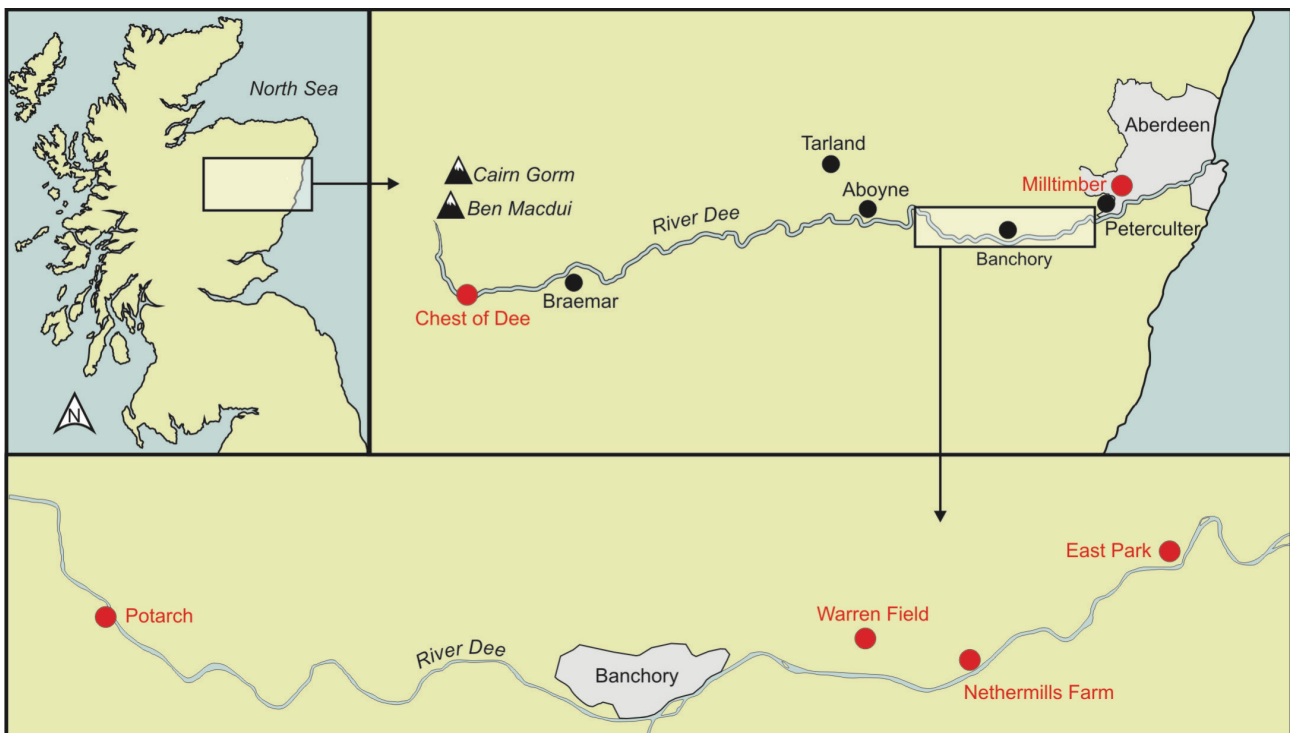


## 2. INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of archaeological fieldwork undertaken along the River Dee, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, roughly between Aboyne and Peterculter (Illus 2.1), from 2017 to 2019 (and including small amounts of previous prospection). This area, Mid Deeside, has long been known for its Mesolithic and other prehistoric finds. Fieldwork has been undertaken here since at least the early 20th century (Paterson & Lacaille 1936), and in the later 1970s and early 1980s excavation took place at the site of Nethermills Farm, Crathes, with the aim of providing more detail of the early activity. Publication of this work did not take place immediately, but when it did the archaeological potential of the area was highlighted, particularly with regard to pre-Neolithic hunter-gatherer activities (Wickham-Jones et al 2017). Excitingly, in addition to abundant evidence related to Mesolithic communities in the area, the archaeological material at Nethermills Farm included finds related to the Late Upper Palaeolithic groups who were the earliest known people to venture along the river since the Last Glacial Maximum, which ended around 20,000

years ago. This contributes to the understanding of a period of Scottish prehistory that has been unrecognised in previous studies and the River Dee is thus a significant archaeological resource for early prehistory.

The publication of work around Nethermills Farm led to the formation of the voluntary Mesolithic Deeside community archaeology group and the undertaking of an extensive programme of fieldwalking in the fields bordering the river. In addition, a separate test pitting exercise was completed at the original site of Nethermills Farm in order to assess archaeological survival on the excavation site itself. Test pitting has also taken place at one of the key sites, East Park, in 2018, and small-scale excavation was undertaken at another, Heughhead, in 2017 and 2019. This publication brings together the results of all exercises and discusses the lithic sites of the River Dee in their widest context. It should be noted that fieldwork has continued since the publication cut-off date of the end of December 2019. Further fields were walked in the spring of 2020, and, after a ‘coronavirus-imposed’ hiatus, fieldwork, including both test pitting and walking, is planned for 2021.



Illus 2.1 Location map of the River Dee and principal locations mentioned in the text