

PREHISTORIC FUNERARY AND RITUAL SITES PROJECT

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY AT CEFN
GWERNFFRWD MONUMENT COMPLEX,
CARMARTHENSHIRE 2007



Prepared by Cambria Archaeology
For Cadw



ARCHAEOLEG CAMBRIA ARCHAEOLOGY

RHIF YR ADRODDIAD / REPORT NO. 2008/04
RHIF Y PROSIECT / PROJECT RECORD NO. 63886

Ionawr 2008
January 2008

PREHISTORIC FUNERARY AND RITUAL SITES PROJECT

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY AT CEFN GWERNFFRWD MONUMENT COMPLEX,
CARMARTHENSHIRE 2007

Gan / By

Nikki Cook

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CEFN GWERNFFRWD, CARMARTHENSHIRE

Archaeological survey 2007

Contents	Page
Summary	1
1. Introduction	2
2. The site	4
Previous archaeological work	5
3. Results of the 2007 archaeological survey	6
4. Conclusions and recommendations	12
Sources	13
Appendix 1: Regional HER entries for the Cefn Gwernffrwd complex	14
Figure 1: Location map of survey area	2
Figure 2: Location map of individual Cefn Gwernffrwd sites	3
Figure 3: Extract from the 1: 25,000 OS Pathfinder map 1013	4
Figure 4: Results of the 2007 topographical survey	7
Figure 5: 1975 survey of the stone circle and round barrow	8
Figure 6: 2007 survey of the visible elements of the stone circle and round barrow at Cefn Gwernffrwd	9
Figure 7: Comparison between the 1975 and 2007 surveys of the ring barrow and stone row	11
Table 1: Comparisons and correlations between the 1975 and 2007 surveys as labelled on their respective plans	10

CEFN GWERNFFRWD, CARMARTHENSIRE

Archaeological survey 2007

Summary

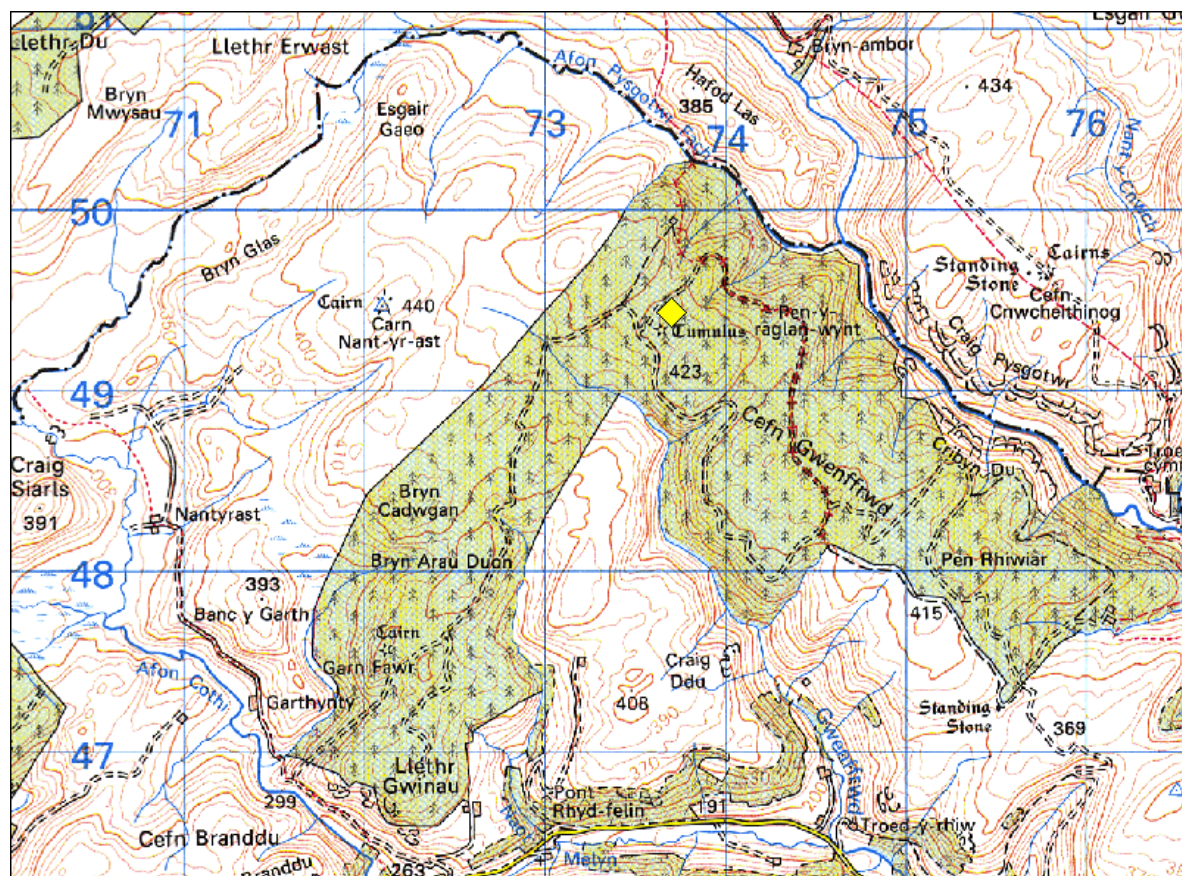
A complex of prehistoric monuments located within a forest clearing at Cefn Gwernffrwd, Carmarthenshire (centred at SN7369249385) was recommended for archaeological survey within the Action Plan produced by Cambria Archaeology for the Prehistoric Funerary and Ritual Sites (PFRS) project in 2006.

A topographic survey was grant-aided by Cadw and undertaken in December 2007. This complements the original survey undertaken by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCHAMW) in the 1970s and sets the monuments more clearly within their immediate landscape.

