
The Roman road at Woodlea, Greenloaning, Perthshire excavations in 1997/8

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The site: the Strip

The area under investigation consisted of a strip of rough uncultivated land, (crossed by the 120m contour line) now dominated by a large electricity pylon, located just to the north of the ruined former dwelling of Woodlea (Illus 1). The strip lay some 2km south of Braco at NN 829071 (Illus 2) and from the evidence of large tree roots and an estate plan of c 1830 (Illus 3), it was once woodland. The surrounding land slopes down quite steeply towards the Allan Water to the N, but to the S it levels out, approximately on the line of the modern A9. The Strip thus enjoys excellent views in all directions, but especially to the N and W. The Roman fort at Ardoch is clearly visible to the north, as are the fortlets of Glenbank and Kaims Castle to the W and NE, despite the presence of modern tree plantations. In 1996 a Roman watch tower was excavated 120m NE of the pylon on the Strip at NN 830 072 (Woolliscroft and Hoffmann 1997, 563–577).

Background

It is generally accepted that the course of the Roman road, from Dunblane (the site of two Roman camps) to Ardoch, lies between the Allan Water on the north, and the A9/A822 (which here follows General Caulfeild's Stirling to Crieff road of c 1740) to the south. The Roman road seems likely to have stayed above the peat and wetland areas around the river and, as is often the case it runs as much as possible along the more elevated, much drier land, from where it would have enjoyed better visibility. Nevertheless, the exact line still remains unknown over much of this section, although it may have remained visible until relatively recently as it is mentioned in a number of antiquarian writings, for example, Charles Roger's recently republished book 'A Week at Bridge of Allan' (1856, 233) states that in his time: 'In Dunblane and also in the Vale of Allan, the remains of a Roman causeway, conducting from Camelon to the camps at Ardoch are still pointed out. It has been of the average width of 12 feet (3.6m) and elevated about a foot (0.3m) above the surface'. The sector around Greenloaning is, however, far better understood because much of the line between NN 822067 and NN 834076 has appeared on aerial photographs (see below), although even here there have been no previous excavations because most of the land has been so intensively cultivated over the last three centuries that all surface trace of the road has disappeared. With the exception

of the ground covered by modern farm tracks and buildings and a few small but deep stream valleys, the Strip at Woodlea is the one piece of currently uncultivated land on this part of the line. The Strip is characterised by rock outcrops, heaps of abandoned field stones (well covered in moss and lichens), dumped field waste, a possible small quarry and, most encouragingly, the overgrown remains of several mounds, parallel banks and ditches. The latter were seen particularly well in the winter of 1996, when the vegetation had been grazed by sheep and such was the clarity of the southernmost ditches and intervening banks (Illus 4) that they were taken to be the road itself, although this proved not to be the case.

Aerial photographs

The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland has granted permission for use of their aerial photographs (Illus 5 and 6), from their collection which were taken on the direction of Gordon S. Maxwell.

