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The importance of the discovery of cord rig prompts a reappraisal of the Iron Age/Romano-British data base in the Tyne-Forth area and the traditional interpretations of its economic basis. This is reinforced by the evidence of demonstrably prehistoric cultivation terraces.

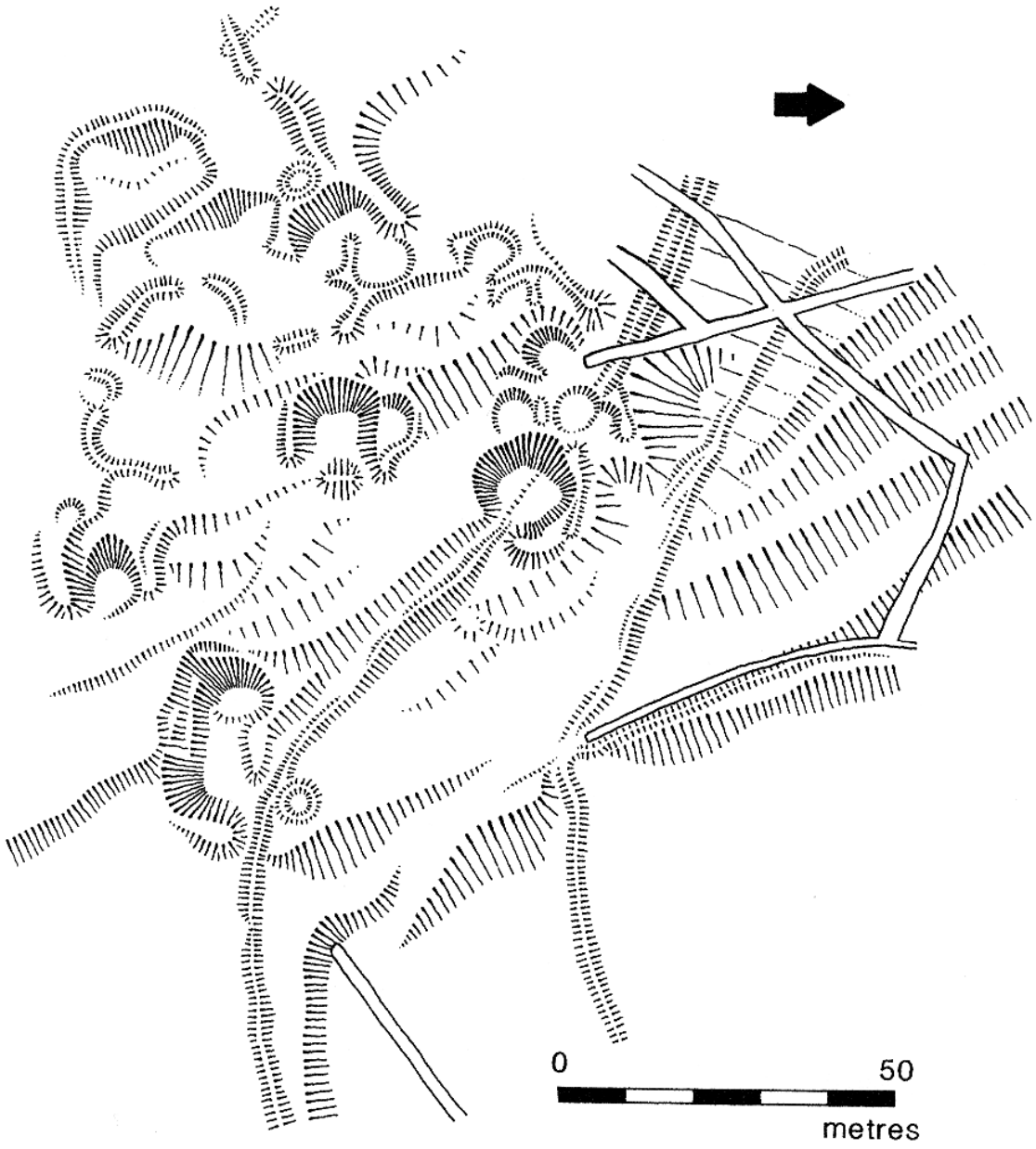

Fig. 7
Plan of Hetha Burn Head, Northumberland, showing early lynchets and terracing underlying later settlements (Survey and drawing, P. Topping)

