

MARKLAND GRIPS IRON AGE PROMONTORY FORT

AN INTERIM REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

MARKLAND GRIPS (SK 511752) is situated on the magnesian limestone in the parish of Elmton, $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles east of the village of Clowne. It has a tongue-like shape and occupies about $10\frac{1}{2}$ acres of level ground. The cliffs with an average height of 25 ft. form a natural defence on the north and south sides. To the north lies a valley, Hollinhill Grips, and to the south Markland Grips. The grips are some 175-200 ft. wide and a stream flows through each. The streams converge as the grips unite into one large valley with a width of 400 ft., at which point the combined streams (after forming a mill dam) become the river Wollen. The course of this river is then south-east towards Creswell Crag. On the west side of the fort, across the neck of the promontory, a system of ramparts and ditches completes the defensive scheme (pl. Ia).

Fig. 1 is based on the report made in 1905 by J. C. Cox,¹ in which he suggested that the following features were to be observed:

1. A rampart of stone on the southern side of the promontory where a steep shelving needed to be protected (A)
2. An entrance at the north-west angle (B)
3. A corresponding steep pathway going up the opposite side of Hollinhill Grips (C)

In 1969 the Derwent Archaeological Society and members of a number of Nottingham University adult education classes attended two week-end meetings at Markland Grips to study:

1. The western defences, making a survey of the present appearance of the site
2. Type of occupation
3. North-west angle entrance (here referred to as the north entrance)
4. The construction of the first rampart and ditch.

¹ *V.C.H. Derby*, I, 364-7.

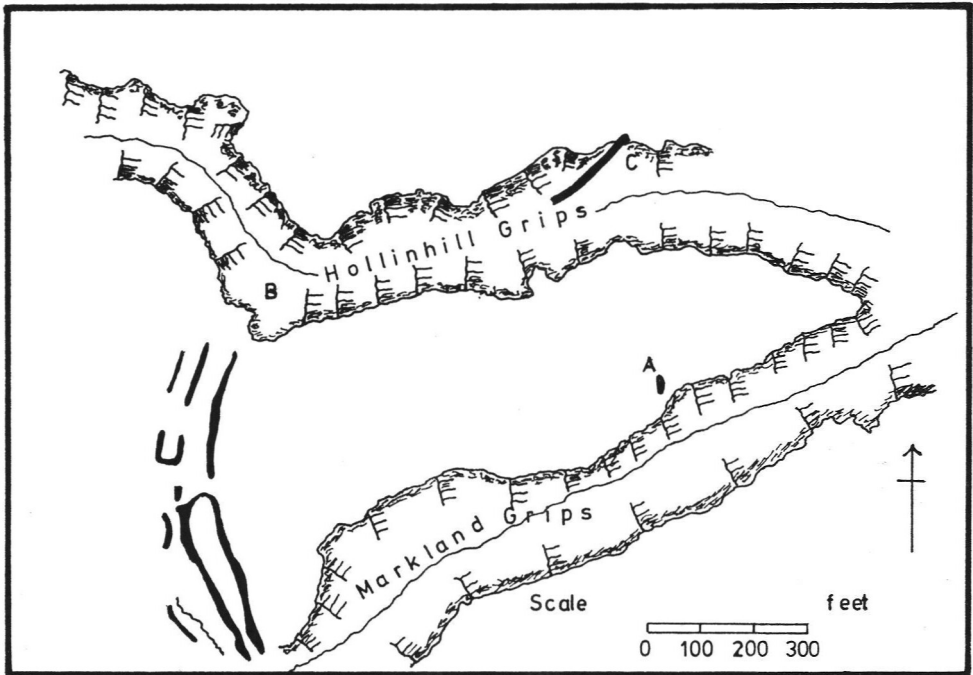


FIG. 1. Plan of the earthworks at Markland Grips, based on the 1905 plan.

SURVEY

The course of three ramparts and ditches can be traced across the neck of the promontory. Of these only the first rampart is complete; though it has been disturbed at the southern end by construction of the railway track in the late 19th century, its termination is clear. The extreme southern point of all ramparts is indeed the best guide to the western defensive system.

