

CPAT Report No. 1875




Van Mine, Llanidloes, Powys

Historic Environment Desk-based Assessment



YMDDIRIEDOLAETH ARCHAEOLEGOL CLWYD-POWYS
CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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CONTENTS

SUMMARY	ii
CRYNODEB.....	ii
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	2
<i>PREHISTORIC ERA (10,000BC – AD 43) AND ROMAN PERIOD (AD 43 – 410)</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>MEDIEVAL PERIOD (410 - 1500).....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>POST-MEDIEVAL AND MODERN PERIODS</i>	<i>2</i>
3 DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT	5
4 FIELD VISIT	9
5 CONCLUSIONS.....	12
6 SOURCES	13
7 ARCHIVE DEPOSITION STATEMENT	14

Summary

The Field Services section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust carried out a desk-based assessment in June 2022 relating to the environs of the former Van Mine near Llanidloes, Powys (centred at NGR SN 9413 8777). The assessment was conducted at the behest of Natural Resources Wales, to inform a project proposal for water management and remediation works in the area of the mine and its immediate environs. Van Mine was at one time in the late 19th century the most productive lead mine in Britain.

The area to be researched was fairly closely drawn by NRW around the various watercourses that flow through the former mine site. A search of existing records for this area revealed some of the former features of the mine, including two Listed Buildings, both are chimneys that once served boiler houses used in operating Seaham's Shaft at the mine. It was clear from available documentary and cartographic sources that many more heritage assets remained to be recorded, and a total of 63 were found. These were recorded from the various sources into GIS and were then polygonised to allow their extent to be appreciated and identified if works were contemplated in their vicinity. The intensity of activity at the mine means there is a likelihood that there will be other assets within the assessment area, which escaped depiction on the available historic cartography, but the records have been made in such a way that this possibility is minimised.

