

V.

THE PREHISTORIC FORTRESSES OF TRECEIRI, CARNARVON, AND
EILDON, ROXBURGH. BY DR D. CHRISTISON, SECRETARY.

I. TRECEIRI.

Some apology, or at least some explanation, seems necessary in bringing forward the results of a few hours' visit paid in 1887 to Treceiri, better known, though perhaps less accurately, as Tre-r-Ceiri, after the numerous and more deliberate accounts in the *Archæologia Cambriensis* by distinguished Welsh observers; but the subject of the best preserved stone fortress in our island is not easily exhausted, and although I could not hope in so brief a visit to add anything of moment to the descriptions of my predecessors, it seemed to be a matter of some importance to record some points in which my impressions differed from theirs. My main object, however, has been to reproduce my drawings, because there can be no question that the illustrations hitherto published are totally inadequate to give a fair idea of remains of such unusual and even unique interest. These drawings have no other merit than a certain rude faithfulness, but I trust they may stimulate others more skilled

with the pencil, or still better, who are adepts with the camera, to give us worthy representations of these important ruins, which, although wonderfully preserved in some parts at present, may in no long time fall into a hopeless state of decay.

Passing by Pennant's account, which seems in a great measure unreliable, the first description of Treceiri worthy of notice is by Mr Jones Parry. This I have not seen, as it is unfortunately contained in a volume (*Arch. Camb.*, 1855) only to be met with by a rare accident. His plan, however, is reproduced by Mr E. L. Barnwell (*Arch. Camb.*, 1871, ii. 66), in the fullest account of the fortress yet published, and it agrees so well with the much smaller and less detailed plan of the Ordnance Survey (fig. 1) as to inspire confidence in its general accuracy. As Mr Barnwell was indebted to Mr Parry Jones, so am I to Mr Barnwell, for every fresh observer finds his labour on the spot greatly eased when he has had the advantage of studying beforehand the work of a careful and reliable predecessor.

Singularly enough the situation of Treceiri (fig. 2) bears a striking resemblance to that of the Eildon fortress, which forms the second of my subjects. Both are upon the most easterly and the second highest summit of a three-peaked hill, and from some points of view the pictorial likeness is most remarkable. Yr Eifl, the Welsh hill, however, has the advantage over its Scottish rival of being about 500 feet higher, and of rising on its western flank directly from the sea. The peak at this end is 1456 feet high, the central one being 1846 feet, and the eastern one 1590 feet. The fortress occupies the whole of the pretty level eastern summit, which nowhere falls much, if at all, below 1500 feet of elevation, and rises rather abruptly at the N.E. end, within the line of defence, to the actual peak. From the summit the ground falls to the north by long, steep, rocky, and stony declivities upon the gentler slopes at the foot, dotted with farmhouses and intersected by numerous stone dykes, as shown in fig. 2; but at the S.W. end, and partially on the N.W. side, there is a comparatively short and gentle descent to the neck which leads to the central peak (fig. 6).

The defences consist (1) of a wall of enceinte which girdles the edge of the summit; (2) of exterior lines on the more accessible part of the

