CPAT Report No 1042

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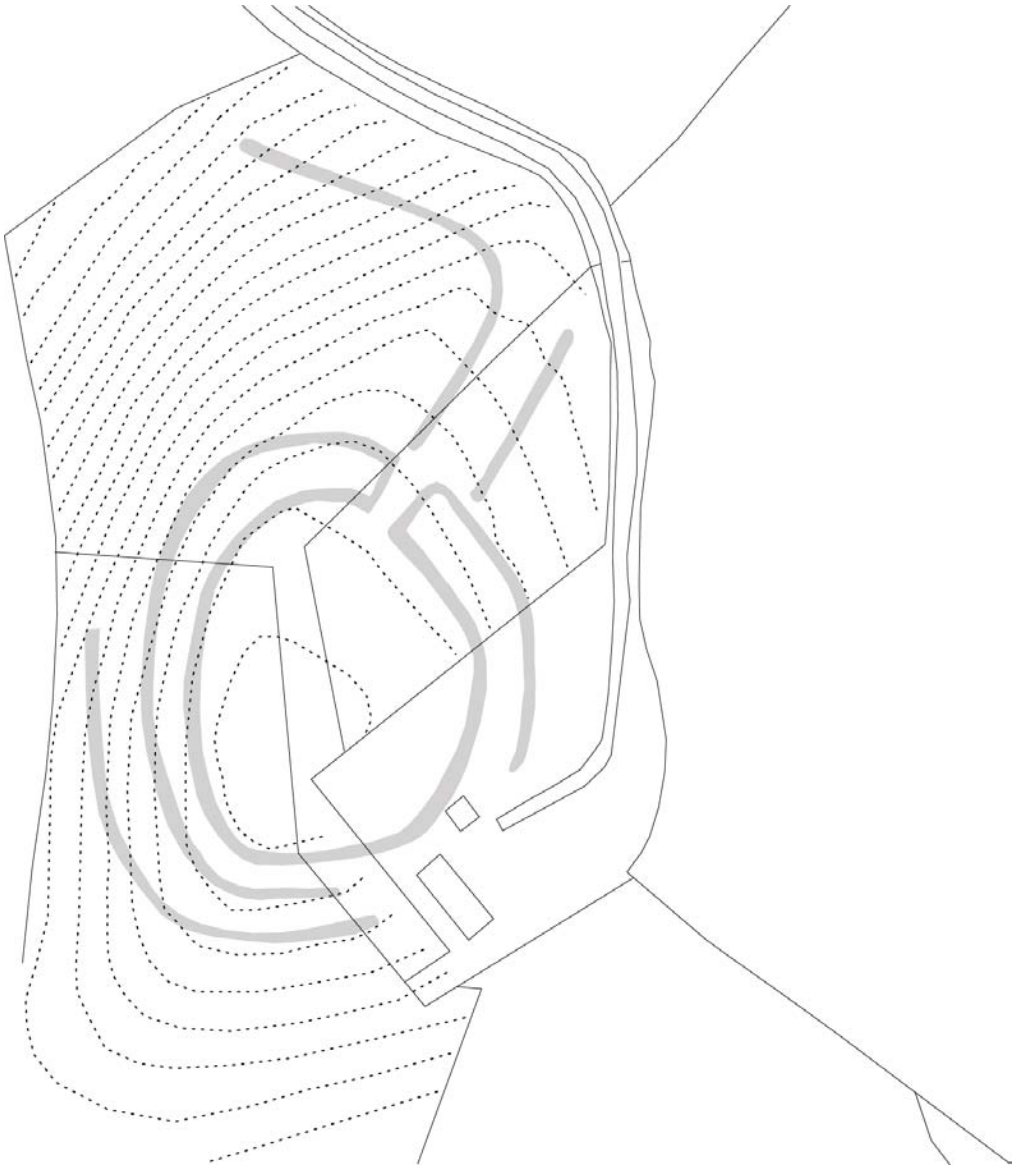

THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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W J Britnell and D Thomas
with a contribution by Astrid E. Caseldine

March 2010

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INTRODUCTION

Following the completion of the rapid field survey of Montgomeryshire small defended enclosure sites in Montgomeryshire (Silvester and Britnell 1993) small-scale trial excavations was carried out at seven sites in the Llandyssil area (Fig. 1). This programme, carried out with Cadw funding between November 1993 and March 1994, was intended to try and develop a methodology for testing the state of preservation of enclosure sites and the feasibility of recovering stratified cultural, environmental, technological and dating evidence (CPAT 1993).

In order to minimise damage to the sites concerned, the project design envisaged the siting of trial trenches across the inner edge of the inner ditch, the area of rampart, and an area just inside the inner bank. To help with reinstatement trenches were de-turfed by hand. Topsoil was then stripped by machine onto the surface of archaeologically significant layers which were then further investigated by hand. For logistical reasons the excavation of defensive ditches was not attempted. Where appropriate trenches were extended and some additional trial boxes were excavated to test the degree of preservation in the centre of the enclosures.

The opportunity was also taken to undertake a detailed ground survey of each of the sites where trial excavations were carried out, in order to record contours and any visible earthworks. Survey was undertaken using an EDM and Gridpad system with PenMap software. The results of this survey work is presented in the accompanying figures, to which have been added cropmark or parchmark evidence from rectified aerial photography.

SITE REPORTS

Cuckoo Hall enclosure, Llandyssil (**1822**, SO 18259475)
Treble- and possibly partly quadruple-ditched enclosure enclosing an internal area of about 0.3ha sited on a low knoll at an altitude of 190m at the end of a slight ridge with good local visibility on all sides (Fig. 1). The ground falls away moderately on all sides, but less so to the north-east. Slight earthworks survive on the southern and eastern sides of the enclosure, overlain by undated building platforms or other disturbances on the southern side. Along the present field boundary a profile of the banks and ditches is preserved. Incomplete curvilinear cropmarks show three ditches, the innermost just below the natural scarp of the hill on the western side.

An area (A) 10m by 1.7m was stripped by machine. The depth of topsoil (01) was greater on the western side of the trench along the field boundary where it was between 0.38–0.45m thick. On the eastern side, where more plough

erosion had taken place, it was between 0.30–0.35m thick. The topsoil was a dark grey-brown fine silty clay loam with occasional angular fragments of slaty mudstone containing small fragments of modern brick and post-medieval and modern pottery. The topsoil overlay a mottled grey and yellow clay subsoil (02). The inner and outer edges of the inner ditch (04) were identified cutting the subsoil, with a width of 4.1m. The yellowish-grey silty clay ditch fill (03) was excavated to a depth of 0.15m to define the ditch edges, from which a single sherd of Roman pottery was recovered (Fig. 9, no. 1). An irregular feature (06) at the southern end of the trench, filled with grey silty clay (05), may represent a tree bole. An additional 3m by 1.7m trench (B) was hand excavated to the north of the original trench to identify features in the interior of the enclosure. A similar depth of topsoil was removed to reveal the subsoil, which was not cut by any features.

Fron Fraith Wood enclosure, Llandyssil (**3722**, SO 16979351)

Double-ditched curvilinear enclosure (Fig. 3) with an internal area of about 0.28ha identified with a small internal rectangular enclosure. The site is known only from parchmarks and there are no visibly surviving earthwork element. The enclosure is sited on a west-facing spur at an altitude of about 180m just to the west of the Mule, a tributary of the Severn, with good views all around. The enclosure abuts a steep-sided stream valley to the south where the line of the defences is obscured by trees.

