Montgomeryshire Collections 90 (2002), 1–40

Earlier prehistoric funerary and ritual sites in the Upper Severn Valley

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INTRODUCTION

This article results from a project undertaken by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust in 1997/98 for Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments to review our knowledge of the prehistoric funerary and ritual sites of this region and to clarify the record of these sites held by the Trust. Over the years confusions and duplication have developed in the record which has reduced its usefulness to researchers. The aim of this project, which was a pilot for a pan-Wales initiative, was not to search for new sites but to assess all the sites on the current record and, where possible, to confirm their survival and identification and standardise the terminology of their description. The area covered by the study comprises the Upper Severn Valley within the historic county of Montgomeryshire.

MONUMENT TYPES

As might be expected, a wide range of monument types, most of which are well known throughout the British Isles, are represented in the Upper Severn Valley. The overall distribution is shown on fig. 1 and a summary of types is given in Table 1 below.

Chambered tombs

Chambered tombs are amongst the earliest surviving man-made structures in the Welsh landscape. They are the remains of the communal tombs of the earliest farmers. In the west they consist of large stones chambers, many of which may have been covered originally by a mound of earth or stone. The Upper Severn Valley is not a traditional stone-building area

[1]Department of Archaeology, University of Bradford, formerly of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT), 7a Church Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7DL. About sixty per cent of the recorded sites were visited during the course of the project. It is intended to visit the remainder in the near future, which may result in changes to the numbers of sites listed within this report. In the text which follows sites are located by the modern community in which they fall, together with the record numbers (shown in bold type) as they are listed in the Regional Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) maintained by CPAT. Further information about the sites covered by the project is obtainable from CPAT's website (www.cpat.org.uk) or at the address above. Details are also available online through the CARN on-line database (www.rcahmw.org.uk) or on the Arts and Humanities Data Service (ads.ahds.ac.uk). Note that most of the monuments described here are on private land and should only be visited with the consent of the landowner. The calibrated radiocarbon dates given in this report (quoted as cal BC) have been calculated by the OxCal v3.5 calibration program by C. Bronk Ramsey (2000), based upon atmospheric data from Stuiver *et al.* 1998, the results are quoted at 95.4% probability and rounded to the nearest 100 years.

Table 1: Summary of prehistoric funerary and ritual monument types in the Upper Severn Valley

monument types	*no. of probable and possible sites*
Chambered tombs	2
Long barrows	2
Mortuary enclosures	1
Cursus monuments	4
Henges and hengiform sites	8
Timber circles	2
Pit circles	5
Stone circles	12
Stone rows	7
Stone pairs	3
Stone settings	8
Standing stones	129
Round barrows	315
Ring-ditches	153
Cists	8
Cremation sites	1
Pits	5

so it is not surprising that no chambered tombs have been reliably recorded here in the pa (Daniel 1950). However, two possible examples, Afon y Dolau Gwynion and, le certainly, Ciddig (fig. 2) have been identified recently. Afon y Dolau Gwynion (**7820**) Llanwddyn community, was discovered during rapid upland survey in 1993 and is situat on a spur commanding extensive views to the south. The site has recently been describe (Silvester 1995) and comprises a roughly rectangular chamber measuring 5m by 2.5 Three orthostats on the north-east seem to form a constricted entrance 1.5m long b approximately 0.6m wide. The chamber is surrounded by a low stony bank very probabl the product of digging out the chamber from its covering mound. The capstones are missin The mound or bank has been augmented by modern dumping. Ciddig barrow (**4788** Llanwddyn, comprises a large, much disturbed cairn. It is oval to circular, with traces kerbing and extensive central robbing. There is a roughly triangular 'tail' of stone to t south-west which may either be structural or the result of outcast from the earlier robbin It is this feature, perhaps comparable to though considerably shorter than the long 'tail' Bryn yr Hen Bobl, Anglesey (Lynch 1969, 115) which is its best claim to be a Neolithic tom rather than a large Bronze Age barrow such as the one (**751**) which stands nearby.

Afon y Dolau Gwynion, therefore, is the only site which may be regarded with a certainty as a chambered tomb within the study area though even here there are problem of interpretation. It is distant from other stone chambers and its nearest neighbours appe to be outliers of the Cotswold-Severn group. However it does not resemble a Cotswold-Seve

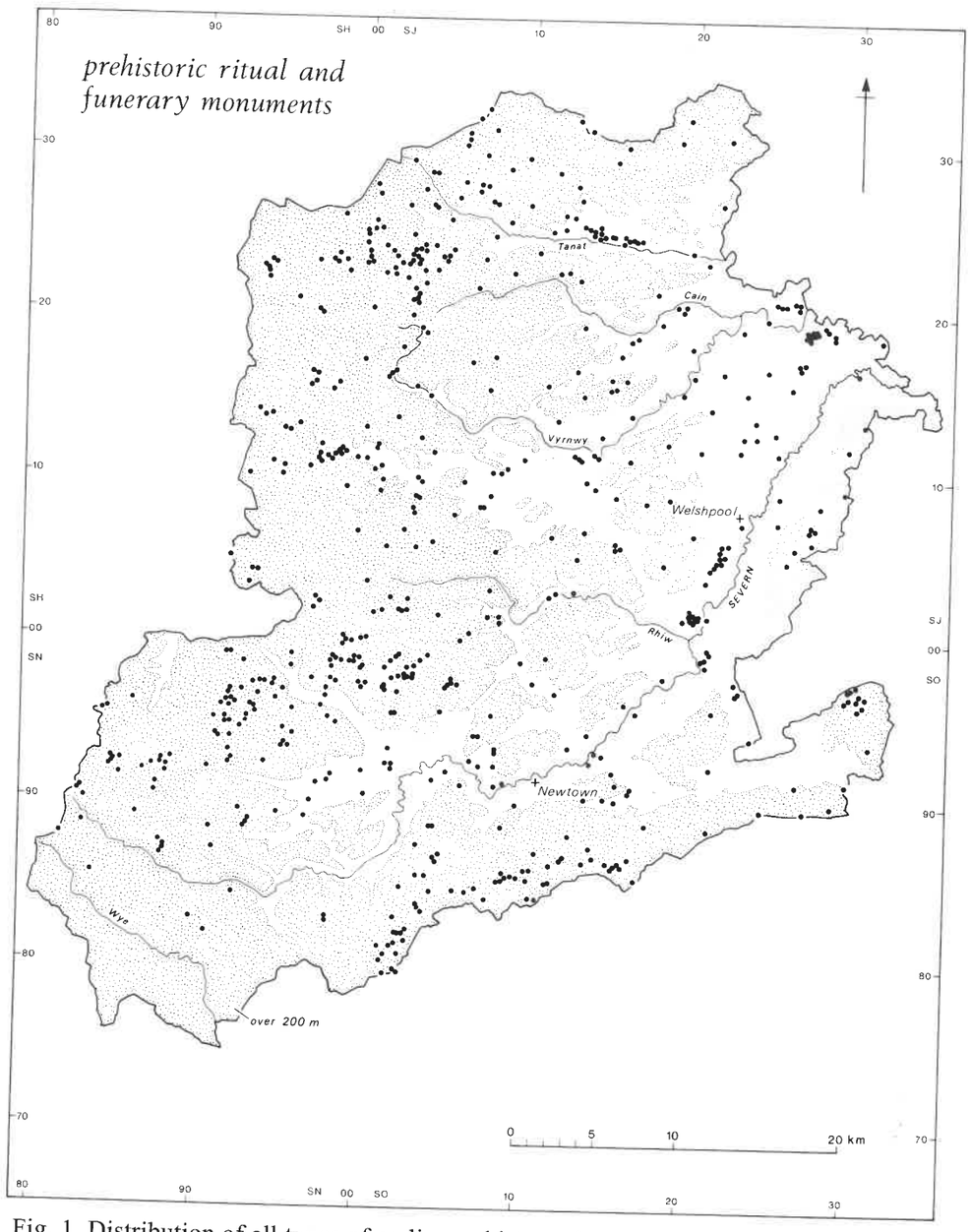

Fig. 1. Distribution of all types of earlier prehistoric funerary and ritual monuments in the Upper Severn Valley.

tomb but rather a passage grave and other exemplars of that group are equally distant. Th poorly understood sites in Derbyshire (Manby 1958) might provide other parallels. If th last identification is correct, the site might be expected to date to the later rather than th earlier Neolithic and its upland location may represent the very beginnings of Bronze Ag upland colonisation in the region. This upland situation is unusual for chambered tombs i North Wales which, in keeping with other early Neolithic monuments and artefact generally favour coastal and river valley locations. Over-speculation on the date an significance of this site should, however, be avoided until it is better understood.

Long barrows

In the past long barrows were thought to belong to the funerary record of lowland rathe than upland Britain, being monuments of earth and wood which were inappropriate to stone using regions. They are the equivalent of the stone chambered tombs of the west and, lik them, sometimes cover communal burials dating from the early Neolithic.

The Upper Severn area contains possibly two or three such long barrows (fig. 2). Lowe Luggy long barrow, Berriew (**3968**) was first identified from the air in 1974. It lies on broad gravel terrace above the present floodplain at about 76m OD and forms the mo northerly and potentially earliest element of the Dyffryn Lane henge complex described *Montgomeryshire Collections* volume 83 (Gibson 1995a) (see later). It comprises a elongated trapezoid enclosure, closed at the distal end. A site visit in 1994 revealed th surviving remains of a mound some 0.3m high at the north-east end tailing away to th south-west. The site was subject to physical survey, geophysical survey and trial excav tion in 1994 (Gibson 2000a) when the presence of a timber façade trench was first note The lateral ditches were identified as bedding trenches, a closing proximal façade trenc was located and the presence of a probable central cairn of waterworn boulders w identified below the proximal half. Radiocarbon dates from the outer rings of carbonise oak posts centred on *c*. 3700–3300 cal BC (BM-2954, BM-2955). These results confirm th site as a classic long barrow with a surrounding palisade and wooden forecourt, frontin the burial area presumed to lie beneath the heap of waterworn boulders.

A sub-rectangular ditched enclosure (**34054**) in the same field as the long barrow ma represent a shorter, oval long barrow, 40m by 30m across. The juxtaposition of long an oval barrows in other areas of southern Britain is well-known (RCHME 1979) and, whi at first sight the Lower Luggy cropmark might appear to be a small settlement enclosu of presumed later prehistoric date, aerial photographic evidence seems to indicate th presence of a slight internal mound. An apparent causeway in the south-east corner recal the similarly-placed corner gap through the ditch of the Skendleby II long barrow Lincolnshire (Evans & Simpson 1991).

New House long barrow (**3422**), Churchstoke, was reinterpreted as a long barrow aft a field visit and survey. The site lies on a false crest at the foot of Corndon and comman spectacular views over the Severn Valley and the Cambrian Mountains. It comprises a oval mound orientated south-west to north-east and 30m by 18m across. The broade higher end rises to a meagre 0.3m above the surrounding field surface and is towards th south-west. This is unusual for long barrows, which normally have their broader ends t the east, though parallels for a western orientation may be found at, for example, Hazelto Gloucestershire (Saville 1990). Around the perimeter on the north-east are some possib kerb stones in the form of large rounded boulders, and a modern clearance cairn no

occupies and augments the south-western end.

Lower Luggy and New House cairn are the only two sites in the Upper Severn area which may fairly confidently be identified as long barrows. The identification of Lower Luggy has been confirmed by excavation; the morphology of New House is as yet poorly understood. It might possibly cover a stone chamber. Either way, these two monuments augment the previously extremely meagre record of earlier Neolithic burial in the region.

Mortuary enclosures

Mortuary enclosures are believed to have been used as part of the excarnation process of burial practiced in Neolithic Britain, especially in relation to chambered tombs, where the bones are found to have been brought into their final resting place when obviously devoid of flesh. However, the term 'mortuary enclosure' is somewhat of a misnomer since the type-sites such as Dorchester, Dorset, and Normanton Down, Wiltshire, have both produced scant evidence for the decay of bodies within. Admittedly, evidence for the process would be difficult to find if the remains were eventually removed. Loveday (1985) therefore prefers the more objective term 'oblong ditched enclosures', which he sees as forming part of a generic sepulchro-ritual tradition encompassing cursus monuments, long barrows, oval barrows and mortuary enclosures. The smaller ditched enclosure at Lower Luggy, Berriew (**34054**), noted above, may be a contender if its interpretation as a long barrow is rejected.

Cursus Monuments

Cursus monuments are an enigmatic yet poorly understood phenomenon in the British Neolithic. They consist of parallel banks and ditches that define a long narrow space, often in the vicinity of other monuments such as henges, which are believed to be ceremonial sites of the later Neolithic. Eighteenth-century antiquaries thought they might be tracks for ritual races so they were called cursus and, for want of a better name and a better understanding of their role, this has continued.

A recent study of cursus monuments in Wales (Gibson 1999a) suggests that only three out of a possible eleven sites — Llandegai, Caernarvonshire (Houlder 1968), Sarn-y-bryn-caled I, Montgomeryshire (Gibson 1992c, 1994), and Walton, Radnorshire (Musson 1994) — can be positively identified as cursus monuments. While comprehensive national studies like that of Loveday (1985) and intensive studies of particular sites (Barrett *et al.* 1991; Bradley & Chambers 1988) have done much to elucidate the conceptual aspects and chronology of cursus construction, it would be rash to extend these conclusions directly to all monuments, particularly since the class exhibits a national, or even international distribution (Chancerel *et al.* 1993), and includes monuments with considerable morphological variation.

This morphological variation is very visible within the cursus and possible cursus monuments of Wales. The small number of Welsh sites seem to be consistent with the national pattern, even allowing for the interpretative difficulties of the cropmark evidence. Their riverine or terrace locations are ubiquitous as is their association with other later Neolithic and Bronze Age ritual monuments. The admittedly very limited dating evidence, which suggests that they are rather earlier in general than the henge monuments (discussed below), appears to be in agreement with national trends though only one Welsh cursus can be securely dated and even then, only by a single radiocarbon date.

