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Roman Camps in Scotland

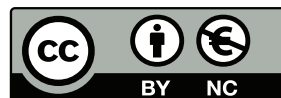
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Distribution of camps in Britain and farther afield

Currently nearly 500 camps are recorded in Britain (this figure includes reused camps where these can be identified, usually involving a partial reuse of the perimeter), of which almost half lie in Scotland (illus 19). No other province in the Roman Empire has such a proliferation of camps. This is probably mainly due to the long tradition of the application of aerial survey to archaeology (Chapter 4), although the antiquarian tradition (Chapter 3) has also played its role, as, indeed, have land management regimes. Recent flying programmes in other Roman provinces have identified new camps, and certainly there has been an explosion of information in places such as Slovakia and the Czech Republic in recent years (eg Kuzma *et al* 1996; Rajtár 1997; Komoróczy & Vlach in prep).

Camps are recorded or suspected across the Empire, from Azamia in Jordan (Kennedy & Bewley 2004: 174–5), to Ermelo in Holland (Bogaers 1974: 33–5; Klok & Brenders 1981: 9–10; Hulst 2007); from Transylvania in Romania (Cătănciu 1981; Stefan 1997) and Brigetio in Hungary (Visy 2003) to Spain (eg Morillo 2003). A number of camps have been recorded in various parts of Germany, including alleged practice camps outside Xanten (Horn 1987: 332–4). However, it is often siege works that have received more attention than ordinary camps, perhaps partly owing to the writings of Josephus and other classical authors. Masada in Israel has received the most attention (eg Richmond 1962; Yadin 1966), but siege camps also survive at a number of other locations (Campbell 2002; Davies 2006), from Machaerus in Jordan (Kennedy & Riley 1990: 99–101; Kennedy 2000: 119–21), to Numantia in Spain (Schulten 1914–31; Keppie 1984: 44–51; Salvatore 1996: 79ff; Dobson 2008).

A glance at the current distribution of camps in Britain, particularly north of Hadrian's Wall (illus 1 & 19) indicates a preference for camping close to Roman roads and fort sites (whether sited underneath a later fort site, one demarcated for fortified occupation, or one already in use). This is hardly surprising, because these generally represent, respectively, the best routeways through

territory and good sites for halting for periods. That the Romans had made maps of conquered territory is highly likely, and it has been argued that these may have taken the form of *Itineraries* (Austin & Rankov 1995: 116), thus reinforcing the idea of reusing routes and returning to an existing fort site (whether it was still occupied or not) to camp. Furthermore, the presence of camps in certain areas can suggest the route of unknown but suspected roads. For example, the camp at **Glenluce** (illus 20 & 138) lies close to the Roman road heading towards Loch Ryan, only recorded in the 1990s, and the probable camps at **Knowe Cottages** and **Bankhead Kirkconnel** indicate a routeway in the upper reaches of the Nith, as suspected by the discovery of a fortlet at Sanquhar and a branch of the road at Drumlanrig (Frere 1985a: 267).

Gathering grounds, such as those recorded near the forts of Ardoch, Camelon (Lochlands), Castledykes, Newstead, Glenlochar and Dalswinton, are known in the frontier zones across Britain (illus 21). These are areas where troops were regularly camped and marshalled before further advance. They are usually sited close to a fort, and in strategic locations related to movement through the landscape. Thus they are often located at a river crossing, and sometimes near a crossroads, at a point where there was often more than one direction in which an army was likely to campaign. For example, at Castledykes, the troops arriving could move onwards in three or four different directions (north-west towards Bothwellhaugh, west to Loudoun Hill, east to Lyne and Easter Haprew, and possibly north-east to Castle Greg); at Drumlanrig, troops arriving on the road running northwards through Nithsdale could either continue campaigning to the north-west up Nithsdale, or cross over the watershed towards the Clyde valley. There are numerous assembly places of this kind on the northern frontier and in the English–Welsh Marches, in areas controlling the routes to the north and west respectively. If a site was identified as a suitable camping ground, then there may well be reason to reuse on more than one occasion. An occupied fort could

potentially be a source of supplies for troops on the march, and troops could be bringing supplies to that fort. Some camps are probably contemporary with their neighbouring forts, whereas others will predate or post-date the forts' occupation. The largest gathering ground in Britain is that at **Lochlands** (illus 22 & 167) outside the fort of Camelon immediately north of the Antonine Wall, where some fifteen structures representing at least eighteen occupations can be identified close to a fort that has occupation dates in the Flavian and Antonine periods (RCAHMS 1963: 108–9; Maxfield 1981). This area was the main crossing point of the Forth–Clyde isthmus and was at a pivotal point on the Antonine Wall, possibly accompanied by a port on the River Carron (Tatton-Brown 1980). The only known gathering ground to the north of this complex is at **Ardoch** (illus 77). Beyond this camps are discovered as singletons or in pairs (the main exceptions being **Strageath** (with **Innerpeffray** and **Dornock** across the river – illus 201, 148 & 113) and at **Inchtuthil** – illus 145 & 146).

