

AFON HARNOG BRITHDIR, MEIRIONNYDD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT (G1439)

REPORT NO. 229



Gwynedd Archaeological Trust
Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd

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Prepared for Shawater Limited

by

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November 1996

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1.INTRODUCTION

The proposed hydro-electric scheme will extract water from the Afon Harnog at SH 8368 2208 and return it to the same river at SH 8151 2233. Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (Contracts Section) has been asked by Shawater Ltd to carry out an archaeological assessment of the proposed scheme, to form part of an Environmental Assessment, leading to an Environmental Statement which is to accompany the proposal.

2.ASSESSMENT BRIEF

An initial report was requested from Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, assessing the likely archaeological impact of the scheme and suggesting mitigatory measures.

The basic requirement was for a desk-top survey and field search of the proposed area in order to assess the impact of the proposals on the archaeological and heritage features within the area concerned. The importance and condition of known archaeological remains were to be assessed and areas of archaeological potential and new sites to be identified. Measures to mitigate the effects of the proposed scheme on the archaeological resource were to be suggested.

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust's proposals for fulfilling these requirements were, briefly, as follows:

- a) to identify and record the cultural heritage of the area to be affected by the proposals;
- b) to assess the importance of what was identified (both as a cultural landscape and as the individual items which make up that landscape); and
- c) to recommend ways in which damage to the cultural heritage can be avoided or minimised.

3. METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

3.1 Desk-top Study

This involved consultation of maps, computer records, written records and reference works, which make up the Sites and Monuments Record at Gwynedd Archaeological Trust. Records (including early Ordnance Survey maps, tithe maps, schedules, and reference works - see bibliography) were consulted in the Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon, Gwynedd Archives, Dolgellau, the University of Wales, Bangor, Archives and the National Library of Wales Archives, Aberystwyth.

3.2 Field Search

This was undertaken on the 1st and 2nd October 1996, when the whole of the proposed route of the pipeline was walked. Conditions were good for fieldwork except that part of the area adjoining the upper section of the route was not visible because it was covered by young conifer plantation. The potential for the area is extremely low, and although there could be features within this area not identified this should not affect the assessment since the route keeps to the trackway through these areas.

No sites of more than minor value were identified and all were of post-medieval date. However, all sites identified were marked on a copy of the 1:10,000 OS map as accurately as possible without surveying. Each site was described and assessed.

3.3 Report

All available information was collated and the sites were then assessed and allocated to the categories listed below. These are intended to give an idea of the importance of the site and the level of response likely to be required; descriptions of the sites and specific recommendations for further assessment or mitigatory measures, as appropriate, are given in the relevant sections of this report.

The criteria used for allocating sites to categories are based on those used by the Secretary of State when considering ancient monuments for scheduling; these are set out in Annex 3 to Planning Policy Guidance 16 (Wales): Archaeology and Planning.

3.4 Categories

The following categories were used to define the importance of the archaeological resource.

Category A - Sites of national importance.

Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Listed Buildings and sites of schedulable or listable quality, i.e. those which would meet the requirements for scheduling (ancient monuments) or listing (buildings) or both.

Sites which are scheduled or listed have legal protection, and it is recommended that all Category A sites remain preserved and protected *in situ*.

Category B - Sites of regional or county importance.

Sites which would not fulfil the criteria for scheduling or listing, but which are nevertheless of particular importance within the region.

Preservation *in situ* is the preferred option for Category B sites, but if damage or destruction cannot be avoided, appropriate detailed recording might be an acceptable alternative.

Category C - Sites of district or local importance.

Sites which are not of sufficient importance to justify a recommendation for preservation if threatened.

Category C sites nevertheless merit adequate recording in advance of damage or destruction.

Category D - Minor and damaged sites.

Sites which are of minor importance or so badly damaged that too little remains to justify their inclusion in a higher category.

For Category D sites, rapid recording, either in advance of or during destruction, should be sufficient.

Category E - Sites needing further investigation.

Sites whose importance is as yet undetermined and which will require further work before they can be allocated to categories A - D are temporarily placed in this category, with specific recommendations for further assessment. By the end of the assessment there should be no sites remaining in this category.

3.5 Definition of Impact

The impact has been defined as none, slight, likely, considerable or unknown as follows:

None:

There is no construction impact on this particular site. (Sites identified as of particular importance are, where possible, avoided by the improvement proposals. Such sites have been identified in the tables.

Slight:

This has generally been used where the impact is marginal and would not by the nature of the site cause irreversible damage to the remainder of the feature, eg a track or field boundary.

