

# WARTON CRAG

Heritage on the Hilltop

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### Front cover image

Morecambe Bay seen from the limestone crags of Warton Crag Lancashire

# TOP OF THE WORLD

The summit of Warton Crag stands at 163m above sea level.

It is the highest point in the Arnside and Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), on the north-west coast of England. On a clear day you will get stunning long-distance views across Morecambe Bay and the Pennines. This is a place for reflection.

At the summit is an enigmatic, ancient stone enclosure, protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The limestone geology supports grassland, scrub and woodland that create a perfect environment for nationally important butterflies and moths. It is protected as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.



The place name Warton may come from the Old English *weard* – a guard or look-out, and *tun* – farmstead. Or it might instead contain the Old English word *warod*, *weard* – shore.

The word *Crag* is Middle English for rock, inherited from either British or Gaelic language.

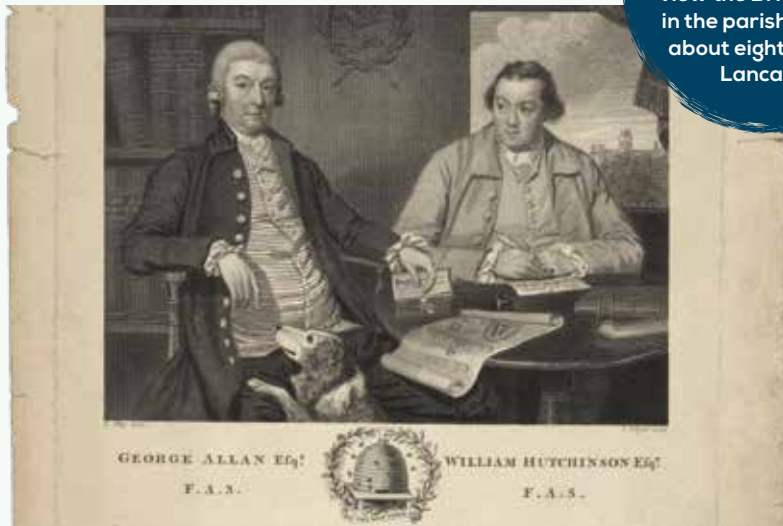
The AONB Partnership works to conserve and enhance this extraordinary place now and for the future. Visit [arnsidesilverdaleaonb.org.uk](http://arnsidesilverdaleaonb.org.uk) to find out more © Louise Martin

## A NATURAL STRONGHOLD?

The three curving stone walls which form the scheduled monument on the summit of Warton Crag blend in to the natural limestone and lie hidden by vegetation. These have intrigued archaeologists and historians for many years. Until recently they were thought to be an Iron Age hillfort.

In 1788 William Hutchinson wrote a letter to his friend and fellow solicitor George Allan. He describes a visit to Warton Crag, a hill he calls 'a lofty conical eminence' onto which 'the Britons had erected three walls' to 'improve the natural stronghold'. He also notes the ruins of a square hut where 'a beacon used to be fired'.

"In the beginning of July 1785, being upon an excursion into Lancashire, I was led to view the British remains in the parish of Warton, about eight miles from Lancaster..."



George Allan Esq. F.A.S. [and] William Hutchinson Esq. F.A.S.  
© Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru – The National Library of Wales

## Fortifications on Warton Crag, Lancashire.

Fig. 1.



Hutchinson thought the walls were built to defend against the Roman Invasion. His sketched 'birds-eye' view showed entrances through the walls. Until the late 20th century, a 'hill fort' was probably the most apt interpretation possible.

