

THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

# Beyond Foundation Outdoor Education Centre, Llyn Brenig, Denbighshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT



CPAT Report No 751

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**Beyond Foundation Outdoor Education Centre, Llyn  
Brenig, Denbighshire**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT**

**N W Jones**  
November 2005

Report for Creation Projectworks Ltd


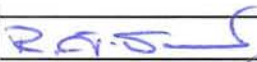

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## CPAT Report Record

### Report and status

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (henceforward CPAT) was asked by Mr Ian Millar of Creation Projectwork Ltd to provide a quotation for an archaeological assessment of a proposed outdoor education centre on the shores of Llyn Brenig, Denbighshire.
- 1.2 The curatorial section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, in their capacity as one of the archaeological advisors to the local planning authority, determined that a pre-planning archaeological assessment should be undertaken and a brief was produced by the curatorial detailing the works required (EVB 595).

## **2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY**

- 2.1 The site occupies approximately 22.5ha on a promontory along the western shore of Llyn Brenig (SH969564; Fig. 1). The area comprises a ridge known as Bryniau'r Hafod which rises to a height of 408m above Ordnance Datum. At present, the area is mostly occupied by mature forestry.
- 2.2 The soils of the area are part of the Wilcocks 2 Association and consist of seasonally waterlogged loamy upland soils with a peaty surface horizon. These overlie drift from Palaeozoic sandstone, mudstone and shale (Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983).

## **3 METHODOLOGY**

- 3.1 The initial phase of the assessment consisted of a desk-based study of the readily available primary and secondary sources. The repositories consulted included: the regional Historic Environment Record (HER), held by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust in Welshpool; the Denbighshire Record Office in Ruthin; the National Monuments Record, organised by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales, in Aberystwyth; and the National Library of Wales, in Aberystwyth.
- 3.2 Following the desk-based study, area was subject to a walk-over survey to examine all the known sites and prospect for previously unrecorded archaeology. Digital photography, to a resolution of 3 megapixels, was taken of archaeological sites identified in the field.

## **4 RESULTS OF THE DESK-BASED STUDY**

- 4.1 The information from the regional Historic Environment Record indicated that there were no recorded archaeological sites within the area of the proposed development, although the wider area around Llyn Brenig contains a wealth of archaeological sites.
- 4.2 While the whole of the Welsh landscape should be considered to be important, some areas have been highlighted which are thought to be particularly important and/or well-preserved. These have been recorded in a *Register of Landscapes of Historic Interest in Wales* (Cadw *et al*, 2001). The proposed development lies within the Mynydd Hiraethog Landscape of Historic Interest which has been the subject of a historic landscape characterisation study whereby the landscape was divided into a number of character areas, each with its own distinguishing landscape features (Britnell 2002).
- 4.3 The study area falls within the Bryn-y-gors Goch character area (Fig. 4) which occupies around 14km<sup>2</sup> of afforested land on the south- and east-facing slopes to the north of the Alwen Reservoir and west of



