An aerial perspective of a reconstructed Roman fort. The fort features a prominent stone wall with crenellations and a central gatehouse. Inside the walls, several long, rectangular buildings with red-tiled roofs are arranged in a grid. Outside the walls, there are more buildings, including a large one with a circular structure in front of it. The fort is situated in a green, hilly landscape with a winding path or road.

CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

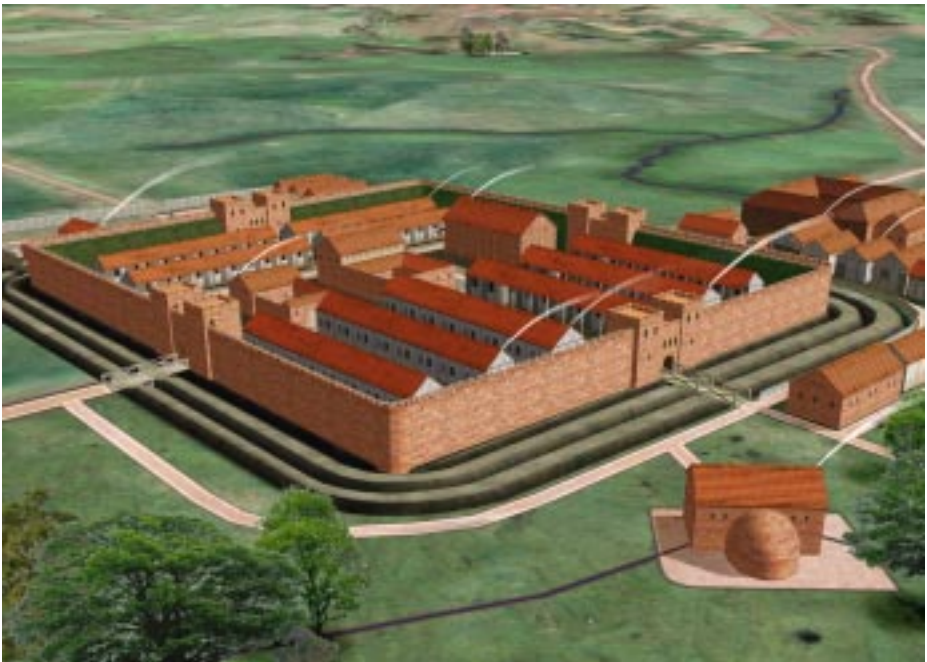
newsletter

Autumn 2007

Virtual Roman Caersws

One of the new and exciting projects we have been working on in the first half of 2007 has been a virtual reality (VR) model of the Roman fort at Caersws in the Severn valley. A computer animation of the model will form the centrepiece of a forthcoming exhibition on 'The Romans in mid Wales' being prepared in conjunction with Powysland Museum, Welshpool for this autumn with funding from CyMAL (Museums, Archives and Libraries Wales), Cadw, and the Welsh Assembly Government. The project ties in with recent work being funded by Cadw on the assessment of Roman military sites in Wales and will give a flight through history, telling the story of the Iron Age communities that lived in the area before the Roman conquest, the conquest period itself, and finally the establishment of Roman rule following the conquest.

The Roman fort just to the north of the village (see the aerial photograph on page 5) is in fact the later of two forts at Caersws. A fort which lay to the east of the village belonged to the 30-year period of the Roman conquest of Wales, between AD 47–78. The later fort, shown below in an image captured from the virtual reality model, dates to the period following the conquest. At first, like the earlier fort, its defences were of earth and timber, with timber barrack blocks, administrative headquarters and commandant's house. Later, the defences and some of the internal buildings were rebuilt

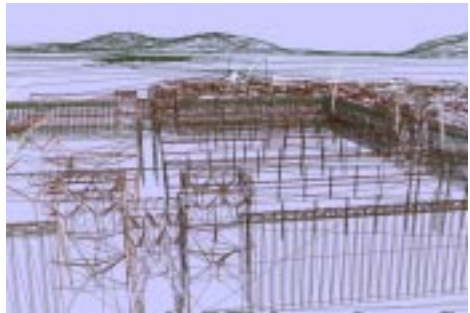


The Roman fort at Caersws, with the bath-house in the right foreground.



in stone and a bath-house was set up just outside the fort. A small civilian settlement of shopkeepers and artisans sprang up between the fort and the river Severn.

