

EXCAVATION OF A BRONZE AGE ROUND BARROW (PRN 55928) AT PANT Y BUTLER, LLANGOEDMOR, CEREDIGION, 2010



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Gan / By

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SUMMARY

2009

Two round barrows were sample excavated in 2009, following geophysical survey in the previous year. Very little survived of the smaller of the two barrows PRN 55929, although a central grave was located and excavated. This contained a cremation burial with no grave goods. It is likely that this grave had disturbed an earlier burial as burnt bone, charcoal and sherds of a presumed Bronze Age urn were scattered in and over it. What little survived of this barrow suggests that it was a cairn rather than an earthen mound. The larger barrow PRN 55928 survived up to 0.5m high and was approximately 15-18m in diameter. It appeared to be built of earth, mainly turf, and some stone. A possible grave cut was located on the very last day of work and was not excavated.

2010

Following the sample excavation in 2009 a much larger area was opened across barrow PRN 55928. The barrow mound was found to be approximately 11m in diameter bounded by a large stone kerb and constructed upon a buried turf horizon. Beneath the mound, lying on the buried turf, were deposits of burnt material including at least 2 burnt wooden planks. Surrounding the barrow mound was a nearly concentric low turf bank with an approximate diameter of 15m. It is possible that this outer bank was contemporary with the mound and that a 3m wide berm separated them. Through the earth and stone mound a rectangular grave cut had been excavated. The grave cut was lined by quartz stone blocks and contained a cremation. Within the cremation deposit were a number of jet and shale beads. It would appear that this grave had disturbed an earlier cremation, one possibly contemporary with the barrow. The mound may well have been covered with large quartz stones after the secondary burial was completed making it a prominent landmark in the surrounding landscape.

Sealed by the buried turf and lying beneath the barrow mound was a large stone monolith, with the appearance of a standing stone that had fallen over onto its side. Also sealed by the buried turf, surrounding the large stone, were a number of possible post holes and short lengths of gully.

INTRODUCTION

Two round barrows were identified on land belonging to Dyffryn Farm, Llangoedmor, Ceredigion in 2004. Both were under an intensive arable regime, with annual ploughing/fertilising. In 2004, the barrows had been ploughed and were readily visible as spreads of stone on low circular mounds. In 2008, the fields in which the barrows were located were fertilised by deep ploughing waste milk products into the ground.

Because of this ongoing threat from agriculture to the barrows an application was made to Cadw for grant aid to assess their character and condition. This application was successful and a geophysical and topographic survey in 2008 was followed by sample excavation of both barrows in 2009, and then further excavation of the larger barrow in 2010.

The 2010 excavation took place over three weeks in September. Participation by members of the local community was planned as an important element of the project from the outset, and during the excavation two Dyfed Archaeological Trust staff members supervised approximately 10 volunteers.

The barrows lie on a rounded ridge at c. 130m above sea level (Fig. 1 National Grid Reference SN 2146 4670). The land falls steadily away to the east, south and west but rises to the north, reaching a ridge summit at 170m 1.5km away. Geology comprises Ordovician siltstone/mudstone (British Geological Survey 1994), with the bedding planes in vertical or near vertical formation. During excavation this shale varied from being hard and consolidated through to broken and shattered. In places pockets of silt overlay bedrock.

The northernmost of the barrows was the larger of the two (Primary Record Number on the Dyfed Historic Environment Record 55928) surviving prior to excavation as a sub circular mound c. 0.75m high, and c. 45m east-west by 36m north-south. The smaller barrow (PRN 55929) lay about 50m to the southwest. In 2009, it was almost unnoticeable, being less than 0.2m high, with the diameter difficult to judge, but approximately 20m. Both of these barrows had more stone on their surfaces than was present in the rest of the field. Both barrows have suffered considerable damage, as the smaller one was visibly lower in 2009 than it had been in 2004, and the landowner, Mr David George, stated that the larger one stood considerably higher when he purchased the land in the 1960s, and that he has removed stone off it over the years.

On the geophysical survey (Fig. 2) the larger barrow lying to the north can clearly be seen. A 'halo' around the barrow is evident (prior to excavation this was considered likely to be a ditch). This halo is 18m to 20m in diameter. There are a number of anomalies associated with this barrow: there are two dark patches on the west side and a smaller one or two to the west, where there is a suggestion of a central dark ring c. 5m diameter.

THE EXCAVATION

Results

After the sample excavation in 2009, a much larger area was opened across round barrow PRN 55928 in 2010 (Fig. 3). The topsoil (20) was removed by machine as well as a considerable amount of mound material (22, 31, 32). After cleaning the area by hand in dreadful weather conditions over several days, it was established that the mound was bounded by a stone kerb (106) and that the large stone (26) recorded in the E-W 2009 trench formed part of it (Fig 5). Unfortunately much of this kerb was removed during machining but what remained indicated that the mound was approximately 11m in diameter. Situated centrally was a large sub-rectangular cut (43) c.4m by 1.8m, orientated approximately E-W, the western end of which was seen in section during the last days of the 2009 fieldwork in the west facing section of the N-S trench. In 2010 this cut was visible as soon as the topsoil was removed, and was filled with a loosely packed stone fill (44).