## Llyn Brenig.

- 4.4 Little evidence of prehistoric settlement in the area has been identified, although early activity is suggested by scatters of stone and flint implements found during excavations in the Brenig valley and the presence of a range of prehistoric funerary and ritual monuments in the Llyn Brenig area. Artefact scatters such as these have traditionally been thought to represent temporary encampments created by small family groups who spent much of the rest of the year in the lowlands, but followed herds of game which migrated to the more open upland pastures in the summer months (Britnell 2002, 18).
- 4.5 The distribution of prehistoric funerary and ritual monuments displays a clear focus of activity around the Afon Fechan, probably spanning a period of 500 to 600 years between about 2100 BC and 1500 BC, during the later Neolithic and early Bronze Age periods (see Fig. 4). The complex includes four large burial mounds, three small stone burial cairns, a ring cairn, a kerb cairn and a large platform cairn. Detailed study of the complex, including extensive excavations (Lynch 1993), has suggested that it forms an essentially inward-looking group of monuments within what might be termed a sacred landscape, conceived and built by a single community (Britnell 2002, 29)
- 4.6 Although the prehistoric complex occupies what is now the eastern side of Llyn Brenig, there are a number of individual monuments along the western shoreline, and indeed on an island within the reservoir (Fig. 4).
- 4.7 There is evidence for a substantial farming establishment in the Brenig area during the medieval period, represented by the enclosed farmstead at Hen Ddinbych. The site was probably known by the name *Bisshopswalle* by the 1270s and appears to have comprised a dwelling and a number of long roofed sheepcotes for overwintering animals. The name implies that it formed an ecclesiastical upland grange, possibly associated with one of the bishops of Bangor.
- 4.8 Smaller-scale dwellings are the more characteristic settlements of the medieval period, associated with pastoral farming and represented by a number of *hafodydd* or 'summer houses'. Although a number of *hafod* placenames are recorded in the area in the 14<sup>th</sup> century many, such as Hafod-yr-onen (Fig. 3) and Hafoty Sion Llwyd (Fig. 4), are first recorded only during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A number of such dwellings had ceased to be occupied by the later 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, when documentary references become more numerous. This was evidently the case with a group of seven seasonally occupied dwellings along the banks of the Nant-y-criafolen stream (Fig. 4) which excavation has demonstrated were built and occupied during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- 4.9 At the time of the Tithe survey for Nantglyn parish in 1840 (Fig. 2), the area is recorded as enclosed pasture owned by Aneurin Given of Tan y gyst and occupied by John Jones, Hafod yr onen.
- 4.10 The Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1:10,560 map, surveyed in 1874 (Fig. 3), shows the area as enclosed moorland, within Bryniau Ty'n-y-ddôl, a featureless expanse of moorland with the exception of a small triangle symbol (Site 1), usually denoting an Ordnance Survey trigonometry point.
- 4.11 The Llyn Brenig Reservoir was constructed between 1973-76, flooding the valleys of the Afon Fechan and Afon Brenig to provide water for homes and industry in north-east Wales, as well as controlling the flow of the Dee and supplying water to the Llangollen Canal (Britnell 2002, 29). Large areas of the surrounding moorland were afforested during the 1930s, forming the Clocaenog Forest, although the forestry within the study area dates from the period after the Second World War (Britnell 2002, 26).

## 5 FIELD SURVEY

- 5.1 The field survey was undertaken on 4 November 2005. The nature of the forestry prevented the use of a systematic transect survey, although all areas were accessed by use of forestry rides and by following planting rows. Past forestry operations had significantly disturbed the ground surface, with deep ploughing having been used to form planting ridges with additional drainage ditches.

- 5.2 The only site identified during the survey was a small modern stone cairn (Site 1; SH 96805650) around 2m across and 0.6m high, sited on the highest point of Bryniau'r Hafod (Fig. 4; Plate 1). The cairn was well-constructed and may originally have formed a circular base, possibly for a triangulation station, as suggested by the early Ordnance Survey mapping (Fig. 3).

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The study area lies within an historic landscape which has been recognised as being of special interest. The Denbigh Moors (Mynydd Hiraethog) is largely a moorland landscape which has its origins in the Neolithic and Bronze Age, but has been modified in more recent centuries by continued seasonal grazing based on temporary settlements, or *hafodydd*. More recently, the landscape has seen considerable change with the introduction of extensive forestry plantations and the construction of a number of reservoirs, including Llyn Brenig (Cadw 2001, 8-11).
- 6.2 The assessment has revealed a single archaeological site within the study area, a small modern cairn which may be associated with the early Ordnance Survey mapping of the area. The site is considered to be of local importance and should be preserved *in situ* and avoided during felling operations.
- 6.3 The wider area around Llyn Brenig has been shown to contain a range of significant archaeological sites, most notably the concentration of prehistoric funerary and ritual monuments which form a complex on the eastern side of the valley. Elsewhere, there is evidence for pastoral farming from the medieval period, with Hen Ddinbych and the remains of several *hafodydd* being of particular significance. This is however, no evidence for any related archaeological sites within the study area.

## 7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 7.1 The writer would like to thank the following for their assistance and co-operation: Bob Silvester, CPAT; the staff of the Denbighshire Records Office, Ruthin; the staff of the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth; and the staff of the National Monuments Record, Aberystwyth.

## 8 REFERENCES

### Published Sources

Cadw, 2001. *The Register of Landscapes, Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in Wales. Part 2.2. Register of Landscapes of Special Historic Interest in Wales*. Cadw: Cardiff.

