

EXCAVATION OF AN IRON AGE DEFENDED ENCLOSURE AT FFYNNONWEN, TREMAIN, CARDIGAN, 2006: INTERIM REPORT



THE UNIVERSITY *of York*



Prepared by Cambria Archaeology for Cadw

ARCHAEOLEG CAMBRIA ARCHAEOLOGY

RHIF YR ADRODDIAD / REPORT NO. 2006/97
RHIF Y PROSIECT / PROJECT RECORD NO. 56990

Medi 2006
September 2006

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SUMMARY

Cambria Archaeology and the University of York undertook geophysical survey in 2005 followed by further geophysical survey and excavation in 2006 on a crop-marked enclosure at Ffynnonwen, Tremain, near Cardigan, Ceredigion. The geophysical survey detected an oval enclosure 160m by 140m within which, and offset from the centre, lay a circular enclosure 45m diameter. Four roundhouses and other features were apparent in the inner enclosure. 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.

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 (Fig. 1). 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.

The late prehistoric settlement of southwest Wales is characterised by hillforts 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 - 50m by 45m - 55m. Most have an entrance through the ditch 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 of 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 sligher 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.

The area in which the crop-marked enclosures have been discovered comprises a roughly triangular dissected plateau, approximately 100 square kilometres, between 80m to 150m above sea level, and lying between Cardigan, Aberporth and Newcastle Emlyn. The modern settlement pattern comprises dispersed farms with a few hamlet/village clusters. Apart from on the steepest slopes almost all the land is parcelled into fields and intensively farmed. The western section of the area is exposed to the prevailing Atlantic winds. Improved pasture is the chief agricultural land-use, with an arable element producing mainly fodder crops.

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, and the formulation of future management strategies; the enhancement of the Historic Environment Record (formerly known as the Regional Sites and Monuments Record) and END. 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* forthcoming).

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 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, geophysical survey in 2005 (Murphy *et al* 2006) demonstrated the high possibility of roundhouses and other structures within the inner enclosure.

Ffynnonwen was discovered from the air in 1996 by Chris Musson, then of the RCAHMMW (Photo. 1). This photograph shows a large oval enclosure with an entrance to the west within which, in the southwest quadrant, lies a circular enclosure with an apparent north-facing entrance. The site is divided in half by a north-south aligned field boundary. In 1996, both fields were under barley. After the barley harvest the site was ploughed and put under grass. It was not ploughed again until after the 2006 excavation. The site lies at the southern end of rounded hilltop (Photo 2.), just off the summit, at c. 170m above sea level (Fig. 2, National Grid Reference SN22574912). Wide-ranging views to the west, south and east are obtained from the site, but to the north these are blocked by ground rising just a few metres onto the summit. From the summit, the Preseli Mountains are visible 25km to the southwest, the Black Mountain 65km to the southeast, and to the west, north and northeast the whole of the Cardigan Bay Coast, up to the Llyn Peninsula 80km away. On clear days, Ireland is visible to the west.

The excavation started on the 16th July and was completed on the 11th August. The weather was exceptionally hot and dry, with the temperatures on the 19th July reaching 34 degrees Celsius, the hottest on record for Wales. Only two short periods of rain were recorded during the four-week excavation. These were at night, but by the following mid morning the following day the excavation surface was dry and dusty.

THE GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY

In 2005, geophysical survey was carried out, measuring 100m by 60m, over the southwest quarter of the site, encompassing the inner circular enclosure and part of the interior of the oval outer enclosure to the north of it. During the excavation in 2006 the whole of the outer oval enclosure and some external areas, was surveyed (Fig. 3).

On the geophysical plot the oval outer enclosure measures 160m north - south and 140m east - west, with slight bulge on the east side (Figs. 3 & 4). A c.12 m wide gap on the west side marks the entrance. A faint, wide anomaly within the entrance running east - west may indicate a hollow-way/track. A thin sinuous ditch/gully curves around this anomaly. To the east of the hedge-bank that divides the enclosure down the centre lies a distinct curving ditch. This seems to be continued as a slighter feature to the west, curving around to form c.30% of a circle 45m diameter. What may be a 10m diameter roundhouse gully lies in the centre of this circle, directly beneath the hedge-bank.

The inner circular enclosure is well defined. It consists of a ditch, c. 45m internal diameter with what could be an entrance on its north side, or possible northwest side. A least four circles, assumed to be roundhouse gullies each c.10m diameter, lie within the enclosure. Discrete anomalies may represent pits and postholes.

A square enclosure 25m across with an east-facing entrance attached to the south side of the oval outer enclosure contains a c.13m diameter roundhouse and other anomalies. Another possible roundhouse lies immediately west, outside this enclosure.

A series of thin ditches aligned southeast - northwest and most pronounced on the southeast side of the survey may be remains of ridge and furrow cultivation. Outside the northeast side of the oval outer enclosure a cluster of pronounced anomalies could be hearths or furnaces. There are many other discrete and linear anomalies on the plot. Some of these are likely to be geological features, but on

the western side of the site there appear to be ditches possibly associated with the enclosure.

THE EXCAVATION

Initially it was planned to excavate a c. 25m square portion of the interior of the inner circular enclosure against the hedge-bank that bisects the site, taking in at least one of the roundhouses detected on the 2005 geophysical survey and the entrance through the enclosure, which the aerial photographs and geophysical survey indicated lay on the north side of the enclosure. However, a site inspection in June revealed a badger sett in the hedge-bank close to where the south side of the ditch of the inner enclosure runs beneath the bank. As there is a legal requirement to maintain at least 30m between badger setts and working machinery, the planned area of the excavation was pushed further out into the field, but still examining the possible entrance and at least one roundhouse. This reordering accounts for the rather strange-shaped area of excavation (Fig. 6 and Photo. 3).

