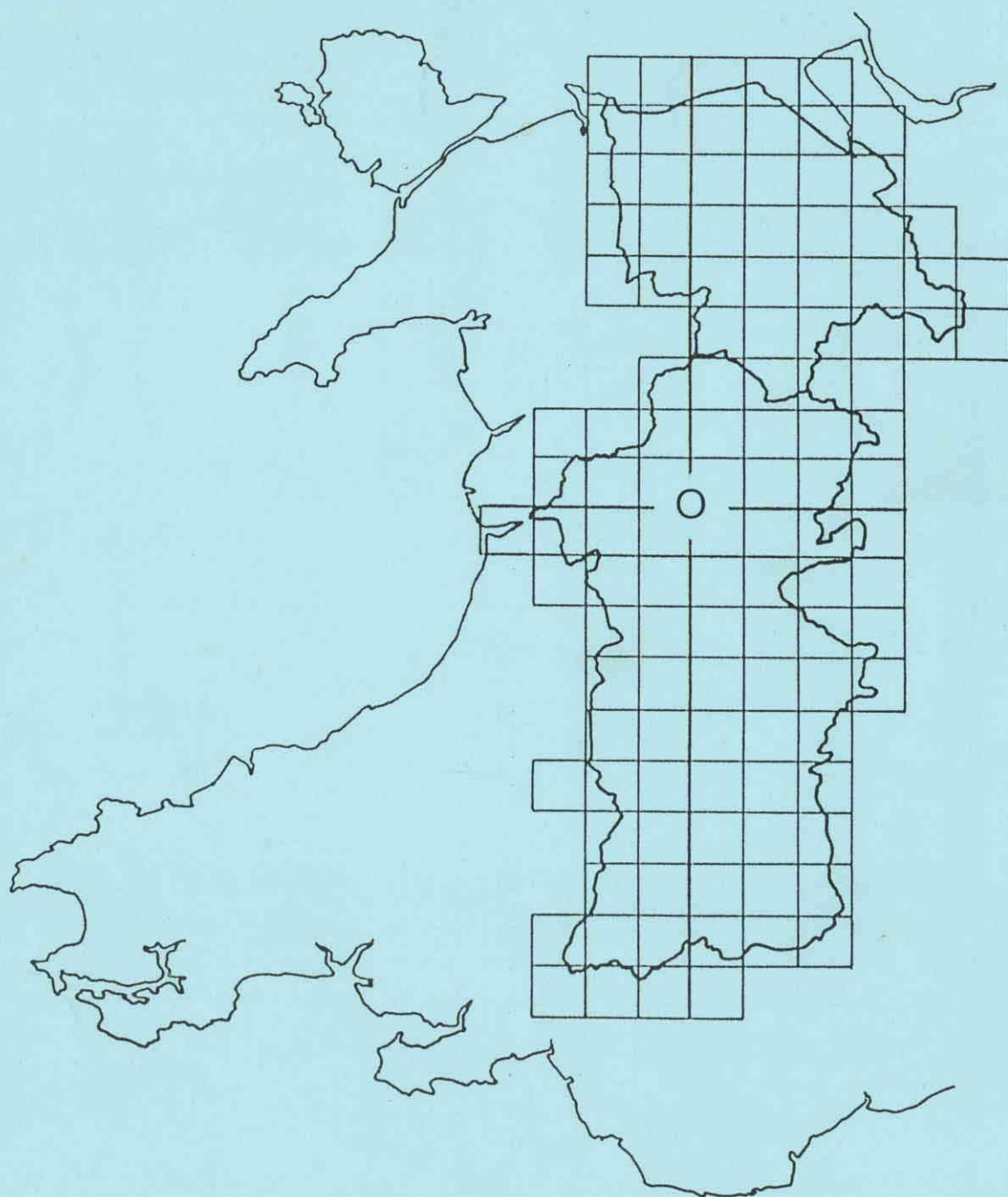


THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

# *The Carno/Dwyrhiw Survey, 1990*

## *Interim Report*



## THE CARNO/DRYRHIW SURVEY

### Introduction

Carno and Dryrhiw range across the Montgomeryshire uplands to the north-west of Newtown and the Severn Valley. The proposed afforestation of 112 hectares of improved and rough pasture around the abandoned farmstead at Carneddau (Carno) led to the excavation of prehistoric and post-medieval features in the summer of 1989. In addition to offering grant aid for this investigation, Cadw funded a field survey covering a block of upland to the north of Carneddau which, it was anticipated, would provide important background data and a valid context for the more detailed study of the Carneddau holding.