© Reproduced from Archaeologia 9, 1789

## LAI D TO REST

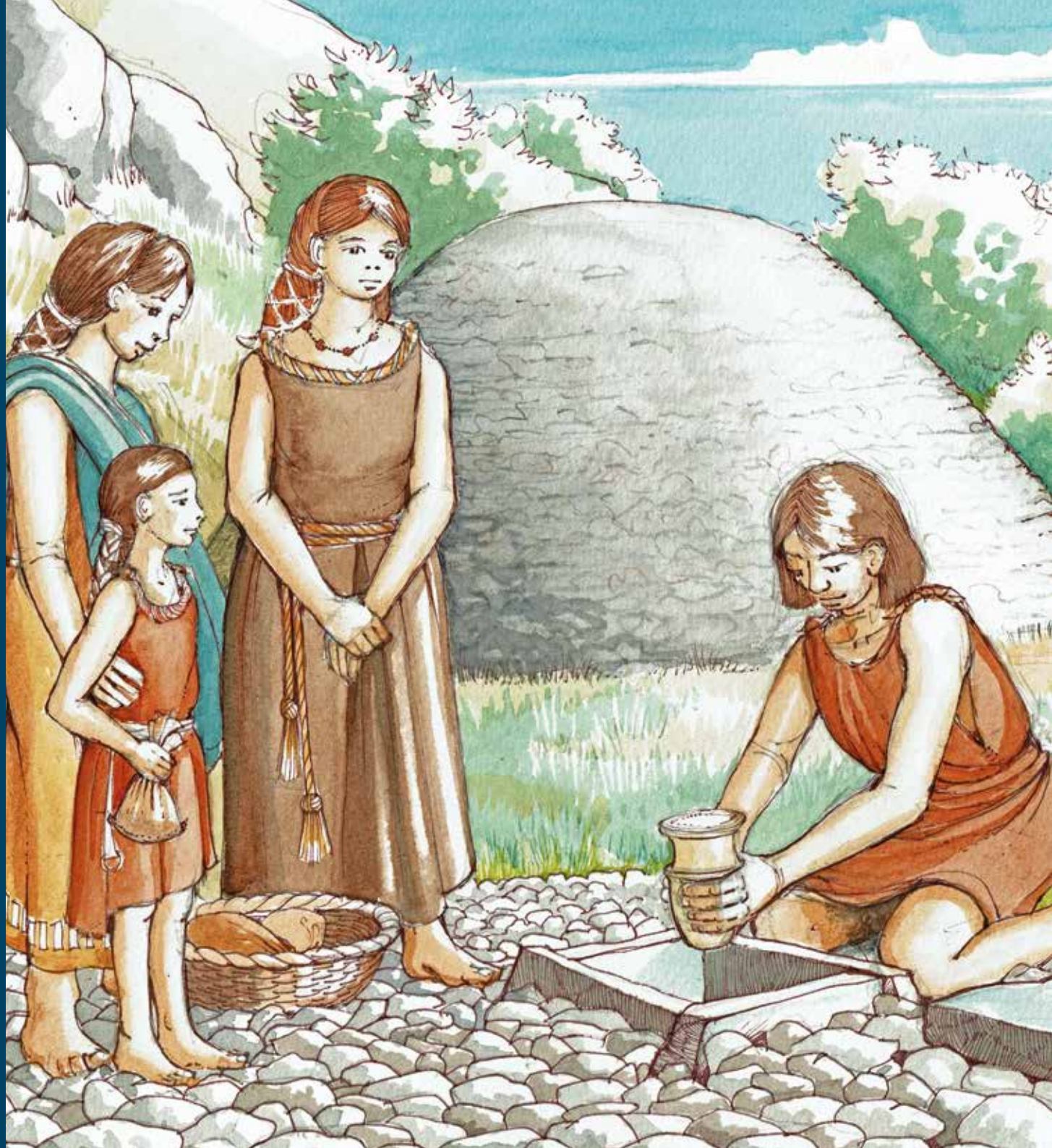
When William Hutchinson visited Warton Crag in 1785 he was shown around the site by local schoolmaster Mr Jenkinson.

Two urns, both containing ashes, had been placed in a small stone case called a cist, and then covered with river cobbles forming a stone cairn. The urns were removed from the site by Jenkinson's workmen as they were levelling cairns to make space for allotments on the lower slopes around Warton Crag.

