

A Landscape Characterisation of: LLanllyr, Talsarn



Focused to the Neolithic Landscape of the Aeron Valley

By Sam Bennett
2026 Llanllyr Excavation

Top right- Picture of Neolithic settlement, taken from English Heritage page, see bibliography

Bottom right- Picture of the Aeron Valley by Roger D Kidd see here:

[The Aeron Valley west of Llangeitho,... © Roger D Kidd :: Geograph Britain and Ireland](#)

Top left- Ordnance survey map of the village of Talsarn, see bibliography

Bottom left- A photograph taken by myself of the Llanllyr excavation site

Index

1. -The physical geography of the Neolithic landscape

1.1- Neolithic landscape of Llanllyr, Talsarn

1.2- Neolithic landscape of the wider Aeron Valley

2. -The evolving land uses of the Aeron Valley

2.1- Neolithic period uses and characteristics of Neolithic inhabitants

2.2- Late Neolithic to early Bronze age transitioning land usage within the Aeron Valley

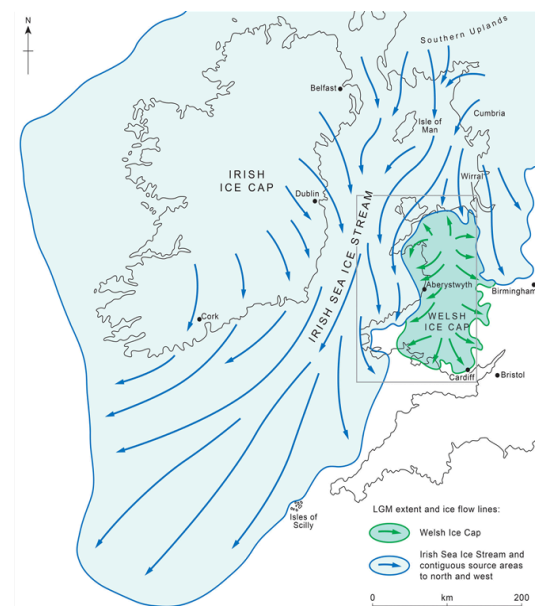
1. - The physical geography of the Neolithic landscape

1.1- Neolithic landscape of Llanllŷr, Talsarn

In the farmlands outside the village of Talsarn in Ceredigion, remnants of a landscape 6000 years in the past remain and show archeologists today what the land that villages like Talsarn were built upon once looked like. In contrast to the modern landscape, Llanllŷr was once not a flat plains area as it remains today but instead a series of marshes with small islands that aided neolithic human activity in the making of tools or charcoal pits. The neolithic landscape of Llanllŷr was dominated by this marsh land and small islands that broke the watery landscape apart. Furthermore the landscape also featured a significant primeval forest that ensnared the neolithic lake/marshlands. The distinct waterlogged marshlands of the Aeron Valley, in specific focus being Llanllŷr, were created through processes linked to the presence of a glacier prior to the mesolithic and neolithic periods, the Welsh ice cap as seen on the right (Glasser et al., 2018).

In particular, the islands which are a distinct part of Llanllŷr's landscape were created by the Aeron Valley glacier during the last glacial maximum around 15,000 to 27,000 years ago (Glasser et al., 2018). This was created during the retreat of the local Aeron Valley glacier through a process named glaciofluvial deposition.

Glaciofluvial deposition of the Aeron Valley glacier created the islands that the neolithic people used as places to knap flint and bring stone tools to. The process is where torrents of sub-glacial meltwater transport tonnes of rubble including: bedrock, sand and gravel. The glacial meltwater then deposits these sediments into glacial cracks across the landscape the glacier is moving across. Meltwater can also deposit these sediments in locations where the movement of the glacier pauses or slows down. Another feature of the landscape of lowland valley areas like Llanllŷr is known as elevated glaciofluvial gravel terraces or kame mounds. Over time, the same "islands" that perpetuated the neolithic landscape of the valley floor of the Aeron Valley in locations like the Aeron Valley region of Wales, was the marshy neolithic wetland. The environment for this feature of the neolithic landscape to form would have been created post the last glacial maximum in the holocene period. During the holocene period, formations in the landscape left over from the actions of the glacier were directly influenced by the climate warming at the start of the holocene period (Glasser et al., 2018). This created the marshy lowland region known to the



