

Great Archaeological Sites in Cardiff



2. CAERAU HILLFORT AND RINGWORK



The summit of a steep hill on the southwestern edge of Cardiff is crowned by the banks and ditches that enclose a flat, roughly triangular area (ST13357500). This is Caerau hillfort, defended not only by the steepness of the natural slopes, but also by massive ramparts still well over 2m high, three of them on the west and north. On the eastern side where the ground outside is more level, there are two ramparts on the northern half. In the middle of this side the ramparts turn inwards to create an entrance, and to the south of it where there is a single massive rampart which runs just beyond the southern corner where there is another entrance.

Hillforts are typical of the Iron Age, although many continued in use in the Roman period and even later. But we now know that the story of Caerau is more complicated than that, thanks to the excavations carried out by Cardiff University with local volunteers <https://caerheritageproject.com/>.

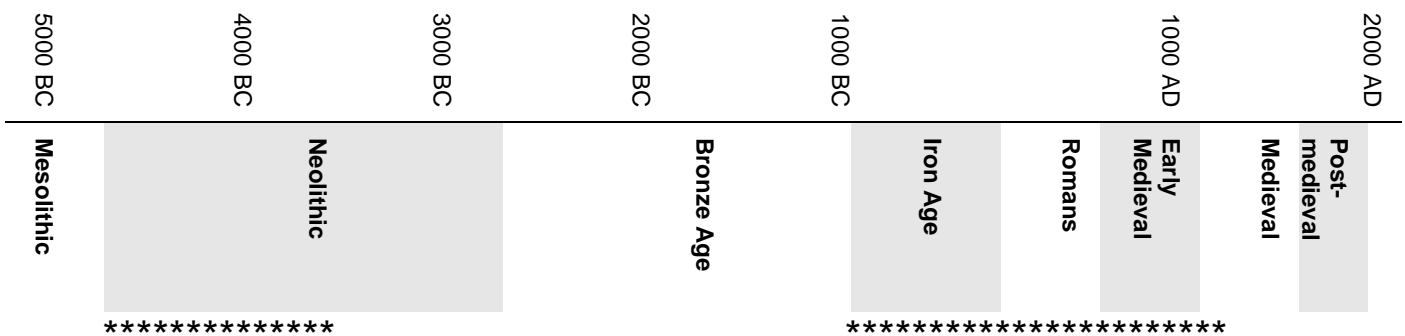
The story begins thousands of years before the Iron Age, in the Early Neolithic. An enclosure occupied part of the area of hilltop that was later to be used for the fort. However, it was not defensive, as there were gaps in the surrounding ditches, which had been dug at intervals over a long period of time. The only finds from them were Neolithic pottery and flints. No evidence has been found so far to show what this particular enclosure was for; although many archaeologists think that similar Neolithic enclosures from elsewhere in Britain may have been connected with mass gatherings.

All traces of this enclosure seem to have disappeared by the time that construction work started on the hilltop in the Iron Age. The first things to be installed, probably in the Early Iron Age, were roundhouses protected by a stout fence. Later on, in the Middle Iron Age, a larger area of the hilltop was enclosed by an earthen rampart. The people who built it also lived in roundhouses. Other Iron Age buildings represented by four stout posts set in square were probably for storage. Eventually the area where the roundhouse had been was covered by a cobbled surface, possibly a yard, and was used for dumping rubbish, presumably by people living elsewhere in the fort. The rubbish continued to accumulate throughout the Roman period. Later, some of the rubbish became incorporated in the rampart when it was raised and strengthened, possibly in the Early Medieval period. Finally, under the Normans, a small ringwork castle was built within the northeastern corner of the Iron Age fort, with a church next to it.



A footpath leads up to the hillfort from the Caerau area of Cardiff, postcode CF5 5QD. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 171, Explorer Series sheet 151.

Timeline (the asterisks indicate possible 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. The Iron Age fort has the PRN (Primary Record Numbers) 00093s, the church is 00094s and the ringwork 00095s. 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.