THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Round Huts in Brecknock An interim report



CPAT Report No 853

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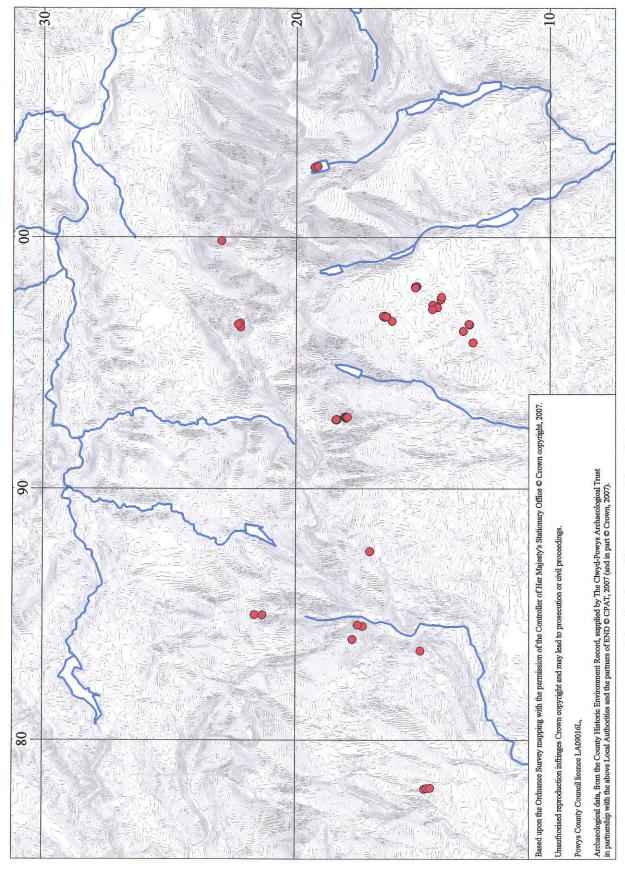
Interim Project Report

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Report for Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments

Summary

This report provides an interim statement on the on-going work on the round huts in Brecknock being conducted by CPAT, which is signalled for completion in 2007-8. It offers an analysis of the desk-top assessment that initiated the project and a brief overview of the fieldwork to date, coupled with a provisional attempt at a coarse classification of the authentic round huts or hut circles that have been visited. This information and the supporting ideas will be repeated in the full report that will appear at the end of the 2007/8, together with a full gazetteer of which only a few selected examples are given here.



Distribution of known round huts in the Brecon Beacons, scale 1:150,000

Round Huts in Brecknock

1 Introduction

1.1 It has long been recognised that the spread of prehistoric hut circles (or round huts), conventionally attributed to the Bronze Age, is extremely uneven. Some areas such as north-west Wales have considerable numbers of them, even though there the majority seem to be rather later in date, of Iron Age or Romano-British origin. Other areas appear to have more localised, sub-regional concentrations, and the Brecon Beacons and probably the adjacent Black Mountains in Brecknock fall into this category.

- 1.2 As a monument type they can be distinctive, though there are other types of site with which they can readily be confused. Frequently they represent elements of broader site complexes which may also include enclosures, fields, clearance cairns and other types that together may be classed broadly as settlements.
- 1.3 The hut circles of eastern and north-eastern Wales have never been studied systematically, the only exception being those that were covered in the Royal Commission's *Inventory* of Brecknock in 1997. This could be a reflection of their general sparsity across the region, but also the fact that thematic studies of some monument types tend to be uncommon or at least sporadic. The report by Musson and Martin in 1998 on *Medieval and Earlier Sites in Wales: Scheduling and the National Database* revealed not only the uneven spread of hut circles across the four Welsh regions, but also the relatively small number of sites 8% of which were scheduled. For a prehistoric site type, the percentage of protected examples seemed inordinately low. Hut circles clearly merited attention.
- 1.4 A desk-top appraisal of all the then known round hut sites listed in the then regional Sites and Monuments Record for Powys Montgomeryshire, Radnorshire and Brecknock and the counties that made up the old county of Clwyd eastern Conwy, Denbighshire and Flintshire was completed early in 1998/99 (Silvester 1998). All those in central Powys (Radnorshire and the southern part of Montgomeryshire) were examined and recorded in detail in the field later that year (Silvester 1999). It was assumed at the time that the study would continue in future years and after a hiatus of three years when funding priorities lay elsewhere, the project was recommenced in 2003/04 with the examination of the scattered sites in eastern Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham, together with the remainder of the Montgomeryshire group (Silvester and Hankinson 2004). After an interval of another three years when other priorities intervened, a return was made to the theme by examining the last and most densely populated county, Brecknock.
- 1.5 It was always considered that because of the significant numbers in the county, it would not be feasible to undertake the study in a single year, and a decision was made at the onset to spread the work over two years with the first year being devoted to an assessment of the existing records and with fieldwork restricted to the Brecon Beacons. It was anticipated that the second year would cover field visits to Mynydd Llangattock and Mynydd Llangynidr and to the Black Mountains, that is the more easterly portions of Brecknock. A full report with a gazetteer would also be prepared later in the second year, but an interim report, offered here, would be circulated after the first year's work. Scheduling recommendations would be submitted as a group in the second year.

2 The Information Base

2.1 In the early part of the financial year, 2006/7, the desk-top assessment pulled together all known information from the Historic Environment Record (HER) including new data that

had been registered within recent years and since the original scoping survey was completed in 1998.

