

CPAT Report No 1027

Pant Pipeline, Llansantffraid-ym-Mechain to Llanymynech

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF



THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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N W Jones
February 2010

Report for Severn Trent Water

The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust


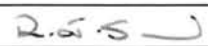

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1 INTRODUCTION

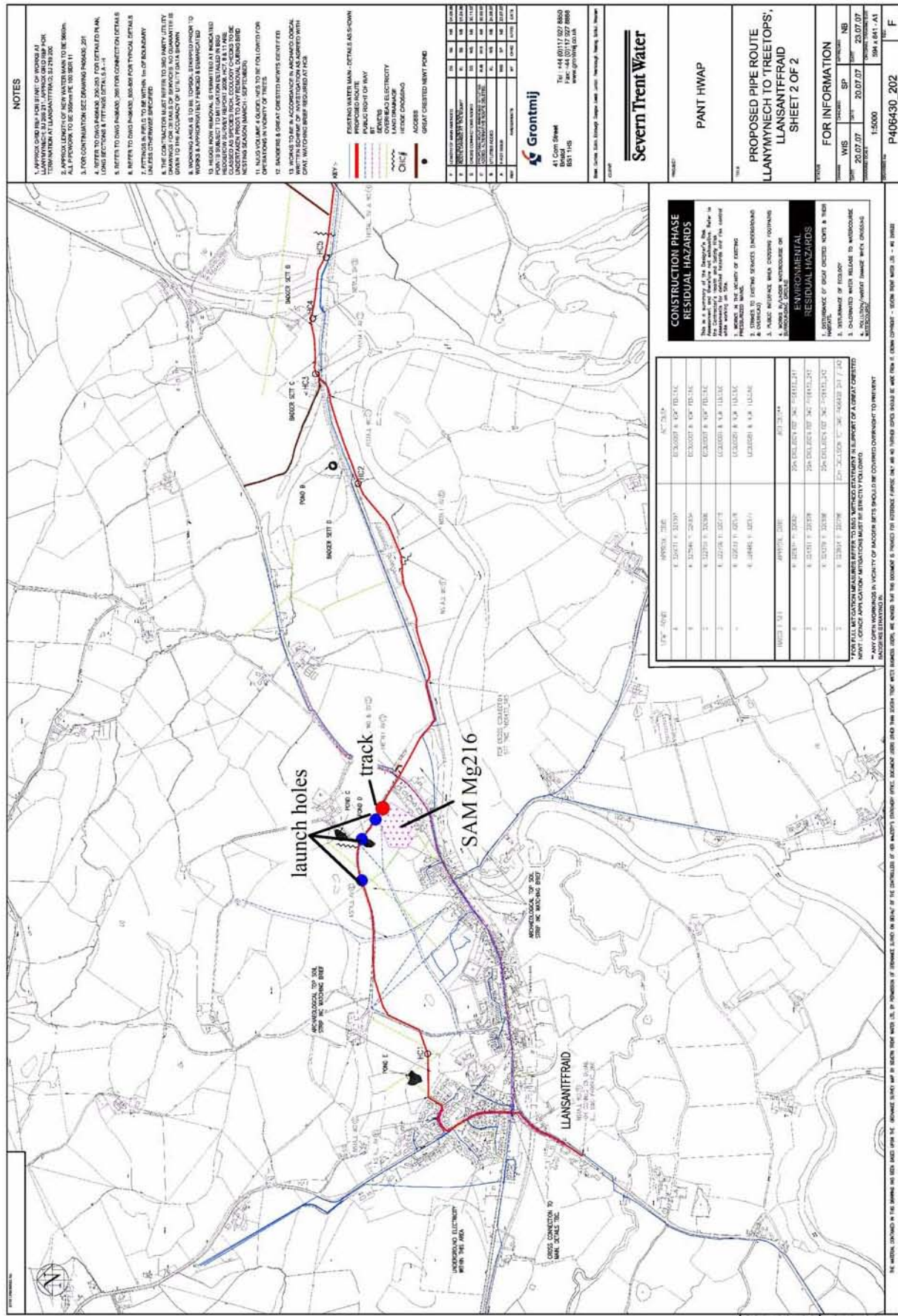
- 1.1 In September 2009 the Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (henceforth CPAT) was invited by Dr Glyn Davies of ARCUS, on behalf of Severn Trent Water, to undertake a watching brief during the installation of a new pipeline between Llansantffraid-ym-Mechain and Llanymynech in northern Powys, known as the Pant Berriew Pipeline.
- 1.2 An archaeological desk-based assessment and field survey of the route had previously been undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology (Halstead 2008) which identified a number of areas of archaeological potential along the route, as well as proposing a general mitigation strategy for the scheme in the form of an archaeological watching brief.

