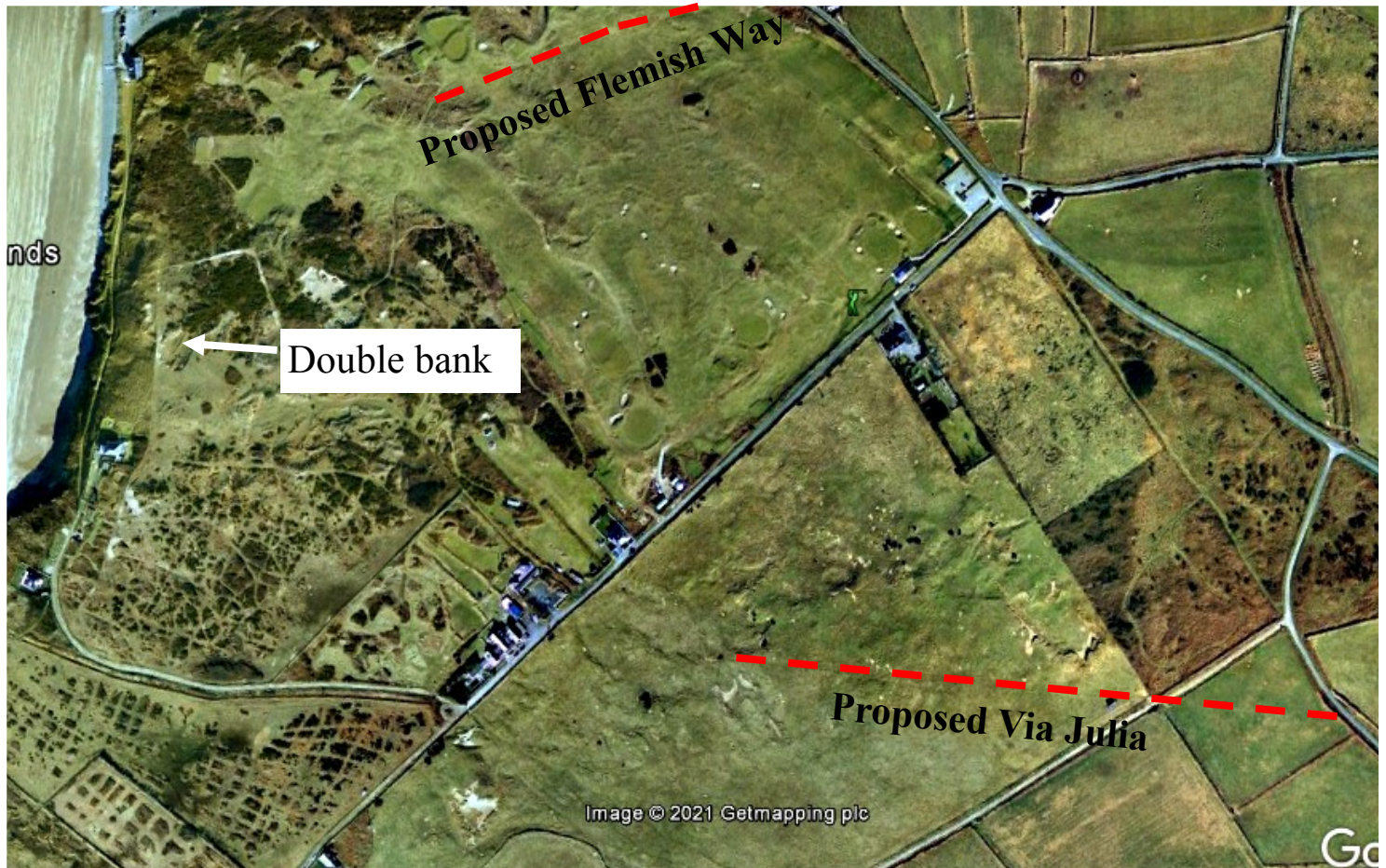


EXCAVATION REPORT UNCOVERING OF POSSIBLE REMAINS OF ROMAN RAMPARTS AT CRAIG Y DON, WHITESANDS

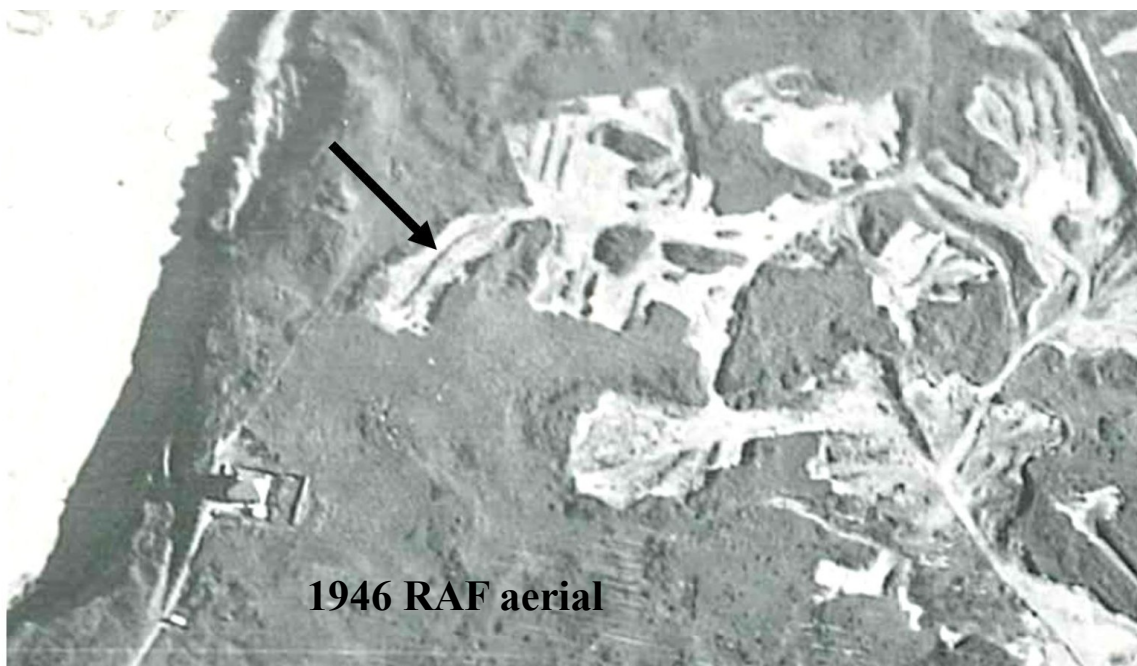
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CONTEXT OF EXCAVATION

A double bank was found whilst exploring Craig Y Don land, looking for traces of a Roman fort or settlement. This was after uncovering two possible Roman roads converging on Whitesands and the subject of a separate report. The banks were visible for 22 metres and the larger bank was about 4 metres wide. There seemed to be a ditch between them. They were in a large shallow crater, and ran parallel to the contour of the coastal slope.

John Winter, the owner of the land, who gave us permission to explore, told us by way of a caveat that large amounts of sand had been extracted from the area in the war period for the construction of St David's airfield. This raised the possibility that the banks might have been caused by a mechanical excavator. The 1946 RAF aerial below showed that there did indeed seem to have been excavation in the crater, but the line of the banks was visible, turning into an intriguing curve as it went north. This curved part is still visible as a bank on the ground, but now separated from the straight banks by scrub. It certainly seemed worth uncovering a narrow width in the hope of establishing whether there were obvious man-made features, and John very kindly gave us permission to do this.



