



Martinsell Hill & the Giant's Grave

At 289m Martinsell Hill is the highest point on the Pewsey Downs and provides a panoramic view of Salisbury Plain; on a clear day the spire of Salisbury Cathedral can be seen 25 miles away on the southern horizon.

On the summit plateau of the hill are the traces of an Iron Age hillfort of 32 acres, known as an univallate fort from the single boundary ditch and rampart that surrounds it. The Mid Wilts Way skirts the southern boundary of the fort.

Some 1km to the south-west, along a ridge forming a natural causeway, is another but much smaller Iron Age hillfort. Built on a promontory, it is known as the Giant's Grave from the significant barrow-like rampart at its centre.

The steep slopes which surround both hillforts reinforce the defensive nature of the manmade ramparts. Nevertheless, modern scholarship suggests that in general Iron Age hillforts were as much settlements for ceremonial purposes as for communal refuge, and the ridge between the hillforts is believed to have been a site for competitive feasting.

In much later centuries it became a custom on Palm Sunday for teams of local youths to hit a ball from the base to the summit of Martinsell using primitive hockey sticks. Oranges were then thrown from the top for the youths to charge down after them, and another sport was to use horses' skulls to glissade down the steep slopes!



Martinsell Hill



View from Martinsell Hill