

Inventory of Historic Battlefields

CROMDALE

1 May 1690

Local Authority: Highland

NGR centred: NJ 091 280

Overview

The Battle of Cromdale was the final battle fought on the British mainland in support of the first Jacobite Rising. It was fought between a small force of Jacobite Highlanders under the command of Major-General Thomas Buchan and a Government army of dragoons and infantry under Sir Thomas Livingstone.

The Government troops inflicted a crushing defeat upon the Jacobite forces, and they would subsequently disperse. Although James' Irish campaign was to continue for another year, the Jacobites in Scotland were unable to mount another major campaign of resistance until 1715.

The Battle

With the usurpation of James VII & II following the arrival of William of Orange during the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688, the exiled King's supporters in Scotland (the Jacobites) rose under John Graham of Claverhouse, otherwise known as Bonnie Dundee by his supporters or as Bloody Clavers, by those with Covenanter sympathies who had suffered at his hands during the 'Killing Times' of the 1670s. The first battle of the rising took place at Killiecrankie in July 1690, and saw the Jacobites inflict a resounding victory against the government army under Major-General Hugh MacKay. Dundee was killed in the battle and with his loss the Jacobite cause began to flounder, with defeat at the Battle of Dunkeld on 21 August revitalising government fortunes.

Over the winter of 1689 and the early months of 1690, the Jacobite army lost many men to desertion as it moved itinerantly throughout northern Scotland, plundering civilian resources. At the beginning of the spring campaign in April, General Thomas Buchan replaced Cannon as commander of what remained of the Jacobite force. The army was largely a Highland one, comprised of soldiers from the clans MacDonland, MacLean, Cameron, MacPherson and the Invermoriston Grants. Buchan led 1500 of these Highlanders into Strathspey, where they encamped at an exposed position on the Haughs of Cromdale. The Laird of Grant, a strong supporter of William and who was displeased that rebel soldiers harassed his lands and were quartered in plain sight of Castle Grant, sent for Sir Thomas Livingstone, the commander of the garrison at Inverness. The government force arrived in the area on 28 April. Under the cover of darkness in the early hours of 1 May, Livingstone's force attacked the Jacobite encampment. The surprised Jacobites were quickly overwhelmed and fled into the mist of the early morning hours, leaving several hundred of their force dead on the field.

The Armies

The Jacobite army at Cromdale was considerably smaller than that which fought at Killiecrankie, a pyrrhic Jacobite victory that had seen the death of John Graham of Claverhouse, known to his supporters as Bonnie Dundee. His replacement as commander of Jacobite forces in Scotland, Colonel Alexander Cannon, did not cover

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himself with glory at the Battle of Dunkeld which followed in August 1689 and was a victory for the government. In April 1690, Cannon was replaced by Major-General Thomas Buchan, who had been serving in Ireland with James. However, through the winter of 1689 and 1690, the Jacobite army which was a predominantly Highland force began to suffer desertions as clansmen not used to long campaigns returned to their homes. Various attempts by Cannon to organise another mustering fell on deaf ears and Buchan himself only managed to raise an army of around 1500 men for the campaign of spring/summer 1690. These men came from the clans of Maclean, MacDonald, Cameron, MacPherson, Macnachtan and Grant of Glenmoriston. The force also included some Irish troops.

Like the Jacobites, the government army found the going hard through the winter of 1689-90 and had largely been reduced to garrisoning houses and fortified sites with small pockets of men, who, like their foes, were finding it hard to supply themselves with the basic requirements of food and drink. Although Major-General MacKay remained in command of the government army in Scotland, the task of defeating what remained of the Jacobite army in the field fell to Sir Thomas Livingstone who was in command of a cavalry unit stationed in Inverness. It was this force that would surprise the Jacobites in camp at Cromdale and bring the Scottish side of the first Jacobite war to a close. The much larger Jacobite army in Ireland, which by 1690 was supported by French troops, was finally defeated at Aughrim on 12 July 1690, following an initial set-back at the Boyne, on 1 July – the more famous of the two battles for having both James and William on the field.

