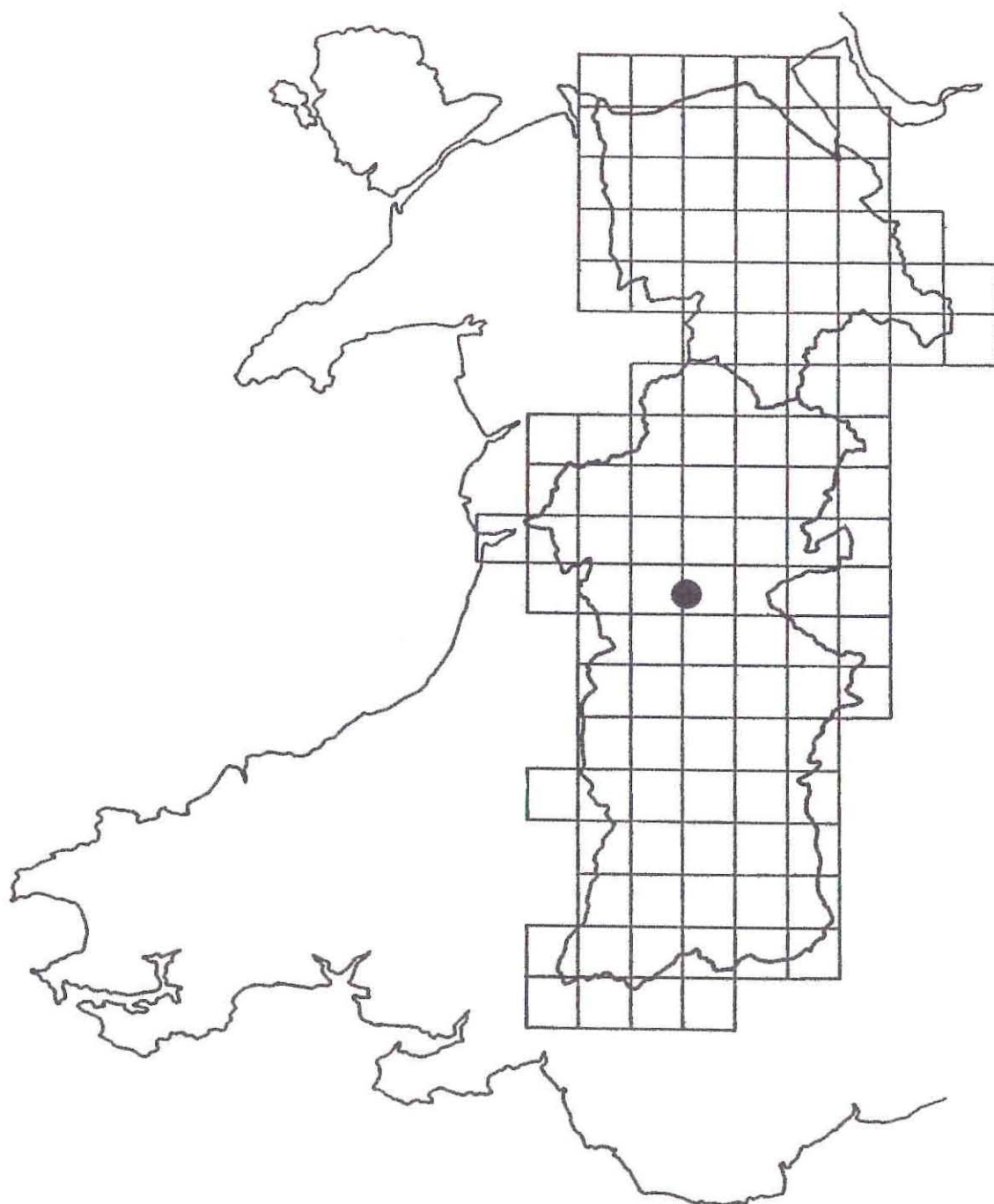


Caersws to Llanidloes Gas Pipeline II

WATCHING BRIEF AND EXCAVATION



Caersws to Llanidloes Gas Pipeline II

WATCHING BRIEF AND EXCAVATION

by R Hankinson

July 1994

Report prepared for British Gas plc (Wales)

