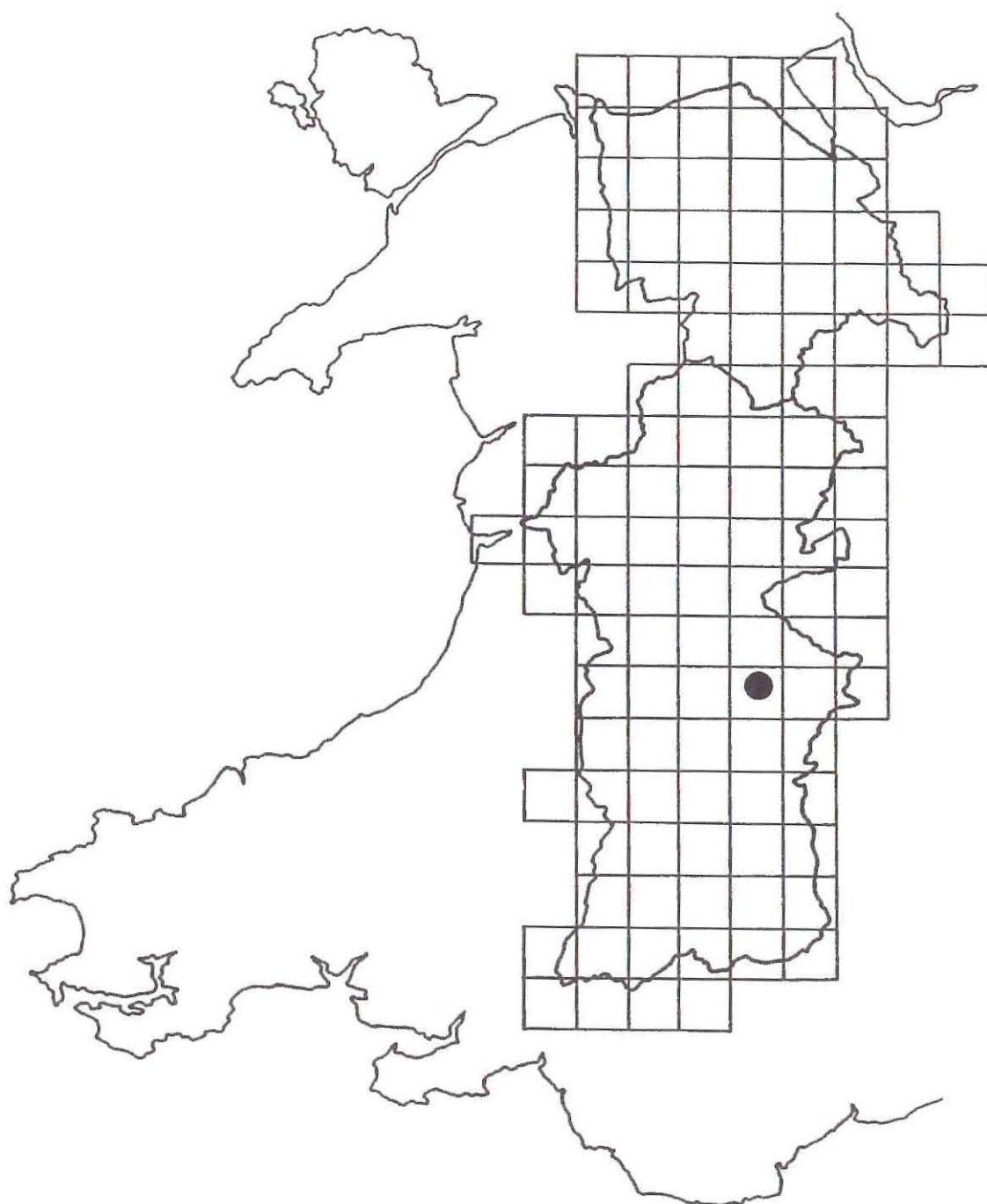


THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

*Dolau Springs Abandonment Water Main,  
Powys*

WATCHING BRIEF



CPAT Report No 132

*Dolau Springs Abandonment Water Main,  
Powys*

**WATCHING BRIEF**

**by R Hankinson and WG Owen**

March 1995

Report prepared for Dwr Cymru/Welsh Water

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## **1 Introduction**

1.1 In March 1994, Acer Wallace Evans consulted the Curatorial Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) with regard to the proposed installation of a 100mm-diameter water main within the roadside verge of the A488 road between Penybont and Llanfihangel Rhydithon, Powys.