A machine removed the topsoil, which was on average 0.25m-0.30m thick and consisted of a stony silt loam. Topsoil lay over vertically pitched Ordovician shale of the Ashgill Series (British Geological Survey 1994). In pockets this rock was shattered and intermixed with a veneer of glacial silts, but over most of the excavation it was hard with the bedding planes clearly visible running in an approximately east-west alignment. Owing to the dry conditions, minor archaeological features such as pits, postholes and gullies were not immediately visible, but the ditch encircling the enclosure was. It was apparent that this ditch was continuous across the location of the supposed entrance on the north side of the enclosure. As the geophysical survey indicated a possible break in the ditch on the west side of the enclosure the topsoil strip was continued into this area with the hope of locating the entrance. Again the ditch was continuous. In total a quadrant of the inner enclosure ditch was stripped of topsoil on the northern and western sides. Topsoil was also removed from a trench over the outer oval ditch near to where the inner and outer enclosure ditches run closest on the southwest side of the site. The final excavated area resembled a parallelogram c. 27m north-south and 23m northwest-southeast.

Following topsoil removal the most effective method of cleaning the site in the dry conditions was found to be hard sweeping with yard brooms.

The Outer Oval Enclosure Ditch

The section through the outer oval enclosure ditch (8) lay c.11m, centre to centre, from the inner circular enclosure ditch on the southwest side of the site (Fig. 7 and Photo. 5). A central 1.5m wide machine-dug trench was initially excavated through the ditch. This was widened by hand to a four metre long section. The ditch was rock-cut and had an open, V-shaped profile 3.8m across, 1.1m deep on the south side and becoming shallower, 0.75m deep on the north side. Four layers were recognised in the ditch, with both sections of the trench showing a similar sequence of deposition. The earliest fill (54 – not shown on the section drawing) was a thin, patchy, primary silt over which lay a silty loam (15) containing many small angular pieces of shale. Above this lay a less stony lay (14) over which was a similar, but slightly more humic deposit (13); this graded into the topsoil.

There was no buried soil or other direct evidence indicating a bank flanking the ditch, but the stony layer 15 and the stones within layer 14 seem to have been derived from the east side of the ditch, possibly from a former bank.

The Inner Circular Enclosure Ditch - southwest side

A 3m wide section, stepped in to 1m wide midway down for safety reasons, was hand-excavated through the inner circular enclosure ditch (5) on the southwest side of the site (Fig. 8 and Photo. 6). The V-shaped ditch was rock-cut, 4.2m wide and 2.2m deep, with steep, almost vertical sides. The depositional sequence was straightforward with several silt loam layers more stony towards the bottom of the ditch and more humic towards the top. The earliest deposit (72) comprised 50% pieces of shale, above which lay a less stony layer (71). Above this layer 33 contained a quantity of large stones within the centre of the ditch, but mostly was fairly stone free. This contrasted with the next layer up (26) which was largely composed of small angular pieces of shale, and seemed to be derived from the eastern side of the ditch. Above this layers 3 and 4 were fairly stone free, with 3 merging with the topsoil. A spindle whorl (902) made from a reused piece of Roman Severn Valley Ware pottery was found in ditch fill 3 and a piece of slag from fill 4.

There was no buried soil or other direct evidence indicating a bank flanking the ditch. Layer 26 seems to have been derived from the east side of the ditch, possibly from a former bank.

The Inner Circular Enclosure Ditch - north side

Five sections were hand-excavated across the ditch (7) on the north side on the enclosure where the geophysical survey and aerial photographs had indicated an entrance. The ditch here was found to be on average 0.30m deep, but in some trenches as shallow as 0.10m (Fig. 9 and Photo. 7). The ditch had an undulating base and, even at its shallowest, had steep sides. The rock here was very hard and pockmarks from percussion tools were visible on the ditch floor (Photo. 8). The ditch fill (2) consisted of a homogeneous silty loam with an even distribution of small stones.

On the eastern side of the excavation trench a small and incompletely excavated section confirmed that ditch was steep-sided, rock-cut and at least 1m deep and continuing. A massive quartz boulder was located in the centre of the ditch c. 0.8m below the surface.

The ditch cut through the fill (25) of gully 38, the base of the gully surviving in the floor of the ditch.

As with the other ditch sections, there was no buried soil or other direct evidence of a flanking bank. Clearly the shallow ditch explains the apparent entrance gap on the geophysical survey and on the aerial photograph. The reason why the ditch was left so shallow is not so easy to explain, but it is possible that the very hard rock combined with the vertical pitched bedding planes running along the line of the ditch (east-west) proved impossible to excavate.

The Internal Area Roundhouse A

The most obvious evidence for Roundhouse A (Fig. 6) was two lengths of curving gully (16, 19), which if projected into a full circle had an internal diameter of 10.4m. The eastern and southern arc of the gully (19) was the longer, at 18.5m. It had a U-shaped profile, and was c.0.8m wide and varied in depth between 0.1m and 0.25m. It had a patchy primary silt of greyish-white silt (21) over which lay the main fill (6), a homogeneous silty loam. A small patch of charcoal rich soil (18) lay within 6 on the south side of the ditch - this seemed to be single period deposit, perhaps a basket of ash thrown into the gully. A 3.6m wide, east-facing gap between the two gullies marked an entrance. The length of gully 16, to the north of this gap was 2.3m long and 0.15m deep and was filled with a silty

loam (16). The northern end of both gullies faded rather than abruptly terminated. Gully 16 cut the fill (25) of gully 38. Two pieces of slag (904, 908) were recovered from fill 6, as well as a flint microlith (903).

Two postholes (28, 46) between gullies 16 and 19 probably represented doorposts of an east-facing entrance into the roundhouse. Both were c. 0.6m diameter and 0.4m deep, and both had packing stones (27 and 45) to support a post. Centre to centre the postholes were 2.6m apart. Posthole 46 had a well-defined post-pipe (24) and fill of post-pipe (23), it also cut two earlier, slightly smaller postholes (76 with fill 75; 87 with fill 86). Fragments of glassy slag were recovered from the fill (27) of posthole 28.

A curving length of gully (40, filled by 39) ran concentrically and 1.2m within gullies 16 and 19. This gully was very shallow, generally less than 8mm, and in places just it was a soil-mark. It did not form a complete circle, being most pronounced on the south and west side. If projected it forms a circle 8.3m diameter. It was too slight to have contained any structural evidence, but it is assumed to have marked the outer wall line of the roundhouse.

It is assumed that the two gullies 16 and 19 fade towards their northern ends as they ran up over the foot of bank that lay within the inner circular enclosure ditch, all evidence for such a bank having now gone. However, the projected line of the supposed wall of the roundhouse (40) would leave only c.2m between the wall and the edge south lip of the ditch (7) - not enough room for a substantial bank.