- 2.2 Initially a database extract was acquired from the HER. Searches were done on a series of key words used in the Type 1 and Type 2 fields of the database, namely, hut, hut circle, round hut, hut settlement (though this term was found not to have been adopted in the Record), hut circle settlement, and unenclosed settlement, and to ensure as great a degree of comprehensiveness as possible, enclosure, enclosure complex and ring cairn.
- 2.3 From the 1207 entries in the database, the numbers were whittled down by removing obvious sites irrelevant to the study by examining a combination of both type and period. In addition a handful of site records identified from earlier sources but not recently located in the field because they appeared to have been destroyed by forestry activity were excluded.
- 2.4 Ring cairn records were also checked, given the inherent difficulties of distinguishing some of them from hut circles, and those where there was some doubt even after a visit during the Cadw-funded Prehistoric Funerary and Ritual Monument programme were retained. By way of example, some authorities are evidently ambivalent about Carnau Cefn y Ffordd Cairn VII (PRN 890), while the Llwyncwmstabl ring cairn (PRN 34322) had been classed as a hut circle by the Royal Commission, but two separate visits by different staff of CPAT in 2004 and now in 2006 have left us reasonably convinced that it is indeed a ring cairn.
- 2.5 Records of enclosures were checked but most were discarded. Post-medieval huts such as Cefn Edmwnt Stone Setting (PRN 5427) and Craig Cwm Sere enclosure (PRN 5437) were ruled out. So too were the various Pen y Wern huts (PRN 6431-6436) which were generally considered to be medieval or later, while the small Blaen Onnau Hut Site (PRN 9554) was believed to be post-medieval.
- 2.6 Some putative hut circles were excised, if there seemed virtually no chance of identifying them in the field. Such were the Gader Fawr Stone Circles (PRN 1055) mentioned by Theophilus Jones in the early 19th century and searched for without success by the Royal Commission. Similarly, there is the Cefn Fedw Fawr cropmark (PRN 1193) which the HER ambivalently classed as either a round barrow or a hut circle; regardless of its nature, the Ordnance Survey were unable to locate it in 1975 and nor were the field team from CPAT in 2004.
- 2.7 Other sites were removed as a result of the HER description. Thus both the Nant y Moch sheepfolds (PRN 1499 and 4372) were classed as a hut circle (?) in Type 2 of the HER, yet the free text description was unequivocal in its statement that though the sites had been identified from a high level vertical photograph, on the ground they were circular sheep stells standing to over one metre high. In keeping with other projects such as the contemporaneous Defended Enclosures programme, there were a significant number of sites detected on aerial photographs by desk-based assessors of the Ordnance Survey but then rejected following fieldwork by the same organisation. Thus Llwyfan Enclosure II (PRN 5867) was considered to be a natural gully as a result of a field visit. Shape here is important. Anything that is rectangular or rectilinear has tended to be excluded unless there are good reasons for assuming that the description is imprecise. Thus many discoveries by Robin Skeates during his Brecon Beacons surveys under the Uplands Initiative in the mid-1990s have been omitted, but others were simply classified as 'hut' in Type 1 and 'unknown' in Period 1 and it was felt that these needed to be assessed (see Skeates 1997).
- 2.8 Further sites are simply no longer accessible. The Fforest Fawr Circles (PRN 1508) seen on aerial photos may or may not be hut circles, but there now lie beneath dense forestry and fieldwork at this stage would not be feasible; Esgair Dafydd Ring (PRN 3023) on top of a ridge was variously interpreted as a ring cairn or a hut; Crychan Forest Rings (PRN 3036)

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and the Nant Hirgwm Huts (PRN 3045) fall into the same category. They may well indeed be hut circles, but in the present circumstances no satisfactory judgment can be made, and this assessment could not usefully contribute to a more positive decision.

- 2.9 More problematic are sites such as Nant Tawe Fechan settlement (PRN 12444) which is classed as a settlement, described as an enclosure and attributed a prehistoric date. The Cwm Haffes enclosure (PRN 12459) falls into the same category. This is in part because of a reluctance within the RCAHMW *Inventory* to use the terms hut circle, round hut or house site. This, it must be stressed, is not a criticism of the author(s) of that volume: there are a significant number of huts such as those along Afon Tawe where the Commission felt unable to put even a broad date to the remains, and site classification is equally problematic in some instances. A degree of caution, particularly when going into print, is probably advisable.
- 2.10 The number of hut circles, even known ones, that actually exist in Brecknock is impossible to gauge. This is not solely a function of the uncertainty surrounding sometimes largely unintelligible remains but also the fact that some complexes incorporating several sites have been given a single PRN in the HER, usually because of the complexity of the records in the Brecknock *Inventory*. Again this is in no way a criticism of the RCAHMW's description, for it is abundantly clear that some of these features are interconnected areally, and that a single descriptive text may be the best way to describe them; it is in fact more a reflection of the sometimes erratic methods employed in entering data into the HER. As desk-top work progressed it became increasingly evident that there was considerable duplication of records in the HER, with some sites appearing twice, or perhaps even three times, as a result of comparable data being acquired and entered at different times from RCAHMW. In some instances it became clear that only fieldwork could resolve these issues, and it was one of the positive outcomes of this project that the HER has seen a considerable rationalisation of the records for the Brecknock uplands.
- 2.11 This further desk-top stage of assessment reduced numbers to 378. A further twenty-two sites were then removed because their grid references located them in Glamorgan, many of these being in the old parish of Penderyn which was formerly in Brecknock before the boundary changes of 1974, but which had been retained in the HER.
- 2.12 Provisional sorting and assessment of the data resulted in the massive number of over 1200 entries being whittled down to around 350 by removing sites obviously irrelevant to the study because of their stated type or period. Over 200 of these have now been visited during the current year, with some new records generated as a result of fresh discoveries. Currently we can distinguish around 58 hut circles or cognate structures as a result of these visits.
- 2.13 Field visits were undertaken for all the supposedly authentic round huts and also to those sites where existing names and descriptions were vague or where the monument site-type was ambivalent. In practice, a sizeable number of features termed 'hut' in the name field of the HER turned out to have some other origin. Thus the Afon Tawe settlement had six listed huts, all classed as such in the Type 1 field with 'unknown' in the Period 1 field. Four of these turned out to be cold stores, one a long hut and one a pen or small fold, all presumably of medieval or slightly later date, and none relevant to this particular project.

3 History

3.1 There is a long history of identifying hut circles and other monuments of prehistoric date in the Brecon Beacons and other upland areas of Brecknock which stretches back into the 19th century. T C Cantrill was active in the 1890s and his manuscript is housed in the National Museum where it was used extensively for the Brecknock *Inventory* (see RCAHMW 1997,

68). In the 1970s Peter Jones and his colleagues recorded sites across the Beacons, sometimes with more imagination than perspicacity, and a limited level of precision. The Royal Commission spent many years accumulating information and material for the *Inventory* and during the same period the National Archaeological Survey was systematically examining parts of the uplands, the results of which appeared in print in 1997 as *Mynydd Du and Fforest Fawr* (Leighton 1997). It should perhaps be stressed at this point that this report in no way supersedes the Royal Commission's publications which are altogether more academic pieces of work.

3.2 In the mid 1990s Robin Skeates, initially based in the university at Cardiff and later East Anglia undertook several seasons of fieldwork as part of the Uplands Initiative (see Skeates 1997). It would not be unfair to suggest that Skeates' enthusiasm for his project and the drive that he brought to it were not matched by his students' field expertise, and sorting out some of his records has formed a significant and time-consuming part of this programme of work. A portent of this came in 2002 when CPAT undertook a reassessment of part of Skeates' survey area in the north-western Beacons on behalf of the National Trust. Because of its perceived sensitivity the report on the re-assessment was never circulated (Silvester and Hankinson 2002).

4 Typology of Round huts and cognate features

4.1 It is probably worth emphasising the fact that there is some not inconsiderable variation in form, size and associations within the round huts that populate the Brecknock uplands. In other words few hut circles are precisely the same. It is not the intention to analyse the material available to us either in this interim report or in the final report which should appear in a year's time, but rather to flag up a few of the variables that occur in the region.