The virtual reality computer animation of Caersws is based upon discoveries that have been made in and around the present-day village over the last century, set within a topographically-accurate model of the Severn valley around Caersws.



Top VR model of Caersws Roman fort and associated civilian settlement.

Middle Part of the wire-frame which forms the skeleton of the VR model.

Bottom Steve Smith who built and helped to design the VR model.



Information about Roman Caersws is gradually being built up as more and more information becomes available from excavations in advance of development as well as from chance finds and observations.

The aerial photo on the opposite page shows Caersws as it is today, with the outline of the Roman fort in the foreground. The sketch below shows some of the evidence that has been found about the annex to the fort, the Roman bath-house, and the civilian settlement with shops, houses and workshops which we now know once existed between the fort and the river. Much more still remains to be found out about the fort and settlement.



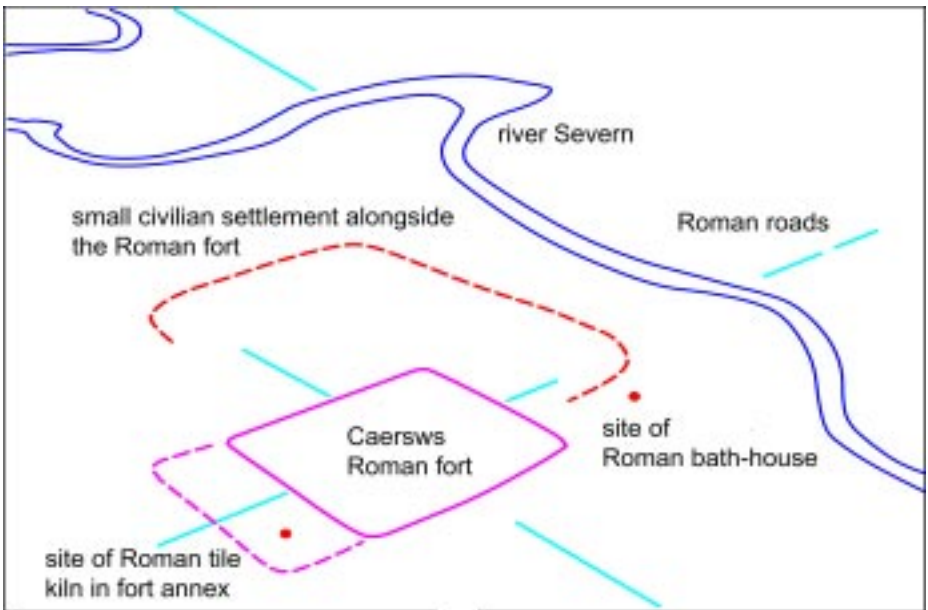
See our next *Newsletter* for the next instalment of the Caersws story covered in the virtual reality model. With Steve Smith's help this will take us back in time to the Iron Age communities living in area of the upper Severn valley just before the Roman conquest as well as the evidence for a second, earlier fort at Caersws, belonging to the actual period of the Roman conquest.



Top Roman tile kiln at Caersws excavated in advance of road widening.
Bottom Watching pipe-laying in Caersws. **Right** Gold coin of the emperor Vespasian found at Caersws.

info

Steve Smith: email gostudio@btinternet.com
Caersws Basin Historic Landscape: www.cpat.org.uk/projects/longer/histland/histland.htm
Roman Wales: *Roman and Early Medieval Wales*, by C. J. Arnold and J. L. Davies



Mold Gold!

This is the first of an occasional series in which we'll be looking at some of the interesting archaeological finds from the Clwyd-Powys area, seeing what they can tell us about the past. So where better to start than the famous Mold Gold Cape, voted the sixth best UK treasure in a recent television poll.