*"Mr Jenkinson shewed us two urns, which his work-people recovered from kairns levelled down within his new inclosures on the skirts of Warton Crag..*

*They were placed in the centres of circular kairns of a conical figure, composed of pebble stones; were secured in a small inclosure made of flat stones set on edge, forming a coffer; the mouth of each urn was covered with a small flat stone, and the coffer with a large blue flag... the kairns were not composed of such stones as were to be had from the rocky surface of the adjoining hill, but of pebbles gathered from the channel of some brook, or broken soil.*

*The adjacent grounds at the foot of Warton Crag contain innumerable barrows or tumuli, of small dimensions, and an oblong figure, composed of earth. Many have been opened by Mr Jenkinson, but no human remains, arms, implements, or urns, were discovered therein."*

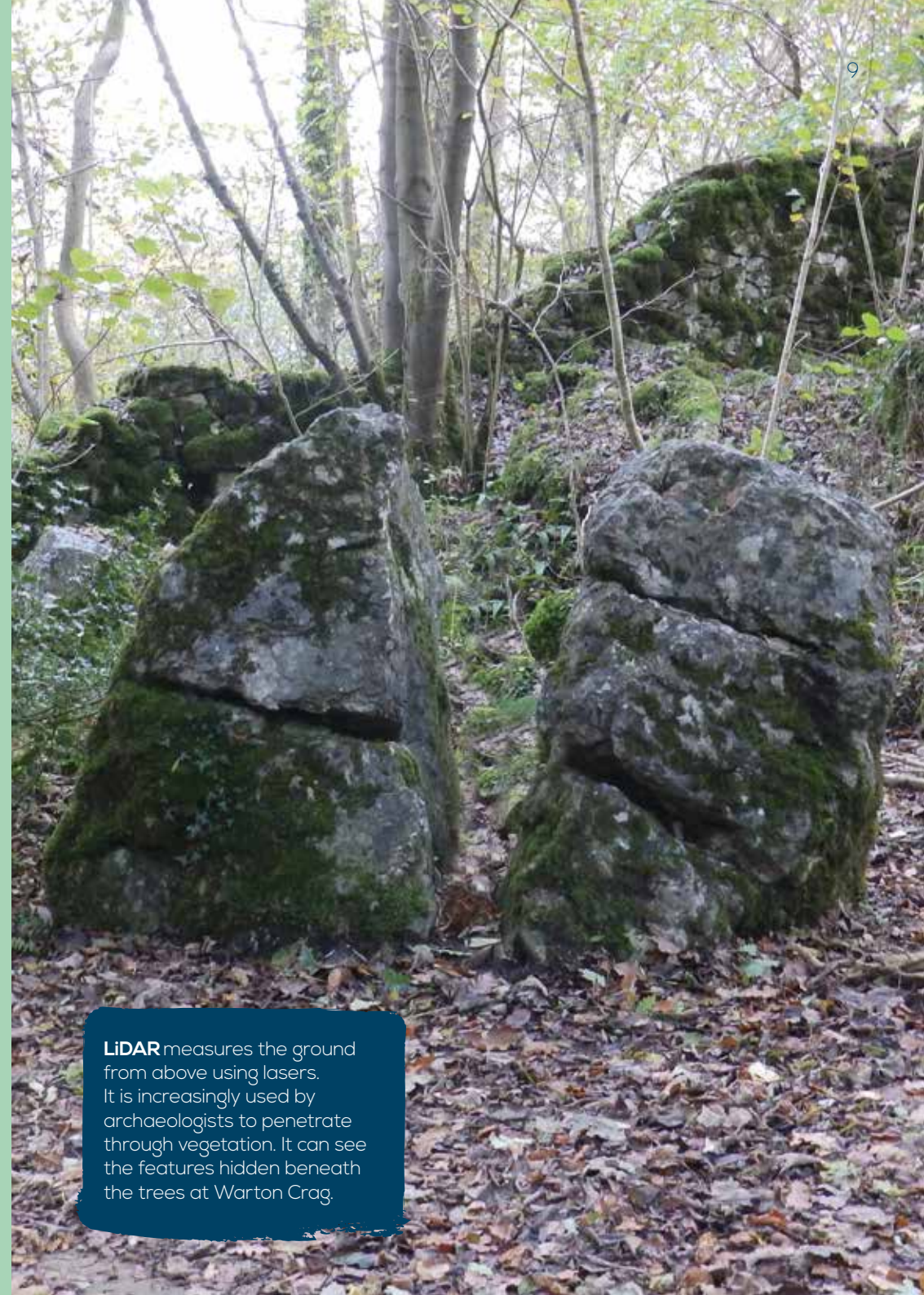


# AN ALL-SEEING EYE

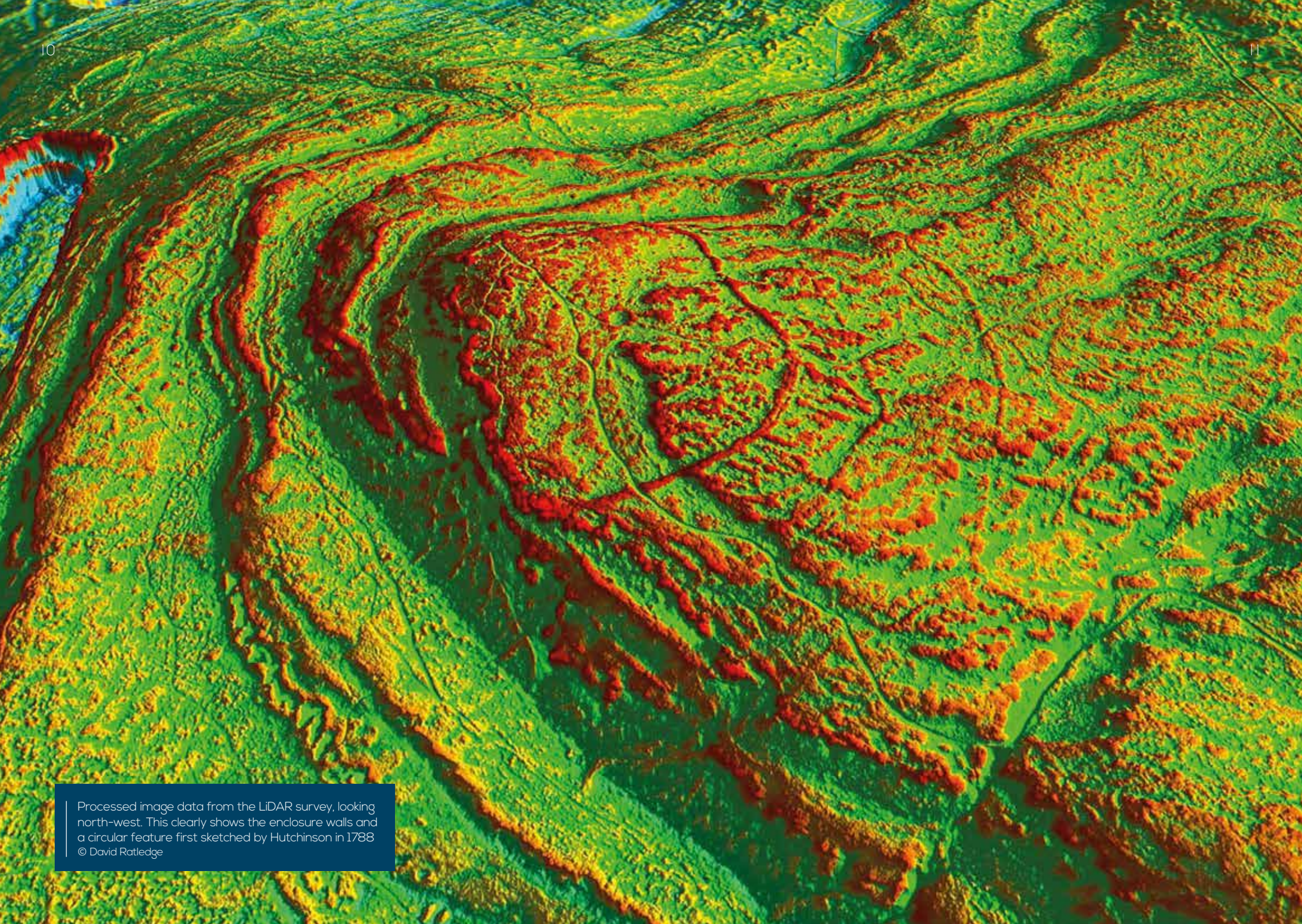
Mapping the enclosures on Warton Crag.

