In the eighteenth century, William Roy documented the Roman road network that provided communication between the Castledykes fort (near Carstairs, Lanarkshire) and the forts at Bothwellhaugh and Loudoun Hill. Recently a possible 13km route has been identified connecting the Loudoun Hill to Castledykes Roman Road with the Castledykes to Bothwellhaugh Road.

South of Stonehouse the long-known Roman road from Loudoun Hill is on a bearing of about 73°. At NS-76688-43941 (positions in this report are taken from a hand-held GPS receiver, with an accuracy of ±5m to ±10m) a separate route seems to depart on a more northerly bearing. The possible link route seems to begin here to avoid the ravine that opens out to the north starting immediately to the west.

Beginning at NS-76851-44405 there is a seemingly unnatural cut in the hill. At NS-76864-44428 a small burn has a kink in its flow direction, which could be the result of a culvert having been constructed beneath an ancient road at right angles to that road. Beyond the burn, probing the soil showed a pattern of apparent bottoming stones 5m wide centred at NS-76870-44442 (the methods used in this study are outlined near the end of this report, particularly the soil probing). These three pieces of evidence are in close proximity along a bearing line of about 18°.

Further along the 18° bearing line, the route seems to shift. The route seems be along the north side of a straight boundary hedge for 1km, down to the Cander Water and then up to the top of the next ridge, a bearing line of about 61°. Near the top of the
constant-slope descent leading down to the Cander Water, soil probing showed apparent bottoming stones centred at NS-77309-45201. Before a GPS receiver was available, a pattern of apparent bottoming stones about 9m wide was detected by probing down closer to the Cander.

On the east side of the Cander, there is an apparent cut that would have allowed a constant-slope ascent. At the top of the ridge, apparent bottoming stones were found to be 4m wide at NS-77965-45554. Probing roughly 3m further east along the 61° bearing line identified apparent bottoming stones about 4m wide. On this ridge top, the route is only 45m south of a mound and ditch rectangular enclosure, only the western edge of which survived the construction of the M74 motorway. Is it possible that this enclosure served as a Roman watchtower? The site has good visibility to the east, south and west.

Continuing along the 61° bearing line, three pieces of evidence were found in close proximity. Probing the soil showed a pattern of apparent bottoming stones centred at NS-79441-46355 with a width of about 7m. At NS-79457-46352 erosion has exposed several large flat stones which could have been bottoming stones. At NS-79470-46363 there is a shift in the flow direction of Dalserf Burn that could possibly be due to a culvert.

Continuing along the 61° bearing line to the hillside above the Clyde Valley, at NS-81634-47552 a hillside cut seems to be substantially more than the nearby furrows within the forestry plantation. The bearing of 61° has now been followed for 5.3km. At NS-81728-47601 the route might have split into two descending slopes to the river.

The first one followed seems to have been a farm access road prior to the construction of the turnpike up the Clyde Valley, but its constant-slope descent and relative straightness suggest that it could have been far older. The track bends somewhat from the 61° bearing line as it goes around Lockhart’s Knowe. It then enters a hillside cut to maintain a constant descending slope. At NS-81931-47736 the route seems to turn about 30° to the right and continues to descend to the Clyde at right angles to the flow of the river. A fence which might mark the line of the route reaches the riverbank at NS-82229-47721.

The first-edition Ordnance Survey map shows that the Clyde was at that time broader in this area. Since the east bank is today a sandy beach, it seems probable that the west bank was also sandy prior to being built up to enlarge the field. The river could have been fordable when the water was not flowing too rapidly.

Back at NS-81728-47601 near Lockhart’s Knowe, there is a second more gently descending route down to the river. Initially it goes sidelong down the hillside on a bearing of roughly 126°. As it gets closer to the river it bends gently eastward. This seems to have been a road prior to the turnpike, and the lower portion was a mine access road after the turnpike. The river is narrower in this area with stone banks, not sandy banks, as it seems to have been about 300m downstream. The hard banks would have been a better site for a bridge.

Since field walking found two plausible routes down the hillside west of the Clyde, one wonders if the ford was used first, since the straight 5.3km route seems to aim for it. Then, to accommodate traffic during wet weather, it seems that a bridge might have been built roughly 300m upriver.
Across the river there is a large flood-plain field. After the above theory of two crossings was postulated, an RCAHMS aerial photo of that field came to light. It shows several interesting things.

There is a crop mark showing two sides of an enclosure which seems to have been a defensive trench. Walking the field confirms that the ground level is lower on the two sides that do not show the crop mark, suggesting that Clyde floods took away the other two sides of the enclosure. That enclosure is situated between the two possible river crossing points, a logical place for a construction camp or fortlet.

The aerial photo also shows a broad swath of seemingly poorer soil with distinctive edges, which passes roughly 50m from the enclosure. That swath of lower quality soil goes away from the riverbank where the suggested upriver crossing may have been at roughly a 45° angle. The soil was probed along that swath of seemingly poor soil. Centred at NS-82386-47564 a solid pattern of apparent bottoming stones was found to be about 8.5m wide.

The RCAHMS aerial photo also shows a less well-defined swath of lower quality soil going away from the river on a line close to that of the postulated downstream crossing. The soil was probed and there was no evidence of bottoming stones. It seems possible that the first crossing at the ford had a gravel surface but was not improved with a solid foundation of bottoming stones, while the second upstream crossing needed an improved road capable of supporting heavier traffic.

