

MYNYDD LLANDEGAI TO BETHESDA
LINK MAIN

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING, TRIAL WORK
AND RECORDING (G1169)

REPORT NO. 125

Smr.

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

MYNYDD LLANDEGAI TO BETHESDA LINK MAIN

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING, TRIAL WORK AND RECORDING (G1169)

prepared for Dwr Cymru/Welsh Water

by A. Shallcross

illustrations by H. Riley

24th August 1994

Gwynedd Archaeological Report No. 125

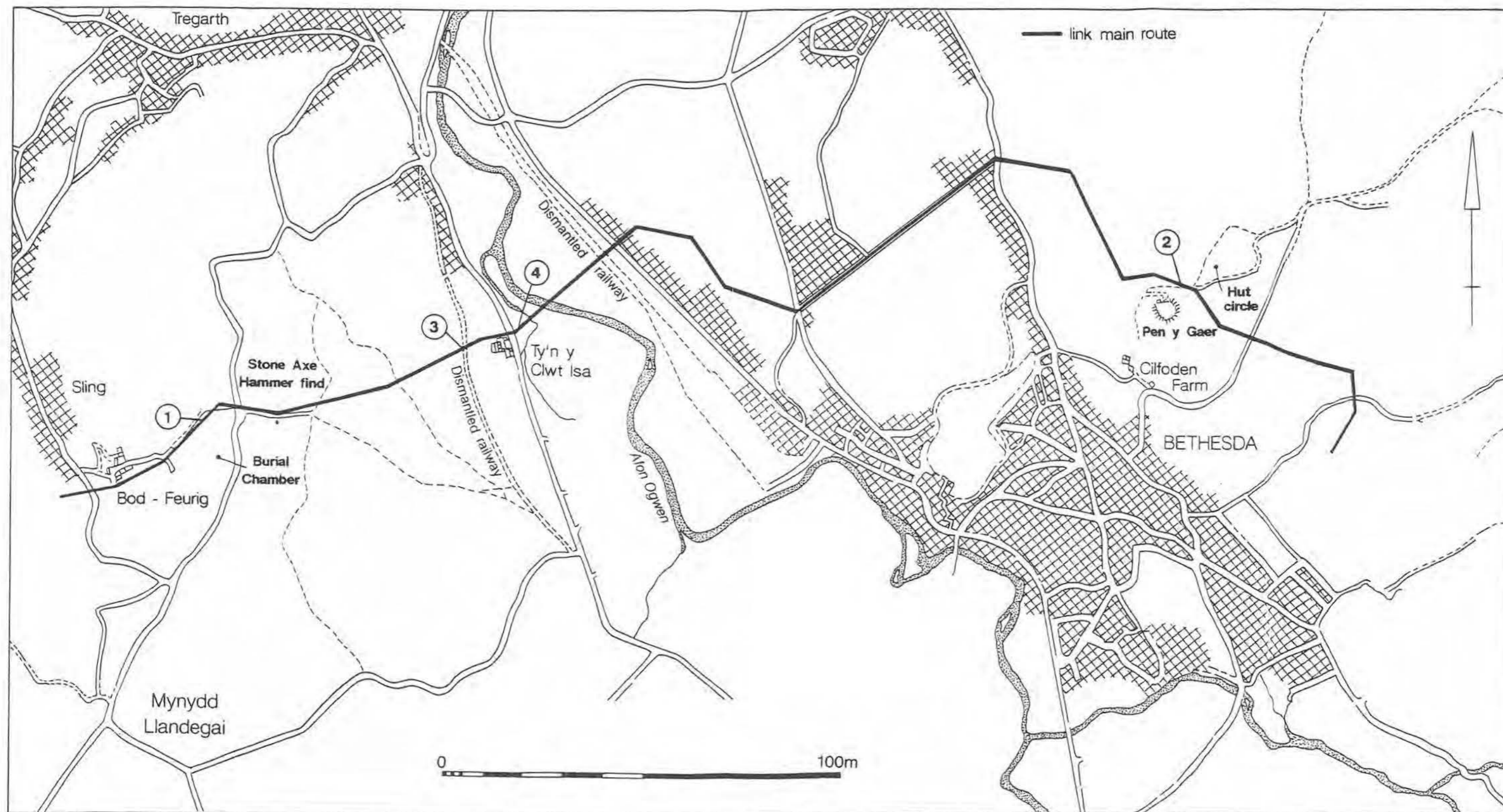


Fig. 1 The link main route and affected sites.

