

Newsletter 9

March 2025

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**We are a local
voluntary group
exploring the
hidden aspects of
our rich heritage
spanning thousands
of years.**



BEYOND THE WALL

Welcome to our ninth Newsletter. Many thanks to all those whose have provided articles: Phil Bowyer, Andy Curtis, Mike Powell & Lorraine Clay.

Wishing you all a very happy New Year and looking forward to some great archaeology in 2025.

Andy Curtis

Membership

Membership for the coming year runs from 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026.

Our subscription rates are: £15 single, £20 couple, £5 students or on benefits.

All our subscriptions go to the cause of furthering our commitment to community archaeology.

AGM & Membership Renewal details will be announced by separate email.



New panel of prehistoric rockart at Wallridge uncovered in 2024

Does Archaeology Matter?

By Mike Powell

This is not a trick question nor am I trying to be facetious. It is just that I suspect those of us who pursue our passion for archaeology, either as amateurs or professionals, are sometimes guilty of not spending enough time thinking about the deeper significance of what we do. As in other fields, it often takes the insight of a perceptive outsider to reach into the heart of things and bring into focus what is most fundamental. In the case of archaeology one such observer is the poet and essayist Kathleen Jamie. Aside from being one of Britain's finest living poets, Jamie is currently Scotland's National Poet or *Makar*, she has also produced several books of lucid essays exploring themes relating to nature, climate change, travel, and human culture. Her 2019 collection "*Surfacing*" includes several thought-provoking pieces about archaeology.

The essay "*In Quinhagak*" begins with Jamie's fascination with the Inuit artefacts, brought home by 19th century whalers, she has encountered in UK museums. It goes on to narrate how that interest led to a 4000-mile journey to Alaska where she joined an archaeological dig excavating a 500-year-old Inuit village on the shores of the Bering Sea. The site was discovered when rising sea levels and melting permafrost caused by climate change resulted in hundreds of artefacts being eroded from the tundra. These were collected by the inhabitants of the nearby modern village of Quinhagak, an isolated settlement with a population of around 700 mostly *Yup'ik* people.

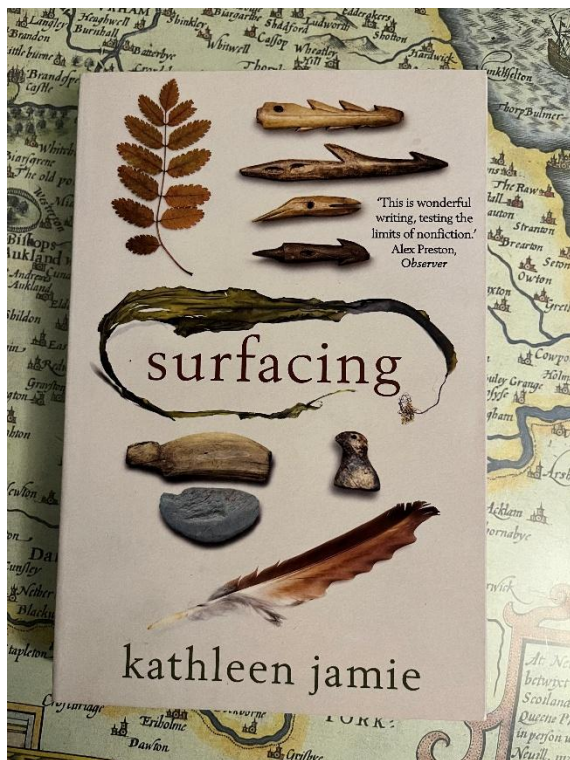
Although only 500 years old, the dig site was pre-contact. The people who had lived there were hunter-gathers who existed before the arrival of western missionaries who started a process of suppressing the indigenous culture. As one of the archaeologists remarked, the site represented '*a survival of the Palaeolithic*'. Initially there was some resistance to the idea of calling in the archaeologists, mainly amongst some of the elders of the *Yup'ik* settlement who felt that the dwelling places of their ancestors and their belongings should be left in peace. Nevertheless, the community leaders eventually decided to seek help with the excavating the site. They were motivated by a concern that the younger people in the village knew nothing about their heritage and they saw this as an opportunity to help them recover some of it.

By the time Jamie arrived, the dig had progressed through several seasons and the archaeological team had established good relations with the people of Quinhagak. At the end of each season the team organised a '*show and tell*' session in which the archaeologists displayed their best finds of arrow-heads, hunting tools, harpoon parts, gaming pieces, darts, wooden dolls, and other artefacts. Jamie writes movingly about how a group of *Yup'ik* elders sat around over cartons of fruit juice and snacks handling the artefacts and discussing in the *Yup'ik* language what they were and how their ancestors would have used them. A journey of reconnection for them and an education for the archaeologists who listened carefully via an interpreter. But it was not only the elders of the community who were interested in what the archaeologists had uncovered. Jamie quotes Warren Jones (*Yup'iks* have

adopted American names), the president of the village corporation, talking about the impact of the dig on young people.

