
Gauber Cow Pasture excavation blog

Day 17, Wednesday 17 July 2024

This will be the last posting for a few months.

On another warm day today Trench 5 was put to bed by a valiant gang of six volunteers who also stuck in with those end-of-project tasks that no one enjoys, least of all me - washing all the mucky buckets and spades, dismantling the tents, and packing all the gear into David's trailer to be hauled back to the main track by a Natural England quad bike.



The project moves on to the next phase now - sorting out all the info, preparing the animal bone and whatnot to send to the enviro lab, hopefully being able to send off good samples to the dating lab, analysing all the results, interpreting the site and writing the project report. It will all take up to six months. As and when there is something to report, there will be a new posting on this blog site.

Text: David Johnson. Photos: David Johnson & Beverley Rymer.



Gauber Cow Pasture excavation blog

Day 16, Monday 15 July 2024

The last excavation day - Monday, 15 July - brought the same beautiful sunny weather that we started with three weeks ago. It is as if the weather gods were teasing us.

Trench 5 was completed with the last efforts concentrated on the area tucked into a corner of the building where we found the remnants of a hearth along with yet more burnt stone and animal bone. The soil was taken out and carefully sieved to identify anything of interest. Beverley and David then planned the trench at a scale of 1:20.



In the morning staff from the Wild Ingleborough programme came on site with cameraman Finn who was charged with taking footage of our work to form part of a fund-raising drive for the programme's work. Mark Simpson was also here, very kindly taking final drone photography for us.

All that is left now is to backfill Trench 5, take down the mess and site tents, load all the gear into David's trailer, watch it being taken to the track by a Natural England quad bike and wave bye bye to the site.

This is just the end of the beginning though. What comes next is sorting out and making sense of everything, putting plans and notes into their final format, sending enviro samples to the lab for analysis and identification, radiocarbon dating any suitable samples and the small matter of writing up the project report. All this will take the rest of the year. Updates will be posted on this blog as and when appropriate.

My thanks go to all those who took part in the dig, all those who have been following the blog, all those who have given their help logistically, the very generous funding bodies, Historic England and the YDNPA for believing in the project and granting consent ... and anyone else I have forgotten to list. Thank you all.

Text: David Johnson. Photos: Beverley Rymer.



