

The Roads to the Roman Crossing at Chepstow



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Lynne Davies, PhD

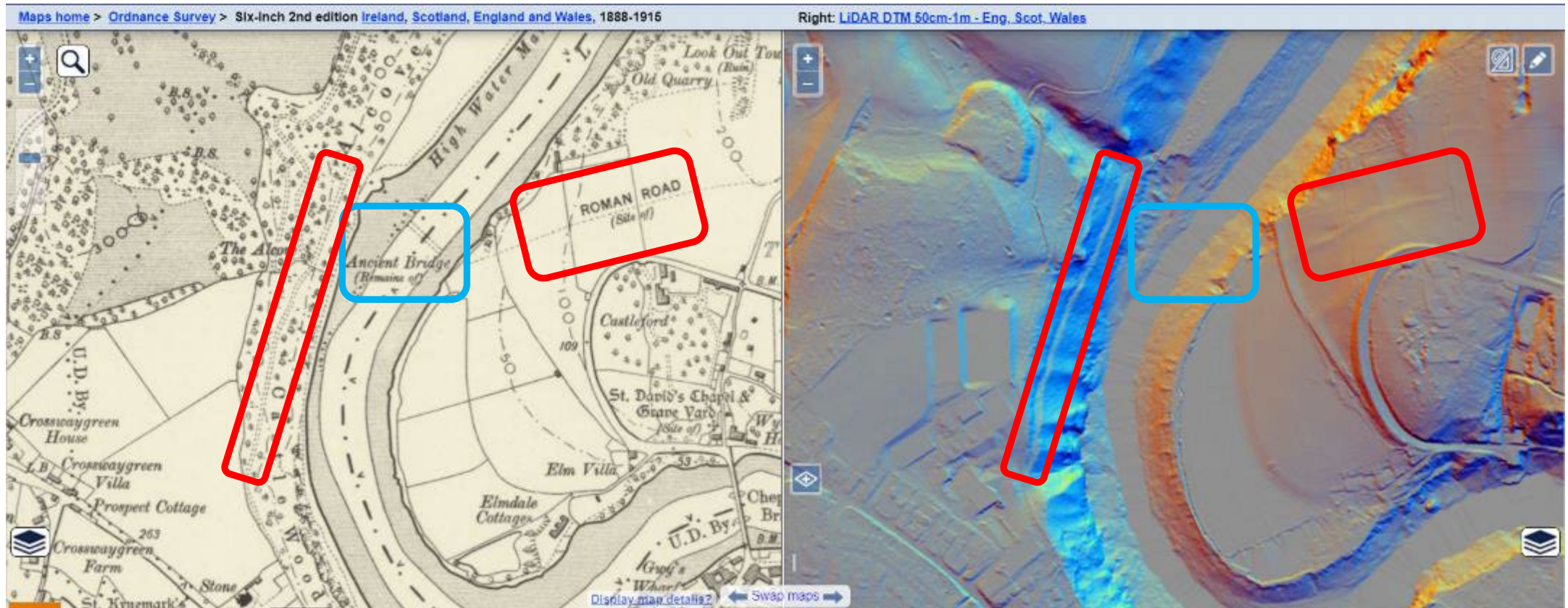
Chepstow Archaeological Society / Cymdeithas Archeolegol Cas-gwent