An area 10m by 1.7m across the line of the ditch of the small rectangular interior enclosure was stripped by machine. The topsoil (01) was a dark greyish brown fine silty clay loam between 0.26–0.31m thick with angular fragments of soft slaty mudstone and occasional fragments of modern brick. At the north-east end of the trench the underlying natural was soft slaty mudstone bedrock (07) striking vertically from south-west to north-east. At the south-west end it was a yellowish grey clay (02) which overlay the bedrock and became thinner to the north-east. The ditch (04) of the rectangular inner enclosure was identified cutting through the natural with a width of 2.2m. The fill consisting of a brown silty clay loam (03) was excavated and revealed that the ditch was 0.6m deep with a U-shaped profile. The fill produced two fragments of modern brick and is therefore likely to be post-medieval, and unrelated to the enclosure. No features or stratification contemporary with the enclosure were identified. The only find of possible antiquity of the site was a small haematite burnishing stone from topsoil (Fig. 9, no. 2).

Some time after the trial work was undertaken a small caravan park was established to the north-west which partly impinges on the outer defences of the enclosure.

Mount Nebo enclosure, Kerry (**4448**, SO 20389167)

Double-ditched enclosure on a low knoll at the end of a ridge at an altitude of about 230m enclosing an area of about 0.32ha (Fig. 4). The ground falls away moderately to the north, less so to the west, and is relatively flat to the south and east. The visibility is good on all sides except to the east and south-east. The site is a combination parchmark and enclosure site, with the best preserved earthworks in the field to the north-east. Slighter earthworks remain in the field to the west, but are partly obscured by recent quarrying activity, which has also removed part of the enclosure interior. Ditches are also recognisable as parchmarks in this field, including possible outworks representing a funnel entrance outside the south-western entrance. The earthworks are barely recognisable in the field to the east, but the line of the ditches are recognisable as parchmarks. The earthworks on the north-east side are interrupted by a possible trackway associated with the quarry and by a former east-west field boundary which crossed the enclosure.

An area 10m by 1.7m was stripped by machine within the interior. The topsoil (01) was approximately 0.18m deep at the northern end of the trench, and 0.38m to the south, consisting of a dark brown silty clay-loam, with occasional angular fragments of soft mudstone, including modern brick and pottery fragments. The topsoil overlay the south-west to north-east vertically striking soft shaly mudstone (02), with yellowish grey clay in between. No stratigraphy survived in the area of the rampart, and no features were identified in the interior.

Cloddiau enclosure, Llandyssil (**4566**, SO 19369424)
The site lies on a flat topped knoll at an altitude of 235m with moderate slopes on all sides except the south where it is more gentle (Fig. 5). Visibility is good on all sides, with extensive views to the north. The site is a double- and partly treble-ditched parchmark enclosure, with no visible surviving earthworks. Outworks are visible running downhill outside the entrance on the north-east. The inner ditch appears to lie just below the edge of the scarp and encloses an area of about 0.22ha.

An area 10m by 1.7m was stripped by machine. Topsoil (01) was a dark brown silty clay loam with occasional angular stones, and varied in depth between 0.18–0.22m. The underlying natural subsoil (02) was a yellowish-brown clay with occasional rounded stones. The outer and inner edges of the inner ditch (04) were identified crossing the trench with a width of 4.6m. The yellowish-brown loamy clay fill (03) was excavated to a depth of 0.15m to clearly define the ditch edges. No finds or other features identified and there was no surviving stratification or traces of the inner bank surviving.

Some time after the trial work garden boundaries and hedges belonging to an adjacent house were laid out over parts of the enclosure and a small plantation established over the outer defences on the north-west side.

Cwmberllan enclosure, Kerry (**7090**, SO 20429277)
The site lies on a spur at an altitude of about 270m, with moderately steep slopes to the west, partly covered by a recent forestry plantation to the north (Fig. 6). The ground slopes up slightly to the north-east, and is flat to the east. Visibility is good on all sides, except to the north where it is restricted by forestry. The site consists of earthworks which survive only on the north and west sides. A modern track cuts through the earthworks on the west side. Assuming that the enclosure is fairly symmetrical it encloses an area of about 0.4ha.

An area 10m by 1.7m with the western end of the trench on top of the inner bank, and extending into the interior to the east was stripped by machine. The topsoil (01) varied in depth between 0.12–0.20m, and was a dark grey-brown silty clay loam, with occasional worn angular stones. The topsoil overlay the yellow and grey clay subsoil (02). The ditch itself was not identified, but above the subsoil in the area just inside it was a lens of brown silty clay loam (05), 0.08m in depth and 1.5m wide, which probably represents a palaeosol buried by the former rampart, of which no trace had survived. An undated shallow feature (04), at least 2.2m across and 0.11m deep was identified within the interior, filled by a yellowish brown loamy clay (03).with lumps of redeposited natural clay and occasional pieces of charcoal.

Mount Pleasant, Llandyssil (**7500,** SO 18979368)
Curvilinear, double- and partly treble-ditched enclosure (SAM Mg237(POW)) with an internal area of about 0.38ha. The site lies on a low knoll on a ridge at an altitude of about 265m with gentle slopes to the north and east, and a steeper slope to the west (Fig. 7). Visibility is good all round except to the south. The enclosure is represented by a combination of earthwork and parchmark evidence. The earthworks are best preserved on the inner bank where the modern field boundary partly overlies it. The rest of the earthworks are visible but not substantial, except to the north-west where only the inner bank is visible. The parchmarks are visible in all the fields, and show an entrance to the north.

An area (A) extending from the inner edge of the ditch through the area of rampart into the interior was stripped by machine. The topsoil (01) was a grey-brown silty clay loam, and was between 0.2–0.6m deep and contained small angular stones and occasional fragments of modern brick and pottery. A lump of burnt clay with seed and straw impressions was also recovered. The base of the grey clay dump rampart (15), about 3.25m wide, survived to a depth of 0.4m, overlying a palaeosol (11) up to about 0.3m thick, consisting of a yellowish-brown clay loam with occasional small angular stones and scattered flecks of charcoal, which thinned to about 0.08m towards the interior of the enclosure. The inner edge (23) of the inner ditch was identified to the west of the rampart. Behind the rampart the

truncated remains of a hearth were recognised consisting of a reddened area (07) directly overlain by a layer of flat broken mudstone fragments (04). The trench was extended by hand 0.5m to the south around the area of the hearth to determine its full extent, which measured 0.6–0.7 in diameter. Also behind the rampart were two postholes (12 and 22) 2.2m apart. These were cut through the buried soil (11) which may represent two of the settings of a four-post structure. Posthole 12 was 0.8m wide at its widest point and 0.32m deep and appeared to have been packed with clay (10). Posthole 22 was also 0.8m wide at its widest point, and 0.44m deep and also appeared to have been packed with clay (21). Charcoal samples from the packing of the two postholes have provided radiocarbon dates (see below).

A 1m by 1m box (B) was excavated in the centre of the enclosure to determine the likely preservation of stratigraphy in the interior. No features were recognised in this box, but the palaeosol recognised in the main trench (11) was still present.

Cwm Badarn enclosure, Llandyssil (**7504**, SO 19789374)

Curvilinear enclosure lies on a low ridge at an altitude of about 270m, with a slight slope from north to south, but not in a particularly defensive position (Fig. 8). The site is a single-ditched circular enclosure enclosing an area of about 0.23ha, with ill-defined earthworks representing the line of the ditch. Parchmarks can be recognised for the whole circuit. The visibility is extensive to the north, east and west, but less so to the south.

An area 10m by 1.7m from the inside of the ditch towards the interior was stripped by machine. The topsoil (01) was a dark brown clay loam with occasional angular stones, and was between 0.28–0.32m in depth. It overlay the grey and yellow mottled clay subsoil (02). The inner edge of the enclosure ditch (08) was identified, which was filled by a yellow-grey clay material (08) overlain by a thin lens 0.06m thick of greyish brown hill-wash (07). The only features identified in the interior of the enclosure were both recent and consisted of a U-shaped ditch, 1.2m wide and 0.26m deep, with a dark brown clay loam fill (03) which corresponds with a former field boundary shown on the 1st edition 1:2,500 Ordnance Survey map of 1886 and a modern field-drain (06) 0.4m deep.