The grave cut had very straight-sides and had been excavated through the barrow mound (32), through the buried turf (26), the buried soil (41) below, and even slightly into the underlying bedrock (39). This process may well have removed traces of an earlier burial, as a discrete area of small loose pieces of burnt bone (SF 118) and a little charcoal were recovered from the western end of

cut (43), within the top of the stone backfill (44), as if they had been thrown in when backfilling. No other burnt bone, apart from the cremation (108), was discovered anywhere else across the site.

The cut had been carefully backfilled with large/medium shale and quartz stone (44) with very little soil between the stones. Upon removal of this stone fill it was discovered that the cut was lined with large quartz blocks (46) along its long north and south sides (Fig 6). Lying below the stone fill and butting up against the quartz blocks was a very thin dark organic layer (45) that was sampled for phosphates. This layer appeared to be contemporary with the cremation deposit (108) that was positioned centrally within the cut. It was a compact area of semi-cremated? bone placed directly on the shale bedrock. There was no evidence that it had been enclosed within a vessel or container. Within the degraded bone appeared a number of small black circular beads, and then a larger darker burnished triangular bead (all SF 121). There were other indications that there may have been other grave goods - the only trace of which was a slight staining of the soil. The whole deposit is now in the hands of the conservators at Cardiff University, whose initial report shows that there are a total of 61 circular beads and 1 triangular bead. Mary Davies from the National Museum in Cardiff believes the triangular bead is jet and was delighted that the first discovery of this material had been made in west Wales.

At the eastern end of the grave cut was a large monolith (101) measuring 1.5m high by 0.82m wide (Fig. 6). Initially it was thought that it filled the eastern end of the grave cut but upon excavation it was clear that the stone fill (44) butted up against this large stone and that it did not form part of the fill of this burial. In fact the barrow mound was constructed over it, and the buried turf layer (26) overlapped its edges but did not completely cover it. At the time of the barrow's construction it may well have had the appearance of a standing stone that had been pushed over and was lying in a hollow, incompletely covered with turf.

The barrow mound itself (Fig 7) was constructed mainly from turf, with pockets of soil and layers of stone (22, 31, 32), and bounded by a stone kerb (106), spreads of stone (112) and clay (111) suggestive of re-deposited turf (Fig 6). It was constructed on a buried turf layer (26) possibly indicative of a grassland environment. Below this turf layer was a buried soil (41) that lay above the natural shale bedrock (39).

Lying on the buried turf layer (26) below the mound was evidence of burnt wood including 2 possible wooden planks (23, 102) and dense spreads of charcoal (103,104).

Cut into the buried soil (41) but sealed by the buried turf (26) beneath the mound were a number of possible postholes and short lengths of gully (47-99) (Fig. 4). The majority of the features are located close to but south and east of the centre of the barrow but do not appear to form any identifiable pattern.

The fill of these features is consistent and very similar to the buried turf that seals them, as if it has been compressed into the cuts or depressions below.

There was an area to the north of the stone monolith (101) where the buried turf layer (26) did not exist. Instead in this area there was a very thin dark silty layer (100) sitting on top of the buried soil, so thin that it nearly disappeared on trowelling.

Somewhat concentric to and approximately 3-4m further out from the barrow mound was evidence of a raised low light coloured clay ridge (105) indicative of a

former turf bank. This was only visible on the west side of the barrow but may well have been destroyed elsewhere by the effects of ploughing which appeared to be more severe to the east of the barrow.

The owner reported that this northern barrow PRN 55928 had always been the more prominent earthwork of the two in the field and that it had been constructed of many large quartz stones. He had thought that the mound and stones were a natural consequence of glaciation and over the years had worked hard to remove all the stone in this area to prevent them causing damage to the plough blades.

There were very few small finds in 2010 apart from the beads and the burnt bone already mentioned. The other small finds were two flint flakes (SF 113,114) from the mound material (32), two flint flakes (SF 117,120) and a possible rubbing stone (SF 119) from the buried turf layer (26), as well as one piece of unstratified flint (SF 116) and a piece of post medieval pottery (SF 115).

It was pointed out by a volunteer, at the end of the excavation, that in the fields just to the west of barrows PRN 55928-9 were two more unrecorded barrows just the other side of the hedge (Fig 8). Both are under pasture and one is a very good earthwork, therefore forming a barrow group of four.

Interpretation

Layers 22, 31, 32 represent the remains of what would originally have been a very substantial earthen round barrow, at least 11m in diameter but of unknown height, bounded by a prominent stone kerb. This seems to have been constructed mainly of turf, with pockets of topsoil and layers of stone, on top of a large monolith (101) lying on its side, that at the time would have probably been showing through the turf. Surrounding this mound and concentric to it, separated by a 3-4m berm, was a low circular turf bank, possibly created by scraping up the turf outside of it, the same buried turf that lies beneath the barrow. This turf layer may indicate a grassland environment and palaeoenvironmental analysis should confirm this. The burnt 'plank' (23) recorded in 2009 within the mound material and the burnt deposits (102-4) recorded in 2010 that lay immediately beneath the mound, indicate that burning was being undertaken in the area before and perhaps during the construction of the mound. At a later date a large straight-sided rectangular cut (43) was excavated through the mound, possibly removing any primary burial/cremation (SF 118), and within this cut was placed a cremation (108) in association with numerous jet beads (SF 121). The large quartz stones that covered the mound (as reported by the land owner) may be contemporary with this secondary burial, which would have made it a prominent landmark in the surrounding landscape.

