



HISTORIC
ENVIRONMENT
SCOTLAND

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ALBA

Property in Care (PIC) ID:

PIC180

Designations:

Scheduled Monument (SM90030)

Taken into State care:

1931 (Guardianship)

Last Reviewed:

2021 (2025 update to include Empire connections)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

BARSALLOCH FORT



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Cover image: Oblique aerial view of Barsalloch Fort, from west, 2017.
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HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

BARSALLOCH FORT

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I. SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

Situated 1.2km west of Monreith, in Dumfries and Galloway, **Barsalloch Fort**¹ survives as a D-plan enclosure, bounded on its landward sides by a deep ditch, flanked on either side by a mounded rampart. The ramparts and ditch are curved on plan and positioned on the edge of a steep coastal slope. The enclosed area is now largely featureless, with open views across Luce Bay.

The site has never been excavated, but on analogy with comparable sites it is interpreted as a late Iron Age defended farmstead, constructed around 2,000 years ago.

In 1888 Barsalloch Fort became one of the first monuments in Scotland to be protected under the provisions of the 1882 Ancient Monuments Protection Act, having been included via Order in Council.² This arrangement was confirmed with a Guardian Agreement in 1931. It was officially Scheduled in 1921.³

The site is unstaffed, with information provided via an on-site interpretation board. Barsalloch Fort is free to access all year round, with visitor numbers estimated to be around 1,100 per year.⁴ The site is waymarked, and reached by a steep, stepped path from the A747 road, where limited parking is available.⁵

1.2 Statement of Significance

The interior has been cultivated and is now largely featureless. It slopes towards the north-east, where the lower profile of the enclosing earthworks hints at a possible entrance, though there is no level causeway across the ditch.

¹ Also known as Barsalloch Point, see [Trove ID 62816, Barsalloch Point \(trove.scot\)](#) (Accessed: 28 July 2025).

² Notes on Order in Council of 3rd May 1888, and Deed of Appointment deposited July 1888, both contained in file MW1/772, National Records Scotland. This brought the monument formally into State care, but it was not formalised by a deed until 1931.

³ SM90030, amended in 2002; scheduling documents are accessible at: <https://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/SM90030> (Accessed: 31 March 2022).

⁴ 2019-2020 figures, courtesy of Historic Environment Scotland (HES).

⁵ Prior to visiting, please check access information, available at: <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/barsalloch-fort/getting-here/> (Accessed: 31 March 2022).

Not far from Barsalloch is **Rispain Camp**,⁶ which has been partially excavated and probably offers the best idea of how Barsalloch's interior may have been used.⁷

Barsalloch's D-shaped plan, with the straight, un-ditched side of the enclosure formed by the sharp edge of the former cliff line, is usually considered to be an example of the use of natural features to allow economies in labour during construction. However, depictions of the site on 18th century maps suggest that the enclosure's plan may then have been more of a complete oval,⁸ and that the present appearance may result from erosion rather than design: this is now impossible to test. If correct, it is also possible that an original entrance may have been lost.

Key aspects of Barsalloch Fort's significance include the following:

- The evidence for late Iron Age enclosed settlement on a relatively small scale (compared with the more familiar hillforts of the earlier Iron Age).
- The extent to which it typifies, or is exceptional to, the generality of late prehistoric settlement in what is now lowland Scotland, and how it may fit into developing theories of Iron Age architecture, society and economy.
- The strong possibility of surviving undisturbed deposits and structural remains capable of providing further information about the site's construction and occupation.
- The site's relationship to other archaeological and landscape features – notably to the nearby **Rispain Camp**,⁹ which has been partially excavated and is believed to belong to the same broad period and class of site.
- Its history of antiquarian and archaeological interest, including the association with General Pitt-Rivers (the first Inspector of Ancient Monuments) through his friendship with the landowner, MP and leading Scottish antiquarian, Sir Herbert Maxwell of Monreith, who lived nearby.

⁶ Throughout the text, site names in **bold** are managed by Historic Environment Scotland and are publicly accessible. Access information can be found at: www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/ (Accessed: 31 March 2022).

⁷ Haggarty and Haggarty 1983.

⁸ For example, see John Gilone's 1778 map with Barsalloch fort labelled as 'Camp' – note that the fort appears to show more of a return curve on the top of the coastal slope, suggesting a more complete circuit than appears at the present day. Accessible at: [NLS, Maxwells of Monreith Estate Maps and Plans, 1777-1778, West Barsalloch \(maps.nls.uk\)](http://NLS.Maxwells of Monreith Estate Maps and Plans, 1777-1778, West Barsalloch (maps.nls.uk)) (Accessed: 31 March 2022). Such evidence must be considered with caution though as the purpose of estate maps was not to accurately map the archaeology, but to delineate agricultural features.

⁹ A Statement of Significance can be downloaded from the HES website: [Rispain Camp Statement of Significance \(historicenvironment.scot\)](http://Rispain Camp Statement of Significance (historicenvironment.scot)) (Accessed: 31 March 2022).

- Its conservation, use and presentation as an ‘Ancient Monument’: Barsalloch was taken into State care in 1888 (although this was not formalised until 1931), so was among the first sites in Scotland to enter State care, and one of the first to do so which had not been specifically named in the 1882 Ancient Monuments Protection Act.

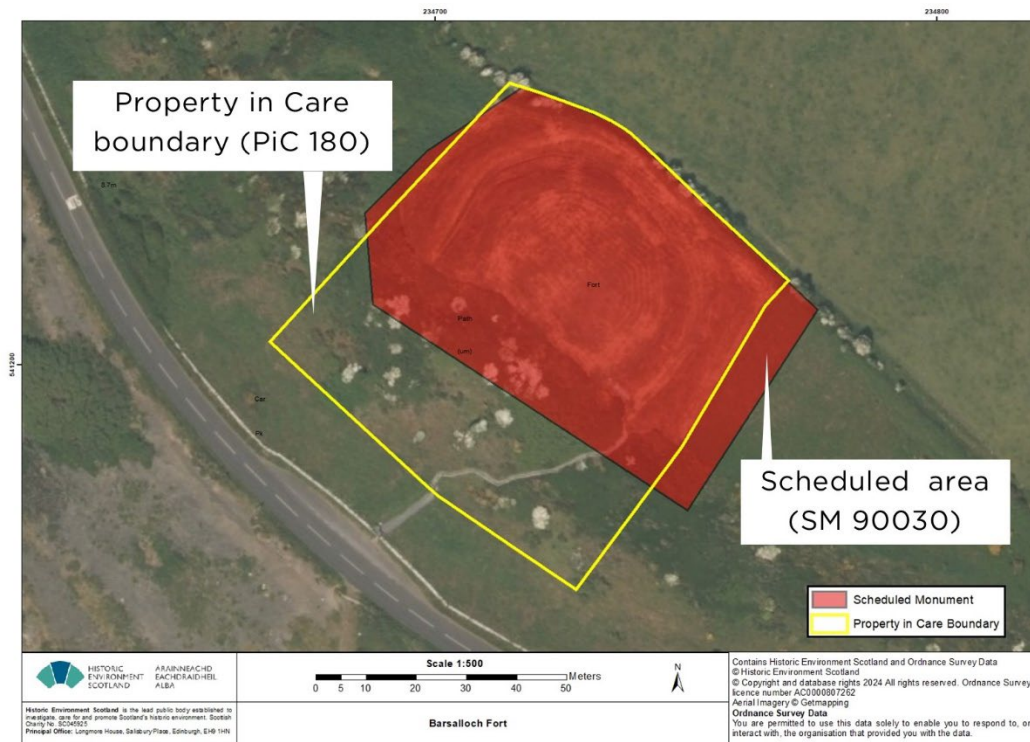


Figure 1:

Barsalloch Fort scheduled area and Property in Care (PIC) boundary. Image for illustrative purposes only.

