

**CPAT Report No 1112**

# Twyn-cae-yr-eithyn, Llanigon, Breconshire

**EXCAVATION AND SURVEY 2011**



**THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST**

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**EXCAVATION AND SURVEY 2011**

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Report for Cadw

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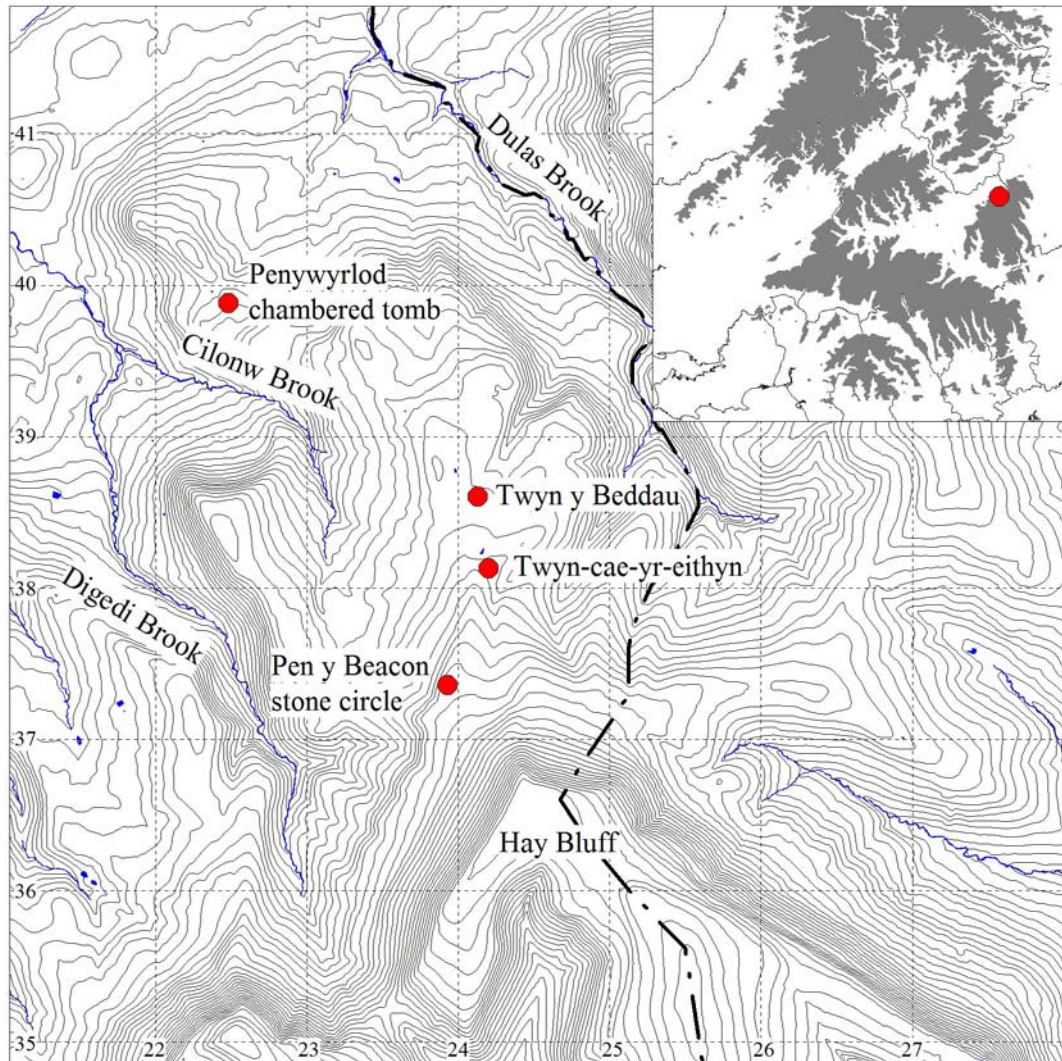
cover: Trial excavations at Twyn-cae-yr-eithyn, viewed from the south. Photo CPAT 3296-0048

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 A programme of detailed survey and trial excavation was undertaken to investigate a potential Neolithic chambered tomb (PRN 72243) near Twyn y Beddau, in the Black Mountains of eastern Breconshire (SO 24183810). 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 Twyn-cae-yr-eithyn

