

**ARCHAEOLEG CAMBRIA ARCHAEOLOGY
DYFED ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST**

**REPORT ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
ON THE BRECHFA MOUNTAIN MAIN SUPPLY SCHEME
PHASE 3 (CON 96/5)**

AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 1996

Project Record No. 33210

Commissioned by:- Welsh Water (South Western Division)

Report by:- I.M.Darke

Dyfed Archaeological Trust
The Shire Hall, 8, Carmarthen Street,
Llandeilo,
Carmarthenshire.
SA19 6AF

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BRECHFA MOUNTAIN MAIN SUPPLY SCHEME PHASE 3 (CON96/5)

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Summary

The section of the A485 road followed by main water supply scheme CON 96/5 is believed to follow the course of an ancient highway, possibly Roman in origin, running north-east to south-west from Pont Dulas to Pen-sarn-Helen. It was therefore feasible that any works parallel to, and along the road, may have revealed evidence of an earlier highway and associated structures, possibly of Roman origin.

The watching brief revealed no evidence of an earlier highway below the modern make-up. This is possibly due to the fact that this section of the A485 has been subject to widening and straightening in the recent past.

1.2 Planning history

Mr D R Bowen, Planning Officer for Welsh Water (South Western Division) informed the Heritage Management Section of Cambria Archaeology/Dyfed Archaeological Trust, in a letter dated 8th February 1996, of the detailed proposals for the Brechfa Mountain Main Supply Scheme - Phase 3.

The Heritage Management Section of Cambria Archaeology/Dyfed Archaeological Trust recommended that a watching brief should be undertaken along the course of the A485 in a letter dated 26th March.

The Project Engineer, Mr. G H Lewis informed Cambria Archaeology/Dyfed Archaeological Trust that the scheme was to start on the 19th August and it was agreed that an officer from the of Cambria Archaeology/ Dyfed Archaeological Trust's Field Operations Section would monitor the operation.

Eight visits were made between the 19th August and the 17th September to ensure that the scheme was comprehensively monitored.

1.3 Content and scope of the watching brief

An archaeological watching brief is defined by the Institute of Field Archaeologists as a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during an operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons - normally a development or other construction project - within a specified area where archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed. The programme will result in the preparation of a report and ordered archive.

The watching brief will be intended to allow, subject to resources, the preservation by record of archaeological deposits in advance of their disturbance or destruction and to provide an opportunity, if necessary, for the watching archaeologist to alert all interested parties to the presence of an archaeological find for which the resources allocated to the watching brief are insufficient to support satisfactory treatment.

The watching brief is not intended as a substitute for contingent archaeological excavation.

The client will be supplied with 3 copies of an archaeological report of the results of the watching brief. The report will be fully representative of all the information recovered. A copy of the report will also be deposited with Dyfed Sites and Monuments Record.

1.4 Purpose and methodologies of the watching brief

The purpose of the watching brief is to undertake as complete a record as possible of any archaeological features affected by the client's scheme of works. In the case of larger archaeological sites it will seldom be possible or necessary to undertake a record of the entire site; the record will be undertaken only on those areas of the site that may be affected.

The primary stage of the watching brief for any scheme involves consultation of the consultation of Dyfed Sites and Monuments Record, which is maintained by Cambria Archaeology/Dyfed Archaeological Trust's Curatorial Section, the client will normally advise Cambria Archaeology/Dyfed Archaeological Trust's Field Section of any changes in the proposed works of any which may be affected by the scheme. The client will also provide the Field Section with a proposed schedule of works in order that a full field study may be performed on any affected site prior to the commencement of the works.

Work on or around those affected sites will be subject to the watching brief. The work will be closely observed by an archaeologist from the Field Section who will also undertake a full drawn, written and photographic record of any archaeological features which may be disturbed by the scheme, and any artefact or find exposed during the works. Recording will be carried out where necessary and when convenient: it is the Field Section's aim to minimise any disruption to the client's schedule. However, if archaeological features may be lost during the scheme, it may be necessary for the Field Section to request a postponement of the works in order that the archaeology may be recorded. Larger areas affected may require fuller excavation and/or survey.

2.0 RESULTS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

2.1 Site Location

The site description and history below are based largely on publications by Heather James of Cambria Archaeology/Dyfed Archaeological Trust.