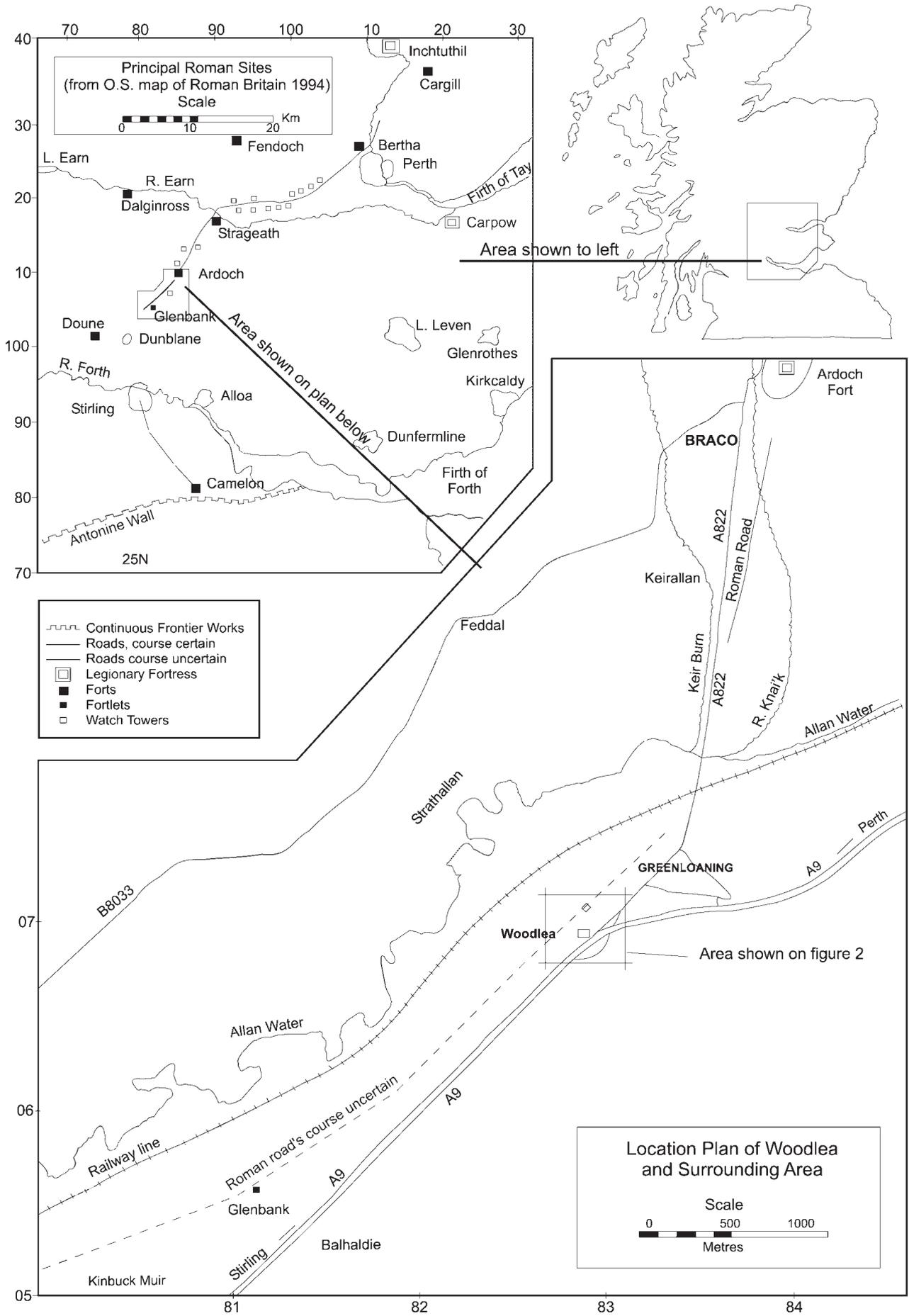
Gordon Maxwell has confirmed that soil and crop markings identified as the course of the Roman road align here on the strip.