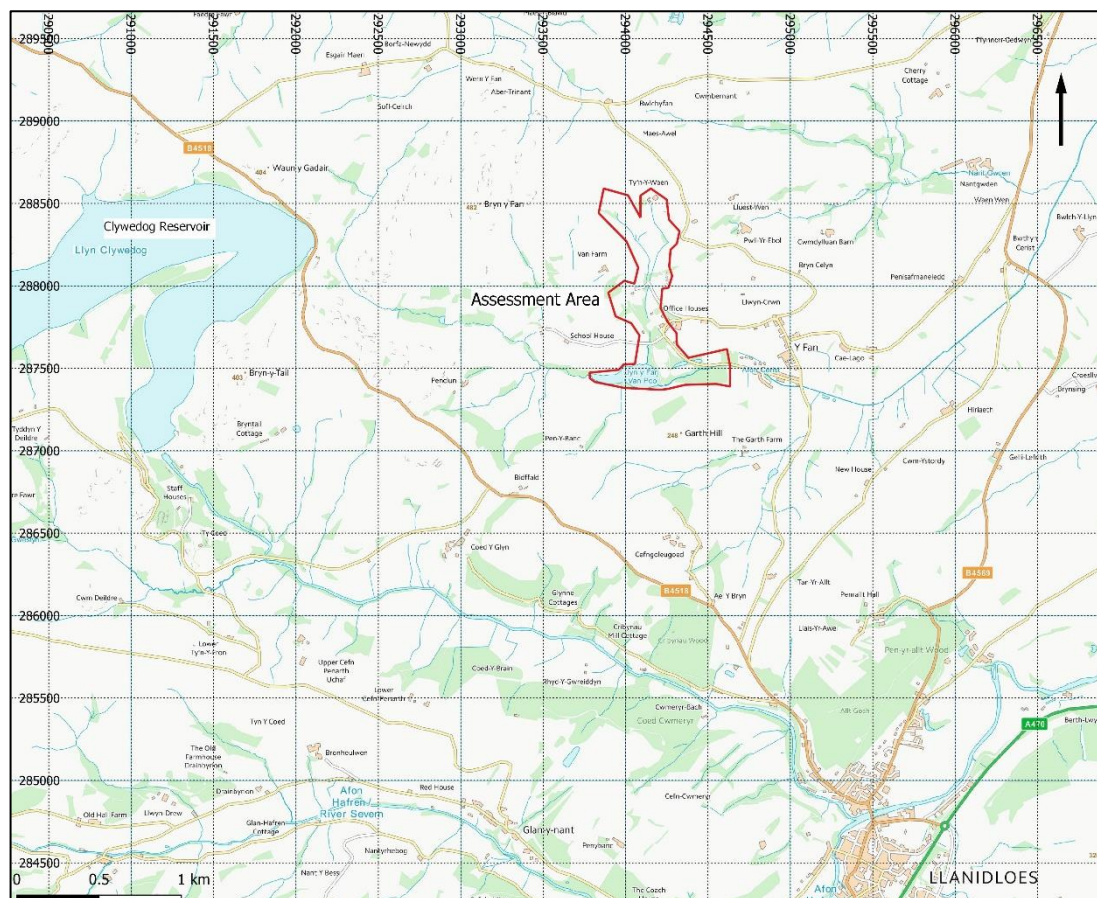
Crynodeb

Bu adran Gwasanaethau Maes Ymddiriedolaeth Archeolegol Clwyd-Powys yn cynnal asesiad wrth ddesg ym mis Mehefin 2022 yn ymwneud ag amgylchoedd cyn Fwynglawdd y Fan ger Llanidloes, Powys (â'r canolbwynt yng Nghyfeirnod Grid Cenedlaethol SN 9413 8777). Cynhaliwyd yr asesiad ar gais Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru, i ddarparu sail ar gyfer cynnig prosiect ar gyfer rheoli dŵr a gwneud gwaith adfer yn ardal y mwynglawdd a'i gyffiniau agos. Mwynglawdd y Fan oedd y mwynglawdd plwm mwyaf cynhyrchiol ym Mhrydain ar un adeg ar ddiwedd y 19^{eg} ganrif.

Roedd Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru wedi llunio'r ardal i ymchwilio iddi yn agos o amgylch y cyrsiau dŵr amrywiol sy'n llifo trwy gyn safle'r mwynglawdd. Pan chwiliwyd cofnodion a oedd yn bodoli o'r ardal hon, datgelwyd rhai o hen nodweddion y mwynglawdd, gan gynnwys dau Adeilad Rhestredig, y ddau yn simneiau a fyddai unwaith wedi gwasanaethu boelerdai a ddefnyddiwyd i weithredu Siafft Seaham yn y mwynglawdd. Roedd yn eglur o'r ffynonellau dogfennol a chartograffig a oedd ar gael bod yna dal ragor o asedau treftadaeth i'w cofnodi, a daethpwyd ar draws 63 ohonynt i gyd. Cofnodwyd y rhain o'r ffynonellau amrywiol i GIS ac yna'u hisrannu'n bolygonau i ganiatáu gwerthfawrogi a nodi eu graddau pe ystyrir gwneud gwaith yn eu cyffiniau. Mae dwysedd y gweithgarwch yn y mwynglawdd yn golygu ei bod yn debygol y bydd yna asedau eraill o fewn ardal yr asesiad, na chafodd eu darlunio ar y mapiau hanesyddol sydd ar gael, ond mae'r cofnodion wedi'u llunio yn y fath fodd fel bod hyn mor annhebygol â phosibl.

1 Introduction

- 1.1. The Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) were commissioned by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to conduct an Historic Environment desk-based assessment on land in the environs of the former Van Mine, near Llanidloes in Powys (centred at NGR SN 94138 87776). The assessment will inform a project proposal for water management and remediation works in the area of the mine and its immediate environs. The area defined by NRW covered approximately 43.5ha (Fig. 1), currently in a mixture of agricultural, domestic and leisure use, which comprises the maximum extent of the zone in which works will be contemplated.



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Fig. 1: Location of the assessment area

- 1.2. The Clwyd-Powys Historic Environment Record (HER) and readily available documentary, cartographic, and web-based sources were consulted to provide the background data. This was combined with a field visit, undertaken on 29 June 2022, following which this report was written. The HER search was limited to the assessment area identified by NRW and produced 20 heritage assets, the majority of which were related to the mine site in some way.
- 1.3. Although this was once a substantial industrial site, its current appearance is rather different. Much of the dressing floors are now occupied by the Coed y Fan woodland area, planted following the remedial works to cap the mine waste tips in the 1990s.

2 Historical Background

- 2.1. This section provides a brief summary of the archaeology and history of the study area and its immediate surrounds, to enable the findings of the assessment to be placed in a wider context. Although there are a small number of earlier sites in the vicinity, much of this is related to the mine as this is most relevant to the assessment.

Prehistoric Era (10,000BC – AD 43) and Roman Period (AD 43 – 410)

- 2.2. A group of cairns has been recorded on Fan Hill, over 500m to the west, but these were apparently all destroyed in the 19th century. No remains have been found in more recent times.
- 2.3. Approximately 200m to the east of the assessment area lies the Pen y Castell Iron Age hillfort, confirming that there was prehistoric settlement in the area. The fort occupied the crest of a prominent hill and its defences were bivallate, though have been considerably reduced by later activity.

Medieval Period (410 - 1500)

- 2.4. The Melin y Wern corn mill was sited on the course of the Cerist stream about 200m to the east of the assessment area, where it covers the lower dressing floors of the mine site. This was recorded in the late 13th century and it had apparently survived into the 19th century according to cartographic evidence.

