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LONG MEG FARM CUMBRIA

Report for McCombie & Bousfield Ltd on an Archaeological
Watching Brief in November 2017 relating to the installation of an
underground electricity cable for a barn conversion at
NGR NY 35684 53698

Updated report - November 2023



*General view looking eastwards over the cable trench, with Long Meg visible
in the background (behind the field wall, in front of the distant farm buildings).*

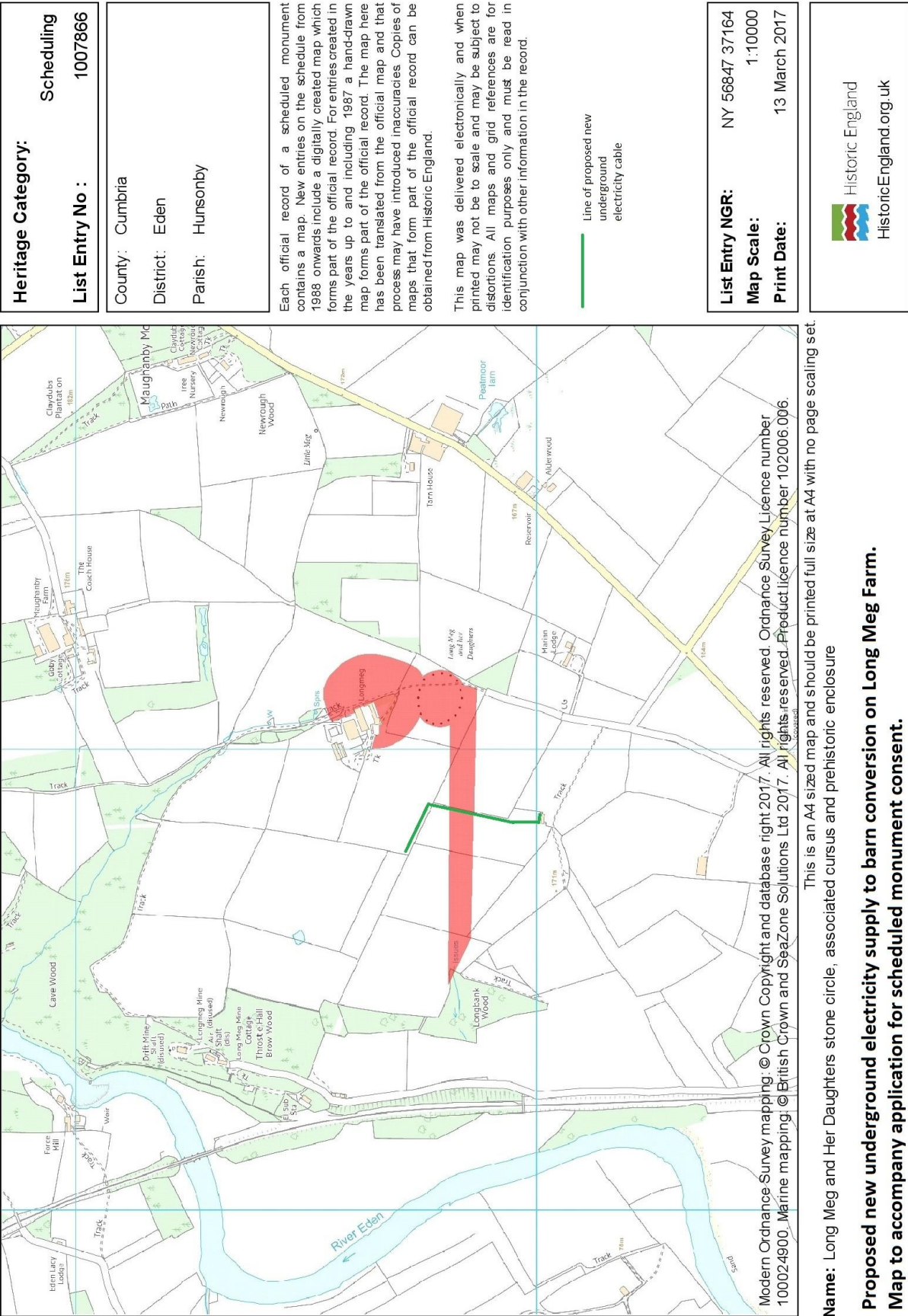


Fig 1. Map showing location of the cable trench in relation to the extent of the Long Meg scheduled monument. (Originally produced as part of the Scheduled Monument Consent application).

