CPAT Report No 1210

Dolgarrog to Pentir overhead powerline, Gwynedd
Excavations adjacent to tower AD13

THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Client name:	Iberdrola Engineering and Construction
CPAT Project No:	1865
Project Name:	AD Line Revision II
Grid Reference:	SH 74819 70132
County/LPA:	Gwynedd
Report Title:	Dolgarrog to Pentir Overhead Powerline, Gwynedd. Excavations adjacent to tower AD13
CPAT Report No:	1210
Report status:	Final
Confidential:	No

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Completion date:	5 June 2013

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Checked on:	13 June 2013	

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R J Silvester	Head of Field Services	
Approved on:	13 June 2013	

Bibliographic reference:
Jones, N. W. and Grant, I., 2013. *Dolgarrog to Pentir Overhead Powerline, Gwynedd. Excavations adjacent to tower AD13*. Unpublished report. CPAT Report No. 1210.

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Summary

A small-scale excavation was undertaken by the Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust on behalf of Iberdrola Engineering and Construction as part of a wider programme of mitigation works associated with the refurbishment of a 132kV overhead powerline between Dolgarrog and Pentir, in Gwynedd. The excavation was conducted along the route of a trench for a new underground cable required to divert an existing lower voltage powerline prior to the commencement of refurbishment works.

The cable trench crossed a prominent bank thought to be part of a medieval or earlier field system and a full section across the earthwork revealed a sequence of deposits forming the bank, together with the remains of a roughly built stone revetment. Currently the feature remains undated.

A watching brief during the machine excavation of the remainder of the cable trench identified no features or deposits of archaeological significance.

1 Introduction

1.1 In May 2013 the Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was invited by Iberdrola Engineering and Construction to undertake an archaeological excavation as as part of a wider programme of mitigation works associated with the refurbishment of a 132kV overhead powerline, known as the AD Line, between Dolgarrog and Pentir, in Gwynedd. The excavation was on the line of a trench for a new underground cable required to divert an existing lower voltage powerline in advance of refurbishment works.

1.2 The cable trench crossed a prominent bank thought to be part of a medieval or earlier field system and a full section was excavated across the earthwork, adjacent to tower AD 13 (Fig. 1; SH 74819 70132). The scope of the works was agreed with John Roberts, the Snowdonia National Park Authority Archaeologist, at a site meeting held on 3 May 2013.

Fig. 1 Plan of the site showing the location of pylon AD13.

1.3 The cable trench extended for 240m from an existing wooden pole on the roadside and was subject to a watching brief beyond the area of archaeological excavation, although no features or deposits of archaeological significance were identified. The opportunity was also taken to conduct a total station survey of the earthwork, together with a number of other contemporary or later banks in the immediate area (Fig. 2).