Cardiff University MSc student, Archaeological Sciences

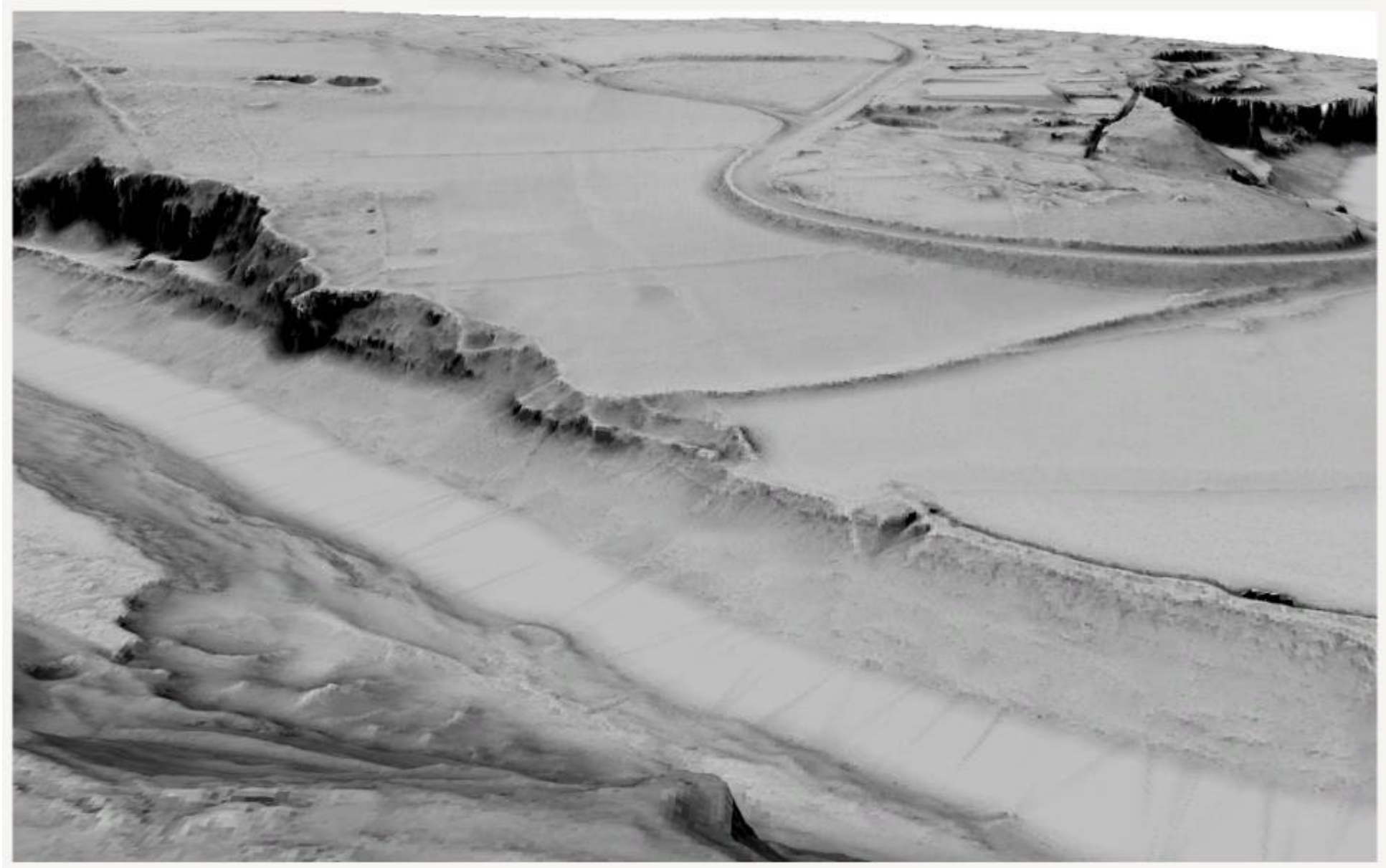
The Roads to the Roman Crossing

According to tradition the bridge over the Wy was formerly half a mile above the present bridge, at a place called Eddis, nearly opposite to the alcove in Piercefield grounds, and seemingly in a direction leading towards an ancient encampment which encircles the grotto. The remains of the abutments are said to have been visible within the memory of some of the present generation; and vestiges of a pitched road were recently found in digging near the spot.

