

LLANWENDA TO PENYGROES GAS PIPELINE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING & WATCHING BRIEF (1506)

REPORT NO. 278

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

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**Prepared for
BRITISH GAS - TRANSCO
December 1997**

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1. INTRODUCTION

British Gas have constructed a new mains gas pipeline between the gas sub-stations at NGR SH47855841, just east of Cae-moel farm, Llanwnda, and SH47625301, just north of the B4418 in Penygroes. The work was undertaken by the contractors Beynons plc.

An archaeological assessment of the route was carried out in July 1997 (GAT Report No. 267) in which recommendations were made for the avoidance of some sites and the recording of others in advance of construction. It was also recommended that an archaeological watching brief should accompany the phases of top-soil stripping and subsequent trenching. Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (Contracts Section) submitted a project design and quotation for this archaeological work which was accepted. The work was monitored by Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service, who acted as independent advisors to British Gas Transco.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AIMS

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust was employed to carry out the work of recording the archaeological sites 15, 17, 18 and 19 as identified in GAT Report No. 267. A further area was identified for recording, through which the pipeline had been re-routed to the west, to avoid sites 20 and 21. In addition a watching brief was to be carried out over the entire length of the pipeline.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Recording

Three areas were recorded prior to construction, two of which were recommended following the archaeological assessment, whereas the third arose following the re-routing of a section of the pipeline. The first area was the south-east corner of field No. 3069, situated on Cae Forgan farm and centred at NGR SH48355463, which included archaeological site Nos. 15 and 30. The second area was field Nos. 2722 and 2414 on Cae Uchaf farm, centred at NGR SH48275422, which included site Nos. 17-19. The third area was identified after field walking the slightly altered route at the southern end of the pipeline. This area lay in field No. 0033 on Pant Ddu farm, at NGR SH47905340 and was just east of site No. 20.

The archaeological recording consisted of:-

- a) a 'total station' survey, using an electronic distance measuring machine, the results of which were processed using digital ground modelling software
- b) a photographic survey
- c) a written description of each feature.

3.2 Watching Brief

The route of the pipeline was examined during and following the fencing and top-soil stripping between 16th October and 10th November 1997. Work began at the Afon Llifon crossing and proceeded in both north and south directions. Top-soil stripping was completed in the northern section by the 28th October and in the southern section by 10th November.

The pipeline was also examined at intervals during the course of excavation and backfilling between 4th November and 10th December 1997. Work again began at the Afon Llifon crossing but adverse weather conditions prevented working in both directions and necessitated working at different locations along the route as areas became accessible. The northern section was completed by 22nd November and the majority of the southern section by 5th December. A short length of the route between Cae Uchaf and Ffordd Llwyndu was on too steep a slope for the machinery and a flatter easement had to be created to complete the work. This section was completed by 12th

December.

4. TOPOGRAPHY

The underlying rock of this area is of the Arvonian Series consisting mainly of rhyolitic volcanics, particularly ignimbrites, mantled with varying thickness' of glacial drift (Roberts, 1979). The sub-soil exposed during the top-soil stripping and trenching phases of the work consisted mainly of red-brown and orange gravels with some areas of peat over grey clay. In some places the plough soil was too deep for the top-soil stripping to expose the sub-soil, reducing the reliability for archaeological observation. The topography is described from north to south along the route of the pipeline.

The north end of the pipeline from SH47885841 to SH47955779 consisted of a loamy drift with between 25%-50% gravel content. The plough soil had been removed from 60% of the surface, over most of area, allowing fair visibility but with less clarity to the south. Afon Carrog, at SH47985767, runs from east to west through a wide U-shaped valley of stony humic silt to the north and deep gravelly plough soil overlying red-brown gravelly drift to the south, with poor surface visibility. From SH47965725 the soil changed to a humic peat overlying a grey clay which, in turn, was overlying pure gravel at a depth of c. 1.5m. Surface visibility was poor in this area. South of SH48015704 and from SH48205676 the brown gravelly drift formed alternate layers with pure sand, which recurred south of the road. However, there was a dramatic change, at SH48285668, from red gravelly drift to grey-brown clay which continued south to the road. The hill behind Maes Tryfan was covered in peat over grey gravelly clay with poor surface visibility. The V-shaped valley of Afon Llifon had cut a gorge in the gravelly drift to expose occasional large boulders. To the south of the river there were peat filled hollows in the gravelly drift allowing only poor surface visibility. The top-soil was very thin from SH48525540 south with 70% gravel, pebbles and cobbles but with fair visibility. The gravelly drift was orange-brown south of SH48405490 with varying depths of peat in the marshy areas where visibility was very poor. This drift here was overlying a grey-brown stony clay.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Recording

