

CARN EUNY

COURTYARD HOUSE SETTLEMENT

SW 402 288 [OS Maps Explorer 102; Landranger 203]

LOCATION

Carn Euny Courtyard House Settlement can be found near the farmland of Brane, deep in the hidden heartland of West Penwith.

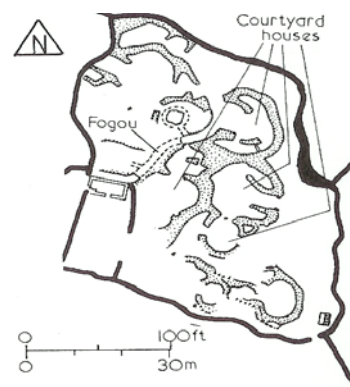
ACCESS

From Penzance take the A30 towards Land's End. About a mile past the B3283 turning to St. Buryan you will see a small turn on your right that leads to Sancreed. [From St. Just take the A3071 towards Penzance and just past the turn to Sennen take the next right to Sancreed]. Near Sancreed take the signed turn northwards to Brane and Carn Euny. There is a small car parking area and then a walk up a lane and across fields to the site, which is managed by Cornwall Heritage Trust.



DESCRIPTION

Carn Euny is a fine example of a Courtyard House Settlement, second only to Chysauster [also available as a downloadable leaflet]. Courtyard House Settlements are a uniquely West Penwith form of dwelling, which began to appear at the end of the Iron Age (about 500 BC) and continued to be occupied until the 4th-5th centuries AD (Romano-Cornish period). Each consisted of a small, well-built circular or oval enclosure, generally with a single entrance, usually containing a single round dwelling house and a number of outbuildings set around the periphery of an open courtyard. In the case of Carn Euny however, what eventually evolved from an earlier settlement were four interlocking courtyard houses, each containing a large courtyard, with adjoining spaces.



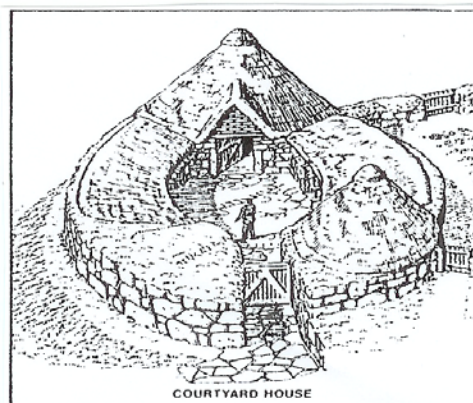
[c] Craig Weatherhill

Each house would have been roofed with thatch or turf over a timber framework, and the whole 'village' would have been a secure and self-contained unit. The inhabitants worked the surrounding fields, and there is no evidence of any tribal fighting here: the settlement was abandoned peacefully in about the 5th century AD.

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES & FINDS

Part of the reason that the site was chosen was because the area all around was once rich in alluvial metallic ores (especially tin, which was a much prized commodity, being necessary for the process of bronze making). Some tin streaming may have taken place here, along with weaving and corn-grinding: pottery and various types of stone tools that were found on the site are indicative of this.

However, perhaps the most interesting and significant feature of the site is the presence of an underground **Fogou & Beehive Hut**. For more details of this structure and its purpose and meaning please turn to p.2 of this leaflet.



Reconstruction of a Courtyard House
[c] Craig Weatherhill

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CARN EUNY FOGOU & BEEHIVE HUT

SW 4024 2885 [OS Maps Explorer 102; Landranger 203]

LOCATION & ACCESS As for Carn Euny Courtyard House settlement [see p.1 of this leaflet]. The fogou is best reached by walking to the top (N) of the settlement and down into one of the courtyard houses, from where the fogou and beehive hut lead off.

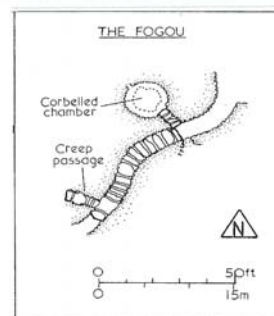


DESCRIPTION

Fogous are a unique West Penwith structure. They are always associated with settlements, but in the case of Carn Euny at least the fogou predates the Settlement, showing that the Settlement grew up around the fogou. 'Fogou' is a Cornish word meaning 'cave', which is an apt description of the structure. It consists of a roofed underground

tunnel 20m (66ft) in length and over 1.8m (6ft) high. Both ends are now open, though originally both were sealed, and the only way into the fogou would have been by means of a tiny creep passage at the S end, which would only have been accessible by crawling down it. The fogou originally had a paved floor with drainage channels.

To the N of the fogou and attached to it is a Beehive Hut, a corbelled chamber 4.6m (15ft) in diameter and 2.4m (8ft) high. It is completely below ground level, but there is some doubt as to whether it would originally have been roofed or not. Today an artificial roof that was subsequently grassed over has been placed on it.



[c] Craig Weatherhill

PURPOSE AND MEANING

To unravel the possible purpose and meaning of the Fogou & Beehive Hut, we have to go back to the earliest period of its development. In the beginning, the Beehive Hut was constructed, with its entrance facing SE, and a recess at the back opposite to the entrance. This 'hut' was thus deliberately aligned to catch the first rays of the rising sun at the Midwinter Solstice, which would have shone directly into the recess, which may have formed some kind of 'altar' to celebrate the rebirth of the sun God/dess. The next phase of building was the fogou, which was sealed at both ends, with access only by the creep passage. The orientation of the fogou (and most other extant fogous in Wesp Penwith) was now in a NE/SW direction, which means that the northerly end would have received the rays of the rising Midsummer sun. About this time the houses in the Settlement were being built, and the Beehive Hut and Fogou were incorporated into the northern house, so that the house may have served as some kind of ante-chamber or preparation room for entering the Hut and Fogou.

What then was the purpose of the fogou? Three main suggestions have been made (1) refuge (2) storage & (3) ceremony and ritual. **Refuge** seems an unlikely function. As we have seen, both ends of the fogou were sealed, so once inside the inhabitants would have been trapped and easy to smoke out or be destroyed. Although fogous bear a superficial resemblance to souterrains in Ireland, Scotland & Brittany from the same period, in fact souterrains, which were used for refuge, are very different, with false passages, hidden doors and secret areas. **Storage** is also unlikely. It has been shown that most foodstuffs would perish very quickly if stored there. Only dairy products would do well, and fogous seem unnecessarily elaborate to serve as an Iron Age fridge! **Ceremony & Ritual** seems the most likely explanation. We may imagine that at significant times of the year, like Summer Solstice, initiates would crawl down into the chamber and await the rebirth of the sun as the first light entered the chamber through perhaps a removable stone at the entrance.

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