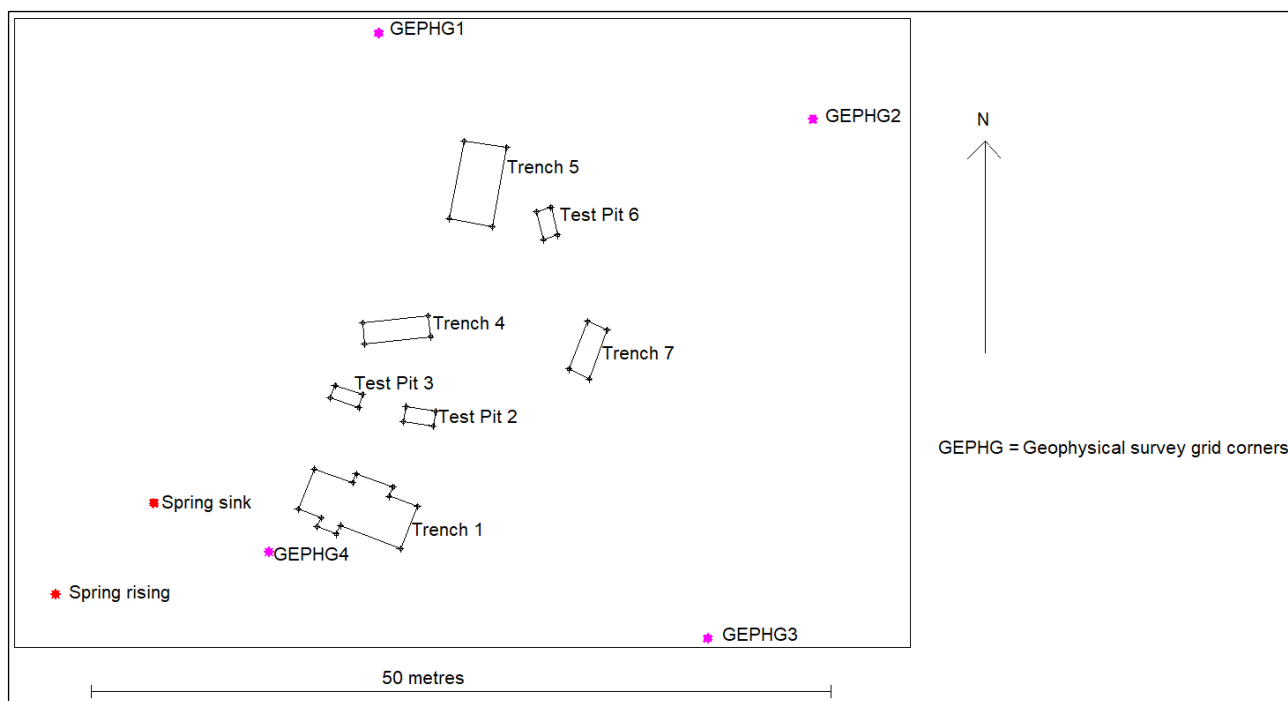
Gauber Cow Pasture excavation blog

Day 15 – Friday, 12 July 2024 - continued

A Total Station survey (EDM - Electronic Distance Measurement) was carried out on Day 15, mapping the trenches, the test pits, the geophysical survey grid points and the site of a spring, emerging and disappearing just a few metres from Trench 1.

We'll now try and place this survey onto an OS map and onto an aerial photograph of the site to give context - see draft at bottom of page.

Text and diagram: John Cuthbert.



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Day 15 – Friday, 12 July 2024

Week 3 had mixed fortunes in terms of weather though we only lost one day (Tuesday) and, amazingly, had two completely dry days in a row. A lot was achieved.

Trench 4 across the north gable in the main building was completed, as was Trench 7 in Building 3. Both were aimed at determining the form of their end wall containing the entry point.



Most of the work this week focussed on Building 2 which was laid out across its north end to examine both sides walls, the west gable wall and a section of the interior. As work progressed, the site began to reveal some of its secrets - at long last - and enabled a better interpretation of what was there. A lot of burnt sandstone was unearthed, 11 fragments of animal bone some of which showed signs of burning, two (maybe three) pieces of charcoal (hooray!) and a small iron stud nail of the sort used to fix the wooden staves of a bucket to the iron holding loops, and the first actual artefact from the site, namely a broken whetstone used for sharpening blades. In addition, the three walls are now clear and we also have a floor, partly natural limestone bedrock but partly and, very interestingly, a cobbled floor.

Text: David Johnson. Photos: John Cuthbert.



Gauber Cow Pasture excavation blog

Day 14 – Thursday, 11 July 2024

Conditions at the dig site began with thick cloud, but dry -- and remained so despite the forecast. The good conditions allowed us to get a lot done today. The first task was to replace the stone which had been removed from building one in Trench one. Fortunately, David did not require each rock to be placed exactly where it had been removed from, but nevertheless they were replaced in such a way as to resemble the original outline, ready for the soil and returfing.



All hands then turned to building two (Trench 5), which showed much promise following yesterday's efforts. The first task here was to clean the excavated areas ready for a photographic record. Evidence for a cobbled floor had been found and a well delineated inner wall line, despite the presence of tumbled stone from the walls.

After the photoshoot, we set to work continuing to reveal more of the cobbled floor and removing the tumbled wall stones as we progressed. Perhaps the best find (dare I say of the dig so far?) was a piece of a whetstone, broken and pressed into the clay floor between the cobbles. An actual artefact!

We also found several pieces of wood together with a great deal more burnt sandstone, suggesting the presence of a more substantial hearth or, dare we hope, maybe even an oven? Hopefully more work will establish this in days to come.

The afternoon also saw some visitors from the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's Wild Ingleborough Programme, looking at our progress so far, and a large party of midges, keen to see what each of us was up to. Who knew they had such enquiring minds!

Text: Phil James. Photos: Beverley Rymer.





Gauber Cow Pasture excavation blog

Day 13 – Wednesday, 10 July 2024

Having been rained off on Tuesday we were all watching the weather forecasts with a level of attention only equalled by line judges at Wimbledon. The outlook for Wednesday was quite uncertain but David made a good call at 7.30 am, let us decide for ourselves and everyone able to be there naturally turned up.

We backfilled trenches 4 and 7 in short order then resumed work on trench 5 in building 2. This is already proving to be the most rewarding area excavated so far with 2 more pieces of bone, a cobbled area, some burnt sandstone and wall lines emerging during the course of the day. There's still significant work to be done on it so we are very much looking forward to tomorrow.