One certain and three possible cursus monuments have been recorded in the Upper Severn

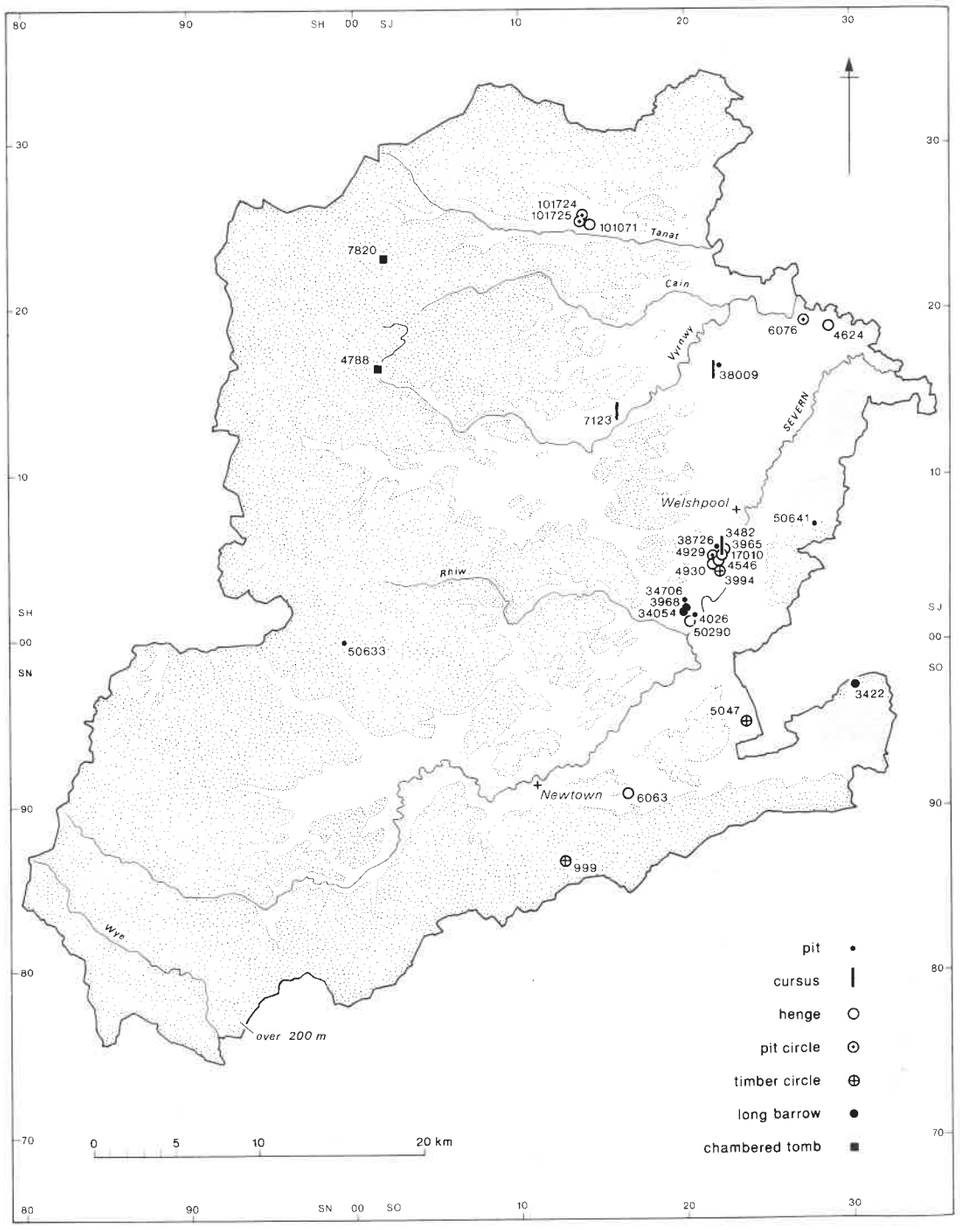

Fig. 2. Distribution of both certain and possible pits, cursuses, henges, pit circles, timber circles, long barrows and chambered tombs in the Upper Severn Valley.

area (fig. 2). The Sarn-y-bryn-caled cursus (Site 5, **3482**), first discovered from the air in the mid 1970s, has recently been described and its position within the ritual complex south of Welshpool has been demonstrated (Gibson 1994, 167–71). The cursus is 380m long, 10m wide and is orientated north-east to south-west. Aerial photographs show that it had squared terminals and had causeways at points along its lateral ditches. Trial excavation revealed the ditches to be shallow and flat-based and demonstrated silting from the outside, attesting the former presence of external banks. A radiocarbon date of *c.* 4000–3600 cal BC (OxA-3997) was obtained from oak charcoal on the floor of the eastern ditch but since this date represents one of the earliest dates for the cursus tradition in Britain, it must be acknowledged that the charcoal may have been from old wood.

Possible cursus monuments have been identified at Meifod and Collfryn. The site at Meifod (**7123**) was recorded from the air 1984. It comprises two parallel ditches and measures over 160m long and 20m wide. It lies parallel to and 60m from a stream known as Hen Afon which is probably a former course of the River Vyrnwy which presently flows 450m to the south-east. There are undulations in the field which probably attest to other meanderings of the Vyrnwy. Little more can be said about this site until further aerial photographs are available or until geophysical survey or trial excavation are undertaken. The site at Collfryn (**38009**), Llandrinio, was recorded from the air in 1981. It is orientated north-north-east to south-south-west and is visible for approximately 83m. The squared terminal at the northern end is visible but there is no trace of the southern terminal. The site is defined by two parallel narrow ditches 8m apart and bears a superficial resemblance to the narrow cursus monuments at Llandegai and Sarn-y-bryn-caled. A large ring-ditch, about 35m in diameter, lies to the west and encloses a large eccentric pit. A fourth possible site (**4025**), which falls within the Sarn-y-bryn-caled complex is perhaps more likely to be a later trackway.

Henges and hengiform sites

Henge monument are the best known of the later Neolithic ceremonial monuments, but this should not imply that their roles are well understood. A henge consists of a circular area enclosed by a bank and ditch, the ditch normally inside the bank, a peculiarity which demonstrates that these enclosures were not designed for defence. The space is defined rather than enclosed and it has been suggested that participants may have watched ceremonies from the bank. One or two causeways allow access to the central space. The ditch is generally the most visible feature of these sites, surviving even when the banks have been ploughed away, but air photographs may also reveal internal features such as posts or pit circles which may be shallower and therefore more vulnerable to erosion. They also hold out more hope of elucidating the nature of the ceremonies performed within, though admittedly excavation has seldom been entirely successful in this. The paucity and peripheral location of burial evidence suggests that ancestral bones no longer played the central role in religious ritual that they had in the earlier Neolithic.

Eight sites are currently recorded as henges or possible henges within the Upper Severn area (fig. 2). With the exception of excavated sites at Sarn-y-bryn-caled and Coed-y-dinas the sites are generally only known from cropmark evidence. One exception is the Dyffryn Lane henge where antiquarian excavations have taken place and where both earthwork and geophysical evidence has been recorded.

The Dyffryn Lane monument, Berriew (**50290**) still survives as an earthwork (Gibson

1995a). It measures 60m in diameter overall and is defined by a low bank with internal ditch 5m wide and 0.3m deep. The interior of the site is covered by a low mound and antiquarian references record stones having been moved from the site, perhaps attesting the presence of a kerbed barrow or stone circle. Parch marks on aerial photographs also suggest the presence of such stones. The entrance is to the north-west and there appears to be a pit across the causeway. The site is obviously multi-phased, though the sequence is unlikely to be resolved without excavation.

A monument at Sarn-y-bryn-caled (Site 2, **4930**) was totally excavated in advance of the Welshpool bypass and measured 8m by 7m overall with a penannular ditch 1m wide and 1m deep (Gibson 1994, 159–61). The site opened to the north-west and the single entrance causeway was flanked by two postholes. Four cremation deposits were recovered from the ditch terminals. The primary burial, of a young adult female, was in an undercut in the southern ditch terminal. A child and an adult (possibly female) were recovered from secondary and tertiary contexts respectively in the southern terminal. A severely plough-truncated cremation from the northern terminal was of an adult of indeterminate sex. The ditch had been recut at an advanced stage of ditch silting and Neolithic Peterborough pottery was obtained from both the lower and upper levels of this recut. Radiocarbon dates of *c.* 3300–2900 cal BC (BM-2820) and *c.* 2900–2600 cal BC (BM-2819) were obtained respectively from the base and top of the recut.

A second small site at Sarn-y-bryn-caled (**17010**) appears to resemble the penannular ring-ditch but opens to the south-west. It was revealed during the geophysical survey of the southern terminal of the cursus but has not been proven by excavation or confirmed by air photography.

A large ring-ditch also at Sarn-y-bryn-caled (**4546**), measuring some 40m in diameter, lies to the north-east of the northern terminal of the cursus. The site is recorded only as a cropmark with no trace of an associated bank or mound. The present road from Sarn-y-bryn-caled to Belan Locks bisects the monument and no entrance causeways are visible. The positioning of the monument within the cursus complex mentioned above is in keeping with henge-cursus relationships explored elsewhere in Britain.

A ring-ditch at Coed-y-dinas (**3965**) was discovered from the air in 1975 and was excavated in 1992 in advance of the construction of the Welshpool bypass (Gibson 1994, 161–7, Sarn-y-bryn-caled Site 3). The site measured 19m in internal diameter with a ditch 1.5–2.3m across and surviving to 0.38–0.85m deep below the gravel surface though the ditch had been considerably eroded on the south where it was shallowest. There was an entrance in the west and a partial causeway on the east. This partial causeway was represented by two ditch butt-ends below the upper fills of the ditch and was clearly non-functional in terms of entry and exit. The finds from the lowest fill of the ditch comprised a collection of Beaker sherds and a single Neolithic Grooved Ware sherd associated with carbonised remains of hulled barley and a radiocarbon date of *c.* 2100–1900 cal BC (BM-2837). Interestingly and unusually, the ditch silts clearly indicated that silting had taken place from the interior of the site suggesting either the former presence of a bank or a steep-sided low mound.

The Meusydd monument (**101071**), south of Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant, is another hengiform monument recorded from the air by St Joseph. This site comprises a small circular ring-ditch with no trace of a bank or mound. The site measures only some 10m across overall but is marked by a broad ditch. It is this which has given rise to its

interpretation as a small hengiform site, rather than a ring-ditch or ploughed-out barrow.

A segmented ring-ditch at Glanmule (**6063**), Kerry, measuring some 15m in diameter with possible larger gaps to the south-east and north-west, the ditch being composed of eight distinct segments. Possible parch-marks identified on aerial photographs have suggested the presence of an external bank (Harding & Lee 1987, 339–42), though this interpretation is not wholly convincing. Other pits and a ring-ditch appear in the same field.

A site at Four Crosses (**4624**), Llandysilio, was first recorded by aerial photography in 1977. It has a circular bank *c.* 2m wide and an internal ditch with an entrance gap on the north-north-east. The whole site measures some 25m across and lies on a gravel terrace above the River Vyrnwy. Harding and Lee (1987, 337–9) consider this site as possibly being natural in origin, however, and unlikely to be a henge monument.

These monuments, to which others doubtless remain to be added once the aerial photographic coverage for the Upper Severn Valley gravels is comprehensively studied, are all united in their valley bottom and river gravel distribution (fig. 2). Of the eight known sites in the Upper Severn Valley, two lack any evidence for an entrance causeway including one of the Sarn-y-bryn-caled sites (**4546**) and Meusydd (**101071**). Of the other six, five have a single entrance (Class I henge). Three face north (Dyffryn Lane and Sarn-y-bryn-caled (**4930**) being orientated north-west, and Four Crosses, north-north-east) while the sites at Coed-y-dinas (**3965**) and Sarn-y-bryn-caled (**17010**) are orientated west and south-west respectively. It is difficult to determine the orientation of the Glanmule site since it is a causewayed ring-ditch, but larger gaps to the south-east and north-west suggest two entrances there, making it the only candidate for a Class II henge in this region.

In terms of size, the Upper Severn Valley sites are quite modest (Table 2) ranging from just under 2,000m^2 to less than 10m^2. Harding and Lee (1987, 37–41) state that henges most commonly have internal diameters of less than 60m and the Upper Severn Valley sites belong to this group. Sites with internal diameters below 14m are termed 'mini-henges' and the four smaller sites in the present survey would fall into this classification.

Table 2: Comparative sizes of henge monuments in the Upper Severn Valley

site name	*record no.*	*overall diam. (m)*	*internal diam. (m)*	*internal area (m^2)*
Dyffryn Lane, Berriew	**50290**	60	50	1,963
Sarn-y-bryn-caled, Welshpool	**4546**	40	36	1,018
Coed-y-dinas, Welshpool	**3965**	23	19	284
Four Crosses, Llandysilio	**4624**	25	15	177
Glanmule, Kerry	**6063**	15	11	95
Meusydd, Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant	**101071**	10	7	39
Sarn-y-bryn-caled, Welshpool	**4930**	8	5	20
Sarn-y-bryn-caled, Welshpool	**17010**	6	3	7

Timber Circles

Timber circles never survive as upstanding monuments. Freestanding examples, occasionally revealed by air photography, may be compared to the more familiar stone circles; while others discovered beneath round barrows may represent temporary structures which fulfilled some ritual role during the preliminary ceremonies of burial. They may be related to the smaller-scale stake circles often found beneath round barrows such as those at Four Crosses and Trelystan (Lynch 1993).

Two timber circles are known within the Upper Severn area (fig. 2). The first, at Sarn-y-bryn-caled (Site 1, **3994**), forms part of the ritual complex south of Welshpool examined in 1990 in advance of the construction of the Welshpool bypass (Gibson 1992c; 1994). It was a double circle, constructed of oak and orientated towards the south. At the centre of the inner circle were two cremation burials. The primary burial was associated with four barbed-and-tanged flint arrowheads and is interpreted as a sacrifice with analogies at Woodhenge and Stonehenge in Wiltshire. The secondary burial was associated with a small undecorated vase Food Vessel. Radiocarbon dates from the outer rings of the oak posts indicate that the circle was built in about 2100 cal BC (BM-2805–2810). The second is Caebetin Hill (**999**), Kerry, a round barrow excavated in the early 1930s by Noel Jerman and published in the *Montgomeryshire Collections* (Jerman 1932). This circle, a small oval circle of stakes, was covered by the burial mound, but like Sarn-y-bryn-caled it had orientations on the cardinal points in the form of larger posts to the east and west and an edge-set stone to the south.

Over forty timber circles are known throughout the British Isles (Gibson 2000b), other sites doubtless being represented by pit circles or henges. These circles vary in complexity, size and date though generally belong to the period between *c.* 3000–1000 cal BC with the complex sites clustering towards the middle of the period. The Sarn-y-bryn-caled timber circle falls midway within the currency of these sites while that at Caebetin Hill is possibly only slightly later.

Pit circles

Pit circles are normally recognised from air photographs where they show as rings of large dark marks. Pit circles may be difficult to date and interpret without excavation. Since the pits may be postholes, stoneholes, cremation pits or votive pits. They might also represent the ground remains of prehistoric post-built round-houses, as possibly in the case of a site at Four Crosses (**6076**), Llandysilio, and as demonstrated at Fochabers in Morayshire (Barclay 1993). The site at Sarn-y-bryn-caled was a classic example which excavation showed to have been a circle of tall timbers, described above; the others may be similarly interpreted, but without excavation certainty is impossible.

Five pit circles are recorded in the Upper Severn area (fig. 2). Four of the five are close to other burial or ritual monuments and may be considered to form part of prehistoric ritual complexes. The two pit circles at Meusydd (**101724**, **101725**), to the south of Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant, are both cropmark sites discovered by aerial reconnaissance (St Joseph 1980; Britnell 1991). One comprises a small ring of six pits set in a circle 6m in diameter. The other is slightly larger at 10m in diameter and comprises ten pits. The association of these monuments with the ring-ditch and henge complex at Meusydd argues in favour of the sites being Neolithic or Bronze Age in date. A faint arc of pits (**4929**) within the Sarn-y-bryn-caled complex to the south of Welshpool may represent a further circle,

though the gravel surface is so pockmarked with alluvial anomalies in this area that the identification of this site is by no means certain. The Four Crosses site (**6076**) is also represented by some eleven pits forming the eastern and southern arcs of a circle with a diameter of about 30m. As with the Brandyshop Bridge site only excavation will prove the nature of this site but its location within a landscape of ring-ditches may well hint at its validity as a Neolithic or Bronze Age ritual monument. A site near Lymore Park (**5047**), Montgomery, comprises six pits around a central pit. It lies within the later prehistoric enclosure on the crest of a slight knoll (Silvester & Britnell 1993). The pits appear to be regularly and widely spaced. While possibly a domestic structure, the spacing of the pits and the presence of the central pit may suggest that the monument represents an earlier ritual circle.

Where excavated, pit circles have been shown to be largely Neolithic to early Bronze Age in date. Even in the case of excavated examples it can be difficult to decide whether they were designed as rings of pits — sacred holes as contact with the earth or the underworld — or postholes for a timber structure. The pit circles at Dorchester, Oxfordshire, for example, have been reinterpreted as timber monuments (Gibson 1992a) while opinion is still divided over the circle of pits known as the Aubrey Holes at Stonehenge (Cleal *et al.* 1995). The majority of excavated cropmark pit circles, like that at Sarn-y-bryn-caled (**3994**) discussed above, appear to have held timber uprights, however, and a recent survey has shown timber circles to be a much more common phenomenon than previously thought (Gibson 1994; 2000b).

Stone circles

Stone circles, like henges and timber circles were significant landscape features of their day but we can understand little of their role. Archaeological excavation has been rare and seldom productive of easily understood finds. In Scotland there is a connection with human burial, but elsewhere in Britain this is less obvious and people have been tempted to look to the heavens, astronomical alignments and perceived subtleties of plan in seeking an explanation for these monuments. Where datable objects have been found they suggest construction in the Early Bronze Age, a later horizon than the henge monuments, with which they have much in common, and slightly later than the few dated timber circles. However, it is tempting to see them as the upland version of these timber circles. The circles in the Upper Severn area are generally small and comprised of small stones which often barely peep above the surrounding vegetation. They vary in diameter (Table 3) but are nevertheless modest in size. They are usually loosely associated with other broadly contemporary monuments, cairns and stone rows at Rhos-y-beddau, Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant (discussed below), cairns at Llyn-y-Tarw II and a general distribution of ritual monuments in the area of the Whetstones. All are in upland valleys or are on ridge positions and they may well be sited on routes or passes through the hills. This is particularly true of the Rhos-y-beddau, Cwm Rhiwiau and Y Capel stone circles which all lie near the heads of their respective valleys. Llyn-y-Tarw II is situated near a still-used ridgeway and Whetstones is on a pass between Stapley and Corndon Hills as well as just to the east of the old track along the west side of Corndon. This track actually runs through Mitchell's Fold stone circle to the south of Whetstones and, being in Shropshire, lies just outside the study area.

