



*Bronze Age evidence 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 (SH 23402990). 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 called Coeten Arthur 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 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. The fort on Garn Fadryn is on the summit of Garn Fadryn but in Porthdinllaen there are remains of a coastal fort) from the same period.

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



*Cromlech Bachwen, Clynnog Fawr*

On the land of Cefnamwlch, Tudweiliog there is Coeten Arthur (quoit of Arthur) (SH 23003450). This is a portal dolmen built in Llŷn 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 an exposed site on the coast.

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

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 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'.

## Coeten Arthur, Cefnamwlch (SH 230345)



**Directions:** Take the B4417 from Tudweiliog (2.25km) and turn left towards Sarn Mellteyrn at a junction at the edge of the hill (Mynydd Cefnamwlch). After 0.5km this cromlech can be seen on the right, in a field.

Coeten Arthur (quoit of Arthur) is a striking cromlech (dolmen) on the edge of the hill of Mynydd Cefnamwlch. The field is named after it as Cae Coetan Arthur (1841) and Cae'r Gromlech (2009). It's suggested this was built because it's a prominent site in relation to Garn Fadryn.

There's a tale that King Arthur threw a quoit from the top of Garn Fadryn and it landed here. This is the capstone.

Did this capstone (*penllech* in Welsh) give its name to the parish of Penllech?

It's said the stones of this cromlech were moved at one time, but crows kept cawing endlessly until they were returned. At Plas ym Mhenllech there is a standing stone with cup shaped markings on it. Is there some connection between them? Was the standing stone moved from here?

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

These are the standing stones in this area -

A standing stones in Welsh is known as a *Maen Hir* and these are the ones in this area -

- **Maen Hir Gwynus**, Pistyll (SH 346421)
- **Maen Hir Penfras**, Llwyndyrus (SH 380417)
- **Maen Hir Nant y Gledrydd**, Madryn (SH 29353650)
- **Maen Hir Sarn Mellteyrn**, (SH 23713284)
- **Maen Hir Plas ym Mhenllech**, Penllech (SH 22253452)
- **Maen Hir Llangwnnagl**, (SH 208325)
- **Maen Hir Tan y Foel**, Rhiw (SH 22612767)
- **Maen Hir Pandy**, Nanhoron (SH 28803230)
- **Maen Hir Bodegroes**, Efailnewydd (SH 35783536)
- **Meini Hirion Tir Gwyn**, Llannor (SH 34423913)
- **Maen Hir Glan Afon**, Abererch (SH 392360)
- **Maen Hir y Gwystl**, Y Ffôr (SH 40003901)

## Local Standing Stones



**Maen Hir Nant y Gledrydd** (Standing Stone in Nant y Gledrydd) (SH 29353650)

**Directions:** *On the road leading from Rhydyclafdy to Nanhoron (B4415), keep right in the direction of Madryn and Dinas. Keep right again in 2km and then left. It's in a field on the right, near Gefail Gledrydd.*

This is a striking standing stone, 2.2m tall, in the middle of a field. It's on the exact line between Carn Fadryn and Garn Boduan. Is there some significance in this?

### **Maen Hir Sarn Mellteyrn (SH 23733284)**

**Directions:** *On the right at the top of a hill on the road from Sarn Mellteyrn to Tudweiliog are the ruins of Sarn Mellteyrn Church. The standing stone is in the cemetery.*

Although recent studies refer to it as a standing stone, the inventory Caernarvonshire: West (RCAM) doesn't do that. This stone is 2.3m tall, with Carn Fadryn as a backdrop to it. It's near to Coeten Arthur (SH 23003450). Is there some significance in this and a link between the site and Carn Fadryn? It could have been moved here from somewhere else. There's a hole in it that was used for hanging a lantern.



## 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 (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* (sow + black + short), 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 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).

The elements 'carn' and 'carnedd' are conspicuous in place names in Llŷn, e.g. Carn Sethon and Carneddol in Mynytho.

## Iron Age Hill Forts



*Creigiau Gwinau, Rhiw*

In the Porthdinllaen area there are two hillforts of some importance, and different to each other. On the peninsula, Trwyn Porthdinllaen there is a coastal hillfort (SH 27504160) in a very remarkable place, with a wide ranging view in different directions. There is another hillfort on the coast of southern Llŷn, Castell Ysgubor Hen, Cilan (SH 30372470) which is in a striking coastal location.

Carn Fadryn is 6 km south of Porthdinllaen and can be seen very prominently. On its summit there is one of our special hillforts (SH 27903530).

There are a number of these in Llŷn, including the ones on Tre'r Ceiri, the Eifl mountains (SH 37304460) Garn Boduan (SH 31203940), Castell Odo (SH 18702850) on Mynydd yr Ystum and Creigiau Gwinau (SH 22862752), on Mynydd Graig, Rhiw. Other hillforts from the Iron Age are at Penhengaer (SH 32303147) and Nant y Castell (SH 32153145) on either side of the A499, as if defending the valley between Llanbedrog and Abersoch.

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.

## Garn Fadryn (SH 279353)



*From the fort towards other forts at  
Garn Boduan and Tre'r Ceiri*

**Directions:** To get to the fort, go to Garn Fadryn village (SH27803452) and follow the path running alongside the chapel.

Garn Fadryn (cairn of Madryn) mountain stands majestically in the middle of Llŷn. From its summit there are magnificent views of the whole of Llŷn and beyond.

Slightly lower than the summit, an Iron Age fort was built in two phases, about 300BC and 100BC. The first fort was considerably smaller in size and because of that its

walls are inside those of the second fort. There is a very conspicuous collection of round huts to be seen, within walls that are now very deteriorated.

Another fort was built here later, in the C12th. Giraldus Cambrensis visited Nefyn in 1188 and he mentioned a castle built here recently and belonging to the sons of Owain Gwynedd.

There are also signs of a burial cairn close to the summit.

On the flatter ground to the north there is a well, Ffynnon y Brenin (well of the king) (SH 27903530) which is a natural medicinal well, and Bwrdd y Brenin (table of the king) (SH 28003535). The king of course is King Arthur.

## Porthdinllaen Coastal Fort (SH 275416)



**Directions:** Either walk along Porthdinllaen beach and climb the path to Nefyn Golf Course from the Tŷ Coch inn, or walk up from the National Trust parking ground in Morfa Nefyn (SH 28154065) and along the golf course.

This coastal fort was on Trwyn Porthdinllaen (peninsula of Porthdinllaen), almost surrounded by the sea. It was built in the early Iron Age. It had a bank and three ditches around it, up to 3m deep. This was confirmed by excavations here in 2011.

The site was damaged when a road was created down to the beach.



### Follow the Story

Find out more about prehistoric life by visiting Garn Fadryn - See the remains of a vast Iron Age hill fort and a 12th century castle.