The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust

7a Church Street Welshpool Powys SY21 7DL

tel (0938) 553670, fax 552179

© CPAT 1994

1 Introduction

1.1 In November 1992, as a result of the consultative procedure between British Gas (Wales/Cymru) and the curatorial section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT), the latter was informed of the details of the proposed construction of a gas pipeline from Moat Lane, Caersws to a point south of Llandidloes in Powys.

1.2 Following interrogation of the County Sites and Monuments Record the curatorial section of CPAT decided that there was a possibility that sites of archaeological interest might be disturbed during the pipeline construction. M.J.Walters of the curatorial section prepared an outline recommendation for an archaeological field evaluation of the preferred route in order to identify features of potential archaeological sensitivity while plans for the pipeline works were still at an early stage. This recommendation was accepted by British Gas and on 5th April 1993 they commissioned CPAT to carry out the work, the survey being conducted during April 1993 and the report completed in May of the same year (Hankinson 1993).

1.3 In March 1994, CPAT were informed of the intention of British Gas to commence pipeline construction during May 1994. Following the recommendations of the field evaluation report of May 1993, it was accepted by British Gas that an archaeological watching brief should be maintained during the topsoil stripping stage of the works. This was carried out during May and June 1994.

2 Location (Figs 1 and 2)

2.1 The route of the pipeline runs from near Moat Lane, Caersws (SO 0433 9103) to the east of the village of Llandinam before meeting the A470 trunk road to the south of Llandinam, broadly following its line as far as Dolwen bridge. The route then leaves the road and takes a south-westerly course past the village of Newchapel before terminating at a point (SN 9715 8168) adjacent to the B4518 road, 1.5km to the north of Tylwch village. Its total length is approximately 12.5km.

3 Topography, Land Use, Geology and Soils

3.1 From its start on the Severn flood plain at 125m OD, the route ascends a steep slope onto a gradually sloping, north-west facing shelf which lies at the base of the line of hills situated to the east and south of Llandinam. This shelf is utilised until its south-western end where the route climbs up a steep slope in the direction of Pen-y-banc Farm. The remainder of the route follows a line of hilltops up to a maximum elevation of almost 350m OD, descending slightly to its terminal on the watershed between the streams of Nant y Bradnant and Dwr Tenau at a height of 320m OD.

3.2 Land use on the route is almost entirely agricultural pasture, except for two small areas of woodland known as Ty'n y Maen Wood and Coed Pwllan. The land is generally Agricultural Class 4, except for the area near Dolwen Bridge which is Class 5.

3.3 The geology of the pipeline area is composed of a series of Silurian shales and mudstones. The overlying soils are divided into two basic types: Well drained fine silty soils of the Manod Association, and seasonally waterlogged fine loamy, loamy over clayey and clayey soils of the Brickfield 1 and 3 Associations (Rudeforth et al 1984).

4 Methodology

4.1 The watching brief entailed thorough examination of the pipeline wayleave after the removal of topsoil had taken place and was carried out at intervals of, on average, three days. The topsoiled corridor was examined at regular intervals due to its use by site traffic and the spells of dry weather encountered, factors which are likely to mask any archaeological features present in the subsoil.

4.2 The subsequent trenching for pipe installation was observed in areas which the topsoiling stage had demonstrated to be of archaeological significance. The watching of all trenching activities throughout the length of the pipeline was not considered to be necessary or cost-effective, as the area had been examined in a detailed manner during topsoiling.

4.3 In addition to the watching brief, significant areas noted in the field evaluation were examined in line with the recommendations of the accompanying report (Hankinson 1993). This was to determine whether any further information on their dating or function could be obtained (Section 5, below).