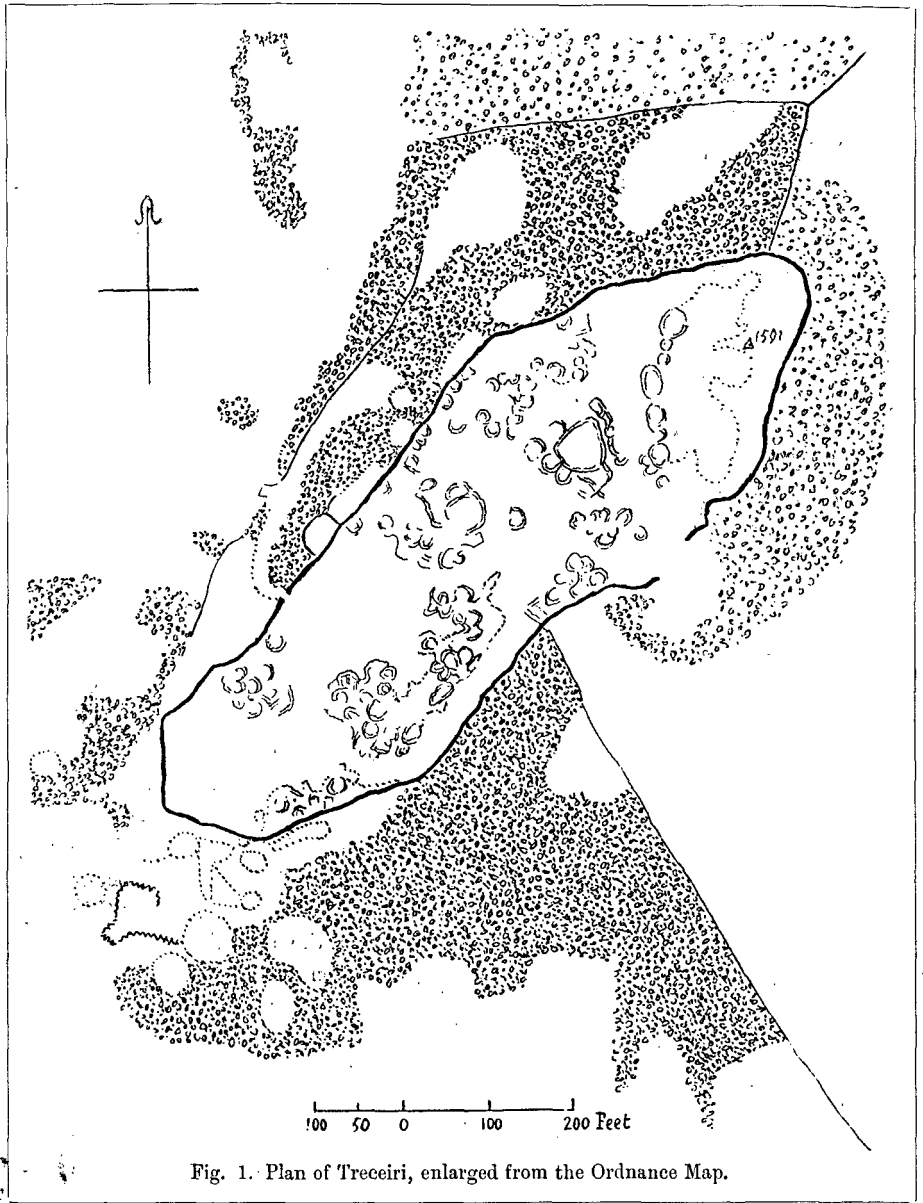


Fig. 1. Plan of Trecciri, enlarged from the Ordnance Map.

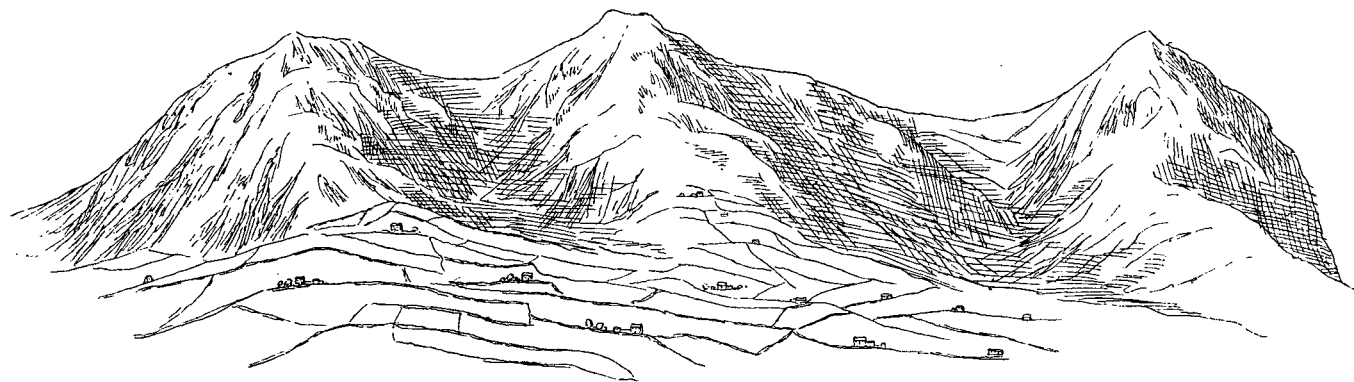


Fig. 2. The Hill Yr Eifl.

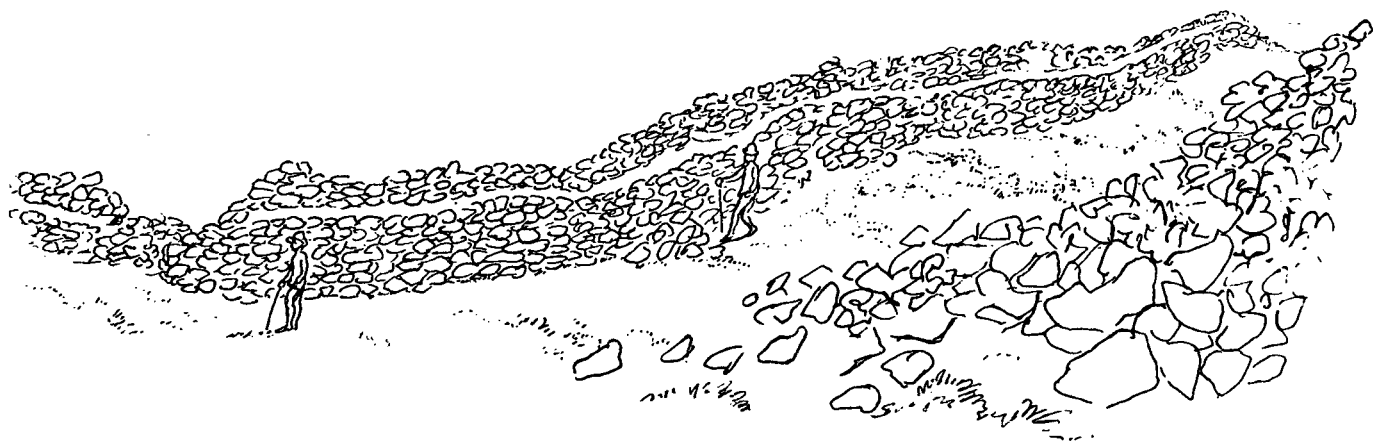


Fig. 3. Interior View of N.E. Wall, Treceiri.

N.W. slope; (3) of an elaborate series of works thrown out down the gentle S.W. slope to protect the entrance.

(a) The main wall, by reason of following the edge of the slopes, forms an irregular oval figure, enclosing a space about 960 feet in length by 350 towards the N.E. end and 230 towards the S.W. end. This is according to the 6-inch O.M., but Mr Jones Parry's plan makes it about 40 feet longer. The wall is completely ruinous for a great part of the circuit, but in some places, and particularly for a stretch of nearly 200 yards at the N.E. end, it appears to be pretty perfect (figs. 3, 4, and 5).

