

Archaeology Wales

1255 Battle of Bryn Derwin Bwlch Derwin, Garndolbenmaen Caernarvonshire

Battlefield Survey



By
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Report No. 1211

Prepared for:



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



Archaeology Wales

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Prepared For: The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales

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Crynodeb Anhechnegol

Y mae'r adroddiad yma yn amlinellu canlyniadau ymchwiliad archeolegol ar safle tybiedig brwydr 1255 ym Mryn Derwin, Bwlch Derwin, Garndolbenmaen, Sir Gaernarfon, ar gyfer Comisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru (CBHC).

Amcan y gwaith oedd hel tystiolaeth ynglŷn â maint a lleoliad meysydd brwydrau gwahanol ar gyfer Cofrestr Meysydd Brwydrau Cymru.

Roedd y gwaith archwilio yn cynnwys crwydro'r maes ac archwilio'r maes gyda datgelyddion metel yn ogystal ag astudiaeth o arolwg LiDAR. Fe wnaeth yr arolwg datgelydd metel ddarganfod casgliad bychan o wrthrychau metel, ond nid oedd un yn dyddio o'r canol oesoedd. Ni lwyddodd yr arolwg LiDAR na chrwydro'r maes ddatgelu fwy o wybodaeth yn gysylltiedig â'r frwydr yma.

Non-Technical Summary

This report draws upon the results gained by archaeological investigations into the site of the 1255 Battle of Bryn Derwin at Bwlch Derwin, Garndolbenmaen, Caernarvonshire, for The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales.

The work forms part of a larger investigation, the objectives of which are to gather evidence that will verify and inform the location and extent of Welsh battlefields and to inform the consideration of each site for inclusion on the Welsh Government proposed Register of Historic Battlefields in Wales.

Various survey methods were undertaken for the site, including Lidar analysis, metal detector survey and a site walkover. The metal detector survey recovered only a very small finds assemblage, which contained no medieval material, whilst the Lidar analysis and site walkover identified no features evidently related to the 1255 battle.

1 Introduction

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In March 2013 Archaeology Wales carried out a series of archaeological investigations around Bwlch Derwin, Garndolbenmaen, Caernarvonshire, NGR SH 46422 46139 (Fig 1). Work undertaken included Lidar analysis, a site walkover and a metal detector survey.
- 1.1.2 The work was carried out at the request of Louise Barker of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (Henceforth – The Commission) and was funded by the Welsh Government. It formed part of a series of on-going battlefield surveys undertaken by Archaeology Wales Ltd on behalf of The Commission, the

primary objective of which is to inform the consideration of each battlefield site for inclusion on a proposed Battlefields Register for Wales.

2 Objectives

2.1 Outline Requirements

- 2.1.1 The objective of the work is to gather evidence that will help verify and inform the location, extent and archaeological character of each battlefield. The fundamental criterion is that in order for a battlefield to be protected and for change to be managed, its location and extent must be confidently identified. In addition, the battlefield must meet at least one of the following three criteria:
- 2.1.2 **Be associated with historical events or figures of national importance** (i.e military innovations, direct associations with nationally important figures or events and whether the engagement played a key role in a campaign); and/or
- 2.1.3 **Have significant physical remains and/or archaeological potential** (i.e include natural or constructed physical features at the time of the engagement, evidence from the engagement or other related buried archaeological evidence); and/or
- 2.1.4 **Have a clear landscape context that allows the events of the battle to be understood or interpreted** (i.e the initial area of deployment and fighting, wider landscape incorporating earthworks, skirmishes, camps, burial, line of advance and retreat, and detached elements such as memorials)

2.2 Aims & Proposals

- 2.2.1 The main aim of the work was to define those areas around Bwlch Derwin which were likely to have been associated with the 1255 battle.
- 2.2.2 This was to be achieved by:
- Analysing Lidar data to identify likely landscape features possibly associated with the battle.
 - Assessing the local topography for areas upon which the battle could have taken place by means of a site walkover.
 - Undertaking metal detector surveys, along with fieldwalking where possible, in fields around Bwlch Derwin deemed likely to have been associated with the battle (after Lidar analysis/site walkover).
- 2.2.3 The area chosen for the metal detector survey was primarily that around Terfynau Farm at the southern end of Bwlch Derwin (Fig 2). The landowner, Mr Evans, did point out, however, that all of the area had been subject to metal detection in the recent past..

2.3 Geology and topography

- 2.3.1 The underlying solid geology of the Bwlch Derwin area is primarily made up of igneous Rhyolitic tuff, including Ignimbrite, of the Silurian, Ordovician and Cambrian eras (British Geological Survey, 2001).
- 2.3.2 The 1255 battle site of Bryn Derwin is overlain by slowly permeable, wet, very acid upland soils with a peaty surface.
- 2.3.3 The site is located in a pass between two hills, Mynydd Cennin to the south-west and Y Foel to the north-east. The main road to Bwlch Derwin, possibly a reflection of the medieval routeway through the area, occupies a flat area between the two hills.
- 2.3.4 Mynydd Cennin rises to 262m above ordnance datum whilst Y Foel is at 218m. The area between the two hills lies at approximately 150m above ordnance datum and is divided into areas of grassed pasture and largely unimproved, marshy areas, characterised by thick gorse bushes.
- 2.3.5 A smaller hill, little more than a natural conical mound, lies at the southern foot of Y Foel. It rises perhaps 10m above its surroundings and, whilst not as high as the nearby Y Foel, provides a good vantage point from which to survey the battlefield area.

2.4 Archaeological and Historical Background

- 2.4.1 A complete description of the 1255 battle of Bryn Derwin is contained in the report (2013) that resulted from the historical research undertaken by Dr Adam Chapman. The main events, however, can be summarised as follows:
- 2.4.2 The battle of Bryn Derwin was fought for the unity and independence of Gwynedd. It was born out of the period of division and dissent that followed the deaths of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth (d. 1240) and Gruffudd ap Llywelyn (d. 1246). It was a short and decisive battle and resulted in the victory of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd and his forces over forces led by two of his brothers, Owain and Dafydd. At the end of the battle Owain and Dafydd were captured and imprisoned, while Llywelyn went on to attain dominance over all of Gwynedd. Within two years of the battle, through diplomatic agreements with other native Welsh rulers, Llywelyn was able to achieve influence, if not outright control or overlordship, over much of Wales. The battle was the catalyst for this process, although the precise date and scale of the conflict is unknown. In contrast, however, the location of the battle can be given with surprising accuracy.
- 2.4.3 After at least 1253, and in all likelihood earlier, Llywelyn and his brothers had been in dispute over the partition of Gwynedd, to make provision for the youngest brother, Dafydd, who was 'already casting himself in the role of arch-troublemaker, a role which he consistently played throughout the rest of his life. By the beginning of 1254, at the latest, Llywelyn knew that Henry III was proceeding with his declared course of action of securing for Dafydd the portion of his inheritance that he considered was the prince's right. His intentions were given substance by a commission he appointed consisting of Alan la Zouche, justice of Chester, John Lestrangle, Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn of southern Powys, and Gruffudd ap Madog of northern Powys, on 26 April 1254. The king empowered the commissioners to hear disputes between the brothers and, based

upon the evidence presented, the king's council would then meet out the necessary justice. It was the rejection of this process, which was transparently designed to subordinate the native rulers, that culminated in the struggle for outright control of Gwynedd.

