



CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

# newsletter

Autumn 2008

# Trust acquires Beacon Ring prehistoric hillfort

The Trust has recently acquired the magnificent Beacon Ring hillfort which crowns Long Mountain in eastern Montgomeryshire. The main aim of this new venture is to ensure the preservation and long-term management of the site and its environs for the benefit and enjoyment of the general public. The interior of the hillfort is currently densely wooded (see box opposite). Now that these trees are reaching maturity it is hoped to find a way of returning the interior of the site to upland meadow, just as it was before the early 1950s.

Little appears to be known about the hillfort – not even the origin of its name. But with extensive views far across mid Wales and Shropshire it would certainly have been a good site for a beacon. Its Welsh name – Caer Digoll (‘Digoll camp’) – comes from Cefn Digoll (‘unbroken ridge’) the Welsh name for Long Mountain. The site has not been excavated, but



Aerial imagery – © GeoPerspectives & COWI A/S



**Left:** Beacon Ring from the air in 2006, showing the E II R monogram, picked out in pine and beech trees inside the hillfort defences, planted to celebrate Queen Elizabeth's coronation in 1953. Many of the trees inside the hillfort have now reached maturity, like the woodland at the top of the picture that has recently been felled. The compounds to the right of the hillfort house the two tall masts visible on the skyline of Long Mountain. These were built in the 1970s and 80s, the taller of the two housing the main television transmitter for mid Wales.

**Above:** view of the perfectly preserved rampart and ditch near the southern entrance to the hillfort. In the long term it is also hoped to return the interior of the hillfort to grassland.

like the well-known local hillforts at the Breiddin and Ffridd Faldwyn, it was no-doubt first built and occupied at some time in the period between the later Bronze Age and the early Iron Age – after 1000 BC and before the arrival of the Romans in about AD 50.

The hillfort lies close to the ancient border between England and Wales and appears in a number of early myths and legends. One of the earliest of these is in the 9th- or 10th-century saga known as *Canu Llywarch Hen* ('The song of Llywarch the Old'), in a passage about hostilities in the 7th century between the British prince Cadwallon and Edwin, the Anglo-Saxon, king of Northumbria. Beacon Ring is described, somewhat poetically, as the *lluest* or camp of Cadwallon where he stayed for seven months, carrying out seven skirmishes daily.



## 'Going Dutch'

In the longer term the site will become the focus of a wide range of educational activities to be sponsored by the Trust. In view of concerns about the damage that tree growth and harvesting might have upon buried archaeological deposits (see box below) one of the more immediate and pressing concerns is to look at the best way of returning the site to a more sympathetic land use regime. Fortunately, we have already gained the ardent support of Dutch archaeological colleagues from the Ruud van Beek Foundation in addressing these issues. Having been shown round the site on a visit to Wales several years ago they became concerned about the question of the sustainable management of archaeological sites in the countryside and have now commissioned us to carry out a study of the various issues involved in acquiring and managing the site.



## How to get there

One of the most enjoyable ways of reaching Beacon Ring is to take the road uphill from Leighton and then join the Offa's Dyke Path at SJ 256053, opposite Pant-y-bwch (see map opposite). This walk of just over half a mile approaches the hillfort entrance from the south-west and gives magnificent views westwards over the Severn valley and mid Wales.

*Top: excavations inside Credenhill hillfort in 2008. This project by Herefordshire Archaeology, the county archaeological service, is looking at the impact of afforestation on the interior of the site. Bottom: Beacon Ring Iron Age hillfort from the air in 1983*

### info

Keep up to date with what's happening at Beacon Ring by visiting the Beacon Ring hillfort diary: <http://www.cpat.org.uk/beacon>

If you have any views about Beacon Ring or would like to help in any way:

contact Chris Martin at CPAT (see address and telephone number on back page, or by emailing [chrismartin@cpat.org.uk](mailto:chrismartin@cpat.org.uk))