- 1.2 The site, believed to be that referred to in antiquarian sources as Twyn-cae-yr-eithyn, is located at the foot of Hay Bluff at an altitude of 420m, around 500m south of the prominent burial cairn at Twyn y Beddau (PRN 1064) and 800m north-north-east of the stone circle at Pen y Beacon (PRN 3125). Topographically, the site is at the southern end of a broad spur between the Cilonw Brook and the Dulas Brook, and overlooks a tributary of the latter to the east.
- 1.3 The potential presence of a chambered tomb in this area was first raised by the antiquary Theophilus Jones in 1805, who noted that ‘at some distance from Twyn-y-beddau, on the left hand of the track leading to Llanthony, and not far from the mouldering ruins of an old public house called Rhydwarnen, is another tumulus, called Twyn-cae-yr-eithyn; it is in the form of a parallelogram, measuring about thirty yards by twelve’.

1.4 Thereafter the whereabouts of the cairn became lost and some confusion entered the records relating to a possible chambered tomb at nearby Maes Coch (PRN 3117) which was identified by D P Webley in 1956 at SO 239378 (Webley 1956, 54-5). Webley's site was later equated with a mound at SO 239373 by RCAHMW and considered to be natural (RCAHMW 1997, 65), although the published description indicates that the site in question was actually the ruinous stone circle at Pen y Beacon, which is also known as Blaen Dgedi, lying some 430m south of the Webleys recorded location at SO 2393 3736. It was not recognised as a stone circle until a visit by Don Benson in 1970 (RCAHMW 1997, 65 and 159-160).

