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3

R2R Project Discoveries

3.1 Introduction

By June 2006 the training days were completed, survey teams assembled, leaders selected and geographical patches allocated. The daunting nature of the task ahead – to walk over and record features covering some 70 square kilometres of often challenging ground, was eclipsed by an overriding sense of excitement and enthusiasm. No one at that point, however, was quite sure what lay before us and few anticipated that we would both exceed our target and record in excess of 3,000 sites of archaeological significance.

The teams turned out in all weathers and seasons and sustained their commitment as the weeks rolled into months and then into years. We covered stretches of hill and valley that were sometimes easy-going. On fine days it was sheer delight to be out enjoying the wild beauty of the landscape with like-minded companions. Frequently however the ground was hard going – wet, slippery, steep, rocky or covered with spiky bracken stubble. The wind and cold often added to make such days a real challenge.

But something motivated us all to keep going and successfully complete the task in hand. The excitement of discovery was one factor as was the opportunity to walk in new places; with the cooperation of local landowners it was a privilege to explore sections of farmland well away from rights of way and open access land. Perhaps more significant though was that magical sense of making a tangible link with people from the past through the remains that were found. A link that had been lost over time was being restored. Glimpses of past lives were made – sometimes hazy, sometimes clear, though more often mysterious and confusing. More generations than can be imagined had moulded the landscape in different ways at different times and left their mark, and we were rediscovering this and piecing it together.

In presenting the discoveries made in the course of the project we will therefore focus on the people of the past – this is, after all, what archaeology is about. Rather than catalogue the features in relation to site-type or era, we will concentrate on the human activity that the sites represent and what they tell us about those who lived and worked the landscape.

Prior to the start of the project some sections of the parishes had already been surveyed by the National Trust. Aerial photographs had also been taken. It was

Map 3 (*Right*) The 343 archaeological sites in the Duddon Valley recorded in the Lake District Historic Environment Record before the R2R project began

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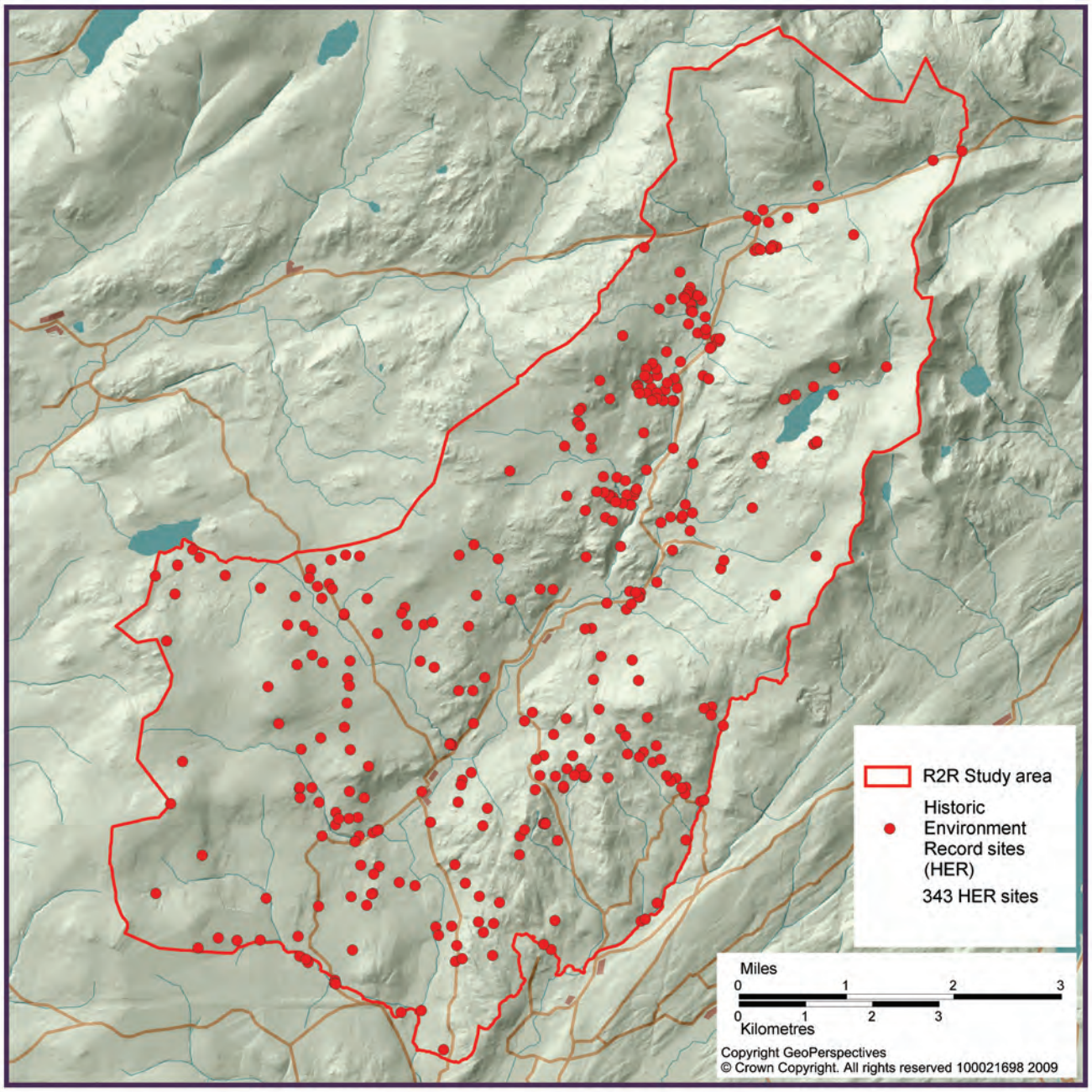