Twelve certain or possible stone circles are recorded within the Upper Severn area (fig. 3), of which a number have been lost or destroyed. In addition, the possible stone circle suggested by the descriptions of the Dyffryn Lane henge, has been discussed under henges

above and the possible setting of four stones or 'four-poster' at Bryn-yr-aran, Carno, is discussed under stone settings below.

Lost sites include those at Garth Eilun, Llanerch Emrys, Four Crosses and Kerry Pole. Garth Eilun (**1242**), Llanfihangel, is recorded as having been destroyed during the construction of the farmhouse but even then the authenticity of the site was uncertain. Llanerch Emrys stone circle (**4282**), Llansantffraid, was recorded as a stone circle in 1949 at the western end of Four Crosses farmhouse, but can no longer be identified. Kerry Pole stone circle (**1010**) was recorded as a circle of six stones in 1889 but has not been located since and may be a mis-siting of the Kerry Hill stone circle some 200m to the west (see below). Whetstones stone circle (**209**), Churchstoke, is a destroyed site of more certain authenticity. It lies within an important area. The Mitchell's Fold stone circle is just to the north while the large Corndon cairns, the New House long barrow and the Cwm Mawr prehistoric axe-factory lie to the south. The remains of a large cairn also remain in this field. In 1841 only three stones of the circle were recorded, but now none remain in their original position, though some may possibly be amongst the substantial stones lying in the present field boundary. Mynydd y Gribin stone circle (**6594**), Dwyriw, was not relocated as it appears to lie within an area of deep heather and bog, but it may still be there. It is recorded as a circle some 6.5m in diameter with some of the stones being turf-covered and a turf-covered cairn lies to the west.

Surviving stone circles are known at Rhos-y-beddau, Cwm Rhiwiau, Kerry Hill, two sites near Llyn-y-Tarw, Y Capel and at Llanllugan. Rhos-y-beddau (**4**) is 12.8m in diameter and lies on a low shelf at the head of a broad upland valley leading from Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant to the Berwyn ridge. It is currently in an area of reeds and bracken and is associated with the stone rows which run up to but do not abut the circle and with a small cairn and a large quartz boulder which may be a marker for the group. There are approximately twelve stones visible in the circle which has a gap in the north-west arc. As is typical of the region, they are all low stones and rarely more than 0.6m high. Nearby is a recently discovered circle which adds to the interest of this remote valley. Cwm Rhiwiau circle (**6055**) which lies on a slight plateau on the east bank of a small stream some 400m north of the Rhos-y-beddau stone circle, comprises an egg-shaped setting measuring 11.4m by 10.5m across. The stones vary between 0.12–0.4m in height, the largest being 0.37m by 0.57m in plan. There are two outliers, one is 3m to the north and the other 20m to the south which are roughly aligned with the Rhos-y-beddau circle (Britnell 1986). Kerry Hill (**1008**), known locally as the 'Druid Stones', comprises eight very regularly spaced stones placed 10m apart forming a circle up to 26.5m in diameter. The stones are fairly small with the largest being only about 0.5m high. The monument is very regular with all the stones set tangentially to the circle and there is a large flat stone at its centre. Traces of a low external bank, particularly visible in the northern arc, may be agricultural in origin. The circle is one of the largest in the study area but the regularity of the ring and the unusual presence of the central stone cause suspicion that it may be of recent origin. Llyn-y-Tarw I, Aberhafesb (**4284**), is a ring of some 39 stones sitting on a level terrace on a south-east-facing slope. The circle has a diameter of about 19m but is difficult to find since it lies in an area of bracken taller than the stones themselves. The circle also lies in an area containing many edge-set stones, cairns and other possible settings. Y Capel, Dwyriw (**91**), sits on a gently rounded spur within an eastern-facing valley. It comprises a circle of about 54 stones forming a flattened circle 26m by 23m in diameter. Llyn-y-Tarw II, (**38721**), in the community of Caersws, comprises ten small low stones in a circle 13m in diameter, a collection of stones in the centre possibly being the result

of disturbance or the remains of a low cairn. A possible stone circle near Llanllugan (**19092**), Dwyriw, comprises ten edge-set stones set on a ridge within grassy moorland. The circle is small, measuring only 5m in maximum external diameter. The stones are likewise small, only 0.15–0.4m across.

Aubrey Burl has argued that the larger diameter sites in Britain, with imposing stones, were amongst the earliest in the sequence with the smaller sites being later (Burl 1976; 2000). Through time a sepulchral role seems to have gained in importance and thus the small four-poster sites of the Scottish borderland, often with central cairns, are regarded as the end of the tradition. There is nothing in the Upper Severn sites to contradict this hypothesis and it may therefore be that the small circle at Llanllugan represents the end of the local sequence. In a recent study of the siting of monuments within the landscape, Barnatt (1998) has suggested for the Dartmoor circles at least, that the large early sites were located far from settlements; the Grey Wethers stone circle, for example, being sited on a watershed high on the moor and perhaps on a routeway across it. Perhaps the circles lie on a boundary between two groups or populations. By contrast the later rings on Dartmoor, as for example at Scorhill and Buttern, are on the periphery overlooking settlement areas. They were perhaps built and used by smaller local groups to whom they were considered to belong. The circles within the present study area tend to support this hypothesis. Lying in broad valleys, Rhos-y-beddau, Cwm Rhiwiau, and Y Capel may well be situated on the peripheries of settlements indicated by upland cairnfields. Llyn-y-Tarw II, despite its situation near to a ridgeway, also lies on a natural shelf which contains clearance cairns and other monuments and this too may have been peripheral to a settlement. The larger sites such as Mitchell's Fold and Whetstones, (to judge by the size of the stones in the hedge), lie on prominent watersheds which still today mark the border between Wales and England.

Further consideration of the stone circles in the Upper Severn area is hampered by the lack of cultural and chronological information since none of the sites have been excavated. The dating, functions and histories of these sites as well as detection of their associated settlements is an important research priority in this area and within Wales as a whole.

Table 3: Diameters of surviving stone circles in the Upper Severn Valley

site name	*record no.*	*maximum diam. (m)*
Kerry Hill, Kerry	**1008**	26.5
Y Capel, Dwyriw	**91**	26
Llyn-y-Tarw I, Aberhafesb	**4284**	19
Llyn-y-Tarw II, Caersws	**38721**	13
Rhos-y-beddau, Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant	**4**	12.8
Cwm Rhiwiau, Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant	**6055**	11.4
Mynydd y Gribin, Dwyriw	**6594**	6.5
Llanllugan, Dwyriw	**19092**	5

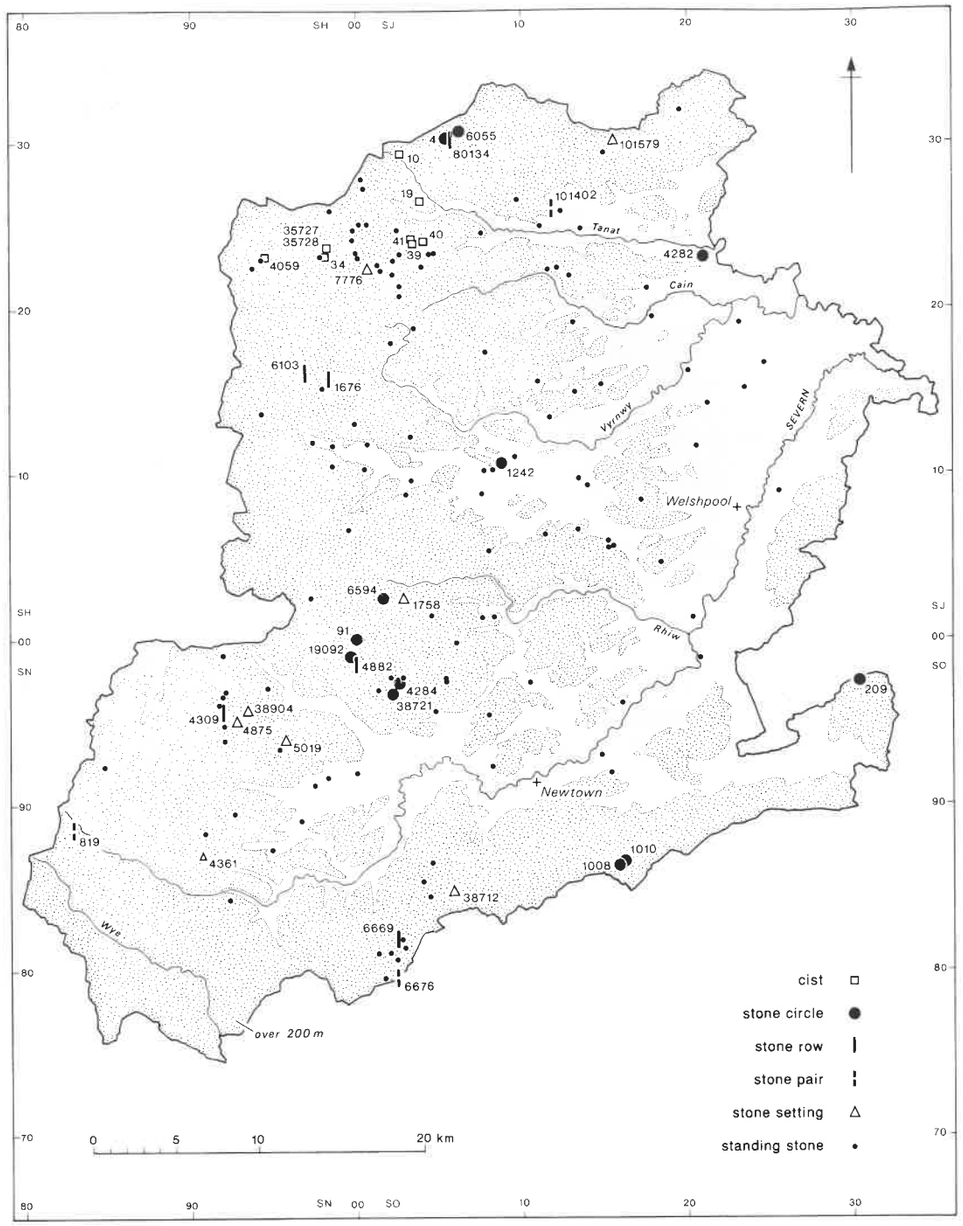

Fig. 3. Distribution of cists, stone circles, stone pairs, stone rows, stone settings and standing stones.

monuments. The longer axes of all but the central stone are aligned with the row. The central stone has its longer side at right-angles to the main alignment and has large flat stones placed around its base. Survey work on the Mynydd Dyfnant stone row (**1676**), Banwy, revealed ten stones of which one is a recent addition and another lying off the alignment, may be part of an associated terminal monument (Gibson 1992b). Eight of the stones form a line about 9m long, orientated north-east to south-west, of which the tallest is 1m high. One of the stones, a lichen-free modern addition, stands close to another long earth-fast recumbent stone by a depression in which quartz was noted, possibly representing a cist beyond the western end of the alignment.

Rhyd Hywel (**6669**), Llandinam, is a possible stone row, perhaps largely destroyed. It now comprises three recumbent stones which are no longer in their original positions. The position of this monument, however, on a ridge and in close proximity to other ritual sites, suggests that it is authentic. A similar possible alignment of three stones at Llidiardau Mawr, Dwyriw (**1758**), recorded in 1865 appears to have been destroyed by 1910.

Stone pairs

Several sites may represent stone pairs, an apparently distinct type of site known elsewhere (fig. 3). Carreg Wen, Llanidloes (**819**), was recorded at the beginning of the twentieth century as a pair of white stones (the equivalent of 2m and 1.25m high), known as *Y Fuwch Wen a'r Llo* ('The White Cow and Calf'), close to one another on moorland near the source of the Severn (RCAHM 1911, no. 592), though only the larger stone can now be seen. Two stones described as having long, narrow grooves on them, are recorded in Hancock's history of the parish of Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant (**101402**) (Hancock 1871), but their present whereabouts are unknown. A site at Fuallt, Llandinam (**6676**), though once described as a setting of three stones may alternatively represent stone pair. The two stones now visible are 10m apart and now lean dramatically due to animal disturbance. Situated at the top of a slope, they are aligned north-east to south-west. Extending the alignment to the north-east, the Breiddin hills are visible on the horizon, though only from the north-eastern stone. A large cairn lies on the horizon to the south-west.

Stone settings

Stone settings are difficult to define, to date and to interpret. Indeed, chambered tombs, stone circles and rows may equally be termed 'stone settings' and this may well indicate that the term is little more than a catch-all phrase which is used to describe little-understood lithic monuments. About eight sites in the Upper Severn area fall into category (fig. 3). The site at Fuallt, noted above, could be discussed under pairs or settings, for example, although the site at Esgair-y-groes (**5019**), Trefeglwys, can be more positively identified as a 'stone setting'. This site was first recorded in 1978 as an area of scattered upright stones covering the rounded summit of the hill in the vicinity of the Esgair-y-groes standing stone and apparently leading off in lines running north-west to south-east. However, a site visit undertaken as part of the present project found the field to have been 'improved' about three years ago and the upright stones now form part of a substantial modern clearance cairn built up against the standing stone and causing the upright to lean. The description of the site brings to mind the multiple rows at Hafod y Dre and Ffridd Cae Awen near Pentrefoelas in Denbighshire (Ellis Davies 1929, 382–4) or even the multiple parallel rows of Dartmoor and Caithness, but alas the surface indications of the site have now been destroyed.

Bryn yr Aran (**38904**), Carno is an unusual trapezoidal stone setting. Lying on a gentle east-facing slope, this site comprises an eastern row of three stones 5.5m apart. Eighteen metres to the west, but not parallel to it is another line of two stones, 7m apart. The solidly set stones are generally small and slab-like and stand to approximately 0.3m above the ground. The arrangement appears to be an irregular quadrilateral with the possibility of an aligned outlier. Esgair Draenllwyn (**4875**), also in the community of Carno, is similarly difficult to understand from surface indications. Comprised of large upright slabs, there appear to be two alignments. The first, 13m long, orientated north-west to south-east, has three edge-set stones the middle one of which has its axis set at right-angles to the alignment. The stones are unevenly spaced at 10m and 3m apart. Beyond the row, at a distance of approximately 3m, is a small round cairn and 5m to the south-west of the middle stone is another standing stone aligned in the same direction. At a similar distance from the north-west stone is another upright with its axis running north-east to south-west.

Pen-y-gaer stone setting (**4361**), Llanidloes, occupies a level area to the south-west of Pen-y-gaer hillfort, and comprises a rough semicircle of five large and fairly regularly-spaced stones extending out from an outcrop. There are, however, many loose stones in the area and so the positioning of these five may be fortuitous. Alternatively, they may have a domestic origin associated with the hillfort. A setting at Pwll Brwyn (**7776**), Llanwddyn, could not be located during the present survey. Three stones are recorded, but there are no details of their arrangement.

Standing stones

Standing stones are defined as single isolated stones of varying sizes in various positions. Their simplicity necessitates that they are poorly datable and many functions are possible. Gateposts, rubbing posts, boundary markers and guideposts may all have the same superficial appearance and the date of an individual site is unlikely to be resolved except by excavation. Moreover, a prehistoric standing stone may well have been used later as a boundary marker or rubbing stone.

