The Inventory of Historic Battlefields

The Battle of Sheriffmuir

Designation Record and Summary Report

The Inventory of Historic Battlefields is a list of nationally important battlefields in Scotland. A battlefield is of national importance if it makes a contribution to the understanding of the archaeology and history of the nation as a whole, or has the potential to do so, or holds a particularly significant place in the national consciousness. For a battlefield to be included in the Inventory, it must be considered to be of national importance either for its association with key historical events or figures; or for the physical remains and/or archaeological potential it contains; or for its landscape context. In addition, it must be possible to define the site on a modern map with a reasonable degree of accuracy.

The aim of the Inventory is to raise awareness of the significance of these nationally important battlefield sites and to assist in their protection and management for the future. Inventory battlefields are a material consideration in the planning process. The Inventory is also a major resource for enhancing the understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of historic battlefields, for promoting education and stimulating further research, and for developing their potential as attractions for visitors.

Designation Record and Summary Report Contents

Name
Alternative Name(s)
Date of Battle
Local Authority
NGR Centred
Date of Addition to Inventory
Date of Last Update
Overview and Statement of Significance
Inventory Boundary
Historical Background to the Battle
Events and Participants
Battlefield Landscape
Archaeological and Physical Remains and Potential
Cultural Association
Select Bibliography

Inventory of Historic Battlefields

SHERIFFMUIR

Alternative Names: None

13 November 1715

Local Authority: Stirling

NGR centred: NN 811 031

Date of Addition to Inventory: 21 March 2011

Date of last update: 14 December 2012

Overview and Statement of Significance

The battle of Sheriffmuir is significant as the only major engagement in Scotland during the 1715 Jacobite Rising. The battle was a chaotic affair, with the outcome very much debatable, but it was sufficient to bring an end to the rising. It is also involves one of largest Jacobite armies ever fielded in Scotland, with only Falkirk in 1746 exceeding it.

After the death of James's eldest surviving daughter, Queen Anne, in 1714, the throne was taken by George of Hanover, leaving the House of Stuart with a weakened claim to the throne. The Earl of Mar began a renewed uprising with the raising of the Scottish standard in September 1715. After gathering their forces in Perth the Jacobites advanced southward, sending a separate force into England via Edinburgh. Mar's army met the Government's smaller force on the high ground to the east of Dunblane. The outcome of the battle was to be inconclusive, with both sides claiming victory. However, Mar's failure to secure a decisive victory and take control of central Scotland meant defeat for the uprising. This was further secured the following day by the surrender of the Jacobite forces in England. The arrival in Scotland of the deposed James Stuart in December could not turn the tide and the 1715 Rising ended with the exile of Mar and the execution of a number of key English Jacobites. Although the Jacobites were beaten, they were unbowed and the next rising happened just four years later.

Inventory Boundary

The Inventory boundary defines the area in which the main events of the battle are considered to have taken place (landscape context) and where associated physical remains and archaeological evidence occur or may be expected (specific qualities). The landscape context is described under *battlefield landscape*: it encompasses areas of fighting, key movements of troops across the landscape and other important locations, such as the positions of camps or vantage points. Although the landscape has changed since the time of the battle, key characteristics of the terrain at the time of the battle can normally still be identified, enabling events to be more fully understood and interpreted in their landscape context. Specific qualities are described under *physical remains and potential*: these include landscape features that played a significant role in the battle, other physical remains,

such as enclosures or built structures, and areas of known or potential archaeological evidence.

The Inventory boundary for the Battle of Sheriffmuir is defined on the accompanying map and includes the following areas:

- Land to the east and south-east of Kinbuck village and the south bank of the Allan Water. The probable location of the Jacobite camp and the direction of their advance.
- Land to the north of Sheriffmuir Big Wood. The approach route of the Jacobite army.
- Lands to the east and north-east of Dunblane. The direction of the approach of the Government troops. The main route was probably along the old west/east road running from Dykedale and Kippendavie which survives as a path.
- Sheriffmuir Big Wood and lands to the south and east including The Linns and lands surrounding Sheriffmuir Inn. The area of the initial fighting.
- Lands to the south and west of The Linns including Waltersmuir Wood and the Wharry Burn. The direction of the rout of the Government left and the Jacobite's pursuit as determined through archaeological fieldwork. This includes the south bank of the Wharry Burn which has high potential to contain graves associated with the battle.
- Lands to the north and north-west of Sheriffmuir Inn. The direction of the rout of the Jacobite left and the pursuit by the Government troops.

