

Corndon Hill burial cairns and Mitchell's Fold stone circle



Walk Information:

Maps: OS Explorer 216

Distance: 5.5 miles / 9 kilometres or 4 miles / 6.4 kilometres

Duration: Allow around 5 hours for whole circuit

Difficulty: medium to hard. Some sections are steep and in places the path is indistinct. A map is essential and a compass and/or GPS might be useful.

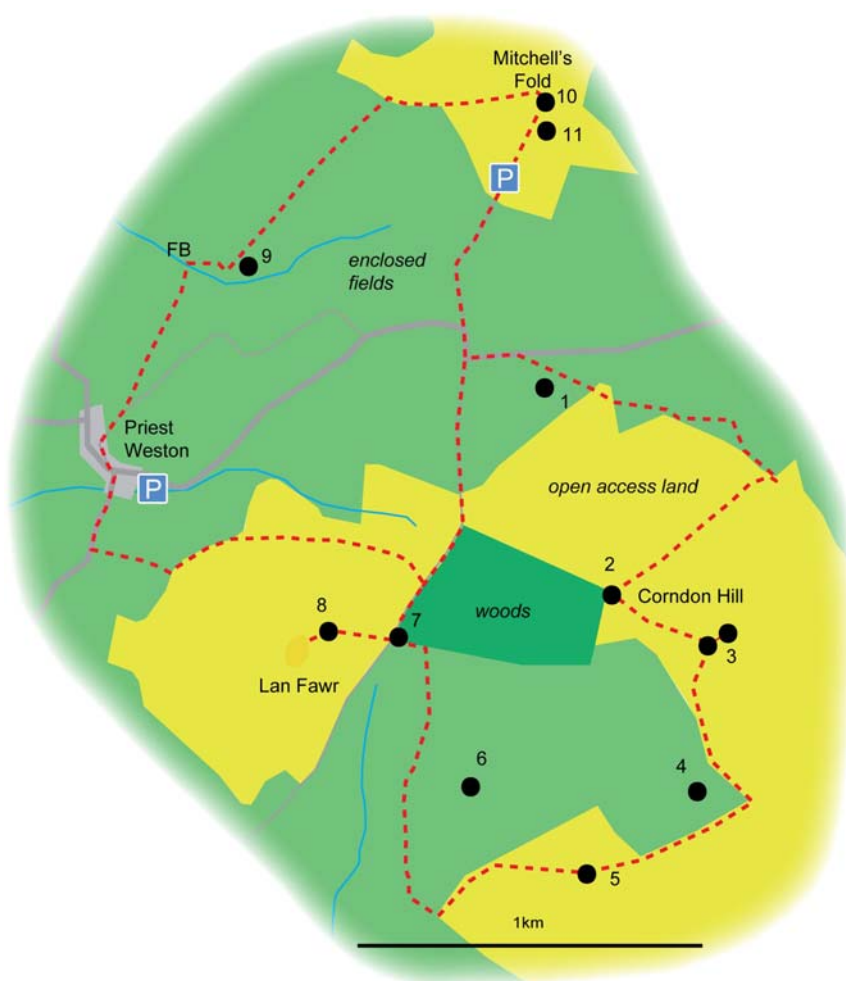
Start and finish: Mitchell's Fold car park **SO 30289806**. The walk can also be completed from the Miners' Arms in Priest Weston **SO29329725**.

Walk summary

The walk takes advantage of public footpaths and open access land.

From the car park the walk follows the access track and then a road before entering farmland. There are several stiles before reaching open access land, rising steeply to the summit of Corndon Hill. There are a number of Bronze Age burial cairns around the summit, and spectacular views. Descending on the SW side of the hill the walk joins a bridleway and then a track.

The optional walk to Lan Fawr provides more good views. The shorter walk then returns along a track to the car park and stone circle, or it is possible to follow footpaths which descend to Priest Weston and the lure of the Miners' Arms. The final section follows a track and footpaths, with one pathless, steep section, before reaching Mitchell's Fold stone circle.



Introduction

The area around Corndon Hill, on the Wales/England border, has been a focus for human activity from prehistoric times to the present day. There is evidence that the land was being cleared, presumably for agriculture, during the Neolithic period (around 4,400 – 2,300 BC) and during the Bronze Age (2,300 – 1,200 BC) a distinct cluster of burial mounds were constructed, occupying prominent hilltops and hill spurs in the Corndon Hill and Lan Fawr area. The stone-built burial cairns are typical landscape features of the Welsh uplands and would have been erected over inhumations (usually single skeletons), and sometimes cremations. These monuments are perhaps contemporary with the stone circle at Mitchell's Fold, which lies further to the north on Stapeley Hill.



