





ROMANNO

RÀTH MANACH?

# Romanno – where it is



Holyrood Abbey Charters:

*De terra de rumenac*

*in feudo de Rothmaneic* (no. 22, 1165)

This grant referred to as *rumanach* in no. 24)

*RRS, iii, no. 92:*

*Terram de Rumanoch* (1179 x 1196)

Newbattle Abbey charters :

Consistently *Rumanoch / Romanoch* from late  
12<sup>th</sup> century

Generally taken (at least since Watson 1926) to be *ràth manach* ‘monks’ *ràth* – < OIr *ráith* ‘ring-fort earthwork, high-status dwelling defended by earthwork, etc.’

This is the most impressive ‘ring’ feature in the locality, though there are many more modest ‘forts’ and ‘settlements’ on the map.

It is thought to be pre-Roman Iron Age with post-Roman re-occupation.

Recent work (e.g. for Place-Names of Fife) suggests use of *ràth* extending to lands controlled from such a centre – as for *toun* and *baile*.

Very rare in Gaelic names of west Scotland; sparse in Ulster compared to most of Ireland; more than ten in Fife, sporadic north of Tay in former Pictland.

Not all Scottish candidates for *ràth* are a good fit for purely Gaelic formation.

***Ratho*** (near Edinburgh airport), *Ratheu* c. 1258, has appearance of a Cumbric plural (and had two prominent hill forts in vicinity).

North of Tay predominance of forms in *Roth-* / *Rot-* and occurrence with *-ket* and *-maise* suggest a close cognate of the Cumbric had been current in Pictish.

Forms in *Rod-* suggest a non-Gaelicised lenition as in MW *rawd*, MnW *rhawd*, BLITON's **rōd**.

*Ràth* names can be well disguised, e.g. Rummond, Fife, *Rodmanand* 1140. Conversely, they can be difficult to distinguish from names with *rann* ‘portion’ or OIr *raith* ‘fern’ (cf *raithnech* ‘ferny place’).

Only one definite *rātis* name from Roman Britain: *Ratae Corieltauvorum*, Leicester. It is secure in some continental place-names e.g. *Argentorate*, Strasbourg, possible in others in France; and apparently behind *-rate* place-names in Gallia Cisalpina, e.g. Gallarate.



Candidate names apart from Romanno and Ratho are very rare south of the Forth:

***Roderbren***# 1161 x 1177, Ayrshire;

perhaps **Rattra**, Borgue, on Solway coast (cf. Rattray, Perthshire, *Rothtref* 1305); doubtfully

**Muckraw**, West Lothian, **Muckra**, Selkirkshire, and ***Carraith***# 1594, Stow, Midlothian;

and with rather less reservation

***Rathquhillintoun***# 1449, somewhere in

Borthwick parish, Midlothian, only about 25 km from Romanno Bridge. + personal name?

The 'obvious' explanation of Romanno / *ràth manach* has problems, among which:

unlikely the name did not exist before the grant to Holyrood Abbey;

but no sign of earlier monastic presence;

the abbey's and grantors' francophone milieu highly unfavourable to Gaelic naming of a new acquisition in late 12<sup>th</sup> century (even if *ràth* still viable for creation of new place-names);

the irrelevance by the mid 12<sup>th</sup> century of already ancient earthworks as motivators for new names for church lands (N.B. the name of the parish containing Romanno, Newlands).

Gaelic is among the languages naming boundary features in Newbattle charter no. 125 – *silvam de Dereleth*# (*doire liath* ‘grey wood’) – and perhaps [*riuulum de*] *Cadcalenoch*#.

Gaelic names are still fairly numerous in the wider locality.

Ratho had an Abthane (*abdaine* ‘abbacy’, the ‘Appin’ of place-names) on record in 1547, and may have had a pre-Norman church.

In Ireland *ráith* developed specialised meanings of ‘enclosed burial ground’ and for the ‘close’ around the church of Armagh.

