

*The stone row of Cerrig yr helfa,  
Mynydd Dyfnant Powys*

**SURVEY REPORT**

**by Alex Gibson  
February 1992**

THE STONE ROW OF CERRIG YR HELFA, MYNYDD DYFNANT, POWYS.

NGR SH98331562

PAR No 1676

SAM No Mg134

OS No SH91NE4

Alternative Names : Bryn Bras Stones: Mynydd Dyfnant stone row

HISTORY

The stones were recorded in 1910 by the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in their inventory of the archaeological sites of Montgomeryshire as "an alignment of seven standing stones, one of which has sunk into a bog, known locally as 'Cerrig yr Helfa', on Mynydd Dyfnant. Orientated north-east to south-west and at intervals of around 10ft, they are of unhewn stone 1.5 to 6ft high." (RCAHM 1911, 98)

The site was scheduled as a monument of national importance in 1937 (Mg 134) and the area around the stones was planted with conifers in 1956.

The site was visited by the Ordnance Survey (OS) in 1977 (with an incorrect grid reference) when only six stones were recorded, the length of the row was measured as 22.5m and a sketch plan at 1:250 was appended (fig.1). On this plan, 5 stones (A-E) form a straight line while stone F, some 8.5m from the end of the row and c.2m offset to the NW of the projected alignment.

Six stones were recorded by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (C-PAT) during a site visit in 1978 (C-PAT, 1978); the OS's stone F, at the NE end of the row, was not located. A further C-PAT visit in 1983, located 7 stones in the row, a stone being located further to the NE from stone E on the OS plan though both stones are noted as being 'less than 2ft high' (C-PAT 1983). Once more, stone F was not located. A third visit in 1988 noted 8 stones, including stone F, and a large upright between stone F and E not previously recorded. It was noted at the time that the row 'has grown by three stones' (C-PAT 1988). This history is summarised in fig 2.

In 1988, Mr L Main sent C-PAT a copy of a typescript he intended to publish in a book of rambles and in which he described the stone row. In this typescript it is stated that "11 or 12 stones can be seen" and damage to one of the uprights is recorded (see below) (Main 1988). Main was of the opinion that, incorporating stone F, the row was in fact curved and probably part of a circle which he confirmed to himself by dowsing. Furthermore, across the forest road and in the trees to the west of the row he located an outlying stone which he believed to have a solar alignment (op cit).

In 1988, accidental damage during tree-felling occurred to the stone row knocking over one of the uprights after which correspondence between Cadw, the Forestry Commission and C-PAT ensued regarding the state of the stones and their future protection/preservation. Private individuals, notably Mr Main and local resident Mr John Roberts also voiced their concern for the future of the monument.

Following a site meeting between Cadw, The Forestry commission, C-PAT and Mr Roberts on 7th January 1992, it was agreed that a survey of the present state of the monument should be prepared before discussions could then take place about the future management and presentation of the site.

Accordingly, the Forestry Commission contracted C-PAT to undertake the



survey prior to the annual Archaeological Liaison Meeting (March 1992). The survey was undertaken by the present writer between February 5th and 10th 1992 and the results are presented here.

### SURVEY RESULTS (fig 3)

The stones recorded on the OS's sketch plan correspond to stones 1, 5-8 and 10 of the present survey.

#### Stone 1

0.50m x 0.38m x 0.58m high. This is the outlying stone F of the OS's sketch plan. It is a roughly square block with weathering channels at the top.

#### Stone 2

0.50m x 0.20m x 0.95m high. This stone does not appear on the OS plan nor on any Powys Archaeological Record site visit forms until 1988 (C-PAT 1988). It is a thin slab with rounded top and is completely free of lichen growth in marked contrast to the other stones. It is clear that this stone is a modern addition to the row (see below).

#### Stone 3

Not recorded by the OS, this stone measures 0.16m x 0.10m x 0.08m high, protrudes only slightly above the present turf and is loose. This may well result from damage caused during the recent felling.

#### Stone 4

0.44m x 0.12m x 0.08m high. A rounded earth-set stone not noted on the OS plan but recorded by C-PAT in 1983.

