



Society of Antiquaries
of **Scotland**

Roman Camps in Scotland

Rebecca H Jones

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PROBABLE ROMAN CAMPS

Bankhead Kirkconnel

(Kirkconnel)

NS 747 120 NS 71 SW 11

St Joseph suggested that he had located a fortlet and possible marching camp at Bankhead in the 1950s, through cropmarks on air photographs, which were subsequently confirmed by excavation (Clarke & Wilson 1960: 136). But the air photographs that St Joseph used to detect the site could not be located – it is possible that these were not Cambridge University photographs. The RCAHMS

record states that traces are visible on RAF air photographs (CPE/Scot/324 – 3429–30), but nothing is visible at the location given. The camp is alleged to measure about 213m by 183m, thereby potentially enclosing 3.9ha (9.6 acres). Clarke & Wilson's excavations recorded that the ditch measured some 1.8m in width and 0.6m in depth (1960: 136).

Bar Hill 'structure' (illus 83)

NS 7073 7592 NS 77 NW 8

The Roman fort on Bar Hill was excavated between 1902 and 1905. During these excavations, what was interpreted as an 'Early Fort' was uncovered lying underneath the Antonine Fort (Macdonald & Park 1906: 11–15). The site of the fort itself lies on the top of Bar Hill, at the highest point for any fort on the Antonine Wall. Just to the east lies the presumed Iron Age fort on Castle Hill, but the site commands good views to the north as well as along the Antonine Wall to east and west.

The first excavations of that 'Early Fort' recorded its unusual plan, much of which can be traced on the ground today as a shallow depression: an inner rectangular enclosure measuring about 58m from north-east to south-west by 49m, enclosing some 0.28ha (0.7 acres); an annexe to the south-west; and outer ditches on the south-east, north-east and north-west sides, with part of the north-west side undetected. The inner enclosure has a single entrance gap in the centre of the north-east side, and there is a staggered entrance to the north of this in the outer ditch. The excavations on the line of the ditch confirmed that it was V-shaped, ranging in width from 2.4m to 3.3m and in depth from 1.1m to 1.4m. The excavators noted that the absence of finds suggested a brief occupation; and the presence of about 0.6m of silt in the ditches prior to the building of the fort suggested that the site had long been abandoned. This led to the interpretation of the site as one of the Agricolaean *praesidia* on the Forth and Clyde isthmus (Macdonald & Park 1906: 15, 129–30). (It was a further 70 years before the probable Flavian fortlet of Mollins was discovered by aerial survey, about 4km due south of Bar Hill (RCAHMS 1978a: 160).)

Excavations between 1978 and 1982 by Keppie agreed with the outline of the 'fortlet' but did not agree with its interpretation as a Flavian outpost. Steer had earlier noted that the site might relate to the construction of the Antonine Wall owing to its similarity to other Antonine sites, including the fortlet at Duntocher (1960: 90). Feachem suggested that the remains may represent Iron Age activity, although this has not generally garnered favour (Robertson *et al* 1975: 8; Keppie 1985: 52). Keppie's excavations gave similar ditch dimensions to those noted earlier, of 2m in width and 1.2m in depth on the south side, although this was not consistent throughout and the ditch was recorded as U-shaped and unusual in places. A rampart of yellow clay was also recorded on the south-east side, some 2.2m in width and 0.2m in height. In addition, various activities were noted in the interior that were assumed to be contemporary with the 'fortlet', including areas of burning (with a hearth of at least two periods) and areas of cobbling. A depression and channel cut through its rampart to reach the ditch, and Roman pot lids of Antonine date, as well as fragments of Iron Age pottery and hobnails, were recovered from this feature. The ditches were deliberately filled with turf and hawthorn brushwood, probably when the Antonine fort was under construction.

The 'fortlet' is generally interpreted as a construction camp for the Wall (Robertson & Keppie 2001: 93) or a semi-permanent Antonine site housing perhaps the garrison for a nearby (as yet undiscovered) fortlet (also see Croy Hill) (Hanson & Maxwell 1986: 120). No Flavian finds have been found on the Hill.

ROMAN CAMPS IN SCOTLAND

One further possibility should be noted – that this enclosure, sited on the highest point of the Wall close to the midpoint, could have housed a garrison engaged in

surveying the Wall, with perhaps another garrison housed at the nearby enclosure underneath the fort on Croy Hill, some 3km to the east.



Illustration 214

Bellie, including various claimed locations for the camp and known cropmarks. Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO.
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Bellie (illus 214)

(Fochabers)

NJ 3551 6103 NJ 36 SE 8

The probable camp at Bellie was first recorded by Macfarlane in his *Geographical Collections* (1726, in Mitchell 1906) and also in Chalmers *Caledonia*, based on information from Colonel Imrie in 1799 (1807: i, 129). On a visit to the area, Crawford reported that nothing was visible on the ground, and, while he voiced some

doubts about the site as a Roman camp, he recorded that the site had been observed from the air in May 1943 by Mr R. F. Jessup. Crawford then placed the camp centred at about NJ 3573 6170, just over 100m south-west of where the 'fosse' of the camp had been placed by the Ordnance Survey (1st edition: Banffshire 1872: sheet i) (Crawford

