

TAL-Y-GARREG

A multiperiod hillfort in western Meirionnydd

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Tal-y-garreg Hillfort

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BACKGROUND

Tal y Garreg is a small hillfort in a strongly defensible position at 178m OD on the crest of a ridge overlooking the estuary of the Dysynni. Below Tal y Garreg and 300m to the south-west, the promontory of the ridge is defended by massive bivallate ramparts. Both forts are scheduled. The ridge on which they stand has long been quarried; the ramparts of the lower fort, Llechlwyd, have been truncated by quarrying operations although the quarry face terminated within 100m of the upper fort, Tal y Garreg, and remained so until 1987. In 1987 permission was granted for a resumption of operations for a period of 50 years and an extension of quarrying within the area outlined on the attached diagram. The quarry face now reaches to within 5m of the defences. This advance is in line with the medium term expansion projected in 1987 and further extraction is envisaged against the boundary of the scheduled area.

Tal y Garreg has a potential particular significance in that it has been identified as a possible post-Roman nucleated fortification with an implied chronologically secondary relationship with the earlier 'conventional' hillfort which it is thought to overlie. This significance may be enhanced by the immediate proximity of the Llechlwyd promontory fort and the observed but unrecorded hut circles on the hill slope between the two sites. The continuation of quarrying operations will have an impact on the landscape in the immediate vicinity of Tal Y Garreg which needs to be addressed both in terms of the site itself and its setting.

The following assessment considers the significance of Tal y Garreg within its chronological and landscape setting so that appropriate management decisions can be taken with regard to the long term future of the site.

THE QUARRY AREA AND THE MINERAL RESOURCE

The ridge of Tal Y Garreg rises above the northern shore of the Broadwater close to the estuary of the Dysynni on the Meirionnydd coastline immediately north of Tywyn. The ridge of grass covered dolerite with occasional outcrops extends along a north-east - south-west axis for approximately one and a half kilometres. The highest point is a rounded hill at 189m towards the north-eastern (inland) end. As the ridge approaches the coastline, however, it assumes a narrower profile with steep slopes, particularly on its southern flank, plunging from 178m OD at its south-western peak to 20m OD over a 550m horizontal distance. The Tonfannau Quarry works the north-west flank of this southern eminence.

The existing quarry permission extends from the quarry offices at 20m OD to 170m OD close to the crest of the ridge.

The Mineral Resource

Tonfannau quarry exploits a NNE-SSW trending sill (volcanic intrusion) of mainly very coarse dolerite/gabbro which follows the crest of the Tal-y-Garreg ridge. The dolerite/gabbro has exceptional mechanical and physical properties that make it particularly suitable for high quality road surfacing applications. The crest of the ridge, on which the Tal y Garreg hillfort sits, is believed to be underlain by further reserves of high quality dolerite/gabbro. As can be seen in the existing quarry faces to the southern and western perimeters of the hillfort site. Geological mapping indicates the presence of a small mudstone raft overlaying part of the dolerite/gabbro beneath the fort. Experience also suggests that a degree of weathering to the surface of the dolerite/gabbro is likely. The extent of the raft and the degree of weathering can only be determined by exploratory drilling, but neither factor is likely to significantly reduce the anticipated volume of reserves underlying the fort.

The present quarry face

The method of working undertaken by previous quarry owners raises question marks about the long-term stability of the existing high face to the southern boundary of the fort. The opinion, based on experience, of the present Company (ARC) is that benched profiles are preferable to high faces for stability reasons and are less prone to climate-induced weathering and erosion. A benched final-face profile would be better suited to restoration and, in the opinion of ARC, is the only practical method of treating the existing high face. This would, however, entail quarrying on the ridge top and the removal of the fort.

Future quarrying operations

The future development of the quarry depends on the availability of good rock and the economic viability of working it. The high quality dolerite/gabbro visible in the existing quarry faces to the southern and western perimeters of the hillfort site, and which underlies it, could extend the quarry's life by perhaps three to four years. Elsewhere in the vicinity of the fort, it is considered unlikely that quarrying operations would extend beyond the existing northern boundary due to a narrowing of the sill, or to the east of the ridgeline for aesthetic and safety reasons. The hillfort remains therefore, as the only logical extension to the existing quarry, albeit a fairly short-term one.

The economic viability of extracting the stone from the fort site is dependent on various factors including:

- (i) Continuing market demand for the stone.
- (ii) Confirmation by exploratory drilling of the volume of high quality stone on the ridge beneath the fort.
- (iii) The costs of archaeological mitigation should Scheduled Monument Consent be forthcoming in respect of quarrying on the ridge top.

Conclusion

The establishment of a benched final-face profile at the summit of the hill is desirable for reasons of stability and restoration and is the only practical method of treating the existing high face.

The mineral resource underlying Tal y Garreg hillfort is the only logical extension to the existing quarry and could extend the quarry life by three to four years. In the short-term (five to seven years), however, more readily accessible reserves are available elsewhere in the quarry.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCE WITHIN THE QUARRY PERMISSION

1. The hillfort of Tal y Garreg

SAM Me74

The highest point at the southern extremity of the Tal y Garreg ridge is crowned, at 178m OD, by a small but potentially very strong fortification. The Tal y Garreg fort is a complex of possible multi-period elements. The principal features comprise two earthwork banks which partially enclose this summit of the ridge on its north-western and south-eastern sides. The banks are better preserved across the axis of the ridge at the north-eastern end of the enclosure which corresponds to the most accessible approach to the site. For much of the north-western circuit of the defences these banks have been reduced to scarps in the hillside. The ridge slopes very steeply down to the Dysynni on the south-eastern flank and barely any trace of artificial defence survives on this side. A small sub-circular enclosure, 25m across, has been built towards the south-western end of the complex and incorporates the highest point of the ridge. Both banks of the bivallate defence previously referred to, run up to this enclosure on its west side. The chronological relationship of the bivallate defence to the circular enclosure is unclear from the surface indications. The inner bank of the two appears to be overlain by the circular enclosure. On the other hand, the outer bank has been made to take a sharp return to join the circular enclosure. At this point, this outer line once again assumes the profile of a bank rather than a scarp. The south-western approach is no easier than that from the north-west or north-east but here the strongest defences have been constructed. The bank of the small circular enclosure is strongest on this south-western side, 0.0m in height, of stone rubble, now turf-covered. Some facing stone appears to be visible. The bank is fronted by two ditches and an intermediate bank. The spread of defences here extends over 30m from the crest of the inner bank to the outer lip of the outer ditch. The innermost ditch has the appearance of being recut, but has been subsequently backfilled with much stone rubble. The outer ditch survives as a significant rock cut barrier, 6m wide and 2m deep. It fronts a rubble bank outside and not quite concentric with the inner ditch.

Interpretation

There appear to be at least two phases of defensive construction on the site.

Phase 1: bivallate hillfort of c. 0.15ha.

The first phase is represented by two earthwork banks which define the north-western limit of an enclosure of approximately 0.15ha. The banks have been reduced to scarps along much of their length but still survive as recognisable earthworks with external ditches where the line crosses the axis of the ridge at the north-eastern end. The defences of this early phase have been obscured at the south-western extremity by the arrangements for a putative second phase. Two alternative interpretations are offered to account for the surviving surface evidence.

A prominent outcrop of rock extends below and to the south of the summit. This was certainly modified and incorporated within the latest phase defences. It seems reasonable that it should have fallen within the circuit of the fort during phase 1. If so, the obvious alignment would be for the outer rampart to continue in a south-westerly direction, turning south to cut off the approach to the fort along the axis of the ridge along the line taken by the outer bank in phase 2 to terminate at this outcrop. It is uncertain whether an outer ditch was provided – the ditch which now occupies this presumed line is more appropriately associated with the outer bank of phase 2. An alternative alignment for the south-western extremity of the phase 1 defences follows the line now visible on the ground. This involves a sharp return of the outer rampart in a south-easterly direction towards the summit of the hill where the line is lost at the point of junction with the summit 'citadel'. It might be presumed that the original line continued under the south-west wall of the 'citadel' to terminate at the edge of the steep slope down to the Broadwater.

The ditch at the base of the summit defences on the south-west side appears to have been recut on at least one occasion. Both cuttings are filled with stone and earth. The earlier of the two may be associated with the phase 1 defences.

The inner rampart now appears to meet the 'citadel' at a point close to the summit of the hill. At this point of junction, the rampart survives as a detached 7m length, however and it is unclear whether it represents an element of the original arrangement or a later modification, post-dating the construction of the citadel. This early inner rampart follows the break of slope on the crest of the ridge to this point and might be assumed to have continued, swinging round to defend the line later followed by the south-western circuit of the 'citadel'. If, however, the outer rampart had been constructed on this alignment, then the inner rampart must have taken a sharp turn across the central area of the summit. Undulations in the bedrock and spreads of bank material, including disturbance associated with the construction and maintenance of the navigation beacon and trig point all conspire to hinder interpretation at this point. Of the two proposed interpretations the former is preferred.

Phase 2: 'citadel and outwork':

A ringwork, strong along its western and south-western circuit but low and spread elsewhere now occupies the summit of the hill. The defences must at least partially overlie those of the phase 1 multivallate fort. The precise relationship is unclear as both outer and inner ramparts of the earlier enclosure do not run directly up to the 'citadel'. The lines of both ramparts are broken by gaps at 11m and 7m respectively from the citadel wall and it is conceivable that these detached portions of apparently early rampart are, in fact, later modifications.

The south-western rampart of the citadel is fronted by a ditch, now almost full of stone rubble, presumably from the rampart, itself. Beyond this is a second bank and a second ditch, rock-cut. Both present relatively fresh profiles and have survived in a better state of preservation than most of the rest of the defences. They may be associated with the second phase of defence and with the summit citadel.

Later disturbance

Two tracks approach the site. One is relatively recent, crossing the outer defences at the north-eastern limit of the site and continuing towards the OS trig station on the highest local point of the ridge. The second track is of uncertain antiquity. It approaches the site from the north, flanking the outer bank on the north-west side and crossing it obliquely to enter the intervallum space at a point where a gap is visible in the inner line of defence.

A navigation beacon occupied the summit of the hill until recently. The concrete foundations and timber stumps of the supporting posts still straddle the north-western circumference of the small enclosure. An Ordnance Survey trig station stands on the defences adjacent to the navigation beacon at 179m OD. A short (10m), recent, dog-leg trench has been dug inside the line of the outer rampart on the west side close to the point where the rampart turns to join the 'citadel'. This feature may be attributable to army manoeuvres from the nearby Tonfannau camp, now disused.

A stone farm wall crosses the site from north-east to south-west.

GAT SMR PRN 1778.
Bowen and Gresham, 1967, 167-8

2. Llechlwyd promontory fort, Llangelynin. SH 57230360

SAM Me124.

On the rocky promontory where the Tal y Garreg ridge meets the coastal plain, 350m south-west of the small summit fort and 100m below it, two massive ramparts defend an area of 0.6ha. The inner rampart, stone-built, stands c.3m high above the interior, extending for 100m across the tip of the promontory on a north-east – south-west alignment. It is provided with an inturned entrance towards its western end. A 60m length of equally massive outer rampart, of quarried dump construction, with external ditch, has been truncated in its western portion by an old quarry road. A complete cross section of the rampart and ditch is exposed at this point. The naturally steep slope of the ridge

provides a defence on the south-east flank. There are indications of possible structures within the fort, particularly near the entrance through the inner rampart.

Quarry buildings have encroached upon the defences.

GAT SMR PRN 1777.

OS NAR SH50SE12.

3. Two Early Bronze Age Halberds. General location: Tonfannau Quarry, Llangelynin. SH 572033

Two bronze halberds were found in loose rubble during blasting operations at the quarry in 1932. One has four rivet holes in the butt and measures 286mm in length; the other has a slightly asymmetric blade, three rivets in place and measures 272mm in length. They date to around the end of the third millennium BC.

The halberd is a large dagger-like triangular blade, characterised by its thickened midrib and rivet holes at the butt end for attachment to a handle, set at right angles to the blade. The weapon is essentially a dagger on a stick. The Tonfannau halberds have given their name to a distinctive class characterised by stout straight blades and four or five rivets in place of the usual three.

GAT SMR PRN 1779.

Archaeol. Cambrensis, 87, 1932, 395-7.