Corndon Hill viewed from the SW

The underlying geology has played a major role in this area, not only in sculpting the landscape, but also influencing man's exploitation of natural resources. The upland mass of Corndon Hill was formed by a volcanic intrusion of dolerite, while just to the south, near Hyssington, is a small outcrop of an even harder volcanic rock known as picrite. This was used to make stone axes at around the same time that the burial cairns and stone circle were constructed. To the north-east of Corndon, and around Snailbeach in particular, veins of lead were exploited for centuries, possibly from Roman times until the early 20th century.

In the centuries after the Norman conquest Corndon Hill and the surrounding area formed a hunting estate, or 'forest', belonging to one of the neighbouring Marcher lordships. This was one of a number of forests, or chases, which once occupied the Welsh borderlands.

The Walk

The car park for Mitchell's Fold stone circle is at the end of a rough track, 200m from the road. From the car park walk back down the track and follow the road around to the left, before crossing a stile on the right. Follow the edge of the field with the fence on your right. Note a large **Bronze Age burial cairn (1)** in the next field, and also the unusual nature of the boundary, which was originally formed by large edge-set stones.



Edge-set stones forming field boundary

Cross the next stile and follow the path through bracken to cross another and continue in the same direction to a redundant stile and then diagonally upslope, passing a small quarry on the right. Go over the rocky outcrop and down to a stile and gate in the corner of the field, from where the path leads diagonally across the next field to a further stile.

This is lead mining country and a ruined engine house can be seen in the distance to the NE, with workings extending into the trees beyond. The main centre for lead mining during the 19th century was Snailbeach and there are some impressive industrial remains still to be seen. There are also smaller scale workings to be found near the turning to the car park (SO 30029767).

Beyond the stile is a stone slab bridging a stream. Bear right, towards a large clearance cairn and continue to a stile in the corner of the field, which leads onto open access land. Cross the stile and turn right, following the fence back for around 20 metres to pick up a path near some holly trees which leads upslope to the summit of **Corndon Hill**.

The triangulation pillar on the summit stands on the slight remains of one of several **Bronze Age burial cairns (2)** on Corndon (SO 30609693). The views from the summit are extensive: the Berwyn ridge to the NW; the Breidden and Middletown Hill to the N; the Stiperstones to the ENE; the Long Mynd to the ESE; Roundton Hill to the SSW; and Lan Fawr to the W.



The smaller of two adjacent cairns **(3)** on Corndon Hill with the Stiperstones beyond

From the summit follow the path SE to a prominent **burial cairn (3)**, the largest on Corndon Hill with a diameter of 23 metres. The cairn has been dug into in the past to create several shelters. Around 40m to the NE is a second, smaller **cairn** with a kerb of edge-set stones and a central burial cist partly hidden by a small shelter (SO 30949680).

Turning SSW, head for the fence bounding the access land, with another **Bronze Age cairn (4)** beyond, to which there is no public access. Turn left and follow the fence to the corner and then around to the right. At the next corner leave the fence and continue ahead to yet another **cairn (5)**. Again the views are spectacular, including the distinctive shape of Roundton Hill to the SW, which is topped by an Iron Age hillfort, and Montgomery to the W, nestling below the remains of its medieval castle.



Aerial view of the Iron Age hillfort on Roundton Hill

To the S the unassuming low hill with hedged field boundaries is thought to be the site of a prehistoric stone axe factory, utilising the outcrop of a hard, igneous rock known as picrite. Numerous picrite battle axes and axe hammers have been found across southern Britain, although their main concentration is in the West Midlands and Welsh Marches. Survey and excavation by CPAT in 2007-08, in conjunction with National Museum Wales, identified an area of small-scale quarrying which may have been the source of stone for the Bronze Age axes.



Picrite axe hammer and battle axe

From the cairn descend westwards (no path) to a fence and follow it down to a bridleway at the base of the hill. Turn right, through a gate, and follow this to a track, turning right to follow the track for some distance, eventually to a gate where it joins a more major trackway. In the corner of the plantation on the right is a stoney mound, which is another **Bronze Age burial cairn (7)**. Unfortunately, the cairn was inadvertently damaged during the course of tree-felling operations late in 2005, when a number of holes were dug into its northern side looking for material to build a forestry road, leading to small-scale excavations by CPAT in early 2006. The round barrow was found to be about 15 metres in diameter and up to 1.8 metres high built of soil and turf stripped from the surrounding area. A few fragments of prehistoric pottery and a number of flint flakes were recovered, together with charcoal which has been radiocarbon dated, suggesting that vegetation clearance was taking place here during the later Neolithic period.

There is the option of continuing ahead, across the field, to the summit of Lan Fawr, with good views, noting another probable **burial cairn (8)** just below the summit. Looking back towards Corndon Hill numerous hollows and larger **quarries (6)** can be seen covering the south-western slopes. The stone extracted from here is an Ordovician shale which may have been used locally as a roofing material from the medieval period onwards.



