

## Prehistoric Funerary and Ritual Sites in Carmarthenshire

*Nikki Cook*

### CRYNODEB

Mae'r gwaith maes diweddar yn Sir Gaerfyrddin wedi canolbwyntio ar ymweld â phob heneb ddefodol ac angladdol hysbys o'r Oesoedd Neolithig ac Efydd yn y sir. Yn ystod y gwaith maes, darganfuwyd amryw o safleoedd newydd a chofnodwyd gwybodaeth ychwanegol am weddill y safleoedd a oedd yn bod yn barod. Cofnodwyd cyfanswm o fwy na 900 o safleoedd tebygol a phosibl, a'r mwyafrif llethol o'r henebion hynny'n grugiau crwn (561 o safleoedd) a meini hirion (175 o safleoedd).

### INTRODUCTION

Recent fieldwork in Carmarthenshire has focussed on visiting all known Neolithic and Bronze Age ritual and funerary monuments within the county. During the fieldwork a number of new sites were discovered and additional information recorded for the remaining pre-existing sites. In total over 900 probable and possible sites (*Fig. 1*) were recorded, with the vast majority of these monuments comprising round barrows (561 sites) and standing stones (175 sites).

Between May 2000 and December 2002 Cambria Archaeology undertook a rapid assessment of the form and condition of all known prehistoric funerary and ritual monuments dating from the Neolithic and Bronze Ages throughout Carmarthenshire, as part of a pan-Wales project funded by Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments involving all four Welsh Archaeological Trusts.<sup>1</sup> The principal objectives of this survey were the enrichment of the Regional Sites and Monuments Record (the SMR) and to contribute to Cadw's Scheduled Ancient Monument enhancement programme.

One of the ways in which these principal objectives was achieved was by conducting an examination of the

surviving physical evidence for all the different monument types which fell within the remit of the proposed project: a full review of all available evidence including artefacts and previous excavations and fieldwork was never the intention. However, in order to place the monuments in a wider context for the purposes of this paper an indication is provided in the text of the more important excavations and discoveries from Carmarthenshire, and other parts of southwest Wales.

### PROJECT AIMS

The ultimate aim of the Prehistoric Funerary and Ritual Sites (PFRS) project is to visit every known Neolithic and Bronze Age ritual and funerary monument throughout Wales to assist in the continued preservation of these monuments for future generations. This aim is achieved by recommending additional sites for scheduling (so they are effectively under the protection of the State) and by disseminating information on their significance and vulnerability with the hope that landowners will sympathetically manage them. In addition to this there is also a valuable research opportunity in which to re-think our understandings of prehistoric landscapes throughout Wales as a whole and to disseminate these findings to the wider public. The collaboration of all four Welsh Archaeological Trusts in this project ensures that there is standardisation in the recording of these monuments. Furthermore, the ongoing revision and redefinition of monument types allows for a more readily accessible set of data for future pan-Wales studies of social, cultural and economic development from prehistory to the present, both regionally and nationally, and at all levels of enquiry, from the professional archaeologist to the amateur.

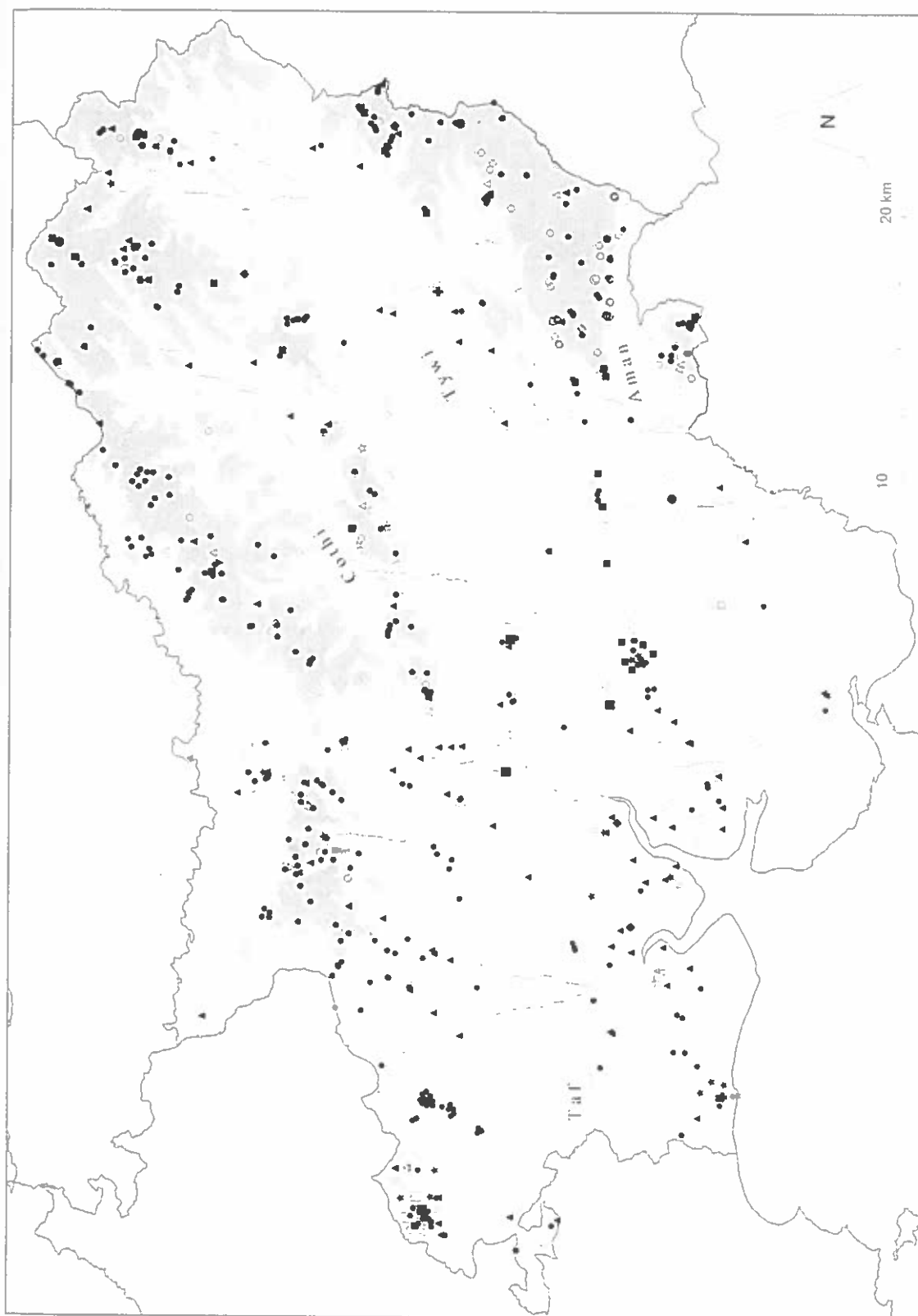


Fig. 1. Distribution of all sites. Solid symbols = probable sites, open symbols = possible sites.  
Land over 264m (800ft) represented by shaded areas.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Pre-survey desk based assessment*

The first point of reference for the PFRS survey was the Regional Sites and Monuments Record (SMR).<sup>2</sup> Prior to the fieldwork phase of the project, the SMR was first interrogated to produce a project database of all sites which potentially fell into the category of Neolithic and Bronze Age funerary and ritual monuments for Carmarthenshire. Included within this were all sites which have previously been positively identified as pre-historic funerary and ritual monument site types (e.g. chambered tombs, round barrows, standing stones, etc.), as well as including those sites for which there are sometimes alternative classifications (e.g. round barrows which may be clearance cairns, standing stones which may be rubbing stones, etc.). In the initial search those sites recorded from documentary sources or place-name evidence alone were also included in the database, as were known destroyed sites and those listed as cropmarks. Once the database had been generated all the entries were then assessed both on the basis of the records held on the computerised SMR database and any other paper records held in the offices of Cambria Archaeology.<sup>3</sup> Where possible, aerial photographs were consulted, as were other bibliographic sources.

