

FAN FOEL ROUND BARROW, MYNYDD DU

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION, JUNE 2004

Interim report



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By
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Crynodeb

Gwnaed gwaith cloddio archaeolegol ar grug crwn o ddechrau'r Oes Efydd ar Fan Foel ar y Mynydd Du ym mis Mehefin 2004. Yr oedd y crug wedi dioddef cryn erydu naturiol, ac erydu gan ymwelwyr, dros y blynyddoedd diwethaf. Amcan y cloddio oedd cofnodi a chloddio'r elfennau a oedd wedi goroesi ar wyneb y crug cyn i'r crug gael ei ddiogelu ac i waith cadwraethol gael ei wneud arno. Cloddiwyd cistfaen claddu canolog. Ynndo, yr oedd gwaddod amlosgiad yn gysylltiedig â phriddlestr a sawl eitem o gallestr. Cafwyd hyd i waddod ail amlosgiad mewn rhes o gerrig a orchuddiai ymyl defnydd y crug. Cynhaliwyd rhaglen helaeth o samplu palaeo-amgylcheddol, a bydd y gwaith yn dechrau'n awr ar ddadansoddi'n ffurfiol yr arteffactau a'r samplau a gasglwyd yn ystod y cloddio.

Summary

An archaeological excavation was undertaken at an early Bronze Age round barrow at Fan Foel on Mynydd Du in June 2004. The barrow had suffered from significant natural and visitor erosion in recent years. The objective of the excavation was to record and excavate the surviving surface elements of the barrow prior to its conservation and protection. A central burial cist was excavated. This contained a cremation deposit associated with a pottery vessel and several flint artefacts. A secondary cremation deposit was recovered from a band of stone overlying the edge of the barrow material. An extensive programme of palaeoenvironmental sampling was undertaken and work will now begin on the formal analysis of the artefacts and samples that were collected during the excavation.

Introduction

This report provides an interim statement on the partial excavation of a Bronze Age round barrow on Fan Foel, Mynydd Du (SN 8215 2234). The site is a scheduled ancient monument (SAM number Br275) and it is recorded on the regional Sites and Monuments Record as PRN 32392. The barrow lies on the county boundary between Carmarthenshire and Powys (Fig. 1) and was visited by Cambria Archaeology on 19 June 2002 as part of the Cadw-funded Prehistoric Funerary and Ritual Sites Assessment project (Cook 2003). At the time of the visit in 2002 it was noted that the monument was suffering from a considerable amount of ongoing erosion on its western and southwestern sides and this appeared to have been responsible for the exposure of a curvilinear arc of large sandstone blocks. This weathering was of concern and threatened to continue to damage the remaining fabric of the monument. In addition, loose stones had been piled up to form a modern walkers' cairn on the northeast side. There was a clear ongoing threat that the stones from the surrounding 'kerb' would continue to be used to add to this modern cairn.

Following discussions with the Brecon Beacons National Park and the Cadw inspectorate, it was generally agreed that it would be very difficult to protect the monument from further erosion and that rescue excavation ('preservation by record') should be considered as an option. Following an initial field assessment (Hughes 2003), the National Park and Cadw agreed to jointly fund the partial excavation of the monument followed by the implementation of measures to protect the remaining element *in situ*. The excavation was undertaken by Cambria Archaeology in June 2004.

