

G1632 Roman Military Sites 2008  
The Roman road between Segontium and Aber

G1632



Report number : 779

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd  
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust



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Prepared for

Cadw

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# **G1632 ROMAN MILITARY SITES 2008**

## **THE ROMAN ROAD BETWEEN SEGONTIUM AND ABER**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

A pan-Wales project examining aspects of Roman military sites in Gwynedd was set up in 2000. The first part of the project examined fort environs using geophysical survey and was successful in identifying a wide range of previously unknown extramural features such as *vici* and *mansiones*. The project encouraged participation by community and amateur groups. This allowed geophysical survey to be expanded into the interiors of some forts and assessment excavation to take place in order to confirm the results of the surveys.

The project was expanded to examine the Roman military road network. This comprised an initial collation of data including the results of a wide ranging and largely unpublished survey carried out by the Ordnance Survey in the 1970s. The resulting road alignments were mapped as linear files in MapInfo (GIS programme). This includes linked database entries giving background information and assessments of confidence in the data. The results were integrated into the HER and have been utilised in the planning process and research.

This was followed by a comparative fieldwork survey which examined all extant remains of Roman roads in the county, examined some areas where data had not previously been collected and made scheduling recommendations. A newly discovered length of extant road above Cwm Penammen was excavated and found to be perfectly preserved beneath a deep covering of peat. The fieldwork included the participation of amateur groups and a close liaison was maintained with RCAHMW. An amateur study group was set up on Anglesey which is currently pursuing its own research project into early roads on the island. A full report and gazetteer was produced (Hopewell 2007), the present report should be seen as an addendum to this. All data has been integrated into the HER and the road alignments can be viewed as MapInfo linear objects alongside the HER data.

Both aspects of the project produced a large amount of new discoveries, representing the most significant step forward in our knowledge of the monuments of Roman Wales in many decades. The new information has been disseminated through regular publication and lecturing, at both local and national levels. This culminated in a project to produce a new edition of *The Roman Frontier in Wales* in conjunction with Dr Jeffrey Davies, Prof Barry Burnham (editors) and RCAHMW.

Liaison with RCAHMW and local groups has focused attention on the environs of the Menai Strait. This has led to several new discoveries all of which require further investigation.

There have been many attempts to trace the line of the Roman road along the north coast of Gwynedd between Segontium and Aber. Some of these date as far back as the early 19<sup>th</sup> century but until recently no convincing evidence had emerged. A well-defined length was discovered running east from Segontium at an earlier stage of the present project. Several lengths of parchmark continuing on this alignment were recorded by Toby Driver during aerial reconnaissance for RCAHMW during the dry summer of 2006. These appear to be the first indications of the route of the road along the coastal plain and need to be assessed by field visits and added to the MapInfo database. One length of potential road near Pentir had previously been identified as a low bank on aerial photographs at an earlier stage of the project but had been dismissed because it was found to be the line of a boundary in a former field system shown on Tithe maps. The RCAHMW aerial photographs appear to differentiate between former field boundaries and the road.

### **2. METHODOLOGY**

All of the potential sites were visited and recorded, where appropriate, by sketch plan, written description and digital photography. This assessment allowed sites that were linear features but not Roman roads to be discounted. Ordnance survey, tithe and estate maps were then examined for the areas around the remaining sites. A planned trial excavation could not be carried out due to time constraints and access problems.

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1 Road near Ty'n-llwyn

PRN 17834  
NPRN 405334  
NGR SH56686760

Aerial Photographs RCAHMW AP2006/3445-6, 3348, 2808-9, 3442-4  
SNP 3/10/86 5286112 and Get Mapping coverage SH56

The road to the west of the B4547 (Fig. 1) is clearly visible as a parch mark on RCAHMW AP 2006/2807 (Plate 1). On the ground, part C-D is visible as a spread and somewhat fragmentary agger running through a boggy area in improved pasture. It is in places defined by an area free of *Juncus spp* rushes indicating better drainage. The agger runs across a natural hollow and is approximately 8m wide at its base at this point. Part B-C and D-E are visible on the RCAHM aerial photographs as parch marks but not as earthworks on the ground. The line is less clear at the western end (A-B), the parch mark alignment indicates that it runs to the northwest of a small hill to the north of Ty-mawr and there are faint indications of a feature that could be the road running along this line on the Get Mapping APs. The basic field pattern remains the same as that shown on the 1832 Vaynol Estate map although some boundaries have since been removed. There is nothing running on the line of the parch mark on this or any later maps (see Fig. 2).