### *Selection of sites for field assessment*

Part of the desk-based assessment included the refinement of the database into a more manageable and achievable fieldwork sample. Sites which had been visited in recent years by Cambria Archaeology and found to have no surviving, visible archaeological presence (i.e. 'destroyed' sites) were removed from the total, as were sites noted only from documentary sources or place-name evidence.<sup>4</sup> The refined database also excluded any duplicated records.

### *The survey area*

Carmarthenshire is a rich and varied landscape, incorporating part of the coast, the Taf, Tywi and Gwendraeth estuaries as well as inland upland areas, characterised by rolling hills and numerous valleys. In the eastern half of the region in particular the area is dominated by two massive upland blocks, comprising the southern edge of the Cambrian Mountains (including Mynydd Mallaen) and the western end of the Brecon Beacons (including Mynydd y Betws and Mynydd Du). The east Carmarthenshire area also includes the watersheds and upper valleys of several rivers including the Tywi, Cothi, Tivrch, Animan, Clydach and Sawdde, as well as numerous

smaller tributaries. The resulting landscape is one of considerable contrasts, with the upper reaches of river valleys contrasting with the neighbouring upland plateaux, on which the vast majority of the monuments are located. Within Carmarthenshire there are a number of well-known monument complexes, including those of Glandy Cross in the west of the area, Mynydd Llangydeyrn in the southeast and Cefn Gwenffrwd in the northeast, all of which contain a high density of different prehistoric funerary and ritual monument types.

### *Fieldwork*

All sites that were visited were recorded and assessed using a pro-forma record sheet, which allowed the consistent recording of the same information for all the monuments within the fieldwork sample. This information included the monument's form, condition, current land use, dimensions, landscape setting and viewshed (i.e. the views over the wider landscape including the intervisibility between monuments, and topographical features). A detailed description and sketch were also made, with National Grid References checked and amended to ten figures using a Global Positioning System (GPS). Details of generic site type were also altered as necessary, based on the glossary of terminology and monument type definitions developed by CPAI<sup>5</sup> and refined by Cambria Archaeology during the course of the fieldwork. Photographs were taken as and when appropriate using colour slide, black and white print and digital formats, and are held as part of the PFRS project archive which is available for consultation at the offices of Cambria Archaeology.

## RESULTS

The results of the PFRS project in west and east Carmarthenshire were written up into two volumes (Bestley 2001; Cook *et al* 2003) and are held as unpublished reports in Cambria's SMR. A summary of results is presented here.

### *Sites visited*

During the desk-based assessment it was found that many of the sites (excluding Scheduled Ancient Monuments) had last been visited by archaeologists in the late 1970s-early 1980s and therefore a field visit to assess their condition and survival was long overdue. The refined database indicated that a total of 751 sites in Carmarthenshire required a field visit, and it is estimated that 97% of these monuments were visited

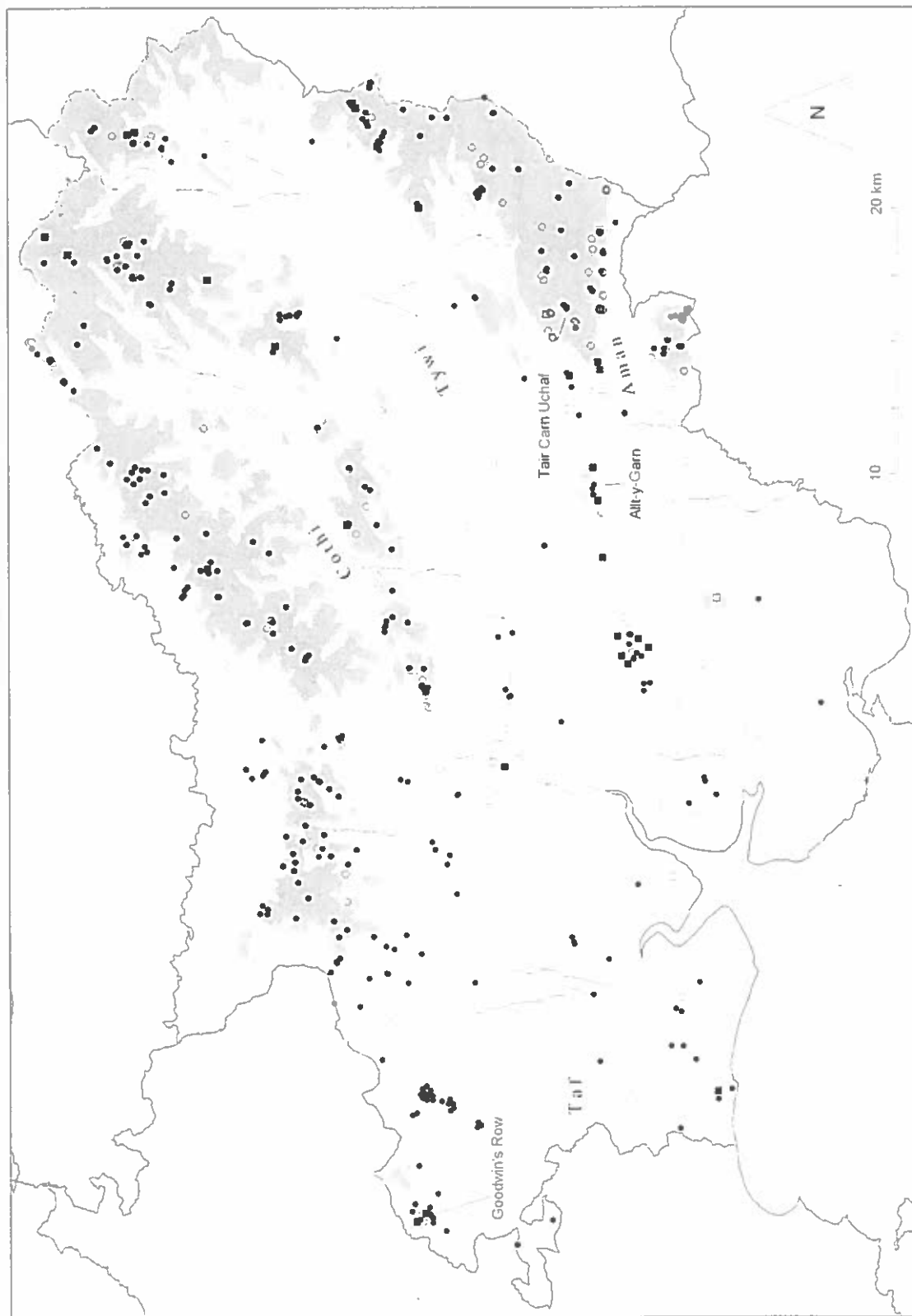


Fig. 2. Distribution of round barrows (circles) and ring barrows (squares). Solid symbols = probable sites, open symbols = possible sites.  
Land over 244m (800ft) represented by shaded areas.



