

THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Roman Roads in Mid and North-east Wales

STATEMENT OF PROGRESS

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Roman Roads in Mid and North-east Wales

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Report for Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Trust has had a long-standing interest in Roman roads, accumulating information and ideas from a variety of sources over quite a few years. A start was made on systematising the data some years ago, but this work was not completed. However, our aspirations were given further impetus by recent developments at Cambria Archaeology whose work on the Roman road network in south-west Wales has informed the recently published new edition of the Ordnance Survey map of Roman Britain. With the curtailment of fieldwork on some of our field-orientated projects in 2001/2 because of foot-and-mouth, Cadw generously agreed to a re-allocation of funding which has enabled the Trust to commence a Roman Roads project – classed as Project no. 966 - towards the end of the financial year, but one that will be continued in the following year.
- 1.2 The primary aims of the project are twofold. Firstly, there is a considerable amount of data available on the road network, but it is disparate, of variable quality and not all of it is readily available. Ordnance Survey records and manuscript mapping offer a starting point, particularly for Powys, and the use of the computerised Geographical Information System (GIS) enables us to record details of all the component sections of each road, whether confirmed or predicted, to a common and consistent standard. The aim is to establish baseline data for all roads in the region, which can then be used, interrogated and extended by the Trust and by other organisations and individuals in the future. At the same time we are conscious that Roman roads can generate particularly strong feelings amongst those involved in their identification and study, so our approach, so we believe, has to be even-handed throughout.
- 1.3 Secondly, a cursory examination of the SMR reveals that a remarkably small number of stretches of Roman road are scheduled: we estimate that the number may be no more than three, all in Brecknock. The second aim of the project is, therefore to identify further lengths of road, which would benefit from statutory protection. Fieldwork will, of course, be necessary to inform any recommendations.

2 METHODOLOGY

- 2.1 The Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) forms the starting point for any study of this nature and initially it was interrogated to produce a project database of all sites which were potentially Roman in date. This included sites where the most likely interpretation (*i.e.* Period 1) was not necessarily Roman, but where other, less likely interpretations (Periods 2 to 3) fell within the scope of the study. For example, the SMR includes a number of roads and tracks which are likely to be post-medieval in origin, but for which an alternative genesis in the Roman era has or might be postulated.
- 2.2 The initial extract produced 1201 sites, which were reassessed, taking into account the SMR description and any readily available published or other written sources. Using GIS, the distribution of various site types was analysed with respect to the existing digital mapping of Roman roads. Particular attention was paid to the relationship between the Roman road network, forts and other military sites, and settlement evidence. The distribution of Roman finds was also analysed. The results of the analysis are presented in section 3.
- 2.3 Two sources of digital data were available to the project and these have provided basic digital mapping for some Roman roads in the region. Information recorded by the Ordnance Survey and derived from the work of their own Field Investigators as well as other archaeologists and some antiquarian sources was passed to the Trust in the form of a series of annotated maplets, probably in the 1980s. Some of this data had previously been partially transferred into the GIS by temporary staff in the SMR. The second set of digital mapping was made available through the good offices of the National Monuments Record, having been compiled by the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments (RCAHMW) to inform the dataset used for the new Ordnance Survey map of Roman Britain.
- 2.4 The majority of the project has to date been conducted using GIS, due to the nature of the study and the available data. The digital mapping provided by the SMR was methodically checked and enhanced to produce a consistent set of digital data for Roman roads in the region. Principally, this took the form of checking the existing record against the original Ordnance Survey information and adding or amending the data as necessary. Additional information was then appended from the SMR point data, such as evidence from excavations and surveys, as well as information from existing aerial photographic plotting.

- 2.5 Each Roman road has been digitised as a series of generally adjoining segments, defined with respect to the existing evidence and survival. Where information has been taken from the Ordnance Survey files the depicted line-style has normally been accepted as indicating either known or proposed lengths of road, except where there is more recent evidence. Each segment has been given a PRN and data have been attached to the record including, for example, which road line it is part of, the length of the segment, its form, condition, status and survival. The latter two fields have been recorded according to a classification devised specifically for this project:

Status

known	confirmed as extant earthwork or as well-recorded buried feature
proposed	conjectural sections either linking known segments or as hypothetical road alignments for which there is some physical evidence
predicted	conjectural road alignment with no known traces
discounted	proposed roads for which an alternative interpretation has now been accepted