4. Hut Circles south-west of Tal y Garreg.

Several hut circles or 'cyttiau' were visited by the RCAHMW on the hill slopes south of 'the beacon' on Tal y Garreg in 1914. The indications are described as 'not sufficiently definite to permit of further description'. No remains now survive which conform to this account. However, the RCAHMW entry is to be read in conjunction with the description of 'Beacon Hill' itself where the ramparts of Tal y Garreg hillfort are dismissed as 'two short trenches'. It is possible that the *cyttiau* refer to the slight structural remains still visible at the Llechlwyd hillfort although it is difficult to imagine that the Commission's investigators missed the significantly more substantial ramparts of Llechlwyd.

Roy. Commission on Anc. and Hist. Mons in Wales, Inventory of the County of Meirioneth, 19XX, 131, no. 427.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCE WITHIN THE WIDER LANDSCAPE

Within the wider landscape, the most significant monuments are the hillforts of Mynydd Tal y Garreg – Castell Mawr, Llechlwyd and Tal y Garreg- and the site of the Medieval llys of Talybont and the adjacent earthwork castle of Domen Ddreiniog.

5. Cultivation terraces. SH 570037

Faint traces of ploughed-out terraces have been recorded in the fields above Tonfannau and round the farm of Cefncamberth. Nothing was observed on consultation of RAF aerial photographs.

Bowen and Gresham, 1967, 205.

GAT SMR PRN 4815.

RAF 106G/UK 1468/6003-4. 4.5.46

6. Two stone axes. Celmi Farm, Llanegryn. SH 59700470

Two Neolithic stone axes were found in 'putting down a fence wall' close to the house at Celmi, Llanegryn, in 1871. One axe is of Group XXI rock from the axe factory site of Mynydd Rhiw, Gwynedd; the other is of quartz diorite from North Pembrokeshire.

GAT SMR PRN 4808.

Bowen and Gresham, 1967, 25-28.

7. Standing Stone, Waun Fach. SH 59440487

Standing stone, 1.8m in height and 0.8m by 0.6m wide on gently rising ground at 45m OD on land of Waun Fach Farm. Packing stones are clearly visible on the north side. Gresham has suggested that this stone is one of a series marking an ancient routeway running north-east from the Broadwater below Tal y Garreg.

GAT SMR PRN 4796.

Bowen and Gresham, 1967, 61-2.

8. Circular cropmark. SH 59190291.

A circular cropmark, c. 11m in diameter has been observed at 10m OD on land north-west of Crynllwyn.

GAT SMR PRN 4810.

RAF 106G/UK 1468/2005-6 4.5.46

9. Pont Dysynni, Llanegryn. SH59910383.

Bridge of 1752 over the Dysynni.

GAT SMR PRN 997.

10. Llys Talybont. SH 596038.

Talybont was the administrative nucleus (maerdref) of the commote of Talybont and the location of a royal llys. Llywelyn ap Gruffydd addressed a letter from Talybont to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in 1275. No surviving remains have been recorded; the only evidence of the location of the llys is the place name of the present village.

GAT SMR PRN 3410.

Jones-Pierce, T., Ancient Meirionydd, 1949, 19

Roy. Commission on Ancient and Hist. Mons in Wales, Inventory of the County of Meirioneth, 1921, 90

11. Domen Ddreiniog, Talybont. SH59690360.

A motte or castle mound on the west bank of the Dysynni at about 8m OD, 250m south-east of Talybont. The mound is a truncated cone, 15m in diameter across the summit and surviving to a maximum height of 5.7m. The gravel mound is eroding and earlier descriptions record a greater

height. The motte is partially encircled by a ditch which erosion of the mound and the effects of ploughing have reduced to a shallow depression, 10m wide and 0.5m deep. The ditch tails off at the river bank.

Hughes gives the alternative name of Tomen y Moreiniog and associates the site with the *Llys* of Talybont.

Hughes, H., *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, 1875, 67-8

GAT SMR PRN 1740

✓ 12. Castell Mawr hillfort, Llangelynnin. SH 5802 0478

SAM Me73

A rocky boss forming a low spur of Mynydd Tal y Garreg on its north flank at 130m OD is defended by ramparts partially enclosing an oval area of 0.44ha. An additional area of 0.16ha has been added to the north to form an annexe. The defences are strongest on the west side, comprising a large inner bank, ditch and low outer bank. The defences on the east were thought by Bowen and Gresham not to have been completed although the Ordnance Survey were able to trace the main bank along this side and to suggest the location of a possible entrance here.

GAT SMR PRN1739

Bowen and Gresham, 1967, 153

OS NAR SH50SE11.

✓ 13. Bron-clydwr. SH57290430.

Bron-clydwr is an eighteenth century regional house of L-shaped plan with end chimney and inside cross-passage.

GAT SMR PRN 4809.

Smith, P., *Houses of the Welsh Countryside*, 1975, map 27.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF TAL Y GARREG HILLFORT

The site has been described above and a provisional interpretation offered. In summary it may be suggested that Tal y Garreg is a small hillfort, partly making use of the steep slopes of the ridge on which it sits to enhance its defensive capabilities. Occupation of the site extended over at least two constructional phase. The first is represented by two lines of bank and ditch earthwork defences. The second involved the construction of a small sub-circular 'citadel' on the highest point of the site, the strengthening of the defences on the south-west side and the possible use of the residual phase 1 enclosure as an outwork.

Two important considerations in assessing the significance of the Tal y Garreg fort have been:

1. The potential for multiperiod occupation and defence of the site and, in particular, the possibility that the site might have been used during the early historic period.
2. The setting of the monument and its relationship in the local landscape to the Llechlwyd fort.

During the last few years the resumption of quarrying has made a significant impact on the setting of the site and, arguably, on its long-term stability. Existing surveys of the monument, while emphasising the complexity of the structural evidence are not sufficiently analytical to allow resolution of the debate concerning the possibility of multiperiod use. Neither has discussion of the site, in debating its significance, extended beyond the more obvious parallels to the resource as a whole.

In the context of the present situation and with regard to the possibility of continuing quarry operations in the immediate vicinity of the fort it would seem appropriate and desirable that a review be undertaken of the significance of Tal y Garreg against the relevant criteria. In so doing it will be necessary to consider the particular detail of Tal y Garreg in the context of hillforts in north-west Wales generally (see Appendix 1).

Documentation

The significance of a monument is generally thought to be enhanced if documentation survives which provides a context for the monument or materially aids its interpretation. Such records may be contemporary with the use of the site or derive from previous archaeological investigations or survey.

The Tal y Garreg fort received only cursory attention in 1914 when the RCAHMW visited the site on 1st May. The significance of the site appears not to have been fully appreciated and the complexity of the ramparts is dismissed as 'two short trenches'.

The site is planned and described by Bowen and Gresham who appear to be the first to suggest the possibility of an early historic context for the site by drawing a parallel with the then recently excavated cliff-edge fortification of Carreg y Llam, Pistyll. Carreg y Llam was subsequently destroyed in the process of quarrying stone.

A fluxgate gradiometer survey was commissioned by Peter Crew, Snowdonia National Park, and undertaken by Engineering Archaeological Services, Ltd during July, 1995. The underlying Dolerite geology and its outcrops, having a high magnetic susceptibility, gave rise to high magnetic noise across most of the data set. The results failed to show a correlation between the anomalies recorded during the survey and the surface features and the survey was unable to advance the interpretation of the site further.

Roy. Commission on Ancient and Hist. Mons in Wales, Inventory of the County of Meirioneth, 1921, 131

Bowen and Gresham, 1967, 167-8

Price, J., Talygarreg Hill-fort, Fluxgate Gradiometer Survey, Engineering Archaeological Services, Ltd, 1995

Group Value

It may be that are circumstances whereby the relationship of one monument to another in a contemporary or successive landscape context enhances the significance of that monument.

The immediate vicinity of Tal y Garreg

Four other monuments or artefact find spots occur within the immediate vicinity (ie within 1km) of the summit of Tal y Garreg. One additional site of potentially significant association lies 1.3km to the north-east. The sites are listed under the numbers which appear in the gazetteer above and are as follows:

13. Bron-clydwr. SH57290430.

PRN 4809

This eighteenth century regional house stands 700m north of Tal y Garreg. It does not contribute to the group value of the monument.

3. Two Early Bronze Age Halberds. General location; Tonfannau Quarry SH 572033

These early bronze age weapons were found during quarrying operations in 1932. Their precise find spot is unknown except that they were found within the limits of the quarry as it then was. Metalwork hoards and other artefacts of the later bronze age are known in association with early hillforts or locations which came to be provided with defences during the iron age. The halberds from Tonfannau are too early by a considerable margin, however, to be considered to have group value with the fort.

2. Llechlwyd promontory fort, Llangelynnin. SH 57230360 and 12. Castell Mawr hillfort, Llangelynnin. SH 5802 0478

Llechlwyd and Castell Mawr are two of three hillforts on the slopes of Mynydd Talygarreg. The summit fort of Tal y Garreg itself is the third. Each has different and distinctive structural characteristics and each is sited to take advantage of a different topographical potential. Llechlwyd is a bivallate promontory fort at 80m OD, relying on strong ramparts as a defence from rising ground which overlooks the site from the north-east. Along much of the rest of its circuit, which encloses 0.6ha, steep slopes falling away from the site provide a natural defence. Castell Mawr occupies a low rocky spur 1.3km to the north-east of Tal y Garreg at 130m OD. This fort also encloses a total area of 0.6ha of which one third is occupied by a defended annexe to the north. Both forts are undated but may be compared with other iron age hillforts. Tal y Garreg is considerably smaller at 0.15ha enclosed within the total area of the defences and 0.02ha. enclosed within the small summit ring work. Nevertheless, the defences on the steep seaward slopes towards the Llechlwyd fort are very strong indeed in proportion to the area enclosed and the location is the most prominent and probably the most naturally strong of the three.

The variety of defensive construction, siting and possible chronological span, displaying different responses to the requirement of providing a strong defensive position within the same landscape block contributes significantly to the group value of the three sites. This argument is particularly true with regard to the relationship of Tal y Garreg and Llechlwyd where the strong defences of both sites face each other along the 300m of the south-western slope of the ridge.

4. Hut Circles south-west of Tal y Garreg and 5. Cultivation terraces above Tonfannau and round the farm of Cefncamberth. SH 570037

Hillforts tend to dominate a landscape both in terms of their physical presence and socially and economically. Nevertheless, the great majority of the contemporary population must always have occupied smaller settlements and farmed the fields of the surrounding countryside. During later prehistory and the Romano-British centuries round house settlements are typical. Agricultural fields on sloping ground can leave an indication of their former presence in terraces formed by the accumulation of soil-creep against down-slope boundaries. Faint traces of ploughed-out terraces have been recorded around Cefncamberth and the RCAHMW recorded hut circles below the summit of Tal y Garreg. Such features could lend group value significance to the hillforts of Tal y Garreg and Llechlwyd, but they cannot now be identified.

The Wider Landscape

Tal y Garreg overlooks the estuary of the Dysynni. The site also commands fine views up the wide river valley to the prominent crag of Craig yr Aderyn (on which a further hillfort is located). Bowen and Gresham have argued that the estuary may have had greater significance in the past before the formation of a shingle beach and silting of the Broadwater. At the ancient crossing of the Dysynni, 2.5km up stream, the village of Talybont retains the name of the commotal administrative centre

(*maerdref*) in the Age of the Princes which gave its name to the commote itself. Both Llywelyn ap Gruffydd (who wrote from Talybont in 1275) and Edward I (in 1295) visited the site. The earthwork castle of Domen Ddreiniog on the river bank, 250m to the south may be directly or circumstantially associated with the *llys*. The Welsh royal castle of Bere, 10.5km up the valley would be contemporary with the late use of the *llys* of Talybont. If the suggestion that the latest occupation of Tal y Garreg might date to the early historic centuries is correct, then the hillfort might legitimately be seen to be a precursor of the *llys*. If so, the significance of both sites is enhanced by association.

Diversity

A number of particularly important features occurring in combination have the potential to enhance the significance of a monument. Tal y Garreg appears to display a succession of defensive arrangements whereby a small bivallate fort is overlain by an even smaller 'citadel' which is, nevertheless, provided with strong banks and rock-cut ditched defences. It is this second phase of occupation which raises the importance of the site above the ordinary and which is further enhanced by its relationship to the surviving earlier ramparts.