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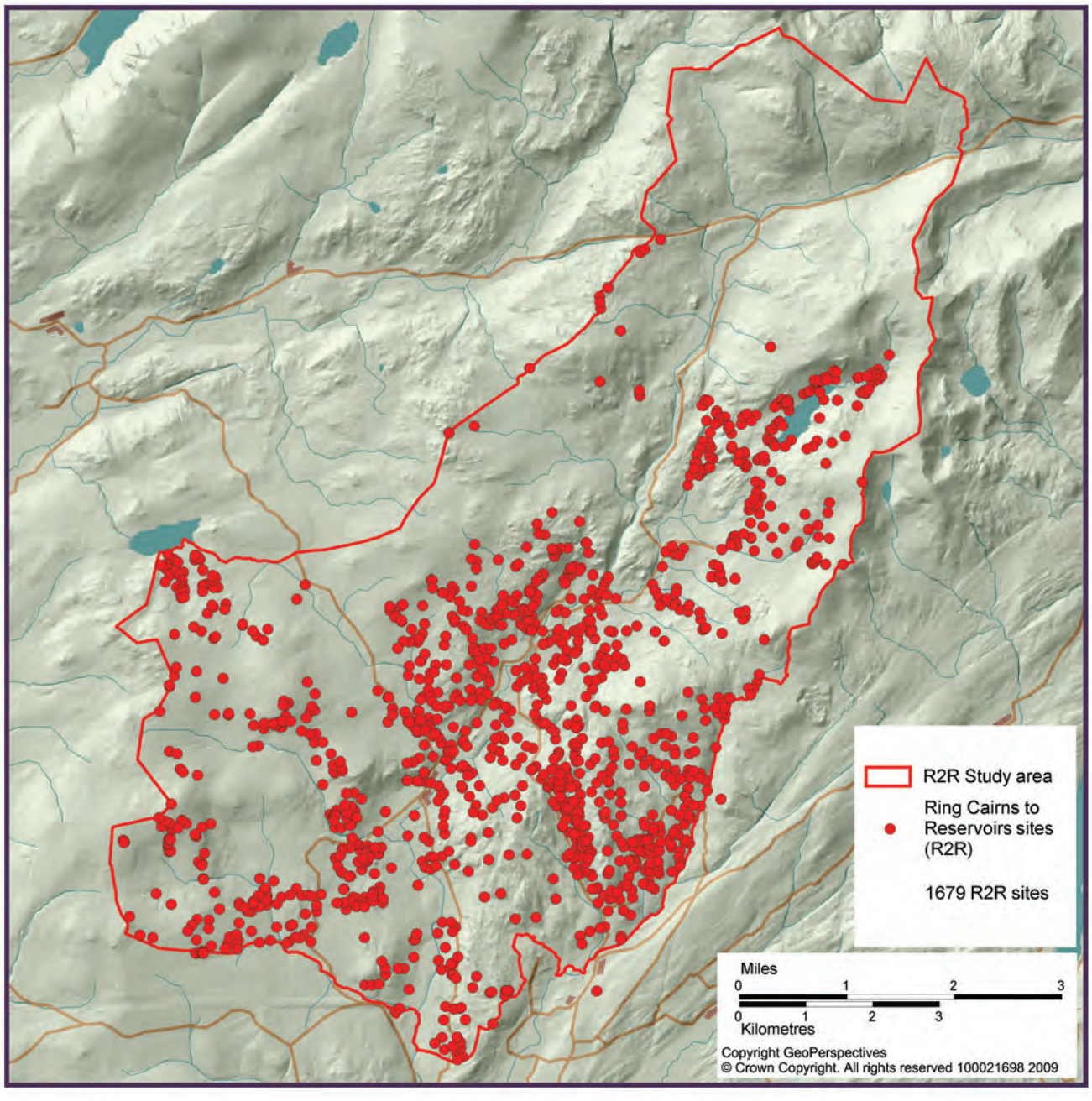

