

BEILI DYFFRYN, CARMARTHENSHIRE

Archaeological Investigation of a possible Medieval Long House and survey of a Neolithic Chambered Tomb

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Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.
For:
Exploration Tywi!



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February 2011

BEILI DYFFRYN, CARMARTHENSHIRE

Archaeological Investigation of a possible Medieval Long House and survey of a Neolithic Chambered Tomb

Gan / By

JAMES MEEK

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BEILI DYFFRYN, CARMARTHENSIRE

Archaeological Investigation of a possible Medieval Long House and survey of a Neolithic Chambered Tomb

SUMMARY

As part of the ongoing project 'Exploration Tywi!' investigating the Tywi valley, a series of week-long archaeological evaluations were undertaken at four locations. This evaluation was undertaken on the sites of a medieval longhouse and ykje site of a Neolithic chambered tomb, to the south of Beili Dyffryn Farm, near Bethlehem, Carmarthenshire.

The medieval longhouse lies on the southern side of a dry-stone boundary wall marking the edge of the agricultural farmland and the upland area of Carn-Goch. It is located at grid reference SN 6972 2517.

The site of the Neolithic chambered tomb, known as Cae'r Ganfa or Cil y Ganfa is visible as a large mound within the agricultural lands, with the boundary of the uplands of Carn-Goch curving around the tomb to the east and south. A number of upright stones are visible within the mound. It is located at NGR SN 6950 2502.

The archaeological investigations within the possible medieval longhouse demonstrated the presence of later medieval/post-medieval pottery within the apparent levelling material used to create the raised platform on which the building sits, suggests a later medieval date for the construction of the structure. The walls of the building used locally sourced stone, mostly irregular shaped blocks, with larger stones used in the footings for the wall. No bonding material was recorded within the walls, although this may have been as a result of weathering removing any clay bonding over the years. If a medieval longhouse, as expected, then part of the structure would have been used for human habitation, and the other end for animals, although the results of the excavation could not confirm which end was which.

The investigations also included vegetation clearance and survey of the chambered tomb of Cae'r Ganfa or Cil y Ganfa. This has demonstrated that it is a sizeable monument, comprising a number of very well set stones within a larger mound of stone rubble. No intrusive excavation was undertaken on the site, although the recorded information suggests it may survive fairly intact within the earth and stone mound which surrounds it, although any capstones which may have been present have long since been removed. The investigations indicate that the tomb comprises three main elements. These are a group of stone at the western end, Stone Group 1, which has parallel rows of stones and potentially an entranceway into a chamber behind. Stone Group 2 comprises a rectangular arrangement of narrow stones forming a large chamber. Stone Group 3 suggests a small chamber to the north of and perpendicular to Stone Group 2. There is still a potential for other chambers to be present within the mound, covered by vegetation or still sealed beneath the mound material. The potential is that the tomb is very well preserved and would be considered to be of high archaeological importance.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

1.1.1 As part of the Exploration Tywi! Project Dyfed Archaeological Trust undertook a series of week-long evaluations on archaeological sites within the project study area. This evaluation examined the site of a possible medieval longhouse to the southeast of Beili Dyffryn Farm (NGR SN 6972 2517) and a Neolithic chambered tomb called Cae'r Ganfa or Cil y Ganfa south of the farmhouse, (NGR SN 6950 2502), near Bethlehem, Carmarthenshire.

1.1.2 Exploration Tywi is part of the Tywi a River Through Time Landscape Partnership Project focusing on the middle reaches of the Tywi valley between Llangadog and Dryslwyn. The four main project partners are Carmarthenshire County Council, National Trust, Countryside Council for Wales and Menter Bro Dinefwr. The project has secured £2.4 million from Heritage Lottery Fund, Rural Development Plan, Welsh Assembly Government, Countryside Council for Wales and National Trust.

1.2 Scope of the Project

1.2.1 The evaluation has been designed to provide information on the character, extent, date, state of preservation and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the site area. The results of the evaluation will be used to inform the scope of any further archaeological works proposed at the site.

1.3 Report Outline

1.3.1 This report describes the location of the site along with its archaeological background before summarising the evaluation results and the conclusions based on those results.

1.4 Abbreviations

1.4.1 Sites recorded on the Regional Historic Environment Record (HER¹) are identified by their Primary Record Number (PRN) and located by their National Grid Reference (NGR).

1.5 Illustrations

1.5.1 Photographic images are to be found at the back of the report. Printed map extracts are not necessarily reproduced to their original scale.

1.6 Acknowledgements

1.6.1 Seven enthusiastic local volunteers undertook the excavation under the supervision of J Meek and R Jones of the Dyfed Archaeological Trust. Trust staff and the volunteers would like to express their gratitude to Mr. Jenkins for allowing the excavation on their land and for their assistance during the excavation.

¹ Held and managed by Dyfed Archaeological Trust, Shire Hall, Llandeilo.

