

FROM MACHAIR TO MOUNTAINS

Archaeological Survey and Excavation in South Uist



edited by

MIKE PARKER PEARSON

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and Excavation in South Uist

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Mike Parker Pearson

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Front cover: Poll a' Charra standing stone at the south end of South Uist

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- Illustrations were drawn by Irene de Luis (1.7, 2.19, 3.2, 3.3, 4.2, 4.9, 4.10, 8.2, 12.5–12.7, 12.9–12.10, 12.13, 13.10, 13.12, 14.6, 14.10, 14.12, 15.1, 15.2, 15.5, 15.7, 15.9–15.11, 16.3, 16.5,

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Contributors

DAVID BARKER
formerly Senior Archaeologist
Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Civic Centre
Glebe Street
Stoke-on-Trent
UK

VICKI CUMMINGS
School of Forensic and Investigative Science
University of Central Lancashire
Preston
UK

JOHN EVANS†

ANDREW FLEMING
formerly School of Archaeology, History and
Anthropology
University of Wales
Trinity St David
Lampeter
UK

RACHEL GRAHAME
Tees Archaeology
Sir William Gray House
Clarence Road
Hartlepool
UK

MICHAEL HAMILTON
Newport City Council
Civic Centre
Newport
South Wales
UK

COLE HENLEY
TINY v
West End Cottage
Acre Road
Bo'ness
UK

MATT LAW
HISAR
Cardiff University
Cardiff
UK

GILL MACLEAN†

RICHARD MADGWICK
School of Conservation Sciences
Bournemouth University
Bournemouth
UK

PETER MARSHALL
Chronologies
25 Onslow Road
Sheffield
UK

JOHN MORELAND
Department of Archaeology
University of Sheffield
Sheffield
UK

JACQUI MULVILLE
HISAR
Cardiff University
Cardiff
UK

AMELIA PANNETT
Cambrian Archaeological Projects
Old Chapel Farm
Tylwch
Powys
UK

MIKE PARKER PEARSON
Department of Archaeology
University of Sheffield
Sheffield
UK

VICKY PARSONS
c/o ArcHeritage
Campo House
54 Campo Lane
Sheffield
UK

ELIZABETH PIEKSMA
Bedford Museum
Castle Lane
Bedford
UK

JOSHUA POLLARD
Department of Archaeology
University of Southampton
Southampton
UK

JOHN RAVEN
Historic Scotland
Longmore House
Salisbury Place
Edinburgh
UK

NIALL SHARPLES
HISAR
Cardiff University
Cardiff
UK

ALISON SHERIDAN
National Museums of Scotland
Chambers Street
Edinburgh
UK

HELEN SMITH
School of Conservation Sciences
Bournemouth University
Bournemouth
UK

JIM SYMONDS
Department of Archaeology
University of York
York
UK

NIGEL THEW
Musée et Service archéologique du canton de Neuchâtel
Avenue du Mail 59
CH-2000 Neuchâtel
Switzerland

From the machair grassland of its west coast to the mountains and rocky shore of its east side, South Uist is an island with an alluringly straight-forward topography. Between the eastern hills and the machair plain, the landscape is dotted with freshwater lochs and lochans in the peaty ‘blackland’. These three different ecological zones – machair, blackland and mountains – all run north-south, to give South Uist its distinctive linear character. Each bears the imprint of human occupation over many millennia. Although the machair strip has long been uninhabited, it is filled with hundreds of settlement mounds, occupied from the Beaker period, 4,000 years ago, until a few centuries ago. The blacklands bear the physical traces of past farming practices – lazy beds and field boundaries – as well as the remains of Medieval settlements, more recent blackhouses and lochs containing duns, brochs and crannogs. In the hills lie the upstanding remains of shielings, Iron Age wheelhouses and Neolithic chambered tombs.

South Uist’s archaeological richness has not always been appreciated. Surveys were carried out sporadically during the late 19th and 20th centuries, notably by the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) during the First World War and by teams of archaeologists on the rocket range during the Cold War. Even so, large tracts of land remained unsurveyed and hundreds of archaeological sites lay unnoticed. Between 1989 and 2003, researchers from many institutions attempted to remedy this situation. Initially conceived as Sheffield University’s SEARCH project in South Uist, Barra and the southern isles, the project grew to include teams from Cardiff University, Bournemouth University, Glasgow University and ARCUS (Archaeological Research Consultancy at the University of Sheffield) amongst others.

As well as carrying out large-scale excavations of Bronze Age houses (Cladh Hallan), an Iron Age broch (Dun Vulcan), Viking settlements (Bornais and Cille Pheadair) and Post-Medieval blackhouses (Airigh Mhuillin), archaeologists also conducted surveys and small-scale excavations in order to provide a new understanding of South Uist’s long-term history from the arrival of farming around 6,000 years ago. Hundreds of new sites were discovered. Evaluative excavations of carefully chosen examples have provided new information on the chronology, material culture and character of South Uist’s archaeological remains. Whilst the large, set-piece excavations mentioned above are being published in separate monographs, the results of the surveys and small-scale excavations have been brought together within this volume. Together they provide a record and

an assessment of South Uist’s archaeology which will be valuable for researchers – amateur and professional – for years to come.

Like the other islands of the Outer Hebrides, South Uist has some of the best preserved archaeological remains within Britain and even further afield. To single out a few of these, the Beaker-period settlements are unmatched in northern and central Europe. The Bronze Age houses preserve the signatures of past domestic activities in floors that have survived the depredations of ploughing, so damaging in other parts of Britain. The Viking settlements also provide a remarkable material record of one of the most fascinating social transformations of the Atlantic world. Finally, the oral history and traditions of an earlier way of life provide insights into ancient agricultural practices and social life before they are lost forever.

None of the research in this volume would have been possible without the support of various institutions, and the help and interest of so many local people. Funding and support for the various projects was provided by Historic Scotland, the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, the Robert Kiln Trust and the Royal Archaeological Institute, as well as the participating universities. Historic Scotland were principal funders of much of the fieldwork and are thanked for contributing to the costs of publication; special thanks go to Rod McCullagh for his encouragement. In South Uist, the local historical society – Comann Eachdraidh Uibhist a Deas (CEUD) – provided help and advice throughout.

So many individuals have to be thanked. We have received tremendous support from Uilleam Macdonald, Seumus MacDonald, Angus John MacKinnon, and Mary Kate and Patrick Morrison. Many who are no longer with us made great contributions to the project: the late Canon John Angus Galbraith (Iain Aonghas Mac a’ Bhreatannaich), the late Effie Macmillan of Dalabrog, the late Callum MacDonald and the late Alasdair MacIntyre of Cille Pheadair, the late Michael MacInnes of Ludag and the late Neil MacMillan of Milton. This book is dedicated to their memory.

Mike Parker Pearson
St. Valentine’s Day 2011¹

Note

- 1 The copy editor, Karen Godden, did not appreciate aiming for completion on this date. I thank her for her hard work and patience, and everything else.

1 Introduction

Mike Parker Pearson and Helen Smith

The SEARCH project (Sheffield Environmental and Archaeological Research Campaign in the Hebrides) commenced in 1987 and covered the southern islands of Scotland's Western Isles, also known as the Outer Hebrides. One team, led by Keith Branigan, Pat Foster and Colin Merrony, concentrated their research on Barra and the small isles at the southernmost end of the island chain (Branigan 2005; Branigan and Foster 1995; 2000; 2002) and the other was based on South Uist (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004). A third team carried out an integrated series of environmental projects investigating palynology, vegetation, palaeoentomology, dune geomorphology, climate change, phytoliths, animal husbandry, crop processing and related fields across South Uist and Barra (Gilbertson *et al.* 1996).

The 1980s was an ideal moment to commence a major archaeological research project on South Uist and Barra. The southern islands had been largely ignored by archaeologists since the 1950s; besides the work of Iain Crawford at the Udal in North Uist, Ian Shepherd at Rosinish, Denis Harding and Ian Armit's Edinburgh University projects in Lewis and North Uist, only John Barber's Scottish Office Central Unit prehistoric farmstead project had extended as far as this southernmost island group.

While working for Historic Scotland and then as a lecturer at Cardiff University, Niall Sharples joined the research team on South Uist to excavate the broch of Dun Vulcan (Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999), later developing a number of Cardiff-led research investigations in the late 1990s and early 2000s. His excavations on the Iron Age and Norse-period settlement at Bornais accompanied those of the Sheffield-led team at Cladh Hallan (Bronze Age and Iron Age) and Cille Pheadair (Norse period). These large-scale excavations are not included in this volume, being published separately.

South Uist – the environmental background

Before discussing the research background, a short description of South Uist will be useful for readers not

wholly acquainted with the island and its position within the Western Isles. The Outer Hebrides are situated 60–80km off the northwest coast of Scotland, separated from the mainland by The Minch in the north and the Sea of the Hebrides in the south. Forming a breakwater against the Atlantic from Cape Wrath in the north to Ardnamurchan in the south, the Outer Hebrides provide some shelter to the mainland and Inner Hebrides, situated to the east. The archipelago stretches 213km from The Butt of Lewis to Barra Head, and consists of 119 named islands of which only 16 are now permanently inhabited (Boyd 1979). The island chain, once known as 'The Long Island' (Carmichael 1884), divides geographically into two main groups, the Sound of Harris separating Lewis and Harris (total area *c.*214,000 ha) from the southern islands (total area *c.*76,000 ha), namely North Uist, Benbecula, South Uist and Barra.

South Uist (Uibhist a Deas) is an island 30km north–south and 12km east–west (Figure 1.1). To the north of it lies Benbecula and, beyond, North Uist. To the south, beyond the island of Eriskay (Eirisgeigh) and other small uninhabited islands, are Barra and the southern isles.

The land is mountainous in Harris, gently undulating in Lewis and generally low-lying in North Uist, South Uist and Benbecula, with the exception of Eaval (347m) on the southeast of North Uist and a ridge of mountains along the east side of South Uist, the highest of which, Beinn Mhòr, rises to 620m. The majority of the land is, however, below 100m Ordnance Datum. Numerous lochs occur in the low-lying land of North Uist, Benbecula and South Uist.

Geology

The Outer Hebrides were formed over 3,000 million years ago from an eroded platform of Precambrian Lewisian gneiss whose primary components are quartz and mica. Subsequent episodes of significance to present-day Hebridean geology were the major emplacements of granite in Harris and south Lewis – the Scourian (older than 2,200 million years old) and the Laxfordian (less than 2,200

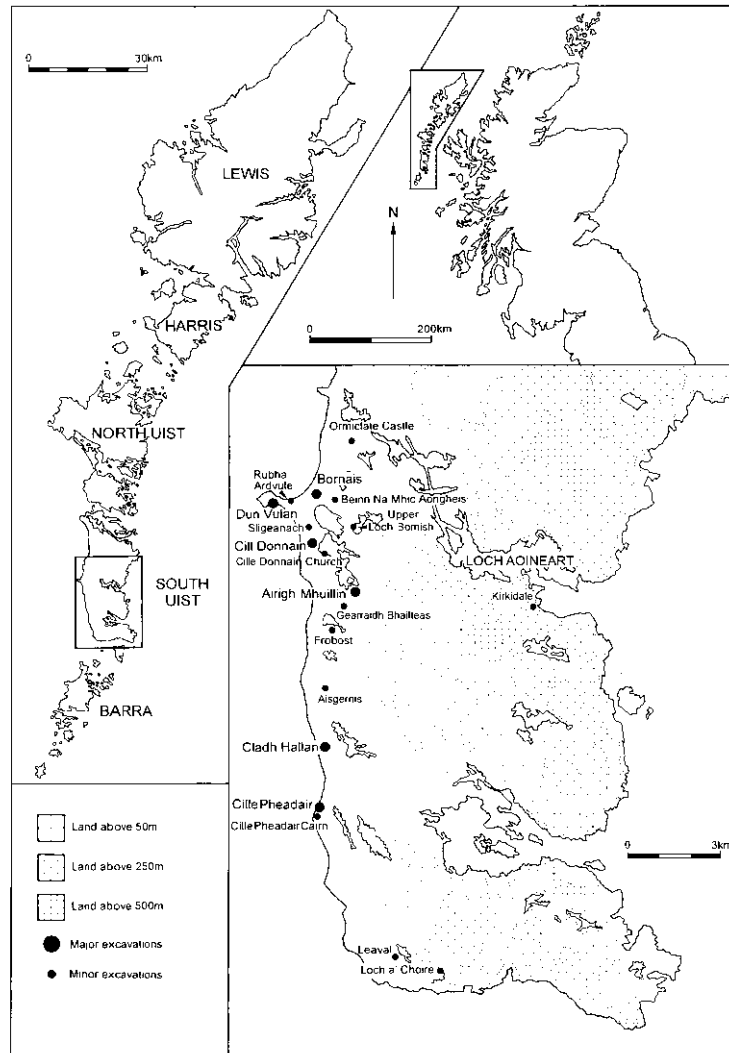


Figure 1.1. Map of South Uist showing the major sites investigated 1991–2003

million years old). The only sedimentary rock is Triassic sandstone, occurring around the shores of Broad Bay, Lewis. The whole of the Uists are made of Lewisian gneiss, with a thrust plane running northeast–southwest, associated with the mountainous band on the eastern seaboard. On the west coast the sea bed is shallow, owing to a submerged platform forming an extensive area of continental shelf. Differential erosion of the gneiss, coupled with a complex fault patterning, has contributed to the irregular surface of the hard rock (Boyd and Boyd 1990; Gribble 1991).

The present-day landscape results from glacial activity in the Quaternary era, during which the hard, acid Lewisian gneiss was eroded, leaving a gently undulating platform, trenched and hollowed along ancient fault lines. Glacial drifts of gravels and sands were deposited onto the ice-sculpted platform. Between 9,000 and 5,000 years ago the Lewisian platform subsided, owing to differential rates of sea level rise and isostatic uplift, which resulted in the formation of numerous salt-water lochs following marine inundations. In the Uists, the glacial deposits are now eroded in places or overlain by peat, particularly in the upland regions in the east, and divided by oligotrophic

freshwater lochs. On the western seaboard, the glacial deposits and peat are overlain by highly calcareous windblown sand, forming dune systems and sandy plains with eutrophic lochs (Boyd and Boyd 1990).

Soil

The southern Outer Hebrides can be divided into three broad zones of soil types. On South Uist (Figure 1.2), the eastern third is the hilly and mountainous area that comes down to the sea in a series of three fjord-like sea lochs separated by a rugged coastline of low cliffs. The middle zone is an area of shallow peat soils, known as ‘blackland’, interspersed with myriad small freshwater lochs. To the west, the sea covers a shallow shelf that stretches out for about 20km from the coastline. This was formerly dry land in the Mesolithic and Early Neolithic but has since become inundated. The most distinct landform of South Uist and the Western Isles is the zone of calcareous sand that covers the island’s west coast and is known as machair. With the associated dune systems, the machair covers approximately 120 square kilometres along the west coast of North Uist,

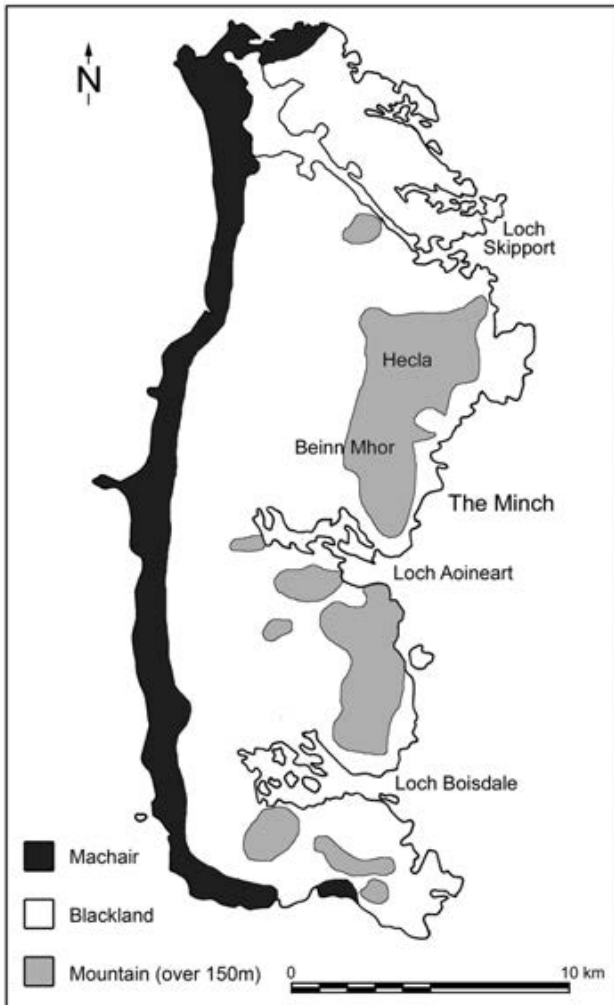


Figure 1.2. Landscape zones on South Uist, after Ritchie 1979



Figure 1.3. South Uist's machair plain on the west side of the island at Bornais

Benbecula and South Uist. The machair forms an almost continuous fertile strip along this exposed Atlantic coast. It supports grass vegetation and extends inland for about a kilometre along the west coast (Figure 1.3); small pockets of it can also be found on the north and south coasts of the Uist islands.

The machair comprises grassland formed on gently sloping shell sand deposits. The nature and evolution of machair formation is discussed in detail by Ritchie and colleagues (1976; 1979; Ritchie and Whittington 1994; Edwards *et al.* 2005). Large quantities of shell sand were swept landwards, aided by rising sea levels, to form an extensive pre-machair dune system. High-energy waves and strong Atlantic winds caused the deflation of beach dunes and swept sand inland. Where the sand stabilized, calciphilic grassland established to form long stretches of sandy machair plain. Radiocarbon dates for offshore peats pre-dating the machair suggest that machair formation commenced before 5700 BP (Ritchie 1979).

The calcareous soils have high pH values, 6.5 to 7.5 in top soils and 7.5 to 8.0 in subsoils. The dune-machair soils range from calcareous regosols and brown calcareous soils to poorly drained calcareous gleys and peaty calcareous gleys, depending on the drainage conditions and level of the water table (Glentworth 1979; Hudson 1991). Water percolating from the freely draining sands has contributed to the formation of lochs and fens in the slack behind the machair. Areas of machair are prone to seasonal flooding.

The soil system of the inland zone is based on shallow acidic glacial deposits and predominantly acid rock, which frequently lies near the surface or protrudes as rocky outcrops (Hudson 1991). Blackland is formed where the peat and shell sand combine with glacial drift, to provide some areas of good agricultural land. Drainage is good on areas of coarse-textured drift, and brown forest soils or cultivated humus-iron podzols may occur. In areas where drainage and permeability are slow, soils include noncalcareous, humic and peaty gleys (*ibid.*). Peaty gleys and podzols occur on areas adjacent to the cultivated blackland where the peat has been removed for fuel. The acid reaction of these soils has been lessened and, therefore, the cultivation potential improved, by the addition of shell sand. Such variations in the soil development on blackland areas have resulted in the recognition of three 'district types' of land, which have been classified as: crofting land, peat-cutting areas and blanket peat (*ibid.*)

Further east lie large open tracts of gently sloping blanket peat rising and giving way to hills or mountains. The character of the moorland is determined by the extent of waterlogging which, in turn, is dependent on the rainfall, temperature and topography. The extreme eastern coast is steep and rocky, in places plunging 50m or more into the Minch.

Climate

The western seaboard of Ireland and Scotland lies on the climatic frontier between two weather systems: the moist oceanic air to the west and the dry continental air to the east. The result of the interaction between these opposing air masses is a storm-belt, particularly energetic over the Hebridean shelf (Boyd and Boyd 1990). The climate of the Outer Hebrides is characteristically cool, cloudy, windy and

wet although oceanic air and North Atlantic drift result in relatively mild winters. The annual and diurnal temperature ranges are extremely small (the annual range of only 8.8°C is one of the smallest in Britain), with cool summers and generally frost-free winters. The warmest months are July and August (12.9°C), although the sunnier months are May and June, and the coldest months are January and February (4.1°C). It is rare for maximum daily temperatures to fall below 0°C (Angus 1991).

The northwest of Scotland experiences some of the highest wind speeds in the world, if not the highest (Gloyne 1968). The average wind speed at Stornoway is 14.4 knots (7.4 m/s) and 50 days of gale force winds are recorded each year (Manley 1979). The mean annual rainfall on low ground is 1020–1270mm (*ibid.*), which compares favourably with agriculturally productive areas elsewhere in Britain. Over 200 raindays commonly occur each year but the distribution of rainfall throughout the year is unusual. The driest months are May and June, which together account for only 10% of the annual rainfall. It is this factor, combined with low summer temperatures and high relative humidity, that produces such a wet climate compared to areas with comparable rainfall on the mainland. Owing to Atlantic Ocean sea spray being carried inland by prevailing winds, the rain on the Outer Hebrides has a chemical composition similar to dilute sea water (Waterson *et al.* 1979).

The Gulf Stream not only ensures mild winter temperatures but also brings what was for many millennia the only source of timber. After most of South Uist's woodland had gone by about 2500 BC (Brayshay and Edwards 1996), the major source of large timber was driftwood that had grown in Canada and floated across the Atlantic on the Labrador current and then the Gulf Stream. Temperatures are too low for successful cultivation of wheat although it was formerly cultivated around 2000 BC. Barley is the island's principal crop, followed by oats and rye.

Vegetation

The vegetation of the Outer Hebrides as a whole reflects strongly the island status, with definite marine influences (Boyd and Boyd 1990). The restricted flora on the islands compared to the Scottish mainland, and even to the Inner Hebrides, results from the limited habitat availability, the climate, high levels of acidity (owing to the bed rock and peaty soils) and a history of human interference. The more fertile zone of machair on the western coast is species-rich (Currie 1979; Dickinson and Randall 1979). Marram (*Ammophila arenaria*) dominates the sand dune systems (Robertson 1984), and eyebright/red fescue (*Euphrasia* spp/*Festuca rubra*) dune pasture occurs on more stable areas (Hudson 1991). On the blackland, heath-grass (*Danthonia decumbens*) occurs in areas of maritime grassland and acid grassland (Pankhurst and Mullin 1991). At the fringe of the Lewis peat plain, on unfenced areas of uncultivated blackland, heath-grass in association with mat-grass (*Nardus stricta*) is commonly the dominant species

(Hudson 1991). Areas of land nearer to the west coast, affected by salt spray, often carry a maritime pasture. The peatland areas are dominated by ombrogenous bog, acidic heath and grassland (Goode and Lindsay 1979).

Previous research on South Uist

South Uist forms a neatly defined research area with clearly bounded edges. However, it has never been inhabited as an isolated island: its past has been intimately bound up with that of the other islands in the chain, particularly North Uist and Barra. Furthermore, seafaring connections to mainland Scotland and Ireland, as well as to England, Wales and Scandinavia in later periods, have played an important role in the islanders' lives.

Other than Captain Thomas' recording of the brochs and duns of South Uist in the 19th century (1890), there was no concerted antiquarian or archaeological investigation of South Uist on a par with Erskine Beveridge's remarkable study of North Uist (1911). In 1912 Mr J. Wedderspoon's report of archaeological finds from sand quarrying at Cladh Hallan on South Uist's machair and other locations was the first such account for the island until the Royal Commission's survey during World War I (RCAHMS 1928).

Werner Kissling, a researcher into Hebridean history (1944), is credited with the first excavation on the island: in 1950 he investigated the remarkably well-preserved Middle Iron Age 'wheelhouse' at Kilpheder (Cille Pheadair). This site was written up and published in 1952 by Tom Lethbridge, a Cambridge-based archaeologist who spent several seasons sailing his yacht to South Uist and finding other Iron Age and Bronze Age settlement sites on the machair, including that at Cladh Hallan.

The construction of a rocket range in the northern part of the island led in 1957 to what might be called the first co-ordinated and large-scale excavation programme. Two wheelhouses (so-called because their internal arrangement of radial piers looks like the spokes of a wheel when viewed in plan; Young and Richardson 1960; Fairhurst 1971), a Norse-period longhouse (MacLaren 1974) and a group of undated 'hut circles' (Jack Scott pers. comm.; Figure 1.4) were excavated on the machair of Drimore and further north. Unfortunately those sites that were published were written up in different journals, with no integrating research design or overall discussion.

During the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s Iain Crawford directed an ambitious excavation programme, on a scale greater than anything before or since, on three settlement mounds at the Udal on the northern tip of North Uist (1986). This prepared the way for a fuller appreciation of the remarkable deep stratigraphic sequences within the machair of the Uists and other islands, and the concomitant long-term record of settlement. The Udal results are only now being written up, and very little information from this far-sighted excavation is yet in the public domain. During this period, Coinneach Maclean (who later completed a PhD in archaeology) recorded discoveries of archaeological finds and structural remains on the machair of South Uist.



Figure 1.4. Wheelhouse-style roundhouses excavated by Jack Scott on Drimore machair in 1957 (machair survey Site 104) as part of the rocket range project

In the late 1980s Crawford's excavations were winding down, and in the 1990s new projects on North Uist were gathering momentum. Ewan Campbell wrote up Richard Atkinson's excavation of wheelhouses at Sollas (Campbell 1991) and Ian Armit conducted research into prehistoric sites (Armit 1990; 1992).

In 1984 a large programme of archaeological excavation was carried out on eroding prehistoric machair sites in the Uists at Baile Sear, Balelone, Hornish Point (at the north tip of North Uist) and Gortan (at the south end of South Uist). The project was implemented by John Barber on behalf of the SDD's central excavation unit and has recently been published (Barber 2003).

That project was an important predecessor for the SEARCH project because it adopted a multi-disciplinary programme of analysis that involved a number of Sheffield-based and Sheffield-trained scientific and environmental archaeologists. In this way, important links, knowledge of the material, and expertise were developed just as the SEARCH project was starting up.

SEARCH project overall aims and outcomes

The main aim of the SEARCH project was to investigate the long-term adaptation of human societies to the marginal environment of the Outer Hebrides. Sheffield University's Department of Archaeology and Prehistory was at the forefront of environmental and processual archaeology in the 1970s and 1980s and this was an opportunity to ground models of human-environment interaction, cultural adaptation to natural constraints, and long-term processes of culture change in a field project in which most of the staff and students of the department collaborated as a joint venture. As the growth of a post-processual archaeology by the late 1980s shifted research agendas away from environmental determinism and evolutionary adaptation towards a social archaeology of human agency and fully integrated scientific techniques addressing social questions, so the aims of the project diversified.

It became apparent from our excavations in South Uist that prehistoric and ancient societies were living here more comfortably than we had initially imagined and that they were also involved in long-distance trading networks. Their 'marginality' was perhaps more of a modern-day perception than a past reality. These were not people on the edge, eking out a miserable subsistence from a harsh and unpredictable environment, but communities capable of producing surpluses and with developed social worlds that reached beyond the islands.

Out of our changed theoretical views and our practical results, a new synthesis of aims emerged. Our previous consideration of environment as an external force was replaced by an understanding of landscape as culturally constructed and mediated. Dwellings also could be understood as cultural artefacts, rather more than mere shelters from the elements. The project developed a threefold set of aims:

1. To investigate the long-term relationship between human settlement and environment;
2. To study social relationships within the landscape in terms of land-use, settlement patterns, field systems, animal husbandry, cultivation and seasonal movements;
3. To study the daily life of past generations through their architecture, use of domestic space, material culture and conditions of life.

Not only did the research aims of the project change with the times but the project also proved to be far more successful than was ever imagined at the start and has run for over 20 years. In that time it has attracted a wide range of sponsorship and financial support and has involved and been helped by the local community, as well as making a considerable contribution to archaeological research and understanding. Many discoveries and advances have been of international significance, particularly in the context of the North Atlantic links with Scandinavia, Nova Scotia, Greenland and Iceland, and mainland Scotland.

The South Uist element of the SEARCH project broadened its base after 1994 to include wider collaboration with other universities and institutions, thereby bringing further expertise and resources to the project. This was partly due to the success of Sheffield's postgraduate students, having received their field training in the Outer Hebrides, in gaining teaching posts at other universities and bringing their own students in turn.

Throughout its life, the SEARCH project on South Uist liaised closely with the South Uist Historical Society – Comann Eachdraidh Uibhist a Deas (CEUD) – whose committee were consulted on a regular basis about each summer season's proposals for fieldwork. In particular, the late Effie MacMillan, the late John Galbraith and the late Neil MacMillan were constant sources of support, encouragement and knowledge without whom the project would not have been such a success.

In terms of community involvement, the public talks, open days and museum exhibitions have contributed to

public interest and awareness locally whilst four television documentaries have brought the project's findings to an even wider national and international audience. Archaeological sites such as Flora MacDonald's birthplace at Milton, the roundhouse settlement at Cladh Hallan, the Cill Donnain wheelhouse and the broch of Dun Vulcan are all now more usefully presented for better public access. There is also an archaeological and wildlife trail which includes the sites close to Cill Donnain Museum. More importantly, the project's research has provided a legacy of knowledge about South Uist's past which is unmatched across most of Scotland and which will provide a resource for education and tourism for many years to come.

A brief history of the project in South Uist

Initial survey work was carried out in 1987 by Martin Wildgoose, Richard Hodges and David Gilbertson. Wildgoose identified a number of midden sites on the machair, three of which were eroding and were thus targeted for excavation. One of these was Cill Donnain III, the small Middle Iron Age wheelhouse subsequently excavated by Marek Zvelebil in 1989–1991. Another was Cill Donnain I, a Beaker settlement that was evaluated in 1988 (see Chapter 10). To the south, on Daliburgh (Dalabrog) machair, Eddie Moth directed another small-scale excavation of a Bronze Age and Early Iron Age site in a sand quarry at Cladh Hallan (Parker Pearson *et al.* in prep.). During the 1990s, a much larger range of sites was selected for further investigation and excavation (Figure 1.5).

In 1988 two surveys were commenced, one by Andrew Fleming on the 'blackland' or peatlands in the townships of Cill Donnain and Gearraidh Bhailteas (Milton; see Chapter 3, this volume) and the other by John Moreland and Alex Woolf along the mountainous east coast of these townships around Loch Aoineart (Locheynort; Figure 1.6; see Chapter 4).¹ The aim was to provide a surveyed transect east–west across the middle of the island in which upstanding sites and monuments might be recorded. Survey along the machair of the west coast in 1990 by Woolf and Jean-Luc Schwenninger, then postgraduate students, identified the site of Dun Vulcan as suffering from coastal erosion. The search for the Mesolithic concentrated on identifying likely looking rock shelters throughout the Uists. Another, more localized survey provided a contour map and building plan of the complex of five Medieval chapels at Howmore. The south Loch Aoineart survey (see Chapter 4) was followed by Moreland's excavation of a group of structures including a 19th-century blackhouse at Kirkidale on the east coast (see Chapter 17).

By 1993 the two landscape surveys were completed, together with the Kirkidale excavations. The surviving walls of the Cill Donnain wheelhouse were moved in 1992 to the grounds of Cill Donnain Museum where they were re-erected by Zvelebil. He, Fleming and Moreland left the fieldwork component of the SEARCH project at this point. In 1991 Mike Parker Pearson and Niall Sharples became involved in the project, guided by Woolf and Moreland, to

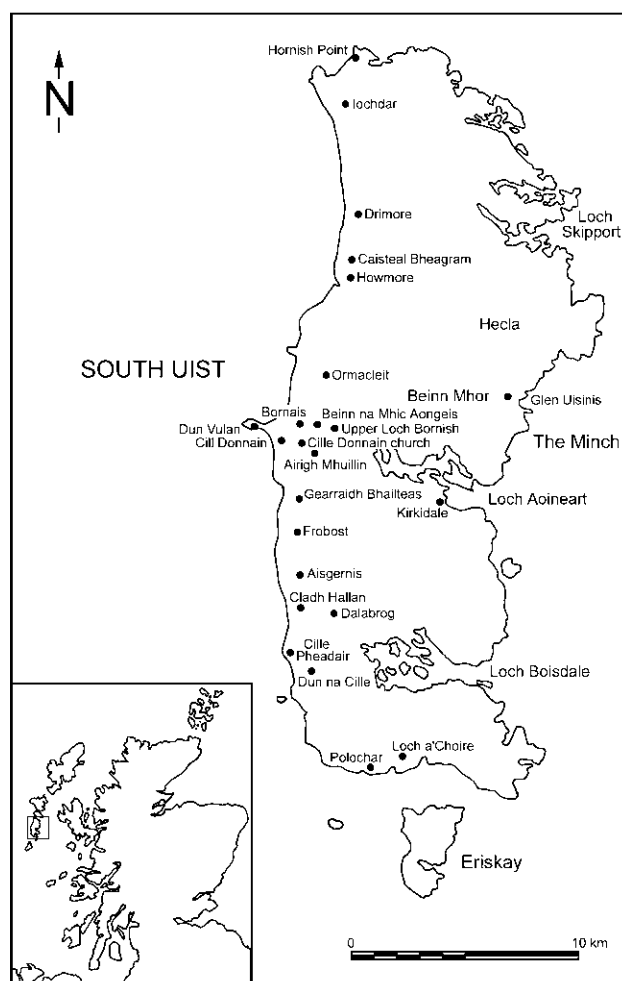


Figure 1.5. Map of South Uist showing many of the sites investigated by the SEARCH project

evaluate the scheduled ancient monument of Dun Vulcan. After trial trenching in that year, they returned in 1992 to commence a larger-scale excavation of the Dun Vulcan broch and its external structures and deposits at risk to coastal erosion. The results of the Dun Vulcan excavations have been published separately (Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999).

The Dun Vulcan project was a success thanks to the environmental science elements of the excavation, provided and co-ordinated by Jacqui Mulville and Helen Smith, former postgraduates whose PhD theses had developed within SEARCH (Mulville 1993; Smith 1994). Thanks to their contribution, a new and integrated methodology was developed at Dun Vulcan for analysing archaeological layers, particularly those from floors. This was to play a major role in future years during the large-scale excavations of the Norse-period longhouses at Bornais and Cille Pheadair, and on the Bronze Age–Early Iron Age settlement at Cladh Hallan (Smith *et al.* 2001).

Research directions after 1994

By 1994 the project had reached a crossroads. Fieldwork



Figure 1.6. A survey team of the SEARCH project in 1990 on the rocky east coast of South Uist in Loch Aoinart. On the left are Alex Woolf and Adrian Chadwick; on the right are Miranda Richardson and Jo Hambley

at Dun Vulan was largely completed and most of the staff had already left. However, the results of the Dun Vulan excavation highlighted a series of key research questions:

1. Comparison of the architecture and diet of the broch's inhabitants with those of the Cill Donnain wheelhouse and other Middle Iron Age 'wheelhouses' indicated that the inhabitants of the broch and its surrounding settlement were probably of a higher social standing. It was important to know more of Dun Vulan's geographical relationship to contemporary settlements during the first millennium AD.
2. The brochs and wheelhouses of South Uist and the remainder of the Western Isles are well known but virtually nothing was known of communities during the previous two millennia. Had the distinctive broch and wheelhouse architecture developed out of earlier traditions? What were the conditions within which this highly visible, monumental architecture appeared?
3. The occupation at Dun Vulan ended before the Viking period. Given that Dun Vulan was probably the 'borg' on the 'ness' (which survives as the Norse-derived place-name for that township: Bornish [Gaelic: Bornais]), what was the relationship of Norse-period settlement to the broch and its hinterland? The Norse period is well represented in many of the subsequently Gaelicized place-names of South Uist but there was no knowledge of Norse settlements or settlement pattern, with the exception of a problematic longhouse at Drimore, excavated in the 1950s (MacLaren 1974).

The 1994 season was focused on the evaluation of a large Norse-period settlement on Bornais machair and a return to Cladh Hallan for further evaluation of the areas affected by sand quarrying. It was also at this time that severe winter storms exposed a small but deeply stratified Norse-period farmstead site at Cille Pheadair. Excavations in these three localities were to be the main elements of the project for years to come. The Cille Pheadair excavations were conducted over three seasons in 1996–1998 (Parker Pearson

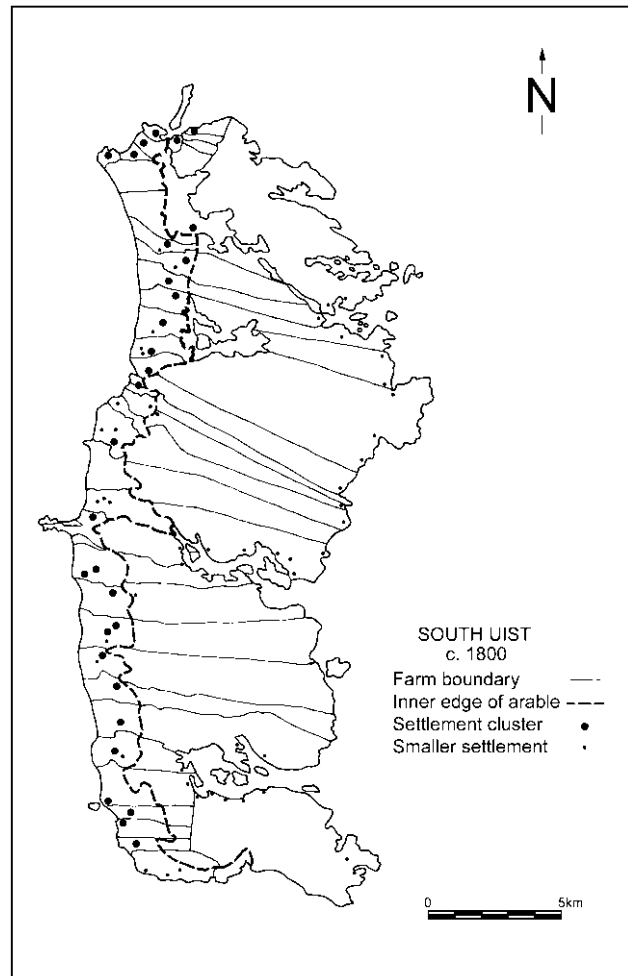


Figure 1.7. Map of South Uist showing the township boundaries recorded on William Bald's map of 1805

et al. forthcoming). The Bornais excavations continued from 1994 to 2000 (Sharples 2005 and forthcoming a and b) and again from 2003. Work at Cladh Hallan was continuous until 2002. The other major excavation project was conducted by Jim Symonds on the 18th–19th century Flora MacDonald birthplace site between 1995 and 2000, not as a rescue dig but as a presentational project (Symonds 1999).

Surveys of the machair and peatlands

The successful identification of these sites for excavation was partly due to the results of the machair survey which began in the spring of 1993 (see Chapter 2). By 1997 the whole of South Uist's machair had been systematically walked and over 240 sites have now been logged.² The vast majority of these were hitherto unknown and they indicate the profound importance of the machair for settlement from the Beaker period and Early Bronze Age to the end of the Norse period. The machair survey was also an opportunity for a management overview. A significant number of these machair settlement mounds are being eroded by natural, animal and human agencies. Although the threatened sites of Bornais, Cladh Hallan and Cille Pheadair could be

excavated, many more remain at risk, particularly from the rabbits whose burrowing led to the sites' discovery in the first place.

The machair survey was the first of a new series of surveys. One of its conclusions was the suggestion that the latitudinal organization of pre-Clearance townships (Figure 1.7) might have its origins in the dispersed pattern of Middle Iron Age settlements (*bailtean*) along the machair (Parker Pearson 1996). Thereafter, particularly for the Norse to early Post-Medieval periods, it was proposed that new townships developed by fissioning and/or by parcelling out those east–west land units which possessed little or no machair. These *gearraidh* ('garry') townships with no machair should thus be largely or wholly devoid of Middle and Late Iron Age settlement mounds.

The 'proto-township' hypothesis developed from the results of the machair survey provided the impetus to critically re-examine the blacklands and mountain areas, to look at settlement patterns more widely. Most of these surveys were student projects organized around the SEARCH project. In the Gleann Dail area at the south end of the island a survey by Rachel Grahame (see Chapter 8) identified a square cairn similar to a Pictish Late Iron Age burial excavated at Cille Pheadair (Mulville *et al.* 2003). In the hills north of Loch Aoineart, Sheffield student John Raven identified a landscape of shielings (see Chapter 7). Thereafter Raven's PhD thesis at Glasgow University investigated Medieval settlement patterns in South Uist (Raven 2005; see Chapters 6, 7 and 13). Cardiff postgraduate students Vicki Cummings (see Chapter 5) and Cole Henley (see Chapters 5 and 9) concentrated on Neolithic chambered tombs and settlements in the upland areas of South Uist, examining their positions in the landscape and how they may have related to paths of movement and habitation.

Evaluations – the Dun Vulcan environs and the area south to Aisgernis

Between 1995 and 1998, a number of evaluations were carried out in different parts of the island to gain more detailed understanding of settlement dates and sequence. Some of these were geophysical, notably Andrew Chamberlain and Bill Sellars' experiments with ground-penetrating radar as well as conventional resistivity and magnetometry, and Mike Hamilton's geophysical surveys of sites on Bornais and Cill Donnain machair (see Chapters 10 and 11). The remainder were mostly trial-trenching and test-pitting exercises. These were carried out in two particular zones – the Dun Vulcan environs and the area to the south of it.

The Dun Vulcan environs

The Dun Vulcan environs provided a useful geographical zone for research into the three issues outlined above. The machair survey had started in this area, between Staoinebrig (Stoneybridge) to the north and Cill Donnain

(Kildonan) to the south, and had identified over 40 sites, most of which are now dated. The excavations at the sites of Cill Donnain III and I (see Chapter 10) provided a useful starting point from which to investigate settlements in the vicinity. The first sites to be investigated were the three settlement mounds on Bornais machair (machair survey sites 1–3, also known as mounds 1–3) that formed the largest of a complex of Norse/Medieval sites in Bornais (Sharples 2005). Thereafter, evaluations to the east of this group, on the western fringe of the blacklands at Bornish House and A Beinn na Mhic Aongheis (Hill of the Son of Angus) identified Post-Medieval settlement remains on the latter site (Chapter 16). Late Medieval remains were found in 1995 at the Cille Donnain church site (Chapters 3 and 14), first identified as a Late Norse foundation in 1989 by Fleming and Woolf (Fleming and Woolf 1992). Test-pitting attempts to locate possible pagan Viking burial places at Cnoc Breac (Staoinebrig) and Cill Donnain site 37 were unsuccessful and revealed only natural features.

The prehistoric elements of the Dun Vulcan environs were revealed by the recovery of diagnostic pottery from machair settlement mounds and by trial trenching in locations that were either unforthcoming of dating evidence or were of some promise. Zvelebil's excavation of Cill Donnain III uncovered a deeply buried layer with Earlier Bronze Age Cordoned Urn pottery in 1991 (confirmed during coring in 2004; Parker Pearson and Seddon 2004; see Figure 20.14). The machair survey also identified a number of Beaker-period and second millennium BC settlement areas as well as Iron Age activity in the area west of Cill Donnain III, known as Sligeanach. In 1997 Sharples excavated a series of test pits and trial trenches here and recovered a Beaker cultivation soil as well as settlement remains of the second and first millennia BC (see Chapter 11). The other prehistoric site evaluated by test pitting and trial trenching was the island 'dun' in Upper Loch Bornish, excavated by Peter Marshall in 1997 (see Chapter 12) which may well have started as a broch pre-dating Dun Vulcan.

The Frobost, Aisgernis and Gearraidh Bhailteas area

The area south of Cill Donnain also attracted further interest beyond the machair survey and the Flora MacDonald project. Plain Style pottery recovered from a sand quarry on Frobost machair was evidence of Pictish Late Iron Age occupation of a very large site whose extent was confirmed by test pitting (see Chapter 13). Otherwise, the remainder of evaluations and excavations were on sites of the historical period. The most recent of these were of 19th–20th century remains – a blackhouse at Frobost, excavated by Helen Smith as part of her investigation into geochemical and environmental characterization of formation processes, and Jim Symonds and Anna Badcock's excavations around 19th–20th-century Milton House.

Medieval and Post-Medieval settlement remains are often difficult to locate given the scarcity of diagnostic finds. However, some success has been achieved in this

area. To the west of the Flora MacDonald birthplace site, Symonds trial-trenched a small settlement of Late Medieval and early Post-Medieval date at Gearraidh Bhailteas (Garryvaltos), first identified in Fleming's blackland survey (see Chapters 3 and 15). A little further south on Aisgernis machair, just east of the golf course, a north–south line of mounds revealed Post-Medieval settlement activity (see Chapter 13). During the project's lifetime, the team received considerable help on the history of South Uist from local historian Gill MacLean and her husband Donald. Gill died in 1998 before she was able to publish her research on the Loch Aoinart area but the greater part of her manuscript is included in this volume (Chapter 18 and part of Chapter 4), with thanks to Comann Eachdraidh Uibhist a Deas (South Uist Historical Society) for publication permission.

In the last ten years, a number of commercial archaeological projects have recorded further sites in Uist and Eriskay. ARCUS carried out survey and excavation in advance of the North Uist–Berneray causeway (Downes and Badcock 1998).³ Babbie carried out survey and excavations in advance of the South Uist–Eriskay causeway (Johnston and Dempsey 2000; Jacobs Babbie 2001) as well as on the south coast at Ludag (SUAT 2006). Similar assessments were also carried out in advance of water pipelines in South Uist (Jacobs UK Ltd. 2004; Shaw 2008). After the hurricane of January 2005, assessments of coastal erosion were carried out for Historic Scotland by EASE archaeological consultants (Moore and Wilson 2005; 2007; see Chapters 2 and 4). Other small excavations and assessments have been primarily carried out by Kate MacDonald (now Uist Archaeology; see *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland* and *CANMORE passim*).

Conclusion

After over 20 years of research on South Uist, many of the SEARCH project's objectives have been met. Two books aimed at a general audience (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004; 2008) have already been published, as well as the first four of eight technical monographs (Gilbertson *et al.* 1996; Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999; Sharples 2005; and this volume). The environmental background and its impact on long-term habitation are better understood. There is now something of an understanding of settlement patterns and land use from the beginning of the Bronze Age to the Clearances. Excavations have provided detailed insights into domestic life and material circumstances for key periods of the Bronze Age, Iron Age and later. Several aspects of the initial research aims have not been so successfully achieved. Evidence for a Mesolithic period of occupation remains elusive. We still know far too little about the Neolithic period. For the Beaker period, South Uist and the Western Isles in general are one of the few parts of Europe where houses and settlements survive in good condition, yet there has been very little research into these enigmatic Early Bronze Age dwellings in recent years. Early and Middle Bronze Age settlements abound on the machair and excavation of these fragile sites is urgently

required to gain some understanding of their inhabitants' daily lives.

Notes

- 1 The place-name Loch Aoinart has multiple alternative spellings. The 2007 edition of the 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey Explorer map uses Loch Aineort but that is *not* the correct South Uist Gaelic spelling (pers. comms. from Uist residents, February 2011). We have chosen the South Uist Gaelic spelling as the primary version used throughout this volume, in order to privilege the local Gaelic in the literature; this spelling may well be in danger of disappearing from use now that both the O.S. map and the road signs have imposed a variant spelling. In local usage the area is still often referred to in the form Locheynort. See Appendix for further variant spellings.
- 2 Site reference numbers for *machair* sites used in all chapters of this book refer to the site inventory in Chapter 2; Chapter 4 has an entirely separate inventory for *Loch Aoinart*, with similar numbering.
- 3 All unpublished reports by ARCUS and the University of Sheffield are available from the Department of Archaeology at the University of Sheffield.

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2 The machair survey

Mike Parker Pearson

Summary

South Uist's machair was surveyed primarily between 1993 and 1996, with further regular but brief visits until 2004 to update the site inventory. The survey area extends from Cille Bhrighde in the extreme south of the island to Baile Gharbhaidh at the north end of the island, a distance of 35km (Figure 2.1).¹ Along this stretch, the width of the machair varies between 300m and 2km, averaging about one kilometre wide (Figure 1.2). RCAHMS records for prehistoric and early historic settlement sites list only some 40 locations within this zone. The machair project has now increased this number to 241 sites. More sites have been identified along the seaward edge of the machair by a recent coastal zone assessment survey though most of these date to the last 300 years (Moore and Wilson 2005). Two of the RCAHMS sites are misidentifications: the site at Orosay [NF 730 173], described as a broch/dun, is actually a small Late Neolithic settlement at An Doirlinn (Sharples 2005b; NF71NW 5), whilst there is no trace of the supposed broch at Dun Ruaidh [NF 739 219]. There is also now no trace of two other sites recorded by the RCAHMS; Gearraidh Bhailteas Site 79 and Dalabrog Site 157 have both been entirely quarried away.²

There are two areas most responsive to field survey on the machair:

- One is the section between Cill Donnain and Staoinebrig, in the centre of the survey area (Figure 2.2). Here, where most of the surviving machair plain has not been covered by dunes, some 53 sites have been recognized. Along with a grouping of Early Bronze Age settlement mounds in the *Cill Donnain* area, the main settlement pattern is a set of clusters of Iron Age to Viking Age settlement mounds within the territory of each of the five townships in this region. This pattern of Iron Age–Viking Age clusters gave rise to the hypothesis of 'proto-townships'; we suggest that the system of land allotment amongst the townships is essentially an Iron Age phenomenon which survived substantially intact until the Clearances of the early 19th century (Parker Pearson 1996b).

- The second area producing remarkable results is *Machair Mheadhanach* in the Iochdar area, north of the rocket range and west of Loch Bee. Here some 35 settlement sites, ranging in date from the Late Bronze

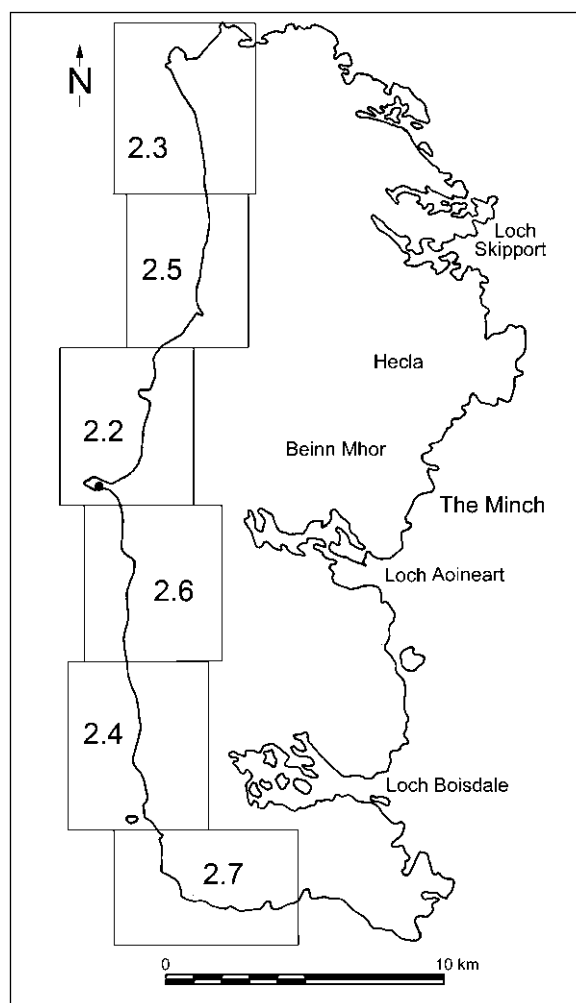


Figure 2.1. Map of South Uist showing the six machair survey zones

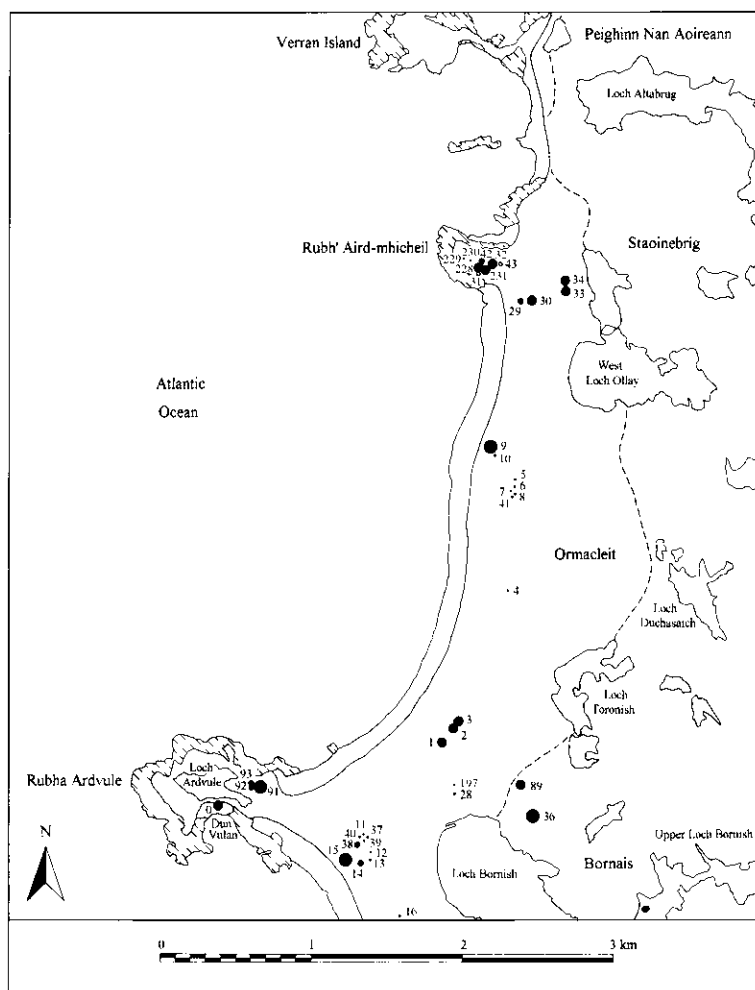


Figure 2.2. Sites in the Dun Vulan environs

Age to the early Post-Medieval period, are strung out along a 2km line on a northwest–southeast axis (Figure 2.3). This multifocal pattern is very different from other settlement patterns on South Uist but could be argued to fit the ‘proto-township’ model.

There are two other notable concentrations of sites:

- One is on the machair of Dalabrog and Cille Pheadair, where a total of 20 sites have been discovered in an area of 3 sq km (Figure 2.4). This density is all the more remarkable given the large extent of dune incursion onto the machair plain in this area. Within this zone three key settlement sites, all well preserved, have been excavated. These are the *Kilpheder* wheelhouse (NF 7330 2031) of Middle Iron Age date (Lethbridge 1952), the *Cladh Hallan* roundhouses (NF 7310 2203) of Early Iron Age date (Parker Pearson and Roper 1994; Mulville and Parker Pearson 1995; Atkinson *et al.* 1996; Mulville and Parker Pearson 1997; Parker Pearson *et al.* in prep.) and the Norse-period house sequence at *Cille Pheadair* (Parker Pearson *et al.* 1996; Brennand *et al.* 1997; Parker Pearson *et al.* forthcoming).³ The most remarkable feature of

prehistoric settlement in this area is the 500m-long string of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age settlements west of the modern cemetery of Cladh Hallan. Many of these buildings were damaged by stone-robbing in the 19th century to build the western walls of the modern cemetery. Others, however, will remain well preserved if inaccessible beneath the surrounding dunes.

- The final major concentration of sites is at *Drimore* where a group of 14 settlement sites, of various dates, are arranged in a south-southeast/north-northwest line 750m long (Figure 2.5). Most of these sites were identified in the 1950s during survey and excavation in advance of the rocket range’s construction. The Viking Age house (Site 103), the ‘hut circles’ (Site 104) and A’Cheardach Bheag wheelhouse (Site 110) were excavated at that time (Fairhurst 1971; MacLaren 1974), as was A’Cheardach Mhor wheelhouse (Site 117), 320m to the north (Young and Richardson 1960).

Although the survey of the machair between 1993 and 1996 was intensive, it was not exhaustive: erosion, cultivation and rabbit burrowing will have exposed some further sites

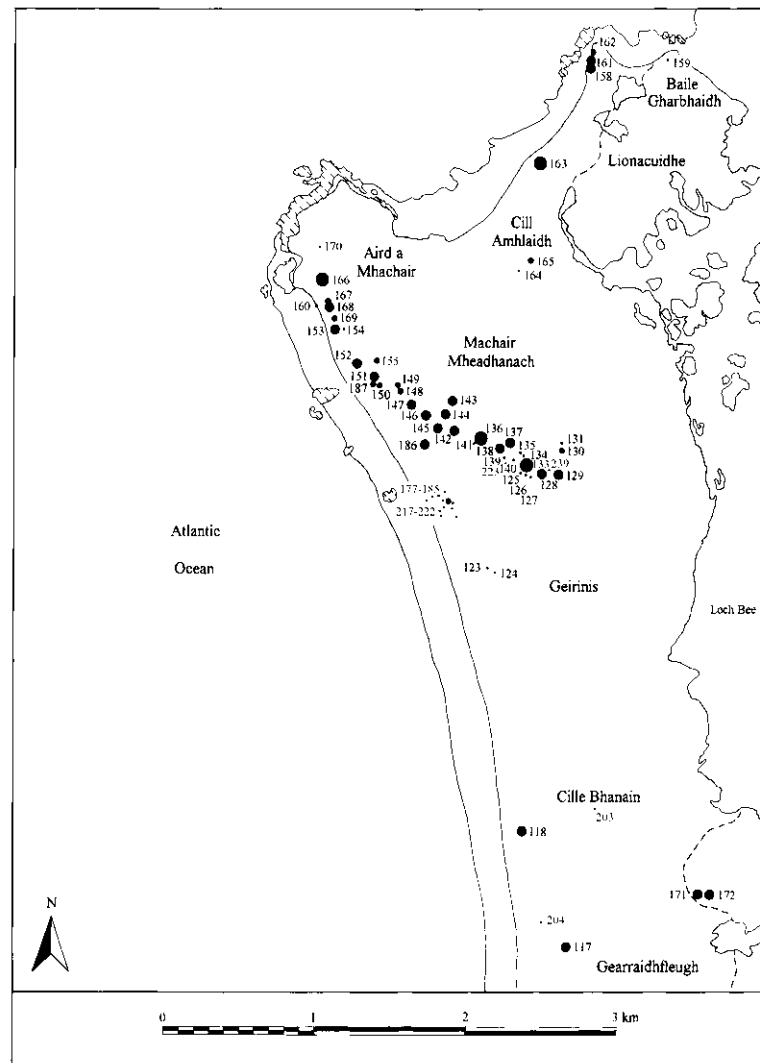


Figure 2.3. Sites in the Machair Mheadhanach area

since that time and others will still remain invisible beneath deep sand dunes. The results of this survey do indicate a remarkable density of later prehistoric and early historic settlements on the machair.

The pattern of hypothesised proto-townships throughout the survey area (Parker Pearson 1996b) holds reasonably well but there are gaps for each of the six 'garry' (*gearraidh*) townships of South Uist. This suggests that these townships might have formed in the Medieval period by subdivision of larger units, and thus do not have prehistoric predecessors. At Gearraidh Bhailteas (NF 735 265), a Medieval to Post-Medieval settlement on the peatland ('blackland') was surveyed by Fleming and trial-trenched by Symonds (see Chapters 3 and 15, this volume). Another Medieval peatland settlement is identified at Upper Bornish (see Chapter 16; Marshall *et al.* 1996). There is a strong possibility that most of the nucleated villages mapped by William Bald in 1805 are located on earlier Post-Medieval and even Medieval settlements. The patterns of Iron Age proto-township clusters and of Post-Medieval settlements on South Uist are definitely nucleated, in contrast to the

dispersed Post-Medieval settlement patterns claimed for the Western Isles and Inner Hebrides as a whole (Dodgshon 1993).

The movement of settlement off the machair mainly occurred in the post-Norse Medieval period. Excavations of Mounds 1, 2 and 3 in the Bornais (Bornish) machair and at Site 66, Cille Pheadair indicate that the process happened at the end of the Norse period, probably in the 13th–14th centuries (Brennand *et al.* 1997; Parker Pearson *et al.* 1996; Sharples 2005a; Parker Pearson and Webster 1994; Sharples *et al.* 1995). The only exceptions are Baghasdal, where the machair settlement was abandoned only after 1805 (supposedly due to 'machair fever'; Seumus MacDonald pers. comm.), Aisgernis where the Medieval settlement is on the edge of the machair, Machair Mheadhanach which was deserted some time between 1654 and 1805, and a settlement on the Dalabrog/Cille Pheadair (Kilpheder) township boundary. The reasons for the earlier large-scale abandonment of the machair in the 13th–14th centuries are unknown.

In conclusion, the 'proto-township' model fits well

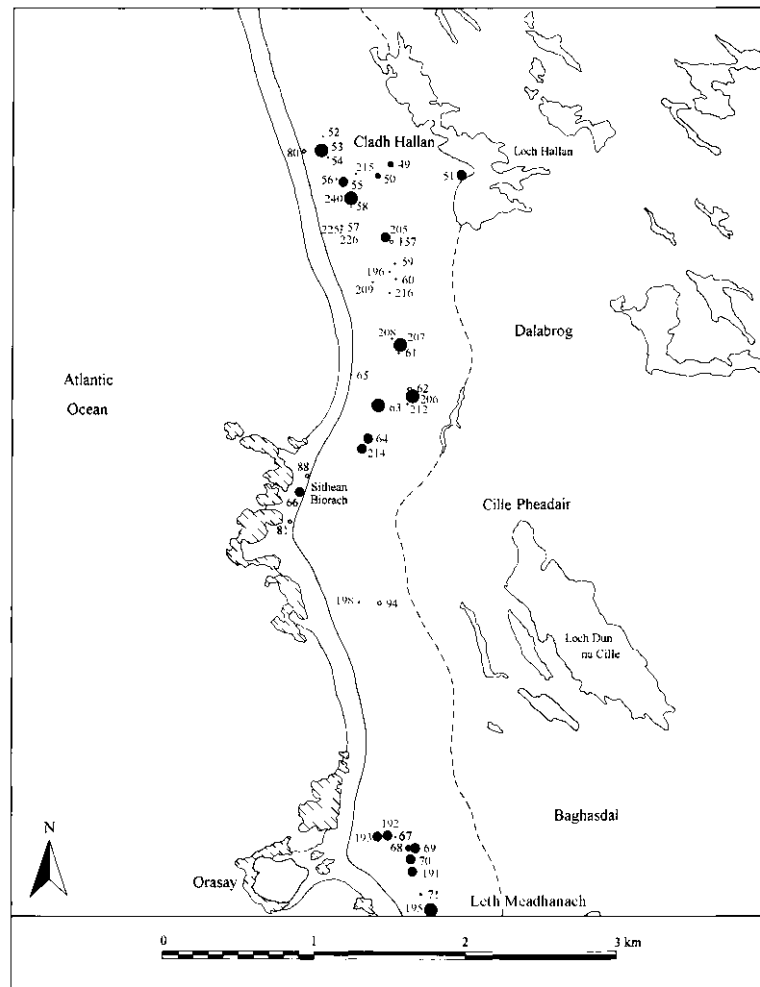


Figure 2.4. Sites in the Cille Pheadair/Dalabrog area

the evidence of machair settlement. Nineteen townships have Iron Age–Viking Age machair settlements in the close vicinity of the Post-Medieval nucleated settlements. Thirteen townships do not fit this pattern but 11 of these suggest significant modifications to the model: six ‘shieling’ townships are of Medieval origin; three are Post-Medieval foundations; and two are Medieval splittings-off of ‘daughter’ settlements.

Aims of the machair survey and management project

Ever since the excavations of the Kilpheder wheelhouse (Lethbridge 1952), and the rocket range sites at Drimore (Young and Richardson 1960; Fairhurst 1971; MacLaren 1974), there has been an awareness of the potential of the South Uist machair for preserving ancient settlement remains. Intensive survey of earthwork and standing remains in the blacklands and hills of Bornais, Cill Donnain (Kildonan) and Gearraidh Bhailteas (Garryvaltos or Milton) townships by Fleming and Moreland for the SEARCH project between 1989 and 1993 revealed a plethora of later historic sites in addition to the Neolithic and Bronze

Age ceremonial and funerary monuments and the undated island duns in these eastern areas. With the exception of a few wheelhouses and souterrains in the eastern parts of the island (including the exceptional remains of souterrains and corbelled structures in Glen Uisinis), there is, however, little evidence of later prehistoric and early historic settlement in these areas of rough grazing and blanket bog. Instead, the concentration of Early Bronze Age to Viking Age settlement seems to have been along the thin machair strip of the west coast.

A prime aim of this project was to find new archaeological sites along the machair strip. The RCAHMS records document some 40 middens, settlements and wheelhouses along the 35km of South Uist’s west coast (*i.e.* an average density of one site per sq km since the machair strip is about 1km in width). Some 241 sites are now recorded on the machair and its environs, the majority of which are settlement mounds of Viking or earlier date. This highlights the inadequacy of earlier records, indicating that site densities are actually much higher than the RCAHMS records indicate, averaging around six sites per sq km and reaching 15 per sq km in the Iochdar complex.

A second aim was to evaluate the significance of the

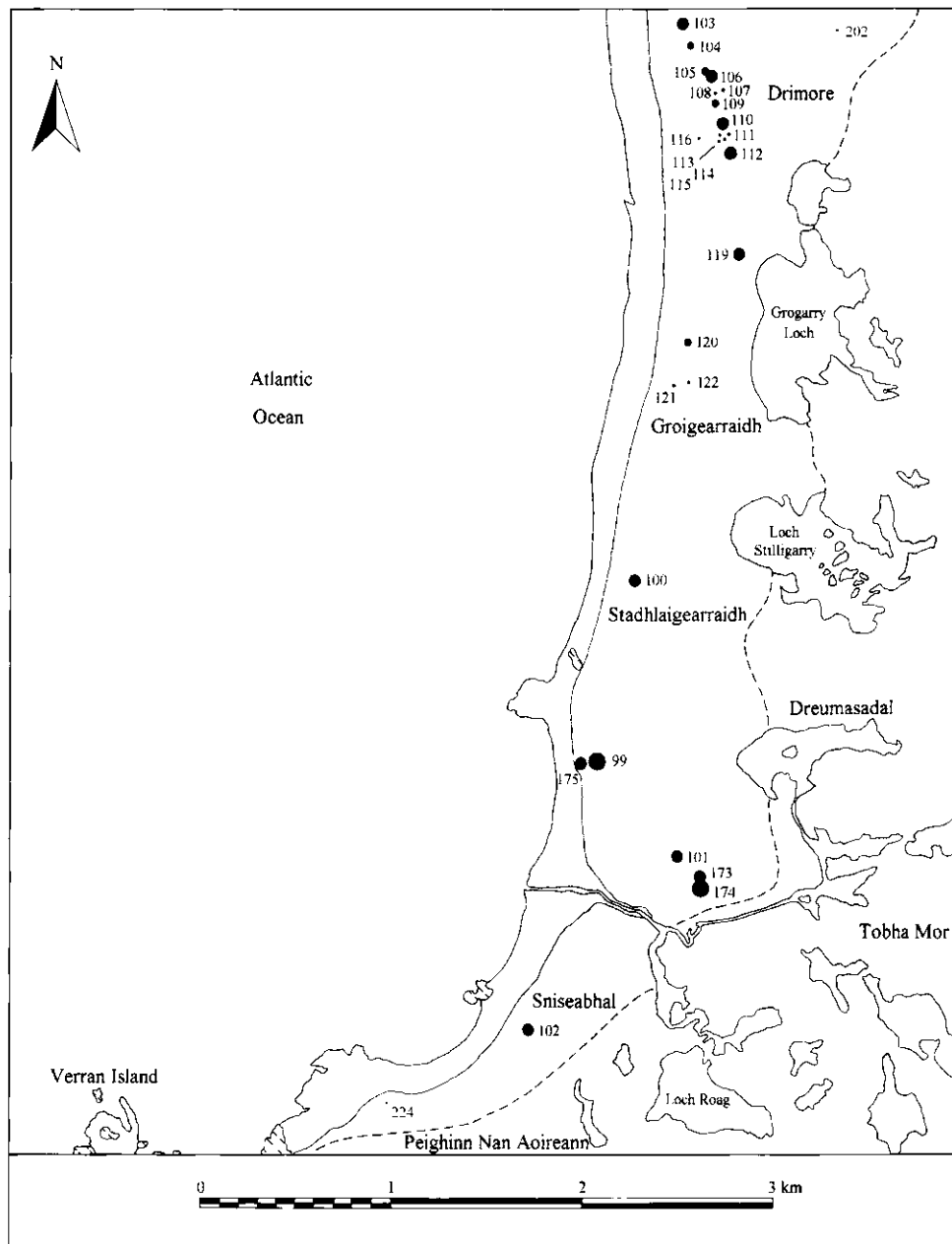


Figure 2.5. Sites in the Drimore/Tobha Mòr area

various surface scatters, middens, stone spreads and other remains to find out which were settlement mounds with buildings and deep stratified sequences as opposed to more ephemeral activity areas. A programme of coring was carried out on 40 sites within the Dun Vulcan environs (within an area of 5 sq km), supplemented by trial excavation on three of them, to establish these points.

