The project aimed to recover aspects of a forgotten and misremembered past in the Anglo-Scottish border in Cumbria using archaeological landscape survey with local volunteers and undergraduates from Newcastle University. It was aimed at building links with landowners and volunteers with publication of the results in peer-reviewed national and local society journals. The project wanted to address the relevance of the past in the present, and the formation and maintenance of a distinct regional identity and its role in present-day place formation and communities.

What did you do?

The project has provided a better understanding of the development of the historic border landscape of Cumbria, north of Hadrian’s Wall, by revealing the extent to which the medieval landscape survives as relict features, such as the earthworks of settlements and field boundaries. The project has also discovered seven new examples of prehistoric rock art. The discovery of new archaeological sites has led to a 70% increase in the number of entries in the Historic Environment Records for the case study areas. A better understanding of the historic landscape will assist Local Authorities and Historic England in their provision of advice in an area which is vulnerable to agricultural abandonment and significant expansion of forestry plantation.

The discovery of new archaeological sites has helped to clarify and refine appropriate approaches and techniques for a wider landscape-scale project of the borders, which is currently in development. In particular it has demonstrated how a combination of digital air photography and ground-truthing can greatly increase the known archaeological resource.

The project aimed to foster interest in the past landscape with the local community and to raise awareness amongst local landowners of the value of some of their unknown or misunderstood heritage assets. Five farming families were contacted and had the project explained to them. The children of one family became involved in the project survey. An amateur local historian took part in the surveys, sharing his knowledge with the team. Two local history societies were kept informed of the project’s progress and it is hopes to provide both with talks, along with one to the county archaeological society. It is also intended to lead a guided walk with members of the local community. The preliminary results of the project have already been presented to the Landscape Archaeology Conference, held in Uppsala, Sweden in August.

The project also provided training for undergraduates from the School of History, Classics and Archaeology with practice in the techniques of landscape archaeology. In particular, it provided them with knowledge in ‘reading’ difficult to understand landscapes which have undergone significant change. In the case of one student, it has inspired her to continue in the study of prehistoric rock art of the area for her undergraduate dissertation.
What difference did it make?

The project had raised awareness amongst local landowners and tenants of the rich archaeological resource on their land. It has increased knowledge of a poorly understood landscape in Cumbria. Both of these achievements will ensure better conservation management of heritage assets in the future.

One of the team members, a new archaeology graduate from Newcastle University, subsequently achieved a post as a graduate trainee with a professional archaeology company in Cumbria.

I learnt a lot about how to interpret the landscapes around us and what this can tell us about the past. I was particularly interested in the rock art which we found, this inspired further reading and has now expanded to become my dissertation topic. It was great to spend time learning how to use equipment such as the GPS and the TST and then seeing this imprinted onto a wider database. These skills are vital and the project enriched my understanding of archaeology. – Project team member, Tilly Reed, Stage 3 undergraduate student, History and Archaeology

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http://www.ncl.ac.uk/mccordcentre/research/projects/Border_to_the_Wall.htm