The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust had completed two previous field surveys in the region. An area east of Carno, centred on the three natural lakes of Llyn Mawr, Llyn Du and Llyn y Tarw, was examined intermittently between 1980 and 1984 (P. Dorling in Montgomeryshire Collections 74 [1986]). The western limits of this survey zone abutted the south-eastern boundary of the proposed Carneddau plantation.

A more general assessment of the upland block between Caersws and Llanbrynmair was undertaken in the winter of 1986-87. A desk top survey of upland some 14 x 17 km in extent was supplemented by a rapid survey of five target areas in order to:

- a) evaluate the completeness of the existing archaeological record
- b) formulate policies for improving the management and recording of upland sites in areas vulnerable to further improvement.

A report on this work was circulated to interested parties in September 1987.

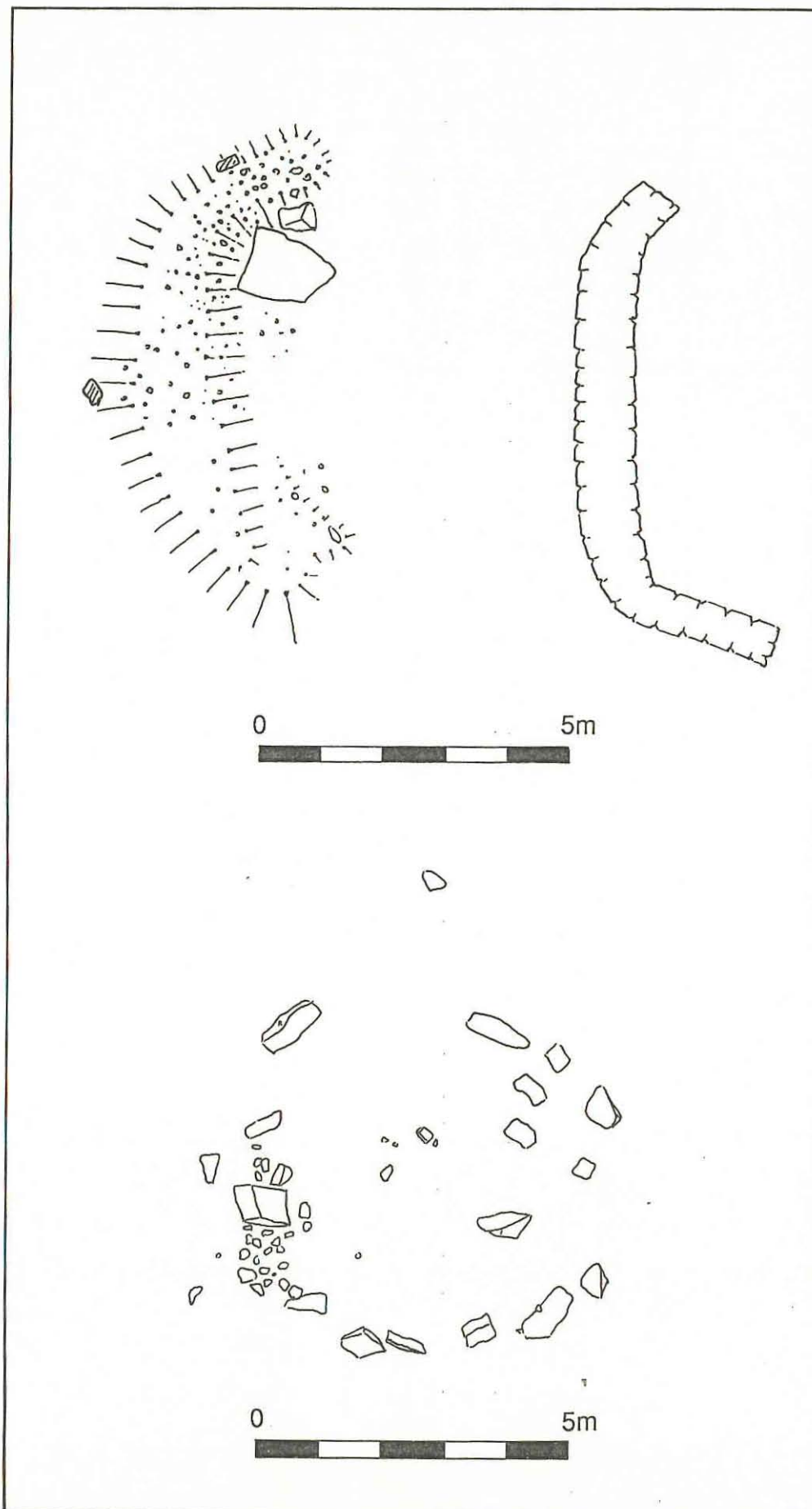
### Survey Methods

Fieldwork for the Carno/Dryrhiw survey was undertaken during the period October 1989-April 1990. Altogether, 31 days were spent on the rapid field survey, normally involving a two-man team. The techniques used in the survey were adapted from those practised by the writer in a very different environment, the Fens of eastern England.

The ground was covered in transects c.30m wide, except where extensive tracts of bog required less intensive examination. Vertical aerial photography, part of the complete cover of Montgomeryshire taken for Montgomeryshire District Council in 1984, proved invaluable, both in advance of and during the survey. Copies of these colour photographs scaled at 1:10,000, were used in the field in place of maps and were annotated for site discoveries and vegetation types. This information was transcribed on to plastic drawing film at the same scale, normally within twenty-four hours of fieldwork.

### The Survey Area

The survey extended over land in three communities - Carno, Dwyrhiw (formerly Llanllugan) and Llanerfyl - and the limits of the survey area were defined by



Figs 2a: PRN 6618 and PRN 6633; and 2b: PRN 6594