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clear from both of these sources that many additional unrecorded sites existed. The number of new features identified surpassed all expectations, however, and further fuelled the enthusiasm of all involved. Maps 3 and 4 illustrate the density of new sites in contrast to previously recorded sites. We can also see an illustration of the efficacy of the field-walking when we compare the sites visible from an aerial photograph with the sites recorded on the ground (compare Aerial Photo 1 with Map 5).

Map 4 (*Left*) The 1,679 most significant archaeological sites recorded by the R2R project. Note that many sites overlap at this resolution, and that a total of over 3,000 previous unrecorded sites has been logged by R2R, some of which have been combined for presentational simplicity.

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Aerial photo 1 A view of Pikeside Farm in the western part of the study area, looking south. The farm buildings appear at the bottom of the picture. This area contains evidence of much past human activity, but although some is clearly visible from the air, many features are only apparent when viewed on the ground (see Map 5) (© English Heritage NMR)

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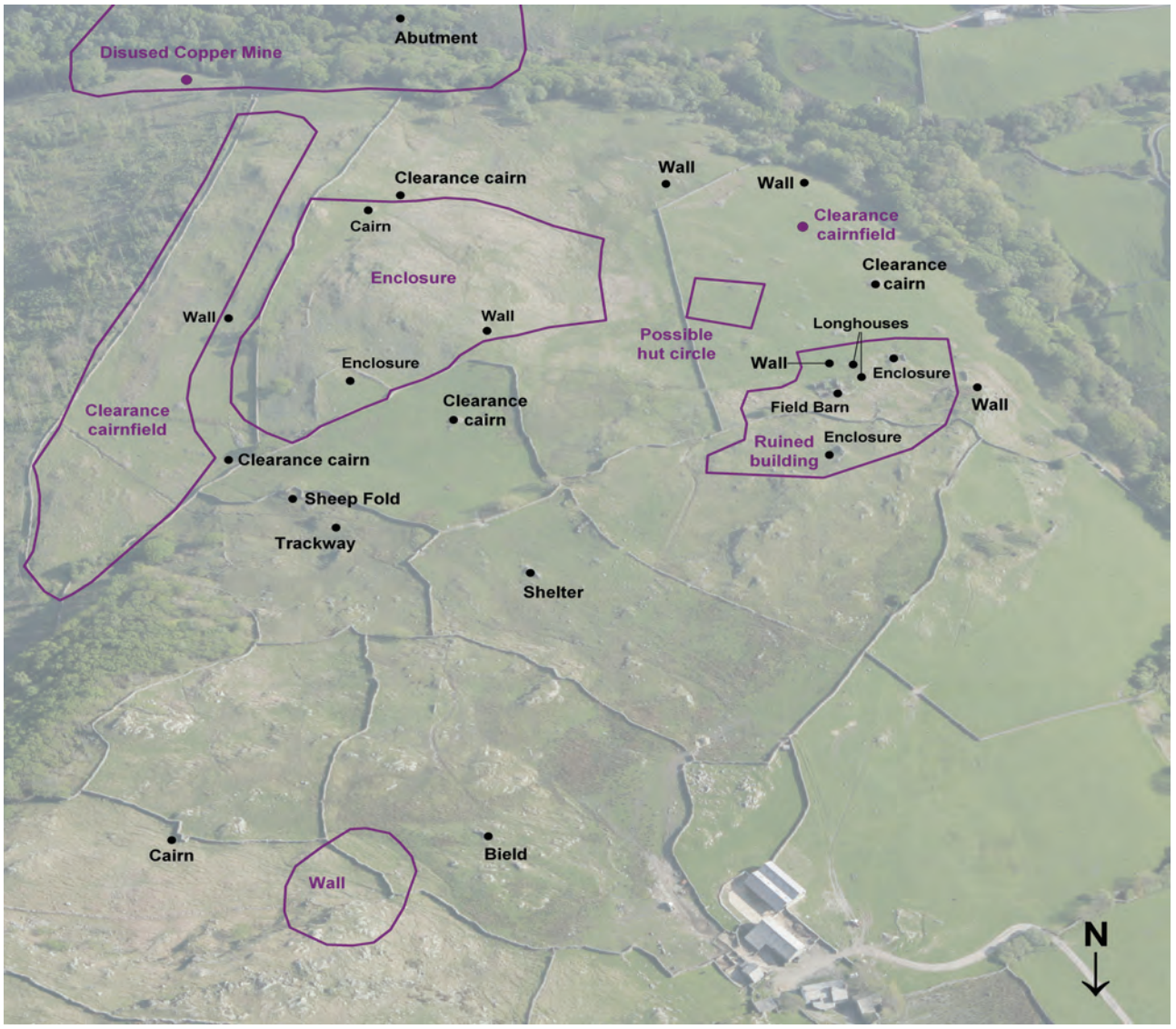

Map 5 The same area depicted in the aerial photograph opposite, but with all known archaeological features labelled. Particularly important features include the foundations of two medieval longhouses and many clearance cairns, indicating that the area has probably been farmed for at least 1000 years.

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3.2 Where People Lived

As the autumn advanced Asmund wanted more warmth, and was constantly telling Grettir to rub his back hard. It was the custom in those days for people to have large rooms with long fires in them in their houses, where men sat by the fire in the evenings on benches, sleeping afterwards at the side away from the fires. By day the women carded their wool there.

From *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*

Examples of clearly identifiable prehistoric dwellings are rare so it was not surprising that we recorded few verifiable examples as part of the survey. At this time most were built of wood and roofed with turf or other natural materials that have long since perished. Therefore contemporary dwellings are conspicuous by their absence within a landscape that appears to reveal so much evidence of prehistoric farming and ritual activity. Also in this region such structures tended to be circular. Consequently any examples that were partially constructed in stone are hard to distinguish from other forms of circular prehistoric stone feature such as clearance and ring cairns. A few possible examples were however identified. One of these was the remains of a roundhouse near Devoke Water which is 7.5 metres in diameter and has an attached walled enclosure (Photo 8). Also, near the Park Head Road the remains of several circular prehistoric structures were recorded. Both of these examples are located at an altitude of approximately 300 metres and could well have been occupied during the Bronze Age when a period of warmer temperatures made living at this altitude possible. We know that the climate deteriorated markedly around 1,250 BC and this would have forced people to abandon such settlement.

