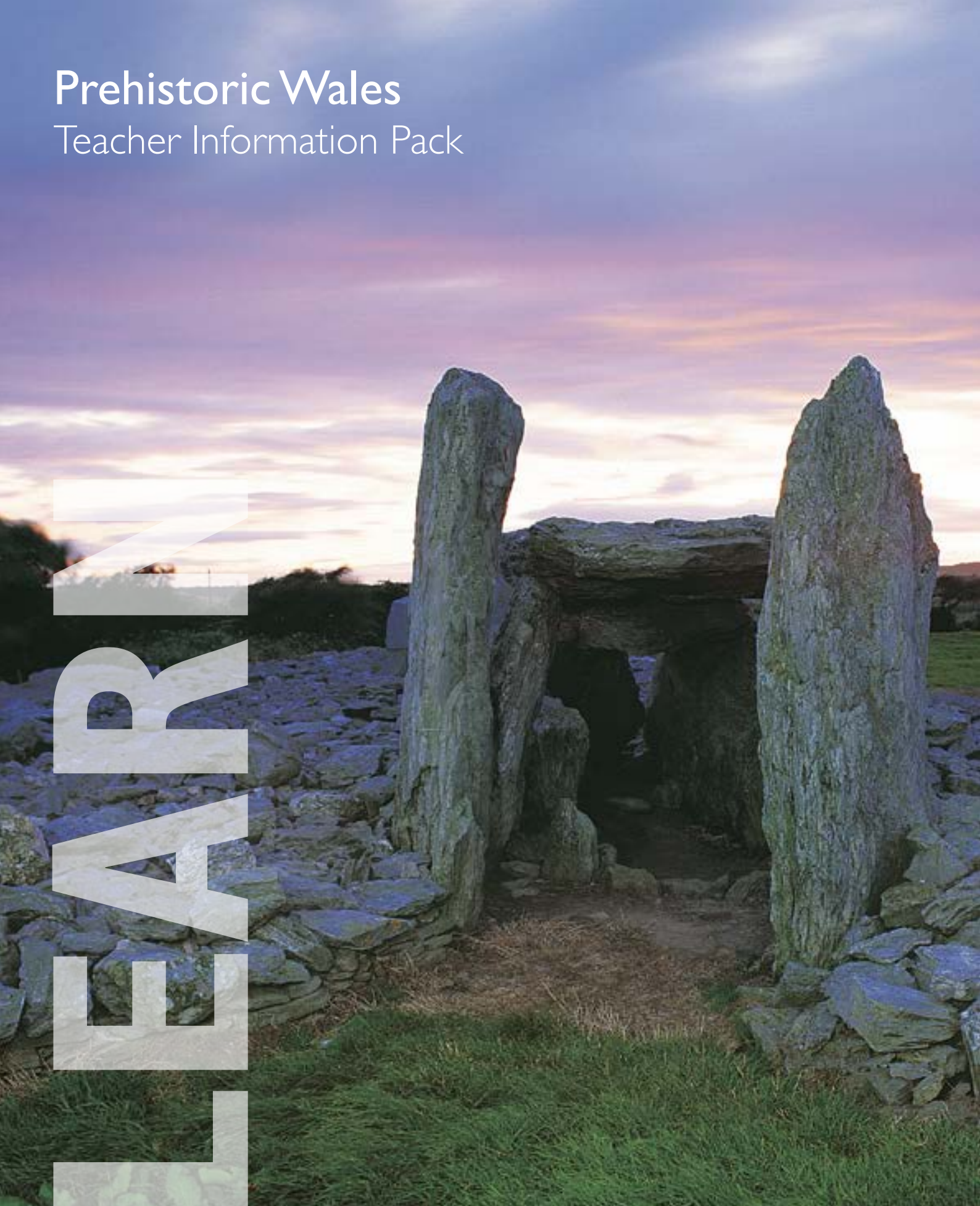


Prehistoric Wales

Teacher Information Pack

LEARN



Notes for teachers

This resource details the major prehistoric periods from the Paleolithic Age to the Iron Age, and supports teaching of the Curriculum Cymreig, as well as providing background information to support visits to prehistoric sites, including the sites in Cadw's care:

Neolithic

Barclodiad y Gawres burial chamber, Anglesey
Bodowyr burial chamber, Anglesey
Bryn Celli Ddu burial chamber, Anglesey
Capel Garmon burial chamber, Gwynedd
Carreg Coeten Arthur burial chamber, Pembrokeshire
Castell Bryn Gwyn, Anglesey
Din Dryfol burial chamber, Anglesey
Dyffryn Ardudwy burial chamber, Gwynedd
Lligwy burial chamber, Anglesey
Parc Le Breos burial chamber, Swansea
Pentre Ifan burial chamber, Pembrokeshire
Presaddfed burial chamber, Anglesey
Tinkinswood burial chamber, Vale of Glamorgan
Trefignath burial chamber, Anglesey
Ty Newydd burial chamber, Anglesey

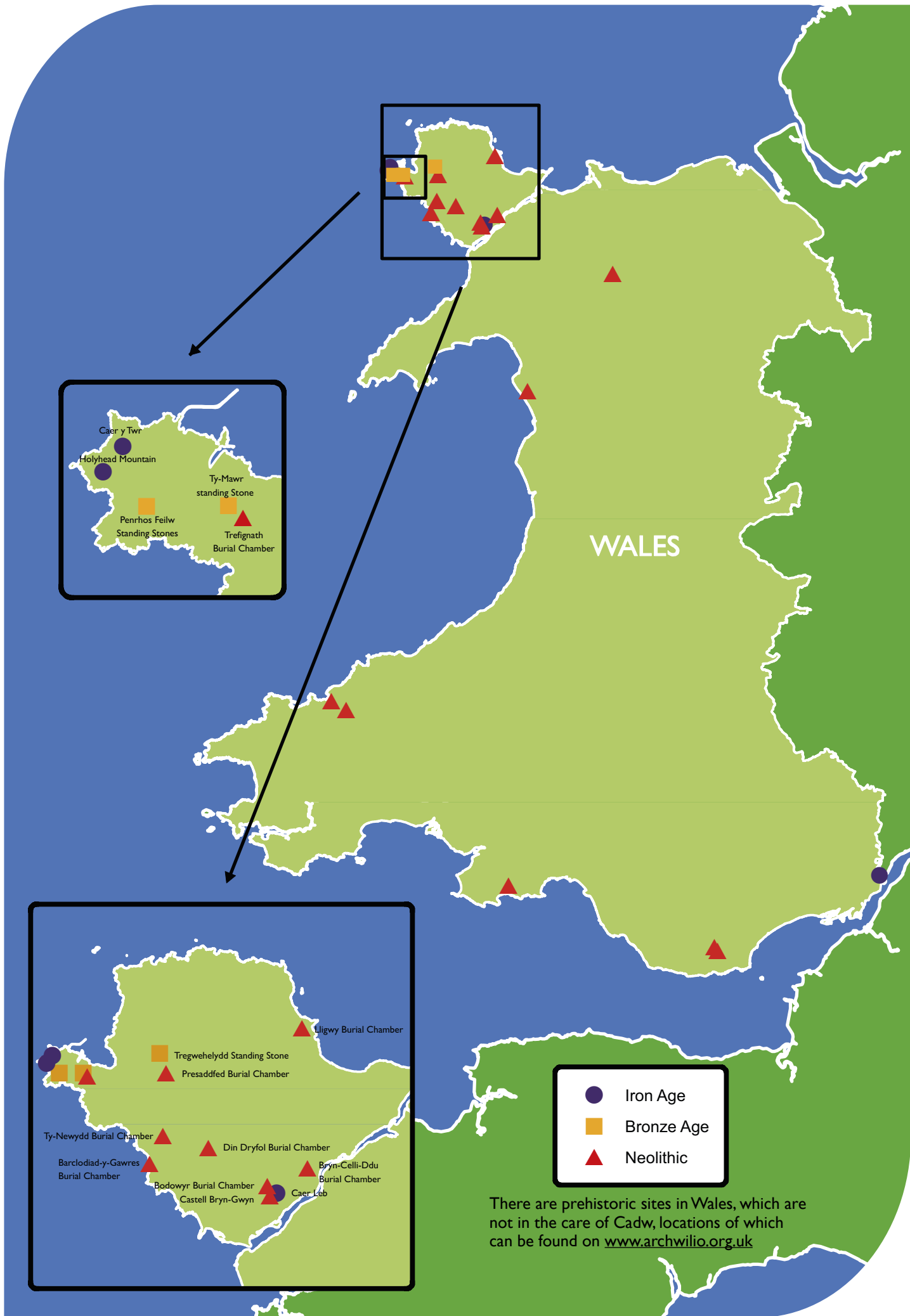
Bronze Age

Penrhos Feliw standing stones, Anglesey
Tregwehelydd standing stone, Anglesey
Ty Mawr standing stone, Anglesey