Post-Medieval and Modern Periods

- 2.5. Occupation of the area in the early part of this period would have consisted of the local farms, which are scattered throughout the locality. The settlement of Y Fan almost certainly grew up in concert with the local mining activity in the latter half of the 19th century, it was not mapped by the Ordnance Survey in the 1820s or by the Tithe survey in the 1840s.
- 2.6. Mining activity in the area of what became the Van Mine, commenced with trial workings in about 1850, but it was not until 1866 that the first lead ore from the site was sold. It developed rapidly thereafter and by 1870 the mine had gained a market value of £1 million. The wealth of the mine led to the construction of what was effectively a dedicated mine railway, the standard gauge Van Railway, built in 1871 to link the site with the mainline of the Cambrian Railway at Caersws.
- 2.7. The profitability of the mine continued to increase and in 1876 it produced its highest yield, comprising 6850 tons of lead ore and over 2000 tons of zinc, though by the 1890s it had become less desirable owing to the drop in the price of lead on the market and thereafter passed through the hands of a number of companies. When the mine finally closed in 1921 it had produced nearly 97000 tons of lead ore and over 28000 tons of zinc. The remarkable width of the mineral vein led to a method of working more akin to that found in coal mines, whereby as soon as a section of vein was worked out, it was packed with waste material and stone dug from the nearby quarry (Fig. 11) to preserve the stability of the ground and allow adjoining sections to be worked safely.
- 2.8. With the closure of the mine, there was little call on the services of the Van Railway and this eventually closed in 1940.
- 2.9. In the early years of the 1990s, a programme of remedial works was carried out on the mine site, which culminated in the levelling and capping of a large part of the lower dressing floor,

within which a number of ruinous former buildings were revealed and recorded. The archaeological aspects of the work were carried out by David Bick, Simon Hughes and the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust. Although the buildings were identified at the time, a map which identifies their locations and a report by Simon Hughes (one of two that were written) are missing, so it has not been possible to correlate the records that were made at the time with those that were depicted on the large-scale Ordnance Survey mapping of the late 19th century.

- 2.10. The earliest readily available map of the Development Area is the Ordnance Surveyors drawing (No 321) of 1822, but this only shows the farm of Ty'n y Waen within the assessment area and has not been reproduced. Likewise a copy of the 1828 Arwystli Enclosure map that was made in 1874 for the Plas Machynlleth estate – the owners of the mine site at the time. The tithe map (Fig. 2) did not show any evidence of buildings predating the mine within the assessment area and a search of the tithe field names in the associated apportionment was similarly unproductive. No field names which might identify potential archaeological sites were found in this search.



