

# TANYREGLWYS BLAENPORTH CEREDIGION

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION DECEMBER 2005



Paratowyd gan: Archaeoleg Cambria  
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Mawrth 2006  
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### **TANYREGLWYS BLAENPORTH, CEREDIGION ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION DECEMBER 2005**

Gan / By

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*Front cover: Main trench, possible corn drier pit in foreground. View S*

## SUMMARY

*One long and three shorter evaluation trenches were machine excavated in the field on the west side of the lane to Tanyreglwys, Blaenporth, Ceredigion. A pit was found and charcoal from this has been radiocarbon dated to Cal AD 770-990. This pit was possibly a corn drier. There also appeared to be a few adjacent smaller features.*

## INTRODUCTION

Cambria Archaeology Heritage Management, archaeological advisors to Ceredigion County Council, identified that a proposal to construct new housing on land on the west side Tanyreglwys Lane, Blaenporth, Ceredigion (SN 2616 4891), may impact on the archaeological resource - Planning Application A050688.

The site lies in close proximity to a number of important archaeological sites (see Table 1 below) of varying dates including a cremation cemetery (PRN 5223), probably dating to the Bronze Age (2200 BC –700 BC). This cemetery was first mentioned in 1859 (Anon 1859, 329) when after visiting the site of the castle it was reported: *"In the adjoining fields, funeral urns, probably British, have lately been found containing fragments of burnt bones, which find was understood not to have been the only one on or near the same spot"*. All later references to this cemetery refer back to this record. Unfortunately, the grid reference given later is only to four figures, and therefore the exact location of the cemetery is unknown. Given the topography it is likely that the cremation cemetery lies alongside a crest of a ridge, although it could also have extended down-slope into the area of the proposed development.

The medieval castle of Castell Gwythian (PRN 82840), is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. This castle belongs to a type, constructed in timber, introduced by the Anglo-Norman conquerors in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century. It is not known if there was a settlement outside the castle. St David's church is medieval in origins although it was completely rebuilt in 1864-5. However the shape of the churchyard and the dedication to St David indicates a religious site here in the early medieval period (410-1066 AD), suggesting there was settlement in the vicinity before the arrival of the Anglo-Normans.

PRN	Name	Grid ref	Date
5224	St David's Church	SN 2627 4878	Medieval
49323	Blaenporth Parish Churchyard	SN2627 4878	Early medieval
5223	Blaenporth Cremation Cemetery	SN 2649	Prehistoric
8227	Castell Gwythian	SN 26554890	12th century

Table 1: Sites adjacent to the proposed development

The underlying geology is Ordovician shales with a covering of Typical Brown Soil Denbigh 1 (Ordnance Survey 1994 and 1983). The proposed development is on the eastern side of a field that slopes gently from the south down to the north with open views to all but the south, and includes a distant view of the sea to the north.

## OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the evaluation were to identify and characterise any archaeological. The report on the evaluation will assist the planning authority in deciding if any archaeological constraints should be recommended on the proposed development.

## METHODOLOGY

Cambria Archaeology Field Services drew up a specification initially for development on both sides of the lane down to Tanyreglwys. However, this was later reduced to just evaluation of the west side. The initial evaluation specification suggested ten 10m by 2m trenches.

The evaluation took place from 12th to 17th December 2005. The weather was exceptionally good for the time of year with only occasional spots of rain. The client supplied a 360° tracked excavator with a 1.8m wide toothless bucket. On arrival on site and after agreement with Cambria Archaeology Heritage Management it was agreed that one trench c. 100m long, running north to south could be excavated at bucket width. This trench was machine excavated, through c. 250mm of turf and topsoil down to the top of the bedrock, which was exposed in most of the trench, or to the top of the subsoil. As there was time available a further three east-west trenches were excavated forming an un-joined capital "E" in plan (Fig. 1). The total length of trench excavated was just over 160m long.

Where a pit was encountered towards the north end of the long trench, the area was widened revealing the whole of the pit. This was again done in consultation with Cambria Archaeology Heritage Management under instruction that the portion of pit outside the original trench was not to be excavated.

