

Great Archaeological Sites in Torfaen



1. CARN Y DEFAID ON MYNYDD Y GARN-FAWR



Two cairns stand on the summit of Mynydd y Garn-fawr, part of the ridge which separates the valley of the River Usk from the Afon Lwyd near its source north of Blaenavon. In this open moorland, structures like cairns helped to orientate people and provide a marker. It is therefore no surprise that the larger of the two marks a change of direction in the boundary between the unitary authorities of Torfaen and Monmouthshire. And although these two authorities only go back to 1994, the boundary itself is much older; in the Middle Ages and beyond it divided the parish of Llanellen from the parish of Llanover, in which Blaenavon lay before it became big enough to warrant being a separate parish. The cairn itself is known as Carn y Defaid (SO 2706 0997). Although it was on the boundary, slightly more of it was in Llanover, which makes it part of Torfaen today. Its companion on the other hand was firmly in Llanellen.

The cairns themselves dates back to the Early Bronze Age, two of the many that dot the mountain ridges of South Wales, loose heaps of the local stone constructed to cover burials. The primary burial is usually at the centre, and may be enclosed in a cist built from stone slabs before the earth or stone was heaped up above it. At times the primary burial was made in a pit dug into the ground. Sometimes the body was cremated before burial, in which case the ashes might be placed in a pottery urn. At other times the unburnt body was buried in a foetal position. Any secondary

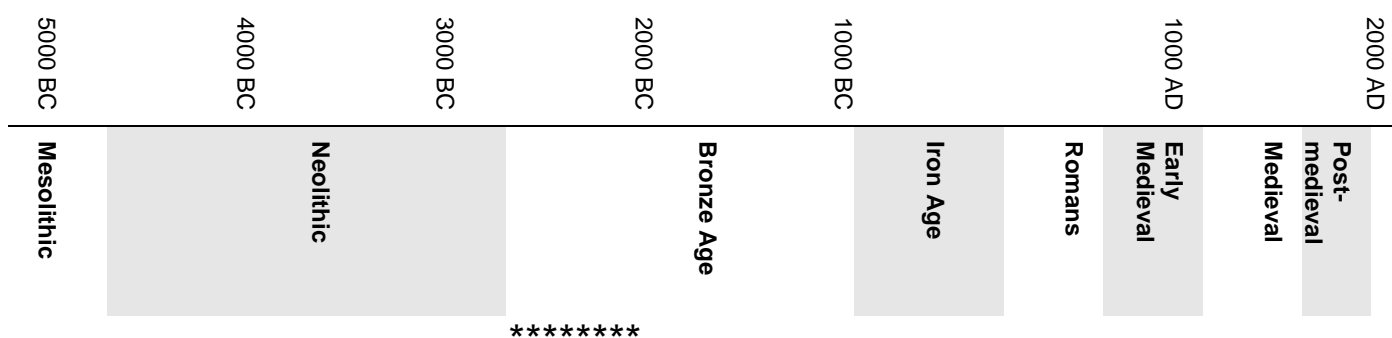
burials were made around the sides, and sometimes were added well after the monument was first constructed.

Carn y Defaid is nearly circular and the diameter is somewhere in the region of 20m, although it is rather difficult to be certain where the edges are. Gauging the height is even more difficult, especially for a cairn like this which is built over an outcrop making one side higher than the other. It has been disturbed by a large hole into the centre, but nothing is visible to suggest that there was ever a cist. The hole was dug long before there are any accounts of it, so we do not know whether anything was found there.



Carn y Defaid is on the open moorland of Mynydd y Garn-fawr. Take the B4246 out of Blaenavon and then the first turn on the right onto the unclassified road that leads to a car park next to the transmitters. Take the footpath on the right-hand (south) side of the road a short distance further on, and then the path to the right at the T-junction, which will eventually take you to the cairn. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 161, Explorer Series Outdoor Leisure sheet 13.

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. Carn y Defaid has the PRN (Primary Record Number) 02081g, and its neighbour is 02083g. You can search for other similar sites here too. See more prehistoric burial monuments on our website at http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/fun_rit/english/fun_ritmain.html.