

CROY HILL: FORT, FORTLET, WALL, AND TEMPORARY CAMP

On a high plateau on the east side of Croy Hill is the site of a Roman fort, fortlet, and probable temporary camp on the Antonine Wall.

The site is located east of Croy village and north of the large quarry. The fort, fortlet, and temporary camp are not visible on the ground today, but the Antonine Wall Ditch is easily identifiable across much of Croy Hill. Just east of the fort, there is a gap within the Antonine Wall Ditch and to the west of the fort the Ditch separates from the line of the Rampart by taking a short detour in the area north of the fortlet, its line determined by the local topography. Croy Hill's elevated position (second only to nearby Bar Hill) offers one of the best views of the surrounding landscape, including the Firth of Forth and hills of Fife to the east, the Kilsyth Hills to the north, and the next fort at Bar Hill to the west.

HISTORY OF DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION:

The existence of a Roman fort at Croy Hill was noted by antiquaries in the late seventeenth century, but by the 1720s visible traces had been almost totally demolished by the later construction of a small hamlet over the site of the fort. In the early 1890s, Alexander Park cut several trenches along the line of the Antonine Wall between Bar Hill and Croy Hill, and this was quickly followed up by a number of sections dug by the Glasgow Archaeological Society's Antonine Wall Committee. Although a large number of Roman stones were found re-used within the walls of nearby buildings, the fort itself was not definitively located until 1920, when trenching by Sir George Macdonald identified the west gateway and part of the west rampart. Macdonald later returned to carry out more extensive

excavations in 1931 and 1935, providing a relatively complete understanding of the fort's defences and some buildings in the interior, and identifying a previous enclosure underneath and to the south of the fort. A second round of excavations by William Hanson took place outside the fort between 1975-78, as a response to quarrying in the area. These excavations included areas to the east, south, and south-west of the fort, identifying a fortlet attached to the south face of the Antonine Wall Rampart 80m west of the fort. Also discovered at this time were limited traces of a probable civilian settlement (vicus) to the south-west of the fort, along with signs of agricultural and industrial activities to the east and south-east.

DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION:

Excavations have revealed that the fort had an internal area of 0.6ha (1.5 acres), and that it was later than the line of the Antonine Wall Rampart. The fort used the Antonine Wall as its northern defences, and here the Rampart was

constructed of turf on top of a 4.3m wide stone base, while the Ditch was 12m wide without a causeway outside of the fort's north gate.

The fort was defended on its east, south and west sides by turf ramparts on a stone base, with as many as three ditches located on the west and south sides, and a short section of a single ditch near the fort's north-east corner. The defences were not recorded in the fort's south-east corner. Within the centre of the fort were found a stone headquarters building (principia) and granary (horreum), while a spectacularly built stone well and underground chamber was located in the north-east corner. Just outside that corner was a stone bath-house with well-preserved hypocausts, measuring about 20.4m by 3.6m and built up against the south face of the Antonine Wall Rampart. Very few artefacts were recovered from the fort, but finds included a number of inscriptions and sculpted stones, including two portions of a relief of Jupiter Dolichenus, an altar to the Nymphs, and a large selection of ballista balls. Pottery fragments were all Antonine in date. Building inscriptions (RIB 2161-63) indicate that the Sixth Legion was probably responsible for the construction of the fort, but an altar (RIB 2160) and a legionary tombstone suggest that a detachment from the legion may have stayed on as part of the fort's garrison. No other unit is recorded at Croy Hill.

Although Macdonald had suggested that the enclosure that pre-dated the fort was probably the remains of a Flavian fort built by Agricola around AD 80, excavations of its ditches to the south of the fort in the 1970s, recovered Antonine pottery, which, has now led to this being interpreted as a temporary camp from the Antonine period. If this is correct, it probably housed the soldiers who were responsible for building the nearby fortlet or for surveying the Antonine Wall in this area before construction began. The idea that this camp could have been used to house troops involved with building the Wall has been rejected because of its small size, but it would have been sufficient for a smaller group of surveyors or fortlet builders. Interestingly, this camp appears to feature an annexe, which is

relatively rare for temporary camps along the Antonine Wall.

The fortlet, situated about 80m west of the fort's west rampart was identified by limited excavation in 1977 and 1978. It was built at the same time as the Antonine Wall, using the Rampart and Ditch as its northern defence, with turf ramparts on a stone base and a single ditch providing further defences on the east, south, and west sides. The fortlet measured about 18.5m by 22m internally, and would have featured gates in both the north and south ramparts.

No definite structural evidence for a fort annexe or vicus has been identified at Croy Hill. Tantalising traces of other activity to both the south-east and south-west outside of the fort, however, do seem to indicate the presence of a civilian settlement adjacent to a branch of the Military Way which bypassed the fort. Among the finds recovered mainly from large ditches draining the flat plateau to the west of the fort are coins of Trajan and Domitian, a bronze arm-purse, fragments of a pottery face mask, bronze brooches, iron knives, hipposandals and large quantities of pottery. Cremated human remains within a storage jar were recorded in one of the fenced enclosures to the south-east of the fort.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

CANMORE Record: <http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/45875>

Glasgow Archaeological Society (1899) The Antonine Wall Report. Glasgow.

Hanson, W.S. (1977) Corbridge and Croy Hill: Recent Work on Agricola's Third and Fourth Campaigns. Pages 1-9 in J. Fitz (ed.) Limes: Akten des XI Internationalen Limeskongresses. Budapest.

Hanson, W.S. (1979) Croy Hill. Pages 19-20 in D.J. Breeze (ed.) Roman Scotland: Some Recent Excavations. Edinburgh.

Hanson, W.S. and Keppie, L.J.F. (1978) Recent Discoveries on the Antonine Wall: Seabegs Wood and Croy Hill. *Current Archaeology*, 6.3: 91-94.

Jones, R.H. (2011) Roman Camps in Scotland. Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. [Croy Hill is discussed on pages 329-30.]

Macdonald, G. (1925) Further Discoveries on the Line of the Antonine Wall. *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 59: 270-95. [For Croy Hill, see pages 288-90.]

Macdonald, G. (1932) Notes on the Roman Forts at Old Kilpatrick and Croy Hill, and on a Relief of Jupiter Dolichenus. *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 66: 219-76. http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/adsdata/arch-352-1/dissemination/pdf/vol_066/66_219_276.pdf [Croy Hill is discussed on pages 243-76.]

Macdonald, G. (1934) *The Roman Wall in Scotland*, second edition. Oxford. [Croy Hill is discussed on pages 140-43, 258-71.]

Macdonald, G. (1937) A Further Note on the Roman Fort at Croy Hill. *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 71: 32-71.

Robertson, A.S., revised by Keppie, L. (2001) *The Antonine Wall: A Handbook to the Surviving Remains*. Glasgow. [Croy Hill is discussed on pages 83-85.]

Roy, W. (1755) *Military Survey of Scotland*. [For the area around Croy Hill, see: <http://maps.nls.uk/geo/roy/index.cfm#zoom=14&lat=55.96613&lon=-4.01752&layers=0B000000TTT>]



Falkirk Council

