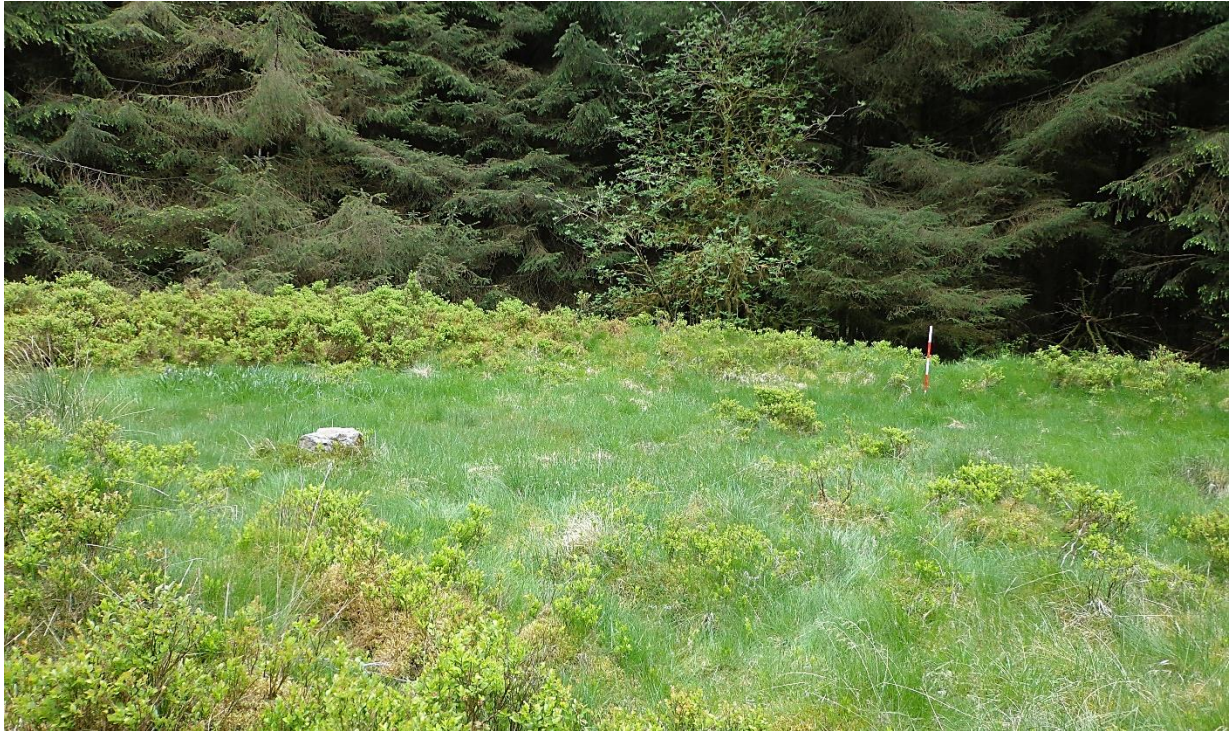


Great Archaeological Sites in Rhondda Cynon Taf



2. GWERSYLL HILLFORT AND CAIRNS



Tucked away in a clearing among the conifers of Gethin Forest at SO 0270 0403 is a surprise – two Bronze Age cairns within a small Iron Age enclosure. Only one side of the enclosure exists today, a semi-circular defence with a bank and a surrounding ditch with a counterscarp bank on its outer lip. A causeway leads through the ditch and counterscarp bank half-way along its length, but there is no corresponding gap in the main bank. No trace remains above ground of the rest of the circuit, but air photographs taken before the trees were planted show it as a very slight mark. Half buried in patches of bilberries in the interior are the cairns. They both consist of heaps of the local sandstone, and have been disturbed. Both have had their centres dug out, but there is no record of what was found, if anything. There is a large slab of stone in the middle of the bigger of the two, perhaps originally the capstone of a cist.

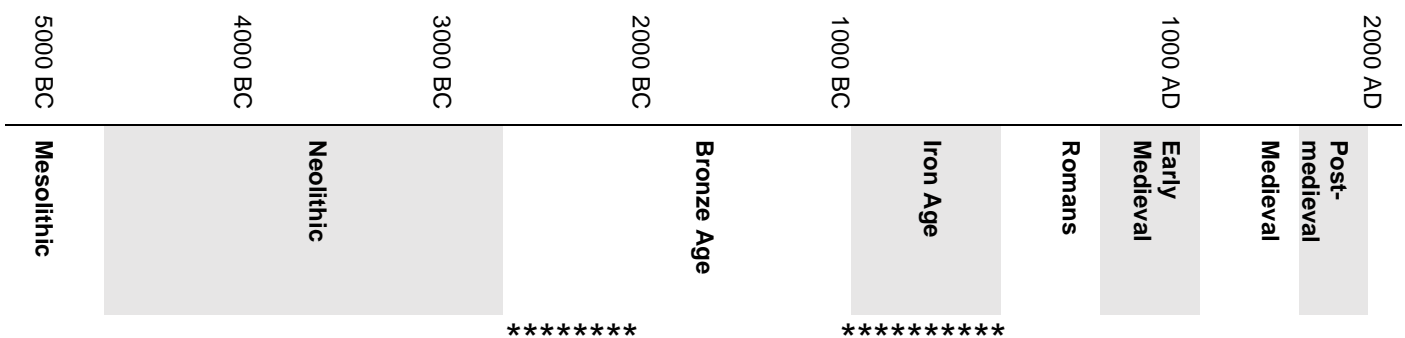
There are a few of places in South Wales where the builders of Iron Age forts constructed them around Bronze Age cairns. No effort seems to have been made to remove the cairns, suggesting that they were still considered to be important in the Bronze Age. Archaeologists tend to put hillforts and cairns in completely different categories, classing hillforts as defences and places to live, and cairns as something connected with spiritual life. But what if the Iron Age enclosure might not always be meant primarily for defence but could also be a way of setting aside an area of

ground and marking it out as special. Very few sites in Wales that have so far been recognised as sacred in the Iron Age, but there are also others where burial monuments of the Neolithic and Bronze Age have been succeeded by enclosures and houses in the Iron Age and Roman period, and they in turn succeeded by cemeteries and other evidence for Christianity in the Early Medieval period. So were the sites changing from religious to secular and back to religious again, or were the people living in the houses and enclosures fulfilling some sort of religious purpose all along? Does this explain why there was no need for the banks and ditch to go all the way round?



This group of sites is in a clearing completely ringed by trees in Gethin Forest, in the angle between the track leading along the crest of Twyn Gwersyllfa ridge, and Coed Morganwg Way. It's much easier to find if you have the appropriate GPS. This section of the Way runs from Gethin Woodland Park, where you can leave your car, to Cwmbach. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 170, Explorer Series sheet 166.

Timeline (the asterisks indicate the possible 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 hillfort has the PRN (Primary Record Number) 00483m, and the cairns are 00484m and 00485m. 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 prehistoric monuments at http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/fun_rit/english/fun_ritmain.html.