Excavations

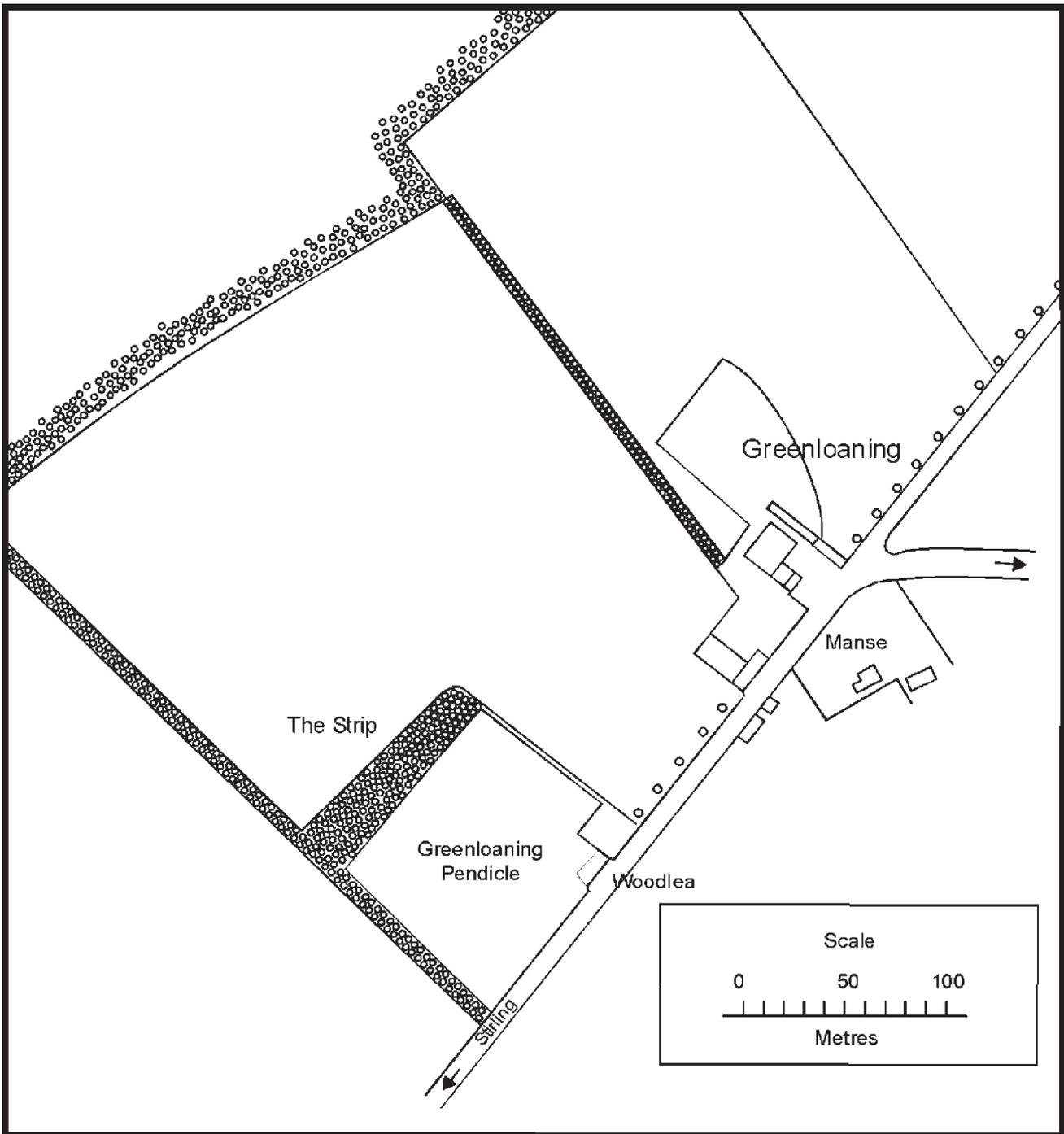
To locate the trenches during the excavations, a grid 150m long (E–W) by 25m wide (N–S) (Illus 7) which covered most of the Strip, was laid out and used for reference in this report. Six trenches were excavated, at right angles to the grid's long axis. Trench 4 crossed its entire width, whilst the others were shorter.

Trenches 1–3

These trenches were dug after Trench 4, 7m long and 1.2m wide between 18–25 North, at 24, 28 and 70 west. After removal of the thick mat of turf and roots the sub-soil exposed in Trench 1, 24W was composed of light sandy soil with a few random rounded stones. In Trench 2, 48W, a similar sub-soil was found but with a greater number of round as well as angular stones, whilst in Trench 3, 70W, the random round stones and sandy soil were mixed with some angular stones. No trace of the Roman road was found, it being assumed that it had here been obliterated by agricultural activity.



Illus 2 Location plan of Woodlea and surrounding area.



Illus 3 Estate Plan of 1830.