FINDS

1. Rim-sherd of Romano-British Severn Valley Ware beaker? From Cuckoo Hall enclosure (**1822**), context 03.

2. Small haematite nodule, shaped and polished on all faces, possibly used a metalwork burnishing tool (cf. Hodges 1964, 76). From Fron Fraith Wood enclosure (**3722**), context 01.

RADIOCARBON DATING

The two following radiocarbon dates were obtained from the Swansea Radiocarbon Dating laboratory. The calibrations, quoted as the range at 95.4% probability, were obtained by OxCal v4.1.3 Bronk Ramsey (2009); r:5, using atmospheric data from Reimer *et al.* (2009).

Mount Pleasant enclosure

Lab. number: SWAN-11

Sample: mixed wood charcoal (see Table 2 for identification)

Context posthole packing, context 12, sample 106

Radiocarbon date: 2270±60 BP

Calibrated date: 484–170 cal. BC

Lab. number: SWAN-12
Sample: mixed wood charcoal (see Table 2 for identification)
Context: posthole packing, context 22, sample 115
Radiocarbon date: 2330±60 BP
Calibrated date: 401–119 cal. BC

CHARRED PLANT REMAINS FROM THE MOUNT PLEASANT AND CWM BERLLAN ENCLOSURES

By Astrid E. Caseldine

Mount Pleasant enclosure

During excavations at the Mount Pleasant enclosure samples were taken from below the clay rampart, a truncated hearth and from two postholes from a possible four-poster. The samples were processed by CPAT and the results are presented in Table 1.

Very few charred plant remains other than wood charcoal were recovered, and almost all came from the hearth (context 07). The only other sample to yield any grain or seeds was from below the rampart, but this was only an indeterminate cereal grain. Samples from the postholes failed to produce anything. The samples from the hearth contained grains and a glume base of spelt wheat (*Triticum spelta*), which is farily typical of Iron Age sites in Wales (Caseldine 1990). The remains probably represent waste used as fuel. The oat (*Avena* sp.) could be wild or domesticated. The remaining seeds were weeds. Buttercup (*Ranuculus* sp.), sheep's sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*), and ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*) were present. A lump of fired clay had a number of straw impressions and a possible wheat impression.

Table 1. Plant remains from Mount Pleasant

	hearth	hearth	below rampart
Context	07	07	16
Sample	102	103	109
Triticum spelta grain (spelt wheat)	3	–	–
T. spelta glume base	–	1	–
Triticum sp. grain (wheat)	–	5	–
Avena sp. grain (oat)	–	1	–
Cerealia indet. grain	–	–	1
Ranunculus sp. (buttercup)	–	1	–
Rumex acetosella L. (sheep's sorrel)	1	–	–
Plantago lanceolata L. (ribwort plantain)	–	1	–

Only two samples (106, 115), both from postholes, yielded charcoal suitable for identification (Table 2). Although the number of fragements identified was small, the sample contained a range of species, including hazel, ash, and possible cherry, willow/poplar and oak.

Table 2. Charcoal idenfications from Mount Pleasant

	posthole 12	posthole 22
Context	10	20
Sample	106	115
Corylus avellana (hazel)	3	–
Fraxinus excelsior (ash)	1	6
Prunus cf. *avium* (cherry)	1	–
Salix/Populus (willow/poplar)	–	1
Quercus sp. (oak)	–	3

Cwmberllan enclosure

The fill (context 03) of an irregular feature in the interior of the enclosure was sampled for plant macrofossil analysis. Plant remains other than wood charcoal were absent. Ten fragments of charcoal were identified and they were all hazel (*Corylus avellana*).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The purpose of the ground survey and trial excavation carried out at these sites was partly experimental and was designed to test methodologies which might be appropriate for learning firstly more about the state of preservation of enclosure sites and the extent to which they were under threat from continued erosion by ploughing and other agencies, and secondly about their dating and sequence. The Llandyssil area had been chosen as the focus for this study partly because of the high concentration of enclosure sites in this area and partly because it contained a wide range of enclosure types surviving in varying states of preservation.

Previous experience at sites such as the Collfryn enclosure (Britnell 1989) has suggested that only large-scale excavation would be likely to provide meaningful information about the timber-built structures which once existed within these sites, and about their dating, sequence of development and economy. Full-scale excavation of any individual site would, however, be both time consuming and costly, and as a consequence very few sites have been investigated on any scale. One of the aims was therefore to see whether small-scale trial excavation offered any scope to tell us more about these sites.

The excavation of areas within the interior of the selected sites was generally avoided on several grounds: the surviving stratigraphy was likely to be relatively thin and the location of structural evidence relating to buildings would be very hit-and-miss and destructive, and potentially detrimental to any future larger-scale excavation. For the same reason it was considered advisable to avoid enclosure entrances, even where these could be closely defined. In addition, experience at sites such as the Collfryn enclosure had shown that dateable artifacts were likely to be few and far between and consequently it would be potentially difficult to both interpret or date any features that were identified within the interiors of sites.

Consequently, the approach that was adopted was to excavate a trial trench extending where possible across the innermost ditch, the line of the assumed inner bank inside it and just into the interior of the enclosure. It was anticipated that trenches in these locations would stand the best chance of providing information about the width of enclosure ditches and might also provide information about the state of preservation of enclosure banks or earlier land surfaces buried below them as well as stratified material which might be dated by radiocarbon dating or other means. Due to the potential time and cost involved in excavating enclosure ditches (which excavations at Collfryn had indicated might be

up to 4–5 metres wide and 3–4 metres deep) full ditch sections were considered beyond the scope of the project.

In most of the sites selected for trial excavation the basic form of the monuments was generally only known from a transcription of cropmark or parchmarks of the enclosure ditch or ditches. Detailed ground survey of each of the sites was also undertaken which in some instances revealed slight earthworks suggesting the survival of original bank material.

The results of this limited trial work confirmed expectations but were nonetheless generally disappointing. Excavations at the triple-ditched Cuckoo Hall enclosure (**1822**) revealed no surviving bank material but showed that the inner ditch was just over 4 metres wide, the upper fill of which produced a single sherd of Roman pottery, the only pottery to be recovered from any of the sites investigated. At the double-ditched Fron Fraith Wood enclosure (**3722**), a trench was set out to investigate a small rectangular enclosure within the interior which was shown to be probably post-medieval in dated and unrelated to the enclosure site, the only find of possible antiquity being a small burnishing stone recovered from topsoil. The treble-ditched at Mount Nebo (**4448**) is a parchmark site with some slight surviving earthworks partly damaged by later quarrying. No stratigraphy survived in the area of the rampart, and no features were identified in the interior. The treble-ditched Cloddiau (**4566**) is a further parchmark site with 'outworks' running downhill outside the entrance, but with no visible surviving earthworks. The inner ditch was found to be about 4.6 metres across but no finds or other features were identified and there was no surviving stratification or traces of the inner bank surviving. Slight earthworks of single bank and ditch remain visible at the Cwmberllan enclosure (**7090**). The enclosure ditch was not located but traces of what had probably been a buried soil below the former rampart were identified just inside the line of the ditch as well as a number of shallow undated features within the interior. The defences of the double- and partly triple-ditched parchmark enclosure at Mount Pleasant (**7500**) are best preserved as slight earthworks where they are overlain by a modern field boundary and provided the best surviving stratigraphy of the sites examined. The base of an inner clay rampart just over 3 metres wide, survived to a depth of 0.4 metre, overlying a buried soil up to up to about 0.3 metre thick. Behind the rampart were the truncated remains of a hearth and two postholes possibly representing a four-post structure containing charcoal that has been provided radiocarbon dates of 484–170 cal. BC (SWAN-11) and 401–119 cal. BC (SWAN-12). Charred plant remains from the hearth and buried soil included sparse grains and a glume base of spelt wheat (*Triticum spelta*), which is fairly typical of Iron Age sites in Wales (Caseldine 1990). The inner edge of the enclosure ditch was identified at the single-ditched Cwm Badarn enclosure (**7504**) but no other ancient features of layers survived.

