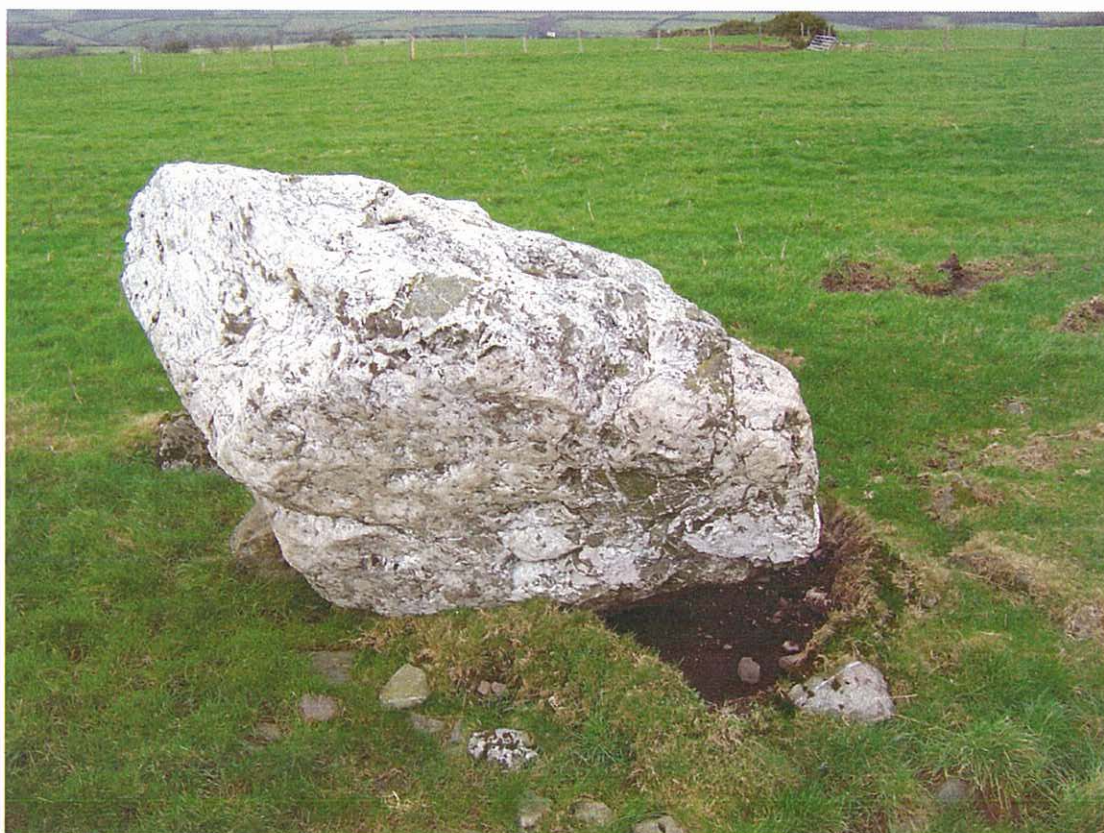


MEINI GWYN



Site visit and damage assessment



Report by Nikki Cook

9th February 2004



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Report by Nikki Cook

Summary

Following a telephone call from an anonymous member of the general public reporting concern over potential damage to the monuments at Meini Gwyn on Sunday 8th February 2004, Nikki Cook of Cambria Archaeology's Field Operations made a visit to the site on Monday 9th February at the behest of Louise Austin (Head of Heritage Management). The damage to the area was recorded and digital photographs taken.

The site

Meini Gwyn (SN46002610) is recorded in Cambria's SMR as a Prehistoric Monument Complex (42531) consisting of three large white quartz boulder standing stones (1726, 1727, 1728), two round barrows (12803, 42515) and a possible ring barrow (42506), thought to date to the early Bronze Age. One stone, 1726, lies in the back garden of Dolgwm house, with the two other blocks (1727 and 1728) in the neighbouring field to the W. Stone 1727 is the middle stone and also the largest block of the three, and lies 1m from the boundary fence which separates the field from the road. In between this stone and the stone in the garden of Dolgwm is a possible ring barrow (42506), located c.20m to the west-north-west of 1727, whilst c.10m to the north of this stone (and 18m to the west of stone 1728) lies round barrow 42515. A second round barrow, 12803, lies in the adjacent field to the north-east.

