

9. A MOTE IN GLEN DEVON, PERTHSHIRE.

I wish to draw attention to a Mote in the parish of Blackford, Perthshire, which has not, apparently, been previously recorded. It is situated in the heart of the Ochil Hills in Glen Devon. The road from Crieff to North Queensferry,

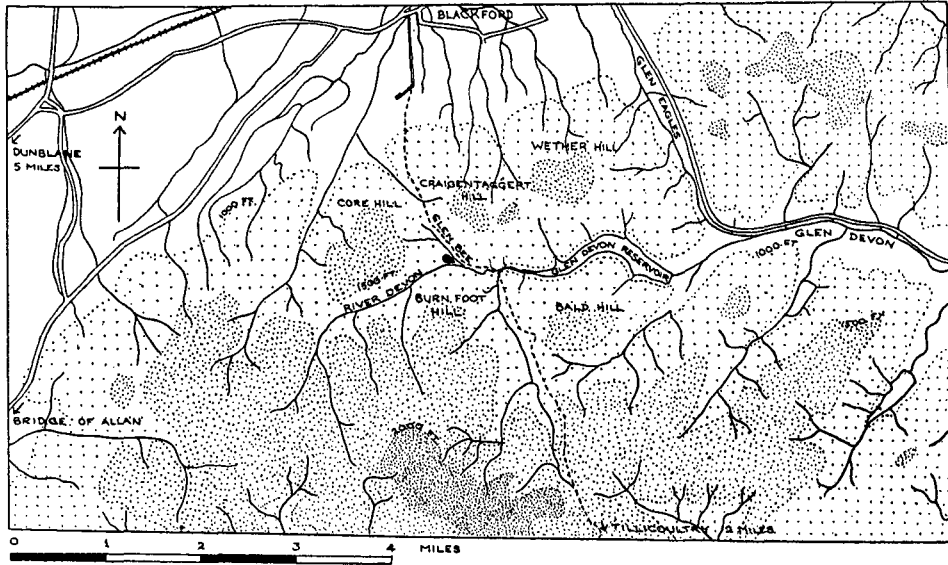


Fig. 5. Glen Devon, Perthshire.

constructed about 1814, and used, to some extent, by droving traffic bound for Falkirk Tryst, traverses Gleneagles and rises steadily to a watershed about 800 feet above sea-level. On the southern descending slope, at Glenhead, a branch road runs west along Glen Devon to a Waterworks of the Fife County Council. The reservoir there, on the line of the River Devon, is about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles long. About a mile further upstream from the western end of the reservoir the Devon is joined by a small stream issuing from Glen Bee and, at its confluence with the River Devon, the Mote is situated—Nat. Grid Ref. 37/904047 (Pl. XXVI, 1).

The position is a striking one at the meeting-place of three glens—the Upper Devon, Glen Devon and Glen Bee, while, around it, the site is dominated by the peaks of Craigentaggert, 1611 feet, to the north; to the west, Core Hill, 1780 feet; Burnfoot Hill, 1725 feet, to the south; while Glen Devon to the east, is flanked on

the north side by the Wether Hill, 1647 feet, and Bald Hill, 1636 feet, on the south. All of these hills are rounded and bare. The whole basin is treeless except for one solitary elm.

A tongue of land, about a mile in width, of Tillicoultry parish, Clackmannanshire, bounded to the west and north by the River Devon and to the east by the Broich Burn, reaches up into Perthshire, and these streams separate the two counties. The Bee Burn joins the Devon from the north-west, and in the apex

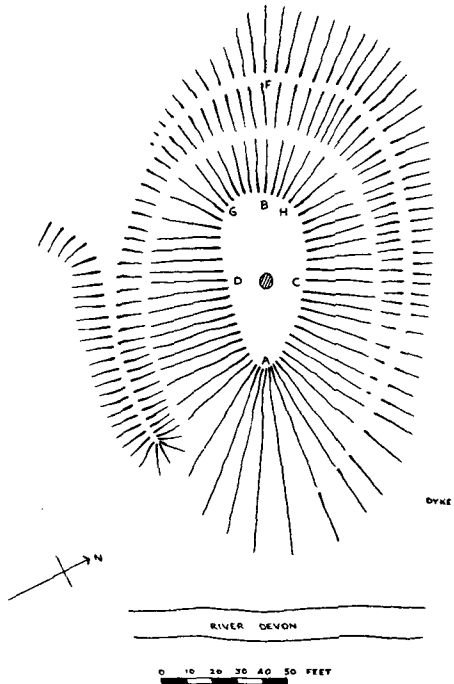


Fig. 6. Plan of Mote.

of the acute angle formed by their junction the Mote stands, its eastern side impinging on the Devon on the Perthshire side of the county boundary (fig. 5).

