



Galloway Glens 'Can You Dig It' Community

Archaeology project – Technical notes.

#5: Glenlochar Roman Fort - “Great empires are not maintained by timidity” Tacitus

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Glenlochar Roman Fort is located on the east bank of the River Dee two miles north of Castle Douglas and approximately one mile north Threave Castle. The site is bisected by the modern day B795. It has had two residential properties constructed within what was the interior and has been overlain by rich arable fields.



Its History

Originally misinterpreted as the remains of an Abbey, Glenlochar Roman Fort was first identified in 1949 by [Dr Kenneth St. Joseph](#) through the presence of [cropmarks](#). St Joseph was an early pioneer of aerial photographic techniques, assisting in identifying countless sites across the British Isles. Five camps were also identified by St Joseph attesting the importance of this location for Roman activity in Scotland.



<https://canmore.org.uk/collection/1757061>
Aerial photograph of Glenlochar Roman fort

It was known at the time of discovery of the fort that there were a series of Roman sites lying along an east-west road running along the Solway coast. To the east on the Nith there are sites at Carzield from the Antonine period and at Dalswinton from the Flavian period. Further west there was a smaller fort at Gatehouse of Fleet, which was also discovered by St Joseph using aerial

photography. The location of these forts along this westward road, coupled with the Roman road from Glenlochar, towards Ayrshire suggests the development of the Roman system of cordon control.

The excavations

The excavation at [Glenlochar](#) took place across March and April 1952. The excavation consisted of one main trench and two minor trenches. The trenches were laid out to assess the nature of the defences and to assess the layout of structures within the interior of the fort.



Trench excavated during the 1952 season

The excavated trenches revealed that there had been a series of three superimposed forts, which for the most part retained common alignments. The first had been constructed in the Flavian period and may have been

destroyed by fire. The second was constructed in the Antonine period, while the third represented later improvements also during the Antonine period.

To the north of this known fort, there is the suggestion there was an earlier Flavian (Agricolan) fort on a different site: a large ditch, visible on the aerial photographs at the northern end beyond the limits of the Antonine phases. This suggests that an earlier site may be situated just north of the B795 on the higher ground.

Five Roman camps are also known at Glenlochar - showing the temporary encampment of military units - suggesting the importance of this location on the eastern bank of the Dee throughout the Roman campaigns in Scotland.

The Finds

65 fragments of pottery were unearthed during the excavation in 1952. They came from 17 different vessels, of which it was possible to create drawings of 6 of the vessels. Of those 6 vessels which were reconstructed, 3 were coarse ware vessels, while the remaining 3 were of [samian](#) ware. The pottery recovered was able to assist in determining the stratigraphy and chronology of the site, with there being two distinct dated pottery types: a Flavian group and an early Antonine group.

Conclusion

The Roman activity is a reminder of the an [Age of Invasion](#) when the Roman empire controlled the indigenous populations of south west Scotland. The site represents repeated and continued attempts to assert some form of control/presence within the Galloway Glens area. The excavations have given us the briefest of insights into the importance of Glenlochar locally, but also suggest its importance in the large national narrative of the Roman occupation of Scotland.

Further Reading

Richmond and St Joseph, I A and J K (1953) 'The Roman fort at Glenlochar, Kirkcudbrightshire', *Trans Dumfriesshire Galloway Natur Hist Antiq Soc*, 3rd, vol. 30, 1951-2. Page(s): 1-16

Jones, R (2011) *Roman Camps in Scotland*, Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. Page(s): 215-6

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