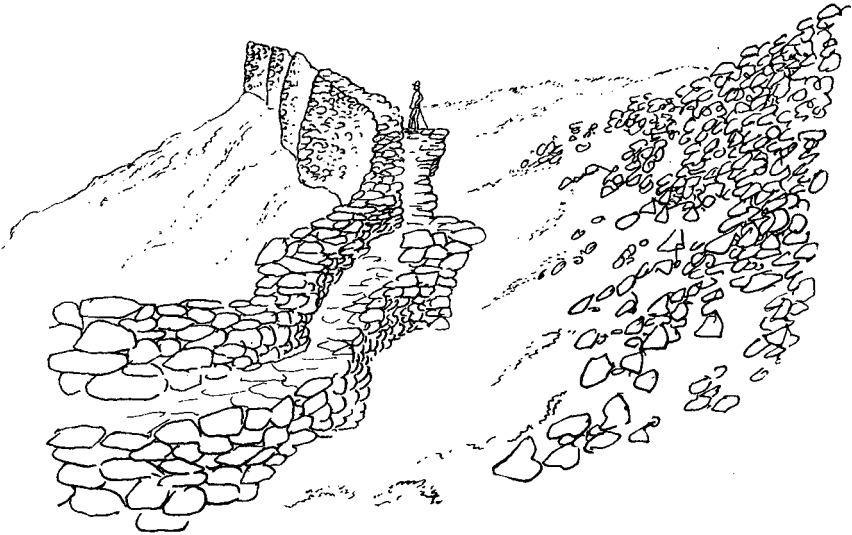


Fig. 4. Part of N.E. Wall, Treceiri.

Here the parapet remains, and I estimated the total height of wall and parapet to vary between 10 and 14 feet and the width to be 10 feet. But Mr Barnwell found the height in some places to be 15 feet, and thinks it would be more if the debris were cleared away. These heights are outside, but in consequence of the wall being constructed on the slope, the inner side, which is on the level of the interior, is usually 2 or 3 feet less in height than the outside. The width seems to

vary. I found it 10 feet at one point, but Mr Prichard (*Arch. Camb.*, iv., 1887, 259) reduces it to 9 feet, and Mr Barnwell made it as much as 16 feet for a short distance near a sally-port where he noticed a kind of double banquette. The wall has no batter, but stands perpendicularly, except where it bulges from decay. The parapet has no loopholes, is about 3 to 4 feet high, and according to Mr Prichard is 5 feet wide, so wide in fact, that as Mr Barnwell remarks, the defenders must have stood *on* it, to be enabled to annoy an enemy at or near the foot.

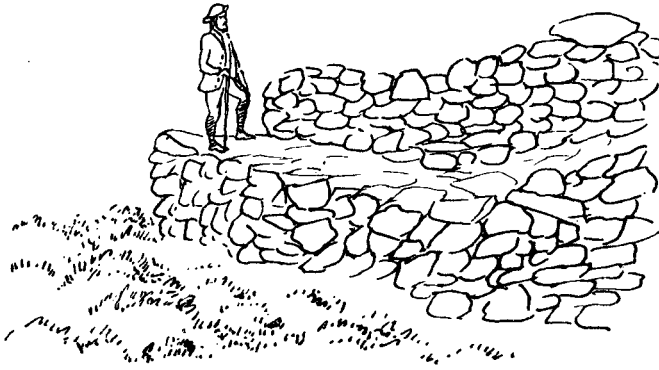


Fig. 5. Wall and Parapet, Treceiri.

(b) Pennant and Barnwell describe the comparatively weak N.W. front as being strengthened by two walls, which in Jones Parry's map are drawn irregularly parallel with the inner wall, enclosing an additional space of about 1000 by 250 feet, crossed by several traverses. I failed to make out either of these walls satisfactorily. In their present condition I took them for low retaining walls, but the difficulty of scrambling over so much rough ground, in the short time at my disposal, hindered me from making a thorough examination. My opinion was founded on the appearance of the visible structure left, on the absence of such mounds of debris as fallen walls of defence might be expected to leave, and on the apparently artificial spreading

of the debris which encumbers this outer space. This artificial character is further proved by the arrangement and extraordinary extent of the masses of debris, close to the more accessible parts of the fort (Plan, fig. 1); by the existence of broad heathery lanes, crossing obliquely the sheets of stones; and by the inner wall of enceinte having suffered little loss here, so that it could not have supplied the mass of debris that lies on the slope below, particulars which, besides what I take to be the retaining walls, are seen in the exterior view (fig. 6). Mr Barnwell was the first, I believe, to suggest that sheets of stones were purposely spread on the slopes of prehistoric forts to obstruct the approach of an enemy, having been led to this opinion by the artificial aspect of the masses lying not, as I understand his description, where I have just described them, but upon the steeper main slopes of the hill. The same idea often forced itself upon me when scrambling over stony masses in front of our Scottish forts, and I have seen an apparent instance of their use at the mediæval castle of Doon, Ayrshire. This interesting ruin is situated on a small, smooth rock-island in Loch Doon, and the whole space between the walls and the water, about 30 to 50 yards in width, is covered with loose blocks, certainly not derived from the castle wall of enceinte, which still stands to nearly its full height; although, alas! tottering to its fall, the stones of the pediment having been disgracefully allowed to be torn away a few years ago—a wanton destruction of one of the most interesting ruins in Scotland which is much to be lamented.

