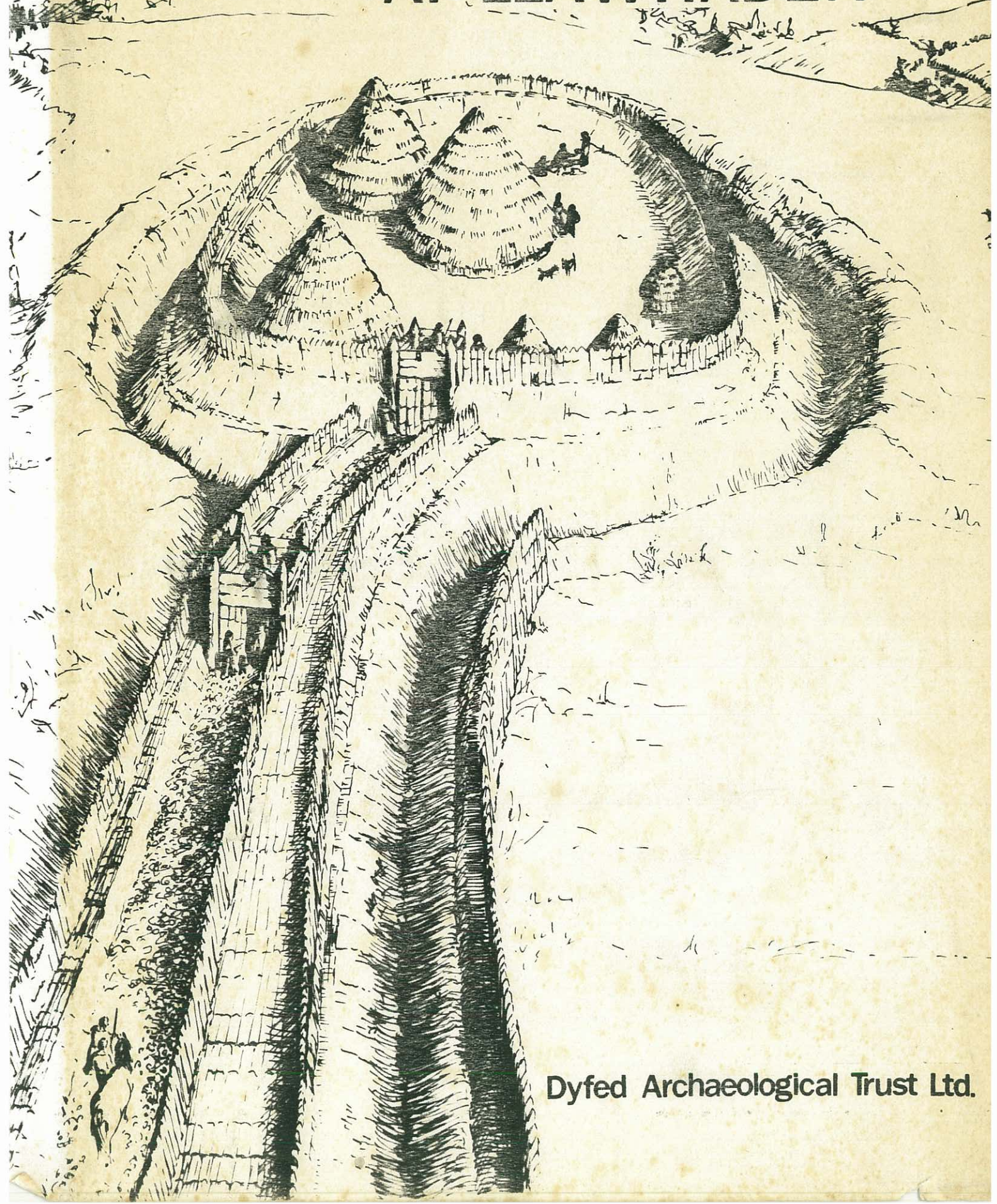


EXCAVATIONS AT LLAWHADEN



Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

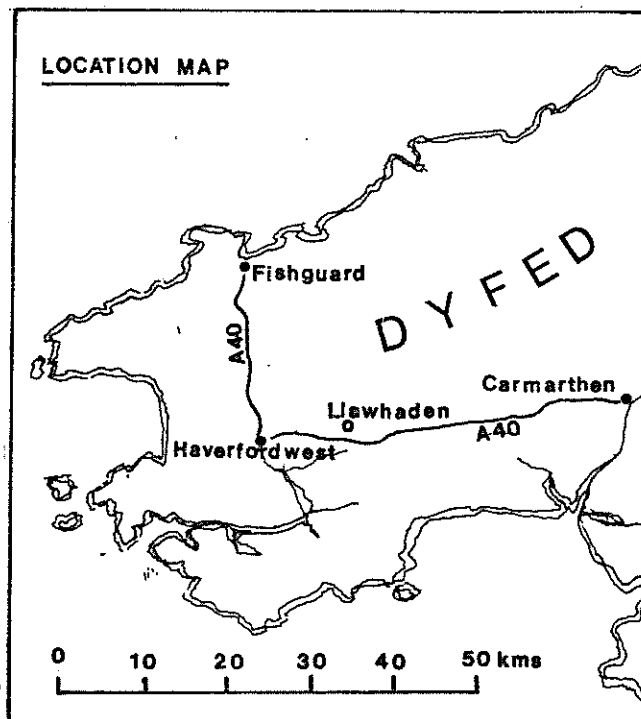
EXCAVATIONS AT LLAWHADEN

Over the last three years an important programme of excavations has been carried out on a group of small defended settlements, of Prehistoric and Roman date, near Llawhaden.