2 THE SITE

2.1 Location and Archaeological Background

2.1.1 Beili Dyffryn Farm is located c.7km to the eastnortheast of Llandeilo, 3km to the southsouthwest of Llangadog and 0.5m to the west of Bethlehem in Carmarthenshire (located at NGR SN 6952 2547; Figure 1 and 2).

2.1.2 The site of the medieval long house was originally identified as being of archaeological significance during a survey in 1993 by Ken Murphy. The house is situated around 350m to the southwest of Beili Dyffryn farmhouse, within a possible small enclosure defined by the dry-stone boundary wall marking the edge of the agricultural farmland and the upland area of Carn-Goch. It is located at grid reference SN 6972 2517 (Figure 2).

2.1.3 The site of the Neolithic chambered tomb, known as Cae'r Ganfa or Cil y Ganfa is around 450m directly due south of Beili Dyffryn farmhouse, located at SN 6950 2502 (Figure 2). The tomb is visible as a large mound within the agricultural lands (the boundary of the uplands of Carn-Goch curves around the tomb to the east and south. A number of upright stones are visible within the mound).

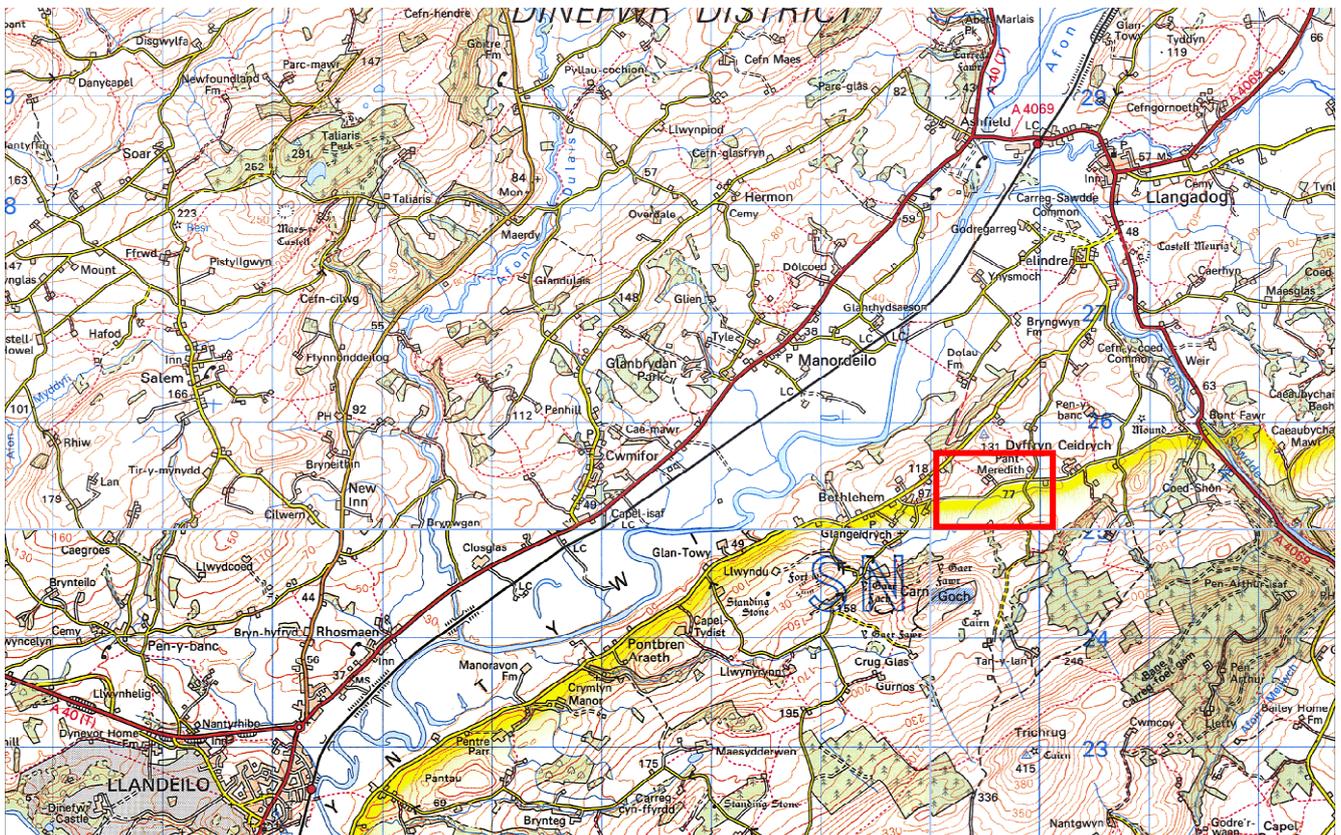


Figure 1: Location Plan of Beili Dyffryn Farm

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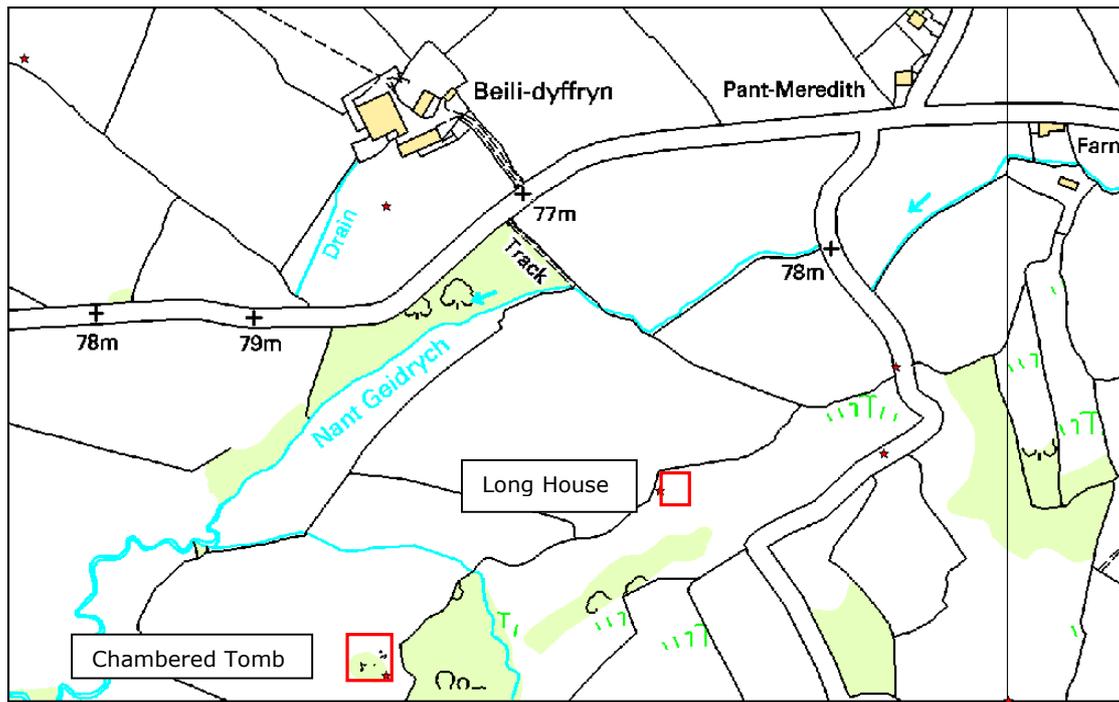


Figure 2: Location Plan of Beili Dyffryn, showing site of long house and chambered tomb

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2.1.4 Map evidence from the 1880s and 1906 (Figures 3 and 4) show that the neither the medieval longhouse or chambered tomb are labelled, although clues to their location are visible. The site of the medieval longhouse is indicated by the slight kink in the boundary wall along the southern edge of the field in which it lies. This kink corresponds to that which still exists today.

2.1.5 The Neolithic chambered tomb, known as Cae'r Ganfa or Cil y Ganfa indicated by a small patch of woodland. In general neither map alters significantly from the existing ordnance survey map as illustrated above (Figure 2).

