

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

## Fragile Heritage: the archaeology of the early Roman campaigns in Wales and the borderland

*Delivered at the 151st Annual Summer Meeting, at the Bala Lake Hotel, Llangywer*

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Fellow Cambrians! Or, in keeping with the theme of this evening's address, should I say '*Ave commilitiones!*' (Hail, fellow-soldiers!). I am immensely proud of the distinction that you have conferred upon me by electing me as your President, an honour that a lad born in the Swansea Valley would not have dreamed of 50 years ago. As I stand here I am acutely conscious of the shades of those distinguished Romanists who received this accolade; V. E. Nash-Williams whom I never met, and the late George Boon who encouraged my research into the realms of Romano-British archaeology, with particular reference to Wales.

It seems as though it was only yesterday that as a schoolboy I cycled to visit the remains of the stone south-east and south-west gates of the auxiliary fort at Neath and the well-preserved earthwork of the fort at Coelbren; eventually venturing further afield on foot from the parental car parked at Oxwich or Port Eynon to locate the caves and shell-middens described in J. G. Rutter's wonderful little handbook, *Prehistoric Gower*. The museum of the Royal Institution of South Wales in Swansea was a boyhood haven, with its curious mix of exhibits ranging geographically from Egypt to the Gower caves; it also possessed a splendid library. The then curator, Dr Kate Bosse-Griffiths, proved welcoming, though I hasten to add that I was only allowed to handle objects, such as those of late Romano-British and early medieval date from Minchin Hole, as an undergraduate. These were formative years for a youngster with a passion for the physical remains of our past, and above all for the study of that remarkable imperial entity which had expanded to embrace the greater part of these islands. It was the purchase of some off-prints from *Archaeologia Cambrensis* in a second-hand bookshop, if I remember correctly dealing with V. E. Nash-Williams' excavations at Prysgr Field, Caerleon, coupled with the publication of his *Roman Frontier in Wales* in 1955, which set me on a path towards an academic career. His *Frontier* proved particularly influential and certainly allowed far more meaningful visits to Roman military sites in Wales and the borderland, whilst what had proved hitherto puzzling classificatory labels for ceramic types, such as Drag. 29, Curle 11 and Knorr 78, were eventually explained by reference to the Prysgr Field report.

It does not seem long ago that a precocious teenager ordered a copy of Nash-Williams' book from W. H. Smith in Swansea. This focused largely upon permanent military sites whose remains were still visible, and almost exclusively upon those of Flavian and later date. There was precious little information on that much more shadowy phase of activity prior to the mid-70s of the first century AD; what we now term the era of pre-Flavian campaigning in Wales and the borderland. Indeed, only four pages were devoted to the description and discussion of sites which supposedly belonged to the campaigning phase (including that of the Flavian era). The physical remains totalled just three marching-camps, those classic indicators of the army in the field, and precursors to the consolidation of the Roman grip on the newly conquered population exemplified by the establishment of the network of legionary bases, auxiliary forts and fortlets. The camps described in the volume comprised the superimposed pair of Y Pigwn (Breckn.)

on the summit of Trecastle Mountain, and what we now know as the pre-Flavian campaign fort at Clyro (Radn.), then erroneously identified as a marching-camp. Not a single pre-Flavian permanent base could be identified, though a more assiduous assessment of the casual finds from Usk would probably have indicated occupation prior to the 70s of the first century AD.

For the student of the Roman army in Wales the 1950s represented a period of relative stagnation, at least in terms of discovery, if not of excavation. It was only in the 1960s that aerial reconnaissance, coupled with excavation in advance of development as well as on a purely research basis, began to throw wholly new light upon, and indeed revolutionize our perspective of the Roman military involvement with the communities of Wales and the borderland prior to the accession of Vespasian to the purple in AD 69. By the time that the second edition of *The Roman Frontier in Wales* appeared in 1969 the situation had changed dramatically. Permanent pre-Flavian occupation was now demonstrable at five sites; a legionary fortress at Usk, a large campaign fort at Clyro and forts at Abergavenny, Jay Lane (Herefords.) and Whitchurch (Shrops.), whilst no fewer than 16 marching camps were now known in Wales and the borderland. The editor, the late M. G. Jarrett had also contextualised these discoveries against the background of the sparse historical sources.<sup>1</sup>

Since then our knowledge of the archaeology of pre-Flavian campaigning in our region has burgeoned; no fewer than 21 permanent or semi-permanent sites of this era are now known (see Fig. 1) together with some 37 marching-camps (see Fig. 4) though a proportion of these must be belong to the Flavian period. The operational bases belong to two main types; overtly permanent in the case of the legionary fortresses at Wroxeter and Usk and the auxiliary forts such as Hindwell Farm, Walton (Radn.), and those sites variously termed ‘vexillation forts or fortresses’ or *aestiva* and *hiberna*, and considered to represent either the operational bases of army detachments either active in the field in the spring and summer months or over-wintering. Rhyn Park (Shrops.) and Clyro/Clifford (Radn./Herefords.) typify the genre, though there are other sites which fall into a grey zone such as the large pre-Flavian site beneath the castle at Cardiff.<sup>2</sup> The marching-camps speak for themselves as the primary indicators of Roman expeditionary forces pushing west out of what have been termed ‘gathering-grounds’ in the borderlands, with the best examples clustering about Wroxeter on a northern axis or from the Gloucester/Weston under Penyard (Herefords.) area south-west towards the lower reaches of the Wye and the Usk valley and thence towards the coastal plain of Monmouthshire and Glamorgan in the south. As we shall see the term ‘marching-camp’ itself embraces a category of site probably held for somewhat longer than the customary overnight halt.

A characteristic feature of all these military bases is that their defences were of earthwork, *very* insubstantial in the case of the marching-camps, and internal buildings—if such existed at all—were of timber and wattle-and-daub. The majority then have proved to be exceedingly fragile monuments. If not long built over as at Abergavenny, Monmouth and Cardiff their remains have either been swept away by agricultural practices or become so degraded as to leave scarcely any above-ground traces. We are, therefore, largely dependent upon the recognition of such sites in the form of crop-marks, the products of aerial reconnaissance in those frequently elusive ‘windows of opportunity’ which occur in the summer months when cereal crops are ripening or where pasture is parched in periods of drought.

I would like to illustrate this point with reference to a remarkable cluster of Roman military sites at Llanfor just on the north-eastern outskirts of Bala (Mer.)(Fig. 2). These typify the types of site which I wish to discuss and the condition in which we find the majority of the monuments which belong to the phase of early campaigning in Wales and the borderland.

To begin with there is nothing visible to the naked eye at Llanfor, though with the advantage of hindsight it is possible to make out the slight ‘roll’ in the grass which defines the perimeter of a large earth and timber fort enclosing 3.9 hectares (9.9 acres). But this is not the only monument of Roman date

