

III.

ON THE PREHISTORIC FORTS OF THE ISLAND OF BUTE.

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Nearly every commanding and impregnable eminence in Bute seems, at one time or other, to have been occupied by a fort—composed either of a rampart of earth or a stone wall. These I treat of from their simple up to their complex form.

1. *Dunallunt* (Dun-allerd) or *Cnoc-an-dune* (342 feet) is a grass-grown hill, whose top is entirely enclosed within an earth-built fort, 120 feet in diameter. The steep slopes on the north and east sides are cut by a ditch, out of which an earthen fence has been raised, apparently as an outer defensive circumvallation. The earth wall on the top is considerably flattened down. Within the circle on the north side four hollows appear, as if they indicated the sites of primitive houses.

2. *Cnoc-an-rath*, or Tom-en-raw (the hill of the rath or fort), is a circular earthwork thrown up on the ridge, at North Bute church (122 feet), between *Ettrick Bay* and *Kames Bay*. It is still entire, is surrounded by a stone wall built by Lord Bannatyne, and is planted with firs, among which is the tomb of a former proprietor.¹ The fort is an irregular circle, 88 feet and 91 feet in diameters. The fosse is 10 feet deep. In early Celtic times a homestead was called a *Rath*, because within its enclosing wall, *rath*, the house and cattle-houses were built.

3. *Aitrick* (Atrig, Athrioehg, *Ettrick* (Pont has *Ettricks*), or *Cnoc-an-Rath*, Ordnance Survey), is a huge green mound, situated in the valley of *Drumachloy*, 180 yards west of the farm-house of *Nether Ettrick*, at the junction of *Drumachloy* and *Ettrick Burns*. It has every appearance of having been formerly a fortified place. According to Mr *Lytteil* (*Landmarks*, p. 300), "Great quantities of the stones which formed the ramparts have been removed within the memory of persons still living in the island. From north to south the fort would be about one hundred paces in length, and the breadth from east to west about fifty-four paces." The upper surface of the mount is oval in

¹ James Hamilton of Kames, born 14th July 1775, died 5th January 1849.

form, and is 60 feet about the level of the burn at its western base. No traces of stone having been utilised in the ramparts are now visible, which leads me to think the circumvallation was of earth.

4. *Nether Ardroscadale*.—On the crest of the ridge above, and north-west of this farm, exists the outline of a circular fort of a simple character, the circumvallation being of earth, unless the stones have been totally removed. It is 80 feet in diameter. The walls of what may have been folds to the south of this circle, composed of huge stones, are still lying partly *in situ*.

5. *Dunallunt* (No. 2).—The scanty remains of a circle, 80 feet in diameter, composed of stones and earth, are visible on the brow of a rocky ridge 50 yards above the road, direct west of Largivrechtan farmhouse.

6. *Dun Scalpsie* (pronounced locally Scaupsay) is reared on a bold precipitous rock overlooking the Bay of Scalpsie, and having an aspect towards Carnahouston, the Dunstrone of Lubas, Dunagoil, and other forts in Arran. It is also a dry-built, irregular, circular structure, composed of the stones lying at hand, some of which measure 3 feet by 2 feet. Some parts of the wall are still *in situ*, and the walls of the doorway remain 4 feet high, being composed of large stones. In the larger diameter, north and south, it measures 87 feet; south and east only 77 feet. The internal diameter is 54 feet. The walls vary in thickness, on the south-east side about 9 feet; north-west, at doorway, 14 feet 6 inches; north side, where the stones are piled 5 feet high, the breadth appears to have been 20 feet. The doorway piercing the wall at the north-west is barely 7 feet at the outer entrance and 10 feet at the inner. There is no appearance of wall passages. The south-east slope is defended by two fosses.

7. *Ardnahoe* is an irregular oval plateau crowning a high conglomerate rock facing Scalpsie Bay, and measuring about one quarter of an acre. On the land side it has been defended by a substantial rampart, 126 feet long, semi-oval in form, and composed of earth and stones, few of the latter remaining.

