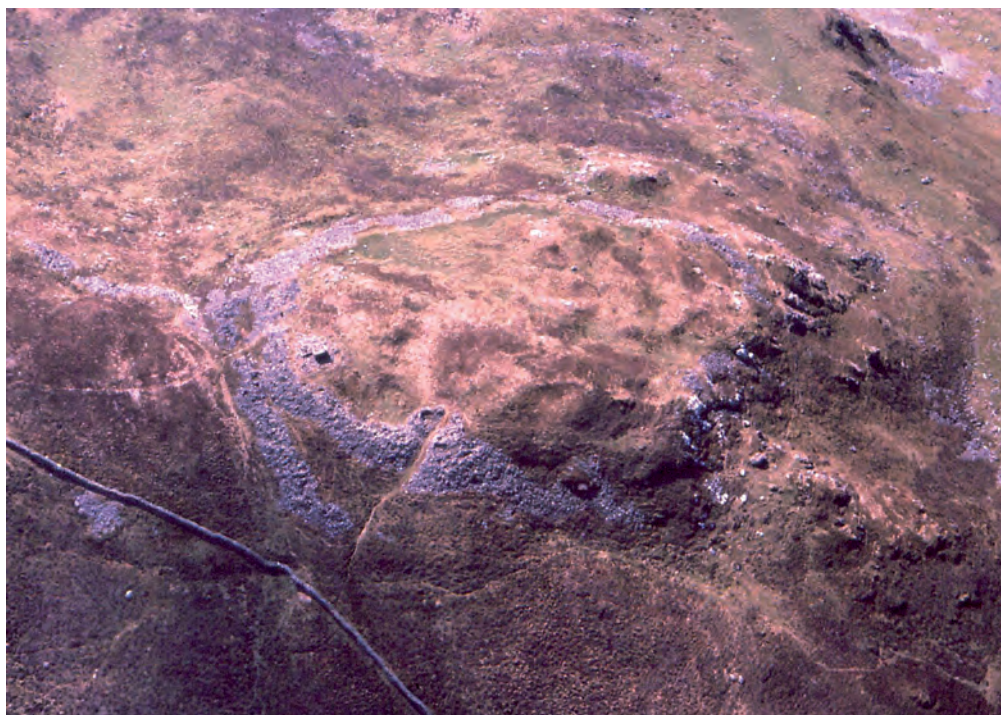

A VISITOR GUIDE TO THE MAIN IRON AGE HILL FORTS OF MEIRIONNYDD

**Project No. G1770
Report No. 839**



Prepared for Cadw
December 2009

By
George Smith



Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

☎ 01248 352535 ☎ 01248 370925 email : gat@heneb.co.uk

www.heneb.co.uk

A VISITOR GUIDE TO THE MAIN IRON AGE HILL FORTS OF MEIRIONNYDD

**Project No. G1770
Report No. 839**

Prepared for Cadw
December 2009

By
George Smith

Cover: Moel Offrwm Upper Fort, Llanfachreth. From the north-east

**Gwynedd Archaeological Trust
Ymddiredolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd**

A VISITOR GUIDE TO THE MAIN IRON AGE HILLFORTS OF MEIRIONNYDD

This document has been produced as a draft text and figures, to be further enhanced graphically and by lay-out, using desk-top publishing software to create a bilingual guide available either as web-pages or as a downloadable PDF document, linked to the GAT and the SNPA websites.

INTRODUCTION

The following provides a guide to the location of and access to the main Iron Age hillforts in Meirionnydd, all but one of which lie within the Snowdonia National Park. It also provides a description of the main features of each fort that can be seen by a visitor. It is designed for the average interested visitor and does not presume a previous knowledge of archaeology. There are more forts than are listed here but those not included are on private land and are not accessible or of less visual value.

Much of inland Meirionnydd has very little evidence of prehistoric settlement and likewise of fortification. In this it parallels modern land-use with farming and settlement concentrated in the valleys and around the coast. The evidence at present suggests that Meirionnydd was somewhat isolated in the later prehistoric period, in the first millennium BC, and its types of settlement and fortification were somewhat different to those prevailing further east in Britain. The typical settlement was a small homestead of a single house or small group of houses in an enclosure but with occasional scattered isolated unenclosed houses or groups of in the more remote upland. Despite the small scale and scattered nature of settlement the existence of some communal organisation or identity is shown by the presence of fortified sites. Their construction must have required considerable communal effort even though most contain very few houses. Some probably denote centres of leadership or communal identity. Some contained no evidence of settlement at all and must have been areas of communal refuge but could also have been used as meeting places for seasonal ceremonies, exchange or discussion. The distribution of forts therefore says something about possible tribal areas and division of agricultural hinterland. The forts in this area are relatively small and in stony areas are typically stone-walled, sometimes with outer defensive works of stony banks. In most cases good use is made of naturally defensive cliffs and crags. Entrances to larger hillforts in Central and Southern Britain sometimes developed over time into special types of complex defensive works. In Meirionnydd the entrances are generally quite simple but follow similar principles of defence, where most of the approaches to the fort were made virtually unassailable while the walls around the entrance were more strongly built and the approach to it was designed to funnel attackers into an area where they were vulnerable. The use of stone-walled forts is exceptional and means that many features are preserved, in particular traces of the original facing of walls can often be seen, usually sloping back to provide stability. Details of entrances and roundhouses can also sometimes be seen but is the overall defensive design that needs to be appreciated, making careful use of natural locations.

Unfortunately, the prehistoric defensive preparations were not sufficient to withstand the organised siege tactics of the Romans. However, the construction of major Roman forts at Caer Gai (Bala) and at Pennal (Aberdyfi) shows that a military presence was needed to control the area in the first and second century AD. The stone walls of some hillforts,

as now visible, are so thoroughly flattened and scattered that it has been suggested that they were deliberately destroyed by the Romans although this is difficult to prove. Others have some evidence of minor later use and re-building possibly in less peaceful times after the end of the Roman period.

NOTES FOR VISITORS

All these forts are protected as Scheduled Ancient Monuments and it is illegal to disturb them in any way or to carry out metal detecting over them. Do not walk over the stone parts of the structures, which can be damaged by trampling.

An Ordnance Survey map is needed to make use of the guide. This would preferably be the Explorer 1:2500 maps OL18 and OL23.

Some of the routes are permissive over private land. Others cross Access land, which must be accessed by available rights of way, gates and stiles.

All the forts except one lie within the Snowdonia National Park. If damage or other problems are noticed please contact the National Park office, see address below.

FOLLOW THE COUNTRYSIDE CODE

Be safe – plan ahead and follow any signs
Leave gates and property as you find them
Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home
Keep dogs under close control
Consider other people

It is suggested that in addition, to protect the hillforts:

Leave all stones as found
Report any finds (Portable Antiquities Officer, see below)
Report any deliberate damage (National Park office, see below)

CONTACTS

Portable Antiquities Officer,
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust,
Craig Beuno,
Bangor,
Gwynedd
LL57 2RT Tel. 01248-352535

Snowdonia National Park Authority,
National Park Offices,
Penrhyndeudraeth,
Gwynedd
LL48 6LF Tel. 01766 770274

FORTS TO VISIT

1. Moel Goedog, Talsarnau
2. Clogwyn Arllef, Llanbedr
3. Pen y Dinas, Tal y Bont
4. Craig y Dinas, Llanddwywe
5. Byrllysg, Tal-y-bont
6. Bryn Castell, Llanaber
7. Bryn y Castell, Ffestiniog
8. Tal y Gareg, Llangelynnin
9. Craig yr Aderyn, Llanfihangel y Pennant
10. Moel Offrwm Upper Fort, Llanfachreth
11. Moel Offrwm Lower Fort, Llanfachreth
12. Moel Faner, Llanelltyd
13. Castell y Gaer, Llangelynnin
14. Caer Euni, Llandderfel

Figures

- 1 Distribution of Iron Age hillforts in Dwyfor and Meirionnydd (Copyright GAT)
- 2-15 Plans of forts (Copyright GAT)

Photographs

- 1 Moel Goedog hillfort from the air (Copyright GAT)
- 2 Clogwyn Arllef hillfort from the air (Copyright GAT)
- 3 Pen y dinas hillfort showing wall-facing near to the entrance (Copyright GAT)
- 4 Craig y dinas hillfort from the air (Copyright GAT)
- 5 Byrllysg hillfort from the air (Copyright GAT)
- 6 Bryn castell hillfort. View of the interior and rampart wall (Copyright GAT)
- 7 Bryn y Castell hillfort from the air (Copyright GAT)
- 8 Tal y garreg hillfort from the air (Copyright GAT)
- 9 Craig yr Aderyn hillfort from the air (Copyright GAT)
- 10 Moel Offrwm Upper fort from the air (Copyright GAT)
- 11 Moel Offrwm Lower fort from the air (Copyright GAT)
- 12 Moel Faner hillfort. View of the entrance, looking towards Llyn Cynwch (Copyright GAT)
- 13 Castell y gaer hillfort from the air (Copyright GAT)
- 14 Caer Euni hillfort and nearby enclosure from the air (Copyright RCAHMW)

1. MOEL GOEDOG, HARLECH SH 614325

From the A496 coast road just south of Harlech turn off through Llanfair and then turn right up the hill, continue for about 4km, past two turnings to Cwm Bychan, until the road starts to dip down again and where a prominent farm track turns off to the east. Moel Goedog is the hill immediately to the north. An old track leads towards it through a gateway. This route is thought to be an important prehistoric track that leads up from Llanbedr and there are standing stones flanking it in places. A little further along here two Bronze Age cairns lie on either side of the track. The hill is all Access land so continue directly up the hill. There are walls across the fort at the top of the hill but there are stiles provided.

Distance: Return trip 1.5km (1 mile)

Difficulty: Medium. Steep climb but easy walking over grass.

Time: 1.5 hours

This small hillfort has relatively slight defences but stands in an exceptionally commanding position. The almost circular summit of the hill is surrounded by two close-set concentric ramparts with shallow external ditches. The banks are nowhere more than 1m high, and it has been suggested that they must have been surmounted by a wooden palisade if they were to provide effective defence. The entrance – a simple gap through both ramparts – is in the south-west, where there is a natural line of approach between two natural rock ridges. A tumbled wall connects these ridges to create an inner sub-circular enclosure, which may have been the earliest fortification on the hill.

There has been no excavation to provide evidence of date or occupation, but Castell Odo, Aberdaron (Llŷn), which it resembles, is one of the earlier hillforts in North Wales, established in the Late Bronze Age. By the Iron Age the preferred settlement unit in this part of Meirionnydd seems to have been the concentric circle farmstead.

2. CLOGWYN ARLEF, LLANBEDR SH595286

From the A496 coast road by the Pensarn Railway halt a small narrow and steep road leads east. At the end of the road, park by the roadside, just before Gwern Einion farmhouse. A public footpath leads east and just before Penarth Farm passes by the side of a hill on which is the fort. The fort is on private land but is open and the owner allows access to monument.

Distance: Round trip 1.5km (1 mile)

Difficulty: Easy

Time: 1.5 hours

The fort lies on a small but locally prominent hill at an altitude of 180m (500ft). It is interesting because although so far undated it may be a very early example of defended settlement, perhaps as early as 1000 BC (Late Bronze Age), characterized by very slight defences. It should be approached from the east side of the hill. On that side is the entrance to the fort and leading towards it, up the hillside is a most unusual feature, an 'avenue' or corridor defined by boulder lines, starting at the foot of the hill. The entrance

is simple and emphasised by stronger defence work as in many other forts. The defences of the fort itself consist of just a single wall around the natural scarp edge of the hill top, enclosing an area of 0.4ha (1 acre). The wall is now mostly collapsed but there are traces of laid out facing. There are no signs of houses within the fort suggesting that it was just a place of refuge, not permanent settlement. At the southern edge of the fort there is another unusual feature. There is a gap in the enclosure wall and nearby are two small cairns. Alternative explanations for this are either that the fort was unfinished or that a start was made on dismantling it. Another idea is that the cairns cover burials relating to the fort and its defeat or abandonment. The area around the fort was well settled in prehistoric times, exemplified by the presence of several small circular homesteads of Iron Age type. At Gwern Einion is a Neolithic chambered tomb and not far from there a Late Bronze Age shield was found during peat cutting in the 19th century.

3. PEN-Y-DINAS, TAL-Y-BONT SH 606208

Park at the roadside close to the National Trust property of Egryn Abbey on the A496 coast road, south of Tal-y-bont. A footpath leads through the south side of the farmyard up the hill (cattle may be in fields), turns north to cross the Afon Egryn by wooden footbridge, then by a stile over a wall, then runs diagonally northeast up the hillside, joining a farm track that passes under the ramparts at the south-side of the fort. The fort is on private land but the owner allows access to monument.

Distance: Round trip 4km (2.5 miles)

Difficulty: Medium. Fairly steep long climb, some rough ground and path not easy to follow.

Time: 2.5 hours

This is a strongly defended small fort on a prominent local summit at a height of 230m (750ft). It lies at the north side of the small deep valley of the Afon Egryn and with wide views over the coastal plain to the west, and the upland plateau to the east.