Vegetation covering the summit of the Crag makes it very difficult to find the site described by William Hutchison in 1785.

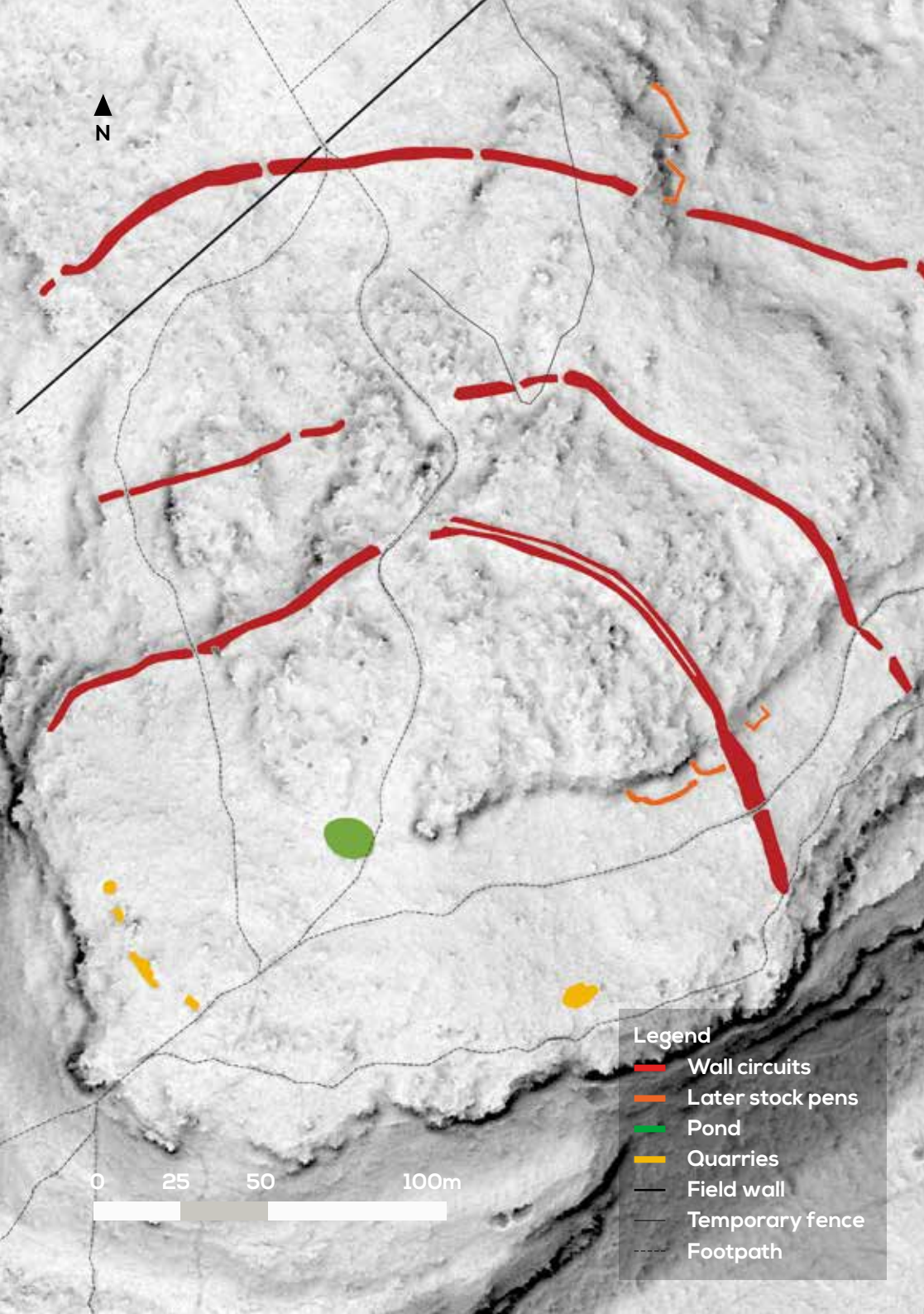
In 2015 specially commissioned Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) survey helped see through the trees and shed light on this mysterious place. Historic England used the LiDAR data to survey the area on the ground and create new maps of the site.