About 129 standing stones currently recorded within the Upper Severn area. This excludes obviously modern boundary markers, though the remaining stones are largely undated (fig. 3). The stones generally appear to be of local unhewn rock and many have either collapsed or are in danger of collapse from animal disturbance at their bases. Like the stone circles, the standing stones in the Upper Severn area are often relatively small. They range in height from the more impressive stones 3.6m high at Maesmochnant, near Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant (**101060**, fig. 4), 2.7m at Llanrhaeadr itself (**101046**), and 1.9m at Cae Garreg (**724**), Trefeglwys, to often little more than 0.3m and frequently invisible from a distance. Notable exceptions to this are the standing stones at Cefn Llwyd (**4403**), Trefeglwys, Maen Llwyd (**1679**), Banwy, and Rhos Garreg Wen (**3896**), Banwy which are blocks of white quartz. The 1.1m high stone at Carreg Llwyd (**767**), Aberhafesb, is also highly visible. It lies at the junction of three parishes which raises the question of whether this is a modern boundary stone, or an ancient stone used as a fixed point in later land divisions.

Generally assumed to be Bronze Age in date, standing stones doubtless have their origins in the Neolithic. Certainly in Brittany the demolition of Le Grand Menhir Brisé and its incorporation into passage graves suggests a middle Neolithic, pre-passage grave, origin for the stone. Associations of passage graves with standing stones in Ireland has recently been highlighted (Cooney 1996) and the Neolithic dates for the sarsen stone elements and

Photograph: Alex Gibson, CPAT 697.3

Fig. 4. Maesmochnant standing stone (**101060**), Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant, which at 3.6m high is the tallest surviving standing stone in Montgomeryshire. The standing stone appears to form part of a complex of ritual monuments known from aerial photography, which include two pit circles and a henge monument.

Heel Stone at Stonehenge are convincing (Cleal *et al.* 1995). More locally, Maen Bueno (**137**), Berriew, may well be an outlier to the adjacent Neolithic henge at Dyffryn Lane (**50290**) rather than a singular Bronze Age entity (Gibson 1995a). Like stone circles, standing stones may have also had wooden counterparts, as suggested by an isolated Neolithic posthole forming part of the ritual complex at Sarn-y-bryn-caled, to the south of Welshpool (Gibson 1994).

There are three instances within the Upper Severn area where standing stones have possible stratigraphic relationships with other, more easily datable monuments. At Llyn Mawr (**4318**), Caersws, the standing stone appears to have a Bronze Age cairn built around it. At Ystrad Hynod (**50474**), Trefeglwys, a stone 2.8m long was found recumbent over its stonehole on the perimeter of a barrow (ApSimon 1973). Unfortunately, the relationship of the standing stone and cairn could not be established though it was assumed that they were probably contemporary. At Forden Gaer (**166**), the position of the stone close to the ramparts of the Roman Fort appears to suggest that the stone is post-Roman in date, though this also raises questions regarding its function.

The function or functions of standing stones has long been debated, the most recent discussion being by Morgan (1992). They are generally assumed to have marked routes, places, graves, or boundaries. But if so for whom, when and why? Burl (1976) has convincingly demonstrated the role of some standing stones as outliers to stone circles. These may serve as sighting points for solar and lunar observation or, more frequently, marker stones for people approaching the monument. Maen Mawr at Cerrig Duon in the Brecon Beacons provides a good Welsh example, visible well down the valley and marking the inconspicuous circle for those approaching from the south. A similar situation occurs At Cefn Llydan, Tregynon, where two standing stones and a depression from which a stone was reportedly removed (**38715**, **38718**, **38719**), lie on the flanks of a slight hill on the summit of which stands an enclosure or ring cairn (**4745**). Boulders within this site suggest that it may have been an embanked stone circle, but its rounded summit position means that it would have been invisible from below, unlike the standing stones which are more prominently sited on the flank of the hill. These stones were identified during the present project and, in view of the rarity of embanked stone circles, the whole area and its monuments would benefit from detailed ground survey. It was also noted during the course of the project that a number of standing stones in the Upper Severn area lie close to fording points or sources of rivers. The stones at Maen Beuno (**137**), Berriew and Forden Gaer (**166**), for example, stand on either side of a traditional fording point of the Severn at Rhydwhiman (though the Forden Gaer stone, so close to the ramparts of the Roman fort, may be later than its partner). Elsewhere, the standing stones at Rhos Collfryn (**7813**) and Y Fawnog (**7809**), both in Llanwddyn, lie opposite each other on either side of a tributary of the Afon Dolau Gwynion, and the Foel Fawr stone (**7823**), Llanwddyn, stands above a crossing point of another tributary of the same stream. Pen Cerrig (**7791**), Llangynog, lies near a fording site, and the position of the Maesmochnant stone (**101060**), close to the Tanat, may also be relevant in this context. Altogether, eighteen stones have riverine locations, as listed in Table 4, including those near streams, rivers and bogs. Admittedly, the listed sites lie at varying distances from adjacent streams though consideration of changes in the water-table and local hydrologies need to be considered. Bogs, for example, may post-date the stones and thus the stones may be at actual stream sources; or the bogs may pre-date the stones, erected to mark a safe passage. As with the discussion of stone

circles, we are hampered by the lack of dating evidence.

Table 4: Standing stones in the Upper Severn Valley close to fording points or other riverine locations

site name	*record no.*	*location*
Ystrad Fawr, Llanbrynmair	**4307**	head of bog
Efail Newydd, Llangyniew	**4786**	head of bog
Carreg Llwyd, Aberhafesb	**767**	head of bog
Eunant Fach, Llanwddyn	**4949**	near stream
Graig Wen, Llangynog	**7915**	near stream
Rhos Collfryn, Llanwddyn	**7813**	near stream and opposite **7809**
Y Fawnog, Llanwddyn	**7809**	near stream and opposite **7813**
Foel Fawr, Llanwddyn	**7823**	near stream
Ffridd Fach, Llanwddyn	**7837**	near stream
Maesmochnant, Llanrhaeadr	**101060**	near the river Tanat
Moel y Tryfel, Banwy	**4077**	near stream and by track over Mynydd Dyfnant
Waunddubarthog, Llandinam	**4869**	near stream
Waun Lluest Owain, Llandinam	**6663**	near stream
Pen Cerrig, Llangynog	**7791**	near a modern fording point
Dol Carreg, Banwy	**1208**	near track leading to ford over the Banwy
Maen Bueno, Berriew	**137**	near track leading to a traditional fording point of the Severn, opposite **166**
Forden Gaer, Forden	**166**	near traditional fording point of the Severn, opposite **137**
Cae Carreg, Trefeglwys	**724**	near track leading to a fording point of the Cledan, a tributary of the Banwy

Standing stones have long been interpreted as more general route markers. Two stones at Craig-y-llan (**38800**, **38801**), Pen-y-bont-fawr, for example are intervisible along a bridleway representing a more ancient route, around the flanks of Das Eithin leading to a pass into the Tanat valley and Cwm Pennant. The Carreg Hir stone (**764**), Caersws, similarly lies on a bridleway running between two lakes, Llyn Mawr and Llyn Du, and up towards Llyn-y-Tarw, and the ridgeway along Mynydd Clogau, on which some large cairns are situated. This stone is also intervisible with Llyn Mawr Cairn II (**4381**), which lies on the same track and has a standing stone built into the monument. A clear demonstration of the association of standing stones and trackways was made by Gresham's study of sites in Merioneth (Bowen & Gresham 1967, 56–63) but Loveday (1998) has suggested that even quite wide routeways may be considered significant in terms of prehistoric travel. By this criterion many standing stones in the Severn Valley area, such as Moel y Tryfel (4077), Banwy community, and Esgair-y-groes (**3583**) and Carreg Slican (**1446**) in Trefeglwys,

may be considered route markers. Cefn Llwyd (**4403**), Trefeglwys, a recumbent stone of gleaming white quartz, has even given its name to the pass, Bwlch y Garreg-wen.

Round barrows

After the uncertainties surrounding the purpose of the henges, stone circles and settings described above it is comforting to turn to a monument type which had a clearer and more certain role. Round barrows are normally found to cover burials, either inhumations or cremations. Though they may have had additional significance and their religious role may be more complex than we think, it is reasonable to see them as the burial places of at least some elements of Early Bronze Age society. The broad term 'round barrow' includes earthen mounds (barrows), stone mounds (cairns), some defined by ring banks (ring cairns), and small cairns with an outer kerb of disproportionately large stones (kerb cairns) (fig. 5). With the exception of ring cairns, these different mound types are often difficult to distinguish in the field and even apparent ring cairns may be round cairns which have suffered from stone robbing.

Earthen barrows and stone cairns can normally be distinguished, their construction materials generally reflecting their topography, but in the case of complete and grassed over mounds the distinction cannot always be made. Some earth mounds may have a core of stone, as at Trelystan (**132**), Trewern (Britnell 1982), and some stone cairns may equally have earthen elements as at Carneddau (**6313**), Carno (Gibson 1993). The term 'structured cairn' has been applied in cases where structural elements may be detected through the turf cover or within the stones of a mound and their identification is often one of chance survival. Once more the surface features of Carneddau did not reveal any of the complex structuring recorded during the excavation. Palisades, remodelling and stake circles below earthen round barrows may well represent the lowland form of structuring in areas where stone is scarce. Kerb cairns, like structured cairns, may be chance identifications where the ground cover is sufficiently low to render the kerb stones visible: in some cases the kerbs may have been removed as convenient stone sources for later structures or may have been covered by cairn slip or masked by subsequent field clearance or cairn augmentation. Consequently, the term is unreliable in terms of rigorously defining field monuments but it is useful as identifying monuments which might repay further study. Ring cairns, which may not have a primarily sepulchral role (Lynch 1993), may be more readily identifiable but can be confused with low, robbed-out mounds, embanked stone circles or even hut circles and small enclosures.

About 315 round barrows of various forms are recorded in the Upper Severn area (fig. 5), of which 142 are classed as cairns, 12 as ring cairns and 29 as structured cairns. These numbers are not definitive but are subject to the vagaries of field observation, monument preservation and interpretation by individual fieldworkers. Round barrows vary in size from less than 5m in diameter (40 sites), to over 30m (7 sites) (figs 6–7). The largest site, Crugynau (**1916**), near Kerry, at some 50m in diameter, is truly monumental in size, rivalling the large Wessex barrows, but there have been suggestions that it is a natural mound. The majority of barrows in the Upper Severn area (86) fall between 10–20m in diameter, with 66 sites measuring between 5–10m, and 27 between 20–30m. There are 89 sites where the diameters have yet to be recorded. While the smallest mounds could have been confused with clearance features, especially since they are found in the uplands, the other sites are probably reliable identifications.

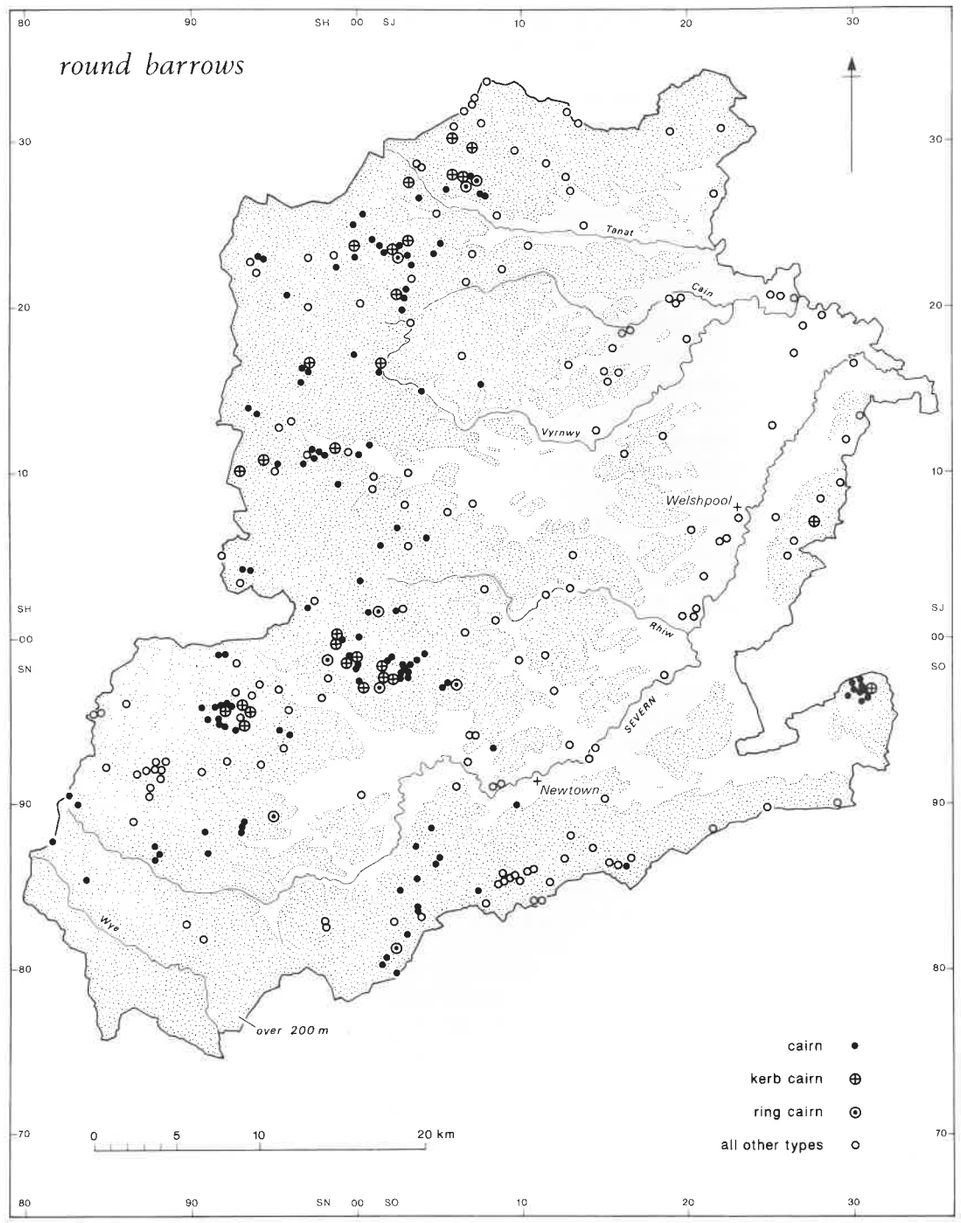

Fig. 5. Distribution of round barrow types in the Upper Severn Valley.

Round barrows are widely distributed across the study area, but there are some general trends in their spacing. Namely, the smaller barrows, under 10m in diameter, lie towards the west of the area while the medium-sized (10–30m) are found both in the uplands as well as in the river valleys (fig. 6). Those with diameters over 30m are almost wholly restricted to the main Severn Valley. This may, of course, be an unreal distribution, resulting from plough spreading, but it might equally be genuine, reflecting the greater availability of labour in more fertile areas, a hypothesis supported by the similar distribution of large ring-ditches (see below). What is surprising is that many round barrows have survived as upstanding monuments despite the intense agricultural use of the fertile valley bottoms. However, these sites clearly remain at risk. There is a particular concentration of larger diameter barrows and ring-ditches in the north-east of the area, near the mouths of the Tanat, Cain and Vyrnwy, at the point where the Severn flows out of its comparatively narrow Welsh valleys into the Midlands Plain. Three of the largest barrows in the study area fall within this concentration in that low-lying fertile area, suggesting that it was an important access point into and out of the uplands of mid Wales.

In the upland areas the siting of round barrows clearly shows variation but also demonstrates some patterning. Mountain-top or crest-sited cairns, for example, are generally large and were clearly intended to dominate their horizon, as in the case of the 3m-high round barrow known as Carnedd Das Eithin (**53**), Pen-y-bont-fawr. Similarly, a large round mound on Glog Hill (**1863**), Kerry, is visible as a feature on the skyline at the highest point of the unevenly topped hill south of Newtown, along which lie other mounds, each on a localised summit. From this site, the large mounds at Kerry Two Tumps (**50001**, **1000**) to the east and Caebetin (**999**) further to the north-east are clearly visible, also as dominant features on the skyline. The large cairns on Plynlimon Fawr clearly fall into this same category of sites which dominate the landscape.

