

Swaledale Big Dig

Newsletter #2 April 2014

This is the second in a series of occasional Swaledale Big Dig Newsletters which are intended to be produced at roughly monthly intervals.

Progress

We have made an excellent start to the project.

The launch events in March were a tremendous success with the participation of local people far exceeding our expectations. Ninety-four people attended the formal launch on Thursday 13th March to hear Keith Sweetmore, Robert White and our keynote speaker, the celebrity archaeologist Carenza Lewis. A further 113 attended the Heritage Open Day to learn more about our project, view our displays and those of the local Vernacular Buildings Study Group, Family History Society and the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority.



Carenza Lewis with Alan Mills and local school children

At the Thursday evening event Keith Sweetmore, Engagement Officer for the North East at the British National Archive (and formerly Manager of the North Yorkshire County Record Office) representing the Heritage Lottery Fund spoke about the importance of Heritage and how projects such as this can enable local people to apply their skills and acquire new ones to discover new things about their community.

Robert White, Senior Historic Environment Officer of the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA) discussed "Swaledale's known unknowns" illustrating very well that there is an awful lot which we do not know about the development. One of the several questions which Robert raised and might be answered by the Big Dig project is why do the three villages of Fremington, Grinton and Reeth each have a different layout.

Carenza Lewis, formerly of Time Team and now Director of Access Cambridge Archaeology at the University of Cambridge, was the main speaker. Carenza explained how we know very little about the development of currently occupied rural settlements (CORS). The existing buildings often make these difficult to interpret. Carenza explained how test pitting can be very valuable in uncovering pot from different periods of occupation with the age, volume and distribution telling us a lot about the development of the settlement. It is also enjoyable!

To conclude, Alan Mills, the Project Manager, outlined the many opportunities for the local community have to participate in the project and to acquire or upgrade their skills and knowledge across a wide range of relevant subjects.

On Saturday 15th March the Memorial Hall was the venue for the Big Dig Open day. One hundred and thirteen people visited the displays outlining the project, the geology and human history of Swaledale, and to discuss these with SWAAG members including explanations of the geophysics equipment and the results it produces, and a fine display of "finds".



Rob & Judith pointing out recent finds to visitors

The Open Day also featured displays by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, the Upper Dales Family History Group and the local Vernacular Buildings Study Group.

On 24th March SWAAG members led by Stephen Eastmead and Mike Walton carried out the first geophysical survey of the Green using the Bartington magnetometer acquired with HLF monies. The following image shows the results of this survey. There are some interesting areas identified for further investigation using the new resistivity equipment, also acquired with HLF monies. We hope to complete this second survey in the next few weeks and will post the results on the website at <http://www.swaag.org/HLF/Reeth.htm>



The results of the first geophysical survey of Reeth Green (24/3/14)

We have a particular interest in the Green. Will test pitting enable us to determine what was there before the Market Charter of 1694/5? The on-going translation of the Medieval Latin charter by David Backhouse and colleagues will also help here.

Our programme of free courses gets underway next week.

The dates of the first two courses are as below. These are free and open to all. Should you wish to participate in one or both then please let me know, preferably by email to bigdig@swaag.org

1. Landscape Interpretation.

This will consist of two walks looking at and interpreting the archaeological features which many of us pass by unnoticed. The two walks will describe the influences of the landscape and the changing woodland environment on human activities throughout prehistoric and recent time, for example the attraction to early pastoral communities of the limestone pastures and significance of springs

The first walk will be a half-day walk on Wednesday 9th April. It will be a 3 mile circuit from Reeth Green to visit the Fremington Dykes passing through the pastures by Arkle Beck towards Cuckoo Hill and thence to Fremington via Low Lane. Finally returning to Reeth through the pastures.

The second walk will be a full day, Saturday 12th April, on Harkerside It will include a fairly long uphill walk, with frequent pauses, through the pastures and across the moorland to visit to the linear earthworks on High Harker Hill.

