



Evidence of a Bronze Age settlement at Meillionydd, Rhiw

Remains of Early Ages in Llŷn

Stone tools have been found on the Eifl mountains and in other places in Llŷn, and dated to the Mesolithic Age, which is proof that people were living here between 8,000 and 4,000 BC. They were the earliest people, and later around 3,000 BC people were excavating stone to make tools on the slopes of the mountain, Mynydd Rhiw. The same development was happening across Europe, at a time when humans were changing from being hunters to farmers. It was in this age that the big 'cromlechi' or portal dolmens were built, which are to be seen in Llŷn. There are similar ones along the west coast from Cornwall and over to Ireland. The cromlech at Bachwen, Clynnog is a good example.

The standing stones that are common in Llŷn were erected in the Bronze Age (2500-1500 BC). We can only wonder why these tall, upright stones were erected in the middle of fields and within walls or as gateposts in entrances. Some may have been moved from their original sites for some reason.

Bronze Age people cremated their dead and buried them under cairns, often on the summits of hills such as Carnguwch and other places where the element 'carn' appears in the name.

The summits were other worldly places, enticing and frightening. This is where the chief of the tribe would be buried.

The summits and the uplands were also important to the farmers of the next age – the Iron Age (750 BC – 43 AD). This is where they built their hill forts surrounded by ditches, banks of stone or wood and soil, to protect and defend their families and animals.

Tre'r Ceiri and Garn Boduan are on summits.

In Porthdinllaen there are remains of a coastal fort from the same age.

Would the pilgrims perhaps have visited the ancient remains, or ignored them because of their 'pagan' links?

Round huts were built recently at Felin Uchaf, Rhoshirwaun as part of a Visionary Social Enterprise.



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government





Dolmens



In this area, the Bachwen Cromlech, Clynnog Fawr is one of the Llŷn cromlechi (dolmens), built in the Early Neolithic Age (up to 4,000 BC). These tombs are found in prominent places, on higher ground, in places with a clear view of a mountain, or an exposed site on the coast.

Would the pilgrims on their journey to Enlli perhaps have taken any notice of it?

They were built because people were burying their dead in groups and either burying the bones or cremating them. Burying the dead like this would release the spirit and provide an opportunity to commemorate families and honour ancestors. It's also likely there would be ceremonies around the dolmens. These people would honour the gods and celebrate the significance of the solstice and significant events in the calendar. Astronomy would also play an important part in the lives of the people.

It's not known how the stones were moved and lifted, at a time centuries before the pyramids were built in Egypt. The site for the cromlech would be selected, rather than choosing a place where the stones were available. The massive capstones weigh at least 25 tonnes and it would have been a tremendous task to move them and the other stones any distance. They were probably built centuries before they became burial places.

To add to the mystery, the centre axis of the majority of them runs north – south and the capstone is angled at $23\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$, which is the tilt of the earth in relation to the sun.

What is the significance of this?

By now, only the large stones are to be seen in Llŷn, the soil and stones that covered them have disappeared. We can see where the burial chamber was, under the capstone, and the entrance between two of the standing stones. This entrance is what gives it the name of 'portal tomb'.

Cromlech Bachwen (SH 40774949)



Cromlech Bachwen (cromlech at Bachwen), Clynnog Fawr

Directions: On the A499 (Caernarfon to Pwllheli), almost opposite Clynnog Church, follow a farm road towards Bachwen (on the right). The path to the cromlech bears left.

This is a traditional cromlech (dolmen) but with over 100 cup-shaped hollows on the upper surface of the capstone. They were much more conspicuous in the mid-C19th. Some of the hollows were linked by grooves. Is there some astrological symbolism here? They may be connected with magic and people's relationship with another world.

Standing Stones



Maen Hir Meillionen, Boduan

It's still a mystery exactly when these stones were set up, but experts agree they were erected in the early Bronze Age (2500-1500 BC). We can only wonder why these stately stones stand in the middle of fields, within walls or were used as gateposts in entrances.

Not every stone that looks like one of these standing stones (*maen hir* in Welsh, plural *meini hirion*) is a genuine one, and some may have been moved for some reason from their original sites.



Is there any significance in where they stand, in relation to nearby mountains such as Garn Fadrun or Rhiw – sacred places in ancient times? Are they the gravestones of heroes or tribal leaders? Were they used in 'pagan' ceremonies with a Christian element possibly added later? Were they put there to help with astrological study? Is there any significance in their sites in relation to the seasons, sunrise on the Summer Solstice or the cycle of the moon? Or were they signposts to direct travellers in earlier centuries? Who knows?

They weren't erected where they are now just by chance, because moving them there from some distance would have been a major task.

