

CISSBURY RING

Cissbury Ring, or Cissbury Hill is the highest point in the Borough of Worthing, rising to 183m or 602 feet. Historically it formed part of the parish of Broadwater, becoming absorbed into the borough in 1902. Much of the land adjacent to Cissbury was only incorporated in 1933, when land previously part of Findon and Sompting parishes was moved into Worthing.

The name 'ring' refers to the vast elliptical earthwork that encloses 24 hectares or 62 acres of the highest part of Cissbury. The earthwork, including a rampart, ditch and outer rampart are the remains of a hillfort – the second largest in the country – that was constructed in c.250 BC, during the Middle Iron Age. Far older than the hillfort is the extensive

remains of Neolithic flint mining that dates back to before 4000 BC and is the second largest flint mining complex in the country.

The name 'Cissbury' derives from the mistaken belief by sixteenth and seventeenth century antiquarians that the hill was named after Cissa, the supposed leader of Saxon invaders who settled in this part of Sussex during the fifth century AD. The hill was also known as 'Caesar's Hill,' from the equally incorrect assumption that the Roman emperor once made his 'camp' here. Local people simply referred to it as 'The Bury,' a general term used by Sussex country people for any hill crowned with a prehistoric earthwork.

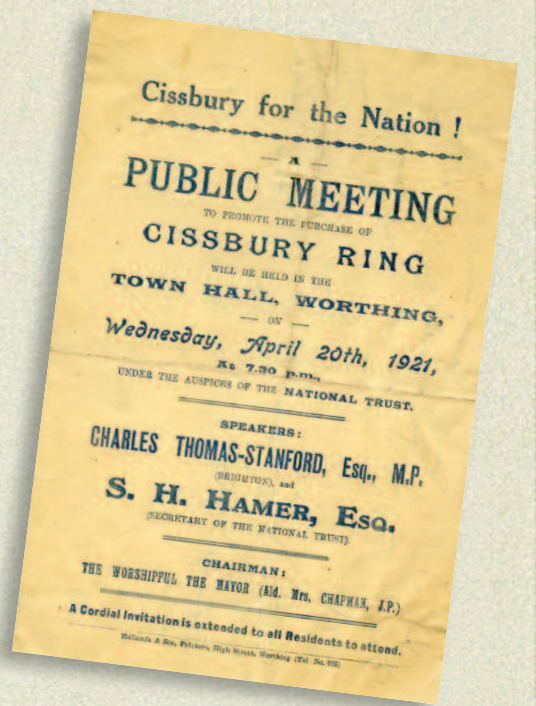
As well as being a site of great archaeological importance, Cissbury is also home to a great deal of flora and fauna, much of it highly localised and rare.

Directions

We recommend starting this trail from Storrington Rise car park (**route 1**), although this is a longer walk it benefits from ample car parking spaces. Alternatively, a shorter (but steeper) route leads from the car park at the eastern end of Nepcote Lane (**route 2**). This is a small car park and is often full, particularly on warm sunny days!

Both car parks are accessed via the Findon Road (A24). For Storrington Rise car park (travelling from Worthing), turn right into May Tree Avenue, then first left into Storrington Rise. The car park is located at the point where Storrington Rise bears to the right. There is a car park sign and a clearly visible entrance.

For the 'Nepcote' car park, travelling north from Worthing on the Findon Road (A24), turn right into Nepcote Lane. This turning will be reached at the point the Findon Road becomes dual carriage. Follow Nepcote Lane as it bears to the left. You will shortly come to Nepcote Green on your right, and then to a junction, where you turn right. After 1km you will see the metalled road ends and turns into a trackway, the car park is on the left.



In 1925, following a public appeal, money was raised to purchase Cissbury Ring on behalf of the people of Worthing. Four years later ownership was transferred to the National Trust.

Approach route 1

Follow the footpath signposted ahead of you for 500m. Look over to your right and observe the lower slopes of Mount Carvey stretching down towards the residential properties – mainly bungalows – in Storrington Rise and Shepherds Mead. These properties were built following a planning inquiry held in 1962-63 that allowed for the development of 126 acres of land on the proviso that a further 100 acres should be protected against development in perpetuity. There was considerable embarrassment thirty years later when Worthing Borough Council itself promoted an A27 by-pass scheme across this land, only to be reminded by protestors of the covenants that they themselves had entered into to protect the land.

At one time most of the land around Cissbury was 'unimproved chalk grassland,' the 'downland turf' celebrated in verse by Kipling and others. A considerable area was ploughed up for agricultural purposes during the Second World War and this continued into the post war period. In 1968, Molly Dallas, the grand-daughter of former landowner, Lt. Col. Wisden, and her friend, Eileen Malcolm, led an unsuccessful campaign against the ploughing up of the remaining greensward. "visually," Mrs Dallas protested, "the approach to Cissbury has been ruined."