MYNYDD LLANDEGAI TO BETHESDA LINK MAIN

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING, TRIAL WORK AND RECORDING

1. BACKGROUND

Welsh Water propose to install a new link main between Mynydd Llandegai and Bethesda. The Planning Advice Section of the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust was consulted by Welsh Water to advise on any archaeological implications arising from the proposed works. Because of the extent of the ground disturbance envisaged and the known richness of the archaeology in the area, the Planning Advice Section recommended that an archaeological assessment should be carried out. This to involve a documentary search and field walkover to identify the archaeological implications of the project and, where necessary, to suggest further archaeological works in mitigation. The Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Contracts Section was commissioned by Welsh Water to carry out this work and a report was produced (GAT 69). The report identified four areas where the proposed works would have an impact upon possible archaeological features or sites and recommended a programme of further archaeological work. The Contracts Section was asked by Welsh Water to produce a project design and costings to address these recommendations. Subsequently, The Contracts Section was commissioned to carry out this work.

2. THE EVALUATIONS

i) Bod-Feurig Farm nr Sling

The Gwynedd Sites and Monuments Record identifies Bod-Feurig Farm as the site of a Romano-British hut group cleared in the late 19th century. The reference ("The Annales Cambriae And Old-Welsh Genealogies" From Harleian MS. 3859. By Egerton Phillimore) is unfortunately vague as to the precise location. However, the assessment identified a natural raised terrace at the NE end of a field to the NE of the farmhouse as a potential site (Site 1, Fig. 1). Here the ground surface was markedly uneven with what appeared to be low banks and shallow circular depressions suggestive of former hut circles.

In addition, the NE field wall immediately adjacent to this area was of unusual form exhibiting a pronounced widening from its usual 1.0m to 2.5m near the visible earthworks (Fig. 2). Surviving ancient stone structures would, as a matter of course, have been robbed of their stonework for modern field enclosure, and recent work by the Trust at Bush Farm near Port Dinorwic has confirmed that it is also reasonably common for parts of these features to be retained as elements of field boundaries where convenient (GAT report: Bush Farm Excavations 1992, Port Dinorwic Bypass, forthcoming).

It was therefore recommended by the assessment report that a small trial excavation be undertaken in this area to clarify the nature of these features before their destruction by the pipe trench.

Methods and Techniques.

The investigations involved firstly a photographic survey of the features and the field wall to record their character before destruction. A detailed total station EDM (Electronic Distance Measurement) survey was then carried out of the depressions, the field wall and their general setting. Finally, two small trenches were excavated to investigate the depressions. This involved hand deturfing and stacking of the turves, hand clearance and excavation of the revealed features. Recording comprised scaled black and white prints and colour transparencies all at 35mm format, scaled drawings, and written descriptions on standard Gwynedd

Archaeological Trust record forms. All finds were located by their context. No environmental samples were required.

Findings

Trench one was excavated across one of the most prominent of the shallow banks which appear to define some of the edges of the depressions. It was thought that some evidence of structure, for example large embedded foundations stones, might have survived the clearance of the huts. The trench was oriented so that its SW end also sampled the deepest part of one of the circular depressions (see Fig.2).

