

Bowden Moor: report on site visits by Peeblesshire Archaeological Society on Bowden Moor on Friday 8 April and Wednesday 13th April 2022

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a) Previously unrecorded sites

Introduction

LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) has brought about a major change in how archaeologists survey landscapes. LiDAR is a method for measuring distances by illuminating the target with laser light and measuring the time the reflection of the light takes to return to the sensor. Differences in laser return times and wavelengths can then be used to make digital 3D representations of the target. Applied at landscape scale, the availability of high-resolution 3D models of the ground surface means that features that were previously impossible to see, either on the ground or in traditional aerial photography, can be highlighted and mapped.

The Scottish Government LiDAR data for the Moor was therefore consulted prior to our visits. This revealed several areas of ridge and furrow as well as the previously recorded earthworks summarised below (see part (b)). In addition a group of mounds was found beside an unnamed burn that drains N from the Moor (see site no 1) and, on the ridge to the W of the farm, a square enclosure (3) and an oval mound (4) were identified. Unfortunately the oval mound could not be confirmed on the ground due to deep undergrowth. The cross-shaped enclosure (5) has also been included as a site of interest as it appears to be an early example of a plantation enclosure as has what appears to be an earlier version of the sheepfold at Bowdenmoor Stell (7).

In terms of mitigation, the new sites recorded by PAS should be respected in the proposed forestry scheme with a buffer zone around them, and also the important group of medieval earthworks that were previously recorded by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (section b. below). However, it is not expected that the areas of ridge and furrow be respected in this way.

The medieval earthworks on the moor are a rare example of assarts - intakes of new land for arable cultivation. The intakes were enclosed in a bank and external ditch – possibly with a hedge on top as stipulated in some medieval deeds, especially when the intakes were in hunting forests. The group on the moor are sequential as more and more land was cleared of trees and improved, with the latest boundary running along the N crest of the ridge of Bowden Moor. This moor was the subject of a dispute between Melrose Abbey on the one hand and Kelso Abbey, the owners of Bowden, on the other in the late 12th century. Melrose Abbey lost out as it was encroaching too far onto Bowden Moor. The intakes have probably survived because of the settlement imposed on them which placed the boundary along the line of the parish boundary which lies to the N of Bowden Moor and can be seen outlined in red on Figure 1.

Section a. Inventory of newly recorded sites (site numbers correspond to those mapped on Figure 1 below).

1. Burnt Mounds NT 52844 32107

On the E bank of an unnamed burn there is a kidney-shaped mound with a hollow on its W, which stands 1.2m in height and measures 12m from N to S by 9m transversely. A turf was lifted to reveal heat-shattered, small angular stones in a black soil matrix. A smaller mound 15m to the E is also a burnt mound, lifting a turf revealed similar heat-shattered stone, but one to the N of similar size displayed a brown soil and no sign of the effects of burning and is presumably natural.

Burnt mounds were places where people heated up stones in wood fires and then placed the hot stones in water-filled containers or troughs to heat the contents. Almost invariably the sites lie close to a watercourse reflecting the need for a ready water supply. The by-products of this process are piles of heat-shattered and reddened stone lying in a matrix of black charcoal enriched-soil – and it is these which form the mounds we see today. Dating from as early as the Bronze Age, they are indications of prehistoric use of the area, possibly for grazing and/or hunting purposes. The purpose of burnt mounds still remains open to interpretation. Commonly they are interpreted as cooking sites (where the food would have been prepared by boiling); however, it has also been suggested that they could have functioned as a simple form of sauna by using the same hot-stone technology to create steam. This is not as implausible as it sounds, for 'sweat-houses' were used in rural Ireland until the relatively recent past.

3. Enclosure (Turf sheepfold) NT 52183 31639

On the grassy ridge of Bowden Moor, there is a square enclosure measuring 21m from E to W by 18m over turf-covered banks spread to about 4.3m in thickness and standing up to 0.25m in height with two possible entrances in the E side beside the corners, centred at NT 52183 31639. It is most likely to be a sheepfold of 18th century date.

4. Oval mound (Barrow, possible) NT 52520 31533

In scrub-covered rough grazing on the crest of an east-west ridge on Bowden Moor an oval mound 12m E-W by 10m N-S at NT 52520 31533 was observed on LiDAR data but it could not be confirmed on the ground as the location was covered in gorse. The character of the mound might suggest a barrow of prehistoric or early historic date.

5. Plantation Enclosure NT 52677 31545

On the E end of spur of Bowden Moor there is a saltire- (or St Andrews Cross) shaped enclosure comprising an earthen bank standing to about 0.5m in height, some 177m from WSW to ENE and 139m from N to S, each arm about 19m in breadth, with some ash and beech trees still growing from it. This type of enclosure is typical of 18th and early 19th century plantations for the provision of shelter as well as amenity.