The site consists of a 600 metre section, parallel to, and along the line of the A485 Lampeter to Carmarthen road (see Figure 6.1). It rises from 140m above sea level at SN49724060 to 170m above sea level at SN 49003965

The stretch of road 5km south-west of Llanybydder is relatively straight and is traditionally known as Sarn Helen. In this location the A485 crosses many streams draining to the north-west, most of which would have been forded rather than bridged, on a route which was not, until the mid eighteenth century, designed for wheeled traffic. The route was carefully chosen to cross the streams before they widen on their descent to the Teifi valley, but avoiding the higher slopes of Brechfa Mountain to the south-east.

The contractors, on behalf of Welsh Water, excavated a trench to facilitate the laying of a new 150mm diameter water main. Where the excavation ran along the line of the road the trench was cut through the modern road surface, and where the excavation ran parallel to the road topsoil was machined off prior to the excavation of the trench.

The site was visited on a regular basis to examine the resulting trench section for archaeological evidence.

2.2 Site history

For the conquering forces of the Roman Empire roads ensured good communications, for both supplies and reinforcements. The roads, that linked a network of forts, were essential to Roman military success. The network of Roman roads and forts in West Wales, constructed during the conquest period of A.D. 75-80, is fairly well known (see Figure 6.2), though there are obvious gaps in our knowledge, and it is clear that much remains to be discovered. Field work, aerial photography and the study of maps and documents are constantly increasing our knowledge, as is the case in the recent discovery of the route west of Carmarthen.

The Roman route then runs through mid-Wales south to Llanio (*Bremia*) and on to the fort and Dolaucothi Gold Mines at Pumpsaint (*Louentinum*) is well known. The route is then most likely to have turned south-east to link up at Llandovery (*Alabum*) with the well known route following the Tywi valley to Carmarthen (*Moridunum*).

Although there is no hard evidence for a Roman route from Carmarthen (*Moridunum*) to Llanio (*Bremia*), thereby linking the valleys of the Tywi and Teifi more directly, there are sufficient indications to suggest that they were linked by a road following a course broadly perpetuated by the modern A 485. The stretch of road subject to the watching brief falls within this parameter and as mentioned previously is known as Sarn Helen.

The name 'Sarn Helen' has been used in Wales almost as a generic term for Roman roads, probably since the early Middle Ages. Sarn means causeway, and Helen is generally thought to be derived from 'Elen of the hosts' who, according to the Mabinogion, was the Welsh wife of Emperor Magnus Maximus.

Emmanual Bowen's map of 1729 depicts a route close to the line of the modern A 485, and further evidence for this road comes from records of excavations, and finds of Roman date, made in the nineteenth century close to the nearby Aberduar chapel. The most important find was made in 1912, close to Pencarreg church, when a gold coin of Arcadius (395-408 AD) was found.

Together these independent accounts provide sufficient evidence to assume that the route was indeed a Roman road, remaining in use into the late Roman period.

2.3 Observations

The excavation started at the north-eastern end, and proceeded south-west for 40m along the line of the road. The trench section revealed that below 0.20m of tarmac lay a further 0.20m of modern limestone hard-core. This directly overlay a natural horizon of mixed clay and gravel.

The trench then dog-legged to run for 450m within the adjacent fields. As noted, the topsoil (0.30m) here was removed prior to the trench excavation. The trench section revealed horizons of natural mixed bands of clay and gravel.

The next 80m ran along the road and the section revealed that below 0.20m of tarmac lay 0.40m of modern limestone hard-core.

For the next 350m the trench again ran within the adjacent fields. Again only natural clay and gravel were encountered.

The trench turned at this point to cross the road. Here, beneath the 0.20m of tarmac, lay 0.70m of modern limestone hard-core overlying natural clay and gravel. After crossing the road the line of the trench continued parallel to the road within the adjacent fields for a further 120m before turning south to rise away from the line of the road. Within this section the trench again revealed only natural clay and gravel.

2.4 Conclusion

No indication of any earlier road surface was encountered during the excavations. The presence of modern limestone hard-core represents recent road workings (within the last 30 years), as it is known that this section of the A485 has been subjected to widening and straightening. It is certain that any previous surface or makeup was machined away during this operation. Whether the Roman road was present here, and whether any remains have been lost during previous works, remains uncertain.

3.0 THE FINDS

No finds were encountered during the watching brief.

4.0 ARCHIVE DEPOSITION

The archive, indexed according to the National Monuments Record (NMR) material categories, will be deposited with the Dyfed Sites and Monuments Record curated by Cambria Archaeology/Dyfed Archaeological Trust. It contains the following:

A. Copy of the final report

B. Field notebook

L. General admin.

M. Project correspondence

There is no material for classes C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K and N.