The Llawhaden sites are typical of the defended settlements of central Pembrokeshire which are often known as raths. Today these usually survive as gentle grass grown banks and ditches representing the levelled remains of once formidable defences which were necessary in the warlike Celtic society of the 1st millenium B.C. Within these defences were houses and storage structures and additional outer enclosures were sometimes provided for the protection of livestock. Two main types of settlement are known: the first which can be called 'small hillforts', are often situated in strong, naturally defensible positions and sometimes strongly defended artificially by two or more lines of banks and ditches. There are also 'ringworks'; smaller, single banked enclosures often situated in non-defensive, hillslope positions.

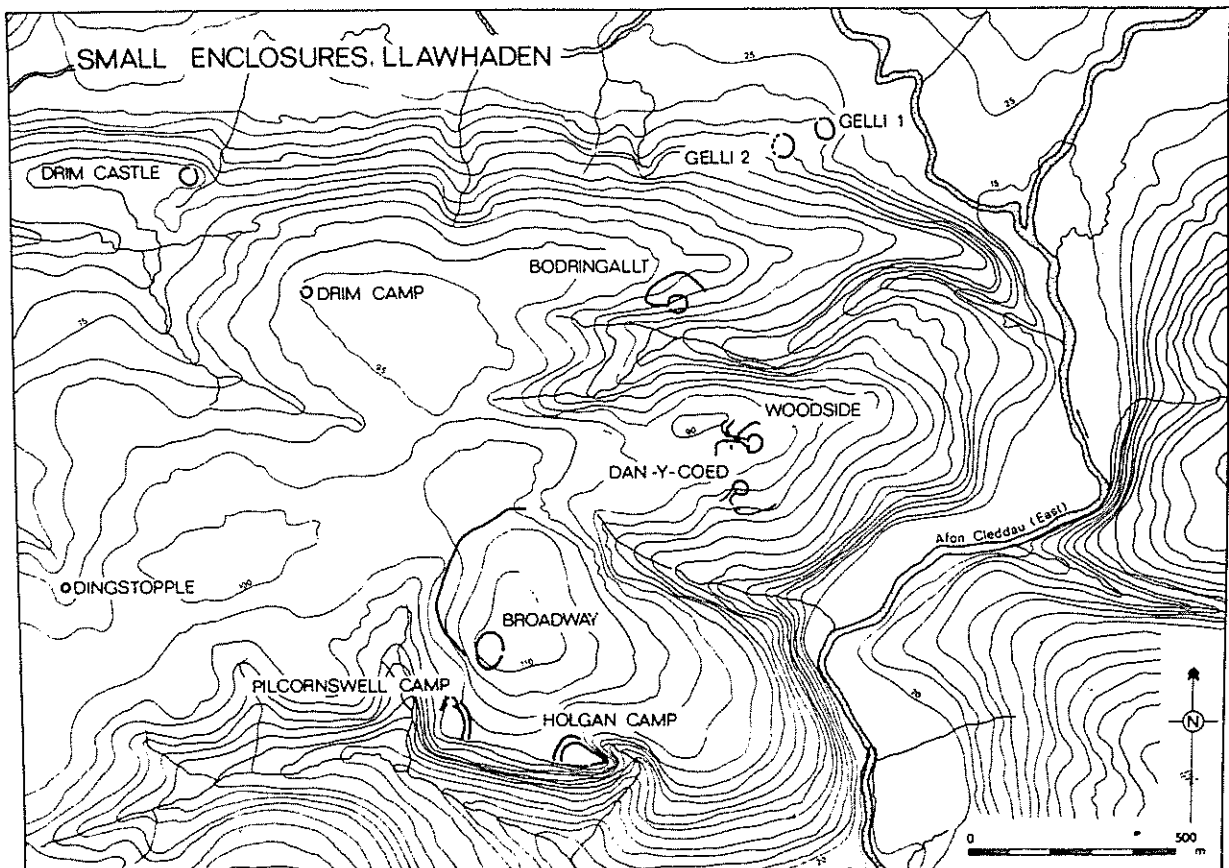
Archaeologists would like to answer a number of questions regarding these sites: exactly when were they occupied? Is one type earlier than another or were they occupied at the same time? What class of people lived in them; for instance was one type of site the residence of a chieftain and another of a person of less wealth and importance? What crops were grown and what animals were kept and how did the economy influence the type of society that developed?

However, we are rapidly losing the chance of answering these questions. The majority of sites lie on farmland and slowly but surely year by year are being ploughed away; not so much by intensive arable farming but by reseed-ing operations. In order to obtain information on these sites before their final destruction, the Dyfed Archaeological Trust has undertaken a programme of survey and excavation, a large part of which has been focused on the group of sites north of Llawhaden.