5.1.1 Area 1 - Cae Forgan - SH48355463

This area is in the south east corner of Cae Forgan field No. 3069, centred at NGR SH48355463, and described as site 15 in GAT Report No. 267. It is located immediately to the west of a curvilinear field, No. 3864, which is raised by up to 1m above the surrounding fields which radiate from it and which it obviously predates (see fig 1). The features noted included a stone bank running east-west across the field to the south of which were other stone alignments. The area was covered with dense gorse making close examination difficult. The ground to the south of these linear features dropped quite steeply to an area of very marshy ground. A break of slope running north east to south west at SH48355470 may signify early ploughing.

A measured survey of the features was carried out on 18th September, and the results were combined with Ordnance Survey map data (fig. 1). Consultation with Transco and Beynons enabled the easement corridor to be re-routed to avoid the enclosure in the north-east of field No 2722, and therefore the watching brief did not add any additional information to the measured survey.

1. At SH48315466, (site 30 in GAT Report No. 267), is the remains of a stone built structure, cut into the slope. It would appear to have been a structure 7m x 3.5m and aligned north-south with a curved wall to the north. This site was not affected by the construction work.

2. A number of medium sized field boulders were visible at SH48325465, which were arranged in such a way as to suggest they once formed part of a small structure measuring 2m x 2.5m. However, no clear wall linking the individual stones was visible. Nothing was noted at this site following top soil stripping, and it was therefore concluded that the stones were probably random field boulders.

3. A low stone bank extended east to west across the field from SH48355465 and delineated an area of marshy ground to the south. The soil here changed from the red-brown gravelly drift, of the rest of the field, to dark brown peat over a very stony grey clay. This bank was destroyed, where the easement crossed it, but a section remained outside the easement fence to the west.

4. A roughly triangular stone spread to the south of the bank centred at SH48335464 was difficult to interpret but formed two distinct concentrations. The most easterly, covering an area c. 5m x 2m, contained several discreet and regular groups of field boulders, although no discernible pattern was observed. The other concentration was a sparse linear spread c. 12m x 1.5m. These are most likely to have been field clearance mounds, where stone was collected from the firmer ground to the north. This feature was totally destroyed during the trenching phase of the work.

5.1.2 Area 2 - Cae Uchaf - SH48275422

This area included site no's 17, 18 and 19, and was situated in field Nos. 2722 and 2414, centred at NGR SH48275422, to the north west of Cae Uchaf. The features as described in the assessment report included a boundary bank, the remains of a stone walled enclosure, with a possible structure inside, and two stone mounds.

A measured survey was carried out on 16th September, which was combined with Ordnance Survey data, and is reproduced here as fig. 2. Consultation with Transco ensured the features were largely avoided by re-routing the easement corridor to the west at the northern edge of field No. 2722 and to the east at the southern edge.

1. A well built low orthostatically faced stone bank, up to 1.5m wide, ran in an arc east-west across the north east corner of field No. 2722. It was similar in style to Romano British homestead enclosure walls and enclosed several groups of stone features centred at SH48305427. These seemed to form two distinct concentrations. The most westerly covering an area c. 10m x 10m, and the easterly, a linear spread, following the line of the bank, c. 20m x up to 5m.

2. A low stone bank, c. 1m wide, to the south of 1., running from SH48325425 south-east for 10m then curving to the north-west to SH48245426. This was probably an Iron Age or Romano British field boundary or outer enclosure related to 1. It terminated to the east of the route of the pipeline and only a few meters were within the easement, and little damage was sustained.

3. To the south of 2. was a stone spread, c. 30m x 13m, centred at SH48265424, with a linear alignment within it running north east to south west for c. 10m. There were also three small sub-circular features which may have been the remains of hut circles. The ground to the south and east of these features rose sharply forming a steep bank from which a stream sprang at SH48265418.

4. The south-west of the field was very marshy with a mound, (site 18 in GAT Report No. 267), under a group of trees at SH48235418. The roughly oval mound, 5.5m x 2m, appeared as the remains of a collapsed wall constructed of small stones. Adjoining this mound to the north west was a spread of medium sized boulders which was probably the result of more recent field clearance dumping. The easement corridor was re-routed to the east of this feature.

5. On the southern side of the boundary bank, between field No. 2722 and field No. 2414 at SH48225418, was another mound (site 19 in GAT Report No. 267). This consisted of a mound, 10.5m x up to 2m, of small burnt stones which followed the line of the boundary. It was suggested in the original report that it was the remains of the southern edge of a burnt mound, of probable early Bronze Age date, which had been truncated by the later field boundary. A further burnt mound has been recorded less than 50m to the west of this feature and there are two other recorded burnt mounds to the north, at SH48295432 and SH48175437. The easement corridor was re-routed slightly to the east of this feature.

