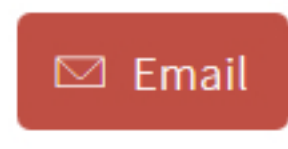
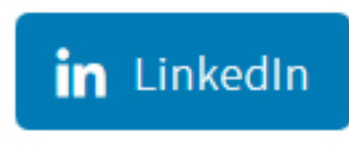


Marches Uplands National Mapping Programme



The Marches Uplands, encompassing the western fringes of Herefordshire and Shropshire, have always been a border region. Their archaeological monuments are characterised by defensive features and enclosures from several periods.

Many Iron Age ramparts occupy spectacular hill top locations, while Roman camps and forts are found on the valley floors. Offa's Dyke marked the Welsh frontier during the early medieval period, and medieval moated sites and motte and bailey castles appear in abundance.



Caer Caradoc hillfort, Shropshire, looking north photographed on 13-FEB-2001. The dramatic Iron Age ramparts occupy a commanding position above the Church Stretton Gap, in the eastern part of the Marches (NMR 21077/12).

Small enclosures

Many small enclosures were recorded by the Marches Uplands project. Most were defined by one or two ditches, constructed on raised ground in defensible positions.

The majority of small enclosures probably belong to the Iron Age and Roman period. Funnel-like entrances, 'antenna' ditches and droveways are present at a number of these sites, suggesting that the enclosures may have been constructed for the protection of stock. Pastoral farming probably predominated over arable during these earlier periods, although some prehistoric field systems have been recorded.

