

CPAT Report No 942

Surveys of Two Stone Circles in Brecknock



THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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Report for Cadw

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The uplands of Brecknock are rich in the remains of Bronze Age funerary and ritual monuments, and a county-wide survey of these sites was conducted by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) between 2001 and 2006 as part of a pan-Wales initiative, funded by Cadw (Jones 2007). During the survey it was realised that there was no measured plan of the stone circle at Crugiau Bach, in the north of Brecknock, and later fieldwork as part of a Cadw-funded survey of round huts incidentally revealed a previously unrecorded stone circle near Ystradgynlais in the south. Both sites have now been the subject of detailed measured survey by CPAT, again with Cadw funding, and an article has been submitted for publication in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*.

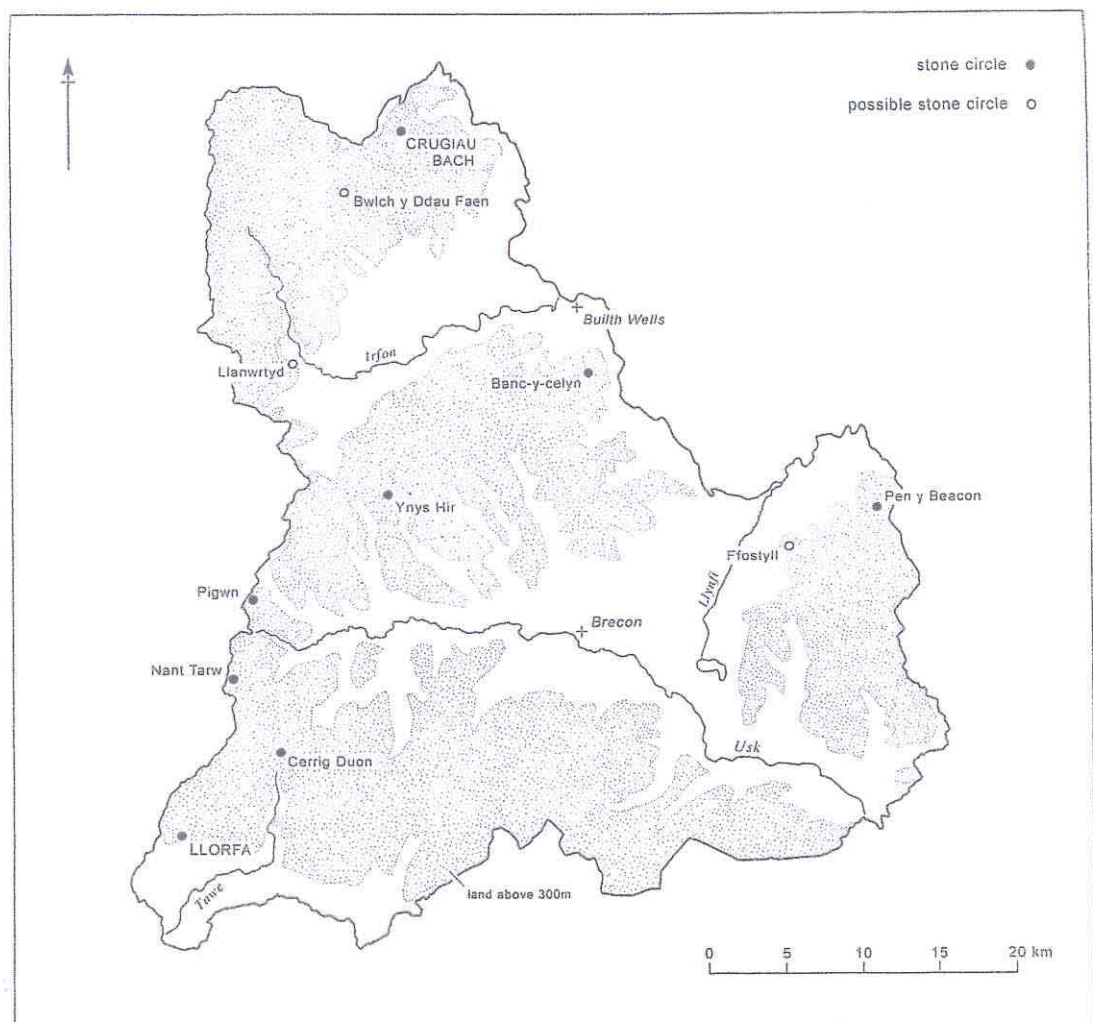


Fig. 1 The Stone Circles of Brecknock

2 CRUGIAU BACH STONE CIRCLE

- 2.1 The stone circle at Crugiau Bach (PRN 13522) was first recorded in 1979 during field survey by CPAT, with a team from the Manpower Services Commission. That record consisted of only a short description and a six-figure grid reference, so when the area was surveyed again in 1998 under the Uplands Initiative, funded by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, the site was recorded as a new discovery (Skeates 1999). The site was subsequently scheduled in 1999 (SAM Br 274). By the time of the pan-Wales survey of prehistoric funerary and ritual monuments in this area in 2005-06 the use of a hand-held Global Positioning System (GPS) was commonplace and it became clear that the stone circle had previously been mislocated by around 500m, an error perpetuated in the scheduling record.