The third aim was to assess the vulnerability of and damage to the sites in this fragile ecological zone. Archaeological sites within the machair are more at risk than any others, collectively, in the blackland or pasture. The main threats are sea erosion, wind erosion, rabbit disturbance, sand quarrying and ploughing.

The fourth aim was to establish ways in which the management of selected archaeological sites may be

improved. It was hoped that there might be scope for limiting the human impact of quarrying and ploughing and for controlling the damage done by rabbits. However, erosion by the wind and sea are less easy to deal with. The rate of coastal erosion varies from up to 1 metre per year at Cille Pheadair to 1 metre per decade at Ardvule. Whilst sea defences were constructed at the Iron Age broch of Dun Vulcan at Ardvule in the mid 1990s, they have since been largely breached by winter storm surges, causing damage to the broch and its extramural deposits. Other sites, such as Hornish Point Iron Age settlement (Barber 2003) and Cille Pheadair Viking farmstead (Parker Pearson *et al.* forthcoming), were excavated and recorded in advance of destruction.

Survey methods

Until 1993 the SEARCH project had been largely oblivious to the wealth of sites surviving on the machair. Pilot surveys in the spring and summer of that year revealed that some sites survive to a height of up to 6m and others are not visible earthworks at all. All can be recognized by surface finds of shell, bone and pottery. Most importantly, any surface spread of limpets, winkles and, in the areas of Iochdar and south of Dalabrog, cockles is indicative of past human habitation. Other sites such as ancient burial sites are not detectable in this way; these have come to light only from the reporting of chance finds over the years.

Sand exposures are caused by wind erosion, cultivation, quarrying and particularly rabbit burrows. It is only in these areas where the machair turf is broken that settlement sites can be found. The only exception to this rule is the recognition of artificial mounds in the machair plains where there has been little or no sand drift or dune formation. Such sites can be seen from hundreds of metres away but can only be validated by discovery of shells, bone or sherds. Another way of potentially identifying settlement sites is by reference to place-names. The word *sithean/sidhean* (fairies or the people of peace) is often associated with these ancient sites but only in the Dalabrog/Cille Pheadair area. Equally there are *sithean* place-names attached to natural hillocks that appear to have little or no archaeological significance.

Field survey consisted of walking the machair to look for pottery, bone and shells in any and all sand exposures. Only in areas where dunes are few (Ritchie's machair surface group 1; Ritchie 1979: 107–10) are the identified sites likely to form a significant portion of the total settlement record. It now seems probable that most of the large settlements of later prehistoric date on the machair have been identified; smaller sites, especially those of the Early Bronze Age, may be less well represented. Aerial photographs are of little use in this terrain since the settlement mounds are indistinguishable from dunes until they are visited on the ground. The only useful application of aerial photography has been to plot some of the mounds in the Machair Mheadhanach area of Iochdar; in this instance they have been distinguished from the air, subsequent to ground survey, as a long line of mounds on the black and white vertical APs taken by the 1987–1988 SDD Central Research Unit (May 1987; 04 87 160, 04 87 161, 04 87 125).

In the first stage of the survey, the sites in the environs of Dun Vulcan were plotted using an EDM. In greater detail, Bornais Mounds 1, 2 and 3 and the Cill Donnain Early Bronze Age settlements have now been contour surveyed, resistivity surveyed and magnetometer surveyed (Hamilton in Sharples 1996). Elsewhere, sites were plotted using a GPS (Magellan 2500) or by relating to nearby landmarks indicated on the Ordnance Survey 1:10,000 maps. During the 1990s the GPS was not reliably accurate to more than six-figure grid references.

Basic details of site size, location, character, land use, and finds have been recorded for each site. These are listed in the site inventory at the end of this chapter.

The machair environment

The machair plain of South Uist's west coast is a remarkable geomorphological landform of calcareous sand (Ritchie 1966; 1967; 1976; 1979; Crawford and Switsur 1977; Gilbertson *et al.* 1996; 1999). Today the machair provides some of the best soils in South Uist even though they require regular fertilizers and fallow periods, and are graded only Class 3 in land use capability (Glentworth 1979). The machair's origin was first considered to date from around 3000 cal BC, based on results from excavations at Northton on Harris (Ritchie 1979: 116; Simpson *et al.* 2006). At that time, Ritchie suggested that sand deposition might have begun as early as 3750 BC with major deposition from 2500 to 1500 BC (1979: 115–17). He thought that there had then been a phase of redeposition in the higher inland areas (the Udal, Northton and Rosinish) until the Iron Age, with the coastal dunes being deflated to form low, flat machair plains. During and just after the Iron Age, he saw a considerable number of short periods of stability alternating with erosion and redeposition. Ritchie's period of primary deposition was from 3000 cal BC to 2500 cal BC, followed by stabilization in the Beaker period (2500–1500 cal BC), followed by inland redeposition in the period 1500–600 cal BC.

The origin of the coastal machair plain has been studied and subsequently reassessed by programmes of sampling of organic deposits in relation to machair sand formation. In 1997 the late John Evans of Cardiff University cored Loch a' Gearraidh Dhuibh at Cille Pheadair, 800m east of the Norse settlement. At the base of a 2m depth of machair sand, he recovered a 0.50m column of peat, below which was another 0.50m column of lake silts on top of bedrock. Cockle shells have been found in this machair sand (Seumus MacDonald pers. comm.), indicating that this loch was open to the sea at some time in the past. The presence of cockle shells on settlement sites of the Late Bronze Age to Iron Age in the vicinity (Lethbridge 1952: 182; Atkinson *et al.* 1996) and their absence on the Viking Age site probably reflects a change in cockle availability rather than a cultural change since cockles are present in Iochdar on other Viking sites. Thus we think that the cockle beds in this loch might have disappeared between AD 200 and 800.

More recently, Edwards *et al.* (2005) have discovered that machair sand began to form at Borve (Bhuirgh) in Benbecula and Kallin on Grimsay from at least the mid-eighth millennium BP (*c.* 5500 BC; see also Ritchie 1985; Ritchie and Whittington 1994). Since Kallin is on the east coast, protected from the transgression of machair sand originating along the Atlantic west coast, machair developed there with little lateral movement or coastal erosion of the kind so prominent on the west coast. High levels of charcoal in profiles at Kallin in the mid to late third millennium BC are interpreted as evidence of Neolithic burning which, together with grazing, may have destabilized the machair grassland, leading to large-scale erosion and accelerated sand movement (*ibid.*: 447). Edwards *et al.* also suggest that charcoal concentrations in the fifth millennium BC may be due to similar burning

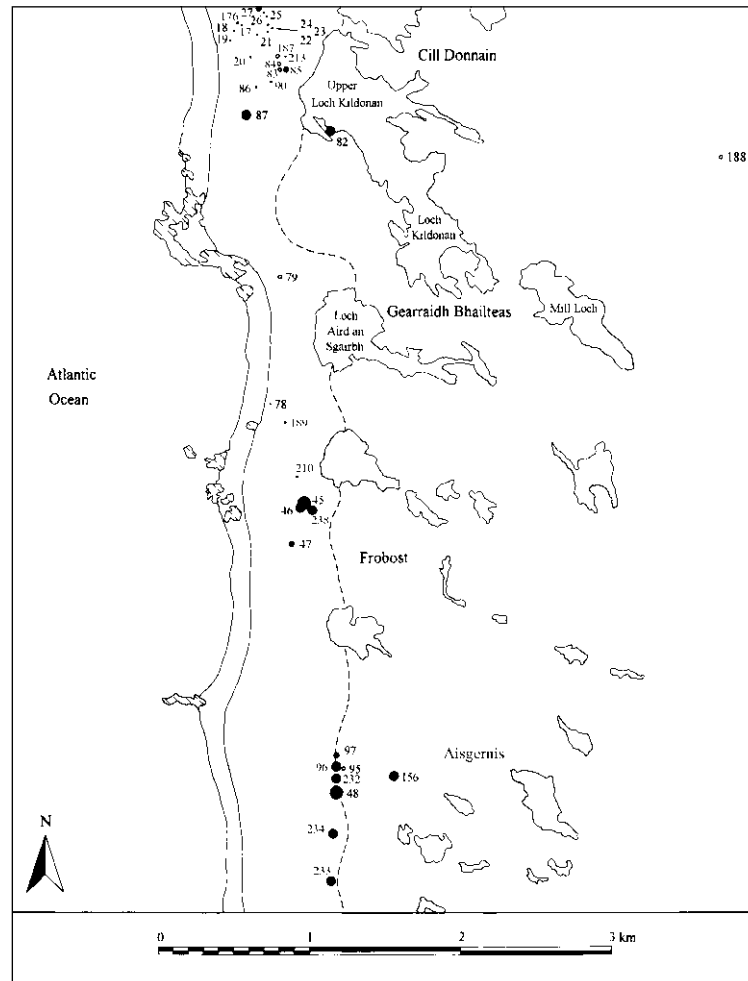


Figure 2.6. Sites in the Cill Donnain/Aisgernis area

episodes by hunter-gatherers, which also caused deflation and sand movement (*ibid.*).

The complete absence of Mesolithic and Neolithic settlement sites on the machair shows that it had not stabilized until the end of the third millennium BC. It appears that the machair was not present during the Middle Neolithic. The Middle Neolithic settlement at An Doirlinn, Orsary, is composed of acidic brown/black soil. Dating probably to the first half of the third millennium BC (on the basis of its ceramic styles; Sharples 2005b), its occupation deposits formed prior to the arrival of machair sand along this section of the west coast, providing a brief window for machair formation between about 3000 BC and 2400 BC.

The Beaker period and Middle Bronze Age settlements at Cill Donnain and Machair Mheadhanach indicate that part of the machair had already become a stable, low flat plain prior to Ritchie's post-Beaker deflation. Although the Cill Donnain, Cladh Hallan and Machair Mheadhanach sites are the only ones securely dated to this phase, others are suspected (Sites 123–124 at Geirinis and a site at Cladh Hallan found by Lethbridge but not subsequently pinpointed by this survey). Our finding of large Late Bronze

Age/Early Iron Age settlements at Cladh Hallan (Sites 54–56 and 58) and Iochdar (Sites 136, 152, 154), amongst others, indicates definitively that the low machair plain had formed by 1000 BC. Dunes were, however, present within the LBA settlement at Cladh Hallan, as revealed by the uneven prehistoric ground surface (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004).

The instability of the machair until recent times is documented in various 17th–19th century sources (Ritchie 1979: 118–19). Perhaps the major period of settlement abandonment on the machair, after the Norse period (during the 13th to 14th centuries), that we have identified, results from a short but intense period of machair instability, possibly enhanced by a climatic downturn also affecting harvests.

Ritchie identifies three groups of machair surfaces (1979: 107–10):

1. Hilly, hilly, hilly, hillside and steeply sloping;
2. Plain surfaces with higher areas landwards that are often demarcated by an escarpment feature;
3. Plain surfaces that are generally level or slope slightly landwards and terminate in marsh or loch or, more rarely, a rock- or till-covered surface.

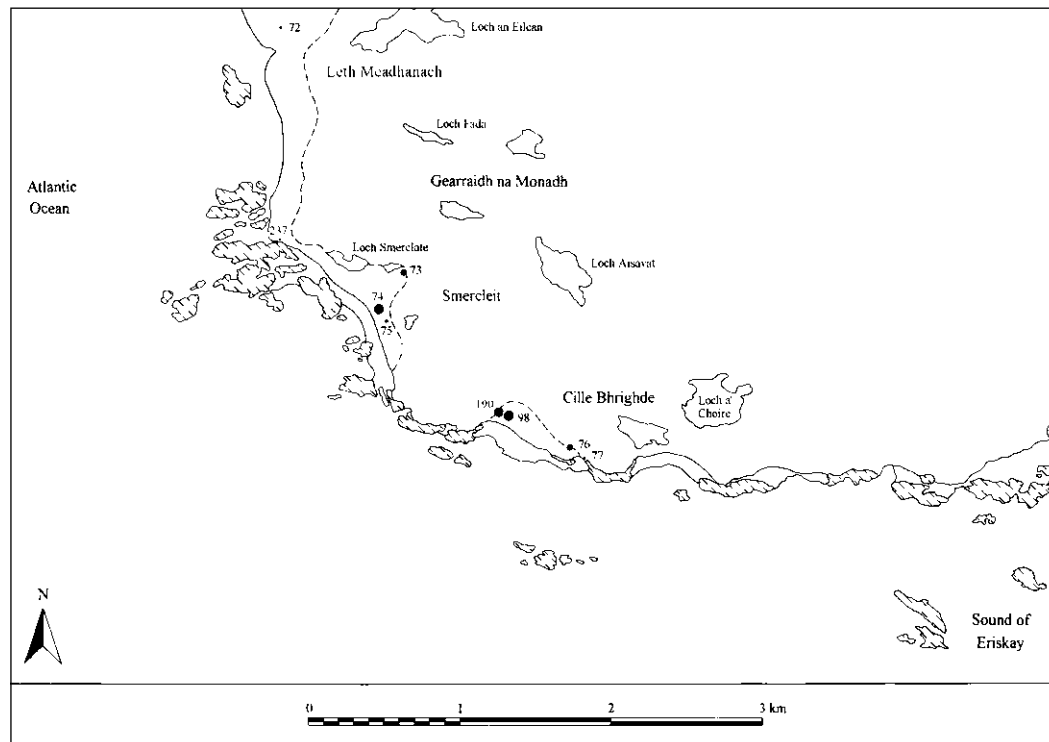


Figure 2.7. Sites in the Cille Bhrighde area

We may categorize the strips of South Uist machair into these three groups thus:

1. Leth Meadhanach; north of Cille Pheadair as far as Gearraidh Bhailteas; south Cill Donnain; Lower Bornish (low hillocks); Sniseabhal; Dreumasadal; Groigearraidh to south Geirinis (mainly low hillocks); north Geirinis to the northern rocket range road (low hillocks); Aird a Mhachair to Baile Gharbhaidh.
2. Cille Bhrighde; Ormacleit; Tobha Mòr (Howmore or Tobhta Mhor); Dreumasadal; south Geirinis.
3. Smercleit to Gearraidh na Monadh; Baghasdal to south Cille Pheadair; north Gearraidh Bhailteas; north Cill Donnain to Ormacleit; Ormacleit to Peighinn nan Aoireann; Tobha Beag (Howbeg or Tobhta Bheag); Stadhlaigearraidh to Groigearraidh; Geirinis to Aird a Mhachair.

Naturally, the different types of terrain have implications for field survey. Group 3 (flat plain) are the easiest to fieldwalk, and they form the survey areas where site identification should be most representative. The areas of low hillocks (part of Group 1) also rate highly in recovery terms, provided that the areas have large populations of rabbits (as was the case). Lower down the scale of recovery representativity is Group 2, since sites may be buried under the sand escarpment. Finally the areas of high sand hills are the most difficult though they can be surprisingly productive given the extensive rabbit burrowing. Even in the most densely dune-covered area (Cille Pheadair to Cladh Hallan) we have recovered a high density of settlement sites.

The survey areas along the machair

South Uist and Eriskay were surveyed in six blocks commencing with the Dun Vulcan environs (Cill Donnain to Staoinebrig) in 1993 and 1994 (Figure 2.2). In 1995 the three blocks to the south were first surveyed, the northern one between Gearraidh Bhailteas and Gearraidh Sheile (Figure 2.6) and the southern ones between Dalabrog and Cille Bhrighde (Figures 2.4 and 2.7). In 1996 the two blocks to the north of the Dun Vulcan area were first surveyed, the southern one between Peighinn nan Aoireann and Groigearraidh (Figure 2.5) and the northern one between Drimore and Iochdar (Figure 2.3). Eriskay's machair was surveyed in 1997 (Figure 2.8). Most of the prospection was done alone at weekends or with one or two other people. Since 1993 many sites have been revisited to collect potentially dateable pottery and other diagnostic artefacts. Even today, the programme is not complete and further visits will need to be made for years to come.

In all, 241 archaeological sites have been recorded on the machair or immediately inland from it. A tiny proportion were logged by earlier researchers but most sites described in the early literature were not re-located during this survey. The number of sites found represents almost a tenfold increase in the number of sites previously known according to RCAHMS records. The vast majority of these new-found sites are settlements, ranging in date from the Early Bronze Age to the 19th century. Of course, many of these 'new' sites have been known to local crofters for many years but have simply not been recorded or mapped.

The Dun Vulcan environs

This locality is well suited for archaeological survey, since it supports a large rabbit population and is relatively clear of deep sand accumulations. The main areas of dunes are the coastal dune front and three clusters of sand hills, one in Lower Bornish machair, one west of Loch Bornish and the largest on the Cill Donnain machair. This survey zone stretches 5km from Staoinebrig township in the north to Cill Donnain in the south, including the townships of Ormacleit, Lower Bornish and Upper Bornish. The principal landscape feature of this zone is the promontory of Ardvule, on which Dun Vulcan is located. Other archaeological sites on Ardvule are a 19th-century kelpers' village (Site 91), three suspected crannog sites, a supposed stone four-poster (unlocated; Burl 1988), two settlement mounds (Sites 92 and 93) and a suspected cairn (underneath the trig point).

Archaeological finds have been made on the machair of Upper Bornish for many years and include an undated stone enclosure and a bronze Late Iron Age mushroom-headed pin, found in 1963 by Coinneach Maclean. He also found a small group of bronze items nearby on Cill Donnain machair around NF 727 283 (NF72NW 15). The Cill Donnain (Kildonan) wheelhouse site (Site 85 also known as Cill Donnain III), excavated by the University of Sheffield in 1989–1991 (Zvelebil 1989; 1990; 1991), the nearby standing stone on Cill Donnain machair, and two nearby sites (Sites 86 and 87, also known as Cill Donnain I and II; see Chapter 10) have also been known about for many years. Other known or suspected sites on the blacklands just off the machair are: a standing stone at Cnoca Breac; an island broch, Dun Altbrug, at Peighinn nan Aoireann; a suspected broch, Dun nan Gallan, at Staoinebrig (of which there is no trace under a modern farmstead;); Ormacleit House and Castle (some walls of which are still standing after it was gutted by fire in 1716); a possible dun or crannog on Loch Ceann a' Bhaigh at Ormacleit; Post-Medieval crofts east of St Mary's Church, Upper Bornish; the Clearance village of Upper Bornish; an island dun in Upper Loch Bornish (see Chapter 12); and the site of the church of Cille Donnain and associated settlement (Site 82; Fleming and Woolf 1992; see Chapters 3 and 14) on a promontory and island in Loch Chill Donnain.⁴

There are now some 54 settlement sites located on this part of the machair. They range in date from the Early Bronze Age to the Viking period. Some, particularly those of earlier date, are low and small. Others are extremely large mounds, reaching over 6m in height and over 50m in diameter. A programme of coring was carried out in 1994 to assess the depths of deposits within some of these mounds and to ascertain whether they were deeply stratified, long-lived settlements or relatively thin midden deposits stratified within deep layers of windblown sand. Unfortunately, it was not particularly successful since the corer hit stones within many of the mounds. Sites cored were 2, 5, 6, 7, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 43 and 85.

We can divide the archaeological sites into seven

chronological groups on the basis of their ceramics (see also Campbell 2002):

- Early Bronze Age (c.2500–1500 BC);
- Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age (c.1200–100 BC);
- Middle Iron Age (c.100 BC–AD 400);
- earlier Late Iron Age (c.AD 400–800);
- Viking Age or Norse period (AD 800–1250);
- Late Medieval (AD 1250–1500);
- Post-Medieval (AD 1500–1700).

Gearraidh Bhailteas, Frobost, Aisgernis and Gearraidh Sheile townships

Only 10 settlement sites are known from this 5km strip of machair. This area is covered by large expanses of dunes and the area around Aisgernis golf course is kept relatively free of rabbits. Whilst sites in this zone are generally either obscured or relatively undisturbed, one of the three settlement mounds in Frobost (Site 45) has a large sand blow-out in its centre and was damaged in 1995 by unrecorded digging into its deep midden layers (see Chapter 13). This was further compounded by the mechanical excavation in May 1996 of a large hole, 2m deep and 10m in diameter, into this Early Iron Age site, partially destroying a probable roundhouse and associated midden.

On the machair track at Gearraidh Bhailteas there is a small, undated midden (Site 78). Another undated midden site is recorded by RCAHMS at NF 728 272 (Site 79) but it has been entirely destroyed by sand extraction. Two large settlement mounds lie adjacent to each other in Frobost (Sites 45 and 46) and may be parts of the same complex (see Chapter 13). The western mound may be of the same date as the badly damaged Late Iron Age eastern mound. A smaller settlement mound, dating to the Middle Iron Age (Site 47), lies to the south of these.

On the Aisgernis machair an unlocated site is reported as having produced a brooch (NF72SW 12). This may well have come from one of Sites 48, 96 and 97, a complex of three settlement mounds either side of the present road between the golf course and the estate office (see Chapter 13). The largest of these, the 'Hill of the Old Kiln' (Site 48), has produced pottery which may date to the Norse and Medieval periods. Its low, spread-out form is the result of its levelling earlier this century. To its southeast are waterlogged deposits containing shells. To the north, test trenches into Site 96 produced Middle Iron Age and Medieval pottery whilst Site 97 may be of the same date or later (Raven 2005: 477). To the east of Site 96 is a fallen standing stone (Site 95) which has been moved from its original location. The stone is marked with a pecked groove around one end (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: fig. 24). A grassy knoll on the edge of the peatland has apparently yielded limpet and winkle shells (Site 156) and may be the site of Medieval/Post-Medieval Aisgernis.

There are other archaeological sites inland: known or suspected island duns in Loch Cnoc a' Buidhe, Loch Eilean

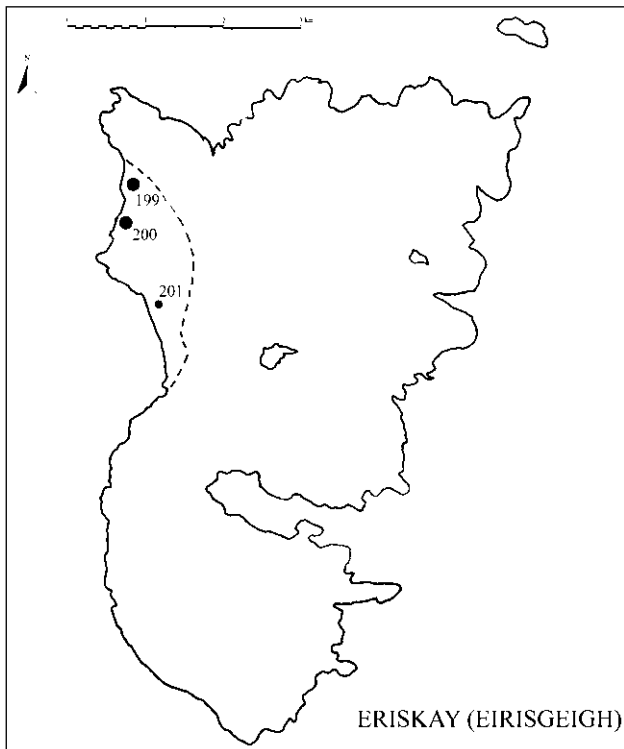


Figure 2.8. Sites on Eriskay machair

an Staoir, Loch an Eilein and Loch an Dùin. Northeast of Milton House are the remains of Gearraidh Bhailteas, a Late Medieval settlement surveyed by Fleming for the SEARCH project and later excavated (see Chapter 15). In the uplands to the east, the prehistoric remains include two chambered cairns (Reineval and Barp Frobost), a hut circle near Reineval, an unusual wheelhouse-like stone setting, and a large number of shielings including ‘Bonnie Prince Charlie’s Shieling’ (see Chapter 7). There is also a stone circle reported by Mary Harman from the hills east of Aisgernis. The presence of prehistoric ceremonial monuments in the adjacent uplands may indicate Neolithic and Early Bronze Age occupation sites on the machair, either hidden beneath dunes or washed away by the sea, or on the blacklands, obscured by later cultivation.

Finally, there is an oral tradition that South Frobost was the farmstead of a rapacious Viking overlord named Thorfinn (Neil MacMillan pers. comm.). Both Frobost and Aisgernis have large Norse-period machair settlements immediately adjacent to their Post-Medieval successors. In contrast, there is no such pattern for Gearraidh Bhailteas and Gearraidh Sheile.

The Cladh Hallan, Dalabrog and Cille Pheadair area

Within the 3km-long machair strip of Dalabrog and Cille Pheadair there is an unusual density of 23 identified settlement sites. This is all the more extraordinary given that the area is densely covered in dunes. There are three

reasons as to why so many archaeological sites have been found here:

- Since the excavation of the Kilpheder wheelhouse in 1951 (Lethbridge 1952) there has been an interest in documenting sites in this area.
- Secondly, the area supports a very dense rabbit population, whose burrow scrapes cover the grassland.
- Thirdly, this area is also affected by human disturbance, notably by sand quarrying around Cladh Hallan and by cultivation of fields on the machair.

Amongst the relatively few archaeological sites known in the blacklands and hills of these two townships, there is a chambered cairn east of Dalabrog (in association with an Iron Age wheelhouse) and a dun, Sgeir Ghlas, on Loch nam Faoileann.

Sites of the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, Middle Iron Age and Viking period are particularly well represented on the Cladh Hallan/Cille Pheadair machair. Amongst the undated sites are two short stretches of field wall exposed on the beach (Site 65). The walls are built with two faces of rough drystone walling, about 1m apart and leaning in to each other.

Baghasdal, Leth Meadhanach, Gearraidh Na Monadh, Smercleit and Cille Bhrighde townships

The machair strip is at its narrowest along this 6km-long belt and many archaeological sites might have been destroyed by the sea. There are also pockets of dunes north of the Abhainn Mhòr stream and south of Cille Pheadair. An additional difficulty in reconnaissance is the low population of rabbits in this area which is divided up into narrow crofting strips about 50–70m wide. One possible settlement site is a pair of undisturbed mound-like dunes in Baghasdal (NF 7342 1868) whilst, just inside the northern boundary of Baghasdal, there is a concentration of stones (Site 94) that included a ‘lintel’ ploughed up over 30 years ago; the absence of shells indicates that this was not a settlement but may be the remains of cairns.

The only concentration of machair sites is at Baghasdal, either side of the township boundary between Baghasdal and Leth Meadhanach. The most obvious are two large, artificial mounds (Sites 69 and 70). The latter has the remains of a chapel and graveyard on top but has all the appearances of an ancient settlement mound. The other, immediately to its northeast, is undated but has produced midden material. Flat sites to their north (Sites 67 and 68) and to the south (Site 71) have also produced midden material but only one (Site 68) has produced any pottery, two Post-Medieval sherds. Further south, Site 72 is partly buried in a dune. It may be the same site as the midden mound with human remains (NF 737 170) recorded in Leth Meadhanach by RCAHMS. The dun recorded by RCAHMS, An Doirlinn, on the causeway to Orosay, to the east, is an eroding Neolithic settlement and not an Iron Age broch (Sharples 2005b), having been stripped

of its vegetation by the storm of 2005 (Moore and Wilson 2005: site SU22). The concentrations here (Sites 67–70 and Site 72) correspond closely to the communities marked on Bald's 1805 map. The Baghasdal settlement remained on this spot (presumably on one of the two large mounds) until after 1805. The Leth Meadhanach settlement of 1805 is marked on the map as being on the edge of the peatland just east of Site 72.

The only other sites on the coast are two settlement mounds at Smercleit, recalled by Mrs MacAulay, and the RCAHMS record of a group of stone-lined graves with crouched skeletons, eroding out of the sands just above the high tide mark on the south side of Ceann a' Ghàraidh (RCAHMS 1928: 119). The settlement mounds are under grass and undisturbed; there is some pottery and shell from where the ground is broken. One of them (Site 74) apparently produced a bone/antler comb. There is a settlement mound in Cille Bhrighde (Site 98) that has also produced undiagnostic pottery. About 500m northwest of it, a standing stone, the Poll a'Charra, is supposed to have stood originally on the site of the Polochar Inn and was reputedly moved and re-erected in its present position when the inn was built. Remains of a Middle Iron Age inhumation (dating to AD 250–390), eroding onto the beach, were found at NF 7504 1428 in 2005 (NF71NE 31; the grid reference and parish on CANMORE are incorrect). A final coastal site (Site 77), on rocks at Cille Bhrighde, produced a Post-Medieval rim sherd but no other finds. It lies about 150m from the site of the church of Cille Bhrighde (Site 76) where a human burial was found by Patrick Morrison.

Inland from the machair, three duns are recorded in Loch Dun na Cille: Dun na Killie, Eilean Chreamh and Dun an Duichal. There is another at Loch an Dùin (Site 73) and a possible 17th-century settlement in Loch a Bhruga or Loch Aiseabhat. Further inland, the so-called Dun Trossary (Trosaraidh) is in fact a Neolithic chambered cairn.

Peighinn Nan Aoireann, Sniseabhal, Tobha Beag, Tobha Mòr, Dreumasadal, Stadhlaigearraidh and Groigearraidh townships

The stretch of machair between Staoinebrig and Howmore (Tobha Mòr) is remarkably empty of archaeological sites. The only one located (Site 102) is a settlement spread of 19th-century date. A possible explanation is that the observed absence is a real one; Peighinn nan Aoireann, Sniseabhal and Totahur townships are not marked or named on the late 16th-century Pont map nor on the 1654 Blau map, whilst Tobha Beag (Howbeg) might have been a Medieval offshoot of Tobha Mòr, given the absence of pre-Medieval sites on Tobha Beag machair and its name as the diminutive of the pair. The machair strip is very narrow or non-existent in this stretch which may help to explain this absence of sites.

Between Tobha Mòr and Drimore there is a regular spacing of mound clusters about 1km apart. The modern church at Tobha Mòr is located on a large mound (Site 174),

part of which was also destroyed when the new carpark was built. To the north is another mound (Site 173), reputedly the site of wheelhouses (Gill MacLean pers. comm.). A large mound 100m southeast of the church may be another. About 800m to the northwest, on the north side of the Tobha Mòr/Dreumasadal township boundary, is another pair of large settlement mounds (Sites 99 and 175). Site 175, with Early and Middle Iron Age pottery, has stone walls exposed and is suffering from wind erosion.

One kilometre to the north is the large Middle Iron Age mound of A'Cheardach ('the smithy'; Site 100) on Stadhlaigearraidh machair. The next group to the north, on Groigearraidh machair, is formed of two low mounds (Sites 121 and 122) and a small but steep mound, with much pottery (Site 120), which is probably Medieval. The only other sites in this strip are small spreads of 19th-century material (Sites 119 and 101).

Drimore, Geirinis and Iochdar

In 1805 this area was composed of nine townships but has since been dramatically reorganized (Caird 1979). I have chosen to retain the 1805 township names and divisions: Drimore, Gearraidhfleugh, Cille Bhànain (Kilivanan), Geirinis (West Gerinish), Machair Mheadhanach, Aird a Mhachair (Ardivachar), Cill Amhlaidh (Kilauley), Lionacuidhe (Linique) and Baile Gharbhaidh (Balgarva).

The Drimore machair has been known since the 1950s to contain a large number of archaeological sites, three of which were excavated in advance of the rocket range (Site 110 – Fairhurst 1971; Site 103 – MacLaren 1974; Site 104 – unpublished excavations by Jack Scott). We have located 14 sites (Sites 103–116) within a 750m stretch (NF74SE 11). All but two (Site 111 and Site 105 [a group of large stones]) are settlement sites but none have produced diagnostic pottery or dateable finds other than the Viking Age house (Site 103), the Iron Age 'hut circles' (Site 104) and the Middle Iron Age wheelhouse of A'Cheardach Bheag (Site 110; Fairhurst 1971). The north–south linearity of this group is remarkable and does not seem to refer to any visible feature; it may relate to a former prehistoric land boundary. At the south end of this group are four small aceramic sites (Sites 113–116).

North of the Drimore group is the lone Middle Iron Age wheelhouse, A Cheardach Mhor (Site 117; Young and Richardson 1960), on the 1805 boundary between Drimore and Gearraidhfleugh. Otherwise, there is no trace of any sites within the machair of the former township of Gearraidhfleugh. Within the next township to the north, the former township of Cille Bhànain, there is a single large Middle Iron Age settlement mound (Site 118). Inland from this, on the peatland ridge, there are two settlement mounds (Sites 171–172), one of which (Site 171) has pottery which is probably Medieval. This is the site of 'Kilivanan' marked on the 1805 map and most likely the location of 'Kilvanen' named on the 1654 map. There are no settlements on Geirinis machair other than two small mounds (Sites 123–124) with quartz artefacts that may indicate a Bronze Age date. It is

very possible that any large mounds were destroyed without record by the construction of the rocket range.

The most remarkable group of settlement mounds on South Uist is found in the next former township to the north, Machair Mheadhanach. Here some 35 settlement sites are located along a 2km-long strip, aligned on a northwest–southeast axis (some of these are recorded on CANMORE as NF74SW 1 [Iochdar]). As with the Drimore sites, there is no visible topographic feature to explain this alignment and we may speculate that it relates to former land division. The sites range in size from small mounds less than 5m in diameter to one mound 3m high and 80m in diameter. They date from the Late Bronze Age through to the Norse period and into the early Post-Medieval period. Not only is Machair Mheadhanach (‘Machribeanach’) marked as a settlement on Blau’s 1654 map and named as ‘the mayne land of the mid cuntry callit Mackermeanache’ in 1549 (Monro 1549 [1934: 511]), but John Raven’s excavations have also confirmed settlement continuing into this later period (2005: 482–4).

It is already apparent that this dense population was a multifocal settlement group and we may be able to unravel three or more settlement clusters within it. The northernmost group strays into Aird a Mhachair (Sites 153–154, 160, 166–169) and may be linked with that township rather than with Machair Mheadhanach. At least one of the Machair Mheadhanach mounds (NF74NW 1) was demolished in the late 1970s, so this impressive mound cluster was once larger than it is today. Finds from the demolition included at least one sherd of Norse-period platter ware (Godden and Godden 1980).

The original four townships of Iochdar were Aird a Mhachair, Cill Amhlaidh, Lionacuidhe and Baile Gharbhaidh. Each has a large mound or cluster of mounds: Aird a Mhachair has Sites 166–168;⁵ Cill Amhlaidh has Sites 164–165 and possibly four others to their east; Lionacuidhe has one large mound, Site 163; and Baile Gharbhaidh has a pair of large mounds at Hornish Point (Site 158), the westerly of which has been partially excavated to reveal wheelhouse structures and Middle Iron Age occupation (Barber 2003). The other prehistoric site in Baile Gharbhaidh is a souterrain (Site 159) on the promontory east of Hornish Point. There is no evidence of substantial occupation debris in association and thus this structure was probably not in association with an Iron Age house or settlement. The remaining sites in the Iochdar townships (Sites 160–162 and 170) are all 19th-century occupation spreads.

Eriskay

There is only a small strip of machair along Eriskay’s west coast. It is largely uncultivated and thus settlement sites are only visible in rabbit scrapes and erosion scars or as a result of human disturbance. The two recorded settlement sites are easily identifiable as prominent mounds. Unfortunately one is under the old cemetery (Site 200) and the other (Site 199) is being encroached upon by the new graveyard. The former is, as a result, badly damaged (at least its top 2m). The

height of these mounds suggests that they may comprise multi-period sequences spanning a millennium or more. Whether they are of different periods is unknown. The only other site is a small eroded stone setting, probably an Early Bronze Age ring cairn (Site 201). As such, it is the only stone monument in this survey from a machair setting as opposed to being located on peatland. CANMORE records a further site at NF 7828 1133 (NF71SE 2).

The archaeological sequence

Early to Middle Bronze Age settlements

With no Neolithic sites yet discovered on the machair (Figure 2.9), its archaeological sequence begins with the

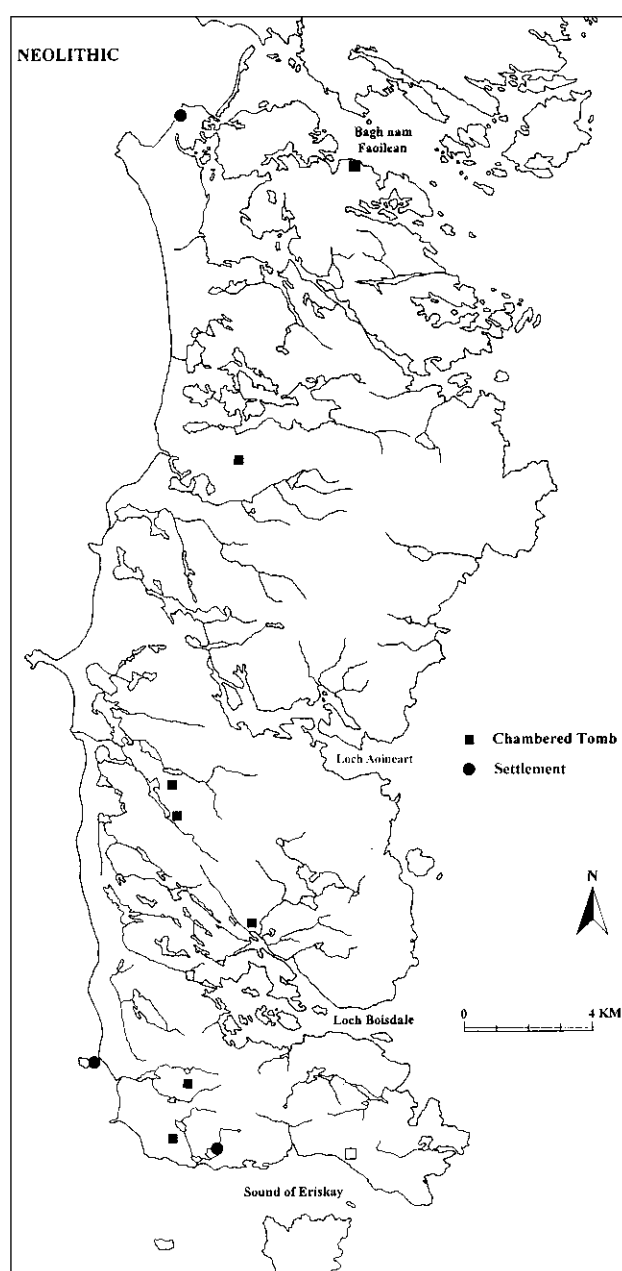


Figure 2.9. Neolithic sites on South Uist

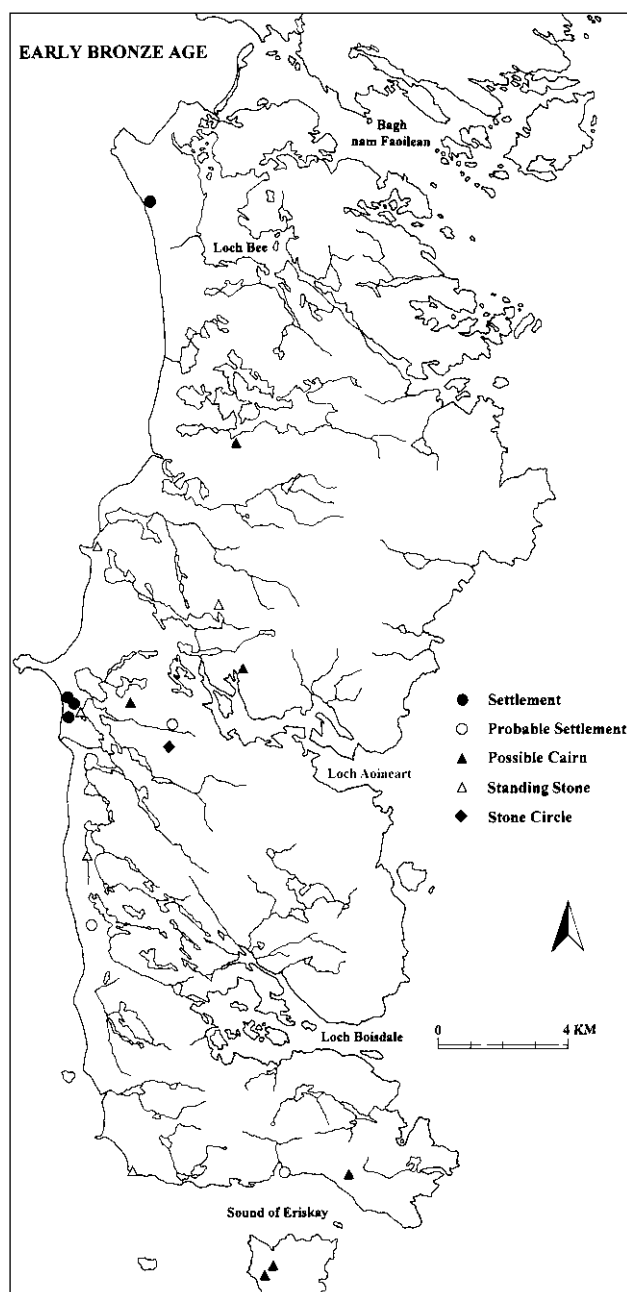


Figure 2.10. Early Bronze Age sites on South Uist

Beaker period. There are three locations on South Uist's machair where Early Bronze Age settlement remains have been found (Figure 2.10):

- The first to be discovered was a site at Cladh Hallan, the burial ground northwest of Dalabrog, located in the early 1950s by T.C. Lethbridge. Unfortunately, there is no record of its precise position other than 'just beneath the modern ... graveyard' (Lethbridge 1954: 180–1).
- The second group was found in the late 1950s during the Ministry of Works survey prior to construction of the rocket range (MOW site numbers 3, 4, 5 and 6).
- The third group on Cill Donnain machair consists

of seven scatters in the area known as Sligeanach ('shelly') and is described in Chapter 11.

The only likely burial cairn of the Early Bronze Age period on the machair is a single eroded kerbed cairn on Eriskay (Site 201). Although such burial sites are known on the machair of Lewis at Uig Sands and at Cnip (Close-Brooks 1995), the blacklands and the edge of the moorland appear to be their preferred locations on South Uist. Further evidence of Early Bronze Age settlement identified on South Uist, is the small settlement mound beneath the Cill Donnain wheelhouse (Site 85) containing sherds from cordoned bucket-shaped vessels (Parker Pearson and Seddon 2004).

Other settlement sites of the Beaker period and Early Bronze Age are also known on the machair of North Uist, Benbecula, Lewis and Harris (Armit 1996; Gibson 1982; Crawford 1986; Shepherd 1976; Shepherd and Tuckwell 1977), as well as on the south coast of South Uist at Gortan (NF 804 143) near Ludag (Gibson 1982: 161).

The Cill Donnain group

Certainly four (Sites 17, 18, 87, 176) and probably seven sites (also Sites 19–21) can be dated to the Early Bronze Age. Cill Donnain I (Site 87) was trial trenched in 1988 by Linda Kennedy Allen (1988) and is associated with radiocarbon dates on carbonized seeds of 3710±80 BP (OxA-3353) and 3560±80 BP (OxA-3354), along with surface finds of two barbed-and-tanged flint arrowheads, four thumbnail scrapers, a fragment of battle-axe, a bone point, and Beaker and other Early Bronze Age pottery (see Chapter 10). The curved stone walls of one, and probably two other, small Early Bronze Age houses are currently visible on the surface. Sherds of Beaker ware and EBA decorated coarse wares have been found on Sites 17 and 18. Other sites likely to be of the same date or earlier are two small, shallow spreads (Sites 21 and 176); Site 21 has produced a flake from an igneous rock. Other sites possibly within this date range are Sites 19 and 20. As mentioned above, beneath the Cill Donnain III wheelhouse (Site 85) there is a partially excavated deposit of cordoned vessels of earlier Bronze Age type.

The Machair Mheadhanach group

A group of three certain (Sites 182–184) and five probable Early Bronze Age settlement sites (Sites 177–179, 181 and 185) are located on the machair on both sides of a small stream flowing westwards into the sea on the division between Geirinis and Machair Mheadhanach, south of Iochdar. These sites are situated immediately south of the present-day rifle range within the rocket range. Another two sites (123 and 124) are probably also of this date and are located 500m to the southeast. The main complex (Sites 177–179, 181–185) may be best understood as a single settlement area extending 150m east–west and 120m north–south. Although there are exposed stones, these need not have derived from structures associated with the midden debris. The Beaker pottery from Sites 182 and 184 is finely decorated with horizontal incisions (see Chapter 10).

The Cladh Hallan site

A single Sutton-type tanged arrowhead was found during excavations in 1997 at Site 55 at Cladh Hallan, immediately west of the modern graveyard (Mulville and Parker Pearson 1997). Although it comes from a Late Bronze Age midden, this stone arrowhead is of a type which dates to the Early Bronze Age. No other material of this period has been found in the area in recent years but Lethbridge discovered a probable EBA settlement here in the early 1950s. He notes ‘...one of these [sites], just beneath the modern Daliburgh graveyard, belonged to the earliest Bronze Age. Here barbed and tanged arrow-heads of flint, minute thumb scrapers and microlithic barbs lay about in profusion.’ (1954: 180–1). Unfortunately, although the area around the graveyard has been fieldwalked intensively on many occasions, this site has not since been relocated but, on the evidence of the other two complexes, it probably lies topographically below the graveyard on its west side, to the west of later settlement remains, and is perhaps Site 215. Alternatively, it is literally beneath the graveyard (within the original enclosure, in existence in the 1950s, or in the more recent extension).

Late Bronze Age – Early Iron Age settlements

Although settlement sites of this period were virtually unknown on the machair of the Western Isles at the beginning of the survey, they are now known at 18 locations on South Uist (Figure 2.11). The coarse, plain, thick-rimmed pottery with large inclusions that is so characteristic of this period is easily recognizable.

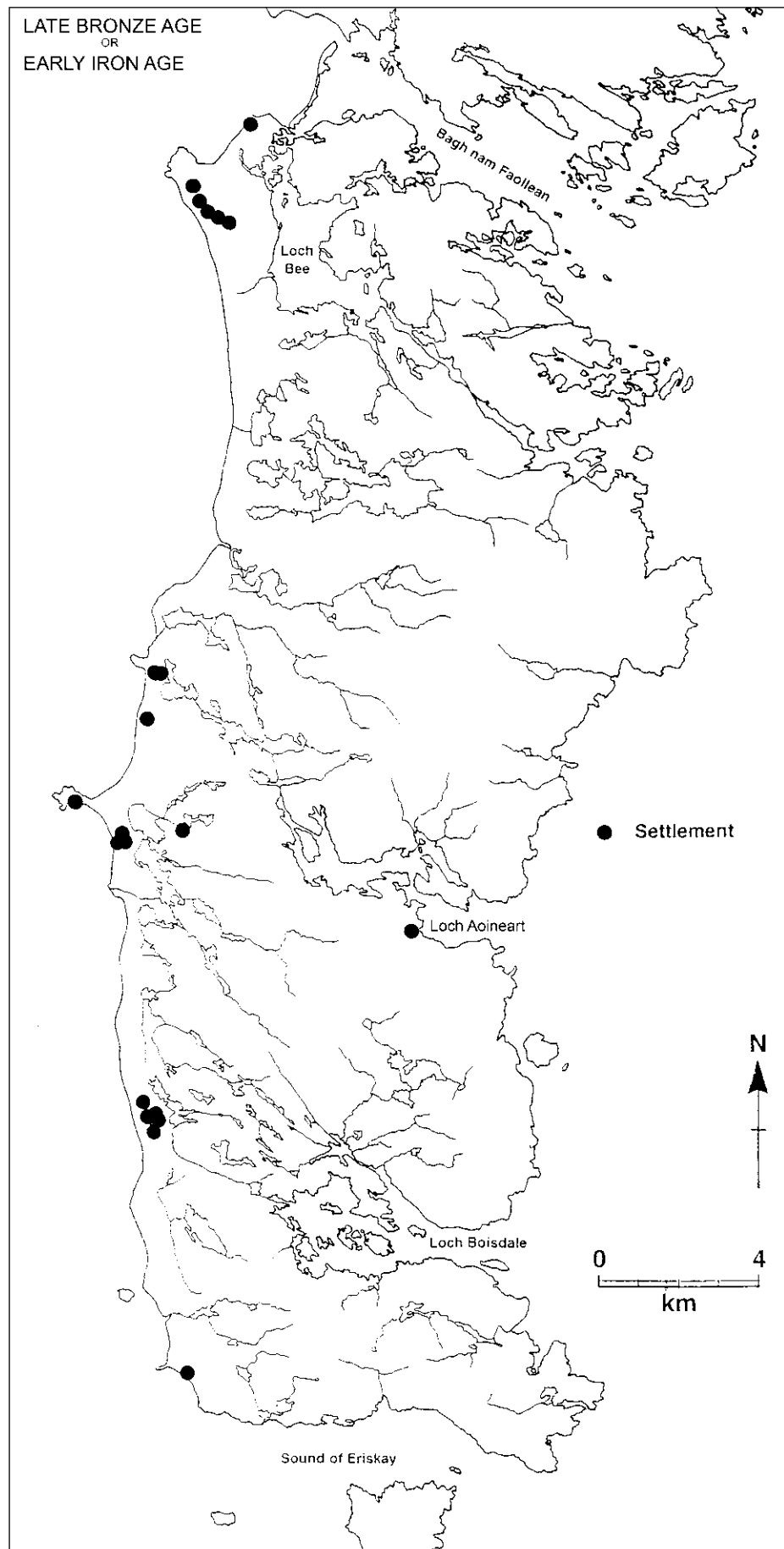


Figure 2.11. Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age sites on South Uist

It has been found during excavations under Dun Vulcan (Site 0; Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999), at Cladh Hallan (Parker Pearson and Roper 1994; Mulville and Parker Pearson 1995; 1997; Atkinson *et al.* 1996) and at Hornish Point (Barber 2003). Elsewhere in the Western Isles, Late Bronze Age–Early Iron Age levels have been recorded at the Udal (Crawford 1986; Selkirk 1996) and at Baile Sear and Balelone (Barber 2003) on North Uist and Benbecula, and at Cnip and Loch Bharabhat on Lewis (Harding and Armit 1990).

There are three areas of South Uist where settlement sites of this period are found. These are on the central machair strip between Frobost and Drimore, and close to the Early Bronze Age settlement areas in Machair Mheadhanach and at Cladh Hallan. Large concentrations of fire-cracked cobbles should be clear indications of sites of this period but none have been found during survey. No burnt mounds are known either. Instead, the LBA/EIA machair settlements make a strong impression on account of their size, with many of the mounds being amongst the largest of any on South Uist. This is especially striking when viewed in comparison with the virtually flat sites of the Early Bronze Age. Their size and height suggest not only a much greater permanence to their inhabitation but also processes of midden accumulation, piling up refuse on and around the settlement.

Dun Vulcan environs

Within the Dun Vulcan environs, five machair sites other than that under Dun Vulcan can be dated to this phase. Two are relatively large mounds at Staoinebrig (Sites 29 and 30) and another is a small mound at Ormacleit (Site 10). On Cill Donnain machair there is one LBA/EIA settlement mound (Site 25) and a pit of LBA/EIA sherds dug into Site 17. To the south, two large mounds (Sites 45 and 46) at Frobost date to this period as does a small mound at Drimore (Site 113). Other likely settlements of this period may lie within the bases of very high settlement mounds (Sites 9 and 15) in Bornais. Since Middle Iron Age pottery came from the top 2m of these 5m–6m high mounds, their basal layers probably date to this earlier period in the same way as the lower layers of the South Mound at the Udal. Another settlement of this period was trial trenched on an artificial islet within Upper Loch Bornish (see Chapter 12). Here middens contained plain wares of slightly finer fabrics dating to the Early Iron Age. The overall pattern in this central area is dispersed, with settlements at least 1km apart, in contrast to the nucleated settlement groups at Cladh Hallan and Machair Mheadhanach.

Cladh Hallan

By the Late Bronze Age this area was already becoming inundated by windblown sand. At and around the excavated site of Cladh Hallan, there are Middle to Late Bronze Age remains at Sites 53–56 and probably 215. Site 54 (Area C of the excavations) includes a sequence from the Early Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age. At Site 55/56 (Areas A and D), extensive excavation has revealed a north–south

row of roundhouses on top of a Beaker period field system, Early Bronze Age burials and other structures (see Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 59–82). This large settlement was extensively quarried for stones in the 19th century when the earlier, western walls of the modern cemetery were constructed. The place-name *hallan* derives from the Norse word for ‘stones’.

The Cladh Hallan settlement extends northwards into a large sand bowl (Site 53, Area B of the excavations), where midden material and stones can be seen in rabbit scrapes and blow-outs, and probably beyond (Site 52). RCAHMS records include another midden site (Site 80) west of Site 53. Within the sand quarry, Site 56 is actually redeposited midden material from Site 55. Further east there is another LBA/EIA midden exposure (Site 215; see above) which may mark the eastern limit of this complex.

In the vicinity of the Cladh Hallan LBA/EIA complex there are eight undated sites. Three are small mounds with midden material which may date to the Early Bronze Age (Sites 57, 226 and 225/227). Two others (Sites 49 and 50) are prominent, artificial mounds within the modern graveyard. On the western shore of Loch Hallan are two large mounds (Site 51) with no evidence of midden material. However, these are probably the site recorded by RCAHMS as Dun Ruadh (NF 7379 2184) and possibly as the midden with pottery and pins at Loch Hallan (NF 73 21). None the less, during the survey periods the rabbit scrapes produced no midden material so the identification of these mounds as sites is tenuous. Further south, the southern (Site 60) of two relatively small mounds (Sites 59 and 60) is being eroded by the wind. Despite structural stonework and exposed midden, no diagnostic pottery has been found.

Machair Mheadhanach and Hornish Point

There are six certain LBA/EIA settlements (Sites 136, 144, 146, 151, 152 and 154) and three probable ones (sites 147, 150 and 187) on Machair Mheadhanach, within 400m–1200m north of the EBA complex. Like the Cladh Hallan group they are arranged in a line but stretching for 1200m on a southeast–northwest axis and are spaced approximately 200m apart. Unlike the dune-covered Cladh Hallan area, the flat machair here allows us to appreciate the sizes of these mounds, which range from *c.* 15m to *c.* 80m in diameter. The largest, Site 136, rises to about 3m above the plain. The basal layers at Hornish Point, 2km to the north, also date to this period (Barber 1998). Other as yet undated large mounds in this area (Sites 163 and 166) may also have LBA/EIA levels at their bases.

Middle Iron Age settlement

Pottery sherds of this period (*c.* 200 BC–AD 300) are particularly prolific in settlement middens (Figure 2.12). They are also relatively diagnostic, often being decorated with motifs such as applied S-shaped cordons and other motifs that are quite distinctive. It is perhaps not surprising that sites of this period are so common since the decorated

pottery of this period is so easily recognizable. Aside from the excavated broch settlement of Dun Vulcan (Site 0) and the Cill Donnain wheelhouse (Site 85), settlements of this date have been identified at Bornais Site 1 (with occupation dating to the Middle Iron Age, Late Iron Age and Norse period), Bornais Site 15, Ormacleit Site 9, and Staoinebrig Sites 30 and 32. Cill Donnain Site 85 is almost certainly part of a larger settlement including Site 84. Pottery of this date has been found on a site off the machair on the artificial island in Upper Loch Bornish (Marshall and Parker Pearson 1997; see Chapter 12). This might originally have been the site of an Early Iron Age dun or broch.

The Middle Iron Age machair settlements in the five townships of the Dun Vulcan environs are large, between 2m and 6m in height and over 40m across. Each of these five townships possesses one MIA mound on its machair although there are two within Staoinebrig. Moving south, one of the mounds on Frobost machair (Site 47) has produced MIA pottery from a test pit, and a few abraded MIA sherds have come from the LIA mound nearby (Site 45). The two northern mounds at Aisgernis (Sites 96 and 97) have also produced MIA sherds from excavations by Raven (2005: 477).

There is something of a concentration of five Middle Iron Age settlement mounds in the Dalabrog/Cille Pheadair area. The unusually well-preserved wheelhouse of Kilpheder (Site 64; Lethbridge 1952) is the best known of these. This is in the northwest quarter of a large mound; the trackway from Cille Pheadair passes over the middle of this mound. Lethbridge noted parchmarks of another two wheelhouses within the mound and there are probably more buildings here. About a hundred metres to the northeast there is an even larger

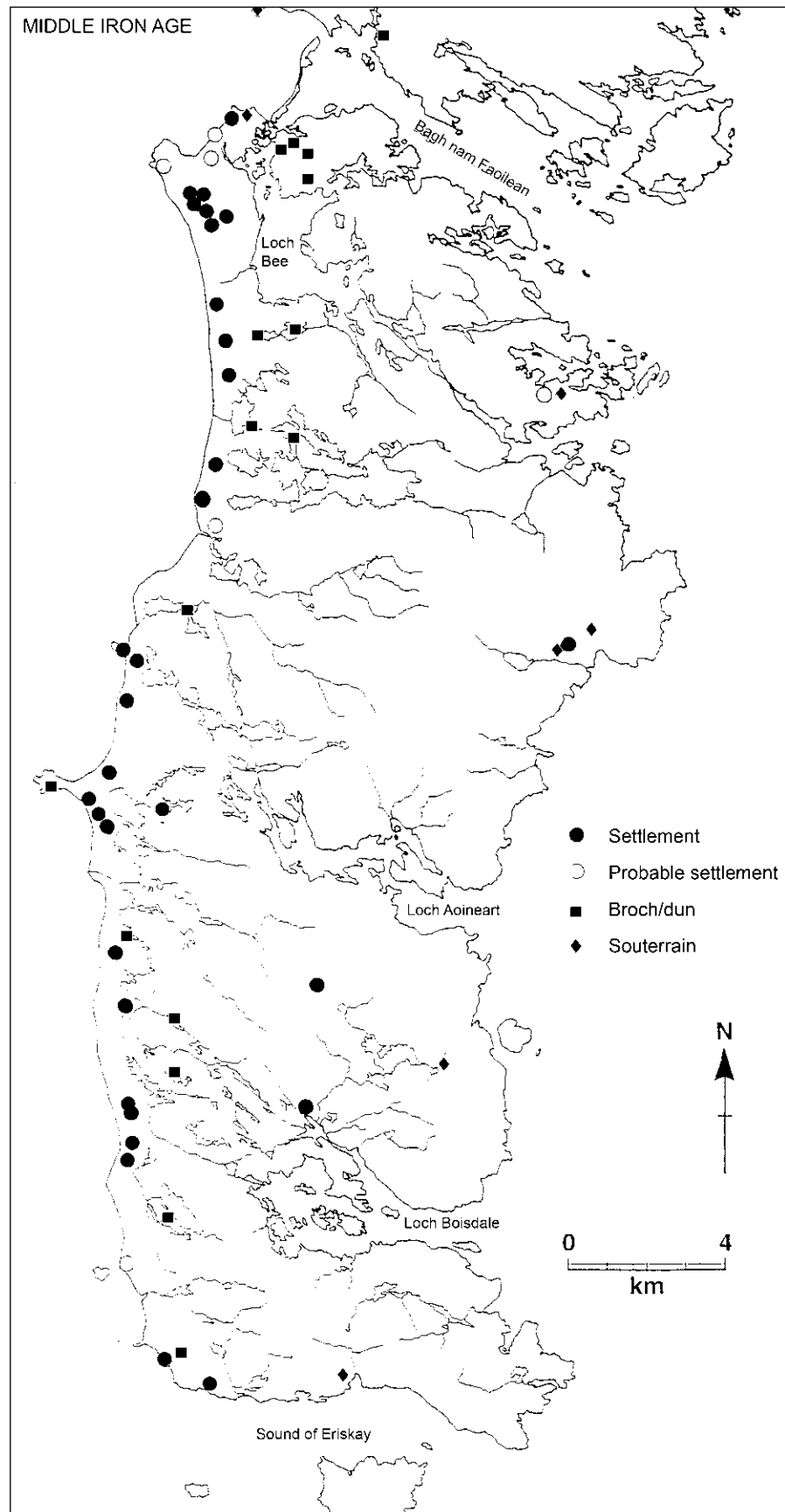


Figure 2.12. Middle Iron Age sites on South Uist

mound that has also produced decorated sherds of the first centuries of the first millennium AD (Site 63). One of the Dalabrog sites (Site 205) is also of this date. Lethbridge identified two other MIA wheelhouse settlements at Bruthach an Tigh Tallan (completely removed some years before his Kilpheder wheelhouse excavations but probably the same as or adjacent to the Viking Age settlement at Site 61) and at Sithean a Phiobaire (Site 157) which has also been completely destroyed (Lethbridge 1952).

In the southern part of South Uist, Cill Bhrìghde (Site 98) can be dated to this period (Raven 2005: 480–1). Other settlement mounds in the south likely to have material of this date are located at Baghasdal (Site 69 or 70).

In the northern half of South Uist there are Middle Iron Age settlements at Dreumsdal (Site 175), Stadhlaignearraidh (Site 100), Drimore (Site 110; Fairhurst 1971), Gearraidh-fleugh (Site 117; Young and Richardson 1960), Cille Bhanain (Site 118), Machair Mheadhanach (probably Sites 126–128, 138 and certainly 129, 142–144) and at Hornish Point (Site 158; Barber 2003). There are large undated mounds which are possibly MIA settlements at Tobha Mòr (Sites 173 and 174), Aird a Mhachair (Site 166), Lionacuidhe (Site 163) and Cill Amhlaidh (under Kilauley House). An undated souterrain, probably of MIA or EIA date, lies in the machair sand of the north coast at Baile Gharbhaidh (Site 159).

Pre-Viking 'Pictish' Late Iron Age

Sites of this period (c. AD 300–800) are generally known as 'Pictish' though there is no compelling evidence that the Western Isles were ever incorporated into the Pictish kingdom or were inhabited by Picts. Archaeological remains of settlements from this time are relatively rare and few have been found in the Western Isles (Armit 1996). Pottery from them is relatively sparse and is comprised mainly of plain wares (Lane 1990). As a result, we have few LIA/'Pictish' settlements identified from surface scatters alone (Figure 2.13). Furthermore, as Armit has noted, they are often found within or on top of Middle Iron Age settlements (Armit 1996) and thus the finding of MIA sherds on these sites may mask the presence of LIA remains.

In spite of these difficulties, sherds with the characteristic flaring rims and brushed surfaces of pottery from this period have been found on the machair at five excavated sites, four survey sites and probably four others. The most secure contexts are the excavated sites of Bornais Site 1, Cill Donnain wheelhouse (Site 85), Dun Vulcan (Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999), A'Cheardach Mhor in Gearraidhfleugh (Site 117; Young and Richardson 1960) and A'Cheardach Bheag in Drimore (Site 110; Fairhurst 1971). At Dun Vulcan this pottery has been found inside and outside the broch; in the latter setting it is associated with three radiocarbon dates. At Bornais it is associated with a stone building and associated layers (Sharples 1997; forthcoming a). At Cill Donnain it is associated with the later phases of the wheelhouse (Zvelebil 1989; 1990).

In the Dun Vulcan environs, Late Iron Age pottery is also found at Ormacleit on a small, isolated mound (Site 4), about 10m across and 0.50m high, and probably on three other small mounds, two on Ormacleit machair (Sites 5 and 7, 1km to the north of Site 4) and the other on Staoinebrig machair (Site 34). The relative isolation of Site 4 is unusual, given the clustered pattern of other sites. Although the area immediately west of it is covered by low dunes, coring and intensive fieldwalking have failed to locate any further sites and demonstrate that there are no large settlement mounds in its vicinity.

Other mounds with LIA pottery have been found at Machair Mheadhanach (Site 141), Dalabrog (Site 59) and Baghasdal (Site 191). Site 141 is of interest because, although small, it is covered in metal slag as well as pottery and may perhaps be comparable to the high-status metalworking site at Eilean Olabhat in North Uist (Armit 1996: 173–8; Armit *et al.* 2008). Hornish Point (Site 158) appears to have pottery of this period within its long sequence and there is also a Plain Style sherd from the MIA settlement at Cille Bhànain (Site 118).

The largest Late Iron Age settlement so far discovered in South Uist is the complex on Frobost machair (Sites 45, 46 and 238) from which a Norse-period pin has also been recovered as well as a few abraded MIA sherds (although the MIA settlement is a few hundred metres to the south). This group of mounds was discovered as the result of sand quarrying into one of them (Site 45), revealing a 1.50m-deep sequence of buildings and midden deposits together with large quantities of pottery and bone. Trial trenching of Site 46 also confirmed that it was a LIA settlement.

The issue of continuity between this period and the Viking period is a contentious one (contrast Crawford 1986 with Armit 1996). The broch of Dun Vulcan has produced no evidence of Viking Age occupation (though it is far from comprehensively excavated) whereas Bornais (Site 1) has a Viking Age building cut into the LIA levels.