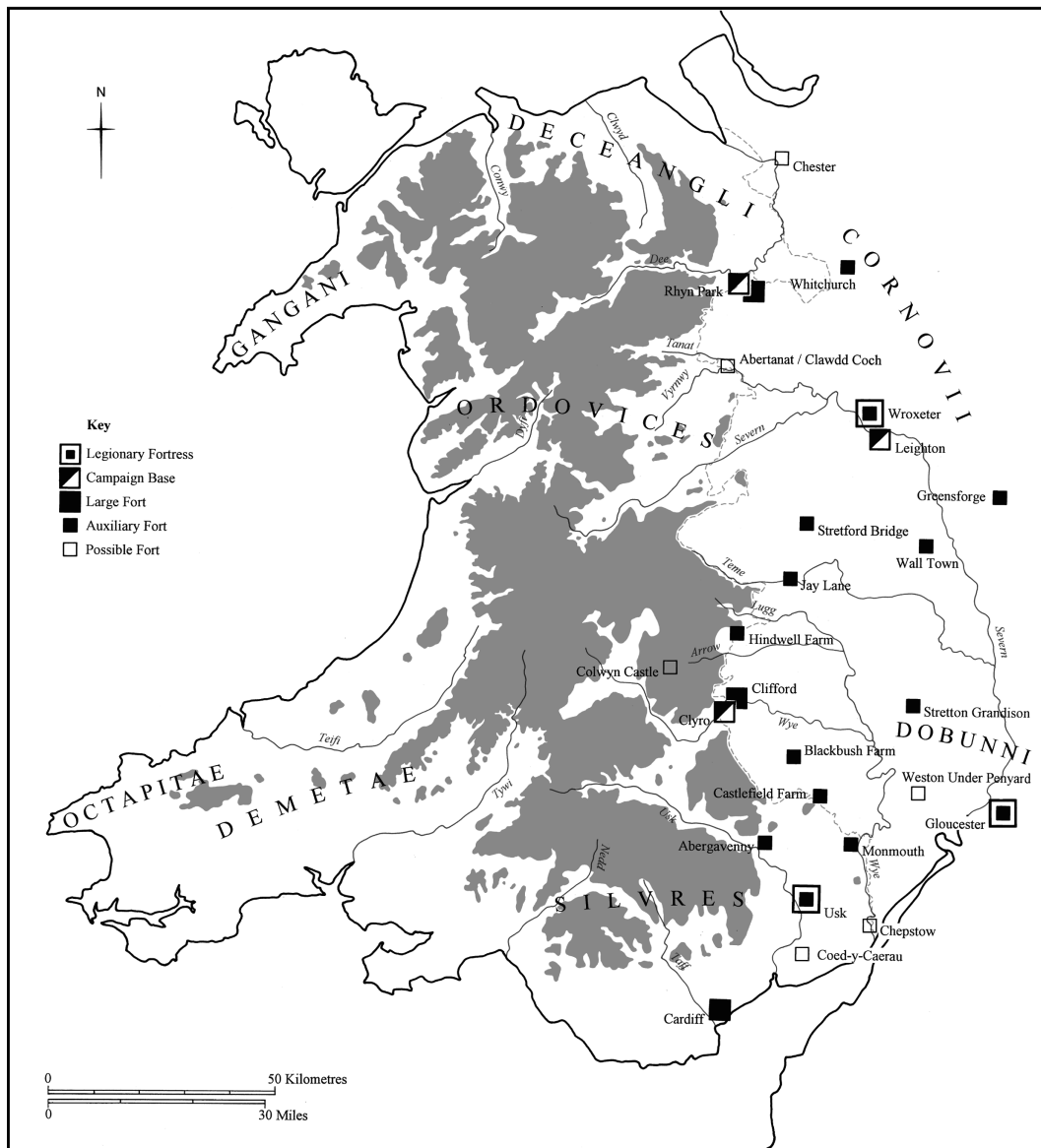


Fig. 1. Distribution map of pre-Flavian permanent and semi-permanent sites in Wales and the Marches.

on the site. The happy co-incidence of exceptionally dry weather in 1975–76 and intensive aerial reconnaissance allowed Professor J. K. St Joseph to record the remains of three sites here: firstly, the large fort, defined by a triple ditch system; secondly, immediately to its north-west a polygonal compound of some 1.2 hectares (3 acres) defined by a double ditch system and with three gates, defined by quartets of postholes, on the side facing east; and, thirdly, immediately to the north of the fort, and overlapped by

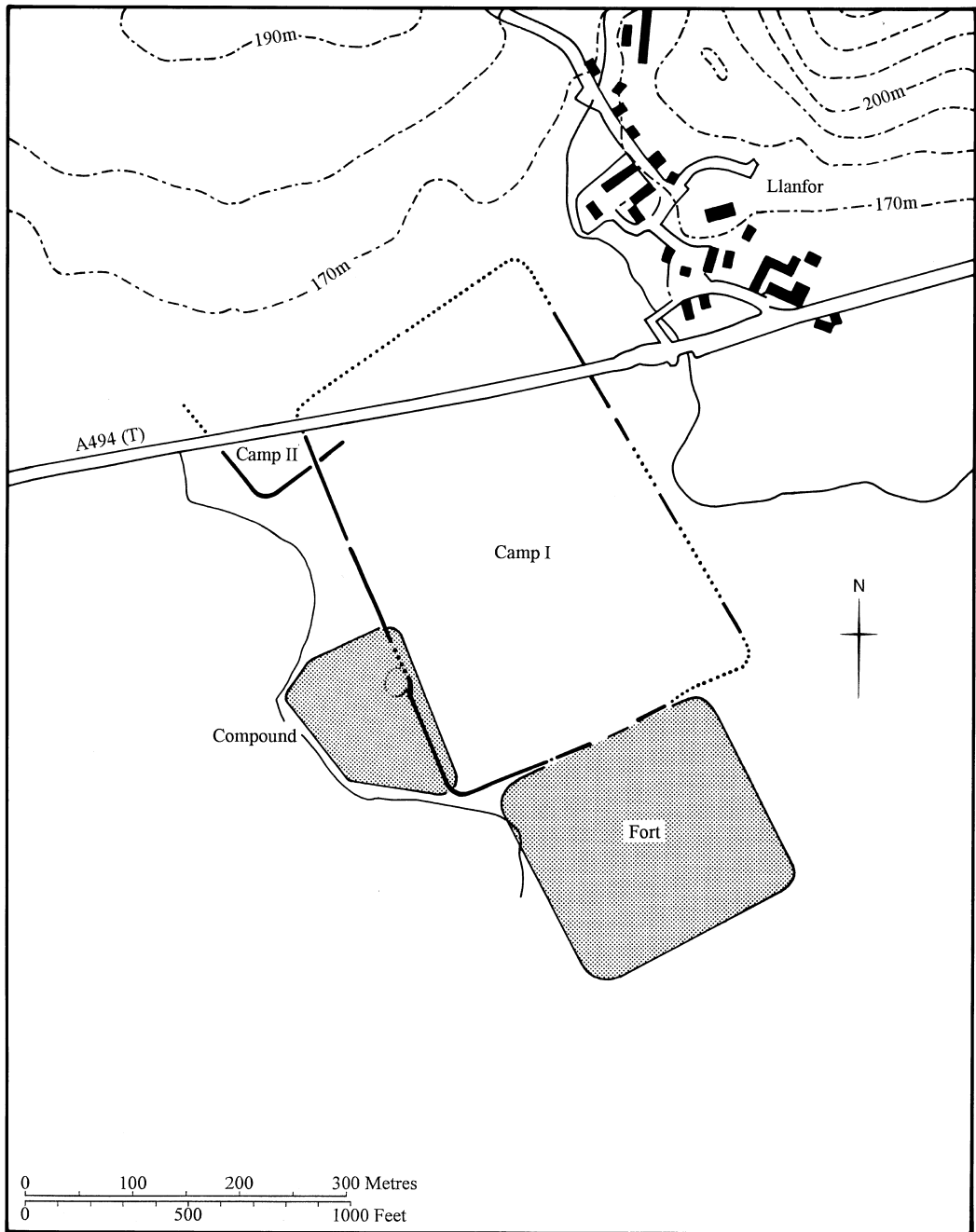


Fig. 2. The Roman military complex at Llanfor (Mer.).

the defences of the compound, a large, trapezoidal marching-camp enclosing 11.5 hectares (28.4 acres). The hosting of the National Eisteddfod on the site in 1997 led to a geophysical survey of the remains by Peter Crew, the Snowdonia National Park archaeologist, and the quite unexpected discovery of another marching-camp overlapping the northern defences of the camp found by Professor St Joseph. Although only part of the circuit of this camp is known its topographical situation suggests that it is much smaller than that found in 1975–76 and cannot have enclosed more than about 2 hectares (5 acres). Finally, in 2002 the site of the fort and its vicinity were subject to a further, and more detailed geophysical survey by the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust as part of the Cadw-sponsored *Roman Forts Environs Project*. This produced the complete plan of its interior (Fig. 3) and also demonstrated the existence of a *vicus* defined by pits, hearths and ephemeral wall-lines flanking roads leading to the north-east and north-west gates; the former representing the *porta praetoria*, or principal gate, showing that the fort faced north-east.

