

2. INTRODUCTION

AOC Archaeology Group undertook excavations at Beaully Substation, Beaully, Inverness-shire between May and June 2022 (Illus 1). This revealed a Middle Bronze Age roundhouse comprising a turf and stone bank and an internal post-ring was recorded (Illus 2 and 3). The work was carried out in advance of substation reinforcement works on behalf of Scottish and Southern Electricity Network (SSEN), and in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) produced by WSP (2022).

The works consisted of the machined topsoil strip of a c 20m x 20m area centred over the Middle Bronze Age roundhouse (National Record of the Historic Environment [NRHE] ID [376515](#)). Deposits were stripped to the first archaeological horizon, where a circular turf and stone bank was recognised. Excavation then continued by hand, with the roundhouse being excavated in quadrants (Q1 to Q4 on Illus 4). Internal deposits and features within Q1, Q2, and Q4 were fully excavated by hand. Four slots were excavated through the roundhouse banks in order to record the nature of wall construction materials and techniques. A possible entrance structure, identified towards the southeast side of the roundhouse, was fully excavated. After the roundhouse banks and interior deposits and features had been sufficiently characterised and recorded in Q1, Q2, and Q4, controlled machine excavation was undertaken of the roundhouse bank and the interior of Q3, in the southwest of the structure. This facilitated the recording of additional archaeological features within Q3 and below the roundhouse banks.

Following the completion of fieldwork, a programme of post-excavation analysis was undertaken in agreement with SSEN, WSP, and the Historic Environment Team of Highland Council. The project's research objectives were to establish the character, extent, quality, preservation, and date of the archaeological remains, and to assess their significance.

2.1 Location, topography and geology

The site comprised a 20m x 20m area centred over a Middle Bronze Age roundhouse (NRHE ID [376515](#)) located next to Beaully Substation, and southwest of

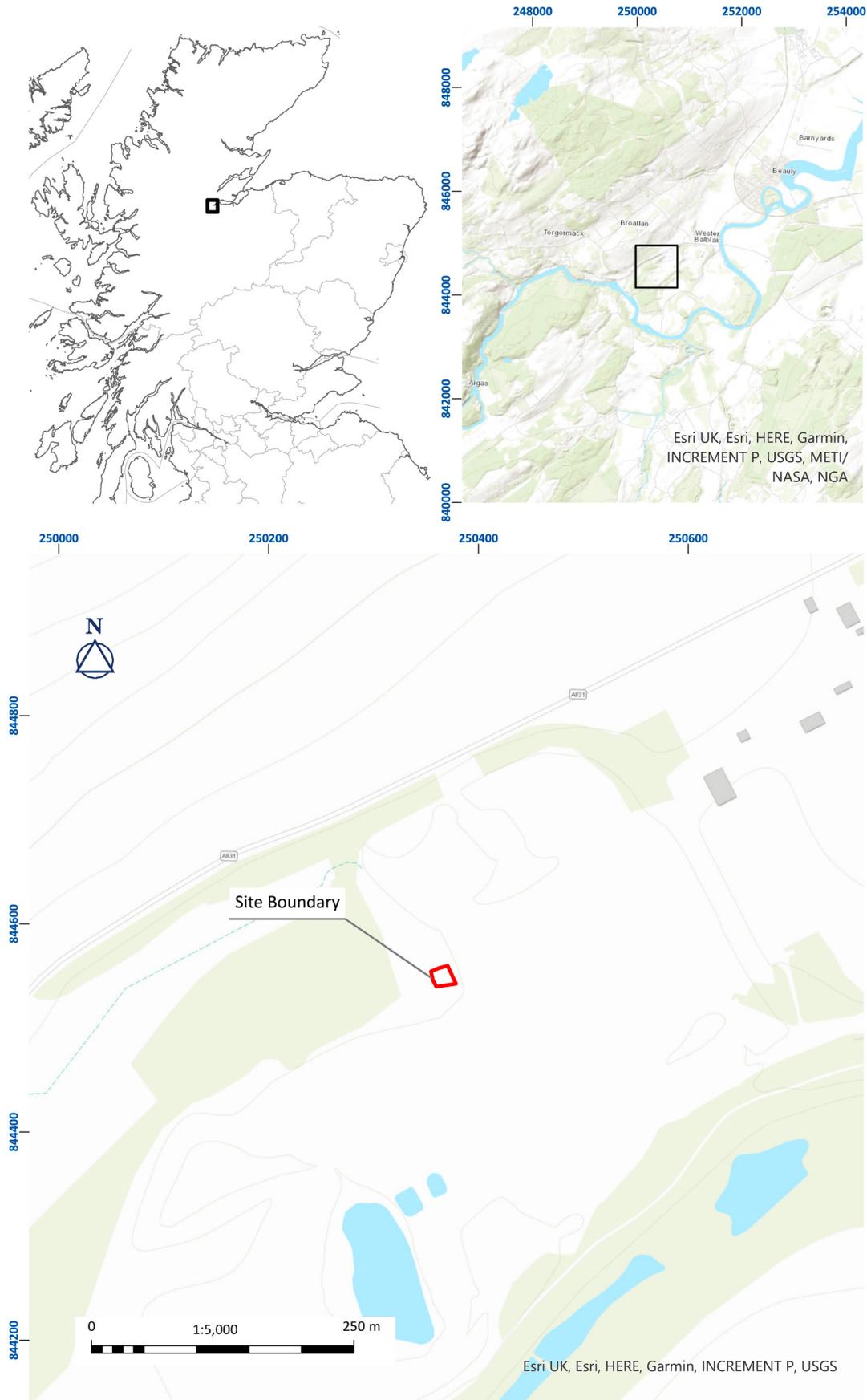
the town of Beaully, Inverness-shire (Illus 1) (centred on NGR: NH 5036 4455). The roundhouse was originally identified during a walkover survey by The Centre for Field Archaeology (CFA) in 1999, and was demarcated during Northlight Heritage excavations between 2012 and 2013 (Becket 2012; 2020). The eastern site boundary was formed by the substation perimeter fence, with scrub vegetation to the north, an overgrown mound to the south, and a gravel access track to the west. The ground surface was covered with heather, bracken, birch, and pine saplings. Mature Scots pine associated with Balblair Wood had previously been present across the site; the majority of these had recently been felled, with the stumps still present at the time of fieldwork in spring 2022.