5.1.3 Area 3 - Pant Ddu - SH47905340

This area of interest was identified from field walking the slightly altered route at the southern end of the pipeline. It is in Pant Ddu field No. 0033, just to the east of site 20, and is centred at NGR SH47905340. It was recorded on 5th November using a 'total station' survey, photographic survey, written description and partial excavation prior to top-soil stripping. The features noted are described as they occurred from north to south within the easement corridor (fig. 3).

1. At SH47935342 there was a spread, c. 6m x 5m, of medium to large boulders, up to 0.8m x 0.75m, containing several scooped out areas and a patch of cobble-sized stones, 2.5m x 1m. This area was not top-soil stripped as it was too stony but the pipe trench revealed a 0.5m depth of stones mixed with dark brown humic soil overlying the stony sub-soil.

2. A low linear stone feature, up to 1.3m wide, ran from the western easement fence at SH47925342 due south for c. 35m. This feature seemed to continue with less clarity outside the easement corridor. A trench 3m x 0.75m x 0.36m deep was dug by machine across this feature. It revealed a dark brown humic soil between the stones of the bank which was built directly on top of the orange sub-soil and was 0.22m high. This feature was largely destroyed by the trenching phase of the work.
3. An alignment of stones at SH47925338, with a possible gully to the east, may have been the remains of a wall running due north. This feature was covered by the spoil mound and could not be further examined but may have survived the trenching phase.
4. A low sinuous stone bank, with an average width of 1m and height of 0.25m, ran east-west across the easement at SH47905337. This feature would appear to correspond to one of the field boundaries shown on the Llandwrog parish tithe map of c. 1840. A trench 5m x 0.75m wide x up to 0.46m deep, was dug, by machine, across this feature. It revealed a 0.24m layer of very stony dark brown humic top-soil under a thin turf layer. The bank, 0.36m high x 1.1m wide, consisted of larger stones resting on the orange sub-soil. This feature was totally destroyed during the trenching phase although lengths of the bank survive outside the easement corridor.
5. At SH47905332 there was an oval mound, 17m x 8.5m, aligned north-south, with two rounded scoops cut out on the western side and a sub-circular feature at the southern end (plate 1). A trench 10m x 0.8m x up to 0.78m deep, was dug, by machine, from north to south through the two rounded scoops. It revealed a very stony dark brown humic top-soil containing frequent small boulders, up to 0.65m x 0.65m x 0.48m, which reached a depth from 0.42m to at least 0.78m below the scoops. It is probable that these were quarry scoops for stone or maybe mineral extraction. The sub-circular feature was excavated by trowelling to reveal a D-shaped structure (plate 2). A natural boulder formed the straight eastern side, a straight wall formed the southern side while the northern wall curved round towards the opening to the west. A mound of stone extended c. 5m to the east of the boulder. No artefacts were discovered and it was not possible to ascertain the date or purpose of this structure. The sub-circular feature was taped off within the easement corridor in the hope that the machines would be able to avoid it but unfortunately that proved impossible. The mound to the north was largely destroyed during the trenching phase.
6. A linear stone bank, with an average width of 1.5m, ran 100m due south from just west of the oval mound and continued outside the easement corridor. This feature corresponded to a field boundary on the Llandwrog parish tithe map c. 1840. It was totally destroyed during the trenching phase of work but lengths still exist outside both sides of the easement corridor, although with less clarity.

5.2 Watching Brief

A watching brief was carried out during top-soil stripping from 16th October to 10th November, and during trenching from 4th November to 5th December. Various features were noted and recorded by photograph, written description and, where appropriate, scaled drawings. Some of these features had been noted in GAT Report No. 267 as requiring a watching brief while others were identified during the construction phases. Only those sites that proved significant have been included in this report using, where appropriate, site numbers allocated in GAT Report No. 267 and records of other features observed are lodged in the site archives located at GAT. The features are described as they occur along the route of the pipeline from north to south.

5.2.1 A curving shallow linear feature was located in Gadlys field No. 9200 at SH47925803 and recorded in plan and section. Its shallow profile and loamy fill suggest it was a relict ploughing feature rather than, for instance, a drainage or structural feature. It produced no dating evidence. A hollow filled with humic loam was located in the same field at SH47935793. Further investigation suggested it to be a former marshy hollow close to a spring which had perhaps earlier been an unploughed marginal area but which had later been incorporated into the main field. The terraced field boundaries of Gadlys farm, site 3, were examined in the pipe trench. They were shown to consist of a clay bank, constructed of the upcast from ditches dug on either side. These ditches had subsequently been filled with dark brown plough soil.

