

An aerial photograph of a landscape. In the foreground, there is a large, calm lake with a blueish-grey hue. The lake is surrounded by a patchwork of green fields, some of which are divided by stone walls. In the middle ground, there are several large, dark green forested areas. The background features rolling hills and mountains under a clear sky. The overall scene is a mix of natural beauty and agricultural land.

CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

newsletter

Spring 2007

Intro

Our Spring 2007 Newsletter looks at some of the work carried out by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust over the last year or so. In many cases you can find more information on the items on our website (www.cpat.org.uk). More recent stories may appear in our online newsletter (www.cpat.org.uk/news/news.htm).

The Trust is a voluntary organisation employing a small professional staff involved with many aspects of the heritage in mid and north-east Wales. We work closely with many other organisations, including Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Powys and Wrexham county councils, Brecon Beacons National Park, Cadw and other departments of the Welsh Assembly Government, the Royal Commission on the Ancient Historical Monuments of Wales, the Countryside Council for Wales, the National Museum of Wales, as well as many local societies interested in the archaeology of our area.

The Trust maintains a record of archaeological information for the Clwyd-Powys area (the Historic Environment Record), provides information and advice on the management and conservation of archaeological sites, and carries out survey and excavation projects.



Photo: CPAT 1766-0050

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Thomas Telford's Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, Wrexham, forms part of the Vale of Llangollen and Eglwyseg historic landscape. For further information visit, www.cpat.org.uk/projects/longer/histland/histland.htm

Dyffryn Lane henge dig 2006

During the long hot summer in 2006 the Trust was busy on a joint project with staff and students from the Department of Archaeology of the University of Bradford, looking at parts of a fascinating complex of prehistoric ritual monuments at Dyffryn Lane, close to the river Severn near Berriew, south of Welshpool.

At this point the Severn winds slowly down a broad valley, confined by quite steep slopes on either side and dominated by the isolated massif of the Breiddins to the north. The area seems to have held considerable attraction to the people of the later Stone Age and the Bronze Age. Great numbers of monuments were built and used here over a period longer than has passed since the Romans left Britain. In the four to five thousand years since their construction, these once-impressive earth, timber and stone monuments have melted back into the countryside, effectively forgotten until their rediscovery by aerial reconnaissance.

The gradual revelation of a remarkable wealth of prehistoric ceremonial and funerary monuments along the Severn valley south of Welshpool is of special interest, partly because of the relative rarity of these kinds of monuments but also because of what their presence here says about the spiritual or social significance of this area to prehistoric people.

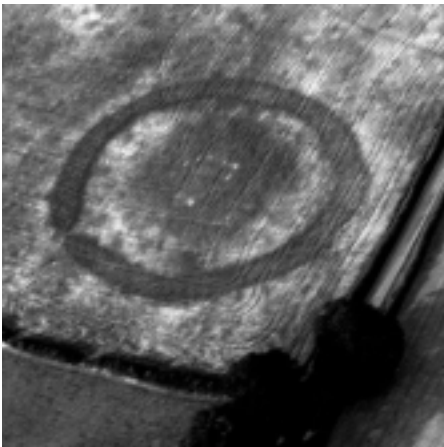


Photo: CPAT 1766-0050; 86-C-0119

Above Cropmark aerial photograph of the Dyffryn Lane henge monument. The ditch appears as a dark circle, with an entrance to the left.



Right The Maen Beuno standing stone stands in the road verge along Dyffryn Lane, near the henge monument.



Photo: © Chris Musson

Excavations in progress in July 2006 on the site of the Dyffryn Lane henge monument. The henge ditch shows as a dark circular grass-mark in the field and can just be seen as a darker soil-mark inside the excavated area

To either side of Dyffryn Lane lies a complex of monuments that would have been a dominant part of the Neolithic and Bronze Age landscape and of the lives of the people living here for many hundreds of years. The oldest sites are a Neolithic long barrow and a nearby enclosure, both of which are known to have been built five and a half thousand years ago, in about 3500 BC. Later, the complex appears to be focused on a type of enclosure known as a henge monument (named after Stonehenge) consisting of a large circular ditch with a single entrance and an outer bank of which only a handful of similar examples are known elsewhere in Wales. A cluster of prehistoric burial mounds surround the henge.