Iron Age

Caer Lêb, Anglesey
Caer y Tŵr, Anglesey
Castell Bryn Gwyn, Anglesey
Chepstow Bulwarks Camp, Monmouthshire
Holyhead Mountain Hut Circles, Anglesey





There are prehistoric sites in Wales, which are not in the care of Cadw, locations of which can be found on www.archwilio.org.uk

A simplified timeline of Welsh Prehistory

| Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age) – c.800,000 – c.12,000 BC | |
|--|---|
| 228,000 BP | Human bones found in Pontnewydd Cave, Denbighshire date to about 230,000 years old, are the earliest evidence of Neanderthal people living in Wales. |
| 62,000 BP | Hand axes found in Coygan Cave, Carmarthenshire date to between 64,000 and 38,000 years old, are evidence of Neanderthal people living in Wales. |
| 24,000 BP | Bones and decorative artefacts found in Paviland Cave, Gower, in 1823, dated to about 26,000 years old, are the earliest Homo Sapien (human) burial remains in western Europe. Paviland Cave was around 100 kms from the sea in Paleolithic times. |
| 14,500 BP | Rock art found in Cathole Cave near Parc le Breos burial chamber, Swansea, in 2010, dated to about 16,500 years old, is the oldest rock art in Britain, and possibly in western Europe. |
| Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age) – c.12,000–4,000 BC | |
| c.11,000 BC | Kendrick's cave, Llandudno, was excavated in the 1970s. Archaeologists found a horse's jawbone engraved with zig zag patterns, dated to around 13,000 years old, along with human bones, and decorated cattle and deer teeth. |
| c.10,900-5,900BC | A large Mesolithic site was found at Rhuddlan, Denbighshire, during excavations of the medieval town in 1978. Over 13,000 stone tools were found, along with five decorated stone pebbles, which are a rare example of Mesolithic decorative art found in Wales. |
| c.8,500 BC | Nab Head, Pembrokeshire, was used as a 'task site', where Mesolithic people made tools or processed food. Thousands of stone tools have been found at the site, along with around 700 shale beads. |
| Neolithic (New Stone Age) – c.4,400–2,300 BC | |
| c. 4,000 BC | Tinkinswood burial chamber built, Vale of Glamorgan. 920 pieces of bone, representing over 40 individuals, were found here, along with pottery sherds. The capstone, weighing about 40 tons, is believed to be the largest in Britain. |
| c. 4,000-3,500 BC | Pentre Ifan burial chamber built in Nevern valley, Pembrokeshire. Excavated a number of times in the 20th Century, archaeologists found flint flakes and pottery shards similar to those found at Pant y Saer burial chamber, Anglesey, suggesting a connection between the two communities. |
| c. 3,500BC | Capel Garmon burial chamber built near Llanrwst, Conwy, in Severn Cotswold style. Excavated in 1925, archaeologists found flint flakes and pottery shards. |
| c. 3,000 BC | Bryn Celli Ddu henge monument built, Anglesey |
| c. 3,000–2,200 BC | Bluestones moved from Pembrokeshire to Wiltshire to make up the earliest phases of Stonehenge |
| c. 2,600 BC | Europe's largest known enclosure built in Walton Basin, Radnorshire |
| c. 2,500-2,400 BC | Barclodiad y Gawres burial chamber built, in the style of Irish burial chambers. Excavated in 1952, archaeologists found traces of a long lasting fire which had been quenched with a 'stew' containing reptile, amphibian and small mammal bones, before being covered with limpet shells and pebbles. |

Bronze Age – c.2,300–700 BC

c. 2,000BC Henge monument at Bryn Celli Ddu destroyed and passage grave built on the site.

