

CPAT Report No. 1549

Coed Fenni Fach Hillfort, BR042

Archaeological investigation






Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



YMDDIRIEDOLAETH ARCHAEOLEGOL CLWYD-POWYS

CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Client name: Cadw
 CPAT Project No: 2253
 Project Name: Coed Fenni Fach Hillfort, BR042
 Grid Reference: SO 0140 2945
 County/LPA: Powys/BBNPA
 CPAT Report No: 1549
 Event PRN: 140217
 Report status: Final
 Confidential: No

Prepared by:	Checked by:	Approved by:
		
Will Logan Project Archaeologist	Nigel Jones Principal Archaeologist	Nigel Jones Principal Archaeologist
13 February 2018	22 February 2018	22 February 2018

Bibliographic reference:

Logan, W. 2018. *Coed Fenni Fach Hillfort, BR042: Archaeological Investigation*. Unpublished report. CPAT Report No. 1549.



YMDDIRIEDOLAETH ARCHAEOLEGOL CLWYD-POWYS
 CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

41 Broad Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7RR, United Kingdom

+44 (0) 1938 553 670

trust@cpat.org.uk

www.cpat.org.uk

©CPAT 2018



The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust is a Registered Organisation
 with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists

CONTENTS

SUMMARY	ii
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION	5
3 CONCLUSIONS	10
4 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	11
5 REFERENCES	11
6 ARCHIVE DEPOSITION STATEMENT	12
ARCHIVE SUMMARY	12

Summary

Four trial trenches were excavated by CPAT in November 2018, on behalf of Cadw, within the interior of Coed Fenni Fach hillfort (SAM BR042), in order to assess the impact that forestry, specifically mature tree root activity, has had upon the archaeological record.

The results determined that forestry activity carried out since at least the early 19th century had caused little damage to archaeological deposits associated with the hillfort.

It is unclear how the subsoil deposit across the site formed, whether it was a result of natural accumulation over a long period of time or a fairly rapid process such as cultivation for example. The subsoil is notably thicker in the eastern, relatively level part of the hillfort, which may support the idea that this area had formerly been cultivated.

1 Introduction

- 1.1. The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) carried out an archaeological investigation at Coed Fenni Fach hillfort, near Brecon, on behalf of Cadw. The hillfort has been afforded statutory protection as a scheduled ancient monument (SAM BR042) and the purpose of the investigations was to assess the impact of coniferous and deciduous forestry regimes on the surviving earthworks.