1946 RAF aerial

AIMS

The aims of the non-invasive excavation were:

- 1) Find out if the banks below the sand were solid; they might turn out to be nothing, i.e. just sand.
- 2) If they were solid, establish from their make-up whether they were likely to be man-made, i.e. a mix of materials, e.g. shale and stones, as opposed to bulldozed material.
- 3) Look out for any post holes, but record and leave them un-dug if found.
- 4) See if there was a ditch cut W of the smaller bank, but not excavate it more than a very shallow amount.
- 5) Investigate the trough between banks to see if there was a cut in the shale going down as a ditch, but not excavate far.
- 6) See if there was a site road (via sagularis) E of the big bank.
- 7) Take levels and produce a section drawing.



Looking NW. Main bank arrowed with smaller bank behind.



Location of the excavation, looking north. It was 11.2 metres N of the S end of the bank.

EXCAVATION FINDINGS (see composite photo plan and cross section on separate sheets.)

RAMPART BASE

Prior to excavation, probing with a steel rod showed deep sand on the east side of the big bank, but at the base of the west side, the rod met with resistance; so after turf removal, this was the first bit to be trowelled. This showed immediately that there was a solid man-made bank at an angle of about 20 degrees, with stones at the base. It was made of a hard, slightly gritty dark rammed orange material, which was possibly a mixture of sand and clay. It was probably as hard as *clom*, but not crumbly. More like a clay floor. No lime content was apparent.

Half-way up the bank, the hard material descended surprisingly in a consistent 230mm wide linear chamfer at 25 degrees, followed by a vertical edge of about 90mm height and then a level base 260mm wide. This profile was hard and indisputably moulded, either by hand or around timber like a ground beam or a mixture of each. The hard material continued on up E from the back of the base, but then became amorphous, with no more rectilinear mouldings. At the top of the hard material, there was a layer of orange sand under the surface grey sand. This I believe to be original sand.

The level base of the moulding looked as if it might have taken a ground beam for a rampart structure and the base of pallsading, and this has been illustrated on the conjectural drawing.

DITCH BASE

Where a ditch would be expected at the foot of the presumed rampart base was a shallow gutter 360mm wide. This appeared to be the natural thin layer of gravel which in this area sits on clay shale. But nevertheless, we drove a steel rod in and finally excavated the surface to ensure that there was nothing below. Down about 35mm, we hit the natural clay shale, so there definitely was no ditch, and here a ditch would presumably have been formed to a degree by a second bank, now virtually gone. (see conjectural drawing).

POSSIBLE TRACKWAY

Near the east end of the excavation was a third shallow linear bank running parallel to the other two. Beneath this was a raised band of stones about 1.1 metres wide. This could have been the remains of a wall, but I favour a trackway. The dark material and staining

associated with it suggests possibly burning.



Left:
possible trackway
in foreground
With raised agger
bank behind.