Roundhouse B

Only the northwest side of this house was available for excavation. It consisted of an outer gully (70), with a projected internal diameter 8.1m. It was c.0.45m across and 0.25m deep and was filled with a homogeneous silty loam (69). Concentrically within it lay a slighter gully (58), c.0.2m wide and 0.1m deep, with a projected diameter of 6.2m. Clusters of small stones within the fill (57) may have been packing around small posts. Gully 58 terminated on the north side just inside the edge of the excavation.

A small posthole (114, filled by 113) lay on the edge of gully 70 and a second posthole (100, fill 99) lay between the two gullies.

Roundhouse C

Roundhouse C was evidenced by three curving, non-concentric, gullies towards the southern edge of the excavated area (133, filled by 132; 130 filled by 128 and 131 filled by 129), presumably representing three phases of roundhouse construction. The fills of all three were homogeneous silty loams.

Gully 133 was the slightest and least well preserved. It was c.0.1m across and just 20mm-30mm deep, and faded to nothing at the ends. As only a small arc of it survived, its projected diameter is difficult to calculate, but was probably in excess of 10m. Gully 130 was 0.35m wide and 50mm deep with a projected diameter of 10m, and gully 131 was 0.35m wide and 8mm deep with a projected diameter of 11m. Gullies 130 and 131 converged at their western ends, but no relationship could be obtained owing to their very shallow depth at this point.

Four-post structure

Four substantial postholes (51, 60, 64, 68), forming a square approximately 2.6m between their centres, lay to the southwest of Roundhouse A. They were all of similar dimensions, c. 0.90m diameter and 0.40m deep. Three (60, 64, 68) contained packing stones with well-preserved post-pipes (posthole 60 had

packing material 59; posthole 64 had packing material 63 and post-pipe 62 filled with 63; posthole 68 had packing material 67 and post-pipe 66 filled with packing material 65), and the fourth (51) contained several layers (47,48,49,50) suggesting that the packing stones had been removed.

Six-post structure

Six postholes (37, 42, 80, 94, 117 124) towards the northern side of the site formed a c.3.5m square. Two, 37 and 80, had particularly good post-pipes (posthole 37 filled by 36 with post-pipe 35 filled by 34; 42 filled by 41; 80 filled by 79 with post-pipe 78 filled by 77; 94 filled by 93; 117 filled by 118 and 124 filled by 123). All measured c.0.55 diameter and 0.25m deep. Pit 117 had been chiselled out of hard rock.

It is clear that the six-post structure and Roundhouse A could not have been contemporaneous. Also, if there was a bank on the inside of the inner circular enclosure ditch then the six-post structure must have pre- or post-dated it. Alternatively, the six-posts could have been a gate structure pre- or post-dating the roundhouse and accompanying the defensive bank; this, however, is unlikely.

Gully 38

A curving length of gully on the north side of the excavation was cut by the inner circular defensive ditch (7) and by the outer gully (16) of Roundhouse A. The excavated length of gully measured approximately 19m, and was rock-cut, c.0.3m wide and 0.25m deep. Stones within the fill (25) had been placed to support posts, indicating that the gully was a foundation for a palisade. At its eastern end the gully seemed to terminate just before it met the inner defensive ditch. However, it was not possible to confirm this owing to the dry weather during excavation and geological deposits of disturbed glacial silts. A fragment of a glass annular bead (907) was found in the fill.

Other features

A shallow pit (108 - 0.7m diameter, 0.1m deep) with a charcoal rich fill lay on the western side of the excavation to the north of which lay a shallow, curving length of gully (126 filled with 125). Both these features must have pre- or post-dated a bank that lay inside the inner circular enclosure ditch. The gully was similar in character to some of the roundhouse gullies described above.

An oval, shallow pit (56 - 1.5m long, 0.8m wide and 0.2m wide) with a whitish-grey silt fill (55) lay to the east. The pit cut a short length of shallow gully (134, filled by 97).

To the south of roundhouse A lay two shallow circular pits, the fills of which contained numerous flecks of charcoal (74 filled by 73; 83 filled by 82).

A group of pits and postholes lay on the eastern side of the site, not all of which were excavated; they formed no coherent pattern. Some must have pre- or post-dated any bank that lay inside the inner circular enclosure ditch. Two postholes (12 filled with packing soil and stones 11; 53 filled with 52 and with post-pipe 44 filled with 43) and a pit (22 filled with 20) lay within Roundhouse A. Other features include eight pits (10 filled by charcoal-rich fill 9; 30 filled by 29; 32 filled by 31; 90 filled by 89; 95 filled by 81; 106 filled by 105; 120 filled by 119; 122 filled by 121), some of which may have been postholes, and five definite postholes (92 filled by 91; 98 filled by 96; 104 filled by 102; 109 filled by 110; 112 filled by 111). The only relationship obtained was pit 92 cutting gully 38.

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, both of Cambria Archaeology. 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 undergraduate, is merited for all the hard work he put into the project. Finally, all members of the excavation team are very grateful to John and Helen Thomas of Ffynnonwen for allowing the excavation and for their help and assistance during fieldwork.