“Since the dig began, kids from the village are hunting, carving again. They’re working on the dig, learning archaeology. learning their own traditions. We’re sending more kids to college. Is that a coincidence? I don’t think so.”

Obviously it is a long way, both in terms of geographical and cultural distance, from the Inuit people of Alaska to the folk of Northumberland but I do think it is possible to draw some parallels with the value archaeology holds for us in our own very different society. I am not suggesting that the good people of Tynedale are likely to start fashioning quern stones to grind corn again or send more of their kids off to Newcastle to study archaeology or anthropology as a result of learning about local archaeological discoveries. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that archaeology brings us into direct physical contact with the everyday lives of our ancestors in a way no other approach to studying the past can achieve. It enhances our awareness of the wide range of practical, artistic, and cultural skills they needed in order to survive and thrive in environments that were often challenging. This is a significant element of our cultural heritage and an appreciation of it enriches our lives and gives us a stronger sense of who we are and where we come from. This, surely, is why archaeology matters and I believe we should consciously acknowledge the fact. Doing so will not only make us better archaeologists but also cause us to be mindful that we have an important cultural duty to share and communicate our discoveries as widely as possible.



The last word goes to Kathleen Jamie quoting Rick, the lead archaeologist on the Quinhagak dig:

“‘This is not about treasure. This is about cultural resilience.’

It’s about saying, this is yours. Everything you feared you’d lost, or never even knew you had. Look it’s here. It’s back.”

Kathleen Jamie, *“Surfacing”*. Available in paperback from Sort Of Books, 2020

Hadrian's Wall Wetlands Landscape Recovery Project

By Phil Bowyer

Northumberland National Park's recently established Hadrian's Wall Wetlands Landscape Recovery Project (HWWLRP) is a major DEFRA funded environmental programme covering the extensive Haltwhistle Burn catchment area. It is one of 52 such current schemes nationally on a 2-year initial roll-out with a view to laying the foundations for a 20-year long term funded programme. It is also the only one of the 52 to be also funded by Historic England. Our community archaeology group is specifically designated within the project description and has a place on the project's official 'Partners Committee', for which I recently attended its inaugural meeting.

At this meeting the Historic England representative emphasised that they were seeking to reinforce the need for the historic environment to be recognised as an integral part of such Landscape Recovery programmes nationally, and that he was hoping that HWWLRP would establish a 'good practice' model for such historic environment elements to be incorporated.

From the outset NOWTAG officers have been working closely with the project's Engagement Officer, Nick Pepper, to develop a practical historic environment programme for community volunteers. With Nick, we have designed and delivered initial 'taster day' events combining a presentation and hands-on group work sessions at The Sill with guided group visits to sites at Greenlee, previously surveyed by National Park volunteers and NOWTAG members in 2022. We will shortly be delivering further elements of our planned volunteer engagement programme. Following the partners meeting, Nick and I had detailed discussion of our proposals with a team of Historic England officers, who were very supportive, and also suggested further specific elements that could be included with their direct support. The ongoing programme of training and fieldwork activities will be fully open to NOWTAG members, and will constitute a significant part of NOWTAG programme of members' activities. As soon as details are finalised we will inform you, and invite bookings for participation.

The NOWTAG team liaising with HWWLRP include Andy Curtis, Martin Green, Mike Powell and Ian Cooper. We are well aware that the opportunity to play a significant role in such a project is a mark of the quality of work done by NOWTAG members over the previous decade or more. We are also pleased that our involvement is a recognition of the value and importance of properly organised, volunteer-led, community archaeology. We also believe that the engagement of our members in this project will benefit us all, both individually, and as a group.

