

The Antonine Wall

Papers in honour of
Professor Lawrence Keppie

edited by

David J. Breeze and William S. Hanson



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Cover illustrations

Front: The Distance Stone of the Twentieth Legion from Hutcheson Hill (*RIB* III 3507) found in 1969 lying face down in a shallow pit immediately to the south of the Wall (copyright Hunterian, University of Glasgow). **Back:** Restored half-life-sized statue of the Roman god Mars from the annexe of the fort at Balmuildy (*CSIR* 129) (copyright Hunterian, University of Glasgow).

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Lawrence at Westerwood. Photo the late Margaret J. Robb

Dedicated to the memory of Margaret Robb (1952-2017)

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13. The Roman temporary camp and fortlet at Summerston, Strathclyde

Gordon S. Maxwell and William S. Hanson

The Roman temporary camp at Summerston (aka Temple of Boclair) (NS 57427237) to the north-west of Balmuildy was first identified from the air by the first-named author during the annual aerial reconnaissance programme undertaken by the then Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (now Historic Environment Scotland) in 1977 (Goodburn 1978: 413; Maxwell and Wilson 1987: 28) (Figure 13.1). The north side of the camp lies some 30 m south of the Antonine Wall, whose location and alignment is confirmed by the wide positive cropmark of its ditch (Figure 13.1 and 13.2). The camp itself was revealed by the faint, narrow positive cropmark of the ditch defining the line of its eastern side and north-eastern corner. Subsequent aerial photography revealed part of the south side, indicating that its axial dimensions were c. 162 m north-south by at least 75 m, and possibly some 140 m, east to west, a probable internal area of c. 2.3 ha (Jones 2011: 307). Though there are gaps in the recorded line of the ditch, no gateways have been identified. The camp is generally included amongst a group of broadly similar size and morphology known along the Wall that are identified as construction camps (Hanson and Maxwell 1986: 117-20; Jones 2005).

Close inspection of the original air photographs revealed faint traces of a narrow curvilinear cropmark close up against the presumed location of the northern ditch of the temporary camp (arrowed in Figure 13.1). This appeared to define the end of a small ditched enclosure with rounded corners situated between the camp and the rear of the Antonine Wall. Though the southern ditch of the enclosure did not run quite parallel with the Wall (Figure 13.2 and 13.3), its morphology and size suggested that it might represent the site of a fortlet and so was worthy of further investigation. Indeed, the possibility of such an installation in this vicinity had been postulated for some time (Robertson 1974: 101), though it was assumed to lie on the summit of Crow Hill some 580 m to the west where Robertson unsuccessfully trenched in search of it in 1961 (2015: 107).

Accordingly, a brief examination of the temporary camp and adjacent enclosure took place over an inclement weekend in late November 1980 (Grew 1981: 320; *DES* 1981: 87-88). The camp is bisected by the march separating the farms of Summerston and East Millichen, whose line also broadly coincides with the probable western limit of the small enclosure. Excavation was restricted to the fields within the farm of Summerston, as those within East Millichen farm were sown with winter barley and so were not available for examination. Five hand-dug trenches were opened. The largest (A) ran at a slightly oblique angle across the two adjacent ditches of the enclosure and the camp, continuing for some 9 m into the interior of the former (Figure 13.3). A second (C) was placed across the line of the ditch just after it curved northwards on the east side of the enclosure, with a third beyond that to the north (not on the plan) to check for the continuation of the enclosure ditch. The fourth, a much smaller trench, was designed to pick up the line of the enclosure ditch as it began to curve northwards on its western side. Finally a fifth trench (B) was cut across the east side of the temporary camp (not located on the plan).



