

BLAENAU BRONZE AGE HOARD



Location of hoard.

Prepared
For: Cadw



Archaeological Trust

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BLAENAU BRONZE AGE HOARD

By

Charles Enright

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BLAENAU BRONZE AGE HOARD

Client

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the discovery of a Bronze Age hoard on land at Blaenau farm in Carmarthenshire in November 2020, Dyfed Archaeological Trust carried out a small investigation, grant aided by Cadw.

A geophysical survey and small excavation did not provide any archaeological context for the hoard, indicating that the pit containing the hoard was an isolated feature and not part of a larger archaeological site.

CRYNODEB GWEITHREDOL

Yn dilyn darganfod celc o'r Oes Efydd ar dir ar fferm Blaenau yn Sir Gaerfyrddin ym mis Tachwedd 2020, cynhaliodd Ymddiriedolaeth Archeolegol Dyfed astudiaeth bach, gyda chymorth Cadw.

Ni ddarparodd arolwg geoffisegol a chloddio bach unrhyw gyd-destun archeolegol ar gyfer y celc, gan nodi bod y pwll sy'n cynnwys y celc yn nodwedd unig ac nad oedd yn rhan o safle archeolegol mwy.

BLAENAU BRONZE AGE HOARD

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BLAENAU BRONZE AGE HOARD

SUMMARY

In November 2020 metal detectorists discovered a Bronze Age hoard on land at Blaenau Farm, Carmarthenshire. The hoard was found in shallow pit and included at least 12 socketed axes and a spearhead. Dyfed Archaeological Trust received grant-aid from Cadw carry out investigative works to ascertain if further significant archaeology survived at the site by carrying out a geophysical survey and small excavation.

The geophysical survey did not detect anything of definite archaeological significance within the area of the hoard find spot.

The excavation found no surviving evidence of the original pit for the hoard indicating that it had been totally removed by the metal detectorists, but two small fragments of bronze were retrieved and retained.

The results of the investigation show no surviving traces of significant archaeological features suggesting that the hoard was an isolated feature and not part of a larger archaeological site.

At the time of writing this report, all of the artefacts are with the National Museum Wales. The Museum will produce a report as part of a treasure case put to HM Coroner for Carmarthenshire.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Commission

- 1.1.1 In November 2020 metal detectorists discovered a Bronze Age hoard on land belonging to Blaenau Farm in Carmarthenshire. The hoard was seemingly discovered in a single, shallow pit and included at least 12 socketed axes and a spearhead (Figure 1). There are no known archaeological sites within the vicinity of the find spot.
- 1.1.3 The main threat comes from our lack of knowledge about the site. Is the hoard an isolated feature or part of a larger complex? Therefore, Cadw grant-aided Dyfed Archaeological Trust to investigate the site and answer this question. A geophysical survey was undertaken in the immediate area surrounding the hoard; this was followed by hand-excavation of a trench over the hoard pit. This work was sufficient to characterise the site.



Figure 1: The hoard – artefacts recovered by the metal detectorists from the land owner’s Facebook page.

1.2. Project Aim and Objectives

1.2.1 The project addresses a number of general research objectives for the Neolithic, Early Bronze Age, Later Bronze Age and Iron Age set out in *Introducing a Research Framework for the Archaeology of Wales*:

Understanding monuments – Ritual and Burial

1.2.2 The aims of the project were:

- to define the extent and character of the archaeology of the site
- to formulate ways in which the remains can be managed and protected for future generations
- to make appropriate scheduling recommendations

The objectives were:

- to characterise the buried remains at the site
- to improve our understanding, management and protection of the sites, and by extension, other similar sites in the region
- to engage volunteers in the project
- to provide information for a Treasure report being prepared by National Museum Wales
- to recommend further work on the site

1.3 Report Outline

1.3.1 This report provides a summary and discussion of the archaeological investigation and its results and puts those results within their regional and national context.

