

# EVALUATION EXCAVATION AT FAN BARROW, TALSARN, CEREDIGION

2011

## INTERIM REPORT



Prepared by Dyfed Archaeological Trust  
For Cadw



ymddiriedolaeth archaeolegol  
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## EXCAVATIONS AT FAN BARROW, TALSARN, CEREDIGION 2011

### INTERIM REPORT

Gan / By

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<b>SUMMARY</b>	1
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	1
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	2
<b>Project objectives</b>	2
<b>Methodology</b>	2
<b>Historical and archaeological background</b>	2
<b>Photographs</b>	3
<b>EXCAVATION RESULTS</b>	4
<b>Charcoal filled pits 009, 011, 042</b>	4
<b>Cremation pits 017, 037</b>	4
<b>Pit 023</b>	4
<b>Other pits 015, 029</b>	4
<b>Possible cut feature 032</b>	5
<b>Natural feature 043, 042</b>	5
<b>Possible features 012, 013, 031, 003, 005, 007</b>	5
<b>FINDS</b>	6
<b>Ceramics</b>	6
<b>Bronze</b>	7
<b>Flint and quartz</b>	7
<b>Worked bone</b>	7
<b>Finds list</b>	7
<b>SAMPLES</b>	8
<b>Bulk soil samples</b>	8
<b>Pollen samples</b>	8
<b>Charcoal for C14 dating</b>	8
<b>Cremations</b>	9
<b>Contents of Pygmy Cup in Cremation 007</b>	9
<b>Micro-excavation of cremation pit 005</b>	9
<b>Other samples</b>	10
<b>CONTEXT LISTS</b>	11
<b>2010 Excavation context list</b>	11
<b>2011 Excavation context list</b>	11
<b>DISCUSSION</b>	14
<b>Barrow form</b>	14
<b>Site formation processes</b>	15
<b>Opportunities to address research agendas</b>	15

<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>	17
<b>Archaeology</b>	17
<b>Monument management</b>	17
<b>Research</b>	17
<b>Further work</b>	17
<b>SOURCES</b>	18
<b>ILLUSTRATIONS</b>	
<b>Figure 1:</b> Site location map	19
<b>Figure 2:</b> Geophysical survey	20
<b>Figure 3:</b> Trench plan	21
<b>Figure 4:</b> Explanation of site formation processes	22
<b>PHOTOGRAPHS</b>	
<b>Photo 1:</b> Aerial photograph taken in 1992	23
<b>Photo 2:</b> Ground photograph taken in 1988	23
<b>Photo 3:</b> Aerial image after destruction of barrow	24
<b>Photo 4:</b> Aerial view of possible barrow site	24
<b>Photo 5:</b> Collared Urn from Cremation pit 006	25
<b>Photo 6:</b> Pygmy Cup from Cremation pit 006	25
<b>Photo 7:</b> Pygmy Cup from Cremation pit 004	25
<b>Photo 8:</b> Pygmy Cup from cremation pit 017	26
<b>Photo 9:</b> Pygmy Cup fragment from cremation pit 037	26
<b>Photo 10:</b> Collared Urn in cremation pit 017	26
<b>Photo 11:</b> Pit 015 before excavation	27
<b>Photo 12:</b> Pit 015 after removal of secondary fills	27
<b>Photo 13:</b> Pit 015 after removal of primary fill	27
<b>Photo 14:</b> Pit 029 before excavation	28
<b>Photo 15:</b> Pit 029 after removal of most of stoney fill	28
<b>Photo 16:</b> Pit 029 after removal of primary fill	28
<b>Photo 17:</b> Stoney fill 033 in cut 032 before excavation	29
<b>Photo 18:</b> Section through 032 showing fills 033 and 034	29
<b>Photo 19:</b> Cut 032 after removal of fills	29
<b>Photo 20:</b> Pit 009 before excavation	30
<b>Photo 21:</b> Small pit 042 before excavation	30
<b>Photo 22:</b> Pit 011 after removal of fills	30
<b>Photo 23:</b> Cremation pit 017	31
<b>Photo 24:</b> Cremation deposit 036 in cut 037	31
<b>Photo 25:</b> Pit 023 before it was lifted 'en bloc'	31



## **EXCAVATIONS AT FAN BARROW, TALSARN, CEREDIGION 2011 INTERIM REPORT**

### **SUMMARY**

A scheduled Bronze Age round barrow at Fan, near Talsarn, Ceredigion was ploughed flat in the late 1990s. In order to ascertain what survived of the monument, Dyfed Archaeological Trust obtained grant-aid from Cadw to evaluate the site. This was undertaken in two phases, a geophysical survey in 2009 (Poucher 2009) and trial trenching in 2010 (Schlee 2010). In 2010 two cremation pits were excavated. One, with a stone lining, contained a Pygmy Cup, and several fragments of bronze. The second (with no stone lining) contained another Pygmy Cup and a collared urn containing the cremation. No evidence for the barrow mound itself or a buried soil horizon was identified.

In 2011 a three week excavation was undertaken to further investigate the remains of the burial mound, specifically to characterise more of the features indicated on the geophysical survey and to recover any further artefacts contained within suspected additional cremation pits.

A better understanding of the character of the barrow and its environs was obtained, enabling the former monument to be de-scheduled if considered appropriate. Along with a range of cut features, several whole pots were recovered from three cremation pits (in addition to the two cremation pits from 2010). The vessels were lifted whole for laboratory-based excavation and conservation. Several bulk soil samples, carbon dating samples and pollen samples were also taken.

The features excavated, and the artefacts, human cremations, environmental and dating samples recovered over the two seasons of investigation represent an important assemblage which warrants a range of detailed post excavation analyses.

This interim report summarises the results of the 2011 excavation. It also presents the list of finds, environmental samples, dating samples and cremation material (more samples will be taken during the conservation of the 2011 finds). The report identifies what further conservation work will be needed and outlines some of the possible research questions that could be addressed by the post excavation analyses.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

During the late 1990s, a scheduled Bronze Age barrow (SAM CD078) located at NGR SN 5647 5870 was ploughed flat. Following this event Cadw commissioned Dyfed Archaeological Trust to undertake a condition survey of the site to inform decisions on its future management. The first phase of the assessment comprised a geophysical survey undertaken in 2009 (Poucher 2009). This was followed up by targeted trench evaluation over 5 days of fine weather in October 2010 (Schlee 2010). In 2011 more detailed phase of excavation was completed over a three week period in September/October.

### **Project objectives**

The objective of the second excavation season was to further characterise the remains of the monument and to undertake 'preservation by record' of any surviving features, to recover sufficient information about the barrow to justify rescinding its scheduled ancient monument status.