The road to the east of the B4547 runs through fairly rough ground that retains the remains of field boundaries that appear to predate the 1832 estate map. Part E-F runs through woodlands and is visible as a 5m wide track with post-medieval characteristics including a small bridge. This short length of track is shown on the estate map running as far as the Dinorwic Tramway. It is visible beyond the former tramway as a low agger, roughly 5m wide. This runs through a modern gate and has been adopted by a later track. This is shown on the 1889 25" OS map (Fig. 3) as a footpath leading to Ty'n-llwyn. It turns to the west (G-H) and changes character as it runs across a particularly boggy area, becoming well-defined, flat topped, and bounded by a wall and a ditch. This part may exclusively be part of the later path and turns away slightly from the line of the Roman road. A large timber retrieved by the landowner from the modern roadside ditch was discovered by Hugh Toller. He suggested that this formed part of a layer of brushwood carrying the road across the bog. This was still lying by the road. Initial impressions suggest that this was relatively modern softwood. A sample was taken and sent to Astrid Castledine for species identification. This confirmed initial impressions; it was identified as Douglas Fir (*Pseudotsuga taxiflora*), a north american species brought into cultivation in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The road cannot be traced through the boggy area (G-I) but is faintly visible in the field to the east of this on RCAHMW AP 2006/2809 and SNP 3/10/86 5286112 (Plates 3 and 4). The road turns a few degrees to the west between G and I but not as much as G-H. The field boundaries were mostly replaced between 1840 (tithe map Fig. 2) and 1889 (OS 25"). The tithe map shows a field boundary on the alignment of the road but no road is indicated on any of the maps examined. There is no visible earthwork in this field.

The road (J-K) on the eastern side of the minor road regularly shows as a cropmark (SNP, RCAHMW and Get Mapping) but is not visible as an earthwork. This length corresponds to a straight line of former field boundaries shown on the tithe map. There is again no indication of a road in this area on any of the maps examined. This length of was first spotted during the 2005-6 phase of the project on the SNP 1986 aerial photographs (Plate 3) but was unproven because it seemed to be part of the 1840 field system. The RCAHMW aerial photographs (Plates 1 and 2) clearly differentiate between the road and former field boundaries. The road is visible as a wide well-defined parchmark with the boundaries are not generally producing parchmarks.



### **3.2 Linear Parchmark, Groeslon roundabout**

*NGR SH 56076700*

*Aerial Photograph RCAHMW AP 2006/3450 (Plate 4)*

A linear parchmark extending top the east from the Groeslon roundabout was shown to be a result of a gas pipeline.

### **3.3 Linear Parchmarks Tynyffridd**

*NGR SH57516820 and SH58176864#*

*Aerial Photographs RCAHMW AP 2006/2810 and 2811 (Plates 5 and 6)*

Linear parchmarks on an alignment to the north-west of Tynyffridd correspond to the line of a gas pipeline.

### **3.4 Linear Feature Tynyffridd**

*NGR SH58116826*

*Aerial Photographs RCAHMW 2006/2811(Plate 6), SNP 3/10/86 5286112 and Get Mapping coverage.*

A linear feature visible on most aerial photographs of the area runs across a field to the south of Tynyffridd. Examination on the ground showed this to be a substantial lynchet. There was nothing to indicate that this was the line of the Roman road. A possible continuation near Pont Ty-gwyn, Glasinfryn appears to consist of modern drainage features. The grass was, however, high when it was examined and this could not be confirmed.

