

STONES AT ABER MAWR MATHRY, PEMBROKESHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION



Prepared by Cambria Archaeology
For

PCNPA



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MARCH 2007

STONES AT ABER MAWR
MATHRY, PEMBROKESHIRE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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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

As part of our desire to provide a quality service we would welcome any comments you may
have on the content or presentation of this report

SUMMARY

Near Aber Mawr on the Pembrokeshire Coast a "pit" with an associated flint flake had recently been discovered in an eroding cliff edge, above which there were some massive stones, a suspected collapsed chambered tomb. A rapid evaluation proved these stones to be modern land clearance. The section of cliff face was quickly recorded and the pit appeared more probably to be a posthole, adjacent to which there may be an occupation layer.

INTRODUCTION

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority commissioned Cambria Archaeology to undertake a rapid evaluation on a potential collapsed chambered tomb that lay between the Pembrokeshire Coast Path and the eroding cliff edge (front cover) (Figs. 1 and 2). The site was located 3km to the north of Mathry, on the small headland between Aber Mawr and Aber Bach (National Grid Reference SM880034893). Additionally a small pit with an associated flint (Photos. 1 and 2) had just been discovered in the adjacent cliff edge. This flint is probably of Neolithic or later prehistoric date. Three hundred metres to the north is the Iron Age promontory fort of Carreg Golchfa.

Due to the limited size and results of this project a description of all nearby known archaeological sites has not been included. There are no known adjacent sites. However, there is a pile of very large stones just inland from the site in the adjacent field, which could be the remains of a cairn or chambered tomb. Also possibly relevant are flints recovered as chance finds during test pitting on peat deposits at Aber Mawr some 300m to the south.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this evaluation were to assess the pile of stones situated on the cliff top in close proximity to a probable prehistoric pit eroding from the cliff face in order to determine if the stones are archaeological in origin and seek to elucidate their relationships with other archaeological features in the area.

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

A trench of up to 3.1m long by 1m wide was excavated between the massive stones. The middle part of the trench was taken down to 0.3m above the general ground surface and at either end, adjacent to the stones, deeper sections were dug to between 0.6 and 0.8m from the surface (Photo. 3).

It was manifestly evident that the massive stones sit on topsoil of some considerable depth. The topsoil was at least 0.6m deep and homogenous, but with some animal burrows. The upper part of this topsoil contained fragments of plastic and three modern glass bottles most of which probably accumulated after the massive stones were deposited. The lower part of this topsoil is likely to have accumulated as soil creep or blown soil filling up a hollow at the base of the hill-slope against a field bank (which has mainly gone over the cliff edge) prior to the deposition of the stones. A measured sketch plan was made of the stones and excavated trench (included in the archive), before backfilling and recovering with the turf.

It was suggested by Polly Groom, PCNP archaeologist, that if the trial trench was completed quickly we should dig a test hole to look at the top of the pit exposed in the cliff edge. However, on inspection this did not appear to be practical without digging on the very edge of the cliff. Also, this pit was between 0.8m to 1m below the ground surface and little of it appeared to remain in the cliff face. Therefore, it was considered that time would be better spent recording this pit in

the exposed cliff face and excavating this pit back from the exposed edge. This work was undertaken on 17 April.

The feature in the exposed cliff section was quickly drawn and photographed (Fig 3, Photo. 4) Due to the way the edge has slumped there was easy access to reach just above the "pit". This "pit" (108) was more the size of a posthole and only ran back a maximum of 180mm into the cliff face (Photo. 5). A considerable amount may have been lost to the west. The edges of this pit or posthole were slightly irregular and may never have been cleared totally of loose soil when originally excavated as there appeared to be some redeposited natural near its base (which was not apparent in the section). The fill (107) above was of a lighter brown silt and one fragment of hazelnut shell was recovered. This fill has been kept for possible analysis and dating.