c. 2,000 BC Pentre Ifan burial chamber built, influenced by Irish burial chamber design. Excavated in 1936, archaeologists found pottery shards.

c. 2,000 BC Copper mining began at Parys Mountain, Anglesey, and Great Orme, Llandudno, around 3,500 – 4,000 years ago. Archaeologists have suggested that the first miners may have come from Spain or the Balkans.

c. 1,800 BC Parc le Breos burial chamber, Gower, built in 'Cotswold Severn' style. Excavated in the 1960s, archaeologists found bones from at least 40 people, and a number of dogs, cats, deer, sheep and cattle. Archaeologists think the bodies of the dead were left in nearby Cathole cave until only bones remained, at which point the bones were moved to the burial chamber.

c. 1,800 BC Collared Urn pottery, knives, a scraper, flint flakes, bone spatula, needle, bead, dog and cat bones and human remains found in Tooth Cave, Swansea (about 1500 metres from Parc le Breos burial chamber) in 1962 are evidence of people living there in the bronze age.

c. 1,000 BC The first 'hillforts' are built, by groups of people enclosing large areas on hill tops, initially by large wooden fences called 'palisades'.

Iron Age c.800 BC–AD48

800BC- AD50 Many hillforts were developed throughout the Iron Age by "The Celts". Communities dug large ditches and massive banks of earth, stone and timber, enclosing hill tops.

750-600 BC People deposited high quality bronze and iron items into Llyn Fawr, Rhigos, Rhondda Cynon Taff. Items recovered from the lake include chisels, sickles and socketed axes, a sword, a spearhead, a razor and horse harness equipment and a very large bronze cauldron. Archaeologists think the items might have been offerings to the Gods.

300 BC- AD100 People deposited bronze and iron items into Llyn Cerrig Bach, Anglesey. Over 150 items have been recovered, including swords, spearheads, cauldrons, slave chains, blacksmiths tongs and a beautifully decorated bronze plaque. Archaeologists think the items might have been offerings to the Gods.

AD 43/48 The Roman Invasion of Britain. The Romans reached the Welsh borderlands around five years later, in AD48.



The Palaeolithic Period – (500,000 – 10,000 BC)

Travellers

Palaeolithic people, who included Neanderthals (*Homo Neanderthalensis*) as well as modern humans (*Homo Sapiens*), foraged for wild plants to eat, created and controlled fire, began to make tools from flint, and developed new hunting and fishing skills. The earliest evidence of Paleolithic people in Britain are flint tools and footprints dating back at least 500,000 years.

Hunter Gatherers

These earliest inhabitants of Wales did not live in farms or villages. They were nomadic people, who gathered wild plants and hunted animals, birds and fish for food, and used animal skins to make clothes. Stone tools, animal bones, human remains and decorative objects have been found in caves in Wales, which were used by people during the Paleolithic period.

Humans and Neanderthals

Neanderthals and modern humans lived alongside each other for thousands of years, but the Neanderthals became extinct by around 40,000 BP. Nobody knows why Neanderthals died out and modern humans didn't, but it's possible that the Neanderthal diet was less diverse than that of modern humans, and climate change could have reduced supply of a main food source for Neanderthals. Modern humans have higher level cognitive skills than Neanderthals did, as evidenced through their acquisition of language, technologies and symbolic cave art.

Art

Palaeolithic cave art is very distinctive and includes paintings of wild animals, which may have been painted to aid hunting; as well as hand prints, mythical beasts and abstract patterns. These paintings were created using charcoal and red ochre. Some of the oldest paintings in western Europe have been found in caves in Wales.

These paintings were not just decorations of living areas, as the caves in which paintings have been found don't have evidence of having been lived in for any length of time, and the paintings are often located in areas of caves that are not easily accessible.

Cave paintings may have been a way of communicating with others, or may have had a religious or ceremonial purpose.

Pets?

Humans probably domesticated dogs at least 15,000 years ago, as scientists think that dogs and wolves may have become separate species as long as 32,000 years ago; the oldest dog fossils found to date are from western Europe and have been dated to between 15,000 and 18,800 years old. Dogs were used for hunting as well as companionship.

Did you know – The 'Red Lady' of Paviland was a man!