The Dyffryn Lane henge appears to have had a particularly long and complex history. Parts of a stone circle were revealed in the centre of the site in the middle of the nineteenth century when a number of trenches were dug by a local antiquarian, D. Phillips Lewis, who had been told of the farmer's intention of removing stones 'which had so often interfered with the free passage of his plough'. An earthen mound had also, unusually, been built in the centre of the site. In Phillips Lewis's day the mound was said to have been 'eight or nine feet above the field' but has since then been lowered by ploughing to

no more than a quarter of this height. The standing stone known as Maen Beuno which has long lain in the nearby road verge seems likely to have formed part of the henge complex.

The Dyffryn Lane project aimed to unravel the order in which the various elements at the site had been built, to recover dating evidence and evidence about the environment in which the monuments were built, and to evaluate the effects of continued ploughing. The project, which included a programme of trial excavation, topographical survey and geophysical survey, was carried out in under the direction of Dr Alex Gibson of the Department of Archaeological Sciences in the University of Bradford with grant aid from Cadw. The project was also designed to form part of the undergraduate course for Alex's archaeological students, by providing practical experience of a variety of excavation and survey techniques.

The henge monument was found to consist of a number of distinct elements including the central mound about 20 metres in diameter, a stone circle about 10 metres in diameter,



Photo: CPAT 2159-096

Archaeology students from the University of Bradford and Trust staff at work in the middle of the henge monument, uncovering some of the stones of the original stone circle.



Photos: CPAT 2155-66, -70

the low outer bank and 2-metre deep henge ditch, as well a central pit, buried turf-lines below the central mound, and a series of earlier pits and other features.

An important discovery was made as the students cleaned back over the outer bank, revealing a concentration of sherds of Neolithic coarse pottery of a type known as Peterborough Ware, which came from a shallow pit. The pit also contained charred organic material including hazelnut shells, as did two other small pits nearby. Other finds from the site include some fine pieces of worked flint, including a Bronze Age barbed-and-tanged arrowhead found in the central mound.

Work has already begun on analysing the various finds and samples recovered during excavation, the results of which will be published in due course. A preliminary series of radiocarbon dates obtained from the Beta Analytic Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory in Miami, Florida, suggest that the henge monument was built after about 2800-2500 BC and that the central mound was built after about 2600-2300 BC.

Above Sealed deposits at the site were carefully sieved to recover charcoal and other carbonised plant remains to provide samples for radiocarbon dating and to provide information about the trees and plants growing in the area in prehistory.

Below Sherds of Neolithic pottery known as Peterborough Ware found at the henge monument.

For further information about the Dyffryn Lane henge dig visit www.cpat.org.uk/news/news.htm

Down the mines . . .

One of the walks by the Trust to places archaeological interest in 2006 looked at the Cwm Elan Lead Mine, west of the Garreg-ddu Reservoir, organised for members of the Cambrian Mountain Society and the Elan Valley Trust.

Lead mining first began here in the 1790s following the accidental discovery of lead ore by workmen digging ditches. Most of the visible remains, however, belong to the 1870s when new investments were made by the mining company. Mining came to an abrupt end when the Elan Valley was purchased in the 1890s for the Birmingham Corporation reservoir scheme, in order to preserve the purity of the water supply.

For further information on metal mines in the Clwyd-Powys area visit www.cpat.org.uk/projects/longer/mines/mines.htm



Above One of the waterwheel pits at the Cwm Elan lead mine, during earlier survey work by the Trust.

Below Looking out across the former Cwm Elan mine sett during one of the historic landscape walks organised during 2006.



National Archaeology Week 2006



Great fun was had by all on Saturday 15 July at the Powysland Museum in Welshpool. Children of all ages enjoyed the various activities, which included dressing up in Roman outfits, excavating and identifying finds from sand boxes, reconstructing Roman pots and tiles, writing on Roman wax tablets and creating their own 'cropmarks' using seed trays, gravel and cress!

As well as the Powysland Museum's permanent displays and temporary exhibition, a range of Roman finds were brought out from behind glass for handling by anyone who wanted a closer look. These included pottery, animal bone, glass objects, brooches and coins.