Aerial view of quarrying on Corndon Hill

Return to the track and head NNE. There is the option of continuing along the track to return to the car park and the stone circle or, for a longer walk, turn left at a signpost (SO 30062694) and continue diagonally across the field to a path contouring around Lan Fawr, over a stile, and down to a track. Turn left and after 200 metres take a path on the right, crossing two fields to a lane. Turn right, into Priest Weston and then left at the road junction and immediately right onto a tarmac track as far as Chapel House, then follow the unsurfaced track ahead. Ignore the descending

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path on the left and cross a stile on the left (SO 29209745) into a field. Follow below the gorse and continue with an old field boundary on your right, then a fence, to a gate on the right. Through the gate turn left and follow the fence down to a stream and footbridge, near corner of the field (SO 29389789).

Turn right onto a track, cross a stile next to the gate and continue up the drive and in front of the cottage to a stile above an outbuilding. Turn left, uphill (no path) with an area of **quarrying (9)** on the right. Follow the crest of the ridge to some hawthorns and larch on the right, continuing onwards to a stile. Cross the stile, turn right and follow the fence to the corner, then take the middle of three paths, which leads to **Mitchell's Fold Bronze Age stone circle (10)** (SO 30439837). The circle is around 30 metres in diameter and now has 15 upright stones, although originally there may have been as many as 30.



Aerial view of Mitchell's Fold showing ridge and furrow.

Legend has it that in times of famine a fairy gave a magic cow which provided an endless supply of milk. One night a witch milked the cow into a sieve and realising that she had been tricked the cow disappeared. The witch was turned to stone and a circle was erected around her to ensure that she never escaped.

The stone circle, and much of the surrounding moorland, is covered by a series of parallel earthen ridges which are evidence of past cultivation, possibly during the medieval period. Earthworks such as these are known as 'ridge and furrow'.

Around 80 metres S of the circle, 40 metres to the left of the track, is a small **Bronze Age standing stone and a burial cairn (11)** (SO 30429828). Follow the track back to the car park.



The small standing stone (11) to the S of Mitchell's Fold with the stone circle beyond



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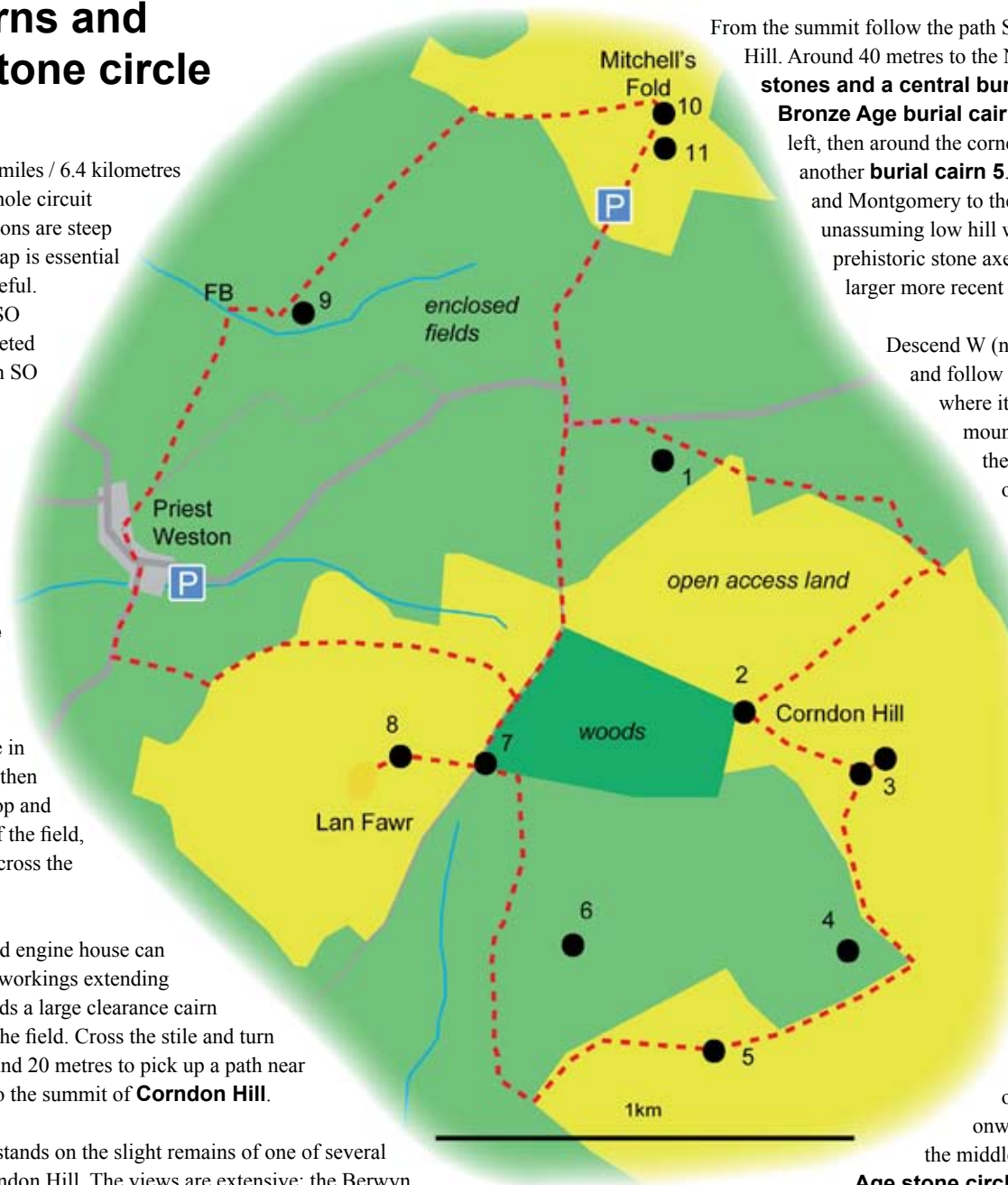
Start/finish Mitchell's Fold car park SO 30289806. The walk can also be completed from the Miners' Arms in Priest Weston SO 29329725.