The cape was made towards the end of the Early Bronze Age, in about 1800 BC. It was found with a skeleton said to be that of a young man, but to make the point that women played an equally important role in Bronze Age society it is shown here around the shoulders of a young woman. The cape is decorated with embossed patterns like strings of beads, and was actually found with what must have been a string of about three hundred amber beads.

The seamless cape is made from over half a kilo of gold, originally stitched to a lining of cloth or leather. It was clearly a symbol of great status and wealth. It would have been difficult to move the arms and the wearer must have been the almost immobile focus of solemn ceremony.



The cape, the original of which is now in the British Museum, is clearly of the greatest importance. Sadly the burial mound from which it came was destroyed when the cape was discovered, as cartloads of pebbles were removed for road building. The original name of the site was Bryn-yr-ellyllon ('hill of the ghosts'), perhaps preserving an ancient folk memory.

The so-called 'Golden Barrow' at Mold was in fact one of a cluster of about a dozen Bronze Age burial mounds, standing stones and other sites in the central part of the Alyn valley near Mold, some of which have also now been destroyed.

One of the burial mounds, at Llong, just over a kilometre further south, provides an interesting comparison with Bryn-yr-ellyllon. Excavations here in the 1950s revealed a burial as well as an elaborate jet necklace consisting of almost a thousand jet beads—nearly as many as the embossed gold 'beads' on the Mold Cape. The jet itself is likely to have come from sources in Yorkshire.





*The Bronze Age stone circle in Penbedw Park.
The site lies on private land and is not open to the general public*

The Mold Cape is unique, and undoubtedly one of the most spectacular and opulent ceremonial garments known from prehistoric Europe.

The stone circle and round barrow in Penbedw Park in the Alyn valley, about 8 kilometres to the north-west of Mold, are two of the more prominent Bronze Age ceremonial monuments in the vicinity of Mold.

The cluster of Bronze Age sites closer to the ‘Gold Barrow’ at Bryn-yr-ellyllon includes several unexcavated cropmark ring-ditches discovered by aerial survey. One of these ring-ditches, at Pentrehobin, forms a circular enclosure over 40 metres in diameter which may have been used for burial or for ceremonial activity.

Sites like the Penbedw stone circle and the cropmark sites and surviving burial mounds in the Mold area are now the only tangible local link we still have with the once all-powerful political or religious community which lived along the banks of the river Alun near Mold.

The preservation of these sites within the local landscape is a matter of high priority.

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Prehistoric burial and ritual sites: www.cpat.org.uk/projects/longer/pfr/pfr.htm

Photographs © CPAT, The British Museum, David Monniaux, CCW

National Archaeology Week 07

CPAT organised and took part in several events during National Archaeology Week in July 2007, including a hands-on surveying course for senior students from local high schools as part of their work experience, and various activities for younger children attending the National Trust's Erddig Park on the weekend of 14–15 July.

Surveying the Iron Age in Guilsfield

Every year we try to take a number of work-experience students from schools in the Clwyd-Powys area. This year we decided to try something slightly different, giving an opportunity for three lucky students to help members of CPAT staff in surveying a recently discovered Iron Age enclosure outside the village of Guilsfield near Welshpool. The students tried their hand at topographical and geophysical survey, as well as basic but essential skills like map reading, site photography and archaeological drawing. At the end of the week all those involved helped to produce a detailed report on their week's work, and this can be seen on the National Archaeology Week pages on our website (details given below). The students learnt quite a lot about archaeology and also enjoyed themselves at the same time. We asked them how they got on and they told us 'it was really good fun' . . . 'it was quite fun working in the rain actually!' . . . 'I wasn't expecting to have so much time to have a go at surveying' . . . 'the week has flown by'. The Trust also managed to get some useful work done for our current project on defended enclosure sites in the Clwyd-Powys area.





Normans invade Erddig!

On the weekend of the 14-15th July, hundreds of people stormed the gates at Erddig Park, the National Trust property just outside Wrexham, for a day of ‘Archaeological Antics’. CPAT were there on the Saturday with lots of crafty activities for children to take part in, including colouring and making Saxon and Roman brooches, making Iron Age roundhouses and, the big winner, making Norman helmets!

