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## 2 INTRODUCTION

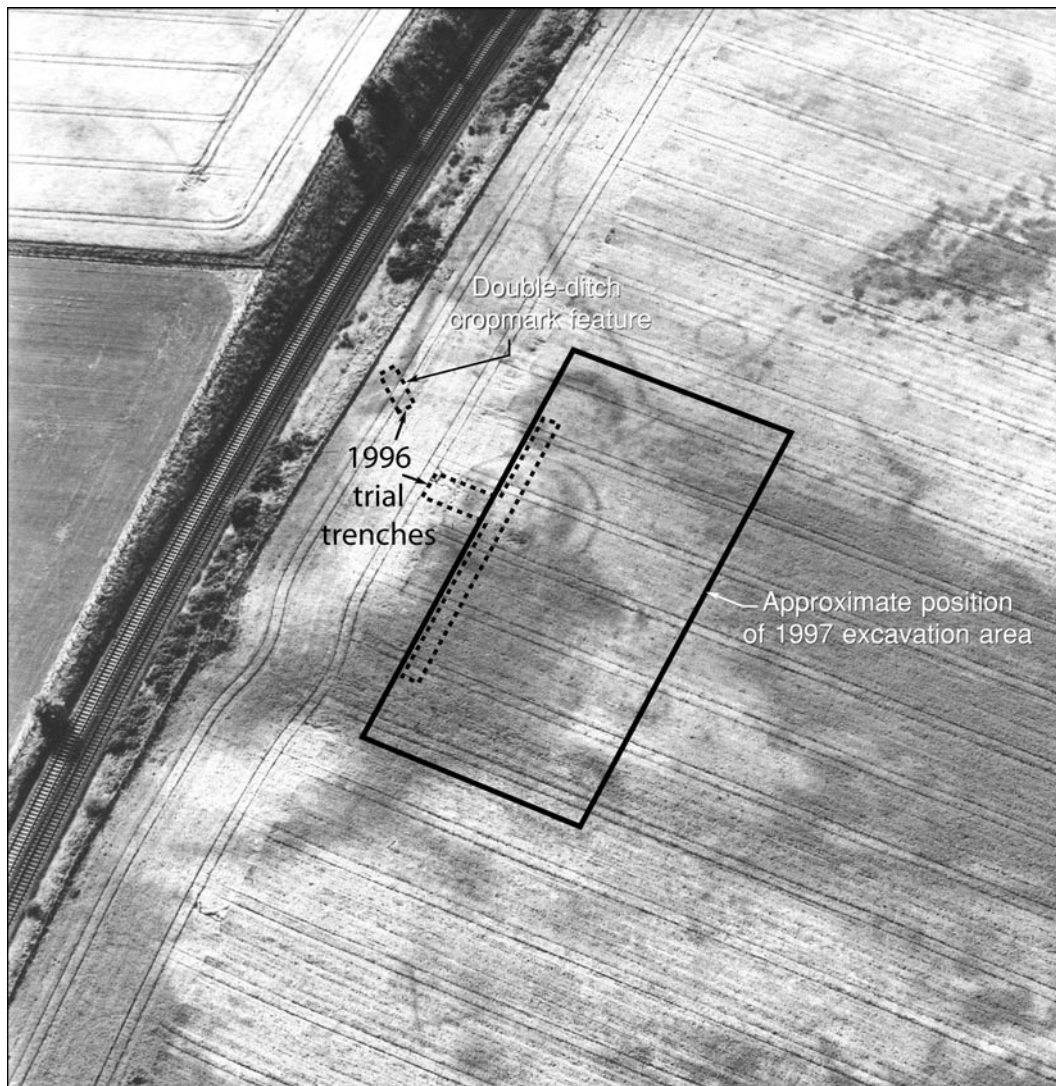
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Rescue excavation at Seafeld West, on a cropmark site to the east of Inverness (NGR: NH 694 445) was undertaken by the Centre for Field Archaeology (CFA), University of Edinburgh, between July and August 1997. The development encompassed an area of approximately 30 hectares and was scheduled for development as a retail and business park (*illus 1*). The project was funded by Inverness Retail and Business Park Ltd.

Excavation, conducted in April and July 1996, of a Bronze Age cemetery site (Area 1) within the proposed development site boundary has been published previously (*Cressey & Sheridan 2003*).