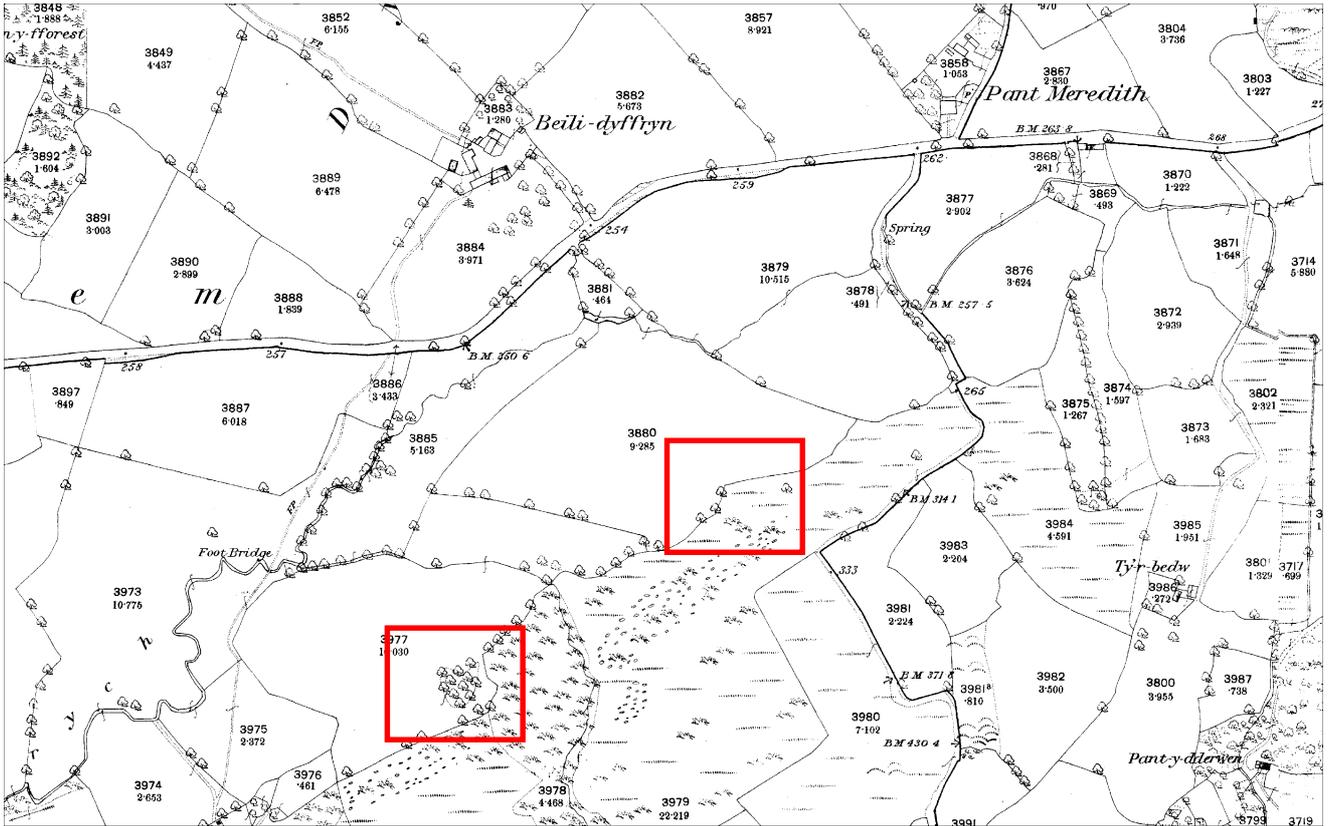


Figure 3: Extract of the 1886 1:2500 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map showing longhouse location central and chambered tomb to bottom left.

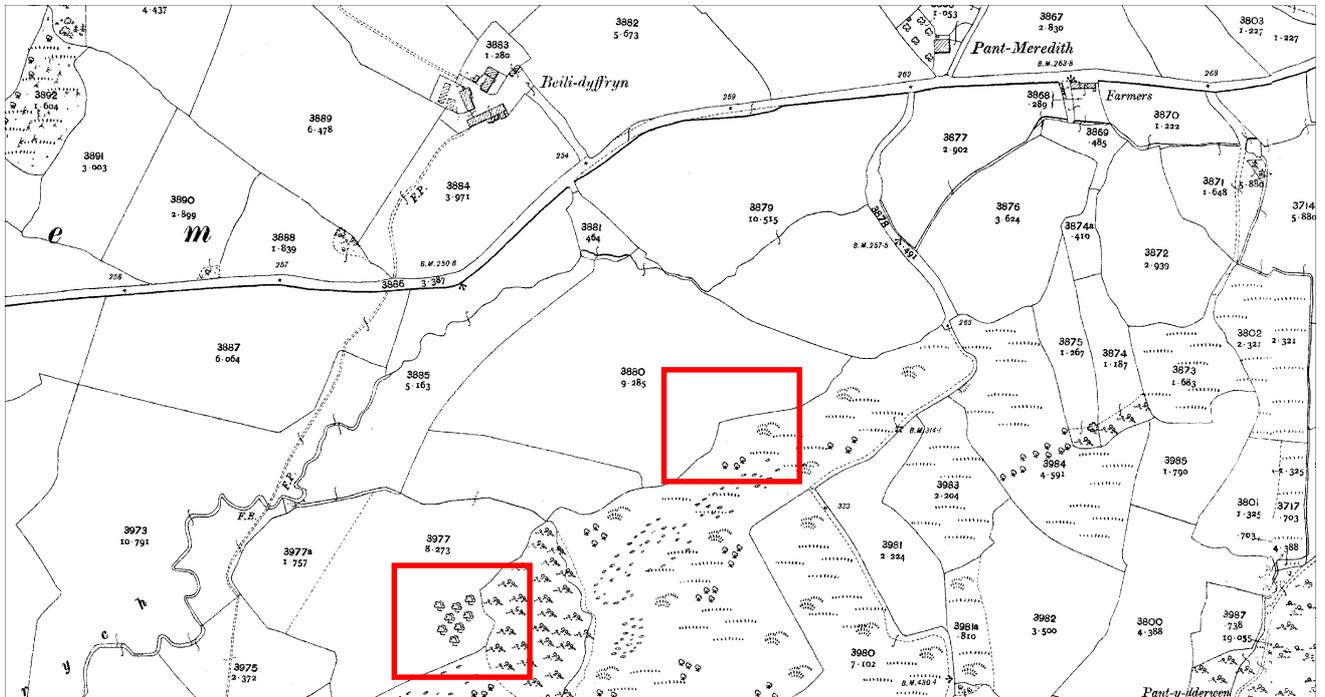


Figure 4: Extract of the 1906 1:2500 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey map showing longhouse location central and chambered tomb to bottom left

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 An initial vegetation clearance was undertaken across the northern half of the possible medieval long house. Grass was strimmed using a petrol driven strimmer with thin nylon cutting cable across the top of the chambered tomb, exposing evident upstanding stones.