The heavy drizzle was persistent but not sufficient to deter us and we left site pleased with a full day's work, optimistic and very muddy.

Text and photos: Beverley Rymer

Postscript from David Johnson

1. It is clear by now that the dig will not end on Friday this week as originally planned, partly owing to the wretched weather, but also to the complexity of Trench 5.
2. The large cast-iron object unearthed in week 1 has been identified as a tooth from the bucket of a mechanical digger. How it ended up on the site will remain a total mystery.

Gauber Cow Pasture excavation blog

Day 12 – Tuesday, 9 July 2024

Monsoonal rains and strong winds caused today's session to be called off, though it wasn't windy enough to blow the toilet over (unlike last Thursday).

I had a pre-arranged site meeting with two of the YDNPA's Historic Environment team just after lunch. Fortunately, the rain had more or less tailed off, but the monstrous man-eating midges had an absolute field day. The staff seemed very pleased with what we have been doing.

It is obvious now that work on site will not be completed this week - three lost days is just too much to catch up on. So, it will have to run into a fourth week.

Text: David Johnson

Gauber Cow Pasture excavation blog

Day 11 – Monday, 8 July 2024

Monday brought bright sunshine and a mystery – it seemed that over the weekend someone had been into the tents and the first aid box had vanished! (Thankfully the hobnobs and flapjacks were untouched.)

Anyway after wondering who on earth might want to take a first aid kit, we all knuckled down to work. We finished a final clean-up of Trench 4 (at the northern end of the main building) and Sheila then began to draw the exposed stones (the technical term for this is 'planning'), a slow and careful task which took her most of the day. Beverley completed planning of Trench 7, and both trenches had their final photography.



Meanwhile, we moved our focus to Building 2, which had not previously been touched. David marked out an extensive area encompassing the wall and part of the floor at the west end of the building which, after de-turfing, became Trench 5.

Great news! After some serious digging and scraping, an area which might well be a doorway was identified. And two pieces of bone were found, one of which appears to be a large vertebra. We are not sure yet what type of animal it belonged to, but the consensus was that it was too large for a sheep. The bones were logged and will hopefully be suitable for radiocarbon dating. (I learned from David that bones are better than charcoal because, since animals have shorter lives than trees, they give a more accurate date.)

The day finished with more sunshine and even better news – the discovery of the first aid box in the grass outside the tent! We have no idea how it got there but are hoping it is a sign that some more positive discoveries will emerge later this week from Trench 5, weather permitting.

Text: Clare Leigh. Photos: Beverley Rymer



Gauber Cow Pasture excavation blog

Day 10 – Friday, 5 July 2024

This week saw mixed fortunes with two days lost to awful weather.

Positives: Trench 1 - the big trench at the south end of the main building - was completed and shut down. This has given us clear structural signals enabling interpretation of how it had been laid out and built; and the position of a hearth tucked into one corner was fixed by a large concentration of burnt sandstone. Trench 7, across the west gable end of Building 3, was also (almost) completed. This was aimed at seeing if, what earthworks suggested, might be a doorway could be identified. The answer is a qualified 'yes'. Work in Trench 4, at the north end of the main building, is also underway. This is also designed to see if a doorway can be identified. Logged finds include several pieces of animal bone, which will hopefully be suitable for radiocarbon dating, and a mysterious and as yet unidentified iron object.



Negatives: There is still a lack of charcoal, apart from last week's single piece, and no artefacts that hint at the site's 'material culture'. The two doorways (in Trenches 4 and 7) must remain conjectural.

My comment a week ago that this site is reluctant to reveal its inner secrets still holds. We have another week on site and so much now relies on Building 2 - which has been left alone so far - to enable full and detailed interpretation of the site. The weather prognosis, however, is not looking good. Fingers and toes crossed!

Text: David Johnson. Photos: Beverley Rymer



Gauber Cow Pasture excavation blog

Day 9 – Thursday, 4 July 2024

Bad weather stopped play.

The excavation was called off today because of the Autumnal weather promised by various weather forecasts. The picture below gives a clue as to the severity of the wind.

Text: David Johnson. Photo: Ann Cunningham

P.S. It's a good job the wall was there - it's a 30 foot drop to the railway line on the other side!



Gauber Cow Pasture excavation blog

Day 8 – Wednesday, 3 July 2024

“Will we, won't we?” was the question today's team pondered looking at gloomy skies early this morning. “Yes you will!” said David's email at 7.30. Two hours later we were all set to go, trowels aqiver, on site.

