

Summer Landscapes: Investigating Scottish Topographical Place-Names¹

Stella Pratt
University of Glasgow

During my undergraduate studies at Glasgow University, we were referred to *The Landscape of Place-Names* by Margaret Gelling and Ann Cole.² It was an exciting discovery for me, in that the authors had not just investigated the derivation of place-names but also invented entirely new methods for exploring them. They had gone beyond theoretical linguistic and historical research and visited the actual sites of English place-names, photographing and sketching their topography. Their conclusions were groundbreaking: they concluded that Old English place-naming was far from random and, instead, constituted a precise and systematic, nationwide phenomenon.

Gelling and Cole's study referred primarily to English place-names and I wondered whether the phenomenon might apply north of the border too. I successfully applied to the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland for a Vacation Scholarship for eight weeks during the summer vacation 2003 to conduct a pilot study of topographical elements in Scottish place-names, using Gelling and Cole's fieldwork methods. From the outset, it was clear that the timeframe was too brief to provide any grandly comprehensive or conclusive findings so the aim was to investigate the fieldwork methodology, as an onomastic research tool, as much as to ascertain exact derivations of the particular place-names.

In order to achieve as much as possible within the time allocated, the project had to be meticulously planned, and this meant recognising strict limitations about the elements and place-names that could be

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² M. Gelling and A. Cole, *The Landscape of Place-Names* (Stamford, 2000).

included. Place-names which had ambiguous etymologies had to be identified first and their linguistic history documented; the number of elements considered was kept to less than ten, focusing on *clif*, *dūn*, *denu*, *heafod*, *hōh*, *ness*, *ofer/ufer*, *scelf* and **scēot*. The next stage was to find all Scottish place-names that contained these elements, whether in their Old English form or in their later Scots reflexes, before confirming which of them still existed as places that could be reasonably investigated. It was only after this that the fieldwork could begin, grouping sites into areas for visiting, to see whether there was any correlation between the topographical features and the elements represented in their names.

Old English terms for hills, slopes and ridges³ were chosen as the study's focus with some crossover into valleys,⁴ because these were most likely to have topographical features that could still be identified, not obliterated or obscured by modern construction. The place-names selected for study had to relate to the element being considered; however, they also had to show potentially identifiable topographical features on Ordnance Survey (OS) maps or as described by previous place-name authors.⁵ Furthermore, they had to be within reasonable travelling distance to be viable possibilities for visiting. Equally vital, was that there had to be some possibility of collecting accurate and informative photographs, the evidence of correlations between features, such as hill profiles and gradients, water courses or settlement locations, and the toponymic term. By reviewing maps of Scotland, place-names were identified which seemed to contain generics referred to by Gelling and Cole—sometimes represented here, of course, by their

³ Gelling and Cole, *The Landscape of Place-Names*, pp. 143–219, Chapter 5 'Hills, slopes and ridges'.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 220–61, Chapter 6 'Woods and clearings'.

⁵ J. Field, *Place-Names of Great Britain and Ireland*, 2nd edn (Newton Abbot, 1990); D. Dorward, *Scotland's Place-Names*, expanded edn (Edinburgh, 1995); J. B. Johnston, *Place-Names of Scotland*, 3rd edn (London, 1934); W. F. H. Nicolaisen, M. Gelling and M. Richards, *The Names of Towns and Cities in Britain* (London, 1970); W. F. H. Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names: Their Study and Significance*, new edn (Edinburgh, 2001); A. Room, *Dictionary of Place-Names in the British Isles* (London, 1988).

Scots reflexes. To incorporate a range of possible alternative explanations of each place-name's origin, the full range of opinion about the derivations of each was then collected and noted for comparison. Where possible, place-names were chosen that most authors thought might have originated earlier than the twelfth century.

One of the most informative aspects of the project was in showing how onomastic research is conducted on the ground with this methodology. Factors that might not otherwise have been considered became highly relevant. The effect of the weather on visibility, for example, was a fundamental ingredient of whether topographical features could be seen, let alone photographic evidence gained. In these terms, summer might seem better for studying features but the season's extra foliage sometimes obscures features that might be clear otherwise. In addition to this, finding the location of certain places had difficulties all its own; it is essential for a minimum of two people to conduct the studies because simultaneously following a map, driving safely and scanning the landscape for specific features on one's own is a feat well beyond the capabilities of most ordinary mortals! Once the site of the place-name is found, however, topographical features can be so obscured or obliterated by housing development that minor settlements were found to offer the clearest evidence. The only difficulty there is that routes to smaller settlements often do not appear on maps at all and, if they do, are not clearly sign-posted, so it is hard to be certain of a site's location or the boundaries referred to by a place-name. These are aspects of research which cannot be known until fieldwork is actually undertaken and yet which significantly affect the findings.

In terms of the landscape features, even when they exist they may not be visible, for example, when a road approaching a site is on an incline. Sites were viewed on foot from as many directions and perspectives as possible to avoid missing features; conscientious but time-consuming too. In almost every case, going to the exact location of the site would have been insufficient as the features in question can usually be viewed better at a certain distance from the place itself. And against that, the distance needed for viewing the feature in its entirety creates problems in itself, particularly in getting photographic evidence, as other features often get in the way. Any comprehensive project would

require not merely wide-angle but panoramic and even aerial views.

The findings for each place-name are included in an appendix to this paper, but the project made possible certain broader conclusions regarding each naming element. Firstly, although steep slope features were invariably present in places whose names bore the *clif* element, none were as steep as the 45 degrees proposed by Gelling and Cole. However, Gelling and Cole mention that ‘if there are some low river-banks to which the term is applied, allowance should perhaps be made for silting in post-Roman times’.⁶ With this in mind, it is possible that the places have changed structurally since they were named and that centuries of farming practices, tipping of refuse or building development have made the slopes more gradual. Another possibility is that the element was applied more loosely in Scotland than England, to places with more gradual slopes. This might be supported by the fact that, during preliminary research for the project, no occurrences were found of Scottish place-names clearly derived from *helde*, the element that Gelling and Cole say was used in the naming of more gradual slopes.