3.1.2 The trenches within the area of the medieval longhouse were opened using hand tools (mattocks, shovels and spades). Four trenches were opened within the area building, two in the northern corners of the structure, one in the central/western part, and a fourth in the northern part of the building against the eastern wall.

3.1.3 The trenches were hand cleaned and all archaeological features recorded using standard Dyfed Archaeological Trust procedures. A plan of the structure was hand drawn, supplemented with sections from the trenches. Context descriptions of all excavated layers and walls were prepared. Digital photographs were taken. The site area was surveyed in and tied to Ordnance Survey datum.

3.1.4 Following the cleaning of the chambered tomb, the area was then subject to a topographic survey using a Trimble Electronic Distance Measurer (EDM) and tied in to Ordnance Survey grid and datum. Photographs were also taken of the exposed area.

3.2 Results of the Evaluation: The Medieval Long House

3.2.1 The site of the long-house was very overgrown with bracken and brambles, and some small trees (blackthorn/hawthorn) covering the southern half of the structure. The first day was spent clearing the northern end of the building of vegetation cover (no trees were removed during the works).



Photo 1: Initial site clearance of the medieval long house

3.2.2 The building was substantially more overgrown than when it was first surveyed in 1993, at which time almost all of the walls of the building were visible. The structure was aligned roughly northwest-southeast along its long axis. Two rooms could be identified within the building, with the possibility of a third at the southeastern end of the structure formed by the end wall of the building and natural outcropping rock. Following clearance of the structure during these works the northwestern room was clearly defined with a dividing wall between the two rooms. The second room was not so clearly visible being very overgrown, although further limited clearance demonstrated its alignment.



Photo 2: Further clearance work revealing the northwestern end of the building

3.2.3 The exposed walls of the building showed no clear evidence of bonding material, implying either they were originally dry-stone or that they were clay bonded which had substantially washed away. The stone used in the structure were locally sourced from the outcrops on the slopes of Carn-Goch. The size of the stones varied from small angular blocks to very large slabs and boulders which were mostly used as the footings for the structure, especially along the northern end of the building. The northwestern end had evidently been built on a raised platform, which reduced towards the south as the natural ground level begins to rise.



Figure 3: View south along western wall of building (205) showing variations in size of stones used in construction

3.2.4 Three trenches were excavated within the northwestern end of the building, one in the northeast corner of the building, a second along the western wall of the building in the northern part of the room and a third on the eastern side of the building adjacent to the dividing wall between the two rooms. The trenches in the northern part of the room demonstrated a c.0.15 – 0.25m depth of topsoil and rubble, which had evidently accumulated within the abandoned building. The lack of many larger stones within this area suggests that the majority of stone had been removed for use elsewhere in antiquity. Below the topsoil a more fine sandy clay soil was encountered, of a light brown colour, with far fewer stones within, which was tentatively identified as a floor layer. In both trenches a few small thin flat stones were revealed all at a very similar level) which are likely to have been the remnants of a slab floor, although it had been much disturbed. The lower sandy clay soil was removed indicating a depth of between 0.12 and 0.22m before a similar sandy clay soil was exposed that was slightly more compact and lighter (yellowish brown) than that above. It is considered that this material was that used to create the raised platform on which this end of the building sits. Some small sherds of pottery were recovered from the layer beneath the topsoil, possibly Dyfed gravel tempered ware, of later medieval/post-medieval date.



Photo 4: Trench 3 in northeastern corner facing south, showing eastern wall (305) and two stones possibly relating to earlier flagged floor (304)

3.2.5 Within the trench in the northeastern corner a small section of the northern internal wall was exposed. On the internal face would appear to have been crudely faced and coursed using smaller more regular shaped stone. This contrasted with the visible external face of the wall in this area, which was comprised of substantial stone blocks, and far less visible coursing or facing (although this may have been due to collapse and removal of stone). The eastern face of the internal wall was also far more irregular comprising larger stones mixed with smaller ones.



Photo 5: Trench 3 in northeastern corner facing north showing internal face of north wall of building (306), with eastern wall along side (305)



Photo 6: External face of northern wall of structure (306) showing substantial blocks used in its construction

3.2.6 The trench on the western side of the building exposed part of the face of the western wall, which mostly comprised a single substantial stone with smaller stones around.



Photo 7: Trench 3 along western wall of building, facing west, showing part of trench and a length of the wall

3.2.7 The trench adjacent to the dividing wall in the centre of the building revealed an entrance to the building accessing from the western side. Stones were also placed projecting out from the entrance possibly indicating a porch structure / windbreak or alternatively wall used to herd livestock into the building. No floor level was identified within this area, the main stratigraphic sequence comprising a c.0.25m deep layer of topsoil and rubble lying on top an orangey brown sandy clay, which containing lots of root activity and was not as free of stones as that excavated to the north. On the southern side of the trench, adjacent to the dividing wall, an area of ash and burnt sand was present within a subsoil under a thinner depth of topsoil. It is considered most likely that this is a dump of material derived from cleaning out a fire. It is not clear whether the ash derived from the use of the structure, or a later episode of burning following abandonment of the structure. The location of the material within the building would suggest that the latter hypothesis is more likely.