5.2.2 During top-soil stripping a burnt mound, 10m diameter, was identified in Cefn Hendre field No. 0070 at SH47985767 on the northern bank of the Afon Carrog (plate 3). A trench, 9m x 2m, was dug, by machine, across this feature from north to south, the east-facing section is illustrated in fig. 4. The southern part of the mound was covered by a mid-grey silt with slight iron mottling which was probably stream-deposited flood silt. The burnt angular stones were mainly c. 0.05m - 0.1m long in a black charcoal matrix, a sample of which was taken for radiocarbon dating. The sub-soil was a grey clay with scattered sub-rounded boulders up to 0.7m long. This feature

was recorded by photograph, written description and scaled drawings and was further examined and recorded during trenching. This showed the mound in section with a pit in the centre which would have contained the trough used for the cooking process (plate 4). A sample of charcoal obtained from the body of the mound was submitted to Beta Analytic Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory for analysis and resulted in a Radiocarbon Age Before Present of 3220 +/- 100. This date calibrated to 1 sigma was 1605-1400 BC and calibrated to 2 sigma was 1705-1265 BC. This gives a Mid Bronze Age date for the Cefn Hendre burnt mound.

5.2.3 On both sides of the boundary, between field Nos. 2280 and 2172 of Hafod Ifan farm, at SH48225674, were three pits, up to 4.5m diameter and 1.5m deep. They had been dug through the bands of sand and gravel found just below the plough soil in this area, and probably signify quarrying. The pits had subsequently filled with dark brown plough soil and boulders.

5.2.4 Site 13 at SH48405490 was a sunken track between earth-covered stone banks running east to west at right angles to the line of the pipe. The curving bank and ditch, site 14, at SH48385485 extended to the western boundary of field No. 3984 rather than terminating in the centre of the field as stated in the earlier report. At SH48375476 a metalled track, c. 2m wide, crossed the easement from north-east to south-west. This substantially built, cobbled and cambered, track, is no longer in use, even as a farm track. It lined up with entrance gaps in the existing field walls to the south west and north east. To the north east it lined up with another gap in the next field wall and, if projected, would continue towards Bryn-neidr. Its probable line was not followed but when seen on a map of the wider area it forms part of what was formerly an extensive minor road network, not just a farm field track. At SH48335457 another stone track, c. 2m wide, crossed the easement from east to west. A feature was located at SH48285439, at the edge of the easement and therefore not affected by trenching. It appeared to be a pit of relatively recent date and was probably a farm animal burial pit.

5.2.5 Several features were found in Cae Uchaf field No. 2722 apart from those described during the recording survey. In the north west corner of the field, at SH48265428 was a dump of pebbles and slate waste and just south of this was a spread of charcoal probably signifying the site of a bonfire. During top-soil stripping in Cae Uchaf field No. 2000 a broken millstone was unearthed. It was 0.55m diameter with a piece broken off one side and a central hole, 0.1m diameter. One surface was convex and the other flat. It was retrieved and is stored by Mr W Roberts of Cae Uchaf.

5.2.6 Three pits to the east of Dyffryn farm, at SH48195398, SH48185394 and SH48185392, were probably farm animal burials and a linear stone spread, 0.5m wide and running north east to south west, at SH48165380 was probably a field drain. Just to the south of this at SH48165379 was a pit, 1.2m x 1.4m, containing stones, modern pottery, slate and iron nails. Two linear features were located in field No. 0054 to the south of Ffordd Llwyndu. They showed as 0.8m wide dark orange strips in the light orange soil which were the remains of field boundaries shown on earlier maps. Close to the southern boundary of field No. 0056 at SH48065354 was an area of dark brown humic soil, c. 6m x 4m, scattered with broken slate, brick, painted plaster, iron nails and modern pottery and glass. This was probably the remains of a small farm building. The OS map of 1986 shows a farm track at this location which has since been ploughed out.

5.2.7 The pipeline was re-routed at the southern end to avoid the archaeological site Nos. 20-25. It was relocated to the west and went through the features described in **5.1.3**. During trenching an area of dark brown humic soil, 6m long x c. 0.3m deep, was noted 5m to the north of the feature described in **5.1.3.1** and may have been associated with it. The altered route still crossed the track, site 23, at the bottom of an escarpment at SH47855328. The track here was cut into the hillside to the north and was raised at least 1.5m above field No. 8227 to the south, with a stone bank supporting it. A stream was running in a ditch along the north side of the track to SH47855327, where it went through a slate-lined culvert under the track. The stream was then retained along the southern side of the track by a stone bank c. 1m high. All these features were destroyed during the trenching phase of the work.