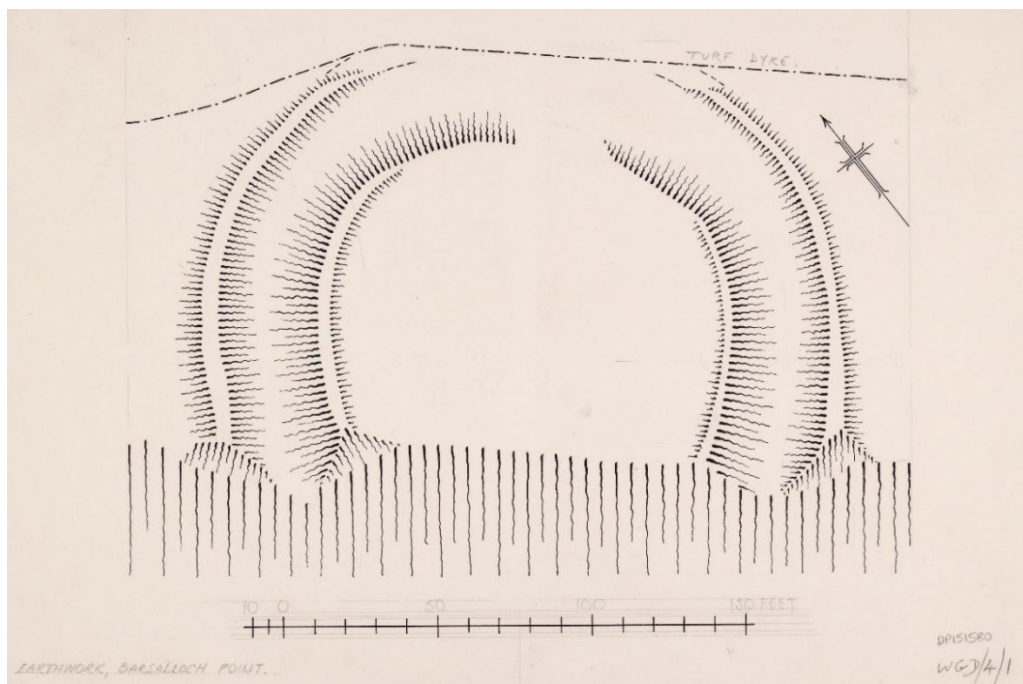


Figure 2: RCAHMS unpublished field survey plan of Barsalloch © Crown Copyright: HES

The above paragraphs outline the key significance of Barsalloch Fort. The following pages give a fuller background and analysis of the site.

2. ASSESSMENT OF VALUES

2.1 Background

2.1.1 Context – Iron Age settlement in southern Scotland

Earlier Iron Age settlement in what is now southern Scotland was characterised by enclosures, ranging in scale and extent from major hillforts and palisaded settlements to much smaller sites. The boundaries enclosing settlements of this period (at least, those which have been examined by excavation) appear to have been intended to act as defences against human attackers, being built on a scale which would be excessive if the exclusion of marauding animals was their primary objective. Ditches with stone or earthen ramparts are the norm, and there is frequent evidence for stout wooden palisades and elaborate gateways. Control of access was clearly of great significance.

Patterns of settlement had changed by the later centuries BC; the date at which (on analogy with **Rispain**) Barsalloch may have been constructed.¹⁰ There is good evidence that forts and other large enclosures had ceased to be maintained, and in some cases, they had clearly been abandoned (for example, houses were built over the former defences of the fort at **Edin's Hall**¹¹ and over the former palisaded enclosure at Dryburn Bridge¹²). The majority of houses were now set in open settlements, though probably surrounded by less substantial boundaries, such as stake fences or hedges.

Although few sites of this period have been explored in south-west Scotland, if the pattern there followed that in the south-east, described above, then Barsalloch would have been relatively unusual in continuing to be enclosed by stout defences. It has been suggested that, as society became more settled, enclosure changed from being a necessary defensive precaution for all, to being an indicator of higher social status for the few. The quality of some of the artefacts recovered from the site may support the theory that the occupants were of high social status.

Society at the time seems to have been organised within a 'chiefdom' model, with power and status more widely distributed than in the earlier Iron Age when hillforts point at regional hierarchies on a larger geographical scale. Increasingly, social rank may have depended as much on intangible matters (such as descent or special skills) as on conventional wealth (such as holdings of cattle, or extent of ploughland). There is

¹⁰ For instance, Armit 1997, 86.

¹¹ Dunwell 1999.

¹² Triscott 1982.

evidence from across Scotland and further afield that portable wealth, in the form of jewellery and other fine metalwork, was becoming increasingly important as a means of displaying status.

The environmental evidence points to mixed farming, with cattle prominent, but sheep, goats and pigs were also raised. Crops included wheat and barley. Wild foodstuffs were also important, including venison, birds and fish. Some 'wild' resources may have been managed, including woodland: fencing and maintaining a substantial enclosure and large wooden houses would have required large quantities of timber, ideally of regular form.

The landscape of late first millennium lowland Scotland, including that around Barsalloch, had long since ceased to be truly wild,¹³ and most settlements would have stood at the centre of extensive areas of cleared and cultivated land, with livestock grazing on poorer soils and pockets and belts of woodland between. Marshy valley bottoms would have provided hay for overwintering stock. Barsalloch's site would have represented a prime location, with access to a long stretch of coastline which would have offered shellfish, and opportunities for fishing and wildfowling. The fresh water supply was likely obtained from a rivulet which runs down a steep ravine to the south.¹⁴ The presence of copper ore in the area may have been important: although there is no clear evidence that it was worked at this date, its location near to the surface makes this likely.

A cautionary note is in order here, however. General understanding of the period is based almost entirely upon sites many kilometres from Barsalloch, with the exception of **Rispain**.¹⁵ Until very recently, most research into the Iron Age of southern Scotland has been concentrated in the eastern coastal plain,¹⁶ and there had been no large-scale excavations in the south-west to compare against those such as Broxmouth,¹⁷ St Germain's¹⁸ and Dryburn Bridge.¹⁹ The nearest area to Barsalloch which has been even moderately well explored is eastern Dumfriesshire, where excavations at Boonies,²⁰ Castle O'er,²¹ and Overrig²² have suggested a relatively impoverished material culture compared with sites further east. However, recent excavations at Black Loch of Myrton, only two kilometres north-west of Barsalloch, are providing a rich assemblage of structural, artefactual and environmental evidence from waterlogged deposits

¹³ Armit 1997, 76.