The Glog and Kerry round barrows also occur at significant points in the geography of mid Wales. Glog Hill lies between the sources of the Mule, the Cwmrhiwdre brook and the River Ithon which cut valleys to the north-east, north and south respectively. At Kerry Two Tumps the mounds lie at the junction of three watersheds: the Mule, the Ithon and the Teme which flows to the south-east. At Caebetin (**998, 999**), Kerry, the watershed is between the Mule and the Nant Miheli, while further to the north-east Rhiw Dan Tin (**1881**), Kerry, also lies on a crest between the Nant Miheli and one of its tributaries. These sites clearly demarcate major watersheds and their position and landscape dominance may very possibly have a territorial significance, perhaps being situated on the boundaries between adjacent land ownerships. The Corndon and Plynlimon cairns are yet more impressive examples. The Plynlimon mounds are situated between the sources of two major rivers, the Wye and Severn, which flow to the south-east and north-east respectively, while on the west the Afon Gwerin flows to the coast. The Corndon cairn, on an easily recognisable massif, the significance of which will be discussed again below, lies between the Camlad and the West Onny. These majestic mounds of stone must have had a significant territorial role being at the watersheds of major valleys and thus perhaps marking more important, possibly even tribal, landholdings.

Some cairns, like some stone circles and standing stones, appear to be sited in passes and major routes through the hills which may have territorial significance since this places them at the boundaries of naturally defined land units. The concentration of cairns around Glan Hafon (**5056**, **5055**, **6381**, **6382**), Llangynog, is just such an example. These cairns, today at the crossroads of several rights-of-way, include a ring cairn with large central monolith and dominate a pass linking the Tanat and Rhaeadr valleys. Similarly, the cairns at the head of

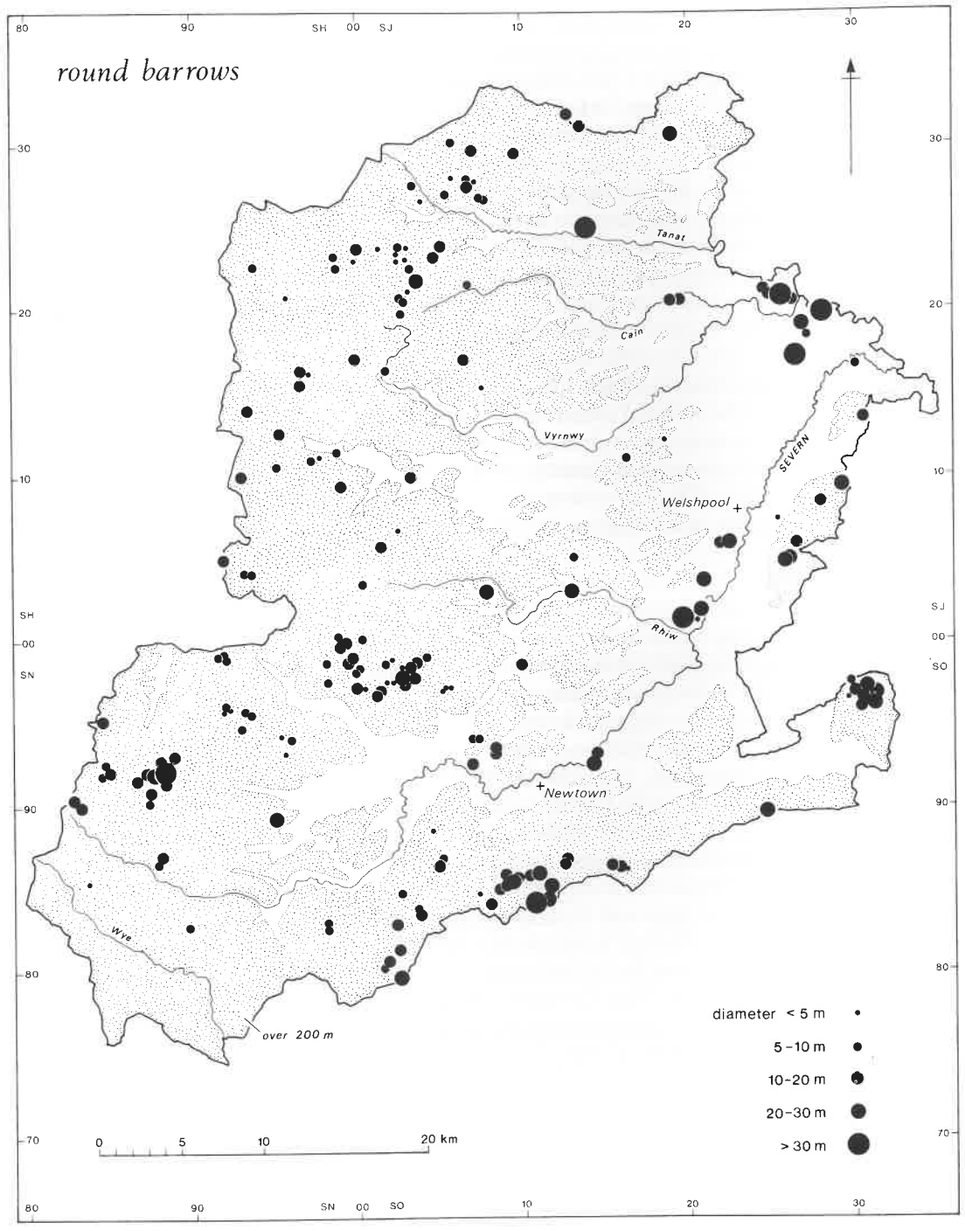

Fig. 6. Distribution of round barrow of different diameters in the Upper Severn Valley.

Bwlch Sych (**4990**, **4992**, **6024**, **6025**, **46**, **4991**) are situated close to modern paths which lead over a spur between the valleys of Hirnant and Pennant. The large mound known as the King's Barrow (**51**) dominates the skyline in the same area and, despite being currently hidden by surrounding forestry, it lies on a traditional routeway between the Hirnant and Vyrnwy.

At Cefn Llwyd, near Penffordd-las, where the location of the white quartz stone at the head of the significantly named Bwlch y Garreg-wen has already been noted, there is also a major barrow concentration centred on the large Cefn Llwyd cairn (**1377**) at this pass. The complex of sites on Trannon moor, despite being in a presently featureless landscape, also straddle two modern rights-of-way leading from the Garno valley via Cledan to the Twymyn valley to the west. The Trannon sites, dominated by the massive but much-despoiled Twr Gwyn cairn (**910**), are situated more or less midway between the two main valleys and are significantly bunched on the only cross-moor paths within 2km to the south and 2.5km to the north. This may represent a comparatively modern formalisation of a very much older route (cf. Loveday 1998).

Barrows sited on ridgeways may also have had directional and territorial functions, for such pathways may once have formed the boundary of two or more adjacent territories. For example, barrows on the present bridle-path between Llyn Fawr and Adfa over Mynydd Bwlch-y-gors and Mynydd Clogau, for example, are all sited along the crest of the ridge (**4750**, **5772**, **763**, **762**, **1548**). The cluster of barrows along the top of Long Mountain also follow a ridgeway (**4503**, **4504**, **50644**, **50645**, **3638**, **4920**, **129**, **128**). The Kerry Ridgeway, too, has its share of sites, cairns (**1916**, **1000**, **50001**, **1897**, **1006**, **1007**, **1005**) as well as the Kerry Hill stone circle (**1008**), though the antiquity of this latter site has been questioned (see above). Numerous finds of flintwork from along this ancient route also attest its prehistoric significance (Chitty 1963). In particular the finds of raw cortical flint nodules, clearly imported from the chalk lands, at Cloddiau near Kerry, may suggest the presence of a former trading or distribution site situated on this important route.

Other cairns seem to have been sited for the views from them rather than for considerations of landscape domination. A feature noted on some site visits was that many cairns, even if on hilltops, were rarely noticeable until the final approach. Sites such as Y Garnedd Wen (**101014**) and Y Foel Ddu (**101013**) near Llanarmon Mynydd Mawr are spectacular examples of this. Both sites command extensive views to the south and east and most notably to the Breidden hills. Cil Haul barrow (**4997**) in the Nant Fyllon valley and the Carneddau cairn (**6313**), to the north-east of Carno (Gibson 1993), demonstrate a similar siting with the Breidden on the horizon. The Breidden and Cordon Hill are both particularly distinctive landforms in the Upper Severn Valley providing obvious reference points, suggesting that the view to them might have been deliberate. Other monuments also demonstrate this siting. The standing stones and the possible ring cairn at Cefn Llydan (**4745**), north of Caersws, for example, and the stone row at Fuallt (**6676**), south-east of Llanidloes, both have the Breidden within their sights. On present evidence the upland valleys of the Severn appear to have been colonised after the main valley and therefore presumably from it. The apparent preoccupation with the Breidden and other instantly recognisable landforms may therefore suggest a looking back towards an ancestral homeland.

Burials beneath barrows are often found to be associated with pottery vessels which can provide information on date and cultural links. Whilst it is now accepted that there is a great deal of overlap between ceramic styles it is nevertheless unusual to find a Beaker secondary

to a Food Vessel and a Food Vessel secondary to a Collared Urn. Radiocarbon dating has demonstrated the earlier appearance of Beakers and the late survival of Cordoned Urns, though there appears to be little chronological distinction between Collared Urns, Food Vessels and Food Vessel Urns, which instead seem to belong to a diversity of types spanning the earlier Bronze Age between *c.* 2000–1500 cal BC. Barrow excavations in the Upper Severn area have produced Beakers, Food Vessels and Urns (Table 5). There are also some Neolithic finds from Four Crosses which are discussed in the context of ring-ditches below. Grooved Ware and Beaker sherds were recovered from pre-barrow contexts at Trelystan where Food Vessels in various forms were associated with burials (Britnell 1982). From upland barrows as at Carneddau, Carno, the ceramic associations appear to be almost entirely Collared Urn of the early Bronze Age with a possible Food Vessel identification also from Carneddau I. A small accessory vessel was recovered from one of the urns at Carneddau I. Cordoned Urns are recorded from Ystrad Hynod, Trefeglwys, as well as a small perforated-wall cup accessory vessel. At Ysgwennant, Llansilin, an upland valley location, long-necked Beakers were found. Such Late Neolithic pots are the earliest ceramic so far from upland areas.

Table 5: Ceramic types from round barrows in the Upper Severn Valley

site	*record no.*	*ceramic type*	*stratigraphy*
Ysgwennant, Llansilin	**100993**	Beaker (2 vessels and sherds)	primary
Bryn y Fedwyn, Cadfarch	**821**	Food Vessel	primary?
Foel cairn, Banwy	**1206**	Food Vessel	secondary
Trelystan II, Trewern	**50645**	Food Vessel	secondary
Trelystan I, Trewern	**50644**	Food Vessel (2 vessels and frags)	secondary
Carneddau I, Carno	**6313**	Food Vessel	secondary?
Penfforddlas I	**1380**	Collared Urn	primary?
Carneddau II, Carno	**6312**	Collared Urn (2 vessels)	primary and secondary
Carneddau I, Carno	**6313**	Collared Urn (6 vessels and sherds)	primary and secondary
Lan Fawr, Churchstoke	**17192**	Collared Urn	primary
Caebetin I, Kerry	**999**	Food Vessel Urn	primary
Trelystan I	**50644**	Food Vessel Urn (5 vessels)	secondary
Trelystan II	**50645**	Food vessel Urn (2 vessels)	secondary
Ystrad Hynod, Trefeglwys	**50473**	Cordoned Urn (2 vessels)	primary
Carneddau II, Carno	**6312**	Accessory Vessel	primary?
Ystrad Hynod, Trefeglwys	**50473**	Accessory Vessel	primary?
Gwynyndy, Banwy	**1207**	unspecified urns	—
Carnedd Cerrig, Pen-y-bont-fawr	**3907**	unspecified urns	—
Ysgwennant, Llansilin	**100993**	unspecified vessels	—

A series of radiocarbon dates from round barrow excavations in the region support this general assumption and also the hypothesis of Early Bronze Age colonisation of the uplands. The dates for Trelystan I and II, Carneddau I and II, and Lan Fawr (fig. 10) span the period between *c.* 2500–1200 cal BC, the earliest dates for barrow contexts coming from the Trelystan barrows situated on Long Mountain on the eastern edge of the main valley.

Ring-ditches

The discussion of ring-ditches continues and extends some of the themes already raised in the commentary on round barrows since the majority of ring-ditches, usually first identified as cropmarks from the air, may be largely interpreted as the remains of ploughed-out round barrows. Some of the larger ones, such as those near Carreghofa (e.g. **2455**), Blackhall Cottages (**2510**), Caersws, and Sarn-y-bryn-caled (**4546**), Welshpool, between 40 and 60m in diameter, may be henge monuments. The remainder of the 153 ring-ditches recorded in the Upper Severn area, like the surviving barrows, vary between 5m and 30m. The ring-ditches generally have a riverine and lowland distribution, in areas where arable agriculture is concentrated — the areas where conditions for cropmark formation are at an optimum.

The majority of ring-ditches fall in the 10–30m diameter range (figs 7–8). About 70 sites are recorded as between 10–20m, and a further 54 sites between 20–30m. Ring-ditches of this size may be readily interpreted as the ploughed-out remains of round barrows. Indeed, excavation of one of the ring-ditches at Four Crosses demonstrated that remnant mound material survived below the ploughsoil yet was not identifiable as a surface feature (Warrilow *et al.* 1986, Site 1). Aerial photographs of sites within this category frequently show central pits presumed to be for burials. This is particularly the case of the Sarn-y-bryn-caled ring-ditches (**4928**, **8951**), Welshpool, and also at the ditched round barrow at Aberhafesb (**4022**) which, as well as having a low spread earthwork mound, shows from the air as a well-defined ring-ditch with large central pit. There are also 24 much smaller sites, with diameters of between 5–10m. These are difficult to interpret and while small ring-ditches are certainly known in the Neolithic and Bronze Age, the danger of confusing these small cropmarks with redundant animal feeding sites is obvious. Excavation of such sites at Four Crosses and Sarn-y-bryn-caled provided rather ambiguous evidence, though pottery confirms a Late Neolithic date. At Four Crosses a small ring-ditch and a satellite ring-ditch (Warrilow *et al.* 1986, Site 6 and Site 2) appear to have been designed to enclose burials (though no trace of such remained in the central pits). In contrast, another small ring-ditch in the same complex (Site 3) produced no evidence for there having been a burial. At Sarn-y-bryn-caled (**4930**) the small penannular ring-ditch produced dating evidence but no central burial (Gibson 1994), though cremations were recovered from the ditches.

Like surviving barrows, ring-ditches are often found to occur in groups or cemeteries. Ironically it is sometimes easier to appreciate the size and variety of the group from air photographs of completely destroyed sites than from field examination. The fact that many of these larger groupings are in valley bottoms may be related to the presence of fertile land capable of supporting a larger population. Such cemeteries have been identified at Banhadla in the Tanat Valley (fig. 9), in the Caersws basin, at the Sarn-y-bryn-caled cursus complex south of Welshpool (Gibson 1992c; 1994), at Dyffryn Lane in Berriew (Gibson 1995a), at Four Crosses (Warrilow *et al.* 1986; Owen & Britnell 1989), and at Carreghofa where there is a concentration of large diameter sites. There also appears to be evidence for

the clustering of smaller sites around the larger ones, suggesting that the larger sites may be primary with the smaller diameter monuments added around them. Amongst surviving barrows or cairns there are three similar concentrations of smaller monuments around a larger, presumed primary monument which deserve comment in this context. On Trannon moor there is a varied group of ritual monuments surrounding Twr Gwyn Mawr (**910**); on the edge of the Dyfnant Forest a group of small cairns and a stone row lie to the south-east of the Moel Tryfel cairn (**4076**); and at the head of Bwlch y Garreg-wen there is a concentration of cairns around the Cefn Llwyd round barrow (**1377**) (though some of these might be grass-covered outcrops). Generally, the larger monuments tend to stand in isolation, often at strategic points within the landscape and where cemeteries of larger mounds can be identified, for example on Glog Hill and at Penffordd-las, the mounds are widely spaced. Smaller sites tend to cluster, for example in the upper Vyrnwy valley around

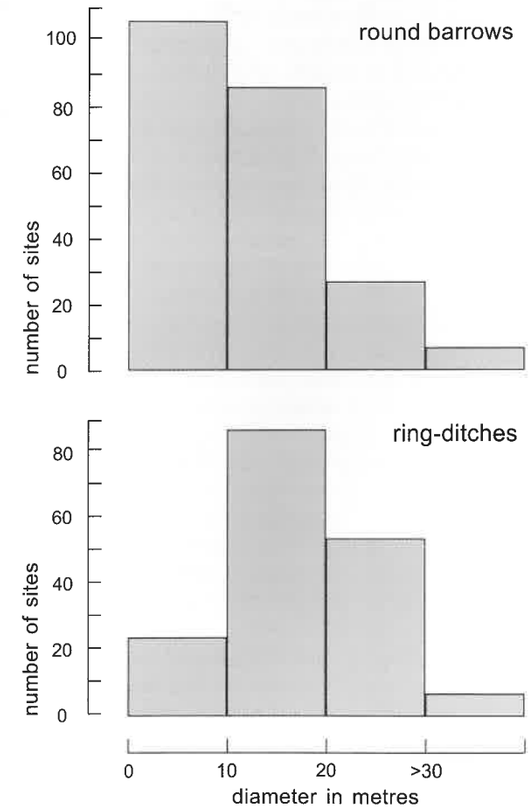

Fig. 7. Comparative dimensions of round barrows and ring-ditches in the Upper Severn Valley.