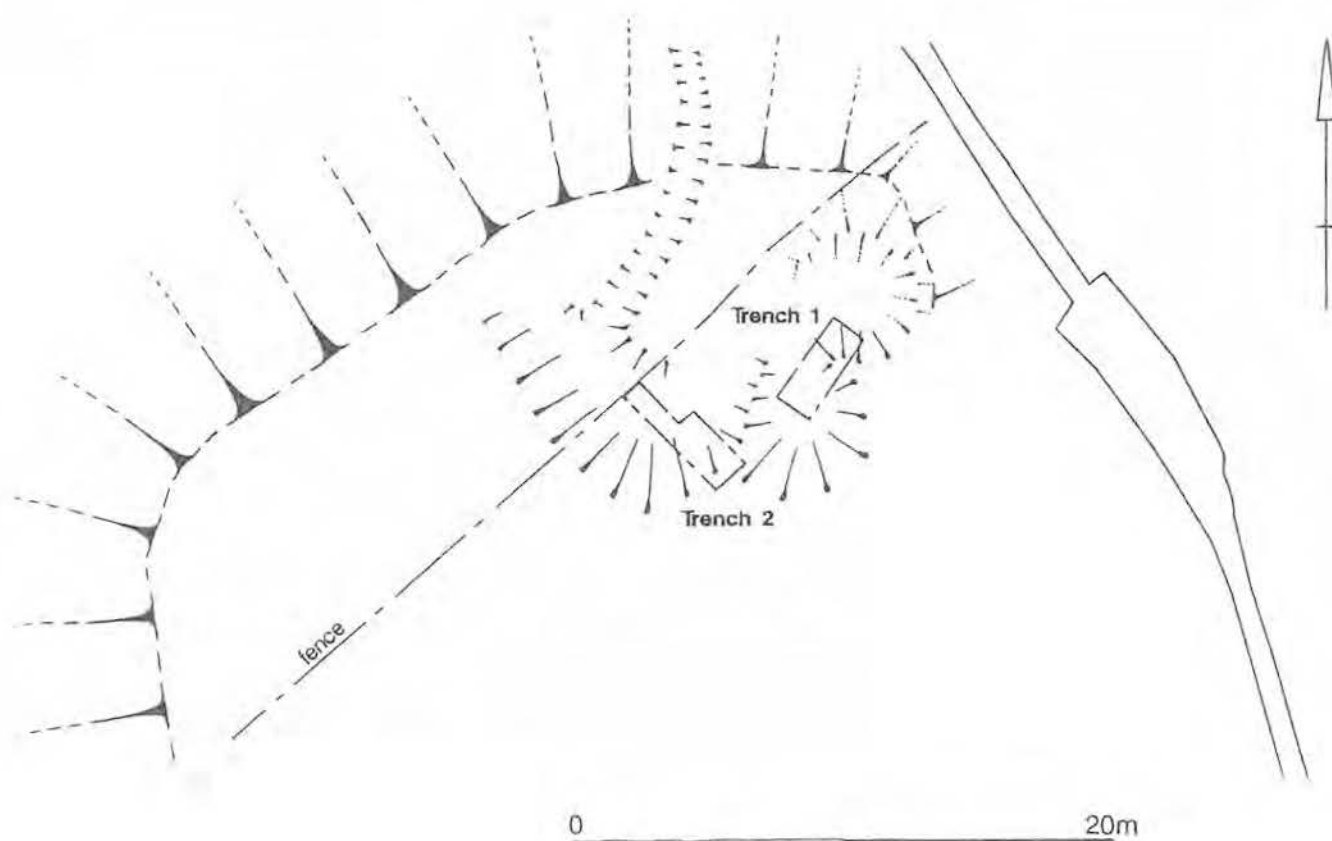


Fig. 2 Bod-Feurig farm - area of depressions and banks

The trench measured 3.8m long by 1.6m wide and was excavated to a depth of 0.2m. The topsoil of 0.1m depth was removed revealing two distinct contexts: to the SW 003, a grey brown silt containing frequent, closely-set, irregular blocks of slate, the majority ranging in size from 0.1 to 0.2m. To the NE was an orange/brown sandy silt (002), containing moderate much smaller, irregular slate fragments from 0.03m to 0.10m in size. The two layers were separated by an 0.2m wide band of large blocks and lumps of slate measuring from 0.2 to 0.3m in length. The band ran across the trench width 1m from the SW end and in the base of the shallow circular depression. Excavation of 003 and 002 revealed a layer containing a jumbled mass of irregular shaped, thin 'leaves' of slate which extended throughout the trench. The band of large stones passing through the trench was seen to be protruding detached blocks of bedrock apparently resting in situ.

