

Cornwall's Archaeological Heritage

A field guide to accessible sites



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Castle-an-Dinas

St Columb Major

Restormel
NGR: SW 9455 6237



Castle-an-Dinas is one of the largest and most impressive hillforts in Cornwall, sited in an imposing position on the summit of Castle Downs with extensive and panoramic views across central Cornwall to both north and south coasts. It features in Cornish legend as one of the seats of the Duke of Cornwall and folklore has it that Cador, Duke of Cornwall, and Ygraine, King Arthur's mother were killed here. That the site has attracted such mythic associations may be a reflection of its continued significance from its prehistoric beginnings into the Post-Roman and Early mediæval periods. The very limited excavations that took place in the 1960s were unable to provide evidence to confirm this, however.

The hillfort is surrounded by three ramparts and ditches, one of which is of a noticeably slighter construction and indicates either an earlier phase of occupation, or the remodelling of the ramparts. There are two Bronze Age barrows, now in a rather poor condition, in the interior and these may represent the initial use of the site around which the later enclosures were built. Alternatively, the several gaps within the slighter bank have led to speculation that they are multiple entrances and this is in fact the remains of a Neolithic causewayed enclosure which would pre-date the barrows and indicates an even earlier origin for the site.

The small amount of material excavated from the interior suggested that the main period of use fell within the Iron Age when the ramparts would have stood at their highest, probably surmounted by a wooden palisade. The main entrance lies on the south-west side, and the gateway had a cobbled surface. There is documentary evidence for a causeway leading away to the west towards Trekenning, but nothing visible remains today. The problem of providing a water supply for hilltop sites such as this is often remarked upon; at Castle-an-Dinas there is a spring in the northern part of the interior against the rampart walls and cobbling around this area and a gully leading towards a hollow, possibly for water collection, may be associated with the main occupation of the site. Although the excavations recovered little evidence for activity in the interior, it is likely that there would have been timber roundhouses and other structures and work areas. Hillforts are considered to have provided a focus for the community, symbolising of the wealth and power of the tribe, and providing a central place for social ceremonies, trade and ritual.

A 20th century wolfram mine has left its mark on Castle-an-Dinas with level platforms cut into the prehistoric ramparts to carry an aerial ropeway known as a 'blondin' which would have transported skips of ore from the mine on the northern side of the hill to the processing works on the south. Despite continuous activity on this hilltop for the past two thousand years, this is still one of the most impressive and popular archaeological sites in the county.

The monument is managed by Cornwall Heritage Trust and is accessible by public footpath across open ground from both the north and south.

Sources

Thurley, S and Preston-Jones, A, 1990. *Castle-an-Dinas - its Preservation Above and Below Ground*. English Heritage.

Wailles, B, 1963. *Excavations at Castle-an-Dinas: Interim Report* in *Cornish Archaeology* 2, pp.51-54.

How to get there



The monument is managed by Cornwall Heritage Trust and is accessible by public footpath across open ground from both the north and south.

[Map link](#)

Ground & Aerial photographs



Illustrations & Plans



Nearby sites

- ▶ Roche Rock Chapel
- ▶ St Piran's Church