



The Iron Age

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Introduction and History of Research

The Iron Age (750 BC–AD 400) is often considered to be a well understood period of Scottish prehistory. The stone-built brochs and duns of the north and west have become almost inseparable from discussions of Iron Age Scotland, while the large number of hilltop enclosures and forts of the south and east have long attracted the attention of antiquarians and archaeologists alike. Recent popular general studies of the Scottish Iron Age (Armit 1997; Hingley 1998), however, have tended to ignore evidence relating to west central Scotland in favour of that connected with these better researched regions, often giving the impression that little work has been done in the area. This tendency has applied to south-west Scotland in general, including Dumfries and Galloway (Banks 2002), and in particular to Renfrewshire (Alexander 2000). The archaeological remains that characterize the Iron Age, in contrast with earlier periods (Finlay and Noble in this series), are not artefacts or burial cairns but the extensive remains of settlements, often bounded by banks and ditches, and from the later part of the Iron Age evidence of the incursions of the Roman Army into west central Scotland (Hanson 'The Roman Period' in this series) (fig. 1). The aim of this paper is to review the current evidence and propose some areas for future research.

Our knowledge of the Iron Age of west central Scotland is based on work undertaken during the last 40 years. However, some of the earliest references to local archaeological sites can be found in the descriptions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers. Increasing numbers of earthwork structures were being recorded, such as the possible fort on Barr Hill, Kilbarchan, Renfrewshire, and the possible fort on Oakshaw Hill, Paisley, Renfrewshire, which at the time was considered to be Roman (NSA 1845). Such references often provide accounts of sites destroyed by later building or levelled by agricultural improvements. Archaeological remains are discussed in local history books, which appear from the late eighteenth century onwards, such as *The General Description of the Shire of Renfrew* (Crawfurd and Semple 1782) which mentions the 'vestiges of an Old British Camp' on the lands of Rosshall, Renfrewshire, now only visible as a cropmark (Alexander 1992, 20). For Rutherglen and the East Kilbride area, Ure's history (1793, 124) also provides some useful information, such as about the recovery of structural remains and Roman Iron Age artefacts from the large mound at Gallowflat, Rutherglen, South Lanarkshire. The first edition Ordnance Survey maps of the mid nineteenth century often illustrate sites which have now been destroyed, such as South Branchal fort, near Bridge of Weir, Inverclyde, which was planted with conifers in the 1950s, or the enclosure on Byres Hill, Barshaw Park, Paisley, which was flattened to create a golf course.

Apart from David Christison's study of the Lanarkshire forts (Christison 1890), little of our study area received much antiquarian interest. Another notable exception, however, was the work undertaken by John Bruce and William Donnelly (Bruce 1900) on the intertidal crannogs located along the banks of the Clyde, which focussed on Dumbuck on the north side, close to Dumbarton Rock. Around the same time the small dun site of Dumbaie, above Dumbuck, was also excavated (Millar 1896; Hothersall 2007, 58–9) and Donnelly painted beautiful watercolours of the work in progress. Bruce continued the crannog work by investigating another site in Renfrewshire on the opposite, southern, shore of the Clyde at Langbank East, between 1901 and 1902 (Bruce 1908). Donnelly's watercolours provide an excellent impression of the nature of such antiquarian interest and have recently been published along with a discussion of the controversy over some fake artefacts recovered at the time (Hale and Sands 2005). Other crannog sites to attract early interest were at Hyndford Bridge, South Lanarkshire (Munro 1899) and the sites at Bishop Loch and Lochend Loch, north of Glasgow, in East Dunbartonshire (Monteith and Robb 1937).

In the first half of the twentieth century there was increased interest in surveying and excavating Iron Age sites, and inventories by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) were produced for much of south-east Scotland and work undertaken on the Border forts. One outlier to all this work was Gordon Childe's rescue excavations in 1939 of the fort on Cairngryffe Hill, Lanarkshire, in advance of its destruction by quarrying during World War II (Childe 1941).

After World War II, studies of hillforts elsewhere in Scotland linked them into an emerging British and European framework. Members of the Glasgow Archaeology Society helped excavate the multivallate fort at Meikle Reive, East Dunbartonshire (Fairhurst 1956) and also participated in the excavations of the earthwork in the North Wood of Pollok Park (Johnson 1959 and 1960; Hothersall 2007, 42–3). In the 1950s RCAHMS visited many of the major sites in the study area as part of the Marginal Land Survey and lists of the Renfrewshire sites were published in an appendix of the Selkirkshire Inventory (1957). A number of these sites were described for the first time in Feachem's *Guide to Prehistoric Scotland* (1963), including the hillforts of Park Knowe and Blackhill in Lanarkshire; Craigmarloch Wood, Inverclyde; and Walls Hill, Duncarnock and Dunwan in Renfrewshire.

In the 1950s and 1960s there was a marked increase in the involvement of amateur archaeologists and the most productive fieldworker in the study area, particularly in Renfrewshire, was Frank Newall (Alexander 1996a and b), who in addition to surveying (Newall 1964, 1978) also undertook excavations. The