On the following Monday staff of the Trust and Powysland Museum visited Llanidloes Primary School. In a combination of assemblies and group activities we worked with all children from Years 3 to 6. The day was a great success and something



Photo: CPAT2161-013, -018, -020

Left YAC member
Christopher Cole (10).
Below Andre Peate, an
avid Time Team fan.

which we would hope to do in years to come, hopefully moving around different schools.

Young Archaeologists' Club

Kids aged between 8 and 16 can join the Young Archaeologists' Club (YAC) . There are several branches in Wales, but if there are none near you, you can still join the club and receive the magazine four times a year and enter competitions including the annual 'Young Archaeologist of the Year Award'.

For further information about the Young Archaeologists Club visit www.britarch.ac.uk/yac/index.html



Brothers Andre (5) and Louis (4) Peate dressed as Roman soldiers.

Historic ports and harbours

The north-east Wales coast and the Dee Estuary in Denbighshire and Flintshire has a rich legacy of small ports and harbours which are important to our understanding of the history of transport, trade and industry in this area from Roman and medieval times up to the coming of the railways in the second half of the nineteenth century.

With support from Cadw the Trust has been carrying out a detailed assessment of the potentially significant upstanding or buried remains associated with a number of the more important historic sites—such as Rhuddlan, Foryd, Talacre, Llannerch-y-môr, Greenfield, Bagillt, Flint, Connah’s Quay, Queensferry and Sandycroft—to provide a baseline from which to develop future management strategies.

It is likely that the Roman coastal settlements at Prestatyn and Flint were associated with active trade along the coast to Chester, though direct evidence of this still awaits discovery. During the medieval period the medieval towns at Flint and Rhuddlan both had active trading ports.

By the middle of the fifteenth century silting in the Dee estuary was already becoming a problem. By the sixteenth century recommendations were being made for the digging



Above Dockside facilities at Connah’s Quay, Flintshire, began in the late eighteenth century in conjunction with a tramway carrying coal from the Northop collieries. Passenger services to Llandudno and Chester developed in the 1860s.



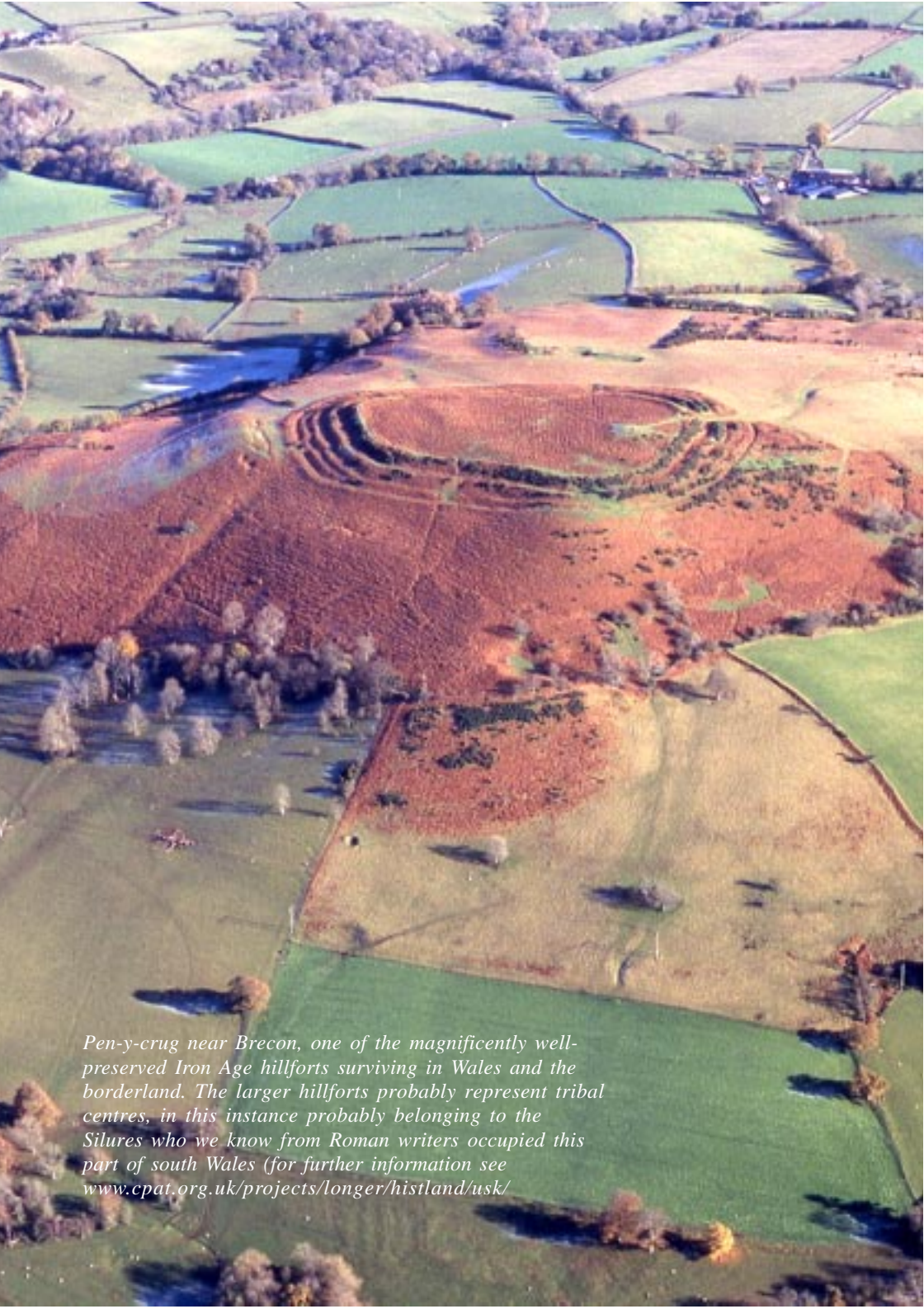
Llanerch-y-môr Quay, Denbighshire was set up to serve the nearby leadworks. The Duke of Lancaster, a former Isle of Man ferry, now lies abandoned at the mouth of the inlet.