The Norse period

Twenty-four machair sites have produced Viking Age and Late Norse finds (Figure 2.14), making this one of the most densely occupied areas to have been recorded in Scandinavian Scotland (Crawford 1987; Young 1996). A Norse-period copper alloy pin was found on one of these in 1964, probably Site 37 (NF 723 295 in RCAHMS records), whilst a bone/antler comb was found prior to the survey on Site 74. Otherwise the other 21 settlements can be assigned to this period on the basis of sherds of grass-impressed pottery. Viking Age pottery of the 9th–11th centuries is sparse in comparison to earlier Iron Age assemblages but can be clearly diagnostic. The cooking pots and other rounded containers are plain whereas the flat circular platters, known as Udal platterware, are distinctive because of their flatness and because of the grass impressions on their undersides (Lane 1990). Still, sites of this period are difficult to identify because of the relative scarcity of pottery deposited and, in addition, the

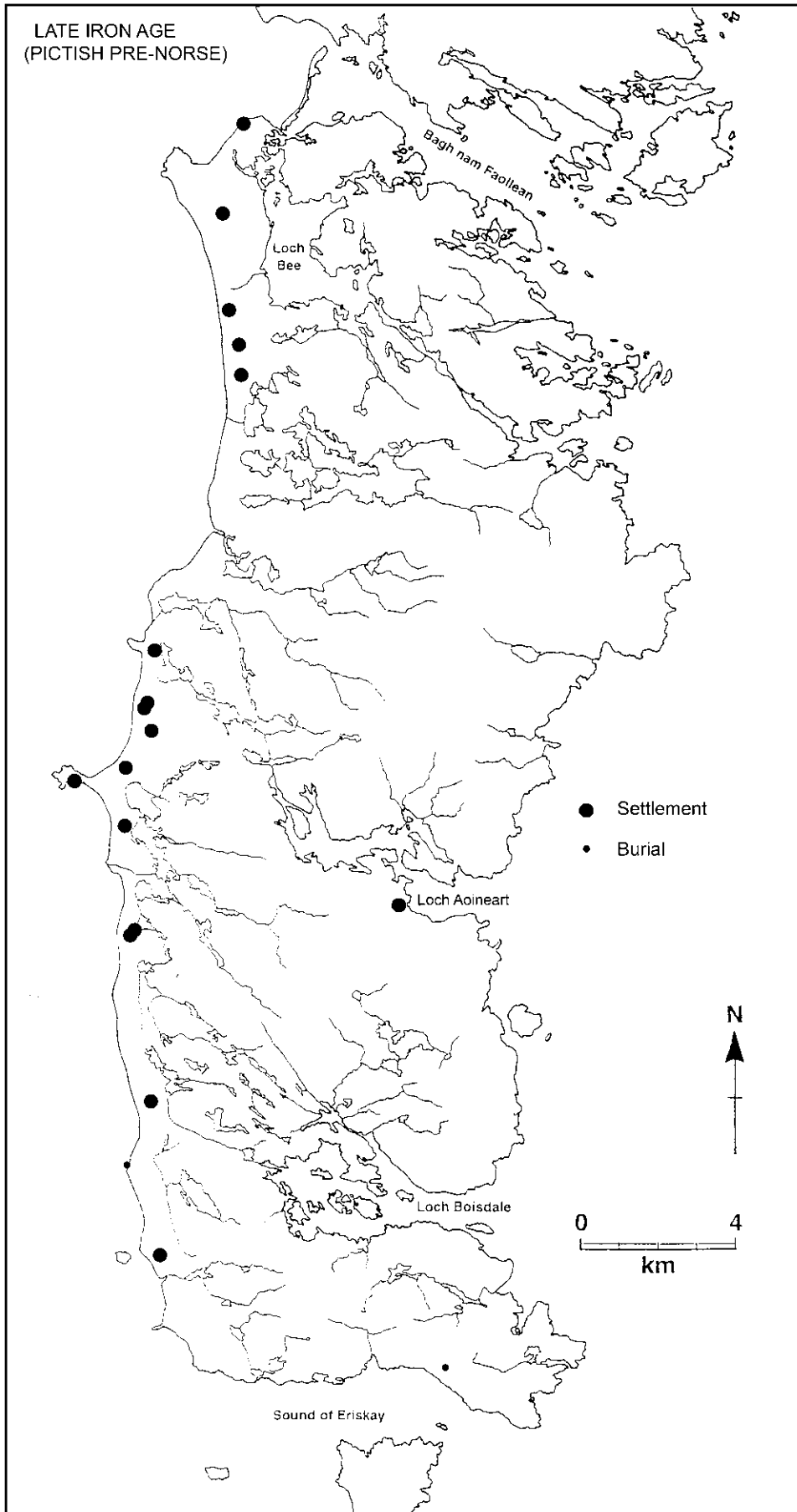


Figure 2.13. Pre-Viking Late Iron Age sites on South Uist

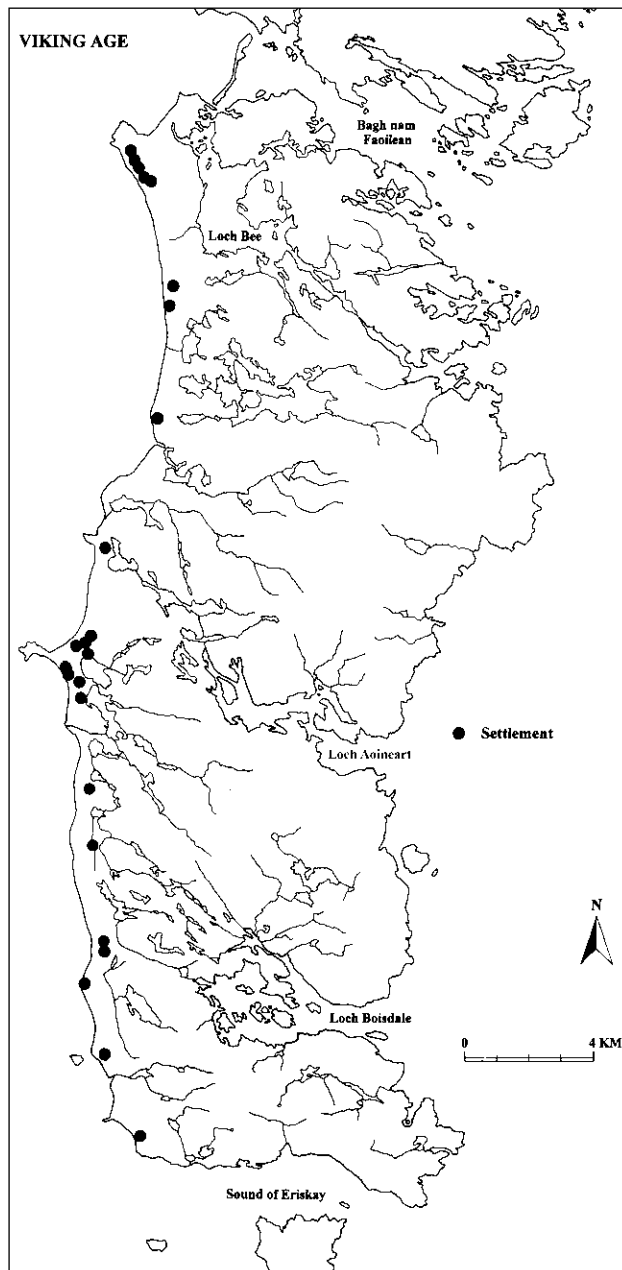


Figure 2.14. Viking Age settlements on South Uist

distinctive grass-impressed wares can make up as little as 5% of these assemblages (Lane 1990).⁶

Settlement mounds with Viking Age pottery or other finds have been identified in the Dun Vulcan environs at: Bornais (Sites 1, 2, 3, 14, 28 and 40), Cill Donnain (Sites 83 and 84), and Staoinebrig (Site 34). There are three in the Dalabrog–Cille Pheadair area (Sites 61, 66 and 207), one at Baghasdal (Site 191), one at Smercleit (Site 74), one at Dreumasdal (Site 99), the excavated house at Drimore (Site 103; MacLaren 1974), excavated layers at A'Cheardach Mhor in Gearraidhfleugh (Site 117; Young and Richardson 1960) and an impressive group of Sites 145, 148, 149, 155 and 186.

These sites are mostly adjacent to one or more mounds of earlier date with Middle Iron Age to Late Iron Age

(‘Pictish’ period) pottery, with the exception of the three sites in the Dalabrog–Cille Pheadair area. One of these, Site 66, was excavated in 1996–1998 as part of a broader research investigation into Viking Age settlement on South Uist (Parker Pearson *et al.* 1996; Brennand *et al.* 1997; Sharples and Parker Pearson 1999; Parker Pearson *et al.* forthcoming).

The other recently excavated settlement is the large nucleated site at Bornais (Sites 1, 2 and 3) whose unusually large size differentiates it from all other sites of this period on the island (Parker Pearson and Webster 1994; Sharples *et al.* 1995; Sharples 1996; 1997; 1999; 2000; 2003; 2005a). The deep stratigraphy encountered in these excavations is probably typical of other Viking Age settlements on South Uist. Coring on Site 27 at Cill Donnain indicates the survival of four distinct midden layers to a depth of 0.70m (at which level the corer was impeded by stones).

Other settlement mounds with a known Viking Age presence are Smercleit (Site 74; Raven 2005: 479–80), Aisgernis (Site 48; see Chapter 13) and Frobost (Site 238=45; see Chapter 13) and have components which date to this period. Other sites producing possible Viking Age ceramics are Ormacleit (Site 6), Cill Donnain 27 (a single sherd amongst MIA finds, though this may be LBA grass-tempered pottery), Staoinebrig (Site 33) and Bornais (Site 37).

In the northern part of the island, settlement mounds that have not yet produced any pottery at all are found at Tobha Mòr (Sites 173 and 174), Aird a Mhachair (Sites 167 and 168), Cille Amhlaidh (Sites 164 and 165) and Lionacuidhe (Site 163). The mound at Hornish Point (Site 158; Barber 2003) also has a sizeable area to the east of, and higher than, the excavated western section and a Viking Age occupation phase cannot be ruled out.

Two other possible Viking Age sites might have lain near the excavated Cille Pheadair settlement. Middens were recorded here by RCAHMS; one at Sithean Biorach, 100m to the north (possibly Site 88) and the other about 250m to the south, producing pottery and nails (Site 81). It is most likely that these two RCAHMS sites are additional to those in our inventory since Site 66 was only found by Seumus and the late Callum MacDonald in the winter of 1993/94. One of the Viking Age sites was noted in 1967 by the late Elizabeth Eames when it was seen collapsing out of the beach's sand cliff.

The distribution of Norse place-names is matched reasonably well by the distribution of Viking Age settlements along the machair (Figure 2.15). Where Norse place-names are not associated with a known settlement at Ormacleit and Hornish Point, this is probably because the settlement of this period remains to be discovered. In the case of Hellibost and Peighinn nan Aoireann there is no trace of any potential settlement mound.

Viking Age burials are known from Lewis at Cnip and Bhalto (Welander *et al.* 1987; Cowie *et al.* 1994; Dunwell *et al.* 1995; Armit 1996: 195–202) and from smaller isles such as Colonsay (Armit 1996; Ritchie 1993). There is a likely grave find from Eriskay (Grieg 1940) and another

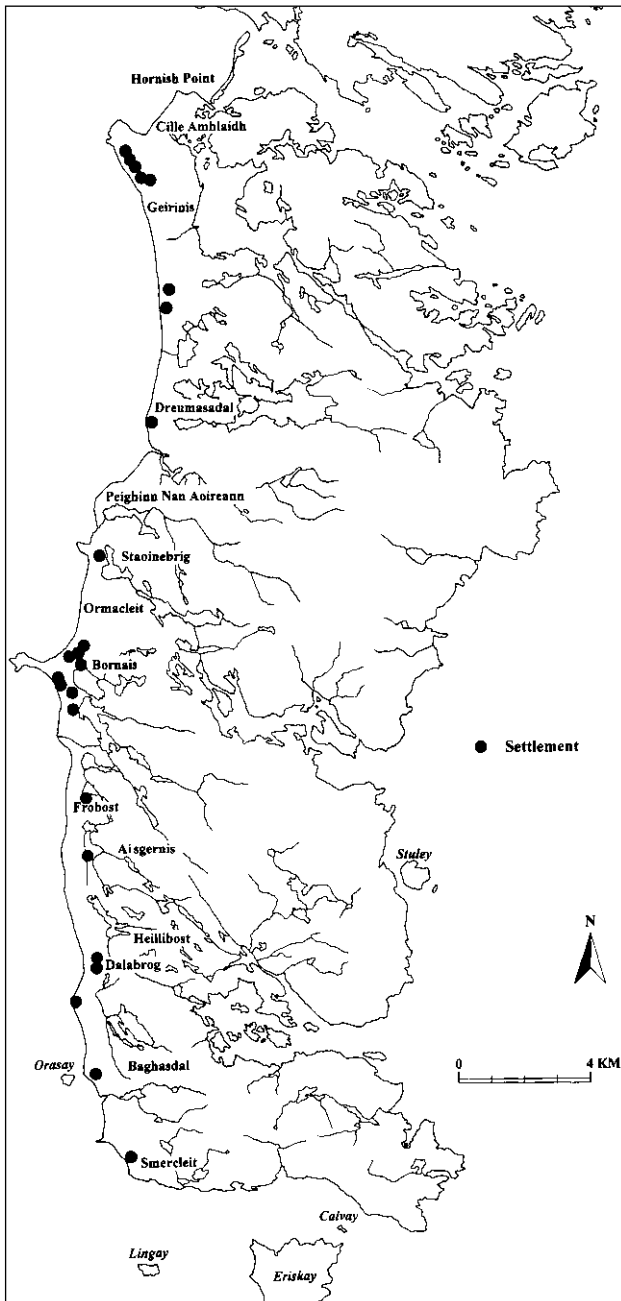


Figure 2.15. Norse place-names and Viking Age settlement on South Uist

possible grave, consisting of a find of an antler comb from a stone ‘cist’ in a sand mound on South Uist (*ibid.*: 73–4) but their locations are unknown. Otherwise, no Viking Age burial places are known on South Uist. There is one unmarked, disused cemetery (with no surface indications of its use or date) on the machair on the boundary between Cille Pheadair and Dalabrog townships. It is clearly visible as a large sand hill (Site 62) in which human bones and skulls have been found during the digging of potato clamps. This may possibly be the site of a pagan Viking Age cemetery though it is marked on the O.S. 1:10,000 sheet as an ancient burial ground.

There are ancient ecclesiastical sites that may have their origins in the Late Norse period or possibly before. The clearest examples of these are Cille Donnain (Fleming and Woolf 1992; Parker Pearson 1995; see Chapters 3 and 14), where 13th–14th century green-glazed pottery has been found in layers outside the church (see Chapter 14), and Howmore (Tobha Mòr) where the standing remains of the earliest chapel probably date to the 13th century (Fojut *et al.* 1994: 41–2).⁷ There are other known and likely church sites at Cille Bhrighde (Site 76; probably associated with a burial ground), Geirinis (the rectangular building on top of the broch in Loch Cille Bhànain; Raven 2005: 225) and Cille Pheadair (the rectangular building and other structures on the large crannog in Loch Dun na Cille). However, the ancient church of Cille Pheadair is remembered in oral tradition as having been lost to the sea, having been located on a spot now about 100m offshore from the current west coast, near the Viking settlement site (Site 66).

Although the term *cille* means religious cell rather than church, the regular distribution of *cille* place-names, approximately every 5km, hints at parochial organization rather than monastic retreats. No church site has yet been identified at Cille Amhlaidh. The marking of a place-name of ‘Gill’ near Frobost on the Blau map of 1654 hints at the possibility of a religious site here. The regular spacing of churches would be complete if another could be found in the Ormacleit area.

The Later Medieval period

None of the Viking Age settlements identified on the machair seems to have survived long beyond the Norse period, with the possible exception of Staoinnebrig Site 33, which is known as ‘the old town’ in Gaelic. Two other settlements are known from oral histories and maps to have been located on the machair during the Medieval period but Medieval pottery has not been found on them. One is the mound complex at Baghasdal which was abandoned in the 19th century and is illustrated on the Bald map of 1805 (Figure 2.18). It is probably either Site 69 or Site 70. The second is Machair Mheadhanach which is marked on the Blau map of 1654 (Figure 2.17) as ‘Machribeanach’. Of the 36 mounds in this area, only Sites 137 and 138 have produced diagnostic Medieval pottery (Raven 2005: 483). The other machair settlement with Medieval occupation is Aisgernis (Site 96 and probably Site 97) which is close to the position of the 1805 settlement and has produced Medieval and Post-Medieval ceramics.

It would thus seem that, apart from these four places, settlements on the machair were abandoned during or at the end of the Norse period. Medieval pottery, consisting of pots with high collars and decorated with lines of small dots, has been identified at Dun Vulcan (Parker Pearson and Sharples 1991; Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999). A Medieval settlement was located on the Beinn na Mhic Aongheis (‘Hill of the Son of Angus’; Site 89), located on the peatland at the machair edge between Bornish church and Bornish House (Marshall *et al.* 1996; see Chapter

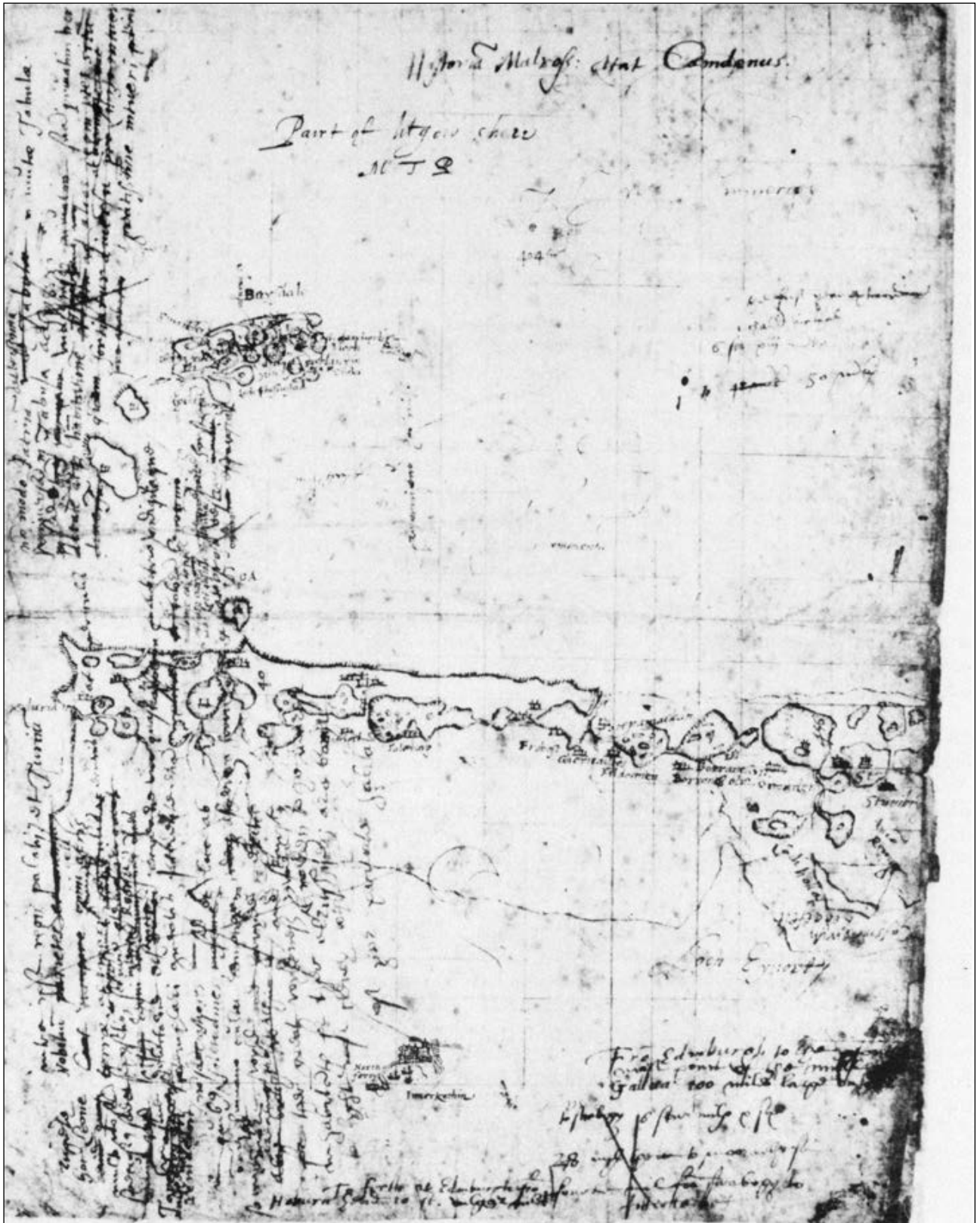


Figure 2.16. Timothy Pont's map of South Uist, drawn c.1595

16). Medieval pottery has also been recovered from the excavations on the deserted settlement of Gearraidh Bhailteas (see Chapter 15). Another settlement mound on the peatlands just off the machair at Cille Bhanain (Site

171) has also produced Medieval pottery. Adjacent to it is another low mound with remains of stone buildings and a glazed Post-Medieval sherd (Site 172) in the map location marked by Bald as the settlement of 'Kilivanen'.

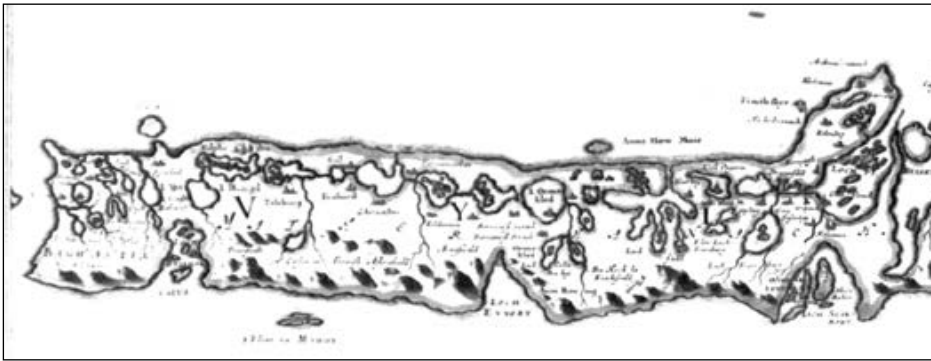


Figure 2.17. Joan Blau's 1654 map of South Uist

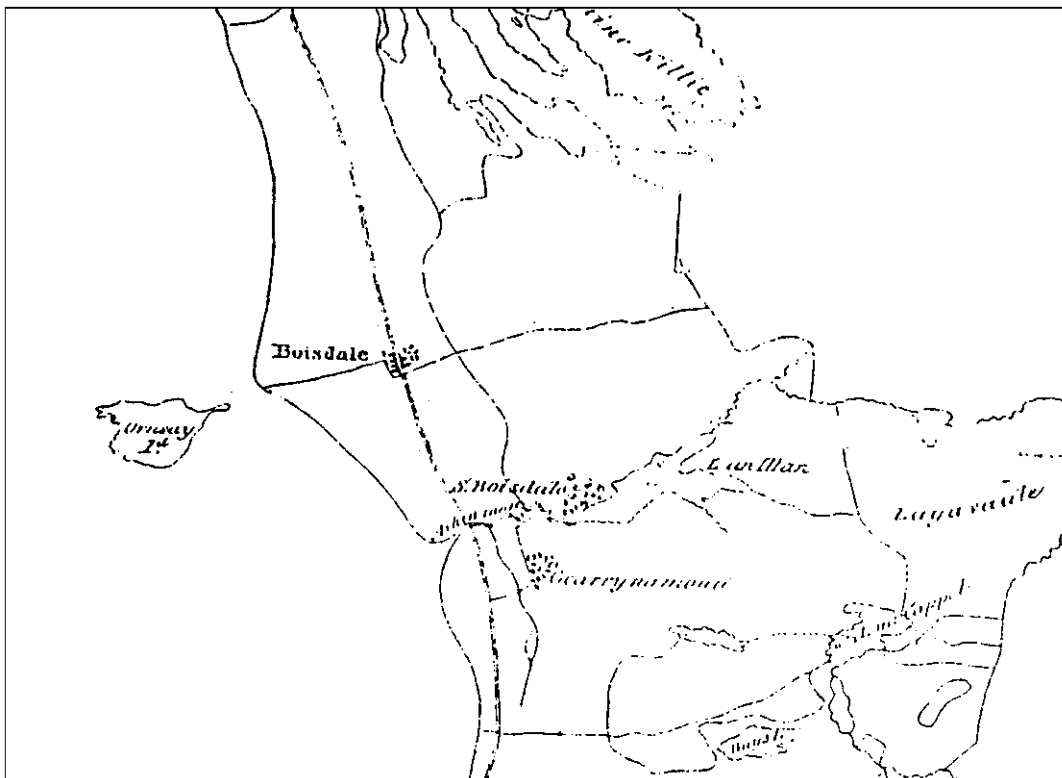


Figure 2.18. William Bald's 1805 map of South Uist (the Boisdale area)

Our working hypothesis is that some Medieval settlements are located close to the Norse ones but just off the machair, whilst others occupy new land in the *gearraidh* townships. These locations are adjacent to, or under, the major township settlements marked on the Bald map of 1805. The existence of most of them in the early Post-Medieval period can be attested by their appearance on the Pont map (Figure 2.16) which was compiled in the 1580s or 1590s (estimated as *c.*1595).

The Post-Medieval period

The earliest maps of South Uist with any detail are Timothy Pont's late 16th-century sketch map (Figure 2.16) and Blau's map of 1654 (Figure 2.17) which acknowledges Pont and is partly based on his drawing. These maps are

remarkable for showing apparently interconnecting lochs for much of the length of the island. Pont's map appears to show linked lochs between Cille Pheadair and Iochdar whilst Blau's shows connected lochs from Cille Pheadair to Ormaclait and from Dreumasdal to Iochdar. This suggests that much of the island might have been accessible by inland navigation as well as along the coasts. No land routes are marked but presumably there was also access along the machair.

Another interesting detail is Pont's marking of settlement in lochs, apparently in Loch an Eilean (near Leth Meadhanach), Loch Ormaclait (West Loch Ollay/Loch Olaidh an Iar), Loch Altbrug and another unidentifiable loch. Blau similarly shows settlement in Loch a Brug (or perhaps Loch Aiseabhat), Loch Ormaclait (West Loch Ollay), Loch Altbrug, and Loch an Eilean (presumably

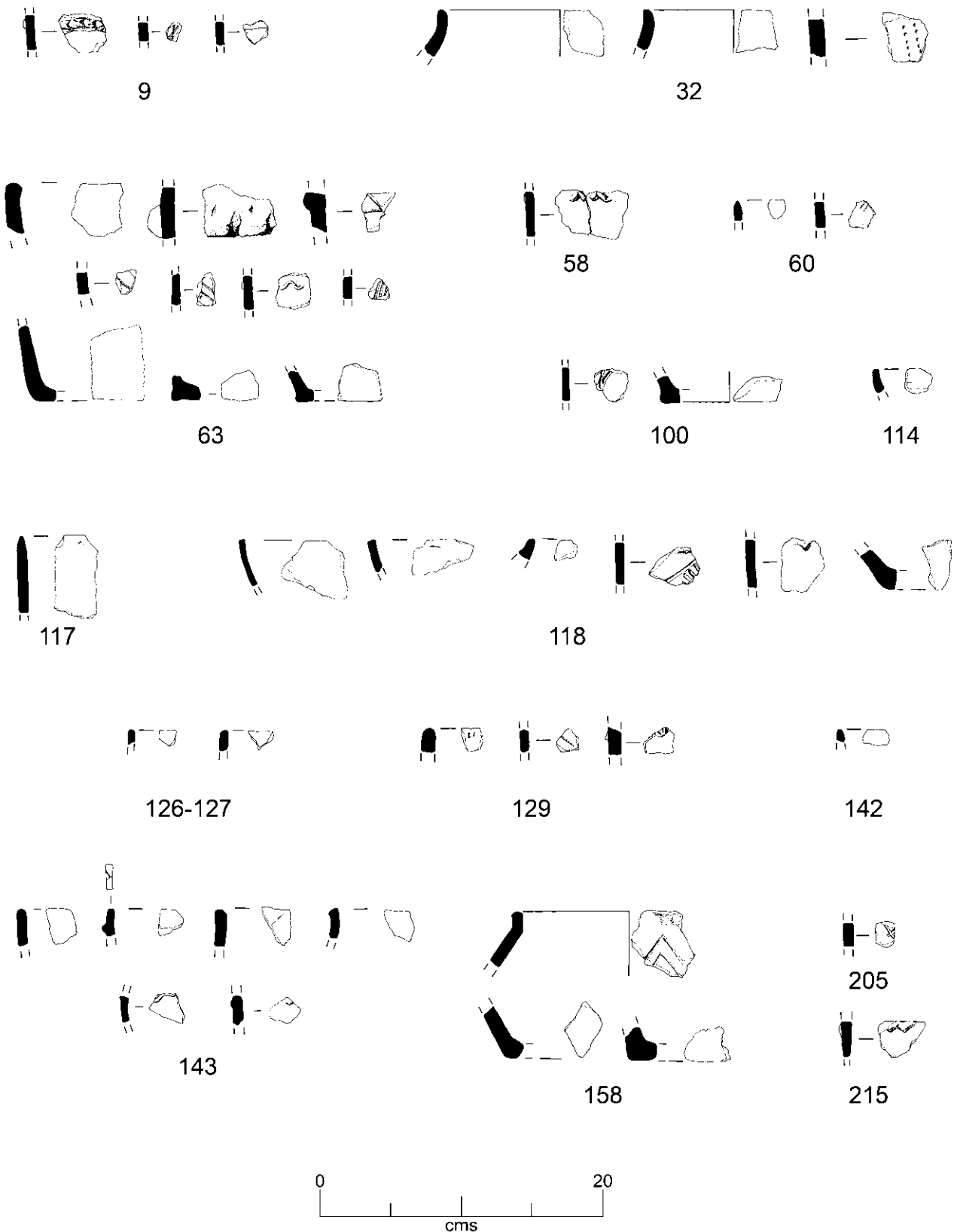


Figure 2.21. Middle Iron Age pottery from machair sites

settlement between Loch Ormacleit and Loch Altabrug which must be Staoinebrig, Tobha Beag (Howbeg), Tobha Mòr (How M:), Staidlaigearraidh (Styraig and Erry marked as two settlements), Groigearraidh (Grog---), Dreumasadal

(Dromesdill), Geirinis (Kereynish), ?Gearraidhfleugh (Imferhge), Cille Bhànain (Kilvanen), Cill Amhlaidh (Kileulay), Machair Mheadhanach (Machribeanach), ?Lionacuidhe (Kilehainic [?]), and Aird a Mhachair

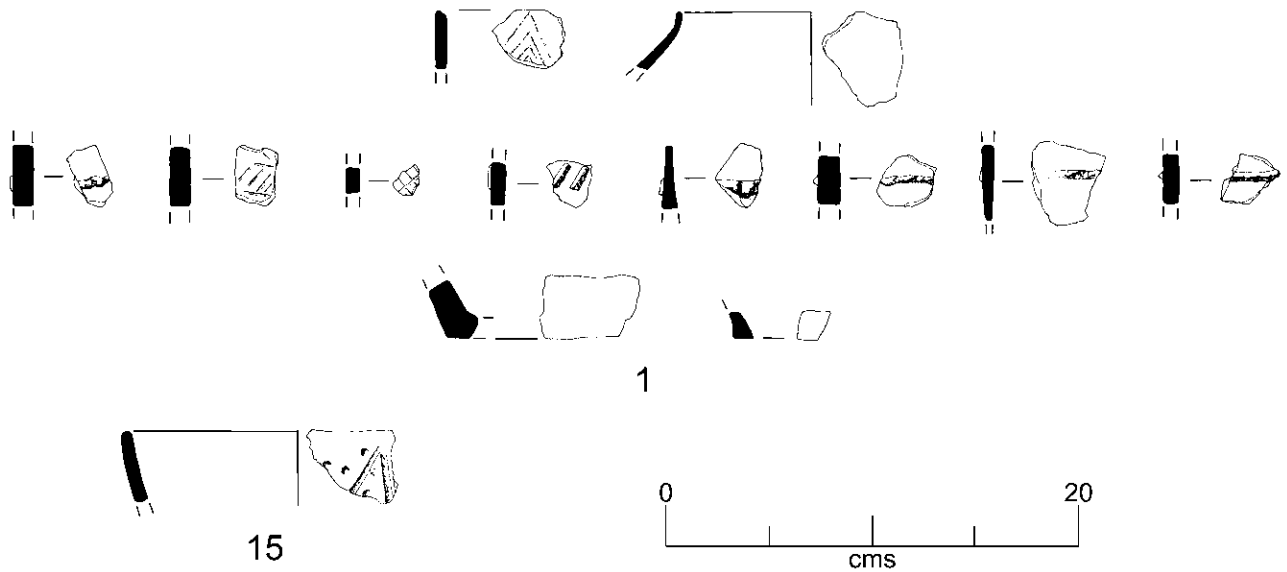


Figure 2.22. Middle Iron Age pottery from Bornais sites 1 and 15

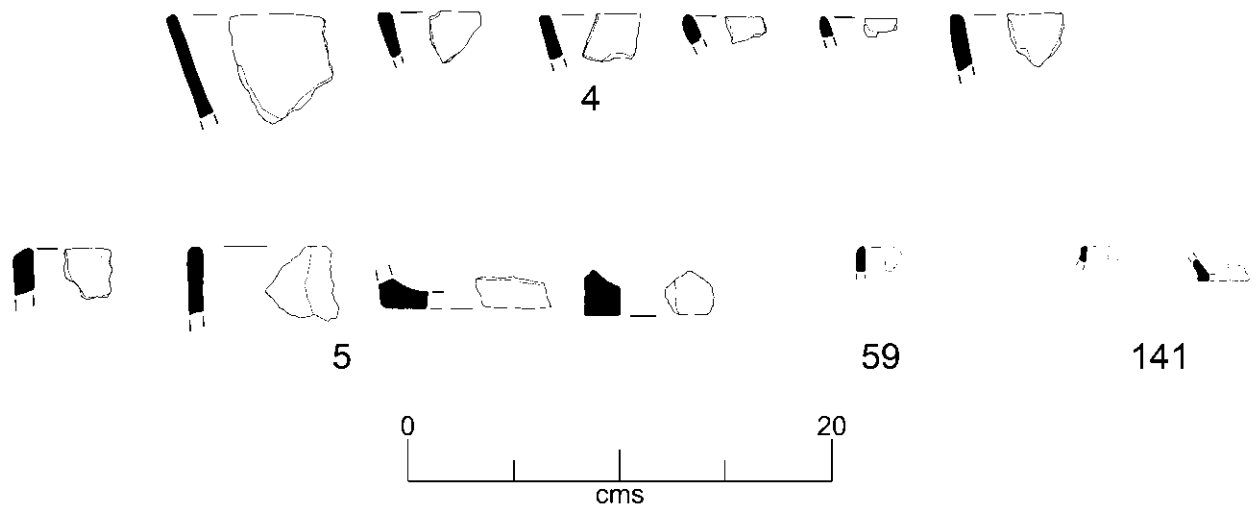


Figure 2.23. Late Iron Age pottery from machair sites

(Ardmachrianich). Additionally, Baghasdal is shown on top of a prominent hill whilst Upper Bornish is shown on a low hill as, possibly, are ?Staoinebrig and Aird a Mhachair.

William Bald's map of 1805 (Figure 2.19) is the first accurate map of South Uist and it names the following settlements along the west coast (the number in brackets is the number of houses marked; spellings are Bald's): Kilbride (3), PoulAcharr (2), Smerklet (9 including 1 on the machair), S. Boisdale (13), Boisdale (14 on the machair), Kilipheder (28), Dalburgh (20), Garrihellie in ruins (6), Askernish (9), South Frobost (20), North Frobost (27), Garryvaltas (5), Mingary (4), Milton (18), Kildonan (10), an unnamed settlement a couple of hundred metres north of Kildonan (20), Upper Bornish (6), Lower Bornish (19), Ormiclate (22), Ard Michael (4 on the machair), Dun Gallan (3), Stonybridge (20), Peninirine (3), Snushievaule (8), Totahur (10), Howbeg (16), Howmore (12), Driminsdale (12), Stelligary (13), Grogary (11), Drimore (8), Gerryfleugh (15), Kilivanan (16), Gearnish

(6), Machair Meanach (deserted), Ardivachir (16 including 2 on the machair), Kilaulay (36 including 6 on the machair), Lieneque (11 including 4 on the machair), and Balgarva (20). Bald also indicates 'Castle Veggrum' as a residence whilst 'Duine Rhail' (Dun Raouill) is the only other island site marked.

Pont's and Blaué's maps indicate that most of the township communities of South Uist were in existence at least by the 17th century. The absent townships are Gearraidh na Monadh, Leth Meadhanach, probably Aisgermis, Peighinn nan Aoireann, Sniseabhal, Totahur, Drimore, and possibly Gearraidfleugh. The locations on the maps cannot be considered precise but there is strong evidence that at least two communities were living on the machair at this time. The first is Machair Mheadhanach since its territory as marked on Bald's map is entirely on the machair. The second is Baghasdal which is represented as being on a hill and was still on the machair until the early 19th century. By the time of Bald's map, the four

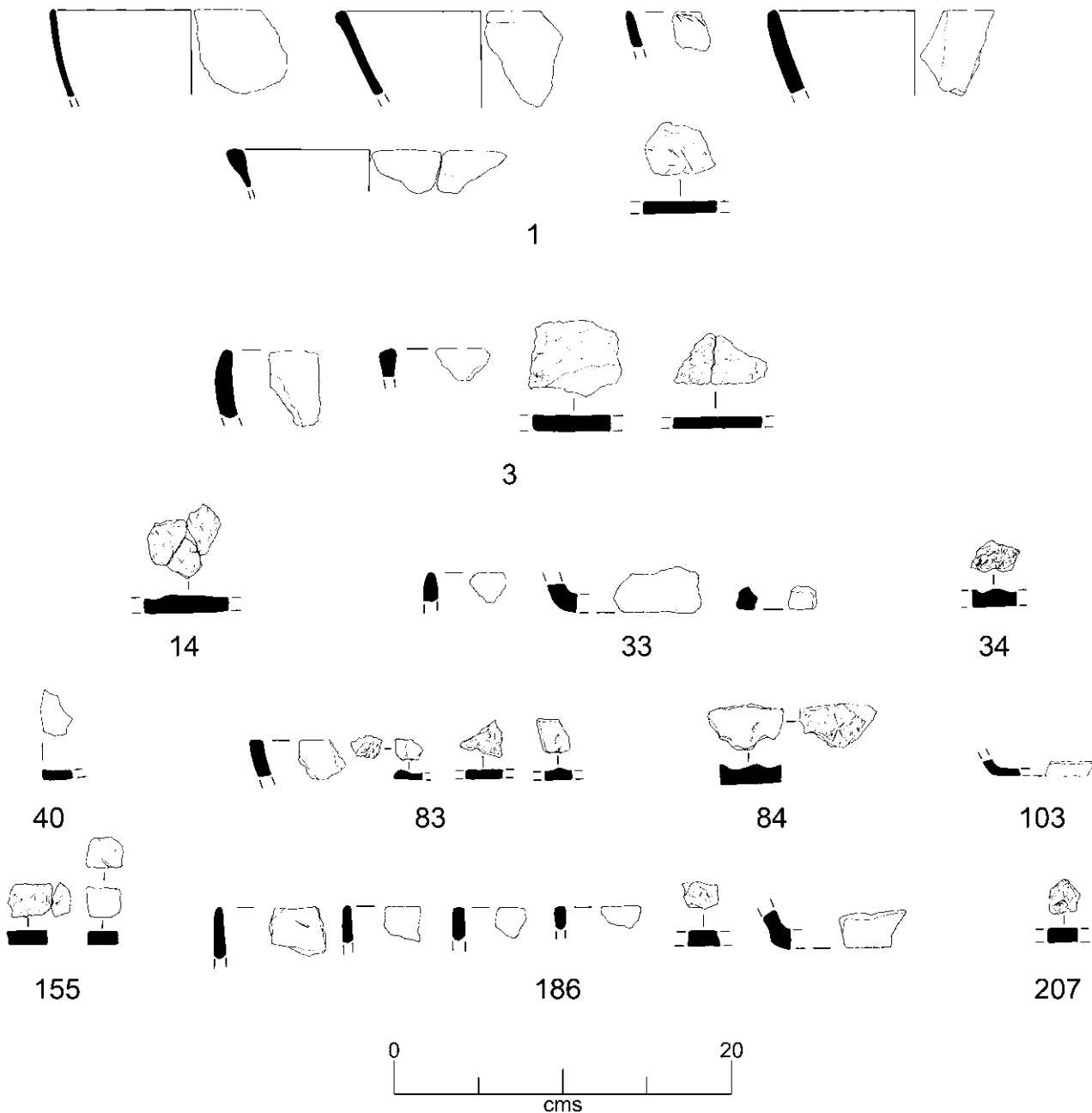


Figure 2.24. Norse-period pottery from machair sites

or so island duns shown as occupied in the 17th century are all uninhabited except perhaps for Castle Bheagram. His map shows that the Machair Mheadhanach settlement was no more and that, other than Baghasdal, only a few communities had outliers living on the machair: Smercleit, Aird Mhicheil (part of Staoinnebrig), Aird a Mhachair, Cill Amhlaidh, and Lionacuidhe.

It is interesting that four of these outliers must be very close to or on archaeological sites of greater antiquity, suggesting that Bald was mapping the final stages of settlement drift away from the machair for these communities. The fifth machair outlier, at Cill Amhlaidh, is in an area where no archaeological sites have been observed (since they are located 400m further inland where the main settlement is shown).

Six of the settlements marked on William Bald's map have been archaeologically investigated. Upper Bornish is marked in the position where Bornish House stands today. Test trenching revealed much 19th and early 20th-century material but only a few scraps of earlier material (Parker Pearson and Roper 1995; see Chapter 16). In contrast, A Beinn na Mhic Aongheis, the 'Hill of the Son of Angus' (200m southwest) has produced buried house structures and a large assemblage of Post-Medieval coarse wares (Marshall *et al.* 1996; Chapter 16). This is presumably the site of Upper Bornish ('Boraness Yorach'; Bornais Uarach) marked on the 1595 and 1654 maps.

The second excavated settlement is Airigh Mhuilinn, Flora MacDonald's birthplace, marked as Milton on Bald's map. Excavation of visible house remains has indicated



Figure 2.25. Late Medieval pottery from machair sites

occupation in the 18th and 19th centuries (Symonds 1999a and b; 2000). The other sites investigated are Smercleit (Site 74; Raven 2005: 479–80), Aisgernis (sites 48, 96 and 97; Raven 2005: 476–8; see Chapter 13), Baghasdal (Sites 67, 68 and 191; Raven 2005: 478–9) and Cille Pheadair (Raven 2005: 481).

Other locations are corroborated to a greater or lesser degree. Cille Bhànain (Sites 171 and 172) has been located by field survey, and North Frobost is visible as house ruins on a large grassy knoll and one of the 19th-century blackhouses here has been excavated by Helen Smith. Old Drimore is also visible as a low grassy knoll (Gill MacLean pers. comm.). Cill Amhlaidh is a large knoll with two mounds to its southeast (Sites 164 and 165) and another four potential mounds close to them. Clearly more work can be done on these settlement sites but they are difficult to verify since they are generally either uncultivated (and there is no rabbit damage) or there are modern buildings on top of them.

'Post-Clearance' settlements

A number of sites on the machair have produced finds dating to the 19th or early 20th centuries. The most notable are the kelpers' cottages on Ardvule (Site 91) where 19 small sunken stone-walled buildings, each *c.* 5m × 3m, are associated with porcelain, glass and other finds from the early part of this century (Badcock *et al.* 2000). To the west of it, Site 92 is a small mound which has produced 19th-century glass.

Another structure of this late date was found at Bornais on top of Site 2, partially excavated in 1994 (Parker Pearson and Webster 1994). This small rectangular bothy was a field hut used in the 1950s, as dated by its association with a teacup and as remembered by the MacKay brothers. Another rectangular structure can be seen on Site 180 on the rocket range, adjacent to the Early Bronze Age settlement. There are blackhouse foundations visible on the machair at Smercleit (Site 75), Aird a Mhachair (Site 170) and Hornish Point (Sites 161 and 162). The remainder of 19th to 20th-century spreads are flat sites without mounds or structures. They are Bornais Site 197, Baghasdal Sites 68

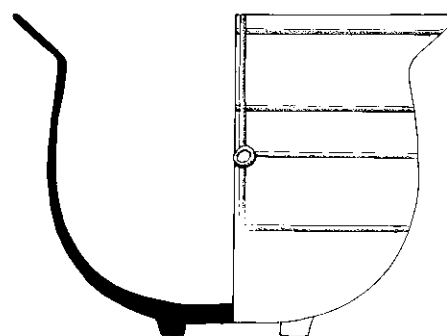


Figure 2.26. An iron cauldron from the kelpers' bothies, Ardvule

and 193, Leth Meadhanach Site 195, Cille Bhrighde Site 190, Howmore Site 101, Sniseabhal Site 102, Groigearraidh Site 119 and Aird a Mhachair Site 160. The lack of dense midden material suggests that these settlements were short-lived or were used sporadically. One surface scatter, Site 212, is recalled in oral tradition as the location of an inn on the machair track in Cille Pheadair. It is not marked on the Bald map and thus probably dates to the mid and late 19th century.

The 'proto-township' hypothesis reviewed

Initial survey results in the Dun Vulcan environs (Cill Donnain to Staoinebrig townships) demonstrated a marked regularity in the spacing of Middle Iron Age settlements at roughly one kilometre intervals along the machair. Secondly, this pattern matched the distribution of the nucleated township communities mapped by William Bald in 1805. Thirdly, most of these MIA settlement sites were in close association with Viking Age settlement mounds. On the basis of these observations, I proposed that the townships recorded in 1805 may have an ancient origin 2,000 years ago in the Iron Age (Parker Pearson 1996b). The distribution of Iron Age and Viking settlement clusters could thus represent a 'proto-township' distribution and organization prior to the shift of settlement onto the edge of the peatlands.

According to this model, the shifts from one mound site to another and eventually onto the peatlands were minor discontinuities within a long-term continuity of territorial organization for township communities living in predominantly nucleated settlements from the Iron Age until the Clearances. This model contrasts wholly with Dodgshon's notion of dispersed Medieval and Post-Medieval settlement in western Scotland (1993), and with his idea that townships were a Medieval imposition by landlords for administrative convenience onto a landscape

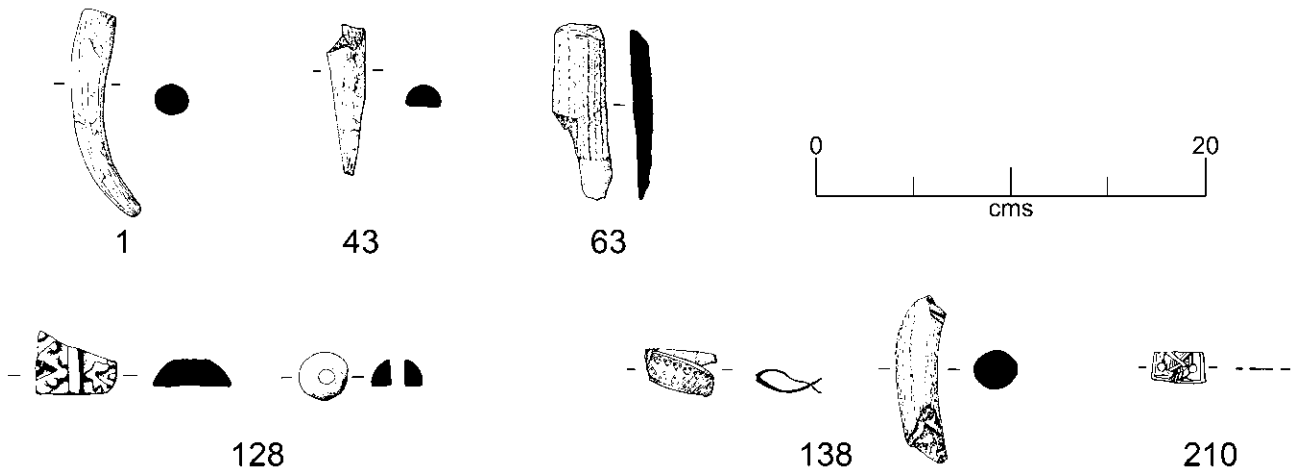


Figure 2.27. Artefacts of various periods from machair sites (worked antler [sites 1, 63 and 138], a worked bone point [site 43], a lead spindle whorl [site 128], fragments of 16th/17th century metalwork [sites 128 and 138] and a fragment of drilled copper-alloy sheet [site 210])

of scattered farmsteads (pers. comm.). It may well be that South Uist is very different from the broader pattern, especially with its wide machair zone. In this respect, it is interesting that the extents of arable land within the South Uist townships are amongst the largest in the whole region (Dodgshon 1992). This may possibly reflect their more ancient origin during the Iron Age when farming yields and perhaps population levels were lower.

Two strategies were developed to examine and test the ‘proto-township’ hypothesis:

The first was to select a single township, Upper Bornish,⁸ and excavate the settlement sites within it to determine whether there was a long-term continuity of nucleated settlement. Excavations have since been carried out on Dun Vulcan (Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999), Bornais Sites 1, 2 and 3 (Parker Pearson and Webster 1994; Sharples 1996; 1997; 1999; 2005a; Sharples *et al.* 1995), Bornish House (Parker Pearson and Roper 1995; Chapter 16), the ‘Hill of the Son of Angus’, Bornais Site 89 (Marshall *et al.* 1996; Chapter 16) and the dun on Upper Loch Bornish (Marshall and Parker Pearson 1998; Chapter 12).

The second strategy was to increase the scope of the machair survey to cover the whole of South Uist. We are now in a position to evaluate the extent to which Iron Age–Viking Age sites on the machair correspond with Medieval–Post-Medieval pre-Clearance township communities on the adjacent peatland fringe. The material has already been presented in this chapter but can be summarized:

- Those townships where there is a good correspondence (*i.e.* a multiperiod mound or a cluster of IA–Viking sites) are:
- Smercleit, Baghasdal, Cille Pheadair, Dalabrog, Aisgernis, Frobost, Cill Donnain (two settlement clusters), Upper Bornish, Lower Bornish, Ormacleit, Staoinebrig (two clusters), Tobha Mòr, Dreumasadal, Drimore, Machair Mheadhanach, Aird a Mhachair, Cill Amhlaidh, Lionacuidhe and Baile Gharbhaidh.

- Those townships where there is a weak correspondence (*i.e.* a single later prehistoric mound which is probably not multi-period) are:
- Cille Bhrighde, Leth Meadhanach, Gearraidh Bhailteas (Site 79 undated and destroyed without trace), Stadhlaigearraidh, Groigearraidh, Gearraidhfleugh and Cille Bhànain.
- Those townships where there are no later prehistoric machair settlements are:
- Gearraidh na Monadh, Gearraidh Sheile. Peighinn nan Aoireann, Sniseabhal, Totahur, Tobha Beag and Geirinis.

Whilst 19 show a strong correspondence, seven show a weak one and seven have no identified sites of the Iron Age to Viking periods. Of the last two groups, six are the *Gearraidh* or ‘garry’ townships on South Uist whose Gaelic rather than Norse names hint at their originating in the Medieval period or even later (Parker Pearson 1995a). Another two (Leth Meadhanach and Tobha Beag) are junior or ‘daughter’ settlements within dual townships (Dodgshon 1985) and may thus have split from their parent township at a similarly late date. A further three are in an area with no substantial machair and are not marked on the 1654 map (Peighinn nan Aoireann, Totahur and Sniseabhal). The last two (Cille Bhànain and Geirinis) are inexplicable save that the area has been substantially modified by construction of the rocket range.

In conclusion, the degree of correspondence is good but not absolute. There are anomalies but they can be accounted for in simple ways that put forward intriguing modifications to the basic model:

- The ‘garry’ townships are Medieval sub-divisions from larger units;
- Some townships were formed after 1654 in an area with little or no machair (Peighinn nan Aoireann, Totahur and Sniseabhal);
- Others are Medieval splittings of one half of a

- dual township into a ‘daughter’ settlement (Leth Meadhanach and Tobha Beag);
- Certain townships have been dual townships, composed of paired communities, since the Iron Age (Upper and Lower Bornish, Cill Donnain and Staoinebrig). Others were divided in the Medieval period or later (Frobost and Gearraidh Bhailteas, Baghasdal and Leth Meadhanach, Tobha Mòr and Tobha Beag). The division of the Iochdar townships has also been a recent phenomenon (Caird 1979);
 - Two township settlement groups might have been linear multi-focal units, with more than two settlements in one township. These are Machair Mheadhanach and Cille Pheadair–Dalabrog. Along with the densely inhabited Dun Vulcan environs, these might have constituted the three core settlement areas whose origins lie in the Bronze Age.

It may still be argued that the Iron Age–Viking Age settlement distribution fortuitously matches that of the Post-Medieval settlements owing purely to the environmental constraints of the universal need to locate settlements in particular resource-rich places along the machair. However, the very close proximity of 19 of the prehistoric ‘proto-township’ sites to directly adjacent Post-Medieval township communities is unlikely to be the result of coincidence. Additionally, the Upper Bornish excavations hint at a Medieval nucleated settlement beneath the Post-Medieval levels (Marshall *et al.* 1996; see Chapter 16). Overall, the extension of the machair survey from five townships to 33 has tended to confirm the proposition rather than weaken it. In conclusion, there is a very strong case for long-term continuity, punctuated by minor locational discontinuities, notably at the onset of the Viking period (*c.* AD 800) and at the end of the Norse period (*c.* AD 1250). The pairing of certain settlements from the Iron Age onwards is also an interesting feature, found elsewhere in Scotland (Dodgshon 1985).

Assessment of damage and options for management

Within the total of 241 sites recorded in the inventory, around 214 prehistoric to Medieval sites are located on, or adjacent to, the machair strip on the west coast of South Uist, and three on Eriskay. Of these, 46 (21%) are relatively stable and are not being damaged at any appreciable rate.⁹ Nine sites are located on the blacklands away from the machair. Ten have not been rediscovered in this phase of survey. A further five sites have been entirely destroyed since they were recorded by RCAHMS.¹⁰

The various erosive processes and threats that are destroying sites are coastal erosion, wind erosion, rabbit infestation, ploughing, sand quarrying, grave digging, and disrepair (Table 2.1). The 162 (75%) sites that are actively being eroded are, with seven exceptions, each suffering from substantially one only of these destructive processes. The exceptions are subjected to multiple threats: Bornais Site 1 (wind erosion, rabbits and cultivation), Sites 2 and

| | | |
|------------------|----|-----|
| Unaffected | 46 | 21% |
| Coastal Erosion | 5 | 2% |
| Wind Erosion | 12 | 6% |
| Rabbit Burrowing | 66 | 31% |
| Cultivation | 61 | 28% |
| Sand Quarrying | 3 | 1% |
| Modern Cemetery | 7 | 3% |
| Disrepair | 1 | <1% |
| Multiple threats | 7 | 3% |

Table 2.1. Numbers of prehistoric-Medieval machair sites affected by particular threats on South Uist and Eriskay

3 (rabbits and cultivation), Frobost Site 45 (wind erosion, rabbits and sand quarrying), Dalabrog Site 56 (wind erosion and sand quarrying), Site 53 (wind erosion, rabbits and sand quarrying) and Site 136 (ploughing and rabbits).

Coastal erosion has been recognized at only three locations, on Ardvule, at Hornish Point and at Cille Pheadair. Concrete sea defences were erected in the 1990s at the broch of Dun Vulcan on its seaward side. It was hoped that extensions to the west and east (each about 5m long) would also give some protection to the associated structures and deposits associated with the broch. However, the concrete sea wall has been damaged by recent winter storms and a 40m length of archaeological remains are at risk. Erosion along this longer section of coast, however, is relatively slow and the sea appears to be encroaching on the land at only 1m every 10 years. In contrast, erosion in the southern area, between Cille Pheadair and Smercleit, is much more rapid. Although partially excavated, Hornish Point continues to erode; buildings and material are falling out of a vertical cliff face. Likewise, severe winter storms since 2005 have destroyed Cille Pheadair Viking farmstead (Site 66) in the years since it was rescue excavated in 1996–98. Sites immediately endangered by coastal erosion are Sites 0, 65, 77, 158 and 162.

Wind erosion occurs when the machair vegetation disappears, resulting in sand blow-outs. Archaeological deposits may be winnowed by the wind, resulting in deflation horizons in which artefacts from several layers are mixed. This problem currently afflicts 12 sites.¹¹ Whilst most of these appear to be stabilizing, those especially at risk are Sites 1, 12, 45, 53, 60, 175 and 201. These sites should be monitored and re-seeded.

Rabbit burrowing is a variable phenomenon along the machair. The two areas where this problem is most severe are the Dun Vulcan environs and the Cladh Hallan-Cille Pheadair area, with 12 sites badly affected in the former and six in the latter. Less badly affected areas are Drimore and Iochdar (Machair Mheadhanach). Some 66 sites are thus being damaged. Excavations at Bornais Sites 1, 2 and 3 (Sharples 1996; 1997; 2005a) indicate that burrows may go down at least 1m in depth and can be dug close together, about 0.30m apart, severely damaging the stratigraphy as sites are turned into the archaeological equivalent of Swiss cheese. Archaeological deposits are thus damaged and seriously compromised within substantial parts of their stratigraphic sequences.

Bornais 0 (coastal erosion of deposits not protected by the sea wall)
 Bornais 1 (wind erosion, ploughing, rabbits)
 Bornais 2 (ploughing, rabbits)
 Bornais 3 (ploughing, rabbits)
 Bornais 12 (wind erosion)
 Cill Donnain 17 (ploughing)
 Cill Donnain 18 (ploughing)
 Staoinebrig 32 (coastal erosion)
 Frobost 45 (wind erosion, rabbits, sand quarrying)
 Dalabrog 53 (sand quarrying, wind erosion, rabbits)
 Dalabrog 55 (sand quarrying, wind erosion)
 Dalabrog 56 (sand quarrying)
 Cille Pheadair 64 (collapse of masonry)
 Cille Pheadair 66 (coastal erosion)
 Baghasdal 191 (ploughing)
 Dreumasdal 175 (wind erosion)
 Cille Bhanain 118 (ploughing)
 Machair Mheadhanach 129 (ploughing)
 Machair Mheadhanach 136 (ploughing, rabbits)
 Machair Mheadhanach 142 (ploughing)
 Machair Mheadhanach 149 (ploughing)
 Machair Mheadhanach 150 (ploughing)
 Machair Mheadhanach 154 (ploughing)
 Machair Mheadhanach 155 (ploughing)
 Machair Mheadhanach 186 (ploughing)
 Machair Mheadhanach 187 (ploughing)
 Machair Mheadhanach 182 (rabbits)
 Machair Mheadhanach 183 (rabbits)
 Machair Mheadhanach 184 (rabbits)
 Machair Mheadhanach 185 (rabbits)
 Hornish Point 158 (coastal erosion)
 Eiriosgaigh 199 (cemetery extension)
 Eiriosgaigh 201 (wind erosion)

Table 2.2. The thirty-three sites most at risk on South Uist

Although most of the machair sites have some rabbit damage, 29 of them are seriously at risk.¹² The most obvious way of dealing with this problem is to control the rabbit population by gassing as was carried out in the Tobha Mòr and Stadhlaignearraidh machair areas during the 1990s. At Aisgernis, by the end of the survey period Site 48 had been cleared of rabbits as part of an ESA management initiative. Rabbit populations have risen dramatically in many areas of the machair in recent years, causing even more damage to archaeological sites especially in the Dun Vulcan environs and the Cladh Hallan-Cille Pheadair area.¹³ Clearance from individual plots is not effective in the long term since the rabbits soon recolonize these areas; concerted action is required across the entire machair if the damage caused by burrowing is to be substantially reduced.

The other most extensive threat is cultivation. The machair is ploughed and sown on a regime of two years crop and 3–7 years fallow. The three main areas affected are the Dun Vulcan environs, Machair Mheadhanach and the Baghasdal machair. Some 61 sites are being damaged in this way.¹⁴ Excavation of Bornais Site 2 has demonstrated that the walls of a very fine Viking Age house have been damaged by the plough (Sharples 1996). Settlements that

have survived as mounds are gradually being spread and levelled. The solution to this problem would be to take these areas out of cultivation. Unfortunately there seems to be no suitable mechanism for doing this over the long term (Noel Fojut, pers. comm.).

Quarrying of sand is a relatively rare threat but it can have devastating results for any archaeological sites located within the quarry areas. It is a fairly informal activity, usually affecting only a small surface area. None the less, one site has been badly damaged at Frobost (Site 45) by casual sand digging for levelling of Baghasdal football pitch, and four sites (Sites 53–56) have been partially damaged in the Cladh Hallan area. Two of these have now been rescue excavated (Sites 54 and 56). Where possible, those quarrying the sand were alerted to the problem and it seems that raising the level of archaeological awareness is the best way of dealing with this problem.

Seven sites are being damaged because they lie under modern cemeteries (Sites 32, 42, 49, 50, 70, 199 and 200) although only Sites 32, 42 and 199 are likely to suffer further damage. There is, of course, little that can be done here. A continuing problem is the steady deterioration of the Kilpheder wheelhouse, whose drystone masonry is collapsing within the excavation trench which was never backfilled. A recommended solution is the pointing of upstanding masonry to prevent further collapse whilst providing a site that can be visited by the public. Longer term actions could involve the rebuilding of the fallen walls, an initiative in which there is much public interest.

In conclusion, the sites listed in Table 2.2 are most at risk and require urgent attention. Some management solutions are already in place and being carried out. For others, rescue excavation within a research framework is the preferred solution; Bornais 1, 2 and 3, Dalabrog 55 and 56, Cill Donnain 17 and 18, and Cille Pheadair 66 can be highlighted for their potential within the research strategies of the SEARCH project and were excavated (either in full or in part) with the financial support of Historic Scotland and the Universities of Sheffield and Cardiff. Bornais 1, 2 and 3 are crucial for understanding the formation and continuity of the proto-township settlement pattern. Dalabrog 55 and 56 are part of a very large LBA–EIA settlement at Cladh Hallan, a period not previously well understood in the Western Isles. Cill Donnain 17 and 18 are EBA settlements whose house forms and layouts are poorly understood. Cille Pheadair 66 is a settlement of the Viking Age and Late Norse period, a formative period which is still little understood in the Western Isles.

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Archaeological Site Inventory

Site Number: 0

Township/Locality: Bornais/Ardvule

Grid Reference: NF 7140 2980

Dimensions: 60m E-W, 30m N-S

Depth of deposits: 4m

Surveyed: 1990; excavated 1991–1996; recorded by Moore and Wilson 2005 as SU59

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: LBA/EIA, MIA, Pre-Viking LIA, Medieval–Post-Medieval

Other Finds: Bone and antler tools, worked stone, animal bones, plant remains, waterlogged wood, human bones.

Comments: NF72NW 1. Dun Vulcan broch and associated settlement, partially excavated 1991–1996 (Parker Pearson and Sharples 1991; 1992; 1993; 1995a; 1999). It continues to suffer from erosion, despite the construction of coastal defences.

Site Number: 1

Township/Locality: Bornais

Grid Reference: NF 7288 3016

Dimensions: c.50m diameter

Depth of deposits: c.2m

Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994

Land Use: Ploughed

Pottery: Considerable – MIA, Pre-Viking LIA, Viking.

Other Finds: Iron-smithing slag, shell, bone, antler

Comments: NF73SW 8. MIA, pre-Viking LIA and Viking Age deposits encountered during excavations in 1996–1997. Contour survey, resistivity and magnetometer surveys in 1995–6 (Sharples 1996; 1997; 1999; Hamilton in Sharples 1996; Sharples *et al.* 1995; Sharples forthcoming a).

Site Number: 2

Township/Locality: Bornais

Grid Reference: NF 7294 3026

Dimensions: c.50m diameter

Depth of deposits: c.2m

Surveyed: June 1993, April 1994, June 1994

Land Use: Ploughed

Pottery: Scarce – Viking and Medieval

Other Finds: Some ironwork of recent origin, shell and bone in the initial survey. Norse-period buildings revealed by excavation.

Comments: NF73SW 8. Contour survey, resistivity and magnetometer surveys in 1995–6. Mound 2a is a small extension to the E. Excavated 1994–1997, 1999–2000, 2003–2004 (Parker Pearson and Webster 1994; Sharples *et al.* 1995; Sharples 1996; 1997; 1999; 2000; 2003; Sharples forthcoming b). Mound 2 also joins on to Mound 3 and they are best seen as a single Norse-period settlement.

Site Number: 3

Township/Locality: Bornais

Grid Reference: NF 7299 3031

Dimensions: c.50m diameter

Depth of deposits: c.1.5m

Surveyed: June 1993, April 1994, June 1994

Land Use: Grass but ploughed in 1995

Pottery: Scarce – Viking and Medieval

Other Finds: Some metal fragments, shell and bone found initially. Norse-period buildings revealed by excavation.

Comments: NF73SW 8. Contour survey, resistivity and magnetometer surveys in 1995–6; excavated 1996; 1997; 1999; (Sharples *et al.* 1995; Sharples 1995–1997, 1999; 2005a)

Site Number: 4

Township/Locality: Bornais (Lower Bornish)

Grid Reference: NF 7330 3118

Dimensions: c.10m diameter

Depth of deposits: c.0.50m

Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994

Land Use: Ploughed

Pottery: Fairly abundant – Pre-Viking LIA Plain Ware

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: This appears to be a lone site in isolation. Coring of low sand hillocks in its vicinity failed to recover further midden layers or settlement mounds.

Site Number: 5

Township/Locality: Ormacleit

Grid Reference: NF 7334 3191

Dimensions: c.25m diameter

Depth of deposits: c.1.2m

Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994, July 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Fairly scarce – Iron Age, probably Pre-Viking LIA Plain Wares

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: The pottery is thin and has an uneven surface possibly caused by thumb impression.

Site Number: 6

Township/Locality: Ormacleit

Grid Reference: NF 7333 3186

Dimensions: c.30m NW-SE by 8m SW-NE

Depth of deposits: 0.30m

Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994, July 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Scarce – ?Iron Age; rim sherd prob. Viking

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: About 40m S of Site 5. At least a dozen stones are visible on the SE end of this mound.

Site Number: 7

Township/Locality: Ormacleit

Grid Reference: NF 7331 3184

Dimensions: c.30m NW-SE by 10m NE-SW

Depth of deposits: 0.50m

Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994, July 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Scarce – ?Late Iron Age (thin wares)

Other Finds: Metal slag, shell and bone

Comments: About 15m SW of Site 6. Irregular mound with light soils.

Site Number: 8
Township/Locality: Ormacleit
Grid Reference: NF 7333 3182
Dimensions: c.10m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.80m
Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994, July 1998
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: 2 sherds
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: About 10m to the S of the S end of Site 6.

Site Number: 9
Township/Locality: Ormacleit
Grid Reference: NF 7318 3212
Dimensions: c.60m diameter
Depth of deposits: c.5m (only the top metre cored).
Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994, July 1998
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Scarce – MIA (sherd with incised line decoration and sherd with applied wavy cordon)
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: This enormous mound was initially recognized by Jim Bowie as an archaeological site but was not credited as such by MPP and NS during a site visit with Bowie in June 1992. We were not then aware that mounds like this were of human origin. In April 1993, MPP returned with Andrew Fleming and Angela Piccini and observed sherds, bone and shell outside the rabbit burrows. It was from that moment that the machair survey commenced in the new knowledge of the character of ancient settlement sites on the machair.

Site Number: 10
Township/Locality: Ormacleit
Grid Reference: NF 7318 3207
Dimensions: c.10m diameter
Depth of deposits: c.1m
Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Scarce – LBA/EIA (rim and base sherd)
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: A finds bag in the archive from 1994 is marked Orm 19 but is most unlikely to come from Site 19 (Cill Donnain) which is aceramic. Error in labelling: it is Orm10.

Site Number: 11
Township/Locality: South Bornais (Lower Bornish)
Grid Reference: NF 7235 2958
Dimensions: c.7m diameter
Depth of deposits: c.0.50m
Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Metal slag, shell and bone
Comments: None

Site Number: 12
Township/Locality: South Bornais (Lower Bornish)
Grid Reference: NF 7239 2945
Dimensions: c.6m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.05m
Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994
Land Use: Sand blow-out in pasture
Pottery: Almost none – ?Iron Age
Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: A very thin deflated horizon. Probably not a settlement *per se* but near areas of occupation.

Site Number: 13
Township/Locality: South Bornais (Lower Bornish)
Grid Reference: NF 7239 2939
Dimensions: c.10m diameter
Depth of deposits: c.0.50m
Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994
Land Use: Ploughed (partly grown over)
Pottery: Scarce – Iron Age
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: None

Site Number: 14
Township/Locality: South Bornais (Lower Bornish)
Grid Reference: NF 7233 2938
Dimensions: c.15m diameter
Depth of deposits: c.0.70m
Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994
Land Use: Ploughed (grown over)
Pottery: Scarce – Viking Age platter ware
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: None

Site Number: 15
Township/Locality: South Bornais (Lower Bornish)
Grid Reference: NF 7224 2940
Dimensions: c.60m diameter
Depth of deposits: c.6m
Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Scarce – MIA (rim decorated with wide incised horizontal zigzag and dots)
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: A rim sherd which can be matched in the Dun Mor Vaul assemblage (MacKie 1974; Sollas A phase, Campbell 1991). This is a very large mound.

Site Number: 16
Township/Locality: South Bornais (Lower Bornish)
Grid Reference: NF 7260 2902
Dimensions: c.10m diameter
Depth of deposits: c.0.50m
Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994; trial excavated in 1998.
Land Use: Pasture/blow-out
Pottery: Scarce – possibly Middle Iron Age
Other Finds: Iron fragment, shell and bone
Comments: This small and shallow occupation site was located on a large sand hill immediately S of the township boundary fence between Bornais and Cill Donnain; the sand hill extends N of the fenceline. This is probably the site referred to in RCAHMS records as Bornish NF 725 290 structure/midden. Excavated by Niall Sharples in 1998 (NF72NW 37). See Chapter 11 for excavation results and radiocarbon dates.

Site Number: 17
Township/Locality: Cill Donnain
Grid Reference: NF 7252 2889
Dimensions: c.10m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.20m
Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994, June 1996; trial excavated in 1998.
Land Use: Pasture/cultivation

Pottery: Scarce – EBA (angled incisions 1cm long, possibly from a Food Vessel). Large coarseware sherds recovered in 1996, including a fingernail-decorated sherd of Food Vessel/Collared Urn. EIA pottery was found in a pit cut into this mound in 1998.

Other Finds: Iron fragment and pumice, shell and bone

Comments: Some of the sherds have an orange/red exterior with angled incised decoration. Resistivity and magnetometer survey in 1996 defined the occupation area but no trace of habitation structures. Excavated by Niall Sharples in 1998 (NF72NW 37). See Chapter 11 for excavation results and radiocarbon dates.

Site Number: 18

Township/Locality: Cill Donnain

Grid Reference: NF 7250 2883

Dimensions: c.10m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.50m

Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994, June 1996; trial excavated in 1998.

Land Use: Pasture/cultivation

Pottery: Scarce – EBA (Beaker sherd with thin incised chevrons). Further EBA coarseware and a sherd with lightly incised cross-hatching recovered in 1996. Beaker and Food Vessel sherds excavated in 1998.

Other Finds: Large piece of pumice, shell and bone fragments (retained)

Comments: Resistivity and magnetometer survey in 1996 defined the occupation area but no trace of habitation structures. Excavated by Niall Sharples in 1998 (NF72NW 37). See Chapter 11 for excavation results and radiocarbon dates.

Site Number: 19

Township/Locality: Cill Donnain

Grid Reference: NF 7248 2877

Dimensions: c.5m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.30m

Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994; trial excavated in 1998.

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: No pottery or lithics, just shell and bone. This site and Cill Donnain 21 are probably those referred to in RCAHMS records as Sligeanach Kildonan (Cill Donnain) NF 726 286 Settlement; middens; small finds. Excavated by Niall Sharples in 1998 (NF72NW 37). See Chapter 11 for excavation results.

