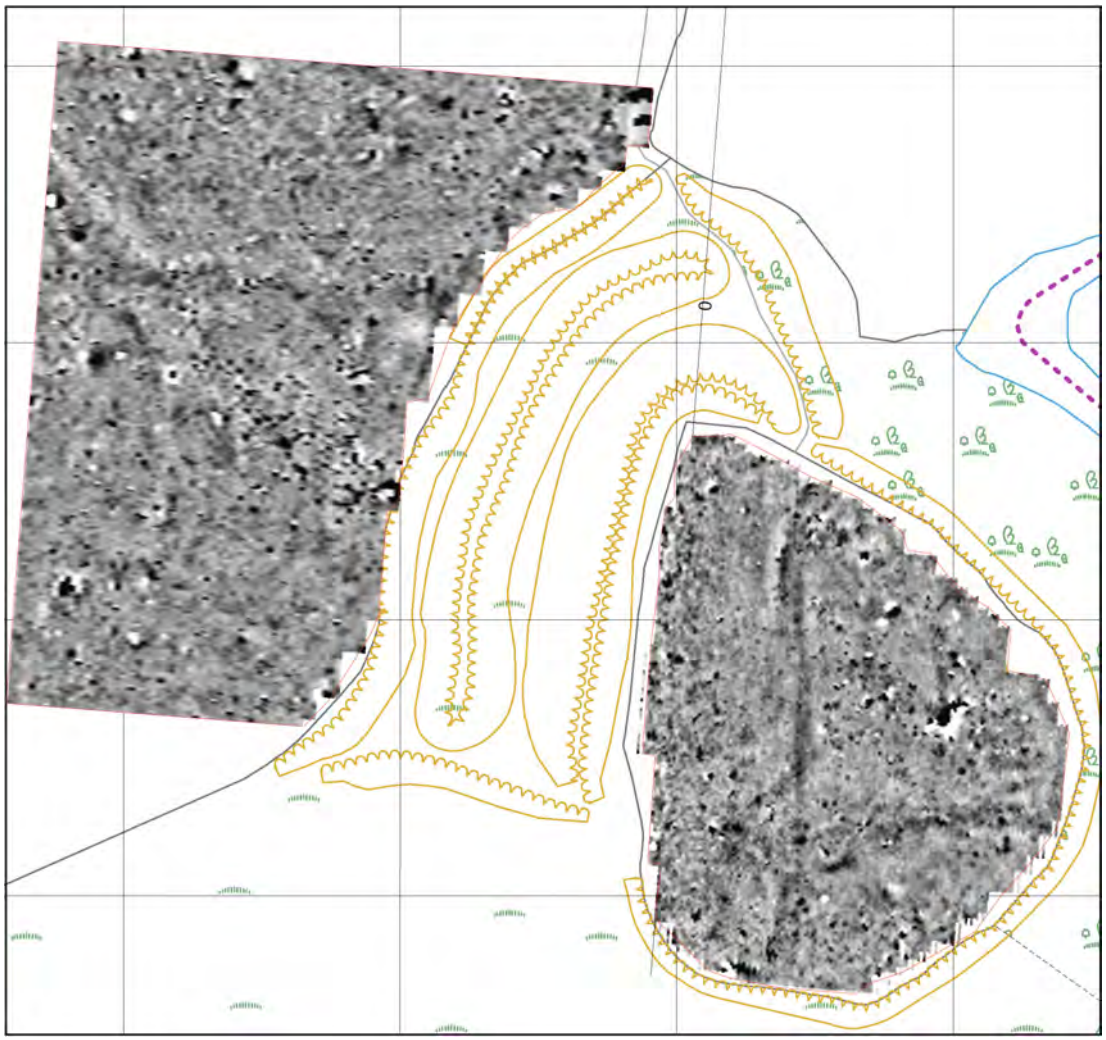
EXCAVATION AND SURVEY AT CRAIG Y DINAS

Geophysical survey and community excavation



Llŷn Ardal o Harddwch Naturiol Eithriadol
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Cadw

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

EXCAVATION AND SURVEY AT CRAIG Y DINAS

Geophysical survey and community excavation

Project No. G2608c

Report No. 1629

Prepared for: Llyn AONB and Cadw

March 2022

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Cwblhaodd Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd asesiad ar gaer bentir Craig y Dinas fel rhan o brosiect Dinas Dinlle a Llŷn - tirluniau hynafol a chwedlonol, a ariannwyd gan Gronfa Datblygu Cynaliadwy AHNE Llŷn. Mae'r safle yn un o leoliadau posib Caer Dathyl, sef cartref Math fab Mathonwy a'r enw lle y cyfeirir ato amlaf yn y Bedwaredd Gainc o'r Mabinogi. Credir mai caer bentir ydyw o Oes yr Haearn gydag ailfeddiannaeth o bosib yn y canoloesoedd cynnar, wedi ei lleoli ar ystum o Afon Llyfni. Cwblhawyd arolwg geoffisegol ar rannau mewnol y gaer ac ar ardal y tu hwnt i'r rhagfur. Darganfuwyd pump o nodweddion anghyffredin ond aneglur a chawsant eu cloddio drwy dyllu pum ffos. Yr unig nodwedd archaeolegol a ganfuwyd oedd twll postyn yn cynnwys siarcol a chlawdd o'r cyfnod ôl-ganoloesol. Daethpwyd i'r casgliad bod y rhan fwyaf o'r cerrig ar y safle wedi eu cludo ymaith a'r safle wedi'i aredig hefyd yn ystod y cyfnod o welliannau amaethyddol, gan ddinistrio unrhyw olion a fyddai wedi dangos unrhyw anheddiad.