### **Methodology**

#### **Open area excavation**

Based on the interpretation of the 2009 geophysical survey (Figure 2) and the results of the 2010 evaluation, a larger area of topsoil was stripped to target a variety of potential features (Figure 3).

The excavation area was stripped of topsoil using a tracked 8 tonne JCB with a 1.20m wide toothless ditching bucket. Following initial results (which suggested that the barrow was not defined by a perimeter ditch) it was unclear exactly what the exact location and extent of the barrow was. The initial intention to expose what was thought to be the entire monument was modified to a smaller area.

In the event, almost all of the probable barrow area was excavated. It is thought likely that all significant features within the barrow area were excavated. In addition, part of the immediate periphery to the north and west of the monument was exposed within the excavation area.

During the excavation numerous bulk soil samples for the recovery of cremated bone, environmental and radiocarbon-dating evidence were taken. Standard excavation and recording techniques were employed.

### **Historical and archaeological background**

Fan Barrow is associated with the discovery of a Bronze Age Pygmy Cup known as the Abermeurig or Nantcwnlle Cup. In an article in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* (1879) the Rev. E.L. Barnwell reports that the cup was found in a field near Talsarn 'in the time of' Dr T.E. Rogers of Abermeurig'. The cup is curated at the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff (Accession No. 15.139/1-2).

In 'A Short History of the Parish of Nantcwnlle' by the Rev. Evan Edwardes, published in the *Cambrian News* in 1930 (translated by J Hyatt 2003) the cup is described as having been found in a group of stones on Ty'n rhos bank on the Abermeurig estate.

A local resident has pointed out that Fan Barrow itself is not located on Ty'n Rhos Bank, nor has the land on which the barrow sits ever been part of the Abermeurig estate. He was able to identify the location which he has always understood to be the site from which the Abermeurig Cup was excavated, which is indeed a suspicious looking 'pimple' on the nearby rise known as Ty'n rhos bank. This location (SN 56840 58900) has not been previously identified as a round barrow and is not recorded in the HER.

A visit to the location during the excavation identified the remnants of a possible barrow, however, a considerable amount of disturbance, including what appear to be the remains of a rectangular enclosure or building, and other delvings, have somewhat obscured the situation (see Photo. 4). It is considered entirely possible, however, that this is the location of a barrow from which the Abermeurig Cup was recovered.

It is also noteworthy that another round barrow was excavated in 1929 at the nearby farmstead of Pen-y-glogau, just over 1km away (SN 55440 59320). A useful description of the excavations (Jones and Davies 1930) suggests it may have been a similar feature to Fan Barrow. The excavation was undertaken when cremations were discovered during the removal of the barrow to provide roadstone for the repair of local roads.

The Pen-y-glogau excavation report describes a stone-lined primary cremation pit (Grave N) with similar characteristics to cremation pit 004 which formed the central, primary burial at Fan. In addition to general similarities of form and size, several other features described in the report would appear to be similar to features excavated at Fan. A Collared Urn and Pygmy Cup recovered from the excavation are stored at Cardigan Museum (Accession numbers 75.1278 and 75.4738).

Another local resident reported another possible unrecorded barrow (perhaps visible at SN 56800 59780) and several unrecorded burnt mounds in the surrounding area.

### **Photographs**

Photo 1, taken in 1992 is an aerial photograph showing the mound before it was destroyed. Photo 2 is a ground photo showing the monument as it appeared in 1988. A digital aerial image from 'Get Mapping' (Photo 3), of c.2001, shows a pale coloured area which corresponds to the circular feature suggested by the geophysical survey. This discoloration seems to indicate the area in which intensive ploughing and harrowing has 'scalped' the upper parts of the natural geology. Surrounding this is an irregular area of reddish hue, thought to be formed by the spreading of the mound material when it was destroyed. The former extent of the barrow is unclear.

## **EXCAVATION RESULTS**

### **Charcoal filled pits 009, 011, 042** (Photos 20, 21 and 22)

These three cut features were all roughly circular, vertical sided and flat based. Each contained a black charcoal rich fill, with no other inclusions. These pits are located on the north side periphery of the mound. They do not appear to be cremation pits. Bulk soil samples of each pit fill were taken for flotation.

### **Cremation pits 017, 037** (Photos 23 and 24)

Together with cremation pits 006 and 004 (excavated in 2010) these three simple cut cremation pits form the focus of the burial group. If the mound area is represented by the geophysical feature, or is centred on cremation pit 004, it is noticeable that the cremations seem to be concentrated in the western half of both features.

Cremation pit 017 contained a Collared Urn and a Pygmy Cup placed on top of a cremation laid in the base of the cut. Below the cremation the soil appeared to have been heat affected. Although possible, it is hard to imagine that when it was deposited, the cremated material was sufficiently hot to discolour the underlying soil. Perhaps something was burnt within the cut prior to the deposition of the cremation.

Cremation pit 037 contained a smaller quantity of cremated bone, and approximately half of a Pygmy Cup. The initial appearance of the feature suggested it had suffered considerable plough damage. Initial observations of the fragment of Pygmy Cup, however, are not particularly suggestive of recent damage. It is possible that the vessel was included in the cremation ritual and only fragments were transferred into the burial deposit.

### **Pit 023** (Photo 25)

This pit contained a partly damaged ceramic vessel. The entire pit was lifted for micro-excavation, and as yet it is uncertain whether this is a cremation pit or not. Initial observations suggest the vessel is not a Collared Urn, and unlike the excavated Collared Urns, this vessel does not appear to have been laid on its side. No traces of cremated bone were observed at the surface. This may not therefore be a cremation pit.

### **Other pits 015, 029** (Photos 11 to 16)

Two pits were located just to the south of the cremation pit group, but within the area of the former barrow, suggesting they are part of the same group of features. Both features appear to contain structured deposits, perhaps suggesting some form of ritual associated with the burials.

Pit 029 contained two charred planks (or the remains of two partially burnt logs?) laid parallel to each other in the base of the pit on a roughly north-south alignment. The pit then appears to have been intentionally backfilled with a uniform, but mixed fill of redeposited natural from which a single fragment of worked flint was recovered. This fill was overlain by a deposit of tightly packed stones which appeared to be contained within a second slightly smaller and shallower pit cut 019. Alternatively, the stones may originally have formed a small cairn over the pit, which over time (or as a result of pressure from the overlying barrow mound) subsided into the backfilled pit below.

Pit 015 also appeared to have two phases of deposition. The original pit was roughly circular and cut into natural silts. This appeared to have been

intentionally backfilled with redeposited natural, before a second, smaller circular shallow pit with a level base was cut into the top of the backfill. This cut appeared to have been roughly lined with small stones before being backfilled with a charcoal rich fill from which some fragments of pottery, some burnt quartz, a struck flake of glass-like quartz crystal and an apparently unworked piece of quartz crystal were recovered. It is not yet known if the ceramic fragments are part of a single vessel or not.