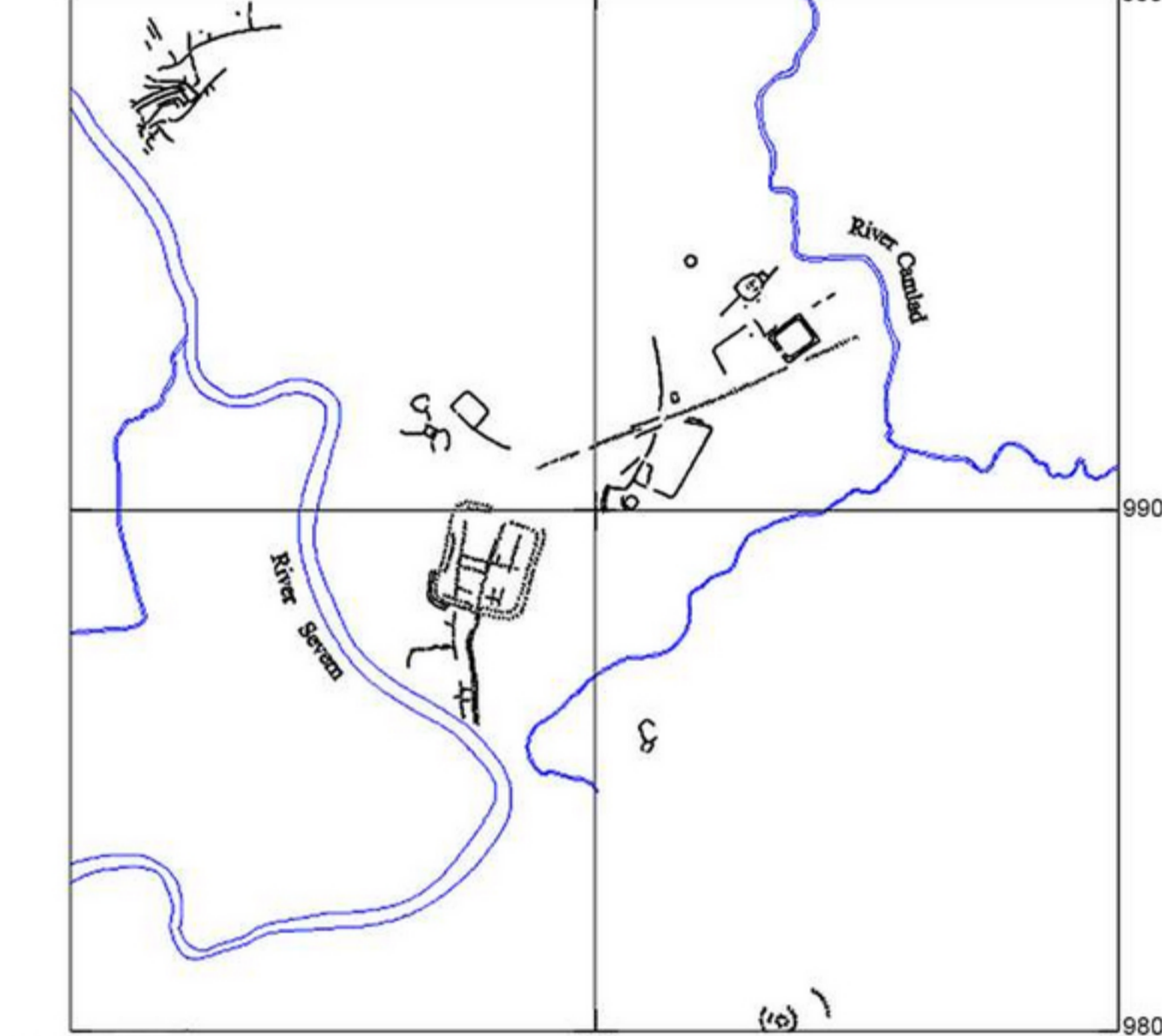


A typical double ditched enclosure near Leintwardine, northern Herefordshire, photographed for the first time on 5-AUG-1994. A clear entrance gap and a ditch, suggestive of a trackway, can be seen on the right hand side. (NMR 15174/16) © Historic England. NMR

Groups of enclosures and field systems may afford fragmentary glimpses of Iron Age or Roman period agricultural landscapes. Clusters of small enclosures can be found especially in the Clun Forest region of the central Marches, in the lower-lying area to the west of Stapeley Hill, and on Corndon Hill and the lower hills in northern Herefordshire.

The Marches in Roman times

During the second half of the 1st century AD, the Marches became the base from which the Romans sought to control the Welsh tribes to the west. Virtually all of the Roman features recorded by the Marches Uplands NMP survey appear to be military in nature. Eight forts, 11 temporary camps and 31 lengths of road were mapped, almost all from cropmark evidence.



The Roman fort of Lavobrinta, with fragments of Roman road and possibly associated enclosures to the north and north east. Fordon Gaer, Shropshire; detail of NMP map SO 29 NW. © Historic England

Medieval castles in the Marches

The political upheaval around the time of the Norman Conquest is reflected in the Marches, as elsewhere, by the appearance of many small fortified sites.

Motte and bailey castles, ramparts and ringworks were built on both sloping and flat land throughout the region, and were especially common in the rolling hills and small valleys of the more remote border areas.

Many of the small, quickly constructed castles must have been built to meet immediate needs, and perhaps were not in use for very long. This may account for their number and the fact that, in several locations, two or three such sites appear within a relatively short distance.

Clun Castle, seen in the image below, is a 13th century oval motte with two baileys, but also appears to be accompanied by a 13th century designed landscape; the square moat-like feature to the left has been interpreted as a medieval 'pleasance' or formal pleasure garden, and additional enclosures and water channels can be seen above and below the main enclosure.



Clun Castle, 13th century oval motte with two baileys photographed on 01-JUN-1981 (NMR 1959/348). © Historic England. NMR

Industrial activity in the Marches Uplands

Industry in the Marches has been concerned mainly with mineral extraction, especially lead and coal mining, and limestone quarrying. One lead mine, on Shelve Hill to the west of Stiperstones, coincides with an area which was mined for lead in Roman times, but most of the evidence – pits, prospecting trenches and spoil heaps – is of medieval or later date.

The largest and oldest areas of lead extraction and copper and barytes mining are located in south-central Shropshire in the vicinity of the Stiperstones, Long Mynd and Corndon Hill. Limestone quarrying took place in the northern part of the region near Oswestry, in the central area around Presteigne and Knighton, and towards the south near Hay-on-Wye.

Most of the mining and quarrying recorded by the Marches NMP appears to represent activity on a fairly small scale, although covering some large areas and taking place over a long time.

The image below shows scattered extractive pits and spoil heaps, indicating small scale post medieval lead mining on the Long Mynd, Shropshire. The linear pattern of the features is characteristic of the extraction of metal ores which occur close to the surface in seams or linear deposits.



Scattered extractive pits and spoil heaps indicating small scale post medieval lead mining on the Long Mynd, Shropshire are visible on this photograph taken on 17-OCT-1962 (RAF 543/1913 F21 0081). Historic England RAF photography.