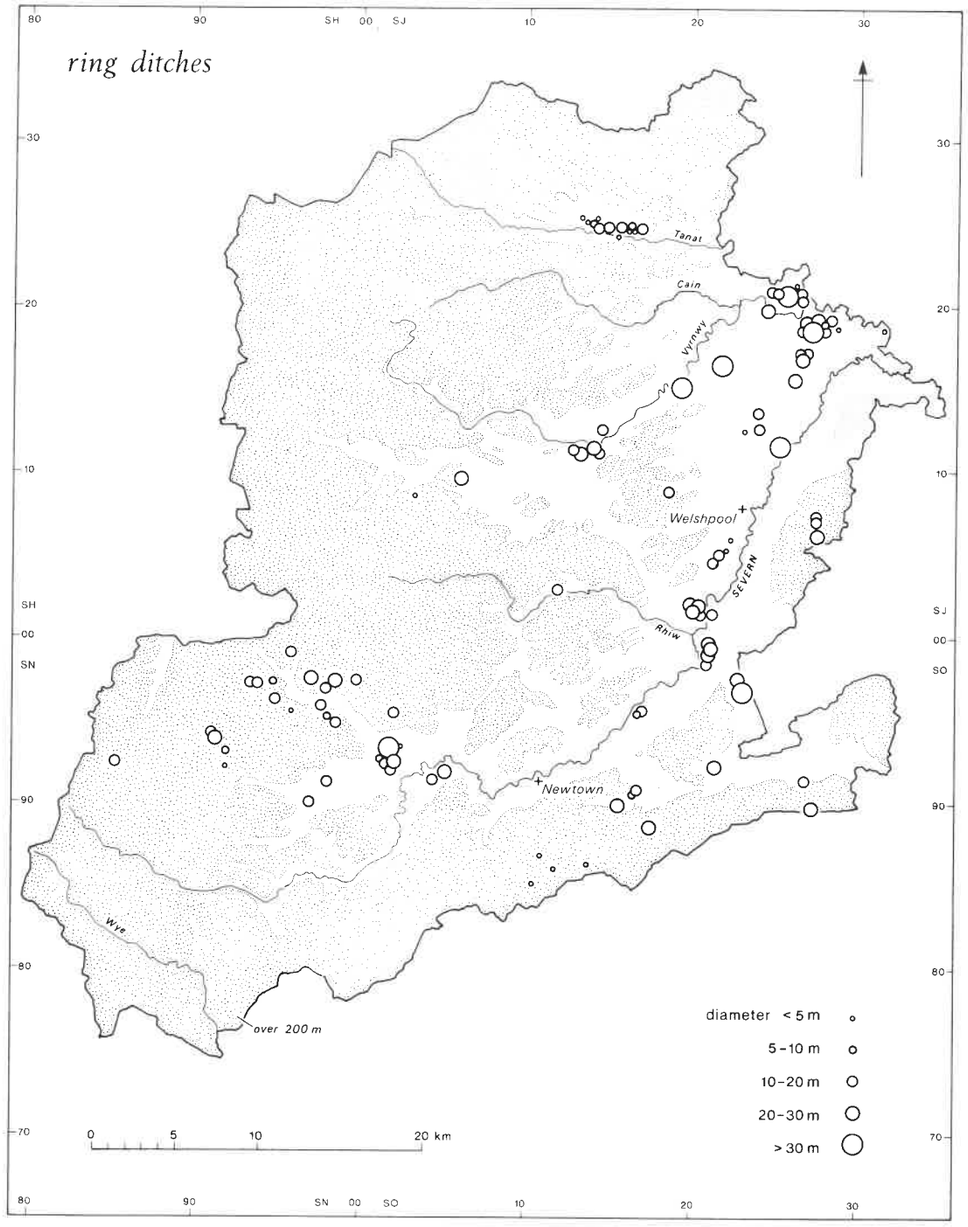

Fig. 8. Distribution of ring-ditches of different diameters in the Upper Severn Valley.

Bwlch-sych (**46**, **4990**, **4991**, **4992**, **6204**, **6205**), and around Garnedd Wen in the Tanat Valley (**3901**, **5055**, **5056**, **6381**, **6382**). These clusters cannot be regarded as nucleated cemeteries, however, as they generally lack a visibly principal monument.

At Dyffryn Lane, Berriew, the ring-ditch cemetery would appear to be a nucleated one with the henge and central barrow at its core. Around this some ten ring-ditches cluster at a respectful distance. None can be regarded as satellites to the henge, the nearest (**4023**) being some 65m from it. The much earlier Lower Luggy long barrow lies 500m to the north-west of the henge but while its presence is worthy of mention, any direct link with the henge complex is impossible to demonstrate. At Banhadla, Llangedwyn, a roughly linear arrangement of at least three small-diameter sites (e.g. **70852**, **101782**, **70853**) are located approximately 60m to the north-east of a considerably larger ring (**70854**), which though only 17m in diameter internally has a ditch approximately 6m wide. While obviously the depth of this feature is unknown, there is clear potential for a large mound being formed from the upcast of such a broad feature. The smaller barrow group has two outliers (**101781**, **101783**) suggesting a possible sequence of building with later barrows clustering on, but diverging from the original linear development. Approximately 600m to the west of Banhadla Farm is a second linear cemetery. Here five further small ring-ditches (**106399**, **70847**, **102651**, **70846**, **70845**) form a linear group stretching virtually north-south for a distance of 100m. About 70m to the south of this group, and continuing the main alignment, is a larger ring-ditch (**70851**), about 20m in diameter. Without excavation it is uncertain whether this is the primary monument and the smaller sites run off from it, or whether it is a later site continuing the original linear cemetery. Again, however, there are outliers to the cemetery (**70850** is a satellite of the large **70851**, while **70848** lies to the west of **70847**). Midway between these two linear cemeteries at Banhadla lie three other funerary monuments; two ring-ditches (**70849**, **102648**) as well as a small penannular ring-ditch (**101713**). Clearly the multiplicity of mounds in this small area and their variation in size must reflect a complex chronology and probably a subtle social hierarchy. What is less clear is how much of this information has survived the agricultural erosion of the centuries.

At Carreghofa, there is a broadly linear arrangement of four large-diameter sites (**4599**, **4601**, **2455**, **4597**) stretching over 700m and orientated east-west along the Vyrnwy, close to its confluence with the Tanat. The significance of this siting at the junction of the major valleys and access ways has already been commented upon. Little has yet been published on the subject of these larger ring-ditches and little is known about their dating or function. They are arguably earlier, possibly Neolithic in date, though the well-documented Neolithic ring-ditches (see Kinnes 1979) rarely reach such proportions. The presence of mounds within these monuments is often assumed but has never been demonstrated; the ditches are rarely wide in relation to their diameter and consequently any mound must have been low and well spread or else restricted to a small mound within a large ditch; central pits, generally assumed to be primary graves, are also absent from these larger sites. The assumption that they were simply very large round barrows may therefore prove to be mistaken.

Comment on the Four Crosses cemetery, Llandysilio, has been left to last because excavation here provides greater certainty about chronology and cemetery development over a period of two millennia between the middle Neolithic and the middle Bronze Age (Warrilow *et al.* 1986). Three sites with diameters of over 30m (**50559**, **50554**, **5149**) are interspersed with smaller sites. The larger sites form a broadly linear arrangement from one on the south (**38096**), via a number of sites north of Oldfield (**38091**, **50559**), to one on the north (**23661**). This linear arrangement

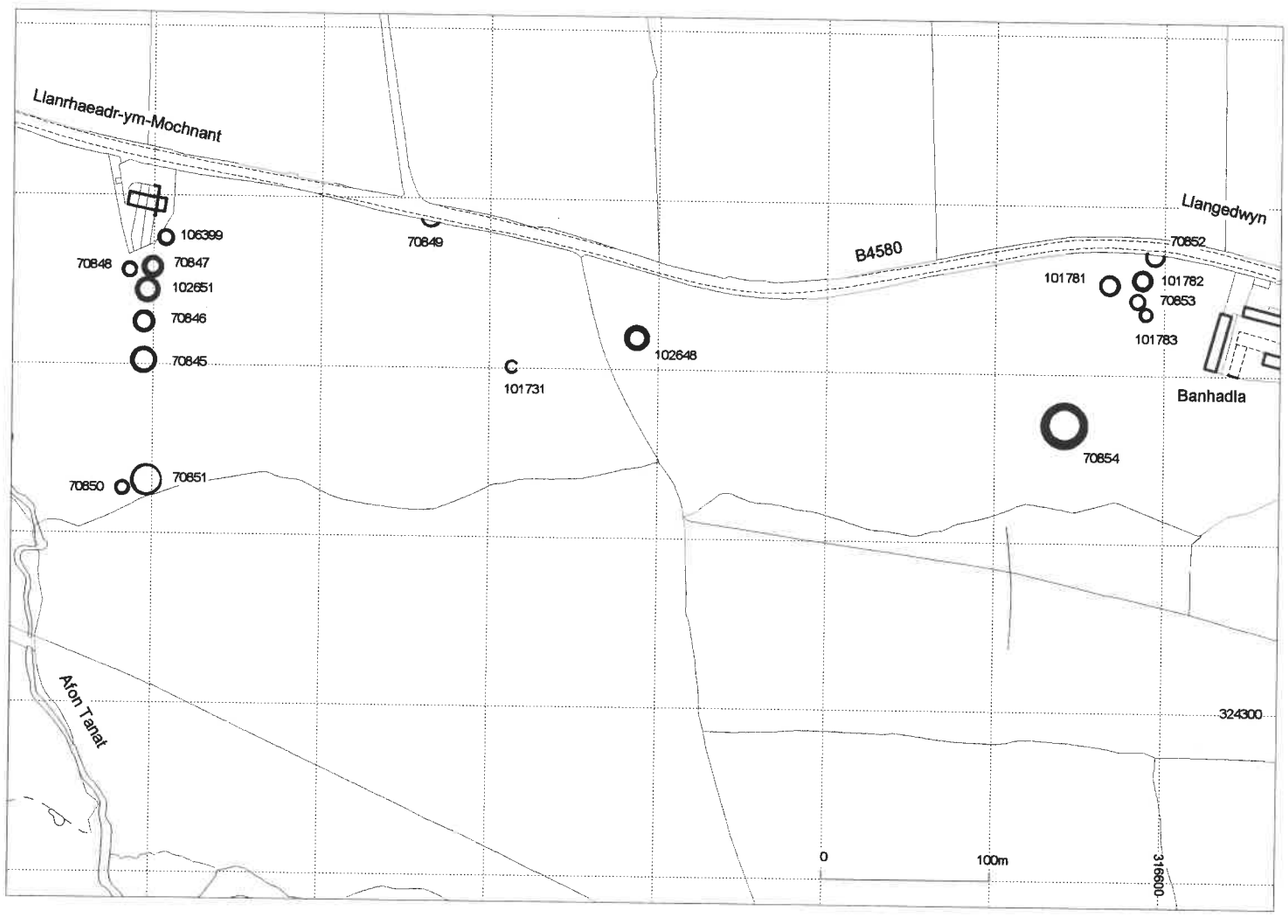

Fig. 9. Ring-ditch cemetery near Banhadla, Llangedwyn, in the Tanat Valley.

covers a distance of 385m and a total of eight, (or perhaps more considering the area around the cemetery which is built over), smaller ring-ditches are interspersed between the larger ones. In the light of the composition of large cemeteries in Wessex such as Winterbourne Stoke this might suggest that the large diameter sites are primary with smaller sites later infilling the inter-barrow spaces, acting as satellites to the larger mounds.

A series of radiocarbon dates from ring-ditch excavations in the Upper Severn Valley, for sites at Four Crosses and Coed-y-dinas, span the period between *c.* 3400–1400 cal BC (fig. 10). Finds from ring-ditches are also restricted to these sites. The earliest find is the middle Neolithic plain bowl with a burial at Four Crosses, an early appearance of this type of pot as a grave offering. Late Neolithic pottery found in association with barrows usually still has an uncertain role, like the Beaker sherds deliberately buried at Coed-y-dinas and the similar fragments from Four Crosses which appear to be simply residual debris. However, in the Early Bronze Age it became customary to include a pot as a grave offering or as a container for such offerings and larger pots, Food Vessel Urns and Collared Urns were actually used to hold cremated bone. At Four Crosses the recovery of fragments of coarse jars of Middle Bronze Age type reveal that burials continued to be added to these mounds up to about 1000 cal BC. As might be expected, the finds confirm the established radiocarbon chronology for these sites. Even though it is a small sample the pattern is similar to sites elsewhere in the country where more extensive excavation has taken place. For instance at the Devil's Quoit, Oxfordshire ring-ditch construction commenced in about 3000 cal BC and continued up to the end of the early Bronze Age (Barclay *et al.* 1995). The Beaker attention seems to have been greater at this latter complex than at the Severn Valley sites but the Beaker burials often lie outside the ring-ditches and the overall development of the cemetery appears to resemble the Four Crosses sequence.

Cists

Prehistoric burials were normally covered by a mound of some kind but cists in flat cemeteries, without barrows, are known elsewhere in upland Britain and therefore their presence in Wales might be expected. About eight possible cists presently unassociated with a covering mound are recorded in the Upper Severn Valley area but their distribution is restricted to the upper Tanat valley (fig. 3). All have been disturbed in the past, their cist covers are rarely still in position and the former existence of a mound cannot be discounted. The only recorded burial at a flat cist site is that at Nant Llwyn Gwern (**10**), Llangynog, which is perhaps apocryphally recorded as having contained coins when opened in the nineteenth century. Some cists formed an element of larger complexes of burial sites. Those at Ffordd Gefn (**41**) and Drum Llethr (**39**), Llangynog, and Moel Bwlch Sych (**40**), Pen-y-bont-fawr, for example, lie within areas of cairns and standing stones, but the first two were destroyed by forestry and the third, said to be a double cist, could not be relocated. Of the remaining cists the two recorded at Carreg Coch (**35728**, **35727**), Llanwddyn are possibly fortuitous arrangements of stones resulting from peat cutting (Silvester & Hankinson 1997).

