

# Great Archaeological Sites in Caerphilly



## 3. TWMBARLWM



On the top of Twmbarlwm Mountain (NGR ST 2421 9261), with stupendous views over the surrounding hills and across the Bristol Channel, is a large hillfort, one of the most iconic monuments of the Iron Age in South Wales. This was such a good position that it was also utilised by the Normans for one of their early earthwork castle. Their motte can still be seen at the eastern of the hillfort, with its earthworks cutting through the prehistoric defences. No archaeological excavation has taken place on either.

The people who built this hillfort chose a site that was strongly defended on all sides by natural steep slopes, which can even in places be described as being precipitous. They enhanced these by constructing a bank and ditch around the summit. Even after two millennia or more of the effects of the weather on these defences, there is still a height in places of 3m from the bottom of the ditch to the top of the bank. The ditch is 12m wide at the top, and in order to make it more difficult for attackers to retreat out of danger when they were being bombarded in the ditch with missiles by the defenders, another bank was constructed on it outside lip.

We are not entirely certain where the original entrance was. There is a break in the northeast section of the defences, but as this is next to the motte, and it is possible that it was connected with the Norman castle rather than the use of the hillfort in prehistory. A more likely candidate for the original entrance is the gap in the middle of the hillfort's southern edge, where the steepness of the natural slope would prevent it from being rushed, and the topography would channel an enemy along the lip of the ditch where he would be exposed to defenders on the rampart.

There are also gaps in the defences on the western end which have led to suggestions that the hillfort may have been unfinished, but when the vegetation covering them was burned in 2018, it was possible to see that they had been caused when sections of the bank were knocked down to fill the ditch.

The top of Twmbarlwm Mountain is open access land overlooking Risca and Crosskeys, where there is a railway station on the Cardiff to Ebbw Vale line. It is also accessible from Cwm Carn along the Raven Walk, with car parking at Cwmcarn Forest Driver Visitor Centre, or Pegwm-y-Bwlch. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 171, Explorer Series sheet 152.

**Timeline** (the asterisk 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. Twmbarlwm has the PRN (Primary Record Number) 00114g, 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.