The fort is roughly circular following the shape of the hill on which it lies, which has steep natural scarps on three sides. The defences have been mostly robbed to build later walls but a small part survives at the east side. This shows it was a single massive wall or faced bank 5m wide and at least 3m high.

The entrance is on the north-west side where the slope is greater. The enclosure wall is thickened and in turned at each side of the entrance. A trackway approached from the north-west and the approach there was further protected by an outer defensive bank and ditch. Some excavations were carried out at the fort in 1919 but there were no datable finds. There are no obvious signs of buildings in the interior, but there is a large sub-rectangular platform about 15m by 10m just inside the entrance. This feature could be a hay-stack stand, later than the occupation of the fort. This is a real possibility because all around the fort are the remains of Medieval houses and fields and more are to be found on the south side of the Afon Egryn. One of the walls of these Medieval fields blocks the trackway onto the fort, which seems proof that the fort had gone out of use by that time.

4. CRAIG Y DINAS, DYFFRYN ARDUDWY SH624230

From the A496 coast road just south of Dyffryn Ardudwy turn east up the road to Cors-y-gedol. Follow this road to its end, where there is a small private car park where a small fee is payable. From here walk east up the track that is a continuation of the road towards the hills until a broad upland valley is reached. In the centre of the valley will be clearly seen a distinct rocky knoll on which is the fort. This is Access land. Follow a path across the moorland, which may be very wet in parts.

Distance: Round-trip 6km (4 miles)

Difficulty: Easy with some rough and wet ground

Time: about 2 hours

This isolated rocky summit, at an altitude of 350m (1150ft) is a natural focus for this wide upland valley. It is occupied by a small fort of about 0.2ha (0.5acre), which has central and commanding views over the valley. It has some naturally defensible crags, added to by a single massive wall about 2m thick, now mostly collapsed. Some areas of original outer facing can be seen at the south side. The remains of the wall are also partly obscured by a modern wall on the same line. The entrance to the fort is on the south-east side and was approached by a track running diagonally up the slope. The wall is wider (and so was probably higher) at this point and turned outwards to create a strong point on one side of the approach corridor. The approach from the gentler slope at the north side of the fort is made more difficult by the provision of two extra lines of stony banks or walls. There are no traces of houses within the fort but there is a small settlement of five round houses only 100m away to the east on low ground outside the fort, and there are remains of other round houses around the valley and within the better agricultural land on the slopes to the west. The lack of houses within the fort means it was probably created as a place of refuge and perhaps as a communal meeting place, rather than as a permanent settlement or as the centre of authority of a chief. There have been no excavations or chance finds from the fort to suggest a date for it but a date in the middle of the first millennium is likely. The next nearest defended site lies about 3km away to the south-west at Pen-y-dinas, and is a larger and rather different style of fort, probably of a later date and perhaps replacing Craig-y-dinas.

5. BYRLLYSG, DYFFRYN ARDUDWY SH 596241

From the A496 coast road just north of the centre of Dyffryn Ardudwy take the minor road up hill towards Cwm Nantcol. About a kilometre up the road is the entrance to Byrllysg Farm. Park here then walk along the track, which is also a public path. After a kilometre the path continues past the farmhouse, across the stream and up the hill, passing the fort after about 150m, on the left. The fort is on private land but the owner allows access to monument.

Distance: Round trip 2km (1.5 miles)

Difficulty: Easy

Time: 1 hour

This is an unusual fort in that although strongly defended it is not on a hill top but on an inland promontory between two stream valleys at an altitude of only 120m (400ft). It is approximately circular, 60m in diameter enclosing an area of about 0.25 ha (0.5 acre). In size and location then it is more like an enclosed settlement, but has significant defences. The main line of these consists of a large bank, probably the remains of a faced wall enhance by a steep natural scarp on the end of the promontory. The neck of the promontory, with an easier approach from higher land from the east has the additional defence of a massive bank thrown up from a ditch in front of it. The defences have been robbed and the interior entirely cleared for agricultural use associated with a former farmstead at the south-east side, possibly obscuring the original entrance and track to the fort, which are not visible elsewhere.

The fort is quite is quite similar to that of Pen-y-dinas, Tal-y-bont and both have been suggested to be of medieval date. The name Byrlysg has been interpreted as 'the Llys or court of Osber', a historical figure Osbrwn Wyddel who married an heiress of Cors-y-gedol estate, nearby. However, there are so far no finds to support this idea. A recent geophysical survey of the interior by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust did not identify any features in the interior, perhaps because of the agricultural clearance. In style the fort resembles a large version of one of the smaller Iron-Age and Romano-British homesteads that occur on the western slopes of Meirionnydd nearby.

6. BRYN CASTELL, LLANELLYD SH650204

Reached via a minor road that runs up hill for 2km from Bont Ddu on the A496 on the north side of the Mawddach estuary between Barmouth and Dolgellau. The minor road ends, where there is room to park and from which a footpath runs westward for 600m when a small prominent hill can be seen to the north, on which is the fort. Follow the west side of the field wall towards the fort. The fort is on private land but is open and the owner allows access to monument.

Distance: Return trip 1.75km (1.2 miles)

Difficulty: Part fairly steep climb over rough ground

Time: 2 hours

This is a small fort lies on a hill at 320m (1000ft) OD. It consists of a just a single wall enclosing an oval area of about 0.1ha (1/4 acre). The enclosure wall is now very low and badly eroded but there are traces of internal and external facing and the naturally defensive steep slopes of the hill on all sides gave the fort a strong position. The wall was thickened and slightly in turned at the east side creating a more easily defended corridor approached by a trackway running diagonally up the hillside. There is one possible house platform at the north end of the interior but the small size of the fort means it could never have held many people. Its small size, single-walled construction and minima evidence of settlement means it closely resembles several other small forts in the area, such as Moel Offrwm Lower, Moel Faner, Craig y Dinas and Craig y Castell and was perhaps primarily designed as a strongly defendable refuge.

7. BRYN Y CASTELL, LLAN FFESTINIOG SH 728429

From Llan Ffestiniog take B4391 towards Bala, at left turn immediately after passing under the railway bridge. After 2km (1.2 m) turn left at minor cross-road into gated lane. Leave car beyond waterworks at junction of tracks. Take track bearing right for 0.5km (1/3 m). Bryn y Castell is the small hill on the left and can be approached from the north side. This is all Access land.

Distance: Return trip 1km (0.65 mile)

Difficulty: Medium.

Time: 1 hour

This small defended hilltop was completely excavated from 1979-85 and the rampart and stone buildings in the interior have been partially reconstructed. The site produced remarkable evidence of iron-working carried out both within the fort and in a round hut later built outside on the northern slope.

The defences are relatively simple consisting of a stone rampart encircling the very top of the hill but the entrance must always have been rather awkward for bringing in heavy or bulky industrial materials. The original 2m-wide gate was near the north-east corner, but that was blocked early in the history of the occupation and a new one made 9m further west. The position of the gate-posts is now indicated by stones standing vertically in their post-holes.

The interior was crowded with buildings of varied construction. The most unexpected discoveries were two stake-wall round houses in the central area (indicated now by cobbling and the porch post-holes). Wooden houses of this type had not previously been recognised in Welsh hillforts, where stone huts were considered the norm. However, more careful excavation (for the stake-holes are extremely difficult to recognise) is likely to produce evidence of others.

The stone building in the north corner was originally a conventional round hut with a doorway facing south-east. Later the south wall was moved to create the unusual snail-like plan. This provided a draught for ventilation, and shade for smithing hearths along the east wall. The interior was full of smithing debris. A hut of this shape may be seen at Garn Boduan hillfort (Llŷn) and is also probably a smithy. Concentrations of iron-working debris and the remains of smelting furnaces were found at the south end of the fort and just outside the entrance, in the lee of the rampart.

Iron-working, both smelting And smithing, seems to have been the chief activity of the inhabitants at Bryn y Castell. They used bog-ores from the nearby peat-bogs and cut trees for charcoal to fuel their furnaces on a very large scale.

Radiocarbon and archaeo-magnetic dating show that the settlement was occupied from the late Iron Age until the coming of the Romans. The industry was re-established probably after a withdrawal of the local garrison in the 2nd century AD, but the hillfort was no longer occupied. Activity was centred instead at a building just outside. This was filled with slag and surrounded by dumps (including, on the west, a large stone anvil with smithing slag on its surface), suggesting intensive production, but perhaps over short period.

8. TAL Y GAREG, TYWYN SH 574036

From the Pont Dysynni on the A493 coast road 5km north of Tywyn take the minor road west for 2.5km toward the end of the promontory north of the Broadwater, where the road turns sharply. The road is narrow and confined and there is parking there for only one or two cars. A signed footpath leads diagonally east up the south side of the promontory. Where the path starts to level out head more steeply up the hill towards a stile that will be seen above. Do not cross the stile but double back west along the south side of the wall until the fort is reached. The north side of the fort adjoins the sheer cliffs of the quarry which are not well fenced off so care must be taken. This is private land but crossed by the public footpath.

Distance: Round trip 2.5km (1.5 miles)

Difficulty: Rough track and steep climb

Time: 1.5 hours

This is a fortification in an exhilarating position, fronting the sea and exposed to all the winds that blow! Its date is very uncertain, and it may have been occupied at more than one period.

The defences are built on the very top of the narrow ridge. They consist of two relatively low earth and stone banks enclosing a rectangular space about 45m long and 22m wide. At the seaward end there is a much stronger point – the base of a tower or small circular enclosure (10m in diameter) fronted by a rock-cut ditch now virtually filled with stone. If this stone comes from the collapse of the tower, it must have been quite high. Beyond the ditch is a curving bank with another deep rock-cut ditch beyond. This ditch is now right at the edge of the quarry – take care! The ring of concrete pegs on the tower once anchored a shipping signal.

9. CRAIG YR ADERYN HILLFORT, LLANFIHANGEL Y PENNANT SH643068

This fort lies on a small but spectacular hill overlooking the valley of the Afon Dysynni, 5km NE of Bryn Crug and 3km W of Abergynolwyn. Approached either from the A467 N of Corris or from the A493 coast road, N of Tywyn. There is a small car park by the roadside at the foot of the hill. Although the face of the hill is a sheer cliff, don't be put off, there is a relatively easy route around the back of the hill. The path is signed from the footpath along a farm track, then after about 500m the path diverges (unsigned) to the right more steeply up the hill away from the farm track and over Access land.

Distance: Return trip 4km (2.5 miles)

Difficulty: Medium. Steep climb but short and good path.

Time: 1.5 hours

The hill is named after and famous for the birds that nest upon it, particularly the cormorants, which rarely nest inland. These nest on the steep north face so are not disturbed by visitors. The fort occupies the summit at 239m OD (700ft), and has extensive views.

On the south side of the rocky summit is a slightly lower natural shelf and this was fortified in two phases, of an overall internal area of 0.8ha (2 acres). The first phase consisted of two lengths of large bank rampart set at a right angle enclosing a triangular area and making use of the natural cliff for defence on the other side. There was an entrance at the east side through an in-turned gap in the rampart, creating a defensible corridor. Although the ramparts are now much eroded there are traces of original stone facing.

The second phase consisted of the addition of another line of defences enclosing a larger area on the east side, which was most vulnerable to attack. This outer defence was more substantial than the first consisting of a massive stone wall, now collapsed. This was further strengthened by the addition of an outlying wall on the south and two banks on the east. All these created a deeply in-turned entrance corridor, approached up a considerable slope and so an easily defensible feature.

There is a level area behind the inner rampart that would be suitable for occupation but there is no evidence of huts there. However, in 1921 two possible platforms were visible in the south-east corner. Also, in the 19th century a local antiquary, W. Wynne Foulkes, excavated a 'cist' or hut at the fort. He found some Romano-British pottery, a perforated lead weight and a curved piece of lead, possibly part of an armlet.

The overall difficulty of access to the fort suggests that it was used as a refuge rather than a permanent settlement. Nevertheless the fort was constructed on a large scale and over more than one period. Despite the dramatic elevated position the actual altitude is not too great, and there are other forts at greater altitude that certainly contained settlements.

10 and 11. MOEL OFFRWM UPPER AND LOWER FORTS, LLANFACHRETH SH750210

These two forts can be visited together as they both lie on the hill of Moel Offrwm and are only about half a kilometre apart although one is on the summit at about 400m OD, while the other is on a lower spur at about 300m OD.

Park at the Precipice Walk car park, which is halfway between Dolgellau and Llanfachreth. From the car park cross to the east side of the road and follow the farm track there for 200m. Just before a gate an old track in the trees on the right hand side leads gently up the hill. This track can be followed around the foot of the hill until it meets a wall that leads steeply up the hill. Follow the wall directly up the hillside until just before the summit is reached the entrance to the upper fort will be seen on the right. After visiting the upper fort return to the wall and follow it down the hill to the south until below all the rocky scarps. A path then leads off on a lower terrace around the contour and the lower fort will soon be seen on a prominent rocky knoll. After visiting the lower fort keep on the same terrace where a path leads along the contour back to the north side of the hill, where a fairly steep descent on a grassy slope will take you back to the same track back to the car park. All this land belongs to the Nannau Estate. Until recently, when it became Access land, it had been little visited and there are no established footpaths. Care must be taken not to disturb grazing animals and dogs should not be taken.

