

**Caer Drewyn and its environs**  
**Survey and desktop analyses, 2009-2010**  
**Preliminary Report**



**Raimund Karl and Ian Brown**

**Bangor/Gwynedd, August 2010**

Bangor Studies in Archaeology  
Report No. 3





## Bangor Studies in Archaeology

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Report No. 3

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**Cover image:** Bangor University and *Heather & Hillforts* project staff during the production of a photographic archive / surface survey at the *Fron Newydd* enclosure (ramparts visible in the foreground). In the background on the small elevation in the centre of the picture, *Moel Fodig* hillfort. (Photo R. Karl)

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## Introduction

### Location and site descriptions

The first year of the project has focussed on three sites, referred to as *Caer Drewyn* (site 2) located at SJ 094 449 (also recorded under the name *Fron Newydd* in the RCAHMW records), *Caer Drewyn* (site 3) located at SJ 089 447, and the (miniature) hillfort of *Moel Fodig* located at SJ 096 456. These three sites are in the immediate vicinity of the more prominently located hillfort *Caer Drewyn* located at SJ 087 444 on a slope to the north-east of (and visible from) Corwen in the Dee valley (fig 1).

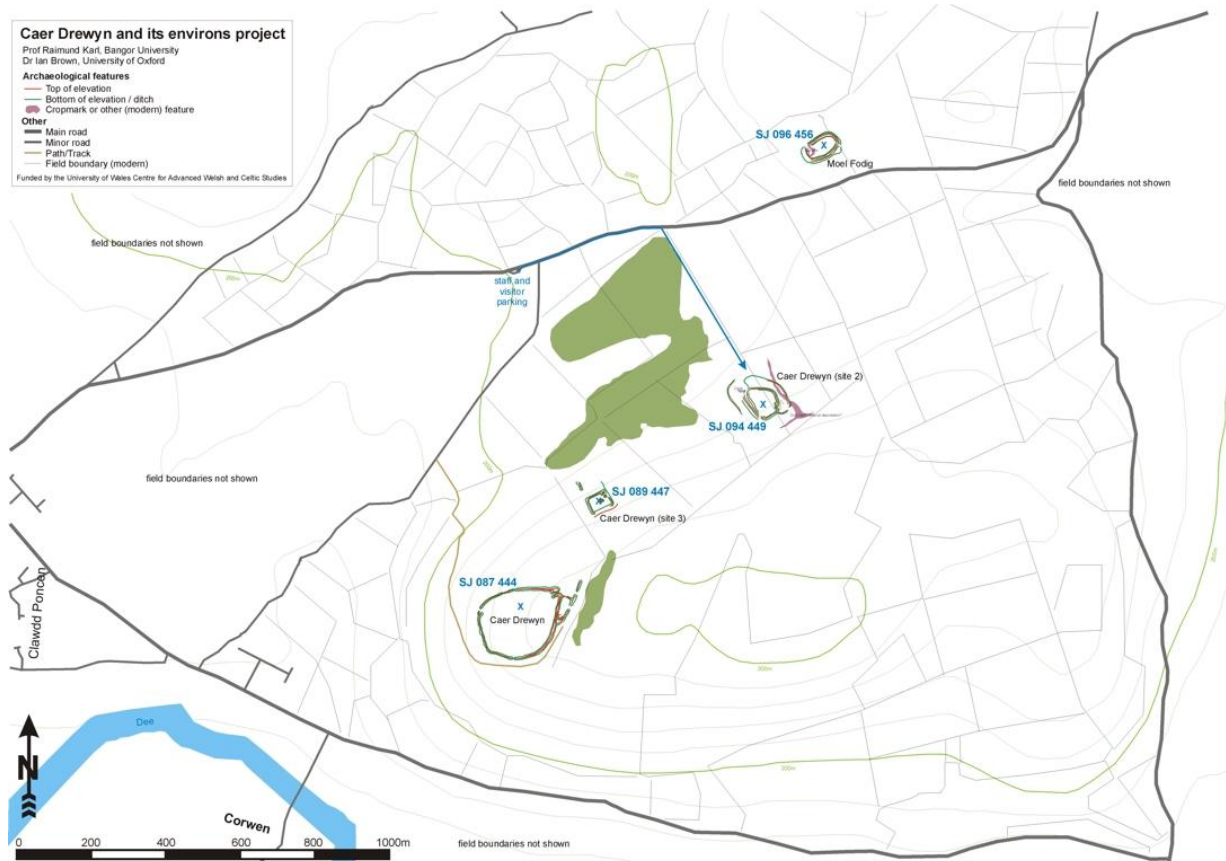


Figure 1: *Caer Drewyn and its environs* project map (miniaturised).

### Caer Drewyn (site 2) / Fron Newydd

Located at SJ 094 449 near the bottom of the north-facing slope of the eastern end of the Llantysilio Mountain ridge, this is a bi- or multivallate sub-circular hillslope enclosure of presumably Iron Age date. It is recorded in CPAT HER under PRN 101454 (Frost 1995, 36; Jones 1999, 10-2; also see fig 2) and by RCAHMW under NPRN 54431<sup>1</sup>.