The 'Red Lady' has been carbon dated to around 27,000-31,000BP, which makes it one of the earliest known burials in Europe. The body of a man in his mid 20s was buried in a shallow pit in a cave at Paviland, on the Gower coast. He had a stone 'pillow' under his head, and another under his feet. He was dressed in leather clothes - shirt, trousers and moccasins – and some broken ivory rods and bracelets were laid upon his chest. Periwinkle shells with holes in them were laid on his thigh, and red ochre was sprinkled all over him before his body was covered with earth.

The Mesolithic Period – HUNTING AND GATHERING (12,500 – 4,400 BC)

Hunting and gathering

Mesolithic people were able to live in a range of different landscapes because they made tools out of natural resources and had a diverse diet. Archaeologists don't know whether they had temporary shelters or lived in caves; no evidence has been found of Mesolithic houses in Wales. Mesolithic people also began developing and making Microliths- very small flint tools such as blades, awls, drills and tiny blades, which could be used as individual tools or used in multiples to make tools and weapons, such as spears, harpoons and arrows.

Stone

In an age before the discovery of metals, stone was fundamental to everyday life. Mesolithic people shaped stone to make axes, arrow and spear heads, blades for cutting and scraping, and awls and drills. They developed new hunting technologies, such as bows, arrows, spears and harpoons, and used wood and nets to make fish and eel traps.

Wood

Mesolithic people made boats, buildings, tools and decorative objects from wood, as well as tools and decorative objects from bone and antlers.

Settlement?

Mesolithic settlement sites have been found in Northumberland, and Star Carr in North Yorkshire. Star Carr was excavated in 2010, and archaeologists found evidence that the house may have been occupied for and rebuilt over 500 years. They also found a number of objects, including a boat paddle, beads, arrowheads and antler headdresses. Antler headdresses suggest that the Mesolithic people engaged in ceremonies or rituals of some kind, as they are not purely practical hats worn for protection from the weather.

No Mesolithic house remains have yet been found in Wales, but archaeologists have found several 'task sites' where tools and beads were being made, perhaps for trade. The major 'task sites' found to date are at Rhuddlan, Nab Head, Pembrokeshire; and Burry Holmes, near Gower. In the Mesolithic period, when sea levels were perhaps 142 metres lower than they are today, both Nab Head and Burry Holmes were inland hilltops.



Neolithic Period – THE FIRST FARMERS (4,400 – 2,300BC)

Farming

Neolithic people moved from being nomadic hunter-gatherers to becoming the first farmers. They used stone axes to clear forested land, firstly for animal enclosures and later to plant crops. They began domesticating goats, pigs and cattle. Sheep were brought to Britain from the eastern Mediterranean about 4,000 years ago.

Farming ensured a reliable food supply, so people began settling in one place for longer periods than they had before, although people may have lived in different places at different times of the year, to provide summer and winter grazing for their animals.

Skills and Trade

Living in one place for more extended periods, meant less time was spent travelling, and this gave Neolithic people more time to develop ideas, skills, and artefacts such as polished stone axes. Several “factories” for producing these axe-heads have been found in Wales, the largest being at Graig Llwyd, Penmaenmawr, Conwy. Axe heads from Graig Llwyd have been found as far away as Yorkshire and the English Midlands, evidence of the development of trade.

Neolithic people also started using clay to make pottery. Pottery was important because it meant people could carry and store food and water, and could also be used for cooking. As their skills developed, people started making different kinds of pottery, and decorating it with patterns.

Houses

In some regions the change from being nomadic hunter-gatherers to staying one place for longer periods of time led to substantial houses being built in place of simple shelters made from sticks and animal skins. The remains of two Neolithic houses have been found on an Iron Age hillfort site at Clegyr Boia near St Davids, Pembrokeshire, along with Neolithic round bottomed pottery shards, and polished stone axe-heads.

Burial

The building of burial chambers, something not done by nomadic hunter-gatherers, was a major part of the transformation of daily life in Neolithic times. The burial chambers, still obvious features of the landscape in Wales, were probably built for the collective burial of the community rather than as individual graves. They usually consist of a series of upright stones supporting a large capstone, which covered the chamber. Some of the capstones are immense – weighting 30-40 tons, and it probably took around 200 people to move them into place.