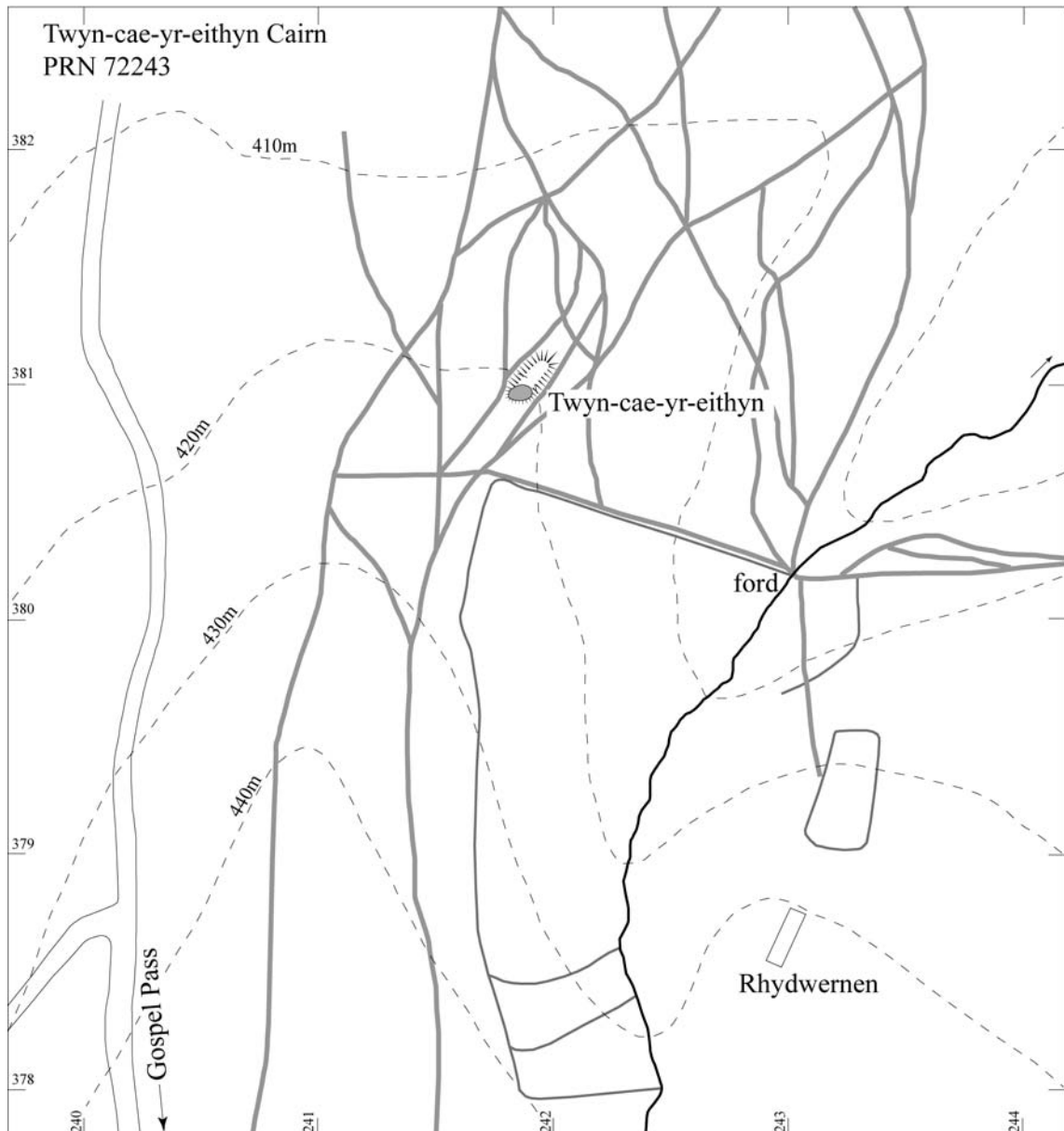


Fig. 2 Location of Twyn-cae-yr-eithyn and Rhydwwernen in relation to the trackways

1.5 In the late 1990s a long mound was identified at SO 2414 3810 during fieldwork by Frank Olding and Graham Makepeace. The mound was orientated south-west to north-east and was recorded as being 29m long, 14.5m wide at the hill south-west end, and up to 1.5m high. A substantial amount of stone was identified at the south-western end, which it was thought might be the site of the main burial chamber. The site was surveyed and the resulting plan was initially published under the name of Maes Coch (Makepeace and Olding 1998) and later as Maes Coch-Twyn y Beddau (Olding 2000, 26 and 87).