## **RESULTS**

In the shorter, E - W, trenches nothing of archaeological significance was seen. Some small anomalies were investigated in the middle E - W trench, but were considered to be features or the results of stones being moved by ploughing. Crossing the southern E - W trench was a small asbestos water pipe. In the northern E - W trench there was a larger water main pipe trench running approximately east-west. This water pipe trench also crossed the long trench.

The pit (103 - Photo. 1 and front cover) in the northern end of the main trench was about 14m south of the hedge line defining the northern side of the development area and 3m south of the water pipe trench (Fig. 2). It cut into natural clay subsoil, rather than into the adjacent shaley bedrock, probably to take advantage of the softer material.

This pit was sub-linear in plan, aligned approximately east - west, possibly with a wider part to the west. However, as the eastern part was not excavated and the whole pit was truncated by ploughing its shape and alignment, if any, could not be fully ascertained.

The base of the pit was reddened in places by heat, but probably not an excessive amount. On the bottom of the pit there was a thin fill (108) of dark charcoal rich soil with a very few small fragments of calcified bone (Fig. 3, Section 203 and Photo. 2). A sample of charcoal was taken from this fill where a stone had sealed it, as elsewhere there were a number of voided animal runs (probably moles). This charcoal sample Beta-213001 (302 on Fig. 2) gave a radiocarbon determination of Cal AD 770 to 990 at 95% probability (Appendix 1).

Above the charcoal rich fill there was a deeper fill (102) of very slightly reddish silty soil with a few charcoal flecks and a lot of large stones (Photo. 3). The stones appeared to be part of deliberate back-filling and were not the remains of an intact structure. Again there was evidence of animal burrows.

To the north of the large pit (103) there was a small shallow "pit" (Fig 2. 107 and Fig. 3 Section 202) with a similar fill (106) to that of the upper fill (102) of the large pit (103), although this fill (106) only contained charcoal flecks in its upper part.

In the adjacent extended area there were a number of small features that could have been stake-holes or small post-holes and were not excavated. It is however, just as likely that these were root-holes or animal burrows.

## **DISCUSSION**

Further analysis of the written reports on the Bronze Age cremations found in the vicinity together with the topographical evidence suggests that there is little likelihood of a Bronze Age cemetery in the area of this proposed development, especially on the northern, lower part of the site. However, burials on the upper part of the site cannot be totally ruled out, but there was absolutely no evidence of any mounds on the surface or subsoil features in the evaluation trenches.

The early medieval radiocarbon date of charcoal from the pit was unexpected, as a pre-historic feature was considered more likely. Sites and features of early medieval date that are not either graves or churches are very rare in Wales. The discovery of this feature is therefore of national importance.

Although the date of this pit was not anticipated, with the probable early medieval founded church only a short distance away, it was not a surprise, with the pit, perhaps, an indication of settlement contemporaneous with the church.

The pit would appear to have been deliberately dug into soft deposits, rather than the hard rock that characterised most of the evaluation trenches. The most likely use of the pit was as a simple oven, possibly used for corn drying. Only a few of this type and date have been found in Wales: nine ovens and hearths were found near Welshpool (Blockley and Tavener 2002), two corn driers, at Newton, Llanstadwell, to the east of Milford Haven, Pembrokeshire (Crane 2004), four on at South Hook, Hubberston, to the west of Milford Haven (Crane forthcoming 1) and recently two more on a site near Goodwick, Pembrokeshire (Crane forthcoming 2). All of the Pembrokeshire examples are close to the sea, as is this site. There are historic references to corn driers of this date in Ireland (Kelly 1997) and there have also been a number of similar discoveries there, although little has been published (Manning 1984, Monk 1981). Initial work on the charred grain material from South Hook suggests that grain was deliberately sprouted, possibly for brewing (Wendy Carruthers pers. comm.)

The very small amount of calcified bone seen in the lower pit fill is not considered to be of great importance, at this stage of our understanding. It is likely that these "corn driers" could have been multifunctional, also being used for cooking.

The adjacent small pit and possible stake holes or small postholes have no obvious function. Finding of any additional features nearby may give an indication of further activities on this site.

Given that the pit exploited softer geological deposits, and was relatively small, that and there were a large number of voided animal burrows, geophysical survey is unlikely to be of much assistance in determining further archaeological features.