As anticipated, no surviving earthworks or stratification was identified at three sites which are essentially cropmarks – Cloddiau, Cuckoo Hall or Fron Fraith Wood. Some earthworks do survive at Cuckoo Hall, but this largely concerns the outer defences which were not investigated. No surviving rampart material was identified at three further sites – Mount Nebo, Cwmberllan and Cwm Badarn – where slight earthworks had suggested that it might survive. A palaeosol was idenfitied at Cwmberllan, however, which probably represents the remnants of what had been a buried soil beneath the rampart. Remnant bank material and a buried soil were identified at Mount Pleasant – the best preserved of the sites investigated. A considerable variation in topsoil cover is evident a the sites investigated, depending upon the location and degree of slope. At Mount Pleasant, for example, topsoil varied from as little as 0.2m in the more heavily eroded and more vulnerable parts of the site to up to 0.6m on the downslope behind the rampart where there had been a build up of soil. The average depth of topsoil at all the sites investigated was about 0.3m but shallow soils of only 0.12–0.2m in parts of the sites at Mount Nebo, Cloddiau, Cwmberllan and Mount Pleasant suggests that a high proportion of sites will continue to be vulnerable to even shallow ploughing for reseeding.

It is also notable that two of the seven sites – Fron Fraith Wood enclosure (**3722**) and Cloddiau enclosure (**4566**) – have been affected by the construction of new boundaries, tree and shrub planting and other developments since the trial excavations were undertaken.

Further trial work on a number of earthwork sites would be worthwhile to test for the preservation of surviving

rampart material, particularly in areas where this may be masked by a build-up of soil. This information would have an important bearing on the state of preservation and future management of the fairly large number of hill-slope enclosure sites in Montgomeryshire known from earthwork and cropmark evidence.

Although the trial excavations have provided useful information on the state of preservation of the sites investigated, only a disappointingly small amount of cultural, technological, environmental and dating evidence has been recovered. Mount Pleasant is the only site which has produced samples for radiocarbon dating and environmental analysis. The only artefacts that have been recovered are a fragment of Roman pottery from Cuckoo Hall, a stone artefact from Fron Fraith Wood and a fragment of fired clay with organic impressions from Mount Pleasant.

A greater amount of dating and structural evidence would undoubtedly be recovered by trial excavations sited within the centres of the sites but it is considered that excavations of this kind would cause unjustified damage to the sites. Comparison with the more extensive excavations at the Collfryn enclosure also suggest that trial excavations of the size undertaken would be likely to be hit or miss.

The excavation of complete ditch profiles would undoubtedly provide a greater amount of data but would inevitably be more time-consuming and potentially more difficult to arrange with landowners. More extensive rescue excavations of sites under plough threat will be justified where, as in probably a majority of cases, topsoil cover is thin and where surviving stratified deposits and structural evidence is at risk of continued erosion from ploughing and reseeding.

In summary, the trial excavations have provided useful information on the state of preservation of the sites investigated though only small a amount of cultural, technological, environmental and dating evidence was recovered. The work confirms, as would be expected, that the best surviving structural remains are likely to occur on sites where some surviving earthwork remains are visible. The excavation of full ditch sections hold the prospect of recovering stratified dating material but the trial work confirms that the elucidation of structural remains and site sequences is likely only be possible from large-scale area excavations of the defences.

Acknowledgements
Astrid Caseldine would like to than Kate Griffiths for sorting the environmental samples.

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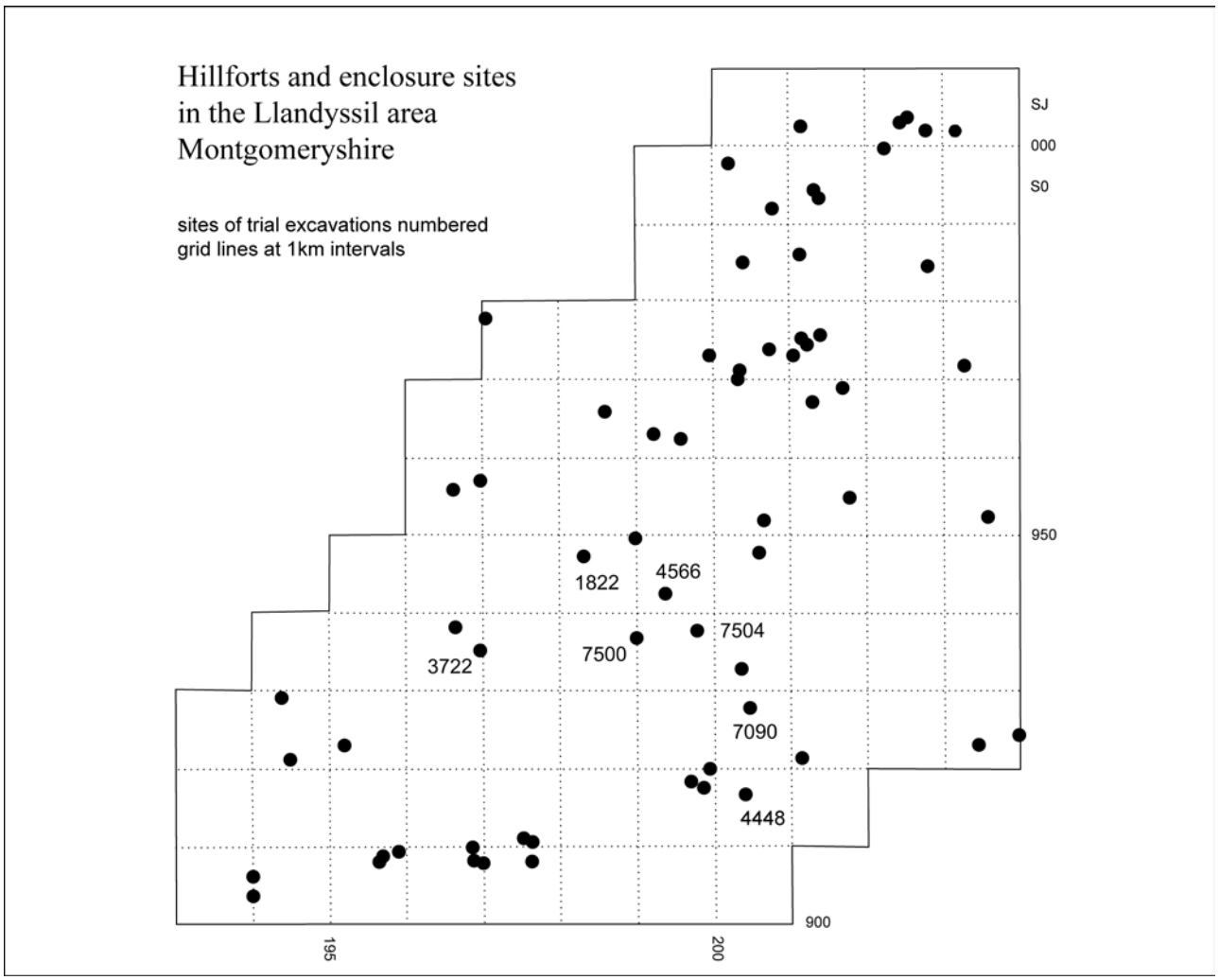

Fig. 1. Distribution of enclosures and hillforts in the Llandyssil area with sites where trial excavations were carried out numbered: Cuckoo Hall enclosure (**1822**); Fron Fraith Wood enclosure (**3722**); Mount Nebo enclosure (**4448**); Cloddiau enclosure (**4566**); Cwmberllan enclosure (**7090**); Mount Pleasant enclosure (**7500**); Cwm Badarn enclosure (**7504**).