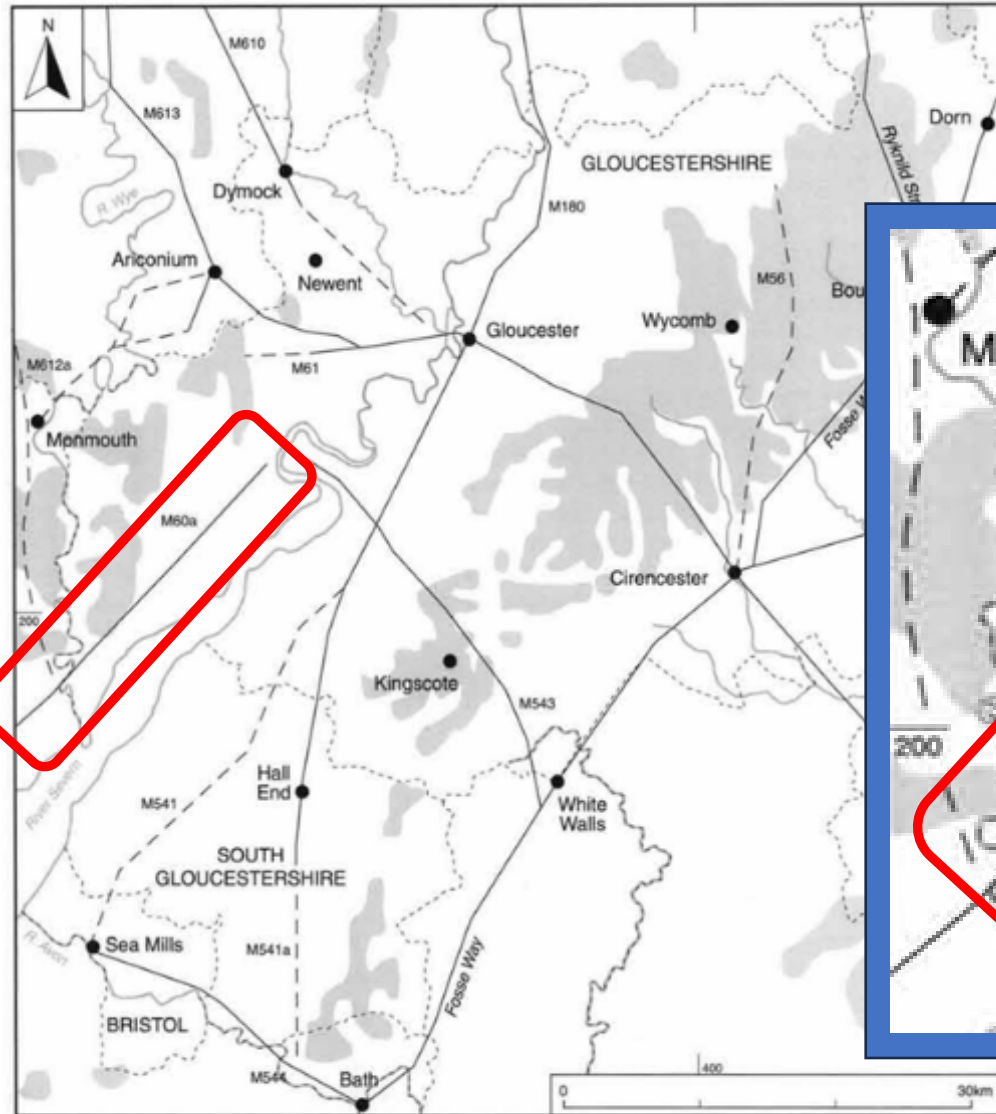
William Coxe, 1801



Roman Road – Gloucestershire side



Roman Road – Gloucestershire side



Ivan Margary's
Roman road system:
RR60a

HER 5061 DESCRIPTION

- Strata Julia (RR60a) constructed by Julius Frontinus [Governor c.74-78AD] – scourge of the Silures!
- Ormerod (c.1840) "...a mass of stoneforming a roadway 10ft wide....at Tutshill the older road, visible at various points beside the turnpike between Gloucester and Chepstow, diverged in a westerly direction towards the Wye."

Fig. 1: Roads and Major Settlements. The roads are numbered according to I.V. Margary, Roman Roads in Britain (1967)

Roman Road – Gloucestershire side

Extreme Archaeology (2003) – a ‘Time Team’ spin-off

- Highlighted challenges of archaeology on the tidal river
