

The fort at Bar Hill lies at the highest altitude of all Antonine Wall forts, with spectacular views in all directions. The fort platform, east gate, and the exposed remains of the fort's headquarters building (principia) and bath-house are visible on the ground.

The fort is not directly connected to the line of the Wall, but is set back about 30m to the south of the Wall's Rampart, with the Military Way running between the fort and the Antonine Wall Rampart. This situation offers a good comparison to the relationship between the fort and Wall at Rough Castle. Within the fort are traces of an earlier enclosure that is now considered to have been a small temporary camp occupied during the construction of the Antonine Wall. A second probable temporary camp has also been located outside the fort's south-west corner. Parts of the earlier enclosure can still be traced within the fort's interior, but nothing of the external camp is visible on the ground today. Also of interest at Bar Hill is the presence of an Iron Age fort (called "Castle Hill") located immediately north-east of the Roman fort and south of the Antonine Wall Rampart.

HISTORY OF DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION:

The fort at Bar Hill is one of the earliest to be described by antiquarian writers, having been noted as early as the seventeenth century. In the early 1890s, Alexander Park cut seven sections across the Antonine Wall between Bar Cottage and the north-west side of "Castle Hill", helping to lead to further work by the Glasgow Archaeological Society's Antonine Wall Committee. In 1895, a Roman altar to Silvanus (RIB 2167) was ploughed up outside of the fort, near "Castle Hill" to the north-east of the Roman fort. In 1957, fifteen trenches were dug across the Antonine Wall to the east of Bar Hill, including the re-opening of five of the Antonine Wall Committee's sections.

The fort itself was first excavated between 1902-05, with occasional visits from a young George Macdonald, who published the detailed results of the excavation with Alexander Park in 1906. With these excavations, Bar Hill became the third

Antonine Wall fort to be excavated, following those at Castlecary and Rough Castle, which had been excavated a few years earlier by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. The Bar Hill excavations revealed the fort's full defensive outline, an earlier enclosure within the fort's interior, and a number of buildings. One of the most important discoveries, however, was a 13m deep well located within the fort's headquarters building (principia). When excavated, this was found to have been deliberately filled-in with artefacts and debris, including around 50 architectural fragments, some with inscriptions. Following the completion of the excavations, Macdonald, through the work of a local correspondent onsite in 1908, identified traces of extramural ditches to the south-west of the fort, representing what he thought was probably an annexe.

A second campaign of fort excavations was carried out between 1978-82, in advance of consolidation work to preserve the fort's exposed remains, which had deteriorated ever since they were left open following the 1902-05 excavations. These excavations focused on the fort's interior, particularly the area of the bath-house and latrine, the principia, and the ditches of the enclosure that had preceded the Antonine fort. A number of artefacts were uncovered, confirming dates broadly consistent with Antonine period occupation.

Around 1979, aerial photographs revealed cropmarks of a possible temporary camp to

the south-west of the fort, in the same area where Macdonald had earlier suggested an annexe was located. This area was partially excavated between 1982-84, revealing that the ditches were not connected to the fort and suggesting that this may represent part of a temporary camp.

More recently, two campaigns of geophysical survey have been carried out, in 1995 and 2006. The 1995 survey consisted of resistivity centred on the line of the Antonine Wall Rampart to the west of the fort, while the 2006 survey used magnetometry over a nearly 3ha area around the fort's east, south, and west sides.

DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION:

The fort at Bar Hill is unique along the Antonine Wall (with the possible exception of Carriden) as the only example to be detached from the Antonine Wall Rampart. Excavations have revealed that the fort had an internal area of about 1.3ha (3.2 acres), with turf ramparts on a 3.6m wide stone base. There were two ditches on the fort's east, south, and west sides, with a single ditch to the north. Beyond this northern ditch was the Military Way and then the Antonine Wall Rampart. There were four gateways, with gaps through the north, east, and south ditches, but surprisingly no gap within the fort's western ditch. Short separated sections of ditch were also located just outside of the entrance gaps on the fort's east and south sides, adding an extra measure of defence for these gateways.

