

# **COED NANT GWERNOL ABERGYNOLWYN**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT (G1516)**

**Report No. 279**

**Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd**

**Gwynedd Archaeological Trust**

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**Prepared for  
THE WOODLAND TRUST  
January 1998**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (Contracts Section) were asked by The Woodland Trust to undertake an archaeological assessment of the woodland, known as Coed Nant Gwernol, that they have acquired to the south east of Abergynolwyn in the parish of Llanfihangel-y-Pennant in Meirionnydd.

### **2. ASSESSMENT BRIEF**

The aims of the archaeological assessment were to identify and record the cultural heritage of the area concerned and to evaluate the importance of what was identified, both as a cultural landscape and as individual features which make up that landscape.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Desk-top study**

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust carried out a desk-top study which involved consulting the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust's Sites and Monuments Record, the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments (Wales) *Inventory for Merioneth*, relevant material held by the County Record Office in Dolgellau including tithe maps and schedules and Ordnance Survey maps, and other literary sources including Alan Holmes *Slates from Abergynolwyn: the story of Bryneglwys slate quarry*.

The map information was collated, digitised and plotted on the relevant OS map to form the basis for the field work.

#### **3.2 Field search**

A field visit was undertaken by Trust staff on 18th December 1997 to verify the results of the desk based assessment and to identify the potential for further archaeological sites within Coed Nant Gwernol.

## **4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Location**

Nant Gwernol is situated to the north of the Dysynni valley between Tywyn and Tallyllyn in the south of Snowdonia National Park. Coed Nant Gwernol, which extends to 11.7 ha, is located below Graig Wen on the steep northern side of Nant Gwernol from NGR SH67910685 to SH68880594. It covers the area from the banks of the Llaeron river up the steep wooded slope to a farm track in the north and a wire fence in the south. The height extends from c. 100m OD in the north to c. 190m OD at the southern end of the site. The site is predominantly broadleaved oak woodland with a small plantation of Japanese larch above the oak at the northern end.

### **4.2 Historical Background**

#### **4.2.1 Pre-modern Period**

The glaciation of the Tallyllyn valley to the north left the hanging valley of Nant Gwernol through which the Llaeron stream has cut a deep ravine with several waterfalls. There is evidence of the occupation of the area from at least the

Bronze Age as three urns containing cremations were found in Abergynolwyn in 1833 at SH67810699. These urns disintegrated upon removal but one was reportedly decorated. A Bronze Age cist, partially covered by a slate capstone, was found in the village in 1877 but could not be located in 1958 (Savory, 1958). It contained two urns with a cremation in one of them. Collar fragments of both urns are in the National Museum of Wales. An empty stone-lined cist, of unknown date, was found in 1817 in a garden in the village but was entirely destroyed by c. 1865.

#### *4.2.2 Medieval Period*

Occupation during the medieval period is suggested by the remains of the farmhouses at Nant-llwyn-gwedd and Hendrewallog. Both show evidence of medieval cruck construction within the nineteenth century reconstruction. Nant-llwyn-gwedd is described as a group 'A' storeyed platform house with upper crucks, fireplace stairs and a lateral chimney (Smith, 1975). Hendrewallog is also described as a platform sited house type 'A' with a downhill parlour and the cruck frame surviving in the nineteenth century renovation (Smith, 1975). These dwellings are typical of the scattered rural settlement pattern of North Wales and their function has changed little since medieval times.

#### *4.2.3 Modern and Industrial Period*

The parish tithe map of Llanfihangel-y-Pennant in 1838 shows the north side of Nant Gwernol split into three properties under the ownership of two people and all listed as arable, pasture and woodland (Dolgellau Archives, 1838). The woodland then, as now, probably occupied the steep side of the river gorge. The land closest to Abergynolwyn was called Pandy and extended, within Coed Nant Gwernol, from SH67910685 to the stream at SH68300655. This was listed in the tithe map schedule as owned by Griffith Edward Humphries and occupied by John Jones. Under the same ownership and occupancy was the property of Nant-llwyn-gwedd to the south, from SH68300655 to SH68400638. The property of Hendrewallog from SH68400638 to the southern edge of the woodland was owned by Hugh Pugh and occupied by Hugh Jones.

Slate quarrying in the valley began in the middle of the nineteenth century at the Bryneglwys Slate Quarry to the south east of Coed Nant Gwernol and although a tramway and incline were constructed on the south side of the Llaeron there were no quarry constructions on the much steeper north side (Holmes, 1986). In 1844 the property, known as Hendrewallog, on the northern side of Nant Gwernol, was owned by the Ruck family of Pant Lludw, Pennal and bordered the Bryneglwys Estate, owned by Lewis Morris of Machynlleth, to the south east and Cantrybedd or Cae-yn-trybedd, owned by Rev Richard Pughe of Llanfihangel-y-Gwynt in Montgomeryshire, on the opposite side of the valley.

The major development of the village of Abergynolwyn took place in the mid-1860's when the Aberdovey Slate Company built seventy-one houses of slate slabs under slate roofs (Holmes 1986). The increase in the population is reflected in the 1871 census returns when 516 people were listed in the Township of Maestrefnant covering the area between Rhiwerfa and Bryneglwys as well as the village of Abergynolwyn (Holmes, 1986).

A small hydro-electric plant was installed by Haydn Jones at Abergynolwyn in the 1920's to provide electricity for the village, which was not connected to the National Grid until the 1970's (Holmes, 1986).