CPAT describes the site as “Multivallate enclosure 90x60m, situated on N facing slope dominated by high ground to S. Oval in shape with inner and outer series of bank and ditch. Inner bank 2 m high on S side, entrance to N. N0180; AP Plot during project 509 1998. Main enclosure c. 70-65m with entrance at NW corner. Internal area c. 0.35 ha. Single outer ditch to N and E and a series of possibly three external ditches to W.” (Jones 1999, 10).

<sup>1</sup> see <http://www.coflein.gov.uk/en/site/54431/details/FRON-NEWYDD+DEFENDED+ENCLOSURE/>.

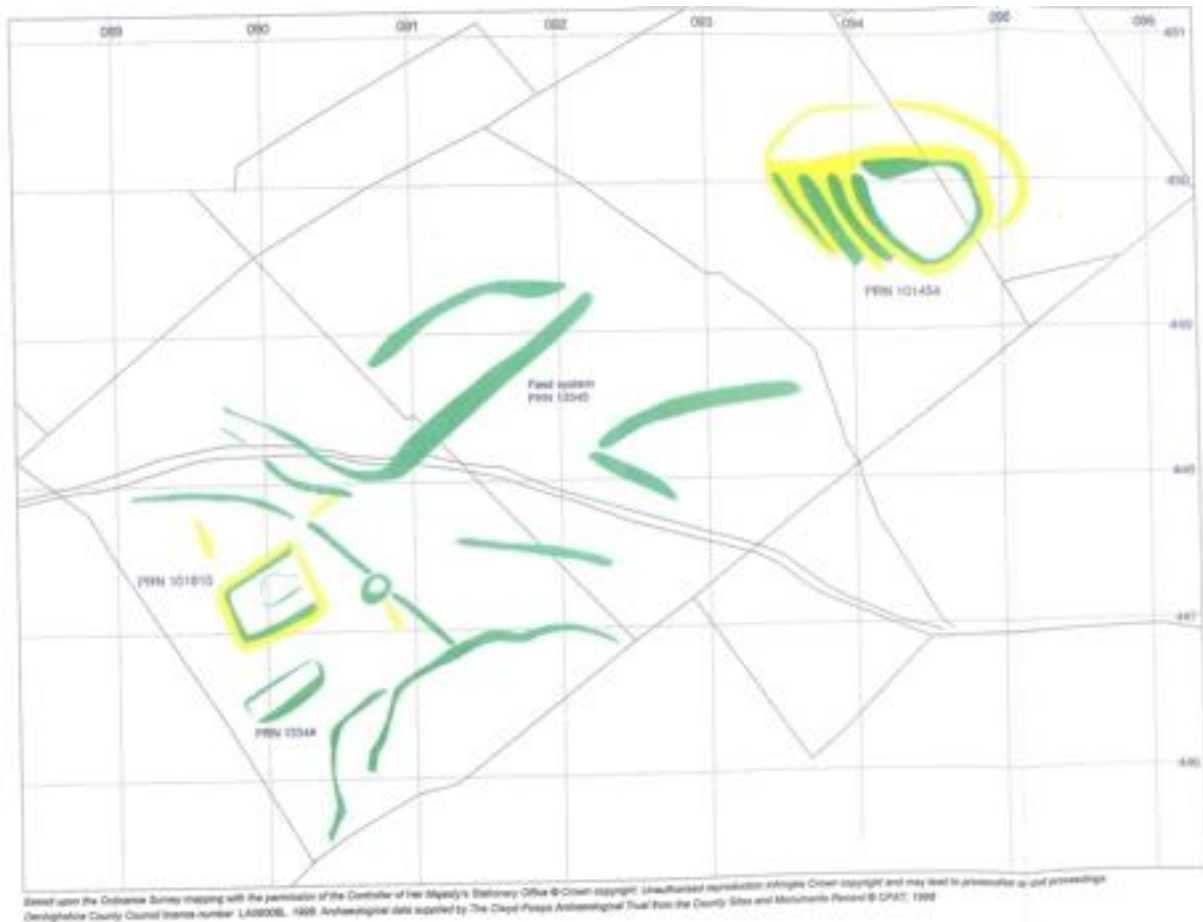


Figure 2: Caer Drewyn site 2 (top right corner, PRN 101454) and site 3 (bottom left, PRN 101810) with possible field system in between (Jones 1999, 12).