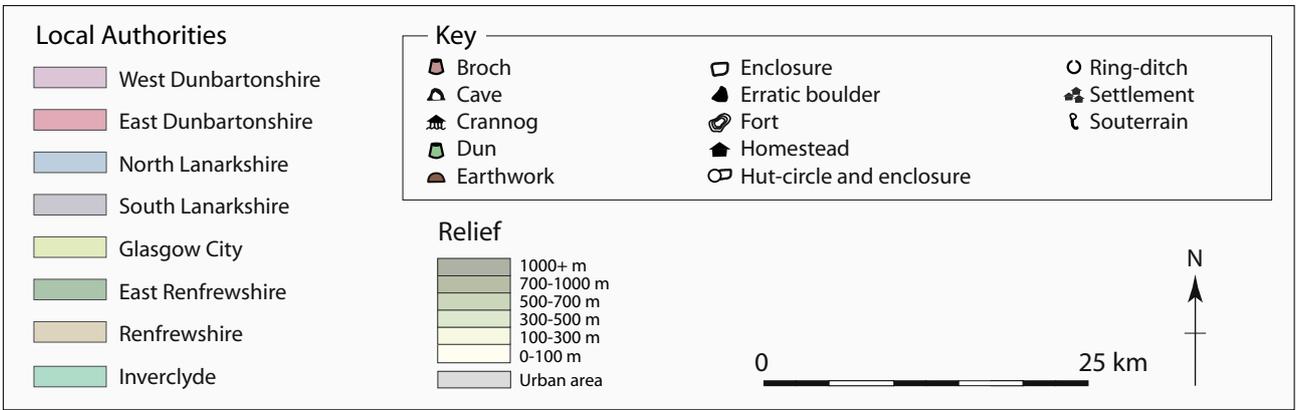
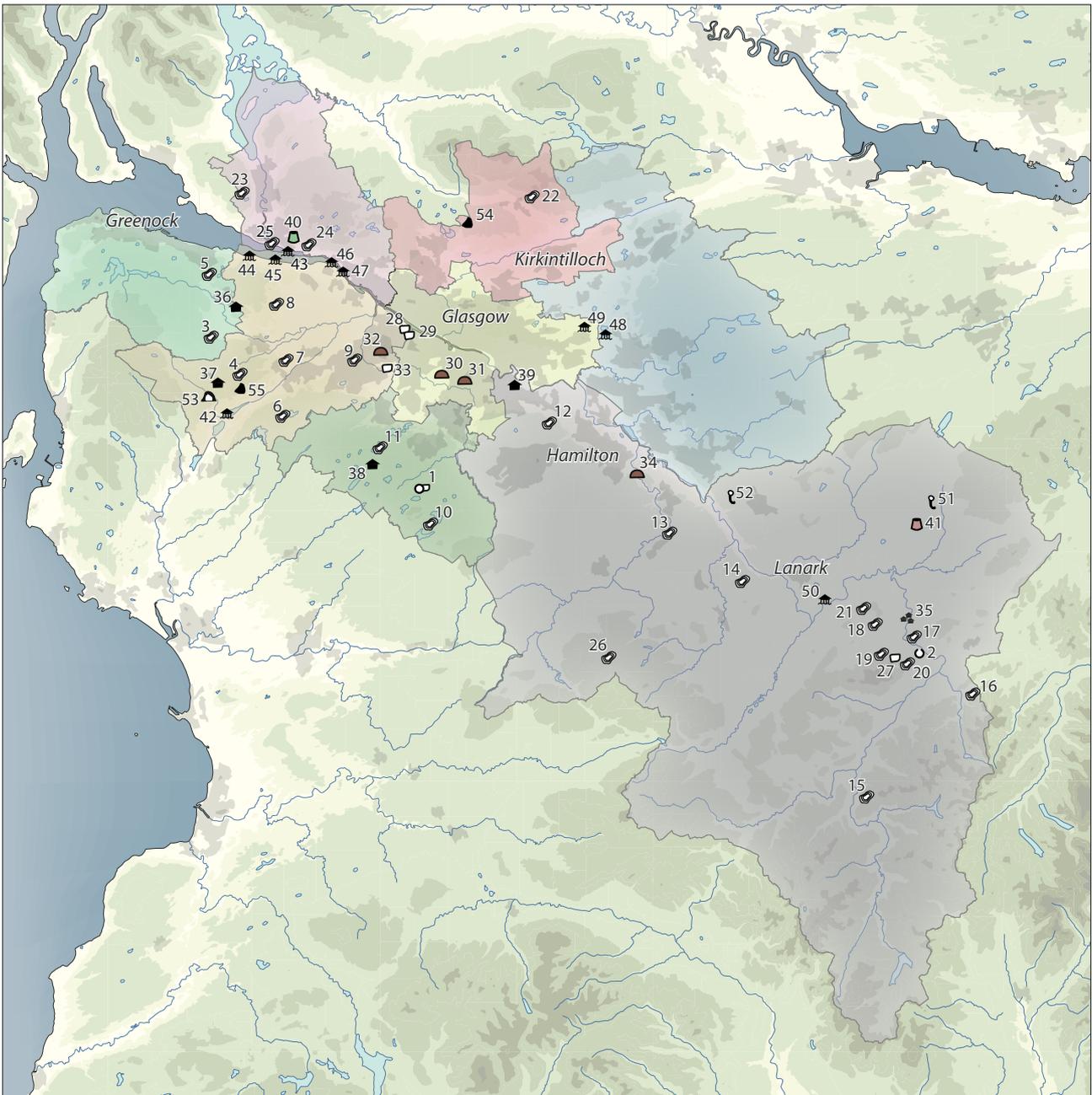


Figure 1. Distribution map of Iron Age sites in the study area mentioned in the text (for site identifications see table 1).

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small excavation on the large hillfort on Walls Hill, Renfrewshire, in 1956 was to mark the beginning of a series of investigations into different site types in Renfrewshire that was published by Paisley Museum (Newall 1960). Newall then excavated the prehistoric and medieval homestead at Knapps, Kilmacolm, Renfrewshire, between 1961 and 1962 (Newall 1965).

Around this time Robin Livens of the Hunterian Museum excavated the homestead at Knockmade, Lochwinnoch, Renfrewshire, in 1959–60 and 1967, while Helen Nisbet of Paisley Museum investigated the vitrified hillfort at Craigmarloch, near Port Glasgow, Inverclyde, between 1963 and 1965. Both sites, however, remained unpublished until 1996 (Livens 1996; Nisbet 1996). The first regional study which incorporated the area was Jack Scott's book on the archaeology of south-west Scotland (1966).

By far the most systematic and important study carried out in west central Scotland is the RCAHMS Inventory of Lanarkshire (1978). In addition to publishing plans of many of the upstanding remains of forts and enclosures in the area, this volume also includes a large number of cropmark sites. This was the first major concentration of such sites to be systematically photographed, described and published. The largest concentration of cropmark sites is formed by the enclosures found on the rich arable land in the Upper Clyde Valley.

Further north and west there is a higher proportion of land under pasture and thus cropmarks are less prolific (see Hanson 'Aerial Reconnaissance for Archaeology' in this series). There is a small cluster of cropmark sites in Renfrewshire within the low-lying farmland along the southern side of the Clyde (Alexander 1992). Of these, the cropmark site at Shiels, Govan, Glasgow, was the first to be investigated, in advance of warehouse construction in 1973 (Scott 1996). On the opposite side of the Clyde, also in the 1970s, Euan MacKie excavated trenches on the hillfort on Sheep Hill, North Dunbartonshire, as part of his work on vitrified forts (MacKie 1976).

More recent developments have affected the low-lying sites and have been the subject of developer-funded investigations. At Annieston, near Symington, South Lanarkshire, three cropmark ring ditches, interpreted as later prehistoric houses, were excavated in 1994 (Neighbour 1995). In the early 1990s there were also several major linear construction projects, such as the upgrading of the A74; the Shell Pipeline cut through the eastern end of the study area in Clydesdale, but surprisingly little of Iron Age date was recovered.

The construction of an Ikea store at Braehead, Renfrewshire (Ellis 2007) led to the complete excavation of a cropmarked, multiple-ditched enclosure, c. 500m to the south-east: the Shiels

enclosure, Glasgow. This was the single largest archaeological excavation of a later prehistoric settlement site in west central Scotland. In December 2007 excavations were carried out on a previously unknown palisaded and ditched enclosure at Mar Hall, Renfrewshire, in advance of the construction of a golf course beside the south end of the Erskine Bridge (Alexander and McCrae 2012, 63–65).