of a navigable channel along the Flintshire shore to provide deep water navigation to Chester. It was not until 1737, however, that the New Cut was eventually dug which led to a revival in coastal traffic along the Dee. It was also directly responsible for the birth of Saltney, Sandycroft, Queensferry and Connah's Quay, which handled the export of coal and minerals to ports elsewhere in Britain and Europe.

The development of the railway network during the second half of the nineteenth century gave a spur to further expansion for most of the ports along the coast of north Wales, especially at Connah's Quay and Mostyn. Rhuddlan began to decline in importance as a port, however, due to silting of the river Clwyd. This led to the emergence of the harbour at Foryd at the river estuary.

With the exception of Rhuddlan, the ports were at their busiest during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The subsequent decline in the local coal, lead, brick, engineering and shipbuilding industries led to the closure of all of the smaller ports. Connah's Quay remains active, but is a shadow of its former self. Only Mostyn has survived as a major port, and indeed has somewhat ironically recent expanded due to the growth in air travel! It handles the export of wings produced by the European Airbus factory at Broughton.

For further information about historic ports and harbours visit www.cpat.org.uk/projects/longer/ports/ports.htm



Pen-y-crug near Brecon, one of the magnificently well-preserved Iron Age hillforts surviving in Wales and the borderland. The larger hillforts probably represent tribal centres, in this instance probably belonging to the Silures who we know from Roman writers occupied this part of south Wales (for further information see www.cpat.org.uk/projects/longer/histland/usk/)

Iron Age villages and farms

During the last couple of years the Trust has been engaged in a project with Cadw trying to ensure the continued preservation of so-called ‘defended enclosures’ throughout the Clwyd-Powys area. These are generally types of sites that we think of as belonging to the Iron Age—the period between about 700 BC and the Roman conquest in about AD 60, though some began life in the preceding Bronze Age if not earlier, and others continued in use during the Roman period and beyond.

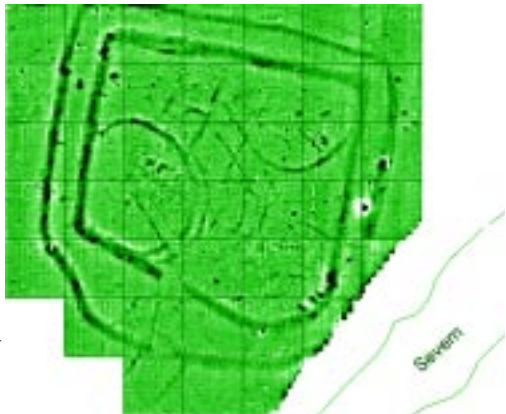
The defended enclosures were protected by banks and ditches and probably enhanced in some cases by stone revetment walls or timber palisades. At the big end of the scale are sites like Penycloddiau hillfort, shown below, enclosing many hectares and set on top of impregnable hilltops. These larger sites could accommodate many hundreds of people together with their animals and belongings, and most probably represent tribal centres. At the other end of the scale are much smaller sites, often sited on much lower-lying ground, representing farmsteads which probably only housed only single families.

