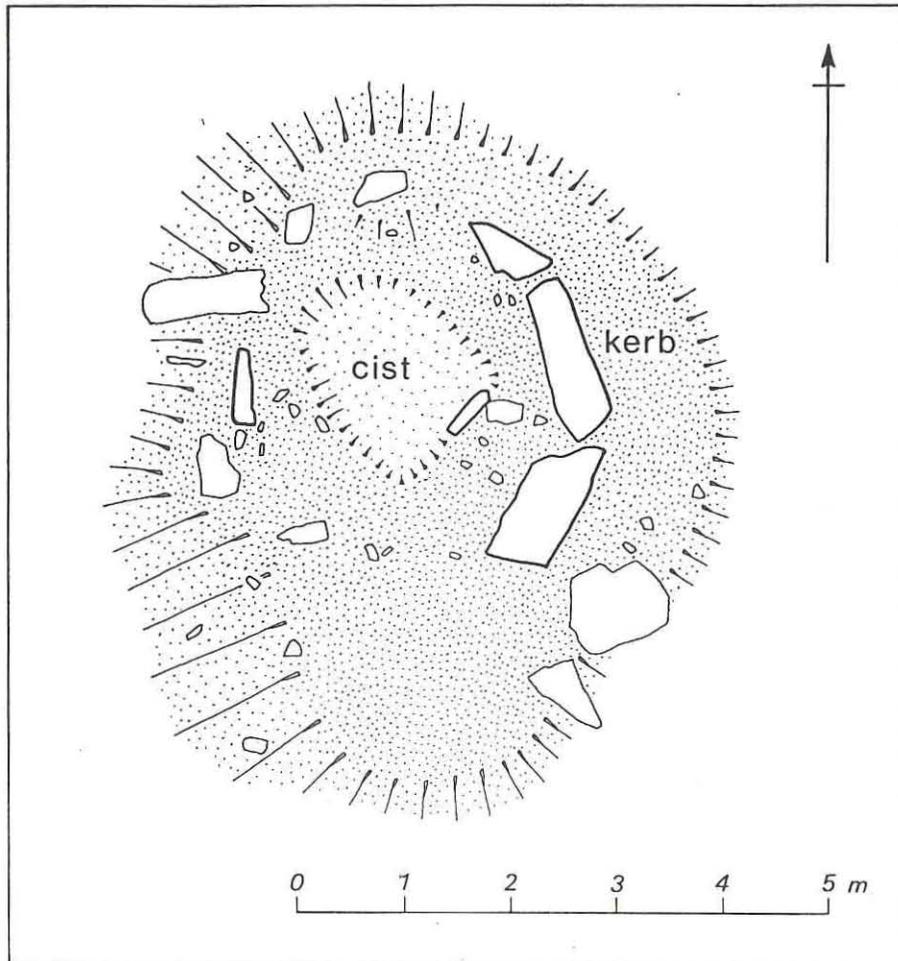


*Pennant, Llandrillo, Denbighshire*

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD SURVEY



**CPAT Report No 173**

*Pennant, Llandrillo, Denbighshire*

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD SURVEY**

**by R J Silvester**

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Report prepared for Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments

**The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust**

7a Church Street Welshpool Powys SY21 7DL

tel (0938) 553670, fax 552179

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## The Survey of Pennant, Berwyn

### 1 Introduction

1.1 Systematic fieldwork on the western side of the Berwyn over the last five years has confirmed what was already hinted at by earlier more random work together with aerial photography, namely that this area was particularly rich in archaeological remains. Above Cwm Pennant, a sharply defined valley that carries Afon Cediog through the village of Llandrillo and on to its outfall into the River Dee a kilometre or so beyond, the land sweeps upwards in a series of ridges and interfluvial spurs before rises more steeply to the main Berwyn ridge.

