



Society of Antiquaries
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Roman Camps in Scotland

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CHAPTER 5

Excavation and survey of camps

The labelling of a particular site as a ‘temporary camp’ is itself dependent on a variety of factors. Firstly, a site can appear morphologically similar to other temporary camps, which allows it to be classified as such. Secondly, excavations of possible camps may produce some of the required evidence for classification as Roman, namely a

V-shaped ditch, possibly with a cleaning or ‘ankle-breaker’ slot in the bottom (and, occasionally, artefactual dating evidence or interior features such as pits and ovens). At the end of each flying season, St Joseph spent time placing small trenches through linear cropmarks to confirm that these were, indeed, the ditches of Roman camps (Jones 2009b) (illus 17). This is knowledge that we now take for granted when identifying sites as camps from the aerial evidence alone.

Until relatively recently, excavations on temporary camps have largely either concentrated on solving chronological questions, such as at **Ardoch** and **Ythan Wells** (illus 17) (St Joseph 1970), usually by aerial practitioners such as St Joseph, or have been triggered by the threat of development. Since the advent of developer-funded archaeology, more and more trenches have been placed through camps by people who are not specialists in the field of Roman military archaeology (a trend observed by Leslie 1995: 20). Few research projects have looked specifically at camps in Scotland; two recent projects included camps, although these were not the focus of the projects: the ‘Newstead Environs’ project conducted by Bradford University, and the ‘Gask Ridge Project’ (originally under the auspices of Manchester University, and latterly Liverpool University). Professor W S Hanson excavated at Monktonhall, **Inveresk** in 1984 (Hanson 2002), and Leslie subsequently proposed that only large-scale research excavation on camps was likely to result in fruitful results beyond V-shaped ditch sections; this suggestion was borne out not only by his own excavations at **Beattock Bankend**, **Kirkpatrick-Fleming** and **Pathhead** (Leslie 1995: 123ff; Leslie & Will 1998), but by subsequent excavations at **Dullatur** and **Kintore**. The former produced datable ceramics from the ditch, of which a large area was excavated (Lowe & Moloney 2000: 244–6); the latter identified numerous field ovens and pits when a large area in the interior was opened up over several seasons of excavations (Cook & Dunbar 2008; see section 7f). The excavations at **Kintore** have provided a wealth of information and finds, illustrating

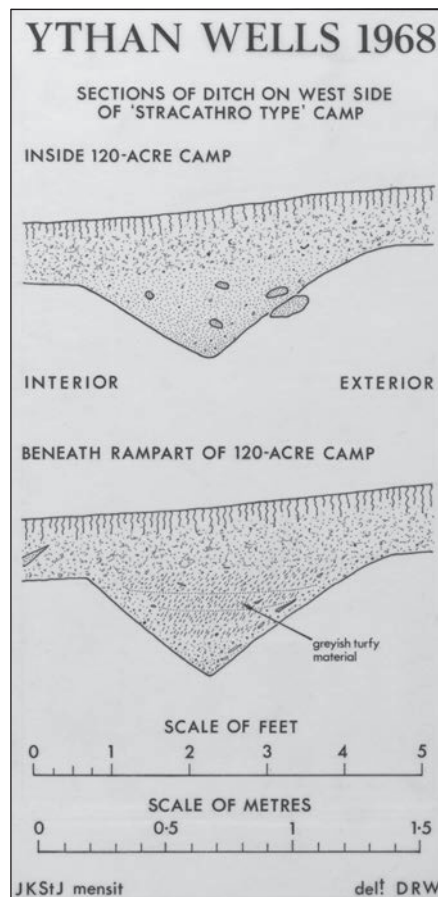


Illustration 17

Example of a section of ditch excavated by Professor St Joseph of the camps at Ythan Wells in September 1968. © Crown copyright: RCAHMS (Professor J K St Joseph Collection). DP071207. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk.

with our suggestions of their length of occupation (see section 7f).

However, the small trenches placed through camps did have a purpose, particularly at sites such as **Ardoch** and **Lochlands**, where several camps intersect one another, and can provide extremely useful data in terms of relationships between camps of differing morphology and size. Elsewhere, the presence of a V-shaped ditch has often been enough to argue for a Roman military date, although as a result there remain a number of proposed but disputed camps, such as Easter Galcantry, also claimed as a fort by the excavators (Gregory 2001: 214, 216). The Gask Ridge project has also investigated a variety of small enclosures close to the Roman road, some previously discounted as camps, such as Upper Cairnie (St Joseph 1965: 82) and East Mid Lamberkine (where the evidence is far from conclusive, *contra* Woolliscroft *et al* 2002: 36–9; see Chapter 2), reinforcing Leslie's view on the near futility of small-scale excavation on such structures. Occasionally, additional camps are located by excavation, although this is rare, and only 2% of known sites have been recorded this way (table 2). The obvious examples are the location of an alleged second camp at **Cardean** (St Joseph 1973: 224), and of a possible annexe or third camp at **Kirkpatrick-Fleming** (Leslie forthcoming).

Another clue that excavations can provide is the reuse of camps, frequently invisible from the air unless the perimeter ditch was altered, as at **Dullatur** (illus 116). Although the perimeter ditch of the camp at **Kintore** demonstrated no evidence for reuse, the finds from the pits and ovens told another story (Cook forthcoming;

see section 7f). Elsewhere, recuts have been observed in the perimeter ditches, such as at **Dunning** and **Finavon**, which provide clues to later reoccupation of the camps (see section 7g).

Detailed topographic survey can also elucidate further information about camps, as was demonstrated at **Raeburnfoot** (illus 43; Jones and McKeague 2009) and at several upstanding camps in England (eg Chew Green: Welfare & Swan 1995, 85–90).

Remote sensing techniques have been deployed on some camps with a modicum of success. The application of airborne Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) is still in its early stages, but can help with the interpretation of slight earthwork remains and those under certain types of woodland (eg Bewley *et al* 2005; Devereux *et al* 2005). Geophysical survey has also played a role, disclosing the perimeters of suspected camps, such as **Ravenswood** (Clarke 1995: 6), and identifying new camps elsewhere in the province of *Britannia*: at Llanfor in Merioneth (Crew & Crew 1997), Hindwell Farm in Radnorshire (Gibson 1999: 67–8) (both in Wales) and at Middlewich in Cheshire, England (Welfare & Swan 1995: 181). Geophysics also has the potential to provide more information on the location of interior structures such as ovens and pits, as evidenced by recent magnetometry survey by the Römisch-Germanische Kommission (RGK) on the camp on the haughland at **Dalswinton** (Hüssen *et al* 2009a). Indeed, it is likely that in pastoral areas, geophysical survey could play a major role in identifying new camps and providing more information about known camps, unless current agricultural regimes change and arable is favoured over pasture.