

# EXCAVATION OF AN IRON AGE INLAND PROMONTORY FORT AT BERRY HILL, PEMBROKESHIRE, 2007: INTERIM REPORT



THE UNIVERSITY *of* York



Prepared by Cambria Archaeology for Cadw

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### EXCAVATION OF AN IRON AGE INLAND PROMONTORY FORT AT BERRY HILL, PEMBROKESHIRE, 2007: INTERIM REPORT

Gan / By

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## **SUMMARY**

*Cambria Archaeology and the University of York undertook geophysical survey in 2006 on a crop-marked inland promontory fort that had been discovered from the air in 1984 at Berry Hill, near Newport in Pembrokeshire. The geophysical survey detected little additional information to that already shown on the aerial photograph - essentially the site is defined on the south and east sides by a steep valley side and on the north and west sides by a crop-marked ditch with hints of a bank towards the west end. There is a west-facing entrance. Excavation in the summer of 2007 concentrated on the fort's entrance, with investigation of both ditch terminals, part of the surviving bank, the entrance itself and a small area of the interior immediately inside the entrance.*

*The ditches were rock-cut. That on the north side of the entrance was 4.5m wide and 2m deep. The terminal of the south ditch was 4m wide and 2.5m deep. However, it rapidly shallowed out to just over 1m deep and then rose to the surface. It seemed that the ditch on this side was unfinished. The bank on the interior side of the ditch survived to just 0.1m in height to the north of the entrance. To the south of the entrance it had disappeared. Four postholes represented two phases of simple gates or a slightly more complex single phase entrance, probably the latter. One of these postholes cut an earlier palisade gully - this was the only stratigraphic sequence on the site.*

*Apart from a line of pits or postholes and a possible hearth, virtually no archaeological remains were detected in the fort's interior. Numerous pieces of perforated shale, possibly weights, were found during the course of the excavation. No diagnostic artefacts were, however, recovered, and dating of the site will have to rely on a future programme of radiocarbon determination.*

*Overall, the excavations suggest that the fort was possibly unfinished or used for a short period of time.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Since the early 1980s a number of crop-marked enclosures of presumed later prehistoric or Romano-British date have been recognised through aerial photography in south Ceredigion and north Pembrokeshire (Fig. 1). In south Ceredigion, prior to these discoveries few later prehistoric settlements were known, and these were confined to a couple of substantial hillforts with upstanding earthwork defences, such as Castell Nadolig to the southeast of Aberporth. A series of dry summers, 1983-84, 1994-95 and 2003, and an increasing awareness by archaeologists that the terrain of south Ceredigion was conducive for crop-mark archaeology, has resulted in the recording of almost 60 new enclosure sites, and the enhancement of knowledge of the few previously known settlements. In north Pembrokeshire late prehistoric settlement was better recorded, with substantial sites such as Castell Henllys near Eglwysrwrw and Caerau at Moylgrove among the better known examples, but here few smaller sites had been recorded. However, recent aerial photography has started to identify these small, crop-marked sites.

The late prehistoric settlement of southwest Wales is characterised by hill-forts and smaller defended enclosures. Typically these consist of earthworks - defensive banks and ditches - enclosing an internal area that is usually oval or irregularly oval in shape. Rarely, some defended enclosures are rectangular. In the course of the discoveries in south Ceredigion it became increasingly clear that a high proportion of the crop-marked enclosures (32 out of 59) were rectangular.

The rectangular enclosures are remarkably similar indicating similar function and date. They are defined by crop-marked ditches, between about 3m - 5m wide, with only very occasional evidence for banks or other features. Only rarely are earthworks present. The enclosures usually approximate to a square, with dimensions between 40m - 55m. Most have an entrance mid-way along one side. Although the ditches, and assumed accompanying banks, indicate a defensive function, rectangular enclosures are not located in obvious defensive locations; most in south Ceredigion are sited on hill-slopes/valley sides, often just below a crest or high point, but locations towards the base of slopes are also known.

The oval or near oval enclosures are more varied, but are towards the smaller end of the scale when compared with all sites of this type in southwest Wales, with internal dimensions of 40m to 60m, and ditches 3m - 5m wide. They are found in a wider variety of locations than the rectangular enclosures; on rounded hilltops as well as on hill-slopes. Several oval enclosures have concentric, larger enclosures surrounding them, some over 100m diameter. The ditches of these outer enclosures are generally slighter than those of the inner ones, but not always so. Ditches of the outer enclosures entrances are sometimes in-turned, forming a ditched track-way approach to the inner enclosure.

During the summer of 2004 a geophysical and topographical survey was undertaken on eight of the rectangular enclosures in south Ceredigion (Murphy *et al* 2004). The aim of this project was to evaluate the potential for buried archaeology on these sites with the objectives of: the assessment of the archaeological significance of the sites in both a regional and national context; the assessment of the vulnerability of the sites; the formulation of scheduling criteria, which may be appropriate regionally and nationally; the formulation of future management strategies; the enhancement of the Historic Environment Record. In 2005, five rectangular and non-rectangular sites were surveyed (Murphy *et al* 2006), and in 2006, a further six sites were surveyed (Murphy *et al* 2006).

This work confirmed that only rarely did any surface evidence for enclosures exist, and where present it was very slight. Geophysics, however, demonstrated that important below ground archaeology is likely to survive in addition to the crop-marked ditches recorded on aerial photographs. In particular circular gullies, probably indicating the location of roundhouses, hearths, postholes and internal divisions of the enclosures were detected on some sites.

In the summer of 2005 Cadw grant-aid was obtained to sample excavate one of the enclosures subjected to geophysical survey the previous year. Troedyrhiw was selected for excavation on the basis that it was a good example of a rectangular cropmarked enclosure in south Ceredigion and one where the geophysical survey demonstrated that some below ground archaeology other than large ditches was likely to survive (Murphy and Mytum 2005).