- Big thank you to SARA for helping CAS to over-come these challenges!



2003 study identified features associated with the Roman Road

- Structure around 50cm below surface, around 6m wide
- Survey showed road going 20m up from river into field, then diverging to route of RR60a



Roman Road – Gloucestershire side excavations (2003)



- Limestone surface uncovered
- “a bit rough for a Roman road”?
- No dateable finds, could be mediaeval or later farming
- Quartz river pebbles on surface - suggest deposits from flood events?
- Positioning next to 1st C AD bridge timbers suggests link



Roman Road – Monmouthshire side

Where did the RR60a go from the crossing?

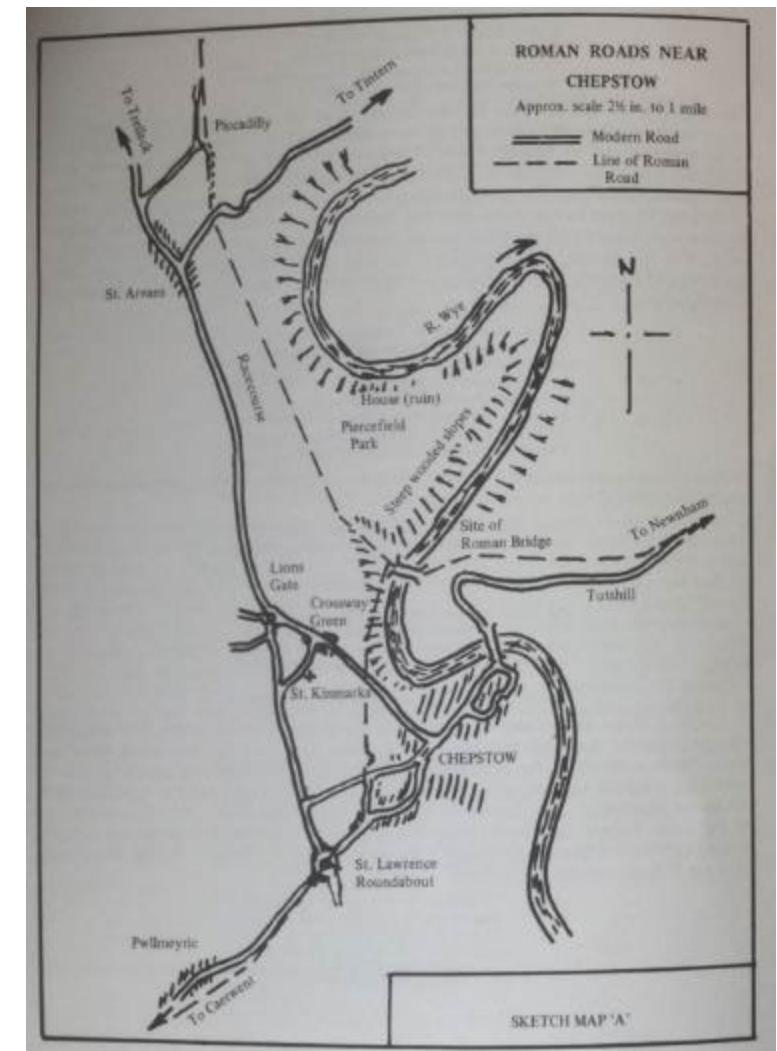
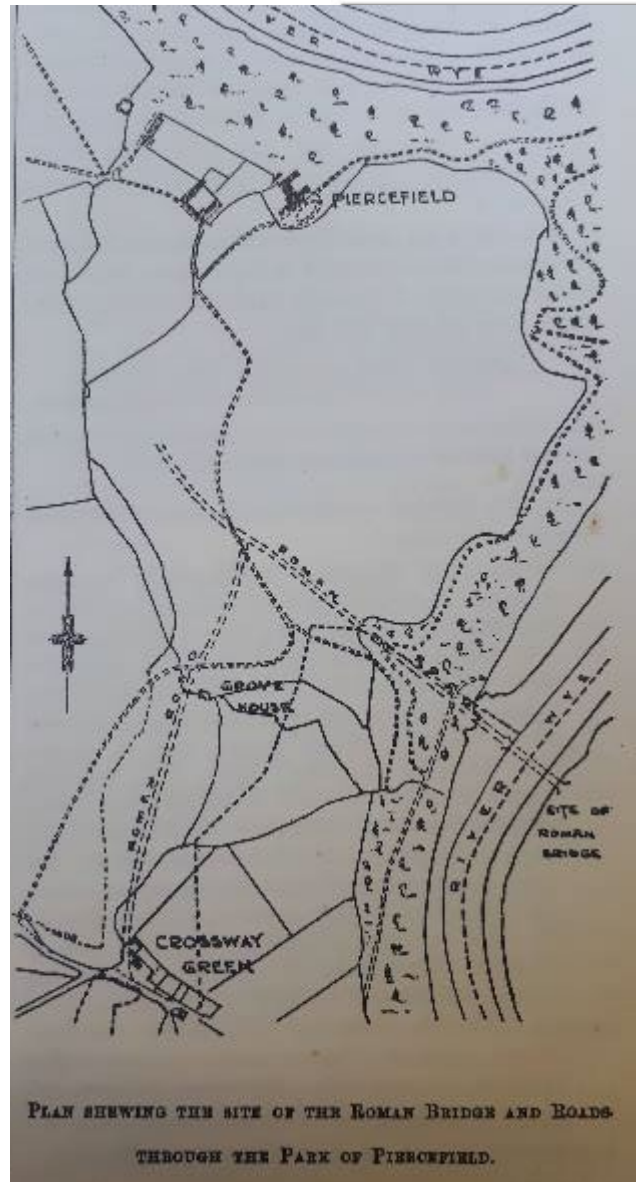
HER 5061 DESCRIPTION