The Llawhaden Group

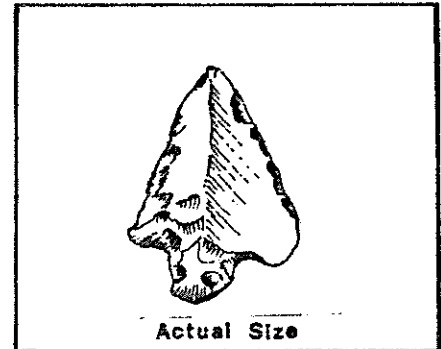
The sites occupy an extensive (4 sq km) tongue of land lying between Llawhaden and Gelli. Eleven defended sites are known in the area: Dingstopple Motte and Drim Castle are mediaeval but the rest are of Prehistoric origin. Of these, Broadway, Pilcornswell and Holgan are 'small hillforts' while the remainder are 'ringworks'. Small scale excavation has been carried out at Broadway, Pilcornswell, Holgan and Bodringallt, while Drim, Woodside and Dan-y-Coed have been totally excavated.



This is the greatest concentration of small enclosures in Pembrokeshire and contains sites of the two main types the majority of which are under the plough. The bulk of the excavations have been carried out by the Trust in conjunction with the Manpower Services Commission as a job creation scheme. The Trust has also co-operated with the Oxford University Archaeological Society and St. David's University College, Lampeter.

The Early Bronze Age

The earliest occupation so far discovered lay below the defences of Pilcornswell, Holgan and Woodside. Archaeological features consisted mainly of pits and hollows but included a roundhouse at Woodside. Radio-carbon dates suggest this occupation belongs to the Early Bronze Age (as early as 1800 BC). These structures were buried long ago below the soil and forgotten when the main phase of occupation began and their preservation and discovery was to an extent a matter of chance.

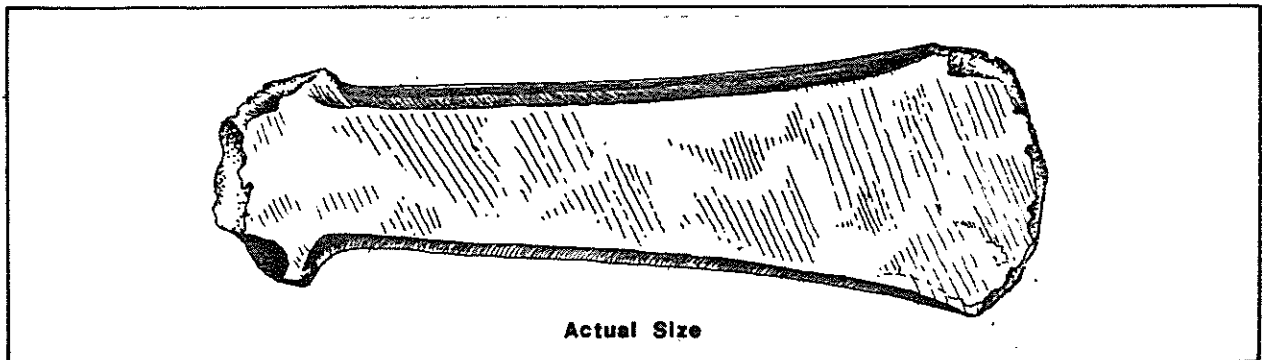


*Early Bronze Age flint
arrowhead from Dan-y-Coed.*

In this respect they are important as they show a much greater density of Early Bronze Age activity in the area than would be suspected from the relatively few surviving monuments such as round barrows and standing stones. These have probably long been destroyed by agriculture and the Bronze Age landscape of lowland Pembrokeshire was probably every bit as densely settled as the upland north.

The Later Bronze Age

After the Early Bronze Age is a "Dark Age" (between 1400 and 800 BC) when hardly any sites are known in West Wales. No certain settlement has been excavated at Llawhaden although a Bronze Trunnion chisel of the period was discovered embedded in the enclosure bank at Broadway. Although this may have been accidentally lost and only later incorporated into the rampart it does suggest there may have been a settlement of this date somewhere in the area.



Later Bronze Age Trunnion chisel from Broadway.

The Small Hillforts

This lack of settlement suggests there may have been a catastrophic breakdown in society in the period, perhaps brought on by various factors such as over population, over-cultivation of land and climatic deterioration. Certainly when settlements were again well established in the 1st millenium BC society had become much more aggressive. Continuing competition for available resources led to widespread tribal warfare, which included ritualised head hunting and necessitated the construction of massive defences around settlements.

