

CPAT Report No 1110

Craig y Fan Ddu Stone Rows, Talybont-on-Usk

EXCAVATION AND SURVEY 2011



THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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Report for Cadw

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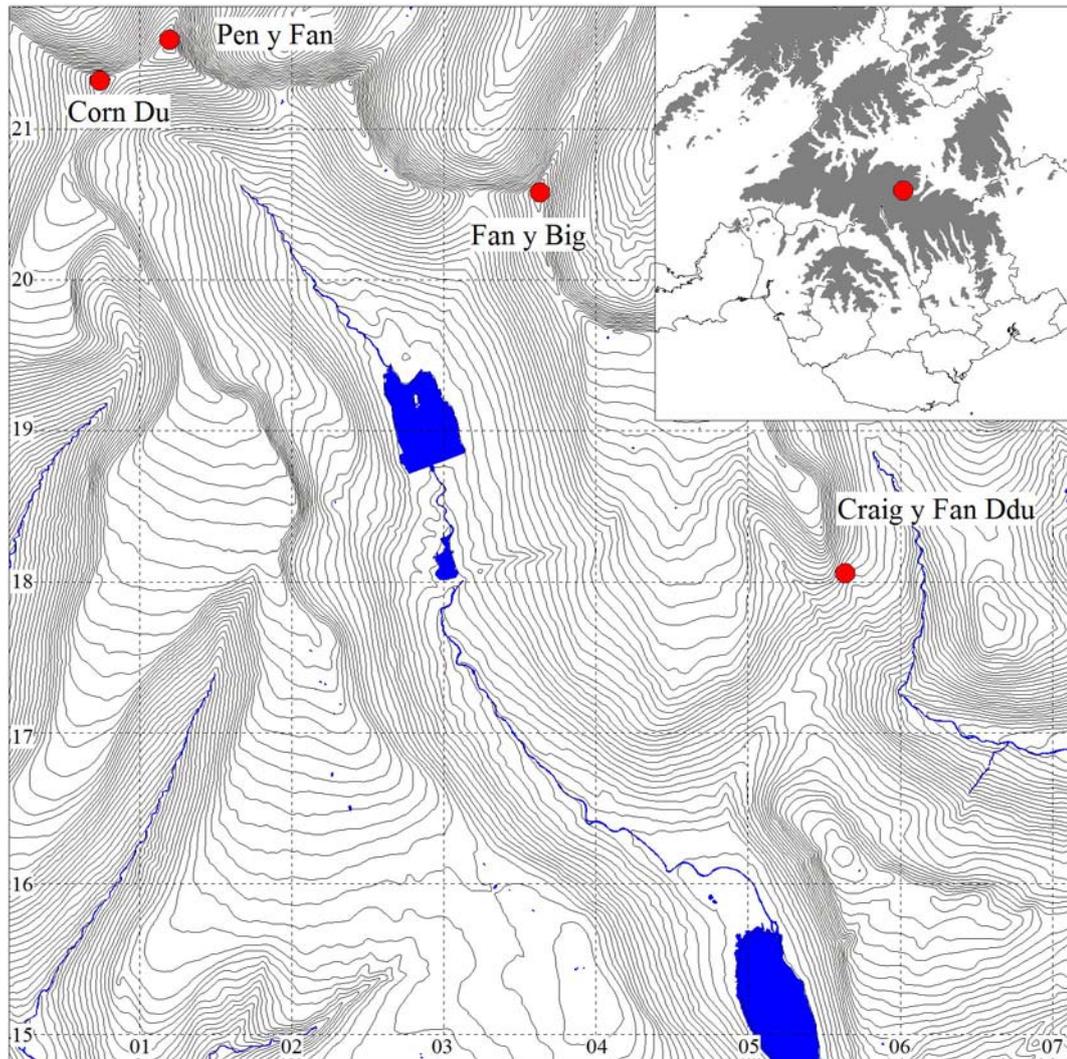
cover: Craig y Fan Ddu stone rows viewed from the south-west. Photo CPAT 3325-0020

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 A programme of detailed survey and trial excavation was undertaken to investigate a group of erect stones (PRN 4393) at Craig y Fan Ddu in the Brecon Beacons. (SO 05637 18058). The work was funded by Cadw as part of the continuing study into prehistoric funerary and ritual monuments in mid and north-east Wales.



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Fig. 1 Location of the Craig y Fan Ddu stone rows

- 1.2 The site is located around 7.3km south-west of Talybont-on-Usk, and lies at an altitude of around 500m on the south-eastern slope of Craig y Fan Ddu, overlooking the upper reaches of the Caerfanell stream. Craig y Fan Ddu forms a ridge extending south from the main range of the Brecon Beacons, which includes Corn Du and Pen y Fan, both of which are surmounted by Bronze Age burial cairns (Gibson 1997), as well as Fan y Big, where the remains of a cremation burial were found in association with two cordoned urns and a bronze implement (Briggs *et al.* 1990).