## **CONCLUSION**

This evaluation has proved that there is some significant, if small-scale archaeology on the lower, northern, part of the site.

## **SOURCES**

Anon 1859 Report on visit to Blaenporth. *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 3<sup>rd</sup> Series Vol 5

Blockley K and Tavener 2002 Excavations at Sarn-y-bryn-caled, Welshpool, Powys, in 1998-99. *Montgomeryshire Collections* 90, 41-68

Crane P 2004 Excavations at Newton, Llanstadwell, Pembrokeshire. *Archaeology in Wales* Vol 44

Crane P forthcoming 1 *Excavation at South Hook, Hubberston, Pembrokeshire*

Crane P forthcoming 2 *Ty Isaf, Llanwnda, Goodwick, Pembrokeshire. Archaeological Watching Brief*

Kelly F 1997 *Early Irish Farming*, Early Irish Law Series IV. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies

Manning C 1984 The Excavation of an early Christian Enclosure of Killederdarum in Lackenavorna, Co. Tipperary, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* Vol 84C, Number 7

Monk M 1981 Post-Roman drying kilns and the problem of function: a preliminary statement, in D O'corrain (ed) *Irish Antiquity: Essays and Studies Presented to Professor M J O'Kelly*, Cork, 216-30

Ordnance Survey 1983 Soil Survey of Wales

Ordnance Survey 1994 Geological Map of Wales

## Appendix 1: Radiocarbon Date sample 302

### CALIBRATION OF RADIOCARBON AGE TO CALENDAR YEARS

(Variables: C13/C12=-24.7;lab. mult=1)

Laboratory number: **Beta-213001**

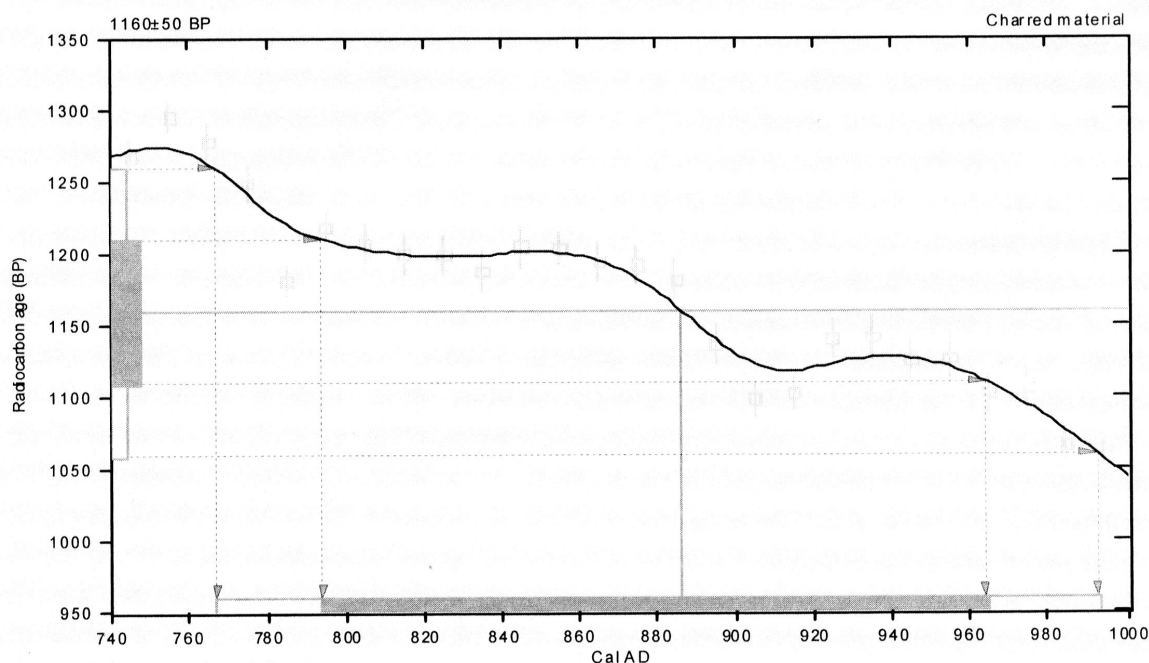
Conventional radiocarbon age: **1160±50 BP**

