RHOSNEIGR SEWAGE SCHEME

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

Report number : 337

Prepared for

DWR CYMRU

September 1999

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

Event prn: 40431

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1. INTRODUCTION

Dwr Cymru have extended the existing sewage treatment works at Bryn Ddu near Llanfaelog Anglesey and have constructed a new pipeline to link to the existing outfall at Rhosneigr. The works were carried out by Amey Construction Ltd.

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (Contracts Section) were contracted by Dwr Cymru to carry out a watching brief during the construction of the new pipeline.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AIMS

The aims of the watching brief were to investigate and record all archaeological features revealed during the construction of the pipeline.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Watching Brief

All areas that were stripped of topsoil prior to the excavation of the pipe trench were examined in order to identify any features cut into the subsoil. Approximately 40% of the length of the pipe trench was excavated directly into sand or marshland without topsoil stripping. The contractors used steel shoring boxes for reasons of health and safety in these areas. Only 3m of the trench was visible at any one time during this process and therefore a continuous watching brief was beyond the scope of the project. Several site visits were undertaken per week allowing the soil profile to be observed at regular intervals and at potential points of interest. A close liaison was kept with the contractors who reported any finds of buried peat or shell etc in the sand dunes and put to one side any preserved wood found in the marshy areas. A watching brief was not carried out during the excavation of the westernmost part of the pipeline as this passed along the line of a modern road and the ground had already been disturbed.

3.2 Recording

Features of interest were recorded photographically on Kodak Gold 200 film and a written description was made. Soil profiles were recorded at intervals along the pipe trench and all finds were located on relevant plans. Provision was also made for more detailed drawn records at scales of 1:20 for plans and 1:10 for sections.

The route of the pipe is divided up into 6 parts in the report, mainly delineated by changes in the topography. The line of the pipe trench and the position of the 6 parts are shown on Fig. 1.

4. TOPOGRAPHY

Part 1 of the pipeline runs through the southern side of Rhosneigr village along Lon Traeth Llydan before crossing the beach below the mean high water mark and turning north into the dunes.
Part 2 runs through the sand dunes to the south of Llyn Maelog, initially running in a north-easterly direction away from the foreshore before turning towards the east and running just to the south of the Rhosneigr-Llanfaelog road.
Part 3 of the pipeline deviates from the line of the above road and runs through boggy but still sandy ground.

Part 4 runs in an easterly direction between a point just to the south of Pont Rhydau-hirion, through marshland alongside a fast running stream, to Pont Pensir.
Part 5 passes through improved pasture as far as a footbridge over a small stream to the south of Glan-y-gors.
Part 6 runs uphill through improved pasture to the sewage works.

The underlying geology consists of Ordovician grits at the west end with igneous intrusions of hornfels and granite at the east end.

5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Evidence for Mesolithic activity on the south-western coast of Anglesey has been found at Trwyn Ddu, (SH 352679) located approximately 3 miles to the south of the present works, where a large assemblage of flint implements have been recovered both as casual finds and during two excavations (Houlder 1957, Lynch 1973 and White 1978). The well-known Neolithic burial chamber of Barclodiad y Gawres (SH32897072) stands 1 mile to the south of Rhosneigr and an Iron age promontory fort, known as Trecastell can be seen just to the south of Cable Bay.

Medieval occupation was probably centred around the parish church of St Maelog in the centre of the present hamlet of Llanfaelog. Further evidence of medieval activity is provided by an inscribed stone set into the wall of a barn to the east of Penseri farm (SH33347227). The inscription reads 'Malis' (the stone of Mali) and can be dated to around the 5th or 6th century. The stone was probably found in a nearby field and may indicate the presence of an early medieval cemetery.

It should also be noted that the dunes on this coast of Anglesey have varied in extent over time. Inundations and storms have caused widespread alterations to the landscape. In a great storm on 6 December 1330, 186 acres of land were rendered useless for agriculture by the seas and windblown sand. There were further serious inundations throughout the 13th and 14th centuries (Robinson 1980 and Carr 1982). The mobility of the dunes has resulted in the formation of buried ground surfaces and associated archaeology within the sand.

6. RESULTS OF THE WATCHING BRIEF

A watching brief was carried out, as detailed below, at various times between 4/5/99 and 5/7/99

Part 1

A watching brief was not kept on this part of the pipe excavation as it passed through previously disturbed ground and along the foreshore.

Part 2

This section of the pipeline passed through the sand dunes to the south of Llyn Maelog. Topsoil stripping was not carried out here and the trench was shored at all points. A periodic watching brief was carried out.