Large Huts

4.2 Scattered across upland Brecknock are large hut circles, impressive for their size and definition. Often around 9m to 10m in external diameter, they stand out because their outlines are normally reasonably straightforward to distinguish with only limited amounts of rubble in the interior, even if the average height of the bank forming the hut is in no way unusual. Nant Llywarch hut III (PRN 12560) is a good example, about 9.5m in diameter, the interior largely empty of stone, and perhaps an entrance on the south-east through the ring bank which is up to 1.5m wide. Less than 50m to the west is an enclosure which is likely to have been associated with the hut. One of the Waun Tincer hut circles (PRN 17509) is 9.7m across. These are perhaps what we might consider as typical of the type, perhaps misleadingly so, for they appear to be less common than their smaller counterparts.

Small huts

4.3 These are rather less impressive than their larger counterparts, though it should be stressed that these represent the two ends of a continuum and that there will be intermediate sites that cannot be easily accommodated under either heading; the Nant Gihirych hut (PRN 1502) is one such example. That they are less impressive is not because their form is less substantial but because there is a greater chance that the interiors will be choked with rubble and their outlines consequently blurred.

Grouped or contiguous huts

4.4 The Ffald Newydd Hut (PRN 50264) in the Hepste Valley offers something different in as much as there are three possibly interlocked huts, one appearing rather more authentic than the others. Parts of the straggling Craig Cerrig Gleisiad Settlement on the northern side of the Beacons has at least one set of paired huts (PRN 72057) close to several

scoops, and possibly another, although the appearance is equivocal and could imply a long hut (PRN 72058). Generally, however, contiguous huts with party walls are a rarity.



Nant Llywarch settlement, hut circles (PRN 12556)

Huts in enclosures

4.5 A classic example of this, even though the field evidence is not exactly clear, is PRN 3169 on Craig Cerrig Gleisiad. The hut is small, little more than 5m to 6m across and the enclosure is of a maximum 15m across. It is set into a hill-slope, a sheltered position facing south-eastwards. Ffald Newydd Enclosure I (PRN 3516) in the Hepste Valley is different inasmuch as the enclosure is distinctive with its turf-covered stone bank, but there are only the vaguest traces of any internal features. That this is only a pound or stock enclosure cannot be entirely dismissed, but there may be a hut inside, even though there are only fugitive traces. Also in the Hepste valley, one of the Waun Tincer huts (PRN 33597) is attached to an oval enclosure about 30m by 16m which presumably functioned as a paddock or fold.

Settlement complexes

- 4.6 There is an inclination to assume that many of the round huts in the Brecon Beacons are likely to be integral parts of complex settlements that will also include enclosures, field boundaries, clearance cairns and other elements that make up archetypal prehistoric landscapes. In fact such complexes are probably less common that might be thought.
- 4.7 The Upper Hepste Valley to the east of Ystradfellte provides exemplars as the small-scale plan in the Royal Commission's *Inventory* implies (1997, fig 144). Most of the elements mentioned above are present, particularly the cairns that are assumed to be the product of land clearance rather than burial activity, though this is not to deny that both functions might have been served by a single cairn. Amongst these there are undoubted round huts (e.g PRN 17509) though not it appears as many as are indicated on fig 144. Several could not be located despite perfectly adequate descriptions, and the one in the large heart-

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shaped enclosure appeared to be more likely a clearance cairn, comparable with others in the immediate vicinity. On the other hand, as hinted at in the Royal Commission's text there was at least one good example of a round hut which had subsequently been used as a dumping place for cleared surface rubble (PRN 97115). There is what might be termed a sociological issue here, but one which has undoubtedly been addressed in other, more academic studies, but in the absence of any visible, later prehistoric or medieval activity it also indicates some time depth to the community that lived here.



Craig Cerrig Gleisiad enclosure with internal hut circle (PRN 3169)

- 4.8 The authentic round huts and the frequent clearance cairns appear to be mixed fairly indiscriminately, in as much as it is difficult to detect any patterning in the layout of the settlement. It is noticeable, however, that there is a solitary exception, one round hut (PRN 97116) which lies on a slightly higher terrace at a distance of more than one hundred metres from the rest of the complex (and which is not entirely convincing as a settlement site). The higher terrace has a rather different vegetation with more coarse grass, while the tract populated by the cairns and huts has a mix of shorter and coarse grasses and there is more natural surface stone in evidence. Superficially at least, the farming on the west side of the Hepste Valley focussed on the slightly lower and more stony ground, possibly with thinner soils and now supporting what may be less peaty deposits.
- 4.9 The Hepste Valley settlement has little in the way of field or enclosure boundaries. Only one or two are depicted on the Royal Commission's plan (1997, fig 144) and there is no reason to believe that much has been missed. In contrast it is the integrated enclosures and hut sites of the Rhyd Uchaf settlement (PRN 3239; SAM Br258) that make the site so immediately distinctive. For reasons that remain unexplained the regional HER has erroneously attributed a medieval date to this complex, a mistake perpetuated in the scheduling documentation which even evokes a non-existent, 'preserved medieval landscape'. It is, however, clearly prehistoric in origin. Three lobate enclosures are appended to each other and accompanied by a further three low boulder walls which run along the contours and there four small platforms with varying amounts of stone on them that could pass for round-hut foundations (RCAHMW 1997, fig. 132). Of the four, three

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are convincing, while the most northerly is probably authentic, though minor doubts remain

4.10 Perhaps more typical is the Pentre Cribarth settlement, one obvious hut circle (PRN 12407), one slightly smaller, a small pound, one or two wandering walls and other miscellaneous features. Mixed up in this group may be features of later date, and the whole does not offer a neat and orderly package, but a rather untidy assemblage of individual elements which don't produce a coherent picture.

Platforms

- 4.11 It would be a misapprehension to think that all of the prehistoric unenclosed settlement in the Brecon Beacons and adjacent areas show as stone-walled or banked circles. Some round huts are platformed or terraced into gentle slopes. Allt Fach hut III (PRN 12428), for instance, has evidently been terraced into the slope and then the wall built up from the top of the slope backing the terrace.
- 4.12 Prehistoric sites comprising platforms without any other structural form to them are rather rarer. The group of earthworks forming a settlement above Afon Llia and collectively known as the Fan Llia settlement (PRN 33467) was initially overlooked in this study because as a 'type' in the HER it was recorded as a platform settlement, a phrase which, where it has been used in the past, has been adopted solely for medieval or perhaps later settlement complexes. It had however been scheduled relatively recently as a prehistoric settlement site (BR259(POW)). As a result of personal acquaintance with another site PRN 3239 a few hundred metres to the north, it was visited, and can take its place as a type-site for the area.
- 4.13 These are distinctively different from the elongated, contour-bisecting platforms of medieval and early post-medieval date which litter the uplands of south and mid-Wales, for their form is clearly curvilinear and most are of ovoid shape. Very little stone is in evidence at Fan Llia, even though there are natural boulder streams nearby. Where stone



The Fan Llia platform settlement (PRN 33467)

appears it is embedded to a greater or lesser degree in the fans and aprons of the five platforms (PRNs 12544-48) that represent the key elements of the site. In as far as it is possible to tell – and one of the earthworks is too rush-covered to be certain – there are no visible hut foundations on any of the five platforms. The assumption then is that the huts were made entirely of such non-durable materials as timber, and this has much wider implications for settlement densities in this and other valleys. The settlement site is visible because of the deeply entrenched platforms. On gentler ground such platforms would have been much slighter or even unnecessary and the settlement would not have been visible to the fieldworker.