Historical Background to the Battle

The Jacobite army, which numbered some 7,000 men, was led by the Earl of Mar, while the Government army, numbering around 3,000 men was led by the Duke of Argyll.

The battle was essentially an encounter action, where the two sides meet on ground of which neither was fully certain. However, both sides had been in readiness for battle since the previous evening, when the Jacobites camped to the east of the Allan Water and the Government army slept in battle formation to the north of Dunblane, expecting the Jacobites to attack from the north.

On the morning of 13 November, a reconnaissance party, including Argyll, climbed up on to the moor to view the Jacobite army below and to the north. This move precipitated the advance of a strong party of Jacobites, under George Keith, up the slope which led onto the moor from the north. In the mistaken belief that the Government reconnaissance marked a wholesale shift of the army onto the moor, word was sent back to the main Jacobite host, which promptly shifted from line into four columns and began a rapid advance up the slope. This march appears to have been somewhat disordered and when the columns attempted to change back into line, upon reaching the top of the hill, the cavalry which should have been deployed on the left ended up

in the Jacobite centre, where it was to play no significant role in the ensuing battle. One reason for this failure to deploy on the left may have been the presence of an extensive morass or marsh which is mentioned in both Jacobite and Government accounts. Although it had frozen over night the wet ground still provided an impediment to movement. The Jacobite left appears to have become compressed against this feature, to the extent that the men here were deployed 15 deep.

In the meantime the Government army marched across the Jacobite front without noticing the true location of the Jacobite right, as it was concealed in a hollow way. When it came to a halt, the Government line was seriously outflanked on its left by the Jacobite right. The Government right may have overlapped the Jacobite left but this is less certain. Before the Government line was put in order, having turned to the left to face the Jacobites, who were oriented east to west, the Jacobite right attacked the Government left. After discharging volleys of musketry the Jacobites charged and put the Government left to flight. The Jacobites, including Mar among their number, set off in pursuit and a running fight ensued in the direction of Dunblane to the west and Stirling to the south. There is a colourful eyewitness account of red coated soldiers fighting back to back on the midden mound at The Linns, a farmstead over half a mile to the south-west of their original position. All of these men were killed. With the Jacobite right and centre departed from the field, the left, which lacked cavalry protection, was put to flight by dragoons on the Government right. The pursuit was joined by several regiments of Government infantry, which included Argyll and Wightman. The Jacobites made a fighting retreat, with a number of skirmishes interrupting their progress down the hill, back in the direction of their initial advance.

The pursuit of the Jacobite left was only broken off when the Allan Water was reached, with some Jacobites drowning as they tried to cross. As the day drew to a close the victorious Jacobite right, which had no idea of the fate of the left, returned to moor, where the only troops remaining on the field were the cavalry. In the meantime the Government right returned from the Allan Water and took up position in enclosures below the moor. With evening drawing on, neither side wished to re-engage, and the Government force was allowed to march back to Stirling unmolested, while the Jacobites returned to Perth. Casualty rates are uncertain but the Jacobites may have lost around 400 men, killed, wounded or captured, and the Government army somewhere in the region of 500.

Although neither side could claim victory, the Battle of Sheriffmuir was effectively a Jacobite defeat on strategic grounds. They had engaged a much smaller Government force and yet failed to cross the Firth and take control of the central belt, which included the towns of Stirling and Edinburgh. It is possible that had Mar chosen to press home an attack late in the day he may have been able to break what was left of the Government force, but he was not a decisive leader, with one Jacobite going as far as wishing ‘for one hour of Dundee’ a reference to the Viscount Dundee, John Graham of Claverhouse, the leader of the first Jacobite uprising killed at the battle of Killiecrankie in 1689.

