

Lordenshaw

Lordenshaw hill has one of the largest clusters of ancient cup and ring marked stones in the UK. We've chosen four interesting spots we'd like to share with you.

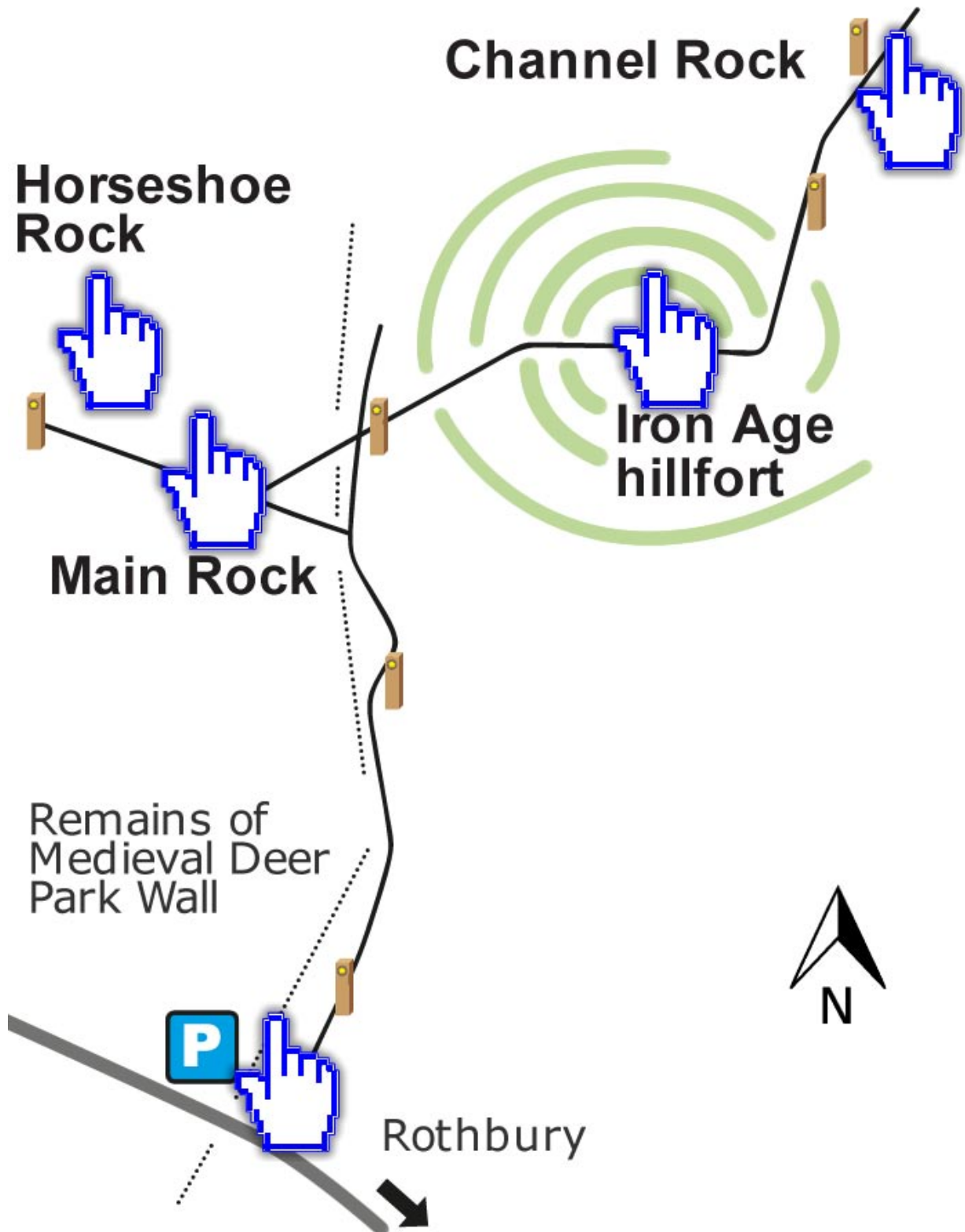
What are cup & ring marks?