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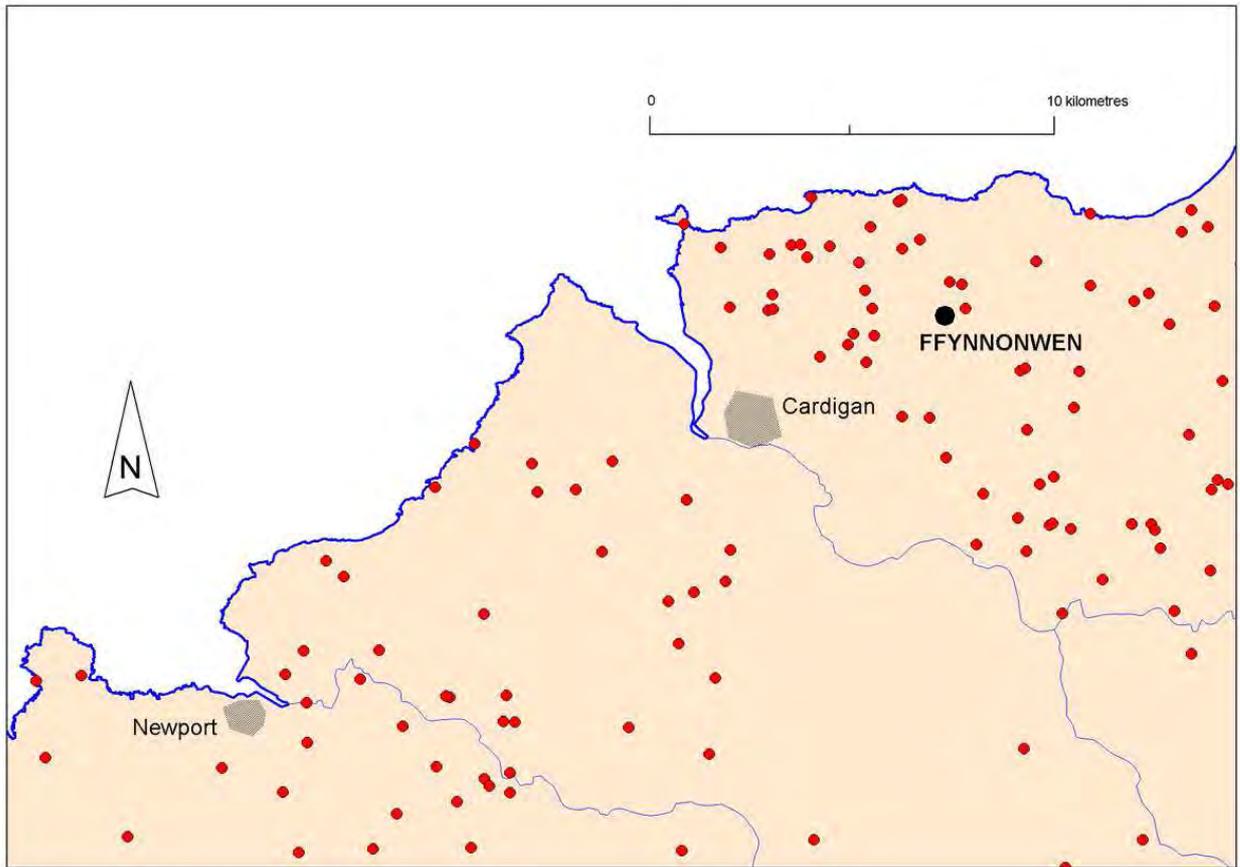


Figure. 1. Defended Enclosures in south Ceredigion and north Pembrokeshire.

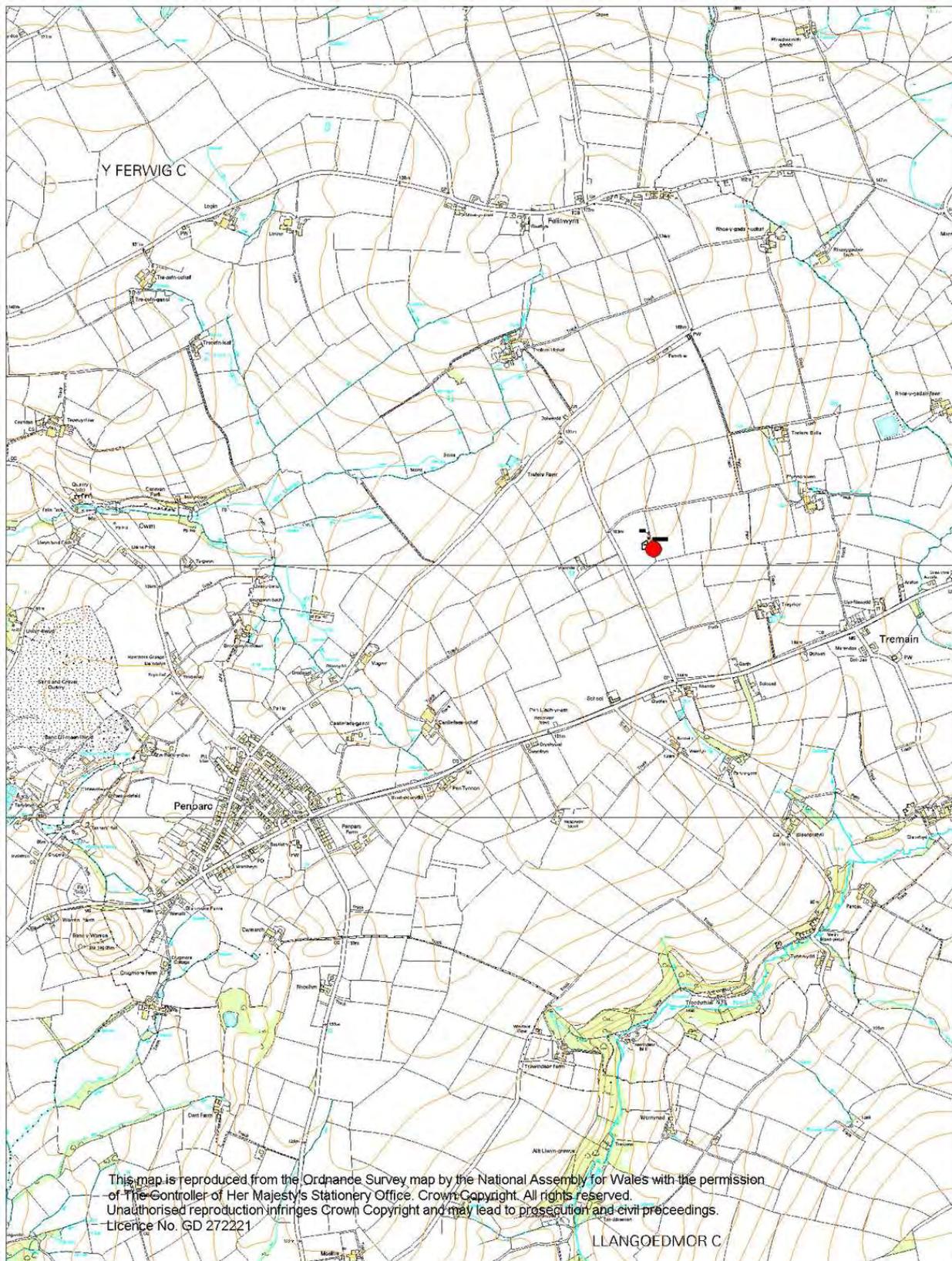


Figure 2. Location map. Scale 1:25,000.