Artefacts are not common on prehistoric sites in west Wales, and as entrance ditch terminals are one of the most likely receptors for cultural material a sampling strategy of these areas of the enclosures was decided on. Excavation of the entrance area demonstrated the defensive character of the ditch surrounding the enclosure. The enclosure entrance was a simple gateway represented by two phases of two post-holes. No definite evidence for structures was found within the enclosure, although a sufficient number of gullies, post-holes and trenches were excavated to indicate that evidence for buildings is likely to survive elsewhere within the interior. An assemblage of over 200 sherds of Roman pottery indicated occupation in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD.

Building on the success of the 2005 excavation at Troedyrhiw, grant-aid was obtained for a second season of excavation on a different site. Ffynnonwen (also known as Waunlle on the regional HER - record no. 5838) was chosen as it was considered that the results from this circular enclosure within a larger oval enclosure would provide a useful contrast to those from Troedyrhiw. Ffynnonwen lies less than 2km from Troedyrhiw, and the sites are inter-visible. Also, a geophysical survey in 2005 (Murphy *et al* 2006) demonstrated the high possibility of roundhouses and other structures within the inner enclosure.

At Ffynnonwen excavation concentrated on the inner enclosure revealing one complete roundhouse and parts of two others. A four-post structure and a six-post structure were also investigated. The defensive ditch on the southwest side of the circular enclosure was rock-cut 4.2m wide and 2.2m deep, but on the north side the ditch was unfinished. The ditch of the oval enclosure was 3.8m wide and c.1m deep. The structural remains are characteristic of a late prehistoric settlement. However, dating evidence was scarce, with artefacts confined to several pieces of slag, part of a glass bead, a spindle whorl made from a reused piece of Roman Severn Valley Ware pottery and a Mesolithic flint microlith.

In 2007, a further six sites were subjected to geophysical survey and an inland promontory fort at Berry Hill was selected for excavation. Berry Hill had been surveyed in 2006 (Murphy *et al* 2006). Terry James of Dyfed Archaeological Trust (Cambria Archaeology) discovered Berry Hill fort from the air in 1984 (Photo. 1) when it was under a barley crop and showed as a faint crop-mark. This is the only aerial photograph of the site. Lying on a blunt promontory at 40m above sea level (Fig. 2), Berry Hill fort was selected for excavation to contrast with the rectangular enclosure excavated in 2005 and the circular enclosure investigated in 2006. To the south and east of the fort the land falls away steeply to the tidal marsh of the River Nevern (Fig. 3). There are no apparent defences on these sides, but this could not be confirmed owing to dense blackthorn scrub covering the upper slopes. The fort lies on a high point, with land falling away gently to the north and slightly more steeply to the west. A ditch with traces of an internal bank defend these easily approachable sides. The geophysical survey (Fig. 4) and the aerial photograph show the ditch enclosing a roughly oval area c.120m east-west and 75m north-south, with a simple gap marking the position of a west-facing entrance. Traces of a bank are evident on the photograph and on geophysical survey towards the western end of the fort. On the ground a scarp slope up to 1m high marks the location of this bank on the north side of the entrance. Several sections of narrow, straight ditch were also detected by the geophysicists. Apart from these the only geophysical feature of interest and not shown on the aerial photograph was the broken character of the ditch to the south of the entrance. It was decided to adopt the same excavation strategy as in previous years and investigate the entrance area and ditch terminals of the fort. An assemblage of Roman pottery from the ditch terminals had been recovered using this strategy at Troedyrhiw in 2005, and it was considered likely that Berry Hill fort, located as it is 1.8km from Newport beach and immediately above the sheltered Nevern estuary, would return a comparable assemblage of imported pottery as well as prehistoric imports.

Solid geology comprised Ordovician shale (British Geological Survey 1994). In the area of the excavation bedding planes were vertically pitched. Over most of the excavated area ploughsoil averaging 0.3m thick directly overlies hard bedrock with pockets of fluvio-glacial silty-clay across the site but concentrated around the entrance area.

An area of topsoil c. 30m by 27m was machine stripped over the entrance on the 16th and 17th of July. Hand excavation commenced with a team averaging 12

people on the 18th of July and continued until the 8th of August. Apart from using machines to remove large quartz boulders all the ditch sections were dug by hand. Topsoil was restored by machine on the 9th and 10th of August.

## **THE EXCAVATION**

### **The Entrance**

The two ditch terminals, remains of the defensive bank and gate postholes comprised the entrance. All these features were hand-excavated. A gap or causeway of 11m separated the ditch terminals (Fig. 5).

### ***North ditch terminal***

Ditch 44, the north ditch terminal, was the simpler of the two and is therefore described first (Fig. 6, Photos. 8-11). A c. 3m long section of it was excavated. It was 4.5m wide and 2m deep with a square end, steep, almost vertical, sides and a flattish bottom. It was rock cut, with the northwest side smooth where the builders had dug with the grain of the rock but jagged on the southeast side where slabs of rock had been prised out. Marks on the rock were possibly made by antler picks or other tools (Photo. 11). The ditch contained a simple sequence of ditch fills, with no evidence of re-cuts or ditch cleaning. Essentially the fills became progressively stonier and more gleyed with depth, and record a slow, continuous accumulation of deposits. All the fills were 'clean' in that they contained little in the way of charcoal, daub or other material associated with occupation. Three massive quartz boulders, one from the upper fill (36) and the others from midway down are likely to have come from a revetment to the defensive bank at the entrance.