5.0 SOURCES CONSULTED

Unpublished

Dyfed Sites and Monuments Record, maintained by Cambria Archaeology/Dyfed Archaeological Trust.

Fenton-Thomas, C., 1994, *The Roman Road West of Carmarthen*, unpublished client report, copy held with Dyfed Sites and Monuments Record.

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James, H., 1991, 'The Roman Roads of Carmarthenshire', in James, H. (ed.), *Sir Gar: Studies in Carmarthenshire History*.

James, H., 1982, *Roman West Wales*.

Thorpe, L. (ed.), 1978, *Gerald of Wales: The Journey through Wales/ The Description of Wales*.

Margary, I. D., 1955, *Roman Roads in Britain*.

Jones, G. D. B., 1971, 'Fieldwork and Aerial Photography in Carmarthenshire', *The Carmarthenshire Antiquary* Vol. 7.

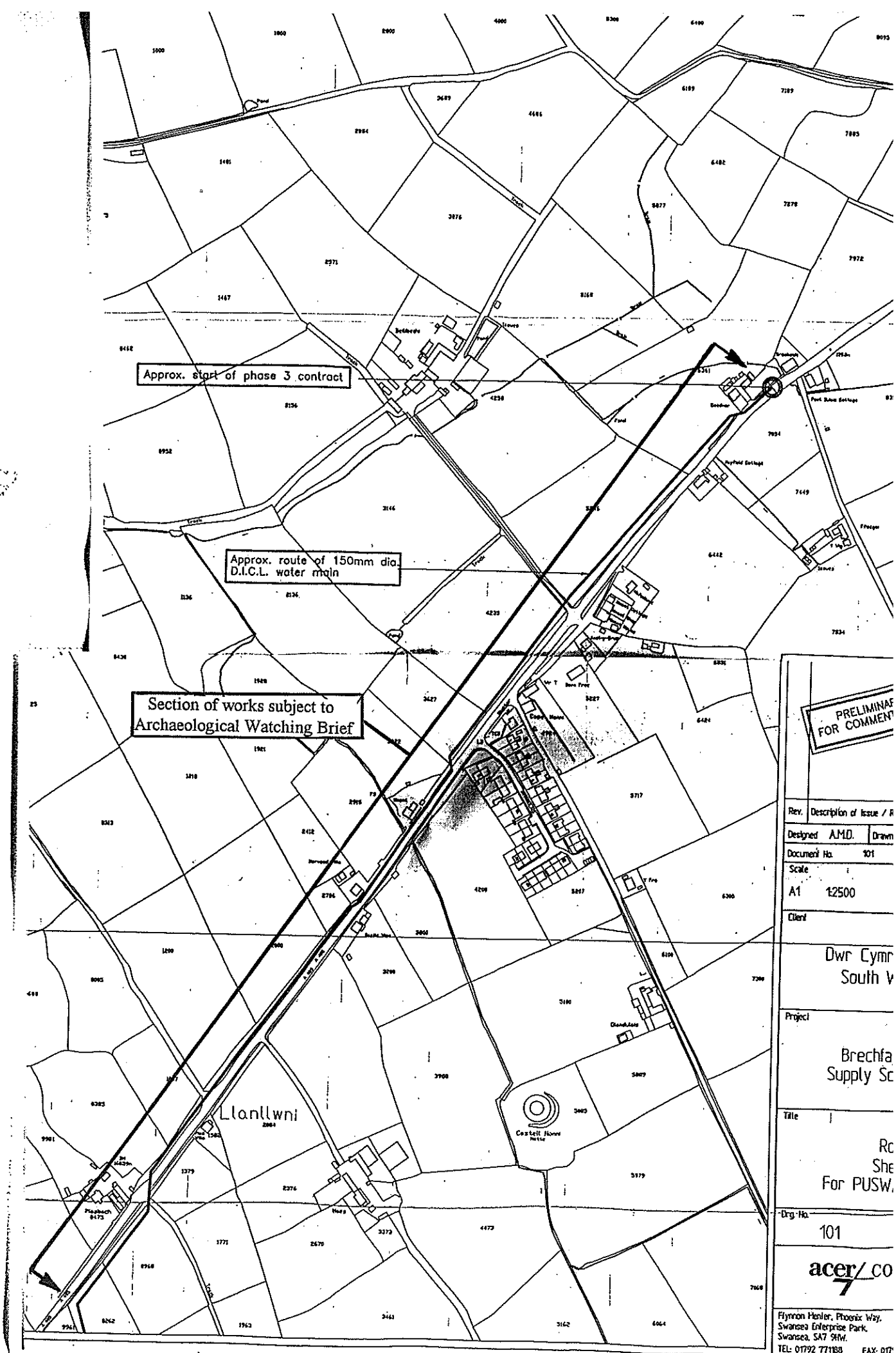


Figure 6.1 Reduction of Engineers' Drawing

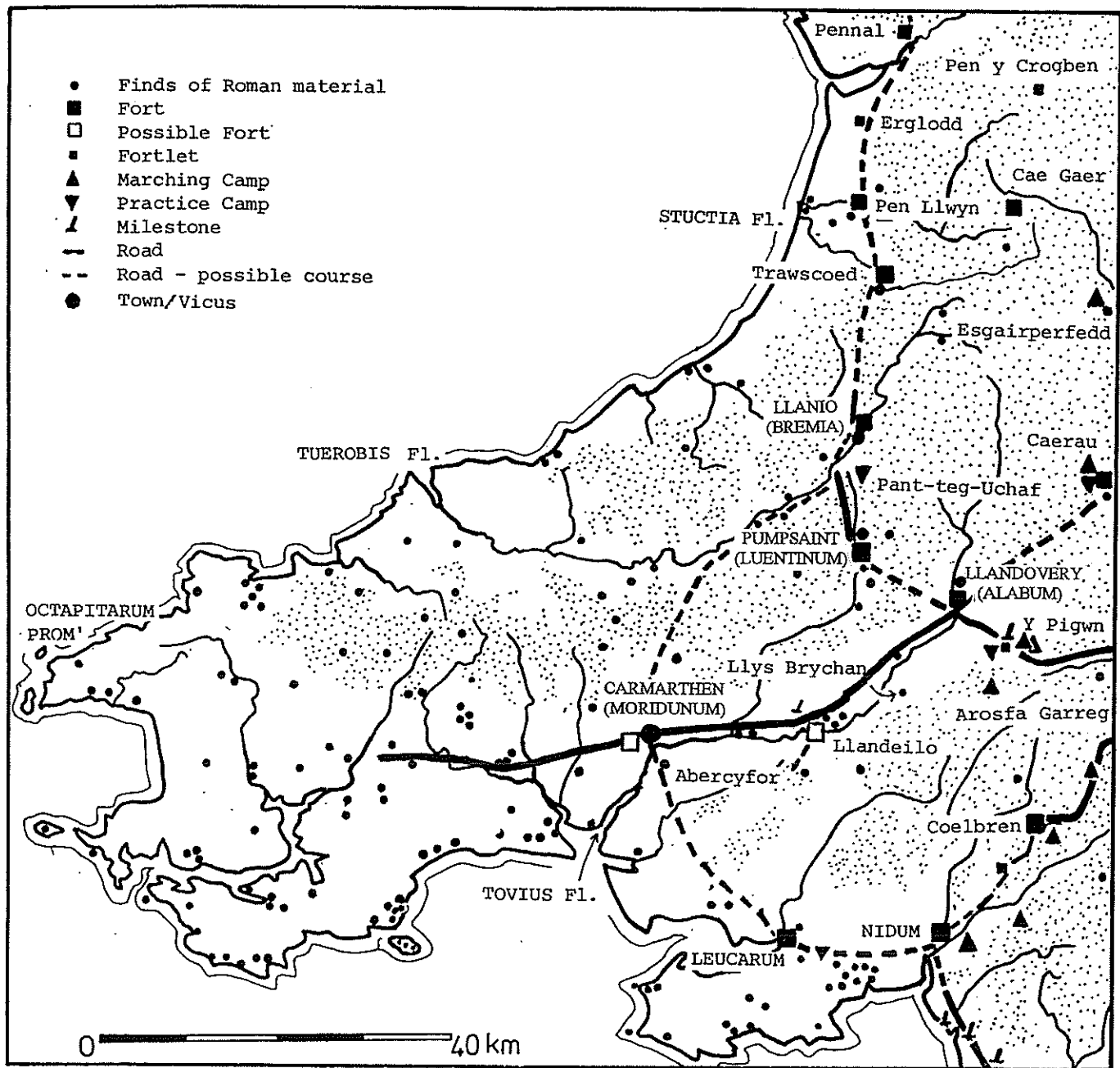


Figure 6.2 Map of Roman West Wales