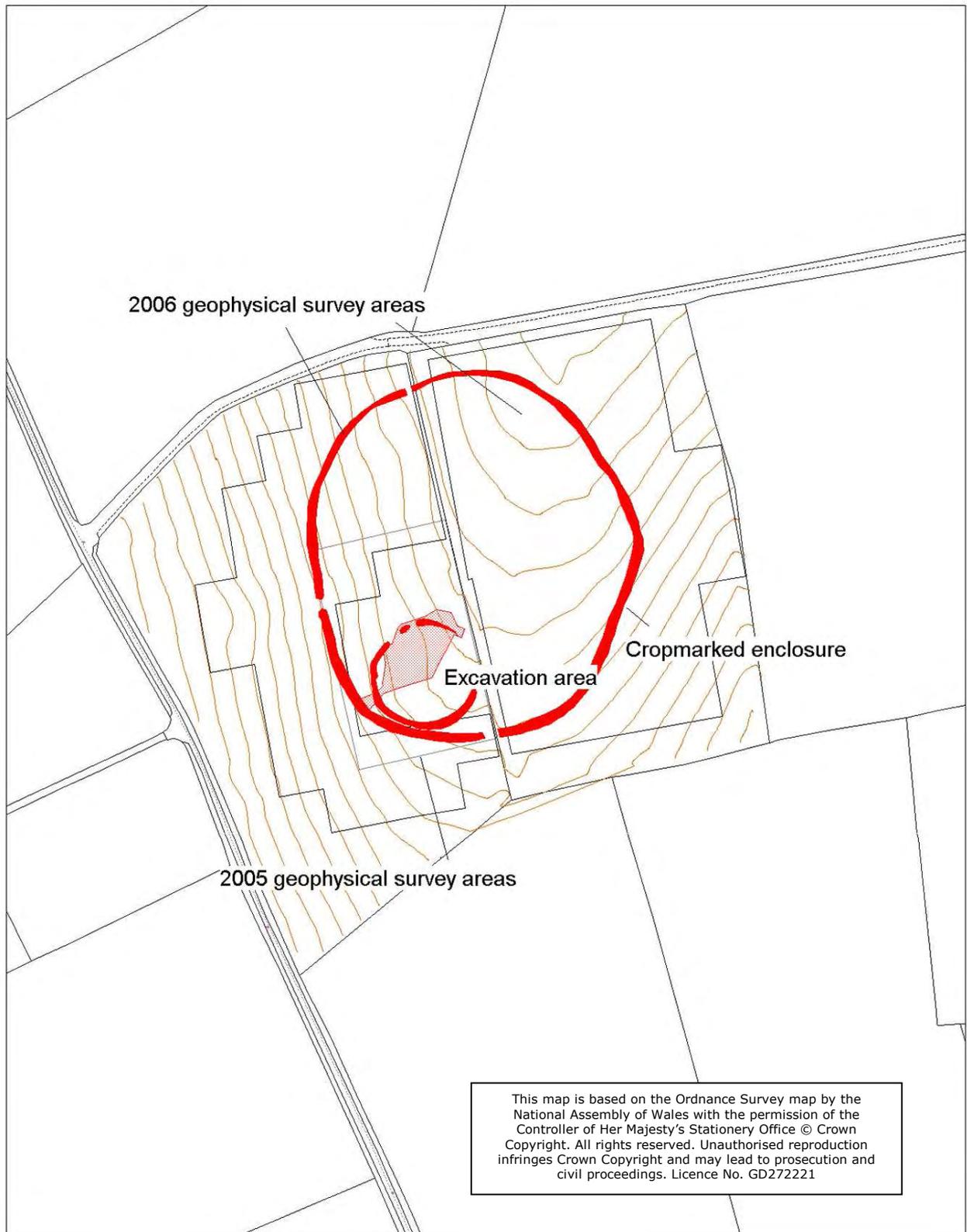


Figure 3. Location of excavated area and geophysical surveys in relation to crop-marks. Cropmark plots: © Crown Copyright: derived from RCAHMW data.

