

REBECCA JONES RCAHMS DAY OF ARCHAEOLOGY

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My name is Rebecca Jones and I'm a Romanist. My regular work at RCAHMS is as an Operational Manager in the Survey and Recording group where I am responsible for Data and Recording, overseeing a range of projects relating to the data in our online database, Canmore, and its mapping application, and working in partnership across the sector to deliver information to the public. Information Management is one strand of my research interests but another is very firmly placed in Roman military archaeology.



View of the eastern defences of the Roman fort at Ardoch (©Rebecca Jones 2008)

Scotland is one of the best places in the Roman empire to study the archaeology of the Roman army. Repeated attempts to conquer Scotland left a legacy of remains that are the envy of the rest of the Roman world. One of the places where this is most evident is the [Roman fort of Ardoch](#) in Perthshire. This is the location of one of the best earthwork Roman forts in Britain, and the plain to the north of the fort was a marshalling ground for large armies on campaign through Perthshire to the north.

The fort itself was occupied several times leaving a legacy of multiple ditches still surviving as earthworks. I have accompanied several tours of the site and visitors never fail to be impressed by the scale of the defences. Some of these were excavated in the late 19th century by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and some of the photographs from those [excavations](#) are amongst the most fascinating [early excavation shots](#) held in the Collections at RCAHMS.

But not only is the fort an amazing site. To the north lie at least five marching camps. These were temporary structures occupied by invading armies who were housed in rows upon rows of leather tents. We are fortunate that they built ramparts and ditches around the perimeter of their encampments, for it is these that leave visible archaeological remains. Imagine a field of tents from T in the Park or Glastonbury: after the weekend is over and the tents have gone – what have you left? No doubt a sea of litter but the Roman's did not live in our disposable culture. Once the litter is cleared you probably have a muddy field. But then six months later? Is there any evidence that those tents were there? But if a regular perimeter rampart and ditch with particular rounded corners and entrance protection is built, then that leaves an archaeological footprint that we can detect as Roman. The majority of the camps at Ardoch have been levelled through centuries of ploughing and only the perimeter ditch can be seen from the air through differential cropmarkings in dry summers, although stretches of three still survive as upstanding earthworks.



Rebecca Jones explaining the camps at Ardoch

A handful of other camps in Scotland have revealed internal rubbish pits and ovens through aerial and geophysical survey and excavation but for most camps, it is the perimeter which we can identify. The camps at Ardoch witnessed one of the largest Roman forces that ever took to the field in Britain, with the largest camp enclosing over 54 hectares / 130 acres.

It's this combined evidence of the transient Roman army plus the troops stationed in the fort here for several years, that make these seemingly peaceful fields in Perthshire so fascinating.