5 Archaeological Areas Noted in the Field Evaluation

5.1 Information obtained during the watching brief which relates to the archaeological sites previously recorded during the field evaluation is detailed in the paragraphs below.

5.2 PRN 7863 (SO 0382 9060) is a possible house site of medieval or post-medieval date first seen as an earthwork during the initial fieldwork. The site was avoided by the pipeline wayleave and no further information regarding it was discovered during the watching brief.

5.3 PRN 7864 (SO 0384 9044) is a portion of redundant trackway first seen during the initial fieldwork. The feature was cut by the pipeline wayleave, but no further details of its structure became apparent. It was hoped that the area could be observed during the pipeline trenching (ie pipe installation) works, but due to the unpredictability of the contractors timetable, and to their unannounced decision to work through a weekend, this proved impossible.

5.4.1 PRN 4579 (SO 0381 9019) is an enclosure, currently thought to be of Roman date on the basis of both its morphology and on the recovery of a single sherd of Samian pottery during fieldwork by CPAT in November 1991. It shows as a cropmark on an aerial photograph taken in 1976 (Cambridge University Committee for Aerial Photography, CBI 16). Archaeologically it is a highly significant site.

5.4.2 The pipeline wayleave had been adjusted to avoid the immediate area of the enclosure, but it became apparent that potentially associated deposits were disturbed during the stripping operations. A 5-10cm thick layer of mixed charcoal and burnt clay could be seen in the spoil from the vicinity of the site. This layer may not be directly associated with a specific feature on the site but could represent general disturbance due to previous agricultural activity. Nevertheless, it appeared to be a discrete deposit not incorporated into the topsoil, suggesting that it might have been a spread of material emanating from the enclosure. It was hoped that the area could be observed during the pipeline trenching works, but for the same reasons that applied to PRN 7864 (see section 5.3) this was not possible.

5.5.1 PRN 7865 (SO 0268 8707) is a mill leat first seen during the initial field work. The leat begins at Pwllan brook and runs in a north-westerly direction towards Pwllan house. The visible remains of the leat end at a field boundary before reaching the pipeline wayleave, and it was anticipated that a continuation would be seen after topsoil stripping as it appeared to have been levelled by ploughing or other agricultural activity.

5.5.2 The course of the leat was observed crossing the topsoiled area from south to north at SO 0268 8717. The opportunity was taken to excavate two small sections of the leat and these showed that the remains were very slight with a cross-section some 0.6m wide x 0.15m (max) deep. A fragment of burnt bone was found in the fill, but no datable finds were discovered. The northern extent of the leat in the topsoiled area revealed it curving slightly to the west, and this fits in well with the original hypothesis that the leat served a mill in the vicinity of Pwllan house.

5.6.1 RR 82d is a Roman road which, it was suggested, followed the line of the present A470 and then the minor road past Newchapel village. Prior to topsoil stripping the line of the road was unknown and it was hoped that the watching brief would provide further information on its location.

5.6.2 No evidence of the road was found at the locations noted in the field evaluation. However, a section of metalled surface which may be the Roman road was observed crossing the wayleave in the vicinity of Berth-ddu Lodge at SO 0148 8602 (See section 6.1).

5.7 PRN 7866 (SN 9972 8513) is a possible trackway running towards Dolwen bridge on the opposite side of the A470. The feature was visible in the trench after topsoiling, but appeared to be of recent date. The possible surface noted in the original report was composed of loosely set small stones and was approximately one metre in width.

5.8.1 PRN 7867 (SN 9937 8476) is a trackway shown as a public right of way on the 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey map of the area; it forms an extension to a track noted on the 1:2500 site plan. The trackway is 3m in width and may have another track joining it from the south at this point, although the latter could possibly have been formed by natural erosion, as it runs down a steep slope.