Investigations of place-names with the elements *-dūn* and *-denu* focused primarily on which one was the actual derivation. The dissimilarity of these two types of formations, as hill or valley, made it relatively apparent which element the place related to. However, although a place might be clearly on a hill, what was less easy to identify was whether it was on a *-dūn* hill shape. Gelling and Cole suggest that, where the *-dūn* element appears in a place-name and the settlement itself is not on such a hill shape, it might relate to an ‘uninhabited hill adjacent to the settlement’.⁷ As they describe various types of *-dūn* shapes, it is usually easy to find something that matched in the area; it could be said, then, that this would seem to provide an explanation that fits just about any circumstance. Against this, however, several sites investigated have turned up settlements and *-dūns* which perfectly match Gelling and Cole’s descriptions, sometimes with place-names that previous explanations have suggested

⁶ Gelling and Cole, *The Landscape of Place-Names*, p. 153.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

were derived from the element *-denu*. Much of the published work relating to *-denu* suggests that it is most commonly the source of place-names incorporating *-dean*. In most cases, the study's findings bear this out; however, the possibility that place-names incorporating *-den* might be more closely related to *-dūn* is supported by the topographical features.

The evidence from sites bearing names with *-head* almost invariably bore out Gelling and Cole's description of *-heafod*, in a variety of ways. As the individual site reports show, often the first or preceding element in the place-name allowed the meaning of the second 'head' element to be better defined. It also became clear that place-names incorporating *-head* are so numerous that they would properly make up a considerable and worthwhile study of their own.

The *-hōh* element was the most problematic, in terms of confirming the hill shape. Place-names with firmer connections with the element might have produced better evidence. Although apparently specific, the *-hōh* hill shape is also open to wide interpretation, making it harder to confirm conclusively.

The *-ness* element is one which has several interpretations, and a topographical feature in the area could always be matched to those suggested by Gelling and Cole. In each case, special efforts were put into establishing *which* aspect of the element the features most closely related to, but each place was so different that no consensus could be reached to narrow it down. Aside from the shape of the topographical feature, it was established that each place did indeed bear relation to some type of water feature, either in the place or adjacent to it.

Selecting place-names to investigate in relation to the *-ufer* or *-ofer* element was complicated by the potential cross-over with the word 'over', rather than any difficulties with the hill shape described by Gelling and Cole. For this reason, just one place-name was investigated; however, as this one suggests a possible relationship with the topographical feature, others should be further investigated.

There are few Scottish place-names that might derive from *-scelf*, rather than the word 'shell'. For this reason, it was important to establish whether a clear relationship existed with this one place-name and the topographical feature. The findings not only exceeded our expect-

ations but proved to be among the most conclusive in the study.

As with the *-scelf* element, place-names relating to *-scēot* were rare. The difficulty of investigating links with Gelling and Cole's description was exacerbated by the indistinctness of the topographical feature: with no angle of slope specified, what comprises a 'steep' slope remains debatable. Of the two place-names were investigated, both turned up quite different findings.

In conclusion, it might have been more satisfying if the findings had been more conclusive, but it is only possible to take from the evidence what is found. On the whole, this study suggests that the interpretations of the elements *-clyf*, *-dūn*, *-denu*, *-heafod*, *-ness* and *-scelf* identified by Gelling and Cole within English place-names also apply in southern Scotland, but the evidence is less secure for *-hōh*, *-ofer* and *-scēot*.

Aside from the place-name evidence, where the project was particularly rewarding was in showing the limitations and possibilities that fieldwork investigations can offer, particularly when compared to conventional research methods. The investigations where they proved most insightful were in relation to place-names where ambiguities exist. Despite the time and budgetary constraints, it is hoped that the pilot project underlined the enormous potential inherent in Gelling and Cole's research methods and revealed the feasibility of pursuing future investigations of Scottish place-names on the scale of their English study. What the project also hoped to promote is the idea that a new vitality can be added to place-name studies by releasing them from the desk and the book, and that actively going to the places and experiencing them can offer new insights and add appreciably to the bank of knowledge we have.

APPENDIX

1. **CLIF:** this element is used in place-names where slopes are 45° or steeper, *helde* being the term for more gradual ones.⁸ *clif* is frequently a riverside feature, but there are also examples not related to water. On OS maps, *clif* features often seem slight but Gelling and Cole suggest that ‘all *clif* features need to be evaluated on the ground’.⁹ There are many dramatically high river-banks to which the word is applied and many inland escarpments and rock faces, but less obvious examples need careful evaluation on the ground.

i. **Clifton Craig (DMF)** On an unmarked side road, Clifton Craig is difficult to find but is a very distinct topographical feature. It is a rock-face of granite rising up sharply two or three hundred feet by the roadside at an angle of considerably more than 45°, more like 80–90°. It is not a riverside feature but is quite close to the coast.

ii. **Rockcliffe (DMF)** Rockcliffe rises up from the bay and, as a popular seaside area, is highly developed. Particularly apt in this case is Gelling and Cole’s assertion that ‘features which look unimpressive on the map may be much more striking on the spot’.¹⁰ The weather and building development makes it hard to confirm photographically that the slope exceeds 45 degrees but this was clear *in situ*.

iii. **Lillesleaf (ROX)** *Lyllesclefe, Lyllescleue* 1147–1521. An area intensively farmed now, where the entire village is built along a ridge that might have been the earlier *clif*. The corn fields are terraced and, although the OS map does not reflect this particularly, there is a distinct and considerable drop in level from the village to a waterway running parallel with the ridge. Possibly farming over the centuries has lessened or filled in the slope, perhaps even deliberately in order to facilitate pre-modern farming with horses (cf. Wormerlaw below).

iv. **Wormerlaw (BWK)** *Wyrmsclif* 1367–68. Wormerlaw is now a privately-held, working farm, just outside Eccles, owned by the Craig family and time-consuming to find, as private properties are not signposted or shown on maps! It is on one of the highest, most marked slopes in this relatively flat area, set on a ridge with very steep slopes that are now the farm’s front and

⁸ Gelling and Cole, *The Landscape of Place-Names*, p. 153.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

rear driveways. Though steep, however, neither slope exceeds 45 degrees.

