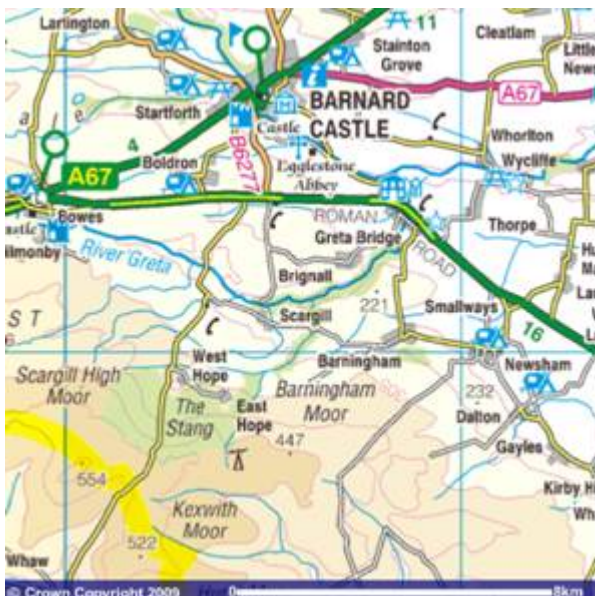


Barningham Moor Rock Art Field Trip (A personal view)

Barningham Moor is in North Yorkshire, just short of the border with County Durham. The village of Barningham is actually in Durham, but don't tell anyone. The moors are grouse breeding (and shooting) moors, owned by the Sir Anthony Milbank Bart. of Barningham Park and although there is now full access to the moors, the field trip followed public footpaths and track ways and avoided any breeding areas. The map below shows the general area of the moors for those who are interested in the geography.



Barningham Moor

The main purpose of the trip was to see the rock art on the moors. Some people were there for most of the weekend and some only there for one day, so the rock art hunt was split to cover two days with slightly different trips organised to ensure everyone got a good "rock art" session.

There is a rock art "panel" within easy walking distance from the village. This panel was visited on both full days and used as a "taster". Alas, this example of

Cups with joining grooves did fail to impress one of the group. The panel is shown below and in comparison to some of the examples I guess it is a little tame.



The local rock art panel

The next closest panel is a little south of the above panel, and appears to be associated with an enclosure. The block has cuts in the surface, where someone has at one time tried to split it with wedges. Fortunately they did not succeed and the block remains in one piece with the rock art safe. This example is shown below with the wedge marks arrowed. The art is not very visible on this photograph.



The rock they could not split

The location of these two examples is shown on the map below. The first local example is arrowed and the second example is at the area called "Grey Stones".



The local rock art area

The area between the moors and the village is called Barningham Low Moor and through this moor runs a stream. There is a small ford where the rough pathway to the High Moor crosses the stream and a little way down stream the water flows through limestone caves, leaving the stream bed dry except in wet weather. There is a small cave in the stream, too small for entry, but it clearly is a cave. Just down stream from this cave, the bank is being eroded and out of the bank, pottery is continually exposed. This is a bit of a mystery as there is no obvious evidence of habitation. The pottery is well buried within the side of the bank. The large piece shown in the photograph opposite was in a secure context, in the side of the rabbit hole. It was about 25cm across. The pottery is Victorian and I have seen lots of pieces in the stream bed. I have often wondered where it came from and this was the first time I have seen it in situ.



Pottery in stream bank

The rest of this first day was spent on the High Moors. Due to very windy conditions, a short walk was made to Frankinshaw Howe to view some rock art associated with a bronze-age cairn. The location of this cairn is shown later but the cairn itself is shown below. There are three decorated earth fast boulders within the surface of the cairn.



Frankinshaw Howe

No excavation of this cairn has been recorded. The three visible panels are quite good examples and although the cairn is obviously eroded due to rabbit burrows and 3500 years of exposure to the elements, it is still quite obviously a cairn. The views from the cairn are extensive and the site has a good "feel" to it. It is, as far as I am concerned, a special spot.

The best example of the three rock art panels on the cairn is shown below.



Frankinshaw Howe Panel

The weather was very windy, so at this point the day one crew returned to base-camp (the village hall) and then went on to Barnard castle, where we visited the Bowes Museum to sample the other art work. I now understand the difference between “impressionist” and “realist” art. It should have been obvious, but when it is explained in some detail, by two people who appear to know what they are talking about, then it does begin to make sense. The highlight of the visit for me was the mechanical silver swan. This fantastic mechanism, over 150 years old, is shown below.



The silver swan

It is operated once a day and it runs by clockwork, for about 12 seconds. The head of the swan animates, swings down and catches a fish. It is fantastic. The museum itself is a work of art and is shown below.



