

**Darren Camp, Banc-y-Darren, Trefeurig, Ceredigion (SN 6790 8302; SAM: CD028; NPRN: 303592)**

*To be read in conjunction with the RCAHMW survey interpretation plan*

Darren Camp, is a prominently sited hillfort, located on the spur of an ascending ridge between the valleys of Nant Silo and Peithyll. It is a Univallate fort, comprising a single strong rampart, which on the north and east sides has been created through the modification of the steep natural slope and here survives as a scarp some 3.8m high. On the west and south sides of the fort, where the slope is much gentler, the rampart stands as a bank on average 12m wide, with the prominent external face some 4.5m high and the internal face some 2.5m high. Clear terminals along this rampart mark the position of three contemporary gateways, between 2-3m wide. The main entrance was on the west with a second situated directly opposite on the east, for which traces of the former **approach route** can be seen on the lower hill slopes to the south east and with the third entrance situated at the northern tip of the fort.

Excavation at the south terminal of the main entrance in 2005, revealed what appears to be three phases of construction - two phases of soil and stone embankment (the latter from material scraped out of the internal quarry ditch), with the third phase consisting of a large (approx. 1m. diameter) white quartz boulder together with a dry stone-walled revetment with rubble infill. The quartz boulder was carefully placed to allow for full visual impact to anyone approaching the fort from the south-west, and represents a statement of prestige often found at hillforts. Similar entrance settings have been noted at other Iron Age Hillforts in the Aberystwyth area, such as Cnwc y Bugail near Llanafan in the Ystwyth Valley (Driver 2004 & 2005). At the rear of this gate terminal what is thought to be a small 'guard chamber' was also uncovered, consisting of a well preserved inward curving section of dry stone walling made up of quarried flat stones laid upon the foundations of large water-worn boulders. Dating these different phases is difficult, although it can be suggested that the small cordoned pot sherd of Late Bronze Age Date, of a similar type to that recovered from the early Breidden hillfort in Clwyd, found here during the 1996 excavation may well relate to the early soil and stone phase of the fort, with the final phase enhancement occurring in the Iron Age.

Surrounding the western, and part of the northern and southern sides of the fort are a series of outworks, most likely constructed to provide extra protection for the most vulnerably protected area of the fort. Here four lines of outworks cut off the ridge and create a strongly defended approach route up to the main entrance and thus forced people to approach from the south rather than the more obvious west. The exact line of these outworks are obscured by an early (at least Medieval) opencast **mine** and its accompanying spoil tips (NPRN 33835), as well as from a now redundant **field boundary**, the bank and ditch of which cuts across the two innermost outworks, and from the enhancement of a **well/spring** which cuts into the innermost outwork..

In broad plan however, they consist of three sections of earthwork (**outworks 1-3**) which run broadly parallel to the main fort rampart together with a fourth section (**4**) to the south-west of the fort which traverses the hill side in a north-west to south-east direction. Outwork **1** is situated between 3 and 8m from the foot of the main rampart and comprises two sections on either side of the main gate. The northern section runs for 48m and appears to have been cut by outwork **2**. It takes the form of a very denuded bank 3m wide and 0.2m high, possibly created from the upcast of the slight ditch 0.1m

deep and 4m wide at the foot of the main rampart. The denuded nature of this section and the fact that it is cut by outwork 2 may indicate that it went out of use and was not maintained from an early date. The section running south from the main gate is however more prominent, it survives as a scarp created through the modification of the natural slope, and varies in height between 0.3 and 4.5m.