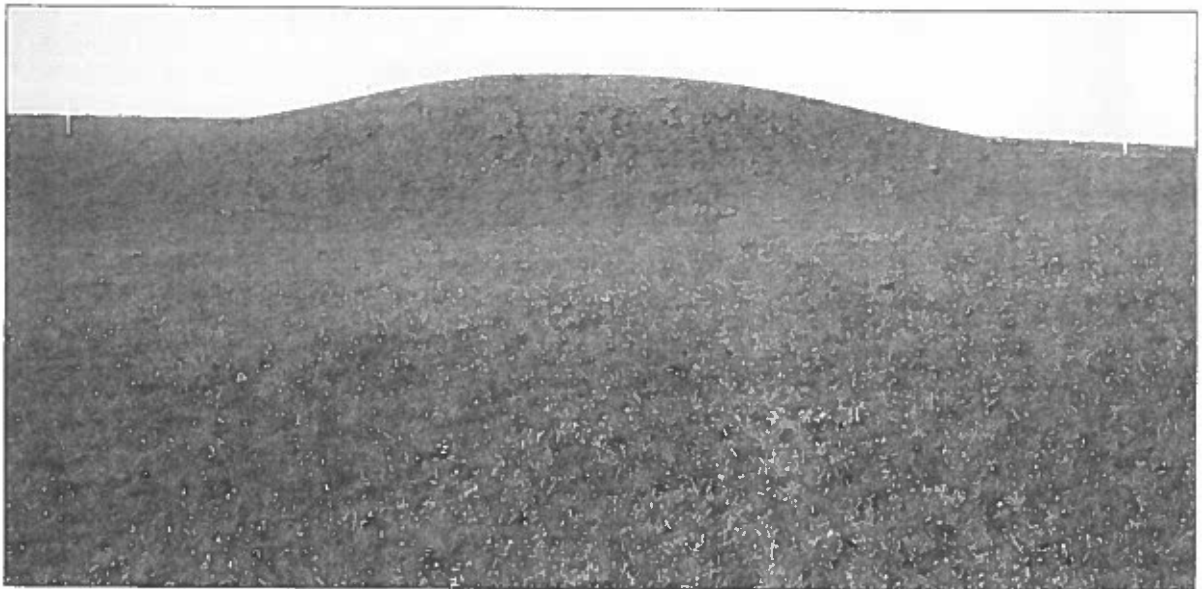
*Carnau'r Correg Las, Llanddewant, two summit-top stone-built round barrows also forming a round barrow pair*

during the fieldwork phase of the PERS project. The remaining 3% (c.23 sites) not accessed was largely due to the refusal of permission by, or inability to make contact with, the relevant landowners.

*Individual site types, definitions and numbers*

*Round barrow* (Fig. 2 – 561 sites) – a round mound of earth and/or stone with a rounded or flattened top

presumed to be for burial and other ritual activity during the later Neolithic or Bronze Age. The mound may be enclosed by a circular or intermittent outer ditch and may have a complex structure including stone kerbs, stone settings or burial cists. Such internal and external features can rarely be recorded for these monuments unless they have been excavated and documented. This site type is the most commonly found prehistoric funerary and ritual monument, with 368 probable



*Cwm Iror, Burry Port, an example of a well-preserved earthen round barrow*

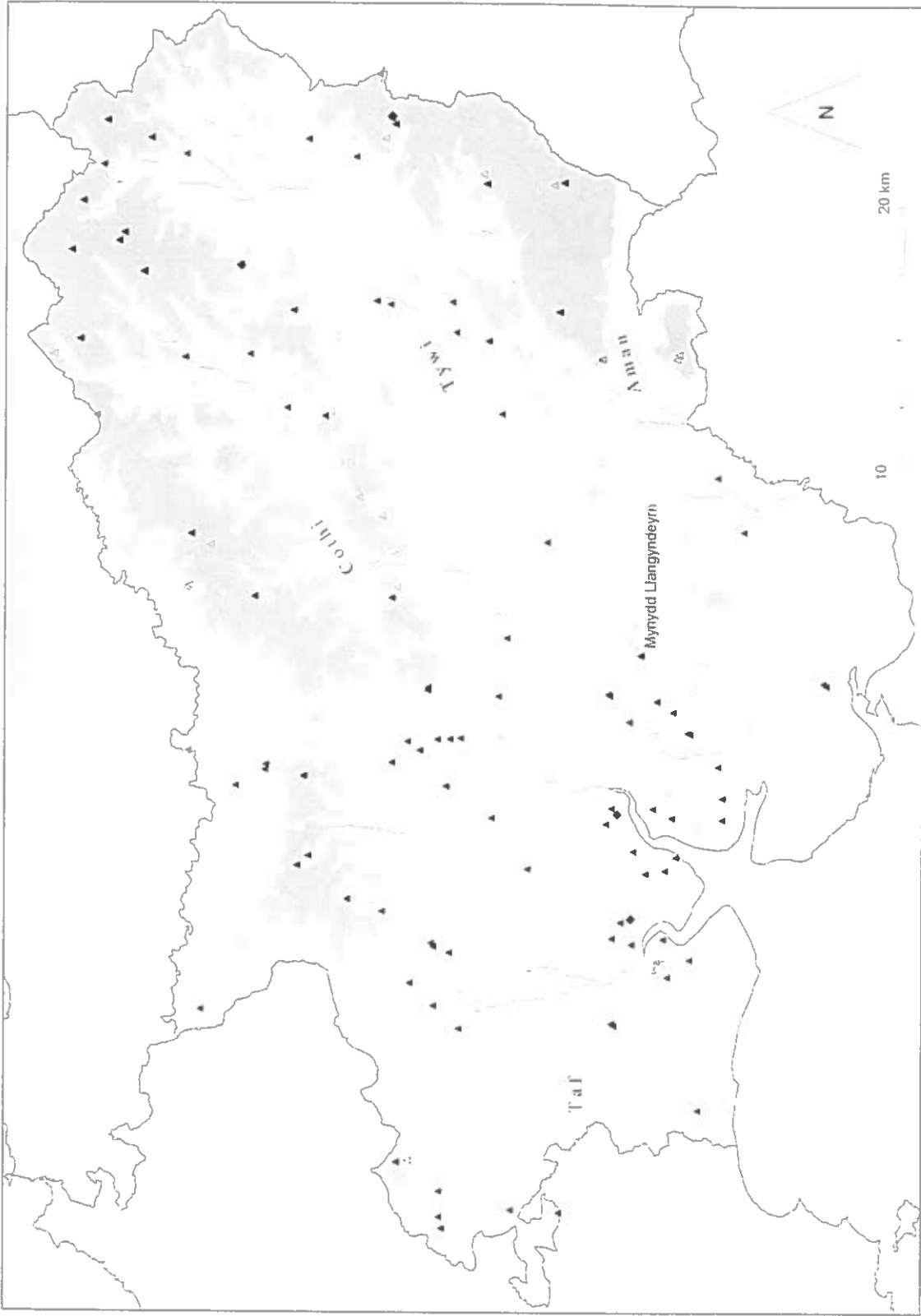


Fig. 3. Distribution of standing stones (triangles) and standing stone pairs (diamonds). Solid symbols = probable sites, open symbols = possible sites.  
Land over 2.5m (800ft) represented by shaded areas.

barrows and 193 possible sites now recorded in Carmarthenshire alone. Altogether 77 new sites (45 probable, 32 possible) were newly discovered during fieldwork and were recorded onto the SMR. After visiting a selection of sites recorded in the SMR simply as 'cairns' 15 of these were re-classified as definite round barrows.<sup>4</sup> However, 6 previously recorded possible round barrows were re-classified as natural features, 4 were re-classified as mining features/spoil tips, 2 re-classified as cairnfields, 8 re-classified as possible clearance cairns, and one re-classified as a possible ring barrow instead. Despite their abundance, very few of these Carmarthenshire round barrows have been fully excavated, and only two, Allt-y-Garn (a summit-top stone-built barrow-see Murphy 1995) and Goodwin's Row (a damaged earthen site at Glandy Cross – see Murphy 1990), have been investigated using modern scientific techniques.