Survival

earthwork	road surviving as earthwork
cropmark	road surviving as cropmark, soilmark or buried feature identified through excavation or geophysical survey
fossilised	used where road or road line is believed to have been adopted by a more recent road or field boundary
predicted	conjectural road alignment with no known traces
document	recorded segment the evidence for which is unspecified

- 2.6 Once the known road data has been fully digitised, other sources of information will be investigated. A number of specialists have yet to be consulted including Hugh Toller, Bill Putnam and staff of the RCAHMW. Work will also commence on the roads in the old county of Clwyd, though this is perceived to be an easier task as earlier work is perceived to have been less rigorous..

3 RELATIONSHIP WITH CONTEMPORARY FEATURES

Forts and other military sites (fig. 1)

- 3.1 It has been assumed that the basic road system was probably constructed soon after the establishment of permanent military garrisons in the later first century (RCAHMW 1986, 157). The relationship between the roads and forts or other military sites is therefore of major significance. An examination of this relationship reveals that, as would be expected, the majority of confirmed roads do indeed form a basic network linking the known forts. This is particularly true in Powys in relation to Caersws, Forden Gaer, Castell Collen, Caerau, Brecon Gaer and Pen-y-Gaer. The evidence for north-east Wales is less certain.
- 3.2 There are, however, clearly a significant number of roads which on this basis would appear to be entirely absent from the known record. The forts at Colwyn Castle, Llanymynech and Rhyn Park (just over the border in Shropshire), at present have no known roads associated with them. Hindwell too has not yet been linked into the overall network although short lengths of road have been identified adjacent to the fort and a line has been postulated to the west as far as New Radnor (Gibson 2000, 67).
- 3.3 The distribution shown in fig. 1 includes not only the known and possible forts, but also other military, or possible military sites such as fortlets, marching camps, practice works and signal stations. Also depicted are a number of rectilinear enclosures, recorded largely from cropmark evidence, some of which might conceivably provide evidence for military sites.

Civilian settlement (fig. 2)

- 3.4 The relationship between the road network and civilian sites and other evidence of Roman occupation (excluding finds from hillforts) is to some extent also a reflection of the distribution of military sites. There are, however, a number of sites with no local military association and these do in general appear to be located close to roads.

- 3.5 As with military sites, the evidence of Roman settlement also indicates areas where roads might be expected. At Prestatyn, on the north Wales coast, there is evidence for a substantial settlement dating from AD 70 to the early 4th century (Blockley 1989). This has been assumed to be in association with a fort, although there would now seem to be little evidence to support this. Excavations during the 1980s identified a small civilian settlement at Plas Coch, Wrexham (Burnham 1996, 390; Gifford & Partners 1998), although this is unlikely to have been served by a main arterial route.

Finds and hoards (fig. 3)

- 3.6 There are 35 Roman hoards recorded in the area, only 7 of which lie within 1km of a known or proposed Roman road. Of the 250 recorded finds spots, some of which relate to military sites, 71 (28%) lie within 1km of a known or proposed Roman road, demonstrating a correlation between the two. As we have seen above there are significant areas where Roman finds are recorded but for which no Roman roads have so far been identified or postulated. This is particularly true for the Severn valley north of Forden Gaer, as well as for a large part of north-east Wales.

Ancillary information (fig. 4)

- 3.7 The extract from the SMR includes 293 records which relate directly to Roman roads. These take the form of physical evidence such as milestones, earthworks, cropmarks, and evidence from excavations, as well as placenames and conjectural alignments and associations such as river crossings and bridges. Plotted against the digital map base it is clear that the majority present supporting evidence for the existing mapping. In two cases, however, records from the SMR would appear to provide evidence for further alignments which, although already postulated, have yet to be mapped by the project. A Roman road has been postulated running east to west over Long Mountain, north of Forden Gaer, as far as Machynlleth, and presumably the fort at Pennal (Rigg and Toller 1983), and in north-east Wales, there is evidence for a short section of road to the south of Mold.