- 2.4.4 The clearest evidence concerning the site of the battle comes from a praise poem directed toward Llywelyn by Llygad Gŵr following his victory. The poem places the battle on the boundary of the commotes of Arfon and Eifionydd near Bwlch Dau Fynydd (the pass of the two mountains – Drws Daufynydd/the door of the two mountains). Lloyd confidently interprets this ‘near the modern Bwlch Derwyn and Derwyn Fawr... on the borders of the parishes of Clynnog and Dolbenmaen. Bwlch Dau Fynydd is a little to the west.’
- 2.4.5 The site identified by Lloyd lies in a pass, around 250 metres wide, located between Mynydd Cennin and Y Foel, named Bwlch Derwin, although the name Bryn Derwin suggests a site at the summit of the pass. If this were the case, Llywelyn would have enjoyed the advantage of height. However, since nothing is known of the weapons or tactics employed, we cannot be sure of the precise benefits that this advantage would have provided. If this is the site, we may speculate that, based on the evidence of the poem, Llywelyn's forces barred the way of those of Owain and Dafydd as they approached from the south-east. The poet clearly imagines Bwlch Daufynydd as a backcloth to the battle, and this would accord with what is known of the relative disposition of the lands in Gwynedd of Llywelyn, Owain and, in particular, Dafydd.
- 2.4.6 The battle was short, sharp and fought quickly to a conclusion. Llywelyn and his forces stood at Bryn Derwin, in the pass, and awaited the attack of the opposing army led by his brothers. Owain was captured and Dafydd fled, and their forces were killed, captured or fled. Of the known historical accounts of the battle, the version of the Brut y Tywysogion in the Red Book of Hergest is alone in suggesting that Dafydd was captured.
- 2.4.7 The available sources have nothing specific to say about the forces that faced each other at Bryn Derwin. Clearly the armies were of a reasonable size; they are described as hosts, implying forces above and beyond the teuluoedd (Military Households) of the brothers themselves. It is probable that those captured and taken prisoner were of elite status, but no idea is given of the numbers involved or any named captives beyond Owain and Dafydd ap Gruffudd.

3 Methodology

3.1 Lidar Analysis

- 3.1.1 Lidar data, at a resolution of 2m, was purchased for analysis from Geomatics Ltd. Both digital shadow and terrain models were analysed for features likely to relate to the battle.

3.2 Site Walkover

3.2.1 A site walkover, encompassing all of the purported battle site and its surroundings, was undertaken on 16th January 2014.

3.2.2 All areas were photographed using high resolution (14MP) digital photography.

3.3 Metal Detector Survey

3.3.1 A detailed metal detector survey was undertaken by Chris E Smith and volunteers from local metal detecting clubs. Areas subject to survey are shown on figures 2 & 4-9.

3.3.2 All areas surveyed were divided into transects of equal width and marked with canes to ensure coverage. Each individual transect was assigned to a metal detectorist who scanned the area twice, once going up the field and again on the return.

3.3.3 All metal detectors were set to 'All Metal' mode so as to include responses from ferrous and non-ferrous objects.

3.3.4 When a find was located it was placed *in situ* within a finds bag, with a marker flag placed next to it. A waterproof label was placed in the bag with the depth of the find marked on it in indelible ink. Subsequently, the finds were collected by the supervising archaeologist. Each find was labelled with an individual find number and each numbered findspot was located using a Topcon GTS 725 total station.

3.3.5 The grid coordinates from each findspot were entered into an excel spreadsheet detailing all the finds, their descriptions, dates and locations. The total station survey was overlaid onto a map to show the distribution of the finds across each assessment area.

3.3.6 Finds which were clearly identifiable in the field as being of 20th – 21st century date (agricultural/machinery/litter) were not retained to form part of the project archive. These were removed from site and discarded away from the survey area.

3.3.7 All works were undertaken in accordance with current Health and Safety legislation.

4 Lidar Analysis Results

4.1 Digital Terrain Model

4.1.1 The Lidar data, at 2m resolution, shows the assessment area in good detail (Fig 3).

4.1.2 No features potentially associated with the battle were identified.

5 Site Walkover Results

5.1 Conditions

- 5.1.1 The site walkover was undertaken on an overcast and grey day after a period of very wet and windy weather. Ground conditions were very wet.

5.2 Site Walkover (Plates 1-4)

- 5.2.1 Figure 2 shows the area covered by the walkover. Wet ground conditions restricted access to some areas of marsh and gorse.
- 5.2.2 Whilst no features were observed that were obviously associated with the battle, it was noted that the area around Terfynau Farm is situated in the pass exactly between Mynydd Cennin and Y Foel. Topographically, this would have been an ideal place to bar the way, or impede the progress, of an army moving northwards.
- 5.2.3 The small hillock, Moel Fychan (small bare hill), at the base of Y Foel offers a good vantage point from which to survey the pass and the approach-road from the south.

6 Metal Detector Survey Results

6.1 Ground and weather conditions

- 6.1.1 The metal detector survey was undertaken three weeks after heavy rainfall in order to give the ground time to dry out. Some areas of marsh were still very wet at the time of the survey and thus were avoided.
- 6.1.2 The survey area encompassed a total of twelve fields (Figs 2 & 4-9) located to the north, south and west of Terfynau Farm.

6.2 Constraints

- 6.2.1 As previously mentioned, large areas of the pass between Mynydd Cennin and Y Foel are covered in marshy, boggy ground. These areas were avoided.
- 6.2.2 The four fields immediately surrounding Terfynau Farm to the west and north, as well as to the east of Y Foel, have been subject to previous metal detector surveys, with no finds being reported (Evans, Pers comm).
- 6.2.3 A search of the Portable Antiquities Scheme online database confirms that no finds have been reported from this area.