The Meini Gwyn complex of monuments were last visited in June 2000 as part of the Prehistoric Funerary and Ritual Sites (PFRS) survey, a pan-Wales project funded by Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments¹. The aim of the PFRS project is to visit every known Neolithic and Bronze Age ritual and funerary monument throughout Wales to ensure the continued preservation of these monuments for future generations. This involves updating the SMR records for the sites by checking current known information about the sites and recording additional information as necessary. In the main this involves an assessment in the field of their condition, fragility and vulnerability, with scheduling and/or management recommendations made as and where appropriate. In the case of this Meini Gwyn complex, two new sites were discovered here during fieldwork: a round barrow (42515) and a possible ring barrow (42506). These two new sites are located in the same field as two of the large white quartz blocks (1727 and 1728), and it was potential damage to these stones in particular which gave rise to the call made to Cambria noted above. Currently none of the monuments in the complex have Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) status, although it was recommended after fieldwork that the area be properly surveyed and planned prior to any scheduling recommendation to properly assess the site and its significance.

It was understood from the telephone call made to Cambria Archaeology on Sunday 8th February 2004 that the ownership of the land on which the bulk of the monuments lie has recently changed hands², and that this new landowner had contracted a JCB and driver to work specifically in the field containing two of the white quartz blocks and barrows. The caller is one of many local residents who fear for the safety of these prehistoric monuments, which they view as an important local landmark.

Site visit

In response to this information it was suggested by the Heritage Management section at Cambria Archaeology that an archaeologist should make a visit to the site to assess the level of damage to the area. As project manager of the PFRS project, Nikki Cook of Field Operations went to visit the site straight away on Monday 9th February, as she was familiar with the site having previously assessed the area in June 2000.

The field in which the monuments lie is situated next to the road linking Horeb and Felingwm with the main A485 at Rhydargaeau. As a result it was easy to assess the damage to the area from the boundary bank separating the field from the road. No damage was apparent to round barrow 42515, nor to stone 1728. The possible ring barrow 42506 also did not appear to have been compromised, although it was noted that the nettle growth at the centre of the mound had died off. Consequently this actually makes the monument far more visible in the field as a bank of stones with a sunken centre, made prominent by the contrast of the brownish vegetation with the surrounding green pasture. However, it was stone 1727 which showed quite clear evidence of having been tampered with very recently.

Damage to stone 1727

This stone, a large recumbent white quartz block 1.5m high, is located at the edge of the field within 1m of the boundary fence. There is clear evidence of the stone having been recently damaged in what appears to be an attempt to move it from its current location using a large machine.

Wheel ruts are apparent on the grass to the NE and within 3m of the stone suggesting the stone was attacked from this side. The stone itself appears to have been toppled and shifted round slightly in an anti-clockwise direction (when viewed from the boundary bank), exposing a 1m² area of socket, characterised by fresh dark earth with some small and medium-sized stones visible. The socket is defined by a low grass baulk on three sides, with the southern and eastern sides the most prominent. The stone originally stood within a small raised mound, and to the north and south of the boulder there are a number of turf-consolidated loose (probably tumbled) packing stones within the hollows. At its western side this large quartz boulder now rests on a smaller angular stone block, which was previously free-standing.

It is possible that the stone could be nudged back into its socket, but there is the risk that such an operation might cause further damage.

Conclusions

It is hard to see why stone 1727 in particular was targeted by the JCB driver: if field clearance was the aim of the exercise, then stone 1728 lies much further into the field and would be the more obvious candidate for removal, as it could be perceived as being 'in the way' of potential ploughing operations. It is also a much smaller stone and thus would presumably be easier to move. However, stone 1727 is a massive block of quartz which lies within a metre of the boundary: to simply move the stone to the boundary as clearance would be a useless exercise. It can only be assumed that the intention was to possibly move the stone entirely from the field, otherwise there seems little point in paying a contractor to just nudge the stone a few centimetres.

