



Redesdale

Landscapes through Time

Landscape Area 2

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This report is one of a series of six, produced by project volunteers during the *Redesdale Landscapes through Time* project, part of the NLHF-funded *Revitalising Redesdale* Landscape Partnership scheme. The project was managed by Karen Collins (Revitalising Redesdale Heritage & Engagement Officer).

The project background, methodology and general results are summarised in a general Project Report by the Project Consultant, Paul Frodsham (ORACLE Heritage Services). The Project Report and all six Area Reports are available on the Revitalising Redesdale website: <https://www.revitalisingredesdale.org.uk/>

Any questions about the project prior to September 2022 should be addressed to Karen Collins: karen.collins@nnpa.org.uk

From September 2022 onwards, please address any questions to Paul Frodsham (ORACLE Heritage Services): paulfrodsham@hotmail.com



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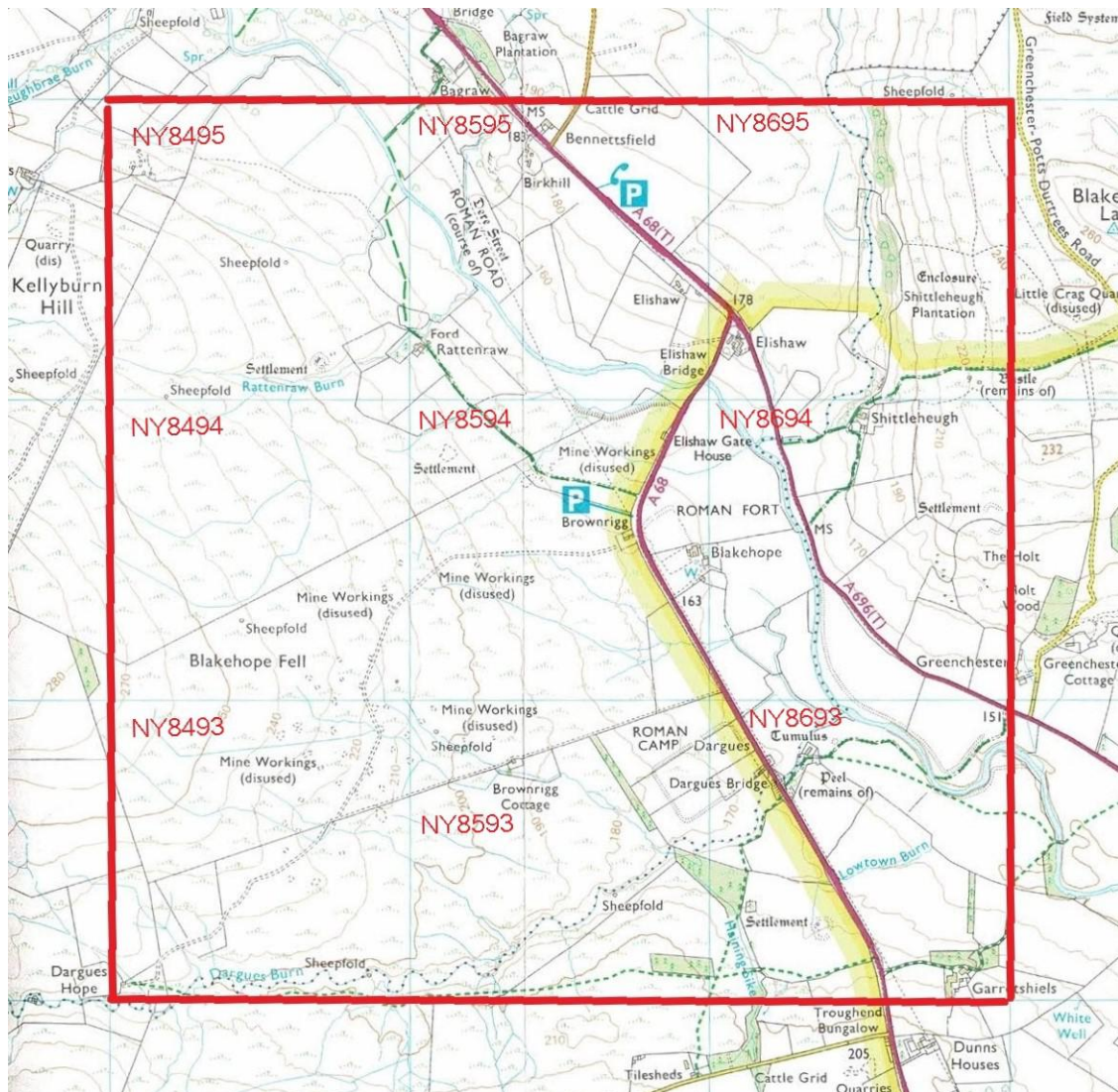
Cover illustration

Lidar imagery of part of Area 2. This image, extracted from the actual imagery used by volunteers during the Landscapes through Time project, shows the medieval field system at Garretshiels at the SE corner of Area 2, within which lie a couple of recently discovered medieval settlements and a substantial earthwork enclosure of probable Iron Age or Roman date. Volunteers used this imagery, along with other sources, to construct 'landscape biographies' for each of the project's six areas.

Area 2 ...a chronological narrative.

Landscape

The part of Redesdale covered by Area 2 consists of upland slopes either side of the River Rede rising relatively gently from about 150m to around 280m. Its underlying geology is sedimentary sandstone overlain by glacial deposits and peat formations. Peat is found on the higher ground and glacial-alluvial deposits are found in the valley. The area is described as transitional between the North Tyne and Cheviot formations. Compared with the North Tyne the soils of the Rede Valley have greater fertility and lower acidity. Although there is evidence of some arable agriculture during certain periods pastoralism has been the predominant agricultural practice and remains so today.



Area 2 Ordnance Survey Map

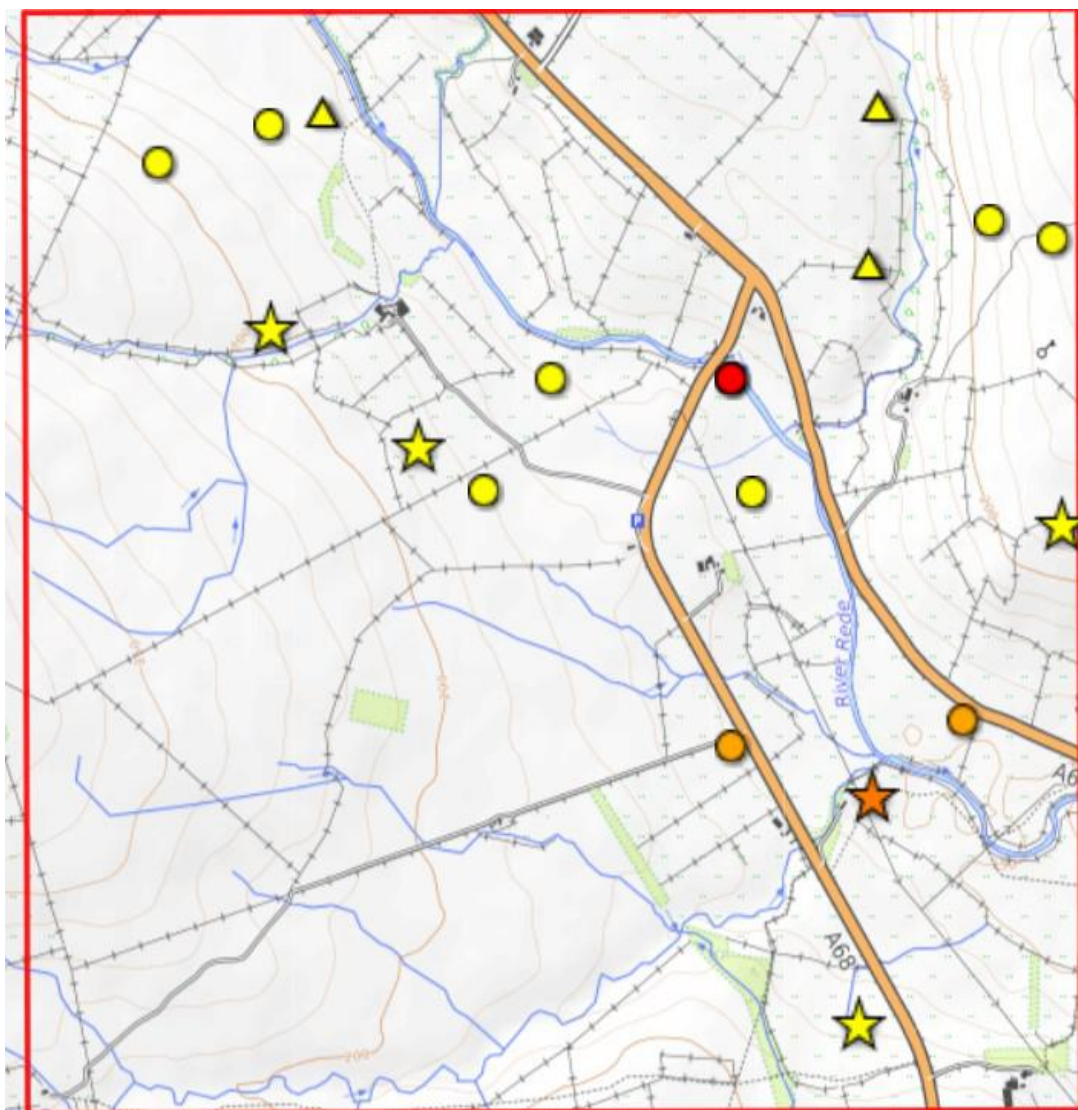
Mesolithic Era (c 10,000 - 4,000 BC)