Distance: Round trip 4km (3 miles).

Difficulty: Steep climb of 300m (1000ft) up the main hill. Rough ground, in places obstructed by bracken in summer. There are some steep scarps so it is important to keep to the recommended route.

Time: 3 hours

10. MOEL OFFRWM UPPER FORT – This encloses about half a hectare (1.25 acres). The steep sided hill provides a very good defensive position and the fort itself was defended by a single stone wall with the addition of an outer rampart on the south side which is less steep. The entrance is on the east side through the outer and inner ramparts. There were probably guard chambers on either side of the inner entrance but these have been obscured by the building of a sheepfold. The main wall is almost entirely collapsed down the steep slopes, the best preserved parts being on the south side. On the summit is a modern rectangular tower cairn which probably lies on top of a possibly prehistoric round burial cairn. From the summit another, smaller fort can be seen on the lower hill to the south-west, Moel Faner.

Although the fort was in a very high and isolated position the fort was certainly well-occupied because within it are platforms for about 40 roundhouses. On the south side there is also a subsidiary enclosure somewhat larger in area than the main for itself. It lies on a slight promontory there and was defended by a single bank and ditch. This enclosure has no house platforms and so was perhaps designed to corral and protect cattle or sheep.

11. MOEL OFFRWM LOWER FORT – This fort is quite different to the Upper Fort. It is small, of only 0.2 hectare (0.5 acre) internal area and is built on a small but very prominent rocky knoll which provided little room for settlement but is surrounded by sheer, easily defendable cliffs. In addition to the natural defences, which were sufficient in themselves there is a massively built wall, mainly around the south side. Traces of internal and external facing can be seen and the wall must have been of a considerable height. The original entrance was probably narrower than the present gap suggests. Much of the interior is taken up by a natural outcrop. The only level area is a small ledge at the west side, where there was a single roundhouse about 6m diameter. Some excavations were carried out at the fort in 1926-8. A bronze finger ring was found in the rubble of the rampart wall and some pieces of pottery within the fort that were thought to be of Roman-British date.

The difference between these two forts is significant. The upper fort is a classic Iron Age type, being a defended communal settlement. The lower fort was defensively very strong but could never have accommodated more than a handful of people and is similar to early forms of castle such as those of the Welsh Princes and of the Normans. Similar small fortified areas, sometimes called 'citadels' seem to have been built within a number of Iron Age hillforts sometime after the end of the Roman period. This is taken to indicate the development of new centres of authority, dependent on individual leadership but still focussed on the earlier hillforts and their associated communities.

12. MOEL FANER, LLANELLYD SH733205

On a prominent hill top around which is the well-known scenic 'Precipice Walk'. Park at the Precipice Walk car park halfway between Dolgellau and Llanfachreth. Leave the car

park and follow the signs to the Precipice Walk; take the eastern part of the walk alongside Llyn Cynwch and after leaving the south end of the lake an area of open ground is reached just below the hill summit. Here traverse upwards to the north side of the hill. Parts of the Precipice walk are a private but Permissive path but the hill on which the fort lies is all Access land.

Distance: Return trip 4km (3 miles)

Difficulty: Easy approach but steep climb over rough ground to hill top

Time: 2 hours

The fort lies on the rounded promontory that forms the south end of the ridge at a height of 290m (950ft). The medium slopes of the hill are not naturally strongly defensive but there are extensive views over the Mawddach valley and hills beyond. The fort is quite small, of only 0.2ha (0.5 acre) defended by a single wall, which is now been badly trampled was originally probably about 2m high. The slopes of the hill add some defensive value. No walls or platforms of round houses can be seen within the fort but there are some level areas where there may have been houses. There are several modern climbers' shelters and cairns. The entrance to the fort is at the NE end at this point the enclosure wall is wider and so probably higher and stronger. There is also a slight outwork of a ditch and mound next to the entrance, which may have been designed to narrow any approach, so making the entrance easier to defend.

13. CASTELL Y GAER, LLWYNGWRIL NGR SH 592090

On a hill immediately south of Llwyngwril (on A493 road 17km (11 miles) south-west of Dolgellau. From north, take 2nd turning left after bridge (steep road) between church and war memorial). Site is on right shortly beyond end of walls. The fort is on private land but the owner allows access to monument.

Distance: Return trip 200m (220yds)

Difficulty: Easy

Time: 45 min

This is a small fort on a spur overlooking the sea. It is very similar in size, design and situation to fort Caer Bach in the Conwy valley. They both use a combination of stone and earth defences, but it is difficult to tell whether or not the two systems are contemporary.

The stone rampart originally surrounded the flat top of the hill completely, but almost all of it has been removed from the west and north sides. ON the south and east enough survives to show that it was about 4m thick with a simple entrance at the south-east corner.

The outer defences exist only on the south, where two ditches with a high bank between them cut off the promontory from the rising ground behind. The distance from the top of the bank to the bottom of the ditch is about 3.5m. The bank ends with a slightly out-turned bastion on the east side, where a path curves in to enter the fort by the gate through the stone rampart. The northern side may have been slightly steepened by an artificial scarp, but the bank and ditches do not continue around it.

No excavation has been carried out to date the sequence which is implied by the different types of defence, but which is not proven because both circuits use the same entrance.

14. CAER EUNI, LLANDDERFEL **SJ 00040412**

From Bala, take A494 NE for 7km (4.5 miles) and turn left at Bethel onto narrow road and continue along contour for 3.5km (2 miles) to complex junction at Tyn y Bwlch. If coming from the A5, turn west at Maerdy onto narrow road opposite Goat Hotel. From Tyn y Bwlch turn sharp left (signed Cwm Main); continue for 1km (0.75 mile) past No Through Road sign. Park where road bears right and is gated; follow fence to left directly up the hill or follow path ahead then walk back along the ridge to enter fort at SW end. This is all Access land but use only the paths and stiles provided. Bracken can be a problem in high summer.

Distance: 1.25km (0.75 mile)

Difficulty: Easy

Time: 1.5 hours

This long narrow fort is of interest because of the surface evidence of enlargement, the existence of vitrified stone in its south-west rampart, and for its superb views.

It is built in a naturally defensive position, with steep, unbroken slope to the valley floor on the south-east. The original fort ran from the north-east tip to the highest point of the ridge – a narrow, triangular enclosure with a curving south-west bank and an awkward entrance in the apex, with perhaps three gateways in line one behind the other. The south-east side needed little extra defence; on the other there were two banks, essentially scarps, with a small ditch between.

The curvature of the south-west end is the clue to the enlargement of the fort, for the smooth line of the extension is broken where the original incurve began. This can be on the ground quite easily on the south-east side, and on aerial photographs it is very obvious; even the line of the demolished rampart across the hill can be made out.

The added defences on the south-west are much more substantial than the original ones, largely because the hill became less steep here. The most notable feature is a deep rock-cut ditch fronting a higher and stonier rampart with its own counterscarp bank. No new entrance was provided, which must have made life difficult for the inhabitants, for access to the north entrance is awkward, even for friendly visitors! The present gap in the western defences is modern, though a little further south is an original uncut section of ditch, perhaps an informal crossing point.

Vitrified stones, presumably fallen from the rampart above, have been found in the ditch on the north-west corner. Vitrification of stone normally arises from the burning of a timber-laced rampart (a stone wall braced by a timber framework) but only excavation could confirm the presence of this feature. It is an aspect of military design which was thought to be restricted to a certain period and to certain groups, possibly with Scottish connections, but this has not been convincingly demonstrated.

Patches of dark vegetation can be seen in the fort on aerial photographs, and sometimes on the ground. These may mark sub-surface features, probably round house sites. No finds have been reported from the site, although the interior has been cultivated at some period, for cultivation ridges can be seen on the summit in suitable lighting conditions.

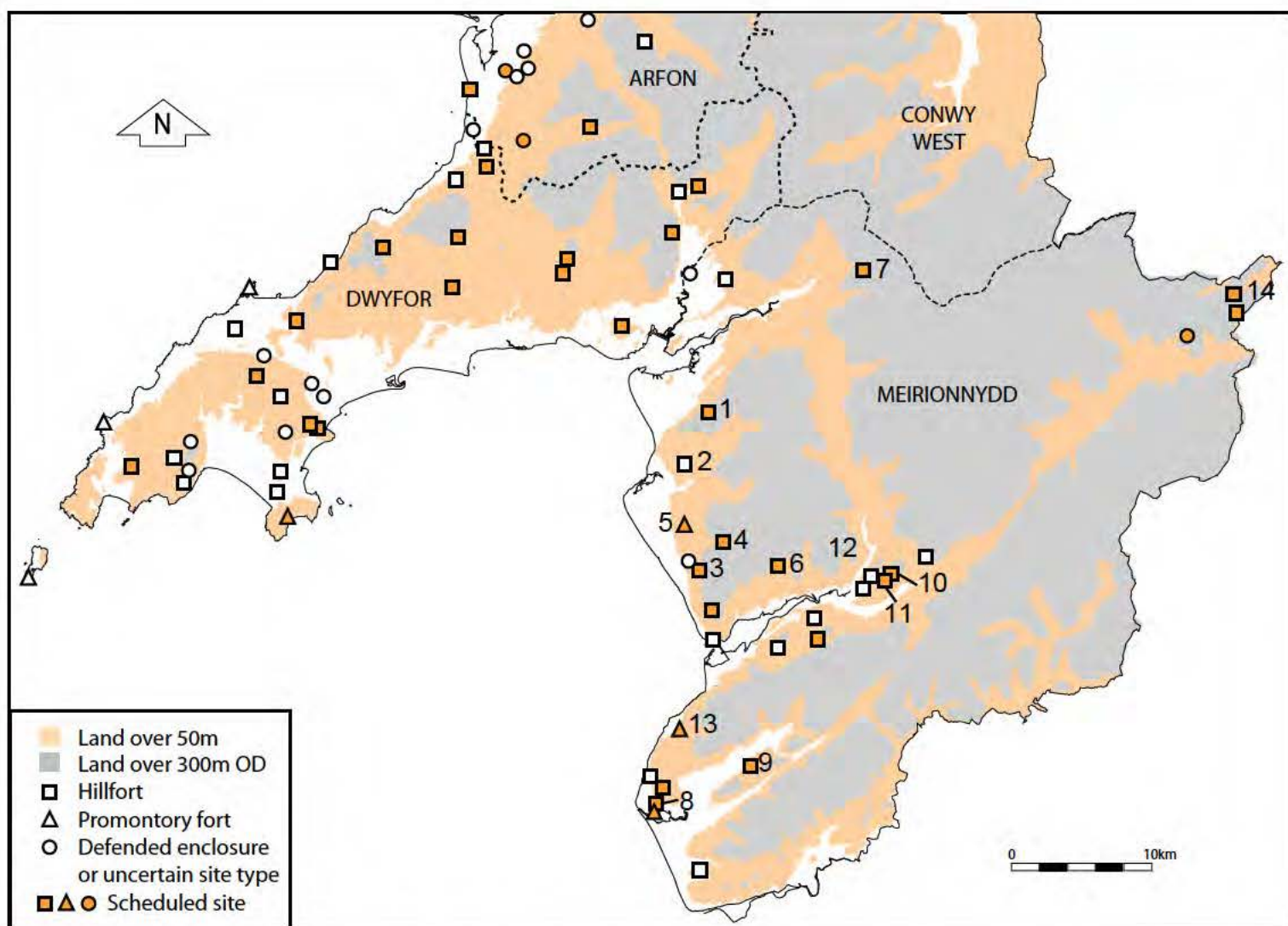
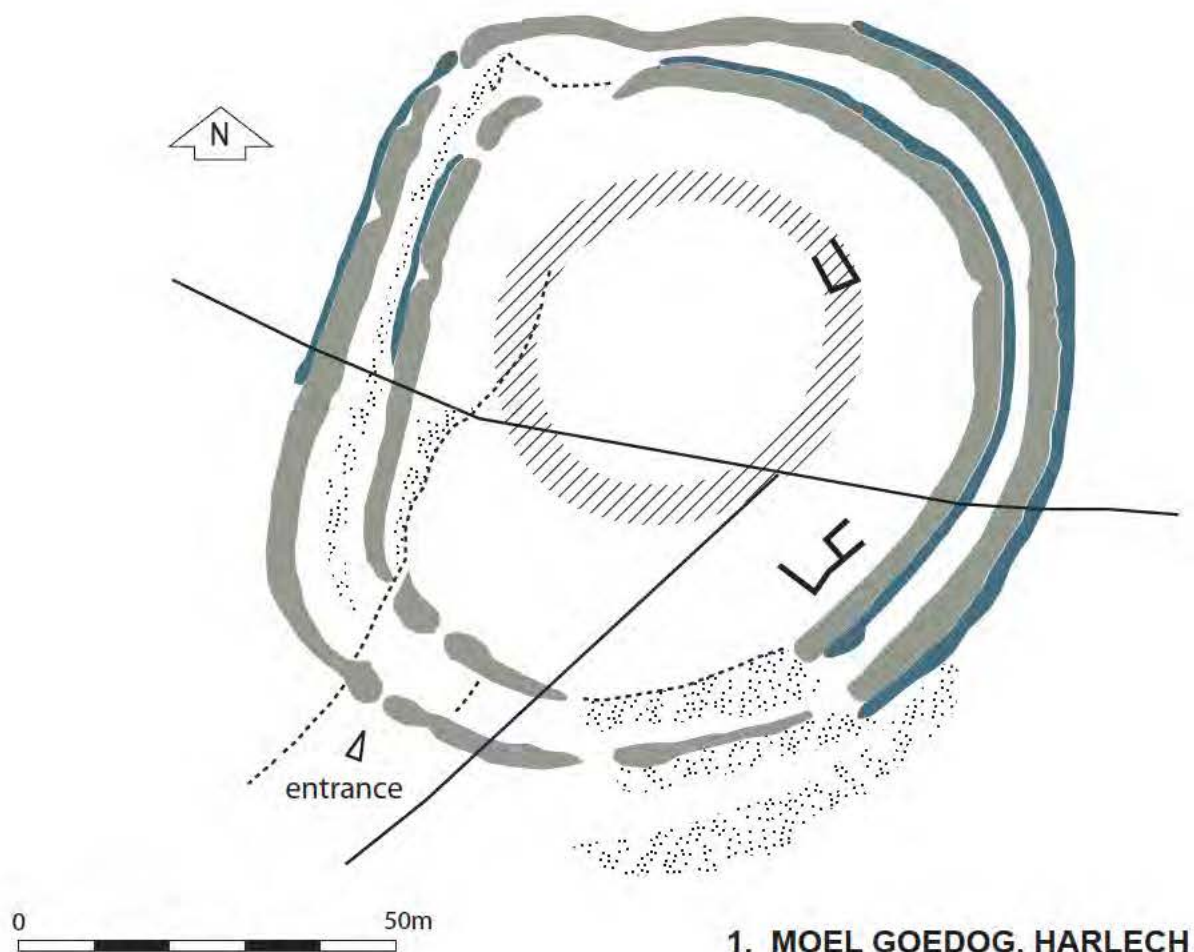