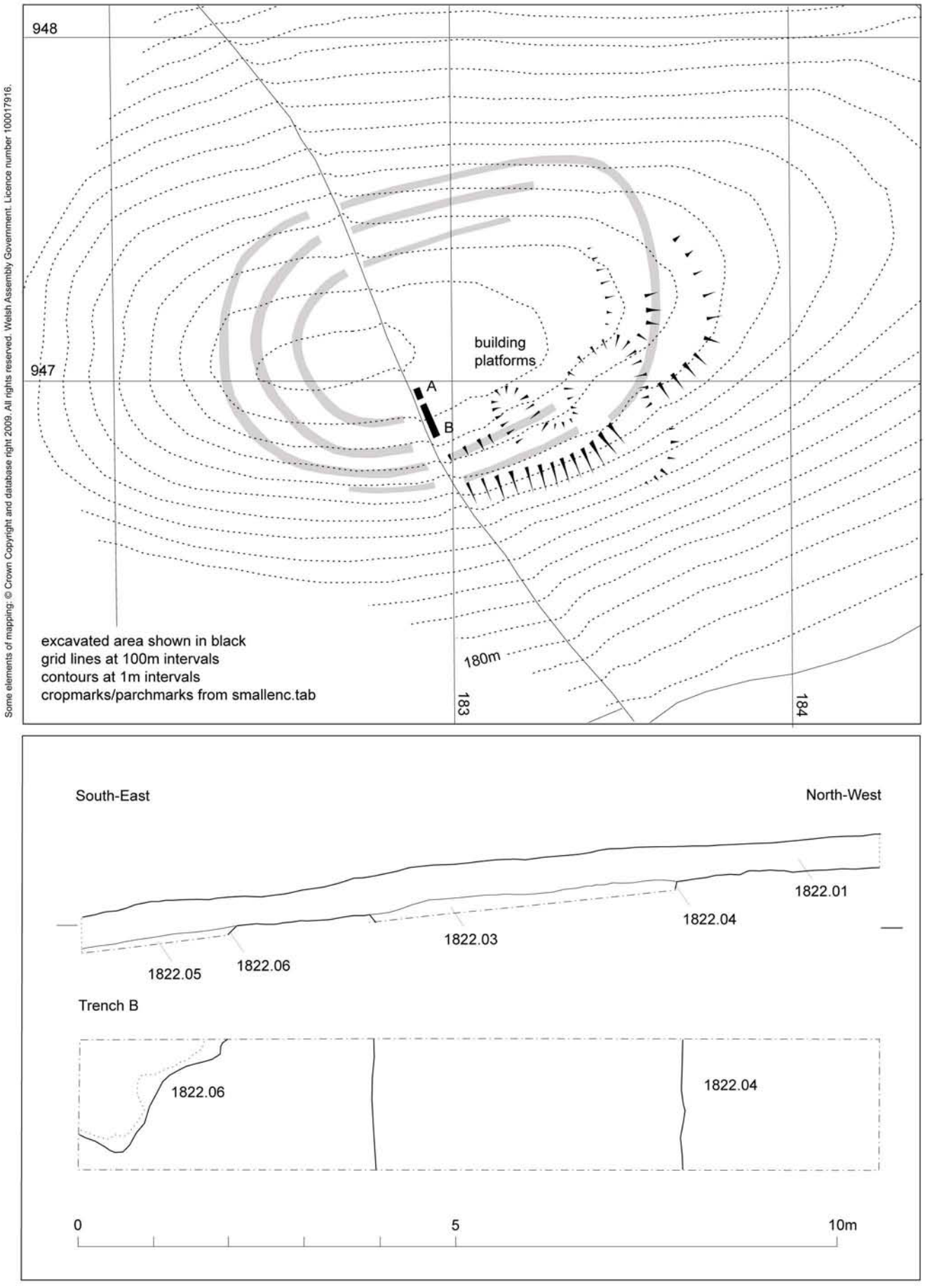

Fig. 2. Cuckoo Hall enclosure, Llandyssil (**1822**, SO 18259475).

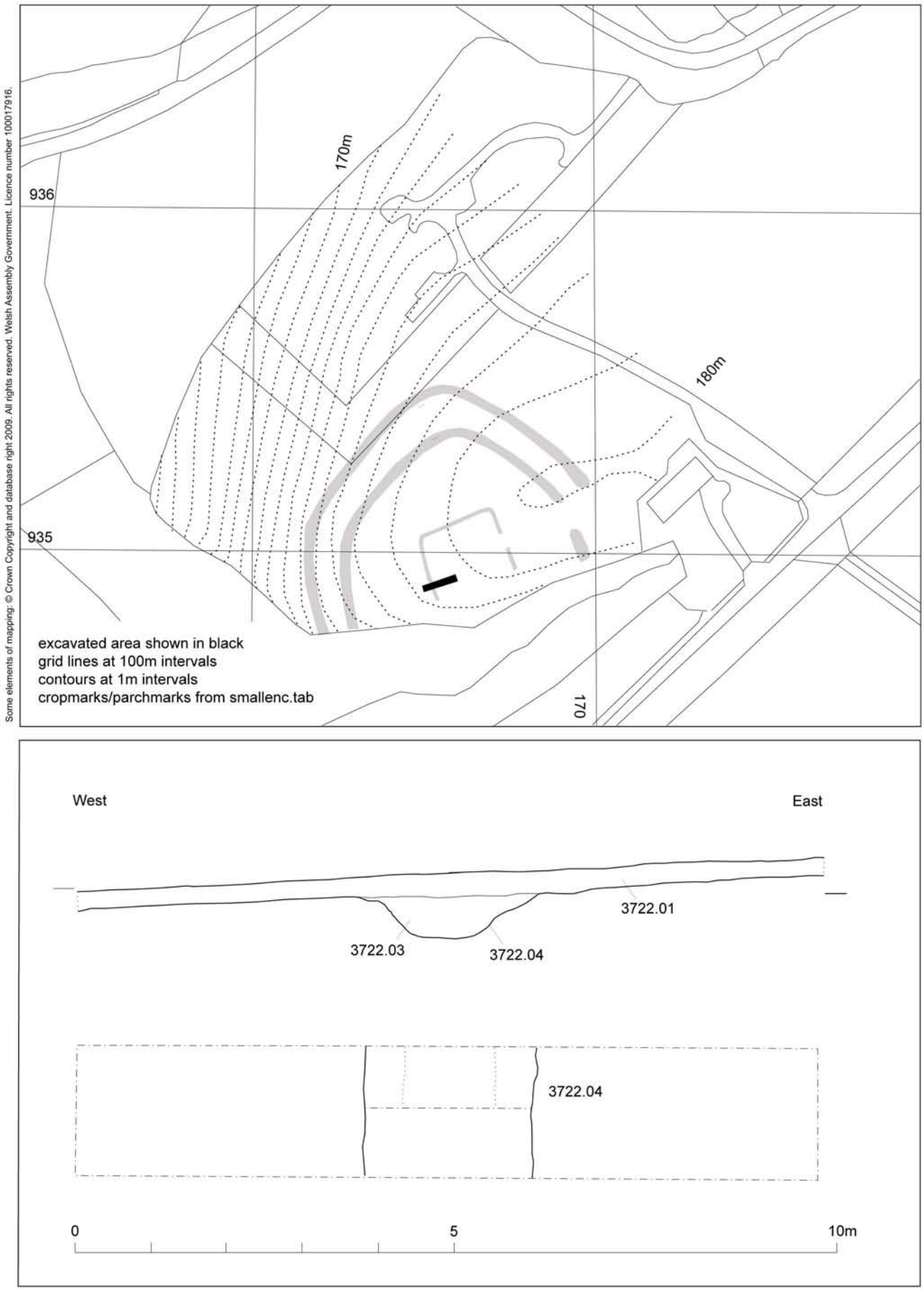

Fig. 3. Fron Fraith Wood enclosure, Llandyssil (**3722**, SO 16979351).