**Possible cut feature 032** (Photos 17, 18 and 19)

This possible cut feature corresponded with part of the large circular geophysical feature. It appeared to contain two fills. The upper fill was primarily composed of stones within a silty matrix. A considerable amount of charcoal was observed within the matrix, some fragments sufficiently large to doubt they could have been worked in through natural processes. It may represent another 'structured deposit, although apart from charcoal, no other cultural material was recovered from the fills. The feature lies just beyond the probable edge of the barrow, and may represent a different phase of activity on the site.

**Natural feature 043, 042**

Although initially considered to be a stone-filled cut feature, on excavation, it appeared that this was most likely to be a natural geological feature of some kind. Occasional small charcoal fragments were, however, noted in the matrix between the stones. These are presumed to have worked downwards into the feature through natural processes.

**Possible features 012, 013, 031, 003, 005, 007**

Although potential pits and posthole cuts, these features could not be convincingly defined, primarily due to difficulty of distinguishing the fills from the surrounding natural. They did contain occasional charcoal fragments. They may relate to a different type or phase of activity to that represented by the burial features.

## **FINDS**

### **Ceramics** (Photos 5 to 10)

The overall ceramic assemblage recovered from Fan Barrow (four Pygmy Cups, two Collared Urns and two other as yet unidentified vessels) all have the potential to be radiocarbon-dated by their associations with charcoal and or cremated bone from the cremation pits in which they were found. They are therefore a very important assemblage offering the first opportunity to study Welsh Pygmy Cups and other vessels with which they are associated, in funerary contexts, using modern methods of analysis and dating. It will also be possible to compare the forms and fabrics of the Fan Barrow assemblage with the ceramics recovered from other nearby earlier barrow excavations.

Welsh Pygmy Cups are thought to have been containers for offerings or offerings themselves, to accompany cremations, either alone or in association with other vessels especially Cinerary Urns. The form of Pygmy Cups is typically considered to be derived from food vessels. There are various forms of Pygmy Cups with distinct distributions in Britain. Their characteristics demonstrate influences from the Atlantic seaboard of Europe but are probably a local style with influences from several continental sources.

Wales and southwest Scotland has the main concentration of 'Bipartite' forms of Pygmy Cups, and Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire have a notable concentration of specimens with fine characteristics. These are considered to be the 'pure' form, whereas further east a higher proportion of Pygmy Cups is of coarser wares with less fine decoration. Welsh Pygmy Cups are generally considered to date to the Middle Bronze Age, in the centuries immediately following the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC.

Of the 49 recorded pygmy cups from Wales, few, if any, have been excavated since the 1930s. The provenance, associations and archaeological details of many of these finds is uncertain, and none have been radiocarbon-dated. The four Pygmy Cups from Fan exhibit some similarities and some differences in form. Together they will make a significant addition to the regional assemblage.

Pygmy Cups are found both unaccompanied with cremations and accompanied by urns. Both such situations are represented at Fan, but the vessel in cremation pit 023 is yet to be excavated so its type and form have not been determined. Fragments of pottery from pit 015 include a thick curved rim from a large vessel of an as yet unidentified form.

The Pygmy Cup from cremation pit 005 appears to have contained a red pigment. Samples will be taken from all the vessels in the hope of ascertaining whether they each contained something. Three Pygmy Cups from Wales found before 1931, were included in a lipid analysis project (Gibson and Stern 2006) with negative results, but no other analyses of this class of vessel have been undertaken in recent years. Newly excavated samples may offer better potential than previously curated material, and other forms of analysis may provide more positive results.

Two burials contained Collared Urns. In 005, the cremation was contained within the urn, while in 017 the urn was placed on top of the cremation. Comparison of the variations between the burial contexts of the Fan assemblage may provide fresh evidence of Bronze Age burial traditions in the region.

### **Bronze**

Although heavily corroded, fragmentary and melted, specialist analysis of the bronze fragments recovered from within cremation 007 and the backfills 010 and 003 may be warranted to try and ascertain what the objects may once have



been. Analysis of the composition of the copper may also provide important detail about metal production technology in the region during the Bronze Age. A well dated cremation accompanied by ceramics along with Bronze objects will provide a useful addition to the evidence of the dates and distribution of Bronze Age burials containing metalwork within the region.

### **Flint and quartz**

Three pieces of worked flint have been recovered during the excavation. One piece of worked quartz crystal and a piece of unworked quartz crystal were also recovered. Processing of cremation deposits and pit fills may reveal other worked and or burnt flint.

### **Worked bone**

A fragment of bone recovered from fill 003 of the stone-lined cremation pit, was at first thought to have been worked and decorated. This is no longer thought to be the case.

### **Finds list**

FBT10	007 Pygmy Cup (consolidated)
FBT10	005 Pygmy Cup (consolidated)
FBT10	005 Collared Urn (consolidated)
FBT11	020 Pottery fragments
FBT11	021 Collared Urn (awaiting consolidation)
FBT11	021 Pygmy Cup (awaiting consolidation)
FBT11	023 Collared Urn? (awaiting consolidation)
FBT11	038 Pygmy Cup fragment (awaiting consolidation)
FBT10	002 Flint
FBT10	003 bone pendant fragment?
FBT10	003 Copper droplets
FBT10	010 Copper droplets
FBT10	007 Copper droplets
FBT10	007 Burnt flint
FBT11	001 Flint
FBT11	020 Quartz
FBT11	020 Burnt quartz
FBT11	021 Burnt stone
FBT11	025 Flint
FBT11	036 Burnt quartz

Other finds may come to light during sample processing and micro-excavations.

## **SAMPLES**

Numerous samples have been taken for a variety of purposes. Specialists can be consulted to ascertain which, and how many samples it would be desirable to process and or analyse further. The samples taken so far are listed below. Others will be taken during the micro excavation and conservation of the complete vessels recovered in 2011.

### **Bulk soil samples**

The cremation deposit (007) was retained for osteological analysis and the recovery of fragments of copper, burnt flint, and any other items that may have been cremated with the body. The entire primary and secondary fills of cremation pit 006 were also retained as bulk soil samples, to be processed for the recovery of charred plant remains, cremated bone fragments and any other items that may come to light.

FBT10	006 Cremation
FBT10	007 Cremation
FBT10	008 Pit fill
FBT10	010 Pit fill
FBT11	002 Pit fill
FBT11	008 Pit fill
FBT11	010 Pit fill
FBT11	014 Pit fill
FBT11	016 Cremation Pit fill
FBT11	018 Pit fill
FBT11	020 Pit fill
FBT11	021 Cremation Pit fill
FBT11	025 Pit fill
FBT11	028 Cremation Pit fill
FBT11	030 Pit fill
FBT11	033 Pit fill
FBT11	036 Cremation Pit fill
FBT11	Cremation Pit fill
FBT11	041 Pit fill

### **Pollen samples**

Pollen samples were taken from cremation pit deposits excavated in the field:

FBT10	006
FBT10	007
FBT11	016
FBT11	021
FBT11	028
FBT11	038

Additional pollen samples are understood to have been taken from FBT10 006 and the fills of the ceramic vessels during their conservation. Other pollen samples will be taken during consolidation of 2011 pots.