It is interesting that both burial monuments in this field appear to have primary burials that have been removed and discarded or thrown in during the backfilling of secondary burials, showing their obvious lack of worth. There are hints that the secondary burials may well have been more elaborate and associated with more prominent earthworks than those they superseded. The deposition of something so rare and valuable as jet beads and the elaborate style of the grave within the northern barrow PRN 55928 would suggest that the person or persons buried here carried high importance for those doing the burying.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Approximately 12 enthusiastic local volunteers undertook the excavation under the supervision of F Murphy and H Wilson of Dyfed Archaeological Trust. Trust staff and the volunteers would like to express their gratitude to David and Lynette George of Dyffryn Farm for allowing the excavation on their land and for their assistance during the excavation.

REFERENCES

British Geological Survey. 1994. *Geological Map of Wales. 1:250000 Scale. 1st Edition Solid.*

REGISTER OF SMALL FINDS 2010

No.	Context	Comment
113	32	Flint flake
114	32	Flint flake
115	20	Sherd of post med pottery
116	U/S	Flint flake
117	26	Flint flake
118	44	Small discrete area of burnt bone located within top of stone fill 44 of grave cut 43
119	26	Rubbing stone?
120	26	Flint core?
121	108	1 triangular jet bead and numerous circular jet/shale beads all pierced with central hole – part of cremation deposit 108

REGISTER OF SAMPLES 2010

No.	Context	Comment
518	32	Bulk sample taken from mound material 32
519	32	Bulk sample taken from mound material 32
520	45	Phosphate sampling of organic layer 45 at bottom of grave cut – taken W of baulk
521	45	Organic layer 45 at bottom of grave cut – material left after phosphate sampling– taken W of baulk
522		Column sample taken from W facing section of opened area
523	87	50% sample of fill of possible post hole 86
524	95	50% sample of fill of possible post hole 94
525	48	50% sample of fill of possible post hole 47
526	61	50% sample of fill of possible post hole 49
527	63	50% sample of fill of possible post hole 62
528	65	50% sample of fill of possible post hole 64
529	102	100% sample of possible burnt wooden plank 102
530	103	100% sample of dense charcoal spread 103
531	104	100% sample of dense charcoal spread 104
532	107	Bulk sample of darker soil 107 within grave cut fill 44
533	108	Bulk sample of cremation 108
534	110	50% sample of fill of cut 109
535	108	Darker area of cremation 108 – taken from southern edge of cremation – possibly an indication of former grave goods
536	45	Organic layer 45 at bottom of grave cut – taken E of baulk

