

# The search for a missing Cairn on the Sleights Near Ribblehead



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Front cover. Showing location of missing cairn lower centre. *Photograph M Simpson.*

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Several writers over a considerable period of time have stated that there were two large cairns on the Sleights. These were on the right hand side of the road going towards Ribblehead. The location of one of these is well known and there are still remains to be seen, the second one is more elusive as there are no remains only statements by writers describing local features eg. Caves, Geology, local history and Cairns.

Below are some of the most informative references to the cairns.

1. J Hutton 1780.

“We returned back nearly the way we came, to the turnpike road in a pasture called the *Sleights*, where we had ordered our horses to be stationed. We could not but observe in this field, two remarkable large heaps of small round stones, at about a quarter of a mile distance from each other, called by the country people the *Hurders*, they seemed evidently placed there by human hands, and what was most extraordinary, there was not one stone scarce to be seen of the kind near them, all the stones in the neighbourhood were limestones but these were round, sandy, gritty stones, most probably these mounts were *tumuli*”.

2. J Hutton 1781.

“As we went along we passed a large heap of small round stones, called an *hurder* : We were told there were two others by the side of the turnpike road, in a field called the *Sleights*, one about a mile, and the others a mile and a half east of the *Chapel in the dale*. They seem evidently placed there by human hands, and what was most extraordinary, they were all small, round, sandy, and gritty stones, and all the stones on the surface of the ground near them are limestone. No doubt they were *tumuli* of some deceased chieftains in the neighbourhood, or who died on their travels”.

3. W Howson 1850.

“Near the road above the Hill’s Inn are two cairns, one of which has been opened, and a skeleton enclosed in its rude coffin of stones discovered; the other has not been examined”.

4. H Speight 1892.

“Over the wall on the right there is a long, broken limestone pavement, and at its north-west angle one such large upright boulder may be seen with its longer axis poised on the limestone in the direction of the valley. Nearer the wall there are indications of a rude, double circle, artificially formed of these dark, weathered grits. The inner circle is about 20 yards in diameter, and the outer one forms a narrow aisle surrounding it, with an outlet to the north; but some of the stones have been removed, probably to build and

repair the adjoining fences. The situation is open, and commands the country on all sides between the lofty moors and summits that hem in the dale head. On the opposite side of the road are the remains of a couple of large cairns. They are presumably Danish. One was opened about a century ago, and found to cover a rude stone coffin containing an entire human skeleton. The other large pile does not appear ever to have been examined”.

#### 5. F Riley.

“In a field adjoining the road, where a milestone indicates five and a quarter miles to Ingleton, are the remains of a large cairn or barrow-presumed to be Danish. Partial excavations were made about 140 years ago, when a stone coffin containing an entire human skeleton was discovered”.

There are other writers who mention the cairns briefly but do not add any information different to the above from whom they are probably quoting. The above apart from Riley are unanimous about the existence of two cairns, but he is probably more concerned with what he can actually see on the ground. Hutton does not state anything about one of the cairns having been excavated or robbed in any way, so we can assume that excavation took place after 1781. In 1850 Howson states that one cairn has been opened and a stone coffin containing a skeleton was found. We now know the excavation took place before 1850. Prior to 1892 Speight who was travelling from Ribbleshead to Ingleton reports seeing a double circle of stone grits on the right hand side of the road, he also provides a very accurate description of the location in the field We have previously published a paper (Ref. Batty A. 2011) on this feature which is located in Haws House Pasture. Speight also mentions the two cairns on the opposite side of the road, and states one was opened about a century ago, but the second one has not been examined. This suggests that the second cairn was still intact in the early 1890's, the 1850 first edition OS map shows that the walls near to where we think the cairn was have already been built (Fig1). Survey of Sleights showing cairn's (Fig 2).

I published a paper (Ref Batty A. 2016) regarding what I consider to be the excavation of Cairn 1 this should be read in conjunction with this paper. Both Speight and Riley are suggesting that the cairn was opened in the early 1800's, and the date of the article in the newspapers 1828 ( see 2016 paper) is from this period.

The search for Cairn 2 or the remains of it until now have proved elusive, I have not found any archaeological writings relating to the removal/excavation of another cairn. I contacted the landowner Mr Beresford for any information he had regarding the past clearance or tipping of stones on Sleights pasture which is now two fields, the most south-west field has two areas which are cut for hay. On the upper terrace there was a collection of stones which looked suspicious but Mr Beresford informed me that these had been gathered up in recent times. On the lower ground there is a raised area with no stones showing, this area was probed down to roughly 75cm without encountering stone, so this is also ruled out.

We now turned our attention to the north-eastern field, I had obtained a UAV 4K video from which I was able to extract single frame photographs (Plate 1). I left one of these with Mr Beresford and meeting with him the next day he thought he knew where the cairn was, I agreed it looked very convincing this was a slightly raised area of bedrock limestone which has been quarried, but there was a lack of evidence for the presence of sandstones. I proceeded to dig two small inspection holes one on top of the raised area (Plate 2) and the other on what appeared to be the outer edge of the cairn (Plate 3) The first hole 30cm deep contained several small sandstones on top of the bedrock. The second hole was 15cm deep the bottom was covered with sandstones. I removed a small turf from three other areas these also revealed sandstones were present.

