

= Eddisbury hill fort =

Eddisbury hill fort , also known as Castle Ditch , is an Iron Age hill fort near Delamere , Cheshire , in northern England . Hill forts are fortified hill @-@ top settlements constructed across Britain during the Iron Age . Eddisbury is the largest and most complex of the seven hill forts in the county of Cheshire . It was constructed before 200 ? 100 BC and expanded in 1 ? 50 AD . In the 1st century AD , the Romans slighted the site . It was reoccupied in the 6th ? 8th centuries AD , and an Anglo @-@ Saxon burh was probably established at Eddisbury in 914 . In the medieval and post @-@ medieval periods quarrying and farming have damaged the site . Ownership is currently split between the Forestry Commission and a local farm . Eddisbury is protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument .

= = Background = =

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 " .

= = Location and layout = =

Although there are over 1 @, @ 300 hill forts in England , they are concentrated in the south of the country , with only seven in Cheshire . Eddisbury is the largest and most complex of the Cheshire hill forts . The forts form two geographical groups of three , with Maiden Castle on its own in the south of the county ; Eddisbury hill fort is in the southern group with Kelsborrow Castle and Oakmere hill fort . Located at grid reference SJ553694 , Eddisbury Hill , in common with all of the hill forts in Cheshire , sits on part of the central ridge that runs north ? south through the county .

Eddisbury hill fort follows the contours of its hill and measures 200 by 380 m (660 by 1 @, @ 250 ft) . It is surrounded by two ramparts with a ditch in between . The ditch is 10 m (33 ft) wide and 0 @. @ 5 m (1 @. @ 6 ft) deep . The inner bank lies between .

= = History = =

There is evidence of Bronze Age activity at Eddisbury . Before 250 BC , a palisade was erected on Eddisbury Hill . The first hill fort was built in 200 ? 100 BC . Eddisbury hill fort has two main archaeological phases . In the first phase of activity , the site was defended by a single rampart and ditch ; this type of hill fort is termed " univallate " . The settlement was concentrated on the eastern part of the fort 's hill . During the second phase , the fort extended westwards , occupying the entire hill top , and the defences were enhanced through the addition of more ramparts and ditches . The enclosed area expanded from 5 @. @ 5 acres (22 @, @ 000 m²) to 7 acres (28 @, @ 000 m²) , and the defences covered 15 @. @ 5 acres (63 @, @ 000 m²) , 6 acres (24 @, @ 000 m²) more than previously . There are two theories about the expansion of the fort : either the growth westwards and the extended defences were completed at the same time or that they were separate

events . If they happened at the same time it is likely to have been in the interest of making the site easier to defend . If they were separate , the ramparts may have been extended to incorporate an entrance at the western end of the site . The expansion phase dated to 1 ? 50 AD .

In the late 1st century AD , the hill fort was destroyed by the Romans . The defences were slighted to prevent the site being reused . In the 4th ? 6th centuries AD , the hill fort was reoccupied and huts were built over the inner rampart . A later hut , dating from the 6th ? 8th centuries , has also been discovered . Eddisbury has been suggested as the site of an Anglo @-@ Saxon burh built in 914 by Æthelflæd , daughter of Alfred the Great , and recorded in the Mercian Register in the Anglo @-@ Saxon Chronicle but this has been queried . In the medieval and post @-@ medieval period , the south @-@ east part of the site was inhabited , at one point being used as a forester 's lodge . The centre of the fort has been cultivated since at least the 19th century , still undergoes ploughing , and was used as a quarry .

Eddisbury was excavated between 1935 and 1938 by W. J. Varley , who also undertook excavations at Maiden Castle nearby , as part of his investigation into the origin of Cheshire 's hill forts . The structure was made a Scheduled Ancient Monument in 1995 , giving Eddisbury protection against unauthorised change . The site has been assessed as being " at high risk " due to ploughing on the site , causing erosion . Five of Cheshire 's seven hill forts have been assessed as being " at high risk " compared to 15 % of North West England 's Scheduled Monuments . Although the western and northern parts of Eddisbury are owned by the Forestry Commission , the rest of the site is part of Old Pale Farm .