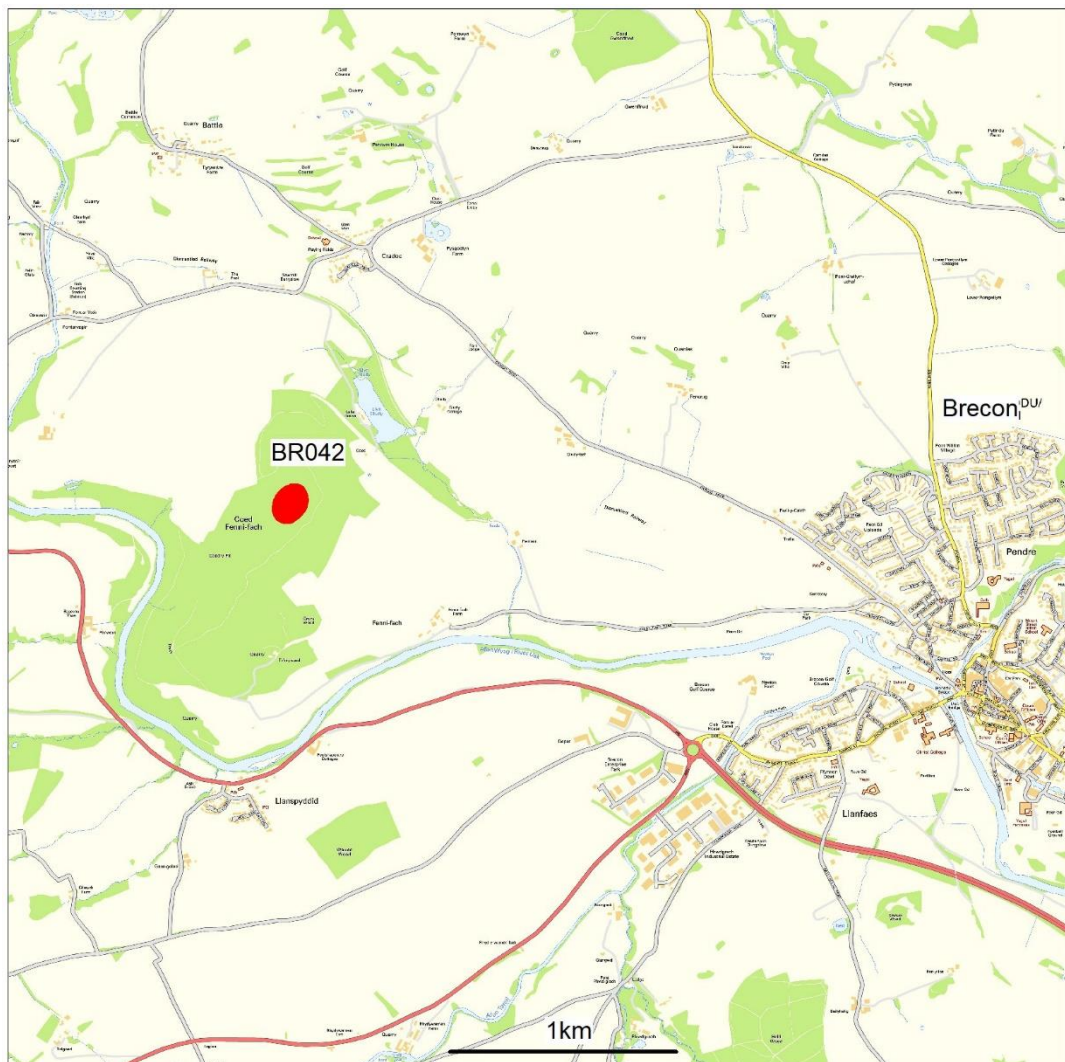
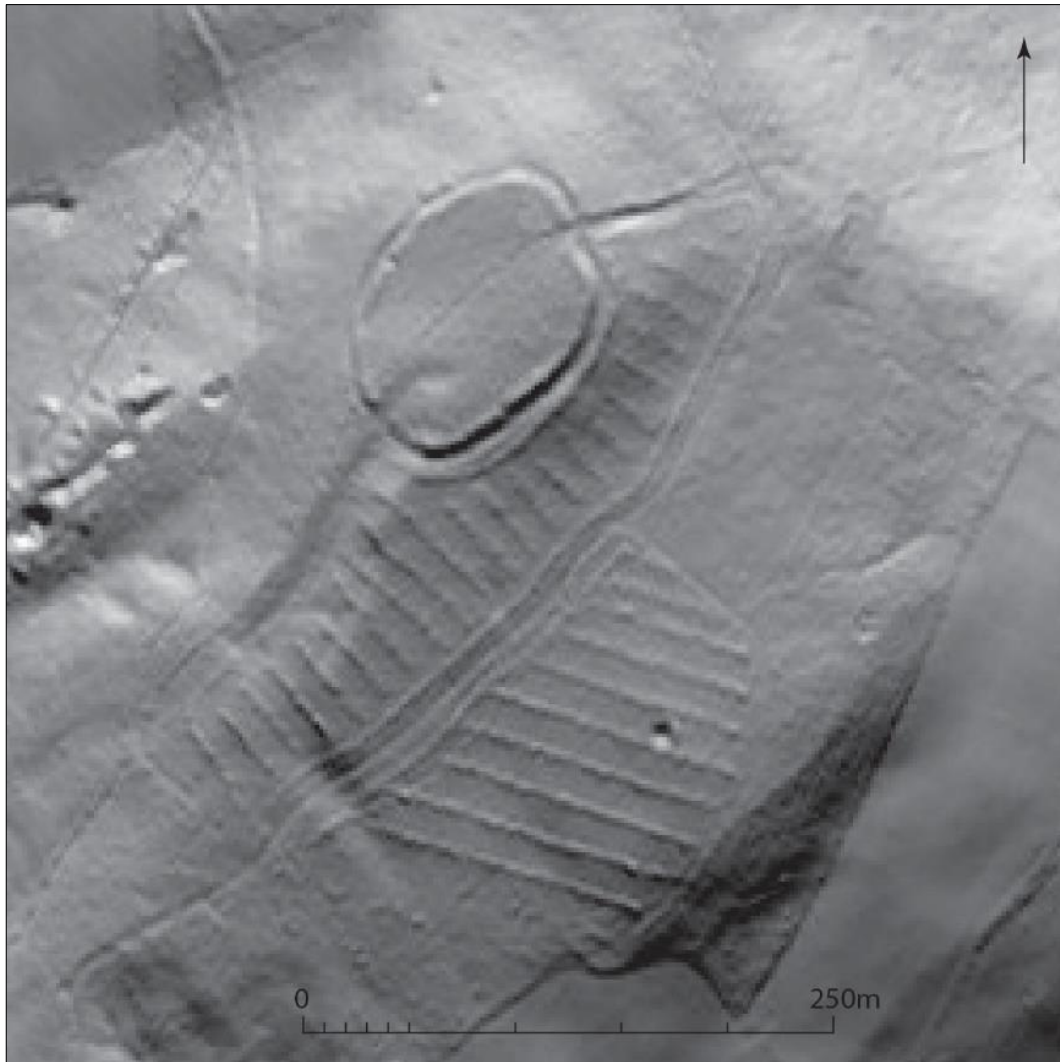


Fig. 1 Location of Coed Fenni Fach Hillfort SAM BR042

- 1.2. Coed Fenni Fach is a fairly large, oval univallate fort which encloses the summit of a prominent hill rising to 289m aOD, 2.5 km west of Brecon (Fig. 1; SO 0140 2245). Beyond the defences the hillslope falls away steeply on all sides. Dense conifer forest encroaches on the south and north-east perimeter but elsewhere recent felling has opened up the margins of the site. A less closely planted stand of larch and some fir (planted in 1939) with a dense undergrowth of bracken and bramble covered the interior south-east of the field bank that bisects the enclosure (this area had been felled and cleared by late 2016). The north-western half of the interior is more open with a cover of larch, bracken and bramble undergrowth and areas of grass. The

interior of the fort is fairly level, with some raised areas such as that investigated by Trench 3 (Fig. 5). Scattered larger stones and evidence of possible outcropping were visible within the interior of the fort and the topsoil had been exposed throughout much of the interior following the recent tree felling and clearing work. A holloway leads from the west entrance to a quarry within the interior.