### **3.5 Linear feature and possible quarry pits Ty'n y Hendre and Tai'r Meibion**

*NGR SH62297112*

*Aerial Photographs RCAHMW AP2006/3421 (Plate 7) and 4420*

An alignment of hedgerows and parchmarks that could be quarry pits at Ty'n y Hendre and Tai'r Meibion. There is no sign of a surviving agger but the parchmarks correspond to hollows. These could be quarry pits but could also be features unrelated to the Roman road. The line through the fields by Ty'n y Hendre is not entirely convincing because the lie of the land is quite uneven and cuttings or terracing would have been necessary. Several hundred years of intensive agriculture could however have removed all signs of the road. This length would merit further aerial monitoring but remains unproven

### **3.6 Linear feature and cropmark Ty'n Hendre to Capel Gilfach**

*NGR SH62407096*

*Aerial Photograph RCAHMW AP 2006/3421 (Plate 7)*

An earthwork and a parchmark form a linear alignment from Ty'n Hendre to Capel Gilfach. Examination on the ground showed the earthwork to the south-east of Ty'n-y-hendre to be a pronounced roughly linear scarp curving sharply to the south-west at the north-east. This appears to be a lynchet, probably part of the extensive multiperiod field systems that run from the uplands down to the coastal plain in this area. A parchmark beyond this is not visible as an earthwork and could either be a road or a gas pipeline. The pipeline appears to cross the road near Ty'n-y-hendre just below the line of the lynchet and crosses the road near Capel Gilfach so the pipeline is the most likely interpretation.

### **3.7 Linear cropmark Tan-y-clogwyn cottages**

*NPRN 405338*

*NGR SH66657348*

*Aerial Photograph RCAHMW AP 2006/3416 (Plate 8)*

This linear cropmark corresponds to the gas pipeline. An alternative line below the minor road between Tan-y-clogwyn cottages and Gorddinog is visible as a slight break in slope but is not of obviously Roman construction.

### **3.8 Excluded cropmarks**

Two lengths of cropmark were not examined in detail:

AP 2006/3419 near Bryn-meddyg was looked at from the road and nothing could be seen but access could not be arranged.

AP 2006/3414-5 (NPRN 405337) NGR was beyond the line of the Roman road as it turns towards Bwlch y Ddeufaen (indicated by milestones at Gorddinog) and was not examined.

## **4. CONCLUSIONS**

Many of the features examined on the ground appear regularly as cropmarks. The project has produced useful results allowing modern linear features and other site types to be discounted from future aerial survey work on Roman roads. The combination of evidence from aerial photographs, map regression and fieldwork has shown that the road near Pentir is almost certainly Roman. This new evidence is a major step forward in the study of this road allowing the general alignment to be traced for 10km to the east of Segontium. Unfortunately the alignment between Pentir and Aber remains elusive.

## **5. REFERENCES**

Hopewell D. 2007, *Roman Roads in North-West Wales (Revision 4)* GAT Report Number 668

### ***Cartographic sources***

Vaynol Estate Map 1832 (Caernarfon Record Office)  
Pentir Tithe Map 1840 (Caernarfon Record Office)  
Ordnance Survey 1:1000 1976

### ***Aerial Photographs***

*SNP 3/10/86 5286112 and Get Mapping coverage SH56*

*RCAHMW AP 2006/2808*  
*RCAHMW AP 2006/2809*  
*RCAHMW AP 2006/2810*  
*RCAHMW AP 2006/2811*  
*RCAHMW AP 2006/3414*  
*RCAHMW AP 2006/3415*  
*RCAHMW AP 2006/3416*  
*RCAHMW AP 2006/3419*  
*RCAHMW AP 2006/3421*  
*RCAHMW AP 2006/3348*  
*RCAHMW AP 2006/3442*  
*RCAHMW AP 2006/3443*  
*RCAHMW AP 2006/3444*  
*RCAHMW AP 2006/3445*  
*RCAHMW AP 2006/3446*  
*RCAHMW AP 2006/4420*