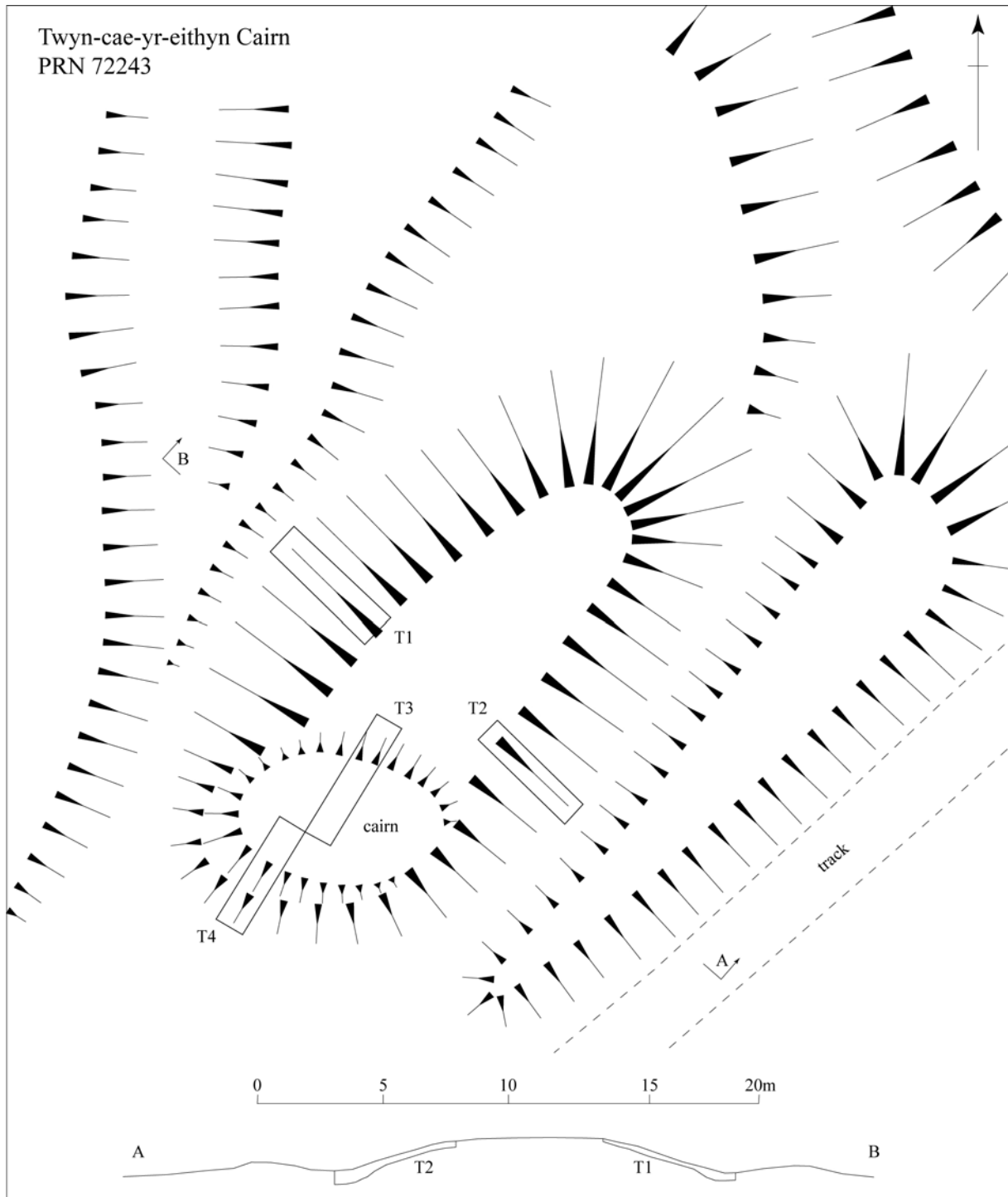


Fig. 3 Detailed survey showing the relationship between Twyn-cae-yr-eithyn cairn and the holloways



- 1.6 Fieldwork by CPAT in 2003 as part of the Cadw-funded pan-Wales survey of prehistoric funerary and ritual monuments also recorded the long mound (at SO 2418 3810), which again was thought to have the appearance of an intact chambered tomb, and it was noted that it was flanked by holloways on the north-west and south-east sides (Jones and Owen 2004). It was thought likely that the site was that originally recorded by Theophilus Jones since the dimensions and the location were very similar, especially so once it was realised that the road to Llanthony used to follow a line much closer to the site than the modern road, as evidenced by the Ordnance Survey Surveyors' drawing of 1814 (Jones 2007, 31-2). During the 2011 excavation information was received from a local resident regarding the location of 'the old cider house', presumably the old public house referred to by Jones as Rhydwrnen, the earthwork remains of which lay 260m to the south-east at SO 2430 3786 (see Fig. 2). This appeared to confirm that the mound was indeed that known as Twyn-cae-yr-eithyn.

## 2 EXCAVATION AND SURVEY

- 2.1 A small-scale excavation was conducted in early June 2011 in conjunction with a detailed total station survey to record accurately the earthworks of the mound and the adjacent holloways (Fig. 3). This confirmed that the mound was around 29m long, 14.5m wide and up to 1.3m high, although it appeared to be higher owing to the presence of the holloways on either side.
- 2.2 The clearance of the bracken from part of the mound identified what appeared to be a small cairn on the south-western end. This was oval, measuring 9.8m east-west by 7m north-south and perhaps 0.4m high. Several stones were visible through the turf and the generally uneven nature of the ground suggested the presence of numerous stones just below the surface.



Fig. 4 Trench 1 investigating the north-west side of the mound with the holloway in the foreground. Photo CPAT 3296-0033

- 2.3 The excavations focused initially on determining the nature of the long mound with the excavation by hand of two opposing trenches (Fig. 3, T1 and T2). Following the removal of the topsoil a deposit of stiff, reddish-grey clay was identified at the top of the mound in both trenches. In trench 1 a band of shattered sandstone was also uncovered which, on the surface, had the appearance of a possible wall. However, further investigation in both trenches revealed these deposits to be part of the natural subsoil and exposures of bedrock, confirming that the mound was composed of naturally occurring deposits.
- 2.4 Parts of the flanking holloways were investigated in both trenches, showing them to have cut, or worn into the sides of the mound. In both instances the holloways had become infilled to a depth of around 0.55m on the south-east side and 0.4m on the north-west side. The only artefact recovered from the excavation was a lead musket ball from the upper fill of the holloway in trench 1.



Fig. 5 Trench 2 investigating the south-east side of the mound with the holloway in the foreground. Photo CPAT 3296-0028

- 2.5 The cairn at the south-western end of the mound was investigated by two trenches (Fig. 6, trenches 3 and 4), the positions of which were determined by the vegetation, avoiding patches of gorse, such that they were aligned north-east to south-west rather than along the axis of the cairn itself.
- 2.6 In trench 3, which measured 5.5m by 1.1m, the removal of the topsoil immediately uncovered a substantial spread of stone rubble forming the makeup of the cairn, with three larger stones constituting an obvious kerb on the north-eastern side (Fig. 7). No further excavation was undertaken and the thickness of the rubble makeup was not determined.