- 1.3. The underlying geology of the site is characterised by well drained fine loamy reddish soils of the 541a Milford series, overlying Devonian sandstone, siltstone, mudstone and slate (Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983).



Contains Natural Resources Wales information © Natural Resources Wales and database right

Fig. 2 The earthworks of Coed Fenni Fach hillfort as revealed by 2m-resolution LiDAR data, hillshaded from 16 directions. The parallel lines are windrows of brash as a result of clearfelling forestry

- 1.4. The hillfort measures 131m north-east to south-west by 87m internally, an area of 0.88 ha. The rampart on much of the north and west sides has been reduced to a single outward facing earth and stone scarp whose crest stands up to 2.8m above the terrace or faint depression of a ditch that lies in front of it. The bank is better preserved on the north-east where its inner face is up to 0.9m high and the crest of its outer face between 2.7 and 3.4m above the base of the ditch which is a well-defined hollow 0.2m

deep, immediately in front of it. There is what may be an original entrance at the south-west side of the hillfort, which has an in-turned bank profile either side of the entrance leading into a hollow way running north-east. This hollow way may be a later feature associated with quarrying activity within the south-east part of the enclosure (Fig. 2). An entrance at the north-east end may be a later feature, perhaps created during or after the construction of a field bank (see below). The field bank of presumed medieval date which bisects the hillfort and is part of a long boundary which runs from the Roman road at the north-east foot of the hill, across its crest, to the River Usk on the south-west. It has been suggested by the landowner that this field bank marked the division between the lordship lands and those of Brecon Priory, although it was not possible to confirm this via historical sources. The construction of this feature and traffic along its line have breached the earthworks on the north-east and south-west and other modern breaks occur in the north and south. There are traces of relatively recent quarry hollows in the south-west of the interior (RCAHMW 1986, 66).

- 1.5. The 1840 Tithe Map for the parish of St John the Evangelist depicts the area as heavily wooded and also depicts the hillfort as 'Ancient Fortress', but without showing it in any detail. The Tithe Apportionment gives the name Fenny fach Wood, occupied by the owner, plot measuring 62 acres, 2 roods and 2 perches.

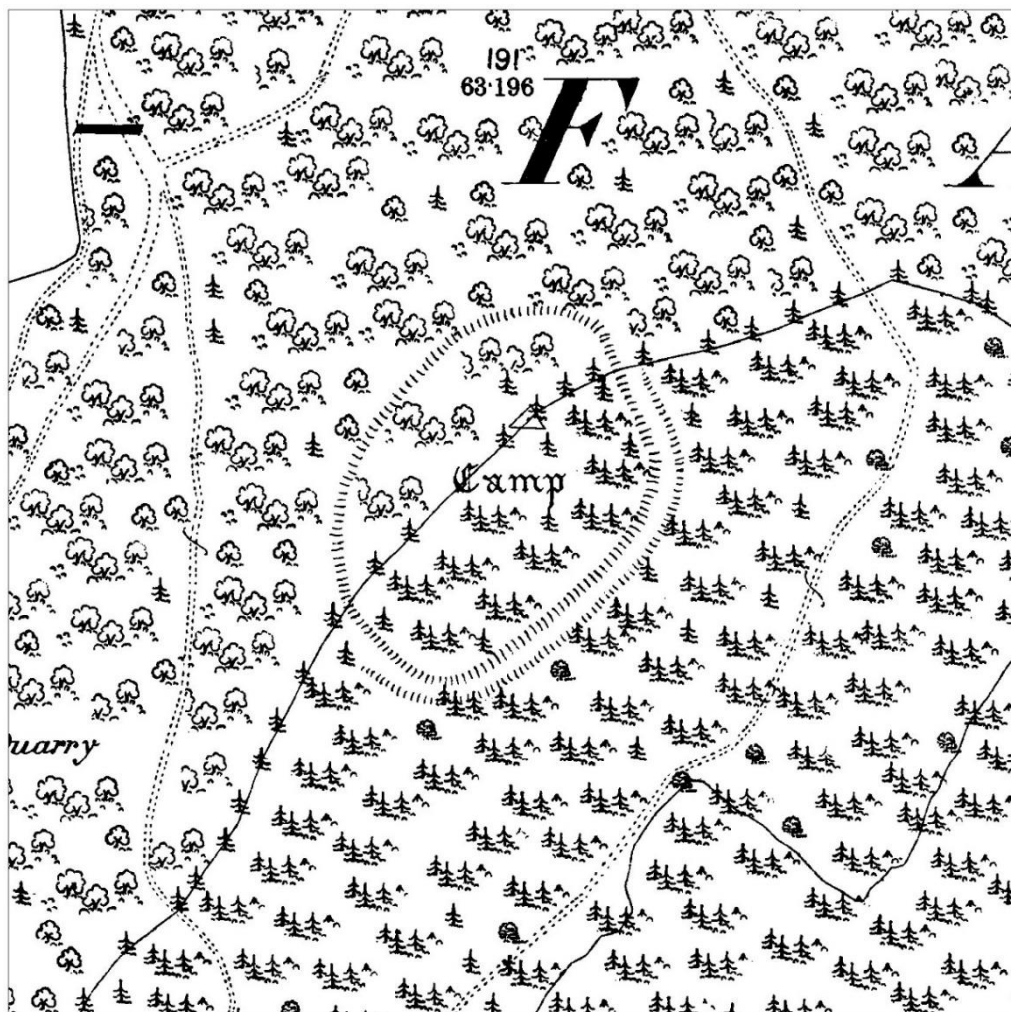


Fig. 3 Extract from the Ordnance Survey 25" 1st edition map of 1889

1.6. Ordnance Survey mapping from 1889 (Fig. 3) depicts deciduous woodland to the north-west of the field bank and coniferous woodland to the south-east, a situation which remains today. The hillfort therefore contains three historic land-use elements, namely:

