

*Ceredigion 2008 Vol.15, No.4*

## **PREHISTORIC FUNERARY AND RITUAL SITES IN CEREDIGION**

### **Introduction**

Recent fieldwork in Ceredigion has focussed on visiting all known Neolithic and Bronze Age ritual and funerary monuments within the county. During this fieldwork a number of new sites were discovered and additional information recorded for the previously known sites. During 2004 and 2005 Dyfed Archaeological Trust 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 Ceredigion, as part of a pan-Wales project grant-aided by Cadw involving all four Welsh Archaeological Trusts. The principal objectives of this survey were: the field recording of all known sites; the enhancement of the Regional Historic Environment Record (the HER) with data collected during the recording; and the recommendation to Cadw of management requirements of sites including that of statutory protection through the Scheduling Enhancement Programme.

An examination of the surviving physical evidence was undertaken for all the different monument types that fell within the remit of the project. During the Neolithic and Bronze Age, dating from approximately 4400BC for the early Neolithic through to c.1300BC for the end of the middle Bronze Age, a variety of different monument types were built, either used for the burial or associated with funerary rituals. The earliest of these monuments were megalithic chambered tombs (although none survives in Ceredigion). At the time when these monuments were built the trend was towards collective burial of individuals, although it is clear that not all members of society were treated in

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this way. The processes and rituals which surrounded death and burial in the Neolithic and Bronze Age were highly complex and changed gradually during this period, and the developments in monumental architecture would seem also to reflect these trends.

In simplified terms, at the start of the Neolithic, dead bodies were generally placed in the chambers of megalithic tombs once they had been defleshed, i.e. the cleaned bones of individuals were gathered together and interred. It is believed that a number of rites were enacted, after which most (but not all) of the disarticulated bones were (often selectively) deposited. This has led archaeologists to suggest that early Neolithic society tended towards the egalitarian, as the bones of men, women, children and foetuses are all included in burial rites, though not necessarily together. Perhaps we detect here the denial of individuality in death, reflecting a belief in a communal set of 'ancestors'. Evidence from anthropological contexts suggests that these ancestors were believed to govern the fortunes of the living, controlling, for example, their ability to procure food, and to influence their health; as such these ancestors needed constantly to be appeased and venerated through successive rituals at the same locations.

Although the Neolithic was the time of the first farmers, it is highly likely that to start with people still lived a fairly nomadic lifestyle, moving between upland and lowland pastures herding animals. As a result the evidence we have for actual settlements is quite scanty when compared with that for ritual/funerary monuments. It is clear that people in the Neolithic possessed the ability to build lasting architectural forms (there are at least four accepted Neolithic tomb sites within Ceredigion), but they felt no need to build comparable megalithic domestic dwellings. However, chambered tombs acted as fixed places in the landscape where people could periodically gather together, reaffirming their 'collectivity' through the performance of rituals involving communal ancestors, which in turn would serve to unite the

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group. It is important to see these monuments as much as places for the living as they were for the dead; they fulfilled a role far greater than just a repository for the dead. As places of collective burial these megalithic tombs were used time and time again, sometimes for hundreds of years, before they went out of use and were sealed up, or deliberately emptied of their contents and abandoned. There were successive phases of activity at chambered tombs, which often saw bones moved and rearranged as new additions were made. Excavations of chambered tombs elsewhere in Wales have provided evidence for a variety of rituals that accompanied the deposition of bodies within the tombs, including the lighting of fires, feasting, and the placement of grave goods such as pieces of pottery and items of flint. This strengthens the interpretation of the tombs as foci for the living, where they could gather together for the reaffirmation of social and religious bonds as much as to celebrate their ancestors.

Towards the middle-late Neolithic (c.3000BC), intact bodies were placed in chambered tombs; this may suggest a move away from previous expressions of collectivity towards a celebration of the individual. However, it was not until the beginning of the Bronze Age (c.2300BC) that individual burials become commonplace, and when monumental architecture had changed completely. Round barrows constructed for the interment of a single individual were now the dominant form of funerary monument. At the same time, life for the living was becoming more sedentary than nomadic, and it is during the Bronze Age that we see the shift towards structured settlement and more permanent domestic structures. Even so, the archaeological evidence for such domestic life in west Wales remains ephemeral and elusive, in contrast to the funerary and ritual beliefs. At the same time as the introduction of the new style in monumental architecture, new ways of dealing the dead were employed, perhaps reflected changing trends in perceptions of life and death. During the late Neolithic we see the first cremated remains, with

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some cremations placed within chambered tombs, before these monuments were abandoned. Many round barrows contain a central (primary) cremation burial interred within (often inverted) pottery vessels, with other 'satellite' cremation burials included around the outside of the mound. Other round barrows were raised over the articulated inhumed remains of an individual, buried in a shallow pit or within a stone-lined cist, with secondary cremated deposits placed in the mound at a later date. As was the case with chambered tombs, round barrows acted as foci for repeated acts of ritual and deposition: they were not built for single events, despite their more 'closed' architecture. However, regardless of the funerary rite, it seems that round barrows were intended to celebrate the burial of individuals, often accompanied with grave goods. This has led to the assumption that these were the tombs of important people, such as 'chieftains', indicating a more hierarchical society as a more sedentary farming lifestyle became the norm.