Likely:

In some instances the site in question would not fall within the direct line of the proposed development but could be affected by construction works and therefore may, subject to its nature be removed or damaged.

Considerable:

The total removal of a feature or its partial removal which would effectively destroy the remainder of the site.

Unknown

This is used when the location of the site is unknown, but thought to be in the vicinity of the proposed development.

3.6 Definition of Mitigatory Recommendations

None:

No impact so no requirement for mitigation measures.

Detailed recording:

Requiring a photographic record, surveying and the production of a measured drawing prior to commencement of works.

Archaeological excavation may also be required depending on the particular feature and the extent and effect of the impact.

Basic recording:

Requiring a photographic record and full description prior to commencement of works.

Watching brief:

Requiring observation of particular identified features or areas during works in their vicinity. This may be supplemented by detailed or basic recording of exposed layers, structures or sections.

Avoidance:

Features which may be affected directly by the scheme, or during the construction of the scheme, should be avoided. Occasionally a minor change to the proposed route of the pipeline is recommended, but more usually it refers to the need for care to be taken during construction of the pipeline to avoid accidental damage to a site. This is often best achieved by clearly marking sites prior to the start of work.

Reinstatement:

The feature should be re-instated with archaeological advice and supervision.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Preliminary topographic assessment

The route as presently proposed falls into four topographic zones:

- a. In the easternmost area, from the proposed intake for c. 500m, the route crosses open, stony, medium-sloping poor grass pasture with rock outcrops and, in the uppermost part, boulder field. The ground is open and any man-made interference or structures would be easily visible.
- b. The route then follows along a straight, modern trackway for c. 500m on a medium slope. This is bordered by a young conifer plantation and so any nearby features would not be visible.
- c. The route then follows for c. 500m along an earlier, winding trackway where the sub-rectangular, enclosed and improved fields of the farm bordered on the poorer, open hill pasture. The land is open and visible but any early features are likely to have been destroyed as shown by the presence of stone clearance cairns.
- d. Finally, for c. 600m, the route, still following the track, crosses a medium sloping field of recently improved pasture, across the farmyard, road and car park, down to the river's edge.

In terms of potential for archaeological remains of human settlement or other activity, the route follows the existing trackway for most of the distance and this, along with the road crossing and recently machine-levelled car park, by the river, can be expected to be effectively of no archaeological potential. The exception is where the route crosses the farmyard where earlier building foundations (of the monastic grange) might be encountered. Only in zone a. does the route cross undisturbed land but it is high, at c. 360m OD, rocky and of low potential for settlement.

4.2 Archaeological and historic background

In the medieval period as part of the kingdom of Gwynedd the area southeast of the Afon Wnion lay in the township of Brithdir Uchaf, in the commote of Talybont, in the cantref of Meirionnydd. In 1209 a large area of central Meirionnydd was granted by Llywelyn Fawr to the Cistercian monks for the foundation of Cymer Abbey (Williams-Jones, 1957), and this included Brithdir Uchaf. It has previously been observed that the lands in Brithdir Uchaf seem to have been divided into a number of large areas, divided by the rivers flowing into the Afon Wnion, and that these areas might reflect pre-existing sub-divisions of the land which may then have continued as tenements of the abbey (Gresham, 1984, 150). However, records show that a number of granges (outlying houses or farms of the abbey) were established and one of these was *Eskegaur* the existing farm of Esgair Gawr in the survey area. Another was Brynbedwyn which probably lay close to Esgair Gawr on the opposite side of the Afon Harnog (Williams-Jones, 1957, 66-7). However, in later years some of the grange land was rented out as shown by a record of taxation of the lease of Esgair Gawr to the Bishop of Bangor in 1292-3 (Williams-Jones, 1976, 143). The tax for Esgair Gawr was nearly three times that of Brynbedwyn which was still held by the abbot of Cymer. Brynbedwyn was clearly a very small establishment and its ploughland was valued at one carucate (Williams, 1981, 49). It may be supposed that Esgair Gawr had more extensive ploughlands. In 1550, after the dissolution of the monasteries, Cymer and its lands were granted by Edward VI to a Royal Sergeant-at-arms and later, through private sale eventually came into the hands of the Vaughan family in which it remained until the late 19th century (Gresham, 1984, 148).