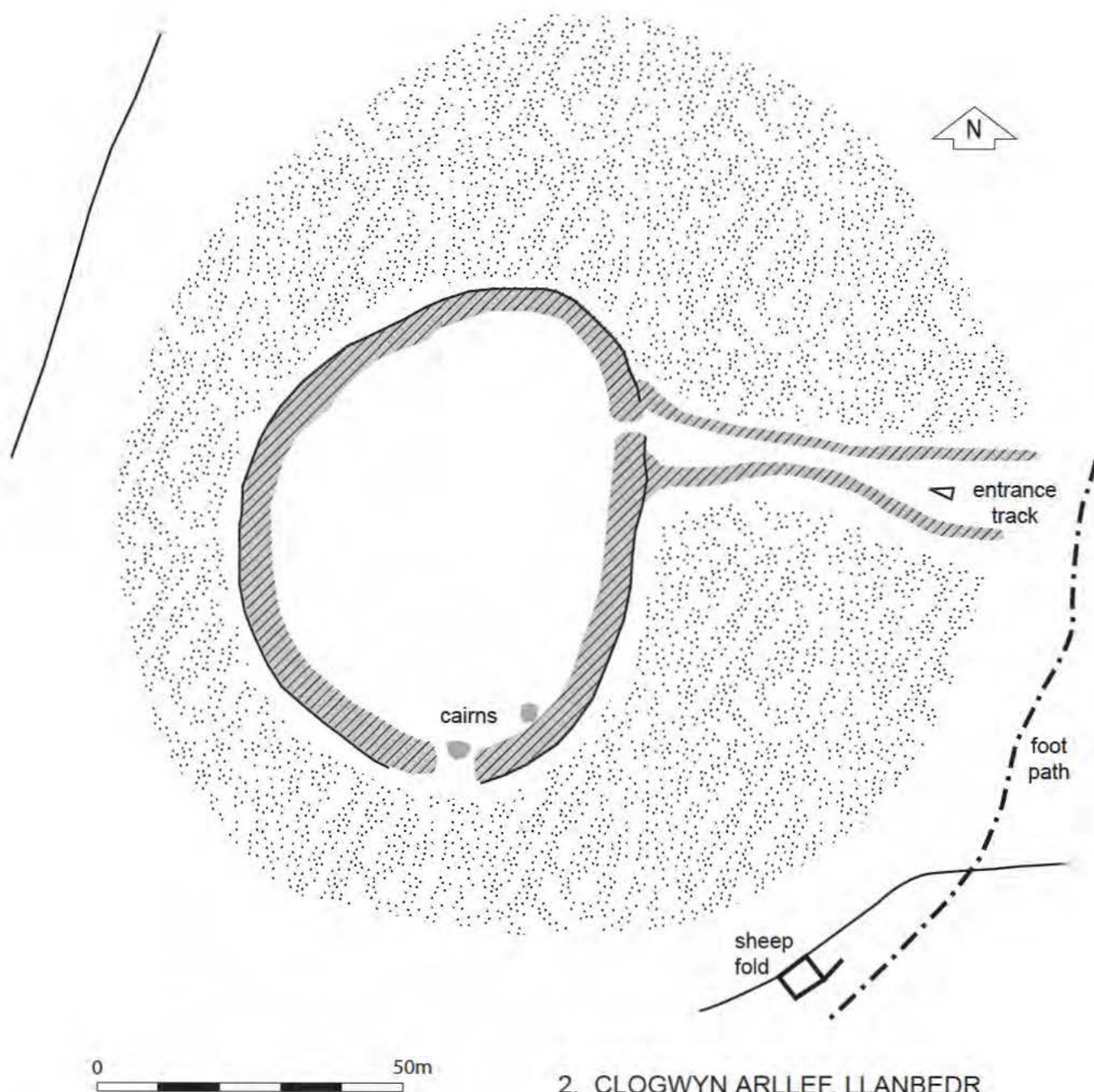


Fig. 1 Hillforts in Dwyfor and Meirionnydd
1-14: Forts described in guide




1. MOEL GOEDOG, HARLECH


- | | | | |
|---|-------------|---|----------------------------|
|  | bank |  | possible earlier enclosure |
|  | ditch |  | later features |
|  | scarp edge |  | present day field wall |
|  | scarp slope | | |