A team of six spent the morning deturfing a new trench at the northern gable end of the largest building, in preparation for a visit, this Saturday, of the Young Archaeologists Group.



Meanwhile Beverley and Sheila were concluding their life's work of drawing, in detail, the exposed stones at the other end of the building.

The darkening skies didn't deter the two team competition which was held in the afternoon. The A Team in a metre square test pit felt they deserved a medal for finding a piece of (probably) 19th Century cast iron of agricultural origin, whilst Team B felt they deserved accolades for exposing the probable entrance to the small, hopefully Anglo-Saxon, dwelling.

An early tea break at 3 o'clock was called when rain chased us to the tent and no further work followed. None of us thought the rain would hold off for as long as it had done.

We all headed for home, light of step and satisfied with our day's endeavours.

Text: Phil Robinson. Photos: Beverley Rymer.



Gauber Cow Pasture excavation blog

Day 7 – Tuesday, 2 July 2024

Day 6 (Monday, 1 July) was a non-starter. A forecast of high wind and rain made any chance of excavating unlikely, so we missed a day's work yesterday. Day 7's forecast offered a bright start, with things getting worse as the day progressed. David decided to give it a try and we had a full day's worth of filming, excavating, photographing, drawing and back-filling.

The day started with a video of the major excavated area, with David giving a voice-over. We should be videoing every day, but high winds have created too much noise for the microphone to eliminate. This morning was relatively quiet, so David took the opportunity to explain the rather confusing results in Trench 1.



We created two, new test pits to investigate areas highlighted by the magnetometry survey done some time ago. One of these found little, or nothing, so we back-filled it. The second uncovered a couple of flag-stones. This was rather puzzling as we would have expected such a feature nearer to the major building – Trench 1. It was extended a little, photographed, videoed and back-filled.

Whilst all this excavation was going on, Beverley planned Trench 1 at a scale of 1:20. This onerous task uses metre-square drawing grids placed over the trench to give a scale. The rest is down to the skill of the planner. Beverley seems unfazed by the task, even though she had at least 21 square metres to record.

The end of the day came without a drop of rain falling.

Text: John Cuthbert. Photos: Beverley Rymer.



Gauber Cow Pasture excavation blog

Day 5 - Friday, 28th June 2024

One week done now. The first thing I would say is that Trench 1 has to be the most uncooperative and frustrating trench I have ever worked on and the hair count on my head is much less now than a week ago.



We have clear(ish) wall lines at the south end of the biggest building though trying to make sense of the west wall has been a challenge. I think we have the remnants of a paved floor and I believe we have the site of a hearth tucked into one corner where I would expect it to be. We have oodles of small sandstone pieces, all clearly heat affected, indicating the presence of a hearth but out of the whole trench just one measly bit of charcoal. There should be lots of it. Two tiny pieces of animal bone may offer hope of a dating sequence, but a small rim fragment from a glass vessel may not help in dating the site.

On Day 5 we also opened up three very small test pits to investigate magnetic anomalies. One produced two really exciting (!) items – an iron stud nail and an L-shaped iron nail or pin; another only produced a molar; and the third absolutely nothing. Before we gave up, because we had had enough of being battered by really strong winds and frequent blustery showers (typical fare for summer up at Ribbleshead), we made a start on another, small, trench designed to investigate the west gable wall of building 3 on the site.

We'll see what next week brings ... apart from more rain and strong winds.

I want to formally record my gratitude to the team of volunteers for their sterling efforts this week.

Text: David Johnson. Photos: Beverley Rymer.



Gauber Cow Pasture excavation blog

Day 4 - Thursday, 27th June 2024

Day 4 brought very different weather and the day's fourteen volunteers gathered in the excavation tent for the 9.30 briefing. However, the occasional showers were short-lived while the wind proved a more persistent and bothersome companion. Two volunteers, new to the task of drawing plans, took on the challenge of capturing the walls of trench one. Another test pit was opened in the possible garden area and this gave people the opportunity to get involved in sampling soils and identifying different contexts.



Trench One continued to intrigue, giving up numerous pieces of burnt sandstone but no charcoal; was it the hearth that had been uncovered in the corner or not? The trench was extended and the building's floor tentatively identified, but, in spite of a lot of patient and careful trowelling, no charcoal emerged. The search will continue.