The curious hollows and grooves we call 'cup and ring marks' or 'rock art' were pecked onto outcrops and boulders across Northern Britain and Ireland by Neolithic and Bronze Age people between 6000 and 3500 years ago. The original meaning of the symbols is now lost but they provide a unique personal link with our prehistoric ancestors.

Let's find some rock art.

Setting Out

Without crossing the road, take the path up the hill from the car park. Follow the waymarkers to the Main Rock, bearing left when the path splits. (400m)



Main Rock

You should now see the Main Rock in front of you. It is the large exposed rock next to the metal 'Ministry of Works' sign.



Take a closer look

Please treat the rock with care.

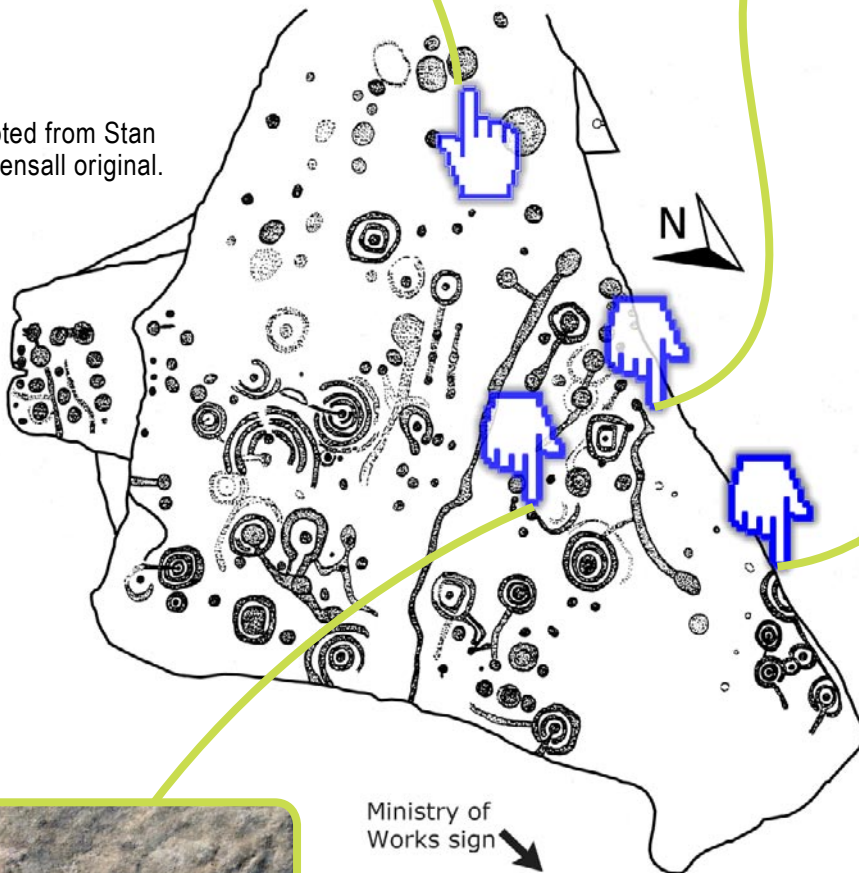


Deep natural erosion on exposed edge may have started as cup marks.



Recently carved motif looks sharper and less weathered.

Adapted from Stan Beckensall original.



Truncated motif due to quarrying. Some of the removed stone may have been used to build the hillfort or the deer park wall.



'ROCK MAP' graffiti was here in 1931 when the panel was recorded.

Although quarrying is visible at about 15% of Northumberland rock art panels, it is not common to see such a clearly truncated motif.

Read about Main Rock

(please note that this is an audio transcript)

Can you see the grooves and hollows on the surface?

I can see a couple of marks here, but they aren't very clear...