Fig. 2: 1846 Tithe map, approximate extent of assessment area outlined in red

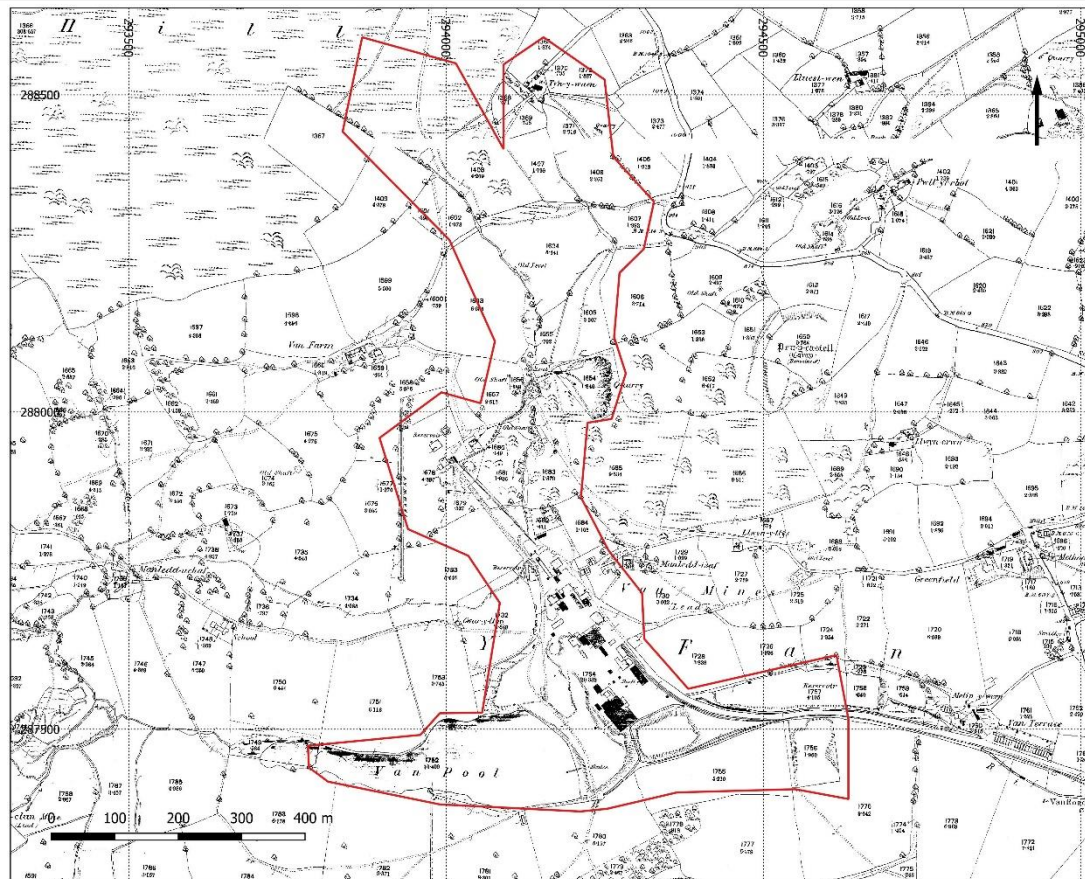
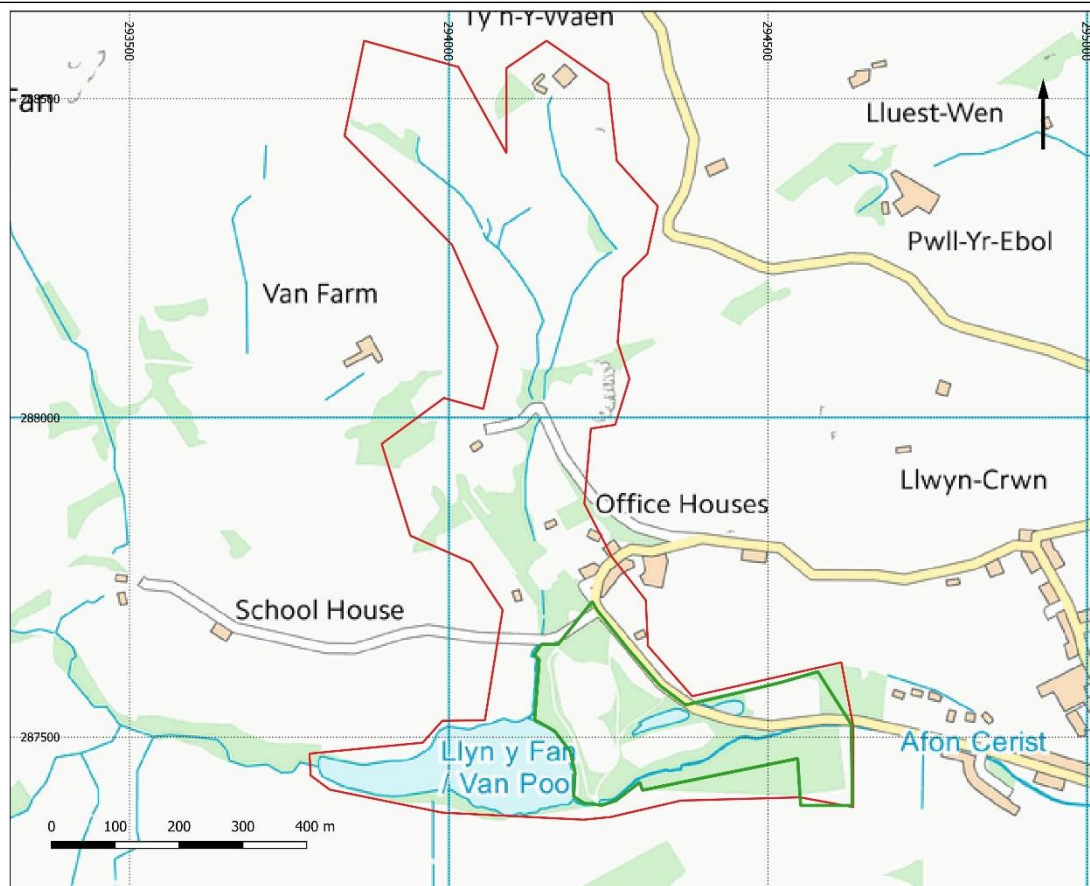


Fig. 3: Extract of the 1884 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 mapping (Montgomeryshire 41.8 and 41.12) with the Assessment Area outlined in red