- Engineered terrace-way down the cliffs on the Monmouthshire side
- Road can be traced.....into the suburbs of Chepstow. Near Kingsmark Priory it probably turned left and joined Akeman Street to Caerwent.

Archwilio

- Not recorded, near 'Striguil Bridge'

Bradney, J.A. (1932) *A History of Monmouthshire from the Coming of the Normans Into Wales Down to the Present Time: Vol 4 Part 2*

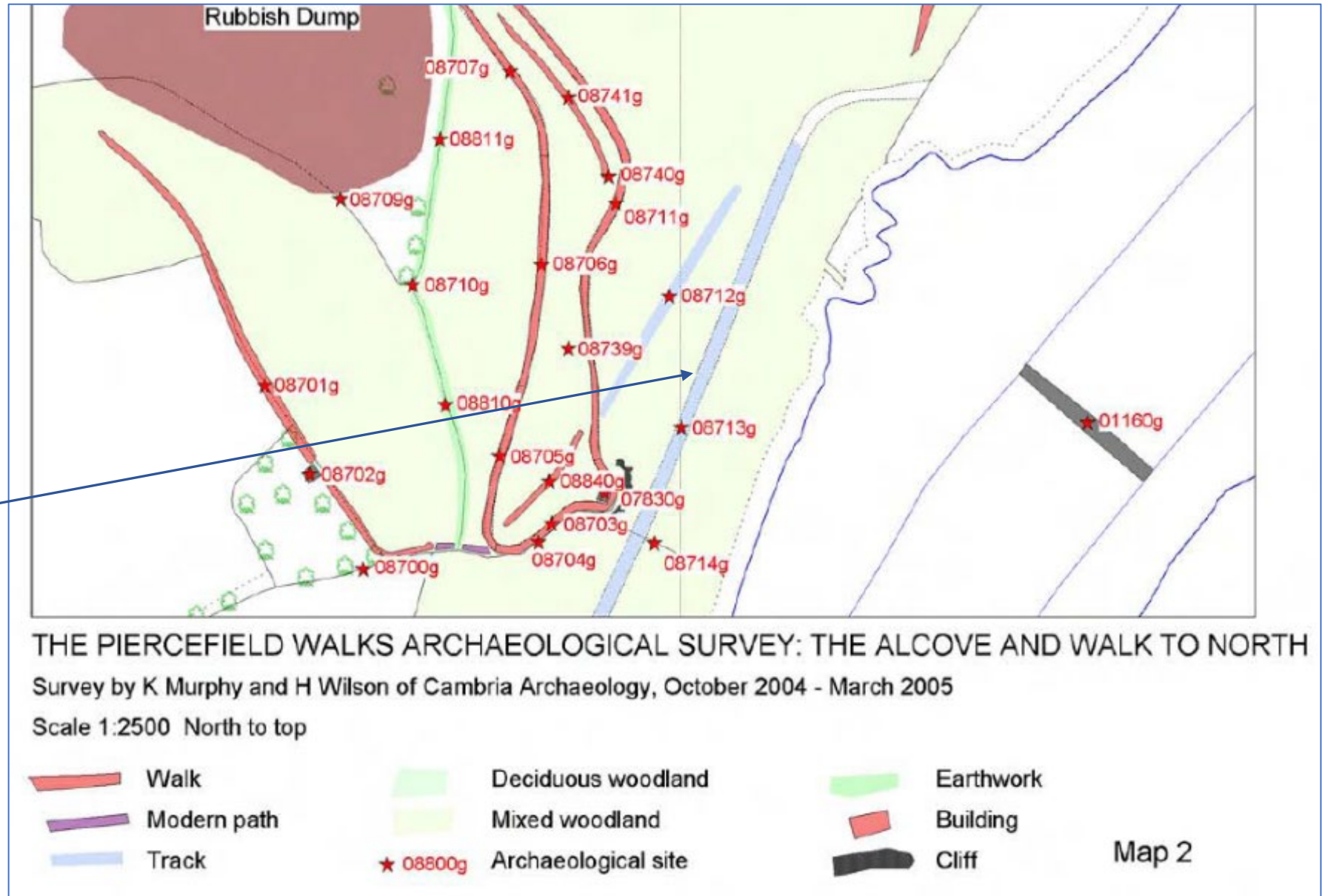


JRE Hamilton-Baillie (1960s): Roman Roads Near Chepstow

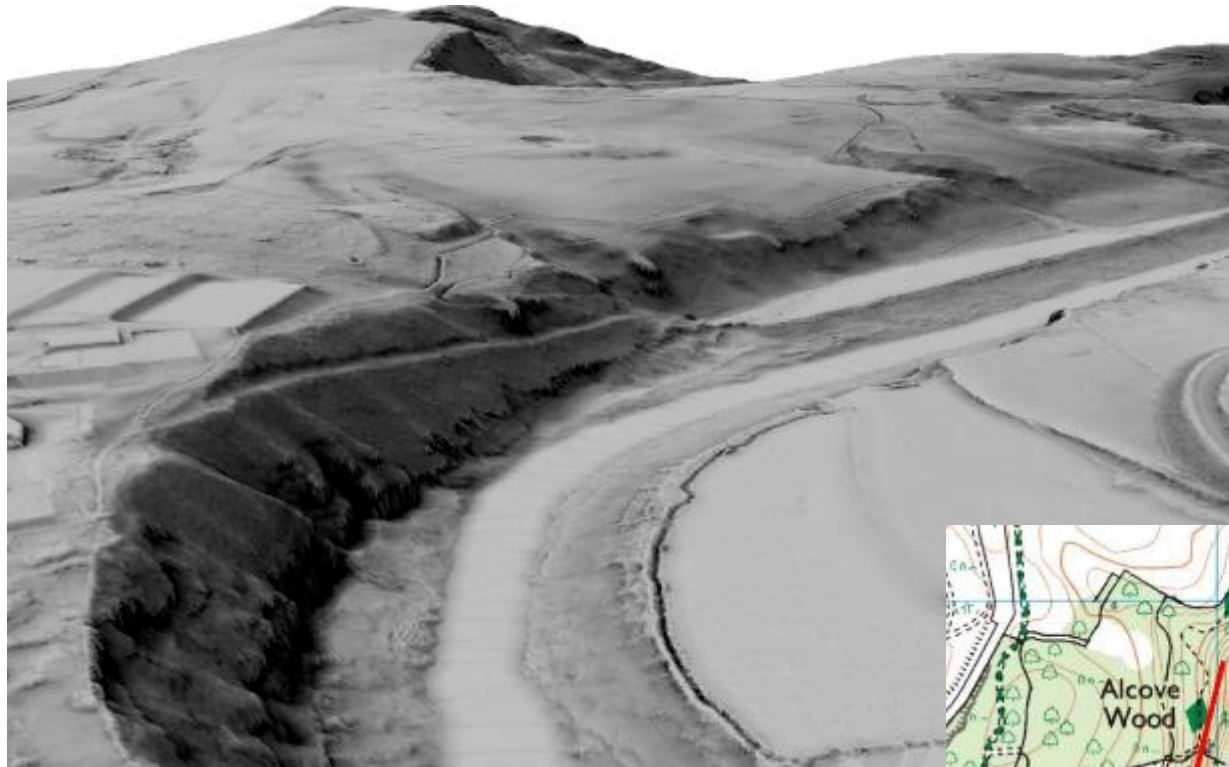
Roman Road – Monmouthshire side

Piercefield Walks Survey 2005:

“...road terrace leads southwards diagonally up the valley side ... This terrace is certainly a Roman road ... It is actually about 460m long, measured from the maps. We measured the track width to 7.5 – 8.0m (25 ft)”



Roman Road – Monmouthshire trackway



- LIDAR – clear trackway
- On the ground – large trees absent – lack of sub-soil
- a wide, flat surface, relatively accessible up to the Piercefield wall, very inaccessible and degraded beyond that
- SSSI: permissions from landowner, Gwent Wildlife Trust, NRW



