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Bath-Badon contents

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Pendragon investigates Arthurian history and archaeology and the mystery and mythology of the Matter of Britain. Opinions stated are those of the writers concerned.

EDITORIAL

Recently the sales graphs in Typp-Ex H.Q. must have shown an upward curve- heralding the emergence of the long-awaited Badon edition- also the arrival of the light infantry. namely young Roland Lovegrove born to Emily, Chris and family in October, to whom go all our love and congratulations.

Magazine production therefore fell into secretarial hands. She apologises for the quality of her part of the work and gives grateful thanks to the rest of the "pool". Now we can all appreciate the work that Chris usually puts in it!

Small mag. production is difficult....in view of the fact that most of them are "hand-done" so as not to pass on soaring printing/postal charges to subscribers. Some have been harsh in their criticism of our late schedule...but my favourite letter opening paragraph must be from our good friend and colleague Steven Banks who noted the good timing of the arrival of his "Spring 1982" Pendragon (in September) as it was indeed Spring when he wrote from his home in South Africa!

Sorry we're late again- but we do promise you all get at least four issues for your subs.

Which, by a coincidence brings us to the

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NOTICEBOARD

AND THIS QUARTERS SPECIAL OFFER TO MEMBERS ONLY.....BACK ISSUES OF PENDRAGON ARE CURRENTLY 15p. each or £1.50 for THE LOT.....
TITLES AVAILABLE:

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	2	Galahad
	3	Timeslip
	4	Old Stones
X1V	1	News & Views

plus "A for Arthur" an informal history of the Pendragon Society.

Activities

At the time of going to press (press?) we haven't formulated a winter programme of activities/talks in Bristol, but, as ever, members wishing to be notified of events such as these should write to me and ask to be put on the mailing list. However, a second visit to the very important Bronze Age (rescue) excavation near Winchester is planned for early December. Access is difficult except by car, but ring me (o272/45483) if you would like to go from the Bristol area or meet us in Winchester from elsewhere.

Kate Pollard.

Bath and Badon

Introduction — Chris Lovegrove

The battle of Badon represents the zenith of the historical Arthur's career. His contemporary, Gildas, wrote:

"Since that time (i.e. The coming of the Saxons) sometimes the natives, sometimes the enemy, won until the year of the siege of Mons Badonicus."

He added that this was "near enough the last though not the least slaughter of the foe". The English historian, Bede, following Gildas, added instead that Mons Badonicus was "when they made no small slaughter of the invaders". Celt and Saxon alike, then, agreed that this siege was a momentous occasion in history.

Mons Badonicus, literally "The Badonic mount" has caused no small headache for historians, not least, how to call it.

Beadonescan dune, (King Alfred"s version)
Baddesdown-hill, (Dent version of Bede)
Badon HIll, or simply Badon, (modern standard version)

This section, on the Bath connection, looks only at some of the difficulties involved. It has to ignore some recent developments (such as the 1976 excavations at Liddington Castle, near Badbury in Berkshire which showed Dark Age refurbishment of the defences) and problems of dating.

Hampton Down — Chris Turner

By courtesy of the late Rev. W. Phelps and his Opus Magnus, we wander through the pages of History and Antiquities of Somersetshire in search of morsels of information to further our quest of matters Arthurian. Arthur himself only warrants one mention in this book, presumably on the grounds that at the time he was far too mythological a figure to be included in a predominantly factual narrative.

However, a great deal of information is given that bears directly on the search for Mons Badonicus, Arthur's last and greatest battle against the Saxons. As with"Camelot" we are plagued with a multiplicity of Badons, probably for the same reasons, i.e. that while each little second or third-rate temporary campaign headquarters was given the name of Camelot in local lore, so any skirmish with the Saxons could not satisfy regional pride unless it was claimed at a later date as being none other than Badon itself.

The History and Antiquities of Somersetshire provides us with a number of clues to the enigma which I shall try to list as comprehensively as possible.

In the survey of Belgic- British camps (chapters 3&4) the Rev. Phelps writes: "We continue with the station Caer Badun, Bath, or more properly, the settlement on the summit of Hampton Down. The situation chosen for the town Badun, in the vale, after the country became tranquilised, was most appropriate, before the introduction of artillery.

"Whether the Britons appreciated the hot springs which rose on the spot, we have no means of ascertaining. The Romans, however, when they became possessed of this part of Britain, soon turned them to advantage.

"From the position of the various earthworks we see how strongly the Britons had fortified this post and its approaches on the different track ways so as to render this frontier town, between the Bodunni(1) and Haedui, more secure.

"The view from the summit is extensive: on the east, the range of hills in north Wiltshire are in sight: on the south, Long Knoll and Alfred's Tower are in view: and on the southwest, the range of Mendip with the elevated points of Downhead, the Beacon, Maesbury Castle, Pen

hill and Black Down are distinctly visible....a signal made at the Beacon on Mendip, or at Bratton Camp on the Wiltshire Downs would immediately apprize the inhabitants of Caer Badun (Bath) of any danger to be apprehended coming from the south coast."

All this, of course, is leading up to the contention that Mons Badonicus is in fact Hampton Camp at Bath. The cry will no doubt be raised that Mons Badonicus is a Latin name and Bath was known to the Romans as Aquae Sulis. How to explain the anomaly? Phelps also notes in passing that Bath is recorded in the Domesday Book as Bade; while of all unlikely books, the Consise Oxford Dictionary gives the following derivations of the word "bath" and "bathe": old English bathian, old High German badon, old Norse batha, from Germanic bathon. All this, coupled with the fact that more recent research has shown that the beneficial properties of the hot springs were known before the Roman invasion, enables us to list the probable names of Bath from the late Iron Age to date. The list will also demonstrate that Mons Badonicus is but an error in transalation

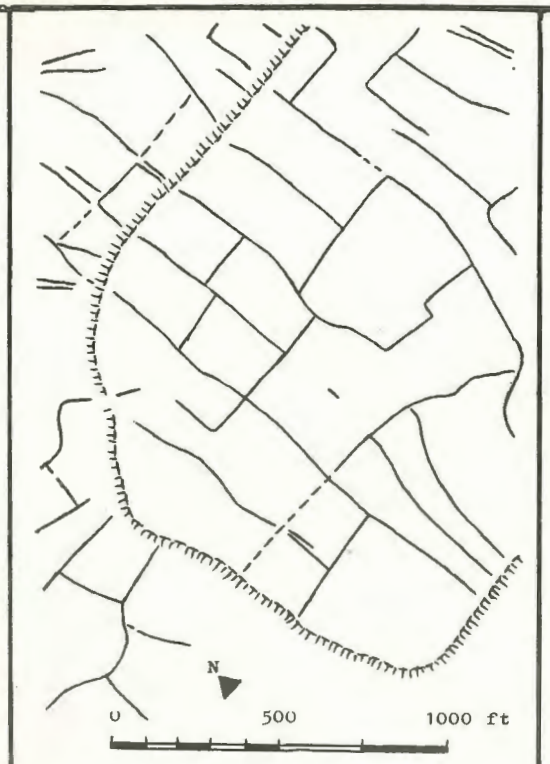
Pre-Roman period	BADUN	the baths
Roman period	AQUAE SULIS	the water of(Minerva) Sul
Romano- British period	BADON	the (Great) Baths
Saxon period	BADE? (2)	
CXIV- XVIII	BATHE	
Modern	BATH	