Settlement types

It is clear from this brief review of previous work that the Iron Age of west central Scotland has attracted quite a lot more attention than might be realized. The quality and quantity of the data, however, varies greatly and it is difficult to provide anything more than a brief overview of the evidence here. The sites can easily be divided into enclosed and unenclosed settlements.

The nature of settlement development and the relationship between enclosed and unenclosed sites continues to be one of the major research topics that dominates the study of later prehistoric settlement in southern Scotland. For many years the Hownam sequence provided an evolutionary model for the development of Iron Age settlement types (Armit 1997). This sequence consisted of a progression from unenclosed settlement to palisaded enclosure to univallate fort (bounded by a single rampart) to multivallate fort (bounded by more than one rampart) and finally to unenclosed settlement again. Although the results from Broxmouth (Hill 1982) have indicated that the situation in the eastern Lowlands is more complex than suggested by this simple evolutionary model devised for the central Borders, the evidence from west central Scotland does not contradict the general trend over time towards enclosing works of increasingly enhanced solidity.

Unenclosed settlements

Recent work has been undertaken on stone-walled hut circles within the study area, as at Picketlaw, Renfrewshire (Alexander and Henry 1996), where radiocarbon dates now suggest that these start in the middle of the second millennium BC. Likewise, excavation at Lintshie Gutter, in Clydesdale, has shown that the unenclosed platform settlements of Upper Clydesdale date to the first half of the second millennium BC (Terry 1995). As yet there is little direct evidence for unenclosed house sites that definitely belong to the Iron Age, although it is possible that some of the sites of upstanding hut circles, like those identified in the Renfrewshire uplands (Newall 1964), may belong to this period. In addition some of the annular cropmark sites of the upper Clyde valley may represent Iron Age house sites.

The only excavation of an unenclosed settlement of ring-ditch houses in west central Scotland



We are grateful to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland for permission to reproduce this image.

Figure 2. David Christison's sketch of the entrance to Fallburn fort printed in 1890 by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

was undertaken at Annieston, South Lanarkshire (Neighbour 1995). The truncated remains of three possible ring-ditch houses, one with an associated pit-defined enclosure 30m in diameter, were excavated. It is possible that the enclosure served as a yard for the house, perhaps holding animals or enclosing a small cultivated plot. A small assemblage of coarse pottery from the fill of the ditch of Houses 1 and 2, and the absence of any funerary deposits, suggested that the sites were likely to be domestic structures. Charcoal from within the fill of the ring ditch of House 1 was radiocarbon dated to 770–400 BC (see table 2).

Large Enclosed Settlements

By far the most numerous settlements thought to belong to the Iron Age are large enclosed sites, including forts, settlements, palisaded enclosures and simple enclosures.

Forts

Forts or hillforts are often thought of as the archetypal Iron Age sites but there is growing evidence from elsewhere in Scotland that many may have had their origins in the Late Bronze Age (c. 1000–700 BC). The discovery of broken clay moulds for late bronze-age weapons on Sheep Hill (MacKie 1976) supports this argument. The forts were defended by a variety of works including earthen banks, stone walls and ditches. It is also clear that the enclosing works of many must have incorporated a good deal of timber in their construction. Often this is only apparent following excavation or where the defences have burnt and the wall core has vitrified, as at Craigmarnloch and Sheep Hill. Given the topography of west central Scotland, the majority of forts are irregular in plan, following the contours of the hills or

promontories on which they are set, and incorporating natural features such as steep slopes and cliffs. The exception to these general characteristics is the group of circular forts in South Lanarkshire, such as those at Arbory Hill, Fallburn (figs 2 and 3), Chester Hill (fig. 6) and St John's Kirk (RCAHMS 1978). These last three are almost in view of each other, occupying round-topped hills more characteristic of the Southern Uplands and the Scottish Borders.

Generally it is difficult to see direct comparisons between forts in west central Scotland, as they form such a heterogeneous group. Only at a very local level, as in the Clydesdale group, are similarities evident. Perhaps these local-scale patterns are simply

Figure 3. The circular fort at Fallburn, South Lanarkshire.



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a reflection of the geological and topographical nature of the ground and availability of construction materials in these areas, but there may be some cultural link as well. Certainly the incidence of more than two entrances on forts and settlements appeared to be a localized phenomenon confined between Abington and Elvanfoot (RCAHMS 1978, 26). Such shared architectural features could at least indicate contemporaneity between sites and perhaps close social ties between the occupants. It is possible that other instances of local characteristics are preserved in other elements of the archaeological record which would require excavation to discover, such as house forms and material culture. Unfortunately none of these sites have been excavated.

Amongst the forts several stand out due to their size, such as Carman, in West Dunbartonshire, and Walls Hill (Feachem 1966, Hothersall 2007, 62–3, 124–5). Walls Hill is the largest fort in west central Scotland. It consists of a large basaltic plateau surrounded by steep crags which were defended by a rampart around the perimeter. The defences survive as a turf and earth bank, c. 1m high along the north and south-west sides, enclosing c. 7.5ha. There are three possible original entrances through the perimeter. Excavation at the north-east entrance, along with a small area inside, showed the rampart to be 3.0–3.5m thick and faced with stone to the front and rear with a mixed clay and earth core (Newall 1960). The entrance measured 1.5m wide and was lined with opposed upright timbers, perhaps supporting a timber gateway. Underneath medieval layers were the remains of two earlier phases of occupation consisting of the possible remains of two huts. Sherds of coarse native pottery, Dunagoil Ware (MacKie 1976), then thought to date to the first century BC (now more likely to be simply dated to the Iron Age), were recovered along with some fragments of worked shale from a pit.

Perhaps one of the best-known fort sites in west central Scotland is Craigmarloch, where the Phase II vitrified fort is roughly oval in shape and measures c. 50m long by 27m wide, enclosing 0.12ha, and has outworks on the northern and southern sides (Nisbet 1996). Surface evidence suggests that the 3m-wide wall was burnt, as pieces of vitrification have been recovered, intermittently, around its circuit. There is a notable concentration of vitrified material in the north-western and western parts of the site and Nisbet suggested that this might have been the direction of the prevailing wind at the time the fort was burnt. Charcoal from between and under the kerbs of the wall was radiocarbon dated to 100 BC–AD 90; however, Ashmore suggests that the error range for this date should be increased, giving a date range of 400 BC–AD 400 (see table 2). Incredibly, Craigmarloch remains the only fort in the area for which there are radiocarbon dates. A bronze Donside terret, possibly dating to the third to fifth century AD (Hunter personal communication) was found at Cairngryffe (Childe 1941; MacGregor 1976, no. 112).

