

ART. III.—*The Roman temporary camps near Troutbeck, Cumberland.* By R. L. BELLHOUSE, B.Sc.

Read on the site, July 3rd, 1956.

THOMAS WEST'S "traces of a large encampment" upon Hutton Moor and "vestiges of a square encampment" towards Whitbarrow, together with the very large camp discovered by Dr J. K. St. Joseph, F.S.A., when considered in relation to the nearby Roman road, present a particularly interesting group of Roman camps. They all lie to north of a clearly defined Roman road and are only separated from one another by intervals of 300 and 400 yards respectively; all three exhibit constructional features — small ditches, earth ramparts and simple clivicle entrances—which we associate with the temporary halting-places of the Roman army on the move. It seemed to me that a close examination of the group might throw a little light on the early history of our district, and I therefore decided to survey them and to examine the structure of their ramparts. The work was done in October 1955, with the assistance of Mr Brian Blake.

I. SITUATION.

The camps are situated as it were at the threshold of the Lake District, occupying three different levels on the high ground at the head of the wide valley of the Glendaramackin and Trout Beck; even the lowest of them, on Hutton Moor proper (map-reference 382273, at 820 ft. O.D.), commands a splendid view, not only of the ground westwards towards Keswick, but also northwards through part of the Caldew valley towards the green hill of Calebrack (346360, 1,011 ft. O.D.) and southwards over Matterdale and Threlkeld commons. The camp on the

next shelf is the smallest of the three (384274, 900 ft. O.D.); it has a little wider outlook than the first, because of its higher position, including a fairly good view to the south-east. The position of the third and largest camp cannot be indicated by a single map-reference because it lies between the Matterdale road-end and Lofshaw Hill, and is nearly 40 acres in extent; it occupies the highest position, being above the 900 ft. contour and rising above 1,000 ft. on the north side; the terrain that can be viewed from it is consequently extensive, including additional ground to eastward that is out of sight from either of the other camps. I wonder if its situation was chosen for reasons other than those of outlook and surveillance? When the legions entered new territory they must have been an imposing sight to the native population, and we can be certain that the Romans appreciated the value of a deliberate show of organised strength. From the Keswick direction this camp, or at least the saddle-shaped hill on which it has been constructed, can be seen from all the high ground between Castlerigg and the stone circle, and no doubt the tents of the legion and the smoke of its cooking-fires drew many eyes eastwards, for the hill is prominent on the horizon and the limits of the camp can be made out even now, if one knows where to look for it.

II. SURVEY AND EXCAVATIONS.

We began work on the smallest camp (fig. 1). Its rampart and ditch can be traced easily on the ground, although the land is in "wheat riggs", and the two entrances with external *claviculae* are quite plain. The rampart appears as a green *agger* about 15 ft. wide, and the characteristic rounded corners are clearly outlined by the curved strip of rush growth marking the line of the ditch. Signs of an outer mound, formed of upcast from the ditch, occur on the north and east sides

in particular. We opened a trench 2 ft. wide across the rampart and ditch of the south side, just east of the entrance, to obtain a section for study (fig. 2). The important features revealed were as follows:

