

The remains of a Roman fort or its annexe have been identified on the east bank of the River Avon, near the site of Inveravon Tower. No traces of the fort are visible on the ground and its interpretation remains uncertain. Three temporary camps have also been identified to the south of the Antonine Wall in this area, but there are no visible traces on the ground today.

HISTORY OF DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION:

A fort had long been expected at Inveravon, based on spacing grounds and antiquarian speculation, some of which appears to have been misidentification of the nearby medieval Inveravon Tower as a Roman fort. In 1914, while searching for the line of the Wall, Sir George Macdonald uncovered portions of possible surfaces near the River Avon's east bank and "at the top of the field". Hopes that this represented the Rampart's stone base were disappointed by the stones' arrangement and lack of correspondence with the Wall's linear elements. The Rampart and Ditch were shown to lie on separate lines to either side of the Avon, with the east stretch lying about 140 feet downstream (that is, to the north) of the Wall on the river's west bank. On the River Avon's east bank and south of the Antonine Wall's Rampart, Macdonald found possible stone surfaces and a fragment of a second-century mortarium. On this evidence, by the 1930s, Macdonald had suggested that this was the location of the Inveravon fort, which was relatively small and largely obliterated by the destructive powers of the river and plough.

Later, Professor Anne Robertson carried out exploratory excavations in 1967, revealing structures of probable Roman date in the vicinity of the finds previously noted by

Macdonald. The discoveries included the foundations of stone walls and cobbled surfaces of two distinct phases of Antonine occupation. Survival was poor, and a clear plan was unattainable, with no defensive ditches or ramparts identified. Later, Robertson suggested that the uncovered remains represented a small fort or fortlet positioned to guard the Avon crossing. Inconclusive evidence for a proper "fort" here also led Robertson to suggest that a more substantial Inveravon fort remained to be discovered in a separate location on higher ground to either the east or west of the River Avon.

In 1983, small-scale excavations were carried out in advance of the laying of two new gas pipelines across the line of the Wall and the defences of a Roman temporary camp near Inveravon Farm. No evidence for the Rampart's stone base was uncovered, though minor traces of turfwork were identified and the Antonine Wall Ditch was measured at about 7.5m wide. Trenching south of the Wall revealed part of the shallow east ditch of the temporary camp, which measured about 1m wide and 0.55m deep. Excavation inside the camp revealed the remains of one post-hole and a possible portion of another. The Military Way was sought, but could not be located.

Limited occupation traces of uncertain date just south of the expected line of the Antonine Wall Rampart were noted, including patches of burnt clay and some shallow channels.

In 1991, excavations in advance of an ethylene pipeline uncovered traces of what has been interpreted as a Roman fort or a fort annexe in the area previously investigated by Macdonald in 1914 and partially overlapping trenches dug by Robertson in 1967. This excavation work followed on from aerial reconnaissance in 1989 and geophysical survey in 1990, and consisted of a single trench measuring 84.5m long by about 2m wide. Three phases of Roman period activity were identified. The Antonine Wall Rampart was identified and measured at about 4.4m wide by about 0.7m high; the stone base was intact and bounded by roughly-dressed kerbstones, while the surviving superstructure was noted to consist of an earthen core with clay and/or turf cheeks. The Berm was identified and measured at 9.2m wide, sloping gently downward to the Ditch. Possible traces of defensive pits were found on the Berm, joining a growing collection of these features on both the Antonine Wall and Hadrian's Wall. The Ditch was measured to be about 8.2m wide, but only 1.15m of its fills were excavated, revealing disturbed ploughsoil and medieval and post-medieval pottery. The Military Way was identified about 13.2m south of the Rampart and appears to have been about 5.2m wide in the first, pre-fort, phase.

Immediately south of the Rampart and abutting its south kerb was a structure of similar construction, with a stone foundation including kerbs and a superstructure of earth with clay cheeks; this was measured to extend about 7.8m south of the Rampart, but only the western portion was visible in the narrow trench, with the remainder extending into unexcavated soil to the E. While the base of this structure, interpreted as an "expansion", abutted the Antonine Wall Rampart's base, they may have been built at the same time.

The purpose of this "expansion", as well as other like it (see Tentfield, Bonnyside, and Croy Hill expansions), is unknown, and it appears to differ from other known examples by being both larger and probably of trapezoidal, rather than square, plan.

Traces of a "small fort", measuring about 34.5m north-to-south, were identified as part of phases 2-3; this was defended by a single rampart and no traces of a defensive ditch system (except for the Antonine Wall Ditch to the north) were uncovered in excavation. The Military Way ran through the centre of the fort, and the "expansion" appears to have been enclosed within the fort's ramparts, though plough damage had removed traces of how this "expansion" had been used or modified after the fort was constructed. A "rough surface" of about 3m wide was laid atop the collapsed material adjacent to the "expansion" and about 2.5m north of the Military Way. The Military Way itself was slightly truncated by a shallow cut on its north edge, with the cut being later filled with a thin layer of occupational debris and stone and earth dumping. While the "expansion" appears to have been left standing and not built over in phase 2, the excavators noted a series of new cobbles extending its kerb further south-east into the edge of the trench.

This evidence from Inveravon appears to convincingly indicate the presence of a fort, but it remains unclear if the features uncovered here were located within a fort or, perhaps, a fort annexe. Based on the excavations that have occurred in the area, and the location of the features that have been uncovered, it is likely that a fort here would have been very small and probably placed here primarily for the purposes of guarding the river crossing. Unfortunately, geophysical survey in 2008 has not been able to clarify the situation of the fort.

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