North of the central entrance the evidence for the second and third ramparts and ditches is the spread of pebbles and red/orange clay in the arable field west of the first rampart. From the air the line of the second and third ramparts is clear (pl. Ib). It can be seen that the two ramparts are joined together by a further rampart, the combined appearance being that of an elongated U. Fig. 1 shows that this group of ramparts could be seen in 1905. The north termination of the second rampart can be seen (A), (fig. 2) and this takes the defence to the edge of the cliff. Further to the north-west the third rampart would terminate in the same manner.

In the area between the central entrance and the railway track recent disturbance obscures the direction and pattern of the second and third ramparts and ditches. The remains (B) and (C), shown by open hachures,

were recorded in 1905 (fig. 1). An isolated bank (D) could be a branch of the second rampart since the second rampart merges with the first near the entrance. An extension of the second rampart would shield the entrance and prevent direct access to the fort.

Only a small part of the third rampart is visible (E), but in 1905 its direction appears to have been known (C), (fig. 2). In the area (F) there are elevations and depressions in the rough ground suggesting that sufficient evidence may yet be found to complete the defence system, but this would require excavation.

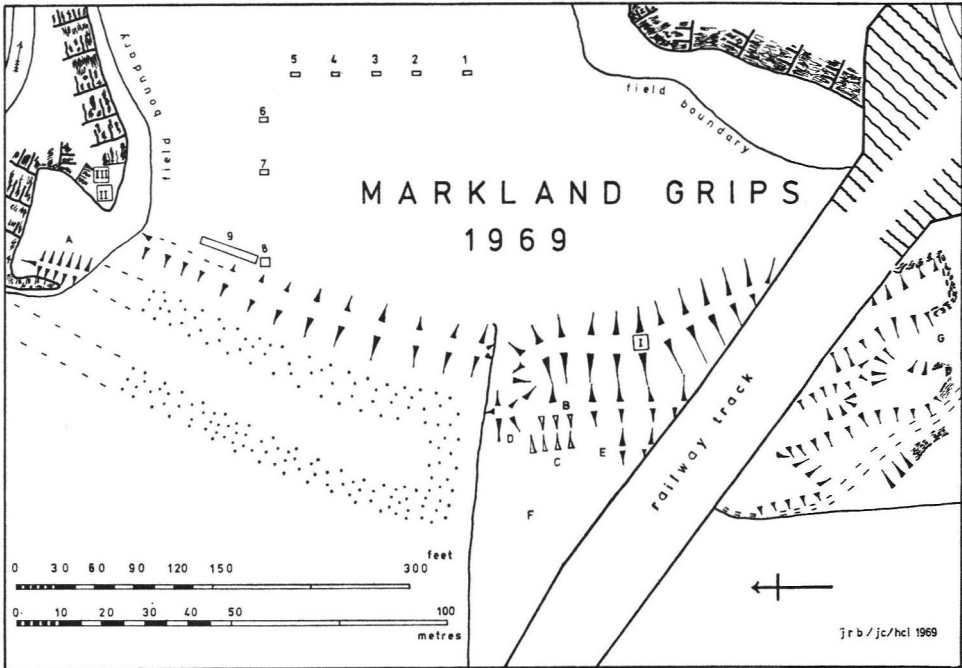


FIG. 2. Plan showing second and third ramparts (stippled), other features in the survey (A-F), sections I-III and trenches 1-9.

It has been suggested that the central opening is a comparatively modern farm entrance.² Whilst this may be so, the following should be considered:

1. The first rampart turns *outwards* as it approaches the centre.
2. From the south the first and second ramparts merge near the centre.
3. The U-appearance of the second, third and linking rampart.
4. Possible function of the isolated bank (D) situated immediately in front of the opening.

If there were an entrance at the southern end of the defences,³ the gap

² *V.C.H.*, I, 366.

³ *D.A.J.*, XXXIII (1911), 14.

through the first rampart could have been concealed when the railway track was constructed. Fig. 1, however, shows the rampart as uninterrupted. It is possible therefore that access to the fort would be along one of the ditches (probably the second) to the central entrance.