6.3 Finds

- 6.3.1 Only 26 finds were recorded (Appendix 3, Figs 4-9), all of which are post-medieval or modern in date. The finds assemblage contains no material that can be linked with any certainty to the 1255 battle of Bryn Derwin.
- 6.3.2 The oldest dateable find is a silver Charles I sixpence (1625-49) (Plate 5). This coin appears to have come from the Aberystwyth mint (Spink, 2003).

- 6.3.3 A large number of modern finds and items of non-archaeological material, such as pieces of coke, were discarded during the survey.

7 Fieldwork Results

7.1 Site Walkover

- 7.1.1 Whilst the site walkover located no features evidently associated with the 1255 battle of Bryn Derwin, it highlighted the fact that the location of the site, on a flat area between the two hills, would have been ideally placed for barring the path of an army moving northwards.

7.2 Metal Detector Surveys

- 7.2.1 The metal detector survey located only a very small amount of finds, none of which were evidently associated with the battle.

8 Discussion and Interpretation

8.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 8.1.1 The field investigation was slightly hampered by weather conditions leading to the postponement and rescheduling of both the site walkover and the metal detector surveys.
- 8.1.2 Metal detecting could not take place in certain areas owing to the presence of very wet and marshy ground. Cows, located in the field immediately opposite the lane to Terfynau Farm, were similarly avoided.

8.2 Overall interpretation & Evidence for the Battle

- 8.2.1 Based solely on the evidence of the 2014 fieldwork at Bwlch Derwin, none of the areas subject to survey can be linked to the 1255 battle.
- 8.2.2 The evidence from the 2013 historical research is, however, quite compelling and, as noted during the site walkover, the area is topographically ideal for the barring of an armies progress.

8.3 Conclusions

- 8.3.1 The metal detector survey carried out in the pass between Mynydd Cennin and Y Foel, the purported site of the 1255 battle of Bryn Derwin, produced only a very small amount of finds and, notably, no finds contemporary with the battle.
- 8.3.2 However, given the relative strength of the documentary evidence in support of this location being the battle site, it is possible that any finds from the battle which were not

immediately recovered afterwards have corroded away. This is likely due to the nature of the soils in the pass which are predominantly of a wet and acidic nature, not conducive to the survival of metal artefacts, in particular iron objects.

- 8.3.3 As a result of the 2014 phase of work, no definitive boundary can be drawn around an area highlighting it as belonging to the 1255 battle of Bryn Derwin.

8.4 Recommendations for further investigations

- 8.4.1 As a total of twelve fields in the area of the Bwlch Derwin pass were subject to survey and only a very small finds assemblage, with no contemporary material, was recovered, it can be concluded that ground conditions in the area are not conducive to the preservation of metal objects.
- 8.4.2 As the pass area appears to become boggy further to the north, beyond the 2014 survey area, no further metal detector survey work can be recommended here.

9 Acknowledgements

- 9.1.1 Thanks are due to the landowner of the assessment area, Mr Evans, for allowing us onto his land and to Louise Barker of the Commission for valuable liaising. Special thanks are reserved to the members of the metal detecting clubs who gave up their own free time in very cold and wet conditions.

10 Bibliography and references

British Geological Survey. 2001, 4th Edition. Solid Geology Map, UK South Sheet.

Chapman, A. 2013. Welsh Battlefields Historical and Documentary Research – Bryn Derwin 1255.

Spink, 2003. *Coins of England and the United Kingdom*, 38th Edition. Cromwell Press, Trowbridge

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APPENDIX I: Figures

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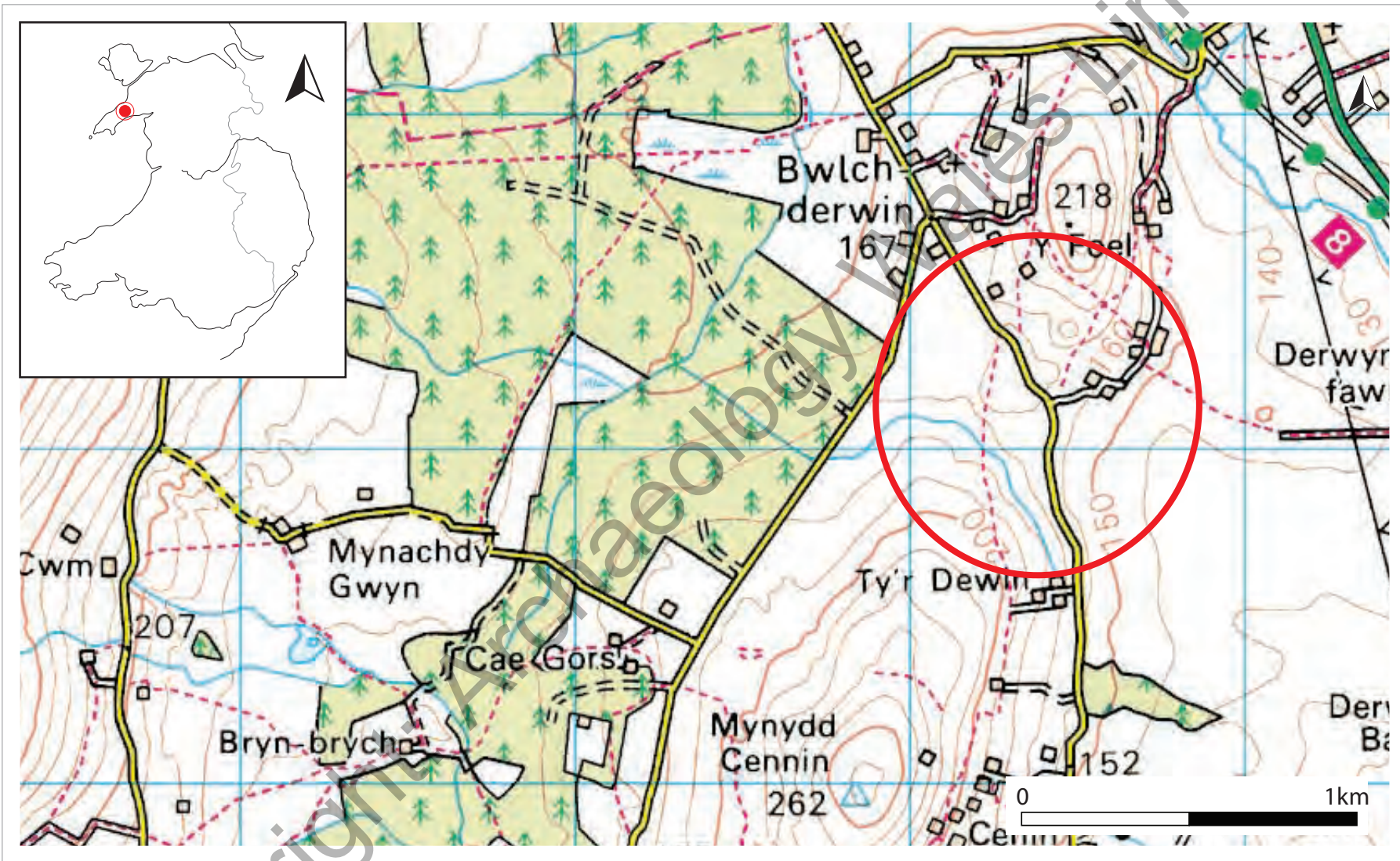