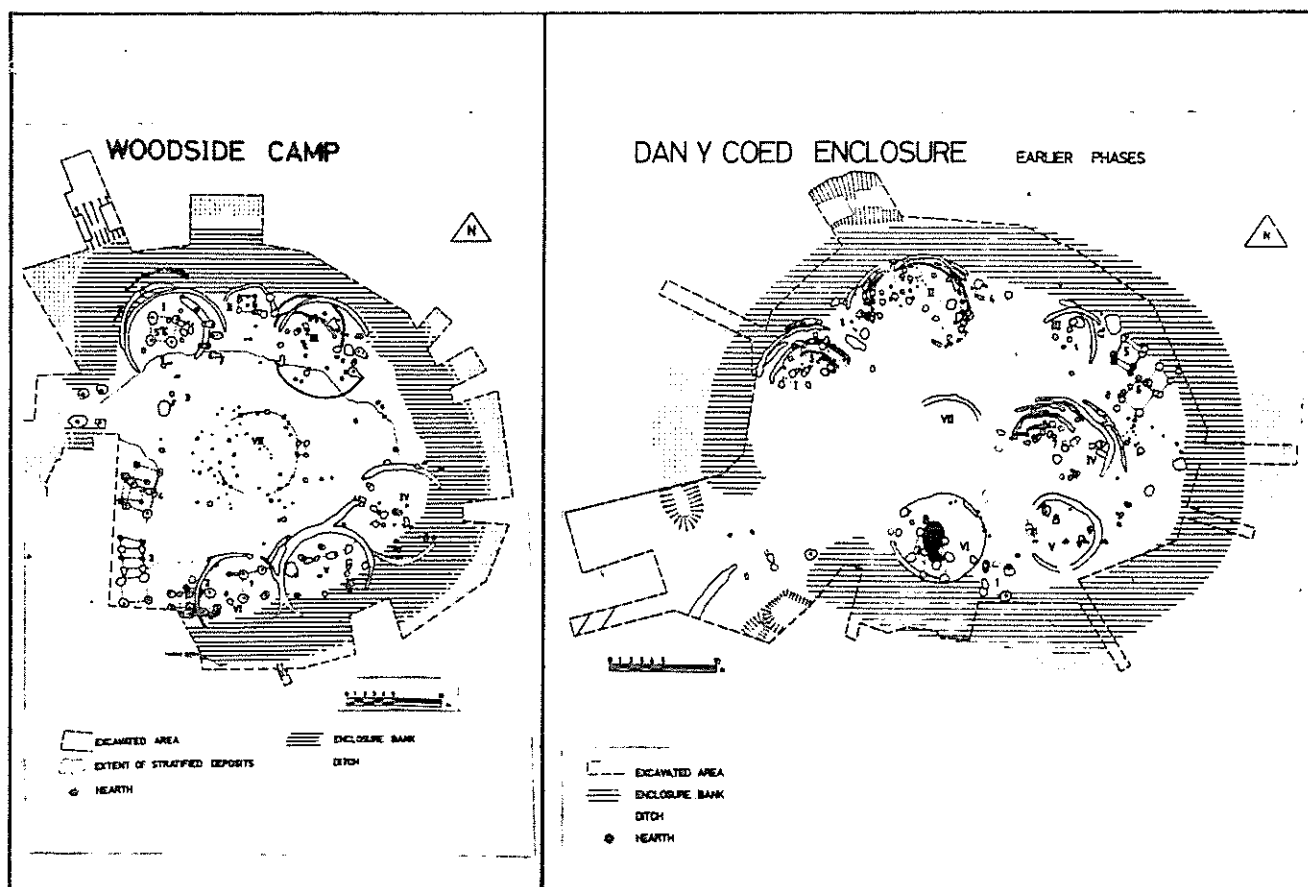
The earliest defended settlements at Llawhaden were the larger sites, the 'small hillforts' Broadway and Pilcornswell. Broadway started as an undefended settlement, perhaps as early as the 8th century BC and only later was given a defensive bank and ditch. Pilcornswell was built from scratch as a defended settlement, perhaps at a slightly later date. Its defensive rampart seems to have been supported by timbers and it collapsed in flames into the ditch, perhaps as the result of enemy attack. This sequence demonstrates the increasingly warlike nature of the times.