It is suggested that further work at the site could be undertaken, and a programme of geophysical survey is recommended.

1. INTRODUCTION

The complex of prehistoric monuments at Cefn Gwernffrwd, Carmarthenshire (centred at SN7369249385) is located within a forest clearing within the Bryn Aran Duon forestry plantation, managed by SelectFor on behalf of the Forestry Commission.



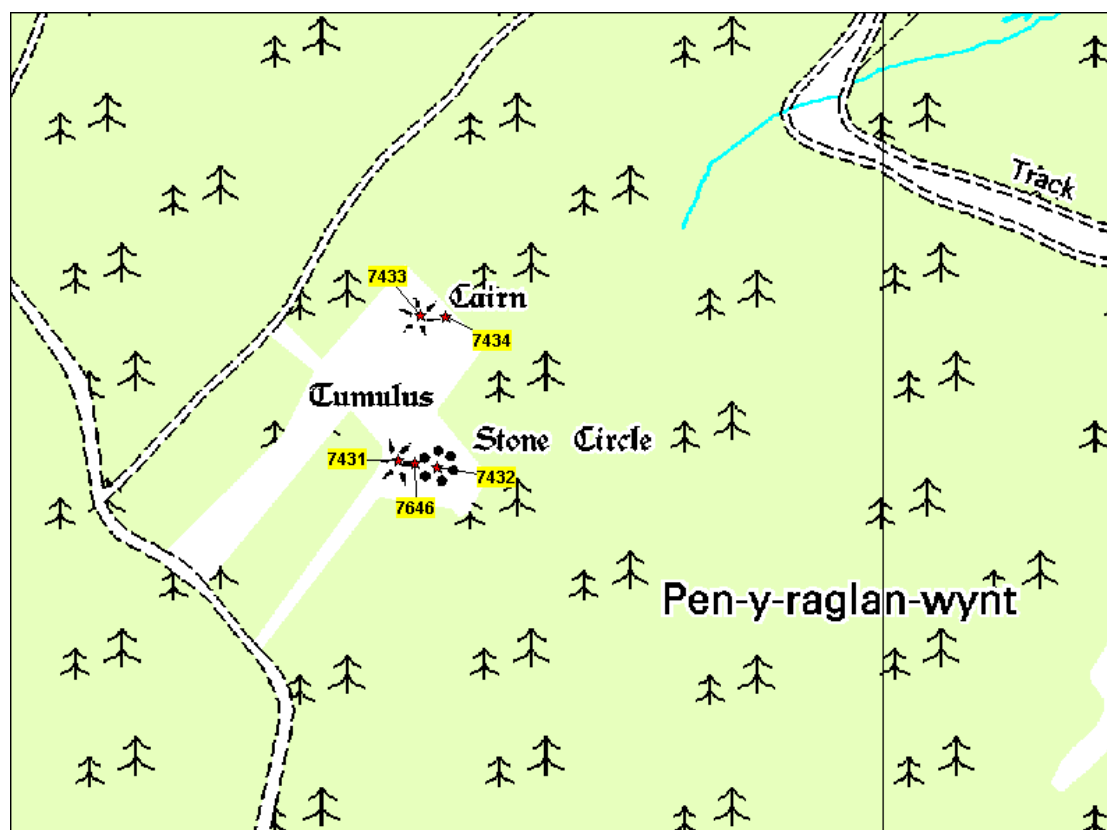
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Figure 1 Location map of survey area (shaded yellow), based on the Ordnance Survey

The complex, which is a scheduled ancient monument (SAM CM218), consists of a round barrow (PRN 7431), stone circle (PRN 7432), ring cairn (PRN 7433) and a stone row (PRN 7434), with a second stone row also recorded (PRN 7646), although this is no longer visible. These sites were visited in 2002 during the PFRS – East Carmarthenshire phase of the project and discussed in the end-of-year report (Cook *et al* 2003) (see Appendix 1).

An 'Action Plan' was produced by Cambria Archaeology in 2006 for Cadw (Cook 2006), which was intended as a regional synopsis of the outcomes of the PFRS project in southwest Wales undertaken over six years from May 2000. This *Action Report* identified key sites and landscapes, monuments at risk and future initiatives for the PFRS project, with the complex at Cefn Gwernffrwd one of several groups of monuments suggested as worthy of further study (*ibid.*: 6,9).

A project proposal was submitted to Cadw by Cambria Archaeology, which suggested a programme of archaeological survey at Cefn Gwernffrwd. Cadw agreed to grant-aid the work during the 2007-08 financial year, and a topographic survey was therefore undertaken in December 2007.



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Figure 2 Location map of individual Cefn Gwernffrwd sites with corresponding PRNs

Scope and aims of the survey

The main aim of the survey was to provide an updated plan of the monument complex at Cefn Gwernffrwd and to illustrate the topographic location of the individual sites and their relationships in a digital format, accessed through map-based GIS layers.

A CD-rom containing the digital survey data accompanies this report.

