

Great Archaeological Sites in Newport



1. TREDEGAR HILLFORT



Towering above the M4 between junctions 28 and 27 is a steep hill. On top of it, in a commanding position overlooking the River Ebbw (ST28958684), is Tredegar hillfort, also known as Gaer fort, constructed in the Iron Age. It follows a pattern fairly common in South Wales, with two sets of defences spaced widely apart.

Archaeologists have speculated that perhaps this arrangement may have been chosen so that livestock could be brought in and pastured safely in the space between.

At the east side, the defences have been dug away by later quarrying. The natural slope of the hill is steepest on the west side, where a counterscarp bank was thrown up on the outside of the outer ditch. The greatest need for defences was on the north side where the ground is relatively level, and here the outer bank and ditch are at their most massive. Although there are a number of gaps, the original entrance seems to have been from the north-east where the ends of the outer rampart turn in

slightly at either side of an opening. Opposite, a wide causeway leads across the inner ditch and through the inner rampart into the central enclosure. Whereas the outer enclosure is roughly circular, the inner enclosure is closer to a polygon. The defences around this part of the fort are strongest on the west and south sides. Outside the main part of the hillfort, a third bank and ditch enclose an annexe on its south side.

There has never been any excavation of any part one of the hillfort so we do not know how it was used in the Iron Age, whether people lived there permanently or whether it was only used from time to time – perhaps as a refuge during times of trouble. The earthworks in the interior are very much more recent – the remains of a golf course! Although some people in the past have misinterpreted as the remains of a medieval ringwork with an outer bailey, in the belief that the Normans had reused this splendid defensive site as they did at Twmbarlwm, a few miles up the River Ebbw, they are actually a tee and a bunker.

The site is partly overgrown by trees and bracken. Nowadays it is managed as a nature reserve, but in the late 17th and early 18th century it was used as a focal point for the landscaping of the grounds of Tredegar House.

Tredegar hillfort stands in the Gaer Nature Reserve, where there is free access. The main entrance is from Basseleg Road (NP20 3PX), where there is space for a few cars to park. There is also pedestrian access from a number of points on the Gaer estate off Shakespeare Crescent. The nearest railway station is Pye Corner on the Cardiff to Ebbw Vale line, and the Sirhowy Valley Walk long-distance footpath crosses the site. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 171, Explorer Series sheet 152.

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. Tredegar hillfort has the PRN (Primary Record Number) 00049g. 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.