Numbers

Jacobites: The Jacobite army was more than halved from the estimated 4000 men that fought at Killiecrankie, to a scant 1500 by the time of Cromdale (Black 1936, Brander 1993).

Government: For the government force, Livingstone lists 6 companies of Grants, 400 men from Sir James Leslie, Mackay's Highland company, 3 troops of Livingstone's own dragoons, Yester's troops, and 3 troops of dragoons of Elgin's and Burnet's horse that joined them at Brodie (Livingstone 1690). In total, they numbered 17 troops of dragoons and 3 regiments of foot (Brander 1993). In addition to this, they were joined by 800 Grants, who along with Mackays served as guides with valuable knowledge of the local terrain (Livingstone 1690).

Losses

Estimates of Jacobite losses are 300-400 killed (Livingstone 1690; Black 1936; Brander 1993), with an additional 100 made prisoner (Livingstone 1690), though these numbers may be inflated. The government side is thought to have lost only a few of its number.

Action

The government force crossed the Spey at the ford located down stream from Cromdale Kirk (today the site of a bridge) at 3 a.m., their advance shielded by the darkness and tree cover (Livingstone 1690). An attack on the kirk itself may have served as a diversion for the crossing, drawing the Jacobite guards away from the ford to support their comrades at the kirk (Hopkins 1998; 217). The Jacobite army was guarding three fords, one up stream from the kirk, one directly opposite and one down stream. A further garrison, commanded by Buchan's nephew, was placed at Lethendry Castle on the rocky western slope of Lethendry hill, though this may have taken place only once the government attack had commenced (ibid). Though the

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Jacobites at Cromdale Kirk rang out the bells in warning, there was little time for the encampment to prepare.

An attempt was made to rally a defence - most notably by the MacLeans - but ultimately the Jacobites were able to inflict little damage, other than cutting down some of the government horses. Livingstone describes the night attack in a letter to Major General Mackay as follows:

[T]wo Troops of Dragoons, and Captain *Mackay's* Highland Company was already passed before the Enemy perceived us, and then we see them run in Parties up and down, not knowing which way to turn themselves, being surprized, so I commanded all the Horse and Dragoons to joyn, and pursued them, which affrighted them, so that they took themselves to the Hills, and at the foot of *Crombdel* we overtook them, attacked them, killing betwixt three and four hundred upon the place, and took about 100 Prisoners, the greater part of them Officers, the rest got off by a Mist, that came just at that time upon the top of the Hill, so that we could scarcely see one another, otherways the Slaughter would have been greater.... (Livingstone 1690: 1).

Livingstone's men also attacked the outpost at Lethendry Castle, where Captain Buchan and some sixty men had been posted. Following an attack which included the throwing of grenades, the garrison surrendered (Hopkins 1998).

The government troops celebrated their resounding victory with captured claret and wore green branches in their hats to celebrate May Day (Livingstone 1690).

Aftermath and Consequences

Significantly, the Battle of Cromdale destroyed the Scottish Jacobite army, which had already been seriously weakened by the loss of Viscount Dundee. One month later, the Stuart cause was again dealt a heavy blow with the defeat of James VII's forces at the Battle of the Boyne in Ireland, and the last vestiges of Jacobite resistance suffered final defeat in 1691 at Aughrim. The dispersal of the Highland forces at Cromdale effectively ended the campaign of resistance against the new regime of William III on the British mainland and it would be over two decades before Scotland again mounted a major campaign of Jacobite resistance in 1715.