#### Stone 5

1.40m x 0.50m x 0.60m high. Stone E on the OS plan. This stone is angled and is the stone that was damaged during the felling operations and is recorded by the OS as 0.40m x 0.60m x 0.90m high. It is a roughly square block with rounded, weathered top.

#### Stone 6

0.70m x 0.30m x 0.44m high. Stone D on the OS plan, this is a small angular block with a rounded top forming an apparent close-set pair with stone 6.

#### Stone 7

0.60m x 0.60m x 0.80m high but leaning slightly towards the north. Stone C on the OS plan, this stone is roughly square and also has a weathered, rounded top. A water-filled depression lies to the immediate north of the stone and it appears that the stone is no longer in its original position.

#### Stone 8

1.70m x 0.40m x 2.00m high but with a considerable lean to the west. Stone B on the OS plan, recorded as leaning in 1977. A large, water-filled hollow to the west of the stone suggests that the stone is no longer in its original

position.

Stone 9

0.28m x 0.30m x 0.08m high. This stone is not recorded on the OS plan and is present only as a rounded earth-set stone protruding slightly above the turf line.

Stone 10

0.56m x 0.24m x 0.34m high with a slight lean towards the west. This is stone A on the OS plan and appears as an elongated slab with rounded and weathered top.

No further stones could be detected in the plantation to the south of stone 10 although probing the ground at both ends of the row might in future be fruitful.

A visit to the west, across the forestry road, to examine the possible outlier proved fruitless. This stone was visited by the present writer in 1990 but was clearly not in its original position. It was not earth-set but was loose and lay over the present turfline.

## DISCUSSION

The Cerrig-yr-Helfa stone row, as surviving today, is broken into three distinct units formed roughly of stones 1 and 2, stones 3-5 and stones 6-10. The gaps between these sections may, however, be more apparent than real since vehicle tracks are visible in the disturbed ground between stones 2 and 3 and plough furrows separate stones 6 and 7. A drainage ditch runs between stones 7 and 8 and may well have removed another stone in this slightly larger gap. The vehicle tracks between stones 2 and 3 attest the modern mechanical damage to stone 5, now leaning dramatically, and they are possibly also responsible for loosening stone 3.

The gaps between stones 3-4-5, 6-7 and 8-9-10 average c.0.9m and it may be possible to postulate that, assuming a regular spacing of stones, as many as six stones may be missing between stones 3 and 10.

Stones 7 and 8 are leaning markedly and have water-filled hollows at their bases. At first this was thought to be the result of animal poaching but it became clear on closer inspection that both stones have been raised. The other stones, with the exception of No 2, are covered with an even lichen growth however the tops of stones 7 and 8 have traces of moss (sphagnum) which is a ground-growing species. Furthermore, there is a lichen-free area on the north side of stone 7 corresponding to the edge of stone 6 against which stone 7 must have originally lain. The height of stone 7 is recorded as 0.9m on the OS plan, similar to its surviving height today, and stone 8 is labelled as leaning therefore it is likely that these stones were raised in the recent past though prior to 1977.

In stark contrast to the other stones, stone 2 is completely free of lichen. It first appears in the record in November 1988. A photocopy of a



photograph taken by Mr Main, dated spring 1988, and sent to C-PAT in October of the same year shows the stone clearly by the still upright stone 5. Stone 2 was definitely absent in 1983 (C-PAT 1983). It must therefore have been erected sometime in the mid 1980's.

Although not an original upright of the stone row, stone 2 may nevertheless have been an integral or related element. To the west of this stone is a ground depression bordered on its western side by a large horizontal edge-laid stone, 1.20m long, corresponding very closely in size to stone 2. It may be that stone 2 originally formed an eastern edge to this depression and if so the two may represent a stone-lined pit or cist. Fragments of quartz are abundant within this depression and the appearance of quartz on megalithic sites is well-known (Burl 1974: 1976, 170). If this interpretation of the depression is correct, then the row may well have a sepulchral association in common with many of SW Britain, particularly Dartmoor (Emmett, 1979). The offset stone 1, therefore, may form part of a terminal sepulchral monument rather than an element of the stone row and it is notable that there is more surface stone visible in the plough furrows at the north end of the row than at the south. In contrast to the Dartmoor rows where stone rows tend to run directly towards sepulchral monuments, the Welsh examples appear to be more tangential (for example Cerrig Duon, Brecknock and Rhos-y-Beddau, Montgomeryshire) to cairns or stone circles (Grimes 1963, figs 31 and 23).