4 PROGRESS

- 4.1 At the time of writing good progress has been made on digitising and systematising the data available for Powys. Much of the work on the OS maplets is complete, leaving only some of the less certain roads, together with more recent information compiled by the RCAHMS and published in the *Brecknock Inventory* in 1986, and road lines identified by Barri Jones, Hugh Toller and others.
- 4.2 As an example of the methodology the road from Wroxeter to Trefeglwys (RRX64) has been mapped according to status (fig. 5) and survival (fig. 6), enabling us to provide an objective assessment of the survival of the road.
- 4.3 The road west from Wroxeter has two proposed alternatives to the east of Forden Gaer, one running over Long Mountain and the other following lower ground to the south. From Forden Gaer the line has been assumed to follow the Severn Valley to Caersws and then run westwards where it has been traced as far as Trefeglwys. Within Powys, the road and its variants total 49.5km in length, although an alignment of 3.4km to the east of Caersws has now been discounted in favour of a more generally accepted alternative, leaving 46.1km of potential Roman road.

Table 1: Status

Status	Length (km)
known	2.7
proposed	14.9
predicted	28.5
Total	46.1

Table 2: Survival

Survival	Length (km)
earthwork	4.1
cropmark	0.7
fossilised	14.5
unknown	26.8
Total	46.1

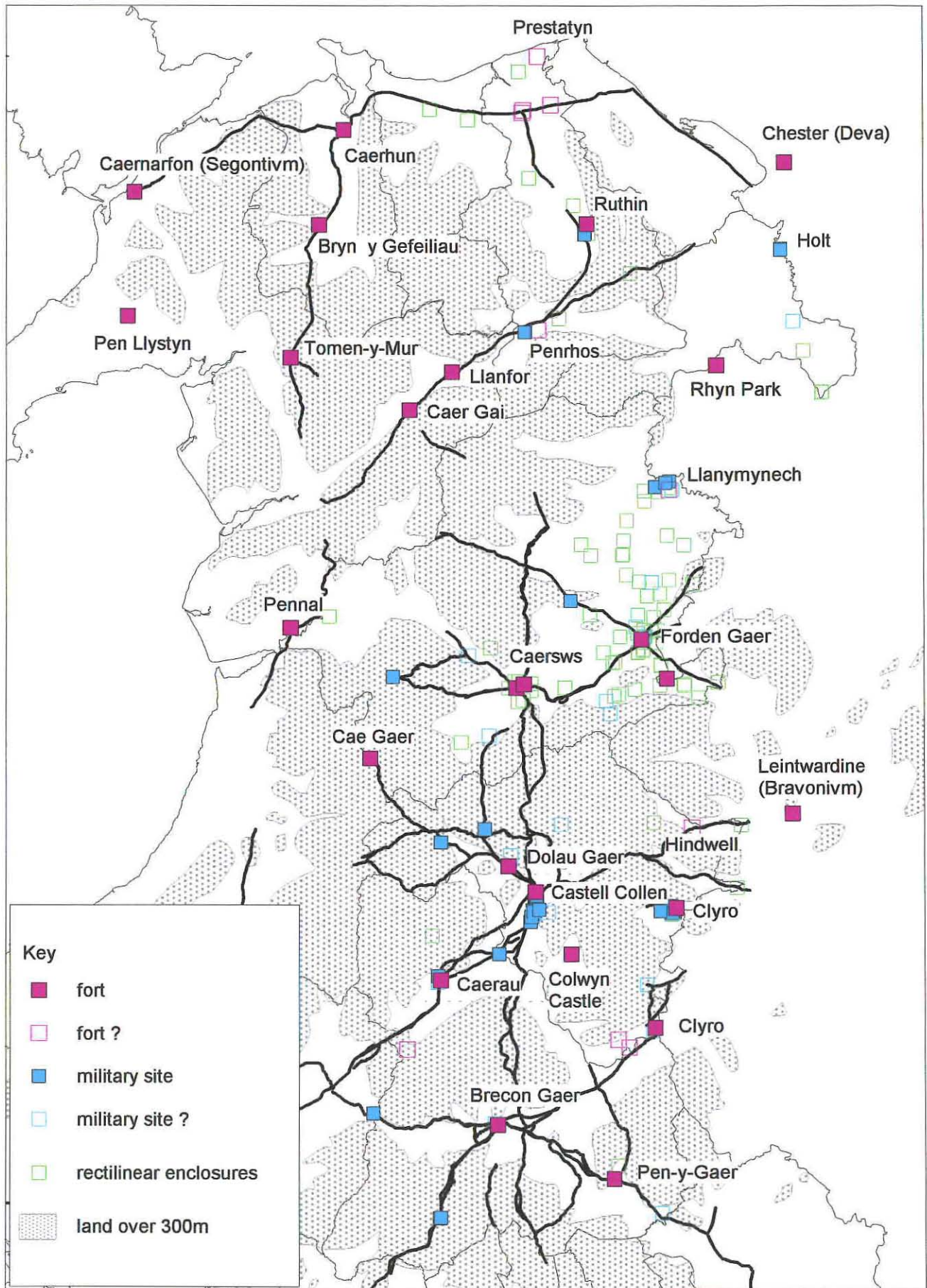
- 4.4 What is evident from Tables 1 and 2 is that only a small percentage of the total road length has been confirmed (5.8%), although there is some physical evidence for almost twice that length (10.4%), comprising earthworks and cropmarks. In fact, the only confirmed sections are those to the west of Caersws I Fort, where the road survives as an upstanding agger and has also in part been identified through geophysical survey, and a section further to the east where the road again survives as an earthwork, or shows as a soil mark during ploughing. The majority of the road alignment (62%) is entirely predicted, with no substantive evidence for the actual route.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments for providing the funding; RCAHMW for providing digital mapping of Roman roads; Powys County Council for permission to use the Ordnance Survey Land Line digital data; and Wendy Owen who has undertaken much of the digitising work.