Yet these facts alone would be a flimsy argument for a general connection between *ràth* (or close cognate) and early monasticism in Scotland.

The name Romanno has only appeared with *Ru-* or *Ro-* in its first syllable, never as *Rath-* or *Ra-*.

In this it may be unique south of the Forth, apart from the lost *Roderbren*# in Ayrshire;

but share the feature with the group of *Roth-* names from one-time Pictland.

Except perhaps **Rattray** (Perthshire and Aberdeenshire), **Rattra** (Galloway) and ***Mìodhrath*** (Reay Country, Caithness) all of the modern and extinct medieval names show neoCeltic order of elements.

So they were formed, or just conceivably 'modernised', after about the mid first millennium AD.

**Rait** (Errol, Perthshire), **Raith** (Kirkcaldy, Fife) and **Ratho** are simplex forms, as were earlier forms for [Logie]**rait** (Ballinluig, Perthshire), **Rothie**[brisbane] (Aberdeenshire) and **Rothie**[norman] (Aberdeenshire).

At least four North-East names in Rothie- are possibly plural, like Ratho.

**Rameldrie**, **Rumgally** and **Rummond** in Fife have early forms in *Rat / Roth / Rath / Rod*.

In some names the specific is very likely to be a personal name:

**Rameldrie** (Fife) – *Maolrioc?*

**Ramornie** (Fife) – *Morganach*

**Rathelpie** (Fife) - *Ailpín*

**Rathmuryel**# (Aberdeenshire) – *Muirgheal*;

**Rumgally** (Fife) – *MacGallán* (or sons of *Gallán*, or sons of foreigners)



In others an ethnic reference is a significant possibility, though in no case secure:

**Radernie** (Fife) and **Rottearns** (Ardoch, Perthshire) – *Èireannach / Èireann* (if not ‘of sloes’ *àirneach* or ‘of alders’ *fearnach*);