RCAHMW's description differs somewhat from that of CPAT: *"Fron-Newydd is a bi-vallate Iron Age defended enclosure set on a north-west facing hillslope some 750m NE of Caer Drewyn hillfort (NPRN 95431). The inner enclosure is pear-shaped with its narrow end pointing downhill. The original gateway appears to have been sited at this narrow apex. It is surrounded by an outer rampart, wide-spaced on the east and north but set close to the inner enclosure on the south-west, flattened side. The whole site measures approximately 155m north-west, south-east by 113m south-west, north-east, enclosing 1.25 hectares. Aerial photographs taken in winter light show scoops in the interior, likely to be platforms for prehistoric houses. The enclosure is not scheduled and is intermittently ploughed. Source: Musson, C, 1994, Wales from the Air, RCAHMW, page 106."*<sup>2</sup>

A surface survey carried out by this project would indicate that while both descriptions are roughly accurate, the maximum length of the monument could be as much as 170m along its NW-SE axis and c. 145m along its SW-NE axis or c. 2 ha, with the inner enclosure c. 60m in length and c. 50m in width or c. 0.3 ha enclosed area. While previous surveys have interpreted a lower section of the inner bank in the NW corner of the monument as its likely entrance, our survey seems to indicate that the main entrance through the inner rampart, characterised by inward turning rampart terminals, is actually to the East, with a gap in the outer rampart facing to the South-east possibly being the outer entrance of the site. The inner enclosure seems to have an outer enclosure attached towards the East and North and is certainly bi-vallate, possibly even tri-vallate towards the SW, but only uni-vallate

<sup>2</sup> see <http://www.coflein.gov.uk/en/site/54431/details/FRON-NEWYDD+DEFENDED+ENCLOSURE/>.

towards the South, indicating a rather complex history of construction of the site. Within the inner enclosure, several flattened areas can be interpreted as house platforms.

In addition, our survey identified a stone-built cairn directly outside the inner rampart immediately West of the NW corner, but inside the area defined by the possible third (outermost) ditch of the site (fig 3). While it cannot be established with perfect certainty, its location in the middle of the field, the large boulders used, and its relatively clearly defined, straight edges would indicate that this is a prehistoric (possibly Bronze Age) cairn, rather than a more recent clearance cairn. Since nothing is scheduled at the site, further work, including possibly partial excavation, may be possible to clarify this further.



Figure 3: Possible prehistoric cairn at NW corner of *Fron Newydd* inner enclosure (picture taken facing South-west, photo R. Karl).

It was planned to carry out a geophysical survey at *Fron Newydd* in June 2010. However, due to the field going on sale at this time, the permission to carry out work was withdrawn for the duration of the field being on sale. After the sale being completed, new permission for the survey work was granted and will now be carried out during early fall 2010.

### Caer Drewyn (site 3) / rectangular enclosure

Located at SJ 089 447 half way up the same north-facing slope on which *Caer Drewyn* (site 2) is also located, this is a rectangular enclosure surrounded on 3 sides (NE, SE and SW) by a single bank with on 2 sides has an exterior ditch (NE and SW). The fourth side (SE) has neither bank nor ditch but the hillslope has been artificially steepened to provide a SE limit to the levelled rectangular area defined

on its other sides by the banks and ditches. It is recorded in CPAT HER under PNR 101810 (Frost 1995, 70; Jones 1999, 10-12; see fig 2) and by RCAHMW under NPNR 309746<sup>3</sup>.

CPAT describes the site as *“Rectangular enclosure 55-45m marked by bank 7m wide and 0.5m high, ditch 4 m wide and 0.4m deep. Has possible entrance on E side. Situated on N facing slope with high ground to S. S and W sides somewhat denuded. N1284; AP plot during project 509 1998. The area to the S and E has a series of banks of possibly associated field system PRN 13345. A possible rectangular platform PRN 13344 lies immediately to S.”* (Jones 1999, 10).

Again RCAHMW's description differs somewhat from CPAT's: *“Extensive rectilinear field system, centered on an enclosed platform shelved into the hillslope at the grid reference. The field system extends for some 500m between the Iron Age hillfort of Caer Drewyn to the south-west (NPRN 95431) and a defended hillslope enclosure below and to the north-east (NPRN 54431). While the enclosed platform at the centre of the field system has the appearance of a medieval structure, the general character of the field system is prehistoric and it may be that this is when they originated.”*<sup>4</sup>

Again, this projects own surface survey confirms these descriptions as roughly accurate, although our own observations differ slightly in detail. As already mentioned above, the SE side of the enclosure seems not to be characterised by a bank and/or ditch, but rather by an artificial steepening of the hillslope towards the higher ground to the SE (see fig 4). This steepening seems to have been done in two steps, with the higher slope set back a bit from the lower part of the slope, but hardly sufficiently to characterise this as a bank, though this may have been intentional to create a clear outer boundary of the rectangular enclosure. According to our observations, the bank is still best preserved on the SW side of the monument, where it is still quite prominently visible (fig 5). The NE and especially the NW side are much less clearly visible and less well preserved; though on both sides the bank is still sufficiently well preserved to be clearly identifiable. A gap in the NE bank may well have been the original entrance to the site, though there are possible inward turning terminals of the bank on the NW side of the enclosure near its northern corner that may have been the original entrance.

