

# Removal of a Visitor Cairn at Carn Ingli Camp, Pembrokeshire.



**View from Carn Ingli Camp, looking north over Newport Sands.**

Prepared by Cambria Archaeology  
as part of a Service Level Agreement  
with Pembrokeshire Coast National  
Park Authority.



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RHIF YR ADRODDIAD / REPORT NO. 2005/32  
RHIF Y PROSIECT / PROJECT RECORD NO. 54034

March 2005

## Removal of a Visitor Cairn at Carn Ingli Camp, Pembrokeshire.

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### 3. Introduction.

Carn Ingli Camp (PRN 1494, NGR SN 06353730) is an Iron Age hillfort at the summit of Carn Ingli. It is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM Pe011). The site is well-known locally, and attracts a large number of visitors – both local people, and, especially in the summer, tourists. The site is very accessible, with a number of official and unofficial footpaths leading up to the summit.

In 2004 Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (PCNPA) received reports of disturbance within the Scheduled Area. A site visit showed that there had indeed been recent disturbance, with stone being removed from one of the banks to construct a nearby visitor cairn on the north side of the hillfort. The cairn is visible on Cadw's photographs from some 8 or 9 years ago, but appeared to have been significantly enlarged more recently.

Since the cairn still appeared to be 'active' – i.e. people were still adding to it, and causing further disturbance (see figures 1 and 2), it was decided that PCNPA would apply for Scheduled Monument Consent to record and dismantle the cairn.



**Figure 1. Photograph of the visitor cairn as it appeared in June 2004. In the stone bank (right of picture) the area of disturbance can be seen as a discoloured area of stone.**



**Figure 2. Photograph of the visitor cairn as it appeared in late November 2004. The cairn had not increased in height, but had clearly been added to and ‘spread’, covering more ground. This may well have occurred during the peak summer visitor months of July and August, when this site sees comparatively heavy recreational use.**

#### **4. Methodology.**

Once Scheduled Monument Consent was received, a small group of volunteers, the PCNP ranger for the Preselis and the PCNP archaeologist carried out the work. A photographic record was made throughout the works.

All work was done by hand. Stones were removed from the visitor cairn, and replaced into the disturbed areas of bank. These areas were quite clearly defined, both by hollows where stone had been removed, and by discolouration. The outer stones on the banks are covered with a white lichen, whereas the inner 'core' of the bank, which is not normally exposed, is more red in colour, and lacks the lichen (see figure 3). Care was taken that the stones, wherever possible, were replaced into the banks with the white surface outwards. This helped to ensure that the 'repairs' were unobtrusive.

The construction and contents of the visitor cairn were recorded as the work progressed. No archaeological features or layers were encountered. All the stones in the cairn were simply lying on the ground surface – none had been dug into it.



**Figure 3. Showing an area of disturbance within the bank of the hillfort. Note the different colours of the stones – the disturbed area is red/pink, whereas weathering and lichen growth has made the undisturbed areas more white/grey.**





**Figure 4 (above) and 5 (below). Volunteers at work, dismantling the visitor cairn.**



## 5. Results.

For the most part, the visitor cairn appeared to be a simple pile of stones. Modern litter was found throughout it, including crisp packets, beer cans and paper. About half way down, three necklaces were encountered. One consisted of shells strung on coloured thread, one was a copper cross on coloured thread and one appeared to be a metal St. Christopher, also on coloured thread. The three were encountered together, and had clearly been deliberately placed. Carn Ingli has strong associations with the Christian church, taking its name (Mount of Angels) from the story that St. Brynach would climb the mountain to pray, and that he spoke with angels at its summit. Since the three items appeared to have a religious significance, and to have been deliberately deposited, it was felt appropriate to leave them on site.

At its base, the cairn contained a thick layer of ash and burnt heather. This appeared to be contained within a roughly built hearth - a ring of large stones surrounding the burnt patch. The remains of a packet of firelighters attested to its modern date and function! The burnt layer must have represented either a significant bonfire, or a series of fires in this hearth. Stones had then been piled over the top of the hearth.

The rubbish and ash was removed from the site and disposed of.