Although the area has thus far yielded no evidence of pre-agricultural human activity the Rede valley would have provided nomadic hunter-gatherer groups of the Mesolithic and early

Neolithic eras with a convenient route for seasonal migration from the coast to the uplands allowing access to a wide range of resources. We therefore cannot discount the possibility that such early activity occurred.

Pollen analysis at Bloody Moss on Otterburn Training area (Moores and Passmore 1999) cited by Rob Young (Peat, Pollen and People in Archaeology in Northumberland National Park, Paul Frodsham 2004) indicated that peat formation in this part of Redesdale began around 3000BC, some 2,000 years later than further east in the Simonside Hills. Young suggests that this may be linked to human activity as *“the presence of heather pollen here, prior to the first evidence for peat growth, attests to some anthropogenic clearance and an opening up of the forest. This, in turn, ties in with pollen data from valley floor sites in Redesdale...suggesting that both pastoralism and cereal cultivation were occurring in the immediate area in this period.”* (Young, op.cit p162)

Neolithic Era (c.4,000 - 2,200 BC)



Distribution of Neolithic (red), Bronze Age (orange), and Iron Age (yellow) sites

Pollen analysis from Bloody Moss indicates that a gradual expansion of heathland vegetation occurred between c4000 and c2500BC, with a corresponding reduction in tree pollen.

The only evidence of human presence in Area 2 during the Neolithic is in the find of a Neolithic stone axe head near Elishaw Bridge and a flint arrowhead, recorded as Neolithic/Bronze Age, found at Shittleheugh. Both finds could just be attributed to people traveling through the area and so cannot on their own act as evidence of settlement. Nevertheless the long cairns elsewhere in Redesdale on Dour Hill, Bellshiel Law and west of Harehaugh Hill provide evidence of these early communities, suggesting a focus on communal burial practices. As yet there is no direct evidence of habitation in Redesdale during this period, although the construction of monuments as large and impressive as the long cairns is very strongly suggestive of local populations during at least some part of this period.

Bronze Age (c.2,200 - 800BC)

Although no evidence of Bronze Age settlement sites has been discovered in Area 2 the first appearance of cereal pollen at nearby Bloody Moss is dated to c1500BC, although Young notes that *“even when we do get evidence for cereal pollen it is never in large amounts and always in the context of small-scale, seemingly temporary, clearings, particularly in the uplands.... At Bloody Moss a marked increase in heathland species was recorded at the start of the Bronze Age, in association with a charcoal peak indicative of a large scale fire. This may be evidence of anthropogenic (human) forest clearance related to the promotion of heather as fodder for grazing animals.”* (op.cit p165)

Consistent with these findings the presence of the remains of probable Bronze Age burial cairns is circumstantial evidence for human habitation in the locality. The Round Cairn north east of Dunns Cottage, scheduled as a Bronze Age burial monument, is indicative of a more settled presence somewhere in the vicinity. The recording of a group of three burial mounds (HER 8275) is however questionable given that 20th century visits found no traces of the mounds within what is described as hummocky ground.

There are numerous Bronze Age burial cairns elsewhere within the valley of the Rede, including the site known as “The Three Kings” in Redesdale Forest. Classed as a ‘4 Poster stone circle’, one of just two or three of this form of burial monument, which are found mainly in Aberdeenshire and Perthshire, to be discovered in Northumberland. The distribution of 4 Posters is suggestive that the cultural practice spread from its northern Scotland heartland to just a few isolated areas further south. Whilst this similarity of cultural practice does not necessarily entail a migration of people, the isolated scatter of such burial monuments could be an indication of a migration of small-scale groups over generations rather than a wholesale movement of ideas and people.

As Charlton and Day (Archaeologia Aeliana 5 VI) pointed out *“early settlements of timber construction would be unlikely to leave any but the slightest of traces on the surface”*. Therefore, if we are seeking any indications of sustained habitation, remains of any features related to early agricultural practices would be a more likely option. The Lidar survey did identify a group of mounds that could possibly represent a cairnfield (Site 2.103) however it has been observed that this could be a natural feature. Should a later site visit support

interpretation as a cairnfield dating would remain an issue, but such features are characteristic of Bronze Age land clearance. However, such features may also be the result of later field clearance. When possible clearance cairns are accompanied by other linear features associated with proto-field systems they become stronger indicators of habitation. Although there are a number of other earthwork features in the area that are classified as being of uncertain date none of the short descriptions appear particularly suggestive of fitting this scenario. Two small groups of clearance cairns west of Rattenraw farm were recorded during a 2018 Level 1 walkover survey and although there were some boulders and a stone scatter nearby these did not amount to any indication of being a proto-field system. Without such an association isolated clearance cairns could date from any period.

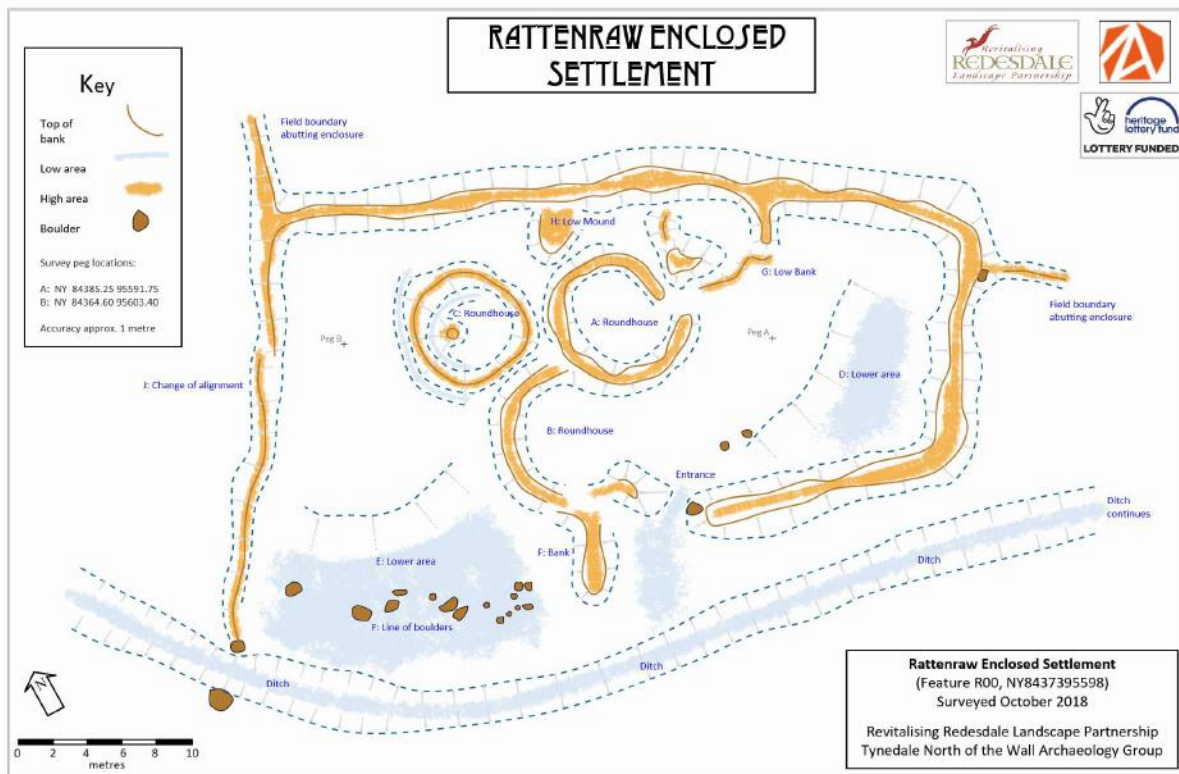
Whilst in other upland areas of the county there is evidence of a transition from transhumance to more permanent settlement during the Bronze Age, and there is no particular reason why this could not have been occurring in Redesdale, features identified and recorded to date in Area 2 provide no clear evidence to support this.