- 4.1.4 The Fan Llia settlement is not unique in the Beacons. The Gwys Fach settlement comprises a small and newly identified group of three curvilinear platforms of medium size (PRNs 97107-97109) on the western slopes of a shallow valley at a height of around 350m OD. Additionally, there are the curious complex of platforms below Craig Cerrig Gleisiad (PRN 72057) which do not display the usually 'tidy' and well-defined appearance of medieval hut platforms, but are grouped rather haphazardly on the side of a knoll. Adjacent are two 'scoops', both with a stone component suggestive of low wall foundations, but the platforms with distinctive fans have less visible stone and there is a contiguous triangular enclosure defined by low rubble banks which has a distinctively 'prehistoric' look to it. Craig Cerrig Gleisiad prehistoric settlement (PRN 3168) also consists primarily of platforms, and because of their layout one is tempted to see them not necessarily as of Bronze Age date but perhaps of a later period.
- 4.15 Of the Llyn Llywarch platforms recorded by the RCAHMW only one (PRN 50287) is convincing.
- 4.16 Yet by any account platform settlements in the Brecon Beacons are not common. Had they been, rather more would have been recorded by now. Three or four examples is a small enough sample to draw on, and their curvilinear form and absence of stone structures apart, the three are rather different in their layouts with the platforms at Fan Llia reasonably



Gwys Fach hut platform I (PRN 97107)

evenly spread, those on Craig Cerrig Gleisiad appended to each other and the Gwys Fach settlement forming a linear grouping that follows the contour of the hillside. The morphological differences in appearance between the Fan Llia settlement and the Rhyd Uchaf settlement a little to the north of it begs the question as to whether they are of the same general period, and raises a more general issue as to whether Fan Llia, reflecting a distinctively different morphology, might, as hinted at in the SMR, be of later, perhaps Iron Age, date. There is no substantive evidence to support such a contention, but it is a possibility that needs to be considered, even if supporting evidence can come only in the form of excavation.

- 4.17 There is one further issue: why was the Fan Llia settlement and indeed its counterpart to the north, the Rhyd Uchaf settlement (PRN 3239), located so high up the valley face. Even if the valley floor itself was damp and boggy, the settlements are more than 30m higher and presumably well beyond any area at risk. From their more elevated positions, though in relative terms only a very small part of the way up the slope, the aspect up and down the valley is excellent and could offer a solution, albeit one that is not too convincing. There is an alternative possibility: in some valleys in upland Brecknock, the dispersed settlements, usually farms lie at higher altitudes on the slopes and are linked by trackways that provided the main communication arteries along the valleys in the past. It is perhaps not too fanciful to see this pattern going back into the prehistoric period, and the Fan Llia settlements being established close to an existing trackway, although one that has now largely disappeared through lack of use.
- 4.18 Individual platforms also exist, but arguably are more difficult to identify, and conversely are more likely to be overlooked. The Llyn Llywarch platforms (PRN 52087) are a case in point. The Royal Commission (1997, 234) identified two small, adjacent platforms, but we were convinced only by one of them, though the summer vegetation did not assist in their detection. Neither was reportedly more than about 5m across and the height of the platform at the front, its apron, appeared to be only half the one metre detected by the Commission. Perhaps more significant is the question as to whether these would have been identified at all had they not been in any area where there were other round huts and enclosures such as the considerably more obvious PRN 12562.

Huts (post-occupation)

- 4.19 A number of huts have been recognised where it appears that clearance stone has been dumped after occupation ceased, the evidence being sufficiently distinctive to suggest that the piled stone was not simply the result of collapse. In these instances the huts lie in areas of prehistoric occupation and there is no convincing evidence that there was later activity in subsequent centuries, one feasible implication being that after the cessation of occupation the house was deliberately filled with rubble. There could be sociological implications here, but it may also have implications for the preservation of occupation material within the abandoned house. Huts of this type have been recognised at Llyn Llywarch (PRN 12562) and Waun Tincer in the Hepste Valley (PRN 97115).
- 4.20 Huts can also be used for other purposes after their original abandonment. Thus by Afon Hepste, one probable hut appears to have within it a shooting box or butt (PRN 33597), the construction of which has presumably denuded the hut circle wall.

Uncertain huts

4.21 There are a significant number of huts which even from the remaining ground evidence in largely undisturbed upland areas cannot be confirmed with certainty. In some instances, we find an anomalous situation where different field teams have reached different conclusions. Thus the RCAHMW felt that the Pwll Byfre hut II (PRN 12492) was the poorly preserved

remains of a second hut circle close to a rather better preserved example, while the present assessors saw it as an outlying part of a nearby scree field. Twyn Du hut (PRN 33309) was thought by the Royal Commission in 1987 to be a robbed cairn, while CPAT during the Prehistoric Funerary and Ritual Monument programme in 2004 considered the possibility that it was a round hut. During the present project other CPAT field staff favoured a natural origin.

