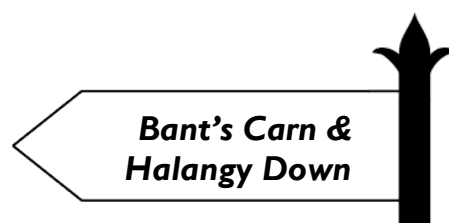




**THE
PREHISTORIC
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SINCE 1935



Signposts to Prehistory

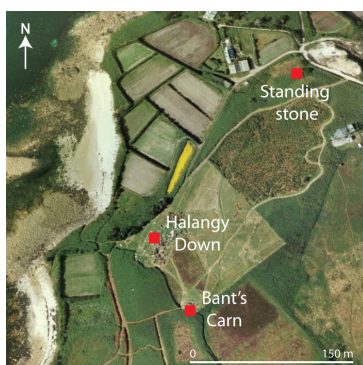
Location: This group of prehistoric sites is situated on the north-west coast of St Mary's, in the Isles of Scilly, 1 km north of Hugh Town.

Main period: Bronze Age, Iron Age

Access & ownership: The sites are in the care of English Heritage; access is free. The area is best approached by foot or by bike.



Fig. 1. Entrance to Bant's Carn. By Don Cload [CC BY-SA 2.0]



The Isles of Scilly were permanently settled from around 2500 BC, when much of Scilly was a single landmass. As sea levels rose, the farmlands in the sheltered valleys became flooded, creating the island landscape we see today. This small area close to the coast has well-preserved sites representing a long period of prehistory from the Bronze Age burial chamber of Bant's Carn, and large standing stone, to the Iron Age settlement of Halangy Down.

Fig. 2. Aerial view (GoogleMaps)

Bant's Carn (SV911124), set on a NW facing slope just 150 m from the sea (Fig. 1), is a well-preserved example of an Entrance Grave, one of 80 recorded on the Isles of Scilly. Built in c. 2000 BC, it continued in use for about 500 years. An outer platform with a granite kerb on the N and E sides measures 13 m across and is 0.6 m high (Fig. 3). This surrounds an inner mound of 8.6 x 6.2 m, enclosed by an inner kerb, 8 m in diameter and 1 m high. The mound contains a large (5.25 x 1.5 x 1.6 m) stone chamber constructed of large slabs and roofed by four massive capstones up to 2.5 m in length. The chamber is accessed via a stone-lined passage, now roofless. Large portal stones mark the entrance.

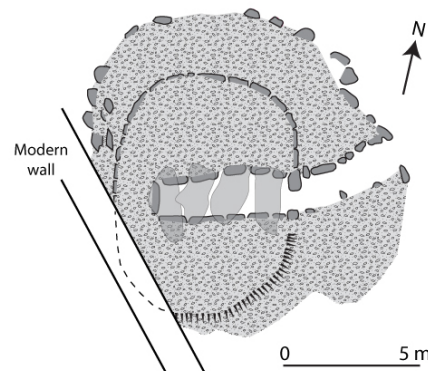


Fig. 3. Plan of Bant's Carn. After Ashbee 1976, fig. 2.



When the monument was excavated by Cornish antiquary George Bonsor in 1900, four piles of cremated human bone were found at the western end of the chamber, along with Neolithic and Bronze Age pottery. Restoration work in 1970 uncovered 140 pottery fragments and two worked flints.

The granite standing stone, 'Long Rock' is set 270 m NE of Bant's Carn (SV91091254). It can be difficult to find, concealed by ferns, near a small wood but is an impressive 2.4 m tall, 1 m wide, and oval in section. Some claim to see a 'face' on the upper surface. The stone is aligned with Bant's Carn on the summer sunrise and so can be assumed to be of Bronze Age date.

Fig. 4. 'Long Rock'. By Bob Embleton [CC BY-SA 2.0]

Halangy Down is a late prehistoric settlement just 50 m north of Bant's Carn. Between the two, traces of ancient field systems are visible as terraces and banks – some up to 300 m long – following the contours of the slopes. Stone slabs used to retain the terraces can still be seen. These may have a direct relationship with the burial chamber (Ashbee 1976). The banks that intersect the terraces are later modifications to create small rectangular plots.

The remains of the settlement seen today date to the Late Iron Age–Roman period, but evidence indicates the site was occupied from c. 200 BC, in the Bronze Age. Excavation (Ashbee 1970) revealed a complex of 11 inter-connecting stone houses, mostly simple oval structures (Fig. 5) with stone-lined drains. Stone 'cupboards' were built into the walls.



Fig. 5. Iron Age house at Halangy Down. By Bob Embleton [CC BY-SA 2.0]

One larger house (27 x 14.5 m) was built on a courtyard pattern characteristic of Romano-British villages in west Cornwall. The house had three rooms accessed from a small courtyard, all contained within a massive enclosing wall and entered via a long, curved entrance passage. All the houses showed signs of repair and alteration, confirming that the settlement was occupied over a long period. Excavations produced many artefacts including spindle whorls, pottery, and animal bones reflecting a mixed economy with cattle, sheep, pigs and horses. Unlike their ancestors, who were buried in large collective tombs like Bant's Carn, the people of Halangy Down were buried individually. West of the settlement is a cemetery of cists – stone-lined graves – typical of the Romano-British period in Scilly.

References and further information

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Ashbee, P. 1996. Halangy Down, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly. Excavations 1964–1977. *Cornish Archaeology* 35

English Heritage visitor website: www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/bants-carn-burial-chamber-and-halangy-down-ancient-village/history/

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