Trench two (Fig.2) was excavated oriented NW to SE so as to investigate the edge of another of the depressions, again in the hope of picking up structural remains. It also extended down into one of the depressions to sample the interior of the depression where the tops of a random pattern of moderate sized stones could be seen protruding through the turf. The final dimensions of the trench measured 5m long by 1.5m wide and 0.4m deep. However, initially the trench was excavated to a length of 3m. Removal of the topsoil revealed an orange brown silt (005) containing moderate slate fragments. This layer was excavated down on to 006, a reddish brown sandy silt which contained frequent sub-rounded and sub-angular stones from 0.1m to 0.4m in size. The stones appeared to form a distinct layer with many voids between them and with the matrix almost as a sealing layer. There appeared to be no pattern to their arrangement. The trench was then extended towards the NW to investigate the extent of the stone layer. The layer's general character remained unchanged and it extended right across the trench. The layer below the stones at a depth of 0.4m, consisted of a light orange/brown sandy silt (007), and was similar in character to 003 in trench one but with far fewer slate fragments.

Conclusions

It would appear that the remains investigated here are in fact the result of small scale local quarrying for slate. This is supported by the great quantity of slate waste uncovered in trench one. It is also possible to identify occasional slate fragments protruding through the turf throughout the area surrounding the excavations. No evidence was found for any structures. The layer of loose stones observed in trench two (006) appeared to be a dump used simply to help to level one of the depressions. It is interesting to note that the present field boundary is defined by a wire fence and timber posts but there are signs that it was originally a dry stone wall. It is possible that the depression was filled with stone from the collapsed/ruinous stone field boundary at the time of its replacement with the present fence line. This would suggest a fairly recent process which perhaps is supported by the lack of consolidation of the stones and their matrix.

Clearance of the thick vegetation masking the bulging wall adjacent to the area of depressions revealed that the wall here was built onto outcropping bedrock, the unevenness of which may have resulted in slumping. There is evidence that the area of thickening may also be the result of a new wall being built flush with the NE face of the slumping wall to act as a buttress. No relationship was observed between the wall and the area of depressions.

Related Work

A further photographic record was made of a stretch of field wall which was to be truncated by the passage of the link main in the SW corner of the farmhouse field at Bod-Feurig.

This stretch of field wall contained two large upright stones, which may be old gateposts, and so could indicate the site of an old, and now blocked entrance. The western-most post was 0.75m high, tapering towards the bottom. The second was approximately 0.7m high, though its dimensions were obscured by vegetation. The distance between the two was 1.45m. All the wall was of rough dry stone construction reaching 1.0m in height, but the stonework between the posts was consistently slightly higher than the rest of the wall. No furnishings were observed on either of the posts.

A watching brief was also carried out on the remainder of the pipe corridor as it passed through Bod-Feurig farm and in the general surrounding area. The only feature of note was located opposite Pen-y-Ffriddoedd cottages, to the NE of Bod-Feurig Farm. This was a low bank with a shallow ditch running alongside, some 85m in length. Several stones were seen to protrude from the sides of the bank, possibly forming a facing of some sort. The feature mostly ran parallel to the pipeline, but had been cut where it curved towards the pipe trench near to the Tregarth/Mynydd Llandegai road. It is most probably the remains of an old field boundary.

ii) Cilfoden Farm, Bethesda

At Cilfoden Farm the trench for the link main was to pass between the base of the low hill upon which Pen-y-Gaer hillfort is located and the site of a hut settlement (see Site 2, Fig.1). The field walk element of the assessment identified a series of low linear alignments of stones and a low bank below the hillfort on its N side, which were to be directly affected by the pipeline works. The conclusion from the assessment was that these features were possibly related to the hillfort, perhaps representing an early field system. The assessment report recommended that a total station E.D.M. survey and photographic survey be carried out to record the features before they were disturbed. A watching brief was also to be undertaken during ground disturbance in the area.