5.8.2 The trackway appears to have been levelled, probably as a result of pasture improvement work, but was probably used until fairly recently: rusted wire fencing was included in the backfilled material, probably from a field boundary on the north-east side of the trackway. No information was obtained about the converging trackway noted above.

5.9.1 PRN 7868 (SN 9917 8454) was a area of possible ridge and furrow cultivation in a field through which the preferred route passes. It is visible as a series of parallel furrows 4m apart, running down a moderate north-east facing slope.

5.9.2 After the topsoil had been removed it became clear that the reason for the appearance of the field was a series of parallel ridges of bedrock under a very thin soil, rarely exceeding 10cm in thickness. This feature is therefore not archaeological in nature.

5.10 PRN 4956 (SN 9815 8275) is noted in the Powys Sites and Monuments Record as a possible burial mound. Fieldwork during the evaluation suggested that it was more likely to be a natural landform. This was confirmed during the watching brief, when the mound was seen to be composed entirely of bedrock. No archaeological features were seen in the topsoiled area at this locality.

5.11 PRN 4957 (SN 9810 8255) is noted in the Powys Sites and Monuments Record as a possible burial mound. Fieldwork during the evaluation suggested that it was more likely to be a natural landform. As with PRN 4956, this was confirmed during the watching brief, when the mound was seen to be composed entirely of bedrock. No archaeological features were seen in the topsoiled area at this locality.

5.12.1 PRN 7869 (SN 9784 8219) is a possible redundant field boundary in the field to the north of the crossroads at SN 9782 8200. It shows as a curving bank approximately 150m in length, 2m in width and 0.3m high. The feature was not disturbed by the topsoiling operations, but within its vicinity a curving gully, suggestive of a field boundary, was seen. The two features may possibly be related.

5.12.2 The archaeological significance of this area stemmed from the possibility that the bank showed the line of a road predating the modern one. The significance of the locality was enhanced by the supposed proximity of the Roman road (RR 82d) previously mentioned. However, as the Roman road was not seen at this locality, it is likely that the bank has a lesser status than was first thought.

6 Sites Discovered During the Watching Brief

6.1.1 The Roman road (RR 82d) noted in paragraphs 5.6.1 and 5.6.2 was discovered during the topsoil stripping operations at SO 0148 8602 (PRN 7921). Two sections were excavated across the road before the laying out of the pipeline.

6.1.2 The excavations comprised two sections, each approximately 5m by 1m. The sections, 5m apart, attempted to determine the width of the road which could be seen crossing the wayleave at an acute angle. The excavations showed that the road ran in a north-north-east/south-south-west direction and appeared to be approximately 3.3m in width, with a surface of compacted stone, that provided a slight camber. The central section of the road had been resurfaced and widened at some point in its history with compacted river gravels. A shallow gully on the uphill side of the original road was noted, but this was filled in when the road was resurfaced, and it is probable that side ditches were not required because of the very stony and well drained subsoil of this locality. Not surprisingly, finds attributable to the Roman period were absent.

6.1.3 The visible length of the Roman road was limited to approximately 30m and consequently any conclusions about its overall course must be tentative. Nevertheless, the road appears to have a rather different alignment to that previously postulated. On the basis of the new evidence, the road follows the flood plain of the River Severn from Caersws, leaving it approximately 300m to the north-north-east of the excavated area and running underneath the modern A470 immediately to the south of the excavation. It seems likely that the continuation of the road to the south-south-west, for possibly the next 3km, is to the east of its previously predicted course.

6.2.1 A second feature (PRN 7922) was discovered in the field to the north-east of that containing the Roman road. The site appeared initially as a small patch of charcoal and was investigated in the first stages by the removal of any remaining topsoil in an attempt to determine whether there were any archaeological features present in the subsoil. This work revealed an oval feature, 2.20m east/west x 1.10m north/south, containing reddened and probably burnt soil. The feature also contained fragments of prehistoric pottery

attributed to the Middle Bronze Age (c.1000 to 1200 BC). A second feature to the north-north-west incorporated further pottery of the same period.