As well as chambered tombs and round barrows, many other ritual/funerary monuments were constructed, such as henge monuments, standing stones, stone circles, and ring cairns, all of which are discussed later in this paper. In the absence of settlement evidence, the changing nature of ritual and funerary monumental architecture remains the sole indicator of social activity in the early prehistoric past, and forms the basis on which our interpretations about the lifestyles and beliefs of our ancestors are founded. A full review of all available evidence, including artefacts and the results of excavations and fieldwork, was beyond the scope of the project. However, in order to place the monuments in a wider context, this paper describes results from some of the more important excavations and other discoveries from Ceredigion and other parts of south-west Wales.

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### SURVEY RESULTS

A total of 495 sites in Ceredigion were assessed during the fieldwork phase of the project, 29 of which were newly discovered sites, including 19 round barrows, nine standing stones, and one ring barrow.

#### Individual site types, definitions and numbers

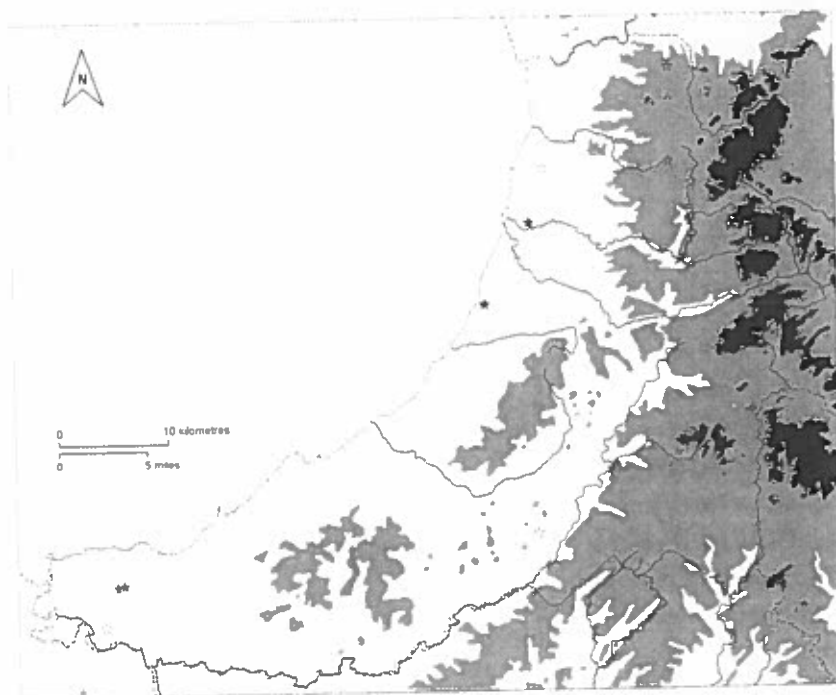


Fig 1: Chambered tombs in Ceredigion  
*Filled symbols = definite sites. Open symbols = possible sites.*

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**Chambered tomb** (Fig. 1 - 9 sites) – a 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 (c.4400-3200BC). 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 are nine chambered tomb sites recorded in Ceredigion, of which only four were assessed as being genuine examples. With 82 chambered tomb sites recorded in Pembrokeshire, and 35 examples known for Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion appears at first glance to have largely missed out on the initial funerary and ritual activity ascribed to the Neolithic. This can perhaps partially be explained by its smaller coastal zone: in both Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire the coastline offered abundant resources, and had been populated during the preceding Mesolithic period, with continuing exploitation during the new stone age. Ceredigion, on the other hand, with its rugged and dramatic upland landscape, appears to have been less densely populated in the early Neolithic. However, by the later Neolithic and early Bronze age this trend appears to have been reversed, and Ceredigion has some fine examples of stone circles and summit cairns. Of the four chambered tomb sites in Ceredigion, two are located close to the coast (one at Llanbadarn Fawr, one near Bow Street), whilst the two recorded near Llangoedmor were positioned overlooking the Teifi estuary as it widens and flows out into Cardigan Bay.

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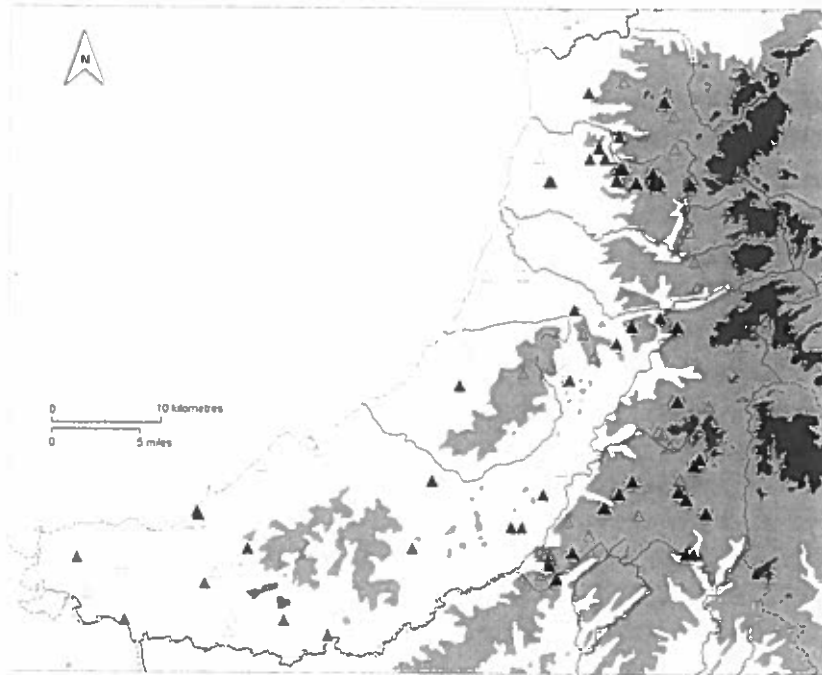
**Long barrow** (4 sites) – defined as earthwork or cropmark indications of a long and roughly rectangular or trapezoidal mound of earth and/or stones, presumed to have been built and used as a funerary and/or ritual monument during the early to middle Neolithic.