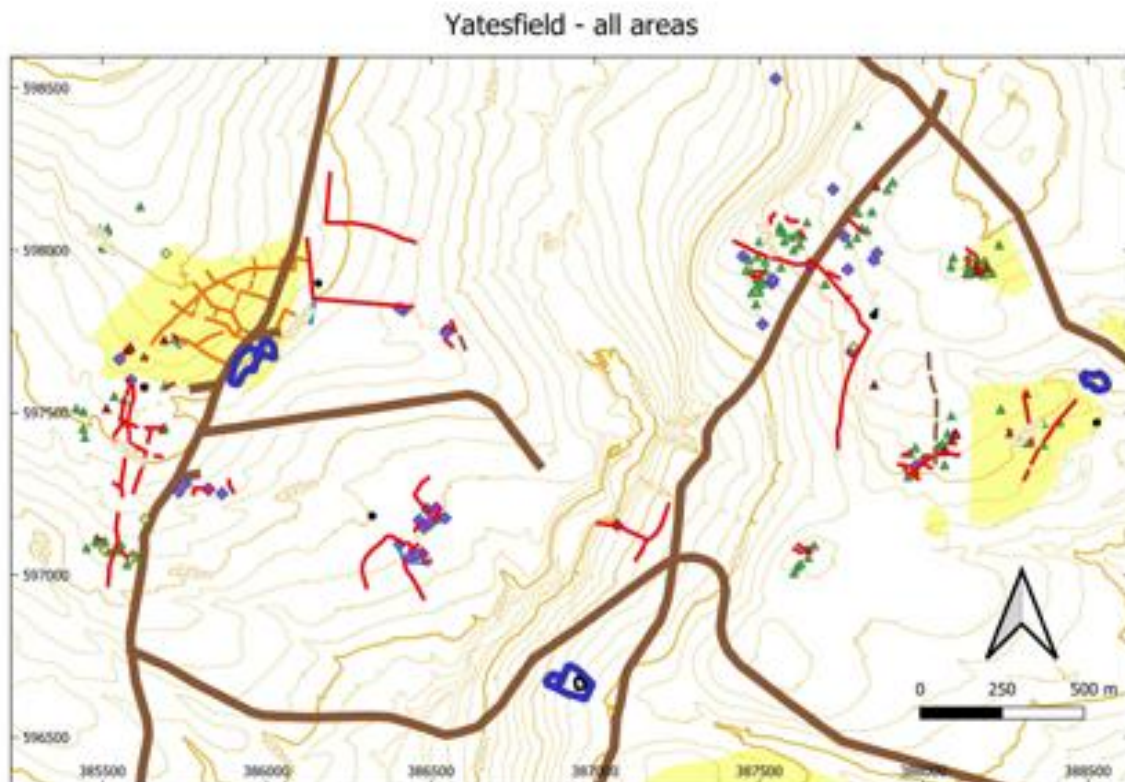
Redesdale Archaeology Group landscape surveys on the Otterburn Ranges

By Phil Bowyer

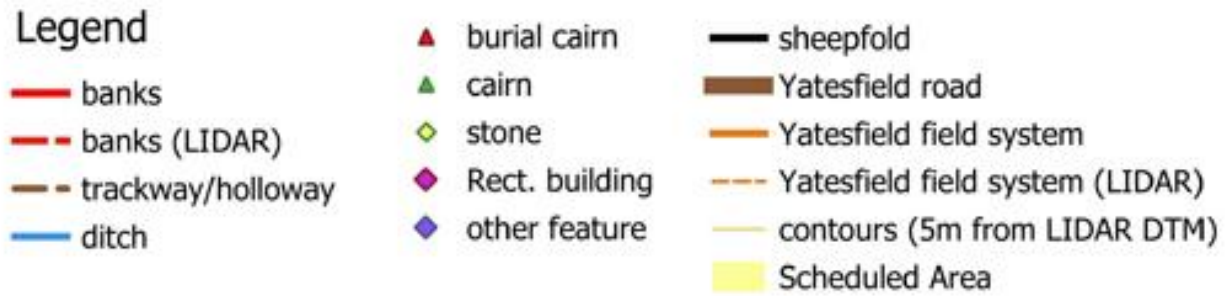
Quite a number of NOWTAG members have been involved over recent years with investigations in Redesdale, initially with the Revitalising Redesdale Project and more recently with the Redesdale Archaeology Group (RAG) set up to continue this work. Some of this has involved landscape surveys on Otterburn Ranges.

In mid-April 2024 RAG members returned to the Ranges to survey locations immediately north of the 2023 survey area around the enclosed settlement at Yatesfield that RAG members have been excavating alongside Operation Nightingale volunteers. Last year's findings had for the first time shown a sequence of agricultural clearance and field system development dating back into the Bronze Age. The 2024 survey covered an area between scheduled 'Romano-British' enclosed settlement sites at Yatesfield Hill and Barracker Rigg.