Events & Participants

Following the death of William III, who reigned with Mary, the eldest daughter of James VII & II, in 1702 the crown went to Anne, James's eldest surviving daughter and the last of the Stuarts to reign. Her death without issue in 1714 caused a constitutional crisis which was only settled with the coronation of George of Hanover as King George I.

With the last chance of a peaceful Stuart restoration gone, the Jacobite cause was taken up by the Earl of Mar, a Tory favourite of the late Queen Anne who found no favour with George. He raised the Jacobite standard at Braemar on 6 September and an army was quickly mustered from Highland clans staunchly loyal to the Stuart cause. After further recruitment in Perth the Jacobite army marched south, whilst the Government army moved north from Stirling to Dunblane.

Mar's subsequent failure to cross the Forth and take control of central Scotland, coupled with Jacobite defeat in the north of England, marked the end of the fighting. Things had gone so badly for the Jacobites that even the arrival of the exiled James (the son of James VII & II) from France could not turn the tide and with his return to France in January 1716 the Rising came to an end.

The Duke of Argyll was a staunch supporter of the Government and fought for the British army in the War of Spanish Succession under the Duke of Marlborough. He was commander-in-chief of British forces in Spain in 1711 and Governor of Minorca from 1712. He supported the Hanoverian succession in 1714, and was rewarded after Sheriffmuir and the collapse of the Jacobite rising by being made Duke of Greenwich. In 1742, shortly before his death, he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the British Army.

Figures of national importance who fought in the battle include Mar and Argyll, but also a number of prominent personalities who were to go on to be involved in later Risings. On the Jacobite side there was James Keith, who was also to fight at Glenshiel in 1719, was a teenager at the time of Sheriffmuir but would go on to the position of field-marshal in the Prussian army and become a close friend of Frederick the Great, while Alexander Gordon of Auchintoul was a General in the Russian Army. James elder brother George Keith, tenth and final Earl Marischal would also go on to serve in the Prussian forces in the years after Sheriffmuir. Another Jacobite supporter was Alexander Forbes, 4th Lord Forbes of Pitsligo, a noted writer who would also take part in the 1745 rising at the age of 67. Rob Roy MacGregor and his men had accompanied the Jacobite army, but they did not take part in the battle, at the time being in the vicinity of Cromlix. Several notable individuals on the Jacobite side were killed in the battle, including MacDonald of Clanranald and John Lyon, the Earl of Strathmore and Kinghorne.

Major General Wightman was also present on the Government side, who was to go on to command the victorious Government army at Glenshiel. The most notable person to die on the Government side was Lord Forfar.

Battlefield Landscape

The exact location of the initial encounter of the two armies on the moor has been a long standing debate. Recent archaeological investigation in 2006 has given a more accurate impression of the location of the battle. Key here has been the identification of the morass or marsh which is mentioned in a number of eyewitness accounts as marking the location of the Jacobite left. Following the recent archaeological survey, which combined historical accounts, map research and metal detecting; there is little doubt that this wet ground was the area of three interlinked marshes located to the north-west of where the Sheriffmuir Inn now stands. The information gathered from the survey suggests that the battle unfolded across the landscape as follows:

The Jacobite army marched from Perth via Ardoch and camped on the east side of the Allan Water on the night before the battle, somewhere to the north-east of Kinbuck. The Government army marched from Stirling and spent the night camped on ground just outside the town of Dunblane, with their line oriented east to west, anticipating an attack along the floor of the glen to the north.