Well, if you look at the diagram afterwards you may be able to see them more clearly, especially when there is low sunlight.

Wow, I didn't realise there was so much! This could be on rocks all over the hill!

Well maybe it is! The North East of England is particularly rich in cup and ring marks. Here, at Lordenshaw there are over a hundred carved stones scattered about the hillside. Throughout Britain and Ireland there are about six thousand of these ancient decorated stones! And these are just the ones that have stood the test of time!

That's amazing. But what does it all mean? Why did they do it?

The truth is that we really don't know what they meant to the Neolithic and Bronze Age people who made them, but there are lots of ideas – some more sensible than others, from maps and route markers to doodles made by bored shepherds! Have you any ideas?

Mm, I don't know. They look a bit like ripples on a pond, but I'm not sure. Maybe they're just decoration...

It's one possibility!

From Main Rock to Horseshoe Rock

From the Main Rock take the path leading steeply downhill until you reach a crossroads and wooden post (150m). Cross straight over and you will find the Horseshoe Rock 15m down the path, a few paces to the right.

Horseshoe Rock

You should now be at the Horseshoe Rock, just off the path. Take a moment to enjoy the view, then turn to face up the slope with the carved rock in front of you.

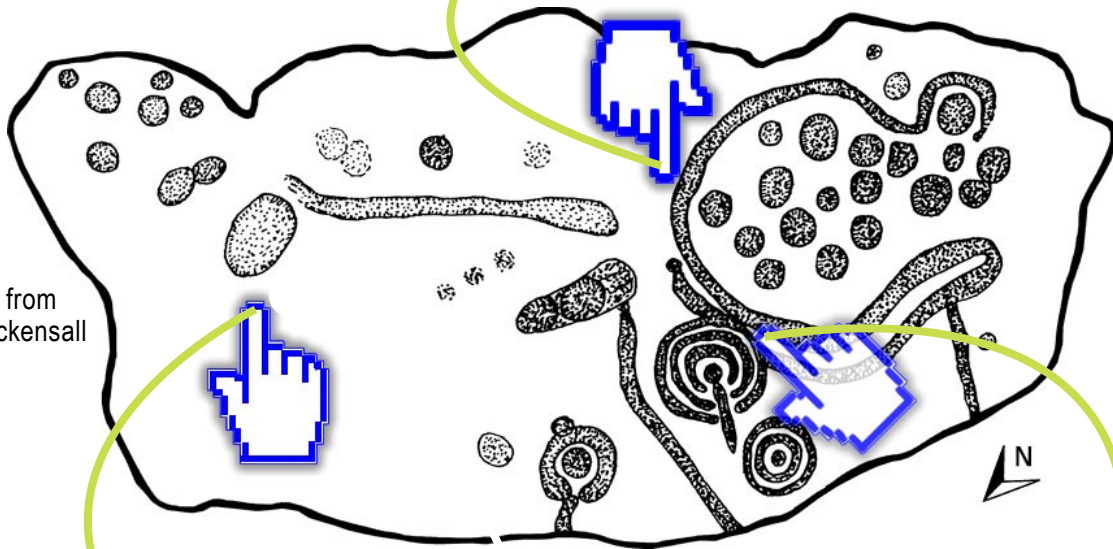


Take a closer look

Please treat the rock with care.

'Horseshoe' groove follows natural contour around the dome of the rock.

There are many instances in Northumberland rock art where the carvings appear to take advantage of the natural contours of the rock.



Adapted from Stan Beckensall original.



This area has no carvings. Why do you think this is the case?

This part of the rock is generally lower than the carved sections. It is possible that it was covered by turf when the carvings were made.



Penannular (gapped ring) overlies groove. Was this added later?

Study of the layering of rock art motifs may provide important clues as to their relative age.

Read about Horseshoe Rock

(please note that this is an audio transcript)

What a fantastic view—that must be Rothbury down in the valley?