Enclosures

By far the largest category of later prehistoric sites in west central Scotland is the wide variety of enclosed sites that do not fall into the 'fort' category, because they are not on hilltop locations, for which the general term 'enclosure' is used here. This catch-all definition includes a number of enclosed sites in undefended locations with evidence of houses inside, classified by RCAHMS as 'settlements'. There are also other upstanding sites without evidence of habitation, surrounded by banks and ditches, which have been termed 'earthworks'. Finally, there are other sites surrounded by a wall, bank or ditch, often only revealed as cropmarks on aerial photographs, which have simply been classified as 'enclosures'.

Palisaded enclosures are sites surrounded by a timber stockade, fence or palisade and are relatively common across Scotland. These sites have been shown through excavation to have a long currency, from the first millennium BC into the first millennium AD (RCAHMS 1997, 121). Use of wooden fences to enclose settlements may simply reflect the availability of timber as a building material and does not appear to be chronologically diagnostic. This was highlighted by the excavation of a palisaded site at Titwood, Newton Mearns, East Renfrewshire (Johnson et al. 2003), which looked like it might be later prehistoric in date but produced radiocarbon dates that indicate occupation in the ninth century AD.

The earliest evidence for construction at Craigmarloch consisted of two palisade slots c. 1.5m apart lying 3–4m outside the line of the later timber-laced wall. The slots were 0.6m wide by 0.5m deep and appear to have held closely spaced, but staggered, upright posts, which may have supported interwoven branches or planks. The excavated evidence suggests that both palisades may have been burnt down and replaced. A date of 810–530 BC was obtained by radiocarbon dating charcoal from within the occupation layer associated with the palisade slots and sealed below the later wall, but this date requires a longer error margin which would give a date range of 1050–200 BC (see table 2).

It is within the category of cropmark enclosures that the most extensive excavation work has been carried out. At Shiels, c. 250m south of the River Clyde, topsoil stripping revealed a large oval enclosure with an entrance to the east (Scott 1996). The enclosure measured 45m long, east to west, over the ditches, and 37m wide. The surrounding ditch was v-shaped and about 2m wide but had been subsequently recut to a depth of 0.85m and 2.8m wide. Organic remains were recovered from the water-logged fills of the ditch and included remains of wood, plants, moss and animal teeth. Two radiocarbon dates from pieces of alder provided calibrated dates of 400 BC–AD 400 and AD 330–540. Both dates indicate that the site



Figure 4. Two cannal-coal rings from Craigmarnloch fort.

was occupied sometime during the span of the Iron Age into the Early Historic period (AD 400–1100). The enclosure had a timber-lined entrance passage between the ditch terminals. Although very few artefacts were recovered from the enclosure the excavation revealed the remains of five possible round houses of ring-groove type, of which two were at least 13m in diameter. One of these structures may have predated the enclosure ditch.

More recently another cropmark site, 500m west of Shiels, was excavated on the flat land to the south of the Clyde at Braehead. In addition to the three ditches that appeared on the aerial photograph, there were the remains of eight structures, of which at least four were round houses. The location of ring-groove houses at the eastern end of the enclosure just inside the entrance has strong parallels with Shiels. Multiple lengths of palisade were also recorded, in varying states of preservation. Some of these palisades may have been associated with the ditches while others appear to have preceded them. The finds assemblage was limited: comprising sherds of coarse pottery, rough-outs of cannal coal bracelets (in the first stage of their production; fig. 4), coarse stone tools and lithics. Initial indications are that the earliest feature on the site may be a large round house which might not have been enclosed. The settlement then appears to have contracted over a period of time to within the area of the inner ditch before finally expanding back over the deliberately in-filled inner and middle ditches

(Ellis 2007). Radiocarbon dates from Braehead suggest that the occupation there was focussed between 800 and 200 BC, while those from Shiels suggest a later use from around 100 BC to AD 400. As it is very similar in size, it will be interesting to see if the recent re-excavation of the earthwork in Pollok Park produces a similar range of dates to Shiels.

One of the few other excavated earthwork enclosures is at Cadzow, South Lanarkshire, where a promontory overlooking the River Avon gorge is defended by two banks with a medial ditch 9m wide and up to 2.4m deep. The site was excavated over a number of years in the 1980s by members of the Lanark and District Archaeological Society (Archer and Henderson 1989). The only find of significance from the site appears to have been a silver denarius of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, indicating occupation in the Roman Iron Age, in the mid second century AD.

Small enclosed settlements

In addition to the larger forts and enclosures in west central Scotland, there is a range of smaller enclosed sites which are only of sufficient size to have accommodated one or two houses or one household – probably representing a single family unit. To this category may be ascribed sites described by RCAHMS as crannogs, homesteads, brochs and duns. Many of these sites display evidence of occupation during the Roman Iron Age.

Crannogs

A crannog is a settlement on an artificial or sometimes reinforced natural island located in shallow water by the margins of rivers or inland lochs. Despite the relatively large number of crannogs investigated in the area, and the excellent preservation of the timber elements, just what form the crannogs took is still a matter of debate. Most, like the excavated remains at Buiston, Ayrshire, are presumed to be stone and timber platforms held in place with vertical piles. Also, as at Buiston, there may have been timber round houses on top. The remarkable organic preservation at some crannogs provides an insight into Iron Age carpentry skills otherwise unavailable from dry-land sites. For example, there are large structural elements displaying mortise-and-tenon joints, a ladder at Dumbuck (Hale and Sands 2008; Hothersall 2007, 56–7) and possible furniture stools from Lochend (Monteith and Robb 1937).

Defensive arguments can be advanced for some crannog sites but accessibility was undoubtedly part of their function, especially those located along the banks of the Clyde. Travel by water must have been an important method of transport. Many of the 34 dugout canoes found in the Clyde (Mowat 1996) may be of Iron Age date. One was certainly found in close association with Dumbuck crannog while another from Erskine Ferry has been radiocarbon dated to the Iron Age (Hale 2001, 556).

Duns and brochs

RCAHMS, in the Argyll Inventories, defined a dun as '... a comparatively small defensive structure with a disproportionately thick drystone wall, usually but not always sub-circular or oval in plan, and enclosing an area not exceeding about 375m sq.; it would thus normally hold only a single family unit' (RCAHMS 1971, 18). A further distinction has been made between dun houses and dun enclosures: between those small enough to have been single-roofed structures and those that are not (Harding 1984). The smaller structures approximate to the size of brochs, as large round houses, while the dun enclosures are similar to forts in terms of their form and topographic setting, although smaller in enclosed area. The distribution of duns is western and there are concentrations along the Ayrshire coastal fringe, though one or two outliers fall into the current study area, such as Dumbuie (Millar 1896; Hothersall 2007, 58–9). The slight remains of the broch at Calla, South Lanarkshire (RCAHMS 1978, 109–10), is one of a group of structures in Lowland Scotland (Macinnes 1984) but is unique in the study area.

