

# Great Archaeological Sites in Swansea



## 2. GRAIG FAWR CHAMBERED TOMB



Before the start of the Neolithic period, the people of Britain had led a nomadic lifestyle, moving around from place to place in order to exploit the seasonal resources offered by the natural world. The introduction of farming involved a completely different way of living off the land – people needed to stay in one place long enough to plant seeds, look after the growing crops and bring in the harvest. Having a fixed base also gave them somewhere to store the agricultural produce they could live off for the rest of the year. These changes not only led to a different relationship with the land, it also meant they could live in larger groups. For the first time it was possible to plan and build permanent structures. Although very few Neolithic houses have been discovered so far in Wales what we do have the houses the built for the dead – chambered tombs constructed of stone and usually covered, at least in part, by mounds of earth. The mounds have generally gone leaving only the stone chambers where the bones of the dead were placed.

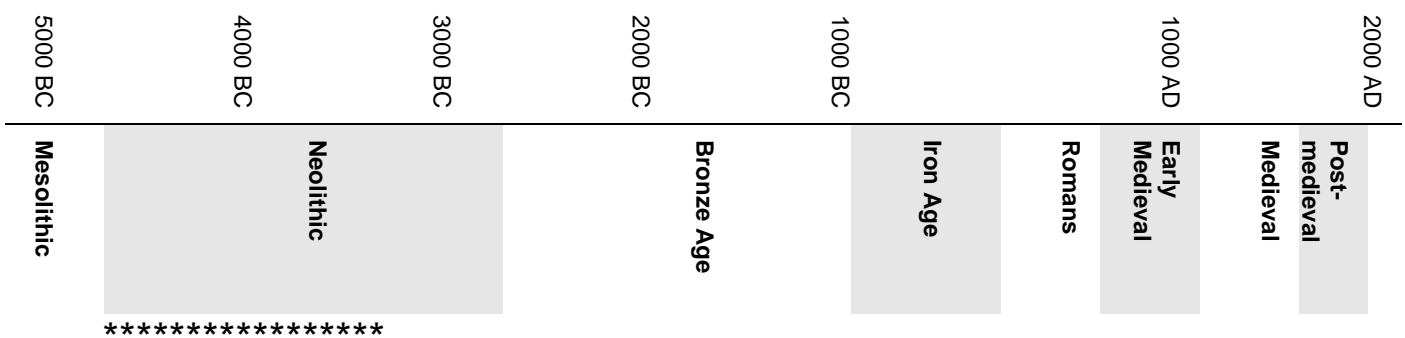
The Gower peninsula contains the greatest concentration of chambered tombs anywhere in South Wales. Besides the two known as Sweyne's Howes on Rhossili Down, there is Arthur's Stone on the top of Cefn Bryn, with three more – Parc le Breos, Penmaen and Nicholaston – at its foot. All these have been recognised as what they are for centuries, and it had been thought that this was all there was. However, in the 1980s a new tomb was identified in the upland hinterland north of Pontardulais (SN 6085 0620). It stand on the ridge of Graig Fawr which overlooks the River Loughor, with extensive views all round except on the northeast side where the hill rises to a summit.

Whereas most of the peninsular tombs are massive structures, the remains of the Graig Fawr tomb consist of two chambers built of thin slabs of the local sandstone, each with a separate entrance. They lie at different angles and were probably not built at the same time, as a survey carried out by the Trust in 2006 revealed slight traces of what appeared to have been a circular mound around one of them. The other chamber looked as though it had been built against the edge of the mound, which would then have been enlarged to cover it too. Any bones they originally contained are long gone. This monument probably belongs to the regional tradition archaeologists call the Severn-Cotswold, whose centre is in the Cotswolds although tombs of this type also occur in South and Mid Wales, Wessex and Herefordshire.



Graig Fawr is open access common land north of Pontardulais. It can be reached from the town centre along Dantwyn road, which has a few places where a car can pull off and park. The St Illtyd's Way long distance footpath runs close to the site. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 159, Explorer Series sheet 165.

**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. Graig Fawr chambered tomb has the PRN (Primary Record Number) 00924w, and you can search for other similar sites here too. You can contact us via social media or through the methods given at the bottom of the page. See more prehistoric monuments at [http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/fun\\_rit/english/fun\\_ritmain.html](http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/fun_rit/english/fun_ritmain.html)