Period

The criterion requires that the monument be characteristic of a site type or period. In order to apply this criterion it is obvious that some clear indication of site type and date is available. There must then be a general familiarity with the resource as a whole in order to assess the degree to which the monument in question is characteristic of:

1. hillforts in general.
2. multiperiod hillforts

There is no objective evidence with regard to date. Nevertheless, it has been suggested that if Tal y Garreg is a multiperiod hillfort then the early phase is prehistoric and the secondary occupation is early medieval. Against the period criterion, the question concerns the degree to which Tal y Garreg is characteristic of high status sites of the early medieval period.

Rarity

In conjunction with 'period' this criterion would seek to assess whether a monument was typical of its class or whether it was rare. Both the typical and the rare are valuable attributes which add significance to a monument. Again, the application of this criterion requires a detailed knowledge of the resource as a whole.

Survival/Condition

The survival of a monument's archaeological potential is a particularly important consideration.

The following components are described:

the bivallate ramparts of the 'early' fort	Absent on crest of steep south-east slope; poor and surviving only as a scarp on north-west flank; good at north-eastern approach to the site where external ditches are also visible. A recent vehicle track crosses the ramparts at this point and has levelled the bank. The ramparts also survive as a bank, rather than a scarp, at the point where each runs up to, or is overlain by, the 'citadel' rampart.
the interior of the early fort	Turf-covered; crossed by vehicle track; short, recent dog-leg trench inside outer rampart on west side close to the point where the rampart turns to join the 'citadel'. Possibly attributable to army manoeuvres from Tonfannau camp.
the 'citadel'	Crossed by vehicle track; overlain by concrete base of OS trig station and concrete foundations of navigation beacon (now demolished); erosion at base of trig station. Good survival of bank on south-west side.
the interior of the citadel	Turf-covered
the inner rock-cut ditch	Almost full of stone rubble, presumably having tumbled from the adjacent 'citadel' bank.
the intermediate bank	Good
the outer ditch	Good, well defined profile.

The site is crossed from south-west to north-east by a dry stone wall.

In general, the remains of the putative secondary phase are considerably better preserved than those of the 'earlier' phase, despite relatively recent disturbance to the 'citadel' rampart and may be described as medium to good. This observation might lend some weight to the hypothesis of multiperiod use. The accumulation of tumbled rampart material in the inner of the two ditches protecting the south-western flank of the 'citadel' may protect stratified deposits which are of potential significance in answering the question of multiperiod occupation.

Fragility

The surviving elements of the hillfort are essentially robust. The banks of both the bivallate and the 'small' fort have reached an angle of rest and are, for the most part, turf-covered. There is some slight indication on the south-west side of the 'citadel' that the rampart here may have been stone-faced. There are further indications from the quantity of stone in the adjacent ditch that this wall is considerably reduced from its original condition. It has, however, now reached a stable profile. There are certain restricted areas of the summit where disturbance of the turf cover has initiated erosion but this does not appear to be a serious problem.

Vulnerability

A public footpath crosses the summit and this is used by walkers. This does not appear to have given rise to a serious erosion problem. A vehicle track crosses the outer banks on the north-east side and continues towards the summit. It has caused some reduction of the ramparts but does not now appear to be regularly used.

The site is, however vulnerable from the renewal of mineral extraction at Tonfannau Quarry and the granting of permission for the extension of operations over a considerable area of the south-western portion of Mynydd Tal y Garreg. The quarry face now approaches the boundary of the scheduled area to within 8 metres of the south-west defences and 20m of the north-west defences. The quarry edge is almost vertical leaving the fort perched, stack-like on an isolated and potentially unstable pinnacle of unquarried rock, divorced from its topographic and landscape context and from its relationship with its immediate neighbour, Llechlwyd. The fort is therefore extremely vulnerable to the natural processes of erosion and decay.

Potential

This criterion acknowledges that archaeology is an imperfect science, that techniques of analysis will develop and that interpretations may change. Not all the information which might contribute to a full understanding of a monument's significance will necessarily be available at the moment of assessment. There may, however be good reason to suppose, on circumstantial or comparative grounds, that the relevant evidence will become available at some point in the future and that a monument suspected to be of national importance will be shown to be so. If a monument has this unrealised potential, then it is a consideration in assessing its significance.

The potential of Tal y Garreg may be summarised as follows:

1. The surface evidence shows indications of multiperiod construction with the replacement of one type of fort by another.
2. The putative secondary fort is characterised by a small, but very strong, defence. This exists in a spatial relationship to the primary fort which conveys the impression of a 'citadel and outwork'.
3. Such nucleation or 'hierarchical organisation of space' when observed at hillforts, has been interpreted to be an early medieval rather than late prehistoric characteristic.

Early medieval fortifications are known from Wales but are very rare. If the hillfort of Tal y Garreg could be shown to be early medieval, then the significance of the site would be considerably enhanced.

Conclusions

The Hillfort

The Tal y Garreg hillfort is an important monument for a number of reasons. It has significance within the regional landscape of the Dysynni and potential significance within the wider landscape of north-west Wales. At a local level:

‘the variety of defensive construction, siting and possible chronological span, displaying different responses to the requirement of providing a strong defensive position within the same landscape block contributes significantly to the group value of the three hill forts, Llechlwyd, Castell Mawr and Tal y Garreg . This argument is particularly true with regard to the relationship of Tal y Garreg and Llechlwyd where the strong defences of both sites face each other along the 300m of the south-western slope of the ridge.

If the suggestion that the latest occupation of Tal y Garreg might date to the early historic centuries is correct, then the hillfort might legitimately be seen to be a precursor of the *llys* of Talybont. If so, the significance of both sites is enhanced by association’.

At a wider level:

‘Tal y Garreg appears to display a succession of defensive arrangements whereby a small bivallate fort is overlain by an even smaller ‘citadel’ which is, nevertheless, provided with strong banks and rock-cut ditched defences. It is this second phase of occupation which raises the importance of the site above the ordinary and which is further enhanced by its relationship to the surviving earlier ramparts’.

In this respect, it is the potential of the site, in its phase 2 nucleated plan which is of national importance.

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The value of the monument as a feature in the landscape, has been eroded by the removal of much of the immediate landscape by quarrying. Nevertheless, it is clear that while the contribution of the monument as a physical feature of the landscape was a major component of the site’s importance, the potential of the site as a possible early medieval stronghold is very considerable. The significance which Tal y Garreg retains lies in the potential information it contains on a monument type which is rare in north-west Wales.

Appendices

HILLFORTS IN NORTH-WEST WALES

The Resource As A Whole

Setting

The hillforts of north-west Wales (see map) occupy a variety of topographic settings which include coastal and inland promontories, cliffs and ridges, hill slopes, broken rocky hills and exposed mountain peaks. Most occupy prominent positions, taking advantage of the defensive potential of the site. The altitude range extends from 33 ft OD at certain coastal locations to 1591 ft OD on the summit of Tre'r Ceiri, Llyn. The median altitude value is 570 ft OD and there is no obvious concentration of forts within any particular altitude band up to 1300 ft. Above 1300 ft, Braich y Dinas, Penmaenmawr, and Tre'r Ceiri are exceptionally high at 1540 ft and 1591 ft respectively.

The Taly Garreg hillfort occupies a prominent and commanding position on an eminence at the end of a long ridge. The site overlooks the estuary of the Dysynni and the coastline of Cardigan Bay from an altitude of 550 ft OD. The setting, though impressive, is no more so than many comparable monuments. The hillfort of Craig yr Aderyn, 00 km to the north-east and intervisible with Tal y Garreg occupies an even more spectacular and prominent location, perched on a crag at 702 ft OD overlooking the Dysynni. Pared y Cefnhir, 00 km to the north-east, occupies one of the most outrageously spectacular locations at 1200 ft OD, overlooking Llynau Cregennan north of Cadair Idris.

At 550 ft, Tal y Garreg is close to the median altitude value for the range as a whole. (table 1)

Size

The smallest enclosures which can reasonably be considered to fall within this monument class are Carreg y Llam (Pistyll), a multivallate fort on a coastal cliff edge at 470 ft OD and Castell (Porth Trefadog), a coastal promontory at 33 ft. Both sites enclose an area of 0.02 ha. Carreg y Llam has now been destroyed by quarrying but was the fort with which Tal y Garreg was originally compared when considered as a candidate for possible early medieval occupation. The 'citadels' at both Tal y Garreg and Carreg Olau (Maenan) – at 570 ft – enclose an equally small area (0.02ha) but require to be considered in relation to earlier or contemporary 'outworks' on the same site. The largest hillforts within the sample area are Garn Boduan (Nefyn), a stone walled fort of 11.2ha incorporating a summit citadel of 0.15ha at 920 ft OD and Pen y Corddyn (Abergele) which occupies a limestone plateau at 558 ft and encloses 14ha. There is no direct correlation between size and altitude. There is, however, a distinct concentration of forts at the smaller end of the range. (table 00)

The average of the total area enclosed by all forts is 1.09ha. This statistic fails to give a clear indication of just how small the majority of north-west Wales forts are:

- The median value for the range of areas is 0.43ha.
- 77% of all forts in the study area are smaller than 1ha.
- 94% of all forts in the study area enclose areas of less than 5ha.

The total area within the defences at Tal y Garreg is 0.15ha; the citadel encloses 0.02ha. Tal y Garreg is a small hillfort within an area of generally small hillforts. (fig. 1; table 1).

Multivallation, multiperiod use and annexes

The provision of multiple lines of defence occurs at 27% of the forts in the study area. Six of these forts present a plan which suggests compartmentalisation of the total enclosed space or the enclosure of additional areas as annexes. Annexes also occur as a component of univallate forts (15 sites) and on 18% of all forts in the study area. Such apparent relationships may occur through the superimposition of later defences on more extensive earlier enclosures and it is rarely possible, without excavation, to establish whether such a hierarchical use of space was fortuitous or deliberate. Equally, it is possible that multivallation, itself, might represent a chronological development of a site.

Similarly, the presence of a strong, small 'citadel' in a relationship to a more extensive but weaker or less well preserved 'outwork' implies either a contemporary hierarchical use of space or a

chronological superimposition of one type of site on another. The latter possibility does not, however, preclude an intention to make continued use or re-use of the earlier site. Nucleation occurs at 9 sites in the study area (6% of the total). The presence of a nucleus or 'citadel' is, therefore, rare. At only 2 sites is nucleation combined with multivallation. The two sites are Tal y Garreg, where the nucleus, with defences doubled on the south-west, appears to overlies the slighter defences of a small multivallate fort and Carn Pentyrch (Llangybi) where an extremely strong, bivallate, nucleus overlies an earlier defensive line which appears to continue in use as an annexe.

Figure 1 plots the distribution of univallate and multivallate forts in the study area. Figure 2 plots the distribution of nucleated forts and illustrates, proportionately, the size relationship between the nucleus and outwork at each site. Table 3 charts the same size relationship against bands of altitude.

The nucleus or 'citadel' at Tal y Garreg is small, matched only by the citadel at Pen y Castell, Carreg Olau, where the argument in favour of an early medieval date has been pushed further. It is not, however, impossibly small and the possibility of an early medieval date for small strongly defended citadels of this type deserves serious consideration within the context of the present state of knowledge of early medieval high status sites in general (see appendix 2).

'CITADEL' FORTS AND THE IDENTIFICATION OF EARLY MEDIEVAL SITES OF HIGH STATUS

Background

'In the early historic period, ... at the royal level, the fortified hill-top was the dominant form of settlement and the major centre of political, social and military organisation'. Leslie Alcock, 1981, 180.

Alcock's conclusion refers to North Britain. It is based on an appraisal of documentary sources which allowed the compilation of a survey-gazetteer of potential locations followed by extensive, cost-effective, assessment of target sites. At the outset, Alcock's work recognised that '*in contrast to Wales and south-west England*, fortified sites which might be attributed to the period on the evidence of historical or quasi-historical references, were fairly common'. Despite this, only one such site had (in 1973) been confirmed by excavation. At the conclusion of his research programme Alcock was able to map seventeen documented fortifications, of which six had been excavated (1992, 217 illus. 1). In addition, it has long been recognised that numerous other fortifications might be dated to these centuries on the evidence of typology, scientific dating or the association of artefacts. The corresponding situation in Wales is dismal. The most recent published surveys are able to suggest but a handful of potentially Early Historic 'high-status' sites, fortified or otherwise, with any confidence.

