



Book Reviews

AN UPLAND BIOGRAPHY. LANDSCAPE AND PREHISTORY ON GARDOM'S EDGE BY JOHN BARNATT, BILL BEVAN AND MARK EDMONDS

Windgather Press, Oxford. 2017. 202pp; 41 figs; 20 colour and 21 B&W plates, 6 tables, pb, ISBN 978-1-911188-15-5, £34.99

Landscape archaeology in areas of upland moor and scrub woodland is notoriously challenging. This book describes a large project on the northern part of Gardom's Edge in Derbyshire from 1995 to 2000, an area owned by the Peak District National Park Authority. Detailed survey of surface features in an area roughly 1.4 km by 0.5 km was followed by the excavation of 32 trenches and five test-pit transects: initial geophysical survey did not prove effective and was not pursued. Funding by and location in a National Park encouraged public participation with many volunteers taking an active part, over 8000 visitors and a variety of associated activities. The book reflects both the challenging archaeology and engagement with this wide audience.

The opening chapter briefly considers some of the theoretical developments in our understanding of how upland landscapes are perceived, and how they have developed. Popular beliefs that they are natural and unchanging are gradually being replaced, while antiquarians and archaeologists have escaped the early constraints of geographical determinism. The challenges facing researchers combine the sometimes extensive preservation of earthworks and stone features, on often thin, acidic soils with a poverty of material culture. The authors raise some of the big questions about exploitation strategies in the past, while acknowledging the difficulties in answering many of them and the need to place localised projects in a wider, regional context.

The following chapter provides details of the geology of the area, and links to previous work including extensive surveys on the East Moors. A broadly chronological approach then considers the wealth of detail recorded by survey and carefully targeted excavation on Gardom's Edge, with maps providing an excellent key to the location of the recorded features and excavation areas. The most prominent feature to be investigated was the large scarp-edge enclosure defined by an interrupted stone bank, which was initially thought on the basis of surface evidence to be Neolithic in date. Excavation, however, demonstrated that it belongs to the late second millennium BC, but the function of the enclosure remains enigmatic. The authors point out significant contrasts to hillforts in the immediate area and suggest comparison with a small and widespread group of cliff-edge fortified sites. This is unconvincing, but the lack of comparative sites is perhaps more to do with a lack of recognition of a peculiarly upland phenomenon. A cliff-edge enclosure in Upper Wharfedale, for example, appears to contain a hut circle and so may only be comparable in terms of its location, but publication of the revised results from Gardom's Edge at least provides a starting point for comparison with work elsewhere.

The need to support surface survey with sampling by excavation is illustrated by the discovery of three house sites dating to the beginning of the first millennium BC. One of these was completely invisible on the surface, while fewer than half of the potential platforms identified through survey could be demonstrated to have had buildings on them. The overall results indicate an ebb and flow of exploitation going back to the fifth millennium BC which finds parallels in some nearby upland locations but not in others, indicating a complex range of trajectories through time that does not necessarily conform to lowland models. The authors give an honest assessment of the factors limiting our current

interpretations, and indicate future directions for research which is still at an early stage. The book concludes with much useful discussion in detailed appendices on the worked stone (Edmonds), pottery and stone artefacts and a unique lead object thought to represent a torc terminal or part of an armlet (Beswick), glass beads (Jackson) and thin section ceramic petrography (Cootes and Quinn).

Having reviewed the content, we must turn to its presentation and production. Unfortunately, there are many errors throughout the main text of the book, grammatical, typographical and organisational, which do not reflect well on the quality of editorial control at the Windgather Press. There is an erratic over-use of italics throughout, and although referencing is comprehensive there is a lack of consistency in details between text references and the bibliography, and missing, incomplete and misplaced entries. The main style of pottery found during the project appears variously as Deverel- and Deverill-Rimbury, with inconsistent hyphenation of post-Deverel-Rimbury. It would have been helpful to have some indication of scale for the artefact photographs, particularly when going from a group of large quern stones to the curious lead object, shown by the excellent line drawing in the appendix to be less than 50 mm long.

The book combines detailed description and discussion of stone features and excavated contexts with generalised, informal material that will appeal to a non-specialist audience: chapters are separated by full-page, atmospheric colour photographs opposite coloured pages with, in white font, chatty and often whimsical comments on the landscape and the farmers, quarrymen and climbers who use and have used it. The poignantly personal response of the visiting Somalian refugee and his son reflects the commendable public face of the project, but sits uncomfortably alongside archive-level details of 'sub-oval boulders' and 'sub-angular clearance stone' in context descriptions. This reflects a wider challenge in presenting often arcane archaeological evidence to a general audience. It is good to see a National Park funding research and public engagement on this level given the scarcity of opportunities for developer-funded intervention in the uplands, but communication of the results to professional and general audiences requires careful handling. Nevertheless, the Gardom's Edge project has set a benchmark in a continuing campaign to develop our understanding of upland landscapes not only in this region, but throughout the country.

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