Fig. 6 Plan of Twyn-cae-yr-eithyn cairn showing excavated areas and the position of the kerb

- 2.7 The results from trench 4 were essentially the same as trench 3, although here the kerb had been partly displaced (Fig. 8). In addition, a slight scarp was noted some 0.5m outside the kerb, suggesting that the natural ground level had been cut away. The only artefact recovered during the investigation of the cairn was a single flint flake (SF 100) from the surface of the natural subsoil at the base of the scarp.



Fig. 7 Trench 3 investigating the north-east side of the cairn with the kerb in the foreground. Photo CPAT 3296-0055



Fig. 8 Trench 4 investigating the south-west side of the cairn with the kerb in the foreground. Photo CPAT 3296-0063



Fig. 9 The earthwork remains of a building presumed to be Rhydwwern viewed from the south. Photo CPAT 3296-0079

- 2.8 The presumed site of Rhydewernen (PRN 72243; SO 24297 37868) was also visited at the time of the excavation, identifying the earthworks of a long, rectangular building aligned roughly north to south and measuring around 25m by 7m overall (Fig. 9). There is a broad, turf-covered bank along the west side with a break indicating a probable entrance, although the east side is not readily apparent. The southern end has larger earthworks with external dry-stone walling suggestive of a substantial gable wall and chimney. Within the building there are two sunken areas, the northern having exposed dry-stone walling and rubble. The site lies close to a small quarry and the area has been used as a firing range which may account for the form of some of the earthworks.

### 3 CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 The recent investigations focused on an elongated mound thought to be that identified by Theophilus Jones in 1805 as Twyn-cae-yr-eithyn and then thought to be a tumulus, similar to the well-known site at nearby Twyn y Beddau. Having been effectively 'lost' for almost two centuries the mound in question was rediscovered by Olding and Makepeace in the late 1990s, at which time it was considered to be an intact chambered tomb, although the association with the named site was not made until a visit by CPAT in 2003. The chambered tombs of Wales, comprising the communal tombs of the earliest, Neolithic farmers, are amongst the oldest surviving man-made structures in Wales. Breconshire has an unusual concentration of such sites in the south-east of the county, on the lower slopes of the Black Mountains and the slopes overlooking the valleys of the Wye and Usk, of which the closest to Twyn-cae-yr-eithyn is Penyrylod, Llanigon, 2.5km to the north-west.
- 3.2 The small-scale excavation and survey of 2011 were designed to elucidate further the nature of the site and it had been expected that the results would confirm the mound as a well-preserved chambered tomb. It is now clear, however, that the mound in question is composed of entirely natural material and that its present appearance is perhaps largely the result of it having been modified by holloways which have cut into either side. There is a palimpsest of former trackways crossing this part of the upland common, resulting from the migration of the route between Hay-on-Wye and Llanthony, via Gospel Pass, together with more local routes.
- 3.3 Despite the apparently natural origin of the mound it is also clear that it had become imbued with a sense of importance, both in the prehistoric period and perhaps later. The excavation demonstrated that the south-western end of the mound, its highest point, is crowned by an oval burial cairn measuring 9.8m by 7m, surrounded by a kerb of larger stones, which is presumably of Bronze Age date. Whether the appearance of the mound had been modified at all either before or in association with the construction of the cairn it was not possible to determine.
- 3.4 What drew the attention of Theophilus Jones is uncertain. He may have been directed to the site because of its perceived historical significance, or perhaps identified it as a tumulus as a result of his own experience. The fact that the mound had been named indicates that at the least it was considered a prominent topographical feature some time before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although the name Twyn-cae-yr-eithyn translates simply as the mound in the gorse field. The only other such landmark to be named locally is the well-attested tumulus at Twyn y Beddau, 500m to the north.

### 4 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 4.1 The writer would like to thank Wendy Owen, Bill Britnell and Jenny Britnell of CPAT for assisting with the excavation, together with Frank Olding, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. Thanks are also due to Sandy Douglas of Knight Frank, and Debbie Murray from the

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