



Digging for history: Assistant director at the Dan y Coed excavation, Mr. Ken Murphy, with some of the small finds from the site, including the spinning whorl. Behind, diggers excavate the contents of the prehistoric settlement.

(Telegraph picture)

Experts on trail of our farming tribes

BY RORY MACLEAN

The settlements of a Welsh farming tribe from Pembrokeshire's pre-history are gradually being unearthed by a team of archaeologists from the Dyfed Archaeological trust.

The sites, near Llawhaden, are in the form of defended farmsteads known as 'raths', and are providing clues to the type of life of the people who occupied them.

And according to site director Mr. George Williams, the archaeologists have been lucky to excavate at the moment, as any further ploughing would have completely erased the evidence they need.

There are ten of the defended farmstead sites within a four square kilometer area at Llawhaden, and work has been done on a number of them.

They range in size to a considerable degree, from a mere 30 acres, and the dates

vary from the Bronze Age to medieval times.

However, the main period of occupation at the sites seems to have been in an 800-year period within the Iron Age.

The settlements were defended by earth banks or ramparts surrounded by a ditch and there are indications that in the largest settlement the height between the bottom of the bank to the top of the ditch would have been 40 feet.

Inside the settlements, circular huts would have stood along with

barns, granaries and stables, and at Dan y Coed — the site currently under investigation — there are the remains of a stone built structure.

The tribe in the area during the Roman occupation of Britain is known to have been the Demetae — whose capital was Carmarthen — and it seems likely that at some stage members of the tribe would have lived at the settlements.

Why they were defended remains a mystery, although theories of an increased population and decreased resources

have been suggested to indicate strife.

In sites like Dan y Coed and Woodside there is an interesting question posed, because of their nearness to each other. If they are of the same period could one be the residence of a chief, while the other was for people living under his patronage?

However, it could just be that one settlement followed another and they were situated near each other because of the natural suitability of the area.

There have been some finds of small objects from these sites, including a trunion chisel which was found beneath the rampart at a settlement called Broadway and predates it, carbonised spelt wheat from the Woodside camp which indicates the farming activities, and a spindle whorl decorated with a herring bone pattern, which was used in the spinning of wool.