Fig 1: Map showing general location of assessment area

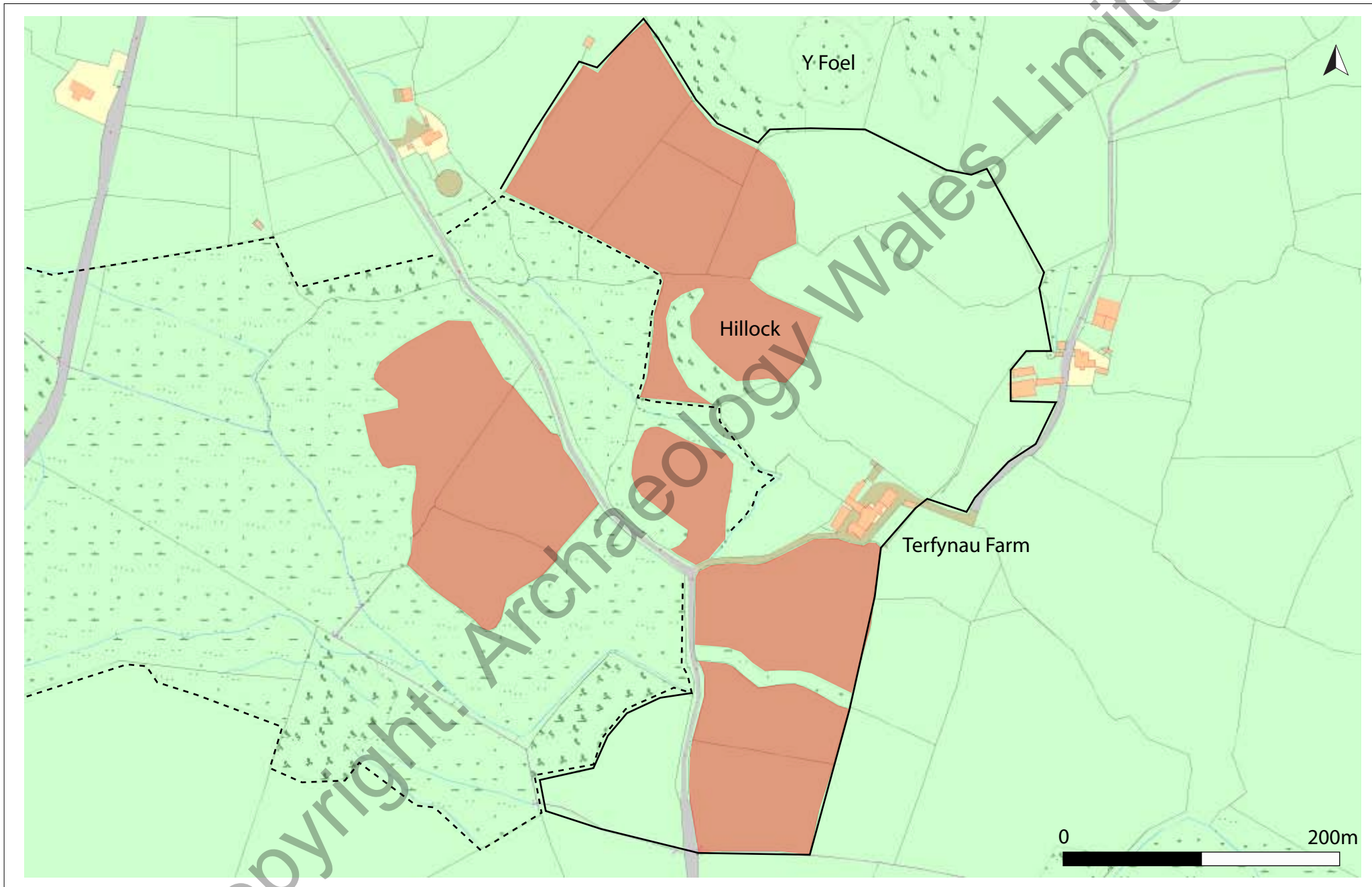


Fig 2: Plan showing metal detector survey areas (red), areas made inaccessible by bog/marsh (dashed line) and areas subject to walkover survey (Solid line)