Executive summary

This report, originally produced in 2017, was revised in November 2023 to include amendments to the text and the addition of illustrations unavailable in 2017.

Under the terms of Scheduled Monument Consent granted for the installation an underground electricity cable relating to a barn conversion on Long Meg Farm, Little Salkeld, Cumbria, a watching brief was maintained on the digging the cable trench. This passed through a westward extension of scheduled monument no. 1007866 that it was thought might, on the basis of cropmark evidence, contain the remains of a linear feature, perhaps a cursus. The watching brief was extended to the entire length of the trench, extending well outside the scheduled area, but particular attention was paid to the detailed examination of both faces of the trench where it passed through the scheduled area.

The watching brief was undertaken on Wednesday 29 November 2017 by Paul Frodsham of ORACLE Heritage Services (who has directed survey and excavation projects at Long Meg over recent years and is very familiar with the site), assisted by Marc Johnstone.

A feature corresponding to the north side of the 'cursus' was observed in the trench; this was a post-medieval field drain set within a ditch that could conceivably be much older, potentially Neolithic. No feature was recorded exactly on the line of the south side of the 'cursus', which it is clear from aerial photography is a field drain. A field drain was recorded c20m south of this cropmark, and several further field drains crossed the trench. No other features were recorded within the trench, and no artefacts were recovered from the disturbed ground. The possible implications of these results for the future study and management of the Long Meg complex are considered in this report.

This document was written by Paul Frodsham (ORACLE Heritage Services). References to it should be structured as follows:

Frodsham, P. 2023. *Long Meg Farm, Cumbria. Report for McCombie & Bousfield Ltd on an archaeological watching brief in November 2017 relating to the installation of an underground electricity cable for a barn conversion at NGR NY 35684 53698.* Unpublished ORACLE Heritage Services report.

1. Introduction

This report presents the results of an archaeological watching brief to mitigate the impact of groundworks associated with the provision of an underground electricity cable relating to a barn conversion by McCombie & Bousfield Ltd. (of Langview House, Winskill, Cumbria) on Long Meg Farm, Little Salkeld, Cumbria. The trench for the new cable was dug by machine along the edges of two pasture fields for a total length of approximately 360 metres.

Paul Frodsham of ORACLE Heritage Services was commissioned by McCombie and Bousfield Ltd to undertake the watching brief and compile this report. He was assisted in the field by Marc Johnstone. A written scheme of investigation (WSI) for the work was agreed by Historic England prior to the commencement of work.

The following two paragraphs from the Scheduled Monument Consent application explain the context of the work:

The old barn at NY 35684 53698 is being converted to residential accommodation, the electricity supply for which is to be provided via an underground cable from an existing pole to the north at NY 35677 53728. The trench for the cable will be 30cm wide and 100cm deep and will run for a total of c360 metres, including c50 metres across part of scheduled monument number 1007866 (see attached map). This particular area is included within the scheduled monument as it has been suggested that a linear feature recorded here as a cropmark on aerial photos may be a cursus or related Neolithic monument, though many archaeologists familiar with the site think it more likely to represent much later agricultural activity of no relevance to the Long Meg complex. Examination of the trench proposed here may throw some light on this important issue, and thus be of value to the interpretation and future management of the Long Meg complex.

The trench will be dug by means of a mechanical digger and will be backfilled as soon as the cable has been laid. There will be no ground disturbance within the scheduled area other than the digging and backfilling of the trench. An archaeological watching brief on the work will be maintained by Paul Frodsham who directed recent survey and excavation projects at Long Meg and has a detailed understanding of the site. A comprehensive Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) will be agreed with Historic England prior to the commencement of work. The watching brief will cover not only that portion of the trench through the scheduled area, but its entire length. Any features noted in the trench will be recorded, and the spoil from the trench will be searched for artefacts. If potentially interesting features are noted in particular sections of the trench then the trench may be widened up to 1 metre in order that such features can be properly seen and recorded, but under no circumstances will the trench in any place be any wider or deeper than 1 metre. A comprehensive illustrated report on the watching brief, copies of which will be sent to Historic England and the Cumbria Historic Environment Record, will be produced.

