2. Iron Age Land Use on Bonchester Hill

Recently two soil samples from the turf-line beneath the Iron Age Fort on Bonchester Hill (Roxb.) were examined by pollen analysis in an attempt to determine the contemporary vegetation and land use. The samples were from the 'greasy grey turf-line' beneath the outer ramparts in Cutting VII: there was no direct evidence for the date of these defences but they were tentatively assigned to 'the Roman period or the Dark Ages' by the excavator.[1] The material, being relatively base-rich, was not ideal for pollen

[1] *P.S.A.S.*, lxxxiv (1949–50), 125–8.

preservation, and though a moderate amount of pollen was extracted, it was in very poor condition. It is apparent that the soil was microbiologically active; nevertheless, it was possible to obtain an adequate count of the pollen in both samples.

A summary of the results is given in the Table; these percentages are based on total pollen and fern spores.

	Sample A	*Sample B*
Forest Trees (Alder)	0·9	1·0
Hazel	1·4	1·5
Heather	—	1·0
Grasses	37·8	35·4
Cereals	1·4	1·5
Liguliflorae	8·3	16·5
Plantain	38·2	23·3
Other Herbs	6·0	7·3
Fern Spores	6·0	12·6

It is apparent that the locality was devoid of woody vegetation; only alder and hazel were represented, and since they are both anemophilous and produce a great amount of pollen, no significance can be attached to their presence. Essentially the two samples show the same vegetation type; differences in detail are of a degree which may be expected between such samples. Grasses were the most abundant pollen type, but in both samples the Liguliflorae and plantain were strongly represented. These are commonly regarded as weeds of cultivated land, though in fact these spectra could equally well represent pasture. However, the presence of cereal pollen points to cultivation in the vicinity, and it may be that the land had been cultivated but had subsequently become overgrown.

Such use of the land would accord with the inference from the condition of the pollen that the soil was an active one and therefore probably a fertile one.

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