The present dimensions of the best preserved parts of the ramparts and ditches are:

Rampart 1	45 ft. wide	9 ft. high
Ditch 1	15 ft. „	—
Rampart 2	18 ft. „	4 ft.
Ditch 2	15 ft. „	—
Rampart 3	15 ft. „	2-3 ft. high

EXCAVATION

Interior (fig. 2)

No structural or other surface features are to be seen inside the fort. This may be due to the fact that the interior has been subject to repeated ploughing. Subsidence, due to coal mining, is likely to increase the destruction of parts of the interior, and already the National Coal Board has filled in a crevice which occurred where the promontory begins to narrow, east of the line of trenches 1-5 (fig. 2).

Trenches 1-9 display similar stratigraphical features. The topsoil, layer 1, maintains a depth of 5-6 in. Layer 2 is a compact red clay with small water-worn pebbles; it has an average depth of 2-3 in. and shows some disturbance, particularly in trenches 1, 2, 8 and 9. Layer 2 rests immediately on the magnesian limestone. The following table shows the relationship of materials and artifacts to layers 1 and 2.

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Materials/Artifacts</i>	<i>Layer 1</i>	<i>Layer 2</i>
1	Modern furnace slag and red shale	x	
2	Pot boilers		x
	Salt glazed pottery (late 19th century)		x
3	Roman type nail		x
	Bone fragments from bone working		x
	Fragments of charcoal		x
4	Bone fragments from bone working		x
	Romano-British pottery	x	
5	Carved astragalus		x
6	Romano-British pottery	x	
7	Romano-British pottery	x	x
8	Burnt clay/slag	x	x
	Larger pieces of slag		x
	Bone fragments from bone working	x	x
	Fragments of iron		x
	Romano-British pottery		x
9	Burnt clay/slag in large quantities	x	x
	Bone fragments from bone working		x
	Iron age pottery		x
	Romano-British pottery	x	x

Only a brief account of the main finds will be given at this stage as a detailed discussion is reserved for the final report.

Pottery

Only two thin body pieces of iron age pottery were found. The fabric consists of a brown fine paste, coloured a yellow/brown on the outside and black inside. The pottery is hand-made and well fired. It is not possible to give a date to this pottery, but it does resemble the description given for the finer ware from Mam Tor hillfort excavations.⁴

Most of the Romano-British coarse wares compare with the pottery from the Scarcliffe Park (enclosure 1) excavations.⁵ A date of early 2nd to 3rd century is suggested for the Scarcliffe Park pottery.⁶

Bone

The remains of bone-working were found in quantity including fitting fragments from finely executed disks of bone. Two of these had the appearance of buttons, one with a diameter of 18 mm. and the other 11 mm. The larger one was unfinished, and the smaller one had neat perforations indicating that it was intended for the decoration of some article of clothing. The astragalus (pig) from trench 5 had been carved at the distal end to produce four short pointed legs; its possible use would be for decorating pottery.

Slag

Large quantities of slag came from trenches 8 and 9. A specialist report on the slag is not yet available, and since the colour and hardness of vitreous materials are often misleading a discussion at this stage would be premature. Chemical analysis does however show a strong presence of iron, but examination has been carried out on only a small quantity of slag with inconclusive results. No hearths have been identified, but the large quantities of burnt clay fused with pebbles and vitreous material may be significant.

First rampart and north entrance

Section I (fig. 3)

The rampart consists of a clay and gravel core with flat slabs of limestone lodged horizontally into the face of the core. The appearance is that of ledges 1 ft. 8 in. apart at the top half of the rampart. Earth and stone rubble is packed upon and between the ledges, layer 3. The outer face does not show timber construction of any kind nor stone wall revetment.

⁴ *D.A.J.*, LXXXVII (1967), 158-9.

⁵ Report forthcoming.

⁶ I am grateful to Mr. M. Dolby of Doncaster Museum for his comments on the Cantley pottery. There are a few wares comparable to the Cantley, near Doncaster, and Little London (Lincolnshire) wares. The bulk of pottery from Scarcliffe Park is however in fabrics different from either source which suggests that the kilns have yet to be discovered.