Summary

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust carried out an assessment of Craig y Dinas promontory fort as part of the Dinas Dinlle and Llŷn - landscapes of antiquity and myth project, funded by the Llŷn AONB Sustainable Development Fund. The site is one of the possible locations of Caer Dathyl home of Math fab Mathonwy and the most regularly mentioned place-name in the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi. It is thought to be ân Iron Age promontory fort with possible early medieval reoccupation and is set in a meander of the Afon Llyfni. A geophysical survey was carried out covering the interior the fort and an area outside the rampart. Several indistinct anomalies were identified. These were investigated by five assessment excavation trenches. The only archaeology that was revealed was the base of small post-hole containing charcoal and a post-medieval bank. It was concluded that the site had probably been cleared of stone and ploughed during agricultural improvements thus removing much of the evidence of occupation.

G2608c EXCAVATION AND SURVEY AT CRAIG Y DINAS

Dinas Dinlle and Llŷn - landscapes of antiquity and myth

1. INTRODUCTION

This project has been seeking to inform ways of sustaining the cultural heritage of Llŷn AONB by focusing research on two key sites, Dinas Dinlle and Craig y Dinas (Pontllyfni). The project was carried out in partnership with the Cadw funded community excavations at Dinas Dinlle. This report contains the results from survey and assessment excavation at Craig y Dinas (SAM: CN057 PRN: 1312 NGR: SH44885200C). This aspect of the work was principally funded through the AONB Sustainable Development Fund as part of the Dinas Dinlle and Llŷn - Landscapes of Antiquity and Myth project. The Dinas Dinlle results are in a separate report; Hopewell, D. and McGuinness, N., 2022 *G2608b Dinas Dinlle: Excavation of an Eroding Hillfort*. Llŷn is an area rich in archaeological sites, and in particular hillforts and settlements of late prehistoric and Roman date. Management of these sites can be challenging, particularly where natural erosion is a major factor. By looking closely at the causes of erosion at Dinas Dinlle, and identifying means of mitigation, processes can be learnt and applied to other sites. It is a truism, however, that any management regime has to be led by a clear understanding of the significance and nature of the sites. Excavations and dating programs at both Dinas Dinlle and Craig y Dinas have enhanced our knowledge and understanding of the sites.

This information is also producing a clearer understanding of the way these sites were seen in the medieval period, and how they entered stories and narratives. They are a significant part of the cultural history of the area, and it is intended that this project will encourage recognition of their importance. Working with local volunteers, and keeping the community fully informed of the progress of the projects, has encourage greater recognition of the heritage of Llŷn, and helps to bind communities with a common understanding. Visitor experience has also been enhanced. Partnerships with other organisations including the National Trust, Cadw, RCAHMW, CHERISH, Community Councils and the AONB have been a significant aspect of the project, and will ensure future sustainability. Local volunteers and local schools have been involved with the wider project, and the results have been publicised via Gwynedd Archaeological Trust's website, social media and the CHERISH Project. Thanks are due to the owner Dafydd Hughes from Eithinog Wen for permission to carry out the works.

2. LANDSCAPES OF MYTH - THE MABINOGI

Craig y Dinas is a promontory fort in a meander of the Afon Llyfni 1.8km from the coast. This is one of the suggested locations for Caer Dathyl home of Math fab Mathonwy and the most regularly mentioned place-name in the Fourth Branch. The name no longer exists in the landscape and there are two or three suggested locations based on topography and other place-names.

3. Fieldwork

3.1 Introduction

Craig y Dinas is usually described as an Iron Age promontory fort although the defensive bank and ditch system is unusually large and well-defined and stands well above the interior of the enclosure (Fig. 1). It is a defended site in a meander of the Afon Llyfni which runs through a steep sided valley. The neck of the meander is defended by two large banks and ditches with a counterscarp bank on the outside. The defences enclose an area of 0.6ha. The site lies within an area of lowland improved pasture and the interior appears to have been ploughed and improved in relatively recent history with stones from field clearance being dumped on the defences or used to build a field wall at the break of slope above the Llyfni. Minor investigations in 1878 revealed that the outer rampart is of earth and the inner is mostly of stone with two phases of facing. The RCAHMW inventory states that "from the investigation of the inner rampart it would appear that the fortress incorporates work of two periods". There is a large ill-defined mound in the interior which both RCAHMW and the early investigators consider to be possibly artificial (RCAHMW 1960 209-10). This could be interpreted as the base for a tower or look-out over the defences to the west although a natural origin cannot be discounted.

The dating and interpretation has been called into doubt by recent work by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust which examined Hen Gastell, a small defended site with similar massive defences which was shown to be medieval with dates corresponding to the time of the Welsh Princes (Kenney 2017). The project aims to define the period and site type of Craig y Dinas and assess the survival and character of any structures in the interior using geophysical survey and trial excavation.

