



ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND MONUMENTS RECORD

1 SITE CODE H N D 2 6 S E 0 0 3		2 NGR N D 2 8 2 8 6 1 8 2		3 QUAL CE	
4 DISTRICT CAITHNESS		5 PARISH BOWER		6 SITE NAME R I N G / O F / C A S T L E H I L L	
7 AREA STATUS		8 SITE STATUS SCHEDULED		9 REGIONAL STATUS	
11 CONCORDANCE OS ND 26 SE 3		12 FORM EARTHWORK		13 DIMENSIONS	
16 RELATIONSHIP OF ELEMENTS		17 CONDITION INCOMPLETE		14 PERIOD/DATE EM (NOR?)	
20 LAND USE ROUGH PASTURE		21 GEOLOGY		15 DATING METHOD TYP	
22 SOILS		23 VEGETATION		18 SHAPE	
24 HYDROLOGY/DRAINAGE		25 RELIEF GENTLE HILLSLOPE TO STREAM		26 ASPECT 360°	
				27 ALTITUDE 10 = 20m OD	
28 EXCAVATION (EXCAVATOR: DATE: EXTENT: QUALITY)					
29 BIBLIOGRAPHY (AUTHOR: DATE: TITLE: JOURNAL OR PUBLISHER: VOLUME: DETAIL)					
1. ORDNANCE SURVEY: 1970: 6" MAP 2. RCAHMS: 1911: CAITHNESS INVENTORY: HMSO: pp2-3, No. 4 3. TALBOT, E.: 1979: PROC. SOC. ANT. SCOT: Vol. 108, p378 4. HMB(SDD): 1985: LIST OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS 5. ORDNANCE SURVEY: 1906: 6" MAP 6. TALBOT, E.: 1974: SCOTTISH ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONUMENTS: VOL. 6: pp 37-45. 7. TALBOT, E.: 1974: SCOTTISH ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONUMENTS: VOL. 6: pp 48-57. (OHR)					
30 GROUND PLAN NO.			31 GROUND PHOTO NO.		
32 SLIDES NO.			33 HR. AP. NO.		
34 NMR. AP. NO.			35 OTHER AP. NO.: SOURCE		
36 ARCHIVE AND LOCATION					
37 GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY			38 SAMPLES		
39 PALYNOLOGY			40 NUMERICAL DATES: RANGE: LAB NO.		
41 SMALL FINDS				42 MUSEUM/LOCATION	
43 OTHER					
44 NAME & ADDRESS OF OWNER				45 ATTITUDE OF OWNER	
46 NAME & ADDRESS OF TENANT				47 ATTITUDE OF TENANT	
48 ACCESS & RESTRICTIONS					
49 NAME & ADDRESS OF FINDER/RECORDER: DATE				50 RECORDER: DATE GS: 19.8.1985	
				51 CHECK: DATE Am. 24.8.1985	

52 TEXT  
 --- "See over card for text."  
 ---  
 --- "see continuation cards for text + map  
 ---  
 --- "ND 283 618. Ring of Castlehill, Fort 800m SW of Barrock House." (4)

BOX 52 (ND 2828 6182) Ring of Castlehill (NR) (1)

A circular green mound rising from a now-drained moss. A ditch some 35 ft in width encircles it at its base, having on the outside a bank, formed of the upcast, some 2 ft 6 ins in elevation above the natural level, and 11 ft across the top which is flat. The ditch has a depth of some 5 ft below the level of the top of this outer bank, and of 8 ft 2 ins from the top of the breastwork which crowns the scarp. The breastwork, which seems to be an earthen mound, is some 8 ft thick at base and some 2 to 3 ft high on the inner side; the diameter of the interior is some 94 ft. The entrance has been from the N, from which direction the continuity of the ditch is interrupted by an approach over unexcavated ground some 15 ft wide. There is no stonework visible through the turf with which the construction is covered, but at one or two places near the base of the scarp on the W, rock protrudes, indicating that a natural elevation has been utilised. The ditch was probably wet, the bottom being considerably below the natural level.

(2)

The Ring of Castlehill, a roughly circular defensive earthwork, is generally as described by the R C A H M. The breastwork around the flat top of the central mound is no longer visible in the NE and SW arcs. The ditch still contains water and the outer bank is cut in the S by a modern ditch. Another concentric modern ditch skirts the outer bank along the N, E and S sides. Across the entrance, at the outer bank, there is a slight bank of earth 0.2 m high, the purpose of which is unknown. The earthwork may be the site of a castle.  
Resurveyed at 1:2500.