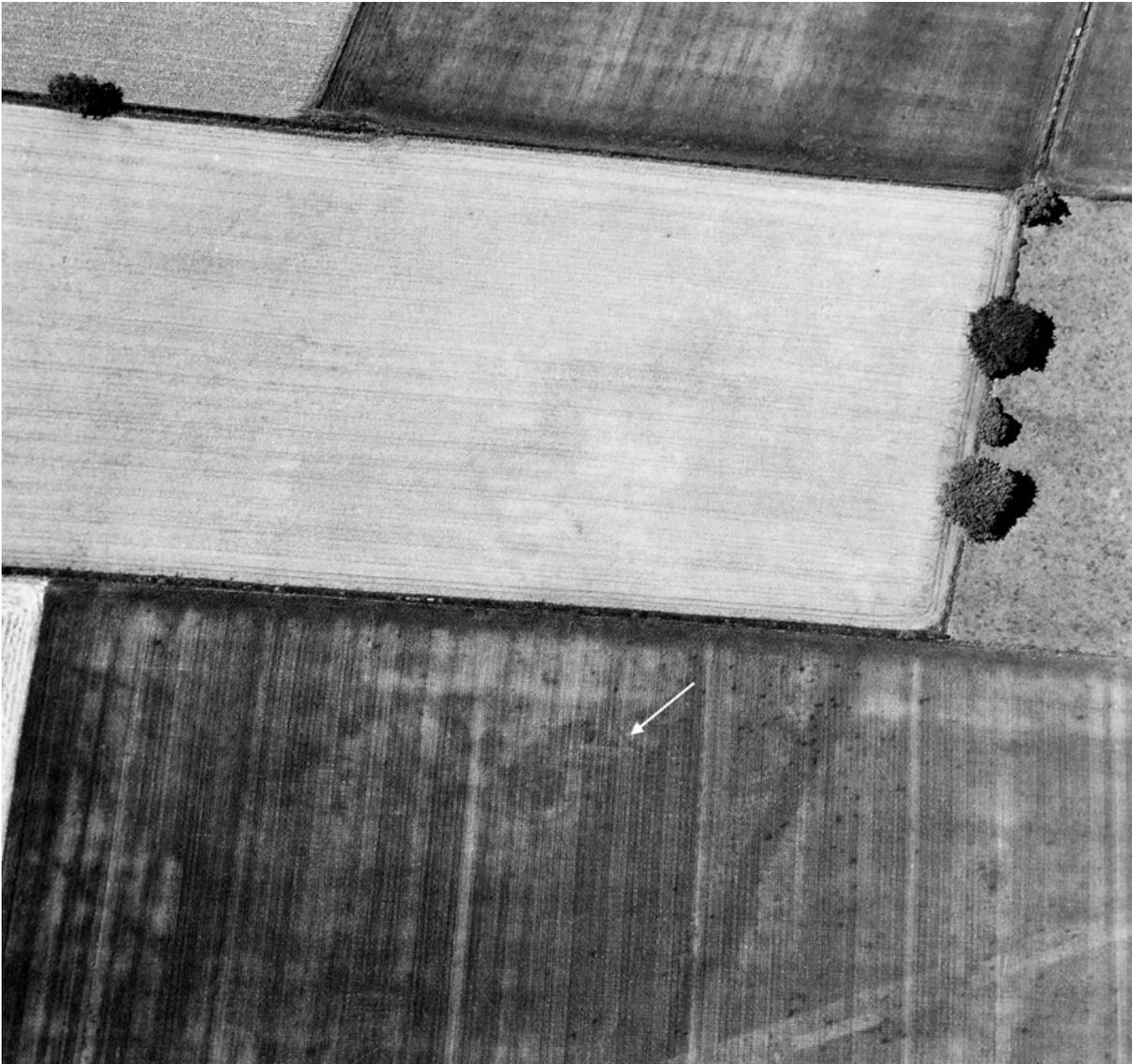


Figure 13.1. Aerial photograph of Summerston camp and fortlet (arrowed) from the east. The line of the Antonine Wall is visible as a broad positive cropmark in the right foreground (SC 1724870 Crown copyright © Historic Environment Scotland).

