

## Begwns Walk with Ben Mullen

At 6pm, on an absolutely glorious evening in late July, members of the Local Interest Group and the Gardening Club were treated to a fantastic walk around some very important sites on the Begwns, led by Ben Mullen, the National Trust Warden.

Before we started our walk, Ben explained that there are five Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs) on the Begwns, four of which date from the Bronze Age and one from the Middle Ages. A SAM is a site of archaeological importance with specific legal protection against damage or development. The list of such sites in Wales is maintained by CADW. The Begwns was surveyed by archaeologists in the 1990s and they found many ancient monuments, but only five were "listed". In the descriptions of each site that we saw, a 10 figure grid reference is given to make it easier for you to use GPS to find them if you go up onto the Begwns for a walk.

Our first stop was Maesgwyn Round Barrow (SO 16382 43554), which is very close to the lake. This is a burial mound or tumulus and was, originally, 1.6m high and is roughly 20m in diameter. No exact date can be given for this or any of the other pre-historic sites, but the Bronze Age lasted from about 2500BC to 800BC in Britain. It is probable that important people were buried at this site because it is on high ground with good views. Unfortunately, the Victorians were great collectors of ancient artifacts and this mound has probably been raided and emptied; this has meant that it is now a bowl shape. It is possible to see the mound and inner "crater" once you know where to look, but it is better to go at a time of the year when the bracken is not growing.

From here, we walked a little way further up the hill to the Bailey Bedw Ring Cairn (SO 16500 44172), which again dates from the Bronze Age. As its name implies, it is a ring shape, about 20m in diameter, but its outer wall was probably larger. Once again, it is situated on higher ground and was probably where important people were buried. Some people today believe that these burial mounds were built on energy lines (or ley lines). A 1m high and 3m wide stone wall surrounded this cairn, and you can see some stones within the circle today. It also had a 7m round cairn in the centre, but this is no longer standing. This site has been damaged in the recent past as a result of orienteering on the Begwns and CADW had to take action to prevent this from happening in the future.

Our walk to the third site took us around the northern side of the Roundabout. The Begwns Round Cairn (SO 15375 44823) is probably the most difficult site to see. It is about 11m in diameter and around 1m high and is definitely not as prominent as the previous two mounds. However, it is close to the last Bronze Age monument, the Begwns Standing Stone (SO 15211 44991). This is known as a recumbent stone as it is almost lying down. It is a split stone about 1.2m in height. You can see the layers in the rock very clearly and we could see similar rock in the cliffs above the track as we walked on to the final site and so it is probable that the stone came from the local area. On one side is some very distinct dark colouring and this has resulted from the fact that sheep use it as a rubbing post thus causing the staining. (In fact, Jane Nicholls said that it was probably their sheep that were responsible for this! I don't think that CADW will be prosecuting them.) Unusually for a standing stone, it is not on a high or prominent point, but it is an excellent example of a Bronze Age standing stone and is well worth a visit.

The last site was further to the west and this is known as Pentre Jack (SO 14225 44430 at its centre). It is the site of a medieval village although, as Mo said, you need a great deal of imagination to visualise this. The Medieval period was from the 5<sup>th</sup> century to the 15<sup>th</sup> century and no-one is certain of the exact dates when this settlement was occupied. Beneath the bracken it is possible to see level platforms, if you know where to look, and seven of these have been found. Two of them are stone platforms and were probably long houses. You can also see the boundaries of old enclosures; these show up as raised banks when there is no bracken. There were probably quite large numbers of people living here over a long period of time. During the medieval period, the climate was warmer and so this area was more suitable for habitation. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the climate cooled and so it became harder to survive up on the Begwns and consequently the people moved away. It is a fairly flat site and this may have been the reason that it was chosen as a good location for a village. The site has the most fantastic views towards the Brecon Beacons. Although it has been surveyed recently, very little is known about the village as there are no written records of it. It is not known what it was called; it was given the name Pentre Jack after the farm very close to the site.

The walk from here back to the cars was around the southern side of the Roundabout. By this stage, the sun was setting and the most amazing full moon had risen above the Black Mountains. We all agreed that we had had fantastic luck with the weather and everyone had thoroughly enjoyed the walk, covering about 5 km in total (just over 3 miles). We are very grateful to Ben Mullen for giving so generously of his time and for showing us these important landmarks in our local area. The whole experience was made even more enjoyable because of the wonderful weather and the amazing views that we got along the way.