FIGURES

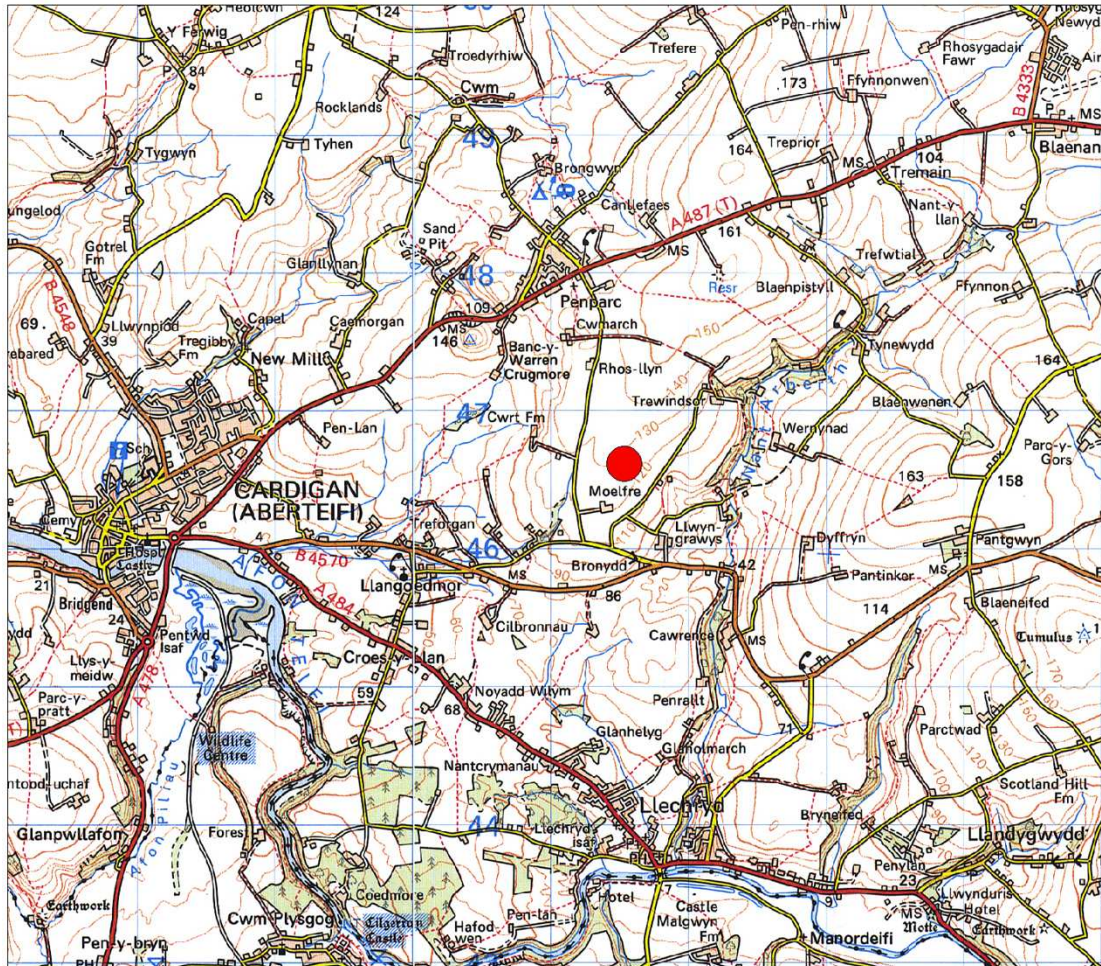


Figure 1. Location of the Pant y Butler excavation 2010. Scale 1:50,000.

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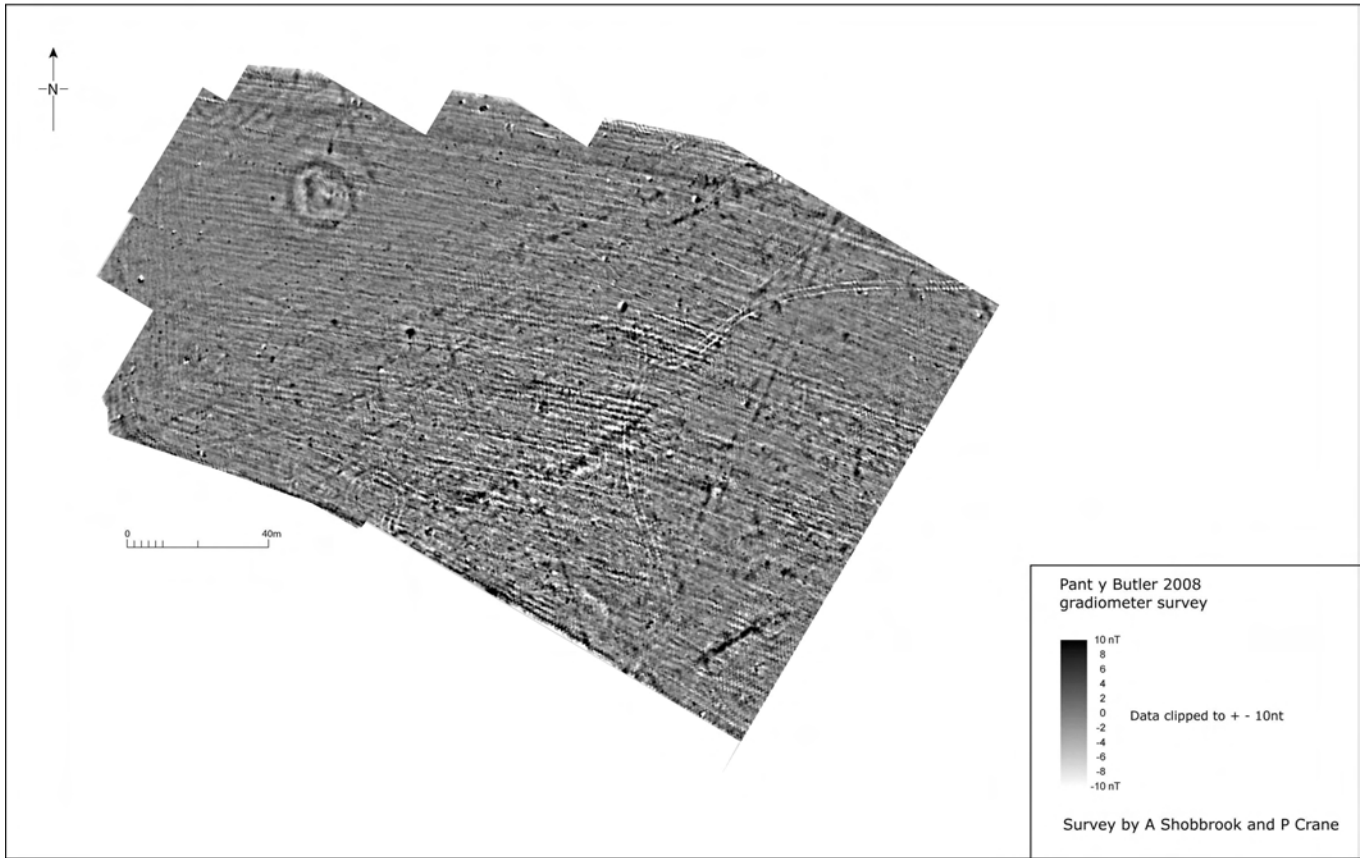


Figure 2. The Geophysical Survey.