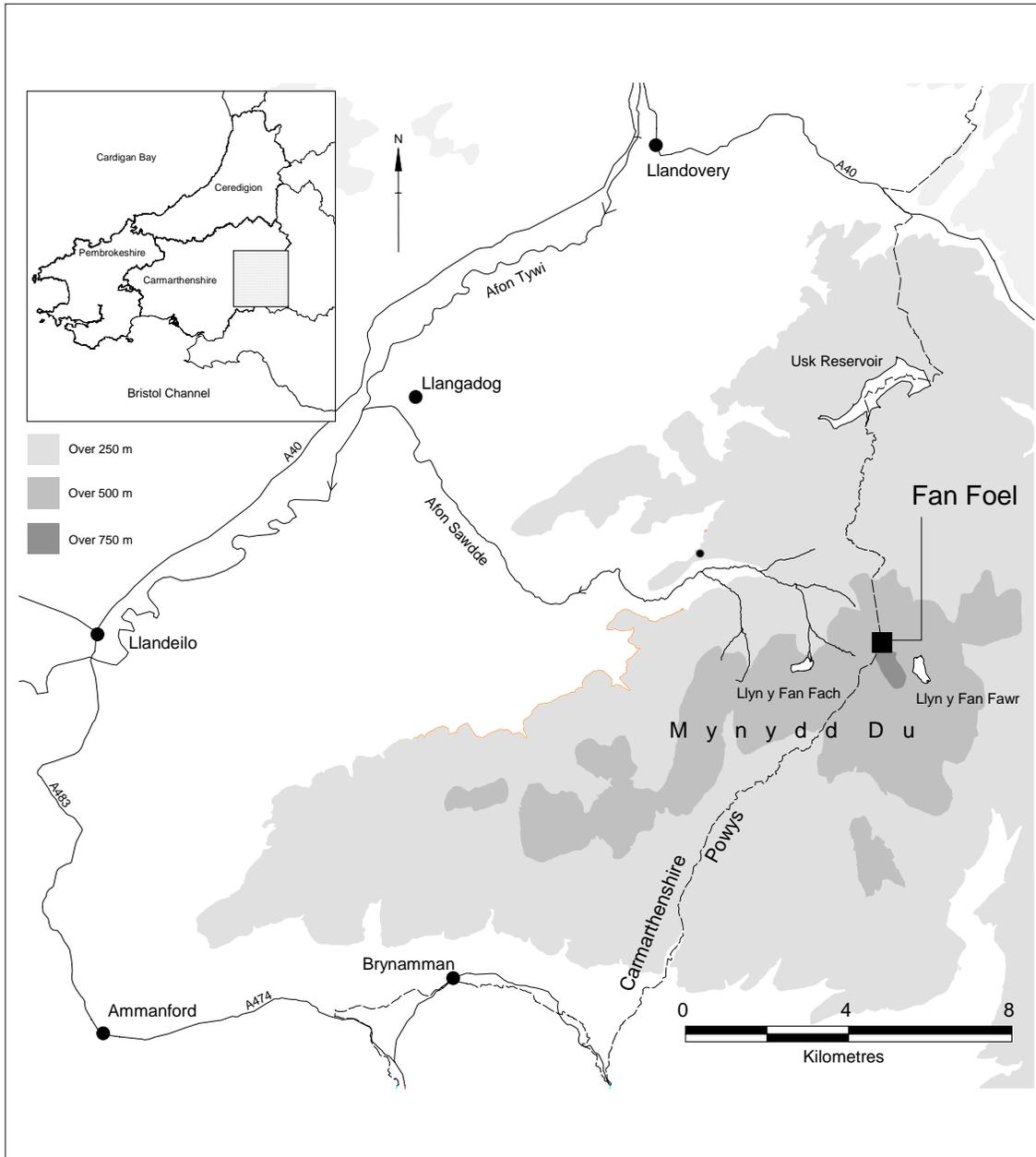


Fig. 1 – Map showing the location of Fan Foel.

Site description (Fig. 2)

The cairn is situated on a summit at 781m AOD. The most recent OS 1:25,000 map indicates that the modern county boundary runs through the centre of the monument. The initial assessment had indicated that the core of the barrow was constructed of a peaty-loam soil. This was partly surrounded by a circular stone 'kerb' enclosing an area 11m in diameter.