2. Archaeological background

The Long Meg stone circle complex (Frodsham 2016, 2021), one of northern England's most important yet enigmatic ancient monuments, has to date enjoyed remarkably little attention from archaeologists. It has huge potential to answer questions relating to aspects of Neolithic life in the Eden Valley, and also to patterns of communication across the North Pennines, linking north-west and north-east England. Recent survey and excavation projects undertaken by the Altogether Archaeology project, in partnership with Durham University and Oxford Archaeology North, have further enhanced our understanding of it, while also demonstrating the potential for further such work (ASDU 2013, 2015).

The Long Meg complex is legally protected as a scheduled monument under the terms of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 (as amended). The full title of the scheduled monument is 'Long Meg and her Daughters stone circle, associated cursus and prehistoric enclosure' (Fig 1). The List Entry number is 1007866. The site is recorded on the Cumbria Historic Environment Record as site no 6154.

As noted in the introduction, this watching brief relates in particular to the possible cursus at Long Meg (Figs 2 & 3). This was first described in a paper by Soffe and Clare, published in 1988, although it is important to note (as further discussed in the conclusion, below) that they did not claim the feature to be a cursus. Establishing whether or not a Neolithic feature is represented by some of these cropmarks was identified as a priority in a list of research themes for Long Meg (Frodsham 2016, part 3), from which the following text is taken:

The possible existence of a cursus at Long Meg has been suggested on the basis of cropmarks extending through fields to the west almost as far as the east bank of the Eden. This is the reason for the linear extension of the scheduled area through four fields between the stone circle and the intriguingly named 'Longbank Wood'. The feature is almost certainly not a cursus, as its supposed southern ditch is clearly part of a recent drainage network (Soffe & Clare 1988). However, its irregular and apparently hand-dug 'northern ditch' is intriguing. This runs east-west through the southern edge of the stone circle, extending 500 metres from Longbank Wood towards the southern perimeter of the stone circle, apparently also extending at least another 200 metres to the east. The apparent link to the stone circle, and the fact that it runs east-west, suggest that it may originally have been some sort of bank barrow, possibly contemporary with, or even earlier than, the stone circle. Establishing the nature of this feature through a couple of excavation trenches should be a priority. If it is archaeologically significant then we need to know more about it; if not, then the scheduled area should be revised accordingly, thus removing restrictions on land use in the four fields through which it passes.

The digging of the cable trench across the site of the linear earthworks identified by Soffe and Clare provided an opportunity to investigate the nature of these features, although this opportunity was restricted to one narrow

trench and the results should not necessarily be assumed to relate to the entire features as recorded from aerial photography.