1.4 Abbreviations

1.4.1 Sites recorded on the regional Historic Environment Record (HER) are identified by their Primary Record Number (PRN) and located by their National Grid Reference (NGR). Sites recorded on the National Monument Record (NMR) held by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW) are identified by their National Primary Record Number (NPRN). Scheduled Monument (SM). Altitude is expressed to Ordnance Datum (OD). References to cartographic and documentary evidence and published sources will be given in brackets throughout the text, with full details listed in the sources section at the rear of the report.

1.5 Illustrations

1.5.1 Printed map extracts are not necessarily produced to their original scale.

1.6 Timeline

1.6.1 The following timeline (Table 1) is used within this report to give date ranges for the various archaeological periods that may be mentioned within the text.

Period	Approximate date	
Palaeolithic –	c.450,000 – 10,000 BC	Prehistoric
Mesolithic –	c. 10,000 – 4400 BC	
Neolithic –	c.4400 – 2300 BC	
Bronze Age –	c.2300 – 700 BC	
Iron Age –	c.700 BC – AD 43	
Roman (Romano-British) Period –	AD 43 – c. AD 410	Historic
Post-Roman / Early Medieval Period –	c. AD 410 – AD 1086	
Medieval Period –	1086 – 1536	
Post-Medieval Period ¹ –	1536 – 1750	
Industrial Period –	1750 – 1899	
Modern –	20 th century onwards	

Table 1: Archaeological and Historical Timeline for Wales.

¹ The post-medieval and industrial periods are combined as the post-medieval period on the Regional Historic Environment Record as held by Dyfed Archaeological Trust

2. THE SITE

2.1 Site Location

2.1.1 The hoard was discovered on a spur of land at the confluence to two streams, located at approximately NGR SN 79572 24401 (Figure 2) at a height of approximately 300m OD. Due to the remote location there is no available mapping that depicts the area accurately. It was not possible to obtain a GPS reading at the site.

2.1.2 The hoard lay in light woodland that on the spur that slopes gradually in a southwestern direction before dropping steeply on all sides down towards the streams (Photos 1 – 3).