1.2 A consultation of the County Sites and Monuments Record by the Curatorial Section indicated that the development lay close to or on the presumed alignment of a Roman Road (recorded as X76). As it was possible that sub-surface remains of road metallings and lateral drainage ditches related to the Roman road might be detected during the course of the works, Acer Wallace Evans were advised that a watching brief should be maintained during the initial topsoiling and subsequent trench-cutting stages of the scheme.

1.3 In May 1994, Acer Wallace Evans requested CPAT Contracting to provide them with a specification and costing for maintaining a watching brief during the course of the pipeline works; and in August 1994, CPAT contracting was commissioned to carry out the work as specified.

## **2 Geographical Background**

2.1 The pipeline route extended from a point (SO 1174 6416) on the verge of the A488 road adjacent to Penybont Common and followed it in a generally north-eastern direction to a point (SO 1598 6733) approximately 1.0km to the north-east of Llanfihangel Rhydithon, a total length of approximately 5.5km.

2.2 For the first 2.4km the road passes through the unimproved pasture of Penybont Common thereafter being bordered by enclosed and intensively cultivated arable and pasture fields.

2.3 Soils in the area are slowly permeable fine silty and clayey soils either of the Cegin or Wilcocks 1 Associations derived from Palaeozoic drift (Rudeforth et al 1984). The lower B horizons of these profiles were exposed during trench-cutting and were, typically, blocky clays of high density.

## **3 Archaeological Background**

3.1 The earliest reference to the presence of a Roman Road in the vicinity of Penybont dates to 1858 but the route described travels to the west of the village and no reference is made of a road to the north-east (Williams 1858).

3.2 It was reported in 1969 that aerial photography had provisionally identified the site of a Roman fort at Maes-Treylow (SO 2684 6526), near Discoed in the Lugg valley (St Joseph 1969). An implication of this was that a Roman road would have passed through the fort, and subsequently entered Penybont from the north-east, travelling towards the known fort at Castell Collen, near Llandrindod Wells. A small number of



features considered to be representative of this road line are noted in its entry in the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) for the area; these were suggested by the examination of RAF aerial photography, originally taken in the 1940s.

3.3 The line of the suggested road (see Fig 1) left Penybont in a north-easterly direction; two possible routes then diverged after approximately 0.6km. One route followed traces of a road still visible on Penybont Common and the general line of the present A488 road through Llanfihangel Rhydithon, while the other took a direct line, passing 1km south of the village. The routes rejoined at SO 1841 6803, where a minor road travelling from the south-west joins the A488.

3.4 In 1979 the site of the suggested fort at Discoed was partially excavated (Britnell 1980). Unfortunately, however, no evidence for a fort was discovered. The features seen on the aerial photography were considered to be field boundaries resulting from agricultural activity of medieval or later date.

3.5 The traces of a road, mentioned in paragraph 3.3, above, which still exist on Penybont Common, can be partially dated by cartographic evidence. Their date of origin is unknown, but it is apparent that they belong to a road which was in use in 1817. By the time (1831) of the survey which led to the production of the Old Series Ordnance Survey 1 inch:1 mile map in 1833, the road, although still shown, had been superseded by a turnpike road on the line of the modern A488.

3.6 The evidence for a Roman road which mirrors the course of the pipeline is, at present, based entirely on the interpretation of aerial photography. In the light of the excavations at Discoed (Britnell 1980) this evidence would appear to be equivocal.

## **4 Methodology**

4.1 Owing to the length of the pipeline, it was deemed to be prohibitive in terms of both time and cost to maintain the watching brief throughout all the trench cutting. Particular attention was paid to trench cutting on Penybont Common, and to road crossings, as these were considered to be the operations most likely to reveal any features associated with a Roman road. The areas in which trench cutting was observed are depicted on Fig 1.