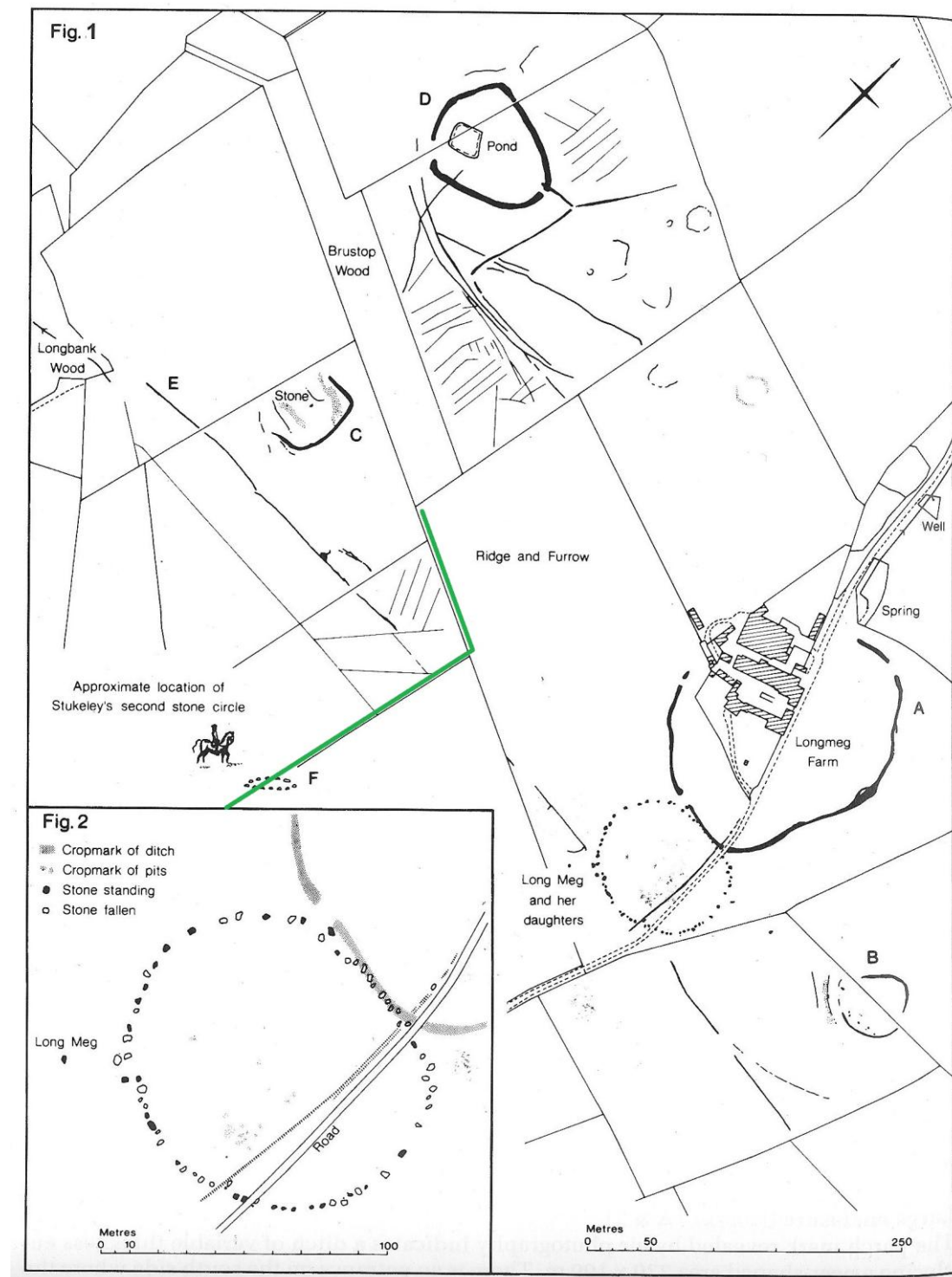


Fig 2. Plot of cropmark features published by Soffe and Clare (1988 Fig 1), overlain with the location of the new cable trench (green line). Note that the location of Stukeley's 'second stone circle' is very approximate and the new cable trench almost certainly does not pass through it. Note also the north arrow, which points to the top-right corner; thus north-west, rather than north, is to the top.



Fig 3. Two aerial photos, taken in July 1984, showing the linear cropmarks of the supposed Long Meg cursus, with the approximate line of the new cable trench overlain in green.

3a (above). Taken from the west, showing the parallel cropmarks at centre, heading towards the stone circle in the distance.

3b (below). Taken from the south-west, showing the parallel cropmarks entering from the left margin, with the stone circle visible in the top-right corner.

Photos © Cumbria County Council: Cumbria Historic Environment Record.

3. Methodology

The cable trench was machine dug in two days. Sections north and south of the scheduled area were dug first, in advance of the day of the watching brief. The central section, including the stretch through the scheduled area, was dug on the day of the watching brief (29 Nov 2017) and was closely monitored.

Particular attention was paid to the examination of the trench within the scheduled area, but both sections of the trench, along its entire length, were also examined for evidence of archaeological features. In addition, a search was made of the entire length of the spoil heaps adjacent to the trench, to recover any artefacts that may have been lying on the surface; had any artefacts been recovered, then the adjacent stretches of spoil would have been examined more closely.