The interior of the enclosure seems to have mostly been levelled, with the southern half of the interior on a slightly higher level than its northern half. Some very low elevations on this level interior area near the northern corner and the center of the site may be remains of (possibly) roundhouses or other internal features, but this is anything but clear at this stage and will have to be examined further by a detailed topographical and geophysical survey and possibly excavation. Since the site is also not scheduled, further examination should be possible with landowner permission only.

The field system around this rectangular enclosure (see fig 2), identified both by CPAT (Jones 1999, 10-12) and RCAHMW<sup>5</sup>, is also hardly visible on the surface. Our own surface survey indicated the possible presence of some of these features, but could not fully confirm them. Further examination, e.g. by geophysical survey, would be required to establish whether this is really a (prehistoric?) field system related to the rectangular enclosure.

A geophysical survey of the rectangular enclosure itself is planned for fall 2010 to establish the existence of internal features within the enclosure, and possibly to identify the presence of (the hardly visible) ditches on at least two, possibly three sides of the site.

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<sup>3</sup> see <http://www.coflein.gov.uk/en/site/54431/details/FRON-NEWYDD+DEFENDED+ENCLOSURE/>.

<sup>4</sup> see <http://www.coflein.gov.uk/en/site/54431/details/FRON-NEWYDD+DEFENDED+ENCLOSURE/>.

<sup>5</sup> see <http://www.coflein.gov.uk/en/site/54431/details/FRON-NEWYDD+DEFENDED+ENCLOSURE/>.





Figure 4: SE side of the rectangular enclosure (facing SSW, photo R. Karl).



Figure 5: The rectangular enclosure from the SW (facing NE, photo R. Karl). The SW bank is clearly visible at the left side of the picture.

## Moel Fodig

Located at SJ 096 456 on a small elevation in the middle of the valley overlooked by the other sites, this is a oval-shaped miniature hillfort which is either univallate with a small counterscarp bank, or possibly bivallate. It encloses a total area of c. 0.26ha, which is the flat hilltop. Parts of it have been used as a quarry in the past, leaving only c. 0.18ha for examination. Its main entrance, currently covered by gorse, seems to be facing towards the East or North-east. It is recorded in CPAT HER under PRN 100792<sup>6</sup> and by RCAHMW under NPRN 306594.

CPAT describes the site as “A small univallate hillfort on a ridge with NE SW axis. There is a bank at NE end but mostly defence is by scarping. The entrance at NE possibly inturned. Possible huts in interior. Damaged by quarry W side. SM 51;”<sup>7</sup>.

The RCAHMW's description is “The oval, ridge-top enclosure at Moel Fodig measures c.77m by 34m, and is defined by a bank and ditch, with slight remains of a counterscarp. It is thought to have been originally walled, with a north-east entrance. There are possibly two roundhouse emplacements within, whilst the north-west of the interior has been obliterated by quarrying.”<sup>8</sup>.

These description match our own observations during the surface survey. The results of the geophysical survey carried out as part of this project are described further below.

## Previous archaeological work

With the exception of *Caer Drewyn* itself, no previous archaeological work (other than basic analysis of surface surveys and aerial photography for superficial morphological descriptions) has been carried out at any of the sites discussed above.

## Research questions

The project has a number of aims and objectives, some of which also relate to the interests of project partners<sup>9</sup> or other research projects carried out by Bangor University<sup>10</sup> and the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies<sup>11</sup>. The main aims and objectives of this ongoing project are

- to critically examine past work on these sites to provide a context for the following:
- to undertake geophysical and topographical surveys (where appropriate)
- to undertake locational analyses of the strategic importance of the monuments in the area
- to undertake initial assessments of the social, economic, political and/or ritualistic importance of the monuments
- to gather additional data for the interpretation of the monuments, particularly regarding dating, construction methods used, and their relationship to other monuments in an area and regional context, and especially to other sites in north-east Wales (for example the Clwydian Range) and the northern Marches.

<sup>6</sup> see <http://www.cofiadurcahcymru.org.uk/arch/index.html>.

<sup>7</sup> see CPAT HER entry PRN 100792 at <http://www.cofiadurcahcymru.org.uk/arch/index.html>.

<sup>8</sup> see <http://www.coflein.gov.uk/en/site/306594/details/MOEL+FODIG%2C+ENCLOSURE/>.

<sup>9</sup> *Heather and Hillforts* project.

<sup>10</sup> *Hillforts of North Wales* project; University of Wales Publications and Collaborative Research Committee funded *Early Celtic Societies in North Wales* project.

<sup>11</sup> *Ancient Britain and the Atlantic Zone* project directed by Prof. John T. Koch.

In collaboration with the *Early Celtic Societies in North Wales* project:

- to gather additional data on hillfort settlement activity in North Wales
- to gather additional data useable for establishing a firm typology of Iron Age Settlement in North Wales
- to gather dates of the sites to establish their position in a chronological sequence of the development of upland and lowland settlement in North Wales
- to gather additional data on the relationships between local communities in North Wales of the late 2nd and 1st millennium BC.