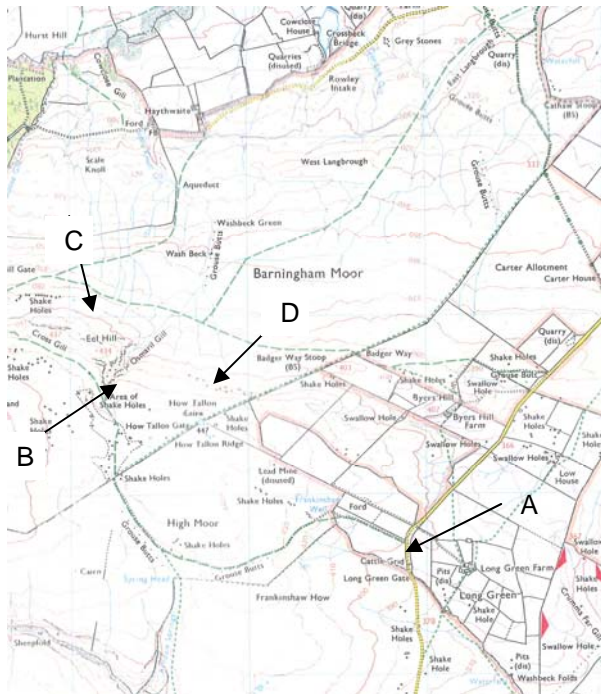
Bowes Museum

The day one crew was joined by the rest of the group around 5pm, back at the hall and we all went to a local pub in Dalton to eat. There is nothing special to relate about this pub visit apart from the food took a very long time to be served. We then returned to the hall and walked to the Milbank Arms, which is a very.....interesting pub!

From the outside the pub looks normal, if a little small. Inside, it is small, with no bar.....No more information, you have to experience it. However, the “ladies” is upstairs, not outside and “hens” live in the outbuilding labelled “Hens”. These are important notes for ladies. Men have no real problems as long as they like art work in their “loos”.

The “indoor camping” was actually very good with excellent facilities. The tea and toast, served with a smile in the morning was also quite acceptable. The water was hot, the accommodation, in two separate rooms was ample and the cheese and strawberries after returning from the pub was almost sensuous.

The “long walk” on the moors started with a short drive along an almost deserted road. The vehicles were parked off the road and the walk was started. The weather was dry, with a gentle breeze and glorious sunshine. The map below shows the route taken, more or less. The start point is marked with “A”.



The long walk map

The plan was to start off with relatively simple rock art and then “woo” the doubters with increasingly impressive rock art. Then the drama of Osmaril Gill, and Ell Hill would convince the doubters. This would be followed by rock art, prehistoric settlements, a bronze-age burial mound and then back to the cars.

The walk followed the green pathway, across a muddy area and then out of the mud and across a green swathe of grass towards an obvious gate. From here the pathway became very obvious. The first area of interest was a rather bare patch of ground to the left of the path. A stream cuts across the path through a culvert and the sloping area on the south bank of the stream is eroding continually. If you look

carefully you can find small chips of chert, the result of chert chipping in Stone Age times. We did find some and left it in place for the enjoyment of others.

The track way passed by Frankinshaw Howe, visited the day before. The rock art here was a bit more interesting, but there were still doubters. The photograph below shows the group searching out the rock art.



Unconvinced

There were some who did not doubt and started worshipping the rock art as shown below.



Convinced!

The walk continued towards the area marked “B”. This area is just above Osmaril Gill. Here there is another,

unexcavated cairn, a stone circle and more rock art, with more dramatic cups and grooves. All are shown below.

Then, we entered Osmaril Gill. This is a rather special place, with a very special feel to it. I want to be here at sunrise or sunset and watch it go dark. It is a fantastic place. The gill sort of sneaks up on you. It looks like a small valley as shown below.



The cairn



The gill



The rock art

As you approach the lip, the gill opens up to expose a fantastic valley, small, but perfectly formed. There is a scree slope on one side with much larger stone blocks at the bottom. There is a very special concentric ring stone at the bottom of the valley, engraved on a large, sloping slab. Here, the vast expanse of sky meets the distant horizon and the views are to die for.



The stone circle



Osmaril Gill



Concentric circles



Eel Hill rock art

Opposite the entrance to the gill is a rounded hill called Eel Hill, marked "C" on the map, which has a remarkable stone on the top. This example of rock art finally convinced the most ardent doubter. The cup in the centre is at least 30cm deep and the concentric circles surrounding it appear to be symmetrical around this central cup. The slab of rock is an earthbound rock but in earlier times it may have been a standing stone. Who knows what it meant in those days, but the views are fantastic and it is another very special place with a magical feel about it.

From Eel Hill the walk went east, across the lower slopes of Osmaril Gill, to follow a plateau above an ancient track way called "Badgers Way". The plateau is sheltered from the south by a step slope. This area, marked "D" on the map, has many examples of rock art, but its real treasure is the number of prehistoric hut circles, enclosures and other structures, that spread along the plateau beneath the escarpment.



Eel hill rock art



Hut circle

One area has significant structure still standing to a good height. The area is very rich and to the north is an example of a

burnt mound, which we could not find. Perhaps next time we will.



The significant structure

While this was not an archaeological dig, one of the group did find a rather ancient communication device, which was returned to its original context to protect the significant archaeology.



Ancient communications device

The walk then continued up the escarpment towards How Tallon, which is

an excavated bronze-age burial mound. The excavation failed to note the the rock art within the cist and the portable boulders with cups on them were built into the dry stone wall which now crosses the mound. Oddly enough, to me, How Tallon, visible from Greta Bridge some miles south and one of the highest places on the moors, does not have that special feel that Osmaril Gill or Eel Hill has. Perhaps it is the white trig point on the top.



How Tallon

Oh, before we finish the walk, I would like to show you another fine example of a “corn drying kiln” as we have back home at Caer Alyn, or is it!



A kiln???

Then back to the cars.