



MAM TOR

Scale  
0 100' 200' 300'

MAM TOR, CASTLETON.

## Mam Tor, near Castleton.

By I. CHALKLEY GOULD.



IT may be permissible to commence this article by quoting from my paper, read at Buxton in 1899,\* with reference to the defensive earthworks of man in the dim ages of the remote past.

“It is evident to everyone who has studied these works, that their makers could have been no mere savages, but men with intelligence enough to scheme their fortresses to the greatest advantage. Cæsar’s words would lead us to suppose that the Britons depended on forests for their defence; but Cæsar’s visits here in B.C. 55 and 54 were very short in time and range. Let me quote the words of General Pitt-Rivers, in his paper on Mount Caburn, by Lewes, in Sussex:—

‘The skill displayed in the selection of their sites negatives the supposition that they could have habitually been situate in the midst of woods. We find they are, for the most part, erected on the summits of hills, which, from the nature of the soil, could never have been thickly wooded. The careful manner in which their ramparts are invariably traced, so as to command the slopes, proves that these slopes could never have been covered with wood, otherwise the advantage of the arrangement would have been nullified.†

“Belonging to this early period is that wonderfully-situated earthwork known as ‘Mam Tor,’ or the ‘Shivering Mountain,’ near Castleton. No words, that the most fluent of speakers could use, would do more than justice to the beauty of the scene from the commanding height of this great hill, with its prospect into the charming Derbyshire dales, and far over Peak-land. At about 1,700 ft. above the sea level, 1,200 yards of double rampart defended the ridged summit, which nature itself

\* *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 1901.

† *Archæologia*, vol. xlvi.

had rendered almost inaccessible, save on the north, where it is linked to the ridge of Lose Hill. Not content with double ramparts on the south, we find that the makers threw up a third bank, and it is on that side that the original entrance appears; a low sunken path, beginning far in the valley below, climbs its way to the south-west corner of the precipitous height, where a great massive bank commands the entrance. A tumulus is here, too, but whether it formed any part of their scheme, or whether it is older than the banks, or not, it is singularly well placed to aid in fighting the foe at the gate."

Mr. Thomas Bateman, in his book *Vestiges of the Antiquities of Derbyshire*, says:—

"The summit of Mam Tor, near Castleton, was extremely well adapted for a military station, as the ascent on every side, excepting the north-east, is very steep, and the height of the mountain is nearly one thousand three hundred feet above the level of the valley.\* The camp upon its summit was surrounded by a double trench, which is, for the most part, in excellent preservation, save where the decomposition of the shale, of which the mountain is composed, has caused the lines to be broken.† It extended from north-east to south-west, along the ridge of the eminence, and occupied rather more than sixteen acres of ground, the circumference being nearly one thousand two hundred yards. The inclosed area is very irregular, but, on the whole, approaches to an oblong form. The principal entrance was from the west. At the north-east corner is a perennial spring, and near the south-west side are two barrows, one of which was opened some years ago, and a brass celt and some fragments of an unbaked urn were found in it."

Beyond the reference closing this extract, we have no record of any "finds," and must be content to form what opinion we may of the age of this fortress, by its form and position, at the same time regretting that, as was pointed out in this *Journal* (vol. xxiii. p. 109), "form of construction alone will not always give the required basis for judgment, as the most simple forms adopted by early man were also, on occasion, used by the invaders of the eighth to the tenth centuries."

Nevertheless, there are, frequently, certain characteristic features which are indicative of early work, foremost among them, being the nature of the approach and entrance.

\* Bateman was not quite correct in this. The O.S. shows the height of Mam Tor a few inches less than 1,700 feet above sea level, the Edale Valley 696 feet, and the vale east of the hill about 1,100 feet, above the same datum.

† Surely the popular belief in the original continuity of the ramparts is unwarranted, for the disintegration of the shale would commence *ab initio*.—ED.