6.2.2 Following the discovery of the features, the writer immediately contacted British Gas and their contractors, A.Hak. It was agreed that the area surrounding the features would have a temporary fence erected around it, to allow CPAT to carry out a rescue excavation to determine the nature and extent of the site.

6.2.3 The excavations (CPAT reference: GL 94) showed that PRN 7922 was a circular house site (see Fig 3), dated to the Middle Bronze Age. The site was composed of a penannular gully 12m in overall diameter surrounding a ring of post-holes with an overall diameter of approximately 7m. A combination of post-holes and slots on the south-east side indicated an entrance porch. The majority of the post-holes retained packing stones used to support vertical posts.

6.2.4 Within the area bounded by the gully were two features not readily attributable as post-holes. Feature 2, the oval feature referred to in paragraph 6.2.1, appeared to be an oven with stake-holes along its south, east and west sides. Contained within the feature were numerous sherds of pottery, charred grain and quantities of charcoal. Feature 6, containing pottery and charcoal, and also noted in paragraph 6.2.1, may have been a rubbish or storage pit. The results of the specialist reports should provide further information on these possibilities.

6.2.5 The site area and its environs were examined during the pipeline trenching and installation operations, but no further evidence relating to the site or a putative surrounding enclosure was discovered.

6.2.6 The house site is the first of this date to be excavated in Wales and is without question of national importance. It was the subject of a press release organised by British Gas (Wales) from Cardiff and featured in several regional newspapers. A full excavation report will be prepared by CPAT in due course and published in an appropriate academic journal. The conclusions given here should be taken as interim results only.

7 Conclusions

7.1 The recommendations of the field evaluation report (Hankinson 1993) were adopted by British Gas in the final layout of the pipeline and ensured the continued preservation of the Roman enclosure (PRN 4579). Unfortunately, however, it was not possible to confirm conclusively whether adjacent deposits were affected by the pipeline operations.

7.2 The Bronze Age house site (PRN 7922) and probable Roman road (PRN 7921) discovered during topsoil stripping work demonstrate very clearly the value of an archaeological input into pipeline schemes at an early stage. Through the close co-operation of British Gas and their contractors, A.Hak, the early discovery of the site meant that time was available for a rescue excavation to be carried out before the site was disturbed by the pipeline installation work. Observations carried out during pipeline installation in the site area and its environs demonstrated that little would have been accomplished if the watching brief had been limited to this sphere of operations: time available for archaeological input at this stage is often extremely limited.

8 Acknowledgements

8.1 CPAT wishes to express its thanks to British Gas, particularly Mr R. Roberts and Mr D Jones, for facilitating all aspects of the work; and to their contractors A.Hak, for their co-operation and consideration during the watching brief and subsequent rescue excavation. Thanks are also due to British Gas for the provision of additional resources to assist with the excavation and post-excavation of the Bronze Age house site. Thanks are also due to Mr T.R.Savage and his family for their interest and co-operation during the excavation of the round house.

9 References

- Hankinson R.H. 1993. Caersws to Llanidloes Gas Pipeline CPAT Report No 63. Welshpool.
- Rudeforth C.C. et al. 1984. Soils and Their Uses in Wales. Soil Survey of England and Wales Bulletin No 11. Harpenden.

