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# Bitesize History- Hill Fort

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## *Knockmade Hill Fort*



**T**he ancient Britons had forts on the flat tops of hills. The hill usually was difficult to ascend, and very “steep” all round, except perhaps at one point, where there might be a narrow ridge to pass by. The ramparts were composed of dry stones, without mortar or cement. Usually they exhibit a face towards the assailants, of regular but rude masonry. The Celts defended themselves on these hill-forts, and threw volleys of stones down on their besiegers.

On the top of Knockmade hill at the Kaim in the parish of Lochwinnoch, are the remains of a Hill-fort. The round dyke formed an enclosure occupying the south end of the hill. On the other part, or north of the

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same hill, without the area, there is huge flat stone leaning against another. Probably was an altar on which the Druids made their fires dedicated to the sun.

*[The same priests called the sun Bel or “Beal” and “tein” signifies fire in the Gaelic, and the Irish languages. Hence, “Beltane” is used to denote the term Whitsunday generally in the whole of Scotland. I may observe here says the writer of the “Paisley Magazine”) we have our provincial word “tounil” from the Welsh, one of the kindred dialects, as well as the Gaelic and Irish of the Celtic language. This word bequeathed from our ancestors the people of the kingdom of Strathclyde; and not used in any other part Scotland, I have reason believe, except in the west. This word signifies a large bonfire set up on the top of a hill at night, especially about the time of Beltane. The Welsh have a word “taulhuylth” of similar import, from the verb “taunil” to set fire. Hence the same or similar derivation these two worus “Taunil” and “Beltaime” is from the practices of the Druids.]*

The Knockmade Hill fort was discovered about 1817, by an intelligent gentleman in the immediate neighbourhood of it. He says this fort is in view of the “Gowk’s stane,” so called, or Beligeith, on the farm Greenside, in Kilbarchan parish, which stone may have been one of Bel’s altars, or a rocking stone, though now immoveable; and also in sight of the rocking stone, at the the parish of Beith. These fires are always within view, of each other.