They were moved to their present positions with the intention, probably, of turning them into Christian sites.

These are the two standing stones (*meini hirion*) nearest to Llŷn Maritime Museum:

Maen Hir Gwynus (standing stone at Gwynus), Pistyll (SH 346421)

Maen Hir Penfras (standing stone at Penfras), Llwyndyys (SH 380417)

And here is where you'll find the most conspicuous standing stones in Llŷn –

Maen Hir Nant y Gledrydd (standing stone in Nant y Gledrydd), Madrun (SH 29353650)

Maen Hir Sarn Mellteyrn (standing stone at Sarn Mellteyrn) (SH 23713284)

Maen Hir Plas ym Mhenllech (standing stone at Plas ym Mhenllech), Penllech (SH 22253452)

Maen Hir Llangwnnadr (standing stone at Llangwnnadr) (SH 20803250)

Maen Hir Tan y Foel (standing stone at Tan y Foel), Rhiw (SH 22612767)

Maen Hir Pandy (standing stone at Pandy), Nanhoron (SH28803230)

Maen Hir Bodegroes (standing stone at Bodegroes), Efailnewydd (SH35783536)

Meini Hirion Tir Gwyn (standing stones at Tir Gwyn), Llannor (SH34423913)

Maen Hir Glan Afon (standing stone at Glan Afon), Abererch (SH392360)

Maen Hir y Gwystl (standing stone Gwystl),
Y Ffôr (SH40003901)

Local Standing Stones



Maen Hir Penfras (standing stone at Penfras) Llwyndyys (SH 37954196)

Directions: In Llwyndyys (on the road from Caernarfon to Pwllheli, you will need to leave the A499 at 1.4km north of Y Ffôr) turn into the farm road for Penfras Uchaf and follow it to the end. Go along the right hand side of the house and into a field, where the stone can be seen on the right.

It's a striking standing stone, about 2.5m high. The mountains of the Eifl and Moel Carnguwch form a backdrop for it, and we would naturally wonder whether there was a connection between it and these mountains, and with the Holy Well nearby close to Eglwys Carnguwch.

Maen Hir Gwynus (Standing Stone at Gwynus), Pistyll (SH 34604210)

Directions: Travelling from Llithfaen towards Pistyll and Nefyn on the B4417, turn left near the bottom of the hill and go towards Gwynus Golf Course. Walk along the public footpath and turn left, walking for about 1km and then left again across the fields.

It probably originally stood on open ground. It's too big to be a gatepost, and the name of the three fields around it in 1841 was Cae Maen Hir (field + maen hir in Welsh = standing stone).

Cairns in Llŷn



Moel Carnguwch and Tre'r Ceiri (left)



Towards the end of the Neolithic Age the Beaker Folk (2800 – 1800BC) came to live in Britain. We don't have much evidence from that age but a 'cist' grave, with stone sides to it, has been found in Llithfaen. The body of a man about 1.8 metres tall was lying on its right side in it, together with a beaker.

But by the Early Bronze Age people usually cremated their dead and buried them under cairns, often on hilltops like the ones in Llŷn. A simple cairn of stones would be built, with a circle of larger stones around its base.

They vary in size, and the largest in Llŷn is on Moel Carnguwch (barren hill of Carnguwch) (SH 35004290). There was probably a conical tower of stones on it, but that was later destroyed. The site would have been even more striking with the stones in place.

The local people would congregate here at Halloween to light a bonfire but they would have to hurry home before the *Hwch Ddu Gwta*, a sow from the supernatural world, could catch them.

The local people believed the summits were places of the supernatural and that they were magical and frightening. Tribal leaders would be honoured by being buried there and it's easy to believe the cairn would be an excellent memorial to them. From there, they could continue to dominate. These could also be memorials to people's traditions or mark their territory and authority.

There are a number of cairns in the area, but by now they are in poor condition. They can be seen on the summit of Eifl (SH 36504470), Mynydd Rhiw (SH 21002940) and there are others, by now less conspicuous, on Garn Fadrun, Tre'r Ceiri, and Foel Gron, Mynytho. This was known as *Carnedd y Brenin Engan* (the cairn of King Engan) – on the most conspicuous summit in his territory.

There is also a cairn near Castell Odo on Mynydd yr Ystum, called Barclodiad y Gawres (apronful of the giantess) (SH 18702460).

Iron Age Hillforts – Introduction



Creigiau Gwinau, Rhiw

There are two hillforts of some importance in the Nefyn area, on Tre'r Ceiri (37304460), one of the summit of the Eifl, and on Garn Boduan (SH 31203940) looking down on Nefyn.

