

9th, *On certain Vitrified [and Unvitrified] Forts in the neighbourhood of Loch Ness and the Moray Firth. By George Anderson, Esq. F. R. S. Edin. &c. In a Letter to Dr Hibbert.*

MY DEAR SIR,—I am now enabled to submit to you a few observations on the series of vitrified stations in this quarter. Their positions, as far as I could determine them, you will find marked on the accompanying sketch, taken from Arrowsmith's Map of Scotland.¹ The actual appearances of each I shall endeavour to describe, without obtruding on your attention anything like theory, further than what exists in the attempt to point out a connection of the several stations with one another. You will have to recollect, however, that in the following enumeration I have included those eminences which are crowned by stone walls, whether those walls are vitrified or not; and that I leave it to future inquirers to say, whether the vitrification has been accidental, or whether the structures wanting that mark are of a different era from those which possess it.

The Ord of Kessock² having been described, I now come to mark the most important feature of this station, viz. its command of eminences crowned with structures similar to its own. The most conspicuous and prominent hill in the extreme distance towards the east is the Bein Hill of Cullen.

The second is Castle Finlay, bearing from the Ord E. 10° south, but not easily discernible.

The third is very conspicuous, and is known by its tabular summit. This is Dun Evan, lying S. E.

In front is Dun Daviot, with a similar tabular hill close by it (which I have not examined), bearing S. 5° E.

Another very conspicuous hill, which I suspect to be one of the series, lies due south, distant about 10 miles.

And in the S. S. W., standing out a little apart from the chain of mountains which conducts the eye towards Loch Ness, is Chastal Dun Riachy.

¹ As it is very possible that before another fasciculus of these Transactions is published, an addition may be made to the number of vitrified sites in Inverness-shire, &c. the map may be prudently postponed.

² Much matter is omitted regarding the Ord of Kessock, as it is contained in the separate and more detailed account which Mr Anderson has given of this vitrified site.

Immediately beneath us, bearing S. W., is Craig Phadrick; and beyond it the long winding shores of Loch Beaully, over which the mountains of Strath Glass and Strath Conon rise in grand rugged lines, and bound the horizon on the west.

Looking towards the village and carse lands of Beaully, the eye will catch the projecting ridge on which the chain of forts lately brought to light by Sir George Mackenzie are placed, and of which the highest, Dun-an-Avor, is very conspicuous, bearing due west.

A little to the left, lying W. S. W., the dark wooded hills of Moniach present themselves, forming a cluster, among which is embosomed the vitrified station of Castle Spynie.

And lastly, turning towards the north-west, we may discern the long ridge of Knockfarril, surmounting the bold cliffs and wooded policy of Brahan.

Having thus pointed out the positions of those structures visible from the Ord of Kessock, and most of which are vitrified, it is now my object to give a short detail of the peculiarities of each, and to trace out the mode of communication which I have fancied can be established between them and the interior districts of the country.

BEIN HILL OF CULLEN.—I have remarked that the most conspicuous and prominent hill in the extreme distance towards the east is the Bein Hill of Cullen; but I know not whether it has been remarked as a hill-fort, or as a beacon or ward-hill. It is, however, distinctly visible in fine weather from the Ord of Kessock, from which also a station more celebrated (see Chalmers), that on the Clunie Hill at Forres, is discernible with greater ease, lying almost due east.

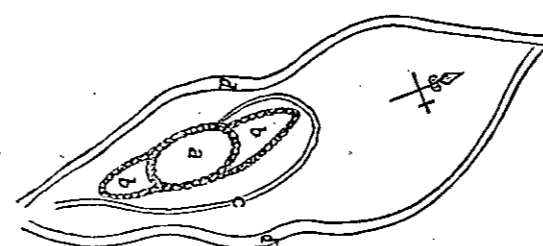
I shall assume, then, this as the first station yet known on the south side of the Moray Frith, of the great series of vitrified forts which stretch towards the West Highlands.