Plate 1 Crugiau Bach Stone Circle viewed from the west.

- 2.2 The Crugiau Bach stone circle lies on a level shelf at 458m OD, on the north-western side of Y Gamriw, to the east of the Nant-y-gro stream (SN 93156240). It comprises 21 visible stones, of which only seven are still upright, one is leaning significantly, and the remainder are recumbent. Probing with a surveying arrow has suggested that there may be at least a further 22 very small or recumbent stones which have become buried as a result of peat growth, which reaches a depth of around 0.3m in this area. In the centre of the circle there is a large recumbent slab, measuring 1.3m by 0.55m, which may have fallen to the south.
- 2.3 Like many stone circles the ring of upright stones does not in fact describe a true circle, instead measuring 24m across its broadest axis from east to west, and 23.5m from north to south (Fig. 2). The tallest of the upright stones (no. 1) is on the southern side, standing to 0.74m, while there are two large recumbent slabs on the east side (nos 16 and 17) and that in the centre measures 1.25m in length. The other upright stones, nos 2, 3, 11 and 19, stand to 0.18m, 0.05m, 0.05m and 0.44m respectively. The remaining stones are all rather small, generally no more than 0.45m in visible length. Although the number of original stones is unknown, it is possible

that there may have been at least 50 stones comprising the circle, based on the general spacing and potential buried stones.

