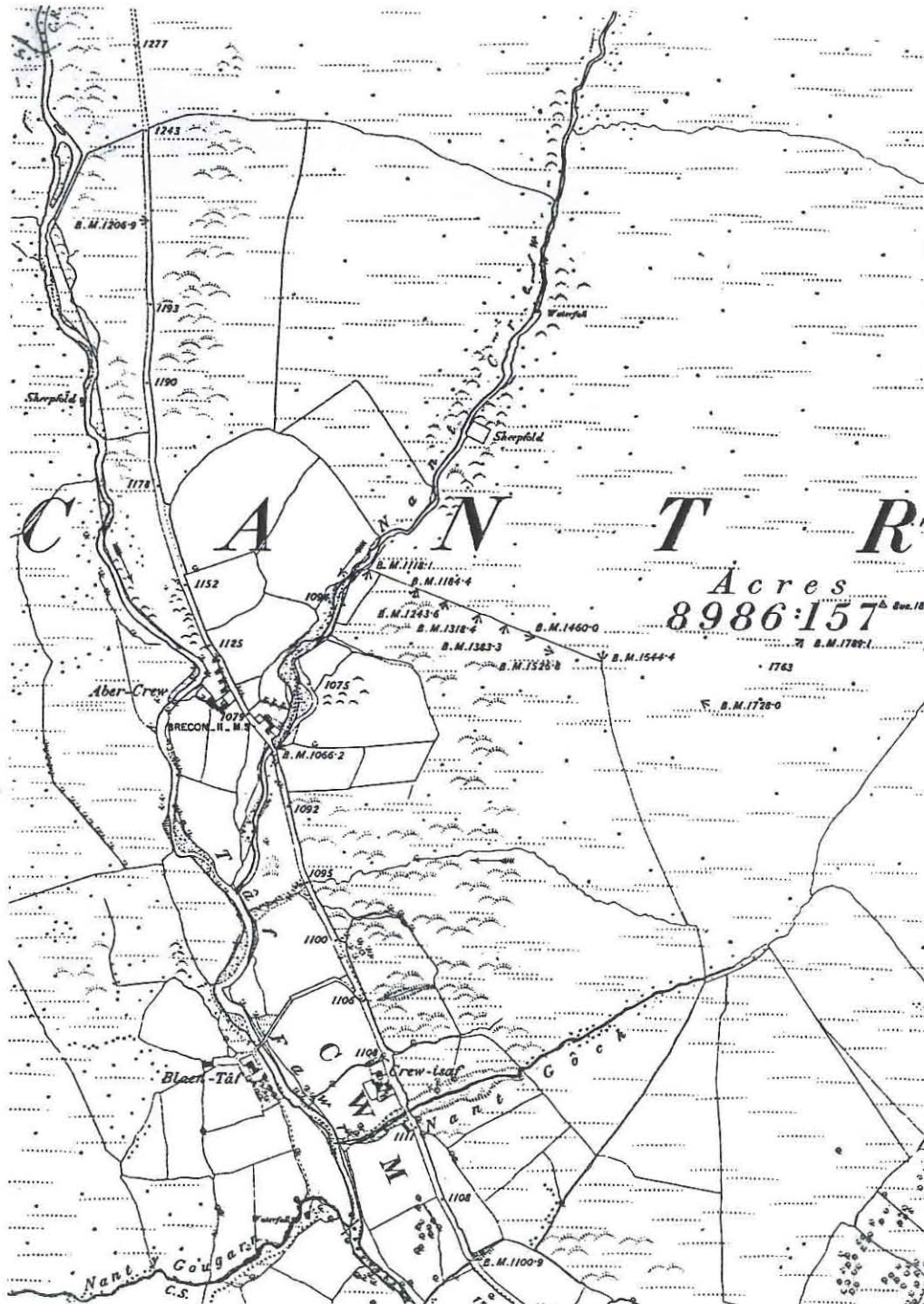


A470 Trunk Road, Nant Crew Improvement

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF



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W.G.Owen
October 1999

Report for Powys County Council, Highways and Property Design Group

CPAT Report Record

Report and status

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The improvement at Nant Crew to the A470 in its course through the Brecon Beacons in southern Powys is located between the Cantref Reservoir and the Beacons Reservoir at approximately SN 9916 (fig. 1). The work involved short lengths of off-line improvements to straighten two bends in the road which links Brecon and Merthyr Tydfil.
- 1.2 Information from the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) indicated that no recorded archaeological sites were affected by the scheme, although a number of sites existed in adjacent areas. However, it had been suggested that the existing road might overlie a possible Roman road, although there was no independent evidence to support the contention. However, in view of this possibility and the proximity of other sites of known archaeological interest, the Curatorial Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, acting in their role as archaeological curators for the county, determined that an archaeological watching brief should be undertaken during the ground works, and a project brief was prepared by Mr M.Walters (No CWAT 311, dated 25th March 1999) which described the scheme of works required.

2 TOPOGRAPHY, GEOLOGY AND SOILS

- 2.1 The site of the road improvements lies, in general terms, at a break in the slope to the east of the Taf Fawr watercourse. To the east of the road the ground rises steeply to the Cefn Crew ridge and Craig y Byllfa, while immediately to the west the land falls more gently to the river.
- 2.2 Soils in the general area derive from drift from reddish sandstone and siltstone of Devonian Age (Rudeforth *et al*, 1986) and have been attributed to the Wenallt Soil Association. Where the road passes through common land in the northern part of the corridor, the peaty loam topsoil below the turf is thin, on average no more than 0.15m thick. Where there are wet or waterlogged conditions the topsoil overlies a grey clay some 0.10-0.15m thick which represents a gleyed horizon. This in turn overlies a more gritty, orange coloured, sandy clay. Elsewhere, where drainage is not impeded the topsoil is deeper and varies from a very dark brown friable peaty loam over a reddish-orange sandy subsoil to a brown loam over a red subsoil which, according to the evidence of boreholes, extends to a depth in excess of 1.0m.