1.2 The last few years have seen the fieldwork coverage of much of the upland edging the eastern side of the valley from Craig Wen in the south (SJ 027303) to the lower slopes of Trum y Wern several kilometres to the north (SJ 049360). The completeness of the assessment has been interrupted only by the lack of survey on the interfluvial known as Pennant (SJ 046334) between Nant Cwm Tywyll on the north and Nant Esgeiriau to the south, though its archaeological interest is signalled by three cairns depicted on modern Ordnance Survey maps, and reinforced by the recognition of a large hut circle and several 'wandering walls' during casual visits. The decision by Cadw's regional inspector to schedule these unmapped remains as well as other sites on the interfluvial, emphasised the need for a thorough survey of Pennant, and with resources provided by Cadw this was undertaken by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust in March 1996.

### 2 The Area

2.1 Pennant as defined here covers an area of one square kilometre of open moorland owned by the Countryside Council for Wales as part of the Pale Estate and given statutory protection within the Berwyn National Nature Reserve. Because of traditional grazing rights on the Pale Estate, the western edge of Berwyn does carry widely spaced stockproof fencing, the layout of which has recently been modified in this particular area. No fences, however, cross the survey area, though a north/south fence forms the eastern perimeter of the search zone. Improved pasture fields defined the lower, western limit and as noted above streams provided boundaries to the north and south.

2.2 The natural topography of the interfluvial is straightforward with the Cefn Penagored ridge dropping down to Nant Esgeiriau at the western end, and at the same time displaying an increasing amount of surface stone. Eastwards is a saddle of land, reasonably stone free and then the ground rises gradually and then more steeply to an interfluvial ridge which further east is named as Foel Fawr. With the appearance of this ridge the slopes become steeper and the coarse short-cropped grass with rushes in damper spots gives way to heather, tufted grass and bilberry over acidic peat. It is beneath this ridge, however, on the gentler peat free slopes that much of the archaeology focuses.

2.3 The height variation even within this relatively limited tract is considerable. At the western end close to the stream it is around 390m OD, the saddle and much of the archaeology range between 450-500m OD, while the Foel Fawr ridge achieves 600m OD.

### 3 Methodology

3.1 The whole interfluvial from the edge of the enclosed grassland on the west to the modern fence running northwards over Foel Fawr on the east was investigated using standard rapid survey techniques: 30m transects by a team of two people with aerial photographs for locational purposes. Subsequently an EDM survey was undertaken to map all the recognisable features in the scheduled area, together with some lying outside it. The opportunity was also taken to locate accurately a couple of 'cairns' on Cefn Penagored which had previously been identified and scheduled but only imprecisely located; and time also permitted the detailed planning of two cairns and a newly discovered hafod.

3.2 Computerised aerial photograph rectification has enabled additional detail to be plotted from the exceptionally clear 1984 monochrome photography taken for Clwyd County Council by J.A.Storey Ltd. The amalgamated results are depicted in Fig. 1.

## 4 The Archaeology: Prehistoric

4.1 Several cairns of putative Bronze Age date have already been recorded in this area. Outstanding amongst these is a triple ring cairn (PRN 101925; SAM Me146), certainly reported in the 1970s and perhaps known long before that time. About 20m in diameter, it was until recently bisected by a fence line, but this has recently been removed by CCW. About 40m to the south-west is a second, more typical cairn (PRN 101662; SAM Me146), about 6m in diameter. This pattern of pairing is repeated elsewhere. On the western slope of Cefn Penagored are two small cairns (PRNs 105142 & 105143) found in 1992; the latter is a simple stone mound displaying two of the vertical slabs for a central cist, while the former is a fine kerb cairn (Fig 2) again with traces of a cist.

4.2 South of the crest of the Cefn Penagored ridge is a cairn (PRN 19580) about 7m in diameter with the opposing slabs of a cist projecting through the turf and an interrupted arc of kerb stones within the body of the mound. Within 30m or so of this unequivocal man-made mound are three others of less certain authenticity (PRNs 19581, 19582 & 19583). A feature of the Pennant landscape is the amount of surface rock, sometimes configured to mimic artificial mounds, and distinguishing between man-made and natural rock patterns is not always easy and sometimes impossible. The three small mounds referred to here lack diagnostic features, and it is their proximity to the kerb cairn that has ensured their recording.