It is also interesting that both swaths of apparently lower quality soil lead toward the only exit from the field that doesn’t necessitate a steep climb. Along most of the east side of the field, Poplar Hill rises steeply. Near the northeast corner of the field there is a gently rising line through a field that bends toward the southeast behind Poplar Hill. That plausible route joins the current road for about 150m. Then there could have been a U-turn with a radius of about 25m, so that the route could ascend northward sidelong up the steep hillside along the line of an abandoned farm track to the upper fields.

In the first open field toward the top of the hillside there was soil seemingly undisturbed by modern development. Probing showed a pattern of possible bottoming stones about 14m wide centred at NS-83007-47790.

Probing near Maregill Burn found a pattern of apparent bottoming stones about 6m wide centred at NS-83662-48419. The bearing from the previous probe point is 46°. That line avoids the steep-walled ravine that Maregill Burn falls into just to the west.

The route then seems to ascend a gentle ridge to the left of a field hedge along a bearing line of about 37° to the high point at NS-84298-49292. From here modern Carluke appears ahead. The highest point beyond Carluke is the ridge at Hillhead, 2.5km to the northeast, which the Castledykes to Bothwellhaugh Roman road traversed on a southeast to northwest line. Due to Carluke development and extensive quarrying and mining, probing was not possible, so a plausible route was sought.

The intervening natural obstacle is Jock’s Burn, which flows in a ravine 20m deep. At NS-85024-50202 a change in bearing to about 57° starts a gentle constant-slope sidelong descending hillside cut down to Jock’s Burn. On the north side of the burn, at NS-85214-50391, the route seems to return to a bearing of about 33° to ascend at a constant
slope. This Jock’s Burn crossing is a footbridge today. Eighteenth century maps seem to suggest that it was there before Carluke was a town. As Carluke developed to the northwest, the southwest-to-northeast direction of this crossing was not suitable, so the newer crossings are closer to Carluke.

Continuing toward the northeast at roughly NS-85472-50782 the route up from the Jock’s Burn crossing could have turned more eastward along a track that was once a road from Carluke to Hillhead. At NS-86020-51012 that track turns due east to meet the Castledykes to Bothwellhaugh road.

The high point on the Castledykes to Bothwellhaugh road (just east of where the Hillhead Farm drive meets the road) seems a viable spot for a Roman junction. There is extensive visibility to the south, west and north, a fine location for a camp or fortlet. However, mining and quarrying have probably destroyed any possible evidence.

At the Hillhead high point, the road from the Castledykes Roman Fort has gently turned from a northwest bearing to due west. Possibly it was entering the east gate of a Roman camp, or possibly there was a camp or fortlet immediately north or south of the road. In either case, just west of where a camp or fort might have been, it appears that there could have been three roads splitting off in different directions. The route from the southwest has been explored in this report.

The road that departs Hillhead going northwestward seems to turn more northward beyond Belstane Burn. That route has not been studied for this report but it could have continued onward to the central portion of The Antonine Wall, possibly Castlecary.

A third route could have continued straight west, and then turned northwest following the line of the Old Wishaw Road to cross Garrion Burn, thereafter becoming Main Street, Wishaw, which has long been accepted as the Roman road to Bothwellhaugh. Since Roman road designers tended to avoid soft ground, this route is suggested as an alternate to crossing the Garrion Burn boggy area from Belstane.

This search has included study of old and current maps, plus the published work of past Roman road researchers, observing the terrain while field walking and probing for bottoming stones beneath the surface. A thin 1m stainless steel rod with a t-handle on one end is used when the ground is sodden. The rod can be pushed down into the soil to detect solid stone. The probing has been done across the width of a suspected route at 0.5m intervals in the hope of finding a high density of stones, followed by a much lower stone density on both sides of the postulated road. Probing has been used where there is no documented or visual evidence of use other than agricultural ploughing.

Hugh Davies said in “Roads in Roman Britain” (published in 2002) “if a road has been found at two points, even many miles apart, there is every reason to expect that it continues across the intervening space” (page 32). There are gaps in the route reported here and individual pieces of evidence could be questioned. However, the collective evidence is spread along a reasonably straight 13km route with a plausible goal at each end and evident terrain reasons for each direction shift.

Feedback is sought as to whether additional evidence should be gathered. If so, is there electronic ground scanning equipment which could be made available for use along this route?
Based on the apparent design of the road and the route taken, a theory has evolved on the Roman motive for building the route explored for this report. The use of a solid foundation of bottoming stones, apparently covered by gravel, suggests that there was heavy traffic flow; it wasn’t constructed solely for the movement of soldiers. The width of the pattern of bottoming stones suggests that there was considerable bidirectional traffic and/or a need for faster traffic to overtake slow traffic. The straight constant-slope descents to streams and rivers suggest heavily laden carts or wagons with rudimentary or non-existing brakes. The long-radius turns and a wider bottoming stone pattern at a turn suggest the use of four-wheel wagons with a rigid front axle, unable to turn sharply, particularly when heavily loaded.

The physical evidence suggests haulage of heavy goods, so one can speculate on why the route was selected. Since the road from Loudoun Hill fort was probably built soon after Agricola’s conquest, the soft banks of the previously identified Cander Water crossing had perhaps become unusable when the Roman Army returned to Scotland decades later. So perhaps the Cander crossing described in this report was built about 1.2km downstream because of the firm stream banks at that location. Was there a period when The Antonine Wall was heavily garrisoned, requiring that bulk supplies (grain, iron, etc.) had to be transported from England or Wales? Was there a period when supply ships could not safely approach port at the western end of The Antonine Wall because of hostile ships emerging from sea lochs and from behind isles in the upper Firth of Clyde? If so, landing the supplies on the Ayrshire coast, might have been less vulnerable to pirates. Was the route explored in this report a short cut for supplies being hauled to the central portion of The Antonine Wall?