- 4.22 The Upper Neuadd Reservoir has some classic sites, showing particularly clearly because they have been washed clean by the waters of the reservoir. PRN 23086 epitomises the problem. The RCAHMW (1997, 113; fig 78) prefer to see this as a disturbed ring cairn, while the CPAT field team that visited the site recently tends to view this as a hut circle with an entrance in the west side, 0.5m wide, and perhaps flag-set stones within the threshold of the entrance. They noted relevant characteristics of the structure including the greater number of edge-set stones in comparison to the 'funerary cairns' to the north and north-east, as well as the smaller scale of the build. Interestingly, the members of the field team who visited the site during the Prehistoric Funerary and Ritual Project are adamant that it is the site of a cairn. Equally problematic is PRN 23084 which CPAT claimed as a ring cairn in 1995, the Royal Commission concurred in their publication in 1997, but on another visit in 1999 CPAT thought this might be a hut circle. Our current thinking favours a hut circle, but as the Commission aptly stated in their original report, 'without excavation it is not possible to ascertain [the} functions [of the Neuadd Reservoir features]', and perhaps the only thing we can be absolutely certain about is that it is man-made.
- 4.23 The Nant Llywarch settlement (PRN 12549) is an instance where archaeology is discernible but interpreting it to everyone's satisfaction is not easy. The RCAHMW have claimed two huts here, but neither is entirely convincing. The wider significance of this is that this settlement is on the open moors, where the only substantive threat locally is a track used by agricultural and perhaps off-road vehicles. It might be assumed therefore that site preservation and survival would be fairly good, yet this does not really appear to be the case. Blaen Onneu round hut I (PRN 97100) is an example of where an extant feature might be interpreted as a prehistoric feature, but there must remain a doubt as to whether it is a much later feature, perhaps a lime-burner's shelter, the problem being the slope which it occupies with no trace of any attempt to terrace it into the slope.
- 4.24 Carn Caniedydd round hut I (PRN 12565) presents a different problem. Is the site a round hut or a small enclosure? The Royal Commission prefer the former, we are not so certain. Similarly, the Y Gyrn south-west enclosure (PRN 34526), one of Robin Skeates discoveries, is undoubtedly of archaeological interest but whether to view it as a stock enclosure or a hut circle is only rendered more uncertain by the loss of part of the perimeter through stream erosion.
- 4.25 A further problem is created by sites of other periods. In Cwm Crew there are three platform houses with associated round huts (PRN 12571-12573). Though the huts are superficially similar to prehistoric structures, it is thought much more likely that they are elements of the medieval, or early post-medieval settlement, perhaps small pens. Robin Skeates recorded two circular structures in Cwm Crew (PRN 26396), one about 8m in diameter which sounded promising. In fact this appears to be a multi-celled enclosure comprising a number of circular compartments that may be folds, though we cannot rule out entirely a group of small huts. There are in fact significant numbers of small circular features that may be contemporary with medieval or perhaps post-medieval summer settlements, and are best interpreted as cool stores or even pens. It would perhaps be tempting to see these as prehistoric dwellings that have been re-used, and in truth the only unequivocal method of demonstrating this would be excavation. As it is the close and regular correlation instead points to a specific type of feature with an origin in the historic era. Thus the Cwm-fforch wen pen (PRN 34907) was originally recorded as a hut circle by the Trust in 1996, but its comparable condition and its proximity to a long hut, no more

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than 15m away, points to it be an animal pen. That this is not always the case is suggested by the Twyn Y Neuadd Hut III (PRN 50182) which is viewed as an authentic round hut, 7m across, despite the presence nearby of medieval or later settlement remains. More positively there are records where long huts and round huts are contiguous. Thus the Twyn y Neuadd Huts (PRN 2366) show this combination.

4.26 The several huts on Mynydd y Garn (PRNs 12592-12597) may not be prehistoric, though this is based on morphological grounds alone, being sub-square rather than circular in form. There is, after all, a period of fifteen hundred to two thousand years from the late Iron Age through to the imposition of Norman rule, when our knowledge of settlement form and its intrinsic elements is virtually non-existent for this region. Indeed, we cannot really confirm that there was any activity in upland areas such as the Brecon Beacons over these many centuries, although it is difficult to believe that these uplands were totally avoided, even in the summer months. Confusion with sites of other periods is likely in some cases. From a different era, Pontsticill Hut (PRN 2381) has been interpreted as a charcoal burners hut.



Mynydd y Garn hut circle (PRN 12592)

4.27 The Gwar Yr Gigfran Hut Platforms in the community of Talybont-on-Usk (PRN 17329) are examples of discoveries by P Jones and K Palmer, and exemplify a different problem, that of imprecise records. The location given is an exceptionally steep south-east-facing slope, most unlikely to have been the scene of any dwellings, while the plateau immediately above does have some hollows on it, although these are all of natural origin. However, what we cannot establish is whether this failure to locate what Jones and Palmer recorded is due to their poor archaeological recognition, to a lack of precision in siting their discoveries on the map, or a combination of both. Similarly, they recorded hut sites and enclosures with low banks known as Waun Llech Settlement (PRN 17352), but the NGR places this site in the centre of the low-lying and rather boggy area that is termed the 'waun', and it is highly unlikely that any settlement activity occurred here though there is a well-known standing stone on its southern side.

5 The Gazetteer

5.1 The gazetteer, of which this is no more than a sample, is ordered here by Primary Record Number. In the final report there will be concordances ordered by Name and by NGR.

- 5.2 Each record generally gives the original description as contained in the HER (with appropriate editing), followed by a separate paragraph detailing what was found during the present study. Generally each hut circle is given its own PRN and gazetteer record but occasionally, and particularly where the one hut circle appears subsidiary to another, the record has been doubled up.
- 5.3 The gazetteer includes sites, previously claimed as hut circles for which no evidence can now be found.

6 References

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Skeates, R, 1997. Brecon Beacons archaeological survey, Archaeology in Wales 37, 32-46

GAZETTEER OF KNOWN AND POSSIBLE SITES

PRN: 843

Name: Pen Y Waun Dwr Hut

NGR: SN90752300

SAM:

County: Powys

Altitude in metres: 385

HER record: hut (RCAHMW); no further details. A small circular depression was visible (CPAT visit 1981).

CPAT 2006: the given NGR is just inside the E part of a coniferous shelter belt. The planting is quite dense but just accessible. Nothing was found, perhaps because of the ploughing which had taken place prior to planting. The field to the E was also examined in the vicinity of the site, but nothing relevant was found.

PRN: 3170

Name: Craig y Fro Circles

NGR: SN97322075

SAM:

County: Powys

Altitude in metres: 389

HER record: two unclassified circles (OS 1964).

CPAT 2006: no trace of the circles were found at this NGR, which is located in the centre of a boggy area. The edges of the bog, some 80m distant, were also examined but nothing was found to account for the record. Possibly the circles had been created by vegetation changes.

PRN: 3169 Name: Craig Cerrig Gleisiad Hut in Enclosure

NGR: SN96592224 SAM: Br267(POW)

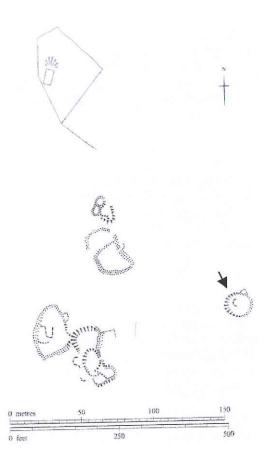
County: Powys Altitude in metres: 434

HER record: the enclosure is sub-circular, slightly lobed on the east-north-east and with what seems to be a flattened side on the west. It is set on a slope and is terraced into the slope on the west. Whether this could legitimately be described as 'scooped' is another matter.

Cadw 1999 record: dimensions as 15m x 13m internally, bounded on the western side by a low rubble bank 2m wide. There is an entrance, some 2m wide, on the east side and on the northern side there is a small triangular annexe.

