

## **ANNUAL REPORT: PENYCLODDIAU HILLFORT (WALES, UK) 2013 FIELD SCHOOL**

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Student training underway across the Iron Age earthworks

### **GENERAL**

Located in North Wales, the University of Liverpool Archaeology Field School took place between July 21<sup>st</sup> and August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2013. A total of forty-six students and fifteen staff members participated this season, including ten students from the Institute of Field Research (IFR).

The University is working in partnership with Cadw (Welsh Assembly Government) and Denbighshire County Council to understand more about the archaeology of the Clywdian Range hillforts in a bid to help manage the monuments more effectively.

### **RESEARCH RESULTS**

At 21 hectares, Penycloddiau hillfort is one of the largest pre-Roman Iron Age sites in the UK. Previous work suggests that similar large contour enclosures may be a very early type (c. 800-400 BCE); as a result, our excavations aim to help date the very origins of the hillfort in western Britain.

This was the second season of excavation at Penycloddiau. Work by the student cohort commenced with the re-opening and extension of Area 1 – located north of the hillfort's eastern entrance – where a presumed modern farm track had cut through both inner and outer earthworks.

The 2013 research aims were to:

- assess the survival of prehistoric remains
- provide dating evidence for the final phases of prehistoric abandonment
- gain an understanding of inner rampart construction

Students worked to date construction of the farm track – achieved with recovery of 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> century CE clay pipe fragments from a deposit truncated by its construction. A series of late post-holes, and heavily-corroded farm iron in the quarry scoop clays suggest post-Medieval pastoral/agricultural activity at the site. We were able to confirm that the stone wall along the crest of the inner rampart

was later than the Iron Age collapse deposits, and now believe this might be attributed to the Medieval period when a number of hillforts in Wales and Cheshire were utilised as deer park enclosures. Our historical archaeologist colleague – Mr. Spencer Smith -- is now researching this possibility.

This season also provided improved understanding of hillfort construction. Over the inner rampart, students continued excavation of Iron Age collapse deposits, to expose the original c. 5 m wide structure. This consists of faced stone walls at both the rear and front, revetting an earthen core. Construction of the front revetment wall appears ‘double skinned’ with a stone brash core – a close parallel exists at Eddisbury hillfort (Cheshire) in a section through the inner rampart (Varley 1938). Extending Area 1 over the outer rampart revealed further collapse deposits, the removal of which exposed an earthen feature with no revetment structure.

Work in the ditch area saw removal of all post-Iron Age deposits, exposing a single deposit extending from the ditch up the inner rampart gradient. We have yet to locate any ditch deposits/cut edges, which may suggest that we have an original ditch terminal/hillfort entrance way.

During survey work, the team was able to complete 7 hectares of the hillfort interior, identifying a small number of roundhouses. We plan to extend Area 1 across the quarry scoop to the west during our next season of research – a likely spot for a prehistoric roundhouse – to stratigraphically phase all four elements, and gain samples for dating.

### **STUDENT TRAINING**

The field school provides students with a solid understanding of the full range of practical skills involved in the archaeological process:

- topographical survey and geophysics
- principles of stratigraphy and formation processes
- single-context excavation and recording
- environmental sampling and processing
- technical archaeological drawing (plans/sections)
- archaeological photography
- finds identification, processing, conservation
- archaeological finds illustration

Off-site lectures included a full day of taught material with Dr. Rachel Pope, theoretical perspectives surrounding hillfort interpretation, and daily readings on regional sites and national scholarship.

Fieldtrips included a private viewing of the Bronze Age Mold Cape, visits to the Iron Age hillforts of Old Oswestry and Moel y Gaer Rhosesmor, excavations at Bodfari hillfort (with a site tour by Prof. Gary Lock), a contract excavation in Chester (including question and answer session with a professional archaeologist), Chester Roman amphitheatre and museum (with talk by excavator Gary Crawford-Coupe), and visits to three Medieval castles (with talks by Director Richard Mason).

In addition to their archaeological training, several of the IFR students went to the Welsh National Eisteddfod, where they spent the day shadowing relevant national heritage organisations. This unique opportunity was provided after the kind donation of tickets from the following: the National Museum of Wales, Royal Commission for the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW), Cadw (Welsh Assembly Government), CPAT (Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust), and DCC (Denbighshire County Council) – our thanks to all.