It must be appreciated that the first account of the battle of the Battle of Badon was written by a cleric who would naturally have used Latin rather than the current tongue. The site of the encounter was called Caer Badon (the -fortified - hill of the baths) in Celtic or Badenburgh (Battenburgh?) in Saxon. The word caer was correctly transalated into mons in the narrative, but instead of transalating Badon as Aquae Sulis, it was transliterated into Badonicus thus giving rise to the confusion that has persisted to the present day. One final scrap of corroberation is the well-known German health spa at Baden-Baden, which means only "Baths-Baths".

There appears to be a direct link with South Cadbury, for the view from the top (where the Pendragon Society lit a beacon in 1966) is described as "extensive....on the north is seen the range of Mendip Hills, with the beacon and other conspicuous points on its line." Can this be the same beacon that can be seen to the south-west of Hamoton Down (OS ref. 639458)? There is no other reason to think otherwise. The distances involved are more than the standard beacon range(8-9 miles) but two intermediary stations, one possibly at OS Ref 669362 would bring Hampton within four-point signal range of Cadbury 3.

Notes

(1) i.e. Dobunni.
(2) Saxon charter 796 aet Badum, "at Bath".
(3) First published in Pendragon Vol. 4 No 1 (Sept. 1969) as "Bookworm's Progress (2)"



Bathampton Down, Celtic fields.

Geoffrey Dando

Walking about on top of the hill proved a hazardous occupation as we dodged flying missiles- golf balls- but many signs of past ages are still visible amongst the more obvious signs of this modern sport. Evidence could be seen of the hut circles which were opened by Sir Richard Hoare in 1856. Other features uncovered by excavations in the 19th. century were five barrows which range in a semi-circle around the western entrance of the camp. According to old newspaper reports, skeletons in a sitting position have been found in apertures in the rocks on the side of the hill. Six hundred yards from the southern boundary formed by the Wansdyke is situated a Roman camp. However, half of this was missing in 1854 and today (1969) there is little trace of it. The Wansdyke is still visible and forms the boundary of the Belgic camp.

From the summit of Hampton Rocks, important beacon points can be seen which would give warning to forces on the hill of any imminent attack from the south coast. The fact that there is a bridge over the Avon at Bathampton (and map references to a ford) show that there was a suitable passage for reinforcements and supplies; an essential asset for a beseiged army.

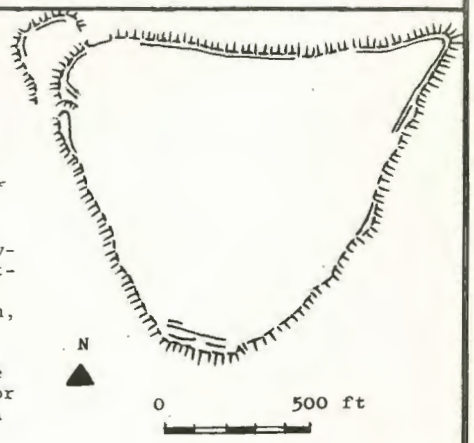
First published as "The battle for Badon at Bath" in Pendragon vol 4 no 2 Jan 1970; here abridged.

Solsbury Hill

Chris Lovegrove

Solsbury Hill is a large hillfort of some twenty acres north of modern Bath. It's single bank had dry-stone walling on both inside and outside faces. Excavations revealed pre-Roman Celtic occupation with the usual Iron Age evidence of pottery, weaving combs, carbonised grain, hut sites and storage pits.

Now, its' name is puzzling.(1) Leslie Grinsell suggests it may come from Sol or Sul which he thinks may be the name of a pre-Roman Sun-god. This is exciting in



Solsbury Hill

itself- how many forts are named after a god?- but seems to have nothing to do with Arthur or Badon.

It is, however, worth looking at the early references to Badon to see what we can deduce. Gildas tells us nothing about the site, but Nennius' "heap" of information (as he calls it) may be more useful, even if set down three centuries later. Badon is mentioned in two sections: (1) the Easter Tables, and (2) The battle List of Arthur. Here's what they say:

EASTER TABLES	BATTLE LIST
The battle of Badon in which ARTHUR bore the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ for three days and three nights on his shoulders (shield?)	The twelfth (battle) was the battle on the Mount of Badon in which perished in one day 960 men from one charge by ARTHUR and none laid them low save he alone
and the Britons were the victors	and in all the battles he was the victor

Arthur is mentioned in both accounts, but it's as if each account was propaganda for different viewpoints; implicit, I think, in the Easter Table account, is that the Britons were victorious only because Arthur bore Our Lord's cross. (metaphorically? or was it a fragment of the True Cross? Or a cross of sewn material?) Counter to the religious view ("three days and three nights" is not only a Celtic but a very Biblical phrase) is the claim in the Battle-List that Arthur slew his enemies by his own valour(that is, not by any relics or pious miracles.)

The 960 slain adverseraies have elicited much comment. Are they Saxon? Did Arthur really slay them all on his own? Or is it his own troops that are meant? Is 960 an exact figure or a poetic turn of phrase, such as "Thrice three hundred and three score"? Did the battle last one day only or were the 960 slain in just one day out of three? The point that is missed, however, is the possible anti-religious element which slights the Christian influence and boasts instead of Arthur's military prowess. Was there controversy at the time over the manner of this British victory over the pagan Saxons?

The Battle-List also refers specifically to the Mount of Badon. The late John Morris noted that, of the many hills and hillforts in the neighbourhood of Bath, the only mons is Solsbury Hill by Batheaston. It is "sharply escarped on all sides, small enough to be defended with ease by a body of dismounted cavalry." But Morris assumed the Britons were the besieged, an assumption that is hotly disputed.....not least by Geoffrey of Monmouth!(2)

Morris also suggests that among Arthur's slain enemies were Aesc (or Oesc) of Kent (the son of Hengist) and Cerdic of Wessex, with Aelle of Sussex, bretwalda or ruler of Britain surviving the battle Again, there is no direct evidence of this.