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The main archaeological interest lay in the possibility that the existing alignment of the A470 overlay a conjectured Roman road which linked the forts located at Penydarren, Merthyr Tydfil (SO 0500 0670) and Brecon Gaer to the east of Brecon (SO 0030 2971). An alternative route for the Roman road has been proposed (Hogg & Houlder 1969) based on the identification of a probable length of extant road on Pen Milan (SO 001237 - SN 993224) and a shorter length (PRN 3262; SN 988180 - SN 987177) on the western slopes above Taf Fawr and opposite the northern end of the present road improvement works. During the watching brief a fieldwork on the slopes above the river confirmed the Hogg and Houlder thesis, the road (fig. 1) surviving to a maximum width of 6.0m, with a distinct agger and side ditches in places. Some stone metalling was visible where the road was not turf-covered, although, this could reflect a more recent attempt to re-establish a road surface which was eventually replaced by the construction of the A4059. This obvious section of road is overlooked near Nant yr Eira by a severely denuded earthwork enclosure probably of Iron Age date (PRN 3248, SN 98741776). To the south of this earthwork, a trackway is visible for a further 200m but it is entirely turf-covered and lacks the features visible to the north of Nant yr Eira.
- 3.2 The Ordnance Survey 1st Edition map of 1890 and its 2nd Edition counterpart of 1903 denote several post-medieval land boundaries on both the east and west facing slopes above the Taf Fawr watercourse some of which may still be identified, whilst others have entirely disappeared. Also shown immediately adjacent to the river at SN 99051690 is the location of a structure identified in the SMR as a rectangular longhouse with two adjacent paddocks (PRN 3258).

4 WATCHING BRIEF

- 4.1 The watching brief was maintained intermittently over a period of two weeks, commencing on 28 April 1999, site visits being dependant on the nature of the contractor's work programme. The initial stages of topsoil stripping were monitored in the areas where the line of the road improvements deviated from the existing road alignment.
- 4.1 During the course of topsoil stripping in the northern area (plate 1), where the scheme crossed common land, no features of archaeological significance were noted. In particular, there was no evidence of terracing which might have indicated the position of an earlier road or track. No finds were recovered either from the stockpiled topsoil or from the surface underlying the topsoil.
- 4.2 In pasture land immediately adjacent to the existing A470, a field bank (fig. 2, site 1 and plate 2) was noted. This was curvilinear, 60m long and 1.20m wide and up to 1.10m high, and tailed off at its northern end. This field boundary is shown on the Ordnance survey 1st Edition map of 1890.
- 4.3 Following the removal of topsoil the works proceeded to excavate benching to reduce the ground level. A watching brief was only maintained during the initial stages until it became obvious that the excavations were entirely within natural, undisturbed subsoil and substrata.
- 4.4 It had been assumed that further monitoring might be required once the existing A470 was removed and excavations commenced to construct the new road. However, following discussions with the Resident Engineer, it was determined that the scheme did not involve any excavations along the line of the existing road which would exceed the depth of existing road makeup.

