped hill, is to be examined. The land around the stones is clear of vegetation and the setting is dramatic, overlooking lake and fells, and suggesting, perhaps, that these stones were significant to our ancestors.

Mark answered questions from the floor before being thanked for his interesting and stimulating talk.

The next talk will be on Tuesday 13th April at 7.30pm, in the Supper Room, Market Hall, when Paul Frodsham Historic Environment Officer North Pennines AONB Partnership will speak on *The Prehistory of the North Pennines*