Four sites have been recorded in the past as possible long barrows in Ceredigion. This survey concluded that it is unlikely that any of the four sites are genuine; the only possible contender being Cefngranod, near Penbryn, where a Neolithic adze-head was discovered c.10m downslope of the site.

**Standing stone** (Fig 2, Plate 1 - 84 sites) – defined as a singular upright monolith or boulder set in the ground and assumed to be a ritual monument of prehistoric date. Recumbent stones are included as a sub-type within this monument class.

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. Fifteen new sites were discovered during fieldwork, bringing the total to 50 certain and 34 possible sites. Several standing stone sites have been excavated in mid and south-west Wales, with particularly good results at Plas Gogerddan, near Bow Street. Excavations here demonstrated the complex and

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*Fig. 2: Standing stones in Ceredigion*

*Filled symbols = definite sites. Open symbols = possible sites.*

extensive below ground remains that can survive around standing stones, and included numerous pits and postholes, and a number of other features, including a neolithic food deposit (c.3640-3340 BC). The site also continued to be the focus of ritual/funerary practice into the Iron Age, with three ring-ditches and three crouched burials encountered to the west of the stone. One burial dated to middle Iron Age (c.390BC), and demonstrates a time in which there was renewed interest in standing stones and inhumations, with existing Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments being re-used in preference to constructing new ones. Also within the vicinity of the standing stone lay 22 east-west aligned



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extended inhumation graves, three of which were surrounded by rectangular timber structures. A coffin stain from one of these graves was dated to the 3rd-7th centuries AD, and shows an incredibly long sequence of funerary and ritual practice at Plas Gogerddan spanning some 3000 years.



*Plate 1: Llech Gron standing stone*

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**Henge** (1 site) - 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.

There is only one possible henge monument recorded in the county of Ceredigion, and even that is of dubious authenticity. A number of large stones set into the circuit of the churchyard boundary at Ysbyty Cynfyn have been interpreted as a possible stone circle or henge monument in the past. However, most of the stones are built into the wall and do not touch the ground surface, making it unlikely that they are in their original position (if they were indeed ever part of a stone circle) and casting some doubt on their antiquity.<sup>2</sup> One large stone at the north-east side of the churchyard wall stands over 3m high and is well set into the surface. This is the only possible prehistoric standing stone which may actually be *in situ*.

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***Standing stone pair*** (Plate 2 - 10 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.

Williams has reviewed the evidence for standing stones and standing stone pairs in southwest Wales.<sup>4</sup> None of the Ceredigion examples has been excavated. However, given the complexity of features associated with single standing stones (as evidenced by archaeological work at Rhos-y-Clegyrn, St Nicholas, Pembrokeshire),<sup>5</sup> it could be reasonably predicted that similar settings, pits, post-holes and areas of charcoal would be discovered if any of these pairs of stones were investigated. In Ceredigion there are six probable and four possible sites. The majority of these are located in the northern half of the county, with four pairs noticeably located in close proximity to one other (Blaen Llywernog, Buwch a'r Llo, Glandwr and Disgwyfta Fach), in the environs of Esgair Nant-y-Moch. The remaining standing stone pairs are more widely distributed, with an outlier, Parc Pwdwr near Rhydlewys, the only example in the south-west of the county.

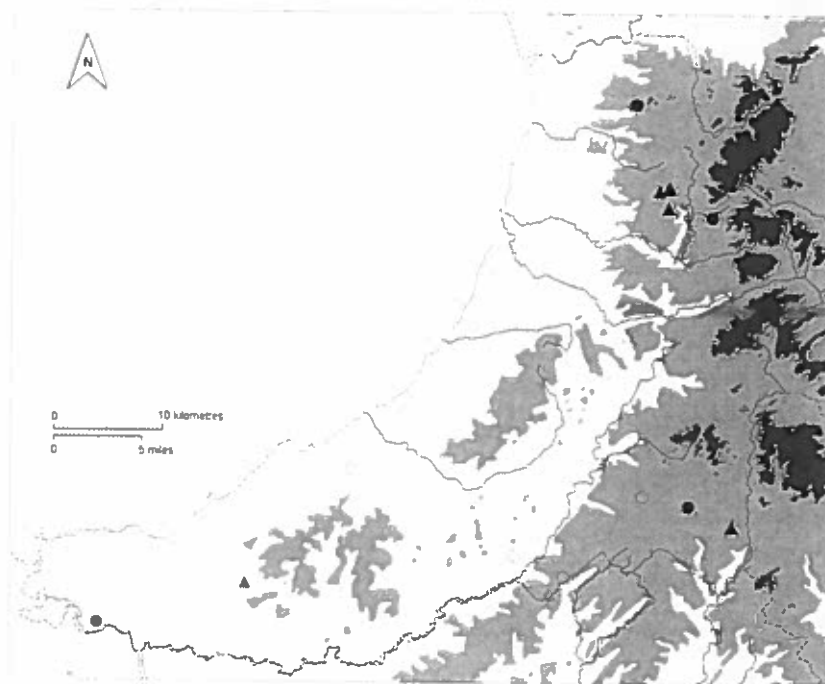
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*Plate 2: Bwrch a Llo standing stone pair*

**Stone circle** (Fig. 3 - 11 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.

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*Fig. 3: Stone circles and standing stone pairs*

*Circles = stone circles. Triangles = standing stone pairs.*

*Filled symbols = definite sites. Open symbols = possible sites.*

In Ceredigion there are five probable and six possible stone circles, with a wide distribution throughout the county. None is known to have been excavated, although other excavated stone circles elsewhere have yielded evidence for burial, suggesting at least some degree of funerary function for this monument type.