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The watching brief failed to identify any evidence to support the suggestion that the present course of the A470 followed the line of a Roman road. However, confirmation of a section of metalled road further to the west would appear to add weight to the assertion that the Roman road ran to the west of Taf Fawr in an area unaffected by the present scheme.
- 4.2 The only archaeological feature identified during the watching brief was a former field bank, surviving as a broad lynchet, which was shown as extant on the Ordnance Survey map of 1890.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 5.1 The writer would like to thank Meurig Leyshon of Powys Highways and John David, the Resident Engineer, for their assistance and co-operation during the watching brief.

6 REFERENCES

Hogg, AHA & Houlder, CH 1969. Pen Milan, *Archaeology in Wales* 9, 17.

Rudeforth, C.C., Hartnup, R., Lea, J.W., Thompson, T.R.E., and Wright, P.C., 1984, *Soils and their Use in Wales*, Bulletin No 11. Harpenden: Soil Survey of England and Wales.

APPENDIX 1: SPECIFICATION

A470 TRUNK ROAD, NANT CREW IMPROVEMENT SPECIFICATION FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF BY CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The improvement to the A470 at Nant Crew is located between the Cantref Reservoir and the Beacons Reservoir at approx. SN9916. The work involves minor lengths of off-line improvements to straighten two bends in the road.
- 1.2 Information from the County Sites and Monuments Record indicates that no recorded features will be affected by the scheme, although a number of sites exist in adjacent areas. However, it has been suggested that the existing road overlies a possible Roman road, although there is no firm evidence to confirm this. In view of this possibility and the proximity of other known sites the Curatorial Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, acting in their role as archaeological curators for the county, have determined that an archaeological watching brief should be undertaken. Accordingly, a Brief has been prepared by M.Walters (No CWAT 311, dated 25th March 1999) which describes the scheme of works required.

2 Objectives

- 2.1 The objectives of the archaeological watching brief are:
 - 2.1.1 to monitor the initial stages of topsoil stripping and road construction in order that any archaeologically significant deposits or artefacts can be identified, located and retrieved.
 - 2.1.1 to record the nature, condition, significance and, where possible, the chronology of any archaeological deposits and/or features revealed within the area of the proposed development during the development works in so far as these aims are possible;
 - 2.1.2 to prepare a report outlining the results of the watching brief.

3 Methods

- 3.1 The watching brief will involve the examination of all the groundworks listed above. Limited excavation of significant features may be undertaken following consultation with the curator and the developer.
- 3.2 All archaeological deposits and/or features noted during the watching brief will be recorded by drawn plan and/or section and photographed in 35mm format colour slide, black and white print and colour print. Features will be accurately located with respect to the Ordnance Survey grid and Ordnance Datum where possible.
- 3.3 Following the on-site work an illustrated and bound report will be prepared according. This will be in A4 format and contain conventional sections on: Site location, Topography and Geology; Historic Background; Catalogue of sites identified with notes on their condition and significance, Conclusions and Recommendations and References, together with appropriate appendices on archives and finds.
- 3.5 The site archive will be prepared to specifications laid out in Appendix 3 in the *Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage, 1991). The full site archive will be deposited with the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust as specified in section 9 of the Brief.

4 Resources and Programming

- 4.1 The watching brief will be undertaken by a skilled and experienced archaeologist. Overall supervision will be by Mr R.J.Silvester, a senior member of CPAT's staff who is also a member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.
- 4.2 All report preparation will be completed by the same field archaeologist who conducted the watching brief.
- 4.3 It is anticipated that the report would be prepared immediately following completion of the watching brief, dependent on the client's instructions and the arrangement of a suitable timetable. The date of commencement, at the time of writing, has yet to be agreed with the client, and will be dependent on the state of the site and negotiated access. The archaeological curator will be informed of the detailed timetable and staffing levels when agreement has been reached with the client.
- 4.4 Requirements relating to Health and Safety regulations will be adhered to by CPAT and its staff.
- 4.5 CPAT is covered by appropriate Public and Employer's Liability insurance.

