

The Craven Way

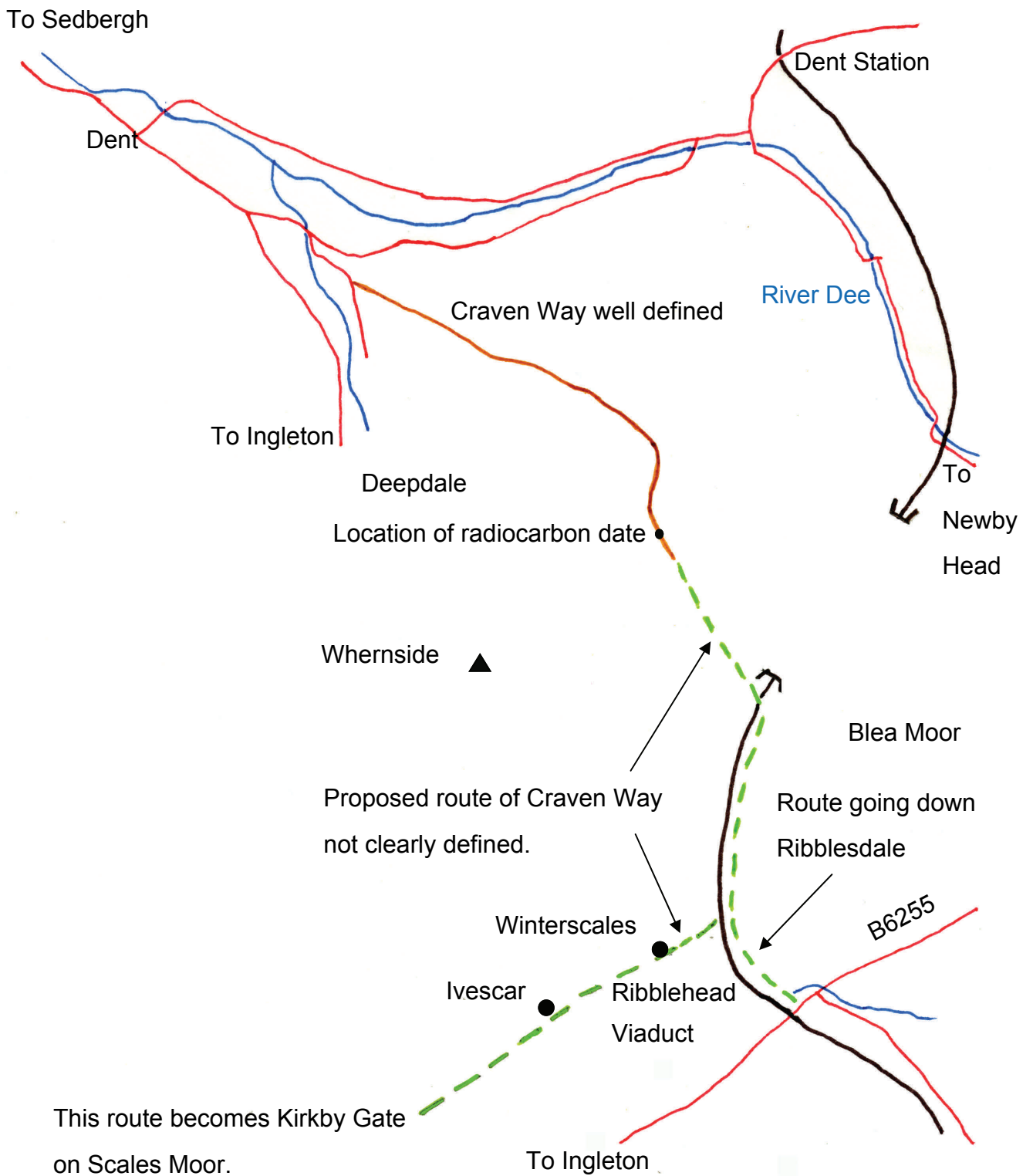
A track/road linking
Dentdale and Chapel-le-Dale.
New dating evidence.



A Batty
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Cover. Showing Craven Way track looking towards Dentdale.

Photograph A Batty.



The Craven Way

The Craven Way connects Dentdale and Chapel-le-dale going from near Whernside Manor, over Craven Wold down Littledale to Winterscales farm. The track crosses the Cumbria, Yorkshire border at Grain Head just east of Hagg Worm Haw, this location is mentioned in early 13th century monastic records as the northern boundary of Adam de Staveleys Southerscales estate, but there is no specific reference to a track. There is also the possibility that this location, which is a high point dividing the water-shed between Dentdale and Chapel-le-dale, may have been on a previous tribal boundary, but we have no definitive evidence for this at present. In more recent time the track has, and still is, being used as access to the moor for grouse shooting.

We have walked the track several times to see if there were any features which would have the potential to provide evidence of its use, or age. At grid ref SD 7526 8326 a tongue shaped area of peat bog has formed over the track and traffic is now deviating around this, and has obviously done so for a considerable period of time (Plate 1).

A short distance to the north is a location called Duncan Syke Foot, where there are, what may best be described as, several round cairns. We use this description tentatively being aware that there may be some glacial depositional process that has taken place at this altitude, of which we are unaware. We do not have any information concerning these, but there is the possibility they may be Bronze Age burial cairns.