Within the fort's interior were found the remains of a stone headquarters building (principia), granary (horreum), possible workshop along the main road (via principalis) running through the centre of the fort, and a long and narrow stone bath-house and possible latrine built against the western side of the north rampart. Post-holes for at least four probable barracks were also identified, some with surviving portions of timber posts. A number of pits and hearth were also noted.

The principia was almost square in shape, measuring 23.5m by 25.5m, with a northern courtyard followed by a covered crosshall with a raised dais, and then three separated rooms on the south. The central room in the southern range was probably the fort's shrine of the standards, and this was found to contain a stone-lined strongbox set into the floor. Within the northern courtyard was a well, measuring 1.2m in diameter and reaching a depth of 13m. The well was discovered on the first day of excavation in 1902, and contained a wealth of deposited objects, including faunal remains, stone, metal, wood and ceramic artefacts, as well as 21 columns or column portions, 14 bases and 11 capitals, a large altar dedicated by the First Cohort of Baetasians (RIB 2169), and three fragments of an inscribed stone that have been reconstructed as a building dedication stone of the same Baetasian cohort (RIB 2170). The inclusion of so many broken architectural fragments, apparently deposited in a single operation, provides significant evidence for a deliberate destruction of the fort, probably as part of an organised decommissioning at the time of withdrawal from the Wall.

Inscriptions at Bar Hill indicate the presence of soldiers from the Second and Twentieth Legions and the First Cohort of Baetasians,

each of which are recorded in building inscriptions. A further unit, the First Cohort of Hamians, an auxiliary unit of archers from Syria, is evidenced by the 1895 discovery of an altar to Silvanus (RIB 2167) outside of the fort, as well as the remains of bow fragments and arrowheads. The Silvanus altar was dedicated by Caristianus Iustianus, a praefect of the First Cohort of Hamians. This indicates that the cohort was probably in garrison at Bar Hill, and that there was probably a religious shrine somewhere in the vicinity of the Castle Hill Iron Age fort located to the north-east of the Roman fort. It has been noted that the fort at Bar Hill is almost a direct copy of the Hadrian's Wall fort at Carvoran, where the First Cohort of Hamians is also attested by inscriptions, leading to the suggestion that Bar Hill may have been specifically built for the purposes of housing this Syrian unit. Based on the epigraphic evidence (that is the evidence from inscriptions), we may be able to reconstruct the chronology of units as probably consisting of the Second and Twentieth Legions being responsible for the fort's initial construction, followed by the first permanent garrison being the First Cohort of Hamians, with the First Cohort of Baetasians representing the final unit at Bar Hill, when they carried out some rebuilding work within the fort.

There is also some evidence for the presence of women and children at Bar Hill, most visibly in the form of small leather shoes that were deposited in rubbish pits within the fort's interior. There were at least 67 women's shoes and more than 30 that would have belonged to children. Similar examples of women's and children's shoes are also known from the forts at Balmuildy and Castlecary, and it is now well-accepted that women and children played a role in the life of the Roman frontiers across the empire (Vindolanda may be the most famous example). The women and children represented by these shoes may have been the commanding officer's family members, and might have lived within the fort. Alternatively, they may have been members of

the fort's attached civilian settlement (vicus). Unfortunately, any such vicus has been difficult to identify at Bar Hill or elsewhere along the Antonine Wall, despite continued efforts to locate them through geophysics.

Excavations of the early enclosure within the fort between 1978-82 have now overturned Macdonald's suggestion that this represented a Flavian fort built by Agricola around AD 80. This is now widely considered to have been an Antonine period temporary camp, probably used during the surveying or building of the Antonine Wall, and later built over by the Antonine fort. The second temporary camp, located outside of the fort to the south-west, is less certain, as only the probable north-east corner and a short section of the east defences have been located. While this must remain uncertain, it has been estimated to have had an internal area of about 0.6ha (1.48 acres), and to have probably been a construction camp occupied during the building of the fort. Combining the evidence of the two camps with that of the fort, it seems likely that the Antonine Wall at Bar Hill was built first, with the soldiers working in this area housed within the camp that underlies the fort, while a new camp was then setup to the south-west in order to make room for the construction of the fort.

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