On the morning of the battle, Argyll and some of his officers rode onto Sheriffmuir, the high ground to the east, from where they reconnoitred the Jacobite army below. By this time, the Jacobites were manoeuvring into battle formation, with the lines facing those of the main Government army several miles to the south. However, the Jacobites saw the Government party on the high ground and in reaction sent up a force to take a closer look. Before reaching the summit of the moor, this group reported back that the entire Government army was moving to a position of strength on Sheriffmuir, from where they could outflank the Jacobite right. The Jacobites therefore made a rapid march up the gentle slope onto the moor, shifting from line to column in order to do so. Accordingly, the Government army, which had not been shifting wholesale onto the moor, now did so as it was clear that the Jacobites were on the move and would soon be threatening their right from the high ground. The Jacobites fell into some disorder in their advance and ended up with the left flank bereft of cavalry support and trapped up against a morass on the moor. This morass is marked on several 18th century maps and was located to the north-west of the 19th century Sheriffmuir Inn, and where the ground is still very wet today. The cavalry which should have been protecting the left ended up in the centre of the line, while the right did have cavalry support. The Jacobite army at this point was oriented roughly east to west across the wide terrace onto which they had climbed.

In the meantime, the Government army marched up onto the moor from Dykedale and Kippendavie, probably using an old road running west to east. The Government line simply turned to the right from its position on the low ground and marched up in extended line, with what was to be the right at the head of the column and the left at the rear. The Jacobites achieved the summit first and were trying to shake themselves out into some sort of order, shifting from four columns into a battle line, when the Government army marched across their front. The Jacobite right appears to have gone

unnoticed during this march, as it was concealed in a 'hollow way', possibly an old mill leat (lade) shown on 18th century maps.

The Government march did not halt until the right had outflanked or at least come level with the Jacobite left. The fact that the Government army was considerably smaller than the Jacobite meant that the Government left was dramatically outflanked by the Jacobite right, which appears to have been concealed. The Government line then turned to the left to face the Jacobites but before they were entirely in position the Jacobite right launched its attack. The Government left was quickly turned and pursued to the south and west by the Jacobite right.

The archaeological survey identified battle related artefacts, in the form of musket balls, horseshoes and other objects, in the open fields which fringe the forestry, both to the west and south-west of the initial encounter site, including the fields where the farmstead of The Linns was located (where a private house now stands). These finds relate to the flight of the Government left and the pursuit by the Jacobite right.

The Jacobite left, however, had also been chased off the field by the Government right. Although the morass on the Jacobite left provided some protection from a flanking attack, the Jacobite troops on this part of the field were pressed up against the morass, which was in any case partially frozen and so not entirely impassable for dragoons on the Government right. Other Government troops may have moved around the morass to the east in order to enter into the pursuit of the Jacobite left off the hill to the north and west. Finds made in the paddock to the west of the Sheriffmuir Inn appear to relate to the Government attack on the Jacobite left.

The battle was fought on the high undulating moorland of Sheriffmuir. Sheriffmuir is located on a high plateau at the western end of the Ochil Hills. The gently sloping land drops down to the banks of the Allan Water to the north and west. Although the landscape of the moor has been altered through the planting of areas of commercial woodland, enclosure and drainage of marshland, key landscape features and views are largely intact and it appears that the overall character of the battlefield survives. The topography of the moorland, which played a key role in the battle, is well preserved in places as open farmland and moor and the approach of the Jacobites up the slopes from the north to the higher ground is clear.

The greater part of the location at which both armies faced one another prior to launching their flank attacks is currently covered by coniferous forestry plantations, some of which date back to the 19th century. This forestry masks the topography of the core of the battlefield and prevents key views out across the moorland to be gained. The remainder of the land within the Inventory boundary is generally free from development and the potential for surviving archaeological evidence is high.

Archaeological and Physical Remains and Potential

19th century accounts mention a variety of finds from the moor, including pistols and swords but no artefacts are extant and their provenance is unproven. Local traditions say that bodies were encountered by soldiers digging latrine pits during World War II on the banks of the Wharry Burn to the south of the farm at The Linns. This location would not be at odds with reports of Government troops being killed around The Linns, nor with finds of battle debris from its environs (Pollard 2006).

