

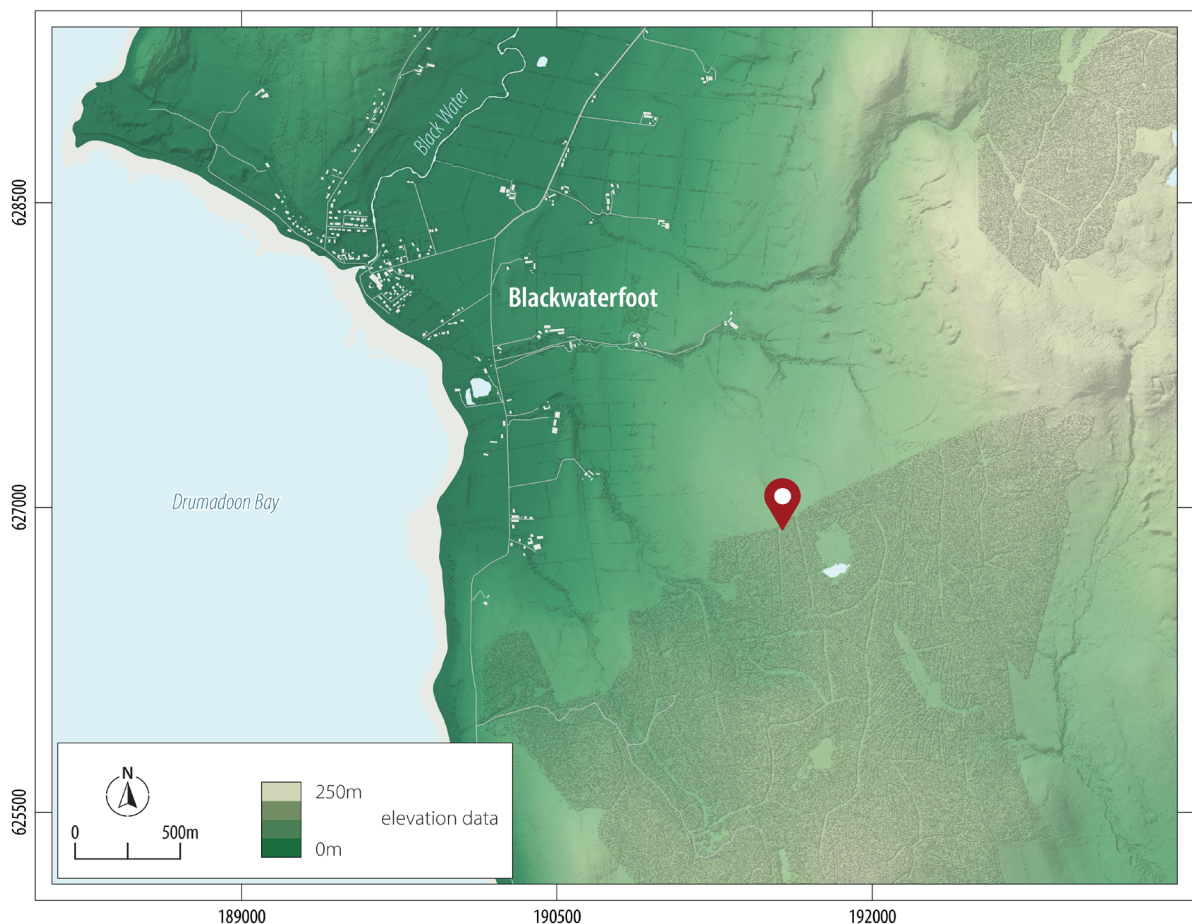
2. INTRODUCTION

The simple passage tomb of Carmahome can be found on the southwest side of the Isle of Arran, North Ayrshire, roughly 1km east of Kilpatrick (NR 9149 2685, NRHE ID [39628](#)) (Illus 1). It is now located on the edge of a commercial forestry plantation owned and managed by Forestry and Land Scotland, an executive agency of the Scottish Government. Its location appears to have been carefully chosen, being set on the west-facing slope of Beinn Tarsuim (*c* 140m OD) just at the point where the ground starts to fall away more steeply, ensuring that, when viewed from the shore, it would have been silhouetted against the skyline. The passage tomb lies within a landscape rich in archaeological features, many of which were investigated by John Barber and his team between 1978 and 1981 in order to inform future policies for the conservation of rich upland archaeological areas at risk of afforestation (Barber 1997).

