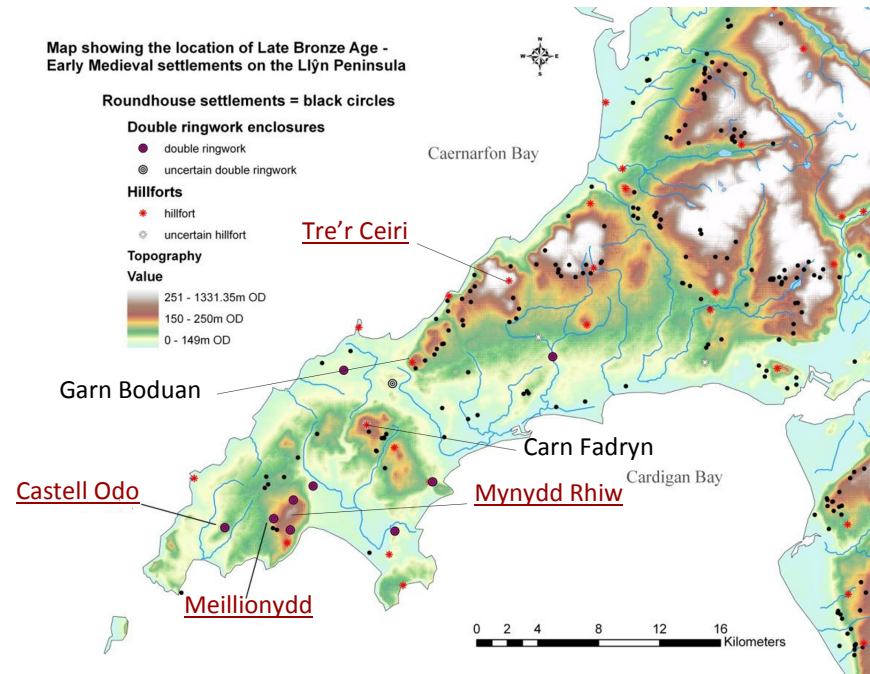




The Meillionydd Project



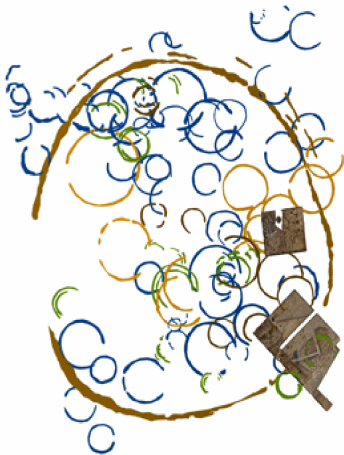
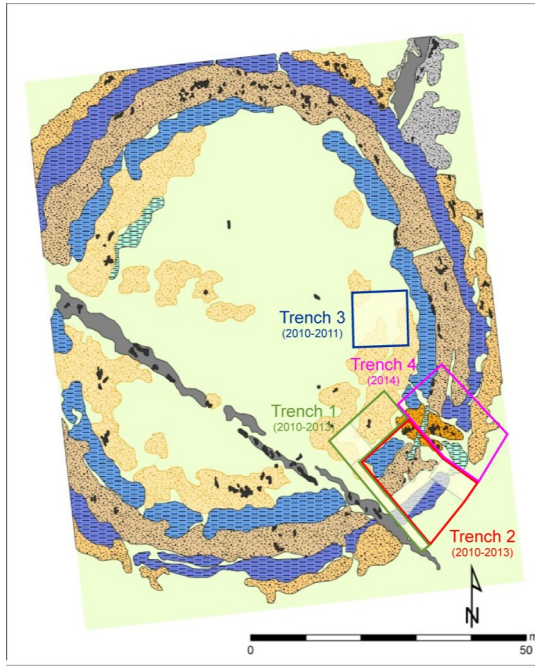
Sites on the Llŷn peninsula



This area of outstanding natural beauty — the crooked finger of Wales — is home to not only amazing beaches, headlands and wildlife, it is also an area packed full of history and heritage. This booklet serves as a educational guide for visitors to the Iron Age hilltop enclosure of Meillionydd. It also briefly explores the prehistory of the Llŷn peninsula, from the Neolithic axe factory on Mynydd Rhiw, to other Iron Age hillforts, such as Tre'r Ceiri.