### **Charcoal for C14 dating**

Spot samples of charcoal thought likely to be suitable for radiocarbon dating were taken from the following deposits:

FBT11	002
FBT11	008

FBT11	010
FBT11	016
FBT11	018
FBT11	020
FBT11	021
FBT11	025
FBT11	028
FBT11	030
FBT11	033
FBT11	036
FBT11	038
FBT11	044

Charcoal for dating could also be recovered from cremations 007 and 005.

### **Cremations**

Four cremation deposits and one probable cremation (awaiting 'micro' excavation) were excavated and sampled:

FBT10	005 Cremation
FBT10	007 Cremation
FBT11	021 Cremation
FBT11	023 Cremation?
FBT11	038 Cremation Pit fill

Other bulk samples from the fills of these features also contain cremated bone.

### **Contents of Pygmy Cup in Cremation 007**

#### List of Layers:

Layer 1	dirt and small stones from rim of vessel down
Layer 2	stone / charcoal fragments
Layer 3	large stones
Layer 4	material beneath large stones

#### List of samples:

Layer 1	1 bag of material
Layer 2	1 bag of material
Layer 3	1 bag of material
Layer 4	1 bag of material

1 bag of material from outside vessel  
2 x bags of material taken for pollen samples from layer 4 (below stones, close to base of pot)

### **Micro-excavation of cremation pit 005**

#### List of Layers:

Material has been collected as layers (the material outside the vessel) and contents (within or directly below the vessel) as described below:

Layer 1	from surface of vessel to a depth of 5cm. The layer was stopped where it came down on to cremated material spilling from the mouth of the vessel.
Layer 2	another 4 cm depth, but includes all of the cremated material spilling from the mouth of the vessel.
Layer 3	remainder of depth to bedrock / lifting board.

- Contents 1 from rim of vessel to approximately lower collar band.  
Contents 2 from lower collar band to base.  
Contents 3 from directly beneath vessel, spilled during lifting or micro-excavation.

List of samples:

*Layer 1*

- 1 bag of soil from outside of pit
- 1 bag of fill material from around urn
- 1 bag of soil from open end of urn
- 1 bag of fill and cremated material from sides and base of urn
- 1 bag of larger cremated pieces, separated from fill and cremated material.

*Layer 2*

- 1 bag of soil / fill from around urn
- 1 bag of cremation and fill from sides / base of urn.
- 1 bag of larger cremated pieces, separated from fill and cremated material from sides and base of urn.
- 1 bag of cremation and fill from rim / mouth of vessel and 'upwards'.
- 1 bag of larger cremated pieces, separated from cremation and fill from rim / mouth of vessel and 'upwards'.

*Layer 3*

- 1 bag of cremation and fill from sides and base of vessel.
- 1 bag of material from baseboard.

*Contents 1*

- 1 bag of fill and cremated material.
- 1 bag of larger cremated pieces.

*Contents 2*

- 1 bag of fill and cremated material.
- 1 bag of larger cremated pieces.

*Contents 3*

- 1 bag of fill and cremated material.
- 1 bag of larger cremated pieces.

**Other samples**

- Pollen 1 from pigmy cup, close to edge of vessel near base.
- Pollen 2 from collared urn, midpoint of height, against lower body.
- Pollen 3 from collared urn, midpoint of height, against lower body.
- Fragments of urn, several small fragments which could not be re-adhered / positioned.
- Fragments of Pygmy Cup, several small samples not consolidated to allow for analysis.

## CONTEXT LISTS

### 2010 Excavation context list

Context	Type	Description
001	Topsoil	Loose light grey brown clay silt with frequent stones.
002	Cleaning	Same as topsoil.
003	Fill of 004	Loose dark brown clay silt with charcoal, bronze droplets and cremated bone. Upper fill of cremation pit above stone backfill 008.
004	Pit cut containing 003	Rectangular cut. 1.15m x 0.85 x 0.3m deep with rounded corners, sloping sides with level base.
005	Fill of 006	Upper fill of cremation pit, above 011.
006	Pit cut containing 005	Roughly circular pit 0.4m diameter. Approx. 0.15m deep. Lifted whole for micro-excavation.
007	Cremation deposit in 004	Relatively fragmented cremation laid on stone lining 009. Melted bronze droplets. No clear evidence of formal arrangement or containment.
008	Fill of 004	Stone backfill below 003 and above 007.
009	Stone lining of 004	Carefully arranged, but not formally constructed stone lining of cremation pit using flat slabs of sandstone and shale.
010	Fill of 004	Fill between cut 004 and stones of 009.
011	Cremation deposit in 006	Cremation deposit within pit 006, below 005.

### 2011 Excavation context list

Context	Type	Description
001	Topsoil/cleaning	Loose light grey brown clay silt with frequent stones.
002	Fill of pit 003	Loose grey brown clay silt with moderate stones and occasional charcoal fragments.
003	Pit cut containing 002	Possible oval pit 0.8x0.7x0.35m deep. Vertical sides with flat base.
004	Fill of 005	Loose light grey brown silt with frequent gravelly shale fragments and very occasional charcoal.
005	Pit/posthole? containing 004	Circular, 0.45m diam. 0.35m deep. Vertical sides, flat base.
006	Fill of 007	Loose orange brown gravelly silt with occasional stones and charcoal.
007	Pit/posthole? containing 006	Circular 0.4m diameter 0.35m deep, slightly tapering sides, flat base.
008	Fill of 009	Black charcoal rich clay silt fill.
009	Pit cut containing 008	Circular pit 0.45m diameter 0.18m deep. Vertical sides, flat base.
010	Fill of 011	Black charcoal rich fill.
011	Pit cut containing 010	Oval, 0.5m x 0.47m x 0.27m deep. Vertical sides, slightly concave base. Shape distorted by stones in surrounding natural.
012	Fill of 013	Loose reddish brown silty clay.
013	Pit cut containing 012	Possible oval pit or natural feature. 0.7m x 0.42m x 0.15m.
014	Fill of 015	Upper fill of pit 015. Compact friable reddish brown silty clay with quartz and burnt stone fragments and charcoal. Overlies 020.
015	Pit cut containing 014	Oval pit 0.58 x 0.56 x 0.20m deep. Steep sides, flat base.
016	Fill of 017	Friable reddish brown clay silt with frequent charcoal and cremated bone. Upper fill of cremation pit sealing/containing collared urn. Above 024.
017	Pit cut containing 016	Egg-shaped cremation pit 0.47m x 0.49m x 0.32m deep. Steep sides, concave base.
018	Fill of 019	Intentionally placed and tightly packed stone deposit in loose mid grey silt matrix.
019	Pit cut containing 018	Possible shallow cut 1.15m x 0.8m x 0.25m deep. Containing and defined by removal of 018.
020	Fill of 015	Black charcoal rich deposit 0.04m thick with three pottery fragments, clear quartz crystal frag and flake and burnt quartz fragments. below 014, above 027.
021	Fill of 017	Friable grey clay silt matrix with cremation deposit below 016, above 028.
022	Fill of 023	Loose dark brown clay silt with frequent charcoal. Unexcavated fill of pit containing pot. Lifted for micro-excavation.
023	Pit cut containing 022	Roughly circular 0.35m diameter. Depth unknown.
024	Fill of 017	Friable yellow grey sandy clay deposit of natural subsoil - collapse from pit edge between 016 and 021.
025	Fill of 019	Moderately compact mixed silty clay with occ stones and charcoal. Lower fill of 029, cut by 019 overlain by 018. Two