However, there are also some fairly deep hollows in the field close to the stone, and it is possible that it was intended to push the stone into one of these, although the hollows are mostly to the east of the stone, and thus not in the direction that the stone has been shunted. It is assumed that the current damage to the stone was relatively slight because it posed too difficult an undertaking to shift the stone in the first place. The tyre ruts made by the JCB suggest that there was some wheel spinning by the digger as it dealt with the resistance from the stone, which is presumably why the stone has been left almost in situ.

Considering that the landowner has contracted the JCB and driver for works in this field, then it must be assumed that there is an immediate and serious threat to the remaining prehistoric monuments here, and perhaps to stone 1728 in particular. Urgent attention must be given to the site, with possibly an emergency scheduling suggested. It is quite possible that neither the new landowner nor the digger driver are aware of the archaeological importance of the stones, and it is unlikely that they would recognise the other features in the field as Bronze age barrows either. However, the stones are held in high regard locally as being of significance as a local landmark, and it seems unlikely that these operations are being wholly conducted in complete ignorance.

It is possible that if the landowner is contacted and made aware of the archaeological significance of the site that he may review his intentions towards the field. However, if he is aware that the site is currently unscheduled he may instead try to get the works completed before any schedule is passed. A happy outcome would be to see stone 1727 returned to its former position and a management agreement made with Mr Jones to leave the remainder of the monuments in situ and intact. A proper survey of the field and its features is desirable, especially given its proximity to other prehistoric monuments located along the same NE-SW running ridge, which suggests this area to be a significant ritual landscape in the early Bronze age³.

¹ An unpublished report on the results of the West Carmarthenshire 2000-2001 survey are held in the SMR at the offices of Cambria Archaeology, Report number 2001/25.

² The land was previously owned by the nearby farm, Meini, whom we liased with for access during the PFRS fieldwork, but has recently been acquired by neighbouring farmer Lyn Jones, Hengiluchaf, Peniel, Carms. 01267 853252.

³ Round. barrows 1720, 1721, 1722 and 1723 form a linear arrangement to the north-east of the Meini Gwyn complex following the line of the ridge, with the Meini Gwyn stones at the south-western extremity of this concentration of monuments.