Fortunately an archaeological excavation at Stephenson Ground, located within the project area, took place in the 1990s and provides us with valuable additional information about dwellings from this and later eras (see Chapter 4.1). Here the remains of a Bronze Age roundhouse (Photo 60) were identified during the latter stages of an excavation of a medieval structure. There was nothing on the ground prior to this to indicate the presence of the house. One wonders how many more 'invisible' structures we

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Photo 8 Remains of a prehistoric roundhouse and enclosure near Devoke Water

have walked over in our survey! What the excavations revealed were the post holes that supported the roof enclosing an area estimated to be 10 metres across, with internal features including a fire hearth and shallow storage pits. The many sherds of Bronze Age pottery and flint tools found within led to the conclusion that the house would have been a permanent rather than a seasonal dwelling.

Whilst evidence regarding prehistoric dwellings is thin, much richer evidence was found for the early medieval period. At Stephenson Ground the information gleaned from the excavation of a longhouse of this era helps bring to life a number of similar structures recorded at other locations during the survey (Photos 9 and 61). Longhouses may have been introduced with the settlement of Norse populations in the area during the tenth century AD. Although dated to between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, the Stephenson Ground longhouse was found to be similar to other examples found on the Isle of Man, in Western Scotland and Orkney – areas similarly settled by Norse populations. The excavation revealed superb glimpses of the people's lives. For example the house was built with an adjoining byre so that cattle could be brought under the same roof as the family for their mutual benefit, a symbiosis providing warmth for the people and protection for the livestock. A water drainage system had been constructed to ensure that water from the fell side was channelled away thus keeping

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Photo 9 The previously excavated longhouse at Stephenson Ground

Photo 10 High Crag Hall ruined farmstead

the floor of the house dry. There was evidence of furniture and fittings fixed directly into the floor – not so much a design feature but rather a necessity as the floor sloped downhill!

During our survey we recorded many newly-identified examples of longhouses, thus providing additional information regarding the extent of early medieval settlement in the two parishes. At an abandoned group of structures at Pike Side the remains of several longhouses were recorded which represented a small community or succession of dwellings. This site became the subject of interest and research by the group that identified it (see Chapter 4.2).

Other similarly fine examples are located at High Close, Lad How (Fig. 5), Long House Close, by Walna Scar Road and on the lower slopes of Caw