**Rathillet** (Fife) – *Ulaid* ‘of Ulsterman’ (the most probable of these);

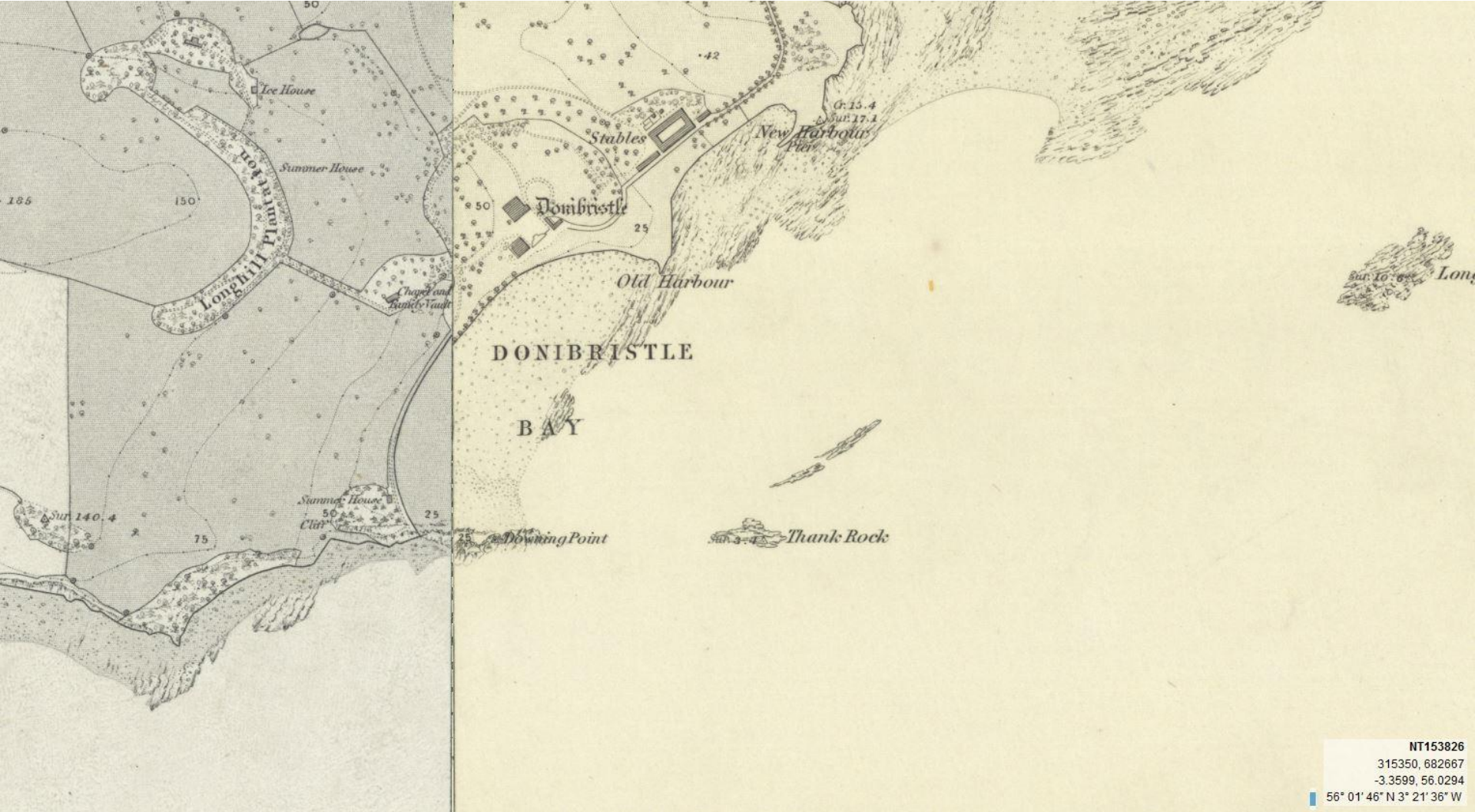
**Rohallion** (Perthshire) – cf. *Sìdh Chailleann / Schiehallion*, holy mountain of Caledonians;

**Rummond** (Fife) – *Manau* (“very tentatively” in *Place-Names of Fife*).

*Place-Names of Fife* points to a likely Irish (Ulster) connection for **Donibristle** (*Donibressil* 1162 x 1169) as *dùnadh + Breasal* or *dùn + Uí Breasal*.

Dalgety parish was dedicated to St Bridget, in genealogy claimed as kin to *Uí Breasal*.

Worth noting that if Rathillet was an estate = Kilmany parish, the patronal dedication to an otherwise unexpected Irish saint *Máine* or *Manna* or less likely *Mannán* supports an Irish connection.



Site of Donibristle Castle beside a sandy bay on north side of Firth of Forth (First OS 6 inch map)

Also to be noted that the hill fort of Dunearn (Burntisland, Fife) has name forms, since 15<sup>th</sup> century, consistent with origin as *Dún Éireann*.

This is in a commanding position close to the sea and overlooking a main east-west route.

As seems to be the case with '*Roth Manach*', it has post-Roman work within an earlier fort.

Enough so far to allow question at least to be raised: could Romanno, though well south of the Forth, have been named by association with an Irish group?

*Manach* (early Irish pl. *manaig*) ‘monk’ was formally identical to the ethnic name in county *Fir Manach* / Fermanagh.

The tradition of origins in Leinster is consistent with Ptolemy’s (writing c 150 AD) location of the *Manapii* tribe.

According to a theory of long standing though maybe too circumstantial to be accepted by all, *Manapii* were an offshoot of *Menapii*, a Belgic tribe living around the Rhine/Schelde delta;

and *Manach* / *Manaig* was the result in early Irish after adaptation into Q-Celtic and influence from the 'monk' word.