(c) The principal entrance is at the S.W. end, and extraordinary precautions have been taken to protect it. Unfortunately the elaborate defences are so dilapidated that it is extremely difficult to determine their precise nature. According to Jones Parry's plan, the approach is by a sinuous passage, only a few feet wide, like an elongated S, 210 feet in length, without following the curve. This passage winds through three walls on the western side and two on the east, which are not in a line with each other, and are roughly parallel with the main wall. A hornwork is thrown out on either side from the outer wall, that on the east being in advance of the one on the west, and a third hornwork is inserted in a wide space between the outer and

middle walls on the east side. All these hornworks closely flank the entrance.

But a totally different plan has been furnished to Mr Barnwell by Mr T. J. Blight, who represents the passage as straight, no less than 24 feet in width, and cutting through four advanced walls on the east side and three on the west, all straight and strictly parallel.

Comparing these two plans on the spot, my impression was distinctly in favour of the earlier one by Mr Jones Parry, particularly as regards the narrowness of the passage and its winding character, both of which seemed to me unmistakable. The small 6-inch Ordnance Plan differs from both, but resembles Mr Parry's much more than Mr Blight's, although it makes the total projection of the mass of outer defences only about 170 feet instead of 210.

A second important entrance, which I had not time to examine, is on the N.W. front, and is fully described by Mr Barnwell. There is also a sally-port through the N.E. wall (fig. 3 on the left), apparently much choked with debris since it was described by Mr Barnwell. He gives a view of it from the outside, showing the lintel in its place, believed to be the only one left in Wales. The width of the passage he found to be 6 feet, and Mr Parry Jones gives its height as 5 feet. Mr Barnwell describes and figures a kind of double banquette, running for a short distance on each side of the port in rear of the wall. But Mr Prichard, who took down a part of the lower step of the banquette, believed it was put as a support to the wall, which was giving way. I failed to notice this lower step, and it does not appear in my sketch (fig. 3). Mr Prichard believed also that the wall of the upper banquette was an integral part of the rampart wall, and that they were not independent, placed alongside of, and against each other, as in some Welsh, English, and Irish forts. In rear of the port, and leading towards it, there seemed to me to be the remains of a sunk passage, but excavation would be necessary to prove if my surmise is correct.

Fig. 7 gives a general view of the interior, taken from the stony knoll at the N.E. end of the place. In Mr Jones Parry's plan five larger and five smaller groups of enclosures and ruined dwellings are shown. Three of the larger and one of the smaller groups abut

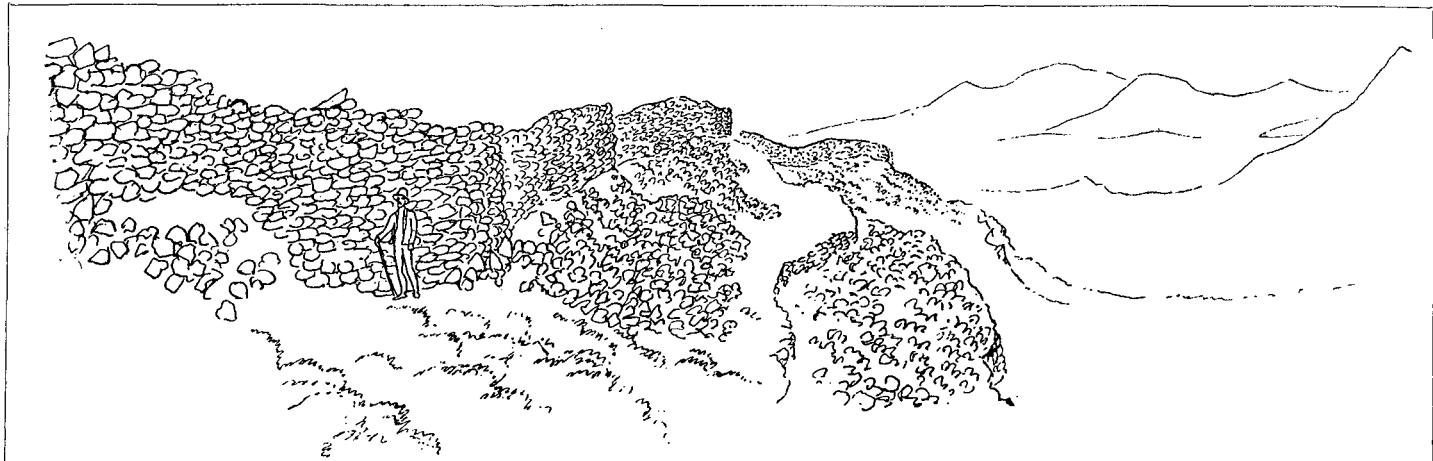


Fig. 6. Exterior View of S.W. Wall, Treceiri.



Fig. 7. General View of Interior, Treceiri.

more or less on the wall, and in each group the "huts" abut closely on each other. The size and shape of these enclosures varies exceedingly; some appear to be too large for dwellings, but the great majority are small enough, and are more or less rounded in figure. Mr Jones Parry states that some are 30 feet long, and Mr Barnwell says that some of the circular ones are 15 or 16 feet in diameter. In a group of four chambers he gives the dimensions as $16\frac{1}{2} \times 10$ feet, $11 \times 6\frac{1}{2}$, 20×8 , and 8 by about 6. The walls of a few of the chambers are still 6 feet high, but the great majority are less, and many of them have no doors (Barnwell). It seemed to me that a number of them are sunk 2 or 3 feet in the ground, but this may have been due to the accumulation of rubbish outside. Besides these ten groups there is a solitary hut circle standing free, and three separate double chambers abutting on the west wall in Jones Parry's plan. The total number of chambers or enclosures of one kind or another on the plan is about 150, and they do not occupy more than about a third or fourth of the interior space, which is much overgrown with heather, and is rough, as if the debris of many more buildings may exist underfoot.

