

3. BACKGROUND

The site at Loak Farm was situated on the edge of Lowland Perthshire immediately to the south of the Highland Boundary Fault. This is a particularly fertile area within the lower catchment area of the River Tay, with a good, reliable source of fresh water running down from the higher ground to the north and west and, as such, would have been particularly attractive for prehistoric settlement.

The topography of the area was generally flat. Across the majority of the area, the substrate consisted of orange-brown sands and gravels, and wet clays were seen at the base of a steep bank at the east end of Area 1. Overlying the substrate was 0.3m–0.5m of grey-brown silty-sand topsoil. The depth of this overlying deposit would have left the archaeological features vulnerable to deep ploughing, and it is reasonable to infer that a degree of truncation would have taken place.

Within the wider area there have been numerous sites of archaeological potential identified as cropmarks visible on aerial photographs. In addition to the two pit alignments within the borrow pit area (NHRE IDs: [27032](#) and [92608](#)) these include: an unenclosed settlement at Loakmill (NHRE ID: [286021](#)); a pit alignment at the nearby Court Hill (NHRE ID: [82087](#)); possible pits and souterrain at Jackstone (NHRE ID: [306003](#)); an unenclosed settlement consisting of roundhouses and a possible souterrain at Gellybanks (NHRE ID: [286018](#)); a pit alignment at Tophead (NHRE ID: [27031](#)); a ring ditch at Tophead ([27034](#)); a settlement and possible souterrain at Black Hill (NHRE ID: [27028](#)); a pit alignment at Northleys (NHRE ID: [239548](#)); and a significant concentration of features around Newmill/Newmill Cottages including roundhouses, pits, pit alignments, a ring ditch, unenclosed settlements, a palisaded enclosure and souterrains (NHRE IDs: [27006](#), [27024](#), [27030](#), [77387](#), [77388](#), [82075](#), [82082](#), [82085](#), [82116](#), [360414](#) and [360415](#)).

Evidence of prehistoric ritual activity is also apparent within the surrounding area. Lying adjacent to the borrow pit is the Loak standing stone (NHRE ID: [27014](#)) and Loak Court Hill barrow (NHRE ID: [27025](#)), while sites within the more general area include a standing stone and former stone circle at Pitsundry (NHRE ID: [27038](#)), a cup-marked

rock at Scot's Wood (NHRE ID: [293617](#)), standing stones at Gellybanks (NHRE ID: [27039](#)), and a standing stone topped by a more recent sundial at Over Benchil (NHRE ID: [27002](#)). A prehistoric barrow is recorded at Gauls (NHRE ID: [27009](#)), but a recent evaluation (Cachart 2018) suggests that it is a natural glacial feature.

Although evidence of confirmed subsurface archaeology within this general area is rather more limited, a souterrain (NHRE ID: [27007](#)) was identified at Newmill towards the summit of a low, flat-topped knoll. When this was excavated, a small area of associated settlement was also identified (Watkins 1981). This consisted of a roundhouse, numerous pits and post holes (some of which were thought to represent fence lines), and a much earlier Beaker burial at the centre of what was probably a penannular ring ditch (Watkins & Shepherd 1981).

More recent work within the general area has consisted of a programme of trial trenching associated with the dualling of the A9. Trenching at Newmill unenclosed settlement (NHRE ID: [27006](#)), on the opposite side of the A9 to the souterrain excavated by Watkins, identified a concentration of features including pits, post holes, linear features and burnt spreads (AOC Field No.6.5; Paton et al 2018). Probable Grooved Ware pottery recovered from these features would suggest a Neolithic date rather than the later prehistoric date of the souterrain and settlement, but the limited scope of this programme of works means that a multi-period date for this part of the settlement cannot be precluded.

Trial trenching also identified features within the vicinity of the cropmarks recorded as Ladner unenclosed settlement (NHRE ID: [27030](#)) and Marlehall enclosure and souterrain (NHRE ID: [82075](#)) (AOC Fields 6.2 and 6.3; Paton et al 2018), but no artefacts were recovered, and their date is uncertain. Further to the south, a number of features were identified during groundworks for the section of the Logierait gas pipeline between Pitcairngreen and Watermill (Gray & Kirby 2009; Kirby 2010). These sites consisted of small pit groups, one of which may have represented a structure, and ranged in date from Middle Neolithic to Iron Age. The examples above demonstrate that this area of Perthshire was heavily settled throughout prehistory from at least the Neolithic period onwards.