Roman Road – Monmouthshire trackway geophysics and planning

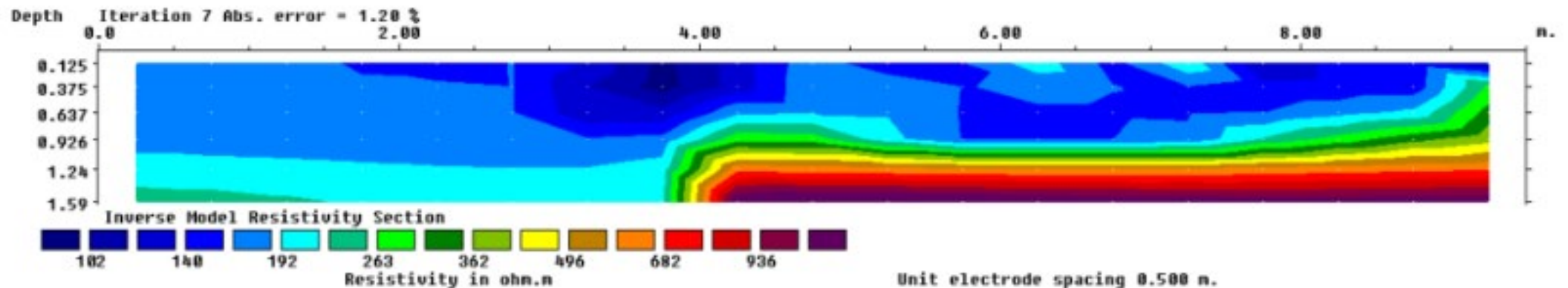


Excavations:

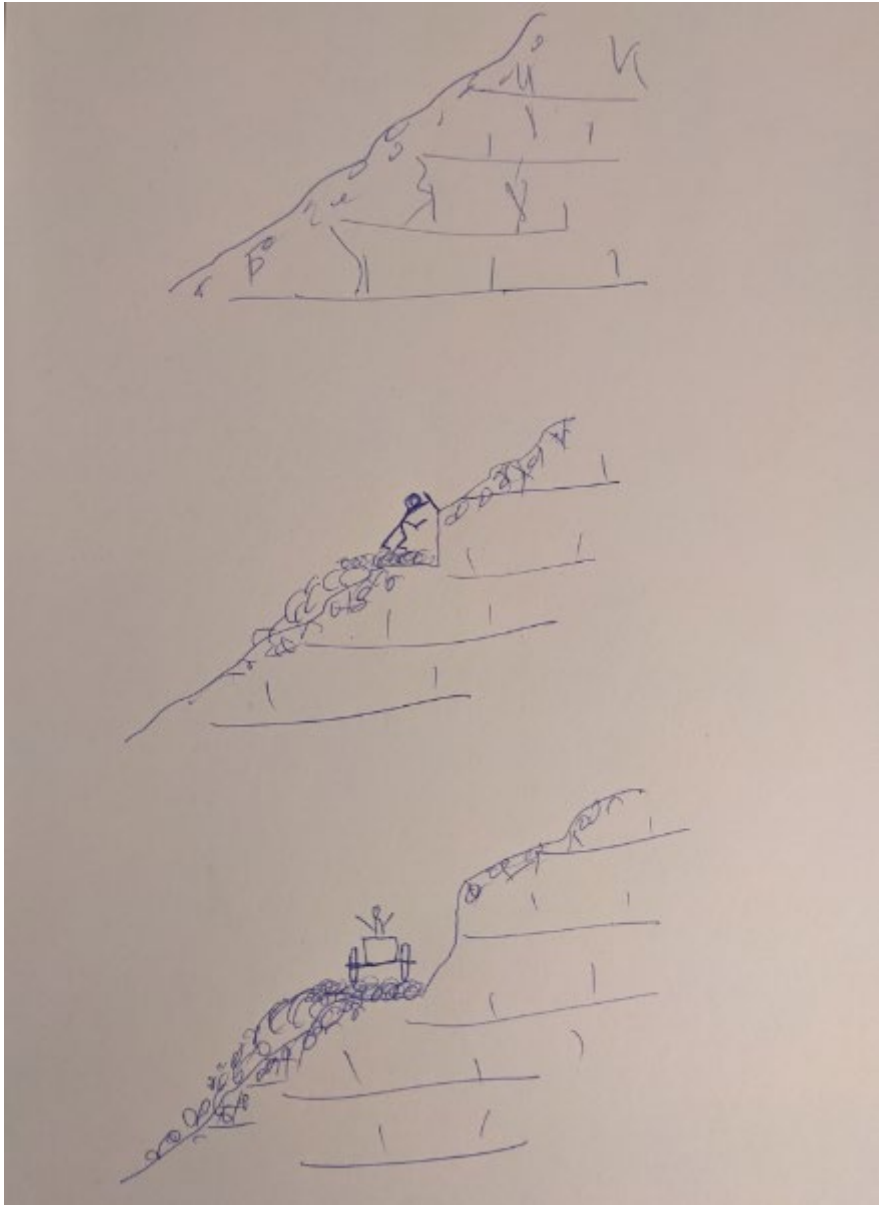
- Test pits: small sections to limit interference with SSSI vegetation – replaced all at end of excavation
- 5 Test pits opened, one expanded to a trench across the trackway; another dug towards the cliff

Geophysics

- Dr Mark Lewis – Resistivity mapping in lower area of trackway.
- Interpretation - rock-cut fairly level-sectioned incline with no inner or outer ditches.