2. CLOGWYN ARLLEF, LLANBEDR

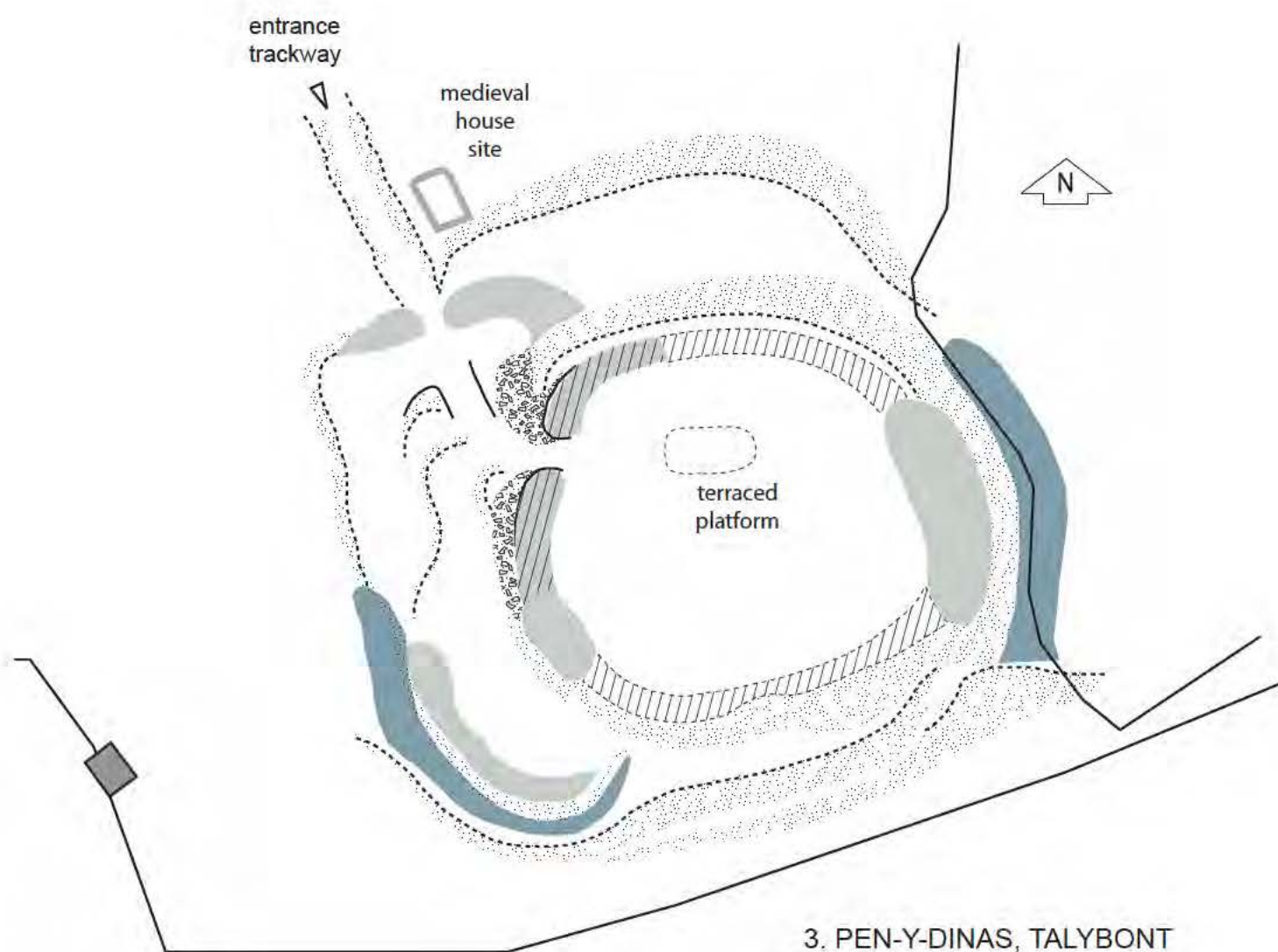
 wall with facing

 wall


 scarp slope

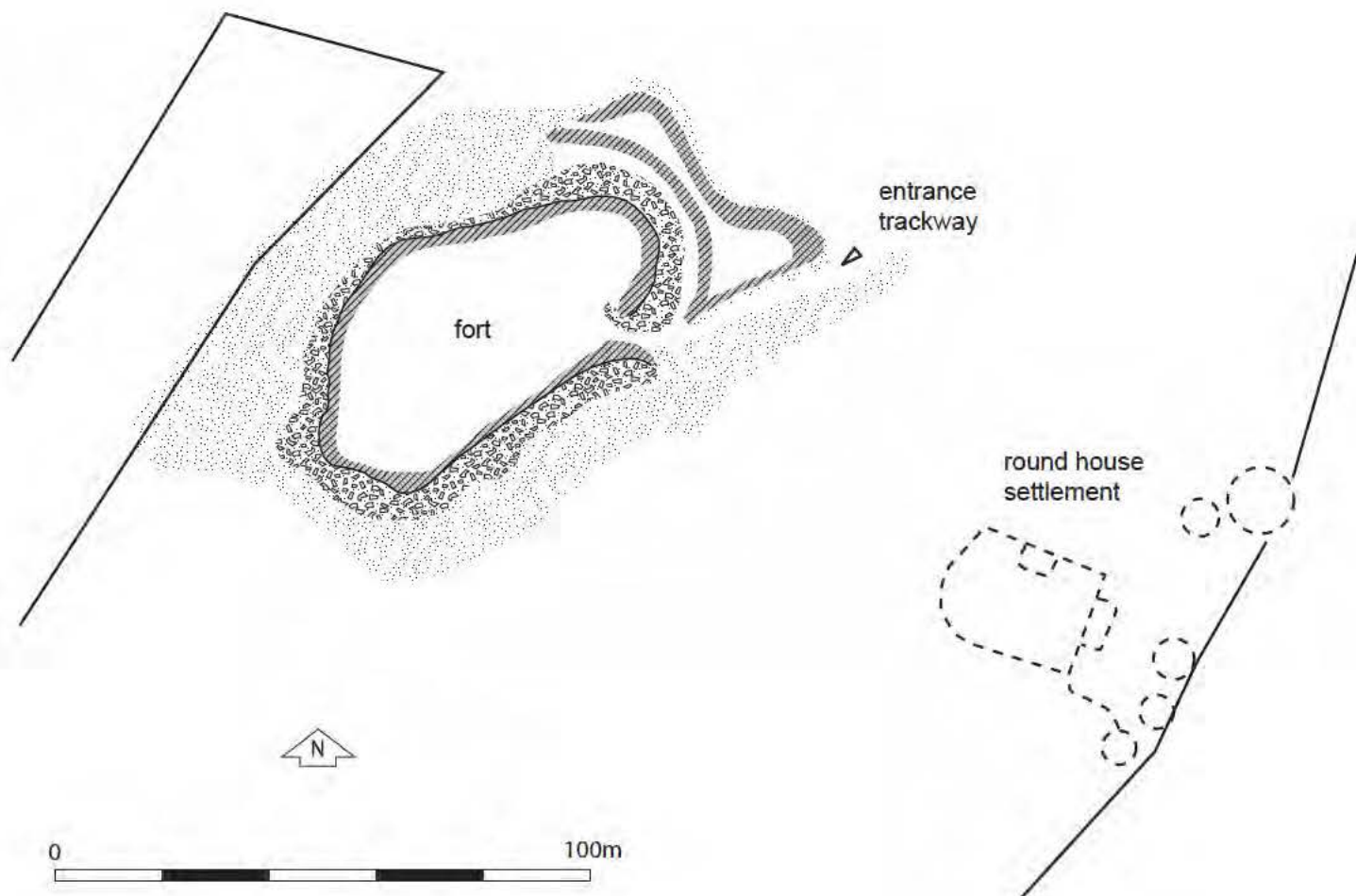
 later features

 present day field wall

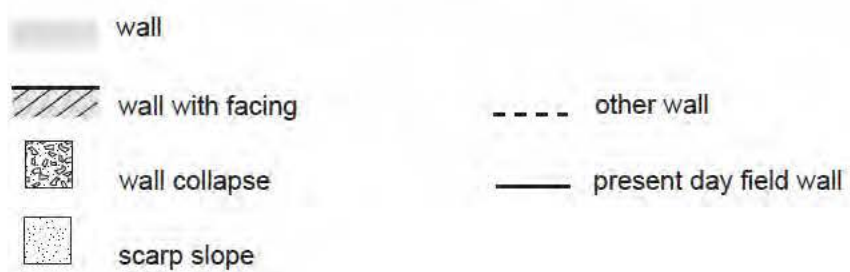


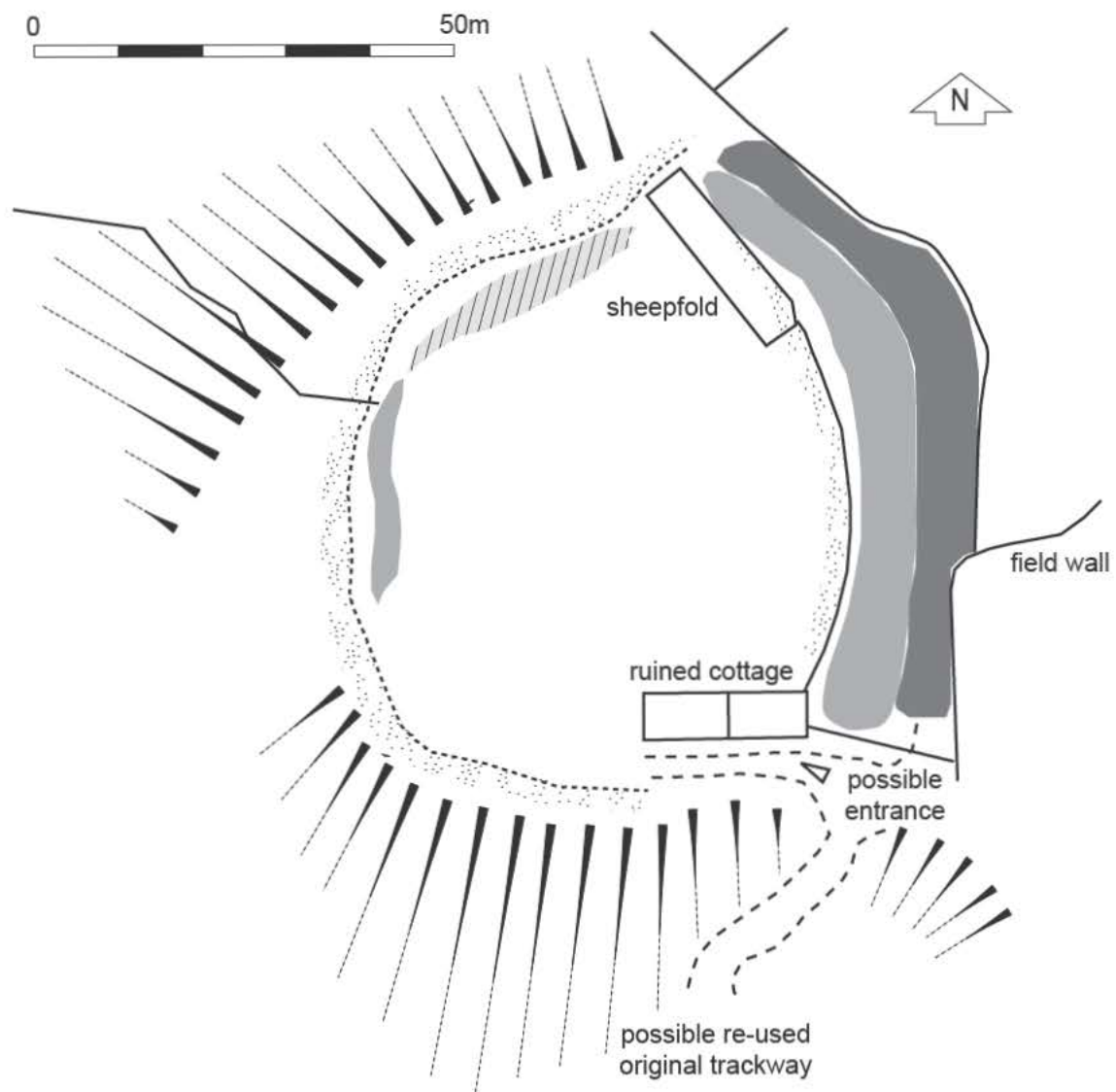
0 50m

- | | | | | | |
|---|------------------|---|-------------|---|------------------------|
|  | wall with facing |  | robbed wall |  | scarp edge |
|  | wall collapse |  | bank |  | scarp slope |
| | |  | ditch |  | present day field wall |



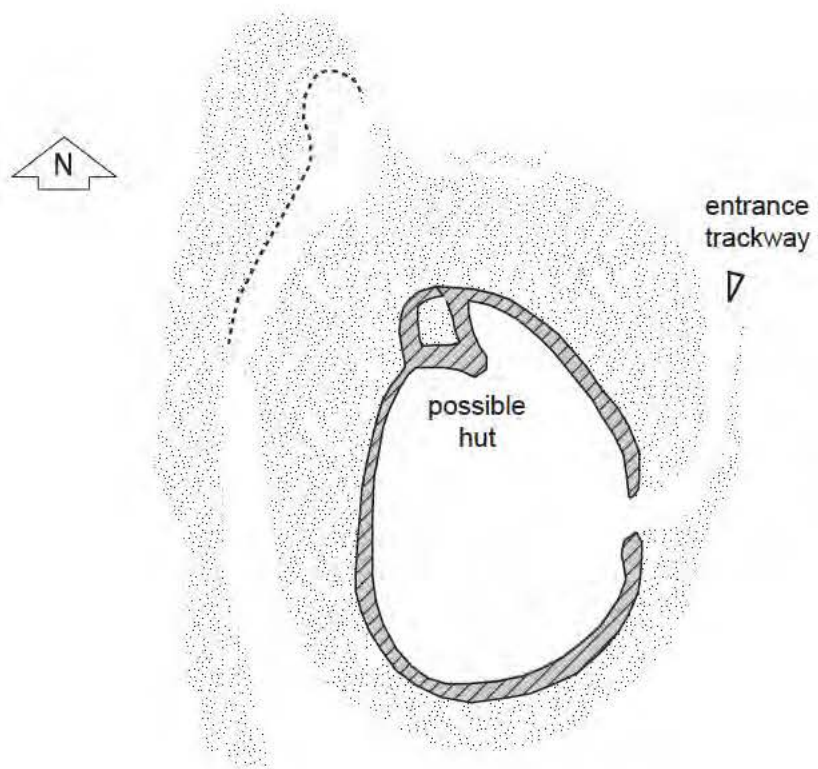
4. CRAIG Y DINAS, DYFFRYN ARDUDWY





5. BYRLLYSG, DYFFRYN ARDUDWY


- | | | | |
|---|-------------------|---|-------------|
|  | stony wall / bank |  | scarp slope |
|  | quarry ditch |  | scarp edge |




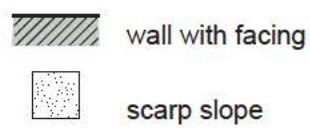
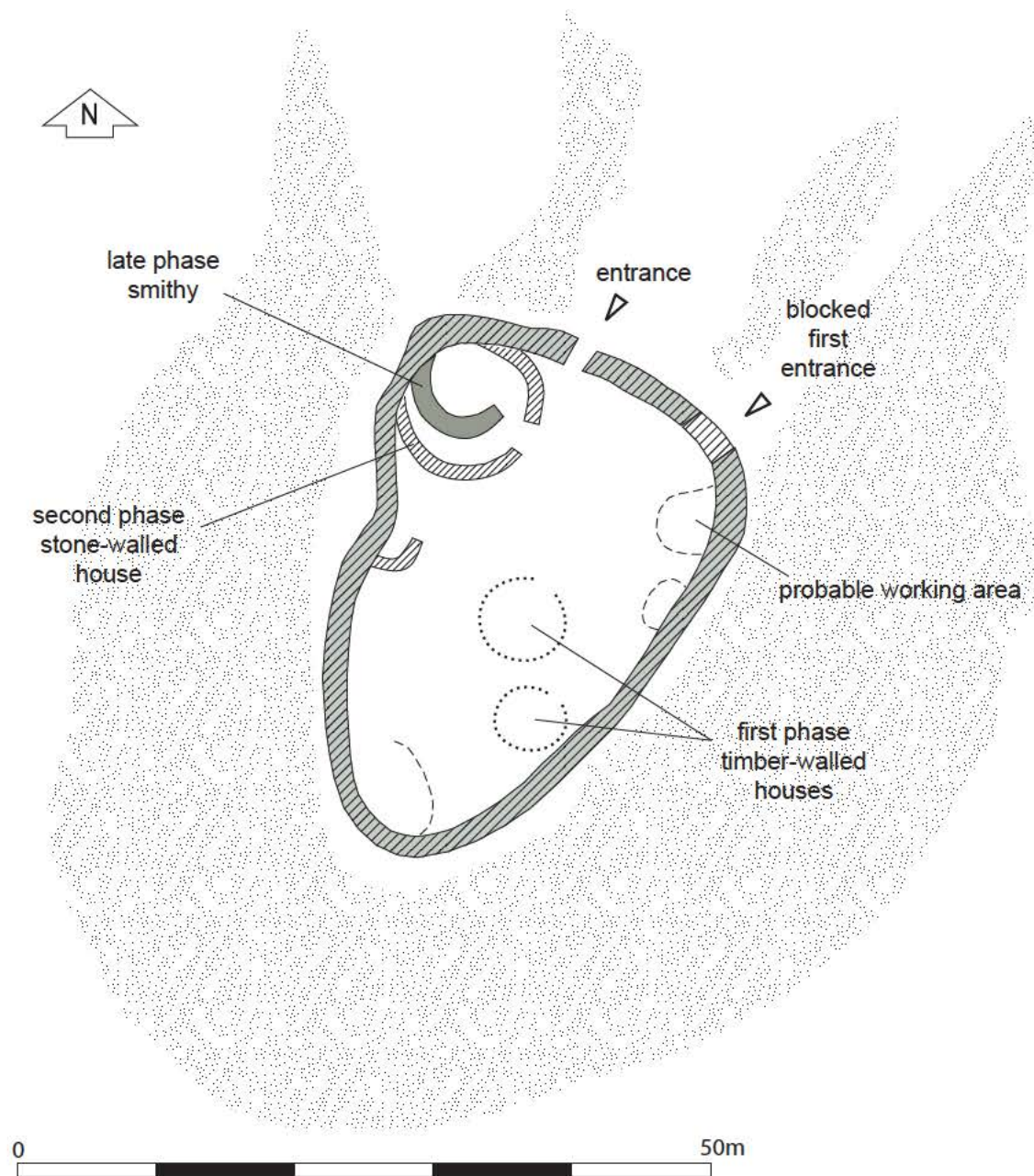
0 50m