Sheriffmuir is one of relatively few Scottish battle sites to have benefited from archaeological survey. Metal detector survey in 2006 guided by information gleaned from the contemporary accounts and maps revealed a pattern of battle debris, including musket balls, buttons, horseshoes and other material, relating to the retreat from the moor of the left wings of both armies. Unfortunately, however, it seems likely on the basis of this work, that the position of both armies as they faced one another prior to the attacks was planted with conifer trees in the 19th and 20th centuries. Where the tree plantations give way to open fields, archaeological survival is relatively good with scatterings of battle debris located to the east of the Sheriffmuir Inn and to the south and east of the Macrae monument in the vicinity of Linns.

The 'Gathering Stone' is a prehistoric standing stone located within Sheriffmuir Big Wood. It is said to have marked the spot where the Jacobite army raised its standard prior to commencement of the battle. Following the recent archaeological survey the stone's location may indeed coincide with the approximate position of the Jacobite right. According to local tradition the stone was broken by navvies working on the railway in the mid 19th century after falling out with locals. The stone is marked on the 1766 Commons map but is labelled on that as the 'Karling Stone'. Crossed swords marking the supposed site of the battle are also shown on the map, not far to the south-east of the stone.

Surrounding the stone are linear trenches and circular depressions which are likely to relate to the military training exercises which took place on Sheriffmuir during WWI and WWII. The linear features have been visually identified from their typical characteristics by archaeologists as practice trenches with possible collapsed dugouts attached and the deep, circular depressions as probable shell holes.

The location of the initial encounter is largely obscured by coniferous tree plantations, which in some cases date back to the 19th century. It is uncertain what impact this forestry will have had on buried archaeological remains; other battlefields in Scotland similarly covered with forestry have yielded very few artefacts from modern archaeological survey.

A feature probably relating to the Government advance is the road which appears to have carried the bulk of Argyll's army up onto the moor from its initial positions at Dykedale and Kippendavie near Dunblane. This road has been preserved as a footpath which climbs up the hill from the town and terminates at the Macrae monument, beyond which point its route would appear to roughly correspond with the modern road, which travels on toward the Sheriffmuir Inn.

Cultural Association

The battle has strong cultural associations and appears in a number of poems and ballads and an early 18th century painting. Robert Burns penned the poem *The Battle of Sherramuir* in 1787. The song *Will Ye Go To Sheriffmuir* appears to be later than the Burns poem and has been associated with James Hogg. A common theme is the uncertain outcome of the battle, perhaps best summed up by the ballad *Sheriffmuir*, which includes the lines:

> 'There's some say that we wan and some say that they wan. And some say that nane wan at a' man.'

There are two purpose-built monuments to the battle on the moor. The largest of these is a cairn-style obelisk dedicated to the dead of the MacRae clan built in 1915. Not far from the MacRae monument is a much smaller cairn monument erected by the 1745 Association in 2002.

The Gathering Stone was broken into pieces by labourers in the 19th century, following which it was encased within an iron cage. It is still a focus for wreath laying on the anniversary of the battle.

Select Bibliography

Mackay, E. 1898 *The Battle of Sheriffmuir: related from original sources.* Stirling.

Baynes J. 1970 *The Jacobite Rising of 1715*.

Brander, M & Macgregor. J. 1975 *Scottish and Border Battles and Ballads*. Seeley, London.

Getmapping. 2002 *British Battles: Amazing Views.* : HarperCollins, London.

Inglis, B. 2005 *The Battle of Sheriffmuir*. Stirling Council Libraries Community Services.

Pollard, T. 2006 *Sheriffmuir Battlefield: Data Structure Report*. GUARD 2214, University of Glasgow.

Rae, P. 1717 *The History of the Rebellion.* John Martin, Edinburgh.

Reid, S. 2005 *Battles of the Scottish Lowlands, Battlefield Britain*. Pen & Sword, Barnsley.

Seymour W. 1979 *Battles in Britain and their Political Background, 1066-1746*. Book Club Associates, London.