EAST OF THE TRACKWAY, POSSIBLE DITCH

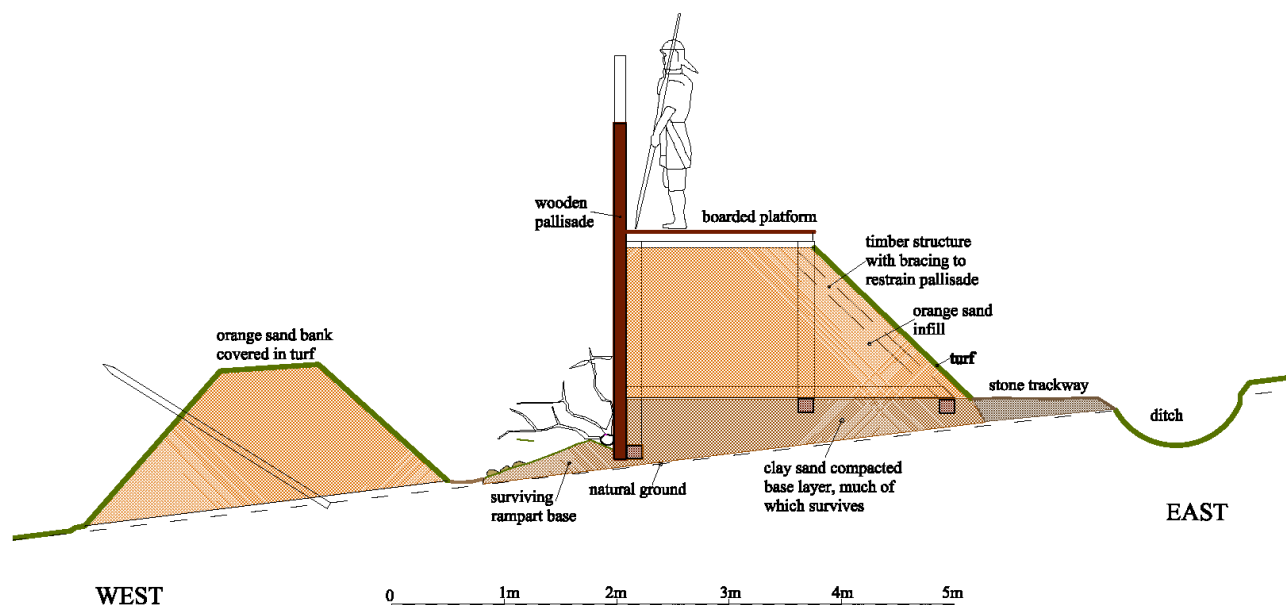
Here at the extreme east end of the excavation was a pale yellow messy, blotchy layer which had 'rust' and charcoal in the surface. It trowelled down very easily, and in retrospect, I think it could have been the top of a ditch. This would make perfect sense in that location with the lie of the land descending from the east; and provided it went down to the shale level, it would soak away. Otherwise it might need culverts running below the ramparts.

Whilst trowelling this, I found a clear thumb-sized imprint of an object in the surface which had disintegrated leaving a few ferrous remains. If this is a ditch, this is where all the dating evidence will be, especially if guards were walking past it day and night en route to the ramparts. Following this ditch linearly would be an excavation in itself. But detectorists are a concern, as they could potentially destroy evidence. I have mentioned this to John Winter and he says he'll refuse any further requests to detect, the last being 25 years ago.

Another factor of key importance if this is a ditch, is its potential for showing up on a geo-physical survey elsewhere on the land outside of the crater where the dig was carried out.

CONCLUSIONS

The solid bank with its crisp mouldings is unquestionably a linear man-made feature. The conjectural drawing below shows how this could have worked as the base of a rampart which could have fitted between this and the trackway.



CONJECTURAL CROSS SECTION
RAMPARTS AT CRAIG Y DON, WHITESANDS

An orange sand bank with turf covering (shown) to the west would explain the lack of a defensive ditch. A thin layer of orange sand in fact survives along the west end of the excavation. If further planted with gorse, this would have made a reasonable obstacle. The general ground covering in this area is now grey sand of hugely varying depths on gravel on clay shale. A previous road dig 900 metres E of this site established that orange sand almost certainly pre-dated the Medieval storm events which must have brought the grey sand.

The above suggests that the majority of the defensive structure could have consisted of timber, turf and sand. The first two would have perished and the sand may have been scoured away and blown inland by an earlier extreme storm event which was starved of sand to the west. (i.e. the beach had lost its sand, which sometimes happens). The Medieval storm events, which brought sand, would then have covered the remains at a later date.

As regards mechanical excavation during the war, it is possible that something of a crater already existed, so that the banks were visible to the digger driver, who could see that they were man-made and avoided them, expecting impurities such as stones, which would have contaminated the sand, rendering it useless for bedding mortar or plastering if it had stones in it.

The foregoing excavation has been carried out with minimal damage or disturbance to original material, the only loss being a small amount of orange sand, minor trowelling of the suspected ditch at the E end of the dig and a small shallow hole in the gutter between banks.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to John Dyer for all his help with the excavation and his useful questioning at every stage.

Thanks to John and Irene Winter for their permission to dig; for their interest and being so accommodating and welcoming after initial doubts when two suspicious-looking characters turned up at their door.

MARTIN DAVIES 16/5/21