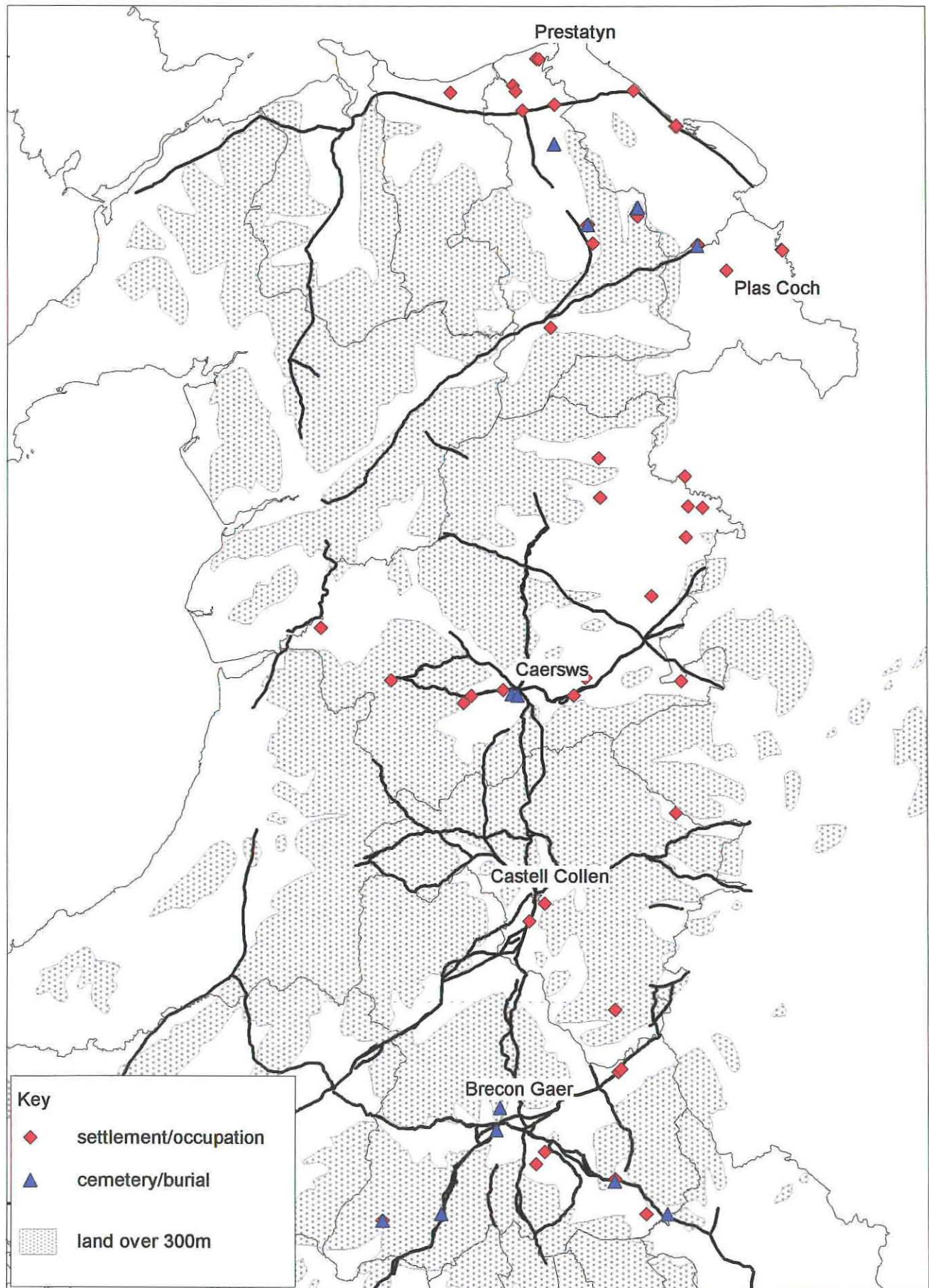
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Fig. 1 Roman roads and distribution of Roman forts