CASTLE FINLAY.—The station I noticed after that at Forres was Castle Finlay. It occurs near the old Castle of Raits, about three miles south of the town of Nairn and two and a half east from Calder. Its position is rather curious, being not more than 150 or 200 feet above the level of the sea, and scarcely at all elevated above the surrounding moorland. On the south side of this station a high mountainous ridge occurs, screening it from a sight of the plains of Moray and of the hill at Forres; and being placed on one of the lower acclivities of this ridge, Castle Finlay itself is scarcely visible till you approach very near to it. Its exact locality is near the junction of a great deposit of gneiss with a newer sandstone, both of which are partially concealed by a very deep bed of alluvial matter or gravel. This gravel has been furrowed out to a great depth by the alpine torrents which descend from the hills above; and it has been on a small knoll or islet, round which two of those streams sweep and detach it from the adjoining moor, that the builders of Castle Finlay, whoever they were, chose to pitch their insignificant but almost inaccessible fort.

In addition to its natural strength of position, Castle Finlay has had a ditch partly cut round its base. The summit is of an oval shape, extending from north to south, and is about 35 paces long by 15 broad. It is surrounded only by one wall, placed exactly on the edge, and which, as elsewhere, seems to have been either thrown down, or subjected, I should think, to more than ordinary atmospheric causes of dilapidation.

Almost the entire circuit of the wall is vitrified, and large masses of detached stones, united together by the vitrifying process, are found among the other fragments on all sides of the knoll. The height of the summit above the adjoining burns is from 60 to 80 feet; that of the wall, especially of the vitrified part, seldom above 2 feet.

Plan of Castle Finlay.



- a, Summit, surrounded by one wall.
- b, Projecting parts of the bank below, on which there are partial indications of outer defences.
- c, Ditch extending along the base.
- d, Burns running in the bottom of two deep ravines.

In no instance have I seen the portions of rock composing the walls more completely vitrified than on this little structure; and, in particular, I here procured most beautiful specimens of vitrified gneiss, possessing a prismatic form, with four and six sides. The substances chiefly acted upon are sandstone, gneiss, and granite; and in some of the larger grained varieties of the latter the felspar has been changed into a beautiful porcelain.

The hill-forts visible from Castle Finlay are, 1st, Dun Evan, lying W. S. W., distant about 4 miles; and, 2dly, the Ord of Kessock, bearing W. by N., Craig Phadrick being concealed by an intervening ridge. The Suters of Cromarty have a very peculiar appearance from this point; and I suspect similar structures to those we are considering will be found in the Cromarty Coast, with one of which Castle Finlay, like Kessock Hill and Craig Phadrick, was probably meant to correspond. My inquiries on this head have as yet been fruitless; but my suspicions are the more plausible, from the circumstance that Knockfarril, near Dingwall, is shut out from a view of the sea, except in the exact line between the Suters of Cromarty, to both of which it looks as to signal points.

DUN EVAN.—The next station is Dun Evan, of which I need give no description, as you examined it personally. It is sufficient to remind you of the extensive view enjoyed from the summit, and of the rugged character of the adjoining ground; which last feature is an almost universal attendant on all the structures in question.

DUN DAVIOT.—The fourth station in the order above mentioned is Dun Daviot. It lies about six miles west from Dun Evan, and the hill on which it occurs springs very abruptly from the north bank of the river Nairn. Like the rest, it is difficult of access except from the east and west, and it stands unconnected with any hill or ridge by which it might be overlooked or commanded. The shape of this Dun is that of a cone flattened on the apex, rising from a smooth sandstone ridge, which it exceeds in height by about 150 or 200 feet.

The area on the summit is 30 paces long by half as broad, and is surrounded by a single wall of loose stones, none of which appear to be vitrified, and which would, therefore, in ordinary antiquarian language, give to the structure the name of a British hill-fort.

The wall has been so completely removed or shaken, that its elevation is in no part more than two feet above the natural rock. The position of the hill, however, is worthy of particular remark. I believe, if my observations (taken a considerable time ago) were correct, that Dun Evan is not visible from it, but Craig Phadrick and the Ord are. Towards the south a great opening is seen stretching to the mountains of Badenoch, and it is through this opening that the military road from Perth has been conducted. Coming from the south, Dun Daviot seems like an island or projecting crag placed in the very centre of the opening, and therefore it is visible to the inhabitants both far and wide. It is also remarkable, that a hill considerably higher, lying a little to the west of it, but on the opposite side of the river Nairn, presents exactly the same kind of tabular summit as Dun Daviot, so that if a beacon were lighted upon it, it would be distinguished as far inland as Cairn Gorum.