So, is Solsbury Badon? Unfortunately, none of the limited archaeological investigations have revealed anything sub- or post- Roman.(3) In the absence of hard evidence we would have to fall back on place-name studies. But, as the table shows, there is too much uncertainty. We then have to fall back on common sense and war-game tactics. What then are Saxons approaching possibly from the south or east of Aquae Sulis, doing at a hillfort to the north of the city?

LATIN	AQUAE SULIS waters of Sul	?MONS SULIS Mount of Sul
CELTIC	?BĀD (pronounced "Bāth")	?MONS BADONICUS or MONS BADONIS
SAXON	ACEMANNS CEASTER Acemann's Roman fort BADON (Bathon")	
ENGLISH	BATH	SOLSBURY

① Phelps calls it "Sulisbury Camp"
② B.Fowler etal Early Mediaeval Sites....(Bristol Archaeological research Group 1980) 16
③ Anon Little Solsbury Avon (Archaeology in the National Trust,n.d.)

Bathford Hill

Rita Moreno

Many sites have been suggested for this battle, but, in considering the available evidence, Geoffrey of Monmouth's **History of the Kings of Britain** cannot be totally disregarded: "As the Saxons sailed away across the sea they regretted the bargain they had made (with the Britons) They reversed their sails, turned back to Britain and landed near Totnes ... Then proceeded by forced marches to the neighbourhood of Bath and beseiged the town". Then follows a description of the battle until "finally towards sunset, the Saxons occupied a neighbouring hill". The following battle in which Arthur stormed and defeated them is the battle known as Mons Badonicus. Why Totnes? A glance at the map of Roman Britain shows that landing at this point only a short distance separated them from the Roman road that led to Isca (Exeter) and to Lindinis (Ilchester) to surge on by forced marches to Bath. Bath is surrounded by high ground - Bathamptom, Beacon Hill, Claverton, to name only a few. Bathampton was identified by Stukeley, among others, as the ancient Caer Badon with its defensive point Bathford Hill guarding the ford over the Avon and the way to Caer Badon. If a hill in the neighbourhood of Bath was occupied by the Saxon hordes, then this hill is deserving of close attention.

A made-up road leads steeply upwards until, just above a parking area a horizontal stone marks the point where the old path from the East begins its journey towards the distant summit.

It can be no co-incidence that this path (probably the continuation of the Roman road from Verluccio, near Calne, which the OS map indicates as disappearing to the East of the hill) is also - according to the authors of **Mysteries of the Wansdyke**, Major and Burrows - a part of that other mystery of the Dark Ages, the Wansdyke. So I walked this old road, bounded by moss-covered marker stones and old levels strewn with squared blocks of dressed stone and further on, always pushing upwards, punctuated by grass-covered mounds that hint at ruined buildings. One such hump overhangs the hillside just where the best view of the valley below is obtained, with a plateau where animals could be grazed under the eye of the watch tower. But the path leads upwards until the final summit is reached, and far below the silver streams that are the Avon and the Kennet, together with the whole width of the valley, provide a strongpoint that any modern general might covet.

First published as "In Search of Badon " in Vol 4 No. 3 (May 1970); here abridged.

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With acknowledgements to M. Darling and J. Weaver.

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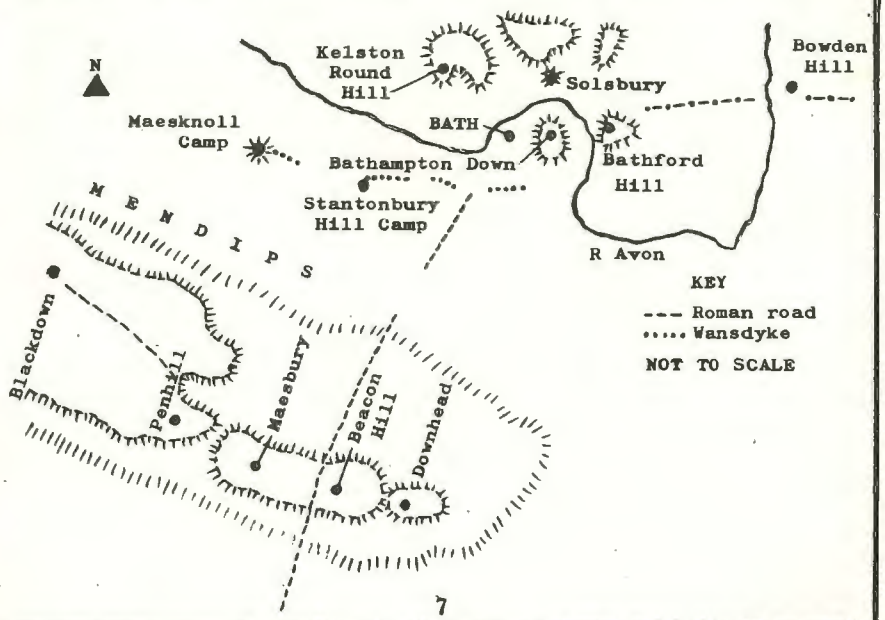
BATH AND BADON SITES MAP



The Battle of Badon Sid Birchby

"At that time, the Saxons increased and grew strong in Britain. Then Arthur fought against them. The 12th battle was on Mons Badonicus, and in all the battles he was the victor" (Nennius, ca 822)

Like Old Kaspar in the poem, we know it was a famous victory, but little more. Judging by gaps in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, some event checked the Saxons for many years. Was it Badon? If so, when and where was it fought? Gildas, born ca. 493, says that the battle took place in the year of his birth. At one time, the year 516 was favoured, on the basis of the Welsh Annals, but this is disputed by Chambers (1) and Alcock (2). The Annals record events between 444 and 977, and were collected at about the latter date from notes in the margins of ancient tables for finding the date of Easter. This depends on the 19-year lunar cycle and the marginal notes are dated accordingly, rather than by Anno Domini which system was not used before ca. 525. To convert a lunar-cycle date to AD requires a known date in the cycle to identify the particular 19-year period being considered, and Chambers and Alcock believe that the supposed date of 516 for Badon is a mis-reading of a table next to the right one. Allowing for textual vagueness, Badon was therefore fought at least 19 years earlier, ca. 493. In support of his theory, Chambers says that the Badon table contains other datable events displaced by 19 years - a claim worth checking.