3.2.8 The dividing wall along the south of the trench was constructed of fairly regular long blocks of stone, implying a fairly neat face to the wall. Only a small part of the wall was exposed, and only to a single course in height.



Photo 8: Trench 1 adjacent to dividing wall, facing east

3.2.9 A fourth small trench was located within the southern room of the building adjacent to the eastern wall. This trench revealed a topsoil depth of around 0.45m containing far more rubble than had been seen in the other trenches. Below the topsoil a sandy clay was revealed of light brown colour, which may have been natural subsoil or a similar layer of material associated with the construction of the raised platform on which the building sits. No evidence of flooring was seen. The topsoil within this trench contained a number of artefacts probably dating from the 19th century onwards. No earlier finds were recorded. The eastern wall of the building in this part of the site was very irregular in its construction with no clear facing or coursing (although was constructed of mostly medium sized stones).



Photo 9: Trench located in southern room showing part of eastern wall (502), facing north

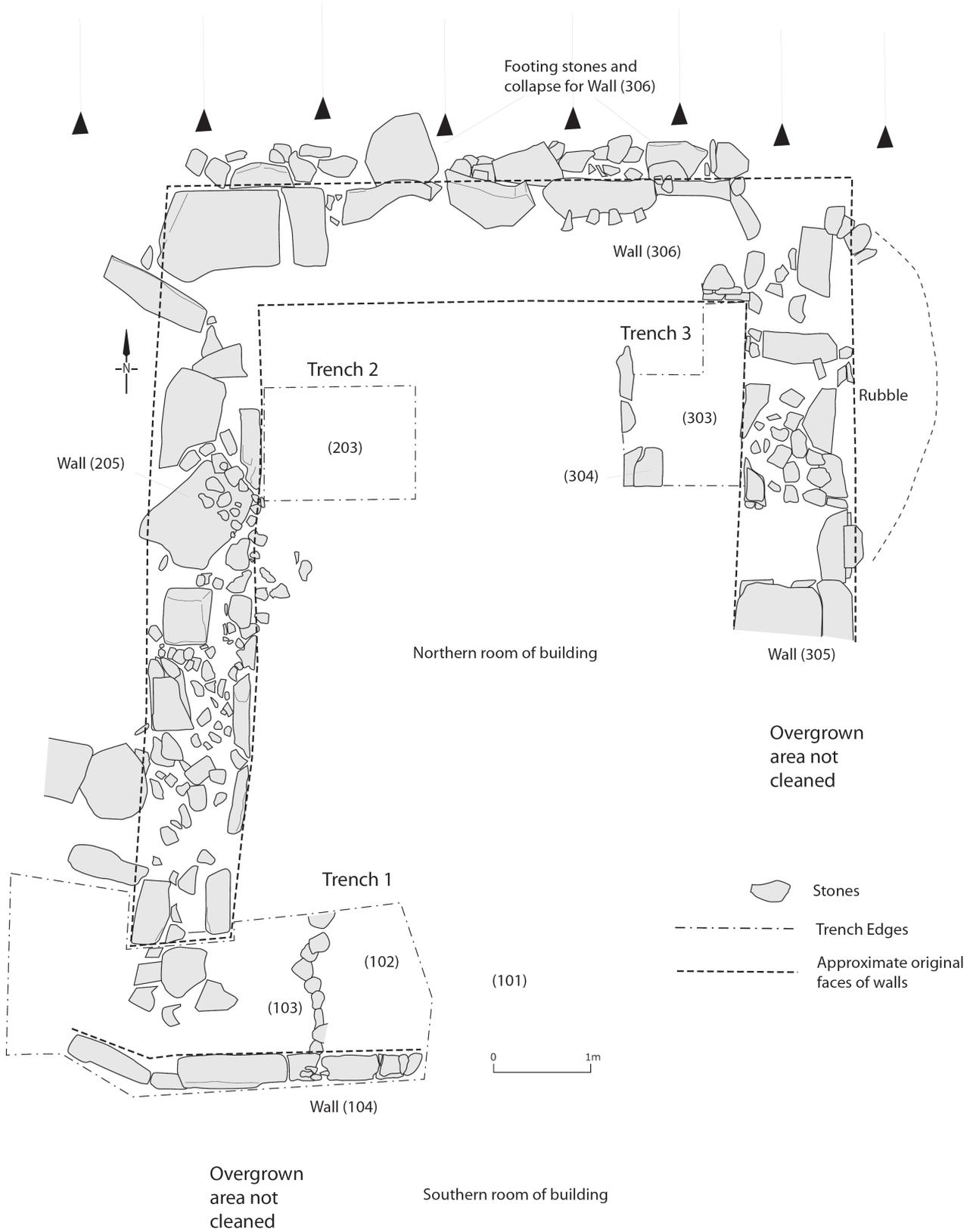


Figure 5: Plan of Northern end of building, showing Trenches 1, 2 and 3

3.3 Results of the Survey: The Neolithic Chambered Tomb of Cae'r Ganfa or Cil y Ganfa

3.3.1 The site of the chambered tomb was overgrown with long grass and some areas of bracken. A number of mature trees are also present on top of the mound. Numerous loose stones were present on the mound presumably placed there from field clearance. An initial vegetation clearance exercise was undertaken on top of the mound, around the upright stones identified as being part of the tomb using a strimmer with nylon cutting wire.

