

# CLWYDIAN RANGE ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP

## Evaluation Report No.1

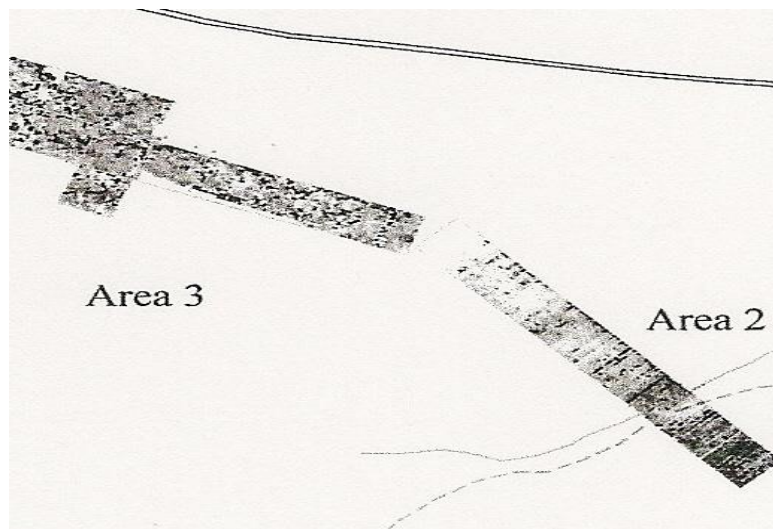
### Exploratory Excavation to Investigate a number of features identified by Geophysical Survey on Moel Arthur.

#### 1. Introduction

In August 2010 a geophysical survey commissioned by Heather and Hillforts Landscape Partnership Scheme was undertaken by Engineering Archaeological Services Ltd. It was run as a training event by the Partnership Scheme for members of the public and included members of the Heather and Hillforts Archaeology Group. This group was established as part of the Heather and Hillforts Project as an ongoing educational and training forum until funding ceased at the end of 2010.

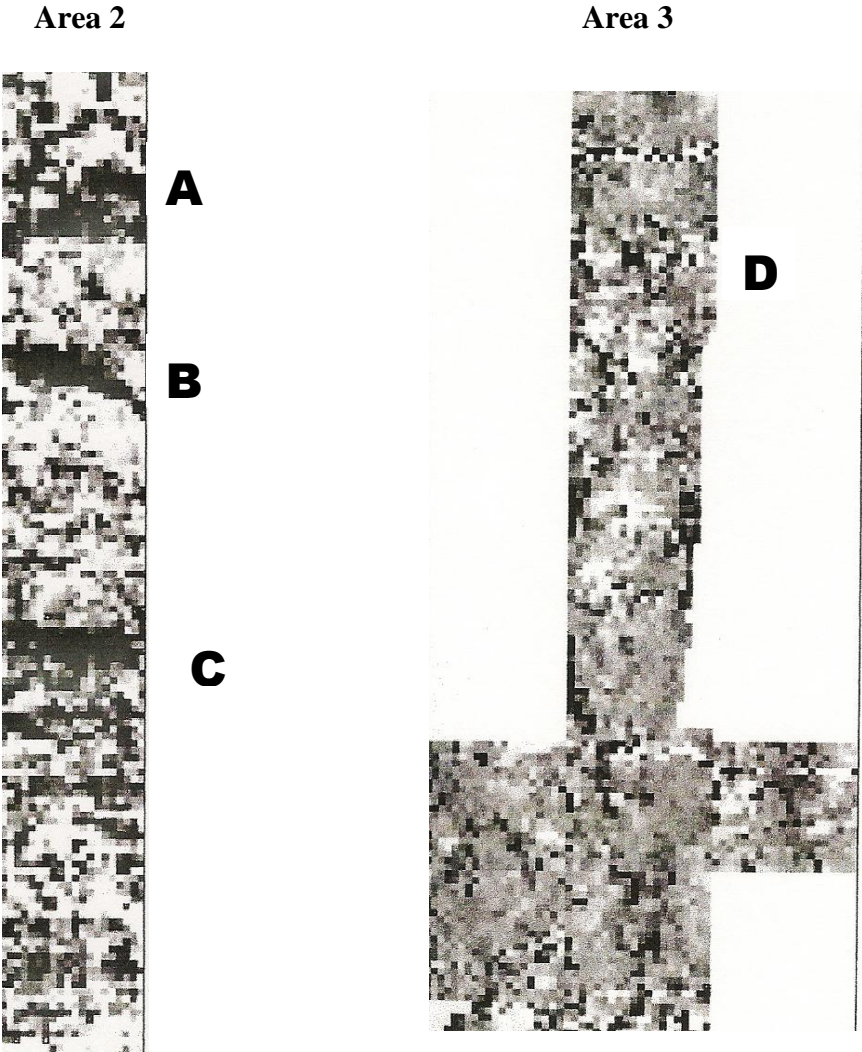
The survey covered three areas on Moel Arthur, two of which, were outside of the scheduled area of the hillfort and took advantage of a recent heather management scheme which had cleared areas of heather on the flanks of Moel Arthur. This allowed both resistivity and fluxgate gradiometer surveys to be undertaken. Fig 1 below indicates the relationship of these areas to each other.