The hilltop sites are often well preserved, with clearly defined defences, but are sometimes under threat from pasture improvement or afforestation. The defences of many of the smaller, low-lying sites have been ploughed down over the centuries and are often only known from cropmark aerial photography or from geophysical survey, and may vulnerable to damage by ploughing or by building development.



Above Penycloddiau hillfort on the Clwydian range in Denbighshire.

Below Geophysical survey of a recently-discovered enclosure on the banks of the river Severn at Dol-las near Berriew, now invisible on the surface of the ground. The darker marks show inner and outer enclosure ditches with entrance gaps towards the bottom of the picture. Curving ditches inside the inner ditch were probably drainage ditches which encircled roundhouses.



CPAT 2006; Photo: CPAT 84-C-0271

Throwing light on the Dark Ages

Because of the relative lack of written records, the period between the end of Roman rule in about AD 410 and the Norman Conquest in 1066 is often known as ‘The Dark Ages’. It was clearly a dynamic period, however, which witnessed the emergence of Wales as a separate identity and the creation of the early kingdoms that were to play an important role in Welsh history throughout the Middle Ages. The dearth of written records during this period means that archaeology has a particularly important role to play in fleshing out the bare bones of the historical record.

One of the best-known monuments of the period is the bank and ditch running along the boundary between England and Wales built by Offa, the Anglo-Saxon king of Mercia, before his death in AD 796. Much less well known is the pattern of much shorter dykes along the Welsh borderlands which have sometimes been thought of as belonging to the Dark Ages. Recent work by the Trust with the support of funding by Cadw has for the first time provided definite proof that this is indeed the case. Small-scale excavations at five dykes in Powys—Clawdd Mawr, Crugyn Bank, Upper Short Ditch, Giant’s Grave and the Short Ditch—have provided samples for radiocarbon dating, showing that they were constructed most likely in the period between AD 450–750, the critical period during which the early Welsh kingdoms were forged. These shorter dykes seemed to have played a significant important role in defining these early territorial divisions.



Photo: CPAT 87-MB-1179

Crugyn Bank dyke cuts across the hills south of Dolfor close to the southern boundary of the former county of Montgomeryshire. Organic samples from below the bank have been shown to date to the period AD 650–780.



Photo: CPAT 92-MB-0053

The Short Ditch, shown here under snow, running through woodland, cuts across the saddle of the hill south of Beguildy. Charred material recovered from below the bank shows that it was built in the period AD 410–590.

Welsh Historic Landscapes

Many cherished Welsh landscapes have been shaped directly or indirectly by human activity over the course of the many thousands of years. Even those parts of the



countryside that we think of as being somehow ‘natural’ often preserve a detailed record of past ways of life.

A number of landscapes of outstanding or special historic interest in Wales are described in two *Historic Landscape Registers*. Since the registers were published a few years ago we have been trying to identify in greater detail the historic elements that make up these landscapes, defining a number of distinctive ‘historic landscape character areas’ within each landscape.



One of the landscapes the Trust has been looking at in this was is what is called the *Middle Usk Valley*, between Brecon and Talybont-on-Usk. Some of the distinctive character areas in this historic landscape are shown alongside, which include (from top to bottom) the river meanders on the Usk near Scethrog, the centre of the village of early medieval origin at Llanddew, field systems of medieval origin near Llanddew, and the town of medieval origin at Brecon.



For further details on historic landscapes visit www.cpat.org.uk/projects/longer/histland/histland.htm



Front cover Llangors lake in southern Powys with the Black Mountains beyond, forms part of the Middle Usk Valley historic landscape. The lake, is a rich source of local legends and was the site of an important royal settlement of the early medieval kingdom of Brycheiniog, built on an artificial island (crannog) in the lake.