The wider landscape comprises undulating land; this topography is natural in origin and was shaped by glacial action. The underlying geology comprises part of the Ousdale Arkose Formation – Breccia and Conglomerate. The local environment was previously dominated by rivers, resulting in an overlying sedimentary geology consisting of alluvial deposits (BGS 2023).

2.2 Archaeological background

Previous archaeological investigations have revealed that the site is part of a wider substantial Bronze Age landscape (Illus 3). Inverness Museum staff undertook rescue excavation in 1990 of a Bronze Age cist with associated Beaker pottery, within Balblair Wood, 300m east of the present site (Hanley & Sheridan 1995). In 2002, the North of Scotland Archaeology Society (NOSAS) carried out a walkover survey in an area north of Balblair Wood and several probable prehistoric sites were identified, comprising linear earthen banks, clearance cairns and hut circles (NOSAS 2002). In 2004, Headland Archaeology excavated a Bronze Age burial cairn at Balblair Wood, and investigated the surrounding area of clearance cairns and stone banks (Dutton et al 2008), which had originally been identified during previous walkover surveys (Coghill & Hanley 1993; Neighbour 2000; Marshall 2002).

In 2010, several of the sites identified during the NOSAS walkover survey, comprising three cairns, an enclosure, and a linear bank, were evaluated



Illus 1 Location map of Beauty Substation archaeological works (© OpenStreetMap and contributors, CC-BY-SA)



Illus 2 General view across site (AOC Archaeology)

by Glasgow University Archaeological Division (GUARD) prior to the construction of an access track and a programme of tree planting associated with the Beaully Substation (Becket 2010). Subsequently, between 2012 and 2014, archaeological evaluation and excavation was carried out by Northlight Heritage, to the north of the current development area. These works uncovered Bronze Age remains consisting of stone cairns, banks, and other possible structures (Becket 2012; 2014; 2020; Gallacher 2014). The stone cairns (Feature (FTR) 003n, FTR 004, FTR 005, FTR 006b, and FTR 008) consisted of circular or oval mounds, and varied in size from 5.6m to 15m in diameter. On average, they survived to a height of 0.6m. Most of the cairns appeared to have been constructed directly onto the natural subsoil; however, FTR 004 had been constructed above an archaeological deposit and several pits. Burnt bone, consisting of three fragments from a medium to large terrestrial mammal and six small fragments that could not be identified to species, and fragments of pottery were found within this cairn and in the underlying pits. While most of the cairns appear to be associated with stone clearance, FTR 004 may have been a funerary monument.

Three linear banks (FTR 001, FTR 006a, and FTR 009b) were also excavated by Northlight