Illus 4 Upstanding earthworks looking North East in 1996.

Trench 4

This trench was 25m in length (N-S) x 1m (E-W) (Illus 8) and lay 78m from the grid's east end. Removing the topsoil revealed little other than to highlight the banks and ditches already visible on the surface. Further excavation from 0-25N more clearly defined the ditch at 5N-10N and the bank 10N-15N. This bank was found to be completely composed of fine gravely earth which has the appearance of having been imported—it is of a regular consistency and is laid on the underlying glacial clay bed. It does not appear to be of Roman date. The next ditch 15N-20N is similar to that at 5N-10N. At



Illus 5 A 36934 (1985) is taken from above the Strip at x looking north-east. The line of the Roman road can be seen as a lighter coloured line X–Y running out from the Strip. (Crown Copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland)

20N there is clearly visible a ‘V’ or small ‘patch’ of dark brown stony pebbly earth. At 21N the ground rises to form a hump (Illus 9) composed of a mixture of reddish brown sandy earth and more noticeably between 21 and 22.5 more angular stones mixed with sub rounded pebbles and cobbles all mainly of sandstone. The interstices are filled with imported fine sharpish grit or sand. The substrate is made up of blocks (some very large) of flaggy purple-reddish sandstone. These flag stones are randomly placed. By their composition they are clearly the structure of a road. Its location and construction imply that it contained within it a part of the Roman road, which is seen between 20 & 23.5N. It

is assumed that the rest of the road on the South was removed on the later, probably Medieval road.

Trench 5

Located at 108W this trench was excavated from the north at 25N to 16N. At 20N there were a few large sub outcropping blocks of purplish, fine grained ferruginous sandstone below a thin topsoil forming a rock outcrop on the extension of the line of the Roman road above at 78W. As this ‘head’ of rock was undisturbed there was no evidence of the Roman road.



Illus 6 A 36939 (1985) is taken from a point above Lower Quoigs, looking north-east towards the Strip which is approximately 1000m distant at 'X'. The line of the Roman road can be seen running towards the Strip by a series darker-toned 'blobs', or maculae. These indicate the quarry pits used to construct the road, and located on either side of it. (Crown Copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland)