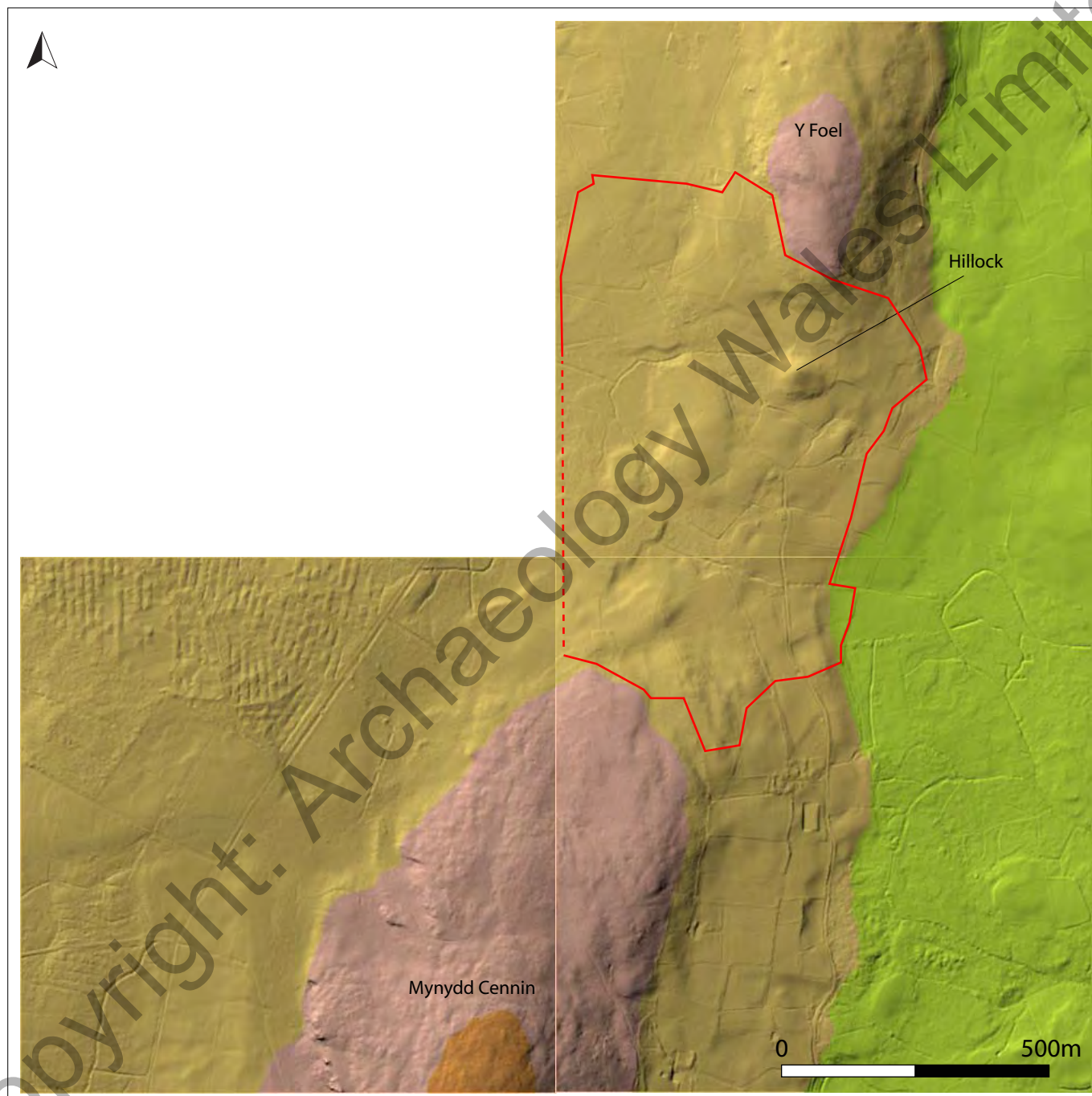


Fig 3: Lidar digital terrain model showing assessment area (red boundary) and landscape features