There are a number of them in Llŷn, including those on Garn Fadrun, Castell Odo on Mynydd yr Ystum and Creigiau Gwinau, on Mynydd Graig, Rhiw. Penhengaer (SH32303147) and Nant y Castell (SH32153145) are Iron Age hillforts, one on each side of the A499 as if they were protecting the valley between Llanbedrog and Abersoch.

But some also protected the coast, like the one on the peninsula at Porthdinllaen (SH 27504160) and Castell Ysgubor Hen, Cilan (SH 30372470)) which is in a striking location at the top of Pared Mawr, above Porth Ceiriad.

People generally believe that the Celts established themselves in Wales during the Iron Age, 750 BC - 43 AD, and that they were responsible for building the hill forts that are so common in Llŷn. By now, some people believe a form of the Brythonic language was spoken earlier than that, and that Bronze Age people had started to build hill forts. Despite the name, they are not all located on hilltops.

The Iron Age people were farmers, and it's obvious they planned the forts to protect families and animals.

There are ditches, and banks of stone and sometimes also of wood and earth around the forts – single or double.

There is evidence that forts were renovated or restored at different times, and so the older building work can be seen under the renovated fort.

In the west, the round huts had stone walls, as they have in Llŷn. The wooden supports for the roof would rest on the walls and the roof would be of straw, rushes or turf. The floor would be hardened earth, and it's easy to believe rushes would be spread on it, and screens put up to separate the living areas from the beds.

To complicate things further, there may have been defences and buildings added in the Dark Ages (400 – 900 AD) on top of Iron Age forts. This is when the nation of Wales was formed, and the Welsh language evolved from the Brythonic.

Round huts were built recently at Felin Uchaf, Rhoshirwaun as part of the Felin Uchaf, Rhoshirwaun Project – a Visionary Social Enterprise .



Tre'r Ceiri, Llanaelhaearn (SH 373446)



Directions: You can walk to Tre'r Ceiri, either by following the path for the mountain on the road from Llanaelhaearn to Llithfaen (B4417) almost opposite the entrance to Gellia (SH 38744155) or from Pen Nant (SH 35314408) which is on the road from Llithfaen to Nant Gwrtheyrn on one of the Llithfaen Heritage Paths.

Tre'r Ceiri (settlements of the giants) is one of the most significant forts in the British Isles, its form and buildings are particularly well preserved. It was used during the Roman period (100BC – 400 AD) and probably stands on the remains of an earlier fort. It's on the eastern summit of the Eifl mountains, with a clear view in all directions and especially towards Segontium, the headquarters of the Romans.

The ramparts are up to 3.5m high in places, and within them are up to 150 round houses. As many as 400 people lived there at times. The diameter of the houses varies from 3m to 8m, the largest ones were built in the early stage and the smaller ones later. The houses vary in shape: some rectangular, some square, some D shaped. Some of them may have been workshops or for storage.

After entering Tre'r Ceiri through the entrance, follow the path to the left, towards the north. Various items have been discovered there, such as cooking equipment, iron tools and a 'fibula' which is an item of gold jewellery, and a porcelain necklace from Egypt. This is evidence people were living there during the Romano-British period.

In the 1990s, Gwynedd Archaeological Trust excavated and restored the site. There's a hole in every new stone that was put in.

Garn Boduan (SH312394)



Directions: Take the B4354 (Boduan – Y Ffôr) from the A497 (Nefyn – Pwllheli) for 0.3km. Parking area on the left.

This is one of three striking Iron Age hill forts in Llŷn, from the same period as the forts at Tre'r Ceiri and Garn Fadrun (1000 BC/AD). This one was built on a summit of 279m, above the steep slopes and with a clear view in all directions.

There are about 170 stone houses at this site, the majority round ones but the others of various shapes. These weren't all homes for people, and it's unlikely they were all used at the same time. There's reason to believe there was a smithy amongst them.

The fort has two ramparts, showing two periods of construction. It's possible they were about 2m high, but we can't be certain because they're ruins by now. There were two entrances, one in the south-east (which is used these days) and the other in the north-east. Inside the fort there are two wells; those would be essential for a defensive site like this.

There are also signs of defences from the Dark Ages on the summit, and according to tradition it was the home of Buan, from the C 7th. Some people believe he was the grandson of Llywarch Hen and that he established Boduan Church.

There were excavations here in 1954, and a few items were found, such as pieces of Roman pottery, beads, and stones for a sling.

There was a fire on Garn Boduan in the 1970s and its effects are still to be seen.



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Find out more about prehistoric life by visiting Tre'r Ceiri - One of the best preserved Iron Age hillforts in the British Isles.