6. BRYN CASTELL, LLANELLYD

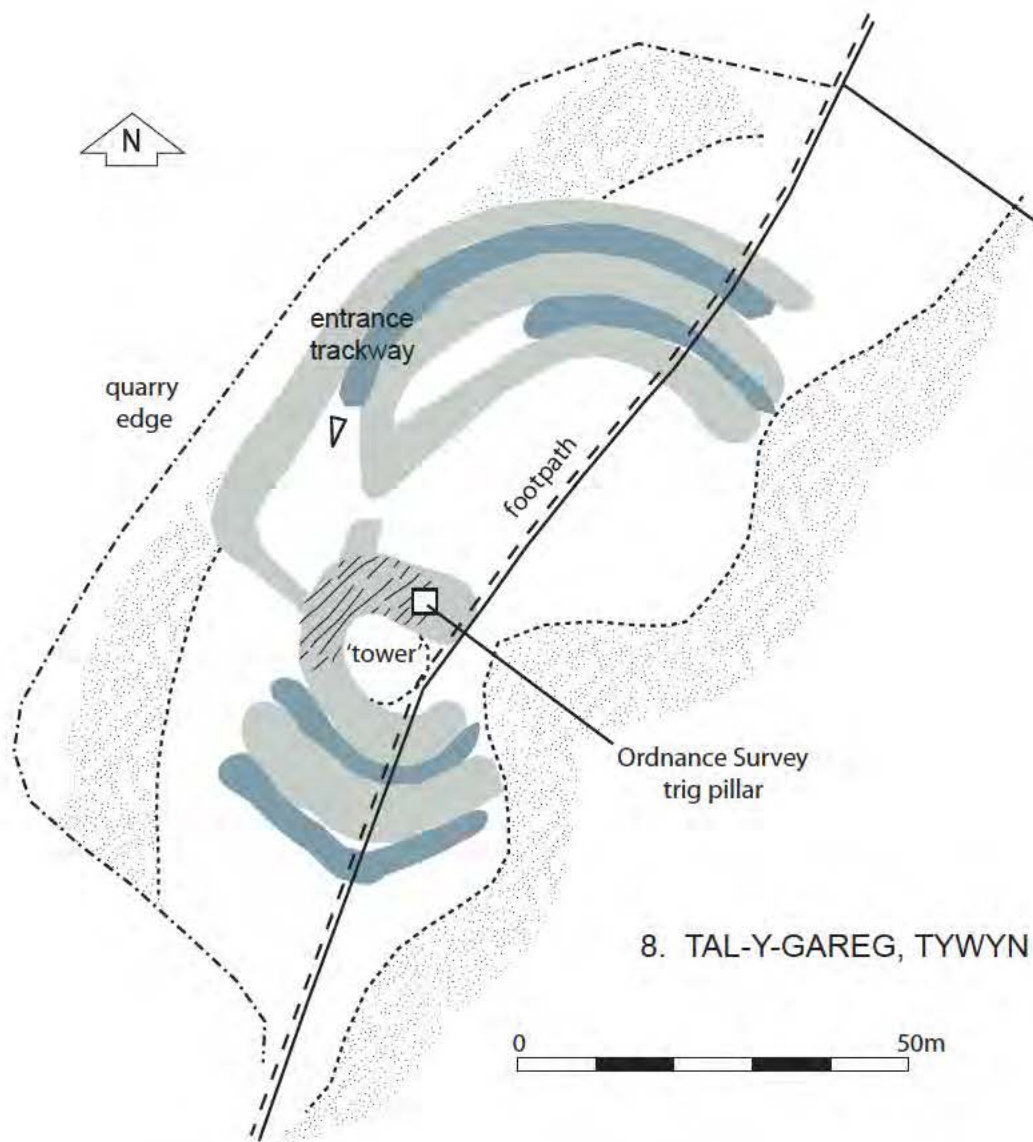
 wall with facing

 scarp slope

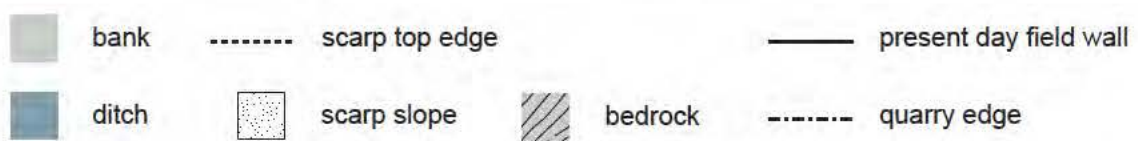
 scarp edge

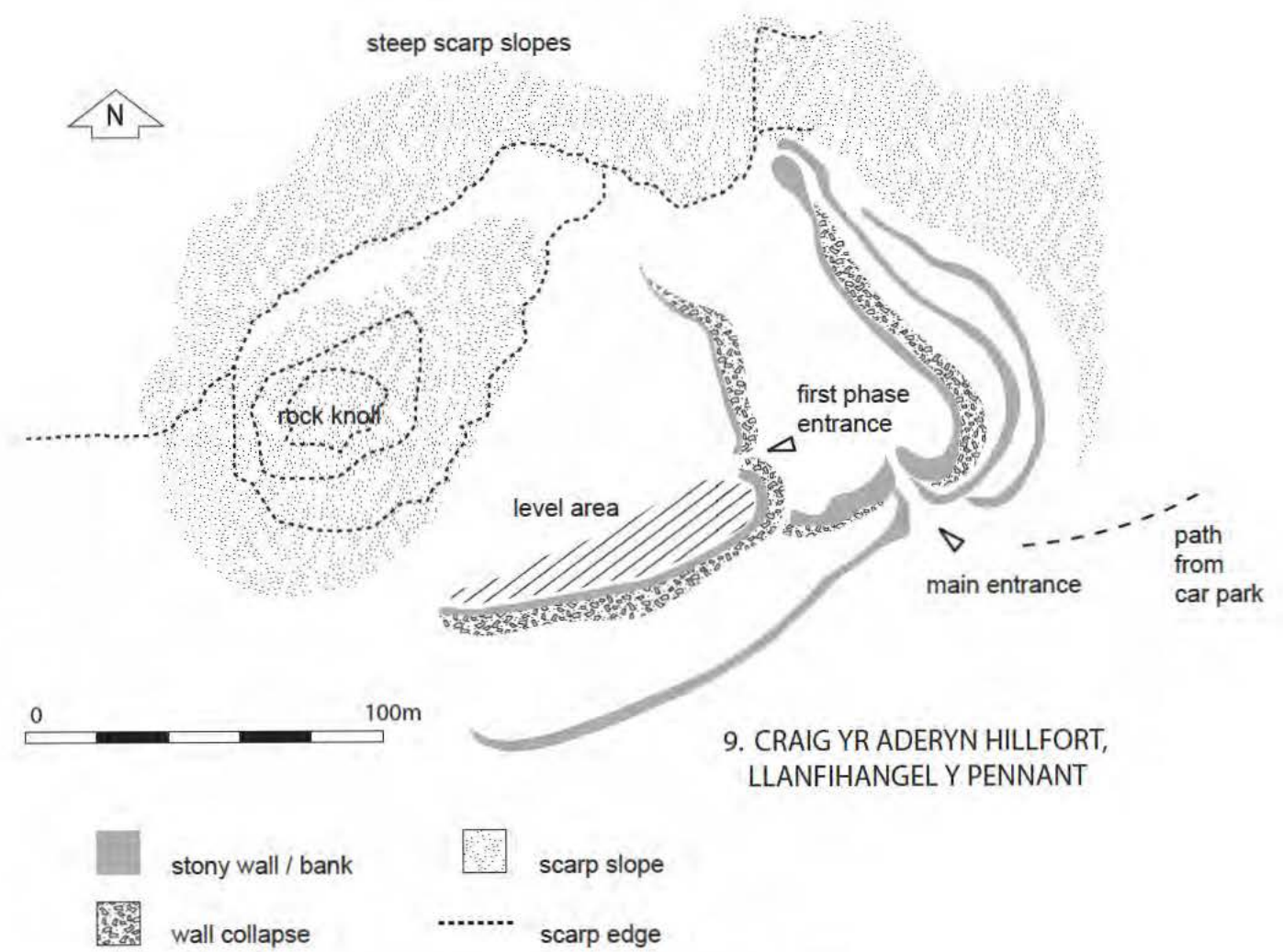


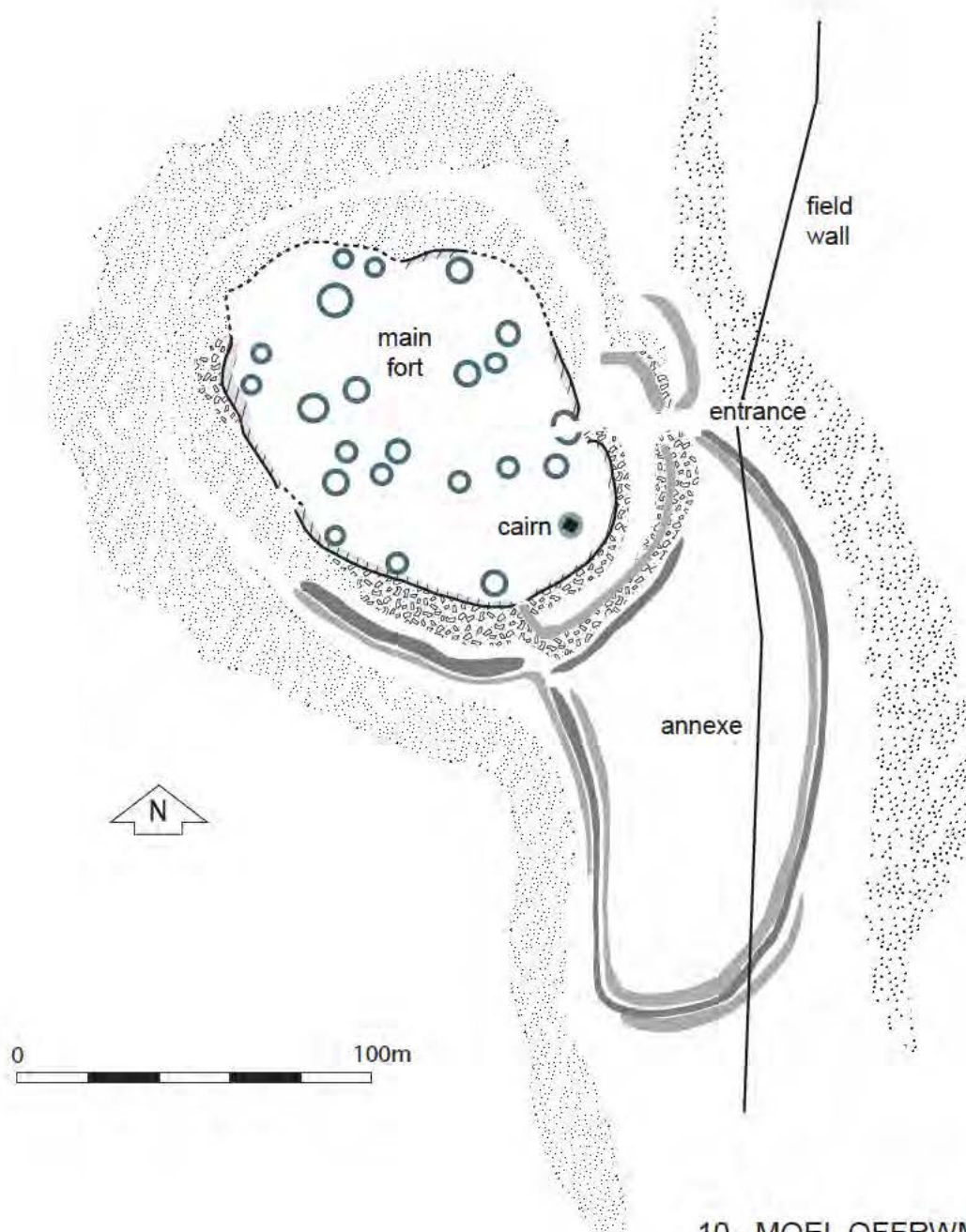
7. BRYN Y CASTELL, LLAN FFESTINIOG










8. TAL-Y-GAREG, TYWYN

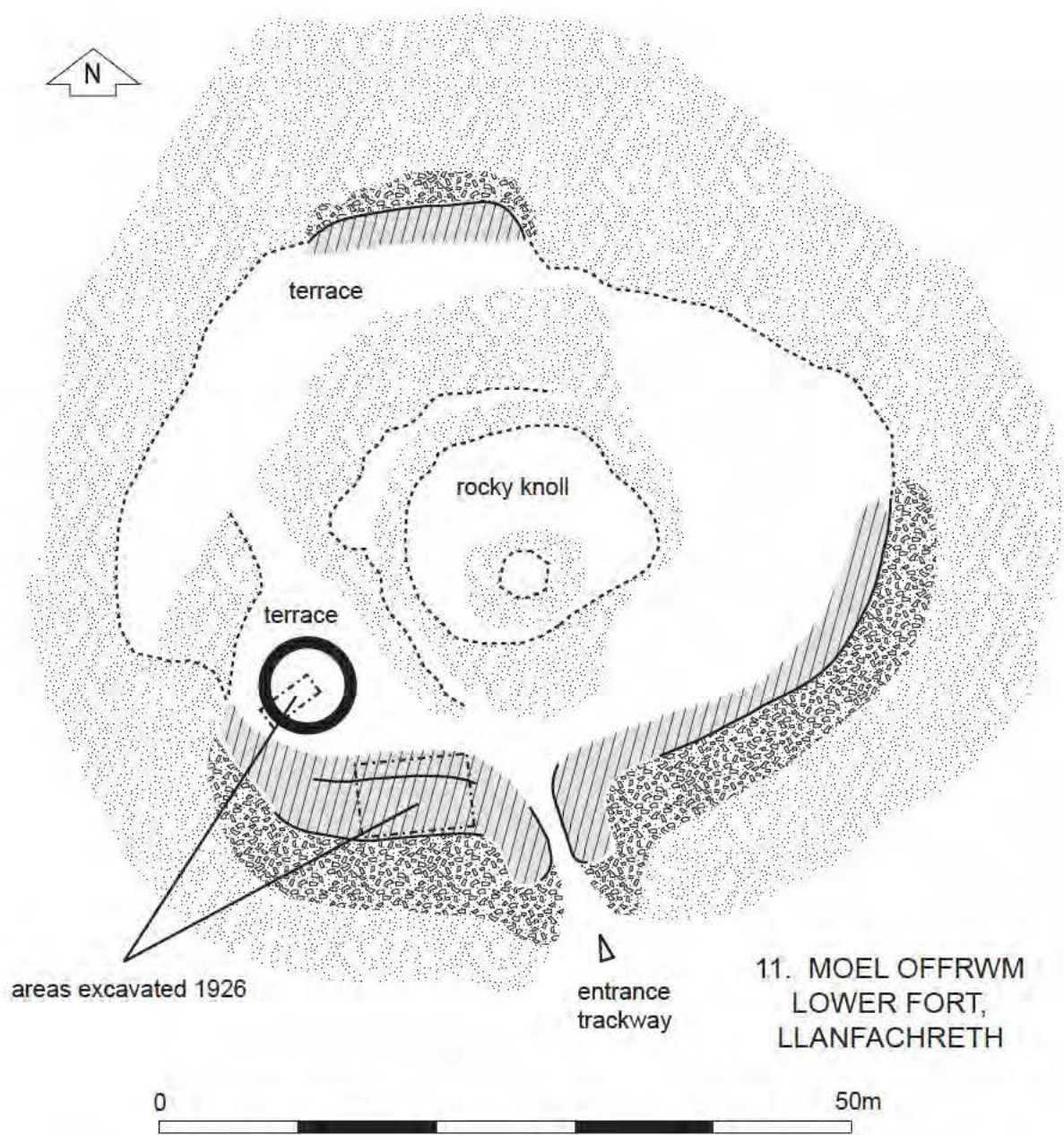








10. MOEL OFFRWM,
LLANFACHRETH


- | | | | | | |
|---|-------------------|---|---------------------|---|-------------|
|  | wall with facing |  | quarry ditch |  | scarp slope |
|  | wall collapse |  | roundhouse platform |  | scarp edge |
|  | stony wall / bank | | | | |




