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Dublin Core

Title

Stepping Stone between Wales and Ireland? | Carreg Gamu rhwng Cymru ac Iwerddon?

Subject

Ireland

Iwerddon

Wales

Cymru

Mythology

Mytholeg

Creator

Manchán Magan

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Relation

<https://perma.cc/NA25-WUUD>

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Curatescape story

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English

Welsh

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Curatescape Story Item Type Metadata

Lede

The Irish Sea separates Ireland from Wales, but perhaps it wasn't always the case. There are some tantalising hints that suggest a series of giant "stepping stones" that might have made it a lot easier to cross from Wales to Wicklow long ago.

Lead (Welsh)

Mae Môr Iwerddon yn gwahanu Cymru ac Iwerddon, ond efallai nad felly y buodd hi bob amser. Ceir awgrymiadau gogleisiol bod yna gyfres o "gerrig camu" enfawr a allai fod wedi'i gwneud yn llawer haws croesi o Gymru i Wicklow ymhell yn ôl.

Story

Looking across the Irish Sea to Snowdonia in Wales on a bright snowclad morning is a disconcerting experience. From Wicklow, Wexford and even parts of Dublin it seems as though you could walk across to the Welsh coastline, and there are some tantalising suggestions that maybe at one time you could.

Certainly, these two coasts were closer in the past, as can be seen by the extensive remains of submerged woodland beneath Cardigan Bay, which lies directly across from Wicklow. A vast realm of twisted tree stumps and coiling roots dating to between 4000 and 5000 years ago stretch out like stunted peaks and shiny seals across the sands. Even an ancient timber walkway of coppiced branches and upright posts has been uncovered, built eons ago as the sea was inundating the land.

There's a real possibility that a land bridge linked the two regions around ten thousand years ago. It sounds like long ago, but is, in fact, recent enough that memories may still linger in old stories, such as in the medieval Welsh tales among the Mabinogion. An episode in one of the Four Branches, Branwen Daughter of Llŷr, recounts how the Welsh giant, Bendigeidfran, leads his army across from Wales to invade Ireland. The attack is described as, "an entire landscape, it seemed, moving towards Ireland." Swineherds in Wicklow warned their leaders that, "a wood have we seen upon the sea, in a place where we never yet saw a single tree... and the wood, and the mountain, and all these things moved." Bendigeidfran led the charge, wading through the water ahead of the fleet.

There is much exaggeration to the story, but could there be grains of truth in the story. And looking across the Irish Sea on a clear day the question that arises is whether a giant could have waded across the channel long ago, when some of the ice sheets still remained and the water levels were far lower? First off, we must acknowledge that giants are not make-believe. Genetic research has isolated a gene mutation among Irish people which causes a pituitary adenoma, a condition that can lead to gigantism in certain people. In the Hunterian Museum in London there are skeletal remains of an Irish man, Charles Byrne, who was 7ft 7ins tall. His ailment can be traced back through many generations and appears to have first arisen

among the Irish 1500 years ago, but geneticists point out that it could have started as far back as 3,700 years ago. So, there were always a small proportion of very tall people in Ireland.

Furthermore, the short 80km stretch of sea between Ireland and Wales was likely shallower at times than it is today. *The Mabinogion* explains Bendigeidfran's ability to cross the Irish Sea by saying, "in those days the deep water was not wide. He went by wading. There were but two rivers, the Lli and the Archan were they called, but thereafter the deep water grew wider when the deep overflowed the kingdoms."

This description matches the claim made by some geologists that there was a temporary land bridge running between Wales and Ireland 11,000 years ago. Robin Wingfield of the British Geological Society believed that the slow northward retreat of the ice was followed at its boundary by a migrating "forebulge" as the earth's crust rebounded from the weight of the ice cap. This ridge of land would have existed for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. The distinguished naturalist and Professor of Quaternary [Ice Age] Studies in Trinity College Dublin, Frank Mitchell, was adamant that this was the case and he pictured "a very remarkable type of automatic trackway across the Irish Sea."