		charred wooden planks arranged at base of fill.
<b>026</b>	Fill?	Probably a natural concentration of stones.
<b>027</b>	Fill of 015	Loose light grey/reddish brown mottled silty clay with charcoal and pot fragment. Fill of 015 below 020.
<b>028</b>	Fill of 017	Heat reddened (not by the cremation?) clay silt with occasional charcoal below cremation deposit 021, above 017. Appears to be a discrete deposit.
<b>029</b>	Pit cut containing 025	Oval pit cut 1.05m x 0.85m x 0.45m deep with vertical sides curving in to flat base. Two charred wooden planks laid parallel on base, plus a few stones prior to backfilling (025).
<b>030</b>	Fill of 031	Moderately compact mixed clay silt deposit with moderate charcoal with traces of heat reddening, giving way apparent natural but with occasional charcoal fragments. Possibly over-dug/disturbed pit fill?
<b>031</b>	Pit cut containing 030	Irregular oval .9m x 0.6m x .3m profile uncertain. Possible natural/over-dug feature.
<b>032</b>	Pit cut containing 033/034	Linear pit resembling a short ditch with steeply sloping sides and a level base. May or may not be man-made.
<b>033</b>	Fill of 032	Small to large angular stones in a friable dark brown clay silt with occasional charcoal fragments. Some stones appeared heat affected. Possibly in a recut of 032.
<b>034</b>	Fill of 032	Friable orange brown clay silt with occasional charcoal flecks. Primary fill of cut 032.
<b>035</b>	Fill of 032	Friable grey clay silt. Occasional charcoal fragments. Possibly a 'natural' deposit.
<b>036</b>	Fill of 037	Friable Dark brown/black charcoal rich deposit of cremated bone fragments. Overlies 038.
<b>037</b>	Pit cut containing 036	Oval cremation pit 0.43m x 0.32m x 0.13m deep. Vertical edges, slightly concave base.
<b>038</b>	Fill of 037	Firm black charcoal deposit below cremation 036. 0.03m thick.
<b>039</b>	Fill of 040	Moderately compact mid grey-brown sandy clay silt. Possibly a natural fill of a natural feature.
<b>040</b>	Pit? cut containing 039	Unconvincing shallow concave irregular oval 'cut'. 0.70m x 0.4m x 0.12m deep. Possibly a natural feature.
<b>041</b>	Fill of 042	Soft, loose very dark brown/black charcoal rich fill.
<b>042</b>	Pit? cut containing 041	Circular, straight sided, flat base diameter 0.22m, depth 0.10m.
<b>043</b>	Deposit	Apparently natural stoney deposit with occasional flecks of charcoal.
<b>044</b>	Deposit	Apparently natural orange clay deposit with occasional flecks of charcoal.



## **DISCUSSION**

### **Barrow form**

The excavation results indicate that the mound element of the monument, and any evidence for a buried soil horizon beneath it, has been entirely ploughed away. Despite the plough damage, the survival of burial deposits contained within cuts through the underlying ground suggests that if the barrow had been defined by a perimeter ditch, some evidence of this is likely to have survived. Since no such evidence was apparent it is assumed that this was a 'ditchless barrow'. No other evidence of how the mound was constructed has survived, although the character of the ploughsoil in the vicinity of the former mound does not suggest it contained large quantities of stone.

The excavated remains of a similarly mutilated barrow nearby at Pen-y-glogau (Jones and Davies 1930), suggests that mound was also not ditched. The account of the excavation reported that in addition to the cremation pits cut into the underlying natural, three large stones forming three sides of a rectangle filled with rubble were revealed within the body of the mound, but were destroyed during the removal of the mound material prior to the excavation. Secondary cremations also appear to have been dug into the mound.

At Fan Barrow, it is possible, but sadly not provable, that the rectangular anomaly visible within the mound area on the geophysical survey (Figure 2) may have been the former location of a similar stone cist constructed within the mound. This location was investigated during the evaluation in 2010, but no evidence of a cut, or stone settings was apparent. No other evidence to suggest the form or fabric of the mound was evident.

Other similarities between the two barrows include the presence of stone lined primary burial pits in both (cremation pit 004 at Fan and Grave N at Pen-y-glogau), and the intentional laying of collared urns on their sides within cremation pits.

At present, stone lined cremation pit 004 appears to be the primary (and central) burial associated with the barrow. Four other cremation pits are located a few meters to the south, west, southwest and northwest of the primary cremation pit.

Two other pits located slightly further south of 004, appear to be associated with the barrow. They contain cultural material, but are not cremation pits.

Three charcoal filled pits are located on the north side of the barrow. Although these features lie within, or on the periphery of the barrow mound, it is also notable that they appear to align well with the circular geophysical anomaly (Figure 2) although this seems most likely to be coincidental. Radiocarbon-dating will be needed to ascertain whether any of these features should be attributed to a single phase or can be attributed to different phases.

Because of the lack of surviving stratigraphy it is not yet possible to say whether the primary burial and the satellite burials belong to the same phase or funerary event or not. It remains possible that the site started life as a 'flat' cremation cemetery i.e. one not marked by a barrow. However, only 'a handful' of such sites are conventionally accepted as such (Benson et al 290), and possible examples in Ceredigion may instead be the result of the degradation or removal of overlying mounds from conventional barrows, as is known to have happened at several other sites.

### **Site formation processes**

Despite the total absence of surviving evidence of the exact former location and extent of the barrow, the geophysical survey undoubtedly indicates the presence of a large circular 'anomaly' (Figure 2). What is at present unclear is whether this

anomaly represents the former extent of the barrow (or another archaeological feature), or was formed by another process.