The exceptional clarity of the road and drainage system, and the wall-lines and postholes of buildings within the fort suggest that only one phase of building was involved, and that the occupation was probably of short duration. The garrison also seems to have been unusual insofar as there appear to have been at least 22 barrack-blocks within, each barrack being about 60 metres long, and, thus, substantially larger than those found within auxiliary forts in Britain which range in length from about 35 to 50 metres. Whilst the barracks at Llanfor are substantially shorter than the average to be found within legionary fortresses, even those of timber as at Claudian Colchester, where they are in excess of 70 metres long, or within the unfinished Flavian fortress at Inchtuthil, where they are *circa* 80 metres long, they are comparable to those within the Neronian legionary fortress at Exeter (57.5–61.6 metres long) and the Flavian fortress at Nijmegen in the Netherlands (*circa* 65 metres). It would thus seem that on grounds of barrack size Llanfor may have been designed to accommodate four legionary cohorts, whose slightly more cramped accommodation may reflect campaigning conditions. Again in keeping with the legionary theme we may point to the provision of extra rooms in the rear range of the fort's *principia*, again more in keeping with legionary planning, together with the single granary placed in the sinistral division of the *praetentura*, which could store half as much foodstuffs again as one of the larger granaries within the Neronian legionary fortress at Usk. The site would thus appear to be the only certain example of a 'vexillation fort', designed to accommodate legionaries alone and comprising detachments, which, if Mark Hassall's thesis on legionary pairing is correct will have been drawn from two legions.<sup>3</sup> Depending upon the dating of the fort, these would have either been drawn from *Legio XX Valeria* and *Legio XIV Gemina* or *Legio XX* and *Legio II Adiutrix*, the legions operating in the central and northern borderland in the Neronian-early Flavian period.<sup>4</sup>

The nearby polygonal compound, sometimes interpreted as a supply-base, but apparently devoid of internal structures which casts doubt on this interpretation, has as its nearest comparator the so-called 'temporary compound' close to the unfinished Flavian legionary fortress at Inchuthil in Scotland, almost certainly being built by men of *Legio XX*.<sup>5</sup>

The complex at Llanfor, of course, presently remains undated; the only excavations of which I am aware being test-pits dug prior to the holding of the Eisteddfod and a single trench dug by Professor St Joseph across ditch of Camp I, the larger of the two marching-camps. The lack of dating evidence means that we are in no position to contextualise the large fort and compound, with a view to placing them in either a pre- or early Flavian phase of military operations. It is also unfortunate that the other Welsh forts enclosing about 3.9 hectares (9.5–10 acres)—Llwyn-y-brain near Caersws (Mont.), and Dynefor Park (Carm.) near Llandeilo—cannot be closely dated. On the basis of the slight evidence from Dynefor Park where the large, primary fort appears to be early Flavian,<sup>6</sup> and a single sherd of Flavian samian ware from Llwyn-y-brain,<sup>7</sup> both sites appear to post-date the 50s–60s. The latter appears to have been given up in favour of a fort guarding the Severn crossing at Caersws, but whether it may have been established in the

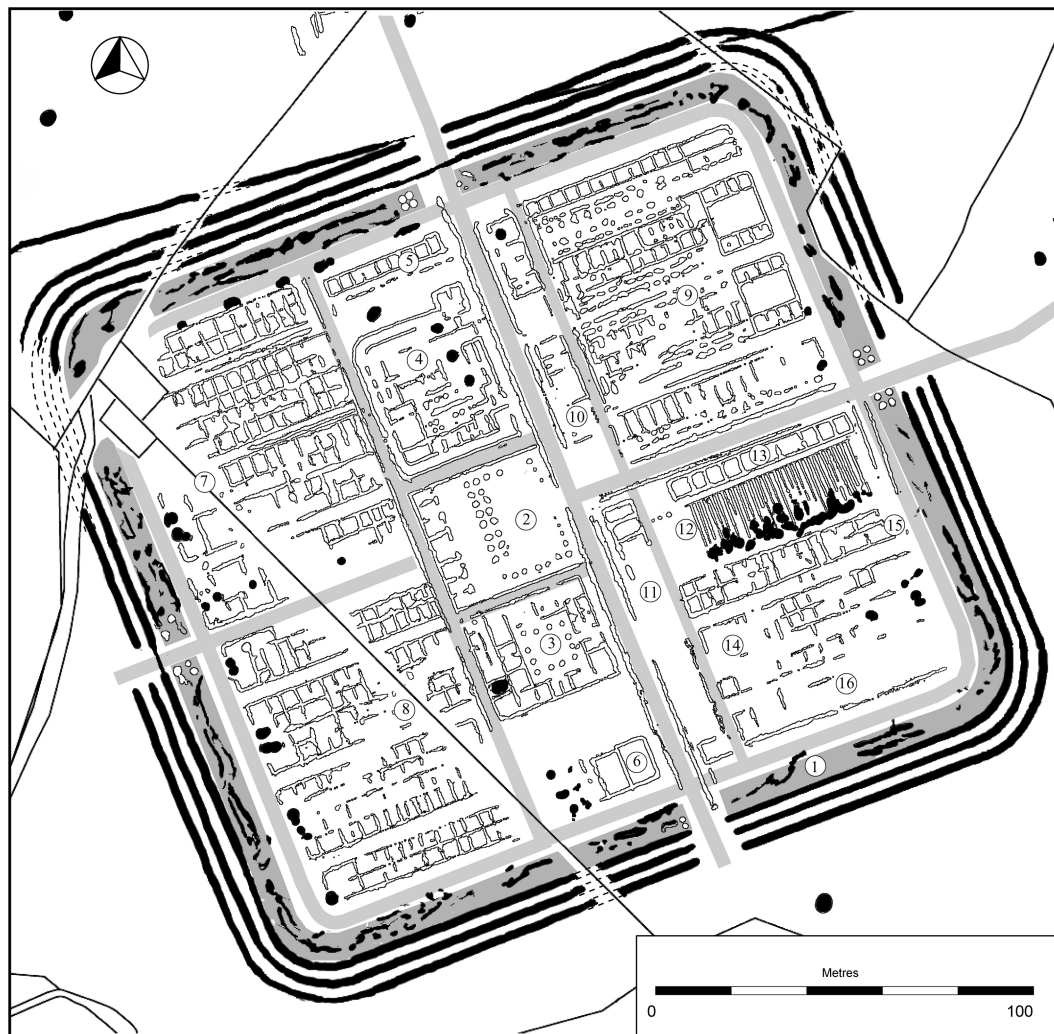


Fig. 3. The plan of the Roman Fort at Llanfor as revealed by geophysical survey.

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pre-Flavian era and then occupied into the early 70s is a question which can only be resolved by excavation. Personally, on the basis of comparable sequences from southern Scotland, I am inclined to place Llanfor and Llwyn-y-brain into an early Flavian context when large forts with strong garrisons were initially established in key strategic locations, to be eventually abandoned in favour of standard cohort forts once major operations were over. *Caer Gai* and *Caersws* will have replaced Llanfor and Llwyn-y-brain respectively.

Whatever the precise chronology, there is little doubt that here at Llanfor/*Caer Gai* we have a potentially extremely important informative sequence since future excavations upon the site of the large fort and polygonal compound may produce datable material which, in due course, can be compared with