2. **DŪN:** hill, upland expanse, low hill with fairly level and fairly extensive summit, good settlement site in open country. There is a high degree of consistency in sites of villages with *dūn* names, with most examples on hills of 200–500ft. Evidence of early spelling forms are vital for the correct identification of *dūn* names due to later confusion between *-don* and *-ton*, and weakening of *-don* to *-den*.

i. **Graden (ROX)** First element OE *grΣg* ‘grey’ or ‘wolf’. Graden is on a tiny side-road outside Linton, near Morebattle, and is only marked on larger scale maps. It is, however, very distinctly on a *dūn*-type rise, not in a *denu* valley. The settlement is on the top of a level, extensive summit with no development further down. Good clear photographs are possible but the *dūn* was so large that it was necessary to take two shots to get it all in.

ii. **Duns (BWK)** Possibly from Germanic *-dūn* element from 1296¹¹ or from Gaelic *dùn* for ‘hill’¹²; the general relationship with ‘hill’ words is widely acknowledged.¹³ Gelling and Cole do not specifically mention Duns but they do assert that the *-dūn* element ‘is not common as a simplex name or first element’.¹⁴ Duns is at the foot of Duns Law, providing the possibility of an ‘uninhabited hill adjacent to a settlement’ described by Gelling and Cole. The settlement does seem to be on an upland expanse of some sort but intervening hills makes it impossible to confirm this.

iii. **Gordon (BWK)** 1250 *-din*, 1289 *-dun* W. *gor din* ‘spacious hill’.¹⁵ Gordon seems to be a settlement on a *-dūn* type of hill but the slopes on two of the sides are much greater than those on the remaining two. A large village occupies the plateau of the *-dūn* with a crossroads at its centre.

iv. **Hadden (ROX)** Hadden Rigg: 1540 *haulden rigg*, possibly ‘Haldane’s Rigg’ (ridge).¹⁶ Definitely and distinctively a *dūn*, with the village sitting neatly on top of a level and extensive summit, set in open country, exactly as Gelling and Cole describe. Our easiest and most conclusive investigation!

¹¹ Johnston, *Place-Names of Scotland*, p. 166.

¹² Room, *Dictionary of Place-Names in the British Isles*, p. 121.

¹³ Field, *Place-Names of Great Britain and Ireland*, p. 64.

¹⁴ Gelling and Cole, *The Landscape of Place-Names*, p. 167.

¹⁵ Johnston, *Place-Names of Scotland*, p. 195.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

v. **Denny (STL)** Unexplained place-name. *Litill Dany* 1510; *Denny* 1601; *Denne* 1622? OE *denu* ‘valley/hollow’ or OE *dūn* ‘hill’.¹⁷ A relatively large and developed town, clearly on a hill rather than in a valley. The *-dūn* appears to have a church built in the centre, like the settlements described by Gelling and Cole, in an area that appears to have been subject to long-term settlement. Only one end is clear—the other is obscured by a shopping centre.

vi. **Tullibody (CLA)** *Dunbodeuin* 1147, *Dumbodenun* c.1150, *Tullibotheny* 1195; Gaelic *tulach* ‘hillock’ seems to have replaced *dūn* with same meaning in the twelfth century; the second element may be Gaelic *bothan* ‘cottage, hut’.¹⁸ We had hoped to offer some clues on the derivation of Tullibody, in relation to a *-dūn* type of hill. The settlement is on a hill but, disappointingly, there is such extensive modern housing development that it is impossible to see what type of hill it is.

vii. **Coalden (FIF)** Not established whether related to OE *-dūn* or *denu*. Small settlement next to Cardenden; very distinctly set upon its own *-dūn* rather than in a *-denu* valley.

viii. **Cardenden (FIF)** ‘The hill or the valley/hollow near Carden’? Possibly derived from Pictish *carden* (as Welsh *cardden*) for ‘thicket’. Only example north of Forth/Clyde; possibly OE *denu* ‘hollow’.¹⁹ Most of the Cardenden settlement seems to be on its own *-dūn*, although there is also a slight dip in the middle of it that might suggest a relationship with a *-denu* valley. However, as the only settlement after the dip is new housing built within the last twenty or thirty years, this is unlikely. The new housing makes it hard to establish the precise boundaries of the older, original settlement area but, as a whole, the place is still very clearly on a *-dūn* hill rather than in a *-denu* valley.

ix. **Hownam (ROX)** *Hunum/Hunedun(e)* 1165–92, 1185. Initially, Hownam does not seem to bear any relationship to a hill feature but rather to be in a slight dip between two slopes; however, the whole settlement sits on top of an undeniably flat, extensive summit with distinctively sharp sides. Unfortunately, it is not possible to get enough distance away and still incorporate the whole feature in one photograph. There is also a large uninhabited hill overlooking Hownam, which might relate.