### ***South ditch terminal***

The 4m wide south ditch terminal (4) shows as a discontinuous signal on the geophysical survey, the reason for which became apparent once topsoil had been stripped and excavation commenced, as the ditch had been dug as a series of short segments with spines of unexcavated bedrock left running across the ditch. Some of these spines were visible immediately after topsoil removal (Figs. 5 and 7 - 9, Photos. 5-7).

The terminal of the ditch was squared ended, with an almost vertical north end and sides. It was 2.5m deep. However, the ditch did not continue at this depth, but rose steeply to less than 1m below current ground surface before gradually deepening to a little over 1.2m. Essentially the ditch terminal was a rectangular, almost vertically sided, rock-cut pit. The upper 0.8m of the ditch contained a dark brown silty-loam (3) similar to the topsoil. Towards the base of this fill were two massive quartz boulders, which, like those in the ditch to the north, are assumed to have come from a bank revetment. Below this a series of thin lenses of brown and grey brown silty-loam (15) represent gradual accumulation of soils in the ditch. A distinct dark sticky layer (20) with occasional charcoal inclusions below this may have been derived from occupation deposits. This was the only layer within this section to have contained any significant amount of charcoal. Below this a dark-grey stone-free deposit (46) could represent soil development in the ditch. The remainder of the ditch fill comprised loose, angular pieces of shale (37). This layer either represents deliberate backfilling of the ditch or sudden collapse of a bank into to the ditch.

To the south where ditch 4 is substantially shallower the sequence of fills is broadly similar to that described above, except there is evidence of a shallow recut (39 filled with 38), but this may be a local feature. Essentially the sequence shows gradual accumulation of material except for the lowest fill (43). This fill contained over 70% shale pieces and may have been deposited over a relatively

short time period. Layer 40, midway up the ditch, seems to have been a soil development with hints of a turf line and indicates a period of stabilisation in the accumulation process.

### ***Defensive bank***

There was no trace of the defensive bank to south of the entrance (Fig. 5). To the north a c.30m long and up to 1m high earthwork scarp marks the location of the bank. On excavation this scarp was found to be a combination of a natural break of slope and the cumulative effect of the bank and ditch. Only the very base of the bank (2) survived consisting of a c.8m wide and 0.10m thick band of broken shale in a silty-loam matrix (Fig. 4; Photo. 3). There were no postholes, palisade trenches, revetments or other structural elements to the bank. Sealed by the bank was a 0.15m thick buried soil (22) with a definite turf line. Partly overlying and surrounding the bank (2) was a layer of bank wash (16 - not shown on plan). This also sealed gateway structural elements.

### ***The Gateway***

Four postholes arranged in two pairs comprised the gateway (Fig. 5). The pair of postholes to the exterior to the fort (23 filled by 21 and 52 filled by 51) were oval in plan, 0.8m by 0.5m and 0.5m deep. Both contained numerous packing stones defining what seemed to be three post-pipes in each hole. However, the stones had collapsed and it was not possible to obtain accurate measurements for each post-pipe nor was it possible to obtain separate samples from the packing material and the pipe. The post-pipes were contemporary, and therefore each 'gatepost' consisted of three upright timbers. The width of the gate would have been 2.4m.

A pair of postholes (55 filled by 54 and 57 filled by 56) lay to the east and 2m distant from the larger pair (23 and 52). These were circular, approximately 0.3m diameter and 0.4m deep with packing stones defining posts. Fill 56 had a quartz boulder on the surface that may have been placed to fill a hole left when the post was removed.

A small patch of worn quartz stones (35) located between the postholes was probably the remains of a pebble track.

There was no stratigraphic connection between the two pairs of posts and so it is not known whether they are part of a single gate structure (as is most likely) or represent two phases of gateway.

Posthole 23 cut the fill of palisade trench 47, and bank wash (16) sealed all four post-holes.

### ***The Palisade Trench***

One of the large gateway postholes (23) cut the southern section of a palisade trench (48 filled by 47) and bank wash (16) sealed both sections. Both sections of trench were approximately 0.35m wide and 0.3m deep and contained large, upright stones. These were clearly packing stones, but it was not possible to identify individual post-pipes in the fills. The north end of the southern palisade (48) and the south end of the northern palisade (59 filled by 58) ended in distinct post-holes with packing stones defining post-pipes 0.25m diameter. The gap between these posts formed a 2m wide gateway. A patch of worn quartz stones (34) in the gap, protected by the bank wash (16), represents the remains of a pebble surface.

The south end of the south palisade (48) gradually shallows out until it fades to nothing. For most of its course the palisade is dug through soft fluvio-glacial

deposits, but at the south end it runs into hard bedrock. It seems likely that the builders were unable to dig through this hard rock and that the base of the trench rose over it, leaving no archaeological trace. However, posthole 25 (fill 24) lay on the projected line of the palisade, and may have formed a deeper element of it.

### **The Interior**

Few detectable archaeological remains survived in the interior of the fort, and what was excavated is not easy to interpret. A line of five pits (10 filled with 5, 11 filled with 6, 12 filled with 7, 13 filled with 8 and 14 filled with 9 - Photo. 4), with a smaller pit (18 filled with 17) adjacent to 11, may have been postholes. However, no packing stones or other structural evidence were present and their fills were similar to the ploughsoil, perhaps indicating a recent date.

Apart from an isolated possible small posthole (31 filled with 30) the only other feature of interest was a patch of reddish coloured subsoil (61) associated with charcoal, which may have been the base of a hearth.

