

Great Archaeological Sites in Neath Port Talbot



2. MYNYDD Y CASTELL HILLFORT, MARGAM



The most well-known monuments of the Iron Age are its hillforts. One of the best in Neath Port Talbot can be found in the deer park of Margam Country Park. Most of the high ground at the north-east side of the park forms the ridge of Mynydd Margam, but at its eastern end a separate smaller, rather lower and very steep hill (SS 8061 8655) is crowned by a hillfort. This is Mynydd y Castell, 'Castle Mountain'.

A massive bank and ditch constructed all the way round the summit encloses a D-shaped area. Only a part the spoil from the ditch was used to create the rampart. The rest was piled up around the outer edge to create a counterscarp bank, another barrier to anyone trying to attack the fort. The modern entrance is from the northeast, but modern quarrying has confused the layout of the defences too much to be sure whether this is original, like the entrance on the south-east side, where a ramp from the south cuts through the counterscarp bank. The ends of the inner bank are turned in slightly at this point to provide more space for defenders to oppose enemies who were trying to rush the gate.

Inside, the ground slopes up from north to south. 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 slight bank that divides the higher part from the lower is not part of the original arrangements – it is an old field boundary. Another recent introduction is the large concrete-lined basin at the southern end of the hillfort. This was a reservoir built to supply Margam Castle with water. We do not know whether its construction involved the disturbance of any Iron Age remains. A circular depression a short distance away has been interpreted as possible platform for a roundhouse, but other theories suggest it may be connected with the reservoir or with the summerhouse that was here at the beginning of the 19th century.



The hillfort is in Margam Country Park on the hill directly behind Margam Castle, and can be reached by paths that lead round the north side of the hill. See Margam Country Park website for opening hours and charges – visit the remains of the abbey there too. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 170, Explorer Series sheet 165.

Timeline (the asterisks indicate the possible time-span)



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