### **4.3 Archaeology of Coed Nant Gwernol**

The field visit undertaken on 18th December 1997 confirmed the findings of the desk-top study. The north side of Nant Gwernol is too steep for any settlement and no significant archaeological features were located within the site. The farmsteads of Nant-llwyn-gwedd and Hendrewallog remain as ruins with evidence of former enclosures around them. The surrounding land is used as rough pasture for sheep. There are the remains of an early boundary bank, surmounted by hawthorns, to the south east of Hendrewallog which enters Coed Nant Gwernol at SH68770600.

On the river above the waterfall just north of the bridge, at SH68180657, are some water management features. They consist of an iron grille covering the end of a pipe, which is housed under a small, c. 1m x 2m, slate-built platform. The pipe emerges to cross the river above the waterfall where it continues north on the opposite bank. From the position of the pipe above the normal level of the river it would appear that these features were associated with flood control.

It was noted that iron rails, probably from the quarry railway, and slate paving slabs had been used at some of the stream crossings along the footpath on the northern bank of the stream.

## **5 SUMMARY**

An archaeological assessment has been carried out at Coed Nant Gwernol. The assessment consisted of a desk-top study of relevant archival and bibliographical sources and a field search. No features of particular archaeological significance were located within the study area.

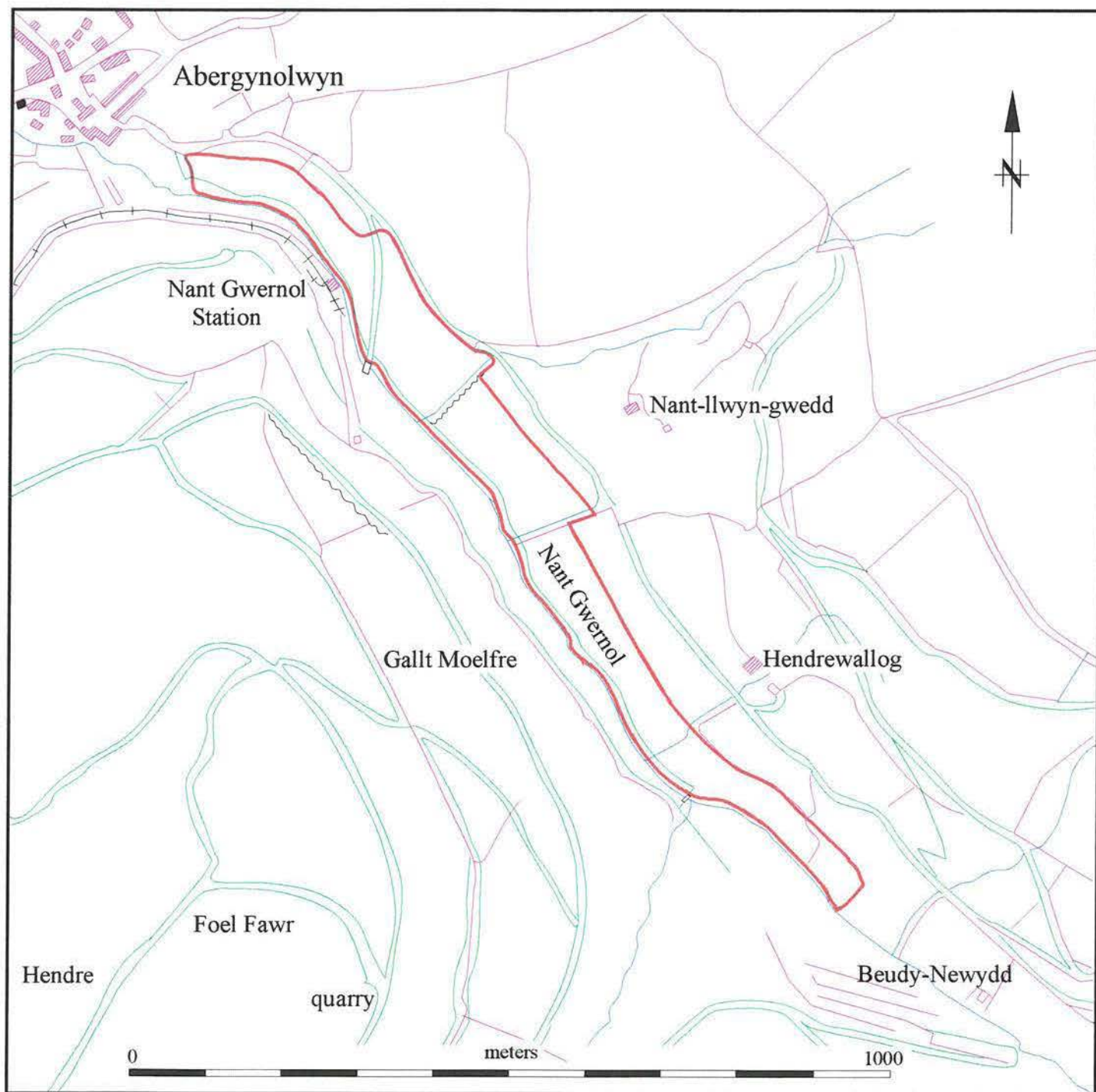
## **6 BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### **6.1 Maps**

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Llanfihangel-y-Pennant Parish Tithe Map 1838

### **6.2 Published sources**

Dolgellau Archives 1838 *Llanfihangel-y-Pennant Tithe Map Schedule*  
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Coed Nant Gwernol Location Map

**YMDDIRIEDOLAETH ARCHAEOLEGOL *GWYNEDD* ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST**

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