

Description of the Encampments on the Hill of Burnswork.

To the Secretary of the Antiquarian Society.

SIR,

EXPECTING that observations on subjects of antiquity will be received by your Society, though transmitted by persons unconnected with it, I have taken the liberty of sending to you the following account. It may perhaps be esteemed imperfect by those who examine the spot. If the Society send any one for that purpose, I shall be well pleased. I wish to see the antiquities of my country investigated; and will be happy to contribute my assistance, if it will be of any service to a Society, the professed purpose of which, is to pursue that branch of knowledge.

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I had lately an opportunity of visiting a hill in Annandale, much talked of by antiquaries in that part of the country: It stands northwest from Annan, at the distance of eight miles. It is detached from the south side of that chain of mountains, which run across the island from Northumberland to Galloway. The country around it, though not very level, may be called a plain, when viewed from its summit.

To this hill, which has the name of Burnswork, many resort in the summer, on account of the agreeable prospect which it commands. On the north the view is confined, and the country barren; to the west, all the valley is washed by the Annan, and lies open, from Moffat to the Solway frith; on the east, you penetrate far into the wilds of Northumberland, about the heads of South Tyne; all the low country of Cumberland lies full before you, gradually rising from the frith, till the scene terminates in the romantic falls of Keswyck, among which the lofty Skiddaw, towering pre-eminent, forces itself on your attention. The lowering Criffel, on the Scottish side, shuts up the prospect of the less level country about Dumfries. The frith of Solway adorns the middle of the plain, and greatly brightens the prospect; appearing near Langholm as a moderate river, it gradually spreads out to your view; in some places sending its waters far into the country, these seem detached like lakes; proceeding on, it widens along the plain, and expands to a sea.

This hill attracts the attention of the antiquary, by the distinct remains of encampments, with which a considerable part of it is covered. On each side of the hill there is a camp, which gives every evidence of having been formed by the Romans. On the top there are also the remains of fortifications. Some think it very difficult to account for the conduct of the Romans, in choosing so high and inconvenient a place for their encampment: I shall attempt a general

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ral description of these camps, and then give the conjecture which I formed when I visited them.

Before you reach the plain ground, at the foot of the hill, from the southeast, there is a very gradual rise of near two miles. The hill itself is oblong, and runs from northeast to southwest. The ascent at first is gentle, and becomes gradually more difficult as you approach the summit; near the top it is rocky and nearly a precipice for a considerable way round, especially to the north and west. In the places not rocky, it is very steep. On the top there is an irregular plain, three hundred yards in length, and one hundred and fifty yards or upwards in mean breadth. It is divided into two by a small hollow, by which the west part, which is the smallest, is rendered nearly circular. Around this there are evident remains of a wall, composed of earth and stones; and within that, some confused marks of building. The traces of a wall may also be seen running from this inclosure around the eastern part, except in those places where the rock rendered it unnecessary. There are plain marks of a road at the distance of half a mile, coming from the south to the top, which gradually ascends the side of the hill, and enters the fortifications where they join at the hollow place in the middle. On the west end, where it is rocky, there is the appearance of a road cut in a sloping direction down the face of the rock. The fortification on the west part of the summit, measures about one hundred and eighty yards in diameter; the eastern part is not above one hundred and fifty yards at the broadest, and about two hundred and eighty in length. Near the center of this there is a small hillock, higher than the rest, composed of loose stones, now covered with earth.

The camp, which lies on the side of the hill, to the southeast, is the most entire; the upper side is within an hundred yards of the fortifications on the summit. It is formed of a rampart with a large
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ditch, so well preserved, that the top of the rampart is still eight feet perpendicular above the bottom of the ditch. This side measures about two hundred and forty yards, and hath three gates at equal distances. The east side measures one hundred and thirty yards, and has one gate near the upper side of the camp. On the corner, above that gate, there is a strong fortification, not above twenty yards square, separated from the camp by a rampart and deep ditch. The lower side of the camp measures two hundred and sixty yards, and has only one gate in the middle. The west side is not carried in a straight line, it bends a little outward, and measures about two hundred yards, and has one gate a little above the middle. All the gates are fortified with a small mount, cast up a few yards before each, and having a deep ditch in front. The three gates on the upper side have mounts larger than the others.

The camp on the northwest side is considerably different. The summit of the hill is more steep than on the other side. The camp is lower down, and is longer than the first, but not so deep. The upper side has only two gates, with a front of two hundred and eighty yards; the west side appears to have two gates, although only about eighty five yards in length; the ground on the lower west corner is wet and soft, and on that account the traces are very indistinct. The lower side is three hundred yards long, and seems to have two gates; the east side has only one gate, very near the lower end, and measures about one hundred yards. The two gates on the upper side of this camp, have also mounts before them, but the others seem to have had none.

To the south of this camp, near the foot of the hill, there are some springs, one of which is large, and appears to have been fortified. Below the south corner of the hill, on a plain, there is a small encampment, nearly circular in its form.

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The whole suggested to me the idea of a siege. The natives, from the plains, had conveyed their cattle and effects to the top of the hill, and increased the natural defence by walls. The Romans divided their forces into two bodies, and placed one on each side of the hill. This accounts for the difference in the form and gates of the camp, from that plan which they usually formed in their encampments. The camps are not square, the lower side is considerably longer than that which fronts the hill. The gates in this front are more numerous, to enable them to form the troops more expeditiously so near the enemy; and well fortified, to protect them in case of a retreat. The principal attack has been carried on by the camp on the southeast side; there the hill is most accessible. The natives could have no water on the top. Perhaps they cut the road down the rock on the west end, for getting down unobserved to the springs below. In order to prevent them, the principal well has been fortified and guarded. To support the guards readily, has perhaps been the reason for having two gates in that narrow side of the camp on the back of the hill. The party stationed in the small encampment on the south side, had been placed there to watch the motions of the natives, if they should come down in a large body to force their access to the springs, or to make their escape.

If this hill was the refuge of the natives in the time of the Romans, it perhaps often served the same purpose in the wars between the Scots and English. To this period we may refer the road which leads from the lower ground up the hill, if not also part of the fortifications on the top. The cairn, on the eastern summit, was perhaps raised as a place for lighting fires, as beacons for the country in cases of invasion. But the camps, on each side of the hill, can never be ascribed to the English; they bear every mark of being formed by the Romans.

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The army which served there, was perhaps that which served under Agricola. This hill is near the road, by which it is probable, he marched into the north; for he appears to have marched his army up the banks of Annan, and then to have crossed the mountains and descended into the valley on Clyde, near the head of that river.

The banks of this river, above Lanark, afford a fertile subject for an antiquary, though they have received few visits from such a character. A Roman army has spent the winter in that country. The head quarters are about three miles to the east of Lanark. Small cantonments are scattered along the eminences, up each side of the river, for seven or eight miles. Some of these still retain the name of *Co-wherds*, from *cobortium*. Several remains of the Roman way are still to be seen. A bridge over a small river near Lanark, usually ascribed to the Picts, may perhaps claim the honour of being built by Roman hands. At the foot of a hill, called Tinto, west from Biggar, there are still the plain vestiges of a Druidical temple, which is perhaps the largest in North Britain.