TRE'R CEIRI MONITORING VISIT

20TH AUGUST 1999

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Introduction

PRN 613.

Tre'r Ceiri (SH373446) is an exceptionally well preserved hillfort standing at a height of 485m on the easternmost of the three peaks of Yr Eifl, on the Llyn Peninsula. The two-hectare fort is bounded by a massive, 2.3 to 3.0m thick, dry-stone wall. Unusually, due to the inaccessibility of the site and the abundance of stone on the peak very little masonry has been cleared from the site for re-use. The rampart has survived close to its original height of up to 3.5m in places, the best-preserved portions retaining a dry-stone rampart. A further outer defensive wall stands to the north-west of the fort. There are two defended entrances through the inner rampart, at the south-west and north-west of the fort with additional simple gaps in the rampart at the north, west and south-east. The rampart is carried over the north 'postern' by several stone lintels. The north-west entrance appears have been the main entrance into the fort with a 15m long passage leading to a terraced pathway and a further gateway through the outer defensive wall. The interior of the fort contains the remains of about 150 dry-stone huts and enclosures exhibiting a great variation in size and shape, ranging from simple round huts to irregular and rectangular structures.

This spectacular site has been attracting large numbers of visitors for at least 100 years. Complaints about visitor damage were made by the Cambrian Archaeological Association as long ago as 1894 (Cambrian Archaeological Association 1895). The erosion and general deterioration in the condition of the site prompted Cyngor Dosbarth Dwyfor, in conjunction with Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments and Gwynedd County Council, to embark in 1989 on a conservation project to consolidate the site. The project ran for an initial five years. Gwynedd Archaeological Trust was commissioned to provide archaeological supervision and to record all works as they progressed. A management plan was produced at the end of the fifth season including a survey of all unconserved areas in the fort, recommendations for a further, concluding, five years' work and a long-term management strategy. Funding was subsequently agreed by Cyngor Dosbarth Dwyfor, Cadw and Gwynedd County Council for a further five-year program which commenced in 1994. Local government reorganisation in 1996 led to the formation of a new unitary authority, Gwynedd Council, who took over the management of the project from C.D.D. again with financial help from Cadw. The tenth season of the project was managed by C.D.D. and funded by Cadw. Work was completed in mid November 1998.

A strategy for the long-term management of the site was agreed during the latter years of the project and a management plan was produced (Hopewell 1999). The masonry on the site had been stabilised but remained somewhat vulnerable to erosion by the increasing numbers of visitors. Study of previous damage to the site had shown that the most efficient way of conserving the masonry is to consolidate damage soon after it has occurred thus ensuring that any areas of instability do not spread into the surrounding masonry.

It was therefore agreed that two monitoring visits should be carried out per annum. These visits would allow minor stabilisation work such as the backfilling of metal detector holes and the replacement of occasional stones to be carried out. A contingency budget was also put in place allowing a team of 3 stonemasons to be contracted for three days per annum to allow for the conservation of any more serious problems.

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust was contracted to carry out the first monitoring visit.

Results of the monitoring visit

The site was inspected on Friday 20th August 1999.

All masonry on the site was inspected for damage and points of instability. Provision was made for photographic, drawn and written recording.

The following minor areas of damage were identified and were marked onto a plan of the site (Fig. 1). All were minor and in areas of reinstated masonry. No original masonry had been affected. Written records were kept of all works. No further recording was necessary as all but one of the areas of damage were stabilised by minor adjustments to the wall core.

The Huts

1. A facing stone on the top of the dividing wall between huts 3 and 4 had become loose due to a small area of erosion in the core. This was an area of previously rebuilt masonry. The core was repacked thus stabilising the facing stone.

The Ramparts

Five areas of instability were identified, all of which appeared to have been caused by visitors walking along the tops of the rampart.

2. A stone was beginning to work loose at the top of the inner facing 8m to the north of the south-west entrance. The stone was left in place and a few small packing stones were inserted into the core behind it.

3. The action of visitors walking along the wall top had caused a patch of wall core to become loose. A few loose stones that were causing the instability were repacked into the core.

4. The rampart travels up a steep slope at this point and the wall core was beginning to become unstable due to the affect of visitors scrambling up this vulnerable area of the rampart. This area had been stabilised during the site review at the end of season 10 of the conservation project.
The loose stones were packed back into the wall core. This section of the rampart will obviously have to be observed carefully during future monitoring visits.

5. A packing stone had fallen out of the wall at this point, causing a large stone on the edge of the wall to rock when trodden on. Loss of this stone would have led to instability in the upper facing, wall top and original parapet. The missing stone was lying in front of the wall and was reinserted into its original position thus stabilising the wall top.

6. A single stone had slipped forward from a previously conserved length of inner facing just to the north-east of the large outcrop that breaks the line of the rampart at its south-easternmost point. The stone was pushed back into its original position.