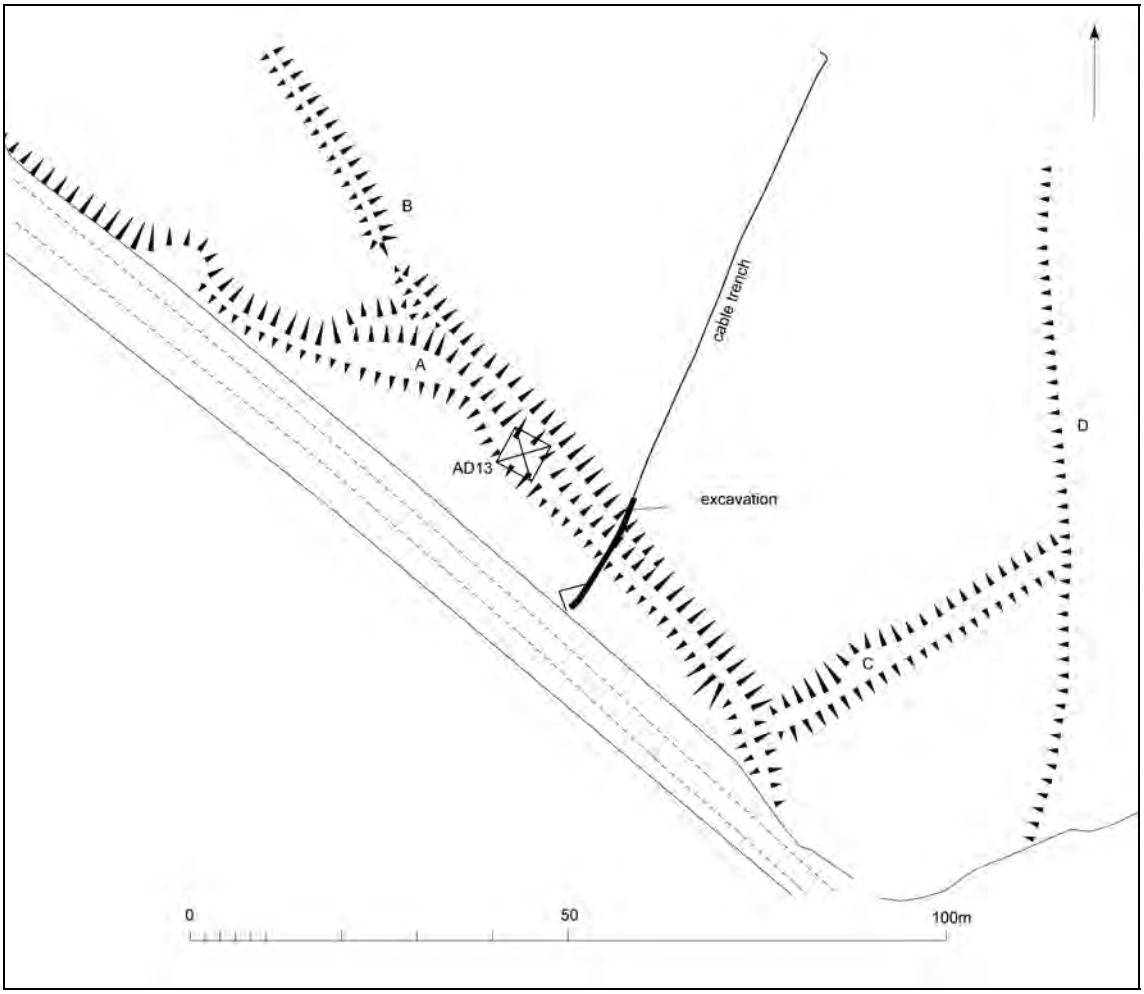

Fig. 2 Plan of the field system showing the location of the excavation, cable trench and the position of tower AD13

1.4 The field system was first identified during a field survey of the powerline route in April 2013, although the regional HER already contained records for three medieval house platforms within the general area (PRNs 4694, 7560 and 7561; Jones and Thompson 1998), between 100-200m distant, with which the banks may be associated.

2 Excavation

2.1 The excavation was conducted over a three-day period between 13-15 May 2013. The cable trench, 0.5m in width, was initially excavated by machine from the base of the electricity pole adjacent to the road to a point around 5m beyond the enclosure bank, a length of around 17.5m. The turf and topsoil (1) were removed under close archaeological supervision onto the surface of the first recognisable archaeological horizon. Thereafter all excavation was conducted by hand to include a full, though narrow section across the earthwork.

2.2 During the excavation a full drawn, written and photographic record was compiled, details of which are provided in Appendix 1. Numbers in brackets illustrated on the site plans and incorporated in the following text refer to the individual contexts recorded in the site archive.

Fig. 3 View of the excavation across the embankment with tower AD13 located to the left of the trench. Photo CPAT 3634-0001

2.3 The trench, which was aligned north-north-east to south-south-west, provided a complete section through the bank and allowed an investigation of deposits to either side.

2.4 A number of deposits (02, 03 and 10) which post-dated the bank were removed by hand to reveal its surface. This had been constructed directly on top of natural subsoil (13), which varied from pale, iron-stained, yellow stony clay to pale grey sand and grey silty clay. Thin deposits of mottled grey silt (12) to the south of the bank and a silty clay (4) to the north, both around 80mm thick, may represent remnants of an old ground surface, though this was not evident beneath the bank.

Fig. 4 The bank with its in-situ revetment wall along the south-eastern face.
Photo CPAT 3634-0013

2.5 The bank was around 4.6m wide and survived to a height of 0.5m, having been constructed from four dumps of soil (5, 6, 7 and 8) deposited against a roughly built stone revetment wall (9). The basal construction deposit (8), an orange brown silty sand, was 0.3m thick, into which the revetment wall had been set along the south-east edge of the bank. There was evidence to suggest that the rear of the wall had been packed with individual blocks of turf (7) (Figs 4-6), from which several fragments of charcoal were recovered.