Other coastal and geophysical researchers are more sceptical, believing that the sea level never dropped far enough in the channel to allow the land emerge entirely. They point to the fact that the Irish Sea floor has a great trough, 100m deep, running up the centre. Yet this deep central trough is bridged by a high ridge running east to west, roughly between Wicklow and Cardigan Bay, where Bendigeidfran had his base. It's not quite high enough to have been exposed in the post-glacial period, but experts do speculate that there could have been a series of soggy, temporary islands that might have allowed the giant Irish "elk" make the crossing, holding up its antlers as it swam. If Bendigeidfran was indeed as tall as Charles Byrne he too might have made it across, especially if he knew where the moraine ridges of rocks left behind by the glaciers were and could leap from one to the other.

Such speculation is definitely more the realm of arts than science, but it does help to clarify in our imaginations, at least, just how strong the linguistic, trading and cultural links are between Ireland and Wales.

Story (Welsh)

Mae edrych ar draws Môr Iwerddon tuag at Eryri dan eira ar fore llachar yn brofiad rhyfedd. O Wicklow, Wexford a hyd yn oed rhannau o Ddilyn mae'n ymddangos y gallech chi gerdded drosodd i lannau Cymru, ac mae yna awgrymiadau gogleisiol fod hynny'n bosibl efallai ar un adeg.

Yn sicr, roedd y ddau arfordir yn nes at ei gilydd yn y gorffennol, fel y gwelwch chi yn olion helaeth coetir sydd wedi'i foddio o dan Fae Ceredigion, yn union gyferbyn â Wicklow. Mae casgliad helaeth o foncyffion coed a gwreiddiau troellog sy'n dyddio i rhwng 4000 a 5000 o flynyddoedd yn ôl yn ymestyn allan ar draws y tywod fel copaon bach byr a morloi sgleiniog. Mae hyd yn oed rhodfa bren hynafol o ganghennau wedi'u tocio a physt wedi dod i'r golwg, a honno wedi'i hadeiladu oesoedd yn ôl wrth i'r môr ddechrau gorlifo'r tir.

Mae yna wir bosibilrwydd bod pont dir yn cysylltu'r ddau ranbarth tua deng mil o flynyddoedd yn ôl. Mae'n swnio'n bell yn ôl, ond, mewn gwirionedd, mae'n ddigon diweddar nes ei bod yn bosibl bod atgofion yn parhau yn hen straeon yr oesoedd canol, megis y Mabinogion. Mewn pennod yng Nghainc Branwen Ferch Llŷr, adroddir sut llwyddodd y cawr o Gymro, Bendigeidfran, i arwain ei fyddin drosodd o Gymru i ymosod ar Iwerddon. Disgrifir yr ymosodiad fel tirwedd gyfan yn symud tuag at Iwerddon. Cafodd penaethiaid Wicklow rybudd gan ddynion yn gofalu am eu moch, "yr ydym wedi gweld coed ar y weilgi

yn y lle na welsom erioed un pren... a'r coed a'r mynydd a phob peth oll o'r rhai hynny'n symud." Bendigeidfran arweiniodd y cyrch, gan gerdded drwy'r dŵr o flaen ei lynges.

Mae llawer o or-ddweud yn y stori, ond oes rhyw ronyn o wirionedd ynddi tybed? Wrth edrych ar draws Môr Iwerddon ar ddiwrnod clir y cwestiwn sy'n codi yw a allai cawr fod wedi cerdded y sianel ymhell yn ôl, pan oedd rhai o'r llenni iâ yn dal yno a lefelau'r dŵr yn llawer is? Yn gyntaf, rhaid inni gydnabod nad stori ffug yw cewri. Mae ymchwil enetig wedi canfod mwntaniad genynnau ymhlith pobl Iwerddon sy'n achosi adenoma pitwïdol, sef anhwylder a all arwain at gawraeth mewn rhai pobl. Yn Amgueddfa Hunter yn Llundain ceir olion sgerbwdd dyn o Iwerddon, Charles Byrne, a oedd yn 7 troedfedd 7 modfedd o daldra. Gellir olrhain ei anhwylder ef yn ôl drwy genedlaethau lawer ac mae'n ymddangos bod yr anhwylder wedi codi gyntaf ymhlith y Gwyddelod 1500 o flynyddoedd yn ôl, ond mae genetegwyr yn nodi'r ffaith y gallai fod wedi dechrau mor bell â 3,700 o flynyddoedd yn ôl. Felly, roedd yna gyfran fach o bobl dal iawn yn Iwerddon erioed.