### **FINDS**

Thirty-four small finds (Appendix 2) were recovered during the excavation: none was datable. Apart from three small fragments of burnt bone all were of stone and include possible slingshots and rubbing stones. Pieces of thin shale perforated by a single hole were the most common type of find, with 21 discovered, all from the fills of the two large ditch terminals (4 and 44). These perforated stones vary in size from 50mm across up to 200mm across. The holes also vary in size. Some have been shaped into a neat circular disk with a neat round central hole; others are misshapen with roughly punched, eccentric holes. Some of the perforations exhibit rope or cord wear. They are assumed to be weights.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The excavations were carried out in partnership between Cambria Archaeology and the Department of Archaeology, University of York. Ken Murphy undertook overall project management and site direction with the assistance of Hubert Wilson, Marion Page and Louise Austin, all of Dyfed Archaeological Trust. Most the site work was carried out by students attached to the Castell Henllys field project, Pembrokeshire, run by the University of York under the direction of Harold Mytum, and by other volunteers. These are too numerous to thank individually, but a special mention to Andy Greef, a York graduate, is merited for all the hard work he put into the project. Finally, all members of the excavation team are very grateful to Hayden Evans and family for allowing the excavation and for their help and assistance during fieldwork.

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## **APPENDIX 1. INDEX OF CHARCOAL SAMPLES**

Context	Description
3	Top of fill of ditch 4
6	Fill of posthole 11
4	From upper fill of ditch 4
16	Wash off defensive bank
20	Fill of ditch 4
19	Fill of ditch 4
22	Buried soil beneath defensive bank
37	Fill of ditch 4
46	Fill of ditch 4
50	Fill of ditch 44
62	From ditch 4
61	Hearth
63	Possible archaeological feature

The following of the above samples may be used for radiocarbon dating: 6, 20, 22, 37 and 61.

## APPENDIX 2. INDEX OF SMALL FINDS

Find	Context	Description
1001	15	Perforated stone from ditch 4
1002	15	Bone frag. from ditch 4
1003	15	Possible slingshot from ditch 4
1004	20	Perforated stone from ditch 4
1005	15	Perforated stone from ditch 4
1006	19	Perforated stone from ditch 4
1007	37	Perforated stone from ditch 4
1008	37	Perforated stone from ditch 4
1009	37	Perforated stone from ditch 4
1010	37	Possible hammer stone from ditch 4
1011	37	Perforated stone from ditch 4
1012	37	Perforated stone from ditch 4
1013	36	Slag from upper fill of ditch 44
1014	45	Perforated stone from ditch 44
1015	50	Stone disk from ditch 44
1016	50	Perforated stone from ditch 44
1017	37	Bone frag. from ditch 4
1018	37	Perforated stone from ditch 4
1019	37	Perforated stone from ditch 4
1020	37	Possible slingshot from ditch 4
1021	37	Stone with ?antler-pick mark from ditch 4
1022	36	Perforated stone from ditch 44
1023	60	Perforated stone from ditch 44
1024	60	Perforated stone from ditch 44
1025	60	Perforated stone from ditch 44
1026	15	Perforated stone from ditch 4
1027	46	Perforated stone from ditch 4
1028	37	Perforated stone from ditch 4
1029	37	Hammer stone from ditch 4
1030	1	Flint fragment
1031	37	Bone frag. from ditch 4
1032	37	Perforated stone from ditch 4
1033	47	Possible rubbing stone from palisade 48
1034	47	Possible rubbing stone from palisade 48