In collaboration with CAWCS's *Ancient Britain and the Atlantic Zone* project:

- to gather additional primary evidence on early Celtic communities in the Atlantic zone for comparison with other areas along the 'Atlantic fringe'.

## Methodology

On-site geophysical fieldwork will be undertaken at *Caer Drewyn* (including site 2 and site 3), *Moel Fodig* and *Moel y Gaer, Llantysilio* hillforts using a Bartington Instrument's GRAD601 gradiometer under the following guidelines:

- that the surveys will cover as much of the interior and selected exterior areas of each hillfort as possible, considering the vagaries of slope and vegetation. At *Caer Drewyn* this will involve areas determined for further investigation as a result of an initial magnetometer survey undertaken by Brown and Wintle (2008) and investigations in 2006 by Engineering Archaeological Services Ltd. At *Moel y Gaer Llantysilio* this will involve areas determined for further investigation as a result of surveys undertaken by Engineering Archaeological Services Ltd. In 2009. At *Moel Fodig* and *Caer Drewyn* (site 2 and site 3) no such investigation has taken place yet.
- the surveys will determine the location and extent of any possible archaeological features, in particular ditches and structures, as a prelude to further detailed analyses and potential future excavation.

Thus, at *Moel Fodig* much of the interior of the hillforts as possible will be covered (total area of 0.28 ha), whilst at *Caer Drewyn* an area of circa 0.25 ha immediately outside of the main north-eastern entrance, and within the interior a number of 30 m grid squares (to be determined) in an area of possible 'hut platforms' indicated by Engineering Archaeological Services (Brooks 2006), will be surveyed. The investigation outside the entrance is especially aimed at determining whether the earlier smaller enclosure (often called an annexe but now, as a result of geophysical survey in 2008, determined as an earlier enclosure) extended in front of the present entrance. At *Moel Fodig*, Bowen and Gresham (1967) suggest that circular depressions in the centre of the site and adjacent to the eastern entrance could be evidence of structures, and the geophysical survey should determine the veracity of this observation. At *Caer Drewyn* (site 2 and site 3), geophysical and topographical surveys should allow to increase our knowledge of the sites, especially in regard to the existence of internal structures, and allow to establish a strategy for targeted excavations to be carried out in the future. At *Moel y Gaer, Llantysilio*, increasing destruction by motor-cycle/recreation use, makes survey of the site particularly important, and Burnham (1995) indicates that there are 'numerous possible positions for hut platforms in the interior'. Further detailed investigation of some of the areas (c. 0.25

ha) identified as possible huts during the 2009 survey by Engineering Archaeology Services Ltd. and of the areas immediately outside the eastern and western entrances (c. 0,10 ha respectively) not covered by EAS's surveys will be undertaken. Earlier magnetometer surveys at *Caer Drewyn* have determined that such techniques can be extremely successful in these physical conditions.

Topographical survey will be undertaken at *Moel Fodig* and *Caer Drewyn* (site 2 and site 3), having already been undertaken at *Caer Drewyn* and *Moel y Gaer, Llantysilio* by Engineering Archaeological Services Ltd (Brooks 2006).

The surveys will be carried out by a team from the Institute of Archaeology, Oxford University and Bangor University during the period April to July 2011, in collaboration with staff from the *Heather and Hillforts* project of Denbighshire County Council who will undertake vegetation removal (bracken and gorse) at *Caer Drewyn*. Post-survey work will be carried out before October 2011, with the compilation of maps and the writing of the survey report.

### **Off-site research and analyses**

This will involve on-going research throughout the two year period of the project and will include extensive library work, predominantly at the Bodleian, Sackler and Taylor Institution libraries at Oxford and the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth, as well as local sources. Locational analysis, using models devised by Brown (2002), will determine the strategic significance of the monuments in comparison with regional hillfort assessments of selected hillforts in Wales and the Marches, with particular emphasis on river pattern. An extensive photographic record will be undertaken throughout the project. A final project report will be presented in October 2011, with an interim report in September 2010.

### **Survey of Moel Fodig June 2010**

In June 2010, a magnetometer survey of the interior of *Moel Fodig* was carried out by EAS Ltd. for the project (Brooks 2010). The Fluxgate Gradiometer survey, using a Geoscan FM 36 with an "ST1" sample trigger, was using a 20x20m grid (see fig 6) with readings taken at 0.5m intervals along transects 0.5m apart, walked in a zigzag pattern. A total of 0.18 ha of the internal area were subjected to the survey, effectively all of the internal area preserved and reasonably accessible (the eastern end is covered in dense gorse).

A number of anomalies were detected during the survey and can be interpreted partially as roundhouses, partially as linear features, and partially discrete magnetic anomalies, possibly pits or hearths (Brooks 2010, 2; see fig 7, 8).