Site Number: 20

Township/Locality: Cill Donnain

Grid Reference: NF 7261 2866

Dimensions: c.5m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.20m

Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994

Land Use: Cultivation

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: None

Site Number: 21

Township/Locality: Cill Donnain

Grid Reference: NF 7265 2880

Dimensions: c.10m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.30m

Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994

Land Use: Ploughed in 1993, pasture in 1994

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Struck flake (grey igneous), shell and bone (some bone kept)

Comments: Presumably EBA. This site and Cill Donnain 19 are probably those referred to in RCAHMS records as Sligeanach Kildonan (Cill Donnain) NF 726 286 Settlement; middens; small finds.

Site Number: 22

Township/Locality: Cill Donnain

Grid Reference: NF 7272 2882

Dimensions: c.5m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.10m

Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994; trial excavated in 1998.

Land Use: Ploughed

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Metal slag, shell and bone

Comments: The test trench revealed only a very shallow shell layer without diagnostic finds. Excavated by Niall Sharples in 1998 (NF72NW 37). See Chapter 11 for excavation results.

Site Number: 23

Township/Locality: Cill Donnain

Grid Reference: NF 7274 2883

Dimensions: c.10m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.20m

Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994; trial excavated in 1998.

Land Use: Cultivation

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: Small scatter only. The test trench revealed only a very shallow shell layer without diagnostic finds. Excavated by Niall Sharples in 1998 (NF72NW 37). See Chapter 11 for excavation results and radiocarbon dates.

Site Number: 24

Township/Locality: Cill Donnain

Grid Reference: NF 7272 2886

Dimensions: c.10m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.10m

Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994; trial excavated in 1998.

Land Use: Ploughed but grown over.

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: The test trench revealed only a very shallow shell layer without diagnostic finds. Excavated by Niall Sharples in 1998 (NF72NW 37). See Chapter 11 for excavation results.

Site Number: 25

Township/Locality: Cill Donnain

Grid Reference: NF 7271 2892

Dimensions: c.7m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.20m

Surveyed: June 1994; trial excavated in 1998.

Land Use: Cultivation

Pottery: Scarce – EIA

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: Friable and coarse but small sherd recovered in 1994. Excavated by Niall Sharples in 1998 (NF72NW 37). Dated by radiocarbon and ceramic styles to the EIA. See Chapter 11 for excavation results and radiocarbon dates.

Site Number: 26

Township/Locality: Cill Donnain

Grid Reference: NF 7270 2895

Dimensions: c.10m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.50m +
Surveyed: June 1994; trial excavated in 1998.
Land Use: Cultivation
Pottery: Scarce – EIA
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: Excavated by Niall Sharples in 1998 (NF72NW 37). Dated by radiocarbon and ceramic styles to the EIA. See Chapter 11 for excavation results and radiocarbon dates.

Site Number: 27
Township/Locality: Cill Donnain
Grid Reference: NF 7269 2898
Dimensions: c.15m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.80m +
Surveyed: June 1994 (cored); trial excavated in 1998.
Land Use: Cultivation
Pottery: Scarce – Viking Age or LBA (base sherd and grass-impressed) or MIA
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: Part of a curved stone wall, presumably a wheelhouse wall, was found in 1998 during trial trenching, along with MIA pottery. Despite the find in 1994 of a sherd with Norse-style or LBA light grass impressions, only MIA pottery was found in the 1998 excavation. This is probably recorded twice in RCAHMS records under the name Sligeanach Deas, NF 728 291 (moved from NF 725 291) midden; bone point (NF72NW 12) and as Bornish midden at NF 725 290 (NF72NW 20). Excavated by Niall Sharples in 1998 (NF72NW 37). See Chapter 11 for excavation results and radiocarbon dates.

Site Number: 28
Township/Locality: Bornais
Grid Reference: NF 7296 2984
Dimensions: c.9m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.20m + (mound is c.0.50m high)
Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Three sherds (one grass-impressed platter ware – Viking Age)
Other Finds: Shell and bone and two pieces of iron
Comments: Roughly circular with much stonework. Possibly a wheelhouse.

Site Number: 29
Township/Locality: Staoinebrig
Grid Reference: NF 7343 3306
Dimensions: c.25m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.60m
Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Scarce – LBA/EIA (two rim sherds)
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: Thick, friable and coarse sherds.

Site Number: 30
Township/Locality: Staoinebrig
Grid Reference: NF 7345 3308
Dimensions: c.30m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.50m + (mound is c.1m high)
Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994, July 1998
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Fairly plentiful. A single MIA sherd was found in 1994 but the pottery found in 1998 is all LBA/EIA.
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: One sherd is decorated with MIA applied S-cordon

decoration. Most of the remainder are thick-walled sherds with large grits and soft textures, characteristic of LBA/EIA fabrics.

Site Number: 31
Township/Locality: Staoinebrig/Aird Mhicheil
Grid Reference: NF 7310 3327
Dimensions: c.20m diameter but irregular and not an obvious mound
Depth of deposits: 0.40m
Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994, July 1998
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Single sherd – ?Iron Age
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: A light coloured sandy soil with shell and bone.

Site Number: 32
Township/Locality: Staoinebrig/Aird Mhicheil
Grid Reference: NF 7319 3334
Dimensions: c.100m diameter
Depth of deposits: c.4m
Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994, July 1998; recorded by Moore and Wilson 2005 as SU52
Land Use: Cemetery
Pottery: Moderate from grave cuts – Early MIA (two rims, one with finger impressions under rim; sherd with 2 lines of stabbed dots)
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: Balevullin-style stab dot decoration on one sherd (MacKie 1965). On top of the mound are two long rectangular turf enclosures, aligned N-S. The western one may be a house setting (c.5m × 15m) but the other is larger. These may be the house and stable featured in the ghost story about the little old lady of Aird Mhicheil (MacLennan 1997: 120–1). This site is an enormous mound whose northern edge extends outside the cemetery to the beach. A 50m stretch of it, between 30m and 50m from the N wall of the cemetery's N wall, is eroding into the sea. This is also the site of a chapel: 'Nothing remains of this site [chapel] Cill Aird Mhicheil, but it was apparently situated in the old graveyard out at Aird Mhicheil. Martin Martin refers to it as "St Michael" (155).' (Macleod 1997: 79).

Site Number: 33
Township/Locality: Staoinebrig
Grid Reference: NF 7368 3314
Dimensions: c.25m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.50m + (mound is 1m high)
Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994; test trenched by Raven
Land Use: Cultivation
Pottery: Scarce – prob. Viking (thick obtuse-angled base)
Other Finds: Some shell, no bone
Comments: Referred to as 'the old town' in Gaelic (Archie Beaton pers. comm.). Little bone or shell survives but pH test indicates that acidity is not high. Sherd scarcity indicates LIA/Medieval date. Test-trenching revealed extensive middens but no diagnostic pottery (Raven 2005: 481).

Site Number: 34
Township/Locality: Staoinebrig
Grid Reference: NF 7370 3320
Dimensions: c.15m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.50m +
Surveyed: June 1993, June 1994
Land Use: Cultivation
Pottery: Viking and Late Medieval – 1 sherd incised Medieval, 1 sherd platter ware, 1 base, 2 fine rims

Other Finds: Shell and bone (sparse), some porcelain, glass and slate

Comments: One sherd has the wiped exterior surface similar to pottery in the later phase of Dun Cuier (Young 1956; *i.e.* pre-Viking LIA) but the assemblage is broadly Norse and later.

Site Number: 35

Township/Locality: Staoinebrig

Grid Reference: NF 7335 3367

Dimensions: Unknown

Depth of deposits: Unknown

Surveyed: June 1993

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: One sherd – ?Iron Age

Other Finds: No shell or bone

Comments: Found W of the standing stone at Cnoca Breac. Survey in 1994 failed to re-locate this spot. No trace of any midden possibly due to soil acidity. Large cattle scrape 150m WNW of the standing stone might have been the location.

Site Number: 36

Township/Locality: Upper Bornish

Grid Reference: 7349 2969

Dimensions: 300m E-W, 50m N-S

Depth of deposits: Unknown

Surveyed: April 1994

Land Use: Rough pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: None

Comments: Foundations of five rectangular stone blackhouses between St Mary's Church and the church hall. Probably 19th-early 20th century.

Site Number: 37

Township/Locality: South Bornais (Lower Bornish)

Grid Reference: NF 7238 2957

Dimensions: *c.* 6m diameter

Depth of deposits: *c.* 0.50m

Surveyed: June 1994

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Scarce – Iron Age

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: A small midden deposit close to or actually where the bronze Viking Age pin was found in 1964. It is recorded by RCAHMS as Loch Bornish NF 723 295 Enclosures; cairn; midden; bronze pin; pottery.

Site Number: 38

Township/Locality: South Bornais (Lower Bornish)

Grid Reference: NF 7232 2950

Dimensions: *c.* 20m diameter (partly covered by dune)

Depth of deposits: *c.* 1m

Surveyed: June 1994

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Single sherd

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: Part of a large mound, hidden under deep dune

Site Number: 39

Township/Locality: South Bornais (Lower Bornish)

Grid Reference: NF 7235 2954

Dimensions: *c.* 6m diameter

Depth of deposits: *c.* 0.40m

Surveyed: June 1994

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: A small mound next to the stone-walled enclosure.

Site Number: 40

Township/Locality: South Bornais (Lower Bornish)

Grid Reference: NF 7230 2957

Dimensions: *c.* 6m diameter

Depth of deposits: *c.* 0.40m

Surveyed: June 1994

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Rim of grass-impressed platter ware (?). Probably Viking Age

Other Finds: Shell and bone, iron, antler, quartzite

Comments: A small mound.

Site Number: 41

Township/Locality: Ormacleit

Grid Reference: NF 7332 3180

Dimensions: *c.* 10m diameter

Depth of deposits: *c.* 0.40m

Surveyed: June 1994, July 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: 3 sherds

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: A 1m-long line of stones NW-SE is visible on the W side of the mound. The site is *c.* 60m N of the fence line which runs across the machair E-W to the sea.

Site Number: 42

Township/Locality: Staoinebrig/Aird Mhicheil

Grid Reference: NF 7312 3336

Dimensions: *c.* 60m diameter

Depth of deposits: *c.* 2m or more

Surveyed: June 1994, July 1998

Land Use: Cemetery

Pottery: Three sherds – broadly Iron Age

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: This is a large mound. Within a grave cut on its S side could be seen a sequence of three or four 0.20m–0.40m thick bands of dark midden soil interspersed with sand layers.

Site Number: 43

Township/Locality: Staoinebrig/Aird Mhicheil

Grid Reference: NF 7324 3334

Dimensions: *c.* 10m diameter

Depth of deposits: *c.* 0.50m

Surveyed: June 1994, July 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Two tiny sherds

Other Finds: Shell and bone, charcoal and a broken bone point

Comments: This small mound is buried beneath the SW side of a high sand hill *c.* 50m S of the cemetery's SE corner.

Site Number: 44

Township/Locality: Staoinebrig

Grid Reference: NF 7356 3322

Dimensions: *c.* 40m across

Depth of deposits: *c.* 1.50m

Surveyed: June 1995, July 1998

Land Use: Cultivation

Pottery: Scarce (six sherds) – Early Post-Medieval (16th–17th century) – hard-fired red and black

Other Finds: Shell and bone, piece of worked pumice

Comments: In Mr and Mrs Campbell's croft.

Site Number: 45

Township/Locality: Frobst

Grid Reference: NF 7286 2569

Dimensions: 40m diameter

Depth of deposits: 3m

Surveyed: June 1995, April 1996, June 1996, July 1997, June 1998, June 1999

Land Use: Pasture but large blow-out and informal sand quarry

Pottery: Scarce in 1995 – Pictish Plain Ware and some MIA. Large quantities of plain sherds and some decorated in June 1996. Some of the pottery was initially thought to be late EIA. Some sherds have the 'wiped' surfaces and flaring rims of Pre-Viking LIA 'Pictish plain ware' pottery. One sherd has an angled applied line.

Other Finds: Shell and bone, stone walls. An antler handle was found in 1999. A Norse-period bone pin was found just to the E of here (Frobst Site 238) in 1996 but none of the pottery appears to date to this period. Saddle quern.

Comments: A large settlement mound suffering damage in 1995 from sheep scrape on N side, wind erosion in the centre and damage from unrecorded digging (hole 1m × 0.80m and 0.50m deep) within the large blow-out in the middle. Deep midden layers exposed in the hole. In May 1996 a large hole, 10m diameter and 2m deep, was dug by machine into the S end of the mound and the spoil was spread over Baghasdal football pitch. In the S section of this hole two stone walls are visible, flanked by midden and lying above midden layers. The walls may be part of a damaged roundhouse. There has been considerable damage to the N and S ends of the quarry, with large quantities of soil removed by JCB bucket. See Chapter 13.

Site Number: 46

Township/Locality: Frobst

Grid Reference: NF 7282 2568

Dimensions: c.40m diameter

Depth of deposits: 3m

Surveyed: June 1995, June 1998; test trenched 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Several sherds on surface. Thick Norse sherds from just below the surface in Trench 2. A rim sherd was found in Trench 1.

Other Finds: Shell and bone, building stone

Comments: Possibly part of 45. Two shallow trial trenches, Trench 1 and Trench 2, and a smaller test pit were dug in June 1998 in order to date the mound's upper layers. Trench 1 (3.30m NW-SE × 1.50m SW-NE × 0.40m deep) was located on the mound's northeastern slope whilst Trench 2 (1m square × 0.48m deep) was dug into the top of the mound 13m SSE of Trench 1. The 0.30m-square test pit was dug midway between the two. See Chapter 13.

Site Number: 47

Township/Locality: Frobst

Grid Reference: NF 7280 2547

Dimensions: c.80m diameter

Depth of deposits: 4m

Surveyed: June 1995, June 1998; test trenched 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Three sherds – one has two near-parallel incised lines (from an angled chevron motif) and is MIA.

Other Finds: Shell and bone, iron fragment

Comments: The mound has been deeply eroded in its centre where there is now a large, grassed-over blow-out or quarry within which six large stones lie. Shells have been found in rabbit holes to the N and E of this hollow. The pottery came from a rabbit scrape to its S. Two 1m square test trenches were dug on the S side of the hollow to obtain further dating evidence. One of these, Trench 3, was located on the slope of this hollow. Beneath 0.50m of windblown sand was a homogeneous layer of brown sand with shells 0.90m deep and capped with a 0.05m-thick dense shelly layer. Only two small pieces of bone were found in this layer. Trench 4 was dug 10m to the S of Trench 3 but was abandoned after 0.50m depth of windblown sand. See Chapter 13.

Site Number: 48

Township/Locality: Aisgernis

Grid Reference: NF 7324 2382

Dimensions: c.100m N-S, 70m E-W

Depth of deposits: 1m

Surveyed: June 1996, July 1998, June 1999; test trenched July 1998 and by Raven

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Copious but plain. Probably Norse and Medieval or later on the basis of the thin rotary quernstone.

Other Finds: Shell and bone, fish bone and some slag. Reports of bone pins from a site in this area, on/around the golf course, may relate to this site or to Sites 96 and 97. Rotary quernstone and bone point found during excavation in July 1998. 12th–14th century copper alloy pin found in subsequent excavations by J. Raven.

Comments: This and sites 96–97 and 232 are NF72SW 21. Found by Don MacPhee in 1995/1996 and confirmed by Mary Harman. Known as the 'Hill of the Old Kiln' acc. Uilleam Macdonald. He says that it was deliberately flattened earlier this century, hence the long low shape. To the SW, c.30m from the mound, drains have been cut into the waterlogged sand c.0.50m deep, revealing shells and a piece of land drain tile – potential for organic survival close to the settlement mound. Trench 10, 2m NE-SW × 1m NW-SE, was dug on the SW side of the mound to a depth of c.0.70m. There were large quantities of animal bones but very few sherds. The finding of a complete rotary quernstone supports a Medieval or later date for the site, though its thinness suggests that it may be Post-Medieval. Later test-trench excavation by John Raven found a 12th–14th century copper alloy pin at the base of a turf-walled structure, c.1m down. This turf wall with stone footings formed part of a rectangular building whose plan was revealed by geophysical survey (Raven 2005: 476–8).

Site Number: 49

Township/Locality: Dalabrog

Grid Reference: NF 7346 2200

Dimensions: c.25m diameter

Depth of deposits: 2m

Surveyed: June 1995

Land Use: Cemetery

Pottery: None

Other Finds: None

Comments: An obviously artificial mound inside part of the cemetery which is no longer used for burials.

Site Number: 50

Township/Locality: Dalabrog

Grid Reference: NF 7337 2194

Dimensions: c.25m diameter

Depth of deposits: 2m

Surveyed: June 1995

Land Use: Cemetery

Pottery: None

Other Finds: None

Comments: A second obviously artificial mound inside part of the cemetery which is no longer used for burials.

Site Number: 51

Township/Locality: Dalabrog

Grid Reference: NF 7395 2194

Dimensions: 30m diameter

Depth of deposits: 3m

Surveyed: June 1995

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: None

Comments: There is dark soil in the few rabbit scrapes but no midden material (it seems sandy enough to preserve bone and shell). Another mound, immediately to the N, is a possible site but the sand is yellow and clean in its rabbit scrapes. This may be RCAHMS's site of Dun Ruadh (NF 7379 2184), of which there is no other sign, or even Loch Hallan midden (NF 73 21), a name which could refer to one of a number of sites in this area.

Site Number: 52

Township/Locality: Gearraidh Sheile/Dalabrog

Grid Reference: NF 7305 2218

Dimensions: 40m N-S × 60m E-W

Depth of deposits: 0.50m

Surveyed: June 1995, June 1999

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Some – undiagnostic but not thick or friable enough to be LBA/EIA – MIA or later

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: Scatter of midden material in rabbit scrapes in a gully through which a track passes. The mound might have been flattened some time ago but there are no stones on the surface. The site is on the E side of a small sand hill, NE of a high sand hill. There is also midden material from the base of the high sand hill on its N side and c.10m to the N of this. This may be the site where Mr J. Wedderspoon recorded the demolition of a 'bee-hive shaped structure of dry stonework' filled with sand and 9 or 10 feet high but with no door or exterior passage (presumably a wheelhouse or EIA roundhouse) from which c.25 tons of stone were taken to build the graveyard wall. He says that all that was left was a saddle quern ('a basin-shaped stone') which was taken to Askernish (1912: 327–28).

Site Number: 53

Township/Locality: Dalabrog/Cladh Hallan

Grid Reference: NF 7305 2207

Dimensions: 50–100m in extent

Depth of deposits: c.0.40m

Surveyed: June 1995. Excavated 1996

Land Use: Disused sand quarry and blow-out

Pottery: Some LBA/EIA. The flint scraper hints at EBA activity.

Other Finds: Shell and bone, some stone, flint scraper, fired clay ball, human phalanx

Comments: Within a scooped-out 'amphitheatre' or bowl 100m N-S and 50m E-W. The midden layer, revealed by rabbit scrapes, appears to follow a contour within the W and N sides of this depression. A small, still eroding blow-out, excavated in 1996 as Area B, has revealed stones. Many stones were taken from here, apparently, to build the cemetery wall in the 19th century. This is immediately N of the excavated house Site 54. This too may

be the site (or, alternatively, perhaps on the track between Sites 54 and 56 or the track past Site 52) where Mr J. Wedderspoon recorded the demolition of a 'bee-hive shaped structure of dry stonework' filled with sand and 9 or 10 feet high but with no door or exterior passage (presumably a wheelhouse or EIA roundhouse) from which c.25 tons of stone were taken to build the graveyard wall. He says that all that was left was a saddle quern ('a basin-shaped stone') which was taken to Askernish (1912: 327–28). Wedderspoon found a second midden retracing his steps towards the burial ground, at the base of a 30-yard wide blow-out. Here he found two urned cremations (one probably EBA on the basis of herringbone decoration, found with an S-shaped piece of 'clay slate'), antlers, teeth of cattle and other animals, horse (4 only) and humans (2 teeth only). This may therefore be NF72SW 5.

Site Number: 54

Township/Locality: Dalabrog/Cladh Hallan

Grid Reference: NF 7305 2203

Dimensions: 10m N-S × 5m E-W

Depth of deposits: 3m

Surveyed: Excavated June/July 1989, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998

Land Use: Disused sand quarry

Pottery: EBA (Cordoned Urn), LBA, EIA with EIA house (House 150) and midden.

Other Finds: Human skeletons, shell, bone, worked quartz and flint. See excavation reports (Moth 1989; Parker Pearson and Roper 1994; Mulville and Parker Pearson 1995; Atkinson *et al.* 1996; Mulville and Parker Pearson 1997; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 85–6).

Comments: This is Area C of the excavation, which includes an EIA double roundhouse with a small connecting doorway, dug into LBA midden covering EBA Cordoned Urn settlement layer. The lintel of the doorway is *in situ* today, at knee-height from the present ground surface. NF72SW 15.

Site Number: 55

Township/Locality: Dalabrog/Cladh Hallan

Grid Reference: NF 7318 2188

Dimensions: 40m diameter

Depth of deposits: 2m

Surveyed: June 1994, June 1995, June-July 1997, June-July 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003

Land Use: Former sand quarry; the hollow has now been reinstated. It is under grass, with some reconstructed stone walling, but is still vulnerable to wind erosion and misuse.

Pottery: EBA, MBA, LBA, EIA

Other Finds: Shell and bone, stone-walled houses.

Comments: Sherds were scarce on the quarry surface. Before excavation an area of c.40m × 20m of the top of the midden had been exposed as a surface down to which sand was extracted. The N and NE sides were damaged by vehicle ruts. The site is susceptible to wind erosion. It probably extends 40m to the S where bone and shell are visible in rabbit scrapes on the other side of the sand hill. Three roundhouses have been excavated in the centre of the quarry area and a double-celled roundhouse has been excavated on the NE side of the occupation area. Excavation of this Area A in 1996–2003 (Atkinson *et al.* 1996; Mulville and Parker Pearson 1997; Marshall *et al.* 1998; 1999; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2000; 2001; 2002; 2004: 59–87; 2005; 2007; Parker Pearson *et al.* in prep.). Area D is the southern end of the mound, excavated in 2001. NF72SW 11 and 17.

Site Number: 56

Township/Locality: Dalabrog

Grid Reference: NF 7317 2188
Dimensions: c.5m E-W × 8m N-S
Depth of deposits: 0.20m
Surveyed: June 1995

Land Use: Sand quarry
Pottery: Copious – LBA/EIA
Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: A thin layer which had been truncated by the W side of the sand quarry. It sat c.1m above the midden layer of 55. Also suffering from wind erosion where the turf had gone over an area of 20m to the W of the quarry. Not traced during 1996 excavations and it was almost certainly a layer of midden material redeposited during quarrying operations in the 1990s. It is thus not a separate occupation site.

Site Number: 57
Township/Locality: Dalabrog
Grid Reference: NF 7319 2162

Dimensions: 8m diameter
Depth of deposits: 1m
Surveyed: June 1995, June 1998, September 2000 (geophysical survey), September 2002

Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: 3 sherds
Other Finds: Shell and bone and quartz flake
Comments: There are two similar mounds to the S of this one (226 and 227/225) both producing shells. Resistivity and magnetometry surveys were carried out on Sites 57, 225/227 and 226 by Andrew Chamberlain in September 2000. An anomaly to the E of Site 226 may be the remains of an E-W oriented EBA house.

Site Number: 58
Township/Locality: Dalabrog
Grid Reference: NF 7323 2174
Dimensions: 5m stretch exposed, c.60m diameter

Depth of deposits: c.1m
Surveyed: June 1995, June 1998
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Scarce – originally thought to be LBA/EIA but the 1998 pottery, including a wavy cordon, is MIA.

Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: A small exposure and rabbit holes within a large quarried-out dune with some stonework lying around.

Site Number: 59
Township/Locality: Dalabrog
Grid Reference: NF 7346 2133 (GPS)
Dimensions: c.12m diameter

Depth of deposits: 1m
Surveyed: June 1995
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Copious including several Pictish LIA ‘wiped’ sherds
Other Finds: Shell and bone, quartz flake
Comments: A small mound with midden material in the rabbit scrapes. The site of Sithean na Phiobaire was recorded by RCAHMS (NF 734 214 possible aisled roundhouse; possible wheelhouse; midden; pins) as being 100m to the N but the sand hill has been quarried and there is no trace of this other archaeological site.

Site Number: 60
Township/Locality: Dalabrog
Grid Reference: NF 7356 2133 (GPS)
Dimensions: 10m diameter
Depth of deposits: 1m

Surveyed: June 1995
Land Use: Pasture/sand blow-out
Pottery: 12 sherds undiagnostic (one sherd possibly platter ware), one sherd MIA with parallel incised lines
Other Finds: Shell and bone, stone structure
Comments: A high mound with a blow-out in its centre. The erosion surface has largely stabilized but the N end is suffering from wind erosion as well as rabbit holes. Some of the stones appear to be part of a buried wall line.

Site Number: 61
Township/Locality: Dalabrog
Grid Reference: NF 7350 2073 (GPS)
Dimensions: 6m+ diameter

Depth of deposits: 1m
Surveyed: June 1995
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: One sherd – Viking Age (base with finger impressions on top and grass impressions on underside)
Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: Immediately N of a corrugated iron cowshed within an E-facing slope. Low concentration of shells. Exposed by cattle/sheep scrape along a 6m length. This is probably the same as the site recorded by RCAHMS as Bruthach an Tigh Tallan (‘the Brae of the Buried House’; NF 734 207; NF72SW 3; possible aisled roundhouse; possible wheelhouse; midden; bronze pin; ‘...a midden with a few stones is all that remains of a wheel-house...which was completely removed some years ago.’ [Lethbridge 1952: 176]. ‘A bronze [ring-headed pin] was found by Dr Kissling in the midden at Bruthach na Tigh Tallan.’ [*ibid.*: 184]). Presumably the MIA site and this Viking site were adjacent.

Site Number: 62
Township/Locality: Dalabrog/Cille Pheadair
Grid Reference: NF 7357 2050
Dimensions: ?

Depth of deposits: ?
Surveyed: June 1995
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Human bones and skulls reported
Comments: Marked on O.S. Map (1:10,000) as an ancient burial ground. Skulls reportedly found whilst excavating a potato clamp, on the S side of a large sand hill. The sand is clean with no shells. Angus Mackenzie, local crofter, also found a skull on the S side of the sand hill many years ago, immediately N of the E-W fence line (NF72SW 2). This may also be the same location as a midden with flint and quartz recorded at NF 7350 2050 (NF72SW 13).

Site Number: 63
Township/Locality: Cille Pheadair
Grid Reference: NF 7336 2038 (GPS)
Dimensions: c.80m E-W and 50m N-S

Depth of deposits: 5m
Surveyed: February 1995, June 1995, July 1996, June 1998, geophysical survey July 1998
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Some – MIA (Incised line decoration and a thick, in-turned rim in 1995; 1st century BC/AD cordon in 1996; 2 wavy cordons and 2 sherds with parallel incised lines in 1998)

Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: A large mound, partly covered by a large dune. Finds visible in rabbit scrapes. W end partly covered by a dune. Surveyed

with a resistivity meter in July 1998 by Andrew Chamberlain; the anomalies suggest the presence of several wheelhouses.

Site Number: 64

Township/Locality: Cille Pheadair

Grid Reference: NF 7337 2015

Dimensions: c.50m diameter

Depth of deposits: 2.50m

Surveyed: NW part excavated summer 1951, geophysical survey July 1998

Land Use: Archaeological excavation not backfilled

Pottery: Copious – MIA

Other Finds: See excavation report

Comments: Wheelhouse, very well preserved before excavation (Lethbridge 1952) but now in serious state of collapse. Recorded by RCAHMS as Bruthach an Tionail Ard NF 7337 2022 (NF72SW 1) but named as Bruthach Sitheanach ('Brae of the Fairy Hill') by Lethbridge (1952: 178). Aisled roundhouse; trumpet brooch; middens. '[D]iscoloured grass indicated the presence of buildings...It seemed probable that at least three circular buildings existed here in close contact with one another.' (Lethbridge 1952: 176); '... at least three rings of brown grass, which indicated walling close below the surface. One of these c.thirty feet in diameter, suggested the existence of a wheel-house.' (Lethbridge 1954: 181). Geophysical survey with a resistivity meter in July 1998 by Andrew Chamberlain suggests the presence of two other wheelhouses, both with circular annexes.

Site Number: 65

Township/Locality: Cille Pheadair

Grid Reference: NF 7321 2057

Dimensions: c.5m exposed

Depth of deposits: Walls c.1m high

Surveyed: February 1995

Land Use: Beach

Pottery: None

Other Finds: None

Comments: Two small stretches of drystone walls, with convex sides. Probably ancient field boundaries of unknown date.

Site Number: 66

Township/Locality: Cille Pheadair

Grid Reference: NF 7290 1980

Dimensions: 40m N-S and 15m E-W

Depth of deposits: 1m

Surveyed: February 1995, June 1995; excavated June–July 1996, 1997, 1998; recorded by Moore and Wilson 2005 as SU21; most of the excavated area was washed away by 2010.

Land Use: Machair sand cliff above beach

Pottery: Viking Age

Other Finds: Shell and bone, stone walls, antler combs, bone pins, coins (Parker Pearson *et al.* 1996; Brennand *et al.* 1997; Brennand *et al.* 1998; Parker Pearson *et al.* forthcoming).

Comments: Sequence of Norse-period longhouses, excavated in 1996–98 (NF71NW 18). First seen by Seumus and Callum MacDonald in winter 1993/94. This is probably the same site as NF71NW 11, reported by Richard Feacham in 1951. About 1m of it then eroded in one year. The coast is eroding steadily at this rate and 20m went in 20–25 years; a major storm destroyed the site in 2005. RCAHMS records another site (Cille Pheadair 88) at Sithean Biorach, 100m to the N (NF 729 199). This might have been a separate settlement site of which there is no longer any trace. The same goes for Cille Pheadair 81. Cille Pheadair was 'at one time a large and important chapel' (Macleod 1997: 80); 'In 1309 King Robert the Bruce granted... land in the parish

of Kilpedire Blisen' (*Origines* 1851: 366 cited in Macleod 1997: 83). 'According to the oldest men (in the 17th century) there are destroyed touns and paroch churches of Kilmarchimor and Kilpetil, and the church of Kilmonie is now called Kilpetil, that is, the church of the muir, for so it lay of old nearest the muirs, but now the sea and sands have approached it. There be sum remaynes of the destroyed churches yit to be seen at low tydes or ebbing water.' (*Origines* 1851: 368, cited in Macleod 1997: 83). This site should not be confused with Sithean Biorach (Site 88).

Site Number: 67

Township/Locality: Baghasdal

Grid Reference: NF 7353 1752

Dimensions: c.8m diameter

Depth of deposits: ?

Surveyed: June 1995; geophysical survey by Raven

Land Use: Cultivation

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: A small scatter with no appreciable mound. Geophysical survey by John Raven suggested that settlement remains within this mound might have been demolished (Raven 2005: 478–9).

Site Number: 68

Township/Locality: Baghasdal

Grid Reference: NF 7361 1747

Dimensions: c.20m diameter

Depth of deposits: ?

Surveyed: June 1995; geophysical survey by Raven

Land Use: Cultivation

Pottery: Sparse – Post-Medieval (one glazed sherd, one coarse but hard-fired).

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: No appreciable mound. This may be the machair settlement (or part of it) that was abandoned as late as the late 18th/ early 19th century acc. to Seumus MacDonald (whose great-great-grandfather lived here). It was supposedly abandoned because of disease. If so, it would appear to be the only late (*i.e.* post-Norse) machair settlement abandonment in the survey area. Geophysical survey by Raven suggested that settlement remains within this mound might have been demolished (Raven 2005: 478–9).

Site Number: 69

Township/Locality: Baghasdal

Grid Reference: NF 7367 1746

Dimensions: c.35m diameter

Depth of deposits: 2m

Surveyed: June 1995

Land Use: Cultivation and pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: A large mound which is occasionally ploughed (under grass when surveyed). Absence of rabbits. This is probably the site referred to by Lethbridge as a wheelhouse (1952: 177 map).

Site Number: 70

Township/Locality: Baghasdal

Grid Reference: NF 7364 1738

Dimensions: c.45m diameter

Depth of deposits: 3m

Surveyed: June 1995

Land Use: Ruined chapel and cemetery

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Late 17th century copper coin, glass, porcelain
Comments: No ground disturbance and none of the burials are recent. Presumably this prominent mound is artificial and an ancient settlement site. This is NF71NW 4. Teampall, Baghasdal: 'There is no certainty at present about the location of this chapel. The ONB states, "A burial ground 1 mile S of North Boisdale and 1 mile north east of South Boisdale and is the supposed site of a chapel." (Inverness 1878: 92)' (MacLeod 1997: 81).

Site Number: 71

Township/Locality: Leth Meadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7370 1715 (GPS)

Dimensions: c.10m diameter

Depth of deposits: ?

Surveyed: June 1995

Land Use: Cultivation

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: A small scatter in a flat field. This or possibly Site 72 may be the same as RCAHMS's record of a mound, midden and human remains in Leth Meadhanach (NF 737 170; NF71NW 9), 300 yards SSE of the burial ground and 200 yards from the shore, 45' by 30' and 2'6" high (1928: 119).

Site Number: 72

Township/Locality: Leth Meadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7380 1684 (GPS)

Dimensions: c.10m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.50m

Surveyed: June 1995

Land Use: Cultivation

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: A small, low mound, partly under cultivation in 1995, N of the Abhainn Mhor stream.

Site Number: 73

Township/Locality: Smercleit

Grid Reference: NF 7463 1525/NF 7464 1522

Dimensions: c.20m diameter

Depth of deposits: 3–2m

Surveyed: June 1995, Sept 2000, 2001, 2003

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: None

Comments: Recorded as a dun in Loch an Dùin. Presumably this was an island broch since it seems to have been circular with a steep profile. Fairly small stones (30–40cm) have been re-used in a small building. Otherwise there is no indication of its original character. See Chapter 6.

Site Number: 74

Township/Locality: Smercleit

Grid Reference: NF 7448 1497

Dimensions: c.50m N-S and 110m E-W

Depth of deposits: 3m

Surveyed: June 1995, June 1997, June 1999; geophysical survey and trial trenched 2000

Land Use: Cultivation/pasture (western half ploughed in 1999)

Pottery: Single sherd in 1997; lots in 1999 – 18th–19th century porcelain, 16th–18th century thin hard-fired, red and black-surfaced coarse wares and thin rims, 1 possible Viking Age sherd (but no diagnostic Medieval). In 2007, LBA/EIA sherds were noted by MPP from the base of the mound's eroding S side.

Other Finds: Shell and bone. Bone/antler comb, presumably Viking Age

Comments: Recalled by Mrs MacAulay, retired school teacher, as two ancient midden sites where she found shell and bone as a child. She found a Norse-period bone/antler comb here. The sometimes cultivated field was under pasture in 1995 and there were no rabbit holes or beach exposures producing midden material. In 1997 shells were visible in a rabbit scrape and in a small stripped area. The sherds and bones were found in the mound's exposed S side on the beach, c.60m W of the gate. Chamberlain carried out a resistivity survey in 2000, which revealed 5 anomalies. In September 2000 Raven excavated 5 test trenches in these anomalies. The excavations revealed a complex sequence of structures (formerly turf walls formed by stone footings) dating from the MIA to the 17th–late 19th centuries. Recorded by Moore and Wilson 2005 as SU69.

Site Number: 75

Township/Locality: Smercleit

Grid Reference: NF 7451 1485

Dimensions: c.50m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.05m

Surveyed: June 1995, June 1997

Land Use: Cultivation/pasture

Pottery: Porcelain

Other Finds: Shell and bone. Stone buildings

Comments: A flat site with stone walls of two blackhouses, a third eroding into the sea, and an associated midden also eroding on the S side into the sea. One of these sites (74 and 75) may be wrongly located by RCAHMS whose records refer to a *sithean*, a small mound of soil and stones 5m diameter and 0.60m high, never cultivated, in the middle of a croft ½ mile NNW of the Polochar Inn and 200 yards from the shore (1928: 119).

Site Number: 76

Township/Locality: Cille Bhrighde

Grid Reference: NF 7570 1410

Dimensions: 20m E-W, 15m N-S

Depth of deposits: 0.50m

Surveyed: June 1995

Land Use: Pasture (back yard)

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Human skeleton found in 1980s by Patrick Morrison of 8 Cille Bhrighde.

Comments: NF71SE 1. The site of the church of Cille Bhrighde. Although it is marked on the O.S. 1:10,000 map, the spot marked is too far to the W. The site is visible as a low rise, partly artificial, partly natural knoll directly behind the modern house. Pont refers to this as 'Kilvrid'. 'In the old burying ground at Kilbride is the site of the ancient church of the same name, but all traces of it have been swept away.' RCHM(S) 1928: 120. Recorded by Moore and Wilson 2005 as SU73.

Site Number: 77

Township/Locality: Cille Bhrighde

Grid Reference: NF 7583 1403

Dimensions: c.5m exposure

Depth of deposits: 0.20m

Surveyed: June 1994

Land Use: Beach

Pottery: Single sherd – Post-Medieval (hard-fired, flared rim with orange surface)

Other Finds: None

Comments: Probably too acidic for bone and shell to survive. This might have been a small shieling or fisherman's temporary

camp. In the exposed cliff face the soils appear not to be humanly modified.

Site Number: 78
Township/Locality: Gearraidh Bhailteas
Grid Reference: NF 7264 2590
Dimensions: c.5m
Depth of deposits: ?
Surveyed: June 1993, June 1996
Land Use: Trackway
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: A very ephemeral site. Not visible in June 1996.

Site Number: 79
Township/Locality: Gearraidh Bhailteas
Grid Reference: NF 728 272
Dimensions: ?
Depth of deposits: ?
Surveyed: RCAHMS records
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: ?
Other Finds: ?
Comments: Recorded as a midden (NF72NW 12 on CANMORE). There is no trace of any ancient occupation. It was completely quarried away some years ago acc. Neil MacMillan.

Site Number: 80
Township/Locality: Dalabrog
Grid Reference: NF 729 221
Dimensions: ?
Depth of deposits: ?
Surveyed: RCAHMS records
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: ?
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: No longer visible, unless it is Sites 53–54 mislocated.

Site Number: 81
Township/Locality: Cille Pheadair
Grid Reference: NF 728 196
Dimensions: ?
Depth of deposits: ?
Surveyed: RCAHMS records
Land Use: Beach
Pottery: Yes – unknown date
Other Finds: Shell and bone, nails
Comments: No longer visible and thus probably eroded away by the sea. The presence of nails suggests a Norse or later date. This may be the site recorded by Lethbridge as 350 yards SW of the Kilpheder wheelhouse (1952: 176). From either this or another site (150 yards SW of the wheelhouse) came an Iron Age long-handled weaving comb. He mentions a third site 200 yards to the SE of the wheelhouse, completely buried in 1952. Site 81 is the approximate location of the Pre-Viking Late Iron Age square cairn found in the beach shingle and excavated in 1998 (NF71NW 19). The cairn covered the stone-lined grave of a 40-year old woman (Brennand *et al.* 1998; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 117–23).

Site Number: 82
Township/Locality: Cill Donnain
Grid Reference: NF 7315 2816
Dimensions: c.50m diameter

Depth of deposits: 1m +
Surveyed: 1989; trial trenched in June 1995
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Medieval
Other Finds: See survey and excavation reports (Parker Pearson 1995; Chapters 3 and 14 this volume)
Comments: Cille Donnain Late Norse church site and disused burial ground (Fleming and Woolf 1992) with range of Medieval ‘cell’ buildings. ‘Kildonan’ is mentioned in a paper in 1498 describing how James IV was giving away land in South Uist (Origines Parochiales Scotiae, 1851, Lizars, p. 366; cited in Macleod 1997: 79). Other references to churches are: Martin Martin’s reference to ‘St. Jeremy’s chapel’ in South Uist; Origines 1851 maps a church to the E of Kildonan called ‘Clachan of Branagh’ – there is no information as to whether this is linked to Clach Ard an Dugain (Macleod 1997: 83).

Site Number: 83
Township/Locality: Cill Donnain
Grid Reference: NF 7280 2858
Dimensions: Unknown
Depth of deposits: Unknown
Surveyed: June 1994, 1996
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: IA rim found in 1994. Udal platter ware found in 1996.
Other Finds: Iron fragment, shell and bone
Comments: Stones strewn all around this grassed blow-out, suggesting previous damage to buildings. Within the same erosion gully as Cill Donnain III (Site 85), c.200m to the S of it. A Viking Age settlement, probably part of the same complex as Site 84. A 10m-long N-S line of stones may be the E wall of a longhouse. This is probably the source of the collection of small bronze items found by Coinneach Maclean in 1963 (NF72NW 15).

Site Number: 84
Township/Locality: Cill Donnain
Grid Reference: NF 7280 2861
Dimensions: Unknown
Depth of deposits: Unknown
Surveyed: June 1994
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Scarce – one sherd of Viking Age grass-impressed platter
Other Finds: Piece of iron, bone and shell
Comments: Previously thought to be part of Cill Donnain III (Site 85) but the same date as Site 83.

Site Number: 85
Township/Locality: Cill Donnain
Grid Reference: NF 7284 2857
Dimensions: 15m diameter +
Depth of deposits: 1.50m
Surveyed: June 1987 and 1988; excavated June 1989, 1990, 1991; cored 2004
Land Use: Disused sand quarry
Pottery: MIA, LIA and EBA (Cordoned Urn)
Other Finds: See excavation reports (Zvelebil 1989; 1990; 1991; Zvelebil and Parker Pearson in prep.) and also Parker Pearson and Seddon 2004.
Comments: This is Cill Donnain III wheelhouse (NF72NW 25 and 26). Part of this site was excavated but probably most of it remains buried under dunes. The bronze mushroom-headed pin found by Coinneach Maclean (NF72NW 14) probably came from here. The EBA settlement has been partially damaged but is largely

preserved beneath the excavated site of the Iron Age wheelhouse. The wheelhouse's ephemeral stonework has been re-erected in the grounds of Kildonan Museum. At NF 7273 2860 there is a standing stone which is now completely buried under sand; human remains were found in the vicinity (NF72NW 3).

Site Number: 86

Township/Locality: Cill Donnain

Grid Reference: NF 7265 2845

Dimensions: *c.* 6m diameter

Depth of deposits: Unknown

Surveyed: June 1988

Land Use: Pasture (grassed-over hollow)

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Stones

Comments: Cill Donnain II – undated and uncharacterized. No midden. Some *in situ* stones suggest a structure. This may well not be an archaeological feature.

Site Number: 87

Township/Locality: Cill Donnain

Grid Reference: NF 7259 2828

Dimensions: 40m E-W, 15m N-S

Depth of deposits: *c.* 0.30m

Surveyed: June 1987 and 1988; trial trenched June 1988; surveyed June 1996

Land Use: Sand blow-out gradually reverting to grass.

Pottery: Beaker sherds, grey wares, sherd with small nipple-like boss.

Other Finds: 2 barbed-and-tanged flint arrowheads (one broken), a bone point, 4 thumbnail flint scrapers, flint flakes, fragment of black battle-axe, dense shells and some bone. The first B&T was found in 1988, the remaining artefacts in 1996.

Comments: This is Cill Donnain I, trial excavated in 1988. Radiocarbon dates of 2350–1890 cal BC and 2140–1690 cal BC (OxA-3353 and OxA-3354) from carbonized seeds. Evidence of stone foundations of possibly three round/oval buildings. Contour, resistivity and magnetometer survey in 1996. The site was first located in 1987 by Martin Wildgoose. See Chapter 10.

Site Number: 88

Township/Locality: Cille Pheadair, Sithean Biorach

Grid Reference: NF 729 199

Dimensions: ?

Depth of deposits: ?

Surveyed: RCAHMS records (NF71NW 10)

Land Use: Sand cliff above beach

Pottery: ?

Other Finds: Shell and bone, stone structures

Comments: No longer visible and thus probably eroded away by the sea. The location of this site was remembered by Seumus MacDonald. Cleaning of the beach section in this locality indicated that there were no surviving midden layers though a few wrinkle and limpet shells in the clean windblown sand attest to the former location of a settlement, since washed away. This is *not* the Viking settlement (Site 66) excavated in 1996–1998 and recorded by Moore and Wilson (2005) as SU21.

Site Number: 89

Township/Locality: Upper Bornish

Grid Reference: NF 7340 2990

Dimensions: *c.* 40m N-S, 80m E-W

Depth of deposits: 0.50m

Surveyed: Trial trenched June 1996

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Medieval–Post-Medieval

Other Finds: See excavation report (Marshall *et al.* 1996) and Chapter 16

Comments: Known as the 'Hill of the Son of Angus' (NF72NW 30) and as the site of the 19th-century tacksman's house in Bornais acc. Neil MacMillan. Probably a long sequence of occupation.

Site Number: 90

Township/Locality: Cill Donnain

Grid Reference: NF 7275 2850

Dimensions: *c.* 10m diameter

Depth of deposits: *c.* 0.20m

Surveyed: June 1996, July 2004

Land Use: Cultivation

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell and bone, slag (non-metallurgical)

Comments: *c.* 100m SW of Cill Donnain III (Site 85)

Site Number: 91

Township/Locality: Upper Bornish/Ardvule

Grid Reference: NF 7167 2988

Dimensions: *c.* 100m E-W, 50m N-S

Depth of deposits: ?

Surveyed: June 1996; July 1997; recorded by Moore and Wilson 2005 as SU58

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Porcelain, stoneware

Other Finds: Iron cooking-pot fragment, iron mole trap (recent). See Badcock *et al.* 2000.

Comments: NF72NW 21. Kelpers' cottages. 19 small structures *c.* 5m by 3m with E-facing entrances, arranged in a courtyard shape along three sides and open to the W. Outlier house on NE side. Supposedly occupied in the first two decades of the 19th century but the porcelain dates to the later 19th and early 20th centuries. Unconfirmed account of early 19th-century inhabitants eating off floor because too poor to own crockery. Badly affected by rabbits.

Site Number: 92

Township/Locality: Upper Bornish/Ardvule

Grid Reference: NF 7163 2988

Dimensions: *c.* 15m diameter, 1m high.

Depth of deposits: 1m

Surveyed: June 1996

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell and bone, glass and iron

Comments: Probably part of the 19th-century kelpers' village.

Site Number: 93

Township/Locality: Upper Bornish/Ardvule

Grid Reference: NF 7163 2991

Dimensions: *c.* 20m diameter

Depth of deposits: 1m

Surveyed: June 1996

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Two sherds (undiagnostic)

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: None

Site Number: 94

Township/Locality: Baghasdal

Grid Reference: NF 7341 1908

Dimensions: ?

Depth of deposits: ?

Surveyed: June 1996

Land Use: Pasture/cultivation

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Stones

Comments: Acc. Mr MacAuley of Cille Pheadair, he found a lintel-like stone while ploughing here many years ago. There are stones on the surface here that have come from elsewhere. Possibly a cairn site? At NF 7342 1868 there are two sand hills which may possibly be settlement mounds (no rabbit burrows).

Site Number: 95

Township/Locality: Aisgernis

Grid Reference: NF 7340 2392

Dimensions:

Depth of deposits:

Surveyed: June 1996

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Former standing stone, lying E-W immediately N of the track.

Comments: A long stone (c.2m long and 0.40m wide and 0.40m thick), with a pecked band (c.30mm wide) around it, c.0.40m from its E end. It has not been here long but presumably comes from the vicinity. Lies immediately N of the modern road, c.20m S of the old track to Aisgernis. It is said to have been taken from the masonry of the demolished estate barns. Information from Don MacPhee, Uilleam Macdonald, Neil MacMillan.

Site Number: 96

Township/Locality: Aisgernis

Grid Reference: NF 7328 2402

Dimensions: c.30m diameter

Depth of deposits: c.1m

Surveyed: June 1996; June 1997; trial trenched February 1998 and July 1998; and by Raven

Land Use: Pasture. Ploughed on W side in spring 1997

Pottery: Sparse – one neck sherd with small triangle impressions, another sherd with a short vertical incision, another with angled incisions on the shoulder – Medieval. Raven's excavations found Middle Iron Age pottery.

Other Finds: Shell, bone, recent glass and iron

Comments: This and Sites 48, 97 and 232 are NF72SW 21. On land farmed directly by South Uist Estates. Shallow cattle scrape on surface. On 15/2/98 a small trial-trenching exercise was carried out by M. Parker Pearson, J. Symonds and Ramilisonina. Six trenches (0.50m × 0.50m) were dug in a N-S line 50m W of and parallel to the N-S open field drain to the E of the site. These trenches ran from the middle of the mound to its northern edge. The northernmost trench (Tr. 1) lay due E of the junction between the N-S and E-W field drains to the E of the site. Trench 2 was 2m S of Trench 1. Trench 3 was 1m S of Trench 2. Trench 4 was 4m S of Trench 3. Trench 5 was 5.50m S of Trench 4. Trench 6 was 6m S of Trench 6. A seventh trench (Tr. 7) was dug c.5m W of Tr. 4. The southernmost trench (Tr. 6) produced a single sherd from the grey sand beneath the topsoil. The triangle-impressed and other sherds came from a thin orange and black midden layer in Tr. 2. Stones in Tr. 3 might have belonged to a structure. Trench 8, 2m E-W × 1m N-S, was dug in July 1998 adjacent to Trench 2 in order to sample the thin midden layer for more diagnostic pottery. Raven's later geophysical survey and excavations (5 trenches) found walling, probable floor layers, midden and some Late Medieval–Early Post-Medieval pottery, as well as MIA pottery (Raven 2005: 476–8).

Site Number: 97

Township/Locality: Aisgernis

Grid Reference: NF 7331 2410

Dimensions: c.20m diameter

Depth of deposits: c.0.50m

Surveyed: June 1996; trial trenched July 1998; and by Raven

Land Use: Pasture. Ploughed in spring 1997.

Pottery: Some sherds, probably Medieval, and pieces of 19th-century porcelain. Middle Iron Age pottery found by J. Raven.

Other Finds: Shells and bone

Comments: This and Sites 48, 96 and 232 are NF72SW 21. On land farmed directly by South Uist Estates. Trench 9, 2m N-S × 2m E-W, was located on the southern edge of this mound. Porcelain was found in the ploughsoil but only earthenware sherds came from lower levels. None of these sherds are decorated but their thin fabrics and hard-fired surfaces suggest a Medieval date. Raven's later geophysical survey and excavations (6 trenches) found walling, probable floor layers, midden and some Late Medieval–Early Post-Medieval pottery, as well as MIA pottery (Raven 2005: 476–8).

Site Number: 98

Township/Locality: Cille Bhrighde

Grid Reference: NF 7534 1429

Dimensions: c.30m diameter

Depth of deposits: c.1.50m

Surveyed: June 1996, February 1998, June 1999, trial trenched 2000

Land Use: Partially cultivated

Pottery: Copious but mostly undiagnostic. MIA cordon-decorated pottery from deeper levels of test trenches

Other Finds: Shell and bone, slate

Comments: The southern part of the mound has been quarried into in the past. Possibly the occupation layers are limited to the upper part of this mound. Trial trenched in September 2000 by Raven. The 4 trenches revealed 2.50m of stratified deposits, continuing even deeper. A turf wall with stone footings and thick midden layers were associated with MIA pottery (Raven 2005: 480–1).

Site Number: 99

Township/Locality: Dreumasadal

Grid Reference: NF 7513 3706

Dimensions: c.60m N-S by 20m E-W

Depth of deposits: 2m

Surveyed: June and July 1996, June 1999

Land Use: Pasture (ploughed for barley and potatoes in 1999)

Pottery: Some including grass-impressed – Viking Age rim and platter ware in 1999

Other Finds: Shells and bone

Comments: None

Site Number: 100

Township/Locality: Stadhlaigearraidh

Grid Reference: NF 7532 3801

Dimensions: 50m diameter

Depth of deposits: 6m

Surveyed: June 1996, June 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Some – one sherd with horizontal and angled incisions – MIA

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: Finds of pottery and shells came only from the E side of this mound c.1m above its base. The hill is known as A'Cheardach (the smithy) acc. Mr MacAskill.

Site Number: 101
Township/Locality: Tobha Mòr
Grid Reference: NF 7554 3657
Dimensions: c.30m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.05 m
Surveyed: June 1996
Land Use: Cultivation
Pottery: Porcelain
Other Finds: Shell, slate, iron
Comments: On flat, E-facing slope.

Site Number: 102
Township/Locality: Sniseabhal
Grid Reference: NF 7478 3564
Dimensions: c.40m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.05m
Surveyed: June 1996
Land Use: Cultivation
Pottery: Porcelain
Other Finds: Shell
Comments: On flat, E-facing slope.

Site Number: 103
Township/Locality: Drimore
Grid Reference: NF 7556 4092
Dimensions: 40m E-W by 20m N-S
Depth of deposits: 0.50m
Surveyed: Excavated 1957; June 1996, July 1998
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Some
Other Finds: Shells, bone (see MacLaren 1974).
Comments: Site of excavated Viking Age house (NF74SE 5). No pottery found in excavations but picked up off surface in rabbit scrapes in 1996 and 1998. No signs of other structures or of a larger settlement area. This site is recorded as number 9 and possibly also number 8 by the Ministry of Works in the late 1950s. Stones are visible on the surface. A nearby site of a 'Viking hut' was excavated in 1956 by K.A. Steer for the Ministry of Works; this was located at NF 7558 4101 (NF74SE 10).

Site Number: 104
Township/Locality: Drimore
Grid Reference: NF 7560 4080
Dimensions: c.20m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.50m
Surveyed: Excavated 1957; June 1996, July 1998
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Single sherd
Other Finds: Shell, bone, stones.
Comments: Excavated by Jack Scott in 1957 but unpublished – 'hut circles'. No significant finds were made (Scott pers. comm.). NF74SE 8. See Figure 1.4.

Site Number: 105
Township/Locality: Drimore
Grid Reference: NF 7567 4063
Dimensions: c.15m diameter for each of the two spreads of stone
Depth of deposits: 0.30m
Surveyed: June 1996, July 1998
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Stones in two small clumps, one located 15m SW of the other.

Comments: No signs of settlement activity or shells. Possibly a recent feature or maybe one or two cairns?

Site Number: 106
Township/Locality: Drimore
Grid Reference: NF 7570 4063
Dimensions: c.30m diameter
Depth of deposits: 1m
Surveyed: June 1996, July 1998
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: 6 sherds including a base sherd.
Other Finds: Shell, stones
Comments: About 100m SSE of Site 105.

Site Number: 107
Township/Locality: Drimore
Grid Reference: NF 7575 4057
Dimensions: c.10m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.50m
Surveyed: June 1996. Not relocated in July 1998.
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Shell
Comments: None

Site Number: 108
Township/Locality: Drimore
Grid Reference: NF 7570 4055
Dimensions: 2 mounds c.10m diameter each
Depth of deposits: 0.50m
Surveyed: June 1996, July 1998
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: 5 sherds including a base sherd (MIA-LIA)
Other Finds: Shell, in W mound stones
Comments: Immediately N of and bisected by the new fence. The mounds are c.5m apart. The W mound is under the fence line and the E mound is immediately N of it.

Site Number: 109
Township/Locality: Drimore
Grid Reference: NF 7571 4050
Dimensions: c.20m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.05m
Surveyed: June 1996, July 1998
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Sparse, undiagnostic
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: About 50m S of Site 108. An ESE-WNW line of stones, along with other large stones, is visible.

Site Number: 110
Township/Locality: Drimore
Grid Reference: NF 7577 4040
Dimensions: c.40m diameter
Depth of deposits: 1m
Surveyed: Excavated 1957; June 1996
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Copious – MIA
Other Finds: Shell and bone, wheelhouse (Fairhurst 1971)
Comments: Excavated wheelhouse of A'Cheardach Bheag, with most of the stonework arranged in a large arc on the western edge of the site. Ministry of Works number 10. NF74SE 7.

Site Number: 111
Township/Locality: Drimore

Grid Reference: NF 7576 4035
Dimensions: c.5m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.20m
Surveyed: June 1996
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: None
Other Finds: None
Comments: Low mound with a possibly curving wall on the N side of a depression in the mound's centre. Not a settlement feature since there are no shells in the rabbit scrapes.

Site Number: 112
Township/Locality: Drimore
Grid Reference: NF 7578 4023
Dimensions: c.30m NE-SW, 10m SE-NW (155' by 60' as recorded in the 1950s)
Depth of deposits: 0.50m (2' as recorded in the 1950s)
Surveyed: June 1996, July 1998
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Single base sherd, rim sherd and sherd – undiagnostic other than MIA-Viking Iron Age.
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: Ministry of Works number 11 but not excavated. Not heavily affected by rabbits.

Site Number: 113
Township/Locality: Drimore
Grid Reference: NF 7575 4029
Dimensions: c.5m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.50m
Surveyed: June 1996, July 1998
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Seven sherds – LBA/EIA
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: Clean sand. This is the southernmost of three mounds; Site 114 is 10m to the NE and Site 115 is 10m to the NW. All are probably part of the same occupation area.

Site Number: 114
Township/Locality: Drimore
Grid Reference: NF 7570 4028
Dimensions: c.5m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.50m
Surveyed: June 1996, July 1998
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: 5 sherds including a rim (MIA)
Other Finds: Shell
Comments: Clean sand. E of Sites 113 and 115. Oyster and mussel shells present.

Site Number: 115
Township/Locality: Drimore
Grid Reference: NF 7572 4031
Dimensions: c.5m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.50m
Surveyed: June 1996, July 1998
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: One sherd
Other Finds: Shell
Comments: Clean sand. W of Sites 113 and 114. Oyster and mussel shells present.

Site Number: 116
Township/Locality: Drimore
Grid Reference: NF 7563 4030

Dimensions: c.5m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.50m
Surveyed: June 1996. Not located in 1998.
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Shell
Comments: Clean sand.

Site Number: 117
Township/Locality: Gearraidhfeugh
Grid Reference: NF 7570 4130
Dimensions: c.40m diameter (150' diameter as recorded in the 1950s)
Depth of deposits: c.2m high (5' as recorded in the 1950s)
Surveyed: Excavated 1957; June 1996
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: MIA (LIA and Viking also found during excavations)
Other Finds: Shell and bone, wheelhouse (Young and Richardson 1960)
Comments: A'Cheardach Mhor. Ministry of Works number 7. NF73NE 7 and NF74SE 9.

Site Number: 118
Township/Locality: Cille Bhànain
Grid Reference: NF 7542 4204
Dimensions: c.50m diameter
Depth of deposits: c.2m
Surveyed: June 1996, July 1998
Land Use: Pasture on N side, ploughed on S side
Pottery: Copious MIA pottery (four MIA rims, wavy cordon motifs, and incised chevron motif). One sherd with a roughened surface may be Pre-Viking Late Iron Age.
Other Finds: Shell, bone
Comments: In 1996 this site was virtually free of rabbit damage but was heavily infested in July 1998, causing large quantities of pottery to be brought to the surface.

Site Number: 119
Township/Locality: Groigearraidh
Grid Reference: NF 7585 3970
Dimensions: c.50m N-S by 10m E-W
Depth of deposits: 0.05m
Surveyed: June 1996
Land Use: Cultivation
Pottery: Porcelain
Other Finds: Shell, slate, coal, brick
Comments: On part of a long N-S sand ridge.

Site Number: 120
Township/Locality: Groigearraidh
Grid Reference: NF 7558 3927
Dimensions: c.25m diameter (recorded as 65' in the 1950s)
Depth of deposits: 3m (recorded as 7' in the 1950s)
Surveyed: June 1996, July 1998
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Copious – a variety of fabrics, some with unusual grits. The sherds are hard and thin-walled, and one sherd has a possible applied interrupted cordon. Probably Medieval or later.
Other Finds: Shell and bone, antler
Comments: A small but strikingly high mound with material on its top and sides. Few shells in relation to sherds. Immediately S of the canalized stream flowing W out of Loch Groigearraidh. This was recorded as number 12 in the Ministry of Works survey in the late 1950s.

Site Number: 121
Township/Locality: Groigearraidh
Grid Reference: NF 7553 3902
Dimensions: c.10m
Depth of deposits: 0.05m
Surveyed: June 1996
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Shell
Comments: A bowl-shaped depression with shells on its E side in clean sand.

Site Number: 122
Township/Locality: Groigearraidh
Grid Reference: NF 7558 3904
Dimensions: c.5m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.50m
Surveyed: June 1996
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Shell
Comments: Clean sand.

Site Number: 123
Township/Locality: Geirinis
Grid Reference: NF 7518 4379
Dimensions: c.5m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.50m
Surveyed: July 1996, September 2000
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Shell, one quartz pebble, 5 quartz flakes, bone
Comments: Clean sand – probably EBA. The finds were in a flat area immediately W of the small mound (rather than within it).

Site Number: 124
Township/Locality: Geirinis
Grid Reference: NF 7522 4378
Dimensions: c.5m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.50m
Surveyed: July 1996
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: None
Other Finds: One quartz flake
Comments: Clean sand – probably EBA. There are winkle and limpet shells in the E end of a second small mound 10m to the NW at 7520 4370.

Site Number: 125
Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach
Grid Reference: NF 7548 4441
Dimensions: c.8m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.50m
Surveyed: July 1996
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: Small mound adjacent to a larger one (Sites 126–7).

Site Number: 126
Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach
Grid Reference: NF 7549 4441
Dimensions: c.10m diameter
Depth of deposits: c.1m

Surveyed: July 1996
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Sherds include rims which are probably MIA
Other Finds: Shell and bone, slag
Comments: Part of a large N-S sand ridge which is actually one large settlement mound that includes Site 127 and merges into Sites 128, 132 and 133.

Site Number: 127
Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach
Grid Reference: NF 7551 4438
Dimensions: c.10m diameter
Depth of deposits: c.1m
Surveyed: July 1996
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Some sherds; the rims are probably MIA
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: Part of a large N-S sand ridge which is actually one large settlement mound that includes Site 126 and merges into Sites 128, 132 and 133.

Site Number: 128
Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach
Grid Reference: NF 7553 4438
Dimensions: c.40m diameter
Depth of deposits: 1.50m
Surveyed: July 1996, June 1998; test trenched August 2001
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Some sherds; probably Medieval or later, including a sherd of Norse platter ware.
Other Finds: Shell and bone, iron, iron slag
Comments: Large mound partially obscured by the sand ridge which includes Sites 126, 127 and probably Sites 132, 133. Modern brick and concrete constructions on E side of the ridge, seen in 1996, have been removed. The mound has been severely disturbed here. Resistivity survey by Raven identified three anomalies which were all test-trenched, though only one trench contained substantial midden material and slag, albeit undated (Raven 2005: 482).

Site Number: 129
Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach
Grid Reference: NF 7564 4443
Dimensions: c.40m E-W, 20m N-S
Depth of deposits: 2m
Surveyed: July 1996
Land Use: Pasture on N side, ploughed on S side
Pottery: Some including incised curvilinear decoration and applied cordon – MIA. Post-Medieval on flat ground of N side.
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: Immediately E of the N-S fence. Free-standing mound. On the flat ground immediately to the N of Site 129 Craig Allaker found with his metal detector a lead spindlewhorl, a small, heavily worn coin of Charles I (copper twopence with 'English' crown, Earl of Stirling coinage, 1632–1639), and a fragment of copper alloy chip carving, cut through on two sides.

Site Number: 130
Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach
Grid Reference: NF 7567 4482
Dimensions: c.30m diameter
Depth of deposits: 1m
Surveyed: July 1996, June 1998
Land Use: Pasture in cultivated field; disturbed by digging into mound

Pottery: None
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: Stones piled into a small ring on top of this mound which has been dug into.

Site Number: 131
Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach
Grid Reference: NF 7567 4483
Dimensions: c.10m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.50m
Surveyed: July 1996, June 1998
Land Use: Ploughed
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: None

Site Number: 132
Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach
Grid Reference: NF 7551 4449
Dimensions: c.50m diameter
Depth of deposits: 2m
Surveyed: July 1996, June 1998, August 2001
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: 7 sherds – one steeply curved and thick (?Viking/?Medieval)
Other Finds: Shell and bone, fish bone
Comments: Partly obscured on its W side by dune which contains Sites 126, 127, 128, 133.

Site Number: 133
Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach
Grid Reference: NF 7543 4444
Dimensions: c.60m diameter
Depth of deposits: 2m
Surveyed: July 1996, June 1998
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Two sherds – one has a bright red interior and black exterior and is probably Medieval/early Post-Medieval.
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: Shell and bone from rabbit scrapes on the W side only. Part of dune which contains Sites 126, 127, 128, 132. Stones are visible on the mound's NW side.

Site Number: 134
Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach
Grid Reference: NF 7537 4458
Dimensions: c.10m E-W by 30m N-S
Depth of deposits: 0.50m
Surveyed: July 1996, June 1998; geophysical survey and test trenched September 2000
Land Use: Pasture (potato field in 2000)
Pottery: 1 sherd
Other Finds: Shell and bone, lots of small pebbles
Comments: Small mound immediately E of two decaying wooden gate posts, c.40m N of Site 133. Many stones are visible on its W side. Resistivity survey revealed 8 rectilinear anomalies, of which 5 were test-pitted to reveal walls, floors and midden in all trenches. Scarcity of sherds prevented this site being dated any more securely than after the MIA and before the 19th century (Raven 2005: 483).

Site Number: 135
Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach
Grid Reference: NF 7535 4451
Dimensions: c.20m diameter

Depth of deposits: 1.50m
Surveyed: July 1996, June 1998
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: 3 sherds – undiagnostic
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: There are some stones on top of the mound, which is immediately S of Site 137. The low mound to the NE, between Sites 135 and 138, has no shells.

Site Number: 136
Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach
Grid Reference: NF 7519 4460
Dimensions: c.80m diameter
Depth of deposits: 3m
Surveyed: July 1996; June 1997, June 1998
Land Use: Pasture with potato patches on W and S sides
Pottery: Large sherds of LBA/EIA plain wares survive where not directly exposed on surface of S potato patch. A rim sherd was found in 1997
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: A very large and uneven mound, badly affected by rabbits.

Site Number: 137
Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach
Grid Reference: NF 7537 4454
Dimensions: c.50m diameter
Depth of deposits: 2m
Surveyed: July 1996, June 1998; test trenched September 2000, August 2001
Land Use: Pasture (with potato patches in 2000)
Pottery: Some sherds – steeply curved profiles – Medieval sherd with horizontal row of three impressed circles 2mm dia.
Other Finds: Shell and bone, fish bone
Comments: The site lies c.10m W of the two decaying gate posts. There are some stones on the W side and on the top of the mound. Resistivity survey by Raven revealed a highly complex mound stratigraphy. Of his 11 test trenches, 4 were unproductive, 3 revealed only thin lenses of midden, and 4 contained small turf and stone walls and floors of sunken-floored buildings. Most of the pottery was undiagnostic but two sherds may be Late Medieval (Raven 2005: 483).

Site Number: 138
Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach
Grid Reference: NF 7528 4478
Dimensions: c.70m diameter
Depth of deposits: 2m
Surveyed: July 1996; June 1997, June 1998, July 1999; test trenched September 2000
Land Use: Pasture, previously quarried on W side
Pottery: Some but undiagnostic. A Medieval pinprick-decorated rim was found in 1997. Very thin wares
Other Finds: Stones, shells and bone
Comments: This mound has been badly damaged by quarrying on its W side, damaging a formerly upstanding building. There are lots of dislodged stones, no doubt from buildings eroded out of the mound's W side. It continues to be damaged by rabbits but these were gassed in the late 1990s – unfortunately the digging in to the tops of the burrows has left erosion scars. In June 1999 Craig Allaker found a decorated copper alloy strip here with his metal detector. He also found a large flint nodule here. Resistivity survey by Raven was followed by 10 test trenches; these revealed midden layers and walls, and a house floor 1m below the wall of the formerly upstanding building. Finds included Late Medieval

pottery and an iron hunting arrowhead dating to the 11th–15th century, though potentially in use until the 16th–17th centuries (Raven 2005: 483–4).

Site Number: 139

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7532 4447

Dimensions: c.20m diameter

Depth of deposits: 2m

Surveyed: July 1996, June 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: A very irregular hummocky mound with many stones visible. Shells are sparse.

Site Number: 140

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7533 4447

Dimensions: c.10m diameter

Depth of deposits: 1m

Surveyed: July 1996, June 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: A small round mound immediately E of Site 139. Shells are sparse.