Unsurprisingly, Britain is not alone in having camp concentrations in areas that clearly saw intense military activity. For example, a number of camps are known around Bad Nauheim on a corridor into free Germany (Baatz 1991: 175), and on either side of the Danube at Brigetio and Kelamantia (Komáron, Hungary and Komárno, Slovakia respectively, Visy 2003: 34–8; Rajtár 1997).

In addition to groups of camps recorded in the vicinity of forts, many are known flanking Roman roads such as Dere Street, the road leading from York via Corbridge probably towards the fort at Elginhaugh. In particular, clusters are recorded around the fort of High Rochester in Redesdale

(Northumberland), near **Cappuck** at the crossing of the Oxnam Water (see **Millside Wood** and **Ulston Moor** – illus 177), and close to the forts at Elginhaugh and



Illustration 19

Distribution map of known and probable camps in Britain. Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO. © Crown copyright 2010. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100020548.

Inveresk (illus 150), as well as small groups at **Pennymuir** (illus 191) and **Pathhead** (illus 190).

Away from known Roman roads in southern Scotland, the discovery of a camp at **Kaimhouse Lodge**, south-

east of West Linton, suggests a campaign route up the side of the Lyne Water, as well as the western route to **Castle Craig**. A line of march from the forts of Easter Happrew and Lyne along this river leads to the camps of **Wester Happrew** and **Kaimhouse Lodge** before the route emerges at the fortlet of Tocherknowe, at the point where the Roman road running down the east side of the Pentland Hills crosses the Lyne Water.

The camps at **Castle Craig** are situated close to the



Illustration 20

Aerial view of Glenluce, with the quarry pits of the nearby Roman road visible in the foreground, taken from the south-west in 1992. © Crown copyright: RCAHMS. SC1164108. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk.

convergence of the road running from the Rivers Tweed and Clyde and the road running from the Upper Clyde up the east side of the Pentland Hills. The cross route from Tweed to Clyde continues to the fort at **Castledykes** and beyond. This fort, one of the gathering grounds noted earlier (illus 21), is surrounded by four temporary camps (two of which demonstrate at least two phases of occupation) (illus 23 & 101), and its nodal function in the road network is clear. Further routes to the fort at Loudoun Hill and possibly to the fortlet at Castle Greg (perhaps via the nearby fortlet at Bankhead near Carnwath just to the east (Hanson 1991: 104)) presumably also ran

from here. No camps are at present confirmed on this line. A further three camps are located within 2.5km of **Castledykes** (two at **Cleghorn** and one at **Carstairs Mains**). The location of these three camps some distance from the fort might suggest that the usual camping ground near the fort was unsuitable or unavailable, or that the fort was not occupied (or even built) at that time.

Camps are also recorded flanking the main Roman roads through Nithsdale and Annandale. In the route into southern Scotland, the lower Annan valley is dominated by Burnswark Hill, and close to this lies the fort of Birrens. At least four camps are recorded in the vicinity of the fort (**Birrens** and **Broadlea** – illus 86), with a further two at **Middlebie Hill** some 1.5km to the north-west. As with the camps located a short but significant distance from **Castledykes**, the location of the camps at **Middlebie Hill** some distance from Birrens might suggest that the fort was not occupied or not built at that time. Running up Annandale, a further cluster lies some 700m north-west of Milton at **Beattock**, on the valley floor of the Evan Water, and a combination of aerial evidence and the alluvial deposits has led to proposals of their possible dates (Jones 2009a: 871–2; see Chapters 7b and 10.1 below).