Events & Participants

Cromdale is not noted for the calibre of the participants, coming at a point that the Jacobite cause was faltering after its initial success. The Jacobites were commanded by Major-General Thomas Buchan. He was a professional soldier who had fought in France and Holland for Charles II in Hugh Mackay's regiment, and in 1686 was commissioned as Colonel in the Earl of Mar's Regiment by James VII & II. He remained loyal to James, taking over command of the Jacobite cause in Scotland after the defeat at Dunkeld in August 1689. Surviving the debacle at Cromdale, he tried to re-ignite the rising several times, including attempts to take Inverness, but in 1692 when the Highland chiefs settled with William, he went into exile in France but returned to Scotland at Inverlochry in 1707, plotting a new Jacobite rising (Buchan 1925). He died in 1721, a Jacobite till the end.

The government force was commanded by Sir Thomas Livingstone, Viscount Teviot, who was Lieutenant-General in the Army and General of the Scots Force. He was born in Holland and spent most of his career fighting for William of Orange, coming to Britain with William in 1688. He was later a Privy Counsellor and died in 1710.

The importance of Cromdale as a battle comes from the fact that it was the last engagement of the first Jacobite rising. There were various high ranking Jacobite

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chiefs present, the most notable of whom was probably Coll MacDonald, fifteenth Chief of Keppoch. He was a committed Jacobite, who also commanded the army of highlanders at Mulroy in 1688 and fought with the Jacobites at Killiecrankie the previous year and at Sheriffmuir in 1715. He had been Chief since the death of his father Archibald in 1682 and inherited from him the dispute of land and tenancy which had first caused Lachlan MacKintosh to successfully press the Privy Council for commission of fire and sword in 1681. Coll was studying at the University of St Andrews at the time of his succession, a clear indication that the upper strata of the highland clans were not the uncultivated mountain men which Lowlanders generally regarded them to be. Initially, he sought to resolve the situation through negotiation but when this failed, and indeed led to him spending some time in jail, he was equally capable of demonstrating that there was also warrior's blood flowing through his scholar's veins.

Context

The late seventeenth century was a politically and religiously turbulent time in British history. The unpopular policies and Catholic sympathies of King James VII & II created widespread discontent among his Protestant subjects. In 1688, Parliament and the Whig aristocracy invited the Protestant Dutch rulers William of Orange and his wife, James's daughter Mary Stuart, to claim the British throne. The Glorious Revolution, celebrated in traditional historiography as a non-violent change of power, was in fact a bloody struggle in Ireland and Scotland. Throughout 1688 until final defeat at the battle of Aughrim in Ireland in 1691, James and his supporters mounted armed resistance to the newly formed government of William III. James, backed by French support, led an armed rising in Ireland, while in Scotland Jacobite forces were organised by James Graham of Claverhouse, Viscount Dundee. Scottish Jacobites won a dramatic victory at Killiecrankie in 1689, though the death of Claverhouse in the action threatened to destabilise the force. Leadership of James's army in Scotland was assumed by Colonel Alexander Cannon of Galloway, an unpopular and inexperienced choice. His first engagement following Killiecrankie ended in a disastrous loss to a numerically disadvantaged government force of Cameronians (the extremist inheritors of the Covenanting tradition) at Dunkeld in August 1689.

Physical Remains & Potential

The buildings of Cromdale Kirk and Lethendry Castle are still standing, though the ruined tower at Lethendry is in a state of semi-collapse (which has worsened significantly through the winter of 2010-2011). Action related to the government attack on the Jacobite camp took place at both of these locations. Indeed, at Lethendry Castle, grenades were recorded as having been used against the defenders and evidence may survive of this early use of the weapon.

It is reasonable to expect to find remains from the engagement. The Jacobites were encamped in the area which would allow for the deposition of materials over a period of time. The surprise attack by the government force led to disorganised hand-to-hand fighting between foot soldiers and mounted troops. In the confusion of the surprise attack and retreat into the hills, a variety of physical remains would have been lost, dropped or abandoned, including items of camp equipment as well as spent and dropped ammunition, damaged weapons, personal accoutrements like buckles and buttons, and cavalry items like horseshoes, nails and other hardware. Furthermore, the naturally boggy soil conditions might have allowed for the preservation of organic materials not often found on drier sites.