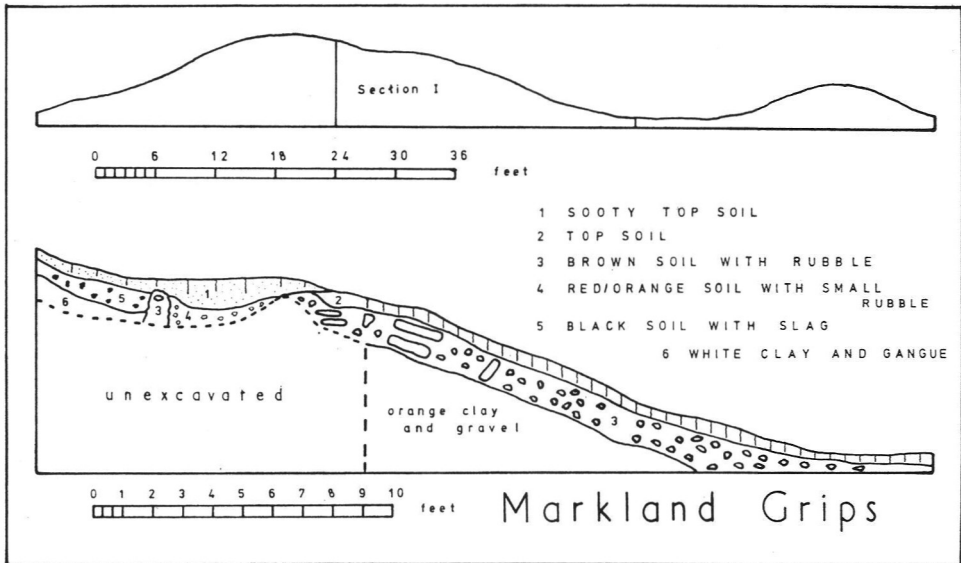


FIG. 3. Section I with profile of first and second ramparts.

The outer tail of the rampart runs out at the level of the parent rock; here and to the end of the section, there is no sign of a ditch cut out of the rock.

At the top of the rampart layer 1 consists of a dark soil mixed with soot, tailing off at the lip of the rampart where it meets layer 2. Layer 3 is not seen at the top of the rampart, except as a division between layers 4 and 5. Layer 4 is a loose red/orange soil with small rubble and is probably the upper part of the core which has been disturbed. Layer 5 is a firm black soil containing slag. Layer 6 consists of a compact white clay material with lumps of yellow/white gangue containing veins of iron oxide. On reaching the level of layer 6 it was decided not to extend the section to the interior or to excavate the rampart below the point reached.

North entrance (fig. 4)

Excavation 26 ft. 6 in. from the boundary fence at the head of the gully, section II, confirmed that there is an entrance at the northern end of the neck of the promontory. To the north of the section there is a large accumulation of stone rubble. There is no corresponding accumulation of rubble on the south side. Though a quantity of scree might be expected near the rock outcrops the bulk of the rubble belongs to a small wall which would run alongside the trackway but only on the north side. The only finds were those of two fragments of Central Gaulish samian ware.

Section III was 15 ft. north-east of section II at a point where two rock outcrops converge to give a width of 7 ft. 6 in. for the trackway. A good surface of level rocks, like a pavement, was found but this need be



a. Aerial view from the east.



b. Aerial view from the south-west showing U-shaped feature.

