

# Great Archaeological Sites in Neath Port Talbot



## 3. BLAEN CWM BACH MARCHING CAMP



When the Romans invaded Britain, they came with a well-trained and well-organised army. In the end, it was too much for the local tribes, even the Silures of what is now South Wales, whose fighting qualities the invaders much respected. They were experts at surprise attacks, but the Romans already had a response to some of these tactics. When the army was on campaign and marching through hostile territory, the soldiers would dig in every night when they stopped to make camp to create defences against a possible night attack. They would dig a ditch and use the spoil to create a bank which would be reinforced by the stakes each soldier carried as part of his equipment.

Very few of these temporary camps have survived the vicissitudes of the past two thousand years, but one that has can be found at Blaen cwm bach (SS79709878), high above Tonna in the Neath valley, where it sits astride the ancient ridgeway route. The banks and ditches can still be seen clearly although erosion has done its best to level them. The camp is a long narrow rectangle covering an area of about 26.7 hectares, big enough to hold a large battlegroup. It is in fact the largest Roman temporary camp in Wales. However, the defences do not extend all the way around.

They are interrupted by gaps large and small, with the biggest gaps being in the middle of the long sides. We do not know whether these were left because there were natural obstacles there at the time, such as thorn bushes, or whether the gaps were created later when existing banks and ditches were ploughed away.

The best-preserved side is at the west, where one of the original gateways preserves its *titulum*, the short length of bank thrown up a short distance in front to prevent the enemy from being able to rush at it directly and overwhelm it by weight of numbers.



Blaencwmbach marching camp lies in fields right at the far end of Fairyland Road, Neath. It is crossed by a couple of footpaths, from which the best-preserved earthworks can be seen. Fairyland Road is single-track, with no opportunities for on-street parking. The nearest car park is 2km away in the Gnoll Country Park. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 170, Explorer Series sheet 165.

### Timeline (the asterisk indicates the time-span)



You can learn more about this site, and other similar archaeological sites in Wales, by going to <https://www.archwilio.org.uk/arch/>. Please read and observe the Conditions of Use. Blaen Cwm Bach camp has the PRN (Primary Record Number) 00616w. You can search for other similar sites here too. You can contact us via social media or through the methods given at the bottom of the page. See more about the Romans in South Wales at [http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/romans\\_in\\_south\\_wales/index.html](http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/romans_in_south_wales/index.html)