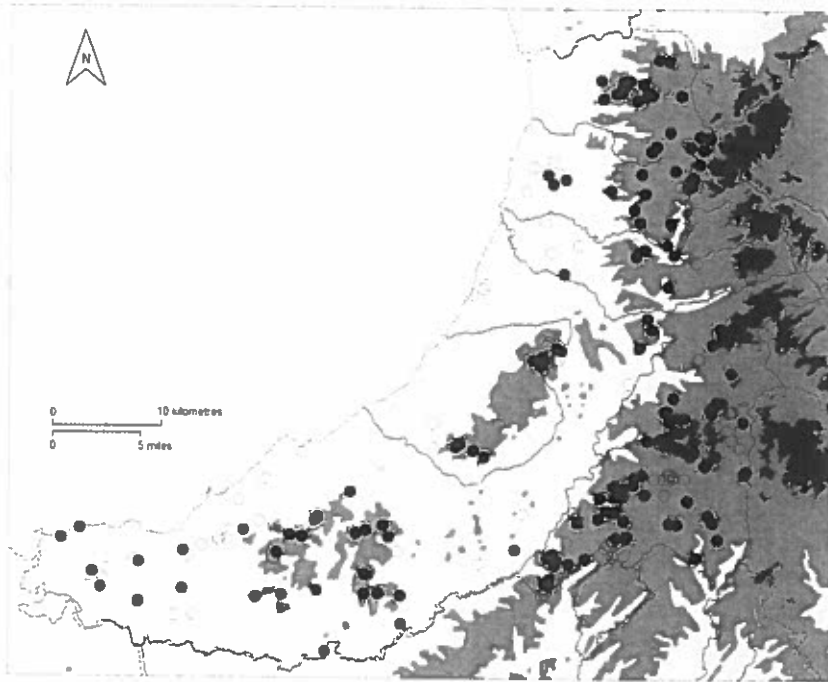
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**Stone row** (1 site) – one or more roughly parallel rows of three or more upright stones set at intervals along a common axis and presumed to have been used for ritual activity during the late Neolithic and Bronze Age.

Only one stone row site is known within Ceredigion, at Bryn Du, Ysgubor-y-Coed. The paucity of this monument type is matched by their overall rarity within mid- and south-west Wales in general. It is likely that more sites once existed. Stone rows were often constructed using stones considerably smaller than single standing stone or stone pairs, making them vulnerable to being cleared away. None has been excavated in Ceredigion, nor indeed have any in Wales. Their precise role is uncertain, although many seem to occur in upland locations in similar landscape settings to stone circles, with which they often seem to be associated.

**Round barrow** (Fig. 4, Plates 3 and 4 – 302 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 are rarely recorded unless excavated.

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*Fig. 4: Round barrows in Ceredigion*

*Filled symbols = definite sites. Open symbols = possible sites.*

This site type is the most commonly found prehistoric funerary and ritual monument, with 212 probable barrows and 90 possible sites now recorded in Ceredigion alone. In addition to the known extant sites, a further 72 round barrows are recorded from place-name and documentary sources. Despite their abundance, very few of these Ceredigion round barrows have been fully excavated, and Aber Camddwr II is the only one to have been investigated recently using modern scientific techniques.<sup>5</sup> Aber Camddwr II was almost circular, roughly 4m in diameter,

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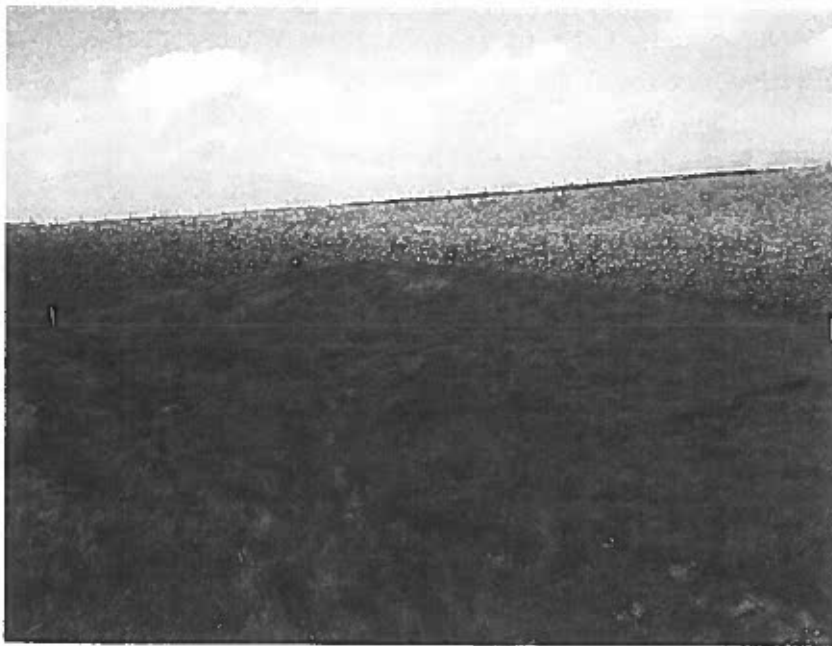
*Plate 3: Garn Fawr round barrow*