CPAT 2006: there are traces of a hut within the enclosure though these are somewhat ephemeral, being most obvious as low spreads of stone on the south-west and south-east. The eye of faith might establish a complete perimeter, but where the entrance was is unclear. External dimensions of the hut are in the region of 5.5m north to south by 4.8m.

This is included in PRN 3524 as US86vi and is scheduled within Br267(POW).



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Craig Cerrig Gleisiad Hut in Enclosure PRN 3169. Photo CPAT 2156-002

PRN: 3267 Name: Berth Lwyd Platform

NGR: SN91431357 *SAM:*

County: Powys Altitude in metres: 343

HER record: sub-circular platform (bounded by limestone boulders) some 19m by 17m across cut into steep w-facing slope. Possibly a building platform associated with adjacent enclosure PRN 3266.

CPAT 2006: level platform as previously described but bracken-filled so the detail is difficult to determine. Notwithstanding this, it is not convincing as a hut platform.

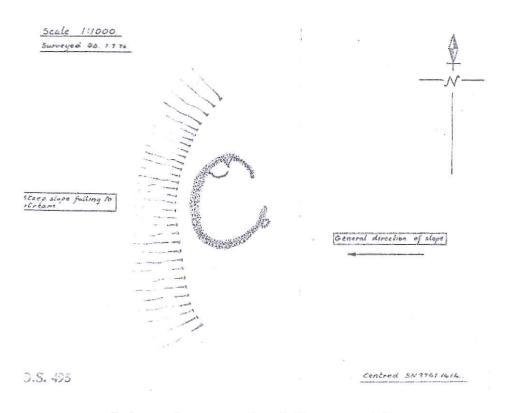
PRN: 3516 Name: Ffald Newydd Enclosure I

NGR: SN97621414 SAM:

County: Powys Altitude in metres: 370

HER record: a sub oval-enclosure 25m N-S by 20m E-W with turfed over wall some 0.2m high (max). Entrance on E (uphill) side. There is a small possible hut circle against inside of the N face.

CPAT 2006: a sub-circular enclosure, about 20m to 25m across, on a terrace above Hepste river, composed of a partially turf-covered stone bank without any obvious facing or coursing. Bank is up to 2m wide and 0.5m high although more generally 0.2-0.3m high. Gap on the SE where there is a (probably natural) small hollow. Also a gap, 7m wide, on the E side. This seems anomalous but two possibilities exist: either that stone has been robbed for another structure in the area, or alternatively that a timber-built hut was sited here, as there are slight traces of a platform on the interior of the projected circuit of the bank. There is a more well-defined feature on the N side, comprising a sub-circular structure incorporated into the stone bank of the enclosure. This looks to be contemporary with the enclosure.



Ordnance Survey record card: Crown copyright

PRN: 5383

Name: Blaen Hepste Hut

NGR: SN96221331

SAM:

County: Powys

Altitude in metres: 369

HER record: hut circle some 12m dia (CPAT site visit, 1981). No further detail.

CPAT 2006: nothing could be found at this location. It is perhaps a misinterpreted cairn or an incorrect grid reference.

PRN: 5438 Name: Nant Cynwyn Enclosure

NGR: SO02792130 SAM:

County: Powys Altitude in metres: 586

HER: stone bounded enclosure 20m diameter. On slightly flattened east-facing slope. Possibly a hut site. Contains hut PRN 26469 (Skeates 1996).

CPAT: 2006: no trace of the supposed enclosure could be found at this NGR. Either the NGR is incorrect, or the site is a misinterpretation of a natural ribbon of stone coming down from the face of Cribyn.

PRN: 6400 Name: Cefn Bach Hut II

NGR: SN97011870 SAM:

County: Powys Altitude in metres: 671

HER: one of two hut circles (OS, 1964) - see also PRN 3249. Visible as faint outlines during CPAT site visit in 1981. No further detail.

CPAT 2005: visited during the Prehistoric Funerary and Ritual Monument survey in 2005/06. No obvious hut circles were identified in the area indicated by the NGR and indeed no obvious signs of any stone structures. There is a semi-circular scoop, about 3.5m in diameter on the upper edge of a slight E-facing scarp, with a patch of reeds below it (SN 9698 1874); the scoop has the appearance of being artificial though it could be natural.

PRN: 6401

Name: Berth Lwyd Circle I

NGR: SN91431368

SAM:

County: Powys

Altitude in metres: 351

HER record: unclassified circle (O.S., 1964). No further detail. See also adjacent circle PAR 6402 and enclosure PAR3266.

CPAT Tir Gofal assessment 2000: there were no circular features visible in this location at the time of the visit (Jan 2000), although a number of D-shaped or sub-circular quarry like features are cut into the west slope of the hill (these may be natural),

CPAT 2006: bracken cover made assessment difficult but no circular features were visible.

PRN: 6402 Name: Berth Lwyd Circle II

NGR: SN91451364 SAM:

County: Powys Altitude in metres: 351

HER record: unclassified circle (O.S., 1964). No further detail. See also adjacent circle PAR 6401 and enclosure PAR3266.

CPAT Tir Gofal assessment 2000: there were no circular features visible in this location at the time of the visit (Jan 2000) although a number of D shaped or sub circular quarry like features are cut into the west slope of the hill (these may be natural),

CPAT 2006: bracken cover made assessment difficult but no circular features were visible.

PRN: 12321 Name: Carreg Lem settlement

NGR: SN80541788 SAM:

County: Powys Altitude in metres: 450

HER record: according to T.C.Cantrill 'On the Brecon [Old O.S.6" map] 37, at Lat. 51'50'43+",long. 3'44' 41",on the moorland, 480 yds W. 10' S. of Sink-y-Giedd, 40 yds NE of a swallow-hole into which a small stream drains from the peat on the south'.. was a hut-circle.. about 21 ft. in diameter, entrance facing E, flanked on each side with a stone'. This indication places the site on Carreg Lem. It has not since been re-located. Cantrill thought it comparable to one now considered to be a cairn, situated upon Carnon Gwynion.

CPAT 2006: the description given by Cantrill points firmly to the revised NGR at SN 80541788 and not that given in the HER (SN 80201730). Despite this, there is no trace of the reported site, either around the sink-hole or within 200m. Perhaps the area was wrongly identified, or the site was a natural grouping of boulders. It might be worth rechecking Cantrill to confirm the description.

PRN: 12407 Name: Pentre Cribarth settlement

NGR: SN83531503 SAM:

County: Powys Altitude in metres: 330

HER record: the RCAHMW record (US 3) states that in a dry valley SW of PENTRE CRIBARTH, about 340 m above OD, and to the NE of the modern wall bounding it, which runs NNE-SSW at the higher end, is a boulder wall (US 3i) about 2m wide and some 60m long, following the NE-SW running valley bottom. At its extreme SW termination in a hollow below a NE-facing slope, interdigitated with shakeholes, are the remains of two, possibly three, ill-defined platform huts (US 3ii), bounded by poorly defined rubble walls. (US 3iii) To the N. of this valley is a quarry trench running uphill perhaps 200m E-W. Immediately S of this is a square enclosure with rubble walls up to 0.3m high and about 15m square.

