

CPAT Report No. 1441

Castell y Blaidd, Powys




Topographical survey



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Cover photo. View from the north of Castell-y-Blaidd (photograph by Mark Walters) CPAT 4224-0150



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Summary

The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was invited by Owen Lewis to carry out a topographical survey of the scheduled ancient monument known as Castell y Blaidd, as part of a Welsh Government/Glastir-funded programme of earthwork repairs. The survey was carried out in August 2016, with repairs being carried out in September 2016.

Castell y Blaidd is an oval earthwork enclosure defined by a single bank and ditch, occupying an isolated hillock on enclosed moorland at the head of a tributary of the Ithon to the west of Garreg Lwyd Hill, 3km north-east of Llanbadarn Fynydd in Powys. It has been interpreted as either an undocumented medieval ringwork castle, owing to its name and the relative scale of its defences in relation to the small internal area, or perhaps a small, late prehistoric enclosure.

The overall form of the monument is generally well preserved but the earthworks had suffered extensive localised damage by livestock and display multiple erosion scars. This damage was recorded during the survey and repaired in September 2016.

The enclosure at Castell y Blaidd was constructed by reshaping a natural rise in the topography, apparently to defend a route way running broadly north-south immediately to the east of the monument.

Interpretation of the topographical survey and the photogrammetric survey confirms that the defensive circuit at Castell y Blaidd was never completed. Both the inner and outer defenses appear to have been abandoned in an incomplete state. The gaps visible in the inner and outer upcast banks seem to indicate that they were raised as a series of separate earthworks which were intended to be joined together to form a continuous line.

No evidence was found for a formal entrance to the enclosure, although it seems to have been accessed from the west through the gap in the earthworks. No evidence for an exterior causeway or path was identified, which would suggest that the enclosure was not in use for very long, if it was used at all. The inner bank appears to have a slightly flattened area in the centre which may indicate the position of an entrance. It is possible that the west approach was defended by a palisade or some similar structure constructed on this inner bank.

The interior of the enclosure is sloped, with the exception of a slightly raised, flattened area in the east extent. No evidence for the date or occupation of the site was identified during the course of this survey and no finds or features were revealed by the damage to the upcast defensive banks.

1 Introduction

- 1.1. The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was invited by Owen Lewis to conduct a detailed topographical survey of the scheduled ancient monument known as Castell y Blaidd, SAM Rd102. The survey was required as part of a Welsh Government/Glastir-funded programme of earthwork repairs. The resultant drawings will provide a detailed pre- and post-works record of the monument and baseline data for its future management.



Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2016

Fig. 1 Location of Castell y Blaidd

- 1.2. Castell y Blaidd is a scheduled ancient monument (SAM) which comprises an oval earthwork enclosure defined by a single bank and ditch, occupying an isolated hillock on enclosed moorland at the head of a tributary of the Ithon to the west of Garreg Lwyd Hill, 3km north-east of Llanbadarn Fynydd in Powys (SO 124 797). It has been interpreted either as an undocumented medieval ringwork castle due to its name and the relative scale of its defences to the small internal area or a small late prehistoric enclosure (as scheduled), although other dates and functions are equally possible. Just to the east of the enclosure is a low oval mound of uncertain origin, possibly a small pillow mound, its relationship to the enclosure being unknown.
- 1.3. The form of the monument is generally well preserved but the banks and slopes of the hillock have suffered extensive localised damage by livestock and display

multiple erosion scars. Cadw's Field Monument Warden Records have recorded gradual deterioration since the 1990s and it is on Cadw's Monuments at Risk Register as a medium risk site.

- 1.4. Cadw produced a SAM management plan for the monument to support the Welsh Government's agri-environment scheme *Glastir*. This identified erosion repairs to be carried out and a specification has subsequently been drawn up by a consultant. This will entail the infilling of the erosion scars with imported soil and in one area timber lacing in order to restore the earthwork to its original profile.
- 1.5. The management plan also specified the need for a topographical survey of the monument to provide a detailed record of the earthworks prior to the commencement of the repairs. On completion of repair works a second visit will be required to survey the newly restored and re-profiled areas. This will act as the key record for the future management of the monument.

2 Objectives

- 2.1. The objectives of the survey were:
 - to record the nature and extent of the surviving earthworks by means of detailed topographical survey
 - to also record the location and extent of erosion scars.
 - to resurvey the site following the completion of reprofiling works
 - to conduct a photographic survey recording the extent and nature of erosion
 - to repeat the photographic survey on completion of reprofiling works
 - to produce an overall hachured plans showing the earthworks of the monument and the location of erosion scars.

