

= Dolebury Warren =

Dolebury Warren (also known as Dolebury Camp) is a 90 @. @ 6 hectares (224 acres) biological Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and ancient monument near the villages of Churchill and Rowberrow in North Somerset , part of South West England . It is owned by the National Trust , who acquired the freehold in 1983 , and managed by the Avon Wildlife Trust .

Standing on a limestone ridge on the northern edge of the Mendip Hills , it was made into a hill fort during the Iron Age and was occupied into the Roman period . The extensive fort covers 9 @. @ 1 hectares (22 acres) with single or double defensive ramparts around it . The name Dolebury Warren comes from its use during the medieval or post medieval periods as a rabbit warren . The topography and differing soil types provide a habitat for an unusually wide range of plants , attracting a variety of insects , including several species of butterfly .

= = Geology and location = =

The site is at the top of a Carboniferous Limestone ridge on the northern edge of the Mendip Hills . It forms part of the Black Down Pericline where the limestone has been exposed because of erosion of the overlying Triassic Dolomitic Conglomerate . The soil depth varies considerably , owing to the slope within the site and the effects of its exposure to the wind .

Dolebury Warren overlooks the villages of Churchill and Rowberrow and provides good visibility across the surrounding lower lying areas as far as the Bristol Channel . The highest point , at the eastern end of the site is 183 metres (600 ft) OD , with the hillfort being up to 50 metres (160 ft) below this . It is the starting point for the Limestone Link , a 36 miles (58 km) long @-@ distance footpath which ends at Cold Ashton in Gloucestershire .

= = Description = =

The fort covers an area of 9 @. @ 1 hectares (22 acres) and commands views over the surrounding countryside . The hill fort is bivallate on three sides and a single rampart on the southern side which is protected by a steep slope . It is almost rectangular with the longest axis from east to west being 487 metres (1 @, @ 598 ft) long and 200 metres (660 ft) from north to south , surrounded by a rampart which is around 4 metres (13 ft) high and 12 metres (39 ft) wide . It was protected by a limestone rampart with a ditch and counterscarp on all sides but the South . There is an inturned entrance on the West and an annexe of 0 @. @ 4 hectares (0 @. @ 99 acres) protecting the easier Eastern approach .

= = History = =

= = = Etymology = = =

The name Dolebury means the idol hill from the Old English dwol and beorg .

= = = Early = = =

Hill forts developed in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age , roughly the start of the first millennium BC . The reason for their emergence in Britain , and their purpose , has been a subject of debate . It has been argued that they could have been military sites constructed in response to invasion from continental Europe , sites built by invaders , or a military reaction to social tensions caused by an increasing population and consequent pressure on agriculture . The dominant view since the 1960s has been that the increasing use of iron led to social changes in Britain . Deposits of iron ore were located in different places to the tin and copper ore necessary to make bronze , and as a result trading patterns shifted and the old elites lost their economic and social status . Power passed into

the hands of a new group of people . Archaeologist Barry Cunliffe believes that population increase still played a role and has stated " [the forts] provided defensive possibilities for the community at those times when the stress [of an increasing population] burst out into open warfare . But I wouldn't see them as having been built because there was a state of war . They would be functional as defensive strongholds when there were tensions and undoubtedly some of them were attacked and destroyed , but this was not the only , or even the most significant , factor in their construction " .

Various artefacts have been uncovered representing the long period of occupation of the site at Dolebury Warren . These include flintwork from the Palaeolithic , bronze spearheads , Bronze Age pottery , and Roman pottery and coins . There is evidence of occupation of the site during the Iron Age . The defences and Celtic field systems there date back to the 7th century ? 3rd century BCE , though they might mask earlier developments . The hillfort was occupied until approximately 100BC , though it is possible that it was reoccupied in the Roman and post @-@ Roman periods . The archeological consultant Peter Leach has suggested there may even have been a Roman Temple built within the hillfort , while aerial photographs suggest the probable remains of an Iron Age or Roman coaxial field system . Local historian Robin Atthill also suggests that Dolebury may have re @-@ emerged as an important centre of population in the 5th century .

= = = Medieval = = =

In the medieval or post @-@ medieval period , the remains of the hillfort were used as a rabbit warren which was used to breed rabbits , providing valuable meat and fur . Many warrens were surrounded by banks or walls to prevent the rabbits from escaping ; escaped rabbits caused damage to nearby farmland and meant a loss in profit . The warren at Dolebury is completely enclosed by the substantial ramparts of the Iron Age hill fort and thus provided an ideal location to breed rabbits . The presence of pillow mounds and vermin traps demonstrate man 's management of the site for husbandry . Ridge and furrow agriculture has also been identified , from aerial photographs , within the fort . Some of these structures , along with earlier Iron Age features , have been damaged by subsequent quarrying which may have been for lead , ochre or calamine . The site was described by John Leland in the 16th century . A three @-@ storey building , believed to be the warrener 's house and possibly a watch tower , surrounded by a garden , was in ruins by 1830 .

= = = 19th and 20th centuries = = =

The site was visited in the early 19th century by John Skinner and surveyed in 1872 by Charles William Dymond . In 1906 the Mendip Lodge Estate , which included Dolebury Warren , was sold . It was first scheduled as an ancient monument in 1929 . In 1935 Dolebury Camp was bought by Miss V. Wills of the W.D. & H.O. Wills tobacco company to prevent development . Dolebury Warren was notified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1952 . The freehold of 92 @.@ 657 hectares (228 @.@ 96 acres) was acquired by the National Trust in 1983 from A. G. Gosling , D. F. Gosling and J. M. Kent , and is managed by the Avon Wildlife Trust .

= = Ecology = =

The site of the fort and warren is now grassy slopes which attract a wide range of wild flowers and butterflies . The differing soil types provide suitable habitats for both acid- and lime @-@ loving plants . Kidney vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*) , harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*) and woolly thistle (*Cirsium eriophorum*) thrive on the dry stony soils . Heath bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*) and wood sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*) are found in more acidic areas . The higher areas support bell heather (*Erica cinerea*) , western gorse (*Ulex gallii*) and common heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) . Trees and shrubs include the wayfaring tree (*Viburnum lantana*) , guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*) , whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*) , privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*) and dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*) .

Scarce plants found at the warren include knotted pearlwort (*Sagina nodosa*) , and slender bedstraw (*Galium pumilum*) . Butterflies recorded here include the small blue (*Cupido minimus*) ,

marbled white (*Melanargia galathea*) , dingy skipper (*Erynnis tages*) , grizzled skipper (*Pyrgus malvae*) , small pearl @-@ bordered fritillary (*Boloria selene*) , and wall brown (*Lasiommata megera*) .