1949: 122–5, fig 321; see illus 214). The area was subject to excavations by St Joseph in 1967, who confirmed a probable Roman camp with a centre at about NJ 355 613 (1969: 113), some 400m south of where the camp had been placed by Crawford. Fragments of a glass bottle from about 1770–80 were found in the top of the ditch (but below the plough soil), suggesting that it had lain open until the later part of the 18th century, which broadly fitted in with the antiquarian accounts. Keillar reported to the Ordnance Survey archaeology branch that the ditch St Joseph excavated ran south from NJ 3555 6113 (this grid reference is located just in Lion's Den Wood) and that three of St Joseph's trenches across it were still open at the time of his visit (OS Recorder 1971). However, the illustrations in the St Joseph Collection in the RCAHMS (DC 37252; Notebook 4) indicate that the ditch he excavated was farther north, and ran north-east to south-west from NJ 3569 6134 to NJ 3548 6112. The two trenches that he illustrates (RCAHMS DC 37253; St Joseph Collection: Notebook 4) do not demonstrate a particularly V-shaped profile, although he recorded that the ditch was about 2.1m in width and over 0.9m in depth (St Joseph 1969: 113). In 1984, Jones & Keillar recorded the well-rounded northern corner of a camp at NJ 355 611, together with a long linear cropmark running in the same field (1984: 12). The note that appeared in the 'Roman Britain in 1985' section of *Britannia* recorded this slightly to the north at NJ 355 612 (Frere 1986: 370). It is presumably the cropmark of this possible camp recorded by Jones & Keillar that was subject to further excavations by Daniels in 1986, who intersected the ditch in five places. The only published report of these excavations indicates that the location of the camp was at NJ 354 610 and that the ditch was shallow and about 2m wide (Keillar 1987: 11). In addition, the summary in *Britannia* noted that the ditch traced by St Joseph in 1967 probably related to an 18th-century road (Frere 1986: 370). It is worth noting that St Joseph did question the absolute Roman date of the site in his summary article (St Joseph 1969: 113).

The area lies to the north of Fochabers, just north of the old Church of Bellie, on the east side of the River Spey only 4km from the Moray coast. The area is now under arable cultivation, and it lies on a fairly flat terrace, which slopes gently up to Whiteash Hill to the south-east. Immediately to the north is an area known as Roman Camp Wood and Romancamp Gate. The old *Statistical*

Account notes that the camp in Bellie parish is traditionally known as the Danish camp, possibly connected with a battle between the Scots and the Danes (Sinclair 1795a: xiv, 271).

The air photographs taken by Jones were not available, but a study of photographs taken by Cambridge University in the 1970s–80s and Aberdeenshire Archaeology Service (AAS) in 1982 reveals a linear cropmark to the east of Bellie Church, running south-west to north-east for about 160m and turning in a rounded angle to the south-east, before running into the Lion's Den plantation. This provisionally has the characteristics of a Roman camp. It lies at about NJ 3551 6103 and is possibly the same feature as that recorded by Jones & Keillar. It is also close to where Keillar noted St Joseph's trenches lay, although the drawings in the RCAHMS demonstrate that this was incorrect, and, indeed, St Joseph's article suggested that he was expecting the cropmark that he excavated to represent part of the east side of an enclosure, not the north-west side of an enclosure, close to the north corner (1969: 113). The linear cropmark that St Joseph excavated is also clearly visible on the air photographs, but demonstrates no obvious Roman characteristics, and his section drawings do not present unequivocal evidence for a Roman origin. Therefore, Jones' suggestion that the cropmark excavated by St Joseph represents the remains of an 18th-century road seems more likely (Frere 1986: 370). Certainly a Roman date cannot be comfortably given to this feature. The lack of information on Daniels' excavations does not assist in the interpretation of that feature as a camp, although this may be the same feature visible on the Cambridge and AAS air photographs noted above. The discovery of an interior pavement of flat sandstones in the interior of the camp during Daniels' excavations raises questions about the temporary camp classification of the feature excavated (Keillar 1987: 11).

The level of confusion surrounding this site suggests that it should be regarded as a probable camp, rather than given the accolade of (currently) the most northerly camp known in the Roman Empire. Leslie notes the possibility that there may be two separate sites here (1995: 317), and there do seem to be two distinct locations, firstly where Crawford and the OS recorded the camp, and secondly the site visible on air photographs (which may have been that excavated by Daniels). Whether any or all of these features are Roman in date awaits further investigation.