A number of camps are known on the Roman road leading between Annandale and Nithsdale, reaching the cluster around the Flavian forts at **Dalswinton** and then probably continuing west to **Glenloch** on the River Dee (illus 21). The Roman road up Nithsdale continues to **Drumlanrig** and then appears to split into two. The fort at Drumlanrig is sited at this crossroads, with one route continuing up the Nith towards the fortlet at Sanquhar and beyond (where a further probable camp is attested at **Knowe Cottages** and alleged at **Bankhead Kirkconnel**), the second branching north-eastwards towards Clydesdale, past the fortlet and camps at **Durisdier**, joining the Clyde and Annandale roads just south of **Crawford** (Maxwell 1989: 74). Given the convergence of routes at both **Crawford** and **Drumlanrig**, it is no surprise that several camps accompany both. While only three are known close to **Drumlanrig** (one of which is located at **Islaford** across the river near Castlebank ford) (illus 114), two more lie less than 2.5km to the south at **Carronbridge** and **Waterside Mains**, although there is a question mark over the interpretation of the latter camp. In addition, the majority of the area around Drumlanrig fort is in parkland, and it is possible that more camps lie undetected. While this fort is suspected to be Flavian in date (Maxwell & Wilson 1987: 19–20), recent excavations by Time Team in 2004 (Hunter 2005: 401–2) failed to locate occupation earlier than the Antonine period. A

level of complexity is visible from the cropmarks of the fort and its annexes, and it is possible that the excavations did not go sufficiently deep to locate any Flavian phases, the trenches in its interior being small-scale and shallow. Parts of the camp at **Carronbridge** have been excavated, and an oven located outside the entrance was radiocarbon-dated to a broad Roman date range, AD 25–240 (Johnston 1994: 258–9).

The discovery of camps located some distance from the Roman road network hints at penetration routes which may not have been consolidated when fort and road building was ongoing. The concentration of camps around the Flavian and Antonine forts of **Glenlochar** on the River Dee, west of Nithsdale, suggests a potential north–south marching route up the Dee, as well as west into Galloway. The recent discovery of a possible fortlet at Lochrutton (Hunter 2005: 402) and possible camps at **Shawhead** supports the idea of a routeway or possible road from the River Nith to Glenlochar, close to the route taken by the A75 or the nearby Military Road. No further camps are currently known up the valley of the Dee, but this is an area that has seen less aerial reconnaissance than other parts of the country (Cowley 2002). Indeed, if there were an invasion route up the Dee, possibly on the path later taken by the modern A713, then this, combined with the Drumlanrig to Sanquhar road in the upper Nith, and the Loudoun Hill road west of Castledykes, would indicate the location of a nodal point on the west coast in the vicinity of Ayr or Troon. The Roman road west of the camp at **Glenluce** is last recorded at Soulseat Loch, but its continuation would suggest a fort somewhere on Loch Ryan. This, combined with the presence of two camps at **Girvan**, midway between Loch Ryan and Ayr, attests to campaigns and a Roman presence in the far south-west of Scotland, and further archaeological evidence should be sought