Fig. 1



**The Excavation**

The excavations were planned to investigate the anomalies identified as A-D on the geophysical surveys shown below. The work was carried out by the Clwydian Range Archaeology Group, a group of volunteers, which evolved from the Heather and Hillforts Archaeology Group, and performed under the supervision of Fiona Gale, County Archaeologist and Sarah Peveley, Community Archaeologist.



In total four trenches were originally planned to investigate each of the anomalies. These were located below the hillfort, on the North West slope of Moel Arthur and because of the difficulty of access all excavations had to be undertaken by hand using mattock, spade and

trowel. The sites of Trenches I and III were both on sloping ground. Trench II was located on a narrow terrace and Trench IV on a flat plateau.

### **Trench I**

Was opened to investigate anomaly A in area 2 on the geophysical survey report. The trench was 4m long by 1.5m wide. Below a layer of peat (context 1) which varied in depth between 12cm and 15cm, a thin layer of brown gritty soil (context2) lay on top of a layer of firmer brown clay containing inclusions varying from 2mm up to 10cm (context 3). Nothing of interest was noted in any of these layers. A test pit was opened within the trench and excavated a further 10-15cm down to bedrock. No further work was undertaken in this trench.

The proximity of bedrock to the surface may explain the anomaly shown on the geophysical survey.

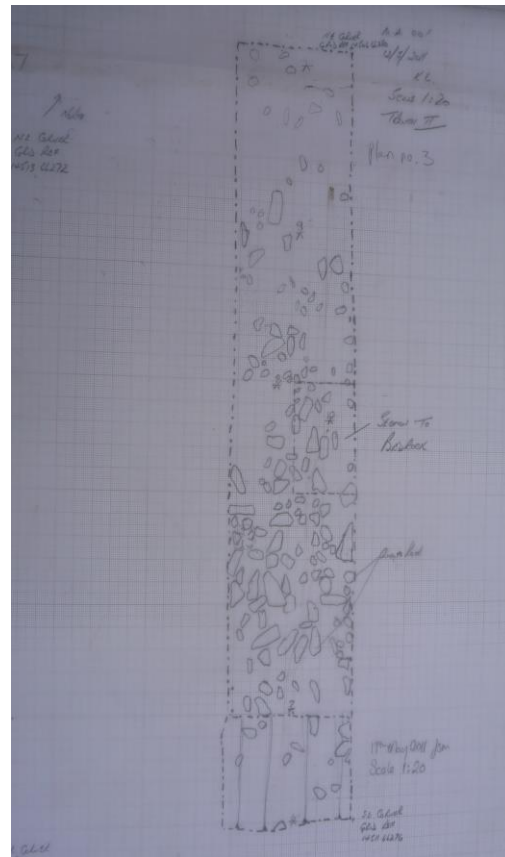
### **Trench II**

Was opened to investigate anomaly B in area 2 This trench was also originally opened 4m long by 1.5m wide. Once the peat was removed a number of flat stones were found at the interface between a fine gritty soil layer and a clay layer containing inclusions. Following careful cleaning more of these flat stones were found, all lying flat on top of the clay layer. These stones varied in size from 10 – 40cm long and 1 – 8 cm thick (average 3cm). The trench was then extended by a further 2m at the north west end and a further 1m at the south east end into the slope to ascertain the extent of the area covered by the stones. Although additional stones were found in the extensions, they were less numerous. However, the clay layer located in the north west extension was much more compacted than the similar layer in trench I. A test pit was excavated in the trench and bedrock was encountered after 10-15 cm.