4.3 Another pair of cairns occupy level ground close to a prominent rock outcrop some 300m to the south-east of the last group. The larger of the two (PRN 19584; Fig 3) has at least two cists, neither centrally placed, while its partner (PRN 19585), some 25m away is smaller and has a central cist.

4.4 The lowest part of the saddle between Cfen Penagored and the Foel Fawr ridge is traversed by a grip and adjacent to where this is crossed by a trackway, is a low spread of stone, little more than 0.2m high but around 10m in diameter (PRN 19586). It is relatively formless but the absence of surface stone in the immediate area suggests it is artificial. Whether it is a burial cairn, a clearance cairn or even a marker of unknown date cannot be ascertained from fieldwork.

4.5 Within the scheduled block (SAM Me 146) is a circular sheepfold (PRN 105021; see below) and this clearly overlies another circular feature (PRN 19595), largely robbed out though nearly 50% of its circumference is still discernible. Possibly a large hut circle with a wing wall running off to the north-west, it is also possible that it was a ring cairn, stone from which was used to construct the superimposed fold. This finds a parallel on the far side of Nant Esgeiriau where a complex of sheep pens (PRN 105769) has been constructed in the ruins of a large cairn (PRN 105768), the most prominent feature of which is a massive capstone from a cist.

4.6 Cairns are not uncommon on the western edge of the Berwyn. Much more unusual are occupation sites. Thus the discovery of two hut circles together with meandering stretches of walling and clearance cairns is of some significance. All of the complex lies within SAM Me 146 and has been classed collectively as PRN 105023.

4.7 The focus appears to be a large hut circle (PRN 19596) with a diameter of around 10m. Its very low wall bank is breached by a gap on the east which should probably be identified as the original entrance. Surrounding this feature on all sides is a network of 'wandering walls' (PRN 19597) representing a reasonably unbroken pattern on this south-facing slope, though there are isolated stretches of walling further out which cannot be linked to the main pattern, either through fieldwork or aerial photo analysis. One isolated stretch runs close to the triple ring cairn (PRN 101925), and a 150m+ stretch of wall (PRN 19579) runs up the south-eastern slope of Cefn Penagored past the group of cairns centred on PRN 19581. All the walls are low and of tumbled stone, though the main north/south wall has some indications of revetment slabs. Within the 'fields' defined by the walling are relatively stoneless areas which have certainly been cleared of surface rock, and this tend to imply former cultivation. In addition, the slope is littered with clearance cairns, rather denser to the east of the hut circle than to the north and west. More than forty of these were plotted, and others may have escaped attention, not least because of the difficulty of distinguishing less prominent examples from natural conglomerations. Not obvious on the ground, but visible from the air is a patch of ridging immediately to the west of hut circle and abutting a partly natural scarp. It is tempting because of the geographical proximity and the absence of any tangible later occupation to see this ridging as cultivation associated with the dwelling yet the implications of such an association need to be addressed. There is another hut circle (PRN 19599), a much smaller affair, set against the south face of one of the wandering walls.

4.8 Study of this complex has led to the suggestion above that the feature beneath the nearby sheepfold (PRN 105021) could conceivably be another house site rather than a cairn. More likely, however, is one of a pair of sites on the east flank of Cefn Penagored. Both PRNs 105139 and 105140 were initially identified and subsequently scheduled (SAM Me 145) as ring cairns. In form and appearance they are not dissimilar, and the former is set prominently on the crest of the ridge. But PRN 105140 occupies a natural shelf sheltering from the prevailing westerly winds beneath the ridge and in appearance is very similar to the larger hut circle in the PRN 105023 complex. That it is another occupation site deserves serious consideration.

## **5 The Archaeology: Medieval and later**

5.1 There is little that can be definitely cited as of medieval date on the interfluvium itself. There are however a number of interesting features of later date.

5.2 Within the scheduled area (SAM Me 146) is a sheep fold (PRN 105021) in a good state of preservation, but particularly notable because of its circular form with funnel walls leading to its entrance. Common enough in the north of the British Isles, circular folds are rare in Wales, this being one of only three or four noted by CPAT during its upland surveys. On the ridge of Foel Fawr are extensive traces of peat cutting - long rectangular extraction areas running across the flat ground of the ridge. The modern fence line runs through these cuttings and close to it is a recumbent boundary stone (PRN 19588) with the letters A M W incised on one face.