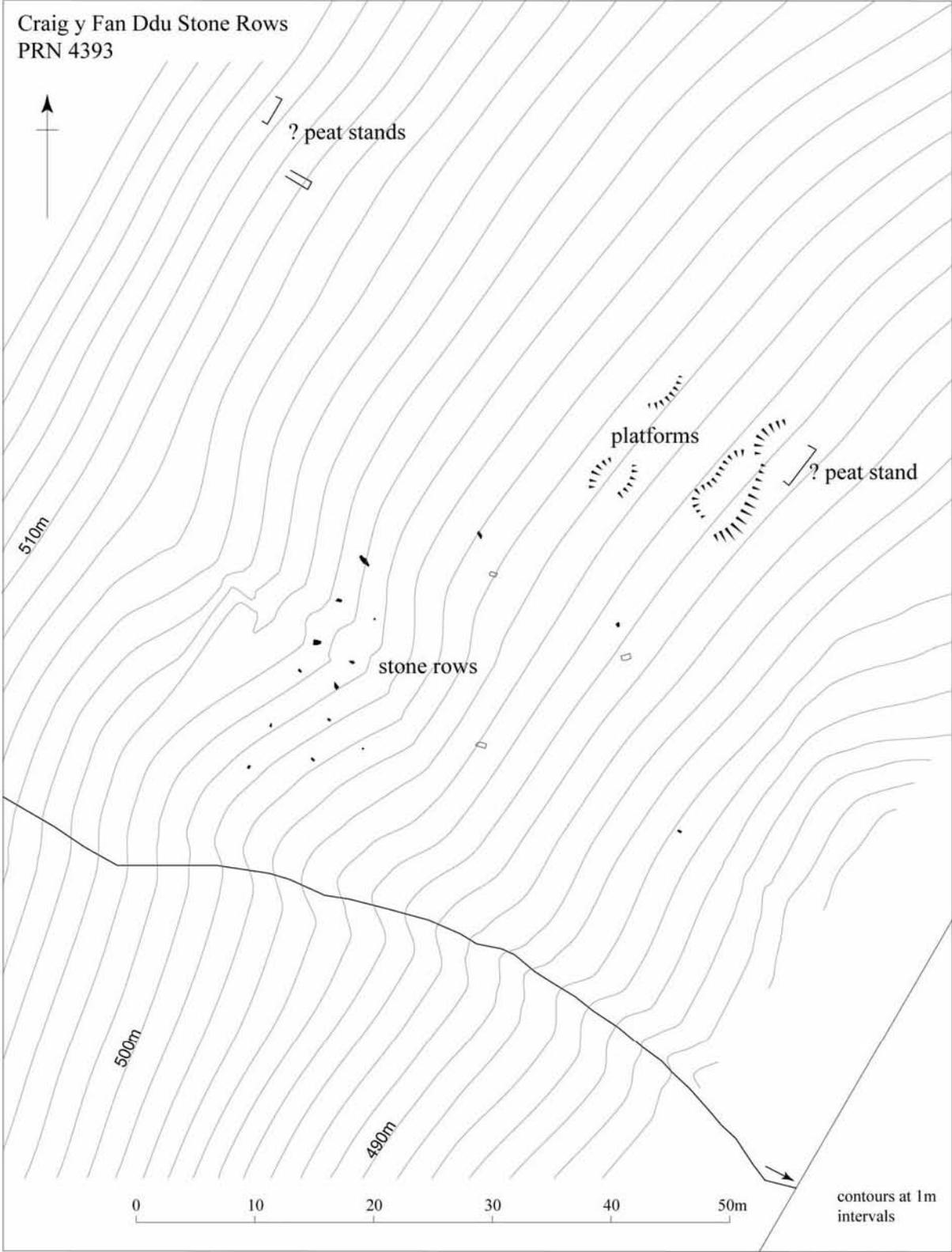


Fig. 2 Plan of Craig y Fan Ddu stone rows PRN 4393 and possible peat stands PRN 4394.

2 EXCAVATION AND SURVEY

2.1 A small-scale excavation was conducted in late August 2011 in conjunction with a detailed total station survey to record accurately the position of those stones which were already known, as well as attempting to identify any further stones which might be associated. The survey also recorded a series of possible peat stands and earthwork platforms immediately to the north and north-east of the stones.

