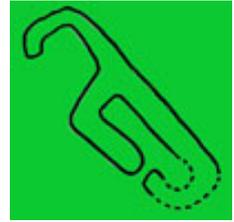


Marchers Archaeology

Newsletter 3 - 5th September 2010



Popping Stone Excavation

Three excavators (WH, TM, RP) continued the slow but steady process of exposing the sections of wall and floor revealed by trench 1 and began a second trench intended to examine a hint of a cross-wall. Trench 2 showed a well-made stretch of outer wall about 75cm thick with large facing stones and the space between filled with rubble. The trickle of severely weathered Victorian pottery from between the fallen stones continues.

Below the charcoal-rich layer mentioned in the last newsletter we found a layer of rounded pebbles. Test pits dug nearby showed the same layer at roughly the same depth and it probably represents the top surface of the ancient river bed - in other words a natural, undisturbed base to the building. The charcoal-rich layer may therefore represent the floor of the house, and a sample has been taken for radiocarbon dating of the charcoal (when a wealthy benefactor appears).



The wall exposed in trench 2 - the rubble core is below the trowel, with large facing stones either side.

Herd Law (formerly Calfclose Sike)

CM has reviewed a recent NNPA* publication on drove roads in Northumberland, and picked out a number of interesting points. In particular, the finding of several examples of cross-dykes (ditches running across drove roads) in other areas may be significant in interpreting the large ditch running close by our excavation. From CM's notes:

Some of these cross dykes may have played a role in channelling stock as they negotiated the moorland ridges, whilst others have been interpreted as barriers constructed to impede the escape of reiving raiding parties. However, it has also been suggested that at least some of these cross dykes may be much more ancient, perhaps Neolithic or Bronze Age in origin, and that they may have functioned as communal boundary markers. In practice, it is likely that such dykes were constructed and used for different purposes and in different periods, extending over a very long time-span.

It seems a natural corollary of the construction of such a barrier that it must have a gateway of some kind to permit or control approved movements of stock, and such crossing points may be important landmarks. It seems that the house at Herd Law (and its predecessors) may have been built at such a crossing point.

Rusty deposits in the house at Herd Law suggested that smithing may have been taking place there, and Don O'Meara, an environmental archaeologist with North Pennines Archaeology at Nenthead, has very kindly agreed to examine our samples. He showed me how easy it is to recognise the hammer scale and iron droplets characteristic of smithing - and the importance examining samples by flotation.

Spread the word - that there's an active archaeology group in this area welcoming all comers. Excavations on Thursdays, currently meeting at the Spa Hotel "upper" car park at 9am, but you can come down any time.

<http://www.laverocks.co.uk/archaeology/index.htm>

* <http://www.northumberlandnationalpark.org.uk/lookingafter/projects/droversproject.htm>