Meini Gwyn prn 1726

Stone in back garden of Dolgwm house



looking NNE

taken June 2000



looking WSW

taken June 2000

Meini Gwyn prns 1727 and 1728

Stone 1728 in foreground



looking SW

taken June 2000



looking SW

taken February 2004

** Note how the profile of furthest stone 1727 has changed with the recent damage*

Meini Gwyn Stone 1727 in foreground



looking E with stone 1728 in background

taken February 2004



looking W with possible ring barrow 42506 in background

taken February 2004

Meini Gwyn possible ring barrow 42506



looking W

taken February 2004



looking NE

taken February 2004

Meini Gwyn relationship between possible ring barrow 42506 and stone 1727



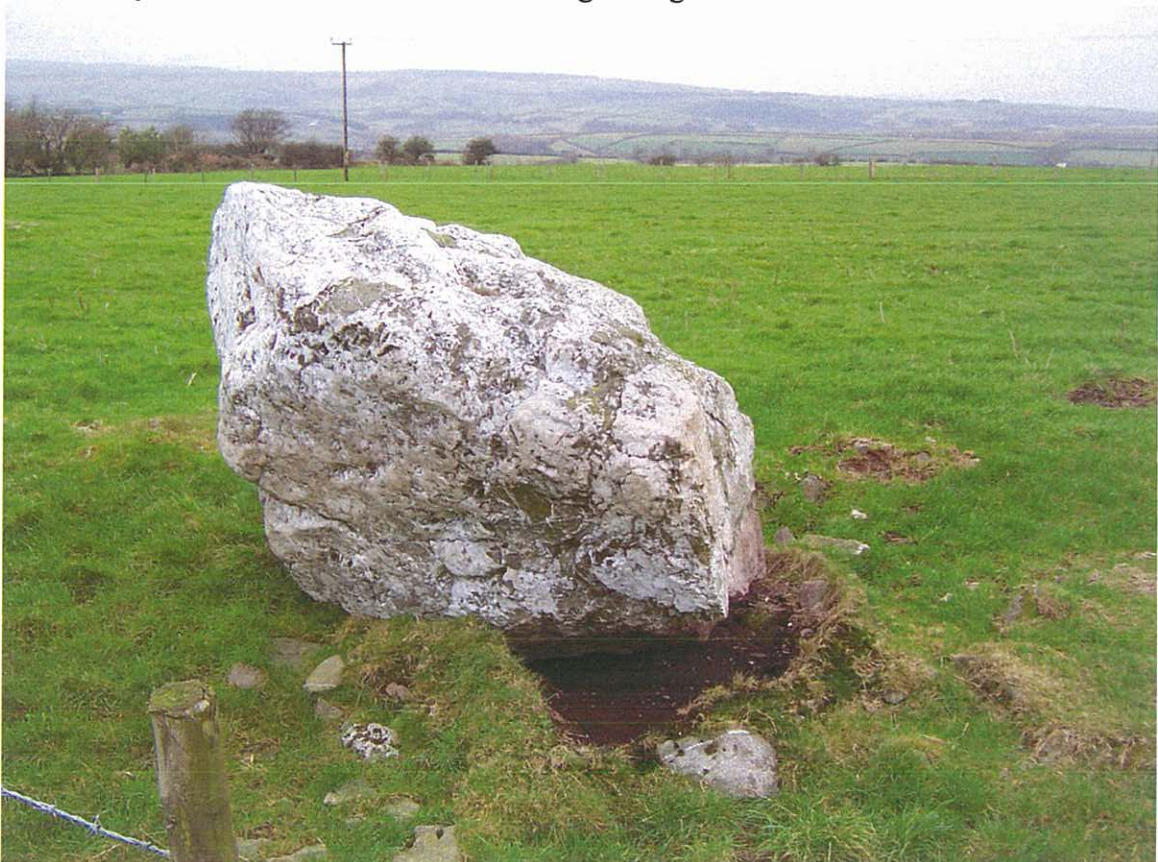
looking ESE

taken June 2000

** Note how the vegetation inside the ring barrow has changed*

Meini Gwyn stone 1727

showing damage



looking NW

taken February 2004

** Note the close proximity of the stone to the boundary fence*

Meini Gwyn stone 1727

showing proximity of wheel ruts



looking SSW

taken February 2004



looking NNW

taken February 2004

Meini Gwyn stone 1727

showing detail of socket



taken February 2004



taken February 2004

Meini Gwyn stone 1727

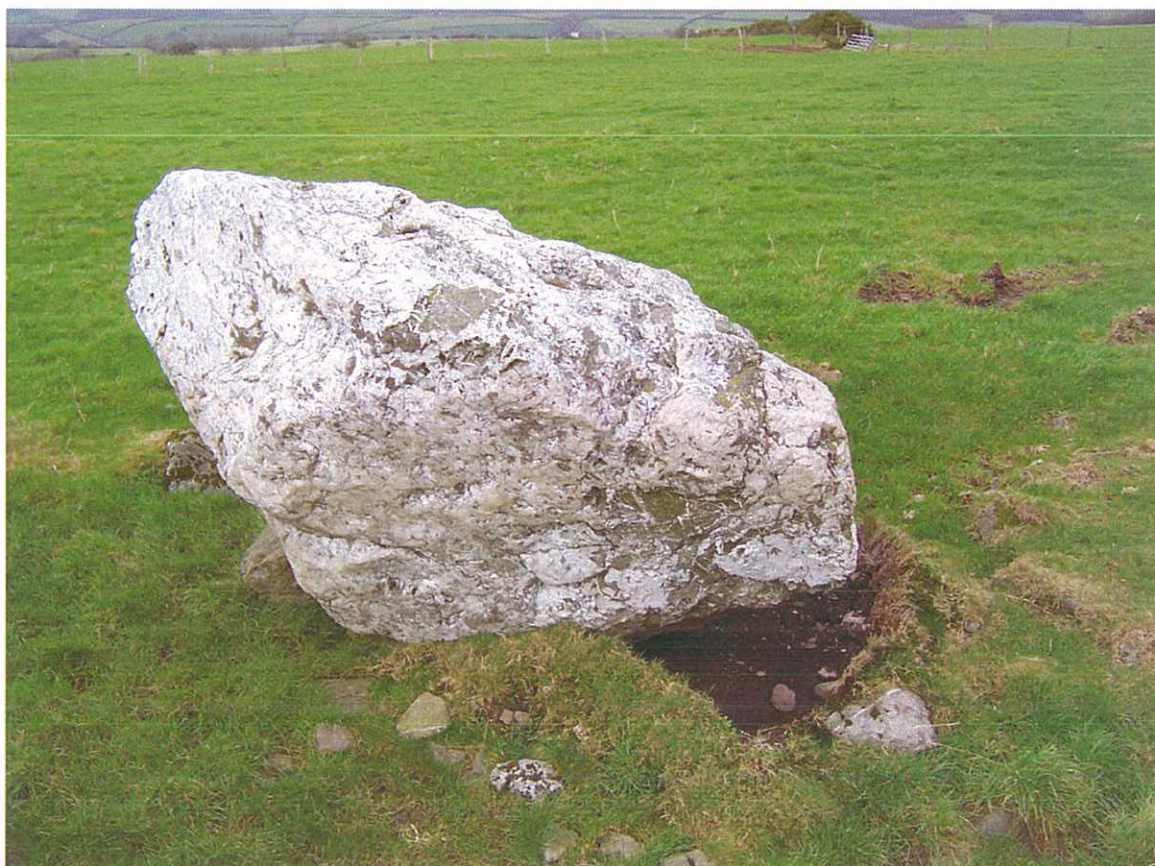
showing mound and tumble of packing stones