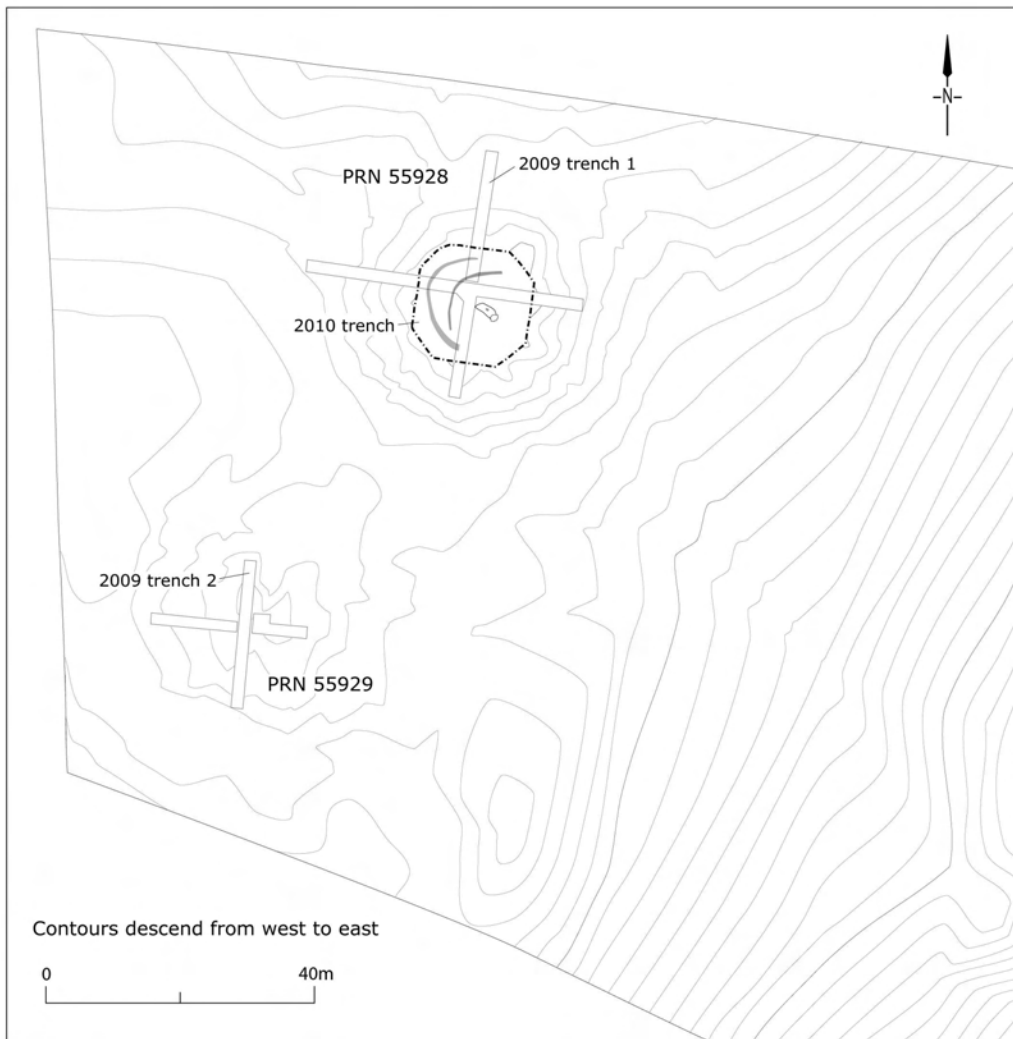


Figure 3. Location of the trenches excavated across the two barrows in 2009 and 2010, in relation to the contour survey.

The main features discovered in 2010 in the area of barrow PRN 55928 are shown.