the boundaries of individual landholdings. Carneddau and adjacent land lay on the southern edge, Carrig-y-Beg and the Nant Wythan valley on the north, with the common lands of Carno on Twmpath Melyn in the west to Tan y Foel quarry and Mynydd y Gribin common eastwards. This forms an irregular block, c.5.5km east to west by c.5.0km from north to south, with an overall area of some 15.75 square kilometres (Fig. 1).

The block of upland incorporates several wide valleys running eastwards with streams that converge on the River Rhiw. Between these are broad interfluvies. Cwm Llwyd on the western edge of the survey area and running from north to south offers a contrast, the valley sides being considerably steeper. Overall the effect is of a series of topographical zones running on a west-east axis except on the extreme west. Much of the land is over 300m OD and on Mynydd Pistyll-Du rises to 450m OD. Only in Cwm Llwyd does the valley floor fall below 300m OD.

#### Land Use

The availability of colour photography allows distinctions to be made between areas of heather, bracken, coarse grass and other unimproved upland species, as well as improved and partially improved pasture. The present extent of land improvement, in conjunction with the 1984 aerial record, should allow quantification of the proportion of improved land in the study area and also a measure of the improvement that had occurred over the last six years.

A cursory examination of the mapped data reveals that improvement in this upland block has been considerable and is still continuing, though at a reduced rate. During the course of the survey three fields near Bryngwyn and Carreg-y-Big were ploughed and reseeded, though all had been previously improved either wholly or in part. A field containing several pillow mounds near Tan y Foel quarry is due to be improved this year: on the basis of similar pasture improvements nearby, the denudation of the mounds could be extreme (see below).

Heather moor is extensive in only two places, one of these being the Cefn Coch common opposite Tan y Foel. Unimproved upland supporting coarse grass, rushes or bog species is now localised, with the largest blocks again on the common lands around Twmpath Melyn and near Y Foel and in private ownership near Gwaenydd.

