



Evidence of the Bronze Age at Meillionydd, Rhiw

Remains of Early Ages in Llŷn

Stone Age tools have been found in the area, on the headlands of Trwyn Llanbedrog and Pen Cilan, and dated to the Mesolithic Age. This 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 early 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.



Dolmens



Coeten Arthur, Cefnamwlch

In a field on the outskirts of Y Ffôr is a magnificent dolmen. It was built on high ground overlooking the sea, and with an expansive view of Eifionydd and Snowdonia (SH 39903849).

Many of the large portal dolmens to be seen along the Western coast of the British Isles are in Llŷn.

Would the pilgrims on their journey to Enlli / Bardsey perhaps have taken any notice of them?

The dolmens of Llŷn were built in the Early Neolithic Age (up to 4,000 BC). These are tombs in conspicuous places, on higher ground, in places with a clear view of a mountain, or on an exposed site on the coast.

They were built because people were burying their dead in groups and burying the bones or cremating them. Burying the dead like this would release the spirit and be an opportunity to commemorate families and honour ancestors. It's also very likely there would be ceremonies around the dolmens. There 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'.

Although there are two dolmens to be seen in this area, unfortunately only their capstones remain. One is in Llanbedrog and the other in Cilan.

Cromlech Abererch SH 39903849



Directions: This is on the land of Gromlech farm, Y Ffôr. The farm access is on the eastern side of the A499 (Y Ffôr – Pwllheli), less than 0.5km from the crossroads at y Ffôr.

There is an expansive view from this dolmen (cromlech) over the valley of the river Erch, onwards over Eifionydd and to the mountains of Snowdonia.

Some of the stones here, including the capstone, were re-set in 1936 and by now the dolmen itself is in its original state except that the mound of earth that covered it at that time has by now completely disappeared. In the C18th there would have been an avenue of stones leading towards it from the north.

According to tradition, this is where Rhydderch Hael was buried. He was a king from the *Hen Ogledd* (Old North) who fought with Urien Rheged against the king of Northumbria in the late C16th. According to the *Englynion y Beddau* (englynion poetry + graves) from the poetry *Canu Llywarch Hen* he was buried in Abererch – 'in abererch riderch hael'. Fishermen from the Isle of Man who came to fish in Pwllheli Bay would pay tribute to their hero, Rhydderch Hael, by visiting this dolmen.



Standing Stones of Llŷn



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 their present positions and by now they are 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 something significant about where they stand, in relation to nearby mountains such as Garn Fadryn or Rhiw – sacred places in ancient times? Are they the gravestones of heroes or tribal leaders? Were they used in 'pagan' ceremonies and a Christian element was possibly added later? Were they put there to help with studying the stars? Is there some 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 show travellers the way 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.

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

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

Details of standing stones in Llŷn:

- **Maen Hir Gwynus**, Pistyll (standing stone at Gwynus) (SH 34604210)
- **Maen Hir Penfra**, Llwyndyrus (standing stone at Penfras) (SH 38004170)

- **Maen Hir Nant y Gledrydd**, Madryn (standing stone at Nant y Gledrydd) (SH 29353650)
- **Maen Hir Sarn Mellteyrn** (standing stone at Sarn Mellteyrn) (SH 23713284)
- **Maen Hir Plas ym Mhenllech**, Penllech (standing stone at Plas ym Mhenllech) (SH 22253452)
- **Maen Hir Llangwinnadl** (standing stone at Llangwinnadl) (SH 20803250)
- **Maen Hir Tan y Foel**, Rhiw (standing stone at Tan y Foel) (SH 22612767)
- **Maen Hir Pandy Saethon**, Nanhoron (standing stone at Pandy Saethon) (SH 28803230)
- **Maen Hir Bodegroes**, Efailnewydd (standing stone at Bodegroes) (SH35783536)
- **Meini Hirion Tir Gwyn**, Llannor (standing stones at Tir Gwyn) (SH34423913)
- **Maen Hir Glan Afon**, Abererch (standing stone at Glan Afon) (SH39203600)
- **Maen Hir**, Canolfan y Gwystl, Y Ffôr (standing stone at Canolfan y Gwystl) (SH4001238999)

Local Standing Stones



Heini Hirion Tir Gwyn, Llannor SH 34533915

Directions: *The stones are in a field close to Tir Gwyn, Llannor. Follow the road from Llannor towards Pentreuchaf and bear left (SH 3540737656), go past 'Mela' and bear left again.*

From Penprys (Pentreuchaf) follow B4354 (towards Boduan/Nefyn). Turn left at first crossroads (SH3468439722), then bear right.