Iron Age / Romano-British Era. (c.800BC - 410AD)

Within Redesdale it remains challenging to be able to distinguish between features that pre-date the Roman presence, relate to the Roman period itself, or date from after the Roman military departure. It is certainly possible that a number of sites may have spanned all three periods. For the purposes of this account we use the Iron Age / Romano-British descriptor for 'native features'. We will address Roman military / infrastructure features in a separate section.

In their 1978 report (op cit) Charlton and Day recorded 33 Iron Age settlement sites in Upper Redesdale, identifying 4 typological categories: enclosed settlements of either Cheviot or North Tyne Type, unenclosed forecourt settlements and unenclosed round stone houses. All were stone built and lay in non-defensive positions. At the time, all of the sites identified as of North Tyne type were located on the south side of the River Rede. The Cheviot type, mostly found further north on long ridges of the low-lying Cheviot foothills, are described as having a lifespan *“probably within and possibly beyond the Roman occupation ... the round stone houses lie on well-drained land at the back of the settlement and cattle were corralled in a single sunken forecourt. The whole settlement was surrounded by a perimeter wall with no visible evidence of an external ditch.”* In contrast the North Tyne type have two sunken forecourts and a dividing wall. As with the Cheviot type the round stone houses are located towards the rear of the site. A number of these show signs of expansion.

Within Area 2 there are remains of such sites located on both the South (Western) and North (Eastern) sides of the River Rede. Of those sites on the South side of the river three, Rattenraw (scheduled site W of Rattenraw Farm), Blakehope and Garretshiels, were on the list of North Tyne sites compiled by Charlton and Day. The recently discovered site NW of Rattenraw Farm, site 2.041, which has now been partially excavated by the Revitalising Redesdale project, also has the two sunken forecourts characteristic of the North Tyne type.



Enclosed Settlement site NW of Rattenraw Farm, Site 2.041

Four further possible enclosed settlement sites on the south side are questionable. The site N of Rattenraw Farm (Site 2.042) was subject of a Level 3 survey which found no indications of any round house but contained a rectilinear building structure and yards along with features resembling a stack stand, small external stock enclosure and a small rectangular, possible outhouse, structure described by Charlton and Day (*Archaeologia Aeliana* 5, VII 1979) and Ramm as shieling/medieval farmstead features. The square shaped enclosure (Site 2.052) slightly further east is difficult to discern amongst the ridge and furrow, and inspection on the ground gave no particular indications of an enclosed settlement.

A feature further east on Rattenraw Farm site 2.056 has been described as a possible round house. Inspection on the ground argues strongly against this. The feature is a circular turf structure. The lack of any sign of an entrance suggests that it was probably a stack stand. The remaining possible settlement site, NE of Blakehope Roman Fort (Site 2.026), suggested by aerial photographs, is not discernable on the available Lidar imagery.

On the northern side of the river three enclosed settlements are listed on the LASA spreadsheet. Little Crag enclosed settlement is recorded as Cheviot type by Charlton and Day. Lidar imagery and the description for Site 2.091 at Durness Burn, Elishaw, whilst supportive of interpretation as an enclosed settlement does not provide a basis for a distinction between Cheviot and North Tyne typology. Similarly Lidar imagery and descriptions of Site 2.013 south east of Shittleheugh are insufficient to establish whether the structure matches the Cheviot type.

In summary, current information regarding Iron Age/ Romano British enclosed settlement sites in Area 2 is still consistent with Charlton and Day's observation of the distribution of the Cheviot and North Tyne types of enclosed settlements. Thus far there are no examples of the Unenclosed Forecourt site type in Area 2 and the one possible isolated round house type (Site 2.056) is in all probability a stack stand as described above.

In his section on Archaeological Background in the 2019 Initial Report on the excavation of Rattenraw enclosed settlement (site 2.042) The Archaeological Practice's Richard Carlton provides a useful summary of what may be discerned regarding the development of settlement practices during this period. After discussing possible evidence of the early stages of transition from defensible hillfort settlements to smaller non-defensive settlement structures he observes :

"By the late Iron Age, in contrast, a widespread, dispersed settlement pattern of less defensible enclosed farmsteads, also predominantly rectilinear in plan, was becoming established in the valley, and this persisted into the succeeding Roman period. Such smaller sites of known or presumed mid- or later Iron-Age origin, thought to be later in origin than the hill-forts but perhaps occupied contemporaneously at times in the late iron age, generally lie in less obviously defensible positions, many occupying secondary ridges or wide terraces. This rough distinction between larger and smaller settlement types may reflect a social hierarchy or differences in function. Such enclosures were protective rather than defensive, designed to secure livestock from escape, predation and rustling. Although usually associated with pastoralist economies, with cattle regarded as more important than sheep, many enclosures are now recognised as having field systems associated and it is undoubtedly the case that all depended on extensive lands beyond their boundaries, with a range of social, industrial and agrarian activities being carried out at increasing distances from the enclosure."

A key question regarding the development of settlement within Upper Redesdale, and in particular Area 2, is to what extent was it the arrival of the Romans that initiated more permanent settlements or to what degree was this happening beforehand. The difficulty in giving a definitive answer has been the lack of dating evidence from such sites in Upper Redesdale. The 1977 excavation at Woolaw led to the following assessment: *"The small finds, by analogy with similar finds elsewhere, point to a terminus post quem of the second century a.d. for the construction of the final phase of occupation at Woolaw."* (Charlton and Day 1978 op.cit). Given that three phases of round house construction were identified this does suggest that it is likely that there had been occupation prior to the arrival of the Romans in Upper Redesdale.

The Revitalising Redesdale excavations at Rattenraw (Site 2.042) in 2019 and 2020 recovered materials that were radio-carbon dated. *"The dates obtained indicate that the site was occupied from at least as early as the early first century AD (29 AD) until at least the mid-first century AD (62 AD) - i.e. conceivably for as little as two generations. However, the dates also allow for the possibility of occupation over a much wider timescale, from as early as the late 2nd century BC to as late as the early 2nd century AD.... These dates cannot be taken to prove contemporaneity with the Roman occupation of Redesdale, but do strongly suggest that the enclosure was established well before the imposition of Roman roads, marching camps and forts in the valley."* (Richard Carlton, Radiocarbon dates procured for contexts at Rattenraw Iron Age/Romano-British enclosed settlement, Otterburn, excavated by Revitalising Redesdale in 2019.)