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Cultural Association

Although there is no formal monument to the battle a large boulder to the east of Glaggersnich Wood (NJ 1026) is known as Clach nam Piobair (the Piper's Stone) and according to local lore is associated with a Jacobite piper called Hugh who played his pipes on the rock despite being wounded.

Another stone, this time possibly a prehistoric standing stone is located close to the confluence of the Gonglass Water and the River Avon, over 5 km to the east of the battlefield. The stone bears the inscription 1690 and is traditionally held to mark the site where a fleeing Jacobite soldier succumbed to his wounds.

The battle is remembered in a ballad popular throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Prints and reprints of *The Haughs of Cromdale* are widely available in numerous archives as well as collected editions of Scottish ballads, such as Hogg's *Jacobite Relics*. The ballad tells the tale of the surprise attack on the Jacobites and their defeat, but curiously conflates the 1690 battle with the earlier 1645 battle of Auldearn, fought between Montrose and a Covenanter army – a battle in which a Highland force was victorious. Brander has suggested that the sudden shift to Auldearn allows the tune to end on a note of celebration, instead of defeat (Brander 1993).

Battlefield Landscape

Following the encounter at Cromdale kirk, which accompanied the fording of the Spey by Livingston's men, the mounted arm of the government force advanced rapidly on the Jacobite camp on the Haughs of Cromdale. The kirk stands on haughland down by the river, lying lower than the modern village of Cromdale. The Jacobite troops were camped on the high ground above the village, in a rural area at the foot of the Hills of Cromdale. Streams run down from the granite and limestone hills and meander across the level, boggy ground. Aside from ruined field boundaries and the foundations of a longhouse, the landscape is still largely uninterrupted and marshy. A track runs through the battlefield area on its eastern side, winding across the nearby hills.

Location

The Highland village of Cromdale is on the southern bank of the River Spey about 5 km east of what is today Grantown-on-Spey. The battlefield lies approximately 3 km east of the village (NGR NJ 103 277) on the Haughs of Cromdale on the western side of the Hills of Cromdale. The eastern side of the battlefield is cut by a winding track.

Terrain

The battle took place in a rural area at the foot of the Hills of Cromdale. Streams run down from the granite and limestone hills and meander across the level, boggy ground upon which the fighting took place.

Condition

The battlefield is within the boundaries of Cairngorms National Park. Despite limited late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century agricultural occupation, the battlefield has not been extensively or commercially developed and it is probable that archaeological remains from the battle still exist. Groome's 1885 edition of the *Gazetteer for Scotland* found the area of Cromdale largely uncultivated, though plantation was in evidence in the near vicinity. The 1905 revision of the Ordnance

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Survey map shows that earlier eighteenth and nineteenth century farm buildings were abandoned and pathways fallen into disuse. Aside from ruined field boundaries and the foundations of a longhouse, the landscape is still largely uninterrupted and marshy. A track runs through the battlefield area on its eastern side, winding across the nearby hills.

Battle-related landmarks still exist throughout the neighbourhood of Cromdale, including the ruins of Lethendry Castle and Cromdale Kirk at the location of the Spey ford.

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 the position 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 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 Cromdale is defined on the accompanying map and includes the following areas:

- Cromdale kirk, where a Jacobite outpost was attacked and taken as the Government army crossed the Spey; the kirk's bells sounded the alarm, but with too little time for the Jacobites to react effectively.
- Lethendry Castle, where a Jacobite outpost was attacked by Government troops using grenades.
- The area of high ground where the bulk of the Jacobite army was camped near Claggersnich and Ballachule.
- Clach nam Piobar, a stone on the slopes of Cromdale above Claggersnich Wood, which is associated with the battle.
- Dalchapple where Keppoch is said to have camped with his men, who preferred to camp below Tom an Uird away from the main body of Jacobites.