The peat bog over lying the track, and the probable burial cairns are the only features we could identify with the potential to provide early information about the track. As excavating a cairn would be a considerable undertaking in this location, we decided to extract a peat core down to the base of the peat bog, a 30mm core 700mm deep was extracted down to bedrock. The core revealed that 140mm of clay deposits had built up on the bedrock, above which peat had formed. A 30mm deep section of the peat immediately above the clay deposits was extracted and sent for radiocarbon dating. The results of this are shown in (Fig 1).

Conclusions.

The peat core was taken from a location where we could be completely confident that the peat had formed in situ, and inspection of the core confirmed this, showing no anomalous variations or mixing in the peat formation. The radiocarbon date reveals that the formation of peat began around 500BC to 370BC SUERC-60369(2342,26) the clay deposits underlying the peat obviously formed first. The formation of the clay deposits would have to be under stable conditions i.e. no constant traffic passing over while being laid down, otherwise it would be continually eroded away. Estimating the earliest date that the track went out of use has to start with the date of around 500BC plus an estimated time for the build up of underlying clay deposits, this can be no more than a rough guess and we have opted for 100 years. This leaves us with an earliest date for the build up of deposits over the track at around 600BC. Whether there is a connection between the track and the

proposed cairns one of which is shown in (Plate 2), is unknown. We have radiocarbon dates from round houses situated on limestone terraces in the local dales. The most recent of these which we consider to be Bronze age is around 850BC with other dates going back to around 2000 BC. To our knowledge there are no other radiocarbon dates for tracks in our area leaving us with nothing as a comparison.

Many years of archaeological study in our local area has revealed a considerable number of sites dated to the Bronze Age e.g. burial cairns, ring cairns, burnt mound, round houses, worked timber in river embankment and artefact finds. These provide evidence for considerable population in the Bronze Age, which would result in the movement of people from dale to dale, transporting goods by pack horses, travois, or horse drawn wheeled vehicle. The Craven Way is the most direct route possible from the head of Dentdale into Chapel-le-dale and is very likely to have been used throughout the Bronze age and possibly even earlier.

Calibration Plot

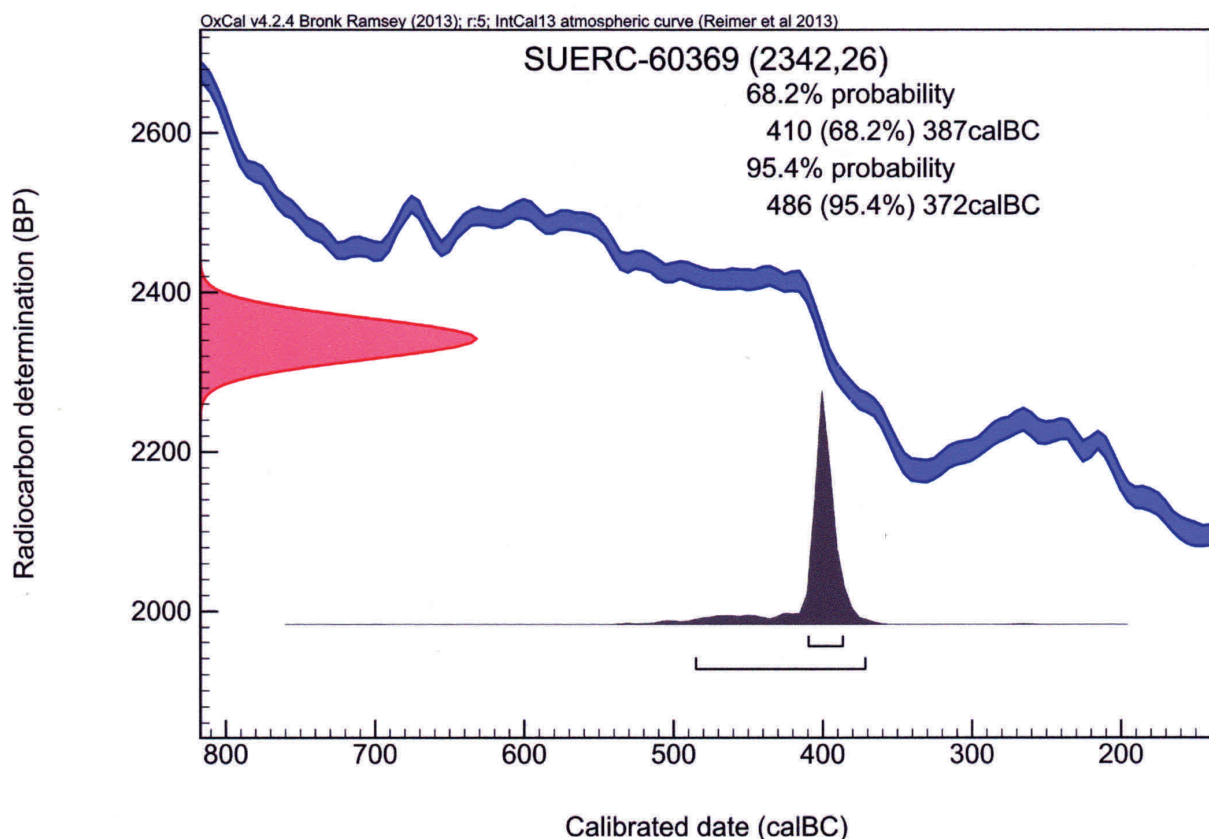


Fig 1. Radiocarbon date.



Plate 1. Peat build up over Craven Way track.

Photograph A Batty.



Plate 2. One of possibly several Bronze Age burial mounds.

Photograph A Batty.