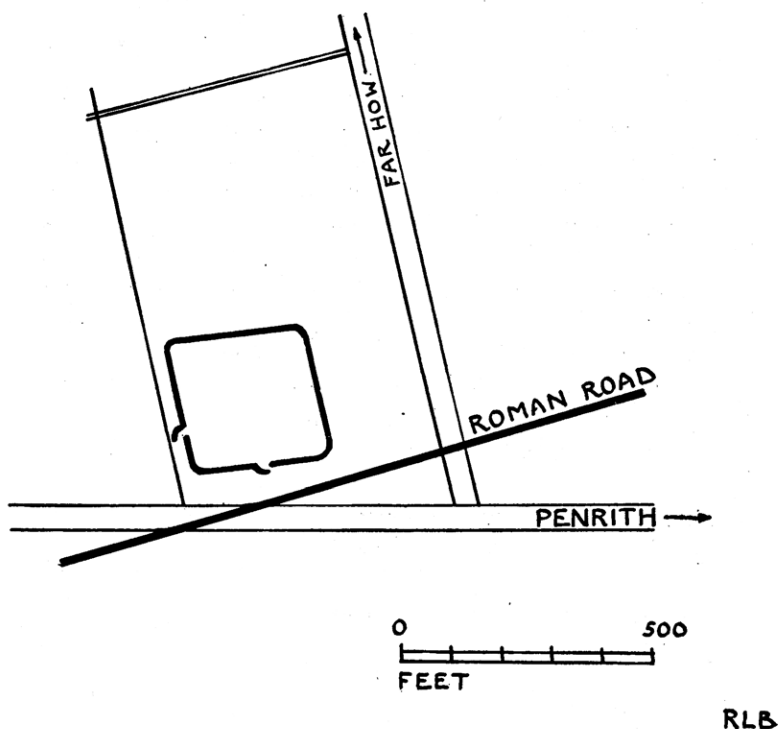


FIG. 1.—Troutbeck, the smallest camp. The north point is at the top of the illustration.

(a) *The ditch.* This was 9 ft. wide between lips and 4 ft. 6 in. deep, without a square drainage channel at bottom. Peat layers $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. thick seem to mark periods of stability in the silting: the first was 18 in. from ditch-bottom, the second 2 ft. 4 in. The top 15 in. of filling is clearly post-enclosure plough-soil. An ochreous horizon occurs below the high peat layer, no doubt

representing the limits between which the water-table fluctuates.

(b) *The rampart.* A very small berm, less than 1 ft. wide, separates the ditch from the first signs of turf-work in the rampart. Turfing was identified by the alternate dark layers (humus) and pale grey layers (clay) over the whole width of the rampart, 10 ft. Some cobbles occurred at rampart-centre, but in the upper levels only, and there was no evidence for the existence of any special foundation (such as clay and cobble) below the turf. The

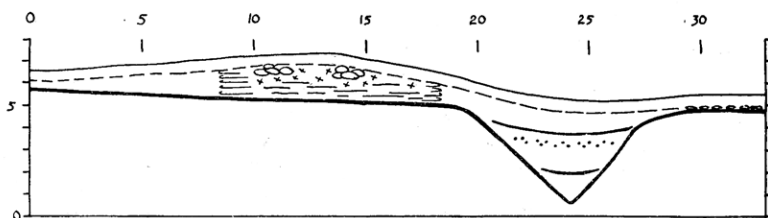


FIG. 2.—Section through the defences of the smallest camp, Troutbeck.

greatest surviving height of the rampart in this section was a little more than 2 ft. An interesting feature of its composition was the abundance of black concretions of iron and manganese, and yellow patches of limonite: the normal soil hereabouts (when not concealed by blanket peat) is a pale brown loam on a sticky yellow, shaley drift.

The Roman road runs past the south side of the camp, at a distance of about 40 ft. from it; a thin gravel spread beyond the outer lip of the ditch may perhaps represent a path connecting the gateway of the camp with the road. We surveyed the camp by measurement along the centre-line of its rampart; it is a parallelogram, with its north and south sides 280 and 284 ft. long respectively as against 270 and 263 ft. on the east and west sides, giving an area of 1.6 acres.

