

TRE'R CEIRI MONITORING VISIT

JUNE 2001

Report number : 417

Prepared for

GWYNEDD COUNCIL

JULY 2001

G1605.02

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

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By

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Introduction

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. Regular monitoring visits have been carried out by G.A.T. since the end of the conservation project although no visits were carried out at in late 2000 and early 2001 due in part to the foot and mouth epidemic. The site was reopened to the public in mid June and the site was visited at the end of the month.

Results of the monitoring visit

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). Written records were kept of all works.

The Ramparts

Twenty-three areas of instability were identified, all but one of which appeared to have been caused by visitors walking along the tops of the rampart.

1. A stone had become unstable on the top of the outer face. The stone was pushed back into place.
2. 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.
3. A stone had become unstable on the top of the inner face. The stone was pushed back into place.
4. A stone had become unstable on the top of the inner face. The core behind the stone was repacked.
5. A stone had been slightly displaced from the top of the inner face and was pushed back into place.
6. A stone had become unstable on the top of the inner face. The core behind the stone was repacked.
8. A stone had been slightly displaced from the top of the inner face and was pushed back into place.
9. A patch of wall core had been loosened, presumably by the action of visitors walking along the ramparts, and was threatening the stability of the surrounding masonry. The core was repacked in this area.
10. A stone had been slightly displaced from the top of the inner face and was pushed back into place.
11. A stone had become unstable on the top of the outer face. The core behind the stone was repacked.
12. A loose stone on the outer face was stabilised by the addition of a single packing stone.
13. A stone had been slightly displaced from the top of the inner face and was pushed back into place.
14. A stone had been slightly displaced from the top of the inner face and was pushed back into place.
15. A stone had been slightly displaced from the top of the outer face and was stabilised by the addition of two small packing stones.
16. A patch of wall core had been loosened, presumably by the action of visitors walking along the ramparts, and was threatening the stability of the surrounding masonry. The core was repacked in this area.
17. A stone had become unstable on the top of the inner face. The core behind the stone was repacked.
18. A stone had been slightly displaced from the top of the outer face and was pushed back into place.
19. Two stones had worked loose on the face of the lower banquette. This was again caused by displacement of the wall core. A small patch of core was cleared and repacked.
20. A large slab had been displaced from the top of the outer face and was pushed back into place.
21. A stone had been slightly displaced from the top of the outer face and was pushed back into place.
22. A hole 0.5m x 0.5m and 0.3m deep had been dug in the top of the rampart, presumably by metal detectorists. No *in situ* facing had been disturbed and the hole was filled in.
23. A stone had been slightly displaced from the top of the outer face and was pushed back into place.

24. A stone had become unstable on the top of the inner face. The core behind the stone was repacked.

The Huts

7. A small treasure hunter hack was backfilled. No *in situ* masonry had been affected.

25. Hut 90. A facing stone and a patch of core had worked loose at a point where visitors commonly climb onto the hut walls. The core was repacked thus stabilising the stone.

26. A very large drilled slab had been pushed from the end of the flanking wall in the entrance of hut 6. The wall was not otherwise unstable and when the stone was reset on the wall, it locked back into place. It therefore appears that this was not an example of accidental damage and that the stone had been deliberately thrown from the wall.

27. Two large drilled slabs had been pulled forward on the wall of hut 25. This damage is typically caused by people climbing up the hut walls. The two slabs were reset in their original positions.

28. A short length of partially displaced original facing was beginning to collapse in the northern wall of hut 144. This corresponds to collapse 144c (season 10 report). This was recorded as having ridden forward on a large slab after the wall had been undermined by a treasure hunter hack and being 'not even close to its original position'. It was also stated that nothing could be done to stabilise the facing. Further examination tended to support this observation so no action was taken.

General observations

The cairn was observed to be in reasonably good condition with only minor disturbance having occurred since the last monitoring visit. All three notice boards were still standing and in reasonable condition, although some further shrinkage of the stick-on panels had occurred.

Discussion

There was a significant increase in the level of damage to the fort compared to last years' figures. Twenty-eight as opposed to six points of instability were identified. The majority of the erosion was to the top of the rampart on the north-west of the site. As in previous years, the damage had been caused by the tendency of visitors to climb on, and walk along the top of the ramparts and was easily repaired. There is probably no reason for concern about the increase, as the damage could easily have been caused by a large group of people walking along the ramparts. Of more concern is the example of deliberate damage caused to hut 6 and the continued use of metal detectors on the site.