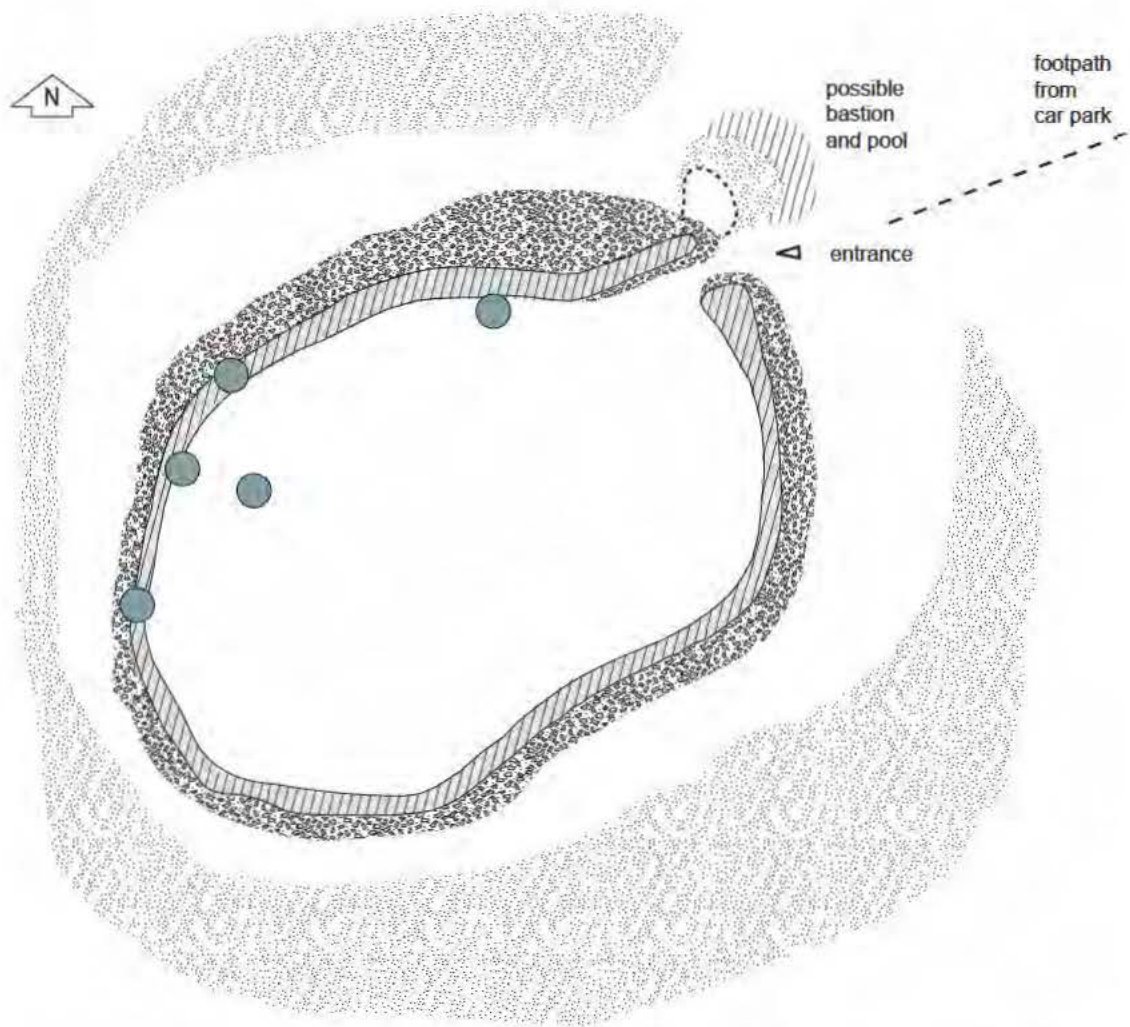
 wall with facing

 wall collapse

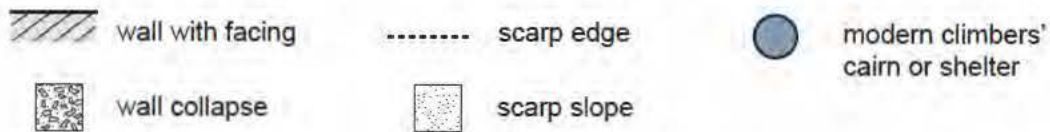
 roundhouse platform

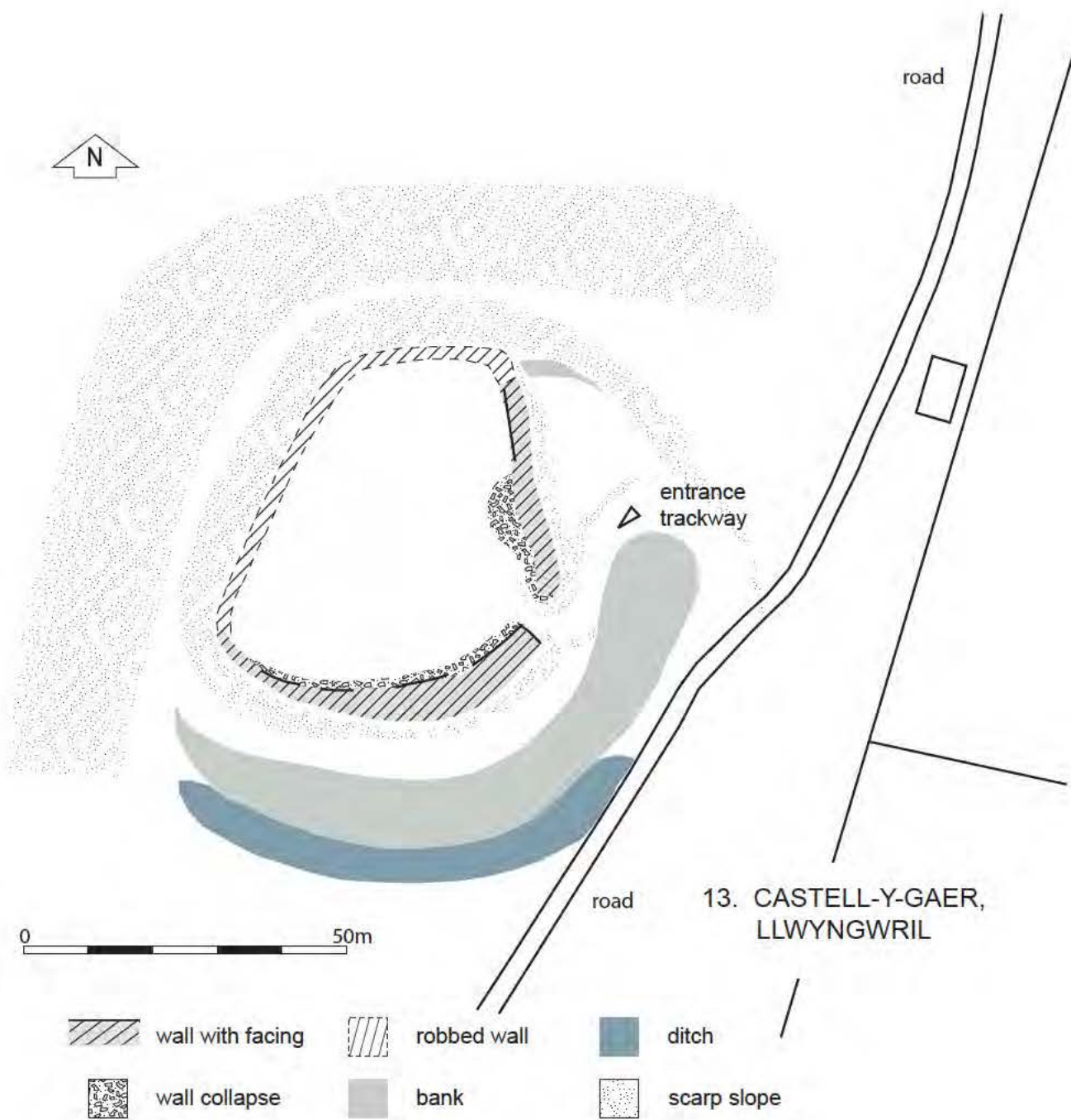
 scarp edge

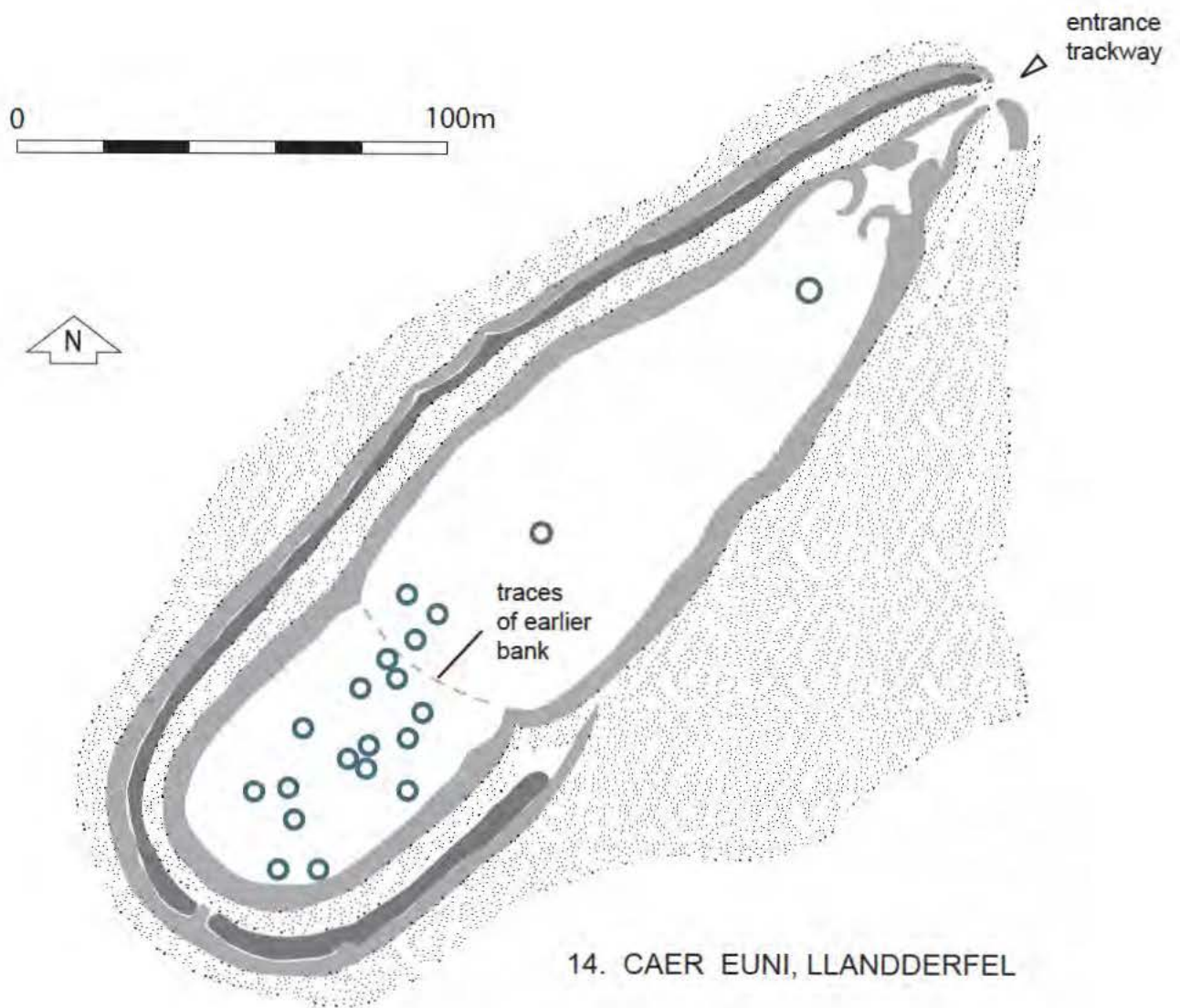
 scarp slope



12. MOEL FANER HILLFORT LLANELLTID



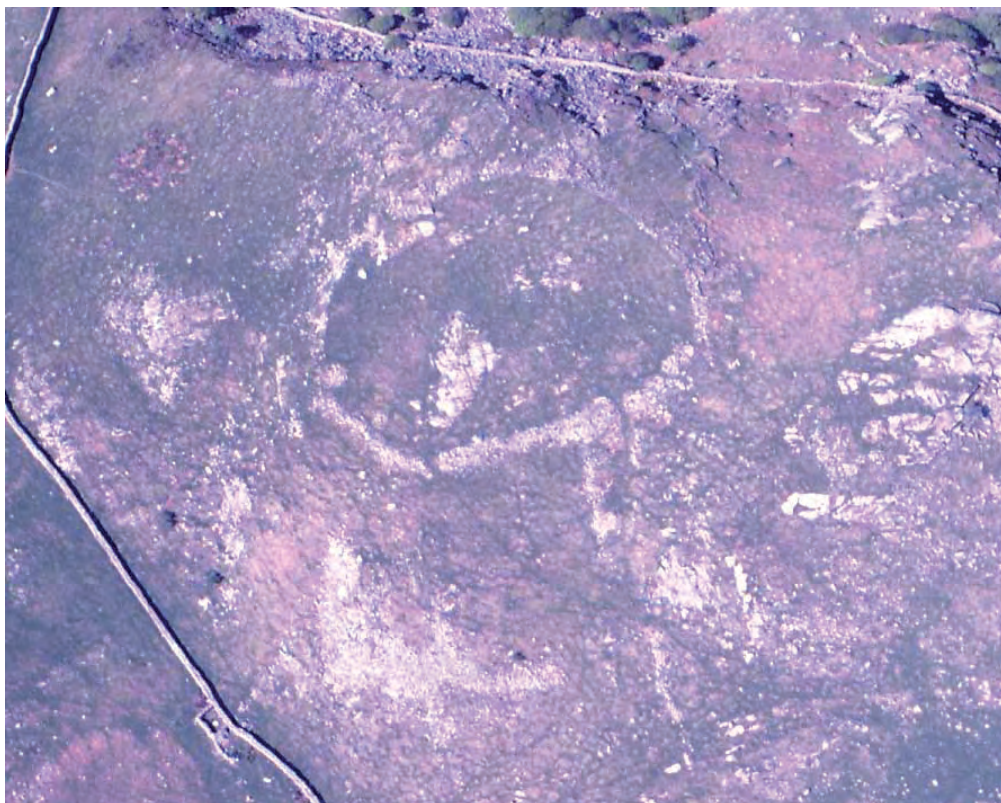




- | | | | |
|---|-------------------|---|---------------------|
|  | stony wall / bank |  | scarp slope |
|  | quarry ditch |  | roundhouse platform |



1. MOEL GOEDOG, HARLECH



2. CLOGWYN ARLLEF, LLANBEDR



3. PEN-Y-DINAS, TALYBONT
Showing wall-facing near entrance



4. CRAIG-Y-DINAS, DYFFRYN ARDUDWY



5. BYRLLYSG, DYFFRYN ARDUDWY



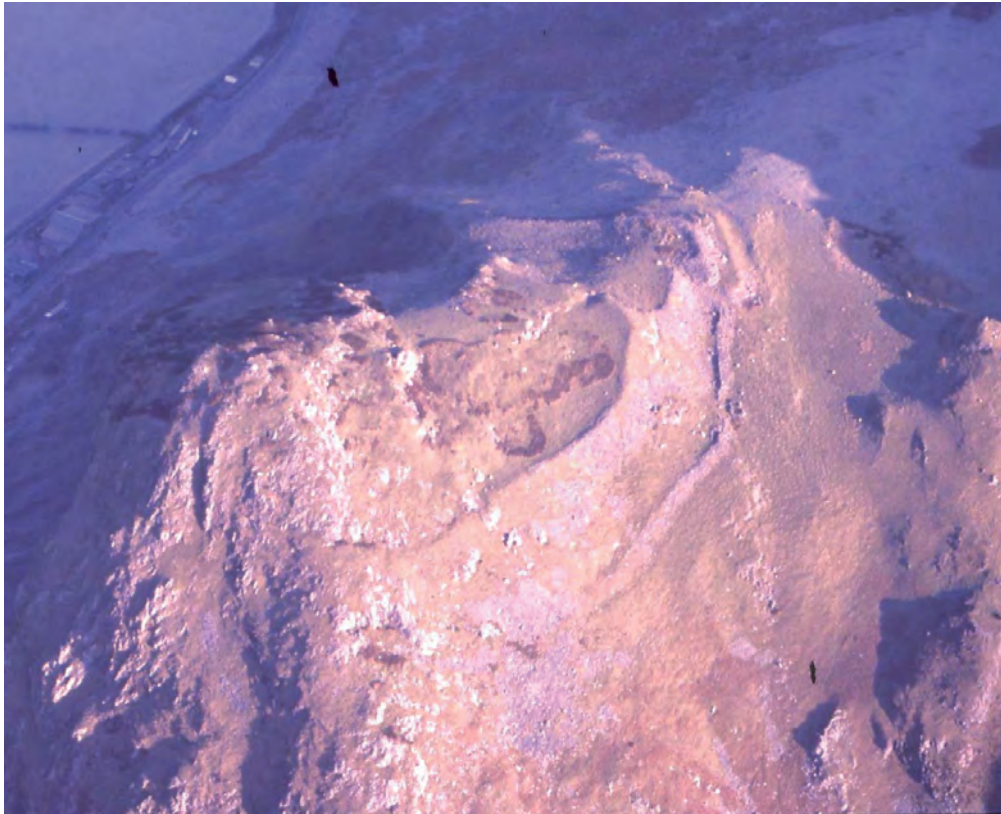