There is a large limestone within a few metres that has been set on edge (Plates 4-5 ) the base of which is 35cm into the ground and has sandstones wedging it upright. We initially thought this may be the remnant of a stone circle around the cairn the same as Cairn 1 but I have not found any other evidence for this. I think it is possibly a stone erected as a marker to show where the cairn had been. According to Speight Cairn 2 was still there in 1892 but up to now I have not found any information about its removal. Cairn 1 appears to have been constructed of limestone at least around its perimeter (Plates 6-7-8) and (Fig 3) If this also applies to Cairn 2 then it is very likely to have been removed by rockery stone merchants, or used in limekilns, hence no record of its removal.

I have not seen another cairn built like this in the local area. there are possible Neolithic cairn's built of limestone and several known Bronze Age cairn's built of sandstone but none that I know of built with both. There is a possibility the cairn may have been chambered as there would be plenty of large flat limestone's available for this purpose, there is one laid on the ground, on the outer edge of the cairn. The three linear dumps of stone and most of the rounder ones appear to consist of mostly sandstones. This cairn may represent a transition period from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age around 2300 BC to 1900 BC.

## Acknowledgements.

Mr R Beresford. For access on to his fields, and information of any ground work that had taken place. either digging out, or filling in.

Mr M Simpson. For supplying UAV aerial video.