- Plantation of deciduous forestry
- Plantation of coniferous forestry
- A possible area of pre-medieval land surface under the later fieldbank



Fig. 4 Aerial view of Coed Fenni Fach in 1994, from the north-east, showing the coniferous forestry to the left, a larch plantation in the centre and deciduous woodland to the right. Photo CPAT 94-4-0010

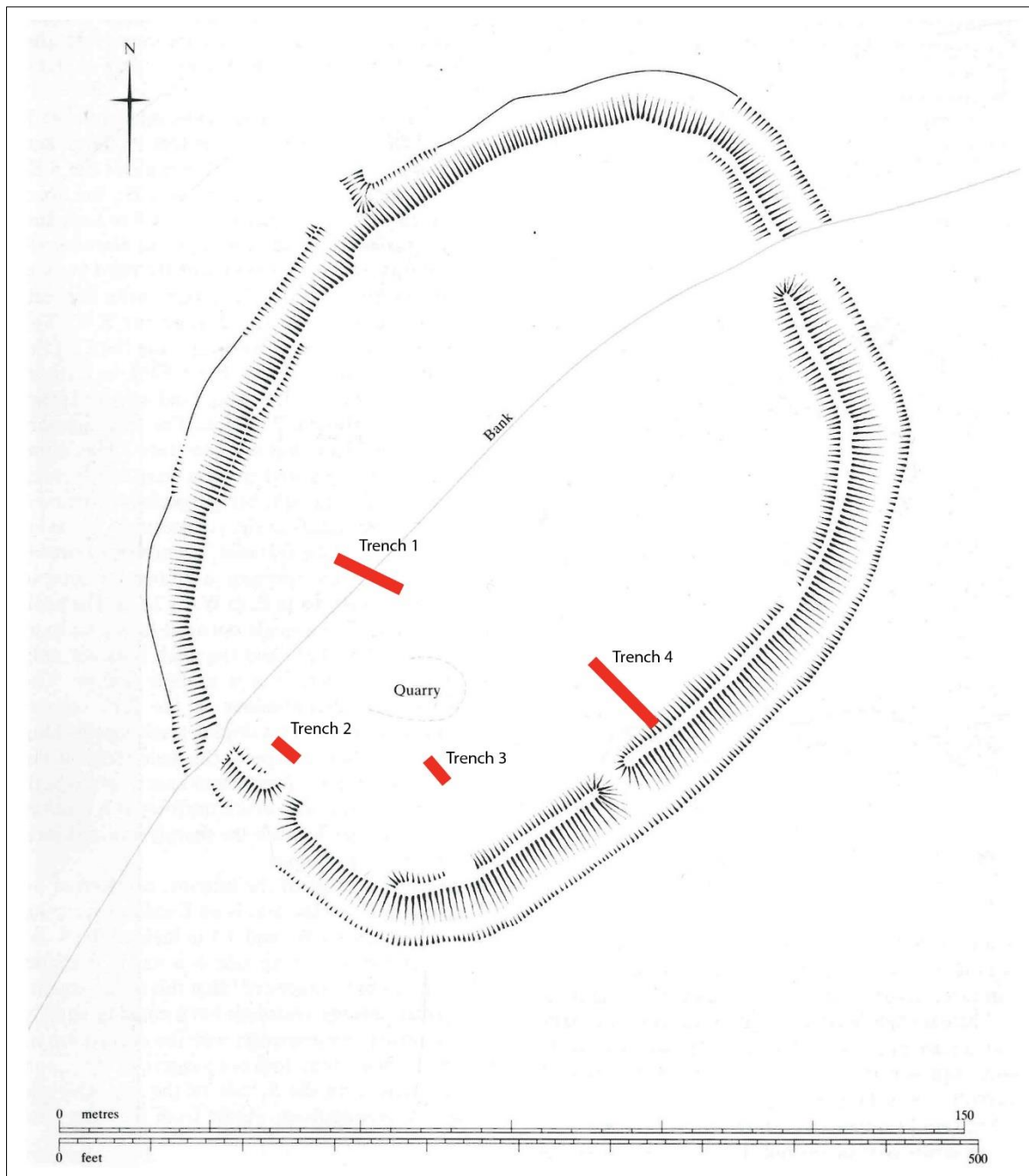


Fig. 5 Location of the trial trenches (after RCAHMW 1986, fig. 76)

2 Archaeological Investigation

- 2.1. The excavation was conducted according to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (CIfA) *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (2014). The trenches were positioned to investigate visible features within the hillfort and to assess the impact that forestry, and earlier land usage has had upon them and the buried archaeological record. Trenches were positioned to determine the damage caused by root disturbance, but tree stumps were avoided where possible as they would have been impossible to remove.

- 2.2. Four trenches (Fig. 5) were excavated entirely by hand, the results of which are presented below.

