
**A487 FISHGUARD TO BANGOR TRUNK ROAD
IMPROVEMENT AT FRIDD GATE, MACHYNLLETH**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

Project No. G1816

Report No. 548

Prepared for Hyder Consulting Ltd

October 2004

By
G. H. Smith



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Gwynedd Archaeological Trust**

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SUMMARY

The main archaeological feature that was expected to be affected by the road works was found to be mostly outside the area of impact. A limited area that was exposed showed that the feature was most likely to be of agricultural origin, not related to preliminary works a tramway proposed in 1850, as first thought. Other features identified in the assessment were not affected by the construction.

INTRODUCTION

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust was asked by Hyder Consulting Ltd. to carry out a programme of archaeological recording in advance of improvement of the bend in the A487 at Fridd Gate, north of Machynlleth. The mitigation recommendations following the archaeological assessment (Kenney 2002) included detailed recording of certain features and a watching brief. The detailed recording was completed in January 2004 (Hopewell 2004) and a watching brief was carried out later the same month.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The main interest of this particular area relates to the remains of early transport features that followed the same line as the present A487 road. These comprise first the turnpike road from Dolgellau to Machynlleth, possibly built in the early 19th century with a toll cottage built c. 1830 at the junction of the present A487 and B4404 roads. Second a horse-drawn quarry tramway from Machynlleth to Corris, built about 1850. Thirdly the Corris railway line built in the late 19th century using the track bed of the tramway. Several other minor features such as farm tracks and field boundaries were noted in the original assessment, which identified 15 features in total on or close to the route of the new road (Kenney 2002).

FURTHER ASSESSMENT

The 2002 assessment recommended further study of the documentary evidence to check the line of the Machynlleth to Corris tramway. The Dolgellau Archives were therefore visited and the original engineer's plan for the Corris-Machynlleth Tramway (Dolgellau 1850) was traced to allow checking of the line against the modern map. Plotting of this line showed that the tramway had clearly been planned to run across the area south of Fridd Farm (Figs 1 and 2). However, the proposed route did not coincide obviously with the linear scarps (Feature 10) noted previously in that area.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD WORK

Of the 15 features identified during the assessment (Kenney 2002) six were recommended to be covered by a watching brief during the road construction. These were:

Feature 4	The Corris Railway line
Feature 6	Machynlleth to Dolgellau turnpike
Feature 9	Ruined structure
Feature 10	Parallel scarps
Feature 12	Tracks on Fridd Farm
Feature 13	Field boundaries

The site was visited on January 28th in the company of the Site Manager Chris Lane. The fence line along the north side of the easement had been completed and topsoil stripping was in progress and almost completed to the south of Fridd Farm and west of the A487. Another area had been stripped to the east of the A487 for a temporary materials storage area. The topsoil had been neatly stripped to the subsoil surface. The topsoil was thin, c. 150mm deep, lying over a yellow-brown shaley clay which gave good visibility for any possible archaeological features.

Features 4 and 6. Evidence of these might have been visible in the area that had been stripped east of the A487 for a construction materials storage area. This area was inspected but although the subsoil was quite well exposed no archaeological features were visible.

Feature 9. A small stone-built construction of uncertain function. This was also inspected but lay beyond the line of the new road and so would not be affected.

Feature 10. This was the main feature that might have been affected, consisting of two parallel scarps which were considered to be possibly the remains of initial works for a horse drawn quarry tramway, which was proposed in 1850 (Dolgellau 1850) but eventually built on the south side of the road, finally being replaced by the line for the steam railway.

The final line of the easement fence actually lay to the east of Feature 10, which was therefore unaffected by the construction except in a small area at the east end where a new access road to Fridd Farm was being built and a wider area was being stripped. Here the machining had just clipped the ends of the two scarps of Feature 10. The scarps showed also as a slight undulation in the subsoil surface, reflecting the surface topography (Fig. 3) showing that the surface features were not just changes in the thickness of the topsoil due to ploughing for instance. It was also noted that there were traces of other similar but slighter linear scarps along the contours further up the slope. This suggested that the features might have been terracettes resulting from some cultivation method rather than remains of initial works for the tramway proposed in 1850.

The stripped area was walked over but no features that might have been archaeological were seen.