The stony knoll or ruin at the N.E. end is partially seen in figs. 3 and 4 on the left. It is the highest point, and commands an excellent view of the whole interior. Mr Barnwell considers it to be "a high artificial mound composed of large stones;" but possibly it is partly a natural knoll. Regarded as purely artificial, the accumulation of stones would be enormous. Mr Barnwell thought it was a ruined look-out post.

As to the water-supply, Mr Barnwell says "there would be no scarcity except in unusually dry seasons." He does not mention, however, whence the supply would be derived, and I did not notice any springs within or near the walls.

Mr Barnwell says that Tre-r-Ceiri, the usual literary form, means *the town of fortresses*; but Prof. Rhys (*Arch. Camb.*, 1877, 339) has ascertained that the native pronunciation is Treceiri, and that in Carnarvonshire *ceari* is the plural of *caer* (a giant), and is not an interchangeable form of *caerau*, the plural of *caer*, a fort. The meaning, therefore, he maintains, is *the town of giants*, "a name which implies that all tradition of its builders had so entirely died out as to cause the

Welsh people to attribute its origin to a race of beings different from themselves, and endowed with supernatural strength." I have adopted Prof. Rhys's spelling.

It says much for the skill of the builders that so much of a perpendicular wall, of great antiquity, built without a particle of cement, should still stand nearly perfect. This immunity from destruction it probably owes, as far as man is concerned, to its elevated and comparatively inaccessible situation, and to the enormous *scree*s of stone which clothe the hill slopes, amply sufficient to supply materials for stone dykes without recourse being had to the ruins above.

As to degradation from the weather, it may be that a loose stone wall is less liable to destruction than a cemented wall, in one important respect. Water is apt to get shut up in crevices in a cemented wall, and there to exercise its enormous destructive power of expansion when freezing, but in an uncemented wall it can escape freely through the interstices. Something may also be due to the construction of the wall. Professor Babington found that a number of the stones were set not longitudinally but transversely, with their heads outwards. This may have had a binding effect. He was not able to investigate this point so thoroughly as it evidently deserves.

In conclusion, I may recapitulate the points which seem to require further investigation.

(1) Are the sheets of stone on the steep slopes and on the S.W. and N.W. fronts natural or artificial? An accurate plan of their precise shape and position, with the direction of the heathery lanes that cross those on the N.W. front, would be valuable.

(2) The precise dimensions, shape, and internal structure of the wall.

(3) The precise nature of the two outer "walls" on the N.W. face, with their appurtenances.

(4) The "sally-port" on the north should be cleared out.

(5) The nature of the supposed sunk passage in its rear should be ascertained.

(6) The double banquette on either side of the sally-port, which I did not notice, and which does not appear in my sketch, should be further studied.

(7) The main entrance from the S.W. should be examined, to clear up the discrepancies between the plans of Mr Jones Parry and Mr Blight.

(8) Is there any existing water-supply at or near the fortress?

(9) Photographs or drawings should be taken of the details.

(10) An accurate plan should be made of the structures in the interior, and the floors of a number of them should be excavated, with the object of finding relics which might throw light on the antiquity of the fortress.

To accomplish all this demands a considerable expenditure of time, labour, and money, but these have not been grudged in the excavation of other ruins, at home and abroad, which I do not hesitate to say are of far less interest and importance to us Britons than the unique remains of the best preserved native prehistoric fortified town in our Island.

All Archæologists will learn with the deepest regret that the Government has declined, on the score of expense, to place Treceiri under the protection of the Ancient Monuments Act, when recently requested to do so by the owner, Mr R. H. Wood of Rugby.

II. EILDON.

The Eildon fortress, or fortified town, although it resembles Treceiri in its situation, is a great contrast to it in other respects, for while Treceiri is a stone fortress containing stone dwellings, Eildon appears to have been defended by palisaded terraces, enclosing huts of some easily perishable material.

In prehistoric or early historic times the Eildon Hills, commanding as they do on their eastern flank the easy pass from the south to the centre of Scotland, formed by the Tweed as it emerges from the hill country on the open part of Roxburghshire, must always have been deemed of great importance. An ancient road, commonly attributed to the Romans, but which, for aught we know, may have existed long before their day, has been traced making its way to this pass, in continuation of the Northumberland Watling Street; and in the pass itself, nestling under the flank of the hill, remains, indicative of one of the very few Roman Stations known to exist in Scotland, have been found.

