

Brean Down Fort (Battery)

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|-----------------------|--|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| Commenced | 1864 21 December | Armament | |
| Completed | 1871 July | 1882 | 7 x 7-inch RML |
| Cost | £ 12,622 | | 3 on 'C' racers 4 on 'A' racers |
| Map Reference | ST 280593 | 1901 | disarmed |
| Position | Brean Down Point Somerset, near Weston-Super-Mare | WWII | 2 x 6-inch BL ex-naval |
| Type | Coast defence | | |
| Ditch | Dry (gorge only) | | |
| Guns | 7 | | |
| Barrack Accom. | 51 | | |
| Present use | National Trust open site | | |
| History | magazine explosion 1900. Re-used WWII. | | |
| Disposal | | | |
| Condition | Derelict | | |
| Access | Free and open access | | |
| Sources | A History of Maritime Forts in the Bristol Channel 1866-1900 : Barrett | | |

History and Description

Brean Down Fort (Battery) is situated 60 feet above sea level on the headland 9 miles NW of Weston-Super-Mare. It was designed to give covering fire across the Severn Estuary towards Steep Holm Island. It consists of an enclosed work with a loopholed wall, barrack block and dry moat across the gorge. The fort is approached by a military road along the length of the promontory. Access is by a bridge across the 12 ft. deep ditch and a gap through the barrack. The barrack is of dressed limestone and is a single storey in two sections either side of the gate. It has flat roofs. A small parade area in the centre of the fort separates the barrack from the sea facing gun positions and magazines. It was armed with 7-inch RMLs, four on A pivots and three on C pivots, all on Dwarf traversing platforms.

In August 1885 the fort was used to test a *'Carriage, Garrison, Iron Sliding and Platform Iron with projectile lift, 5ft. Muzzle loading 7-inch 7-tons 6ft. Parapet experimental allowing loading and elevating under cover'*.

For most of its working life the fort was used for training. It was manned by members of the District Establishment, the Officers' Quarters being occupied by a Master Gunner and his family. The 1st. Gloucestershire Volunteers practised on the RMLs on Brean Down between 1874 and 1891.

The fort was the scene of an explosion on 4 July 1900 when Gunner Haines took his own life as he *"fired a carbine loaded with ball cartridge down the shaft of the ventilator whilst in a state of temporary insanity."* The magazine held 3 tons of powder at the time. This blew up destroying two of the gun positions, part of the gorge wall and a portion of the barracks. The fort was re-armed in WWII with two 6-inch B.L. guns. Rockets and other experimental weapons were tested at the fort. In front of the fort can be found a section of rail used by the Admiralty's Directorate of Miscellaneous Weapons Development from HMS Birnbeck during WWII. Weapons developed here include the Expendable Noisemaker and the slip-launched anti-submarine missile AMUCK. On the hillside overlooking the site is the combined command and observation post for the war time battery. Two searchlight positions are still extant one to the west of the fort and one in front. Access to the battery is either along the former road or over the top of the down to join it, either way it is a good walk.

In 2000 the National Trust began to consolidate the structure by clearing and stabilizing the barrack and officers' blocks, adding interpretation boards.

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