¹⁷ Nicolaisen, Gelling and Richards, *The Names of Towns and Cities in Britain*, p. 82.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 67

3. **DENU:** standard Old English term for a main valley. The incidence of *denu* is heavily obscured on modern maps by confusion with *dūn* ‘hill’ and OE *tūn* ‘farmstead, village’. It is also necessary to bear in mind that in south-east England many names now ending in *-den* are from OE *denn* ‘woodland pasture’, not *denu*. *denu* is taken to refer to ‘long, narrow valleys with two moderately steep sides and a gentle gradient along most of their length’.²⁰

i. **Deanburnhaugh (ROX)** As the OS maps suggest, Deanburnhaugh lies in a valley formed by a triangle of three hills that rise up around it. However, none of these hills seems to conform to Gelling and Cole’s descriptions of *dūn*-type hills, despite investigations from several angles. The other possibility is that *-dean* refers to a *denu*-type valley in the centre.

ii. **Hassendean (ROX)** 1155 *Halestonesden*, 1158 *Hastenden*, c.1320 *Hass-*. OE *hālig stān denu* ‘Dean [i.e. valley] of the holy stone’.²¹ River Teviot runs along a long, narrow valley with parallel, gentle slopes either side. Hassendean appears to be within a valley; however, it is not the clearest example of a *-denu* valley because it is an area of dense woodlands and the twisting road makes it difficult to get good photographs, despite being investigated from four different directions. It is unfortunate that the photographic evidence is not more conclusive because Hassendean does clearly lie between two slopes with moderately steep sides and there is a moderate gradient along most of its length, just as Gelling and Cole describe.

iii. **Denholm (ROX)** 1296 *Denum*, 1304 *Denhom*. Johnston attributes this to OE *denn*,²² while Doward offers ‘valley-field’ from *denu* with ON *holmr* ‘river-meadow’.²³ However, the early forms suggest OE *denum* ‘at the valleys’, dative plural of *denu*. Unfortunately, it was not possible to photograph the features of Denholm even with a wide-angle lens because the hills are so large and lie so far apart. Preliminary research of OS maps indicates that Denholm lies in a hollow beside the River Teviot, with banks rising up on either side. The approach to Denholm is up a slope, arriving at a complete flat plateau with a central common green, which forms a square with houses built around its outside edges.

(a) as a *-dūn*: definitely a flat settlement area on an upland expanse, which suggests a *dūn* derivation rather than a *denu* one. The River Teviot runs close

²⁰ Gelling and Cole, *The Landscape of Place-Names*, p. 114.

²¹ Johnston, *Place-Names of Scotland*, p. 201.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 154.

²³ Doward, *Scotland’s Place-Names*, p. 76.

by Denholm with associated tributaries and nearby place-names that relate to water features, such as Burn Foot and Ashy Bank. This might suggest, therefore, that the area was relatively marshy and provide a reason for settlement on such an upland expanse, where drainage would have been better. Denholm is laid out as an enclosure with central, protected common land for rearing livestock or crops.

(b) as a *-denu*: very little evidence of Denholm being a valley as there are no steep sides apparent in the place itself. There are, however, relatively substantial hills set at a distance, including the Minto Hills to the North-West, Rubers Law to the South and Dunion Hill to the North East. It cannot be ruled out, therefore, that although Denholm lies on a relatively flat area in relation to the further area, it may also lie within a valley of sorts.

iv. Collydean (FIF) Beyond the predominantly 1960s buildings is the much older settlement of old, stone houses and a granary building, the latter now functioning as a Baptist Church. These sit within a saddle or pit, rather than a valley *per se*, and connections with this type of formation are supported by nearby place-names, such as Pitkevy Gardens, Pitcairn Avenue, and Pitmedden Loan. A possible derivation may be from Modern English *dean* ‘narrow wooded hollow’.

4. HEAFOD/HEAD: head, end, source. Gelling and Cole suggest that in field-names, *heafod* means a headland in a ploughed furlong, and that in ancient settlement-names, it means a ‘projecting piece of land’. They believe it does not, however, refer to ‘peak’ or ‘summit’, as there are no instances where it clearly refers to the highest part of a feature. They suggest that it often refers to a piece of land jutting out below the level of the rest of the massif, similar to the way an animal sometimes carries its head below shoulder level, and think that it refers to shape, rather than pagan sacrificial sites.

i. Burnhead (INV) There are three main properties in the area: a large stone Manse, a renovated church and a smaller, white 1½ storey house. The church is now a domestic residence, having been built with the Manse around 1845–50; however, the other smaller house was originally the boat house for the area. Apparently, the river (Scaur Water) spontaneously changed course in 1846 or 1847 after bursting its banks one night. The river or ‘burn’, therefore, no longer runs through the area but the village might originally have held a different position in relation to its ‘head’ or ‘source’. The river bed stretches out before the stone house and is now entirely dry, but the old river bank can

be seen clearly rising up to one side and the level portion lying before the boat house is still boggy marshland. Despite this relationship to water, however, the original course of the river would only have passed through Burnhead, rather than being its ‘end’ or ‘source’. A better relationship seems to be to the noticeably prominent mound that rises up sharply behind the former boat house and is certainly a ‘projecting piece of land’.

The Story of Virginhall is by a local historian, Reverend David Black, the occupant of the Manse House in 1908.²⁴ He tells the tale of how, in 1843, the Duke of Buccleuch’s decision to refuse the Free Church a site on the western, inhabited side of the valley was overridden by the Yarrow river itself. Although the proprietor of land on the other side, Mr Johnstone of Alva was agreeable to the Free Church, the Duke and his agents fiercely disapproved of it and its separatist leaders as ‘wild firebrands’. The dispute continued until the river literally intervened, when ‘coming down one night in tempestuous flood, it tore out a new channel for itself and left its old bed...’²⁵ This effectively transferred the ownership of the land to Johnstone, who allowed the new church and manse to be built on the old bed of the river. The first Free Church minister told Reverend Black that ‘And here, in this dining room of the manse we are sitting and talking above what was the best fishing pool on this reach of the river’.²⁶ While this may not confirm that the river source or head was at Burnhead (a.k.a. Virginhall), his mention of a ‘pool’ suggests that it was more than just a passing river and his story is certainly charming.

ii. Mersehead Sands (DMF) Possibly from OE *mersc* ‘marsh’, meaning ‘marsh end’. OS: possible ‘source’ connection with Southwick Water (south of Clifton) and Spa Well (Chalybeate).