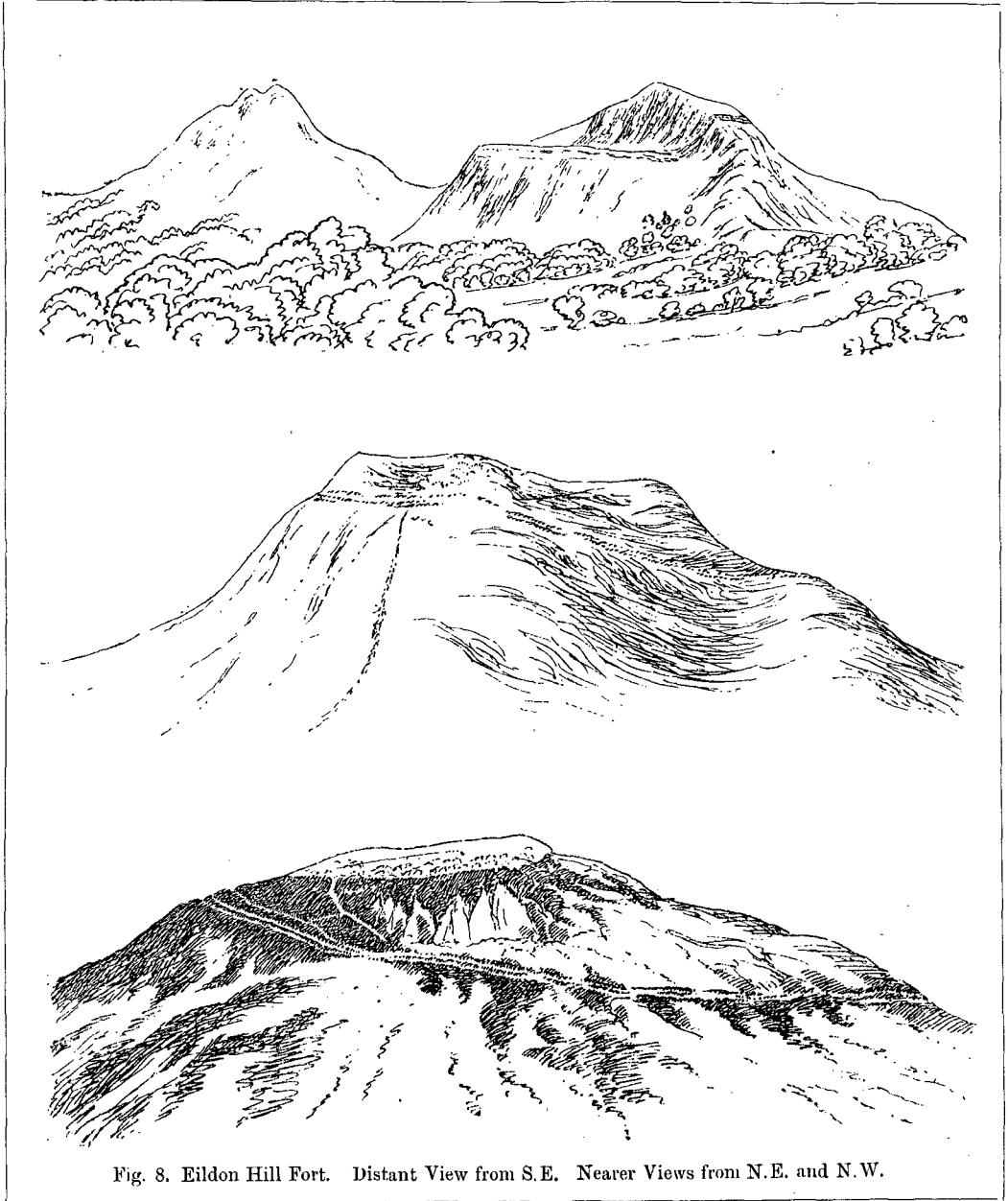


Fig. 8. Eildon Hill Fort. Distant View from S.E. Nearer Views from N.E. and N.W.

So prominent a position for outlook and defence could not escape occupation at a time when the security afforded by difficulty of access was deemed ample compensation for the necessary discomforts and inconveniences of a lofty site. Accordingly, ample evidence remains of such occupation upon the north-eastern of the three peaks which give the Eildons their characteristic and beautiful form. This is not the highest of the peaks, as it is about 50 feet lower than the central one, which rises 1365 feet above the sea ; but the latter is too conical and sharp-pointed for occupation, whereas the other has a considerable amount of pretty level space on the top, with several natural terraces on the slopes, affording ample room for the erection of habitations. It also enjoys the strategic advantage of being projected into the angle where the Tweed, flowing 1150 feet below, changes its course from east to south on emerging from the hills and winds round it, at a distance varying from a mile to a mile and three-quarters from the summit. The defensive lines encircle the hill, at a height of perhaps 70 feet below the top on the east (fig. 8, on the shoulder of the hill to the right, upper view ; on the hill to the left, middle view), falling about 150 feet lower on the west (middle and lower views), where they are still about 100 feet above the neck ; and they may be seen on the hill face from a distance of several miles. At the east end (upper and middle views) they are horizontal at first but soon descend pretty steeply to the edge of a plateau on the north (middle and lower views), after which they continue on the hill face, at nearly the same lower level round by the west to the edge of another much more extensive plateau on the south (upper view), and complete the circuit of nearly a mile by climbing abruptly up the east end of a steep "scree" or "scalthier" of loose stones which rises from the southern plateau to the summit of the hill (upper view). In Plan (fig. 9), the enclosure is very nearly circular.

In structure the lines consist in general of three narrow parallel terraces, constructed one above another on the face of the hill, from 3 or 4 to 6 or 7 yards apart. The upper one, however, required very little making, as it generally runs where a steep slope eases off to a gentle one, and in taking the edge of the north and south plateau it, of course, required no making at all. The width of the lower