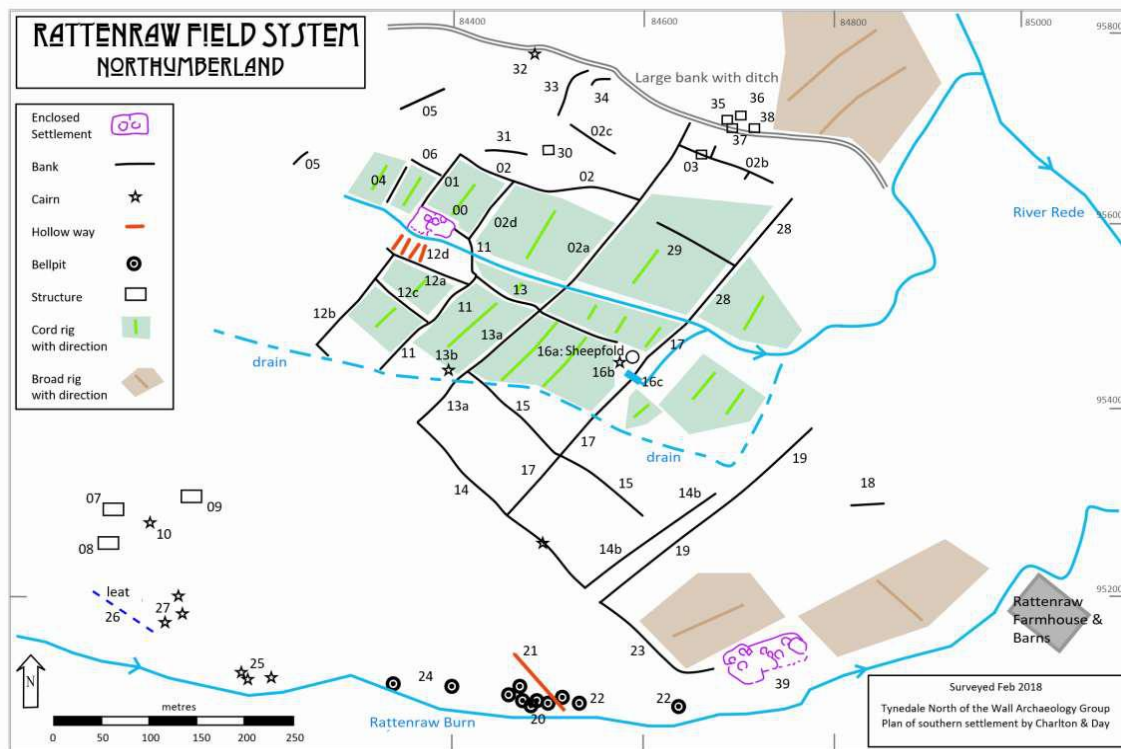
Until further dating evidence is available from other sites we cannot say how extensive settlement was during the pre-Roman Iron Age, but we can be confident in identifying that there was some degree of pre-Roman settlement in the area. Although it is unlikely that the area was completely abandoned after the departure of the Roman military there is no dating evidence to confirm this within Area 2.

Richard Carlton (The Archaeological Practice Ltd. 2019 Rattenraw Farm, Archaeological Evaluation) observes:

*“ it is clear that by the mid-first millennium AD, a substantial, permanently settled population was well-established in the area. Towards the end of the first millennium BC, pollen evidence suggests that all remaining upland forest had been cleared, and small enclosed settlements were established in increasing numbers, some on the sites of earlier hillforts, or overlying their defences, which in some cases were seen to have been abandoned for some time (Welfare 2002, 75). Certainly, **some later prehistoric sites have been found beneath Romano- British settlements at both Hetha Burn and Kennel Hall Knowe (Burgess 1984, 168; Jobey 1978), while Alnham Castle Hills hill-fort has rectilinear additions of presumed Romano-British .”** (My emphasis)*

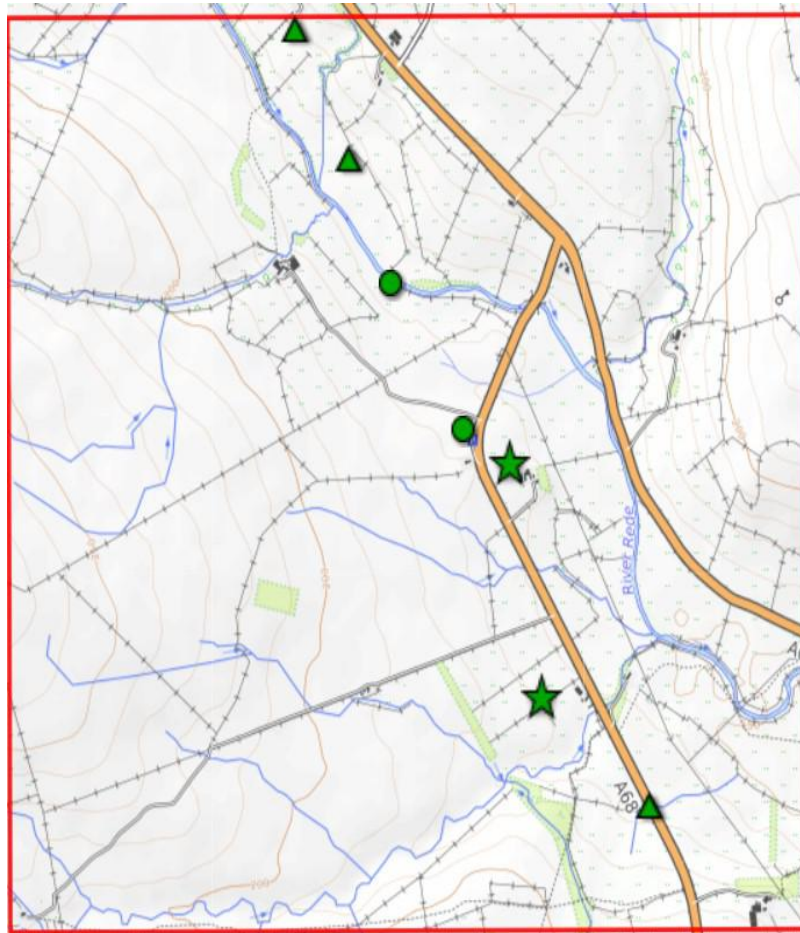
We can also identify that within Area 2 all the sites that we can confidently regard as enclosed settlements are located, on both sides of the River Rede, either just below or just above the 200 metre contour level. The putative sites lower than this are very questionable as Iron Age/Romano-British enclosed settlements as outlined above.

In addition to the enclosed settlements recorded there are areas of cord-rig and field boundaries consistent with Iron Age agricultural activity. Surrounding Site 2.042 at Rattenraw an extensive field system, with field boundaries abutting the enclosed settlement were recorded by a Tynedale North of the Wall Archaeology Group landscape survey in 2018.



Rattenraw Field Systems with Enclosed Settlements

Roman Military features. (c.43 – 410AD)



Distribution of Roman Military sites

The route of Dere Street runs across Area 2. Visible traces are now limited but antiquarians in the 18th and 19th centuries recorded remains of a Roman bridge over the River Rede west of Rattenraw. However, the exact crossing point is now uncertain. Parts of the route are clearly visible on Lidar and on the ground.

The earthworks of Blakehope Roman fort and camp are clearly visible on Lidar imagery, as is the line of Dere Street. The HER refers to a fort and a 'possible temporary camp' here; the Lidar imagery clearly shows the fort lying within the ramparts of a camp. Dere Street appears to pass through the W side of the camp, suggesting the camp could predate the road. The fort, in contrast, lies immediately E of the road which it presumably post-dates.

Further south are the remains of a temporary Roman camp at Dargues. The camp is rectangular in shape, measuring 300m by 194m, and is surrounded by a bank and ditch. There is some speculation that site 2.064 to the north of Blakehope Fort was another temporary camp, although the breaks of slope could well be related to a medieval field system.

Richard Carlton (op cit) summarises the relationship between the Roman military presence and the native population thus:

“Following the Roman Conquest most of Northumberland lay beyond the Roman frontier for much of the period of occupation, but the influence of Roman culture was maintained in

Redesdale by the presence, first, of marching camps on or close to the principal Roman arterial road through Northumberland, Dere Street, and its branch westwards to the Devil's Causeway, and, subsequently, the permanent outpost fort of Bremenium, occupied for nearly three centuries after its foundation around 138 A.D. ... The relationship between the Roman occupiers, represented by the fort, and native populations represented by small enclosure sites, has long been suggested as mutually supportive – with the Roman army supported by local farmed produce, for example – but to date no support for this has been forthcoming through epigraphic or archaeological finds.”

Early Medieval (c.410 – 1066)

The complete absence of any pre-Conquest Medieval sites not only in Area 2 but also throughout most of Redesdale is striking. While small enclosed homesteads of a type common in the middle and later Iron Age are likely to have continued in use for several centuries into the later Roman period, the fate of the native population following the end of Roman occupation remains obscure.