8. *Carnahouston*, on the confines of the farms of Ambrismore and Ardnahoe, was formerly a stone fort raised on the plateau overlooking

Scalpsie Bay, and opposite *Dun Scalpsie*. All that remains of it is an irregular circular mound about 70 feet in diameter, on which a few stones lie scattered (Blain's History of Bute, p. 37). The stones were removed for building purposes in the beginning of this century.

9. *Clachcarnie*, or Clachan Ard, on Ardscalpsie farm, is a small fortified enclosure on a bold rock looking down on the sound between Bute and Inchmarnock. The wall is a semi-oval work defending the S.S.E. side, and with a natural breastwork on the opposite side enclosing an oval space, in the longer diameter 72 feet, in the shorter 54. The wall, now cast down, has been 12 feet thick, and formed of the big stones plentifully lying at hand.

10. *Dunstrone* is a high rock surmounting the Sound of Bute, on the same ragged ridge as Dunagoil. Its eastern side is a wild precipitous cliff; the western is a steep grassy slope; the northern is a red sandstone cliff; the southern is steep but accessible, and by it is access to the top. The crest was crowned by an oval stone fort, measuring 77 feet by 42 feet in diameters. The wall seems to have been 4 feet thick. The contour of the western face is fortified by a strong dry-built outwork, now thrown into confusion. Parallel to this, farther down the slope, at distances varying from 9 feet to 4 feet, is a second wall, and many of the stones of both walls are yet *in situ*. The forts of Dunagoil, Ardnahoe, Carnahouston, Scalpsie, and Barone are in view of Dunstrone.

11. *Mecknock*, according to Blain (p. 91), "was a stone encampment on the confines of the farms of Nether Kilmory and Mecknock, which went by the name of The Fort; its materials were removed not many years ago towards building dykes on the first-named of these farms."

12. *Castle Cree* is a remarkable stronghold perched upon a huge clay-slate rock, almost perpendicular on three sides, which rises 50 feet above a meadow close to the west shore of Bute, upon the farm of Upper Ardrosedale. On the fourth side the rock is separated from the high ridge east of it by a deep natural fosse (which is not shown in the illustration). The top of the rock slopes to the west, and round a large portion of its rugged, irregular brow the walls of the fortification have been deftly built, wherever a foundation was secure, so as to include as

much free space on the crest as possible. A view of this almost heart-shaped site leads me to suppose that the configuration of the ground suggested a name for the castle—*Cridhe*, which is pronounced *Cree*, being the Gaelic for a heart. Parts of the walls are thrown into confused heaps, but at the eastern apex (the easiest assailed portion) the

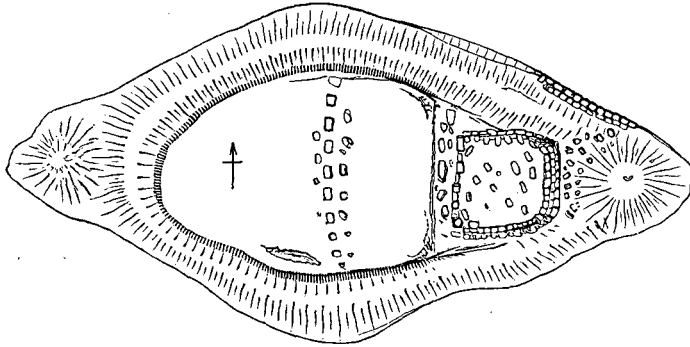


Fig. 1. Ground-plan of Castle Cree.

building is quite entire, and gives proof of the immense strength of the fort, that section of wall being over 20 feet thick. Here, within, three portions of the wall still stand, to the height of 4 or 5 feet, being substantially built of moderate-sized stones cleft from the adjoining rocks,—apparently forming a chamber (or a tower, 11 feet in diameter internally). These walls all round are 11 feet thick, and have no cementing medium. Without excavating, I cannot determine exactly whether the fort covered the entire rock or only a part of it, being oval in form, but I incline to the latter idea. The accompanying scale-plan will illustrate the present condition of this interesting ruin. It is also called Macrae Castle (*Landmarks*, p. 303) and Mackie's Castle (Blain, p. 91).