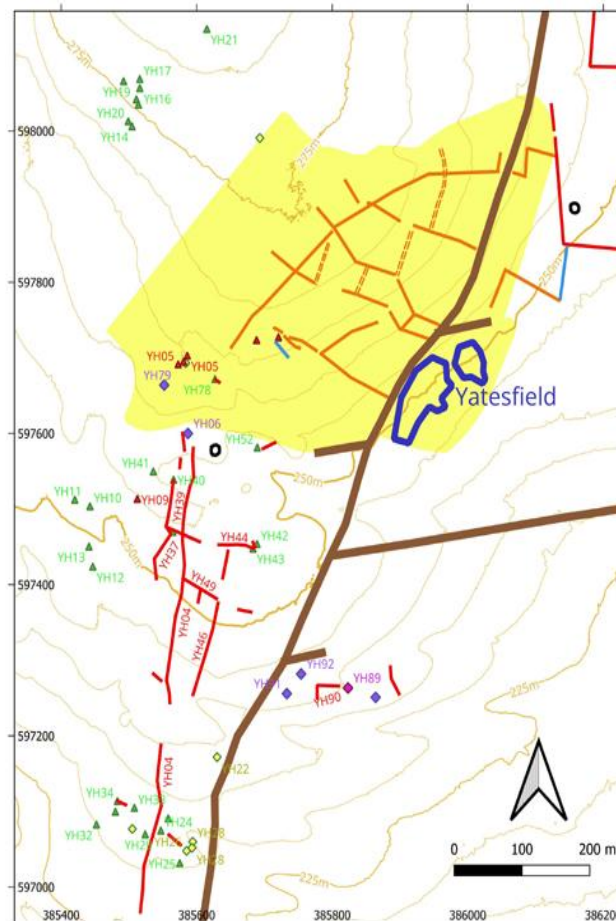
The map below shows features recorded.



Subsequent maps show closer detail using the same legend to depict categories of feature.



120 cairns were recorded, generally in clusters indicative of either primary clearance or with short lengths of stony linear bank typical of the emergence of a proto-field system. On Yatesfield Hill, at the west of this year's survey area, there is an extensive cultivated field system with areas of cord rig typical of the Iron Age/Romano-British period.



Yatesfield Hill field system development

South of the scheduled area the above map shows a sequence of cairns (green triangles) with just a few banks developing into possible field boundaries as we move north towards the settlement. Interesting though this is, our most striking find in this area was a previously unrecorded probable Bronze Age burial complex (YH05) comprising three ring cairns and two standing stones, one now tilted.