Cremations

Like cist burials, cremation burials are normally elements of more complex and monumental structures. Cremations from flat cemeteries are known in Britain from Beaker contexts onwards but are generally chance discoveries. At Pennant Melangell (**50677**) characteristic

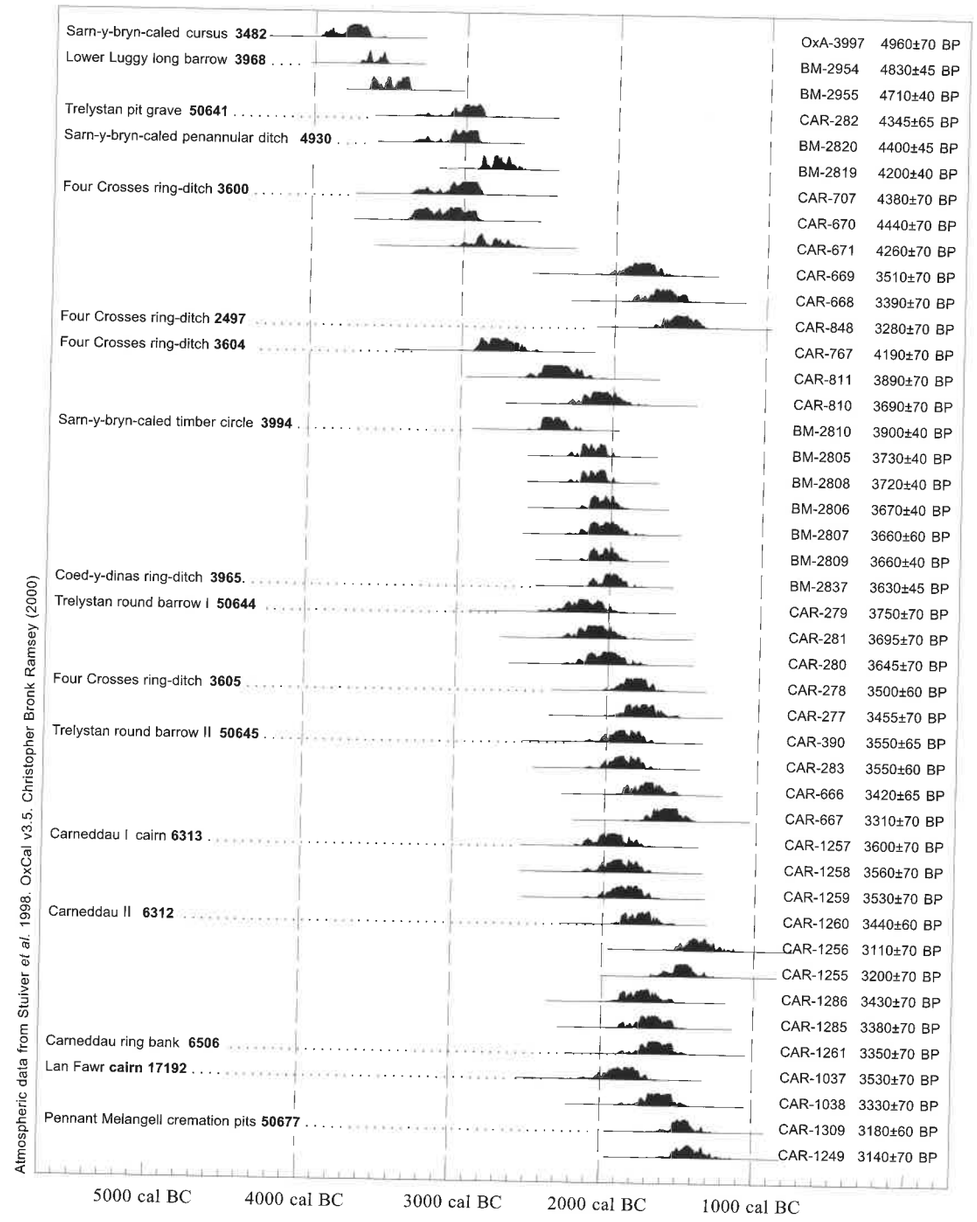

Fig. 10. Calibrated radiocarbon dates from prehistoric funerary and ritual sites in the Upper Severn Valley.

Bronze Age cremation deposits were found unexpectedly during the excavations at the medieval church (Britnell 1994). Two pits contained cremated human bone, dated to *c.* 1600–1200 cal BC (CAR-1249, CAR-1309).

Pits

Individual pits are a largely unstudied phenomenon in British prehistory and little may be said in synthesis except to highlight examples of these sites which clearly demonstrate the enormous potential of these features. Pits are commonly found on later prehistoric settlement sites, where they are usually interpreted as storage features, but they are less well known in the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods. The Bronze Age shaft at Wilsford, Wiltshire, is an obvious exception, dated to the period about 1450 cal BC, even though the interpretation of this site (which might have been a well) is ambiguous (Ashbee *et al.* 1989). Several barrows, such as Garton Slack 75 in Yorkshire (Mortimer 1905), have exceptionally deep graves beneath them often containing a sequence of burials. The slightly earlier pit beneath Duggleby Howe, Yorkshire, about 3m across and 2.7m deep, also contained a sequence of burials, demonstrating that such exceptionally large graves go back to the later Neolithic (Mortimer 1905; Kinnes *et al.* 1983). A contemporary late Neolithic grave at Four Crosses (Warrilow *et al.* 1986, Site 5) was contained within a pit of exceptional size, about 3.75m by 4.50m across.

Five sites featured in the Severn Valley area are classed as pits of possible funerary or ritual significance (fig. 2). That at Carneddau (**50633**), Carno was a small pit associated with a ring bank and has been excavated (Silvester in Gibson 1993). A large pit about 1.5–4m across, containing sherds of Beaker pottery, was found during excavation within the Collfryn Iron Age hillslope enclosure (**3603**), Llansantffraid (Britnell 1989). Three other large circular pits have been identified from aerial photographs and appear to form an element of known Neolithic and Bronze Age complexes. A large pit at Sarn-y-bryn-caled (**38726**), Welshpool, is clearly shown in aerial photographs as a large roughly circular area about 10m across. Its date and function are unknown, but its location suggests a significant role within the ritual complex. The Lower Luggy pit (**34706**), Berriew, is again unexcavated but has been recorded by both aerial photography and geophysics (Gibson 2000a). It measures approximately 10m in diameter and although its date and function are again uncertain its location to the north of the Neolithic long barrow suggests its archaeological potential. It seems too large to be a grave and it may be possible that it represents an earlier pit with some other function. The Dyffryn Lane pit (**4026**), Berriew, again lies within a complex of ritual sites, to the east of the henge, again appears to be over 10m in diameter (Gibson 1995a).

THE ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

The earliest permanent settlement of the Upper Severn Valley is presumed to have come from the Midlands Plain, probably via the Breidden/Llanymynech gap in the first few centuries of the fourth millennium BC. This area appears to have remained important throughout later prehistory, for it is here that the confluence of the Severn, the Vyrnwy and the Tanat are to be found, the major rivers which drain the mountains further west. Perhaps fairs or markets were established at these meeting points from which access can be gained

to the interior. The exceptionally large barrows and ring-ditches found in this area may be visible evidence of this importance.

Within five hundred years of the establishment of agriculture in Britain, the Neolithic cursus at Sarn-y-bryn-caled, to the south of Welshpool, had been constructed. Dated to *c.* 4000–3600 cal BC (OxA-3997; Gibson 1994) the cursus continued to be a focus of ritual attention for approximately two millennia, well into the Bronze Age. Similarly at Lower Luggy and Dyffryn Lane, Berriew, a long barrow and henge attest early and middle Neolithic activity in the area. By the middle and later Neolithic, the valley sides were being utilised as evidenced at Ffridd Faldwyn near Montgomery and Trelystan on Long Mountain where Peterborough Ware and Grooved Ware were respectively found. Several radiocarbon dates in the early third millennium cal BC have been obtained for Peterborough pottery in the Severn Valley (Gibson 1995b). By the end of the third millennium and the beginning of the second BC, the use of Beaker pottery had spread into the valley as far south-west as Aberbechan, near Newtown, and probably much further.

Evidence for Neolithic activity has been largely restricted to the bottom and sides of the main valley. Only the finds from beneath the barrow at Ysgwennant, Llansilin, suggest penetration deep into the side valleys. In the earlier Bronze Age, however, while the valleys were not abandoned, there was a marked expansion into the uplands. The scant pollen evidence, discussed below, suggests that pastoralism was the main economy in the uplands but over-reliance should not be placed on these limited data. Evidence of early settlement is generally rare in the region, but once again the pollen data indicates that the forest was being cleared and it would therefore be logical to expect the houses to have been constructed in wood, as indeed was the case at Trelystan. Cairnfields in the uplands of Montgomeryshire can logically be interpreted as representing a long-term commitment to local land improvement and might therefore suggest a certain permanency of settlement.

Stone burial cairns are the commonest evidence for this upland expansion but stone circles and rows of Bronze Age date are also markedly upland in their distribution, with the exception of the possible circle beneath the central mound of the Dyffryn Lane henge. Standing stones, however, are less restricted and are found in both upland and valley locations. The functions of these sites have been discussed above and tentative conclusions drawn. It would appear that they often have a territorial significance or are placed on routeways through and across the uplands and rivers.

It appears that the uplands were colonised from the main valley and in this respect it is interesting to note the frequent reference to the valley and in particular the visibility of the distinctive landforms of the Breidden and Corndon hills from many of the upland Bronze Age sites. This has also been discussed above and it is suggested that these landforms act as geographical reference points for ancestral pasts. The sitings may also have a purely functional referencing. If the upland economy is a pastoralist one, then the main Severn Valley landmarks may also have served as referencing points for local granaries and markets for surplus produce.

Pollen analysis of upland peats in conjunction with the excavations at Carneddau in the hills north of Carno, has provided a complete pollen spectrum for this district from the post-glacial to the present (Walker 1993). In the post-glacial, hazel and birch spread into the region, with oak, pine and some elm and alder colonising the area in the later Mesolithic till about 6000 cal BC. At Carneddau this forest cover is not cut back until the Bronze Age, but elsewhere there is evidence for early Neolithic clearance — an indicator of the beginning

of local farming. Analysis of the sediments in a natural pond on the summit of the Breidden suggests the opening up of the local forest canopy and the introduction of Neolithic economies at a date corresponding to the date of Neolithic and Bronze Age monument building at Lower Luggy and Sarn-y-bryn-caled in the valley below (Britnell in Musson 1991, 105–111). Further palaeoenvironmental evidence for the middle Neolithic period has been obtained from the excavations within the Sarn-y-bryn-caled complex, where charcoal includes fast growing oak suggestive of good growing conditions, presumably on the valley floor and sides, as well as hazel, poplar and hawthorn suggesting clearings or scrub within the oak forest (Gibson 1994). However, hazel and hawthorn in particular are good hedging species and their dominance may more properly reflect land division, an interpretation unfortunately difficult to demonstrate archaeologically. Once again, the data are supported by the analysis at the Breidden pond which has revealed the appearance of weeds generally associated with arable agriculture at a date of about 3000 cal BC.

In the later Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age, the picture is maintained with the continued dominance of oak but the increased presence of hazel, blackthorn, maple, rowan, poplar and gorse. Once again, this is generally taken to mean the presence of scrub, but equally a formalised hedged environment might produce similar results, the charcoal derived from the burning of trimmings resulting from regular hedge maintenance. The Breidden pond data suggest the greatest effect on the landscape was taking place around 2000 cal BC, with some forest regeneration following, and then a renewed phase of clearance around 1500 cal BC.

The first clearance episode in the mixed woodland at upland Carneddau is marked by an abrupt decline in alder with a decrease also in the pollen of oak and hazel. This episode has been dated to 1600–1200 cal BC (CAR-1239), towards the end of the earlier Bronze Age (Gibson 1993). This date is probably a *terminus ante quem* for it is later than the dates obtained for the two cairns at Carneddau, where burial possibly started as early as 2000 cal BC and was complete before 1500 cal BC. The sitings and orientations demonstrated within the cairn suggests that the woodland was already substantially cleared in the early Bronze Age. An increase in the pollen spectra of weeds of cultivation as well as grasses is taken for evidence of pastoralism in the area. This habitat underwent little change until another phase of forest clearance around the later Bronze Age/Iron Age transition in the first millennium, perhaps suggesting that the uplands were continuously occupied, or at least managed, throughout this time. The pollen evidence from Carneddau and the Breidden pond suggests that the opening up and exploitation of the uplands started in the early Bronze Age but that the valleys were not abandoned. This is in line with similar evidence for other areas of Wales.

Analytical work on the ancient river channels in the Upper Severn Valley has shown that the river had changed from a braided river system at the end of late post-glacial period to a meandering system by the end of the Bronze Age (Taylor & Lewin 1993). It was suggested that the reasons for this change might in part be due to increased finer-fractioned silts in the river leading to accumulation through sedimentation processes. This may in part be due to an increase in vegetation following the last glaciation but could also be a result of the increased freeing of soils brought about by agricultural clearance. It is tempting to suggest that Neolithic and particularly upland Bronze Age agriculture increased the depth of alluvium in the main valley through soil erosion and if so, perhaps earlier Neolithic monuments and particularly settlement may be buried beneath this silt.

The numbers of round barrows and cairns potentially associated with Bronze Age

agriculture are obvious from the distribution maps. This has led to the hypothesis of greater population pressures in the first half of the second millennium forcing the exploitation of more marginal lands. This may be true to some degree, but in view of how little we know of Neolithic activity in the area, speculation based solely on the large numbers of upland sites would be rash. This is especially so given the generally better survival of monuments in the uplands. It may, for example, as equally represent an economic change, with an increased emphasis on pastoralism and stock management. It is worthy of note that the upland pollens from Carneddau indicate grassland, while the contemporary pollen spectra from the Breidden contain cereals, as did the valley-bottom henge at Coed-y-dinas.

Burgess has suggested that climatic deterioration at the end of the Bronze Age resulted in a population decline and a movement back towards the valleys and lowlands (Burgess 1985). This was detectable archaeologically by the difficulty in identifying artefacts from upland cairns which could be dated to much after *c.* 1200 cal BC and a decline in metalworking at this time. This also coincided with the emergence of defended enclosures and early hillforts. At face value the archaeological evidence from the Upper Severn Valley shows compliance with this model, but any retreat from the uplands may have been short-lived for the pollen data from Carneddau demonstrate another major clearance episode at the Bronze Age/Iron Age transition. Until more active research is undertaken into upland settlement in mid Wales, we must be careful not to confuse absence of evidence with evidence of absence.

Acknowledgments

The author is most grateful for help provided by Chris Martin in providing information from the Regional Sites and Monuments Record, maintained by CPAT, and Johnny Dempsey (database and map preparation). Aubrey Burl kindly gave advice on the stone circle and stone row elements. Richard Hankinson and Glyn Owen assisted with the fieldwork. The maps have been drawn for publication by Brian Williams. Nigel Jones, Bill Britnell and Frances Lynch Llewellyn have kindly helped in the preparation of the article for publication.

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Published with the aid of a grant from Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments

Table 1: Summary of prehistoric funerary and ritual monument types in the Upper Severn Valley

monument types	*no. of probable and possible sites*
Chambered tombs	2
Long barrows	2
Mortuary enclosures	1
Cursus monuments	4
Henges and hengiform sites	8
Timber circles	2
Pit circles	5
Stone circles	12
Stone rows	7
Stone pairs	3
Stone settings	8
Standing stones	129
Round barrows	315
Ring-ditches	153
Cists	8
Cremation sites	1
Pits	5

so it is not surprising that no chambered tombs have been reliably recorded here in the past (Daniel 1950). However, two possible examples, Afon y Dolau Gwynion and, less certainly, Ciddig (fig. 2) have been identified recently. Afon y Dolau Gwynion (**7820**) in Llanwddyn community, was discovered during rapid upland survey in 1993 and is situated on a spur commanding extensive views to the south. The site has recently been described (Silvester 1995) and comprises a roughly rectangular chamber measuring 5m by 2.5m. Three orthostats on the north-east seem to form a constricted entrance 1.5m long by approximately 0.6m wide. The chamber is surrounded by a low stony bank very probably the product of digging out the chamber from its covering mound. The capstones are missing. The mound or bank has been augmented by modern dumping. Ciddig barrow (**4788**), Llanwddyn, comprises a large, much disturbed cairn. It is oval to circular, with traces of kerbing and extensive central robbing. There is a roughly triangular 'tail' of stone to the south-west which may either be structural or the result of outcast from the earlier robbing. It is this feature, perhaps comparable to though considerably shorter than the long 'tail' at Bryn yr Hen Bobl, Anglesey (Lynch 1969, 115) which is its best claim to be a Neolithic tomb rather than a large Bronze Age barrow such as the one (**751**) which stands nearby.

Afon y Dolau Gwynion, therefore, is the only site which may be regarded with any certainty as a chambered tomb within the study area though even here there are problems of interpretation. It is distant from other stone chambers and its nearest neighbours appear to be outliers of the Cotswold-Severn group. However it does not resemble a Cotswold-Severn

tomb but rather a passage grave and other exemplars of that group are equally distant. The poorly understood sites in Derbyshire (Manby 1958) might provide other parallels. If this last identification is correct, the site might be expected to date to the later rather than the earlier Neolithic and its upland location may represent the very beginnings of Bronze Age upland colonisation in the region. This upland situation is unusual for chambered tombs in North Wales which, in keeping with other early Neolithic monuments and artefacts, generally favour coastal and river valley locations. Over-speculation on the date and significance of this site should, however, be avoided until it is better understood.