4.3 The existing archaeological record

No individual sites of archaeological interest have been recorded in the vicinity of the survey area. An old track which crosses to the south of the Afon Harnog and which can be traced over the hills towards Dinas Mawdddy was once thought to be the line of a Roman road from Tomen-y-mur to Pennal (RCAHM, 1921, 10-11). Since then a new Roman fortlet has been located and partly excavated at Brithdir 6km to the south-west and it seems more likely that the road also lay to the west. However, the road which crosses at Pont Gawr seems likely to follow the east/west route of the Roman road from the fort of Caer Gai at Llanuwchllyn to Brithdir (Bowen and Gresham, 1967, 255). There is record of rebuilding of the bridge of Pont Gawr in c. 1762 (Williams -Jones, 1957, 66).

There are no detailed records of field names on the tithe map of this area of c.1841 which might help in interpretation and the local place names are mostly of a simple descriptive topographic nature (eg Afon Harnog - 'beautiful river').

The existing house of Esgair Gawr is of post-medieval build. It seems likely to be on or close to the site of the medieval grange from which it took its name Esgair Gawr, Esgair - 'ridge' and Gawr from the Afon Cwm-ochr, probably originally from cwm-y-gawr (Williams-Jones, 1957, 66), gawr or cawr - 'giant'. The farm house is situated on a low eminence or ridge as suggested by the name. However, the grange may have made use of the fast-flowing river for milling and any areas of the river bank are potentially of interest.

4.4 The archaeological survey

Features are numbered from the higher end of the route downwards and their locations are shown on the accompanying map (1439/3/1).

Recommendations for further assessment are made if the site cannot be sufficiently well understood from existing knowledge to allow mitigation measures to be recommended. The mitigation measure is a product of the category of importance, the impact, and the nature of the site. Where "avoidance" is recommended, this is to include both direct avoidance by the pipeline and avoidance of construction traffic.

1. Field wall

Category D Impact: Slight

Rubble-built wall, disused but still standing to its full height of c. 1.6m high in places. Narrow, tapering from base to top. Curving in plan. Part of post-medieval fridd boundary made redundant after afforestation.

Recommendation for further assessment: None.

Recommendation for mitigatory measures: None.

2. Trackway terraces

Category D Impact: Slight

Unfinished terraced trackways, cut into slope by machine. Modern, presumably abandoned pre-afforestation tracks.

Recommendation for further assessment: None.

Recommendation for mitigatory measures: None.

3. Track hollow-way

Category D Impact: Slight

Former line of track up steep part of slope marked by curving hollow-way. Presumably line of pre-afforestation farm track.

Recommendation for further assessment: None.

Recommendation for mitigatory measures: None.

4. Sheepfolds

Category D Impact: None

Complex of folds and smaller pens. Partly in-use. Post-medieval shearing pens.

Recommendation for further assessment: None.

Recommendation for mitigatory measures: Avoid.

5. Field wall

Category D Impact: None

Rubble-built wall, no orthostats, c. 1.6m high. Straight in plan. In use. Post medieval, related to 4.

Recommendation for further assessment: None.

Recommendation for mitigatory measures: Avoid.

6. Field wall

Category D Impact: Likely.

Ruinous, well-spread wall. Partly laid, partly orthostatic. Curving in plan. Disused. Possibly earlier in origin than 5. Medieval?

Recommendation for further assessment: None.

Recommendation for mitigatory measures: Avoid.

7. Drainage ditch

Category D Impact: Likely.

Small drain, function not obvious but presumably to divert surface water away from the trackway.

Recommendation for further assessment: None.

Recommendation for mitigatory measures: Reinstate.

8. Terraced track

Category D Impact: None.

Farm track to fields up slope, partially terraced into the slope.

Recommendation for further assessment: None.

Recommendation for mitigatory measures: None.

9. Field wall

Category D Impact: None.

Rubble built wall. In use. Post-medieval.

Recommendation for further assessment: None.

Recommendation for mitigatory measures: Reinstate.

10. Clearance cairns

Category D Impact: None

Two small dumps of field clearance stones, probably over outcrops. From post-medieval use of field.

Recommendation for further assessment: None.

Recommendation for mitigatory measures: None.

11. Clearance cairn

Category D Impact: None

Small stones from field clearance dumped over natural rock knoll. From post-medieval use of

field.

Recommendation for further assessment: None.

Recommendation for mitigatory measures: None.

12. Building

Category C Impact: None

Ruinous, unroofed, stone-built, rectangular building, 12m by 5m internally. Single storey, no fireplace. Formerly had slate roof. Field barn or winter cattle shed.

Recommendation for further assessment: None.

Recommendation for mitigatory measures: Avoid.