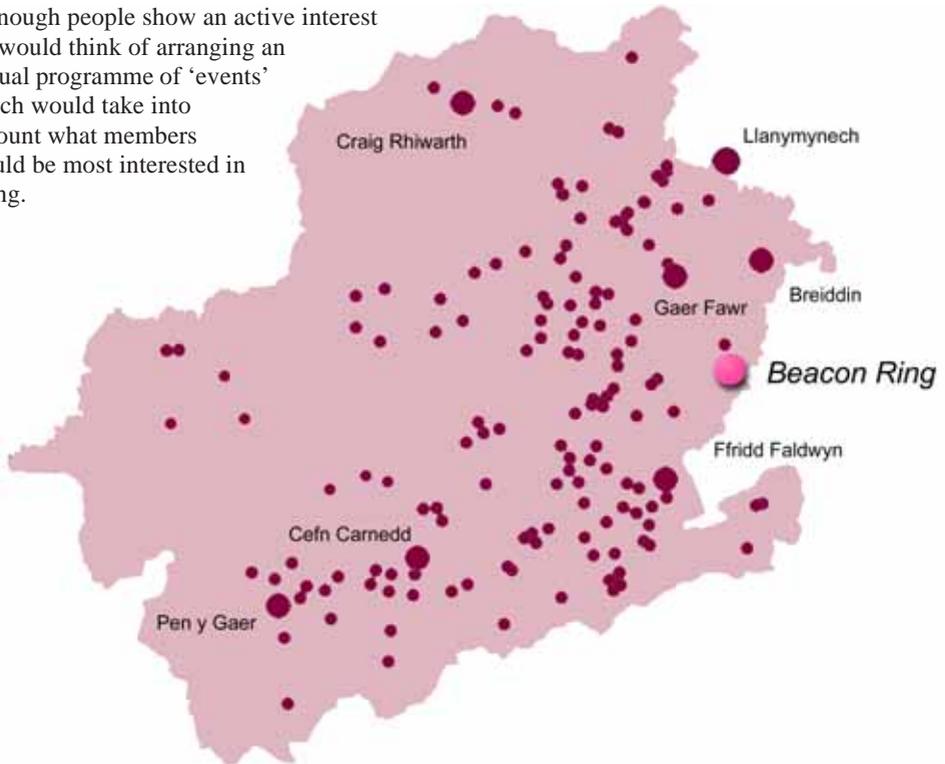
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# Would you like to join our 'Hillfort Club'?

On the back of the Beacon Ring project we are thinking of setting up a 'Hillfort Club' – focusing on Montgomeryshire at least initially – which could involve things like site visits, learning what is known about them, and talks about hillforts and life in the Iron Age.

To get the club off the ground we will need a certain 'critical mass' of active members who would like to take part. We would like to try to arrange visits to as many sites as possible spread out over a number of years. Bear in mind that many hillforts are (not surprisingly) at the tops of hills and may involve a tiring walk! Children under 16 would need to be accompanied by a responsible adult.

If enough people show an active interest we would think of arranging an annual programme of 'events' which would take into account what members would be most interested in doing.



*There are perhaps over 150 Iron Age hillforts in Montgomeryshire. The map names some of the better-known sites.*

## info

If you are interested in joining in: contact Bill Britnell at CPAT (see address and telephone number on back page, or by emailing [billbritnell@cpat.org.uk](mailto:billbritnell@cpat.org.uk))

# medieval lime-making in Betws-yn-Rhos



The kiln shown above, found during excavations in advance of development by Jones & Fishwick Ltd in Betws-yn-Rhos, is one of the few reliably-dated medieval limekilns in Wales. Charcoal taken from the floor of the kiln has provided a radiocarbon date suggesting that it probably dates to somewhere between the later 10th to earlier 12th century AD. The kiln lay close to St Michael's church. It may have been used to provide lime for the construction of the medieval church – the precursor of the existing Victorian church – which is known to have been in existence by at least the 1250s.

*The kiln, constructed of large blocks of limestone and sandstone, showed clear evidence of burning on the inner face of the walls. It had a flue on one side and would have been loaded with limestone from the top. Charcoal on the floor of the kiln suggests that it was fired with fuel from local coppiced alder woodland.*

## info

For further information about limekilns see:  
R. Williams's *Limekilns and Limeburning* (Shire Publications, 1989)

