

SCOTTISH BORDERS (local authority)

Cavers (parish)

Stobs Camp former PoW cemetery

Geophysical survey and Excavation

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NT 50523 09563 (centred on) A ground resistance geophysical survey was conducted, 4 October 2016, followed by two community excavations, 28-29 October 2016 and 2-3 April 2017, E of Stobs Camp by Archaeology Scotland.

The aims were to investigate the construction of the former PoW cemetery and to explore a potential route taken by funeral processions during the First World War. The geophysical survey covered an area 40 x 40m and was completed by Edinburgh Archaeological Field Society. Subsequently five trenches were opened by hand.

Geophysical survey

The geophysical survey identified the edge and extent of a raised platform with a strong degree of certainty and supported what could be seen visually. An exploratory test pit between the memorial stone base and the top of the steps would be necessary to determine whether the platform was naturally formed or man-made. The survey also captured the north and west lines of trees around the square open area (roughly 5 metres in from the N edge and 12 metres in from the W edge respectively). The survey hinted at other faint E-W and N-S lines in the top left quadrant. These were not observable on the ground. There was an impression of a change in geology running roughly NE-SW though the centre of the plot that was possibly hiding detail in the light SE area. Although the granularity of the geophysical results did not suggest the location of any missing headstones the local authority archaeologist proposed further fine grained gradiometer and GPR surveys.

Trench 1 measuring 1 x 1m

Trench 1 was opened on top of the raised platform to determine whether it was formed naturally or was man-made. Upon excavating to a depth of 0.1m small coarse stone was found to be covering larger irregular natural bedrock. The presence of the small stone suggests material brought in to create a level surface for the platform.

Trench 2 measuring 4 x 2m

Trench 2 was initially opened to focus on linear anomalies identified by geophysical survey. It was on an approximate N-S alignment. A second visit to the trench re-opened the N end and extended it eastwards. This trench was 4 x 2m on an approximate E-W alignment. During excavation a path of fine, hard dark material was identified and two grave settings were revealed extending in a southwards direction. At a depth of 0.3m two headstone shoes were found on an approximate N-S alignment. A later cut was identified and this was assumed to represent the excavation of the grave to exhume the body in 1962. A section was dug to determine if the emptied grave contained a missing headstone. The cut had steep sides but at a depth of 1m ground water was encountered and the exercise abandoned. The irregular shape of the cut showed that in order to remove the body the original grave was probably widened in order to work with ease at depth. It would appear that the digging burrowed below the concrete of the headstone setting. Damage was observed on the headstone shoe and it is believed this had occurred during the removal of the human remains.

Trench 3 measuring 1 x 0.5m

Trench 3 focused on the remains of a memorial cairn on the raised platform. The trench located the corner of a stone plinth that supported the cairn. The height of the plinth measured 0.25m.

Trench 4 measuring 1 x 1m

Trench 4 was opened at the foot of stone steps leading up to the raised platform. Photographs taken circa 1917 suggest there were 6 steps but only 5 were visible. At a depth of 0.1m small irregular stones representing the bottom step were unearthed.

Trench 5 measuring 2 x 1m

Trench 5 explored an area at the N edge of the cemetery where it is believed funeral processions entered. Bedrock was encountered during excavation. No evidence of a path was identified.

Forty-one volunteers took part in the geophysical survey and combined excavation dates.

Archive: Historic Environment Scotland, Scottish Borders Council, Historic Environment Record (intended)

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