looking SW

taken February 2004

** Note the discolouration of the stone where it has been in the ground but now exposed*



looking NW

taken February 2004

Meini Gwyn stone 1727 showing how the stone is now resting on an angular block



looking S

taken February 2004



looking N

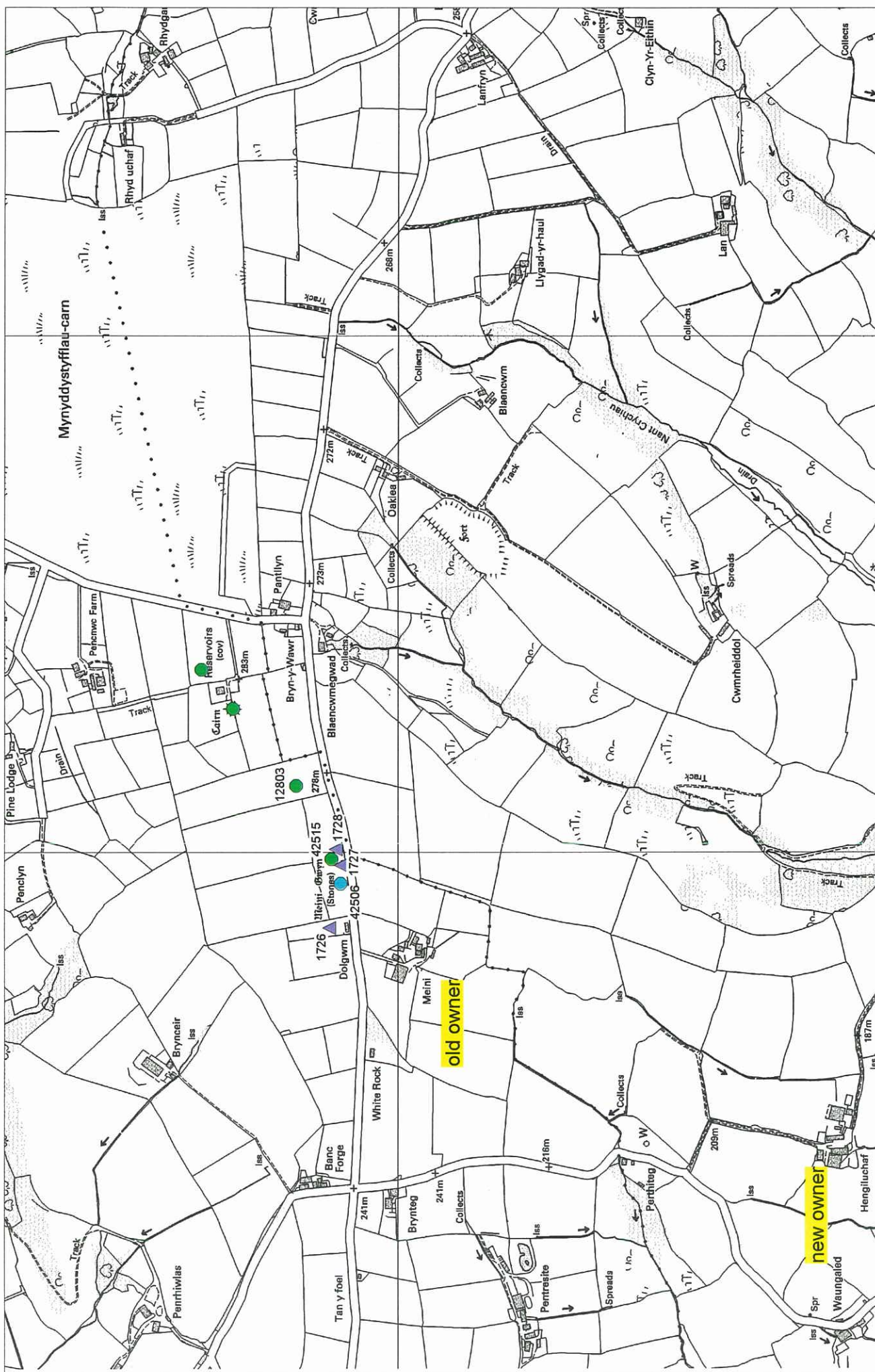
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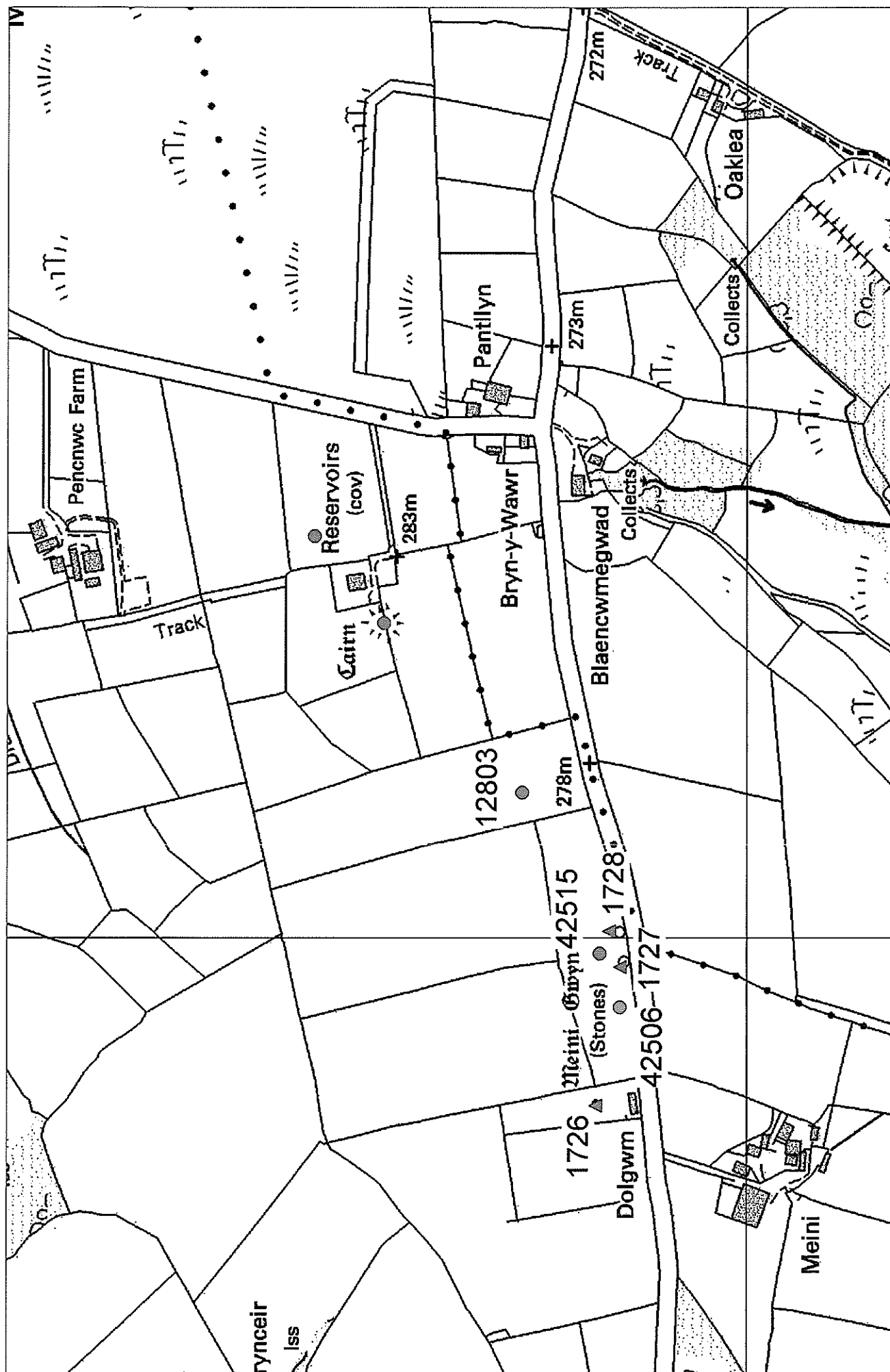
Meini Gwyn prn 1728 showing its position relative to the boundary plus its smaller size