5.2.8 The only other feature noted during the watching brief was the line of the old gas pipeline through field No. 5500 at the southern end of the route.

6 DISCUSSION

The initial assessment of the proposed route of the gas pipeline identified a total of 33 sites of which 25 were within the easement corridor. The recommendations for mitigatory measures outlined in GAT Report No 267 were put into effect and, with the co-operation of the developer, the pipeline was re-routed to avoid the more significant

archaeological sites where possible. Two areas (areas 1 and 2 above) were surveyed in detail before construction to aid the recognition of the archaeological features, and to ensure minimum damage was occasioned during construction. Another area was surveyed immediately prior to construction, after features were noted during the watching brief phase (area 3 above).

It was not possible to avoid area 1 completely and it sustained some damage during the construction of the pipeline. Feature 1, the remains of a stone structure, was outside the easement corridor and was unaffected by the work. Where a low stone bank, feature 3, crossed the easement corridor it was totally destroyed but was still visible to the west of the pipeline. Features 2 and 4 were also totally destroyed. By a sensitive re-routing of the pipeline it was possible to avoid the archaeological features identified in area 2. The only feature affected was the western extremity of feature 2, which was probably an Iron Age or Romano British field boundary. Area 3 was only identified during the fencing of the easement when the line of the pipe was changed to avoid other archaeological features further to the east. Within this area features 2, 4 and 6, the stone banks, were destroyed where they crossed the easement but were still traceable outside the easement. Features 1,3 and most of 5 were also destroyed during construction work although the eastern side of feature 5 extended beyond the easement corridor.

Several features were identified during the top-soil stripping phase, the most significant being a burnt mound at Cefn Hendre Farm. This was found in a short section to which access had been denied during the original archaeological assessment. It was recorded prior to, and during, the trenching phase of work.

A number of burnt mounds have been excavated in Britain, and they are all substantially similar, consisting of a mound of burnt and fractured stone which makes up over 90% of their content, the remaining material being dark clay/silt with charcoal inclusions (Hedges, 1975). Although the function of burnt mounds is somewhat enigmatic, and indeed they may have served a number of functions, there is little doubt that the burnt stone is a result of heating stones in a fire, and then using the hot stone to heat water in an adjacent pit. The mound is formed by the disused stone, which can only be used three or four times before the fracturing and splitting of the stone caused by the sudden change in temperature reduces the effectiveness of the stone to transfer heat. The mounds are nearly always located adjacent to a water supply, usually a stream or a spring. The Cefn Hendre mound fits in with this general pattern in all respects.

A high percentage of excavated burnt mounds exhibit several periods of use but the calibrated radiocarbon dates from the majority of sites suggest periods of use during the Bronze Age c. 2500 BC - 1250 BC (Hodder & Barfield, 1991).

A sample of charcoal from the burnt mound at Cefn Hendre was submitted for dating to Beta Analytic Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory and the following results were obtained. The results are shown in tabular form, with dates from similar sites within North Wales included for comparative purposes.

Site Details	Lab No. and Details	Radiocarbon Age BP	Age in Cal. BC (1 sigma) (2 sigma)
G1506 Cefn Hendre	Beta - 114179	3220 +/- 100	(1605-1400) (1705-1265)
G1474 Figin Fawr	Beta - 106684	3770 +/- 60	(2280-2050) (2350-1985)
G1339 Gwalchmai	Swan - 125	3650 +/- 70	(2140-1940) (2280-1870)
G1352 Nant Porth	Swan - 140	3290 +/- 60	(1670-1510) (1740-1440)
G1317 Llanbedrgoch	Swan - 124	2840 +/- 70	(1130-910) (1260-840)

The site at Cefn Hendre was therefore in use during the middle of the second millenium BC comparable in date with the site at Nant Porth. The other sites indicate the continuing usage of similar technology from the end of the third millenium BC through to the beginning of the first millenium BC.