(a) as an *end* or *source*: Southwick Water (south of Clifton) and Spa Well (Chalybeate) lies between Southernness and Sandyhills. It is possible that, with Mersehead Sands, forming a cape around this entire area, the place-name might refer to the original location of water sources.

(b) as a *projecting piece of land*: Mersehead is beyond Southernness—out to sea—and lies at a lower level than the land around. It is neither a ‘peak’ or ‘summit’ and does not, therefore, contravene Gelling and Cole’s assertion that there are no instances of the element referring to the highest part of a feature. However, as a topographical feature, it is very clearly a ‘projecting piece of land’.

²⁴ D. Black, *The Story of Virginhall* (Dumfries, 1908).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

(c) as an *animal head*: a massif or hill range rises up between Sandyhills to Caulkerbush and Criffel, behind Southernness, which could describe the ‘shoulders’ of an animal. A row of hills form some of the highest points above sea level in the area (White Hill 125m (OS 87–53); Torrs Hill 91m (OS 88–54); Bainloch Hill 287m (OS 89–56); Clifton Craig 183m (OS 91–57); Millbank Hill 131m (OS 91–57); Redbank Hill 273m (OS 93–58); Airdrie Hill 298 (OS 94–58)). The *-ness* of Southernness could describe either an animal’s nose jutting outwards and lying below its shoulders so that the *-head* of Mersehead Sands refers to the whole of a Gelling and Cole style animal profile; or an animal’s head which, rather than hanging below the shoulders, is more like an animal lying on its front with its head level on the ground before it; or an aerial view of an animal’s head, as suggested by the shape of the headland on maps.

iii. Loanhead (MLO) ‘Top of the lane’ (*Loneheid* 1618); a compound of OE *lane* and *heafod* ‘head’.²⁷ On the outskirts of Edinburgh, Loanhead is highly developed and topographical features are hard to see. However, since as Dorward notes, *loan* is a Scots dialect word meaning ‘a grassy lane, or cattle track, often leading to a common grazing’, and ‘the right of passage of animals over a loan was a *loaning*’,²⁸ it might be possible that Loanhead was originally the cattle market area of Edinburgh and, therefore, the *head* of the track to market. Nearby Shank Bridge might also be relevant, as *shank* is a Scots term for a projecting hill slope.²⁹ ‘Shank’ might also refer to an animal’s hind leg and relate either to the shape of the bridge or to animals being driven to market over it.

iv. Dykehead (LAN) Dykehead is the neighbouring settlement to Shotts and there is no distinct boundary line between the two places. The area is very built up but Dykehead is part of the main Shotts promontory. The old ironworks—a tall tower and wall built up from the main approach road next to the Shotts District Healthcentre, opposite the town library—might provide a derivation for the first element of the place-name and its relationship to water. Alternatively, there is a prominent rise across from the ironworks that constitutes a projecting piece of land. Near Dykehead, there are further place-names relating to water, such as Bowhousebog, Bogside and Greenburn. The East Anglian ‘dykes’ were built for drainage in marshy land, so perhaps such

²⁷ Nicolaisen, Gelling and Richards, *The Names of Towns and Cities in Britain*, p. 127.

²⁸ Dorward, *Scotland’s Place-Names*, p. 90.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

nearby bog lands and river features might indicate similar derivations for naming in the area.

v. **Dykehead (STL)** The approach road crosses the River Forth, which might offer a connection with the water-related first element. Dykehead is also on a risen prominent back that could be described as a headland or promontory. It bears a strong resemblance to the long river banks or ‘dykes’ one sees in East Anglia.

5. **HÖH:** heel, projecting piece of land—ridges rising to a slight point and concave end; ‘the shape is in fact that of the foot of a person lying face down, with the highest point for the heel and the concavity for the instep’.³⁰

i. **Howpasley (ROX)** 1494 *Howpaslot*.³¹ Thick woodland in the area obscured most topographical features; however, a prominent hill overlooks Howpasley that seems to conform to Gelling and Cole’s description of a *-hōh*. Initially, the density of woodlands makes it hard to work out the precise shape of the hill ‘shoulder’, but it does seem concave.

ii. **Elcho (FIF)** Possibly from Gaelic *eileach* ‘rocky place’.³² In relation to Dorward’s suggestion, the area does not seem to be particularly rocky and although nearby Elcho Castle is stone, possibly loosely referred to as ‘rock’, it is sixteenth century and the place-name predates it. The tourist board brochure suggests that the name Elcho might originally have been ‘Elchoch’ or ‘Elkok’ but does not state any sources. Apparently buildings have existed on the site since the time of King Alexander III (1214–1249). Investigating the possible connection with a Gelling and Cole *-hōh*, there seem to be several heel-shaped hills in the area but none are particularly close to Elcho itself.

iii. **Ratho (MLO)** Dorward takes this to be a simplex name from Irish *rath* ‘circular fort’, here used in the sense ‘enclosure or garden’.³³ On the OS map, there is too much road development to see formations clearly. The M8 and its surrounding tangle of roads make it difficult to find Ratho, let alone identify land features. Ratho is up on a hill but what type of hill is hard to establish. It does not lie on the type of hill shape that Gelling and Cole suggest as a ‘heel’. From the canal, other possible *-hōhs* can be seen in the area but there are no definite *-hōh* shapes. It is possible that Ratho sits on such a hill shape but summer foliage is obscuring it. More information about Ratho

³⁰ Gelling and Cole, *The Landscape of Place-Names*, p. 186.

³¹ Johnston, *Place-Names of Scotland*, p. 205.

