

Fin Cop Prehistoric Fort.

By EDWARD TRISTRAM.



ONE of the most attractive of the many beautiful roads in Derbyshire is that which runs from the village of Taddington down the well-known Topley Pike hill to Ashford. At each curve in the road an ever-varying combination of hills and woods is disclosed on both sides, and at the foot the river Wye winds and ripples along towards the Monsal Dale Valley. Besides the scenery, however, this locality possesses two objects of prominent antiquarian interest. A gate on the left hand leads to the site of the Romano-British village described by Mr. Storrs-Fox in the last¹ *Journal* of our Society, and the high, bare hill on the further side of the river to the north-east is Fin Cop, on the summit of which is situated the prehistoric earthwork, the subject of this paper.

The best way of approaching the fort is to continue on through Ashford, and then take a sharp turn to the left, and proceed uphill until the hotel at Monsal Dale Head is reached. From this point, by arrangement with the Duke of Devonshire's gamekeeper, whose cottage adjoins the hotel, the fort can be approached through some fields, sloping very gradually up to the summit, which is under half a mile from the hotel.

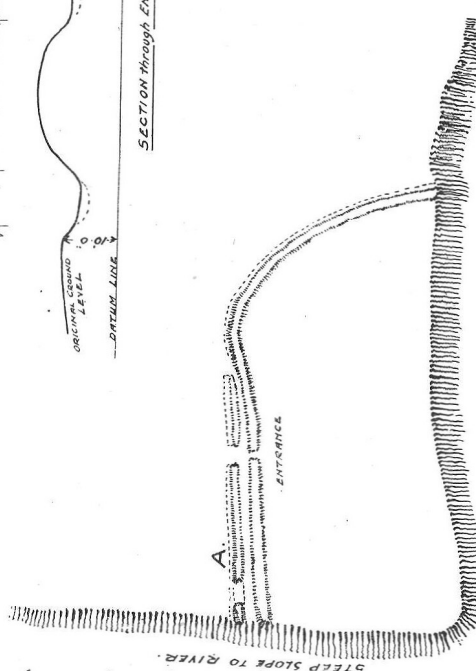
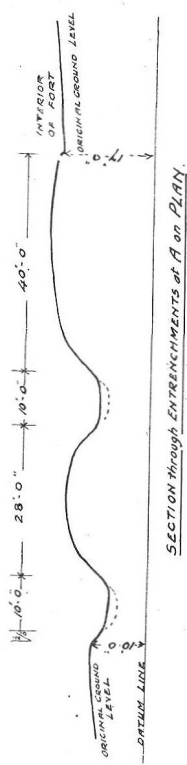
The plan of the fort which illustrates this paper has been prepared by Mr. E. Gunson, who was responsible for the plans of Combs Moss and Carls Wark forts appearing in the last²

¹ Vol. xxxiii., p. 124.

² Vol. xxxiii., p. 1.

Journal. Mr. Gunson's professional training enables him to secure the greatest accuracy, and these plans are of high value from an antiquarian point of view.

— PLAN OF PROMONTORY FORT AT FIN COP —



— ERNEST GUNSON, ARCHITECT, 6 MARSDEN ST., MANCHESTER. —
 Oct 1911.

Fin Cop on the north and west sides rises very abruptly to the height of nearly 500 feet above the river Wye, which curves round its base. The summit is 1,071 feet above the Ordnance

Survey datum line. The slopes on the north and west are in many places precipitous, and to climb to the fort anywhere on those sides would be an arduous undertaking, not unattended with danger.

The builders of the fort appear to have considered that the steep declivity of the hill on the north and west sides, and the river below, constituted a sufficient defence on those sides. In the Ordnance plan, and also in the plan in the *Victoria History of Derbyshire*, which latter appears to be a copy of the former, some indications are given which seem to signify artificial scarping on the westerly side. Mr. Gunson and the writer, on a careful examination of the ground, could find no trace of any such work, and consider that a formation that may have been taken as evidence of scarping is merely a natural outcrop. On the westerly side of the present field-wall (not shown on Mr. Gunson's plan), and between such wall and the declivity, is a considerable expanse of barren ground, which evidently has never been cultivated in any way. If any artificial defensive works ever existed on this ground, which must have been the case had such works encircled the hill, very distinct remains should still be visible.

Some small lime-works, long ago abandoned, at one time existed on the summit of the hill inside the fort. In the Ordnance plan some excavations, evidently made by the lime-workers, have quite properly been shown; but on that plan, and on the *Victoria History* plan, it is impossible to distinguish whether these are ancient defensive works or not. In Mr. Gunson's plan the lime-workers' excavations are omitted, and only the original defensive earthworks, as they now remain, are shown.

