

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

AOC Archaeology undertook archaeological work on land 2.2km southwest of Grantown-on-Spey (centred at NGR: NJ 01865 25612) between 2019 and 2020 (Illus 1 and 2). The fieldwork and subsequent post-excavation analyses were sponsored by Gordon and MacPhail in advance of a proposed new distillery with visitor centre, 350m southeast of Lower Gaich, Craggan, Grantown-on-Spey (NRHE reference: [NJ02NW 168](#); Canmore ID [367915](#)). An evaluation followed by a watching brief undertaken in advance of development of the Cairn Distillery uncovered evidence of prehistoric activity dating to the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition, a Late Neolithic cremation and Late Bronze Age activity. Settlement activity in the Iron Age comprised three Middle Iron Age roundhouses and a metalworking furnace, with a later phase of settlement represented by three Late Iron Age roundhouses. Fire pits, refuse pits, a post-defined structure, a metalworking furnace, and metal waste pits were dated to the early medieval period. Both Iron Age and early medieval settlement evidence confirmed the presence of grain processing on site, including four deliberately deposited quernstones and a quern or millstone rough out.

An evaluation was undertaken in 2019, which identified three putative structures and isolated features. Due to these findings, an excavation was undertaken during the stripping of topsoil in 2020 (Illus 2). The site comprised flat or gently sloping pasture fields, with topographic undulation as a result of differential glacial and alluvial activities and deposits. The River Spey formed the southeast

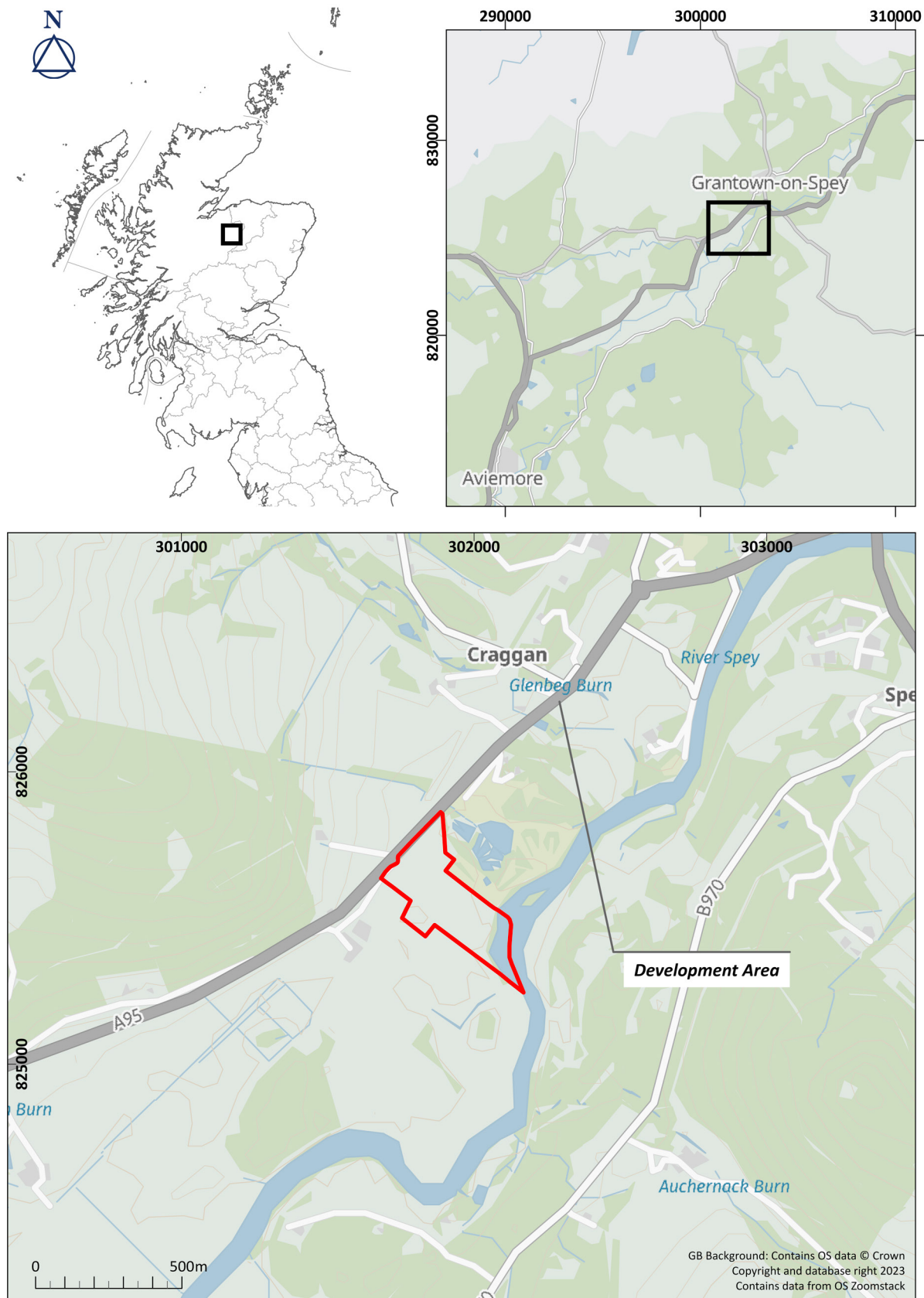
boundary of the site, with ground sloping down toward the river. The archaeological features were mostly located on the higher points of the site and on sandy gravel, whereas the areas on-site where sand was encountered were mostly blank of archaeological activity.

