Dinas Dinlle Hillfort
Llandwrog

Archaeological Watching Brief

GAT Project No. 2118
Report No. 847
Feb 2010

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Gwynedd Archaeological Trust
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Cover: Dinas Dinlle Hill Fort and WWII Seagull Trench from the North

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Dinas Dinlle,, a substantial late prehistoric hill fort located on an isolated hill of glacial drift, has a coastal location overlooking Caernarfon Bay south of Caernarfon, within an area of land managed by the National Trust. The site has been subject to extensive coastal erosion and also visitor erosion. To improve visitor access and to minimise foot erosion two schemes have been put in place, consisting of a fence to protect the cliff face, and a path way across the monument. The watching brief monitored both the instillation of a reinforced foot path through the monument and the fencing off of the coastal edge. This was designed to create a safe environment and to enable the possibility of using the land for grazing.

The fence posts were all driven into the ground, so no new archaeological deposits were observed as a result of the erection of the new fencing. The new path was constructed upon new make-up material, so no archaeological deposits were affected.

1 INTRODUCTION

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (GAT) was asked by National Trust to carry out a watching brief to observe the placement of wooden posts for a new fence along the western cliff edge at Dinas Dinlle hill fort, located at NGR SH 43705635. This fence was placed in conjunction with a new path through the site of the hill fort at Dinas Dinlle during 2010. Both schemes were put in place to minimise foot erosion and also to define an area where it was safe for visitors to walk. The fencing was also placed to enable the reintroduction of grazing animals on the site to prevent rank vegetation from obscuring and damaging the archaeology during the winter months.

The fence line runs from the gate at the northern part of the site near the former Marine Hotel near the public car park at Dinas Dinlle beach and runs south over the hill fort banks and interior (Fig. 1). The fence consists of five to six strands of high tensile wire which means that there is less need for posts than would be required for standard post and wire fencing, and causes minimal ground disturbance.

2 SPECIFICATION AND PROJECT DESIGN

No specific brief for the work was provided by Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service (GAPS), however the works were approved by Ashley Batten of GAPS. As the site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM), Scheduled Monument Consent was obtained from Cadw in a letter dated 30th December 2009 (Ref A-CAM001-02-QA821121). This consent required that professional archaeological advice be taken on the location of the individual posts, especially where they passed over the ramparts and into the interior of the fort.

3 METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

The placement of the posts was carried using a drop weight post driver attached to a *Scot Trax* all terrain vehicle which was used for both the exterior and interior of the hill fort (Plate 4). The placement of the posts along the bank were carried out by hand using hand held post drivers (Plate 3). All works were observed by the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust representative and some advice was given as to the placement of the post away from any areas of major erosion to minimise damage to the structure of the banks. The route of the fence can be seen on figure 1, and the posts were driven in to a maximum depth of one metre.

PRN (Primary Record Number) refers to the unique site reference number on the Gwynedd Historic Environment Record (HER).

4 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The hill fort at Dinas Dinlle was constructed on an isolated rounded hill of glacial drift by the sea shore overlooking Caernarfon Bay (NGR SH 43705635) about 6km south of the town of Caernarfon (Fig. 1, Plate 6). It reaches a height of about 33m OD, overlooking the very low lying ground surrounding it, which was formerly marshy, to the north (RCAHMW 1960, 190). The low lying soils surrounding the hill consist of alluvial gleys of the Rockcliffe Association (BGS 1983), whilst the hill itself consists of

a brown earth of the Wick Association created by glacial drift (Smith and George 1961, 12) overlying Precambrian rock.

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

5.1 Introduction

The hill fort at Dinas Dinlle (PRN 1,570) is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Ref: CO 48). It is currently the property of the National Trust. A geophysical survey was carried out on the site in 2005 (Smith 2005), although no excavation work has been carried out. The site has eroded significantly above the cliff along its western edge as a result of pedestrian access, and has also suffered from significant coastal erosion.

