

Rampart and ditch of an unfinished promontory fort on Chillerton Down, known as 'Five Barrows'

Chillerton and Gatcombe, Isle of Wight

Details

The monument includes an earthwork rampart and ditch of what is believed to be an unfinished Iron Age promontory fort lying partially across the narrow point of a long steep-sided spur which runs north east-south west on the chalk downland hills of the Isle of Wight. The rampart stands to c.3m high and is c.85m long and 5m wide on top. The total width of the rampart base is c.18m. On the south west side is a ditch from which material was quarried during the construction of the rampart. This ditch can be seen as a slight depression 18m wide and c.0.5m to 0.7m deep. The top of the rampart is sunken in places giving it the appearance of separate mounds, hence the monument being called 'Five Barrows' on old maps. Six sherds of pottery, thought to be Romano-British, were found in 1952 by Professor Hawkes in a ploughed field south west of the rampart. A flint scraper has also been found in the vicinity of the monument.

The post and wire fences to the south and east sides of the monument are excluded from the scheduling, but the ground beneath is included.

Source: Historic England

Reasons for Scheduling.

Promontory forts are a type of hillfort in which conspicuous naturally defended sites are adapted as enclosures by the construction of one or more earth or stone ramparts placed across the neck of a spur in order to divide it from the surrounding land. Coastal situations, using headlands defined by steep natural cliffs, are common while inland similar topographic settings defined by natural cliffs are also used. The ramparts and accompanying ditches formed the main artificial defence, but timber palisades may have been erected along the cliff edges. Access to the interior was generally provided by an entrance through the ramparts. The interior of the fort was used intensively for settlement and related activities, and evidence for timber- and stone-walled round houses can be expected, together with the remains of buildings used for storage and enclosures for animals. Promontory forts are generally Iron Age in date, most having been constructed and used between the sixth century BC and the mid-first century AD. They are broadly contemporary with other types of hillfort. They are regarded as settlements of high status, probably occupied on a permanent basis, and recent interpretations suggest that their construction and choice of location had as much to do with display as defence. Promontory forts are rare nationally with less than 100 recorded examples. In view of their rarity and their importance in the understanding of the nature of social organisation in the later prehistoric period, all examples with surviving archaeological remains are considered nationally important.

Although the Chillerton Down promontory fort was probably never completed, the intention to construct what would have been the only Iron Age fort on the Isle of Wight is illustrated by the earthwork known as 'Five Barrows'. This survives well and is of interest as one of only relatively few examples nationally, of an unfinished Iron Age fortification.

Sources:

Books and journals

Isle of Wight archaeological index, (1979)

Historic England

<https://ancientmonuments.uk>

Coordinates

Latitude: 50.6527 / 50°39'9"N = Longitude: -1.3224 / 1°19'20"W

OS Eastings: 447996.909809 = OS Northings: 83888.995747 = OS Grid: SZ479838

Mapcode National: GBR 8BW.VX9 = Mapcode Global: FRA 873B.YDM

Entry Name: Rampart and ditch of an unfinished promontory fort on Chillerton Down, known as `Five Barrows'

Scheduled Date: 10 November 1964

Last Amended: 6 March 1995

Source: Historic England

Source ID: 1010012

English Heritage Legacy ID: 22029

County: Isle of Wight

Civil Parish: Chillerton and Gatcombe

Traditional County: Hampshire

Lieutenancy Area (Ceremonial County): Isle of Wight

Church of England Parish: Gatcombe St Olave

Church of England Diocese: Portsmouth