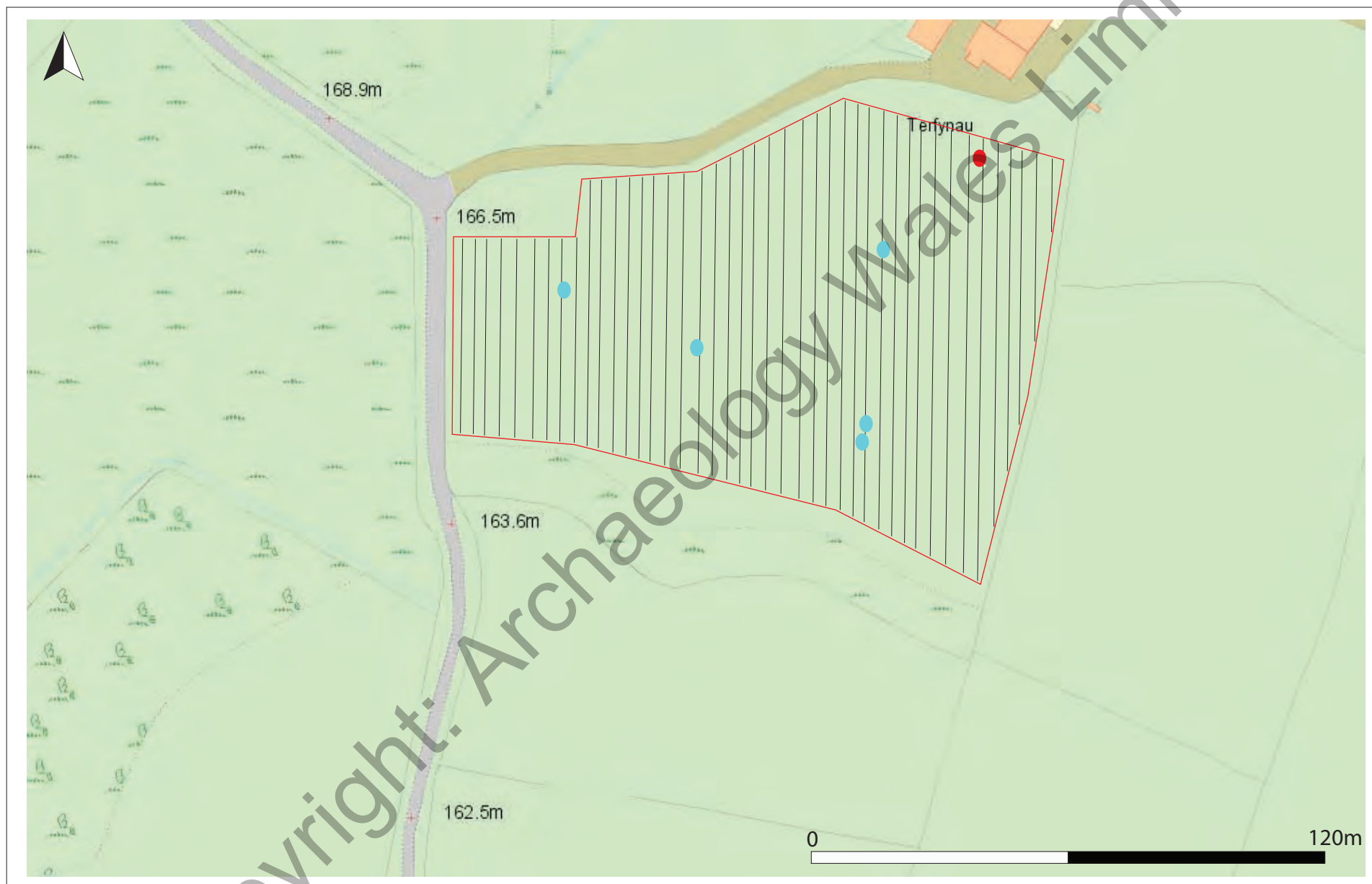


Fig 4 : Plan showing metal detector survey areas, traverses & find locations



Fig 5 : Plan showing metal detector survey areas, traverses & find locations

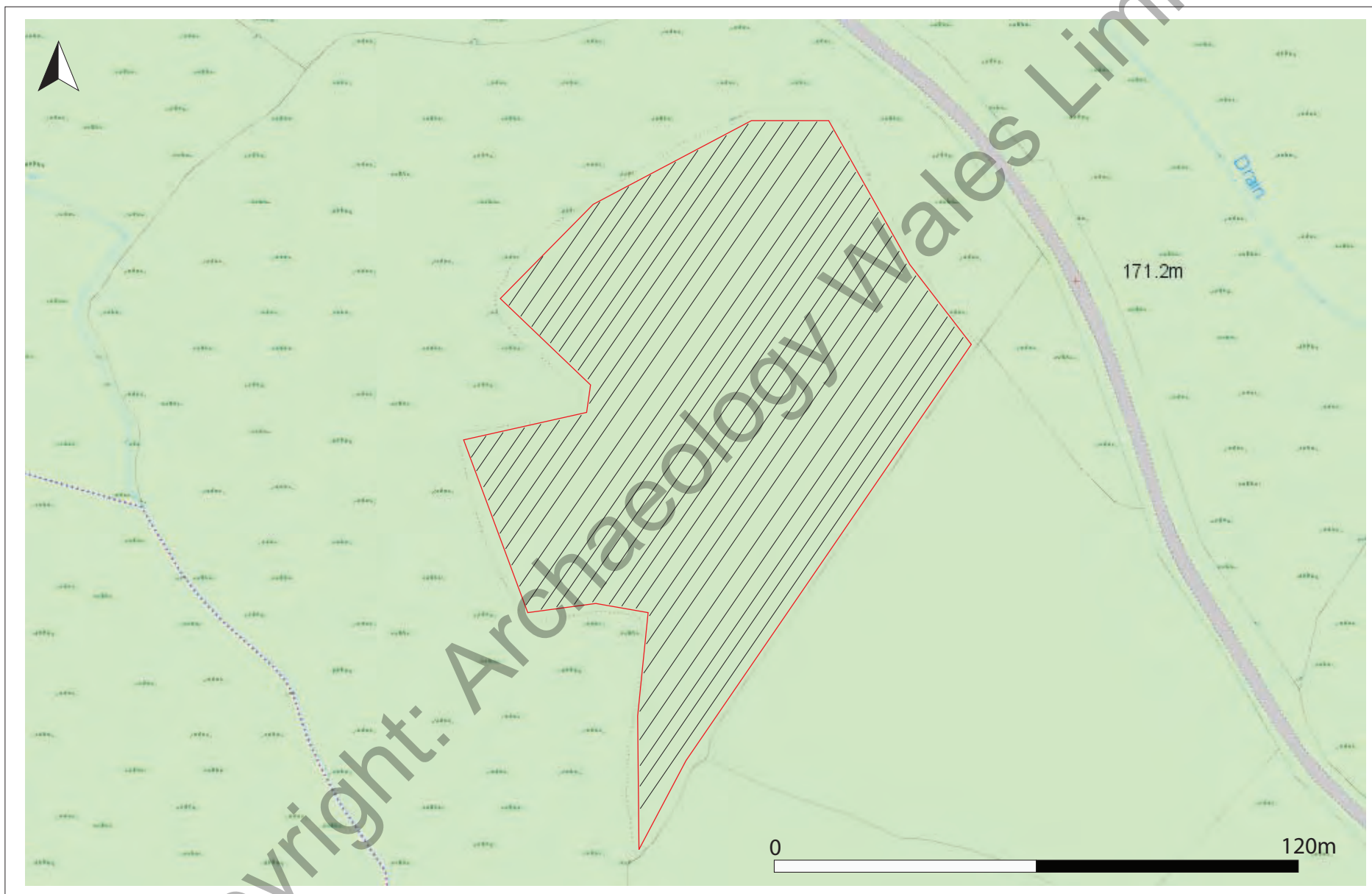


Fig 6 : Plan showing metal detector survey areas, traverses & find locations

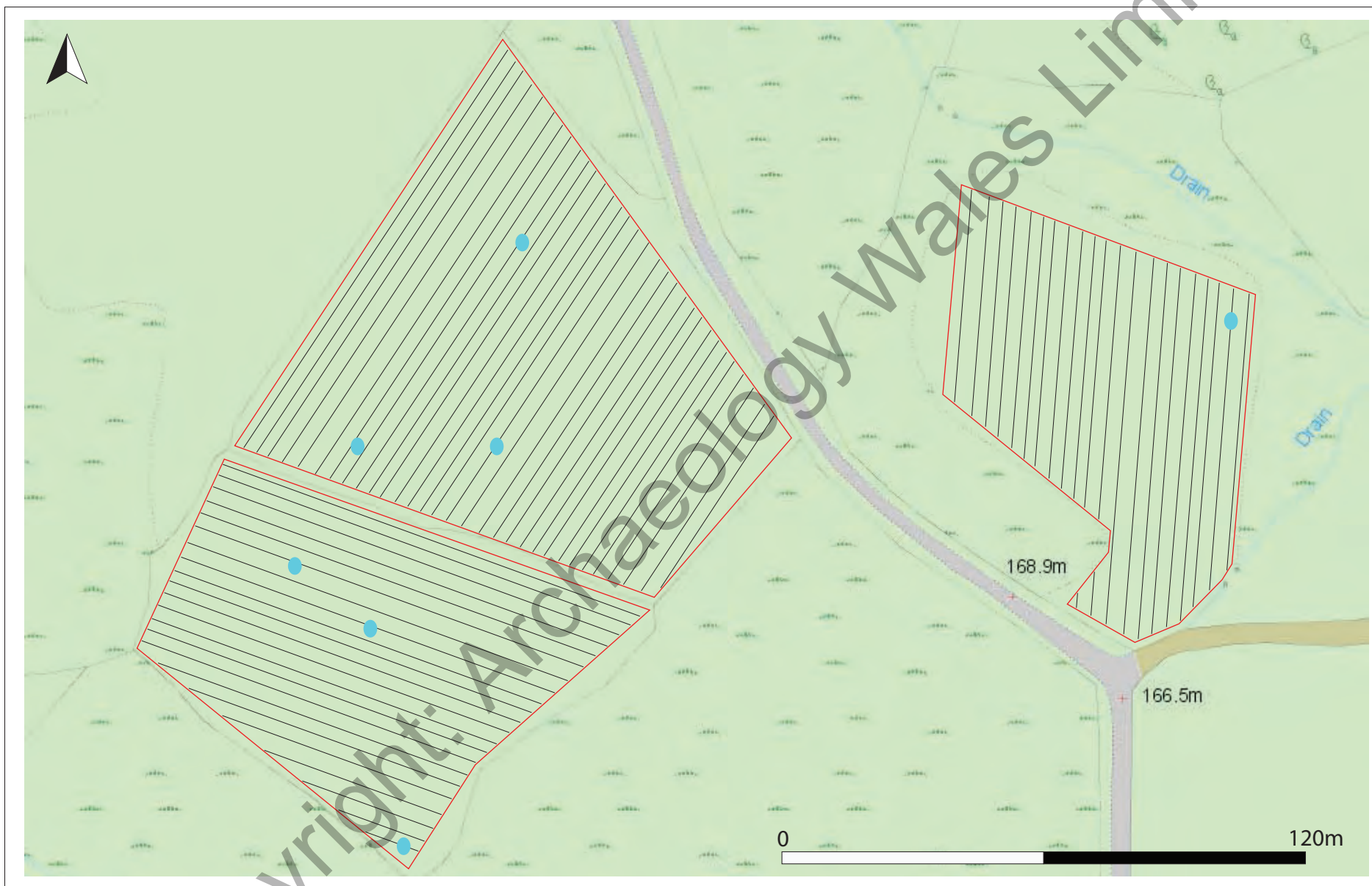


Fig 7 : Plan showing metal detector survey areas, traverses & find locations

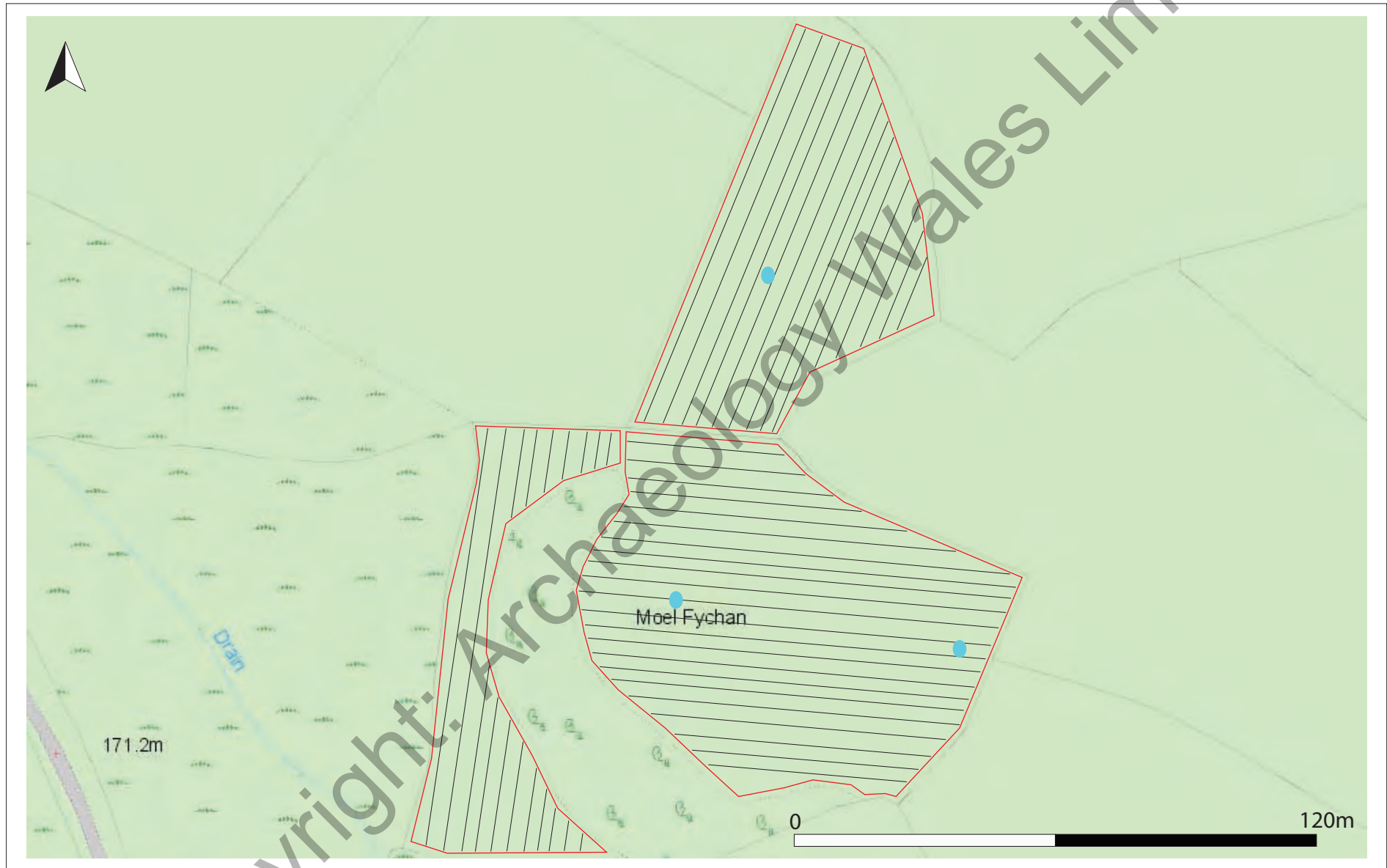


Fig 8 : Plan showing metal detector survey areas, traverses & find locations

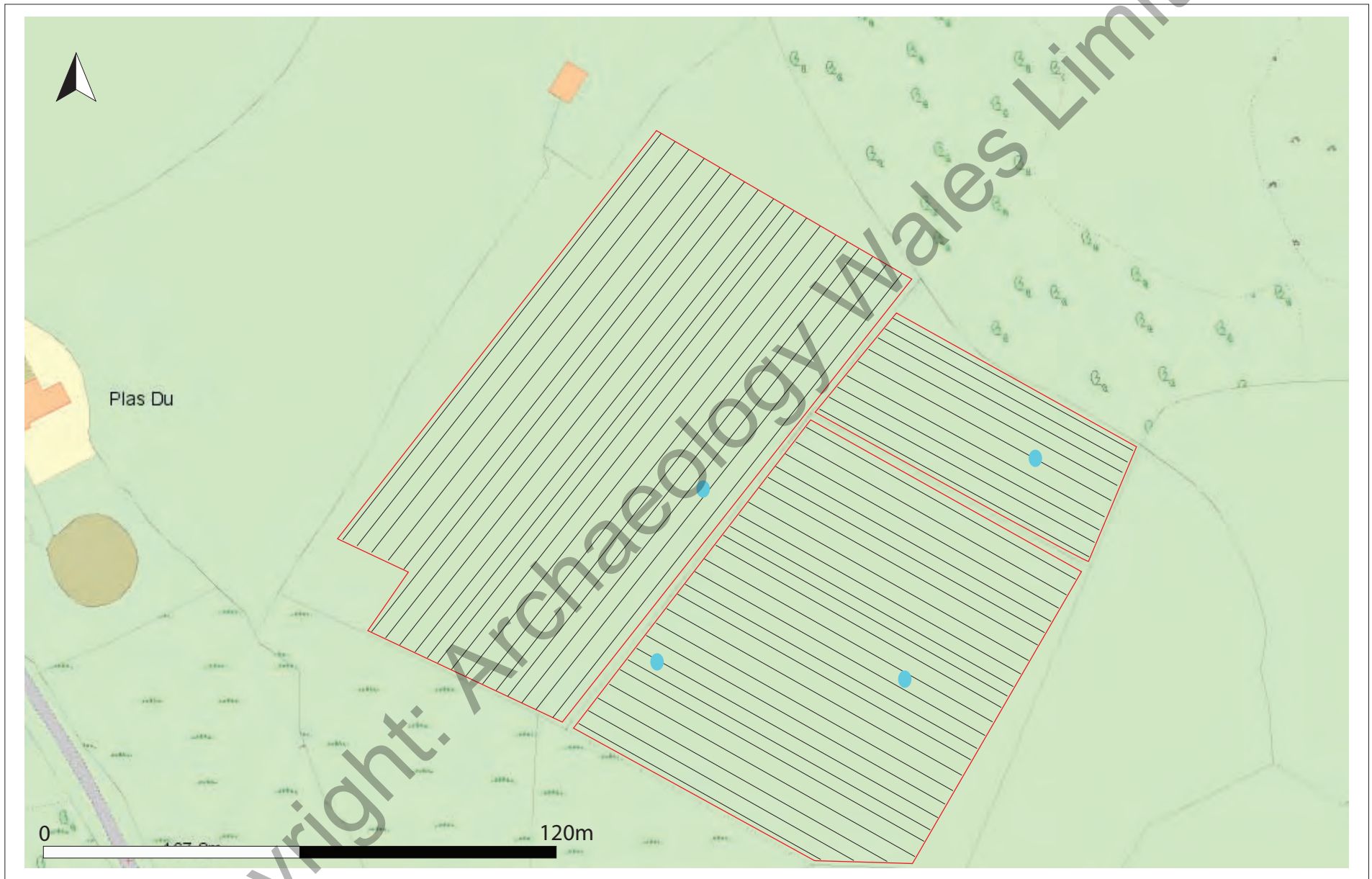


Fig 9 : Plan showing metal detector survey areas, traverses & find locations

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APPENDIX II: Plates

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Plate 1: View north towards hillock feature from road between Y Foel and Mynydd Cennin



Plate 2: View south from top of hillock feature beneath Y Foel across 'pass' and towards Mynydd Cennin



Plate 3: View south east from hillock at foot of Y Foel towards Terfynau Farm



Plate 4: View south from hillock at foot of Y foel showing road approaching 'pass' area



