

The Castle

The castle is a simple tower, rectangular in plan, built from rubble which includes some of the vitrified stones of the fort. This rubble is levelled off periodically into courses, an indicator of an early date and similar to the castles of Balvenie (near Dufftown) and Coull (near Aboynne). The unvaulted ground floor was probably used for storerooms and is lit only by two slit windows. The centre of life in the castle was on the first floor, in the great hall which is represented today only by the fine pointed window that survives in the west wall. Here the Balliol nobleman who built the tower would have held court and dined. This is one of the earliest castles in Scotland and was probably in existence by 1260.



Hillforts

There are approximately 50 sites in Grampian which were fortified in later, prehistoric times. They range from impressive upland locations such as Tap o' Noth at Rhynie to coastal promontories. They were occupied between approximately 900 BC and 900 AD.

The Forts

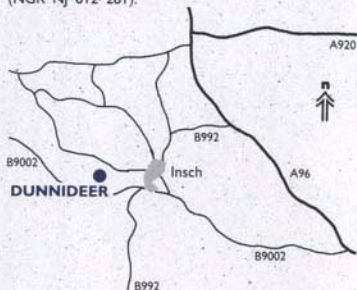
Two thousand years ago the night skies of the Garioch were alight in the west with the flickering flames of a great disaster: the strong fort on the hill of Dunnideer was alight, its defeat flaming for all to see.

Today, the remains of the defeat can still be seen in the tumbled masses of fused ("vitrified") stone that surround the summit. Cold and grey now, but once alight because the builders had tried to create an impressive defence by running baulks of timber through the stonework to reinforce the wall. Once the fort had been captured the victors set fire to the wall in order to demolish it and to impress on the locals the finality of their defeat.

Traces of a possible later scheme of defence lie downslope.

Reaching the site

Park at the Belts, a small clump of trees 1.2km west of Insch. A stiff but short walk (400m) up the east shoulder (NGR NJ 612 281).



Please respect these ancient structures.



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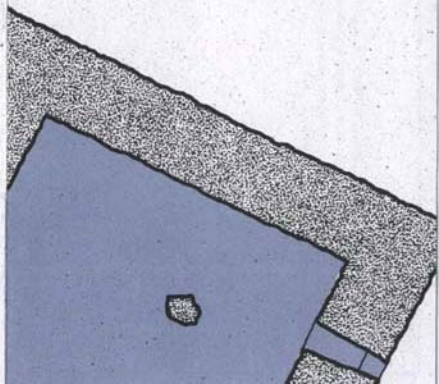
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Dunnideer

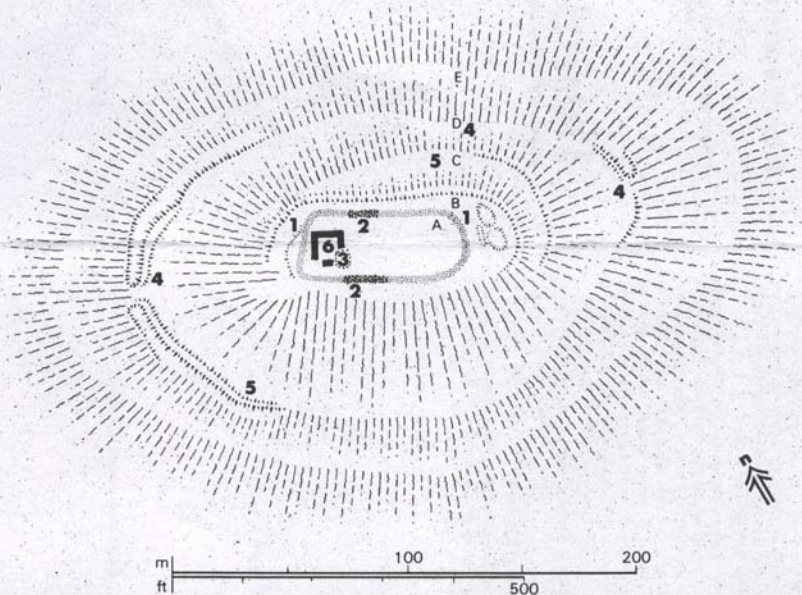
*Fifth in a series of leaflets
on the Archaeology of N.E. Scotland*



DUNNIDEER

This conical hill, which rises to a height of 268m, provided a site suitable for fortification from early times. Two phases of fortification can be seen on the upper slopes, represented by five roughly concentric ramparts. The three outermost are probably the later and may represent an unfinished fort. They survive as lengths of rampart and ditch linked by slight marker trenches.

PLAN



- 1 The summit defences consist of two stone walls, the outer, B, being a low stony bank absent on the south. The inner, A, represents the vitrified fort, an oblong enclosure 65m by 25m, with no clear entrance. The wall stones are mostly a fine-grained hornblend-like igneous rock.
- 2 Vitrified wall lumps (one with timber void).
- 3 Cistern of upper fort.

- 4 Defensive lines C, D and E; unfinished fort represented by earthen ramparts at east and west and faint 'marker trenches' between them.
- 5 Hut platforms which probably pre-date the unfinished fort as the marker line of the fort skirts one of the northern platforms. There are seven in all, five on the south and two on the north of the summit. The largest is 12m by 7.5m and has been scooped out of the hillside.
- 6 Castle (13th-century).

Further Reading

GM Fraser, *Dunnideer and its Triple Fortresses*, Aberdeen (1927).

IBM Ralston, *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 116 (1986), 17-40.

A & G Ritchie, *Scotland: Archaeology and Early History*, London (1981).

IAG Shepherd, *Exploring Scotland's Heritage, Grampian*, Edinburgh (1986).

WD Simpson, *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 69 (1934-5), 460-71.

Unfinished Forts

Dunnideer is one of a series of so-called 'unfinished' forts in Grampian which include the hill opposite Dunnideer (Hill of Christ's Kirk), as well as Little Conval, Dufftown; Knockargetty Wood, Cromar and Durn Hill, Portsoy. Some of the marker trenches, such as those on Dunnideer, may have in fact held fence lines or small stockades.