The site of Badon has many champions. It is 'near the Severn mouth' (Gildas), or 'near Bath' (Geoffrey of Monmouth) (3) although Mommsen (4) suspects that the Gildas remark is a later gloss, an attempt to change the record. This is always a possibility where Mss. survive only as hand-written copies of a later date; nor are more recent authors blameless. Chambers mentions one E.W.B.Nicholson as being 'too eager to justify Geoffrey' by inventing a 'British word "bad", a bath in the sense of a watering-place' in order to equate Bath and Badon.

Chambers may be correct or not. Arguments from etymology can rarely stand on their own merits, but it is worth noting that Gildas was a Welsh monk who wrote in Latin a narrative copied by successive scribes, not all of whom may have been Welsh. To none of them, or even to Gildas, was Latin the native tongue. Even if there were no transcription errors, and no glosses, we cannot be sure that Gildas' Mons Badonicus means Mount Badon. At best, it is a Latinisation of a Romano-British place-name based on an earlier one, passed on by many copyists. We may be quite wrong in looking for the battle-site at a place named something like Badon.

I cannot find a Celtic place-name element "Ba-" or "Bad-". The nearest is the Welsh "Bre-", a hill, possibly (5) from the earlier Celtic "Brig-". The element "-don" may be the Celto-Saxon "-dun", a hill-fort, and such place-names as Bredon or Braden may come from Brigo-dunum, also meaning hill-fort. So Badon is neither Ancient British not Roman British, and shows signs of being Anglo-Saxon. We can now dispose of the theory that Badon was fought at the Dorset hill-fort of Badbury Rings (4,5) which was in the following dubious terms:

1. In 519, the Saxons won a battle at Charford, South of Salisbury (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle)
2. They advanced into Dorset until checked (probably so). This was at Badbury (unproven) which is near the modern county boundary. The boundary marks the check-point (unproven).
3. Badbury is Badon because the names sound alike and both are hills (illogical).

Put that way the evidence for Badbury Rings is very weak, and there seems no reason to consider the site to be that of a British victory. Indeed, the ASC for 901 calls Badbury 'Baddan-byrig', said to be the fort of Badda (8). Yet, having said that, what of Chambers' remark: 'Why did so many Badda's give their names to high fortified British places? Is it possible that "Bad" represents some Celtic name adopted by the Saxons and perverted into something more consonant with their own linguistic habits?' He cites the place-names of such ancient hill-forts as Baydon, Beedon, Bowden, and Bown Hill.

And consider Caer Bladon, the former name of the hill on which the town of Malmesbury stands, 'on the very toppe of a great slaty rock...wonderfully defended by nature' (Leland). Malmesbury is in NW Wiltshire, near the Cotswolds, and was in the forest of "Braden", cleared in the reign of Charles II. The local guide-book says that "caer" means a fortified camp. so that the original name was possibly something like Caer Brigodunum, the hill-fort. Once again, we see a confusion between the place-name elements "Bla-" and "Bra-" or "Bre-".

Which brings us back to Bath, and Geoffrey of Monmouth, who said that the town of Kaerbadum, now called Bath, was built by King Bladdud, who constructed the hot baths. The Romans called Bath "Aquae Sulis", the waters of the Celtic goddes Sul, and it is a matter of opinion whether it was later known as Kaerbadum. Geoffrey is unreliable, as always: consider his account of the campaign that led to the Battle of Badon. The Saxons beseige Lincoln and Arthur defeats them. They surrender and he allows them to return to Germany. Later, they return, landing at Totnes in Devon, and invest Bath from a nearby hill. Arthur's men attack in vain until he goes berserk, draws his sword Caliburn, and storms the hill. The Saxons retreat to Kent, where their leader is killed on the Isle of Sheppey by the Duke of Cornwall (not by Arthur, as one might expect). They surrender.

This confused campaign ranges from Lincoln to Bath and back to Kent, with Arthur always winning, though by modern wargame standards he does not. Perhaps the rules of strategy and tactics were different then. Alcock (2) thinks that 'In strategic terms, given the mobility of warfare at the time, there is nothing to exclude Bath' (as being Badon) but there is: all invasions by nature, sway back and forth over wide areas, and their historians usually miss the fine detail. Already the Allied invasion of Nazi Europe in 1944-45 is a matter of controversy, and in a few more centuries, with perhaps another Dark Age, what will be made, for instance, of an invasion of Germany by someone called Eisenhower?

S. L. Birchby 1982

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'Badon: Battle and slaughter

I.W.J.Snook.

The battle of Badon has always seemed to have a special significance in the history of Arthur's Britain. It is usually referred to as the last of his twelve great battles. Before commencing battle both he and Archbishop Dubricius made exhortations to the troops, after which Arthur assumed all the panoply of his greatness: the dragon helmet; Pridwen, the shield with the picture of the Blessed Mary; Caliburn, his sword; and Ron, his lance. Obviously this was to be a hard battle and morale had to be heightened. Arthur must have hurried down from his battles in the North at top speed, and probably with only the elite of his own troops, to be supported by less seasoned troops from the surrounding areas. This is probably the basis of the story that Arthur alone killed four hundred and seventy men. What it probably means is that Arthur and the elite group actually broke through the Saxon's defences, which allowed the supporting troops to get to grips with the enemy. Some of the fury of this battle could also be because it was a threat to Arthur's own capital and homeland, which I believe there is good reason to locate in the Wiltshire area.

How had the Saxon's found their way to Bath at all? All Arthur's other battles were far away in the East or North of Britain. Geoffrey of Monmouth relates that in the North Arthur had defeated a large force of Saxons, but these were then reinforced by another large force who arrived on 600 ships. With the help of Howell from Brittany Arthur defeated the combined power of the Saxons. He then took all their treasure, and took hostages, and allowed the survivors to board their ships on the understanding that they would return to Germany.

But soon he received information that instead of honouring their agreement they had landed in Southern Britain and were beseiging Bath. So he ordered the execution of the hostages and proceeded at top speed towards Bath, arranging for Cador to follow as soon as possible. That Bath was the actual scene of the battle seems to be correct. Gildas says that it took place at 'Bath Hill'. Geoffrey of Monmouth says that the Saxons landed at Totnes 'and made an utter devastation of the country as far as the Severn Sea. From thence they pursued their march to the town of Bath and laid seige to it'. And of Arthur he says 'at length, having entered the province of Somerset and beheld how the seige was carried on ...'. Obviously as Arthur came down from the North he would only have to 'enter' Somerset to be in the region of Bath.