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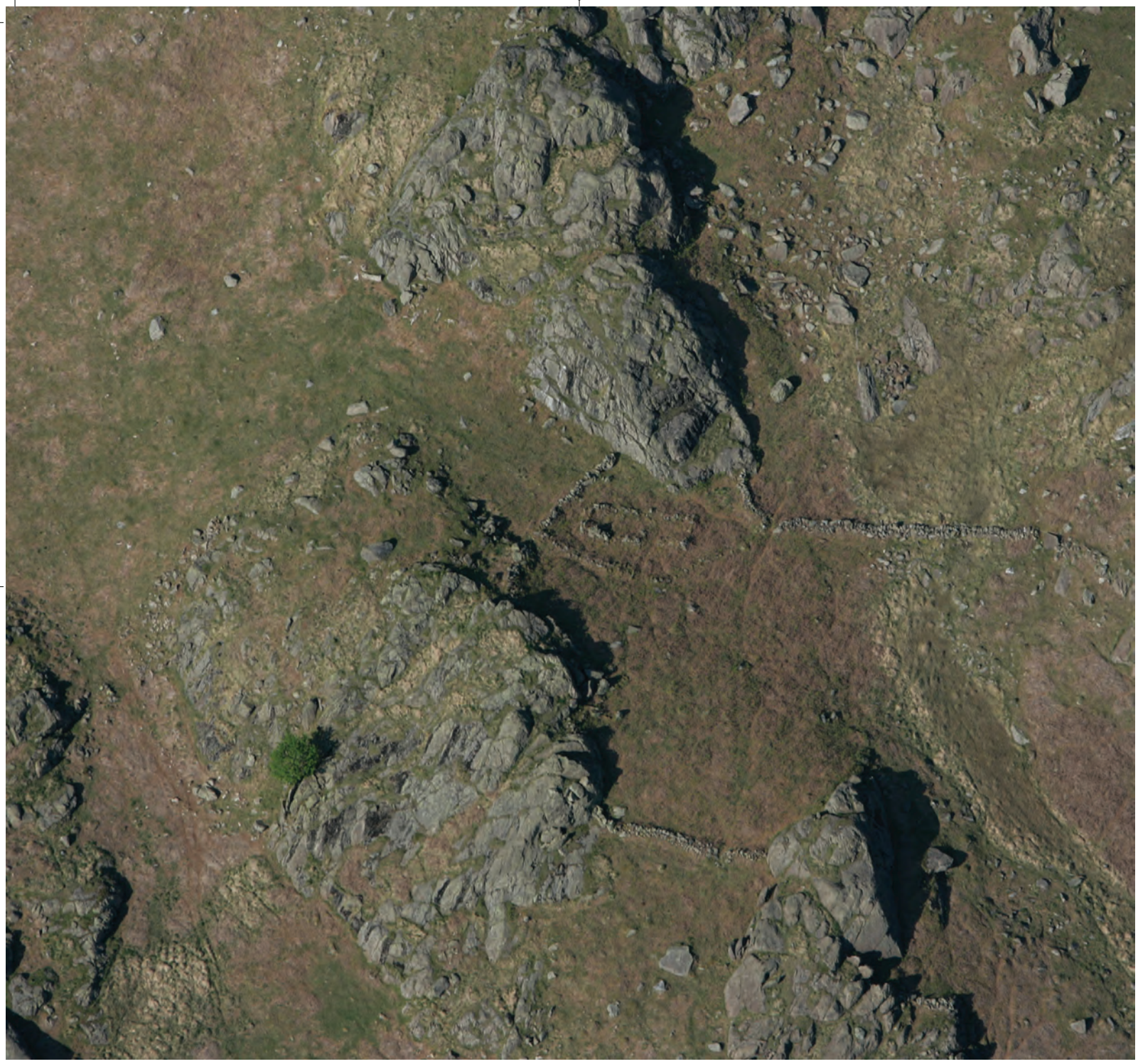
Photo 11 Bowscales ruined farmstead

above Seathwaite. The longhouse at Tongue House High Close is especially evident in the aerial photograph (Aerial Photo 2).

Moving to the later medieval period, the Stephenson Ground excavation revealed an unusual double-walled dwelling with cobbled exterior floor. This house dated from the troubled times of the fourteenth century which may account for its location, being well hidden from all directions. Two later structures, one identified as sixteenth century, were also studied and recorded as shielings (temporary seasonal dwellings used by farmers while stock grazed the upland pastures in the warmer months). This farming practice, known as transhumance, was commonplace in mountain areas and was practised in parts of Europe until relatively recently.

We identified many fine examples of abandoned post-medieval farmsteads such as High Craghall and Bowscales (see Photos 10 and 11). We can only speculate on the reason for the abandonment of such houses. Many of these farmstead buildings include outbuildings and farmyards whose functions can be clearly identified. At the ruined farmstead of Gaitscale that was occupied between 1686 and 1771 the farmhouse, barns, sheep pens and old field boundaries are all visible. Other former houses were converted to barns and their domestic character lost. Occasionally well-preserved examples of very old farms remain