Roman Road – Monmouthshire trackway excavations TP1



Roman Road – Monmouthshire trackway excavations TP1

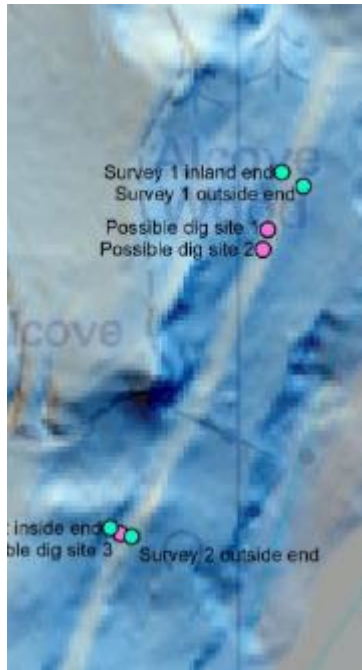
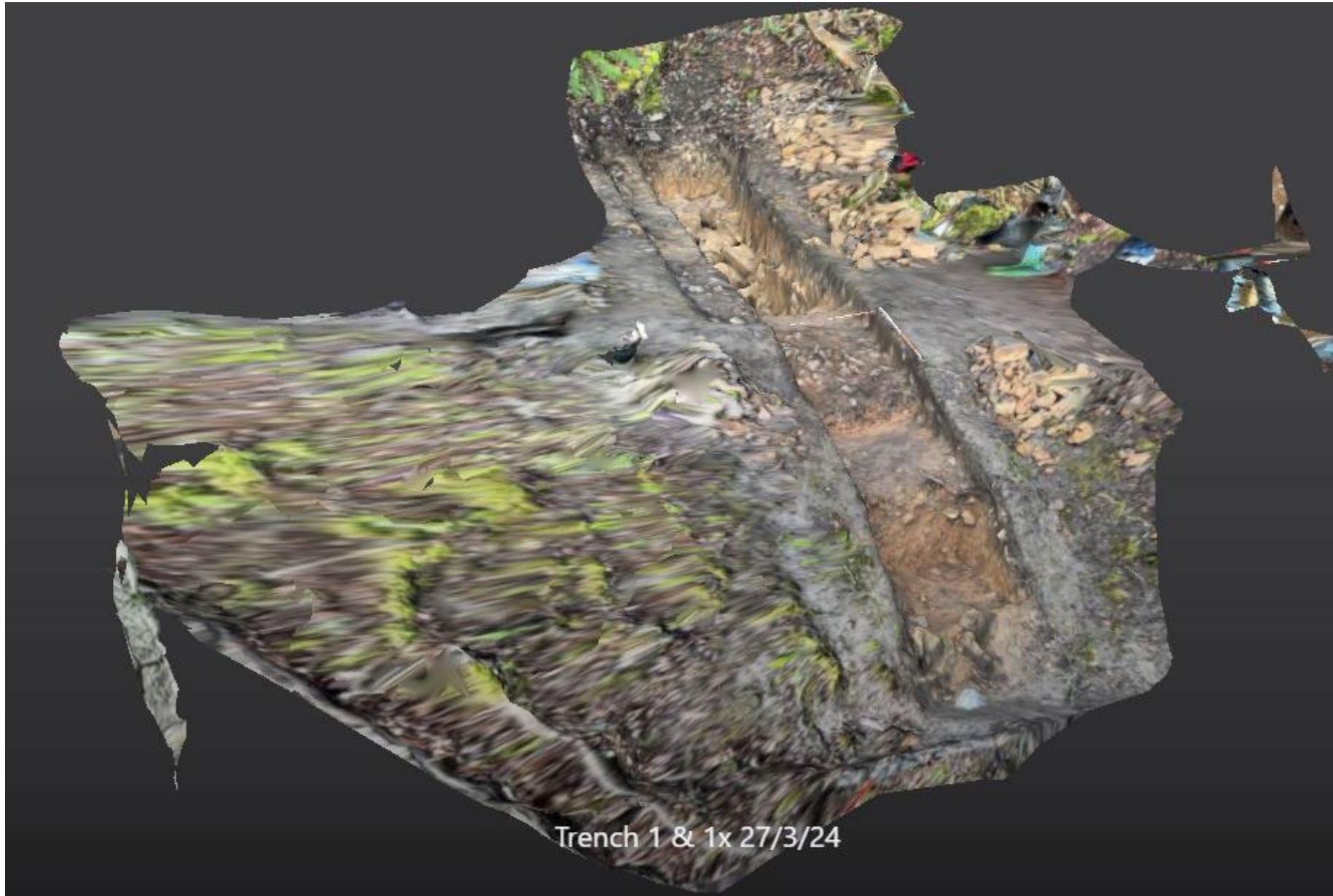


Figure 5 - 3D scan of Trench 1, in section. The possible top of the camber is marked.