The four circular anomalies A, B, C and D probably indicate the position of roundhouses (Brooks 2010, 2). Anomaly C seems to coincide with low elevations visible on the surface which have already been interpreted as possible remains of a roundhouse by both CPAT HER and the RCAHMW. Anomaly D seems to largely coincide with a flattened area at a slightly lower level than the rest of the hillfort's interior near the southern rampart which has also already been suggested to be a roundhouse platform. The diameters of all four anomalies (A 9.04m, B 6.34m, C 11.4m, D 9.59m; Brooks 2010, 2) fall nicely within the range expected of Iron Age roundhouses in Wales (cf. Ghey et al. 2007, fig 17). Possibly associated with circular anomaly C is a substantial discrete anomaly (L) which has an enhanced magnetic signature and may represent the position of a hearth (Brooks 2010, 2).

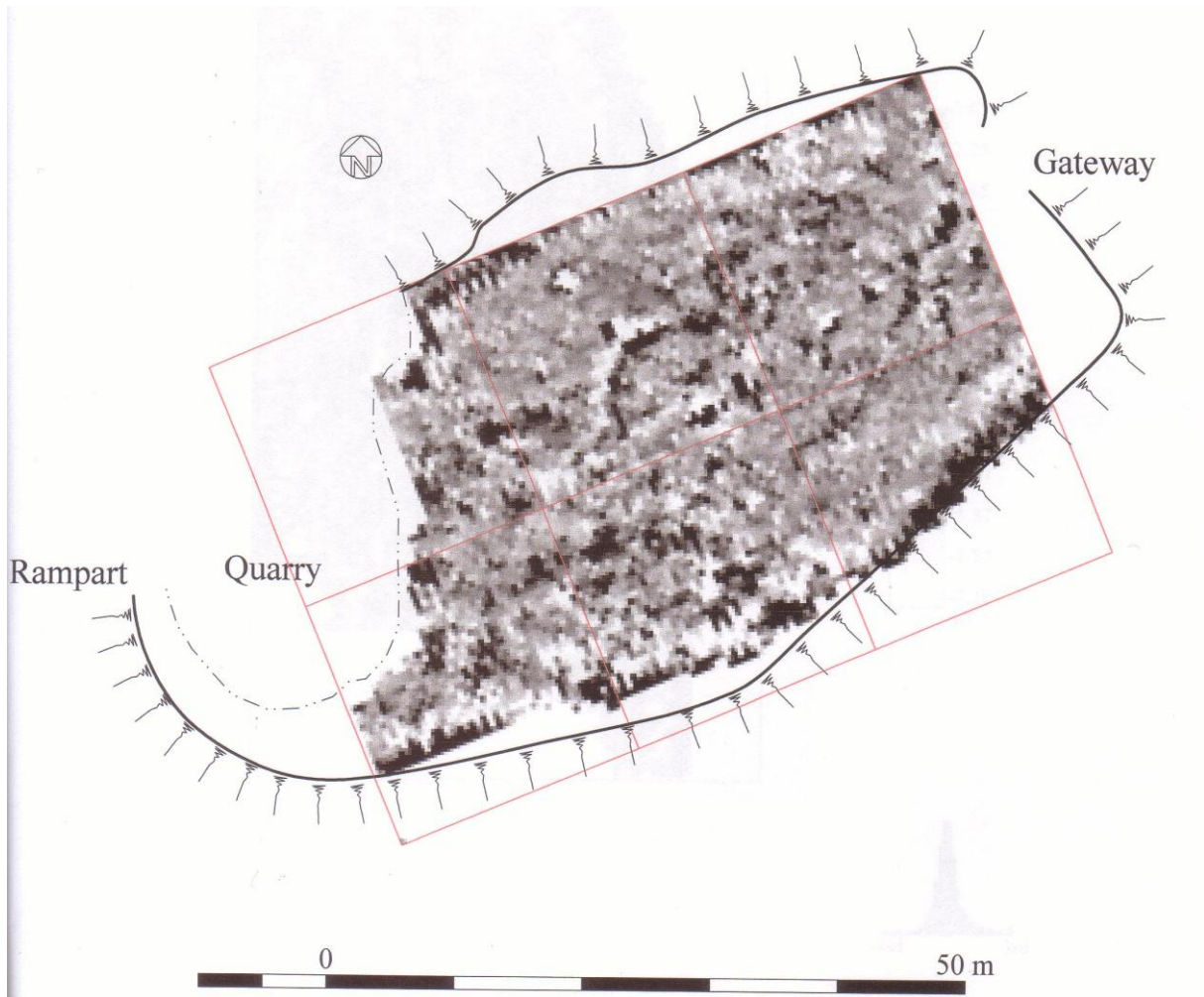


Figure 6: Location of survey on sketch plan (Brooks 2010, fig 2).

Of the four linear anomalies (E, F, G, H), the first two (E, F) may be associated with the large circular anomaly C and perhaps form an enclosure at the rear of a central roundhouse on the site. The other two (G, H) possibly represent other internal divisions at the site (Brooks 2010, 2). Partially, these linear features, especially E and F again coincide with low elevations visible on the surface of the site and may indicate that drystone features are to be expected.