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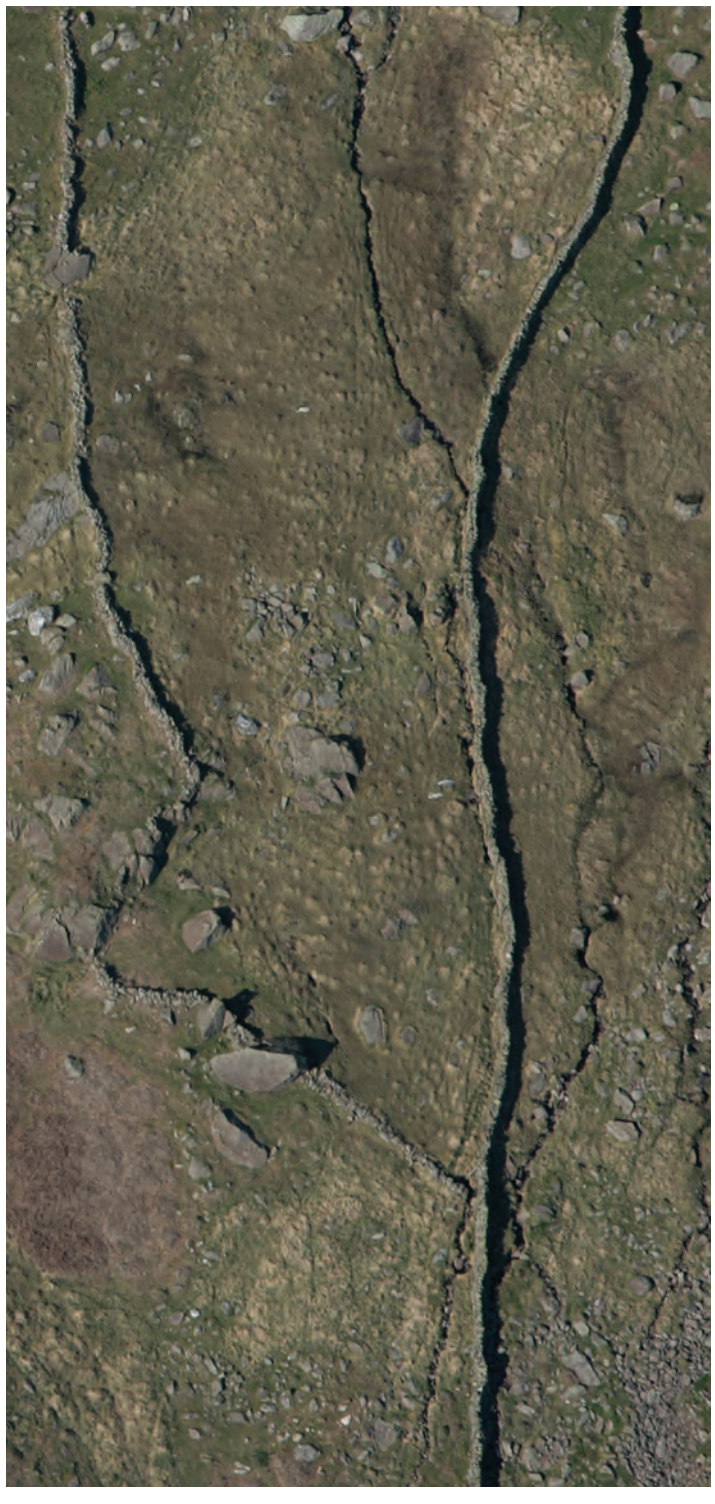

standing. For example, Hutton, which has been barely modified over the centuries and, although unoccupied, the structure is well maintained by its current owner.

We should of course not ignore the many farmsteads dating from the 1600s that are still lived in today and retain many original features, such as Dale Head, Picthall Ground and Tongue House. As we move beyond 1,500 AD we begin to be able to research the history of some of these through documentary evidence. For example, the farmstead of Sella has been in the same family since the sixteenth century.

It should also be mentioned that the high status hunting lodge of Frith Hall served a number of functions over the years but was certainly occupied over several generations.

Aerial photo 2 Remains of a probably medieval longhouse (*centre left*) situated in Tongue House High Close. The oblong rectangular shape of the longhouse is enclosed by a wall on three sides (the fourth being a rock outcrop), and other walls that may be part of the farmstead can be seen further to the right and in the centre foreground. A much more recent post-medieval wall is seen running from top to bottom on the far right. (© English Heritage. NMR)

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3.3 How People Travelled About

And now you would never know
There was once a road through the woods
Before they planted the trees.
It is underneath the coppice and heath,
And the thin anemones.

From Rudyard Kipling's 'The Road Through the Woods'

The two parishes reveal fascinating evidence of the routes used by people to move around the landscape on foot, horseback and in horse-drawn vehicles. Many of these routes are enshrined as current rights of way. They link each home and farmstead with the wider community – neighbours, churches, grazing areas and of course the separate valleys themselves. Additional ancient track-ways whose original purpose and usage has been lost in time criss-cross the landscape. Most are well above the level of the valley floor which, prior to land drainage, would have been boggy and impenetrable.