Settlement, People and Society

A review of the quite extensive previous work and the wide range of Iron Age site types within the study area clearly indicates that there is enough evidence to try and address some of the research issues being

explored elsewhere in the country, such as the nature and meaning of enclosure, socio-political groupings, Roman/native interaction, material culture, economy, ritual activity, settlement development and the chronology of change.

Settlement development and chronology

Discussions of just how the various settlement types evolved and changed over time is dependent on absolute dating. Currently there are only around 21 radiocarbon dates available for the Iron Age in the study area (table 2). While this may sound a lot, these actually only date six sites: Annieston ring-ditch houses (3 dates), Craigmarloch fort (2), the enclosures at Braehead (5) and Shiels (2), and the crannogs at Dumbuck (4) and Erskine Bridge (4). One date is from a log boat found at Erskine Harbour (Mowat 1996). More dates are obviously required and there is a clear bias towards the lower reaches of the Clyde with the crannogs and enclosure sites beside the estuary being predominant. It is clear, therefore, that any detailed understanding of the date of various site types has to be based on work from elsewhere in Scotland.

Enclosure boundaries

The reasons for enclosure on Iron Age sites have been examined. Hingley (1992) stressed the symbolic nature of boundaries, while Collis (1996) re-emphasised the diverse range of functions these can have, including defence, display, to reflect social status and to delineate areas between activities and communities. The nature and scale of enclosing works throughout west central Scotland varies markedly, from simple wooden fences to complexes of walls and ditches. The major ditch at Shiels provides good evidence that a rigid distinction between upland hillforts – often still defined by upstanding earthworks – and lowland enclosures – normally now cropmark sites – is perhaps as much a result of subsequent land use as of their original scale. In many cases, however, the size of the enclosing works, whether banks or walls, appear so small, as at Marshall Moor, that their effectiveness as defensive boundaries must be questionable. On some of the large forts, as at Walls Hill, it seems doubtful if the extensive perimeter line could have been effectively manned. Despite these doubts, it is certain that some of the enclosed sites were destroyed (as evidenced by vitrification at Craigmarloch and Sheep Hill) but whether this was through warfare, accidental damage or rituals of abandonment is unclear (fig. 5).

Despite this evidence of destruction, it seems likely that the majority of enclosures actually had little defensive capability. Most were probably built as statements of status and prestige and for the practical purposes of dividing living space from both domestic and wild animals. Indeed the discovery of cut hawthorn branches in the ditch at Shiels suggested



Figure 5. Trench V at Craigmarloch fort showing a section cut through the vitrified wall core, with the dark occupation deposit associated with the palisaded enclosure continuing underneath.

that they had been used as a barrier (Robinson 1983, 130–4), most likely to control animals. It is interesting to speculate how many of the other stone and earthen-banked enclosed sites would have made similar use of organic resources. Envisaging some of the diminutive ‘defences’ topped with bristling thickets of thorns, whether cut or growing, adds a new dimension to the appreciation of these enclosed sites. Could seemingly open sites have been surrounded by cut brushwood or hedges that would leave little or no trace in the archaeological record?

The ditches at both Shiels and the shallow ones at Braehead were susceptible to flooding (Scott 1996, 65; Ellis 2007). Could it be that at some of these low-lying sites large enclosure ditches were deliberately excavated in order to surround the settlement with water? A water-filled ditch would have been a defensive feature similar to the moat of a medieval manor. Perhaps, though, the purpose of the enclosing ditch was not simply defensive, as enclosing the settlement with water may have had special symbolic significance. The flooding of enclosure ditches has also been remarked upon in relation to St Germain’s, in East Lothian (Alexander and Watkins 1998). The recovery of two wooden daggers from the waterlogged ditches at Over Rig, in Annandale and Eskdale, may support the interpretation that such boundary contexts were symbolic and could be used for ritual deposition (Hingley 1992, 38). The placing of deliberate deposits within or at boundaries around settlements has been suggested as a common ritual act of later prehistoric communities (Hingley 1990 and 1992). However, apart from the placing of a rotary quern beside the causeway leading to Dumbuck crannog (Hale and Sands 2005,

38) and possible burials at Lochend crannog, there is little evidence for this in the study area.

Hingley (1999, 246) has also proposed the idea that communities in later prehistory ‘partly identified their place in the world through reference to ancient monuments’ and provided numerous examples where Iron Age sites had reused earlier Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments. The hillforts at Black Hill and Dechmont Hill (RCAHMS 1978; Hothersall 2007, 37–8) were built around the remains of large round cairns that are believed to date to the Early Bronze Age, and may at least suggest respect for earlier monuments. Whether the builders of these enclosed sites deliberately chose these locations because they bore clear traces of earlier activity – burial cairns, with their clear links with ancestors or folklore – is debatable since many of the other enclosed sites contain no such physical remains.

One of the common features that link both the unenclosed and many of the enclosed settlement sites in west central Scotland, as in the rest of the country, is the presence of round houses. Unfortunately, too little work has been undertaken on these structures within the study area to focus on them here but as elsewhere in Scotland they are likely to have been substantial structures with a range of functions (Hingley 1995). One site of particular note is Knockmade, Lochwinnoch, Renfrewshire, where the remains of a stone-lined drain were recovered within

a large round house, suggesting that animals may have been kept within (Livens 1996, 35–6). The width of the door, at 4m, might also indicate the moving of animals in and out of the house.

Economies

While settlement types changed throughout the Iron Age the basic economy of mixed farming appears to have remained, although it must have varied in scale and intensity, as is reflected in the pollen diagrams for Whittliemuir (Ramsay 1996 and Tipping this series). The proximity of some of the crannog sites to water meadows has been commented on and indeed at some of the riverside settlements such as Shiels and Braehead use may also have been made of seasonal pasture. If so, the availability of seasonal pasture and the need to move cattle about in the Lowlands may have contributed to a decentralized settlement pattern in west central Scotland. Perhaps the evolution of enclosures came about through the need to protect stock as much as the local community. The small, enclosed yard attached to the ring-ditch houses at Annieston might have been used for stock. The concentration of the ring-groove houses towards the entrance at the eastern end of both Shiels and Braehead may have been to keep the rest of the enclosed area free for cattle as suggested for Uppercleugh, Annandale (Terry 1995).

As the majority of excavations in west central Scotland were carried out prior to the 1990s and were of limited extent, very few have produced large assemblages of palaeobotanical or faunal remains. Some of the excavated sites, such as Craigmarnloch, do at least include small assemblages of animal bones but not from secure contexts or in enough quantity to allow the relative proportions of animals or changes in animal husbandry to be detected. At Craigmarnloch bones of pig, sheep and deer were found. Cattle bones have been recovered from the crannogs at Langbank East, Langbank West (Hale 2001) and at Lochend Loch (Monteith and Robb 1937).