The excavation has shown that the circular geophysical anomaly is characterized in different ways in different parts of the site, and does not represent a single coherent feature. The inside edge of the circular anomaly appears to be defined by an arc of exposed natural shale. Other parts of the anomaly are formed by slightly deeper ploughsoil, possibly natural geology, and possible cut features.

Over time, the area covered by the barrow will have been better protected from later destructive processes. If the land surrounding the mound had been ploughed prior to the destruction of the barrow, it is possible that the subsoil was disturbed to a greater depth than the original soil horizons protected by the mound.

When the barrow was removed, the ploughing and harrowing appears not only to have removed all traces of the barrow mound, but also to have 'scalped' the underlying geology of the crown of the hill upon which the barrow was located. The geophysical anomaly appears to be the fortuitously shaped result of the exposure of geological deposits on the crown of the hill, contrasting with deeper surrounding topsoil. Figure 4 attempts to illustrate this process.

Since the plough damage was sufficient to have removed all evidence of the mound structure, at present the exact location and extent of the former mound remains unclear. It is hoped that if suitable aerial photographs of the barrow can be found, it will be possible to rectify the images to accurately locate the former barrow in relation to the fieldwork undertaken recently.

### **Opportunities to address research agendas**

The artefact and environmental assemblage recovered during the excavation offers the opportunity to address several issues and avenues of research identified in the Research Agenda for Wales. These include:

- What was the nature of mortuary or funerary activity during the Bronze Age?
- Was there a change from communal to individual burial?
- What can monuments tell us about the nature of society?
- What was the relationship between different monuments and between monuments and the wider landscape?
- What can the immediate environs tell us about the development, role and use of monuments?
- The examination of the use of space within monument complexes.
- Provenancing of Bronze Age metal artefacts linked to geochemical fingerprinting of Welsh ore deposits – as a means to identify sources of raw material.
- Identify continuing use/reuse and possibly even foundation in the middle Bronze Age through carbon dating.
- Unaccompanied cremations and deposits such as charcoal-filled pits from Early Bronze Age ritual and funerary monuments should be routinely radiocarbon dated for evidence of later Bronze Age and Iron Age use/reuse.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

### **Archaeology**

The results demonstrate that the barrow structure has not survived. No evidence of a ditch or bank surrounding the barrow (as was suggested by the initial interpretation of the geophysical survey) was apparent within the excavated area. Nor could any clear evidence be found to suggest that the circular geophysical anomaly was a coherent archaeological feature. Instead, it appears to have been caused by an arc of slightly deeper soil surviving on the fringe of an area of plough disturbed natural geology on the crest of the hill, and some amorphous features that may be of natural origin. If the geophysical anomaly did represent an archaeological feature, it too has been plough damaged to the extent that it could not be defined through excavation.

### **Monument management**

The excavation has ascertained that the above ground elements of the former Bronze Age barrow have been completely destroyed by ploughing. Some or all of the cremation pits and other cut features that survive on the site may pre-date the burial mound, or may be contemporary with it. Although some features suggested by the geophysical survey were found not to be of archaeological origin, and some features of archaeological origin were not visible on the geophysical survey, it is considered that the excavation has successfully excavated the surviving features of the barrow, negating the need for its continued SAM status.

### **Research**

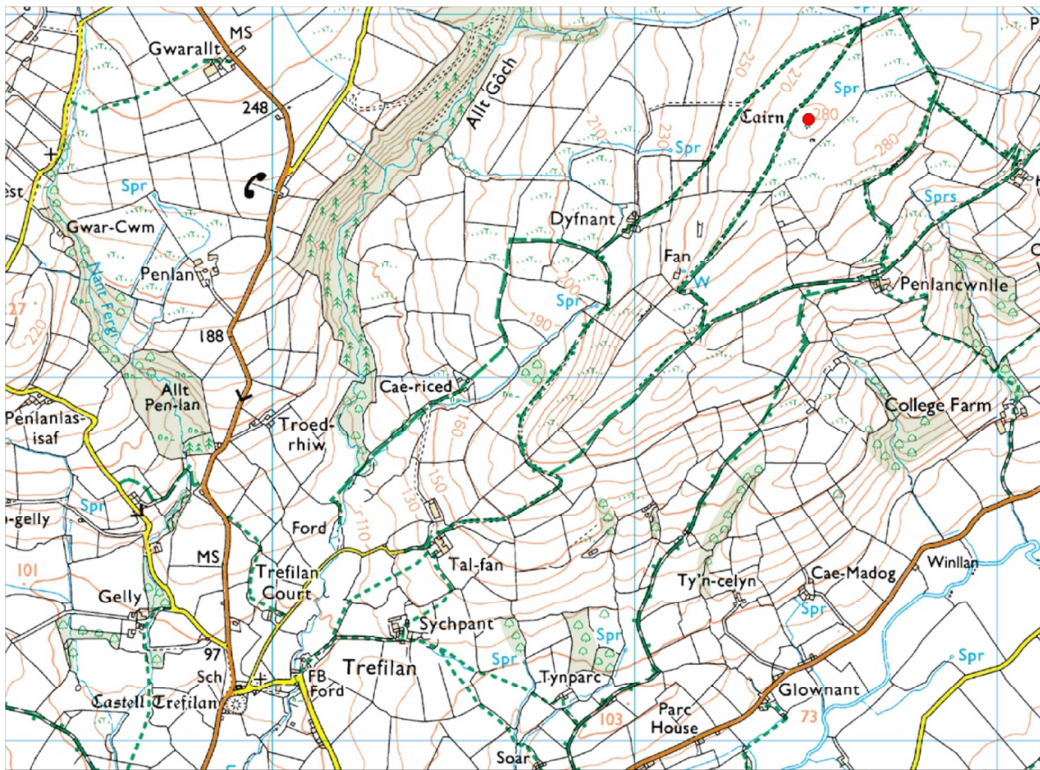
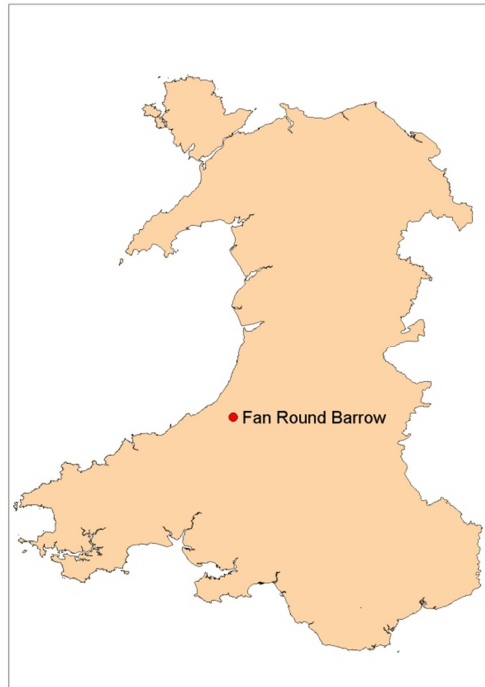
The samples and artefacts recovered during this excavation are an important assemblage for the study of Bronze Age ceramics and funerary practices, both within the Ceredigion region and Wales as a whole. Extensive dating, sampling and analysis would provide a considerable quantity of new and important data for inclusion in future research and analyses.