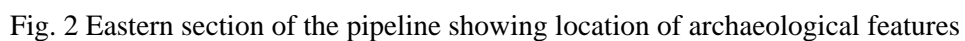
2 LOCATION

- 2.1 The pipeline route extended for 5.6km from a point on the south-western outskirts of Llansantffraid-ym-Mechain (SJ 21782005) to just north of Llanymynech (SJ 26612117). At the western end the first 630m of the route ran alongside roads and through a housing estate, and the watching brief was not maintained in this area. Thereafter, the route crossed agricultural land, most of which was under pasture, with the exception of two arable fields to the west of Llanymynech.
- 2.2 Topographically, the route crossed undulating ground to the north and north-east of Llansantffraid-ym-Mechain, before following alongside a disused railway across the floodplain of the River Vyrnwy, including a crossing of the Afon Tanat close to its confluence with the Vyrnwy. To the east of the Afon Tanat the route initially crossed a relatively flat area, including river terraces, before rising slightly to cross the lower slopes of Pen-y-Foel, to the south of Llanymynech Hill.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The original archaeological assessment (Halstead 2008) identified a number of known archaeological monuments within the immediate vicinity of the pipeline, the earliest of which appear to be the remains of at least six ploughed out Bronze Age burial mounds to the south of the route, near Carreghofa Lane, Llanymynech. In the same area there are three pit alignments, similar to excavated examples near Four Crosses, which are also thought likely to be Bronze Age in date. There are two later prehistoric defended enclosures which overlook the route, one known as Soldier's Mount, to the north-west of Llansantffraid-ym-Mechain, and the other near White Rock Farm, to the north of Llanymynech.
- 3.2 To the north-east of Llansantffraid-ym-Mechain the route passes alongside a scheduled ancient monument (SAM Mg216; Fig. 1) which was identified and investigated by Professor Barri Jones during the 1980s and interpreted as a Roman supply depot. A slight earthwork in the form of a low, intermittent bank, some 11m wide, formed the south-east side of the enclosure, while the rest of the perimeter, detectable only from aerial photographs, was seen as an irregular polygonal shape bounded by double ditches. The excavations appear to have identified several timber buildings in the interior, one of which was interpreted as a granary, although there were no finds from the site which were indubitably Roman (Silvester 2008).
- 3.3 There is limited direct evidence for medieval activity in the area. St Ffraid's Church in Llansantffraid-ym-Mechain is recorded as early as 1254, although its origins could be several centuries earlier. It has been suggested that the church may have acted as a focus for settlement during the medieval period, although to date there is no evidence to support this. Post-medieval activity is evidenced by a number of listed buildings in Llansantffraid-ym-Mechain and Llanymynech, together with the route of the Llanfyllin Branch of the Cambrian Railway.





4 WATCHING BRIEF

- 4.1 The watching brief was conducted between 8 October 2009 and 25 January 2010, with site visits being dependent on the contractors' programme of work. A tabulated summary of the watching brief's daily visits is provided in Appendix 1.
- 4.2 The watching brief monitored the removal of topsoil along the whole of the route, maintaining a permanent presence in areas where there was considered to be a high archaeological potential, or where the working practice dictated that occasional inspections would be ineffective. In addition to monitoring topsoil stripping the watching brief was also maintained during the excavation of a number of launch holes which were excavated to facilitate directional drilling (see Figs 1-2).
- 4.3 Only a limited number of archaeological features were identified during the stripping of topsoil, perhaps the most significant of which was revealed on the eastern outskirts of Llansantffraid-ym-Mechain, where the route passed alongside the scheduled ancient monument thought to be a Roman supply depot (SAM Mg216; Fig. 1). The watching brief identified a trackway immediately to the north-east of the scheduled area. This measured 2.8m wide and was composed of compacted gravel which contained 19th-century pottery. The track is depicted on the Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25" map of 1886 and its course appears to coincide almost precisely with the northern side of the putative supply depot (Fig. 3). This side of the Roman enclosure had been identified from aerial photographs and it now seems likely that the trackway may have been misinterpreted as part of the defensive circuit.



Plate 1 The post-medieval trackway identified near the putative Roman supply depot at Llansantffraid-ym-Mechain.

