



In this issue we have an article on a couple of interesting old roads near Eyemouth by Neil Ramsay, Project Officer for the Heritage Paths programme, some thoughts on the Roman road across Craik Moor and take a look at some intriguing holes in the bed of the river Clyde at Crossford.

Along the Road to Eyemouth

Neil Ramsay

Project Officer, Heritage Paths

Working on a project to research and promote historic paths as I do, it is surprising how rare it is for me to get out and walk some of them.

However I managed to get out recently and have a look at an old road locally known as 'The Moss Road' near Coldingham and another old track that runs from Dowlaw Farm, near Fast Castle Head, south to Coldingham. Both of these old roads run parallel with each other but there is only one road running in this direction recorded on Roy's Military Survey of 1747-1755.

The road marked on Roy's map is noted as being 'the road to Eyemouth' and there was certainly a need for this road as the Great Post Road that linked London and Edinburgh ran through Cairncross and Ayton, entirely by-passing Eyemouth and Coldingham.

In medieval Scotland Coldingham was the location of a very important Priory where travellers often stayed overnight. Edward I is known to have stayed at Coldingham Priory on his way to Dunbar and Haddington in 1296 and Mary Tudor's retinue also visited in 1503.

There is no question that this road existed but its location is more problematic, which I sought to resolve in my recent trip.



Terracing

I set out north from Coldingham to traverse the Moss Road and found it very difficult to trace, much of it has been left for decades and is now overgrown and boggy while a dense plantation forces a detour around part of it. However there are many places where it is a hollow-way and where it has been terraced into the hillside showing evident age to the road.

Once I reached the Dowlaw road I then turned east to look at the other candidate for this road, which is the path that runs south from Dowlaw Farm, past Lumsdaine to Coldingham. This road



The bridge on the Dowlaw road



Rambles on Old Roads

was far easier to follow and, although no longer a vehicular right of way, has been used by delivery vans within living memory.

Although there was an old bridge on the way there were no points that resembled a hollow-way and little evidence of very old usage.

Sadly this trip was inconclusive and may well always be so but I am of the opinion that the road depicted in Roy's map is that of the Moss Road.

The reason is partly that there is such a lot of erosion on this path through heavy use in the past and also because it comes out, at the north end, alongside the historic Soldier's Dyke and between an old fort and an old settlement. The Moss Road is also 7 metres wide in places with drainage ditches while the alternative option is quite narrow and has no noticeable drainage features.

Details of the Moss Road can be found at www.heritagepaths.co.uk where you can have a look and decide for yourself.

The Craik Cross Roman Road

In his book, *The Roads of Mediaeval Lauderdale*, published in 1942, R H Hardie suggested that an old track that ran over Craik Cross could be the via regia or King's highway from Roxburgh to Annandale mentioned in charters of Melrose Abbey, and moreover that it might be Roman.

With the fort at Eskdalemuir finally established as Roman, Ian Richmond undertook a survey of the Craik Cross road and was able to conclude that it also was Roman. His findings were published in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* in 1947, in which he gives detailed comments on each sector of the road as well as

six-inch map extracts. An earthwork at the summit was examined which may have been a signalling post.

A number of attempts have been made to identify the course of the road north and south of the Craik Cross section, which is some 8 miles long. At the north end it may have made directly for Newstead near Melrose or intersected Dere Street some miles short of Newstead. To the south it may have made directly for the main road in Annandale, near Lockerbie and/or gone over to Broomholm fort near Langholm. These questions are still unresolved.

The road appears to have been in use in the middle ages when it linked the royal centre of Roxburgh with the Bruce lands in Annandale, centred on Lochmaben. It shows up as a parish boundary east of Dere Street, making directly for Roxburgh, although this section may be mediaeval rather than Roman.



There are faint signs of terracing in this photo

Today, the Craik Cross section makes a pleasant walk with some fine views. It can be accessed either from Eskdalemuir, near the Tibetan Samye Ling monastery, worth a visit in itself; or from Craik forest.