**2 Sigma calibrated result: Cal AD 770 to 990 (Cal BP 1180 to 960)**  
(95% probability)

Intercept data

Intercept of radiocarbon age  
with calibration curve: Cal AD 890 (Cal BP 1060)

**1 Sigma calibrated result: Cal AD 790 to 960 (Cal BP 1160 to 990)**  
(68% probability)



#### References:

*Database used*

*INTCAL 98*

*Calibration Database*

*Editorial Comment*

*Stuiver, M., van der Plicht, H., 1998, Radiocarbon 40(3), pxii-xiii*

*INTCAL98 Radiocarbon Age Calibration*

*Stuiver, M., et al., 1998, Radiocarbon 40(3), p1041-1083*

*Mathematics*

*A Simplified Approach to Calibrating C14 Dates*

*Talma, A. S., Vogel, J. C., 1993, Radiocarbon 35(2), p317-322*

### Beta Analytic Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory

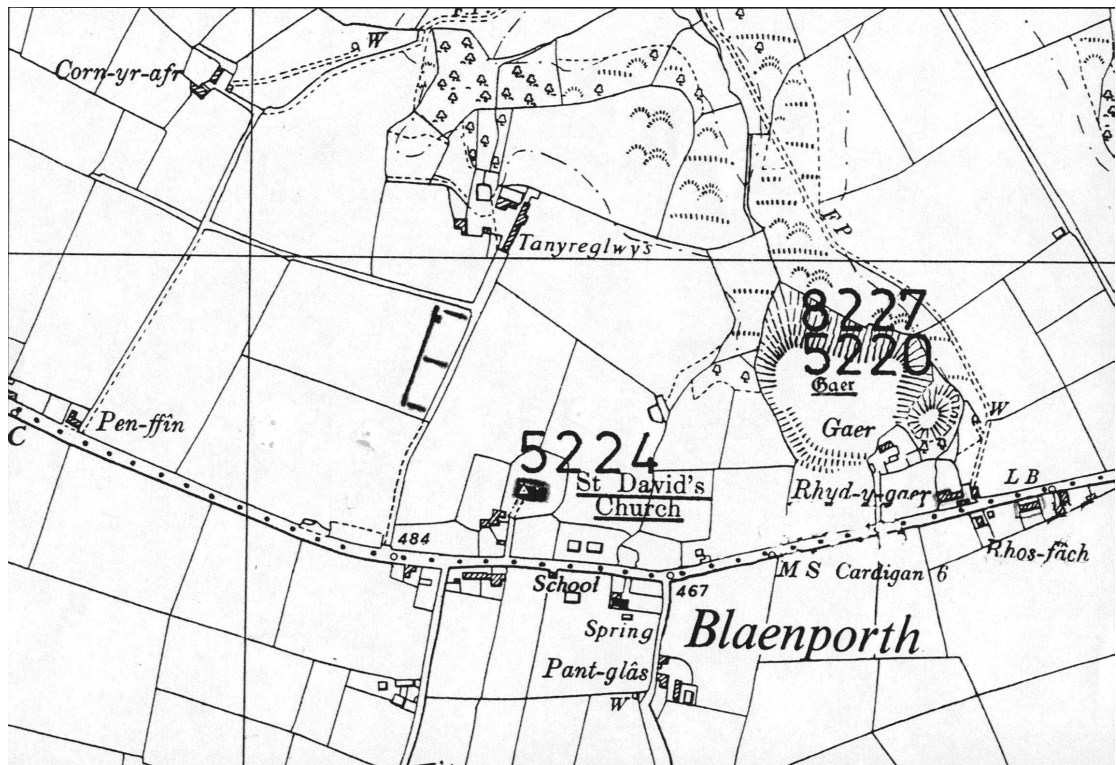
498 S.W. 74th Court, Miami, Florida 33155 • Tel: (305)667-5167 • Fax: (305)663-0964 • E-Mail: [beta@radiocarbon.com](mailto:beta@radiocarbon.com)