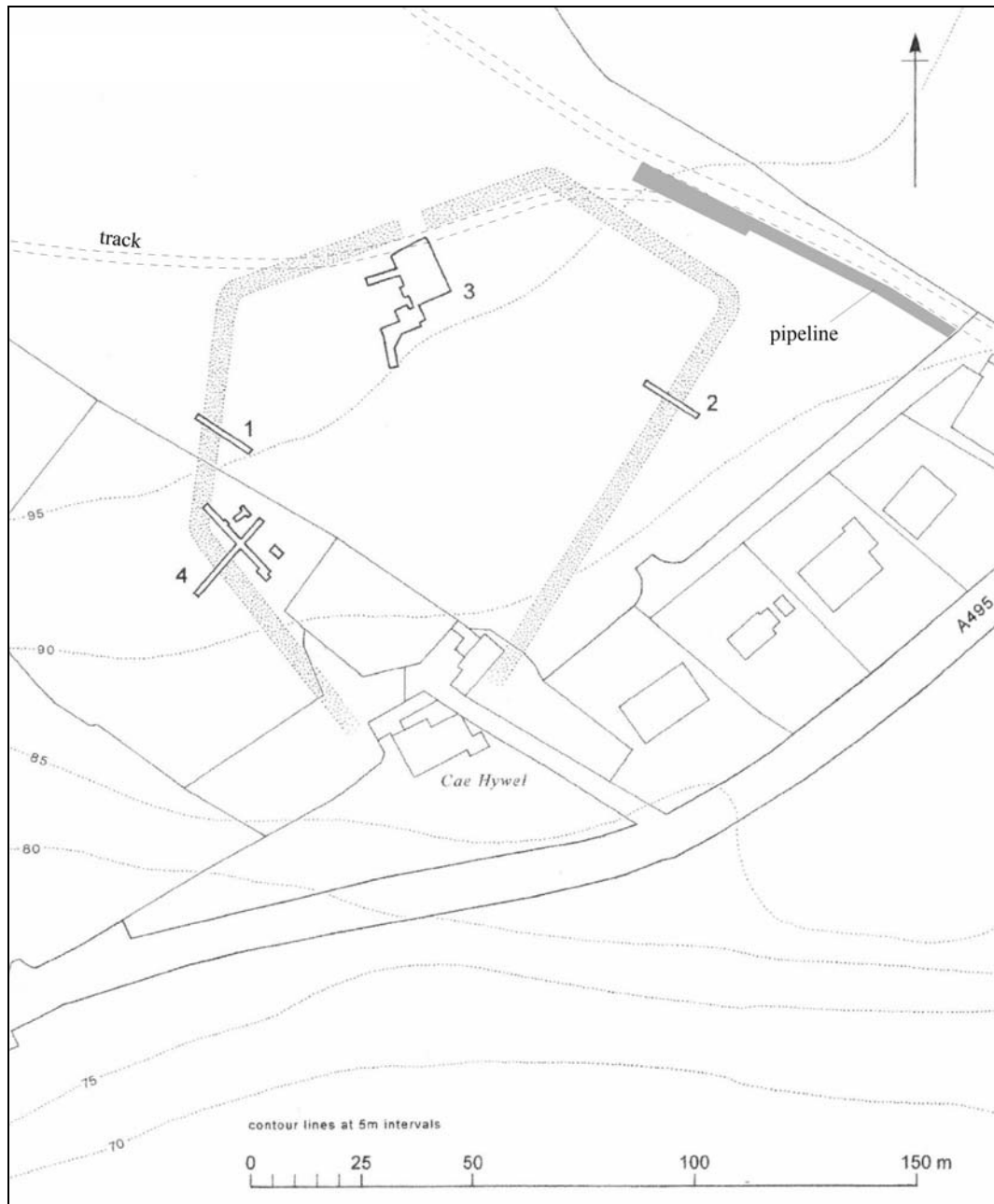


Fig. 3 Plan of the postulated Roman supply depot at Llansantffraid-ym-Mechain showing the track depicted by the Ordnance Survey in 1886 and the location of the pipeline (after Silvester 2008, Fig. 6).