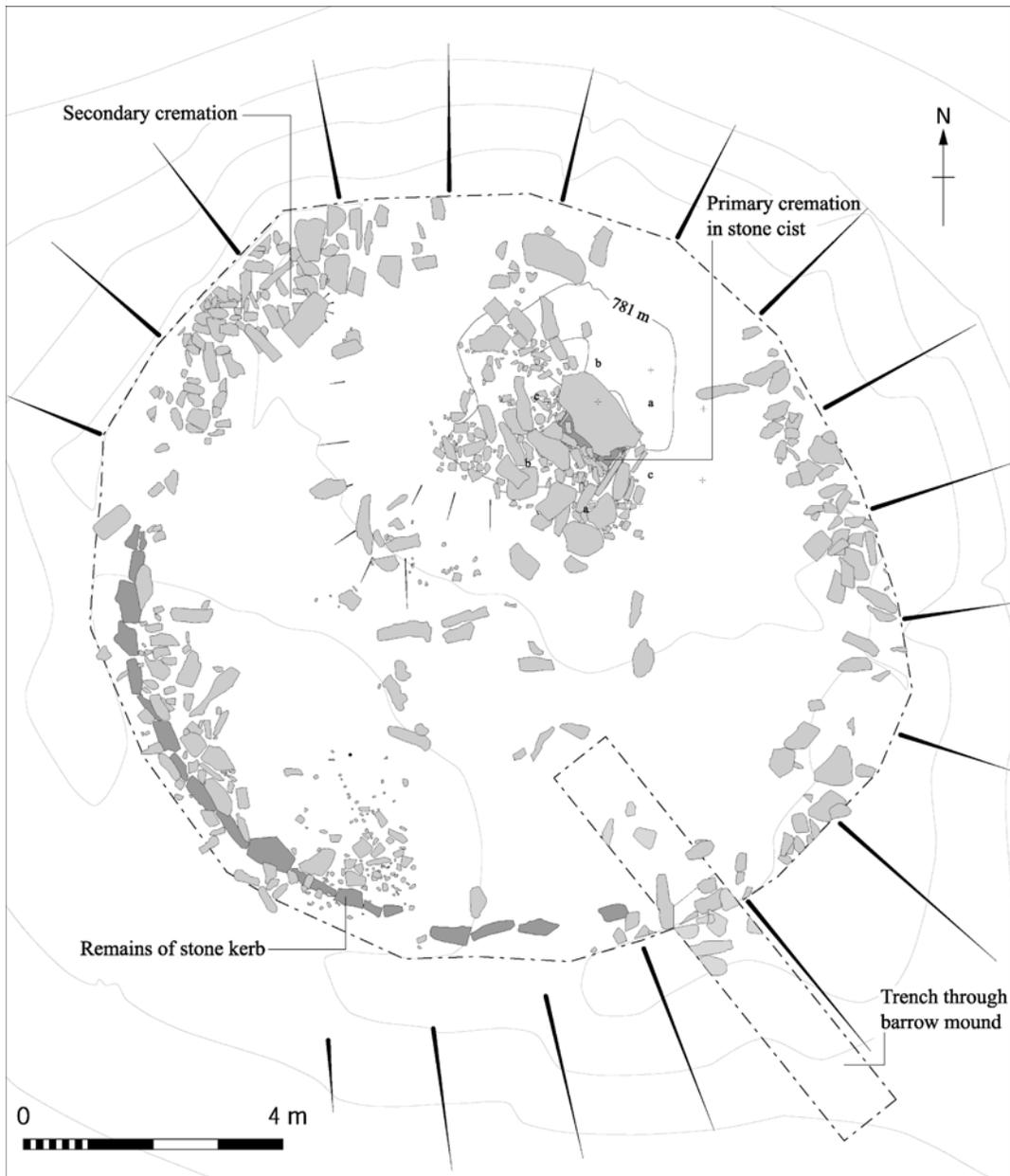


Fig.2 - Plan of the excavation after the removal of the topsoil.

The modern walkers' cairn was located in the northeastern sector and measured approximately 4m x 2.5m in plan and 1m high. A number of other, smaller stones were set into the surface of the eroding interior of the barrow. There is a reference to finds of flint flakes and a 'string of clay beads' from a cairn on Fan Foel, although the provenance is uncertain (Grimes 1933). However, there were no obvious surface traces of any earlier disturbance to the barrow.

Excavation aims and methodology

The general objective of the archaeological and conservation work was to ensure the protection and long-term survival of the monument. However, it was recognised that before any remedial work could be undertaken a detailed record would need to be made of the surface archaeological deposits and features associated with the barrow. This would be undertaken in a research context. In particular the evidence for barrow construction and the nature of funerary and ritual activity can be directly compared with the information from the barrows at Pen-y-fan and Corn-du (Gibson 1997).

The excavation involved the recording and removal of the walker's cairn and the remaining turf overlying the kerb and the interior of the barrow. This fully exposed the surrounding stone kerb and a central stone cist. The whole of the interior was then cleaned and recorded prior to the excavation of the kerb and the stone cist. In addition, a single trench, 1m wide and 7m long, was excavated through the surviving barrow mound on the southeastern side of the monument down to the natural bedrock. An extensive programme of palaeoenvironmental sampling was undertaken with the assistance of staff from the University of Lampeter. Finally, the exposed surface of the barrow was then covered with a layer of geo-textile and the site was backfilled with the intention of re-establishing a grass cover.

A summary of the excavation results

The trench through the barrow mound – The bedrock was overlain by two thin deposits of silty-clay up to 0.15m thick, possibly the remnants of a buried soil. This was overlain by a group of large stones hinting at an earlier stone kerb defining the edge of the barrow. The surviving barrow material itself was up to 0.3m thick and comprised a very mixed dark brown silty-loam with lenses of yellow silty-clay and dark brown clayey-peat giving a mottled appearance. This deposit was almost entirely stone free. The remains of the later stone kerb overlay the edge of this barrow material. This in turn was overlain by a dark brown peaty turf up to 0.2m thick. Several pollen cores were taken from this sequence of deposits and these now await detailed analysis.