What is Meillionydd?

Situated on a low hill, c. 4 miles from Aberdaron, is the hillfort of Meillionydd. This is a double ringwork enclosure: it has two circular banks of earth and stone forming its boundary.



Within the enclosure are a number of timber or stone roundhouses which housed several family groups over a period of several centuries. The enclosure was also used for communal gatherings, such as festivals and feasts.

Why excavate Meillionydd?

Although there are ten double ringwork sites on the Llŷn peninsula, only one other has been excavated: the site of Castell Odo was explored by Leslie Alcock in the 1950s. Double ringwork enclosures are mainly found on the Llŷn peninsula and they reveal that the communities living here in the first millennium BC had very distinctive identities.

What have we found?

The excavations at Meillionydd by Bangor University began in July 2010. We have demonstrated there to be two main phases to the site—a circular enclosure made from a timber fence and ditch, with timber roundhouses, dating to the Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age (c.900–400BC); followed by a settlement made of two circular banks, with stone roundhouses, dating to the Middle Iron Age (c.400–200BC).

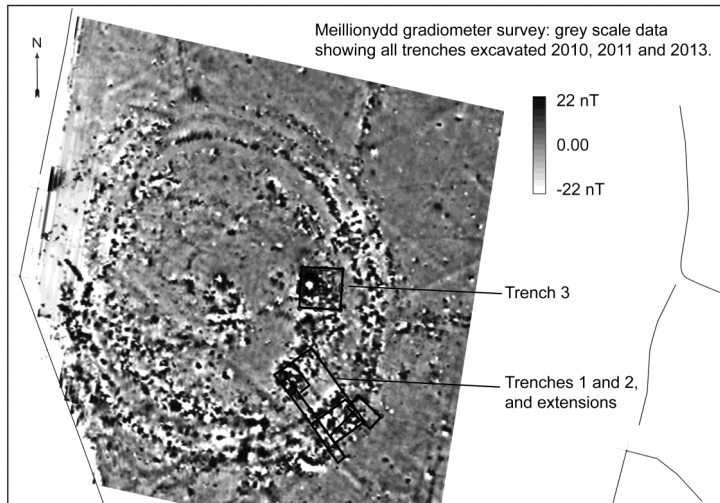
Enclosures

Entrances

Houses

Enclosures

Our trenches on the east side of the enclosure, next to the entrance-way, show that there was an early ditch and timber fence which enclosed the site, followed by two concentric banks of earth and stone. In-between the banks was a quarry-hollow, where the material was dug out to make the banks.



Entrances

The entrance to the enclosure is positioned on the eastern side of the site. The first timber enclosure had a gate-house and a cobbled track-way led through this area. The second enclosure was more elaborate and impressive; there were two entrances, through both the inner and outer banks, and the inner enclosure had an in-turned entrance-way. A cobbled track-way ran through them. The track-ways were made of roughly packed stones which made a hard surface ideal for a large amount of traffic—animals, carts and people.

The picture below shows the postholes of the early timber enclosure fence and gatehouse: each person is standing in one of the postholes.



Houses

Trench 3 provided evidence for at least 2 timber roundhouses and possibly 3 stone roundhouses.

The first timber house was large, spanning 12m in diameter, with a central hearth (see below) dating to 753–410 cal. BC.



The well-preserved stone roundhouse was 8m in diameter and this dated to 384–203 cal. BC. The wall sat on top of the earlier hearth. A stone-lined pit for food storage was found in the floor.

Houses

This photo shows the stone-lined pit in the roundhouse in trench 3.

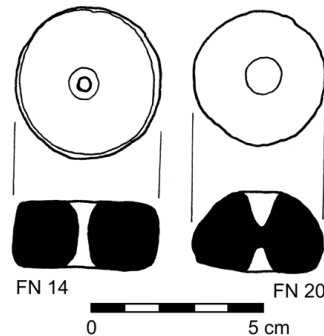


Perhaps the most unexpected discovery at Meillionydd was a stone roundhouse in trench 2, which was built into the outer bank and on the floor of the quarry-hollow. Its position next to the entrance-way points to it being a particularly important building. It post-dates the bank.