looking SE

taken February 2004





<u>PRN</u>	1726	<u>NGR</u>	SN45852612		
<u>SITE NAME</u>	MEINI GWYN			<u>FORM</u>	O.Struct
<u>SITE TYPE</u>	STANDING STONE				
<u>DESCRIPTIVE TYPE</u>	Boulder			<u>SITE STATUS</u>	Not Scheduled
<u>CONDITION</u>	B			<u>SITING</u>	Ridge/flat/middle
<u>ASSOCIATED WITH</u>	1718;42530				
<u>PART OF</u>	42531				

A large white quartz recumbent boulder now forming part of a garden rockery feature at the back of Dolgwm house, and adjacent to a field containing another two similar white quartz standing stones with all three stones forming part of prehistoric monument complex 42531. Commanding views are achievable from this site which is located at the top of tongue of flat land before it begins to slope off to the NNE. This rock was clearly very specifically sited and moreover quite carefully selected: within its fabric there are observable a number of faceted crystals. The stone was placed at the very end of a NE-SW running ridge and although it is not possible to see beyond the ridge from this stone, a view which is obscured by the high ground on which barrow cemetery 42530 is located c.500m away to the NE, it is possible to see neighbouring stone 1727, c.100m away to the ESE. The surface of this boulder has a number of hollows (which could be both natural and/or cultural) and which were water-filled at the time of our visit, and this stone may well have been deliberately carved, or chosen because of its ability, to catch water in this way. Two earthfast conglomerate stones with large quantities of quartz inclusions lie at the S end of the stone around its base, which is otherwise surrounded with shrubs and ericas.

Huge views visible from the site: to the SW is the coast, and Frenni Fawr and the Preselis clear to the W. Viewshed is 140 degree arc from SW to N.

DIGITAL CAMERA

<u>PRN</u>	1727	<u>NGR</u>	SN45982610		
<u>SITE NAME</u>	MEINI GWYN			<u>FORM</u>	O.Struct
<u>SITE TYPE</u>	STANDING STONE				
<u>DESCRIPTIVE TYPE</u>	Boulder			<u>SITE STATUS</u>	Not Scheduled
<u>CONDITION</u>	B			<u>SITING</u>	Ridge/flat/top
<u>ASSOCIATED WITH</u>	1718;42530				
<u>PART OF</u>	42531				

A large white quartz boulder-type standing stone, part of prehistoric monument complex 42531 and very similar to the two other standing stones in this group, 1726 c.100m to the WNW and 1728 c.40m to the ENE. A possible ring cairn (42506) lies c.20m to the WNW of this stone in alignment with stone 1726 which is now obscured from view by the boundary and trees of Dolgwm house. This massive recumbent boulder, with its long axis aligned NNW-SSE and large faces SW-NE, has an almost triangular shape and is surrounded by large angular boulders and smaller stones as packing material at its base, which are of igneous/conglomerate rocks with quartz inclusions.