¹⁴ Pitt-Rivers Inspection Report dated 1 November 1887, contained within file MW1/772. National Records Scotland.

¹⁵ Haggarty and Haggarty 1983.

¹⁶ Banks 2002.

¹⁷ Armit and McKenzie 2013.

¹⁸ Alexander and Watkins 1998.

¹⁹ Triscott 1982.

²⁰ Jobey 1960 and Jobey 1975.

²¹ Mercer 2018.

²² Mercer 2018.

associated with an enclosed settlement on the edge of a small loch.²³ Once fully analysed, this will offer a much more complete picture of the material culture and economy of the local area in the centuries just before Barsalloch came into being.



Figure 3: Aerial view 2017, from north east © Historic Environment Scotland

2.1.2 Descriptive overview

Barsalloch fort survives as a D-plan enclosure, with internal dimensions of about 42m north-south by about 44m transversely: an area of just under 0.1 hectare. It is bounded on the south-west side by the edge of a steep slope; a former cliff-line, which forms the straight edge of the D-plan. The other, landward, sides are bounded by a deep, curving ditch, up to 10m across and 3.5m deep. This is deepest at the points where it reaches the edge of the coastal slope, and shallows halfway along the north-east side, which may represent a former entrance. On either side of the ditch is a bank, up to 1m high and 2m wide, but in places reduced almost to the level of the surrounding land. The banks appear to be simple, dumped earth ramparts, but this has not been tested by excavation. Part of the outer bank is overlain by a later field bank (annotated as ‘turf dyke’ in Figure 2, and ‘8 inch field boundary’ in Figure 8), probably of post-Improvement date (18th century or later). The interior of the enclosure, which slopes gently towards the north-east, is largely featureless, apart from a shallow platform towards the north-west edge, which may represent the site of a house.

²³ Cavers and Crone 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019.

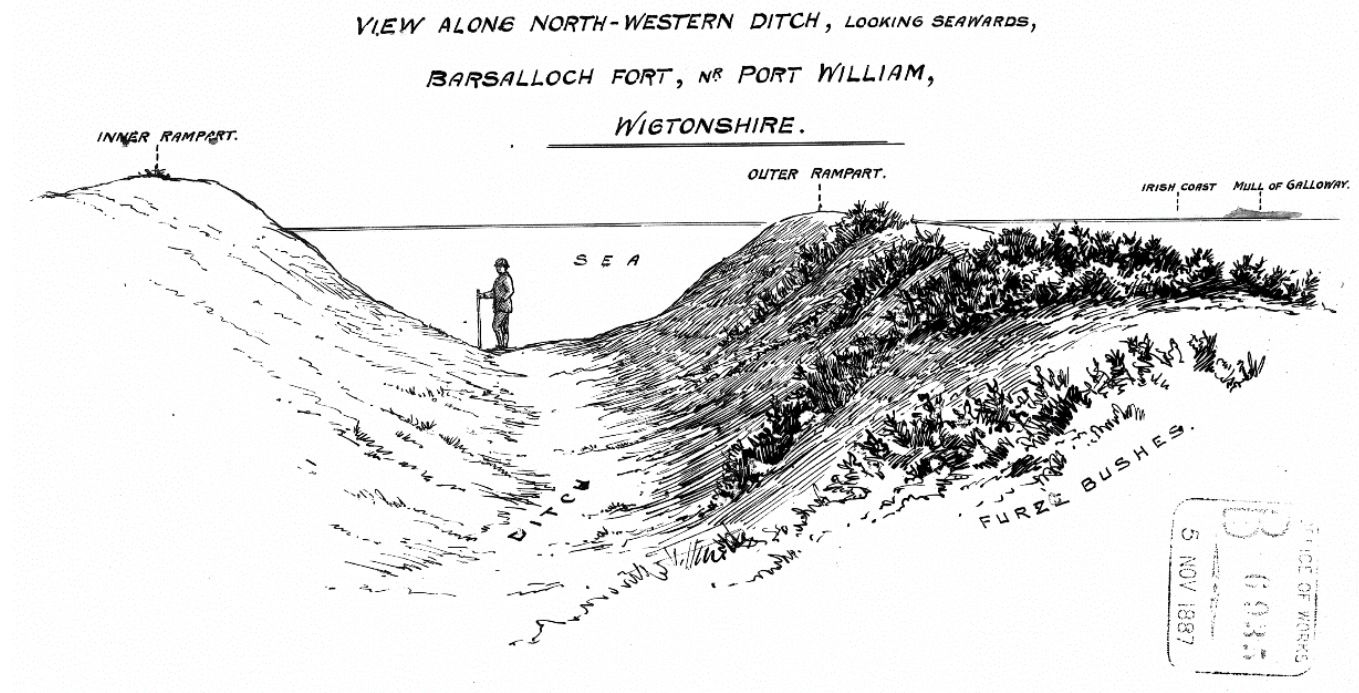


Figure 4: Pitt-Rivers sketch after site visit of 1887, showing view along the north-western ditch, with figure for scale. © Crown Copyright HES.



Figure 5: Modern photograph of the same view. © Crown Copyright HES.

The earthworks have been affected by erosion from grazing livestock, and it is possible that the coastal edge has been significantly eroded since the fort was built. There has been no recorded archaeological excavation.

The site sits at a height of about 25m above sea level, on the edge of a steep slope which drops 20m to the level of the public road. This runs along a level coastal strip which represents a post-glacial raised beach, while the slope is a former cliff line. The view from the site is extensive, around the shoreline of Luce Bay and south-westwards to the Mull of Galloway, beyond which Northern Ireland is visible in clear weather as is the Isle of Man towards the south.

The site is fenced off from adjacent farmland. A steep, stepped path gives access from the limited roadside parking. There is an interpretation board providing visitors with information about the site.

2.1.3 Early antiquarian interest and activity

What would appear to be Barsalloch fort is depicted on General Roy's map of 1755, but is not named or indicated as an antiquity.²⁴ One of a set of maps prepared for the owners of the Monreith Estate by John Gilone, dated 1777-8, shows the site as 'Camp', while the accompanying notes have it as 'British Camp'.²⁵ Just a few years later, it appears as 'Danish fort' on Ainslie's 1782 county map of Wigtownshire,²⁶ and similarly it was described as such by Pitt-Rivers in 1887 who noted that 'It seems very probable from its form and size that it may be of Danish construction'.²⁷ This indicates early differences of antiquarian opinion; sites such as Barsalloch might be described variously as Roman, British, Native or Danish (which at that date was more usual than the term Viking).

That diversity of opinion is reinforced by the first known textual reference to the site, written around 1794 and published in 1796:

At the eastern extremity of the sea coast, at the summit of a steep bank, there are the very distinct remains of an Anglo-Saxon camp.²⁸

The site appears as 'Fort (Supposed Danish)' on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of the area (surveyed in 1849).²⁹

²⁴ Roy 1755, available at: [NLS, Roy Military Survey of Scotland 1745-55 \(maps.nls.uk\)](https://maps.nls.uk) (Accessed: 31 March 2022).

