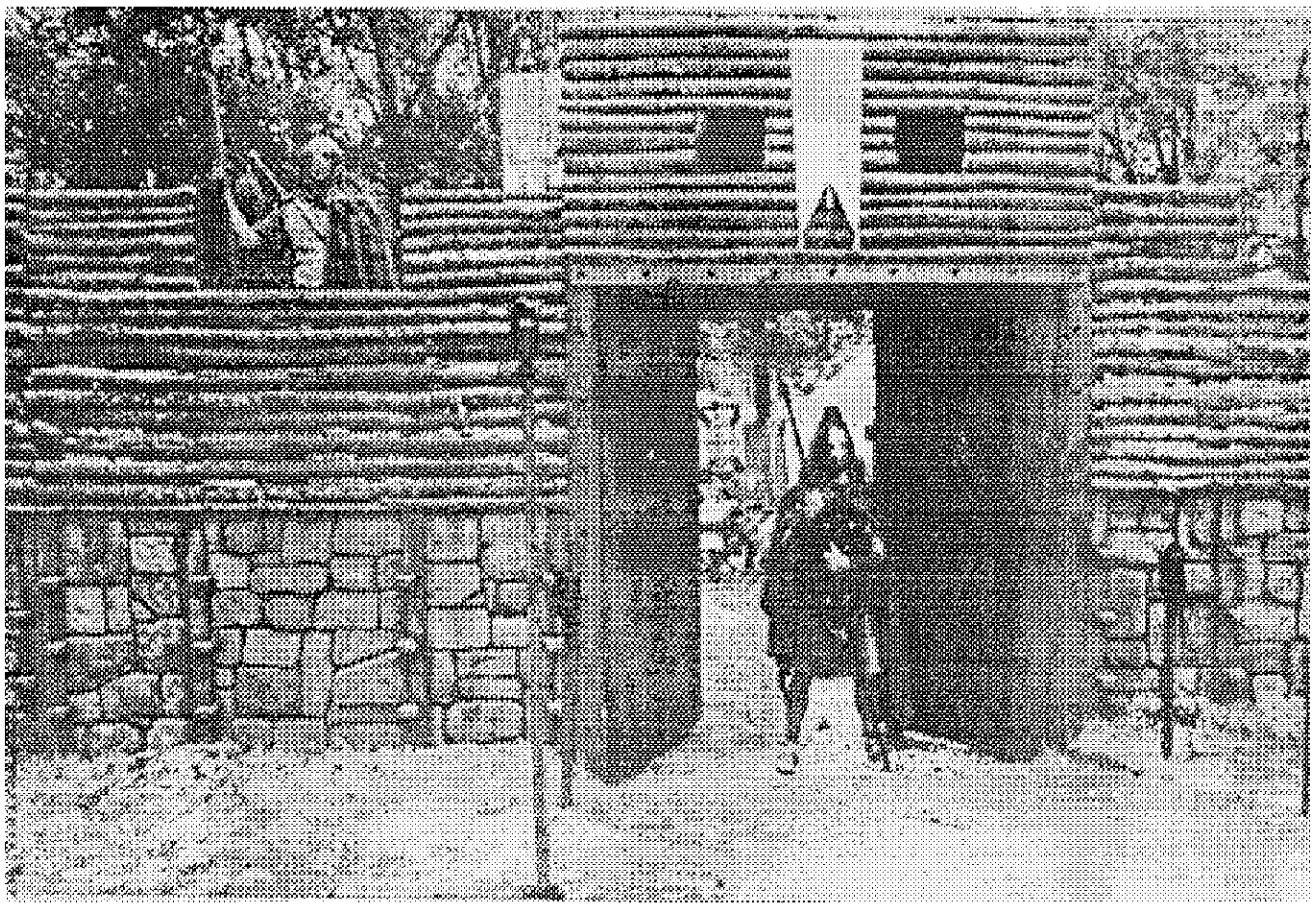
Cadbury Camp

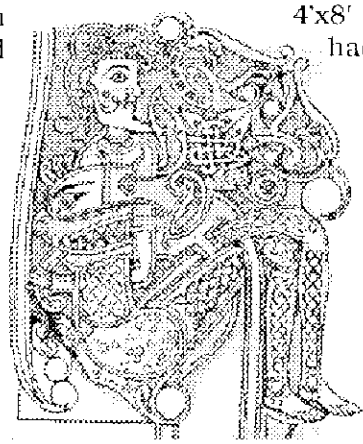
Reconstructing a Celtic Hillfort



By Matthew Power
Syr Arlof O'Donovae, Count of Aranmor

For almost everyone involved, the building of the Cadbury Camp gate at Pennsic XIX was an experience not soon forgotten To make this project possible required lots of volunteer work, a reasonable amount of cash (about $700.00 not counting the trailer), and, above all, a belief in the improbable.