At this point I begin to wonder what led the Saxons, under Cheldric, to risk a landing on a part of Britain where none of their countrymen had landed previously and about which therefore they could have no information. Or did they have some information, perhaps from prisoners, or even traitors, who may have told them about the shape of Britain, and possibly pointed out that with all the best troops engaged in the North, the Southern parts would be only lightly defended? If they landed at Totnes, how did they find their way all up to Bath, and why did they avoid or ignore all the towns along the way? I think that Totnes was only given as their landing point because it is the traditional place for it, and that it is more probable that they landed somewhere on the shores of the Severn Estuary, whence they 'made an utter devastation as far as Bath'. The fact that when Cador arrived after the Saxons had been defeated the first thing he did was to send troops to capture the ships suggests that they were not very far away. I also think that Arthur's capital and home base was in Wiltshire, and I wonder whether, following the information the Saxons had gained, they actually intended to strike for Arthur's capital.

Now what about the 'slaughter' aspect? Gildas says 'until the year of the siege of Bath-Hill, when took place also the last almost, though not the least slaughter of our cruel foes...'. In other words, there had been a number of slaughters of the foe, and Bath-Hill was nearly the last, but not the least of them.

When we turn back to Geoffrey of Monmouth there is little doubt about the slaughter. When Cador arrived with reinforcements Arthur and his men had already won the battle, but were apparently too exhausted to pursue the fleeing enemy, and this task was given to Cador. Without ado Cador immediately sent some of his best troops to capture the enemy's ships, so that they would not be able to escape. In other words the plan was to stop their way of escape and exterminate them. And this Cador proceeded to do. Pursuing them he gave no quarter, hunted down any who tried to hide in caves or woods, driving them before him until the remnant reached Thanet. There he continued the slaughter until Cheldric's death, when he finally allowed the few who were left to give hostages and surrender.

I think there is a very important aspect of this slaughtering of the Saxons. Even those historians who do not believe in Arthur as a real person have to admit that from about AD 500 for 40 years or so the Saxons seemed to make a negligible impact on Britain. Something or someone must have held them in check. Does it not seem reasonable that when large invading armies were annihilated, or reduced to a few terrified fugitives, that the Saxons would either stay at home, or find somewhere other than Britain to invade

The Horse at Badon Roger Webster

The proposition that Arthur used cavalry to defeat the Saxons is not new but the way in which he might have used horses has never been fully explored. To do so, we must start way back in history.

The first recorded cavalry appeared in the Middle East around 900 B.C. among the Assyrians, Scythians, Medians and Parthians.

They used no saddles and were armed with bows and arrows which they used with great dexterity, much in the way of the American Indians of more recent times. Their usual tactic was to gallop up to within bowshot of the enemy, release a salvo and gallop away again before the much slower infantry could get to within spearshot of them. This tactic would be used again and again to devastating effect. The most famous of these cavalry were the Parthians who, as they galloped away, would release one more shot behind them- the famous"parthian shot"- which is still common parlance today.

The horses they used were the native Arab horses which have survived virtually unchanged to this day- they stood around 14 hands(HH) tall. A hand (breadth) is standardised at four inches and is measured from the withers (a protuberant ridge of vertebrae at the base of the neck) to the ground. As a rough guide for afficianados of the "Horse of the year Show" the ponies you see belting around in the Pony Club mounted games are, on average, 12-14HH, the show jumpers 16-17HH, and the great Shire Horses stand 18HH or over. There are three subdivisions of height which are measured in inches and shown as--e.g. 14.1HH; 14.2HH; 14.3HH; 15.0 HH.

Chariots were another very effective way of linking the horse to the fighting man. In 1700 B.C. the charioteers of the mysterious nomadic Semites, known as the"shepherd kings" or "Hyksos" overran Egypt leaving the foot soldiers of the Pharoah defeated and demoralised. By 600 B.C., however, the Egyptians themselves fielded an enormous cavalry arm composed of bowmen, javelin throwers, and spearmen. The horses they used were again the typical 14.0 HH Arabs of the region.

Around 300 B.C. the Chinese, beleaguered by Barbarian cavalry rapidly trained and put in the field their own cavalry mounted on the tiny (12-13HH) Mongolian pony, which quickly pushed back the invaders and saved their frontiers.

In 55 B.C. Julius Caesar's first attempt at the invasion of Britain foundered on the chariots and cavalry of the British defenders. Caesar, having failed to rendez-vous with his own cavalry was forced to withdraw his hard-pressed infantry. he later said. in praise of the British charioteers, that they combined the best points of infantry and cavalry. The British tactics seem to have been those universal among early cavalry - the sudden attack followed by a rapid withdrawal.

Thus it may be seen that the chief tactical advantage of early cavalry was mobility. Horses allowed a large body of men to stay in the field,largely unharmed, when engaged against infantry.

They demonstrated the first principle of tactical advantage- the ability to inflict losses on the enemy without incurring heavy losses oneself. They could also lose every battle and still win the war. Cavalfyfighting infantry could afford to lose ground again and again using their greater mobility to remove themselves to safety after each encounter, sharpen their weapons, change horses, eat a decent meal and keep on returning to the fray until the enemy was forced to give up and go home.

This was a favourite tactic of the Parthian light cavalry after 200 A.D. who would continually harass the enemy until they were weak enough to be finished off with a rapid series of relayed attacks.

The Celts were renowned horse men. They have been closely associated with horses throughout their history. The Goddess Epona (usually depicted as a woman feeding mares with apples or seated sideways on a mare, often with a foal running alongside) was one of the chief deities of their pantheon and with the importance of Celtic cavalry in the Roman army, became well known throughout the Roman Empire.

The Roman legions themselves con tained only small units of "Legionary Cavalry" who were used more for rapid communications than for fighting. The fighting cavalry of the Roman military machine was composed entirely of auxilliary units of mounted men, many of them mainland European and British Celts. Indeed, even the language of these troops was different. Arrian, in his treatise on generalship, notes that, while all commands to intantry units- regardless of origin - were given in Latin, commands to cavalry units throughout the empire were given in Gallic or Ibero-Celtic largely because the technical terms for ordering cavalry manoevres did not exist in Latin.

The Romans, of course, invaded Britain again. This time they were supported by 2000 Gaulish cavalry, mounted on bigger, more durable horses which quickly outclassed the local defenders. The Romans brought order to Britain in the shape of the "Pax Romana" but the Britons - apart from notable detractors like Bouddica or Caradog, prospered under their rule. They undoubtably brought discipline to the wild British horse warriors and taught them to act in concert with infantry and how to make the best use of their speed and nobility.