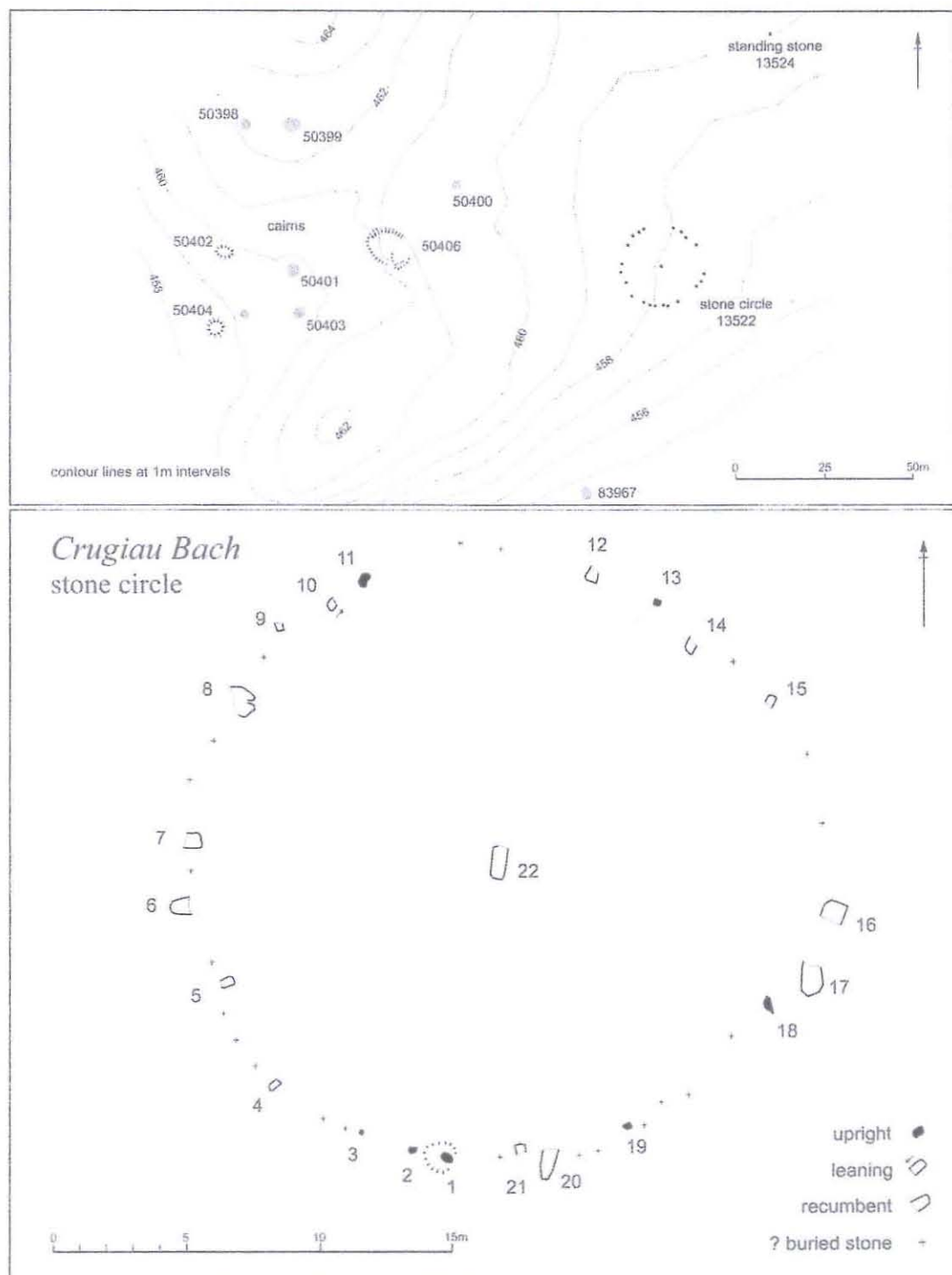


Fig. 2 Plan of Crugiau Bach Stone Circle

- 2.4 Around 75m from the centre of the circle, to the north-north-east, is a small upright stone 0.85m high (PRN 13524), now leaning, and at distances of between 60m and 120m to the west of the circle there are seven small cairns (PRNs 50398-50404), with another (PRN 83967) 60m to the south-south-east. The cairns are mostly rather irregular and vary between 2.5m and 5.8m across, although two (PRNs 50402 and 50404) are more regular. While their general

appearance is perhaps more suggestive of field clearance, their proximity to the stone circle may be significant. There is, however, also a low earthwork (PRN 50406) in the same area defining an oval enclosure, measuring c. 14m north-west to south-east by 10.7m north-east to south-west, which may also be related to the cairns. The earth and stone bank is mostly turf-covered, up to 1.6m wide and 0.2m high, with a possible entrance on the south-west side. There is a suggestion of an internal feature against the bank on the south-east side, which could be a hut.

3 LLORFA STONE CIRCLE

- 3.1 The stone circle (PRN 83894) was discovered by CPAT in June 2006, while undertaking field visits to a number of round huts in the area. The site, which is currently not scheduled, lies at 340m OD towards the western side of a broad north-south ridge between the valleys of Gwys Fach and Gwys Fawr, to the south of the main upland plateau of the Brecon Beacons and 5km north of Ystradgynlais (SN 7861415005; Fig. 3).



Plate 2 Llorfa Stone Circle viewed from the south-west.