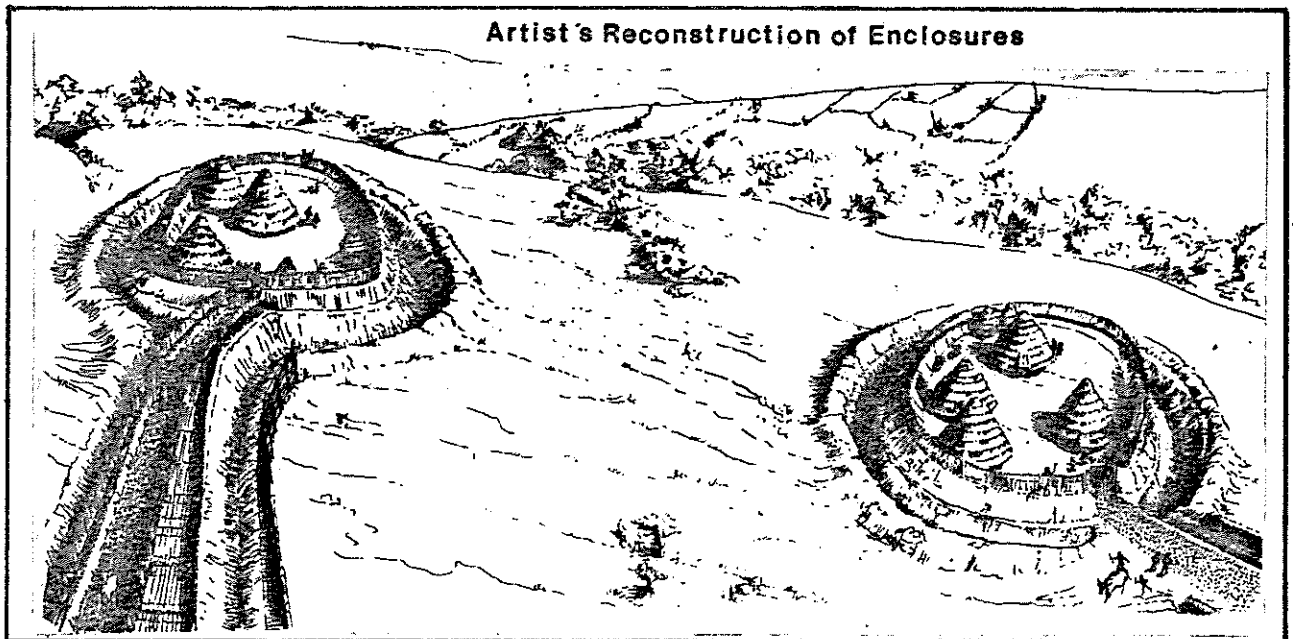
The Ringworks

These tensions may have become worse from the 3rd century BC onwards (the Later Iron Age), leading to a fragmentation of society and the construction of large numbers of ringworks. It is the total excavation of the ringworks - Drim, Woodside and Dan-y-Coed - which has provided the bulk of our evidence regarding the structure and function of these settlements.

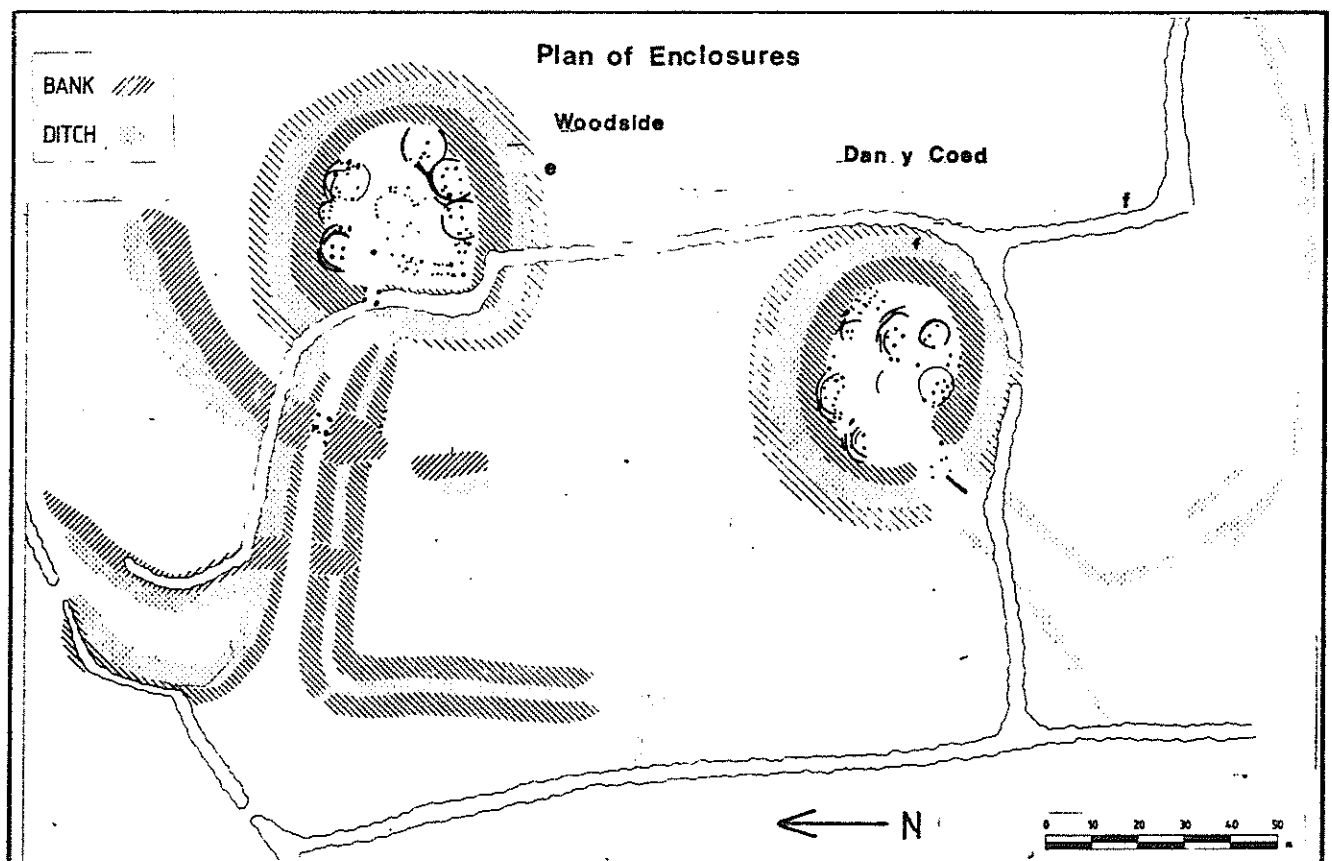
Although the sites were small, the defences were massive; the ditch at Dan-y-Coed was ten feet deep in places, the ramparts probably reaching an equal height. The ramparts would have been topped by a fighting platform and the entrances at Drim and Woodside were defended by timber towers much like an American cavalry fort.