13. Causeway

Category D Impact: Considerable

Slab-paved causeway where the track runs past building 12. Post-medieval. Possibly it was constructed to avoid the track wearing and de-stabilising the building but there is also a hollow down-slope which could have been used for collecting slurry.

Recommendation for further assessment: None.

Recommendation for mitigatory measures: Reinstate.

14. Field wall

Category D Impact: None

Rubble-built wall, c. 1.4m high plus fence. In use. Somewhat irregular and curving in plan. Post-medieval but possibly earlier in origin.

Recommendation for further assessment: None.

Recommendation for mitigatory measures: Reinstate.

15. Building

Category C Impact: None

Slate-roofed, stone-built, rectangular building, c. 4.5m by 8.5m internally, no fireplace. Post-medieval winter cattle shed.

Recommendation for further assessment: None.

Recommendation for mitigatory measures: Avoid.

16. Terraced trackway

Category D Impact: Likely

Trackway, partly terraced into the slope, gravelled. Sinuous in plan. In use. Post-medieval but possibly earlier in origin.

Recommendation for further assessment: None.

Recommendation for mitigatory measures: Reinstate.

17. Farmyard and buildings

Category E Impact: Slight

Post-medieval but possibly overlying medieval monastic buildings.

Recommendation for further assessment: None.

Recommendation for mitigatory measures: Watching brief with excavation and detailed recording if necessary.

18. Bridge

Category B Impact: None

Pont Gawr. Late 18th century.

Recommendation for further assessment: None.
Recommendation for mitigatory measures: Avoid.

5. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MITIGATORY MEASURES

This lists the sites according to their perceived archaeological value.

Category A - National importance

Nil.

Category B - Regional importance

18. Bridge. Avoid.

Category C - Local importance

12, 15. Buildings: Avoid.

Category D - Minor or damaged sites

4, 5, 6.	Avoid.
1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 11.	No action required.
7, 9, 13, 14, 16.	Re-instate.

Category E - Sites of potential value

17. Farmyard and buildings, possible site of monastic grange:	Watching brief and excavation and detailed recording if necessary.
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6. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The construction requirements

The pipeline construction will require a minimum easement of c. 5m. For the most part this can be contained within the existing track which the route follows.

6.2 Archaeological recommendations

Although there are a number of features along the proposed pipeline route, most are of a minor or relatively recent nature, consisting mainly of field walls, tracks and associated features. These can all be avoided or do not merit any action except that reinstatement is presumed for most existing field walls which might be affected.

There is only one area which is of potentially greater value and one on which there will be considerable impact. This is where the route runs through the existing farmyard and buildings of Esgair Gawr which probably lie on the site of the medieval monastic grange of the same name. The trackway may continue the line of a medieval track or wear and maintenance of the track and yard may have obliterated any earlier structures. However, these cannot be certain and the site is sufficiently valuable to justify a response. It is therefore recommended that the excavation of this part of the pipe trench be covered by a watching brief accompanied by detailed recording if necessary. This would involve archaeological direction of the machine working and some archaeological cleaning, recording and possibly excavation, depending on the evidence encountered. This part of the route would therefore need to be investigated some way in advance of the pipelaying in order to allow the work to continue without interruption.

The proposed inlet weir and turbine house sites are both in archaeologically non-sensitive areas and need no further action.

The following recommendations are made:

6.2.1 Before construction

A. The schedule for construction should be designed to allow investigation of the site of potential value, that of the monastic grange.

6.2.2 During construction

A. There should be provision for archaeological observation and excavation and recording of any layers or structures where the route runs through the farmyard of Esgair Gawr. This would need to be more than a watching brief during pipe trench excavation but need not be a full hand excavation although some hand cleaning, excavation and recording might be necessary.

6.2.3 After construction

A. There should be allowance for production of a proper level of archiving of any records and of a report if the resulting information is deemed to warrant it.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

7.1 Unpublished Sources

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Gwynedd Council, Caernarfon Archives
Gwynedd Council, Dolgellau Archives
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University of Wales, Bangor, Archives.