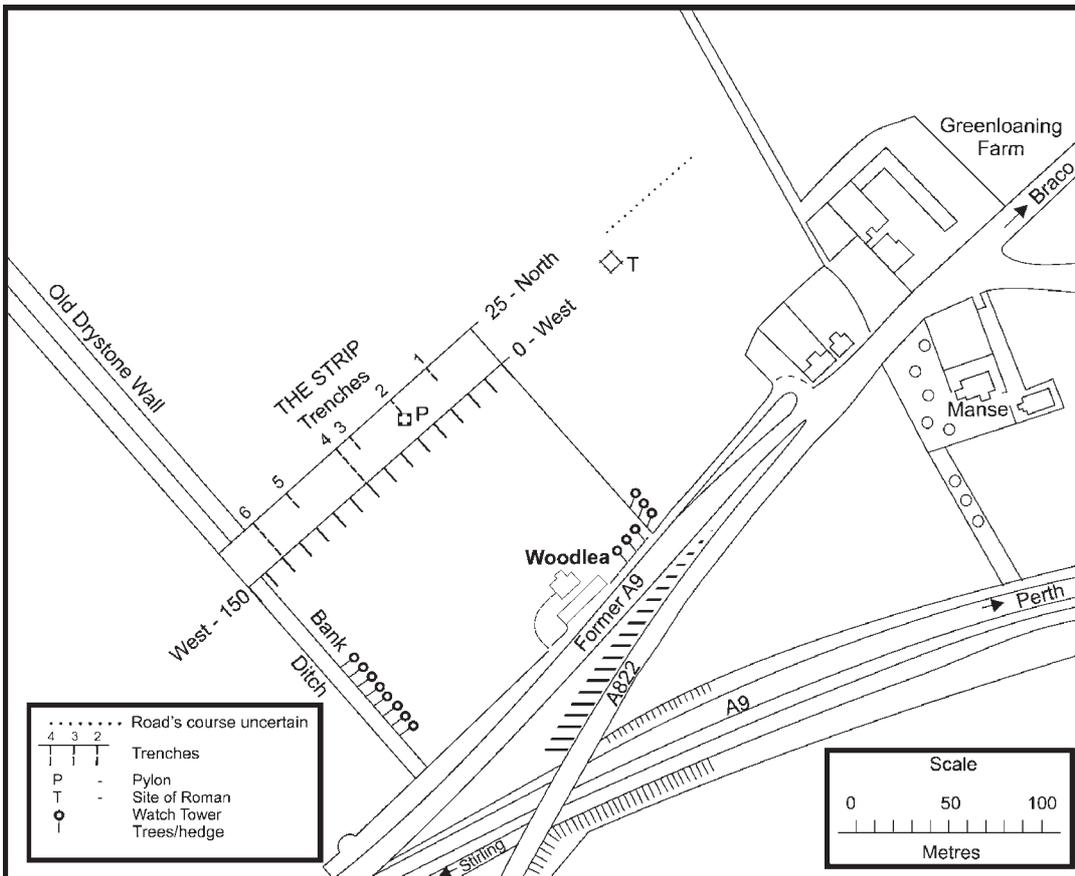
Trench 6

Located at 140W at a lower level than either of 4 and 5 and at its northern endcut is mainly through good deep black brown soil. The strip of land from 120W to 140W (which includes the line of an old dilapidated drystone wall) may have been partly cultivated as the majority of it does not have any of the features of the ditches and ramparts from 20W to 120W. The excavation in Trench 6 exposed angled cobbled pavement at 8N with a marked ditch to its south at 6N and a stone built rubble drain or faced ditch. It is assumed that this was an associated feature of the banks and ditches (Illus 10).