The burials, either cremations or inhumations, were placed in the chambers with appropriate grave goods for the departed, such as pottery vessels or stone tools. Archaeologists have found shards of pottery at the entrances of many Neolithic burial chambers, and think there may have been rituals involving the breaking of pottery associated with burials in the chambers.

Originally the chambers were partially or totally covered with a large round or wedge shaped mound of stones or earth. Most of these mounds have disappeared with the passage of time, and only the interior stone chambers remain.

Archaeologists have found seeds, charcoal, and other plant and animal materials, on the old ground surface below the cairn (mound of stones). These remains have extended modern knowledge about Neolithic farming practices and the environment and provided scientific dating evidence.

Towards the end of the Neolithic period, people had begun working metal, initially developing their skills on soft metals like lead, copper and gold before learning to make alloys and work with harder metals.



The Bronze Age – BRONZE, FARMS AND STANDING STONES (2,300 – 700 BC)

Gold

The skill of early metalsmiths in working with gold is evident from the 'Mold Cape', a decorative and finely worked cape, thought to be made to fit a young woman. The cape was made from a single piece of gold and has been described as one of the finest examples of Bronze Age sheet metal work, featuring the BBC's History of the World in 100 Objects. It was not made purely for burial purposes, as it has been worn and repaired, but as the wearer would need help putting it on and taking it off, and would have had severely restricted arm movement, the cape was not intended for everyday wear. It has been dated to between 1,900 and 1,600BC. It was found in a Bronze Age burial chamber at Bryn yr Ellyllon, Mold, along with a skeleton, amber beads and a pottery vessel containing cremated human bones, by workmen digging for stone in 1833.

Copper

Archaeologists think that copper tools first appeared in Wales towards the end of the Neolithic period. Copper is a very soft metal, and easy to work but not hard enough to make durable tools from. Early metalsmiths experimented with alloys of copper and harder metals, and made bronze by combining copper with tin. It's possible that the influence and ideas from the metal workers who created the tools arrived in Wales by sea from Spain or the Balkans.

Much of the copper for the production of bronze in Wales probably came from the copper mine on the Great Orme Llandudno, where prehistoric mining on a very large scale dates largely from the middle Bronze Age. Copper mining also took place at Parys Mountain, Anglesey. The tin was probably brought from Cornwall, but there are also ancient tin mines in Brittany and northern Spain.

Bronze

Tools made in bronze, particularly axe-heads, were innovative in both metallurgy and design. They were widely traded, with examples being found as far away as Brittany and north Germany.

Daily Life

Most Bronze Age people were farmers, but they remained as small-scale social groups who were still quite mobile, many of whom moved animals around ancestral landscapes season by season. Settlements were small and unenclosed, comprising of a few buildings, rather than villages or towns. Although there is little archaeological evidence in Wales of high population density or fixed and laid out fields, unlike in other parts of southern Britain, intensive aerial archaeology in Powys (using aerial photography) has identified lots of previously unknown sites. This reminds us that just because we haven't found it yet, doesn't mean it did not exist! Towards the end of the Bronze Age, people began to enclose their settlements using palisades (large fences), many of these later being 'upgraded' to hillforts during the Iron Age.

The remains of Bronze Age round stone huts and enclosures have been found at Ffrith Bryn Helen, near Cerrigydruddion, and a late Bronze Age round house made from wood has also been found near Llandinam, Powys. In the late Bronze Age, upland farms were abandoned. Archaeologists think that there was either a shift in climate to colder wetter weather, or because clearing upland woodlands to farm them led to a deterioration in thin soils, land became waterlogged and inadequate for farming.



The Bronze Age – BRONZE, FARMS AND STANDING STONES (2,300 – 700 BC)

Burial

Bronze Age burial practices developed from the communal burials of the Neolithic period to cremations. A select few, likely to be important people in the community, began to be buried with grave goods, which show warrior and status relationships, hinting at identities and societal hierarchies. Burial mounds were characteristically made of earth and turf in lowland areas, and of stone in upland areas.

Excavations of burial mounds have extended modern knowledge of Bronze Age burial practises, including a better understanding of how mounds were built, and learning about aspects of burial ceremonies.