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Cultivation terraces are a relatively widespread phenomenon in the Border counties which until recently were ascribed to a 'Dark Age' or Anglian phase of colonization. The publication of the Inventory of Roxburgh (RCAHMS 1956) presented a challenge to this traditional interpretation in which three examples of terracing suggested earlier origin. It should have come as little surprise that this type of cultivation could have prehistoric origins. In Northumberland as early as the mid-19th century MacLauchlan (1867, 12–14, 31, 78) had observed several instances of terraces in close relationship to prehistoric earthworks. Early excavators such as Pitt-Rivers had recorded lynchets at South Lodge Camp overlain by a Late Bronze Age settlement, and had also noted further prehistoric terraces in north Wales (M. Bowden, pers. comm.). Thus historically the concept of prehistoric terracing has had a lengthy gestation in the Borders area.

Amongst the smoothly undulating hills of the Cheviot massif many slopes still retain the scars of earlier cultivation, and at its most dramatic terraces ascend the hills like a staircase to roughly the 289 m (950 ft) contour, well beyond the limits of modern cultivation and often past that of the Medieval period. Terraces in Northumberland can be slightly formed such as the examples recorded by RCHME in the Ingram Valley no more than 1 to 2 m high and 5 to 10 m wide; to the prominent terraces on the flanks of White Hill (NT 893287) which stand 2 to 3 m high and up to 10 to 15 m wide.

The relative chronology of cultivation terraces

One of the problems in reviewing the evidence of these terraces in the Borders is to establish their date of origin. They are an inevitable development where cultivation occurs along the contours of a hillside and should be anticipated at all periods. An insight into this problem in the Cheviots is provided by the unenclosed settlement at Houseledge which is associated with a multi-phase field system (Burgess 1984). In its earliest phases several terraces are overlain by field walls, some of which are hidden beneath subsequent peat growth. Excavation has shown that the settlement developed during the Early Bronze Age, thus providing a *terminus ante quem* for the terraces.

At present, Bronze Age precursors are all that can be inferred, but the possibility of earlier contexts should not be ignored. There is a reasonable degree of Neolithic penetration along Cheviot valley floors from the evidence of stone axes (Burgess *et al.* 1981), stone circles (Topping 1981), and long cairns (Gates 1982). Unarguably there is a degree of Neolithic colonization, but unfortunately it is impossible at present to identify Neolithic settlements on the ground. The potential is there for the preservation of Neolithic terracing, and we know from other sites that Neolithic cultivation techniques do produce lynchets as at Scord of Brouster (Whittle 1986).

On the south-east-facing slopes of Kilham Hill (NT 89453050) at an altitude of 152 m OD, lies a sub-oval Cheviot-type settlement, conceivably of Iron Age/Romano-British date, which has been constructed over a series of low lynchets (cf. pl. 28b). A similar situation has been recorded on Coldsmouth Hill (NT 859293; fig. 8) where at a height of 230 m OD on north-facing slopes are the remains of a small scooped rectilinear homestead which overlies a group of narrow terraces, one of several prehistoric settlements scattered along a break in slope on this hillside. Again terraces can be seen to pre-date the construction of a site for which an Iron Age date can be inferred. Another example discovered during a RCHME survey on the eastern slopes of Ritto Hill (NT 95871652) at roughly 310 m OD, consists of an unenclosed forecourt settlement (for definition see Charlton and Day 1978, 77–78) which has been partially excavated into the scarp of a terrace still standing

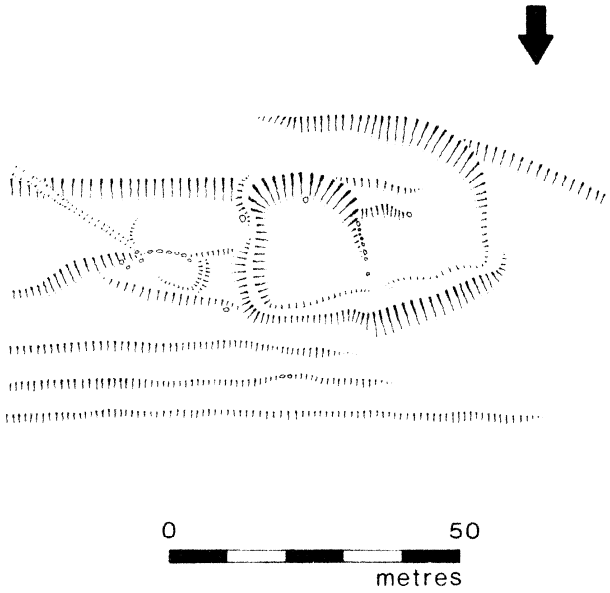

Fig. 8

Plan of Coldsmouth Hill, Northumberland, showing early lynchets and terracing underlying a later settlement (Survey and drawing, P. Topping)