3.3.2 The tomb comprised a large mound located on the start of a natural rise in the ground towards the uplands of Carn-Goch. The mound is evidently made of rubble stone covered in turf along its northern edge as was noted from walking in these area (although the turf was not removed to confirm). A plateau is present at the top of the rise on which three distinct groups of upright stones are present. The depth of the upright stones is not known, but they seem very well set.

3.3.2 The first group of stones (Stone Group 1) lies at the western end, with an incomplete parallel arrangement aligned roughly northnorthwest-southsoutheast, the western line 1.3m in length, the eastern line 5.5m in length. The alignments were c.0.8m apart. A gap is present in the eastern alignment, of c.1.5m width, with a perpendicular stone running from the northern edge of the gap to the east, towards a substantial upright boulder. The boulder was 1.2m in width facing the gap in the eastern alignment.



Photo 10: Stone Group 1 facing eastnortheast, with scale adjacent to substantial boulder (second group of stones to rear marked by distant scale)



Photo 11: Parallel alignments of stone in western Stone Group 1, facing southsouthwest



Photo 12: Stone Group 1 facing northnorthwest

3.3.4 The second group of stones (Stone Group 2) lies at the eastern end of the mound and comprises a rectangular arrangement of long narrow stones forming an apparent chamber. The western end of the chamber was partially damaged where a former field bank crossed across the top of the mound. The chamber measured around 4.2m x 1.5m in width, aligned roughly eastnortheast to

westsouthwest. The rectangular chamber is aligned very closely with the gap in the eastern alignment of stones in the western group.



Photo 13: Stone Group 2 forming rectangular chamber, facing eastnortheast



Photo 13: Stone Group 2 forming rectangular chamber, facing westsouthwest with western group of stones visible in distance (marked with scales)

3.3.5 The third group of stones (Stone Group 3) lies 3.5m to the northnorthwest of the rectangular chamber comprising two parallel lines of stones, both around 1.4 – 1.5m in length, a metre apart. The stones are aligned perpendicular to the chamber, northnorthwest to southsoutheast.