These trenches revealed that the ditch of the camp had been much attenuated by ploughing. It now measures at best only 1.55 m wide and barely 0.55 m deep and appreciably less elsewhere, which may explain why so little of its perimeter can be discerned from the air. The section (B) cut through the east side of the camp revealed a layer of red-brown rapid silt up to 0.1 m deep overlain by a slightly deeper layer of grey, gritty silt (Figures 13.4 and 13.5), indicating only one period of use, at the end of which the defences were allowed to silt up gradually. On the north side, however, the picture was somewhat different. Excavation (Trench A) revealed that the ditch in this sector had been deliberately



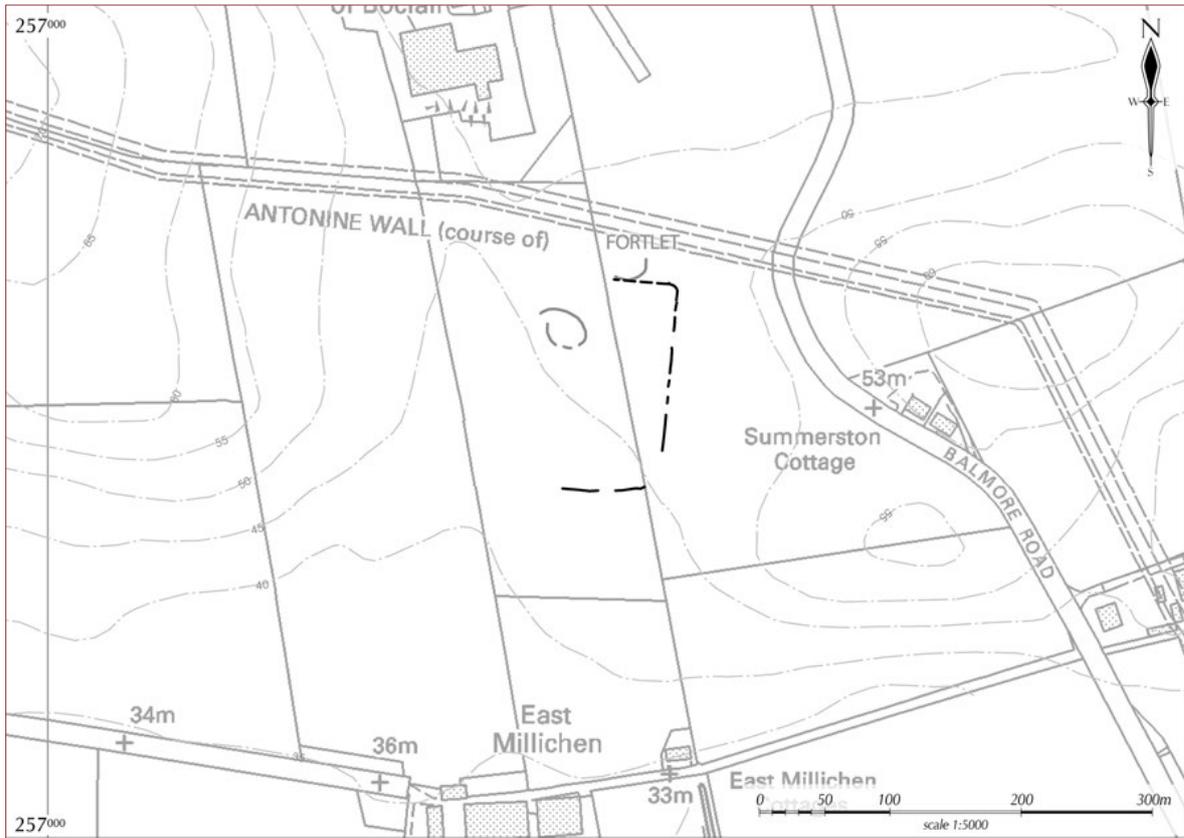


Figure 13.2. Location map of the line of the Wall, the construction camp and fortlet at Summerston (after Jones 2011) (reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO. © Crown © 2010. Ordnance Survey Licence no. 1000020548).