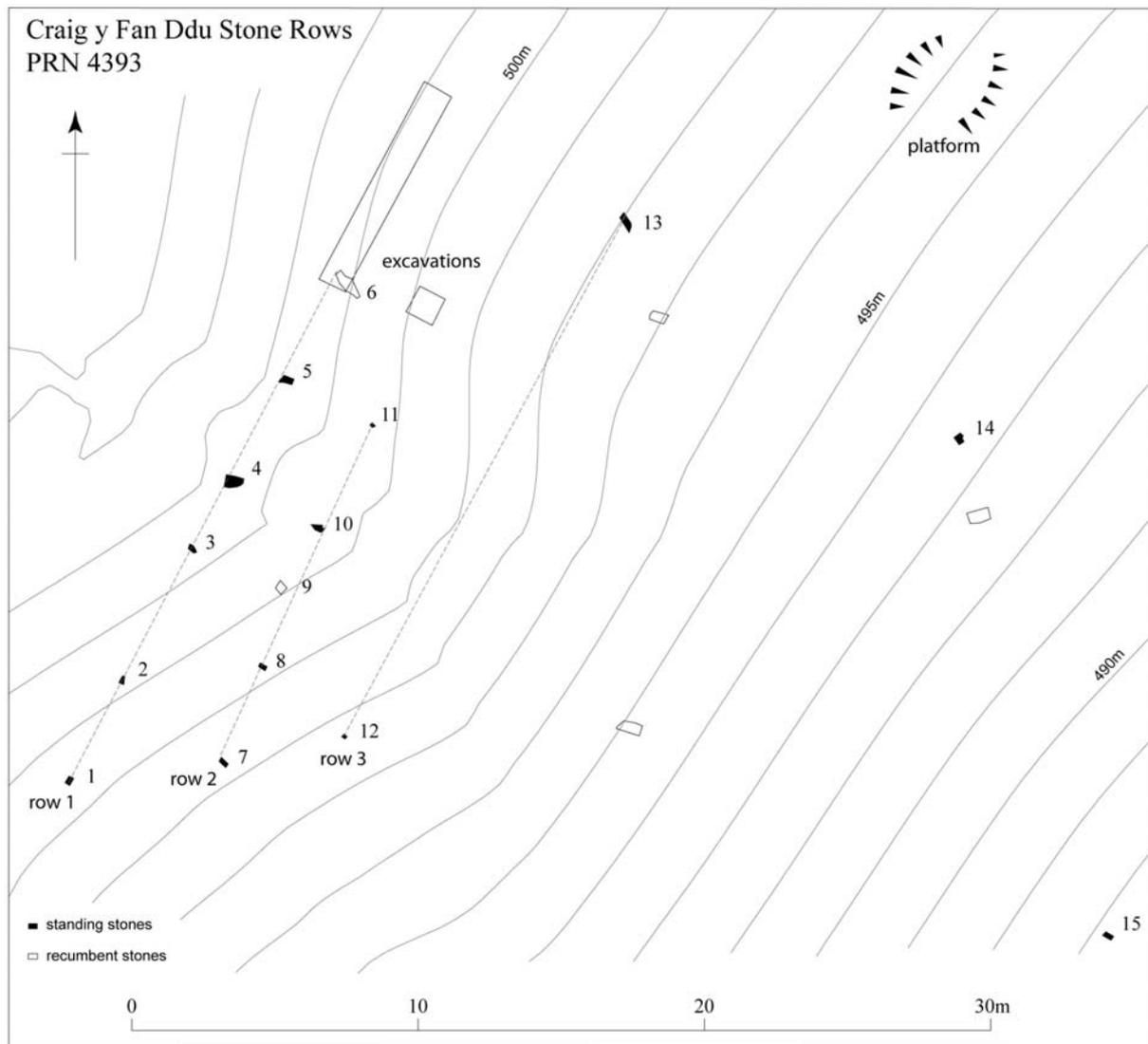


Fig. 3 Plan of Craig y Fan Ddu stone rows PRN 4393 showing location of excavations

2.2 The survey identified 14 or 15 stones which were either still upright, or could be demonstrated to have been so, the majority of which formed two rows aligned north-north-east to south-south-west (approx 32° degrees east of magnetic north), with a possible third row now only consisting of two stones and two outliers which did not appear to be associated with any other surviving stones.

2.3 The uppermost row, Row 1, is composed of six stones, spaced between 2.8m and 5.25m apart, and extends for a distance of 20.2m. The potential for an extension of the row to the north-north-east was examined by the hand-excavation of a trial trench 8m long and 1m wide. Although this identified the stone-hole for stone 6, which is now recumbent, no evidence was found to suggest the former existence of any other stones forming part of the row.

Stone 1: an upright stone 0.29m long, 0.18m thick and 0.7m high.

Stone 2: an upright stone 0.28m long, 0.13m thick and 0.5m high.