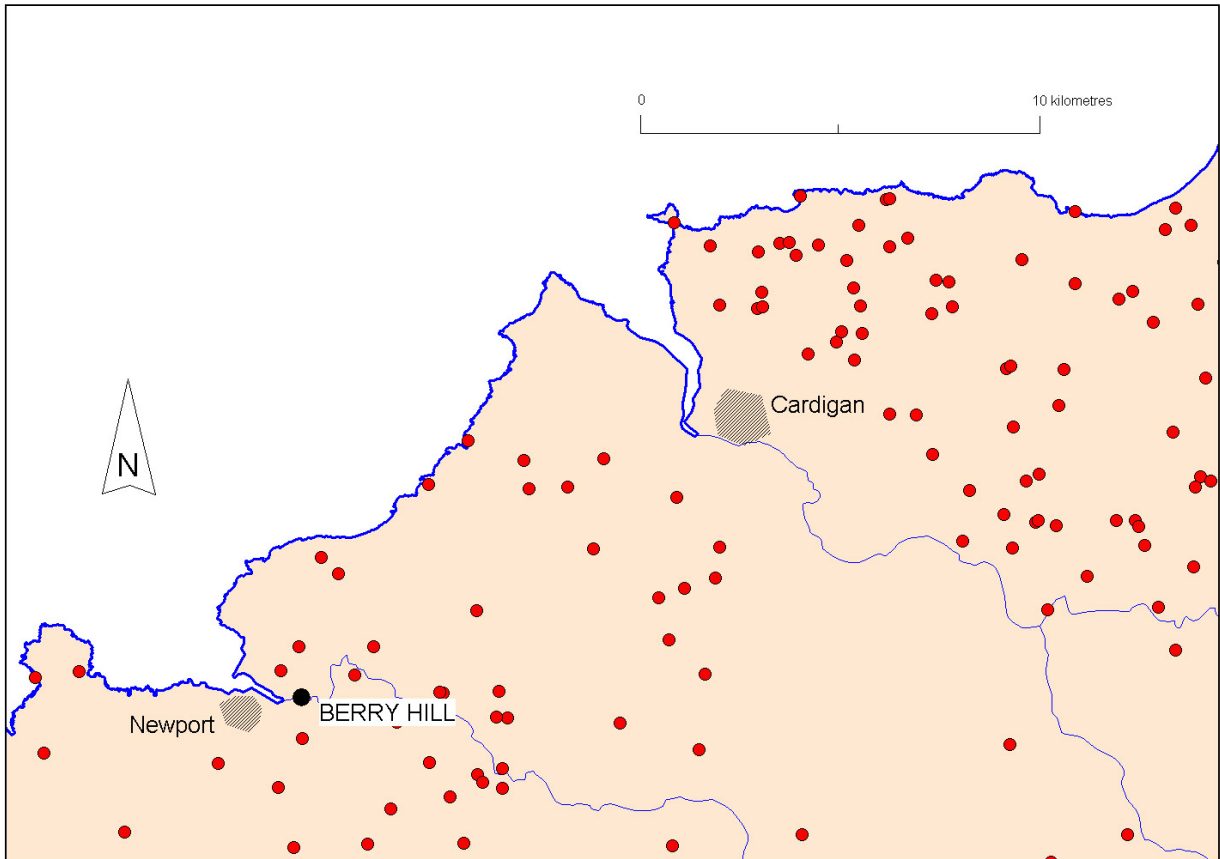


Figure 1. Location map of defended enclosures in north Pembrokeshire and south Ceredigion.



Figure 2. Location map of Berry Hill.

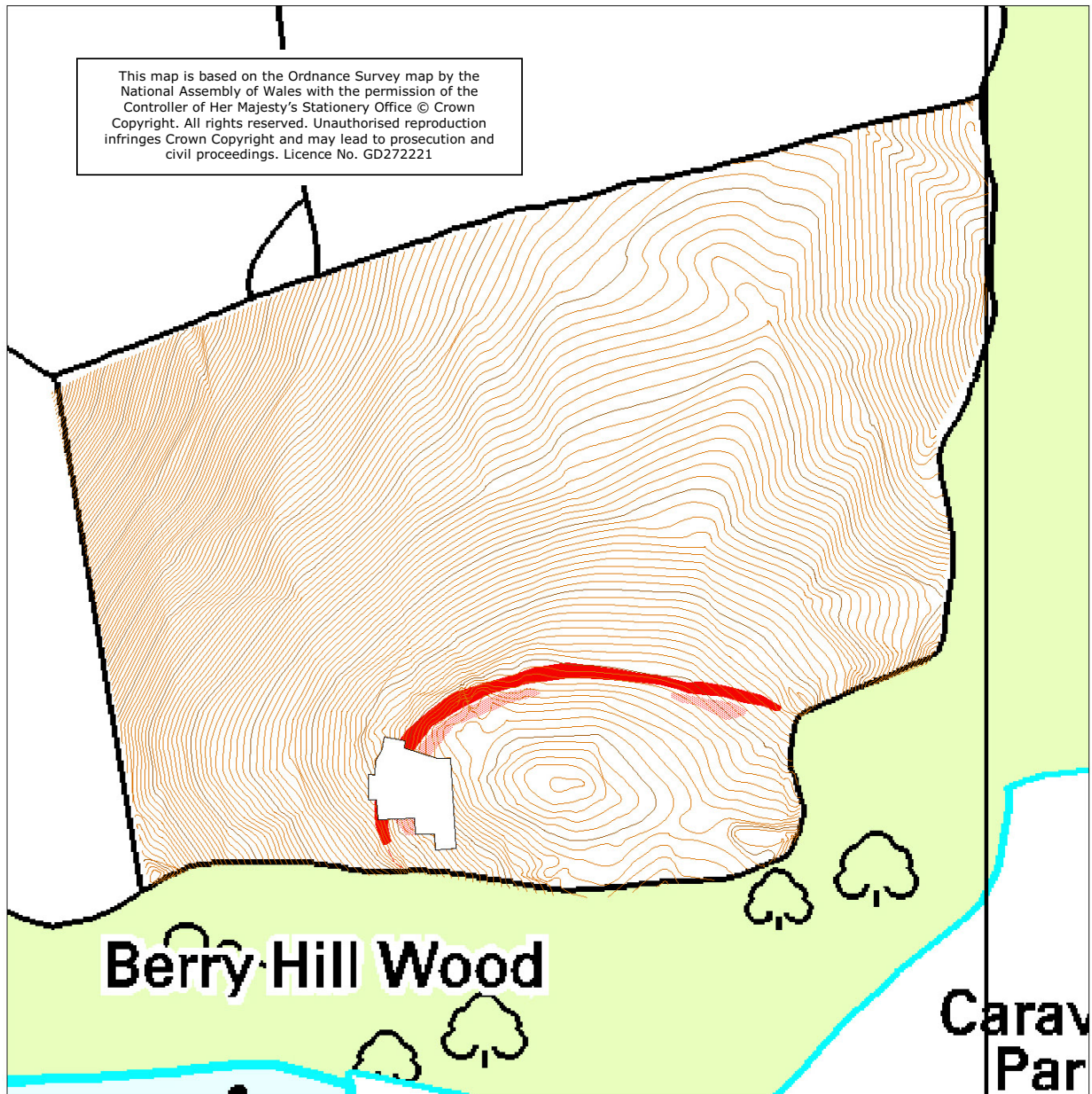


Figure 3. Location of Berry Hill excavation, showing the area of excavation, the plot from the aerial photograph and contours at 0.10m intervals.