*Ring barrow* (Fig. 2 – 39 sites) – a monument comprised of a ring of earth and/or stones, usually between 5 and 20m in diameter, surrounding a hollow central area that is (or was initially) free of cairn material, and which is presumed to have been the focus of various prehistoric ritual ceremonies during the later Neolithic and Bronze Age.<sup>6</sup> There are 30 probable and 19 possible ring barrow sites in Carmarthenshire, with a cluster focussed around Mynydd Llangydeyrn and the remaining sites generally located within the upland areas. None of these Carmarthenshire sites have been scientifically excavated, although a now destroyed example at Marros was examined in the early 20th century (Ward 1977). In north Wales several have been investigated, with Brenig a particularly good example (Lynch 1993).

*Standing stone* (Fig. 3 – 175 sites) – defined as a singular upright monolith or boulder set in the ground and assumed to be a ritual monument of prehistoric date. A sub-type included within this monument type are recumbent stones. Standing stones are often, though not always, associated with other ritual and funerary monuments of Neolithic and Bronze Age date and may also be the focus of ceremonial activities including the use of pits and timber structures, the lighting of fires and also acts of structured deposition. Such features are not visible above ground, and are only recorded as the result of excavation. Thirteen new sites were discovered during fieldwork, with 107 probable and 68 possible sites known for Carmarthenshire as a whole. Several standing stone sites have been excavated in southwest Wales, including



*Mynydd Mallaen Maenhir, an upland standing stone.*

two on Mynydd Llangydeyrn (Ward 1983), and one at Stackpole in south Pembrokeshire (Benson *et al* 1990). The latter site demonstrated the complex and extensive below ground remains that can survive around standing stones. Williams (1988) has also reviewed the evidence for this site type in southwest Wales.

*Standing stone pair* (Fig. 3 – 12 sites) – quite specifically a pair of standing stones located immediately adjacent or within close proximity to one another, usually no more than 15m apart. Often, though not always, characterised by a so-called 'male' stone (a tall and tapering monolith) and a 'female' stone (shorter and more squat). These stones appear to have been purposefully chosen and sited together, and are distinct from a stone row. Prior to the recognition of standing stone pairs as a monument form in their own right at least three sites had been recorded as possible chambered tombs: these were re-assessed during the fieldwork phase of the project and rightfully assigned to their proper site type as standing stone pairs. Excavation around Yr Allor stones took place in early 1990s (Kirk and Williams 1990), but subsequently this site has been classified as a cove (see below).

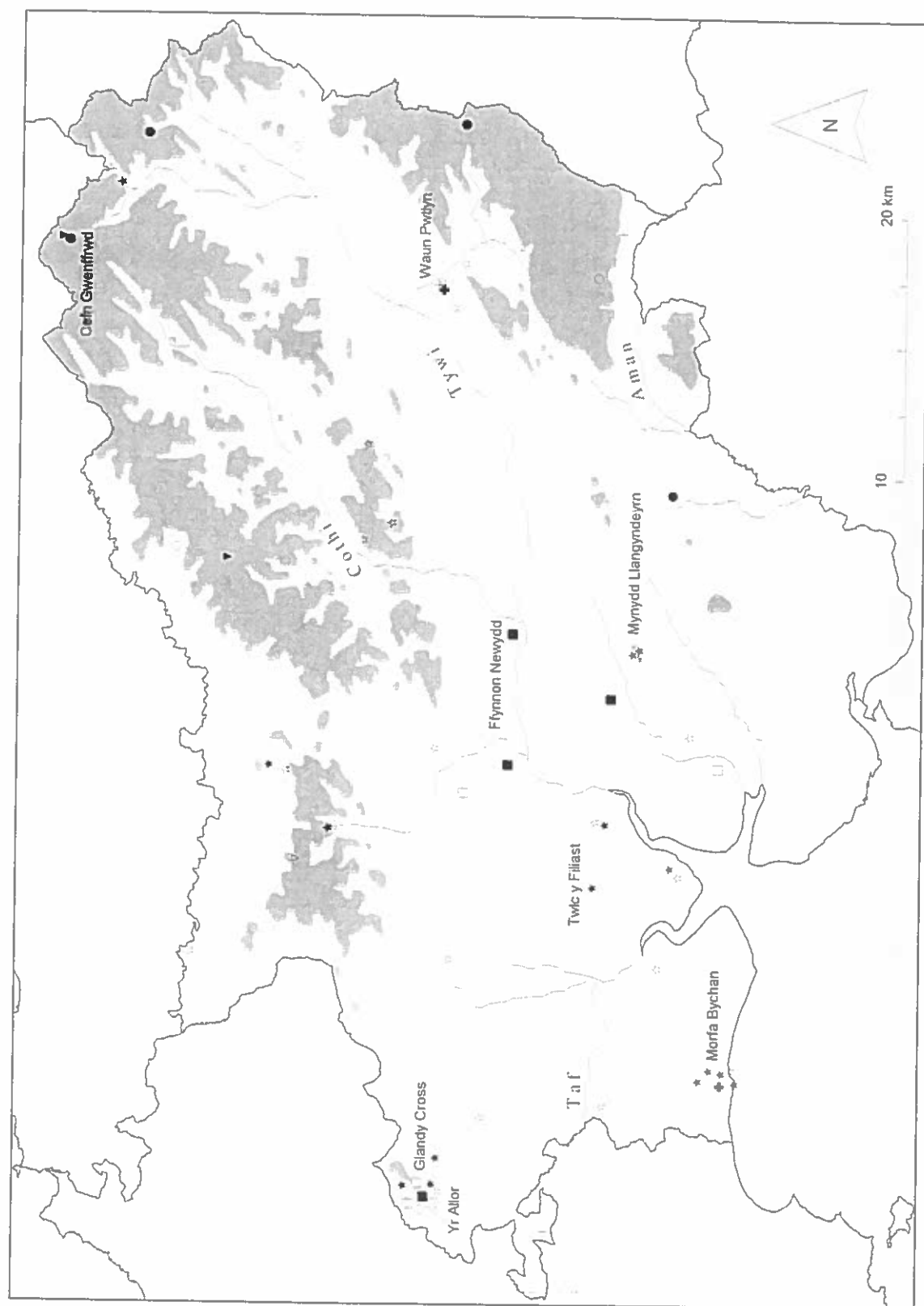
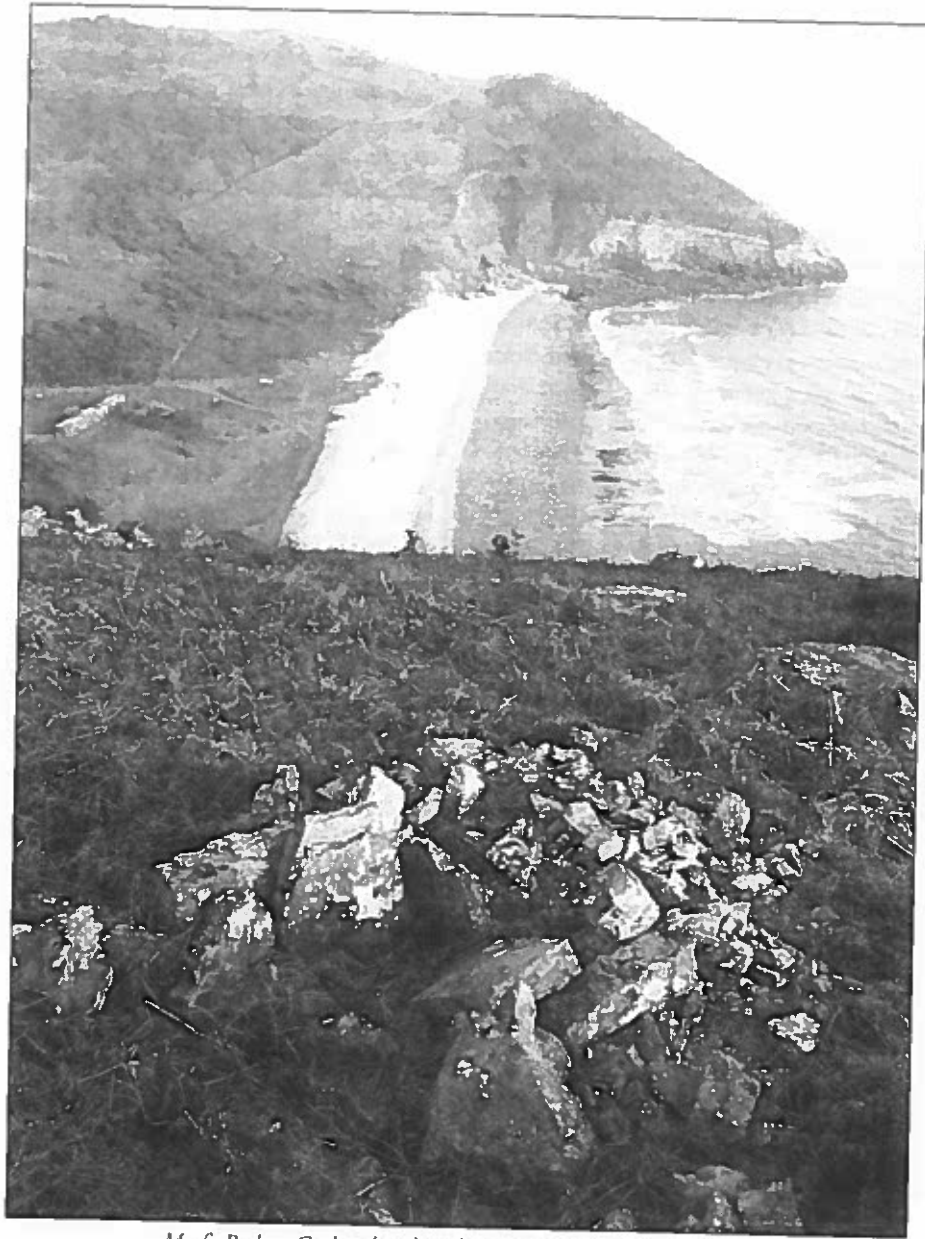