A conscious decision was made to exclude woodland areas from the survey area; thus only a single large conifer plantation west of Carreg-y-Big falls completely within this upland block, though more extensive plantations edge the area near Carneddau and Twmpath Melyn.

#### The Archaeology

Prehistoric The stone circle of Y Capel (Scheduled Ancient Monument Mg179) and a cairn on the southern extremity of the Carneddau holding were the only previously known prehistoric features in the survey area. Fieldwork in advance of the Carneddau excavations identified a low sub-circular bank, subsequently defined as a structured cairn on excavation (Gibson: forthcoming).

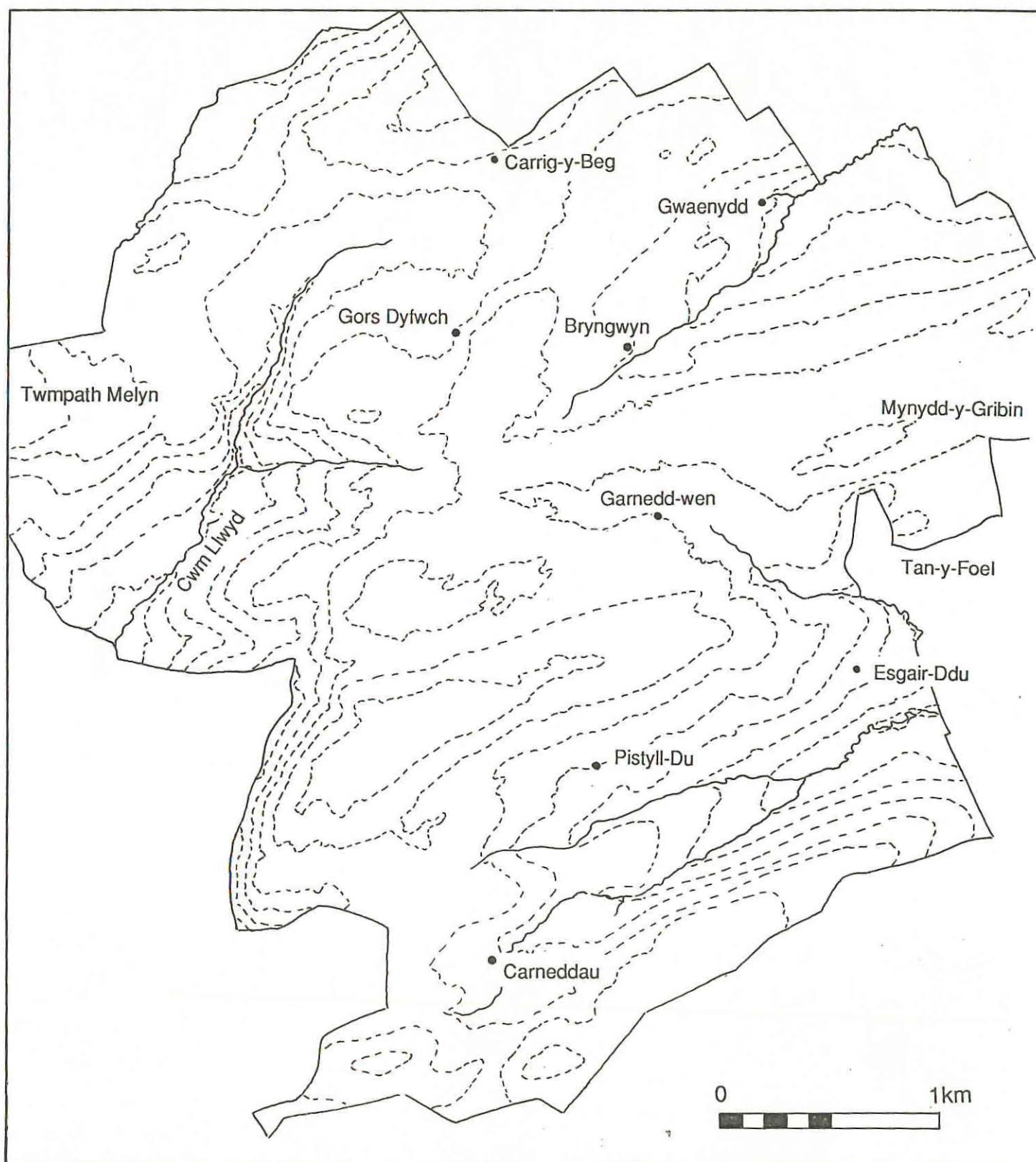


Fig. 1: The Carno/Dwyryhiw Uplands



A further nine cairns and related features of probable prehistoric origin were detected during fieldwork with a couple more of very dubious authenticity. Most appeared as simple stone heaps, PRN 6622 on the slopes below Twmpath Melyn almost certainly being the tumulus recorded on the first edition of the Ordnance Survey 1" map which could not be located by either the Royal Commission in c.1911 or the Ordnance Survey Field Investigator in 1977. Above Y Foel quarry, the remnants of a ring cairn with two large upright stones projecting from the remaining bank segment lies in improved pasture adjacent to a relatively recent shelter wall. It seems likely that the ring cairn was disturbed and perhaps robbed to build the shelter. Ironically the presence of the shelter, which was too substantial to remove during recent improvements, may have helped to preserve the ring cairn (PRN 6618; Fig 2a). The common of Mynydd y Gribin just to the north has a stone ring close to the highest point of the ridge. Consisting of a number of slabs, some upright, others lying flat, this site is worthy of statutory protection (PRN 6594; Fig 2b).

Traces of prehistoric occupation were few. A group of two hut circles and adjacent cairns near Pistyll-Du (PRN 6512) are due to be excavated in the current year, for further improvement on the terrace where they lie could level them completely. The one or two other small huts that were encountered are as likely to be post-medieval as prehistoric in origin.