Site Number: 141

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7512 4459

Dimensions: c.15m E-W by 20m N-S

Depth of deposits: 0.50m

Surveyed: July 1996, June 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Single rim sherd, a base sherd and 9 body sherds. The rim is pre-Viking LIA

Other Finds: Shell, bone and slag

Comments: None

Site Number: 142

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7503 4467

Dimensions: c.35m diameter

Depth of deposits: 1.50m

Surveyed: July 1996

Land Use: N half ploughed, S half pasture

Pottery: Some; wavy cordon and rim – MIA

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: None

Site Number: 143

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7504 4488

Dimensions: c.30m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.50m

Surveyed: July 1996, June 1998, August 2001

Land Use: Ploughed on S side

Pottery: Some – MIA cordon and everted rim and two other rims

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: None

Site Number: 144

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7500 4454

Dimensions: c.40m E-W, 20m N-S

Depth of deposits: 1m

Surveyed: July 1996, June 1998; test trenched May 2002

Land Use: Ploughed

Pottery: Scarce on the surface (assumed to be Medieval but excavation produced MIA pottery and EIA pottery)

Other Finds: Stones, shell and bone

Comments: Double mound. Resistivity survey was followed by 3 trial trenches (Raven 2005: 484). Large MIA ceramic assemblage separated by 0.40m of windblown sand from a pavement of smashed sherds of EIA round-rimmed pots.

Site Number: 145

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7488 4471

Dimensions: c.30m diameter

Depth of deposits: 1.50m

Surveyed: July 1996

Land Use: Ploughed on N side (and on S side in 2000)

Pottery: Some – MIA incised angular decoration and a probable grass-impressed Viking Age sherd

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: A MIA settlement possibly with later Viking Age occupation.

Site Number: 146

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7480 4476

Dimensions: c.40m diameter

Depth of deposits: 2m

Surveyed: July 1996

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Some – LBA-EIA sherds (flat rim)

Other Finds: Shell and bone, quartz flake

Comments: None

Site Number: 147

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7471 4482

Dimensions: c.40m diameter

Depth of deposits: 2m

Surveyed: July 1996

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Some – LBA/EIA and possibly later sherds

Other Finds: Stones, shell, bone

Comments: None

Site Number: 148

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7461 4494

Dimensions: c.10m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.30m

Surveyed: July 1996, June 1998

Land Use: N half ploughed

Pottery: Some, including a rim sherd which is probably Viking Age. A right-angled base sherd is probably not Viking Age.

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: Probably the southern part of Site 149, separated by a deep plough furrow.

Site Number: 149

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7457 4497

Dimensions: c.20m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.50m
Surveyed: July 1996, June 1998
Land Use: Ploughed
Pottery: Rim and grass-impressed (Viking Age) and other sherds
Other Finds: Stones, slag, flat-topped nail/rivet, shell, bone
Comments: A small Viking Age settlement eroding badly.

Site Number: 150
Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach
Grid Reference: NF 7443 4509
Dimensions: c.15m diameter
Depth of deposits: 1m
Surveyed: July 1996, June 1998
Land Use: Ploughed
Pottery: Some – LBA/EIA
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: This is the southern part of the same LBA/EIA complex as 151 and 187.

Site Number: 151
Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach
Grid Reference: NF 7435 4513
Dimensions: c.40m diameter
Depth of deposits: 2m
Surveyed: July 1996
Land Use: Pasture but the southernmost portion is ploughed
Pottery: LBA-EIA
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: This is the site recorded by the Ministry of Works as number 2 (and dated by them as 'Iron Age'). There is a small stone-walled structure (of presumably relatively recent date) on the SE side of the mound

Site Number: 152
Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach
Grid Reference: NF 7431 4519
Dimensions: c.35m diameter (135' by 115' in the 1950s)
Depth of deposits: 1.50m (6' in the 1950s)
Surveyed: July 1996
Land Use: N side ploughed
Pottery: Some – LBA/EIA coarse pottery
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: It is recorded in the Ministry of Works survey as number 1 ('food refuse').

Site Number: 153
Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach
Grid Reference: NF 7424 4533
Dimensions: c.30m diameter
Depth of deposits: 2m
Surveyed: July 1996
Land Use: S side ploughed
Pottery:
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: None

Site Number: 154
Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach
Grid Reference: NF 7427 4534
Dimensions: c.10m diameter
Depth of deposits: 1m
Surveyed: July 1996
Land Use: Ploughed
Pottery: Some – LBA/EIA coarse wares

Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: None

Site Number: 155
Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach
Grid Reference: NF 7442 4524
Dimensions: c.15m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.50m
Surveyed: July 1996
Land Use: Ploughed
Pottery: Some grass-impressed and others – Viking Age
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: None

Site Number: 156
Township/Locality: Aisgernis
Grid Reference: NF 7356 2389
Dimensions: c.50m diameter
Depth of deposits: ?
Surveyed: June 1996
Land Use: Garden and modern house
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Shell
Comments: Soil with shells found while digging on SE edge of mounded area acc. Tim Atkinson, Factor.

Site Number: 157
Township/Locality: Dalabrog
Grid Reference: NF 734 214
Dimensions: ?
Depth of deposits: ?
Surveyed: RCAHMS
Land Use: Disused sand quarry
Pottery: MIA. 1st century BC/AD cordon (Lethbridge 1952: fig. 6.3)
Other Finds: Shell and bone, wheelhouse, 5 bone pins and one ring-headed iron pin (Lethbridge 1952: fig.5.6–11).
Comments: The site of Sithean na Phiobaire (the piper's fairy hill), recorded by RCAHMS (NF 734 214 possible aisled roundhouse; possible wheelhouse; midden; pins; NF72SW 4). The sand hill has been quarried and there is no trace of this archaeological site. '...remains of an aisled house.' (Sharkey 1986: 54). '...Half a mile to the north of Bruthach an Tigh Tallan [probably Site 61 or adjacent to it] another wheel-house, Sithean na Phiobaire..., was removed to build a wall round a nearby grave-yard.' (Lethbridge 1952: 176).

Site Number: 158
Township/Locality: Hornish Point, Baile Gharbhaidh
Grid Reference: NF 7582 4763
Dimensions: c.50m E-W, 40m N-S
Depth of deposits: 3 m
Surveyed: Partially excavated 1980s; surveyed July 1996, June 1998; recorded by Moore and Wilson 2005 as SU35
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: MIA cordon and incised chevron; one 'wiped' sherd (Pre-Viking LIA)
Other Finds: Shell, bone, wheelhouses (partially excavated; Barber 2003)
Comments: Partially excavated in 1980s but still continuing to erode on vertical cliff face 40m long N-S on W side of this double mound. Buildings can be seen along the N half of the exposure. Two small mounds (c.10m diameter and 1m high) c.50m and 100m to SE may be other settlement sites but no exposed surface.

A deposit of intertidal peat can be found on the beach *c.*50m SW of the site. NF74NE 18.

Site Number: 159

Township/Locality: Baile Gharbhaidh

Grid Reference: NF 7636 4719

Dimensions: Souterrain *c.*10m E-W and 1m N-S

Depth of deposits: 0.50m of dark soil above stones of souterrain whose base is *c.*1.50m below land surface.

Surveyed: June 1992, July 1996

Land Use: Garden of house

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell

Comments: Winkles and cockles but no limpets, sherds or bone in the dark soil 0.40–0.50m deep above the souterrain. Flat terrain with no trace of a midden or structures above. The souterrain was cut through by a house drain in 1992; the souterrain is *c.*10m long and runs parallel (E-W) with the cliff edge, *c.*3m S of the edge. The cliff has been protected by large boulders and stones as a sea defence.

Site Number: 160

Township/Locality: Aird a Mhachair

Grid Reference: NF 7508 4751

Dimensions: *c.*5m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.05m

Surveyed: July 1996

Land Use: Trackway

Pottery: Porcelain

Other Finds: Shell

Comments: 19th-century midden spread cut by wheel ruts.

Site Number: 161

Township/Locality: Baile Gharbhaidh

Grid Reference: NF 7585 4770

Dimensions: *c.*50m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.20m

Surveyed: July 1996; recorded by Moore and Wilson 2005 as SU34

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Stone enclosures, shell

Comments: Probably a Post-Medieval set of enclosures.

Site Number: 162

Township/Locality: Baile Gharbhaidh

Grid Reference: NF 7585 4773

Dimensions: *c.*30m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.20m

Surveyed: July 1996; recorded by Moore and Wilson 2005 as SU34

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: House foundations (N-S, 15m × 6m and barn adjacent to E 8m × 5m) within stone-walled enclosure. Shell.

Comments: Shells in 0.20m deep layer eroding onto beach on N side.

Site Number: 163

Township/Locality: Lionacuaidhe

Grid Reference: NF 7550 4647

Dimensions: *c.*80m diameter

Depth of deposits: 6m

Surveyed: July 1996; recorded by Moore and Wilson 2005 as SU36

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell

Comments: Stone enclosures set into E side. A very large mound, apparently a settlement mound.

Site Number: 164

Township/Locality: Cill Amhlaidh

Grid Reference: NF 7540 4575

Dimensions: *c.*10m diameter

Depth of deposits: 1m

Surveyed: July 1996

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell

Comments: No rabbits – just a slight animal scrape. Three other possible settlement mounds to E two fields away and one in same field *c.*100m to W.

Site Number: 165

Township/Locality: Cill Amhlaidh

Grid Reference: NF 7547 4580

Dimensions: *c.*20m

Depth of deposits: 1m

Surveyed: July 1996

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell

Comments: No rabbits – just a slight animal scrape. Three other possible settlement mounds to E in next field (NF 7554 4583, NF 7557 4581, NF 7562 4579) and one two fields to W (NF 7529 4568). The old graveyard is at NF 755 463 (marked on O.S. map as ‘disused burial ground’) where the Cill Amhlaidh meeting house was situated (acc. to Donald John MacDonald [1981]). ‘The small local churches were called meeting houses. This was before the Reformation.’ (MacLeod 1997: 74). ‘West of “Kileulay” on Pont’s map is “Kilehainie”’: could there have been a meeting house there with a name like Cill Choinnich?’ (MacLeod 1997: 74). CANMORE has the possible church at Cill Amhlaidh at NF 7529 4586 (NF74NE 1).

Site Number: 166

Township/Locality: Aird a Mhachair

Grid Reference: NF 7413 4569

Dimensions: *c.*60m diameter

Depth of deposits: 3m

Surveyed: July 1996

Land Use: W side recently ploughed

Pottery: Single sherd

Other Finds: Shell

Comments: Another, smaller mound to the SE has a house on it and is probably another site. This site (with Sites 167 and 168) may be the small group of houses on the 1805 map.

Site Number: 167

Township/Locality: Aird a Mhachair

Grid Reference: NF 7418 4556

Dimensions: *c.*20m diameter

Depth of deposits: 1.50m

Surveyed: July 1996

Land Use: Ploughed

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: Lack of pottery may indicate a Norse/Medieval date?

Site Number: 168
Township/Locality: Aird a Mhachair
Grid Reference: NF 7419 4552
Dimensions: c.40m N-S, 20m E-W
Depth of deposits: 1.50m
Surveyed: July 1996
Land Use: Pasture but ploughed on southern extremity of mound
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Shell
Comments: No rabbits.

Site Number: 169
Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach
Grid Reference: NF 7421 4544
Dimensions: c.20m N-S, 10m E-W
Depth of deposits: 1m
Surveyed: July 1996
Land Use: Pasture but previously ploughed on W side
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Shell
Comments: None

Site Number: 170
Township/Locality: Aird a Mhachair
Grid Reference: NF 7411 4591
Dimensions: c.5m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.20m
Surveyed: July 1996
Land Use: Grass mound unploughed in ploughed field
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Light scatter of shells around. Porcelain from c.50m to S.
Comments: Possibly linked to the ruined building c.50m to N.

Site Number: 171
Township/Locality: Cille Bhànain
Grid Reference: NF 7649 4163
Dimensions: c.30m diameter
Depth of deposits: 1.50m
Surveyed: July 1996
Land Use: Ploughed
Pottery: Some, one with probable prick-marked decoration (Medieval)
Other Finds: No shell (acidic soil), iron.
Comments: Probably Medieval. On site marked as 'Kilivanen' settlement on 1805 map, and as 'Kiluanen' on Pont map. The building is 54' × 23' and built on a dun (RCHM[S] 1928: 120). See also Macleod 1997: 75.

Site Number: 172
Township/Locality: Cille Bhànain
Grid Reference: NF 7655 4162
Dimensions: c.30m diameter
Depth of deposits: 1.50m
Surveyed: July 1996
Land Use: Ploughed (S half) and pasture
Pottery: Post-Medieval glazed sherd
Other Finds: Stone house ruins on top of low mound
Comments: On site marked as 'Kilivanen' settlement on 1805 map.

Site Number: 173
Township/Locality: Tobha Mòr
Grid Reference: NF 7565 3644

Dimensions: c.40m diameter
Depth of deposits: 1.50m
Surveyed: July 1996
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Shell
Comments: Shells in small area of cattle scrape. Site of wheelhouses acc. to the late Gill MacLean; remains seen by the late Donald MacLean. Another wheelhouse was reported by her at c.400m N of here on loch side (but there is no rise in the ground there). No rabbits.

Site Number: 174
Township/Locality: Tobha Mòr
Grid Reference: NF 7565 3641
Dimensions: c.60m diameter
Depth of deposits: 2m
Surveyed: July 1996
Land Use: Modern church
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Shell
Comments: The church sits on a truncated large mound. The mound's E part has been damaged by a recent carpark. Some of the mound is not artificial as the bedrock comes close to the surface on the E side. Acc. Gill MacLean archaeological deposits have been observed here. 100m SSE of the church there is another mound but unverified given lack of rabbit scrapes.

Site Number: 175
Township/Locality: Dreumasadal
Grid Reference: NF 7505 3706
Dimensions: c.50m diameter
Depth of deposits: 2m
Surveyed: July 1996, July 1999
Land Use: Pasture and sand blow-out
Pottery: Some MIA and EIA including a rim
Other Finds: Shell, bone, stone walls
Comments: A large blow-out has exposed a midden area and remains of two walls, one rounded. The site continues to be eroded. Taken there by Gill MacLean.

Site Number: 176
Township/Locality: Cill Donnain
Grid Reference: NF 7256 2881
Dimensions: c.30m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0.50m
Surveyed: July 1996, June 1997; trial excavated 1998
Land Use: Pasture/cultivation
Pottery: One sherd of EBA incised pottery. Beaker sherds excavated in 1998.
Other Finds: Pebbles, with shell and bone on W side
Comments: W of Sites 17 and 18. A settlement mound. Excavated by Niall Sharples in 1998 (when it was at first not recognized as Site 176 and mistakenly assigned the incorrect site number Site 238 as a result of a location error (E for W) in my early survey records). Dated by ceramic styles to the EBA. See Chapter 11 for excavation results.

Site Number: 177
Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach
Grid Reference: NF 7492 4428
Dimensions: c.30m
Depth of deposits: c.0.10m
Surveyed: June 1997, June 1998
Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell

Comments: A group of grassed hummocks covering the ground surface from which shells are visible in the rabbit burrows. This site is Ministry of Works number 3. It is probably part of the EBA settlement complex of Sites 177–185.

Site Number: 178

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7494 4419 (blow-out) and NF 7495 4420 (mound to E)

Dimensions: *c.*30m

Depth of deposits: *c.*0.1m

Surveyed: June 1997, June 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell and quartzite

Comments: A group of small irregular grassed hummocks and a grassed-over blow-out in which shells are visible. This site is Ministry of Works number 4. It is probably part of the EBA settlement complex of Sites 177–185.

Site Number: 179

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7489 4427

Dimensions: *c.*30m diameter

Depth of deposits: *c.*0.1m

Surveyed: June 1997

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell, quartz flakes and large stones

Comments: The large stones lie within a slight depression. They are too large and too chunky to have constituted prehistoric building stones and might have been dumped here recently. The flaked quartz lies on the N side of the depression and the shells lie on the N, E and W sides. This site is Ministry of Works number 5 and is part of the EBA complex 177–185.

Site Number: 180

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7483 4424

Dimensions: *c.*5m

Depth of deposits: *c.*0.10m

Surveyed: June 1997

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Stone building (a field bothy)

Comments: A small bothy but without any other signs of human presence. This site is Ministry of Works number 6.

Site Number: 181

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7489 4426

Dimensions: *c.*10m diameter

Depth of deposits: *c.*0.10m

Surveyed: June 1997

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell

Comments: This site lies *c.*50m E of Site 180 and is part of the EBA complex 177–185. It is visible as a patch of shells in disturbed ground. The grid reference is for the densest part of a very large scatter of shell on the N side of the stream.

Site Number: 182

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7500 4421

Dimensions: *c.*10m diameter

Depth of deposits: *c.*0.10m

Surveyed: June 1997, June 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Decorated rim sherd of a Beaker

Other Finds: Shell

Comments: A hummock covered with long grass, *c.*70m S of the small stream. The EBA Beaker pottery came from a rabbit burrow.

Site Number: 183

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7496 4422

Dimensions: *c.*15m diameter

Depth of deposits: *c.*0.10m

Surveyed: June 1997, June 1998 and visited in subsequent years

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Plain rim sherd of an EBA vessel and a Beaker rim sherd

Other Finds: Shell and stones

Comments: A grassy hummock with some stones, *c.*50m S of the small stream. The EBA pottery came from a rabbit burrow. There is an iron spike driven into the centre of this mound but it barely protrudes above the surface.

Site Number: 184

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7493 4417

Dimensions: *c.*10m N-S by 5m E-W

Depth of deposits: *c.*0.10m

Surveyed: June 1997 and all subsequent years to 2010

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: 14 sherds of a finely decorated Beaker and 4 sherds from two other Beakers (one decorated with twisted cord and the other with comb impressions).

Other Finds: Shell

Comments: A slightly raised area, *c.*100m S of the small stream. The EBA Beaker pottery came from a rabbit burrow on the W side of this small mound.

Site Number: 185

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7494 4415

Dimensions: *c.*8m diameter

Depth of deposits: *c.*0.10m

Surveyed: June 1997, June 1998, September 2000

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Two sherds, probably EBA, 2 more in September 2000.

Other Finds: Shells and quartz flake

Comments: A hummock covered with long grass, *c.*20m S of Site 184. The sherds, probably EBA, came from rabbit burrows.

Site Number: 186

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7474 4457

Dimensions: *c.*35m diameter

Depth of deposits: 1m

Surveyed: June 1997

Land Use: Ploughed

Pottery: Grass-impressed platter – Viking Age.

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: This small Viking Age settlement is being severely damaged by ploughing.

Site Number: 187

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7443 4500

Dimensions: c.15m diameter

Depth of deposits: 1m high

Surveyed: June 1997

Land Use: Ploughed

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: This small mound, being severely damaged by ploughing, lies between Sites 150 and 151, and is probably part of both/either. Thus it is probably LBA/EIA.

Site Number: 188

Township/Locality: Gleann Chill Donnain

Grid Reference: NF 757 280

Dimensions: Unknown

Depth of deposits: Unknown

Surveyed: 1989, June 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: One sherd

Other Finds: Three worked flints, probably in association with the sherd. A quartz flake was found in 1998

Comments: The flints and probably also the sherd came from the basal 0.20m of the blanket peat.

Site Number: 189

Township/Locality: Gearraidh Bhailteas

Grid Reference: NF 727 262

Dimensions: Unknown

Depth of deposits: Unknown

Surveyed: 1970s

Land Use: Unknown

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Antler tine

Comments: Midden on Milton machair found by C. Maclean. Not subsequently relocated.

Site Number: 190

Township/Locality: Cille Brighde

Grid Reference: NF 7530 1432

Dimensions: c.40m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.50m

Surveyed: June 1997

Land Use: Partly cultivated

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Slate, shell and bone

Comments: A large low mound immediately W of Site 98 and lower. Both sites have wide spreads of shells in the cultivated field c.100m to the N of them, suggesting that they have been flattened.

Site Number: 191

Township/Locality: Baghasdal

Grid Reference: NF 7365 1728

Dimensions: c.50m N-S and c.30m E-W

Depth of deposits: 1m

Surveyed: June 1997; test trenched by Raven

Land Use: Ploughed

Pottery: Pre-Viking LIA plain wares and Viking Age grass-impressed sherds

Other Finds: Shell and bone, a 17th century coin. Porcelain

came from off the mound to its E.

Comments: A low, badly ploughed mound c.100m S of Site 70. Geophysical survey by Raven identified 8 anomalies, all of which he test-trenched, revealing midden layers and stone structures (Raven 2005: 479). The associated pottery was MIA-LIA but some sherds may be Late Medieval.

Site Number: 192

Township/Locality: Baghasdal

Grid Reference: NF 7351 1754

Dimensions: 60m N-S and 30m E-W

Depth of deposits: 0.50m high

Surveyed: June 1997

Land Use: Ploughed

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: A low ploughed mound 200m N of Site 70

Site Number: 193

Township/Locality: Baghasdal

Grid Reference: NF 7343 1753

Dimensions: c.30m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.50m

Surveyed: June 1997

Land Use: Ploughed

Pottery: Two sherds and porcelain

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: A low ploughed mound c.150m W of Site 192

Site Number: 194

Township/Locality: Leth Meadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 737 170

Dimensions: ?

Depth of deposits: ?

Surveyed: RCAHMS records

Land Use: ?

Pottery: ?

Other Finds: Midden and human remains

Comments: Recorded by RCAHMS as a mound, midden and human remains but not relocated.

Site Number: 195

Township/Locality: Leth Meadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7379 1703

Dimensions: c.100m E-W and 50m N-S

Depth of deposits: 0m

Surveyed: June 1997

Land Use: Ploughed

Pottery: Porcelain and other 19th-century wares

Other Finds: Shell and bone, a burnt flint and two pieces of quartzite.

Comments: A large, sparse spread of shells and bone in a flat, ploughed area.

Site Number: 196

Township/Locality: Dalabrog

Grid Reference: NF 7351 2133

Dimensions: (?) 10m diameter (W side buried under a dune)

Depth of deposits: c.0.50m high

Surveyed: June 1997

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Many sherds – undiagnostic.

Other Finds: Shell and bone, piece of slag

Comments: A small low mound between Sites 59 and 60

Site Number: 197
Township/Locality: Upper Bornish
Grid Reference: NF 7296 2987
Dimensions: c.5m diameter
Depth of deposits: Unknown
Surveyed: 1997
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: One piece of porcelain
Other Finds: Shell
Comments: No evidence of a mound. This might have been the site of a 19th–20th century machair hut.

Site Number: 198
Township/Locality: Baghasdal
Grid Reference: NF 7330 1906
Dimensions: c.50m diameter
Depth of deposits: ?
Surveyed: June 1997
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Shell and a fish bone
Comments: Three rabbit holes in an otherwise undisturbed pasture field, producing seashells within clean sand. They are located in a level area below grassed dunes. This is in the same field as indicated for the stones comprising Site 94 and this may be part of the same site.

Site Number: 199
Township/Locality: Eiriosgaigh/Rubha Ban
Grid Reference: NF 7842 1175
Dimensions: c.50m diameter
Depth of deposits: 8m high
Surveyed: July 1997
Land Use: Cemetery and pasture
Pottery: Some – undiagnostic sherds
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: A very high mound which has the Rubha Ban burial ground on its SW side. The centre of the mound, on its S side, has the graveyard extension on top of it and this area will be damaged when new graves are eventually dug into it. The sherds came from a small scrape on the N side of the mound.

Site Number: 200
Township/Locality: Eiriosgaigh/Rubha Cladh
Grid Reference: NF 7835 1155
Dimensions: c.40m diameter
Depth of deposits: c.4m high
Surveyed: July 1997
Land Use: Largely underneath a burial ground
Pottery: Undiagnostic sherds
Other Finds: Shell and bone
Comments: A high settlement mound under Rubha Cladh, a burial ground that is rarely used anymore. The sherds came out of a small exposure on the W side of the mound where it is eroding down the cliff.

Site Number: 201
Township/Locality: Eiriosgaigh/Coilleag a'Phrionnsa
Grid Reference: NF 786 110
Dimensions: 4m diameter
Depth of deposits: 0m
Surveyed: July 1997
Land Use: Rough ground
Pottery: None
Other Finds: A circular stone setting

Comments: The centre of this stone setting above Coilleag a'Phrionnsa is wholly eroded and only the stone kerb remains. It is probably the remains of an EBA cairn.

Site Number: 202
Township/Locality: Drimore
Grid Reference: NF 763 408
Dimensions: c.30m diameter
Depth of deposits: c.2m
Surveyed: 1950s, June 1998
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Oyster shell and animal bone. 'Stone cairn'.
Comments: This potential archaeological site was described as a stone cairn during the Ministry of Works survey in the 1950s. It lies 800m NE of Drimore farm. Lots of stones are visible in the rabbit scrapes on the top of this mound, which is probably a settlement mound though no winkles, limpets or pottery were found. In 1998 the turf on top of the mound had been recently repaired. Hummocks to the N and S of this mound may similarly be archaeological features but they are undisturbed by rabbit burrows.

Site Number: 203
Township/Locality: Geirinis
Grid Reference: NF 7593 4221
Dimensions: ?
Depth of deposits: ?
Surveyed: Marked on O.S. map
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: None
Other Finds: None
Comments: Marked on the O.S. map as a burial ground. It has not been seen during this survey but probably survives c.600m S of the rocket range buildings at Geirinis.

Site Number: 204
Township/Locality: Gearraidh Fleugh
Grid Reference: NF 7555 4142
Dimensions: ?
Depth of deposits: ?
Surveyed: Ministry of Works 1950s
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: None
Other Finds: None
Comments: Recorded as site number 7 by the Ministry of Works but there is no trace of any archaeological remains (possibly confused with Site 118?).

Site Number: 205
Township/Locality: Dalabrog
Grid Reference: NF 734 215
Dimensions: c.20m diameter
Depth of deposits: c.1m
Surveyed: February 1998
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: A few sherds including a small piece with MIA incised lattice decoration.
Other Finds: Shell, bone and iron.
Comments: Found by Ramilsonina. It is largely buried except on its W side where rabbit burrows produce midden material. It must be close to the destroyed wheelhouse of Sithean na Phiobaire ('the piper's fairy hill') Site 157. This site may be in the vicinity of one found by Wedderspoon near the N side of a two-acre inland basin of slimy mud, known as the Old Loch

(1912: 330). The shells and bones were visible on the dark mud and the midden extended 20 yards northwards until covered by a sand hill. On the edge of this sand hill he found 'two hammer stones... several horn pins, and broken needles, a shaped piece of horn of the toothpick pattern, several human teeth and charred bones, a few fragments of pottery with herring bone markings, a number of flint flakes, and a chipped stone'. He is probably describing an EBA settlement and cremation burial.

Site Number: 206

Township/Locality: Cille Pheadair

Grid Reference: NF 7364 2044

Dimensions: c.80m diameter

Depth of deposits: c.8m

Surveyed: February 1998, June 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Many sherds but undiagnostic – probably Medieval or early Post-Medieval since they are thin and hard-fired.

Other Finds: Shell and bone. Several cockle shells in the western part. There are also mussels and razorfish shells.

Comments: Under the southeast and eastern edge of the large sand hill which is immediately N of the ancient burial ground Site 62. This is a very large settlement mound whose western half is buried beneath an even larger sand dune.

Site Number: 207

Township/Locality: Dalabrog

Grid Reference: NF 7355 2076

Dimensions: c.30m diameter

Depth of deposits: c.1.50m

Surveyed: February 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Some sherds including platter ware – Viking.

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: Immediately N of another Viking settlement mound Site 61.

Site Number: 208

Township/Locality: Dalabrog

Grid Reference: NF 7350 2082

Dimensions: c.5m diameter

Depth of deposits: c.0.50m

Surveyed: February 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Single sherd

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: A small exposure in the base of the SE face of a large sand dune c.100m NW of Site 207.

Site Number: 209

Township/Locality: Dalabrog

Grid Reference: NF 734 213

Dimensions: ?

Depth of deposits: ?

Surveyed: 1987

Land Use: ?

Pottery: Four undiagnostic sherds

Other Finds: None

Comments: Found by Martin Wildgoose.

Site Number: 210

Township/Locality: Gearraidh Bhailteas

Grid Reference: NF 729 259

Dimensions: ?

Depth of deposits: ?

Surveyed: 1987

Land Use: ?

Pottery: some – undiagnostic sherds

Other Finds: Iron, pumice and a small rectangular copper alloy sheet 12mm × 7mm with two 1mm holes, one drilled near each end.

Comments: A midden found by Martin Wildgoose.

Site Number: 211

Township/Locality: Cill Donnain

Grid Reference: NF 724 280

Dimensions: ?

Depth of deposits: ?

Surveyed: 1987

Land Use: ?

Pottery: Six undiagnostic sherds.

Other Finds: None

Comments: A midden found by Martin Wildgoose.

Site Number: 212

Township/Locality: Cille Pheadair

Grid Reference: NF 7361 2039

Dimensions: c.20m diameter

Depth of deposits: c.0.10m

Surveyed: February 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell and iron (not kept)

Comments: The site of the vanished inn on the machair track acc. to Seumus MacDonald and Angus Mackenzie (who farms this croft). Mr Mackenzie recalls that the inn was in use during the time of his grandfather's grandfather. The inn is not marked on the 1805 Bald map and was presumably in use in the mid to late 19th century.

Site Number: 213

Township/Locality: Cill Donnain

Grid Reference: NF 728 287

Dimensions: Unknown

Depth of deposits: Unknown

Surveyed: 1989

Land Use: Pasture/dune

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Human skull fragment

Comments: Found by David Gilbertson in 1989 but the site has not since been relocated.

Site Number: 214

Township/Locality: Cille Pheadair

Grid Reference: NF 7333 2010

Dimensions: c.20m diameter

Depth of deposits: c.1m

Surveyed: June 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Footed base sherd

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: A large sand dune with shells and bone from the lower parts of its northern and southwest sides. The sherd came from the SW part of the mound. This is within 100m S of the Kilpheder wheelhouse mound and is probably one of the sites recorded by Lethbridge (1952).

Site Number: 215

Township/Locality: Dalabrog

Grid Reference: NF 7324 2198

Dimensions: c.5m diameter

Depth of deposits: c.1m

Surveyed: June 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Some – 6 sherds probably LBA/EIA and one possibly Medieval or Beaker

Other Finds: Cockle shells (no limpets or winkles), quartz flakes

Comments: This is a small mound partially covered by dunes and lying within a deep depression surrounded by high dunes on all sides, c.70m E of the machair track. It may be the same site as that found by Mr J. Wedderspoon in 1912 when he described a very large midden in the E end of a 'wind-swept hollow' 'at the bottom of the hill occupied by the burial ground'. The midden extended eastwards to 'about 30 yards west from the enclosure'. 'One part of the midden was composed almost entirely of cockle shells; the rest of the surface was covered with shells and bones indiscriminately. A considerable number of burnt stones in groups were found at several places... On a smaller mound a little detached from the large midden, a considerable number of flints were found... a well marked hammer stone was found with the flints, one end damaged by fire, and a bone needle... Several hammer stones were got at the large midden, two bearing marks of fire, also a bronze knob, several human teeth, a bone bodkin, broken bone needles, fragments of coarse pottery, and a number of wrought bones of unknown use. The latter were found near the centre of the hollow on a smaller midden, which was entirely covered with splinters of horn and bone. On a subsequent visit to the midden another small heap of charred bones was found, with a few fragments of the urn marked in a herring bone pattern ... near a ring of fire-marked stones.'

Site Number: 216

Township/Locality: Dalabrog

Grid Reference: NF 7339 2011

Dimensions: c.5m diameter

Depth of deposits: c.0.10m or less

Surveyed: June 1998

Land Use: Exposed sand blow-out

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell and bone

Comments: A sparse spread of shell and bone in a deep blow-out S of the E-W track. There are no midden layers, presumably deflated though these may be better preserved beneath dunes to the E. There is also much recently dumped material here. It is probably one of the sites recorded by Lethbridge (1952).

Site Number: 217

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7497 4424

Dimensions: c.9m diameter

Depth of deposits: c.0.40m

Surveyed: June 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Four sherds of thick-walled pottery from S side of mound – probably EBA

Other Finds: Shell, bone and quartz

Comments: A heavily burrowed mound, 12m from the edge of the stream just E of where it bends steeply.

Site Number: 218

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7495 4424

Dimensions: c.10m diameter

Depth of deposits: c.0.50m

Surveyed: June 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell, bone and quartz flakes

Comments: This low mound lies 10m N of Site 183 and 10m S of the edge of the stream just W of its bend. It is heavily burrowed.

Site Number: 219

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7498 4423

Dimensions: c.7m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.30m

Surveyed: June 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell, bone and quartz

Comments: This low mound lies between Sites 217 and 218 but is 20m S of the bend in the stream and 10m NE of Site 183. It is heavily burrowed.

Site Number: 220

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7495 4423

Dimensions: c.9m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.30m

Surveyed: June 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell, bone and quartz

Comments: This low mound lies 10m W of Site 218 and 14m S of the stream. There are two large stone blocks immediately W of this heavily burrowed mound.

Site Number: 221

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7500 4423

Dimensions: c.7m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.30m

Surveyed: June 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell and quartz – very sparse

Comments: This mound is 5m NE of Site 182.

Site Number: 222

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7504 4418

Dimensions: c.9m N-S by c.50m E-W

Depth of deposits: 0.50m

Surveyed: June 1998, Sept 2000

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Sherd of decorated Beaker and EBA sherd found in September 2000 from the small mound 5m to the N

Other Finds: Shell, bone and quartz

Comments: This marram-topped row of low humps lies c.40m SE of Site 182. Another mound (producing the Beaker and EBA sherds) lies 5m to the N of this low row of humps.

Site Number: 223

Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach

Grid Reference: NF 7541 4443

Dimensions: c.20m diameter

Depth of deposits: c.1m

Surveyed: June 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell

Comments: Several rabbit scrapes have produced shells within a larger windblown N-S dune which runs parallel and to the W of the dune ridge containing Site 133 and others. This site lies within the most westerly dune within this southern area of the dune complex.

Site Number: 224

Township/Locality: Peighinn nan Aoireann

Grid Reference: NF 7405 3525

Dimensions: 5m diameter

Depth of deposits: ?

Surveyed: June 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Stone ring

Comments: A horseshoe-shaped stone structure with a 1m-wide wall of sea-worn stones enclosing a circular area of c.3m diameter. The horseshoe is open on the NE side. This structure is set into peat on the vet's croft in a field, c.80m SW of the field's N corner.

Site Number: 225/227

Township/Locality: Dalabrog

Grid Reference: NF 7317 2159

Dimensions: c.5m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.30m

Surveyed: June 1998, July 1998, geophysical survey 2000

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell and a flint flake

Comments: A low circular mound c.10m SW of Site 226. Resistivity and magnetometry surveys were carried out on Sites 57, 225/227 and 226 by Chamberlain in September 2000. An anomaly to the E of Site 226 may be the remains of an E-W oriented EBA house.

Site Number: 226

Township/Locality: Dalabrog

Grid Reference: NF 7318 2161

Dimensions: c.5m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.30m

Surveyed: July 1998, geophysical survey 2000

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell

Comments: A low circular mound 20m SW of Site 57. Resistivity and magnetometry surveys were carried out on Sites 57, 225/227 and 226 by Chamberlain in September 2000. An anomaly to the E of Site 226 may be the remains of an E-W oriented EBA house.

Site Number: 228

Township/Locality: Staoinebrig

Grid Reference: NF 7312 3330

Dimensions: c.60m N-S by c.20m E-W

Depth of deposits: 1.50m

Surveyed: July 1998; this may be the site recorded by Moore and Wilson 2005 as SU53

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell

Comments: Grey soils but no bone or pot. The small heap of

stones on its top may be modern. This site is possibly an extension of Site 42.

Site Number: 229

Township/Locality: Staoinebrig

Grid Reference: NF 7301 3337

Dimensions: c.6m diameter

Depth of deposits: 1.50m

Surveyed: July 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: None

Comments: A small circular/oval stone cairn with a large, loose stone on top. It is c.60m W of the cemetery wall. A second small mound, 15m to the NE, may be another.

Site Number: 230

Township/Locality: Staoinebrig

Grid Reference: NF 7305 3335

Dimensions: c.10m diameter

Depth of deposits: 2m

Surveyed: July 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell and bone from the soil within the stones

Comments: A stone cairn immediately W of the SE corner of the cemetery wall.

Site Number: 231

Township/Locality: Staoinebrig

Grid Reference: NF 7317 3334

Dimensions: c.20m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.20m

Surveyed: July 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: Shell

Comments: A slight bump c.50m SSE of the cemetery's southern gate and c.50m NE of Site 228.

Site Number: 232

Township/Locality: Aisgernis

Grid Reference: NF 7328 2391

Dimensions: c.30m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.50m

Surveyed: July 1998. Test trench excavated July 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: Two sherds – undiagnostic

Other Finds: Shell and bone.

Comments: This and Sites 48, 96 and 97 are NF72SW 21. Trial Trench 11 (1m square) was dug into the middle of this low mound, immediately S of the gate onto the golf course road (within the same field as Site 48). The trial trench revealed three main layers but the site remains undated.

Site Number: 233

Township/Locality: Aisgernis

Grid Reference: NF 7332 2319

Dimensions: c.30m diameter

Depth of deposits: 0.30m

Surveyed: July 1998

Land Use: Pasture

Pottery: None

Other Finds: None

Comments: The site of the 'old town' which was robbed of its

stones acc. to Uilleam Macdonald. This low mound is three fields to the S of Site 48 and has no rabbit burrows or surface traces of former human activity. Another low mound 40m N-S × 20m E-W lies at NF 7329 2327 c.100m to the NW of Site 233 and may be another site.

Site Number: 234
Township/Locality: Aisgernis
Grid Reference: NF 7329 2361
Dimensions: c.60m N-S by 20m E-W.
Depth of deposits: c.0.30m
Surveyed: July 1998
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Shell
Comments: Only one rabbit hole in this long low mound.

Site Number: 235
Township/Locality: Fuday
Grid Reference:
Dimensions: c.40m diameter
Depth of deposits: c.1.50m
Surveyed: July 1998
Land Use: Grass
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Complete saddle quern
Comments: Since there are no rabbits on Fuday there are no burrows in which to find shells. The saddle quern lies on the SE edge of the mound.

Site Number: 236
Township/Locality: Fuday
Grid Reference:
Dimensions: Southern cairn c.10m diameter; northern cairn c.7m diameter
Depth of deposits: Southern 1.50m high, northern c.1.20m high
Surveyed: July 1998
Land Use: Grass
Pottery: None
Other Finds: None
Comments: Two kerbed cairns on the headland on the NW part of the island. The northern cairn, with its large stones, is disturbed.

Site Number: 237
Township/Locality: Smercleit/Tipperton
Grid Reference: NF 739 153
Dimensions: ?
Depth of deposits: ?
Surveyed: 1920s. Not located in 1998. Re-discovered by Moore and Wilson 2005 as SU74
Land Use: Beach
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Stone cists with inhumations reported by RCHAM(S); NF71NW 7.
Comments: No trace of these in 1998. Apparently the stones from these cists were incorporated into the dyke which brings fresh water to the beach but no obvious cist stones are visible within the walls of the dyke.

Site Number: 238
Township/Locality: Frobst
Grid Reference: NF 7287 2566

Dimensions: 3m E-W × 20m N-S (partially buried under large dune to W)
Depth of deposits: ?
Surveyed: June 1999
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: Thick but hard sherds may be Viking Age or Pictish LIA – a base has a horizontal groove
Other Finds: Norse bone pin, shell and bone
Comments: On the W side of a long, narrow N-S gully, this site may be the eastern limit of Sites 45 and 46 (which produced mostly Pictish LIA pottery). Jerry Bond found a Norse bone pin here in June 1996.

Site Number: 239
Township/Locality: Machair Mheadhanach
Grid Reference: NF 7560 4440
Dimensions: c.10m E-W × 20m N-S
Depth of deposits: 0.50m
Surveyed: July 1999
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Shells
Comments: The site is immediately W of the N-S barbed wire fence and c.30m NW of Site 129. It could possibly be the findspot of the metal finds detected by Craig Allaker in June 1999 though these are more likely to have been found on Site 128.

Site Number: 240
Township/Locality: Dalabrog
Grid Reference: NF 7323 2181
Dimensions: c.40m diameter
Depth of deposits: 2m
Surveyed: September 2000
Land Use: Pasture
Pottery: None
Other Finds: Shells and bone
Comments: The shell and bone were seen in rabbit scrapes on the S side of the mound. This site lies immediately N of Site 58.

Notes

- 1 All place-names are given in their Gaelic spelling, except for those which are regularly referred to in their Anglicized form, notably the excavated sites at Dun Vulcan, Kilpheder wheelhouse and Hornish Point. A short English-Gaelic glossary of place-names is provided as the Appendix at the end of this volume.
- 2 The numbering system for sites on the machair relates solely to the *machair* survey (for the Loch Aoineart site inventory, see Chapter 4). Sites have been numbered according to the sequence in which they were found (or incorporated into the inventory) and are listed in the site inventory at the end of this chapter.
- 3 This site was erroneously named as Sithean Biorach during the first season of excavation, a mistake also made by the EASE team in their coastal assessment (Moore and Wilson 2005) who recorded it as their site SU21; Sithean Biorach is actually Site 88, a washed-away settlement mound formerly at the promontory to the north of the site.
- 4 See Chapter 6 for an inventory of island brochs and duns.
- 5 Human remains dating to the seventh century AD were recovered from the coast at NF 7391 4564 in 2005 (NF74NW 4).

- 6 Although excavations at Cille Pheadair indicate that proportions of platter ware rise from c.5% to 46% between the 11th and 13th centuries.
- 7 Andrew Reynolds of the Institute of Archaeology at UCL re-surveyed the Howmore structures and carried out a small excavation immediately east of the graveyard (Reynolds *et al.* 2004).
- 8 I have used the English place-names for Upper and Lower Bornish to avoid the Gaelic terms for ‘upper’ and ‘lower’ since these would not be recognizable to most readers without recourse to a dictionary. Bornish (Bornais) is divided into two townships, Upper and Lower Bornish. The latter is to the north of Upper Bornish but there are small parcels of land within Upper Bornish which are marked on Bald’s map as being parts of Lower Bornish. These are principally on part of Ardvule, the promontory where Dun Vulcan is located, and on the machair where the concentration of Sites 11–16 is located. Whereas there is just a single small pre-Viking LIA site on Lower Bornish’s main area of machair (Site 4), the group of Sites 11–16 is located within the land parcel south of Upper Bornish designated as part of Lower Bornish. A possible explanation for this is that Lower Bornish was originally south of Upper Bornish when the communities were living on the machair. When they moved off the machair and onto the edge of the blacklands, at the end of the Norse period, the community of Lower Bornish was unable to relocate onto its adjacent peatlands, on account of the position of Loch Bornish there, and thus moved to the edge of the peatlands 3km further north. We might also surmise that the Ardvule promontory was shared between the two communities. Elsewhere I have also used the terms ‘South Bornish’ and ‘North Bornish’ for the geographical description of the southern and northern parts of Bornish’s machair. These do not correspond perfectly to the political divisions of Upper and Lower Bornish and are used purely as a descriptive means of dividing the Bornish machair north and south of the road which runs out to the Ardvule promontory.
- 9 They are site numbers: 11, 15, 28–32, 35–43, 46–48, 51, 57, 59, 61, 62, 78, 79, 86, 92, 93, 96, 97, 99, 159, 160, 164, 165, 173, 174, 179, 180, 196–198, 208 and 212.
- 10 Sites 61 (the MIA component of the mound), 79, 81, 88 and 157.
- 11 Sites 1, 12, 16, 45, 53, 58, 60, 85, 87, 175, 181 and 201.
- 12 They are: 1–3, 5–10, 19, 83, 84 (in the Dun Vulcan environs area), 45 (Frobost), 52, 53, 56, 58, 60, 63, 205–207 (in the Cladh Hallan/Cille Pheadair area), and 136, 177, 178, 182–185 in the Machair Mheadhanach area.
- 13 Their rise in numbers may be linked to the systematic killing in 1994 of their main predator, the polecat, which was thought to be eating birds’ eggs. Currently the most serious predator of birds’ eggs is the introduced hedgehog. Although it lives in rabbit burrows it poses no apparent risk to archaeological sites. The shooting of rabbits for domestic consumption has disappeared entirely.
- 14 They are: Sites 1–4, 13, 14, 17, 18, 20–27, 33, 34, 44, 90, 176 (Dun Vulcan environs), 67–69, 71, 72, 191–195 (Baghasdal machair), 74 and 75 (Smercleit), 98, 190 (Cille Bhrighde), 101, 102, 119 (Tobha Beag to Groigearraidh), 118, 129, 131, 136, 142–145, 148–155, 166–170, 186, 187 (Cille Bhànain and Machair Mheadhanach).

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3 The blacklands survey: Cill Donnain and Gearraidh Bhailteas townships

Andrew Fleming

The first, exploratory year of this survey covered a transect (Figure 3.1) from Beinn Mhòr and Loch Olaidh an Ear, to Taobh a Deas Loch Aoineart, over Beinn Coraraidh, through the north side of Gleann Chill Donnain and the area of Loch Chill Donnain Uarach to the machair near the Cill

Donnain excavated settlement sites (Zvelebil 1991).¹ It was then decided not to attempt to create a detailed record or distribution map of archaeological ‘sites and monuments’. It was clear that to employ a small number of half-trained students in making records of a large number of largely uninformative, stand-alone ‘sites’ would make little impact on our understanding of the history of this part of South Uist. Much of the visible surface archaeology in the survey area is apparently the product of the last two or three centuries, a period already well known from documentary sources (*e.g.* Cameron 1986; Craig 1990).

It was therefore decided to concentrate on recording and interpreting two sites with a relatively high information content – the church and associated structures at Cille Donnain (NF 731 282; NF72NW 4) and a multi-phase complex of stone-footed buildings at Gearraidh Bhailteas (NF 735 265; NF72NW 27).² The former was clearly considerably earlier, in part at least, than most of the other sites encountered, and the latter offered much more evidence of chronological depth than is normally available. Towards the end of the survey period, attention was turned towards the understanding of areas in which the relationships between houses, boundaries, sets of cultivation ridges and constructed pathways allow them to be read as coherent archaeological ‘landscapes’, albeit of mostly early 19th-century date. It was this initiative which was subsequently continued by Jim Symonds as the ‘Landscape of Flora MacDonald’ project (Symonds 1997). In what follows, the sites at Cille Donnain and Gearraidh Bhailteas are described in some detail. But it is appropriate to start with a brief general account of the archaeology of the survey area.

In the hills, mostly to the east of the A865 road, ‘sites’ are not uncommon but are usually only roughly dateable. There are a few ruined rectangular buildings with stone footings, many of which probably relate to the ‘improvement’ and clearance phases of the first half of the 19th century. We were unable to develop criteria which allowed us to identify any of these structures as of earlier date. There are also ‘shielings’, groups of small rectangular stone-footed cabins often visible at a distance because of the bright green

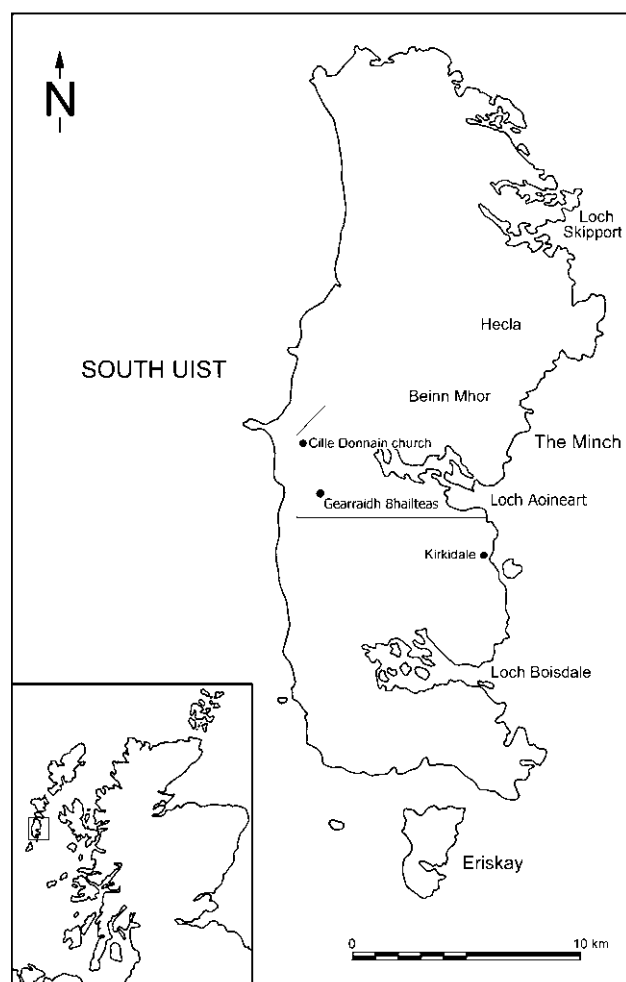


Figure 3.1. Map of South Uist, showing the blacklands survey area

patches of grass around them, which stand out against the heather (see Chapter 7). Some of them are on grass-covered mounds that may represent the accumulated ruins of their predecessors; but it is not always possible to be certain that these are not prehistoric burial cairns of Neolithic or Bronze Age date. The latter would have been attractive to the cabin-builders as sources of stone and as locations for the cabins themselves; they were vantage points from which large areas of pasture could have been kept under observation. More detailed investigation of these ‘shieling’ sites may augment the distribution of megalithic tombs, and add to the rather meagre scatter of putative Bronze Age burial cairns of small and medium size in the area.

There may be prehistoric sites beneath the extensive areas of deeper blanket peat in the valley floor areas, although a careful inspection of contemporary peat cuttings was largely unproductive; the only sub-peat walls noted were located near the Neolithic cairn at Reineval (NF 7549 2597); one stretch of wall some 40m long is only about 150m southeast of the cairn. Where the blanket peat is thinner, it is possible in one or two places to locate one or two short lengths of walling, or a primitive enclosure, such as the roughly rectangular one measuring some 30m × 15m defined by boulder walls, and built just below a steep slope, west of Trinneabhal (NF 774 266).

In the more low-lying terrain to the west of the hills and mostly to the west of the main road, archaeological sites and features – mostly the ruins of rectangular stone-footed buildings, turf and stone walls of varying degrees of preservation, and cultivation ridges – are much more densely distributed, although there is little to indicate that they are more than about two centuries old. In theory it should be possible to interpret the stone building foundations, in chronological succession, as components of pre-improvement townships, as buildings erected on post-improvement tenant farms, as buildings representing dispersal and/or squatting consequent upon clearance, or as buildings relating to the early life of 20th-century crofts. In practice this enterprise is not straightforward; in any case some buildings have gone through more than one phase of construction. Unfortunately the details of Bald’s map of 1805 are not to be trusted with regard to houses and settlement plans. Caird’s research (1979) shows that the boundaries of the farms created in the early 19th century in the Iochdar area were different from those of the earlier townships. Information about the history of some of the buildings is still available from local people.

Cille Donnain church and associated structures

A detailed account of the site of the Cille Donnain church and associated structures, carried out before the project’s excavations, has been published elsewhere (Fleming and Woolf 1992); this account will provide a more succinct summary of what is known of the site, taking into account the excavation results (see Chapter 14).

The remains of Cille Donnain church are clearly identifiable, despite the statement to the contrary in the

RCAHM(S) volume published in 1928, based on fieldwork carried out just a couple of weeks after the outbreak of the First World War (NF72NW 4). They are located, with other buildings, on a knoll on the neck of a short, narrow promontory in the northwestern sector of Loch Chill Donnain (Figures 3.2–3.4). The walls of the church have apparently not been very much robbed, despite the presence of Building A (probably 19th-century) immediately to its south, and other walls and structures nearby which are also probably of 19th-century date. The church was bicameral, with a clearly defined nave (about 8.52m × 4.40m internally) and chancel (3.10m long × 2.30m wide). A narrow door linked the nave with the chancel, and the main (sole?) entrance was apparently in the west wall.

Cille Donnain is one of a group of four known bicameral churches on the Western Isles (the others being Teampall Eoin, Bragor and Teampall Pheadair, Shader [Lewis]) and Vallay [North Uist]). There are at least eight reasonably comparable bicameral churches in Orkney, seven in Shetland (five of them in the northernmost island, Unst), and one at Lybster in Caithness (for more detail see Fleming and Woolf 1992). These churches are regarded as being broadly 12th century in date (RCAHMS 1946 vol. 1: 45); recent attempts, not involving excavation, to date a few of them more closely have proved problematic. With its internal area of c. 44.5sq m, Cille Donnain is one of a group of five relatively large bicameral churches (only two more complex cases, at Egilsay and Brough of Birsay, are significantly larger than the other members of this group). Both the Shetland churches in the group – Kirk of Ness (Yell) and St John’s, Norwick (Unst) – were headchurches in terms of Shetland’s ecclesiastical organization (Cant 1975: 15). Cille Donnain was significantly larger than the other two measurable bicameral churches in the Western Isles.

It has been argued that Cille Donnain was a high-status site (Fleming and Woolf 1992). This contention is not simply based upon the size of the church’s floor area. The church must have been built within the first century or so after Christianity became established among the Norse communities of the Western Isles and, in these circumstances, it is more likely than not that it started life as a private church belonging to a high-status individual, rather than as a community or district church. In this context the role of the neighbouring island of Eilean Mòr is worth serious consideration. It is a relatively ‘high’ island with a broad, fairly flat top, linked to the church promontory by a causeway in two parts which incorporates a low, flat island as a ‘stepping stone’. Eilean Mòr holds the ruins of four rectangular buildings – the largest one (A) measuring 10m–12m × 4m internally – and there are indications of a landing-place on the east side of the island, just below Building A. There is no sign that the island has ever been ‘fortified’.

Eilean Mòr is clearly not one of the structures of the dun/crannog type, presumed to have late prehistoric origins, which are to be found on quite a few natural and artificial islands in the South Uist lochs (see Chapter 6). In any case the topography of the island makes it an unlikely site

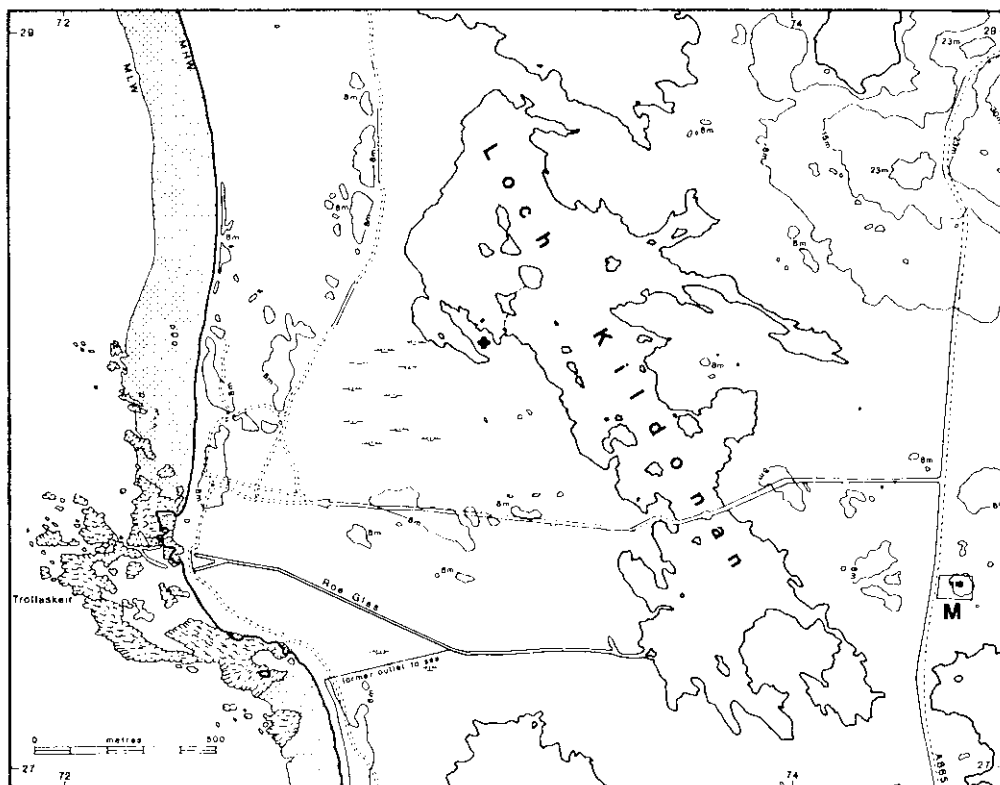


Figure 3.2. Map of Loch Chill Donnain Uarach (Upper Loch Kildonan), showing the church site on the west side of the loch

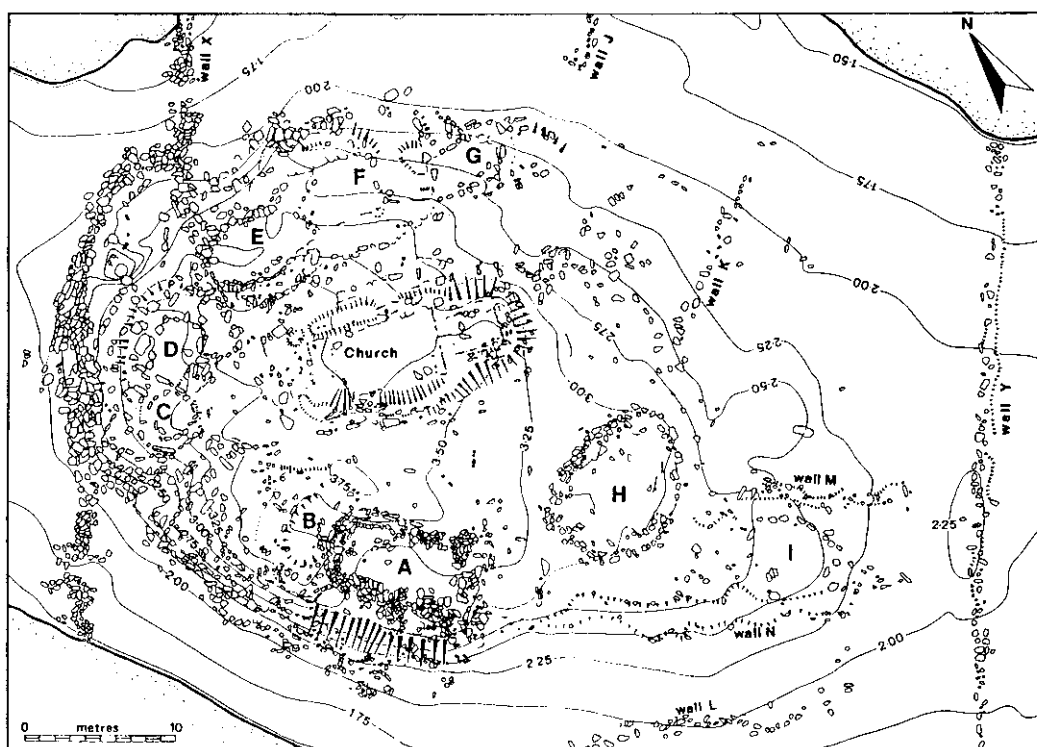


Figure 3.3. Earthwork plan of Cille Donnain church

for such an edifice. On the other hand, if this cluster of buildings had some status in the Post-Medieval period (and it is clearly not a conventional settlement type), one would expect its name to have survived. That it has not would

be consonant with the idea that the site did not survive in use into the Late/Post-Medieval 'Gaelicisation' period. Nor does the site display any sign of Post-Medieval architecture of the sort visible at nearby Caisteal Bheagram.

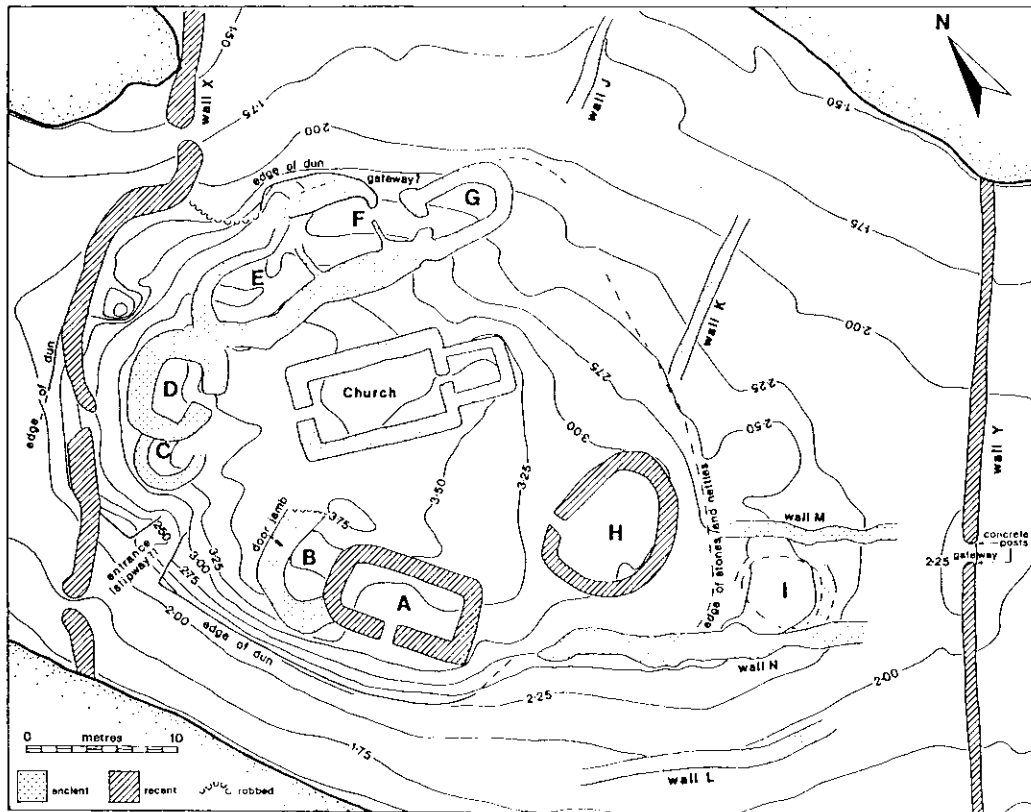


Figure 3.4. Interpretive plan of Cille Donnain church

These considerations make it quite possible that the church and the cluster of buildings on Eilean Mòr are contemporary; the configuration is comparable with that at Finlaggan on Islay, the traditional seat of the Lords of the Isles. There are now numerous Late Medieval/Post-Medieval buildings identified at Finlaggan, but it is arguable that the core features here were a prestige residence and a church, on an island, with a causeway leading to a much smaller island 30m across with three buildings on it – Eilean na Comhairle (Council Island). The topography around Finlaggan reminded Munro (1961: 99) of the high-status site at Tingwall (Shetland) which was also associated with council meetings.

Certainly Cille Donnain/Eilean Mòr is well situated to have fulfilled the function of a local *thing*-site, a regional central place, in Norse times. Timothy Pont's map (Stone 1989), dating from c. 1595, suggests that only here – via the natural predecessor of the Roe Glas drainage channel – and at Howmore (Tobha Mòr) was it possible to get from the ocean to the inland lochs by boat. From some way out to sea, the profile of the ruined broch at Dun Vulcan (Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999) would doubtless have been more impressive than it is today – hence Bornais (Bornish), the 'fort headland' – and would have formed a good seamark for approaching ships; also the buildings on the top of Eilean Mòr would have been more prominent from the sea when the level of the top of the machair was lower. Going north from Loch Chill Donnain, according to Pont's map, it would have been possible to enter Loch Bhornais,

and seemingly, via lochs and connecting channels, to travel by boat nearly as far south as Dalabrog (Daliburgh). This configuration, of course, pre-dates the coastal changes precipitated by the unusually violent storms around 1700 (Walker 1980: 13), and the artificially-improved drainage of the last two centuries.

From the east, a boat could get to within 4km of Cille Donnain via Loch Aoineart; a brief scramble would have taken its crew to the saddle at the head of Gleann Chill Donnain, from which buildings on the high island of Eilean Mòr would have been clearly visible (in favourable weather conditions). Not only was Eilean Mòr a good centre for access by water, it was also very close to the main, perhaps the only, long-distance dry land route (dry being the operative word!), the spinal road along the machair that linked all the proto-townships of South Uist. The island itself commanded good views over a naturally-defined unit of land centred on Gleann Chill Donnain to the east, and, to the west, over contemporary settlements on the machair. If, finally, one takes into account its position halfway along the South Uist coastline, the Cille Donnain/Eilean Mòr site would have been in an excellent position to play a central sociopolitical role in the 12th century, as a high-status residence, and/or an important ecclesiastical centre, and/or a *thing* site.

Relating the origins of the site to contemporary document-based history is problematic. If one follows Cant (1984) in accepting that the patterns of church dedications in western Scotland are much more likely to

represent preferences within the world of Norse Christianity than the mission districts of the Hiberno-Christian ‘saints’ themselves, the Donnain dedications seem to relate to areas controlled by the heirs of Godred Crovan (died *c.* 1095) rather than those controlled by the heirs of Somerled mac Gilla Brigte, who seem to have favoured Colum Cille (the definition of these two spheres of influence was clarified after a decisive sea battle which took place in 1156). In this context it is only to be expected that it is Howmore, the church of Mary with a chapel dedicated to Colum Cille, which has come to be regarded as the most important ecclesiastical site in South Uist.

After the battle of Largs in 1265 the Norse lost control of the Isles and the MacRuaidhri³ heirs of Somerled took over; the MacRuaidhris might well have promoted the Howmore site at the expense of Cille Donnain. In 1549 this part of South Uist was in ‘the parochin of Howf [Howmore]’ (Munro 1961: 76) and a 1625 deed (Macdonald 1978: 321) suggests that Kildonan township with its five penny lands was significantly smaller than its neighbours (Bornish and Garryvaltos [Gearraidh Bhailteas]). The Cille Donnain church is absent from Pont’s map of *c.* 1595 (Stone 1989) on which churches are normally marked with a standard symbol; it is also absent from the maps of Mercator (1564) and Ortelius (1570), on which churches are the only non-natural features indicated. Probably the church was a roofless ruin by the mid-16th century, if not earlier.

That the sphere of influence of Godred Crovan’s heirs was formalized after 1156 does not imply that Cille Donnain/Eilean Mòr must have been created after that date. It has already been suggested that the site may embody the same basic concept as at Finlaggan, and there are potential links between the two areas. Godred Crovan died on Islay around 1095 and might well have lived there; garbled Icelandic accounts (the *Kings Sagas* and a verse by the Skald Gisli) suggest that Lagman, Godred’s son and heir, also known as Ivistar Gramr, or Prince of Uist, might have had some sort of vice-regal position in the Outer Isles during his father’s reign (Vigfusson and Powell 1883, vol. II: 241–2). This does supply a context for the occurrence of a high-status site of Finlaggan type in South Uist, with a church dedicated to a saint favoured by Godred Crovan’s family, though it might equally have been one of Lagman’s successors who was responsible for the developments at Cille Donnain/Eilean Mòr.

On the knoll near the church there are various other features. There are the two cross-walls X and Y which look recent; they may go with Structure A which was in existence when the first edition of the six-inch Ordnance Survey map was published in 1881, but they might be even more recent than that. Structure H is interpreted as a relatively recent stock pen, on the basis of its appearance and comments made by local visitors to the site. There are also a few possible stretches of walling which are un-interpretable. Two sets of probably non-recent walled structures are encountered on the knoll – a ‘range’ of rather irregular and apparently conjoined buildings (E, F, G) which look different from most of the stone-footed structures encountered on our

survey, and two small sub-rectangular structures B and D, apparently both with side entrances, the former being clearly earlier than Structure A. The relationship between Structures D and E makes it seem likely that E is the later of the two structures, and unlikely, but not impossible, that they were in contemporaneous use.

To the southwest of the church is a carefully-constructed access and docking facility for a small boat; it is apparently continuous with a wall-face that revets the lower edge of the knoll, and which was demonstrated to be recent in trial excavations carried out on the site (see Chapter 14). Originally it was interpreted as defining the edge of what was called the ‘dun’; apparent fragmentary stretches of facing wall and two small quarries which seem to have robbed it were encountered on the west and north edges of the knoll, and the north wall of Structure F, which is considerably thicker than the north walls of its neighbours E and G, could have formed part of a perimeter wall. Along the eastern side of the top of the knoll the distinct linear ‘edge’ of a zone of stones and nettles is visible.