Outwork **2** is of a different character to that of outwork **1** and there is a clear indication that it may have been modified at some stage. It appears to have been continuous in its 170m length and would have blocked any approach to the main entrance from the west. One (possibly original) stretch of this earthwork survives to the north of the fort, where a scarp 0.2m high runs from a rock outcrop. This section is then destroyed by the mine some 12m to the north of the north entrance. At this point the earthwork seems to have been modified as running out from the north gate are traces of an earthwork which seems to have formed the outer face of the ditch around the base of the main rampart and also the inner face of an outer bank. This cuts across the outwork **1** at **a**, and has then been partially destroyed by the later mine, although intact traces of wall-courses formed of weathered rounded stones have been traced in the grassed over and eroding section of the mine and are thought to represent the original outer wall face of this outwork. Emerging from the mine the outwork survives as a denuded and partially interrupted bank of clay and rubble construction between 5 and 8m wide and an average 1.4m high, with hints of an outer ditch 3m wide and 0.1m deep. Where the outwork cuts across onto steeper sloping ground to the south of the fort it becomes much clearer with the main outer face standing some 2.3m high.

It has been suggested that the modification of this earthwork, was possibly to accommodate what was (then) a small opencast mine trench, as it is felt inconceivable that the occupants of the hillfort could not have known about the silver-lead vein they had cut into, during the initial construction of the ditch for outwork **2**. The 2005 excavation does much to support this theory, with evidence highlighting two phases of activity. The first phase of rampart appears to have consisted of a soil mound overlain by quarried shale rubble and soil, with a revetment wall composed of rounded water-worn boulders presumably collected from the floor of the Silo and Peithyll, together with a small rock cut ditch as seen in the section at **b**. The second phase (excavated at **c**) involved the deepening of the ditch to create a substantial rock cut defence, some 2.8m deep which followed the line of the silver-lead vein pinching out at its base to only 0.3m wide. Whether or not the first excavators began by taking advantage of an original hollow, it seems clear that they came upon the vein at shallow depth and then started to follow this downwards, thus recutting the bottom of the original ditch. Both the original ditch cut and re-cut was carried out using some sort of blunt instrument, the rock being effectively 'battered'.

Outwork **3** is situated some 35-55m away from the main rampart and runs parallel and 20m away from outwork **2**. Little of this rampart survives; it has either been destroyed or covered in spoil from the mine. The best preserved section is a 40m stretch of clay and rubble bank 8m wide and 2.1m high to the south and east of the mine. The 2005 excavation did however reveal that the 28m stretch of bank 3m wide and 0.8m high just to the west of the mine and its associated spoil heap may well mark the continuation of this feature.

The final section of outwork (**4**), consists of a 38m stretch of bank 9m wide and 4m high, with the slight traces of a ditch 3m wide and 0.5m deep, which traverses the main hill

slope in a north-west to south-east direction. It appears to have been cut by the mine and seems unlikely to be associated with the mining activity here. The fact that outwork **3** has a clear terminal at the meeting point with this bank, does suggest that it forms part of the forts defences and it can therefore be interpreted as a block to prevent access between outworks **3** and **4** and thus made clear that the approach up to the entrance ran between outworks **1** and **2** which could also have functioned as a public annex.

The interior of the fort is uncultivated and rocky, with sections of exposed bedrock dominating the eastern half of the forts interior. Here the main eastern rampart is set lower than the bedrock and it could be suggested that this was intentional and would have added to the strong defensive impression of the fort. Behind the main rampart around nearly the whole circumference, there is a broad (8m wide) quarry ditch, which may have been utilized as a settlement area. Elsewhere across the interior, there are the slight traces of terracing to create platforms which due to its sheltered position may well have been used for settlement. The survey by Ceredigion Archaeological Survey (Thorburn 1997) did however identify at least 10 possible terraced areas, although the subsequent survey by RCAHMW did not identify them all and it is felt that a number of these terraces may simply result from the underlying geology. One area in the northern half of the interior does however contain at least 2 small scooped **platforms**, some 5m in width.

The presence of a cairn (NPRN: 404049) 0.5m high on the summit of the hill in the southern part of the forts interior indicates activity here from at least the Early Bronze Age, prior to the construction of the fort. The cairn is now surmounted by a quartz cross which marks a relatively recent cremation burial (a villager, pers. comm 1996). It can also be suggested that the very slight mound 4.5m wide and 0.3m high, 10m to the north of this cairn, may also be a cairn (NPRN: 404050).

## **References**

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