

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL SUMMARY

The excavation at Ness Gap encompassed an area of approximately 2.5 hectares. An average of 0.60m (up to a maximum of 1.5m) of topsoil was removed, revealing a natural sub-stratum of sand with bands of gravel (Illus 2). These bands became more prevalent towards the eastern (downslope) side of the site. The geology of the site proved a challenge in that archaeological features were concealed by raised beach deposits (Whittow 1977: 226). Several features were only discovered due to the thoroughness of the archaeological team. The features found to be prehistoric included:

- a cluster of three pits within the eastern half of the excavation area containing Neolithic Carinated Bowl pottery;
- two short-cist burials to the western extent of the site, one of which included an Early Bronze Age Food Vessel;

- two pits to the south containing Beaker pottery;
- and seven centrally located pits forming a more disparate cluster of Bronze Age urned and unurned cremation burials.

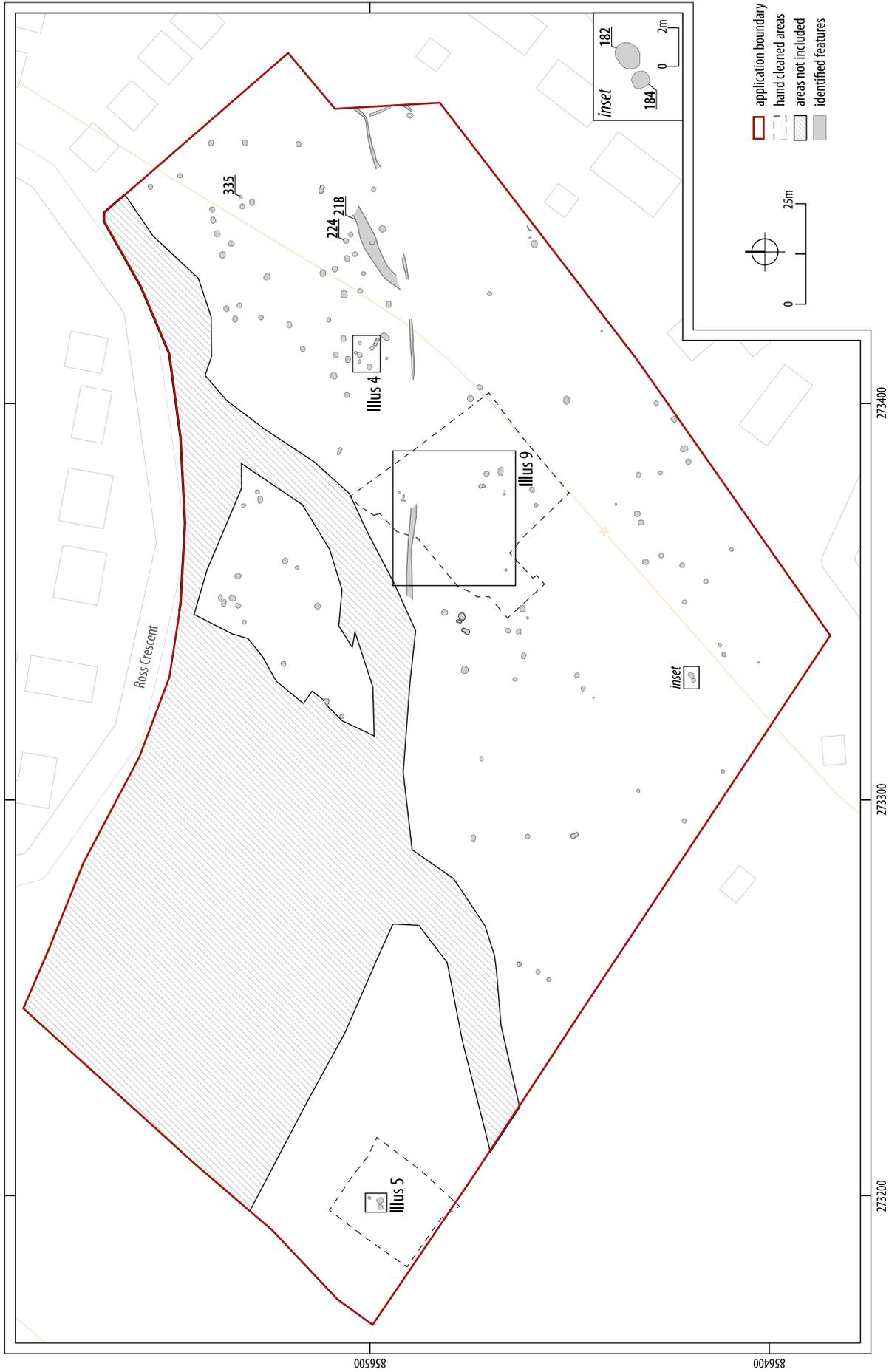
The finds were dominated by pottery, which was mostly recovered from the various pits across the site. The assemblage includes Carinated Bowl fragments, Beaker fragments, Food Vessels, Cordoned Urns, a Cinerary Urn, and an assortment of less diagnostic prehistoric material (Table 1). Burnt bone was also abundant within many of the pits relating to the cremation burials.