²⁵ Gilone 1778, available at [NLS, Maxwells of Monreith Estate Maps and Plans, 1777-1778, West Barsalloch \(maps.nls.uk\)](https://maps.nls.uk) and [NLS, Scheme extent and soil of Monreith Estate, Maxwells of Monreith Estate Maps and Plans, 1777-1778, West Barsalloch \(maps.nls.uk\)](https://maps.nls.uk) (Both accessed: 31 March 2022).

²⁶ Ainslie 1782, available at [NLS, Ainslie, 1782, A map of the county of Wigton \(maps.nls.uk\)](https://maps.nls.uk) (Accessed: 31 March 2022).

²⁷ Pitt-Rivers' site report, dated 01/11/1887, contained within file MW1/772, National Records of Scotland.

²⁸ OSA 1795 p57 vol xvii Rev John Steven (quoted verbatim in NSA).

²⁹ [NLS, OS six-inch, first edition, 1850, Wigtownshire, Sheet 33 \(maps.nls.uk\)](https://maps.nls.uk) (Accessed: 31 March 2022).

Sir Herbert Maxwell of Monreith, the landowner and a keen antiquarian, was instrumental in several local monuments being included in the original Schedule to the 1882 Ancient Monuments Protection Act, though Barsalloch was not one of these. The Maxwell of Monreith family had major imperial connections, and through Herbert E. Maxwell's maternal line, the Shaw-Stewart family, connections to Caribbean slavery. It is not clear how much of that family's fortune made it into the Maxwell family, but there was undoubtedly some transfer of wealth, which may have played a role in the preservation of sites on Maxwell's lands.³⁰

Maxwell developed a lively friendship with General Pitt-Rivers, the first Inspector of Ancient Monuments, who was also heavily involved in the British Empire and whose family inheritance allowed him to pursue his archaeological interests³¹ and who was appointed Inspector under the aforementioned Act. Pitt-Rivers visited Maxwell a few years later and inspected the fort. In his resulting memorandum to the Secretary of the Office of Works, Pitt-Rivers noted that 'It is not an earthwork of the first importance but having been offered by Sir Herbert Maxwell who takes so much interest in the antiquities of his district and does so much to forward the objects of the act I would recommend that it should be accepted. It is the first Danish Camp that has been offered.'³² As a result, it was brought under the provisions of the act via Order in Council in May 1888, along with three other sites in the ownership of Herbert Maxwell: **Drumtroddan Standing Stones, Drumtroddan Cup and Ring Marked Rocks, and Druchtag Motte.**³³ Barsalloch was formally passed into State care in 1931.

Through these connections, Barsalloch Fort has a 'cultural' Empire connection.³⁴ It is clear that the status of both men ensured that Barsalloch Fort was brought under the protection of the Ancient Monuments Protection Act 1882.³⁵

³⁰ Mullen *et al* 2024, 60-61.

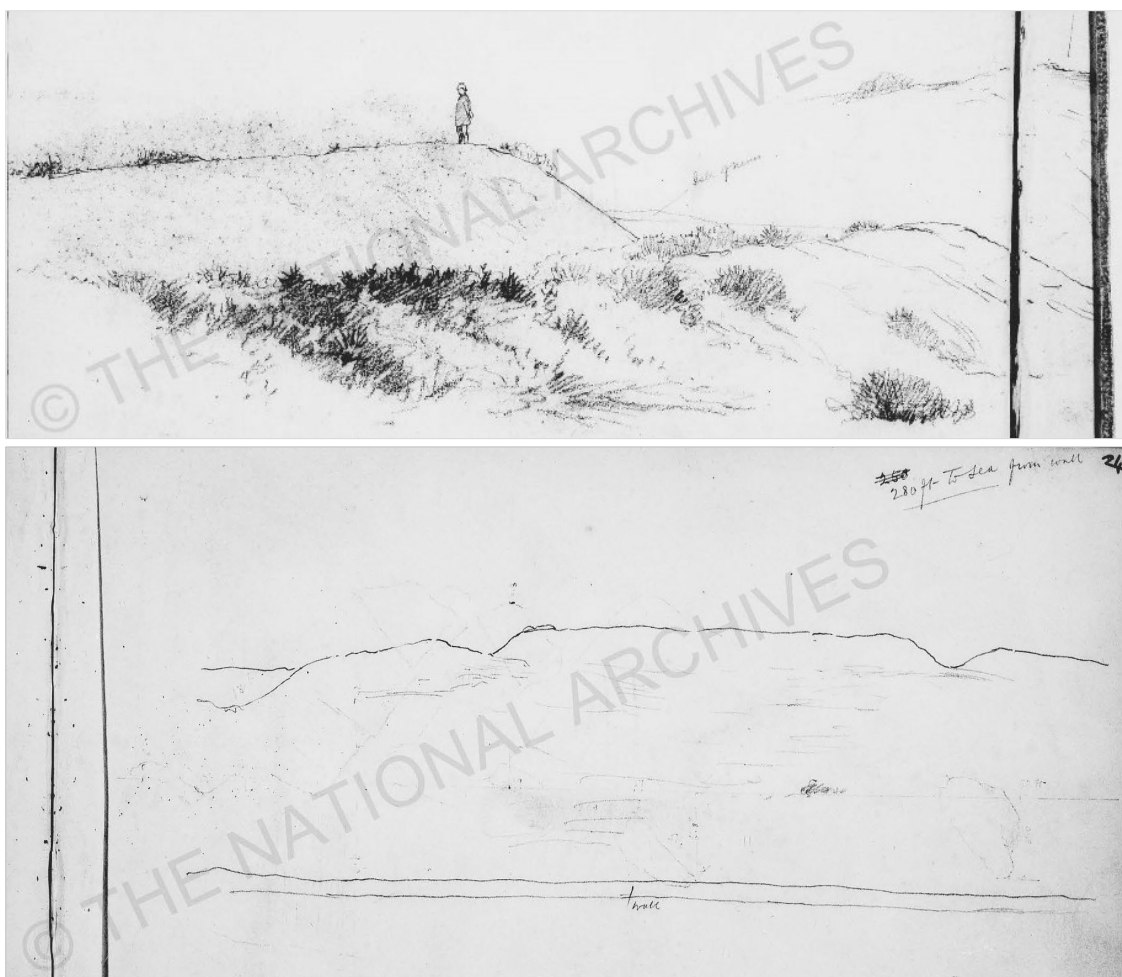
³¹ Mullen *et al* 2024, 62.

³² Memorandum from Pitt-Rivers to the Secretary, titled 'Ancient Monuments Act. The Semi-circular Earthwork on the sea cliff, Barsalloch, Mochrum.' Dated Nov 1 1887, contained within file MW1/772, National Records of Scotland.

³³ Deed of Appointment, dated 26th July 1888, contained within file MW1/772, National Records Scotland.

³⁴ 'Cultural' connection describes a connection that denotes the ways in which an empire influence, often in the form of wealth and associated prestige, enabled owners or those acting on their behalf, either through action or inaction, to shape the condition, fabric or representation of a PiC. See Mullen *et al* 2024, 30-31 for a full definition of typology.

³⁵ For more information on the connections between British Empire and the Properties in Care, please download the full report from HES website: [Surveying and Analysing Connections between Properties in Care and the British Empire, c. 1600-1997](https://www.historicenvironment.scot/publications-and-reports/surveying-and-analysing-connections-between-properties-in-care-and-the-british-empire-c-1600-1997/) ([historicenvironment.scot](https://www.historicenvironment.scot/))



Figures 6 and 7: Pitt-Rivers sketches of Barsalloch, from 1887 site visit. © The National Archives.