7. Sheepfold and plantation enclosure NT 52965 31760

On the crest of Bowden Moor there is a drystone enclosure or sheepfold overlying a medieval linear earthwork on its N side, the ditch of which is visible on the side of the wall. This sheepfold replaces a

U-shaped enclosure marked by earthen banks which is annotated The Stell on the first edition OS map and depicted with tree symbols.

Rig and furrow

A number of areas of rig and furrow of medieval/post-medieval date were recorded with evidence of characteristic reverse-S ridges and also a few areas of modern rig and furrow from the early 19th century where the ridges are straight due to use of a lighter plough drawn by a small team of horses (nos 10-12). These have been mapped on Figure 1 as follows:

2. Centred at NT 52742 32036, on N-S axis, overrides E-W linear earthwork which is visible to E.
6. Centred at NT 52470 31404, extensive area of rig on N-S axis on S facing slope of moor.
8. Centred at NT 52265 31825, N facing slope of moor, on N-S axis, impinges on a linear earthwork on S.
10. Centred at NT 53271 31917, on N-S axis on ridge in poorly drained rough pasture.
11. Centred at NT 53388 31985, on ENE-WSW axis on a terrace on E facing slope on rough pasture.
12. Centred at NT 53146 31871, on ENE-WSW axis, terminates at earthwork on E and by modern cultivation to W.
13. Centred at NT 52086 31394, on NNW-SSE axis to W of small unnamed burn of S facing slope.
14. Centred at NT 52733 31585, on E-W axis, reduced by modern cultivation in field to E and overlain by the saltire cross-shaped plantation enclosure.
16. Centred at NT 52487 31830, a small area of ridges on N-S axis on N facing slope of moor to E of a small unnamed burn.
17. Centred at NT 52168 31981, a small area of rig on N-S axis to N of main block of rig and furrow (8 on plan) on N slope of the moor.
18. Centred at NT 52364 31745, a small area of rig on N-S axis that runs up to a linear earthwork at its N end.
19. Centred at NT 52676 31678, a small area of rig on N-S axis on a S-facing slope of the moor.
21. Centred at NT 53078 31443, a large expanse of rig on a S-facing slope in modern fields is visible on LiDAR.
22. Centred at NT 52867 31610, small area of rig on N-S axis at the bottom of a modern field to N of a burn gully.

Section b. Previously recorded sites

Canmore (<https://canmore.org.uk/>) is the publicly accessible National Record of the Historic Environment for Scotland. The existing Canmore records for Bowden Moor Farm are as follows:

NT53SW 5 Linear Earthwork(s) (Medieval) Canmore ID 55759 Bowden Moor

Note: the series of numbers in italics given here relate to a plan published by the RCAHMS in 1956, reproduced below as Fig 2.

The following linear earthworks can be seen on Bowden Moor either as standing monuments or as crop marks on air photographs (106G.Scot.UK.18: 5253-8 and 106G.Scot.UK.142:5058-63).

1. From the fort on Cauldshiels Hill (NT53SW 1) to the NW corner of Bowdenmoor Stell. (OS 6" 1860 shows this earthwork continuing to connect with earthwork 3 at NT 5319 3185) The earthwork is evidently later than the fort since its ditch blocks the fort entrance. No. 2 may be a continuation of this earthwork, but there is no connection between 2 and 6 as is implied in the statement (G Chalmers 1881) that the earthwork extended to the NW face of the Eildon Hills.

2. From the E edge of a cultivated field on the E side of Bowdenmoor Stell to the head of a small burn which passes under the modern road from Melrose to Bowden.

3. From the head of a branch of the Haxel Cleuch to the Huntly Burn; thence (as a crop mark) through two cultivated fields, in the first of which it impinges on the bank of enclosure NT53SW 16; thence in a wasted condition to the fork in the farm road running W from Bowdenmoor farm; and finally (as a crop mark) across a cultivated field [23 on Figure 1].

4. From the E side of no. 3, NE to the Harley Burn and thence NW to the corner of a cultivated field.

5. From an unnamed burn 200 yds NW of trigonometrical station 934, NE through a cultivated field (as a crop mark); thence to the SE corner of Jean's Wood.

6. From the E bank of the small burn on which no 2 terminates to a point 40 yds E of another burn at the foot of Eildon Mid Hill.

7. From the same burn on which no 6 originates to the S edge of Broomy Brae plantation.

Although they are now in varying stages of decay, all the earthworks have consisted of a ditch from 8ft to 12ft wide and a bank from 10ft to 15ft thick. They are evidently boundary marks, linking natural features or obvious landmarks such as Cauldshiels fort, and probably date to medieval and later times. The record of a dispute which arose in 1200 between the Abbeys of Kelso and Melrose shows that the boundary between their territories was marked by various crosses and ditches 'in medio monte', i.e. presumably somewhere on the Eildon Hills, and ran thence westwards to Cauldshiels and Faldonside Lochs (Tomus Primus, Liber de Melros). It is uncertain, however, whether any of the earthworks described represent the actual boundary in question.