N.W.Jones
Projects Officer
30th March 1999

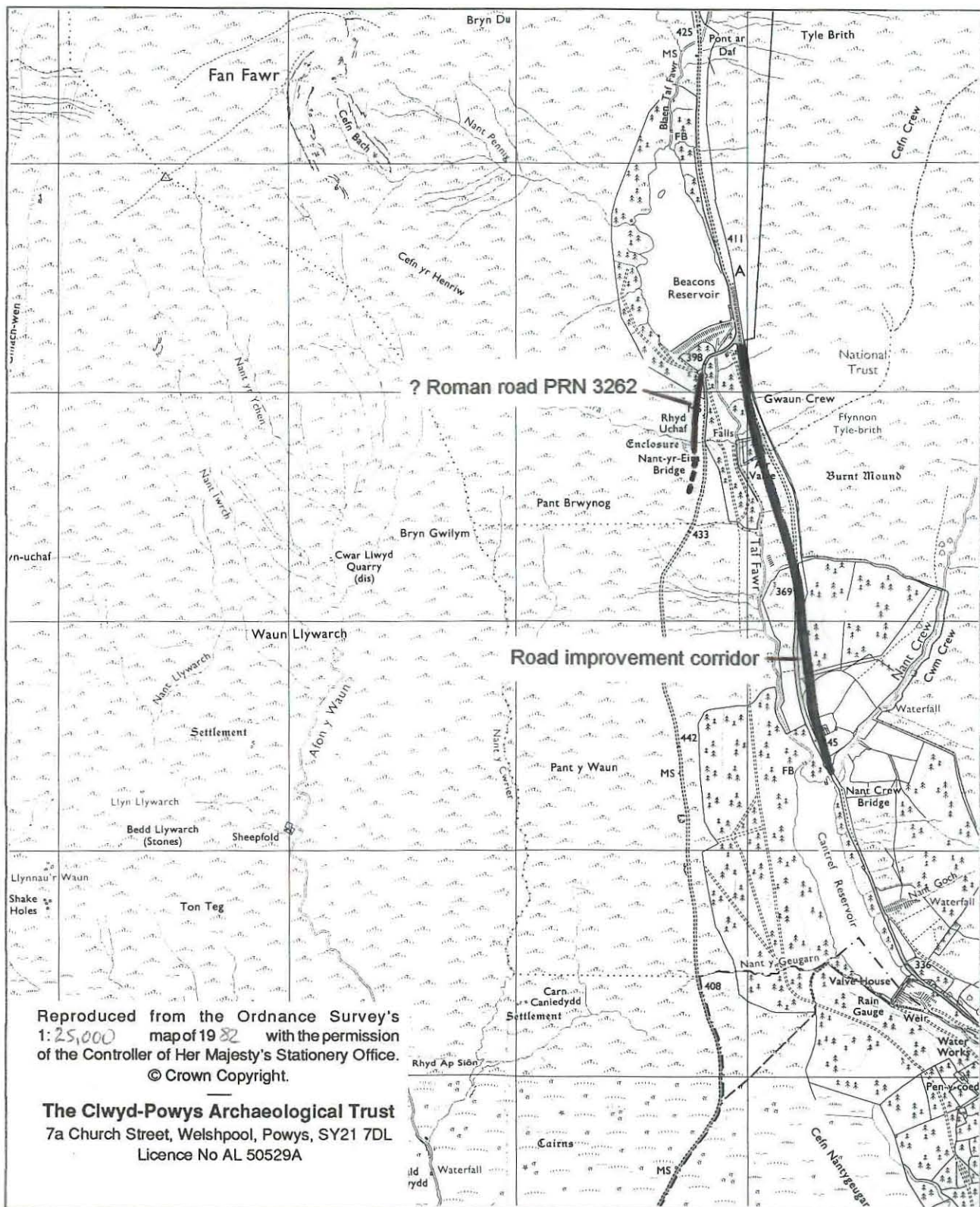


Fig. 1 Road Improvement location. Scale 1:25,000

Fig. 2 Road Improvement Corridor. Scale 1:5,000

