

Report on the IAG Walk, 29 March 2023 by Mike Short

Many thanks to David Shepherd and Yvonne Luke for leading our late March walk.

On 29 March 2023 a group of eight members joined guest guide, David Shepherd, together with our Vice-Chair Yvonne Luke, on a circular walk of less than five miles taking in Sleights Pasture, Scar Close, Keld Bank, Philpin Sleights and the natural feature of Haws Gill Wheel. The gloomy BBC weather forecast, which was for rain all day, doubtless contributed to the low numbers. As it turned out, the Met Office forecast proved to be much more accurate and there was no rain until the very end of the walk.

David Shepherd has an academic background in Social Psychology and his focus is with ways people express their relationship with places. For more than twenty years, David has had an involvement with archaeology, particularly in the South Pennines. In 2013 he authored an interesting paper, *“Propped Stones: The Modification of Natural Features and the Construction of Place”*, in which he examined features in the landscape in the South Pennines and Southern Yorkshire Dales that he believes could constitute a previously unacknowledged type of megalithic structure. The focus of this walk was to look at three such features as well as looking at other archaeology on the route.



At Sleights Pasture Great Cairn

Starting from the roadside parking spot 300m south-west of Ribblehead Viaduct the group headed through Sleights Pasture stopping briefly at the recently surveyed Sleights Pasture Great Cairn and its associated features. The next point of interest was 340m SSW towards the SW corner of Sleights Pasture to the first ‘propped stone’ at NGR SD7579578018 (see attached notes and photographs provided by David).

The walk continued past the sheep folds at the SW corner of Sleights Pasture through the two fields of Scar Close turning north just before Great Douk Cave onto Keld Bank to look at the second propped stone at NGR SD7475977253 before stopping for lunch at the prehistoric settlement of Keld Bank. Listed as being of Iron Age to Romano-British date, this extensive settlement on two terraces consists of three main enclosures within a perimeter

bank together with smaller structures and a further sub-circular enclosure. Within the complex there is a probably medieval field, curving and with high straight sides.



Examining propped stone 1

On the lower terrace of the Keld Bank settlement lie four cairns – three of which were the next stops on the walk. At NGR SD7465277396 the walkers viewed a Neolithic long cairn approx. 24.5m N-S and 13.9m E-W, a cairn that has been excavated at some unrecorded time in the past. At the SE end of this cairn is a small doughnut-shaped cairn. Fifteen metres to the SW of the larger cairn is a smaller oval or sub-rectangular Neolithic cairn. A short distance to north of these three cairns and on the north side of the field wall at approx. SD7467277456 is a prominent round cairn which could be either Neolithic or Bronze Age which was seen but not visited. *(A paper on the Keld Bank neolithic cairns by Yvonne can be found on the IAG website – click on ‘publications’, then ‘Ingleborough’, then ‘A survey of the NW flanks of Ingleborough’, then ‘Keld Bank’.)*



Leaving Keld Bank Neolithic long cairn

Descending to Philpin Sleights, David introduced us to his third propped stone at NGR SD7486677760. David firmly believes that all three of these propped stones have been placed and raised on chocks by human effort but there has to be the possibility that they were naturally transported to their present location during the last ice event. David points to examples of ‘propped stones’ in parts of the UK unaffected by the last ice event. On the

other hand, in very close proximity to the three visited stones, there are numerous sizeable lumps of limestone that have been ripped up by glaciation and redeposited on top of the limestone pavement – the only difference between them and the three ‘propped stones’ simply could be that these three came to rest on intervening smaller chunks of glacial debris.

Nevertheless, David Shepherd has introduced us to the possibility that these features that many of us familiar with our local glacially altered local landscape hitherto have walked past with barely a second glance, could have been placed by human activity. That is a fascinating hypothesis, and we are extremely grateful to David for giving up his time to introduce us to these three stones and his work on propped stones.

For the return to the parking spot, the walk dropped down to the *Old Hill Inn* crossing the main road to walk up Philpin Lane and branch E up a footpath to Haws Gill Wheel. Close to here, Winterscales Beck disappears below ground into an extensive cave system but after prolonged wet weather the flooded caves spew out huge quantities of water to form a lake in a bowl in the earth that drains through a swallow hole within the bowl. When it is very wet it is a spectacular sight marred only by quantities of farm debris that have found their way into the hole.

And then it was the return to Sleights Pasture continuing NE on the footpath and SW along the lane through Haws House Pasture, crossing Lower Sleights Road just as a light shower began to fall. It had been a very good walk.

(Note: for a self-guided walk of the many archaeological features in this area including the settlement and cairns on Keld Bank see: *Archaeology Walk No. 3: Ribblehead, Great Douk and Southerscales*, available on the IAG website (click on ‘publications’, then ‘Ingleborough’, then ‘Archaeology Walks’)