3.1.3 The nearest known Bronze Age site is the Waen Lwyd stone circle, situated 1.3km east of the hoard.

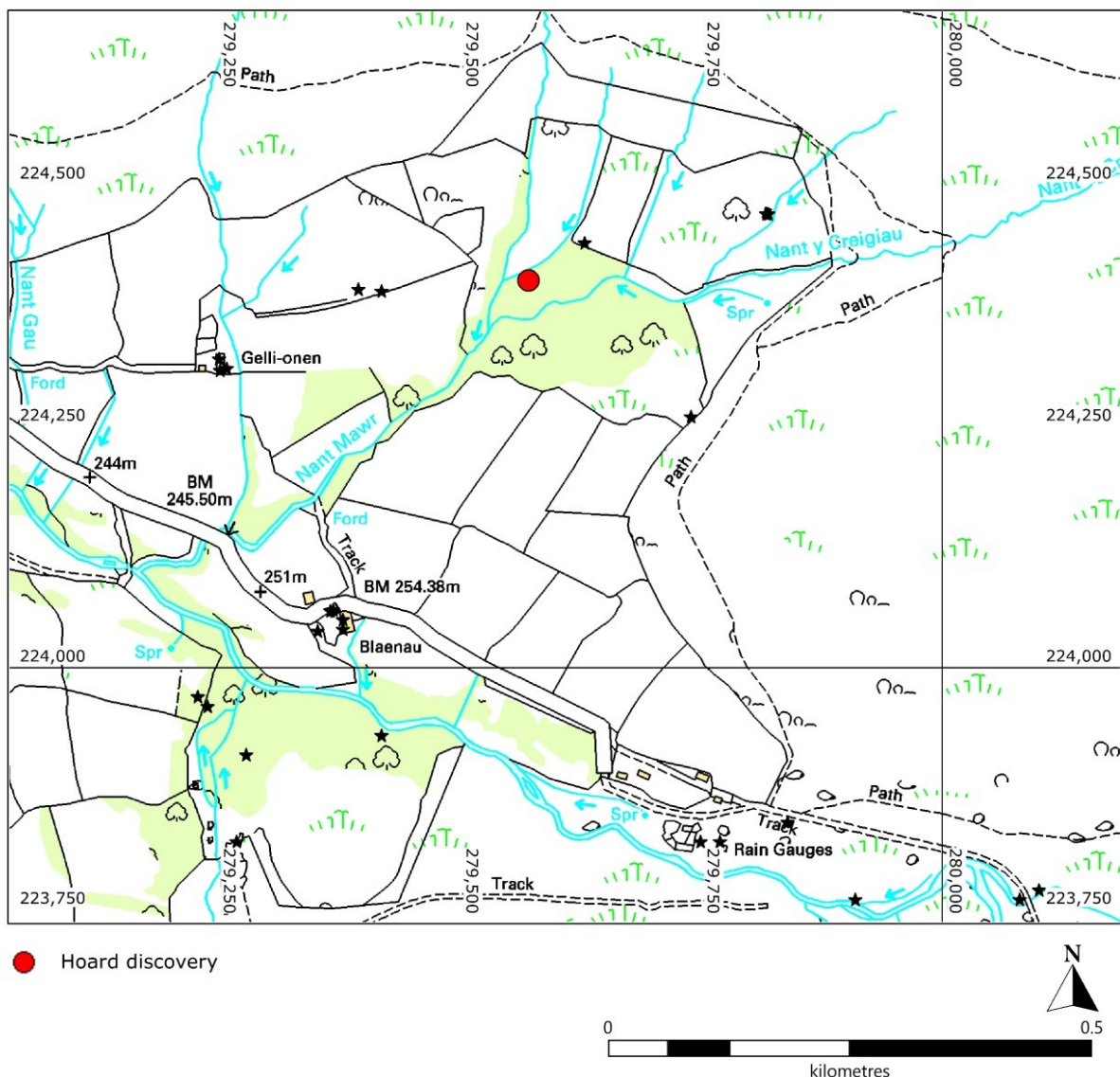


Figure 2: Location of the hoard discovery (approximate).



Photo 1: Location of the hoard find spot on the spur. A blue marker had been placed by the landowner. View north. 1.0m scale.



Photo 2: View along the spur in an easterly direction (upslope) showing the find spot. Scale 1.0m.



Photo 3: View in a western direction (downslope) along the spur showing the find spot. Scale 1.0m.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Geophysical Survey

3.1.1 Archaeologists from Dyfed Archaeological Trust visited the site on the 17th March, 2021. At this time the woodland growth was minimal. It was possible to set up two partial 20m x 20m grids centred over the hoard find spot and survey an area 0.04ha in size. A fluxgate gradiometer with a DL601 data logger was used to conduct the detailed geophysical survey, which detects variations in the earth's magnetic field. Data was collected using the zigzag traverse method with a medium resolution i.e. a sample interval (x-axis) of 0.25m (four readings per metre) and a line separation (y-axis) of 0.5m.

3.2 Excavation

3.2.1 The excavation consisted of a single 1m x 1m hand excavated trench over the hoard find spot. The trench was hand cleaned to expose the deposits below the topsoil and recorded with a photographic record and site note book.

3.2.2 As soil was removed from the area of the hoard find spot it was screened through a 5mm mesh sieve to retrieve any smaller fragments of material that may have been missed during the original discovery. The detectorists who discovered the hoard were present to scan the excavated soil for metal fragments. At the end of the excavation the trench was reinstated.

3.3 Locating the investigation area

- 3.3.1 Ordnance Survey maps of the area show limited topographic and other information and so are limited use in accurately locating the find spot. The presence of light woodland means that aerial photography is also of little use. It was not possible to obtain a precise location using a satellite signal for a GPS receiver because of the sheltered location. Therefore, it was not possible to achieve sub-cm accuracy. A grid reference was obtained using a hand-held GPS device. This can typically have a positional error of up to 5m +/-, which can increase under tree cover. Because of this the geophysics survey plot has not been overlaid on a topographic map following usual practice. A total station could be used to create an accurate area map, but it would need along traverse to tie it into a known point; this was beyond the scope of this investigation.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Geophysical Survey