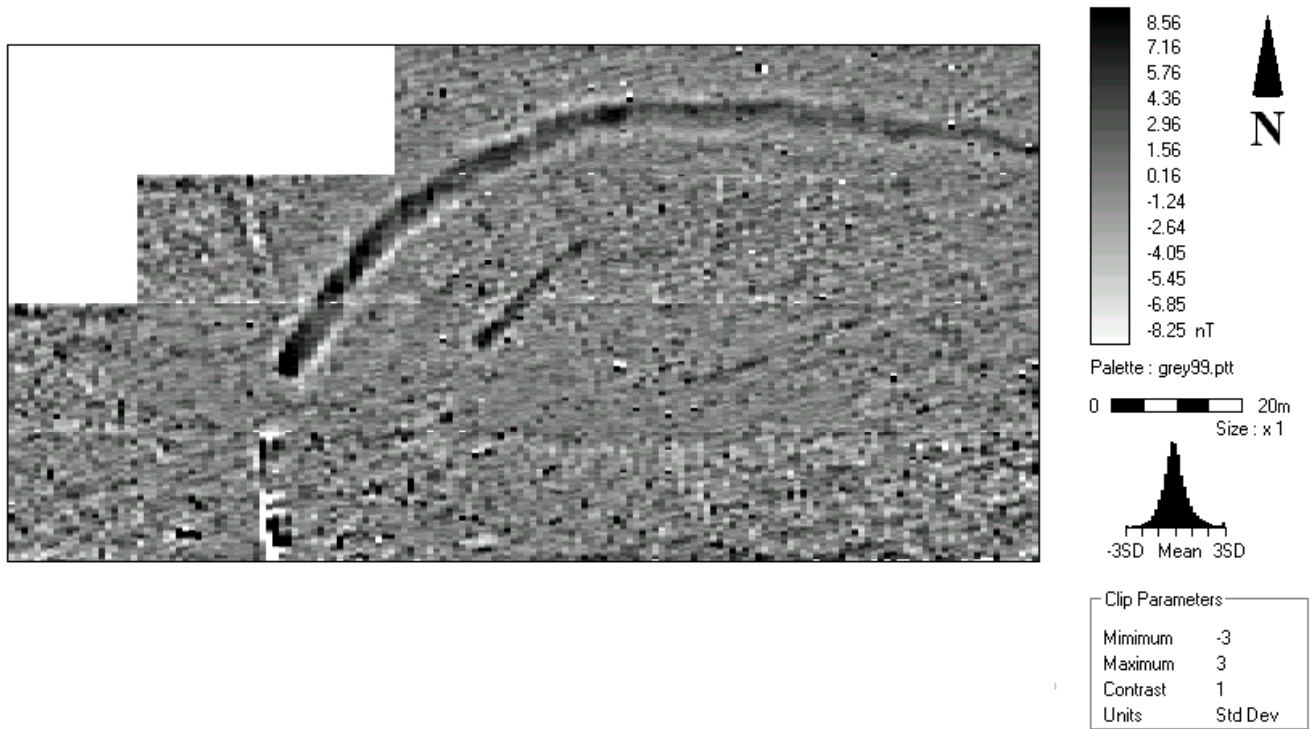


Figure 4. The magnetometry plot of Berry Hill.

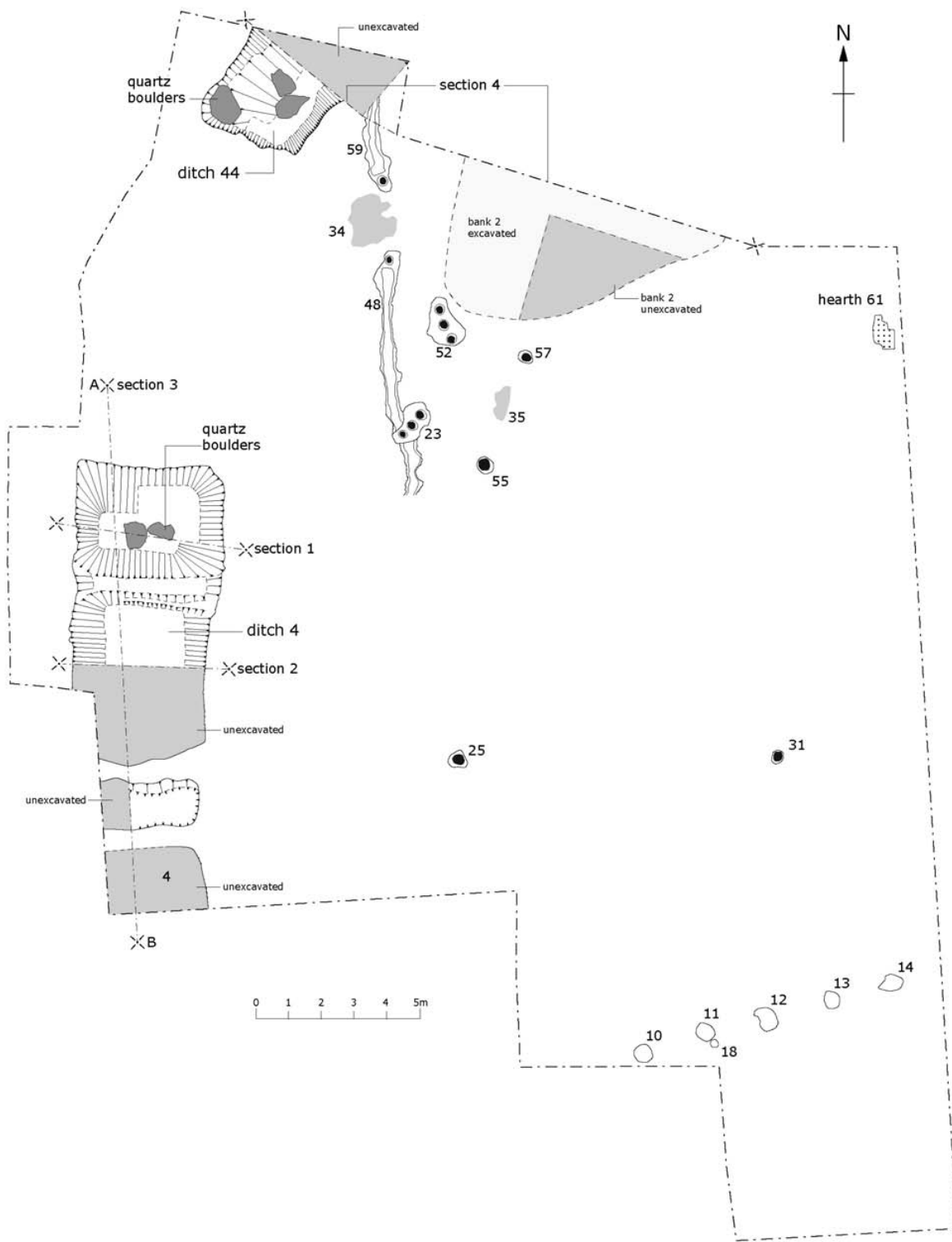


Figure 5. Plan of excavated area.

