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Crime scene forensics help recreate hillfort siege

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10 July 2025

David Knox

BBC Scotland News

A team of archaeologists has created the most precise reconstruction yet of a Roman siege on a British hillfort by using crime scene forensics.

The eventual victory at Burnswark Hill in 140AD is considered to be one of Rome's greatest military triumphs north of Hadrian's Wall.

As well as archaeological mapping from four excavations and several geophysics surveys, the reconstruction experts also used forensic ballistics to

determine the sequence of events. Prof Stuart Campbell from the Trimontium Trust said that using all the

evidence and information available he thought the finished walkthrough was "fantastic".



Just two years later a 5,000-strong army marched north towards the

indigenous stronghold of Burnswark Hill where they created siege camps on either side.

victories to his name and decided to make his mark in what is now Scotland.

Dr John Reid of the Trimontium Trust said: "Antoninus Pius sends his Legate or senior general in Britain - to take Caledonia for him and for Rome.

"The first thing they hit when coming from Hadrian's Wall is Burnswark Hill."

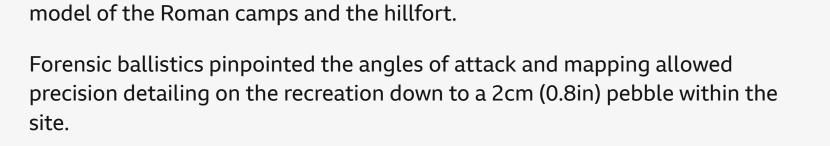
About 3,000 locals were either living - or had taken refuge - within the

hillfort's palisade defences.

TRIMONTIUM TRUST

1960s.

More than 8,000 individual characters feature in the 3D digital reconstruction



The results of an archaeological survey of the site a decade ago were added to

previous data and finds from studies which took place in the 1890s, 1920s and

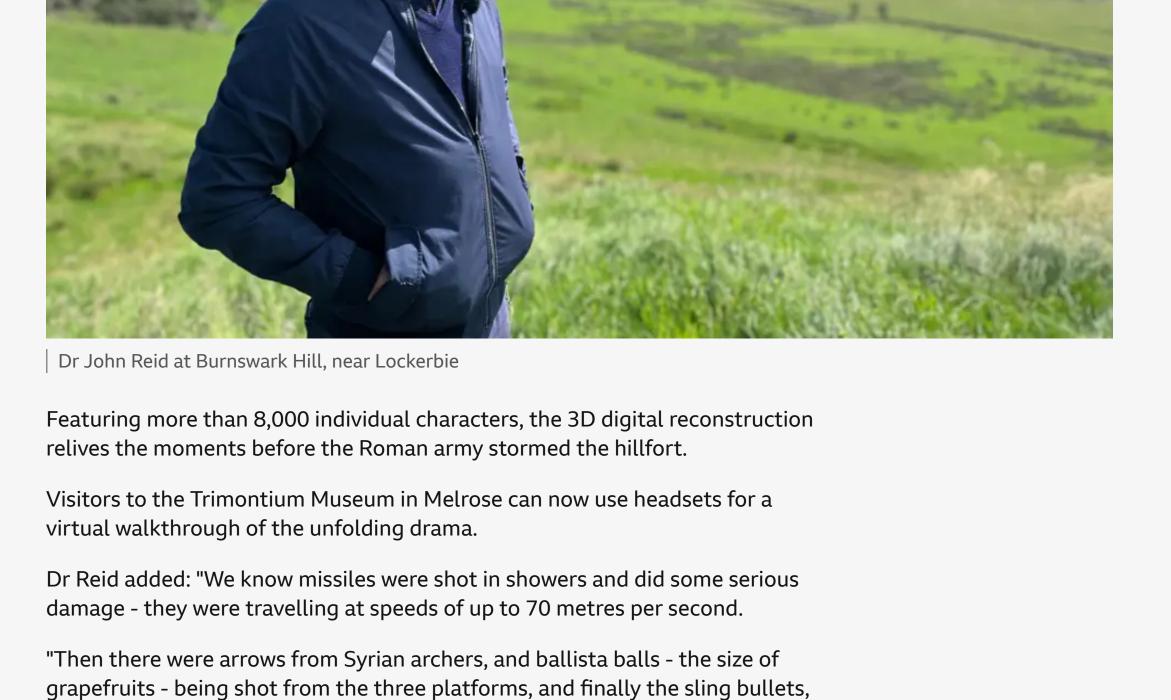
By using drones, the Trimontium Trust was able create an accurate 3D terrain

For over a year the archaeologists worked with digital artist Robert Gapper of Virtual Histories to build the 3D walkthrough.