Internal structures - represented by post-holes, drains and wall gullies - included two main types. The first were round dwelling houses with low walls and high pitched thatched roofs, much like recent African houses. There were also '4-posters' - storage structures raised on four massive posts to protect the contents from damp and rodents. Many of these structures were rebuilt a number of times, resulting in a complex sequence of post holes and gullies. The most complete plans come from the larger ringworks, Dan-y-Coed and particularly Woodside, and the sequence of development is also clearest at Woodside. At first only one or two roundhouses and 4-posters were built within the enclosure, but later it filled up with structures. The later roundhouses were built over the collapsed remains of the rampart. In its mature phase it had a neatly planned layout, with roundhouses arranged around the periphery of the site surrounding a central (perhaps slightly larger) roundhouse and 4-posters largely confined to the south western corner. At Dan-y-Coed there was also a succession of roundhouses and 4-posters although the former were not concentrated in any one area but were scattered throughout the enclosure, sometimes alternating with roundhouses on the same site.

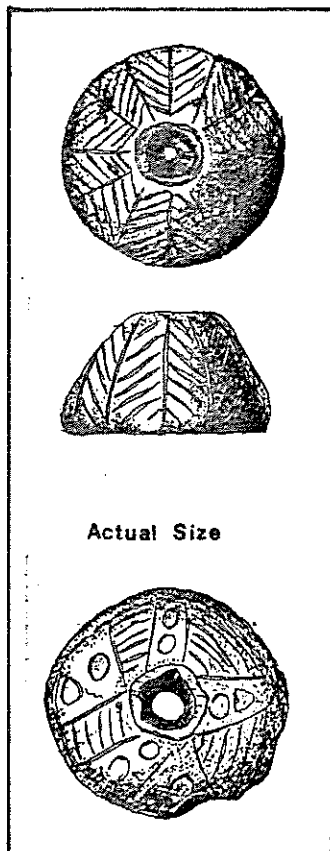




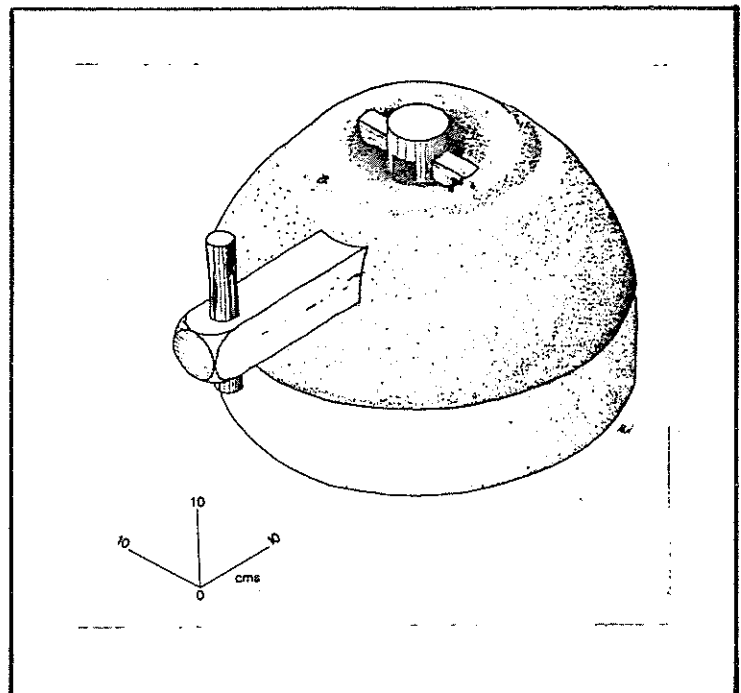
A very elaborate approach was provided to Woodside camp. At first this consisted of a metalled trackway flanked by banks and ditch with a timber tower set half way along it. The excellent preservation of these features was due to their protection by two later arcs of bank and ditch laid out more or less concentrically to the main enclosure. Both these phases of outwork were probably primarily intended to provide a monumental and impressive approach to the enclosure.



An indication of the dates of these sites is provided by finds of pottery and metalwork and radio-carbon dates. These suggest that occupation at Dan-y-Coed and Bodringallt started in the later Iron Age (probably in the second century BC). Woodside and Drim were probably not established until Early Roman times although buildings and material culture remained of a traditional, native type.



Left: Decorated stone spindle whorls from Dan-y-Coed.