**Figure 1: Location**



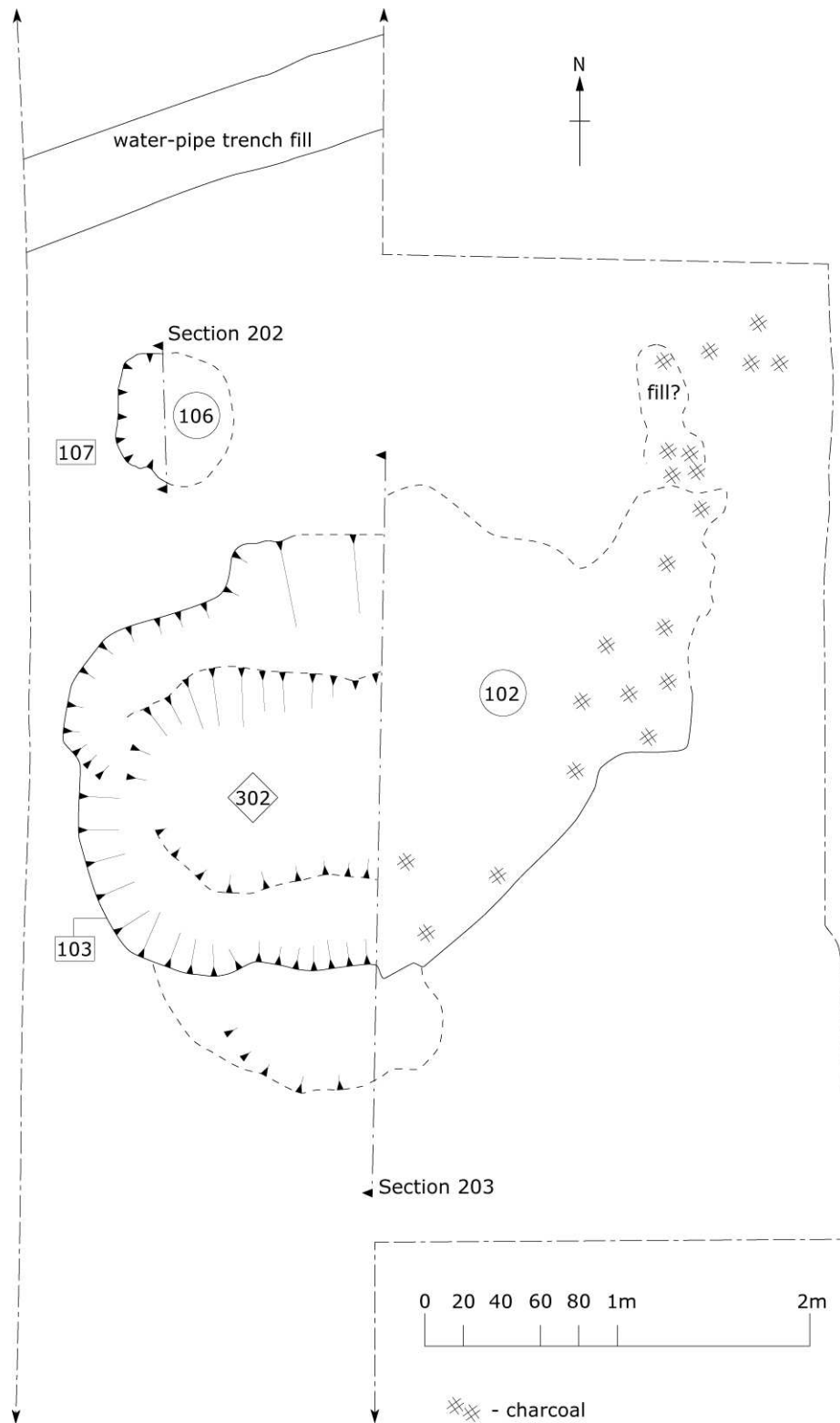
Reproduced from the 1995 Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 scale Landranger Map with the permission of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright Cambria Archaeology, The Shire Hall, Carmarthen Street, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire SA19 6AF. Licence No AL51842A