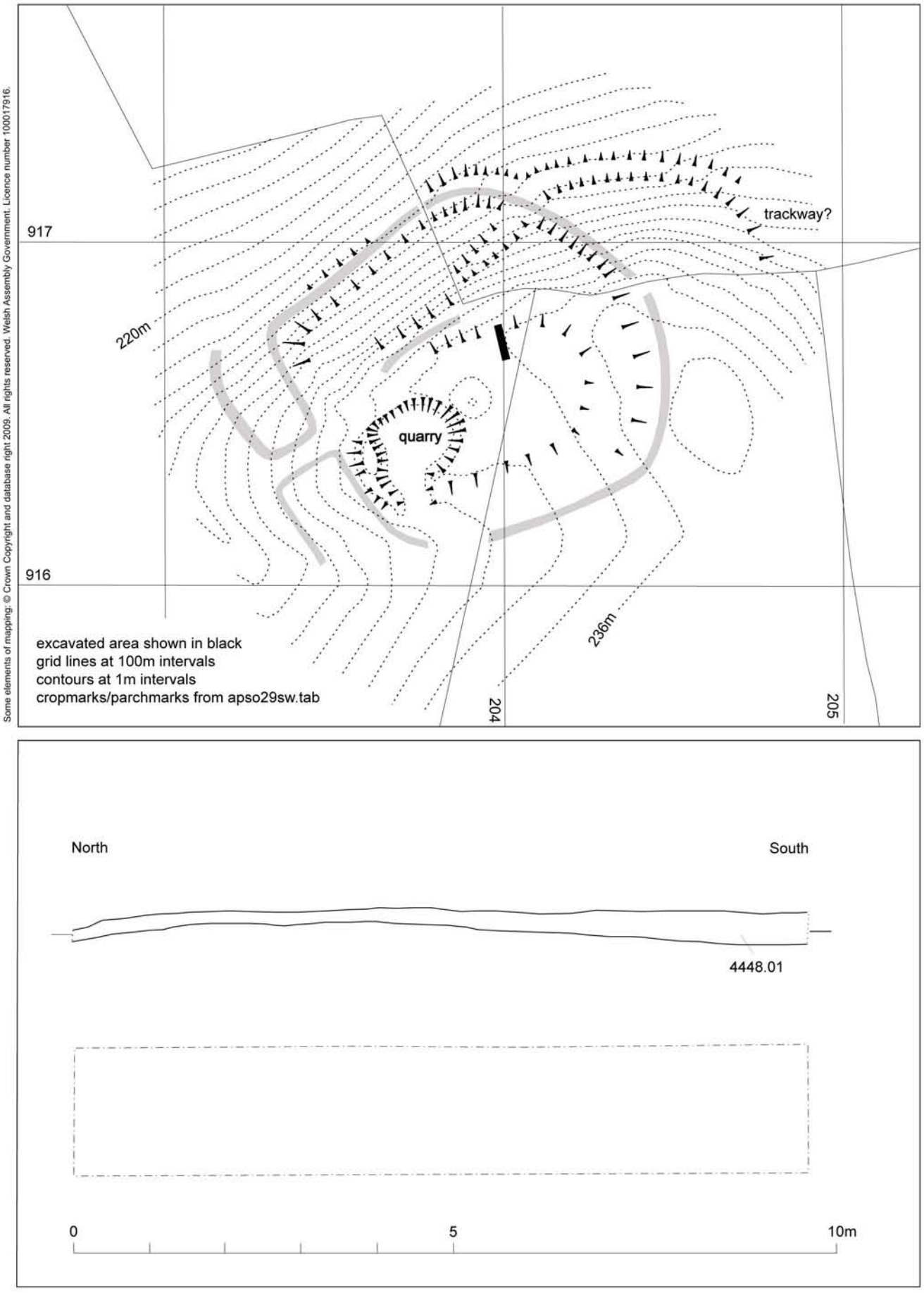

Fig. 4. Mount Nebo enclosure (**4448**, SO 20389167).

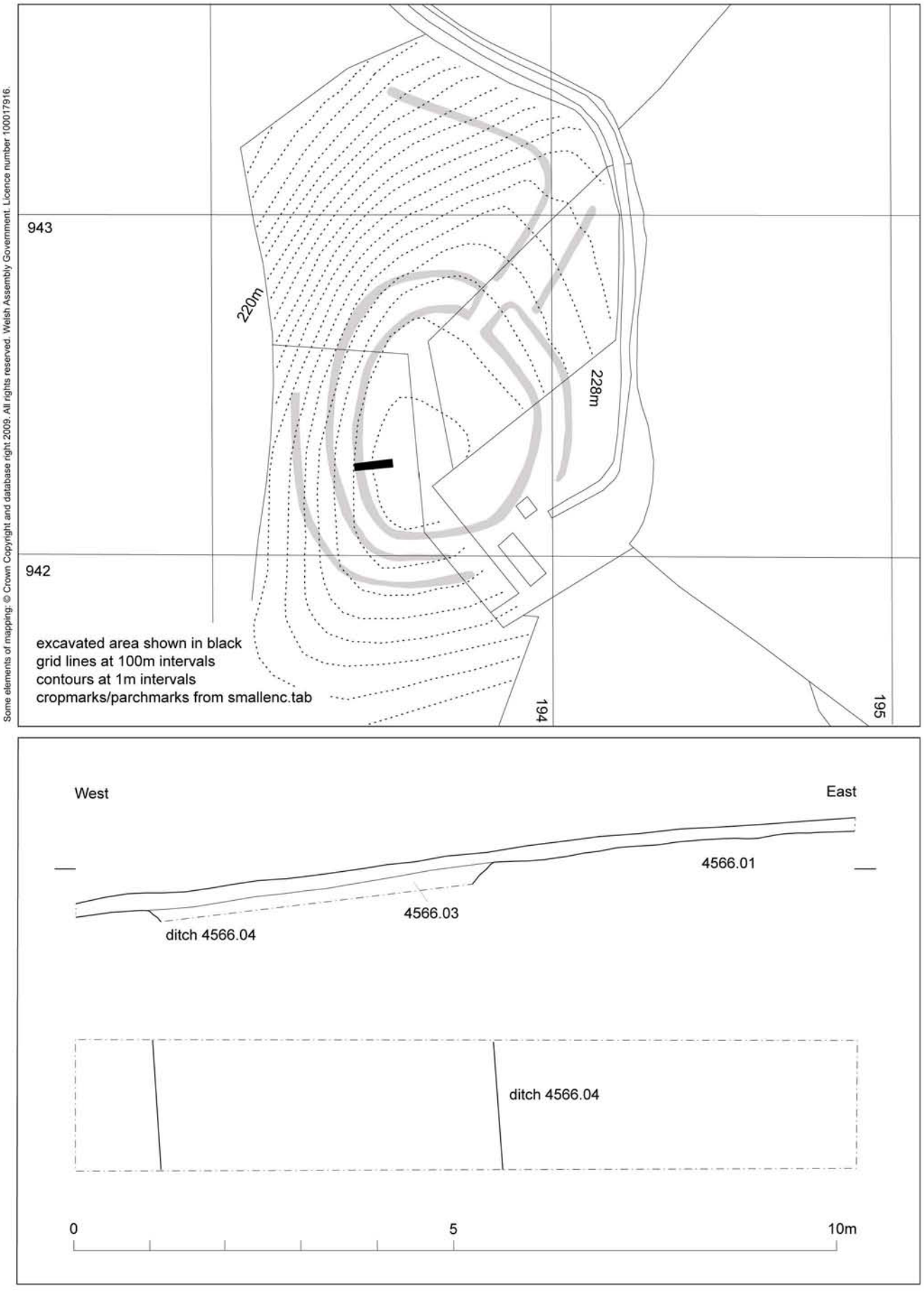

Fig. 5. Cloddiau enclosure, Llandyssil (**4566**, SO 19439420).