Early Historic High Status sites in north-west Wales - the problem

During the 5th and 6th centuries AD, Gwynedd emerged as one of the strongest and most important independent kingdoms of western Britain. The royal administrative centres of the successive kings and princes of Gwynedd have a claim to be considered as the most important secular complexes in the north Welsh medieval landscape before the Anglo-Norman conquest. These 'major centres of political, social and military organisation' should be at the core of our understanding of its development. A small number of locations – Degannwy, Aberffraw and Dinas Emrys, for example, have acquired, through tradition, a symbolic significance which has contributed towards the characterisation of a regional identity. Nevertheless, for the crucial early period, the identification of sites, with these very few exceptions, continues to elude us.

The most recent survey of the available evidence (Edwards and Lane, 1989) can only point to three sites, within the boundaries of the study area, which can - with any degree of certainty - be described as both high status and secular and identified on the ground in the period between the end of Roman Britain and the first Norman incursions. The sites are Degannwy, Dinas Emrys and Rhuddlan (Aberffraw, Dinorben and Bryn Euryn are possible rather than definite sites). These three identifiable locations occupy a chronological span of 700 years during which no other site of comparable status has yet been identified.

This understanding contrasts sharply with the later period where the potential for locating and understanding the structural components of royal *llysoedd* at the focus of administrative townships (*maerdrefi*), has been demonstrated through recent survey and assessment by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust. This work refers to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries by which time a disposition of royal sites can be detected which reflects an emphasis on communication and accessibility at the heart of commotal administration. This situation clearly represents a late stage in an evolving process and one which may find a parallel in Scotland. Alcock, drawing on extensive analysis of North British high status sites has identified a phase between the tenth centuries and the thirteenth centuries when unfortified low-lying political centres such as Scone come to prominence. This phenomenon corresponds broadly to the observable Welsh pattern with the establishment of a network of lowland *maerdrefi* in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. By the thirteenth century, in both Wales and Scotland, stone castles are being built in defensible, often upland, locations. Between the fifth and the tenth century, hillforts were the basis of control in the political landscape of North Britain; after the twelfth century stone castles were built often on the site of earlier 'dark age' fortifications. It cannot yet be demonstrated but it might be postulated that all stages in this sequence find a parallel in Wales.

As a working hypothesis, therefore, we might envisage, during the fifth to tenth centuries, a landscape dominated by 'royal' or 'high-status' sites of secular character. The indications are that some might be fortified, occupying naturally defensible locations. Dinas Emrys and Degannwy might be target sites. For others (Aberffraw, for example,) the early evidence of enclosure and fortification is ambiguous. Nevertheless, few potentially early sites which suggest themselves for further detailed analysis are obviously linked to the later pattern of commotal administration discernible by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Approaches to the Identification of High Status Sites: Early Medieval High Status Associations

A number of settlements might, on circumstantial grounds, be considered to have high status associations in the early Middle Ages. Various gazetteers have been compiled which attempt to map the distribution or list the perceived attributes of such sites.

1. The Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (Caernarvonshire Inventory, vol 3, West, 1964, cxvi-cxviii, fig. 23) discussed, on the basis of morphology and siting, those forts considered to have the potential for having been occupied in Early Post-Roman Caernarfonshire. The principal selection criteria employed seem to be locational and morphological. Much is made of, on the one hand, the defence of craggy, terraced, rocks in the manner of Dinas Emrys, one of the few sites with datable associations and, on the other hand, comparison with the small size but substantial defences of the summit fort on Garn Boduan (see below for these two sites).
2. Alcock (1987, 168-71) and Alcock and Alcock (1990 130-138) have produced gazetteers of fortified sites which include those of Early Medieval Wales. Here the criteria for inclusion rely on the presence of more specific site associations – artefacts, stratigraphical relationships or historical documentation.
3. Edwards and Lane (1988) have produced a gazetteer of secular settlement in Wales generally. Again, the criterion is direct evidence of artefacts, structures or documentary evidence indicative of permanent or temporary occupation. Degrees of probability reflect the quality of the evidence.
4. Dark (1994) has analysed secular 'elite' settlements in western Britain from AD400 to AD700 and has suggested a methodology for identifying previously unrecognised sites. He has proposed various site-type models based on the co-incidence of locational, topographic and morphological criteria which are then ranked on the basis of other criteria which include the circumstantial association of relevant monument types. Further, Dark has assigned the sites to five morphological groups, one of which – citadel and ward – may not be represented in the earlier, Iron Age, landscape.

Other morphological and locational characteristics which may be relevant to the present analysis include the provision of annexes and the potential for the hierarchical organisation of space (Alcock and Alcock, 1990, 103, 119). One or other, or both, of these characteristics are a prerequisite of Dark's 'citadel and ward' group but need not necessarily imply the presence of a 'citadel'. Alcock and Alcock also noted the significance of access to harbours (1990, 119-130).

From these surveys may be abstracted a recent broad consensus on the location of possible and probable Early Medieval high status sites within the study area (Table 1). The following table summarises a sample of current opinion. The degree of confidence with which sites have been assigned to the period has been assessed by the researchers against different criteria and has been expressed by them in different ways. A 'probable' categorisation in the table would mean a 'definite' site to Edwards and Lane, 'more certain' to Alcock and Alcock and 'very probable' to Dark. A 'possible' site in the table would mean a 'possible' site to Edwards and Lane, 'less certain' to Alcock and Alcock and 'probable' to Dark. Dark's optimistic analysis has identified further sites within the study area which might be regarded as 'possibles' but, in respect of which, the 'positive' evidence rests on less secure ground. However, some of these 'possible' sites, fall within Dark's morphological classification of 'citadel and ward type' which, he argues, may not be represented in the earlier Iron Age landscape and have a claim for consideration here. These are included in the table. In addition, some attempt has been made to give consideration to the inclusion of annexe forts and 'hierarchically organised' forts.

Table 1. Fortified and high status sites of possibly early medieval date according to recent assessments.

Degrees of confidence	Edwards and Lane, 1988	Alcock and Alcock, 1990	Dark, 1995	RCAHM(W) 1964 (see below) <i>Not ranked</i>	Morphological criteria (see below)
Probable site	Deganwy Dinas Emrys Rhuddlan	Deganwy Dinas Emrys	Carn Pentyrch Deganwy Dinas Emrys Tre'r Ceiri Pen Llystyn	<i>Carn Pentyrch</i> <i>Dinas Emrys</i>	<i>Carn Pentyrch</i> <i>Dinas Emrys</i>
Possible site	Aberffraw Bryn Euryn Dinorben Pen Llystyn Segontium	Aberffraw Bryn Euryn Carreg y Llam	Bryn Euryn Camp Hill Carn Fadrún Dinorben Pen y Corddyn	<i>Carn Fadrún</i> <i>Carreg y Llam</i>	<i>Bryn Euryn</i> <i>Carn Fadrún</i>
			Dark Group 1 'citadel and ward'	RCAHM(W) possible sites (morphological and locational criteria)	'Hierarchically organised' sites
			Bryn Euryn		Bryn Euryn
			<i>Carn Fadrún</i>	<i>Carn Fadrún</i>	Carn Fadrún
			Craig Yr Aderyn		Craig Yr Aderyn
			Creigiau Gwineu		Creigiau Gwineu
			Dinas Gynfor		Dinas Gynfor
			Tal Y Garreg		Tal Y Garreg
			Moel Y Gest	Moel Y Gest	Moel Y Gest
				Dinas Emrys	Dinas Emrys
				Carn Pentyrch	Carn Pentyrch
				Cerrig y Dinas	Cerrig Y Dinas
				Carreg Olau	Carreg Olau
				Garn Boduan	Garn Boduan
				Carreg y Llam	
				Castell, Coed Mawr	
				Carreg y Fran	
				Castell Caerau	
				Craig y Tyddyn	
				Pen y Gaer, Aberglaslyn	
				Pen y Garreg	
				Caer Bach	
				Caer Glasgoed	
				Gaerwen	
				Nantlle	
					Moel Offrwm,

				Dinas Dinorwig
				Pared Y Cefnhir,
				Castell Caer Lleion
				Pen Y Ddinas Llanaber
				Castell Mawr, Rhoslefain
				Craig Y Dinas, Llanddwywe

Highlighted sites have been selected in table 1 on criteria additional to purely morphological

Early royal associations at the sites of later maerdrefi.

In the later period, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a royal administrative complex could comprise a *llys* (royal court) and *maerdref* (the royal estate incorporating the communities of the king's bond tenants who worked the royal demesne) (Stephenson 1984, 57-8). The names and general locations of over twenty such maerdrefi can be deduced from documentation of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. There are a small number of sites which can, on direct evidence or by association, be considered as significant power bases during the early centuries of the kingdom and which can, later, be documented as *maerdrefi*.

Deganwy

Two precipitous hillocks and an intervening saddle dominate the east bank of the Conwy estuary. Roman pottery of the first to fourth centuries and a third to fourth century coin series indicate occupation of the westernmost of the two hills. One sherd of class B1 imported eastern Mediterranean wine amphora and several possible sherds suggest post-Roman activity (Alcock 1967, 190-201; Campbell 1988, 126). A persistent local tradition associates the early sixth century king, Maelgwn, with Deganwy. This, in itself, of course, is only significant as evidence that later generations considered Deganwy an appropriate location for an early royal association. The tradition finds some tenuous support in a parenthetical comment on the *Annales Cambriae* reference to the death of Maelgwn 'in the *llys* of Rhos' (Morris 1980, sub anno 547). This death or 'long sleep' of Maelgwn had achieved proverbial status by the thirteenth century and Deganwy is almost certainly implied as the location (Bromwich 1978, 437-439). Mentions of the burning and siege of *arx Decantorum* in the ninth century probably refer to Deganwy. Robert of Rhuddlan built a castle there c. 1080 following which the hill was held alternately by the Welsh and Anglo-Normans until 1263. Llywelyn ap Iorwerth and Henry III both built stone castles there (Roy. Commission on Anc. and Hist. Mons, Wales, 1956, 152-4). Deganwy was obviously an important political and strategic focus controlling the Conwy estuary over a very long period of time and is one of the few centres of commotal administration in Gwynedd which can be shown conclusively to have had a native, rather than intrusive, fortification. Post-conquest surveys confirm the *maerdref* status of Deganwy (Ellis, 1838, 2).

Aberffraw,

Aberffraw, on the west bank of the Ffraw near its estuary on the west coast of Anglesey, has sometimes been styled the capital of the independent kingdom of Gwynedd. It is recognised in the bardic tradition as one of the three tribal thrones of the island of Britain and is consistently equated with the symbols of kingship. These are not in themselves evidence of antiquity in that function. However, two miles to the east, at Llangadwaladr, a seventh century memorial stone commemorates Cadfan, 'wisest and most renowned of all kings', father of Cadwallon the victor over Edwin's Northumbria and grandfather of Cadwaladr whose dedication the church bears (Nash-Williams 1950, 55-6). English and Welsh traditions conspire to suggest that during Edwin's years of exile he spent some time on Anglesey, perhaps at the court of Cadfan, perhaps in the company of Cadwallon (Bromwich 1978, xcvii-xcviii). Later, before his final defeat at the hands of the Gwynedd and Mercian alliance, Edwin returned to harass the island bringing 'Anglesey and Man under English rule'. It has been argued that a two-phase bank and ditch defence in the area of the present village might be dated, in its first phase, to the Roman period and, in its second phase to the Early Middle Ages (Longley and White, forthcoming). Aberffraw was ravaged by Vikings in 968. Llywelyn ap Iorwerth took the unique title 'Prince of Aberffraw, Lord of Snowdon' in the last decade of his reign. Thirteenth century sculptured masonry has been recovered from the present village and in 1317 one hundred and ninety eight lengths of timber were removed from the buildings of the court for re-use in the construction of Edward's castle at Caernarfon. When English surveyors assessed the former Welsh

royal lands after the conquest, Aberffraw could clearly be seen to have been an exceptional *maerdref* with seven dependent bond hamlets under *tir cyfrif* tenure (Carr 1972, 172-6; 1982, 132-4).