The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) surveyed the site in 1911 and described it their 1912 Inventory as ‘this little promontory fort’,³⁶ even though it is not strictly situated on a promontory. Its position is more accurately described as a cliff-edge or hillslope fort.³⁷ A medieval date was suggested for **Rispain** and similar sites in the 1950s including Barsalloch, but has not been generally accepted since the excavations at **Rispain** (1978-81).³⁸ Since then, sites such as Barsalloch have generally been assigned to the later Iron Age, even though that date is not yet proven.³⁹

20th century investigations of the wider Barsalloch Point area, including field walking and analysis of flint scatters, were undertaken by the late WF Cormack, editor of the Dumfries and Galloway Natural History and

³⁶ RCAHMS 1912, 78, no. 199.

³⁷ [Lock, G. and Ralston, J. 2017. Atlas of Hillforts of Britain and Ireland \(hillforts.arch.ox.ac.uk\)](https://hillforts.arch.ox.ac.uk/) (Accessed 23 February 2022).

³⁸ Haggarty and Haggarty 1983.

³⁹ Stell 1986, 133 No 58. (The author, Geoffrey Stell, worked for RCAHMS at the time he produced this volume, in which he describes Barsalloch as ‘iron-age’.)

Antiquarian Society (DGHAS). Cormack was a significant figure in the archaeology of the area; he contributed many articles to the Transactions of the DGNHAS and his excavations included the important early mediaeval site at Barhobble, just inland from Barsalloch.⁴⁰

2.1.4 Maintenance and conservation activity

When the site came into State care, a field boundary in the form of a turf-built linear bank (of unknown date) ran over the original outer rampart and ditch on the north-east side.⁴¹ At this date, the site had already been fenced off from the adjacent arable fields, but continued to be grazed for many years, mainly by cattle which ranged along the steep slope. This undoubtedly contributed to ongoing erosion, with both banks being slowly reduced in height. The typescripts accompanying the RCAHMS site visit of October 1955 noted that the ditch and interior of the fort had been under cultivation, and that the entrance had been widened by ploughing.⁴²

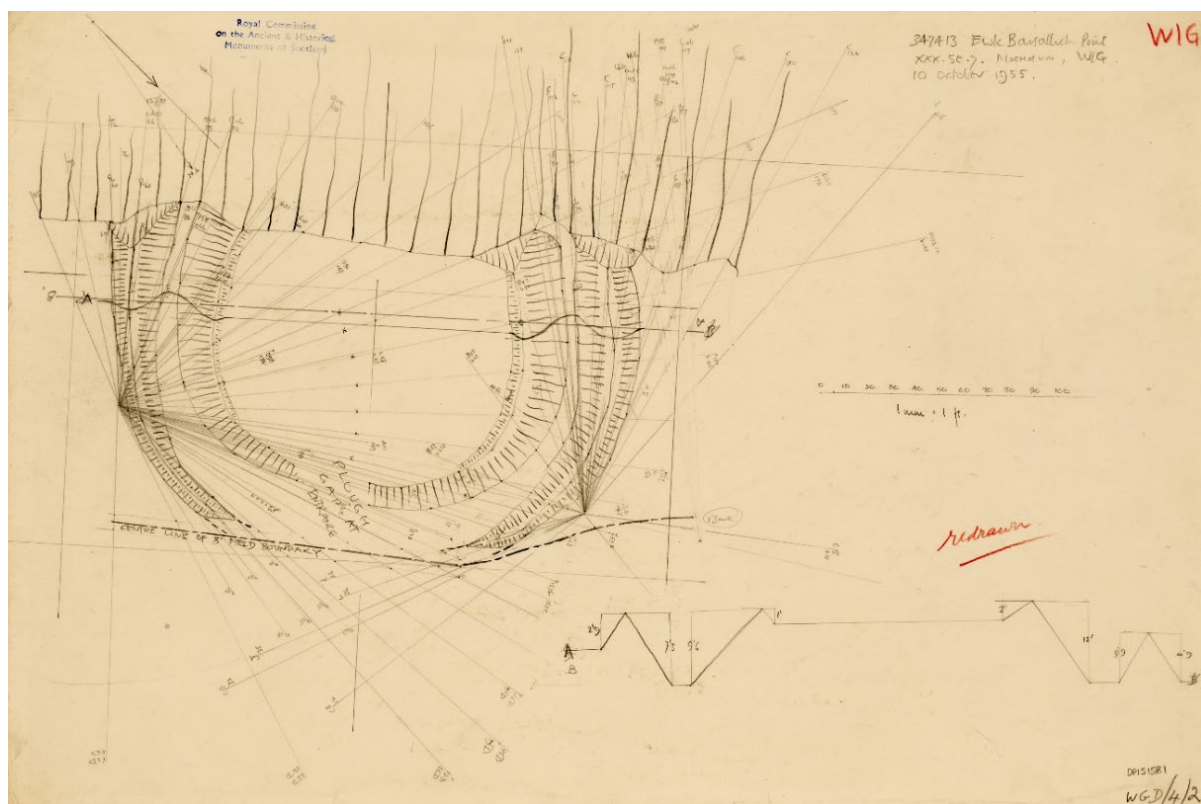


Figure 8: Plan and profile of Barsalloch, from RCAHMS field survey of October 1955. © Crown Copyright: HES

⁴⁰ Information courtesy of the Whithorn Trust. Details of some of the flint artefacts recovered by Cormack are available to view on: [Future Museum, Microlith, Barsalloch South, Port William \(SMAH 033\) \(futuremuseum.co.uk\)](https://futuremuseum.co.uk) and through the National Museums of Scotland catalogue: [NMS, Search Our Collections \(nms.ac.uk\)](https://nms.ac.uk) (Both accessed: 31 March 2022).

⁴¹ Pitt-Rivers field report dated 01/11/1887, contained within file MW1/772, National Records of Scotland; RCAHMS 1912.

⁴² RCAHMS 1955.

Possibly in the early 1980s, and echoing changes at **Rispain Camp**, this position was reviewed. The decision was taken to control grazing in the interior, and new fencing was provided. Damaged sections of the ramparts and ditch sides were repaired and grassed over. The first of a series of information panels was erected soon afterwards.

In recent years there have been further changes. A gravel path with wooden-edged steps now leads up from the road to the site and continues to a short flight of steps allowing access up the inner side of the ditch to the interior. The steps have been carefully constructed to lie on the surface, so that archaeological deposits have not been disturbed. An information panel has been installed near the point where the steps emerge onto the summit of the site (Figure 9).

In recent years, the site has been recorded by laser scanning as part of the Rae Project, providing an objective digital record which will underpin future conservation work.

There are currently (2021) no significant threats to the integrity of the site, beyond natural hazard risks⁴³ and the ever present risk of rabbit or mole incursions. Ongoing monitoring and management are therefore undertaken.



Figure 9: Emergence of path onto the summit of the site, on the south east side © Crown Copyright HES.