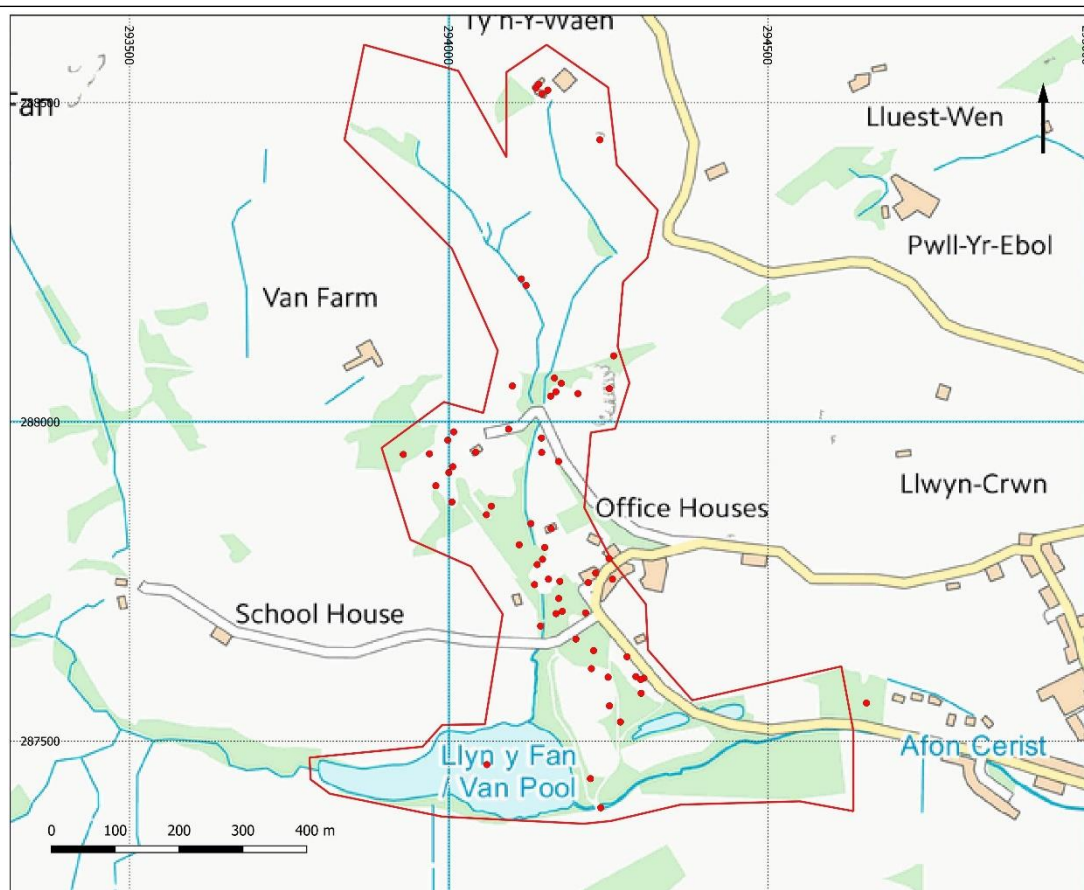
- 2.11. The first edition Ordnance Survey mapping of 1884 (Fig. 3: Montgomeryshire 41.8 and 41.12) was the first accurate and detailed mapping of the assessment area and this was registered against the modern Ordnance Survey mapping to allow the locations of buildings and structures to be identified and plotted. Although slightly later than the most productive phase of the mine, it is reasonable to assume that most of the features of the mine were depicted on the map, but it should be borne in mind that mine sites can develop in a haphazard way as new demands for working and the processing the ores are identified. It therefore may be that some of the earlier features of the mine had become redundant and subsumed by later structures by the time the map was created. This possibility is highlighted by the tramway (PRN 214936) between the mine quarry and Seaham's Shaft; on a mine plan of 1875 this tramway extends beyond the shaft to service two other shafts which lie outside the assessment area but was truncated by 1884, by which time these shafts seem to have been abandoned. To allow for this possibility the upper and lower dressing floors have been recorded as assets, as these are most likely to have seen regular changes over time and so have the potential to contain a range of structures that do not appear on the available mapping.
- 2.12. In 1903 the Ordnance Survey mapping was revised and the same can be said for this source as for its predecessor. By this time the mine was past its best in terms of production, though there were still times when the price of lead was sufficient to make it profitable. Reading Chapman (2007) it is clear that the equipment at the mine saw periodic renewals and with the regular changes in the companies which operated it - in 1892, 1902, 1908 and 1916 - this perhaps became more likely. Again, this gives rise to the possibility of there being a time depth to the structures at any one place on the site. He also notes that the mine spoil was reworked



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Fig. 5: The extent of the area that was capped in the 1990s, outlined in green.

- 3.3. As far as can be judged, these plans made use of the large-scale Ordnance Survey mapping, from which this assessment has drawn much of its locational information, so the lack of identification is perhaps not as much of a problem as might be expected. The main aim of the assessment has been to map archaeological evidence so that heritage assets can be avoided or a suitable means of mitigation developed in advance of proposed works on the watercourses by NRW, so the identification of their function is perhaps less important than might otherwise be the case.
- 3.4. The digital mapping is represented by the following figures, which give an impression of the concentration of heritage assets within the area. The individual heritage assets are listed in Table 1, though it should be noted that the difficulties of identification already mentioned have led to mine buildings being recorded in groups rather than by function.



