

# The Inventory of Historic Battlefields

## The Battle of Loudoun Hill

### 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.

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# Inventory of Historic Battlefields

## LOUDOUN HILL

Alternative Names: None

10 May 1307

Local Authority: East Ayrshire

NGR centred: NS 608 373

Date of Addition to Inventory: 14 December 2012

Date of last update: N/A

### Overview and Statement of Significance

The Battle of Loudoun Hill is significant as one of the first victories of King Robert I (the Bruce) against the English forces, then under Aymer de Valence, following his inauguration as King. As a result of the defeat, Edward I resolves to deal with Bruce personally, but his failing health leads to his death before he even reaches Scotland. Meanwhile, having been victorious in battle, Bruce's cause is boosted and he begins to strengthen his position in Scotland afterwards.

Following on from the skirmish at Glen Trool, where Bruce had caused de Valence's army to flee when they attempted to attack his camp, Bruce and de Valence met again at Loudoun Hill. As the battle was arranged following a challenge by the English commander, Bruce was able to arrive first and prepare the ground before his enemy reached the area. With ditches restricting the ground available for manoeuvre, Bruce was able to overcome the much larger English army and inflict heavy casualties on them.

### 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 Loudoun Hill is defined on the accompanying map and includes the following areas:

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- The plain below Loudoun Hill where the fighting may well have taken place and where there is a reasonable potential for the survival of the ditches dug by the Scots.
- The A71, following the line of a Roman Road, which probably remained in use in the medieval period and which is likely to have been used by both armies to reach the battlefield.
- Loudoun Hill which provides a focal point for the location.

## **Historical Background to the Battle**

Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, challenged Bruce to fight after the Scots success at Glen Trol in March 1307. As de Valence had almost captured Bruce at Methven in June 1306 following a similar challenge, this approach is unsurprising. Bruce accepted the challenge and the battle was fought on the plains at Loudoun Hill on 10 May 1307. Bruce took the opportunity of the challenge to prepare his ground. He cut three ditches inward from the edge of the mosses, leaving 90m gaps in the centre which were guarded by dismounted pikemen, while soil embankments with ditches protected the flanks. Bruce then gathered his small force and awaited the approach of the English army. De Valence advanced with around 3,000 men. The English force was split into two squadrons as they advanced on Bruce's army. The Scots used their spears to great effect against both men and horses, leaving many wounded, and then charged them as the English assault began to collapse, at which they broke and fled. There was probably no pursuit as the Scots were on foot and thus were unable to chase down the mounted English forces.

## **Events & Participants**

Only two of the participants are named in the sources. The English army was commanded by Sir Aymer de Valence, the Earl of Pembroke. Barbour mentions no other names within the English force. De Valence was a Frenchman by birth but owed his allegiance to the Kings of England for the Earldom of Pembroke. He was a loyal supporter of Edward I and of his son Edward II, fighting for both kings. He was present at Bannockburn in 1314 and helped Edward II escape the field. He was also involved in the arrest of Edward's favourite, Gaveston; the seizure of Gaveston from his custody by the Earl of Lancaster and his subsequent murder in 1312 had the effect of confirming de Valence as a Edward loyalist. His attitude towards Bruce may also be explained by the fact that as well as a loyal servant of the English King, he was also the brother-in-law of John Comyn, murdered by Bruce in 1306.

Robert the Bruce is one of Scotland's most famous historical figures. His grandfather was one of the claimants to the Scottish throne in the dispute following the death of Alexander III. Bruce was crowned King of Scots on 25 March 1306 at Perth, after murdering his rival John Comyn, Lord of Badenoch, also known as the Red Comyn, at Greyfriars Kirk in Dumfries. Although Bruce had authored his own coronation, he would become the focus

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of Scottish resistance to the English occupation. However, his initial efforts were less impressive than his later accomplishments. He suffered defeat to an English army under Aymer de Valence at Methven in June 1306 and again by the forces of John of Lorn, a relative of John Comyn, at Dail Righ in August, and Bruce was forced to flee mainland Scotland, while many of his family were killed or imprisoned. While in hiding that winter, the legend of the spider spinning a web is said to have inspired him to return in 1307, where he met with more success. He won an important victory against de Valence at Loudoun Hill in May, and gained further advantage when Edward I died at Burgh-by-Sands, near the Scottish border, in July 1307. With the English threat now drastically reduced, Bruce turned to deal with his internal enemies. All of Comyn's supporters opposed Bruce, at least initially, and he faced a long struggle against them in the south-west and in the north-east. The Battle of Barra two years after his coronation was the critical victory of this campaign, leaving him a relatively free hand to deal with his last few Scottish enemies and then to pick off English garrisons one by one, destroying the captured castles in his wake to prevent the English returning to them. After his overwhelming victory in 1314 at Bannockburn, Bruce was able to turn onto the offensive, raiding into England until a settlement was finally signed in 1328 under the Treaty of Edinburgh-Northampton.

### **Battlefield Landscape**

The originally recorded site of the Battle of Loudoun Hill was at NS 609 378, although this locates the battlefield on the southern precipitous face of Loudoun Hill. McLeod (1960) suggested a more feasible location would be to the south of the River Irvine and north of Wallace's cairn. Topographically, this location does appear to fit more appropriately into the detailed description provided by Barbour (1395).