13. *Bicker's Houses*.—On a ridge of the heathy muirland between Barmore Hill and Kilmory Hill, looking down upon Loch Quien and Scalpsie Bay, are remains of what evidently has been an oval fort. It has not hitherto been mentioned by writers on Bute, nor marked on the Ordnance Survey. In its internal diameter, from north to south, it

measures 116 feet ; from east to west, 99 feet. Both on the northern and southern segments the walls are distinctly visible, and in the southern part, where the doorway has been, two or three courses of the wall are still standing. Here the wall is not so thick (4 feet) as on the northern side, where it is 8 feet thick. Such dimensions lead to the conclusion that it had been a fort. Strong walls in the vicinity have probably used up the larger stones of which it was composed.

14. *Aultmore* (great stream) is a stronghold or place of refuge, singularly situated on the south side of the precipitous declivity over-

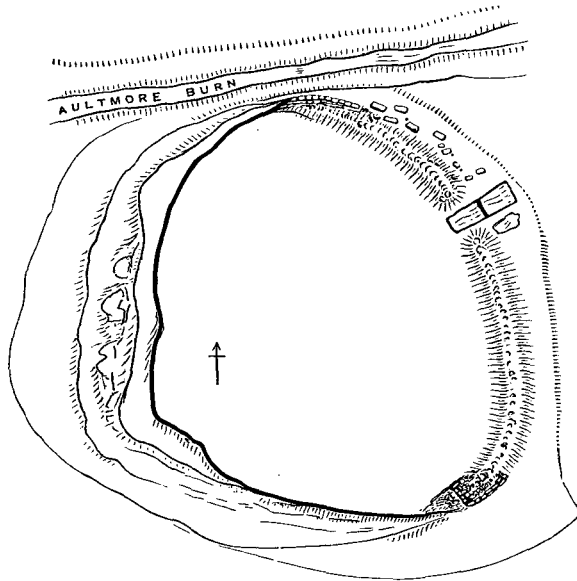


Fig. 2. Ground-plan of Aultmore Fort.

looking the gorge of Aultmore Burn in Kilmichael farm. A strong dry-stone wall, now overgrown with grass, brackens, and whins, 76 feet long, forming the arc of a circle, cuts off an irregular oval area, quite inaccessible on the other segments of the circle. This wall is 12 feet 9 inches thick on the south side, where it is fully exposed. At the

distance of 30 feet from the northern extremity it has been pierced by a doorway, to all appearances 3 feet wide. Lying in this doorway is a magnificent micaceous schist monolith, 8 feet 7 inches long, tapering from 22 inches to 18 inches broad, and 8 inches thick. In the middle, evidence of an attempt to halve the stone by cutting are visible. The diameter of the area, north-east and south-west, is 60 feet; south-east and north-west, 50 feet. On the south side the wall is nearly 6 feet above the level of the fosse.

15. *Cnoc-an-coigreach* (Hill of the Strangers) was a circular stone fort on Auchantirie farm, removed about fifty years ago to build dykes and drains. The stance is visible yet, and the plough sometimes turns up the "found." A tradition says a chapel stood here. In the same field several cists containing skulls have been found.

16. *Ardmaleish Fort* was a dry-stone fort in sight of Eilean Buidhe, which formerly stood on a crest between the farm-house and Ardmaleish Point. According to Blain (p. 114), it was removed to build dykes. "Among the ruins were found two pairs of querns or hand-mills, indicating that the aborigines were not only acquainted with the raising of corn, but knew how to convert it into meal, towards their subsistence. The only other discovery worthy of remark was a few of the lower steps of two stairs, provided for the convenience of the people when they had occasion to ascend the wall." The circular foundations are partly visible, and it seems to have been 80 feet in diameter.

17. *Drumgirvan*, according to Blain (p. 117), was an oblong war-station, a mile south-east of Barone Hill. On a rocky ridge overlooking Barone farm and Loch Fad, on the boundary of Auchamore Wood, are the distinct remains of walls built on the rocky ground as a defence to what seems to have been a "fank" or "stell" for cattle. On the west side there is a deep trench behind the wall. The circular wall round the fold has been of turf. From the irregular outline of these works, I conclude that this place of retreat had been improvised in a hurried manner, perhaps in more modern times. The Ordnance Survey omits it.