After 200 A.D. the Marian military system which had served Rome so well for so long, began to show its weaknesses. The borders of empire were now very long and the Roman presence needed to be everywhere at once. The military made two important responses to the new conditions. One was a fundamental shift in emphasis from infantry to cavalry, the legions dwindling in size in relation to their cavalry arms and the other was the foundation of the "Limitanei," a part time militia formed with land grants along the borders (Roman legionary soldiers were only rewarded with land on their retirement from the army) The cavalry could now move unhindered by the legions to support the frontier-guarding Limitanei with the legions fulfilling more of a role of a strategic reserve to be employed against really serious border incursions.

This strategy worked well within limitations, chief of which was the fact that the part-time Limitanei together with the Foederati (allied troops, often German in origin) could only be loosely controlled by Rome.

Nevertheless, Roman power in this country was not worn away by pressure on the borders, rather it was hollowed out from within by demands made upon the legions by European and even internal Roman conflicts. Indeed when the last of the Romans finally departed around 400 A.D. the imperial borders were mostly intact, manned by Limitanei and auxilliary cavalry. The furthest flung of them probably only became aware of their masters' withdrawal by virtue of a slow disintergration of the communications and supply network.

This happened to the garrison on Hadrian's line. The headquarters at York and the sixth legion, which was their strategic reserve, had melted away behind them. Due to the complex system of cross-posting for promotion employed by the Romans, it was impossible for them to work out who should assume command, therefore they placed themselves at the disposal of Cunedda, king of the Votadini. This is not as surprising as it may seem because the Votadini had been pro-Roman for generations and in any case already made up a large proportion of the garrison in question.

In the years following the emperor Honorius' refusal to help the beleaguered Romano-British in410 A.D.- which put the last nail into the coffin of Roman withdrawal- the Saxons imported by the Romans as Foederati began to flex their muscles as did the treacherous Hengist and Horsa, imported by Vortigern to help him fight off the Picts. The long drawn out conflict of the dark Ages was on.

The Saxon encroachment of Britain should not be regarded as a concerted invasion but more as a process of setlement punctuated by aggressive pushes to obtain more land. It was probably the essentially local nature of these conflicts, together with the fragmentary state of post-Roman Britain, which made an orchestrated approach to the defence of the realm so difficult to achieve. What little we know of the protagonists of this early period is largely supplied by the lamentably sparse and highly coloured contemporary or nearly contemporary accounts. For instance, The Anglo- Saxon Chronicle under 44a says:-"The King (Vortigern) ordered them (Hengist and Horsa) to fight against the Picts and so they did and had victory wherever they came. They then sent to Angel and ordered them to send more troops and to tell them of the worthlessness of the Britains and the excellence of the land."

Gildas writing in "The Ruin of Britain" (as he says) 44 years after Badon has this to say of his countrymen- "The wickedness of Britain was without end. The enemies left us but we would not leave our vices. For it has ever been the custom of this nation (as it is now at this day)to be feeble in repelling an enemy but valiant incivil wars, and in carrying on a course of sin.....for then it grew to so high a pitch it might be truly said at the time 'Here is such fornication as was never among the Gentiles! Nor was this the only prevailing sin of that age but all other vices that can be imagined incident to human nature especially (which also now this day overthrow all goodness among us) a spight to truth and the teachers of it, a fondness for lyes and those that forge them, imbracing evil for good and a veneration for lewdness instead of virtue, a desire for darkness instead of light and entertaining Satan before an angel of light".

Gildas' dislike of his own kind was only exceeded by his loathing of the Saxons, as in:- "The brood of cubs (Hengist and Horsa)burst from their lair of the barbarian lioness in three keels as they call warships in their tongue.....at the orders of the accursed tyrant (Vortigern) they fixed their fearful claws upon the eastern part of the island. as though to defend it... Their dam learning the success of the first contingent sent over a larger draft of the sattelite dogs....Thus were the barbarians introduced.... in the guise of soldiers taking great risks for their generous 'hosts' as the liars asserted. They demanded supplies which were granted, and for a long time shut the dogs' mouth."

Gilbert Sheldonwrote in "The Transition from Roman Britain to Christian England", concerning the historical value of Gildas' narrative:- "It is as if some future historian had to gather what information he could about the progress of the Great War from a volume of sermons preached in St. Pauls between 1914 and 1918."

Gildas, then, is not the most fruitful of sources. He does, however, admit that the battle of Badon decisively halted the Saxon incursions and he draws our attention to Ambrosius Aurelianus.

It is tempting to visualise Ambrosius as the Field Marshall and Arthur - not mentioned at all by Gildas (but then hardly anyone is)- as his brilliant cavalry commander. But it is more likely that he was the wily fox and Arthur the cub (though not necessarily related) who succeeded him. It is my guess that it was Ambrosius who created local militia in imitation of the Roman system of limitanei and ensured that they were sufficiently well-trained to offer effective resisance to the Saxon war bands until such time as he, together with a hard core of professional soldiers arrived to direct operations. Gildas calls him "perhaps the last of the Romans to survive whse parents had worn the purple....." It is only natural, therefore, that any resistance he organised would be along late Roman lines.

Ambrosius then, held the Saxon advance. It is unlikely that he was able to generate enough enthusiasm to mount a full-scale offensive. Post-Roman Britain had declined to become a patchwork of squabbling kingdoms who would probably look upon the Saxon overthrow of a distant kingdom in much the same way as Britain looked upon Germany's annexation of Czechoslovakia in 1939..unforgivable, but really none of our affair. The establishment of an efficient local militia was likely the best Ambrosius could hope for.

What was needed to break the deadlock and convince the Saxons that aggression towards the British Kingdoms was too costly to be undertaken was a fundamental strategic and tactical advantage which could be used in conjunction with the existing local militia. That is to say, something that did not involve the formation of a large professional, national army which, like as not, no one was prepared to pay for. It is my belief that Arthur provided the answer with a body of well drilled cavalry, probably developed under Ambrosius' influence but only coming to the fore after his departure from the scene. Such a body of cavalry would be cheap enough to satisfy the local paymasters yet highly sucessful against an enemy which fielded no mounted soldiers at all.

The idea of Arthurian cavalry is by no means a new one, it has been laid before us frequently by all manner of commentators upon the Dark Ages, but always carelessly, as an interesting possibility, even probability. It is, however, more worthy of more serious consideration as it raises as least as many questions as it seems to satisfy. For instance.....were the right sort of horses available at the turn of the fifth and sixth centuries in Britain? What sort of weapons and tactics did they use? And, of course,the vexed and tedious question of stirrups, the least important of them and yet the only one which seems to excite the historians.