Discussion

No serious damage had occurred to the site over the nine months since the last inspection. Six minor points of instability were identified during the monitoring all of which were easily stabilised. In all cases more severe damage would have occurred within a short space of time if the stabilisation works had not been carried out. Erosion to the wall core tends to destabilise the facing and the loss of facing stones inevitably causes instability in the surrounding masonry and the loss of additional core material. It should also be noted that a member of the public reported that a metal detectorist has been seen on the site. No treasure hunter holes were found during the monitoring visit.

References

Cambrian Archaeological Association, 1895. 'Report of Carnarvon Meeting, July 1894.' *Archaelogia Cambrensis* 5th series XII, 146-148.
Hopewell, D., 1999. *Tre'r Ceiri Management Plan.*
Hopewell, D., 1999. *Report on the tenth season of the Tre'r Ceiri Conservation Project.*
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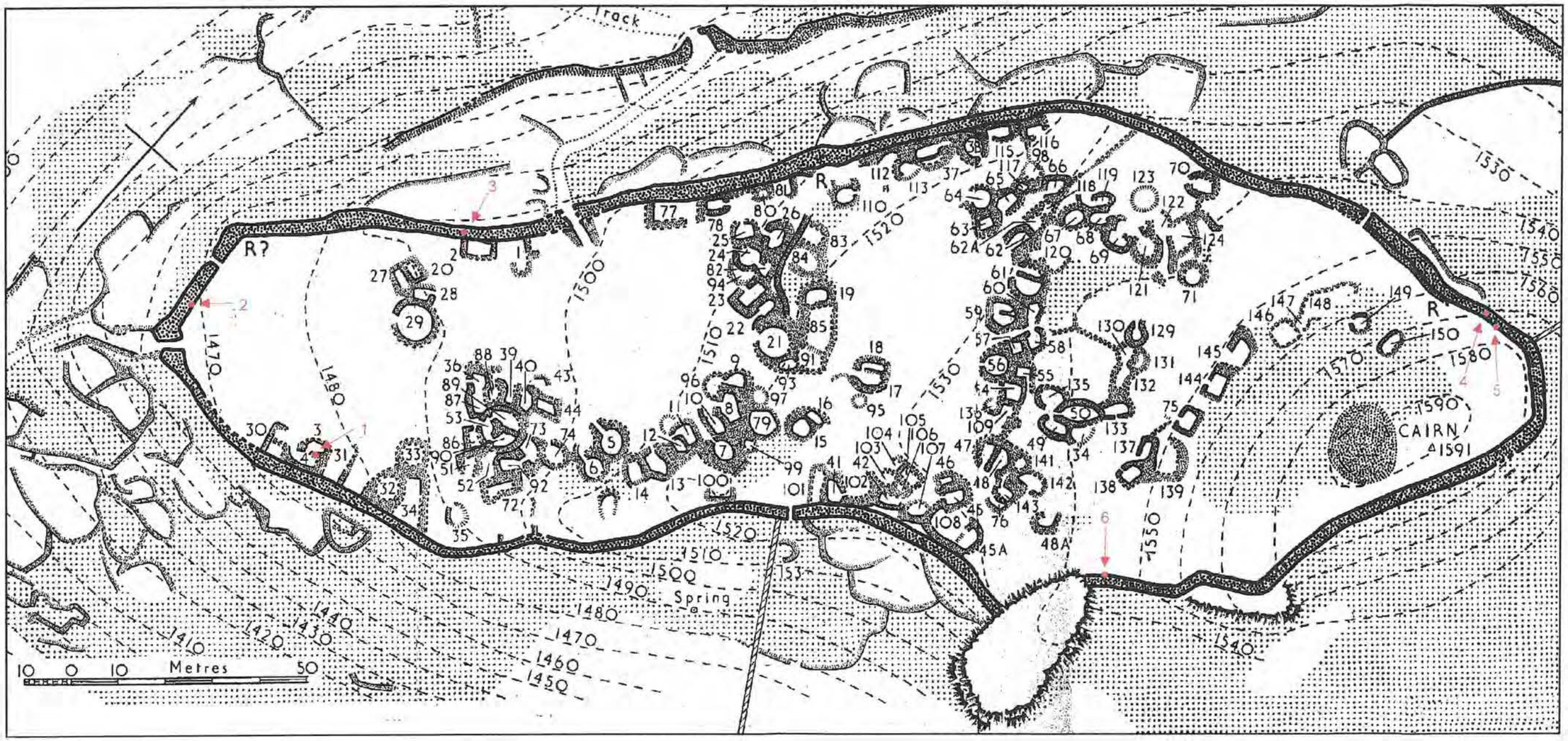

Fig.1 Tre'r Ceiri showing points of instability identified during the monitoring visit (after R.C.A.H.M.W. 1960)