Select Bibliography

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Brander, M. 1993. *Scottish and Border Battles and Ballads*. New York: Barnes & Noble Books.

Groome, F.H. (ed.). 1882-1885. *Ordnance gazetteer of Scotland : a survey of Scottish topography, statistical, biographical and historical*. Edinburgh : T. C. Jack. Shelfmark: Atlas Bibliog JQ 1882-O vol. 1-6.

Hopkins, P. 1998. *Glencoe and the End of the Highland War*. Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers.

Wilson, W. 1751. *The true and impartial relation of the persecuted Presbyterians in Scotland; their rising in arms, and defeat at Bothwell-Bridge, in the year 1679*.

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Further Bibliography

Information on Sources and Publications

Documentary source material for the battle is relatively scant. There is a widely printed and reprinted primary account of the battle from Sir Thomas Livingstone (Livingstone), commanding officer of the victorious government force. There is little in the way of detailed modern analysis of the battle, though brief overviews appear in battle compendiums such as Black's 1936 *Scottish Battles* and Brander's *Scottish and Borders Battles and Ballads* of 1993. The battlefield is recorded in Groome's 19th century *Gazetteer for Scotland* and appears on first edition and subsequent Ordnance Survey maps.

Primary Sources

Livingstone, T. 1690. *A true and real account of the defeat of General Buchan and Brigadier Cannon, their High-land Army, at the Battel of Crombdell upon the 1st of May; 1690*. Edinburgh: Printed by the Heir of Andrew Anderson. Available digitally via Early English Books Online

http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:52529328. [Last accessed 5/3/2010]

Cartographic and Illustrative Sources

Roy, W. 1747-55. *Military Survey of Scotland*. Available digitally at <http://geo.nls.uk/roy/> [Last accessed 4/7/2011]. The Roy map shows the rural landscape around Cromdale, as well as the road network and crossing points of the Spey as they appeared in the mid-18th century. Claggersnich (Clagisnach) and Ballachule (Ballachuil) farmsteads both appear on the map, along with accompanying rig systems, evidencing a very limited amount of development. Also shown is the course of Allt Mhic Neacàil, though it is unlabelled. The castle at Lethendry (Lethindy) on the western slope of Lethendry hill is also marked.

Ordnance Survey. 1874. First edition county series 1:10560. Available digitally via Edina digimap at <http://digimap.edina.ac.uk/historic/HistoricMap?page=oneUpMap&req-oneUpMap=right> [Last accessed 8/3/2010] Location of battlefield marked. The Claggersnich wood has not yet been planted and the vicinity of the battlefield still appears as marshland. Claggan and Fuaranbuie farmsteads and their associated enclosures and limekilns appear in the battlefield area, as well as a pathway, showing a moderate increase in development of the area.

Ordnance Survey. 1905. First revision county series 1:10560. Available digitally via Edina digimap at <http://digimap.edina.ac.uk/historic/HistoricMap?page=oneUpMap&req-oneUpMap=right>. [Last accessed 8/3/2010] By the first revision of 1905, plantation at Claggersnich wood appears to the south of the battlefield. Claggan and Fuaranbuie farmsteads, their enclosures and limekilns have fallen out of use since the last Ordnance Survey.

Ordnance Survey. 2009. Available digitally through Edina Digimap at <http://digimap.edina.ac.uk/osmapper/osmapper?execution=e2s1> [Last accessed 5/3/2010]. The latest OS map showing current suggested battlefield location and current land use data.