Fig. 5 View of the turf packing (7) behind the revetment wall (9).
Photo CPAT 3634-0036

Fig. 6 The west-north-west facing section through the bank with a block of turf (arrowed) visible to the right of the scale. Photo CPAT 3634-0074

2.6 The main bank material (8), together with the turf packing (7), was sealed beneath a 80mm-thick deposit of greenish-grey gritty sand (6), with an uppermost layer of firm, orange brown, sandy silt (5), up to 0.16m thick and containing a significant quantity of small stones. A deposit, 0.24m-thick, of orange grey gritty silt (11) had accumulated against, and partly overlay the revetment wall (9), possibly material eroded from the bank.

Fig. 7 The excavated trench view from the south-east, showing the bank and tower AD13. Photo CPAT 3634-0063

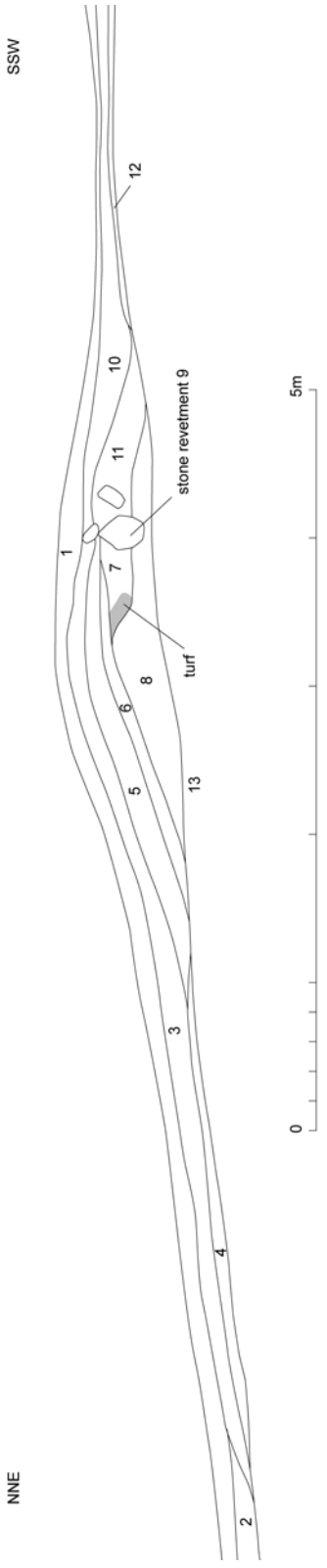

Fig. 8 The excavated section through the bank

3 Conclusions

3.1 The excavation investigated a section across a prominent bank which forms part of a wider field system. The bank, which was around 4.6m wide and 0.5m high, had been constructed directly on the surface of the natural subsoil and consisted of a number of soil layers which had been deposited against a roughly-built revetment wall along the southern side of the bank. There was no evidence to suggest an accompanying ditch. No artefacts were recovered during the excavation, although small fragments of charcoal were retrieved from one of the blocks of turf which had been packed behind the revetment wall. However, this material would not provide secure dating for the bank since the turf has been redeposited on the top of the bank and its origin is unknown.

3.2 The ground to the south of the bank was higher than that to the north, giving the impression of a raised platform, although the excavation has demonstrated that there is a natural slope from south to north and that the present form of the earthwork is a result of its erosion and later deposition.

3.3 In the absence of any dating evidence to the contrary it seems most likely that the bank is part of a field system associated with a group of nearby house platforms which predates the present field system and the public road. The survey of the immediate area identified three other banks which are all likely to be part of the field system (Fig. 2 B, C and D), although bank D appears to be later than the rest. The excavated bank (Fig. 2, A) is the most prominent feature and the stepped nature of its profile, at least along part of its length, may suggest that the field system has more than one phase.

4 References

Jones, S. and Thompson, D., 1998. *Deserted Rural Settlement in Eastern Caernarvonshire*. Unpublished GAT Report.

APPENDIX 1

PROJECT ARCHIVE

Site records
13 context record forms
Context Register
Drawing Register
1 A2 sheet (section drawing of the Trench)
77 digital photographs, CPAT film 3634
Photographic register
Total Station survey