For both walks meet on Reeth Green at 10 a.m. outside the Gift Shop. Wear walking boots or stout shoes, bring waterproofs, a drink and for the full-day, a snack.

You will gain most by coming on both walks but are welcome to join either one only if necessary.

Tim Laurie will lead both walks. Tim is a well-known and respected independent landscape archaeological researcher, having been active in Swaledale for more than 30 years. He is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries (FSA) and President of the Swaledale & Arkengarthdale Archaeology Group (SWAAG).

Please let me know if you wish to join one or both of the walks so we can assess numbers.
bigdig@swaag.org

2. British Archaeology.

This introduction to British Archaeology takes the form of five sessions of two hours each, on Thursday evenings 7pm - 9pm, beginning on 24th April with the remaining four sessions on Thursdays 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th May. The course will provide an overview of the post-glacial archaeology of Britain, highlighting where there are links - and gaps - in the north Pennine area. The five sessions will be looking at themes and trends, with more detailed follow-up possible subsequently if/where there's interest. The venue will be in Reeth, Grinton or Fremington depending upon numbers of participants.

The course tutor will be Roger Martlew. Roger taught archaeology at the University of Leeds for 16 years before founding the Yorkshire Dales Landscape Research Trust in 2004. He is a Fellow of the Societies of Antiquaries of London and Scotland.

Please let me know if you wish to join this course so that we can assess numbers.
bigdig@swaag.org

Future courses will include more on British Archaeology, Finds Handling & Identification, Archaeological Illustration, Interpreting Aerial Photography / Lidar, Topographic Survey using GPS and Interpreting Geophys. There will be more on these in the May / June Newsletter.

Forthcoming events

Saturday 10th May 2pm Reeth Memorial Hall – Test pit training session. This is aimed at all those who have kindly volunteered their gardens or offered to assist with the test pits, digging, sieving, bucket carrying or whatever.

Saturday 17th May & Sunday 18th May – the first of our test pit digging weekends in Reeth.

Further digging sessions are planned for:

Friday 6th June – a one day dig on Reeth Green during the Swaledale Festival

Saturday 21st June & Sunday 22nd June in Reeth

Saturday 19th July & Sunday 20th July, again in Reeth as part of the CBA Festival of Archaeology.

There will also be School-based activities but the nature of these means that participation is limited to a small number of members.

We will contact all those who kindly offered space to dig regarding what we propose, who will do it and how and when is convenient to you.

Later in the year we will begin work in Fremington and Grinton. We aim to begin geophysical surveys in these two villages later this year with test-pitting in 2015.

Recent articles about the Big Dig in the press:

Darlington & Stockton Times 14th March “Yorkshire Dales community prepares for archaeology project”.

http://www.darlingtonandstocktontimes.co.uk/news/11079347.Yorkshire_Dales_community_prepares_for_archaeology_project/

Northern Echo 21st March “Big Dig Expert does the groundwork at village” – about the launch event with Carenza Lewis – unfortunately this does not seem to be on their website yet

Dalesman April 2014: Digging for history

<http://www.helenforwordsandpictures.com/news/2014/03/dalesman-april-2014-digging-for-history/>



Fremington Tithe Map 1839 © R White / YDNPA

How you can get involved

There are many opportunities for all to become involved in the Big Dig. If you are interested and able to participate in any of the following activities please contact the person shown:

Test-pitting, Rob Nicholson: rob@swaag.org

or Philip Bastow: philip@swaag.org

Surveying incl geophys, stephen@swaag.org

or Mike Walton: mike@swaag.org

Documentary research Ann Russell: ann@swaag.org

or Judith Mills: judith@swaag.org

General enquiries to bigdig@swaag.org

If you are interested in some other aspect of history (eg family history, vernacular buildings etc) then we can put you in touch with relevant groups; if you are interested in archaeology generally then join SWAAG (see the website) !

All the best

Alan Mills