

# Great Archaeological Sites in Swansea



## 4. HILLFORTS ON HARDINGS DOWN



Hardings Down is one of the smaller hills on Gower, but surprisingly it is home to no fewer than three Iron Age hillforts or enclosures. The strongest and most impressive by far is the one on the western tip of the hill (SS 4343 9078), where the steepest slopes overlook Llangennith. This was so steep that the fort's builders did not seem to think just a rampart was needed at this point, although the rampart has an outer ditch on it other sides. The defences mark out a roughly oval enclosure at the edge of the escarpment, sloping up markedly towards the a local summit at its eastern end. The east side is less well naturally defended, and two additional ramparts and ditches were constructed here. Nowadays it is easy enough to outflank them, but perhaps they were originally supplemented at the ends by palisades or some sort of natural barrier such as gorse thickets.

An excavation in 1962 showed that the main rampart on the north-east side was built as a dump of earth and rubble dug from the ditch, and that it had originally been faced by blocks of stone. It would have been at least 5m high to the bottom of the ditch, which was V-shaped. The opening for the gateway was in the north-eastern corner was also faced with blocks of stone around the toe of the ramparts, and in between them four postholes suggest that there had been a gate tower. Two hut platforms in the interior were also excavated. Both of them had been occupied by roundhouses.

The fort on the summit of the hill (SS 4370 9064) has never been excavated. It is much larger, but apart from one very short length of stone-faced rampart, only the eastern side of the defences remain to be seen and it looks as though this fort was never finished. No hut platforms have been identified. A much smaller bank, also apparently unfinished, encloses an outer ear on the east. The third fort is near the bottom of the hill on its north side. It is much smaller and has only a single bank and ditch, and might perhaps be taken for a medieval ringwork except for the fact that it contains a circular hut platform. It too has never been excavated.

Since only one of the forts has been excavated, and even then only a tiny proportion was investigated, the reason why there are three forts, and how they relate to each other, remains a mystery.



Hardings Down is an area of open access common land a short distance south-east of Llangennith village. There is limited space to pull off the unclassified road between Llanrhidian and Llangennith, and a bridleway leads up the hill via the track to Upper Hardingsdown Farm. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 159, Explorer Series sheet 164.

**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 three hillforts have the PRNs (Primary Record Numbers) 00025w, 00027w, 00028w, and 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.