Nearly 30 years earlier, in 1930, there was consternation locally, when developers built the first houses in Findon Valley (prior to that time the valley was entirely rural, with just the occasional cottage and barn). The consternation was not so much due to the proposed houses, as to the massive sign formed of letters cut into the turf and lined with chalk that the developers had cut into the western slope of Mount Carvey, advertising the Cissbury Down Estate. According to Arthur Beckett, President of the Society of Sussex Downsmen, the sign was 520 feet long and each letter was 45 feet high and could be easily read at Highdown Hill more than two miles away.

The developers retorted that the letters were only 20 feet high and assured a concerned public that, "Suggestions that we are going to erect bungalows or anything of that kind is groundless."

"Our aim," the statement continued, "is to develop an estate strictly in harmony with the beauties of the Sussex Downs."

Since 2009, Worthing Downlanders have been pressing Worthing Borough Council to allow 'open access' to all walkers at Mount Carvey and near-by Tenants Hill.

Continue along the footpath until you come to a small wood where you will find the path divides. Take the path that carries ahead, not the turning to the left. Cross the stile and walk up the field, bearing slightly to the left.

To your right you will see the remains of a Bronze Age (2,500–800 BC) 'bowl' barrow. This barrow was still a clear landmark in the 1920s, and may have been degraded by a combination of Second World War military activities and later twentieth-century land management.

The path is indistinct, but shortly you will see a further stile. Cross here and ascend the footpath onto the ramparts of Cissbury Ring. (**B**)

Approach route 2

With the car park behind you, enter by the gate in front of you and walk straight ahead. Presently you will cross over a bowl like depression in the ground.

Cissbury Dewpond and Fairy Shrimp

This is the remains of the Cissbury dewpond. Dewponds were created from the seventeenth century onwards to provide fresh water on the downs for sheep, cattle and horses. They were lined with clay or, as in this case, puddled chalk. Despite the name, these ponds were principally filled with rainwater rather than dew. The remarkable fairy shrimp lives in this habitat. These tiny and extremely rare creatures can lie dormant for years until the pond fills with water. Vulnerable to predators, they cannot survive in permanent ponds.

Continue up the incline and across through the gate in front of you. (**A**)



Birds and Butterflies of Cissbury

These woods are home to many migrating birds, including whitethroats, blackcaps, willow warblers and stonechats. The wheatear, was once a common migrating bird, but its numbers were decimated during the nineteenth century by Sussex shepherds who would trap the birds in their hundreds and sell them to upmarket London restaurants, where they were much in demand as a delicacy.

Rare butterflies can also be found at Cissbury, including the Chalk Hill Blue, the Adonis Blue, and the Dark Green Fritillary.

Continue up the path (which may be slippery in wet weather) until you come to the ditch and ramparts of the hillfort. A series of steps will help you ascend to the interior. This modern entrance to Cissbury was first opened up during the Second World War.

Take the footpath that runs on top of the inner rampart and turn right. After 400m or so you will notice that the land to your left is marked by undulating ground, with hollows and depressions, many filled with gorse and brambles.



Cissbury Ring

Both routes now combine as the trail continues around the ramparts of Cissbury Ring. (**B**)

The Flint Mines

The entire north-eastern section of Cissbury contains the remains of over 270 mine shafts that extended down into the chalk to a depth of 12m (40 feet). The mounds around the shafts are spoil heaps, while the smaller mounds in between are the accumulation of flint chippings, struck off during the process of making flint axe heads. Mining took place at Cissbury throughout the Neolithic period (4000 – 2500 BC) and for upwards of 1000 years into the Bronze Age (2500 – 800 BC). This activity took place long before the hillfort was constructed in about 250 BC. It is sobering to consider that the people who built the hillfort are nearer in time to us than the hillfort builders were to the first flint miners. Mining took place at Cissbury for

upwards of 2,500 years. Nor was it operating in isolation, other, smaller flint mines, were located close by at Church Hill, Blackpatch and Harrow Hill. Although Grimes Graves in Norfolk is the largest assemblage of flint mines in England, these four West Sussex sites taken together are much larger. Five thousand years ago, Cissbury was at the centre of the Neolithic industrial revolution.

Why mine flints?

But the question remains, why mine? Could not the flints simply have been gathered from the surface or collected from the seashore? Flints exposed to the elements – to wind, rain, hot and cold temperatures, are more fragile than the flint that runs in bands or 'seams' through the heart of the chalk. This 'tabular' flint is what the miners were after. They would dig out the first seam, and when that was exhausted, they dug down further to the next seam, and so on. Close inspection of an exposed chalk cliff will reveal the black bands of flint running in horizontal lines through the body of the chalk.