4.2 During the watching brief, the likely features which could be expected to signify the presence of the road were described to the on-site staff of both Welsh Water and Tomlinson Thompson. This was in order that contact could be made in the event of any such features being revealed during pipeline trenching.

## 5 Archaeology

5.1 Little evidence in support of the presence of a Roman road was recognised. A section of cobbling was seen in the trench by Welsh Water staff at SO 1346 6567. Unfortunately, due to safety considerations, the trench had to be backfilled before the CPAT visit of the following day. The section of cobbling was reported to be c. 0.25m thick, at a depth of approximately 1m below the present road level.

5.2 The cobbling almost certainly relates to a previous road, but this is impossible to date with any certainty, particularly in view of the documentary and field evidence relating to the road extant in 1817, which was noted in paragraph 3.5, above. It is possible that the road has a Roman origin, but further evidence, in the form of finds or recognisable Roman features, would be required before a Roman date could be safely ascribed.

5.3 Examination of a number of road crossings and longitudinal trench sections in the course of the pipeline installation provided no further evidence of a Roman road. It must be considered, however, that a significant amount of road improvement has occurred on this length of the A488. This, combined with the restricted width (c. 0.5m), of the pipeline trench would undoubtedly have rendered identification of any traces of Roman road difficult.

## 6 Conclusions

6.1 No evidence which could definitely be attributed to a Roman road was discovered during the watching brief. The section of cobbling reported at SO 1346 6567 could relate to a road of post-medieval date.

6.2 The lack of a Roman fort at Discoed throws the suggested road alignment occupied by the pipeline into doubt. Further evidence than that discovered by the watching brief would be required before a road on this alignment could be confirmed.

6.3 If a Roman road did follow this general alignment, then it appears most likely that it either took a different course to the present road, or has been substantially destroyed by later road construction.

## 7 Acknowledgements

7.1 CPAT would like to thank the on-site staff of Welsh Water and their contractors Tomlinson Thompson for their help and assistance during the course of the pipeline installation works.

7.2 In addition, the writer would like to thank the staff of the following organisations for their help and assistance:

The National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth

The Sites and Monuments Record, Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust



## 8 References

### Documentary

Britnell J.E. 1980 'Supposed Roman Fort at Discoed, Powys'  
Britannia 11

Margary H. 1992 The Old Series Ordnance Survey Maps of England and Wales (Vol VI - Wales) Lympe, Kent

Rudeforth et al 1984 Soils and their Use in Wales Soil Survey of England and Wales Bulletin No 11 Harpenden

St Joseph J.K. 1969 Journal of Roman Studies 59

### Cartographic

1817 Ordnance Survey Surveyors Drawing No 197 (2 inch:1 mile)

## **Annex 1**

### **DOLAU SPRINGS ABANDONMENT PROPOSED WATER MAIN**

#### **SPECIFICATION FOR A WATCHING BRIEF TO BE CONDUCTED BY CLWYD- POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST**

##### **1.0 Background**

1.1 Wallace Evans propose to lay a water main along the A488 between Penybont and Llanfihangel Rhydithon in Powys (from approximately SO 160 673 to SO 117 642). This entails work over nearly 6km of modern road which is believed to lie over or close to a Roman Road (x76).

1.2 It is considered by the Curatorial Section of CPAT who maintain the regional Sites and Monuments Record for Powys and act as archaeological advisers to local authorities in the region, that a watching brief is required to record any archaeology relating to the Roman road along the pipeline corridor.

1.3 This aspect has been covered in a letter from the Curatorial Section of the CPAT to Wallace Evans on 28 March 1994.

##### **2.0 Objectives**

2.1. The objective of the watching brief is to establish from field observations whether evidence for the Roman road is present on the pipeline corridor and if so to record its nature and occurrence.