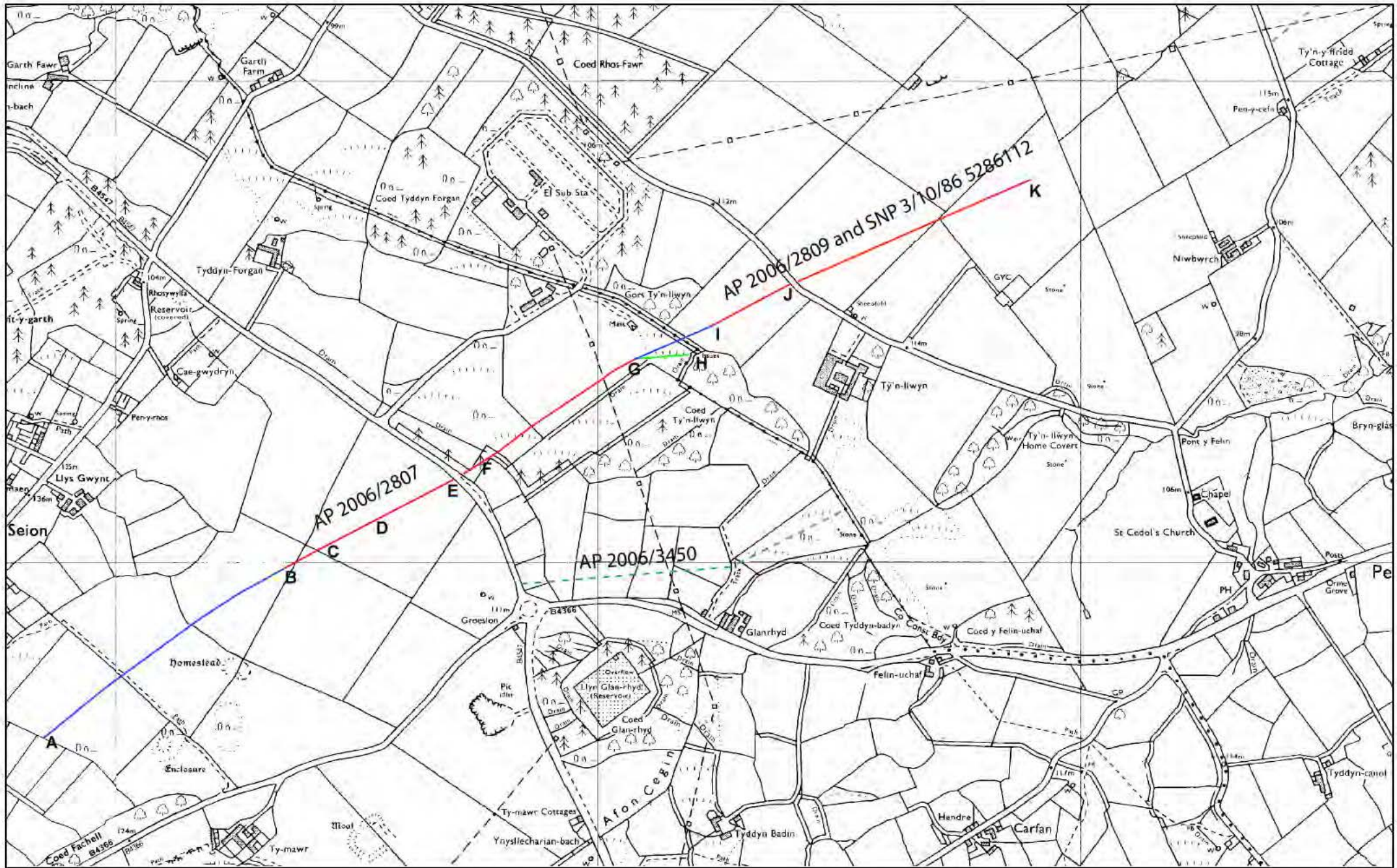