The radiocarbon date confirms that the burnt mound at Cefn Hendre is of Mid Bronze Age date.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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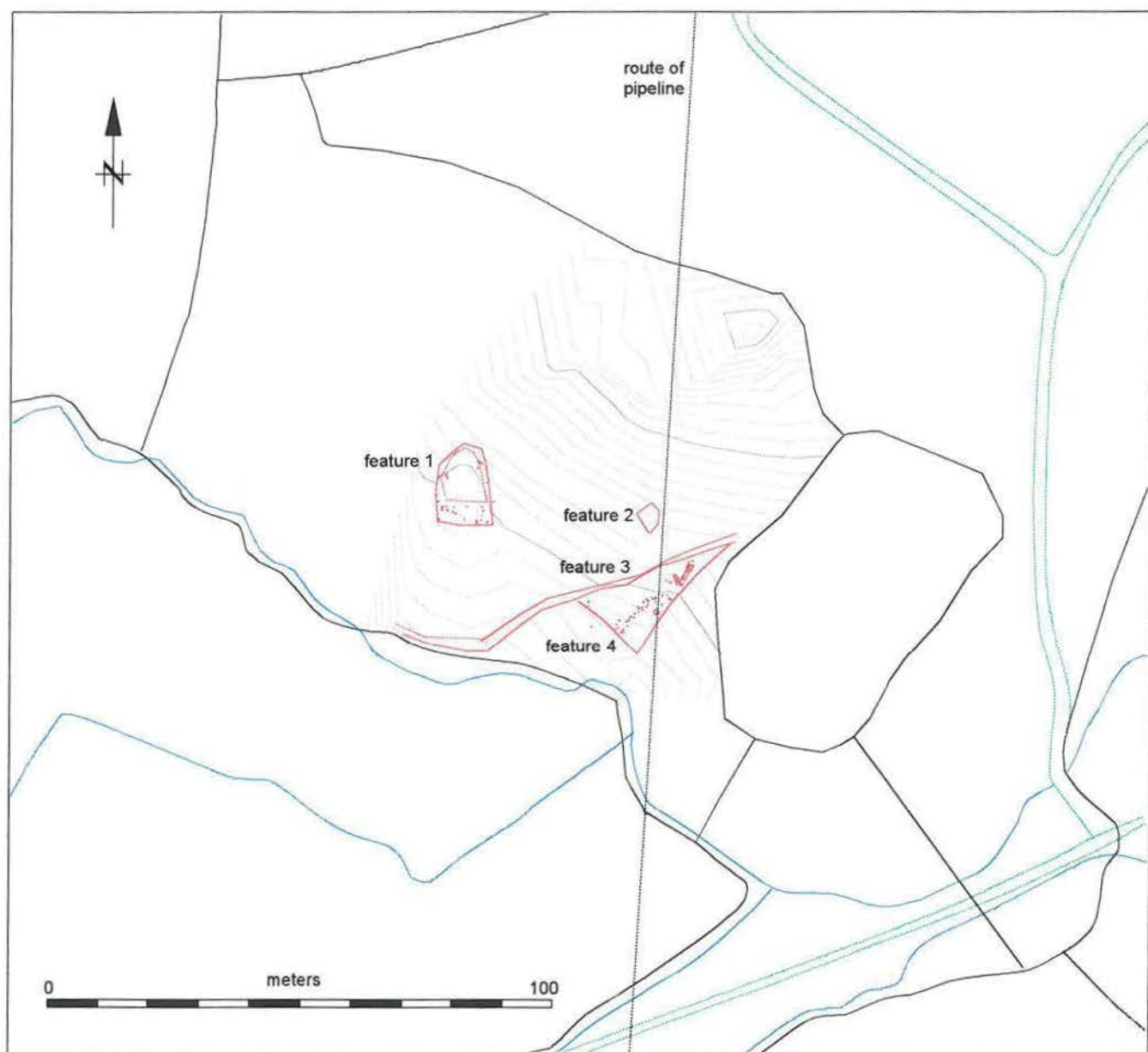