⁴³ Risks for Barsalloch include slope instability, coastal erosion and groundwater flooding. For further detail download: [HES Climate Change Risk Assessment \(historicenvironment.scot\)](#) (Accessed: 31 March 2022).

2.2 Evidential values

The evidential value of Barsalloch Fort is high for what its physical fabric, location and setting can tell us about settlement during the later Iron Age; and for its potential to yield information through ongoing research and investigation. There are no recorded artefactual finds.⁴⁴

The general assumption is that the use of the interior space at Barsalloch was broadly similar to that revealed by excavation at **Rispain**, including several circular wooden houses. This theory seems reasonable but has not been tested. In terms of its curve-sided plan, Barsalloch is closer to many of the small defended enclosures in south-west Scotland, so any evidence from Barsalloch might be particularly useful in contributing to a picture of the wider state of society in the area at this period.

The lack of excavation limits available evidence to the currently visible remains. The very broad and deep ditch (in places still 3.5m below the crest of the flanking banks) is already impressive for a defended site with such a small interior space. It appears that the ditch may be partially infilled, and its bottom extends still further downwards beyond what is visible today. There is a strong likelihood that the deposits filling the base of the ditch will contain evidence relating to the site's construction, occupation and abandonment, and also to local vegetation including crops. The same may be true of the surfaces buried below the inner and outer banks.

The constructional nature of the banks has not yet been established: they may be earthen dump ramparts, perhaps originally faced in stone,⁴⁵ but equally they may be the footings for wooden palisades. Likewise, the presence or absence of the original entrance halfway along the curved north-east side of the fort, remains to be determined. These aspects could be explored using geophysical techniques, without the need for invasive excavation. The enclosed space within the inner ditch displays a slight trace of what may be a house platform at its north-west but is otherwise featureless. Once again, geophysical survey might be informative.

In the absence of excavation, it is important to note that the artist's impression currently (2021) displayed on the site interpretation panel is largely based on surmise and analogy with **Rispain**. If that analogy holds, then the enclosed space could easily have held four or five houses with ancillary structures, but at present there is no proof that it did. It therefore

⁴⁴ However, the National Museums Scotland hold a number of flint artefacts in their collection, which were found near to Barsalloch Fort. NMS catalogue accessible at: [NMS, Search Our Collections \(nms.ac.uk\)](https://nms.ac.uk/Search-Our-Collections) (Accessed: 31 March 2022).

⁴⁵ Note, there was no masonry visible during Pitt-Rivers' inspection in 1887. (Consent Report dated 1 November 1887, contained within file MW1/772, National Records Scotland.)

remains uncertain whether such small defended enclosures represent single-family farmsteads, or small defended hamlets.

Despite some degree of erosion by grazing animals, damage by the later field boundary, and possibly loss of land on the seaward edge, Barsalloch retains considerable archaeological potential. The majority of the fill of the boundary ditch, and the surfaces under the banks, may hold deposits with the potential to provide additional evidence relating to contemporary land use and economic activity, and towards more precise dating of the enclosure, specifically:

- The existence, or lack thereof, of the supposed gateway on the north-east side is unproven, but if it *does* exist, details of its construction might be determined. If it does *not* exist, this might support the notion of an entrance on the south-west side, now lost to erosion. Even if the entrance is lost, circumstantial evidence might survive, for example cobbled surfaces leading towards that edge.
- The interior is likely to contain features cut into the subsoil, and may also contain extensive deposits, all of which might help to establish the unanswered question of the duration of occupation of the site as well as the overall layout and utilisation of space, and whether this changed over time.

2.3 Historical values

Ptolemy's *Geography*, composed about AD 150, is the sole source for the name of the tribe or tribal grouping occupying the south-west, the Novantae.⁴⁶ Unlike their counterparts in south-east Scotland, the Votadini, the Novantae appear in no other Roman sources and generally failed to capture the imagination of early (or more recent) antiquarians.⁴⁷

The primary historical importance of Barsalloch lies in its potential to contribute to evidence-based narratives describing how society in late Iron Age southern Scotland may have operated and changed. It may also offer evidence to support considerations of how that society exploited local resources.

Barsalloch may have the potential to contribute to understanding local circumstances preceding the emergence of nearby Whithorn as an early Christian and medieval power centre. It may be that copper mining in the

⁴⁶ Breeze 1996, 44.

⁴⁷ One exception was Davidson, writing in the late 18th century, who claimed Whithorn as the capital of the Novantae (OSA 1796: 276-7 and 288). This was based on one of the two placenames which Ptolemy gives in Novantae territory being *Leucopibia/Locopibia* and thus potentially equivalent to Whithorn and its 8th century Latin rendition as *Candida Casa*. All begin with an element meaning 'white' or 'shining', in Greek, early English and Latin. Modern scholarship tends to reject this idea as over-speculative.

area of Whithorn, beginning in prehistoric times, had led to its emergence as a regional focus of wealth and power, thus influencing the choice of St Ninian when locating his religious establishment.

The placename, Barsalloch, meaning *headland of the willows* derives from the Gaelic *Bar nan Saileach*.⁴⁸

2.4 Architectural and artistic values

The architectural details of later Iron Age enclosures and round houses have been studied through excavations at a number of sites in eastern Scotland, but there have been few excavations in the south and west.

Although there is a wide range of size and constructional detail, the house excavated at **Rispain** is the closest local example in terms of Barsalloch's assumed date. (At **Rispain**, a stout ring of free-standing, floor-set posts was found, the tops of which may have been connected by a ring-beam which served to take the main weight of the roof. The roof probably oversailed the outer wall of the house, which was not required to carry much vertical load. The outer wall was constructed at least partly of planks, reinforced by upright posts. Wattle, perhaps covered with daub, seems also to have featured in the construction, perhaps for sub-divisions within the house. Its floor area, of about 140 square metres, is comparable with the size of a modest contemporary three-bedroomed house.)⁴⁹

2.4.1 Artists' representations

No early depictions of Barsalloch are known.

The artist's impression which features on the current (2021) interpretative board offers an interior layout closely based on that found at **Rispain**. The defences are left deliberately rather non-descript but resemble palisades rather than ramparts. Apart for the line of the defensive circuit, everything in this drawing is based purely on supposition and analogy.

To date, no instances have come to note of the use of Barsalloch as the inspiration for creative literary or artistic works. Images of the site have very occasionally been used in specialist archaeological guides and reference works,⁵⁰ but it does not typically feature in general guidebooks.

⁴⁸ Maxwell 1930. (Gaelic was the principal language of south west Scotland from some time before AD 1000 until about 1450, after which it was steadily replaced by Scots, with the last fluent speaker of the Galloway dialect of Gaelic dying in 1760.)

⁴⁹ Haggarty and Haggarty 1983.

⁵⁰ For example, Stell 1986.

2.5 Landscape and aesthetic values

Barsalloch is a very attractive site, though access is limited to those able to make the short but steep climb from the road. The fort forms a small 'island' of lush, permanent grassland in what is predominantly an arable landscape. The views are superb: in the near to middle distance is the sweep of Luce Bay (around which evidence has been found for the earliest human presence in the area, during the Mesolithic period⁵¹). Beyond the bay is the low, rugged Mull of Galloway. In clear weather, the coast of Northern Ireland can be seen, over 60km to the south-west, and also the Isle of Man, 40km to the south.