A small assemblage of lithics was recovered from across the site. This included limited evidence of Mesolithic activity, plus a more wide-ranging assemblage of cores and flakes (Table 2).

Evidence for the presence of metal objects (copper alloy), was found among the Bronze Age cremated



Illus 2 View of the site during removal of the topsoil (© Headland Archaeology)



Illus 3 Plan of the site showing the location of the features (OS OpenData © Crown copyright and database right 2020)

Table 1 Pottery types, date range and associated finds. (Radiocarbon dates calibrated in Oxcal v4.3.2 reported at 95.4% probability)

Feature	Context	Vessel	Type	Date	Lab Ref	Finds within/associated with vessels
Cist 030	Lower Fill 032	V1	Food Vessel	2440–2130 cal BC	SUERC-61665	
Cremation Pit 017/027	Fill 018/028	V2	Cordoned Urn	1630–1450 cal BC	SUERC-61662	Green staining on cremated human bone within urn but no surviving copper alloy
Cremation Pit 166	Fill 167	V3	Cinerary Urn	1760–1540 cal BC	SUERC-64983	
Cremation Pit 169	Fill 170	V4	Cordoned Urn	1630–1450 cal BC	SUERC-61661	Copper alloy razor and other objects
Cremation Pit 172	Fill 174	V5	Cordoned Urn	1750–1540 cal BC	SUERC-61659	Beaker sherd V9 Burnt lithics Antler fragments Copper alloy razor
Cremation Pit 172	Fill 173	V6	Cordoned Urn	1660–1500 cal BC 1690–1510 cal BC	SUERC-61660 SUERC-61671	Burnt lithics, chip, quartz pebble Antler handle? Faience bead Bone bead Copper alloy awl Cramp
Pit 182	Fill 183	V7	Beaker	2290–2050 cal BC	SUERC-64615	
Pit 182	Fill 183	V8	Beaker	2290–2050 cal BC	SUERC-64615	Lithics
Cremation Pit 172	Fill 174 of V5	V9	Beaker	c 2400–2000 BC		
Pit 325	Fill 326	V10	Carinated Bowl Pottery	c 3600–3330 BC		
Pit 327	Fill 328	V11	Carinated Bowl Pottery	3700–3500 cal BC	SUERC-64616	
Pit 329	Fill 330	V12	Carinated Bowl Pottery	c 3600–3300 BC		
Cist 417	Mid fill 420	V13	Possible Accessory Vessel	c 2126–1531 BC		