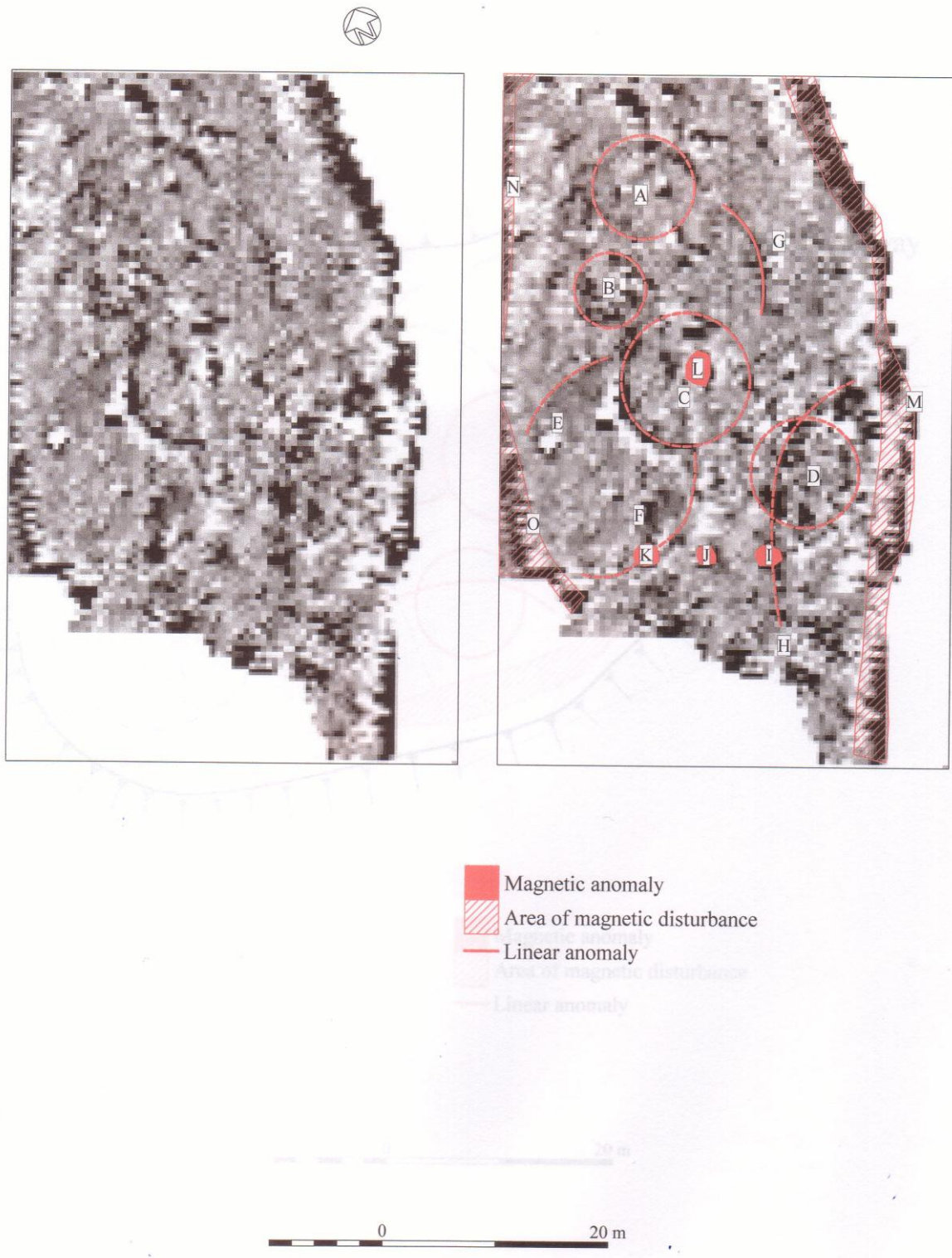
The three remaining discrete anomalies (I, J, K) could indicate a line of large post-pits or other pits (Brooks 2010, 2). Perhaps they represent a short pit alignment (Rylatt and Bevan 2007).

The rampart itself also shows up on parts of the geophysical survey with a slightly enhanced magnetic signature (M, N, O). This may be indicative of the proximity of underlying stones (which were also partially visible during the surface survey) rather than any burning effect (Brooks 2010, 2). Stone-built ramparts are not uncommon in the area (*Caer Drewyn*, for instance, has at least partially stone-built ramparts) and may suggest that at least an outer stone facing of the rampart may still be partially preserved under rampart collapse, as recently observed on *Moel y Gaer, Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd* (Karl and Butler 2009).

### Future work

The result of desktop analyses, surface surveys, the creation of a photographic archive and the geophysical survey carried out at *Moel Fodig* indicate that the *Caer Drewyn* environs have a great

potential for useful further work. Further topographical and geophysical surveys are planned for *Moel Fodig*, *Caer Drewyn*, *Caer Drewyn (site 2)*, *Caer Drewyn (site 3)* and *Moel y Gaer Llantysilio*, to be carried out during fall 2010 and spring / early Summer 2011. These surveys will lay the foundations for targeted excavations at at least some, ideally all the sites mentioned aimed primarily at identifying preservation conditions on site, clarifying questions regarding the internal structures present at these sites, and collecting dating evidence (primarily for scientific dating).