The car park is at the end of a rough track. Walk back down the track and follow road around to left, before crossing a stile on right. Follow right side of the field, noting a large **Bronze Age burial cairn 1** in the next field.

Cross a stile and follow path through bracken to cross another stile. Continue in the same direction to a redundant stile, then diagonally upslope, over a rocky outcrop and down to a stile and gate in the corner of the field, from where the path leads diagonally across the field to a further stile.

This is lead mining country and a ruined engine house can be seen in the distance to the NE, with workings extending beyond into the trees. Bear right, towards a large clearance cairn and continue to a stile in the corner of the field. Cross the stile and turn right, following the fence back for around 20 metres to pick up a path near some holly trees which leads upslope to the summit of **Corndon Hill**.

The triangulation pillar on the summit stands on the slight remains of one of several **Bronze Age burial cairns 2** on Corndon Hill. The views are extensive: the Berwyn ridge to the NW; the Stiperstones to the ENE; the Long Mynd to the ESE; Roundton Hill to the SSW; and Lan Fawr to the W.



From the summit follow the path SE to a prominent **burial cairn 3**, the largest on Corndon Hill. Around 40 metres to the NE is a second, smaller **cairn with a kerb of edge-set stones and a central burial cist**. Turning SSW, head for the fence, with a further **Bronze Age burial cairn 4** beyond (no access), and follow fence around to the left, then around the corner. At next corner leave the fence, continuing ahead to another **burial cairn 5**. More spectacular views, with Roundton Hill to the SW and Montgomery to the W, below the remains of its medieval castle. To the S the unassuming low hill with hedged field boundaries is thought to be the site of a prehistoric stone axe factory. To the NW there are numerous small hollows and larger more recent **stone quarries 6** on the SW slopes of Corndon Hill.

Descend W (no path) to fence and follow it down to a bridleway. Turn right and follow this to a track, turning right to follow the track to a gate, where it joins a more major track. In the corner on the right is a stoney mound, which is a further **Bronze Age burial cairn 7**. There is the option of continuing ahead, across the field, to the summit of Lan Fawr, with good views, noting another **burial cairn 8** just below the summit. Return to the track and head NNE.

For the shorter walk follow the track to return to the car park and Mitchell's Fold stone circle. Alternatively, turn left at a signpost (SO 30062694), diagonally across the field to a path contouring around Lan Fawr, over a stile, and down to a track. Turn left and after 200 metres cross a stile on the right, crossing two fields to a lane. Turn right, into Priest Weston and left at the junction, then right onto a tarmac track, uphill, as far as Chapel House, then follow the unsurfaced track ahead. Ignore descending path on left and cross stile on left (SO 29209745) into field. Follow below gorse and along old boundary, then fence, to a gate on right. Through gate turn left and follow fence down to stream and footbridge near corner of field (SO 29389789).

Turn right onto track, cross stile and up a drive then in front of cottage to a stile above an outbuilding. Head uphill (no path) with **stone quarrying 9** on right. Follow crest of ridge, passing hawthorns and larch on right, continuing onwards to a stile. Turn right following fence to corner, then take the middle of three paths, which leads to **Mitchell's Fold Bronze Age stone circle 10**. Around 80 metres S of the circle, 40 metres to the left of the track, is a small **standing stone** and a **burial cairn 11**. Follow the track back to the car park.