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18. SPRINGBOARDS FOR INVASION: MARCHING-CAMP CONCENTRATIONS AND COASTAL INSTALLATIONS IN ROMAN SCOTLAND

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The peculiar density of Roman military works in North Britain, whether identified as upstanding earthworks or traces retrievable only by aerial survey, is well known. Equally well known is the consistently high rate of discovery of new sites, largely through air reconnaissance (Maxwell & Wilson 1987, 15-41); the summer of 1989 has seen the continuation of this trend with the identification of a 1.5 ha fort guarding a road-junction and river crossing on the Annan near Lockerbie, as well as a fortlet in a side-valley of the Nith and the possible outworks of the Flavian fort at Linlithgow on the Forth-Clyde isthmus.

The recurring discovery of new permanent sites, with its implications for our understanding of the twin problems of manpower and effective troop-deployment in the late 1st-century AD, has tended to overshadow the less dramatic (and piecemeal) acquisition of data relating to temporary camps. Three decades of aerial prospection by survey teams from the University of Cambridge, (cf. St Joseph 1976; Wilson 1982) have served to establish a morphological structure into which a number of the temporary works can be placed, but there are still inevitable gaps in our knowledge: for example, the recognition of second-century examples, other than labour-camps on the Antonine Wall: the identification of indubitable series of Flavian camps marking obvious lines of march; and the absence from Central Scotland of any of the three categories of great Severan marching-camps.

Movement can at least be reported on this last issue - coincidentally, as was forecast at the 13th Limes Congress in Aalen (Maxwell 1986, 63). The cropmark feature representing the south-west angle of a marching camp 2.5 km north-west of the fort at Camelon has now been shown to be part of a Severan camp of about 50 ha (Frere 1989, 271). However, as significant as the fact of its discovery has been the method by which it was confirmed. Since only a short stretch of the likely perimeter was available for excavation, the chances of extending the cropmark evidence at first appeared slim. Almost miraculously, the identification over 40 years ago of an indeterminate arc of isolated ditch and bank in the course of field survey by Royal Commission staff compiling the Stirlingshire Inventory (RCAHMS 1963, No. 580) directed attention last autumn to the pattern of minor roads, fence-lines and civil-district boundaries which provided in outline much of the remaining perimeter of the camp (Fig. 18.1); subsequent close inspection revealed that, even after eighteen hundred years of decay, stretches of the original rampart had survived as an upstanding earthwork (notably at the north-west and north-east angles). Limited excavation confirmed, in addition, the presence of a *titulum* guarding an entrance in the west side *c.* 280 m from the north-west angle.

The location of this bivouac of the imperial army under Septimius Severus on the north bank of the River Carron confirms what has been suspected from the observation of similar sites, namely that