- 3.2 As with the Crugiau Bach circle the stones describe an ellipse measuring 10.25m across the broadest axis from east to west, and 9.5m from north to south (Fig. 3). Of the 20 visible stones, two (nos 1 and 15) are large boulders of millstone grit, each around 1.4m across and only 0.45m and 0.35m high respectively. The remaining stones are all small, although the subsequent growth of peat and turf has clearly obscured the lower parts of the visible stones and may be at least partly responsible for the significant gaps on the south-east and south-west sides.

- 3.3 The tallest stone may originally have been on the south-east where a recumbent slab (no. 17) could have stood to perhaps 0.6m. Generally, however, the stones now stand to no more than 0.35m and several are less than 0.1m above the turf. It is not possible to determine the original number of stones, although it is clear that there could have been considerably more than are currently visible.

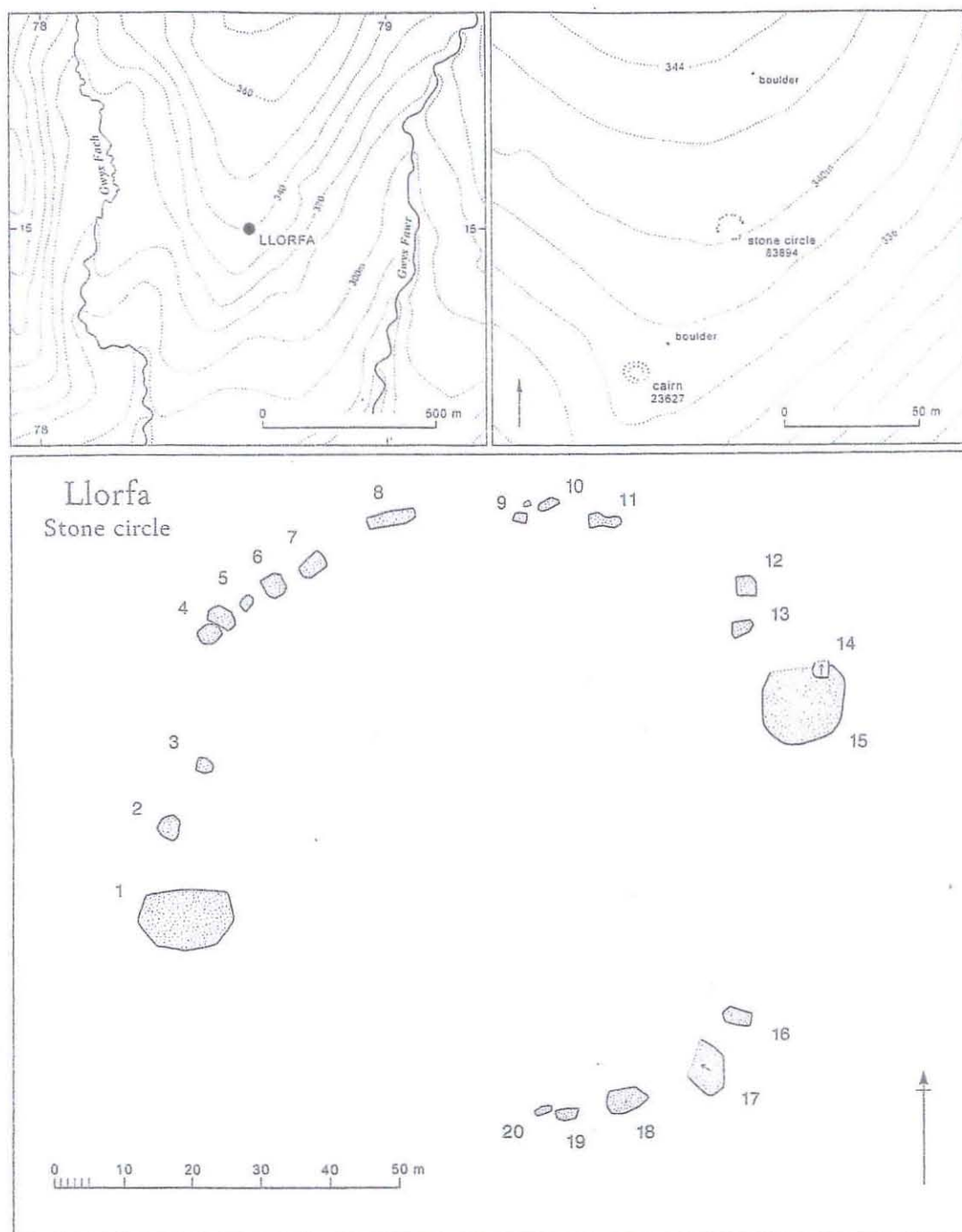


Fig. 3 Plan of Llorfa Stone Circle

- 3.4 There are two prominent millstone grit boulders within the area, one 58m to the north and the other 47m to the south-west. However, there are other boulders within the wider area and these two which are close to the circle may not have any association with it. There is also a badly damaged round cairn (PRN 23627) 63m to the south-west which is around 9m across and now consists of a broad ring bank which may be the result of robbing for stone, possibly for a boundary wall some distance to the south.

4 DISCUSSION

- 4.1 At the time of writing there are ten confirmed stone circles in Brecknock, of which one, at Ynys Hir on Mynydd Epynt, has been reconstructed. In addition, there are two possible circles where the number of stones is insufficient to determine their authenticity, and a further two sites which are suggested by antiquarian references and which cannot now be verified. Their distribution is depicted in Fig. 1 and their relative dimensions in Table 1, which also includes the Primary Record Numbers (PRNs) which have been assigned to the sites in the regional Historic Environment Record (HER).

Table 1 Stone circles in Brecknock (* denotes unconfirmed site)

| Name | PRN | NGR | Max. dimension | Min. dimension | Long axis |
|------------------------|-------|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------|
