



2,500 years of history

the Wrekin Hillfort

The People's Mountain

The Wrekin is Wellington's little mountain, its paths pounded by the feet of hundreds of people from near and far every week. Rising from the flat ground of the Severn flood plain, the hill is a landmark visible from all round the county; welcoming us home when we've been away. For hundreds of years people have been drawn to climb it for its grand views, its potential for adventure and for the sense of distance from the routines and dramas of everyday life.

Affection for the Wrekin is centuries-old. Every feature of the hill has earned a name from the Raven's bowl pool to the Needle's Eye – a craggy outcrop near the summit. Here is the ultimate symbol of localness; tradition has it that only when you have passed through the cleft between the rocks can you consider yourself a true Salopian.



Swing boats and gingerbread

Summer fairs brought merry-making to the hill for hundreds of years. Swing boats, gingerbread and ale booths appeared for The Wrekin Wakes, which also involved a battle between local miners and countrymen. In the 1750s this got a bit rough and the militia was sent in to break it up; by the 1820s the Wakes were discouraged and abandoned. The past few years have brought the annual Wrekin barrel race, reviving the competitive spirit in an altogether friendly way.

Work in the woods

Wrekin's oak woods are valued today for their beauty and wildlife. For centuries they also provided people with a living. Hundreds of charcoal hearths can still be found among the trees, evidence of lives lived in the woods where charcoal burners moved between several kilns, tending their smoking fuel, highly valued in the emerging foundries of Ironbridge, before the introduction of coke.

For the Wrekin, a hill some 600 million years ago, these are the events of last week. When we walk to its summit, we are following in the footsteps of people who lived here thousands of years ago. This place has been the centre of people's lives; somewhere generations have lived, made merry, quarrelled and died.

Designed by MA Creative
www.macreative.co.uk
Photography by Neil Aldridge, Mike Ashton, John Hawkins, Ben Osborne and Stephanie Hayes
Illustrations by Jeremy Pyke

Dogs

Take the Wellington turn off the A5 and go in the direction of Little Wenlock. Park in the Forest Glen car park or along the edge of the lane.

Directions

Well-behaved dogs are welcome on The Wrekin, but please remember to clean up after them.



The Wrekin Forest conservation plan is available at www.shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk

For enquiries relating to the management of the hillfort please ring the Raby Estate (01952 740223).

Over the years the hillfort has taken quite a battering. Every time someone climbs the ramparts a little bit more of it crumbles away, so please don't! To avoid erosion of the grassland please stick to the paths whenever possible.

Metal detectors are neither to be carried nor used on the hillfort

over the next 20 years. appropriate protection as Telford expands the Wrekin and surrounding areas are given Forest Partnership, which aims to ensure that This led to the establishment of the Wrekin co-ordinated by Shropshire Wildlife Trust. conservation plan was produced in 2007, in private ownership. The Wrekin Forest Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is The hill itself is part of the Shropshire Hills is owned and managed by the Raby Estate. under the protection of English Heritage and The hillfort is a Scheduled Ancient Monument

Looking after the Wrekin



Wildlife

The hill is particularly valuable for its woodland and its ancient trees. Towards the summit the woods give way to heathland with heather, bilberry and wavy hair-grass. Ravens, buzzards and occasionally peregrine wheel overhead and wheatears, pied flycatchers and tree pipits return to breed every spring. During spring and summer you might catch a lizard sunning itself on a stone or scuttling off into the heather.

The Wrekin is the eighth highest summit in the county with a magnificent panorama from the summit, said to take in 17 counties on a clear day.



the wrekin hillfort

Hillforts were the centres of Iron Age society, seats of power, home to great chieftains, druids, warriors, their families and servants. The Wrekin hillfort was probably the capital of the Cornovii tribe, who lived here before the Roman invasion. From their farmsteads in the surrounding countryside, people would have gathered here to trade and mingle for festivities and fairs.



Fragments of the past

Flints from Neolithic and Early Bronze Age times indicate the presence of people here as long as 4,000 years ago. Fortifications followed some time later, early in the first millennium BC, starting with a simple earth rampart. Several centuries on, around 400 BC, the inner circuit of ramparts was constructed and the outer one abandoned. The main path to the summit passes through the entrances to both these ancient earthworks; the outer one has become known as Hell Gate, the inner as Heaven Gate, named, according to folklore, after battles during Cromwell's time.

Fortress Wrekin

The earthworks, now eroded by weather and time, would have been awesomely impressive when first constructed; much steeper and higher, with the inner rampart faced with stone. Wooden palings set into the banks and guard houses at the entrances would have given the fort a formidable presence.

Iron Age people would have looked across to many other hillforts, south as far as the Malvern hills; west deep into Wales. Its panoramic views gave the Wrekin's inhabitants a commanding, highly desirable position.

Fragments of pottery and remains of wooden huts unearthed by archaeologists in 1939 and 1973 give us tangible evidence of people's domestic lives on the hill.

Roman invasion

The fort was abandoned in the mid-1st century AD. It may have been taken by force; the discovery of two Roman javelin heads, one by the north-east gate and the other nearby on the Ercall, suggest this possibility. Certainly the Romans would never have allowed a tribal remnant to continue occupying this defended hilltop enclosure, overlooking as it did their new city, Viroconium (Wroxeter). No evidence has been found that the Wrekin was ever re-occupied after the departure of the Romans.

South-west gate

Mound

Grain store

Roundhouses

Wooden palisade

Ramparts

Heaven Gate

Hell Gate