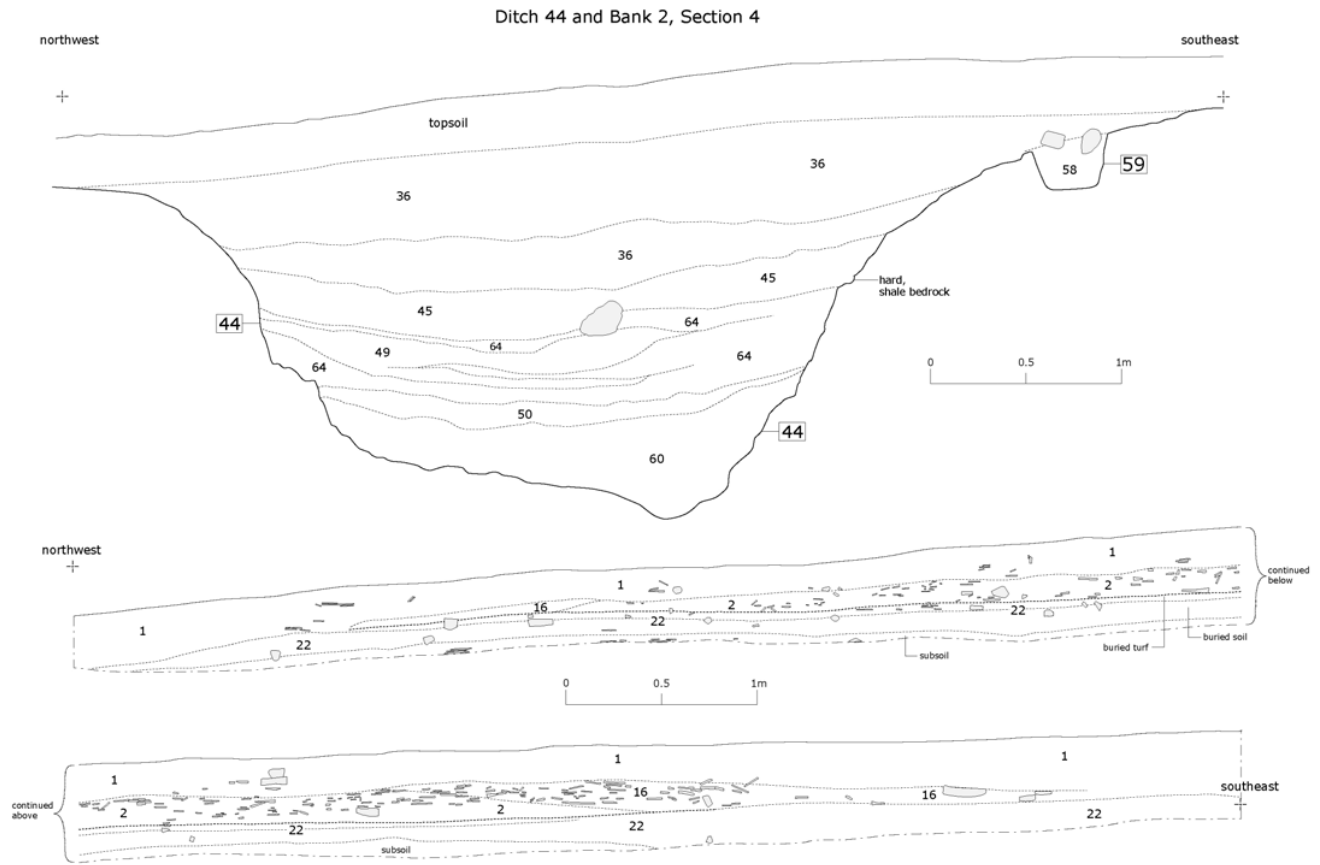


Figure 6. Section 4 of ditch 44 and bank 2.