Rambles on Old Roads

I visited the road from the forest end and was quite impressed to see the Eildons, the Trimontium of the Romans, dead ahead. It seemed a fine solid track, still good after 2000 years.



Despite appearances, the Roman road is on the right of the picture

However, this is quite misleading. On this stretch the present day track is not the Roman road, nor the Annandale road. They run close to the track and sometimes cross it but are buried under considerable masses of vegetation. It is just possible here and there to see faint traces of a terrace but in general, the road is very hard to make out.

Richmond identified terraces and embankments along the course but these are more on the Eskdalemuir side.

It is probably quite fortunate that Richmond made his survey when he did as features may have been clearer at that time prior to afforestation. It would be good if some archaeological work could be carried out on the signal station and the road, as new techniques and equipment available to archaeologists today would no doubt come up with interesting results. A nice project for Time Team!

Crossford



At Crossford Bridge over the River Clyde there are some intriguing holes in the river bed.

J B Greenshields in his book, *Annals of the Parish of Lesmahagow* thought that these were used by the ferrymen (prior to the bridge being built) in times of drought. They would insert posts into the holes and stretch woven battens between them to raise the water level and so be able to continue to ferry people across.

I've always been a bit suspicious of this, primarily because if the holes can be seen, the river could easily be forded. In searching for other explanations, one that occurred to me was that they could have been used as a fish trap. The method would be the same but it would effectively be a primitive weir behind which fish would gather. The monks at the nearby Priory of Lesmahagow would be the obvious originators of such a scheme.

Another thought was that it could have been a primitive bridge. Greenshields says that if so, one would expect pairs of post holes to appear in the river bed. Yet one wonders if an, admittedly

primitive, bridge could not have been built here using this method. McFarlane's *Geographical Collections* mentions bridges that were formed of pillars between which planks were stretched, and there is an interesting example from Darnick near Melrose where there was a bridge effectively consisting of a central pillar (where the bridge master lived) and from where planks could be laid to either bank.

It seems quite feasible that such a bridge could have existed at Crossford (on an early route to Lanark), at least for people on foot. If there were some kind of cross trusses at the top of each timber (approx 12" square) it might have been possible to have had a width of two feet or so, enough for pack horses.

If such a bridge existed, again the obvious candidate would have been the monks at Lesmahagow. Another possibility is that it could have been a Roman bridge although the evidence for this is rather thin. The known Roman road from Lanark to Stonehouse and Loudoun Hill passes south of here but there is a local tradition that another road left the main road running to the west, and ran down to the Clyde valley, perhaps to Crossford.

Whatever the correct explanation is, the holes are quite intriguing. If Greenshields is correct, it reinforces the perception that river ferries were very prevalent in Scotland from very early times and if it was an early weir or a bridge it must have dated from mediaeval or even Roman times.

Recent Additions

Mediaeval Charters, Roxburghshire

In the middle ages monasteries were often given gifts of land. These were noted in charters which defined the grants and, on occasion, mention roads as boundaries of the properties.

Roxburghshire is particularly well represented in the chartularies of the great border abbeys of Melrose, Jedburgh, Kelso and Dryburgh.

These chartularies provide a good insight into the road system of the time. Apart from several mentions of the Roman road, Dere Strete, there is mention of "The Street" and "The Ernspeith" or "Way of the Eagles". There is a Royal Road from Roxburgh to Annandale, part of which was a Roman road, roads from the Cheviot granges of Hownam and Molle to Roxburgh and Melrose, and a road from Selkirk to Jedburgh.

This section looks at these charters and attempts to reconstruct the road network in the area at this time.

Recommended sites

Archaeology on a Great Post Road, Angus Graham

This is another classic paper from the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries in Scotland* - it deals with the early history of the A1 between Edinburgh and Berwick.

<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/ARCHway/toc.cfm?rcn=1340&vol=96>

"Rambles on Old Roads" will be produced six times a year. If any reader wishes to contribute an article or notes on their research these will be very welcome. Send contributions to geraldcummins2@aol.com. Copyright will remain with authors.



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