Report outline

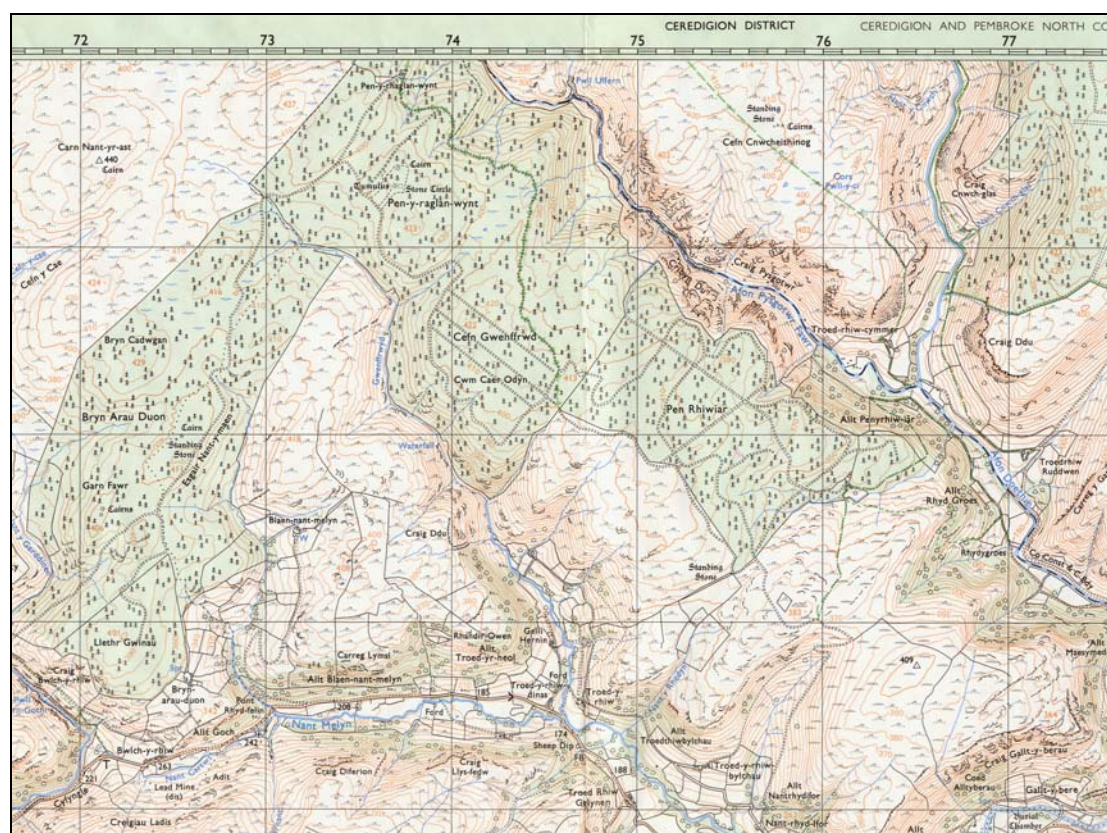
This report briefly describes the physical environment and known history of the site, before discussing the results of the survey. Conclusions and recommendations for further work are then presented.

2. THE SITE

Within a forest clearing at Cefn Gwernffrwd, which is part of the Bryn Aran Duon plantation in the north-easternmost fringes of Carmarthenshire, lies an enigmatic complex of prehistoric monuments. The complex is noteworthy for its rarity, not simply in terms of its comparatively good survival, but for its relative concentration of four different types of prehistoric funerary and ritual monument, each within very close proximity to the other. Very few monument complexes of this calibre and variety remain extant within southwest Wales, and as such, Cefn Gwernffrwd deserves to be viewed as a significant ritual landscape.

The four types of monument represented: stone circle, stone row, round barrow and ring cairn, suggest that this particular monument complex was in use for some considerable time, beginning during the late Neolithic and continuing into the Bronze Age, and moreover that the complex was not built in a single phase, but as part of a longer evolution spanning potentially a few hundred years.

However, the complex at Cefn Gwernffrwd was also part of a much wider prehistoric ritual and funerary landscape, and this complex of monuments should not be seen in isolation. Although the surrounding forestry plantation currently limits the viewshed from the site and disguises the topographical setting of the different monuments, they are in fact sited in a saddle between two local summits, one to the northwest and the other to the southeast, as well as between two river valleys: the Gwernffrwd downslope to the southwest, and the steep-sided Afon Pisgotwr Fawr to the northeast (see Figure 3).



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Figure 3 Extract from the 1: 25,000 Ordnance Survey Pathfinder map 1013

To the east and across the valley of the Afon Pysgotwr Fawr, at Cefn Cnwcheithinog in neighbouring Ceredigion, there is a second group of monuments consisting of two round barrows (PRNs 5534-5) and a standing stone (PRN 5538): although located 2km away, their relative topographic sitings suggests the likelihood that both groups would have been intervisible, surrounding vegetation withstanding, during the Bronze Age. Moreover, 1.5km to the west and on a prominent local highpoint was another substantial round barrow, Carn Nant-yr-ast (PRN 4100), which would also have been potentially intervisible with the Cefn Gwernffrwd complex.

Further downslope to the southwest, and sited on a local summit, were another two round barrows, the Garn Fawr cairns (PRNs 4098-9), and between these barrows and the Cefn Gwernffrwd complex there was also a standing stone (PRN 5532) and a ring barrow (PRN 5533). Although these are not thought to have been intervisible with the Cefn Gwernffrwd complex, their relative proximity suggests they were part of a much wider prehistoric funerary and ritual landscape spanning the upland plateaux of the foothills of the Cambrian Mountains to the north of Mynydd Mallaen, and may even have been encountered on a routeway up to the higher ground on which the Cefn Gwernffrwd complex is situated.

Previous archaeological work

The first published mention of the monument complex at Cefn Gwernffrwd occurred in 1976, in a short note by CS Briggs in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, accompanied also by a plan of the measured survey undertaken in 1975 for the National Monuments Record of the Royal Commission (Briggs 1976). A larger copy of this survey is contained within the Detailed Record File (DRF) for PRN 7432, held within the regional Historic Environment Record at the Cambria Archaeology offices in Llandeilo, and comparisons between this and the most recent survey are discussed later.