The trench was dug to a depth of between 1.5 and 2.0m and was initially inspected during the excavations between the foreshore and the road. The profile consisted of sand with occasional bands of pebbles resulting from storm wash into the dunes.

The trench was then excavated alongside the road to a depth of 1.5m. The section consisted of almost pure sand with occasional thin (2.0cm or less) somewhat diffuse horizons of black humic material indicating the periodic establishment and subsequent burial of stable ground surfaces. One humic horizon was observed at a depth of 0.5m directly to the north of the Maelog Lake Hotel. Further horizons were observed at depths of 0.7 and 0.9m at a point between the access roads to the hotel. All three horizons petered out to the east of the eastern access road. A further, very faint, 0.5cm thick horizon was observed at a depth of 0.6m at a point 10m to the east of the eastern access road. No finds were recovered from any of these horizons.

Part 3

The ground became progressively wetter across part 3. There was an accumulation of 10cm of humic topsoil above pure wet sand. The trench was excavated to a depth of 1.5m.

Part 4

The pipe trench was excavated along the side of the stream feeding Llyn Maelog. This area consisted of peaty wetlands. The soil profile consisted of very wet peat with occasional sandy horizons. The peat was very coarse and contained a high proportion of partially decayed reeds and iris leaves. Several large tree roots were recovered from a depth of between 1.0 and 1.5m. These were very battered, and did not appear to have grown *in situ* suggesting that they had been washed down when the stream was in flood. Hard grey clay was recorded at a depth of 1.5 about half way along section 4. No artefacts were recovered from part 4.

Part 5

The pipe crossed the road close to Pont Penser and continued through improved pasture at all points beyond this. All of this part of the pipe route was topsoil stripped prior to the excavation of the trench. The watching brief was carried out after topsoil stripping.

The topsoil was generally 0.3 to 0.4m deep, overlying hard grey clay and bedrock for the majority of the length of the pipe. Conditions were not ideal, as there had been a spell of hot dry weather making changes in the parched soil difficult to spot. Any large features such as ditches, burnt areas or stone built structures would have been visible. No features were observed.

The excavated topsoil was also inspected in order to identify any finds and occupational debris that had been incorporated into this horizon. Nothing apart from the occasional sherd of 19th century Buckley pottery was found on the western portion of the trench. Two worked flints (see below for details) were found within a few centimetres of each other in the topsoil at the point indicated on Fig.1. This findspot was located on a low, rounded, apparently natural hillock.

It was decided to carry out a watching brief during the excavation of the pipe trench in this area as the contractors had not cleaned off the topsoil to a clearly defined subsoil horizon at this point.. The subsoil was found to become progressively more stony towards the top of the slope and the hillock was found to consist of about 0.3m of topsoil above 3.0m of loose subrounded stones and gravel. The origin of the stone and gravel was not entirely clear. It could have been a result of an ancient marine incursion or it could have been deposited by glacial action. This subsoil was very loose and any features that may have existed here would have been destroyed by the action of ploughing. No further finds were recovered.

Part 6

This final length of pipe ran through improved pasture up to the sewage works that were situated on top of a small hill. The entire length was inspected after topsoil stripping. Conditions were reasonable and the ground was wet enough to show up any changes in the subsoil. No features were discovered.

7. THE FINDS

7.1 Worked Flints by George Smith, Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

1. Scraper, thumbnail, 23x20x10mm. Small thick flake with a few small steep secondary flakes around the convex distal end. Grey flint discoloured by burning and damaged by fire. Heavily struck by direct percussion, probably from a pebble. Thumbnail scrapers are generally regarded as typical of Beaker assemblages, that is of about 2000 BC (Healy 1980), but around the western seaboard of Britain are found

in earlier contexts too because of the reliance on small pebble flint as a raw material (Wickham-Jones, C.R. and Collins, G., 1978).

2. Blade with marginal retouch and abraded butt, 35x10x5mm (Plate 1). Complete, long narrow flake with very fine marginal retouch along both sides. Buff, translucent flint with a red-brown, agate-like band probably close to the original cortex surface. The flint is of good quality and the flake was struck from a prepared core, probably with opposed platforms and probably removed by indirect percussion. The platform area is very small and seems to have been rounded by abrasion after the flake was made so the flake was utilised for two different purposes. The microlithic style retouch and blade preparation technique suggest this is a Mesolithic piece. Although not strictly dateable on its own it is similar to pieces from Trwyn Ddu, Aberffraw, Anglesey (White 1978) and Rhuddlan, Flintshire (Berridge 1994), both with radiocarbon dates in the 7th millennium BC.

