

FORT, CNOG an DUIN. The hill named Cnoc an Duin, which attains a height of 904 feet above sea level, rises steeply for 450 feet from the left bank of the Balnagown River where this runs through Strathrory on its way to enter the Cromarty Firth at Nigg Bay, six miles to the ESE. The hill commands most of Strathrory into which it protrudes from the massif immediately to the N., and at the same time dominates the Glen of Scotsburn and Glen Aldie through which the Aldie Water flows to Tain and the Dornoch Firth.

The summit of the hill consists of a comparatively flat oval area measuring about 730 feet from E. to W. by about 250 feet transversely. The flanks of the hill slope steeply down from this to S. and W. towards the river, but to the N. there is a more gentle descent of less than 50 feet to a narrow marshy valley which connects Cnoc an Duin to the massif beyond. To the E. however the summit plateau is cut off from the neighbouring part of the hill by a steep-sided rocky gorge of striking appearance which runs from N. to S. to form a gash a quarter of a mile in length and up to 150 feet in breadth thus effectively isolating the part of the summit just described.

The construction of a hill fort was begun, but not completed, on the summit plateau which, cut off by the gorge, formed a natural defensive promontory. The inner line was evidently to consist of a stone wall 10 feet in thickness, for starting near the brink of the S. lip of the natural gorge a substantial line of boulders runs W. along the N. margin of the summit plateau for a distance of 770 feet to terminate near the S. extremity. For the most part the line of boulders appears as a heavy mass of tumbled blocks and slabs which is spread to a width of about 10 feet or 12 feet, the edges of the mass appearing to be overlain in places by peat. The westernmost stretch, 170 feet in length, has several interesting characteristics. The amount of stones in this sector appears to be greater than that visible further E., while stretches of built faces begin to be visible above the heather at irregular intervals on either side of the mass of boulders. Some sections of faces up to eight courses in height can be seen/

seen but in all cases these have fallen backwards to a greater or lesser degree into the loose rubble at their rear which formed the core of the wall. At a point 40 feet from the termination of the line of the boulders there is a ruinous but clearly perceptible transverse face which runs across to unite the inner and outer faces. Beyond this the lowest course of the outer face can be seen to continue without interruption all the way to the end; that of the inner face only resumes after a gap of about 5 feet, but thereafter it too runs to the end. It is notable that from the transverse face to the end the wall consists of an inner and an outer face of one or two courses in height between which are placed enough boulders to fill in the space but not to form a pile or to rise above the low faces. There can be no doubt that this final stretch of 40 feet represents an early stage in the construction of the wall, and that the proceeding was apparently first to lay the lower course of the facing stones at the required distance apart, then to fill in the space between them with boulders, and so to erect the wall, in the form of built faces with a rubble core, on the foundation thus prepared. It is remarkable that, when the embryo wall ends abruptly at the W. end of the summit plateau, the course it would presumably have proceeded to follow along the S. edge of the plateau is not marked out either by a marker trench (Little Conval) or by a rickle of stones (Durn Hill). It is possible that perishable objects such as wooden pegs were used in this case.

Apart from the cross-face in the NW. arc of the wall which has been described above, the only other gap in the line of boulders is near the E. end. The line springs from near the lip of the natural gorge, as already mentioned, but after a distance of only 60 feet in a straight line the boulders cease. There ensues a gap of some 20 feet, on the far side of which the boulder line resumes at a different angle. It is possible that the gap was designed to form the basis of a main entrance, but the alinement of the wall on either side of it cannot readily be explained.

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The outer line of defence also appears in an incomplete form. It consists in essence of a linear excavation designed to follow the wall, or the crest of the summit plateau, at a distance varying from 40 feet to 70 feet. At no place was it advanced to a stage nearing completion, but sufficient work exists to show that the final spoil was to be thrown outside the ditch or terrace and that the larger boulders were being collected above the inner lip. All along the N. flank of the hill, from the lip of the gorge for a distance of about 800 feet, this line of defence appears merely as a shallow terrace dimly perceived in the long and deep heather. There are several minor interruptions along it, and two major ones but most if not all these probably represent the boundaries between the work of different gangs. At the end of this stretch the line begins to turn through SW. to S., and thereafter for almost its entire length it is not only free from heather but runs along the steeper flanks of the hill. A gap in the S. arc covers the place in the inner line of boulders where the transverse face crosses it. The gap consists of a causeway in the excavated ditch or terrace some 12 feet in width, the N. side of it being well-defined because an attempt has been made to collect stones and boulders and to form them into a line of transverse facing about 15 feet in length. This spans the end of the excavation and likewise forms a termination to the outer line of gathered stones, and may even have run on to the inner line. It is now so ruinous, however, that no precise description can be given. Beyond the gap the excavation and the collections of boulders and rubble both above and below it continue round the SW. and S. faces of the hill. Traces of gang work appear all along it, and for a considerable stretch the excavation cannot be traced at all. In the last 200 feet before the gorge is reached again the stones and rubble collected outside the excavation begin to form a low mound while the amount of boulders on the inner side increases. Just before meeting the lip of the gorge the outer defence is again covered with long heather, but it is probable that the outer mound turns up to the N. to terminate on the lip of the gorge. There is nothing to show that there was ever any defensive line on the crest of the gorge.

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The interior is covered with peat and heather, and the only definite feature visible within it is what appears to have been a small water-hole. The hole, about 2 feet in diameter, was choked with stones at a depth of 2 feet and dry on the day of visit. It occupies the bottom of a shallow depression itself about 2 feet deep and 10 feet in width in which a penannular wall one course thick stands to a height of 4 feet. The wall is probably of no great age.

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3rd July 1958.