surrounded by a kerb of stones and was associated with a standing stone, several other orthostats and a cairn annexe; excavations also revealed a number of charcoal-filled pits and numerous stakeholes. This site, which is now under Nant-y-Moch reservoir, was excavated and reconstructed by the side of the road which skirts the reservoir, some 200m to the north of its original site. Many other barrows have clearly been disturbed at some point in their 4000 year history - upland stone-built cairns usually by the cairn material being fashioned into shelters, or altered by the construction of walkers' cairns. The three barrows on top of Pen Pumlumon Fawr are good examples of this; nothing is known of what was found within the mounds during disturbance. Two



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barrows excavated under archaeological conditions are Disgwyllfa Fawr and Bwlch Troed-rhiw-seiri.<sup>6</sup> Disgwyllfa Fawr, located on high ground overlooking Nant-y-Moch reservoir, was opened in 1937 and produced two oak coffins and a food vessel, whilst at Bwlch Troed-rhiw-seiri, located further west and excavated in 1955, produced evidence for two successive burials, the earlier one accompanied by a beaker vessel, and the later burial with an incense cup.



*Plate 4: From Ddu round barrow*

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**Ring barrow** (Fig 5 - 25 sites) – a monument comprising a ring of earth and/or stones, ranging in Ceredigion between 5 and 30m 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 .

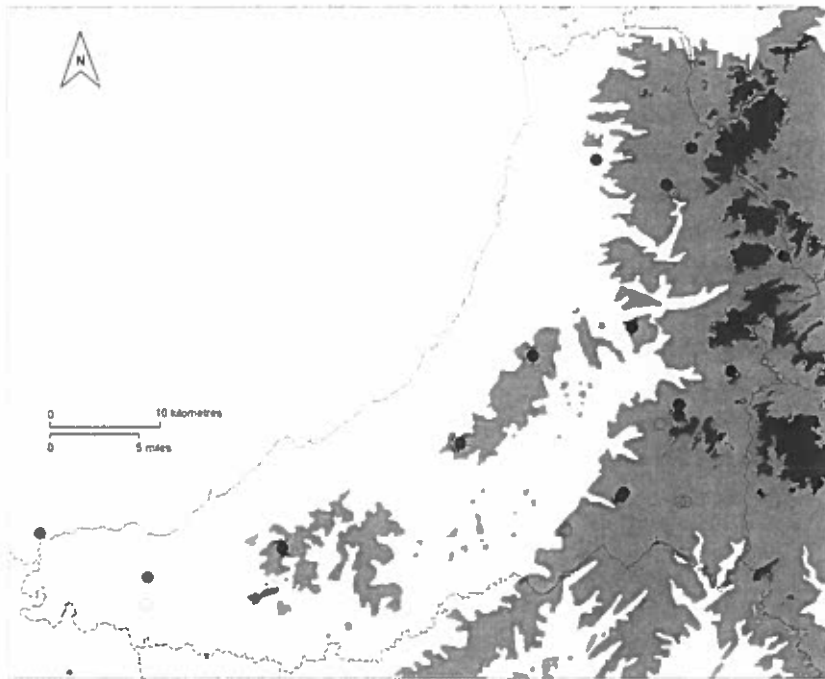


Fig 5: Ring barrows in Ceredigion

Filled symbols = definite sites. Open symbols = possible sites.

There are 17 probable and eight possible ring barrow sites in Ceredigion, with the vast majority concentrated in the eastern portion of the county and on land over 250m. Only one site has been excavated, Aber Camddwr I, now submerged within the Nant-y-Moch reservoir near Ponterwyd, although occasionally

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visible during low water levels. This site was excavated by A. H. A. Hogg in 1962,<sup>7</sup> and consisted of a stone ring, c.2m wide with a diameter of just over 13m, with a rough suggestion of kerbing. Within the ring the central space was almost clear of stones, with the exception of those covering the burnt skeletal remains of a child in Pit 2, whilst the central area revealed traces of ritual activity including numerous other pits, one of which contained a small Collared Urn. There were also at least 28 stakeholes identified within the interior area of the ring cairn, some of which appeared to be arranged with reference to the pottery vessel located within pit 1. It appeared that the child burial had been incompletely burnt *in situ*, but that the body was already disarticulated when it was placed within the ring cairn prior to being set alight. A flint scraper found within rubble just outside the ring bank had been crackled by heat, and may have been used during the funerary ceremony. Other excavated examples of ring cairns in Wales outside Ceredigion have been investigated, Brenig 44 being a particularly good example.<sup>8</sup> Ring barrows, although clearly linked with the burial of the dead, also seem to be associated with a wide range of rituals taking place within their confines, suggesting that they were perhaps more orientated towards other kinds of ceremonial activity, with actual burial a later development. The radiocarbon sequence for Brenig 44 suggests that the site was in use for between 500 and 600 years (between c.2170-1447BC), with a series of pits repeatedly dug against the inner edge of the ring and filled with pure charcoal. It is possible that rituals involving the burial of charcoal were making symbolic references to the funeral pyre, negating the need for actual cremation burials. Three burials were eventually made at the Brenig ring cairn, however, suggesting a change in its emphasis, but not until much later on in its ritual usage. Similar results were also gained from Moel Goedog where repeated episodes of burying charcoal occurred throughout the 200-year history of the site, but with a 'standard' burial only occurring much later.<sup>9</sup>

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**Cairn circle** ( Plate 5 - 4 sites) - a particular type of monument, based on the description by Lynch, which does not correspond to a traditional round barrow or ring barrow, nor a stone circle. These monuments consist of a low cairn from which spaced uprights emerge, more or less prominently, and often leaning outwards. Distinct from a kerb circle, which is a contiguous or close-set ring of stones, with the contiguity of the stones distinguishing kerb circles from cairn circles.