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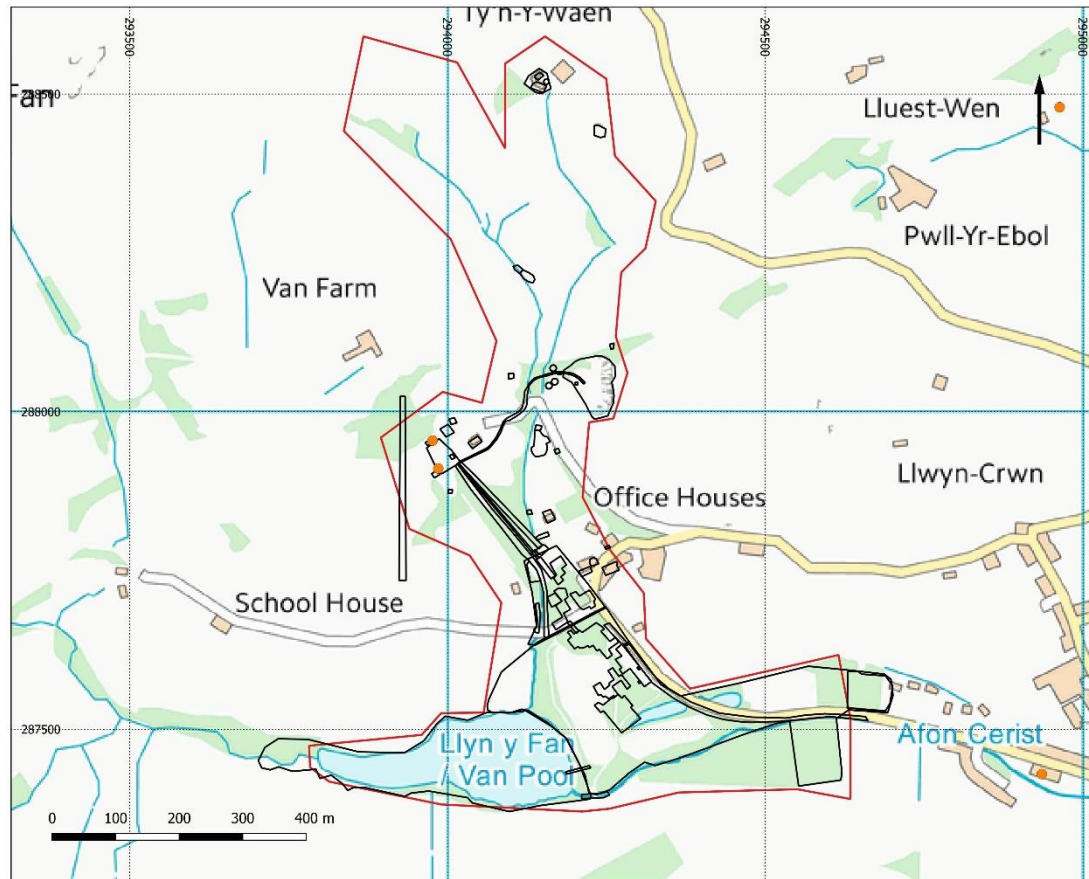
Fig. 6: Point data giving the location of the identified heritage assets within the assessment area, but note also Fig. 7, which delineates the extent of each asset.

Table 1: Heritage Assets within the assessment area

PRN	Name	Period	Type	NGR
5936	Van Mine	POST MEDIEVAL	LEAD MINE	SN9425087600
21207	Cambrian Railway (Van Railway)	POST MEDIEVAL	RAILWAY	SN9430587598
22056	Van Mine Shaft No 2	POST MEDIEVAL	MINE SHAFT	SN9410088056
22057	Van Mine Quarry	POST MEDIEVAL	QUARRY	SN9425288052
42523	Brynludw, chimney stack sw (Listed Building)	POST MEDIEVAL	CHIMNEY	SN93988790
42524	Brynludw, chimney stack w (Listed Building)	POST MEDIEVAL	CHIMNEY	SN93978795
84032	Van Reservoir	POST MEDIEVAL	RESERVOIR	SN9465587560
84036	Van Mine Shaft No 3	POST MEDIEVAL	SHAFT	SN9414587975
84037	Van Mine, Old Level	POST MEDIEVAL	LEVEL	SN9411488224
84038	Ty'n-y-waen Quarry	POST MEDIEVAL	QUARRY	SN9423788442
122663	Van Pool Reservoir	MODERN	RESERVOIR	SN9406087463
125875	Van Mine, incline I	POST MEDIEVAL	INCLINED PLANE	SN9392987949
125876	Van Mine, disused tramway I	POST MEDIEVAL	TRAMWAY	SN9403887847
125877	Van Mine, incline II	POST MEDIEVAL	INCLINED PLANE	SN9406787868
191738	Ty'n-y-waen farm	POST MEDIEVAL	FARM	SN9413788523
188898	Ty'n-y-waen farm, farm building	POST MEDIEVAL	FARM BUILDING	SN9414688514
188899	Ty'n-y-waen farm, farm building	POST MEDIEVAL	FARM BUILDING	SN9414188529
214238	Van Mine, weir	UNKNOWN	WEIR	SN9423887395