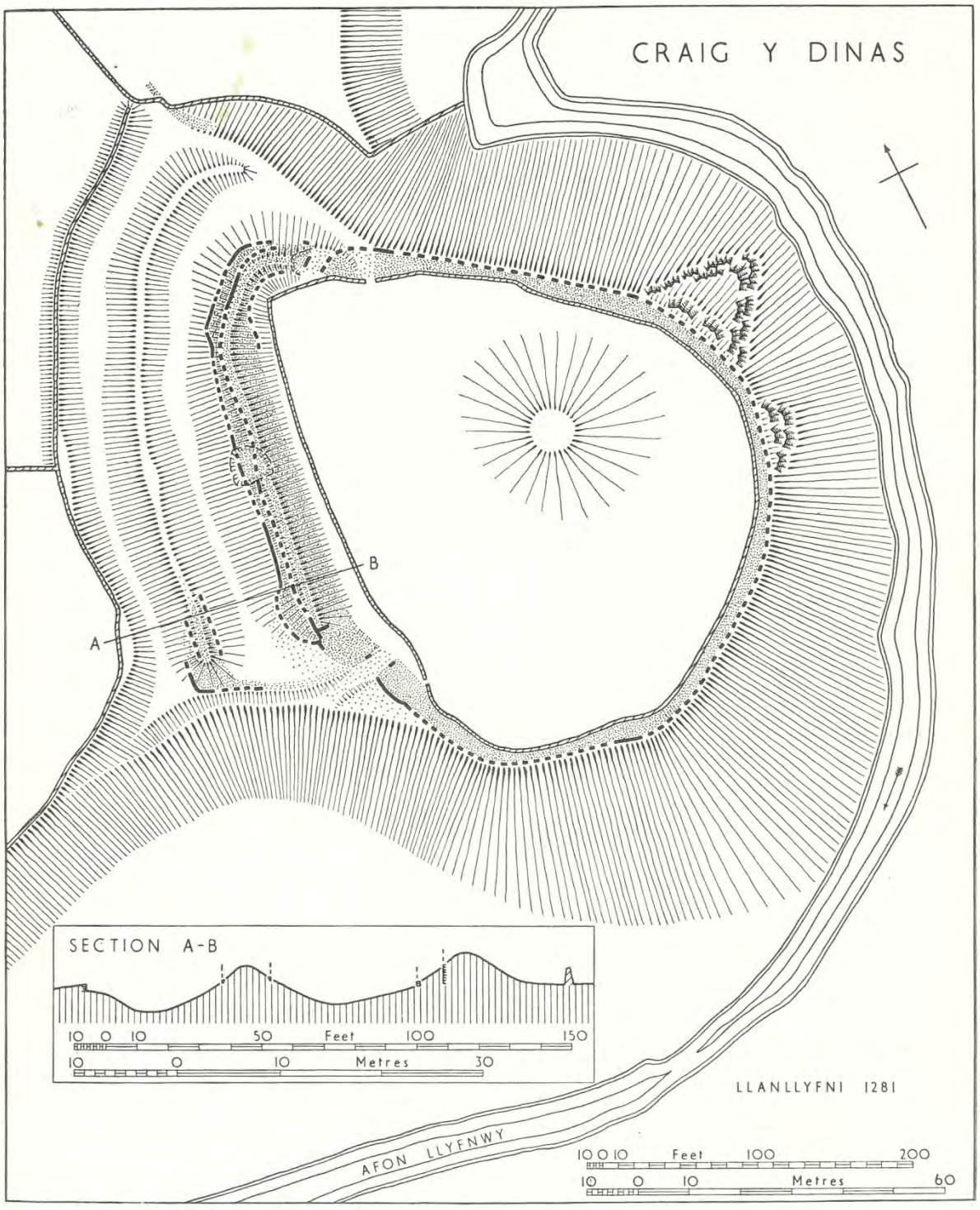


Fig. 1 Plan of Craig y Dinas by RCAHMW (1960)

3.2 Geophysical Survey

The survey was carried out in July 2021 in a series of traverses within 20 x 20m grids covering the area shown on Fig. 2. The grids were tied into the Ordnance Survey National Grid using a Trimble R8S high precision GPS. The survey was conducted using a Barrington Grad 601-2 dual fluxgate gradiometer and carried out at high resolution within the fort and standard resolution in an area to the west of the ramparts. The survey was carried out by David Hopewell and Dan Amor.

3.2.2 Methodology

Instrumentation

The Bartington Grad 601-2 is a handheld dual fluxgate gradiometer which uses a pair of Grad-01-100 sensors. These are high stability fluxgate gradient sensors with a 1.0m separation between the sensing elements, giving a strong response to deeper anomalies. Each sensor consists of two vertically aligned fluxgates set 1000mm apart. Their cores are driven in and out of magnetic saturation by a 1,000Hz alternating current passing through two opposing driver coils. As the cores come out of saturation, the external magnetic field can enter them producing an electrical pulse proportional to the field strength in a sensor coil. The high frequency of the detection cycle produces what is in effect a continuous output. The magnetic variations are measured in nanoTeslas (nT). The earth's magnetic field strength is about 48,000 nT; typical archaeological features produce readings of below 15nT although burnt features and iron objects can result in changes of several hundred nT. The machine is capable of detecting changes as low as 0.1nT and anomalies down to a depth of approximately one metre.

The instrument detects variations in the earth's magnetic field caused by the presence of iron in the soil. This is usually in the form of weakly magnetized iron oxides which tend to be concentrated in the topsoil. Features cut into the subsoil and backfilled or silted with topsoil, therefore contain greater amounts of iron and can, therefore, be detected with the gradiometer. This is a simplified description as there are other processes and materials which can produce detectable anomalies. The most obvious is the presence of pieces of iron in the soil or immediate environs which usually produce very high readings and can mask the relatively weak readings produced by variations in the soil. Strong readings are also produced by archaeological features such as hearths or kilns as fired clay acquires a permanent thermo-remnant magnetic field upon cooling. This material can also get spread into the soil leading to a more generalized magnetic enhancement around settlement sites.