The material culture provides additional, if indirect, evidence for economic practices. Spindle whorls at Craigmarnloch indicate that wool was being turned into thread, probably for weaving. There are no loom weights, although these are generally rare in the rest of Britain outside Wessex (Hunter personal communication).

Despite the evidence for pastoral activity, arable cultivation must also have played an important role. Both saddle and rotary querns testify to the processing of grain at some of the sites, while the coarse pottery may have been used for both storage and cooking. Carbonized unthreshed ears of barley and other seeds were recovered from the Erskine Ferry crannog (Callander 1911) and burnt wheat grains were recovered from

a rock-cut pit possibly associated with a souterrain at Law of Mauldslie, South Lanarkshire (Rankin 1871). The complete absence of querns from sites like Shiels and Braehead may be significant, but could also support the view that they were occupied seasonally.

Material Culture

Another major opportunity for research is the need for a thorough re-evaluation of Iron Age artefactual material, not just excavation assemblages but also stray finds. Pottery for this period is generally undiagnostic (with no recognizable form or features), with undecorated bucket-shaped coarse ware being common throughout, occasionally augmented by Roman vessels. It is likely, on the basis of the form and fabric of the pottery assemblages, that the majority of the vessels were made locally to satisfy purely local needs.

Small assemblages of coarse ware were recovered from the excavations of the enclosed sites at Craigmarnloch and Walls Hill. Even the complete excavation of the sites at Braehead and Shiels only produced a handful of pottery sherds. However, assemblages are never extensive and the importance of pottery in this period must be questioned, with organic containers, such as the wooden vessels found at crannog sites such as Buiston in Ayrshire, playing a far more important role. It should be noted, though, that few of the crannog sites in the study area have actually produced wooden bowls and utensils. The recovery of a carbonized worked piece of wood from Craigmarnloch was also interpreted as part of wooden bowl (Nisbet 1996, 52, fig. 10).

As is often the case on Scottish settlements, soil conditions and depositional patterns (sites being kept clean or objects recycled) preclude any secure assessment of the extent to which iron was in use. The presence of possible whetstones at Craigmarnloch suggests that iron tools were sharpened there, and small concentrations of slag, including iron slag, also indicate that iron working was being undertaken. As elsewhere in Lowland Scotland, there is nothing to indicate an upsurge in iron production in the last few centuries BC, as can be noted on some sites further south in Britain and on the nearer parts of the Continent.

There is clear evidence for other forms of metalworking throughout the period, including bronze casting. In the Roman Iron Age bronze artefacts such as brooches, rings and vessels were used on settlement sites, but only at a few such as Craigmarnloch is there evidence in the form of crucibles for bronze working on site. At Craigmarnloch the small clay mould for a decorative boss was also recovered. Sheet metal working must also have taken place, as is indicated by the bronze cauldron found at Elvanfoot, South Lanarkshire (RCAHMS 1978, 30).

Our understanding of the assemblages of stone tools on sites in west central Scotland is generally limited, despite

the fact that they form one of the more frequent finds on sites. Saddle and rotary querns have been discussed above; other stone artefacts include whetstones, rubbers and pounders.

Probably one of the most common but understudied sets of artefacts from later prehistoric settlement sites in the west is the range of soft, dark sedimentary rocks used to make items of personal adornment. These rocks are described variously as jet, lignite, shale, gas coal and cannel coal. Scientific analysis of the assemblage from Auldhill in Ayrshire has shown that the majority of material was locally obtained cannel coal while two finished artefacts were of lignite and shale (Hunter 1998, 52). The study of the material found at Braehead has now been undertaken: the assemblage is dominated by unfinished items suggesting that the material was collected locally, partly worked at Braehead but finished elsewhere (Hunter personal Communication; Ellis 2007). Fragments of rings, bracelets, armlets, rough-outs and waste material have been found from a wide range of other settlements, including Craigmarloch, Knapps, Dunconnel, Walls Hill, Duncarnock, Knockmade, Hyndford, Meikle Reive, Sheep Hill, Cairngryffe and Calla broch. Given the complete lack of any contemporary burial remains for the study period it is unclear who wore these items and how they were worn, but their prevalence suggests they were important items and as such may reflect social standing.

Ritual activity, caves and natural features

Compared to the preceding Bronze Age, there are very few Iron Age burials in Lowland Scotland and disposal of the dead may have been by excarnation rather than inhumation or cremation. Notable exceptions are the burials outside Broxmouth hillfort and Dryburn Bridge in East Lothian or the recent dramatic finds of a warrior burial in Alloa and the Newbridge chariot burial. In the study area such evidence still remains elusive. Excavation of the crannog at Lochend Loch did, however, locate the partial remains of two individuals laid close to each other on either side of the site boundary (Monteith and Robb 1937, 42–3). One had been burnt while the other, although not complete, displayed signs of a healed fracture to the lower leg.

Apart from the numerous settlement sites and the outlying souterrain structure at Wester Yardhouses, North Lanarkshire (RCAHMS 1978), there are few other types of archaeological sites in the study area that display evidence of Iron Age activity. Unlike on the west coast of Scotland and in Argyll, there are few cave sites within the study area. One exception to this is Meikle Cloak Cave, on the south-west bank of the Calder River c. 2km north-west of Lochwinnoch, Renfrewshire. The site is located to the south of a waterfall where there is a small chamber up to 1.5m high below an undercut rock. Three rotary querns were found within the cave (Newall 1978, 17–8). Two are in the Hunterian Museum,

while the third is in the garden of the Weaver's Cottage, Kilbarchan, a National Trust for Scotland property. This latter quern stone is definitely a bun-shaped rotary quern and is therefore likely to be of Iron Age date. In addition to providing shelter, caves and souterrains may also have had a great deal of symbolic significance, perhaps relating to 'the underworld'.

The use of natural features such as caves, bogs and rivers in prehistory is well known. The discovery of a sheet bronze cauldron in a bog near Elvanfoot, at the upper reaches of the Clyde, is certainly suggestive of a votive offering, but surprisingly little metalwork material has been recovered from the rivers (Hunter personal communication). The cistern/well feature at Meikle Reive may also have been the repository for offerings to the gods, but remains unexcavated. The horse harness and cannel coal bracelet from Queen Mary's Cairn on the Cathkin Braes may be grave goods from an Iron Age burial inserted into an earlier, Bronze Age, mound, but are thought more likely to be a hoard (Hunter personal communication). Another possible votive offering may be the material recovered from Gallowflat mound in Rutherglen (Ure 1793, 124; Hothersall 2007, 92–3) where the finds included two Roman patera (bronze cooking pots), three melon-shaped beads, a rotary quern and a stone lamp.