Luckily the rain of the previous days held off and glorious sunshine was enjoyed all day. With over 200 visitors to our stand, this has been the most successful National Archaeology Week event we have been part of so far.

The National Trust events organisers had arranged other activities for the weekend. Other activities taking place over the weekend included a guided walk and demonstrations of early medieval life, including cookery, weaving and fighting, by the Cwmwd-lâl re-enactment group.

Also present were the newly-formed Wrexham & District branch of the Young Archaeologists’ Club, with more demonstrations and hands-on activities. The Young Archaeologists’ Club is available for young people aged between 8 and 16.

info

CPAT National Archaeology Week 2007:
www.cpat.org.uk/outreach/nad/navaintro.htm
Young Archaeologists Club:
www.britarch.ac.uk/yac/index.html

The Clywedog Valley historic landscape

The Clywedog Valley, west of Llanidloes in central Wales is one of the landscapes of historical importance in Wales highlighted in the two *Historic Landscape Registers* published by Cadw, the Countryside Council for Wales, and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS).

This distinctive landscape preserves a unique story of the impact of human activity over at least the last five thousand years, including Bronze Age burial and funerary monuments, Iron Age hillforts, a Roman fortlet and road possibly associated with early mining activity, medieval settlement and agriculture, the rise and fall of the woollen industry between the Middle Ages and the mid nineteenth century, and extensive lead mining between the eighteenth and early twentieth centuries. Finally, during the later twentieth century, the extensive Hafren



Three distinct periods of activity can be picked out in this aerial photo of the Clywedog dam. Firstly, the hill in the foreground is crowned by the Iron Age hillfort of Pen-y-gaer. Secondly, to the right, below the dam, are the remains of the lead and barytes mine at Bryntail, now in the care of Cadw. Working here began in the early nineteenth century and finally came to an end in the 1930s. Lastly, the Clywedog reservoir itself, built in the 1960s to control the supply of water to places along the river Severn. The reservoir submerged the traces of two other periods of activity—a Bronze Age burial mound and standing stone, as well as a number of cottages and farms of medieval origin.



Forest and the Clywedog reservoir were superimposed upon this palimpsest of earlier activity.

Taking the *Historic Landscape Registers* as a starting point we have recently been looking in greater detail at the various historic elements which make the Clywedog Valley distinctive, as well as defining a number of character areas. The results of this study

together with aerial and ground-level photographs and a list of sources of information can be found on our website (see details below).

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Clywedog Valley Historic Landscape: www.cpat.org.uk/projects/longer/histland/histland.htm
Historic Landscapes Registers: www.cadw.wales.gov.uk



Opposite: Clywedog dam and reservoir, built in the 1960s with some of the remains of the Bryntail lead and barytes mine visible in the foreground. **Above:** part of the hamlet of Staylitttle, at the head of the Clywedog valley which sprang up on the drovers' road and subsequent turnpike road between Llanidloes and Machynlleth. In the Middle Ages the area formed part of an area of upland grazing belonging to the Cistercian abbey at Strata Marcella near Welshpool. In the middle distance is part of the Hafren Forest where planting started in the late 1930s, and forestry village of Llwyn-y-gog, a rural housing innovation of the late 1940s and early 1950s.

