

## 2. INTRODUCTION

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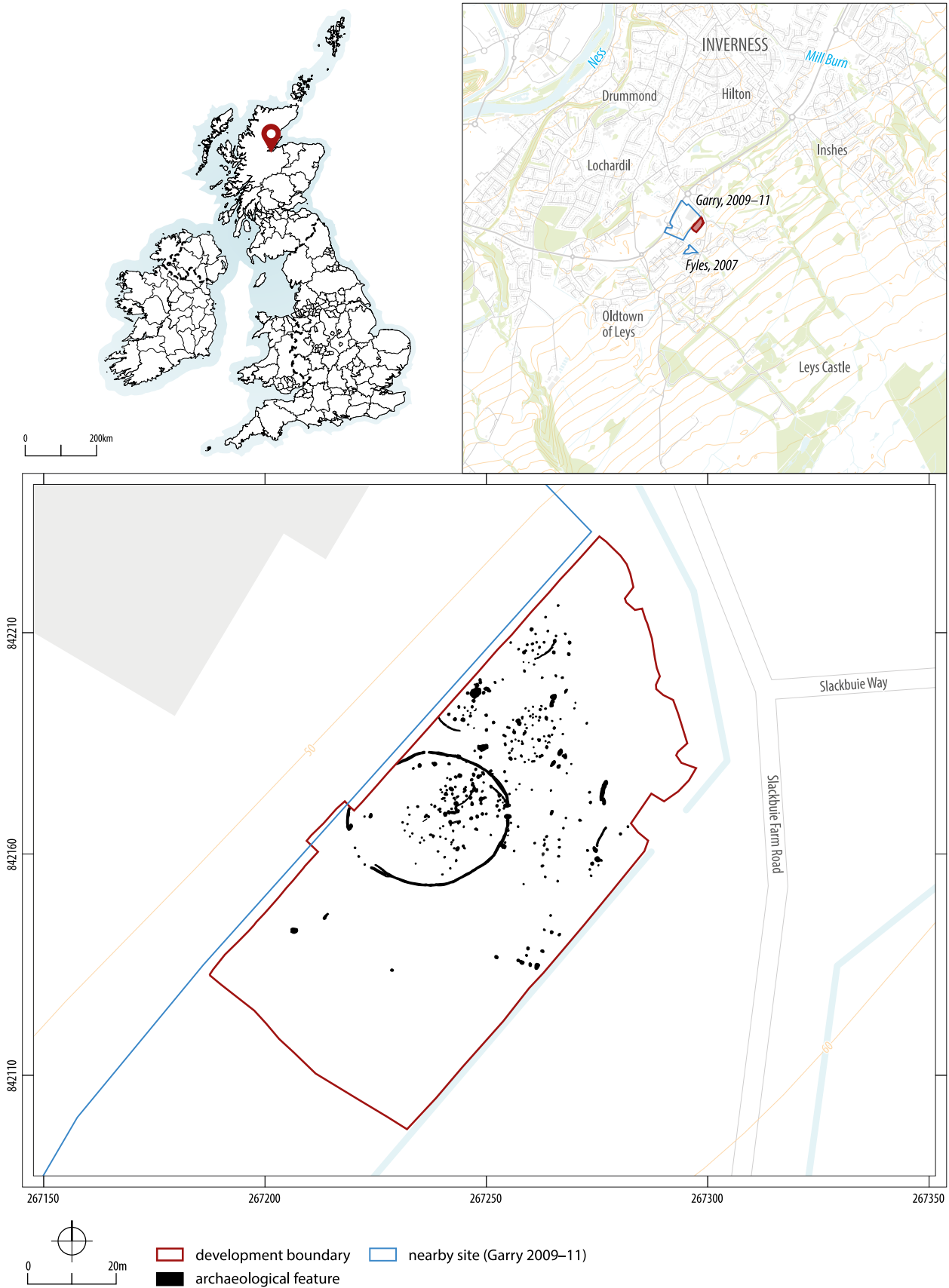
Inverness, Highland, is located at the heart of a key landscape where cultural, burial, monumental, and settlement traditions met throughout prehistory (Cunliffe 2005; Bradley et al 2016; Hatherley & Murray 2021). Over the past 20 years, development-led archaeology in advance of housing and infrastructure developments has revealed evidence for extensive prehistoric activity to the south of Inverness. Evidence for earlier prehistoric activity has centred on scatters of artefacts, pits and burials, with several chambered cairns recorded in the area. The remains of later prehistoric settlement and activity, at varying scales and intensities, have been uncovered during numerous excavations. These features primarily date from the Bronze Age and Iron Age, with indications of a wide range of settlement and architectural forms, longevity of occupation, activities and land use patterns. The recent publication of the exceptional Iron Age craft-working site at Culduthel provides a particularly vibrant picture of the activities that took place in the later Iron Age (Hatherley & Murray 2021). The site at Lower Slackbuie, excavated by Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd in 2019, sits within this rich landscape.