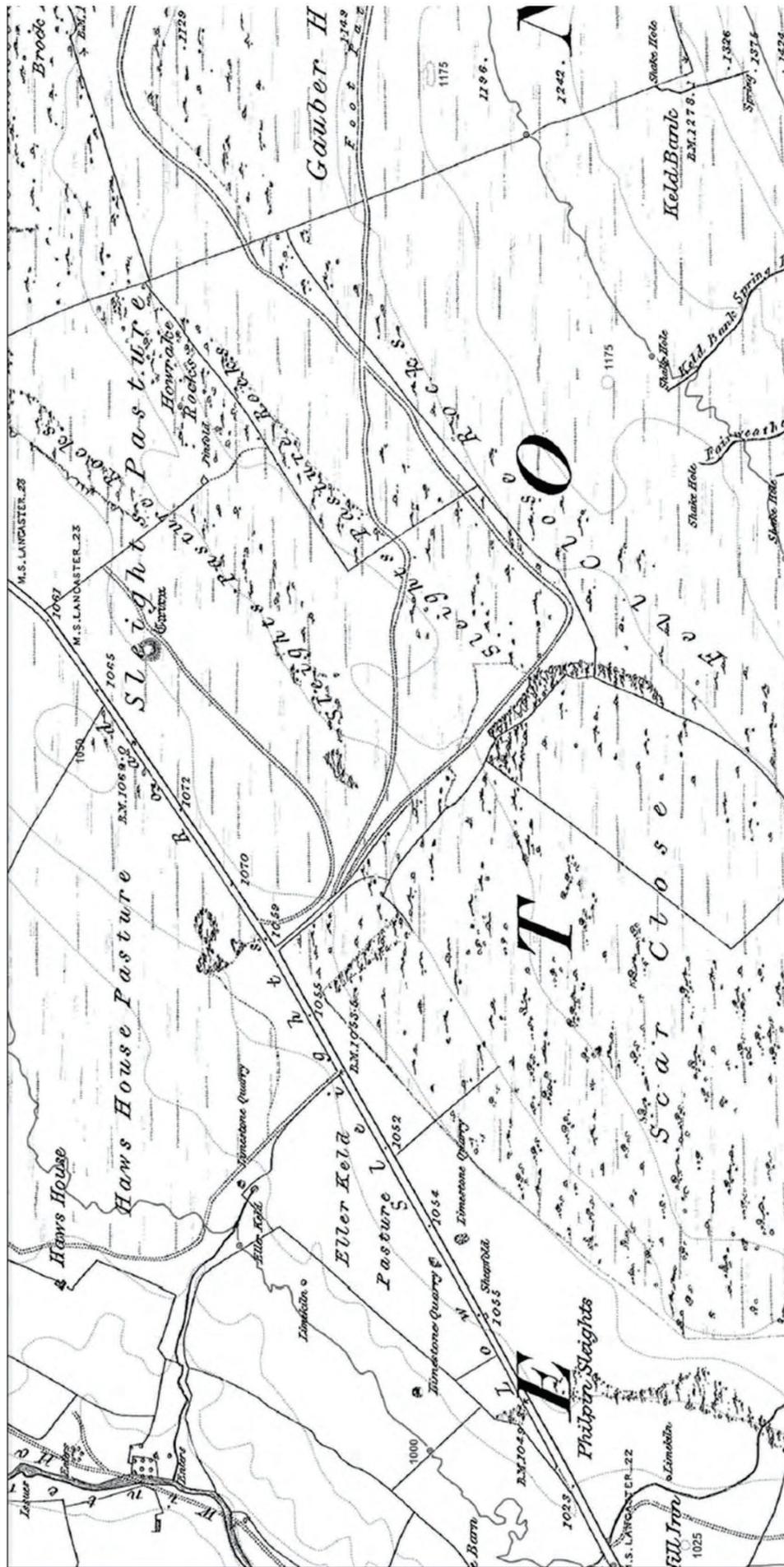


Fig 1. First Edition 6 inch OS map 1850

# Sleights Pasture

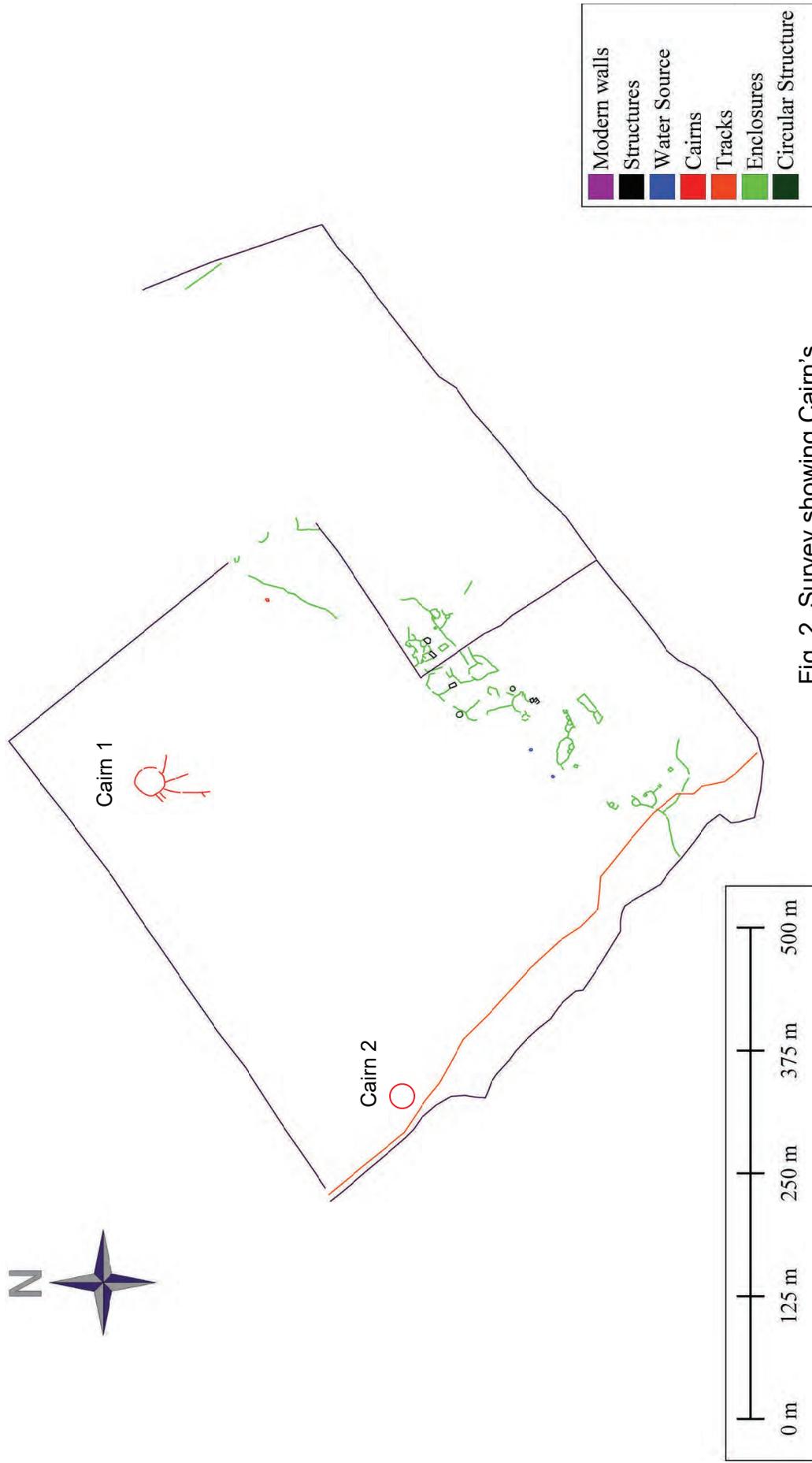


Fig 2. Survey showing Cairn's



Fig 3. Vertical cross section of Cairn 1 remains on south eastern side.

*Drawn by A Batty.*



Plate 1. Showing location of missing cairn lower right.

*Photograph. M Simpson.*



Plate 2 . Showing bedrock and sandstones.

*Photograph A Batty.*



Plate 3. Sandstones on outer edge of cairn.

*Photograph A Batty.*



Plate 4. Possible cairn marker stone.

*Photograph A Batty.*



Plate 5. As above looking edge on.

*Photograph A Batty.*



Plate 6. Showing limestone in cairn.

*Photograph A Batty.*



Plate 7. As above.

*Photograph A Batty.*



Photograph. M Simpson.

Plate 8. Cairn 1.

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