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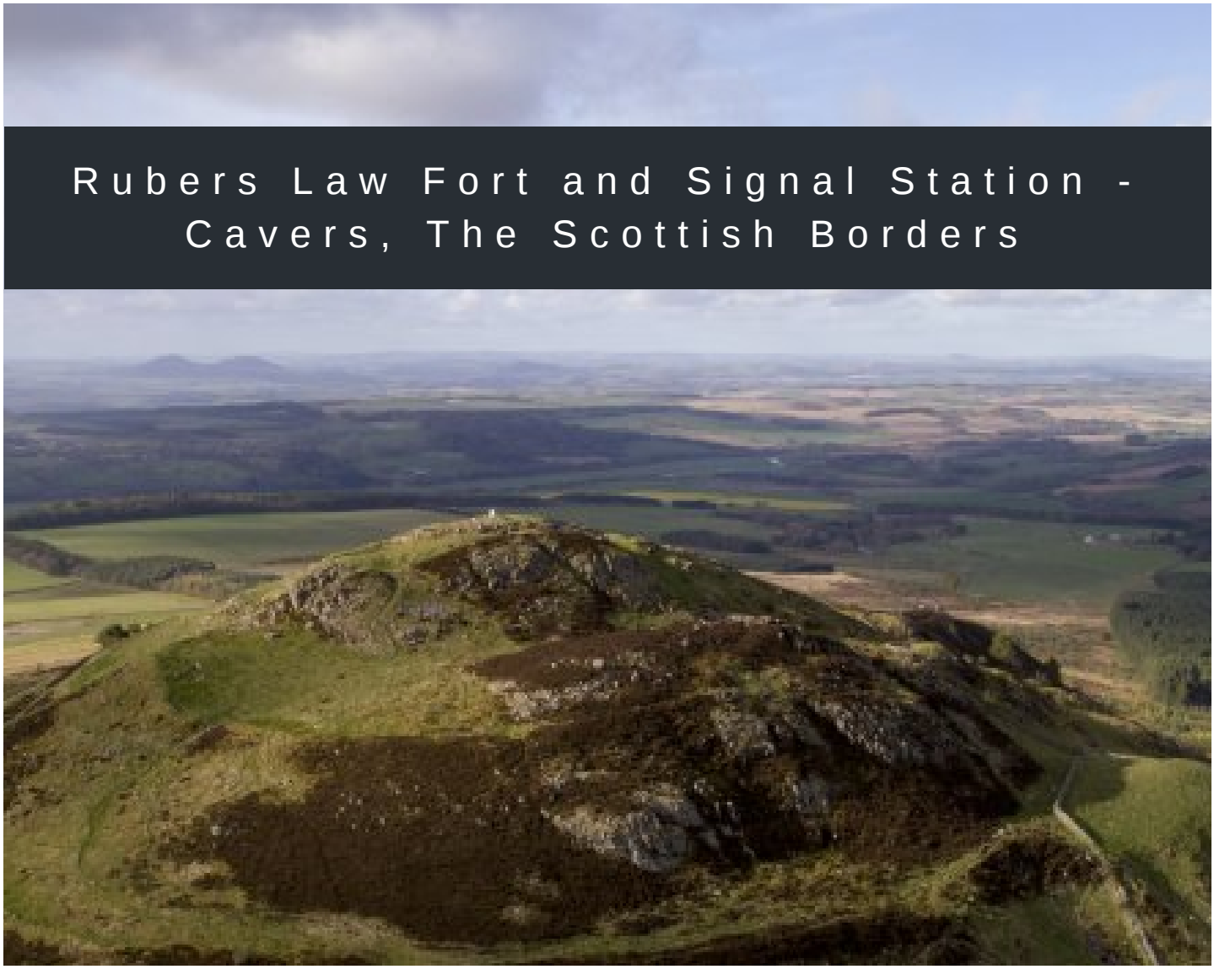