The evidence does seem to suggest the former existence here of a structure comparable to one of the larger ‘island duns’, heavily robbed out and evidently recently refurbished in the area of the boat access area. At 35m–40m across it would be larger than most of the island duns in the area, but quite comparable in size with the one on the west side of Upper Loch Bornish (NF 742 291) which is on a similar promontory location near the shore of the loch, at any rate at present water levels (see Chapter 12). The presence of some kind of island dun here on Loch Chill Donnain would fill a rather obvious distributional gap. The availability of building stone from this putative early structure might have been one reason for the choice of site for the church, and perhaps some of the other buildings on the knoll, on this particular spot. A comparable case occurs at St Tredwell’s chapel on Papa Westray, Orkney.

If the current summer water levels were to rise by about 0.70m–0.80m, or the highest winter levels by about 0.40m, the Cille Donnain knoll would become an island. In these circumstances it is worth considering what is known or deducible about water levels in the past. Today’s loch levels are ‘unnatural’ in the sense that they are influenced by the Roe Glas and other drainage enterprises of the past two or three centuries, and also by the causeway for the road between the A865 and the sea. However, these levels may be much the same as they have been for the past few centuries; it seems in any case that the Roe Glas had a natural predecessor (see above). In the absence of artificial drainage it is hard to believe that water levels have ever been much *lower* than at the present time. Pont’s map of *c.* 1595 shows several islands in Loch Chill Donnain; since almost all of the islands in the loch are low-lying, it seems unlikely that water levels were much *higher* than today. If the buildings on Eilean Mòr date from the 12th century and the causeways leading to them are of the same date, it follows that the water levels cannot have been much higher at that time, since the island used as a ‘stepping stone’ would otherwise have been submerged.



Figure 3.5. Earthwork plan of Gearraidh Bhailteas (Garryvaltos)

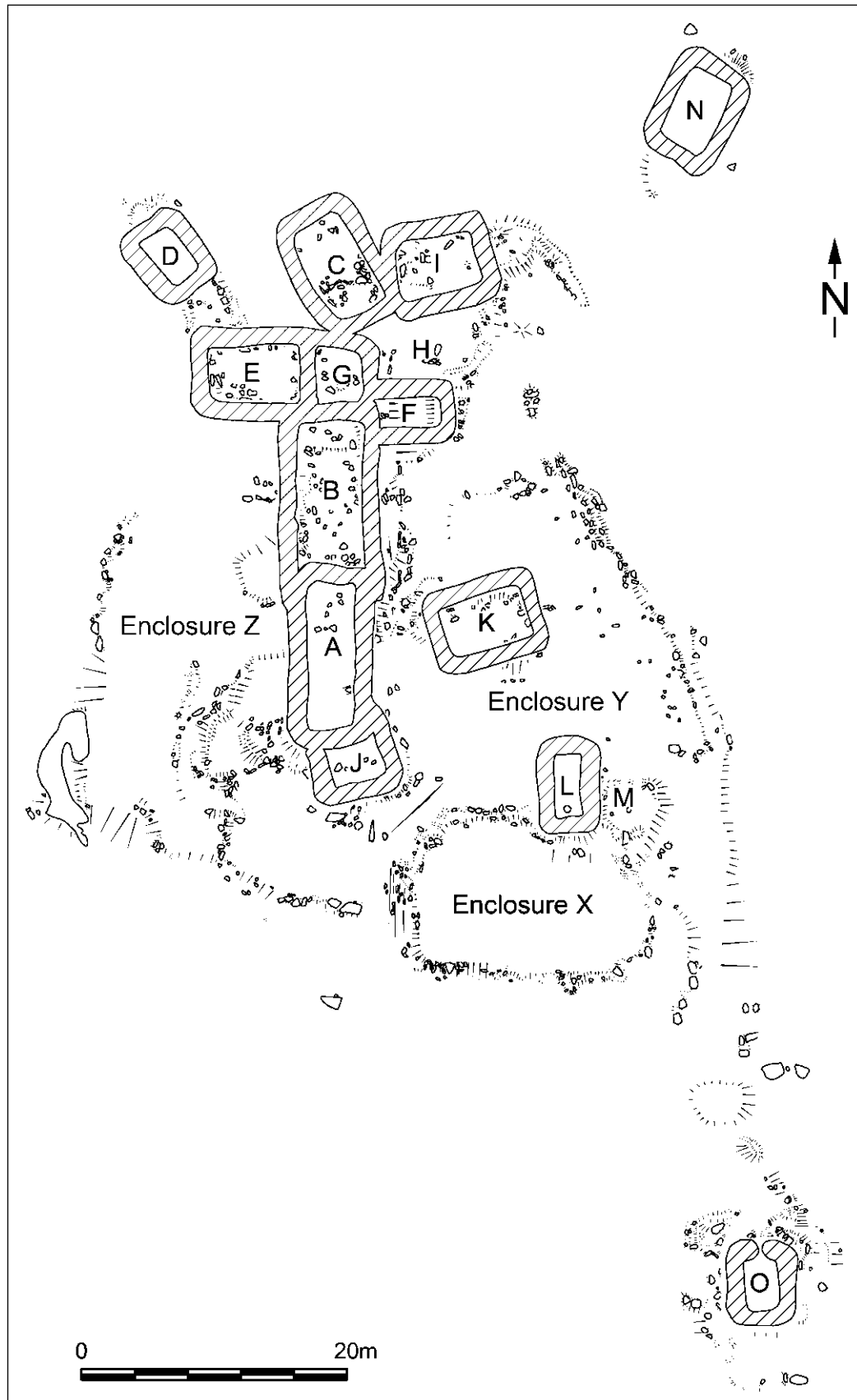


Figure 3.6. Interpretive plan of houses at Gearraidh Bhailteas (Garryvaltos)

On the other hand, profiles of the banks of Loch Chill Donnain show clearly that water levels on *this* loch were once systematically higher. So it is possible that the knoll

at Cille Donnain was an island when the putative 'island dun' was in being. One can only urge further investigation – and note that our own work did not involve consideration

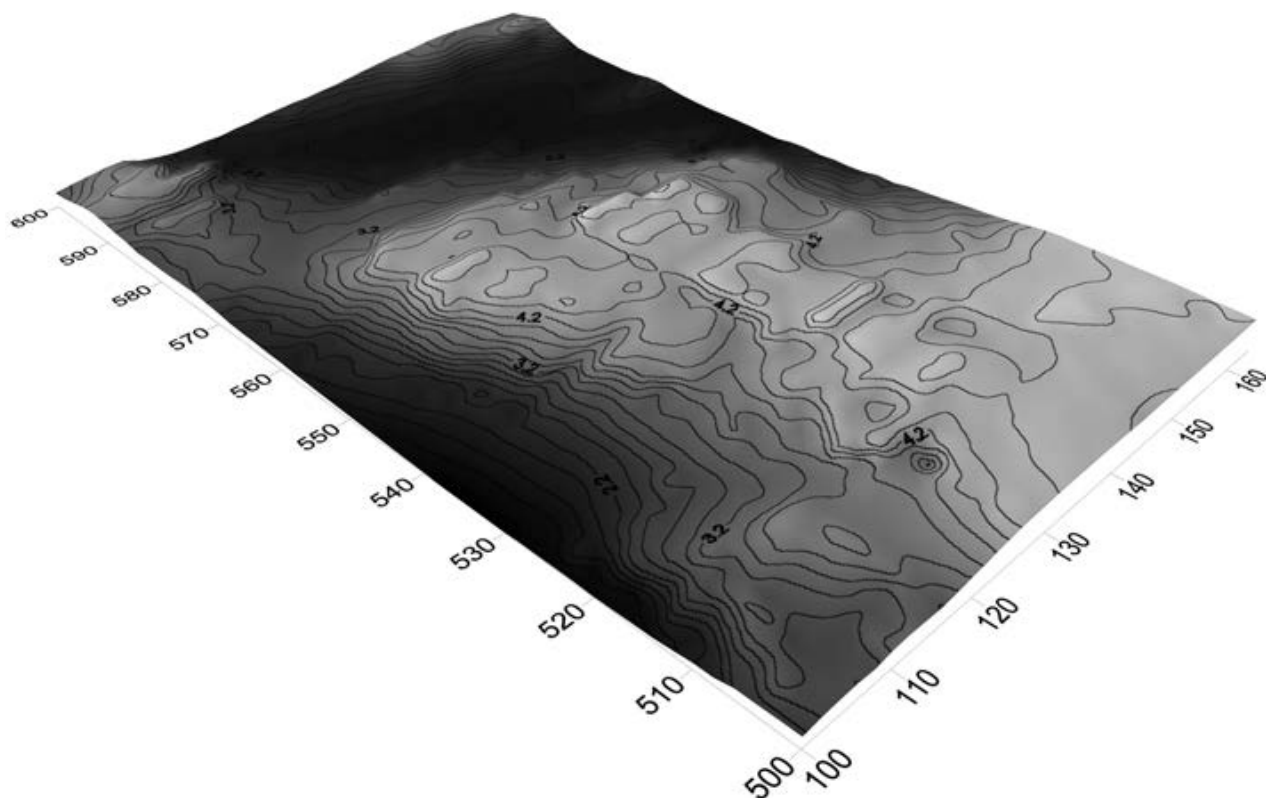


Figure 3.7. Contour map of Gearraidh Bhailteas (Garryvaltos); north is to the upper left

of the source of the stone used for the structures. Is it possible that quarrying here might also have affected the relationship between land and water?

Gearraidh Bhailteas

A plan was made of a cluster of buildings on elevated ground at Gearraidh Bhailteas (Garryvaltos; NF 735 265; NF72NW 27; Fleming 1992). Most unusually, this site displays a cluster of ruined stone-footed buildings, some well-preserved and others robbed and slighted (Figures 3.5–3.6); it is obvious from the close relationships between the buildings that the site contains a good deal of horizontal stratigraphy, and hence perhaps a degree of ‘chronological depth’ most unusual in the area. Excavation has produced a series of buildings and associated artefacts in unusually secure stratigraphic contexts (see Chapter 15). Possibly this site could be regarded as a rare survivor, on ‘dry land’, of settlement clusters now mostly under the sand of the machair – if their stones were not re-used to build other structures.

Locally, the site is on high ground (Figure 3.7). Seen from the east and south, the buildings are on a low knoll, with well-defined steeply-sloping edges, and the land surface also slopes away to the west, though more gently. On the north side, however, the fairly level ground on which the buildings themselves once stood continues to the edge of Loch Àird an Sgairbh, and the approach to the north side of the site from the west is a fairly gentle one. The buildings of this settlement would also have been

conspicuous from much further afield though one has to point out that, in the rolling landscape of this coastal plain, any building on a slight elevation may catch the eye from some considerable distance; it may often be silhouetted against the sky. That said, however, it is obvious that the founders of this settlement sought no natural shelter or concealment.

The oldest features on the site are the robbed-out walls that once formed enclosures, one of them apparently surrounding most of the knoll. Judging by the stones which remain, it must have been quite an impressive structure. This may be the ‘gearraidh’, the enclosure or garth which gave the place its name; Garryvaltos is mentioned in a land charter of 1498, listed between Frobost and Kildonan (Munro and Munro 1986: 228). The plan suggests that there might once have been three enclosures – a small one X at the southeast, which was cultivated at a much more recent date; the large enclosure Y whose northern wall has been destroyed; and Z, a partition of the large enclosure, its wall running through the jumble of stones to the west of Structure A to turn northeast and through the area later occupied by the northeast corner of Structure A. There is a further section of enclosure wall to the east of Structure I, which may be part of Enclosure Y.

The enclosure walls were all slighted by an interesting array of structures. On grounds of preservation, the most recent structures must include A and B, which at some point might have been in use together though A was probably built later than B; K might have gone with B, perhaps a byre set at right angles to the house, as sometimes seen in this

area. These buildings should pre-date 1836, when the site is said to have been cleared (and it is most unlikely that a 'squatter' settlement would have been permitted thereafter so close to Milton House). Of the other buildings on the site, C and L may also be relatively recent, though not as recent as A, B and K.

The relatively old structures include D and J (slighted by E and A respectively); perhaps H is a fragment of a building contemporary with D and J, and goes with the amorphous lump of rubble north of C. Structures E and F both have walls that apparently climb onto a pile of rubble from some earlier structure (here labelled G). Structure C is a square building, comparable on this site perhaps only with M. It has slighted Structure I, a building difficult to interpret.

A tentative sequence might look like this:

1. The enclosures.
2. The old-looking houses D and J (and perhaps H).
3. Structure I and the two structures orientated in the same direction – F followed by E?
4. Structures C and M.
5. Structures B and K, then A (and L?).

This leaves N and O floating in time as well as in space, and of course there might have been earlier buildings where A and B now stand.

It is not possible to insist upon all the details of this sequence. Nevertheless, it is clear that this is a most interesting and complex site, which may well provide a significant key to the local settlement sequence.⁴

Notes

- 1 Anglicized place-names: Ben Mor, East Loch Ollay, South Loch Eynort, Ben Corerary, Glen Kildonan, Upper Loch Kildonan
- 2 Kildonan, Garryvaltos
- 3 Also spelt MacRuairi
- 4 The site was scheduled by Historic Scotland after the survey.

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4 The mountains survey: Loch Aoineart

John Moreland with a contribution by Gill MacLean†

Survey

John Moreland

Loch Aoineart is a seawater loch located on South Uist's mountainous and hilly east coast (the island's highest mountain, Beinn Mhòr (620m), lies just to the north).¹ It extends east–west across 8kms of South Uist's 11km width. Our survey of this beautiful landscape, together with the machair survey and the blackland survey (see Chapters 2 and 3), provided a transect across the three distinct north–south running terrains of South Uist. The fieldwork took place during three weeks in June and July over three years and consisted of walk-over surveys by a small team of staff and students along the coastal zone of Loch Aoineart, logging earthwork and other man-made features. The Loch Aoineart project was divided into a three-phase programme between 1988 and 1993:

1. Extensive survey in 1988–1989
2. Intensive survey and the search for dated parallels in 1990
3. Excavation in 1991–1993 (see Chapter 17).

A second area of Loch Aoineart, immediately to the west of this survey area, was surveyed in 2006 by EASE archaeological consultants as part of a study of coastal erosion (Moore and Wilson 2007). They recorded 37 sites of which seven had been identified before, including two by our own survey (sites 23 and 28; see below). The majority of their sites consisted of landing places, together with a number of deserted settlements, their outbuildings, walls and enclosures; almost all are likely to date to within the last three centuries.

1988 survey

In 1988 almost 100 archaeological features, the vast majority probably dating to the mid-18th to mid-19th centuries (though some might have been Medieval or prehistoric), were located dispersed over the coastal zone around Loch Aoineart (Figure 4.1). For example, in the area

where the Allt Volagir (Allt Bholagair) flows into the sea there is a complex of buildings of this period, including walls, jetties, animal pens, a fish-smoking building and kelp processing areas (Figure 4.2; for example, 172 in Figure 4.1 and in the Site Inventory below). On the southern and eastern slopes of Beinn Bheag Dheas there are several ephemeral house structures, traces of lazy beds which would have been used for potato cultivation, and animal enclosures (Figure 4.2; 56, 57, 63–68, 173–80 in Figure 4.1). It is possible that some of these structures relate to the 'religious house' that is said to have been located in this area in 'olden times', or to the inn which 'strong local tradition' places here in the early modern period (see Arinambane in the Place-names section below, and Figure 4.2). In any case, the material remains point to the diversity of agricultural and marine resources drawn upon by the inhabitants of the region in the early modern period when the population was more substantial than it has been in recent times (see Conclusion; see also Chapter 17).

The principal archaeological elements include a long, linear feature near Loch an Dòrain (probably an ancient turf and stone wall) running along the south slopes of Beinn Bheag Dheas. This wall is visible on Google satellite images (Site 64; Figure 4.3). A similar wall was found on the seaward side of a small stream in the same area and this system of earthworks might have incorporated several cairns discovered close by (81 in Figure 4.1; also Figure 4.10). These cairns are probably either clearance debris or funerary monuments.

The Post-Medieval/early modern period is represented by a series of blackhouses with double thickness walls built of monolithic blocks, and central hearths. Blackhouses and other stone structures were located along the shores of Sloc Dubh (Figure 4.2; also 147, 155, 156 in Figure 4.1), while a series of cairns were situated on the higher ground further inland (*e.g.* 154, 199, 202). Several houses were found in the Hafn area, close to the mouth of Loch Aoineart (Figure 4.2; also, for example, Figure 4.1, 222). Two other structures found close to the Sloc Dubh na Hafn inlet have been interpreted as bothies (165) (for the above,

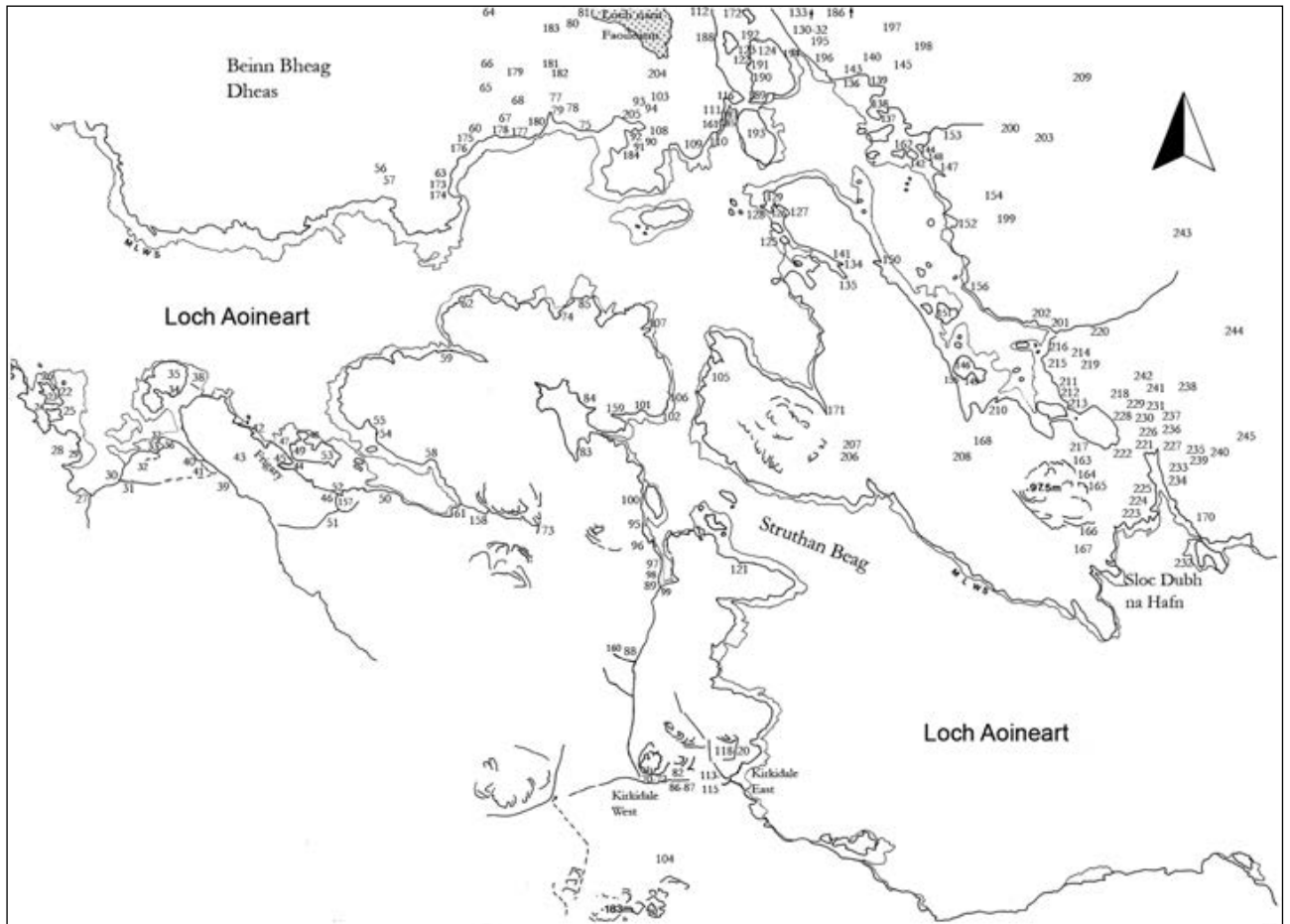


Figure 4.1. Site location map of the Loch Aineart survey area

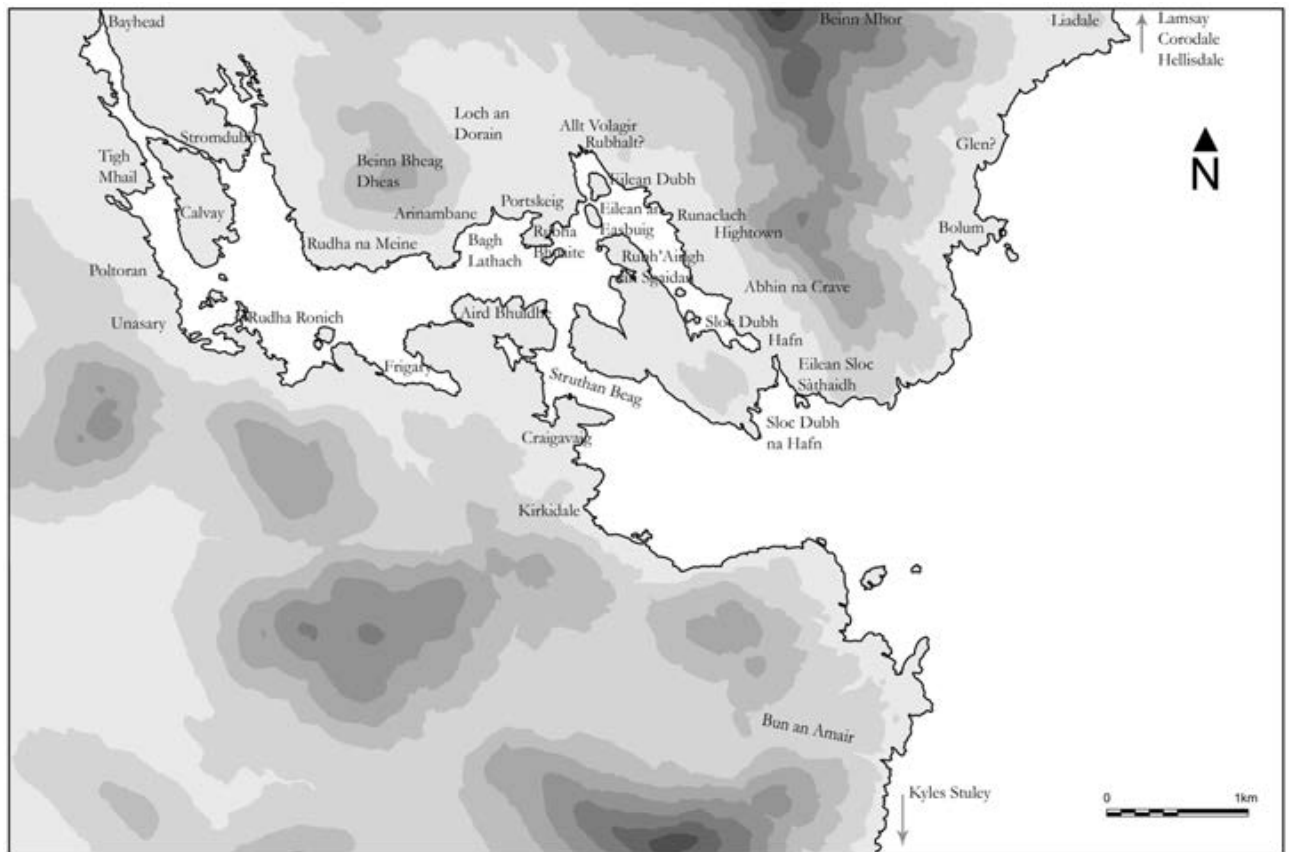


Figure 4.2. Places in the landscape, Loch Aineart

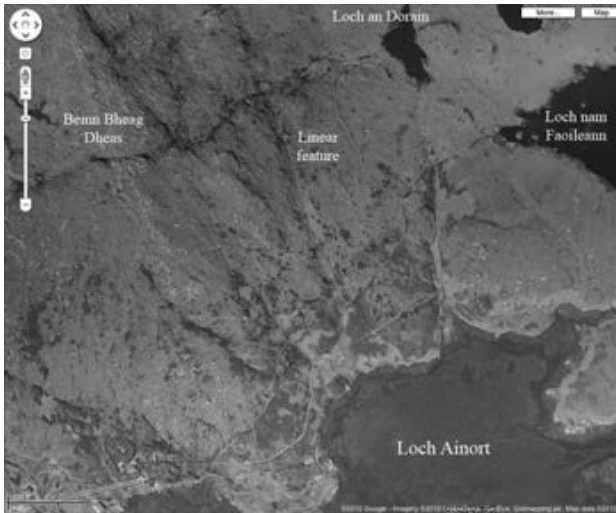


Figure 4.3. Linear earthwork running west and south from Loch an Dòrain (Google maps)

see also Figures 4.9 and 4.10). As we note below, this was a ‘haven’ used as an anchorage by ships waiting to make their way through the Struthan Beag (the narrow entrance into the western part of the loch), and ‘bothies’ are recorded here in the late 19th century. Hafn is a Norse name, and we spent some time looking for Viking-period structures in this area – to no avail (but see below).

1989 survey

The second season of field survey concentrated on the southern shores of Loch Aoinart. As in 1988, many dozens of sites were located, including shoreline facilities, houses and field systems. One of the most significant finds was a large tripartite house at Frigary (Figure 4.2; 45 in Figure 4.1). The walls were made of well-dressed, coursed stone, and the house was associated with a series of walls, paddocks, and slipways (Figure 4.4). It was clearly an

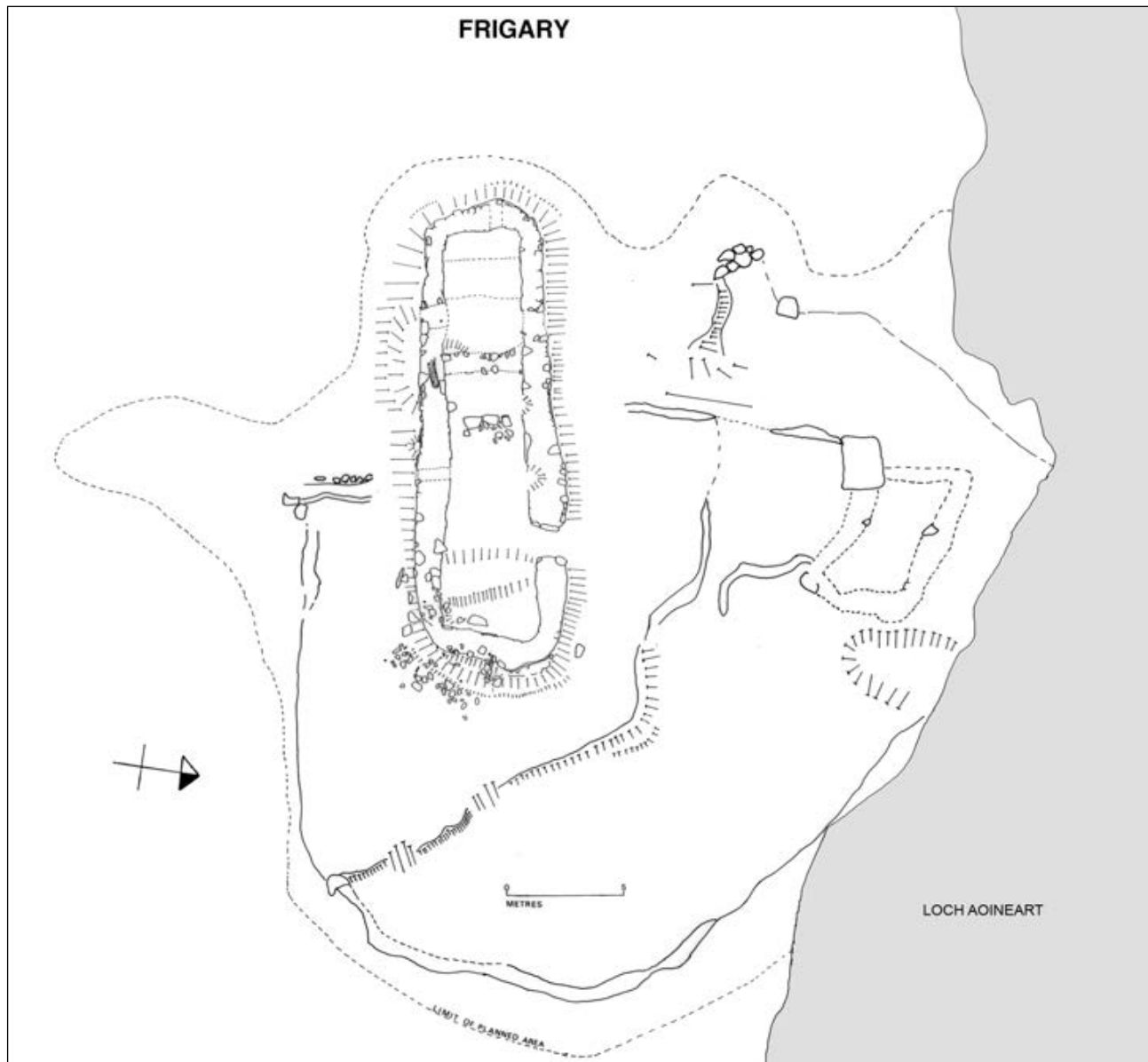


Figure 4.4. Plan of structures and enclosures at Frigary, south Loch Aoinart

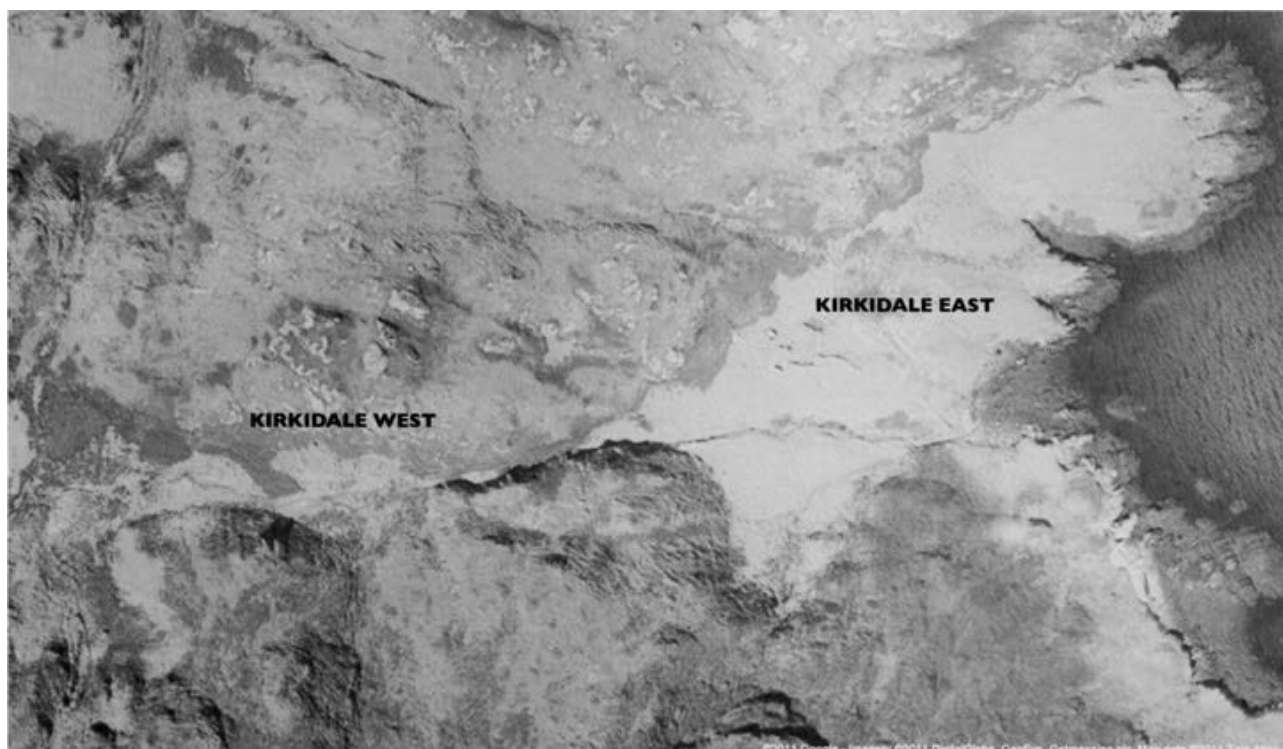


Figure 4.5. Structures at Kirkidale (Google maps)

important settlement, but without excavation we were unable to date it (though a roofless structure is recorded there in 1873 [see Frigary in Place-names section below; also see Conclusion]).

Further east along the coast, in the valley local people call Kirkidale,² two significant groups of features were discovered (Figures 4.2 and 4.5). At the eastern end of the valley, where it opens to the sea, we came across the remains of a blackhouse and associated sheep fank (pen). The latter was built on top of the remains of one of the southern walls of a turf and orthostat house. The size and shape of this (clearly earlier) structure led us to believe (wrongly) that it might have been a Norse house (see below, and Chapter 17). It is possible, however, that it is associated with another (residual) enclosure to the south-east (Figure 4.6 and below in the Intensive Survey: Kirkidale section).

At the western end of this valley we discovered another settlement complex, consisting of two or three circular huts set on the western edge of a large enclosure (Figure 4.7). To the east lie two rectangular buildings, one incorporating the remains of an earlier orthostatic structure. While in its later life the complex was evidently used for sheep penning, local traditions of a religious community in this area, along with the form of the circular huts, may support the idea that this was an early monastic site (see below in the Intensive Survey: Kirkidale and Place-names sections).

One of the pleasures of working at Loch Aoineart was the opportunity to converse with local people and to learn from them about the history, archaeology and folklife of the area. It was on a trek around some of the more inaccessible parts of South Loch Aoineart with Robert Tye (then resident

at Poltoran; see Place-names section below) that we were taken to see another possible monastic site. This consists of six or seven small hut settings at a place called Bun an Amair (Figures 4.2 and 4.8). The inaccessible and remote location makes it unlikely that these are shielings, and they are not in the topographical positions in which most South Uist shielings are situated (see Chapter 7). Like the western site in Kirkidale, that at Bun an Amair is constructed against a rock face, close to a stream and is not visible from the sea. Although attribution must be provisional, it is just possible that both were occupied by early Christian ascetics fleeing the profanity and secularity of the world, and that this (too?) was an early monastic site (see below).

1990 intensive survey: Kirkidale

The third season of research around Loch Aoineart represented a departure from the type of work we had previously been carrying out. As we have seen, in 1988 and 1989 we systematically surveyed the north and south shores of the loch, locating, recording and mapping all archaeological remains – from prehistoric cairns to early modern structures. The result was a comprehensive picture of the distribution of sites in the coastal zone of the region (Figure 4.1).

As I have already noted, however, the major problem we faced was our inability to date the settlements and other structures we had located. While the presence of chimneys allowed us to assign some houses to the later part of the 19th century, the fact that little archaeological work had at that time been carried out on South Uist meant that securely dated parallels simply did not exist for most structures. This

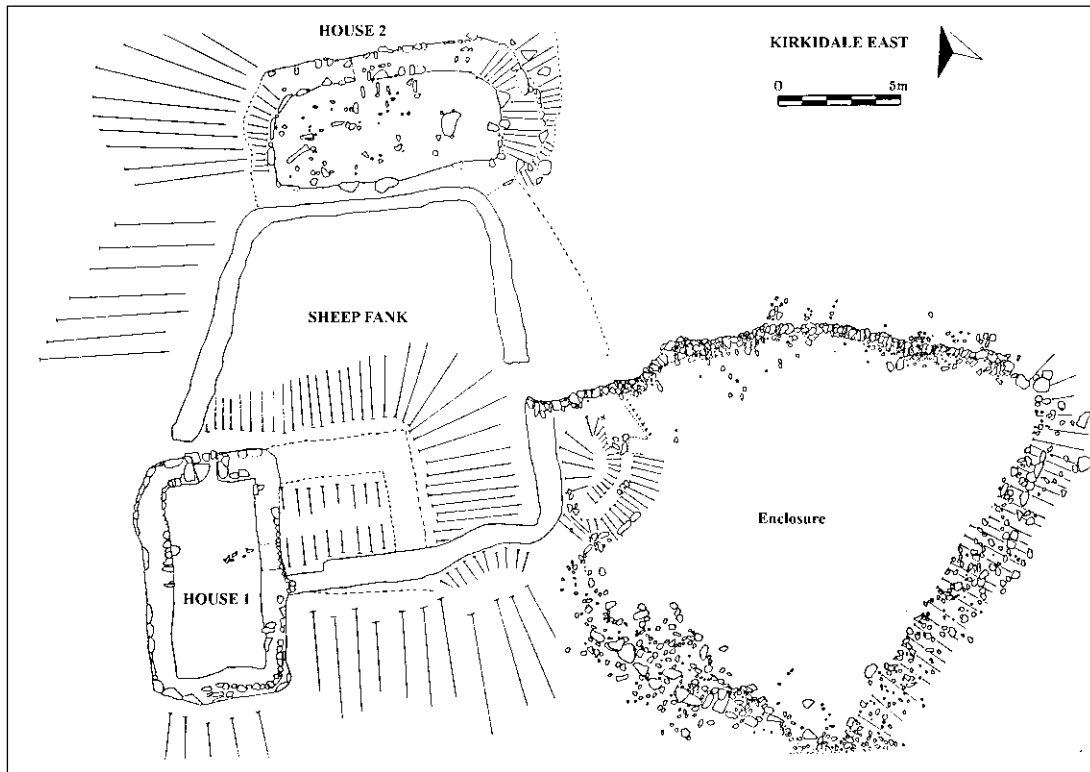


Figure 4.6. Houses and enclosures at Kirkdale East

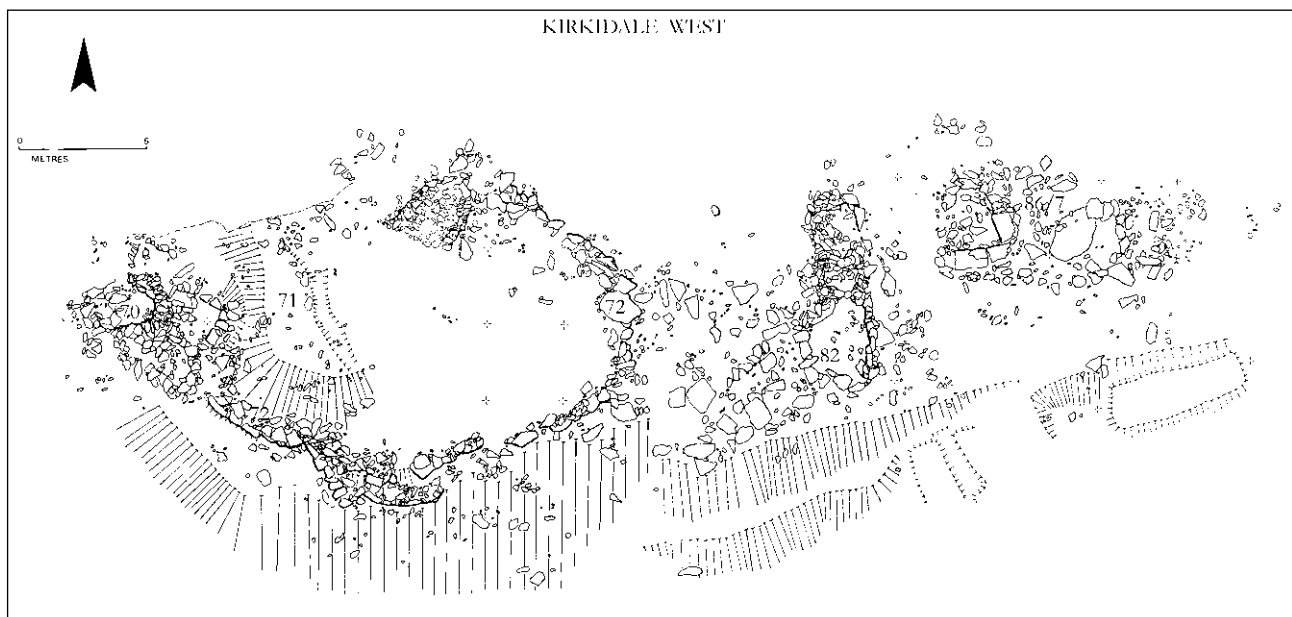


Figure 4.7. Structures and enclosure at Kirkdale West

problem was especially acute for late prehistoric and early historic sites – which were then notable by their absence (or perhaps by our inability to assign dates to them). In 1990, therefore, our teams carried out intensive surveys of several sites, producing detailed plans to enable comparisons to be made with sites elsewhere in the Western Isles and Scotland in the hope of generating more detailed chronologies.

All of the sites surveyed in the summer of 1990 lay on the south side of Loch Aoinart, and work was concentrated

mainly in the valley of Kirkdale which lies about 2km over the hills from the end of the south Loch Aoinart road (Figure 4.2). This valley was selected for particular attention for several reasons. Firstly, the survey of the area in 1989 had shown that there was an unusual concentration of settlement in this short valley (see above). Secondly, the place-name suggested that there may be an early ecclesiastical site here. This suggestion was reinforced by local traditions that there was a connection between

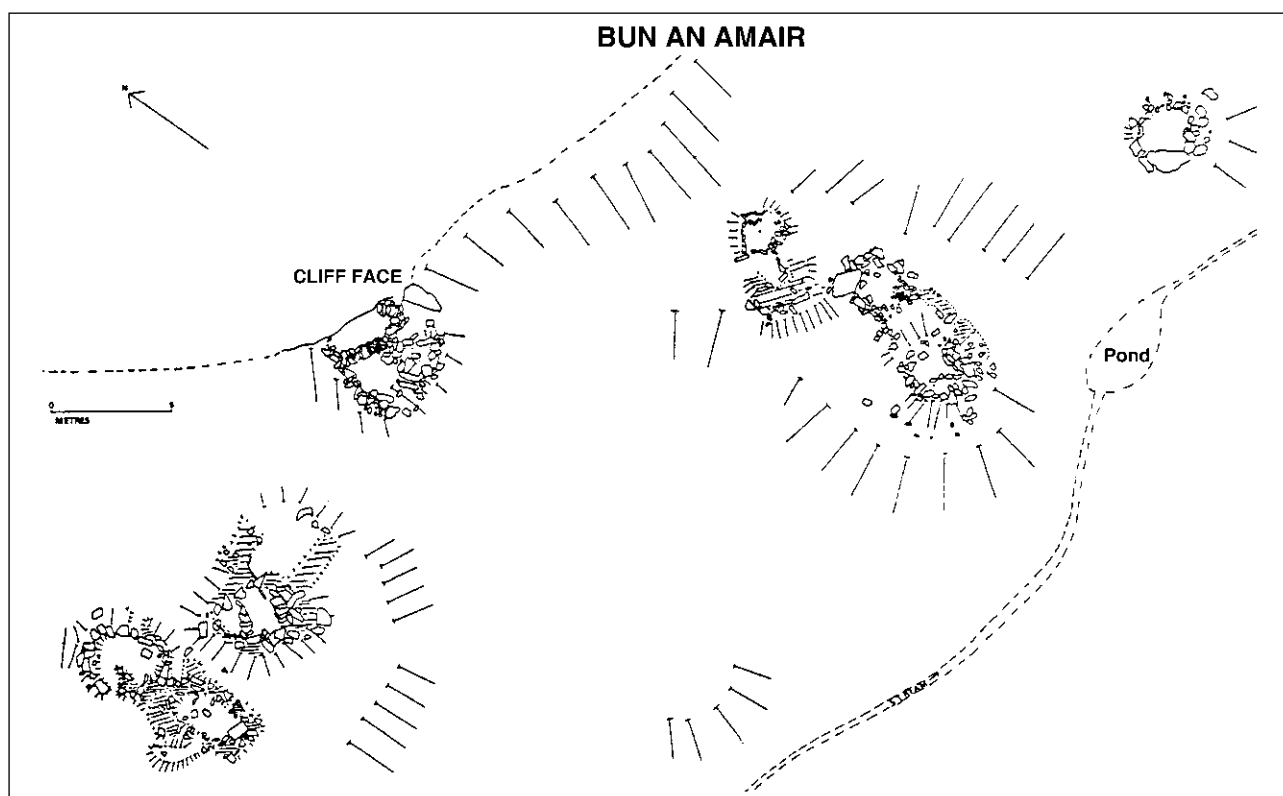


Figure 4.8. Plan of structures at Bun an Amair

Kirkidale and the church of St Peter's at Cille Pheadair (Kilpheder), one of the two parish churches on South Uist in 1549 (the other being at Howmore; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 155, 158), that there was a chapel or prayer house at Kirkidale in the mid-16th century (MacDhomhnaill 1981), and that there was an early monastic site in the valley (see below).

Kirkidale East

The first site to be surveyed lay at the mouth of the valley about 50m from the sea (113–115, 118–120 in Figure 4.1; see also Figures 4.5 and 4.6). As noted above, the site comprised two houses and two enclosures. The best-preserved of the houses (1) lay on the southwestern edge of the complex. The walls of this blackhouse still stood to shoulder-height, and its entrance was in the northern wall. Survey suggested that there might have been a window in the middle of the eastern wall, looking out over a slightly raised area which may represent the remains of a kitchen-garden (Figure 4.6). The southern wall of a (modern-looking) sheep fank was built over this 'garden-area', and abutted the eastern wall of the blackhouse. The northern wall of this enclosure was constructed on top of the much-reduced southern wall of the other house (2) in this complex. This suggests that the sheep fank is the most recent structure in the complex, probably post-dating the abandonment of House 1 (the walls of which might have been used to create a facility for sheep-processing). It seems possible that this archaeological relationship captures

one of the most poignant aspects of the history of Loch Aoineart (and South Uist) – the replacement of people by sheep in the mid-19th century Clearances (see Conclusion and Chapter 17).

House 2 measures *c.*9m long by 4m wide, with walls of orthostatic construction, and (we thought) a doorway in the north wall (see Chapter 17). As noted above, at first we thought this might be a Norse structure. This belief was based on the residual nature of the remains, on possible traces of a central hearth, and on the fact that the eastern wall bowed slightly (see 115 in the Site Inventory). As we shall see in Chapter 17, excavation demonstrated this to be a much-reduced blackhouse. It is clearly earlier than the sheep fank, which was built on top of its southern wall, but we cannot be sure of its chronological relationship with the other blackhouse (House 1) in the complex. The 1805 Bald map show two houses and an enclosure at this location – and it is likely that they represent the structures we recorded. This complex is visible in 'Google maps' – Figure 4.5.

Kirkidale West

About 200m up Kirkidale, away from the sea and sitting on a low shoulder of land overlooking the river that flows down the valley, lies perhaps the most enigmatic and interesting site located in the course of the 1989 survey (70–72, 82, 86, 87 in Figure 4.1). This consists of a sub-circular enclosure (72) constructed against the rock face to the north. The enclosure measures about 25m east–west

by 10m north–south (see Chapter 17). To the west of the enclosure lies a series of structures of various shapes and dates (70, 71; Figure 4.7). There appear to be several phases of construction/occupation – and only further excavation will allow us to confirm/refine the following sequence. At the time of the survey, the first phase seemed to consist of two rectangular buildings orientated roughly southwest–northeast. One of these cut into a low mound (71) which lies at the western end of the enclosure. The second phase of structures in this part of the site seemed to consist of a single rectangular building *c.* 4m–5m long by 2m wide and divided in the middle by a well-built stone wall. At a later date this structure was converted into two sub-circular buildings (but see Chapter 17 for a revised interpretation).

To the east of the enclosure lay another complex of buildings which also suggests a variety of dates and usages (82, 86, 87; Figure 4.7). The most interesting was bounded on the eastern side by a wall of large orthostats deeply set into the ground – one interpretation was that this might be the remains of a robbed-out souterrain (for further discussion, see Conclusion). The wall was reused in later periods, with the last usage probably being in the relatively recent past when a series of very crude walls were constructed to form a number of small rooms perhaps utilized in connection with the rearing or processing of sheep.

The interpretation of this site is very difficult – it looks like nothing else we have encountered in the area (though see the discussion of Bun an Amair, above). In form (an enclosure with ‘cell-like’ structures), it is close to what one would expect an early historic monastic site to look like and, given its isolated location and the local tradition and place-name evidence already mentioned, it is possible that, in its earliest phases, this is in fact what it was. One obvious problem with this interpretation is the apparent lack of buildings within the enclosure. The structures we have located all seem to lie outside the enclosing wall. Two solutions to this problem may be proposed. Firstly, the enclosure may originally have run to the west of the sub-circular buildings described above, thereby bringing them within its circuit. Alternatively there may originally have been buildings within the enclosure which are no longer immediately apparent. As Sally Foster has argued for other Scottish monastic sites, ‘the apparent absence of internal structures [at Cill-an-Suidhe, Lismore, Argyll] may be due to their timber construction’ (1996: 84). That this may be the case at Kirkdale West is suggested by the fact that, when the site is viewed from the top of the rock face onto which it backs, it is possible to make out the lines of at least one, and possibly two, circular structures. These show up as patches of slightly greener grass (see Foster 1996: 84–87 for similar sites in western Scotland, and Fleming and Woolf 1992, as well as Chapters 3 and 14 of this volume, for the 12th-century ecclesiastical complex at Cille Donnain, just 7km to the west). Small-scale excavations on this site produced some evidence to support the dating – if not necessarily the monastic interpretation (and, as Alex Woolf has pointed out to me,

the setting is unsuitable as a burial ground, the other use an ‘ecclesiastical’ enclosure might have (Woolf pers. comm.; see also below and Chapter 17).

The final site surveyed as part of the 1990 season at Loch Aoineart was the house at Frigary (see above; 45 in Figure 4.1). This house was *c.* 19m long by 4m wide and, as such, it is the longest and narrowest structure found not only in Loch Aoineart but also in South Uist as a whole (Figure 4.4). The structure is well built and in places the walls still stand several courses high, despite having been robbed of stone for at least the last century. It was obviously the home of someone of considerable standing in the Loch Aoineart community but it remains undated – other than being recorded as a roofless building in 1873 (see below in Place-names section).

Place-names around Loch Aoineart

Gill MacLean†

Gill and Donald MacLean were unrivalled founts of knowledge about the history and places of South Uist. We spent many a (usually wet) afternoon in their house at Howmore listening to stories of the island’s past. Gill used her researches in Lionacleit library (Benbecula) to reinforce their local knowledge. In an effort to accumulate as much information as possible about the human presence in, and impact on, the landscape of Loch Aoineart we asked her to undertake a study of the significant place-names of the area. There are clearly difficulties in using place-names as a guide to settlement chronology, but they are not insurmountable (Gelling 1988). Further, we now appreciate that the naming of the land is part of the process through which human beings endow it with significance – the names are repositories of meaning and memory (Symonds 1999: 114–15). Gill, therefore, combined her discussions of the meaning of place-names with considerations of the documentary evidence (particularly from census data, historical records, Ordnance Survey and other historical maps) to produce a picture of human activity at particular locales around Loch Aoineart – especially in the early modern period (see also Chapter 7 for further discussion of Loch Aoineart place-names).

In the pages that follow we publish the fruit of her researches largely as Gill left it to us – and in her memory. Her history of Locheynort is published as Chapter 18 of this volume.

A list of significant place-names in the Loch Aoineart region has been compiled from maps, census information and other sources. The boundaries were chosen to coincide with the 19th-century farms, the present occupancy of the land, and on the basis of the demographic analysis of census returns. When using place-name evidence in Uist it is important to know the past history of the area – if the locality was cleared, or the indigenous population replaced by incomers, then names tend to be lost or replaced. In all cases the place-names cited here are at least 200 years old.³

All the sites mentioned below are shown in Figure 4.2. Geographically, the list starts at Lamsay on the east coast of South Uist, following the coastline south and west along the north shores of Loch Aoineart to Bayhead, and then eastwards along the south shore of the loch finishing up on the east coast at Kyles Stuley. No attempt is made to give a full English translation of the elements of all the names, but points of interest are noted (see also the Appendix to this volume).

Loch Eynort is a tautology – Gaelic, a loch, and Norse, a fjord or firth. The *ey* has been equated with ‘ein’, meaning lonely, but it may be Evind’s firth (Pochin Mould 1953: 98). The elements of Loch Aoineart place-names tend to come from three main sources: Norse, Gaelic, and English or Scots.

- Norse elements are *ey* (ay) – an island; *dale* – a valley or glen; *hafn* – a haven; *holm* – an island, as in Bolum; *strom* – a narrows. *Sgeir* – a rock or reef is now accepted as Gaelic (Fraser 1978: 237).
- Gaelic elements are *bagh* – a bay or inlet, although this may come from the Old Norse *vagr*; *rubha* – a headland; *sloe* – a pit or narrow inlet; *allt* – a stream; *abhinn* – a river; *caolas* – kyles, a narrows; *eilean* – an island; *creag* – a cliff, rock or crag; *laimhrig* – a landing place.
- English elements are obvious: *port* is an early borrowing into Gaelic and *kirk* is Scots. Bayhead, Hightown and Black Island are straight translations.

Three place-names have ecclesiastical connections: Arinambane, Kirkidale and Eilean an Easbuig. These are all pre-Reformation in date.

1. Lamsay (NF 844 324). Two buildings are shown on the Bald Map of 1805, and two households were returned in 1841 (census returns for 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871 and 1881 were available at Lionacleit library, Benbecula). There are no buildings or improved land in 1873 and there are no further references.

2. Corodale (NF 834 314). This is known to contain a ‘Forester’s Cottage’ in 1746 when Prince Charles Edward Stuart lodged there for six weeks in May and June of that year (Munro and Munro 1986: 50). Neil MacEachen (born in Howbeg in 1719, and friend of Prince Charles) considered the house to be family property at that time. In 1805 it is mapped as part of the Howbeg tack, and two or three buildings are shown on Bald’s map. In 1817 one tenant was paying £12, but in 1818 this sum was split between two. By 1822 rent had dropped to £9 and three tenants were involved; the same rent was paid in 1830. In 1844 it was advertised as part of Howmore, but by 1850 it was part of the farm of Ormacleit. One household, that of an incoming shepherd, is enumerated in 1841 and contains both Duncans and MacLellans (Lawson 1990). In 1851 another incoming shepherd, Greive, is returned. Pages are missing from the 1861 census, but in 1871 a Beaton from Skye was in residence. The 1873 survey shows one building unroofed, although there is improved land. The valley now contains three ruins of 19th-century type, of which the

oldest looking (traditionally the ‘Forester’s Cottage’) is at NF 833 313 [JM’s note: these are clearly visible on the Google Maps satellite imagery of this location].

3. Hellisdale (NF 834 307). There are two or three buildings in 1805 when it appears to have been part of Snishival township. Four households are enumerated in 1841, including two incoming names. By 1851 the solitary household is occupied by a shepherd and, in 1871, a shepherd’s widow. The area became part of Ormacleit farm in 1850, and remains part of Ormacleit and Bornais common grazings. In 1903 the buildings are shown unroofed but with improved land. [At least two buildings and an associated earthwork are visible on the Google Maps satellite imagery of this location].

4. Liadale (NF 834 304). One or two buildings and an enclosure are shown in 1805 when it was part of Stoneybridge. Three households were noted in 1841, and in 1844 it was advertised as part of Howbeg/Stoneybridge farm land. By 1850 it was part of Ormacleit farm and there are no further census records. By 1873 the land is shown unimproved and all buildings are without roofs. [The remains of several buildings and associated enclosures and lazy beds are clearly visible on the Google Maps satellite imagery of this location].

5. Glen (position uncertain). This appears in 1841 between Liadale and Bolum, with two households. There is no known further reference.

6. Bolum (NF 828 285). There are two or three buildings in 1805, and it is part of Lower Bornish, *i.e.* Clanranald land. Between 1820 and 1830 baptismal records suggest that there was an extended family of MacEachens both here and in Liadale (see above). In 1841 two families, neither MacEachen, are enumerated. In 1844 it is advertised as a pedicle, part of Howbeg/Stoneybridge farm, and there are no further census records. It became part of Ormacleit farm, and in 1873 two roofless buildings are mapped in a small area of improved land.

7. Hafn (NF 815 276). The name (obviously) means ‘haven’, and is one of the traditional anchorages for vessels awaiting the right conditions to make passage through the Struthan Beag (Figure 4.2). It is probably the ‘sailing place’ of Alisdair MacMaighstir Alisdair [Jacobite and cousin of Flora McDonald] (Bray 1986). There is one building in 1805, but by 1821 there appear to be two households, both Curries, as two children with different parents were baptized that year. In 1841 two households, one a tailor, are listed. In 1851 the one family is that of a shepherd imported from Skye. In 1861, 1871, and 1881 the enumerator notes bothies of fishermen, with homes on the east coast of Scotland, somewhere between Bolum and Portskeig, and this is the most likely place. The small gabled building is, for Uist, typical of a late 19th-century fisherman’s bothy, and coal has been found in the vicinity. The place is named as containing a bothy by Angus MacLellan in about 1910 (1997: 185) [see 165 in Figure 4.1.].

8. Abhin na Crave/Bealach na Cridhrich (NF 812 279/819 282) – ‘the stream of the bones’ and ‘the pass of the rieved (plundered) cattle’. In 1797 feu duty (payment

for use-rights) was paid by Bornish to Clanranald for land to the south of this march.

9. Rubh' Airigh an Sgadain (NF 804 284) – ‘the headland of the shieling of the herring’. In 1805 this was part of Clanranald’s land; the march is marked both in 1805 and in 1877.

10. High Town (NF 809 285). Two or three buildings are shown in 1805, but there are no recorded inhabitants in 1841. It is now the site of a sheep fank built *c.* 1850 when it became part of Ormacleit farm [this is visible on the Google Maps satellite imagery of this location]. The stones used in this structure were probably taken from dwellings or shielings, and it has been suggested that the ultimate source of these stones was a prehistoric structure such as a *barpa* (mound). The green grass patch to the south east of the fank may be worth investigation [see 153 in Figure 4.1].

11. Runaclach (Ru clach or Ruanaglach) (NF 805 286) – ‘a stony headland’. In 1786 John MacDonald was granted the pedicle and was paying £4 rent to Clanranald. Prior to this, in 1738, land in Loch Aoinart had been granted by 17th Clanranald to his mistress as a patrimony for his son, and this is the most likely land, given that it is traditionally associated with Ormacleit, and the association with the name MacDonald. One building and an enclosure are shown in 1805. In 1817 and 1818 Mrs Curry was paying a rent of £10/10/- and the same sum is noted in 1831. In 1819, 1824 and 1827 babies with the MacDonald surname, but of different parents, were baptised (MacDonald and MacDonald 1904: vol. II, 236). One household is listed in 1841, but no further references are known. The southwest-facing slope between this site and High Town would have been desirable pasture in the 17th and 18th centuries, and the kelp shores profitable *c.* 1800. Much that is visible in this landscape (buildings, enclosures and seaweed platforms) would have been in use at that time. [The remains of a substantial house are visible on Google Maps’ satellite imagery of this location; see also 139 in Figure 4.1].

12. Eilean dubh (Black Island) (NF 802 288); **Eilean an Easbuig** (Bishop’s Island) (NF 802 285); **Risgay** (NF 798 283) (the islands). All are Clanranald land in 1805 and are called ‘arable’. In 1913 Black Island became part of croft 9 North Loch Aoinart, Bishop’s Island part of croft 10, and Risgay was designated ‘potato’ land and shared between the ten crofters of the new township. No reference to inhabitation was found.

13. Rubhalt (?NF 800 290). The position of this place is uncertain. As written in the 1841 census this could mean ‘the headland of the stream’, but it could also be a corruption of Rubha Bhuaite (see below). Two households are listed in 1841, and in 1873 a small area of improved land is shown. The site may alternatively be nearer to the unnamed headland at NF 799 286. Two unroofed buildings are shown on unimproved land in 1873. Either site would fit the route of the 1841 enumerator. [Google Maps’ satellite imagery of this location shows two buildings and an enclosure – the latter is probably 109 in Figure 4.1. All of this might suggest that this is the location of *Rubhalt*].

14. Rubha Bhuaite (NF 797 283). This is a common name in Uist and means ‘the headland of the cattle enclosure’. It may or may not indicate an embarkation point for cattle export. In 1818 £8/8/- was paid to Clanranald for an area called *Ruavult*, and this is the most probable place. To the north of the headland itself are the ruins of a croft house and byre of 10 North Loch Eynort, postdating 1913. The former access track from the school at Bayhead, built with Board of Agriculture assistance, ends here. The old march between Clanranald and Bornish is to the west.

15. Portskeig (NF 795 287). In 1805 this was Bornish land and had one building. In 1841 there were three households, one containing a young man, Ranald MacDonald, who was a teacher. This family moved to Unasary by 1851 and there are no further census references to Portskeig. However, in 1873 a ‘roofed’ building is shown on unimproved land. In 1913 this became part of croft 9 North Loch Eynort (Land Court Records 1914; see 77–79 in Figure 4.1).

16. Bàgh Lathach (NF 794 285). This is ‘a silty bay’ and was the anchorage for ships waiting for tide or cargo. At nearby *Arinambane* was the inn, and further investigation might produce material evidence for the historically-known use of the area.

17. Arinambane (NF 792 285). According to Alexander Carmichael in 1884 the place-name means ‘the shieling of the women (nuns)’ – ‘there has been a religious house here in olden times, and from this circumstance the place is named’ (Carmichael 1884: 459; see also Chapter 7). The main building is thought to have been called the *Tigh Geal*, the white house, but I have been unable to find documentary evidence of this. The name indicates that a building had chimneys and windows, and is thought to have been slated.

In 1609 the Statutes of Icolmkill (Iona) compelled chiefs to maintain inns for travellers, and no evidence has been found either to confirm or contradict the very strong local tradition that this is one of these inns. Any innkeeper would have been a tenant of Bornish, not Clanranald – but no Bornish muniments are known to have survived. Clanranald rentals do include inns and ‘change houses’. A strong tradition insists that the inn was slated, and it was burnt down before becoming a shepherd’s cottage, when the roof was replaced with thatch. Five buildings and an enclosure are shown in 1805, and five households enumerated in 1841 including a Sinclair who is a publican, but there are no entries for *Rubha na Mheine* for this date (see below). In 1851 there are two households, including a widow who was a grocer, and who had a daughter born in Glasgow, but by 1871 (and again in 1881) the only household was that of an incoming shepherd. In 1873 two buildings are roofed but by 1903 these are unroofed. On both 6” map editions there are areas of improved land to the east and the southwest, but the area of land immediately adjacent to the buildings is unimproved. Arinambane was abandoned in *c.* 1900 when a shepherd’s cottage was built at Ormacleit crossroads. This area became croft 8 North Loch Eynort in 1914. A ‘summer house’ was built by the then owners of

South Uist Estates in the 1940's and at that time the well associated with the settlement was re-opened and altered. [Structures and walls are visible on Google Maps' satellite imagery of this location; see also 60, 63–68 in Figure 4.1; see also Chapter 7].

18. Rudha Na Mheine (NF 783 283) – ‘the headland of the meal’. The records suggest that surplus cereal was usually exported in the form of grain, so it is likely that the headland received the name from meal imported at a time of crop failure [perhaps in 1812 and/or 1815; see Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 173]. The Bald map of 1805 shows five or six buildings and an enclosure. In 1817, 1818 and 1822 rent was paid by two tenants for the land but there is no entry in 1841. In 1844 the area is advertised as a pedicle to be part of Stoneybridge/Howbeg. One household is enumerated in 1851, the last year of a positive census entry. Land is improved both in 1873 and 1903 but the only building is roofless. In 1914 this area became crofts 6 and 7 North Loch Eynort, although the roofless building is on 5 North Loch Eynort.

19. Stromdubh (NF 775 290) – ‘the black narrows’. In 1805 this is Bornish land and one or two buildings are shown. By 1841 there are three households and there are probably the same in 1851, but the enumerator's route is not easy to follow. One is described as a ‘moss crofter’. The census of 1871 notes three households but only two buildings are roofed in 1873. Alternative names for the area are Kyles Calvay and Loch Eynort-side. In 1914 the area became crofts 1, 2, and 3 North Loch Eynort.

20. Bayhead (NF 766 298). Two buildings are shown in 1805, with an enclosure, but there are more buildings at NF 767 296, very close to the present road junction, and between Loch na Laimhrig and the sea. In 1817, 1818 and 1822 Angus Shaw was paying £7/7/- for Bayhead. Numbers of households in 1841 and 1851 are uncertain because this was the boundary between enumeration districts. By 1861 this was part of Bornish farm and probably had fewer than six households. The number appears to be the same in 1871 and 1881. In 1907 the area was crofted by the Congested Districts Board as crofts 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 Loch Eynort (Crofters Commission 1908: 20).

21. Calvay (NF 775 285). The name may mean ‘harbour island’ [Alex Woolf (pers. comm.) believes this in fact means ‘calf-island’ – a small island close to a bigger one, from *Kálfeyr*]. In 1805 the island was divided between Clanranald to the north and Bornish. From 1817 to 1822 rent of £6/6/- was paid to Clanranald for his section of the island, but there is no rental entry in 1830 – although there are several baptisms from Calvay in that year. The Bald map shows two settlements, but the 1841 census does not distinguish the actual position of the seven households listed. As Clanranald land was ‘cleared’ before that of Bornish it is possible that all these families were in the south of the island (MacLean 1984: 492). In 1878 land raiders planted potatoes but as far as is known there was no attempt to recolonize the island (MacLellan 1997: 4–5). After 1914 it became croft land, divided between the 21 shareholders of North Loch Eynort, Loch Eynort and South Loch Eynort.

22. Tigh Mhàil (NF 768 288). In the 17th and 18th centuries rent was normally paid partly in kind, and a building was needed for the collection and storage of these goods – hence *Tigh mhàil*, the house for the payment of goods as rent [see also Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 173]. This being on Bornish land it does not appear in Clanranald rentals. Two buildings are shown on the 1805 map, but the number of households in 1841 is uncertain. The census of 1851 gives three households, but later censuses are confusing as they list some cotters under the general address of Milton Farm. In 1873 two roofed settlements are shown; one of two buildings at NF 769 288, and another of three buildings at NF 768 288. In 1907 the area became crofts 2, 3, and 4 Loch Eynort.

23. Poltoran (NF 770 283). This is named from the anchorage, the ‘pool of the bald rock’, and was the place where vessels were loaded with the surplus exports from the rent collected at *Tigh mhail*. It is the end of the road made for kelp export from Ormacleit to Loch Eynort. In 1805 one or two buildings are shown, and in 1841 and 1861 there is one household listed. From 1871 the returns are unclear, but there is Angus MacLellan's autobiography (1997). The house on both editions of the 6" map is shown as roofed. The description of the house in the 1881 census is that of three rooms with windows.

24. Unasary (NF 772 277). The place known as ‘three stones’ was the boundary between Bornish and Kildonan, and later between Bornish farm and Milton (Gearraidh Bhailteas) farm. After 1907 it was the boundary between 1 Loch Eynort and Milton, until the crofting of South Loch Eynort in 1914. ‘Hunasary’ has a building in 1805 and one household in 1841. In 1851 three were enumerated but from then on there are no further records. In 1914 this area became 1 and 2 South Loch Eynort. [see also Chapter 7].

25. Rubha Ronich (NF 779 275). ‘The headland of the bracken’. A building is shown on the 1805 map but no further references were found. The area became 3 South Loch Eynort in 1914 [see 29 in Figure 4.1].

26. Frigary (NF 784 275). A roofless building is shown in both 1873 and 1903 in an area of improved land. In 1914 this became crofts 4 and 5 South Loch Eynort [see 36 in Figure 4.1].

27. Aird Bhuidhe (NF 793 278). This could mean ‘yellow heights’ or possibly ‘Bowie's point’. The Bowie family history is discussed in MacLean (1984). In 1805 this was Bornish land but no building is shown. There is no record in 1841, but in 1851 three households are noted: one is a retired shepherd from Perthshire, the others are fishermen and a boat carpenter. A single man, Donald O'Henley, was born in Cape Breton but probably had South Uist connections as O'Henley is on record as a Uist name in 1798 (MacLean 1984: 508). In 1861 and 1871 there is one household, and the house is described as having four windows. In 1873 the building at NF 797 277 is shown as roofed, but it is unroofed in 1903 [see 159 in Figure 4.1]. The land became part of South Loch Eynort common grazing in 1914.

28. Craigavaig (NF 798 272). In both 1841 and in 1851 there is one incoming shepherd in residence. The 1861 census is unclear, but there appear to be three households, one a fisherman and another a boat builder (but see Aird Bhuidhe, above). It does not appear subsequently, and in 1873 the land is mapped as unimproved and no building is shown [see 89 in Figure 4.1].