Trench 1

- 2.3. Trench 1 measured 12m by 2m and was positioned across a boundary bank which bisects the hillfort. The location allowed the investigation of the bank construction and also determined whether the bank sealed an earlier ground surface beneath it, together with an assessment of the impact of deciduous woodland to the north-west and a recently-felled coniferous plantation in the south-east.



Fig. 6 View of Trench 1 from the north-east, showing the boundary bank in the centre and the ditch to the left. Photo CPAT 4433-0009

- 2.4. The uppermost deposit was a humic layer (101), up to 0.1m thick, which extended across the whole of the trench. Very little survived of the boundary bank, comprising a 1.2m-wide spread of firm light reddish clay (106), up to 0.18m thick, which had been upcast from the adjacent ditch. There was no evidence for a buried soil, the bank material lying directly above a moderately compacted clayey silt (102). The ditch (105) lay on the south-eastern side and was approximately 1.8m in width, and 0.3m deep. A single layer of silty fill (107) was recorded in the base of the ditch. No artefacts were recovered from either the ditch fill or the upcast material.
- 2.5. Underlying (106) and cut by [105] was (102), a moderately compacted clayey silt subsoil 0.44m thick at the east end of the trench and 0.16m thick at the west end. The deposition was much thicker to the east of the field bank. Underlying (102) was the natural subsoil, a friable dark red silt and stone deposit (103). The sandstone bedrock was encountered within the eastern extent of the trench.

Trench 2

- 2.6. Trench 2 measured 5m by 2m and investigated the impact of forestry on the possible entrance at the south-western end of the hillfort. This was intended to test some of the lower internal ground level immediately to the north-west of the presumed entrance hollow rather than the entrance itself, which lay within a waterlogged hollow way which is not expected to be replanted. No archaeological features were identified.
- 2.7. The excavation revealed limited stratigraphy, comprising a humic silt deposition (201), up to 0.12m thick, lying above a firm orange clay silt (202), up to 0.4m thick, which contained occasional pebbles. This deposit lay directly above the natural subsoil, a friable red silt (203).



Fig. 7 View of Trench 2 from the north-east. Photo CPAT 4433-0030

Trench 3

- 2.8. Trench 3 measured 5m by 2m and investigated a raised area of ground measuring approximately 15m by 10m located within the south-west part of the ramparts. It was unclear at the outset of the excavation whether the raised area was artificially built up or a natural feature. No archaeological features were identified in Trench 3.
- 2.9. The uppermost deposit consisted of a loose dark brown humic deposit (301), 0.13m in thickness. This sealed a red clayey silt (301), 0.41m thick, overlying the natural subsoil, a friable gravelly silt (303).



Fig. 8 View of Trench 3 from the south-west. Photo CPAT 4433-0024

Trench 4

- 2.10. Trench 4 measured 15m by 2m and was positioned to provide a control sample of the area well within the former coniferous plantation. The original intention was for the trench to be located in the centre of the hillfort, but following discussions with Cadw's Inspector of Ancient Monuments it was agreed that the trench would be repositioned to the east, taking in part of the eastern rampart, in order to determine the relative date of the subsoil to the prehistoric defences. Additionally, owing to the lack of any sign of structures, occupation deposits or artefacts in Trenches 1-3 this was also deliberately located to partially cross a clear archaeological feature in order to provide some control data, to determine if earthen features were likely to be detectable on any scale in these soil conditions.
- 2.11. Excavations focused on the south-eastern end of the trench, against the inner tail of the rampart, with three sondages being excavated along the remainder of the trench in order to confirm the stratigraphic sequence.
- 2.12. As in the other trenches, the uppermost deposit was the humic topsoil (401), 50mm thick, overlying a layer of orange silty clay (402), 0.3-0.42m in thickness. The rampart structure was represented by two distinct dumps of material, a basal layer of mottled reddish brown clay (404) and an upper layer of mid-brown clay (405). The base of the rampart lay directly above the natural subsoil, a firm, dark red, gravelly silt (403), which was also revealed in the base of one of the sondages. A distinct localised band of material containing large amounts of rounded and sub-angular stones (406) ran across the trench at the base of inner edge of the rampart. This deposition appeared to be culturally derived and broadly contemporary with the rampart, although it was unclear what purpose it may have served.



Fig. 9 Trench 4, south-east end, showing the section through eastern rampart, viewed from the north-east. Photo CPAT 4433-0040



Fig. 10 View of Trench 4, south-east end, from the south-west. Photo CPAT 4433-0046