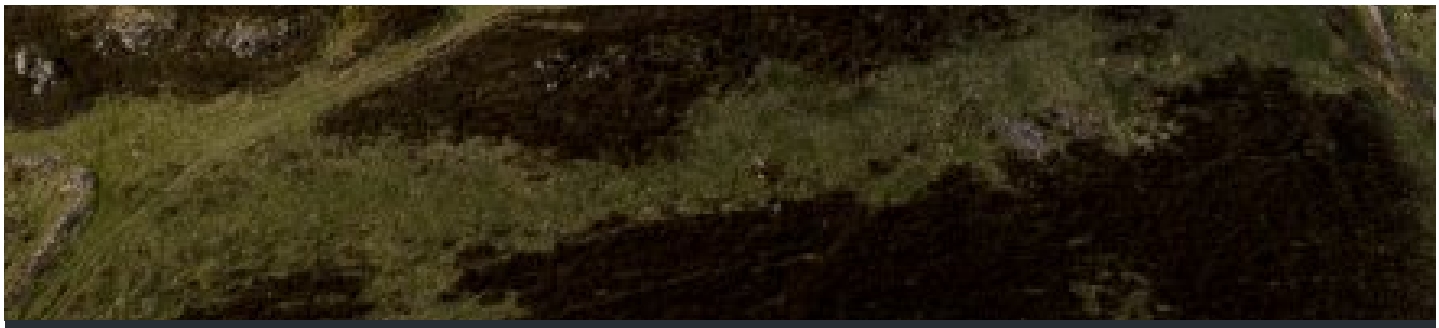

Location and landscape

Rubers Law, which is situated about 5 miles (8km) south-west of Jedburgh and 4 miles (7km) east of Hawick, is one of the most distinctive hills in the Scottish Borders. Rising steeply to almost 425m (1400ft) above Teviotdale, its lower flanks are formed of old red sandstone, while its lofty, rocky summit is composed of igneous rocks. These influence the land-use, with the improved ground around its broad, expansive skirt gradually giving way to a sourer, rougher pasture at higher elevations until the summit is reached, where there is very little vegetation to clothe the sharp ridges, deep gullies, small plateaus and screes.

From here the landscape far below unfolds to reveal the familiar silhouettes of the Eildon Hills and the Lammermuirs to the north, the Cheviots to the east and south and the hills of Selkirk, Roxburgh and Dumfries far away in the distant west.

There are ancient remains on the upper slopes of Rubers Law. In making an ascent from the north, the west, or south, one first encounters a discontinuous, grass-grown, natural terrace upon which there is the tumbled debris of a discontinuous, boulder-faced wall, which encloses almost 3 ha (7ac). This is an Iron Age fort. There are two entrances on the north, where gullies offer an easy approach and another on the south. Much of the broken ground the fort encompasses consists of the rocks that outcrop immediately below the hill's bare summit. These support the remains of further collapsed walls looping from outcrop to outcrop.

Although it can be difficult to perceive their overall plan, these curling walls define a roughly oval enclosure interrupted by a deep gully on the hill's peak, while lower down on the south, there is a roughly rectangular plateau that also incorporates a gully. There is an entrance on the east-north-east providing access to the oval enclosure on the summit, the approach to which is controlled by the natural configuration of outcropping rocks to the north, which are reinforced by further lengths of walling. A narrow path descending from the south-west of the oval enclosure provides a link with the plateau below.

The lost Roman building

These remains were first recognised by Alexander Curle at the beginning of the 20th century, who also made a startling discovery. The walls forming the enclosure and plateau consisted for the most part of the grey igneous rocks outcropping on the summit, but their lower courses also included sporadic, neatly-shaped rectangular blocks of pale red sandstone, some of which displayed 'diamond-broaching' – a criss-cross pattern scored into one surface that is characteristic of Roman work. Others exhibited herring-bone patterns, while some appeared to have formed sills or lintels. Curle concluded that these could only have been robbed from some abandoned Roman building that had once stood in the immediate neighbourhood. He also noted that their incidence clearly demonstrated that the fortifications around the summit (embracing the oval enclosure, its outworks to the north and the rectilinear plateau) could only have been constructed after the Romans had left Scotland. The blocks had been re-used as raw material in the construction of a new stronghold that had been built perhaps several hundred years after the abandonment of the Iron Age fort.

Nevertheless, the location of this lost Roman building in such an exposed and hostile environment was a puzzle. While they could have been robbed from a military post situated on the lower flanks of the hill, Curle could find nothing to support this. Instead, he surmised that the edifice must have stood upon the summit, 'from whence a most extensive prospect would make it suitable for a post of observation, or for a signalling station'.

This idea was subsequently developed by Professor J. K. St Joseph of Cambridge University, who in the latter part of the 1940s discovered from the air the remains of a small Roman fortlet on the flanks of Brownhart Law in the Cheviots. Impressed by the extensive view to the north where Rubers Law dominated the centre-ground, he concluded that this must have been used for long distance signalling, with both sites forming part of a system exerting control over Southern Scotland. In the next few years, further weight was added to this hypothesis by the discovery of the earthworks of a possible timber watchtower on the summit of Craik Cross amongst the mountains far to the west, while those of another was recognised on the top of Eildon Hill North, sited immediately above the Roman fort of Newstead – the most important military post in the region.

However, it is now generally accepted that long-distance signalling would have been impractical and an explanation for the Roman stonework at Rubers Law still remains elusive. While the blocks could derive from a stone watchtower with a much more local remit, it is also possible that they originate from a shrine or some other kind of landmark.

A T Welfare

https://canmore.org.uk/site/55249/rubers-law
http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/SM2129
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