The stone kerb and barrow interior - The scattered stones recorded within the interior of the monument were found to be sitting on top of the barrow material. The stone kerb also overlay the edge of the barrow material and was only really distinct on the southwestern side of the monument. Elsewhere it comprised a band of stone up to 1.5m wide. A cremation deposit was recorded from amongst this stone on the northwestern side of the

barrow. This comprised numerous fragments from a crushed pottery vessel (probably a collared urn) and numerous flecks and small fragments of burnt bone. This deposit lay just below the surface and appeared to be considerably disturbed.

The central cist burial – The central cist was effectively a stone-box with internal dimensions 2.0m long, 1.1m wide and 0.65m deep. The base of the cist was formed by two stone slabs lying flat and the sides were formed by several upright stones. It was partially sealed by a large, sub-rectangular capstone 1.4m long by 0.8m wide. The primary fill comprised a grey-brown silty-clay up to 0.1-0.15m thick. This overlay a cremation deposit lying on the base of the cist just to the northwest of centre. In the northeast corner of the cist were the remains of a crushed pottery vessel, probably a food vessel, although a formal identification still needs to be undertaken. It seems probable that this pottery vessel originally stood upright in the corner of the cist. Also lying on the stone base of the cist and between the cremation deposit and the pottery vessel was a triangular-shaped flint knife. Several other flint objects (several of which were burnt) were retrieved from the within the cremation deposit. The cremation deposit itself consisted almost entirely of burnt bone with almost no charcoal.

The primary fill was overlain by a series of sandy-silt deposits, 0.65m thick, that were presumably the result of silting into the cavity of the cist from the overlying barrow material. The walker's cairn had been constructed immediately over the capstone of the stone cist. In fact modern debris, including crisp packets and sweet wrappers had found their way into the upper layers of the cist interior itself.

Discussion

The mixed appearance of the barrow material suggests that it derived from material, including turf, peat and soil, scraped from the surrounding area and heaped up over the central cist burial to form a mound. The trench on the southeastern side of the barrow just hinted at the presence of a kerb of stones defining the edge of this barrow. The burial in the stone cist was presumably the primary burial associated with the barrow. The stone kerb and associated stone and cremation deposit overlie the edge of the barrow mound and were presumably the result of later secondary activity. It is noticeable that the stone cist does not lie at the centre of the arc formed by this later stone ring. However, it seems possible that it may have been central to the original barrow and that the later stone kerb respected a slightly different focal point.

Comparable barrows with primary mounds of turf and peat and stone capping have been recorded elsewhere, most notably at both Pen-y-fan and Corn-du on the Brecon Beacons (Gibson 1997). The turf barrow at Corn-du was also associated with a stone kerb. However, the kerbstones at Corn Du appeared to have been set upright into the mound and this is not obviously the case at Fan Foel. Both the barrows at Pen-y-fan and Corn-du were also associated with central, rectangular stone cists. The stone cist at Pen-y-fan appears to have originally contained a copper-alloy object associated with a cremation deposit although bronze items were also found from secondary contexts.

Although formal identification of the pottery vessels and flint objects from Fan Foel is still to be undertaken, they are clearly of early Bronze Age date. It is hoped that radiocarbon dates will also be obtained from a number of selected contexts. Work will now start on the formal analysis of the artefacts and samples recovered during the excavation. In particular, the samples collected from the possible buried soil at Fan Foel have a significant potential for an understanding of the barrow in its contemporary environment.

Acknowledgements

The fieldwork was undertaken by a core team comprising Gwilym Hughes, Richard Ramsay, Duncan Schlee and Hubert Wilson (all of Cambria Archaeology), Peter Dorling (BBNP) and Louise Mees (Cadw Field Monument Warden). The palaeoenvironmental sampling was supervised by Astrid Caseldine (University of Lampeter). The illustrations in this report are by Hubert Wilson and comments on the report were provided by Ken Murphy.

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Plate 1 – the walker’s cairn prior to excavation



Plate 2 – The stone kerb in the southeast sector of the barrow after cleaning



Plate 3 – Cleaning underway in the northern sector of the barrow.



Plate 4 – The trench through the barrow mound during excavation



Plate 5 – detail of the trench illustrating the mottling effect within the barrow mound material



Plate 6 – staff from the University of Lampeter collecting pollen samples



Plate 7 – the secondary cremation during excavation



Plate 8 – The stone cist prior to excavation



Plate 9 – The cremation deposit prior to excavation showing location of pottery vessel and flint knife



Plate 10 – The cremation deposit during excavation

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Paratowyd yr adroddiad hwn gan / This report has been prepared by Gwilym Hughes

Swydd / Position: Director

Llofnod / Signature Dyddiad / Date

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

Ken Murphy

ar ran Archaeoleg Cambria, Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf.
on behalf of Cambria Archaeology, Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Swydd / Position: Principal Archaeologist (Field Section)

Llofnod / Signature Dyddiad / Date

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

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