## CONCLUSION

The Cerrig-yr-Helfa stone row has suffered from mechanical damage caused during ploughing, felling and from modern 'embellishment'. The original number of stones cannot be determined from the surface remains but nevertheless eight stones can be traced in a straight line running from south-west to north-east with an offset stone to the north-west. This stone may represent an element of a stone circle or cairn at or near the northern terminal of the row. Stone 2 has been erected in the mid 1980's and may have originally formed part of a cist to the south of stone 1.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer was aided in the survey by M. Walters and B. Williams and has benefitted in discussion with C. Martin. The help of Mr B. Hicks of the Forestry Commission (Newtown) and Dr S. Rees of Cadw is gratefully acknowledged. Mr B.V. Williams drew the present survey.

Alex. M. Gibson  
Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust  
7a Church Street  
Welshpool  
Powys SY21 7DL  
tel Welshpool (0938) 553670

#### REFERENCES

- Burl, H.A.W., 1974, 'The recumbent stone circles of north-east Scotland'. Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 102, (1969-70), 56-81.
- Burl, H.A.W., 1976, The Stone Circles of the British Isles, Yale University Press, London.
- C-PAT, 1978, Powys Archaeological Record site visit form, 12-12-1983.
- C-PAT, 1983, Powys Archaeological Record site visit form, 25-4-1983.
- C-PAT, 1988, Powys Archaeological Record site visit form, 14-9-1988.
- Emmett, D.D., 1979, 'Stone rows: the traditional view reconsidered.' Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society, 37, 94-114.
- Grimes, W.F., 1963, 'The stone circles and related monuments of Wales.' in Foster, I.L. and Alcock, L. (eds) Culture and Environment, Routledge Kegan Paul, London, 93-152.
- Main, L., 1988, 'Mynydd Dyfnant'. Typescript of a walk through the forest sent to C-PAT, October 1988).
- OS 1911, Ordnance Survey record card, SH91NE 4, entry 1, 1911.
- RCAHM, 1911, An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Wales and Monmouthshire. Vol I, County of Montgomery. HMSO, London.

Antiquity No. SH 91 NE 4	County	Parish Illustration	167	1																												
<p><u>Standing Stones</u></p> <p>F</p> <p>E</p> <p>D</p> <p>C</p> <p>B</p> <p>A</p> <p>Leans to NW</p> <p>Sketch Survey 1:250</p> <p>O.S. 495</p> <p>Surveyed DJC 1:11.77</p> <p>(6907) D. 634650 24m 4m</p>																																
<p>SH 9853 1574</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Width</th> <th>Thickness</th> <th>Height</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>A</td> <td>0.5</td> <td>0.2</td> <td>0.3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>B</td> <td>1.2</td> <td>0.3</td> <td>1.7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>C</td> <td>0.5</td> <td>0.4</td> <td>0.6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>D</td> <td>0.4</td> <td>0.3</td> <td>0.4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>E</td> <td>0.6</td> <td>0.4</td> <td>0.9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>F</td> <td>0.5</td> <td>0.2</td> <td>0.5</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>						Width	Thickness	Height	A	0.5	0.2	0.3	B	1.2	0.3	1.7	C	0.5	0.4	0.6	D	0.4	0.3	0.4	E	0.6	0.4	0.9	F	0.5	0.2	0.5
	Width	Thickness	Height																													
A	0.5	0.2	0.3																													
B	1.2	0.3	1.7																													
C	0.5	0.4	0.6																													
D	0.4	0.3	0.4																													
E	0.6	0.4	0.9																													
F	0.5	0.2	0.5																													