3 Conclusions

- 3.1. The programme of archaeological investigation was undertaken to assess the impact of forestry activity on Coed Fenni Fach hillfort and to determine whether continued replanting would be a viable strategy as part of the long-term management of the hillfort.
- 3.2. At the outset the potential impacts of forestry activity upon the hillfort were thought to include damage from planting, including cultivation or banking, root damage, felling, and timber extraction.
- 3.3. The general soil deposition across the interior of the hillfort consisted of a modern organic layer, largely formed from decomposed leaf matter, overlying an archaeologically sterile layer of clayey silt, sealing the natural subsoil, comprising a friable silt, degraded stone and gravel. Although the excavations revealed no archaeological features associated with the hillfort, it is assumed that elsewhere within the interior such features would be cut from the surface of this layer, and any surviving occupation deposits would lie immediately above it. This deposit was encountered at a depth of approximately 0.22m below current ground level in within the deciduous woodland north-west of the hillfort, and 0.46-0.5m in the area of the coniferous plantation.
- 3.4. It was evident that the soil layer between the subsoil and the humic topsoil was formed after the hillfort was constructed since it overlay the inner tail of the rampart. It also clearly pre-dates the construction of the field bank and ditch. No dating evidence associated with the construction of the field bank was recovered. It may have formed as a result of forestry activity, possibly forming a homogenous active layer where the bulk of the root mass was located, overlying the much less permeable subsoil. It has also been postulated that this layer may have derived from cultivation of the interior of the hillfort.
- 3.5. The limited investigation of the rampart identified two distinct deposits forming the tail of the south-eastern rampart of the hillfort. Located approximately 1m inside the inner edge of the rampart was a distinct, spread of stony material which could be associated with a track along the interior of the rampart, although this was far from conclusive. Alternatively, it may have formed the base for a structure.
- 3.6. The impact of tree planting and forestry activity on the site seems to have been rather limited. Root mass disturbance appears to have been limited to the topsoil and the clayey silt layer underlying it, with very little root penetration or disturbance of the much more compacted subsoil. Most of the roots had spread sideways rather than downwards into the subsoil, in which roots were almost completely absent.
- 3.7. The survivability of buried archaeological remains was difficult to assess within a very limited sample area in the hillfort interior. It is likely that the upper layer of later prehistoric occupation deposits have been weathered away or been destroyed by bioturbation. The discovery of the stony layer inside the rampart 0.2m below current ground level suggests that the potential for the survival of features cut into the subsoil is quite high, especially in close proximity to the rampart. This reinforces the likelihood that further deposits survive in close proximity to the rampart and that replanting of this area should be avoided.

4 Acknowledgements

- 4.1. The archaeological groundworks were carried out with the assistance of Rob Blackburn and Rob Billington, with further assistance from Will Davies of Cadw. The author would also like to thank the landowner David Jones Powell and his agent Andrew Bronwin of Andrew Bronwin & Co for allowing us to carry out the work and for providing additional information about the history of the site.

5 References

Published sources

RCAHMW, 1986. *An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Brecknock (Brycheiniog). The Prehistoric and Roman Monuments, Part II: Hill-forts and Roman Remains*. HMSO.

Soil Survey of England and Wales, 1983. *Soils of England and Wales, Sheet 2, Wales*. SSEW.

Cartographic sources

1840 Tithe Survey for St John the Evangelist parish

1889 Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25", Brecknock 27.11

6 Archive Deposition Statement

- 6.1. The paper and digital archive will be deposited with the National Monuments Record (NMR), RCAHMW, including a copy of the final report. This archive will include all written, drawn, survey and photographic records relating directly to the investigations undertaken. A copy of the digital archive only will also be lodged with the Historic Environment Record, Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust.