Plate 5: Dol-y-gamfa cairn circle

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This site type was not recognised in the field during the project in Pembrokeshire or Carmarthenshire, but three probable and one possible site were recognised during fieldwork in Ceredigion. The three extant sites are all situated in close proximity to the Afon Rheidol: two of them (Hirnant I and Hen Hafod) lie within c.750m of each other, in the upper reaches of the Rheidol valley, near Nant-y-Moch reservoir, while the third, Dol-y-Gamfa, overlooking the steep-sided Rheidol valley 5km to the south of the other two, across the river from Ysbyty Cynfyn. Although all three are listed here as cairn circles, in truth they appear to be more a hybrid form, which combine aspects of both the cairn circle and kerb circle traditions. A site on Craig y Foelallt, Llanddewibrefi was re-assigned as a possible cairn circle from its previous classification as a possible ring barrow or hut circle on the basis of its description within its documentary sources, where it was described as 'a circle of stones placed edge-wise'. Unfortunately there appear to no longer be any traces of this site to compare it with the other extant examples. None is known to have been excavated.

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**Cist** (6 sites, 2 cemeteries) – 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. Plus: **Cremation burial** (3 sites, 1 cemetery) – 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, heuges 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.

A relatively small number of cists and cremation burials is known because such sites represent 'flat' burials with little or no surface indication of their presence and are generally only encountered by chance. Of the recorded cists that were visited as part of the project, one was reclassified as a round barrow and one as a natural feature. Of the remaining sites, one was known only from place-name evidence, one was destroyed, and there were no extant traces of the other four. Excavations at Gwarfelin, Llanilar, between 1980 and 1994 revealed the presence of a number of pits, many of which contained urn-less cremation burials, probably of early Bronze Age date, with at least five urned cremations possibly related to an adjacent circular ditched enclosure.<sup>10</sup> This cremation cemetery also produced evidence for prehistoric settlement, with some early-middle Neolithic pottery recognised, as well as later Neolithic Peterborough and Grooved ware sherds found randomly in soils and in pits.

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*Stone setting (1 site) – an imprecise term referring to an arrangement of upright stones that is not readily identifiable as either a stone circle, stone row or any other well-defined type of megalithic monument.*

Only one site is recorded for Ceredigion: Banc Rhosgoch Fach, near Mydroilyn. This site was previously recorded as a possible standing stone, although antiquarian sources describe at least three stones being present, with one of these stones removed from the site in the 1930s. Today only two stones remain at the site: stone A is upright, earthfast and measures 1.3m x 1.3m x 1m at its base, stands 1m in height and is triangular in plan. It nestles in a hollow with neighbouring recumbent stone B, which measures 1m x 2m x 0.6m thick, with the two stones now touching. A trial excavation of a 2m wide trench at the site in February 1989 by Julian Thomas showed that the site consisted of two large stones, one upright and one recumbent, which were surrounded by loosely-bonded stones beneath which were a number of cut features, including three small charcoal-filled pits and a larger feature beneath the recumbent. The site was fully excavated in June 1989 when an area 20 x 24m was stripped by hand, revealing many more small charcoal-filled pits, c.40cm in diameter and c.30cm deep.<sup>11</sup> All of these were located to the west of the two monoliths and appeared to be exclusively derived from oak charcoal, yet did not appear to have been burnt *in situ*. Instead it seems that burning may have taken place to the east of the stones, where finds of worked flint flakes were also concentrated, with the deposition of this burnt material found exclusively to the west. Although this group of stones does not conform to any particular monument type, there would certainly appear to have been some kind of ritual activity surrounding them.

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**Cup marked stone** (1 site) - *a stone bearing one or more small, roughly hemispherical depressions.*

Prior to the survey only one site was recorded in Ceredigion - a boulder bearing two possible cupmarks, noted in the field by A. H. A. Hogg and verified by K. Murphy in 1987 (recorded on the Dyfed HER). No trace of this stone was found during the survey in 2005. The site, located close to the edge of Nant-y-Moch reservoir at Trumiau Camddwrnawr, is interesting because elsewhere in southwest Wales cup marked stones seem to have a spatial association with chambered tombs. However, no chambered tomb sites have been recorded in this area of the Nant-y-Moch reservoir.

### *Group monument types*

The following groups of monuments are not recorded in the HER 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 HER database. In addition to the existing terms, such as 'Round barrow cemetery', two new group monument types were created ('Prehistoric Monument Complex' and 'Round Barrow Pair') and added to the HER during this project. A number of previously unrecorded round barrow cemeteries were also recognised.



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**Prehistoric monument complex** (Fig 6 - 10 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.