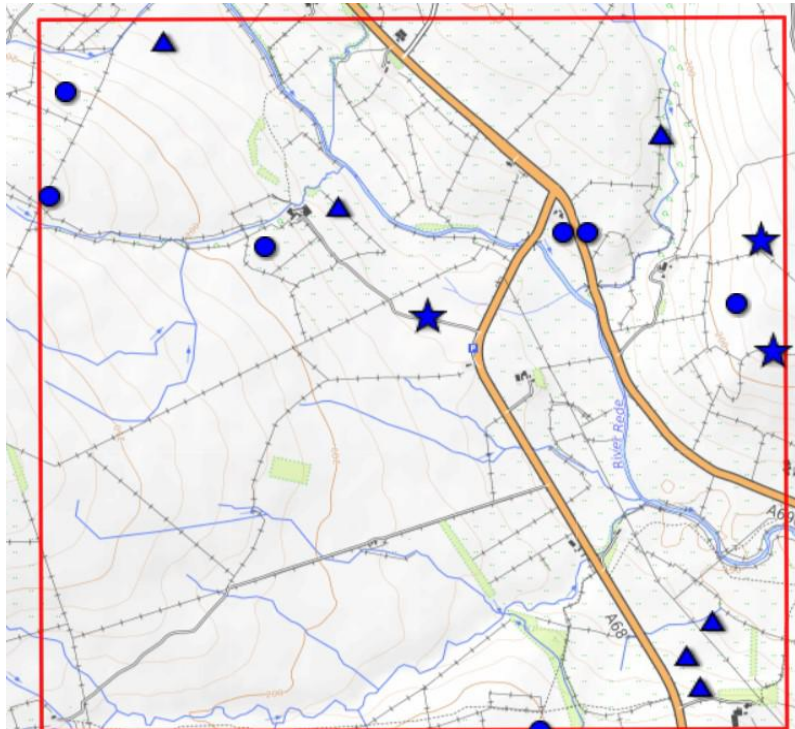
In the absence of surviving evidence it is currently only possible to draw inferences from developments observed elsewhere. Richard Carlton states that *“it may be suggested that sites where late prehistoric occupation was extended into the early medieval period were perhaps only eventually abandoned in favour of lower-lying hamlets and villages in the later pre-Conquest period, many of which are in existence today, following a political takeover by new warrior elites originally deriving from Northern Europe and Scandinavia in the early medieval period. Some continuity of political and territorial from the Iron Age through the Roman period and into the early medieval era seems likely, even as the social and political structures of those territorial communities were perhaps evolving from kinship-based clans or tribes into chiefdoms and ultimately small states.”*

It is also possible that some former Iron Age/ Romano-British enclosed settlement sites were re-used for shielings.

Medieval (c.1066 – 1540)

During the post-Conquest medieval period the Liberty of Redesdale was established from the mid-12th Century under the control of the Umfravilles. Although they moved their main centre from the Elsdon motte and bailey redoubt to Harbottle in 1157 they maintained the Tower at Otterburn as an administrative centre. Until the early 13th Century the area was subject to the ravages of the conflicts between the English and Scottish Crowns, but after 1219 enjoyed a relatively peaceful period until 1296.

Richard Carlton (op cit) observes that Upper Redesdale beyond Elsdon lay beyond or on the very edge of the zone of permanent settlement and cultivation during the medieval era, but settlement did steadily advance up the valley during the climatic optimum lasting up until c. 1300. Seasonal shielings such as Davyshiel, Garretshiels and Greenhaugh had developed into permanent settlements by the end of the 13th century.



Distribution of post-Conquest Medieval sites

Garretshiels lies in the south-east of Area 2 and three previously unrecorded sites have been identified. Two probable settlements (sites 2.033 and 2.034) and an extensive field system (site 2.036). A very extensive and complex medieval agricultural landscape including a great deal of ridge-and-furrow, much of which is very well preserved, extends over much of this km sq. This ridge-and-furrow is overlain in part by post-medieval fields, and nearly flattened in places by recent ploughing. It is clearly visible on Lidar imagery. Linked to the fields are settlements, trackways and other features, all recorded in detail from Lidar by Malcolm McCallum, see project archive.



Lidar showing Garretshiels medieval landscape (East of road)

Near where the A68 today crosses the River Rede at Elishaw a 'hospital' was recorded in 1240 and had probably been established earlier by the Umfravilles to serve travellers and the local poor.

There is also recorded, at Elishaw Farm, the site of a medieval village (site 2.099). Although the remains of large buildings were recorded here in the 1800's there are now no visible remains.

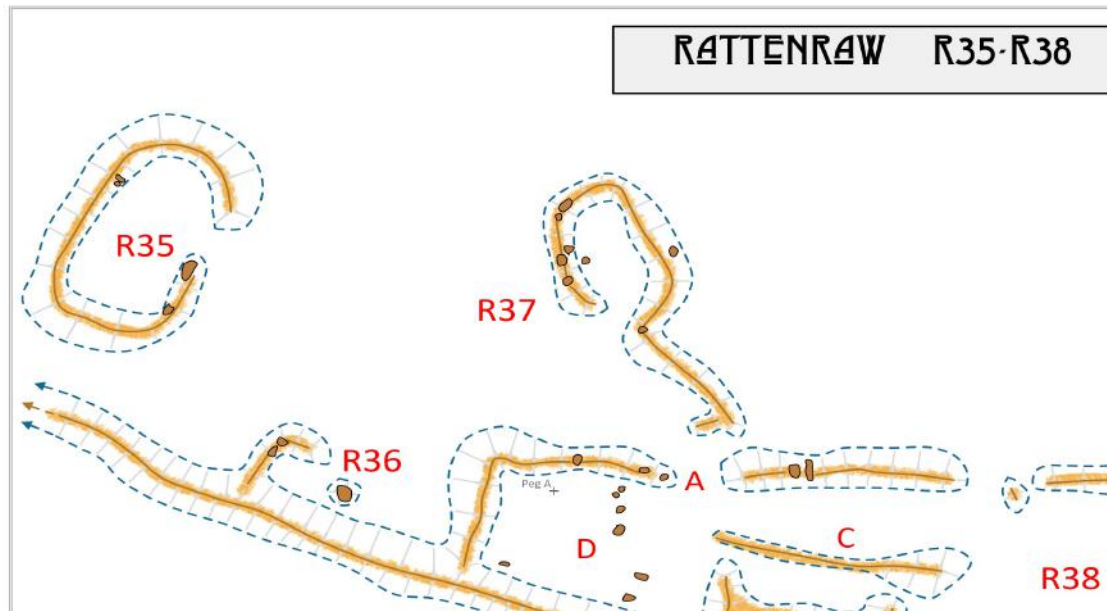
Similarly, at site 2.040, south of Bagraw and just west of Rattenraw Farm, the remains of a medieval village have been recorded, but close examination during a survey in 2018 could not identify any remaining signs of it.

In the north-west of Area 2 lie the remains of the deserted medieval village of Kellyburn (site 2.049). On the east and west sides of the hamlet are traces of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation.

At the western edge of Rattenraw Farm is a group of three earthen structures (site 2.043) , two oval and one rectangular, that might be the remains of shieling structures dating from the medieval period.