5.3 Slate quarries lie beside Nant Cwm Tywyll and on the southern side of the Foel Fawr ridge (PRNs 19590 and 19589 respectively). Both have small buildings associated with them, and the Nant Cwm Tywyll quarry has extensive waste tips and even a slate pile that was never carted away. A pack horse track leads from it down the valley, and a two metre-wide cartway above Nant Esgeiriau and feeding into the track that led to the hamlet of Pennant beside Afon Ceidiog probably served both the quarry and the peat cuttings.

5.4 West of the scheduled area and on the saddle is a small, almost square earthwork enclosure (PRN 105024), about 9m by 8m. There is no obvious stone component in its bank, and its function remains uncertain, but a medieval or later date seems most likely.

5.5 There is little of obvious archaeological significance at the extreme western end of the survey area, except in the valley cut by Nant Esgeiriau. In a fenced and walled area used (?subsequently) for sheep penning and washing is a hafod (PRN 19592: Fig 4), some 12m long by 4.5m wide. It is not only well preserved but reveals details of its internal organisation with a small room on the uphill side, an adjacent cross-passage with access on the south and a larger downhill room with a 'porch' entrance on the north side. It is set within its own enclosure that abuts the stream. A second hafod, in a comparable location but not so well preserved was recorded no more than 200m downstream in 1994.

## **6 Significant unscheduled sites**

PRNs 105142 & 105143: paired cairns, one a kerb cairn.

PRN 19580: kerb cairn.

PRN 19584 & 19585: paired cairns.

PRN 19592: hafod

## **7 Amendment**

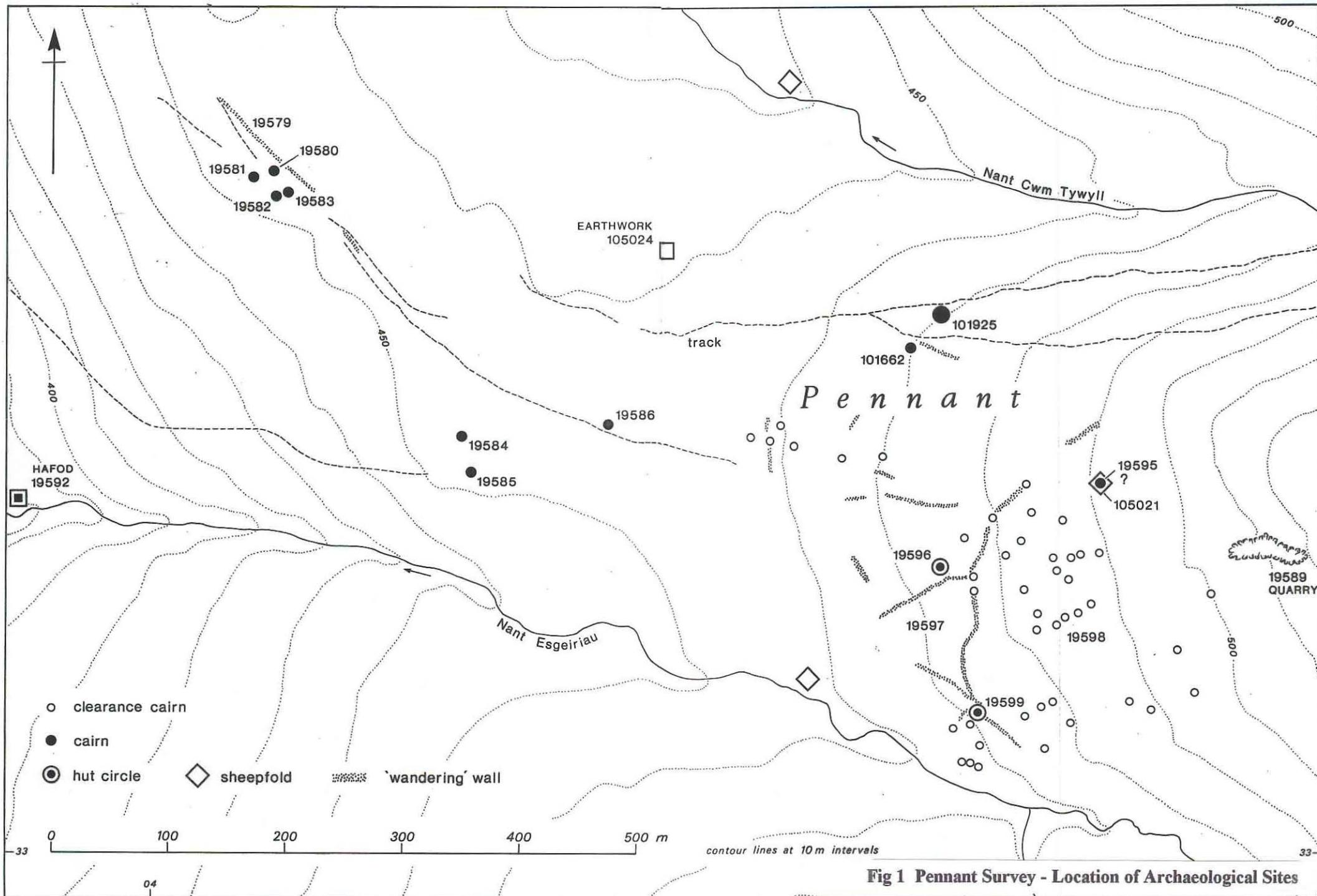
7.1 Two sites on the Cefn Penagored ridge (PRNs 105139 and 105140) were first identified and located in 1991. The present survey has permitted them to be located with considerably greater accuracy. The precise grid references are:

PRN 105139 = SJ 0404 3388

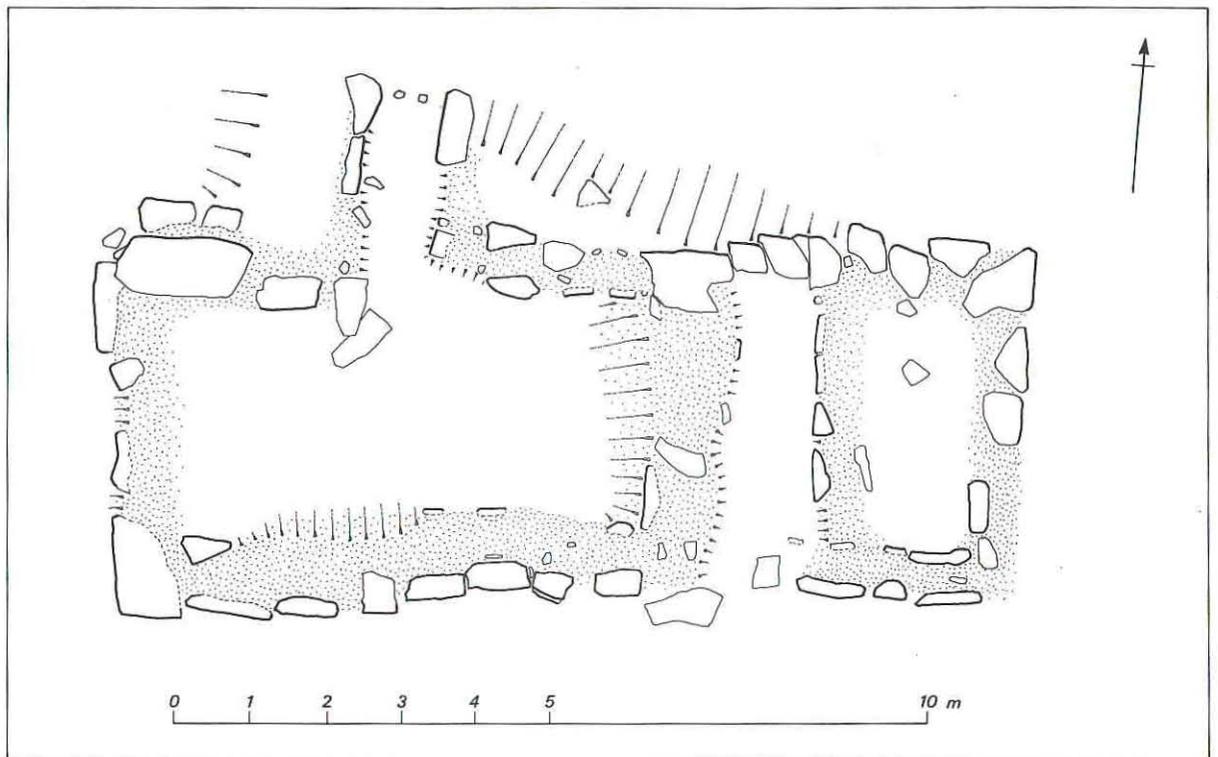
PRN 105140 = SJ 0408 3389

## **8 Acknowledgements**

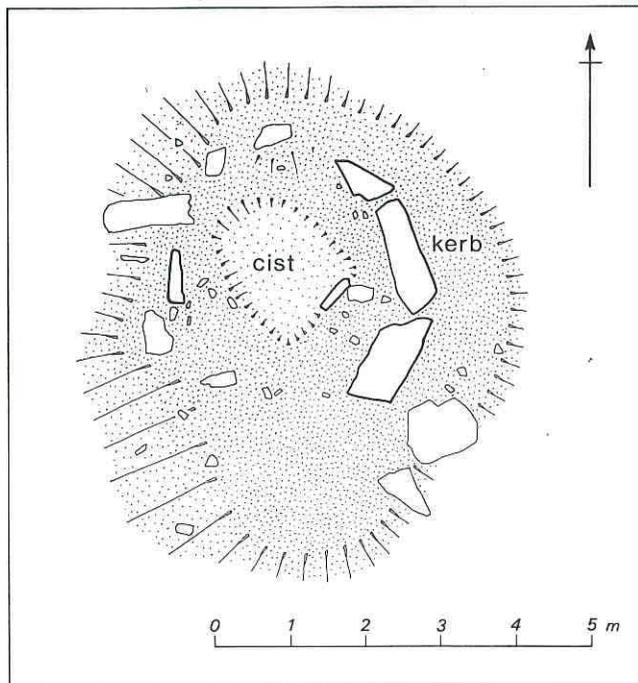
8.1 Thanks are due to Cadw for funding the project, CCW for permitting access to the Pale Estate, and to the farmers with grazing rights on the hill, namely Mr Jones of Cadwst, Mr Roberts of Plas-yn-Dinam and Mr Roberts of Rhyd y Gethin. To the second of these our personal thanks are also due for transporting the survey team and its equipment up the hill each day.