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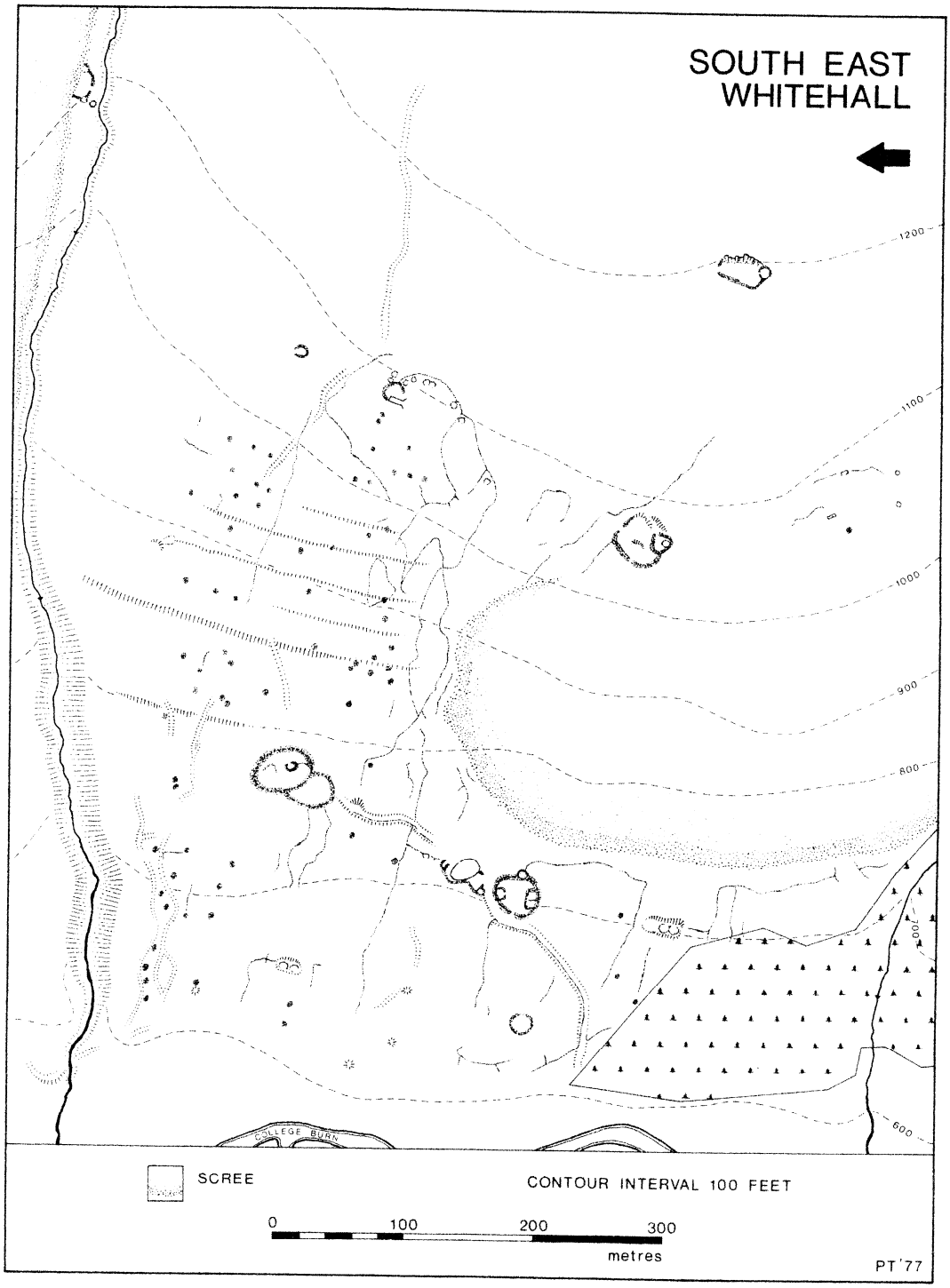

Fig. 9
South-east Whitehall field system, Northumberland (NT 893253) (Survey and drawing, P. Topping)

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to a height of 0.4 m. One further sequence previously referred to which provides a certain chronological depth is at Elsdon Burn (NT 869282), where terraces are overlain by a field of cord rig whose prominent furrows lie across the contours cutting the scarps of the terraces. Here perhaps we are seeing the replacement of an established agricultural technique by a novel innovation in the form of the cord rig, indicating a technological shift by the cultivators (see pl. 30a).