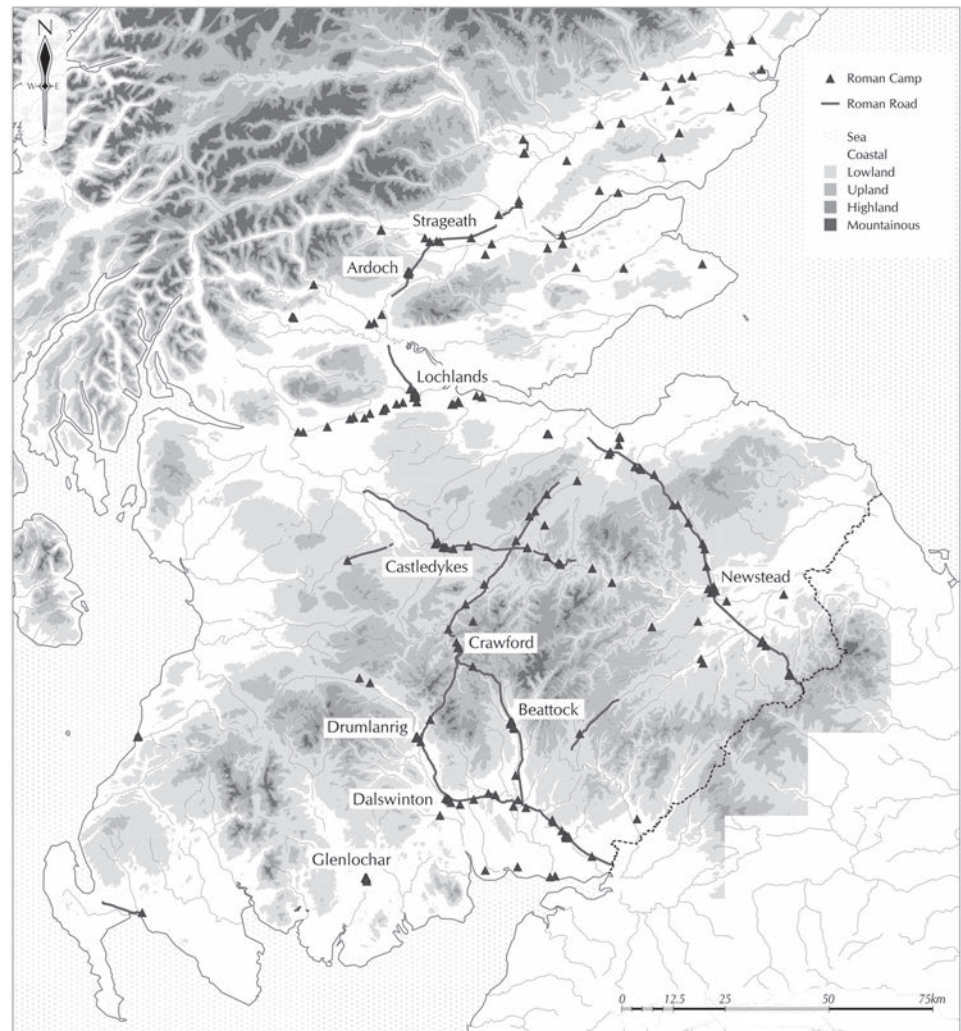


Illustration 21

Distribution map of the main gathering grounds in southern Scotland showing camps with gathering grounds (named), Roman roads and rivers. Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO. © Crown copyright 2010. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100020548.

to corroborate this. Certainly, more camps must await discovery in this area.

Across the Forth–Clyde isthmus, most of the camps along the Antonine Wall probably relate to its construction (Jones 2005b), excepting the large gathering ground at **Lochlands** (illus 22 & 167). North of the isthmus, a number of camps are recorded alongside the Roman road that ran along the Gask Ridge towards Perth, notably around the forts at **Ardoch** and **Strageath**.

The camps at **Ardoch** cluster around the fort (illus 24 & 77) and various attempts have been made to establish their relative chronology, with degrees of success (St Joseph 1970a: 167–9; Hanson 1978a: 146–9). **Ardoch** is an important site for the establishment of chronologies for the various ‘series’ of campaign camps that have been

proposed (Chapter 9). This clustering and overlapping is in contrast to those camps close to Strageath which form a more disparate group around the fort, with one (**Strageath Cottage** – illus 201) lying on level ground immediately west of the fort, but the remaining three located across the River Earn at **Innerpeffray** and **Dornock**. The two at **Innerpeffray** (illus 148) are located on relatively level ground immediately east of the crossing of the Earn and close to the road cutting at Innerpeffray Library (Frere & Wilkes 1989: fig 4; Woolliscroft 2005a). The location of the camp at **Dornock** (illus 113), some distance from the road, may suggest that it predates the fort, and an early date has been proposed (St Joseph 1969: 114; Frere & Wilkes 1989: 7).

North of **Strageath**, camps are recorded either as singletons or in pairs (such as **Grassy Walls** and **Scone**

(see Crawford 1949: 67–9). The camps that are dotted along Strathmore give an indication of routeways, and a possible stretch of road is recorded between the camps of **Keithock** and **Stracathro** aligned towards the fort at the latter (Don 1896: 42). Some of the camps are close to one another (such as **Marcus** and **Finavon**, lying about 1km apart), but these probably relate to the use of known routeways rather than contemporary occupation. The choice of certain sites on which to camp may have followed territorial *Itineraries* (Austin & Rankov 1995: 116).

In northern Scotland, north-east of the Mounth, the camps march in an arc around the edge of the Grampian massif. The battle of Mons Graupius has been claimed at various sites in this area, but none of the claims is confirmed (Maxwell 1990). It is this northern group of camps that

was critical in the development of St Joseph's theories for various 'series' of camps representing troops on the march (St Joseph 1958; 1969; 1973; 1977). A search for the northernmost camp in the Empire has led to claims for various rectilinear enclosures along the Moray Firth, but none has stood up to scrutiny (Gregory 2001). The most enigmatic site is the possible camp or camps at **Bellie**, in Speyside, where the evidence is highly suggestive but not conclusive. The camp at **Kintore**, in Aberdeenshire, has been subjected to numerous excavations in recent years, providing a wealth of information about the Roman army in this area (illus 18). Dating evidence gathered thus far is suggestive of a Flavian foundation, although there are also occasional 3rd- and 4th-century finds from the site (Alexander 1996; Cook & Dunbar 2004; 2008).