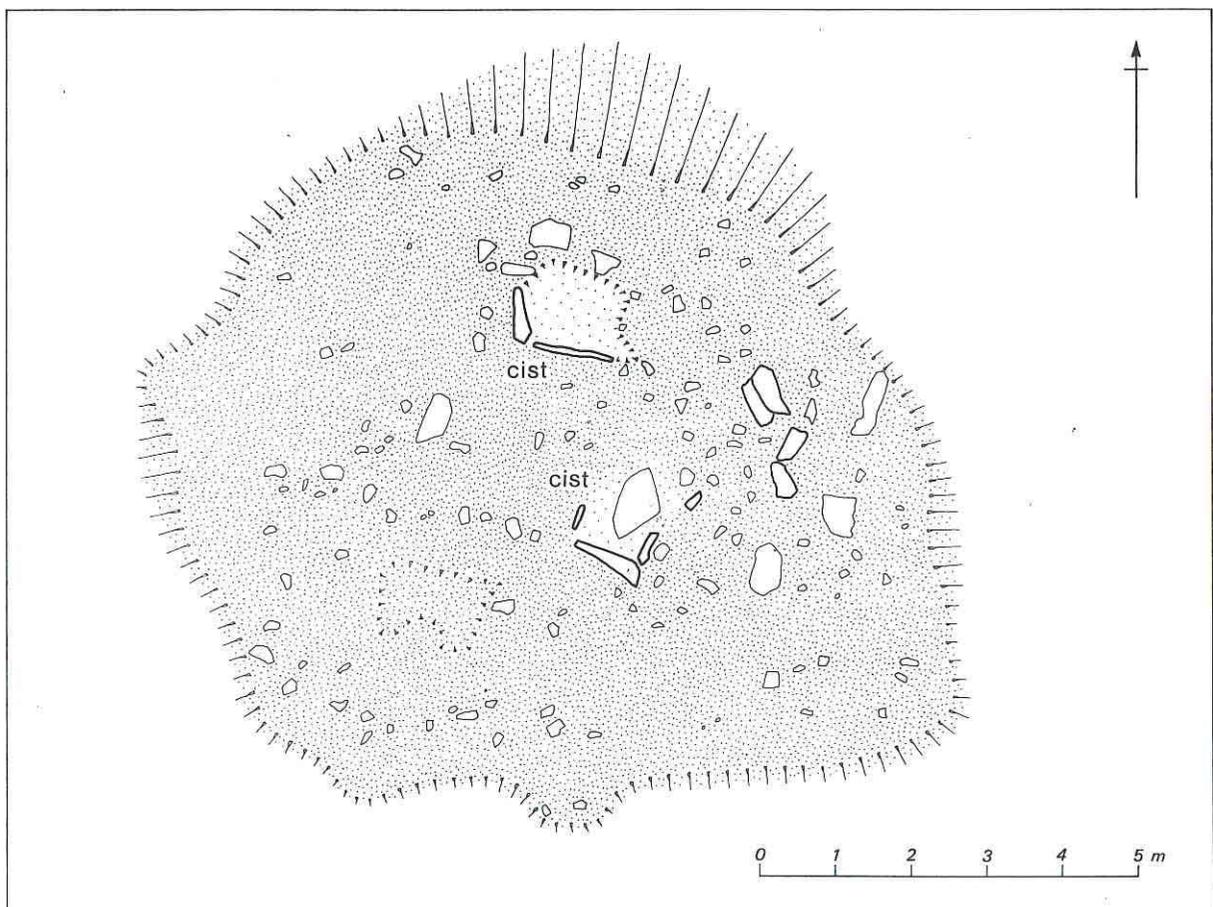
**Fig 1 Pennant Survey - Location of Archaeological Sites**



**Fig 4 Pennant Survey - PRN 19592**



**Fig 2 Pennant Survey - PRN 105142**



**Fig 3 Pennant Survey - PRN 19584**

GAZETTEER

19579 Pennant Wandering Wall SJ0410333603

Wall

Prehistoric

Low wall aligned almost NW/SE. Comprised of boulders cleared from ground surface and piled up to provide SE perimeter. Fades out as stones get less, amongst gorse bushes. About 153m long. Terminating in dump of stone. Then continues on other side of boggy natural depression.

Max 0.3m high, though individual stones higher.

19580 Cefn Penagored ridge cairn SJ0410633583

Cairn

Prehistoric

Cairn. Numerous stones projecting. In centre 2 long slabs on edge. Each 1.1m long and 0.7m apart. Thin interrupted circle of edge stones, some vertical. Mound material with occasional stones outside

Cist = min length 1.2m x 0.6/0.8m wide. Mound diameter 7m x 7.5m

19581 Cefn Penagored satellite cairn I SJ0408933578

Cairn

Prehistoric

Cairn W of PRN 19580 by 14m. Couple of upright stones may act as kerb on E. Much of W invisible under gorse. Otherwise surface stone over some of mound. Authenticity uncertain.

Max 0.4m high.

19582 Cefn Penagored Ridge satellite cairn II SJ0410733560

Cairn

Prehistoric

Mound Possible cairn. 21m SE of PRN 19581. Stone on and projecting through surface, some of it large. No sign of cist and no real kerb. Authenticity uncertain.

4.5m diameter x 0.4m high max.





GAZETTEER

19590 Pennant Quarry SJ0529233544

Quarry

Extensive quarry workings mainly on N bank of Cwm, though one large quarry scooped out of hillside on S. Several buildings, quarry pits, tracks for animal and vehicular access and a stack of worked slates.

