



**YMDDIRIEDOLAETH ARCHAEOLEGOL CLWYD-POWYS  
CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST**

**Dating Offa's Dyke**

May 2014

*Due to confusion in some of the media coverage earlier this year, we have issued this statement to clarify the results obtained from excavations on Offa's Dyke in 2013.*

The great linear earthwork known as Offa's Dyke is one of Britain's most remarkable ancient monuments. In places still acting as the border between England and Wales, the massive bank and ditch survives today as a potent symbol of the ancient origins of both nations. The Dyke consists of an earthen bank which can be up to 8 metres high, associated with a ditch to the west, and typically occupies an imposing position in the landscape with commanding views into Wales.

The surviving 129 kilometres of earthwork make Offa's Dyke Britain's longest ancient monument and it is also the most impressive monument of its kind anywhere in Europe.

Although the Dyke has attracted the attention of archaeologists for almost one hundred years, and numerous sections have been excavated across it, none has produced any evidence to confirm that it was erected by Offa's Mercia as a boundary against a belligerent 8th-century kingdom of Powys.

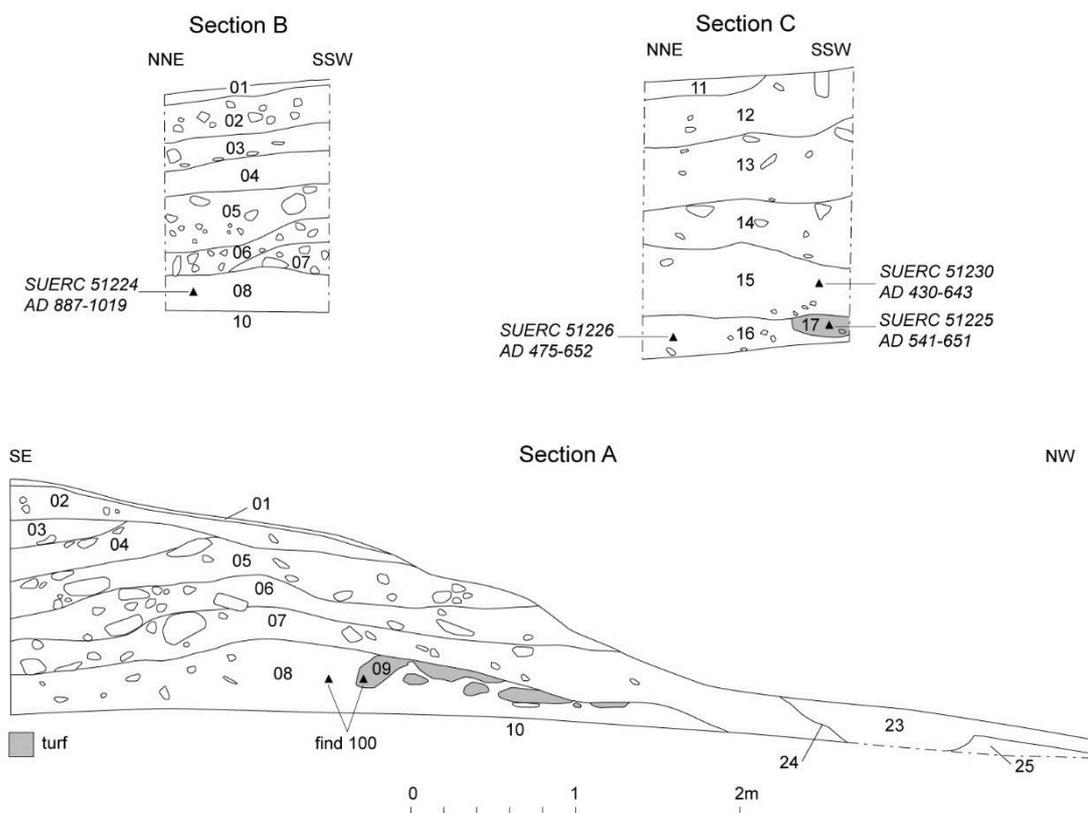
Excavations undertaken by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, on behalf of Cadw, in September 2013 on a damaged section of the monument near Chirk provided the first opportunity to use radiocarbon dating in connection with the Dyke. Samples of redeposited turf were found in the lowest layers of the bank's construction which, together with bulk soil samples from similar layers along a 40m-long section, produced small quantities of charcoal – enough for several radiocarbon dates.



The radiocarbon laboratory at SUERC, in East Kilbride, came back with an interesting set of results in April 2014, which calibrate as follows (at 95% confidence):

- AD 887-1019 (SUERC-51224)
- AD 541-651 (SUERC-51225)
- AD 475-652 (SUERC-51226)
- AD 430-643 (SUERC-51230)

Crucially, however, these results do not provide a date for the actual construction of the Dyke. All of the dated material has been derived from material which had been redeposited at the base of the bank during its construction. They therefore provide what is known as a *terminus post quem* – a date after which the bank was built.



Two points of immediate interest arise from the results. The first is that the dates demonstrate that the bank was built after AD 430 at the very earliest, and is therefore clearly post-Roman in date. The second is that the latest date, AD 887-1019, is over 100 years after the reign of Offa, between AD 757 and AD 796. The sample from which the date was produced was from a secure and apparently undisturbed deposit at the base of the bank and, taken at face value, suggests that this section of the Dyke may not have been built by Offa at all, but by one of his successors.

These are still early days and more research and analysis remains to be done. As is sometimes the case with archaeology the findings are not always what might have been predicted and the question of the date of construction remains unanswered – for the time being at least.