The discovery of the complex drew the attention of a number of scholars to the site, including Aubrey Burl, with Morgan and Ruggles surveying the complex and testing the monuments and their relative alignments for potential astronomical significances in 1975. Their 'indicated horizon profiles' led them to conclude that the Cefn Gwernffrwd site was not used for exact observations of the midwinter setting or midsummer rising Sun, although they noted:

'the fact that stones B [extant stone row PRN 7434] are roughly aligned in these solstitial directions is indisputable...In fact, for any reasonable choice of date, there is a line across the site between B and D [round barrow PRN 7431] from which the Sun could be observed at midwinter solstice...' (Morgan and Ruggles 1976: 164).

Following the archaeoastronomical interest in the site in the 1970s, the complex at Cefn Gwernffrwd then attracted the attentions of palaeoenvironmental researcher FM Chambers, who sampled three peat profiles from the plateau in c.1981, leading to the publication of an environmental history and an analysis of the palaeoecological setting of Cefn Gwernffrwd (Chambers 1982; Chambers 1983).

The environmental history of the Cefn Gwernffrwd upland plateau was based on a peat profile taken from the nearest deep basin on the plateau, located 0.5km to the southeast of the monument complex, and constituted the first radiocarbon-dated long pollen diagram from upland mid-Wales (Chambers 1982: 608). There was firm evidence for tree and vegetational clearances in the Neolithic, with more severe impacts noted for the Bronze Age. Mesolithic pine pollens were ousted by a rise in oak and elm during the early Neolithic, with charcoal layers within the sample core indicating more than one episode of human interference in the Neolithic, and related

high pollen values for hazel (*ibid.*: 613). This suggests a picture of partial clearance in the Neolithic, with perhaps areas like the col in which the Cefn Gwernffrwd complex was situated being comparatively clear of trees, although the wider landscape was not wholly cleared until the Bronze Age, or later. As such, Chambers suggests upland areas in Wales were perhaps more wooded in the Neolithic than previously thought (*ibid.*: 614), with obvious implications for the perceived significance of views between sites and potential astronomical alignments.

A palaeoecological setting for the complex at Cefn Gwernffrwd was analysed from two further peat samples, one from within the immediate vicinity of the monuments, and the other 200m to the northeast within the col. This also showed a high preponderance of hazel pollen in the later Boreal, suggesting that in this part of Wales at least, the uplands were dominated by *Corylus*, and the comparative lack of *Pinus* here when compared to the eastern part of mid-Wales suggests a pine was only a minor component of the Neolithic landscape (Chambers 1983:311). A charcoal horizon within the samples suggested burning and management of the hazel cover during the early Neolithic, with several other interference phases also attributable to this period.

Palaeoecological evidence from the samples at Cefn Gwernffrwd suggested that a selective clearance of hazel initially took place, before the subsequent selective removal of oak. This was followed by a flourishing of grasses during a 150 year period, which Chambers attributes to the early second millennium BC and suggests this might reflect the date range for the construction of the monument complex at Cefn Gwernffrwd (*ibid.*: 312).

3. RESULTS OF THE 2007 ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

Over the course of two days in December 2007 a topographic EDM survey was undertaken of the prehistoric monument complex at Cefn Gwernffrwd. Two survey stations were set up at the site: one at SN7367549417, 12m to the west of the ring cairn (PRN 7433) and the second at SN7370449343, just to the northwest of the stone circle (PRN 7432). The pegs marking these stations have temporarily been left *in situ*, so that any future geophysical survey can be tied straight in to the current survey using GIS software.

Figure 4 illustrates the overall results of the 2007 survey. Contours were surveyed at 0.25m intervals. The perimeter of the forest clearing was recorded where vegetation allowed, although the encroachment of the coniferous plantation meant that the recording of the exact edges of the clearing was hindered in some places. Vegetational cover across the site consisted of tussocky grass, and only the round barrow was visually prominent: some of the stones within the stone circle were almost totally obscured by the grass, and the northeast segment of the ring cairn was also largely overgrown. Probing within the area did reveal patches of occasional stones and there appeared to be a substantial area of peat cutting in the expanse between the ring barrow and stone circle.

A comparison between the survey undertaken by the Royal Commission in the 1970s and the 2007 survey showed some degree of disparity between the two. Attempts to digitally register the Royal Commission survey in order to allow overlapping map layers was unsuccessful, and it was impossible to digitally rectify the discrepancies between the two surveys, without one distorting the other.