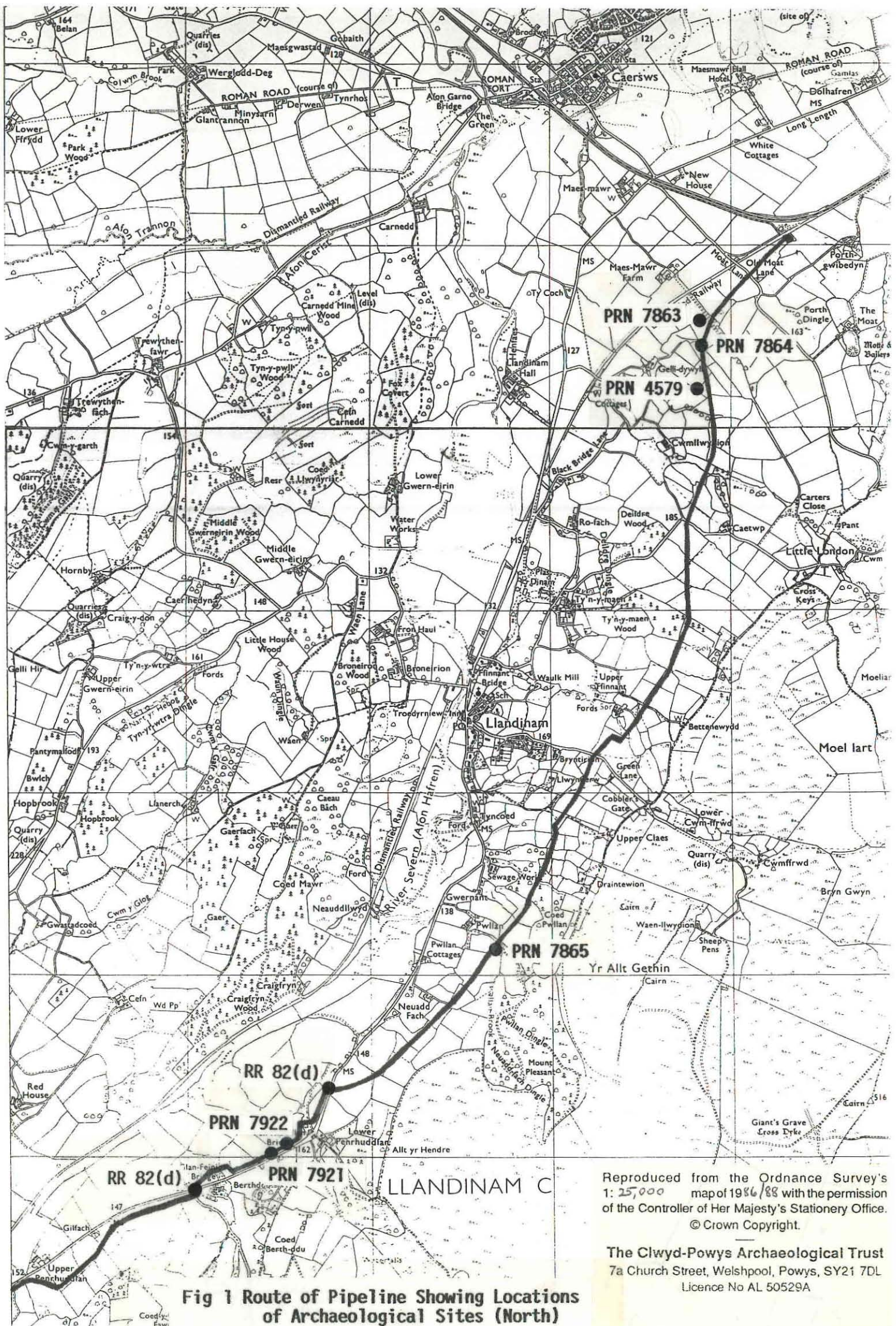


Fig 1 Route of Pipeline Showing Locations of Archaeological Sites (North)

Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey's 1: 25,000 map of 1986/88 with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown Copyright.