3 Methods

- 3.1. The detailed topographical survey was undertaken using total station surveying, employing a Leica Total Station in conjunction with Penmap survey software to conduct the survey to Level 3 standard as defined in *Understanding the Archaeology of landscapes: a guide to good recording practice* (Ainsworth *et al.* 2007). The survey was conducted according to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (CIfA) *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (2014).
- 3.2. In addition, an aerial photogrammetry survey was carried out by Mark Walters on a voluntary basis, using a small, unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) equipped with a camera. This recorded a series of oblique and overhead views in addition to a 3D photomontage. A digital surface model was also recorded from this data (Fig. 14)
- 3.3. The surveys were conducted over four days, between 2--11 August 2016, and comprised a detailed photographic and topographical survey of the monument, recording both the surviving earthworks and the extent of the erosion. The survey data was used to produce a hachured interpretive plan (Figs 11-12). The survey was located with respect to the Ordnance Survey national grid as a best fit with respect to boundaries depicted on modern mapping.

4 Earthwork Survey

- 4.1. The enclosure measures approximately 50m north-west to south-east by 35m internally. It comprises an inner enclosed area, sloping to the north-west, surrounded on three sides by a steep earthen bank approximately 4m in height. At the base of the inner bank is a shallow ditch surrounded by an upcast bank approximately 0.6m in height. The bank was incomplete on the east extent (Fig. 12, 6) and several narrow gaps in the bank were recorded.
- 4.2. The defences are completely absent to the north-west (Fig. 12, 1), apparently having never been completed as the site has never been ploughed and there are no obvious signs of disturbance. A gentle but clearly discernible change in the slope (Fig. 12, 2) running into a depression on the south-western inner bank (Fig. 12, 5) may have been the basis for an inner defensive line, possibly temporary whilst the enclosure was being constructed.
- 4.3. There is a break in the upper and lower defensive bank at the south extent (Fig. 12, 4). The break in the lower bank is distinctly offset to the one in the upper bank.
- 4.4. The inner enclosed area slopes away to the south-west. At the east extent a flat or gently concave circular raised area, 21m in diameter was discernible (Fig. 12, 3).

5 Erosion Survey

- 5.1. The main aim of the survey was to record the nature and extent of erosion to the monument. At the time of the survey large areas of the monument were actively eroding, with most damage not under turf cover. Examples of the erosion scars and their repairs are presented in Figs 2-11)
- 5.2. Most of the damage was caused by sheep scrapes, where sheep have dug into the bank in order to shelter from inclement weather. A large flock of sheep were present in the field where the enclosure is situated at the time of the survey.
- 5.3. There was some very minor burrowing activity visible on the south-west bank of the monument, caused by rabbits (Fig. 5). No tangible evidence of rabbits, besides the burrows themselves was evident at the time of the survey.
- 5.4. There were occasional molehills visible near to the south-west lower bank of the enclosure, but these did not appear to impact upon the structure of the monument in any way.



Figs 2 and 3. Sheep scrape on south-west extent of monument before and after repair work. CPAT 4224-0001 and CPAT 4224-0090



Figs 4 and 5. Large sheep scrape on south-west extent of monument before and after repair work. CPAT 4224-0008 and CPAT 4224-0093



Figs 6 and 7. Extensive livestock and burrowing damage along south-east extent of monument before and after repair work. CPAT 4224-0028 and CPAT 4224-0133



Figs 8 and 9. Sheep scrape on north-east side of monument before and after repair work. CPAT 4224-0040 and CPAT 4224-0113



Fig. 10 and 11. Sheep scrape on north-west extent of monument before and after repair work. CPAT 4224-0046 and CPAT 4224-0115

6 Conclusions

- 6.1. The enclosure at Castell y Blaidd was constructed by reshaping a natural rise in the topography, apparently to defend a route way running broadly north-south immediately to the east of the monument (now a footpath).
- 6.2. Interpretation of the topographical survey and the photogrammetry survey confirms that the defensive circuit at Castell y Blaidd was never completed. Both the inner and outer defensives appear to have been abandoned in an incomplete state. The gaps visible in the inner and outer upcast banks seem to indicate that the earthworks were raised as a series of separate earthworks which were intended to be joined together to form a continuous line.
- 6.3. No evidence was found for a formal entrance to the enclosure, although it seems to have been accessed from the west through the gap in the earthworks. No evidence for an exterior causeway or path was identified, which would suggest that the

enclosure was not in use for very long, if it was used at all. The inner bank (Fig. 12, 2) appears to have a slightly flattened area in the centre which may indicate the position of an entrance. It is possible that the west approach was defended by a palisade or some similar structure constructed on this inner bank, although it was outside of the scope of the survey to determine this.