A photographic record of the entire trench was made. NGRs and heights OD were calculated by means of a hand-held high sensitivity Garmin GPSMAP 64s GLONASS receiver with quad helix antenna and barometric altimeter.

4. Results

The trench was inspected very carefully for any sign of archaeological features, and the linear piles of spoil adjacent to the trench were inspected for artefacts. No artefacts were recorded.

The soil profile was remarkably uniform throughout the entire length of the trench. A typical grey-brown sandy-silt humic topsoil with no inclusions, approximately 30cm deep, overlay an orange-red firm but brittle sandy boulder clay within which were many lenses of grey or yellowish clay, occasional patches of iron pan and manganese, and also a large number of rounded stones up to 30cm across. The boulder clay extended beyond the bottom of the trench except in one place, within the scheduled area, where it was found to be c100cm deep and to directly overlie sandstone bedrock. The interface between the boulder clay and the bedrock was very wet.

Within the scheduled area, along the line of the suggested cursus, it was noted that the fieldwall alongside the cable trench was at its highest point, sloping down gently to north and south. It was not possible to discern remnants of any artificial earthworks beneath it. Faint hints of possible earthworks were noted in the field west of this wall, but all were very slight, impossible to photograph, and could be entirely natural.

Photographs were taken along the line of the trench, and also of several of the field drains cut by it. Section 8 of this report presents a selection of images, with descriptive captions.

The general views along the line of the trench (Photos 1 - 8) require no comment. They show the location and general nature of the trench, but are of minimal archaeological interest.

As noted above, the westward extension of the scheduled area is intended to cover the two linear cropmarks shown on Fig 2 which have been interpreted (almost certainly incorrectly) as a possible cursus.

The northern of the two roughly parallel cropmarks (ie the northern side of the supposed cursus) was cut by the cable trench at NY 56873 37195, 32 metres from the north-east corner of the field. Soffe and Clare describe this feature as having an 'irregular character' and consider it 'probably prehistoric in date'. At this exact location, the cable trench cut through a field drain set within the fill of a broad U-shaped ditch (Photos 9 - 11). When first noticed, late in the day in fading light, this was considered simply as another post-medieval drainage feature similar to others seen previously during the day (see Section 8), albeit with the stone-lined drain set, for some reason, within a wide ditch. However, it subsequently became clear that this must be the feature recorded by Soffe and Clare. At this point on their plan, they show a gap in the cropmark of the ditch, with its line occupied by a straight feature which must be a field drain. It may be that the drain was inserted within the ditch fill at this point because the old ditch, although backfilled, was causing drainage problems. It is quite feasible that the old ditch could have survived as a slight earthwork at the time the drains were installed, presumably at the time the fields were enclosed and improved in the mid nineteenth century, since when they have clearly been heavily ploughed. (The enclosure act for Hunsonby and Little Salkeld is dated 1849, but today's fieldwalls are already in place by the time of the 1st edition OS map in c1860, so it seems reasonable to assume that enclosure and drainage probably date from the 1850s). Presumably, at the time the aerial photographs from which the feature was plotted were taken, this portion of the ditch did not show up because the later drain set within it was absorbing moisture from it, thus effectively rendering it invisible on the photographs. Alternatively, or perhaps additionally, the surviving ditch here may be shallower at this point than elsewhere along its length, due to a combination of ploughing and soil movement away from what is the highest part of the field.

Given that it was initially dismissed as just another a field drain, and its potential significance not immediately recognised, the feature was not recorded in detail in the field. The following description is based on photographs taken during the watching brief (Photos 9 - 11). The ditch section in both faces of the cable trench is truncated by the ploughsoil which is about 20cm deep. The surviving ditch in both sections is 170cm wide at the top and 45cm deep at its centre. The ditch fill is of compact dark grey sandy clay with organic inclusions. The west section incorporates a well-defined band of organic material with a fibrous texture; this respects the ditch profile and must have built up in-situ while the ditch was still open, though partially backfilled. The same horizon is represented in the east section by a darker band within the fill, though this is not as obvious as in the west section. The nature of the fill suggests that the ditch may have lain open for some time, and filled up only gradually. It was thus clearly not dug for the post-medieval field drain that now lies within it. This drain was inserted into the north side of the ditch fill through which a cut, though not obvious, can be seen directly above it. The drain itself consists of stones set within a narrow vertical-sided trench, similar to other drains recorded along the line of the cable trench (see Section 8). It was inserted into the backfilled ditch just below the ploughsoil, in a position analogous to all the other recorded field drains that were set into the top of the boulder clay. The natural boulder clay to either side of the ditch section was