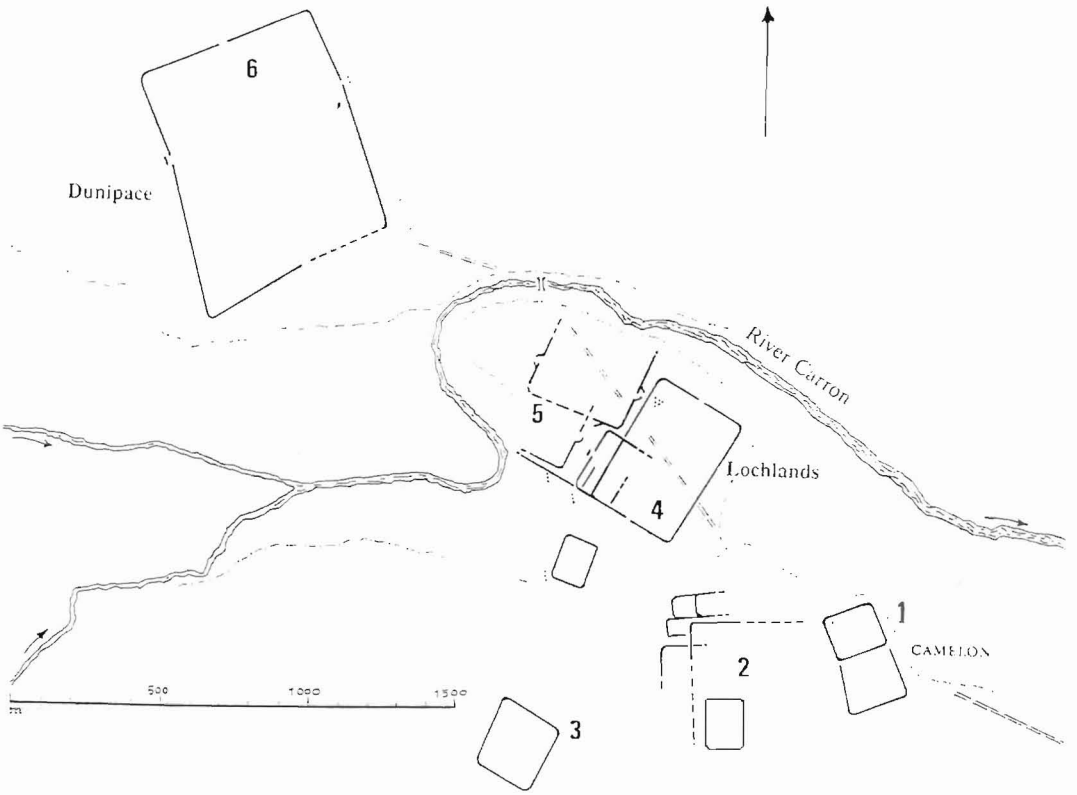

Fig. 18.1. Sketch plan of Roman works at the crossing of the River Carron (20 m OD contour indicated).

an element of tactical routine was practised by the army commander in that campaign; thus whenever a major river had to be crossed in the course of the northward advance, the army bivouacked on the far side. From this several inferences may be drawn, for example, in respect of long-range planning of invasion-routes, the degree of resistance which the enemy were expected to provide, or in practical application, where one might expect to find the next two or three camps to the south-east.

The addition of the new 50 ha site makes the crossing of the Carron the largest compact concentration of military works anywhere in North Britain, away from the two Walls (Fig. 18.1). For a distance of 3.75 km and on either side of the Roman road, a multi-period fort, and a wide variety of temporary works (at least 14) can now be identified, and there can be little doubt that the complex once extended further to the south-west, into an area now buried beneath urban development. Apart from the Severan camp (6) and the fort site at Camelon (1), there are two main nuclei of activity: one at Carmuirs (2) immediately west of the forts (which probably relate to the upper navigable limit of the Carron: Tatton Brown 1980) and the other around Lochlands (4-5), where, on a tongue of free-draining sand and gravel, recent years have seen a quite remarkable intensification of complexity in located traces of marching-camps (Maxwell & Wilson 1987, 29, 39) demonstrating the continued use and re-use of the area over many years. There can be little doubt that here we are slowly recovering evidence for one of the great gathering-grounds or staging-posts of Roman battle-groups, the springboard from which all major invasions of Caledonia were launched, comparable with the complex of camps gradually being pieced together at Mainz at the head of the corridor that leads eastwards into 'Free Germany' (Baatz, this volume). To the north only the cluster of camps at Ardoch at the head of Strathallan (St Joseph 1976, 14-19) approaches this degree of complexity, and even there the Flavian element is relatively slight. For closer parallels one must turn southward to the extensive camp groups beside the permanent forts at Newstead, Castledykes, Glenlochar and Dalswinton, or by the river crossing at Beattock in upper Annandale (Fig. 18.2).

The first of these (cf. RCAHMS 1956, ii, 316) embraces some eight to ten marching camps, averaging 10-16 ha in area, all but a few of which are assignable to some stage of the Flavian advance, most probably, to the third and fourth Agricolan campaigns; at that time Newstead would have been a busy crossroads for separate groups combing the Tweed Valley and the north-south route from the Tyne to the Forth. Some 60 km to the west, Castledykes on the River Clyde (RCAHMS 1978, 124-8; Hanson and Maxwell 1986, 20) represents another natural crossroads where an increasing amount of evidence can be presented - some of it not yet paralleled at Newstead. Particular attention should be drawn to the 26 ha Stracathro-gated camp, later reduced to some 18 ha, and a newly-discovered camp probably of 16 ha which may be partly overlain by the Flavian fort (Frere 1990, forthcoming). At Dalswinton on the Nith, the known 25 ha camp has recently been shown to possess Stracathro-type gates making it very closely comparable with the Castledykes example (Maxwell 1989, 69); its nearest analogue apart from that may be the recently-examined site at Lochmaben (St Joseph 1976), just one day's march to the east. The significance of the Dalswinton complex (which incorporates a two-phase possible vexillation-fortress: cf. Hanson 1987, 61-3) is heightened by the probability that from it an invasion route led south-west at right-angles to the Nithsdale route, heading towards Castle Douglas and ultimately Stranraer. A third of the way along that route lies Glenlochar (Frere & St Joseph 1983, 27-9), where on the left bank of the Dee at least seven camps were constructed - none apparently bigger than *c.* 13 ha, but one with a sizeable annexe. Here it would seem that the aggregation of remarkably uniform camps represents successive re-use of a river-crossing - geographically determined rather than strategically ordained. At Beattock, the builders of the four camps identified there (Maxwell & Wilson 1987, 30-1) might well have been resting en route for points much further north, although the presence of a Stracathro-gated example, possibly approaching 24 ha in area, could perhaps point to use of the head of Annandale as a springboard for very early operations in Upper Clydesdale or the headwaters of the Tweed.