Plate 5: Charles I sixpence (1625-49) recovered from Bwlch Derwin battlefield area

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APPENDIX III: Finds Catalogue

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Find No.	Description	Date	Easting	Northing	Depth
1	Charles I Sixpence	1625-49	246,551.14	346,168.43	0.1m
2	Fe object	Unknown	246,461.54	346,137.20	0.15m
3	Fe object	Unknown	246,489.02	346,122.50	0.15m
4	Fe object	Unknown	246,526.93	346,151.26	0.15m
5	Small Cu Alloy button	PM	246,525.44	346,106.31	0.1m
6	Small Cu Alloy button	PM	246,526.51	356,103.54	0.2m
7	Fe object	Unknown	246,517.58	346,047.06	0.3m
8	Fe object	Unknown	246,500.07	346,029.78	0.2m
9	Fe object	Unknown	246,454.39	346,016.06	0.25m
10	Fe object	Unknown	246,504.09	345,979.37	0.2m
11	Pb lump	Unknown	246,506.93	345,970.61	0.15m
12	Pewter button	Unknown	246,411.61	345,957.60	0.1m
13	Worn Cu Alloy coin	PM	246,452.50	346,240.66	0.2m
14	Worn Cu Alloy coin	PM	246,304.58	346,257.94	0.15m
15	Fe nail	Modern	246,269.55	346,205.87	0.15m
16	Pewter button	PM	246,308.60	346,213.44	0.15m
17	Pb object	Unknown	246,272.39	346,122.56	0.15m