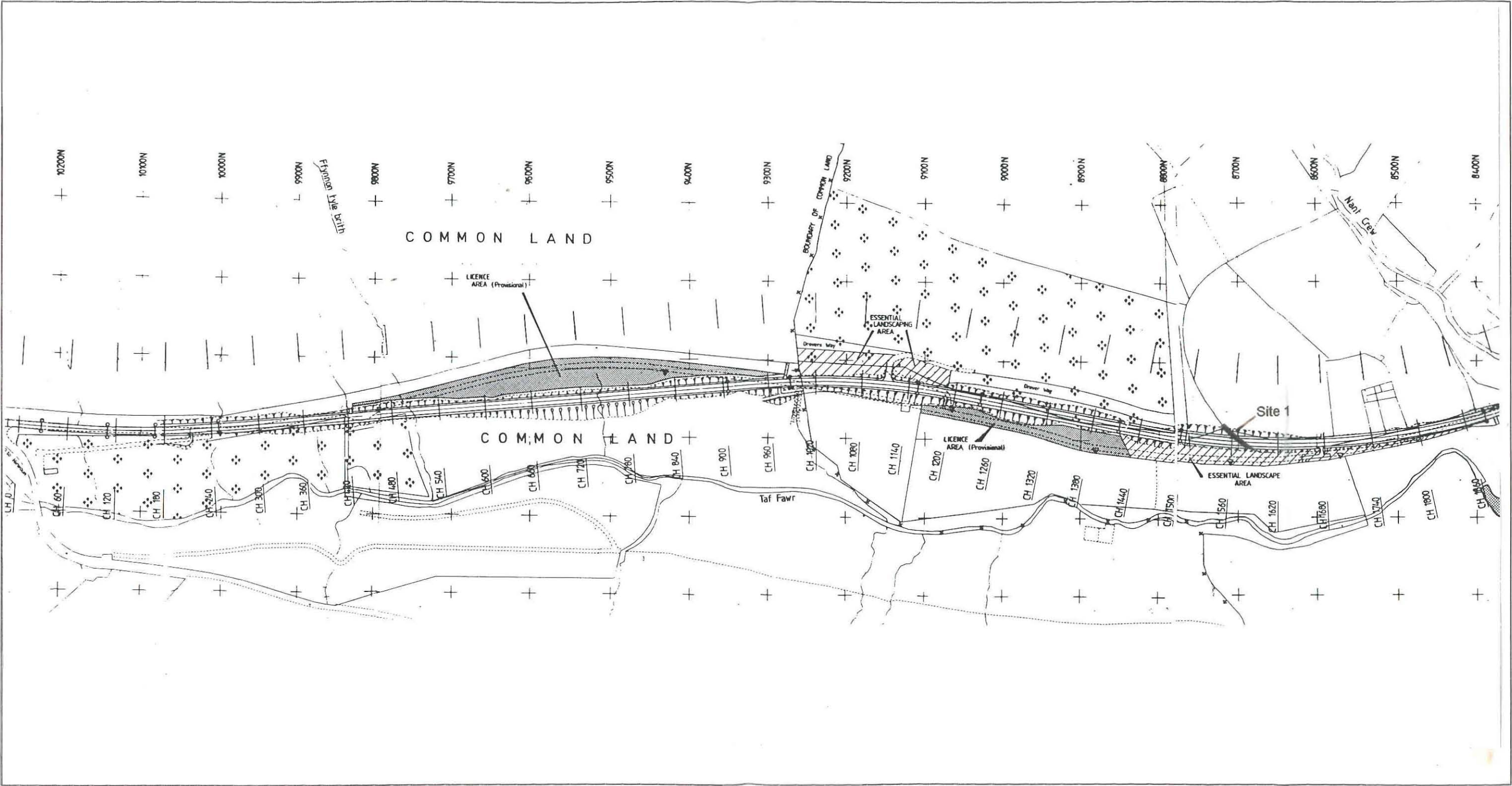




Plate 1. Topsoiling operations across area of common land. View from N. Photo CPAT 817.8



Plate 2. Field boundary, Site 1 from E. Photo CPAT 817.9