
2 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of archaeological excavations undertaken by CFA Archaeology Ltd (CFA) on the route of the St Fergus to Aberdeen Gas Pipeline during May to July 2001. The work was commissioned by Environmental Resources Management (ERM) on behalf of Transco (now National Grid).

An Early Bronze Age unenclosed cremation cemetery was identified to the north-east of Skilmafilly, to the south of Maud (*illus 1*), during a watching brief on topsoil stripping of the pipeline easement, conducted by Kirsty Sabine Archaeology acting on behalf of Nacap Lawrence. This site was not known previously and would have been directly affected by pipeline construction; therefore the aims of the excavation were fully to excavate and record the cemetery prior to its removal.

Further discoveries made during the pipeline watching brief comprised a ring-ditch of uncertain date, an arc of three large pits of likely Late Neolithic or Bronze Age date, and a chipped stone scatter containing lithics of both early and later prehistoric date. These were fully excavated and site reports and post-excavation results are contained within the site archive. Further details relating to isolated minor sites are also contained in the project archive.

The cremation cemetery site lay on a small saddle between two hills at about 135m OD, with a south-east facing aspect (NGR: NJ 9088 3990) (*illus 1*). The Hill of Skilmafilly lies to the west. The land in this area is currently used for mixed farming. In the local area, an extensive field system and settlement remains survive at Bellmuir to the south-west of Skilmafilly, and include a complex of burial mounds. The RCHAMS records numerous findspots in the surrounding area, including axe heads, flint tools, carved stone balls and cinerary urns, many of which are antiquarian finds, and antiquarian records of the removal of burial cairns and stone circles. A

recumbent stone circle survives to the north-west at North Mains of Auchmaliddie, and the Candle Stone lies to the south-west at Drumwhindle House. Slightly further afield, between Mintlaw and Ellon, a number of stone circles, standing stones, burial cairns and prehistoric field systems and settlements are also Scheduled. Late Neolithic settlement remains were recorded at Auchmachar Clump during excavations for a pipeline. These sites attest to the richness of prehistoric activity in this area and the degree of survival of upstanding remains.

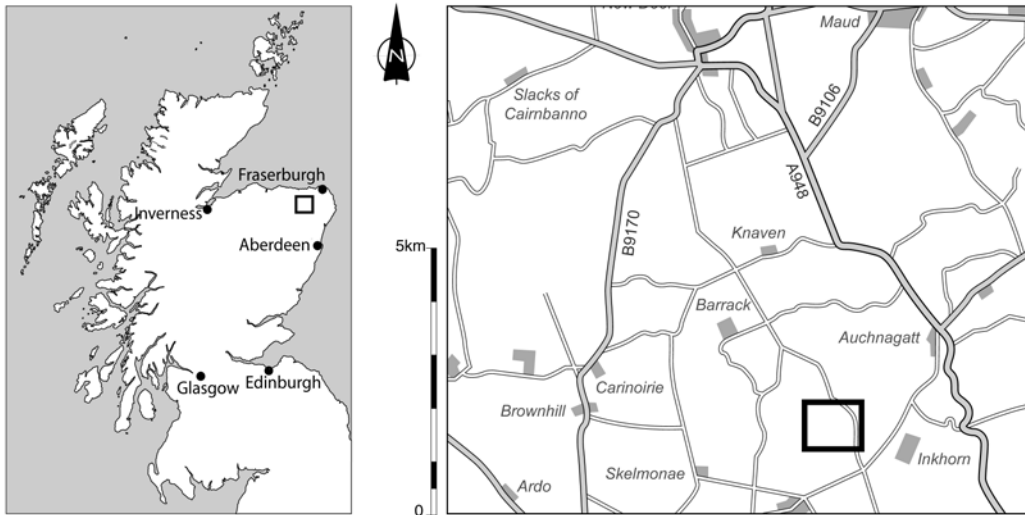
2.1 Working methods

Topsoil was removed by tracked earth-moving machines equipped with smooth-bladed ditching buckets, to reveal the subsoil surface. Once cleared of topsoil the area was cleaned by hand and all features were fully excavated. Sampling consisted of bulk samples for flotation and sub-samples for routine soil tests; these were taken from each context within a negative feature.