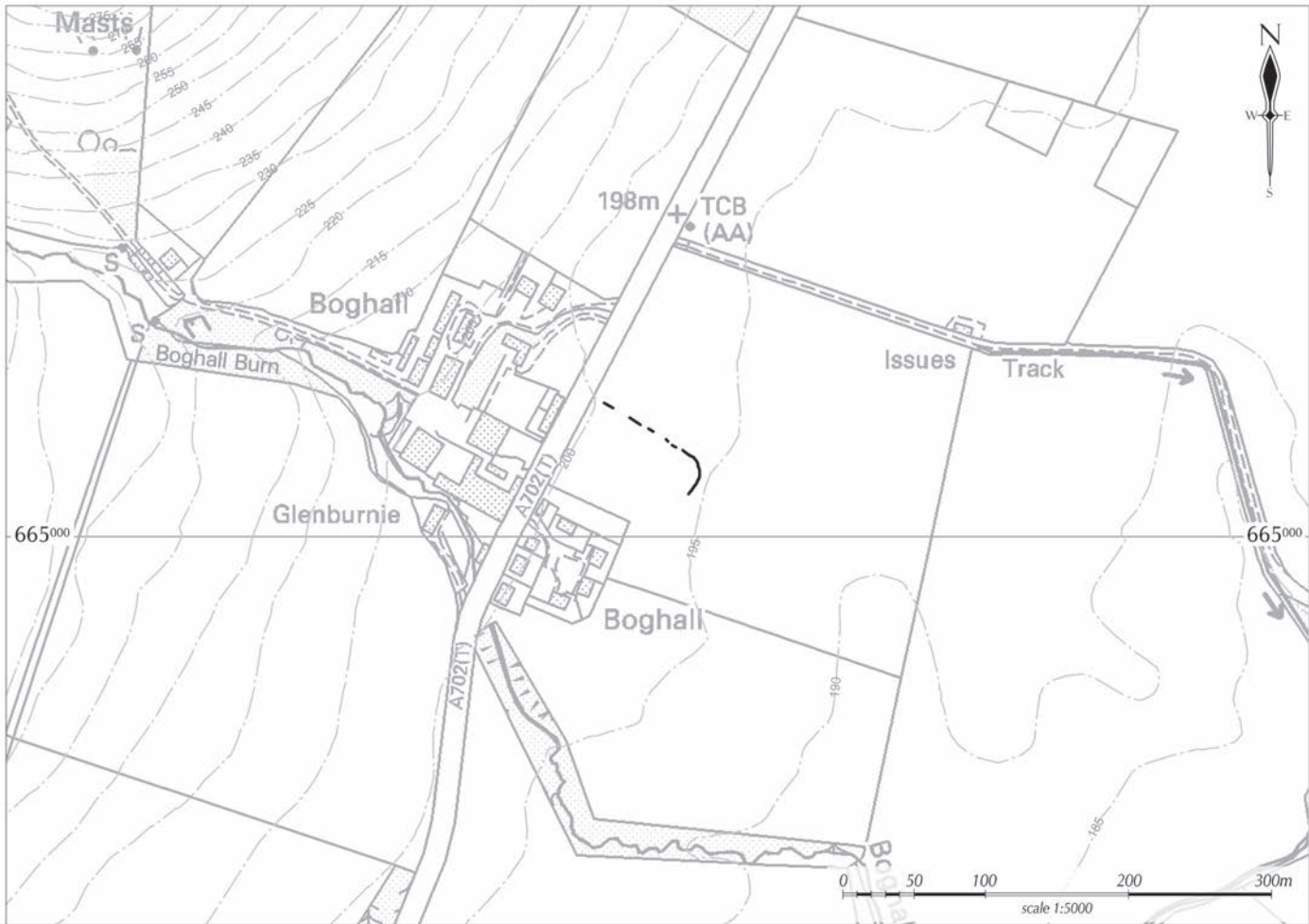


Illustration 215

Boghall. Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO. © Crown copyright 2010. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100020548.

Boghall (illus 215)

NT 2455 6505 NT 26 NW 51

This probable camp lies at Boghall farm on level ground immediately south-east of the A702. Discovered in 1989 by RCAHMS from the air, the remains consist of a linear cropmark, some 84m in length, running north-west to

south-east, with a rounded corner and continuing for 20m to the south-west. (Differential crop growth in the field is the reason for such a small segment of this side having been recorded.)