2.1 Archaeological Background

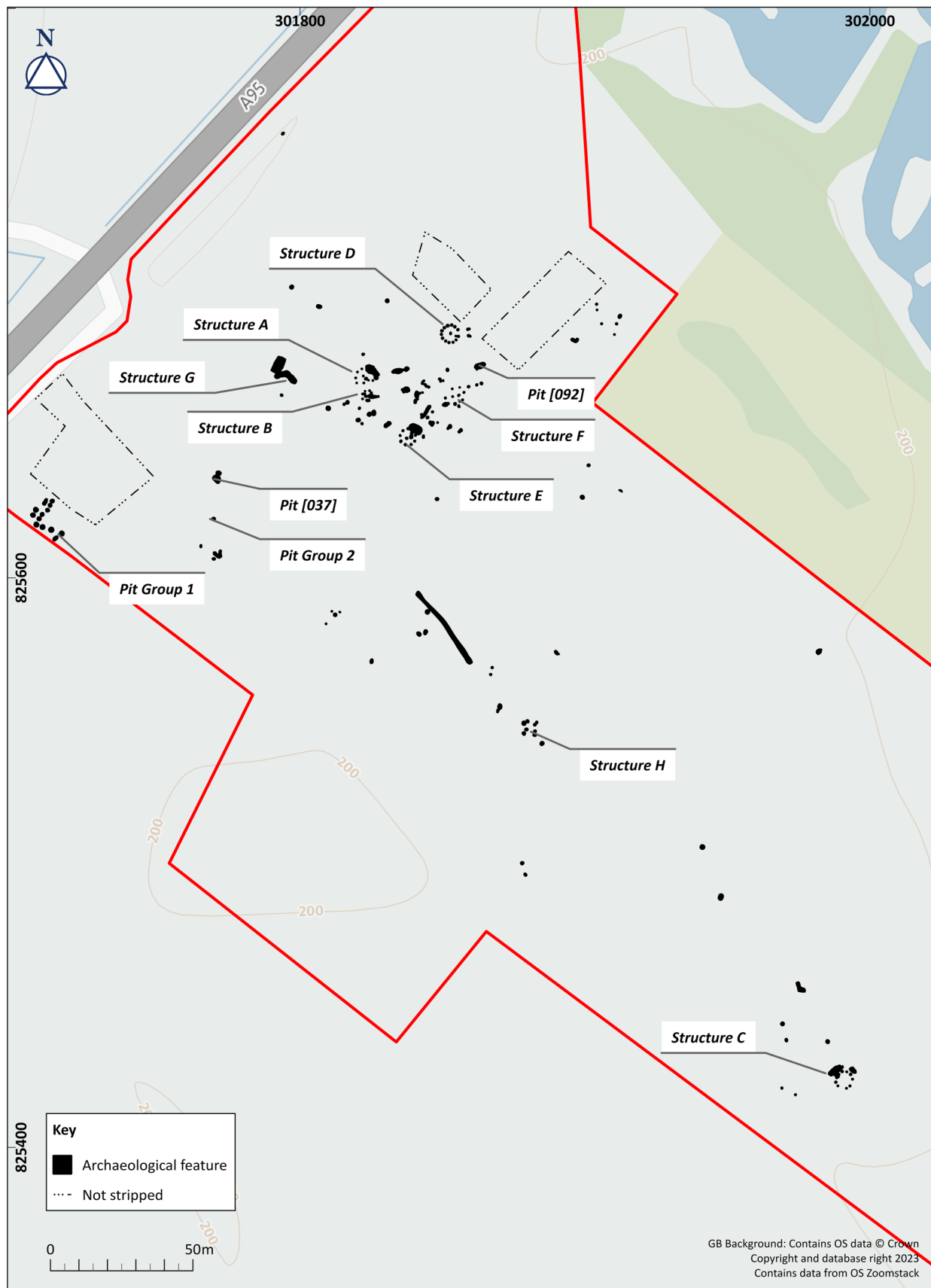
The landscape surrounding the site contained a range of recorded prehistoric sites, including standing stones at Tom Nan Carragh (Highland HER (HHER) MHG6788, MHG6789, and MHG6790), two cairns – Croftscalich (HHER MHG6820) and Gaich Wood (HHER MHG6817), two hut circles – Finlarig (HHER MHG50095) and Laggan Hill (HHER MHG29151), and a possible fort, Lower Craggan (HHER MHG6809).

Early medieval sites are located approximately 0.9km east of the development boundary, near the River Spey at Inverallen, including a Class I Pictish symbol stone and a cross-incised slab (Scheduled Monument Index No (SM) 2456). To the west, Finlarig church is an early Christian chapel (SM2707). Medieval sites also include Inverallen Church and associated holy well and carved stones. A range of post medieval activity is also evident, including farmsteads and the nearby township of Gaik.

Other recent archaeological fieldwork took place at Beachen Court (Murray & Williamson 2019), less than 3km northeast of the present site, where evidence of prehistoric settlement remains was also uncovered.



Illus 1 Location map (Sam O'Leary, AOC Archaeology; Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2023)



Illus 2 Overview of archaeological features (Sam O'Leary, AOC Archaeology; Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2023)