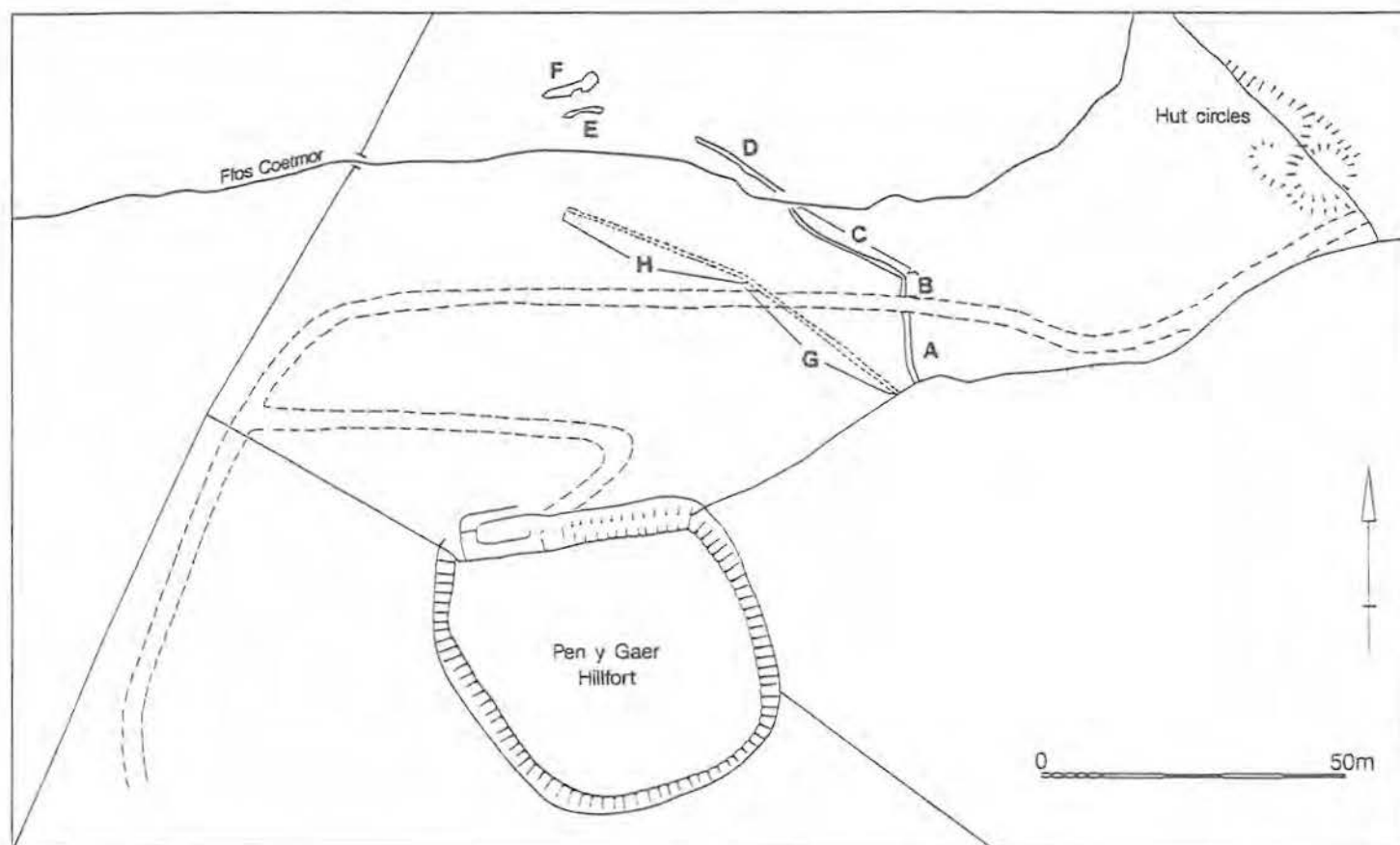


Fig. 3 Cilfoden Farm - linear features.

