

BANFF.

PARISH OF MORTLACH.

FORT, LITTLE CONVAL. Little Conval Hill, which rises to a height of 1,810 feet O. D., stands at a distance of two miles WSW. of Dufftown and four miles S. of the junction of Glen Fiddich and Strathspey at Craigellachie. The N. flank of the hill falls gently to the moors NW. of Dufftown, but the other flanks are considerably steeper, the S. one falling 550 feet to the col leading to Meikle Conval and the other two descending for 1,000 feet before reaching the limits of the cultivated lands below.

The summit of the hill, a comparatively flat area measuring about 700 feet from N. to S. by about 400 feet transversely was chosen for the site of a fort the construction of which was not completed. Two main and two subsidiary lines of defence can be distinguished. The inner, which encloses an area measuring 680 feet in length by 400 feet in breadth, consists for the most part of a line of boulders spread over a width of about 10 feet; but for a distance of 400 feet in the N. and NE. arcs this ceases altogether, and the line is only indicated by a marker trench. This can be traced through the heather and peat along the whole of the space between the ends of the line of boulders in the form of a shallow excavation of irregular width the mean of which is about 5 feet, and along the inner lip of which is a very slight upcast mound. There is no visible indication that the boulders had ever been built into a regular wall with outer and inner faces, but the lowest courses of such features, had they existed, would probably have been buried in the debris. The only entrance is a gap about 10 feet wide in the SW. arc.

At a distance varying from as little as 12 feet to as much as 48 feet outside the inner defences is a line consisting/

consisting entirely of stretches of marker trench. This could not be detected in the deep heather on the steep W. flank of the hill, although it is apparent as a dark line on aerial photographs. The first point at which it could be seen on the date of visit was at a point distance 26 feet from the WSW. arc of the inner defence. It runs thence S. for 90 feet to one side of a gap 35 feet wide which covers the entrance in the inner defence. Thereafter, it continues to follow the S. and SE. flanks of the latter, interrupted by a gap of only 15 feet in the E. arc. At a point 175 feet N. of this there is a pronounced kink in the course of the trench which thereafter continues round the N. arc to be lost again on the steep W. slope of the hill. This marker trench, like the section already described, is shallow and of irregular width and depth, possibly as the result of several separate gangs having worked on its construction. For most of its course this trench has a very slight heap of small stones and earth outside it.

While the lay-out of these two embryo lines of defence is unexceptionable, that of the next to be described is less regular. It starts on the steep W. slope of the hill at a point 75 feet outside the second marker trench and 95 feet outside the rubble of the innermost line in the form of a marker trench similar to the others varying from 6 inches to one foot in depth and from 2 feet to 4 feet in width and showing traces of gang work. It runs thence E. and SE. for a distance of about 600 feet, thus forming the basis of a third line to cover the weakest approach to the summit of the hill. Thereafter, however, it immediately becomes a wall 6 feet in thickness, with facing stones on either side including some measuring about 6 feet in length, 2 feet 6 inches in thickness and one foot in depth, apparently quarried but not dressed, and also large gathered boulders/

boulders of comparable size. The filling is of smaller stones. This wall continues S. along the steepening E. flank of the hill, and after making a salient to the E. finishes abruptly on the SE. flank of the hill, at a point distant 200 feet from the second line described above. No trace of wall or marker trench exists beyond this point, but this part of the hillside bears numerous apparently ancient stone field boundaries, and it is possible that the abrupt ending of the remainder of the wall and the lack of any further work beyond this may be related to their presence. It is, however, difficult to account for the presence of the salient.

A fourth line of defence occurs on the gentle N. slope at a distance varying from 30 feet to 60 feet outside the marker trench which forms the N. arc of the third line. It consists of a slight low bank about 4 feet in width and 330 feet in length.

The interior of the fort is covered in peat and heather, and cloudberries grow in profusion in the NE. part. There are no traces of internal structures.

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BANFF.

PARISH OF FORDYCE.

FORT, DURN HILL. Durn Hill, which attains a height of 651 feet stands immediately O. D.,/NE. of Fordyce Hill, to which it is connected by a saddle, and the two form a conspicuous feature as they rise from the coastal plain two miles SW. of the coast at Portsoy. The flanks of Durn Hill slope gently down in all directions, and the summit area is only slightly domed. The nature of the hill, and also perhaps the distance its summit commands in all directions, make it a suitable place for a hill fort, but although it was indeed chosen for such a purpose the structure was not completed.

Three lines of defences were planned. The innermost, enclosing an area 660 feet in length and 350 feet in width of the most level and even part of the hilltop, is entirely in the form of a marker trench some 2 feet in width and up to one foot in depth. Although the general line is regular the trench continually varies in both width and depth. A gap 55 feet in width occurs in the SW. arc, and another of 10 feet in the NE. arc. A very slight upcast mound can be detected at certain places along the outer lip.

The second line is represented not by a marker trench but by a thin line of loose boulders. It lies at a distance varying from 35 feet to 85 feet outside the inner line and there are four gaps in it, one of 70 feet in the S. arc, one of 30 feet in the E. arc, one of 55 feet in the NE. arc and one of 20 feet in the SW. arc. At three places on this line work has begun on the next stage of construction. This is best seen on either side of the gap in the SW. arc where ditches have been started. These, which clearly show the work of separate gangs of excavators, are up to 3 feet in depth and 10 feet in width. The smaller spoil of earth and stones has been cast up along the outer/

outer lip to form mounds about one foot in height, while the larger boulders have been arranged along the inner lip on the line of the marking-out boulders. At one place in the S. arc traces of a built outer face can be distinguished, and lesser traces of similar work occur in the NW. arc.

The third line, which lies at distances varying from 35 feet to 135 feet outside the second, consists entirely of a marker trench in which there are several small gaps. It is notable that none occurs in the NE. arc, where both the other lines are breached, but there is a gap of 10 feet in the SW. arc. It is probable that the only entrance to the fort was to be in this sector. The trench varies in width and depth with an average of about 3 feet and one foot respectively. It is thus a little larger than the inner one.

Boulders, stones and outcrops of white "Durn Hill Marble" are conspicuous all over the hill, and in the interior of the fort a great many can be seen protruding through the peat and among the heather. In two places circular arrangements of these white stones were noted which could possibly be described as hut circles, although there was no suggestion of regular faced walling in their random arrangement. One of them, measuring 27 feet in internal diameter, partly corresponds with the line of the median marking-out line of boulders at a point in the W. sector where the digging of the ditch had been begun. As the line of boulders impinged upon the circle it can be concluded that the latter was, if only perhaps by a little, the earlier structure. The other ring, 20 feet in internal diameter, lies inside the S. part of the fort.