- 4.1.1 The geophysical survey results are presented as a greyscale plot with an interpretation in Figure 3.
- 4.1.2 No features of definite archaeological origin were detected as a result of the magnetic survey. A number of possible pits were recorded, but as these had no discernible pattern, grouping or association with an archaeological feature there is little evidence to support an archaeological interpretation; none of these anomalies exhibits a dipole response which could suggest a ferrous content. Given the woodland setting it is just as likely that they represent natural features such as tree-throws (former root boles of trees/bushes).
- 4.1.3 The group of anomalies circled in red are in the vicinity of the hoard discovery, but this is difficult to verify without being able to precisely locate the survey grid. When investigated further with a metal detector during the excavation no signal was returned.
- 4.1.4 The magnetic interference in the southwest corner is located near the steep drop down towards the stream and is likely caused by underlying bedrock close to the surface.

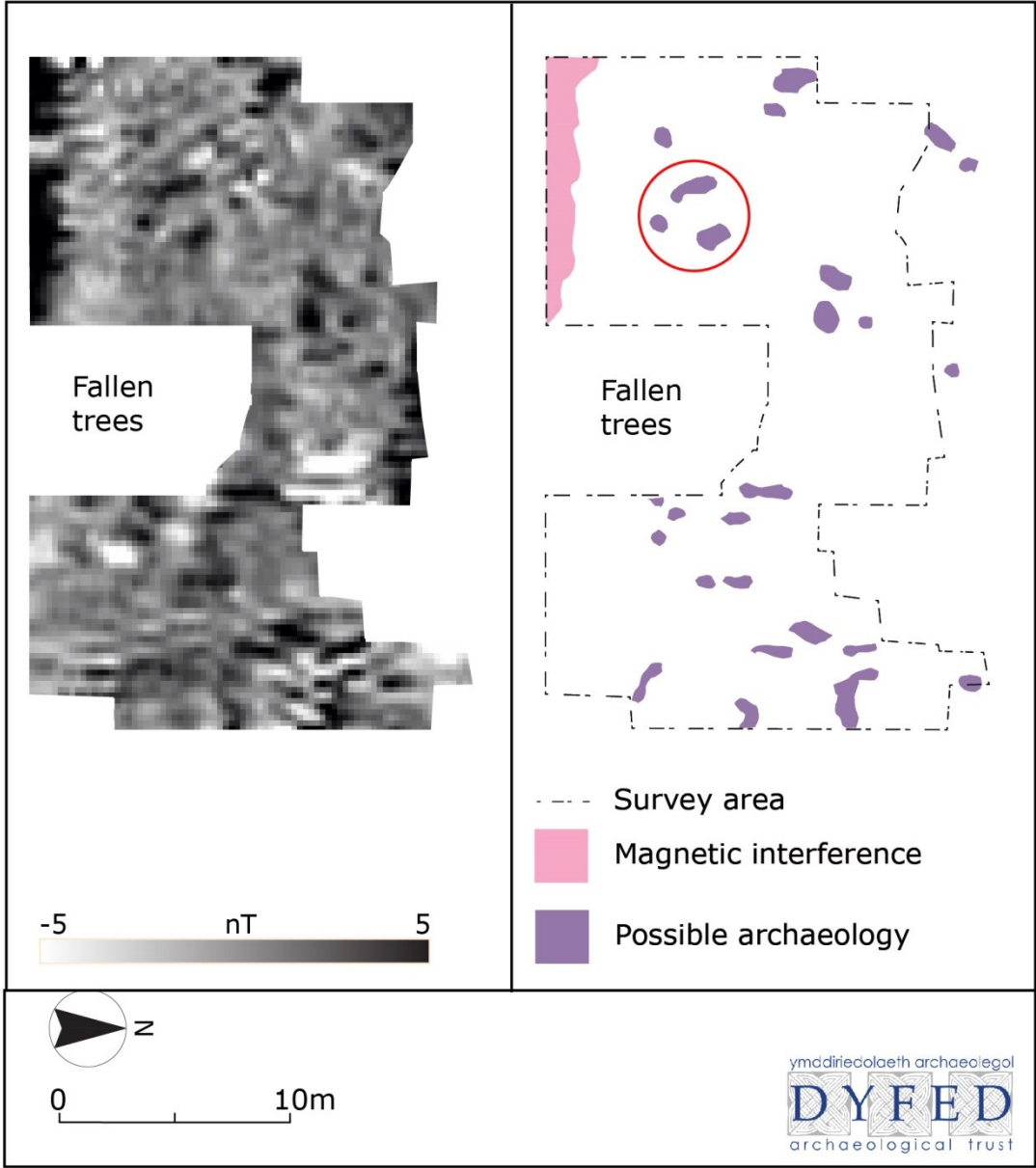


Figure 3: Geophysical Survey Results

4.2 Excavation

- 4.2.1 The excavation trench measured 1.0m x 1.0m and was centred over the location of the hoard where the pit excavated by the metal detectorists in November 2020 was still evident (Photo 4).
- 4.2.2 Initially the excavation trench was half sectioned, removing the southern half first. It was excavated to an average depth of approximately 0.15m and this revealed that the trench was overlain by a 0.05m thick layer of turf consisting of a grey/brown silt. Beneath the turf was a soil consisting of a firm layer of silty clay, orange/brown in colour with occasional stone inclusions.
- 4.2.3 In profile it was possible to see the stratigraphic series of layers described above as well as the metal detectorist pit. This pit was cut through the turf and topsoil to a depth of approximately 0.36m; it was approximately 0.35m wide at the top, tapering towards its base (Photo 5 – 6). There was no evidence to suggest that there were any more artefacts in and around the detectorist pit. During removal of deposits from the southern half of the trench two small fragments of bronze were retrieved from the screens and retained.