Huge views visible from the site: to the SW is the coast (Carmarthen Bay and the sea), with Frenni Fawr and the Preselis clear to the W and a large vista over the surrounding landscape, particularly through the W sector from S to N. The stone is also intervisible with barrow 1720 of the Penycnc cemetery 42530 c.350m away to the NE.

DIGITAL CAMERA

<u>PRN</u>	42506	<u>NGR</u>	SN45962612		
<u>SITE NAME</u>	MEINI GWYN			<u>FORM</u>	Earthwork
<u>SITE TYPE</u>	RING BARROW?				
<u>DESCRIPTIVE TYPE</u>	Cairn-ring			<u>SITE STATUS</u>	Not Scheduled
<u>CONDITION</u>	D			<u>SITING</u>	Ridge/flat/top
<u>ASSOCIATED WITH</u>	1718;42530				
<u>PART OF</u>	42531				

c.20m to the WNW of stone 1727 there is a large circular cairn/stone ring with a central hollow/depression now overgrown with nettles. A clearly circular area, c.12m in diameter and standing 0.6m high, consists of a bank c.1.3m wide with a possible entrance at the NE side. The SW side of the monument is the best preserved, and the site lies within monument complex 42531, and is associated with at least three standing stones and two round barrows, with barrow cemetery 42530 a short distance away to the NE.

Huge views visible from the site: to the SW is the coast (Carmarthen Bay and the sea), with Frenni Fawr and the Preselis clear to the W and a large vista over the surrounding landscape, particularly through the W sector from S to N. The barrow is also intervisible with barrow 1720 of the Penycynwc cemetery 42530 c.350m away to the NE.

DIGITAL CAMERA

<u>PRN</u>	42515	<u>NGR</u>	SN4597226116		
<u>SITE NAME</u>	MEINI GWYN			<u>FORM</u>	Earthwork
<u>SITE TYPE</u>	ROUND BARROW				
<u>DESCRIPTIVE TYPE</u>	Mound-circular			<u>SITE STATUS</u>	Not Scheduled
<u>CONDITION</u>	D			<u>SITING</u>	Ridge/flat/top
<u>ASSOCIATED WITH</u>	1726;1727;1728;12803;42506				
<u>PART OF</u>	42531				

Possible ploughed-out round barrow, 12m in diameter and located in the same small area as stones 1727, 1728 and possible ring barrow 42506. Part of the Meini Gwyn monument complex (42531). Quartz boulder 1727 lies 10m away to the S of the barrow and 1728 lies 18m away to the ESE. A couple of possible kerbstones were visible on the SE side of the mound.

Huge views visible from the site: to the S is the coast, and Frenni Fawr and the Preselis clear to the W.

DIGITAL CAMERA Dcp_0566

<u>PRN</u>	42531	<u>NGR</u>	SN46002610		
<u>SITE NAME</u>	MEINI GWYN			<u>FORM</u>	O.struct
<u>SITE TYPE</u>	PREHISTORIC MONUMENT COMPLEX				
<u>DESCRIPTIVE TYPE</u>				<u>SITE STATUS</u>	Not Scheduled
<u>CONDITION</u>	B			<u>SITING</u>	Ridge/flat/middle
<u>ASSOCIATED WITH</u>	1720;1721;12802;42505;12803;1718;42530				
<u>CONSISTS OF</u>	1726;1727;1728;12803;42506;42515				

Complex of monuments consisting of three large white quartz boulders (standing stones 1726, 1726 and 1728), round barrow 12803, plus the newly recognised possible round barrow 42515 and ring cairn 42506. This complex may also be associated with barrow cemetery 42530 which lies on higher ground just to the NW of the site.

Fantastic views out particularly to the western sector and Frenni Fawr, with the Preselis also visible to the west, and the coast to the S.

DIGITAL CAMERA

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