Carmahome lies on the southern side of a broad glen that stretches from Machrie to Kilpatrick and within which is situated a wide range of prehistoric monuments. To the northwest of Kilpatrick lies the recently discovered earthwork cursus of Drumadoon which is set within a landscape filled with prehistoric hut-circles, cairns, and field systems, all sealed beneath a layer of peat (Brophy & MacGregor 2022). Some of these sites may date to the Neolithic. Beyond this lie the burial cairns, timber and stone circles, and settlement of Machrie Moor. To the southeast lie the early Neolithic Clyde cairns of Torrylin, East Bennan, and Carn Ban.

2.1 Research context

The *Boyne to Brodgar* initiative (whose research framework was published by Sheridan and Cooney in 2014) aims to improve and promote our understanding of the Neolithic monuments that can be found across Scotland, the Isle of Man, Ireland, and Northern Ireland. *Boyne to Brodgar* (<https://>



Illus 1 Location map (image: Forestry and Land Scotland)

scarf.scot/thematic/boyne-to-brodgar-making-monuments-creating-communities/), the *Scottish Archaeological Research Framework* (ScARF, <https://scarf.scot/>) and *Scotland's Archaeology Strategy* (<https://archaeologystrategy.scot/>) provided the strategic direction for the 'Awakening Sleeping Giants Archaeological Route Map' project, created by Gavin MacGregor under the aegis of the *Boyne to Brodgar* initiative (MacGregor 2022). This is an open archaeological proposal rooted in innovative practice: a considered, local action, research programme for the Isle of Arran that was developed in consultation with a wide range of different stakeholders. The *Route Map* proposes potential research actions, suggests possible creative responses and learning activities, and looks to integrate and enhance the visitor experience across a range of different sites. It provides a solid foundation for future archaeological project planning in regard to Arran's fascinating Neolithic heritage. In itself, it represents a new process of project design that is informed by and contributes to *Scotland's Archaeology Strategy*. The *Route Map* identified Carmahome as an important aspect of Arran's Neolithic heritage and prompted its re-examination.

2.2 Primary research questions

The primary aim of the re-examination of the Carmahome passage tomb was to provide data that may help to elucidate our understanding of the earliest funerary monuments and the earliest pottery in Britain. This would be achieved by obtaining dating material from sealed deposits within, or associated with, the Carmahome monument.

The rationale for considering the Carmahome passage tomb within this context is as follows. This monument has been considered to be one of a small group of Early Neolithic 'Breton-style' megalithic funerary monuments – simple passage tombs and polygonal closed chambers, some with surrounding kerbs and some with low cairns – which hypothetically appeared on and near the west coast of Scotland, and elsewhere along the west coast of Britain and around the coast in the northern half of Ireland, at some time between 4300 cal BC and 3900 cal BC, probably *c* 4000/3900 cal BC (Sheridan 2017: 300; Sheridan & Schulting 2020: 196). We will return to possible similar sites that have been associated with this hypothesis later in the report.

The third important aim of the fieldwork at Carmahome was to assess the current state of survival of the monument and determine the effect that commercial afforestation may be having on its physical and geochemical state. Currently the passage tomb is surrounded by mature Sitka spruce plantation with no distant views. The ground immediately adjacent to the monument was ploughed prior to commercial tree planting with the northern side of the cairn suffering some physical damage. The nearest Sitka spruce is less than 1m beyond the northern limit of cairn material and roots from this and another Sitka spruce on its western side had grown over and into the monument. A large drainage ditch lies a few metres to the east of monument and another non-functioning ditch on its southern side. Immediately prior to the excavation, the monument was covered in moss and the central chamber was waterlogged.