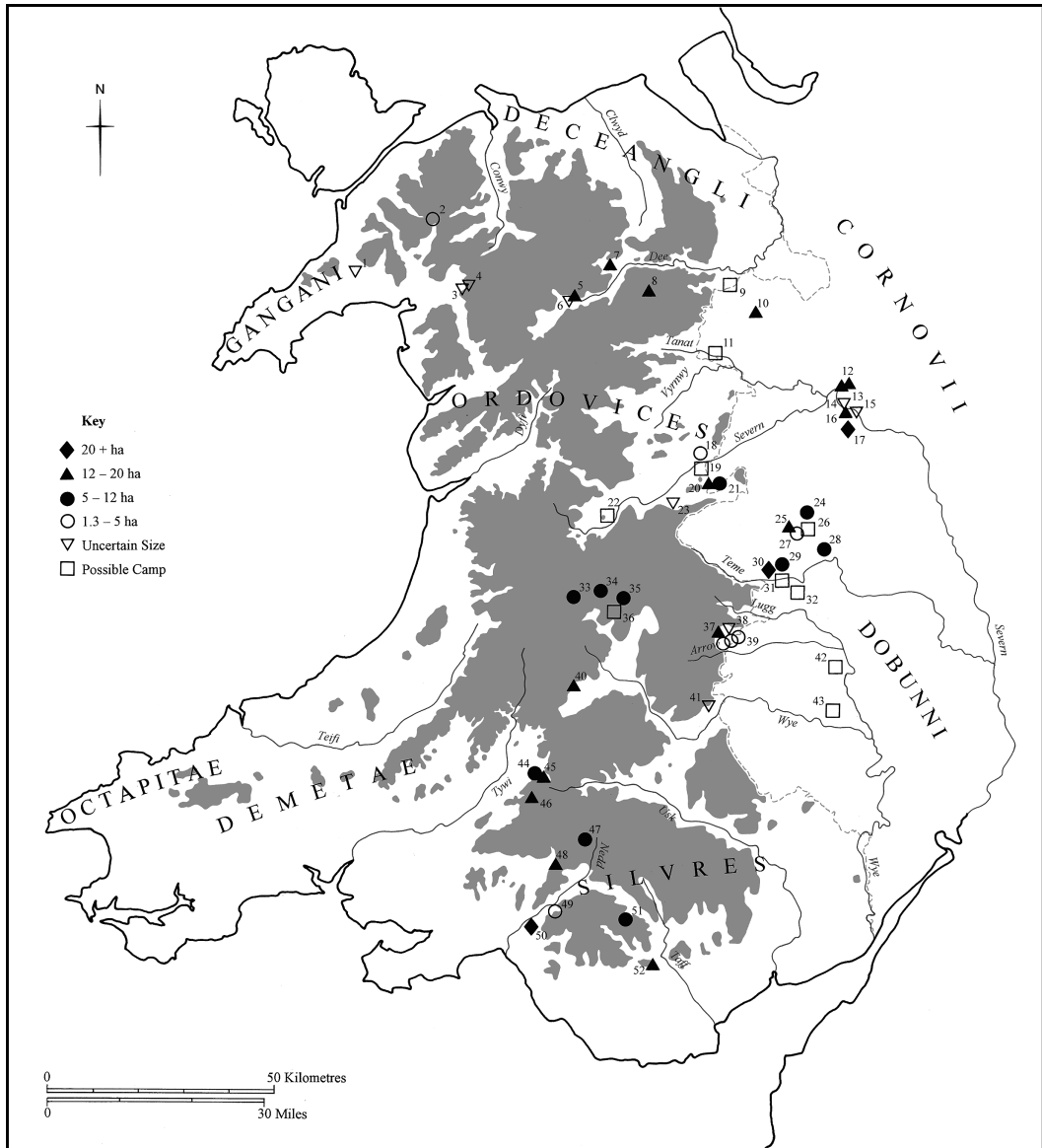


Fig. 4. Distribution map of marching-camps in Wales and the Marches.

- |                             |                          |                         |                      |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Derwin Bach              | 14. Ismore Coppice       | 27. Stretford Bridge II | 40. Beulah           |
| 2. Pen y Gwryd              | 15. Norton II            | 28. Bromfield           | 41. Boatside Farm    |
| 3. Tomen y Mur East I       | 16. Norton I             | 29. Walford             | 42. Ivington         |
| 4. Tomen y Mur East II      | 17. Cound Hall           | 30. Brampton Bryan      | 43. Byford           |
| 5. Llanfor I                | 18. Thornbury            | 31. Buckton Park        | 44. Y Pigwn II       |
| 6. Llanfor II               | 19. Forden I             | 32. Wigmore             | 45. Y Pigwn I        |
| 7. Penrhos                  | 20. Brompton I           | 33. Esgair Perfedd      | 46. Arosfa Garreg    |
| 8. Pen Plaenau              | 21. Brompton II          | 34. Cwm Nant            | 47. Plas y Gors      |
| 9. Rhyn Park                | 22. Dolwen               | 35. Trefal              | 48. Coelbren         |
| 10. Whittington             | 23. Glanmiheli           | 36. Dolau               | 49. Carn Caca        |
| 11. Abertanat / Clawdd Coch | 24. Upper Aficot         | 37. Hindwell Farm I     | 50. Blaen-cwm Bach   |
| 12. Uffington I and II      | 25. Stretford Bridge I   | 38. Hindwell Farm II    | 51. Twyn y Briddallt |
| 13. Attingham Park          | 26. Stretford Bridge III | 39. Walton I-III        | 52. Pen y Coedcae    |

that from other large forts such as Dynefor Park where future excavations may also lead to an improvement in what is presently a poor chronology for the earliest fort on the site.

Presently the relationship between the fort, the large and small marching-camp and the polygonal compound at Llanfor can only be established on a relative basis because they overlap (see Fig. 2). My tentative interpretation of the sequence is that Camp I is probably the earliest Roman construction on the site, representing a force of about 6–7,600 men moving south-west along the Dee valley, with the option thereafter of pushing in either a north-westerly or south-westerly direction. The axis of the camp, and particularly the direction in which it faces, may be significant in this respect, but more of that in a moment. Sometime after, the large fort and polygonal compound were built. The smaller Camp II which is displaced to the north-western margin of the premier camping-ground may either be contemporary with it, perhaps representing a ‘construction-camp’ for the troops engaged in building the fort and compound, or it could be later still, accommodating another force still operating in the field and sheltering in the shadow of the fort’s defences.

It is those military sites with the most fragile defences, scant traces of internal structures, and hitherto comparatively neglected in a Welsh context, that I wish to focus upon this evening: the so-called ‘marching-camps’. These may be classified as ‘a site temporarily occupied by a tented force on campaign’, although in some cases, it may be difficult to distinguish in functional terms between those of modest size, as, for example, in the case of Camp II at Llanfor, which may be construction-camps, camps built by soldiers engaged in specific projects such as felling timber or road-building, or practice-camps built by detachments on exercise, as in the case of those found to the east of the legionary fortress at Chester.<sup>8</sup> The movement of troops across country may also have involved the construction of small camps, some of which will have been situated close to permanent military installations. Nevertheless, the diagnostic feature of marching-camps are their much greater size, at up to 26.8 hectares (66.2 acres) enclosed, well in excess of the largest forts, which tend not to exceed 3.9 hectares (10 acres) in size, and a defensive perimeter of slight character comprising a rampart not exceeding 3–4 metres in spread width and 0.9 metres in height, and a single V-shaped ditch which rarely exceeds 1.8 metres in width and 0.8 metres deep. Although they possess the standard rectangular or sometimes square plan and rounded corners of the fortress or fort, they have none of their other characteristic features, namely substantial timber gates, corner and interval towers. Instead the gates, of which there may well be more than four, are simple gaps protected either by a *clavicula* (see Figs 5 and 8) or a traverse (*titulum/titulus*); sometimes a combination of both. Needless to say, they show no trace of buildings within; the troops being quartered in tents, aligned upon internal streets comprising strips of cleared ground.

The topographical setting of some of the marching-camps, as, for example, at Pen Plaenau in the Berwyn range, Y Pigwn I and II and Arosfa Garreg overlooking the headwaters of the Usk—all bleak, windswept heights—would not suggest an attenuated stay; exactly what we might expect of an army on the march, erecting a camp as an overnight halting-place. However, it may well be that the short-stay, overnight marching-camp, testifying to the passage of an army en route to a strategic objective, is actually in the minority, and that many were used for somewhat longer to judge by the evidence of successive firings of ovens discovered within the camp at Bromfield (Shrops.),<sup>9</sup> and more recently the extensively excavated Scottish camp at Kintore (Aberdeenshire).<sup>10</sup> As a result of protracted occupation, some, as may be the case at Rhyn Park (Shrops.),<sup>11</sup> had their defences substantially modified to suit their changed role, taking on a more ‘permanent’ appearance, though the interior remained devoid of permanent buildings and the soldiers were still housed in their leather tents.