Table 2 Summary of the lithic assemblage

Feature	Context	Quartz pebble	Bipolar core	Platform core	Flake	Chip	Indeterminate	Burnt fragments	Microburin	Scraper	Edge-retouched flake	Total
	U/S				1							1
Cremation Pit 172	Fill 173							4				4
Cremation Pit 172	Fill 174 of V5							7				7
Cremation Pit 172	Fill 175 of V6	1				1		2				4
Pit 182	Fill 183		1		2	4		1				9
Pit 224	Fill 225				1							1
Pit 325	Fill 326			1		1						2
Pit 327	Fill 328				2	9			1			12
Pit 329	Fill 330					1						1
Pit 385	Fill 386										1	1
Cist 417	Fill 420						1					1
Total		1	1	1	6	16	1	14	1	1	1	43

Table 3 Radiocarbon dates from Ness Gap calibrated using OxCal v4.3.2; Bronk Ramsey (2017); r5 IntCal13 atmospheric curve (Reimer et al 2013). The reported dates are presented with the endpoints rounded outwards to five years (following Mook 1986)

**SUERC-61670 and 616699 are anomalous, contrasting with the date of the features indicated by the artefact analysis, and have not informed the interpretation of the features*

Feature	Context	Lab sample	Material	$\delta^{13}\text{C}$	Radiocarbon age BP	Calibrated age ranges (95.4%)
Pit 327	Fill 328	SUERC-64616	Nutshell: hazel, <i>Corylus avellana</i>	-25.6 ‰	4844 ± 28	3700–3530 BC
Cist 030	Fill 032	SUERC-61665	Charcoal: oak, <i>Quercus</i>	-25.5 ‰	3812 ± 34	2440–2130 BC
Pit 182	Fill 183	SUERC-64615	Charcoal: hazel, <i>Corylus avellana</i>	-24.7 ‰	3765 ± 29	2290–2050 BC
Cremation Pit 415	Fill 416	SUERC-61664	Burnt bone: human	-25.0 ‰ assumed	3405 ± 34	1870–1610 BC
Cremation Pit 166	Fill 168 of V3	SUERC-64983	Cremated bone (fibula): human	-21.8 ‰	3372 ± 35	1760–1540 BC
Cremation Pit 172	Fill 174 of V5	SUERC-61659	Burnt bone: human	-23.5 ‰	3367 ± 34	1750–1540 BC
Cremation Pit 172	Cordoned Urn V6	SUERC-61671	Interior residue	-27.5 ‰	3325 ± 34	1690–1510 BC
Cremation Pit 172	Fill 175 of V6	SUERC-61660	Burnt bone: human	-27.3 ‰	3296 ± 34	1660–1500 BC
Cremation Pit 403	Fill 404	SUERC-61663	Burnt bone: human	-29.1 ‰	3279 ± 34	1640–1450 BC
Cremation Pit 017/027	Fill 029 of V2	SUERC-61662	Burnt bone: human	-23.2 ‰	3262 ± 34	1630–1450 BC
Cremation Pit 169	Fill 171 of V4	SUERC-61661	Burnt bone: human	-22.3 ‰	3261 ± 34	1630–1450 BC
Pit 182	Fill 188*	<i>SUERC-61670</i>	<i>Nutshell: Corylus avellana</i>	-26.3 ‰	4824 ± 34	3700–3520 BC
Pit 327	Fill 328*	<i>SUERC-61669</i>	<i>Nutshell: Corylus avellana</i>	-23.2 ‰	3819 ± 34	2460–2140 BC

remains. Copper alloy staining was identified on the cremated bones, suggesting the presence of small metal objects which had been through the cremation process but not survived over the long term. Several small fragments were recovered which appear to have passed through the funeral pyre. These have been identified as the remains of a possible awl and fragments of putative razors.

Two beads were also found during the excavations. One segmented faience bead (in two conjoining fragments) was found inside one of the Cordoned

Urns. A fusiform bone bead was found in the fill of the pit and probably originated from the same vessel, as the contents were disturbed post-depositionally by animal burrowing.

A programme of radiocarbon dating was carried out on samples taken from a variety of contexts. A total of 14 samples were submitted to the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre (SUERC) AMS Facility, East Kilbride. The samples provided 11 radiocarbon dates spanning the Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age (Table 3).