

The R2R 'Next Steps' programme

Peter Matthiessen, November 2009

As I write (9/11/09), the R2R book and walks leaflets are just about to roll off the presses, so you should be reading them by now, and will realise (if you hadn't already) that the R2R project has been successful beyond even John Hoggett's most fevered dreams. During the three years of the project, we have documented more than 3,000 previously unrecorded sites of archaeological interest in the Duddon and western Lickle valleys, carried out Level 2 surveys of 15 of these, and excavated two Bronze Age ring cairns. Even using my normal masterly understatement, this is an astonishing achievement, and everyone concerned has a right to feel proud...

...but not complacent. The question on everyone's lips, therefore, is what should we do next? I am pleased to say that a workshop on 25 July 2009, which involved a representative cross-section of R2R team members, not only concluded that further work was needed, but expressed a strong preference for conducting more detailed studies of sites already discovered. This did not rule out some additional Level 1 surveys in adjacent areas considered to be closely related to the R2R project area, but it was clear that we primarily want to understand more fully the historical significance of some of the sites that have already been logged.

With that conclusion in mind, John Hoggett has pulled together a small team to plan the Next Steps. The team has already met twice, and to date has considered what we could be doing in the short and medium terms (i.e. before obtaining any further funding). We will start the longer term planning in January in close consultation with the professional archaeologists. Even the short/medium term details are not yet cast in concrete, but we have decided to progress several issues in the coming 6 months:-

- 1) We will encourage an exchange of expertise and experiences between the old field teams by organising a series of archaeological talks, walks and visits in the R2R project area so that everyone who wishes becomes familiar with existing finds (e.g. those described in the leaflets), and visits to relevant sites further afield (e.g. ring cairns and longhouses in Langdale and Eskdale) so that we can place the Duddon's archaeology in context.
- 2) We will identify and survey specific limited areas at Level 1, including a few already-surveyed areas (as a means of assessing how many features we may have missed first time around), plus some in-filling of the few R2R areas not already covered, and finally some coverage of areas functionally-related to the Duddon such as the eastern Lickle Valley.
- 3) Finally, we will begin to familiarise ourselves with the techniques needed to conduct a wider range of Level 2 surveys, in particular of sites that are too large to permit use of the tape offset technique. This work will probably focus on a single pilot site such as the Pikeside Farm longhouse complex, and as with the long-term planning, will necessarily involve the support of professional archaeologists.

The planning team think that these three activities will stand us in good stead for the longer term, and will create a firmer basis on which to plan a new bid for funding. We will be alerting you to developments by email and by this new website, so watch this space!