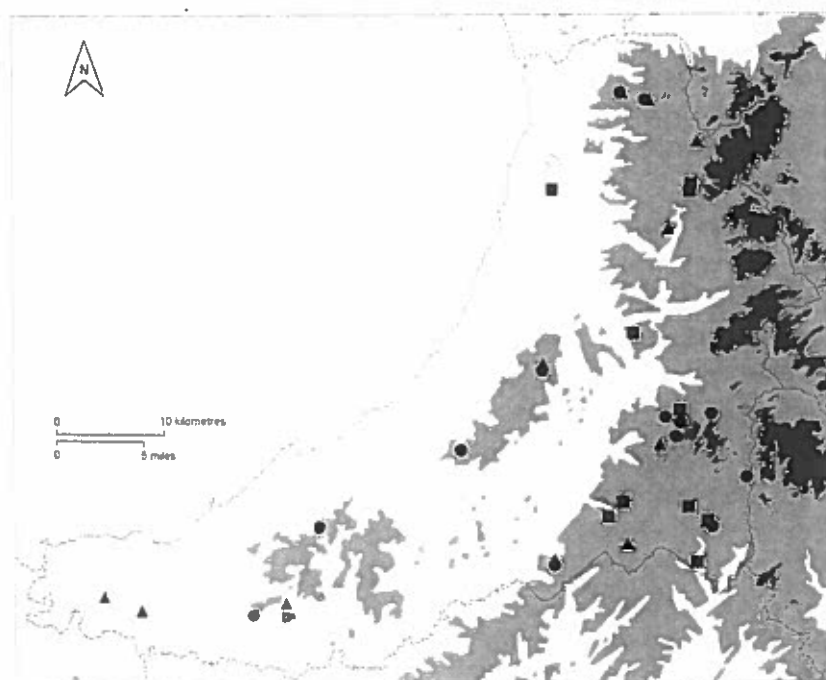


Fig 6: Group monuments in Ceredigion  
Squares = prehistoric monument complex  
Circles = round barrow cemetery  
Triangles = round barrow pair.

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Ten new prehistoric monument complex sites were added to the HER as a result of fieldwork in Ceredigion. All bar one are located in the uplands in the eastern portion of the county, the only exception being the complex at Plas Gogerddan, near Bow Street, Aberystwyth. The most diverse complex group is that of Bryn Gorlan, on uplands to the east of Llanddewibrefi, which comprises a stone circle, a standing stone, a round barrow and two possible ring barrows. Most other prehistoric monument complexes consist of one or two ring/round barrows with usually one standing stone (although occasionally there are more), although at Plas Gogerddan there are two round barrows, three standing stones and number of other subsurface features showing up as cropmarks. Another complex at Y Garnedd, in the Upper Rheidol valley to the north of the Dinas reservoir, includes two round barrows, a cairn circle and a small standing stone. The only complex which has seen any recorded archaeological excavation is that at Plas Gogerddan, where excavation revealed ritual and funerary activity dating from the Neolithic through to the Iron Age and beyond.

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**Round barrow cemetery** (Fig. 6 - 23 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.

Sixteen probable and seven possible round barrow cemeteries were identified. A large proportion of the recorded round barrow cemeteries are located within the eastern uplands of the county, on land over 250m. Panoramic views are gained from these sites, as they are located in prominent positions, often dominating the locations of other prehistoric funerary and ritual sites. This is true in particular of the two impressive groups of round barrow cairns on Pumlumon Fawr and Pumlumon Arwystli, which are visible for miles around, and dominate the landscape.

**Round barrow pair** (17 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'.

In Ceredigion there are 14 probable and three possible pairs of round barrows, mostly located in very prominent locations. The vast majority lie in the uplands in the eastern portion of the county. Two exceptions are on land below 250m within a cluster of barrows near Cardigan; both are cropmark sites. As with barrow cemeteries, it would appear that the location of these monuments on high points in the landscape was a key factor in their design and morphology.

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### Conclusion

The county of Ceredigion is characterised as much by its rugged and dramatic upland landscapes as by its lowland valleys and coastal plateaux. The east is dominated by the Cambrian mountains, large upland blocks of unenclosed rough pasture that slope down to the intensively farmed land to the west. To the north the Afon Dyfi and its estuary define the county, whilst to the south the Afon Teifi provides the natural county boundary separating Ceredigion from the neighbouring counties of Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire. Topographically Ceredigion is a series of dissected plateaux, appearing as a stepped series of plains of differing elevations. Sculpting of the landscape clearly took place during the Ice Ages, as seen in the lower Rheidol and upper Ystwyth valleys, whilst elsewhere, especially on the coast, significant deposits of glacial silts and till were deposited as the ice melted and the glaciers retreated. Huge expanses of peat bog at Borth and near Tregaron are another result of climate change.

As a county, Ceredigion is predominantly agricultural and certainly in the more lowland contexts the land has been intensively farmed, with resultant differentiation in monument condition and survival when compared with the known archaeological resource from the more remote upland areas. Certainly, of all the sites considered within the project, approximately 75% are located on land 250m or above sea level, with clusterings of round barrows particularly noticeable on the upper parts of the Cambrian mountains, on land over 500m. The views from these upland sites are often dramatic and wide-ranging, with the Brecon Beacons and the Llŷn peninsula often clearly visible. Even within the more lowland contexts of the county there are exceptional views, with the Preseli often visible, and the Black Mountain, as well as coastal vistas.