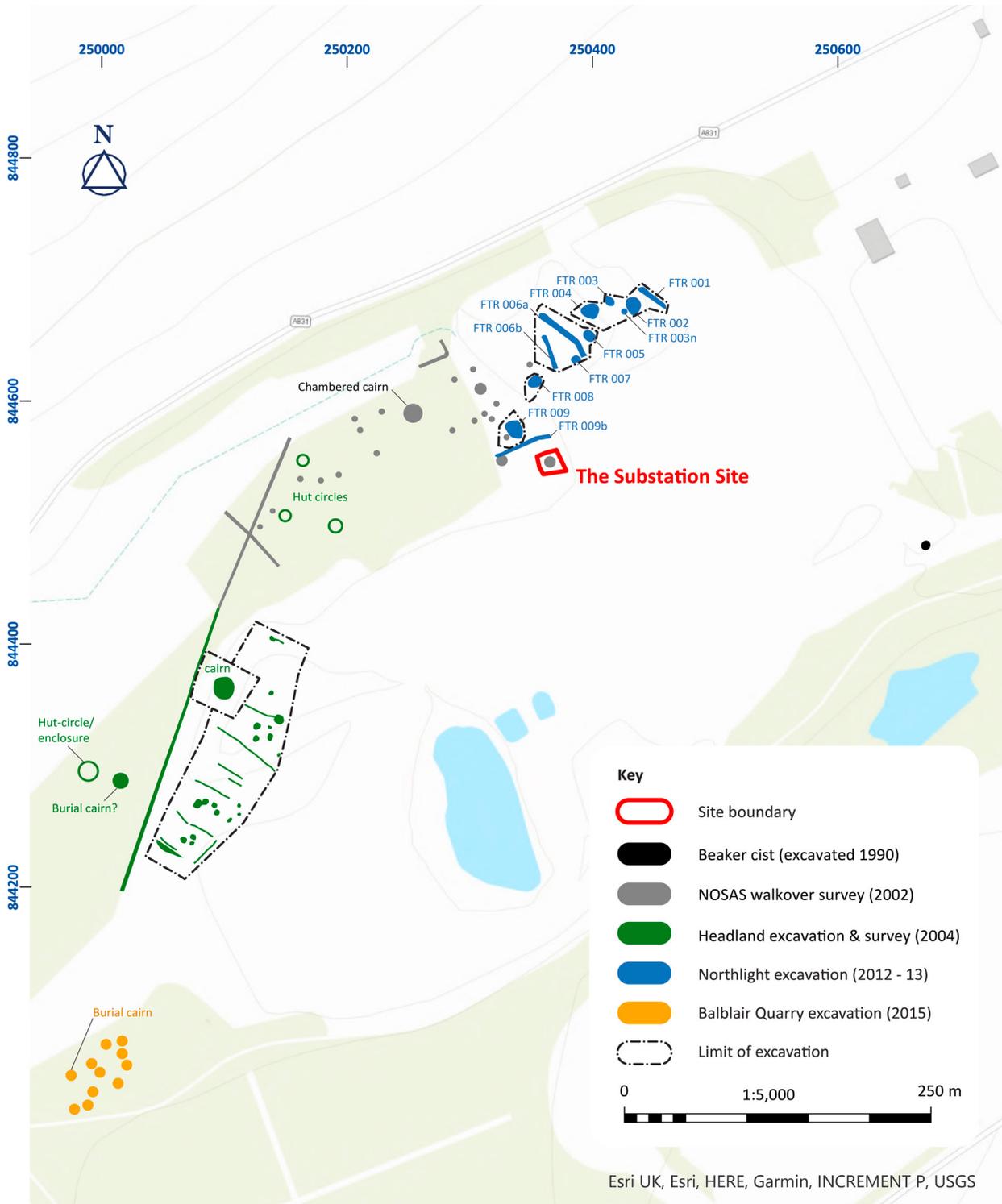
Heritage. They had been constructed with rounded stone cobbles and possibly turf, and each measured between 36m and 45m long, and between 3m and 6.3m wide. These banks were interpreted as field boundaries and may have been constructed during stone clearance activities.

Two roundhouses (FTR 002 and FTR 009), surviving as stone and turf banks, were also excavated by Northlight Heritage. FTR 002 had a southeast-facing entranceway identified as a gap in the bank with a post alignment and a stone step. No postholes were identified within the interior of FTR 002 and there was no evidence of a hearth. FTR 009 was observed as having a south-facing entrance, and the remnants of internal postholes.

In 2012, CFA excavated an area 650m southwest of the current roundhouse excavation as part of a multi-phased extension of Balblair Quarry. Several archaeological features (not depicted on Illus 3) were uncovered, including five stone clearance cairns (CFA 2013). No dateable material was recovered; however, the cairns were interpreted as being related to prehistoric agricultural activities. In 2015, AOC uncovered an additional 11 archaeological features (Illus 3) during an evaluation north of the previous CFA excavations (AOC 2015). These included a burial cairn containing a saddle quern, seven agricultural clearance cairns of probable prehistoric

date, a further possible clearance cairn, which may have comprised a small sub-oval banked enclosure or several overlapping clearance cairns, and two possible

banked enclosures. Apart from the burial cairn, the features were interpreted as relating to prehistoric agricultural activity with simple stratigraphy.



Illus 3 Beaulieu Substation with nearby archaeological sites (Lindsey Stirling & Sam O’Leary, AOC Archaeology)