

Glencorse – An archaeological appreciation

Understanding the Romans in Scotland is a complex matter – with Scotland not being subject to a single phase of occupation or conquest. Every new discovery leads to further understanding of Roman Scotland, and with the confirmation of the Glencorse site we have another important clue in the story.

There were three main periods of activity in Scotland;

The **Flavian**, from 79AD to 85/6AD, during which Agricola destroyed the Caledonians at the battle of Mons Graupius in 84AD in the far north of Scotland. Within Midlothian there are several temporary Camps, and forts like the one excavated at Elginhaugh near Dalkeith, which served as one of the bases for the conquest of Caledonia. Other major forts in the area are located at Inversek and perhaps Cramond.

The **Antonine** from c.138-163AD, with the establishment of a more permanent presence, such as the settlement beneath Inveresk, attached to a fortress, with its harbour at Fisherrow. A major supply base and port was situated at Cramond.

The local tribe were the Votadini, who seem to have had open contact with the Romans, and evidence is showing that activity beyond the main Roman areas was occurring, with field systems perhaps indicating the start of Romanisation. It is clear from the recent discovery of a Roman cavalryman's tomb near Carberry, that the Governor of Britannia spent time here in the Lothians – right on the edge of the Empire.

The final **Severan** advance (208-211AD) was a brief attempt to complete the conquest of Scotland. Once again, the Lothians were occupied, but when the Emperor Severus died in York, the occupation was abandoned.

There is however very little to show of the Romans in the Lothians except military installations, and the site of Glencorse is another vital piece of the puzzle.

In terms of the Romans in Scotland this recently revealed feature is unique in this area, and thanks to the investigations carried out on behalf of Scottish Water; this site has now been confirmed as Roman.

This Roman military site is part of a network of other bases, watchtowers and camps across lowland Scotland – and it seems likely that it was situated to guard a gap in the Pentland Hills to the northwest of Flotterstone and the line of an east-west Roman Road that skirted the foothills of the Pentlands.

Just to the northeast of the site lies the Hillfort of Castlelaw, and through the Pentlands to the north are the forts of Kaimes and Dalmahoy, so we can assume a strategic position to this camp or fortlet, ensuring that a military garrison was well placed in the Iron Age landscape.

The verification of the site as Roman adds greatly to the continuing research into the Romans and their military presence in the Lothians - careful examination and preservation of sites like these will be essential to our further understanding of this fascinating period.