CPAT 2006: the round hut is defined by a sub-circular earth and stone bank in a dry valley SW. of Pentre Cribarth, about 340m above OD. Externally it is 6.3m N/S by 5.7m E/W. The interior of the circle is level, with a possible entrance either in the W or the NE. The ground drops away slightly towards the sink-holes in the SE and rises behind the hut to the NW. Immediately adjacent downslope (to the SE) is a length of earth and stone wall forming a sub-circular pound, open to the NE, with internal dimensions of 4m NE-SW x 3.8m NW-SE; its bank is up to 2m wide and 0.4m high. Adjacent to the NE is a small 2m-diameter cell of turf covered stone, possibly open to the SE.

About 10m to SSE is a second possible hut site, somewhat tumbled into a sinkhole. It consists of stone and earth banks with a diameter of c.4.5m and an entrance in the E. Further walls and enclosures c.100m to the NW are of later, possible medieval, date and include an enclosure, a wandering wall and bank and a fold or small enclosure on the rocky slopes above.

PRN: 12417 Name: Allt Fach hut I

NGR: SN84011778 SAM:

County: Powys Altitude in metres: 450

HER record: RCAHMW US 6i. A hut circle (apparently without entrance), built on a slight platform and consisting of a stony bank varying between 1.3m and 1.7m wide and 0.3m high. It encloses an oval grassy area 4.8m N-S by 4.3m. RCAHMW 1995 - Draft Inventory description.

CPAT 2006: an approximately circular hut defined by a low stony bank, 0.7m wide and 0.3m high, with overall measurements of 5.3m N/S by 4.6m. Interior bisected by a line of stones running WNW/ESE, with a possible entrance at its ESE end giving access to both parts. There is a pile of rubble on the NW side of the interior, which shows some evidence of layering in the stones, suggesting it was part of a collapsed wall or structure. A large flat slab on the WNW edge. The RCAHMW suggest that it is built on a slight platform.



Allt Fach hut I PRN 12417. Photo CPAT 2156-073

PRN: 12418 Name: Allt Fach hut II

NGR: SN84021779 SAM:

County: Powys Altitude in metres: 450

HER record: RCAHMW US 6ii. A similar, though more poorly-defined circle, also without entrance, possibly having been robbed in recent times. It measures 6m in diameter overall, with a well spread bank 0.3m high. RCAHMW, 1995 - Draft Inventory description

CPAT 2006: the site represents the possible traces of a cairn or a (rather less likely) round hut. It consists of an arc of well-set stones on the S (downslope) side. The N side is not evident, but may have been submerged in later peat growth. The interior is at the same level as the arc of stones and there are a few stones in the putative centre of the ring. Its nature is uncertain from the visible remains. The overall diameter is 6.0m (if circular) and 0.3m high.

PRN: 12428 Name: Allt Fach hut III

NGR: SN84531739 SAM:

County: Powys Altitude in metres: 320

HER record: RCAHMW US 7vii. A putative hut circle 4m NE-SW by 3m, bounded by boulder walls 0.8m wide and 0.3m high. It is slightly platformed, built up on the SE to 0.8m and scooped out to a similar depth on the NW. The hut wall is revetted against the slope, and here again there is no obvious entrance. RCAHMW, 1995 - Draft Inventory description

CPAT 2006: a sub-circular hut built around a terraced platform. The lower (SE) side of the platform is built up and stone revetted to 0.6m high, whereas the upper side is cut into the slope to a depth of 0.7m. There is a section of internally faced wall on the NE, while the W side has some edge-set stones defining the circuit. An entrance possibly on the SW. No internal features visible. It measures 5.2m N/S by 4.8m, and internally is a maximum of 3.2m in diameter.



Allt Fach hut III PRN12428. Photo CPAT 2156-070

PRN: 12430

Name: Allt Fach hut IV

NGR: SN84521737

SAM:

County: Powys

Altitude in metres: 320

HER record: RCAHMW US 7 ix. Immediately S.W. of (US 7 viii) is a circular structure, probably a hut circle, 4m in overall diameter, bounded by boulder walls spread to about 1m wide and 0.4m high. It is possible that the entrance was on the SE. RCAHMW, 1995 - Draft Inventory description

CPAT 2006: visit identified a slight hollow in an area of natural rubble. A few stones on the S side may have been deliberately placed, but this is uncertain. If it is an archaeological site, then it is unlikely to be more than a shelter, measuring about 3m in diameter.

PRN: 12434 Name: Allt Fach hut V

NGR: SN84581758 SAM:

County: Powys Altitude in metres: 330

HER record: RCAHMW record. A rubble-filled circular feature, probably a hut circle, 4.5m in diameter. It is bounded by rubble walls 1m wide, 0.4m high, without obvious entrance.

CPAT 2006: site visit showed a possible sub-circular hut, composed of a loose stone bank. The entrance was probably on the S (downslope) side. Some stone shows in the interior, but there was no apparent structure to this. The interior slopes to the SE. It measures 4.4m N/S by 4.3m and 0.3m high.



Allt Fach hut V PRN 12434. Photo CPAT 2156-072

PRN: 12491

Name: Pwll Byfre hut I

NGR: SN87501711

SAM:

County: Powys

Altitude in metres: 500

HER record: RCAHMW. The better preserved (US 22i), apparently lacking an entrance, is about 7m in overall diameter and 2.5m internally, consisting of a stony bank up to 0.3m high. RCAHMW 1995 - Draft Inventory description.

CPAT 2006: a reasonably circular stone-built hut, the external diameter up top 6.2m, the internal diameter around 3.0m. No certain internal or external facing. Also no entrance confirmed although there is a lower grassy section on the WSW slope. The bank has been clipped by a drain alongside the bulldozed track to the S. There are no associated features visible but there is a trackway cleared through the boulder field to the NW some 30m distant.



Pwll Byfre hut I PRN 12491. Photo CPAT 2156-076

PRN: 12492 Name: Pwll Byfre hut II

NGR: SN87471711 SAM:

County: Powys Altitude in metres: 500

HER record: RCAHMW suggest that about 35m to the W of PRN 12491 are the poorly preserved remains of a second hut circle (US 22ii), about 5m in diameter. This one is marked by a perimeter of stones protruding through the turf up to 0.3m high, embanked slightly on the NW

CPAT 2006: noted that although this has been recorded as a possible hut, 5m in diameter, the most probable explanation is that it represents an outlying part of the nearby rubble/scree field. There were not enough visible traces to record it as a hut.