The larger camp, 300 yards further west, is traversed (as West noted) by the modern road; it is most surprising that the prominent visible length of its ramparts should have remained unremarked for so long. The green *agger*, contrasting with the darker rushes and sedges, is 12-15 ft. wide and nearly 2 ft. high. Close to the road, on the south-east side, there is a break in the rampart, guarded by an internal *clavicula*; there is a similar

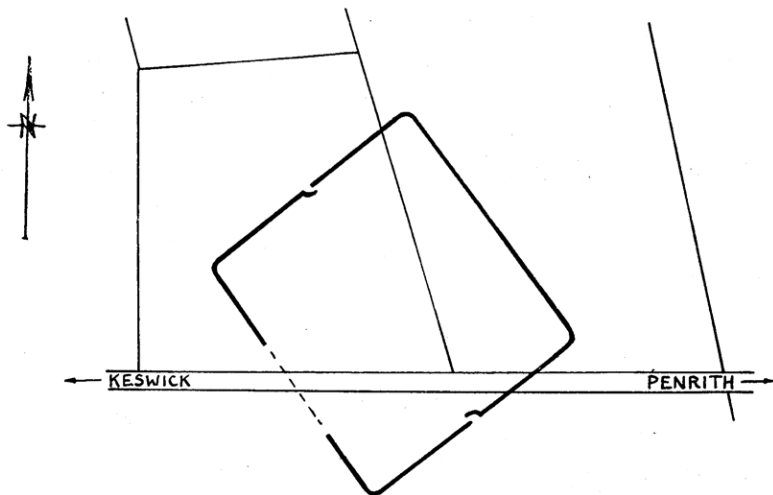


FIG. 3.—Troutbeck, the larger camp.

entrance with internal *clavicula* in the north-west side, the two entrances coming centrally in the two sides, which are better preserved than the other two, in which no traces of entrances were noted. Our survey was done by tape and prismatic compass, and was tied into the road and field boundaries: the outline of the camp is slightly off square, the measurement along the centre-line of the rampart being 640 by 700 ft. and the area practically 10 acres (fig. 3). The radius of the curve at the corners of this camp is comparatively small. We opened a

trench just south of the south-east entrance, and the following features were noted (fig. 4):

(a) *The ditch.* This was smaller than in the previous case, only 5 ft. 6 in. from lip to lip and 3 ft. deep, and likewise lacked a drainage-channel; there was nothing to note about its silting.

(b) *The rampart.* A small berm, about 1 ft. wide, separates the inner lip of the ditch from a clearly defined turf kerb, about 2 ft. wide, which represents the outer face of the rampart; there is a similar turf kerb on the inner face, and the total width of the rampart is 10 ft. Between the kerbs it consists of mixed material, containing some cobbles, and its maximum height at the centre-line is now just over 2 ft. Gravel just beyond the outer lip may indicate a pathway, but the probe showed gravel in all directions, for a considerable distance, here.

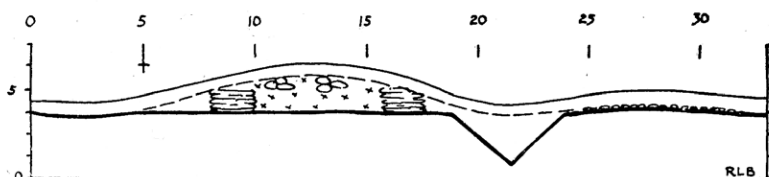


FIG. 4.—Section through defences of larger camp, Troutbeck.

The course of the Roman road cannot be proved near this camp, though we searched for it repeatedly, probing along the line given by the last certain section; if there was no change in direction, this line would just have left room for the road to pass between the south angle of the camp and the edge of the gorge in which the Trout Beck flows. But in any case this camp seems to be unrelated to the road, whereas the other two are clearly connected with it.

The two camps so far described are easily found, and their limits can be traced without difficulty; in contrast the third camp is unconvincing at first sight, by the mere

fact of its large size and the very slightness of its west and south ramparts. The visitor is therefore recommended to stop on the main road at the turning to Matterdale, to pass through the wicket-gate in the hedge on the north side of the road, and then to climb the steep grass slope of the field and look northwards towards Lofshaw Hill. Immediately in front of him will be the Roman road, curving round several quarry-pits, and beyond it, nearly 500 yards away, on the west shoulder of Lofshaw Hill he will recognise the curved corner and parts of the north and west ramparts.