To deal with the last, first., the answer is almost certainly- no, they did not use stirrups. The first stirrups discovered in this country came in with the Vikings. The Roman cavalry did not use them and there is much more to their adoption than is immediately apparent. A detailed discussion on this would be long and boring... suffice it to say that the adaption of the Roman pattern cavalry saddleto take stirrups was not possible to achieve without a fundamental change in design and there is no evidence to support such a change having taken place. Anyway, they didn't need stirrups! As any good horseman will tell you, stirrups are for putting your feet in, they serve no purpose other than convenience. The only way in which they can be said to have contributed anything at all to cavalry technique was the way they made the armour piercing heavy lance a practical weapon in the middle ages. There is no reason to suppose (Hollywood epics aside) that Arthur had recourse to the armour piercing lance.

A very wise old man of my aquaintance was a trooper in some of the last actions undertaken by the British Cavalry. He was able to ride his horse over jumps bareback, blindfolded and without the benefit of reins before he was allowed to use stirrups. They are an aid, not a necessity, and were clearly regarded as such even by modern European cavalry. There is nothing that can be done on a horse with stirrups which cannot be done without them!

A much more intriguing problem is that of the horses they used. Virgil's description of the ideal cavalry mount for the stirrupless rider in30B.C. cannot be bettered:- "His neck is carried erect; his head is small; his belly short; his back broad brawny muscles swell upon his noble chest....and his mane is thick and reposes tossed back on his right shoulder. A double spine runs along to his loins !

Of course no horse has two spines but the compact, powerful sort of horse in good condition described above, has two ridges of muscle that swell each side of the backbone which give the impression of a double spine. Virgil has described the perfect horse for cavalry action- he has a broad back for a secure seat, he is wide in the chest and quarters for rapid yet stable turning and wheeling and he carries his head in such a way as to respond instantly to the rider's hands. He is probably describing the Spanish bred horse most popular with Roman cavalry which would not have been unlike the fine Andalusian horse still used by the Spanish Riding School of Vienna and beloved of circuses the world over. The native British horses which best fit this description are the Welsh cob and Highland breeds of between 13HH and 15HH. It is tempting and by no means impractical to to trace a descent for the powerful Welsh cobs of today from the fabled horses of the Gododdin- and thereby hangs a tale!

We have already seen that the withdrawal of the Roman sixth legion from Britain left the garrison of Hadrian's line leaderless and that they placed themselves under the command of Cunedda. The King of the Votadini considered his position, shorn of support from the south and with no warships to defend his seaward flank, to be untenable. He knew there was supposed to be another Roman force under the direction of the

Comes Brittanarum going to the aid of the Ordovices in North Wales who were hard pressed by Irish coastal raiders. He resolved, therefore to evacuate his whole territory- which stretched from the Tyne to the Forth - and join forces with whatever might be left of the Romano-British ish military machine. Accordingly he loaded everything portable into wagons, burnt everything else, and set out with everyone who could walk, stagger or ride for North Wales.

They came to the province of Venedotia - called Gwynedd by the Welsh - and, with or without the help of the Comes Brittanum (we do not know) they drove off the Irish pirates, settled among the remnants of the Ordovici and became the Gododdin of Welsh legends. Taliesin sings of Cunedda, "Lord of the Cymru" -

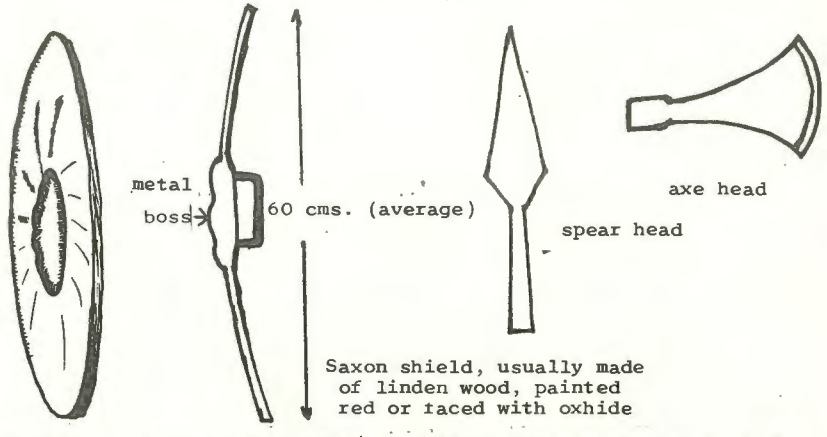
> Cunedda ventured into dire conflict
> Into the scathe of a hundred conflicts before his shriving.
> He was prominent in the tumult with nine hundred horse.
> Among us he would freely distribute milch cows in Summer,
> He would freely distribute war horses in winter....

From Taliesin's description we may conjecture that among the forces placed at his disposal was a wing (ala) of auxilliary cavalry, 900 being the likely fighting strength out of the establishment of 1024 From the excavations at Newstead near Melrose we know that Roman cavalry in the north included 14.0 HH horses indistinguishable from the modern Arab horse and much coarser, large-boned horses of around 15 HH known as Siwalik (after a range of hills in India where their remains are found in great profusion.)

With careful cross-breeding the Gododdin (renowned in legend as horsemen) could easily have produced a very serviceable cavalry horse for our terrain. Not as beautiful perhaps as that described by Virgil but fast, sure footed and strong enough to fulfill the purpose. The photograph shows the sort of horse very likely to have been produced. He is 14.2 HH tall and shows the sort of coarse features exhibited by the Siwalik refined just enough by lighter breeds to improve his speed and manoeverability without sacrificing stamina or strength. He is Welsh. of course, and I know him well. I rode him regularly for two years at a riding centre in the Black Mountains. He is quicker on his feet than a casual observer could ever imagine, he is fast and, more than once, carried a hard-riding 15 stone man (not me, I hasten to add) six days out of seven and never looked tired If this sort of cross-bred horse was available to Arthur's cavalry (and after 100 years there would be far more than enough of the right sort around) then there is no doubt they would have suited his purpose perfectly.

So much for the horses, now we must turn to the difficult question of weapons and tactics. Next to nothing is known about the Dark Age Celts methods of warfare other than the fact that they refortified many iron age hillforts which Ambrosius probably transformed from a disparate and parochial scatter of refuges into a linked system of border garrisons along late Roman lines. However, we do know a little more about the Saxons and it might be possible to deduce from their strengths and weaknesses the probable tactics used against them.

The Saxon military arm was the war band - a sort of leisured class supported by the community in return for its defence. If a chief died in battle his warriors were supposed to die avenging him. When new territory was to be annexed the land-hungry chief would invite others and their war bands to take part in the conquest. In this case, the war bands would be supported by militia made up of Freemen under the chief's protection. Saxon soldiers, both warriors and Freemen, were



infantry Although the better off among them might ride to the battle they invariably fought on foot. Their main weapons were the spear and the shield.