The discovery in recent weeks of a flint scatter (PRN 6630) on a ridge just north-west of Carreg-y-Big, during the ploughing of existing pasture land for improvement, highlights one element of past upland exploitation that is undoubtedly more common than the occasional chance discovery would imply.

Medieval There can be no doubt that these uplands were exploited in the medieval period. Pottery, probably of 13th-14th century date, and a spindle whorl were located during the investigations of a field system which was barely discernible in improved pasture on a south-facing slope above the Carneddau farmstead. There was no stratigraphic association but it seems likely that pottery and field banks were broadly contemporary, and that the former implies medieval occupation in the vicinity.

Summer migrations into these hills must be assumed, although there are no hafod names in this particular block of upland and only two farms to which the prefix lluest was originally applied. Fieldwork identified a number of structures - defined in the tables as habitations - and platforms which might represent hafodydd. PRN 6544 (Fig. 3) is typical of the degree of preservation, consisting of two rectangular platforms edged by earthen banks set in a sheltered position beside a stream. Another four or five structures fall into the same general class in terms of appearance and location but morphology alone cannot provide a date for these and some are probably of post-medieval origin.

Post-medieval 16 farmsteads have been identified, only six of which are still occupied (including three conversions). The close examination of these farms and their associated enclosures would represent a considerable study in itself and one that could not be attempted within the framework of the present survey. Nevertheless a cursory examination suggests that lobby-entry houses of the type common in Montgomeryshire are well-represented in these uplands (eg at Carneddau itself and Carreg-y-Big).