³² Dorward, *Scotland’s Place-Names*, p. 17.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 111–12.

might be unearthed with lengthier investigation.

iv. Howood (REN) OS contour lines show steady descent towards Howood (St. Vincent's Hospice) from 100-80-70-60-50-42 feet above sea level. Howood is visible on the left of the approaching A737 Johnstone bypass. It sits on a hill formation that could be considered 'heel' shaped, according to Gelling and Cole's definition. The ridge rises as sharply but the concave 'instep' is obscured by summer foliage. The steady drop towards Howood is clearer from the OS contour lines but the smaller mound after the 'instep' is apparent at the location.

6. NESS: 'Nose' (ON) or projecting piece of land, flat marshy promontories or peninsulas.

i. Southernness (DMF) To gain a clear, profile view and photographic evidence of the Southernness headland, it is necessary to walk some miles out along the adjacent headland called Balcary Point, viewing it from about 20 miles across the water. The Southernness headland is very distinctly a 'projecting piece of land', jutting out into the waters of the Solway Firth and conforming to Gelling and Cole's description of a promontory or headland. It is noticeably flat in relation to the hilly area inland, varying only between ten and fifteen metres above sea level. The *-ness* of Southernness needs to be considered in relation to the surrounding area called Mersehead Sands and was also investigated for its connections with the element *heafod* or 'head'.

ii. Bo'ness (WLO) Point of Borrowstoun; originally Ness (*Nes* 1494) and later Borrowstounness (*Burnstounnes* 1532) after nearby farm called Borrowstoun (*Berwardeston* 1335-36), meaning either 'Beornweard's farm' or 'bearkeeper's farm'.³⁴ The profile of the Bo'ness promontory can be clearly seen from the approaching road, with marshy lands around it. The settlement is a coastal headland similar to that of Southernness, where a high ridge of land drops down quite steeply to a relatively level projecting plain. It is possible that this ridge is a *beorg* ('rounded hill'), but the extent of modern housing development obscures it too far to be sure. It was thought that we might find some connection here between *-beorg* and the 'borrow' of the original name of Bo'ness, Borrowstounness, but no evidence of such a relationship was apparent.

iii. Gartness (LAN) Dorward takes Gartness to be a Gaelic name

³⁴ Nicolaisen, Gelling and Richards, *The Names of Towns and Cities in Britain*, p. 56.

meaning ‘waterfall place’.³⁵ There is a water authority reservoir nearby, possibly supporting an older relationship with water. However, the settlement itself is made up of groups of houses all gathered on one side of a hill, before a relatively steep drop down into a valley, so that it could be described as a steep-sloped, projecting ridge. Although we approach from both sides of the ridge, the housing development, summer foliage and angle of the road make it difficult to see exactly where the edges of this promontory are.

iv. Gartness (STL) A distinct projection with a farm on top, in a cattle farming area, with a single cattle track running along its ridge. The projection juts out over a deep valley which, judging by the many tall mature trees growing in it, indicates long-established features. Water runs along the length of the valley, an extension of the nearby-named Endrick Water, tending to support Gelling and Cole’s suggestion that *-ness* features tend to be promontories near or over water.

7. OFER/UFER: ‘flat-topped ridge with a convex shoulder’. ‘Usually the ridge is level, but sometimes it has a slight downward slope’.³⁶

i. Gleniffer Braes (REN) OS: distinct level ridge with convex hillsides concluding at Gleniffer Braes Country Park. The Gleniffer Braes overlook the outskirts of Paisley, forming the prominent ridge before dropping down to open countryside beyond. They are uninhabited now but were previously home to crofters. Johnston suggests that Gleniffer might derive from Welsh *glyn dyfr* ‘glen with the stream’ and that the *d* has been lost by aspiration.³⁷ The shape, however, is striking from the Glenburn valley below and consistent with Gelling and Cole’s description of an *ufer* or *ofer* type of hill.

8. SCELFF: very flat, wide summit. Previous interpretation as ‘slope’ or ‘shelving terrain’ was challenged by Gelling: ‘the suggestion ... that in place-names it refers to exceptionally level ground, has been strongly supported by subsequent field work’.³⁸

i. Skelfhill (ROX) *Skelfhill* 1569. Initial difficulty ascertaining how much of the area is referred to by the name Skelfhill. The site has substantial hills all around it (Frame of Comb Hill and Dryden Fell on one side and, on

³⁵ Dorward, *Scotland’s Place-Names*, p. 67.

³⁶ Gelling and Cole, *The Landscape of Place-Names*, p. 199.

³⁷ Johnston, *Place-Names of Scotland*, p. 193.

³⁸ Gelling and Cole, *The Landscape of Place-Names*, p. 216.

the other side, the even more considerable summits of Skelfhill Pen (1746), Cauldcleach Head (1996) Greatmoor Hill (1966) and The Pike (1516)). The owner of Skelfhill Farm, whose family settled here several generations ago, confirms that the name Skelfhill refers to the entire visible area, to both the slopes and the valley between them. The settlement is on one side, overlooking the valley, with a large hill in between. The *-scelf* is a spectacularly flat and distinct green in the valley, clearly visible from the roads either side. This not only supports Gelling and Cole's description of 'exceptionally' level ground, but particularly so in relation to the predominance of large, steep hills in the area.

9. *SCĒOT: slope, steep place.

i. Shotton (DUR) This is one of three Shottons in the county, meaning either 'farm, village, estate of the Scots' from OE *Scot*, genitive plural *Scotta*, and OE *tūn*, or 'farm, settlement on or by a steep slope' from OE **scēot* and OE *tūn*.³⁹ Doublets occur in other English counties.⁴⁰ OS: area too developed to identify contour lines or features but seems to be a flat area. Although technically outside the Scottish border, we included this investigation as we were nearby.