These two stones stand about 20m apart in open fields in prominent view of other prehistoric sites - Garn Boduan, Yr Eifl and Carnguwch. Is there some religious, astrological or ceremonial significance to their relationship with each other?

One of them is 3m tall and the other 2m, and both are narrower towards the top.

Two graves were discovered between these two stones, and the gravestones from them are at Oriel Plas Glyn y Weddw.

Is there some significance to the location of the graves? Was this an attempt to Christianise an old prehistoric religious site? Was there a link between this site and other prehistoric sites that can be seen from here? Were there other standing stones nearby, now lost or buried?

Maen Hir Bodegroes, Efailnewydd (SH35783536)

Directions: Take the A497 (Pwllheli – Nefyn) and this is at the roadside in the Bodegroes wall. There is a hawthorn tree directly opposite

A small stone which is part of a wall. This stone may have been put there to show the boundaries of Bodegroes estate.

Maen Hir Glan Afon, Abererch (SH 39203600)

Directions: This can be seen from the A497 (Porthmadog – Pwllheli) about 2km east of Pwllheli, in a field opposite Trofa, Abererch.

The book 'Caernarvonshire – West' (RCAM) does not record this stone. It's on low ground very close to the river Erch and this site would have been under the sea in the Bronze Age and later flooded.

It's 2m tall and therefore too long to be a rubbing stone for cattle. It's referred to as Carreg Draï (stone + outgoing tide) namely a stone to show the depth of the seawater when ships came in. Abererch limekiln is nearby.

If this is a standing stone, it has probably been moved here from somewhere else. What is the significance of that?

Maen Hir Canolfan y Gwystl (SH 4001238999)

This can be seen in the village of Y Ffôr off B4354 (towards Chwilog) near Canolfan y Gwystl.

Cairns in Llŷn



Moel Garnguwch 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 (SH 35004290). There was probably a conical tower of stones on it, but that was 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.

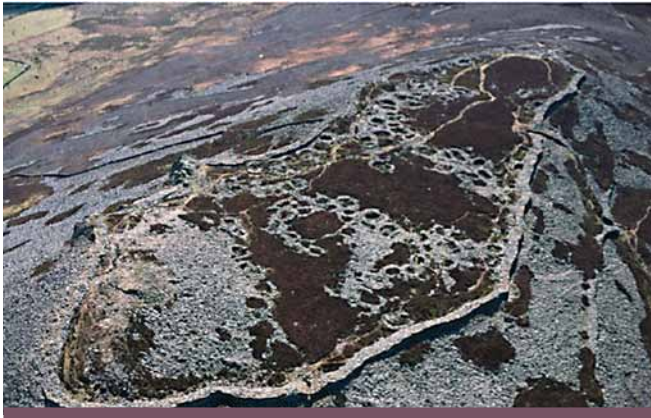
The local people believed the summits were places of the supernatural and that they were magical and frightening. Tribal leaders would be honoured by being buried there and it's easy to believe the cairn would be an excellent memorial to them. From there, they could continue to dominate. These could 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 23152975) and there are others, by now less conspicuous, on Garn Fadryn, Tre'r Ceiri, and Foel Gron, Mynytho. They were known as *Carnedd y Brenin Engan* (cairn of King Engan) on the most prominent summit in his territory.

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



Iron Age Hill Forts



Tre'r Ceiri, Llanaelhaearn

In Llanbedrog there are two hill forts on high cliffs protecting the route from Llanbedrog to Abersoch.

Penhengaer (SH32303147) is on the left, on the A499, Llanbedrog to Abersoch, and Nant y Castell (SH32153145) on the right. Both are Iron Age hill forts. Were they perhaps built to protect the trade route through the valley?

There are a number of hill forts in Llŷn, including the most famous of them all on the top of Tre'r Ceiri. Others can be seen on Garn Boduan Odo on Mynydd yr Ystum and Creigiau Gwinau, on Mynydd Graig, Rhiw.

But some protected the coast, like Castell Ysgubor Hen (castle + barn + old) Cilan. It's in a striking location on top of the cliff of Pared Mawr, above Porth Ceiriad. There was another one on the peninsula in Porthdinllaen (SH 275416). There would be natural defences to protect it – the sea, a precipice or rocks rather than stone ramparts.

By now only traces of the ramparts remain. There is a reference to it from the early C20th as 'Castell Yscuborhin' (SH 30372470)

Directions: Take the unclassified road from Abersoch, through Sarn Bach to Cilan. Go past the chapel, Capel Cilan, and it can be seen on the cliff top opposite a farm road leading to the headland of Pen Cilan.

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 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 renewed or restored at different times, and so the older building work can be seen under the renewed 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.



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