*Menapii* were a warlike and maritime tribe who resisted Julius Caesar and still provided manpower for the Roman army 450 years later.

One of the possible etymologies for the headland fort with Roman-era activity at Drumanagh north of Dublin incorporates the tribal name.

This fort seems to figure in ‘Wooing of Emer’, in which *Forgall Monach* (‘wily /skilful / trickster’) disguises himself as a gift-bringing emissary for Gauls, proposes that *Cú Chulainn* make a trip to *Alba*, and possesses but loses a treasure; an interesting conjunction of themes.

For actual Irish activity in or near south-eastern Scotland, there are hints in fantastical stories of *Fiachnae mac Báetáin* and *Mongán mac Fiachnai*, real persons of early 7<sup>th</sup> century.

In one *Fiachnae* wins the kingship of *Alba*; no doubt grossest exaggeration but maybe a hint of a period of significant influence.

Tentatively, could the period fit the formation of the 'Irish' place-names in Fife?



*'Roth manach'* would then have to be a precocious Gaelic naming in Peeblesshire, a later Gaelicisation of a Brittonic name, a c. late 10<sup>th</sup> century Gaelic naming for a feature with a traditional story, or a formation in a dialect of Brittonic where final /-t/ went to /-th/ instead of /-d/. (Not as apparently in *Roderbren*.)

A different scenario from first thought of a name referring to an outlying post of *Manau*, a district straddling the inner Firth of Forth.

With genitive *Manann* of Old Irish *Manu*, this is remembered in Slamannan (*sliabh* ‘moorland’) and Clackmannan, the not very big stone that gave its name to the ‘Wee County’.

This is nearly always *Clac*- rather than *Clach*- in medieval charters, suggesting Brittonic (cf Welsh *clog*) formation with Gaelicised genitive.

There are rogue forms in *–manet* and *–manech* (x 1153), reminiscent of *Rothmanaic*, but outweighed by *–manan*.

Dalmeny (south of Forth Bridges) may have been on the eastern edge of *Manau*; for Watson 13<sup>th</sup> century *Dunmanyn* ruled out *-manann* and suggested *\*din meini* 'stone fort' – there is a good candidate at Craigie Hill. J G Wilkinson prefers *meinín* 'of stone'.

But others including Alan James are more willing to see 'fort [at boundary] of *Manau*' as feasible.

Watson noted that *Manann* appears more than once in the names of places in Ireland.

*Manau* and *Manu–Manann* are identical between Isle of Man and the Scottish district (making for ambiguity in Irish annals).

The island and the mythical *Manannán mac Lir* are very closely associated, and the name, though not much story, must be connected with *Manawydan fab Llŷr*.

Hence there seems to be a nexus involving the two *Manaus*, a supernaturally skilful sailor and trader, and an Irish kindred founded by Belgic merchant adventurers –