Above this there was a deposit (106) of very dark grey peaty silt with occasional angular stones and a probable hazelnut fragment. The boundary between the fill and deposit was not distinguishable. The base of the "pit" (108) and a small feature of indeterminate nature to the north (109) had iron panning around their sides and bases. This iron panning is not considered to be important and results from natural causes.

Above the peaty layer (106) there was a layer (105) of dark grey brown slightly sandy silt with a larger percentage of smaller angular stones. Above this there was a layer (104) of rounded pebbles with a few angular stones (see Photo. 1), possibly a few of which were heat affected. This layer of pebbles (104) did not appear to extend much to the south of the drawn section, but similar strata was seen elsewhere on the cliff edge.

Above the pebble layer (104) there was a thick deposit (101) of brown grey slightly sandy silt 5% small angular stones and is probably the same as some of the topsoil/plough soil seen in the evaluation trench. Above this topsoil (101) there was a layer/spread of unevenly spaced pebbles (103) and above this the remains of the hedge bank (101).

RECOMMENDATIONS

If a date of any prehistoric antiquity can be obtained from the fill recovered from the "pit", then an evaluation/small excavation should be anticipated between the cliff face up to the current coast path. Because of the deep overburden against the remains of the former hedge bank at the bottom of the hill-slope a small machine would be advisable to remove this. Care will have to be taken with re-instatement so as not to exacerbate the cliff erosion. However, this area is likely to be lost over the next decade or two given the apparent rapid cliff loss over this last winter.

However, if immediate action cannot be taken, this area should be closely monitored at regular intervals for other exposed archaeology over the next few years.