29. Kirkidale (NF 800 265; NF72NE 3). In 1560 there is a record of a chapel or ‘prayer house’ at this site (MacDhomhnaill 1981: 13). In 1805 two buildings and an enclosure are shown, but no census returns refer to this place. Roofless ruins are shown on all OS maps, but the name is transposed [see 70–72, 82, 86–87, 113–115 in Figure 4.1. and Chapter 17; see note 2 on OS error].

30. Kyles Stuley (NF 821 235). Two or three buildings and an enclosure are shown in 1805. In 1841 there are two households of incomers, but there is only one in 1851 and 1861. In 1871 and 1881 there is a probable entry under Milton Farm as the place is known to have been inhabited at this time. Both OS 6” editions show two roofed buildings and improved enclosed land.

Conclusion: Loch Aoinart in history

John Moreland

All archaeology is an attempt to recover and reconstruct the lives of those who lived in the past – not just the poor and dispossessed (as some have argued), but the rich and powerful as well; not just the inhabitants of Neolithic Wessex or Iron Age Hampshire, but people of South Uist and Sheffield in the early modern period too. One of the greatest impediments, as we have already noted, to using archaeological surveys of the kind we conducted around the shores of Loch Aoinart in pursuit of this endeavour is the absence of good datable evidence. Without (even moderately) well-defined chronological markers, we run the considerable risk of creating a ‘past as palimpsest’. While this merging of the material worlds which humans created and inhabited is to some extent a reflection of past reality (in the sense that the landscape inhabited by, for example, the inhabitants of Loch Aoinart in the early 19th century was a product of the activity of previous generations), our inability to prise apart these layers and to situate our 19th-century inhabitants in the world they inherited means we run the risk of creating for them an ahistorical present.⁴

There are, of course, textual sources for the early modern period – especially from the late 18th century onwards. These can be used to construct an historical narrative into which elements of the archaeological record can (with caution) be inserted – and we shall attempt to do this below. On the other hand, we would emphasize once again the fact that these documents are more than just evidence *about* the past. In several recent publications I have stressed the fact that texts were human products which had efficacy in the world in which they were created. They served both as a technology of oppression (Moreland 2001; 2006), and as

a vehicle for liberation and enlightenment (see Moreland 2010). This is not the place to repeat those arguments, but it is noteworthy that the moments when Loch Aoinart (or South Uist more generally) bursts into the light of history tend to be associated with outside attempts to influence or dominate its inhabitants – processes intimately associated with recording their lives and measuring their lands. To take just one example, what we know as the Bald Map of 1805 was commissioned by Ranald George McDonald of Clanranald, and was intended to aid in the future planning of his estates on South Uist (see Chapter 18; also Storrie 1969; Dodgshon 1998: 239). As a map, a record of past landholding, it is more than just evidence from the past. It was, as James Symonds argues, ‘a first step towards agricultural assessment, a weapon in the armoury of the improvers who were advising their landlord clients on how best to extract more profit’ (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 171).

It is also the case that the form these records take affects the way we view the historical process, and the kind of history we write. In Chapter 18, Gill MacLean reminds us that ‘few official records are or were kept in Gaelic’. This muteness, which was itself a function of the operation of power, contributes to the general notion of passivity and acquiescence. Dynamism, power and the capacity to drive forward the historical process are ascribed to those who monitored and recorded both their own activities and those of the people they dominated (see also Symonds 1999: 105). Robert Scally puts a slightly different ‘spin’ on the same phenomenon in early 19th-century Ireland, arguing that our view of the ‘internal life’ of the village of Ballykilcline (Co. Roscommon) is still impeded by the nature of the record that does survive. Because it was kept by outsiders whose main purpose was either to collect the rent or enforce the law, the town-land did not expose its mind to the record-keepers willingly (1995: 4).

In both early modern Ireland and South Uist ‘it was an axiom of survival to evade ... surveillance by all means possible’ (Scally 1995: 4). Fortunately for us, complete evasion from the early modern state was rarely possible, and in any case the ‘silent men and women’ of the past reveal themselves to us in the material world they created. The problem at Loch Aoinart is that, with rare (but significant) exceptions, we have not always been able to tease apart the work of different generations.

This difficulty is perhaps epitomised by the mounds/cairns which we discovered all around the shores of Loch Aoinart (but especially along the shore between the Allt Volagir and Sloc Dubh; see Figures 4.2 and 4.9). These may be prehistoric burial mounds, but they could just as easily be grassed-over early modern clearance cairns. It would be very surprising if this landscape was not utilized at all in earlier prehistory – but without excavation there is no way to tell if these mounds are the tombs of those who did so. The Late Bronze Age pottery from the excavations at both Kirkidale East and West (see Chapter 17) provides more certain evidence for prehistoric occupation of the eastern side to the island. We are as yet unable to say anything

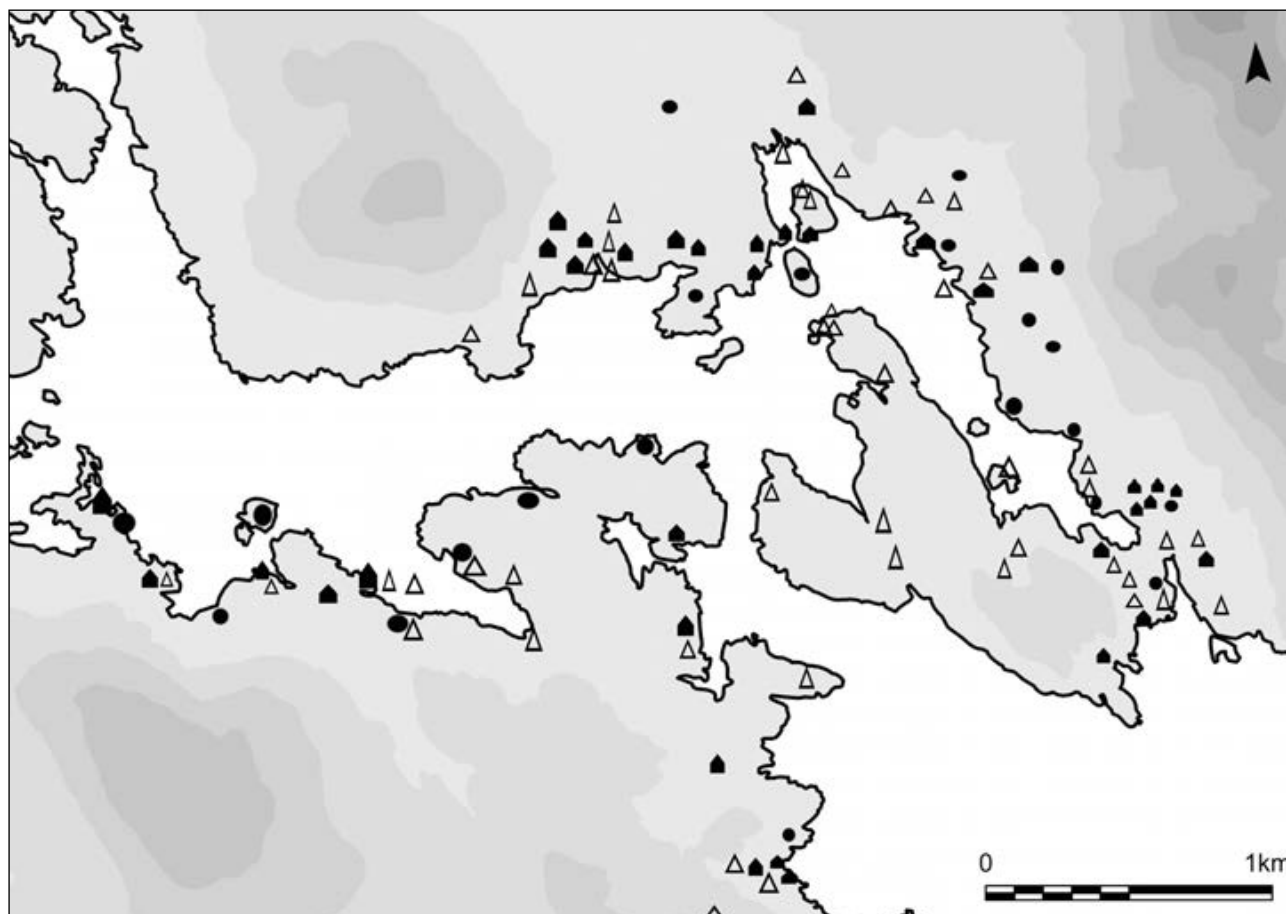


Figure 4.9. Living in the land – houses (house symbol), ‘other structures’ (dots), and cairns (triangles) around Loch Aoinart

about the character of that occupation, beyond the rather basic suggestion that it might have involved the seasonal use of the uplands, perhaps from the settlements of the Bornais machair to the west (see Chapters 2, 10 and 11; Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999: 14; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 61).

The Picts and the Vikings are synonymous with the early historic period in Scotland, and very significant traces of their activities have been found just a few kilometres to the west of Loch Aoinart, on the machair at Bornais (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 105–44; Sharples and Parker Pearson 1999; Sharples 2005). Although situated in the island’s most fertile landscape, these settlements are exposed to Atlantic storms and are separated from the sheltered anchorages of the east coast – to be found in places such as Loch Aoinart. In fact, it is likely that much communication between these settlements and the wider world took place via the east–west sea lochs and the Minch which runs between the east coast of South Uist and the mainland (Sharples and Parker Pearson 1999: 57). Despite the infertility of the landscape, therefore, it would not be unreasonable to expect to find some traces of Pictish and Viking settlement along the shores of Loch Aoinart.

In fact, in the course of the survey we thought we had found evidence for Viking-period settlement at two locations – Hafn and Kirkidale (Figure 4.2). In both cases

our interpretation was based on the discovery of apparently ‘bow-sided’ buildings with central hearths, said to be characteristics of Norse-period houses (see, for example, Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 133). Hafn is, as we have seen, a Norse place-name and, while it is possible that the bow-sided structure there also dates to the early Middle Ages, without excavation we cannot be sure. On the other hand, it does not really matter much in this context, for the name (along with *Calvay*, *Lamsay*, *Stromdubh*, *Hellisdale*, *Corodale*, *Bolum* *etc.*) is itself a product of the Norse presence in, and appropriation of, the land. Maybe this was the ‘haven’ longed-for by the inhabitants of the ‘great longhouse’ at Bornais as they voyaged the Minch?

As we shall see in Chapter 17, excavations of House 2 at Kirkidale East (Figure 4.6) demonstrated that it dated to the early modern, rather than the Norse, period. This does not, of course, rule out the possibility of early historic occupation of this locale – and given its location (at the entrance to the inner loch via Struthan Beag) and name, some Norse presence might be expected. Alex Woolf has recently suggested to me that the place-name (Kirkidale/*Kirkjudalr*?) may well reflect ecclesiastical use in the Norse period (pers. comm.) What is certain, however, is that (at least elements of) the structures hidden up the valley at Kirkidale West pre-date the Norse settlement of the island. As I will describe in detail in Chapter 17, excavations on



Figure 4.10. Using the land – seaweed platforms, jetties, walls and lazybeds around Loch Aoineart (symbols are self-explanatory)

this site suggest at least two main phases of occupation and produced sherds of both Late Bronze Age and Late Iron Age pottery (the latter dating to between AD 300 and 600+) (see also Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999: 86–7; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 115). It is possible that, as elsewhere in South Uist, this prehistoric site was re-occupied in (what we would regard as) the early historic period (see Chapter 17).

In any case, we now have good evidence that the mountainous east coast of South Uist was occupied from the late prehistoric period onwards, reinforcing the suggestion that human use of the interior and of the east coast was not just confined to seasonal transhumance, with perhaps some permanent ‘pastoral or fishing communities’ (Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999: 14; also p. 11 for a map of Middle Iron Age settlement on South Uist). Given the fact that much maritime traffic in the region would have preferred the shelter of the channel between Uist and the mainland, we may also speculate that these remote communities could also have benefited from occasional piracy. This might not have been so true of the early historic occupants of the site if they were monks! However, if this was a monastic settlement, it speaks as much of communication as of isolation. The site was certainly located away from whatever centres of habitation there were, perched on the shoulder of a hill out of sight from

the sea. On the other hand, it was just off the great maritime highway that connected the Uists with western Scotland, with Ireland and (more distantly) with Merovingian Gaul and the Mediterranean.

Strangely, as we move out of the era of the Picts and the Vikings (which many people still characterize as a Dark Age) and into the Middle Ages, our knowledge of how people inhabited, exploited and perceived the landscape of Loch Aoineart becomes vanishingly small. This is, of course, a product of the general difficulty with dating which I outlined earlier, and is not confined to the east coast of the island. It has recently been remarked that ‘we ... know more about prehistoric life on Uist than we do about Medieval houses and villages’ (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 148). However, the problem around Loch Aoineart is exacerbated by the absence of any obviously ‘Medieval’ structures – such as the churches at Howmore and Cille Donnain (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 154–61; Fleming and Woolf 1992; Fojut 1997). That there might have been an ecclesiastical presence in the region in the Middle Ages is reinforced by the possibility of an early Christian community at Kirkidale (see above), by the likelihood that there was a chapel there in the 16th century (see above; MacDhomhnaill 1981), and by the possibility that the place-name *Arinambane* refers to an early nunnery (see above and Chapter 18) – but we cannot be certain.

It is likely that the lands around Loch Aoinart continued to be used (at least) for seasonal grazing, and for refuge, throughout the Middle Ages. However, there are indications that, by the 14th century, the permanent settlements had moved off the machair and onto the margins of the peatlands to the east. The idea might have been to continue to exploit the (comparatively) fertile machair, while enhancing usage of the grazing land on the peat and further into the hills – a move perhaps indicating an increased demand for beef (on or off the island). This settlement shift is confirmed in the 1590s when all the marked settlements on Timothy Pont's map are located just to the east of the machair (see Chapters 2, 6 and 18; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 162). Further, it is very significant that Pont appears to suggest that Loch Aoinart was the main port of the island by this time. Given what we have suggested for the Pictish and Viking periods, this should not come as much of a surprise, but it does illustrate (literally) the fact that, because of its present-day topography and vegetation, we might have exaggerated the marginality and isolation of the east coast in the past.

Although the shores of Loch Aoinart are littered with small quays and slipways (Figure 4.10), we have not been able to pin-point Pont's 'port'. There are indications, however, that it might have been located on the shores of north Loch Aoinart, at (or close to) Arinambane (Figure 4.2). As Gill MacLean pointed out (above, and Chapter 18), the statutes of Iona (1609) required that inns be established to cater for the needs of travellers – and ports would seem to be an obvious place for such an establishment. There is a strong local tradition that there was an inn at Arinambane, and a publican is recorded as resident there in 1841.

Further, Bàgh Lathach (Figure 4.2) is believed to have been the 'silty bay' where ships waited for cargo (or the tide) while Rubha na Mheine is thought to have been the place where meal was imported during later famines (above). Gill also reminds us that piracy almost certainly made a significant contribution to Clanranald's finances, and 'for this Loch Aoinart was ideal as the entrance requires detailed local knowledge to navigate' (Chapter 18). All-in-all, it seems likely that in the 17th and 18th centuries South Uist's imports and exports were channelled through this part of Loch Aoinart, and that many of the features we located between (say) site numbers 56 and 75 (Figure 4.1) facilitated the process.

It is likely that cattle, and cattle products, were the most significant exports passing through Loch Aoinart. The sources of the period are dominated by the rearing of cattle (see Chapter 18), and James Symonds concludes that, 'in broad economic terms, the islands and highlands became producers of black cattle to meet the Royal Navy's requirement for salt beef' (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 170). It is likely that the cattle which fed the navy were grazed on the hills around Loch Aoinart, and that many of the walls and enclosures which divide up this landscape were used in the management of this precious resource.⁵ In this context it certainly seems significant that the densest concentration of these earthworks is to be found

just to the east of Arinambane (Figure 4.10) – as is Rubha Bhuaithe ('the headland of the cattle enclosure' – Figure 4.2, and above). Before continuing on this 'export' theme, however, we should remember that some of these walls and enclosures, and those close to Frigary on the south shore of the loch (Figures 4.2 and 4.10), were probably associated with localized subsistence production dividing the land into 'inbye and outbye' (see Chapter 18). In this context too, it is worth remarking that the unusual length of the house at Frigary may suggest that it had a byre at one end (see above, and Branigan and Merrony 2000).

Returning to export, it is unlikely that cattle were transported to the mainland 'on the hoof'. Speaking of the island of Lingay (off the coast of North Uist in the Sound of Harris) in 1703, Martin Martin tells us that there the 'beef is sweet and tender as any can be'. He goes on to remark that 'the natives are accustomed to salt their beef in a cow's hide, which keeps it close from air, and preserves it as well, if not better, than barrels, and tastes, they say, best when used this way. This beef is transported to Glasgow ... and from thence (being put into barrels there) exported to the Indies in good condition' (Martin 1999: 69), and it is not difficult to imagine that the 'natives' of South Uist did the same. James Symonds has suggested that Loch Aoinart's 'tidal zones might have been used to make salt for preserving ... beef' (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 173), and, since the animals themselves provided the 'containers' in which their meat was exported, the whole process of rearing, slaughtering, preserving and exporting beef might have been focused on this part of the east coast. Thus the late 17th- and 18th-century inhabitants of Loch Aoinart were enmeshed not just in regional and national economies, but also in the project of British imperialism itself – a perspective which entirely undermines notions of marginality and peripherality.

As we shall see in Chapter 17, excavation of House 2, Kirkdale East, reinforces ideas about the 'connectedness' of the island. The ceramic assemblage was dominated by imported table- and tea-wares dated to the late 18th-early 19th century. Perhaps most evocative of the joined-up nature of the early modern world, however, are the wine bottles found in the remains of this island blackhouse. Like the ceramics, they almost certainly entered the island via the same facilities in Loch Aoinart that (a little earlier, admittedly) took salt beef to the Empire. Symonds puts this in a wider context. He argues that the ceramics from his excavations of a blackhouse at Milton, just to the west of Loch Aoinart, 'produced in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Stoke-on-Trent [suggest that] ... along with the rest of Britain in the 1700s, South Uist obtained the new luxuries of tea, tobacco, sugar and molasses, together with the paraphernalia of tea sets and clay pipes'. He notes that, in British terms, the ceramics were 'relatively low-status "industrial" slipwares', points out that some had been repaired with 'lead staples', and concludes that 'there is no denying that the ceramics indicate circumstances of poverty: people were getting by with the cheapest ceramics and going to some lengths to repair many of those that

broke' (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 180–1; Symonds 1999: 117).

I am not so sure. Repair can be taken as evidence of problems with supply rather than being an index of poverty, and the fact that the Kirkidale ceramics show no sign of having been repaired demonstrate that neither condition was general to the island (see Barker in Chapter 17; Barker 2005: 116, 121; though note that a 'glazed base sherd of pottery (with rivet hole) [was] found on a slipway' on Eilean Dubh, north Loch Aoinheart [site 122]. Further, Jack Bumsted has recently commented on the 'generally improved standard of living' enjoyed by the people of the islands in the late 18th century, a product of 'the widespread use of smallpox inoculation and vaccination, the introduction of the potato and ... new sources of wealth for the inhabitants, including kelping' (2005: 127–8; also below). While he goes on to note that this did not always mean 'prosperity in the modern sense' because people often responded to the new circumstances by increasing family size (2005: 128), the evidence from Kirkidale, and from the islands more generally, does seem to point to people at the end of the 18th century living well beyond the level of subsistence (see also Barker 2005: 112).

Most of the excavated blackhouses on South Uist and Barra date to the late 18th or early 19th century (or, at least, that is when they had ceramics; Branigan 2005a: 74, 86, 100; Branigan and Merrony 2000: 13–15; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 176–84), and it seems likely that so do most of those we located around the shores of Loch Aoinheart. *If* they do, they are perhaps another index of at least a certain level of prosperity. Archaeologically, this would be the moment in which Loch Aoinheart was most inhabited (in the sense of people having a sense of place there; see below for the highest level of population). It was a landscape dotted with sturdy farms, each one representing a considerable commitment in time and energy and whose solidity thus rooted their inhabitants in the landscape.

While embedded in the land, these people were also enmeshed in the networks of national and international trade (*contra* MacLean, in Chapter 18, who suggests that the shifting of Clanranald affairs to Benbecula in the 1720s was 'detrimental to Locheynort'). David Barker summarizes the situation nicely. The ceramics of Balnabodach (Barra), he argues, 'would not be out of place in households on mainland Britain. ... An embracing of at least the trappings of a mainland Anglo-Scottish way of life seems to have been complete early in the 19th century, but the precise way in which mainland British material culture was employed within the blackhouse is still uncertain. Here was a domestic environment which had no obvious history of consumerism, and in which people would have had only a limited awareness of the culture they were buying into with these industrially made goods. The available evidence suggests that this was not the natural environment in which factory-made ceramics would readily find a place, and yet here they are in quantities' (Barker 2005: 121–2).

Some may think that I am offering a rather romantic vision of life along the shores of Loch Aoinheart at the turn

of the 18th century. On the contrary, I believe I am, in fact, avoiding the lure of a pervasive 'romantic counter-modernism' which seeks to preserve (or, one might say, construct) the 'purity' and simplicity of traditional societies and which reads their incorporation into the modern world system only as a tale of alienation and fragmentation (see Moreland 2010: 91–3, 111). I have no doubt that, as with all peasant societies, life in South Uist was hard – most of the time. But accepting that, we must also accept that people were resilient, that they sought to use what resources were at hand to construct themselves and their communities – and that some times were better than others. I would suggest that this was one such moment, that it is manifest in the distribution of farms all along the shores of Loch Aoinheart, in the monumental construction of the blackhouses, and in the use of imported ceramics and glass vessels.

The inhabitants of the blackhouse at Kirkidale were not aware that their plates, bowls and jugs were 'relatively low-status'. For them, they were probably prized items, made more so by problems of supply. They clearly did not have the same meaning here as in the production centres in Stoke or Glasgow. As Igor Kopytoff has argued more generally, 'what is significant about the adoption of alien objects ... is not the fact that they are adopted, but the way they were culturally redefined and put to use' (1986: 67). And the fact that many of the South Uist assemblages (including Kirkidale) have large numbers of plates, 'with connotations of a more English style of dining involving tables and chairs', and teawares 'despite evidence to suggest that tea was not widely available before the middle of the 19th century' (Barker 2005: 121) tells us that a process of 'cultural redefinition' had taken place, with even this limited range of ceramics being used to express a new sense of self and place in this joined-up world. It may be only in our eyes that the table- and tea-wares look incongruous in a Hebridean blackhouse.

But if this was one of the 'better times' in the life of ordinary people of South Uist, it was to be a brief one and might have contained within itself the seeds of its destruction. As Symonds has argued, the people of South Uist were soon to be 'toiling in a vale of tears' (Symonds 1999). In her study of the documentary evidence for Loch Aoinheart (historically, Locheynort), Gill MacLean argues that by the beginning of the 19th century the export trade through Loch Aoinheart diminished owing to the fact that Clanranald's 'Edinburgh-based estate administration preferred gentlemen farmers who could pay in cash' – not in cattle, as before (Chapter 18). We also know that there was some emigration from the region (to Canada) brought about (in part) by religious persecution (Chapter 18; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 175). The most significant change, however, was one that linked cash and exports, and which illustrates what happens when world-system connections really do act as a corrosive on the structures of island society.

Kelp had been processed in the Uists from the 1730s. It produced an alkaline ash by burning the seaweed. In the second half of the 18th century, demand for its use in a

variety of industrial processes, including the manufacture of soap and glass, increased significantly. As Jack Bumsted points out ‘the constant warfare of the period often interrupted supplies of alkalines from overseas, especially barilla from Spain, previously the principal source for the British market’ (2005: 124). The result was an increase both in prices and production as Hebridean lairds sought to take advantage of political events to ‘increasingly capitalise’ their estate resources (Dodgshon 1988: 239). ‘Between 1807 and 1809 Clanranald made an average profit of £9,454 a year from kelp’, and by 1810 was selling 1000 tuns (1 tun = 2250 pounds) a year (Bumsted 2005: 125; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 173–4).

Much of that production must have taken place in Loch Aoineart and other parts of the east coast. As Gill MacLean points out, kelp ash made from the bubble weed (*Ascophyllum*) that grows along the east coast was of higher quality than the tangles (*Laminaria*) washed ashore on the west. In late spring and early summer the bubble weed was harvested and dragged ashore to be dried and then burned on rock platforms (Chapter 18). This produced a ‘brittle many-coloured substance’ weighing less than 5% of the weight of the original weed, which was then transported to the slipways or wharfs from where ‘it was shipped south to Hull, Leith, Liverpool, or other destinations in England or Lowland Scotland’ (Bumsted 2005: 124).

So Loch Aoineart might no longer have been supplying the navy with beef, but it was still inextricably caught up in the rhythms of national and international economics and politics. And, while we cannot date them precisely, it seems clear that many of the facilities we located along the shores of the loch were a product of this entanglement. This is seen most clearly in the numerous seaweed ‘traps’ or platforms marked in Figure 4.10, designed to hold the product before it was spread out to dry on land. We might also imagine that many of the slipways we recorded were used to transport the kelp to an export facility (Figure 4.10), and at least some of the bothies were used by those involved in the seasonal production. As Gill MacLean notes (Chapter 18), unlike cattle shielings, these bothies were constructed close to the shore and were made of stone or turf, or even dug out of a bank (see the several ‘U- or D-shaped’ or ‘possible’ structures listed in the site inventory and mapped in Figure 4.9). Finally, many of the blackhouses would have remained in occupation, both as farms and as centres of kelp production. As in the Derbyshire Peak District at roughly the same time, here we are witnessing the creation of an ‘industrial society’ in an entirely rural (and, in Loch Aoineart’s case, marine) context (Hodges 2006: 121–41).

On Clanranald’s estate ‘lands were let to the tenantry with a view to the rents being paid in a great measure by kelp manufacture’. In theory any surplus production was paid for in cash; in reality this was frequently set against arrears, advances or was used as payment for meal distributed when the crops failed – as happened in South Uist in 1812 and 1815 (Bumsted 2005: 126; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 173; Dodgshon 1998: 240; see also *Rudha Na*

Mheine in Maclean’s place-name analysis, above). The fall in the price of kelp from the 1810s onwards exacerbated the situation, but the poor people had to continue production because, as a contemporary noted, ‘if the kelp is given up the small tenants cannot continue to pay the present rents’ (cited in Bumsted 2005: 132). In addition, as the ‘poor people’ devoted more of their time in the late spring and early summer to the production of kelp, so they had less and less time to work the land on which they still depended for their subsistence (Symonds 1999: 110). The result, Gill MacLean argues (Chapter 18) ‘was devastation to both land and people’. By the beginning of the 1820s ‘the situation was one of increasing indebtedness’, and visitors to the island made comparisons between Hebridean kelpmakers and African slaves – to the advantage of the latter (Bumsted 2005: 127). Gill MacLean captures the situation very well:

‘an industrial society, held in thralldom by dependence on land for basic subsistence, on the market value of one commodity, and increasingly on the monoculture of one crop – potatoes – had developed in South Uist’ (Chapter 18).

The situation was untenable, and lairds such as Clanranald knew it. While some efforts were made to improve the process of manufacturing kelp (Branigan 2005b: 140–3; Bumsted 2005: 132), other ‘improvements’ increasingly found favour. Chief among these was ‘clearing’ the land of its existing population and turning it over to sheep grazing – sheep, it was argued, would give Clanranald ‘a well paid money rent and a certain income independent of kelp’ (cited in Bumsted 2005: 132; Dodgshon 1998: 239–42). At first these clearances were internal and, at Whitsun 1827, the township of Milton was ‘cleared’ and a sheep-farm created. The people were ‘re-settled on the small island of Eriskay and on the poor quality lands in the hills and around the sea-lochs of the east coast, where they had to find new ways of feeding themselves with sea fishing and potato growing’ (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 174). It is almost certain that some settled along the shores of Loch Aoineart. As Gill MacLean points out, after years of indebtedness they would have had very few resources; the landscape in which they now lived was very different from the one they had been used to, and many had become ‘semi-industrialized’. The transition to east coast living might not have been easy.

In 1838 Clanranald sold his Uist estates to Colonel John Gordon of Cluny – and the process of clearance continued. The impoverishment of the people was exacerbated by the catastrophic failure of the potato crop in 1846, 1848, 1849, and 1850 – resulting in widespread famine. When asked what he proposed to do about his starving tenants Gordon replied ‘In answer to your enquiry “what do I propose doing with them” – I say – nothing’ (cited in Branigan 2005b: 151). Although he did, after threats of government action, spend considerable quantities of money on famine relief, he also began another process of clearance – this time to Canada. The result was that the population of the island

fell from ‘more than *c.*7500 in 1851 to *c.*5000 in 1860’ (Symonds 1999: 111; Branigan 2005b: 150–52; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 174), and Loch Aoinart was ‘finally abandoned to shepherds and sheep’ with the bothies of some visiting fishermen on the coast (see Chapter 18 and Place-names section above).

The population of Loch Aoinart was probably at its height in the late 1840s, but there is no real archaeological marker of this. And this should not surprise us. The people who moved here lived in bothies and shielings, some of which we might have recorded, and they existed in abject poverty. They left little material mark on the world – and it may be in absences like this that we can find them. As we saw earlier, some have claimed that the pottery assemblages from South Uist are a measure of the poverty of the people. For me, however, a real marker of poverty is the absence of pottery post-dating the 1830s from Kirkdale (see Barker in Chapter 17). While it may be that this is itself an indicator of when this site was abandoned, it is also possible that the people who lived there were no longer in a position to purchase such goods.⁶

It is certainly not a product of the demise of regional-level trade networks – in 1838 Loch Aoinart was still recorded as one of the three main harbours of South Uist (Chapter 18). The kelping system had sucked out people’s labour and delivered it to Glasgow, Hull, Liverpool, Glasgow and Edinburgh – leaving them with nothing with which to enter the market, and barely enough to survive (if that). And when the profits from that proved insufficient, sheep were brought in to replace the human inhabitants. That moment – the replacement of people by sheep – might be marked by the construction of sheep fanks on top of houses at Kirkdale and High Town.

The Clearances are one of the most significant moments in the early modern history of the British Isles, and the still largely abandoned landscape of Loch Aoinart is a marker of these events and a reminder of their real human impact. The fact that we are studying the houses and fields as archaeological phenomena is a product of the dislocation, rupture and displacement they caused. It is humbling to confront the fact that our intellectual endeavours were facilitated by such human suffering.

Site inventory

Transcribed from the survey notebooks by Anna Beck and updated by John Moreland

| Map number | Survey book number | Grid Reference (NF) | Description |
|------------|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 22 | 1.102 | 778 276 | Traces of lazy beds on small hillock – running roughly S-N. |
| 23 | 1.103 | 778 276 | Piles of stones, possibly clearance cairns; small and medium-sized rocks. 3 piles have diameters of 1.70m, 2.80m and 3.20m respectively, though largest is ovoid and 2.10m wide in other direction. Recorded by Moore and Wilson 2007 as SU551. |
| 24 | 1.104 | 778 276 | Wall (4.20m × 1.15m) across eastern end of natural channel between island and mainland. At end of area of channel cleared of loose rock, bounded at opposite end by boundary wall. A causeway of small rocks links island to mainland. |
| 25 | 1.105 | 778 276 | Most of island covered in pronounced lazy beds. Orientation: E-W. |
| 26 | 1.101 | 778 278 | Stone building, roughly rectangular in shape (5.40m N-S × 4.20m E-W). Walls approx. 1.10m thick, formed by medium and small stones. Some evidence for internal structure. Possibly a boathouse? Vegetation: just turf. |
| 27 | 1.134 | 779 274 | Wall, marked on the OS map. 1.10m high, 9m long, 1m wide. Regular, neat construction. |
| 28 | 3.100 | 779 275 [7789 2747]* | Four-walled structure (N wall 6.60m, E wall 5.55m, W wall 4.40m, S wall 5.30m) beside existing house. It has a doorway in the south wall. Sits on raised ground. Wall stands c.0.50m, made of large well-cut stones; N. wall c.0.50m wide. Semi-circular fronting, possibly earlier structure or fallen revetment. Trackway of small rocks on N side. Possible track on S. Vegetation: lots of nettles within. Recorded by Moore and Wilson 2007 as SU550. |
| 29 | 3.106 | 779 275 | Two small structures, possibly outhouses, immediately to south of site 28. Constructed from small rocks of single height, the W one is oval (3m × 2.10m) and the E one has a diameter of 3m. Associated with a building to the W with walls constructed from large rocks. The walls from the building form an 'L' shape, 8.20m N-S × 3.50m E-W, and are c.1m high and 1m wide. A wall runs NE-SW from the SE of the small structures to where it incorporates the front of the building. There are lazy beds in front of the building and the area inside seems to have been a dump for small stones. Vegetation: both structures surrounded by nettles. [see <i>Rubha Ronich</i> in <i>Place-names</i> section above] |
| 30 | 3.107 | 781 274 [7807 2740] | Small slipway 5.70m E-W × 4.70m N-S, not very deep. Wall height 0.50m, single stone, width c.0.50m, measured at low tide. Large rock island (unmarked on map) opposite entrance. |
| 31 | 3.108 | 781 274 | Cairn (clearance?), 2.40m dia. Loosely piled medium-sized stones to height of 0.50m. Looks modern. |
| 32 | 3.109 | 782 275 | Pathway across boggy area (Figure 4.1) – small rocks amongst natural outcrop. Above slipways (site 33). |
| 33a 33b | 3.110 and 3.111 | 782 275 | Two cleared slipways. The one to the S (site 33a) is 20.40m in length N-S and 4m in width widening out to 8.30m (with a platform [seaweed?] on the E side). To the NW of this is a natural outcrop possibly flattened to form another seaweed-storage platform. The slipway to the NE (site 33b) is 13.60m long SW-NE and 5.70m wide. There are lazy beds above the slipways. |

| Map number | Survey book number | Grid Reference (NF) | Description |
|------------|--------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 34 | 1.120 | 782 276 | Small sections of wall (3.20m and 3.80m long) running E-W along face of natural rock. Walls formed by loose piles of small, medium and large undressed rocks. Possibly a seaweed 'store'. |
| 35 | 1.119 | 782 277 | Pile of small and medium-sized stones. c.3.70m long × 1.80m wide, roughly ovoid in shape. Vegetation: turf and bracken. |
| 36 | 3.112 | 783 275 | House (4.70m NW-SE × 4.40m NE-SW) above site 33 on small peninsula. In the middle of the structure is an arrangement of stones c.0.50m across. The doorway in the middle of the SE wall is 1.20m wide. Outside it, to the SE, there are fallen stones or possibly the remains of a small second room. Vegetation: short turf. |
| 37 | 3.113 | 783 276 | Two circular structures at end of peninsula in front of site 36. Small circular structure (2.80m dia.) to W, and collapsed cairn of loose stones in a radial hump (3m dia.) to E. |
| 38 | 1.118 | 783 277 | Single-track causeway between island and mainland. Large stones and boulders. |
| 39 | 1.117 | 784 274 | Short section of wall running parallel to stream. Medium and large rocks overlain by peat. Section is about 14m long and 0.50m wide. Continues sporadically up length of stream. Orientation: 150°. |
| 40 | 3.114 | 784 275 | Trap or jetty? A stream runs down a valley with a wall constructed to the E of it. Beyond the wall the natural rock rises to form a ridge. To the W of the stream there is a natural ridge with a wall constructed on top of it (site 41). [Description reconstructed from diagram]. |
| 41 | 3.115 | 784 275 | Wall – large rocks, 1m–1.50m high, 1m wide, peat-covered. Around ridge; broken up but follows stream/valley. Surrounding vegetation: heather. |
| 42 | 1.121 | 785 275 | Cleared slipways (running E-W). The northern one is 6.70m × 2.60m, and the southern one 9.50m × 1.90m. High tide to top – measured at mid-tide point. |
| 43 | 3.125 | 785 275 | Raised rectangular house (6m NW-SE × 3m SW-NE). Possible (raised) circular feature (2.10m dia.) built within. Lazy beds to the W. Vegetation: covered in bracken. |
| 44 | 1.116 | 786 274 | Possible slipway (22.30m NW-SE × 10.80m NE-SW), harbour wall and wharf/boathouse (7.60m NW-SE × 9.30m NE-SW). At western end there is a rectangular structure of large and medium-sized stones (4.30m NW-SE × 3.10m NE-SW), possibly remains of a wharf/jetty or the foundations of a boathouse. The area of beach to the E of this structure has been cleared, 2 piles of stones marking the site of clearance cairns/harbour 'moles', which might have marked the channel at high water. Extending to the N and S of these 2 stone piles are the remains of walls, and other walls and possible structures (including an oval structure 2.70m NW-SE) can be seen on the southern side of the slipway. High tide reaches right up to jetty. |

| Map number | Survey book number | Grid Reference (NF) | Description |
|------------|--------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 45a | 3.126 | 786 275 [7857 2746] | Very large building, 18.30m E-W × 4m N-S. Built of large stones, walls 0.50m–1m thick. It was thought by KH and KM to be a church but is probably a blackhouse. There are opposed entrances towards its west end and a gap near the east end of the north wall. There are three N-S partition walls in the western half of the house. The building appears to be built on a terrace, partly natural and partly revetted, extending as an apron 1m–1.50m around its exterior wall. Vegetation: turf and bracken inside and surrounding. [This building is visible on the Google Maps satellite imagery] [see <i>Frigary</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above]. |
| 45b | 3.132 | | To the E of building 45a, where the ‘apron’ is widest, a large wall emerges that curves around to the NW until it reaches the shoreline, and then adjacent to the shore until almost the end of feature 45e/45c junction. |
| 45c | 3.127 | | Broken wall constructed from single stones, one course high. |
| 45d | 3.128 | | Broken wall constructed from single stones, one course high. |
| 45e | 3.129 | | Wall, up to c.1m high, turns right angle westwards. |
| 45f | 3.130 | | Broken wall constructed of single stones curving westward. |
| 45g | 3.131 | | Broken wall constructed of single stones, curving off 45c. |
| 46 | 1.135 | 787 274 | Clearance cairn and lazy beds at foot of crag. Vegetation: fern and turf covering. |
| 47 | 1.122 | 787 275 | Causeway between peninsula and island. Small and large boulders, 1m wide, 8.60m long. |
| 48 | 1.123 | 787 275 | Two NW-SE lines of loosely associated stones (5.30m and 4.10m), possible part of a rectangular structure 4.50m wide. Fallen stones concentrate around the corners. Vegetation: short grass. |
| 49 | 1.124 | 787 275 | Lazy beds (running approx. N-S) in fern-covered area on the main part of the island. |
| 50 | 1.140 | 788 273 | Possible structure consisting of scattered medium-sized and small rocks. Some circular and straight patterns can be discerned in the general scatter. Structure appears to post-date an earlier phase of lazy bed cultivation and a woodland episode. Vegetation: mainly turf and bracken but bramble and wood sorrel also present. |
| 51 | 1.139 | 788 273 | Modern fence on top of peat-covered wall (width c.1m). Becomes substantial (recently constructed wall) on coast; marked on OS map – and visible on Google Maps satellite imagery. |
| 52 | 1.136 | 788 274 | Wall (12.40m) blocking short, clear, natural inlet. Continuation of wall coming down hillside. Possibly encloses a seaweed-collecting area. |
| 53 | 1.133 | 788 275 | Rectangular building (6m × 3.90m). Vegetation: short turf and ferns. |
| 54 | 1.144 | 789 276 | Two piles of stones 3m apart, possibly clearance cairns or remains of a structure. Vegetation: turf and bracken. |

| Map number | Survey book number | Grid Reference (NF) | Description |
|------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 55 | 1.145 | 789 276 | Circular feature (1.50m dia.) formed by small stones. Other associated stones can be discerned nearby. |
| 56 | 3.F16 and F15 | 789 284 [7906 2849 – southern end] | Stone wall. Its southern extent (F16) is on an S-shaped, approx. N-S alignment, running from the S side of the cliff edge. Its northern section (F15), approx. SW-NE, terminates on the N side of the cliff edge, crosses a stream and ends in the NE at another cliff face. This northern section also bifurcates. Runs up to Loch nam Faoileann. |
| 57 | 3.F17 | 789 284 | Sunken house platform (5m NW-SE × 3m NE-SW). Picked out in the heather. There appear to be no walls, just a dip in the ground level. To SE below house platform, lazy beds cover the whole terrace before steep slope to sea. |
| 58 | 3.143 | 791 275 | Loose stones, possible of a simple structure, on a small promontory. Vegetation: nettles and brambles. |
| 59 | 1.146 | 791 278 | Loose association of stones, possibly a clearance episode. Vegetation: turf, bracken and heather. |
| 60 | 1.5 | 791 285 [7915 2847] | Stone wall, running approx. NW-SE (grid ref. is at NW end). Roughly piled rocks <i>c.</i> 0.60m wide, possibly 2 rows with loose infill. South end of wall meets edge of an enclosure just to the south and west of a building (known colloquially as ‘the pub’, because of the local traditions that this is the site of an inn; see above). This enclosure has thicker walls (up to 0.70m thick in places) of more solid construction, with at least 2 (possibly 3) rows of stones. Vegetation (top of wall): coarse shrubs, bracken, heather, rough grass, foxgloves near adjoining rocks. Vegetation (in enclosure): bracken, grasses, thistles, foxgloves [see <i>Arinambane</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above]. |
| 61 | 3.141 | 792 273 | Two oval structures. The western one is <i>c.</i> 3.90m N-S × 4.40m E-W, with doorway on E side. It has a large boulder built into the wall on its W side and the wall is 2m thick at the front. There is much debris within the structure. The less substantial lower structure lies just to the NE and is also oval, <i>c.</i> 4m N-S by 3.50m E-W. It has smaller walls and fewer stones. Located on a headland by the coast. Vegetation: foxgloves within structure and ferns surrounding. |
| 62 | 1.157 | 792 279 [7914 2794] | Modern (<i>i.e.</i> 1980s) slipway, 8m long, 1.30m wide, 1m tall. Servicing peat cutting [the latter visible in Google Maps satellite imagery]. |
| 63 | 1.8 | 792 285 | Line of stones (wall?) <i>c.</i> 4m long, 0.70m wide, by the side of a stream. Vegetation: rough grass and bracken, moss. No suitable visible lichens* [see <i>Arinambane</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above]. |

| Map number | Survey book number | Grid Reference (NF) | Description |
|------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 64 | 1.18 | 793 292 – 792 286 [visible on Google Maps from 7922 2906 to 7923 2865] | Wall – with some stones remaining in places, but only earth bank in others. Runs from close to Loch an Dòrain south towards Loch Aoineart (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2). There are two adjoining groups of stones, which may be possible structures [7825 2896]. Vegetation: heather, some rough grass, no lichen. [Google Maps satellite imagery suggests that this is, in fact, a combination of two linear features (Figure 4.3). One of these (A) seems to run first W and then S from Loch an Dòrain, joining (at 7934 2882) another (unmapped) feature which runs from the westernmost corner of Loch nam Faileann towards the complex of sites at 792 285 (65, 66, below) – these appear to enclose the area lying between the two lakes. The other linear feature (B), which appears much straighter, and more modern, runs in a dog-leg NE from 7923 2863 to join A at 7927 2888] [see <i>Arinambane</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above]. |
| 65 | 2.11 | 792 286 | Rectangular building (15m N-S × 7.50m E-W) with drystone walls 0.75m thick and a doorway at the north end of the east wall. Circular feature inside near middle of east wall. No windows visible. Natural bedrock incorporated into SE corner of house. Vegetation: ferns and some foxgloves inside and around the building [see <i>Arinambane</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above] |
| 66 | 3.12 | 792 287 [7926 2865?] | Building c.10m NE-SW × 5.50m NW-SE. Walls generally of haphazard construction, of rocks that were not purposely shaped, with slightly curved corners. Rubble-filled walls, with some stones 1m long. Possible doorway towards NE end of SE wall. Internal ‘L’ shaped wall 0.70m wide at SW end. Walls/banks run away from the NE and SW ends. The house is built within a gap in the long wall 56 [see <i>Arinambane</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above] |
| 67 | 2.15 | 793 285 | Lazy beds. Cleared land (roughly rectangular) with furrows and ridges. Vegetation: mostly grass [see <i>Arinambane</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above] |
| 68 | 2.16 | 793 286 | House (4.50m E-W × 4.10m N-S). Plain drystone walling 0.70m thick with a doorway at the east end of the south wall. No visible internal structures. Additional (L-shaped) outside wall, connected(?) to doorway. Covered in ferns, bracken <i>etc.</i> so difficult to determine [see <i>Arinambane</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above] |
| 69 | 1.156 | 794 279 | Cairn, 2m across. |
| 70 | 1.169 | 795 264 [7977 2644] | Substantial circular structures that seem to be joined. The N ring is 3.30m dia. (with a wall 0.80m thick), and the S one is 2.40m dia. The smaller ring’s entrance is on the NW. The entrance of the larger ring is blocked by debris. Height of walls c.0.80m. Roughly dressed stone. On the E side of the rings there is a short curving wall 3.20m long, and ‘wall’ 71. Surrounded by ferns and other structures to the S (also sites 71–72) [see <i>Kirkidale</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above] |
| 71 | 1.170 | 795 264 [7977 2644] | Wall, 2.50m wide × 7.40m long, running approx. N-S on east side of site 70. Covered in turf, it runs to site 72 from a rock outcrop. [This ‘wall’ may, in fact, be a mound] [see <i>Kirkidale</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above] |

| Map number | Survey book number | Grid Reference (NF) | Description |
|------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 72 | 1.171 and 1.172 | 795 264 [7979 2644] | Long, narrow but substantial wall running eastwards for 15.50m from wall/mound 71 (or possibly from E corner of site 70) then curving northwards for 7.90m and running westwards for 7.50m, ending in structure 1.172, built into it. 1.172 is an oval arrangement of stones, 2.90m wide. Surrounding vegetation: abundant fern growth [see <i>Kirkidale</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above]. [This site was subsequently mapped in detail, and small-scale excavations carried out – see above <i>1990 Intensive Survey: Kirkidale and Chapter 17</i>]. |
| 73 | 1.158 | 795 273 | Wall under turf – but ambiguous. Starts at grid reference, runs <i>c. due N</i> for 21.60m. Thin and low, mostly hidden. |
| 74 | 1.155 | 795 278 | Slipway (N-S), 7.60m. |
| 75 | 3.24 | 795 285 | Slipway. Construction of wall to the E of slipway (1m high, 1.50m wide) appears to be a product of the clearance of stones from slipway – 2 layers. |
| 77 | 1.25 | 795 287 [visible on Google Maps at 7942 2865] | ‘Boat-shaped’ building with stone walls. It is 6.60m N-S × 5.0m E-W with walls 0.80m–1.20m thick. There is a possible doorway on the W side. The massive wall construction probably includes 2 rows of stones with rubble infill and, at the N end, an in-filled area (2.15m N-S) that may possibly be a hearth. There is possibly a second opening at the S end. Vegetation: bracken and fern, moss-covered stones, a small amount of heather, foxgloves. Very overgrown [see <i>Portskeig</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above]. |
| 78 | 1.25 building 41 | 795 287 [visible on Google Maps at 7944 2865] | Remains of a stone-built house (13.50m N-S × 6.40m E-W) lying to the SE of site 77. A ‘regular’ rectangle with the W wall slightly uneven as it merges with hillside. The doorway is at the southern end of the E wall. The walls are thick (1.40m–1.60m), well built with rocks, firmly set in more than one line but with no infill. The interior dimensions are 10.50m × 4.30m. A stone-built feature in the SW corner has a radius of 1.30m. Vegetation: bracken and foxgloves, moss and grass on stone, lichen 10cm [see <i>Portskeig</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above]. |
| 79 | 1.25 building 42 | 795 287 | A three-sided stone-walled enclosure 12.60m S of site 77. Its N wall is 4m+, its S wall is 7m and its curving E wall is 18.15m long. It is of less solid construction than the other buildings, perhaps of loose stone piling, 0.60–0.70m wide, tumbled down. There are no definite internal structures; just loose stones. Vegetation: bracken, moss and clover, no evident lichens. Fewer foxgloves – less organic deposits? N.B. There is a lot of fern to the S of the area surveyed (no extant structures within this area) [see <i>Portskeig</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above]. |
| 80 | 3.26 | 795 288 | Lazy beds over rising terrain. Generally they avoid rocky outcrops. In some areas at the top of the hillside there are lines of eroded peat aligned with the beds, perhaps indicating soil erosion associated with this practice of farming. |
| 81 | 1.27 | 795 289 | Three cairns: 1) roughly circular (7m dia. × 1.50m high) turf-covered mound, possibly a cairn; 2) to the north, a turf-covered cairn (8.40m dia. × 1.60m high); 3) to the SSE, a turf-covered cairn (7.40m dia. × 1.80m high). Vegetation: heather. |

| Map number | Survey book number | Grid Reference (NF) | Description |
|------------|--------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 82 | 1.173 | 796 264 [7981 2644] | Four-celled house (8.0m NE-SW × 2.10m NW-SE). Three rectangular cells run NE-SW with a D-shaped cell attached at the SW corner. Possible doorway in the SE corner of 1st (northernmost) cell. Length 8m, width 4.70m at SW end, 2.10m at NE end, and height c.1m (varies). Lots of tumble, possibly hiding other structures. Site 72 (1.171 and 1.172) lies to the W [see <i>Kirkidale</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above]. |
| 83 | 1.147 | 796 275 | Semi-circular wall, c.8m long. Single line of medium-sized stones – seaweed-holding structure? In southern inlet of Loch an t-Sroim. |
| 84 | 1.148 | 796 277 | Stone wall, running E for 22.70m and then curving and running towards the SW for 13.60m. Wall c.0.50m wide and 0.70m high, of medium and large stones. Possibly a seaweed-holding place. |
| 85 | 1.154 | 796 279 | 2 cairns, c.1.50m across. |
| 86 | 1.174 | 798 264 | Two-celled structure with natural rock incorporated into it. The W cell is roughly square (2.0m × 2.30m internally) and the smaller E cell is roughly circular (1.60m E-W) [see <i>Kirkidale</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above]. |
| 87 | 1.175 | 798 264 | Collection of small and large rocks, 2.50m N-S. Roughly oval in shape. Possibly natural but may be tumble from a small structure [see <i>Kirkidale</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above]. |
| 88 | 1.167 | 797 268 [7973 2685] | Substantial rectangular house (11.20m N-S × 4.80m E-W) with much tumbled stonework inside and outside the building. Large roughly-dressed stones. Wall c.1m wide × 1m high. The doorway, 1m-wide, is towards the S end of the E wall, and a thickening in the wall at the mid-point of the W wall may be the remains of a collapsed chimney. The house's interior is 9.50m × 3.50m. Abundant ferns inside the structure. [This structure is visible in Google Map's satellite imagery]. |
| 89 | 3.164 | 797 271 | A slipway oriented NW-SE with 2 seaweed-covered walls, 12m and 15m long, beside clearways of similar lengths and 2.90m wide. The 1861 census records a boat builder living at Craigavaig which may explain why this slipway is so big. (There is a fish trap across bay, visible as a 1m-high, level line of rocks) [see <i>Craigavaig</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above]. |
| 90 | 3.29 | 797 285 | Lazy beds in bracken. Stones protrude from the edge of a peat cutting. |
| 91 | 3.F102 | 797 285 | Stones eroding out of peat, which appear as a wall on top of bedrock, by the edge of the inlet. |
| 92 | 3.30/ F103 | 797 285 [7970 2852] | Slipway, 15m SE-NW, 2m wide at the NW end and 3m wide at the SE end. Made by clearing rocks. There is a 0.80m-high wall at the east corner. |
| 93 | 1.31 | 797 286 | Roughly rectangular house (5m NE-SW × 3m NW-SE) with rounded corners and a doorway (0.70m wide) at the southern end of the SE wall. Inside the doorway a stone is visible on the N side. Few stones remaining, mostly turf. There is a gully c.0.60m wide, around the N end – was turf removed from here to build the walls? No other features. Associated building = 94. Vegetation: rough grass, bracken, heather, moss on walls. [see also site 103] |

| Map number | Survey book number | Grid Reference (NF) | Description |
|------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 94 | 2.32 | 797 286 | House (15m NE-SW × 7m NW-SE). Walls are a double row of large stones with infill of rubble. Two doorways are at the south end of the long sides. There appears to be a 'partition' at the N end of the building. Inside there is a mixture of ferns, especially in the area behind the partition near the NE end. Associated building = 93. Vegetation: ferns, heather, lichen 10cm dia. [See also site 103] |
| 95 | 3.160 | 798 272 | 'Stirrup'-shaped structure. Its long wall (5.80m) is oriented NE-SW and two curving walls come off either end to meet at a doorway in the middle of the SE side. The width of the wall is 0.50m and the maximum size of the interior is 4m NE-SW × 3.10m SE-NW. The back wall incorporates the rock face and is filled with stones to c.1m high. It sits on a small promontory overlooking the bay. Vegetation: abundant fern growth surrounding. |
| 96 | 3.161 | 798 272 | D-shaped structure, one course thick, built against a W-facing rock face. Its interior is 3.90m NW-SE and 3.0m NE-SW. The doorway faces N. |
| 97 | 3.162 | 798 272 | Seaweed trap, 5m long, running E-W. On shore immediately south of site 96. |
| 98 | 3.163 | 798 272 | Broken causeway of single stones. Between site 97 and mainland. |
| 99 | 3.165 | 798 272 | Clearway (E-W), close to sites 95 and 96, on the opposite side of the island to site 97. |
| 100 | 1.159 | 798 273 | Causeway between mainland and island; 4.60m long × 2m wide (at widest point). |
| 101 | 3.149 | 798 276 | Slipway (cleared) with short wall (constructed from cleared stones) running along N edge of natural inlet. Possible fish trap. |
| 102 | 1.151 | 798 277 | Small seaweed-retaining wall, c.7m. E-W. |
| 103 | 3.33/ F104 | 798 286 | Two sides of an enclosure (80m E-W × 17.20m N-S with 0.50m-high peat wall). There is a 1.50m-wide gap at the S end of the N-S wall for a stream. [Maybe enclosure associated with sites 93/94?] |
| 104 | 1.178 | 799 261 | Semi-circular bothies built into rock face, under overhang. Much tumble. About 10m to the W is another overhang with a lot of fragmentary stone. Vegetation: nettles. |
| 105 | 2.57 | 799 277 | Very overgrown wall, or possibly building, with two walls 5.80m E-W and 4m N-S meeting at the SW corner. Very vague. Vegetation: bracken, very different from surrounding vegetation. |
| 106 | 1.152 | 799 277 | Seaweed-retaining wall, c.9m, N-S. |
| 107 | 1.153 | 799 278 [7977 2787] | Cleared slipway, 9m. N-S. |
| 108 | 3.37/ F105 | 799 285 [7976 2854 at west end; 7981 2852 at east] | Turf wall running E-W between two inlets, c.59m in length and 1.70m wide. Possible enclosure towards E end, c.11m E-W × 17m N-S. [This feature is visible on Google Maps satellite imagery, and clearly cuts off/encloses the <i>Rubha Bhailte</i> headland. Note that Gill MacLean has associated such structures (known as <i>gearraidh ploc</i>) with the management of cattle – whether for simple stock management or as part of a system of corralling associated with the export trade (see Chapter 18)]. |

| Map number | Survey book number | Grid Reference (NF) | Description |
|------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 109 | 3.34/F106 | 799 285 [centre at 7996 2852] | Stone-walled enclosure, enclosing area of ground on 3 sides; the shore is on the 4th side. The walls are of massive construction (1.50m wide) and incorporate boulders. The S wall is 20m, the W wall is 23m, and the N wall (NW-SE) is over 23m long. To the NE there is a valley and an inlet with site 110. [This feature is visible on Google Maps satellite imagery] [see <i>Rubhalt</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above]. |
| 110 | 3.38/F107 | 799 285 | Slipway (24.30m NW-SE × 4.50m NE-SW). The inlet contains two areas cleared of large rocks with a partition in between. This partition is <i>c.</i> 1m wide × 0.90m high, with a number of gaps along its length. The partition is obscured by seaweed so its construction is unknown (possibly bedrock). Walls have been constructed on either side of the area to the SW with smaller stones to the bottom. |
| 111 | 1.91 | 799 286 [visible on Google Maps at 7996 2858] | Stone house (10.60m ENE-WSW × 5.50m NNW-SSE), fairly well preserved. Stone walls standing up to <i>c.</i> 2m in places. Solid construction, two rows and rubble infill (0.70m wide). Cement/mortar between features, two windows and a doorway in front (S) wall. Chimney at S end of E wall, hearth in centre of W wall. No obvious internal structures; a large amount of rubble. Some plaster remaining on internal walls. Stones marking an area outside the front edge of house (<i>i.e.</i> parallel to S wall and <i>c.</i> 1.90m out). This only appears to be along front edge. Other buildings nearby. Also possible enclosure adjacent to W wall of building (regular pattern of stones remaining). Vegetation: many nettles in and around the building along with dandelions, thistles and bracken. Lichens up to <i>c.</i> 12cm. Some rough grass and foxgloves behind. Area around: irises, foxgloves, nettles and bracken over a large area. Rocky hillside behind: some grass and bracken. |
| 112 | 2.39B | 799 289 | Wall. Starts at cliff face, orientation = 65° from N. Width 1m at base. Mostly turf with some stones. Discontinuous, <i>c.</i> 51m long. Lower half in heather, also marked by ferns. |
| 113 | 1.176 | 800 265 [7998 2647] | Farmstead complex (recent) of four structures: A is a pen (3.60m × 3.80m) with a sheep dip in its E doorway; B is a building [blackhouse] to the SE of A (9.70m N-S × 4.40m E-W with a doorway on the N side); C is a square-ish enclosure (internal area 10.80m E-W × 13m N-S with E and W entrances) with B 'built into' its SW corner; D is a small structure (3.70m × 2.80m) S of enclosure C's E entrance (see also sites 114 and 115). [See <i>Kirkidale</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above; this site was subsequently mapped in detail and small-scale excavations carried out – see above <i>1990 Intensive Survey: Kirkidale</i> and <i>Chapter 17</i>]. |
| 114 | 1.177 | 800 265 [8000 2646] | Curving enclosure wall, enclosing an area <i>c.</i> 15m N-S × 12m–15m E-W, to the E of structures C and D of site 113 [see <i>Kirkidale</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above]. |
| 115 | 1.182 | 800 265 [7999 2648] | Robbed-out structure N of area C of sheep fank (site 113). Longitudinal walls, oriented W-E, apparently bowed outwards [see <i>Kirkidale</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above; this site was subsequently excavated – see <i>Chapter 17</i>]. |

| Map number | Survey book number | Grid Reference (NF) | Description |
|------------|--------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 116 | 3.41/ F108 | 800 286 | Tentative house – right-angled turf wall 1.50m N-S × 2m E-W at the N side of a long E-W wall, 1m wide. Scatter of stones associated with wall and lazy beds. Possible lazy beds (very faint) in the vicinity. |
| 117 | 3.90/ F114 | 800 290 | Rock outcrop in bay with large stone on top – navigation aid? |
| 118 | 1.180 | 801 265 | Clearance cairn and possible circular structure constructed along wall 119. |
| 119 | 1.181 | 801 265 | Substantial wall running W-E to the N of wall 120. |
| 120 | 1.179 | 801 266 | Substantial wall running N-S to E of sheep pens. Peters out as slope becomes steeper. |
| 121 | 1.166 | 801 272 | Small ephemeral structure (4m × 4m) of single stones set against a N-facing rock face directly above the sea. |
| 122 | 3.46/F109 | 801 286 | Inlet and slipway (28m N-S × 2m E-W). Glazed base sherd of pottery (with rivet hole) found on slipway. |
| 123 | 1.48 | 801 287 | Jetty (10m NW-SE × 3m NE-SW). Sloping area of cleared rocks, edged by larger rocks which seem to have been moved from the centre. |
| 124 | 1.50 | 801 288 | Rough structure (3.70m E-W × 3.60m N-S) whose shape is delineated by a few stones. Associated ‘lumps and bumps’ to the E, N and W. Vegetation: structure partially overgrown with grass and moss. Bracken, grass, no lichens. |
| 125 | 4.013 | 802 282 | Small number of dressed stones. |
| 126 | 4.011 | 802 283 | Small rectangular structure (4.20m N-S × 3.20m E-W). It consists of many loosely associated stones (large and small). Possibly fish-smoking facility. Many disturbed stones NW of this structure. |
| 127 | 4.012 | 802 283 | Clearway (7.30m N-S × 5.20m E-W) leading out of bay. Tide to top. |
| 128 | 4.09 | 802 284 | Stone structure. Two E-W rows (5.50m and 4.30m, 2.60m apart) of small and medium-sized stones, open at W end but with apparent wall on E side. 5m to the W there is an oval of small stones, with a small circular structure (3m dia.) to its W. |
| 129 | 4.010 | 802 284 | Three-sided structure (3.60m × 3.50m × 3.40m) almost triangular with an opening at the S end. It is adjacent to site 128. |
| 130 | 1.53 | 802 288 | Pile of turf-covered stones (7m × 6m, max. height 3.20m), associated with large rectangular area of ferns with scattered stones (site 131). Vegetation: heather and bracken. |
| 131 | 1.55 | 802 288 | Semi-regular rectangular scatter of stones (4m × 2m). Possible building partially turfed over. Vegetation: rough grass and bracken. |
| 132 | 2.56 | 802 288 | Stone feature. Small, insubstantial, indeterminate shape. Covered in heather and peat. Very near lazy beds (bracken covered). Vegetation: heather, bracken. |
| 133 | 1.57 | 802 291 | Habitation site (?). A boundary wall (over 150m long), roughly following a stream. Solid and well constructed – many stones remaining in place. Up to 1m high × 1m thick. Associated stones and rubble. There is a possible enclosure on the landward side of the wall and bounded on almost three sides by the wall, and 5 structures are marked to the N of the enclosure. Associated (?) lazy beds. Vegetation: bracken, heather and foxgloves. |

| Map number | Survey book number | Grid Reference (NF) | Description |
|------------|--------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 134 | 4.06 | 804 281 | Slipway oriented NE-SW, with a wall (14.70m long) to one side, well-constructed with large and small stones, and with a natural cliff edge on the other side. The slipway is 8.50m wide at one end and 5.70m at the other. The head of the slipway leads to a track which continues to the trap (site 141) on opposite side of headland. |
| 135 | 4.05 | 804 282 [8043 2804] | Possible slipway (20m E-W × 5m N-S), bounded at S end and sides by large slabs and stones. Its entrance is a bottleneck. The high tide mark is beyond the stone slabs at the end of the inlet, <i>c.</i> another 5m on. |
| 136 | 2.59 | 804 287 | Wall (5m long) by sea. Large boulders, roughly piled with rubble on a 1m-high platform 3m wide with rubble behind. Wall continues off to left for 12m. On one of the headlands there are two areas of stones; one is <i>c.</i> 2.50m long and may be a wall. [Sea-weed storage?] |
| 137 | 2.63 | 805 285 | Around the coast from site 138 there is a wall leading from near the house to another slipway <i>c.</i> 8m–9m long on one side (well-built) and 11m on the other side. There are some big boulders and further along there is another wall complex (to contain seaweed?). Further up on the land behind there is a (burial?) cairn and some lazy beds. There is another possible seaweed wall (5m long) further along. |
| 138 | 2.65 | 805 286 | House (10.50m N-S). Well-built stone walls – double course with rubble infill. Large rocks incorporated. The doorway is at the S end of the W wall. There is a stone hearth (?) in the SE corner with nettles growing in it. Immediately E of the house is a square enclosure (9m × 9m) of stone and turf and there is a stone wall following the line of the coast behind the house and in front of the enclosure. Also lazy beds nearby. The house is in a very prominent position looking out over the sea. Vegetation: nettles. |
| 139 | 2.67 | 805 287 | A wall runs along the coast below the path curving inland for about 4m at the end, near other walls by the sea. It runs for about 39m up to the back of the bay where there is a stone-walled rectangular structure (3.50m N-S × 2m E-W). There are irises, heather and short grass by a stream leading to the sea. Further out there are scattered stones of indeterminate arrangement. On the other side of the stream there is another wall that is curved and visible for <i>c.</i> 5m which reappears on the side just above the stream and follows its course upstream for at least 20m. On the other side of this is a band of irises and nettles <i>c.</i> 6m thick, then a break before the heather starts. Across from this on the other side of the inlet is a possible slipway, made of large rocks laid parallel to the natural rock of the coast (see <i>Runaclach</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above). |
| 140 | 1.68 | 805 286 | Structure (2.70m N-S × 2.40m E-W with a circular depression 1.30m dia. in its N half). Possibly a potato store or a clearance cairn. Partially collapsed. Vegetation: heather especially thick. |

| Map number | Survey book number | Grid Reference (NF) | Description |
|------------|--------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 141 | 4.07 | 806 281 | Three stretches of walling (8.50m, 9m and 11m) forming a wall across an embayment. Constructed from large boulders and smaller rocks to enclose a large area (with land to one side). There is a possible structure built on natural rock in a section of this wall. A trackway from site 134 leads directly to the land above this bay. |
| 142 | 2.69 | 806 283 | Lazy beds and a rectangular enclosure of rocks, on the island about 30m out. There are various scatters of stones that may or may not be associated. There may be a possible house or stone building in the middle although the shapes are indeterminate (roughly square). Parallel lines of stones on one side of island. |
| 143 | 2.66 | 806 284 | An oval setting of stones 1.70m dia., on top of the promontory. The whole area is covered with small scatters of rocks around the natural rock on the headland. |
| 144 | 2.70 | 806 284 | On the promontory – scatter of grass-covered boulders. |
| 145 | 2.74 | 806 286 | Rectangular building (4m long) – just a few stones on the surface, a prod was used to find others. |
| 146 | 4.01 | 807 278 | Slipway (21.80m N-S × 5.50m E-W) on shore. Bounded by wall of rocks on S, landward end. There seems to be another slipway on the S side, behind the stone line. Measured at low tide. Seaweed comes up to the line of stones on the S side. Orientation 040°. |
| 147 | 2.75 | 807 284 [8074 2842] | House (8m × 5m) on coast. Its walls are very thick (1m) and well built. There are two doorways along one side and a partition wall in the interior. There is a platform on the right-hand side of the house and a line of rocks at the top. The walls are of double rows of stones with rubble infill. Stones in front of the house may be rubble. In the inlet there are 4 large rocks placed in a very straight line – possibly a wall. |
| 148 | 2.76 | 807 285 | Scatter of stones on promontory, in an area of irises. There are nettles around the stones. Further along from this is a line of turf-covered stones – very hard to distinguish any real shape. |
| 149 | 4.03 | 808 277 | ‘Channel’ (43m long on NE-SW axis), natural or possibly cleared. There is a possible wiggly wall (fish trap?) on E side of island. |
| 151 | 4.08 | 808 279 | Lazy beds on island. |
| 152 | 2.79 | 808 282 | Possible slipway, 13m long on one side and 9m on the other. Very roughly built – stones piled up on either side. A wall just above the slipway possibly continues for another 6m before gradually turning a corner for another 20m towards the coast. |
| 153 | 2.80 | 808 285 | Collapsed stone walls and scattered boulders delineating some sort of rectangular structure, up to 4m N-S × 3m E-W with a pile of rubble on its S side. Walls are of solid construction, with at least 2 rows of stones partially covered in turf. It sits on a natural(?) mound. Surrounding vegetation: lilies and heather [see <i>High Town</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above]. |
| 154 | 2.83 | 809 283 | Small bracken-covered mound (possibly artificial). Max height c.2m × c.5m dia. Surrounding vegetation: bracken and heath. |