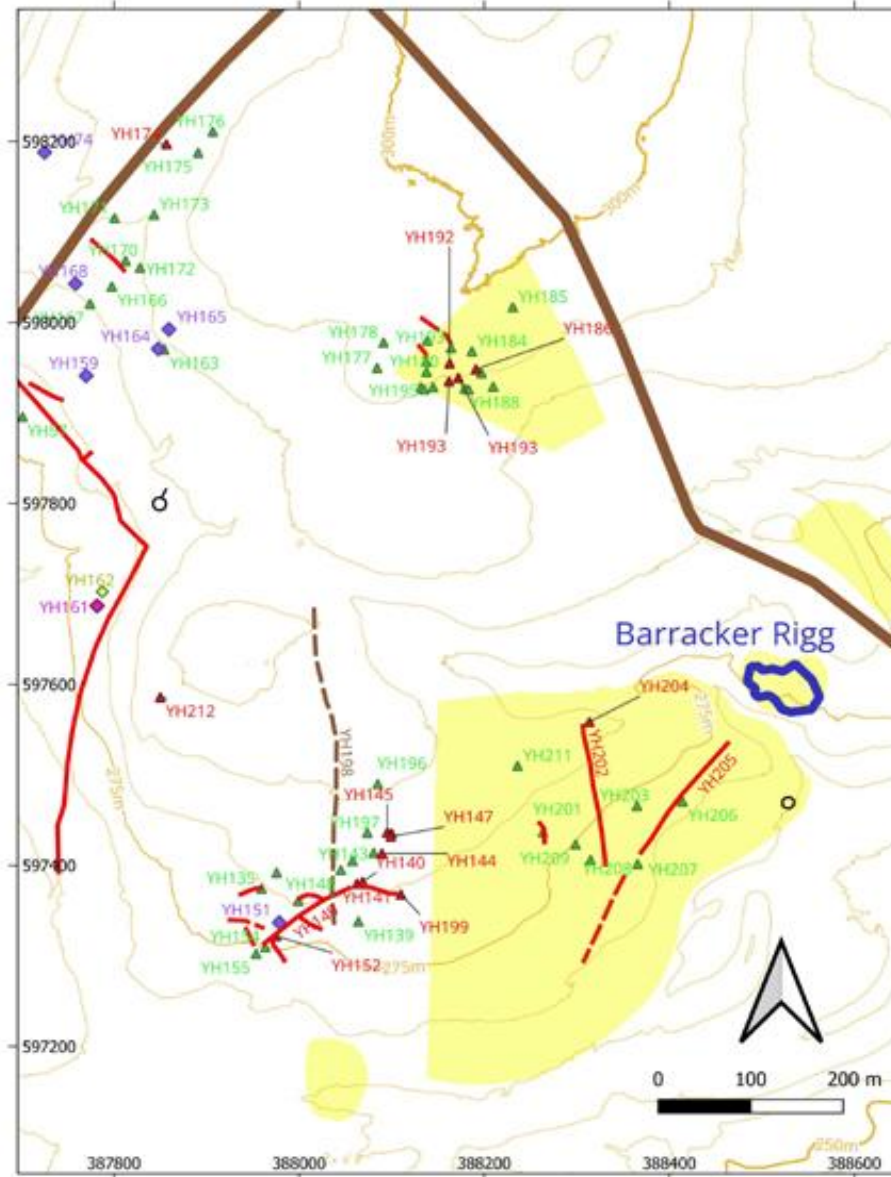


YH05 Bronze Age Burial Complex

Very exciting though this discovery was, it proved to be only the start. Eventually 20 probable burial cairns were identified, all but two of which had not previously been recorded. We also recorded two standing stones (yellow diamonds at S end of the map above), one with a 3m diameter stony perimeter, and two nearby smaller upright stones.



Standing stone YH26



Barracker Rigg

Of the 14 probable burial cairns shown by red triangles on the above map only two large 'round cairns' (YH204 & YH212) are previously recorded. Of particular interest is the area west of the largest yellow scheduled field system. Here were discovered eight probable burial cairns of three different kinds connected by a long stony bank, which in turn contained cairns and other stone structures along its length, plus other adjoining stony banks.



Kerbed cairn YH140 with cist YH141



Kerbed cairn YH147 with YH146 beyond

Perhaps the most unusual find was a three-sided rectilinear structure of upright slabs. Given its context close to other probable burial monuments it is likely to have had a funerary function, although on the Ranges we cannot completely exclude the possibility of a more recent military function.



Rectilinear setting of upright slabs YH144



Long stony bank YH149 with kerbed upright orthostat

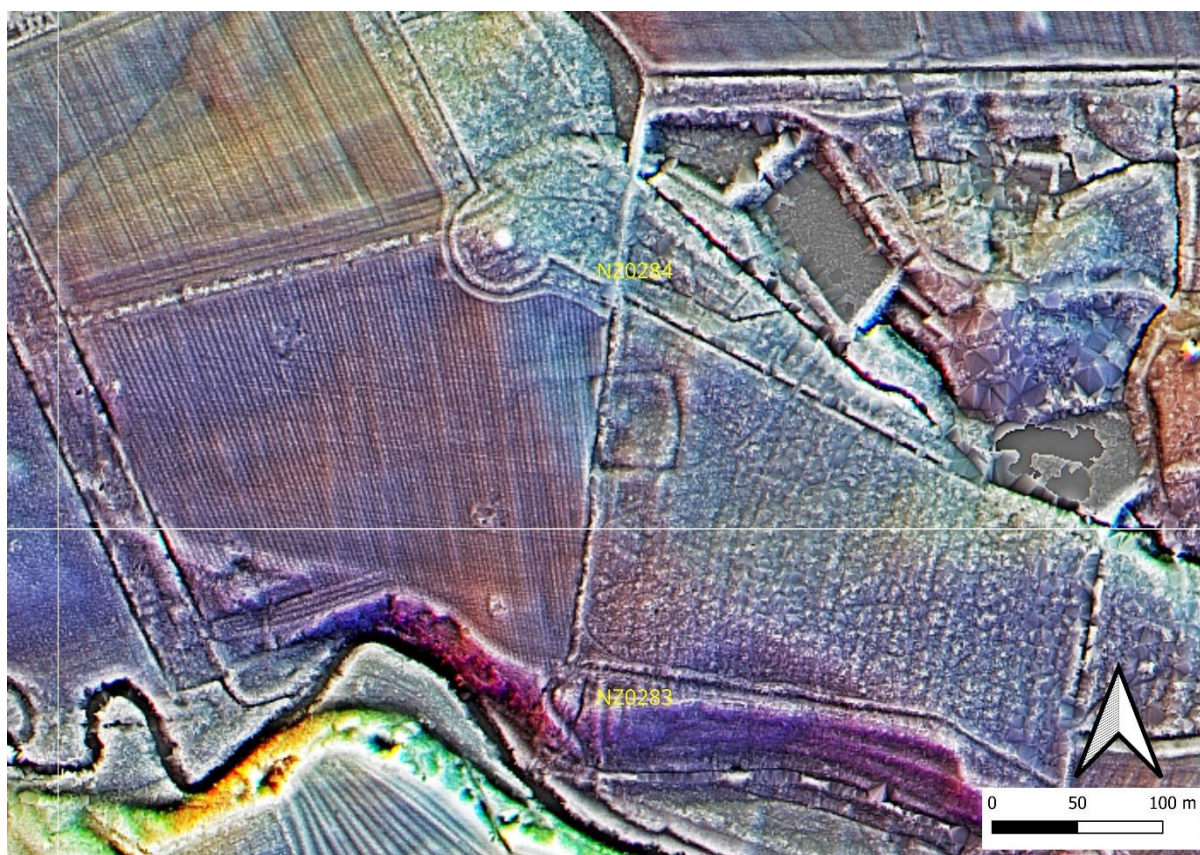
This has been just a snapshot of some of the most striking features recorded by the survey. Also recorded were sites of medieval and post-medieval habitation and other field system features. If you would like more information contact redesdalearchaeology@gmail.com