The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust
7a Church Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7DL
Licence No AL 50529A

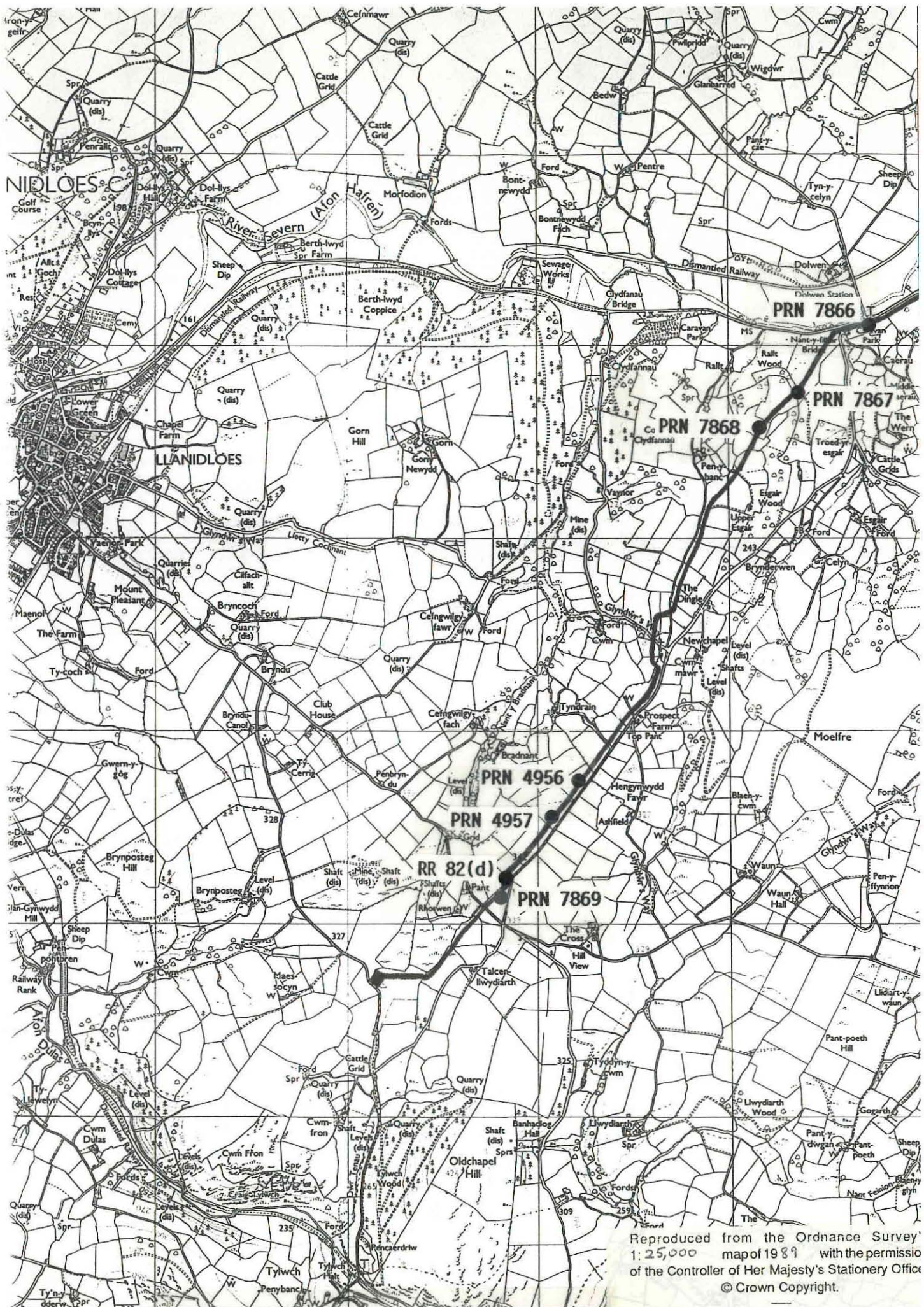


Fig 2 Route of Pipeline Showing Locations of Archaeological Sites (South)

Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey
1:25,000 map of 1981 with the permission
of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office
© Crown Copyright.