Results

The walls and bank were seen to comprise several elements (a-h Fig.3):

- a) A Line of boulders to a maximum surviving height of 1.0m, overall length 11.9m, width 0.75m-1.25m, individual boulders up to 1.25m by 0.65m. Smaller stones were seen to have been used as packing.
- b) A small linear arrangement of boulders, maximum height 0.4m, overall length 3.75m, width 0.25m-0.85m, individual boulders up to 0.8m by 0.7m. A track, believed to be of a modern date, separated a) and b).

c) Low line of boulders running from b) at an angle of 125 degrees, maximum height 0.2m, width 0.45m-0.75m, overall length 21.8m, individual boulders up to 1.75m by 0.75m. This line of boulders ran down to a stream which crosses the area, and was noted to angle towards this stream for the last 5.0m of its length.

d) The line of boulders (a-b-c) resumed on the other side of the stream, however here some of the stones appeared to have been deliberately set on their edges producing a maximum height of 0.65m, the width was 0.43m-1.0m, and the overall length of this stretch of boulders was 16.85m. Individual boulder dimensions were up to 1.8m by 0.4m. The NW end of d) butted a natural stone outcrop.

e) On the same side of the stream as d) was a small group of more angular stones, situated between the outcrop and the stream though reaching neither and on a different alignment to d). Height 0.55m, width 0.45m-1.0m, overall length 6.3m, individual stones up to 2.5m by 1.0m. The ground in this part of the field was noted to be wet.

f) Also on the same side of the stream, this feature ran parallel to e), and was a low, short length of mixed size stones up to 1.3m by 0.8m, the feature had a maximum height of 1.0m, width 0.825m-2.0m, and an overall length of 9.45m. This feature was also in the wet area.

g) Very low narrow grassy bank located on the same side of the stream as a) and b) and running roughly parallel to them. Height 0.1m, width 0.54m-0.935m, overall length 20.8m, no stones visible in its make-up.

h) Long very low narrow grassy bank, same as g) but separated from it by the same track which separates a) and b). Also angles away from g), bringing it on more of a parallel course with c). Height 0.1m, width 0.6m-0.78m, and an overall length of 32.4m.

Related Work

Further work in the area consisted of a watching brief when the pipe trench was excavated through the features, those affected were: a), which was completely removed, e) which had 1.5m of its west end removed and b) which was largely removed (bar a few small stones embedded in the ground) to enable better access to the trackway which cut through the corridor. All other features were outside the area of the pipe trench corridor.

Also observed when the working corridor was stripped was an area of concentrated angular/sub-angular stones ranging in size mostly from 0.05 to 0.15m with a moderate amount up to 0.25m. These formed a discrete 10m wide band running through the corridor from NE to SW immediately to the NW of the breached field wall below the hillfort. Occasional pieces of pottery and glass were also recovered from the general area of the ground disturbance below the hillfort. This was all of modern manufacture including Buckley-ware and porcelain.

Conclusions

An inspection of the removed wall material gave no indication as to period of construction and no evidence was uncovered for other features associated with the hillfort. The function of the band of stones identified running through the working corridor could not be determined from the limited area exposed. It may represent phases of collapse and repair of the up slope field wall. The two lengths of low grassy bank (g and h) apparently mark where an existing water pipe runs, and therefore, despite appearances, they are unrelated to the stone linear features described above.

The only finds recovered were of recent date.

Elements of the features described above were unfortunately disturbed, however, recording was adequate to preserve the information which they represent.

iii) Penrhyn Quarry Railway

Background

There are records of an early track constructed in 1800 for horse drawn wagons running from Penrhyn Quarry. Of particular interest were the rails which were elliptical in section. It was assumed that the later steam railway would have obliterated any remains of the earlier track therefore a watching brief only was called for where the development would cut through the surviving track bed.

Findings

A watching brief was carried out during excavations by the contractors for the pipe trench. The area of disturbance was located to the west of Ty'n y Clwt Isa (Site 3, Fig.1). The feature survived here as a slight terrace cut into a gentle slope with overgrown hedges and a wire and slate fence on either side. The trench was excavated to a depth of over 1m revealing the natural geology at a depth of 0.3m, comprising a yellow and orange boulder clay. Above this was a layer 0.2m thick of the natural mixed with redeposited top soil, forming what appeared to be levelling for the track bedding layer. Above this was the make-up layer to take the track bed, 0.10m thick consisting of slate waste and medium to small rounded/sub-rounded stones contained within a light grey silty clay. No sign of any remaining track or related furnishings was apparent.

iiii) Ty'n y Clwt Isa

Introduction

At Ty'n y Clwt Isa the assessment report identified a prominent interrupted linear earth bank leading to a very faint circular depression some 5m in diameter (Site 4, Fig.1). It was felt that this was likely to be the remains of an old sheepfold but the feature was also suggestive of a hut circle. As it would be largely disturbed or destroyed by the works corridor and pipe trench, it was recommended that a quick evaluation trench be excavated to confirm its nature.