##### **3.0 Methods**

3.1 Fieldwork will take the form of a methodical field examination of the pipeline corridor as the trench is excavated.

##### **4.0 Resources and Programming**

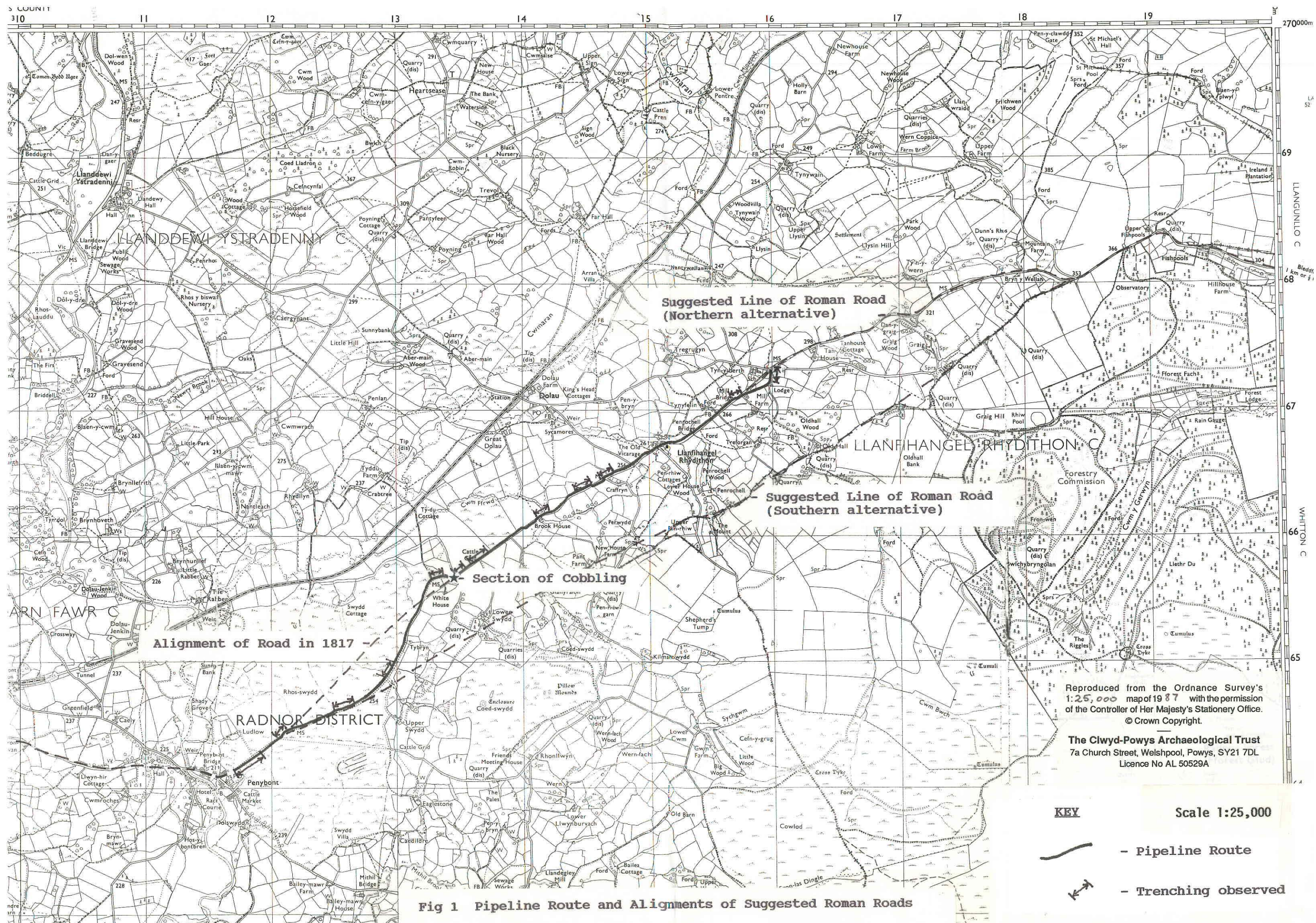
4.1 The fieldwork will be conducted by an experienced field archaeologist from CPAT under the supervision of the Deputy Director of that organisation.

4.2 All report preparation will be completed by the same field archaeologist who conducted the fieldwork.

4.3 It is anticipated that the fieldwork will be undertaken on a selective basis with the archaeologist inspecting the pipeline works for a maximum of twenty days, with particular attention being focussed on those sections most likely to provide good archaeological data.

R. J. Silvester  
12 May 1994





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**KEY**

Scale 1:25,000

— Pipeline Route

— Trenching observed

Fig 1 Pipeline Route and Alignments of Suggested Roman Roads