Caernarfon.

Here, on an elevated ridge overlooking the Seiont, near its estuary, the Roman auxiliary base of Segontium took its name from the river and, in turn, gave a descriptive colour to the medieval focus which succeeded it: *Caer Segeint* (Morris 1980, 65) which became *Caer Seint yn Arfon* (Williams 1982, 38; 189). Regular references and the location of traditional stories at Caernarfon are no confirmation of antiquity although these, and an evolving form of the name, do suggest a continuing familiarity with the place in popular perception. Adjacent to the fort on the south-east side stands the parish church of Llanbeblig, sharing a name with the bond township which supported the king's *llys* at Caernarfon and raising the possibility that the nucleus of the Welsh administrative centre may originally have been close by. Two coins, an early ninth century Northumbrian styca and an eleventh century coin of Cnut, have been found in stratified contexts within the Roman fort (Edwards and Lane 1988, 115-6). Four penannular brooches from the site are possible but not certain indicators of post-Roman activity. By the thirteenth century the *llys*, and timber buildings of the *maerdref*, appear to have been sited on the estuary itself. Here, a Norman earthwork motte was built in the eleventh century and this was the location Edward I finally chose for his idiosyncratic and politically symbolic castle and frontier capital after the conquest of Gwynedd in 1283. *Maerdref* houses were demolished by Edward to build his town walls.

Rhuddlan

An important strategic location on the Clwyd, more obviously so in antiquity when marshes extended between the site and the sea. A battle (at *Rudglann*) is recorded in the late eighth century (Morris 1980, sub anno 797) and by the early tenth century the Anglo-Saxon burh of Cledmutha had been established (Whitelock 1961, sub anno 921). It is the Welsh name which persists, however, and by the eleventh century Rhuddlan was back in Welsh hands. In 1062 earl Harold drove Gruffydd ap Llywelyn from Rhuddlan and burnt his estate and his ships (Whitelock 1961, sub anno 1063). Ten years later earl Robert built a motte close to the site. By the mid twelfth century Owain had regained Rhuddlan, and much more, for Gwynedd but in 1277 work had begun on Edward I's masonry castle.

Dinorben.

This limestone promontory with strong natural defences on the west, north and south approaches was the site of a major hillfort in late prehistory with multiple ramparts protecting the easier approach from the south. A significant quantity of late Roman artefacts suggests occupation to the end of the fourth century. Animal bones from the upper fills of the main outer ditch have produced radiocarbon dates which centre on the fifth and sixth centuries (Guilbert 1980, 336-8) and a fragment of Anglo-Saxon buckle of seventh century date was found within the fort (Gardner and Savory 1964, 162-3, fig 16.3). This material, however, does no more than hint at continued occupation. By the fourteenth century the *llys* of Is Dulas and *maerdref* of Dinorben could be located a short distance to the south of the hillfort (Edwards and Lane 1988, 65-6). A reference to the hearth of Dinorben in *Englynion y Beddau* is significant only in identifying that the site had by the thirteenth century, or perhaps as early as the tenth century, become a landmark of the *ancient* landscape (Jones 1967, 53).

Bryn Euryn.

The *maerdref* status of Bryn Euryn has been proposed but remains uncertain (Jones, 1991, 202). This site is discussed below with reference to its morphology and other early associations.

'Probable and Possible' sites selected on criteria other than purely morphological (columns 1,2 and 3):

The lists include Deganwy, Aberffraw and Dinorben which have been discussed above, and Carreg Y Llam, Pen Llystyn, Bryn Euryn and Dinas Emrys. In addition, Dark (1994, 134) would suggest Carn Pentyrch and Tre'r Ceiri as 'very probable' and Camp Hill (Roman Camp, Bangor), Carn Fadrun and Pen y Corddyn as 'probable' sites.

Campbell (1988, 125) has discounted the pottery evidence from **Carreg y Llam**.

The chronology and nature of the postulated palisaded enclosure on the site of the Roman auxiliary fort at **Pen Llystyn** is very uncertain although late Roman activity at both **Segontium** and Canovium

must encourage consideration of the possibility of continued occupation of an indeterminate nature at these former Roman military sites.

A number of Dark's 'possible' identifications also rest on the presence of late Roman pottery. This, on current evidence, is the status of **Pen Y Corddyn**, despite the recent discovery of an early medieval penannular brooch from the foot of the hill (Dark, 1994, 128).

Dinas Emrys is a prominent igneous intrusion rising steeply through 84 metres from the floor of Nant Gwynant, a major north-south routeway through Snowdonia. Access from the base of the rock on the west side is channelled through a series of entrances, up terraces to the summit. The summit, enclosing an area of around 1.2 hectares, and a dependent terrace to the west are enclosed by weak ramparts. The highest point is crowned by a rectangular masonry keep of probable late twelfth or early thirteenth century construction. The disposition has the appearance of a nucleated fort except that it lacks the essential prerequisite of a nucleus - which deficiency the keep does not remedy. Interpretation is further complicated by uncertainty regarding the chronology of the component parts of the complex. The keep is medieval; the ramparts post-date deposits containing fourth century artefacts. Whether or not the ramparts are contemporary with the keep or whether they indicate an early medieval fortification of the rock is debatable. Numerous sherds of a single imported eastern Mediterranean amphora of fifth/sixth century date and a stamped plate base of the sixth century (Campbell, 1988, 126-7) together with a strong tradition that the site had developed a reputation as a fortress before the construction of the keep (Bromwich, 1978, *passim*) strengthens the argument for an early medieval fortification.

Roman Camp, Bangor, is a rectilinear earthwork with a prominent internal boss-like expansion in the southern angle. Doubt has been cast on the authenticity of the association of a late Roman coin found on the site (Lynch 1986, 81). The site must be regarded as undated. The ridge on which Roman Camp stands overlooks the ecclesiastical lordship centre and early monastery of Bangor and commands extensive views down the Menai Straits and across Conwy Bay. Rather than, as Dark suggests (1994, 124), the monastic site providing context by association for the earthwork, it has always seemed to this observer that the earthwork might represent the documented Norman campaign base of the late eleventh century. The relevant association between the earthwork and the township of Bangor, on this interpretation, is that the Normans sought to control the existing lordship as they did other administrative foci.

Tre'r Ceiri. The defences extend over 2ha and enclose 150 huts on an exposed peak of the Rivals at 485m above OD. In places the ramparts still stand over 4m high. A cairn, recently excavated and almost certainly of Bronze Age date, caps the summit. The structures within the ramparts include large round houses, subdivided round houses, cellular agglomerations of polygonal structures and large rectangular structures against the rampart. Not all the houses are contemporary as compartmentalisation and cellular accretions appear to supersede the larger round houses. Roman pottery of the second century to late fourth century is present. It is presumed that the defences are Iron Age in origin (Roy. Commission on Anc. and Hist. Mons. Wales 1964, lxxiv-lxxv). However, during 1993, twenty-four sherds from a single Severn Valley jar of second-third century date were recovered from low in the core of a refacing of the main (west) entrance. The pottery occurred in front of an original facing to the entrance passageway in circumstances which strongly suggest that the entrance was re-furbished during, or after, the Romano-British occupation of the site. The location of fifth-sixth century memorial stones at Llanaelhaearn, below the hill, has been remarked upon (Nash-Williams 1950, 87-8; Dark 1995) but an association with Tre'r Ceiri cannot be demonstrated.

Sites with with a nucleated 'citadel and outwork' plan.

As Alcock's gazetteer, and his published analyses of site location techniques demonstrate (Alcock, 1987, 153ff), in default of documentary evidence the only certain test of early medieval occupation is the evidence of dateable stratigraphic associations obtained through excavation. Site morphological analysis is strewn with pitfalls (Alcock, 1987, 154-5). In disregard of this good advice and in cognisance of Dark's analysis, the following observations are offered for consideration concerning the morphology and circumstantial associations of a small group of fortified sites including those listed by Edwards, Lane and Dark.

These sites share the characteristic of a spatial disposition which incorporates a strong citadel associated with a dependent outwork or bailey or an association with a potentially earlier enclosure which creates this impression. This morphological characteristic has been noted by the present writer in respect of Caernarvonshire (Longley 1985) and by Dark as his Group 1, citadel and ward type (1995, 135). Carn Pentyrch, though lacking any dating evidence whatsoever and omitted from Dark's Group 1 list, fits within this group. These sites should not to be equated automatically with the Pictish and North British series of nuclear forts although Dark does draw comparison (1994, 135). Rather, the significant feature appears to be the focus created by the presence of a small, strong, 'citadel' regardless of topographic potential or constraints. It is even debatable whether the 'outwork' need necessarily be of contemporary construction or be maintained as an organic unit with the fort. In this respect, though, of course unrelated, the siting of the Norman motte within the earthwork of the Roman fort at Tomen y Mur is possibly relevant (Jarrett 1969, 111-113). Alcock and Alcock would regard such a plan, which relies on the nucleation of enclosed units, as a sub-class within the broader category of *hierarchically organised fortifications*. In such a scheme the potential for the ordering and organisation of space from summit boss (whether enclosed or otherwise) to subordinate terraces and dependent annexes is the important criterion (Alcock and Alcock, 1991, 103, 130-38) and admits the inclusion of Dinas Emrys as a key site.

Tal Y Garreg. For description see above.

Bryn Euryn is a prominent, but low, terraced hill commanding the north-eastern access to the Creuddyn peninsula as Deganwy does the southern. It should be noted that two recent published plans of the site (Edwards and Lane 1988, fig 3; Dark 1994, fig 43) are reproduced at an incorrect scale which magnifies the area enclosed by a factor of 4. The small summit area, thirty five metres across, is enclosed by a drystone rampart with rubble core. A terrace below the summit is partially enclosed by an earthwork on its western side and by precipitous cliffs on the south. This apparent 'citadel and outwork' arrangement of defences was sufficiently reminiscent of a motte and bailey for the Ordnance Survey to designate it such on the 1:1250 map. The designation is incorrect although the overall impression is of a strong citadel and dependent outwork. Unfortunately it cannot be demonstrated that the summit fort and the more extensive outwork are of one period. Nevertheless, the nucleated composite plan should be noted. A debate has developed around whether the site can plausibly be associated with a sixth century reference by Gildas to 'Cuneglasus (red butcher), driver of the chariot of the bear's refuge' (Winterbottom 1978, 31-32; Jackson 1982, 33-4; Dumville 1984, 57-9). The argument in favour of such an association is that *receptaculum ursi* reasonably paraphrases the British *Dineirth* (citadel of the bear); that the medieval township within which the site lies was so named Dineirth and that the *Cuneglasus lanius fulvus*, occurring next to Maelgwn in Gildas' list of tyrants is Cynlas Goch (the red), cousin of Maelgwn and king in Rhos - the Creuddyn and its hinterland. If the association is correct then Bryn Euryn is one of the very few identifiable royal sites of early Gwynedd although it is unclear whether, as Jones has suggested, Dineirth was the *maerdref* of Uwch Dulas (Jones 1991, 202).

Carn Fadrun is a large sprawling hillfort occupying 10 hectares of the summit plateau of the prominent hill of the same name in the southern part of the Llyn peninsula. It is possible that two prehistoric phases are represented and the ramparts which outline these are in a dilapidated condition. Close to the summit crag, however, a small polygonal fortification, 57m by 7m, defines a more regular, better faced and apparently better built fort (fig 00, plate 00). This construction has been identified with Giraldu's description, in the 1180's of one of two stone castles recently built by the sons of Owain on the Llyn peninsula and called *Karmadrud* (Thorpe 1978, 2.6) Among the jumble and succession of round, subrectangular and rectangular stone structures and enclosures which occupy the area, both within and outside the larger defences below the summit are those which belong to the earlier occupation and those which almost certainly belong to a later phase which might arguably be associated with the summit fort (Roy. Commission on Anc. and Hist. Mons, Wales 1964, 69-70).