- 4.4 To the east of Llanymynech it had been thought that the pipeline might cross two prehistoric pit alignments (PRNs 38024-5), based on a projection of their known extents. Owing to the field having been recently ploughed it was decided that stripping would be restricted in this area to the width of the pipe trench at around 1.2m. There was no indication of either pit alignment, although it is possible that one or both continued across the pipeline, but the spacing of pits was such that none were present within the stripped area.
- 4.5 Although there was no evidence for the pit alignments two shallow gullies were identified in the same area, at SJ 2540720799. The gullies were around 0.5 to 0.25m apart and aligned roughly north/south (Plate 2). Both were shallow at around 0.2m in depth, with the western gully being 0.45m wide and the eastern 0.60m in width. No dating evidence was recovered from either feature. Further to the west a small pit was identified which contained fragments of burnt

limestone (SJ 2506020858). The pit, which was only 0.4m in diameter and 80mm deep, contained signs of in situ burning (Plate 3).



Plate 2 Two gullies at SJ 2540720799, viewed from the north



Plate 3 Small pit at SJ 2506020858 containing burnt limestone, viewed from the west

- 4.6 The only other discovery of potential significance was a small collection of medieval pottery which was found towards the eastern end of the pipeline between SJ 2620721040 and SJ 2625321039. The pottery came from the interface between an old ploughsoil and a deposit of hillwash. In total 11 sherds were recovered, three of which were from a cooking pot, including one rim sherd, while the others were all body sherds, possibly from a jug or jar. A possible

rectangular platform was noted on the hillslope to the north-east of the findspot, and this may have been where the pottery originated.

5 FINDS

- 5.1 The majority of artefacts recovered during the watching brief were unstratified finds from the topsoil. The only exception were sherds of 19th-century pottery from the matrix of the trackway near Llansantffraid-ym-Mechain. The topsoil finds included a range of post-medieval pottery, largely dating from the 18th and 19th centuries, none of which has been retained. The only finds of any potential significance were the sherds of medieval pottery from the eastern end of the pipeline, which will be deposited with the Powysland Museum in Welshpool in due course.

6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The monitoring of topsoiling operations along the pipeline revealed few archaeological features. Perhaps the most significant discovery was a 19th-century trackway on the eastern outskirts of Llansantffraid-ym-Mechain, alongside a scheduled ancient monument thought to be a Roman supply depot. The track was depicted by the Ordnance Survey in 1886 and coincides with the northern side of the putative supply depot. Although the trackway itself is not of particular importance, its position suggests that this may have been the feature which was identified from aerial photographs and interpreted as part of the defensive circuit. This, and the absence of any definite Roman finds from excavations during the 1980s, must cast some doubt on the authenticity of the site.
- 6.2 The only other features of note were two shallow, undated gullies, and a small pit containing evidence for in-situ burning, which also had fragments of burnt limestone within its fill.

7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 7.1 The writer would like to thank the following for the cooperation and assistance during the project: Ian Grant, Richard Hankinson, and Ian Davies CPAT; and James Lawton, Enterprise.

8 REFERENCES

Halstead, J, 2008. Proposed Pant pipeline scheme, Powys: Desk-based Assessment 2008. Birmingham Archaeology.

Silvester, R J, 2008. Abertanat, Llansantffraid and Clawdd Coch: Barri Jones's Excavations in Montgomeryshire. *Studia Celtica* 42, 27–53

Cartographic sources

1886 Ordnance Survey 1st edition 1:2,500 map, Montgomeryshire 10.07

**APPENDIX 1
WATCHING BRIEF SUMMARY**

Date	Works monitored	Finds	Archaeology
08/10/2009	Topsoil strip of 1.2m-wide trench in Field 27	None	Two shallow, undated gullies
09/10/2009	Topsoil strip of 1.2m-wide trench in Fields 27-28 Pipe trenching in Fields 20-1. No advance topsoiling	None	Shallow pit with burning and burnt limestone
03/11/2009	Stripping in field 15	None	None
04/11/2009	Meeting with James Lawton. Stripping in fields 12 and 15	None	None
09/11/2009	Stripping in field 13	None	None
13/11/2009	Stripping in Field 14 alongside SAM	18/19 th century pottery	Post-medieval metalled trackway
17/11/2009	Excavation of pipe trench in Field 18. No pre-stripping of topsoil	None	None
25/11/2009	Stripping in Field 35	Medieval pottery	None
26/11/2009	Stripping in Fields 34-36	None	None
30/11/2009	Stripping in Fields 34-36	18/19 th century pottery	None
01/12/2009	WB arranged for Field 35 but route diverted due to land owner	None	None
18/01/2010	Watching brief arranged but no stripping undertaken	None	None
19/01/2010	Monitoring during excavation of launch holes	None	None
25/01/2010	Monitoring during excavation of launch holes	None	None