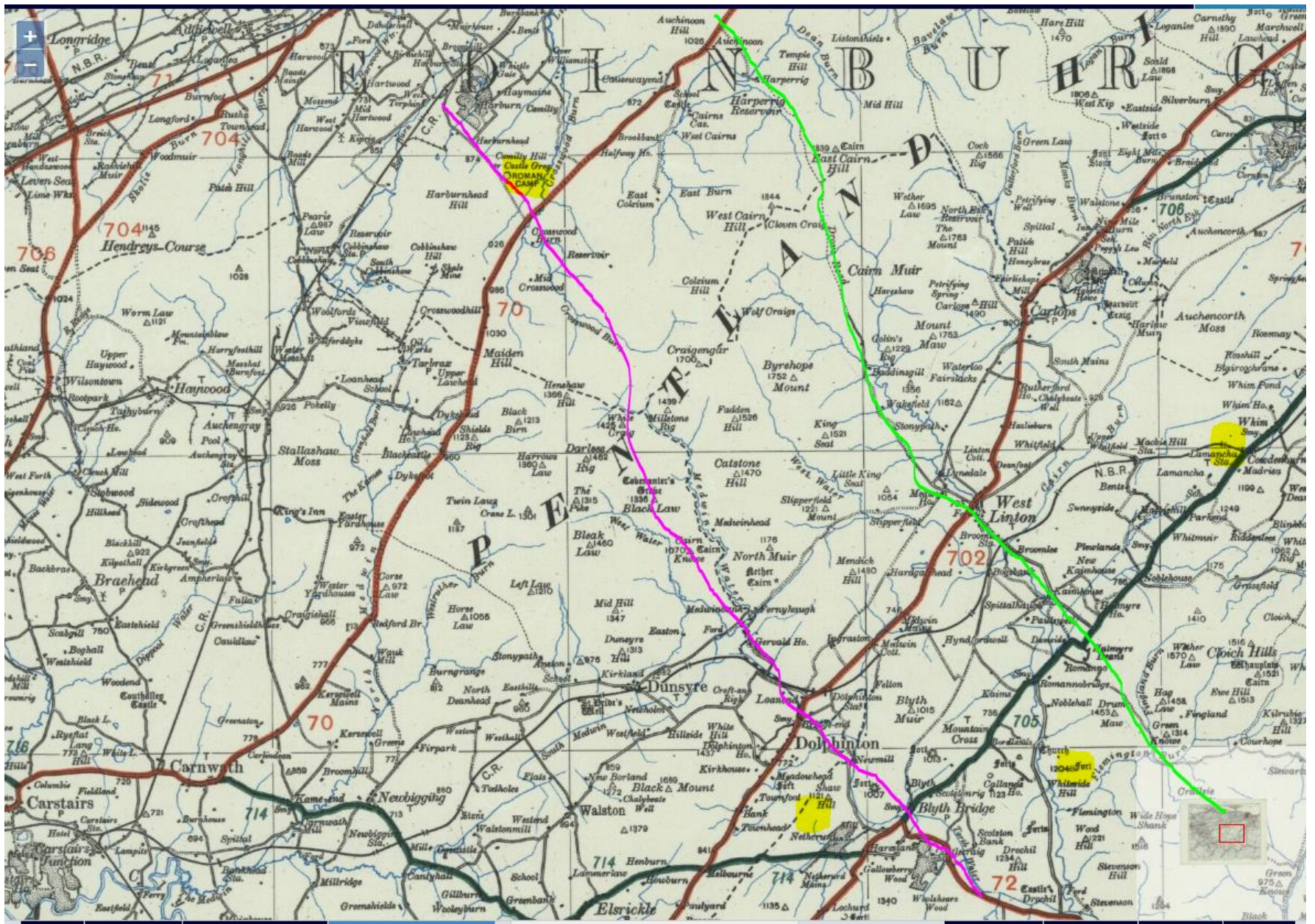
even if not all the similarities of name are due to shared etymology and chronology would be problematic.

Time to consider some geography and some archaeology.

Romanno is at a strategic position close to meetings of NW-SE and NE-SW routes;

the latter represented roughly by A701 and A702 and the former by the drove road and earlier 'high way of the cairns' through the Cauldstane Slap and towards Peebles,

and by a more southerly route that passes a Roman fortlet at Castle Greg by Camilty Hill.



North-west – south-east routes over the Pentland Hills

Two of the most remarkable finds of ancient metalwork in Scotland have been close to Romano.

In 1806 somewhere near the county boundary at Cairnmuir, Netherurd, were found four whole or partial torcs and about 40 'round Gaulish coins'.

CANMORE comments: "... probably hidden in the second half of the 1st century BC by some migrant moving along a natural route".



Nearly all items are lost, but there are 19<sup>th</sup> century descriptions for those.

Fraser Hunter notes Norfolk and probable Irish affinities of the non-Gaulish items. He remarks that the: “composition stresses the wide contacts available to powerful people in Iron Age Scotland, and warns against adopting too insular a view, particularly when the Clonmacnois hoard includes a torc from the Middle Rhine”.