Not all surveys can produce good results as results can be masked by large magnetic variations in the bedrock or soil or high levels of natural background "noise" (interference consisting of random signals produced by material within the soil). In some cases, there may be little variation between the topsoil and subsoil resulting in undetectable features.

Data collection

The gradiometer includes an on-board data-logger. Readings were taken along parallel traverses of one axis of a 20m x 20m grid. Two resolutions were used in the survey 'high resolution' within the fort with a traverse interval of 0.5m and 'standard resolution' outside the fort with a traverse interval of 1.0 m. Readings were logged at intervals of 0.25m along each traverse in both surveys.

Data processing

The data collected in each 20m x 20m grid was transferred from the data-logger to a personal computer where it was compiled and processed using TerraSurveyor v.3.0.33.10 software.

The numeric data are converted to a greyscale plot where data values are represented by modulation of the intensity of a greyscale within a rectangular area corresponding to the data collection point within the grid. This produces a plan view of the survey and allows subtle changes in the data to be displayed.

The Bartington Grad 601-2 captures raw data in the range of +/- 3000 nT. When raw data is presented in greyscale format all but the extreme high or low readings are rendered in the central range of the greyscale and therefore not visible against the background. The data is minimally processed by clipping as archaeological features tend to produce readings within the +/-15nt range.

Corrections may also be made to the data to compensate for instrument drift and other data collection inconsistencies. These corrections may include:

- de-striping using *zero mean traverse* which sets the background mean of each traverse within each grid to zero, removing striping effects and edge discontinuities;
- de-staggering in order to correct for slight differences in the speed of walking on forward and reverse traverses;
- de-spiking to remove high or low readings caused by stray pieces of iron, fences, etc. in order to reduce background magnetic noise;
- the application of a high pass filter to remove low frequency, large scale spatial detail for example a slowly changing geological background;
- the application of a low pass filter to remove high frequency, small scale spatial detail in order to smooth data or to enhance larger weak anomalies; and
- interpolation to produce a smoothed grayscale plot with more but smaller pixels in order to aid clarity.

Presentation of results and interpretation

The results of the survey are presented as a processed greyscale plot (Fig. 2) if further processing or enhancement has been performed. Magnetic anomalies are identified, interpreted and plotted onto an interpretative plot (Fig. 3) with reference numbers linking the anomalies to descriptions in the written report. When interpreting the results, several factors are taken into consideration, including the shape, scale and intensity of the anomaly and the local conditions at the site (geology, pedology, topography, etc.). Anomalies are categorised by their potential origin. Where responses can be related to other existing evidence, the anomalies will be given specific categories, such as Abbey Wall or Roman Road. Where the interpretation is based largely on the geophysical data, levels of confidence are implied, for example: *Probable*, or *Possible* Archaeology. The former is used for a confident interpretation, based on anomaly definition and/or other corroborative data such as cropmarks. Poor anomaly definition, a lack of clear patterns to the responses and an absence of other supporting data reduces confidence, hence the classification *Possible*.

3.2.3 Results

The survey grid was projected from a 240m long baseline with endpoint coordinates of SH44813.91 52174.79 and SH 44795.32 51935.52

Survey conditions

The survey was carried out in two areas. The first comprised the interior of the fort (0.6ha) and was surveyed at high resolution. This comprised improved land with a pronounced mound on the eastern side. The grass had recently been cut for silage and there were no obstacles to survey. The second area was surveyed at standard resolution and comprised a rectangular area of 1.0ha to the west of the defences. This was a slightly undulating field of improved grassland that had also recently been cut for silage.

Fig. 2 shows the data clipped to +-10nT. The data was processed using the de-stripe (sensors) function to correct for a slight sensor mismatch on calibration.

Specific anomalies were transcribed and allocated numerical labels. These are shown on the interpretation plot (Fig. 3), listed in Table 1 and discussed in the text.

Table 1 – Geophysical anomalies	
Anomaly number	**Description**
1	Linear anomaly, possibly a road running across the interior from the northern entrance. It could alternatively be interpreted as an internal division within the enclosure
2	Linear anomaly, possibly a road running across the interior either from an entrance on the south west or a T junction with anomaly 1. This could also alternatively be interpreted as an internal division
3	A similar anomaly to 1 and 2 but running across the flank of the mound. There is a slight possibility that the feature continues to the south and turns to the west to form a rectangle with 1 and 2.
4	A possible bank associated with 1
5	An area of magnetic enhancement to the south-east of the top of the mound with what appears to be a scatter of enhanced material around it. Possibly a thermoremnant response. This suggests an area of burning, possible interpretations include a burnt structure, a beacon fire or agricultural burning.
6,7,8	Indistinct circular anomalies. Probably natural variations in the glacial substrate but could be tentatively interpreted as roundhouses.
9,10,11	A band of increased magnetic noise on the inside of the rampart on the east side of the fort. Perhaps simply a spread of rampart material but hints of structures such as 10 and 11 may indicate a band of occupation.
12	An amorphous area of increased magnetic noise, probably material from the rampart
13	A single strong ferrous response, possibly a piece of modern ploughshare
14	A band of increased magnetic noise corresponding to a linear raised area in the field. Almost certainly a natural glacial feature
15	A band of increased magnetic noise, almost certainly a natural glacial feature
16	A small area of possible disturbance corresponding to a slight deviation of or cutting into the outer rampart. Possibly a small quarry/borrow pit of unknown date

3.2.4 Conclusions

The survey produced a range of anomalies with moderate levels of background magnetic variation. The subsoil appeared to be variable glacial drift. Modern ferrous responses were rare but moderately magnetic discrete anomalies were common and were probably caused by glacial stones in the subsoil and topsoil. This type of natural anomaly is indistinguishable from those produced by post holes and small pits making recognition of small archaeological features unlikely.