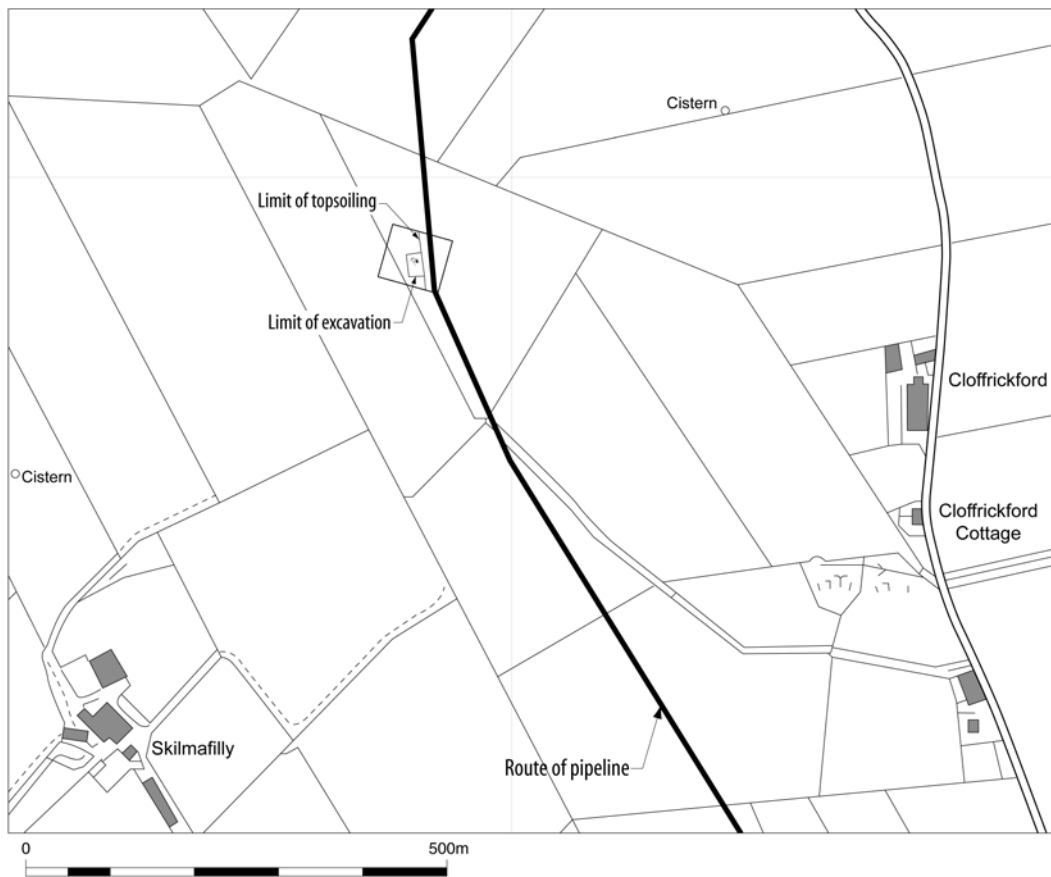
The subsoil consisted of compacted yellow-orange clay, in places leached to a grey-green colour ringed by iron panning. Modern ploughsoil 0.2m deep lay directly over the subsoil. Despite the shallow depth of the topsoil, there were few ploughscores visible on the subsoil surface across the site. Truncation of the inverted pots recorded in certain pits is a clear indication that some destruction had occurred, however.

2.2 Archive

The project archive has been deposited with the RCHAMS. The finds have been claimed under Treasure Trove procedures and have been deposited with the Marischal Museum, Aberdeen.



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Illus 1 Location map