neolithic population, remnants of it remain at the Llanllyr site today. (see right, my own picture)
Glacial clay clogging in the region led to the creation of the marsh as glacial moraines further downstream from Llanllyr in the Aeron Valley choked the flow of water and led to glaciolacustrine (also known as a glacial lake) conditions (Glasser et al., 2018). This slow moving stagnant water created by the moraines at the bottom of the valley led to the deposition of clay and silt surrounding the protruding features of the gravel kames. This effectively led to the valley floor being sealed as rainwater could not properly drain away through the layers of clay and silt. Clay and silt depositions clogged water from escaping the valley and led to the creation of the impassable marshland that became a key feature of the neolithic landscape. In contrast to the basins that surrounded them, the kames were made up of loose gravel and sand which made them able to facilitate self-draining and led to them being one of the few dry parts of the environment.

1.2- Neolithic landscape of the wider Aeron Valley

Outside of the lowland marshland regions of places like Llanllyr the neolithic landscape featured more distinctive landscape formations outside of the lowlands. Though the wider Aeron Valley was shaped similarly to the lowlands through extensive glacial processes. One of these distinct landscape formations caused by glacial processes after the first glacial maximum would be the valley ridges that surround the Aeron Valley themselves. The Welsh ice cap that ran over what would become the Aeron valley did not create the valley ridges by themselves and instead formed them due to transforming older Silurian bedrock that had been folded by tectonic processes older than the glacier (Bgs.ac.uk, 2020). This was in tandem with processes aided by the presence of the glacier in the last glacial maximum period that would lead to the rounded capped off valley hill summits that surround the river Aeron and the rest of the valley. These specific features of the valley ridges were the first features to appear when the glacier gradually pressed down upon the valley. The original sharp, harsh ridges that existed prior to the last glacial maximum period were the first to pierce the ice cover during the deglaciation period. This would lead to the valley ridge tops being exposed to the harsh arctic climate which would lead to these features being at the mercy of extreme freeze thawing as water from rain and snow was able to reach them at the top of the glacial cover. This exposure to the elements would lead to frost shattering in these formations and eventually the harsh repeated freeze thaw reaction in the rock would cause the jagged valley peaks to be broken down by ice (Glasser et al., 2018). The rock debris that resulted from their destruction would further smooth the valley ridges into the softer, rounded hillsides that were utilised by neolithic communities.

Areas of smoothed hillsides as a result of the frost shattering can be pictured in this distance of the photo on the right even in the modern day large ridges are not present on the horizon, similar to the neolithic landscape, without the large forest cover. (Photo taken by me)



2. - The evolving land uses of the Aeron Valley

2.1- Neolithic period land uses and the characteristics of its inhabitants

The Aeron Valley and its landforms created via glacial processes during the last glacial maximum period were routinely exploited by our Neolithic ancestors. A clear example of this would have been the lowland marsh regions, which despite being almost impassable to the neolithic people would have served as a significant area of focus to them as they brought tools made of flint and perhaps even other foreign rocks to fashion into tools. They specifically did this practice on a landform directly created from past glacial activity, namely the gravel kames that were dotted about the watery, marshy lowland of the Aeron Valley. This was primarily due to the properties of the kames being one of the only landforms in the marshy region to self drain and remain dry whilst all around it were clogged with water. It allowed our ancestors in the Neolithic period to form small camps upon these “islands” and create tools. It also served a purpose as a possible foraging camp as the area, despite being impassable, was rich in natural resources.