### Unpublished Sources

Britnell, W J, 2002. *Mynydd Hiraethog: Historic Landscape Characterization*. CPAT Report No. 455.  
 Lynch, F M, 1993. *Excavations at the Brenig Valley. A Mesolithic and Bronze Age Landscape in North Wales*. Cambrian Archaeological Monographs No. 5. Bangor: Cambrian Archaeological Association and Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments.

### Maps

Tithe survey for Nantglyn Parish, 1840 and apportionment 1839  
 Ordnance Survey 1:10,560 Denbighshire 17, surveyed 1874, published 1879  
 Ordnance Survey 1:10,560 Denbighshire 18, surveyed 1874, published 1879



**Aerial Photographic Sources**

*Oblique aerial photographs held by CPAT*

01-c-151 to 164

*Vertical aerial photography held by RCAHMW*

RAF/541/208/4030-4031 25-11-1948



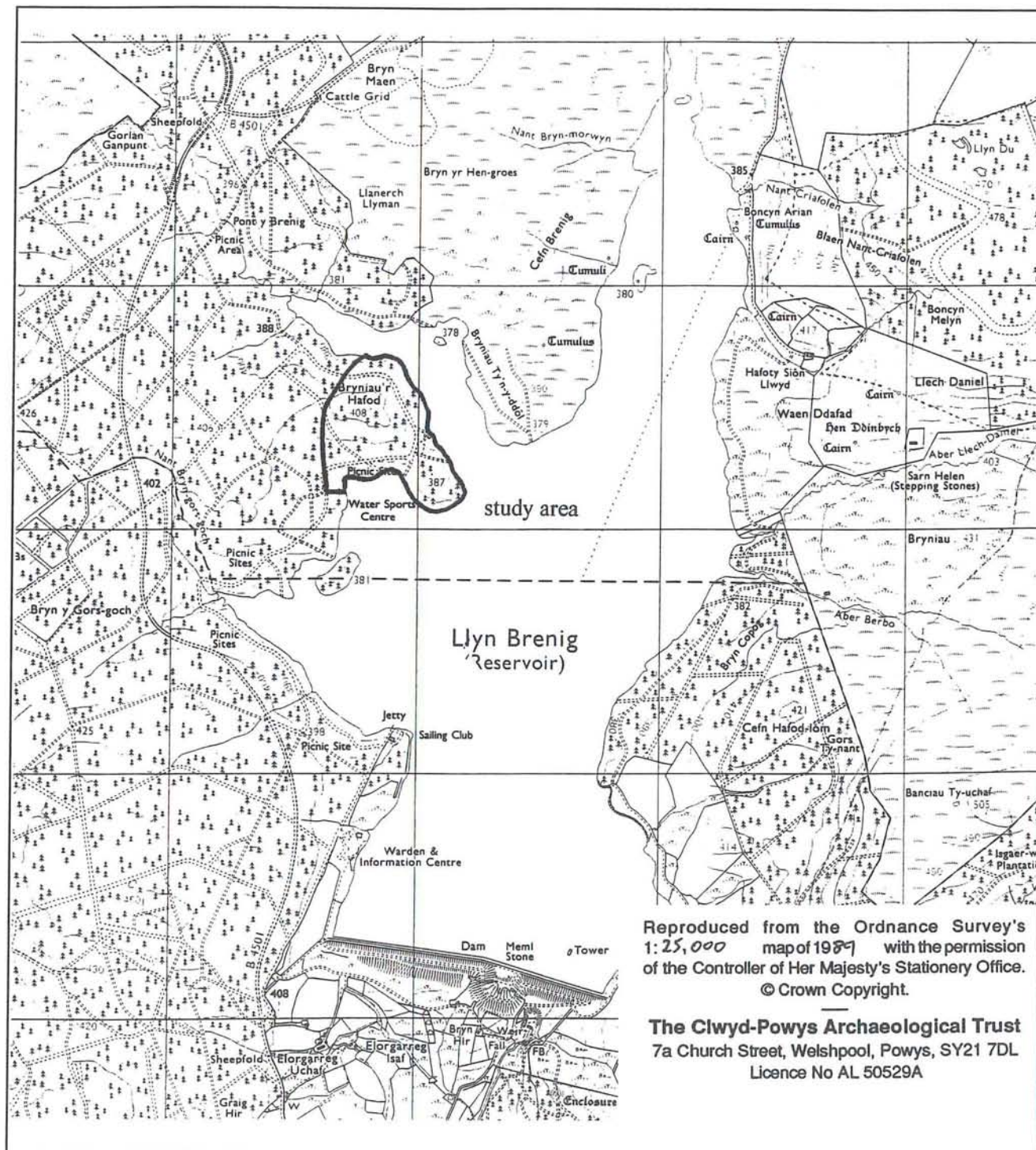


Fig. 1 Study area location

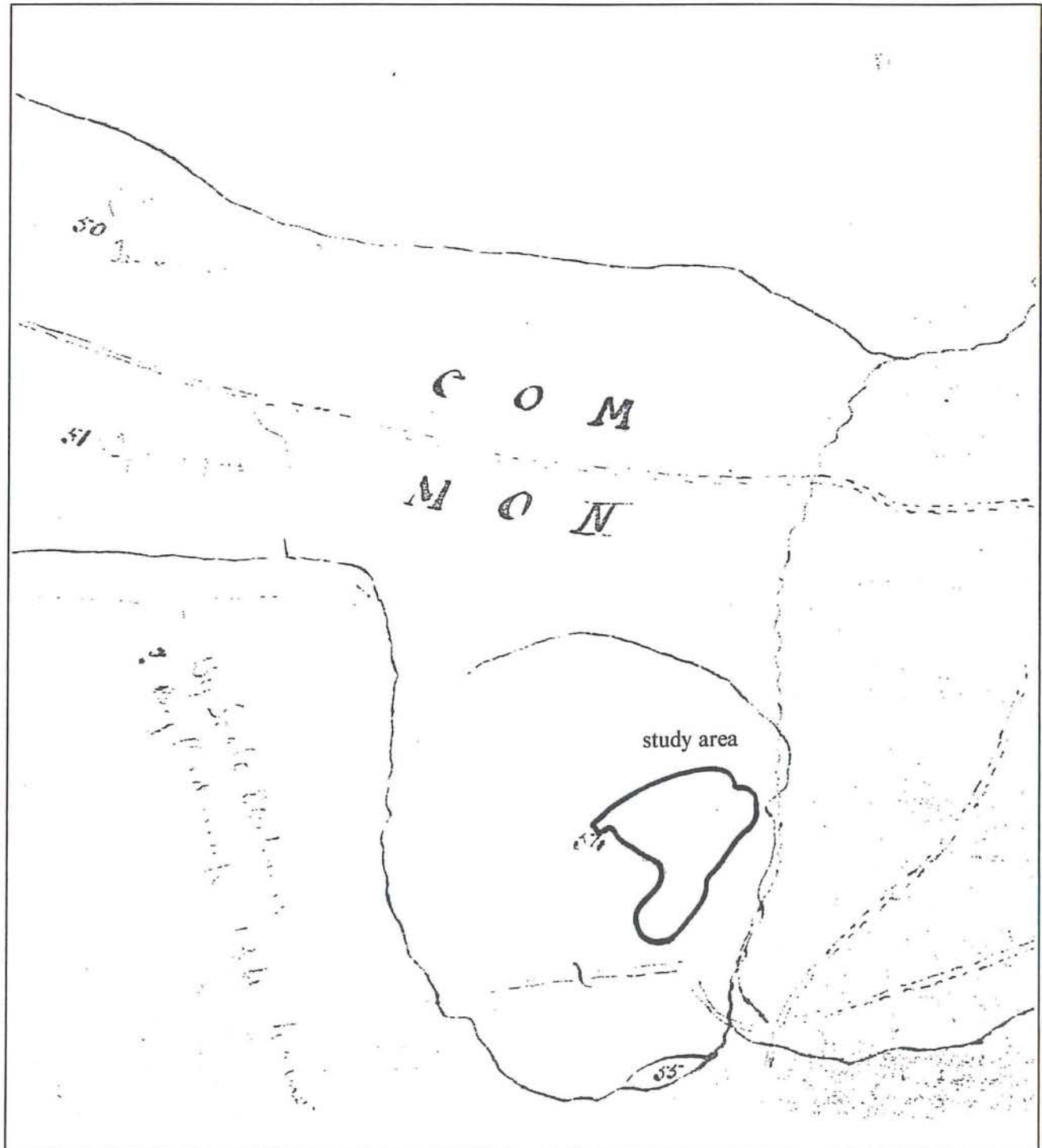


Fig. 2 Tithe survey for Nantglyn Parish, 1840

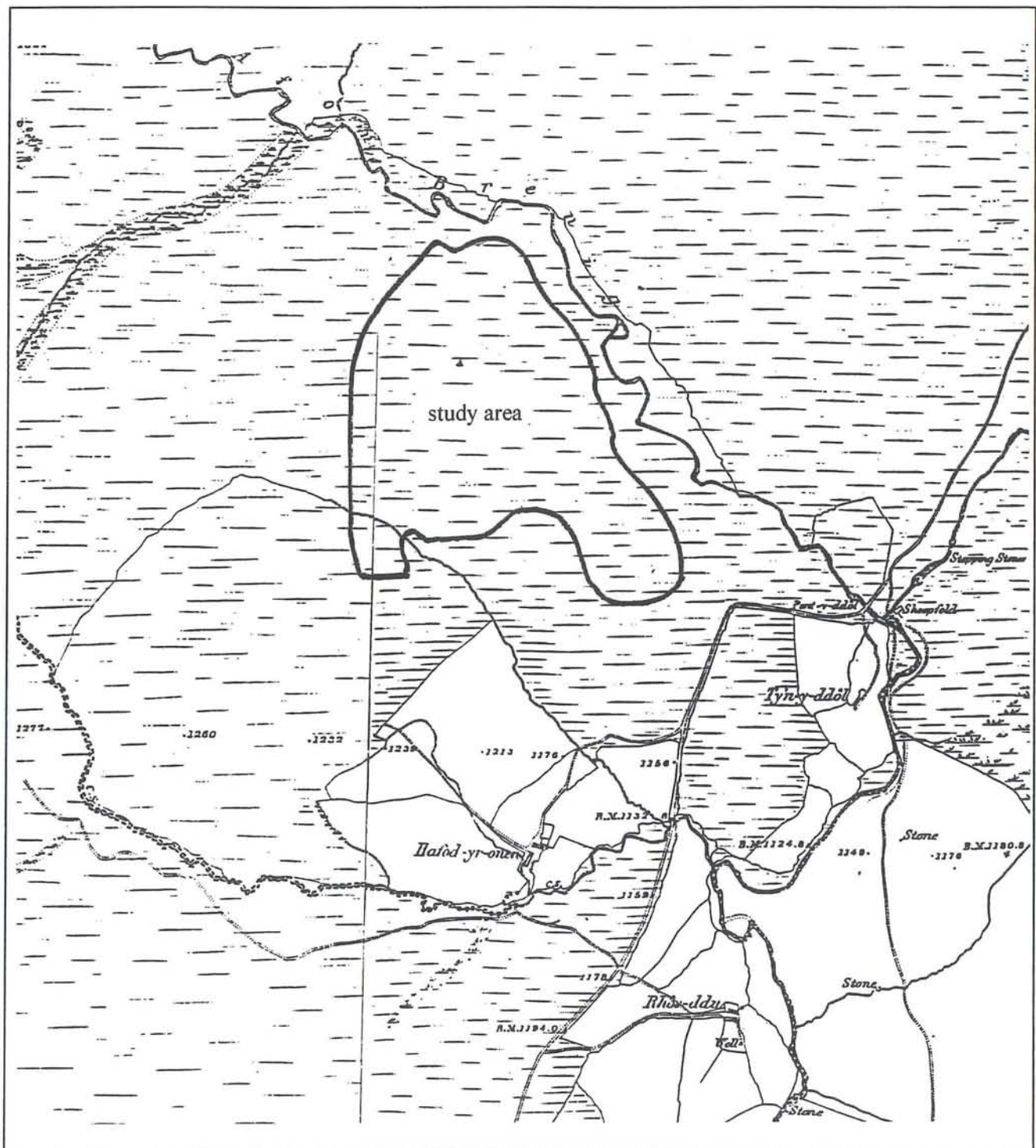


Fig. 3 Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1:10,560 map, surveyed 1874, published 1879