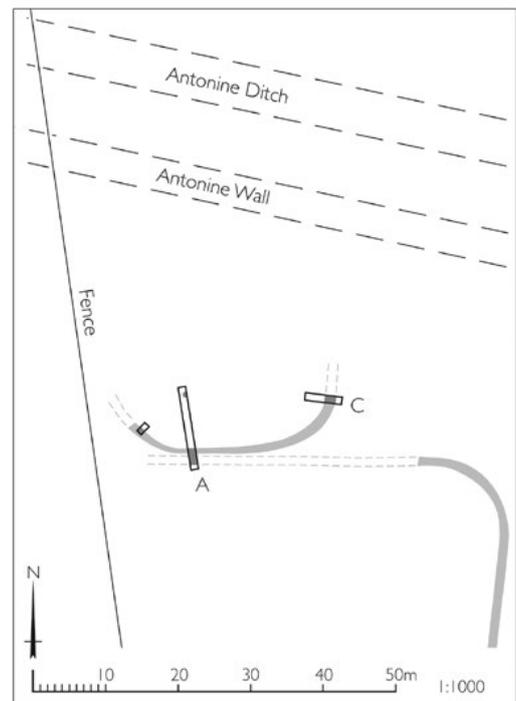


Figure 13.3. Overall site plan, showing the location of the excavation trenches.