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Fig. 2 Roman roads and settlement

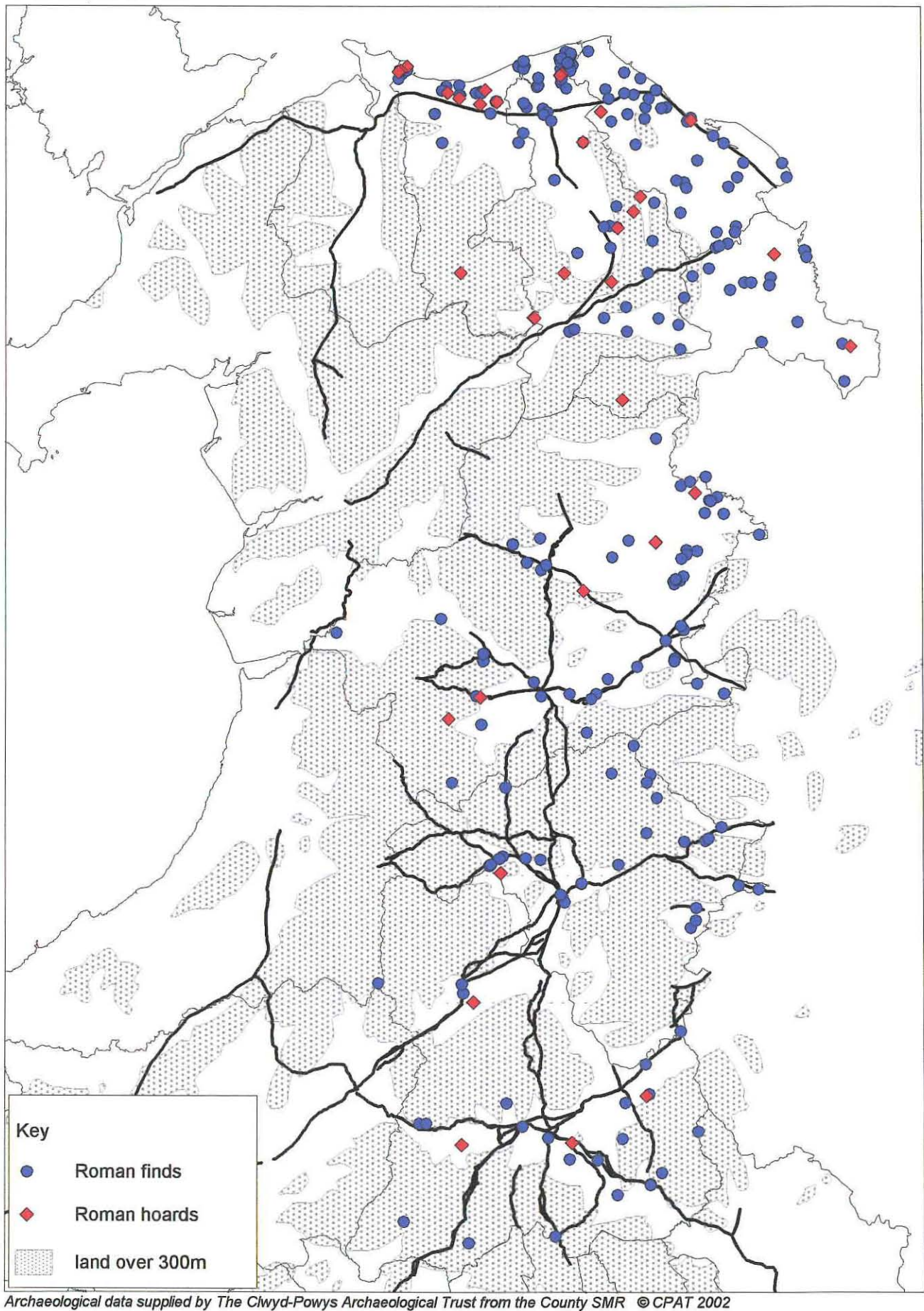
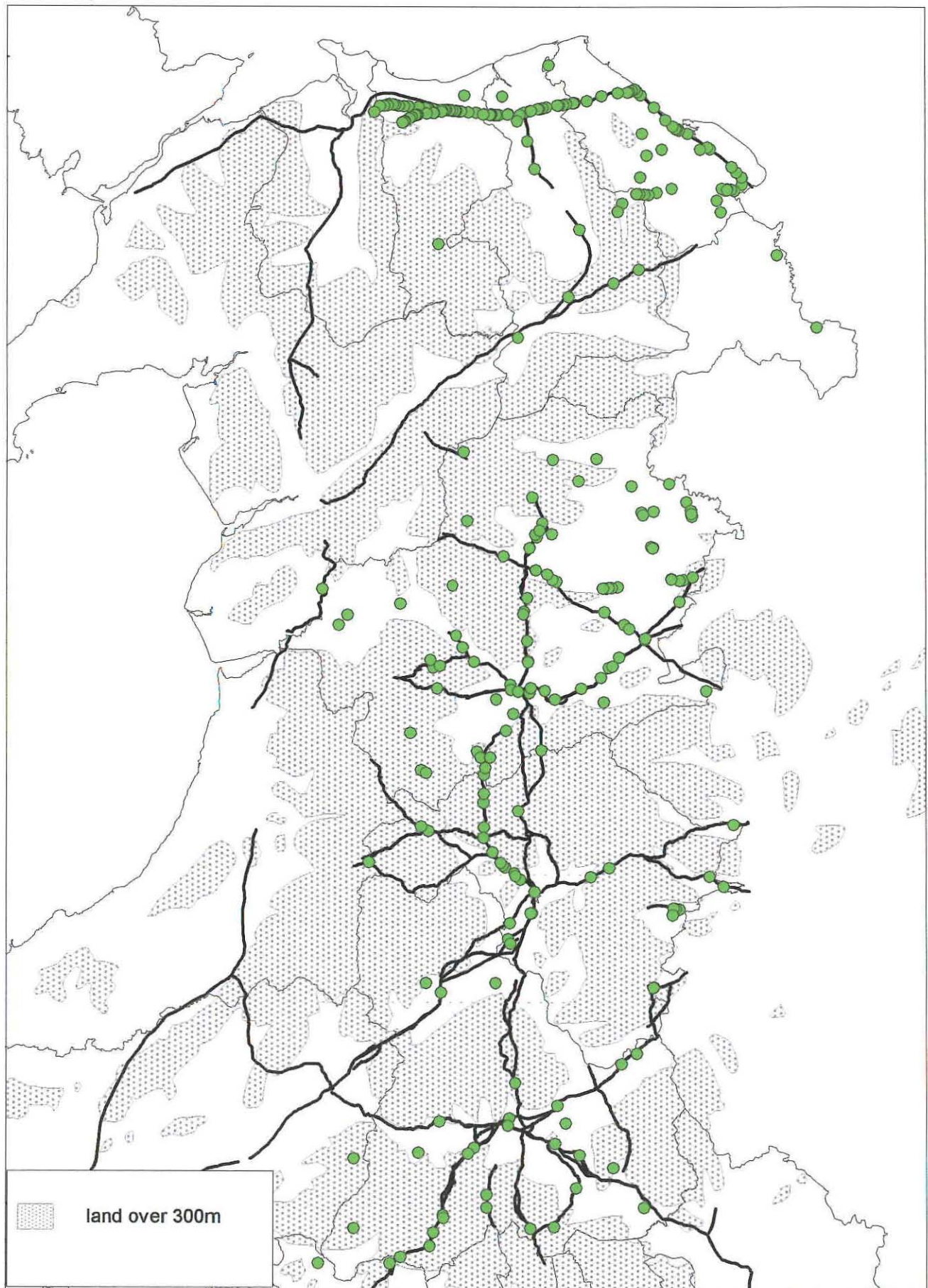