It is possible that throughout prehistory other natural locations and features, for example as forest clearings, were also of importance (Bradley 2000) and could have attracted human activity and even settlement, but that little tangible evidence of this survives. Another example might be large glacial erratics. The Auld Wives' Lifts, on the moor to the north of Milngavie, East Dunbartonshire, consists of three large erratics with a number of heads carved on them, which Alcock suggested might date to the Iron Age, representing a cult of the head (Alcock 1977). Another large glacial erratic, which has always intrigued the author, is at Clochodrick, near Castle Semple Loch, Renfrewshire. Although there are no carvings here, it may still have been revered as a sacred site, with one interpretation of the place name being 'stone of the druid' (Monteith 1791, 487), although there are alternative explanations (Alexander 1996, 21). Perhaps excavation around these stones would reveal deposits associated with occupation or ritual activity.

Tribal groupings

Both Walls Hill and Carman forts are a scale order larger than any of the other settlements in west central Scotland but the nature and chronology of the settlements remain to be defined. Walls Hill in particular has been considered, on the basis of its size and location, as a tribal centre of the *Damnonii* (Scott 1966; Feachem 1963) but there is no evidence at present that the fort was occupied in the first half of the first millennium AD. Indeed, some doubt has now also been cast on whether the *Damnonii* occupied this area at all. Walls Hill was

dated, by Newall, to the first century BC–first century AD on the basis of the artefactual assemblages, but the accuracy of this estimate is questionable given the ubiquitous nature of the artefacts recovered. The pollen evidence from the adjacent Whittliemuir Bog (Ramsay 1996) suggests that there was major activity in the vicinity of the fort after 400 BC but that the woodland was regenerating between 50 BC and AD 50, perhaps confirming that such large sites were abandoned prior to the Roman incursions.

One alternative explanation is that the *Damnonii* did not have a tribal centre but were simply a loose affiliation of smaller tribal groups with a decentralized settlement pattern (Wilson 1998). There are certainly a number of small native sites in west central Scotland which have artefactual evidence that indicate they were occupied in the Roman Iron Age, but very few of these sites have been independently dated by scientific methods and the full length of their occupation is unclear. The dating of these sites has largely relied on the presence of Roman artefacts.

Roman/Native Interaction

When the Roman army first marched into west central Scotland it appears to have been into a largely deforested landscape of quite intensive cultivation (Tipping 1994 in this series). While the Roman military installations have been extensively investigated in the study area, including both Flavian forts and the Antonine Wall (Hanson 'The Roman Period' in this series), due to the general lack of

securely dated sites, few native settlements have been attributed to the Roman Iron Age. The nature of the Roman contact and its cultural impact needs to be re-examined carefully. It is clear that Roman goods, notably Samian ware, were used on a number of native sites; through what process these artefacts, mostly vessels, were acquired remains unclear. They may have been exchanged for goods at Roman forts and/or redistributed from key native settlements by elites. In west Scotland Roman artefacts have been found on native sites at Hyndford crannog, Gallowflat and Cadzow. The quality of the finds from Hyndford is particularly noteworthy and may indicate direct contact between the Romans and the existing elites (Hunter personal communication). Despite the excavators' doubts the recovery of Roman pottery from the well-known Early Historic fort on Dumbarton Rock (Alcock and Alcock 1991) could suggest that there was indeed occupation on the site in the Roman Iron Age (Hunter personal communication).

Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research

This brief review has highlighted the large number of Iron Age sites in west central Scotland and the considerable quantity of research that has been carried out on a wide range of site types including, amongst others, forts, enclosures, duns and crannogs. This research varies in quality and the lack of chronological control has hampered any detailed discussion about settlement and social change. However, a programme of small-scale trial trenching to obtain suitable samples for radiocarbon dating from some previously

Figure 6. Chester Hill circular fort, South Lanarkshire.



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excavated sites would prove beneficial. In addition, re-examining some of the well-known sites and a re-examination of the artefact collections would be worthwhile, especially of the more numerous cannell coal and coarse stone tool assemblages.

While it is always easy to suggest more survey and excavation work, this needs to be systematic and designed to answer specific questions. If regional patterns are difficult to detect, perhaps the focus should be turned to looking for smaller-scale local groupings. The sites on the lower Clyde, both the crannogs and the enclosures at Shiels and Braehead, are at least starting to help in this respect and the dates for the Pollok earthwork would be a welcome addition. It is surprising that more than 30 years after the publication of the RCAHMS Lanarkshire Inventory that one of the most distinctive site types, the circular forts of Upper Clydesdale, remains largely ignored. Some of the sites, such as those at Fallburn (figs 2 and 3) and Chester Hill (fig. 6), appear very similar and

such groupings would merit investigation, as would – it has been suggested – the sites in the Abington area (Banks 2002).

Elsewhere forts are less numerous and work should perhaps concentrate on the wide range of other enclosure sites, while clearly the crannogs are a significant national archaeological asset that require further modern investigation. In conclusion, the rich Iron Age settlement record of west central Scotland holds a wealth of research potential that would help the understanding of this period not just in Lowland Scotland but throughout Britain.

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Table 1. Iron Age sites mentioned in the text

Site name	Type	Local authority area	National Grid Reference	National Monuments Record Scotland No.
Bonnyton Moor	Hut circle and enclosure	East Renfrewshire	NS 541 522	NS55SW 11
Annieston	Ring-ditch	South Lanarkshire	NS 001 365	NT03NW 61
Castlehill, Gibblaston	Fort	Inverclyde	NS 3458 6605	NS36NW 9
Marshall Moor	Fort	Inverclyde	NS 3721 6257	NS36SE 2
Craigmarloch	Fort	Inverclyde	NS 3442 7185	NS37SW 8
Walls Hill	Fort	Renfrewshire	NS 4117 5880	NS45NW 1
Barr Hill	Fort	Renfrewshire	NS 4094 6365	NS46SW 2
Corslie Hill	Fort	Renfrewshire	NS 4056 6902	NS46NW 23
Oakshaw, Paisley	Fort	Renfrewshire	NS 477 640	NS46SE 4
Dunwan	Fort	East Renfrewshire	NS 5468 4894	NS54NW 1
Duncarnock	Fort	East Renfrewshire	NS 5010 5590	NS55NW 3
Dechmont Hill	Fort	South Lanarkshire	NS 656 582	NS65NE 18
Double Dykes	Fort	South Lanarkshire	NS 7647 4793	NS74NE 2
Black Hill	Fort	South Lanarkshire	NS 8318 4350	NS84SW 2
Arbory Hill	Fort	South Lanarkshire	NS 9445 2379	NS92SW 2
Cow Castle	Fort	South Lanarkshire	NS 0425 3311	NS03SW 14
Quothquan Law	Fort	South Lanarkshire	NS 9882 3842	NS93NE 11
Chester Hill	Fort	South Lanarkshire	NS 9532 3953	NS93NE 1
Fallburn	Fort	South Lanarkshire	NS 9619 3674	NS93NE 6
St John's Kirk	Fort	South Lanarkshire	NS 9796 3611	NS93NE 8
Cairngryffe	Fort	South Lanarkshire	NS 9429 4116	NS94SW 11
Meikle Reive	Fort	East Dunbartonshire	NS 6392 7893	NS67NW 2
Carman	Fort	West Dunbartonshire	NS 3720 7944	NS37NE 2
Sheep Hill	Fort	West Dunbartonshire	NS 4348 7440	NS47SW6
Dumbarton Rock	Fort	West Dunbartonshire	NS 3998 7448	NS47SW 5
Castle Hill, Bar Hill	Fort	East Dunbartonshire	NS 7091 7610	NS77NW 28
Park Knowe	Enclosure	South Lanarkshire	NS 9697 3660	NS93NE 9
Shiels	Enclosure	Glasgow City	NS 523 667	NS56NW 15
Braehead	Earthwork	Glasgow City	NS 5259 6629	NS56NW 3
Pollok Park	Earthwork	Glasgow City	NS 5566 6263	NS56SE 33