Garn Boduan lies some 5 km to the north-east of Carn Fadrun. This equally prominent hill rises above the *maerdref* of the commote of Dinllaen at Nefyn and the presumably Iron Age promontory fort of Porth Dinllaen. The summit plateau is defended, as Carn Fadrun is, by extensive ramparts of more than one phase, in this case enclosing a maximum area of around 11 hectares. The footings of over 170 circular houses are visible and the fort is thought to be of Iron Age date (Roy. Commission on Anc. and Hist. Mons, Wales 1964, 22-4). The highest point on the hill is represented by a conspicuous boss of rock crowned by a small (66m by 25m) but very strongly built 'citadel' with walls

surviving in a better state of preservation than the main fort, despite the attentions of visitors (fig 00, plate 00). At Garn Boduan there is no documentary evidence of date. Excavations in 1954 identified Iron Age VCP within a round house in the small fort and Roman pottery and beads overlying tumbled material from the rampart of the small fort. None of this can be used to argue for Early Medieval occupation and Garn Boduan, despite previous serious consideration by Alcock (1971, 217), has been excluded from recent gazetteers of the period. Nevertheless, the arrangement of strong summit fort within the remains of a much more extensive fortification bears close comparison with Carn Fadrun and, at a stage removed, with Conwy Mountain.

Castell Caer Lleion occupies the summit of Conwy Mountain, a ridge rising to 244m, precipitous on the north side overlooking the Conwy Bay coastline, less so on the landward side. It does not feature in any gazetteer of Early Medieval fortification. An area of 3 hectares is defended by a seriously denuded stone rampart, enclosing about 50 round houses. At the western end, just below the summit knoll, the presence of a small (60m by 25m), strongly defended, 'citadel' presents a number of problems of interpretation (fig 00, plate 00). Griffiths and Hogg (1956) believed the first phase of the small enclosure to be Iron Age, contemporary with the main fort, incorporating an impressive entrance on the south side. A second phase of this 'citadel' would then involve a reduction in area. This second phase now presents itself as a very strong, well built, enclosure with a significantly greater level of preservation than the remainder of the large fort. In places the wall is 5 metres thick, revetted front and back. It might be possible to accept one or both phases of small fort as a contemporary, though anomalous, component of the prehistoric defences were it not for two significant points of detail. Firstly, the small fort and the main fort appear, in both phases, to have had their own completely separate access with no direct communication between the two. Secondly, a bank and ditch earthwork was constructed immediately to the east of the small fort with the effect of enhancing the segregation of the two enclosures. This earthwork was erected on occupation surfaces of an earlier phase.

Pen Y Castell, Carreg Olau, occupies a rocky ridge rising 170 metres above the east bank of the Conwy Valley. The north and highest end is defended by a strong drystone, ring work around 20 metres across with walls up to 5 metres thick. A ditch cuts off the base of the ridge on the north side. To the south, three terraces, dependent on the ring work, are defended by intermittent stretches of dry stone walling. The arrangement has been described as 'the adaptation of a motte and bailey layout to an unusual site' (Roy. Commission on Anc. and Hist. Mons. Wales 1956, 168) in recognition of the citadel and outwork plan. Both Avent (1983, 7-8 and the Royal Commission (1964, cxliv) compare it to the drystone summit castle on Carn Fadrun.

Moel Y Gest is a broken, rocky ridge overlooking the estuary of the Dwyryd and Tremadoc Bay. The setting is spectacular and the hill dominates the local landscape. The summit, at 860ft, is crowned by a small defensive enclosure, eighteen metres in diameter. The rampart includes an earth filling or rests on an earthen bank. This material incorporates a large quantity of small white pebbles that are not native to the site. Below the summit, and along the ridge, a series of terraces are enclosed by lengths of walling of no obvious great strength.

Carn Pentyrch occupies a generally rounded but locally prominent hilltop with rock outcrops, rising to 730 ft above OD, immediately north of Llangybi on the Llyn peninsula. There are two lines of concentric inner defence and a third, outer defence which appears to swing away to the north-west enclosing a dependent outwork. The sequence is complicated in that the outer defence comprises both an earthen bank and ditch and, slightly offset and overlapping, a stone wall which appears to replace it. This outer circuit of defences may have been, in its earliest, manifestation, the first rampart on the site. The 'middle' rampart comprises, on the north-west side, a massive bank and ditch and, along the rest of its circuit, a faced, stone rampart. The central defence is small but extremely strong. A stone wall of between 3m and 7m in thickness encloses a sub-rectangular area, 23m in diameter.

DISCUSSION

The suggested chronology of the forts described above spans a very wide range. Griffiths and Hogg argued that the entire complex at Conwy Mountain was Iron Age in date, at least in phase 1, with the 'citadel', although the term is disputed, contemporary with the main fort. The small fort at Garn Boduan which, structurally and in its relationship to the larger enclosure, can be compared to both Conwy and Carn Fadrun has been variously assigned to the pre-Roman and post-Roman periods. Bryn Euryn or

Dineirth may be the location of Cynlas' citadel in the sixth century although Dumville argues the case for caution in acceptance of this identification (1984, 57-9). The defences of Dinas Emrys, stratigraphically post-Roman, have been associated by some with the sixth century occupation of the site and by others with the later stone keep. The ringwork at Carreg Olau has been described as an undocumented Welsh castle. Comparison has been drawn with the summit fort on Carn Fadrun which itself has been associated with castle building by the sons of Owain Gwynedd in the late twelfth century. The dating of none of these sites is established and the majority of these chronological associations are circumstantial or inferred. If it can be suggested to the point of general acceptance (Avent 1983, 7-8) that the summit fort at Carn Fadrun, on the one hand, is the documented twelfth century castle of the sons of Owain, while on the other that the 'small fort' on Conwy Mountain, in phase 1, is contemporary with the 'otherwise perfectly normal' Iron Age fort (Hogg 1975, 180) then the implications have to be addressed. In this respect the circumstantial and relative dating indicators, together with shared morphological characteristics, of the forts described above suggest a potential for considering further the possibility of Early Medieval activity at these sites.

fig. 1



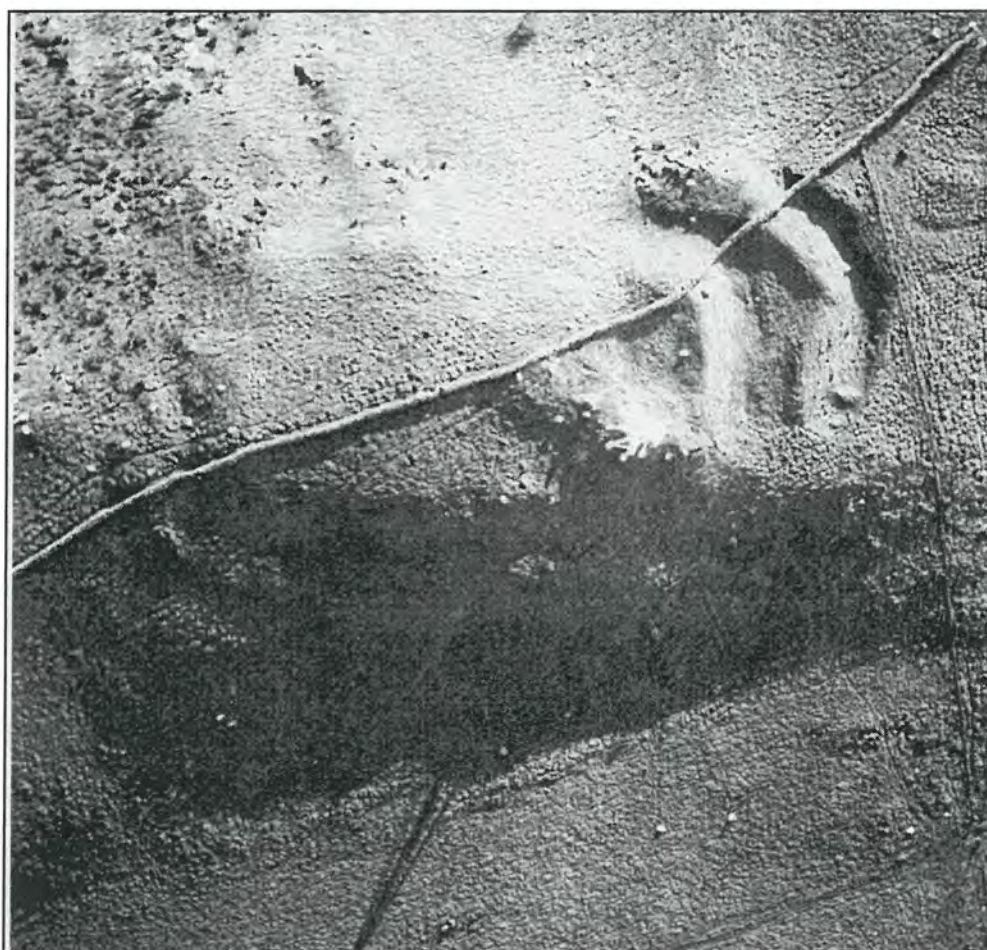
Tal y Garreg from the north-east showing the extent of quarry working in March 1995.
The ramparts of the Llechlwyd fort can be seen in the top left hand corner of the photograph

fig. 2



Tal y Garreg from the east, March 1995

fig. 3



Vertical aerial photograph of Tal y Garreg. The navigation beacon is still in place