noticeably lighter in colour than the reddish boulder clay along most of the length of the cable trench, but this does not appear to be of archaeological significance. On a subsequent visit, on 1st April 2018, long after the backfilling of the cable trench, a careful inspection of the vicinity of the ditch was made, but no surface trace of any feature could be seen (Photo 12). Whether any trace of the ditch survives buried within the field to the east is not known; nothing has been recorded here on aerial photos, but the ditch is presumed to have passed across this area to link with its apparent continuation to the east, represented by cropmarks adjacent to and beyond the stone circle.

The cropmark forming the southern side of the supposed cursus was recorded by Soffe and Clare (1988, 296) as *'clearly part of a 19th-century herring-bone drainage system'*. Exactly why it has subsequently been interpreted as part of a possible cursus, as described in the scheduled monument description, is not known. Nothing was found at the exact location of this cropmark (in so far as this could be accurately mapped from the published plan), but a post-medieval drain was recorded passing through the trench some 20 metres to the south at NY 56856 37117, 108 metres from the north-east corner of the field (Photos 12 - 16). This drain is of simple construction, consisting of a line of stones laid on edge to either side, with capstones above; plenty of water was flowing through it when it was cut by the digger. Looking at the cropmark evidence and the published plan (Figs 2 and 3), it appears possible that the drains recorded as cropmarks do not extend south of the fieldwall adjacent to the cable trench; it is therefore possible that the east end of the drain recorded here by Soffe and Clare (subsequently, and wrongly, interpreted as the south side of the 'cursus') did not reach quite as far eastwards as the line of the cable trench, and thus was not seen in the trench. However, other drains were cut by the trench, so this remains something of a (very insignificant) mystery.

Despite a very careful examination of both sections of the trench (bearing in mind the initial difficulty in distinguishing between ditch fills and adjacent undisturbed ground at Long Meg - see ASDU 2015) no further features, other than post-medieval field drains (eg photos 17-20) were noted. Several other field drains, further away from the scheduled area in the vicinity of the barn to the south, were also noted but are not illustrated here. All these drains are of minimal archaeological interest, but it is worth noting their presence - if only in order to guard against them being mistaken for earlier features in future.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The cable trench cut through the supposed Long Meg cursus. On the line of the north side of the 'cursus', a wide U-shaped ditch was recorded, within which was a post-medieval field drain. Nothing was noted where the cable trench cut the line of the south ditch of the 'cursus', though a post-medieval field drain was recorded c20m south of his point, and several other field drains were noted elsewhere along the length of the trench.

In the light of these results, it is worth noting the full description of these cropmarks provided by Soffe and Clare (1988 296):

twolinear ditches run nearly parallel to one another east from Longbank Wood toward Long Meg. The idea of a prehistoric cursus or an avenue analogous to Stonehenge is attractive but must be discounted on the evidence. The course of the northern ditch runs through and beyond the stone circle. It has an irregular character and is probably prehistoric in origin, although its association with the stone circle or a bank in Longbank Wood is unclear. The other ditch is straighter and thinner and is clearly part of a 19th-century herring-bone drainage system.