- Metalled surface under humic (topsoil) layer - packed surface of rounded stones on a clay and gravel surface
- Beneath this is some 15-20cm of clay and fine gravel
- Underneath: much larger stones within a matrix of clay and gravel
- Base: bedrock, some 70cm below the surface

3D Scans across trench 1

Roman Road – Monmouthshire trackway – 3D scan



Roman Road – Monmouthshire trackway – TP1 dating?



- Initial excitement at find of charcoal circles on downstream cliff edge
- Apparently secure context
- Disappointingly ^{14}C date c. 1800
- Tells us that there was activity on the trackway in the 1800s. Shows there has been slippage since 1800s...
- Contemporary with the build of Piercefield walls by Col Mark Wood.
- Few mentions of trackway in 18/19th C travellers' descriptions. Likely not a part of the picturesque walks

Roman Road – Monmouthshire trackway – TP2-3



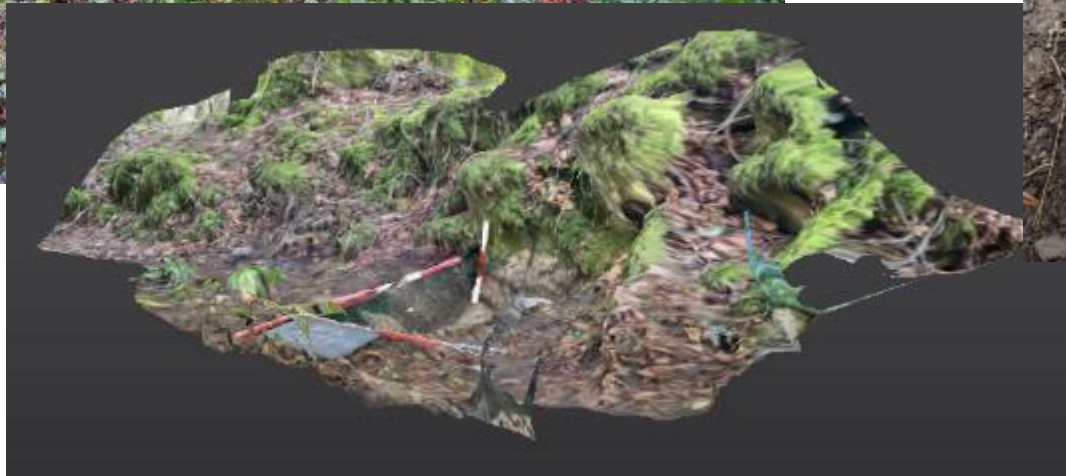
- TP2-3: Patchily covered with metalling, similar to trench 1
- Root activity - damage to this surface
- Exposed TP2 to rock face



Roman Road – Monmouthshire trackway – TP4-5



- TP4: taking advantage of natural rock faces in constructing the track
- TP5: very degraded, but clear evidence of worn cobbled surface stones with rough undersides.



Roman Road – Monmouthshire trackway – What next?

We know that

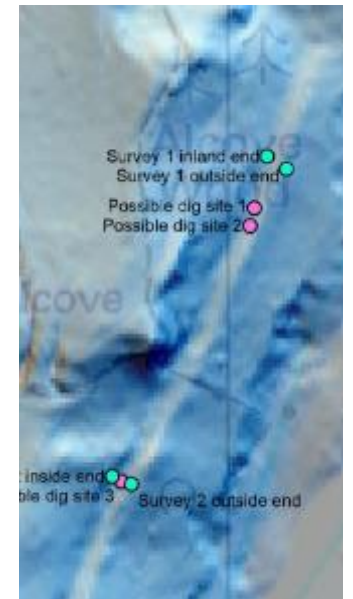
- It's not a natural feature – constructed as some point, before the Alcove wall was built (early 1800s)
- Dimensions and structure, proximity to 1stC AD timbers, consistent with a Roman construction
- Activity on site on outer edges around 1800s (charcoal)

What next?

- Permission for 2 more test pits and excavation around the Piercefield wall under the Alcove to examine the relationship

Strategy

- Open two test pits in the lower trackway, away from the outer face, avoiding tree roots if possible!
- Attempt to find dating materials (pottery etc.). Sieve all materials under humic layer.
- Bioarchaeology perhaps to help with dating and understanding how the SSSI developed. Soil acidity low (- bone + pollen)
- Maybe soil sample for OSL dating at base, if we can get funding...
- **Write up results to ensure it's all in the public domain!**



Roman Road – Gloucestershire Roman Road – What next?

We know that there are

- Features consistent with a Roman Road in the field
- Digs in 2003 suggest Roman Road, no finds
- Historical records indicating a Roman Road

What next?

- Can we get permission to do a detailed geophysical survey?
- Limited excavation with a narrow scope to find dating evidence?

Ideas for the trackway and the road welcomed!



Thanks!

Chepstow Archaeological Society:

Simon Maddison (Dig Director)

Dig team: Simon, Barbara (fab cakes!), Dick, Andrea, Andy, Andrew, Mary, Richard, Isabel, Fearne, Anita, Rod, Ian, Jan

- **National Legionary Museum:** Dr Mark Lewis
- **Gwent Wildlife Trust:** Gemma Bode & Harvey
- **Natural Resources Wales:** Graham Williams
- **CADW:** Dr Amelia Pannett
- **Landowner** of Piercefield woods



JOIN US for future digs!
Contact me or Simon after the talks....