



**Property in Care (PIC) ID:** PIC143

**Designations:** Scheduled Monument (SM13612)

**Taken into State care:** 1913 (Guardianship)

**Last reviewed:** 2014

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

# EAGLE ROCK OR HUNTER'S CRAIG



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# EAGLE ROCK OR HUNTER'S CRAIG

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## SYNOPSIS

The property comprises a natural rock outcrop on the foreshore of the River Forth, ½ mile NW of Cramond and the mouth of the River Almond. The east face of the rock bears a very much defaced carving, reputedly of an eagle and thought to be of Roman origin.

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## CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

### Historical Overview:

- **AD 140** – the Romans build a fort at Cramond, probably to serve as an important harbour serving the garrisons along the newly-created **Antonine Wall**. The fort continues in use, perhaps intermittently, into the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, when it serves as base for the army and navy of Emperor Septimius Severus. It is possible that the carving of the Eagle is executed by an off-duty Roman soldier based at the nearby fort.
- **1794** – the *Old Statistical Account* makes the first mention of the rock carving: 'a rude sculpture bearing some resemblance to the figure of an eagle, standing upright, with its back to the rock ... All traces of that figure are now worn away.'
- **1913** - the Eagle Rock (or Hunter's Craig) is entrusted into state care.
- **1997** – a remarkable stone statue, of a lioness devouring a hapless male figure, is discovered in the mud at the mouth of the River Almond, off Cramond.

### Archaeological Overview:

It must be doubted if there are any archaeological remains surviving at the site. The 6m-high rock outcrop has a noticeable 'tide mark' around half-way up its height, indicating that only the upper half of the outcrop was originally above the water-level; subsequent coastal erosion has exposed the remainder.

There is no doubt that the carving is extremely worn, but it is possible perhaps that new laser technology might shed more light on it. There is also the possibility that further carved work may exist on the rock face, particularly to the north (seaward) of the supposed eagle where there are other strange marks, and at the same high level.

### Architectural/Artistic Overview:

The carving is so indistinct that it is impossible to assess what artistic merit, if any, it may originally have had.

The carving may be no more than a piece of Roman 'graffiti art'. (Another example may be the carving of the winged horse, Pegasus, one of the badges of the Second Augustan Legion, discovered built into a souterrain at Crichton (Midlothian), but probably quarried from the nearby Roman fort.)

### Social Overview:

The rock-face with its supposed carving is a minor curiosity along a very popular, recreational coastal path between Cramond and South Queensferry.

### Spiritual Overview:

It is impossible to say whether the carving was executed for religious reasons or not. The Cramond Lioness, discovered not far from the property in 1997, clearly had a spiritual purpose – a symbol of sudden death and the survival of the soul – and was probably destined to grace a grave of some important Roman official in the fort's cemetery.

It is just as possible that the Eagle carving, if that is what it is, was a piece of 'graffiti-art' executed by an off-duty soldier based at the Roman fort.

### Aesthetic Overview:

The Eagle Rock is an interesting curiosity on an attractive stretch of shoreline. The rock outcrop is readily noticeable, but if it were not for Historic Scotland's blue and white descriptive plate it must be doubted if any passer-by would spot the so-called Eagle.

### What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- What exactly is depicted on the rock, when was it executed, and by whom? It seems highly unlikely that we will ever resolve these mysteries.

## ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Key Points

- The Eagle Rock is an interesting curiosity, which may be related to the nearby important Roman fort of Cramond.
- The property is an appealing feature on the popular coastal path between Cramond and South Queensferry.

### Associated Properties:

*(linked sites)* – **Antonine Wall**; Cramond Roman Fort

*(other Roman rock carvings in Scotland)* – Cramond Lioness (NMS); Crichton Souterrain (Midlothian)

### Keywords:

Roman; eagle; legion; Antonine Wall, Cramond Roman Fort

### Selected Bibliography:

RCAHMS., *Tenth Report with Inventory of Monuments and Constructions in the County of Midlothian and West Lothian* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1929)