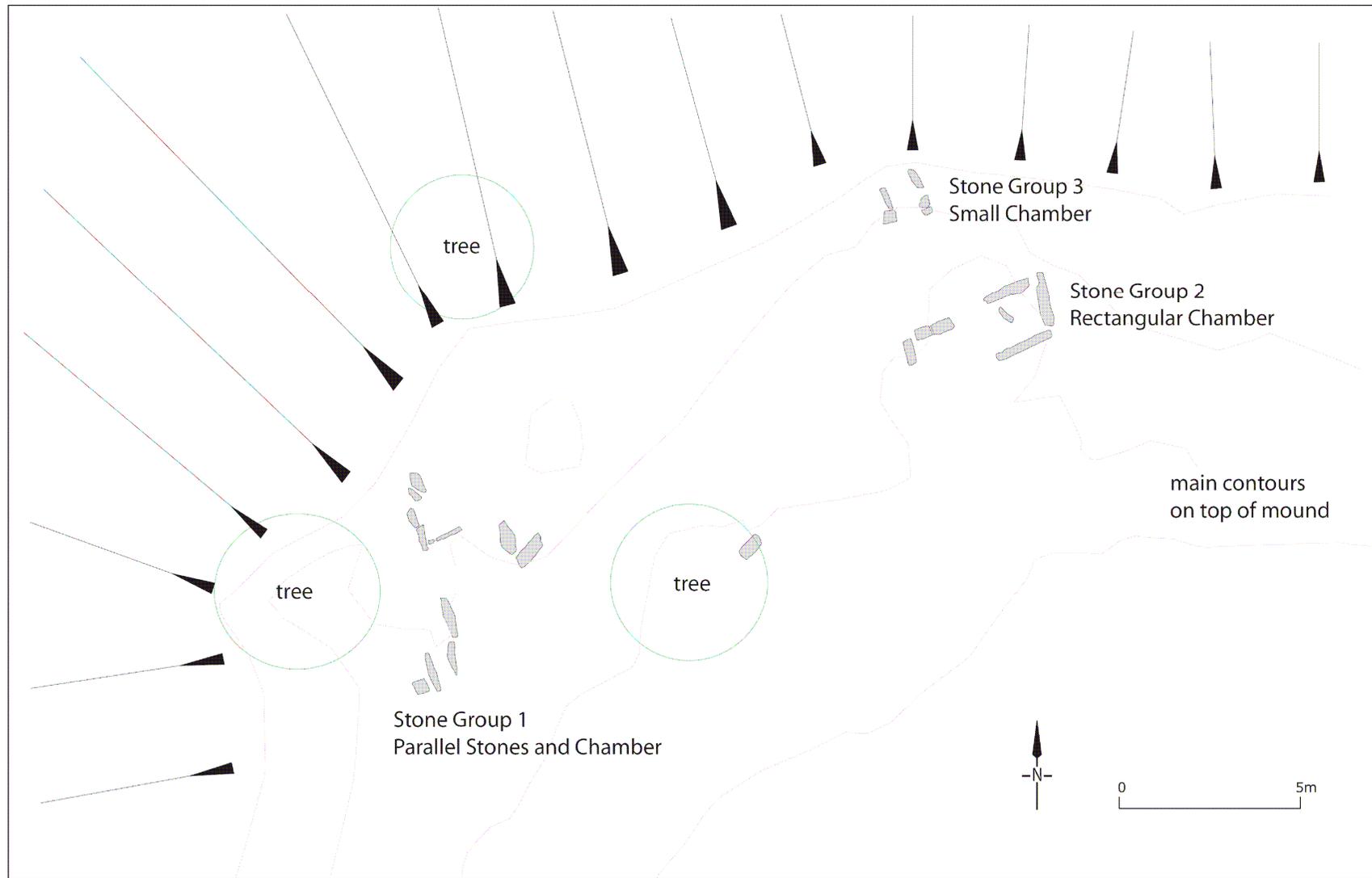


Figure 6: Chambered Tomb Cae'r Ganfa or Cil y Ganfa, showing stone groups (NGR SN 6950 2502)

4 CONCLUSIONS

4.1 The archaeological evaluation of the two sites at Beili Dyffryn farm undertaken as part of the Exploration Tywi! Project have provided interesting results regarding the medieval long house and chambered tomb.

4.2 The archaeological investigations within the possible medieval longhouse have produced interesting information regarding the structure. The presence of later medieval/post-medieval pottery within the apparent levelling material used to create the raised platform on which the building sits, suggests a later medieval date for the construction of the structure at the earliest, although the paucity of finds and their small size is such that this is not seen as conclusive.

4.3 The construction of the walls of the building used locally sourced stone, mostly irregular shaped blocks, with larger stones used in the footings for the wall. At the northern end of the building (where the platform for the building was highest) larger stone blocks and slabs were most evident, presumably creating a more substantial wall footing where it was needed. Potentially some of the stones may have been added at a later date to underpin the gable end following erosion or subsidence of the edge of the platform (although this is by no means certain).

4.4 No bonding material was recorded within the walls, although this may have been as a result of weathering removing any clay bonding over the years. Potentially the walls were dry-stone. Whether drystone or clay bonded, the structure would appear to be a fairly lowly building. If a medieval longhouse, as expected, then part of the structure would have been used for human habitation, and the other end for animals. The evidence from the investigations has not confirmed which end was which. The northern end of the building, the main area excavated, had traces of a rough flagged floor and also an entrance on the eastern side adjacent to the dividing wall between the two rooms. No visible signs of a neat beaten earth floor or neatly slabbed floor were found, nor were many finds indicating domestic use. This may imply this end of the building was used for animals.

4.5 The clearance and survey of the chambered tomb of Cae'r Ganfa or Cil y Ganfa has demonstrated that it is a sizeable monument, comprising a number of very well set stones within a larger mound of stone rubble. Although no excavation of this site was undertaken, the stability of the stones suggests they are fairly deeply set in the ground, perhaps indicating that earlier remains of the tomb could survive buried in the mound. Any capstones associated with the tomb have long since been removed, possibly for use in buildings and walls elsewhere. The three trees growing on top of the mound will have caused significant disturbance to below ground remains from root action, although the extent of disturbance is unknown.

4.6 The chambered tomb potentially has three main groups of stones, comprising a group at the western end, Stone Group 1, which has parallel rows of stones and potentially an entranceway into a chamber behind. Stone Group 2 comprises a rectangular arrangement of narrow stones forming a large chamber. Stone Group 3 implies a small chamber to the north of Stone Group 2. There is still a potential for other chambers to be present within the mound, covered by vegetation or still sealed beneath the mound material. The potential is that the tomb is very well preserved and would be considered to be of high archaeological importance.

5 BIBLIOGRAPHY

5.1 Database

Dyfed Archaeological Trust Historic Environment Record.

5.2 Map

Ordnance Survey 1886 1:2500 Carmarthenshire

Ordnance Survey 1906 1:2500 Carmarthenshire

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Mae'r adroddiad hwn wedi ei gael yn gywir a derbyn sêl bendith /
This report has been checked and approved by: **Duncan Schlee**

ar ran Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf. /
on behalf of Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Swydd / Position: **Project Manager**

Llofnod / Signature  Dyddiad / Date 15/02/2011

*Yn unol â'n nôd i roddi gwasanaeth o ansawdd uchel, croesawn unrhyw sylwadau
sydd gennych ar gynnwys neu strwythur yr adroddiad hwn*

*As part of our desire to provide a quality service we would welcome any
comments you may have on the content or presentation of this report*