The site is distinctive from the air, and oblique aerial views of various dates have been published and are accessible in the National Record of the Historic Environment (NRHE).⁵²



Figure 10: Barsalloch Fort viewed from further inland. © Crown Copyright HES.

2.6 Natural heritage values

The land immediately around Barsalloch is not currently (2021) designated for the protection of species or habitats. However, the coastal waters are protected as the Luce Bay and Sands Special Area of Conservation (SAC).⁵³

⁵¹ One excavated late Mesolithic site lies just over 1km north of Barsalloch fort (Cormack 1970).

⁵² Accessible at: [Trove ID 62816, Barsalloch Point \(trove.scot\)](https://trove.id.au/62816/Barsalloch-Point) (Accessed 31 March 2022).

⁵³ [NatureScot, Luce Bay and Sands SAC \(sitelink.nature.scot\)](https://www.nature.scot/locations/luce-bay-and-sands-sac), consulted 14 March 2021.

The Port William coast is well known among geologists for its raised beaches, created around 12,000 years ago when the ending of the last Ice Age caused the land to rise. Barsalloch Fort represents the only easy access to the top of the raised beach from the road below, and offers spectacular views towards the Isle of Man, the Scaur Rocks and the Rhins of Galloway.⁵⁴

Visitors to the site climb from the coastal raised beach up a steep slope, through gorse bushes and emerge onto a grassy area with arable fields inland, mainly under sown grass. A variety of typical farmland birds are usually audible or visible, for example skylarks *Alauda arvensis*. Being near the coast, seagulls are often overhead, especially when ploughing is taking place.

2.7 Contemporary/use values

To date (2021), there has not been a formal assessment of the value of the site to contemporary communities, either of geography or interest. The number of visitors to Barsalloch are not currently recorded, however these figures are probably relatively low, and are estimated to be around 1,100 per year.⁵⁵

Informal on-site observations suggest that Barsalloch is relatively little used by the local community, although the parking area beside the road is popular. In fair weather its spectacular outward views do reward those able to undertake the steep climb to the site, and this is a feature frequently mentioned in visitor comments on online reviewing platforms.⁵⁶ Visits to Barsalloch are expected to increase with the development of the Whithorn Way; a long distance walking route developed by the Whithorn Trust. The route runs just inland past Barhobble, with local heritage sites just off the route also signposted in the guidebook and on the app.⁵⁷

2.7.1 Community significance

Barsalloch is known of by residents of the area as an element of their rich cultural heritage. The coast neighbouring Port William is locally known as ‘Maxwell country’⁵⁸ because of the multiple links to the Maxwells of Monreith. This includes the aforementioned Sir Herbert, who was

⁵⁴ Information from the Whithorn Trust.

⁵⁵ Estimated figures for 2019-2020, courtesy of HES.

⁵⁶ For example, [TripAdvisor. Barsalloch Fort Reviews \(tripadvisor.co.uk\)](https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk) (Accessed: 31 March 2022).

⁵⁷ For further information visit: [Whithorn. Walk the Whithorn Way \(whithorn.com\)](https://www.whithorn.com) (Accessed: 31 March 2022).

⁵⁸ N.B. The harbour of Port William itself was named after Sir Herbert’s ancestor, Sir William Maxwell.

instrumental in the protection of Barsalloch as well as many other local sites.⁵⁹

The site was one of several to be recently examined as part of a community science project, focussed on the Machars Coast. In 2020-1, the Whithorn Trust's Machars Waterborne project was funded by Historic Environment Scotland's Coast and Waters Heritage Fund to engage volunteers with LiDAR mapping of coastal archaeology. As part of the Year of Coast and Waters, the project focussed particularly on coastal sites at increased risk of erosion and impacts from high energy storms. The interactive LiDAR map for the Machars coasts was developed by AOC Archaeology and is freely accessible online,⁶⁰ where Barsalloch Fort can be viewed in dramatic outline on the LiDAR data.

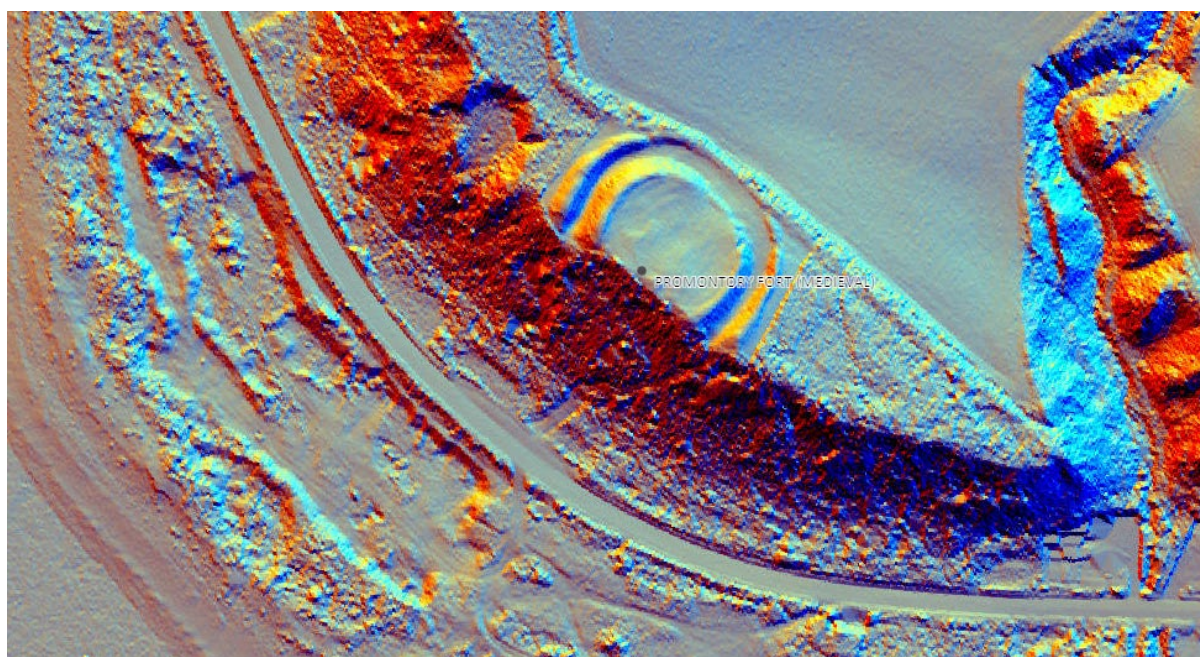


Figure 11: LiDAR visualisation shows the three-dimensional features of Barsalloch fort in hillshaded relief. Image extracted from Machars Waterborn online mapping, and reproduced with kind permission of the Whithorn Trust.

The project also identified a large number of previously unknown sites along the north-west coast of the Machars, among them the newly discovered fort at Blackcraig, just up the coast. This D-shaped enclosure has an entrance on the east, indicated by a worn track that ascends the steep rocky slope from the north-east. The fort makes use of a rocky outcrop with cliffs to the west, enclosing an area of 0.44 hectares and measuring 113m north-west/south-east by 60m north-east/south-west.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Other Dumfries and Galloway sites include **Druchtag Motte**, **Drumtroddan** standing stones, and cup-and-ring marked stones, **Rispain Camp**, **St Ninian's Chapel and Cave**, the **Wren's Egg**, all of which are now Properties in Care of HES as a result of Sir Herbert Maxwell's involvement. Information courtesy of the Whithorn Trust.