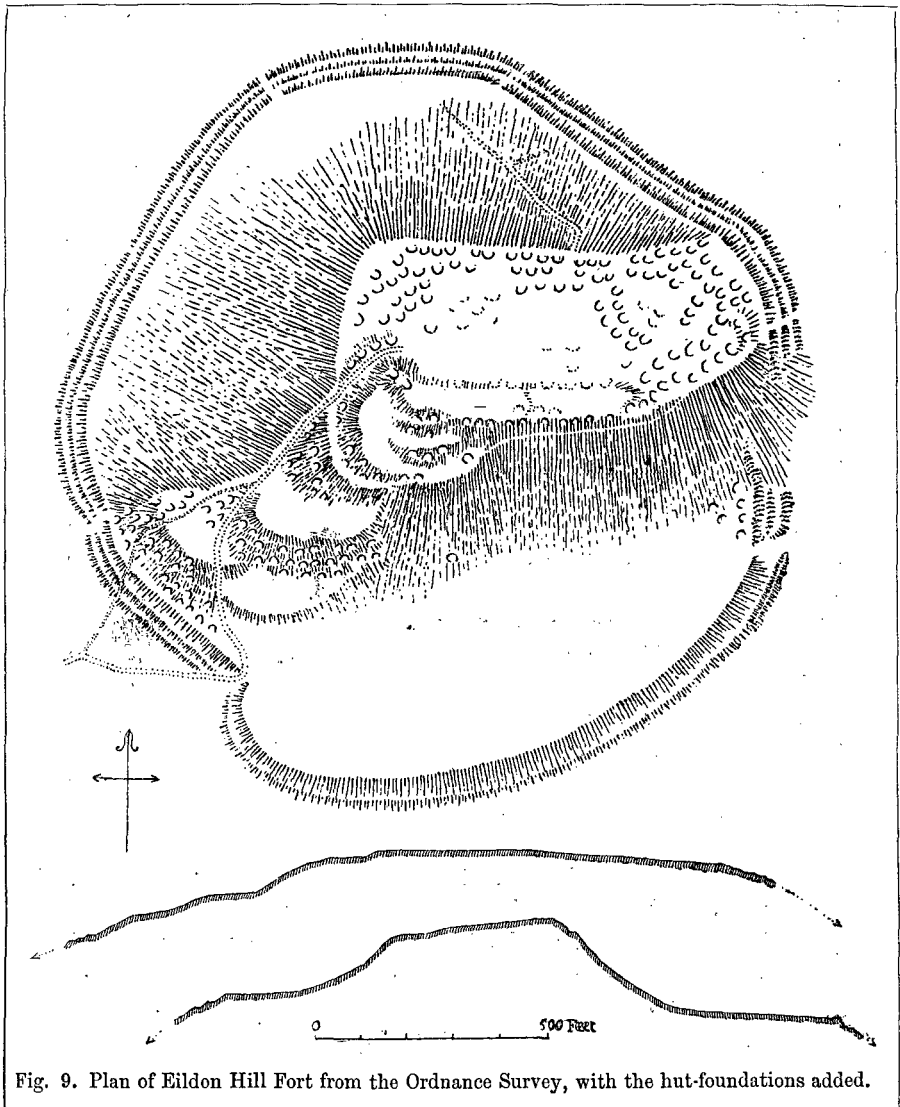


Fig. 9. Plan of Eildon Hill Fort from the Ordnance Survey, with the hut-foundations added.

terraces varies somewhat, but rarely exceeds 7 or 8 feet. On the south side the defensive lines have apparently been reduced to two, one formed naturally by the edge of the plateau, the other some yards down the steep scree which falls here on the woods of Eildon Hall. Indeed, it is only in the eastern half of this part that the terrace can be distinctly traced on the spot, the slipping of the scree having no doubt gradually effaced it in the western half. Similarly, it is not easy, on the spot, to define the lines as they ascend the scree to the highest point of the defences at the east end. Nevertheless, indistinct or untraceable as they may be on the spot, it is remarkable how visible these lines are on the hill face when looked at from a great distance. The modification of the lines at the east entrance will be described in speaking of the entrances. Of course, these terraces do not constitute a defence in themselves, and I think there can be little doubt that they were palisaded at the edge, because there are no remains of earthen mounds, and indeed there is no room for them; neither is there any debris indicative of stone walls, and although many parts of the hill are stony, the stones are small and unsuitable for building.

Entrances—(Plan, fig. 9).—At present there are seven breaks in the continuity of the lines. Four of them, towards the north and N.W., are small, and if not modern may have been sally-ports. Another on the east, where the lines after ascending the scree reach their highest point, is probably an original sally-port. But the two main entrances are at the east and west ends of the great southern plateau. The one at the west end is the most accessible, as it is only about 100 feet above the broad and nearly level neck which connects the summit on which the fort stands with the higher Eildon, and is approached from the neck by a gentle slope. The terraces near the entrance appear to have been widened and multiplied, but are now much broken down. The entrance itself is withdrawn, so as to give a strong flanking defence.

The eastern entrance is close under the summit-scree, and its defences on the north side are now represented by three short, low, broad, stony mounds (Plan, fig. 9) which run from it to the foot of the scree, and on the south by a scarp about 25 feet high, with a sharp-crested

mound at its foot, which is prolonged in front of the entrance, apparently to include a feeble spring there. Another stronger spring, covered and padlocked, is near this on the north side of the entrance, and the two outer mounds on that side bend inwards, so as to flank and exclude it from the lines; but this may be a modern change, when the spring was utilised. As this entrance is on a slope, the three mounds rise one above the other, those in the rear commanding those in front.

Interior—(Plan, fig. 9).—The space within the lines may be divided into the level or slightly inclined summit, or citadel, and the slopes and plateaux which lie between the citadel and the lines of fortification. The summit is nearly rectangular, and measures about 800 by 400 feet, the long axis being from east to west. The actual top is a nearly level narrow ridge about 270 feet long, at the top of the southern scree and towards its west end. From this ridge the ground inclines slightly to the north margin of the rectangle, and slightly, at first, then rather abruptly, to its east margin, where alone it is bounded by the lines of fortification, here at their highest elevation. From the margins of the rectangle the ground falls abruptly in all directions, so that a mere palisade at the edge would convert this upper space into an inner citadel.