This interpretation is backed up by the results of the watching brief. The presence of any kind of conventional cursus at this location now seems very remote; indeed, it can be dismissed. However, it remains possible that the northern of the two roughly parallel cropmarks does represent a linear ditch of some antiquity. (It should be noted that the feature lies along the very edge of the scheduled area, perhaps extending slightly outside it in places, whereas the bulk of the scheduled area to the south appears on the basis of the cropmark evidence and this watching brief to be of minimal if any archaeological importance). This feature appears from the air photo plot (Fig 2) to extend well to the east of the stone circle (outside the scheduled area), presumably passing through (or beneath) it and onwards towards Peatmoor Tarn which was presumably a significant landscape feature in the Neolithic. It is quite possible that this ditch pre-dates the stone circle, which recent work suggests may date from a century or two prior to 3000 BC (ASDU 2016, Frodsham 2021). The great earthwork enclosure to the north of the stone circle appears to be early Neolithic, perhaps as early as c3900 BC, and the linear ditch may well be more closely associated with this than with the stone circle.

The possible relationships between this linear ditch, the spring at Longbank Wood (and the Eden), Peatmoor Tarn, and the (possibly much later) stone circle, together with its east-west alignment, suggest that it may be a feature of some significance. Whether it was always just a ditch, or part of a more complex structure perhaps including a parallel mound (or mounds), may never be known as the evidence may have been destroyed by ploughing over subsequent millennia. However, it is certainly worthy of further study as a potentially significant element of the Long Meg complex.

The spring to the north of the stone circle, and the valley of the 'Long Meg Beck' (actually an unnamed stream) from this to the Eden, have been interpreted as fundamentally significant elements in the development of the Long Meg complex (Frodsham 2021). It is certainly worth noting that water

from the spring at Longbank Wood flows to the Eden along a similar, though much smaller, valley. Both valleys are clearly visible on DTM lidar imagery, on which all tree cover has been stripped away (Fig. 4). If the ditch discussed here is indeed Neolithic, the fact that it appears to link Peatmoor Tarn with the Eden may well be significant.

Further fieldwork, perhaps including high-resolution geophysical survey (it was not detected by conventional geophysical survey in the stone circle field; ASDU 2013) and trial trenching, will probably be necessary to establish the nature and chronology of this feature. It would be a relatively simple exercise to reopen the upper portion of the cable trench where it cuts this ditch (at point X on Fig 4), or to open one or more trenches elsewhere along the line of the recorded cropmark, and obtain samples for analysis; the organic inclusions within the observed sections of the ditch suggest that establishing its general chronology through radiocarbon dating should be feasible. Should a further programme of community archaeology take place at Long Meg in the near future then an evaluation of this feature should be regarded as a priority. The recognition of any kind of Neolithic earthwork in this location would have potentially profound implications for our understanding of the Long Meg complex. Alternatively, should it be established that there is nothing of significance here then the scheduled area could be revised, thus relaxing restrictions on agricultural activity on this part of the farm.