That's right. On a clear day you can see across to the Cheviot Hills. Rock art is often found at places like this, higher ground that overlooks fertile valleys. The people who made the cups and rings probably lived in the same places people do today, down there near the river.

So why did they come up here?

Well one idea is that they were hunting wild animals like deer or herding domesticated animals like cattle, pigs, sheep and goats, maybe moving them around during the year.

Were the cups and rings part of that?

Maybe. Some archaeologists think that the rock art panels might mark clearings in the woodland.

Ah, so would this have been covered with trees?

Possibly.

Could they be boundary markers between different groups of people?

That's a possibility. We believe people started making the carvings when they took up farming and so the carvings might indicate different settlements.

When I first saw them I thought they were decorative, but now I'm not so sure. If they are all found in similar places, maybe they did have a special role connected to the landscape.

From Horseshoe Rock to Hillfort

Retrace your steps to the waymarked crossroads (15m) and take the path leading steeply uphill, along the side of the field (150m). Facing the metal sign at the Main Rock, take the path on your right to the waymarked post (90m). Continue straight on through the entrance of the hillfort until you reach the crest of the hill (200m).

Hillfort

You should be at the top of the hill, within the ramparts of the hillfort. You may like to explore the remains of the hut circles where people once lived on this windswept summit, or stop a while to take in the extensive views.



Read About Lordenshaw Hillfort

It looks like I'm in the heart of the hillfort now.

That's right. You've walked through the ramparts of the Iron Age hillfort. You can see the remains of round huts where people lived in the fort.

Did the people who built the hillfort make the rock art?

No, the hillfort was built around 350BC, which is at least a thousand years after the rock art was made.

I wonder if the people who built the fort noticed the rock art.

We can't tell for sure but they did use some of the carved stones to build with. We've also found quite a few cup marked boulders around the fort.

Maybe they thought they were special.

Or it could just mean they were convenient building material.

Oh. I'd like to think that they chose to use them deliberately.

That's a nice thought, especially as Lordenshaw appears to have been a significant place to lots of people through time. Likewise, Simonside across the road was believed to be a powerful place inhabited by mythical creatures.

What other traces of people are there on Lordenshaw?

Well, there are quite a few Bronze Age burial cairns from between 3500 and 1500 years ago. There is also a stone-lined coffin called a 'cist'. One of the cairns includes cup-marked stones which may have been quarried from existing carved outcrops.

Those cup and ring marks seem to have moved about quite a bit!

Yes, they were probably re-used a few times over the years. They're also in the thirteenth century deer park wall—that was built by a local Lord for hunting.

From Hillfort to Channel Rock

From the top of the hillfort, facing towards Rothbury down the valley, continue through the hillfort to your right. At the waymarked hillfort exit (65m) follow the left hand path. When you reach another waymarker (135m) turn off the path to the right, down the slope. You should see an expanse of white rocks straight ahead (70m).