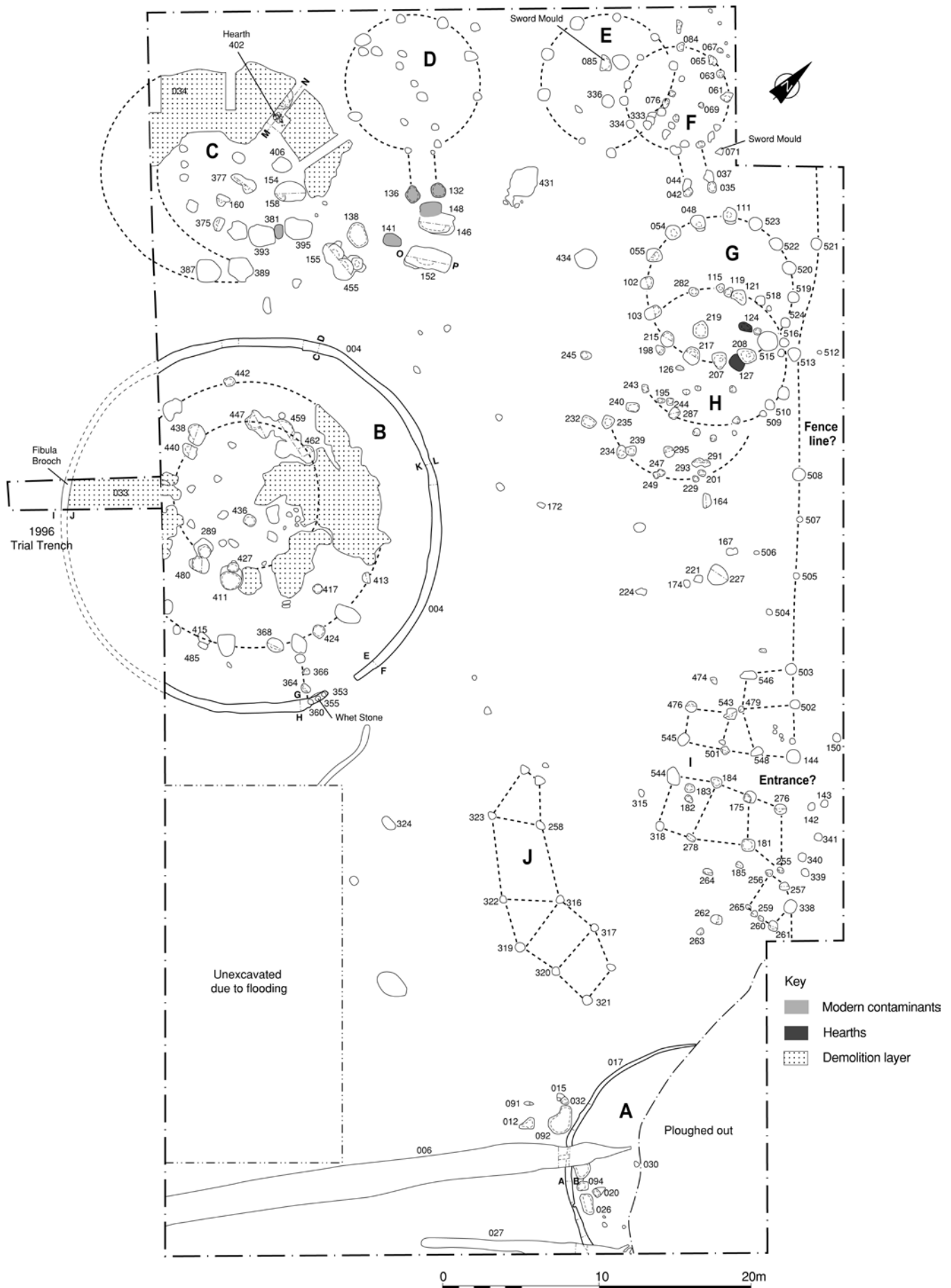
### 2.1 Previous work

Situated to the north of the Bronze Age cemetery site on flat cultivated land adjacent to the Inverness to Perth railway line (Area 2), a series of features had previously been recognised as cropmarks (NMRS ref: NH64NE 106, Stonyfield). Both circular and linear features are represented, with their darker fills clearly contrasting against the gravel-rich subsoil (*illus 2*). In places these features are obscured by deeper topsoil and clay subsoil. Particularly clear on the aerial photograph are three circular features which appeared to be ring-ditch houses, one to



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*Illus 2 Aerial photograph showing crop-mark features*



Illus 3 Site plan

the east and two to the west; the largest of these appeared to be surrounded by a palisade or wall line. Linear features to the north-east of the cropmark complex are attributed to natural palaeochannels within the subsoil.