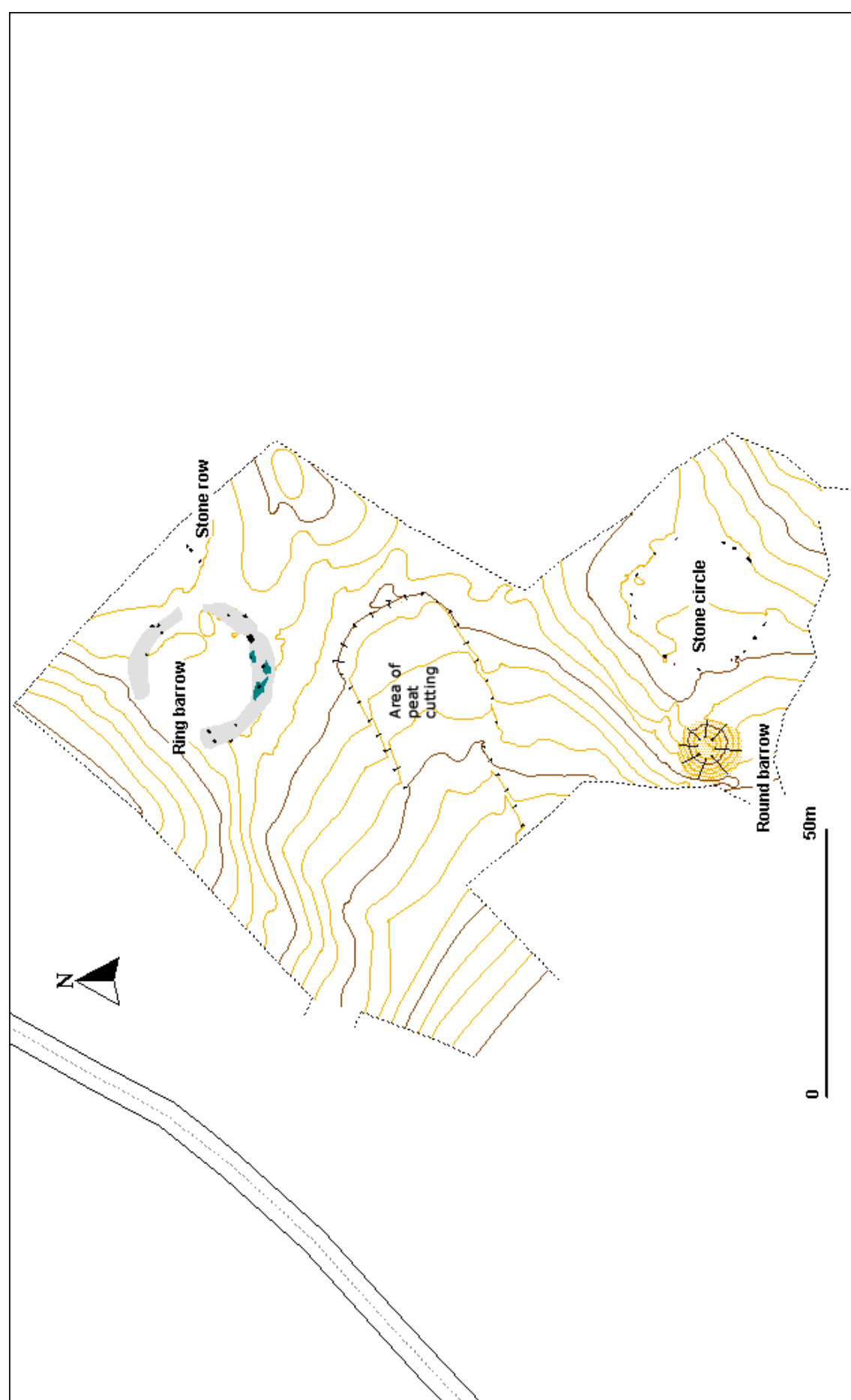


Figure 4 Results of the 2007 topographic survey

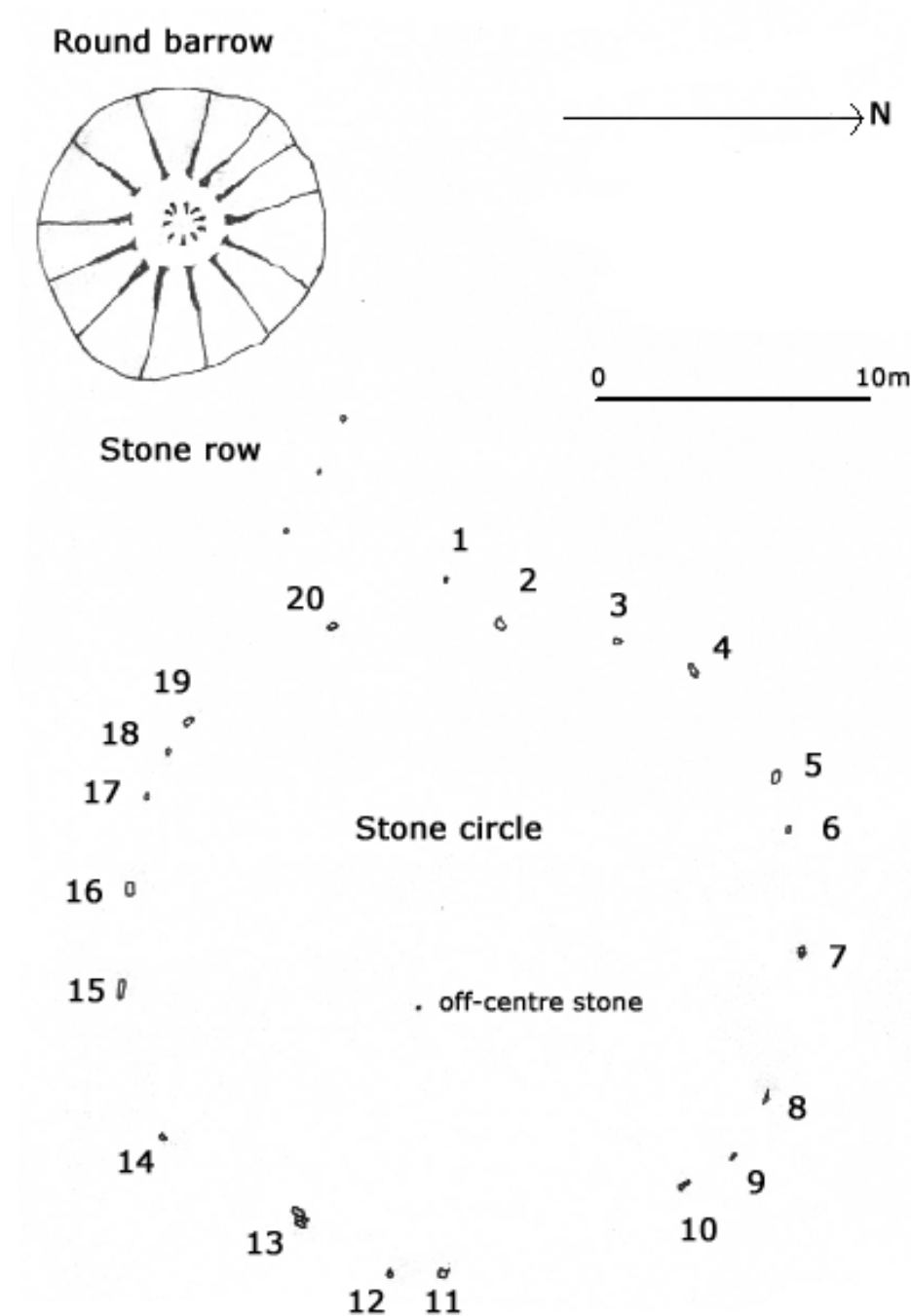


Figure 5 1975 survey of the stone circle and round barrow at Cefn Gwernffrwd by the Royal Commission

Figures 5 and 6 depict the 1975 and 2007 surveys of the stone circle and round barrow in the southern portion of the complex respectively, whilst Table 1 illustrates the apparent discrepancies between the two.