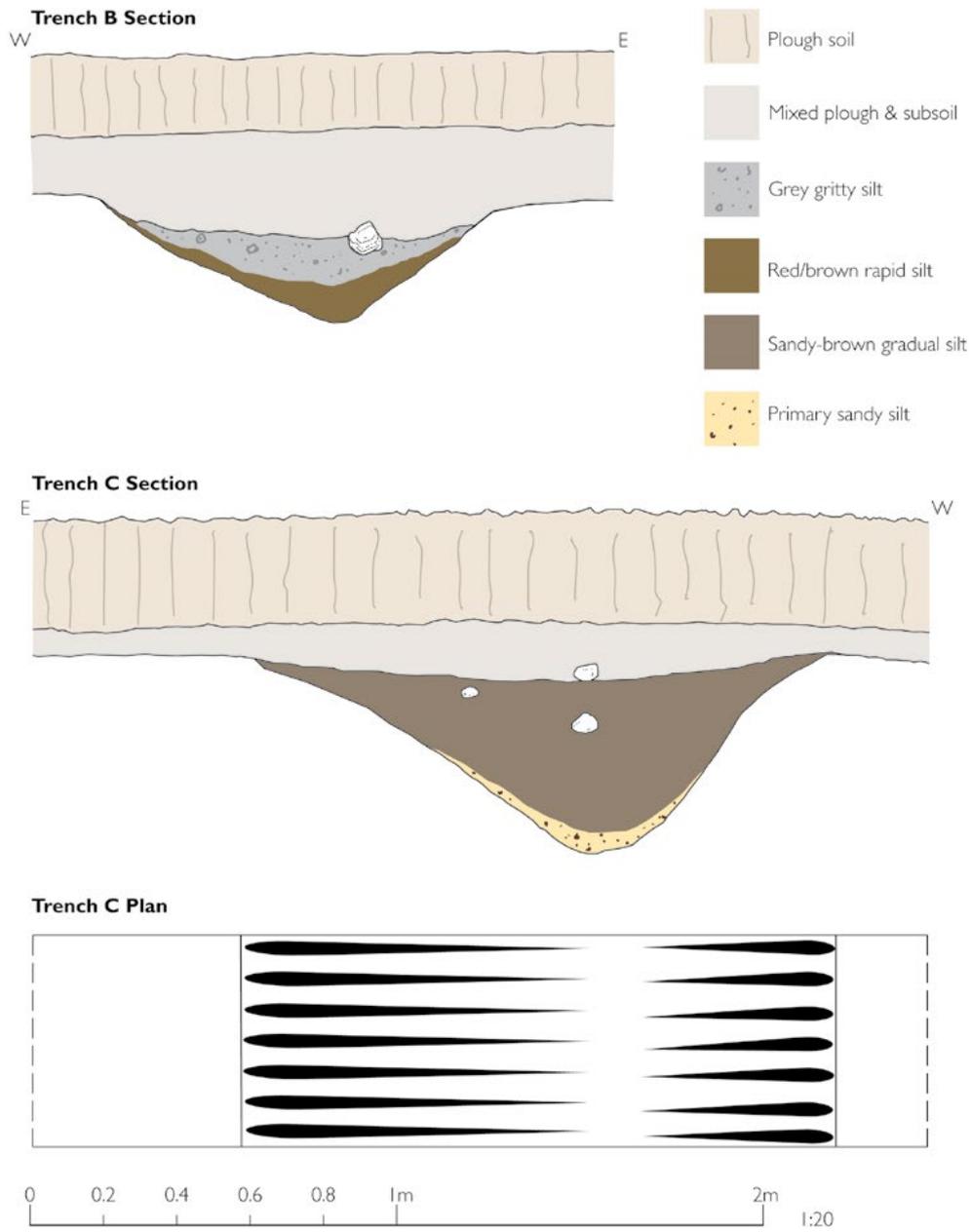


Figure 13.4. Trench B: south-facing section through the eastern ditch of the camp; Trench C: plan and north-facing section through the enclosure ditch on its east side.





Figure 13.5. Photograph of section (Trench B) through the eastern ditch of the camp from the south.

filled with a uniform gritty grey-brown loam with pockets of red-brown subsoil (Figures 13.6 and 13.7). This probably occurred during the cutting of the contiguous enclosure ditch, which appeared to be secondary to it. Indeed, care had evidently been taken to avoid intersecting the camp perimeter, since the enclosure, which lay on slightly lower ground than the north side of the camp, would otherwise have served as a sump for the surface water collected in the ditch system of the camp. For this reason the enclosure ditch was exceptionally narrow and shallow where it approached the camp, being only c. 0.8 m wide and 0.3 m deep, although again ploughing must have contributed to its present reduced state. It seemed to have silted up more gradually, with a basal layer of red-brown rapid silt up to 0.1 m deep overlain by a fairly narrow band of fine grey silt. A section through the ditch of the enclosure on its east side (Trench C) immediately to the north of the south-east angle, however, produced a more respectable V-shaped profile, 1.6 m wide and 0.65 m deep, slightly steeper on the inner edge (Figure 13.4). Here a shallow layer of sandy, yellow-brown primary silt was overlain by a deep fill of sandy brown silt, again indicating the gradual silting up of the ditch. A trial trench several metres further north on the same side, however, indicated that remains of the ditch had been completely obliterated by the plough. It is not surprising, therefore, that no trace of a rampart survived. The only feature found within the interior of the enclosure was a solitary, stone-packed post-hole some 0.6 m in diameter (Figure 13.6). No finds of any significance were recovered.

The proximity of the march fence line with its associated hedge discouraged more complete examination of the western side of the enclosure other than a small trench which picked up the inner edge of the ditch