Episodes of fieldwalking undertaken by local archaeologist Mr Allen Ross had produced a collection of worked flint from within the development area. An examination of this material was undertaken at Inverness Museum by Dr Bill Finlayson and a full report on his results is held in the site archive. In summary, the material appears to represent Mesolithic, Neolithic and Early Bronze Age activity. Two gun flints were also recovered. A large proportion of the material is ascribed to Mesolithic activity. Finlayson noted the presence of platform cores and bladelets along with core rejuvenation, as well as a few microliths, although most of the pieces catalogued as such are unretouched bladelets and bladelet fragments.

Known sites recorded in the NMRS included a ring-ditch and pit alignment (NH64NE 040); two other ring-ditches (NH64NE 059 and 178); and finds of flint, pottery and beads (NH64NE 083).

## 2.2 Method and objectives

Due to the size of the area, which encompassed about 30 hectares, an appropriate sampling strategy was required in order to provide a representative sample of the archaeological potential of the development site. A systematic programme of fieldwalking was carried out, followed by geophysical survey centred across the known area of cropmarks and on land to the south of them. This approach was considered to be the most appropriate strategy in dealing with such a large area of land, where total excavation would not be feasible.

The main objectives of this stage of the fieldwork were to determine the precise location of the features identified from cropmark evidence, to establish the nature, preservation and quality of the surviving remains, and to establish whether the artefacts found within the area represented occasional casual losses or originated from completely ploughed-out sites.

### 2.2.1 Fieldwalking and geophysical survey

Area 2 was fieldwalked using 10 × 10m grids in order to isolate any patterns in artefact distribution. The finds recovered comprised occasional worked flint, 19th-century pottery and glass, and a blue glass bead of uncertain age. The results confirmed that

as a result of modern ploughing there was no visible pattern to lithic distribution.

Following fieldwalking, a geophysical survey was carried out by the Department of Geophysics, Edinburgh University using resistivity and fluxgate gradiometry over an area encompassing 13,700m<sup>2</sup> (Cressey & Finlayson 1996). The geophysical survey grids were centred on where the cropmarks were clearest, and beyond to define the limits of any archaeological anomalies. The gradiometer results confirmed a dense distribution of anomalies of likely archaeological origin spread well beyond the confines of the cropmarks. The magnetometer survey produced evidence of up to five annular features. The clearest results corresponded well with the large concentric ditch (context 004, *illus 3*). Other anomalies were interpreted as possible post-holes, pits and fire-spots.

### 2.2.2 Trial trenching (1996)

Two trial trenches were positioned to investigate the large annular features located on the aerial photographs and confirmed by geophysical survey results. The first trench was located to provide a transect across the larger circular cropmark feature; it also confirmed the presence of a palisade ditch (Structure B2 below). Within what was then presumed to be a large post-built structure, a layer of charcoal-rich soil was initially considered to be the remains of an occupation layer. Several large pits, fire-spots and a series of post-holes, with no discernible spatial pattern, were also identified. A notable find from the palisade ditch was a well-preserved copper-alloy fibula brooch dating to the 1st–2nd centuries AD (see *Section 4.3*).

The second trench was placed to investigate a double-ditch cropmark feature close to the railway line (*illus 2*). This investigation showed that the railway had truncated what appears to be a curvilinear feature 0.15m wide and 0.16m deep. A ditch measuring 0.5m deep and 1.15m wide crossed the trench diagonally. This trench could not be reopened subsequently as it had been buried beneath an earthwork bund screening the development site from the railway line.

The results of this evaluation confirmed the nature and extent of the archaeological features within this area of the development. As they would be totally destroyed by the development footprint, Highland Council's Archaeology Unit recommended that these features and the area surrounding them be more fully recorded well in advance of the proposed development works; an excavation season was thus planned for the following year.