Some of the most prominent Bronze Age sites in the Welsh landscape are single or paired standing stones, such as Penrhos Feliw, Tregwehelydd, and Ty Mawr standing stones, Anglesey, as well as stone circles and rows. Archaeological excavations have revealed that the area surrounding these stones often contain burials, enigmatic stone platforms or the remains of fires. The function of most of these sites was probably as ritual or religious monuments.

Evidence from the middle and later Late Bronze Age provides quite a contrast to the earlier Bronze Age. This is an absence of burials, but more and more settlements (roundhouses) are built. People created hoards of metal objects, but archaeologists aren't sure why. For example, in 2013, a metal hoard of two bronze sword blade pieces, a bronze scabbard fitting, a bronze knife and six copper ingot pieces dated to 1000-800BC were found near Marloes in Pembrokeshire. Archaeologists have described the items as 'exotic' and not typical of the region. Evidence like this shows us that at least some Bronze Age people explored, networked and acquired new and magical technologies and exotic goods.



The Iron Age – FORTS AND IRON (700 BC - 43AD)

Community

The Iron Age was a time when society became more complex, and where people worked together to build large communal enclosures. Towards the end of the period, the Romans reported larger regional tribal structures existing, encompassing areas of perhaps 60-80 miles across.

Hillforts

Large, superbly defended hillforts and enclosures such as those at Llanmelin, Pen Dinas and Tre'r Ceiri, which had communities of a few hundred people centred around them, are familiar features of the Welsh landscape. They had large numbers of buildings built in their interiors, which were sometimes planned in a grid layout. Their defensive banks and ditches may have protected the people who lived there against attack and wild animals, and demonstrated the status and power of those who built them. Hillforts range in size, ranging from 1 to over 20 hectares- that's the size of about 20 football pitches! Many of them were developed over hundreds of years, with sites being enlarged, many having large, fancy entrances being built, and even some being deliberately and carefully destroyed before being abandoned. The hillforts were important sites and may have been connected with the smaller farms nearby and the wider community in the landscape. Some of these defended sites continued in use in the Roman period and later.

Farmsteads

Smaller defensive farm enclosures contained circular thatched wood and stone farmhouses with farmyards and all the buildings needed for storing and milling grain, caring for farm animals, and perhaps for making pottery and iron tools. The remains of the fields attached to these farms are sometimes visible as series of earthworks and raised banks surrounding the main settlement.

Buildings

Many Iron Age buildings in Wales were built from timber, which has rotted away, and the sizes and shapes of these buildings can only be found by excavation. The footings of the stone walls are still visible in some places, such as at Din Lligwy, Anglesey, where a farming settlement predates the Roman occupation of the site, and at Holyhead Mountain where there are the remains

of a farming settlement of around 20 round houses, some with basins and seating ledges. Archaeologists excavating the site found evidence of metalworking, wheat, oats and barley seeds, and limpet and periwinkle shells are evidence that food was also taken from the sea.

Art

People also became more and more skilled in metal working and art. A beautiful iron fire dog with a horse or bull's head, found on farmland near Capel Garmon, had been dated to around 50BC. It weighs 9kgs, is almost 800 mm tall, and was made by a very skilled blacksmith who had fully mastered working in iron. A bronze bowl found on Snowdon, dated to around 50AD, shows that the maker was experienced in sophisticated enamelling techniques as well as creating bronze objects.

Finds of objects not made locally, such as a collection of glass beads from Somerset found at Twyn-y-Gaer, Abergavenny; and a European bead found at Glanbidno, Powys; are evidence that long distance trade connected Wales with other parts of Britain, and also with Europe.

Religion

"The Celts" did not have a written language and probably passed stories to each generation orally. The only written evidence we have about this period in Britain comes from the Romans and it is possible that some of the things that were reported, especially about Iron Age religion and worship, were biased and may be 'propaganda'.

The recovery of hundreds of objects from Llyn Cerrig Bach, Anglesey and Llyn Fawr in the Rhondda is evidence that valuable metal items such as bronze cauldrons, weapons and tools made from bronze and iron were deliberately put into lakes and bogs by Iron Age people. The iron sword, spearhead and sickle found in Llyn Fawr are the oldest iron objects found in Wales, dated to around 650 BC. Similar evidence of deliberate deposits of high quality metal objects in watery places has been found across western Europe, and archaeologists think these may have been offerings to the Gods.