A visit to Wallington to see the snowdrops (9 years too late!)

By Andy Curtis

A few weeks ago, Ann and I paid a visit to Wallington to exercise the dog and see the snowdrops. Usually when we visit Wallington, we always do the same walk, getting away from people on the new path and cycle route north of the hall, returning to the riverside walk, the old bridge and formal garden, and finishing with coffee and a buttered scone in the café.

Being ever so slightly obsessed with lidar at the moment I looked at our route on the free lidar provided by the National Library of Scotland. There are many trees on the Wallington estate but I was viewing a dtm which sees through the trees (especially if they are not too thickly planted). Just below the fishponds not far west of the hall, I spotted a rectilinear ditched enclosure hidden in the deciduous woodland above the River Wansbeck. The path we take from the middle pond down to the river clips the bottom SE corner of the enclosure but we've never seen it, or more likely, probably just thought it was drainage.



Enhanced LIDAR (DTM, 1m) © Environment Agency copyright 2022

The attached image is of enhanced DTM lidar which shows the enclosure ditch as a dark line. Raised areas (banks and mounds) appear white. The mound to the NW in the centre of a semi-circular bulge of a boundary wall is a Bronze Age burial mound (Brian's Hill Barrow) retained as an ornamental feature to the west of the middle pond.

A quick check showed that it didn't seem to be recorded on the Northumberland HER either using Keys to the Past or Heritage Gateway. At the moment it is always best to check both as the records are a bit out of step. An email to Northumberland HER confirmed they didn't have it recorded. The enclosure was also not recorded on the [National Trust's own online heritage map](#) which otherwise shows a lot of detail of the estate.

The enclosure is located at NZ 0234 8406 and measures approximately 56m N-S, 48m W-E defined by a narrow ditch. Its west edge is overlaid by the western boundary of the wood at Huntly Banks, on land high above River Wansbeck, and well hidden from LIDAR DSM, and satellite images by tree cover.

It appears quite similar in form and size to the better preserved Romano-British homestead near Coldwell (NZ 0007 8734; N10397) which contains a single hut circle and is a Scheduled Monument.



National Trust Heritage Map (Wallington Hall)

I also contacted the National Trust archaeologist who replied:

First of all, I think you're absolutely correct and that it's a nicely preserved settlement enclosure of Romano-British date. Its landscape position on rising ground overlooking a watercourse is very common for this area and gives further circumstantial evidence for its date and function.