8. SUMMARY

The two worked flints provide some evidence for the presence of early Bronze Age and Mesolithic activity in the area to the south of Llanfaelog. The possible Mesolithic flint was particularly interesting, as finds of similar tools from the coasts of Anglesey and the Lleyn Peninsular are allowing us to build up a pattern of hunter-gatherer activity from this period. It is interesting to note the presence of the site of Trwyn Ddu three miles to the south, where a large assemblage of flint tools and waste chips marked the position of a Mesolithic camp site. Flints have also been recovered from further inland on this estuary (Lynch 1995). These finds along with others from Newborough warren suggest that the coastal margins of the south-western side of Anglesey were extensively exploited by the hunter-gatherer communities of the Mesolithic period.

The trench through the dunes contained the remains of several, undated, buried ground surfaces, bearing witness to the periodic changes in their topography.

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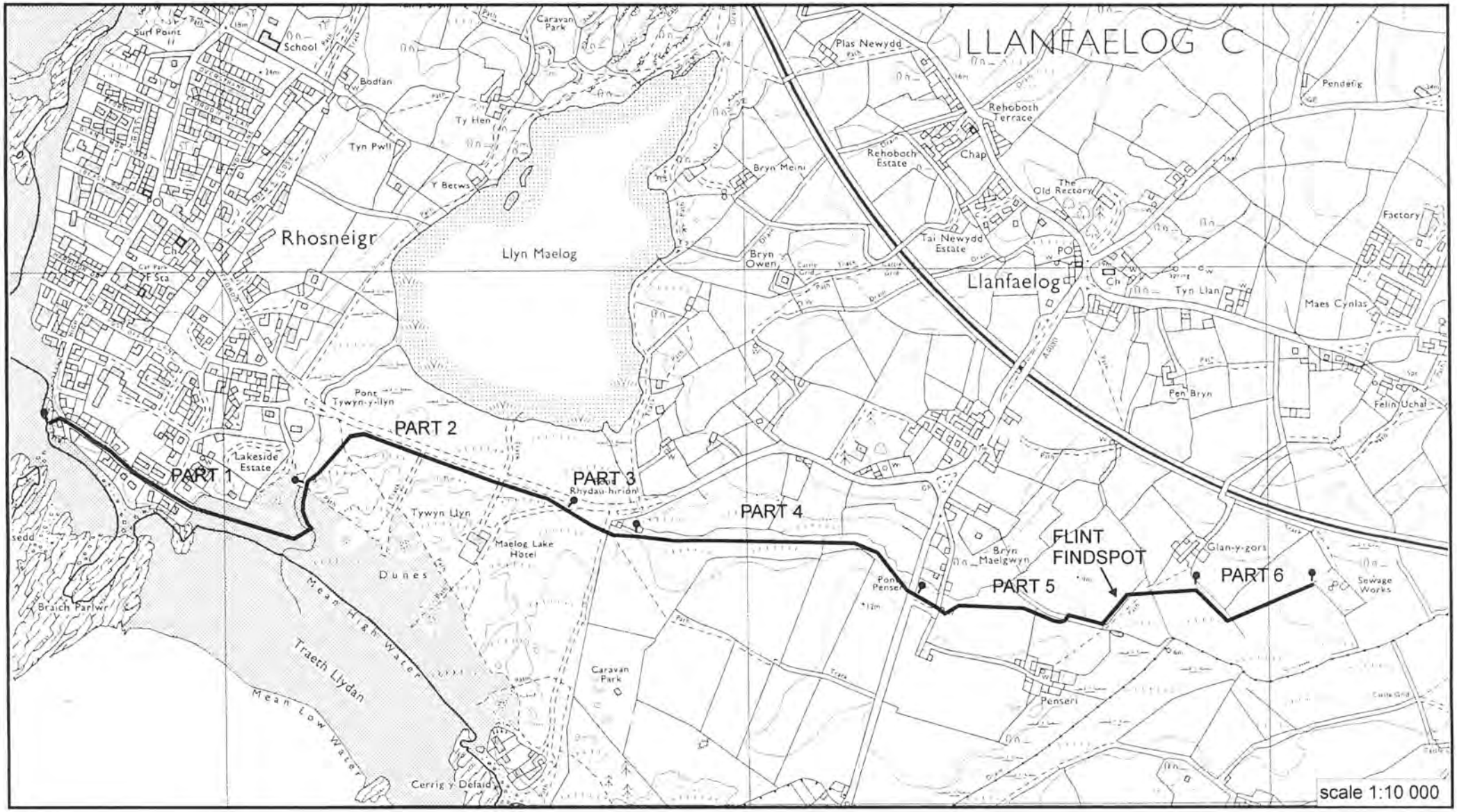

Fig .1 The line of the pipe trench

Figure 2: Flint blade of Mesolithic date