### **Further Work**

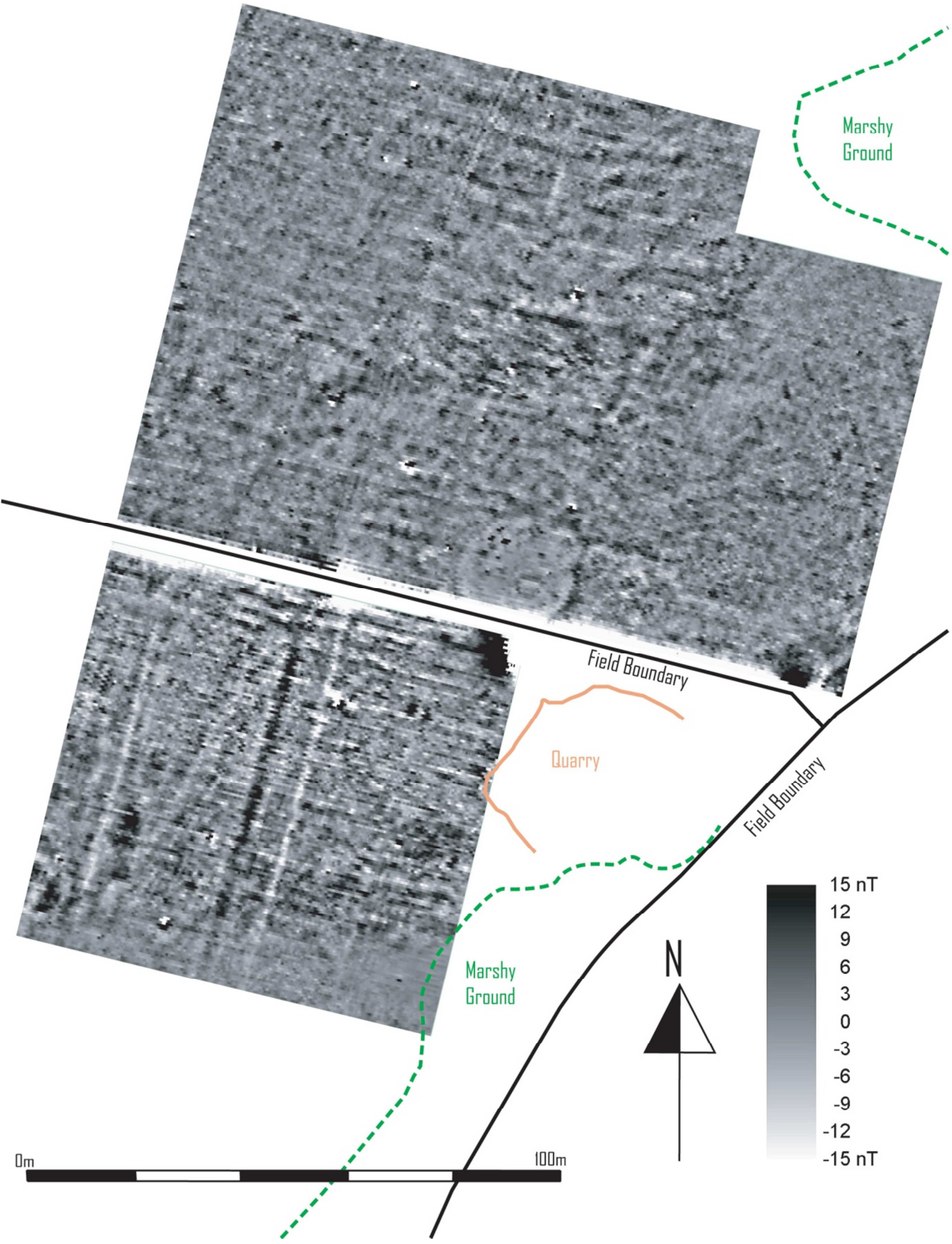
Several bulk samples will need to be processed, and the micro-excavation conservation and sampling of the complete pots lifted in 2011 will need to be undertaken prior to specialist analyses being undertaken.

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**Figure 1:** Site location map