When we find, as at Mam Tor, the artificial banking carried round the hill, which within the enclosure rises rapidly to a hog-back ridge, we may judge that the work is of earlier date than those more regularly-formed examples where the banking surrounds a flat-topped hill suitable for a "camp" or military post. The entrance way, at "C" on the plan, is quite in accord with the methods used in early fortifications, and as there is no reason to suppose that the cutting through the protection, at "B" on the plan, is original, we may assume "C" to have been the only entrance of any importance.

We have, then, this fortress placed on a hill nearly a thousand feet above the dales, with but one track to its entrance, and that a path of precipitous character, easily obstructed from above; these facts, in addition to the ridged nature of the enclosed land, lead to the conclusion that this, like so many hill forts, was a camp of refuge rather than a continuously occupied *oppidum*, for we cannot imagine the tribes who toiled in the vales ascending and descending such a hill in the ordinary course of their daily lives.

The *tumuli* are probably burial barrows, but their presence in no way suggests the occupation of the fortress for the constant dwelling-places of the living, but rather the contrary, for we know the habit of early men was to bury their dead upon lonely heights.

Often we find hill forts devoid of water supply, suggesting the parallel case of some New Zealand fortresses, formerly used by the Maories, up to which, it was the duty of the women of the tribe, to carry water to cisterns therein, for days before it was anticipated that the refuge would have to be occupied (*see* vol. xxiii. p. 113). But on Mam Tor, close to the western defence, there is a spring which must have been of extreme value to the refugees and their flocks. No doubt, some method was adopted by which sufficient water could be held back within the ramparts, and the surplus carried off by a culvert, but, in later ages, the water has broken through the ramparts on its way to the Edale Valley, as shown at "D" on the plan.

The most casual observer, following the lines of the work, will note the weakness of the defence at the northern apex, where the modern entrance is shown at "B." The precipitous slope which guards the rest is lacking here, and one is tempted to think there must have existed an outer protection of which no evidence remains, or that some other fort rendered assault at that point unlikely or impossible. An interesting feature is the break through the inner rampart on the western side, leading, by a causeway over the fosse, to the outer bank, thus enabling the occupants to rush to its defence on occasion.

In numerous fortresses, timber stockades or palisades crowned the earthen ramparts, but here, stone would be so much more available, that it is highly probable a rough, dry-built wall of stones may have been placed along the outer edges of the tops of both inner and outer ramparts, the stones having long since found their way into field walls, (a modern wall stretches along the length of the enclosure,) or fallen far below to side, or foot, of the precipitous slope. Though the slipping away of the hillsides at "A" has created picturesque cliffs, the falls are to be deplored, as they have carried down so large a slice of the defensive work, breaking the continuity of the ramparts and fosse.

The alternative appellation, "Shivering Mountain," is derived from this action of nature, which is well described by Mr. J. D. Sainter in *Rambles Round Macclesfield*, 1878.

I am favoured with the following geological note by Mr. W. H. Dalton, F.G.S., formerly of the Geological Survey:—

"From the top, down 250 feet or thereabouts, the hill consists of Yoredale sandstones, constituting a precipitous face overlooking a steep slope of shales with occasional seams of impure limestone, whilst on the road below, near the old "Blue John" mine, is seen the thick, white limestone that forms the basis of the entire county.

"The steep slope and precipice are both due to the character of the shale, which is hard, brittle, flaky, and traversed closely by joint-fissures, which absorb water by capillary attraction. Apart from the expansion of this water by frost, the mere lubricant effect of its presence, under the pressure of the overlying mass, tends to perpetual disintegration, covering the slopes with detritus, and giving rise to the local name of the "Shivering Mountain." The

compact sandstone above, with its vertical joint-faces, being deprived of support by the crumbling of the shale, breaks off in large masses, which join the *débris* at the foot of the precipice."

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Mr. Gould is anxious that the plans accompanying his articles on "Earthworks" should, for convenience of comparison, be drawn to the same scale, and as a standard he adopts that of the 25 in. Ordnance map. It is to be hoped that this system will become popular in archæological literature, for nothing is more misleading than variations in scale. Mam Tor is the largest of our Derbyshire earthworks, and its plan would, otherwise, have been reduced, to avoid the somewhat crowded effect of the plate.—Ed.