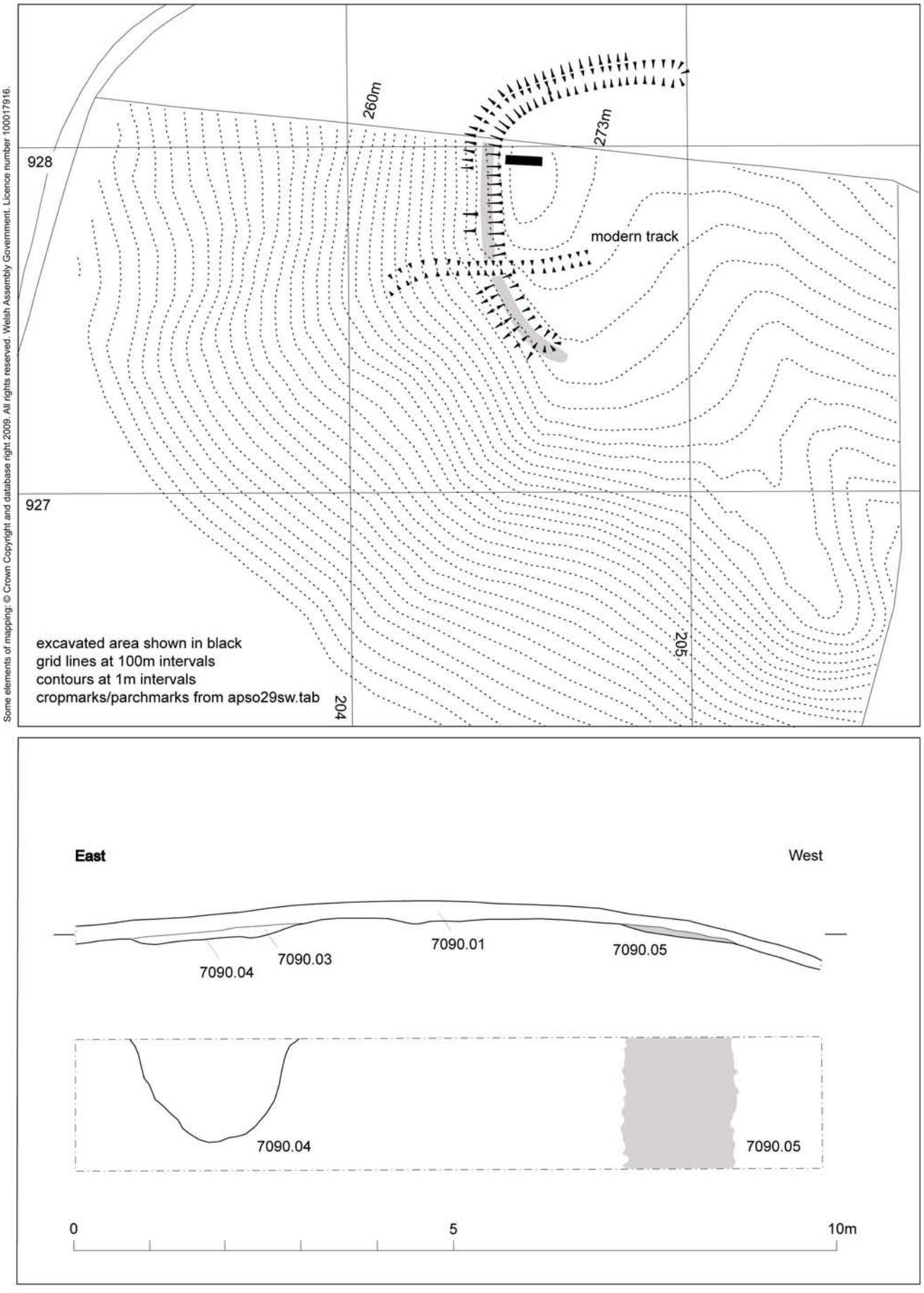

Fig. 6. Cwmberllan enclosure, Kerry (**7090**, SO 20429277).

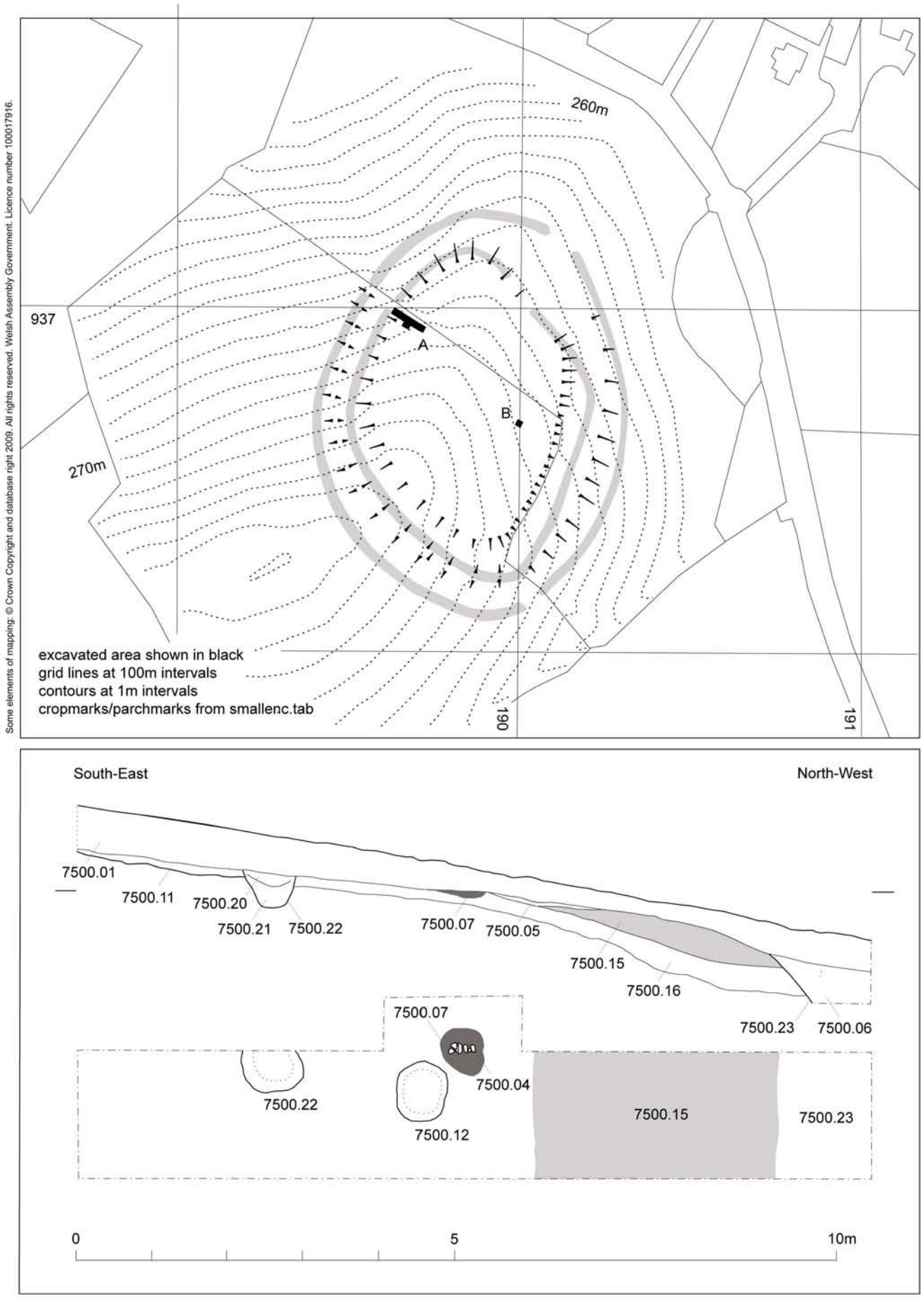

Fig. 7. Mount Pleasant enclosure, Llandyssil (**7500**, SO 18979368).