The idea of building such a gate began with my own wish to have a palisade-type enclosure for the Trimaris Royal Encampment. Master Geoffrey suggested finding a historical precedent, and when we next met, I showed him sketches of the reconstructed Cadbury Camp, including the one shown at right. Geoffrey set to work designing the gate. We decided in advance that it would need to be lightweight, break down in sections no larger than 4'x8' (to fit in my 5'x10' trailer), and it had to look like the real thing.



Frame and Ramparts

In order to make the gate realistic both inside and outside, we had to build rampart and tower platforms that would support human beings. Our research showed the general layout of the ramparts, although these would likely have rested on earthen or stone embankments.

I found a deal on 8-foot "economy studs," and bought about 100 of these 2" x4"s for $.75 each. From this stock, we made all of the ladders (half-lapping the joints), the platform frames and vertical posts for the walls. The "stone" walls were accented by vertical posts set between the pieces of styrofoam. The small "nubs" notched onto these posts helped create the illusion that the stone was part of an earthen embankment.

The 2"x4"s also served as spacers in the huge doors on the central entrance, and we used three of them to frame the double doors.

Because board lumber was too expensive for the rampart platforms, we used 3/4' CDX plywood. To make the plywood look like boards, we used a router to add grooves to the wood's surface, then notched the ends of the platforms with a saw. When we stained the surfaces, we allowed the stain to settle in the grooves and add even more realism.

The Stone Fortified Lower Walls

The stones were carved from styrofoam and painted using spray guns. One element that added greatly to these stones was our ability to use double layers of styrofoam in some places, creating the illusion of 3-dimensional rocks jutting forth. Also helpful was Geoffrey's excellent spattering and color coordination between stones. The little wooden nubs helped in transport, because the allowed us to stack the panels back to front without damaging the styrofoam.

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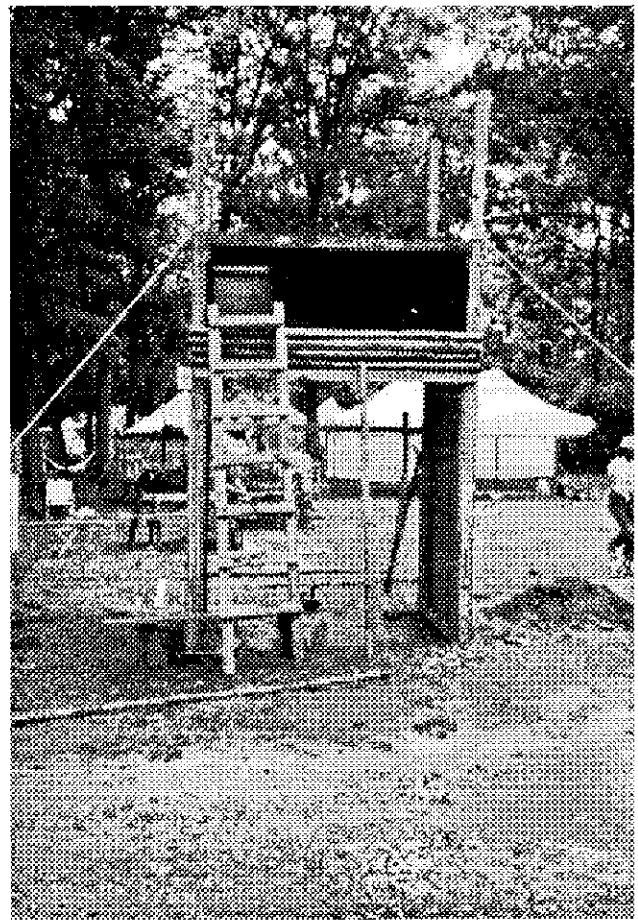
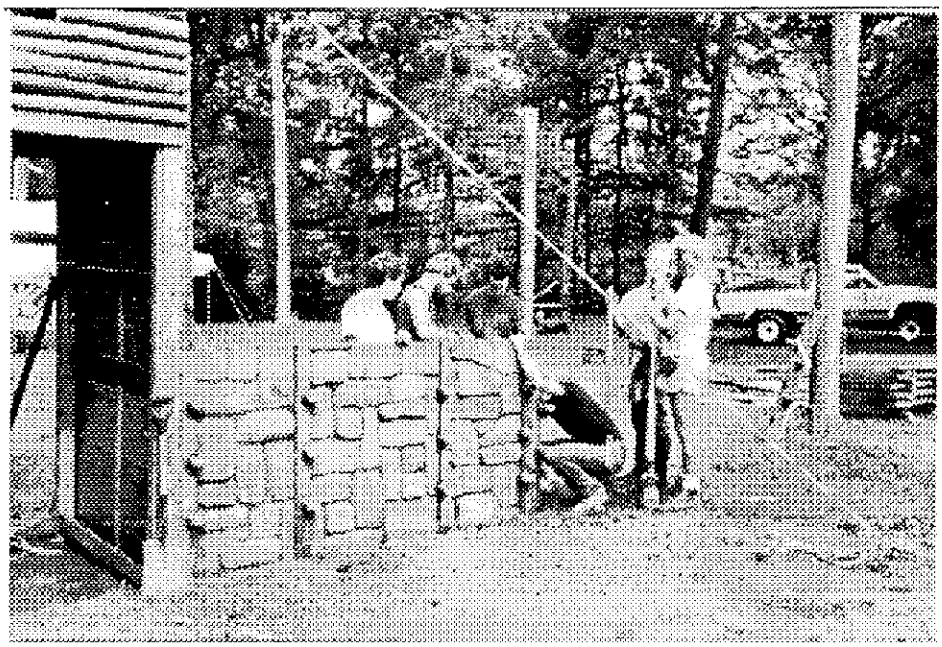