Sometimes the same site may have been re-occupied, with the secondary force adapting the circuit either by cutting off a segment or enlarging the camp, depending upon the size of the force in question. Good examples of such reductions in the defensive perimeter can be seen at Tomen y Mur East (Mer.) (see



Fig. 6) and Uffington (Shrops.).<sup>12</sup> Sometimes, as is the case at Y Pigwn, a new camp was built within the perimeter of the old (see Fig. 5), or the new camp overlapped the older work, as at Llanfor. It is also possible that in some instances an earlier camp may have been re-used without any trace of modification to the defended perimeter.<sup>13</sup>

The earliest recorded and published examples of marching-camps in Wales were those on Trecastle Mountain, their plans being published in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* by Thomas Rees in 1854.<sup>14</sup> Thereafter, the discovery rate was nil until and after the Second World War when aerial reconnaissance produced an enormous crop of photographic prints, which when subject to archaeological scrutiny and a deliberate search for such sites in the late 50s and 60s, massively increased the number known, some still visible as earthworks, others as crop-marks. Despite the enormous and on-going contribution of aerial reconnaissance in this respect, it is manifest that the distribution of such sites is woefully incomplete, particularly if one assumes that camps of a particular size within a discrete geographical region represent the surviving evidence of a specific campaign, as is clearly the case in several instances in Scotland.

The problem, of course, is the fragility of their remains. A couple of ploughings is sufficient to destroy their defensive perimeter, to the effect that their survival in earthwork form is constrained to unimproved upland. For the most part they have long disappeared as a result of a range of human activities, principally agricultural, exacerbated as a result of nineteenth-century and later building and industrial activity, particularly, but not exclusively, along the easier routes of penetration such as the coastal strips of north and south Wales. Although aerial reconnaissance has played a key role in detecting those camps which are visible in crop-mark form, it is a matter of chance whether such sites will be detected or not since it



Fig. 5. Aerial view of the two superimposed marching-camps at Y Pigwn (Breckn.) from the north-west in 1988. The gates protected by *claviculae* are clearly visible. © *Cambria Archaeology* 88/51/32.



Fig. 6. Aerial view of the marching-camps at Tomen y Mur East I and II taken from the east in 1996. The north-east corners of the camps are clearly visible towards the bottom of the picture. *Crown copyright: RCAHMW 965066-44.*

is dependent upon the availability of aircraft and photographers operating in that critical window of opportunity when crop-marks become visible. It is also a case above all of recognition; whether that faint linear element which marks the ditch links up with a nicely rounded corner, or whether the gap for a gate is seen to be protected by a detached portion of ditch, the traverse, and recognised for what it is.

Many camps will remain undetected, or at least have an irritating propensity to remain invisible, despite weather and crop which would otherwise be regarded as eminently conducive to crop-mark formation; for example, Camp II at Llanfor (Mer.) and Hindwell Farm II (Radn.).<sup>15</sup> These were only detected through geophysical survey geared to other research questions. The result is that the distribution and density of sites is often the product of chance. Many more camps must have existed than we are seeing today, particularly in those areas where Roman historical sources, together with a relative abundance of pre-Flavian permanent military sites, suggest a phase of intensive campaigning followed by the establishment of early garrison posts. For example, operations against the Silures in the period AD 49–60 are inherently likely to have left a legacy of marching-camps along the south Wales seaboard from Gloucestershire at least as far west as the Tywi, if not beyond, though not a single example of a lowland camp is presently known in this region. And what of the operations that led to Roman forces reaching Anglesey in AD 60 and again in 77 or 78? No trace of the marching-camps that must surely echo these two operations have been found on the island or on the mainland opposite.



Fig. 7. Aerial view of the camp at Pen Plaenau from the south-east in 2003. *Crown copyright: RCAHMW 2003-5124-63.*

Certain archaeological research strategies may have unconsciously influenced the apparent distribution of known camps. For example, there has been a natural tendency to concentrate attention upon known military sites, such as auxiliary forts and their linking road systems, particularly in the uplands. Whilst geographical imperatives may have remained constant, as is all too clearly shown by the tendency for camps and permanent forts to lie in close proximity to one another, whilst roads will often have been laid out along those natural lines of communication which had been earlier exploited by the army on campaign, we must not get ourselves into a frame of mind which fails to explore other routes, as is graphically illustrated by the discovery of the remarkably preserved camp at Pen Plaenau (Denb.)(Fig. 7) in the fastness of the Berwyn range.<sup>16</sup> We may also note that the grouping or clustering of camps in some areas may not necessarily be the product of chance or a concentration of archaeological activity, but represent deliberate choice on the part of Roman generals, with tactical considerations coming into play. Such is the case in the area around Wroxeter, which seems to have acted as a ‘gathering ground’ and springboard for long-distance operations directed at the heart of Wales.

What sort of historical data may we extract from an examination of these sites, given that the extremely limited excavations undertaken upon them has produced no dating evidence of the conventional kind; and what can they tell us about the tactics and strategy employed to bring about the conquest of Wales and the borderland? To answer these questions we need to briefly consider the historical framework into which they are presumed to fit.

The earliest historical account that we possess recording hostilities between the Welsh tribal communities and Rome dates to AD 47, with Cornelius Tacitus' *Annals* recording an attack from without the province on Roman *socii* or allies: the response by the incumbent governor, Ostorius Scapula, being a campaign against the Deceangli of north-eastern Wales in the following year. His army is said to have nearly reached the sea before being forced to turn back because of a rising in Brigantia. The geographical scene then shifts swiftly south to the territory of the Silures, where hostilities had certainly broken out by 49, thereafter continuing under the leadership of Caratacus until his defeat two years later in battle in Ordovician territory at a site which probably lies somewhere in eastern mid-Wales. War continued against the Silures, and probably the Ordovices too, with some serious reverses for Roman arms: Scapula dying in office in 52. However, by the time that his successor Aulus Didius Gallus' governorship was over in 57, Rome had gained the initiative once more and was clearly committed to the offensive; the high point of operations being reached with Suetonius Paullinus' army forcing the passage of the Menai Strait in 60 or 61. This surely must imply that the Silures, at least, hitherto the Romans' most serious opponent, were now a spent force and their territory was either in the process of being garrisoned or ripe for such. However, these successful operations could not be capitalised upon because of the outbreak of the Boudican revolt in 60 or 61, a traumatic event which appears to have necessitated at least the partial abandonment of newly-won territory in Wales to allow a concentration of forces to defeat the rebels and, more significantly, garrison a swathe of disaffected territory in eastern England.

Our sources, such as they are, say nothing about the situation in Wales and the borderland in the period AD 61–73/4. There is no record of campaigning, indeed such would have been difficult in the earlier 60s. *Legio XIV Gemina* was withdrawn from Britain in 66 or 67; a clear signal that no operations were planned in the West, whilst the dynastic wars which followed the emperor Nero's suicide in 68, and the outbreak of hostilities in northern England in 69 following the overthrow of Cartimandua, the pro-Roman queen of the Brigantes, would have concentrated attention elsewhere. It was only when the Brigantes were subdued that the unfinished business of Wales could be attended to. Tacitus credits Julius Frontinus, governor from AD 73/4–77/78 with the conquest of the Silures, though archaeologists are inclined to attribute the conquest of most of Wales to him, since upon the arrival of his successor, Gnaeus Iulius Agricola in 77 or 78 we hear of the suppression of an Ordovician revolt. Soon thereafter Anglesey was the focus of Roman attention; a surprise attack on the island, without the aid of purpose-built boats, was successful and presumably rapidly followed by the garrisoning of Snowdonia, since it seems improbable that the island would have remained inviolate with the Snowdonia massif in Roman hands.

This is the last chronicled Roman military operation in Wales and the borderland. Whilst we cannot dismiss the possibility of native uprisings after AD 78, there is no literary evidence for such. The only camps that we might expect to be built by the Roman army thereafter fall into a very different category; namely those connected with the training of troops in the art of castrametation. Our marching-camps should, then, fall into a relatively short time-scale of some 30 years and relate to the campaigning chronicled for us by Tacitus, however imperfect and biased his history of the period might be.