19591 Pennant structure SJ0377333544

Building

Unknown

Two sides of building, the others destroyed by more modern tracks. Drystone wall about 0.9m wide and no more than 0.4m high. Its alignment suggests it may be earlier than adjacent field wall. Appears to be well made and aligned along slope.

c.6m SSW/NNE x >8m WNW/ESE.

19592 Pennant House SJ0388733302

House

Medieval

Long rectangular building on relatively level platform raised on western end, in part a natural rise. Building constructed of large slabs and boulders with generally the flat faces giving external and internal wall faces and core material between. Small room at E end, defined by slabs, then cross passage with entrance from S; then bank (=wall) and main room at slightly lower level. Access to this second cell is from porch/funnel on N side. Downhill are walls, some perhaps associated to form small enclosures. Uphill, a larger enclosure defined by a bank and in places a ditch.

Maximum 12m E/W x 5.5m N/S.

GAZETTEER

19593 Pennant Platform House SJ0343833745

Platform Medieval

Possible platform house site. Scoop in moderately steep slope. Not measured. Proximate to another more likely example (PRN 19594).

19594 Pennant Terraced Platform SJ0350233734

Terraced Platform Medieval

Terraced scoop in hillside with secondary platform beside it. Main platform slopes slightly with hill from NE to SW. Base covered with loose stone, probably from stone clearance. No clear sign of in situ walling. Deep scarp at back of terrace with height of perhaps 4m. This shows signs of erosion, rabbit action and has gorse growing on it. At front material pushed out to level the platform. Adjacent is a second smaller scoop which would not have been recorded but for its proximity to main terrace. Sloping base, ill defined sides. Not impressive and very shallow. i) 15.5m NE/SW x c.8m NW/SE ii) c7m NE/SW x 6m NW/SE

19595 Pennant ring bank SJ04813330

Cairn? Prehistoric

Arc of stones, nearly 50% of circle, partly in form of low bank, partly individual stones. Underlies sheep fold (PAR 105021) and has almost certainly been robbed to provide material for it. A short stretch of wing wall running out from beneath fold may be associated.

19596 Pennant hut circle I SJ04673324

House Prehistoric

Large hut circle with entrance to SE. Part of the PRN 105023 complex.

c.7.4m NE/SW x 8.5m NW/SE internally; walls 2.0-2.5m thick; max. 0.4m high.

GAZETTEER

19597 Pennant walls SJ04703324

Walls Prehistoric

Irregularly aligned low walls often edging cleared ground and forming a network centred on a large hut circle (PRN 19596); occasionally incorporating clearance cairns. Part of the PRN 105023 complex.

19598 Pennant clearance cairns SJ04773326

Cairns Prehistoric

Numerous clearance cairns - at least 40 recorded - associated with cleared areas, 'wandering walls' and a large hut circle in the complex PRN 105023.

19599 Pennant hut circle II SJ04703311

House Prehistoric

Small hut circle, its northern side set against a field wall. Walls of stone, but only slight evidence of revetting. Entrance on south. Part of PRN 105023.

101662 Pennant round cairn {S} SJ04663343

Round barrow Bronze Age

Small cairn with large stones protruding, 6m diameter and 0.5m high; central depression. Close to PRN 101925 and within SAM Me146.

101925 Nant Cwm Tywyll ring cairn {S} SJ04683346

Ring cairn Bronze Age

Ring cairn of three concentric rings of stone each 2m wide and 0.2m high. Overall cairn diameter 20m. The inner ring may be a central cairn dug into creating a gap 2m wide on north side. Formely crossed by a fence line.

Now with SAM Me146.

GAZETTEER

105023 Pennant settlement {S} SJ04683325

Settlement Bronze Age

Hut complex probably of prehistoric date. Large hut circle, nearly 8m in internal diameter, together with 'wandering walls and numerous small clearance cairns (Silvester, R J 1992b, 14).

Within scheduled area Me146.

105024 Pennant earthwork SJ04503355

Earthwork Medieval ?

Small almost square earthwork 8.3m by 9.2m externally, with bank c.0.4m high; entrance gap in north-east corner. (Silvester, R J 1992b, 14).