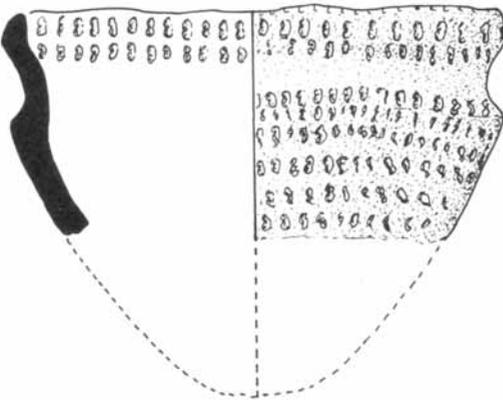
# Neolithic man at Borrass Quarry

In June and July a team of archaeologists from CPAT uncovered the remains of a Neolithic settlement at Tarmac's Borrass quarry near Wrexham. The site was first discovered while carrying out a watching brief during the removal of topsoil and subsoil in preparation for gravel extraction at the new Holt Estate section of the quarry. Tarmac suspended operations for the duration of the dig to allow the remains to be fully recorded.

Patterns of post-holes and associated 'cooking pits' hint at a settlement made up of a number of circular timber buildings. The pits contained fire-cracked stones, charcoal and burnt soil as well as many fragments of pottery (see box opposite) decorated with 'bird bone' and 'twisted cord' impressions. As a whole, the site makes a significant contribution to our knowledge of human activity in north-east Wales during the Neolithic period, in about 3000 BC.

The dig caused quite a flurry of interest in the media over the summer, being covered amongst others by BBC Television News, S4C, the Liverpool Daily Post and the Chester Evening Leader.





*Above: Piecing together the past! Fragments of decorated later Neolithic pottery from Borras. Some belong to types of vessels with thick rims and rounded bases of a kind found in small quantities at other sites in Wales, especially along the north and south coasts and the borderland, as well as elsewhere in Britain.*

*Left: Drawing of a round-bottomed pot under a foot across at the rim, similar to ones found at Borras. This one is from the West Kennet long-barrow in Wiltshire.*

Richard Hulse, Tarmac's Estates & Geology Manager for the North West commented 'We are delighted to have facilitated the discovery of a site of such important archaeological significance during the course of our operations. This find demonstrates how close cooperation between Tarmac and our consultant archaeologists has enabled us to record and assess the site as part of our environmental management commitments'.

## 'a groundbreaking discovery'

Ian Lucas, MP for Wrexham, visited the dig and praised Tarmac for allowing the work to take place. Talking after his visit to the site he said 'It really was a fascinating visit . . . the site is a groundbreaking discovery'. Mr Lucas went on to say 'I was very impressed with Tarmac's attitude towards the site. I believe the way that Tarmac has provided support for the work has proved vital and they should be commended for this'.

Samples of charcoal from the pits will be sent for radiocarbon dating to enable the site to be dated more precisely. Analysis of burnt plant remains in samples taken from the pits will also provide information about the diet of Neolithic people in the area.





*Left: Archaeologist Ian Grant of CPAT being interviewed about the Borrás dig by BBC Television News.*

*Above: Visit to the site by Wrexham's MP, Ian Lucas who said afterwards 'The discovery of the site and the large amount of pottery found there will really help to shed light on the Neolithic era in North Wales'.*

The Trust is grateful to Tarmac for all the help and support they have given during the project. It is expected that further excavation will be carried out in about twelve months time, when further topsoil stripping will take place.

### info

For further news stories about Borrás and links to other websites see: <http://www.cpat.org.uk/news/news.htm>

For other Neolithic sites in Wales see Frances Lynch, Stephen Aldhouse-Green and Jeffrey L. Davies's, *Prehistoric Wales* (2000)

For Neolithic pottery see Alex Gibson and Ann Woods's, *Prehistoric Pottery for the Archaeologist* (1990)