**Figure 2:** Geophysical survey



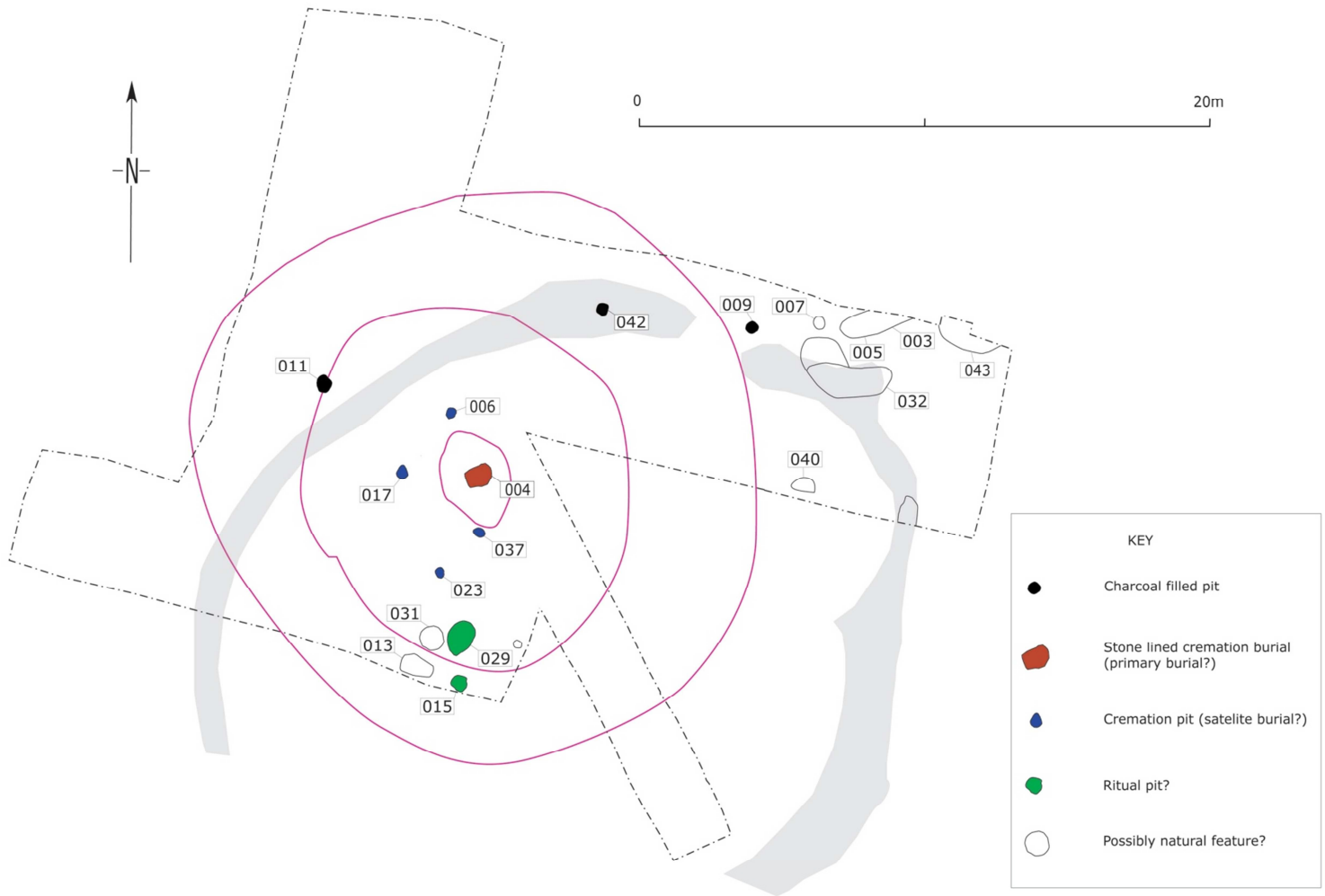
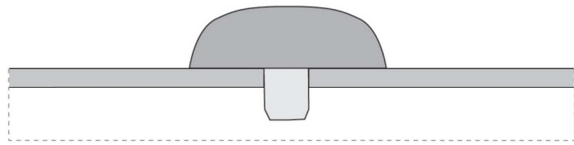
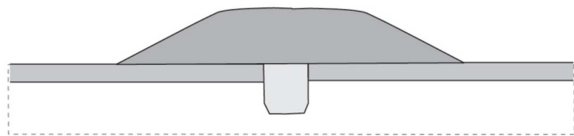


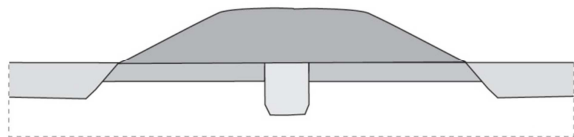
Figure 3: Trench plan



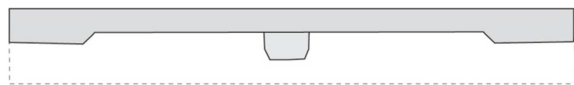
The barrow seals burial cut through topsoil into sub soil.



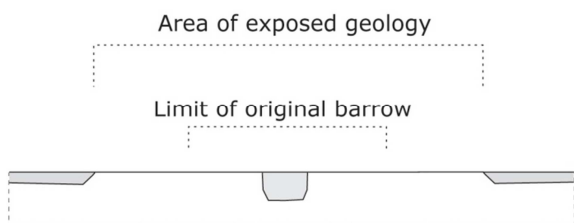
The barrow spreads, covering and protecting a larger area of topsoil.



The barrow material protects the underlying soil horizons from the effects of ploughing, weathering or erosion. In unprotected areas, ploughing penetrates into the subsoil, creating a subsoil horizon at a greater depth.



When the barrow is removed, the surviving topsoil is no longer protected from the effects of ploughing. All evidence of the extent of the original barrow is destroyed, but the difference in subsoil depths persists.



For the archaeological excavation, the topsoil is removed, exposing the formerly protected subsoil, but evidence of the extent of the original barrow has been destroyed

**Figure 4:** Explanation of site formation processes



**Photo 1:** Aerial photograph taken in 1992, looking south



**Photo 2:** Ground photograph taken in 1988, looking east (H. Burnham, Cadw)





**Photo 3:** Aerial image (looking north) of barrow after its destruction. The lower middle white area is a stone quarry. Above is the reddish spread (of mound material?) and the white circular area corresponding with the geophysical survey. (Image from Get Mapping)



**Photo 4:** View (looking southwest) of possible barrow site at SN5684058900. It has been suggested that the Abermeurig Cup was excavated from this site, not Fan Barrow (visible on horizon in distance)



**Photo 5:** Pit 009 before excavation



**Photo 6:** Small pit 042 before excavation



**Photo 7:** Pit 011 after removal of fills





**Photo 8:** Cremation pit 017



**Photo 9:** Cremation deposit 036 in cut 037



**Photo 10:** Pit 023 before it was lifted 'en bloc'



**Photo 11:** Pit 015 before excavation



**Photo 12:** Pit 015 after removal of secondary fills



**Photo 13:** Pit 015 after removal of primary fill





**Photo 14:** Pit 029 before excavation



**Photo 15:** Pit 029 after removal of most of stoney fill



**Photo 16:** Pit 029 after removal of primary fill, showing charred planks in base





**Photo 17:** Stoney fill 033 in cut 032 before excavation



**Photo 18:** Section through 032 showing fills 033 and 034



**Photo 19:** Cut 032 after removal of fills



**Photo 20:** Natural feature 042/043



**Photo 21:** Collared Urn from Cremation pit 006



**Photo 22:** Pygmy Cup from Cremation pit 006



**Photo 23:** Pygmy Cup from Cremation pit 004



**Photo 24:** Pygmy Cup from cremation pit 017



**Photo 25:** Pygmy Cup fragment from cremation pit 037





**Photo 26:** Collared Urn in cremation pit 017

**FAN BARROW, TALSARN, CEREDIGION  
EVALUATION EXCAVATION  
2011  
INTERIM REPORT**

**RHIF YR ADRODDIAD / REPORT NUMBER 2011/53**

**Rhagfyr 2011  
December 2011**

Paratowyd yr adroddiad hwn gan / This report has been prepared by

Duncan Schlee

Swydd / Position: Field Services Project Manager

Llofnod / Signature



Dyddiad / Date 07/12/2011

Mae'r adroddiad hwn wedi ei gael yn gywir a derbyn sêl bendith  
This report has been checked and approved by

James Meek

ar ran Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf.  
on behalf of Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Swydd / Position:

Llofnod / Signature ..... Dyddiad / Date

Yn unol â'n nôd i roddi gwasanaeth o ansawdd uchel, croesawn unrhyw sylwadau  
sydd gennych ar gynnwys neu strwythur yr adroddiad hwn

As part of our desire to provide a quality service we would welcome any  
comments you may have on the content or presentation of this report



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