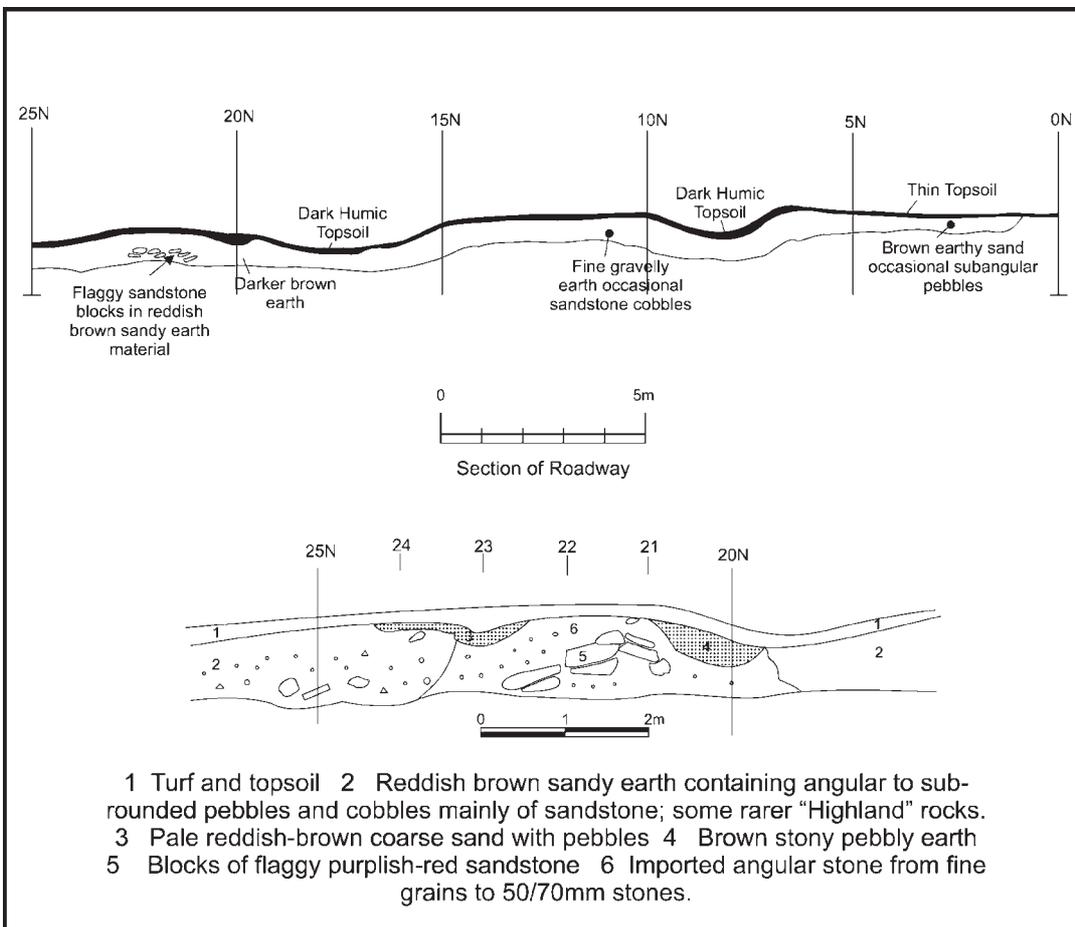
Conclusions

The presence of part of the Roman road in the strip may therefore be identified at the north end of Trench 4. This small part of the road—little over 5m in length—may be all that remains of the causeway between Glenbank and Ardoch. Several excavations on this stretch over the period 1996–8 have failed to provide any other clear evidence of the road on the ground.

The absence of the Roman road (in this arable area), on Roy's map of Scotland c 1750 suggests that there may have been an immediate concerted effort to demol-



Illus 7 *The Strip, location grid and trench lines.*



Illus 8 *Sections of Trench 4.*

ish it following the construction of the Military road, not only to encourage the use of the 'new' road but to halt the use of the former 'right of way' for livestock, and at the same time 'enclosing' the adjacent land with stone dykes, (utilising the readily available road material) and facilitating the creation of secure farm leases which were being introduced into Perthshire at this time. (Reports on Annexed Estates 1755–6).

The presence of the causeway of the Roman road here prior to its obliteration (pre-1740) may have led to the formation of the medieval secure field—Greenloaning Pendicle (Illus 3)—to be sited along side it, although by this time the 'road' itself may have wavered from its original 'Roman' route. The banks and ditches, in the Strip, which are currently visible, correspond to the earth banks and hedges surrounding much of the other three sides of Greenloaning Pendicle and suggest some form of medieval secure field or enclosure. Roy's map names Greenloaning and shows a series of dots indicating a cluster of buildings. The name 'Greenloaning' may well have referred originally to the Roman road itself.

That any of these remains have survived is in line with the policy of preservation of the Roman fort at Ardoch by Sir William Stirling of Ardoch, who fenced off the remains in the 18th Century. Greenloaning was part of the Quoigs Estate, also part of the Stirling family estates, which were first acquired in 1448 and Quoigs was continuously owned by the Stirling family up until the nineteen seventies. That the banks and ditches and two neighbouring tumuli were protected, planted by trees and not ploughed is typical of the care paid by this family to Roman structures on their estates both in Perthshire and at Cadder north of Glasgow.

Acknowledgments

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References

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- Woolliscroft, D and Hoffmann, B G 1997 'The Roman Gask System Tower at Greenloaning, Perth, Kinross' *Proc Soc Antiq Scot* 127 (1997), 563–577).



Illus 9 Photograph of Trench 4, looking north-east.



Illus 10 The cobbled pavement, ditch and stone-built rubble drain or faced ditch in Trench 6.

Abstract

Excavations confirmed the possibility that a series of parallel banks and ditches within a strip of rough ground at Woodlea concealed remnants of the Roman road from Dunblane to Ardoch.

Keywords

Ardoch
General Roy
Roman road