# Fforest Fawr — the Great Forest of Brecknock

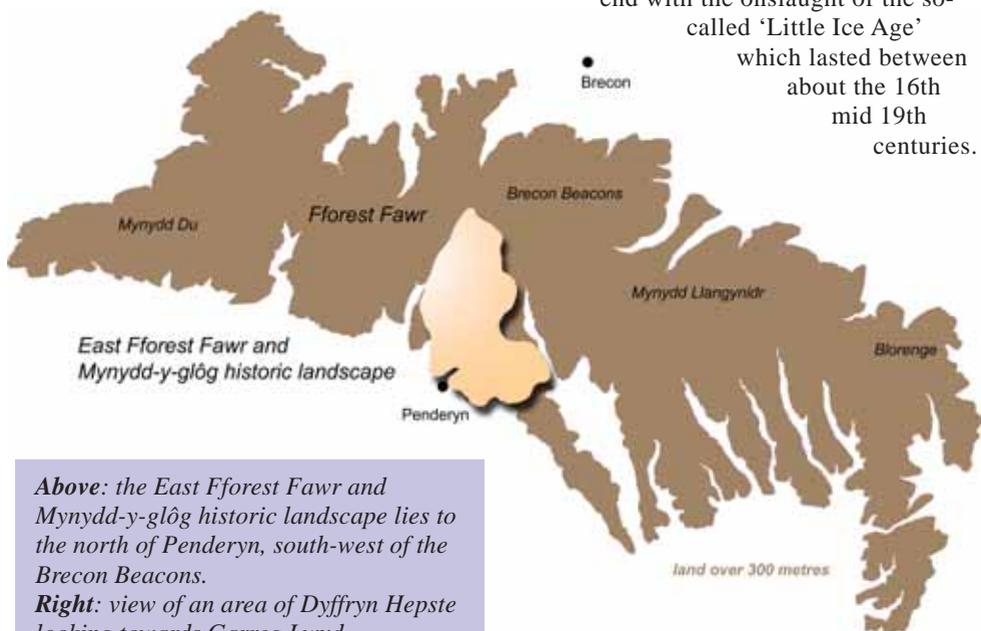
Fforest Fawr – Great Forest of Brecknock – lies towards the western end of the mountain range south of Brecon which defines the boundary between mid and south Wales. For over three hundred years in the later Middle Ages it formed one of the largest hunting preserves in Wales, covering an area of almost a hundred square miles, belonging to the Anglo-Norman lords of Brecon and the Crown.

The eastern part of this area, between Fan Fawr to the north and the upland valleys of Dyffryn Hepste and Cwm Cadlan to the south, constitutes the

registered historic landscape of East Fforest Fawr and Mynydd-y-glôg – a well-preserved landscape rich in the remains of ancient settlement and land use and industrial archaeology.

During periods of more favourable climatic conditions it was feasible for people to live and make a living at greater altitudes than is possible today, creating settlements and fields that were abandoned once the climate deteriorated again.

One milder period occurred in the earlier Bronze Age, during the second and third millennia BC. Another took place during a ‘medieval warm period’ which came to an end with the onslaught of the so-called ‘Little Ice Age’ which lasted between about the 16th mid 19th centuries.



*Above: the East Fforest Fawr and Mynydd-y-glôg historic landscape lies to the north of Penderyn, south-west of the Brecon Beacons.*

*Right: view of an area of Dyffryn Hepste looking towards Garreg Lwyd.*





The remains of the landscapes created during these milder periods were abandoned once the climate deteriorated and now survive more or less untouched on the edge of the moorland. Similar early sites on lower-lying ground are more vulnerable and have been mostly cleared away or destroyed by later field clearance and agriculture.

Our study of the East Fforest Fawr and Mynydd-y-glôg historic landscape area was funded by Cadw and is now available on the internet. A number of more intensive studies of both the field archaeology and the industrial archaeology of Fforest Fawr have been published by the Royal Commission (see info box).

*Stone banked enclosure in the moorland area towards the head of Dyffryn Hepste, looking south-eastward towards Cefn Cadlan. Other sites which survive in this area include a palimpsest of prehistoric and medieval sites including relict field boundaries, stone clearance cairns, house remains, and burial cairns.*