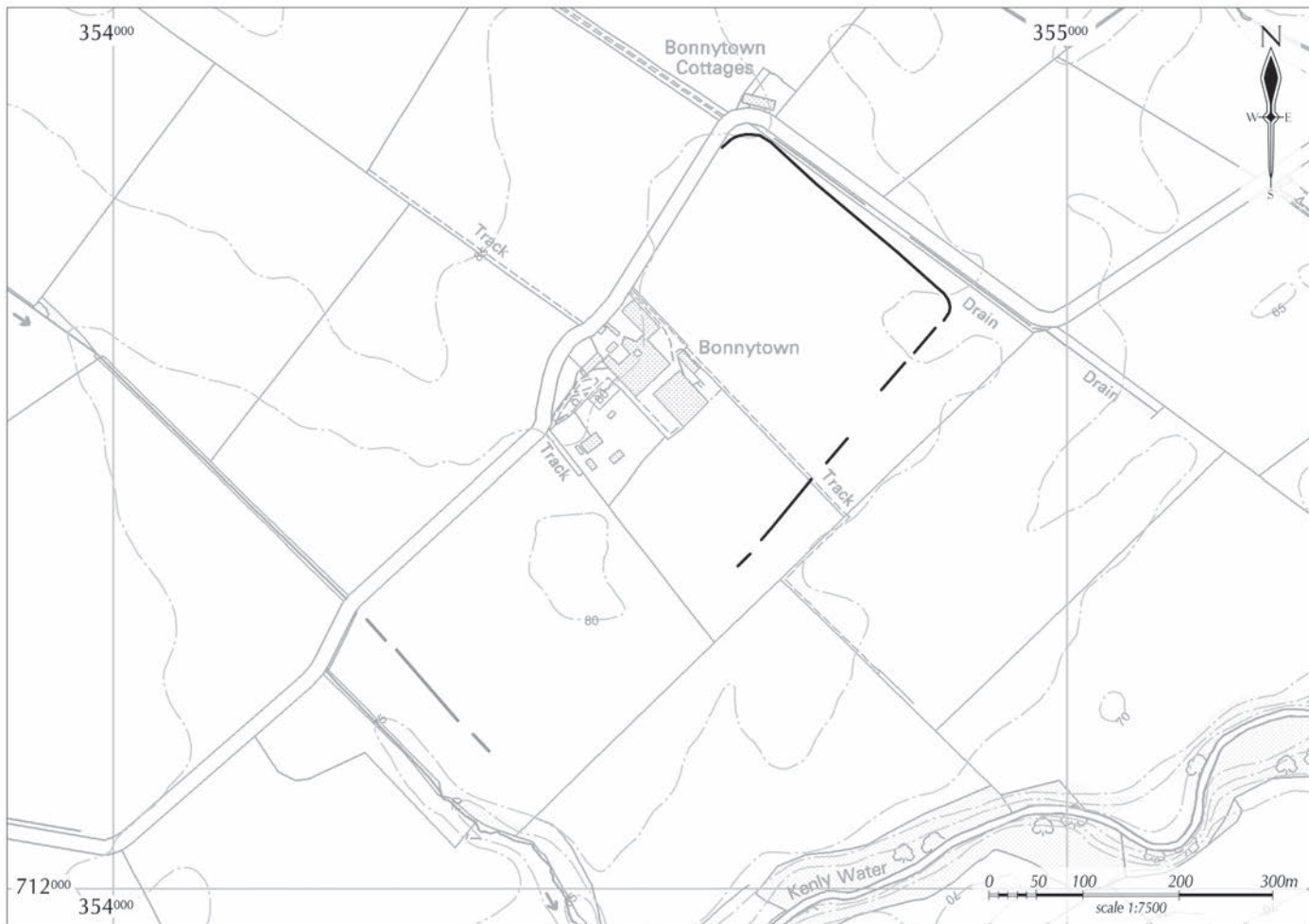


Illustration 216

Bonnytown. Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO. © Crown copyright 2010. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100020548.

Bonnytown (illus 216)

NO 5465 1260 NO 51 SW 14

The alleged camp at Bonnytown was recorded from the air by St Joseph in 1962 (St Joseph 1965: 82), lying on level ground only 2.5km from the Fife coast at St Andrews Bay, and some 18km east of the nearest confirmed camp at **Edenwood** near Cupar.

There are numerous linear cropmarks in and around the camp, many of which are probably field drains, but this confuses the cropmark evidence. What appears to be the north-east side (some 293m in length) together with the north and east corners is detectable, but no entrance gap is obvious. Some 350m of the south-east side is also visible, with further linear cropmarks perhaps suggesting up to 590m might be visible. St Joseph records a rounded south angle in the field just to the south of Bonnytown farm (RCAHMS DC 37264), but this is not clearly visible

as such on the air photographs. There is a linear cropmark running in the field, close to its boundary, some 670m from the north-east side.

St Joseph conducted excavations on the south-east side and north angle in 1966, recording that the ditch on the south-east side was V-shaped, 1m wide and 0.45m deep, with a drain inserted exactly at the base of the ditch. Elsewhere on this side, the ditch was up to 0.9m deep. At the north angle, the ditch was also 1m wide and up to 0.7m deep (RCAHMS St Joseph Collection: Notebook 4). The Ordnance Survey recorded that excavations carried out in 1967 by the Dundee University Archaeology Group proved the existence of the Roman camp (OS Recorder 1968), but these may be the same as St Joseph's excavations of 1966. (His excavations were

carried out with G Rickman, D K Faulks, J J Robertson & D Dunn, and these may be members of the Dundee University Archaeology Group – no further information is available.)

Maxwell has questioned this site as a camp (pers comm) and indeed the aerial photographic evidence is not wholly convincing. Further work may elucidate the cropmark evidence.

Cleghorn II (illus 104)

NS 9038 4550 *NS 94 NW 12*

Some 450m WSW of the camp at **Cleghorn** (I), two sides of a probable second camp have been recorded through cropmarks from the air (by Cambridge University in 1977; RCAHMS 1978a: 159). It is located at the presumed crossing point of the Mouse Water adjacent to the Roman

road from **Castledykes** to Bothwellhaugh. Some 300m of the north-east side together with a rounded north corner angle and 215m of the south-west side have been recorded.