Right: Reconstruction of quern from Woodside.

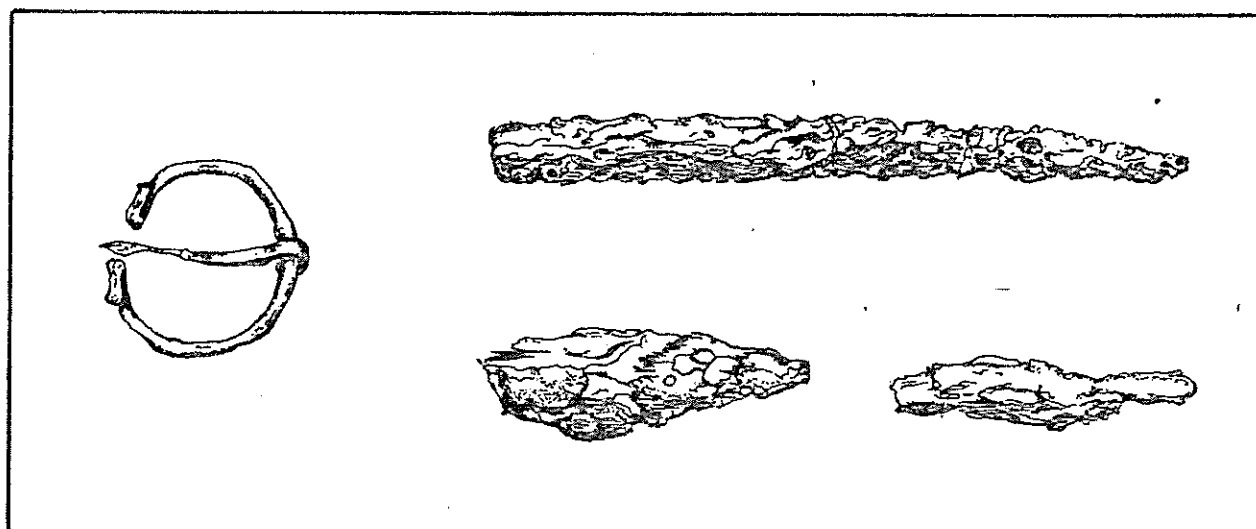
We can reach some conclusions regarding the economy and social function of the ringworks. A mixed farming economy was practised: although the soil is too acid for animal bones to survive, stock rearing is shown by the discovery of implements used in the spinning and weaving of wool and the dressing of skins and leather. Arable farming is demonstrated by the discovery of rotary querns or hand mills and of actual carbonised grain from the occupation layers. However, the latter is relatively rare and stock raising was probably more important, as would be expected by reference to modern day land use in the area. The sites would have lain in an intensively farmed landscape. Although the contemporary field systems have been destroyed by more recent farming, ancient field systems of this type still survive on the Pembrokeshire coast.

This intensively settled but basically stock rearing landscape could never produce large quantities of surplus wealth, allowing the support of complex and sophisticated societies with large nucleated centres, such as developed in the Iron Age in the more arable oriented areas of lowland England. However, in local terms the ringworks were undoubtedly important sites. The presence of relatively large number of 4-posters show that the protection of societies' wealth in the form of stored foodstuffs was an important function, while much effort went into the construction of the defences and the elaborate approach to Woodside. Celtic society was a highly stratified one and this wealth, power and prestige would have been the prerogative of the upper strata of society. A site the size of Woodside could have housed a chieftain, his extended family and servants (about 30 people). The large roundhouse at the centre of Woodside was perhaps the residence of the chieftain and his immediate family. A smaller, single family group may have lived at Drim. Lower status individuals probably lived in hut groups scattered amongst the fields.

A very interesting question is the reason for the apparent increase in number of these high status sites throughout the later Iron Age and early Romano-British period. Reasons may include population increase but also perhaps the Celtic system of partible inheritance (Welsh Gafael) when inheritances were split between heirs rather than passing to the first born. This could be one explanation of the evolution of the paired settlement at Woodside and Dan-y-Coed.

Left: Bronze penannular brooch from Dan-y-Coed.