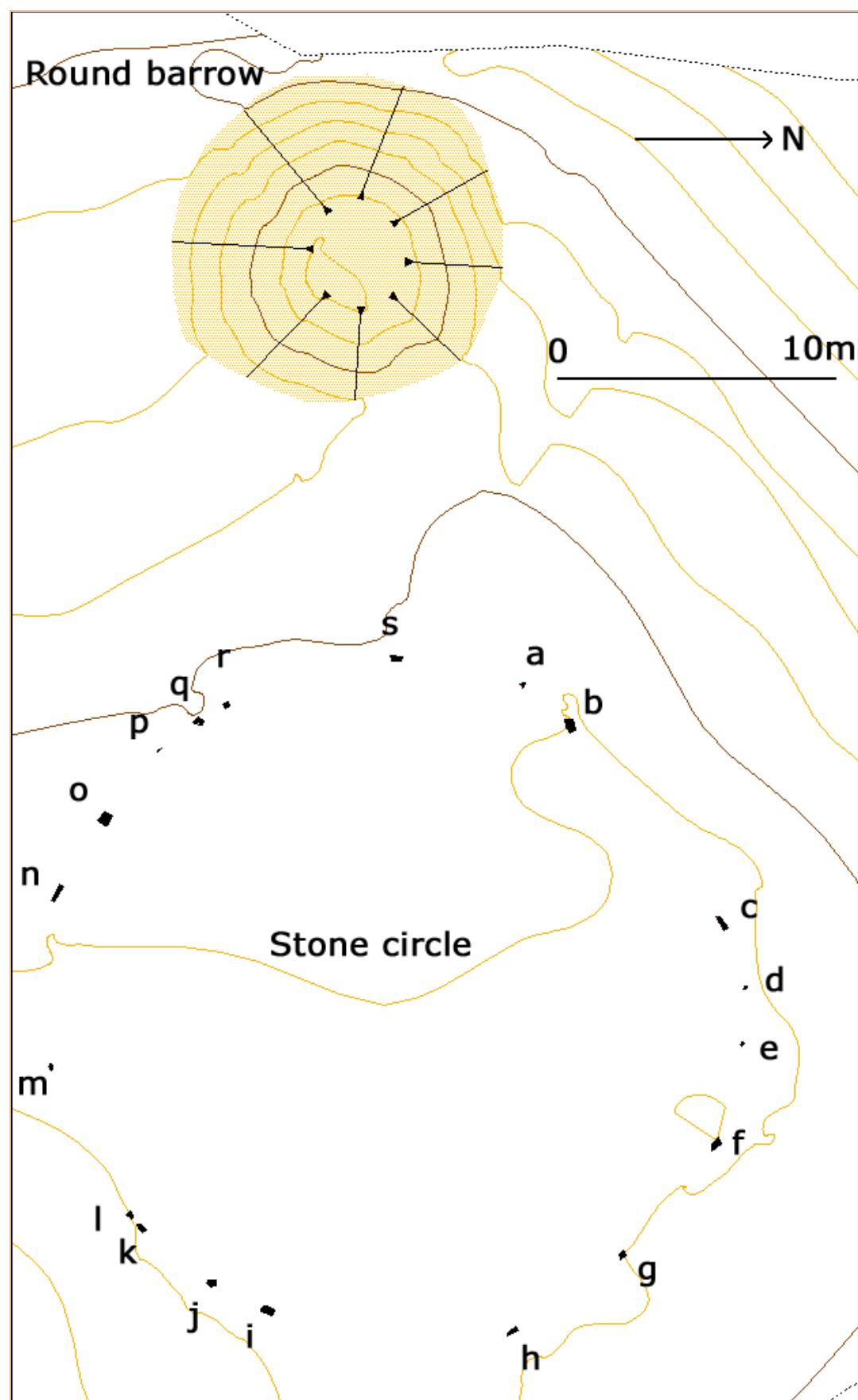


Figure 6 2007 survey of the visible elements of the stone circle and round barrow at Cefn Gwernffrwd

The 1975 survey by the Royal Commission recorded 20 stones within the stone circle, and one additional stone set off-centre. They also recorded three stones of a former stone row (PRN 7646) which is no longer visible but possibly obscured by the current vegetational growth.

The 2007 survey by Cambria Archaeology identified 19 stones within the stone circle, but were unable to locate the stone row recorded by the Commission or the off-centre stone at the centre of the stone circle monument.