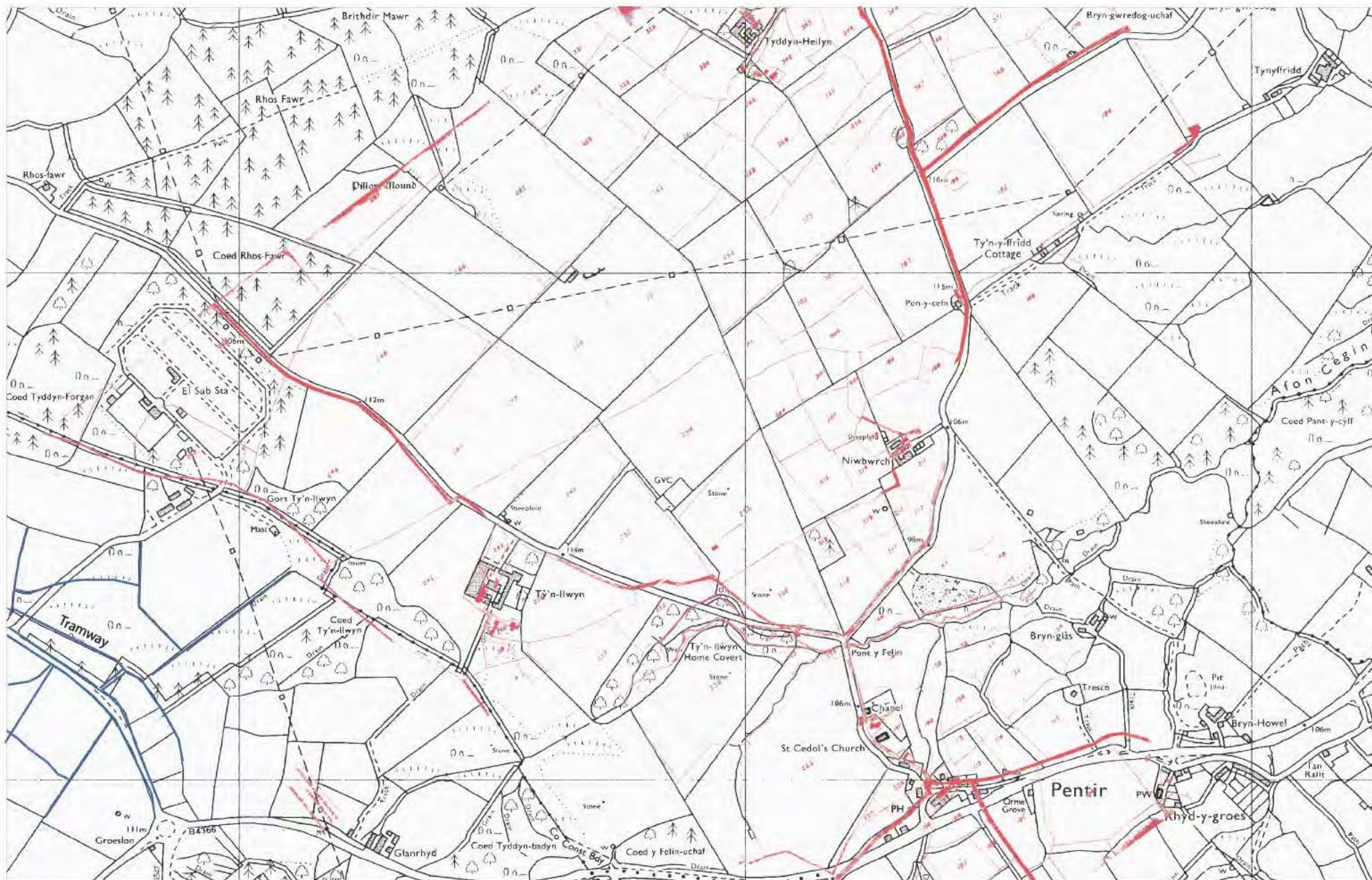