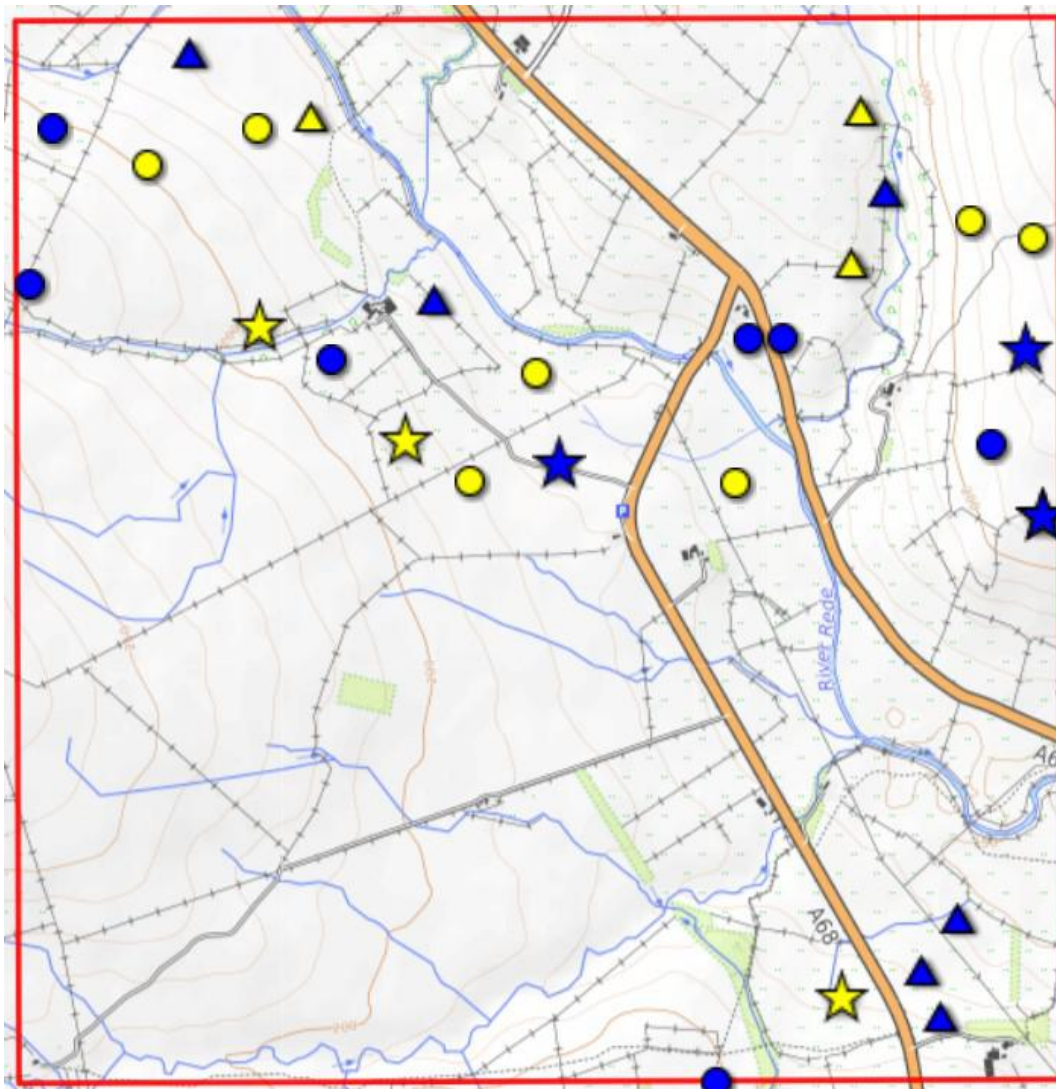
Also on Rattenraw Farm site 2.042 has been mapped among Iron Age sites. HER records 'Possible farmstead north of Rattenraw'. Earthworks are visible at this location but it is unclear whether they represent a settlement; there may be a couple of roundhouses, but some of the features clearly relate to a later field system and drainage. These should be checked on the ground.

When a Level 3 survey was carried out in 2019 by Revitalising Redesdale with Tynedale North of the Wall Archaeology Group there were no signs of round house structures and features recorded included a rectangular stone structure with adjoining yards and adjacent structures much more suggestive of a small, possibly medieval, farmstead. One of the adjacent structures appears to potentially be the remains of an earlier shieling. This interpretation would be consistent with the known sequence from seasonal pastoralism to more permanent settlement during the medieval and into the post-Medieval period.



Rattenraw Farmstead site - surveyed 2019

Richard Carlton (op cit) states that *'By the end of the 14th century, there are hints that settlement was beginning to creep further up the Rede valley, perhaps as a result of the turbulent conditions of the later medieval era which favoured an expansion of peasant colonisation and seasonal transhumance. The establishment of permanent settlements west of Dere Street seems to have occurred within the context of Reiver society, arguably for the first time since the Roman period, in the 15th or early 16th centuries, but even by the mid-16th century Rochester, along with Birdhope, Woolaw and Evistones still represented the uppermost limit of settlement in the valley.'*

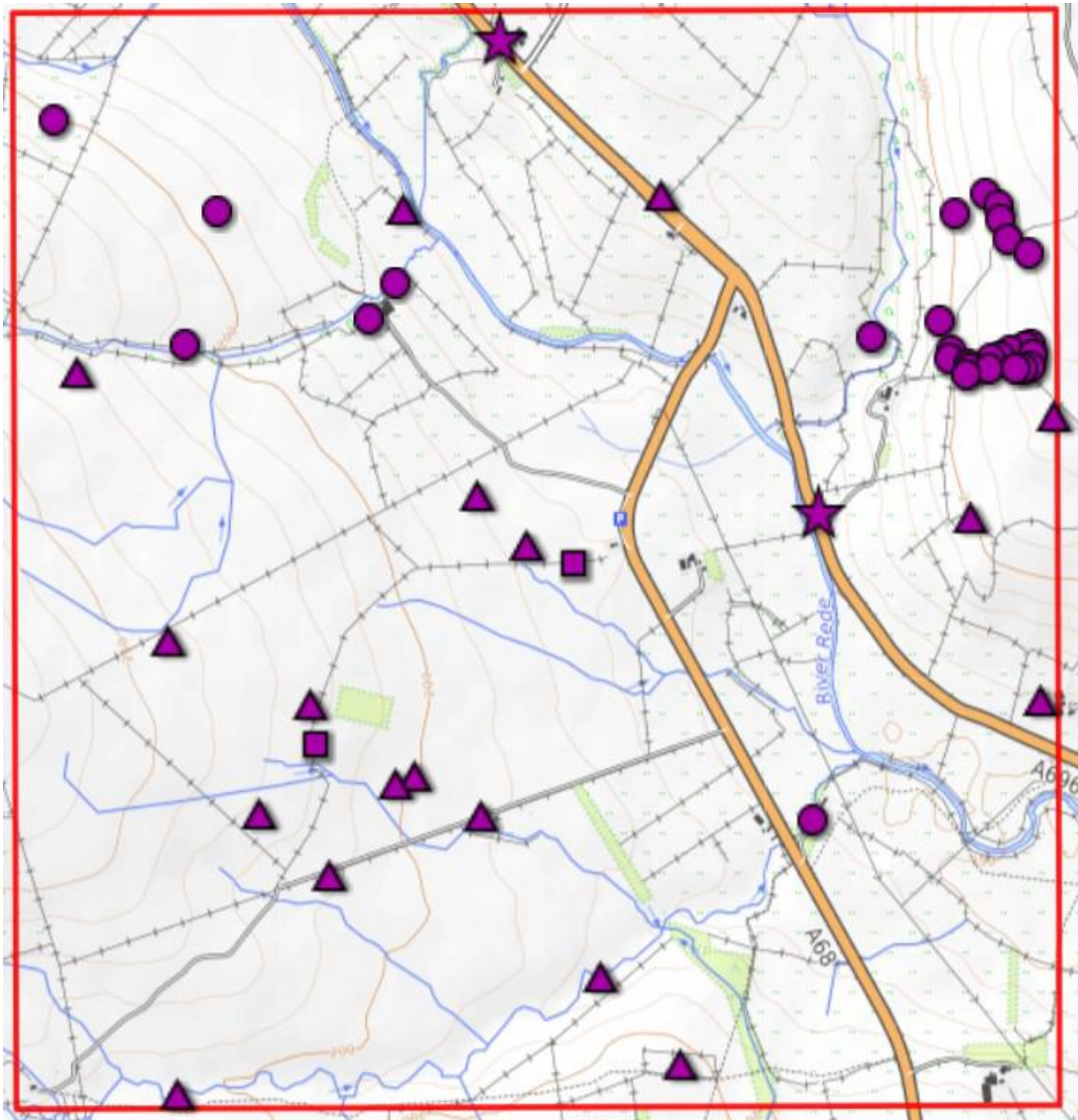


Distribution of Iron Age (yellow) and Medieval (blue) sites

One key issue that remains unresolved is to what extent there was continuity of settlement sites in Redesdale from the Iron Age/ Romano-British periods through the Early Medieval and post-Conquest Medieval periods? In the absence of any known Early Medieval sites we can only compare the distributions of post-Conquest sites with Iron Age/ Romano-British sites. It is noteworthy that there is a good deal of proximity between earlier and later period sites in the areas of Shittleheugh, Rattenraw, Kellyburn and Garretshiels. It is also noticeable that there is an absence of sites in the south-western quadrant of Area 2.