The overall distribution of all monument types within Ceredigion appears at first to show a relatively even spread of

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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. However, closer inspection reveals that lower lying areas towards the coast are not so densely populated compared with upland areas. This bias towards the uplands for the siting of monuments can be partly explained by uneven preservation, although some locations do not seem to have been used for some types of monument. This upland trend is particularly noticeable for group monuments.

The survey encompassed basic analysis of the potential significance of topographical siting in the distribution of different prehistoric monument types. Analysis of the topography of individual and group monuments revealed that hill slopes are the preferred locations for most sites, particularly ring barrows, round barrows and standing stones, with 195 sites in total recorded as having hill slope locations. Of these 195 sites, 125 sites were recorded on gentle slopes, 66 on moderate slopes and four on steep slopes. Most monuments were sited towards the middle, rather than at the top or bottom of the slope.

The assessment of topographical siting suggested variations between different monument types. For example, of the 64 sites recorded on ridges, 61 were round barrows. Round barrows also dominate the other high locations, with 12 recorded on hilltops, 15 on local summits and four on ridge crests. Whilst standing stones also enjoyed upland locations, they were more commonly found on the lower hill slopes, on spurs, with seven also known on high plateaux and five in saddles. It has been suggested that standing stones in south-west Wales are generally sited within the lower one-third of the altitudinal range of a given area. However, the topographic location of sites in Ceredigion is more varied, perhaps influenced by the nature of the landscape.

Similarly, the distribution of round barrows in Ceredigion shows a greater density on valley slopes than in Carmarthenshire

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and Pembrokeshire, although many of these are concentrated within the upper Rheidol valley, which seems to have been a focus for early prehistoric funerary and ritual activity.

The distribution and siting of group monuments shows a preference for the east of the county, particularly prominent locations, such as ridges and summits. Round barrow pairs favour ridge-top locations.

Visibility from and to sites, and the inter-visibility between sites, seems to have been a key factor in determining location. Many monuments are inter-visible, especially those in upland areas. Particular examples of this include the round barrow cemeteries on top of Pumlumon and Trichrug, east of Cilcennin, where it was possible to see the Llŷn peninsula, Cader Idris, the Malvern hills, the Brecon Beacons, the Carmarthen Vans, and even the Preseli. Inter-visibility within the more immediate landscape also appears to have been a factor in siting. In the case of prehistoric monument complexes there were apparent close spatial and visual relationships between standing stones and other monument forms, especially ring and round barrows.

The most common prehistoric funerary and ritual monument type in Ceredigion, and indeed for the whole of southwest Wales is the round barrow. This term covers a wide variety size and composition. Some barrows are composed purely of stone, some of earth, although most are a mixture in varying proportions. Diameter and height also vary. Where preservation allows analysis, a rounded profile is evident, although barrows assume a variety of forms: rounded; flat-topped; low; kerbed; capped, which may have played a role in their usage and monumentality. These differing forms may reflect local traditions, but equally may be deliberate variations on a symbolic, social and cultural level, especially where these different forms are found in close association.

The ten recorded prehistoric monument complexes in Ceredigion suggest that the grouping of more than one type of prehistoric monument was not an uncommon practice, and

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indicates the deliberate creation of ritual landscapes in use for many hundreds of years. Inter-visibility between components of these complexes was clearly important, as was inter-visibility between different groups of sites.

A clear pattern that emerges is the careful selection of specific locations for different monument types; a pattern especially noted for barrow cemeteries and barrow pairs. Inter-visibility between sites was noted during fieldwork: even if the monuments themselves were not visible, their locations certainly were. These observations could be statistically tested to check their validity by applying Geographic Information Systems (GIS) techniques, such as digital terrain modelling and visualisation studies (such as those applied at Stonehenge). During the project in Carmarthenshire, a preliminary examination of topographic location using GIS was recently applied to a small selection of monuments within the Upper Tywi Valley with very promising results. The foothills and plateaux of the Cambrian mountains in particular appear to have been a magnet for prehistoric activity, but the remainder of the county was also a significant Neolithic and Bronze Age landscape.

There is a range of archaeological literature on the perceived relationships between the natural and cultural worlds in the prehistoric past offering a variety of interpretations as to what these funerary and ritual monuments might symbolise. Many of the monuments looked out over huge swathes of undulating landscape dominated inland by major valleys, by upland, or by the coast. Analysis of the fieldwork results also showed that the location of sites appears to make specific reference to significant natural elements such as water. Monuments were often located close to natural springs or small streams, or were actually directly overlooking rivers or the sea. A number of monuments were also located in waterlogged and boggy areas in the landscape as if to re-affirm a connection between ritual practice and natural elements. Such sites offer the opportunity for palaeo-environmental sampling, and the project included selective

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sampling on potentially significant sites. It is anticipated that this data, derived from the analysis of pollen core and other palaeoenvironmental samples, which will be published separately, will increase our understanding of the nature and appearance of the contemporary landscape.

As this project develops it will be interesting to compare these patterns with those already seen in Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire. It is hoped that this work will 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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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project and this paper were undertaken with the assistance of Richard Ramsey (fieldwork), Marion Page (HER), and Ken Murphy, with thanks also to Gwilym Hughes, Sian Rees and Kate Roberts. Illustrations were kindly produced by Hubert Wilson. The fieldwork aspect was facilitated by the co-operation and kindness of the numerous landowners and farmers who gave permission to access the monuments on their land, and also by those who contributed their local knowledge, which was often enlightening. The project was funded by a grant from Cadw.

Published with the aid of a grant from Cadw.



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