Prof Campbell added: "One of the advantages of Burnswark is that there is so

much still on the ground to start with.

"Because it is such an unique site, we've been able to drop people, buildings and weapons - in their appropriate styles - into where they would have been to create this overview."



which were anti-personnel weapons to take arms, legs and heads off. "Then from the main camp there would have been a rapid outpouring of infantry heading straight up to the summit to breakthrough the defences.

Lockerbie

resistance to the west end of the hill."

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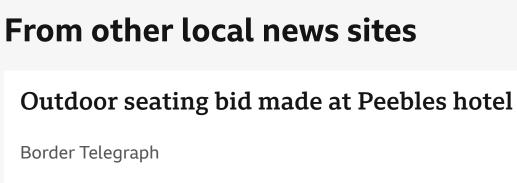
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"They quickly broke through and - from evidence - herded the last of the

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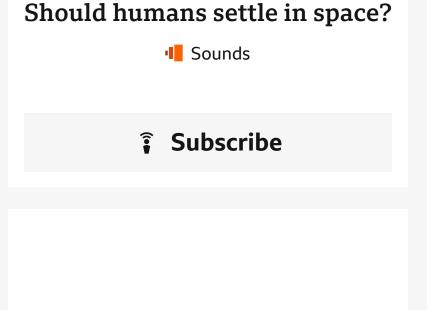
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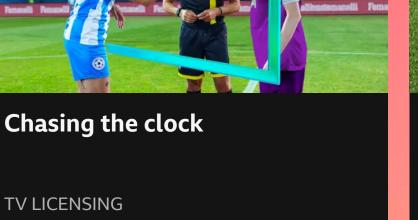
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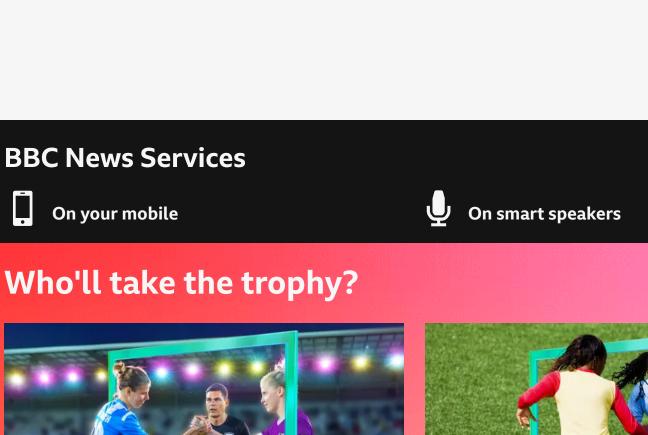
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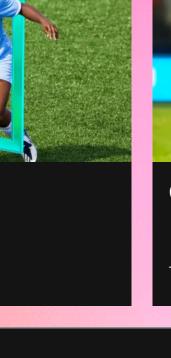


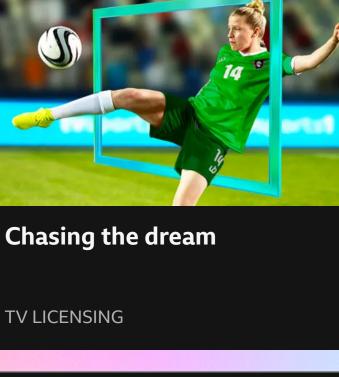
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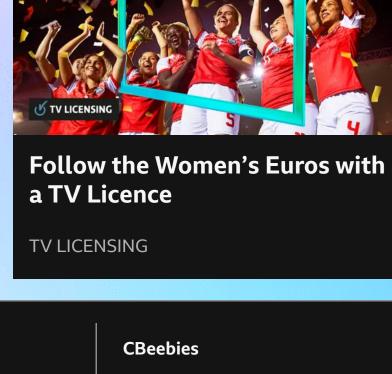
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