

LITTLE SOLSBURY HILL CAMP

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Little Solsbury Hill Camp (N.G. 769679) is the name of a prominent isolated hill of the Cotswold escarpment dominating Batheaston from the north. It is cut off from the main massif of the Cotswolds by the deep valley of Chilcombe Bottom. The shape of the hill is triangular with a slightly domed top, which is surrounded by a feeble-looking defensive bank. There is an inturned entrance at the nw corner. Tactically its defensive position is almost perfect, particularly as the slopes up to it are very steep all the way round.

The interior of the camp itself contains no spring nor has any well been located. However, round the perimeter of the camp, and about 50 feet below the rampart top, is a series of small springs coming out at the top of a bed of clay.

It is possible, at least in part, to reconstruct the history of the site, and to draw inferences.

The first arrivals probably cleared off the thin surface covering of soil and probably also a thin layer of the bed rock and then set up their huts well back from the edge of the hill. The huts were supported by substantial posts, six to nine inches in diameter, set into holes dug to a depth of two feet into the native rock by a jumping bar technique, the only technique that could produce the type of holes found with the tools available. The form of the huts was not absolutely determined but the pattern of the postholes in the limited area excavated did not fit round huts and so, by inference, the huts were more or less rectangular.

Somewhat later, but not very much later, the rampart was constructed. The rampart was in fact a stone wall, which still stands over four feet high in places. This wall was 20 feet thick and originally at least 12 feet high. It was faced inside and outside with well constructed dry-stone walling, with vertical faces, and some of the facing stones were so big that it must have required considerable effort to move them. The core of the wall was composed entirely of freshly quarried, clean Oolitic Limestone of the hill. This stone can only have come from the face of the hill and from quarries, not just from scarping. Thus the builders increased the effective height of their single defensive wall by a good many feet and perhaps as much as 20 feet.

It is difficult to estimate the length of the next stage but it was long enough to allow an appreciable mass of rubbish to accumulate at the foot of the inner face of the wall and for repairs

to be needed to the huts. Then the site was overwhelmed. But the occupation did not cease nor was there any evidence for a break. The new huts were poorly constructed with shallow postholes in the rampart rubble. Though the evidence is slender it is a reasonable inference that the Iron Age 'A' fortress was overthrown by the incoming people with the Glastonbury Lake Village type of pottery.

Subsequently the site was totally abandoned and never re-occupied. Why and when this occurred is not known but the striking absence of any evidence of Roman influence or contacts suggests that the site was abandoned not long after 100 B.C. Where the people moved to is unknown.

The excavations also showed that the occupation area extended inwards from the inner face of the wall for about 40 feet. Evidence from other parts of the camp suggests that there was a band of hut sites right round the interior of the camp of about this width or less, while the large central area was left clear for, perhaps, cattle grazing or corn growing.

A pattern is beginning to emerge from this and other excavations in the area from Glastonbury to Bath. Camps of Iron Age 'A' date destroyed, soon abandoned and not re-occupied. Where there are camps close together the tentative pattern is for one to have been Iron Age 'A' and to have been sacked followed by the construction of another camp on a site close by and the second camp to be the larger. The pottery from the second site is unmistakably Iron Age South-western 'B' of the clay mound people of the Glastonbury Lake Village. It is beginning to look as if these new immigrants were very warlike and took over by main force territory already extensively settled. Even at the Glastonbury Lake Village itself there is plenty of evidence for this sequence. But over the area as a whole the evidence is still scanty and at the most what has been stated above can only be regarded as a working hypothesis. Much more information is required to establish it as a fact.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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