18. *Barone Fort*.—The crest of Barone Hill (529 feet) is encircled by the remains of a very strong fortification, dry-built with the stones

easily procured out of the slate-rock of which the hill is composed. The stronghold has enclosed an oval area, 200 feet in diameter east and west, and 145 north and south. The wall has varied in thickness from 10 to 12 feet. While the greater part of it is dismantled, a good specimen of it is afforded on the south-east side, where the massive stones remain *in situ* to the height of over 3 feet, and give indication of an attempt to vitrify them. The steep rocky ascent on the northern face rendered a wall so heavy less necessary, and in consequence the foundation of it there is less distinct. An outer defensive wall, of no less massive proportions, had been thrown round the fort in the shape of a lozenge, so as to completely utilise the natural strategic position of the rocky summit. To this secure retreat the burgesses of Rothesay and their families fled in times of hazard.

19. *Dunburgidale*.—This compound word gives traces of the successive occupants of the stronghold—Brythons, Goidels, and Northmen. It is a circular stone fort situated in a hollow on the ridge of hills overlooking the valley of North Bute and the Bay of Rothesay. It lies above Acholter farm. It occupies a naturally round rock, with steep grassy approaches, and is in view of other forts on the island and mainland. There are no outer defences. The walls are dry-stone, built with the material scattered in the vicinity, but are much thrown down, without, however, destroying the outline of the fort. The stones are not larger than those used in ordinary dykes. On the north side a portion of the wall, 6 feet high, is still in good condition. The outer diameter is 90 feet or thereby; the inner 67. The walls measure from 10 to 14 feet thick, and are tunnelled on the west side by a passage 2 feet 3 inches broad, and still 2 feet 6 inches deep. This passage was exposed on the fort being carefully opened by the Marquess of Bute. The doorway pierces the E.S.E. wall, which is 14 feet thick, being in the inner side 6 feet broad, in the outer about 10 feet broad. The illustration will better explain this interesting memorial.

20. *Balilone* is marked on the Ordnance Survey as a circular cairn on the crest of the peninsula which juts into the north end of Loch Fad. At no distant date this peninsula was an island. In wet seasons it is so still. It was eminently suited for a stronghold, being a steep rocky ridge

on three sides, about 40 feet high. The fort, for such it was, is of oval shape, to suit the ground, and, roughly speaking, measures 84 feet from north to south, and 60 feet from east to west. Parts of the walls are still *in situ*, and seem only to have been about 4 feet thick, but in places

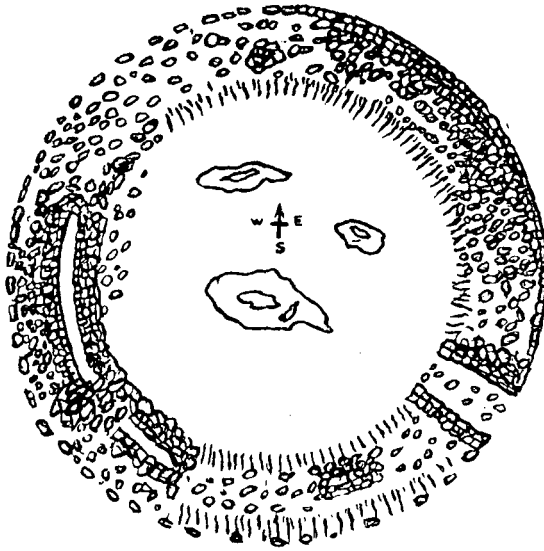


Fig. 3. Ground-plan of Dunburgidale Fort.

are built to the edge of the rock. Traces of small houses or built-retreats are visible within the wall. To obtain a proper estimate of the fort an excavation is necessary. On the west or land side of the island, where the natural defences are weakest, two very strong parallel walls, composed of huge stones, run southward for over 100 yards. Across the middle of the island another strong wall is seen, meeting a wall running south on the east side. These enclosures bear signs of cultivation in former times. According to the Ordnance Survey, a quern and arrow-heads were found on this spot. A little west of the fort is the stance of a steading, overshadowed by three old sycamore trees, which Dr Maclea in

his *Visiting Book* for 1774 marks as "Baileanloine waste" and tenantless.