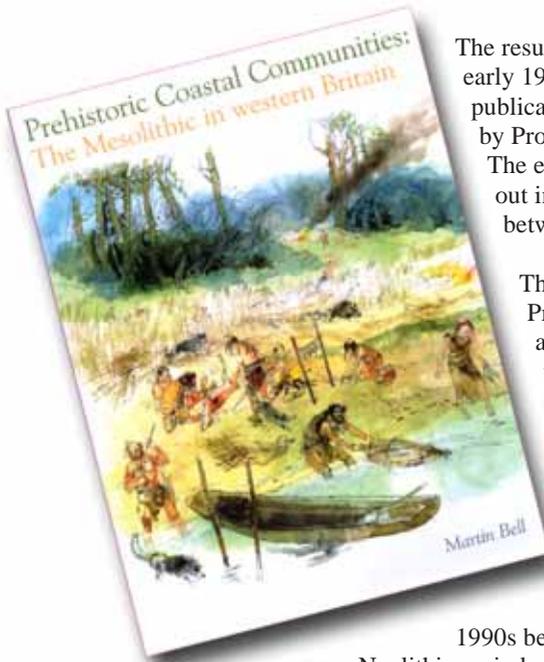
### info

**For the East Fforest Fawr and Mynydd-y-glôg historic landscape see** <http://www.cpat.org.uk/projects/longer/histland/fforest/ffintr.htm>

**For field archaeology in the area see** David Leighton's *Mynydd Du and Fforest Fawr: the evolution of an upland landscape in South Wales* (1998)

**For industrial archaeology in the area see** Stephen Hughes's *The Brecon Forest Tramroads* (1990)

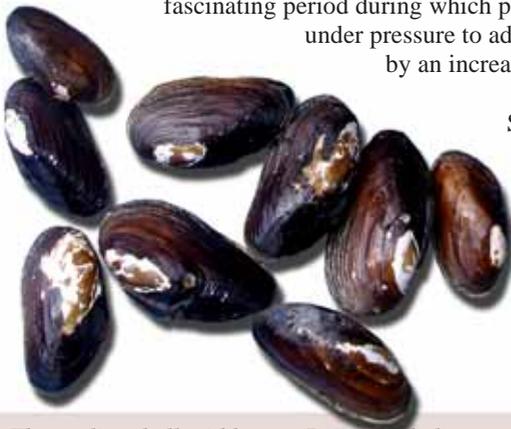
# Prestatyn seafood suppers . . . 4200–3700 BC



The results of the Trust's excavations in Prestatyn the early 1990s feature in this recent specialist publication about prehistoric coastal communities by Professor Martin Bell of Reading University. The excavations, funded by Cadw, were carried out in advance of development in the area between Ysgol Bodnant and the railway.

The earliest evidence for human settlement in Prestatyn has been found in the Bryn Newydd area, to the south-east of the town centre, where activity of the earlier Mesolithic period has been dated to about 8200 BC. Prestatyn then lay over 8 miles inland though sea levels were already gradually rising as the glaciers and ice packs that had formed during the last ice age were gradually melting.

The sites excavated by the Trust in the 1990s belong to the later Mesolithic and early Neolithic periods, between about 4200 and 3700 BC. This is a fascinating period during which peripatetic hunter-gatherers gradually came under pressure to adopt the more sedentary lifestyle demanded by an increasing dependence upon farming.



*The earlier shell middens at Prestatyn belong to the later Mesolithic period and date to about 4200 BC. They contained mussel shells like the ones shown here.*

Six shell middens belonging to this period of transition were discovered close to Ysgol Bodnant, representing food residues discarded by communities living here, at least initially, on a seasonal basis. Four of the middens – the earliest ones, dating to about 4200 BC – were largely composed of mussel shells, discarded in heaps at a time when the coastline probably lay close by.

By contrast, two later middens, dating to between about 3600 BC, were largely composed of cockle shells. The coastline was undergoing rapid



*Section through one of the Prestatyn shell middens, with some of the cockle shells that came from it. This midden belongs to the Neolithic period and has been shown to date to about 3600 BC.*



and dramatic changes at this time. These later middens lay within layers of peat, formed in the marshes hemmed in by the sand dunes that were now developing further seawards.

In view of the habitat preferences of different species of shellfish it seems likely that the change in the composition of the middens from mussels to cockles reflects a changing coastal ecology from a stony or rocky shore to a sandy one during the transition from the Mesolithic to the Neolithic period.

## info

For a full report on the Prestatyn prehistoric middens see Martin Bell's, *Prehistoric Coastal Communities: The Mesolithic in Western Britain*, CBA Research Report 149 (2007) ISBN 978 1 902771 64 9

For other Neolithic and Mesolithic sites in Wales see Frances Lynch, Stephen Aldhouse-Green and Jeffrey L. Davies's, *Prehistoric Wales* (2000)

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*Front cover: party of work-experience students from local schools being shown around Beacon Ring hillfort*