Under David's leadership, volunteers are thoroughly enjoying the numerous opportunities this dig is already providing for both novices and the more experienced to participate in a variety of activities and to learn many different archaeological skills.

Text: Geraldine Norman. Photos: Beverley Rymer.



Gauber Cow Pasture excavation blog

Day 3 - Wednesday, 26 June 2024

Another fine, dry, bright, warm day and eleven volunteers ready to tackle whatever role was assigned to them. All in good spirits, a very friendly, jovial crowd. Differing levels of experience and know-how led to some new to archaeology working in the main trench alongside a more experienced member of the group, while 5 others de-turfed two test pits in the tumbled walls with the aim of identifying inner and outer edges and thereby suggesting more accurately the width of both walls and the building in question.

In the main trench a good number of possible “pot-burner” stones, tiny fragments of bone and a distinct clay layer were found. Many stones and even more buckets of soil were removed and the trench began to perhaps reveal itself a bit – DJ at this point was happy to ascribe the “early medieval” tag to it.

Test pits were recorded and plans drawn by Sheila and Carol, small finds bagged and labelled, many photographs taken – DJ will be working late tonight writing up all the finds!

An excellent day, lots of great work with our enthusiastic, knowledgeable team leader and a day spent in good company.

Text: Carol Dougherty.

Photos: Pauline Elliot



Gauber Cow Pasture excavation blog

Day 2 - Tuesday, 25 June 2024

Day 2 of the dig saw continued beautiful sunshine, the increasing heat accompanied by Small Heath butterflies in the adjoining meadow. Five fresh volunteers reinforced yesterday's team. The first part of the day was spent cleaning the south end of the large building of soil, roots and loose stone. David also carried out contexting of the soil from this top layer, which he identified as silty clay. The first finds appeared: a 30mm segment of animal bone from the west side of trench 1, which will be sent for analysis; a tiny iron head of a rivet or stud nail; and six 'pot boilers' from the south-east corner, 20-30mm diameter cuboid pieces of sandstone.



The afternoon started with the team speculating about the exact wall lines within the trench, followed by the opening of a 2m x 500mm extension along the south wall. This revealed some limestone pavement had been used as the foundation of this wall. The team then cleared large quantities of fallen stones and fill from the south-west corner. However a clear wall line was still evading us by the close of play. Tomorrow promises further work in this trench to try to define its structure more exactly.

Text: David Johnson. Photos: Beverley Rymer.



Gauber Cow Pasture excavation blog

Day 1 - Monday, 24 June 2024



Day 1 of the dig was held in glorious sunshine with 15 volunteers eager to get going after two years of planning. After a detailed site tour and briefing from the project lead, David, Trench 1 was laid out across the south gable of the main building in the farmstead site. It was aimed at understanding how it had been constructed and if it conformed to the style of most other dated, early medieval buildings around Ingleborough.

The day was spent stripping the turf off and trowelling to remove topsoil to start revealing the walls. Several pieces of burnt sandstone were found on the walls which suggest there may have been a hearth at this end of the building. More will be revealed as the days progress.

Text: David Johnson. Photos: Beverley Rymer



Gauber Cow Pasture excavation blog

Preparations - Thursday, 20 June 2024

The Gauber Cow Pasture excavation got one step nearer to kick off today as a team of nine volunteers joined David to erect the mess and site tents and to get all gear on to site ready for the dig starting on Monday 24th. The focus is a farmstead consisting of three rectangular structures showing as turf-covered dwarf stone walls associated with a major complex of small enclosures and field banks. It is hypothesised as an early-medieval site from the Anglo-Saxon period, though time will tell.



This dig follows on from detailed surveying two years ago. It also forms the last element of what has proved to be a 16-year research project into the period on the limestone plateau around Ingleborough. The dig is organised and led by David Johnson in collaboration with IAG.

It is a scheduled monument so a licence to excavate had to be obtained from Historic England and, as it falls under Limestone Pavement Order regulations, full planning permission also had to be obtained. We are grateful to the landowners, Natural England, for their permission to work on site and to the NE team at Colt park for their support and logistical assistance. We are also grateful to the funding bodies which are supporting the dig: Yorkshire Archaeological & Historical Society, Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority through its Sustainable Development Fund, the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust, the North Craven Heritage Trust, and a very generous anonymous donor.

The dig runs for three weeks and Natural England are organising an Open Day on 4 July. Photos and text: David Johnson