Given the narrowness of the timescale, how might we approach the study of these marching-camps? As already mentioned limited, excavations has hitherto produced nothing which is intrinsically datable from any site. On the other hand we may be able to establish a relative sequence for some camps if they overlap, as at Llanfor and Y Pigwn (Fig. 5), or on the basis of their perceived relationship to features such as Roman roads or well-dated permanent military installations: that is, on the basis of proximity. Occasionally, camps can be proposed as part of a 'series' on the basis of size, morphology and spatial relationships, and if one can be broadly dated on the basis of the grounds cited above then its date can be transferred to others in the series. This procedure is not without its problems. Let me cite an example. Scotland has numerous examples of such camp 'series', variously attributed to campaigning in the

Flavian, Antonine and Severan period.<sup>17</sup> Two large camps at Dunning and Abernethy, both in Perthshire, and frequently grouped together on grounds of size, morphology and spacing have produced stratified pottery of Antonine date within the first named and of Flavian within the second.<sup>18</sup> The explanation may be that the former was actually re-used by a Roman force some 60 years after its building—a salutary warning that military operations could lead to re-use of a site. Unfortunately, in Wales and the borderland opportunities for cross-dating on the basis of a linkage in terms of size and plan, with the camps forming a series, are exceedingly few and we can only hazard a guess as to the chronology of the majority.

Location may hold a clue as to the possible chronology of some sites. For example, at least a proportion of the cluster of five or six camps in the vicinity of Wroxeter, a legionary base from *circa* AD 50/55 to about 90, most likely either pre-date the fortress, representing the gathering of armies in the area prior to its construction, or are broadly contemporary with its occupation; in both instances representing forces pushing west into what may have been Ordovician territory. Although the camps at Brampton Bryan and Walford further south in Herefordshire cannot be certainly linked with pre-Flavian campaigning, their proximity to the pre-Flavian sites at Brandon Camp and Jay Lane—a ‘stores-base’ in the first instance, an auxiliary fort in the second—suggest that this is their most likely date-span: a time when Roman armies were exploiting the minor river valleys debouching from the uplands of mid-Wales in operations against the Ordovices. The same may hold true of the two, or possibly three overlapping camps at Brompton close to the fort at Pentrehyling (Shrops.),<sup>19</sup> right on the border, though the only clue as to their relative chronology is the fact that the road-ditch leading to the east gate of the fort cuts that of Camp I. The fort, incidentally, is an early Flavian foundation. On similar grounds there is a presumption that the camps at Boatside Farm (Radn.), Hindwell I and II, and possibly Walton I–III are pre-Flavian by virtue of the proximity of the first named to the Neronian campaign base at Clyro, and the others to the Neronian fort at Hindwell Farm.<sup>20</sup>

However, over most of Wales, where camps are known to exist in close proximity to permanent installations, then their context appears to be overwhelmingly Flavian, and thus relate to the campaigns of Julius Frontinus. Such is the case at Derwin Bach (Caern.), close to the auxiliary fort at Pen Llystyn, or the two successive camps at Tomen y Mur East (Caern.), just south of that fort, or the single camps close to the forts at Caerau, near Beulah (Breckn.) and Coelbren (Glam.). The successive camps at Tomen y Mur East offer a number of alternatives in respect of their relationship to that well-known fort (see Fig. 6). Firstly, we may note that they do not occupy what is tactically the most advantageous ground, with good, all-round views. That is occupied by the fort, and as such could indicate that the fort was already in existence when the camps were built and that they should date to the early Flavian period or later. Secondly, and alternatively, it is possible that the forces which bivouacked here were too large to be accommodated in a camp built on the rise now occupied by the fort, by virtue of the presence of a steep-sided ravine which lies just to south-east of the fort. If such was the case then the camps could pre-date the fort. Thirdly, we may note that the road heading south from the *porta praetoria* of the fort traverses the site of both camps, possibly exiting via one of their gates. If such is the case then the camps must at least ante-date the road. As for chronological precision and the establishment of a *terminus post quem* only the excavation of the Romano-British barrow cemetery, aligned upon the road and which developed on the site of the camps, is likely to produce proof positive.

As at Tomen y Mur it is frequently the perceived relationship between camp and Roman road which holds a clue as to date. For example, the road from Forden Gaer to Wroxeter apparently clips the north-west corner of a small camp at Thornbury (Mont.), whilst the road alignment itself seems to point to an earlier fort which partly underlies that of Flavian and later date. At Beulah (Breckn.) and Cwm Nant (Radn.) the camps lie close to the line of the Roman road linking the forts at Caerau (Beulah), Castell Collen and Caersws, and it is possible that here we may be looking at a sequence of campaigning

followed by the establishment of garrison posts linked by road; all falling within the earlier Flavian period. Again, the isolated camp at Plas y Gors (Breckn.) not only appears to perpetuate the course of a campaign against the Silures from the Glamorganshire uplands towards the upper Usk valley—a route echoed by the Roman road running north-east from the fort at Coelbren to Brecon Gaer—but the road physically crosses the site, seemingly exiting via the site of its south-west gate and a Flavian date is thus highly probable.

The dating of marching-camps on the basis of proximity is, of course, a most inexact and dangerous exercise, since so much depends upon inference, supposition or educated guesswork as to their context and relationship to well-dated permanent installations and linking elements, such as roads. Many of the camps are isolated, and divorced from permanent military installations or roads, as at Bromfield, Uffington and Whittington in Shropshire, Pen Plaenau and Penrhos in Denbighshire, Pen y Gwryd (Caern.), Glanmiheli (Mont.), Esgair Perfedd and Trefal in Radnorshire, Arosfa Garreg (Carm.) and Blaen-cwm Bach, Carn Caca, Pen y Coedcae and Twyn y Briddallt in Glamorgan. Their dating is thus wholly uncertain. However, on grounds of size, morphology and spacing some may constitute a ‘series’; thus recording the passage of an army. One such ‘series’ begins well within the Marches at Uffington (Shrops.); thence probably via a missing site to Whittington; another missing site, then Pen Plaenau, and Penrhos which presently constitutes the most westerly of this ‘series’ of camps (see Fig. 4).

The majority of the known camps are too disparate in size and frequently too geographically far removed from one another to be inter-linked. Though a number of those in upland Glamorgan, Carmarthenshire, Radnorshire and Caernarvonshire may relate to different stages of the Flavian conquest, the jury is still out as to where they fit into the story. Judicious excavations of ditch terminals, where rubbish might be disposed, and the examination of internal features such as pits and ovens, located by means of geophysical survey, may possibly redress this rather unpromising picture at some time in the future. But in the meantime we shall have to make do with supposition and inference.

We have already noted that on grounds of size and morphology some camps may possibly be linked, within specific geographical contexts. Orientation too may also be a significant factor since our ancient military treatises specify the direction in which a camp should face. Vegetius, writing his *Epitoma Rei Militaris* in the last quarter of the fourth century AD, states that:

The gate which is called *praetoria* should either face east, or the direction which looks towards the enemy, or if on the march it should face the direction in which the army is to proceed (Vegetius I, 23).<sup>21</sup>

Pseudo-Hyginus’ *De Munitionibus Castrorum* (possibly dating to the mid-second century AD) states that:

The *porta decumana* is set at the highest point so that the area is dominated by the camp. The *porta praetoria* should always look towards the enemy. (Hyginus 56).

Though Vegetius states that if no specific circumstances prevailed then the camp should face east, it is the possible line of march, ‘the direction in which the army is to proceed’, that most concerns us here, though we may note that a recent analysis of camps in Wales and the Marches indicates that as many as 49% faced east, which suggests that Vegetius’ dictum was regularly adhered to.<sup>22</sup> On topographical grounds one gains the distinct impression that when the position of the camp gates can be established with absolute certainty, thus allowing the identification of the *porta praetoria*, the majority of camps do indeed appear to have faced the real, or intended direction of advance. However, in some instances when it came to the lay-out of the camp no attention seems to have been paid to the intended line of march or

the east-facing dictum. The classic example of such is Pen Plaenau, whose *porta praetoria* faces southwest, though geographical and tactical considerations suggest that the army in question was moving in either a north-westerly or south-easterly direction; with the former being the most probable.