The survey inside the fort produced two clear linear anomalies (1 and 2). The alignment with the gate suggests an interpretation as internal roads. A third similar anomaly (3) runs over the edge of the mound. This is less well-defined and suggests an alternative interpretation of a series of internal, ditched, divisions possibly including a sub-rectangular enclosure around the mound should also be considered. These anomalies should be considered as priorities for further investigation by excavation.

A patch of magnetic enhancement to the south-east of the top of the mound with a scatter of enhanced material around it is a clear anomaly but is open to several different interpretations. It could be a thermoremnant response possibly a burnt structure or a beacon fire. The mound is a steep and stony feature in improved land and more commonplace interpretations could be suggested. The mound could have been either a target for dumping from field clearance or burning of agricultural waste such as scrub clearance. Either activity could have produced a magnetic anomaly as could a lightning strike. Further investigation is recommended.

Other anomalies in the interior are much less certain. Variations in glacial deposits commonly produce semi-regular patterns in geophysical surveys and these cannot be easily distinguished from archaeological features. There is a general trend in the interior of increased magnetic variation around the edge of the fort (9-12) which could be interpreted as the remains of settlement activity such as roundhouses. A few other possible circular anomalies (6, 7, 8) could be very tentatively be interpreted as roundhouses but require further evaluation.

The possible settlement activity does not correspond to the roads/ditches (1-3) suggesting that there may be multiperiod activity; perhaps the reuse of an Iron Age promontory fort in the medieval period. The geophysical survey results are, however, rather inconclusive and open to multiple alternative interpretations and require further investigation by excavation before any definite conclusions can be drawn.

No archaeological anomalies apart from a small borrow-pit (16) were detected outside the ramparts. A substantial bank (14) running across the field is almost certainly a glacial feature but was adopted by a field boundary shown on the 1889 25” Ordnance survey map perhaps leading to some magnetic enhancement.

3.3 EXCAVATION

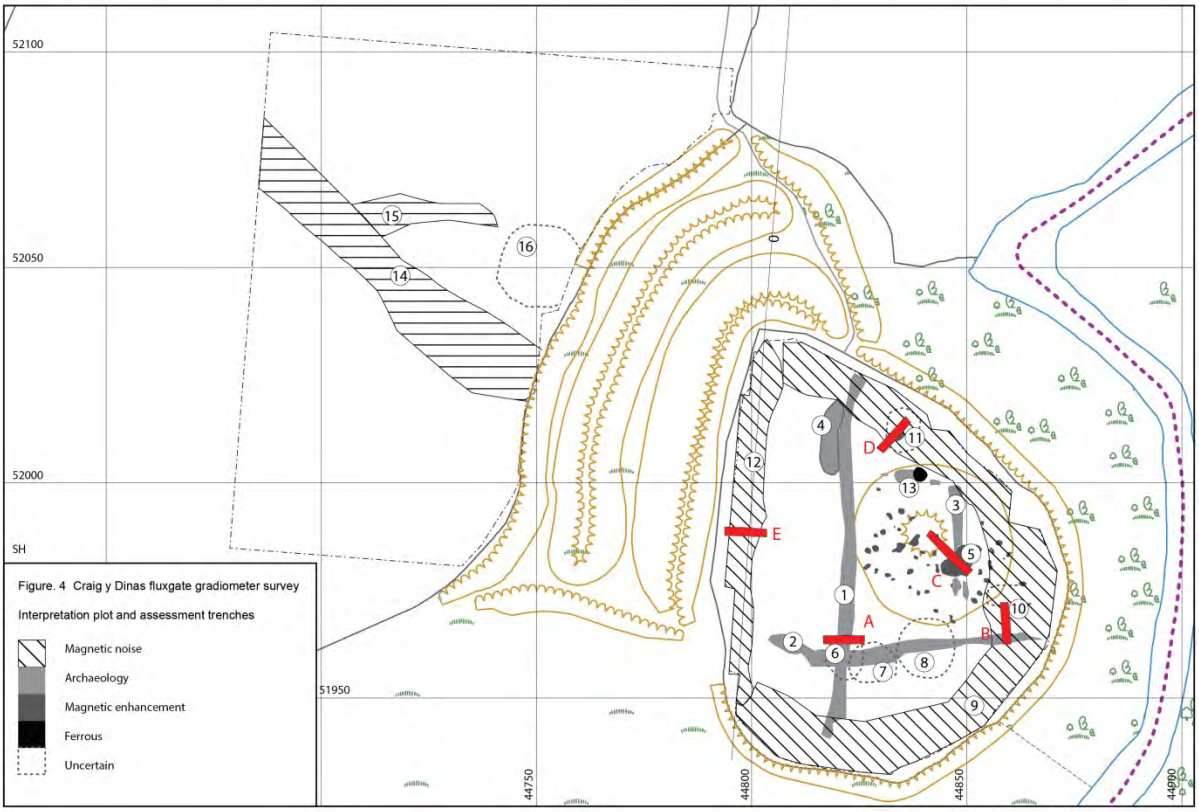
3.3.1 Methodology

The project was designed to be a minimally intrusive assessment of the interior of Craig y Dinas Hillfort. The excavation tested the hypotheses that the site is a multiphase construction with origins in the Iron Age/Romano British period and reuse in the Early Medieval or Medieval period.