Flint is very hard (harder than iron) and very sharp. It makes an ideal tool, and with so much of the material readily available, supply was not a problem. The miners, having exposed the seam, would then dig out galleries extending from the shaft like the spokes of a wheel. They used deer antlers for picks and shoulder blades for shovels.

All this seems very obvious today, but it was not until the later nineteenth century that the purpose of these mysterious pits was correctly identified. People had assumed that the pits were contemporary with the hillfort. Some speculated that they were storage pits, or shelters, or even places of sacrifice. It was Colonel Lane Fox (who later rose in rank to General and changed his name to Pitt-Rivers to receive an inheritance) who first proved that the pits were older than the hillfort and that they had been mine shafts. He was able to show that the ditch of the hillfort cut through several pits which meant that the pits had to be older than the fort.





Miners and Serpents

During the 1870s, Pitt-Rivers, and his colleague, Park Harrison, excavated several of the pits and were able to prove they were mine shafts. They found evidence of the miners’ work and even evidence of the miners themselves – their bones! Local legend claimed that tunnels led from Offington Hall to Cissbury, at the end of which was buried treasure. But the treasure was guarded by fearsome snakes or serpents that would attack anyone who attempted to retrieve it. With this in mind, it is amusing to wonder how the locals might have reacted to Pitt-Rivers unexpected encounter with a flint miner, as retold in his memoirs –

‘Presently a well-formed and perfect human jaw fell down from above, and looking up we could perceive the remainder of the skull fixed with the base downwards, and the face towards the west, between two pieces of the chalk rubble. When I saw this I hollered out so loudly that Mr Harrison, who happened to be outside at the time ... thought [the gallery] must have tumbled in, and came with a shovel to dig us out. It was some time before I could make him understand that we had added a third person to our party.’



Members of the Worthing Archaeological Society visit Cissbury in October 1924
(West Sussex County Council Library Service – www.westsussexpast.org.uk)

Old Road to Steyning

As you stand with your back to the southern entrance of the hillfort, leading diagonally to your right in a north-east direction is a very old trackway, bounded on both sides by low embankments or ‘lychetts’. At one time the road from Broadwater to Steyning passed this way over Cissbury and is clearly marked on a map of 1802.

Beacon and Pond

Still with your back to the southern entrance, but looking diagonally in a north west direction is what is believed to be the remains of a beacon, erected in 1588, and lit to warn of the approach of the Spanish Armada as it sailed up the coast. Observers on Cissbury were well placed to spot the invasion flotilla and the blazing beacon would have been seen in towns and villages right across the Sussex coastal plain.

Continue walking for about 400 metres until you come to the eastern entrance of the hillfort.



At this point, as you look into the fort, to your right is the remains of a **Neolithic enclosure**, possibly for the folding of livestock.

Standing on the rampart, looking over to your right – you will see stretching to the east, Lancing Ring, the

Other archaeologists followed in the wake of Pitt-Rivers, most notably Christine and Herbert Toms in the 1920s. However, it was the digs in the 1950s, led by retired Worthing postman John Pull, that added considerably to the story of the Cissbury flint mines. In 1953, another human skeleton was discovered by John Lucas, a member of Pull’s team. This skeleton proved to be that of a woman, aged about 20 years and 5 feet 1.5 inches tall. The skull found by Pitt-Rivers was also that of a woman. Could it have been that mining was a female occupation? Not a possibility that seems to have been considered in the 1950s.

Hills, Houses and a Mill

Continue walking around the hillfort rampart, until you come to the southern entrance. This is a wide gap in the earthwork and it will be obvious when you arrive.



As you walk, to your right you will be able to look over to Church Hill, and beyond that to the north-east, Blackpatch and Harrow Hill. To the south-east you will see the mass of housing in Findon Valley and the houses of High Salvington beyond. If you look closely you will see High Salvington (formerly Durrington) Windmill. This is a post-mill that dates back to 1750, and is believed to be the oldest surviving windmill in Sussex. An earlier mill stood on the site from at least 1615.

Strawberries and a downland stalwart

If you are following this trail in June, walk up amongst the bramble bushes and you will find that some of those growing closest to the ground are actually strawberry bushes – wild strawberries. The berries are



Adur valley, Truleigh Hill (with communications masts) and beyond that Devil’s Dyke. The large chalk cliff in the Adur valley was created as a consequence of quarrying chalk for cement production – the quarry and cement works closed 20 years ago.

Continue for another 200 metres and you will come to a solitary tree with a bench in front of it, facing northwards towards Chanctonbury Ring.