We started our survey at the north-east corner, plotting the rampart on to a tracing from the 25 in. O.S. plan (LVII. II, 1899 ed.), taking compass bearings and tying in the field boundaries. The rampart was easy to follow, 12-15 ft. wide and with a small ditch, still traceable; a slight irregularity in the first 30 yards looks like a mistake by the Roman surveyors—it was quickly corrected, however, for the rest of the rampart is well laid out. Half-way to the north-west corner we came upon a fine large external *clavicula*, guarding a 40 ft. gateway in the rampart. The bold, wide curve of the north-west corner lies just below the summit of Lofshaw Hill, at a place where the shaley rock of the district shows through the soil. The ditch of this camp has been cut in the rock and the fragments, perhaps judged unsuitable for use in the rampart, seem to have been thrown into an outer upcast mound, beyond which there are signs of another ditch—as if the weakness of the corner, with higher ground beyond it, required extra protection at this point. On the summit, 120 ft. outside the rampart, we found a circular platform of rough boulders showing through the turf; this is marked "Cairn" on our plan of the camp (fig. 5): we intend to investigate it further when a convenient opportunity arises.

The first 500 ft. of the west rampart, from the north-west corner, are well preserved, but the remainder cannot

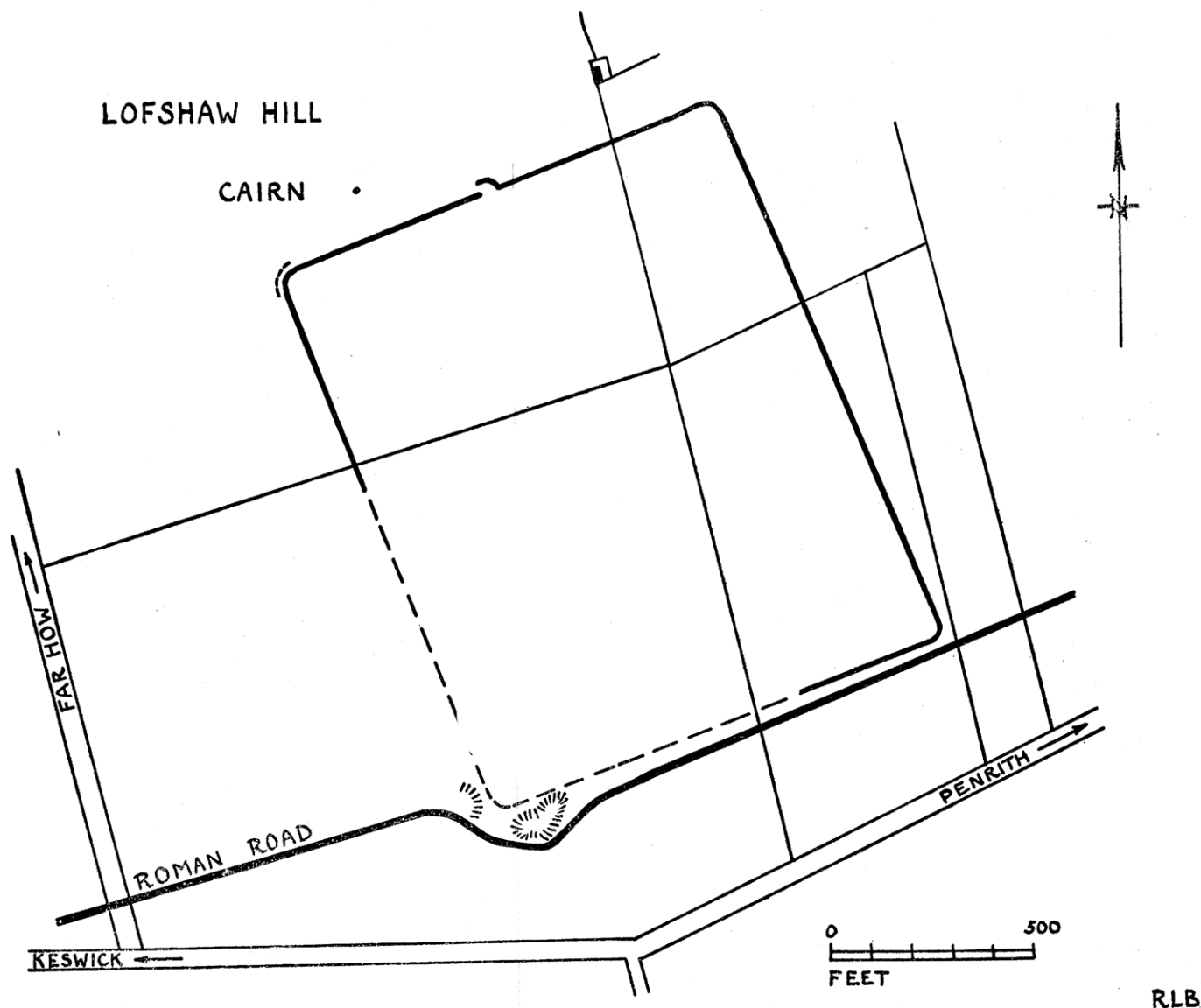


FIG. 5.—The largest Troutbeck camp (38 acres). The Roman road is re-aligned, to pass to South of it.

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be followed with certainty because the plough riggs cross it at an acute angle. Traces of the rounded south-west corner appear just above the old quarry-pits; the south rampart seems to run parallel to the Roman road and about 25 yards to north of it, but here too the traces are indistinct, and no *claviculae* could be identified, though at least one must clearly have been required to guard the *porta praetoria*, giving access to the road, in the centre of this front. The camp measures approximately 1,160 by 1,430 ft. The east rampart can be followed fairly easily because its silted-up ditch persists as a faint hollow, even in places where the *agger* fades away. We did not examine the rampart of this camp, but the visible features of its ditch and mound compare closely with those of the 10-acre camp.