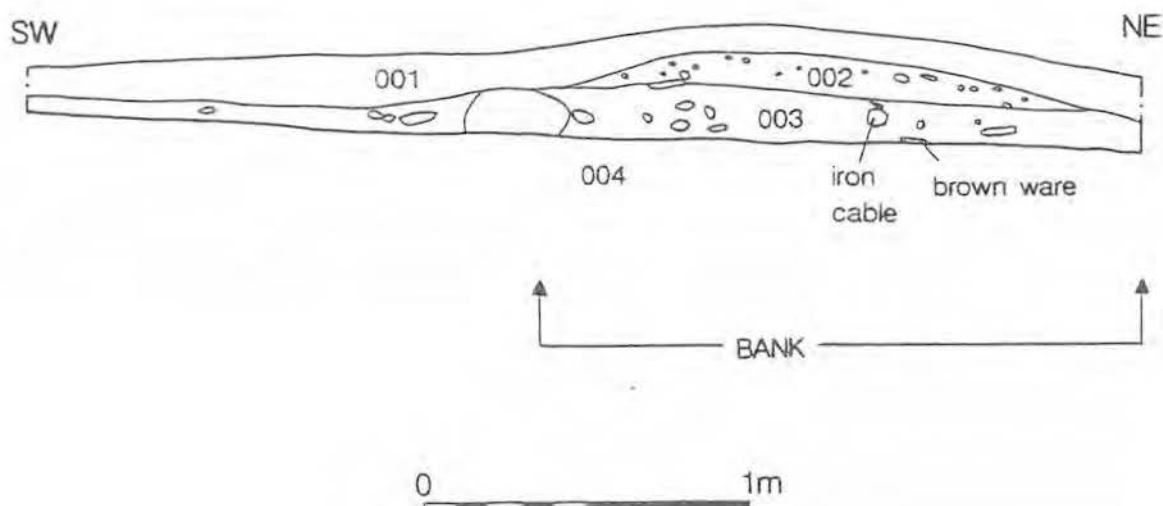


Fig. 4 Ty'n y Clwt Isa - Section through linear bank.

Findings

The excavation consisted of a hand dug trench measuring 3m by 1m positioned across the bank feature. The trench was excavated to a depth of 0.36m (see Fig.4) and revealed the natural geology here to be a light brownish yellow silty clay (004). Above this was a light yellowish brown silty clay, stony, with a 50mm diameter iron cable running through it at right angles, this layer also contained post-medieval pottery. Above this in turn was a wedge of material which appeared to form the core of the bank proper: a greyish brown silty clay with small stones and slate fragments (002), varying in height from 0.08-0.12m. The uppermost context was a grey clayey silt topsoil (001).

Conclusions

There was no evidence for the feature being part of a hut circle site. The finds would indicate that it is of post-medieval date, possibly an old field boundary, or part of a sheepfold.

3. OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

Fortunately the work carried out to record the archaeology that was to be affected by the link main revealed that little of any importance was lost in the four areas identified by the assessment report. The only site where possible significant archaeological features were disturbed was at Cilfoden Farm, where the remnant foundations of several stretches of old field wall possibly relating to the hill fort were removed. However these were recorded in satisfactory detail.

At Ty'n y Clwt Isa, a further remnant field wall was truncated by the pipeline but finds date this as late post-medieval.

At Bod-Feurig Farm there was no evidence produced in either the excavations or the watching brief for the hut circles known to have existed in the last century. The area of circular depressions identified by the assessment proved to be the result of slate quarrying so that fears that a major site would be destroyed were allayed. The possibility of locating the former hut group site somewhere at Bod-Feurig farm remains, and opportunities for investigating any other likely features which are under threat should be taken.

The abandoned railway line near Ty'n y Clwt Isa, as expected, revealed no evidence of the early horse drawn carriageway or its special rails and it is to be assumed that the later railway has indeed obliterated all evidence of the earlier system.