In all cases, more severe damage could have occurred within a short space of time if the stabilisation works had not been carried out, thus underlining the importance of regular monitoring visits.

References

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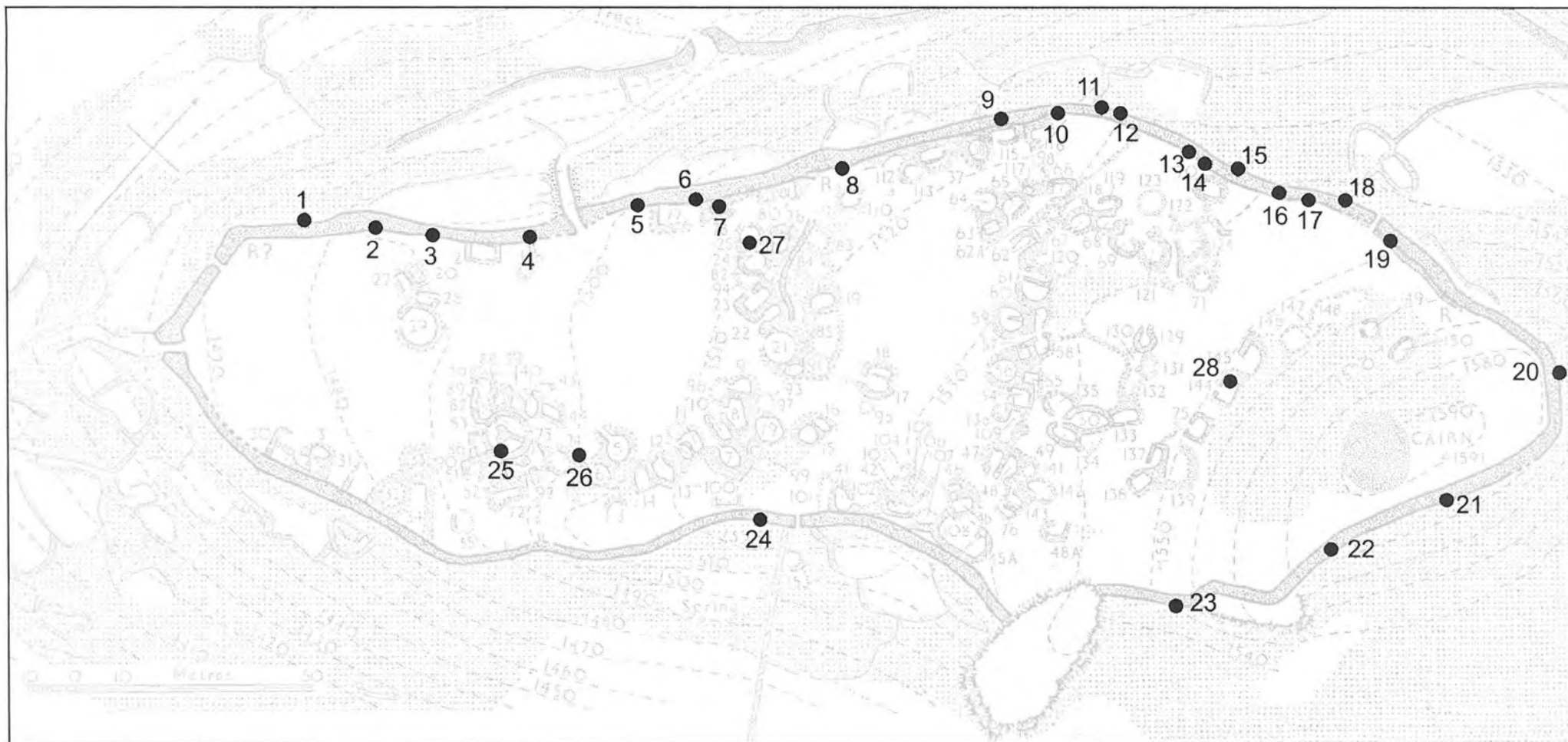


Fig. 1 Tre'r Ceiri (after RCAHMW 1960) showing points of instability identified in the June 2001 monitoring visit