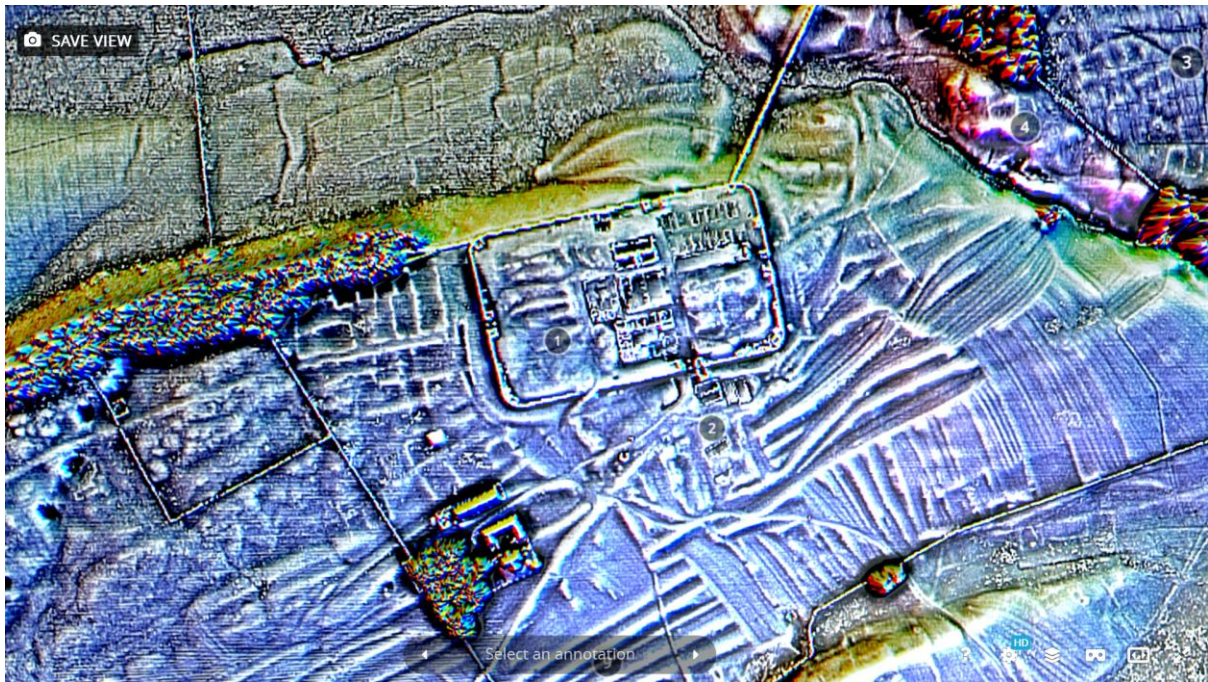
Although the enclosure isn't on our Heritage Records Online site, it is a feature we do know about from our own LiDAR survey, carried out in 2015. This was carried out

at much higher resolution than the EA data, and shows the site very well. In fact, it showed so many sites at Wallington that we're still catching up on adding them to HRO, hence this one not appearing yet! I've attached a jpg of how it looks on our survey for your interest. The enclosure is roughly square, measuring just over 50m across in both directions, and has not seen any previous archaeological investigation beyond your aerial survey investigation, so you're certainly among a very small group of us who've given it any investigative thought!

Across Wallington as a whole there are well over a dozen new enclosures like this that our survey showed for the very first time, so the estate was certainly a busy place during this period.

I have volunteered the services of NOWTAG if there is any thought of something needing excavation at Wallington or elsewhere on the Trust Northumberland estates. There are indeed a great many enclosures roughly of this form and size in the immediate area. A quick scan showed another similar enclosure on lidar within Forty Acre Plantation, also within Wallington estate, but again I'm probably also nine years too late.

3D LIDAR Landscapes By Andy Curtis



Housesteads Roman Fort – 3D LIDAR Landscape



Vindolanda Roman Fort - 3D LIDAR Landscape

LIDAR (DSM, 1m © Environment Agency copyright and/or database right 2022. All rights reserved.)

Enhancement of the LIDAR was carried out using tools made available in the QGIS plugin, Relief Visualization Toolbox. Kokalj, Žiga & Hesse, Ralf. (2017). Airborne laser scanning raster data visualization: A Guide to Good Practice.

Housesteads 3D model on Sketchfab at: <https://skfb.ly/oZZIE>

Vindolanda 3D model on Sketchfab at: <https://skfb.ly/oZZE7>

and many more at <https://sketchfab.com/andrewcurtis53/models>

A good way to explore these landscapes and learn a lot about what things look like on LIDAR is to compare the same area using Historic England's Aerial Archaeology Mapping Explorer: <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/results/aerial-archaeology-mapping-explorer>

Six weeks on a road with no name

By Lorraine Clay



You might not know that I was made redundant from an NHS job in 2017.

A little money in my pocket, and a lot from my Mum's house sale, I decided to do an Archaeology Masters at Durham. A year in commercial archaeology ended in a broken ankle, but, all healed, I'm back in the field!

I can't say much about where I am as its business in confidence, but if you drive between Penrith and Brough, if you dare take your eyes off the road (which I don't recommend) you might spot mechanical diggers and small orange figures in large red fields. This is the start of the much awaited dualling, and one orange splotch might just be me!

Induction was in Penrith so I went down the night before to stay in the rather lovely Travelodge. On the way I'd been recommended Brougham (English Heritage) Castle (pronounced Broom) and had my first experience of crossing the A66 in the rain! I really had to take my life in my hands! The castle is cute, and I was told where to look for graffiti, and I will return on a sunny dry day to get some better shots.