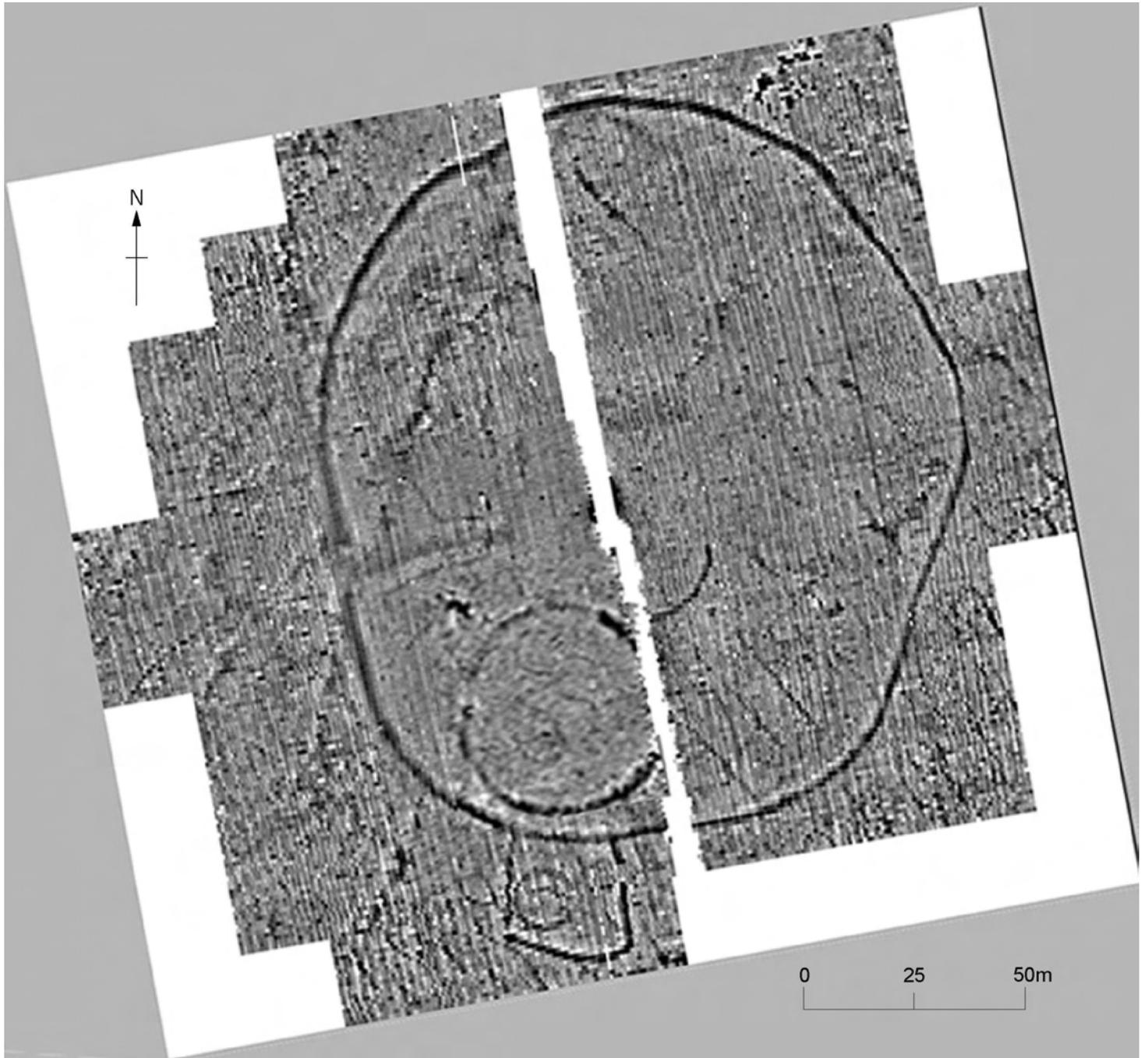


Figure 4. Geophysical survey - raw data.

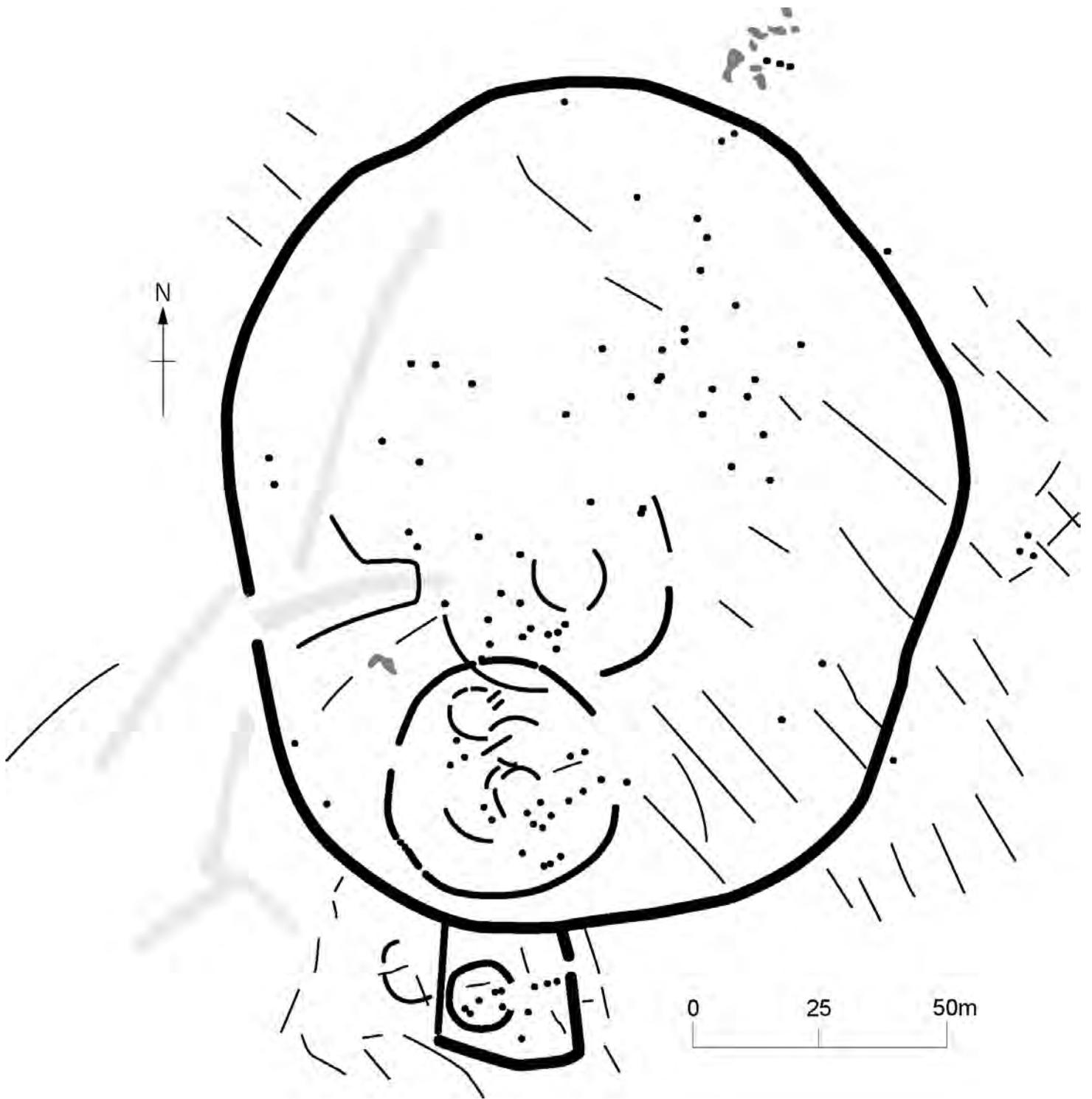


Figure 5. Geophysical survey - interpretation.