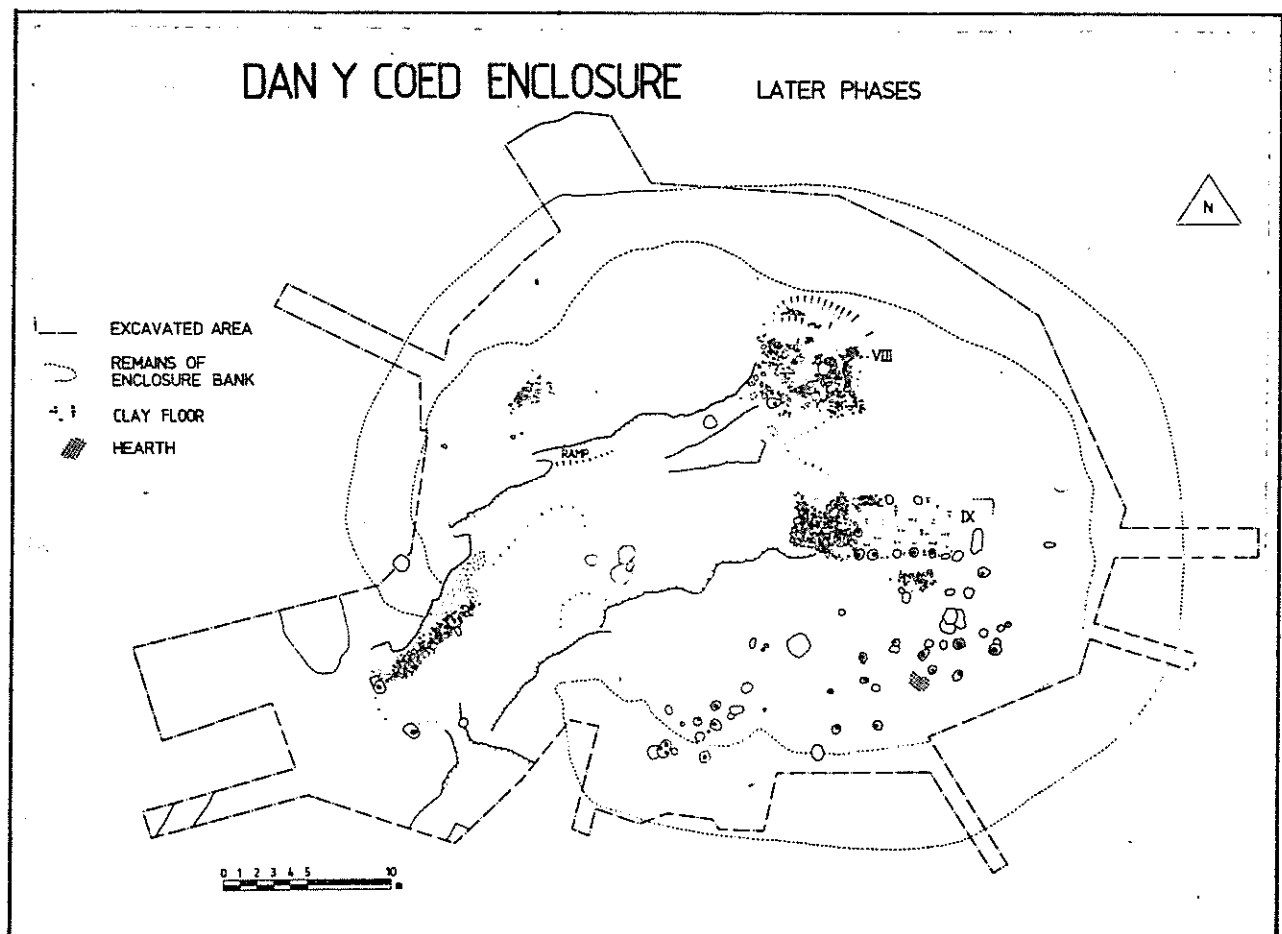
Right: Iron objects from Dan-y-Coed.



The Romano-British Period

Drim and Woodside seemed to go out of use fairly early in the Roman period although Dan-y-Coed probably remained in occupation longer and underwent major changes brought about by the Roman occupation. The more peaceful way of life enforced by the Romans led to the abandonment of the defences and many of the inhabitants were able to move outside the cramped confines of the site. The centre of the enclosure was hollowed out to form a yard. There was only one dwelling house - sufficient for a single family - and this was a partly stone-built, rectangular structure adopting new fashions from more sophisticated Romano-British buildings.

Although these structures at Dan-y-Coed were fairly primitive, finds of storage vessels for oil and wine and a bronze brooch suggest that in local terms this was a fairly wealthy settlement and possibly remained the dwelling of the descendants of the Iron Age chieftain and his immediate family. Indeed few sophisticated Romano-British buildings are known in West Wales because continuing small scale territorial patterns never produce sufficient wealth to allow large scale building programmes centred on the nuclei of the upper class native farms.



The Dark Age

After a period of abandonment, an intriguing final phase of occupation occurred at all three of the ringwork sites. At Drim and Dan-y-Coed structures included very crude stone buildings (at Drim hardly more than hard standings for timber superstructures). Radio-carbon dates suggest this occupation may be late Roman at Dan-y-Coed but at Drim it probably belongs to the post Roman 'Dark Age'. The chronological spread of this later occupation is demonstrated by a date of 950 AD from one of a number of large pits which form the latest phase of activity at Woodside.

The Dark Age activity is potentially one of the most exciting finds of the excavation as little or nothing is known of settlements of this period in West Wales. The period is marked by widespread social upheavals and an eventual end to the settlement pattern which had lasted for over 1000 years. Widespread folk movements occurred, including the immigration of Irish groups into Pembrokeshire. These upheavals were undoubtedly in large part the result of the end of the Roman occupation although, as in the earlier Dark Ages of the 2nd millenium BC, the lack of settlement suggests a human catastrophe perhaps due to climatic or other environmental factors. It is in the context of these troubled times that we can perhaps see the re-occupation of Drim and Dan-y-Coed. Further analysis of these structures and remains will throw important new light on the period.

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