Fig. 4. Distribution of chambered tombs (stars), benges (squares), long barrows (crosses), stone circles (circles), stone rows (triangles). Solid symbols = probable sites, open symbols = possible sites. Land over 244m (800ft) represented by shaded areas.





*Morfa Bychan C, chambered tomb looking over to Gilman Point.*

*Chambered tomb (Fig. 4 – 35 sites)* – monument with evidence of a burial chamber, and occasionally a passage, comprised of upright stones and considered to be a funerary and ritual monument of the early-middle Neolithic period. The burial chamber may be covered by a capstone or roof stones and may be enclosed within a round or long mound or cairn. The burial chamber is generally larger than, and distinct from, a cist. There were 15 probable and 20 possible chambered tomb

sites known in Carmarthenshire. No new sites were discovered. Many chambered tombs in southwest Wales have been investigated at some time in their history, usually with disappointing results. Those in Carmarthenshire are no exception, with, for example, the sites at Morfa Bychan (Ward 1918) and Twlc y Filiast, Llangynog (Savory 1953 & 1956a), subjected to excavation. Barker (1992) has also recently reviewed the evidence for these sites in southwest Wales.

*Henge* (Fig. 4 – 10 sites) – a circular earthwork or cropmark monument normally comprising a ditch with an external or internal bank and one or more entrances, associated with ritual or funerary activity of later Neolithic date and normally also found with other funerary and/or ritual monuments of the Neolithic or Bronze Age. Internal settings may include timber, stone or pit circles, stone settings, central mounds, cremation pits, etc., and generally the henge itself exceeds a diameter of 20m. A sub-type of this category, hengiform monuments, displays the same characteristics as a henge, but have an internal diameter of less than 20m. Only four sites were considered genuine henges after fieldwork, the remainder being more dubious. The only henge monument in Carmarthenshire to have had any excavation is Ffynnon Newydd, Nantgaredig (Williams 1984), but this was very small scale.

*Stone circle* (Fig. 4 – 8 sites) – an approximately circular or oval setting of spaced, usually free-standing, upright (or originally upright) stones. More than one circle may be present, arranged concentrically. Stone circles may be found in association with other prehistoric monuments, such as round barrows, and may themselves be a constituent part of henge monuments. Other features may also be present within stone circles, such as cists or pits, and these monuments are assumed to have had a ritual and possibly funerary function during the late Neolithic and into the middle Bronze Age. In Carmarthenshire there are four probable and four possible sites, with three of the probable sites forming part of much larger monument groupings and thus prehistoric monument complexes. Professor Grimes excavated the embanked stone circle forming part of the Meini Gwyr henge in the late 1930s, unfortunately many of his records were lost during World War II. However, his surviving records have been lodged with the National Monuments Record in Aberystwyth, and composite drawings compiled for the Glandy Cross project (Kirk and Williams 2000) are deposited with Carmarthen Museum. No other Carmarthenshire stone circle has been subjected to excavation.

*Stone row* (Fig. 4 – 4 sites) – one or more roughly parallel rows of three or more upright stones set at intervals along a common axis and presumed to have been used for ritual activity during the late Neolithic and Bronze Age. Two probable and two possible sites are known within the Carmarthenshire area. So few examples of this monu-

ment type can partially be explained by their overall rarity within southwest Wales in general, although it is likely that more sites once existed. Often, though not always, stone rows were constructed using stones which were much smaller than their standing stone counterparts, thus adding to their vulnerability particularly in areas of intensive agricultural activity.

*Long barrow* (Fig. 4 – 4 sites) – earthwork or cropmark indications of a long and roughly rectangular or trapezoidal mound of earth and/or stones presumed to have been built and used as a funerary and/or ritual monument during the early to middle Neolithic. There are two probable and two possible long barrows recorded in Carmarthenshire, with both of the probable long barrow sites closely associated with chambered tombs. Both chambered tombs and long barrows are considered to be broadly contemporaneous with each other, and although none of the long barrows in Carmarthenshire have been excavated, many examples from elsewhere in Wales have been fully excavated revealing various complex internal features such as chambers, cists, and revetment walling (e.g. Pipton (Savory 1956b), Ffostyll North and South (Vulliamy 1921; 1922; 1923), Penywyrld II (Britnell and Savory 1984), Tŷ-Isaf (Grimes 1939) and Gwernvale (Britnell and Savory 1984).

*Cist* (5 sites) – defined as an isolated stone pit assumed to have held a human burial of prehistoric or later date. Generally cists take the form of rectangular structures built from stone slabs set on edge and covered by one or more horizontal slabs or capstones. The small number of sites recorded in Carmarthenshire is likely to result from the fact that such features represent 'flat' burials with little or no surface indication of their presence, and thus tend to be only encountered by chance. Only one of these sites is currently known to survive, with the others all being destroyed or of doubtful authenticity.

*Cist grave cemetery* (2 sites) – a group of two or more inhumations or cremations interred within stone cists. Only two possible cist grave cemetery sites are recorded within Carmarthenshire, both located in the eastern part of the region although both are known of only from antiquarian documentary sources and have no extant remains.

