NO. XXXII.—DRY RIVER CHANNELS IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF
MUIRKIRK. By JOHN SMITH. With an Illustration.

[Read 10th January, 1895.]

WHILST hunting up archæological remains in the parish of Muirkirk in October, 1894, I stumbled across some curious old Dry River Channels, of which I shall now give a short account.

First.—For a short way in the neighbourhood of Priesthill the Ponesk Water flows west, then with a radius of about two furlongs it wheels round and flows through a deep glen in a south-easterly direction. Towards the south-west side of this bend there are—on the inside of the curve—two projecting promontories of rock, both of which have been cut off to a certain extent by two channels.

Plan of Dry River Channels, Muirkirk.

When on the high ground on the south side of the Ponesk Water I saw the first one—that lowest down the stream—for a time I was fairly deceived by it, believing it to be the ditch or moat of an ancient fort. After an examination I have now not the slightest doubt that the point of land cut off by this old high and dry channel has been used at one time as a fort. It is scarped round the side towards the stream, and right across the

centre of the ditch or channel there is an entrance roadway, raised 5 feet above the bottom, exactly in the manner we see adopted in connection with many of the existing old forts.

The length of this channel is 321 paces; it curves slightly, and towards its south-east end it is between 20 and 30 feet deep. It appears to be cut entirely out of solid rock, but towards its north-west end it is now partly filled up with peat. Here it widens out somewhat, the remainder being narrow at the bottom with steeply sloping sides. Both ends are high above the present stream, and there is no running water in it. The point of land cut off is 157 paces in length. (No. 1 on plan, p. 331.)

Second.—The next channel, which is a short distance north-west of the first one, lies at a lower level than it, but is considerably shorter and much wider. It also is cut out of the solid rock, and is high and dry above the present stream, cutting off a small point of land. (No. 2 on plan.)

Third.—The old road from Glenbuck to Dippal passes through this channel. It is about a mile from Spireslack, curves considerably, cutting off a hillock of land, and is both deep and wide. (No. 3 on plan.)

Fourth.—The fourth channel cuts across the felstone ridge in the neighbourhood, to the south of Nether Priesthills Cot (now demolished). It makes a long S-shaped bend 136 paces in length, is cut out of solid rock, and is at a great height above the water of the Ponesk Burn, and that of Stottencheuch. (No. 4 on plan.)

Fifth.—The fifth channel is continuous with the little stream which flows past John Brown's Monument. It is 730 paces in length, with a sinuous course. Its north-east end dips slightly towards the Patrick Burn, and the gap at the head of that stream has probably at one time been a continuation of it. There is a ditch along the bottom which requires to be kept clear by the farmer for drainage of the adjoining land. The bottom of this channel is much wider than that of any of those previously described, and it appears to be partly cut out of Boulder-clay. (Nos. 5 and 5a on plan.)

Sixth.—This channel commences on the side of the Rig Hill, is of full width *all at once*, and is high above the Dippal Burn opposite the shepherd's house. It cuts across the south-west brow of Rig Hill, and resembles a deep railway cutting; in fact, the shepherd on this hill has already set it down as a ready-made way

for the long-talked-of Muirkirk and Strathaven railway. It runs a slightly curving and sinuous course of 950 paces, the bottom opening out at one part to 20 and 30 yards. There are some curious hummocks along its south-west side, and it appears to be partly cut out of Boulder-clay. (No. 6 on plan.)

Seventh.—The seventh channel is the finest of the series. It commences wide and deep on the hill-side, and cuts through the same side of Rig Hill as the one previously noted, but considerably lower down. After a course of 1250 paces, it emerges on the flat land to the west of the bend of the Ponesk Water. It appears to be mostly cut out of solid rock, and is at parts 70 to 80 feet deep. At one place it widens out to 20 or 30 yards, and is sinuous in its course, curving towards the right. There is a ditch in it which requires to be kept open by the farmer for the drainage. At one part not far from its north-west end there is a breach in the south-west side where a small burn crosses on the level, leaving a small quantity of débris in it, but this stream can have had nothing to do with the cutting out of the channel. Near its western end there is a short curving dry channel, which at one time may have been continuous with number 7. (Nos. 7 and 7a on plan.)

If these channels have been cut during the glacial age—let us suppose during the latter part of it—then they may have been made at a time when the valley of the Greenock Water was choked up with ice, which came down from Middlefield Law and obliged the waters of the district to flow in a south-east direction towards the head of the Ayr Water.

If they are pre-glacial, it is difficult to understand how they escaped being filled up (at least partly) with Boulder-clay. From the nature of the ground and the great height at which they are placed above the present drainage of the district, it is quite out of the question that these channels can be post-glacial.

It is quite possible that the Ponesk Burn at one time flowed into the Greenock Water near Blackside, and the deep channel cut by it across the felstone ridge from the second channel in a south-east direction looks as if it had begun to be formed about the same period as those previously described; in fact it may be classed as one of the series, but the longest and deepest one.

For the photograph of the model from which the illustration has been taken, I am indebted to my friend, Mr. Robert Dunlop of Airdrie.