The hill now alluded to, as well as Dun Daviot, afforded, as I understand, two very useful and important points of connection to the gentlemen conducting the Trigonometrical Survey, while taking angles between Cairn Gorum and Ben Wavis in Ross-shire.

But the most important circumstance connected with Dun Daviot is, that it brings us directly into view of the stations on Loch Ness, and thereby completes the chain lying between the sea and the interior of the Great Glen. An observer, looking from the summit of Dun Daviot, will find, in a direction nearly W. S. W., a low detached knoll, which is Dun Riachy, a station immediately to be described; but its position will not be easily detected, in consequence of the dark masses of rock which rise behind it.

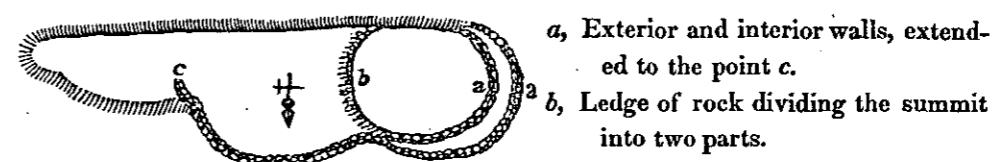
On turning, however, a little more to the south, a valley or opening will be perceived, bounded by two nearly parallel chains of mountains. Almost in the middle between those chains, and in the extreme distance, a round-headed, detached rock will be noticed, bearing S. 55° W. This rock is the well-known vitrified station of Dun Jardil, on the margin of Loch Ness, which is thus brought into the line of communication with the forts situated near the sea.

DUN-RIACHY, OR CHASTAL DUN-RI-CHUAN.—The singular structure next to be described has been raised on the summit of an isolated mass of rock, rising out of a flat boggy moor or table-land, situated about two miles south from the village of Dores, at the eastern extremity of Loch Ness. The whole southern side of the rock is a perfect precipice, nearly 100 feet high; and the opposite side, though not so steep, has been rendered by artificial means almost as difficult of access. The eastern portions of the knoll fall to the level of the adjoining moor by a succession of rocky terraces, the one lower than the one above it, and which combined produce a series of barriers or breast-works not easily surmounted.

The western side, therefore, affords the only regular ascent to the summit, and, as in the Ord of Kessock, we find it compassed across by two very strong walls forming segments of circles bulging outwards, but united at opposite corners into one. The points of junction overhang the natural precipice, and the gate-way or entrance seems to have been half way between them. The summit, the area of which is 75 paces long, by 15, 20, and 25 broad, is divided into two portions by a projecting ledge of rock; that on the east being rough and open, while the western portion is grass-grown, a little hollow in the centre, and of a round or oval form. One part, of a deeper cut than the rest, may perhaps have been a tank or well.

Both walls above described have evidently been reduced in height, as their fragments are strewn over all the western slope, and have partially filled up a kind of drain or ditch which ran along the base. Their strength and height must have been very great, as the building, I believe, is truly Cyclopean, being formed of huge irregularly shaped masses of stone, raised on a foundation eight or ten feet, and gradually tapering upwards.

Summit of Dun Riachy.



The masses employed in this structure are chiefly of a coarse conglomerate, with sandstone and granite, but none of them are vitrified. They are so well exposed, that I think if any vitrified matter existed among them, I could not have missed discovering it. I need only remark further, that the moor adjoining this knoll contains many cairns and stone circles, and that an immense collection of these which occurs in a spot about two miles eastward from Dun Riachy is pointed out as the field of a great battle between the race of Fingal and some Scandinavian invaders.

Craig Phadrick bears N. N. E., but Dun Jardil is concealed from view by an intervening chain of mountains. Most of the stations, however, lying to the east, above described, along the River Nairn, are visible from Dun Riachy.

DUN SCRIPPIN OR DUN SCRIBIN.—The next known station communicating with the one just described, and connecting it and Craig Phadrick with Dun Jardil, is Dun Scrippin or Dun Scribin. Its place is on the north side of Loch Ness, about two miles west from the Castle of Urquhart, on one of the ridges of the great mountain Meal-fourvoney. It is therefore nearly opposite to Dun Jardil, but I have not yet ascertained whether it is vitrified or otherwise, the fact of its existence having been but very recently made known to me. From its great height, however, I am certain Dun Scrippin must command many, if not the most distant, of the stations I have now alluded to; and the view from it, I know, extends westward into the innermost recesses of the Great Glen.