Archive summary

CPAT Event PRN: 140217

56 digital photographs Film No CPAT 4433

4 trench recording sheets

2 A2 permatrace sheets

3 A4 permatrace sheets

4 10 litre soil samples

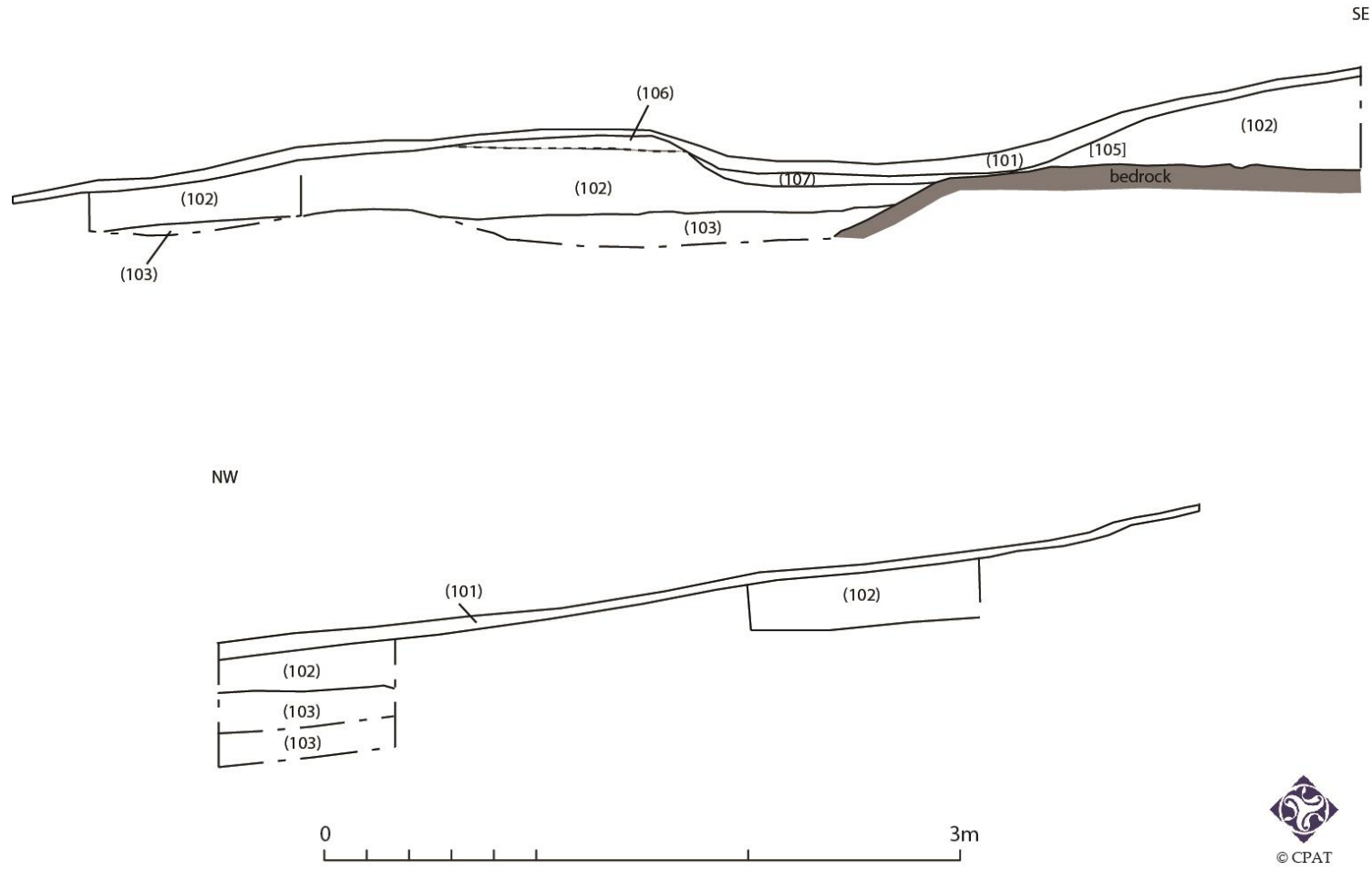


Fig. 11 South-west facing section of Trench 1

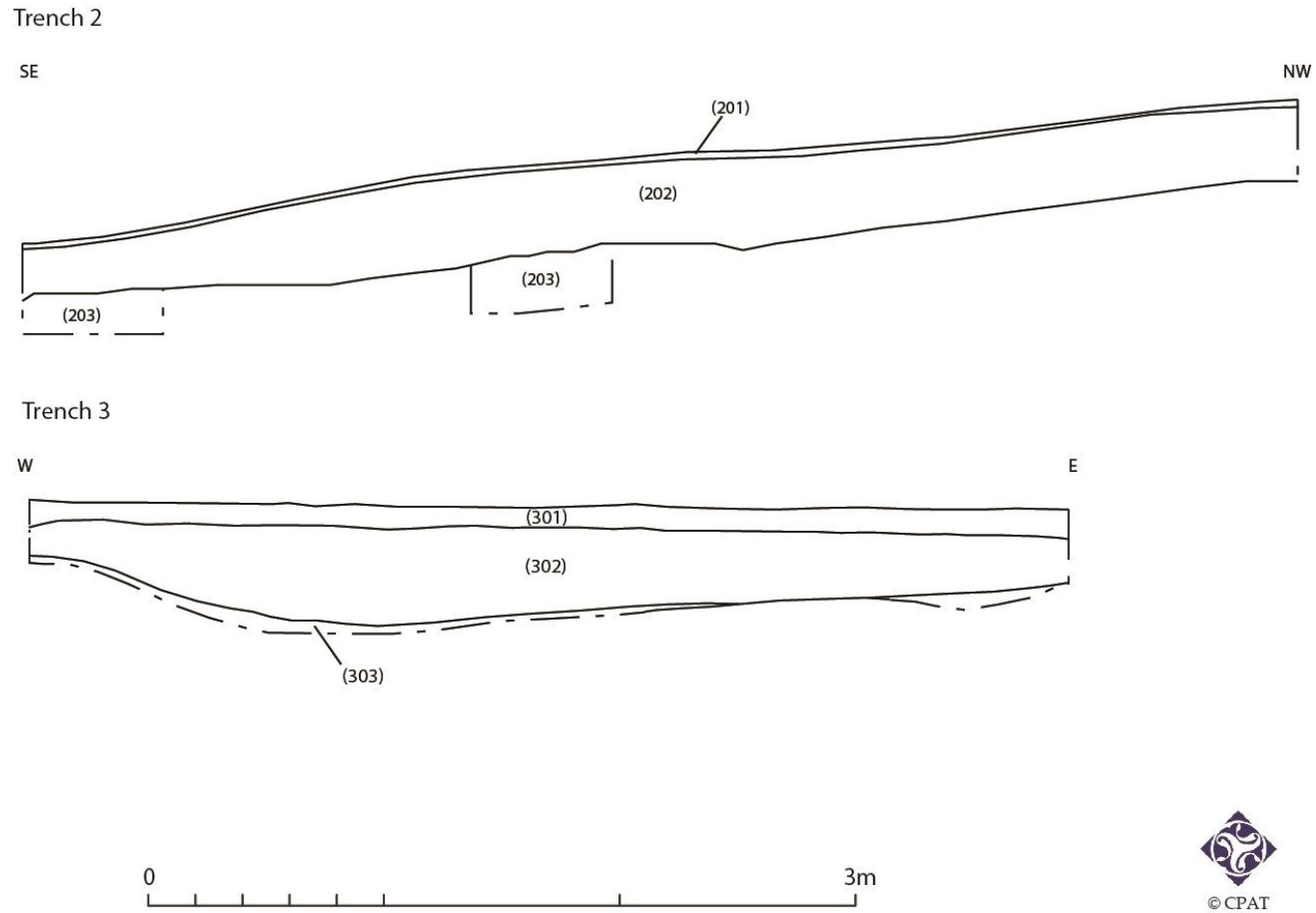
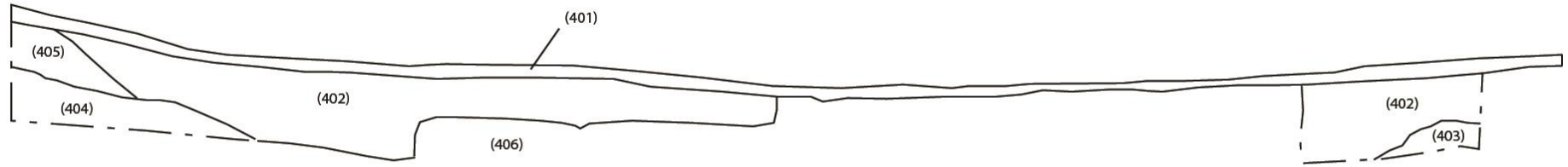
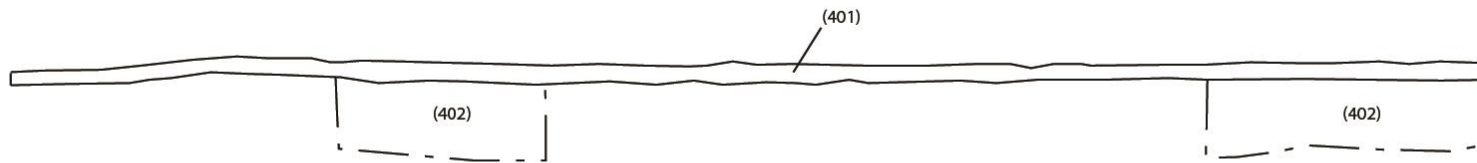