Some evidence was found for marker stones indicating routes that have now disappeared. Marker stones and walls were certainly used to denote parish boundaries for example on Shop Bridge, Broughton Mills, the marker stone is clearly engraved with the parish names (Photo 12) and on Buckbarrow the old parish wall line is still visible (Photo 13).

In some cases the route-ways are now seen as little more than well-worn or sunken paths. Others, however, are solid and well-engineered tracks such as the 'Parsons' or 'Priests' path that winds from the present day Duddon Valley road to the slopes above Stonestar and then on to Broughton Mills (Photo 14). Although we can only speculate regarding the age of this impressive construction it is interesting to note that the path leads to one of the most archaeo-logically-rich areas surveyed as part of the project. Another track at Low Hall is paved and was probably the main route used before the current road was constructed.

Photo 12 The parish boundary marker on Shop Bridge, Broughton Mills

Photo 13 The wall that marks the parish boundary high on Buckbarrow

Most track-ways are wide enough for packhorses or horse-drawn vehicles. Within the field systems there are numerous examples of delightful walled green-roads or bridleways. Among the quarry workings a range of paths and tracks throw light on the routes taken by the workers to access the quarries and to move the slate or minerals. In places such as the quarry track to Stephenson Ground the remains of sled runs are etched into the stone outcrops over which the routes pass, revealing that often sleds were more efficient than wheels for transporting loads over rough ground. We also recorded a number of peat tracks including one leading from a cove below Buck Pike near Longhouse Close with its cobbled surface still visible in places.

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Photo 14 The well constructed trackway that winds up to Stonestar from the Duddon Valley known as the 'Priests' or 'Parsons' Path

The old maps reveal that many of these 'roads' have names that indicate they were the main thoroughfares in bygone times. For example, Gowther Barrow Road and Park Head Road (Photo 15). We could speculate regarding the origins of these names. Maybe the 'Park' of Park Head Road dates back to the land's use as a medieval deer park. Other track names remain in common use, such as Walna Scar Road linking the Duddon Valley with Coniston as well as the quarries that bear its name. A few footpaths are also named and again the name hints at its former use. For example, a bridleway that leaves the Duddon Valley below Frith Hall and winds its way over the hillside to Broughton Mills is termed Gauger Gate on the OS map *c.* 1850. A Gauger was the name for a collector of taxes in the eighteenth and

Photo 15 The old Park Head Road that linked Broughton Mills with Seathwaite

nineteenth centuries, often associated with the tax on whisky. We could imagine that this was the route taken by this probably unpopular person between the Blacksmiths Arms and Frith Hall when it served as a hostelry and hunting lodge.

At the head of the Duddon Valley we noted the well documented section of the Roman road, still visible between Cockley Beck and Black Hall. This was the military route that linked the Roman fort of Galava at Ambleside with Hardknott Fort of Mediobogdum, situated just outside our survey area.

Where paths and tracks cross the streams and rivers of the valleys a variety of bridges are found. We recorded several attractive pack-horse bridges, for example, at Bleabeck, Lind End, Beckfoot and well-known Birks Bridge (Photo 16). Closer examination

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Photo 16 (*Above*) Birks Bridge – built as a pack horse bridge

Photo 17 (*Left*) The slab bridge that crosses Dunnerdale Beck on the track to Scrithwaite Farm

Photo 18 (*Opposite*) The stepping stones known as Crosby Bridge across the Duddon River above Ulpha

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of the underside of many of these, such as Bleabeck Bridge, revealed that they had originally been narrower and subsequently widened sufficiently for carts to cross.

In other locations large but simple slabs have been used to create bridges. A good example is situated on the path that crosses Dunnerdale Beck near Scrithwaite Farm (Photo 17). Stepping stones are another surprisingly common method of getting from bank to bank on foot. The sturdy stepping stones of unknown date at Wallowbarrow, Fickle Steps, High Hurst and The Low can still be used today when the river level is not too high (Photo 18).