(OSFI:NKB:15.9.1965)

A medieval ring-work of either Norse or Norman origin. The counterscarp bank shows traces of stone walling on its outer face in the vicinity of the entrance on the N. This may be merely an entrance feature, but the fact that the outer side of the bank is slightly higher than the inner suggests that it may be the remnant of a revetment to the whole outer face.

If the earthwork is of Norman origin, it may be seen as a campaign castle related to William the Lion's activities in the area (1155-1214). If it is Norse a parallel may be found in the possibly primary earthwork of Cubbie Roof's Castle on Wyre (NY 42 NW 5).

(3)

Ring of Castlehill is as described by the previous authorities. The site may also be compared with the ring works of Strathnaver (HNC 64 SE 030) Borge (HNC 65 NE 001) Leing (HNC 50 NE 030) and Gaisgill (HNC 92 SW 013).

(OSFI:JB:6.5.1982)

## The Ring of Castlehill, Caithness – a Viking fortification?

by Eric Talbot

One of the most distinctive hallmarks of the Anglo-Normans in Scotland is the earthwork castle. Most castles of earth and timber were of the motte-and-bailey form, but occasionally there were constructed more basic defences, 'ringworks', which consisted of a circular or oval bank and ditch. Such a site, by nature, is the one under consideration; it lies half a mile to the south of Barroch Farm in the parish of Bower (NGR ND 282618).

In a recent article (Talbot 1974b) I included the Ring of Castlehill in a list of ringwork castles with some reservation since I had not visited it. The Royal Commission description (RCAMS 1911, 4) does, however, suggest a site of this kind, and a visit (30.7.75) bolstered my view that a medieval earthwork is in evidence. The ringbank has a diameter, internally, of c 28.5 m and has a maximum height of c 1 m. A well-defined ditch (c 10.5 m wide but relatively shallow) has a surrounding counterscarp bank, and there is a causeway across the ditch at the N side of the site. At this N side the eroded counterscarp bank has traces of stone walling on its outer face, which may be an entrance feature or the remnants of a revetment to the counterscarp bank. The outer side is, in fact, slightly higher than the inner, and this may indicate that it was externally revetted for its entire length.

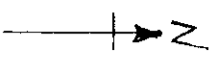
For obvious reasons earthwork castles are rare in the north of Scotland. If the site is to be seen as a Norman-influenced form then a function as a campaign castle, or a more permanent fortification, built during William the Lion's activities in Caithness, might be invoked (Anderson 1873, 165; Crawford 1977). If the site is to be seen with a Norse background, a possible Orcadian parallel can be quoted. In recent discussion (Talbot 1974a, 40), I have suggested that at Cubbie Roo's castle, on Wyre in Orkney, the first phase might not necessarily be the stone tower, but the encircling stone-revetted earthen bank.

Enclosure earthworks of a compact circular or oval form represent a basic kind of defence, and it might be foolhardy to suggest that Castlehill and the enclosure at Cubbie Roo's castle may be a distinctive element in 'Viking' fortification. The view that some ringworks may have a Viking ancestry has been expressed in relation to Welsh research (Alcock 1963, 88-9) and the circular earthworks of Pembrokeshire, in particular, might include amongst their number some with a Viking origin. In England an attempt has been made to suggest possible Danish earthworks in the eastern counties (Dyer 1972).

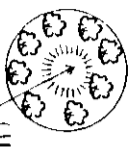
The Ring of Castlehill is an enigmatic site. The setting indicates the use of boggy ground as a natural defensive feature. No aid can come, however, from an assessment of this siting. The earthwork lies close to a routeway which may have led from Huna to Watten but this does not bring us any closer to providing a date and background for the monument.



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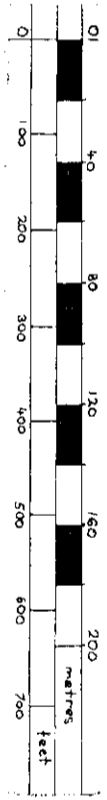
1103  
18.854

  
Gunn's Millack  
(Brough) ①

1104  
.313

1106  
19.227

1102  
3.029  
B.M. 47.5



1099  
18.490

1101  
4.535

1100  
14.613

Ring of Castlehill ③  
(fort)

1109  
6.064

1108  
1.017

Stepping  
Staircase

24.725