21. *Dunagoil Fort*.—The south-west point of Bute is a very rugged and precipitous ridge of porphyritic trap, running parallel to the coast-line N.N.W., and, at that part called Dunagoil, terminating in a small grass-



Fig. 4. View of Dunagoil (from the west).

grown plateau, rising above the sea 100 feet, and on three sides quite inaccessible. On the north a face of perpendicular rock, columnar in formation, sinks into a little grassy dale,—once enclosed with walls,—wherein remain two cairns and two prehistoric graves, opened and found to contain human remains in the beginning of this century.¹ The westerly front drops sheer down upon the rough coast-land. The side extending to the S.S.E. is more of a rocky slope stretching downward to

¹ Blain's *Hist.*, p. 78.

the parallel crest of rugged rocks, swilled by the sea ; at the point there a capacious cave, yielding no "finds" as yet, pierces the headland. The access to the crest was apparently from the eastmost corner, but on the southern side, facing the sea, the wall is pierced by a gateway 8 feet broad. This indicates that here was the access from or egress to Port Dornach below. The upper contour of the side running to the S.S.E. is guarded by the crumbling ruins of a wall, which gives evidences of having been vitrified from end to end, although only here and there the vitrified portions are still *in situ*. The slope beneath is confusedly covered with the fragments of rocks and such *debris* of the fused wall as has not rolled into the hollow beneath. A rich dark soil covers the crest, and small bones lie scattered in the scooped-out stances of former dwelling-places, in which the nettles now grow in wild profusion.



Fig. 5. Elevation of Vitrified Wall of Dunagoil.

The wall itself, laid down in the shape of a bow, measures 285 feet in length, and generally speaking is 6 feet in thickness,—the greatest height of any part remaining being a little over 4 feet. This wall is built of the stone of which the rocky site is composed, and a few gathered stones. Some of the blocks in the wall measure over 2 feet long. Some of them bear no trace of fire-action, others are reddened, many are reduced to scorixæ or slag, while the remainder are roasted, glazed, or fused singly, or bound into solid masses throughout the line of the wall. At the south-west side, where the doorway is, the remanent stones have least felt the fierce fires of the vitrifying builder ; but below

this portion, on the slope, are scattered the roasted lumps of vitrescible matter, defying disintegration.

The most intact part of the wall, at the western extremity, is not vitrified through and through, but the *fused part* juts into the loose masonry which forms a backing to it—the vitreous stream having run into the interstices of the dry-built wall to form holdfasts, or simply penetrating like a wedge. Consequently, when the front face is undermined by the weather eating away the mould, or cattle displacing it, the vitrified blocks above being left to rest on movable foundations, are easily detached, and by their centres of gravity becoming displaced are toppled over. This accounts for the destruction of the upper portions of building otherwise so indestructible. Fortunately some of the lower parts of the wall are preserved, and from it we see that the fusing fires have only put

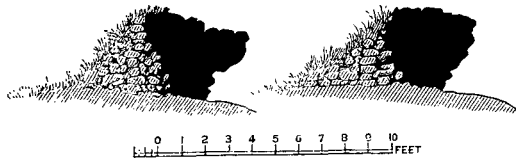


Fig. 6. Sections of Vitrified Wall, Dunagoil.

a hard face upon the rampart. I am indebted to Mr Honeyman, architect, for two sketches of sections of the wall at Dunagoil, exhibiting the union of the vitrification to the uncemented masonry.¹

The fusing has been most effective at the western extremity of the wall, and this I account for by the fact that, when the prevailing wind here—the south-west wind—was utilised to feed the fires playing on the outer face, the direction of the tongues of flame would be the same as that in which we find the vitrification greatest. Indeed, where the flame of this hot-blast—terrific at times, if so needed—was blown right through the angle of the wall at the westerly point, there the vitreous infusion is deepest, the vitrification most complete, and the material most compacted. This western part of the wall is 47 feet long. At its broadest portion