Houses

The floor of the roundhouse in trench 2 had a ring of postholes to support a roof, a drainage gully, and a central hearth. A lead spindlewhorl (see image on right) was also discovered, alongside a sherd of later Iron Age pottery. The pottery is an exciting find; this is rarely found in the Iron Age of northwest Wales, where the acid soils hinder preservation and the communities did not use much pottery. Stone objects were discovered in all of the roundhouses, such as grinders and hammers. Three spindlewhorls (see below), for spinning wool, were found in the stone roundhouse in trench 3.



Postholes



A posthole is a hole dug into the ground for a wooden post. The wooden posts at Meillionydd no longer survive, but the holes and

stones which supported them do (see image above). Experimental archaeology has revealed that the prepared timber post-end was probably slightly charred in a fire to prevent decay. The post would have then been erected in a pit, and stones

would be packed around the post to hold it in place. The posts would help support a roof and could be used to make a wall for a house.



Roundhouse reconstructions at St Fagans

Reconstructing Roundhouses

About 2 miles from Meillionydd is Menter y Felin Uchaf, where you can experience Iron Age roundhouse reconstructions.

<http://www.felinuchaf.org/>



Images show the construction of a roundhouse, and inside the main roundhouse, which is 10m wide.



Overview, trenches 1 & 2

Phase 1 (timber enclosure)

Lilac: early timber palisade and gatehouse.

Light blue: early ditched enclosure.

Dark blue: timber roundhouse, probably contemporary with the timber palisade.

Orange: early phase stone cobbling.

Phase 2 (stone enclosure)

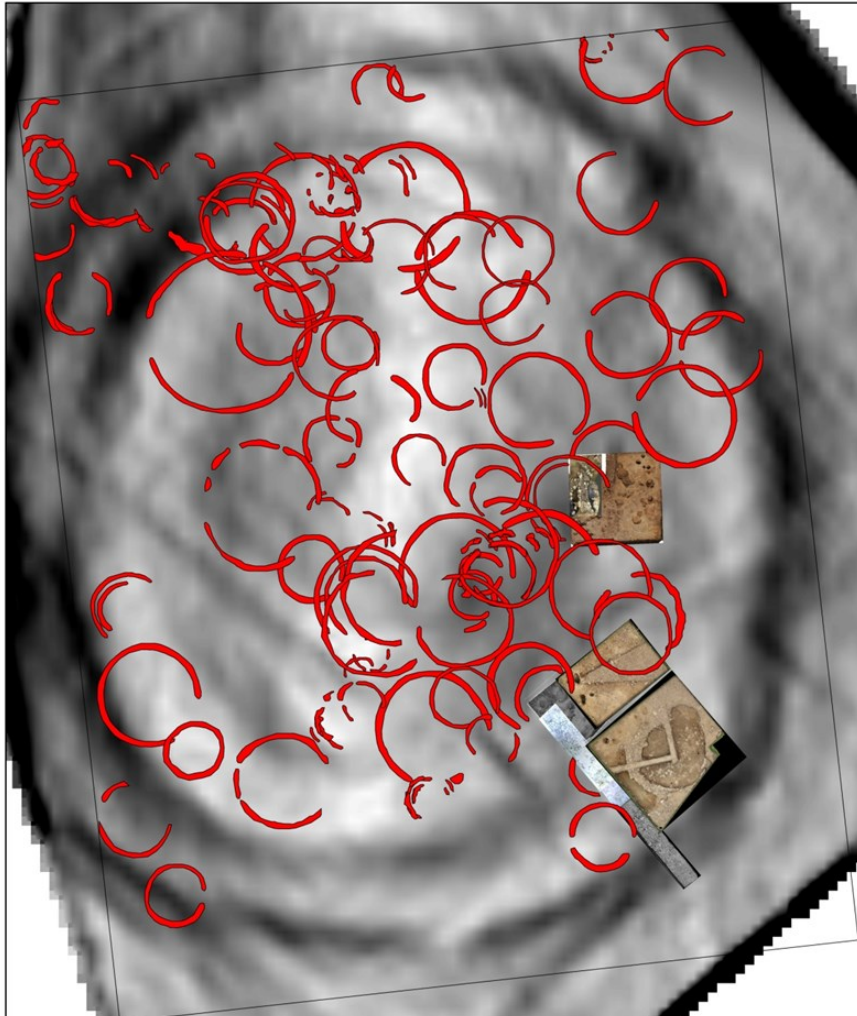
Red: inner and outer banks of the later phase, forming the double ringwork.