The Saxon shield was circular made of wood surrounding a central heavy metal boss whose reverse side incorporated a strong handle. Thus in close fighting, the shield could be used like a mailed fist in conjunction with the thrusting spear in a formation called the "shield wall". The shields of a shield wall thus became more of a continuous battering ram than a defensive formation. The spear was used as the complementary weapon obviously because it could be used between the shields without disturbing the formation unlike the axe or club (swords were very rare among the early Saxons.) Needless to say against the more lightly armed Celtic infantry, the shield wall was devastatingly effective.

Armour was worn only by the nobles and probably of little more than thick leather (mail shirts are known, but rare.) The militia, coming in behind the shield wall,were unarmoured and only lightly armed and therein lies the weakness in the Saxon fighting machine -the rear of their advancing formation was highly vulnerable to attack by a mobile force such as cavalry.

As to Arthurs choice of weapons and tactics- it is difficult to conceive of anything more effective against Saxon infantry than the well-tried horse archers of antiquity. He could wait until the Saxons engaged the Celtic militia the gallop from cover to within bowshot of the enemy and attack his unprotected rear. It would immediately become necessary to disengage a large proportion of the armoured nobles to protect the unarmoured ceorls thus weakening the shield wall.

As the warriors approached within range of their throwing spears (the archers would need to be quite close as the sort of bow used from horseback would not be effective over any great distance) The cavalery would withdraw only to return as soon as the shield wall had reformed. The Saxons thus divided were under constant pressure from the opposing infantry and severely raided in the rear. The confusion and terror spread among the ceorls by these tactics cannot have done much for morale and the efficient Saxon fighting machine is thus brought into disarray. The coup de grace would most likely have been delivered by galloping cavalry hurling javelins of the Roman pattern (Saxon nobles' leather armour might stop the lighter arrows but not a throwing spear hurled from a galloping horse which would have an impact velocity of around 100 miles an hour.)

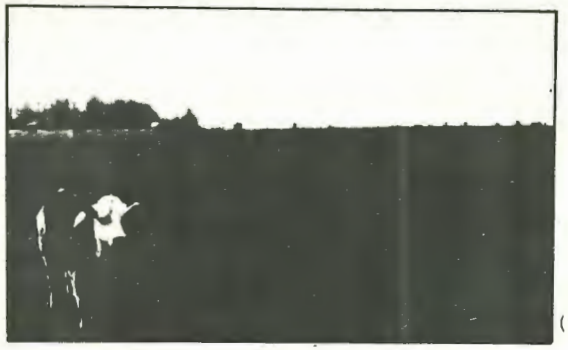
I have not credited Arthur with using the very effective javelin (popular with Roman cavalry) in the opening stages of the engagement for two reasons:- 1) they would need to get closer to the enemy to be effective and 2) they would provide useful missiles for the enemy to hurl back (the disadvantage of cavalry is that horse and rider make a very large target). Neither have I yielded to the tempation to send him ploughing through the Saxon lines in the van of the sort of romantic charge beloved of the light brigade, partly because this way of using cavalry was only in its infancy at that time (the late Roman Cataphracti are probably the best contemporary example and they were probably never used in Britain) and partly because I envisage Arthur's cavalry as a fairly small professional unit (maybe 1000 or so) unable to deliver the death blow in one fell swoop and unable to stand the decimation of trained horses that such a tactic would involve.

Thus I see Arthur's cavalry as the Celtic response to a series of fragmentary localised conflicts were the combatants were numbered in thousands rather than tens of thousands. Where the ability to get from one place to another quickly and mount a disciplined and fast-moving attack was more important than sheer weight of arms. Arthur had to have something to which the Saxons could not easily addapt, and which they could not themselves adopt. The Saxons were foot soldiers and remained so until the Norman invasion,- where they were defeared largely by the Norman heavy cavalry- so they did not adopt cavalry Arthur defeated them at last so soundly that they were quiet for about forty years, so they were obviously unable to adapt to the threat he posed.

"The twelfth was on Mount Badon in which, on that day three fell in one onslaught of Arthur's 960 men and none slew them but he alone and in all his battles he remained victor."

This is how Nennius describes Badon in the Historia Brittonum. This was the great conflict after which the Saxons decided to hang on to what they had and leave the Celts alone. Was it a major battle? Did the Saxons get together in a big way to really try the Celts newfound resilience? Among a horse-proud people like the Celts it is more likely that Artur's cavalry were the best, rather than the only cavalry. Did he assemble a really large body of horse and infantry and succeed in directing and disciplining them to achieve the great victory?

We shall never know for sure but all the British sources (even Gildas) agree that Badon was the big one and so it seems likely. No-one knows where Badon was and it is one of the most tantalising of all Dark Age mysteries. It is claimed variously for Badbury Rings, for somewhere around Bath, and for Liddington Castle. Just to clarify things even less, I am going to add another - Bowden Hill, in Wiltshire.



The top of Bowden Hill (with local inhabitant!)

Bowden Hill lies to the north of the Wansdyke on the Roman road from London to Bath so it is in the right area. Unlike all the others it boasts no sort of fortifications and was never used by anyone ever before. It is interesting to note that, as it lies on the edge of the Marlborough Downs, it would only appear to be a hill to the Celts approaching from Bath. To the Saxons heading westward it is a plain. If the Celts decided on Bowden as a battleground then they had thrown away the whole defensive attitude which marked the early Post-Roman period and presented the Saxons with just exactly what they wanted to see - rows of "worthless" Celtic infantry drawn up in open battle formation with no hillfort in sight to cover their retreat.

However, in their enthusiasm, (upon which a wily leader may have counted) to decimate the Celts, the Saxons may have overlooked the greatest attribute of Bowden. It is perfect cavalry terrain. The top of the hill is level galloping country amply served by woods to provide cover. The Celtic horsemen could wheel and turn and gallop their mounts however they liked to harry the enemy, without regard to the terrain. Bogs, rivers, steep hills (up or down) are great handicaps to moving men on horseback in a hurry and must always be borne in mind by the commander. Bowden has no such disadvantage - and isn't it just possible that Arthur's success at Badon was partly due to the bold master stroke of meeting and crushing his enemy on the sort of ground normally best suited to them?

The Roman road where it joins the Wansdyke

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AMAZING REVELATION! Recently discovered page from Arthurian manual of battle tactics - by Arthur, the real one who lived in the Dark Ages. ABSOLUTELY NOT A FAKE!!