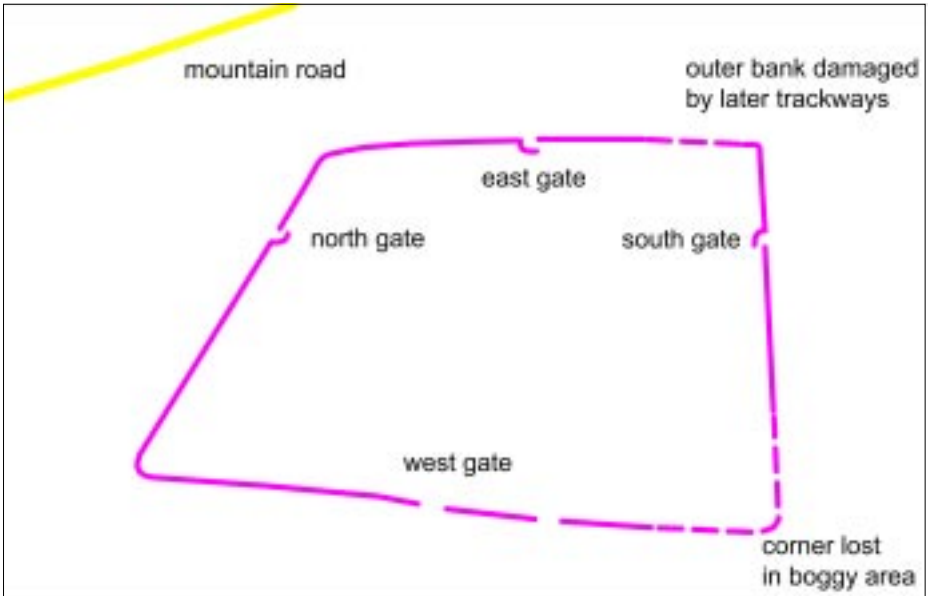
'Over the heather the wet wind blows' . . .

Tramping with damp feet across a bog to visit the Roman marching camp at Esgair Perfedd on a cold wet day in August 2007 made one reflect whether the Roman soldiers who trudged their way to the summit of Elenydd in the first century AD also wondered what on earth they were doing here. The conditions certainly brought to mind the opening lyrics to W. H. Auden's *Roman Wall Blues* about an imaginary soldier guarding Hadrian's Wall: 'Over the heather the wet wind blows / I've lice in my tunic and a cold in my nose'.

We're lucky that a number of remarkably well-preserved temporary camps of this kind survive in Wales, in use by the Roman army for a matter of only a few days or weeks during the conquest period, in the second half of the first century AD. The Esgair Perfedd camp covers about 6 hectares and would have housed 2000–4000 soldiers. Excitingly, it forms one of a chain of similar camps which trace the course of a particular campaign against the Iron Age tribes of mid Wales. The camp was enclosed by a low earth bank with distinctive



The low earth bank at the north-west corner of the Esgair Perfedd marching camp in the wet and cold of mid August 2007! The mountain road between Rhayader and Aberystwyth is visible in the distance.



Aerial photo of the Esgair Perfedd Roman marching camp above with sketch plot below.

rounded corners and inward-curving banks at at least three of the four entrances. Each soldier would have carried two wooden stakes used to form a palisade along the top of the bank. The soldiers slept in leather tents called a *papilio* ('butterfly'), no doubt because they emerged from a roll like a butterfly from a chrysalis.

Whether the Roman soldiers questioned what they were doing at the top of this Welsh mountain is something that can't be answered. We can perhaps be more confident that like us they were eager to keep their feet warm and dry: one of a remarkable series of writing tablets from the Roman fort at Vindolanda on Hadrian's Wall preserves a message—no doubt from a wife or mother—saying 'I have sent you . . . pairs of socks, two pairs of sandals and two pairs of underpants'!

How to get there:

The Esgair Perfedd Roman marching camp lies just off the mountain road between Rhayader and Aberystwyth, about 5 kilometres west of Rhayader, at SN 923 699. The camp lies about 500 metres over a ford across the stream, past a sheepfold and along the trackway uphill.



The visit to Esgair Perfedd also took in the Maen -serth standing stone. It was one of a number of walks during 2007 to sites of archaeological interest organised on behalf of the Elan Valley Trust and the Cambrian Mountain Society.

info

Elan Valley Trust: www.elanvalley.org.uk/
Elan Valley Historic Landscape: www.cpat.org.uk/projects/longer/histland/histland.htm
Roman camps: *Roman Camps in Wales and the Marches*, by Jeffrey L. Davies and Rebecca H. Jones
The Roman army: *The Roman Imperial Army*, by Graham Webster
Vindolanda tablets: <http://vindolanda.csad.ox.ac.uk>

Visit our website at www.cpat.org.uk for more information about CPAT and its work.

CPAT is grateful to the following organisations who have helped to fund various of the projects described in the Newsletter.