5.2 Archaeological Background

Dinas Dinlle hill fort is a roughly oval defended enclosure, set on the summit of a drumlin, or glacial hill of sand and gravel. It measures about 150m north-south by 110m and is defined by double ramparts with an intermediate ditch; there is an entrance in the south east. The enclosure has suffered considerable coastal erosion on the west side and from the beach below: the original ground surface beneath the Iron Age ramparts and other details are clearly visible in the eroding section. Within the eastern part of the interior are traces of circular or rectangular structures or enclosures, one being a possible Bronze Age burial mound.

The difference between the bottom of the inner ditch and the top of the inner rampart is great but much of it is due to the natural slope (Plate 2). There are several internal features probably indicating settlement around the inside of the inner rampart. The outer rampart appears to terminate towards the cliffs on the N. side, where it lies on a probably natural terrace but the reason for the termination is otherwise unexplained unless the defences of the western sides were always partly just natural cliffs. The site has recently been acquired by the National Trust, which has carried out a detailed topographic survey. Some features within and around the site derive from the construction of a golf course around 1900 but these are recorded on a contemporary plan of the site (GAT HER). A geophysical survey of the interior as part of a recent project has identified new features within the interior, including a roundhouse behind the southern rampart and a possible rectangular building in the central space. It was also observed that much of the interior, particularly the western part, close to the cliff edge is masked by up to a metre of blown sand. This means that features and even an original land surface in these areas might be well preserved but at the same time this would not be detectable by geophysical survey (Smith 2005, 11-12).

Casual finds, including Roman coins of A.D. 253 to 296, an intaglio and a sherd of black burnished ware of the second or third centuries, indicate occupation in the Roman period (Griffiths 1949, 1-2).

A World War Two Seagull Trench (nprn 270526) has been built in the lower north-facing ramparts of the fort (GAT HER; Royal Commission of Ancient and Historic Monuments Wales *www.coflein.gov.uk*).

5.3 Geophysical Survey (taken from Smith 2005)

The results of the geophysical survey carried out in 2005 are not clear enough to draw any definite conclusions about the level of archaeological survival within the fort. It seems safe to conclude that there was a band of activity around the inside of the rampart possibly in the form of house platforms. The central area appears to contain at least one further platform, a sub rectangular enclosure and a linear bank. Further lower level magnetic responses could indicate further activity but excavation would be required to confirm that this was not a result of natural variations in the subsoil.

6 RESULTS OF THE WATCHING BRIEF

No impact on the archaeology of Dinas Dinlle beyond that of driving in the posts was observed in the placement of the fence posts and all conditions within the method statement were observed to cause as little disturbance as possible to the site.

Observations carried out by the GAT representative on the placement of the new pathway showed that a deposit of modern imported material was used to build up the bank under the new path way. This deposit contained fragments of burnt bone, charcoal and some building material within its matrix (Plate 5), and served to protect and consolidate eroding bank sections.

A selection of photographs was taken showing areas of disturbance and of the fence setting out process.

7 CONCLUSION

The posts caused minimal disturbance to the archaeology of Dinas Dinlle. As the posts were driven into the ground with no digging, no archaeological deposits were observed. It was observed that off-site material was used as a base during the construction of the new pathway.

8 ARCHIVE

The archive consists of day record sheets, notes and 41 digital images. These are held at GAT under project code **G2118**

9 SOURCES CONSULTED

Griffiths, W.E. 1949 'Roman Coins from Dinas Dinlle', *Trans. Caerns. Hist. Soc* 10, 1-2.

RCAHMW 1960 *An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Caernarvonshire. Vol II: Central* (London)

Smith, B. and George, T.N. 1961 *British Regional Geology; North Wales* (London)

Smith, G.H. 2005 *A Survey of Prehistoric Defended Enclosures in North West Wales 2004-5 (West Conwy, Gwynedd (Arfon) and Anglesey Part 1: Survey Report* (unpublished GAT Report No. 580)

Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983 *Soils of Wales*

Coflein: RCAHMW on-line database

Gwynedd Historic Environment Record

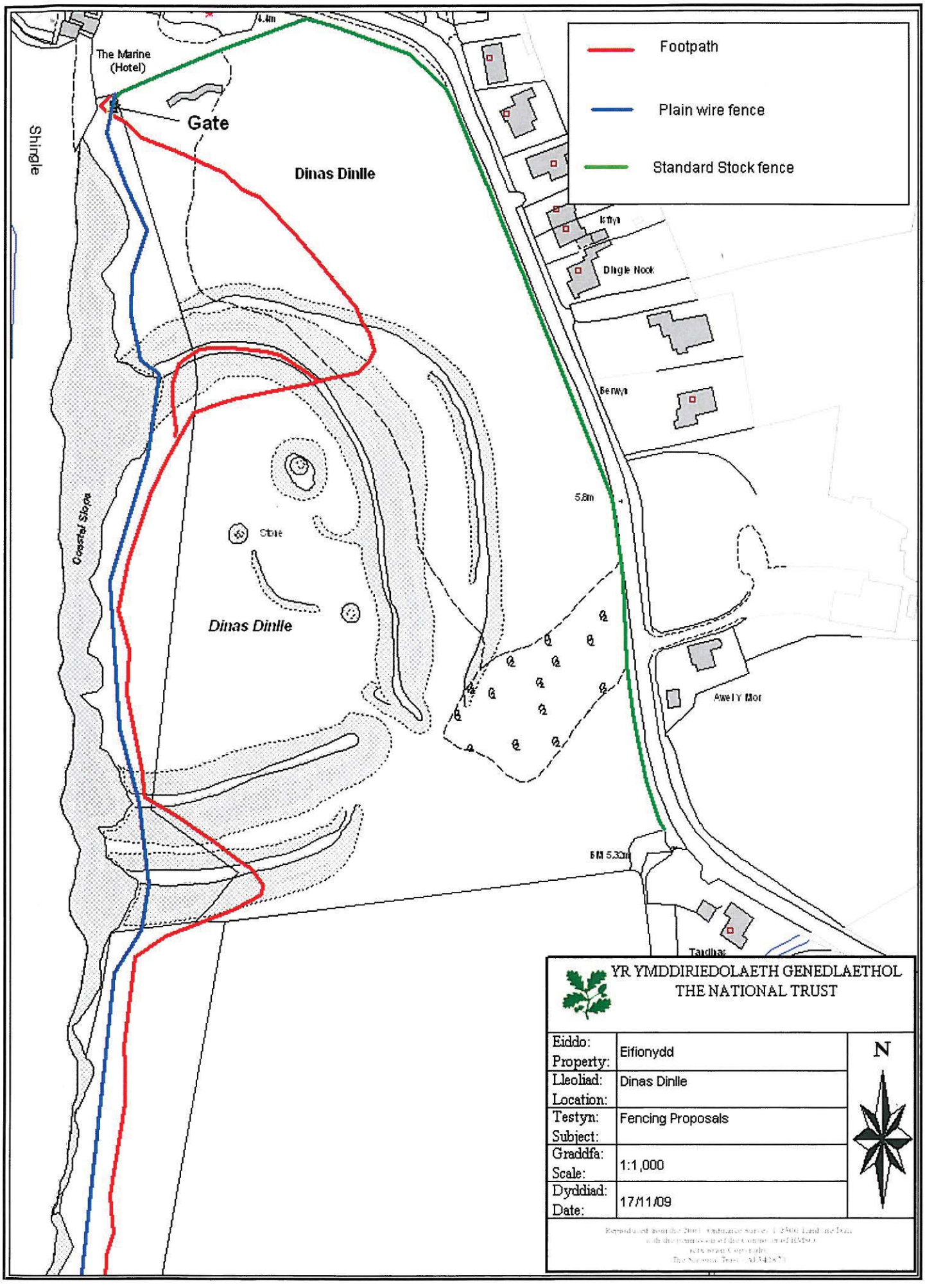

Fig. 1 Location of New Fencing and Pathway at Dinas Dinlle (taken from National Trust Drawing)

Plate 1 Interior of Dinas Dinlle Hill Fort, Facing East, showing Fence Line

Plate 2 Western Banks of the Hill fort, Facing West

Plate 3 Hand Placment of Fence Posts

Plate 4 Mechanical Post Placement

Plate 5 Redeposited soil, consolidation material brought in to stabilize and protect ramparts prior to laying pathway

Plate 6 General View of Hill Fort from the North, Showing Eroding Coastline

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