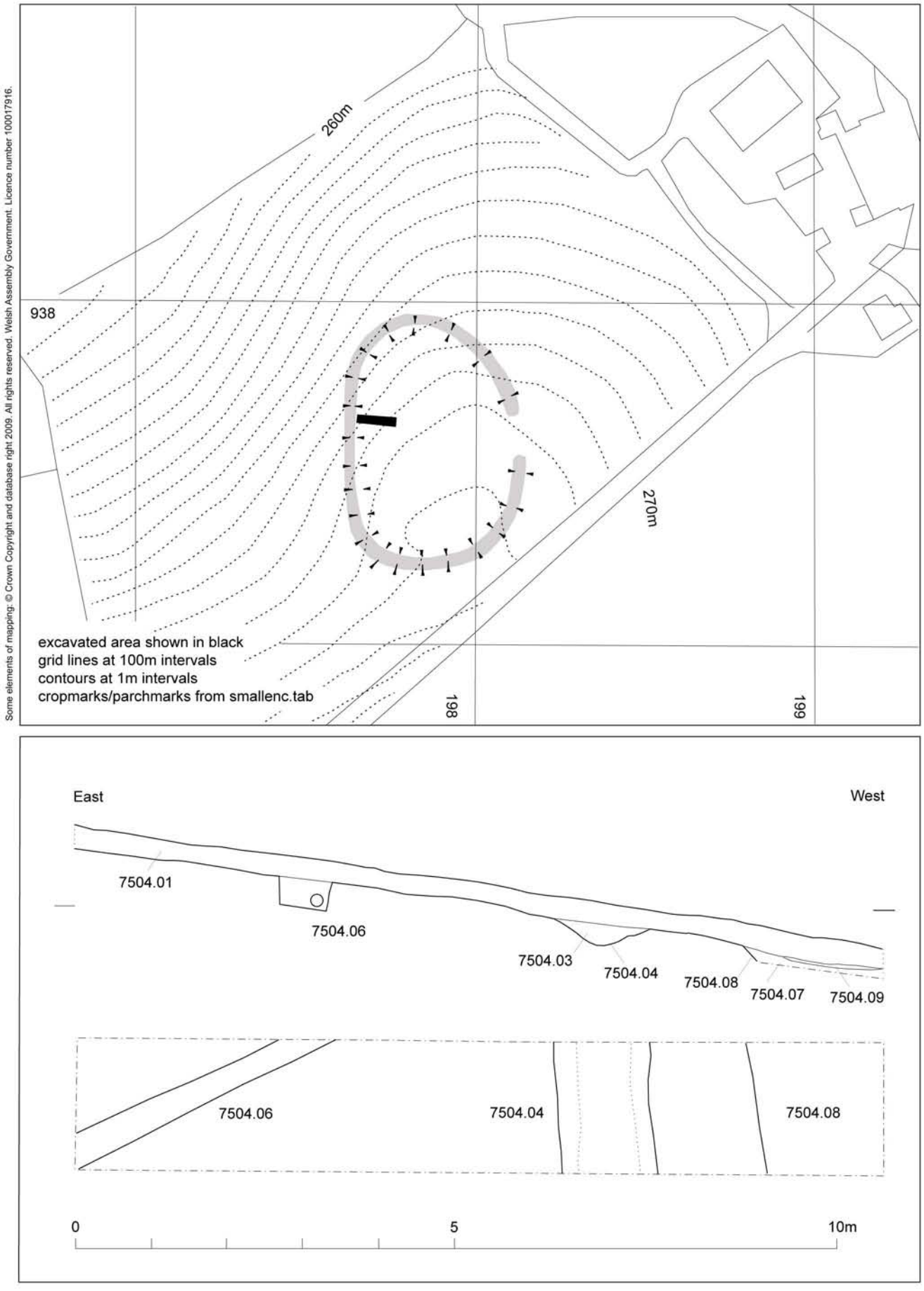

Fig. 8. Cwm Badarn enclosure, Llandyssil (**7504**, SO 19789374).

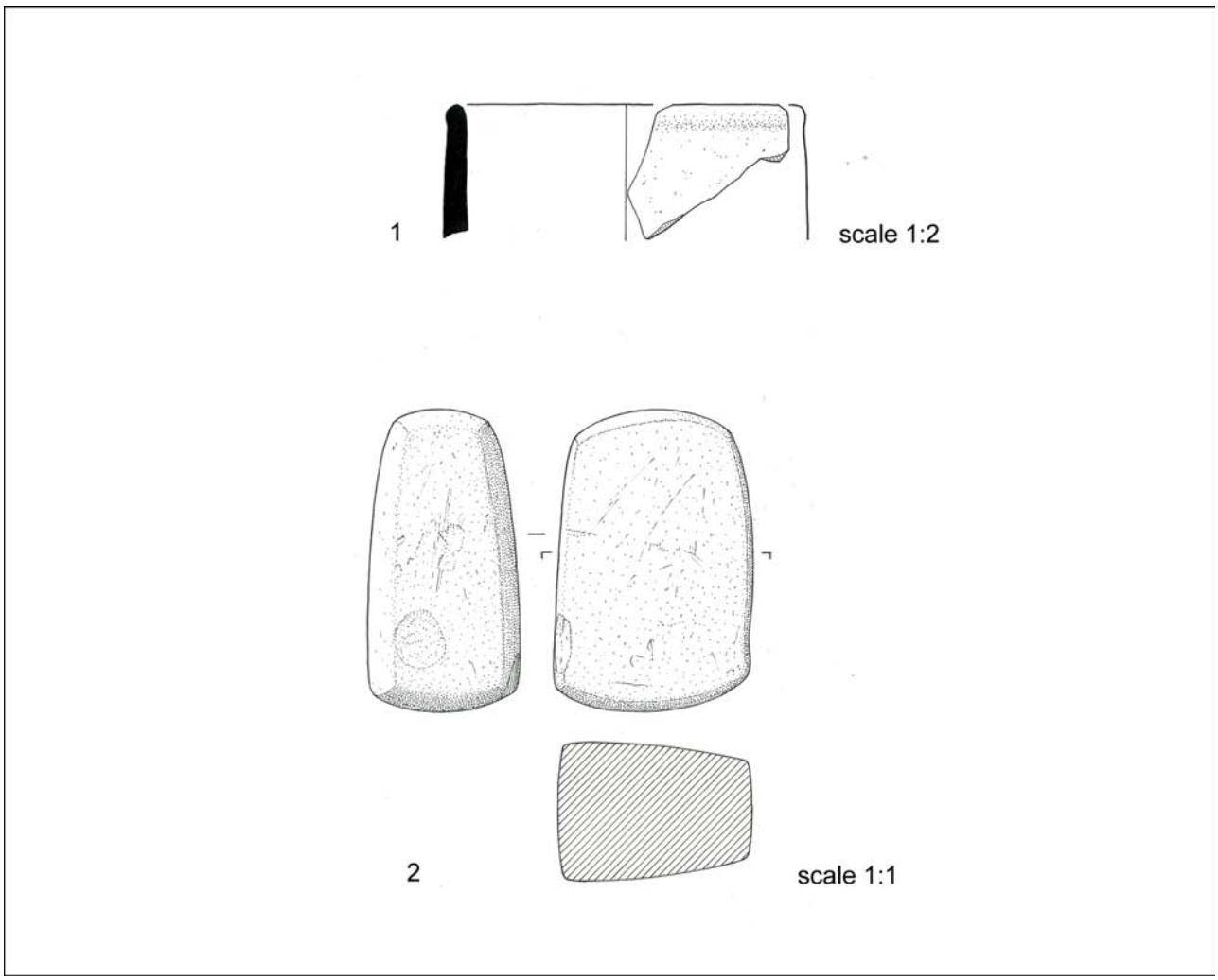

Fig. 9. 1: Roman rim sherd from Cuckoo Hall enclosure (**1822**). 2: haematite burnishing stone from Fron Fraith Wood enclosure (**3722**).