The plan of a camp is also an important factor in terms of trying to determine possible inter-site relationships.<sup>23</sup> In the majority of cases it was a rectangular plan that the military surveyors were aspiring to, the end product being only defective, as at Pen Plaenau and Llanfor I, because of the inability to align and correct sight-lines across large areas, especially when they were not intervisible. Remarkably elongated plans, such as that of the very large camp at Blaen-cwm Bach (Glam.), where the ratio of the sides is 3:1 as opposed to the more common 5:4 or 3:2, is simply the product of the topography. As for plans which depart from the rectangular or squarish norm, two camps specifically laid out as parallelograms are known: Pen y Gwryd and Plas y Gors. The plan of the former is clearly the product of topography, but that of the latter is inexplicable. The distance between the two negates any link, of course.

The most remarkable departure from the standard form occurs at Twyn y Briddallt (Glam.) where the camp occupies the irregular end of a ridge, and as a result produces a part-sinuuous circuit hugging the contours in a manner reminiscent of a hillfort. Why this should be so when a rectilinear form could have been achieved is unknown.

The number of gates and type of gate defence is also an important consideration in respect of camp chronology and possible inter-site links. Gates are normally protected by either a *clavicula* or a *titulum/titulus* (traverse). If the site has been reduced to a crop-mark then the *clavicula*, comprising an inward-curving length of rampart and lacking a ditch, will, of course, have been destroyed, though in the case of the traverse, the ditch should be still visible. Most sites in Wales and the borderland, where the gate type can be established, seem to have been provided with *claviculae*, a type of defence which was very common in the first century AD but seems to have gone out of use before the middle of the second.<sup>24</sup> Camps whose gates were protected by traverses are presently constrained to Blaen-cwm Bach (Glam.) and Brampton Bryan (Herefords.), two sites which are widely separated in geographical terms, but the true total of camps equipped with traverses may have been much greater since the crop-mark record is frequently of insufficient quality to pick up the relatively short length of its ditch.

What do the camps have to tell us about the size and composition of the forces employed in the conquest years? It has long been agreed that the size of the marching-camp is closely related to the size and composition of the force occupying tented quarters within, although other factors may also come into play in determining its layout; topography being the most significant. Unfortunately no formula for calculating the relationship between size and the force camped within has found universal acceptance, and the density has been variously calculated from as few as 192 to as many as 480 men acre (0.4 hectare). Personally, I am inclined to accept Gordon Maxwell's recently suggested figure of 194 men per acre, with due allowance for the fact that the camps were probably planned to accommodate paper-strength units, and that the totals should be regarded as maxima.<sup>25</sup> Changes in the ratio of cavalry to infantry would also require an adjustment to the figure, as may the ratio of legionaries to auxiliaries.

A tendency for camps to cluster about particular size-ranges has also long been evident, and these should reflect specific norms in terms of the size and composition of the force quartered within. These size clusters are common to all British camps, though there are differences in Scotland where camps of up to 70 hectares (173 acres) are encountered, whilst the largest to be found in Wales and the borderlands are no larger than 25 hectares (64 acres), the largest Scottish sites representing field armies of at least double the size of their Welsh and borderland equivalents. Our clusters total five and range from 3–6 hectares (7.5–15 acres), 6–10 hectares (15–24.5 acres), 12.5–15.5 hectares (27–38 acres), 16.5–19 hectares (41–47 acres) and 23–27 hectares (57–66.5 acres).<sup>26</sup> What this means is that a camp such as

Thornbury in the first cluster could house some 700–960 men, Esgair Perfedd in the second some 3,200–4,000 men, Beulah in the third some 7,000–9,000 men, Arosfa Garreg in the fourth some 8,600–11,300 men and Blaen-cwm Bach in the fifth 13,000–17,000 men.

It is instructive to compare these figures against those of royal armies deployed against the Welsh princes in the later thirteenth century. For the war of 1277 Edward I could dispose of a maximum of 15,500 men. For the war of 1282–83 about 20,000 men were raised, whilst for operations against the rebels in 1287 and 1294–95 he raised 11,000 and 31,000 men respectively.<sup>27</sup> It is important to note that these are overall numbers; they were neither in being at one time nor were they ever deployed in one place. For the most part in England and Wales, but not Scotland, the forces employed on campaign by Roman generals in the first century AD generally ranged between groupings of 3,000–5,000, 6,000–7,500 and 7,700–9,000 men. It seems that it was only in exceptional circumstances that larger forces of some 11,000–13,000 were put into the field.

It is noteworthy that the largest camps tend to lie in the borderlands, the natural ‘gathering ground’ for armies that were marshalled prior to being launched against the Welsh tribes. The exceptions are upland camps such as Blaen-cwm Bach (accommodating between 13,000 and 17,000 men), anomalous in every way since it is the biggest camp in Wales at 26.8 hectares (66 acres), and camps such as Arosfa Garreg, Pen Plaenau and Penrhos with holding capacities of 8,500–11,000 men; the last two being possibly part of a long-distance campaign originating well within Shropshire (see above). The remaining camps are of modest size, capable of accommodating the equivalent of a legion and its auxiliary complement (*circa* 6,000–8,000 men) as at Beulah, Llanfor I and Coelbren, or the much smaller camps such as Esgair Perfedd and Pen y Gwryd with capacities for 2,000–4,000 men. The last two either represent the splitting of a larger force into separate elements, or the tactical usage of modest forces best suited to deal with hostile forces in true upland environments.

Is it possible to say anything meaningful about the routes taken and the tactics employed by Roman armies in the conquest of the tribal communities of Wales and the borderlands on the basis of the presently known distribution of marching-camps? The answer must be a cautionary yes. We must remember that our perception of the routes and distances covered by Roman expeditionary forces, implicit in the so-called ‘temporary’ nature of the sites themselves, is governed by their present distribution, itself a function of their survival as earthworks or their recognition as crop-marks, whilst the relationship between sites has been traditionally approached on the basis of comparisons of size, plan (including gate type) and geographical proximity, on the grounds that, theoretically at least, each campaign should have left its traces in the form of marching-camps. The partial survival of the evidence is of paramount concern. Though some camp groupings may be valid, we must be careful that in attempting to group camps of similar plan and proportions into the context of specific operations we do not over-rationalise what may be a much more complex scenario.

We should not underestimate the versatility of the Roman army on campaign: instead of one, several start-points may have been used for one operation; the splitting of forces may have been a common practice, and units may well have been of differing strengths and composition. Again we may look to medieval parallels, as in 1114 when three English armies converged upon Tomen y Mur; one under Gilbert FitzRichard from south-west Wales; another under Henry I from either Shrewsbury or Oswestry, and a third under the earl of Chester from that city.<sup>28</sup>

Initially there may have been problems in formulating strategy in order to bring hostiles to battle, the collection of data about distances and topography being an on-going process. Roman armies did not advance blindly, much reliance being placed upon local guides and *exploratores* to work out approximate routes. The result is the location of some marching-camps in what we can only describe as peculiar locations and campaigning routes that seem to defy commonsense. A good example is that of the newly



discovered camp at Pen Plaenau,<sup>29</sup> echoing a route from the Shropshire lowlands, over the watershed of the Berwyn and into the upper reaches of the Dee. We are inclined to think of easier, natural routes into the heart of Wales via the coast or the major river valleys, and may be surprised at the choice of a minor valley such as that of the Ceiriog and a route over the bleak Berwyn; but this was also the route followed by Henry II's campaign of 1165, with its starting-point at Oswestry.<sup>30</sup> The location of the camp at Glanmiheli (Mont.) suggests another minor river valley, that of the Miwl, was being used, whilst the Lugg and Arrow valley routes into eastern mid-Wales is explicable by virtue of the absence of a major river valley in that region until the Wye is reached about 12–25 kilometres (7–15 miles) to the south.

A key factor which needs to be addressed in attempting to comprehend the possible relationship between camps, but on a strictly regional basis and long central to their study, is the pace of advance of the campaigning forces that built them, as well as their comparative size and plan. Ten to fifteen Roman miles a day is likely to represent the norm in terms of movement of an army, particularly in the uplands. Let us look at some examples, beginning with some of the smallest camps in Wales.

Those at Derwin Bach (3.7 hectares), Pen y Gwryd (4 hectares) and Llanfor II (*circa* 2 hectares) in north-west Wales are uniformly small, and cannot be certainly linked to a single operation, though Derwin Bach and Pen y Gwryd lie within 25 kilometres (15 miles) of one another.