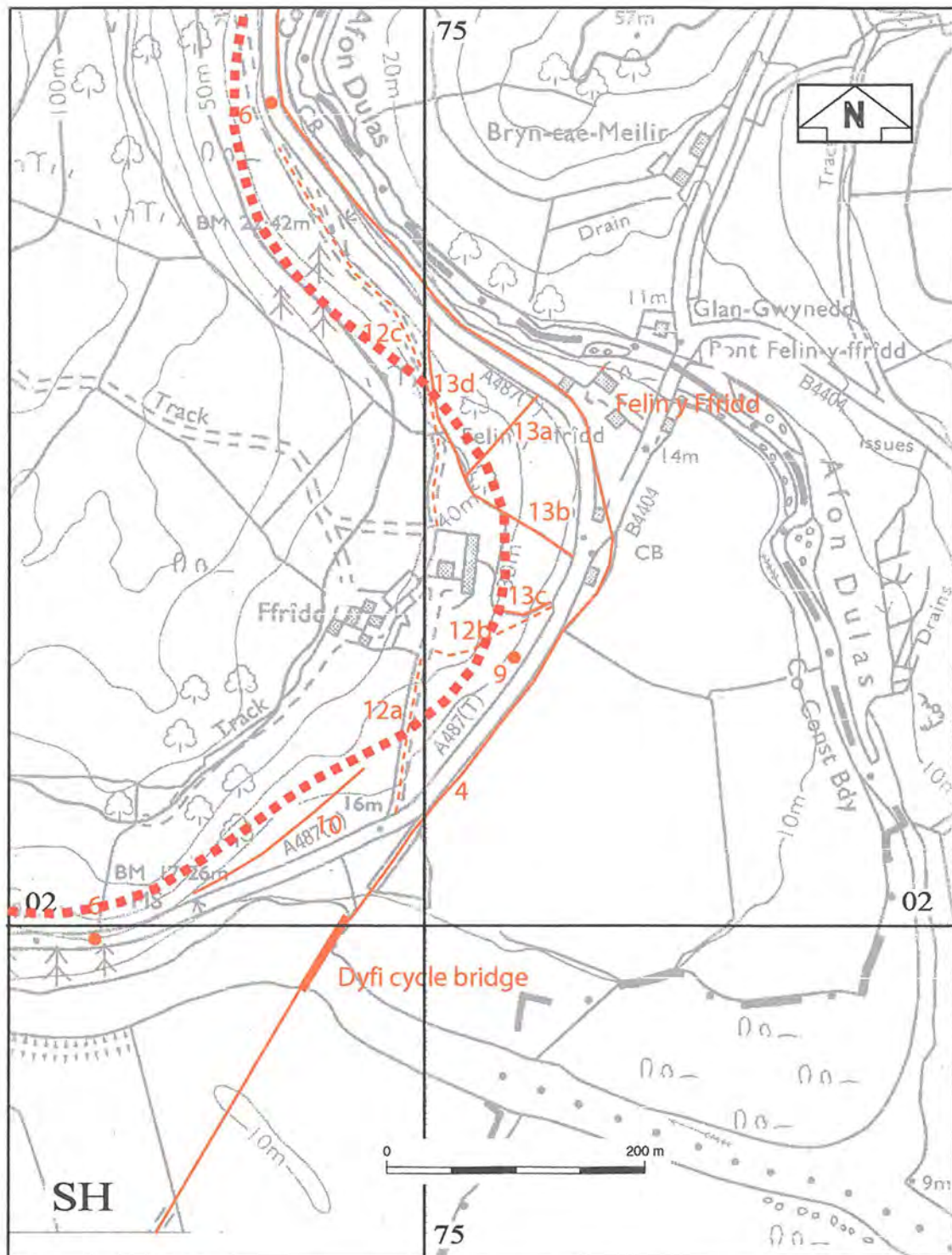
Features 12 and 13. Feature 12 was found to be outside the road line and unaffected by construction. The truncation of the four field boundaries, Feature 13 a-d did not provide any new information beyond what was evident during the original assessment.

CONCLUSION

The watching brief showed that most of Feature 10 was unaffected by the construction but suggested that the feature was the result of agricultural activity rather than the remains of the proposed quarry tramway. No other archaeological evidence was identified in the stripped areas that could provide information about the features identified during the 2002 assessment.