- 6.4. The interior of the enclosure is sloped, with the exception of a slightly raised, flattened area in the east extent (Fig. 12, 3). This may have been a site for a building platform, although it is unclear whether this was completed or whether it was occupied by a structure. No clear evidence for the date or occupation of the site was identified during the course of this survey and no finds or features were revealed by the damage to the upcast banks.

7 Archive deposition Statement

- 7.1. The project archive has been prepared according to the CPAT Archive Policy and in line with the *CIfA Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives guidance* (2014). The archive will be deposited with the regional Historic Environment Record, maintained by CPAT in Welshpool. A summary of the archive is provided in Appendix 1.

Appendix 1: Site Archive

CPAT Event PRN: 140126

CPAT Digital film No 4224 150 images

Digital survey data:

Cyb16.dxf unprocessed survey data

Cyb16.dwg processed survey data positional against OS national grid

Cybsect1.dwg and cybsect2.dwg surveyed profiles

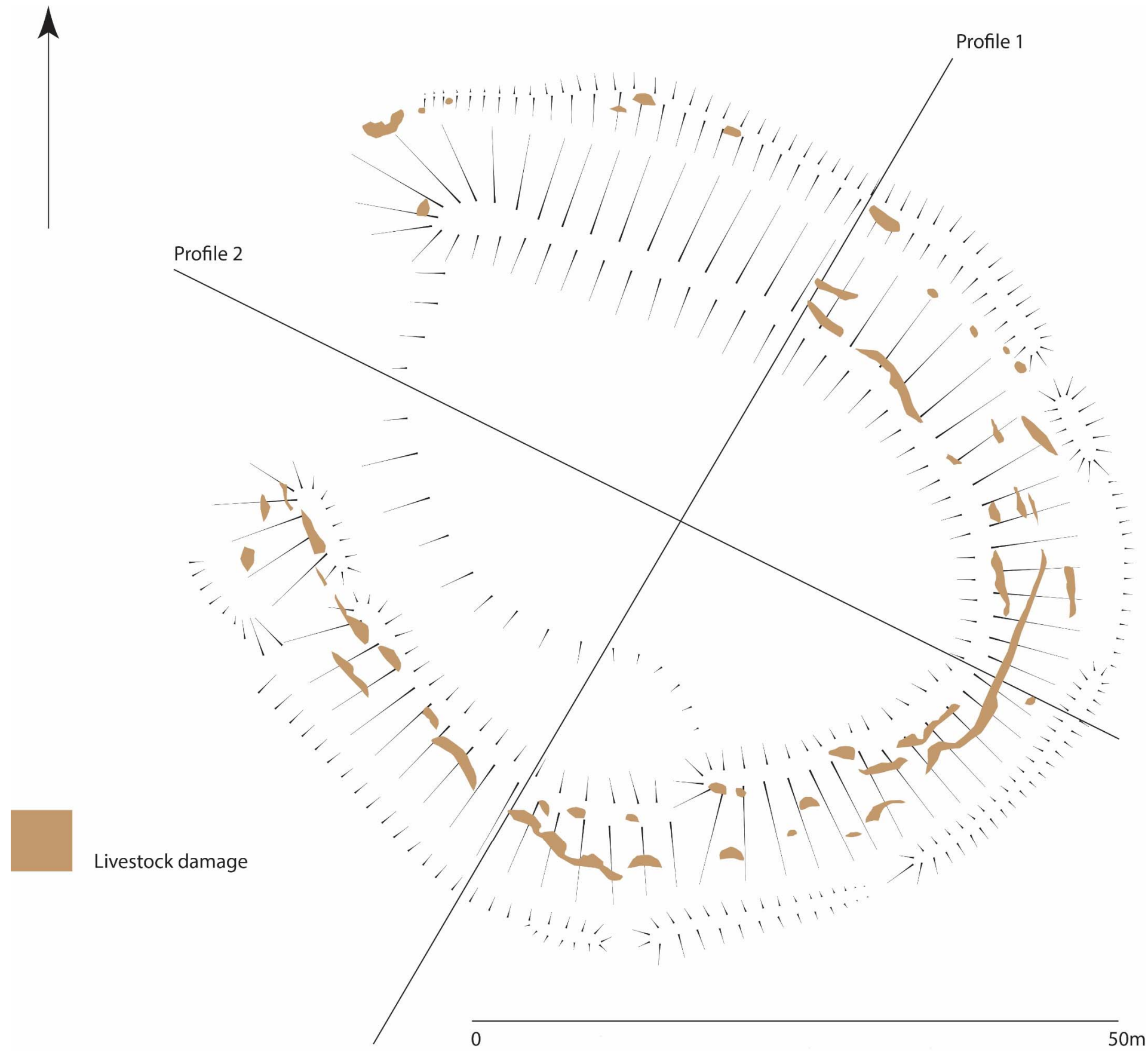


Fig. 11. Plan of Castell y Blaidd showing damage caused by livestock

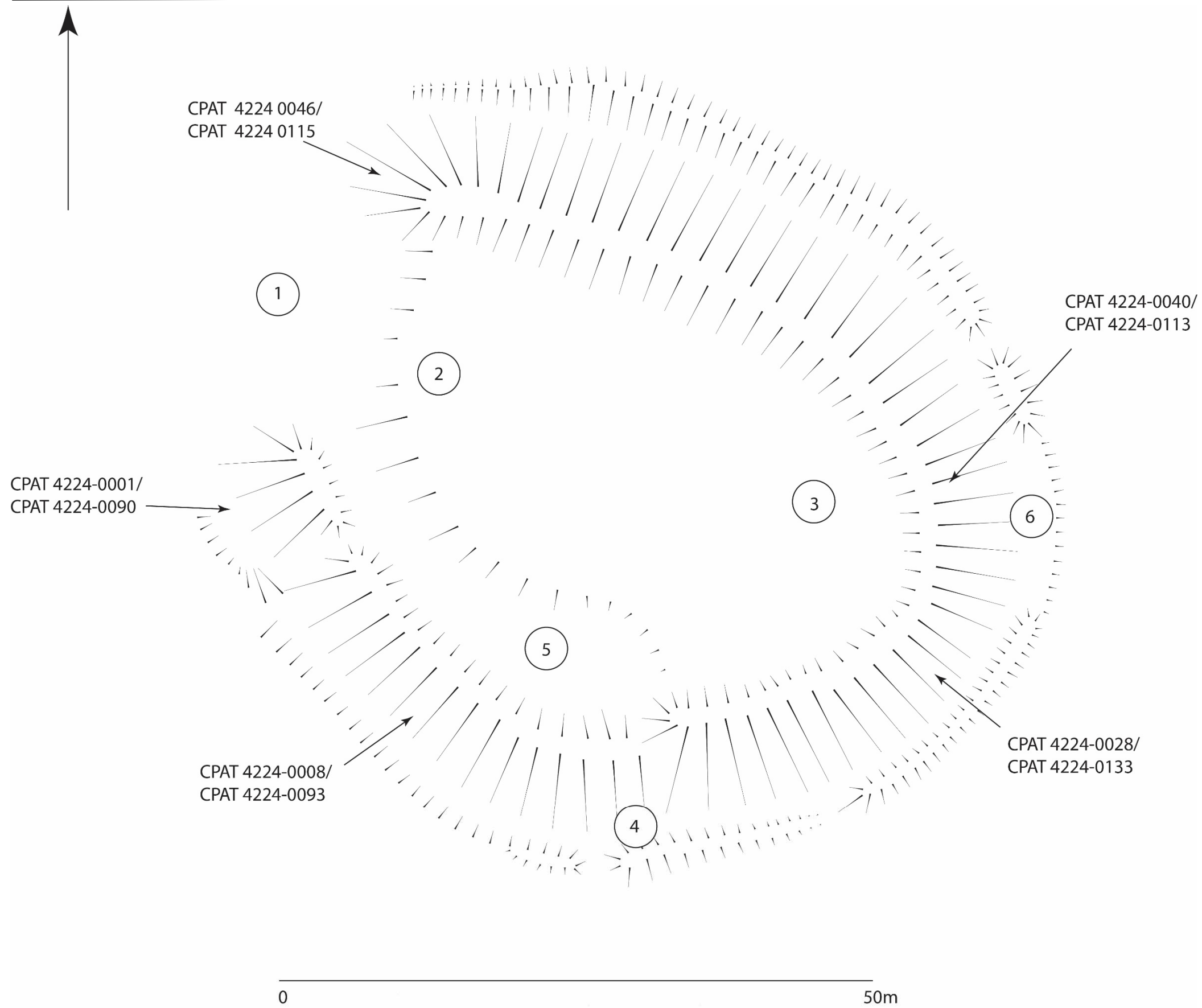


Fig. 12. Plan of Castell y Blaidd showing features and photographs showing damage to monument and repair work

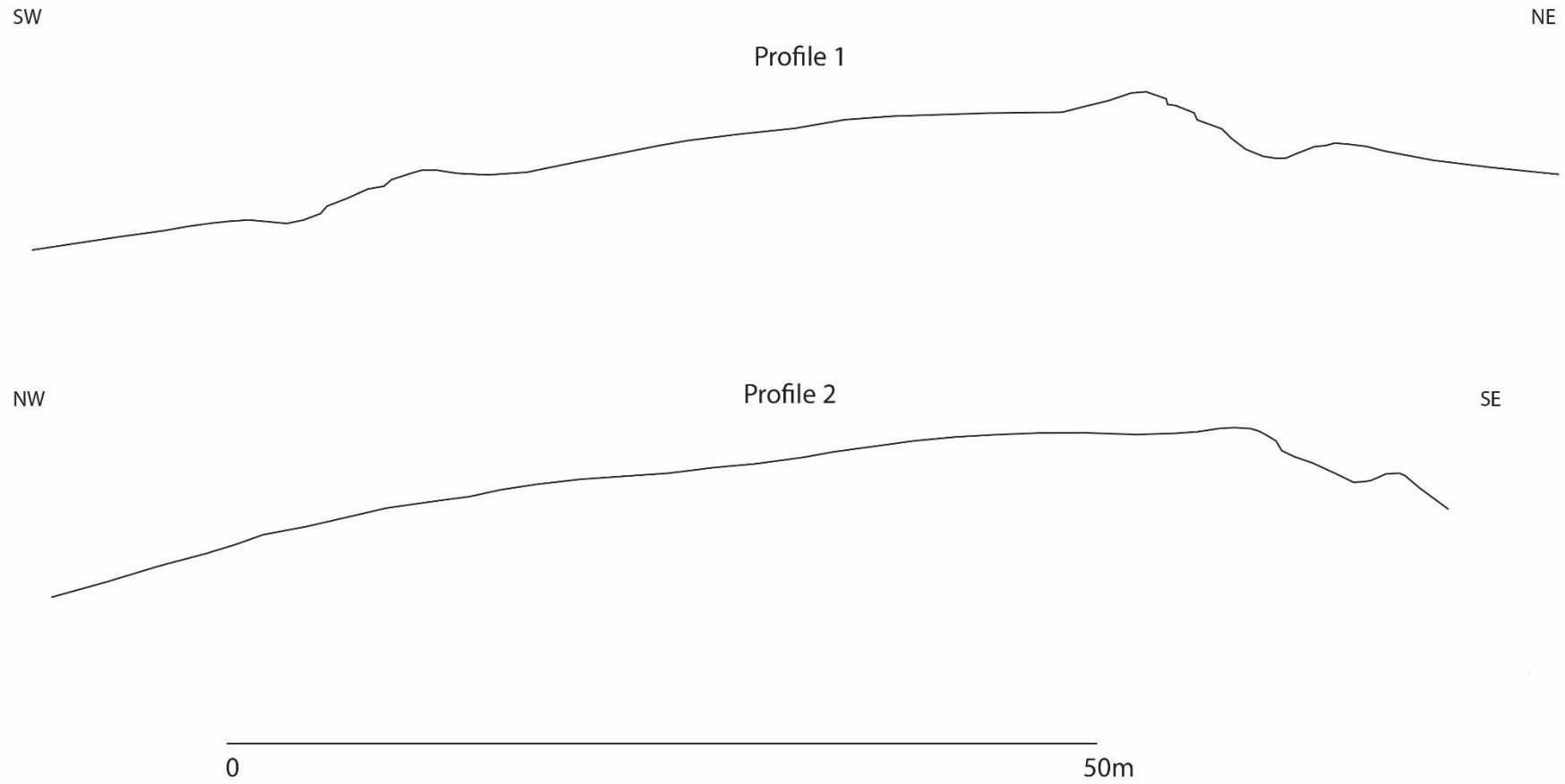


Fig. 13. Transects across Castell y Blaidd (see Fig. for location)