Dun Jardil I need not describe to you, nor Tor Duin, near Fort Augustus, which is the most inland vitrified station hitherto noticed.

I have only to state my regret with regard to the last, that I have not yet ascertained whether it is in view of any other lying farther to the west, or whether it is connected with any chain stretching up Glengarry towards the confines of the west coast.

I will now briefly point out the connection between the chain just traced, and those occurring along the river Beauy. Craig Phadrick and the Ord of Kessock seem to be intermediate or common to both; and from Dun-an-Avor a signal might also be taken up from Dun Jardil on Loch Ness and Knockfarril in Ross-shire.

The series westward from Dun-an-Avor has recently been brought to light by Sir George Mackenzie, who has satisfactorily pursued his investigations to the heights of Glenstrathfarar and Strathglass.

I have not yet had sufficient proof to show that this series is connected with that above described, and therefore I shall not now detail the means I have undertaken to discover whether a chain extends across the island in this direction from the east to the west coast.

Having now finished my description, I ought perhaps to apologise for using the words *chain* and *connection* so often, as if I had established an actual relation or identity of design between the several structures, or shown them to be all of the same era, or to have been used by a people so far associated as to combine in one general scheme for their mutual protection. On these difficult points I am not now prepared to enter, and I shall therefore only remark at present, that the connection I have sought after was that of discovering the several stations to be within sight of one another. The opinion I find most prevalent respecting these structures, and that to which at present I feel most disposed to agree, is that they were used, not only as places of retreat and defence, but also as alarm or beacon posts; and in this latter supposition I am not only favoured by the analogy of feudal customs and the mottoes and war-cries of the Celtic Clans, but in many instances by descriptive local names, as, for instance, by that of Clachnaherry, the lower rocky point of Craig Phadrick,

meaning the watchman's stone, or the point where in general the "warder held his guard;" and Balcarras, or Balcharras, in Fifeshire, signifying the look-out or watch-tower.

I cannot, however, omit remarking before I conclude, the uniform connection which all the traditions extant respecting these hill stations or forts have to facts and stories about Scandinavian inroads and invasions.

Thus Chastal Dun Riachy has been interpreted by the late reverend author of a paper on the parish of Dores, contained in the Statistical Reports, as meaning the *stronghold of the Great Ocean King*, or Vikingr; and accordingly he details the common tradition that such a personage held possession of the country till he was met in battle and overthrown by Fingal or some of his heroes.

A crevice in a rock near Dun Riachy is still called Fingal's chair. In like manner, Dun Jardil was described to me by the country people as the seat or fort of the King of Lochlin's daughter; and with regard to the valley of Urquhart, and some of the names of places well known in it, every tradition about them is purely Scandinavian.

Thus the learned author of an Inquiry into the Origin and Descent of the Gael, Mr Grant of Corrymony, has favoured me with the following circumstances respecting the name of his own estate.

A Scandinavian prince, whose title, at least according to Celtic pronunciation, was Moni-Mor-Mac-Ri-Lochlin, that is, the Great Moni, the son of the King of Lochlin, landed at a place in Argyleshire, since called Pass-Moni, near to the present entrance of the Crinan Canal. He was there met by the natives, and being defeated, was obliged to retreat northward towards Lochaber. Attempting to penetrate through the Great Glen, he was forced to take up his station on a rocky hill near the entrance of Urquhart, called Craigmoni, where he defended himself for a long time, till at last being decoyed from his strong ground, he was pursued up the glen, and was overtaken and killed at a place called Delmoni, or the Field of Moni. There, by the banks of a small rivulet on the edge of a field, his grave or tumulus is still shown; and the adjoining hollow also resounds to his name in the appellation of Corrymony.

Mr Anderson has concluded his very laborious and successful investigations by some interesting hints relative to the supposed connection between these vitrified sites and other remote and obscure remains of antiquity, such, for instance, as standing stones, small stone circles, and cairns. But on account of the length to which these various communications have run, his remarks on this head must be deferred.