From Gleneagles the position is not easy of access over the moorlands traversed by the Devon. But this is not the only approach to the site. From Blackford a trackway, traversible on foot, leads from Kinpauch Farm up the northern slopes of the Ochils and, skirting the western shoulder of Kinpauch Hill about 150 feet below its summit of 1390 feet, it descends along Glen Bee to Backhill, passing within 50 yards of the Mote, and then by way of the Broich Burn and to the east of Ben Cleuch it makes its way down the southern Ochil slopes to Tillicoultry. But, from any approach, the site is remote and, in unfavourable weather conditions, almost impossibly so.

The Mote is a symmetrically-shaped truncated and flattened cone, partly surrounded in horseshoe formation by a deep ditch and an earthen rampart. The open side is to the east, where it slopes about 80 feet down to the riverside. The Mote is somewhat egg-shaped on top, the smaller end to the river having the greatest defensive height, the broader end having a massive ditch and rampart

protection. The long axis is about 66 feet long; the shorter 25 feet transversely. The base measures about 120 yards on its perimeter. The ditch on the line of the major axis is 45 feet wide at the top and has a depth of about 20 feet. The rampart at the north-eastern end merges into the side of the Mote about half-way up its height. The area of the top surface is about 170 square yards; the site is about 1100 feet above sea-level. The top is not quite level; from the apex to the butt there is a rise of about 3 feet (figs. 6 and 7).

The centre of the plateau has been disturbed at some time, there being evidence of an excavation about 6 feet long and 5 feet wide to a depth of about 2 feet.

The major dimensions of the Mote-top conform to the average ascertained by Christison and Coles¹ when they found 21 out of 42 were between 50 and 100 feet long, the remainder varying from under 50 feet to between 100 and 250 feet.

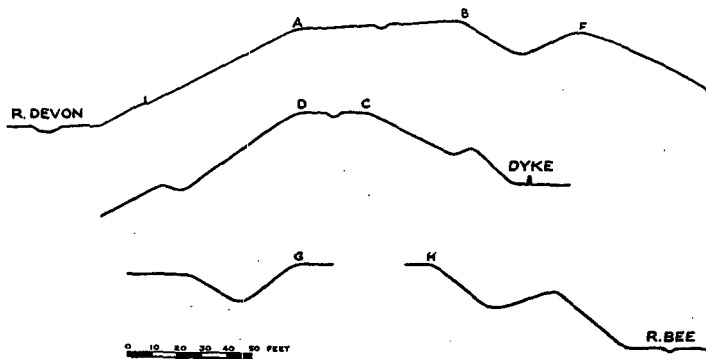


Fig. 7. Profiles of ramparts and ditches.

The area might appear to be small, yet it compares, not unfavourably, with the Mote of Annan, 50 feet by 22 feet; Dunning, 20 feet diameter; Ballagan, 27 feet diameter; Hutton, 24 feet diameter; Lochwood, 24 feet by 16 feet; Ryehill, 62 feet by 47 feet.² And there are many others.

Situated in the valley of the Devon, the position emphasises Christison's comparison between motes and forts in the lowness of their situation and their proximity to water. Any number of motes exemplifying these characteristics can be cited: Nether-ton Mote, Hamilton, and Abington on the Clyde; the Moat Knowe on the left bank of the Biggar burn; Garpol Water and Struan, to mention only a few. But Christison stresses also other features—their proximity to towns and villages—and the Glen Devon site is in sharp contrast to this. If a command post were desired to overlook and protect the way through the three glens, some justification could be seen for the position taken. The reason for the massive defences, which must have entailed a considerable expenditure of time and labour to construct, must have been a weighty one to require such a fortified post in a situation so remote and so desolate.

The distribution of the Scottish motes is largely centred in the south-west, thinning out rapidly in all directions from Kirkcudbrightshire,³ Dumfriesshire, and Galloway, having about 107 examples between them. North of these, only 7 are noted in Lanarkshire and, other than the one under discussion, only 2 are in

¹ *Early Fortifications in Scotland*, p. 20.

² *Inventory of Monuments*. Seventh Report. Dumfriesshire, 1920.

³ *Early Fortifications in Scotland*, p. 20.

Perthshire, while north of the Forth-Clyde Isthmus Christison admits as probables and possibles only an additional 7.

I am indebted to Mr Charles Taylor, Castlecary, now resident in Stirling, for directing my attention to this site and for his generous help; to Mr A. R. B. Haldane, and to the County Road Surveyors of Perthshire and Clackmannan, as well as to Mrs M. E. Scott, for their assistance so freely given to me.

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