

Offering good views of the Antonine Wall Ditch and Rampart, Seabegs Wood is also important as the site of a Roman fortlet and the best place to see the visible remains of the Military Way, the Roman road that connected all of the forts along the Antonine Wall. The Military Way is located about 30m south of the Antonine Wall Rampart, and can be traced as a 7m-wide cambered mound.

HISTORY OF DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION:

The line of the Antonine Wall was well-preserved at Seabegs, and the antiquaries noted that it was very visible through Seabegs Wood, where the Ditch was deep and full of water. Alexander Gordon, the Rev John Horsley, General William Roy, and other antiquaries also noted an “exploratory mound” or possible Roman fort further east in the vacant space currently located between the Antonine Primary School and two industrial estates; this was located to the north of the Antonine Wall Ditch, which it used as its southern defence. By the early twentieth century, this “mound” was no longer considered a Roman feature (and was eventually excavated and confirmed as a medieval motte), but due to the long distance between the forts at Rough Castle and Castlecary, and the hypothesis of one Roman fort at approximately two Roman mile intervals, Sir George Macdonald and others continued to suggest that a fort had been located somewhere in the vicinity of Seabegs. The “exploratory mound” was excavated by Samuel Smith in 1933, proving that it was not Roman, but of probable twelfth-century date. In the hopes of finding the expected fort at Seabegs, trenches were dug around Seabegs

Place between 1968-73. These failed to identify a fort, but were successful in locating the Antonine Wall Rampart base. In 1977, further excavations were carried out near the site of the medieval motte, revealing portions of the Antonine Wall Rampart and Ditch. Finally, in 1989, geophysical examination and trenching took place in a 0.94ha field to the south of Seabegs Place; this could not identify any traces of a fort.

Within Seabegs Wood itself, the Glasgow Archaeological Society’s Antonine Wall Committee cut several trenches across the Rampart in the 1890s, revealing its stone base. In 1977, excavations at the west end of Seabegs Wood located a Roman fortlet attached to the south of the Rampart. A few years later, in 1981, excavations examined a low mound attached to the back of the Rampart, which was considered as a possible “expansion”. More recently, a number of watching briefs have occurred within the area related to local development, but these have encountered no features of archaeological significance.

DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION:

The Antonine Wall's Ditch, Outer Mound, and Rampart are visible within Seabegs Wood for about 400m, with the Ditch being the most obvious feature. Here the Ditch is more than 12m wide and reaches a depth of 2m. The Military Way is located about 30m south of the Rampart, where it is 7m wide and is visible as a low cambered mound.

Excavations have revealed that the fortlet at Seabegs Wood measured 21.8m by 18m, and that it was defended by a turf rampart set on a stone base, with two defensive ditches on its east and west sides. On the north, the fortlet was defended by the Antonine Wall Rampart and Ditch, and excavations confirmed that the Wall and fortlet were built at the same time. There was no ditch on the fortlet's south, which may be related to the close proximity of the Military Way. The fortlet featured gateways in both the north and south ramparts but, while a road passed through the north gate, there was no evidence for a causeway across the Antonine Wall Ditch. The interior of the fortlet was not excavated, but there was evidence for two possible occupations, or changes in the use of the fortlet, including the possible blocking of the north gate. Finds from the excavation include numerous fragments of Roman pottery. The nearby possible "expansion", excavated in 1981, proved to be a layer of collapsed turf from the Antonine Wall, rather than a separate structure.

As with Kinneil, the continued failure to locate structural evidence for a Roman fort at Seabegs is a major point of frustration for Antonine Wall archaeologists. It is possible that no forts were located in these areas, but it must be remembered that Horsley's hypothesis of Roman forts at every two Roman miles has largely proved to be correct, with an additional seven forts having been located since the 1730s, mostly in the precise locations originally suggested by Horsley.

The evidence of later medieval mottes at Cadder, Kirkintilloch, and Watling Lodge may add further weight to the suggestion of Seabegs as a Roman fort site, as every other known medieval motte was located on or very close to a Roman installation. It is possible that this location was chosen—at least in part—because of the presence of significant Roman remains.

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