*Cove* (2 sites) – a prehistoric megalithic monument consisting of three or more standing stones in close

proximity to each other, forming an un-roofed and approximately rectangular structure open in one direction. This monument type is to be distinguished from chambered tombs and stone circles, but may bear some relation to 'stone settings'. The only two recorded examples from Carmarthenshire, and indeed in Wales, are both located within the Glandy Cross prehistoric monument complex. One site, Yr Allor, was re-classified as a possible cove from its previous classification as a possible standing stone pair or chambered tomb based on excavation and documentary evidence for a (now missing) third stone, whilst the other site, no longer extant and known only from documentary sources, was suggested to be a possible cove from the description and drawing made by Stukely in the 18th century (Burl 1981; Ward *et al* 1987).

*Cremation burial (8 sites)* – a single cremation burial, in which the human body is burnt leaving fragmentary charred or completely combusted remains, possibly contained within a pit and/or pottery vessel. Such burials may be accompanied by grave goods but generally have no associated surface features. They are distinct from cremation burials associated with round barrows, henges or other funerary and ritual monuments. They occur during the later Neolithic to middle Bronze Age, and again in the later Iron Age and Romano-British period. As with cist burials, such a small number of known cremation burial sites is likely to be the result of the little or no surface indications of their presence, with the recorded examples known having been found by chance. Once found, these burials are usually removed from their location and housed in museums or other collections, and are recorded on the SMR as 'finds' with no further archaeological presence in the landscape. None of these sites were therefore visited during fieldwork.

*Cup marked stone (2 sites)* – a stone bearing one or more small, roughly hemispherical depressions, either *in situ* or closely associated with a prehistoric funerary and/or ritual monument. The cups may be smoothed from natural erosion and may be naturally-marked stones appropriated within a ritual context, or may equally be the result of both cultural and natural agency. Two new examples of cup marked stones were added to the SMR having been discovered and recorded during a field visit to the Morfa Bychan chambered tombs on Ragwen Point, near Pendine. Both sites fall within the current scheduled area protecting the Morfa Bychan cairns. So

far the only other authentic cup marked stone recorded within the SMR is also associated with a chambered tomb cemetery in Pembrokeshire at Cerrig y Gof, near Newport.

*Inhumation (3 sites)* – a single inhumation of prehistoric or later date which does not appear to be associated with any burial structure such as a cist or round barrow. As with cremation burials and cist sites, the small number of inhumations recorded in Carmarthenshire is a reflection of their lack of visible presence and those known have generally been encountered by chance (e.g. during quarrying) and subsequently destroyed.

*Scoop grave (70 sites)* – the majority of the sites described as 'scoop graves' on the SMR were recorded during a single fieldwork project on the upland block of Mynydd Mallaen following a fire in 1995, which removed large areas of vegetation (Williams and Darke 1996). They generally take the form of a low elongated mound, between 3m and 8m long and up to 1m high, flanked on one side by a shallow ditch. Their recording as Bronze Age funerary/ritual monuments is tentative, and it was decided not to systematically visit all of these sites, although a selection were targeted and visited. However, 3 possible new 'scoop graves' were discovered and recorded during fieldwork on the edge of Mynydd Du.

#### *Group monument types*

The following groups of monuments are recorded in the SMR as site types in themselves, but act as hierarchical terms for a closely associated set of individual monuments. Each individual monument already has its own record number, but the group monument record number allows inter-related monuments to be recognised as a cluster which would not otherwise be possible when searching the SMR. In addition to the pre-existing 'Chambered tomb cemetery' and 'Round barrow cemetery' terms, two new group monument types were created ('Prehistoric Monument Complex' and 'Round Barrow Pair') and added to the SMR as a result of this project. A number of previously unrecorded round barrow cemeteries were also recognised from both the desk-based assessment and fieldwork and also added to the database.

*Chambered tomb cemetery (1 site)* – as the name suggests, a group of chambered tombs located within close proximity to one another. Only one example is known

in Carmarthenshire, and refers to the group of four tombs at Morfa Bychan near Pendine, which are visible from the coastal path, although a pair of tombs are known from Mynydd Llangyndeyrn.

*Prehistoric monument complex (13 sites)* – a pair or group of different types of prehistoric funerary and/or ritual monuments, which are perceived as having some association. An example would be a round barrow and standing stone in close proximity, or a group including a wider range of monuments (e.g. a long barrow and chambered tomb cemetery, or a standing stone, ring barrow and two round barrows, etc.). This recognition of grouping makes an important contribution to our understandings of the inter-relationships and patterns of association between different monument types throughout the Neolithic and Bronze Age.

*Round barrow cemetery (42 sites)* – for this survey a group of three or more round barrows were classed as a cemetery, on the basis that they exist within close proximity to one another: few will be more than 150m from their nearest neighbour and most will be less than 100m apart. A sub-type of this category is a cemetery aligned in a linear fashion, of which there are 5 recorded examples in Carmarthenshire. In total, there are 37 probable barrow cemeteries and 5 possible cemeteries, the possible sites being those which are largely destroyed or known only from documentary sources.

*Round barrow pair (25 sites)* – a clear pairing of two round barrows sited within close proximity of each other, usually within 100m, and distinct from individual round barrows and barrow cemeteries. Often, though not always, the two barrows will be of similar size and construction, suggesting they were deliberately paired together and were not simply the result of an unfinished cemetery or intended larger grouping. This twinning of round barrows may reflect a regional tradition which is also represented by 'standing stone pairs'.

*Additional prehistoric funerary and ritual site types* – There were no recorded examples of the following site types in Carmarthenshire, although they are recorded as Neolithic and Bronze Age funerary and/or ritual monuments elsewhere within Wales:

*Cursus* – a markedly long and narrow ditched enclosure with parallel sides and closed ends associated with ritual

activity during the Neolithic and often spatially associated with other funerary or ritual monuments of Neolithic and/or Bronze Age date.

*Palisaded enclosure* – One or more rows of pits identified from cropmarks or excavation, forming the perimeter of an enclosure which may be associated with Neolithic funerary or ritual activity.

*Pit* – a pit or pits of unknown function, usually associated with funerary and ritual monuments of the Neolithic and Bronze Age and identified from cropmark evidence or excavation.

*Pit avenue* – two parallel rows of pits, possibly originally for upright timbers, forming an avenue. So far, the only known example in Wales is in the Walton Basin in association with a palisaded enclosure (Gibson 1999).

*Pit circle* – One or more concentric circular settings of pits identified from cropmarks or excavation, and considered to be associated with funerary or ritual activity of later Neolithic or early Bronze Age date. Excavation may show that a site should be re-classed as a timber circle or stone circle, but might otherwise represent a circle of cremation or votive pits.

*Ring ditch* – One or more concentric ditches with no visibly surviving internal mound identified from cropmarks or excavation and assumed to be associated with funerary and/or ritual monuments of later Neolithic to middle Bronze Age date.

*Stone setting* – an imprecise term referring to an arrangement of upright stones that is not readily identifiable as either a stone row or stone circle or any other well-defined type of megalithic monument.

*Timber circle* – sites which have been shown by excavation to have consisted of one or more concentric settings of upright posts set in individual post-holes associated with funerary and/or ritual activity of later Neolithic or early Bronze Age date. The definition also includes timber circles which may form part of a henge (Gibson 1994).

#### *New sites added and sites discounted*

A total of 109 new sites were added to the SMR for Carmarthenshire, and an additional 52 hierarchical group monument records also created. From the original

database 62 sites were re-classified as non-funerary and/or non-ritual clearance cairns or cairnfields. A few sites (8) were re-classified as natural features or landforms, with one site re-interpreted as a hut platform rather than a round barrow. One possible ring barrow/stone circle site was found to be a modern folly, having been built in 1976!