214902	Brynludw house	POST MEDIEVAL	HOUSE	SN9404287952
214903	Clifton Villa	POST MEDIEVAL	BUILDING	SN9416187832
214904	Ty'n-y-waen well	POST MEDIEVAL	WELL	SN9415788519
214905	Van Mine Halvans mill	POST MEDIEVAL	BUILDING	SN9426987530
214906	Van Mine Lower Adit ('Williams')	POST MEDIEVAL	MINE LEVEL	SN9417188046
214907	Van Mine Main Adit	POST MEDIEVAL	MINE LEVEL	SN9413887776
214908	Van Mine No 3 Shaft spoil tip	POST MEDIEVAL	SPOIL TIP	SN9414787951
214909	Van Mine Old Engine Shaft	POST MEDIEVAL	MINE SHAFT	SN9400887984
214913	Van Mine Shaft No 4	POST MEDIEVAL	MINE SHAFT	SN9416188039
214914	Van Mine engine house	POST MEDIEVAL	ENGINE HOUSE	SN9416887699
214915	Van Mine incline portal	POST MEDIEVAL	TUNNEL	SN9414587786
214916	Van Mine level spoil heap	POST MEDIEVAL	SPOIL HEAP	SN9412288214
214917	Van Mine lower dressing floor	POST MEDIEVAL	DRESSING FLOOR	SN9423887606
214918	Van Mine lower dressing floor buildings II	POST MEDIEVAL	BUILDING	SN9429687599
214919	Van Mine lower dressing floor buildings III	POST MEDIEVAL	ENGINE HOUSE	SN9425487555
214920	Van Mine lower dressing floor buildings IV	POST MEDIEVAL	BUILDING	SN9421587700
214921	Van Mine lower dressing floor buildings V	POST MEDIEVAL	BUILDING	SN9417987704
214922	Van Mine lower dressing floor buildings VI	POST MEDIEVAL	BUILDING	SN9414287678
214923	Van Mine lower dressing floor shaft	POST MEDIEVAL	MINE SHAFT	SN9430287575
214924	Van Mine lower dressing floor, buildings I	POST MEDIEVAL	BUILDING	SN9422787641
214925	Van Mine quarry building I	POST MEDIEVAL	BUILDING	SN9417688060
214926	Van Mine quarry building II	POST MEDIEVAL	BUILDING	SN9420288044
214927	Van Mine reservoir II	POST MEDIEVAL	RESERVOIR	SN9413387745
214928	Van Mine, Crusher House?	POST MEDIEVAL	CRUSHER HOUSE	SN9417587750
214930	Van Mine, Mary Emma Waterwheel pit	POST MEDIEVAL	WHEEL PIT	SN9415687754
214931	Van Mine, Seaham Shaft	POST MEDIEVAL	MINE SHAFT	SN9400787930
214932	Van Mine, Seaham Shaft buildings	POST MEDIEVAL	ENGINE HOUSE	SN9400087920
214933	Van Mine, Upper Adit	POST MEDIEVAL	MINE LEVEL	SN9416688067
214934	Van Mine, flat rods	POST MEDIEVAL	PUMPING RODS	SN9411187807
214935	Van Mine, reservoir I	POST MEDIEVAL	RESERVOIR	SN9399987971
214936	Van Mine, tramway	POST MEDIEVAL	TRAMWAY	SN9409487988
214937	Van Pool sluice	POST MEDIEVAL	SLUICE	SN9422287440
214938	Van Railway, loading area	POST MEDIEVAL	RAILWAY	SN9427987632
214939	Van building I	POST MEDIEVAL	BUILDING	SN9417287938
214940	Van building III	POST MEDIEVAL	BUILDING	SN9400587874
214941	Van building IV	POST MEDIEVAL	BUILDING	SN9422087747
214942	Van building V	POST MEDIEVAL	HOUSE	SN9423187763
214943	Van building VI	POST MEDIEVAL	HOUSE	SN9425587753
214944	Van building VII	POST MEDIEVAL	BUILDING	SN9415087804
214945	Van building VIII	POST MEDIEVAL	BUILDING	SN9412787840
214946	Van sheepfold	POST MEDIEVAL	SHEEP FOLD	SN9425988103
214947	Van building II	POST MEDIEVAL	BUILDING	SN9425287784
214948	Van Mine upper dressing floor	POST MEDIEVAL	DRESSING FLOOR	SN9417387723
214949	Van Mine tramway piers	POST MEDIEVAL	BRIDGE	SN9419987659
214950	Coed y Fan machine bases	POST MEDIEVAL	DRESSING FLOOR	SN9430187597

- 3.5. A total of 63 heritage assets (as listed above) have been recorded within the assessment area, though one of these (PRN 5936) is a general record for the mine itself. Two (PRNs 42523 and 42524), each a brick chimney (see Fig. 10) that once served a boiler house at Seaham's Shaft, are designated as listed buildings at Grade II; all other assets are undesignated. Each asset is depicted as point data on Fig. 6; their extents (except PRN 5936) are depicted on Fig. 7.



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Fig. 7: The extents of the recorded assets, shown as black polygons. Note that the dressing floor polygons overlie other assets.

The two chimneys at Seaham's Shaft which are Grade II Listed Buildings are shown as orange spots.