⁶⁰ See Machars Waterborne website: [Machars Waterborne. LiDAR map](#) (Accessed: 31 March 2022).

⁶¹ Information courtesy of the Whithorn Trust.

Further work would be required to determine how this site relates to Barsalloch, if at all.

3. MAJOR GAPS IN UNDERSTANDING

Local evidence to support an understanding of the Iron Age in south-west Scotland is virtually non-existent, due to the paucity of excavated sites.⁶² Interpretations have instead been extrapolated from other areas, usually the south-eastern coastal plain and eastern Borders, even though the regional variability of later Iron Age settlement patterns has long been recognised.⁶³ There are relatively few large hillforts, and while there are several coastal forts such as Barsalloch, none has been excavated to date. **Rispain Camp** is the only site of this period in the area about which any detailed information exists,⁶⁴ and evidence from excavations there has been used in suggesting how Barsalloch may have appeared and functioned. This situation is slowly changing: recent years have seen major excavations at Black Loch of Myrton, on an enclosed settlement of slightly earlier date, but the results are not yet published.⁶⁵

At present, it would not be unreasonable to take the view that *any* new information about later Iron Age in the area would be of great value. However, it is possible to sketch out a short list of specific, unanswered questions about Barsalloch:

- Is Barsalloch actually late Iron Age in date? What was its date of construction and occupation?
- How does Barsalloch fit into the local late Iron Age settlement pattern?
- What was Barsalloch's internal layout when completed: was it a single dwelling with several ancillary buildings, or a small cluster of dwellings? This has implications for its social status, with a single-house plan being more likely to indicate higher social status.
- Was the entrance to the fort on the north-east side, as it appears? If not, can any evidence be found to suggest where it was?
- Was the site occupied before the defences were built, and if so, what was the nature of that occupation?

⁶² Banks 2002.

⁶³ Hingley 1998, 44.

⁶⁴ Haggarty and Haggarty 1983.

⁶⁵ Cavers and Crone 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019.

- Does the ditch contain evidence for the history of crops and natural vegetation around the fort over time and, if so, what does this tell us?

Added to these specific questions, there are major knowledge gaps relating to the period to which the monument is thought to belong. Key research questions relating to the Iron Age as a whole are contained within the ScARF National Framework Iron Age report.⁶⁶

Please note, the research for this document was undertaken during 2020-2021 with limited access to archives and resources, as a result of Covid-19. While every attempt was made for accuracy throughout the statement, errors or omissions may remain. Please direct comments or suggestions to CRTenquiries@hes.scot

4. ASSOCIATED PROPERTIES

Associated properties managed by HES:

- **Rispaan Camp** (defended homestead, Dumfries and Galloway) – late Iron Age (approximately 100 BC - AD 200 – possibly contemporary with Barsalloch
- **Chapel Finian** (early church, Dumfries and Galloway) – nearby Early Christian to Medieval church site.
- **Whithorn Priory** (medieval church site with excavated evidence for some prehistoric occupation and a major early Christian presence) – and associated Visitor Centre(s)

5. KEYWORDS

Barsalloch Fort, Iron Age, fort, enclosure, farmstead, Novantae, round house, farm, Dumfries and Galloway.

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⁶⁶ Accessible at: [ScARF, Iron Age Panel Report \(scarf.scot\)](https://scarf.scot/) (Accessed: 31 March 2022).

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Note: Footnotes throughout the text offer page numbers where appropriate. If no page number is given, this indicates that reference is being made to the general thrust of the publication cited rather than a specific point of detail.

Further Resources

Trove ID: 62816

Trove Site Number: NX34SW 1

NGR: NX 34720 41210

Trove entry: <https://www.trove.scot/place/62816>

Scheduling Description: SM90030, details accessible at: <https://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/SM90030>

Historic Environment Scotland – Scottish Charity No. SC045925

Principal Office: Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH

A number of artefacts from the surrounding area are held within the National Museums of Scotland collections. Their collections database can be searched via: <https://www.nms.ac.uk/explore-our-collections/search-our-collections/>

Further information on Iron Age Scotland is to be found at <https://scarf.scot/national/iron-age-panel-report/>

Atlas of Hillforts of Britain and Ireland entry:

<http://hillforts.arch.ox.ac.uk/records/SC0219.html>

Alexander Curle's digitised diary recording site visit to Barsalloch on 7th July 1911: <https://scotlandsplaces.gov.uk/digital-volumes/rcahms-archives/curle-diaries/curle-diary-08/38>

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: TIMELINE

Date	Event
Later Iron Age c.100 BC to c.AD 200	Although we cannot be sure of its date of construction, the ditch and flanking banks were likely built and the site occupied c.100BC to c.AD 200.
Unknown – perhaps by AD 400	Site ceases to be occupied.
Late 18th century	Site comes to antiquarian attention.
1778	Detailed estate plan shows the fort with more of a complete circuit – a 'C' rather than a 'D' on plan.
1796	First brief description in print.
1880s	Landowner and leading antiquary, Sir Herbert Maxwell, draws the attention of Pitt-Rivers to the site. Pitt-Rivers visits in 1887.
1888	The site is brought under the provisions of the 1882 Ancient Monuments Protection Act, via an Order in Council on 3rd May 1888. ⁶⁷ Informal Guardianship commences. Grazing of interior continues.

⁶⁷ MW1/772, National Records Scotland.

1911	Gorse clearance undertaken by H.M. Office of Works. ⁶⁸ Visited by RCAHMS, survey drawing and description published 1912.
1915	Flag pole erected on site by Admiralty, for signalling to patrol boats in Luce Bay. ⁶⁹
1921	Site scheduled. ⁷⁰
1931	Formalisation of Guardianship.
1955	RCAHMS revisit and note the date of the site is uncertain. Site reclassified as medieval.
Early 1980s	Barsalloch re-classified as late Iron Age following excavations at Rispain Camp . New fencing, some repair to eroded ground surfaces.
1980s onwards	Fence repair and new signage – latter updated periodically since.
2002	Scheduling amended to clarify extent of protected area.
2000s	Access path improved, with addition of wooden stairs
2010s	Laser scanning of the site undertaken as part of the Rae Project. ⁷¹

⁶⁸ Notes accompanying Memorandum titled 'Barsalloch Camp, Mochrum, Wigtownshire', dated 28/04/1911. Contained within file MW1/772, National Records of Scotland.

⁶⁹ Memorandum titled 'Barsalloch Camp' dated 07/07/1915, with accompanying note dated 29/09/1919 that the flag pole has been removed and the ground made good. Contained within file MW1/772, National Records of Scotland.

⁷⁰ SM90030, Scheduling documents are accessible at: <https://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/SM90030> (Accessed: 31 March 2022).

⁷¹ More information available at: [HES Engine Shed. The Rae Project \(engineshed.scot\)](https://heshed.scot/) (Accessed: 31 March 2022).