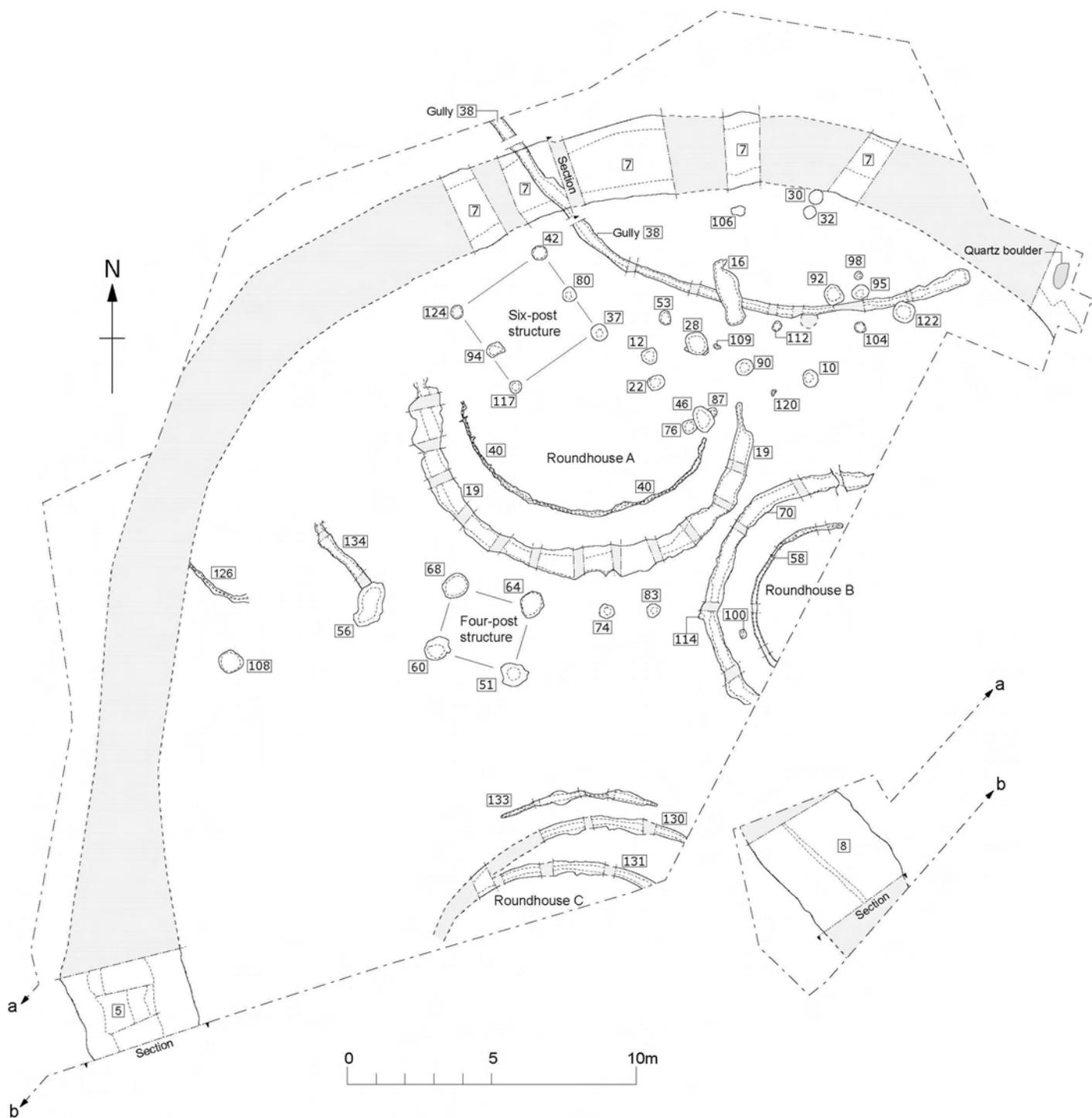


Figure 6. Plan of excavated area.

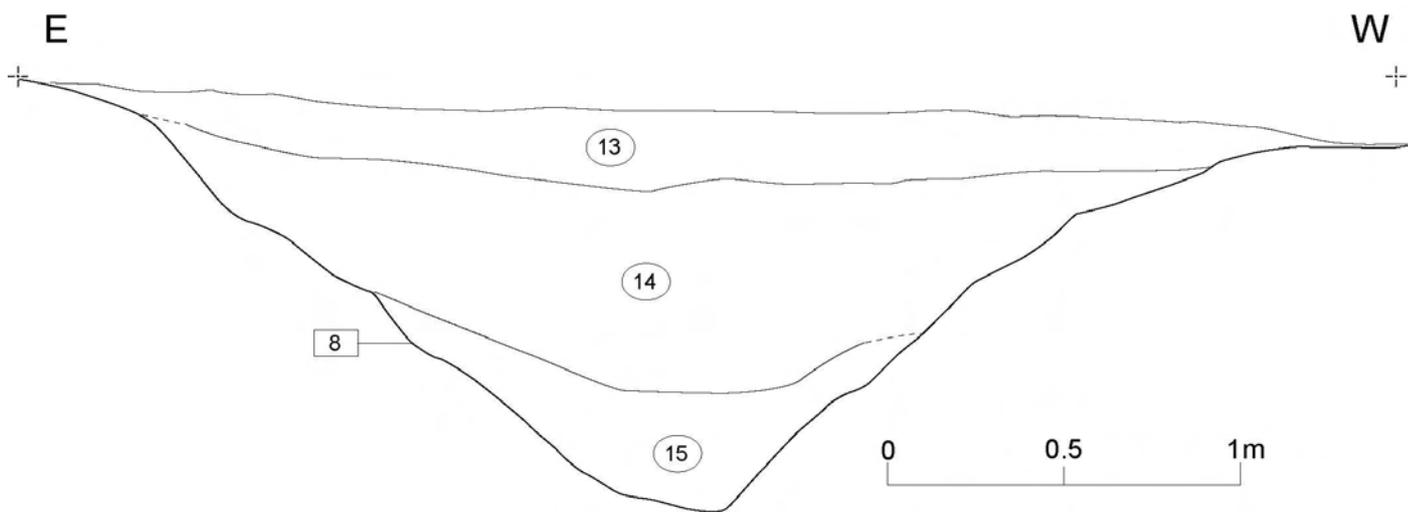


Figure 7. Section of outer oval enclosure ditch 8.