**Figure 6. The only finds (aside from modern rubbish!), these necklaces or charms appeared to have been deliberately deposited within the visitor cairn.**





**Figure 7 (above). The layer of ash and burnt heather at the base of the visitor cairn. Note the modern foil and kindling mixed in with the ash!**

**Figure 8 (below). The site of the visitor cairn. It is hoped that, in time, the heather will re-colonise this burnt patch.**



## 6. Discussion.

The issue of visitor cairns is of growing concern in sensitive, archaeological areas. For the most part, it is not the construction of the cairns, as such, which causes problems, but the removal of stones from archaeological monuments in order to provide the material for the cairn.

Visitor cairns are normally constructed piecemeal, with each person who arrives at the summit adding a stone to the pile. The key issue, therefore, is how to prevent these cairns from starting – it seems that most visitors will happily add to an existing cairn, but fewer will actually start one. Indeed, in this case, it seems that the cairn was started almost accidentally, beginning its life as a hearth and later being ‘converted’.

Visitor cairns can also attest to the continued – and changing – significance which is attached to some archaeological monuments. At Carn Ingli, for example, a visitor had deposited religious items on the site, deliberately concealing them in the cairn. This is not uncommon – at many archaeological sites (normally prehistoric sites), small depositions or offerings can be found. These are often flowers, candles, beads or similar.

A new twist on this tradition was encountered at Fan Foel, Carmarthenshire. The roundbarrow on Fan Foel had been suffering from erosion (both footpath and weather) as well as from disturbance due to the construction of a visitor cairn. During excavations prior to consolidation works, a small ‘geocache’ was located within the visitor cairn (Hughes, *pers comm*). ‘Geocaching’ is a new sport, originating in the USA, which is growing in popularity in Britain and Europe. ‘Caches’ are hidden at various places throughout the country, and the grid references and/or clues to their locations are posted on the internet. The aim is then to find the caches – (which may contain log-books, artefacts or clues to other caches) – and to take an item out, replacing it with another item to prove that you’ve been there. The sport is run through a number of websites. One of them – [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com) - states in its guidelines that it will not include information about certain caches, including: ‘Caches placed on archaeological or historical sites. In most cases these areas are highly sensitive to the extra traffic that would be caused by vehicles and humans’. This implies that some disturbance caused by geocaching is accidental – the result of people being unaware of the archaeology, rather than by people willfully damaging it.

What emerges is that the issue of visitor cairns on archaeological sites needs to be tackled in three ways.

1. Removing visitor cairns from archaeological sites. Where visitor cairns are visible, they are likely to continue to grow as individuals add to them. Care should be taken that sites like hearths may also need to be monitored and/or removed to ensure that they do not act as the focus for creating visitor cairns. (The issue of hearths and fires on archaeological sites – especially on SAMs – also needs addressing. Notable at Carn Ingli was the amount of heather collected and burnt in the hearth – had this fire got out of control, the result may have been a very serious heather burn across a large area.) This is a very reactive approach, managing, rather than solving the problem.
2. Publicity about the issues. It appears that most damage is done through ignorance of the archaeology, rather than being deliberate. Further information about the disturbance which can be caused may help to prevent visitor cairns from being constructed. Groups like ramblers and climbers groups could be profitably targeted, as could local walkers who may

be on-site regularly and, therefore, able to spot any new cairns being constructed. Information in places like Tourist Information Centres and National Park Visitor Centres would also reach a large number of visitors.

3. Publicity about the archaeology. Making people more aware of the archaeological significance of certain areas and sites goes hand in hand with making people aware of the issues about damaging them. It is, therefore, important to raise awareness of the historic landscape amongst residents and visitors to the area.

## **7. References**

Hughes, G: 2004: *Fan Foel Round Barrow, Mynydd Du. An archaeological excavation, interim report*. Cambria Archaeology report no. 2004/88

Hughes, G :2004: *Fan Foel Round Barrow, Mynydd Du. Interim excavation report*, Carmarthenshire Antiquary vol.40, 147-151

Guidelines on hiding and seeking geocaches, published on [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com)

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

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