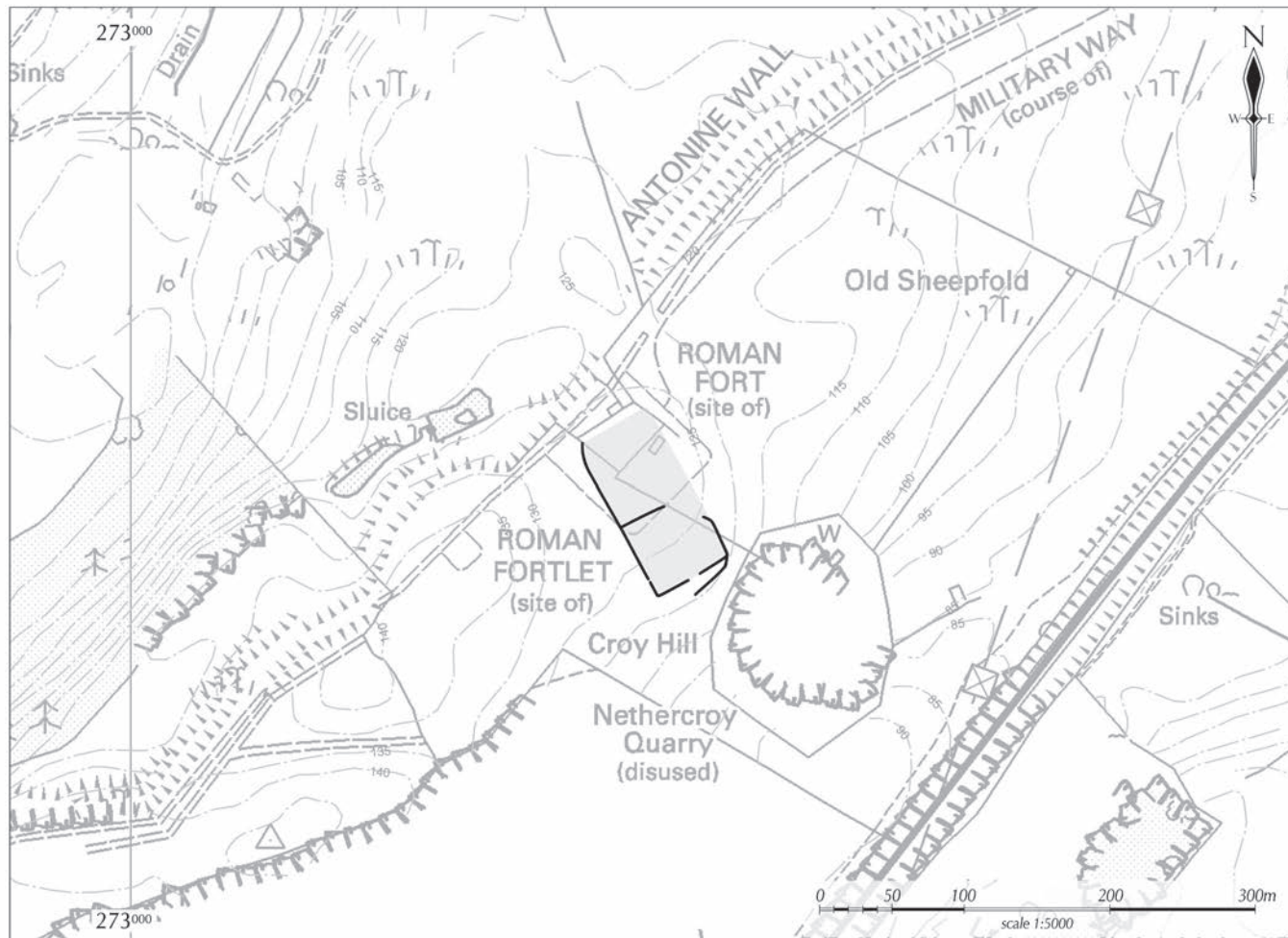


Illustration 217

Croy Hill 'structure' and the Roman fort, fortlet and the Antonine Wall. Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO. © Crown copyright 2010. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100020548.

Croy Hill 'structure' (illus 217)

NS 7335 7652 NS 77 NW 10

The Roman fort on Croy Hill was first discovered during excavations by Macdonald in 1920, following earlier antiquarian reports. In 1925, Macdonald noted the remains of a ditch that could have belonged to an earlier 'lay out' of the fort (Macdonald 1925: 289). Further excavations in 1931 clarified the plan of the Antonine fort, and discovered an 'older fort' lying beneath it, at that stage presumed to be one of the Agricolaean *praesidia* on the isthmus (Macdonald 1934: 267–8).

This older 'fort' or enclosure measures some 67m from north-west to south-east by almost 49m, enclosing an area of 0.32ha (0.8 acres). An annexe is located to the south-east, which approximately doubles the total area enclosed from 0.32ha to about 0.6ha, and there is an additional small stretch of ditch leading from the south-east corner of

the annexe, interpreted as being for drainage purposes by Macdonald (1932: 265–6). (Illus 217 is based on drawings in Hanson 1979.)

Hanson undertook further excavations on the underlying enclosure in 1975 and 1977. His excavations demonstrated that it was Antonine in date on the basis of pottery found in the ditch, and indeed no evidence for Flavian occupation was found (Goodburn 1976: 302). A nearby fortlet, some 100m to the west, was discovered during the 1977 excavations, leading Hanson to suggest that the enclosure underneath the fort was the construction camp for the fortlet (Goodburn 1978: 413–15), while noting that it was considerably smaller than any other presumed construction camp on the Wall (Hanson & Keppie 1978: 93). The ditch of this presumed

construction camp varied in width from 1m to 2.3m and in depth from 0.3m to 1m. It had apparently lain open for some time before being deliberately backfilled with clay and large stones, attested to where the fort rampart overlay the ditch (Hanson 1977; Hanson 1979: 19). The small 'drainage' ditch noted by Macdonald leading south-east from the annexe was recorded as merging with the ditch dug for a Roman road taking traffic around the fort, thereby adding weight to the suggestion of an Antonine date (Hanson 1979: 19).

Since the time of its discovery by Macdonald, the enclosure on Croy Hill has been associated with the

nearby 'fortlet' on Bar Hill (Macdonald 1934: 273) and potentially with other 'Agricolan *praesidia*' on the Forth–Clyde isthmus. The dating of the enclosure on Croy Hill to the Antonine period has led its neighbour under the fort at **Bar Hill** to also be associated with the 2nd century AD, prior to the Antonine Wall forts that subsequently occupied both positions (Hanson 1980: 60).

However, as with Bar Hill, this enclosure is located close to the highest point on Croy Hill, with excellent views to the east along the line of the Antonine Wall and west towards Bar Hill. The possibility exists that both could have housed garrisons engaged in surveying the Wall.

Fourmerkland II (illus 130)

NX 9128 8046 *NX 98 SW 4*

St Joseph recorded a small enclosure close to the camp at **Fourmerkland** (I) which he suggested might be a second camp (1951a: 60). This was dismissed as a probable modern agricultural feature (information from RCAHMS), but the cropmarks are suggestive of a further camp, measuring

55m from west to east by at least 60m. Gaps in the cropmark on the south and east side are accompanied by the remains of two short cropmarks, possibly *tituli*. Further work and air photography is required to confirm this as a Roman camp.