4 Field visit

- 4.1. A site walkover survey was conducted in reasonable weather conditions on 29th June 2022. Some of the mine area itself is publicly accessible but much of the surrounding area is private land and therefore the assessment area could only be viewed from public footpaths and minor roads. Most of the mine site itself is covered in immature woodland and little is visible as a result. The structures that are visible within the area of remedial works/capping carried out in the 1990s (see Figs 8 and 9) were deliberately left in place at the time but are becoming heavily overgrown. It was not possible to examine the area thoroughly for archaeological features not otherwise recorded as a result of the above restrictions and only two additional assets were found.
- 4.2. The topography of the area comprises a south-facing slope which contains two small streams that join and flow south through the former mine site. The combined watercourse continues

south and enters the Van Pool reservoir, which once served the mines and lies on the valley floor occupied by the Afon Cerist. This more level area was once the site of the mine dressing floors where the ore was processed prior to being taken to market via the Van Railway.



Fig. 8: The piers (PRN 214949) that once carried a tramway across the mine site, from the north. CPAT 4999-0001



Fig. 9: Machinery foundations (PRN 214950) on the lower dressing floor, from the north. CPAT 4999-0011



Fig. 10: One of the Grade II Listed chimneys at Seaham's Shaft (this is PRN 42523), from the north-north-east. CPAT 4999-0003



Fig. 11: The Mine quarry (PRN 22057), used to provide stone for the backfilling of worked out sections of the mineral vein, from the west. CPAT 4999-0002



Fig. 12: View across the mine site (covered in woodland) and the Van Pool Reservoir (PRN 122663), from the south. CPAT 4999-0008

5 Conclusions

- 5.1. The former Van Mine was a large complex that was worked for a period of over 50 years and produced a significant output of lead and zinc in that time, becoming one of the best known and most productive mines in the country. The processing and transport of these minerals required a great deal of machinery and structures; these would have been subject to regular changes as the fortunes of the mine ebbed and flowed with the market value of the minerals.
- 5.2. A total of 63 heritage assets have been identified within the assessment area, though it is probable that there were features of the mine which escaped depiction on the available cartography, as mine sites often develop in a haphazard way as new demands for working and processing the ores are identified. The project records have been made in a way that should minimise the possibility that significant archaeology lies outside the asset polygons that have been produced but this possibility still exists. As far as this possibility exists, it is in the area of the upper and lower dressing floors that unknown assets are most likely to be encountered.
- 5.3. There are two main published sources (Bick and Chapman) which go into great detail regarding the development of the mine but the tying together of these written records with the remains of the mine has proved difficult. Rarely is it possible from these to identify which structure mentioned corresponds with the Ordnance Survey mapping of the mine in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and this has led to uncertainties regarding the function of the mapped buildings. It is clear that both Bick and Hughes, who were involved with the remedial works at the mine in the 1990s, had identified the buildings but the reference maps from their reports are missing from the available archive.
- 5.4. For the purposes of this report, the lack of information regarding the function of individual buildings is probably not as important as it might otherwise be, given that what is required here is to identify the location and extent of heritage assets which can be considered in NRWs

project proposals. Heritage assets can then be either avoided or a programme of mitigation adopted.

- 5.5. The consideration of mitigation for possible impacts on the assets that have been identified is particularly important given that many of the assets now have no surface traces. These have gradually been lost during over a century of clearance and remediation works of all kinds that followed the closing of the mine in 1921. It is clear from scrutiny of the available information regarding the works carried out in the 1990s that significant sub-surface remains of the mining structures survive within the area that has been assessed.
- 5.6. There are two assets within the assessment area that are statutorily designated and must be protected from disturbance; these are the two chimneys at the location of Seaham's Shaft, both of which are Listed Buildings at Grade II.
- 5.7. The underground conditions of the mine are obviously not known as it was flooded up to adit level after it closed. It must be borne in mind, however, that the very wide mineral vein was packed with waste rock as each section was mined out and it is very likely that this material has subsequently settled. As far as can be understood the large scale workings never reached the surface so it is not likely that there will be obvious traces of the likely settlement.

6 Sources

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Documentary sources

1845 Tithe apportionment for the townships of Morfodion, Croeslwybr, Manledd, Glyn Hafren and Ystradynod in the parish of Llanidloes

Cartographic sources

1822 Ordnance Survey Surveyors' Drawing No 321

1846 Tithe map for the townships of Morfodion, Croeslwybr, Manledd, Glyn Hafren and Ystradynod in the parish of Llanidloes

1874 Copy of the 1828 Enclosure Map for Arwystli (National Library of Wales Plas Machynlleth 10)

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- 1875 Plan showing lands occupied by the Van Mining Company upon the estate of the Most Noble Marquess of Londonderry (National Library of Wales Plas Machynlleth 19E)
- 1884 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 1st edition Montgomeryshire 41.8
- 1884 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 1st edition Montgomeryshire 41.12
- 1903 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 2nd edition Montgomeryshire 41.8
- 1903 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 2nd edition Montgomeryshire 41.12

7 Archive deposition Statement

- 7.1. The project archive has been prepared according to the CPAT Archive Policy and in line with the CIfA *Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives guidance* (2014). The archive is entirely digital and will be deposited with the Historic Environment Record, Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust and the National Monuments Record (RCAHMW).

Archive summary

18 digital photographs, CPAT film no 4996