The excavation was carried out as part of the community excavation at Dinas Dinlle by Bangor University students supervised by Carol Ryan Young from Gwynedd Archaeological Trust and one supervisor from the university. The team were on site for 5 days between 25/08/2021 and 01/09/2021. Five assessment trenches were be excavated. Fig. 4 shows the geophysical survey interpretation along with the trench locations. The turf and topsoil were removed by a rubber tracked excavator and the trenches were cleaned down to the first archaeological horizon by hand and recorded. Any archaeological features that were uncovered were sampled in order to characterise the feature and obtain dating evidence. Intrusive excavation was kept to a minimum.

All identified features were recorded using GAT recording forms, including trench sheets, context sheets and day record sheets. Any plans or sections were drawn at a minimum 1:10 scale using GAT A4 or A2 gridded permatrace. Trenches features and section lines were located using a Trimble R8 GPS unit

Photographic images were taken using a digital SLR camera set to maximum resolution in RAW format; a photographic record was maintained on site using GAT recording forms and digitised in Microsoft Access as part of the fieldwork archive and dissemination process. Photographic images are archived in TIFF format using Adobe Photoshop for conversion. Any archaeological features/deposits/structures encountered were manually cleaned and examined to determine extent, function, date and relationship to adjacent activity. Full excavation of features was not proposed. The following strategy was used as a guideline: 50% sample of each sub-circular feature, 10% sample of each linear feature (terminal ends and intersection points with other features will be prioritised). However, if more discrete features are identified, these would be 100% excavated as would any exposed segments of linear features.



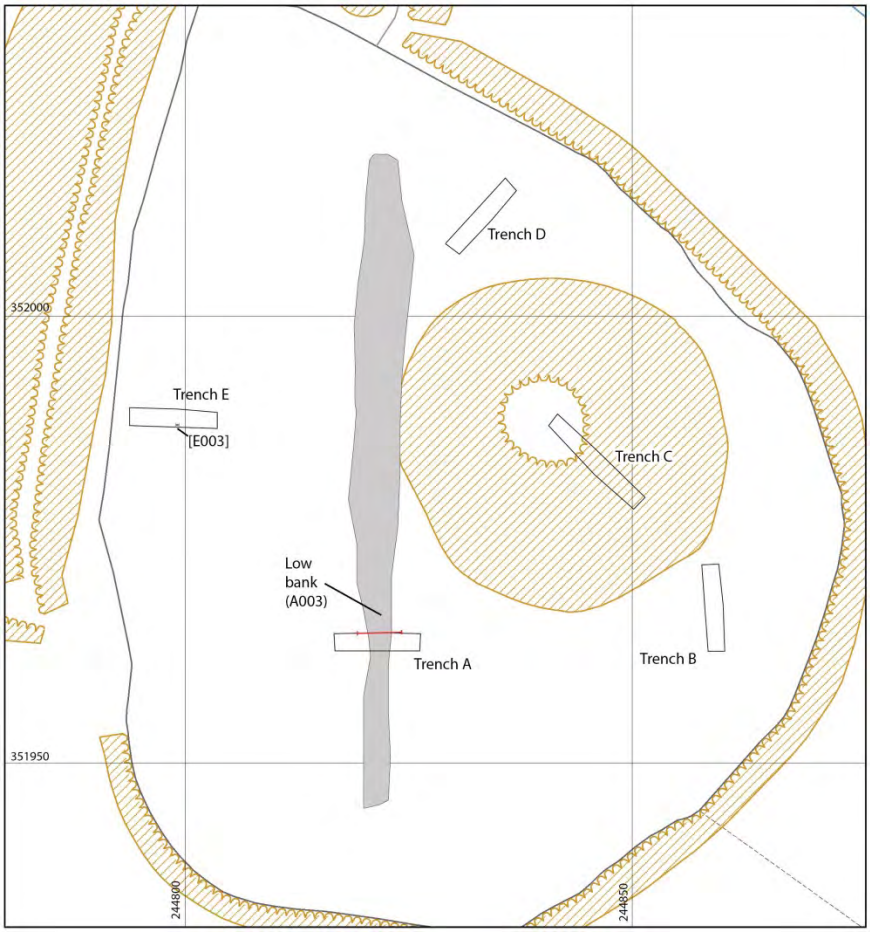


Fig. 5 Craig y Dinas showing detail of trenches

3.3.2 Results

Trench A (10m x 2m)

Trench A investigated linear geophysical survey feature 1, a possible trackway or internal division in the hillfort along with feature 6 a roughly circular anomaly tentatively interpreted as a roundhouse.