Table 1: Comparisons and correlations between 1975 and 2007 surveys as labelled on their respective plans

Royal Commission Survey	Cambria Archaeology Survey
Stone circle:	Stone circle:
1	a
2	b
3	Not visible in 2007
4	Not visible in 2007
5	c
6	d
Not recorded by RCAHMMW in 1975	e
7	f
8	g
9	Not visible in 2007
10	h
11	i
12	j
13	k and l (recorded as two separate stones)
14	m
15	n
16	o
17	p
18	q
19	r
20	s
Off-centre stone	Not visible in 2007
Stone row (three stones)	Not visible in 2007
Round barrow	Round barrow

It would appear that the 2007 Cambria survey identified one stone ('e') which was not recorded by the Royal Commission during their survey in 1975, with Cambria also recording two stones, 'k' and 'l' where the Commission had recorded only one (stone 13). Moreover, three stones recorded by the Commission in 1975, stones 3, 4 and 9, were not located during the Cambria survey, and it is considered likely that they remain extant but are currently obscured by the tussocky grass, given that there has been over 30 years of vegetational growth in the meantime. Similarly, the 'lost' stone row (PRN 7646) recorded by the Commission within the 10m gap between the western edge of the stone circle and eastern perimeter of the round barrow in 1975 was not recorded during the Cambria survey in 2007: however, probing with a ranging rod did identify a stony area c.6m x 4.3m, heavily overgrown and located in the area of the previously recorded stone row, but the exact morphology of this stony area was unclear.

An area of presumed peat cutting, measuring some 40m x 20 and orientated broadly northeast-southwest, was recorded during the 2007 survey, lying within the open expanse between the ring barrow to the north and the stone circle to the south. It appears not to have been recorded or mentioned by Briggs in his 1976 article in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, and has also never been mentioned within Cadw's AM107 monitoring visits of the scheduled area, and yet forms quite a distinct immediate landscape feature.

The ring barrow was identified during the 2007 survey as having two apparent arcs of stones, with the southern arc the more pronounced and easily recognisable. This southern arc was formed of a band of cairn material ranging between 2m and 4m in width, with a diameter of c.25m. The northern arc was more densely overgrown and not so readily identifiable during the survey, but appeared to share a similar morphology to the southern arc. There were two apparent breaks within the ring: a large gap on the northwest side of the ring, measuring c.14m, with a smaller gap on the eastern side measuring c.4m. Comparing the results of the 2007 survey with that by the Royal Commission (see Figure 7 below), the Cambria survey identified some additional larger single blocks and patches of stone not recorded on the Commission plan, although the edges of the ring barrow appear to have been more defined in 1975, particularly on the north-northwestern side. Both surveys recorded the large white quartz boulder on the inside edge of the ring on its southeast side (wrongly described as lying on the southwest side by Briggs (1976: 111)).

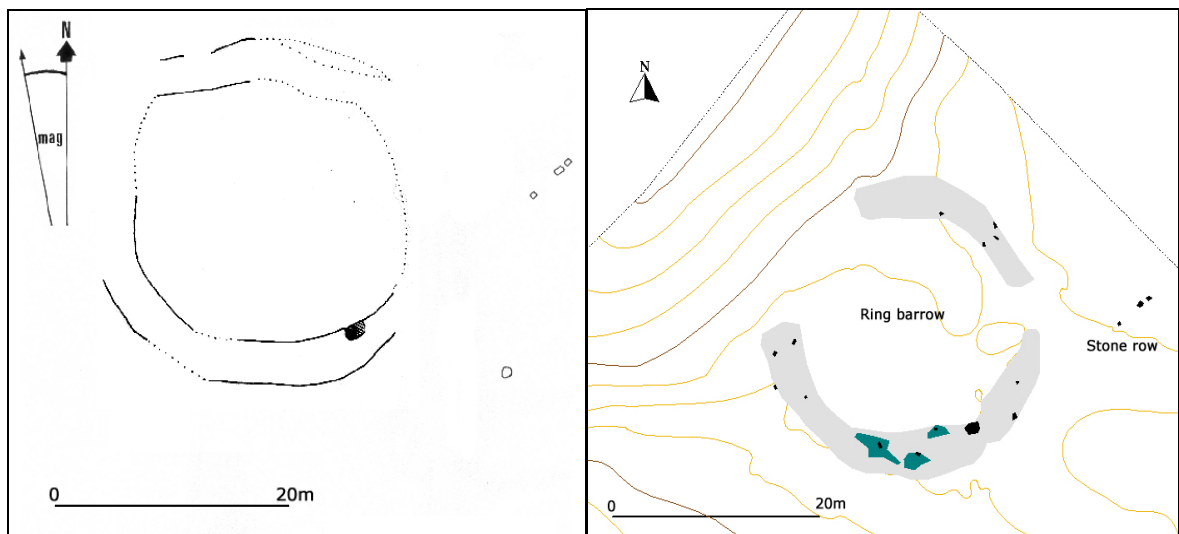


Figure 7 Comparison between the 1975 and 2007 surveys of the ring barrow and stone row

The stone row located c.10m to the east of the ring barrow was recorded equally by both surveys and appears largely unchanged. However, the Royal Commission survey recorded another stone c.12m to the south of the stone row in 1975, which was not identified during the 2007 survey, and is likely to be currently obscured by vegetation.

A small stone block was also noted during the Cambria survey at SN7371549386, located at the edge of the area of presumed peat cutting and lies some 35m south-southwest of the most southerly stone of the stone row. This stone was not recorded by the Royal Commission during their 1975 survey.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Several questions have been raised as a result of this survey:

- Are there additional stones within the stone circle which have yet to be identified?
- Are there any pits or features within the interior of the stone circle?
- What is the exact morphology of the stony area between the stone circle and the round barrow, and is it possible to retrieve any traces of the former stone row?
- Are there any additional stones to either of the stone row sites identified at Cefn Gwernffrwd?
- What is the extent of the ring barrow, and does it contain any additional internal features?
- What is the extent and nature of the possible peat-cutting area which lies between the ring barrow and stone circle?
- Are there any other features currently obscured by the vegetation, which were missed by both the 1975 and 2007 surveys?

A further scheme of non-intrusive work at the site is recommended in an attempt to answer some of the questions raised by the monument complex at Cefn Gwernffrwd, and it is suggested that a programme of geophysical survey across the whole forest clearing in which the monuments are located would be a potentially productive strategy.

