

# Great Archaeological Sites in Swansea



## 3. THE GREAT CARN ON CEFN BRYN



The Gower peninsula seems to have occupied a special place in the spirituality of Neolithic and Bronze Age people. Although it is only 20km long by 12km at its widest point, it contains six Neolithic chambered tombs, clustered around Rhossili Down and Cefn Bryn. Although chambered tombs were no longer used for burial after the Late Neolithic, the places where they had been built continued to be a focus for centuries afterwards, with large numbers of Bronze Age cairns constructed on both Rhossili Down and Cefn Bryn. There has never been any proper archaeological excavation of the cairns on Rhossili Down, but some of those on Cefn Bryn were examined by Swansea University in the 1970s and 1980s.

The structure known as the Great Carn (SS 4903 9056) is one of these. It stands only 100m from the chambered tomb known as Arthur's Stone or Maen Ceti. Although it is much less showy – just a low, flattish mound made of lumps of the local conglomerate rock – it is still impressive, and at 20m across it is the largest cairn on the ridge, hence its name. The excavators found that the heap of stones concealed a ring of boulders 12m across. It was not clear at what stage in the cairn's construction this ring was laid out, whether it was the first thing to be constructed before it was filled in with stone inside and outside, or whether it had originally been intended as an outside kerb.

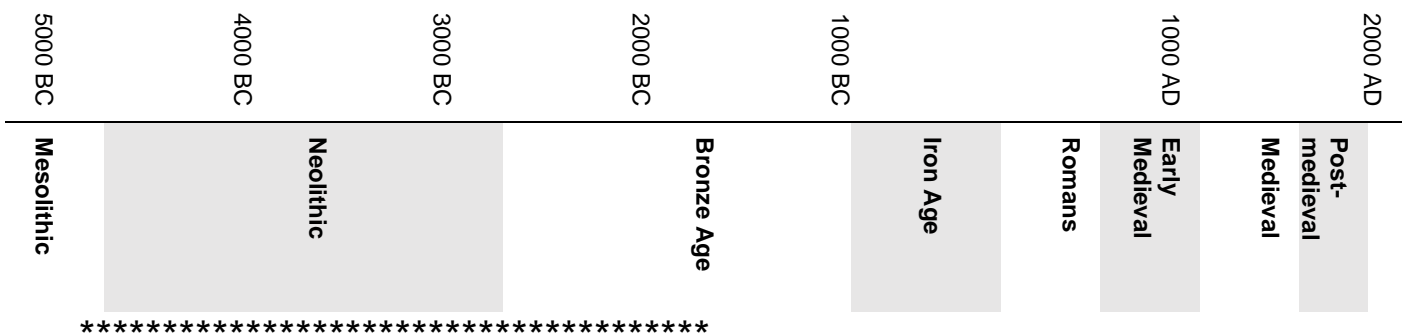
Near the middle was a pit in which, on the remains of a decayed plank within a stone setting, were traces of bone. However, the soil was so acidic that only traces of the

bone remained, and it was not possible to obtain a radiocarbon date. This seems to have been the burial at the heart of the cairn. However, it was not the first time that the site had been used. The stones of the cairn had been heaped up on the ancient ground surface, but underneath that was a bedding trench, a pit, a posthole and a hearth along with sherds of the Neolithic pottery that archaeologists call Peterborough ware, which was in use when some of the Welsh chambered tombs were sealed up for the last time. And even that was not the start of human interest in this particular spot – a scatter of Mesolithic flints was also found under the cairn. Perhaps this was just a coincidence, debris from a hunting party that no-one afterwards knew anything about, but the builders of the cairn cannot have been unaware that they were overlooked by Arthur’s Stone.



The Great Carn stands on open access common land at the western end of Cefn Bryn, above the village of Reynoldstone. On the north side of the unclassified road along the top of Cefn Bryn is a rough pull-in area where cars can be parked. A path leads northwards across the moor to Arthur’s stone, with the Great Carn a little way to the west. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 159, Explorer Series sheet 164.

**Timeline** (the asterisks indicate the possible time-span)



You can learn more about this site, and other similar archaeological sites in Wales, by going to <https://www.archwilio.org.uk/arch/>. Please read and observe the Conditions of Use. The Great Carn has the PRN (Primary Record Number) 00078w, and Arthur’s Stone is 00068w You can search for other similar sites here too. You can contact us via social media or through the methods given at the bottom of the page. See more prehistoric monuments at [http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/fun\\_rit/english/fun\\_ritmain.html](http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/fun_rit/english/fun_ritmain.html)