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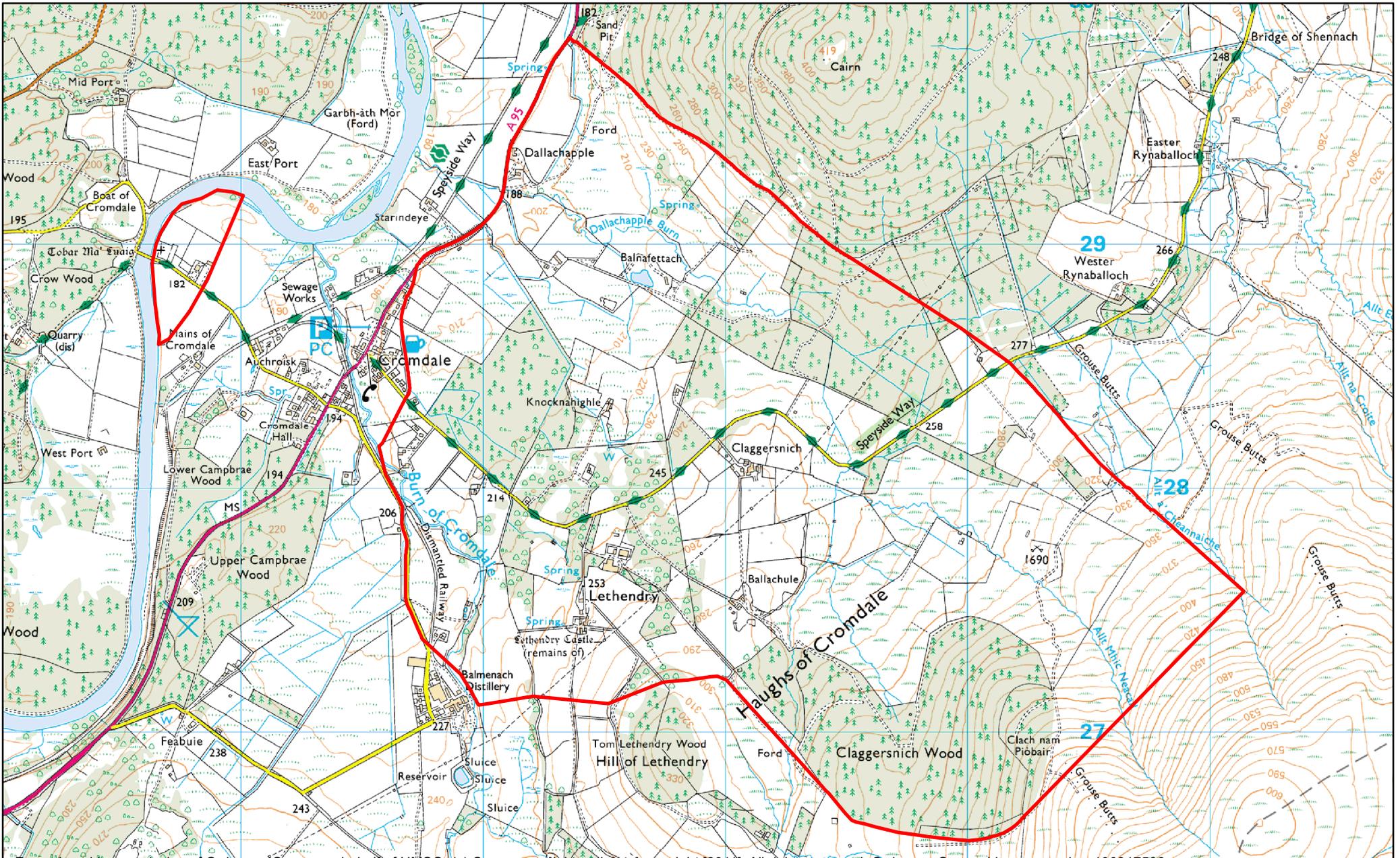
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