7.2 Maps

Ordnance Survey maps:

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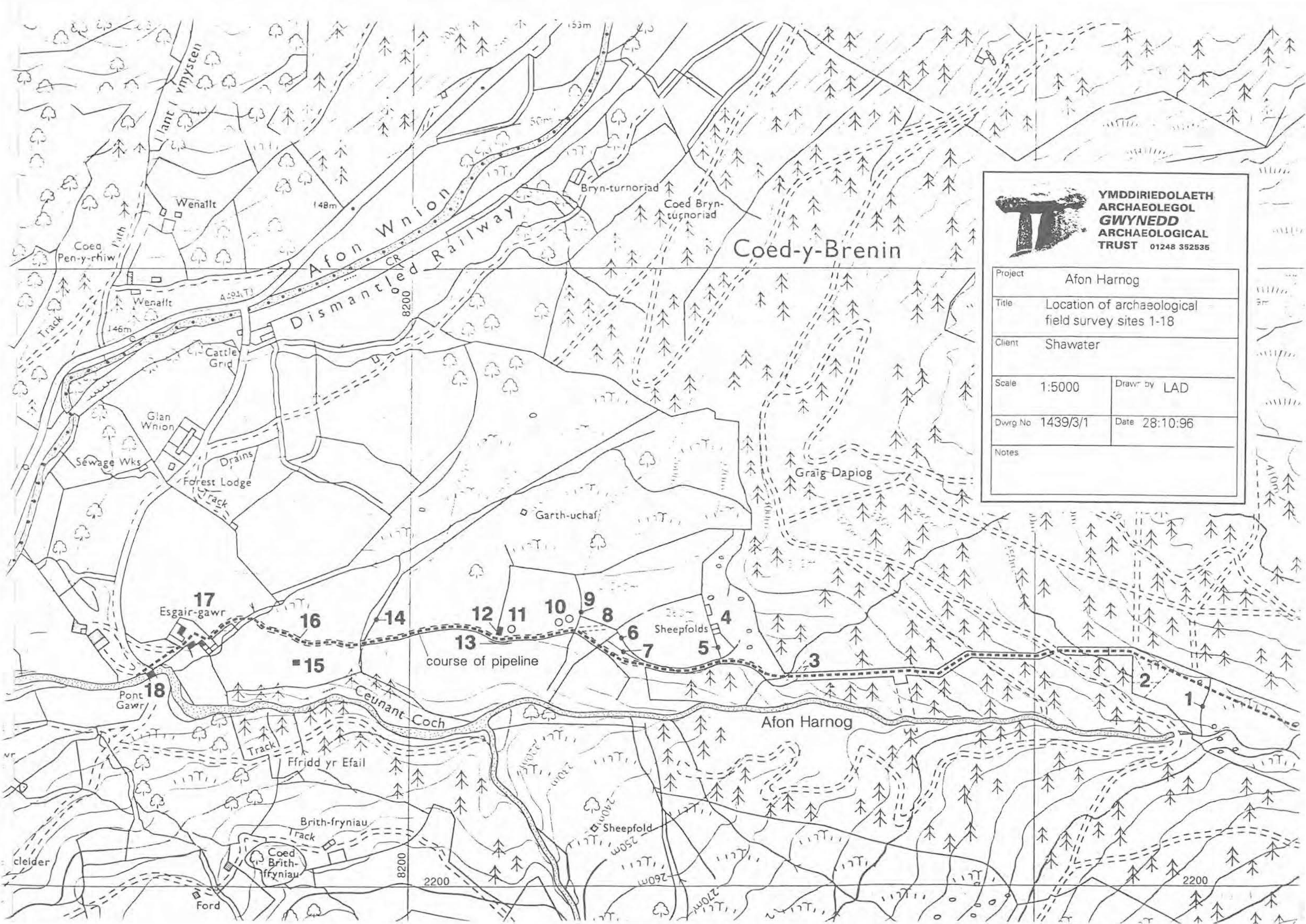
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8. NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

An archaeological assessment was carried out of the route of the proposed pipeline. The work involved a desktop study of existing records followed by a field walkover. The desktop study included examination of records held in the Gwynedd Sites and Monuments Record and searches of other records and maps in archives at Aberystwyth, Caernarfon, Dolgellau and Bangor, as well as maps and printed literature. The field work involved walking all of the route of c. 2.1km with observation of a corridor of approximately 100m width (except where restricted by young forestry plantation) with brief recording and assessment of all features.

The desktop study revealed no evidence of features within the corridor of the route earlier than the post-medieval period but showed that the farm originated as a medieval monastic grange and was therefore of considerable historic interest. The fieldwork recorded a total of 18 features over the whole route. Of these, all were of post-medieval date, including a bridge, farm buildings and field walls. It was recognised, however, that the existing main farm buildings probably lay over the site of the medieval monastic grange.

The majority of the features required no archaeological response and could be avoided or, as existing tracks and field walls, would require reinstatement as a matter of course. The single exception was the existing farmyard. As the probable site of a medieval monastic grange and the possibility of associated structures being revealed a watching brief with accompanying detailed recording, if necessary, was recommended.



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