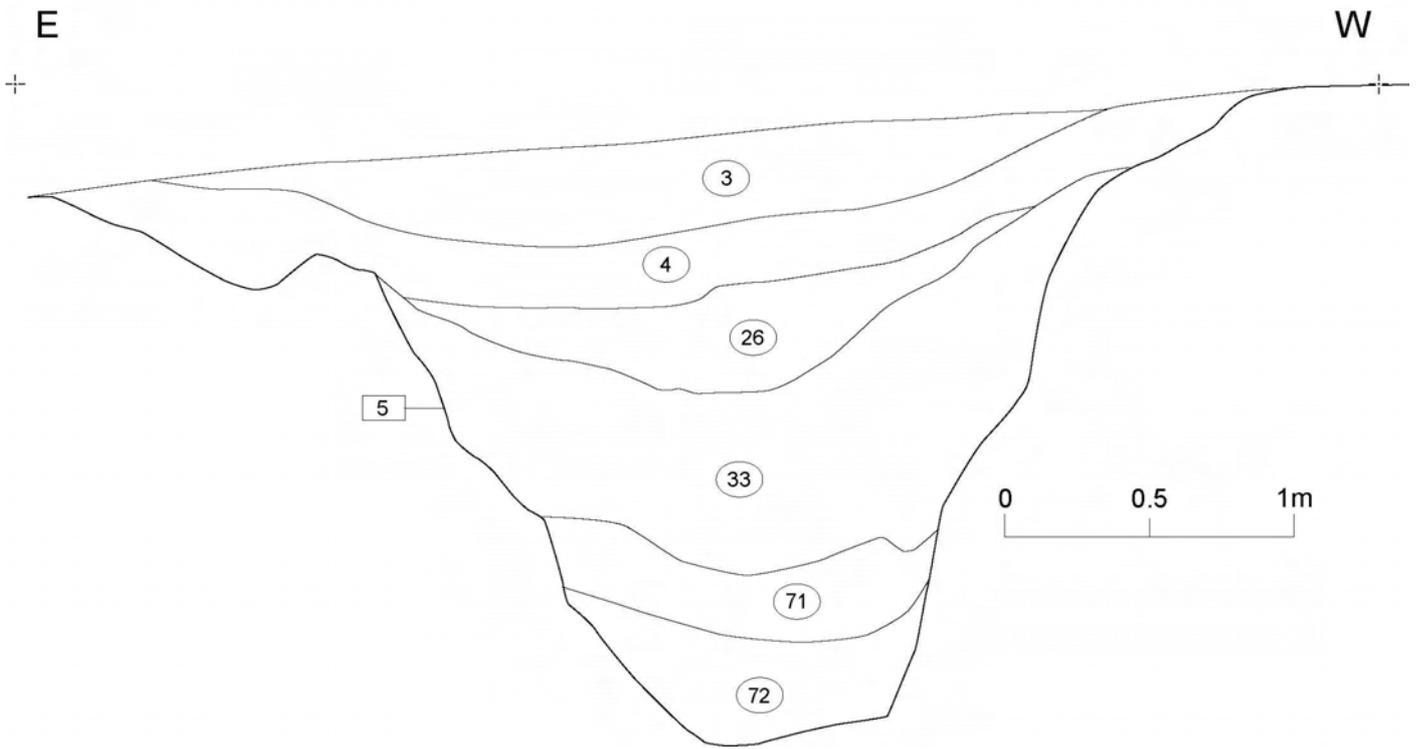


Figure 8. Section of inner circular enclosure ditch 5 - southwest side.

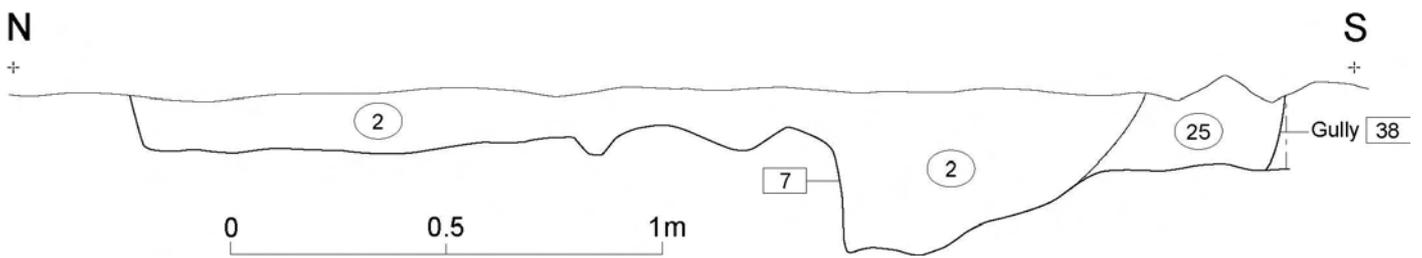


Figure 9. Section of inner circular enclosure ditch 7 - north side.



Photograph 1. 1996 aerial photograph of site (RCAHMW Crown Copyright © reference 96-cs-0997).



Photograph 2. General aerial view of site during excavation looking southwest (RCAHMW Crown Copyright © temporary reference 27th July 2006 Picture 158).



Photograph 3. Aerial view of the excavation (RCAHMW Crown Copyright © temporary reference 27th July 2006 Picture 156).



Photograph 4. Panoramic view of the excavation looking northwest.



Photograph 5. North-facing section of ditch 8. Scale 1m.



Photograph 6. North-facing section of ditch 5. Scales 1m and 2m.



Photograph 7. Inner circular enclosure ditch 7 - north side.



Photograph 8. Tool pockmarks in bedrock on base of ditch 7.



Photograph 9. Roundhouses A and B looking northwest.



Photograph 10. Four-post structure. Scale 2m.



Photograph 11. Six-post structure. Scale 2m.



Photograph 12. Gully 38 looking southeast.

**EXCAVATION OF AN IRON AGE DEFENDED ENCLOSURE AT
FFYNNONWEN, TREMAIN, CARDIGAN, 2006:
INTERIM REPORT**

RHIF YR ADRODDIAD / REPORT NUMBER 2006/97

**Medi 2006
September 2006**

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

Swydd / Position: Principal Archaeologist

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 E G Hughes

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

Swydd / Position: Director

Llofnod / Signature Dyddiad / Date

Yn unol â'n nôd i roddi gwasanaeth o ansawdd uchel, croesawn unrhyw sylwadau
sydd gennych ar gynnwys neu strwythur yr adroddiad hwn

As part of our desire to provide a quality service we would welcome any
comments you may have on the content or presentation of this report