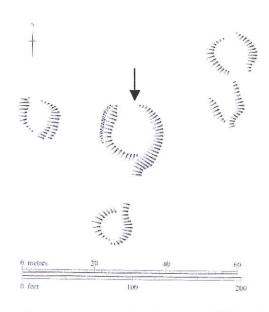
PRN: 12544 Name: Fan Llia settlement, platform I

NGR: SN9283418049 SAM: Br259(POW)

County: Powys Altitude in metres: 450

HER record: RCAHMW record. The most prominent and best-defined platform (US 43i) comprises an overgrown level area 14.5m (N-S) by 10m, its long axis aligned along the contour. The platform cuts the hillside to a depth of about 1 m, and its outer limit is embanked to the same height. At the foot of the scarp lies a low bank of consolidated rubble, 1m wide following the scarp toe.

CPAT 2006: large platform, the largest in the group of five in the complex numbered PRN 33467. Its overall dimensions are 17.5m east to west by 18.2m, with a fan 0.8m high and an apron of 0.9m. No stone is evident but it is under thick rushes.



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PRN: 12500 Name: Cerrig Duon hut I

NGR: SN84982133 SAM:

County: Powys Altitude in metres: 410

HER record: RCAHMW record that these are the remains of a sub-circular hut about 5m in diameter, with stones upstanding 0.3 m, the centre full of stones. This lies adjacent to a small stone scatter (US 31iv) running NNW along the base of the slope and forming the notional boundary to a cleared area, which, against the more heathy nature of the valley in general, is relatively green (on the E) This may indicate its former fertility, and the immediate area seems to form a field roughly 39m square adjacent to the hut.

CPAT 2006: noted that the probable hut is roughly circular in shape with an external diameter of on average 5.1m and an internal one of 2.6m. Internal and external wall-facings are visible, but there is no definite entrance. There is plenty of collapsed walling stone in the interior. The association with a field, 39m square, could not be confirmed. In reality, there are a few areas of clearance and drainage activity relating to the spring c.15m to the N.



Cerrig Duon hut I PRN 12500. Photo CPAT 2156-048

PRN: 12505

NGR:SN84992164

County: Powys

Name: Cerrig Duon hut II

SAM:

Altitude in metres: 420

HER record: RCAHMW US 31viii. Lying along the contour is a small hill-scooped hut about 8 m long (N-S) There is a crescent-shaped scatter downhill of the scoop, which runs the length of the feature and is about 4m wide. There is a large stone 2+ m long and over 1m wide on the NE corner. RCAHMW 1995 - Draft Inventory description.

CPAT 2006: a possible hut site defined by a large natural stone on the W, with an arc of rubble on its E side. It was termed a hill-scooped hut by the RCAHMW. A low section on the ENE may represent the entrance and there is some possible internal wall-facing on the N side. Stones have collapsed into the interior on the S, perhaps hiding any internal facing stones that have survived. There are hints of external wall-facing the SE and E. The interior has a slight slope to the E, but is partially terraced. The hut measures 8.1m E/W by 7.5m externally and 0.6m high; internally it is about 4.2m by 3.7m.



Cerrig Duon hut II PRN 12505. Photo CPAT 2156-047

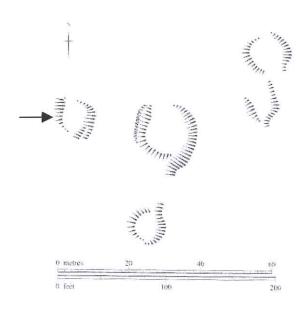
PRN: 12545 Name: Fan Llia settlement, platform II

NGR: SN9280418049 SAM: Br259(POW)

County: Powys Altitude in metres: 450

HER record: RCAHMW record. Another, less well-defined, but well drained platform (US 43 ii) some 10 m N.-S. by 7 m lies 20 m downslope and rises to about 1.2 m from the contour.

CPAT 2006: the platform in the complex numbered PRN 33467 is overall 9.2m north to south by 12.6m with a fan on the east up to 1.0m high and an apron 0.9m. The internal diameter is about 6.4m. The platform itself is generally level though a little uneven in the south-east quadrant.



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PRN: 12546

NGR: SN9284618083

County: Powys

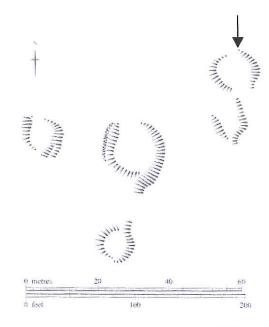
Name: Fan Llia settlement, platform III

SAM: Br259(POW)

Altitude in metres: 440

HER record: RCAHMW record. About 30m NE. of the first example lies a third (US 43iii), badly-drained, overgrown platform, enclosing about 9m square, and built out from the contour to 0.8m.

CPAT 2006: the fifth of five platforms in the complex numbered PRN 33467. This appears to occupy a natural shelf. Its dimensions are 14.0m east to west and 9.1m north to south; the fan is 0.8m and the apron 0.7m high; a small amount of stone projects from the fan.



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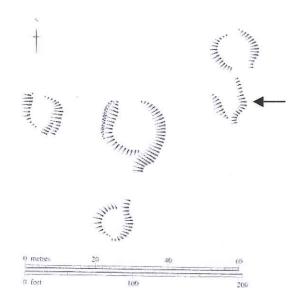
PRN: 12547 Name: Fan Llia settlement, platform IV

NGR: SN92851805 SAM: Br259(POW)

County: Powys Altitude in metres: 460

HER record: RCAHMW record. A fourth, ill-defined, site lies adjacent to the latter on its S. measuring 9m (N-S) by 5m (US 43 iv).

CPAT 2006: the fourth of five platforms in the complex numbered PRN 33467. This is 10.9m north to south by 9.7m east to west, the only difference from the others being that the apron which is about 0.6m high with stone protruding is concave in design. The fan at the rear is 0.7m high and the platform itself is about 5..4m across.



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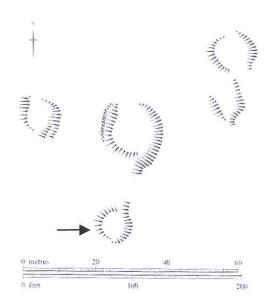
PRN: 12548 Name: Fan Llia settlement, platform V

NGR: SN9283618025 SAM: Br259(POW)

County: Powys Altitude in metres: 460

HER record: RCAHMW record. Twenty-five metres to the S of the first site is another (US 43 v), 7 m (N.-S.) by 6 m and rising to 1 m from the contour.

CPAT 2006: the platform in the complex numbered PRN 33467 is 12.1m east to west by 9.4m south to north; the fan on the east is 0.9m high, the apron perhaps 0.5m; the platform itself is about 6.5m in diameter. Some small rubble projects from the fan and also from the apron.



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