The trench was filled with a c. 0.25m deep mid-greyish brown pebbly topsoil (A001) immediately overlying the natural glacial substrate (A002). The natural was a compact mid-brownish orange sandy silt containing poorly sorted pebbles. There were no features cut into this. A slight increase in the depth of the topsoil to 0.4m marked the line of geophysical survey feature 1. This was c. 4m from the western end of the trench and about 2m wide and 0.15m high. It could be seen as an almost imperceptible low bank (A003) running across the interior of the fort (see Fig. xx). It is presumed that this is either a post medieval or modern feature such as a raised track running across the field from the entrance or an earlier feature that has been mixed into the topsoil by ploughing. The linear feature is presumed to be post-medieval but could possibly be earlier. Raised features such as banks can be ploughed out and mixed into the topsoil but leave a difference in the makeup of the soil that is still detectible by gradiometer survey even though the feature has been destroyed.

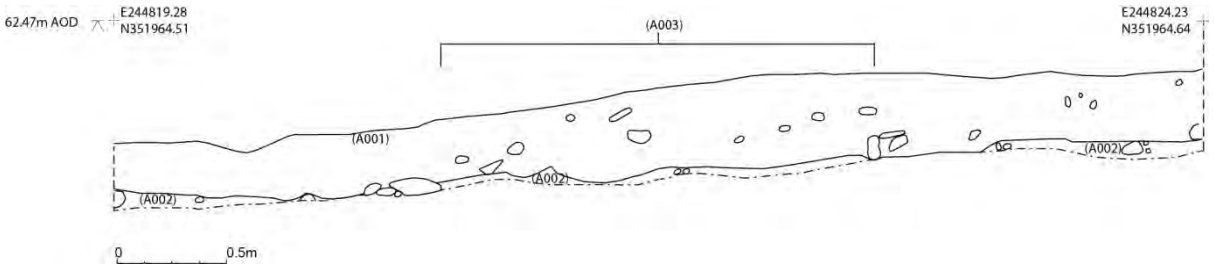


Fig. 6 The central part of trench A showing bank (A003)

Fig.7 The central part of trench A, showing bank (A003) aligned with the fort's entrance

Trench B (10m x 2m)

Trench B investigated geophysical survey feature 2, another possible trackway or internal division along with the increased activity and a possible structure around the eastern edge of the fort (features 9 and 10 on Fig. 4).

The trench was filled with a c. 0.25m deep mid-greyish brown pebbly topsoil containing a few larger stones (B001) immediately overlying the natural glacial substrate (B002). The natural was a compact mid-brownish orange sandy silt containing poorly sorted pebbles and some cobbles. A concentration of cobbles (B003) at the north end of the trench was sectioned but it was found to be a natural variation on the surface of the natural where the stones had been loosened by ploughing.

No archaeological features were identified in trench B and it is assumed that the geophysical survey anomalies were due to variations in the glacial substrate.

Trench C (13.6m x 2m)

Trench C investigated the prominent mound on the east side of the fort and the magnetically enhanced feature on its south eastern side. The trench ran up the south eastern side of the mound, and extended as far as the top.

The topsoil (C001) was 0.22m deep and comprised mid-greyish brown silty sand with frequent sub-angular stones. This was lying directly on very variable yellowish and orange-brown natural glacial

substrate (C001-C004). The matrix contained variable proportions of sand and silt and was hard and compact. This contained a range of mostly rounded stones ranging from small pebbles to large stones c.0.5m across. There was a concentration of stones on the top of the mound. The upper stones were loose but in random orientations. These were cleared revealing more stones that were firmly embedded in the natural. No cut features or alignments of stones could be detected and it was concluded that the large stones were a natural variation in the glacial deposit as opposed to the remains of a stone-built structure. The excavation suggests that the mound is a natural glacial feature and that there is no identifiable structure associated with it.

Fig. 8 Trench C showing rocks in the natural glacial substrate at the top of the mound

Trench D (10m x 2m)

Trench D investigated the increased magnetic activity and possible structures around the north eastern edge of the fort (features 9 and 11).

The trench was filled with a c. 0.25m-deep light greyish brown silty sand topsoil (D001) immediately overlying the natural glacial substrate (D002). The natural was a compact mid-brownish orange sandy silt containing frequent small sub-angular stones along with pockets of larger cobbles. There were no features cut into the natural. It is presumed that variations in the natural were the source of the increased magnetic variation detected in the gradiometer survey

Trench E (10m x 2m)

Trench E investigated the increased magnetic enhancement inside the western rampart (12).

The topsoil (E001) was 0.26m deep and consisted of mid-brown silty sand containing sub-angular stones between 0.02m and 0.05m in diameter. The natural glacial substrate (E002) was somewhat looser than in the other trenches and consisted of mid-brownish orange sandy silt with varying amounts of stones ranging from 0.02m to 0.3 m in diameter.

A single sub-circular feature, cut into the natural, was uncovered on the south side of the trench [E003]. This was filled with a brownish-yellow sandy silt containing frequent pieces of charcoal and a single rounded cobble (E004). The feature was half-sectioned and was found to be 0.22m in diameter and 0.14m deep with a slightly asymmetrical V-shaped profile. The fill was collected as an environmental sample. The feature was relatively slight making interpretation difficult. The concentration of charcoal in the fill suggests that it is anthropogenic, possibly a heavily truncated post hole. Analysis of the sample is recommended and radiocarbon dates should be obtained if it contains suitable material. As in the other trenches the magnetic enhancement appears to be a result of variations in the underlying glacial deposits.