## Trench II looking North West - down slope



## Plan of Trench II



## Trench III

Was opened to investigate anomaly C in area 2. This trench was 4m long by 1.5m wide. Having removed the peat and exposed the clay layer with inclusions nothing of note was found. Two test pits were dug at opposite ends of the trench and excavated a further 10 – 12cm down to bedrock. It was noted that in the north western edge of the trench a lens of peaty material was enclosed within a thin layer of clay suggesting some form of ground disturbance, probably occurring after the formation of the surface peat layer. No further work was undertaken on this trench.

Again, the proximity of bedrock to the surface may explain the anomaly shown on the geophysical survey.

## Trench IV

Was opened to investigate anomaly D in area 3 which was thought possibly to be a round house with central hearth. The trench was 8m long by 1.5 m wide and was located to dissect the area of the possible round house. Although a group of large stones was exposed these were identified as natural and, undoubtedly, were the cause of the geophysical survey results.

There was no evidence of a hearth and no other signs of a round house were found.

However, during the process of the excavation a flint implement was found which has been referred for dating. The soil in the immediate area of the flint has also been removed and sent for further analysis. *We will await results in order to conclude this paragraph.*

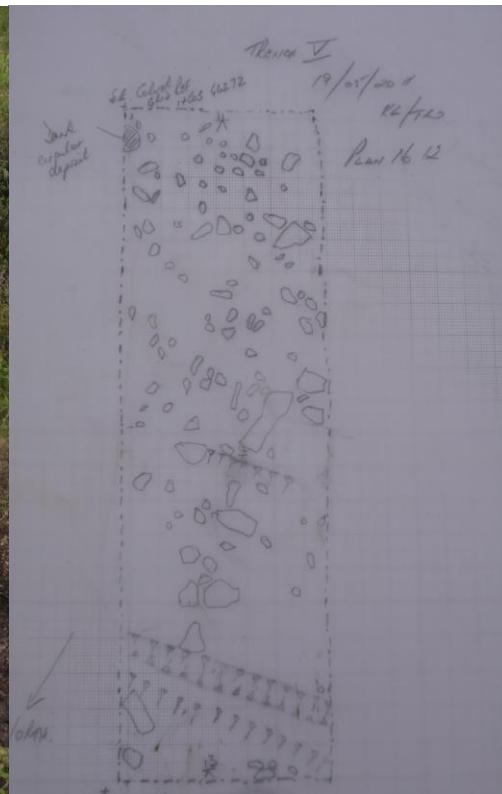
## Trench V

Following the findings in Trench II it was decided to open a fifth trench to ascertain the extent of the flat stones found there. Trench V was, therefore opened some 8m to the west of Trench II. Following removal of the peat layer and a narrow layer of gritty brown soil, two gutter/rut like features were found running parallel to each other approximately 117cm apart.

**Trench V looking South East-upslope**



**Plan of Trench V**



Both features were sealed by the peaty layer above and on its removal the ruts/gutters were found to be approx 2cm deep.

## **7. Conclusions**

Although the five trenches which were excavated on this project were spread over an area some 70m long, the basic geology remained the same. A top peaty layer followed by a thin gritty brown soil lay on top of a clay layer with various size inclusions. This pattern was repeated in all trenches and, undoubtedly, reflects the same contexts across the site. However the depth of the middle [gritty brown layer] varied from a few centimetres on the slopes where Trenches I,II, III and V were located to at least 15cm in Trench IV suggesting movement of the layer from the slopes to the flat.

Natural explanations were found for the anomalies in Trenches I, III and IV. However Trenches II and V have produced interesting finds suggesting the presence of a track running east west across the flank of Moel Arthur below the hillfort at the summit. As the stones in trench II and the ruts in trench V were both located below the peat layer and therefore predated the peat, it is possible to allocate a very approximate date to these features. Report number 0209 produced for the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales entitled 'Analysis of Peat Core from the Clwydian Hills, North Wales' was based on samples taken from Moel Llys y Coed, the neighbouring hill to Moel Arthur and concluded that 'the dramatic expansion of heather to dominate the vegetation of the upland begins AD600 to AD810.' Therefore, it can be assumed that the stones were laid and the ruts formed prior to this and subsequently sealed by the formation of the peaty layer caused by heather decomposition. Therefore, the conclusion is that this track was probably constructed either in the Dark Ages or earlier.

It is intended that further work will be undertaken later this year in order to trace further the route of this track way in both directions.