



Castle Law, Abernethy. ©Ken Ward

Explorer Guide 3

The Tay Estuary between Perth and Dundee is rich in archaeological remains and has a series of impressive ancient forts along both sides of the river.

At the end of the Bronze Age, which spanned the second millennium BC, there was a serious climatic deterioration, and the weather became colder and wetter. The resulting pressure on land and resources led to the construction of new types of defensive structure in the Iron Age. Hillforts, duns and

monumental roundhouses were built, as well as loch dwellings known as crannogs.

The Iron Age in Scotland began around 700 BC and pans over a thousand years of history. It includes the centuries of Roman military activity, like the advance of Agricola in the 70s AD, the campaign of Severus between 208 and 210 AD, and ends with the emergence of early historic kingdoms of the Picts and the Scots. Hillforts were built throughout both the Iron Age and early historic periods.

This leaflet was produced as a legacy project of the Tay Landscape Partnership. TLP has engaged over 82,000 people with their natural, built and cultural heritage.

To find out more about the project and for more info, go to www.taylp.org



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Your Archaeology Field Guide

While walking any of the forts, you will explore various lumps and bumps in the landscape often easier to see with low vegetation or low light from low sun. This field guide is aimed to help you visit sites and work out what lies beneath your feet...

As you stand on top of the fort, imagine how the landscape would have looked 2,000 years ago.

Ramparts:

This is the name for the large faced stone and rubble walls that encircled most forts. Some sites only have one, others have multiple. These will appear as 3-5m wide raised banks that you can often walk along the top of. Look out for facing stones on the outer or inner edges.

Banks & Ditches:

As well as solid stone walls, some hillforts have banks and/or ditches, adding additional defences to the site. Today, they may appear shallow as they have filled up with organic material but would have been much deeper.

Entranceways:

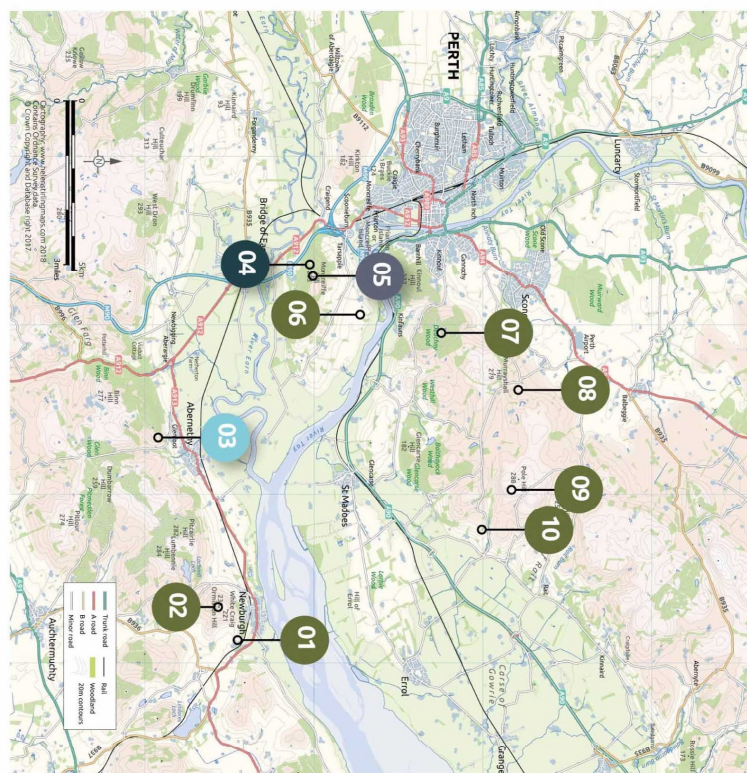
Rounded wall ends or gaps in the defences may indicate original entrance ways. Some entrances or approaches would be intimidating for those entering them, especially as the walls may have been 5m high and well defended from above.

Roundhouses:

These buildings were often constructed inside hillforts. Look for circular earth banks, or circular depressions, between 8-15m in diameter, often occurring in pairs.

Antiquarian Excavation:

As you walk around the site you may notice small trenches or gullies crossing over the site or following around stone walls. Many of the local hillforts were excavated in the late 19th century AD by Victorian archaeologists and local people.



- 01 Clatchard Craig: now quarried away, but rescue excavations revealed Iron Age and Dark Age artefacts.
- 02 The Ring, Ormiston Hill: oval fort bounded by a single stone wall which has almost completely vanished.
- 03 Castle Law, Abernethy: oval-shaped single enclosing wall, with second defensive wall on west.
- 04 Moncreiffe Hill: inner rampart follows top plateau of the hill, with additional walls and earthworks downslope.
- 05 Mordon Top, Moncreiffe: large multi-phased site, Iron Age in date with monumental stone walls and fortified stone round house / broch.
- 06 Dow Hill: truncated site with 2/3 concentric ditches and some remains of rampart.
- 07 Grassy Law, Deuchny Wood: single wall oval shape in plan with ditch at east.
- 08 Law Hill, Armbathie: multi-phase hillfort with internal buildings and various ramparts. Chequer de frise (stood up stones to deter attackers) on the North West.
- 09 Pole Hill, Ewelick: multi-phase site with roundhouses in the interior and three entrances.
- 10 Over Durdie, Pitcudie: Duns thought to be Iron Age, four concentric rings of very faint earthworks now visible.



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Castle Law Abernethy

This fort sits sheltered from the west and commands an extensive view to the north over the River Tay. The fort has a small interior but 5m thick walls and is heavily defended.