The space between it and the fortification lines is thus disposed:—On the south the great upper scree falls from it on the southern plateau about 200 feet below. On the east the summit is bounded by the lines. To the north the slope, precipitous at one part, falls on the northern plateau or terrace. To the west there is a long, continuous, and gentler slope to the lines. To the S.W. the descent is by a series of small plateaux, connecting the summit with the south-west entrance.

Signs of Habitation.—On the inclined parts of the rectangular summit, and on the slopes which fall on the smaller plateaux to the S.W., there are a large number of small circular or horse-shoe shaped excavations, sometimes arranged in two or three irregular rows, sometimes with indications of terracing in front of the rows, particularly near the edge of the summit-space, on the east, north, and west. There is a row even on the very edge of the great southern scree, but there

they are broken abruptly on the side next the edge, as if from degradation of the scree. At first, when I had noticed only a few of these excavations, I took them for mere shelters cut in the face of the slopes, but when I saw how numerous they were, I came to the conclusion that they must have been foundation-spaces for huts, partly perhaps to afford some shelter to the huts, but mainly probably to provide level foundations for them. Their horse-shoe form is explained by their being excavated in sloping ground, which tends to give them more or less of a straight margin on the downward side of the slope. The excavated sides gradually rise to the upper end, where they vary in depth from a foot, or even less, to 3 or 4 feet, in a few instances to as much as 5 feet, according to the steepness of the slope in which they are cut. The total number that can be distinctly made out is about 300, of which nearly 200 are on the summit rectangle, or what we may call the citadel or upper town. But besides these, I have noticed faint signs of others on the more level spaces, sometimes merely indicated by differences in the vegetation, and if we reflect that on the plateaux it would not be necessary to make level foundations, it is quite possible that a thousand of our supposed huts may have stood within the lines originally. On the great southern plateau there is ample room for several hundred, but the space has been banked up and fenced by a retaining wall, and has been under plough, so that any traces there may have been are obliterated. Besides the larger groups already described, there is a very distinct single foundation-space about half way along the foot of the scree, and a group of five in rear of the three mounds on the north side of the east entrance (Plan, fig. 9). It is remarkable that on the extensive slopes within the lines to the north and north-west they are entirely absent, and there are none outside the lines. The position of the huts is laid down roughly in the Plan (fig. 9), and some of them are faintly indicated in the middle and lower views (fig. 8). With a favourable light I have been able to distinguish them from a distance of nearly 2 miles. The huts which may be supposed to have occupied these foundations must have been of some perishable material and not of stone, as there is not a particle of stony debris to be seen about any of them.

The only description hitherto published of Eildon Fort is in an account

of the Parish of Melrose by Mr A. Milne, who was minister there for a considerable period down to 1747. He describes it as "well fortified with two Fosses and Dikes of earth, more than a mile and a half in circuit, with a large plain near the top of the hill, called the Floors. On the head of the hill may be seen the Prætorium surrounded with many huts. There are ports to the east, west, and north, from a place called the Haxrecreag, a plain way to Melrose called the Stile-Dyke. The principal entry has been from the south towards Bethendean, where the ground slopeth more easily, from a place near the South Hill called the Castlestead." He also says the camp "hath many springs of good water near it." This description, characterised as it is by the usual vagueness and inaccuracy of the writers of the period, at least preserves some local names which have disappeared from the map, if not from the memory of the people. Thus he calls what I presume to be the large south plateau,—*the Floors*; and the precipitous bluff below the north-west angle of the upper town is presumably the *Haxrecreag*. The "many springs near the camp" are not now visible, probably because they have been impounded for the water-supply of houses at the foot of the hill. The only springs within or under shelter of the works are the two somewhat awkwardly placed at the eastern entrance. It is possible to drive a cart to the top by a track from the south, as indicated by Mr Milne. This track is shown on the Plan (fig. 9) ascending the neck, piercing the lines at the west entrance, and passing the plateaux and groups of "huts" on the south-west slope on its way to the summit. A footpath branches off from it on the neck to the north, and rejoins it about half way up. Another broad track ascends from the northern terrace to the upper town. This and the triple lines are well seen as green bands in the dark heather (fig. 8 lower view, on the left).

In prosecuting my investigations of Eildon Fort I kept always in view the desirability of settling doubtful points by excavation. Little information by this means can be anticipated in regard to the fortifications themselves. Sections through the mounds at the eastern entrance might show something of their structure, but elsewhere in the wide circuit, if my views are correct, the lines are simply terraces, originally defended by palisades, and not likely to conceal anything of an instructive nature.

It is different, however, with the supposed hut-foundations in the interior, and it is satisfactory to know that with the permission of the Duke of Buccleuch, the proprietor, and Mr Adam Smith, the tenant, some exploratory excavations have been made by Mr James Curle, F.S.A., Scot., in three of these spaces, while these sheets were going through the press. In the first, he found a thin layer of charcoal 14 inches below the surface near the rock, which was partially covered by a thin bed of brick red clay. In the second, a foot below the surface a few fragments of charcoal were found. In the third, at the same depth, he came upon a small piece of the usual coarse pottery mixed with little stones, commonly called early British, and a foot lower there was a thin stratum of charcoal, and some white clay resting on the rock. These results confirm the theory formed of the origin and purpose of these levelled spaces, and it is Mr Curle's intention to carry out a more thorough excavation soon.