- 4.2.4 The remaining half of the excavation trench was removed to fully expose the metal detector pit (Photo 7). At this stage the trench was scanned with a metal detector; no signals were obtained. To confirm that there were no surviving remnants of the original pit or further finds a sondage was excavated immediately over the metal detector pit. The sondage was 0.5m x 0.5m and excavated to a depth of 0.5m below ground surface (Photos 8). There was no evidence of other deposits relating to the detectorist pit or an original hoard pit in the sondage. Prior to backfilling the excavation trench, sondage and excavated material were scanned with a metal detector; no signals were returned.



Photo 4: The metal detectorist pit excavated in November 2020. View east. 1.0m scale.



Photo 5: South facing section of excavation trench showing the metal detectorist pit. View north. 1.0m scale.



Photo 6: South facing section of excavation trench. View northwest. 1.0m scale.



Photo 7: Fully exposed metal detector pit excavated in November 2020. View northwest. Scale 1.0m.



Photo 8: Sondage excavated immediately over the metal detectorist pit. View north. 1.0m scale.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The geophysical survey carried out in the area of the hoard find spot found no evidence of significant archaeological features that could indicate a context for the hoard. Nothing of significance was found during the excavation. It appears that there are no surviving remnants of the original hoard pit – the pit excavated by the detectorists in November 2020 had completely removed it. Only two small fragments of bronze were retrieved from the screens and these have been passed on to the National Museum Wales.
- 5.2 This investigation has met the aims and objectives of the project and the nature and extent of the archaeological potential of the site has been documented. The results suggest that there is no evidence of further significant archaeology within the immediate vicinity of the Bronze Age hoard. This would suggest that the hoard was an isolated feature and was not part of a larger archaeological complex.
- 5.3 At the time of writing this report, all of the artefacts are with the National Museum Wales. The museum will produce a report as part of a treasure case put to HM Coroner for Carmarthenshire.

6. SOURCES

Publications

CIFA, 2014 *Chartered Institute of Field Archaeologists Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation.*

National Standard and Guidance for Collecting and Depositing Archaeological Archives in Wales 2017.
<http://www.welshmuseumsfederation.org/en/news-archive/resources-landing/Collections/national-standard-and-guidance-for-collecting-and-depositing-archaeological-archives-in-wales-2017.html>

Database

Dyfed Archaeological Trust Historic Environment Record

Online resources

British Geological Survey: www.bgs.ac.uk