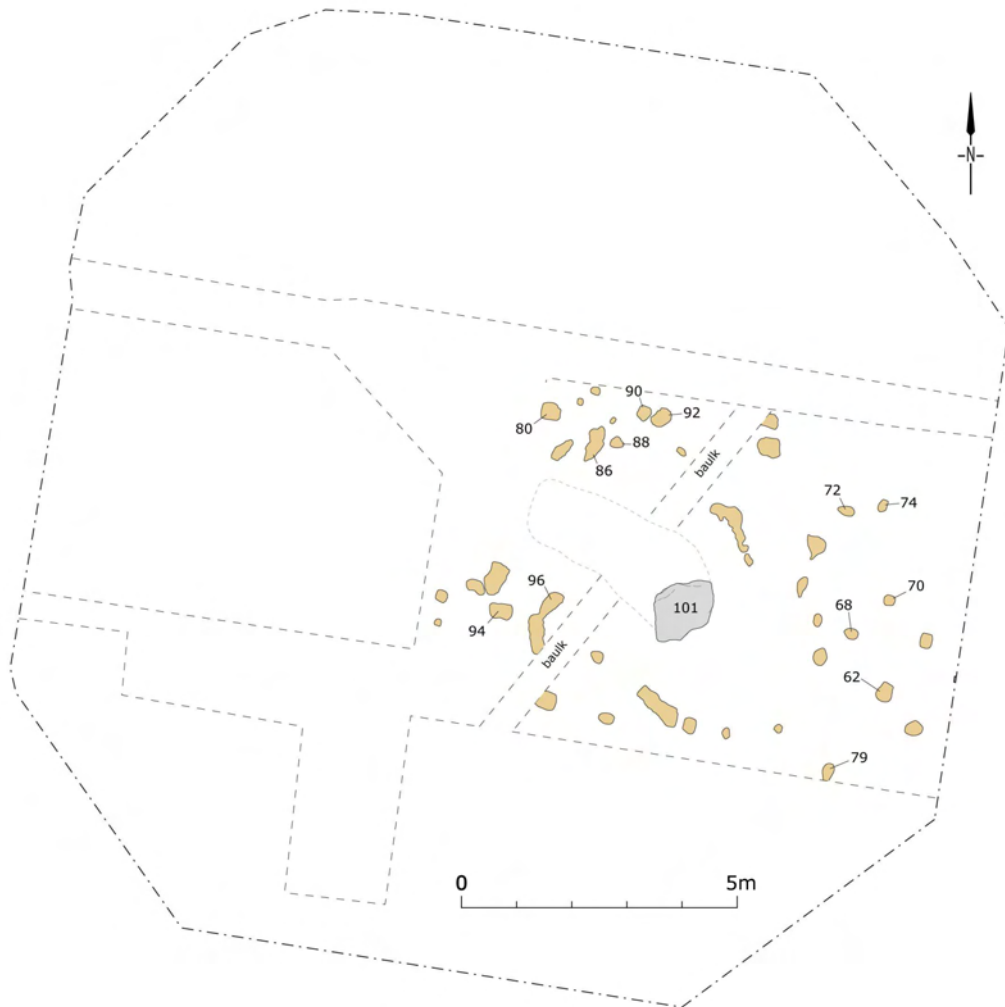


Figure 4. Plan showing the features sealed by turf layer (26) including the stone monolith (101) and a number of possible postholes and short lengths of gully.

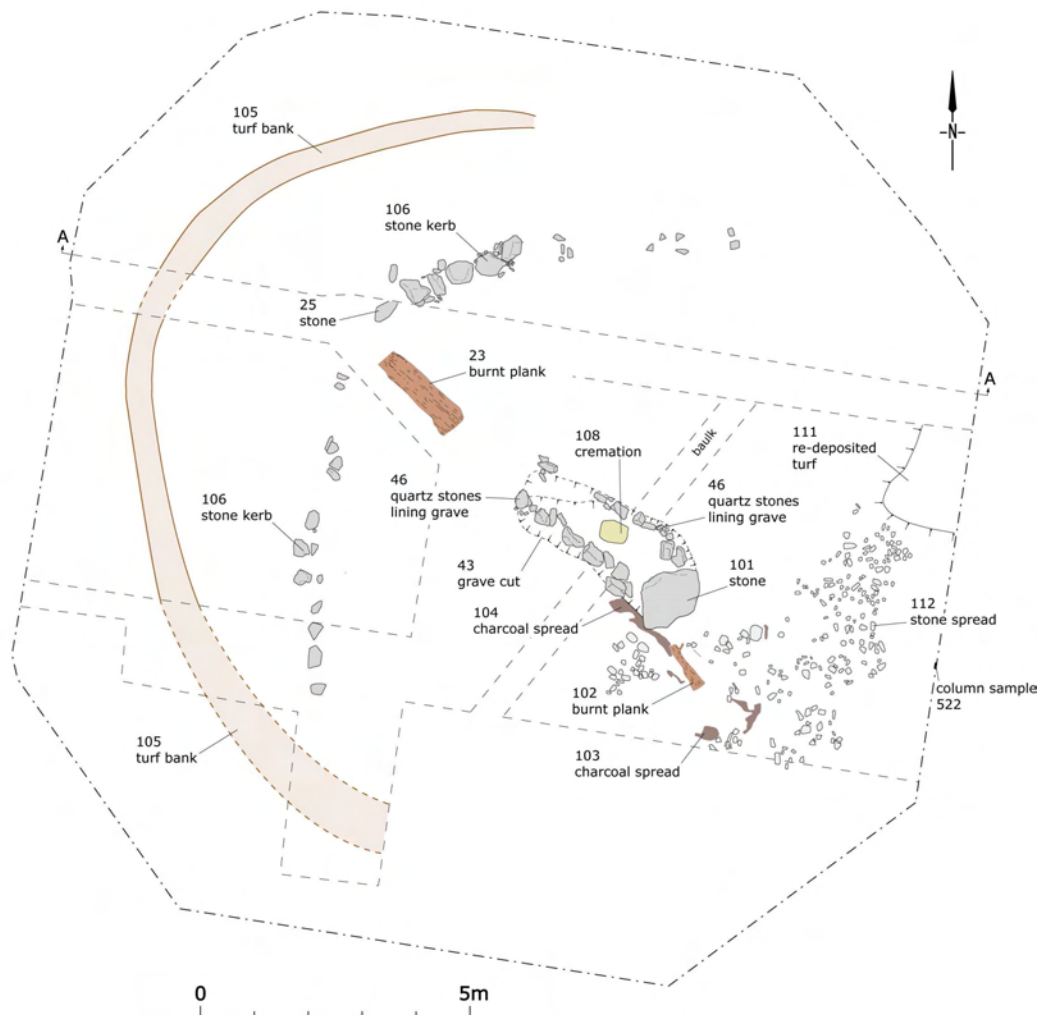


Figure 5. Plan showing the features associated with the Bronze Age barrow constructed upon turf layer (26). The large grave cut (43) was excavated after the barrow mound had been constructed and may well have disturbed the original cremation associated with the barrow.