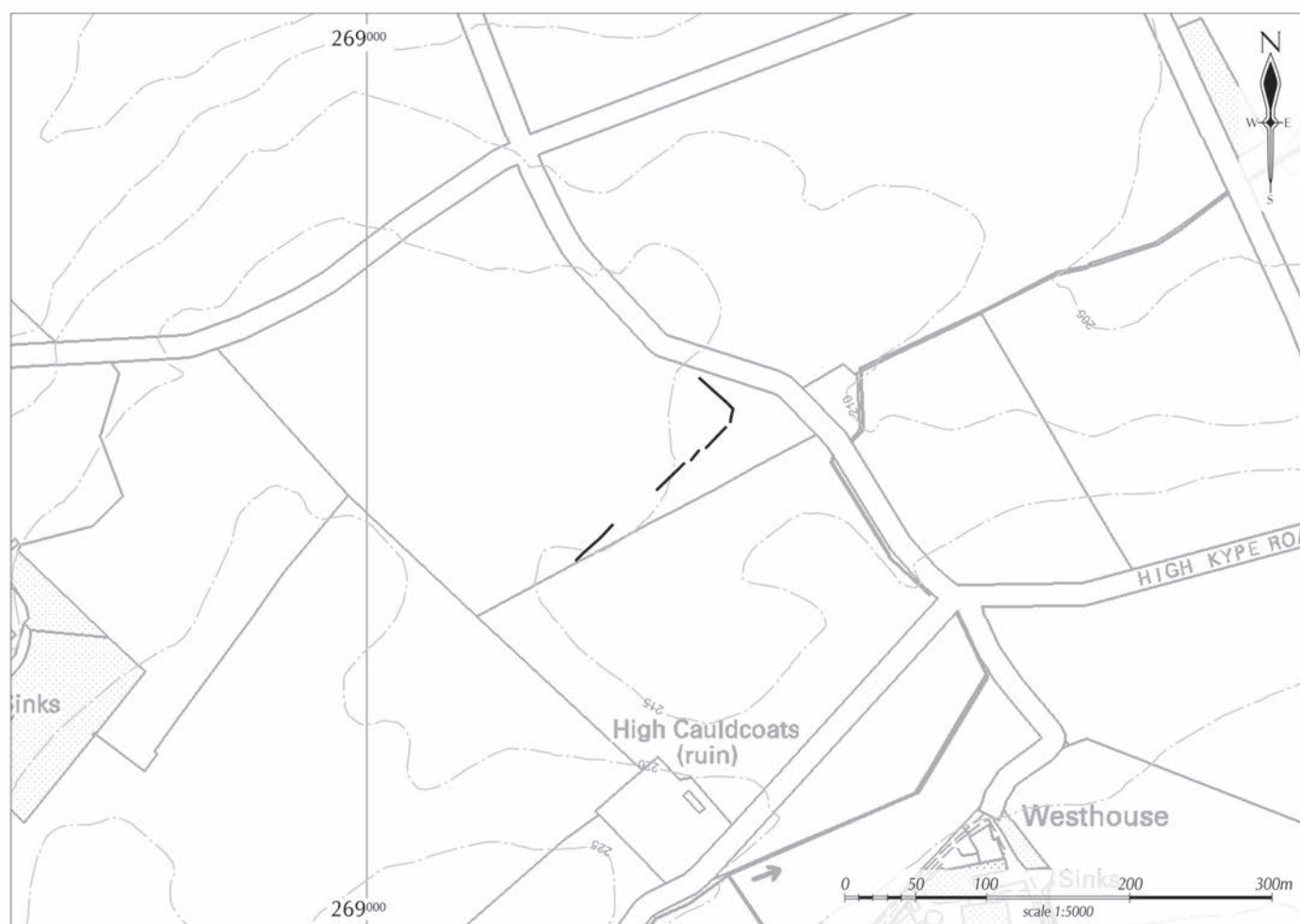


Illustration 218

High Cauldcoats. Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO. © Crown copyright 2010. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100020548.

High Cauldcoats (illus 218)

NS 6925 4144 NS 64 SE 17

At Cauldcoats, close to the line of the Roman road from **Castledykes** to Loudoun Hill, stretches of two sides of a probable marching camp were recorded in 1989 by RCAHMS through cropmarks from the air (Frere 1990:

312). Some 153m of the south-east side is known, along with a probable rounded corner angle and almost 40m of the north-east side.