MARKLAND GRIPS

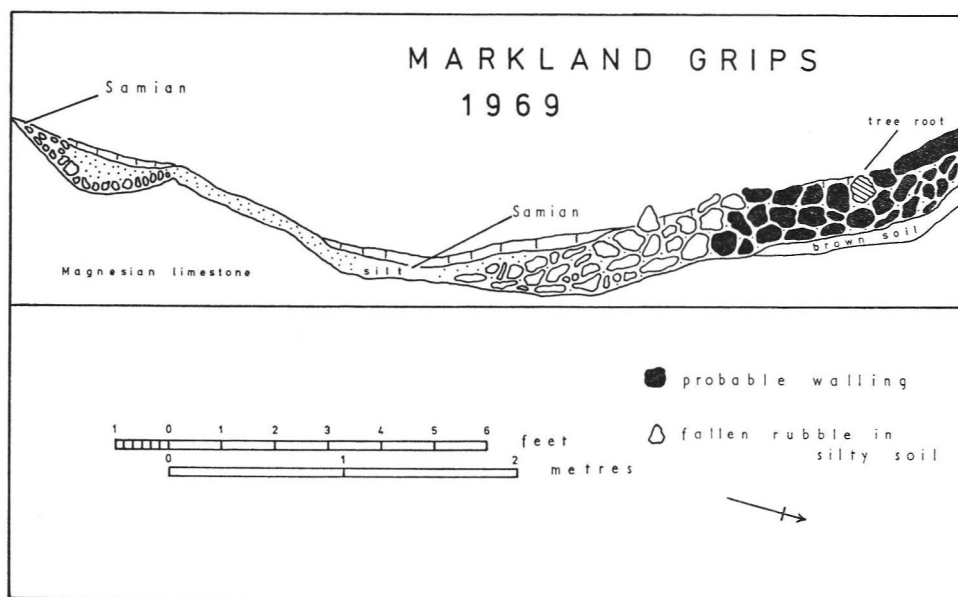


FIG. 4. Section II at the north entrance.

no more than the surface of the magnesian limestone which cleaves along the bedding plane. Nevertheless it would provide a suitable surface for a track up the gully. A deposit of large and medium size rubble is found on the northern side of the track, but as there is little of it to the south it is probably a continuation of the northern retaining wall seen at section II. Also at the north side the parent rock is eroded or cut away forming a trench running parallel to the track. The trench contains a mixture of black silty soil and small rubble, but no time was available to determine the depth and function of this trench. There is no trench apparent on the south side of the section, nor was it present on either side at section II.

Summary

Markland Grips is a promontory fort with three ramparts and ditches protecting the western side. The first rampart is the largest and best preserved. It is of dump construction in which stone plays a large part. No attempt appears to have been made to increase the effectiveness of the ditch by cutting into the parent rock. Entrances may have been sited at the central point on the neck of the promontory and at the northern and southern ends of the defences where there are natural gullies.

No structural remains are visible in the interior of the fort. Materials and artifacts indicate occupation at some unknown date in the iron age. There was also occupation in the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. Industrial activity is suggested by the quantity of gangue, slag and burnt clay, but

the period of working is unknown since no securely stratified objects have been found with the materials. Gangue and slag have been deposited at the top of the first rampart. In order to do this the soil and rubble belonging to the original construction had been disturbed. No other part of the rampart contained either material.

DISCUSSION

The outstanding feature of Markland Grips is its position as an inland promontory fort. Approach from the west is not difficult since Markland and Hollinhill Grips can easily be outskirted by passing one mile south-west or half a mile north-west of the neck of the promontory. It is also possible that an early trackway passes the fort at the points where Markland and Hollinhill Grips would be by-passed.⁷

In strengthening the natural position of the fort a system of three ramparts and ditches provides defence in depth. If the first ditch is representative of the other two, then apart from extending the depth of protection, the more effective rock-cut ditch would seem not to have been important to the builders. This is surprising since the only convincing obstacle is the first rampart, and a good deal of labour appears to have gone into its construction. It raises the question as to the type of intruder the occupants of the fort would be anticipating.

All three entrances could relate to the iron age occupation. The north and the south entrances would give access to a water supply, and both are well screened by ramparts. The northern entrance has been disturbed and the first rampart breached near the head of the gully, but this could be due to more recent activity. It should be remembered however that the Romano-British pottery has come from the northern side of the fort.

The appearance of the deposits of gangue and slag at the top of the rampart suggests that industrial working might have been carried out on the rampart. In this position there would be the advantage of the westerly wind for the reduction of ores. Also, some processing seems to have been carried out on the inside of the fort in the area of trenches 8 and 9. Further discussion of these activities will be possible when the analysis of materials has been completed.

Finally, the object of the survey and trial excavation was to assess the present state of Markland Grips fort and its potential as a source of information for the iron age and Romano-British occupation of sites in Derbyshire. As a result it has now been possible to determine the limitations of the site and to plan future work, which will be based on the following:

- i. Remaining part of section I with particular reference to the gangue and slag

⁷ Discussed by the writer in an unpublished thesis, Matlock College of Education, 1960, and to be included in a forthcoming report. Cf. *D.A.J.*, LXXXVI (1966), 83-4.

2. Occupation of the interior, preceded by a proton-gradiometer survey as the only possible stratified finds are likely to come from pits, if these are present
3. Central entrance
4. Area immediately west of the central entrance and probable trackway from the fort to connect with the main south to north route
5. Southern entrance
6. Second and third ramparts and ditches north of the central entrance.

Acknowledgements

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