III. THE ROMAN ROAD.

When I made my first survey of the Roman road in this area, not yet knowing of the existence of the largest camp, it was a matter of some interest to find four changes of direction in a little more than three miles of road. After travelling seven miles south-west from Old Penrith in a reasonably straight line, it turns at an angle of 16° at 426295 and points at the hill on which Whitbarrow stands (marked 'Bonfire Hill' on the 6 in. O.S. sheet); here a further turn, at an angle of 14° , gives the line of the next mile-length, which brings the road to the spot height 994 ft. O.D. at 393276. This last point is about a quarter of a mile from the large camp, of which the road would have traversed the south quarter if it had continued on the same line—but it does not: instead, it turns first southwards by about 20° for a few hundred yards, and then west again on a new alignment which takes it past the south side of the camp, as far as the rocky hillock at its south-west corner. Here the road descends in a curve to a fresh alignment which takes it

to the last point where it can be proved, at 382272. There are no topographical obstacles to it continuing on the Whitbarrow alignment; the reason for its divergence from that line must be that the large camp was already in existence and occupied, athwart it, when the road was being surveyed; in other words, the camp belongs to the first phase of Roman occupation, the road to the next.

The 10-acre camp, with its small ditch and turf-kerbed rampart, suggests reconnaissance in force; the smaller camp, with larger ditch and better rampart, its two entrances giving access to the road nearby, suggests the base for road-patrols or for the regulation of traffic after the road had been built and the legions had moved on elsewhere.

I wish to thank Mr Percy Harper of Lanehead and Mr Thomas Bennett of Hutton Moor Farm for their interest, and for permission to dig in their fields.

NOTE: Dr St. Joseph has given brief accounts of these three sites, and of their relationship to the Roman road, in the *Journal of Roman Studies* xlv (1955) 83 f., two of his air-photographs being reproduced on pl. xvi. For a survey of the road in greater detail, cf. Mr Bellhouse's account in CW2 liv 17-27. E.B.