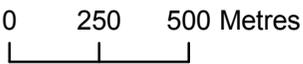
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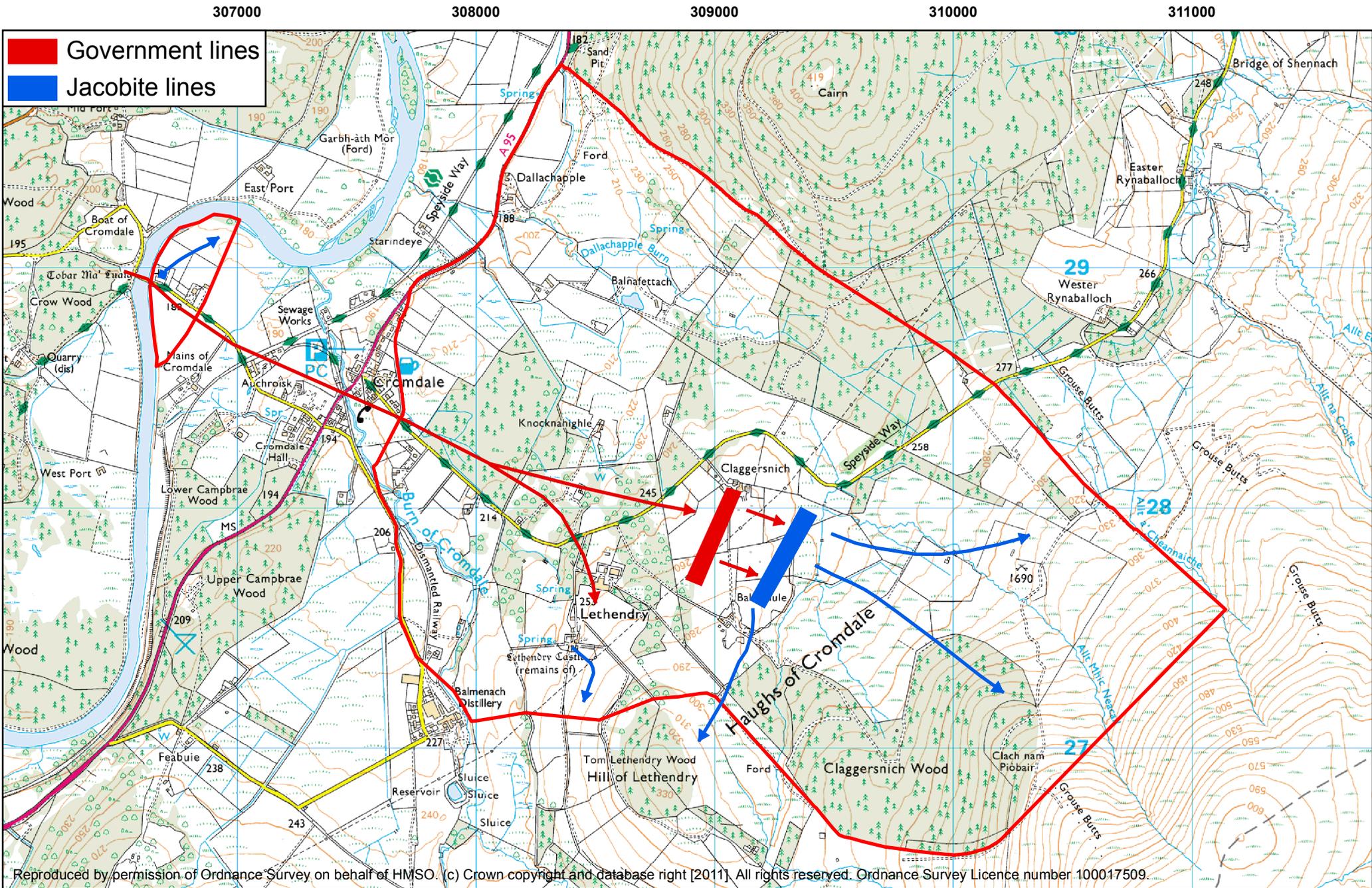
 Battlefields Inventory Boundary

