



Location: Lordenshaws Farm covers 409 ha of the eastern side of the Simonside Hills near Rothbury in Northumberland. It has a rich array of prehistoric and later archaeological remains, including earthworks, burial cairns, rock carvings, and an impressive hillfort.

Main period: Bronze Age–Iron Age

Access & ownership: Visitors have access to Lordenshaws as part of a management agreement between the landowner (The Duke of Northumberland), the tenant farmer, and the Northumberland National Park. A number of the archaeological remains are Scheduled. The site is easily reached from Rothbury (6 km) by taking the B6342 to the south east, then following signs to Simonside. Parking is available close to the archaeological remains. A GPS device will help you to find the rock art!

The earliest remains at **Lordenshaws** are thought to be carvings, known as ‘cup and ring marks’ after their most common form of a small hollow surrounded by a groove. More than 100 of the boulders and outcrops within a 2.5 km² area were decorated with variations of these curious marks (Fig. 3). They are difficult to date precisely but were first made in the Neolithic period, and continued to have significance into the Late Bronze Age. The most striking examples at Lordenshaws are known as ‘Main Rock’ (NZ 05223 99149), ‘Horseshoe Rock’ (NZ 05100 99223) and ‘Channel Rock’ (NZ 05686 99389). See red stars on Figure 2; more detail can be found on the [RAMP website](#) where you can find information for use on a mobile phone during your visit.



Fig. 1. Three of the carved rocks at Lordenshaws: a) Main rock, heavily decorated, very eroded, and much quarried (KE Sharpe); b) Horseshoe Rock with cups enclosed by a groove (Andrew Curtis [CC BY-SA 2.0]); and c) Channel Rock with enhanced natural channels and a scatter of cup marks (England’s Rock Art website)

During the Bronze Age large numbers of stone cairns appeared across the moor. Many were the result of field clearance by early farmers but some contain burials. Two of the larger cairns have been excavated and found to date from the Early to Middle Bronze Age (4000–3000 years ago). One contained a cist (a stone lined grave) in the centre; no human remains were found. The cist with its covering slab can still be seen close to the footpath NE of the hillfort (NZ 0574 9958; Fig. 2). A second cairn nearby contained a smaller cist within which were a little charcoal and two small pieces of pottery; it may originally have held a cremation. Another cairn can be seen about 150 m NE of the hillfort. It was built on top of a cup-marked rock and one of its kerbstones is also decorated. The hollow in the centre of the cairn is the result of excavation in the 19th century.



Fig. 2. Bronze Age cist grave with massive cover slab. By K Sharpe

Three unusual features on the moor have proved controversial. Known as ‘tri-radial cairns’ they have three ‘arms’ formed from stones and earth. Long thought to be post-medieval sheep shelters, there

is now a possibility that they are much older. Excavation by members of the Border Archaeological Society (Deakin *et al.* 2002) revealed a structure similar to a probable Early Bronze Age tri-radial cairn at Turf Knowe. Charcoal from beneath the cairn was dated to 2600 BC —the Late Neolithic. The three arms of each cairn are aligned in roughly similar directions, one pointing N and the others at 140 and 240 degrees. It is suggested that they could be pointers to the mid-summer and midwinter sunrise and sunset.

The Iron Age hillfort (NZ 0545 9925; Fig. 3) was probably first built in about 350 BC, perhaps a thousand years after the last of the cairn burials. Set on the summit of Garleigh Moor at 268 m OD, the site has panoramic views along the Coquetdale valley, and east to the coast; it lies at the junction of four ancient track-ways. The ground falls away steeply on all sides except the SW.

There seems to have been at least two phases of construction, and there may have been a timber palisade on the site before that. The earthworks are extensive, with an overall diameter of 140 m. Three ramparts of earth and stone and two ditches enclose a D-shaped area measuring about 70 x 45 m, with entrances to the E and W. The interior lies on two levels, divided by a natural scarp running from E-W, artificially extended by earthen banks. Two hut circles can be seen in the N part, with internal diameters of 4.0 m and 5.6 m respectively. The walls now stand between 0.3 and 0.4 m high. The S part of the interior contains a very prominent hut circle, of 5.3 m dia. with walls 1.1 m high internally, and 0.6 m externally (Fig. 4). A line of at least four circular depressions set against the southern ramparts may also be houses.