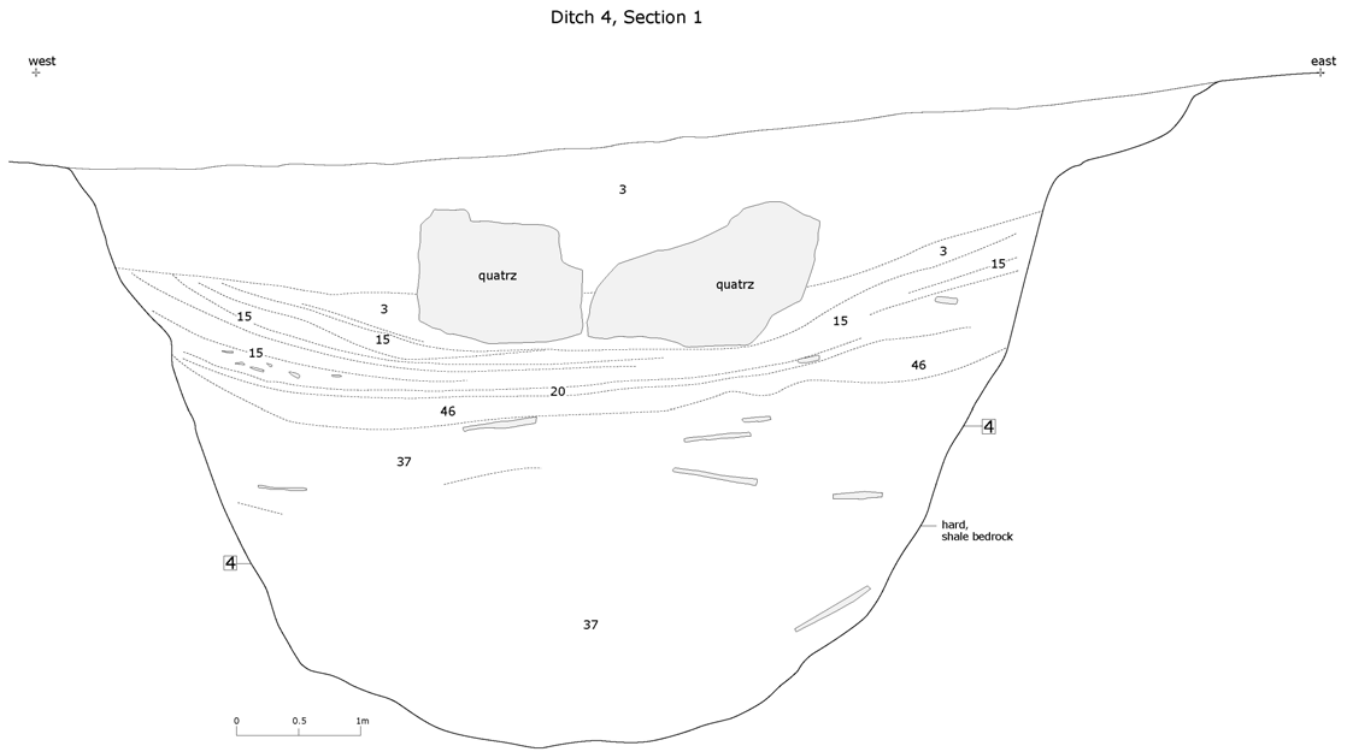


Figure 7. Section of ditch 4.



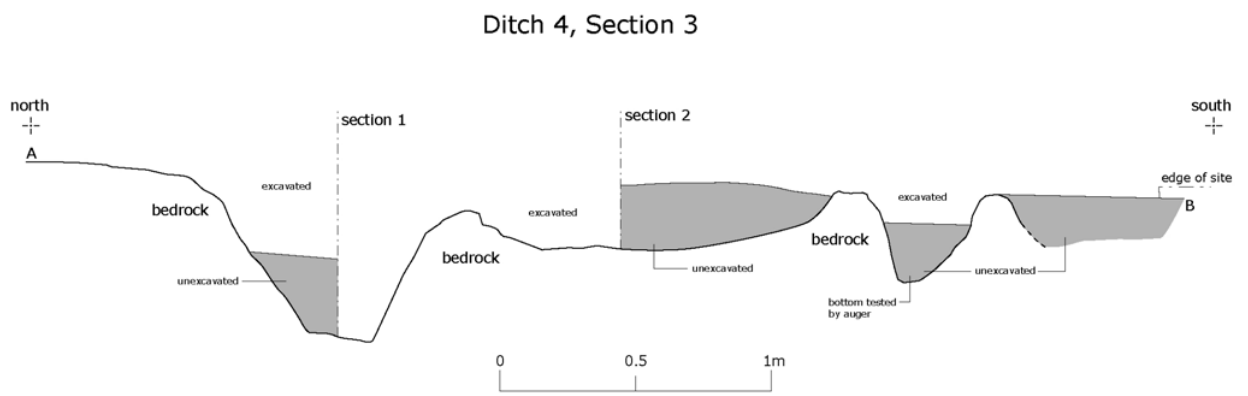


Figure 9. Long section of ditch 4.



Photograph 1. Aerial photograph by Terry James of the Berry Hill site, 1984.



Photograph 2. Initial cleaning of the site with Carn Ingli in the background.



Photograph 3. The defensive bank (2) after removal of bank wash (16).



Photograph 4. Line of pits (10 - 14) running across the interior of the site.



Photograph 5. Excavation of ditch 4 showing the large quartz boulders in the upper fill.



Photograph 6. Section (XX) across the shallow part of ditch 4.



Photograph 7. The excavated terminal of ditch 4.



Photograph 8. The initial stages of excavation of ditch 44 showing the massive quartz boulder in the upper fill.



Photograph 9. Ditch 44 excavated.



Photograph 10. Ditch 44 with the palisade trench 48 and excavated remains of the defensive bank (2) in the background.



Photograph 11. Possible antler pick marks in the side of ditch 44.



Photograph 12. General view of gateway, showing postholes 23, 52, 55 and 57.



Photograph 13. Excavation of one of the large gateway postholes.



Photograph 14. The palisade trench (48).



Photograph 15. The gateway postholes (23, 52, 55, 57) and the palisade trench (48).



Photograph 16. Looking along the palisade trench (48).

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**Hydref 2007  
October 2007**

Paratowyd yr adroddiad hwn gan / This report has been prepared by K Murphy

Swydd / Position: Trust Director

Llofnod / Signature ..... Dyddiad / Date

Mae'r adroddiad hwn wedi ei gael yn gywir a derbyn sêl bendith  
This report has been checked and approved by

ar ran Archaeoleg Cambria, Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf.  
on behalf of Cambria Archaeology, Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Swydd / Position:

Llofnod / Signature ..... Dyddiad / Date

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sydd gennych ar gynnwys neu strwythur yr adroddiad hwn

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