The Lochbrow Landscape Project 2015

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This project aims to investigate the locations of an early Neolithic–Bronze Age monument complex and Iron Age settlement enclosures, all recorded as cropmarks at Lochbrow, near Lockerbie, Dumfries and Galloway, within their wider context and topographic location.

The Project’s sixth season of investigation took place in September 2015. Over a period of seven days, electrical resistance survey (using Geoscan RM15 and RM85 meters) was carried out over an area of approximately 1.5 hectares, creating a total surveyed area in this field of c.3.3ha. The data was collected in grids of 20x20m at a resolution of 1m x 0.5m (800 readings per grid).

The results are strongly influenced by the geology of the gravel terrace (the strong NE-SW trends and strongly dark and light patchy areas), and this complicates the interpretation of the data greatly (Figure 2). Nevertheless, it is still possible to see anthropogenic features from various periods within the dataset, though the interpretation must be treated with caution as a result.
Figure 2. Overview of resistance results (darker areas indicate higher resistance, lighter areas lower resistance).
From previous surveys, it had already been established that the barrows and the timber circle that are clear from the aerial photo transcription show up very clearly in the resistance results. The aim of this season was to attempt to get a better understanding of the length of the cursus, and to link the independent surveys from previous years.

Figure 3. Details from the cursus, showing the resistance results, aerial photo transcription, and original aerial photograph.
Though the aerial photograph does not line up perfectly with the resistance results (due to the rectification process), certain features from the cursus are visible (figure 3). There are clear linear trends of both high and low resistance, which align with the cursus. Some of these appear as low resistance postholes (particularly the central area). The lower area has a slightly offset accreted rectilinear enclosure that shows a higher resistance linear trend aligned with features from the aerial photograph. By recognising such features, additional similar anomalies are now illuminated that may represent cursus features not previously identified from the aerial photograph. Most intriguingly, there are a series of low resistance anomalies in the central section that might represent other phases of the cursus. However, given the complex nature of the geology in this area, it is necessary to be extremely cautious in such interpretations.

A structured experiential survey was also undertaken, recording visual and acoustic perception across the whole of the cursus field and within the location of the palisaded enclosures. This aims to add another dimension to the way in which we understand the sites and landscapes at Lochbrow by recording changing perception across the Lochbrow landscape, thus enabling new interpretations of how past peoples may have experienced the monuments and landscape. Recording was undertaken on pro-forma recording sheets over the course of three days (23rd-25th September). Observations of visual and acoustic perception were taken at set points across the landscape and noted on the recording sheets in the field. The information gathered was transferred into an Access database, adding to the observations recorded in 2013 and 2015. The lines of observation were mapped in ArcMap, linked to the database recorded observations and the mapped lines colour coded. The result is a series of meshes of colour coded observations (Figures 3 and 4). Further work is required to manipulate, depict and interpret the observations, but some preliminary interpretations can be added to those already made (Millican 2014).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, sight and sound varied considerably across the north field – the varied topography played a large part in this. However, in some instances it was still possible to hear what was taking place within the monuments even when vision was restricted or not possible. In particular this was noted when the observer was on the floodplain below the monument complex. The distinct topography also played an important part in feelings of closeness or separation of the location of monuments from particular observation points. Small gestures were at least partially visible across much of the north field and within both the timber cursus and timber circle. Within the monuments themselves large gestures were universally visible. Across the rest of the north field, the visibility of such large gestures varied considerably.

Within the south field, observations were recorded only within the palisaded enclosures (figures 5 and 6) and, while many of the observations noted were as expected (e.g. it is universally possible to see from one side of each enclosure to the other), others were less expected. For example, facial expressions were only partially visible across the width of both enclosures, and it was only possible to partially hear speech across the width of the rectilinear enclosure, with some variability across the circular enclosure. Clearly timber fencing and the presence of roundhouses within the enclosures would have had an effect on visibility and sound. However, the observations recorded provide a starting point to begin to think further about the social nature of space at this site.


References


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