This site was first excavated by two local men from Abernethy in the late 19th century AD, with help from archaeologist David Christison. Recent excavation has shown the timber laced fort walls still survived, and a fire in the interior of the fort took place near the end of its life.

One of the key features of this site is timber laced walls. This type of construction involves horizontal timber running through the stone face and rubble core wall. The timber knits the wall materials together and makes it more structural stable.

In the 17th century AD, witches are believed to have cast their spells from a cave on the hill. Several witches are thought to have been burned to death on nearby Abernethy Hill in the 17th century AD.



An artist's impression of how Castle Law may have looked at the end of the Iron Age. ©Chris Mitchell

CAN YOU SEE A CISTERN?

Water and its management were vital to these fortified hillforts. If under siege, it was crucial to access water to support life of both humans and animals brought in for protection.

CASTLE LAW HAS A ROCK CUT TANK THAT COULD COLLECT RAINWATER.

Excavated wall at Castle Law. ©PKHT



Moredun Top Fort

Moredun is an anglicised form of *mòr*, Gaelic for big and *dùn*, Celtic for fort – which is exactly what Moredun was.

This fort is vast – as big as two football fields. Archaeologists have uncovered the walls of three successive forts built as impressive symbols of power. At times of conflict, animals would have been brought here from surrounding pastures for safety. As you walk up to the site, you may be walking an ancient route through an original entranceway.

If you stand at the cairn, have a look at what you can see around you like hilltops and riverways. The position of this site is one of great control. It's likely the tribal leaders controlled much of the nearby land and people who lived close by.

Excavation has also revealed cup mark stones - early prehistoric carved stones, often re-purposed in the Iron Age walls and placed facing upwards. The Iron Age people quarried the stone to build their huge fortifications and would have seen these ancient markings.

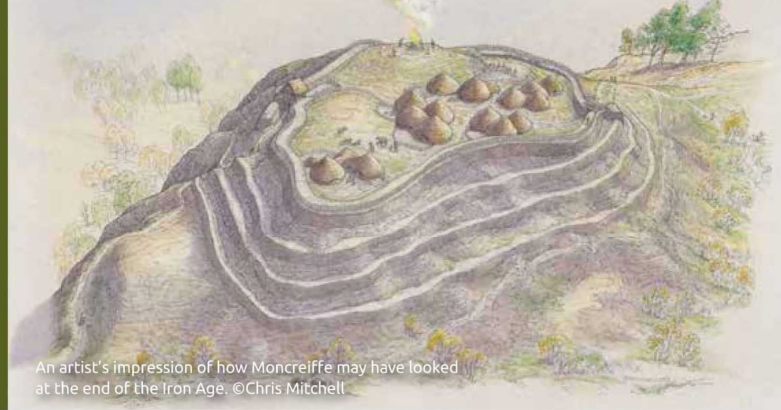


Moredun Top rampart wall aerial. ©Ken Ward

Can you find all four ramparts? The walls here are 5m thick and would have been 5m tall in places. They survive as banks now, but you can walk along them and get an idea of the scale of this huge fort built over 2,000 years ago. The rampart at the very top of the hill was built with horizontal timbers – an architectural style called timber lacing which made the wall stronger.

The small mound at the north east of site is actually a monumental stone round house. It would have been a special building for the powerful leaders of the fort.

As you walk up to the site from the north you may be following in Iron Age footsteps. Although modified in the 19th century AD to bring the lairds and ladies to see the view, this pathway may indeed go by an entrance to this huge fort.



An artist's impression of how Moncreiffe may have looked at the end of the Iron Age. ©Chris Mitchell

Moncreiffe Hillfort

The smaller of two hillforts located on Moncreiffe Hill, commands a view over the south west towards the River Earn and south / south west.

The fort on Moncreiffe Hill was a well-defended site where leading prehistoric people ruled and from where they farmed the surrounding land. The rich agricultural land of the surrounding valley floor supported a population who would have helped to construct the fort.

Although much smaller in size to its neighbour Moredun Top, archaeologists recently found large stone and earth ramparts, entrance ways and artefacts that date from the Iron Age (200 BC).

Who built this fort?

The tribes occupying this fort and Moredun Top may have been peaceful neighbours or from the same clan. With views over the River Earn and down Strathearn, this site has a different strategic position to Moredun.

Though tricky to see if you walk around the top hill level, you are standing on the most inner rampart, a 5m thick wall of stone and rubble. As you look down the slope, you can make out ditches and banks. These relate to the outer ramparts, which would have once stood 3-5m tall.

Ancient roots

During a recent dig, a leaf-shaped arrowhead was discovered, which dates from the Neolithic era. It's likely this hill was used in early prehistory for hunting.

Placename

Moncreiffe Hill's name comes from the Pictish language by way of Gaelic. *Monadh craobh* means 'hill of the tree'.

Neolithic arrowhead. ©PKHT



Moredun Top Rampart wall facing stones. ©PKHT



An artist's impression of how Moredun Top may have looked at the end of the Iron Age. ©Chris Mitchell

Why is it called the Iron Age?

The Iron Age people adopted the use of iron as it spread across Europe because it's harder than bronze. It revolutionised tools, weapons and domestic goods.

They smelted the metal from iron oxide, which is found widely in nature. Using bellows, they pumped air into stone 'bloomeries' or furnaces sealed with clay and then moulded or hammered the 'wrought' iron to make implements.

Iron artefacts don't usually survive well in acidic soil and, if found, are fragile and corroded.