Headland Archaeology was commissioned by Robertson Partnership Homes to undertake a programme of archaeological works in connection with a housing development at Lower Slackbuie, Inverness. The development area lays immediately to the south-east of the Asda superstore at Slackbuie and approximately 4km to the south of the centre of Inverness (NH 6721 4211; Illus 1). The sub-rectangular development area, measuring 240m by 90m, was largely flat with a small hillock towards the north-east end. The area was investigated in two phases, with the initial trial trench evaluation in November 2017 uncovering a series of prehistoric features concentrated on the higher ground towards the north-east end of the site (Dalland 2017). The evaluation also uncovered a pit containing a Neolithic polished stone axe and sherds of possible Grooved Ware pottery (ibid). The results of the evaluation prompted the monitored topsoil stripping of the north-east half of the site followed by a programme of excavation and recording of the exposed features, conducted from 8 April to 28 May 2019.

### 2.1 Archaeological background

As noted above, the site at Lower Slackbuie sits within a rich archaeological landscape, with sites in the immediate area revealing features dating from the Neolithic to the Iron Age (see Illus 16). Typical evidence of Neolithic and Bronze Age activity in the form of pits and burials has been uncovered at sites such as Knocknagael Farm (Kilpatrick 2016; Canmore ID [320610](#)) and Slacknamarnock Quarry (Murray 2009; Canmore ID [296073](#)). Evidence of earlier prehistoric activity is often hidden within extensive later prehistoric settlements. Sites excavated surrounding the development area at Lower Slackbuie revealed numerous post holes, possible structures and features dating from the Middle to Late Bronze Age into the Iron Age.

Neighbouring the Lower Slackbuie development area to the west, the excavations carried out from 2009–2011 prior to the development of the large Asda supermarket revealed archaeological remains dating from the Mesolithic to the present (Garry 2015; Illus 1 & 16). In total over 700 features were excavated including two ring ditches and a possible prehistoric cairn (ibid). This activity likely extended further west towards the site at Slackbuie, north of the A8082 (Farrell 2010; Canmore ID [13520](#)). This site at Slackbuie, first identified on aerial photographs as a possible pit circle and ring ditch, is designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SM5218). Investigation of the scheduled area and its surrounds in 2010 uncovered a series of large post holes, two of which were radiocarbon dated to the Iron Age, that potentially defined multiple structures along with a pit complex (Farrell 2010). To the south-east, 150m from the site at Lower Slackbuie, excavations conducted by SUAT Ltd uncovered numerous pits and post holes representing several Late Bronze Age to Iron Age structures (Fyles 2007). Work undertaken in advance of the flood relief channel at Slackbuie Way also revealed numerous features, including evidence for settlement of a similar Late Bronze Age to Iron Age date (Kilpatrick 2010; Canmore ID: [305344](#)). To the north, the evaluation at Fairways, Castleheather, uncovered a limited number of features with a single pit that indicated prehistoric activity (Hastie 2004; Canmore ID [273707](#)). To the south-west, the multiperiod site at



Illus 1 Site location. (© Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd)

Culduthel, excavated in several phases, represents the most coherent spread of features with evidence for intensive Iron Age activity. An earlier Iron Age settlement and palisade became a major craft-working centre in the Middle Iron Age, with evidence for metal and glassworking taking place on the site (Hatherley & Murray 2021; Canmore

ID [296069](#)). The artefactual evidence indicates that the occupants were participating in extensive trade networks where the site was the regional centre of activity during the Middle Iron Age (ibid). The site at Lower Slackbuie lies within this busy landscape, with features directly related to those uncovered on the neighbouring sites.