

Exploring St Catherine's Hill

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My wife and I are blessed in where we live, not because of our house, which is modest, but our location at the foot of St Catherine's Hill in Christchurch, Dorset.

St Catherine's Hill lies to the north of Christchurch and is the highest part of the borough at 174 feet (53 m) above sea-level. This hill is the most southerly of a chain of three hills, some three miles long encompassing 86 acres (35 ha) of heathland and coniferous forest.

The fact that the hill is called St Catherine's should not surprise us. Her cult was founded in the fourth century at the foot of Mount Sinai, which she supposedly ascended on her death, so hills or mounts would come into her legend early on.

Due to its commanding views, St Catherine's Hill has been in use since prehistoric times as a lookout area and beacon; it is also an area shrouded in mystery and legend.

The Romans definitely used St Catherine's Hill, since their pottery has been found in the ditch of what is thought to have been their signal

station fort. The signal system would have been invaluable for coastal security during times of insurrection, and also when the Saxon invasions became a real and present danger in the fourth and fifth centuries.

Unfortunately, nothing remains today of St Catherine's Chapel, which was built inside the Roman fort. There



Former gravel pits on St Catherine's Hill.