### **Archaeological and Physical Remains and Potential**

Surviving archaeological evidence from the battlefield is possible because of the scale of this fighting, the recorded use of ditches by Bruce and the relatively low level of development in the vicinity of the battlefield, although some areas of the battlefield have been extensively quarried. The potential remains include personal accoutrements like buckles and buttons, as well as pieces of horses' tack and horseshoes since the English were a cavalry force. Barbour states that there was a great breaking of spears as the two forces, which may mean that lanceheads and spearheads may survive on site if the soil conditions allow. The ditches are likely to have filled up through erosion over time or have been deliberately backfilled after the battle, however there is a strong possibility they will have survived as archaeological features in the landscape and could be located through geophysical survey or excavation. They also hold the exciting prospect that any clean up of the battlefield after the fighting may have used the ditches as convenient places to dispose of the detritus of battle or even to bury the fallen.

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### Cultural Association

There is little commemoration of Bruce's victory at Loudoun Hill, despite the fact that it marked a turning point in his fortunes. Three battles were allegedly fought in the general area: one by Wallace in 1296 (though this is of extremely doubtful historicity, it may be Blind Harry ascribing Bruce's victory to Wallace in his writings); Bruce's battle in 1307; and a battle between Covenanters and Claverhouse in 1679 at nearby Drumclog. The only commemoration of the 1307 battle is an engraved stone near the summit of Loudoun Hill. There is a steel monument dedicated to Wallace and the 1296 battle, which has more prominence because of its position within the legend of Wallace; he is said to have gained revenge for the death of his father by killing the English knight Fenwick, who had killed Wallace's father in 1291. There is a ballad called *The Battle of Loudoun Hill*, but this actually refers to the Battle of Drumclog, which was fought a few miles eastwards in 1679.

### Select Bibliography

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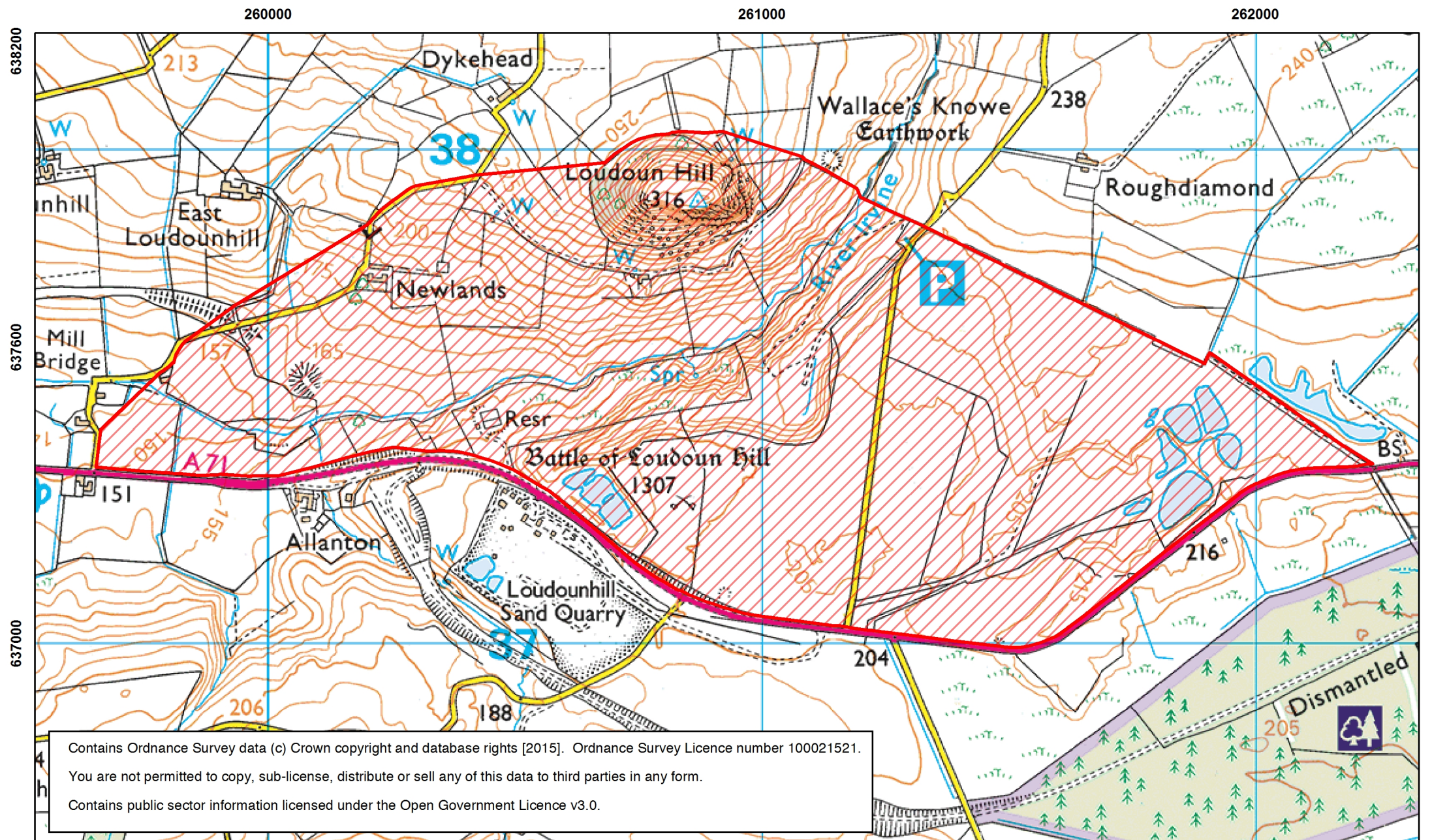
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# The Inventory of Historic Battlefields - Boundary

Loudoun Hill

10 May 1307

Local Authority: East Ayrshire



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