Fig 1 - Area 1 - Cae Forgan

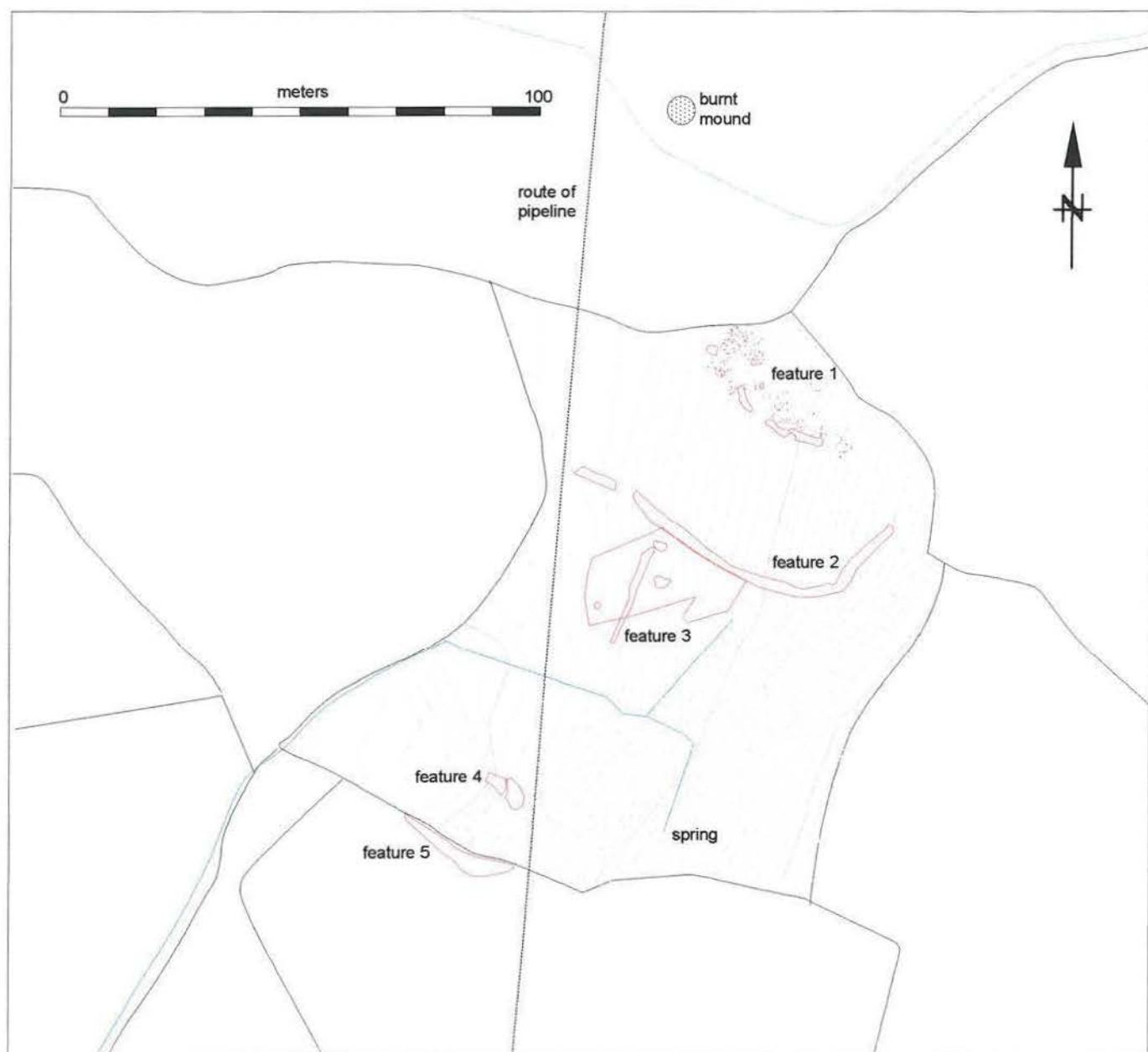


Fig 2 - Area 2 - Cae Uchaf

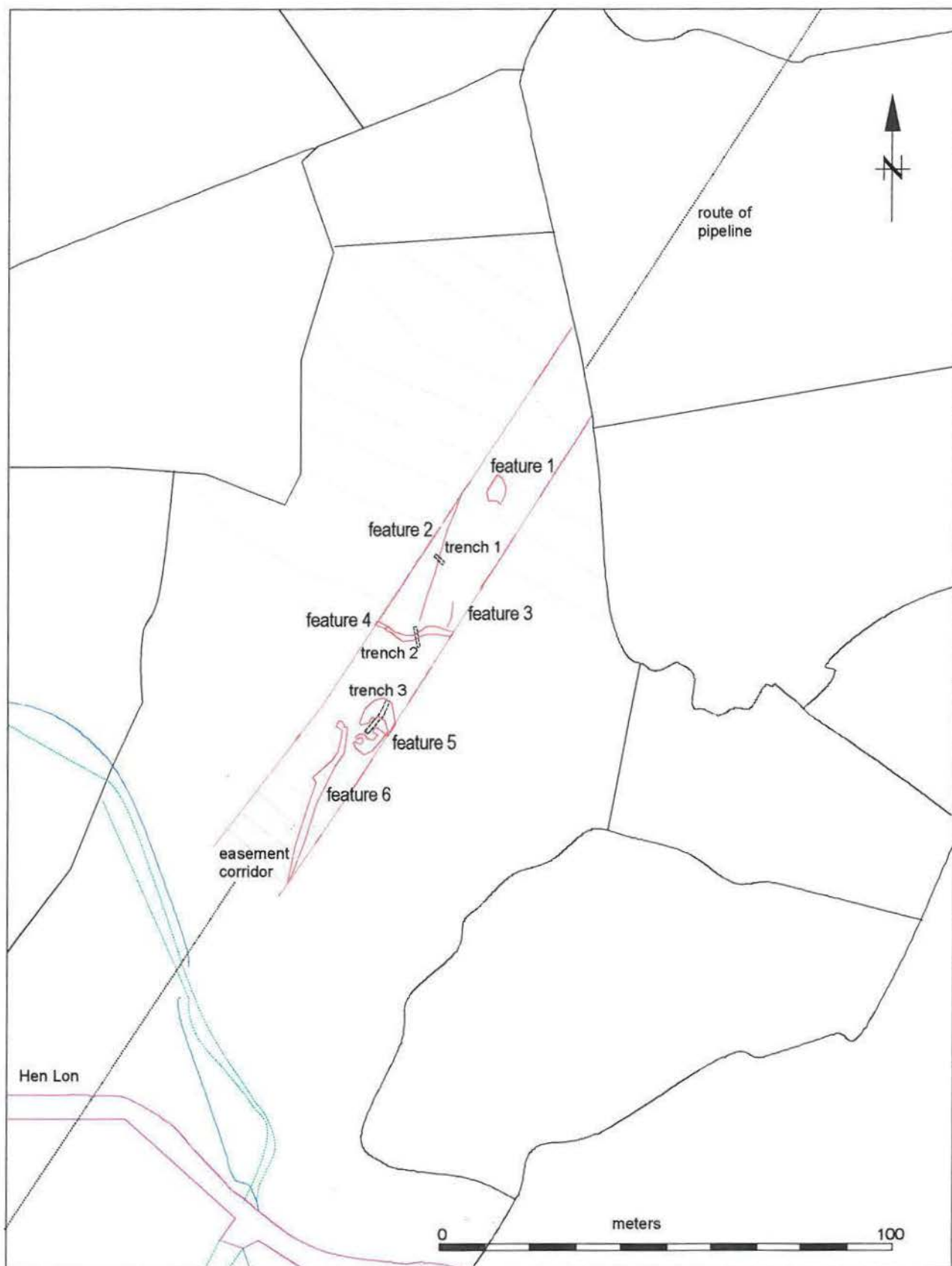


Fig 3 - Area 3 - Pant Ddu

① mid-grey silt with slight iron mottling - probable stream deposited flood silts

② burnt angular stones c. 0.05 - 0.10m long in a black charcoal matrix

③ feature cut into ② and filled with stone