Of the new sites discovered during fieldwork, the vast majority were round barrows (77 sites, of which 45 were probable sites and 32 possible sites). This was a 16% increase on the original known total of 482 round barrow sites. In total 13 new standing stones were also identified (9 probable and 4 possible), an increase of 8% on the original known total of 162 sites. Four new ring barrows (3 probable, 1 possible) were also added, corresponding to an increase of 11% to the original total of 37 known sites. The remaining new sites are summarised as follows: 2 cup-marked stones, 6 standing stone pairs, 3 scoop graves and 1 long barrow.

## DISCUSSION

The overall distribution of all monument types within Carmarthenshire shows a relatively even spread of prehistoric funerary and ritual monuments across the county, suggesting that during the Neolithic and Bronze Age the landscape was both populated and popular with monument builders and users. The spread of monuments at first glance appears to form two sweeping bands leaving a central area with disproportionately less recorded sites: this can be partially explained topographically. The central band is characterised by the lowlands and fertile floodplains of the major rivers in the region, and as such tend to be the most intensively farmed areas. It is likely that the bias in the record is thus a result of a partiality in preservation, although it must also be considered that certain prehistoric funerary and ritual monuments were deliberately *not* built here; instead more upland locations away from the major valleys were favoured.

When comparing and contrasting the siting of individual monument types in more detail, a number of interesting patterns emerge. For example, only one definite chambered tomb is located in east Carmarthenshire in contrast to the 14 sites recorded in the west of the county, which may reflect the generally more upland character of the east. The builders of chambered tombs seemingly favoured locations below 240m above sea level, as well as choosing sites close to sources of water either on slopes overlooking major rivers or on coastal

ridges and floodplains. Long barrows, too, were built in locations overlooking water (e.g. at Morfa Bychan overlooking the sea, and Waun Pwtylyn located 500m from the Afon Sawdde). Of the 10 probable and possible henge monuments recorded in Carmarthenshire, it is also noted that all were located in lowland areas, with none occurring on land over 200m. By contrast, the vast majority of prehistoric monument complexes were located on areas of upland over 244m, with dramatic views over the surrounding landscape and favouring topographic locations such as ridges, high plateaux and local summits from which wide-ranging views could be achieved (and where the monuments themselves could be also be seen from lower ground). Similarly, ring barrows also tend to occupy upland locations, with the distribution of just over a third of all known probable ring barrow sites in Carmarthenshire notably running in a roughly E-W band from the edge of Mynydd Du across to the cluster on Mynydd Llangyndeyrn, and favouring the same topographic sitings as prehistoric monument complexes, of which they often form a part.

The most common prehistoric funerary and ritual monument type in Carmarthenshire is that of 'round barrow'. The term 'round barrow' includes a wide variety of different sizes and composition of a nonetheless easily identifiable monument form. As such these barrows can be composed purely of stone, although more usually are an admixture of both stone and earth in varying proportions. They are equally varied in size and height, but hold in common a usually clearly defined circular shape, distinct from other monument types in the prehistoric landscape. Sometimes, where preserved, a rounded profile is also evident, although these monuments assumed a variety of different forms (rounded, flat-topped, low, small, high, large, kerbed, capped) which would undoubtedly have played a role in their ritual usage and their 'monumentality'. These differing types of round barrow form may potentially reflect localised traditions, but equally may be deliberate variations on a symbolic, social and cultural level, especially where these different forms are closely associated in the landscape. In terms of topographic siting round barrows favour upland locations, for the most part in prominent positions (such as on local summits, ridges, hillslopes and high plateaux), with commanding views out over the wider landscape. Intervisibility between other sites, and in particular between other round barrows, seems also to play a large part in determining their exact positioning. Although round barrows reflect a tradition

of monument building associated with the later Neolithic and Bronze Age in particular, and a tradition of monumentality focused primarily in upland locations, they nonetheless appear to continue with trends set by other prehistoric funerary and ritual monuments whereby locations close to sources of water are evidenced in the majority of cases (although such sources tend to be springs and smaller streams rather than the major rivers and coastal locations favoured by chambered tombs, long barrows and standing stones). Whilst some individual round barrows are known from more lowland contexts, the occurrence of groups of round barrows (round barrow cemeteries) are exclusively located on high ground, and often dominate the skyline for miles around (e.g. the Tair Carn Uchaf and Isaf cemeteries on Mynydd Du).

Standing stones form the second largest recorded prehistoric monument type in Carmarthenshire, and in terms of distribution they appear to be more varied in their choice of topographic location in the landscape, occupying an almost equal spread between lowland and upland contexts. However, as Figure 3 shows, their proximity to the major rivers and Tywi/Gwendraeth estuaries cannot be overlooked as a potential factor in their siting, even though these locations are ones where intensive farming methods are most apparent and thus the sites potentially most threatened. Indeed, when compared to the dense concentrations of round barrows evident in the uplands in east Carmarthenshire (where one might expect a greater degree of preservation of monuments due to the inaccessibility of the land and less intensive agricultural practices) it is significant that standing stones are not reflected so strongly in these areas, suggesting that their overall pattern of distribution is not simply the result of preservation issues. Standing stone pairs, a monument tradition which seems to be a regional variation in southwest Wales, are specifically found in only two types of location: the upland margins and close to the Taf/Tywi estuaries.

With the exception of the embanked stone circle at Meini Gwyr, which forms part of the Glandy Cross monument complex in the far western extremities of Carmarthenshire, all other recorded stone circles occur within the eastern half of the county, and in particular in the uplands bordering Ceredigion and Powys. The very few examples of extant stone rows are also exclusively found within upland contexts in the northern half of Carmarthenshire, and preservation issues alone offer insufficient explanation for these patterns of distribution

for both monument types. Instead, the locations for these monuments were seemingly carefully chosen, and both stone circles and stone rows were often found in association with other Neolithic and Bronze Age ritual and funerary monuments.

A clear pattern which emerges from the above discussion is the apparently careful choosing of quite specific locations for the siting of different individual monument types, particularly in the case of chambered tombs, round barrows and standing stones. Intervisibility between sites was another pattern clearly observed during the fieldwork phase: significantly, even if the actual monuments themselves were not directly visible, their locations certainly were. If we imagine a prehistoric past where story-telling and myth-making about the ancestors played a significant role in ritual understandings and expressions in the landscape, then knowledge about different sites (what they looked like, what happened there, who built them, etc.) would have added to the significance of being able to see the places where other monuments were built, without necessarily needing to see the actual monuments themselves. Yet another distinct pattern observed was the grouping of sites, and of round barrows in particular, within discreet clusters. Pairs of barrows were especially prevalent (25 examples), whilst also clear groups of three or more round barrows (classed as round barrow cemeteries) were more common (42 examples). The thirteen prehistoric monument complexes so far recorded also demonstrates that the grouping together of more than one type of prehistoric monument was not an entirely uncommon practice, and suggests the deliberate creation of more localised ritual landscapes which were in use for many hundreds of years. From many of these groups of sites it was not only possible to see the other monuments within the immediate group but it was also possible to look out over to other prominent locations in the landscape where other groups of sites were themselves sited. Such patterning was not readily apparent from an initial search of the SMR but one of the many results of this project has been to create hierarchical terms designed to reflect these groupings and so enable the SMR to be more effectively and usefully queried and interpreted. It is hoped that these observations can be further tested in order to see if they are statistically valid by applying techniques used within Geographic Information Systems (GIS) such as digital terrain modelling and visualisation studies (e.g. such as those applied at Stonehenge by Exon *et al* 2001). A preliminary examination of topographic location,

cost surface analysis and viewshed using GIS has recently been applied to a small selection of monuments within the Upper Tywi Valley (Davey 2002) with very promising results.