Raising the tower. The ground had to be leveled first. The ropes kept it stable while we added the walls.



Helpers and members of House Arannor dig trenches to level the walls

The Half Timber Upper Walls

I take special pride in this part of the reconstruction, because it showed how careful planning can pay off.

When Hilary and I returned home to Maine in the winter prior to building the fort, we had a mission. My father owns several acres of forest in Maine, woods that occassionally need thinning. One snowy afternoon, Hilary, my brother Tarok (the unfrozen Celt who only goes to Pennsic) and yours truly—went logging. I had estimated in advance the average tree size we would need, and how many would cover the walls. It was strenuous work, but we managed to get about 50 small logs back to the homestead, and set them on blocks to dry.

Months passed. Winter turned to spring. Coronation happened. Our friends from Maine invited us to an event in July. When we arrived we went back to the homestead and found our logs dried and secure.

We put them (they were still heavy) in the back of a truck and drove toward northern Maine, looking for a lumber mill. At the first place we stopped, I found a grizzled, red-bearded gentleman who said he could rip our puny logs in two—for a price. He spent two hours running that massive saw to complete our job. I winced as I asked him "How much?"

"Oh, ten bucks oughta cover it."

I gave him $20 and went away feeling guilty.

These logs, incidentally, did not travel with us back to Florida, where we pre-fabbed the rest of the gate. My brother brought the logs directly to Pennsic from Maine. Even when dry, they were extremely heavy. We attached the split timber to the vertical posts using long drywall screws, taking care to bury the heads of the screws.

