



Viewpoint

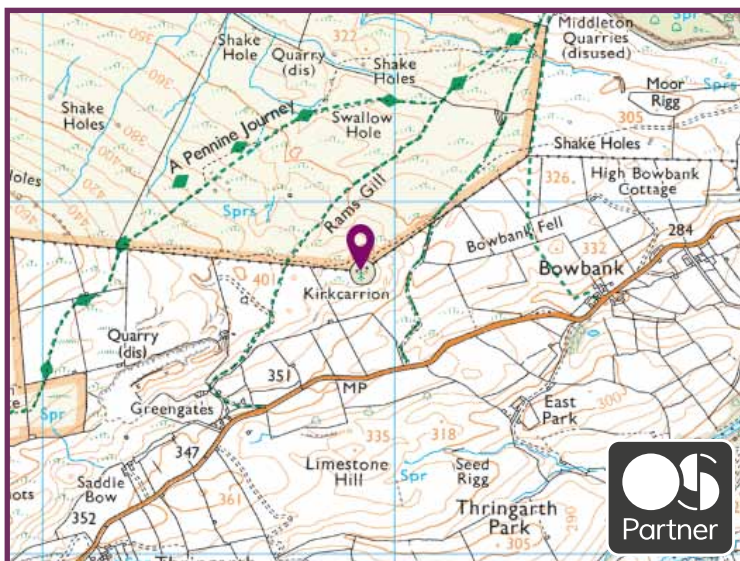
Distant echoes



Time: 15 mins

Region: North East England

Landscape: rural



Location:

Near Middleton in Teesdale, Teesdale,
County Durham DL12 0NT

Grid reference:

NY 93902 23803

Getting there:

From the roadside lay-by just west of Bowbank head west along the B6276 for a short distance to a public bridleway sign on the right. Follow the obvious track uphill to a second gate. Go through the gate and follow the wall up to the mound.

Above the quiet hamlet of Bowbank in Teesdale a copse of trees silhouetted against the sky draws our attention skywards.

These trees mark the site of an ancient long barrow (a prehistoric tomb) thought to be the resting place of a Bronze Age chieftain.

Why did our Bronze Age ancestors choose to bury their dead at this lonely spot?



Views across the patchwork fields and drystone walls of Teesdale © David Forster



Winter sunrise from Kirkcarrion © David Forster

As you gain height and the views open out, a patchwork of small fields draw the eye over gently wooded valleys towards a horizon of distant hills. It is down there in the valleys where our Bronze Age ancestors once lived and where later generations would cast their gaze towards the mound in acknowledgement of their forebears.

It is a beautiful and atmospheric viewpoint, and even today one that invokes a sense of wonder about our own place in the landscape. However stand here just before dawn and it is only then that the true nature of Kirkcarrion is revealed.

At the very moment the light of the rising sun spills across this landscape, there is an unbreakable link between the viewer and those who inhabited this land thousands of years ago. Throughout the year the mound is the first to greet the sun, and as a result the sunlit mound dominates the skyline from the valley.

From the mound itself, the view along the Tees valley is spectacular. To the east, two rivers meet, the River Tees and the River Lune, and perhaps the confluence of these watercourses had special significance for prehistoric people. Along with the smell of woodsmoke and the call of farm animals drifting up from the farmsteads below, it is easy to appreciate why this atmospheric spot was chosen as a resting place for the dead.

Of course the emotions this place invokes go beyond the view and like many such places myth and legend play a part in its story.

Since the mound was disturbed in 1804, people sometimes say they can feel the presence of a spirit. This presence is often heralded by the trees falling silent, and followed by the uncomfortable feeling of being watched.