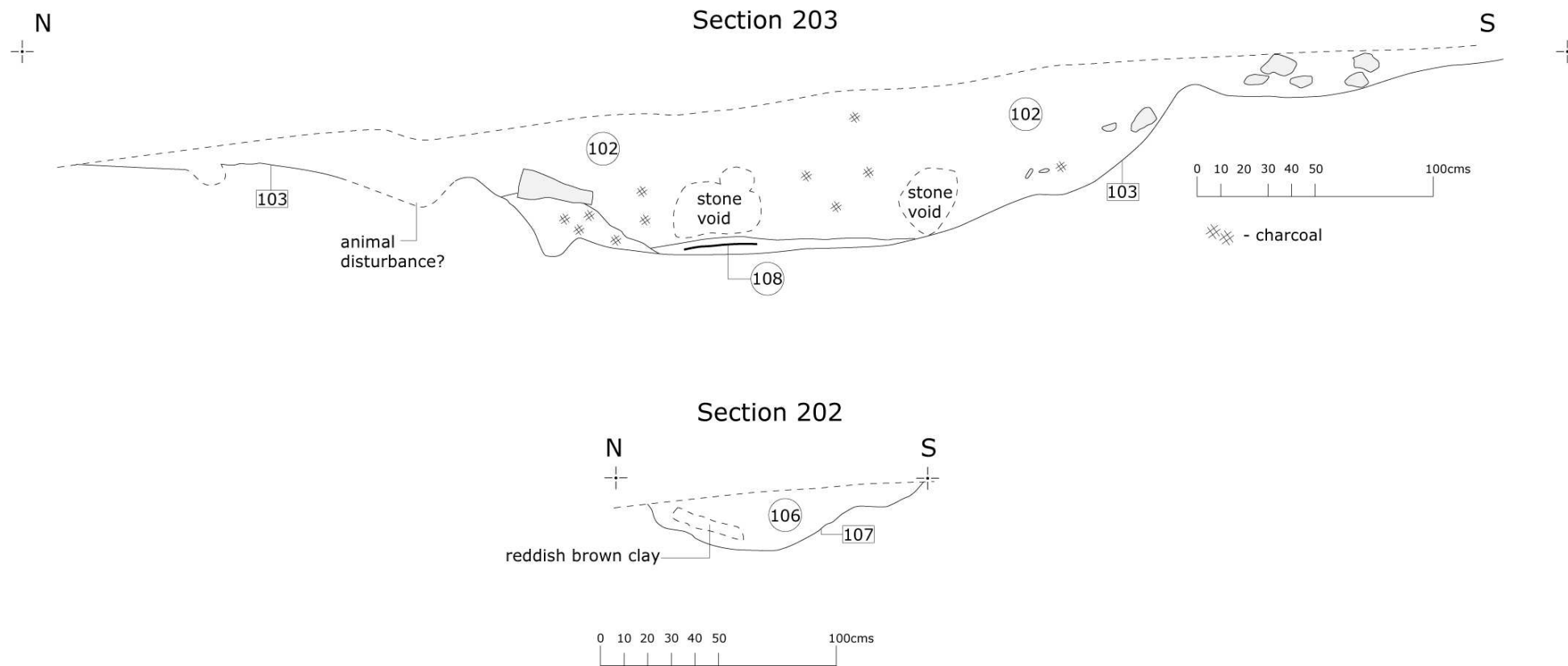
**Location of trenches.**

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**Figure 2: Plan of features**



**Figure 3: Sections of features**







**Photo 1:** Pit 103 as excavated. View NE. Scales 0.5m and 1m



**Photo 2:** Pit 103 as excavated. View E. Scales 0.5m and 1m





**Photo 3:** Pit 103, upper fill (102) part excavated. View NE. Scales 0.5m and 1m

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BLAENPORTH, CEREDIGION  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION  
DECEMBER 2005**

***RHIF YR ADRODDIAD / REPORT NUMBER 2006/56***

**Ebrill 2006  
April 2006**

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ar ran Archaeoleg Cambria, Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf.  
on behalf of Cambria Archaeology, Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Yn unol â'n nôd i roddi gwasanaeth o ansawdd uchel, croesawn unrhyw  
sylwadausydd gennych ar gynnwys neu strwythur yr adroddiad hwn

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