Of all these groups Dalswinton and Castledykes bear closest comparison with the Camelon-Dunipace complex, providing the best startline for the dynamic westward thrust of Agricola's fifth campaign, when the Atlantic coast was the final objective (Tacitus, *Agricola* 24). Until recently the only evidence for the attainment of that goal was the pair of camps at Girvan (St Joseph 1978), but more recently air survey by RCAHMS has located two camps in the valley of the Avon Water south-west of Strathaven, the first temporary works to be discovered on the route between Castledykes and the Clyde estuary. These are very small beginnings but an excellent omen for the solution of the problem relating to Agricola's presumed naval operations of that year.

That the sixth Agricolan campaign also involved the use of naval forces can be accepted without question, and there is, in fact, explicit reference (Tacitus, *Agricola* 25) to combined operations, from which the existence of temporary Flavian coastal installations on the east coast has been deduced. To date, only one specific site, the small temporary work at Dun, on the north shore of the Montrose Basin has been connected with these activities (St Joseph 1973, 225-6). Others may, however, be suggested (Fig. 18.2). Near the shore at East Haven, where the apron of coastal rocks is broken to provide a natural harbour, some 6 km south-west of Arbroath, there are faint cropmark traces, as yet untested, of

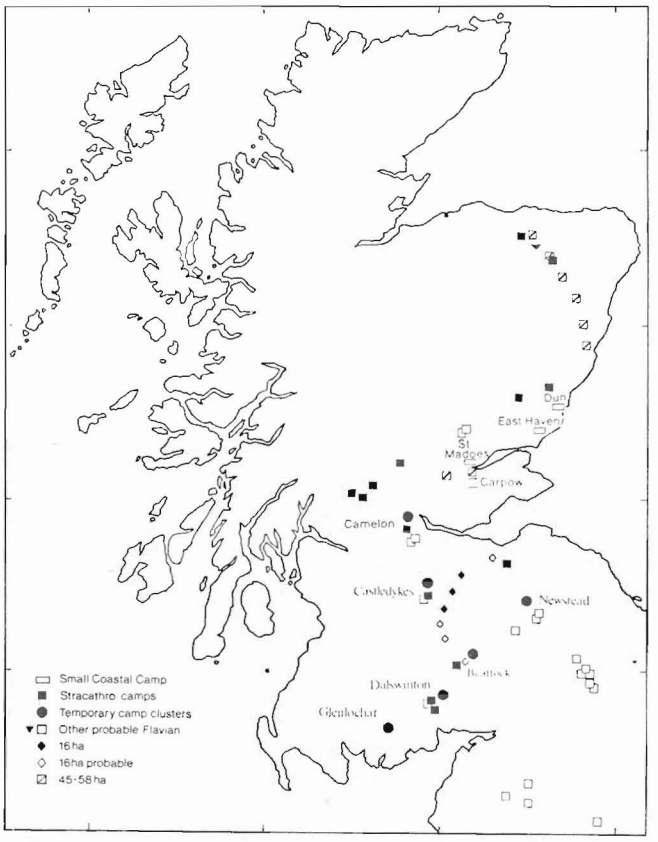

Fig. 18.2. Roman temporary camps, mainly Flavian; dark circles indicate major camp clusters mentioned in the text.

what appears to be a small Roman temporary work; like Dun it adjoins a particularly dense distribution of unenclosed native settlement. The third instance for consideration is the site at St Madoes on the opposite side of the Tay from the Severan legionary fortress of Carpow. This small single-ditched Roman work, of which only the north-west angle and positions of adjacent sides have been recorded, has previously been explained as a bridgehead position guarding the hypothetical pontoon-bridge, by which the Severan army crossed into Angus (Robertson 1980). The possibility of it being instead a coastal depot or guarded landing point like Dun or East Haven is worthy of exploration. Like the other two, St Madoes adjoins an area of densely-packed native settlement, but in none of the three cases is there evidence of large-scale occupation or defence in depth.