While the tendency for camps to be situated close to Roman roads and routeways has been observed, there was also an obvious need for them to be sited close to water. Both Vegetius and Hyginus commented that the site should be safe and close to a river or spring (*Epitoma* I.22; *de munitionibus castrorum* 57). This was a relatively straightforward task in North Britain given the general geography and terrain, and certain



Illustration 22

Aerial view of part of the camps II, III, IV, V and VI in the gathering ground at Lochlands, taken from the south-east in 1983. © Crown copyright: RCAHMS. SC1164523. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk.

Park – illus 140), the only exception being on the plateau outside the fortress at **Inchtuthil** (illus 145) (see section 7f).

North from the Roman fort of Bertha, on the north side of modern Perth, the Roman road is presumed to run towards the forts at Cardean and Stracathro, although very little evidence of this remains beyond hypothesis



Illustration 23

Aerial view of part of the camps I and II at Castledykes (both of which exhibit at least two phases of use), lying to the north of the fort, taken from the west in 1984. The 'Stracathro-type' gate on the south-east side of Castledykes I can be clearly seen, together with a nearby field system. © Crown copyright: RCAHMS. SC1164049. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk

valleys formed natural lines of advance, such as Redesdale in Northumberland, and Nithsdale and Annandale in south-west Scotland. The complex at **Newstead** (illus 183) sits at the point where Dere Street crosses the River Tweed, but quite a number of camps are known farther down the Tweed Valley on the south side (for example, two or three at **Mertoun Bridge**, **Wooden Home Farm**, **Carham**, **East Learmouth**, **Norham** (the latter three in Northumberland) and a possible camp at **Maxton**). Dere Street continues north up the Leader Water, a tributary of the Tweed, flanked by camps, and a routeway clearly continued up the Tweed to the forts at Easter Happrew and Lyne and then up the Lyne Water, as observed earlier. This latter route connected across into the Clyde Valley via **Castle Craig** and **Carnwath**. Other camps in the Scottish Borders indicate advance along other tributaries of the Tweed, such as the River Teviot (with camps at **Cavers Mains** and **Eastcote**) and the Ettrick and Ale Waters (the camps of **Oakwood** and **Milrighall**). It is hardly surprising that marching routes frequently took the convenient river valley routes, but the presence of

camps and forts in certain valleys gives an indication of the way in which these were utilised, particularly in the smaller valleys such as the Ale Water. North of the isthmus, the Rivers Earn and Tay in particular also demonstrate communication and invasion lines, and lines of march can be clearly observed on either side of the rivers and bogs of Strathmore. Camps, and indeed forts, are often sited at suitable river crossing points, such as **Newstead** on the Tweed, where the majority lie on the south side of the river close to the fort, but a solitary camp is known on the north side at **Drygrange**.

The largest camp currently known in the Roman Empire, **St Leonards**, was constructed on the most suitable ground in the immediate area, on a gently undulating ridge above the Leader Water (illus 195). This situation, with camps sited on low ridges above watercourses, appears to be reasonably common for camps in Scotland. There may have been less choice of terrain for a force choosing to camp outside an existing fort, but presumably there were other factors in selecting that location, and the benefits of camping close to a stationary force would have outweighed any minor topographical disadvantages.



Illustration 24

Aerial view of parts of camps I, II, III and IV lying around 500m north-west of the fort at Ardoch, taken from the north-west in 1986. © Crown copyright: RCAHMS. SC355878. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk.

Marching camps were sited on routes of advance. When clusters of camps exist, these indicate periodic occupation and reoccupation of a suitable location and may imply troops massing for major campaigns, troops on manoeuvres, and/or troops bringing supplies to an existing fort. Some may have been occupied temporarily while larger constructions such as forts, fortlets and frontiers (eg the Antonine Wall) were being built, but the majority of camps in Scotland are generally interpreted as marching camps rather than construction camps (see Chapter 2). Not all camps represent the movement of infantry or land-based forces and perhaps others could have been occupied by marines from the fleet or delineate

supply bases in use for particular campaigns at points where land and sea troops would meet, the latter possibly bringing additional supplies for the former. Certainly Tacitus refers to Agricola's army pushing forward simultaneously by land and sea (*Agricola* 25). Coastal camps are known along the north side of the Solway Firth, on both sides of the Tay estuary and overlooking the North Channel at **Girvan**, but what relationship these may have had to the Roman fleet is unknown. The understanding of the location of camps in relation to other Roman structures is important when assessing the various campaigns and analysing the arguments that have previously been proposed.