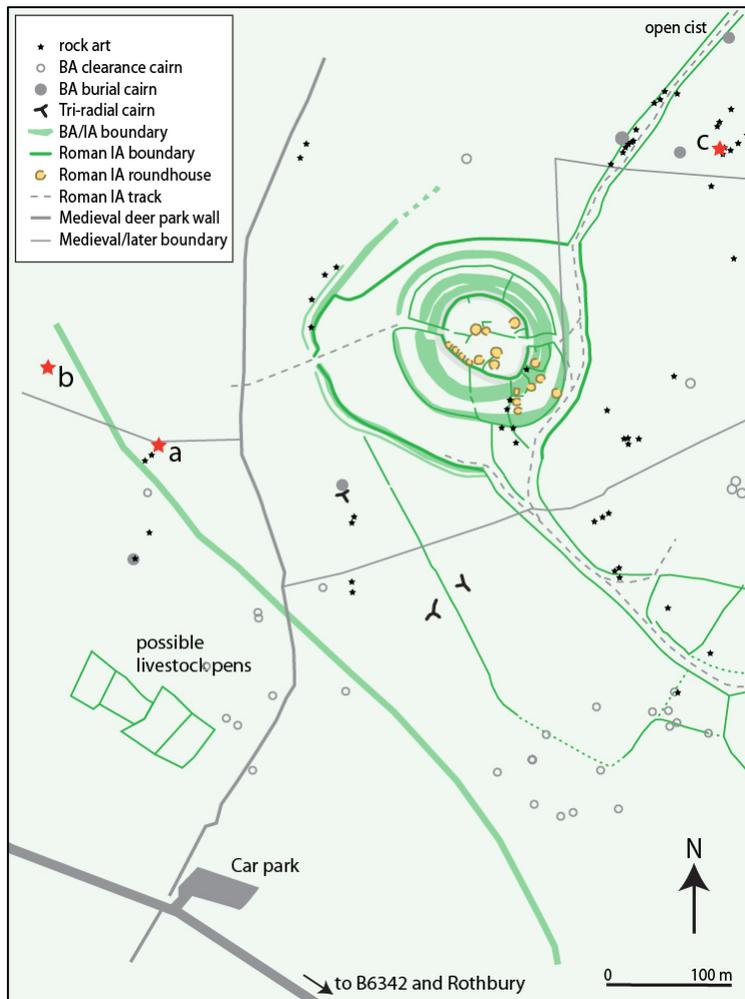


Fig. 3. Plan showing key features. Red stars indicate rock art panels mentioned in the text. After Oswald & Ainsworth 2010: fig.4.8



Fig. 4. The hillfort at Lordenshaws. By Paul Allison [CC BY-SA 2.0]

To the SW, where the approach is easiest, is an additional defence about 1.5 m high. 200 m on from this, a further, substantial NW-SE linear earthwork, 9 m wide and 1.2 m high seems to have barred the approach to the fort, forming a boundary across the hillside. Finally, the remains of a Roman-British settlement overlie the levelled SE defences of the hillfort. The site appears to have had a complex life. Partly overlapping defences suggest reuse and possible expansion, before sections became obsolete and overlain by the later settlement.

References and further information

Ford, B., Deakin, P. & Walker, M. 2002. The tri-radial cairns of Northumberland. *Current Archaeology* 182, 82–5

Oswald, A. & Ainsworth, S. 2010. The Northumberland and Durham Rock Art Project: Some observations on the landscape context and 'taphonomy' of rock art, and recommendations for future projects. In T. Barnett & K. Sharpe (eds), *Carving a Future for British Rock Art*, 37–56. Oxford: Oxbow Books

Topping, P. 1993. Lordenshaws hillfort and its environs. *Archaeologia Aeliana* 5th Series 21, 1–27

Rock Art on Mobile Phones (RAMP) website: <http://rockartmob.ncl.ac.uk/main/r/>

England's Rock Art (ERA) website: <http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/era/>

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