

OUTDOORS

A ring of mystery

THOSE mysterious Bronze Age people who inhabited the uplands of what are now Rombalds and Baildon Moors, continue to fascinate the archeologists.

These prehistoric tribes left behind them cairns, stone circles, rock carvings and low wallings, though the purpose of all this activity is still not clear.

"It is one of the richest and most important areas in Britain," says Dr. Julian Henderson who has recently led a new Leeds University excavation on a ring cairn on nearby Harden Moor.

Believed to date from 1500 to 1200 BC; the site was excavated in the late 1950s when burial urns were found. Using careful modern techniques which involve stripping off layers of earth like an onion, the Leeds University group discovered what appears to be a stone circle on the site. An arrow head also came to light and in one of the top layers of soil a Roman glass bead was found. There is a Roman crossroads on Harden Moor and the bead could have been dropped by a travelling soldier.

There are hopes of completing the excavation either later this year or early next. In the meantime samples of earth from a variety of layers have been taken to Leeds University for pollen analyses.

The university's pollen analysis technique has already yielded results on the opposite side of the moor. The amateur Ilkley Archeology Group excavated a low cairn on Woofa Bank on Burley Moor but found nothing. Peat from beneath the stones was taken for analysis of the pollen grains and produced a mystery.

When the cairn was built, trees flourished on what is now moorland. But beneath the cairn was found a far higher proportion of lime pollen grains than the rest of the surrounding area. Why? Bees frequent lime trees. Could the pollen be evidence of a libation of honey? Or perhaps for some reason a group of twigs were laid there. Also found was one grain of pollen from Enchanter's Nightshade. Make of that what you will!

More Bronze Age walling, by the way, has been revealed on Ilkley Moor by the recent moor blaze to the east of Rocky Valley. The Archeology group intends to survey it in detail. They have already discovered similar walling in the Green Crag Slack area further to the east.

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An exciting discovery for the schoolboy members of Bradford Grammar School's Archeology Group is a section of Roman Road on the moor at Denholme, in excellent condition.

Under the supervision of history master Mr. Donald Haigh, a dozen of them excavated the site a few weeks ago and have now taken measurements, and photographs and recovered it.

"It was a section on the Manchester-Ilkley Road which was just beyond the point where the Roman Road ends on the Ordnance Survey map," says Mr. Haigh. "It was made of cobbles rammed into the natural subsoil and there seem to have been some large boulders.

"It was 4½ metres wide and cambered with two very shallow ditches at either side."

For once the excavation was reasonably easy, except for the tufts of moorgrass which had to be dug out with a pickaxe.

The Group, which has spent several years tracing the Roman Roads in Yorkshire, now intends to move on to the the Halifax area.

by John Hewitt