Channel Rock

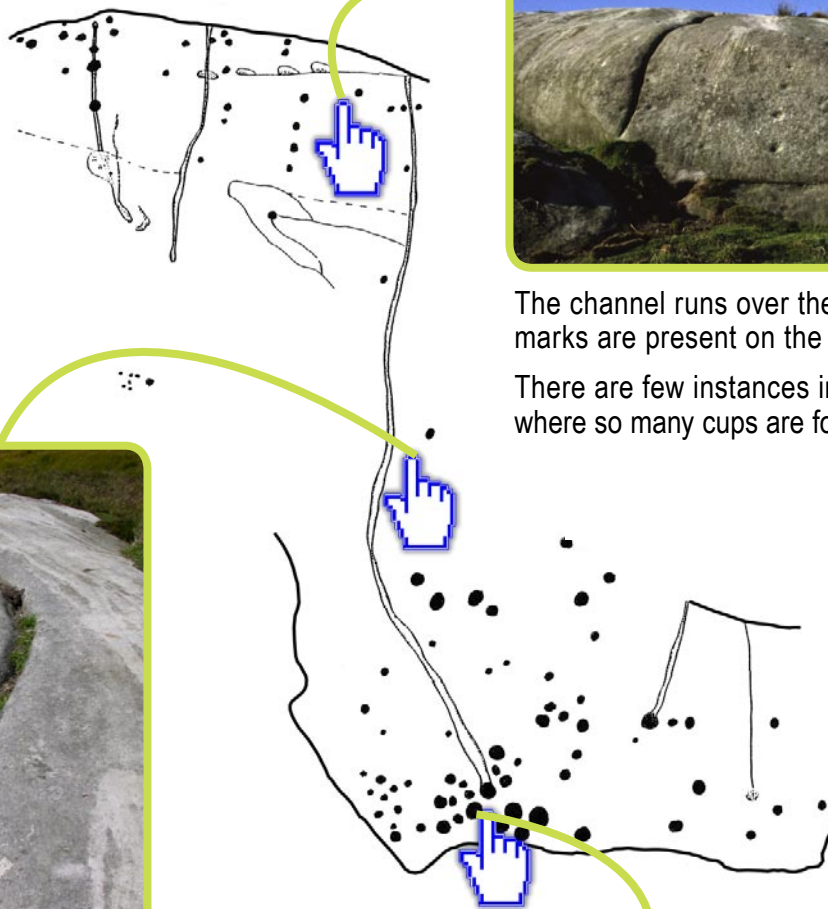
You should now see a large expanse of white rock. The carvings extend right over the edge onto the vertical face below



Take a closer look

Please treat the rock with care.

Adapted from
Stan Beckensall
original.



The channel runs over the edge. More cup marks are present on the vertical face. There are few instances in Northumberland where so many cups are found on steep surfaces.



This groove may have started as a natural erosion channel which was then enhanced.

This is the longest and largest enhanced groove in Northumberland rock art.



The large cups are clustered near the top of the panel. Why might that be?

It is unusual to find such a large cluster of cups in Northumberland rock art without any rings around any of them.

Read About Channel Rock

These outcrops are amazing – the white rock really stands out against the heather and bracken.

Yes, it's easy to imagine that ancient people thought this was a special place.

There are some big cup-marks here at the top of the rock – and this channel is huge!

In fact, this is the longest carved channel in Northumberland, and perhaps even in the UK.

Is it part of the rock art or is it natural erosion?

We can't be sure but there are a few natural channels – made by water running down the rock. We think that maybe this deep one would have started naturally but was enhanced by the carvers when the cup marks were made.

It goes right down over the edge. Could it be some kind of sacrificial slab with a gutter for the blood to pour down? All we need is a goat!

I'm not sure about ritual sacrifice. It's certainly possible that ceremonies took place here because of size of the rock and the unique channel!

These rocks definitely seem unusual. I've never seen any like this before, they're so smooth and rounded.

Well, another theory is that the people who carved the rocks were drawn to them because they thought that the natural features, for instance these water-eroded channels, had been made by their ancestors or gods.

I like that idea. It's nice to think that people many years ago might have used their beliefs to make sense of the landscape.

GPS Coordinates for the site

Car Park

- * Decimal 55.28320 -1.91900
- * N 55° 16.992 W 1° 55.140
- * British Grid: NZ 05243 98788

Hillfort

- * Decimal 55.28710 -1.91509
- * N 55° 17.225 W 1° 54.905
- * British Grid: NZ 05491 99223

Main Rock

- * Decimal 55.28644 -1.91931
- * N 55° 17.186 W 1° 55.159
- * British Grid: NZ 05223 99149

Channel Rock

- * Decimal 55.28859 -1.91202
- * N 55° 17.316 W 1° 54.721
- * British Grid: NZ 05686 99389

Horseshoe Rock

- * Decimal 55.28711 -1.92125
- * N 55° 17.226 W 1° 55.275
- * British Grid: NZ 05100 99223