RCAHMS 1956, visited 1945

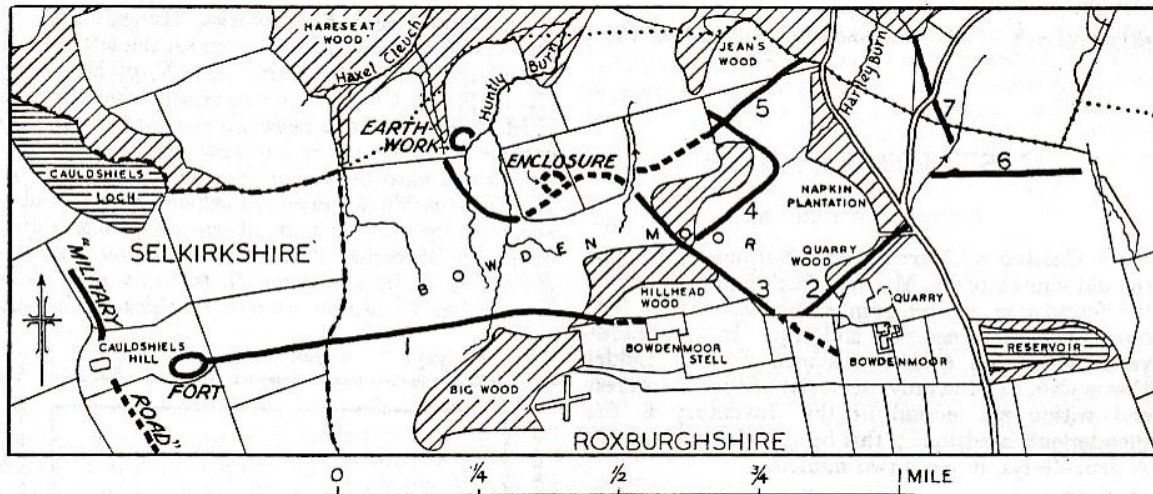


Figure 2 RCAHMS plan published on 1956 showing numbers of earthworks referred to in text above.

Survey of these earthworks, with the exception of no 7, shows that the majority of them were linked with each other.

1. NT 5162 3166 - NT 5319 3185. The course of earthwork no 1 is generally as shown on the RCAHMS plan except for the section between the Huntly Burn and the S end of Hill Head Wood (NT 5244 3179 - NT 5277 3178). There is no evidence here of any earthworks.

2. NT 5376 3219 - NT 5418 3219. In parts of earthwork no 2, stretches of bank appear on the S side of the ditch, indicating that the original earthwork may have consisted of two banks with a medial ditch.

The course of the remaining earthworks is as shown on RCAHMS plan.

From the N terminal point of earthwork no 3 at NT 5226 3239, the remains of another linear earthwork can be traced SW across a pasture field for half its overall length as a shallow hollow; a short length of ditch appears in the angle of the dyke at NT 5202 3222, beyond which no trace was found.

OS 25" 1st ed. shows another earthwork running from NT 5324 3216 to join earthwork no 3 at NT 5286 3216. This work consists of a ditch (4.0m wide) with a bank (5.0m wide) on its N side between NT 5324 3216 and NT 5317 3221, from where no further traces of the work were found, although at NT 5287 3217 a slight scarp can be seen on the E bank of the burn.

Of yet another earthwork shown on the same plan running N from NT 5312 3221 for a distance of about 80.0m, only a short length of mutilated bank, 10.0 m long, was found at NT 5311 3224.

Earthworks surveyed at 1:2500.

Visited by OS (WDJ) 9 February 1961

Addendum

An extension to earthwork no 4 was recorded by PAS from NT 52975 31998 to NT 52813 31983 which had been converted to a track for part of its length, levelling the bank in consequence (see No.9 on

Figure 1). The NW arm of earthwork no 5 appears to be a continuation of a track or hollow way that was observed continuing in rough pasture to the S (see 15 on Fig 1) rather than a boundary earthwork. Two other tracks are visible as hollow ways on LiDAR data in forestry 200m to NE (see 24 and 25 on Fig 1).

Visited by PAS 8 April 2022

NT53SW 16 Enclosure (Period unassigned) Canmore ID 55722

Air photographs (106G.Scot.UK 142:5060-1) reveal the crop mark of an enclosure in a cultivated field on Bowden Moor, 300 yds ESE of earthwork NT53SW 6. The enclosure is approximately circular on plan and measures 100ft in diameter within a single bank. A linear earthwork (NT53SW 5) impinges on it on the SE.

RCAHMS 1956, visited 1949

No surface traces of this enclosure are to be found.

Visited by OS (WDJ) 7 February 1961

Nothing could be seen at this location by PAS at the date of survey

Visited by PAS 8 April 2022

NT53SW 43 Bowdenmoor Findspot (Microliths) Canmore ID 55752

Not visited

NT53SW 95 Bowden Moor Farm (Period Unassigned) Farm Canmore ID 99617

Standing buildings not recorded