Fig. 12 and 13 North-east facing section of Trench 2 and south facing section of Trench 3

SE



NW



© CPAT

Fig. 14 North-east facing section of Trench 4

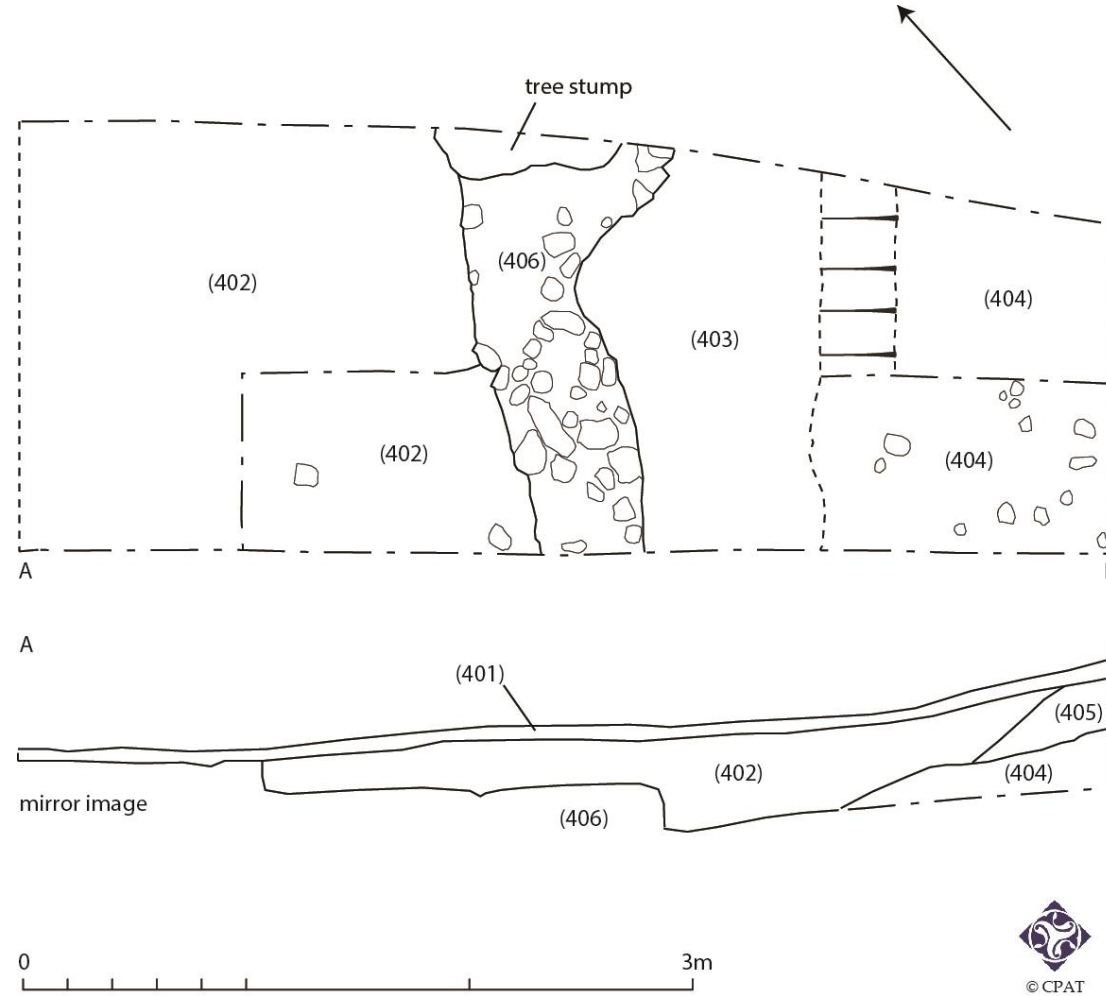


Fig. 15 Plan of south-east extent of Trench 4