Excavations by George Jobey at medieval settlement sites in the North Tyne in the 1960's did identify the remains of earlier settlement structures beneath the surviving medieval structures. Unless there is evidence to the contrary it is probably always wise to bear in mind the dictum that 'a good site is a good site, is a good site' to at least consider the possibility of continuity or re-occupation of sites.

Post-Medieval (c.1540 - 1901)



Distribution of Post-Medieval sites

Paul Frodsham (Archaeology in Northumberland National Park, 2004) observes that in the 1500's the Reiver families in Redesdale and North Tynedale were 'not infrequently in conflict with each other'. By the end of the century Bellingham was the only regular market in the whole of Redesdale and the North Tyne.

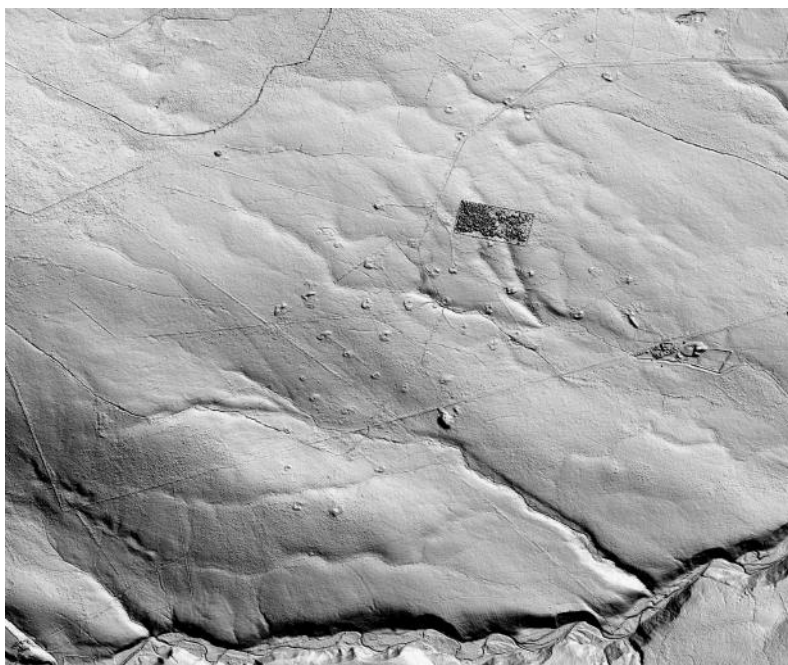
Few stone buildings from this period have been recorded in the reiving heartlands of Redesdale and North Tynedale. Most herdsmen lived in timber houses covered with earth and turf because these were harder to set alight.

Bastles, of which in Area 2 there are examples at Shittleheugh (site 2.081), Dunns Cottage (site 2.030) and Rattenraw (site 2.058), appear to have been built late in the era of the reivers towards the end of the 16th Century. The similarities in their construction may suggest that many bastles were built to a common blueprint. In the vicinity of Shittleheugh Bastle some 11

sites have been identified as field boundaries, 3 as drying kilns, 2 as quarries, 2 as watermill sites and 1 shieling.

Charlton and Day (Excavation and Field Survey in Upper Redesdale: Part II, *Archaeologia Aeliana* 1982) observe that the custom of summer grazing survived into the late 17th Century in the upland marginal areas of Northumberland. Whilst shieling continued into the late 17th Century, the improved political situation arising out of the union of the English and Scottish crowns in 1603 encouraged permanent settlement for the first time in some of the more remote upland valleys. In the later 18th and into the 19th centuries large areas of common land were enclosed using the Parliamentary Enclosure Acts. Farmers sought to better the quality of rough grazing through improved drainage, manuring and liming of the land. This in turn altered the character of the landscape and placed familiar features such as sheepfolds within it. However, by the late 19th Century, the pace of agrarian change had slowed down. The breeding of sheep and the rearing of gamebirds became the main concern of many landowners. As a result the surplus population began to leave the valleys in search of other employment and land, only recently brought under cultivation, again reverted to rough pasture and moorland heath.

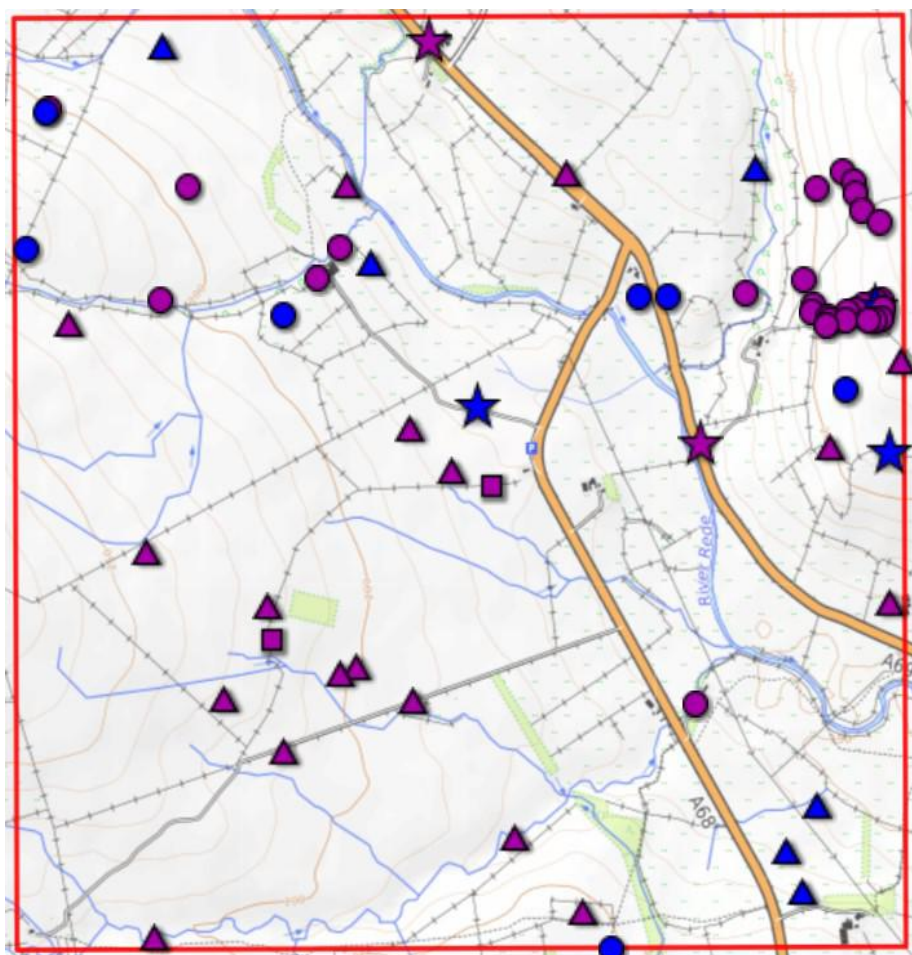
In the 18th and 19th centuries the area was impacted by wider industrial developments, reflected in the survival of bell-pits, the remains of small-scale coal mining, shown as 'old coal shafts' on historic Ordnance Survey plans. The Duke of Northumberland was operating a colliery at Brownrigg, south of Blakehope Fell (surveyed at Level 1 by Carlton & Frodsham in 2017) in the 1820s using a steam pumping engine. In common with most of the local collieries, Brownrigg closed in the early 20th century.



Lidar of SW quadrant showing extensive mining remains

A comparison between the distribution of Post-Medieval sites and the earlier Medieval sites, shown on the map below, again exhibits a noticeable degree of proximity. The exception is that in the south-western quadrant which is devoid of remains from earlier periods there are a

large number of mining sites, primarily for coal.



Distribution of Medieval (blue) and Post-Medieval (purple) sites

Modern Era (c.1901 - present)

The only sites recorded in Area 2 for this era are a couple of bomb crater sites north of Shittleheugh Bastle.