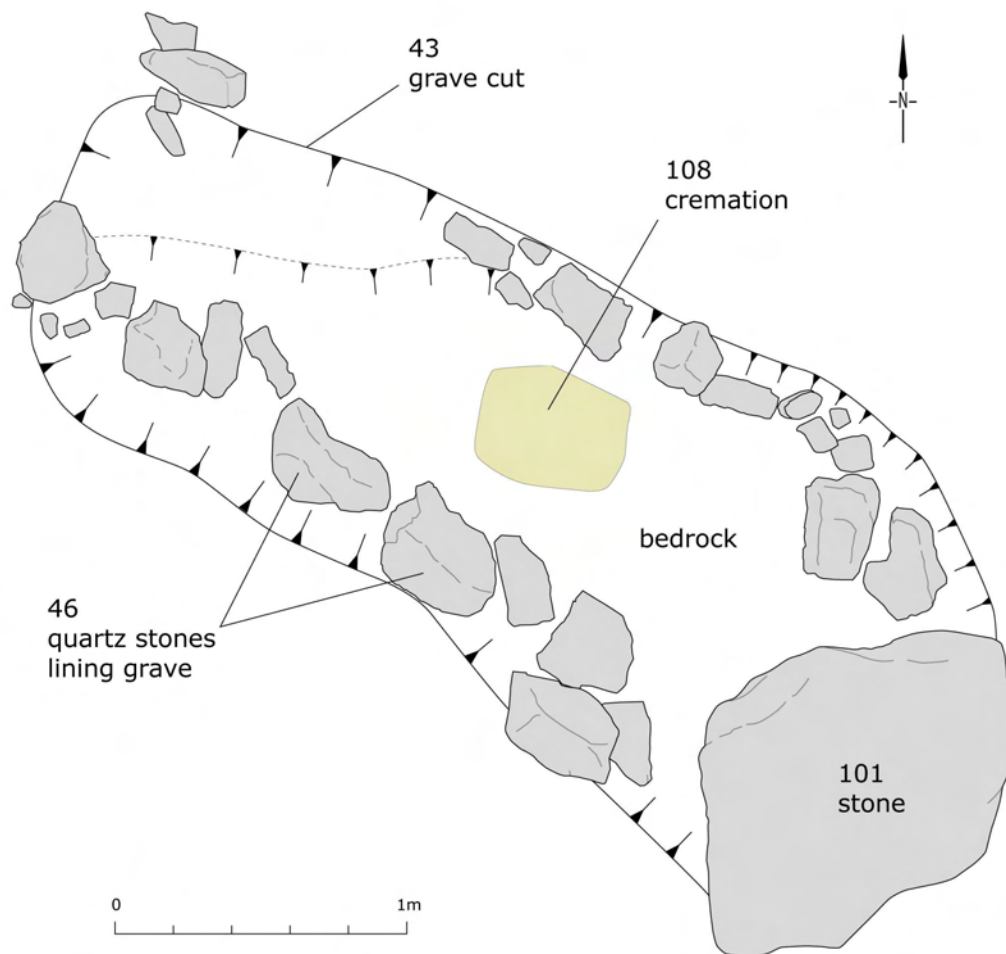


Figure 6. Plan showing detail of grave cut (43).