Site name	Type	Local authority area	National Grid Reference	National Monuments Record Scotland No.
Queen's Park	Earthwork	Glasgow City	NS 578 621	NS56SE 32
Byreshill	Earthwork	Renfrewshire	NS 5005 6477	NS56SW 1
Rosshall	Enclosure	Renfrewshire	NS 5066 6314	NS56SW 12
Cadzow	Earthwork	South Lanarkshire	NS 7343 5347	NS75SW 10
Hillhead	Settlement	South Lanarkshire	NS 9816 4018	NS94SE 23
Knapps	Homestead	Renfrewshire	NS 3693 6884	NS36NE 6
Knockmade Hill	Homestead	Renfrewshire	NS 3524 6182	NS36SE 6
Middleton	Homestead	East Renfrewshire	NS 494 542	NS45SE 24
Gallowflat	Homestead	South Lanarkshire	NS 6230 6158	NS66SW 20
Dumbuie	Dun	West Dunbartonshire	NS 4218 7517	NS47NW 1
Calla	Broch	South Lanarkshire	NS 9911 4884	NS94NE 9
Castle Semple Loch	Crannog	Renfrewshire	NS 360 590	NS35NE 6
Dumbuck	Crannog	West Dunbartonshire	NS 4157 7392	NS47SW 8
Langbank West	Crannog	Renfrewshire	NS 3813 7355	NS37SE 9
Langbank East	Crannog	Renfrewshire	NS 4050 7328	NS47SW 29
Erskin	Crannog	Renfrewshire	NS 4554 7288	NS47SE 56
Erskin Ferry	Crannog	West Dunbartonshire	NS 4656 7211	NS47SE 23
Lochend Loch	Crannog	North Lanarkshire	NS 7065 6618	NS76NW 2
Bishop Loch	Crannog	Glasgow City	NS 687 668	NS66NE 3
Hyndford	Crannog	South Lanarkshire	NS 9061 4187	NS94SW 10
Wester Yardhouses	Souterrain	South Lanarkshire	NT 0042 5079	NT05SW 1
Law of Mauldslie	Souterrain	South Lanarkshire	NS 8214 5146	NS85SW 4
Meikle Cloak	Cave	Renfrewshire	NS 3434 6068	N/A
Auld Wives' Lifts	Erratic boulder	East Dunbartonshire	NS 5818 7646	NS57NE25
Clochodrick	Erratic boulder	Renfrewshire	NS 3736 6127	NS36SE 8

Table 2. Radiocarbon dates from Iron Age sites in west central Scotland

Site	Sample	Lab code	Years before present	Calibrated to 1 sigma level	Calibrated to 2 sigma levels
Annieston	C2079	Beta-105215	2580±40	820–760 BC (0.94) 680–660 BC (0.06)	840–750 BC (0.71)
Braehead	Oak – middle ditch	GU-11449	2550±40	810–520 BC	800–750 BC (30.8) 690–600 BC (9.3) 640–590 BC (19.8) 580–550 BC (8.3)
Craigmarloch	charcoal	GaK-995	2540±40 (160)	800–760 BC (0.44) 690–550 BC (0.56)	810–750 BC (0.35) 720–530 BC (0.65)
Braehead	Oak	GU-11449	2500±45	800–480 BC (88.7) 470–410 BC (6.7)	790–750 BC (6.8) 720–520 BC (61.4)
Braehead	Oak – inner ditch	GU-11448	2430±40	770–610 BC (33.8) 600–400 BC (61.6)	760–700 BC (16.5) 540–400 BC (51.7)
Annieston	C1028	Beta-94195	2440±60	760–680 BC (0.33) 660–630 BC (0.07) 550–400 BC (0.60)	770–400 BC
Braehead	Oak – outer ditch	GU-11451	2440±60	770–610 BC (37.3) 600–400 BC (58.1)	760–690 BC (20.2) 550–400 BC (48)
Annieston	C2026	Beta-105214	2380±40	520–330 BC	760–680 BC (0.19) 660–640 BC (0.01) 550–380 BC (0.80)
Braehead	Oak – BT11	GU-11449	2245±40	400–200 BC	360–350 BC (20.8) 300–230 BC (41.4) 220–200 BC (6.0)
Erskine Bridge	Alder timber	GU-2186	2210±50	370–340 BC (0.18) 320–200 BC (0.82)	400–160 BC
Erskine Bridge	Oak timber	GU-2383	2170±60	370–280 BC (0.48) 260–160 BC (0.52)	390–100 BC
Dumbuck	Oak pile	GU-7470	2090±50		
Dumbuck	Alder floor timber	GU-7473	2060±50		
Dumbuck	Oak pile	GU-7472	2040±50		
Erskine Harbour	log boat	GU-1016	1995±50	90 BC–AD 70	120 BC–AD 120
Craigmarloch	charcoal	GaK-996	1985±40 (160)	40 BC–AD 65	100 BC–AD 90
Erskine Bridge	Oak timber	GU-2187	1970±60	60 BC–AD 90	160–140 BC (0.01) 120 BC–AD 190 (0.99)
Erskine Bridge	Oak timber	GU-2328	1950±50	10 BC–AD 120	100 BC–AD 150
Shiels	stake	SRR-576	1930±140	110 BC–AD 240	400 BC–AD 400
Dumbuck	Alder floor timber	GU-7471	1910±50		
Shiels	stake	SRR-577	1640±40	AD 340–440	AD 260–290 (0.06) AD 330–540 (0.94)

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Abbreviations

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