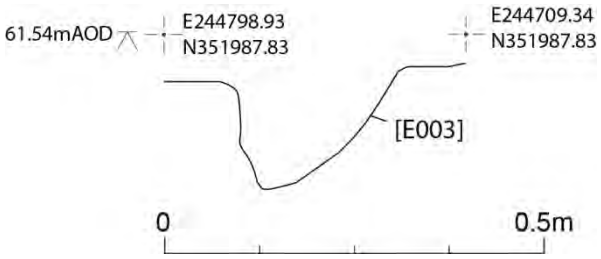


Fig.9 Profile across feature [E004]

Fig. 10 Feature [E004] before excavation against the southern baulk of trench E. No scale; the feature is 0.22m across

4. CONCLUSIONS

Most of the geophysical survey anomalies were interpreted as being archaeological features with a low degree of certainty. On excavation, all apart from feature 1 were found to be a result of variations in the underlying glacial deposits that contains bands and patches of sand, silt, gravel and large stones. The low linear bank (A003) corresponded almost exactly to the geophysical anomaly although there was little evidence of the feature in the excavation apart from a slight increase in the depth of topsoil. Interpretation of such an ephemeral feature is problematic but it is most likely to be a relatively recent bank or raised trackway running from the entranced although an earlier ploughed out feature cannot be entirely ruled out. The five trenches sampled a very small proportion of the interior of the fort (1.75%) although they were positioned in areas where activity would be expected to be found in an Iron Age promontory fort, namely around the inside of the rampart and on the raised mound. There was little to indicate any kind of activity. There were no *in situ* heat affected areas, no cut features, no finds and no visible residual charcoal in the topsoil. This suggests that there may not have been dense sustained occupation in the Iron Age or Romano British period.

The unusually large rampart set across a meander in a river and relatively small interior suggest parallels with the 11th/12th Century defended site at Hen Gastell, Llanwnda (Kenney 2017 GAT report no. 1369). RCAHMW (1960, 209-10) suggest that two phases of rampart are present and it is suggested that the Iron Age defences could have been reused and strengthened to produce a similar type of site at Craig y Dinas. Kenney discovered a series of substantial postholes at Hen Gastell that

were interpreted as either a substantial timber hall or sub-circular tower. Radiocarbon dates demonstrated a fairly short duration of use lasting no more than three or four generations sometime in the 11th and 12th centuries cal AD. Kenney suggests that there may be a series of defended sites across north Wales that are defended homes or strongholds of local lords that may have been a response to political instability in north Wales in the 11th century. This phenomenon recognised in the Research Framework for the Archaeology of Early Medieval Wales c. Ad 400–1070 and it is also noted that a considerable number of early medieval defended sites (such as Dinas Powys, and Glanfraid), have wrongly been identified as Iron Age, though at present recognising them only appears possible through trial excavation accompanied by radiocarbon dating.

A single large discrete structure comprising a number of post holes could easily have been missed by the small sample examined by the trenches at Craig y Dinas. It should, however, be noted that there was evidence for metal-working and quite a lot of occupation debris at Hen Gastell including large amounts of heat affected stones which are in marked contrast to the lack of material from Craig y Dinas.

In conclusion, the most noteworthy feature of the assessment excavations was the almost total lack of detectible human activity with only a single cut feature and a probable post-medieval bank or track identified in five trenches. The excavated area was small so any conclusion should be treated with a degree of caution.

It could be suggested that the substantial defences were constructed but the site was subsequently abandoned after a short period of minor activity making traces of occupation hard to find. It should, however, be noted that the interior of the promontory fort is a mostly stone-free field and could be classed as improved pasture. There are noticeable piles of stones and a modern field wall on top of the original defences around the margins suggesting fairly comprehensive clearance. The topsoil is shallow and directly overlies the glacial deposits with no intermediate horizons. There are two 19th century descriptions of the site in Archaeologia Cambrensis (Barnwell 1878 and Prichard 1887). Prichard suggests that “the loosely built habitations which probably stood at its [the rampart’s] back have long since been removed and the land cultivated as has been the destiny of most of the similarly fortified enclosures in Anglesey.” While this is speculation it does indicate that the interior has changed little since the late 19th century (p. 254). RCAHMW (1960, 210) record that “three spindle whorls have been found in the interior which has been ploughed”. The spindle whorls confirm habitation, possibly in the Iron Age, but do not provide good dating evidence as drop-spindles with which they were used continued in use through the medieval period. Fenton mentions the site in *Tours in Wales (1804-1813)* but only records the mound in the interior. If the field has been cleared and cultivated it is likely that, given the very shallow soil, most traces of habitation would have been cleared away. Stone built structures would have been lost and ploughing would have scoured the top of the stony glacial natural. It can therefore be suggested that much of the evidence for Iron Age activity may have been destroyed during land improvements which could have been made in the 18th century before the written descriptions of the site. The lack of any deeper post holes or material such as charcoal of heat affected clay in the topsoil tends to support the hypothesis that dense prolonged occupation was not a feature of the site in any period of history. This cannot be taken as conclusive evidence due to the small excavation area which could have provided unrepresentative results.

The most significant findings of the excavation may be indications that the interior of the promontory fort has been cleared of most archaeological features. Little evidence for occupation and activities in any period were discovered in the rather limited areas of excavation. A wider area of excavation could uncover further evidence. Given the limited depth of stratigraphy further geophysical survey in the form of GPR or resistivity would probably be unproductive.

5. COPYRIGHT NOTICE

6. REFERENCES

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