This bench was originally placed here in 1995 to commemorate the life of **Captain Bill Jaeger** (1922 – 1995), who devoted the last years of his life to campaigning successfully against proposals to route an A27 by-pass over land to the north of Cissbury.

Continue walking and on your left you will observe a number of mounds and depressions.

These collections of earthworks, although appearing very similar in appearance to the untrained eye, are a mix of Neolithic, Iron Age/ Romano-British, and Second World War features. Much damage was done to the archaeology on Cissbury during the 1939–1945 war, with several heavy guns being dug into the hillside.

Those on route 2 will soon come to the steps that lead back to the Nepcote Lane car park. Those on route 1 will need to walk another 400m before meeting their return path back to Storrington Rise car park.

very small but also very sweet and delicious (after washing!). You will also see there is a wooden bench. This bench commemorates the life of **Constance Scott** (1929–1995), one time borough councillor and county councillor. She was mayor of Worthing in 1978 and for several years chairman of the Coast and Countryside Committee. At one time she was a lone voice on Worthing Borough Council in opposing the preference the Council had for routing an A27 by-pass through the downs close to Cissbury. These plans were rejected at a public inquiry.

The Hillfort



Downs at Cissbury from High Salvington, c.1910
(West Sussex County Council Library Service – www.westsussexpast.org.uk)

The Iron Age people, sometimes confusingly referred to as the ‘Celts’ or ‘Ancient Britons,’ arrived on these shores in three distinct waves of immigration starting in around 800 BC. These first settlers are believed to have come from an area of Europe that is in present-day Austria. Later settlers came from across the Channel in Gaul (modern-day France).

The hillfort at Cissbury is believed to have been constructed by the middle wave of incomers, or possibly by the existing population against the arrival of these new tribes, in around 250 BC. It is hard to exaggerate what an amazing achievement of Iron Age engineering was accomplished at Cissbury. The fort consisted of an outer and inner rampart with a ditch in between. Surmounting the inner ditch was a wooden revetment consisting of between 8,000 and 12,000 whole timbers. An area of 24 hectares or 62 acres is enclosed within the inner ramparts. Today, at its highest point, the inner rampart rises to 8.6m above the depth of the ditch. The ditch itself averages a depth of 1.9m and is up to 5m in width.

Given the inevitable collapse of the ramparts over the intervening 2000 years and the filling up of the ditch, it is easy to imagine how formidable the Cissbury fort must have appeared when newly constructed, with its great wooden palisade surmounting the earthworks. How many thousands of people would have been needed to have completed this work during the course, as is believed, of one summer? How long would it take to build today with all our modern technology? Only Maiden Castle in Dorset covers a larger area than Cissbury but that hillfort only beats Cissbury because of its extensive and concentric ramparts and ditches. The area enclosed within the ramparts is smaller at Maiden Castle than at Cissbury.

Why was it built?

The question remains, why build such a vast fortification? If it was a refuge in time of danger, it could have accommodated the entire population for many miles around. There is no evidence that large numbers of people lived here permanently. In fact, very few people seem to have lived here at any given time.

One thing is for sure – it was not built as a defence against any Roman invasion. The local tribe were in alliance with Rome and welcomed the legions when they came in 43 AD. The local chieftains were well rewarded with fine opulent villas and lucrative trading links across the free-trade zone that was the Roman Empire. At the end of the Roman period, in the fourth or fifth centuries, Cissbury does appear to have been refortified in response to the attacks of pirates and invaders from northern Europe.

The possibility does remain that Cissbury may have had a ritual significance. Rather like a medieval cathedral, its primary purpose may have been tied in with religious practices rather than military defence. This was certainly the case at Chanctonbury, three miles to the north, where two temples flourished during the Roman period, with evidence of animal and even human sacrifice having being practised.

It has also been suggested that much later, in the early eleventh century, the royal mint at Steyning was moved to Cissbury in order to secure it from marauding Vikings. A resistivity survey carried out in 2000 suggested that the fort may have been set on fire at some time, but no date for this event was suggested.

WORTHING HERITAGE TRAILS 11 CISSBURY RING



Flint Mines and Hillfort

Duration: Route 1 (yellow) is 5km and will take up to two hours. Route 2 (green) is 3km and will take up to one and a half hours.
Terrain: Both routes include walking on earth, chalk and flint paths and over undulating grassland. We regret that these routes are not easily accessible for wheelchair users or for push chairs. Please beware that chalk paths can be slippery, especially after heavy rain. Shoes or boots with a firm tread should be worn.

www.worthingheritagetrails.org.uk

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powered by iwalk



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For details of local train and bus timetables and routes see www.westsussex.gov.uk/travelinfo



More information about Worthing can be found at www.visitworthing.co.uk
www.worthingarch.co.uk
www.worthingsociety.org.uk