The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trus
7a Church Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7DL
Licence No AL 50529A

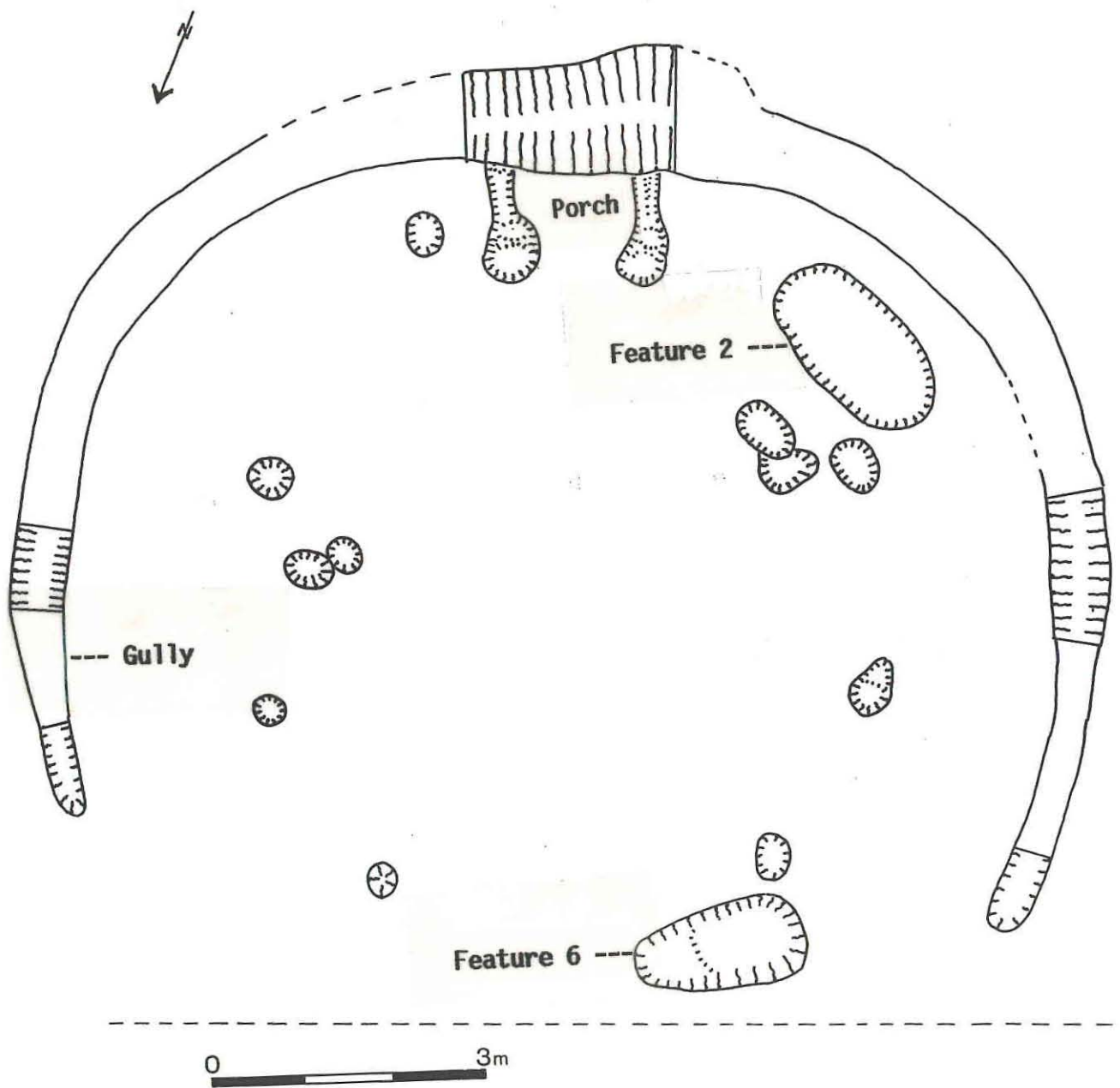


Fig 3 Bronze Age Round House (PRN 7922)