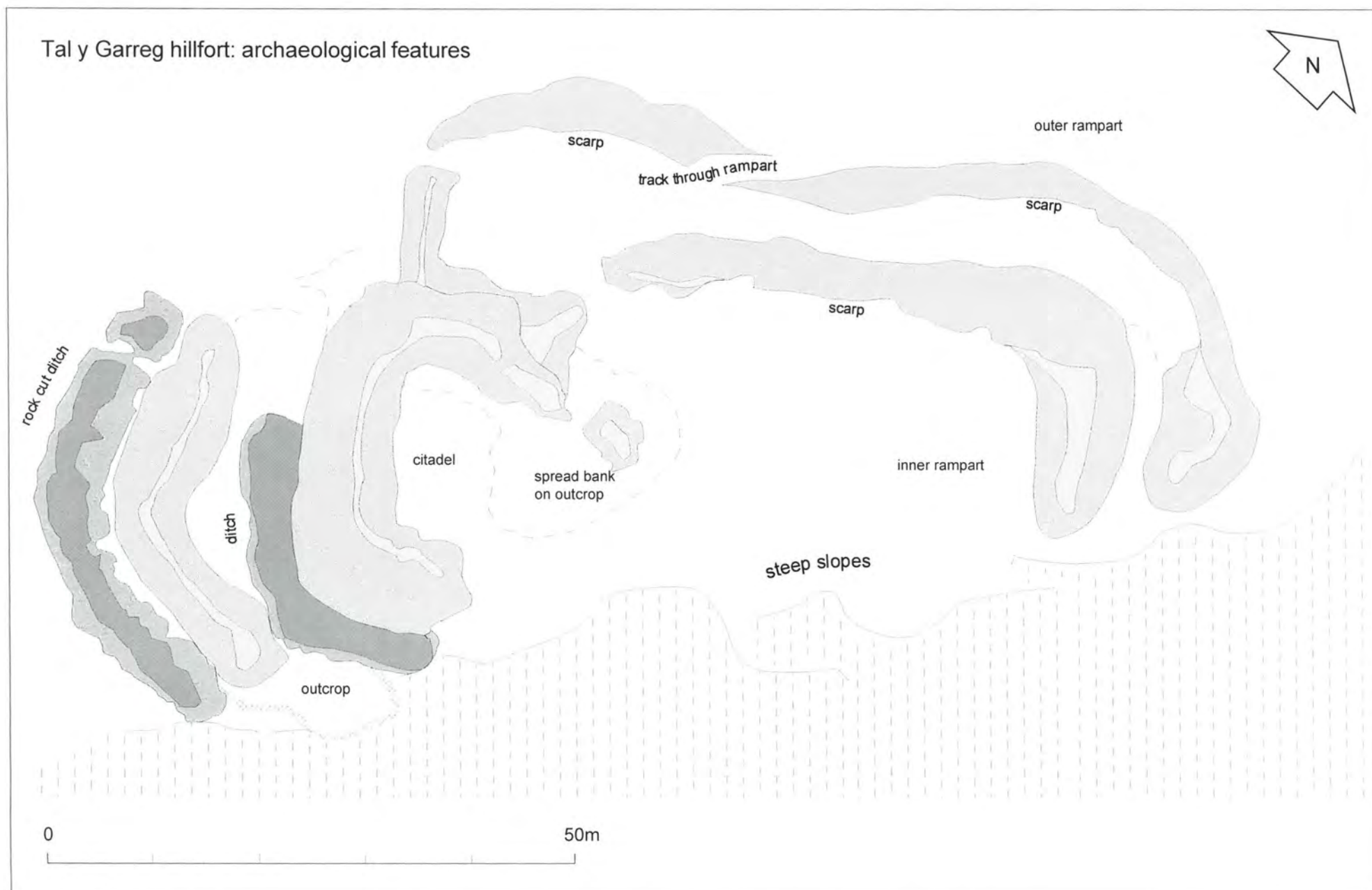
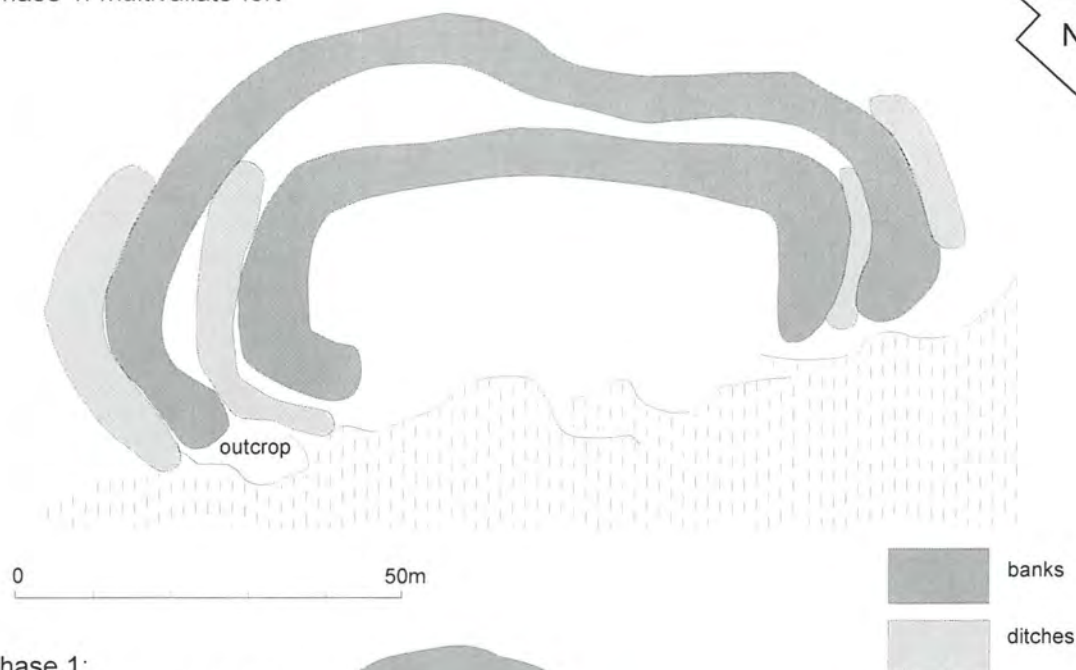
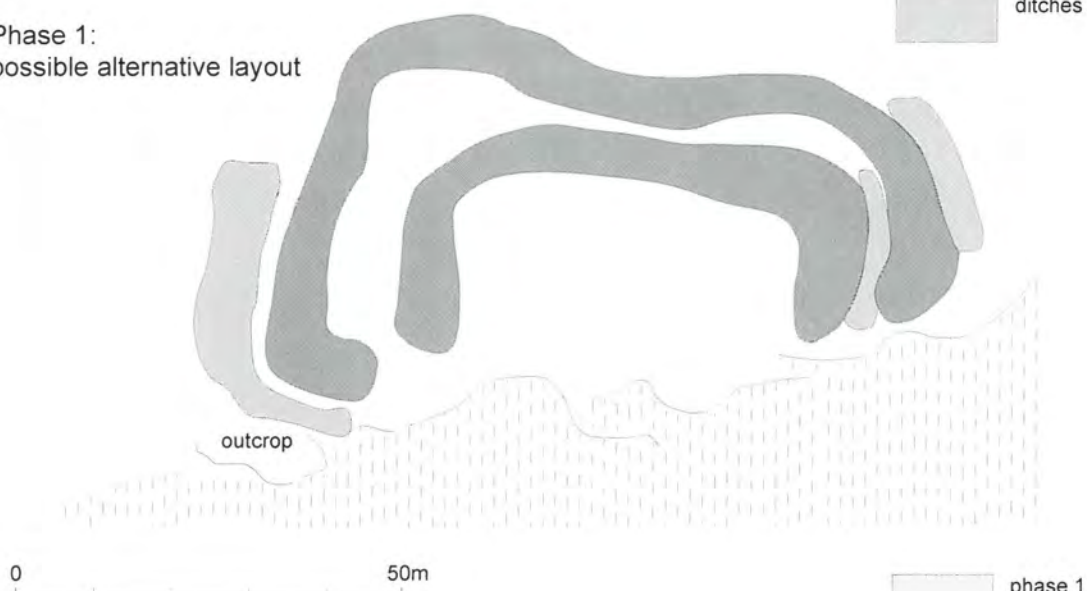