Acknowledgments

The EDM survey was undertaken by Hubert Wilson and Gwilym Bere. Access to the Bryn Aran Duon plantation was kindly granted by Huw Denman, Better Woodlands for Wales and SelectFor Manager.

This project was grant-aided by Cadw.

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Appendix 1 Regional HER entries for the Cefn Gwernffrwd complex

Cefn Gwernffrwd Prehistoric Monument Complex SAM Cm218

The site consists of a group of five prehistoric ritual monuments: a round barrow (PRN 7431), a stone circle (PRN 7432), a ring barrow (PRN 7433), and two stone rows (PRNs 7434 and 7646). These sites are located on top of a ridge in what was once presumably open moorland, which is now afforested. Even though the site has been left clear of trees the northeast end is within 1.5m of the edge of the forest and is becoming overgrown by long tussocky grass.

PRN 7431

NGR	SN7368849329
PARISH	Cilycwm
SITE NAME	CEFN GWERNFFRWD
SITE TYPE	ROUND BARROW
QUARTER SHEETS	SN74NW
PERIOD	Bronze Age
FORM/COND	Earthwork/C
LAND USE	Pasture;Heath
VEGETATION	Short grass and bilberry, and long tussocky ground around the base.

A grass-covered barrow, 12 diameter x 1m high, with a shallow central depression, c.1.5m across x 0.3m deep, which may be the result of previous excavation. Other than the disturbance to the centre of the barrow it survives in good condition. The outer edges of the barrow are becoming overgrown with long tussocky grass. The barrow lies in a clearing within a forestry plantation.



PRN 7431 looking WNW

PRN 7432

NGR	SN7371449328
PARISH	Cilycwm
SITE NAME	CEFN GWERNFFRWD
SITE TYPE	STONE CIRCLE
QUARTER SHEETS	SN74NW
PERIOD	Neolithic; Bronze Age
FORM/COND	O.Struct/C
LAND USE	Pasture; Heath

This stone circle, c.25m diameter, consists of 19 small earthfast stones and one inner off-centre stone. None of the stones are taller than 0.6m, and only four of the stones on the southwest side of the circle were visible in 2002, due to the long tussocky grass that covers the site.



PRN 7432 looking E

PRN 7433

NGR	SN7369349412
PARISH	Cilycwm
SITE NAME	CEFN GWERNFFRWD
SITE TYPE	RING BARROW
QUARTER SHEETS	SN74NW
PERIOD	Bronze Age
FORM COND	Earthwork/C
LAND USE	Pasture; Heath
VEGETATION	Long tussocky grass and some bilberry on the stone bank.

A ring cairn, 28m in overall diameter, with a low bank of stone 3m wide and never more than 0.3m high. The interior is level. There is a large quartz boulder, 1.5m in length, 1m in width and 0.3m thick, which may be a recumbent standing stone against the inside bank on the southeast side. Although the stone bank has been spread in

places, there is nothing to suggest that it formerly stood much higher than it is at present. The site has been left clear of trees, but it is becoming completely overgrown with long tussocky grass and bilberry.



PRN 7433 looking NE

PRN 7434

NGR	SN7372349417
PARISH	Cilycwm
SITE NAME	CEFN GWERNFFRWD
SITE TYPE	STONE ROW
QUARTER SHEETS	SN74NW
PERIOD	Bronze Age
FORM/COND	O.Struct/B
LAND USE	Pasture; Heath
VEGETATION	Long tussocky grass.

This is a row, 4m long, of three stones just to the east of ring barrow PRN 7433. The row is aligned northeast-southwest and consists of three earthfast stones of similar dimensions. The southwest stone measures approximately 0.66m high x 0.3m x 0.3m at its base, although it tapers to 0.26m x 0.2m at the top. The middle stone is set towards the northeast end and it measures 0.66m high x 0.5m x 0.3m. The northeast stone is lightly shorter than the others, 0.57m high x 0.3 x 0.3. The tops of all three stones have been rounded through weathering. The positions of the stones meant that there is a significant difference in the size of the gaps between the southwest and middle stones, 2.5m, and the middle and northeast stones, less than 1m. This suggests that there may originally have been a fourth stone between the southwest and middle stones. The row has been compared to a second stone row reported in this area (PRN 7464), which has now apparently been lost.



PRN 7434 looking NNE

PRN 7646

NGR	SN73704935
PARISH	Cilycwm
SITE NAME	CEFN GWERNFFRWD
SITE TYPE	STONE ROW?
QUARTER SHEETS	SN74NW
PERIOD	Bronze Age
FORM/COND	O.Struct/U
LAND USE	Pasture; Heath

The site is recorded as a row of three stones lying to the west of the stone circle (PRN 7432), between the circle and round barrow PRN 7433. This stone setting was not recorded by Cadw in 1998, when they visited the four surviving monuments at this site, although it is included as an aside within the description of the stone circle (PRN 7432). Examination of the area between the stone circle and round barrow in 2002 failed to locate the stones, and they may have been lost.

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CARMARTHENSHIRE 2007**

RHIF YR ADRODDIAD / REPORT NUMBER 2008/04

**Ionawr 2008
January 2008**

Paratowyd yr adroddiad hwn gan / This report has been prepared by Nikki Cook

Swydd / Position: Project Manager

Llofnod / Signature Dyddiad / Date

Mae'r adroddiad hwn wedi ei gael yn gywir a derbyn sêl bendith
This report has been checked and approved by Nigel Page

ar ran Archaeoleg Cambria, Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf.
on behalf of Cambria Archaeology, Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Swydd / Position: Head of Field Services

Llofnod / Signature Dyddiad / Date

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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have on the content or presentation of this report