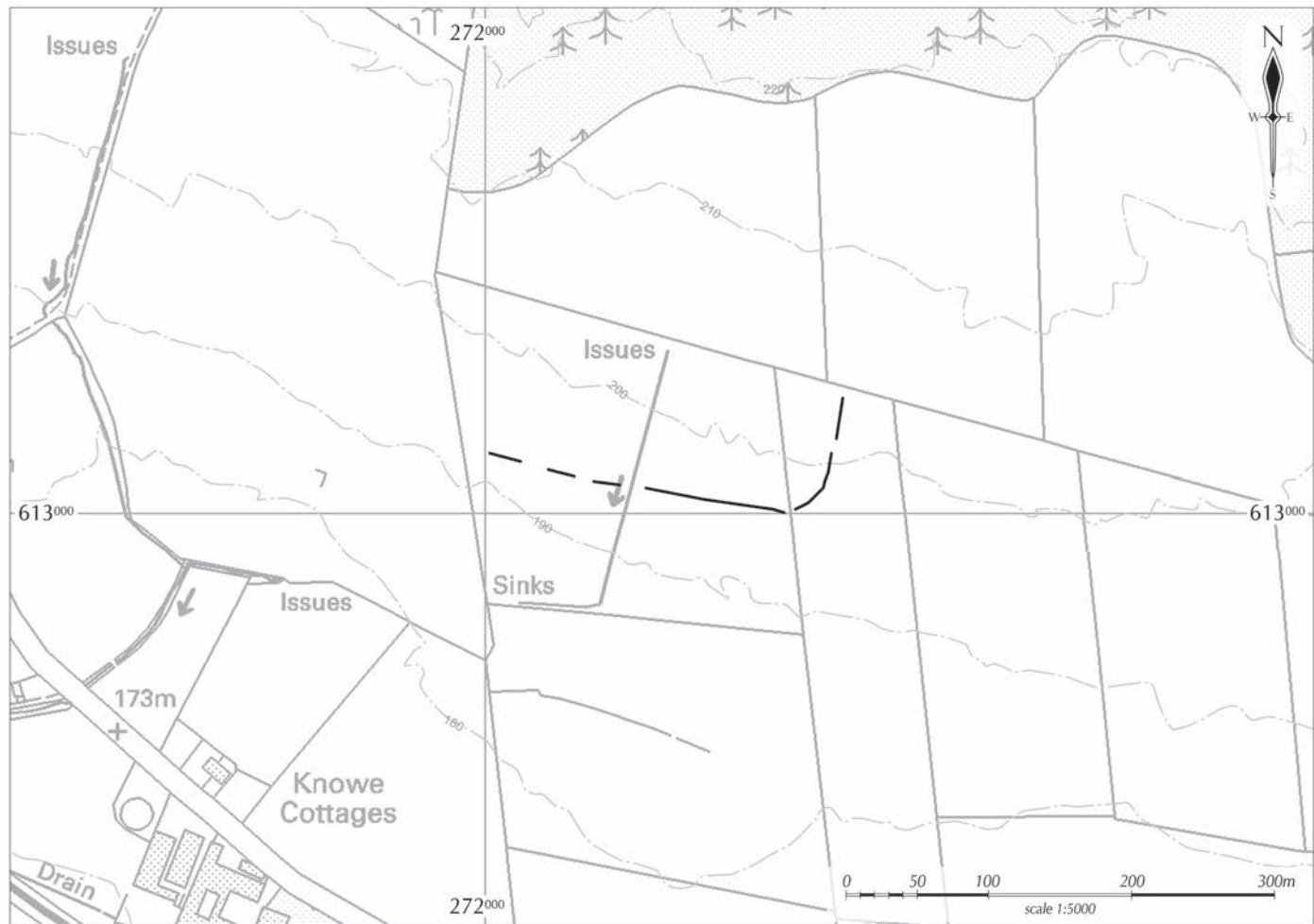


Illustration 219

Knowe Cottages. Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO. © Crown copyright 2010. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100020548.

Knowe Cottages (illus 219)

(Kirkland; Buttknowe; Kirkconnel)

NS 7214 1310 NS 71 SW 10

This probable camp lies in the upper reaches of the Nith valley, some 6km WNW of the Roman fortlet at Sanquhar. It was first recorded during a study of air photographs taken by the Royal Air Force (Clarke 1953: 118). At least 230m of the SSW side has been recorded as a cropmark,

together with the south corner angle and almost 90m of the ESE side; no gates are known. Excavations in 1952 recorded that the ditch was about 3m wide and up to 0.9m deep (Clarke 1953: 118).

Lochlands, Three Bridges VI (illus 167)

NS 8577 8090 NS 88 SE 22

During excavations in 1993, Bailey recorded a ditch to the east of camp IV, of which at least 21m by 14m is known (Bailey 2000: 473. camp g). His trenches recorded that the ditch was up to 0.8m wide and 0.55m deep. It may have been deliberately backfilled after a small amount of silting. He also recorded a further ditch to the west of the

ditches of camps IV and VI, on an east-to-west alignment. This measured up to 1.2m in width and 0.5m in depth and may also have been deliberately backfilled (Bailey 2000: 474, camp h). This may represent the remains of a further camp or be an annexe to or reduction of an existing camp.