Yellow: cobbled surface of the entrance passage.

Green: Stone roundhouse set into the outer bank.



Site overview



Ground Penetrating Radar survey, showing the trenches and roundhouses of different periods.

Open Days

The open days and school visits, held each summer, form part of a hillfort festival, run together with Menter y Felin Uchaf, the Llŷn Landscape Partnership, and the Llŷn AONB. The events involve activities for all the community.



Mynydd Rhiw



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Meillionydd is situated on the south-western slopes of Mynydd Rhiw, but it is not the only prehistoric site on the hill. Two other double ringwork enclosures, namely Conion and Castell Caeron, as well as the hillfort of Creigiau Gwineu, are located on the slopes, and monuments of earlier prehistory are found on the hilltop itself.

[Neolithic Axe Factory](#) [Burial Monuments](#)

Neolithic Axe Factory

Situated at the top of Mynydd Rhiw is the Neolithic Axe Factory. The Neolithic period dates from c. 4000–2500 BC. The site consists of five circular hollows that stretch in a line, running c. 90m along the hilltop. These are Neolithic quarries for Mynydd Rhiw stone, used for the manufacture of polished stone axes and tools. Polished stone axes were functional tools, but they were also highly charged, symbolic objects used for gift-exchange, ceremony and burial. During excavation in the late 1950s, artefact-types commonly associated with Neolithic sites in the Irish Sea area were discovered, although no polished axes were found. However,



many rough-outs for axes were discovered in the excavations, and again in 2007, when the site was re-excavated by the National Museum Wales.

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Burial monuments

Mynydd Rhiw also has two Neolithic burial tombs (Tan y Muriau and Bron Heulog) on its lower slopes, as well as four Bronze Age hilltop burial cairns. The Bronze Age cairns probably belong to the Early or Middle Bronze Age (c. 2000–1150 BC). They are mounds of stone and earth covering burials or cremations. The Bronze Age cairns have not been excavated, although the largest is c. 14m in diameter and stands 3m high.

The Neolithic axe factory, and the concentration of burial monuments on Mynydd Rhiw, reveal that



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this hill had very special, ceremonial associations in prehistory. The hill continued to be highly significant in the first millennium BC, as the unusual clustering of four hilltop enclosures here reveals.

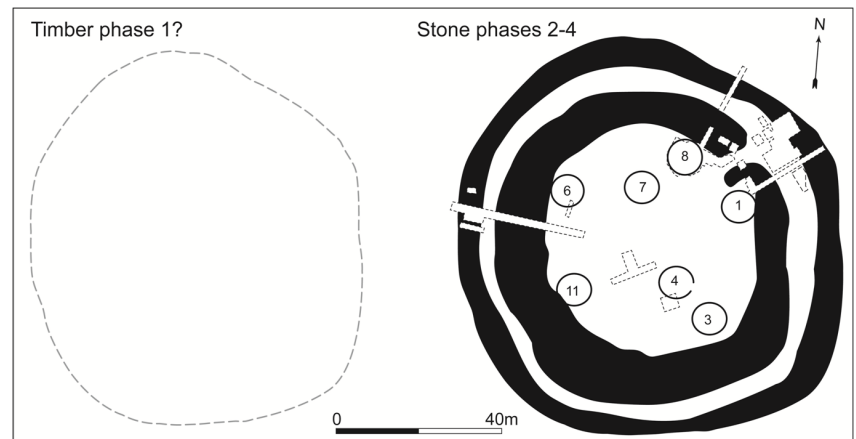
Castell Odo

Castell Odo is very similar to Meillionydd, but the banks are more monumental in size as the monument is much better preserved



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than Meillionydd. Alcock's excavations found an early timber settlement with a collection of Late Bronze Age ceramics. The Iron Age embanked enclosure had evidence for at least 8 roundhouses.



Tre'r Ceiri



Also worth visiting are the hillforts of Garn Boduan and Carn Fadryn which are marked on the map on page 2.



Further Information

<http://meillionydd.bangor.ac.uk>