Exploration, not entirely military in origin, or even early attempts to establish political or mercantile influence over local markets, may seem appropriate explanations for such slightly constructed enclosures. Similar structures may await discovery by excavation beneath the more southerly coastal bases of Cramond and Carriden on the Forth, although artefactual evidence of Flavian activity has been noted at only the former site (Robertson 1983, 419, 421).

On the other hand, a purely military context should not be deemed impossible. It is in precisely this area of Northern Britain that Ptolemy (*Geographia*, ii. 3. 14) locates the coastal site of *Horrea Classis*, which may reasonably be identified as a supply-base for the *classis Britannica*, built and occupied, if briefly, in the governorship of Agricola or his immediate successor. As such, it could have represented the equivalent of the legionary fortress at Inchtuthil, allowing Roman sea-power to be deployed in northern waters, whence control and surveillance of the recently-conquered territory of Caledonia could be effectively amplified. On the basis of its physical relationship to *Tavae Aestuarium*, as shown on Ptolemy's map, *Horrea* has often been identified as Carpow, (but see Rivet & Smith 1979, *s.v.*); certainly such a position, overlooking a sheltered anchorage, would not have been inappropriate. Admittedly, limited excavation of the defences and interior of the Severan vexillation fortress which occupies the site has failed to recover traces of earlier occupation. It is not, however, impossible that a Flavian base begun, but perhaps never completed, might have been largely effaced by the third-century structures. One could, for example, argue that the irregular plan of the Severan defences and internal street-plan resulted from a need to conform to an already existing earthwork of similar dimensions. If that was indeed the case, the size of the Flavian enclosure would have approximated to that of the *classis Britannica* fort at Boulogne (Brulet 1989, 62-72), constructed early in the reign of Trajan. It is tempting to push this argument even further and suggest that, after Agricola's conquest of the North in AD 80-83, it was intended to transfer the fleet from the Channel to a northern base, and it was only after the retrenchment of Flavian frontier policy in Britain *c.* AD 87 that a more southerly base of operations was fixed upon (Johnson 1989, 145-50). At present, however, the matter must remain in the realms of the hypothetical.

Such a hypothesis is nevertheless made inherently more probable by experience at Lochlands, where aerial survey and trial-examination over the past four decades have constantly necessitated revision of assessments. The evolution of the site has proceeded in cycles of growth and dissolution, from an isolated 42 acre camp, to a group of three, and then the dismemberment of the original large work into at least five separate entities (Maxwell & Wilson 1987, 29, 39). More recently, almost microscopic scrutiny of air photographs taken in the last dozen years has revealed the existence of truncated Roman ditches barely 60 cm wide but earlier than any yet found and possibly belonging to the largest camp of all, perhaps as much as 25 ha in area - the size, it will be recalled, of the largest Stracathro camps at Castledykes and Dalswinton.

But there is more: outside the area of the camp-complex, further examination of air photographs has also revealed a series of linear settings of pits, many showing the same general alignment. Excavation of one of these in 1988 indicated that it might well be a rubbish-disposal pit, such as have been found *within* the confines of Roman bivouacs elsewhere (Pitts & St Joseph 1985, 229-39); and similar pits have been noticed in excavation at other widely scattered points on the Lochlands promontory.

These findings give rise to at least two intriguing possibilities: either yet another, still larger camp occupies the site - its defensive outline so faint or fragmentary that it has yet to be recognised - or more serious, there are extensive Roman military bivouacs at Lochlands (and elsewhere in Roman Britain) whose defences are not of a character to leave traces visible even to the aerial surveyor. Since the total usable area of the Lochlands promontory amounts to about 60 ha (and the cropmark 'pits' appear to be widely scattered across it), the possibility exists that the entire Agricolan field-army, accommodated in a bivouac at least as large as Agricola's presumed camp at Logie Durno (St Joseph 1978), could once have encamped here. That so little trace of this might nevertheless survive raises intriguing questions, with applications far outside the limits of Flavian Caledonia.

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