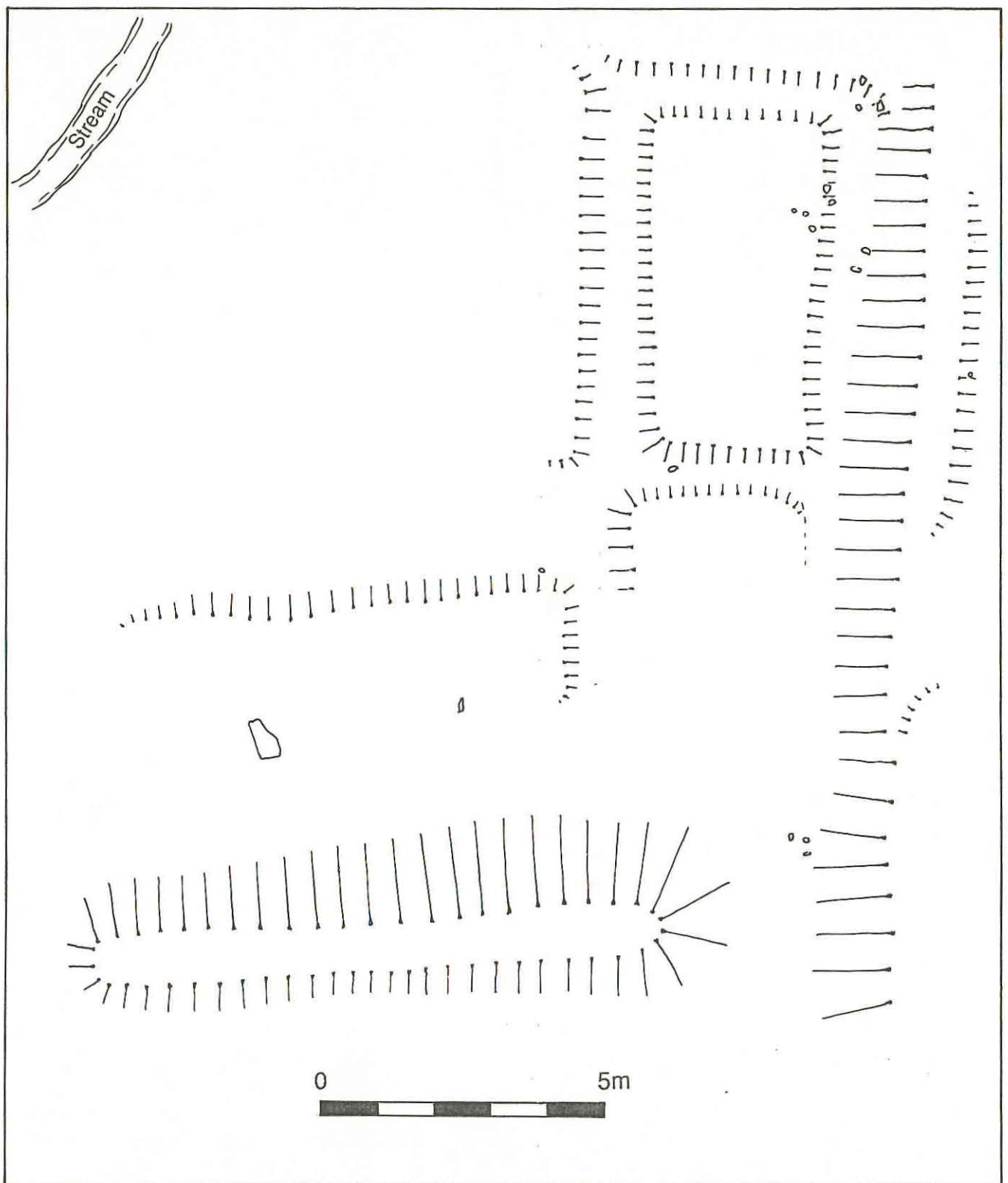


Fig. 3: PRN 6544



Enclosure and field systems show variety. Substantial earthen banks, sometimes stone faced, occur sporadically. At Carneddau, these formed roughly concentric patterns centred on the farmstead. Bryngwyn and Gwaenydd have points of similarity although in both instances the pattern has been disturbed by subsequent land improvement. Very different are the rectangular patterns of fields at Pistyll-Du, Esgair-Ddu and Garnedd-wen. A provisional interpretation would see a chronological implication as well as a response to the natural topography.

North of Carreg-y-Big a rectilinear network of large and exceptionally well-built stone walls points to a different status in land ownership though this has yet to be corroborated.