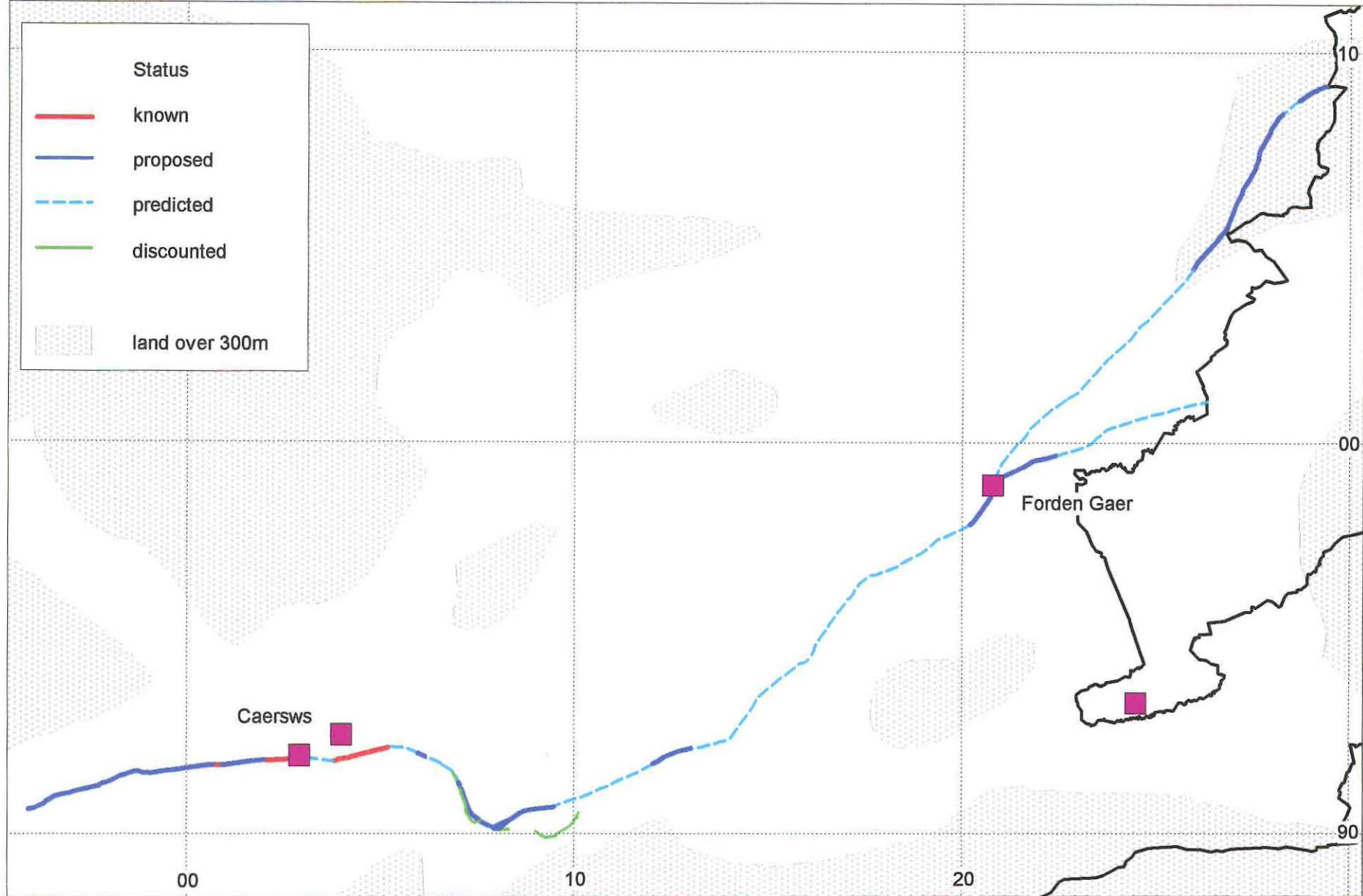


Fig. 3 Roman roads and distribution of Roman finds and hoards



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Fig. 4 Roman roads: point data recorded in the SMR



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Fig. 5 Roman road RRX64 Wroxeter to Trefeglwys: Status