On the right is an image taken by UWTSD from a dig in Llanllyr showing the discovery of a stone axe head for use in a BBC news report (Stone Age axe discovered during dig in Talsarn, 2019) . This is an example of the type of tools that the neolithic people would have fashioned in areas in the Aeron Valley like Llanllyr. This piece was discovered on the remains of a kame/neolithic island in Llanllyr.



Furthermore, the Neolithic peoples also would have utilised the rounded, soft capped valley ridges that run the length of the Aeron Valley. This would have been through the possible burial of their dead on higher ground, as burial in the marshes would have been difficult to achieve, possible ritualistic use of higher ground in these ancient periods such as the neolithic would aid in making it probable that the neolithic people would have used these soft rounded ridge tops to bury their dead. The same rounded ridge tops would have also most likely served another purpose to the Neolithic inhabitants of the Aeron Valley, Travel. Using the ridges for travel is another way the neolithic peoples would have exploited the landscape, the high natural ridges would have served as perfect natural pathways for our ancestors to move around the surrounding areas. Utilising the ridges for efficient travel would have been most beneficial to the Neolithic inhabitants as they could avoid attempting to travel through the impassable lowland areas of the Aeron Valley.

2.2- Late Neolithic to early Bronze Age transitioning land usage within the Aeron Valley

Between the Neolithic and Bronze age within the Aeron Valley there was clear transitioning between the ages as to how they exploited the land around the Aeron Valley that may suggest interesting differences and most importantly, land use continuity, between the two periods. A location in the area surrounding the Aeron Valley that could establish that continuity of the landscape being exploited would have to be sites like the Fan Round Barrow (see picture on right taken in 1992) outside Talsarn in the surrounding Aeron Valley landscape (Poucher, 2010) . Within this site are primarily the remains of Bronze age items of archaeological



interest such as pottery and a bronze spearhead, however it is suggested that beneath the bronze age fan barrow formations there lies evidence of late neolithic activity, in particular, circular cooking pits, other locations across the valley share this unique trend of bronze age areas of interest having been created upon the remnants of a site that would have been utilised by Neolithic period people. This stratigraphic continuity between land use can be witnessed across a lot of archaeological sites across the region. The most likely reason for the land being exploited at similar locations is that the descendants of the people who inhabited the land in the neolithic period continued to inhabit the same areas their ancestors did. This would have most likely been because these early bronze age people already recognised the land as being ancestral and culturally significant. It might also have been because the land still benefited the bronze age people the same way it benefited their neolithic ancestors with things like foraging access or respite from harsh conditions like the swampy lowlands of the Aeron Valley.

-Bibliography-

- Bgs.ac.uk. (2020). *Llangranog district, sheet 194, a brief explanation*. Available at: <https://webapps.bgs.ac.uk/memoirs/docs/B06108.html>
- English Heritage (2019). *Food Timeline | English Heritage*. English Heritage. Available at: <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/stonehenge/history-and-stories/history/food-and-feasting-at-stonehenge/food-timeline/>.
- Glasser , N., Davies, J., Hambrey , M., Davies, B.J., Gheorghiu, D.M., Balfour, J., Smedley , R. and Duller, G.A.T. (2018). Late Devensian deglaciation of south-west Wales from luminescence and cosmogenic isotope dating. *Journal of Quaternary Science* , 33(7). doi:<https://doi.org/10.1002/jqs.3061>.
- Historic Ordnance Survey Map of Tal-sarn, 1923 (2023). *Historic Ordnance Survey Map of Tal-sarn, 1923*. Francisfrith.com. Available at: https://www.francisfrith.com/llanllyr/map-of-tal-sarn-1923_pop844636
- Poucher, P. (2010). *FAN ROUND BARROW, TALSARN, CEREDIGION CD 078 GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY Prepared by Dyfed Archaeological Trust For Cadw*. Available at: <https://heneb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/FAN-ROUND-BARROW-TALSARN-CEREDIGION-CD-078-GEOPHYSICAL-SURVEY.pdf>
- Stone Age axe discovered during dig in Talsarn. (2019). *BBC News*. 31 May. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-48473088>.