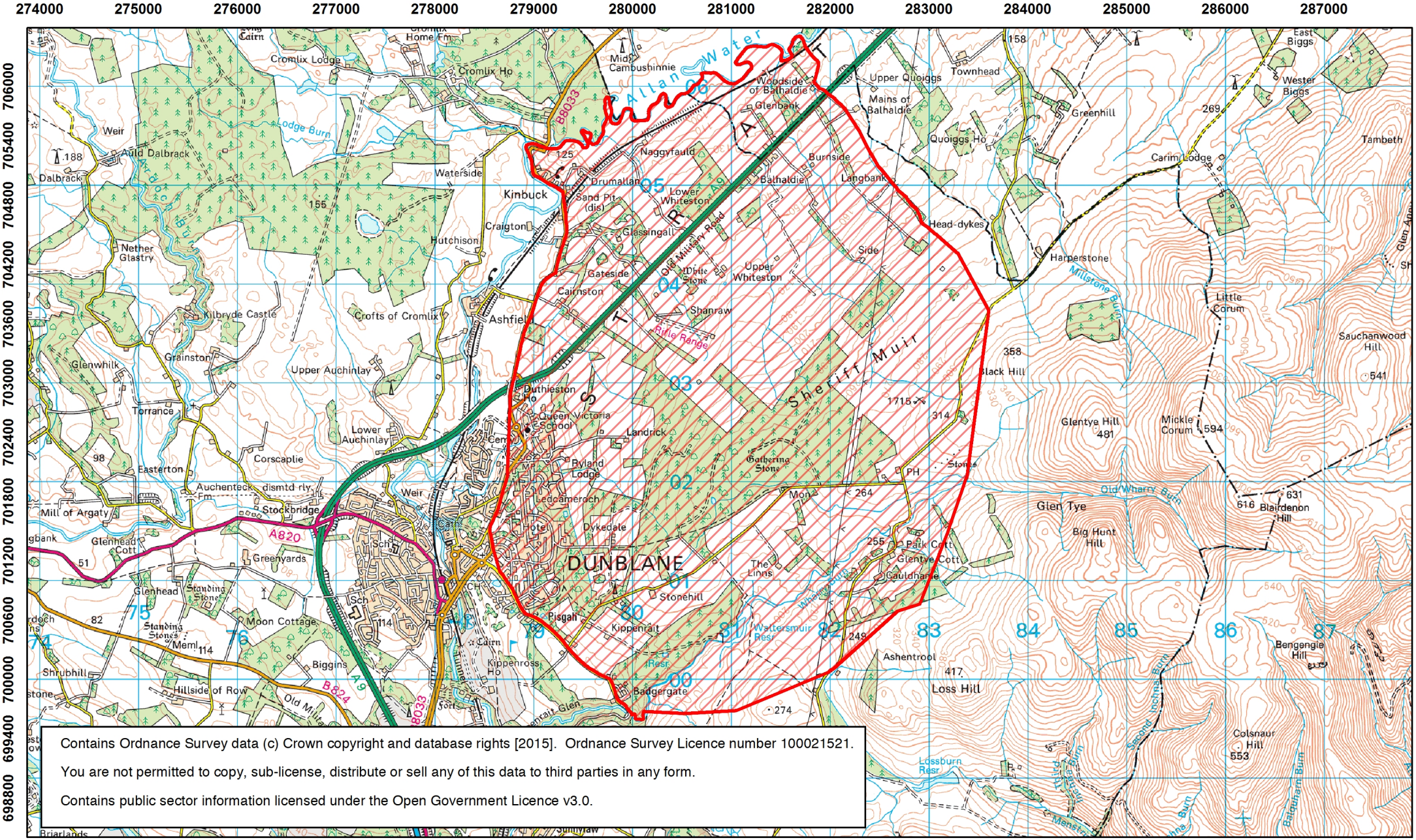
Smurthwaite, D. 1993 *The Complete Guide to the Battlefields of Britain*. Michael Joseph, London.

Tayler, A. & Tayler, H. 1936 *1715 : the story of the rising*. Nelson, SI

Tomasson, K. & Buist, F. 1967 *Battles of the '45*. Pan, London.

The Inventory of Historic Battlefields - Boundary

Sheriffmuir 13 November 1715 Local Authority: Stirling



Inventory of Historic Battlefields boundary

0 500 1,000
Meters