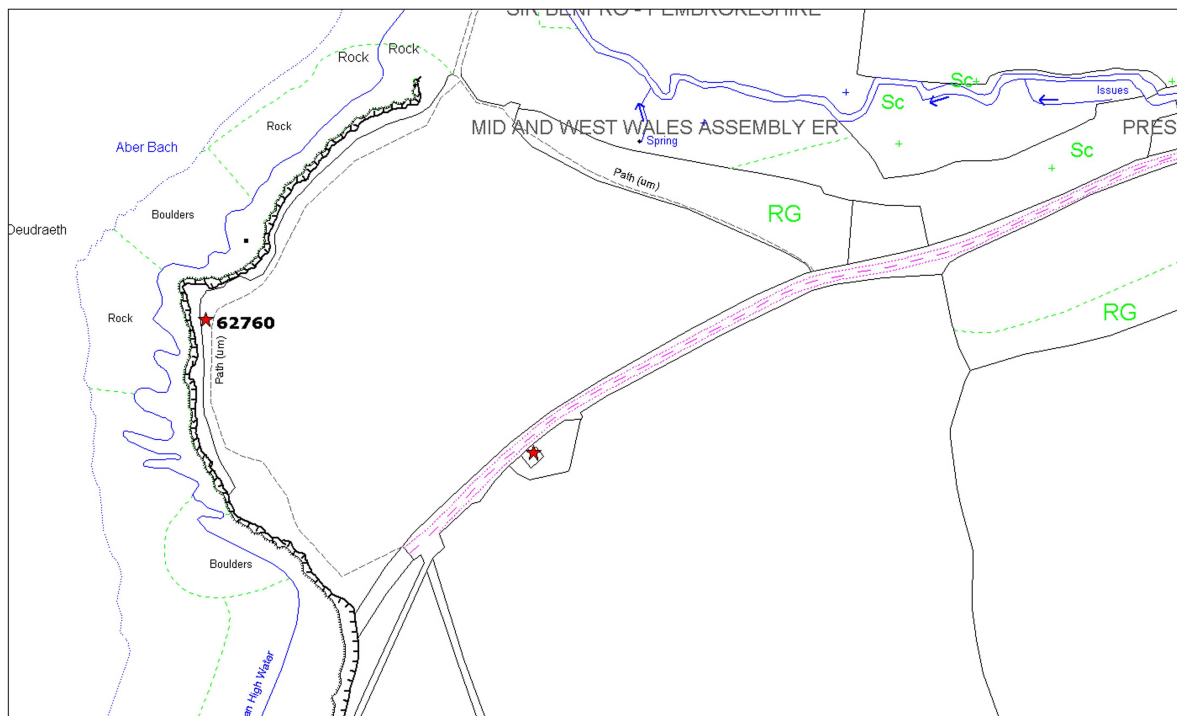
CONCLUSIONS

It was proved without any measure of doubt that the massive stones are not part of a collapsed chambered tomb, but have been deposited recently. The pit or posthole has been recorded, but there is need for further investigation and monitoring of what may be a prehistoric site.



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Figure 1: Site Location



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Figure 2: Site 62760 location (Map 0.5km wide).

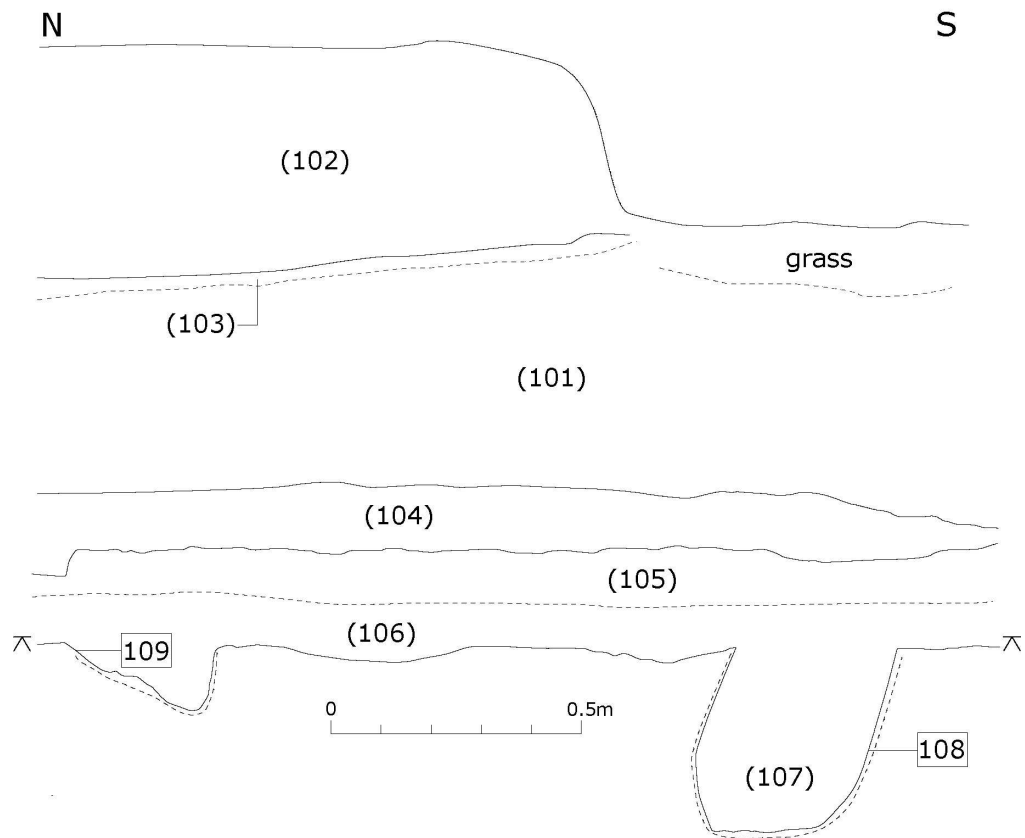


Figure 3. "pit" in exposed cliff edge



Photo. 1: Flint tool



Photo. 2: Flint tool reverse



Photo. 3: Trench as excavated. View S. Scales 0.5 and 1m



Photo. 4: "Pit" 108 in exposed cliff edge. View E. Scale 1m



Photo. 5: "Pit" 108 excavated. Scale 0.5m