Long barrows

In the past long barrows were thought to belong to the funerary record of lowland rather than upland Britain, being monuments of earth and wood which were inappropriate to stone-using regions. They are the equivalent of the stone chambered tombs of the west and, like them, sometimes cover communal burials dating from the early Neolithic.

The Upper Severn area contains possibly two or three such long barrows (fig. 2). Lower Luggy long barrow, Berriew (**3968**) was first identified from the air in 1974. It lies on a broad gravel terrace above the present floodplain at about 76m OD and forms the most northerly and potentially earliest element of the Dyffryn Lane henge complex described in *Montgomeryshire Collections* volume 83 (Gibson 1995a) (see later). It comprises an elongated trapezoid enclosure, closed at the distal end. A site visit in 1994 revealed the surviving remains of a mound some 0.3m high at the north-east end tailing away to the south-west. The site was subject to physical survey, geophysical survey and trial excavation in 1994 (Gibson 2000a) when the presence of a timber façade trench was first noted. The lateral ditches were identified as bedding trenches, a closing proximal façade trench was located and the presence of a probable central cairn of waterworn boulders was identified below the proximal half. Radiocarbon dates from the outer rings of carbonised oak posts centred on *c.* 3700–3300 cal BC (BM-2954, BM-2955). These results confirm the site as a classic long barrow with a surrounding palisade and wooden forecourt, fronting the burial area presumed to lie beneath the heap of waterworn boulders.

A sub-rectangular ditched enclosure (**34054**) in the same field as the long barrow may represent a shorter, oval long barrow, 40m by 30m across. The juxtaposition of long and oval barrows in other areas of southern Britain is well-known (RCHME 1979) and, while at first sight the Lower Luggy cropmark might appear to be a small settlement enclosure of presumed later prehistoric date, aerial photographic evidence seems to indicate the presence of a slight internal mound. An apparent causeway in the south-east corner recalls the similarly-placed corner gap through the ditch of the Skendleby II long barrow, Lincolnshire (Evans & Simpson 1991).

New House long barrow (**3422**), Churchstoke, was reinterpreted as a long barrow after a field visit and survey. The site lies on a false crest at the foot of Corndon and commands spectacular views over the Severn Valley and the Cambrian Mountains. It comprises an oval mound orientated south-west to north-east and 30m by 18m across. The broader, higher end rises to a meagre 0.3m above the surrounding field surface and is towards the south-west. This is unusual for long barrows, which normally have their broader ends to the east, though parallels for a western orientation may be found at, for example, Hazelton, Gloucestershire (Saville 1990). Around the perimeter on the north-east are some possible kerb stones in the form of large rounded boulders, and a modern clearance cairn now

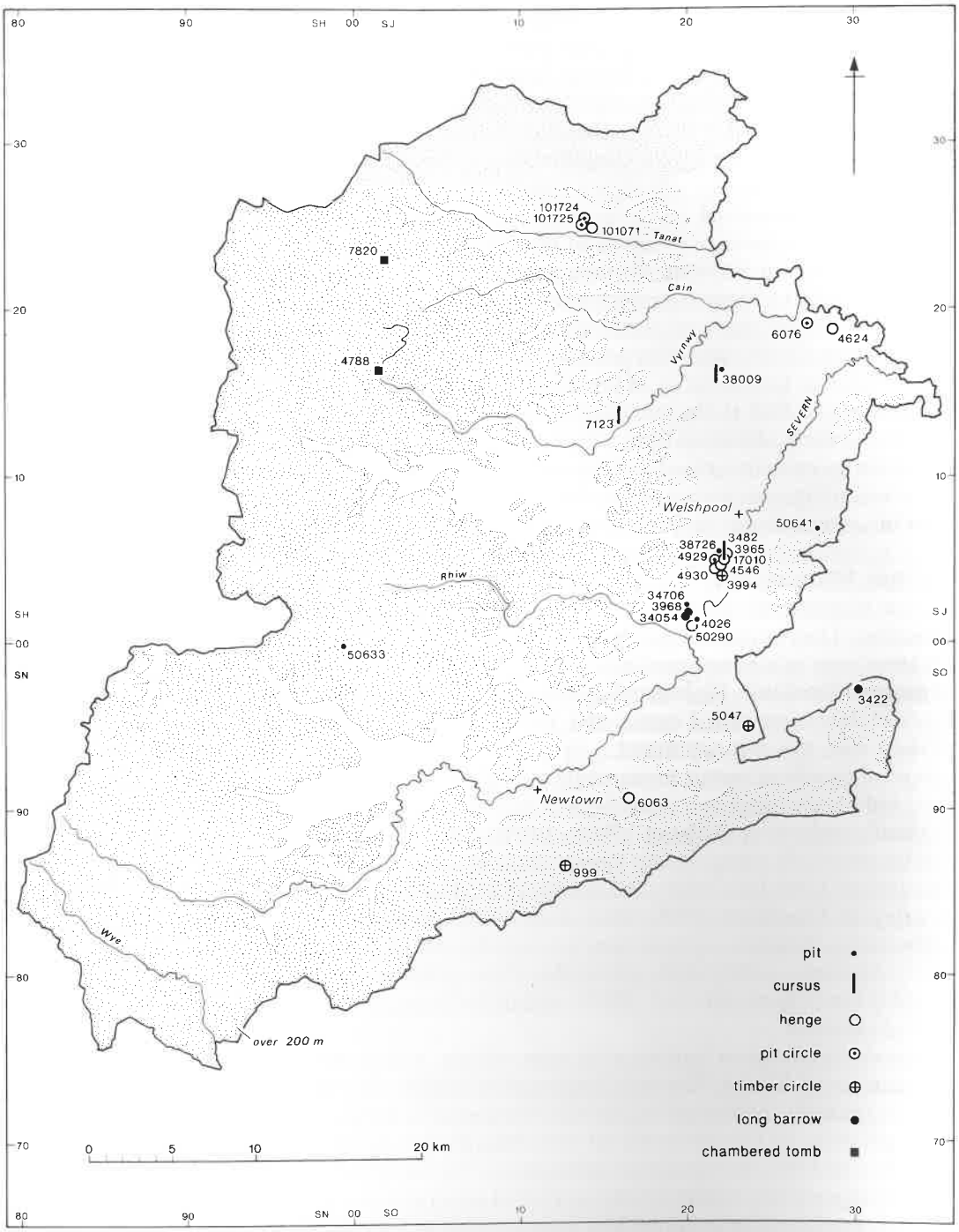

Fig. 2. Distribution of both certain and possible pits, cursuses, henges, pit circles, timber circles, long barrows and chambered tombs in the Upper Severn Valley.

1995a). It measures 60m in diameter overall and is defined by a low bank with internal ditch 5m wide and 0.3m deep. The interior of the site is covered by a low mound and antiquarian references record stones having been moved from the site, perhaps attesting the presence of a kerbed barrow or stone circle. Parch marks on aerial photographs also suggest the presence of such stones. The entrance is to the north-west and there appears to be a pit across the causeway. The site is obviously multi-phased, though the sequence is unlikely to be resolved without excavation.

A monument at Sarn-y-bryn-caled (Site 2, **4930**) was totally excavated in advance of the Welshpool bypass and measured 8m by 7m overall with a penannular ditch 1m wide and 1m deep (Gibson 1994, 159–61). The site opened to the north-west and the single entrance causeway was flanked by two postholes. Four cremation deposits were recovered from the ditch terminals. The primary burial, of a young adult female, was in an undercut in the southern ditch terminal. A child and an adult (possibly female) were recovered from secondary and tertiary contexts respectively in the southern terminal. A severely plough-truncated cremation from the northern terminal was of an adult of indeterminate sex. The ditch had been recut at an advanced stage of ditch silting and Neolithic Peterborough pottery was obtained from both the lower and upper levels of this recut. Radiocarbon dates of *c.* 3300–2900 cal BC (BM-2820) and *c.* 2900–2600 cal BC (BM-2819) were obtained respectively from the base and top of the recut.

A second small site at Sarn-y-bryn-caled (**17010**) appears to resemble the penannular ring-ditch but opens to the south-west. It was revealed during the geophysical survey of the southern terminal of the cursus but has not been proven by excavation or confirmed by air photography.

A large ring-ditch also at Sarn-y-bryn-caled (**4546**), measuring some 40m in diameter, lies to the north-east of the northern terminal of the cursus. The site is recorded only as a cropmark with no trace of an associated bank or mound. The present road from Sarn-y-bryn-caled to Belan Locks bisects the monument and no entrance causeways are visible. The positioning of the monument within the cursus complex mentioned above is in keeping with henge-cursus relationships explored elsewhere in Britain.

A ring-ditch at Coed-y-dinas (**3965**) was discovered from the air in 1975 and was excavated in 1992 in advance of the construction of the Welshpool bypass (Gibson 1994, 161–7, Sarn-y-bryn-caled Site 3). The site measured 19m in internal diameter with a ditch 1.5–2.3m across and surviving to 0.38–0.85m deep below the gravel surface though the ditch had been considerably eroded on the south where it was shallowest. There was an entrance in the west and a partial causeway on the east. This partial causeway was represented by two ditch butt-ends below the upper fills of the ditch and was clearly non-functional in terms of entry and exit. The finds from the lowest fill of the ditch comprised a collection of Beaker sherds and a single Neolithic Grooved Ware sherd associated with carbonised remains of hulled barley and a radiocarbon date of *c.* 2100–1900 cal BC (BM-2837). Interestingly and unusually, the ditch silts clearly indicated that silting had taken place from the interior of the site suggesting either the former presence of a bank or a steep-sided low mound.

The Meusydd monument (**101071**), south of Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant, is another hengiform monument recorded from the air by St Joseph. This site comprises a small circular ring-ditch with no trace of a bank or mound. The site measures only some 10m across overall but is marked by a broad ditch. It is this which has given rise to its

Timber Circles

Timber circles never survive as upstanding monuments. Freestanding examples, occasionally revealed by air photography, may be compared to the more familiar stone circles; while others discovered beneath round barrows may represent temporary structures which fulfilled some ritual role during the preliminary ceremonies of burial. They may be related to the smaller-scale stake circles often found beneath round barrows such as those at Four Crosses and Trelystan (Lynch 1993).

Two timber circles are known within the Upper Severn area (fig. 2). The first, at Sarn-y-bryn-caled (Site 1, **3994**), forms part of the ritual complex south of Welshpool examined in 1990 in advance of the construction of the Welshpool bypass (Gibson 1992c; 1994). It was a double circle, constructed of oak and orientated towards the south. At the centre of the inner circle were two cremation burials. The primary burial was associated with four barbed-and-tanged flint arrowheads and is interpreted as a sacrifice with analogies at Woodhenge and Stonehenge in Wiltshire. The secondary burial was associated with a small undecorated vase Food Vessel. Radiocarbon dates from the outer rings of the oak posts indicate that the circle was built in about 2100 cal BC (BM-2805–2810). The second is Caebetin Hill (**999**), Kerry, a round barrow excavated in the early 1930s by Noel Jerman and published in the *Montgomeryshire Collections* (Jerman 1932). This circle, a small oval circle of stakes, was covered by the burial mound, but like Sarn-y-bryn-caled it had orientations on the cardinal points in the form of larger posts to the east and west and an edge-set stone to the south.

Over forty timber circles are known throughout the British Isles (Gibson 2000b), other sites doubtless being represented by pit circles or henges. These circles vary in complexity, size and date though generally belong to the period between *c.* 3000–1000 cal BC with the complex sites clustering towards the middle of the period. The Sarn-y-bryn-caled timber circle falls midway within the currency of these sites while that at Caebetin Hill is possibly only slightly later.

Pit circles

Pit circles are normally recognised from air photographs where they show as rings of large dark marks. Pit circles may be difficult to date and interpret without excavation. Since the pits may be postholes, stoneholes, cremation pits or votive pits. They might also represent the ground remains of prehistoric post-built round-houses, as possibly in the case of a site at Four Crosses (**6076**), Llandysilio, and as demonstrated at Fochabers in Morayshire (Barclay 1993). The site at Sarn-y-bryn-caled was a classic example which excavation showed to have been a circle of tall timbers, described above; the others may be similarly interpreted, but without excavation certainty is impossible.

Five pit circles are recorded in the Upper Severn area (fig. 2). Four of the five are close to other burial or ritual monuments and may be considered to form part of prehistoric ritual complexes. The two pit circles at Meusydd (**101724**, **101725**), to the south of Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant, are both cropmark sites discovered by aerial reconnaissance (St Joseph 1980; Britnell 1991). One comprises a small ring of six pits set in a circle 6m in diameter. The other is slightly larger at 10m in diameter and comprises ten pits. The association of these monuments with the ring-ditch and henge complex at Meusydd argues in favour of the sites being Neolithic or Bronze Age in date. A faint arc of pits (**4929**) within the Sarn-y-bryn-caled complex to the south of Welshpool may represent a further circle,

Stone rows

A stone row is defined as a linear group of three or more stones. The length of the line and the size of the stones may vary a good deal. Pairs are stones set sufficiently close to suggest deliberation. There are about seven such monuments in the study area, having a markedly upland distribution in the western part of the region (fig. 3). Wales generally lacks the long, elegant rows of Dartmoor, the majestic avenues of Avebury, Wiltshire, or the busy multiple rows of Caithness or Brittany; nevertheless, the region is represented in the national corpus compiled by Burl (1993). The dating of stone rows is far from refined, though Burl (1993, 23) has attempted a chronological scheme based on hypothetical development and the relationship of the rows to other monument types. Burl considers that only the avenues and portals belong to the Neolithic period, with all other rows dating to the early Bronze Age. Furthermore, he proposes a degeneration of the rows through time, suggesting that the longer and more complex monuments date to the earliest Bronze Age, *c.* 2200–1600 cal BC, the short rows slightly later, *c.* 1800–1200 cal BC, with the pairs of stones heralding the middle Bronze Age, at *c.* 1400–1000 cal BC. According to this scheme the sites within the Upper Severn area would date to the millennium between 2200–1200 cal BC, with the detached avenue at Rhos-y-Beddau possibly representing one of the earliest types and the pairs at Carreg Wen and Fuallt representing the latest. There is no objective dating for any of the Welsh sites, however.

The double stone row at Rhos-y-beddau (**80134**) is the longest and perhaps the best known of the stone rows in the Upper Severn area, forming part of a complex of monuments on the moorland above the waterfall at Pistyll Rhaeadr, Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant. It measures some 60m in length and runs from the east towards the Rhos-y-beddau stone circle, where it stops about 8m short of the circle's perimeter. The rows run along the valley, pointing towards its head, on a roughly level terrace and converge from about 4m apart to less than 2m as they approach the circle. The easternmost 12m of the row has a slightly different alignment to the rest and does not continue the widening described above (Grimes 1963). This has suggested to Burl (1993, 78) that the row has two phases of construction. Burl also notes that the stones of the northern row are much smaller than their southern counterparts. There are now twelve stones visible in the northern row and twenty-four in the southern, but earlier recorders have seen more (Grimes 1963). All are low, rarely rising above the grass and reed cover. Tryfel stone row (**6103**) is another double stone row, 10m long, approximately 1m apart and running north-south on a gently sloping spur above the steep-sided slopes of the valley of the Afon Twrch. The uphill, northern end terminates in a cairn with well-defined kerb. The row comprises eight pairs and the largest stone measures a mere 0.3m high.

Before recent excavation the Carreg Llwyd stone row (**4309**) on Trannon moor, Carno, appeared to be a double row. However clearance revealed that it was a single line from which stones had fallen to east and west. It consists of a line of six or seven large stones running 21m northwards from a large recumbent stone. The excavation exposed the holes in which the stones had been erected but there were no finds to elucidate its purpose or date (Jones *et al.* 2000). Lluest Uchaf stone row (**4882**), Caersws, is a similar single alignment of eleven standing or recumbent stones. The row is orientated due north-south and measures about 12m in length, the tallest stone being 0.5m high and the southernmost stone being slightly off alignment to the west. The earth around the base of some of the stones has suffered from erosion, being one of the commonest threats to the stability of these