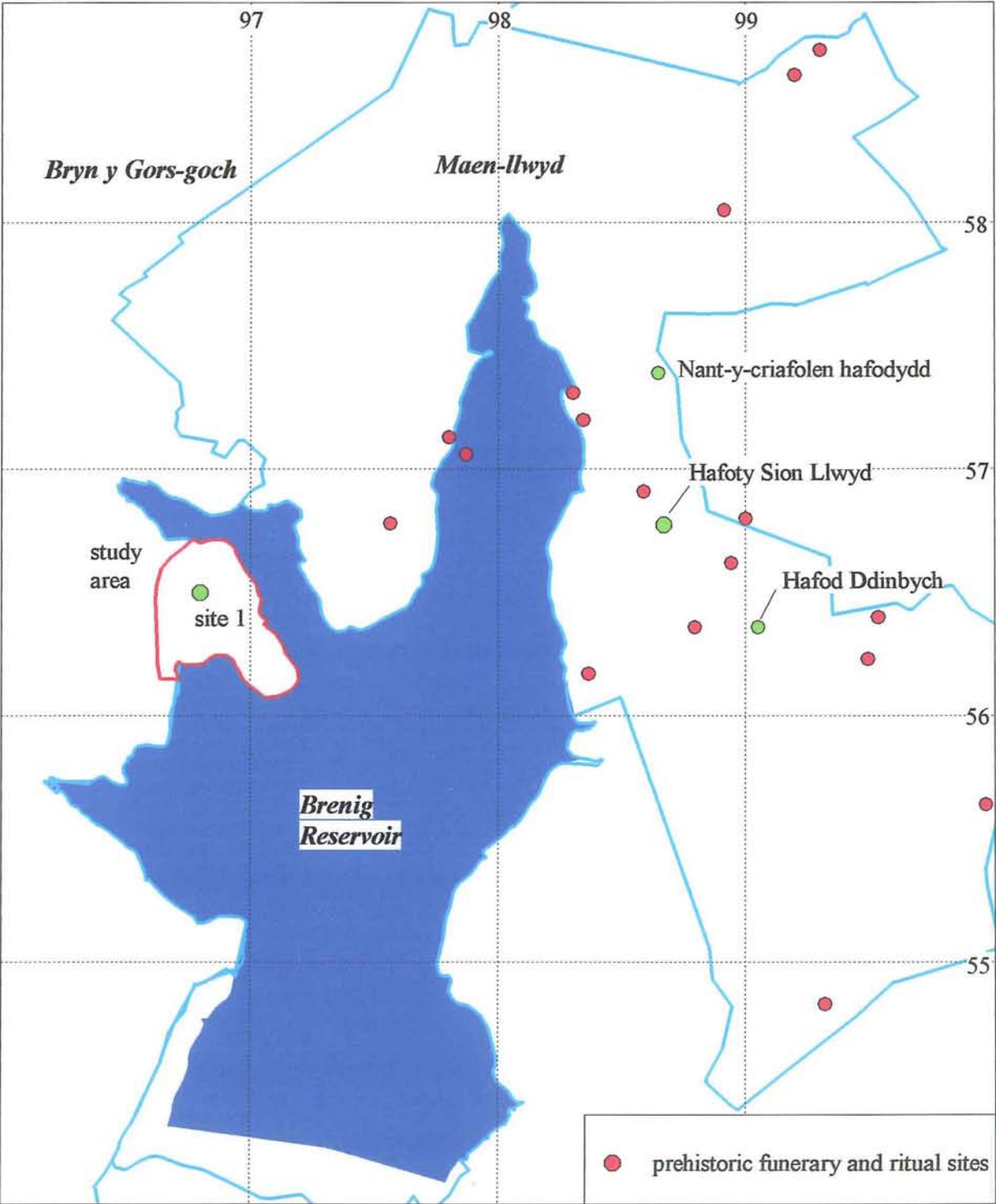


Fig. 4 Historic Landscape Character Areas and significant archaeological sites





Plate 1 Bryniau'r Hafod cairn (Site 1)