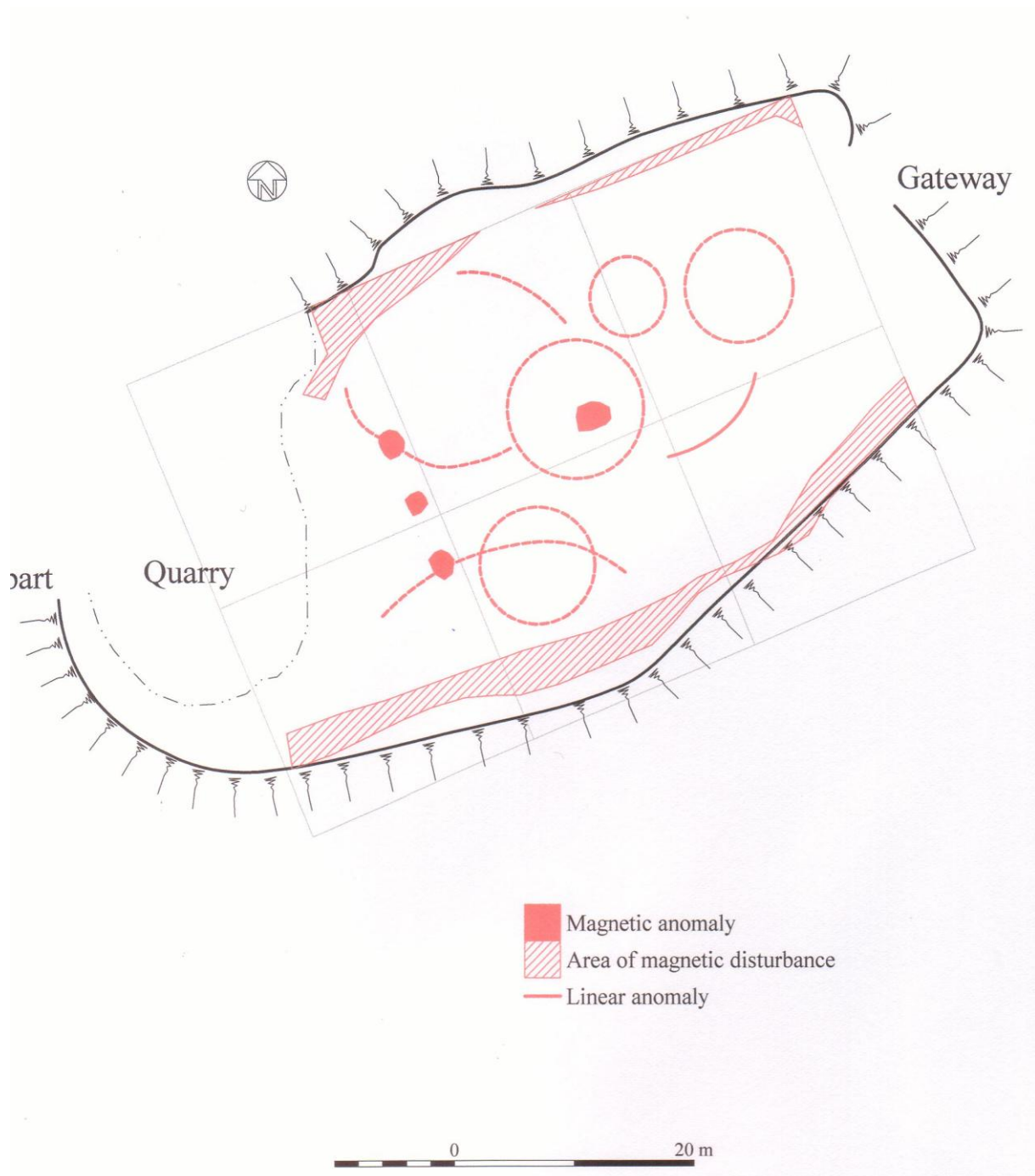


Figure 8: Summary of survey results on sketch plan (Brooks 2010, fig 6).

Permission to carry out further survey work or if possible also excavations has already been obtained from landowners at *Moel Fodig*, *Caer Drewyn*, *Moel y Gaer Llantysilio* and *Caer Drewyn* (site 2), and will hopefully shortly also be obtained for *Caer Drewyn* (site 3). The combined work will hopefully allow to establish the relative chronological position of the sites to each other. In addition, the existence of a small area of boggy ground next to the eastern entrance of *Caer Drewyn* and a sizeable patch of boggy land between *Caer Drewyn* (site 2) and *Moel Fodig* will also allow the collection of palaeoenvironmental evidence to gather information about land use in the area during the periods of occupation of at least some of the sites.

## Acknowledgements

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