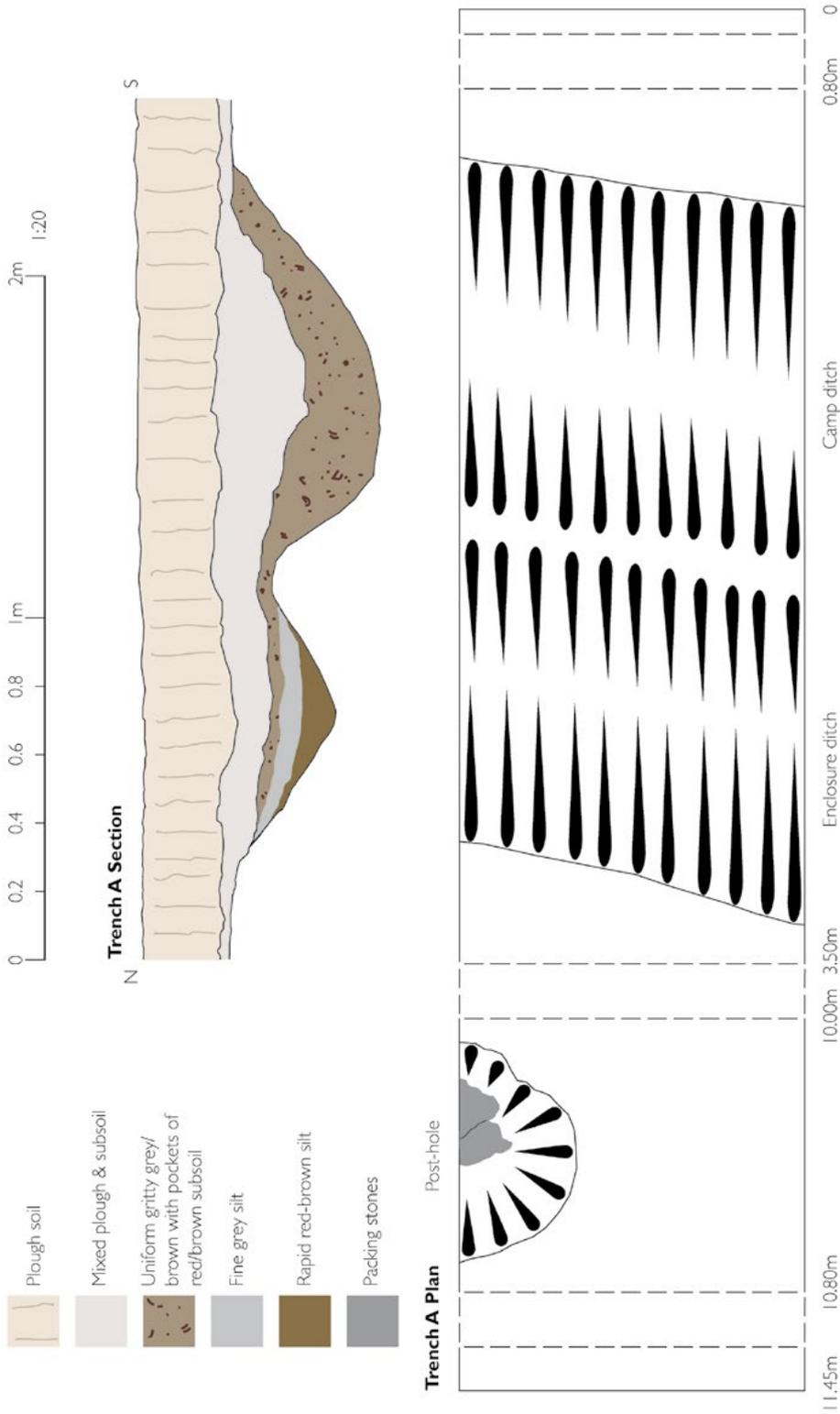


Figure 13.6. Trench plan (A) and west-facing section through the contiguous ditches of the camp and enclosure.





Figure 13.7. Photograph of section (Trench A) through the contiguous ditches of the camp and enclosure from the west.

as it began to curve northwards. This confirmation of the rounded south-west angle faintly apparent in the aerial photographs (Figure 13.1), combined with the known line of the Antonine Wall itself, furnished enough evidence to estimate that it would have measured some 33 m north-south by 30 m east-west within its ditches (Figure 13.3). This compares favourably with the area enclosed at other known fortlets, measuring within their inner ditches where two are attested (Table 13.1). Thus, on grounds of size and morphology alone, acceptance of the Summerston enclosure as a fortlet would seem justified; while its relationship to the temporary camp, which is generally accepted as one of the construction camps for the Wall, lends support to such a view. Finally, its spatial relationship to the fortlet at Wilderness Plantation, exactly two *pes Monetalis* miles to the east as calculated from the LiDAR data (Hannon *et al.*, this volume), would seem fully to justify its identification as a true Antonine milefortlet.

Site	N-S dimensions	E-W dimensions	Reference
Croy Hill	31 m	36 m	Hanson forthcoming; Fig. 3.7
Glasgow Bridge	c. 30.5 m	c. 30.5 m	St Joseph 1955: 86
Kinneil	34 m	42 m	Bailey and Cannel 1996: illus. 28
Watling Lodge	22.5 m	32 m	Breeze 1974: Fig. 2
Wilderness Plantation	28 m	33 m	Wilkes 1974: Fig. 2

Table 13.1. Area enclosed within Antonine Wall fortlet ditches



Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks are due to the undergraduate and Certificate students from the University of Glasgow who assisted in the excavation. For permission to dig we are indebted to Mr Russell of Summerston, as well as Kenneth Ryden and Partners, land-agents for Campbell of Succoth Estates. Thanks are due to Katrina Gilmour for producing the plans and section drawings.

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