Fig 1: OS Sketch plan

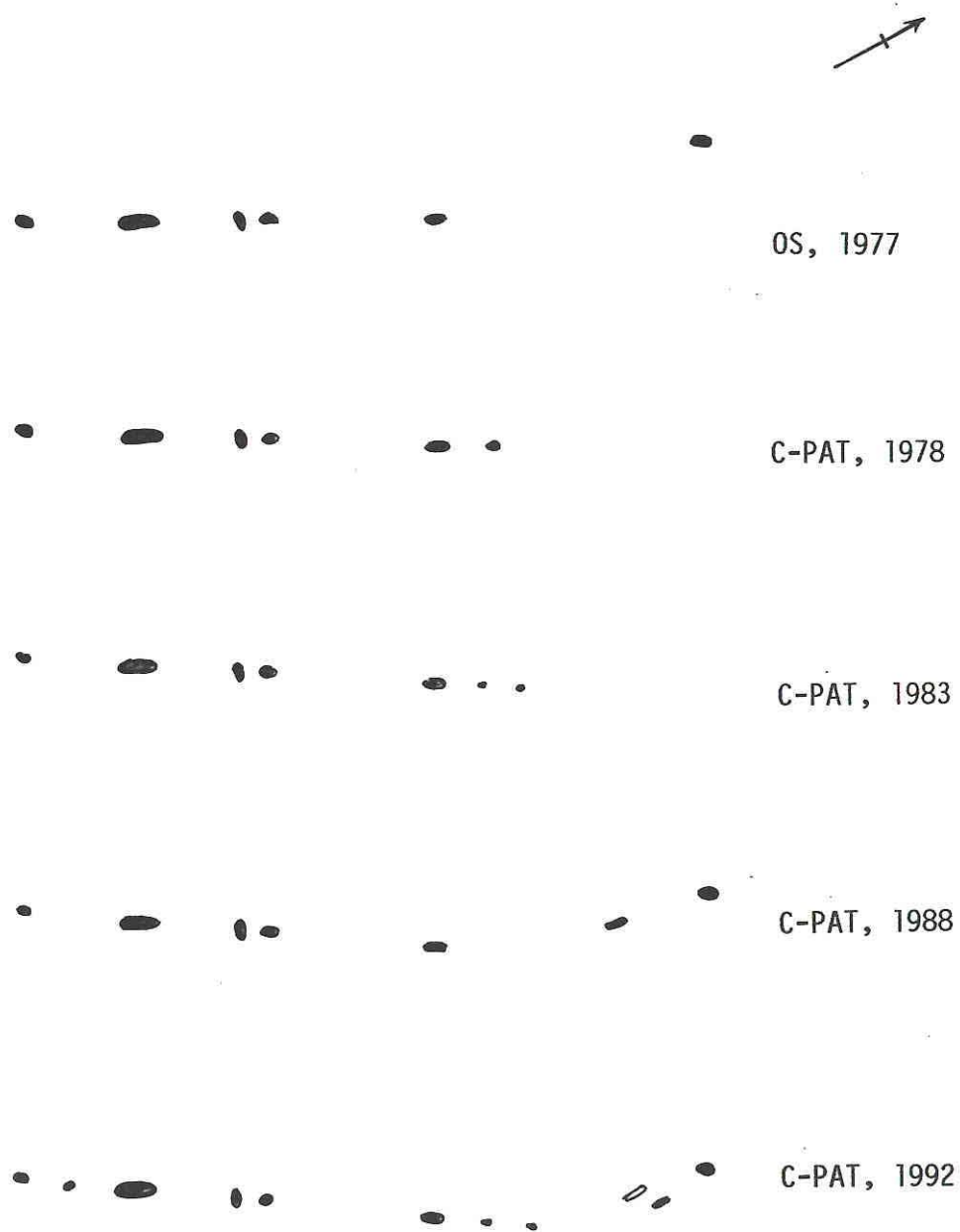


Fig 2: Comparative sketch plans from the OS and from C-PAT site visit forms (not to scale)