HOMESTEAD MOAT, DAVID'S FORT, CONAN. This structure stands at a height of 150 ft. O.D. half a mile SE. of Conan House on broken and marshy ground that slopes down from the Muir of Highfield towards the River Conan. Of characteristic trapezoid plan (Fig. ), it is formed on a minor eminence, the interior standing a few feet above the surrounding ground. It measures 83 ft. from N. to S. by from 85 ft. to 105 ft. transversely within a wet ditch to the level of the water in which its flanks dropped 15 ft. on the day of visit. The surface of the interior is covered with very coarse grass, tangled undergrowth and a few large trees, and the only feature visible was a circular depression 3 ft. in depth and 25 ft. in diameter situated close to the margin halfway along the W. side. The ditch is surrounded by the remains of a substantial bank standing up to 9 ft. in height above the level of the water and to 3 ft. above the ground outside. The W. sector, which stands only 2 ft. above the water and above the ground outside, is cut by a depression about 5 ft. in width outside which a hollow track leads off W. down the slope. The gap lies opposite the depression in the interior, and it is possible that they represent the place where a wooden bridge originally spanned the moat.

PARISH OF KNOCKBAIN.

FORT, ORD HILL, KESSOCK. This fort occupies the summit of the Ord Hill, a conglomerate ridge which rises to a height 633 feet O. D. immediately N. of the narrows at the entrance of the Beaully Firth. The hill forms a natural pair with Craig Phadrig, three miles to the SE, but is both higher and longer. At the date of visit the whole hill was planted with well-grown conifers of no great age and the remains of the fort were measured only with some difficulty. The fort, which is irregularly sub-rectangular on plan with comparatively straight long sides, measures about 900 feet in length from NE. to SW. by about 230 feet in maximum width within the ruin of a substantial stone wall. For most of its length this appears as a spread of blocks and stones which varies in width as many of these have fallen away down the steep NW. and SE. flanks of the hill. In particular there are several gaps where no traces of the wall can be seen in the vicinity of the steepest part of the SE. flank. The best-preserved sectors of the wall are those that enclose the SW. quarter of the fort; they lie on comparatively level ground the approach to which is not difficult, and it is probable therefore that they were constructed, or reconstructed, to provide a more formidable barrier than was necessary at the crest of the steeper slopes bordering the rest of the perimeter. The entrance lies in the S. corner. At a point in the SE. sector of the wall at a distance of between 30 yards and 40 yards NE. of the entrance a stretch of solid vitrification, apparently consisting of wall blocks fused to each other, and to the conglomerate below them, was seen on the day of visit. The magnitude and extent of this vitrified mass suggests that the fort was probably originally formed by a heavy timber-laced wall and may have been comparable in size and strength to the largest of this class in the region. To W. and NW. of the entrance/

entrance the wall assumes a different appearance, consisting of two virtually parallel broad bands of tumbled blocks and stones which lie about 30 feet apart and are each spread to a width of about 20 feet or 25 feet. The inner of these two stretches forms the first 60 yards of the main wall as this leaves the W. side of the entrance, and the outer covers it for this distance before dying out on the steep NW. flank of the hill. The precise arrangement of the three walls near the entrance was difficult to trace on the day of visit because of vegetation and fallen branches, but it appears to be as shown on the sketch plan. Three hut circles each about 10 feet in internal diameter that lie close to the ruin of the wall in the SW. may be comparatively recent in date.

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12th April 1957.

PARISH OF NIGG.

FORT, EASTER RARICHIE. This fort is situated on a knoll which rises from the lower part of the NE. slope of the Hill of Nigg, 650 yards S. of Easter Rarichie farmhouse. The remains are ruinous, having suffered from stone-robbing and the encroachment of the plough as well as from natural decay. They consist of several separate features, the innermost of which is a small stone-walled structure which crowns the knoll. This is represented by a stony mound about 12 feet in thickness surrounding an area about 35 feet in diameter. On the N. arc several continuous outer facing stones still remain in situ, and there is a gap in the SE. arc that represents an entrance. The thickness of the wall suggests that the structure may have been a dun. (a more ruinous example of a similar structure, with an internal diameter of about 30 feet, is situated on a small knoll 200 yards to the W.). The dun stands within the slight remains of a stone wall (I) which enclose an area measuring 170 feet from E. to W. by 80 feet transversely. For the most part this feature now appears only as a slight scarp from which a few boulders protrude. The entrance is in the SE. arc. A second wall (II) lies below this to enclose an area measuring 210 feet from E. to W. by 160 feet transversely. Although it is as ruinous as wall I more loose boulders and stones occur along its course. The entrance is in the E. arc.

The ruin of wall II overlies the N., S. and W. arcs of rampart III the E. part of which runs off beyond the points where the E. arc of wall II turns. This rampart, now a mere crest-line above the scarped flanks of the knoll, encloses an area 300 feet in extent from E. to W. by 160 feet transversely, and the entrance is in the E. The next line of defence is a rampart (IV) partly formed by adapting the lowest part of the knoll and partly by a rubble mound. The whole of the S. sector of this rampart lay on level ground below the knoll, and was entirely removed when the/

the land on which it was built was ploughed. The slight remains of a similar rampart (V) lie outside the SE. arc of IV, and appear to have been truncated in the same way.

It is possible to suggest that at least two main structural phases can be distinguished among the six defensive features that are crowded on to the knoll, despite their ruinous condition. The original work may have consisted of the rampart number III as the innermost line, and those numbered IV and V as its outer defences. The second phase may be represented at least by the walls I and II, and possibly by the dun as well. It must always be borne in mind however that the dun may represent a third, separate, phase of occupation.