| Banc-y-celyn | 17837 | SO05184636 | 18.5m | 15m | E - W |
| Bwlch y Ddau Faen * | 4175 | SN89415831 | 29.3m | - | - |
| Cerrig Duon | 50463 | SN85122062 | 18.5m | 17.5m | N - S |
| Crugiau Bach | 13522 | SN93156240 | 24m | 23.5 | E - W |
| Ffostyll * | 2439 | SO18203475 | - | - | - |
| Llanwrtyd * | 4078 | SN8647 | - | - | - |
| Llorfa | 83894 | SN7861415005 | 10.25m | 9.5m | E - W |
| Nant Tarw East | 795 | SN81972578 | 22m | 18.5m | E - W |
| Nant Tarw West | 794 | SN81852584 | 20.1m | 19.2 | E - W |
| Pen y Beacon | 3125 | SO2392937358 | c. 30m | - | - |
| Pigwn I | 801 | SN83353109 | 23.1m | 22m | NE - SW |
| Pigwn II | 3409 | SN8330731072 | 7.9m | - | - |
| Pigwn III * | 12387 | SN83193118 | 10.6m | - | - |
| Ynys Hir | 847 | SN92093827 | c. 17m | - | - |

- 4.2 Comparison with the other stone circles in the county shows that Crugiau Bach is among the larger monuments, while Llorfa is one of the smallest. It is interesting to note that both circles have a longer axis from east to west, as do three other sites, making this the most common orientation among those sites presenting a more elliptical plan. Indeed, the ellipse is the most common form of stone circle in Brecknock, accounting for seven of the ten confirmed sites. Ellipses also predominate in north Wales and western Scotland (Burl 2000, 187).
- 4.3 Crugiau Bach is rather unusual, at least in Wales, in that it has a central stone which appears to have fallen. It may be compared with the circle on Kerry Hill in Montgomeryshire, although similar monuments are far more common in south-west Scotland and south-west Ireland. It is generally thought that circles with central stones are relatively late and frequently have a cremation deposit at the base of the stone, although one cannot be certain that these features are contemporary with the surrounding circle (Burl 2000, 252).

- 4.4 Of the ten confirmed stone circles, three have only been recognised since 1970, including those described here, together with the Pen y Beacon circle below Hay Bluff. This raises the possibility that further discoveries may yet be forthcoming. The fact that several of these significant monuments were unknown until relatively recently is not perhaps surprising, given the general remoteness of upland mid Wales and in particular the generally small size of the stones.

5 REFERENCES

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