(a) Suggested derivation of *-shot* names from OE **scēot* 'steep slope' and that Shotton names in Clywyd/Durham might mean 'farm by the steep slope'.⁴¹ There are many slopes in the area but Shotton itself does not seem to be on or clearly related to any of them. The only possible relationship might be to one or many of the surrounding, uninhabited slopes.

(b) An earlier suggestion is that *-shot* names might derive from OE *scēat* 'corner, nook, then, division of land'.⁴² This could be a possibility if Shotton's position was interpreted as being tucked into a 'nook' between its numerous surrounding hill-slopes.

(c) Relationship to the word 'Scots'. The closeness of Shotton's location to the border might make the derivation from 'Scots' more likely, as it would then mean Scots-town. While Shotton is just inside the English side of the

³⁹ V. Watts, *A Dictionary of County Durham Place-Names*, English Place-Name Society, Popular Series 3 (Nottingham, 2002), p. 112.

⁴⁰ See for instance the discussion in M. Gelling, *The Place-Names of Shropshire*, 4 vols so far published, English Place-Name Society, 62/63, 70, 76, 80 (Nottingham, 1990–2004), IV, 132–33, s.n. Shotton Hall.

⁴¹ Room, *Dictionary of Place-Names in the British Isles*, p. 323.

⁴² Johnston, *Place-Names of Scotland*, p. 294.

border now, this may not always have been the case, or it may have been a Scottish settlement just inside the English border.

ii. **Shotts (LAN)** *Bertrum Shottis* 1552; *Bartrum Schottis* 1616. OE **scēot* ‘a steep slope’ + personal name.⁴³ There are several steep slopes around the area but nothing that especially marks Shotts out as standing either on or being named after a steep slope. What is most remarkable about the place is that, as a whole, it consists of a series of steep slopes, so a relationship to the topographical features certainly seems indicated.

Ordnance Survey Maps

<i>OS Map Series</i>	<i>Sheet Number</i>	<i>Map Title</i>	<i>Crown copy-right year</i>
Pathfinder	555: 95/95	Dalbeattie Forest	1985
Explorer	341	Greenock, Largs & Millport	2001
Explorer	342	Glasgow, Paisley, Rutherglen & Kirkintilloch	2001
Explorer	343	Motherwell & Coatbridge	2001
Pathfinder	490: N510/NX19	Girvan	2000
Outdoor Leisure	16	The Cheviot Hills – West	2000
Pathfinder	485	Hawick & Area	1987
Pathfinder	484	Ettrick	1990
Pathfinder	450: NT 64/74	Greenlaw	1986
Outdoor Leisure	44	The Cheviot Hill, Tweed Valley (East)	1997
Pathfinder	385: NT 29/39	Kirkcaldy & Buckhaven	1993
Landranger	63	Firth of Clyde	1980

⁴³ Nicolaisen, Gelling and Richards, *The Names of Towns and Cities in Britain*, p. 171.

Figure 1: Illustrations of places with names containing *dūn*

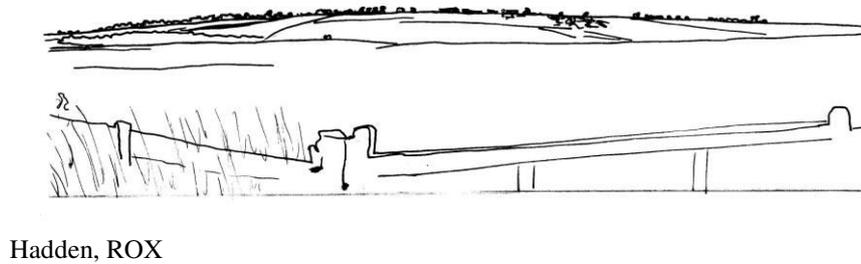
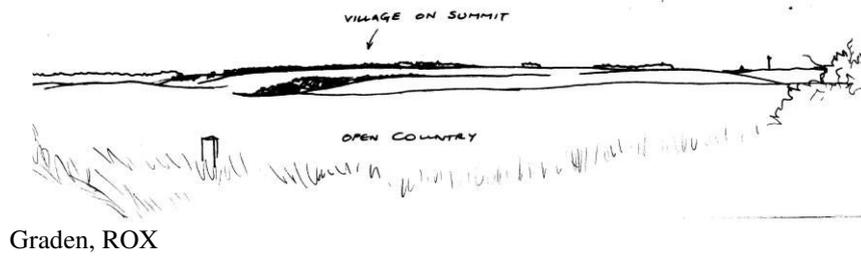
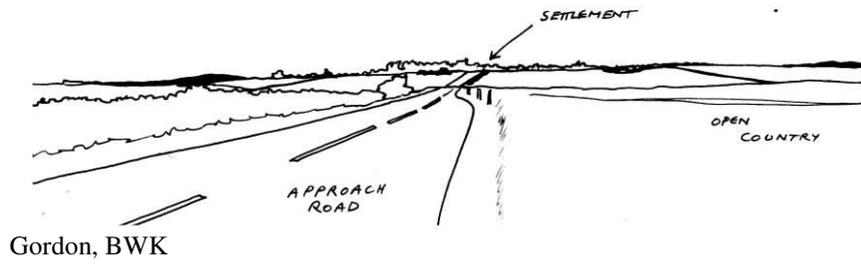
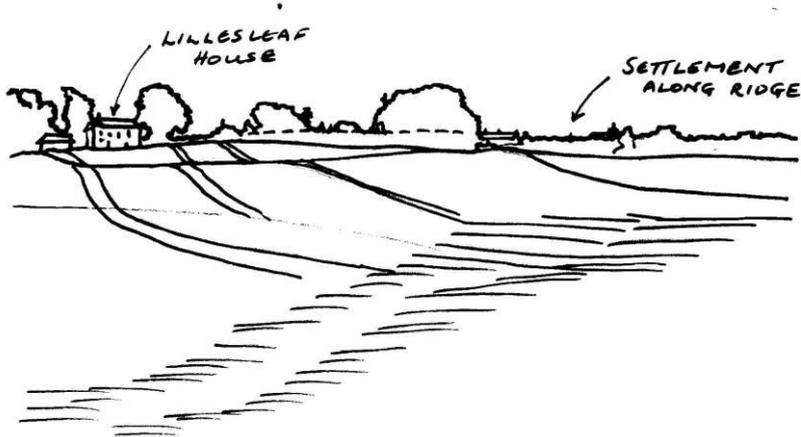
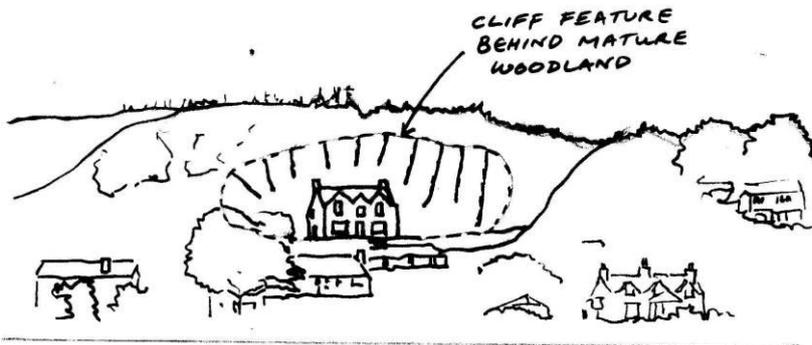