At hynny, roedd y darn byr o 80km o fôr rhwng Cymru ac Iwerddon yn debygol o fod yn fasach ar adegau nag ydyw heddiw. Mae'r *Mabinogion* yn esbonio gallu Bendigeidfran i groesi Môr Iwerddon drwy ddweud, "nid oedd y weilgi yn fawr y pryd hwnnw; gan gerdded yr aeth ef. Nid oedd ond dwy afon, Lli ac Archan y'i gelwid. Ac wedi hynny y cynyddodd y weilgi pan oresgynnodd y weilgi'r teyrnasoedd".

Mae'r disgrifiad hwn yn cyd-fynd â'r honiad gan rai daearegwyr bod pont dir dros dro yn rhedeg rhwng Cymru ac Iwerddon 11,000 o flynyddoedd yn ôl. Credai Robin Wingfield o Gymdeithas Ddaearegol Prydain fod codiad yng nghramen y Ddaear wedi dilyn enciliad araf y rhew tua'r gogledd a hynny wrth i'r gramen fownsio'n ôl yn sgil codi pwysau'r cap iâ. Byddai'r gefnen hon o dir wedi bodoli am gannoedd, os nad miloedd, o flynyddoedd. Roedd y naturiaethwr nodedig a'r Athro Astudiaethau Oes yr Iâ yng Ngholeg y Drindod Dulyn, Frank Mitchell, yn bendant bod hyn yn wir a disgrifiai "a very remarkable type of automatic trackway across the Irish Sea."

Mae ymchwilwyr arfordirol a geoffisegol eraill yn fwy amheus, gan gredu na wnaeth lefel y môr erioed ostwng yn ddigon pell yn y sianel i ganiatáu i'r tir ddod i'r amlwg yn gyfan gwbl. Maent yn tynnu sylw at y ffaith bod yna gafn mawr yn llawr Môr Iwerddon, 100m o ddyfnder, yn rhedeg i fyny'r canol. Ac eto, mae'r cafn canolog dwfn hwn yn cael ei bontio gan gefnen uchel sy'n rhedeg o'r dwyrain i'r gorllewin, yn fras rhwng Wicklow a Bae Ceredigion, lle roedd cartref Bendigeidfran. Nid yw'n ddigon uchel i fod wedi dod i'r golwg yn y cyfnod ôl-rewlifol, ond mae arbenigwyr yn dyfalu ei bod yn bosibl bod yna gyfres o ynnysoedd corsiog dros dro a'r rheiny wedi caniatáu i'r "elc" enfawr o Iwerddon wneud y croesiad, gan ddal ei gyrn anferth i fyny wrth nofio. Os oedd Bendigeidfran mor dal â Charles Byrne, efallai ei fod yntau hefyd wedi llwyddo i groesi, yn enwedig os oedd yn gwybod ble roedd esgeiriau creigiau'r marian a adawyd ar ôl gan y rhewlifau ac yn gallu neidio o'r naill i'r llall.

I fyd y celfyddydau ac nid i'r gwyddorau y mae dyfalu o'r fath yn perthyn, ond mae'n helpu i egluro yn ein dychymyg, o leiaf, mor gryf yw'r cysylltiadau ieithyddol, masnachol a diwylliannol rhwng Cymru ac Iwerddon.

Factoid

Related Resources

M. Davies (tr.), *The Mabinogion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

The Mabinogion, 1877 translation by Lady Charlotte Guest, archived at <https://perma.cc/9HSX-PJY6>

The 1948 translation by Jones, Gwyn and Jones, Thomas of *The Mabinogion*. (Everyman, 1948), archived at <https://perma.cc/V6SX-DKBG>

Anna Lewis, "The stunning ancient forest on a Welsh beach that's more visible than it's been in thousands of years", *WalesOnline*, 26 May, 2019, archived at <https://perma.cc/W9PZ-CBK8>

Official Website