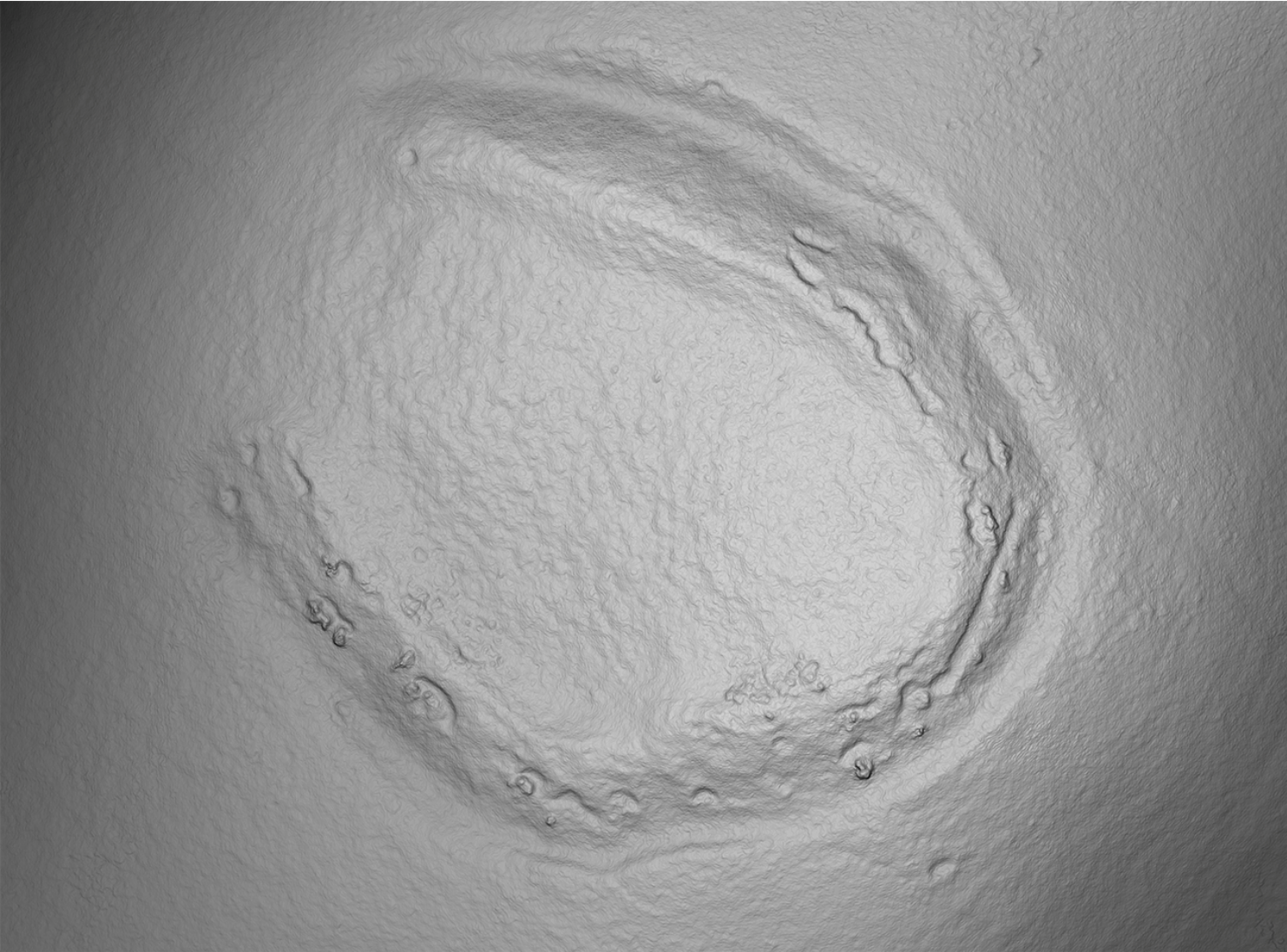


Fig. 14. Aerial photographic surface model (photographed by Mark Walters) CPAT 4224-0149