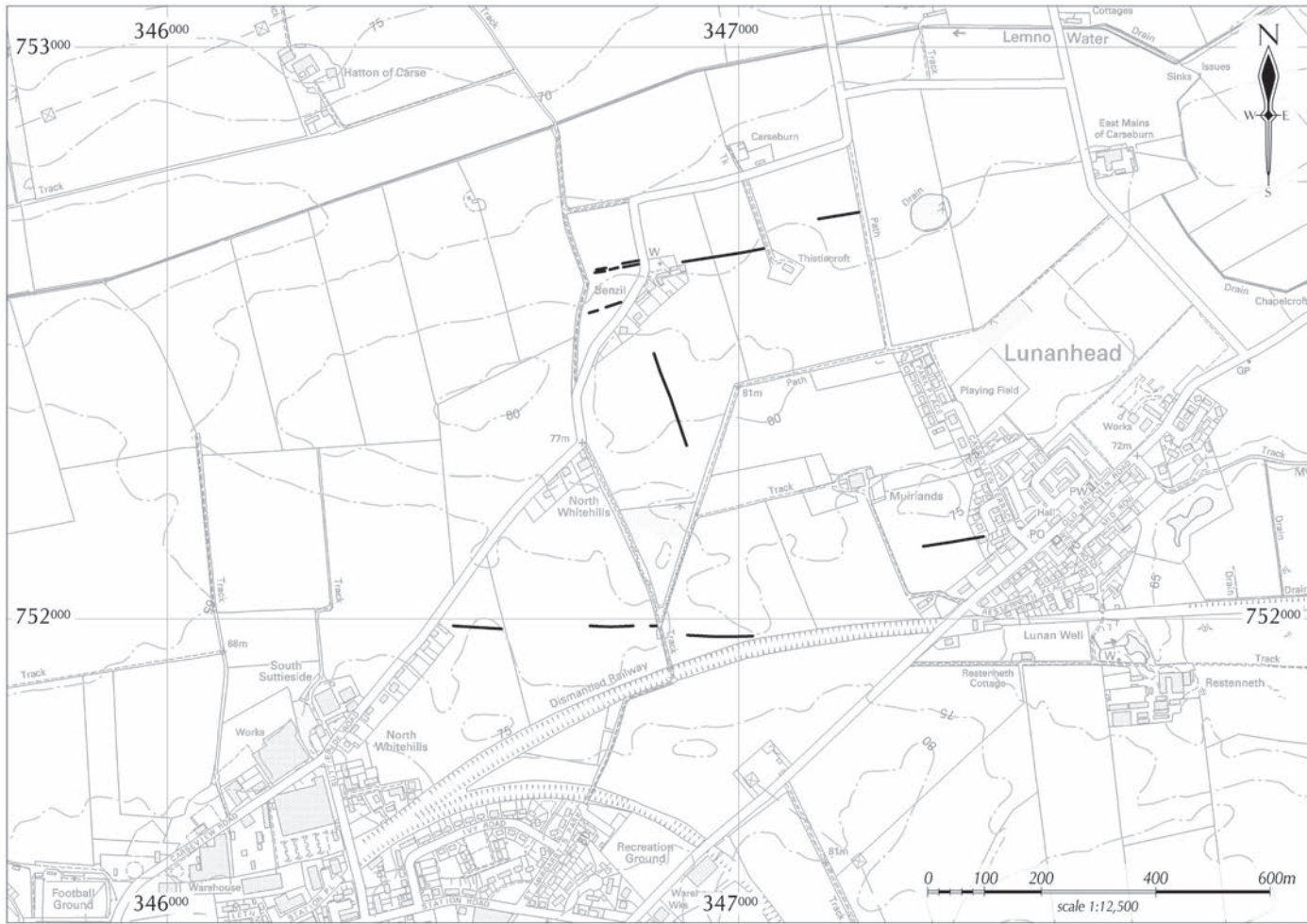


Illustration 220

Lunanhead linear cropmarks. Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO. © Crown copyright 2010. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100020548.

Lunanhead (illus 220)

(Suttieside)

NO 4685 5215 NO 45 SE 11

The camp at Lunanhead, north of Forfar, was depicted on Ainslie's *Map of the County of Forfar or Shire of Angus*, published in 1794. On this map, a long rectangle running from west to east is shown, labelled 'Roman Camp', much of which is lying in a wood.

Jamieson referred to the site as a 'Pictish Camp', noting that only part of it could be seen, the majority being covered by the wood (1822: 23). Crawford recorded that parts of the north and south sides of the 'Pict's Camp' could be seen (1949: 137–8). The Ordnance Survey noted a low bank on the south side in 1958, but commented that this was probably an old field boundary (OS Recorder 1958). St Joseph recorded parts of the

north side and the north-west corner from the air in 1969 (1973: 224).

The site lies on gently undulating land, with the dismantled railway line that ran from Forfar to Arbroath cutting through its southern part, and various roads, including the Old Brechin Road (the B9134) also crossing.

The exact position of the alleged camp is unclear. Linear cropmarks are visible for some 530m in the south, possibly indicating that side of the camp. If Ainslie's map is correct, then the camp would measure up to 1,400m from west to east by 620m transversely, enclosing 86.8ha (214 acres), but this would make it by far the largest camp in Scotland. It is highly likely that the stylisation

of Ainslie's map has led to a distortion. Nevertheless, some of the linear cropmarks recorded at Lunanhead correspond with the location of the north and south sides of the camp as depicted by Ainslie, although the actual camp perimeter cannot currently be established with any certainty.

St Joseph apparently recorded parts of the north side and the north-west corner from the air in 1969, although the photographs could not be identified, and he placed trenches on the north side in 1971 and 1972, noting a V-shaped ditch, 0.9m in depth and 1.4–1.7m in width (St Joseph 1973: 224; RCAHMS St Joseph Collection: Notebook 6).

Millburn Tower (illus 139)

(Gogar)

NT 1735 7184 NT 17 SE 23

Recorded in 1980 alongside its neighbour at Gogar Green (Maxwell & Wilson 1987: 38–9), the possible camp at Millburn Tower lies just outside the Edinburgh City Bypass on the west side of the city. Over 200m of the NNW side have been recorded, together with a rounded east angle and hints of the ENE side.

A recent report reappraising the cropmark archaeological evidence in this area suggested that this

camp was a fortuitous arrangement of medieval or later cultivation remains and field boundaries (Headland Archaeology 2002). But excavations by Maxwell in 1984 revealed a slight ditch (similar to that of Gogar Green), measuring just over 1m wide and 0.5m deep (Maxwell & Wilson 1987: 39). Maxwell is content that his excavations did reveal the likely remains of a camp (Maxwell pers comm).

Milton II (not illustrated)

(Tassiesholm)

NT 0925 0142 NT 00 SE 22

A possible camp at Milton was recorded under the east *intervallum* street of the Roman fort in 1950 during excavations by Clarke (1951: 199). Little is known of its

extent, but the ditch was recorded as measuring some 2.1m wide and as being gravel-filled without silting.