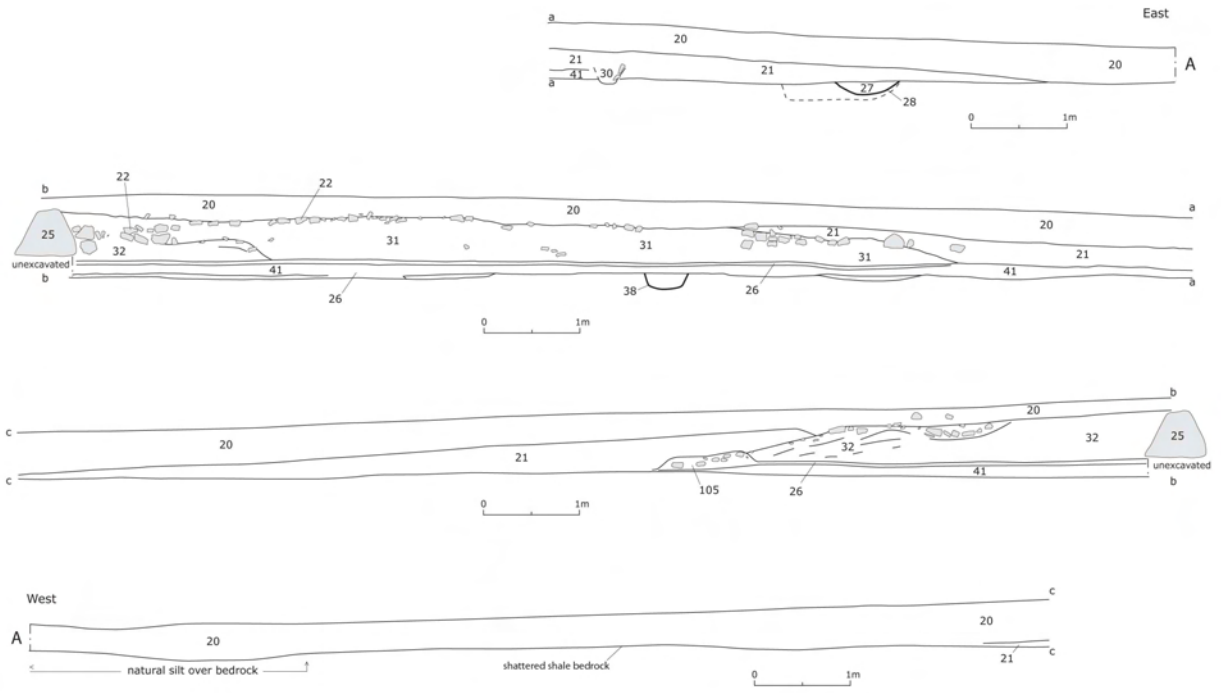


Figure 7. East – west section of barrow 55928 recorded in 2009 but with further information added in 2010.



Figure 8. Map showing the positions of two more barrows, marked by red dots, to the west of barrows PRN 55928 & 55929. These barrows were first recorded during the 2010 fieldwork.

PHOTOGRAPHS



Photo 1. Excavation area opened across Bronze Age barrow PRN 55928 after machining has been completed, looking southeast.



Photo 2. Attempting to clean the site after machining, during a brief period of dry weather.



*Photo 3. Excavation area after cleaning showing the pale turf bank (105) in the foreground, and above it the remnant of the stone kerb (106). The stone fill (44) of grave cut (43) can also be clearly seen within the centre of the barrow defined by the stone kerb.
Photograph taken looking southeast.*



Photo 4. Removal of stone fill (44) within the western half of grave cut (43). Photograph taken looking southeast.



Photo 5. Removing the last of the mound material (32) exposing the thin layer of burnt material (100) in foreground, turf layer (26) and the large stone monolith (101) at the eastern end of grave cut (43). Photograph taken looking southwest.



Photo 6. The stone fill (44) of grave cut (43) butting up against and slightly overlapping the stone monolith (101). Photograph taken looking west.



Photo 7. Detail of stone set on edge along southern edge of grave cut (43) that butts up against stone monolith (101). Photograph taken looking northwest.



Photo 8. After the removal of mound material (32) small areas of burnt wood and charcoal were exposed, including what appeared to be the remains of a burnt 'plank' (102) seemingly in the same alignment as the edge of grave cut (43), and that of the burnt 'plank' (23) recorded in 2009. Photograph taken looking northwest.



Photo 9. The western half of grave cut (43) after the removal of stone fill (44). The large quartz stones (46) that lined the long edges of the grave can be seen and lying at the bottom of the grave cut upon the bedrock and butting up against the stones is a very thin dark organic layer (45). Photograph taken looking east.



Photo 10. Sampling organic layer (45) for phosphate analysis.



Photo 11. Possible posthole features in buried soil layer (41) after the removal of turf layer (26). The pale coloured turf layer (26) can be clearly seen in section along the bottom. Photograph taken looking north.



Photo 12. Part of east facing section of baulk south of grave cut (43) showing how areas of burnt material lay immediately above the lighter coloured turf layer (26). Photograph taken looking west.



Photo 13. Exposing the burnt wooden 'plank' (101). Photograph taken looking east.



Photo 14. The burnt wooden 'plank' (101) fully uncovered. Photograph taken looking north.



*Photo 15. Removing the eastern half of stone fill (44) of grave cut (43)
Photograph taken looking southwest.*



Photo 16. Removing the eastern half of stone fill (44) of grave cut (43). The grey plastic is covering the edge of the cremation deposit the majority of which was under the baulk. Photograph taken looking southwest.



Photo 17. The eastern half of grave cut (43) showing the discrete cremation deposit (108) placed on the natural shale bedrock (39), after removal of stone fill (44).



Photo 18. Cremation deposit (108) before excavation.



Photos 19-21. The cremation deposit (108) during excavation and the beads (SF 121) as they appeared within the deposit.





Photo 22. Above – excavating the cremation deposit (108) in rather wet conditions.

Photo 23. Right – the grave cut (43) after the removal of all fill deposits, showing how it cut into the natural shale bedrock.

Photo 24. Below – lifting the stone monolith (101) by machine just before backfilling, showing how the stone rested on the buried soil (41).





Photo 25. Above – a number of jet and shale beads (SF 121) before being cleaned.

Photo 26. Right - one of the two 'strings' of beads which were kept together in the order they were excavated.

Photo 27. Below – a number of beads after cleaning by conservators at Cardiff University.



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**Mawrth 2011
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Mae'r adroddiad hwn wedi ei gael yn gywir a derbyn sêl bendith
This report has been checked and approved by K Murphy

ar ran Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf.
on behalf of Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Swydd / Position: Trust Director

Llofnod / Signature Dyddiad / Date

Yn unol â'n nôd i roddi gwasanaeth o ansawdd uchel, croesawn unrhyw sylwadau
sydd gennych ar gynnwys neu strwythur yr adroddiad hwn

As part of our desire to provide a quality service we would welcome any
comments you may have on the content or presentation of this report.