These stratified examples indicate something of the chronological origins of terracing. A fuller picture of agricultural development in this area is provided by two examples which illustrate the complex nature of successive field systems. At Hetha Burn Head (NT 86702640; fig. 7) there is a landscape with a three-phase development, the earliest of which is a series of finely developed cultivation terraces. Then, following their abandonment, a series of field walls was built across them associated with unenclosed hut-circles. The final phase is epitomized by the construction of a series of Cheviot-type scooped settlements of Iron Age/Romano-British date which were inserted into the terrace scarps; one settlement overlies and all but obliterates one of the phase-two field walls. This sequence not only provides chronological depth to the cultivation terraces which are sealed beneath known Iron Age/Romano-British period settlements, but it highlights changes in agricultural land use over time.

The second example is the field system at south-east Whitehall (NT 893253; fig. 9) which similarly originated as a series of low cultivation terraces, probably associated with several unenclosed houses, and all located between a scree slope and a ravine on the west-facing slopes of College Valley. A group of 73 small clearance cairns are randomly scattered over this area, some of which may be contemporary with the terraces. The second phase is typified by an enclosed field system superimposed on the terraces; it consists of a large sub-oval area subdivided into several irregular enclosures associated with Cheviot-type settlements by linking field walls. This sequence illustrates the rearrangement of land-use from unenclosed cultivation to a more regulated and enclosed landscape; it also stratifies the terraces beneath a later prehistoric horizon.

Taken as a whole, these random examples of prehistoric terraces add further weight to the argument for a substantial arable component within the local economies of the Tyne-Forth area during the Iron Age. The observation of Strabo (IV, 5, 2) that the indigenous communities 'know nothing of planting crops or of farming in general' (Mann and Penman 1977, 13) has echoed down the years. However, with the recognition of cord rig and the increasing numbers of demonstrably prehistoric cultivation terraces and field systems, it is now apparent that the arable component was a significant part of the overall economy and that large areas of the landscape were given over to cultivation. Although pastoralism still undoubtedly played its part, we now have to re-evaluate our theories and accept that the footloose Celtic cowboy has finally met his High Noon.

Acknowledgements. My thanks go to Adam and Humphrey Welfare and Strat Halliday for reading and commenting on various drafts of this paper; and to Colin Burgess who originally stimulated my interest in the prehistory of the Cheviots, and for the use of his unpublished plan of Fenton Hill. Thanks also go to RCHME for the use of unpublished survey material in advance of its own publications on the southern Cheviots and Roman camps. In addition a debt of gratitude is owed to Tim Gates whose aerial photographs in the NMR provided much information on cord rig sites.

Several colleagues also deserve thanks, notably Mark Bowden, Keith Blood and Donnie MacKay, who have all discussed the problems of cord rig with me on numerous occasions. Needless to say the views expressed above are those of the author and are not necessarily held by my friends previously mentioned; indeed some will actively deny these interpretations.

APPENDIX 1: CORD-RIG SITES IN NORTHUMBERLAND AND CUMBRIA

By Peter Topping and Adam Welfare

Definitions: plot = small unenclosed sites *c.* 30–60 m²; fields = any site generally larger and more formally laid out with some form of boundary enclosing the ridges; unknown = where the size and layout of the site cannot be quantified.

Arrangement of gazetteer: site number; NGR; site name; height OD; description; form of cultivation (plots/fields) and quantity.

(001); NT 964247; Snear Hill; 330 m; field system associated with unenclosed settlement; fields (*c.* 7)

(002); NT 857135; Trows Law; 420 m; overlies palisaded settlement with ring-groove houses; plots (2)

(003); NT 864134; Ward Law; 417 m; radial field system on E and SE slopes, uphill from plough-damaged fort; fields (>2)

(004); NT 853128; Loft Hill; 381 m; adjacent to two ring-ditch houses; plots (>2)

(005); NT 852114; Carshope; 353 m; *c.* 300 m SE of unenclosed settlement of ring-groove houses; fields (1), plots (2)

(006); NT 878094; Shillhope Law; 396 m; adjacent to a defended settlement; ?fields (1), plots (?2)