Figure 2: Illustrations of places with names containing *clif*

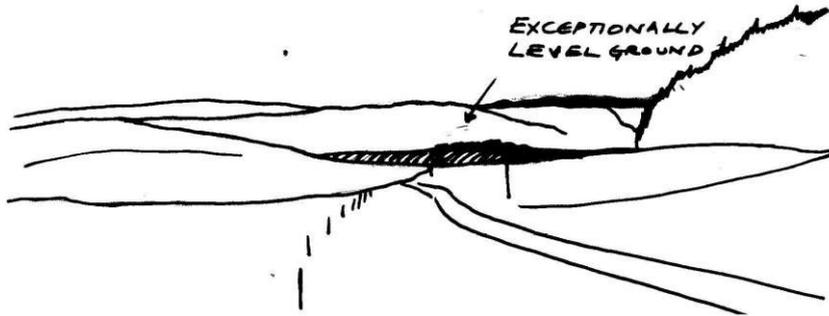


Lillesleaf, ROX

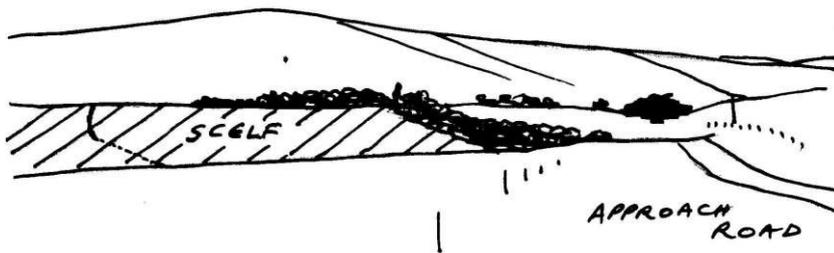


Rockcliffe, DMF

Figure 3: Illustrations of a place with a name containing *scelf*

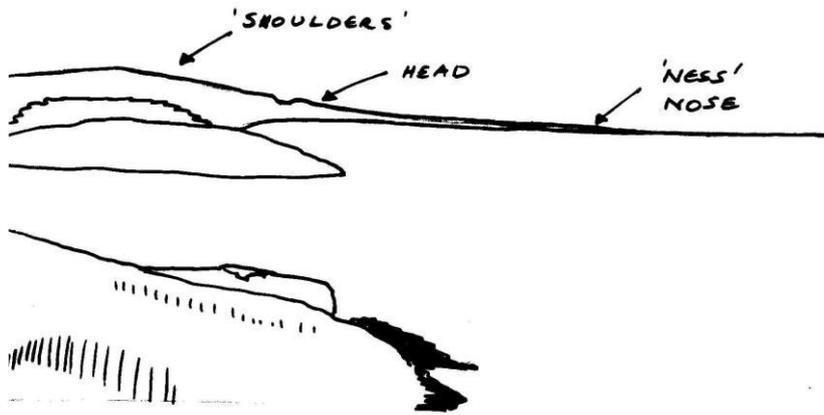


Skelfhill, ROX (approach)

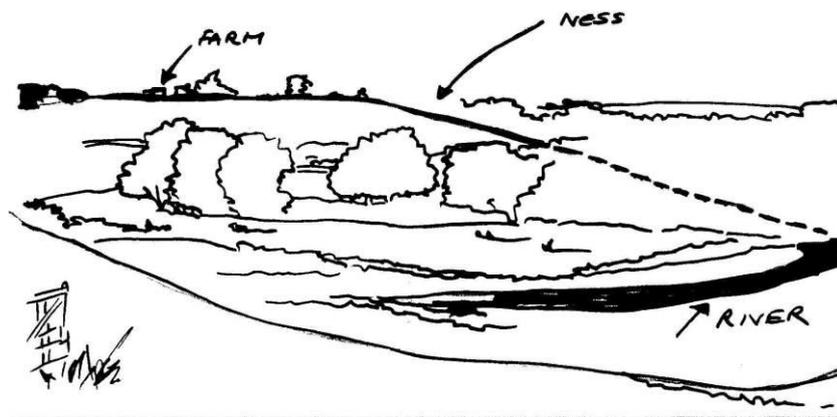


Skelfhill, ROX

Figure 4: Illustrations of places with names containing *ness*



Southernness, DMF



Gartness, STL