fig. 4

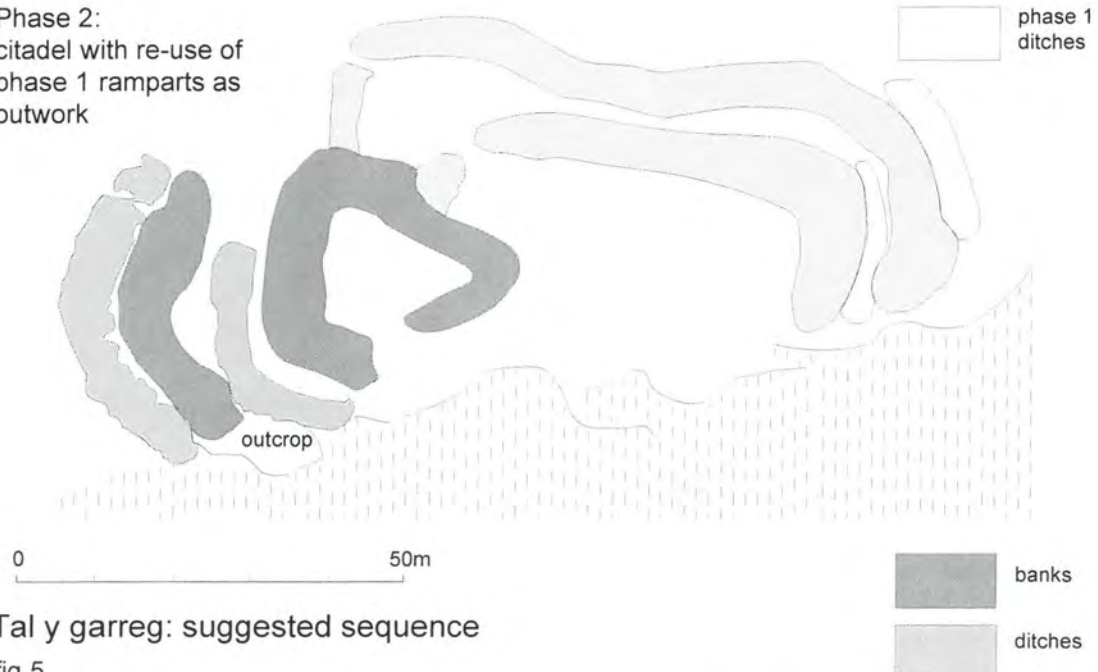
Phase 1: multivallate fort



Phase 1:
possible alternative layout



Phase 2:
citadel with re-use of
phase 1 ramparts as
outwork



Tal y garreg: suggested sequence
fig 5

Tal y Garreg hillfort: later disturbance

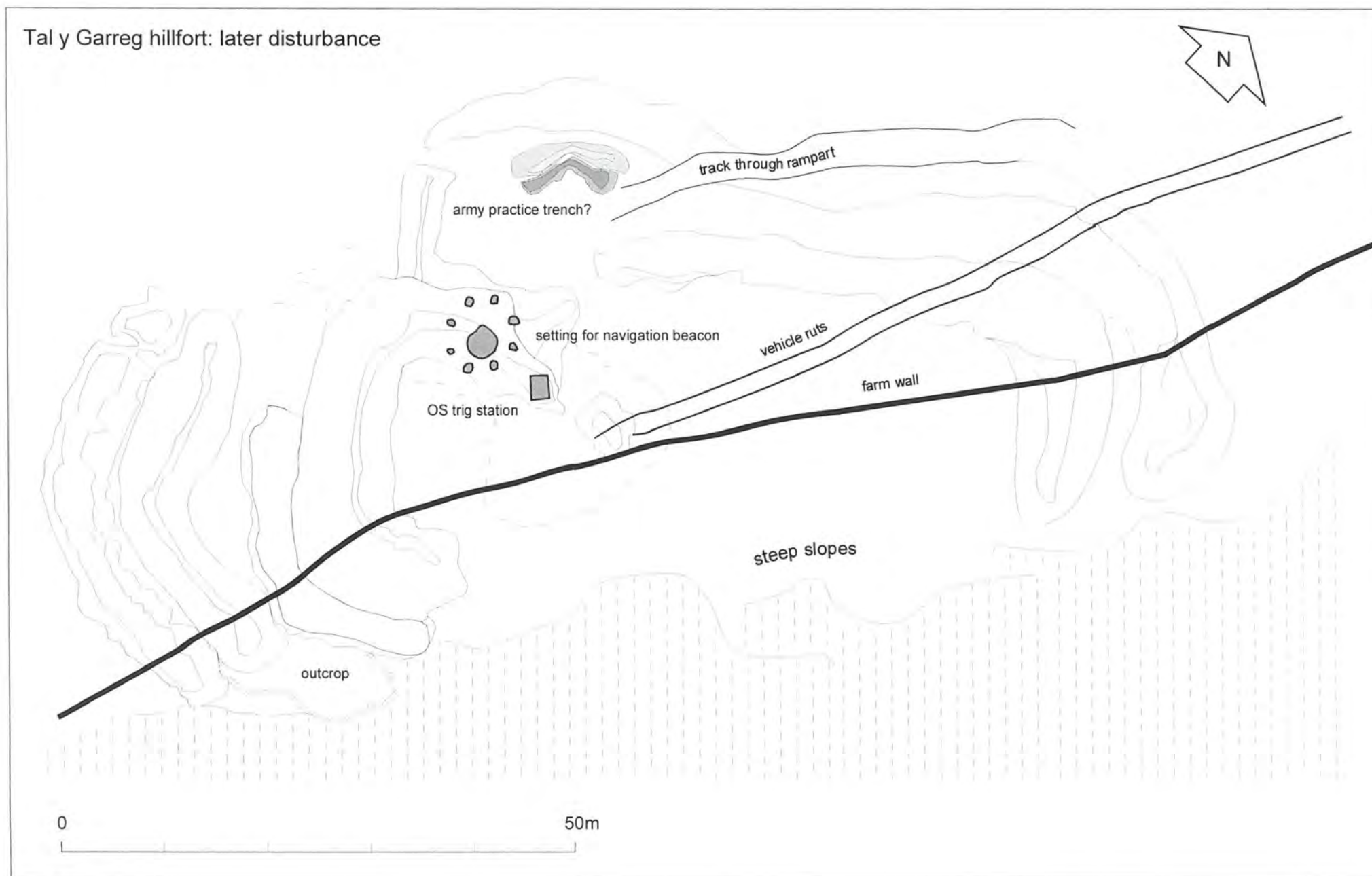


fig 6

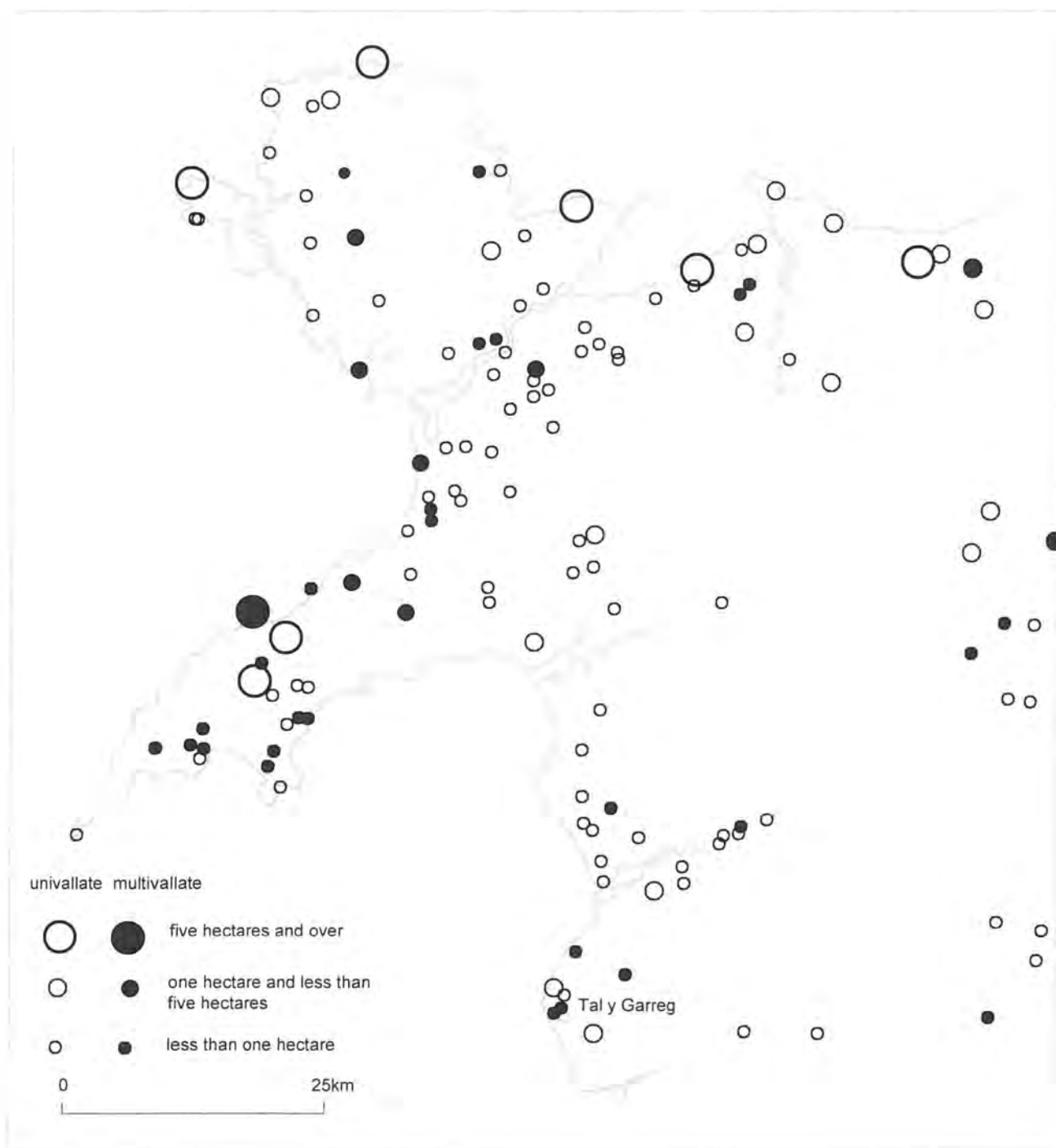


fig. 7 Distribution of hillforts in north-west Wales

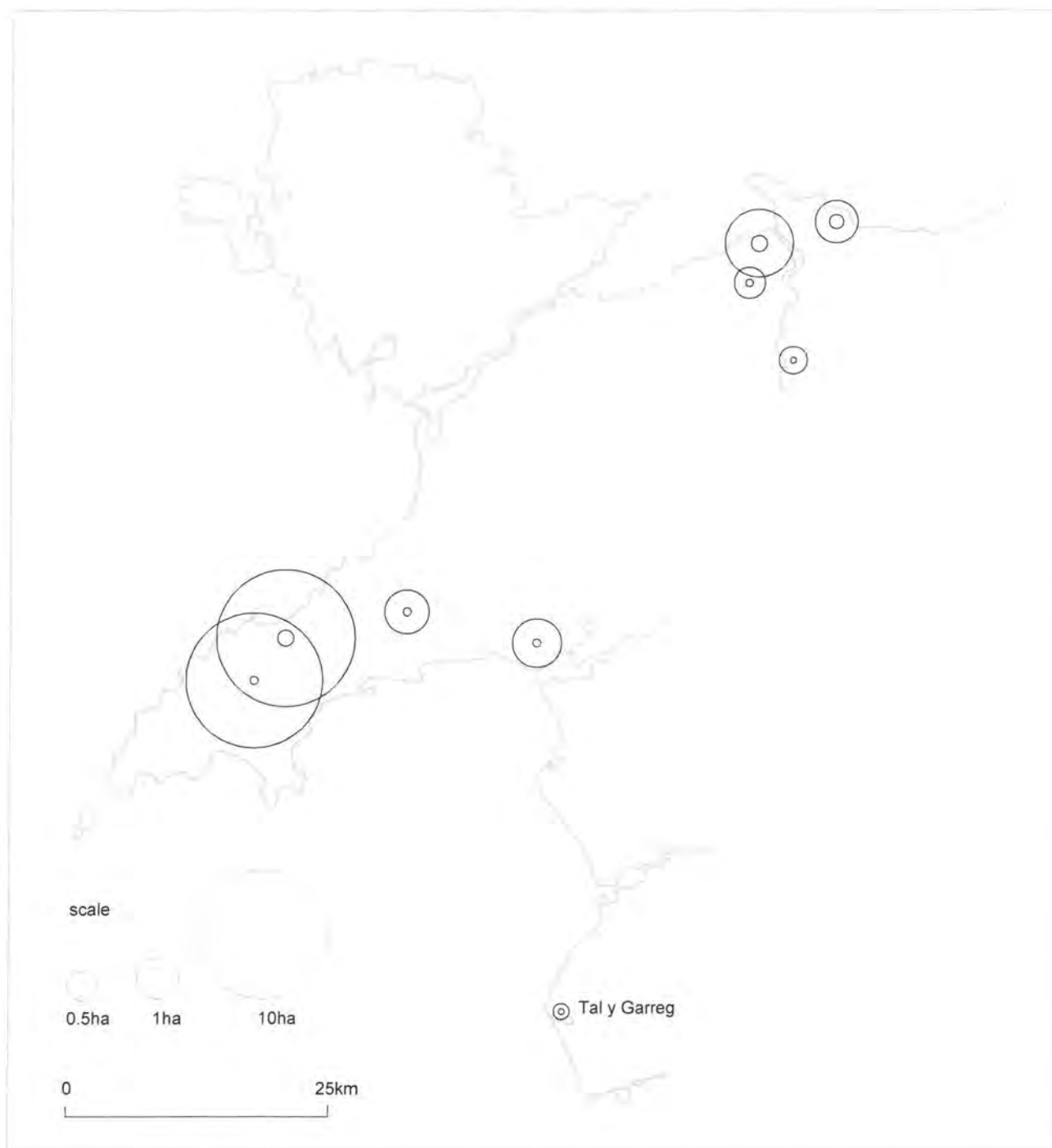


fig. 8 Nucleated forts, showing the area relationship of the nucleus to total area of any outwork or associated enclosure. The chronological relationship of the outwork to the nucleus is, in some cases, ambiguous.

fig 8

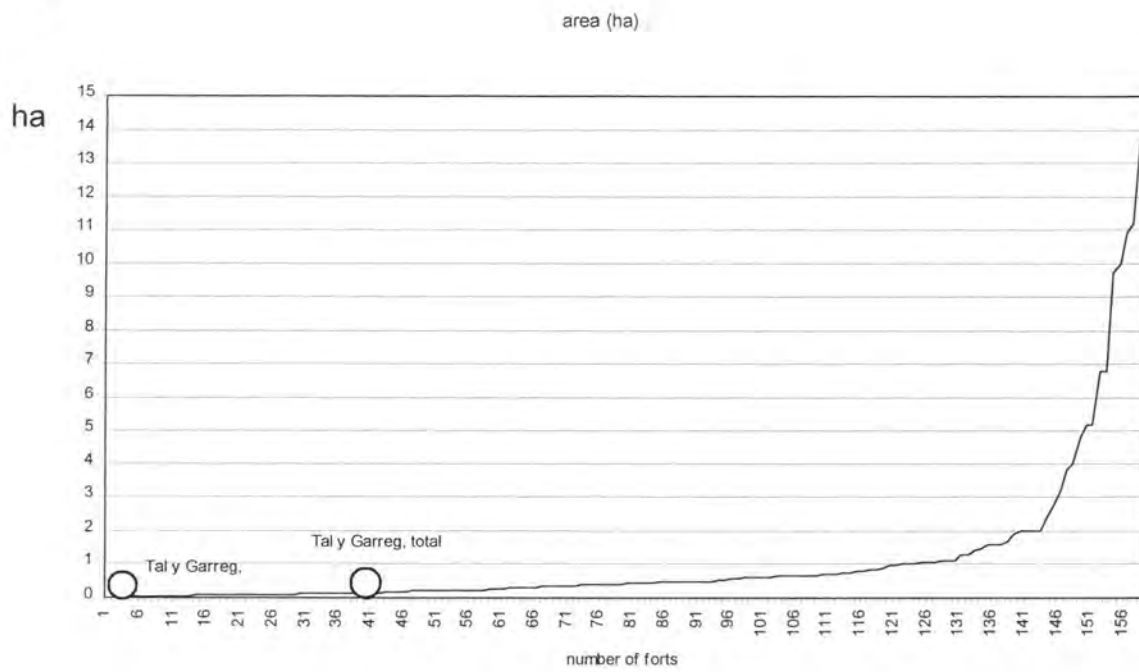
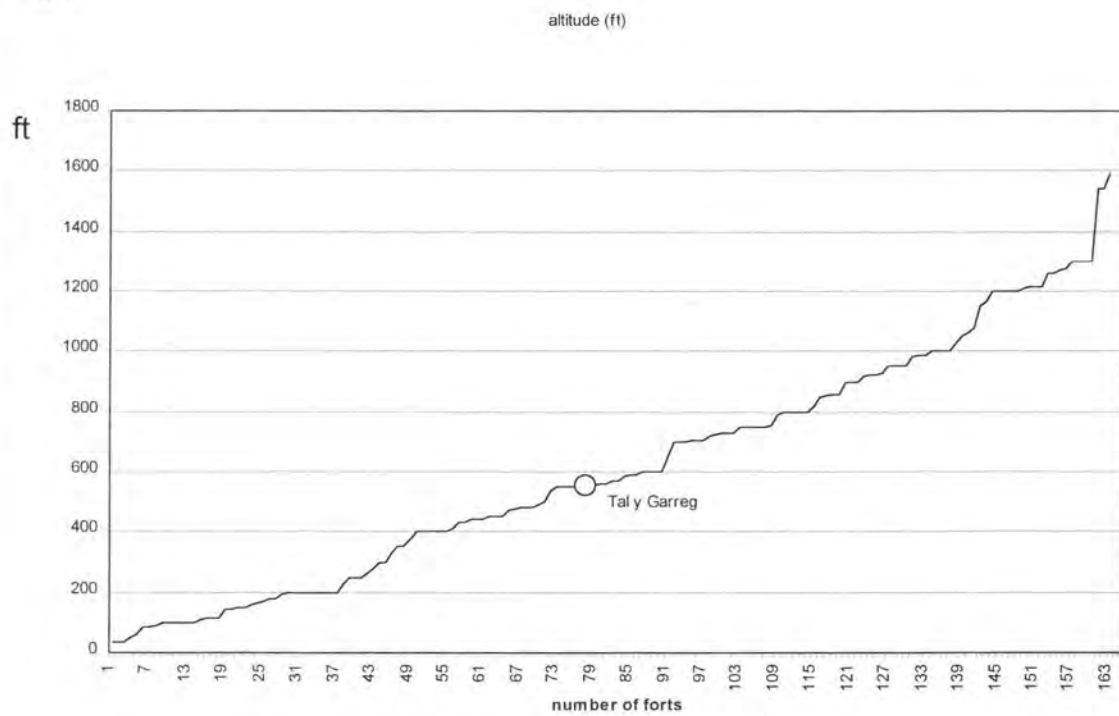


fig 9





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