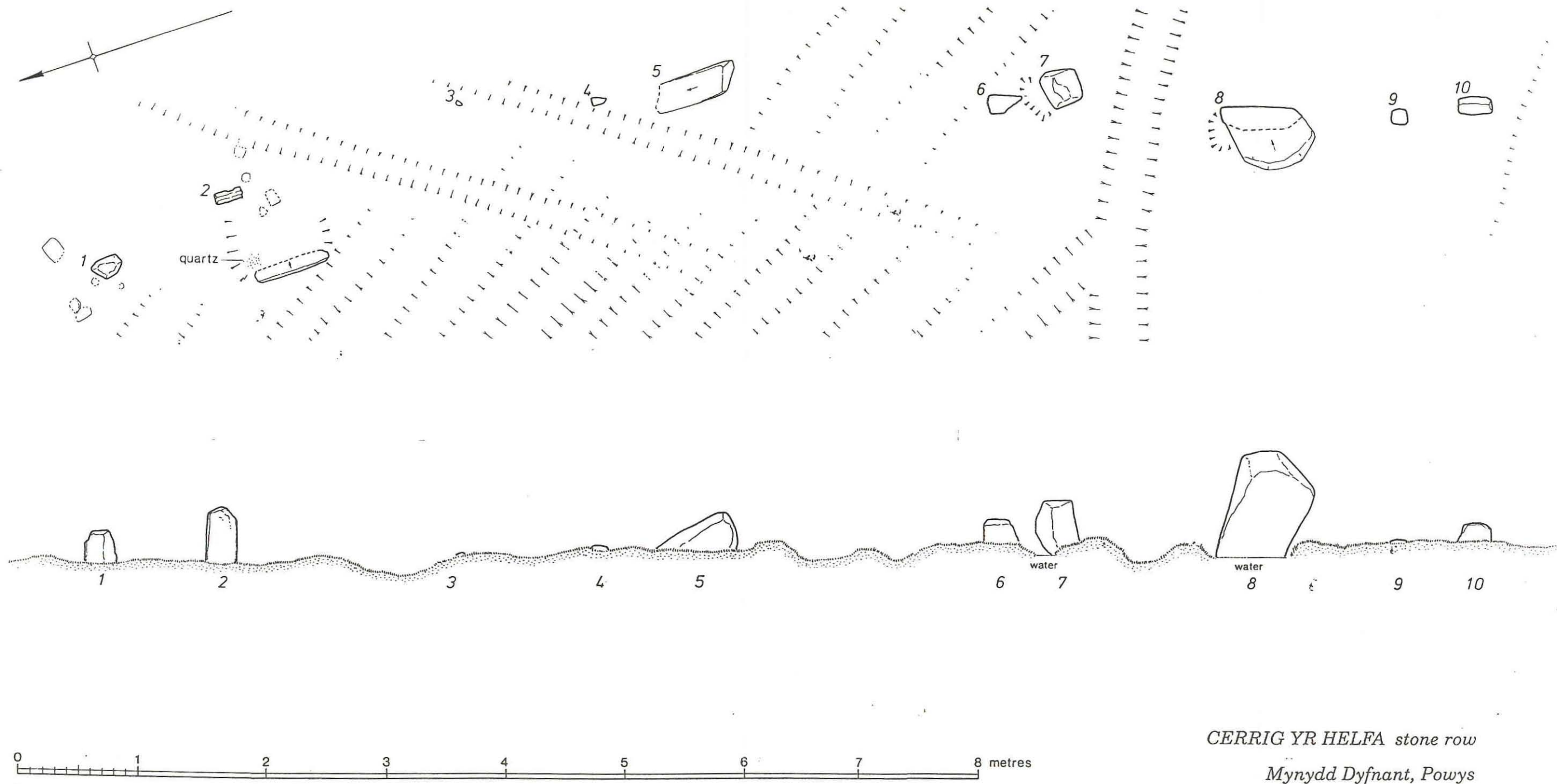


Fig 3: 1992 survey