Battle of Cromdale

1 May 1690

Local Authority: Highland





Battle of Cromdale - Deployments

1 May 1690

Local Authority: Highland

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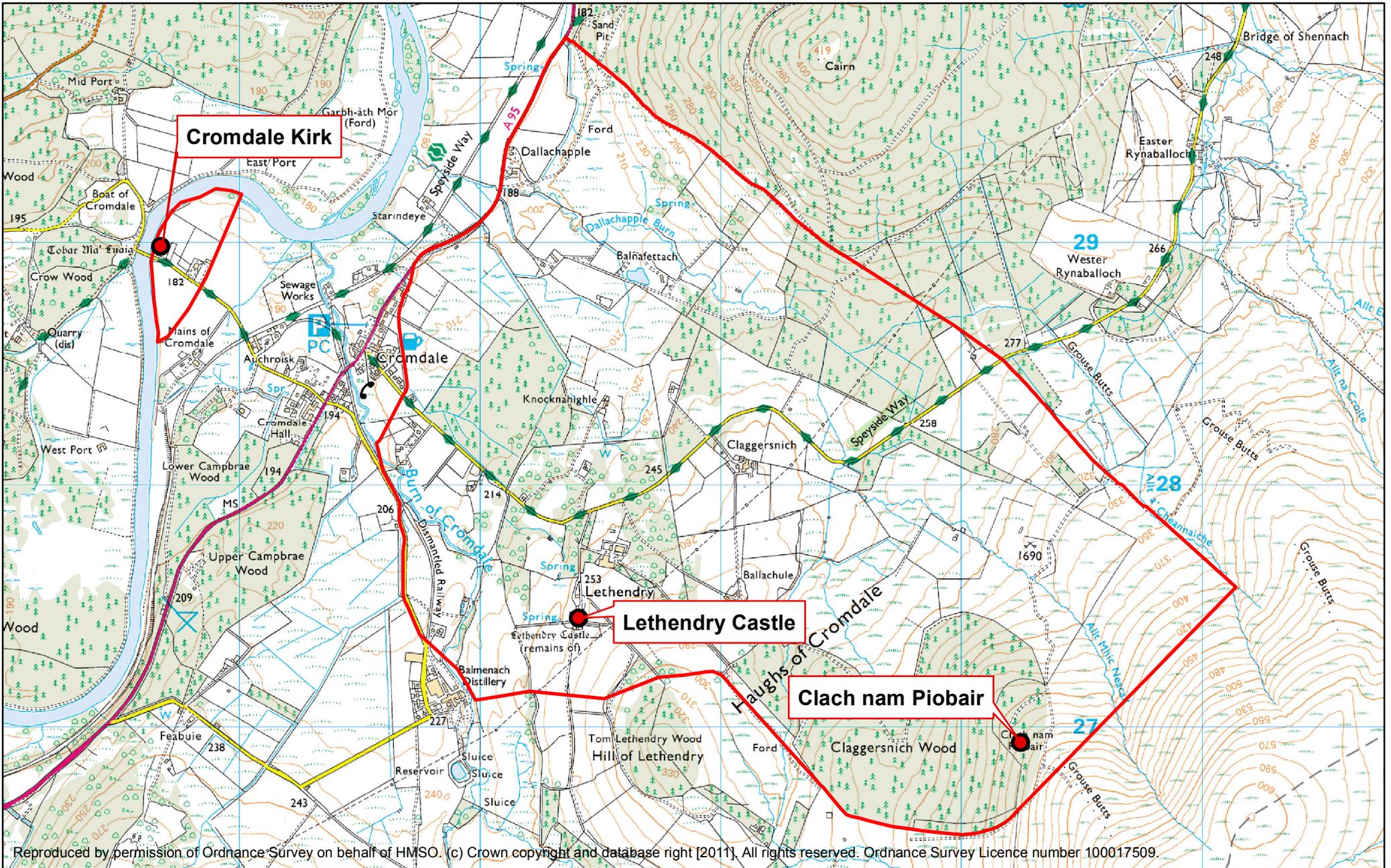
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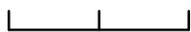
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 Battlefields Inventory Boundary

Battle of Cromdale - Features

0 250 500 Metres


1 May 1690

Local Authority: Highland