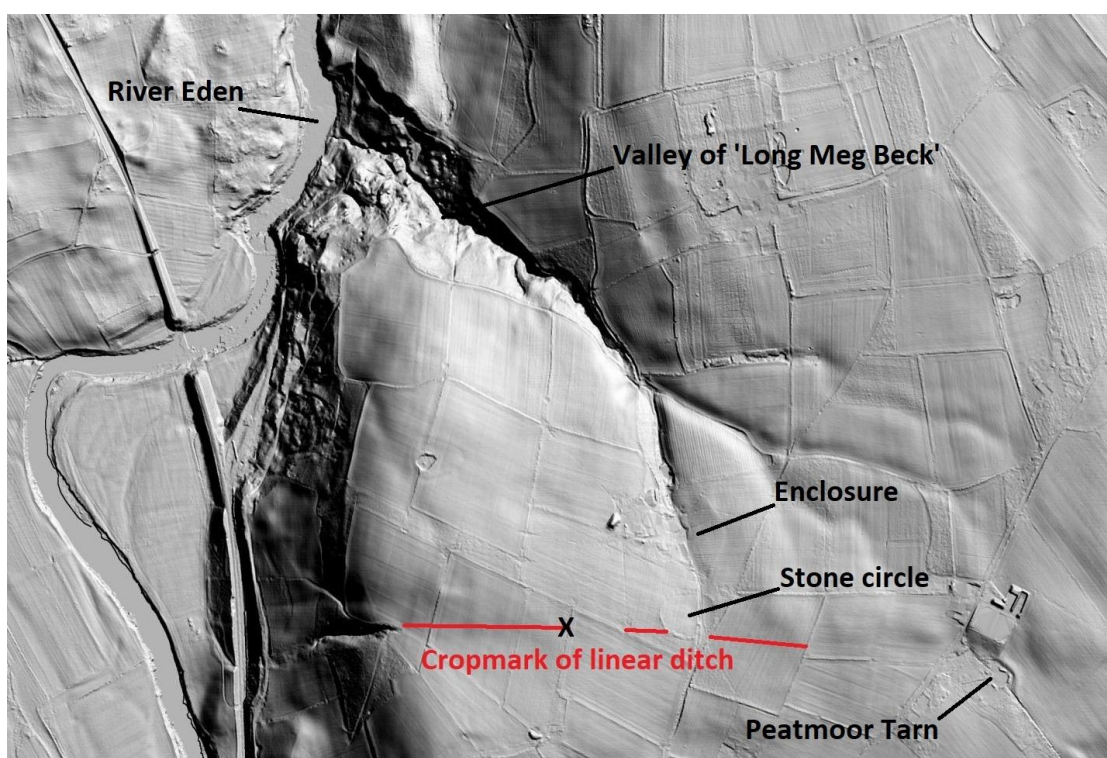


Fig. 4. DTM lidar image showing the line (in red) of the cropmark of the possibly Neolithic ditch, roughly plotted from the plan published by Soffe and Clare (Fig 2). Note the apparent relationship between the west end of this ditch and the natural valley caused by water flowing from the spring at Longbank Wood. X marks the spot at which the ditch was recorded in the cable trench (Photos 9 - 11). To the east, it appears to align with Peatmoor Tarn, a potentially significant landscape feature in the Neolithic, to which it may originally have continued. The much larger valley leading north-westwards from the Long Meg enclosure to the Eden is very obvious in this image. Image produced using 1m-resolution 2022 Environment Agency lidar data.

6. Further information

Any requests regarding this work should be address to Paul Frodsham at ORACLE Heritage Services.

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7. References

Archaeological Services Durham University. 2013. *Long Meg and her Daughters, Little Salkeld, Cumbria. Altogether Archaeology geophysical and topographic surveys*. Unpublished report (no 3132) for North Pennines AONB Partnership. (Available at www.altogetherarchaeology.org).

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8. Photographs



General views of the cable trench.

- 1. Top left. The south end of the trench, looking east.*
- 2. Top right. Looking north along the trench from the angle shown in 1 (the ranging pole is in the same location in 1 and 2).*
- 3. Left. Looking south along the trench through the gate between the two fields, with the old barn visible in the background.*



General views of the cable trench from roughly halfway along its main north-south length.

4 (top). Looking north.

5 (bottom). Looking south.



General views of the cable trench.

6 (top). Looking west-north-west along the trench in the north field.

7 (middle). Looking east-south-east back along the same stretch of the trench as shown in 6.

8 (bottom). The north end of the trench, adjacent to the existing electricity pole.



Ditch and field drain at NY 56873 37195, corresponding to the north side of the supposed cursus. The drain here is clearly set within an older ditch which could be of archaeological importance and quite possibly of Neolithic date.

9 (top). West section.

10 (bottom). East section.



11. Ditch and field drain at NY 56873 37195, east section (the ranging pole is in the same location as in photo 14).



12. View along the line of the buried ditch shown in photos 9, 10 and 11, looking eastwards over the backfilled cable trench towards the stone circle with Long Meg visible behind the distant field wall, just to the left of the ranging pole. There is no surface trace of the ditch, and no suggestion of an earthwork of any kind sealed beneath the field wall.



Field drain at NY 56856 37117, about 20m south of the line of the south side of the supposed cursus.

13 (top left). West section.

14 (top right). East section.

15 (bottom left). General view northwards along the cable trench, showing location of field drain (the ranging pole is in the same location as in photo 10).

16 (bottom right). Close-up view of the field drain (west-section).



17, 18, 19. Three views of a field drain at NY 56873 37204 (west section of cable trench), close to the north-east corner of the field.



20. Field drain with clay pipe at NY 56875 37188 (west section of cable trench), close to the north-east corner of the field.