Fig. 1 Road alignment centred on SH56686760





— Vaynol estate map  
1832

— Pentir tithe map  
1840

Fig. 2 Modern 1:10000 OS map with field boundaries overlaid from Pentir tithe map 1840 and Vaynol estate map 1832









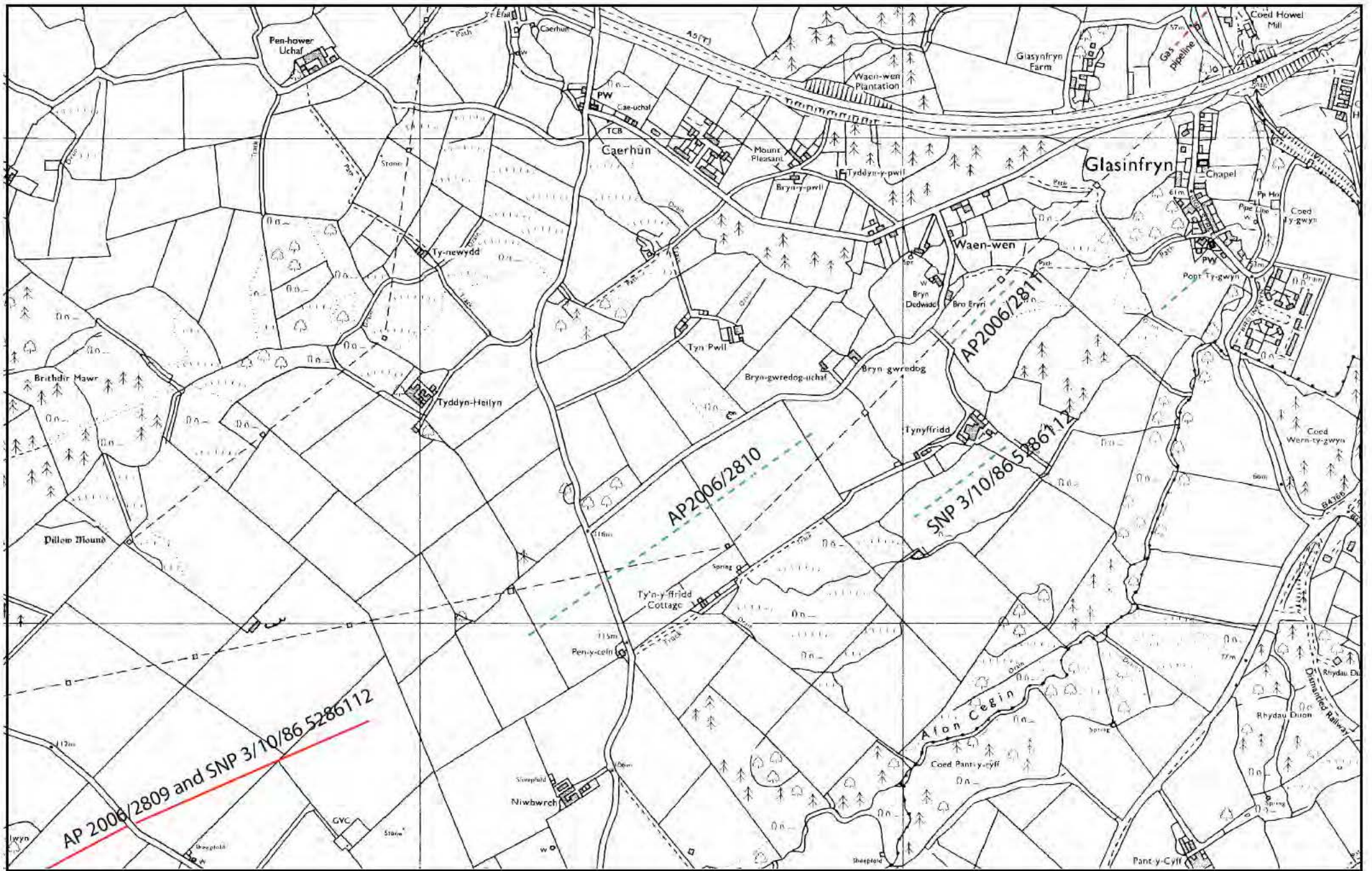


Fig. 4 Possible road alignments centred on SH57516820













Plate 1 RCAHMW AP 2006/2807







Plate 2 RCAHMW AP 2006/2809



Plate 3 SNP 3/10/86 5286112





Plate 4 RCAHMW AP2006/3450



Plate 5 RCAHMW AP2006/2810





Plate 6 RCAHMW AP2006/2811



Plate 7 RCAHMW AP2006/3421





Plate 8 RCAHMW AP2006/3416







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