REFERENCES

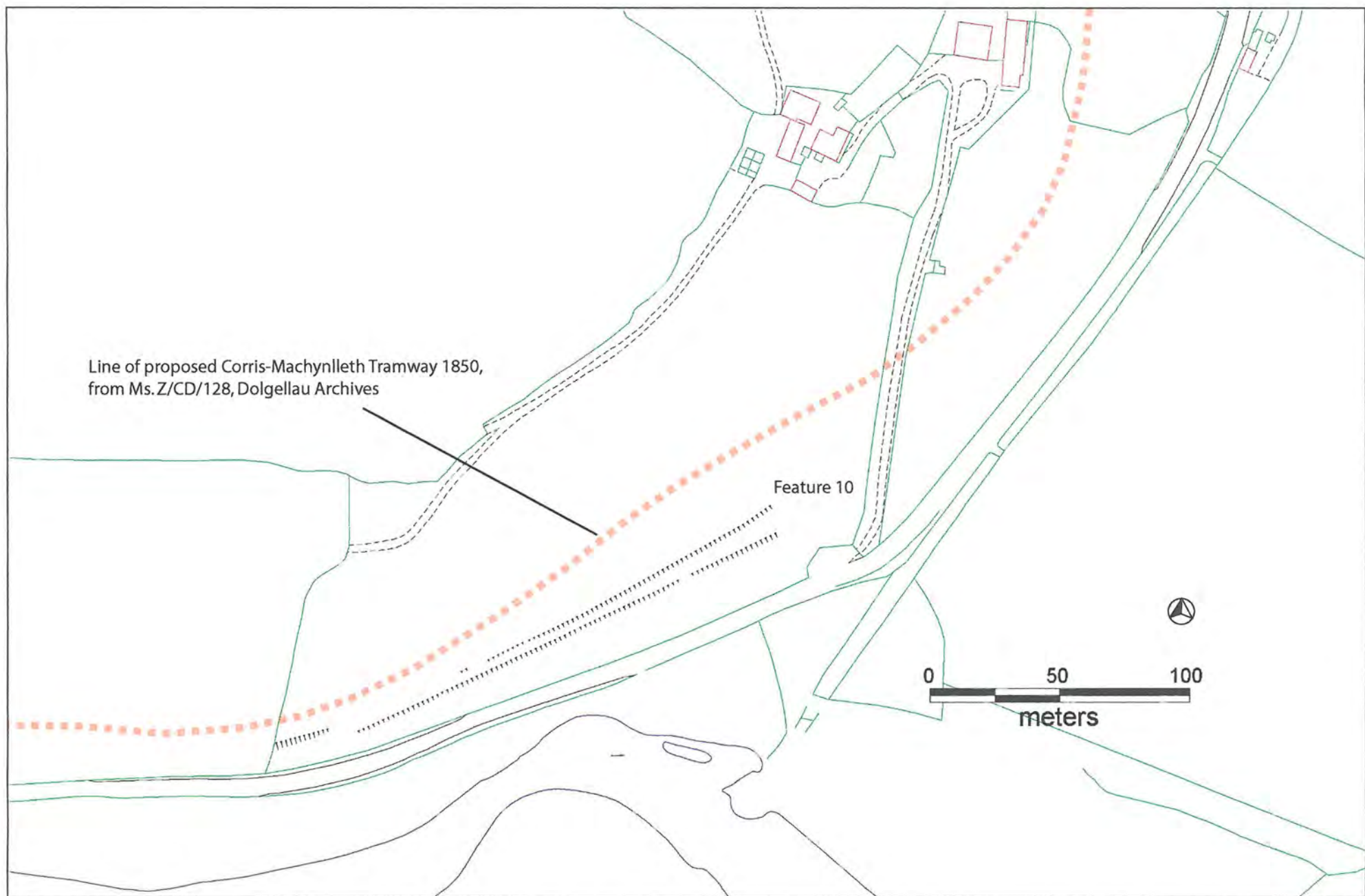
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Fridd Gate Road Improvement Scheme

Fig. 1 Location of archaeological and historic features from the archaeological assessment

- Line of proposed Corris-Machynlleth Tramway 1850, from Ms. Z/CD/128, Dolgellau Archives



Fridd Gate Road Improvement Scheme Fig. 2 Plan of Feature 10 in relation to the line of the tramway proposed in 1850



Fridd Gate Road Improvement Scheme

Fig. 3 Feature 10, Parallel scarps: the north end truncated and exposed showing as a low ridge of subsoil (beneath the scale). From the north. 1m scale.

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