The other local hoard was found somewhere at Lamancha (formerly Romanno Grange).

Much earlier material (Late Bronze Age): three socketed axes of Armorican type; one of Taunton type also found at Lamancha may not have been with those.

An indication that valuable exotic artefacts had been passing this way for a very long time?

On what may have been near the far side of *Manau*, is the recent find of a spectacular hoard at Blair Drummond – the ‘Stirling torcs’.

From 300 to 100 BC: two twisted ribbon torcs of Scottish and Irish style, a broken torc of a style of the Toulouse area, and a hybrid of Iron Age tradition and Mediterranean workmanship.

From Fraser Hunter: “The eclecticism of the styles and origins is comparable to that of the objects in the Broighter Hoard ..., probably of a slightly later period”.

Location of Broighter on side of Lough Foyle, unique golden boat, suspected Rhineland source of some of the gold, and Mediterranean and SE England affinities of items, have suggested an offering to *Manannán* as guardian of traders and seafarers.

Is there any way to make sense of the common features of these Iron Age hoards in terms of routes for travel?

To do so, we need to think of travel by water as often a better option than struggling over bog and mountain and having to cross deep rivers.

A proxy for information relevant to Iron Age sailors on open sea is that for sea kayakers; both very dependant on knowledge of tides, currents and how to read the weather.

For possibilities of inland waters with portages, using small boats or rafts, the proxy is information for inland kayakers.



Between Forth and Romanno only overland travel is possible, but thereafter the Lyne (in high water) and Tweed enable boat travel to the North Sea.

A broad picture of tidal currents along N and E Irish coasts reversing with ebb and flood;

currents generally helpful into rather than out of Firth of Clyde;

in the North Sea a major eddy pushing northward off the SE Scottish coast, general southward drift off eastern England, then an eastward swing towards the Rhine delta.

Not the most obvious thing on the map, but the route between Ireland and the Firth of Forth allowing greatest use of water for travel passes Blair Drummond.

From Clyde to Loch Lomond it can take (a) the River Leven or (b) Loch Long and portage by Tarbet/ *Tairbeart*; thence by portage, lochs and river through the Trossachs, to the River Teith by Callander and down to the Forth.





Blue for saltwater voyage, red for river, loch, portage and innermost Firth of Forth

This idea may seem bizarre, so some comfort to find this route, including the *tairbeart* at Tarbet, in print as semi-official Cross-Scotland Route H for the Scottish Canoe Association. And it has been done.

Downstream of Callander the Teith is a favourite river for novices gaining experience.

It passes close to the find spot of the 'Stirling torcs' or 'Blair Drummond hoard'.

Which prompts the question: could this route be relevant to explaining the river's name?

It is present in early forms for the district of Menteith, probably the 'upland of Teith' (cf. ScG *monadh*, Welsh *mynydd*) such as *Meneted*, *Maneted*, *Meneteth*.

It is a very close match for BLITON's \***tejth** (f), cognate with early Irish *techt* and more distantly Germanic \**stīg-*.

Welsh *taith* and Irish *teacht* have the sense of ‘journey, voyage’. Perhaps the apparent lack of semantic motivation left the name obscure for Watson despite the formally obvious candidate.

That difficulty is solved if the Teith is seen as a ‘river for journeys’, rather than a journeying or moving river. (In Welsh *taith* can refer to the ‘journey’ of a river or to a boat cruise on it or a walk along it.)

Not the first time such an explanation has been offered for a river name.

In Albrecht Greuler's *Deutsches Gewässernamenbuch* (2014) the Main is explained as “Fluss, an dem man entlang gehen kann” (based on IE root *\*mei-*).

Ultimately some more confidence on the uncomplicated Teith than on Romanno with its loose ends and multiple possibilities!

W. Patterson