18	Fe object	Unknown	246,260.08	346,171.31	0.25m
19	Fe horse harness frag	PM	246,247.30	346,185.28	0.2m
20	Fe object	Modern	246,459.41	346,472.68	0.15m
21	Pewter button	PM	246,434.08	346,424.64	0.12m
22	Fe object	Unknown	246,372.40	346,434.38	0.15m
23	Pb object	Unknown	246,383.11	346,470.41	0.2m
24	Small Cu Alloy obj	PM	246,449.67	346,348.34	0.1m
25	Fe object	Unknown	246,514.92	346,335.36	0.2m
26	Small Cu Alloy button	PM	246,472.39	346,421.71	0.1m

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APPENDIX IV: Archive Cover Sheet

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ARCHIVE COVER SHEET

Bryn Derwin Battlefield, Bwlch Derwin, Garndolbenmaen

Site Name:	Bwlch Derwin
Site Code:	WBS3/14/SUR
PRN:	-
NPRN:	402322
SAM:	-
Other Ref No:	-
NGR:	SH 46422 46139
Site Type:	Battlefield
Project Type:	Survey
Project Manager:	Chris E Smith
Project Dates:	Jan-March 2014
Categories Present:	Post-medieval - Modern
Location of Original Archive:	AW
Location of duplicate Archives:	-
Number of Finds Boxes:	-
Location of Finds:	-
Museum Reference:	-
Copyright:	AW
Restrictions to access:	None

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