In the first week we did some field walking and I met my colleagues. It was cold and grey and finds were scarce. Near the path of a Roman road, and in the shadow of a castle I was expecting more!



Week two involved test pitting - nothing in my pit except a sherd of modern pot. The ground was frozen, but digging kept me warm.

The third week was blowing a gale too and I experienced frost nip for the first time. The site manager proactively gave me thermal gloves for the next week, which have solved the problem. The small pits and ditches were not big enough to keep warm and were largely natural, which was frustrating, but we cleared two fields.

The following weeks have been warmer, but wetter, meaning it gets quite sticky in the PPE! The team found a couple of sherds, but nothing with a firm date.



I've continued to come down on Sundays and have ferreted around churches in Warcop, Appleby, Kirkby Stephen, Kirkby Thore, Great Ormside, and this week I'm heading for Newbiggin.

But finally, a warm sunny day on Thursday, with curlews crooning, oystercatchers peeping, and in true Time-Team style, a flint – unstratified but worked nonetheless. I have earned my keep!

Errington Hill Head & Grottingham

By Andy Curtis

Just back from an interesting week of landscape survey at Errington Hill Head. The weather was very kind to us and some days when the sun came out, the curlews were calling and skylarks starting to sing. Great team work from NOWTAG.



Well engineered ford across Swallow Burn below Hazel Dean

As usual, we recorded many old boundary banks, former divisions between farms and fields, but also a probable Medieval settlement called Nightfolds, and two already known Iron Age or Romano-British settlements.

John Collingwood Bruce wrote about the Nightfolds settlement in 1858:

On Errington Hill head, and about half a mile north of the Wall, are the foundations of ancient buildings, called "The Camps," or "Nightfolds". Their position is, as usual, indicated by the peculiar greenness of the sward. Two inclosures, contiguous to each other, have the form of parallelograms; the larger of them is about thirty-four yards long and thirty broad. Some curved lines abut upon these, which may have been folds for cattle. The walls are about three feet thick, and are composed of Roman stones, tolerably regularly disposed, but apparently without mortar. The stones however are Wall-stones, not station-stones, and may have been stolen from the Murus, in mediæval times. If the fort were occupied by the Romans, it must have been with the view of commanding the extensive valley below, or of protecting the agricultural produce, which the land here was well calculated to afford.

Owing to the intervening shoulder of the hill on which this encampment stands, the view of the lower part of the valley is shut out from a spectator on the Wall. The prospect from "The Camps",

which are upon the slope of the hill, is most extensive and most beautiful ; it commands not only the whole of the wide valley, permeated by the Erring-burn, but part of that through which the North Tyne flows.

I am disposed to think that the Romans have originally occupied this site as an out-look post, but that the present ruins are of later date.



NOWTAG members Surveying a native R-B settlement north of Hazel Dean

Henry MacLauchlan (1858) also came by during his survey of the Roman Wall and described the ford and some older and he surmised some earlier remains:

On Errington-hill-head, about 3 furlongs north of the Wall. are the foundations of ancient buildings, called the Camps, or Nightfolds. The road which passes through these remains crosses a brook about 180 yards on the east, where a pavement, partly natural, and partly artificial, would lead to a supposition that it had been made by the Romans; indeed, we are disposed to consider this line a prolongation of that which crosses the Watling Street at Bewclay, which we conjectured before might possibly be the Devil's Causeway; for though we can trace nothing continuously like a road, we have found, not only a small Roman camp, but also, about 180 yards east of it, one of those rude enclosures containing three circular foundations, similar to those at Colwell, and at Birdhope, on the river Rede.

These remains, which do not appear to have been hitherto recorded, are on a commanding position on Red House Crag, about a mile west of Bewclay, and a furlong east of the keeper's house; the Roman Camp is very nearly a square of about 65 yards each side, and thus about 3/4 of an acre. The other enclosure, which is perhaps British, is not half an acre. The remains we have taken for Roman Camp are so situated as to command a view into the valley of the Erringburn, and also the more

elevated post at Bewclay ; the ramparts are very obscure and the ditch merely traceable, rendered more difficult to ascertain from some modern fence formed on the line.

It should be noted that on the first edition OS map (c1860) the farm currently called Errington Hill Head was at that time known as Hazel Dean. Errington Hill Head was '*a good stone building*' located almost a kilometer to the NE of there, standing on a very exposed hilltop, and subsequently demolished. In 1860, it was occupied by a gamekeeper employed by Rowland Errington Esq. (of Sandhoe), the owner of Hazel Dean & Grottington farms (among others in the area).

To find out what we found in our landscape survey on these farms, and whether or not we thought it was or could have been Roman, you'll have to await our full report.