Stone 3: an upright stone 0.18m long, 0.14m thick and 0.58m high, leaning slightly to the east-south-east.

Stone 4: a recumbent stone 0.4m wide and 0.7m in length.

Stone 5: an upright stone 0.3m long, 0.1m thick and 0.5m high, leaning to the east-south-east.

Stone 6: a recumbent stone 0.4m wide and 1.2m in length, having fallen to the south-east. The excavation identified the stone-hole in which it was set, which was 0.46m long, 0.38m wide and 0.26m deep, within which packing stones had been placed along the south-east and north-east sides (Figs 5-6).



Fig. 4 Rows 1 and 2 viewed from the south-south-west looking towards Cwar y Gigfran.

Photo CPAT 3325-16



Fig. 5 Trial excavation along the projected line of Row 1, with the recumbent stone no. 6 and stone-hole in the foreground. Photo CPAT 3325-0042



Fig. 6 The excavated stone-hole showing the position of the packing stones, with the recumbent stone no. 6 in the foreground. Photo CPAT 3325-0047

- 2.4 Row 2 adopted a slightly different alignment, being 4.6m distant from Row 1 at the south-south-west and 3.6m at the north-north-east end. The row consists of four, or possibly five visible stones set at intervals of between 2.5m and 4.2m. A possible recumbent slab 4.5m to the north-north-east of stone 11 was investigated during the excavation (Fig. 7), but this found no evidence for a stone-hole to suggest that the stone was part of the row.

Stone 7: an upright stone 0.19m long, 0.1m thick and 0.55m high, leaning to the south-south-east.

Stone 8: a stone 0.31m long, 0.15m thick and 0.37m high.

Stone 9: a stone 0.32m long, 0.2m thick and 0.2m high which is not certainly part of the row.

Stone 10: an upright stone 0.35m long, 0.08m thick and 0.2m high.

Stone 11: an upright stone 0.11m long, 0.11m thick and 0.45m high.



Fig. 7 Trial excavation along the projected line of Row 2. Photo CPAT 3325-0045

- 2.5 Row 3 consists of only two visible stones set 20.7m apart, each 8m away from the alignment of Row 1 such that they may be part of a parallel row.

Stone 12: an upright stone 0.15m long, 0.1m thick and 0.36m high.

Stone 13: an upright stone 0.26m long, 0.1m thick and 0.82m high, leaning to the east-south-east.

- 2.6 Two further upright stones lie some distance downslope, in addition to which there are at least three slabs, the appearance of which are suggestive of recumbent standing stones, although this belief could not be confirmed without further excavation.

Stone 14: an upright stone 0.3m long, 0.12m thick and 0.55m high.

Stone 15: an upright stone 0.2m long, 0.2m thick and 0.55m high.

- 2.7 The presence of a group of possible peat stands and platforms within 30m of the stone rows may have some bearing on the present appearance of the rows since it is possible that some stones may have been robbed during their construction. There are three structures built of dry-stone walling (Fig. 8) and re at least four small earthwork platforms nearby which are presumably associated.



Fig. 8 The uppermost of the possible peat stands, PRN 4394. Photo CPAT 3325-0023

3 CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 The survey has confirmed the presence of three roughly parallel stone rows, each set around 4m apart and about 20m in length, together with two other standing stones and several possible recumbent slabs which suggest that the rows may have originally been more numerous.
- 3.2 Single, or even double stone rows are not uncommon in Wales, although there are only two other examples of multiple rows, both of which are on the western side of Mynydd Hiraethog, near Pentrefoelas. The larger, although least complete example, is at Ffridd Can Awen and originally consisted of about 450 small stones set in irregular rows. The second site, Hafod-y-dre, has recently been resurveyed by RCAHMW, and identified 87 small stones forming 18 rows, although earlier records suggest up to 130 stones (Silvester 2011, 36-7).
- 3.3 The recent small-scale excavations produced no evidence for dating, a situation which is all too common in the investigation of stone rows. Although such monuments have long been assumed to date from the late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age, recent excavations at Cut Hill on Dartmoor have produced radiocarbon dates from peat beneath a fallen stone which suggest that the stones were erected by between 3700 BC and 3500 BC (Newman 2011, 39).

- 3.4 The function of stone rows remains a mystery and although some have suggested an astronomical association, the wide variance of alignment and inconsistencies within individual rows argues against this interpretation. There is, however, often an association with other monuments as at Hafod-y-dre where the end of each row forms an alignment with a nearby burial cairn, although at Craig y Fan Ddu no other potentially contemporary known monuments are known in the area.

4 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 4.1 The writer would like to thank Wendy Owen of CPAT for assisting with the work, together with Francis Chester-Master for facilitating access to the Welsh Pencelli Estate.

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