Sites of uncertain period

Bob Jackson made visits to four of the eighteen sites of uncertain period (2.018, 2.023, 2.024 and 2.025) and has provided a separate report on these sites. Whilst these reports provide useful additional detail it is fair to say that Bob does not feel that his observations have resolved the uncertainties regarding function and period.

I have commented upon sites 2.045, 2.046 and 2.057 on Rattenraw Farm and site 2.103 in sections above. Other than this I have no observations to add to the descriptions given on the LASA data for Area 2.

Concluding Summary

The paucity or complete lack of surface evidence for human activity during the Mesolithic and Neolithic eras within Area 2 is not unusual and is much in line with other upland areas in Northumberland. The findings from pollen analysis within Redesdale point towards some degree of human activity during these eras. The material culture of hunter-gatherers has not lent itself to providing readily identifiable physical remains and therefore the paucity is unsurprising. The widespread absence of surface evidence of Neolithic habitation in such upland areas is a bit more problematic in that the construction of large monuments such as the long cairns found within Redesdale would have required a significant degree of sustained labour that suggests the likelihood of long term habitation somewhere in the vicinity. Even the hypothesis of groups moving temporarily into the area for the construction and then deposit of bodies in these monuments would be expected to eventually yield some physical evidence. It is acknowledged that much of the Neolithic presence was concentrated in lower-lying areas such as the Millfield Plain or lower river valleys and that movement into upland areas may have been largely confined to seasonal transhumance or continuing hunting parties. Even given this the most likely scenario must be that there were some, at least seasonal, habitation sites surface evidence for which has not yet been discovered or that has been destroyed by subsequent activity during later periods. If at a later date habitation sites are found it may throw light upon whether the usage of the long cairn burial monuments was by a settled local population or some practice of a seasonal movement of the remains of the dead to these upland monuments.

The lack of surface evidence for habitation during the Bronze Age is rather more puzzling, in that such evidence has been found in other upland areas of Northumberland. The point made by Charlton and Day about it being less likely to find evidence of timber structures is of course completely valid. It is also quite feasible that Bronze Age habitation sites could have been reused and therefore surface evidence destroyed during later periods. It must also be acknowledged that agricultural activity down the ages will have removed surface evidence. Although in this report I have queried some of the possible claims to additional isolated round houses or putative cairn fields the number of reliably identified Bronze Age burial monuments across Redesdale does point to there having been a number of habitation locations during this period. With regards to Area 2 it is noted that there is no reliable evidence of Bronze Age agriculture in the form of cairn fields or proto-field systems. Lidar survey can be useful in potentially identifying such features although this would have to be augmented by site visits given the possibility of such indications turning out to be natural features.

Moving into the Iron Age our challenge shifts to interpreting and dating the evidence. I have discussed some of these issues in the section on the Iron Age/Romano-British era above. By typology most of the sites could date from nearly a thousand years before the arrival of the Romans to some centuries after their departure. Historically, necessary dating evidence has not been available and currently it remains limited to a small number of radio-carbon dates which are referred to in the section above. There remains much debate as to how much presence there was before the Romans and also how much continued after their departure. This is a debate with significant ramifications impacting upon assessments of the autonomy and resilience of the indigenous population and cultures. Although this is set a couple of thousand years in the past it relates to the historical phenomena of colonialism and the undervaluing, domination and sometimes destruction of indigenous cultures around the world.

Before the British state became a colonial power its earlier inhabitants were subject to several centuries of colonial rule. It is nowadays being more widely recognised that such colonial domination has a psychological and cultural legacy that extends beyond the years of colonial occupation.

It is arguable that the disparity of archaeological resource allocation between Roman and all other periods in Northumberland is also an expression of this legacy of colonialism. To point out that 'Non-Roman lives matter (historically and archaeologically)' may not bring crowds onto the streets but it does affect the future balance in allocation of resources for archaeology in Northumberland.

The Early Medieval period has also been referred to as the 'Dark Ages'. In terms of lack of archaeological evidence for this period in Redesdale the term currently remains appropriate. We were asked to reflect upon any explanation for this. Does this imply that there was wholesale abandonment of Redesdale after the departure of the Romans? Did the local population stop using stone for their buildings and revert to timber structures? Were there other factors that resulted in a particularly high degree of later depredation of remains from this period? Of these three possible explanations the first would imply that the features broadly attributed to the 'Iron Age/Romano-British' period were very much a consequence of the Roman arrival and continued presence and that without this, life in Redesdale was unsustainable. The second would be surprising given that the known level of deforestation in the area during the Roman period would have depleted the availability of timber whilst the resource of stone would have remained quite plentiful. The third explanation would require identifying some additional factor that made early medieval remains more vulnerable to such depredation than earlier and later periods. It is an issue that requires more searching and research and therefore appropriate resource allocation.

Moving to the post-conquest medieval we encounter more written sources to assist in compiling a narrative from the archaeological evidence. The comparison between locations of Medieval and Iron Age/Romano-British sites shown in the map in the Medieval section above does indicate quite a high level of continuity of location. The number of now known sites from both periods is very similar. The continuity of locations perhaps suggests that there was not a wholesale abandonment of the area during the Early Medieval.

This continuity of location is also exhibited in the comparison of distributions of Medieval and Post-Medieval sites. The main difference is the establishment of coal mining in the south-western part of Area 2. The complete absence of earlier sites in this south-western quadrant could potentially suggest that earlier remains were destroyed by mining activity. However this may be unlikely given that the mining locations align diagonally across just a narrow band, as one would expect with following a coal seam, and there are no remains recorded to the south-west of this strip of mining activity.

The degree of continuity of site location across various periods indicates that in pre-industrial eras it is the nature of the landscape itself that is the predominant factor in determination of land usage and habitation. The route of Dere Street remains the main transport route through Redesdale, perhaps itself an interesting interaction of the nature between the landscape itself and the human impact upon the landscape.

Further Investigation.

General

1. Much still remains to be discovered and discussed about the history of human activity in Redesdale. The engagement of Revitalising Redesdale community volunteers in this Lidar-based project marks a valuable contribution to this process and will hopefully lead to further work in years to come. Experience elsewhere in the region demonstrates the value of following-up similar significantly funded projects, that have enabled professional inputs into delivery of investigations, provision of training and development of community volunteer capacity, with the establishment a volunteer-led local community archaeology group. Such groups have successfully sustained the productive engagement of local volunteers in ongoing archaeological investigation. The establishment of such a group in Redesdale should be encouraged and supported.
2. There are many issues requiring further investigation pertinent to the whole of Redesdale. Among these are :
 - a) Locating habitation sites from the Bronze Age period.
 - b) Refining the dating of sites currently described as 'Iron Age/ Romano-British' in order to establish to extent of occupation prior to and after the Roman presence.
 - c) The related issue of the lack of identified Early Medieval sites could potentially be addressed by investigations beneath known Post-Conquest Medieval sites given the likely continuity or re-use of various sites deemed good for occupation in other eras.
3. The Lidar survey identified a number of sites of uncertain era and others that may or may not be natural features. It would be useful to have a programme for site visits, perhaps prioritising those sites offering to most apparent potential for adding to our existing understandings. This could be an early project for a local community archaeology group.

Investigations specific to Area 2.

1. Our report noted to difficulty in identifying remains of timber habitation sites of Bronze Age or Neolithic date and suggested that evidence of agricultural activities could help identify the potential locations of habitation. The existence of probable Bronze Age burial monuments at various locations points to the likelihood local habitation, as does the pollen analysis evidence of agricultural activity cited in this report. Site 2.103 has been identified as a possible cairnfield. A site visit is required to assess whether or not this is a natural feature, and to check whether there is any evidence of an associated proto-field system.
2. We are still awaiting radio-carbon dating of samples taken during the second (2020) excavation of Rattenraw enclosed settlement. Once these are available they may have a bearing on the question of pre-Roman occupation. Further excavation of other Iron Age/Romano-British sites would of course be very useful, but needs to be realistic about the availability of funding for such work.
3. The Lidar survey identified an extensive medieval landscape around Garretshiels. A full Level 1 landscape survey of this would be an appropriate next step, probably followed up by a detailed measurement survey of features of particular interest.
4. The possible farmstead, site 2.042, at Rattenraw has been subject to a detailed measurement survey and exhibits features suggestive of a possible transition from shieling to farmstead. It is worth considering targets for selective excavation at this site.

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