In mid-Wales the size and proximity of the camps at Esgair Perfedd (6.35 hectares), Cwm Nant (7.3 hectares) and Trefal (8.5 hectares) to one another has given rise to speculation as to their possible linkage. As far back as 1969 it was thought that Esgair Perfedd and Cwm Nant represented the passage of a battle group moving west, climbing out of the upper Wye valley en route for Cardigan Bay. The discovery of Trefal in 1987, only 5 kilometres from Cwm Nant and 10 kilometres from Esgair Perfedd, complicated matters, as did the discovery of a Roman road running north-south close to Cwm Nant. All three should now be considered as representing different operations, or at the very least two separate campaigns.<sup>31</sup> Esgair Perfedd still echoes an operation heading west, the eastern orientation of the camp either conforming to the dictates of the military manual or simply a shelter-seeking exercise. Cwm Nant has a northerly orientation, and indicates a force moving in that direction, whilst Trefal to its south probably indicates an army pushing north up the Dulas valley towards the Severn.

In south Wales the divergence in size between Y Pigwn II (10.3 hectares) and Plas y Gors (9 hectares) is not that great when difficult camping ground within the former is taken into consideration, and the camps are only sited some 15 kilometres (10 miles) from one another. But the similarities end there. Y Pigwn II's position and south-westerly orientation suggests a force moving in that direction, whilst Plas y Gors' alignment and proximity to the road linking the forts at Coelbren and Brecon Gaer strongly suggests a force moving in the opposite direction.

It is evident that the attempt to link the marching-camps on grounds of size and distance from one another into what we imagine constitutes a series, is in many ways an unsatisfactory, as well as a risky exercise. With the exception of Uffington, Whittington, Pen Plaenau and Penrhos, no other convincing series has emerged. This does not mean that other series did not exist. Rather it reflects the imperfect nature of the evidence. We must also be aware of the possibility that camps placed into two distinct groups in terms of size, could relate to the same campaign; units having been split off from a larger body, or even affecting a conjunction. The camps may thus reflect a much more diverse and complex movement of troops in terms of field operations even within the context of one campaigning season.

Although the marching-camp is normally viewed as an indicator of the transient passage of a Roman army, safely ensconced behind its rampart and ditch, eloquent testimony to more than a generation of warfare in Wales and the borderland, it may also be viewed as an instrument of aggression, offering a secure base from which the advance was continued, or from which smaller-scale operations might be conducted over a span of either days or even weeks; the site being only abandoned, according to our

ancient authors, when the ground became too fouled with human and animal ordure. In such a situation supplies to sustain the army in the field could be safely stockpiled within, when that force away from its base for weeks at a time required regular re-supply.

The Roman emphasis was upon bringing a war to a swift conclusion by fighting a decisive battle, but if the enemy would not oblige, and forces which had no wish to fight in such a manner were very hard to engage, then the alternative was the devastation of hostile territory. The Roman army practised a particularly brutal form of economic warfare through the destruction of property and livestock, in the expectation of goading the enemy into offering battle or forcing them to sue for peace. Such would have presented a massive blow to a fragile economy, at the same time instilling fear into the hearts of the opposition thereby breaking the will to resist. It was probably out of such temporary bases (*aestiva*) that such operations were conducted. We can only speculate upon the effects of such punitive operations, conducted from marching-camps, upon the native communities. Certainly their building symbolized the inexorable advance of the Roman army, conveying the impression that it was unstoppable and that capitulation was the only sensible course of action. We might well consider that camp building was part and parcel of Roman strategy to intimidate the enemy; the appearance of force being just as important as its implementation.

Despite large gaps in the evidence, the distribution of the surviving marching-camps can tell something us about Roman strategy campaigning routes and possibly even something of the nature of the opposition. The north and south coasts must surely have served as campaigning corridors, though the northern is presently bereft of such evidence, and it is only the southern route which provides data in the form of camps such as those at Blaen-cwm Bach, Twyn y Briddallt, Pen y Coedcae, Carn Caca and Coelbren, admittedly all situated in the Glamorganshire uplands, though representing part of a story which must surely begin in the lowlands. With the exception of Coelbren their location away from known Flavian forts suggests that they could be early, but whether pre- or early Flavian is presently impossible to determine.

The major river valleys must also have played a key role as natural corridors of penetration from east to west to judge by the incidence of camp clusters near Wroxeter, the natural gathering ground for Roman armies thrusting into mid-Wales via the Severn, whilst camps such as those at Y Pigwn and Arosfa Garreg in the upper reaches of the Usk are indicative of Roman armies pushing west and thence south-west via the Tywi into the territory of the Demetae, though no camps are yet known to the west of the above. In north Wales the upper Dee, probably reached by a number of alternative routes, offers a path towards Snowdonia, as is indicated first by the camp at Penrhos near Corwen, thence on to the camping ground at Llanfor near Bala. The camps located near the forts at Tomen y Mur and Pen Llystyn most probably belong to the closing stages of the Flavian operations. Pen y Gwryd's location, blocking as it does routes via the Llanberis Pass to the north-west and via the Glasllyn to the south-west, its builders probably having come from the east, coupled with its relatively small size, 4 hectares (10 acres), indicates something of the broad strategy behind its location, as well as the modest force required to operate in difficult country during the reduction of the natural fortress into which hostiles had retreated, again probably in the Flavian period.

It is also clear that what are presently regarded minor river valleys had far greater significance as access routes for the Roman army. Such is the case with the Teme and the Lugg, whilst the camps at Walton indicate the use of the Summergill Brook as a route not only to secure the fertile Walton Basin, archaeologically demonstrable to be a centre of population, but also to penetrate beyond it, around the southern margin of the Radnor Forest; the force then either being directed south-west towards modern Builth Wells, or north-west towards the Ithon valley and the region of the upper Wye. The same region could also be reached from the Teme, as is indicated by one of the largest camps at Brampton Bryan, 23



Fig. 8. Aerial view of the south-east side of the camp at Cwm Nant (Radn.) in 1967. The two rounded corners and the clavicular gate show up clearly as an upstanding bank. The whole side has now been destroyed. © Cambridge University Committee for Aerial Photography ASQ 83.

hectares (57 acres), and then passing over the headwaters of the river Aran. In this instance such operations could have been planned to sever links between Rome's chief adversaries in the region, the Silures and the Ordovices. Further to the north the camps at Glanmiheli and Brompton seem to indicate a route from the region of Stretford Bridge via the valleys of the Miwl, Onny and Camlad, but we can only speculate as to the objective. The upper Wye seems to have been a critical region as is graphically illustrated by the relative proximity of the camps at Esgair Perfedd, Trefal and Cwm Nant, where we have

noted several operations are indicated, one of which certainly utilised the natural north-south corridor later utilised by the builders of the Roman road.

Whilst the presence of marching-camps is plausibly indicative of first century AD communities who were at least some stage in their history hostile to Rome, their absence need not necessarily indicate the reverse. Indeed, as I have attempted to demonstrate, the partial survival of the evidence ensures that the conclusions that we reach are necessarily tentative in all respects.

Although their remains are for the most part visually unprepossessing the marching-camps are an exceedingly important, indeed remarkable archaeological record of the Roman army's operations against the communities of Wales and the borderlands in the first century AD. They are a visual snapshot of military campaigning spanning only some 30-odd years, their historical value being enhanced by virtue of their fragility. I would like to conclude by way of illustrating the point with reference to the remains of the camp at Cwm Nant (Radn.). Despite the fact that it is a Scheduled Ancient Monument the camp has now been effectively obliterated by ploughing. The whole of the south-eastern side, with its splendidly preserved clavicular gate, clearly visible on aerial photographs taken in 1994 (Fig. 8), had been destroyed sometime between this date and a site visit by the writer in August 1999. By way of compensation the remarkably well-preserved camp at Pen Plaenau (Fig. 7) was only discovered in September 2003. We may anticipate other exciting discoveries in the future; each one, irrespective of whether it is only represented by upstanding lengths of slight, disjointed earthwork or the crop-mark of a vanished military ditch, has the propensity to add to the complex tale of the Roman conquest. But let us earnestly hope that such wanton destruction of our fragile heritage as occurred at Cwm Nant will never be repeated.

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