**LiDAR** measures the ground from above using lasers. It is increasingly used by archaeologists to penetrate through vegetation. It can see the features hidden beneath the trees at Warton Crag.



Processed image data from the LiDAR survey, looking north-west. This clearly shows the enclosure walls and a circular feature first sketched by Hutchinson in 1788  
© David Ratledge



## READING THE EVIDENCE

Work undertaken by Morecambe Bay Partnership and Historic England, funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, has helped to develop new theories.

Data from the LiDAR survey and aerial photographs were combined to produce a detailed plan of the monument. Investigators checked and refined the plan by examining the site on the ground. For the first time we can now trace the precise courses and extents of all three walls.

The conclusion now is that this monument is not an Iron Age hillfort. Historic England suggest that:

- It dates to around 1500-1000 BC
- Its three walls are similar. None probably were ever much higher than about 1.5m.
- Multiple entrances and the small size of its walls suggest that this is not defensive or a refuge.
- There is no evidence for structures or occupation and it was probably not permanently occupied.
- It may have been a meeting place for scattered communities whose lives revolved around their livestock.
- The monument on Warton Crag appears unique. Possible parallels exist on Gardom's Edge (Derbyshire), and at Helsby and Woodhouse Hills (Cheshire).

To find out more about the Historic England survey results read the report online [research.historicengland.org.uk/Report.aspx?i=15607](https://research.historicengland.org.uk/Report.aspx?i=15607)

A LiDAR survey, examination of aerial photographs and ground investigations undertaken by Historic England mapped the enclosures and other features. We now have a very detailed plan with all three walls clearly mapped. The new survey also found the large circular hollow on the summit first sketched by Hutchinson in 1788. © Historic England 2017



We now know more about hillforts and prehistory than earlier investigators. While this may have been a meeting place there are of course other possible interpretations. Further archaeological investigation may help us to understand how Warton Crag was used, when, and by whom.

Artist's impression illustrating one interpretation of how Warton Crag may have looked during the Bronze Age  
© John Hodgson 2019

Warton Crag is carefully managed by the Arnside and Silverdale AONB Partnership, the RSPB and Lancashire Wildlife Trust. It is owned by Leighton Hall Estates, Lancashire County Council, Lancaster City Council and the RSPB.

Please help to protect this special landscape – stick to footpaths, keep your dogs on leads and take litter home. Visitors should follow the Countryside Code.

Morecambe Bay Partnership is a local charity that celebrates and conserves, connects and collaborates. Our supporters make the Bay a richer place by uncovering lost stories, recording history, sharing skills, volunteering and donating. By working together we make great things happen, such as collecting the stories shared in this booklet.

Special thanks to Kevin Grice for his dedicated research into the history of the site, The White Cross Archaeology Group for sharing their research and survey work, Historic England for their support and commitment to undertaking further survey work and to the National Lottery Heritage Fund, landowners, our partners, supporters and our vibrant volunteer network.

For more information about this and other sites of historic significance around Morecambe Bay please visit [recordingmorecambebay.org.uk](http://recordingmorecambebay.org.uk)

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You can get involved by volunteering to look after heritage sites, care for nature, or do beach cleans. See:

[morecambebay.org.uk/get-involved](http://morecambebay.org.uk/get-involved)

Your gift could train volunteers to research local history, open up access for disabled people, create safe cycle routes, and bring great art events to connect our communities. Thank you.

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