6. BRYN CASTELL, LLANELLYD



7. BRYN Y CASTELL, LLAN FFESTINIOG



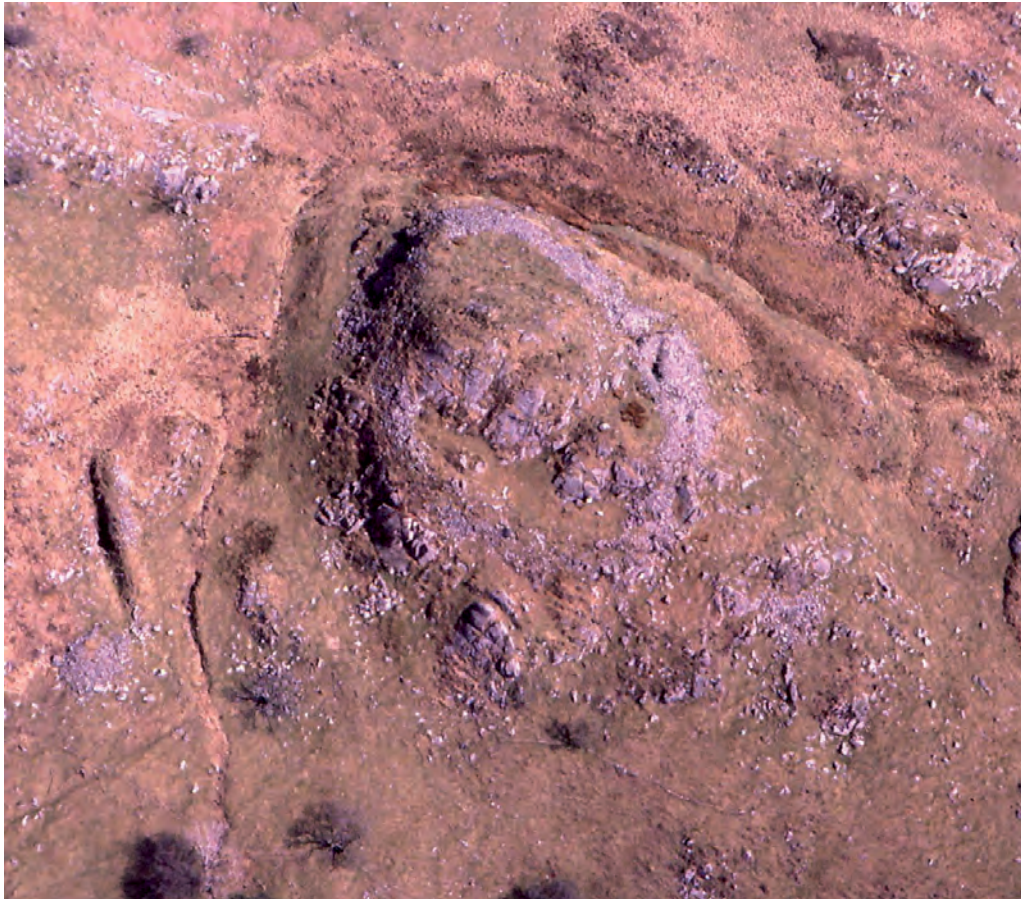
8 TAL-Y-GAREG, TYWYN



9. CRAIG YR ADERYN HILLFORT,
LLANFIHANGEL Y PENNANT



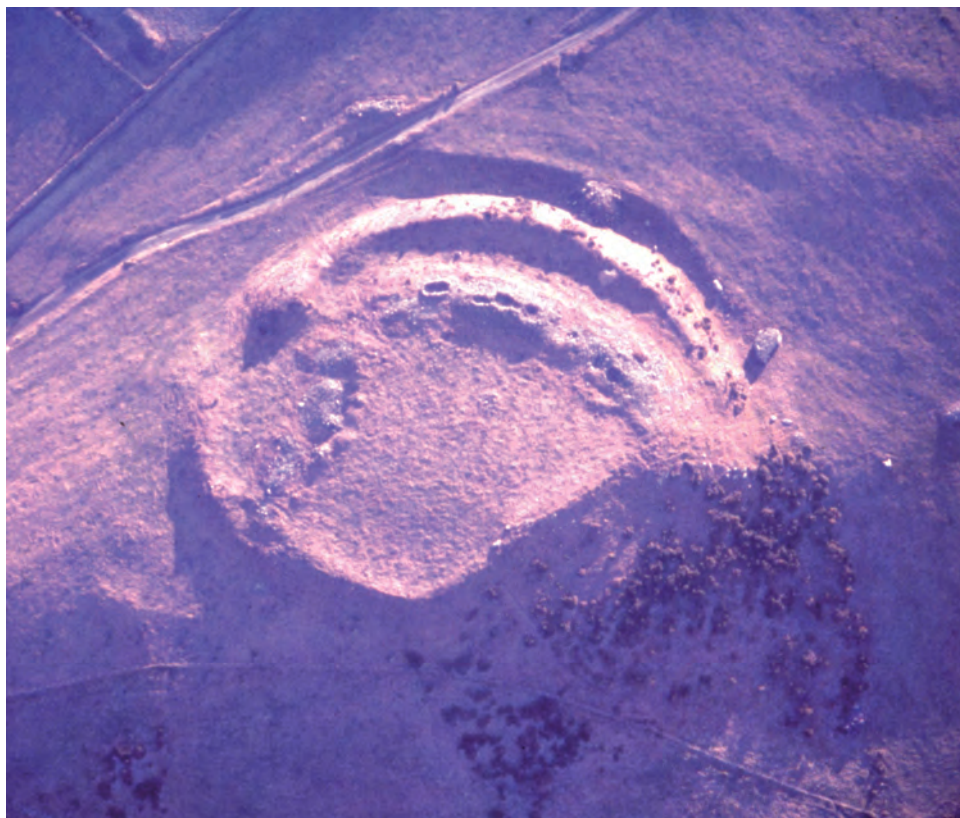
10. MOEL OFFRWM UPPER FORT,
LLANFACHRETH



11. MOEL OFFRWM LOWER FORT,
LLANFACHRETH



12. MOEL FANER HILLFORT,
LLANELLTID



13. CASTELL-Y-GAER,
LLWYNGWRIL



14. CAER EUNI,
LLANDDERFEL



YMDDIRIEDOLAETH
ARCHAEOLEGOL
GWYNEDD



GWYNEDD
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
TRUST

Craig Beuno, Ffordd y Garth, Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 2RT Ffon/Tel 01248 352535 Ffacs/Fax 01248 370925
e-mail: gat@heneb.co.uk web site: www.heneb.co.uk