Even without such 'scientific' analyses, there is no escaping the fundamental relationship which seems to have existed between the natural and cultural worlds in the prehistoric past (see, for example, Bradley 1998, Edmonds 1999, Richards 1996, Thomas 1999 and Tilley 1994). Many of the monuments looked out over huge swathes of undulating landscape dominated inland by the major valleys of the rivers Taf, Tywi, Cothi and Gwendraeth, by the upland blocks of Mynydd Mallaen, Mynydd y Betws and Mynydd Du, and in the south of the region by the three estuaries and the coast. The location of sites also appeared to make specific reference to other significant natural elements, particularly water. Monuments were often located close to natural springs or small streams, or were actually directly overlooking rivers. Many barrows were also located in waterlogged and boggy areas in the landscape as if to further re-affirm a connection between ritual practice, natural elements and cosmological belief. Such connections could also be suggested for certain standing stones where potential naturally-occurring glacial erratics were appropriated as ritual monuments in the Neolithic and Bronze Age.

Despite the very large numbers of prehistoric funerary and ritual sites in Carmarthenshire very few have been excavated, and only a handful – several sites at Glandy Cross (Kirk and Williams 2000), Allt-y-Garn round barrow (Murphy 1995) and Goodwin's Row round barrow (Murphy 1990) – have been recently investigated in combination with radiocarbon dating methods,

palaeoenvironmental analyses and other scientific techniques. This is a great pity as the majority of Carmarthenshire prehistoric funerary and ritual sites are generally well-preserved, upstanding monuments such as earthwork and/or stone round barrows, standing stones and chambered tombs, and therefore potentially hold far more information than the more reduced, yet more frequently excavated, monuments characteristic of the intensively farmed areas of southeast and eastern Wales and middle/southern England.

As this project develops it will be interesting to see how these apparent patterns develop throughout the rest of Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion, and also what new patterns may emerge. Currently fieldwork in Pembrokeshire is ongoing, but is anticipated to be completed and a report produced by March 2004. The results for Pembrokeshire as a whole will be summarized as a paper to be submitted to *The Journal of the Pembrokeshire Historical Society*. Between 2004 and 2006 the PFRS project will finally look at Ceredigion, with the aim of also producing a paper for publication to be submitted to the Ceredigion Historical Society. Following this all four Welsh Trusts intend to synthesise their results from this pan-Wales survey into a variety of media for dissemination to the wider public, although the final format for this information is yet to be established. Altogether this project will help to contribute to a wider understanding and interpretation of the nature and significance of ritual and funerary monuments in the prehistoric past, and in association with the other Welsh Archaeological Trusts and Cadw, will enable the development of a regional and national perspective on Neolithic and Bronze Age monumentality in Wales.

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## NOTES

1. A pilot project was undertaken by Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) in 1997 to examine Neolithic and Bronze Age funerary and ritual monuments in the Upper Severn Valley. During this project a preliminary working methodology and glossary of terminology were developed (Gibson 1998). Similar surveys by CPAT followed for sites in Denbigh & East Conwy during 1998-99 (Jones 1999) and Flintshire & Wrexham during 1999-2000 (Jones 2000). The funding for this Prehistoric Funerary and Ritual Sites project was extended during 2000-01 to facilitate the first of a series of surveys undertaken by the three other Welsh Archaeological Trusts, with all the work having been funded by Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments.
2. The SMR is a valuable source of information for anyone interested in the past landscapes of southwest Wales and comprises a complex system of information with a computer database and Geographic Information System (GIS) at its core and is maintained by Cambria Archaeology at its offices in Llandeilo. At present the database holds over 37,000 records, a number that increases every day. For each record there is key information such as its name, location, type of site, and the period it belongs to, whilst most sites also have further bibliographic references and a description. The SMR provides information for the management of the physical heritage and is used daily to assess the archaeological implications of proposed developments in the area. The record is publicly accessible and enquiries are welcome whether for private research or commercial purposes. To make an enquiry or to visit the SMR in person please contact Cambria Archaeology at The Shire Hall, Carmarthen Street, Llandeilo, Carm. SA19 6AF, by telephone on 01558 823131 or visit our website at [www.acadat.com](http://www.acadat.com).
3. These paper records included Site Record Forms (SRF), Detailed Record Files (DRF) and other sources of information such as Ordnance Survey record cards, Cadw field warden reports for sites with Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) status, and reports from other projects which were relevant to prehistoric funerary and ritual sites (e.g. the Forest Enterprise Welsh Historic Assets survey). Site Record Forms are stored in files at the offices of Dyfed Archaeological Trust and are hand-written records detailing the history of each individual site, noting previous field visits and comments. Most of this information also appears on the computerised database, but not all sites have so far been updated. Also within the SRF files are hand-drawn sketches of some of the monuments which are useful when sometimes attempting to find a less than well-preserved monument in the field! Detailed Record Files are also stored in files at the offices of Dyfed Archaeological Trust and tend to consist of more in depth information, such as professional plans or drawings of sites and any other correspondence relating to the monuments (e.g. planning applications, letters, etc.), which are referenced by, but not stored on, the computerised database.
4. Sites noted from place-name evidence or documentary sources alone, without any confirmed physical archaeological presence, tended to form a large part of the PFRS databases and were practicably beyond the scope of the project. Many of these sites created a bias in the sample on the basis that they had been added to the SMR as a result of selective parish surveys funded during the 1980s by the Manpower Services Commission. It was noted in the unpublished report for west Carmarthenshire (Bestley 2001) that a separately funded project to visit these particular sites would be a useful exercise in assessing how reliable place-name and documentary evidences were in finding new and extant prehistoric funerary and ritual monuments. Although it was decided not to routinely visit sites from place-name or documentary sources, some sites were visited when they were located in close proximity to monuments that were part of the fieldwork sample.
5. The term 'cairn' within the SMR refers to a monument by form rather than by functional interpretation. As such it might refer to either a non-funerary 'clearance cairn' or a prehistoric funerary 'round barrow'. Almost all of these 'cairns' (83 sites) were recorded in east Carmarthenshire and because their exact nature was uncertain a field visit was made to the majority of them so that they could be properly re-classified. As a result, 15 sites were re-classified as definite round barrows, 12 sites re-classified as definite clearance cairns, 2 sites as definite ring barrows, with the remainder re-classified as both possible round barrows or clearance cairns.
6. This site type is included by CPAT as a sub-type under the category of round barrow, but it is strongly felt that ring barrows are a distinct monument form in their own right, and have thus remained in the Cambria Archaeology SMR as ring barrows.
7. Similar monuments in Glamorganshire were described as scoop graves during excavations in the 1940s (Fox and Murray-Threipland 1942), but the results of these excavations were inconclusive and their interpretation as prehistoric funerary and/or ritual monuments remains uncertain.
8. The English Heritage Thesaurus of Monument Class Descriptions defines a round barrow cemetery as five or more barrows, whilst CPAT define a cemetery as 2 or more barrows. ACADAT use the term 'Round barrow pair' to distinguish pairs of barrows from suggested 'cemetaries' of sites, believing that the pairing of sites was a deliberate arrangement, as was also the case with pairs of standing stones ('Standing stone pairs'), which are distinct from a stone row.
9. There is one such monument recorded as part of the Glandy Cross complex, although this currently lies just over the Carmarthenshire boundary within the modern north Pembrokeshire (Preseli) district.