The question as to the existence or otherwise of artificial defensive work on the east and north is of some technical importance, because on it depends the decision whether the fort should be considered as a promontory fort, and included under "A" of the Earthworks Committee's classification, as a fort partly inaccessible by reason of precipices, cliffs, or water, and defended in part only by artificial work; or under "B,"

as a fort with artificial defences following the natural line of the hill. In the *Victoria History*, Fin Cop has been classed under "B," but the writer considers that it comes quite clearly within "A."

The artificial defensive work of the fort on the east consists, for nearly two hundred yards from the northerly end, of a double rampart, with a ditch on the outer side of each, commencing at the edge of the precipice on the north. The ramparts are composed of stones, with some admixture of earth, and seem to have been used as a quarry for material for wall-building. Under this usage the upper part of the inner rampart appears to have been thrown down and spread out towards the interior of the fort. At the northerly end, some excavation, probably for the same purpose, has been made, and the outer ditch filled up for a few yards; but the continuation of that ditch, and also of both ramparts, can be traced between the modern wall and the precipice.

The double rampart and ditch extend, as before mentioned, for about two hundred yards towards the south, at which point the outer rampart and ditch disappear; and thenceforward a single rampart and ditch, the latter in many places now obliterated, continue towards the south, and then, curving round to the east, are carried to the edge of the precipitous slope on the west. The measurements of the ramparts and ditches, and the area of the enclosure, are given below. The measurements were taken at a spot marked "A" on the plan, about ten yards from the northerly end of the ramparts, where less disturbance has taken place than at any other point.

	Feet.
Length of double rampart	390
Length of single rampart	940
Total length of ramparts	1,330
Width of outer ditch	10
Depth of ditto from level of ground ...	3
Height of outer rampart from bottom of outer ditch	8
Width of inner ditch	10

	Feet.
Depth of inner ditch from top of outer rampart	6
Height of inner rampart from bottom of inner ditch	9
Contents of enclosure, about $9\frac{3}{4}$ acres.	

There are on the ground no clear indications on which to base a conclusion whether or not the double rampart and ditch originally extended the whole length of the easterly and southerly sides. The ground slopes gently down from the fort on those sides, and there is no apparent reason why a double rampart should have been considered necessary at the northerly end, and a single one sufficient for the remaining distance. So far as one is able to judge, the double rampart was not in any way connected with an involved entrance. It is rather natural to conclude that the outer rampart and ditch were continued, and have been obliterated for agricultural reasons. There is, however, one rather strong piece of evidence against this supposition. In the rough ground outside the field-wall to the south-west, the end of the inner ditch is very clearly cut right to the brink of the precipice; but there is no trace here of a second ditch or of an outer rampart. One would expect that some trace of the outer ditch, if it ever existed, would still be observable at this point. It is not probable that, in this rough, valueless ground, the ditch would have been completely filled up and the rampart entirely removed for any purpose of agriculture. If the double rampart was originally constructed for a short distance only, one wonders whether the builders of the outer rampart were forcibly interrupted by an enemy during its construction, or whether an apprehended danger passed away and the work was voluntarily abandoned.

There is an entrance to the fort through the rampart about one hundred and twenty-five yards from its northerly end, as shown on the plan, and this has the appearance of an original entrance. Mr. Gunson and the writer carefully examined the ground at both ends of the rampart, and as there are clear indications that the outer ditch at the northerly end, and the

single ditch at the south-westerly end, were carried right to the edge of the precipices, it is unlikely that there was an entrance at either end of the rampart, as exists at Combs Moss. It is probable, however, that there was a narrow, practicable path down the steep slope on the west, which would serve as a postern gate or way of escape if the rampart was forced by an enemy.

There are three other promontory forts in Derbyshire, and two of them, namely, Combs Moss and Markland Grips, have an entrance through the rampart not far from the centre, corresponding with the entrance at Fin Cop. Some doubts have been expressed as to whether these entrances were original. In the *Victoria History* it is suggested that the central entrance at Combs Moss might have been made by the Romans, and that the similar entrance at Markland Grips was cut through the rampart for agricultural purposes. In the last *Journal* the present writer expressed the opinion that the central entrance at Combs Moss was contemporaneous with the outer rampart, but corroborated the view that the Markland Grips central entrance was a modern one. When, however, we take into consideration the fact that the three forts of Combs Moss, Markland Grips, and Fin Cop all possess this central entrance, it appears more reasonable to conclude that in each case it formed part of the original design.

There is no water supply inside the fort, but a modern pond is situated at the foot of the rampart near the centre. To carry water up to the fort from the river must have been a laborious task.

A fragment of a polished flint scraper was picked up by the writer inside the fort, and this, and the general character of the stronghold, points to the conclusion that it belongs to the Neolithic age.