Ancillary buildings and other structures are commonplace. Barns, field-houses and sheep folds were encountered in a variety of locations, though many survive to little more than foundation level. Shelters consisting of stone walls in a variety of patterns are also common. PRN 6633 above Y Foel is shown on Fig 2a). South-west of Bryngwyn, a Y-shaped shelter is one of the few features to survive the drastic pasture improvements on this land holding.

Industrial activity is absent in these hills, but evidence of widespread peat cutting was encountered. The cuttings themselves survive in many places, ranging from a single trench to much more extensive traces covering many hectares (eg to the west of Gors dyfwch). Many of these cuttings are of no great antiquity - there is good evidence that one man was still cutting peat in the vicinity of Gors Dyfwch within the last ten years.

Morphologically distinctive, though more difficult to recognise, are platforms surrounded by shallow gullies on which peat was stacked after cutting. These almost invariably are located on the dryland edge of bogs (although one above Y Foel could not be associated with an obvious peat source and furthermore had survived remarkably well the pasture improvements of the last five years). Two were noted at Carneddau, one of which was excavated.

Jack Spurgeon in 1967 noted over fifty pillow mounds on Y Foel. By 1977, when a Field Investigator of the Ordnance Survey visited the area 29 had been destroyed by quarrying. Two new examples were added in 1990. However, 3 more had been covered with tons of quarry spoil, 3 had been totally levelled in pasture improvement, 3 or 4 had been partially levelled, while 7 remain in good condition at the time of writing, though the field containing them is due to be improved this year. Four others seem to be safe, one in a field which has been improved in recent years. The complex on Y Foel offers a microcosm of what is happening in the uplands and a reminder of the scale of archaeological destruction.

General The survey recorded 165 features, a total that included 29 on the Carneddau holding which were identified before the main phase of fieldwork. A provisional estimate suggests that 157 are of archaeological interest of which 38 (24%) including all of the farmsteads, can be classed as known sites. It is, of course, impossible to date many of the sites with precision, but in most instances a reasonable estimate can be attempted through analogy or association (Table 1). Not surprisingly this emphasises the frequency of buildings and other features that have appeared in the uplands during the last two or three hundred years.



Table 1: Date of Features

	Prehist.	Med.	Med/Post Med.	Post-Med	Undated
Nos.	15	1	10	113	18
%	10	<1	6	72	11

Two sets of data are presented in Table 2. Section A attempts to define how many of these features are visible on the aerial cover, with the caveat that careful use of stereoscopy might alter some of the figures. Bearing this in mind, it is apparent that less than half the cairns were clearly distinguishable and that peat platforms were all but invisible though neighbouring peat cuttings could be readily recognised. Overall it is evident that the photographs are at best an uncertain guide to what exists on the ground.

Selected site-types are distinguished in section B according to their location in improved or unimproved pasture. Most noticeable here is that cairns of prehistoric type were more frequent in improved pasture, an indication that most in the survey area will have witnessed some disturbance. Not surprisingly most of the peat-drying platforms were unimproved, yet despite their relatively flimsy structure, a few have survived some degree of improvement in reasonably good shape (eg at Carneddau and Y Foel).

Table 2: Sites in relation to a) Aerial Photograph Visibility and b) Land Improvement

Site Types	A.P. Visibility			Land Improvement	
	Vis.	Invis.	?	Impr.	Unimprov.
Cairns (prehistoric)	5 (46%)	3 (27%)	3 (27%)	8 (73%)	3 (27%)
Hut circles	- -	4 (100%)	- -	1 (25%)	3 (75%)
Habitations (not farms)	8 (62%)	2 (15%)	3 (23%)	5 (38%)	7 (54%)
Other structures	7 (30%)	9 (39%)	7 (30%)	12 (52%)	10 (43%)
Enclosures/ring banks	8 (73%)	1 (9%)	2 (18%)	6 (55%)	4 (36%)
Stock shelters	7 (100%)	- -	- -	6 (80%)	1 (14%)
Peat platforms	- -	16 (76%)	5 (24%)	4 (19%)	17 (81%)
Pillow Mounds	9 (32%)	19 (68%)	- -	8 (29%)	13 (46%)