¹ *Note on a Vitrified Fort at Rhafresan, Arsmarnock, Argyleshire.* By John Honeyman, F.R.I.B.A., 1886.

it measures 5 feet 6 inches of solid vitrification in breadth, and 4 feet 4 inches in height. At the back of this mass lies a regularly built wall 3 feet 6 inches broad, the stones of which have also been subjected to fire, without however being fused. These stones resemble in size those used in ordinary dyke-building. The interstices between them are now filled with earth. I observe in the Eilean Buidhe Fort a similar proof that the vitrification is greatest exactly at those points where the strongest

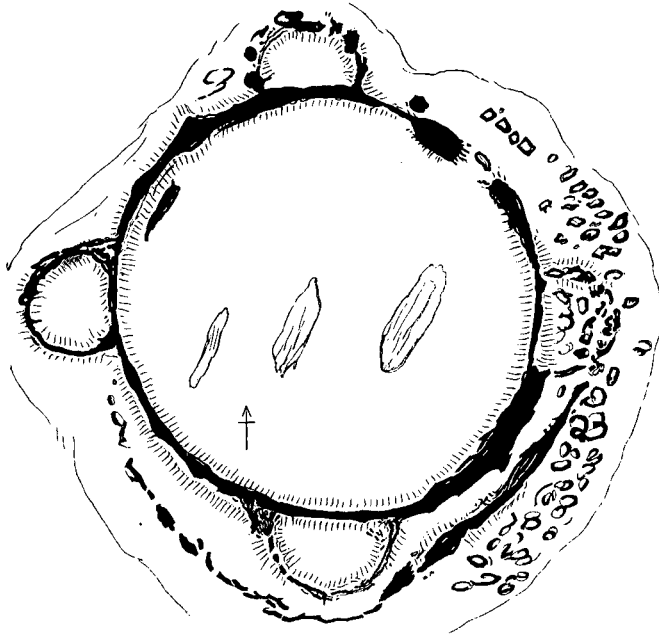


Fig. 7. Ground-plan of Vitified Fort on Eilean Buidhe.

wind—in this instance the south-east wind, by reason of the situation of the hills—blown up the Kyles as through the nozzle of a bellows, impinged upon the wall, an observation which may also account for the imperfect fusion of parts of the structure.

22. *Eilean Buidhe* (the yellow isle), one of the burnt islands, lies to the north of Bute in the Kyles of Bute, and is crowned with the re-

mains of a vitrified fort. The islet, composed of gneiss, is 21 feet above sea-level, and covered with scanty vegetation upon the summit only. The fort is a complete circle 67 feet in diameter from crest to crest of the ruined wall, which in many parts is quite levelled and overgrown with rough grass, through which the fragments of the vitrified work appear. At other points the wall is in good preservation, showing at the north-east a face 4 feet high and 5 feet thick, and also on the south-east a solid mass of vitrification over 5 feet thick.

What is a remarkable feature of this fort is the apparent stances of four towers at the cardinal points of the compass. Unless the upper portions of the wall in toppling over had occupied the ground in such a way that the material was ready to be utilised in later times for these little breast-works, a look of the ground is sufficient to suggest that there existed four little towers 14 feet each in diameter. And unless the south-west wall in falling only rolled down the bank a few feet, there has been an outwork on this, the most assailable side.

The doorway has been through the wall at the E.N.E. point, where the defence was strongest.

It is noticeable that the vitrification is best illustrated on the eastern half of the circle, and at those points where the blast, confined within the throat of the Kyles, was blown from the south-east with pointed, concentrated, and penetrating violence upon the masonry. It would be significant if the outer part of the wall on the south-east, and the inner part of the wall on the north-east, showed more traces of liquefaction than other portions, since at Dunagoil the most vitrified material is found in the direction of the prevailing wind.

In the body of the wall are seen stones which have not yielded to the fire, but, rendered friable, have been banded to the vitrescible stones by the vitreous stream.

A notice of Eilean Buidhe, by James Smith, Esq. of Jordanhill, will be found in the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, vol. x.

[The Society is indebted to Rev. Mr Hewison for the use of the blocks illustrating this paper, from his work on *The Isle of Bute in the Olden Time*.]