④ grey clay sub-soil with scattered sub-rounded boulders up to 0.7m long

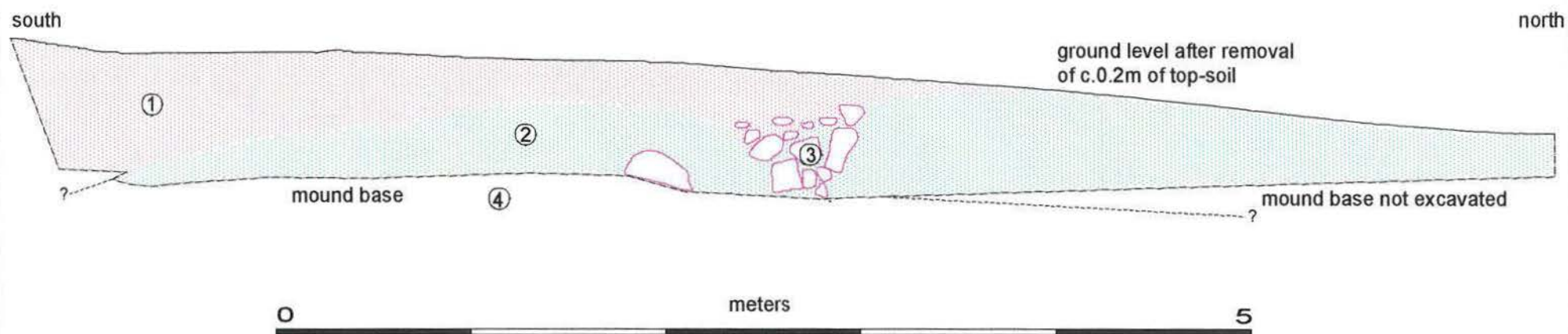


Fig 4 - East-facing section through burnt mound



Plate 1 - Area 3 - Pant Ddu - Feature 5 - before excavation



Plate 2 - Area 3 - Pant Ddu - Feature 5 - after excavation



Plate 3 - Burnt mound before excavation



Plate 4 - Burnt mound during trenching

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