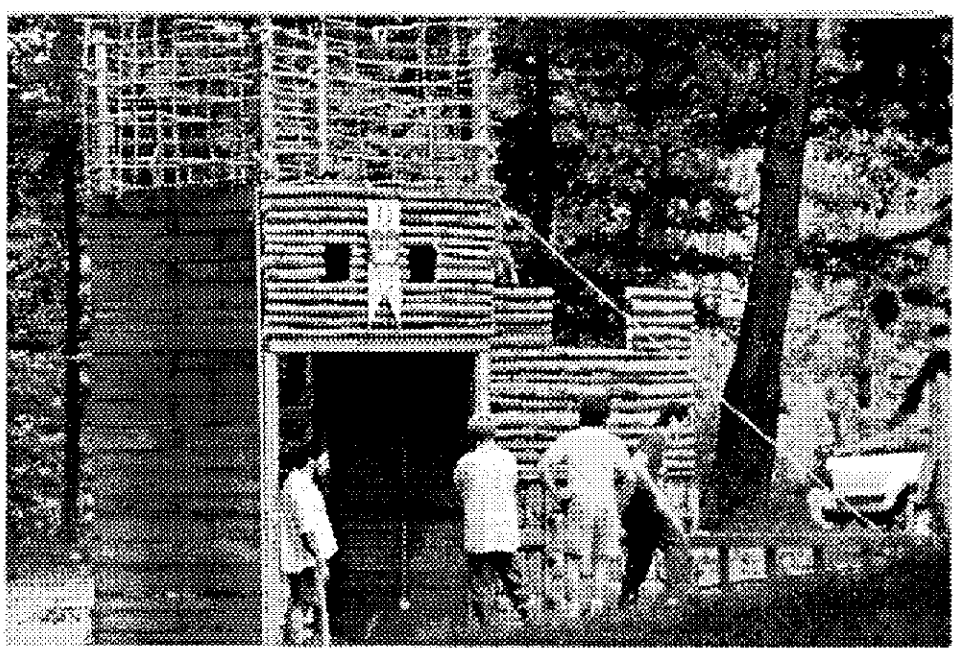
The Doors

Geoffrey did a masterful job on the doors. They were about 4 inches thick, with massive (false) iron bands and hinges and an interior bar to hold them shut at night. Both sides of the doors were covered with huge triangular studs like the ones seen on medieval drawbridges. Yet they were light enough to hang on standard door hinges.

Geoffrey constructed the doors by first making a frame of "2 x 4"s, then covering the frame with a single layer of 1/8" paneling (using the unfinished side out) as a base. On top of the base, he glued board-width strips from another piece of 1/8" paneling (or luan plywood). Careful painting, distressing, and sanding of the edges enhanced the illusion of massive doors.

For the hinges and iron straps, he used more pieces of 1/8" paneling, cut to shape, pounded with a hammer, painted flat black and glued in place.

The original brass stud came from a Spanish fort in Saint Augustine, Florida. Geoffrey borrowed one of the studs from the fort's huge front door to use as a model. He then made a multiple cast from plaster of paris, and used polyester resin



Above: The leather scroll, erected on a stand across from the gate.

Left: After leveling the tower and setting in the "stone" bas of the walls, the half-timber wall is raised up from the rear side and secured to the tower.

to cast the dozens of studs used on the door. Each stud was made with a drywall screw already attached, so it could be screwed on easily.

The Tower

The tower had to be at least 16' tall to achieve the desired look, so we decided to buy the four corner posts AFTER we reached the war, instead of hauling 16-foot beams from Florida. We bought pressure treated posts at a nearby lumber store because untreated lengths were unavailable.

The sides of the tower bothered us. We needed to cover a massive area of "wasted" space, much of which would be invisible from anywhere but inside the tower. Covering the area with boards would have been too heavy and very expensive, so we tried another stage technique. This time, we simply ripped 1/8" paneling (or luan plywood) into board-sized strips and attached then to 1"x 2" frames. We painted the "boards inside and out and even painted on false nails on the outside. We actually attached the paneling to the frames with a high-powered staple gun. To make the boards look thicker, we also notched the 1" x 2" where the crack between each board fell.

Inside the tower, Geoffrey added a weapons rack which he kept stocked with period spears (also fake). The rack, along with the ladder to the upper platform and the double candle chandelier overhead kept people from noticing the flimsiness of the tower walls.

We cut a few corners on the lattice work on top of the tower. Ideally, it should have been true wattle, a much closer weave of straight saplings. We were short on saplings, time and enthusiasm by that point, however, and the lattice work served well. We lashed it to the posts.

A note on erecting any tower. Before you stand anything tall up, the ground must be leveled. This can be done using a piece of string, a couple of wooden stakes, and a carpenter's level. Watch out for gas mains.

Final Details

As with any big project, the real truth is in the details. To enhance the "presence" of our gate, we added a simple log barricade on either side, and kept household banners subdued.

In addition, I made about 30 "Cadbury torches" (see article in this issue) to illuminate the gate at night. These made all the difference. You could see the gate from the other side of Cooper's Lake and beyond. At night, in the mist, with gallic warriors guarding the ramparts, it had a mystical feel.

We also added a "hitching post" of spare logs outside the gate, for wayward travelers to tie their

Countess Hilary (no, not THAT Hilary) stands inside the gate. Note the ramparts with ladders.

mounts. Just inside the gate we erected a fancy weapons rack, and required guests to "check" their weapons with the guard. Across the road from the gate, we set up a small stand with a leather scroll, explaining that this was indeed a reconstruction of Cadbury Camp, and naming those who helped build it. We also covered a very mundane tractor tire across from the gate with some flashy Celtic barding.

Now, you're probably wondering what happened to this gate.

Well, we burned it to the ground.

Everything but the styrofoam. Call me quirky, but I sometimes like to sacrifice things before they before they lose the magic. Some of the perpetual royalty wanted to buy it, buit I wouldn't risk having somebody set it up the next year with an inflatable dinosaur in the tower.

Not for sale.

Of course, I might feel differently about a permanent structure.

Now it's gone, but I know I've got another, better one inside me, just waiting to come out.