| Map number | Survey book number | Grid Reference (NF) | Description |
|------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 155 | 4.02 | 808 277 | Four-walled sub-rectangular structure (4.70m E-W × 2.90m N-S; 100° orientation) formed by small and medium-sized stones. Its NE end is wider than the other and it appears to be open-ended. There is a semi-circular stone feature (c.1.50m dia.) inside its E corner. Surrounded by outlying individual stones. It lies in an area cleared of heather, with turf and some bracken growth. |
| 156 | 1.144–149 | [8081 2805] | Complex of structures. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Near shore – clusters of partially turfed over rocks, associated with distinctive changes in vegetation (pretty flowers, foxgloves, <i>etc.</i>). There are more rocks further inland, but these are mostly hidden by bracken. This may be an enclosure, with associated stone walls. • Natural bay with several large stones in the middle – may be a jetty? • Wall – possibly to contain/store seaweed. c. 15m long (maybe more) • Jetty – c. 10m long • Man-made grass-covered mound on headland. 33m long × 4m wide. Sheer side going down to the sea. Flowers and heather. |
| 157 | 1.138 | [7874 2731] | Peat-covered wall joining site 52 on shore. Splits at the fence and runs up the hillside. |
| 158 | 1.142 | [7920 2723] | Wall extending up to the crest of the slope, possibly to mark boundary of a trackway. From scarp-face remains of a stone wall can be seen extending out at right angles to meet wall coming up. Some of the wall marked as peat cutting, but small and medium-sized stones until point near crest of slope. |
| 159 | 1.150 | [7969 2760] | Standing building, comprised of dressed large and medium stones. Walls are massive in nature, with internal divisions inside the building. Other walls extend out from the structure to the N and W. These are of undressed stone [see <i>Aird Bhuidhe</i> in <i>Place-names</i> above]. |
| 160 | 1.168 | [7973 2685] | Possible wall running uphill (south-westwards) from behind building 88. Runs behind and parallel with 88 for 14m, then runs SW for c. 10m. |
| 161 | 2.35 | 800 285 | House – orientated 60° from N. Rectangular, with (possible) rounded end. Mixture of stone walling and turf. Very loose stones, tumbled and scattered. Ground rises steeply behind. Vegetation: grassy, thistles as well as foxgloves, bramble. |
| 162 | 2.71 | [8064 2847] | Two causeways running from the promontory on which 144 sits, to the first island. C.5m. long, roughly piled stones, up to 0.80m wide. |
| | 2.72 | [8063 2846] | On the first island: roughly rectangular structure (2m × 1.50m); some stone remaining, partially turfed over. Several other scattered stones in the area. Vegetation: grass and irises. |
| | 2.61 | [8058 2847] | On the second island: similar feature to that on first island. Stone structure (2.50m × 1m), facing out to sea. Quite haphazard. |

| Map number | Survey book number | Grid Reference (NF) | Description |
|------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 163 | 2.50 | [8111 2750] | Sub-circular structure (2.30 × 2.60m) built against rock-face in a fault-line gully. Off N-facing slope. |
| 164 | 2.51 | [8114 2746] | Stone wall (10.30m × c. 1m) running between two rock-faces, across the track from fault-line gully. |
| 165 | 2.52 | [8119 2741] | Series of two small shielings and two more ?shielings/natural enclaves, together with a pile of limpet shells and a cave. On right-hand floor and rock-face of gully. Total length 26.50m. |
| | 2.52a | | ?shieling/natural enclave. Corner cairn of rough-piled stone, and occasional stones in a circular alignment. |
| | 2.52b | | (East of 52a). Roughly circular shieling, with 2 sides natural rock, 2 sides evenly-piled stones. N-facing entrance. Narrow passageway (c.0.50m wide × 3m long) between natural boulders connects 52b and 52c. |
| | 2.52c | | (East of 52b). Smallish shell midden in hollow under natural arch in rock. |
| | 2.52d | | (East of 52c). Circular well-built structure – 2 curved walls constructed, one natural rock. NW entrance. Adjacent small circular structure, roughly built with no apparent entrance. Also several natural niches and enclaves that could have been adopted for use [see <i>Hafn</i> , in <i>Place-names</i> above]. |
| 166 | 2.53 | [8116 2723] | Square structure (4.20m N-S × 3.30m E-W), possibly 3-sided with a W-facing entrance. The E side is missing, but there are a few loose stones. Built against S-facing rock slope. Loosely piled stones. |
| 167 | 2.54 | [8119 2717] | Square(ish) structure (5.80m × 4.50m internally), although with W wall slightly curved. Doorway facing E. The walls are well-preserved, standing to a height of c.0.70m. There is a semi-circular feature (0.50m E-W × 1.0m N-S) built into the SE corner. All the walls are slightly bowed, but especially the S wall. There seems to be a later feature built (at a higher level) against the S wall. |
| 168 | 2.55 | [8083 2757] | Roughly circular structure (3.80m E-W × 4.30m N-S) with W-facing entrance in small stream valley leading to the 'heronry' [herons nested on the trees in this valley]. Maybe a hearth against the S wall? To the S, there is an adjoining small circular cell (2.40m E-W × 3.20m N-S), with a separate W-facing entrance. |
| 170 | 2.56 | | Semi-circular, E-facing structure, with doorway to the E. Single line of rocks abutting large natural rock. In a beautiful spot! |
| | 2.56a | | Possible circular feature 30m N of this one. |
| 171 | 2.58 | [8037 2763] | In a large area of bracken vegetation, with a series of well-defined lazy beds, there is a narrow rectangular structure constructed from small rocks. About 20m to the W of this structure there is a dam-like feature, consisting of one large stone with smaller stones piled |

| Map number | Survey book number | Grid Reference (NF) | Description |
|------------|--------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 172 | 3.F110-15 | | |
| | 3.F110 | [7995 2901 – at west end] | Wall, well preserved in the hillside section. Seems to have facing of large stones, with small stones behind. In sections the wall seems to rest on bedrock [Part of complex at Allt Volagir] |
| | 3.F111 | [7996 2900] | Within rectangular walled ‘enclosure’ (wall F110) were some lazy beds and a wall (4m long × 0.20m high) constructed from well-packed angular blocks (disappears under the peat). |
| | 3.F112 | [7997 2899] | U-shaped structure (3.70m NE/SW × 2.40m), with well-constructed wall standing 1.30m high in places. There are large rounded and flattened stones amongst smaller angular ones. |
| | 3.F113 | [7997 2899] | [On top of the mound into which F112 is built]. Structure formed of two E-W walls c.5.70m long (walls 0.80m thick) apparently open at each end. In the centre is a stone feature (2.20m E-W × 1.30m N-S). This may be a hearth, in which case it would take up most of the interior. It may, in fact, be a smoke house – for preserving fish? – and therefore associated with the adjacent slipways. |
| | 3.F114 | [8010 2897] | Rock outcrop in the bay, with large stone on top. Navigation aid? The bay has several walled features and a cleared area, creating a slipway. |
| | 3.F115 | [8011 2899] | Complex – slipway with a series of associated walls. Unusually, the slipway seems to have been cleared of all stones (rather than just the ‘least effort’ method of simpler slipways). The series of walls across and beside the slipway area might have been an attempt to lessen the effects of rough seas; but some perhaps also to retain seaweed. |
| | 3.F116 | [8013 2898] | U-shaped structure, with W-facing entrance, 4.50m long × 3.30m wide, walls 0.90m wide. Possibly similar to ‘smoke-house’ F113, but no sign of hearth. |
| 173 | 1988.3 | 791 283 | Three-sided enclosure around a mound |
| 174 | 1988.4 | 791 283 | Mound (kelp-burning) |
| 175 | 1988.9 | 792 285 | Section of stone wall |
| 176 | 1988.10 | 792 285 | Rectangular stone building |
| 177 | 1988.13 | 793 284 | Fern and heather-covered structure, close to path |
| 178 | 1988.14 | 793 284 | Stone wall, 38m long |
| 179 | 1988.17 | 793 287 | Stone-built house |
| 180 | 1988.19 | 794 285 | Open-ended rectangular enclosure |
| 181 | 1988.20 | 794 287 | Complex of enclosure walls |
| 182 | 1988.21 | 794 287 | Stone-built structure, 10m × 5m, with possible enclosure to the N |
| 183 | 1988.23 | 794 288 | Wall, c.70m long |
| 184 | 1988.28 | 797 284 | Circular mound, 2m. dia. |
| 185 | 1988.36 | 799 285 | Slipway and possible wall in inlet |
| 186 | 1988.40 | 799 293 | Series of structures backing onto rock outcrop |
| 187 | 1988.42 | 800 286 | Slipway? |
| 188 | 1988.43 | 799 288 | Stone wall, c.13m long |

| Map number | Survey book number | Grid Reference (NF) | Description |
|------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 189 | 1988.44 | 801 286 | Possible house close to slipway |
| 190 | 1988.45 | 801 286 | Single course stone wall |
| 191 | 1988.47 | 801 286 | Slip way, boundary walls and small building |
| 192 | 1988.49 | 801 287 | Structure on headland near causeway |
| 193 | 1988.51 | 802 285 | Turf-covered stones scattered on mound |
| 194 | 1988.52 | 802 287 | Causeway/fish trap 12m long, oriented E-W. Note that Gill MacLean speculates that this fish trap might have been associated with the payment of rent (in fish) to the church (see Chapter 18). |
| 195 | 1988.54 | 802 288 | Rectangular enclosure/structure, 15m × 5m |
| 196 | 1988.58 | 803 287 | Open-ended enclosure, facing the sea |
| 197 | 1988.73 | 806 286 > 802 291 > 799 293 | Wall, running N for 370m. |
| 198 | 1988.81 | 808 288 | Cairn?, 2.50m dia. |
| 199 | 1988.82 | 809 282 | Mound, possibly a cairn |
| 200 | 1988.84 | 810 285 | Two possible house platforms |
| 201 | 1988.85 | 812 279 | Three stone walls forming the sides of a slipway |
| 202 | 1988.86 | 813 279 | Mound, possibly cairn or structure, 1.20m. dia. |
| 203 | 1988.87 | 813 284 | Scattered remains of a cairn?, 3m × 5m oval |
| 204 | 1988.88 | [7977 2874] | Wall, stretching north from coast to Loch nam Faoileann |
| 205 | 1988.89 | 797 285 | Square enclosure, c.16m × 14m |
| 206 | 1988.92 | 801 275 | Lazy beds, orientated E-W |
| 207 | 1988.93 | 804 276 | Small rectangular structure, 4m × 1m, oriented E-W |
| 208 | 1988.94 | 804 276 | Rectangular stone structure, 6m × 3m, oriented N-S |
| 209 | 1988.95 | 807 288 > 814 286 | Stone and turf wall |
| 210 | 1988.97 | 809 277 | Wall, 40m long, running from the loch shore to rock face |
| 211 | 1988.99 | 810 277 | Slipway in small inlet |
| 212 | 1988.100 | 811 276 | Mound, 4m dia., possibly a cairn |
| 213 | 1988.101 | 811 276 | Wall of stones leading to loch |
| 214 | 1988.102 | 811 278 | Lazy beds, E-W orientation, 12m × 12m, sloping down to the coast |
| 215 | 1988.103 | 811 278 | Small rectangular stone feature S of site 216 |
| 216 | 1988.104 | 811 278 | Rectangular, open-ended structure, N-S orientation |
| 217 | 1988.107 | 812 275 | Stone structure, 15m × 7m, with hearth and internal partition, with enclosure to the NW. |
| 218 | 1988.108 | 812 277 | Peat cut to form a squarish feature |
| 219 | 1988.109 | 812 278 | Squarish feature |
| 220 | 1988.110 | 812 279 > 815 280 | Wall 100m from loch |
| 221 | 1988.111 | 813 277 | Fish-trap and harbour |
| 222 | 1988.112 | 813 277 | Wall between loch and sea, possible droveway |
| 223 | 1988.113 | 814 273 | Turfed-over stone building |
| 224 | 1988.114 | 814 273 | Rectangular turf building, 5m × 3.50m |
| 225 | 1988.115 | 814 274 | Burial mound?, 14m × 6m |
| 226 | 1988.116 | 814 274 | Possible turf boat-house, 5m × 3m |
| 227 | 1988.117 | 814 274 | Short section of N-S wall, 6m long, above boatyard |
| 228 | 1988.118 | 814 275 | Squarish feature to S of site 231 |
| 229 | 1988.119 | 814 275 | Two groups of lazy beds |
| 230 | 1988.120 | 814 276 | Possible building, N-S orientation |
| 231 | 1988.121 | 814 276 | Turf longhouse, doorway on E side, 10m × 5m |
| 232 | 1988.122 | 815 272 | Cluster of stones, 1m dia., on Eilean Sloc Sàthaidh |
| 233 | 1988.123 | 815 274 | Stone and turf enclosure |

| Map number | Survey book number | Grid Reference (NF) | Description |
|------------|--------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 234 | 1988.124 | 815 274 | Three-sided enclosure |
| 235 | 1988.125 | 815 275 | Structure, 13m × 5m, N-S |
| 236 | 1988.126 | 815 275 | Circular mound, surrounded by large stones, 7m dia.; high bracken made it impossible to draw |
| 237 | 1988.127 | 815 276 | Lazy beds (large area) |
| 238 | 1988.128 | 815 276 | Rectangular longhouse 14m × 6m, with modern square building inside |
| 239 | 1988.129 | 815 276 | Two areas of lazy beds |
| 240 | 1988.130 | 815 276 | Stone and turf rectangular enclosure with doorway on E side, 6m × 4m |
| 241 | 1988.131 | 815 277 | Rectangular stone structure, 8m × 4.50m, with central dividing wall |
| 242 | 1988.132 | 815 277 | Turf building |
| 243 | 1988.133 | 815 278 | Wall running N-S at the head of the crag |
| 244 | 1988.134 | 816 279 | Wall, 190m long |
| 245 | 1988.135 | 817 275 | Pile of stones in wood |

★ We recorded the diameters of lichens (where present) because at that time it was thought that this might give a clue to the age of the building.

* In some cases I have been able to provide more accurate locations than were recorded at the time.

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Notes

- 1 The place-name Loch Aoineart has multiple alternative spellings. The most recent edition of the Ordnance Survey map uses Loch Aineort but that is *not* the correct South Uist Gaelic spelling (pers. comms. from Uist residents, February 2011). We have chosen the South Uist Gaelic spelling as the primary version used throughout this volume, in order to privilege the local Gaelic in the literature; this spelling may well be in danger of disappearing from use now that both the OS map and the road signs have imposed a variant spelling. The area is often referred to in the form Locheynort. See Appendix for further variant spellings.
- 2 Note that Ordnance Survey maps from the 19th century onwards erroneously mark 'Kirkidale' as a valley running northwards to the sea from the head of the valley we know

by that name. Significantly, the 1805 Bald Map attaches the name Kirkidale to the valley in which we were working.

- 3 JM's note: the spelling used is that of Gill's manuscript though this is not always the modern Gaelic spelling as shown on the 2007 1:25000 Ordnance Survey map. Place-names have not been Gaelicized since Gill is referring to historical sources. Refer to the glossary in the Appendix for Gaelic equivalents.
- 4 As noted above, we did endeavour to locate the chronological markers central to historical specificity and to the creation of historical narratives. We carried out detailed surveys in an attempt to find better-dated parallels, we excavated two sites (see Chapter 17), and we even measured the diameter of lichens found on the walls of structures hoping to establish dates through lichenometry.
- 5 Alex Woolf (pers. comm.) notes the irony that one of Napoleon's generals, MacDonaldo Duke of Taranto, was the son of Neil MacEachen from South Uist!
- 6 See Chapter 17 for evidence of later re-use of the abandoned house at Kirkidale.

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5 The chambered cairns of South Uist

Vicki Cummings, Cole Henley and Niall Sharples

In comparison to other areas of Scotland, the chambered tombs of South Uist have not been the focus of recent debate. The island has relatively few Neolithic chambered

cairns (Figure 5.1) and, prior to our survey, they had not been studied since Henshall's work in 1972. There has been little in the way of interpretation of these sites, since Henshall focused primarily on the classification of the cairns in relation to the monuments of other parts of Scotland (Henshall 1972). This lack of interpretative analysis has been due in part to the limited evidence: prior to this survey there had been no excavation of any of the cairns on the island¹ and many of these cairns have been badly damaged by later activity. In an attempt to redress this problem this paper presents the results of a survey of the monuments of South Uist. In particular, we focus on the landscape location of the cairns. We look at each cairn in turn, and try to understand them in terms of both their structure and topographic setting. We can then begin to create a more regionally specific understanding of these monuments.

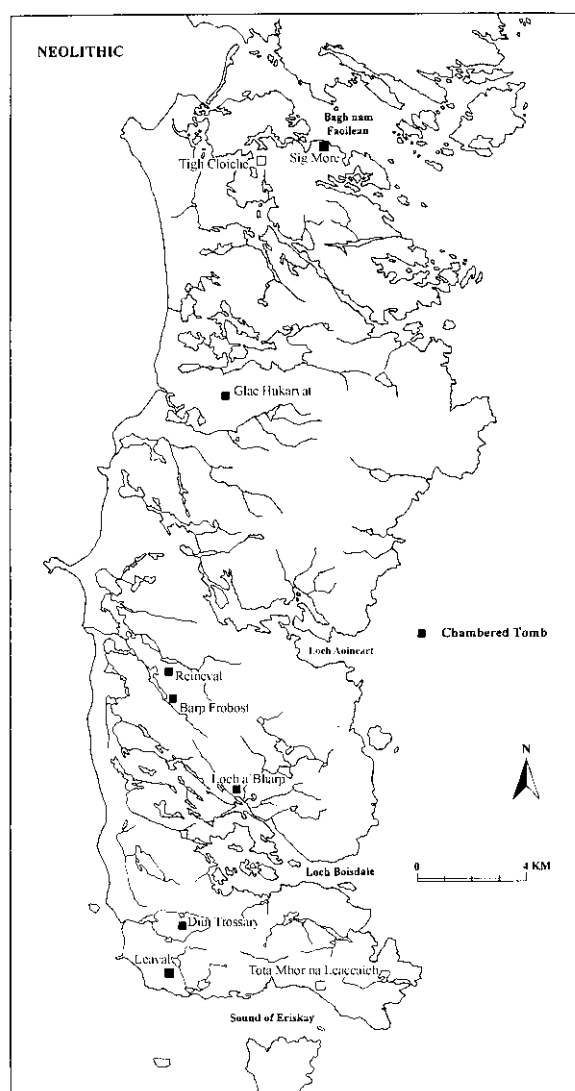


Figure 5.1. Site location map of the Neolithic chambered cairns of South Uist

The nature of the chambered cairns on South Uist

In 1972 Henshall described all the diagnostic chambered cairns of South Uist as part of the 'Hebridean group' of round cairns. These monuments are characteristically circular in form, defined by a 'peristalith' of large upright kerb stones. At the centre of each cairn is a simple undifferentiated chamber consisting of large orthostats, entered by a short passage; the roof would have been corbelled and sealed by a large capstone. A distinctive funnel-shaped forecourt is also common, although the condition of the South Uist sites means that such a feature is often unclear. Round cairns of this type (Figure 5.2) appear across the Western Isles.

None of the structural features of the Hebridean monuments are exceptional. They can be considered as part of a broader tradition of megalith construction, representing an indigenous variation of a common idea. However, the presence of the peristalith, the distinctive shape of the forecourt and the presence of a large undifferentiated chamber does differentiate this region from the adjacent areas of the northern mainland of Scotland. These general similarities suggest that, despite the absence of radiocarbon

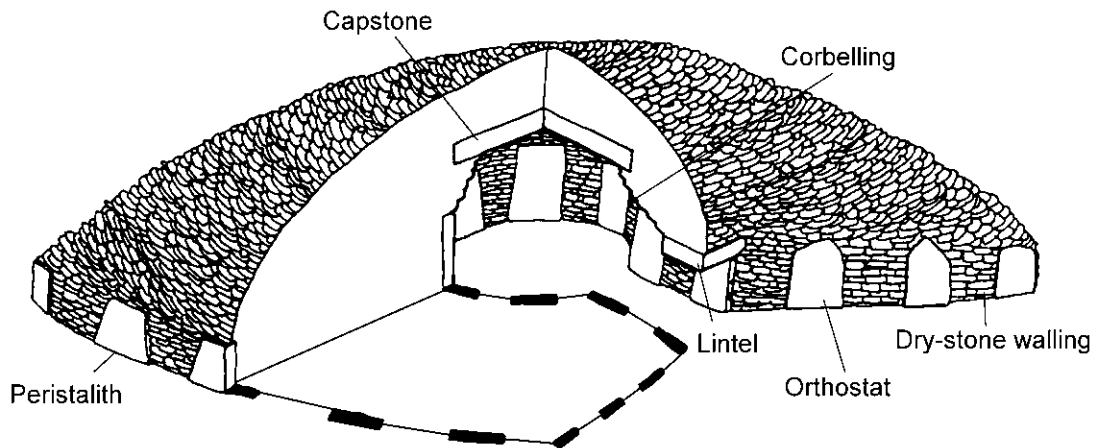


Figure 5.2. Idealized view of a Hebridean round cairn

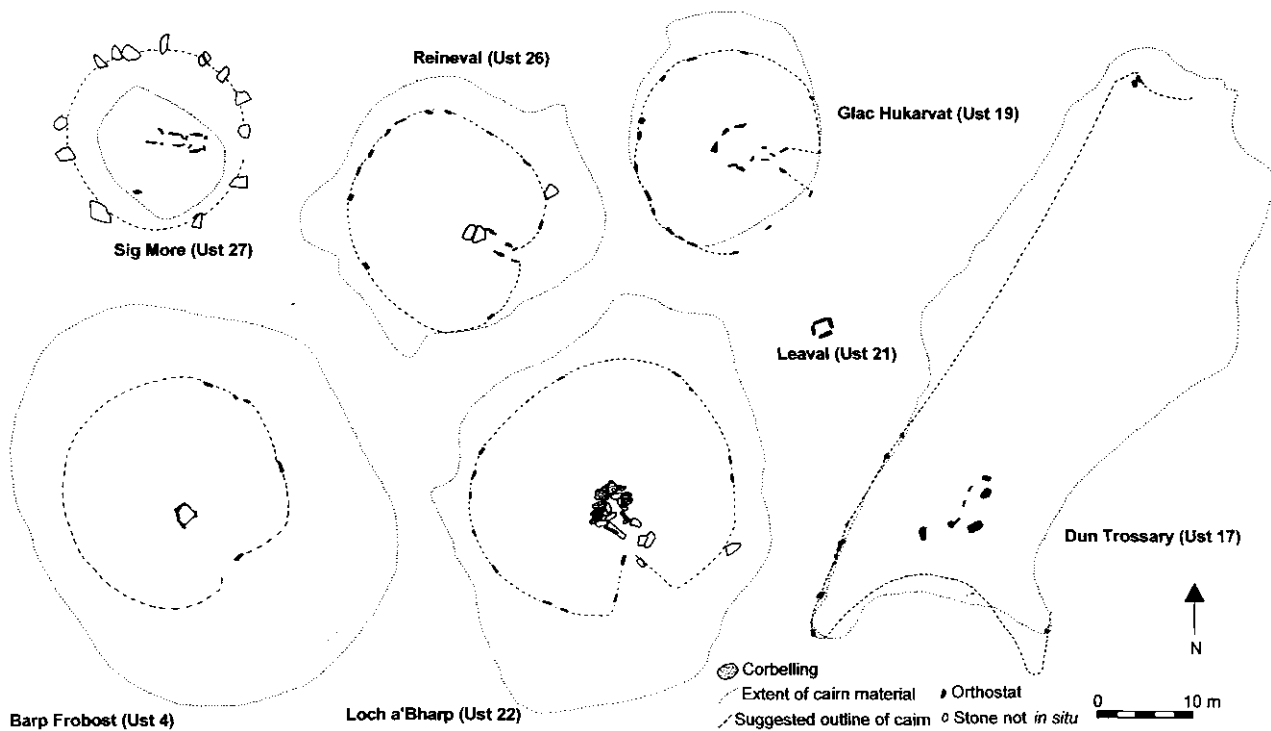


Figure 5.3. Plans of all of the cairns

dates from the Uist tombs, they are likely to have been constructed in the Early Neolithic, and were used into the Late Neolithic.

Four of the cairns on South Uist that Henshall identified as 'Hebridean' cairns exhibit these features. Glac Hukarvat, Reineval (Reineabhal), Barp Frobost and Loch a' Bharp have large round cairns, defined by a peristalith of large kerb stones with a funnel-shaped forecourt (Figure 5.3). All have large orthostats within the cairn material which identify passage and chamber, although at Barp Frobost these barely protrude above the turfed-over collapse. Capstones are identifiable at some of these sites, although most seem to have been deliberately broken and are unlikely to be *in situ*. The architecture of each site is distinctive, although – with the exception of Glac Hukarvat – the height of cairn material conceals the full size, shape and positioning of the chamber and passage.

The chambers seem to have been constructed using large orthostats joined by dry-stone walling. On to these walls were placed large slabs that overlapped to provide a corbelled roof sealed by a large capstone. The passages leading to these chambers appear to be quite short, particularly in comparison with passage graves elsewhere in Scotland (e.g. Orkney). The overall layout and architecture of these sites are therefore quite simple and minimal – they are elaborate only in terms of their size and the effort that would have been required to quarry stone for and to erect such monumental cairns.

Henshall (1972) identified another four 'unclassified' cairns, as well as one possible long cairn. The presence of a long cairn seems unequivocal (Dun Trossary) as does the presence of two other badly damaged chambered cairns (Sig More and Leaval), but there is no evidence to support the identification of the two other cairns (Tigh Cloiche

and Tota Mhòr na Leacaich) as chambered cairns. The site of Leaval (Cummings and Sharples 1999) is too badly damaged to permit extensive comment but it is smaller than other cairns on the island and the orthostats defining the chamber form an unusually square chamber.

Dun Trossary is the only long cairn on South Uist though other long cairns are known in the Western Isles, e.g. Cletraval, which covers an unusual chamber, and Cairinis (Carinish) and Balnacraig which appear to have more typical Hebridean chamber forms. Unfortunately the form of the chamber at Dun Trossary is impossible to define. Sig More is a circular cairn defined by a now recumbent peristalith, but with no evidence of a forecourt. From the outside, it would thus appear to be a Hebridean cairn. The internal chamber is, however, rather unusual as transverse slabs are clearly present that define the entrance to the passage and separate the passage from the chamber. It is also possible that the chamber is separated into two distinct spaces. This sub-division of the chamber introduces a spatial complexity that is unusual on South Uist.

The orientation of the chambers of all the sites is variable but generally favours the southeast/east. This conforms to the normal Hebridean pattern (Henshall 1972: 151) and suggests an interest in sunrise rather than sunset. The exception is the long cairn of Dun Trossary, which is oriented to the south-southwest. Henshall notes that the long cairns of the Western Isles have a more varied orientation than the round cairns (*ibid.*: 151).

The context of the chambered cairns of South Uist

The role that the landscape played in the lives of people in the Neolithic has come to the forefront of debate in recent years (Bender 1993; Nash 1997; Tilley 1994; 1996; Thomas 1993; Topping 1997). Many archaeologists, heavily influenced by new geography and anthropology, began to realize that the landscape was not a passive backdrop to activity but a vital part of the experience of being-in and interacting with the world. The main theoretical arguments regarding the importance of the landscape have been outlined elsewhere (see, for example, Ashmore and Knapp 1999; Hirsch and O'Hanlon 1995; Ingold 1993; Tilley 1994) and this article will assume that monuments were carefully and purposefully positioned in the landscape.

The way in which we understand and use the landscape is dependent on our own social, economic and political context: the way that we, in the 21st century, experience the landscape is likely to be very different from how people might have experienced the landscape in the past (Rodaway 1994; Tilley 1994). Nevertheless, the landscape is a crucial and important part of the experience of place. Although we cannot hope to fully understand the way in which people in the past viewed the importance of the landscape, we can at least examine the location of cairns and attempt to understand how the setting of a site might have been important.

Before we examine the landscape settings of the cairns,



Figure 5.4. Sig More surrounded by water at high tide

we will first outline the nature of the landscape of South Uist in the Neolithic. Today one sees an open, treeless and windswept landscape that consists of three main environmental 'zones': the machair, the blacklands (peaty moorlands), and the mountains. The climate, vegetation and soils of South Uist have, however, been subject to some considerable changes since the Neolithic (Gilbertson *et al.* 1996). One of the most dramatic visual changes relates to the coastline and the machair plain of the west coast. It is likely that sea levels have risen in relation to the land throughout the Outer Hebrides (Ritchie 1985) and the evidence from Sig More (discussed below) supports this interpretation (Figure 5.4). Any change in sea level is likely to have had a dramatic effect on the form of South Uist. A marginal reduction in sea level would join South Uist to Benbecula and North Uist, and would considerably increase the extent of the coastal plain along the west and south coasts of the island.

A related but more complex problem is the position and importance of the machair plain that now dominates the west coast. It is still unclear when this plain formed, although recent research suggests that it was a large offshore bank that began to move into its present position in the 4th and 5th millennia BC (see Chapters 2 and 10). The earliest evidence from South Uist, Benbecula and North Uist suggests that the present machair was not occupied until the Beaker period, though at Northton on Harris (Simpson *et al.* 2006), Late Neolithic activity is found associated with the earliest dune formation (see Chapter 10 for a more detailed discussion). It seems likely, therefore, that settlements associated with the creation of the chambered tombs would not have been located on the machair and it seems likely that the machair plain was still very unstable in the Early Neolithic.

South Uist has been the focus of an intensive programme of environmental research (Gilbertson *et al.* 1996) that

included a detailed examination of the vegetation history. Of direct relevance to this paper are 11 pollen cores from loch and peat sediments in the centre of the island (Bennett *et al.* 1990; Brayshay and Edwards 1996; Edwards 1996; Edwards *et al.* 1995; Fossitt 1996) and the identification of macrofossil remains of trees in several peat cuttings (Fossitt 1996).

The picture presented by these cores is by no means consistent and probably represents localized processes of adaptation. Changes were neither uniform nor synchronous: topography and aspect would have affected the timing, rate and degree of vegetational change significantly. However, both the pollen cores and macrofossil wood remains demonstrate that woodland species, particularly birch and hazel but also pine, oak and elm, were a feature of early to mid-Holocene South Uist. Until around 4000 BP (the mid to late 3rd millennium BC), trees and shrubs would have been extensive on South Uist although these rarely dominate the pollen record. The cores and macrofossil remains show that woodland was certainly a significant feature of the central and eastern parts of the island until this time.

Most of the pollen cores show an expansion around 4000 BP of heath and water-favouring species, coinciding with the formation of peat and a gradual reduction in woodland species. This reduction in woodland is supported by the macrofossil wood remains, the majority of which are radiocarbon dated to between 4500 BP and 4000 BP (Fossitt 1996). The preservation of wood macrofossils probably indicates the expansion of peat to the detriment of the existing vegetation. The lithology of some of the pollen cores also indicates mineralogical changes that suggest a reduction in woodland (*ibid.*: 188). After 4000 BP South Uist would have still featured pockets of woodland but these would have been restricted to sheltered valleys, predominantly on the east coast of the island.

The pollen cores and macrofossil remains suggest that South Uist would have looked very different when Neolithic communities began to construct chambered cairns. The relatively homogeneous heather moorlands that dominate the upland areas of the island today are misleading – this was once a much more varied and colourful landscape. Significant areas of woodland would have been present, particularly on the east coast. It must be emphasized, however, that there was considerable spatial variation within the landscape. Trees would have survived on steep slopes and around the narrow burns and some of the valleys would have retained woodland much later than others. There was also much more temporal variation as the dominant tree species were deciduous and this would have highlighted seasonal variation in the landscape. Other plants would also have changed appearance dramatically throughout the course of the year. It is difficult to predict the spatial parameters of this variability as we have only just begun to acquire the details which demonstrate how important it was. Some of the variety obviously relates to tangible features such as topography but it is also clear that less tangible phenomena are important.

The temporal and spatial variations in vegetation are

difficult to relate to chambered cairns because of the absence of radiocarbon determinations from the cairns and because environmental analyses have predominantly taken place in locations some distance from the cairns. The pollen core from Reineval (Edwards *et al.* 1995) is the exception because it derives from a valley containing a monument. In this core a massive peak of charcoal accumulation around 6000 BP precedes a dramatic expansion of heath species, namely heather, which dominates the vegetational sequence up to the present day. This change in vegetation is around 2000 years earlier than equivalent changes seen in other pollen cores from the island. Edwards has argued that this charcoal peak and associated vegetation changes may represent Mesolithic activity, probably through management by fire to control or encourage grazing by deer (Edwards *et al.* 1995; Edwards 1996). These findings are significant because they provide the only evidence for Mesolithic activity in this region. This possible evidence for early human activity is in marked contrast with the other cores from South Uist and suggests that the tomb at Reineval may be located in this valley because of vegetation changes caused by hunter-gatherers many hundreds of years prior to the construction of the cairn.

The variations discussed above would not only have affected the economic and social exploitation of the South Uist landscape but would also have influenced considerably the visual and perceptual impacts of the monuments. At present the well-preserved cairns stand out as very noticeable features in the purple/brown heather-covered moorland. It is unlikely that they would have always been quite so conspicuous in the varied, partially tree-covered landscapes of the Neolithic. However, it is very unlikely that the tree cover would have been dense enough physically to impede visibility from or to the monuments. Most of the cairns are situated in elevated areas on hill slopes and they are often constructed on small knolls to enhance their prominence. The visual appearance of the cairns in the Neolithic is also likely to have been quite different to the grey monuments we see today. The stones are now covered in lichen and these mask a wide variety of colours which would have been particularly dramatic on any freshly quarried stones, such as those used for peristaliths and revetments.

The position of the cairns in the landscape

The following section examines the actual location of the sites within the landscape. This is designed as a descriptive inventory of the landscape settings of the sites, to allow the reader to imagine the landscapes of South Uist for her/himself. For each cairn we describe its position in relation to the main landscape features and we then describe the views from the entrance of the cairn, the views looking back towards the entrance and in some cases other views that we think may be relevant to our understanding of the cairn's use. The discussion of the cairns is ordered from north to south.

Sig More

This cairn is situated on a small islet off the north coast of South Uist (Figure 5.4). It lies close to the eastern edge of the tidal sands that separate South Uist from Benbecula. Today the cairn is situated on a bedrock ridge that joins the island to the mainland to the southeast. At high tide the sea encroaches onto the cairn and only the highest parts are above water. The coast immediately to the south of the cairn rises steeply and overlooks the cairn. It is clear that the sea level has risen since the cairn was constructed in the Neolithic but it is not clear by how much. It is possible, indeed likely, that South Uist and Benbecula were originally one island and that this cairn lay in a location similar to that at Loch a' Bharp (see below), at the end of a sea loch entering the Minch to the east.

Standing in the entrance to the cairn the viewer has extensive views across the sea and the low islands to the east and north but quite restricted views to the south (Figure 5.5a). An interesting feature of these views is the presence of prominent hills marking out almost exactly the cardinal points to the east, north and south. The passage points east to a distinctive flat-topped hill on Skye, to the north is the very distinctive triangular peak of Eaval on North Uist and the highest peak, Ruabhal, on Benbecula, and to the south the only feature visible above the beach ridge is the summit of Hecla which lies almost directly south. Only to the west behind the cairn are there no distinctive features.

Glac Hukarvat

This cairn is situated in the centre of the island, approximately 70m above sea level and just under 3km from the coast. It was constructed on a rocky knoll on a fairly steep hill slope at the end of a small valley. The valley leads into the southwest corner of Loch Druidibeag, a large freshwater loch behind the coastal plain. To the southeast the ground rises steeply to a shoulder between the low hills of Hatharsal and Na Creagan. Behind this is a relatively large area of flat upland moor that separates the small hills of Hatharsal and Na Creagan from the mountain massif of Beinn Mhòr and Hecla.

This cairn is the highest on South Uist and the views are hence fairly spectacular, although constrained in many directions (Figure 5.5b). For a viewer standing on the high ground directly in front of the entrance, the views are channelled by the valley sides to the northwest. One looks across the cairn to Loch Druidibeag and the coastal plain. Beyond is the Atlantic and, on a clear day, it is possible to see St Kilda and the Monachs in the distance. In contrast, the view from the entrance to the east and south is restricted to the immediate hillslope. No distant mountains can be seen in any direction.

As one approaches this cairn from the northwest it is noticeable that the cairn is invisible until one rises up over a step in the valley about 400m from the cairn. The cairn is then dramatically situated on the heather-covered slopes at the back of the valley, with Hecla immediately behind the cairn. This cairn is quite unusual as distant views of

the mountains are actually obscured when the viewer is located at the cairn, whereas they are clearly visible on approach.

Reineval (Reineabhal)

This well-preserved cairn is situated approximately 30m above sea level on the north side of a small hill about 3km from the west coast. The ground to the north drops to a small loch that fills the floor of a narrow valley between Reineabhal and Beinn a' Mhuilinn. This valley provides access from the west coast into a large triangular area of flat land, now extremely wet and boggy, in the centre of the island.

The entrance faces east-southeast and points across the moorland to Airneabhal and the distant peak of Stulabhal (Figure 5.5c). The view to the right is relatively drab, rising up to the peak of Reineabhal. This is in direct contrast to the views to the left which are more dramatic, looking across the valley and to Loch an Ath Ruaidh, Heabhal and Trinneabhal. The most spectacular views are those to the northwest, to the sea and the flat coastal plain, but these are blocked out by the cairn. These views only become visible over the cairn if one walks away from it up the hill.

Barp Frobost

Barp Frobost lies in the central part of the island, approximately 15m above sea level and approximately 3km from the west coast. It was built on a rocky outcrop on the north side of a wide flat valley. The valley is oriented northwest/southeast and leads from the western coastal plain through to the east coast at Loch a' Bharp. As with most other sites on the island this site is located with flat land to the south and higher ground to the north.

The views of the landscape from this cairn are unusual for two reasons: they are more wide-ranging and distant and there is no major body of water visible (Figure 5.5d). None of the views are particularly visually restricted, although the view south is not extensive. To the north the rocky outcrops of Reineabhal dominate the horizon. To the right of Reineabhal two hills – Heabhal and Trinneabhal – frame a distant view of Beinn Mhòr. Further right, the peak of Airneabhal is prominent and behind the ridge of Criribheinn one can just make out the peak of Stulabhal. This range of hills is terminated by Aisgerbheinn which lies directly to the south. From the south round to the north, the landscape is rather flat and featureless. The view west is towards the sea but the sea itself is obscured by a low hill. Only a tiny amount of water is visible from the cairn, but the low-lying nature of the area suggests that the area might originally have had a number of small lochs that have since been filled with peat.

Loch a' Bharp

This is one of only two cairns on South Uist that is positioned with reference to the east coast of the island.

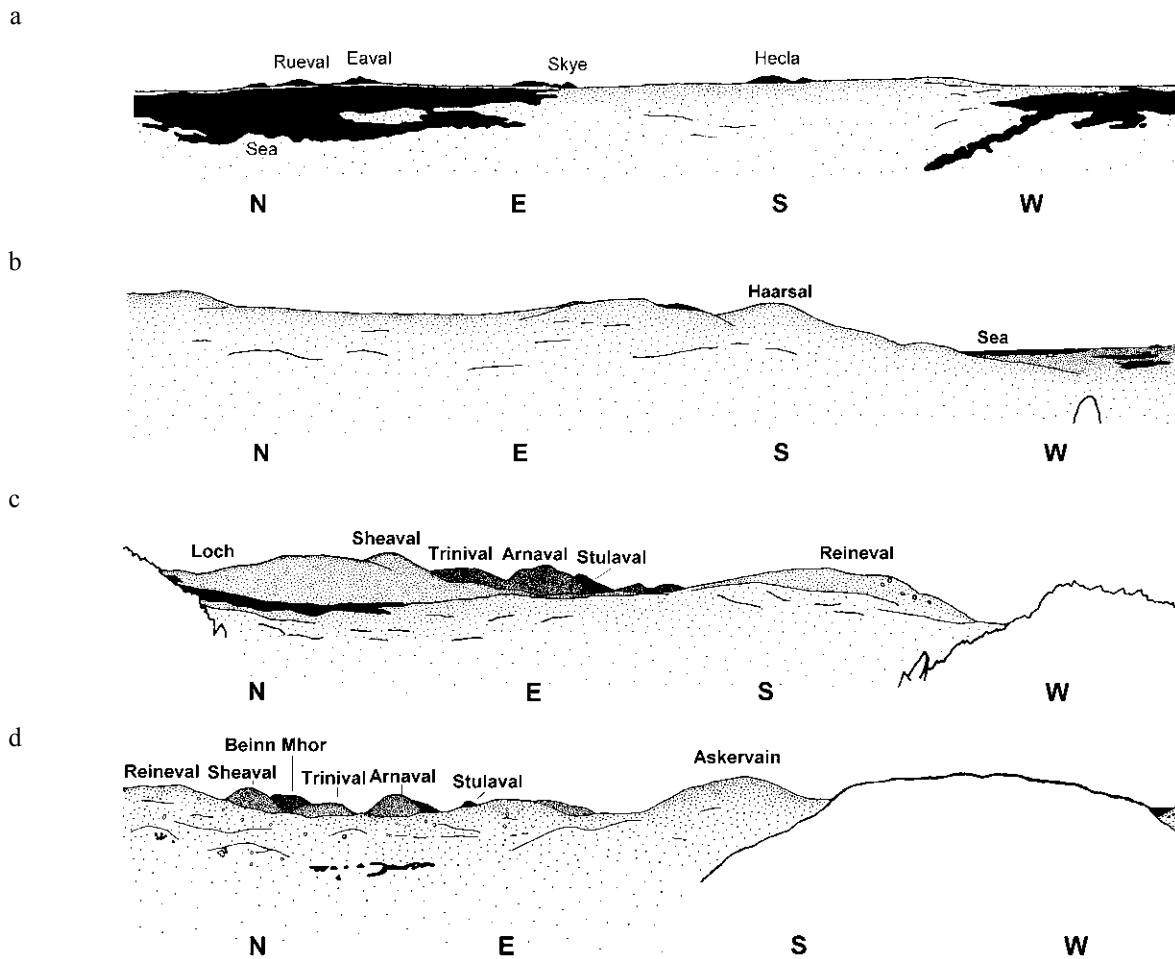


Figure 5.5. Panoramas for: a. Sig More; b. Glac Hukarvat; c. Reineval; d. Barp Frobst

It lies at the southeast end of the valley that runs from the cairn of Barp Frobst to Loch a' Bharp. It is situated at approximately 15m above sea level on a small knoll in the centre of the valley. The ground drops into stream beds to the northeast and southwest and into the loch to the southeast. To the northwest the ground shelves off gradually away from the cairn. Loch a' Bharp would originally have been a sea loch running into Loch Baghasdail but access to the sea is now blocked by a small dam.

The view from the entrance to the cairn (Figure 5.6a) is more impressive than at most of the cairns on South Uist. Standing in the entrance, one looks down the long finger of Loch a' Bharp towards the mouth of Loch Baghasdail and the access to the Minch. To the left one looks across an area of low undulating terrain to three prominent peaks; Beinn Ruigh Choinnich, Triuirebheinn and Stulabhal. To the right the immediate foreground is relatively flat ground but the distant views are less impressive with only the low profile of Easabhal particularly prominent. To the south-southwest it is possible to make out the island of Barra.

Looking towards the entrance from the south, it is difficult to get any impression of the surrounding landscape as, unusually for South Uist cairns, the ground rises up to the cairn entrance. Only from some distance away, from a boat on Loch a' Bharp for instance, would it be possible

to see the cairn framed by the prominent isolated hill of Aisgerbheinn that lies to the northwest.

Dun Trossary

Dun Trossary is situated in the southern part of the island approximately 30m above sea level and 2.3km from the west coast. It sits at the end of a low promontory projecting west from the base of the scarp of Easabhal, a long mountain ridge that effectively divides the plain of the west coast from the hills and valleys of the east coast. Access between these two areas, south of Loch Baghasdail, is restricted to the coastal fringe of Loch Baghasdail and the Sound of Eriskay. Immediately to the north and south of the ridge of Dun Trossary are low-lying basins containing substantial lochs (Loch Trosaraidh and Loch nan Capull). The cairn is situated between flat land to the north, south and west and the uplands to the east.

The cairn has been deliberately positioned not on the flat top of the promontory but on a knoll on the northeast slope. It is consequently overlooked by higher ground immediately to the east and has restricted visibility to the south. The most panoramic views in the vicinity of the cairn are from the high ground immediately to the southeast. From this point one can look west over the long cairn to the sea. The tidal

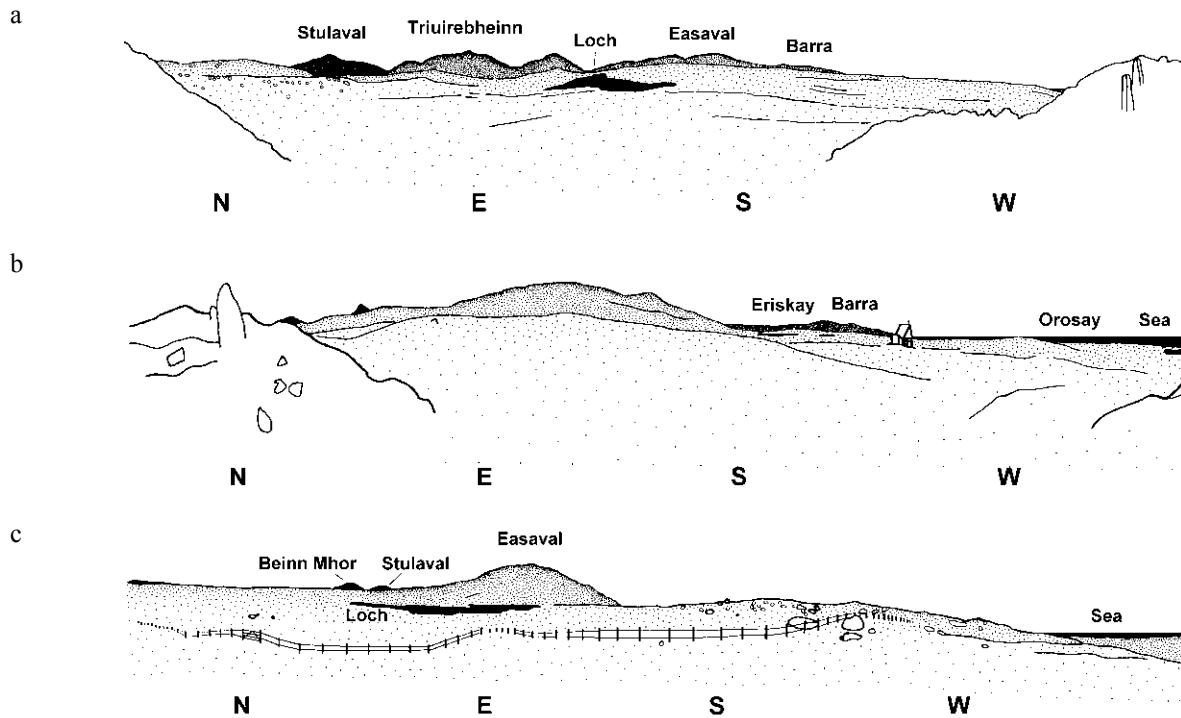


Figure 5.6. Panoramas for: a. Loch a' Bharp; b. Dun Trossary; c. Leaval

island of Orasaigh (Orosay) is a prominent feature of the horizon. To the right one looks over the low-lying ground around Loch Trosaraidh to the low hill of Càireasbhal. Behind this are distant views of Beinn Mhòr, the largest mountain in the centre of the island. To the left one looks over the low-lying ground around Loch nan Capull and Loch Aiseabhat to the low hill of Layaval. The dominant feature of the southern horizon is, however, the distant panorama of the island of Barra. Immediately behind the viewer the horizon is dominated by the scarp of Easabhal.

We have described the views from the high ground to the east because it is important to realise that the views from this tomb are clearly controlled by the location of the tomb and the architecture of the cairn. This is a long cairn and it has a very distinctive focus where the entrance is situated in the middle of a concave facade facing directly south. Looking south from the entrance (Figure 5.6b) the most prominent feature is the distant view to Barra. The siting of the cairn on the north slope of the ridge has not restricted the view of Barra but has curtailed visual access to the low-lying ground immediately to the south of the site. It is also likely that the horns on either side of the forecourt would have restricted visibility to the coastal plain to the west of the site and the mountain to the east.

It is difficult to know exactly what the views into the forecourt would have been like as they depend on how high the revetments and the body of the cairn originally stood. However, the ground does rise to the south and it seems likely that a viewer located here would have had a good view of the coastal plain and that they would have been able to see Càireasbhal and the distant views to Beinn Mhòr immediately behind the entrance to the chamber.

Layaval (Leaval, Leac na Ban Ghailseach)

This site is situated in the southwest corner of the island, at approximately 15m above sea level and about 1km from the coast. It was built about three-quarters of the way up the north slope of a small hill. The hill is isolated from the much higher ground, Easabhal, to the east and controls access from the coastal plain of the west coast to the narrow strip of low-lying land along the south coast. The hill is particularly rocky with considerable areas of exposed outcrop and many large boulders.

As with many of the cairns, its position on the side of the hill restricts the view (Figure 5.6c) to the south, where the entrance may be located. From the northwest to the southwest there are extensive views across the coastal plain to the sea. Three distant mountains, including Beinn Mhòr and Stulabhal, can be seen to the northeast, over a near-by loch, Loch Aiseabhat. To the east is Easabhal, a large hill covered in rocky outcrops. The tidal isle of Orasaigh is clearly visible to the northwest. This cairn appears to have been deliberately placed in the landscape to emphasize certain views and restrict others. If the site had been placed slightly uphill, the views to the south would not have been restricted by the immediate rise and it would be possible to view the island of Barra. If the cairn were slightly lower, some of the distant mountains to the north would not be visible and it would be more difficult to make out the coastline. The location is also ideal for viewing the long cairn of Dun Trossary to the north, framed by the dominating presence of Beinn Mhòr.



Figure 5.7. *Glac Hukarvat*

Approaching the cairns

If the landscape was a crucial part of the experience of place, then the way in which a cairn was approached allowed for different landscape settings to be viewed by the individual actor or body in space. The approach to and from a site might thus have been crucial in the way in which the landscape and the cairn itself were experienced. However, this does not imply that approaches to and from a site were fixed; it may be the case that different approaches were used at different times by different people. This would have created very different experiences of both the landscape and the monument.

Our understanding of the approaches to a cairn depends in part on assumptions we make about Neolithic subsistence strategies. One can imagine essentially two contrasting views of subsistence which would have an impact on how individuals approached the cairns. Firstly people might have led an essentially sedentary lifestyle with permanent settlement in houses and food production (the old orthodoxy and advocated by, for example, Schulting [Schulting 1998; Schulting and Richards 2000]). Alternatively people might have been predominantly mobile with no permanent settlements and food supplies dependent not just on domesticated plants and animals but on wild resources such as fish, shellfish, red deer and nuts and berries (the new orthodoxy). The latter position assumes a basic continuity with the Mesolithic population whereas the former position assumes a significant disruption; the applicability of these different views has been widely debated in recent years (*cf* Thomas 1991; Barclay 1997; Cooney 1997; 2000). Clearly both positions are extreme and polarize debate around the ends of a spectrum with many intermediate positions and Whittle (1997) has outlined some of the variations in mobility that are possible.

If one accepts that the Neolithic communities on South Uist were essentially sedentary, then the approach to the cairns appears fairly clear-cut. The main area of land suitable for permanent agricultural settlements is the low-

lying land concentrated on the coastal plain on the west side of the island. Most of the South Uist cairns lie on high ground immediately inland from this coastal plain (Figure 5.7). This would therefore mean that the monuments were skylined on approach. A substantial walk uphill would also have been required to reach each monument and this supports the idea that sites were set in marginal or liminal places. Sharples (1985) has argued that such an approach was taken in approaching the Early Neolithic Orkney cairns and that this was used to create a deliberate opposition between a land of the dead and a land of the living. By placing sites near to the summit of a hill, the view uphill is restricted, while the view downhill is usually expansive and this might have been used to open up or close down the landscape at specific times or for different people. The cairns would also have been approached by moving east towards the rising sun. Such an approach would almost invariably have led the visitor to the orthostatic revetment at the back of the cairn and the entrance to the chamber would only have been reached by circling the cairn.²

In contrast, if one assumes that communities were more mobile, then there is no need to restrict or concentrate people to the western coastal plain. The coast would have been a good area for the exploitation of the sea and for cereal cultivation but the inland and upland areas would also have been important. They would have provided grazing for domesticated cattle and sheep as well as red deer. The woodlands would have provided a range of resources including nuts and berries. If this was the case, then the approaches to the cairns become much more difficult to predict. One could assume activity in the inland and upland areas as having occurred in the summer months, whereas in the winter people might have congregated in the lowlands. The approach to the cairn would have then depended on the season of use.

This debate must also take into consideration the function or role of the cairn. Although there is as yet no direct evidence for human burial on South Uist during the Neolithic, the excavated cairns of North Uist have revealed the presence of human bones and it seems likely that human remains were also deposited in the South Uist monuments. The number of cairns seems far too limited to assume that everybody who died was placed in a cairn and it seems likely, therefore, that only certain people were placed in these monuments. It is also quite likely that the bodies of these individuals were held in another location until it was felt appropriate to place them in the cairn. Therefore the timing of deposition might have been very important, with restrictions on certain times in the month or even months in the year. Similarly it is possible that the approach to a cairn was not dictated by its relationship to specific features (such as the location at the time of death) but was related to more intangible features such as vegetation or locations with mythological significance derived from ephemeral historical events.

Although it remains impossible to predict from which direction people approached an individual cairn, it is possible to suggest that a variety of approaches were used,



Figure 5.8. Loch a' Bharp cairn looking over Loch a' Bharp towards Loch Boisdale

dependent on the time of year, persons involved, ritual to be carried out and so on. From this starting point, it is interesting to note how the landscape is opened up or shut down according to the direction from which the cairn is approached. In the case of Leaval, for example, it may be possible to suggest that the cairn was approached from the flatter land to the west, or from the sea, also to the west, where a rich variety of resources would be available. Approaching from this direction, the landscape would effectively be shut down as the views became more and more restricted the closer one got to the cairn. Approaching from the south would have meant that the cairn was not visible until the last minute. This could have invoked surprise or perhaps suggests that special knowledge was required to locate the site. An approach from this angle would effectively have opened up the landscape as one would have arrived at the site from above and initially looked over the monument to the views behind. This could be said to reveal the person's place in the world.

Moving either to the site or around the site itself might have been highly symbolic in its own right, perhaps representing the status of those involved in the ritual. It has been suggested that only a few individuals were actually allowed to partake in ritual activity at a site, while the majority of people watched. Thus the type of mobility allowed at a site could have reflected the role each individual could play: those of a higher status or with a more dominant role could have moved relatively freely around a site, looking at all landscape perspectives, while those of a lower status or with no direct role to play might have been restricted to one area and only one view. Thus positioning of people in



Figure 5.9. The cairn of Reineval with Loch an Ath Ruaidh in the background

the landscape and the views they were allowed might have been related to knowledge, and thus power, to be acquired and used to further one's own prestige.

Juxtaposing these different approaches, it seems clear that the landscape might have been used in different ways, perhaps on different occasions and for different ritual practices. It is also possible that the cairn played only a small part in a series of ritual activities, which might have involved walking either from or to the cairn and other less prominent monuments. In this way, the movement between the sites might have been important and the various landscapes visible along the route might have evoked a series of metaphors or represented a series of meanings

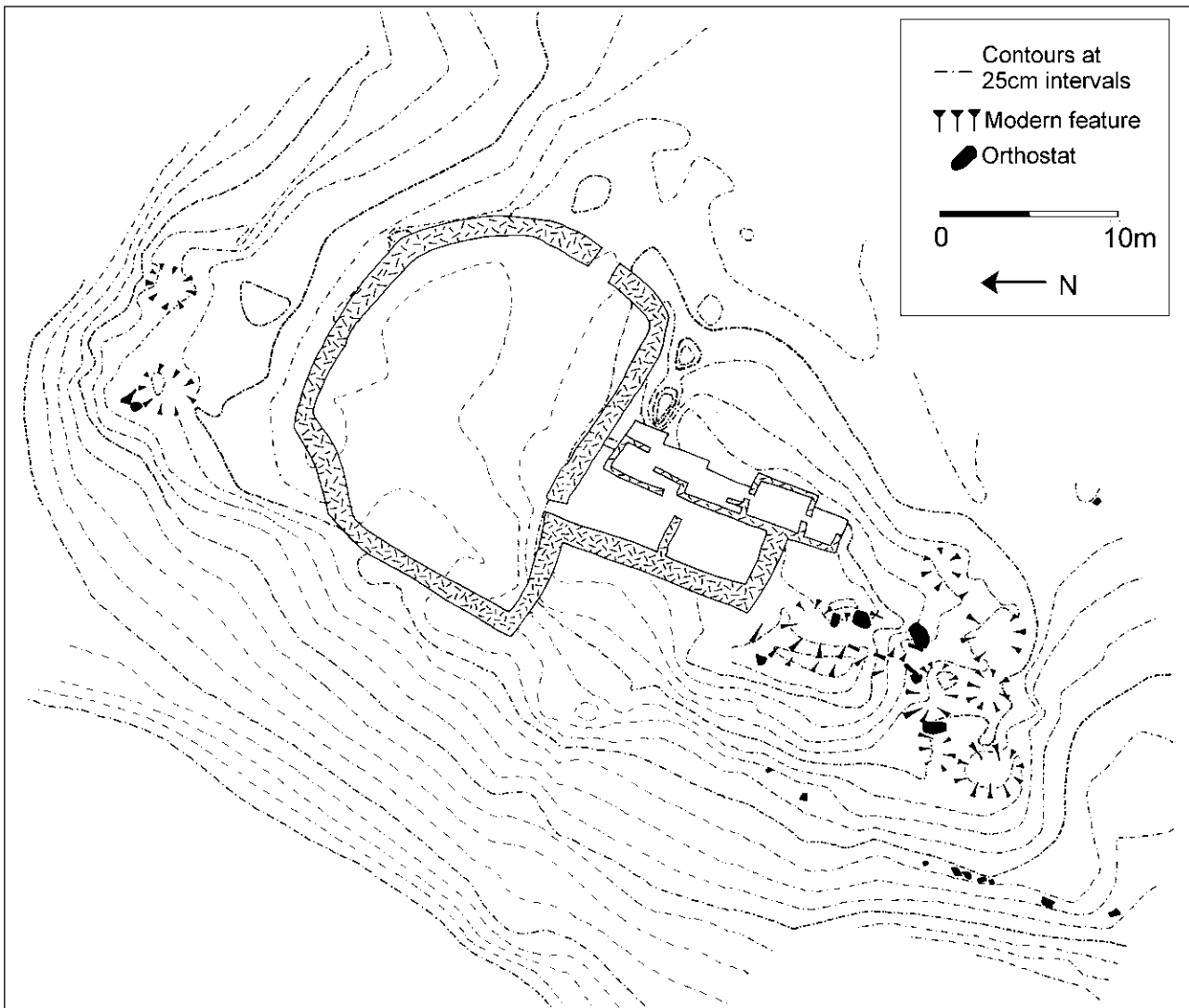


Figure 5.10. Contour plan of Dun Trossary

or reference points, perhaps in a similar way that cursus monuments might have done later in the Neolithic.

Discussion

One of the most significant features of the distribution of the cairns is their location in relation to the west coast. All but two of the cairns are constructed so that they are visible from the western coastal plain. The cairns also have views of the coastal plain and would have been easily accessible from this direction. It seems likely that even without the machair plain, this was still the most important economic zone for the Neolithic occupants of South Uist.

This distribution of tombs could be argued to support the view that the Neolithic occupants of South Uist were essentially sedentary farmers with ephemeral but essentially permanent settlement in the coastal plain. However, there is some evidence to suggest that this is not the case. Firstly it has to be emphasized that the distribution of cairns down the western slopes of the island's mountains is not in any sense even. Large gaps are present and tombs cluster

together in places. There is no standardized territorial division of the island, as has been argued to exist on Arran and Rousay (Renfrew 1976). Clearly this could be due to differential destruction of certain monuments but our impression is that this is not the case. Detailed survey of the landscape south of Loch Aoineart and in the Gleann Chill Donnain (Kildonan Glen) has failed to identify any possible tombs.

The location of the tombs on the western slopes of the mountains is also not designed to maximize the view of the coast from the tombs. Cairns such as Reineval, Barp Frobost and Glac Hukarvat are placed in valleys that constrain the visual access to the coastal plain. If, for example, the builders of Reineval had wanted to place their cairn to dominate the coastal plain, it would have required shifting it by only 350m to the west-facing slopes of the hill. Likewise, Barp Frobost is specifically placed so that the views of the coast are blocked by a very low hill.

The blocking of certain views is a recurrent feature of many of the cairns and may be specifically designed to make it impossible to see the cairn from certain locations. It

seems likely that this is creating a visual distinction between locations suitable for occupation and locations suitable for the dead. It may also reflect the exclusion of individuals or groups from the activities being undertaken at the cairn and therefore a means of controlling knowledge and allocating power to the groups allowed to visit the cairn.

Another very distinctive feature of the views from the cairns is the visibility of certain prominent peaks. All the cairns have views of mountains or peaks. The mountains of Barra are visible from Loch a' Bharp, Leaval and Dun Trossary. Stulabhhal, the highest peak between Loch Aoineart and Loch Baghasdail, is visible from Reineval, Barp Frobost, Dun Trossary and Leaval. Eaval and Hecla are visible from Sig More. In most cases, these peaks only just appear above the landscape horizon and any other location would frequently result in their disappearance. The unusual cairn in this case is Glac Hukarvat where no peaks are visible; however, it does have a distant view of the peaks of St Kilda.

The irregular spacing of the cairns seems to be specifically related to certain valleys that are important routes between different resource areas. This is most clearly demonstrated by the relationship of the cairns found on the east coast, Sig More and Loch a' Bharp. The position of the cairn at Loch a' Bharp is very distinctive. It lies facing the head of the loch that leads into the Minch (Figure 5.8). Access from this point through to the west coast is provided by a long valley that leads past the cairn at Barp Frobost.³ Sig More lies in a similar situation but this cannot be fully appreciated today because the rising sea level has so dramatically altered the coast line in this area. On the western slopes the cairns at Reineval (Figure 5.9) and Glac Hukarvat dominate valleys that lead from the coastal plain to large flat inland basins and Leaval lies close to the original route from the west coast to the south coast.

These locations suggest that the cairns are referencing movements through the landscape. However, the nature of the relationship is still ambiguous. Do the locations refer specifically to movement of communities from summer bases in the hills and winter bases on the western flatlands? Or do they refer to the movement of young adults – herders and/or hunters – following animals as they move upwards in the summer? Some of the locations would have been ideal for watching the movement of animals as they moved through bottlenecks in the landscape. They would also have provided spotting positions for hunting parties.⁴ Perhaps the cairns referenced the remembered locations of hunting camps long since abandoned with the advent of domesticated species. The latter explanation may be supported by the evidence for a very significant Mesolithic clearance in the Reineval pollen core.⁵

Only one cairn is not situated in relation to the movement through the landscape. This is the long cairn at Dun Trossary. This monument is positioned on a low promontory that projects into the coastal plain, an ideal location to visually dominate the coastal plain for many miles around. Access to the east coast or the interior of the island is difficult from this monument. One either has to go south to the coast or

north to Loch Baghasdail. As we have already noted this is a long-horned cairn with a south-facing forecourt. It is unique on the island in its morphology and its cosmological orientation as well as its topographic setting. One feature is, however, similar to other cairns on the island. It was carefully located to the north of the crest of the ridge. This does not impede distant views but it does make the cairn difficult to see or be seen from the low-lying land immediately to its south. This cairn probably functioned in a quite different fashion to all the other cairns on the island, perhaps acting as a focus for a much larger community or a much wider range of activities.

Conclusions

The Neolithic chambered cairns of South Uist provide us with the opportunity to study a small group of monuments in a small geographical area, but which fit in with the broader picture of the Neolithic in Britain. Regional differences and diversities can be fully explored at such a level of inquiry, while relating back to broader syntheses of the development of monumentality in the British Isles as a whole. It is at such a level of inquiry that we are able to investigate ideas such as the role of the landscape in the formation and use of a site and it appears to be clear from the monuments of South Uist that the landscape played a vital role in both the situation and consequent use of the sites. The use of the landscape by people in the Neolithic also helps reveal differences between sites and helps us to understand diversity as well as similarity with other Neolithic monuments. In being able to concentrate on small-scale differences in the landscape settings at sites, we are able to get one step closer to the experience of individuals in the Neolithic and perhaps understand the variety of existence in the past.

Inventory

In 1972 Henshall published the second volume of *The Chambered Cairns of Scotland*, which included a detailed description of all of the cairns found on South Uist. The inventory presented here is not designed to replace this work but provides a summary of the main features of the sites as well as drawing attention to certain features where our interpretation is slightly different to Henshall's. All of the cairns were visited in June 1998 and June 1999 by VC and CH, and NS has visited all of the cairns either in June 1997 or 1998. Two of the sites (Dun Trossary and Loch a' Bharp) have been subject to detailed survey and the site at Leaval was also the subject of small-scale excavation in June 1999 (Cummings and Sharples 1999). All of Henshall's plans have been amended to incorporate our interpretations.

Barp Frobost (Ust 4; NF72SE 3)

The site has been disturbed and is quite badly damaged on the west and east sides. Some cairn material is visible, but

the mound is mostly covered in grass. This site seems to be in much the same state as when Henshall found it.

Henshall (1972: 499) identified eight stones in the peristalith, but only six of these are now clearly visible. Other possible kerb stones can be seen around the edge of the original cairn, but most are heavily overgrown and it is difficult to tell whether these are *in situ* kerb stones or part of the cairn material. The diameter of the cairn, as defined by the surviving kerb stones, is approximately 25m.

A possible displaced capstone is visible on the top of the mound, slightly to the east of the centre. The capstone measures 2.50m by 1.65m. The tops of some large orthostats are visible in the centre of the mound and seem to suggest that although much of the cairn has been robbed, the chamber deposits may survive more or less intact. From the positioning of these chamber stones it seems likely that the entrance to the chamber might have been to the southeast.

Dun Trossary (Ust 17; NF71NE 3)

The site has been heavily damaged by the construction of an enclosure and associated pens for dipping sheep (Figure 5.10). Fortunately the main features of the monument appear to have survived in the area to the south and west of this livestock enclosure. The monument appears to be a long-horned cairn with a chamber entered from the centre of the concave façade at the south end.

The southwest corner of the monument is relatively undamaged and a kerb of nine orthostats runs from the tip of the southwestern horn for about 22m along the west side of the cairn. This is then disrupted by the sheep enclosure but a scarp appears to indicate that the cairn continues to the north of the enclosure for approximately 4.50m before stopping at a couple of large orthostats. If these stones mark the original north end of the monument, they indicate a cairn approximately 65m long. There is no indication that the east side of the cairn survives at all and no evidence for the horn on the southeast side of the entrance forecourt.

The chamber is defined by six stones. Two flat slabs may indicate the position of the entrance to a passage 1m wide. Two other slabs continue the line of the west side of the passage to the north and two orthostats possibly indicate the line of the east side of the passage. The chamber is marked by a surface hollow that probably indicates recent disturbance. Immediately to the east of the putative entrance is a very large orthostat, 3m high and 1.30m wide. This stone superficially appears to be part of the façade but it is leaning against the cairn at an acute angle and its base does not appear to be ground-fast. It might have been placed in this position relatively recently.

The forecourt area has been severely disturbed by the construction of at least five small structures now visible as grassed-over hollows. Similar hollows are visible at the north end of the cairn and to the east and these presumably represent small shelters constructed in relatively recent years.

Glac Hukarvat (Ust 19; NF73NE 2)

Despite being one of the most isolated and inaccessible of the South Uist cairns, this monument has been severely robbed. At least six buildings have been built into or are adjacent to the monument. The most substantial of these structures is located in the forecourt. It is rectangular, approximately 4m by 2.60m, and might have had an east-facing entrance. Another well-preserved building lies in the southern part of the cairn. It is 2.50m square and placed adjacent to a third structure approximately 1.80m by 2.50m. They have south- and north-facing entrances respectively. The fourth structure lies to the west and is only 1.10m by 0.90m with no obvious entrance. The fifth and sixth structures are both found to the north of the cairn and are too badly preserved to define.

A substantial amount of cairn material survives to the north and west but there is little around the chamber area or in the forecourt where several kerb stones can be identified. Henshall (1972: 517) located 14 stones in the peristalith, but we were able to identify at least 16 stones during our visit. The majority of the kerb stones were identified on the west side of the cairn. The kerb stones define a roughly circular cairn that measures approximately 20m in diameter. Six upright stones define a funnel-shaped forecourt facing east. Four of these stones are marked on the original plan by Henshall but for some reason she did not accept a stone on the northeast corner as marking the northern end of the forecourt. There seems no reason not to accept this stone as it mirrors a very similar stone that marks the southeast corner. The forecourt is U-shaped, approximately 3.80m wide where it meets the edge of the cairn. Halfway into the forecourt two opposing stones indicate it is 2.65m wide. Two slabs set just in front of the entrance to the passage are set 0.70m apart.

The passage from the forecourt to the chamber is



Figure 5.11. The excavation of Leaval with core cairn just appearing around the orthostats

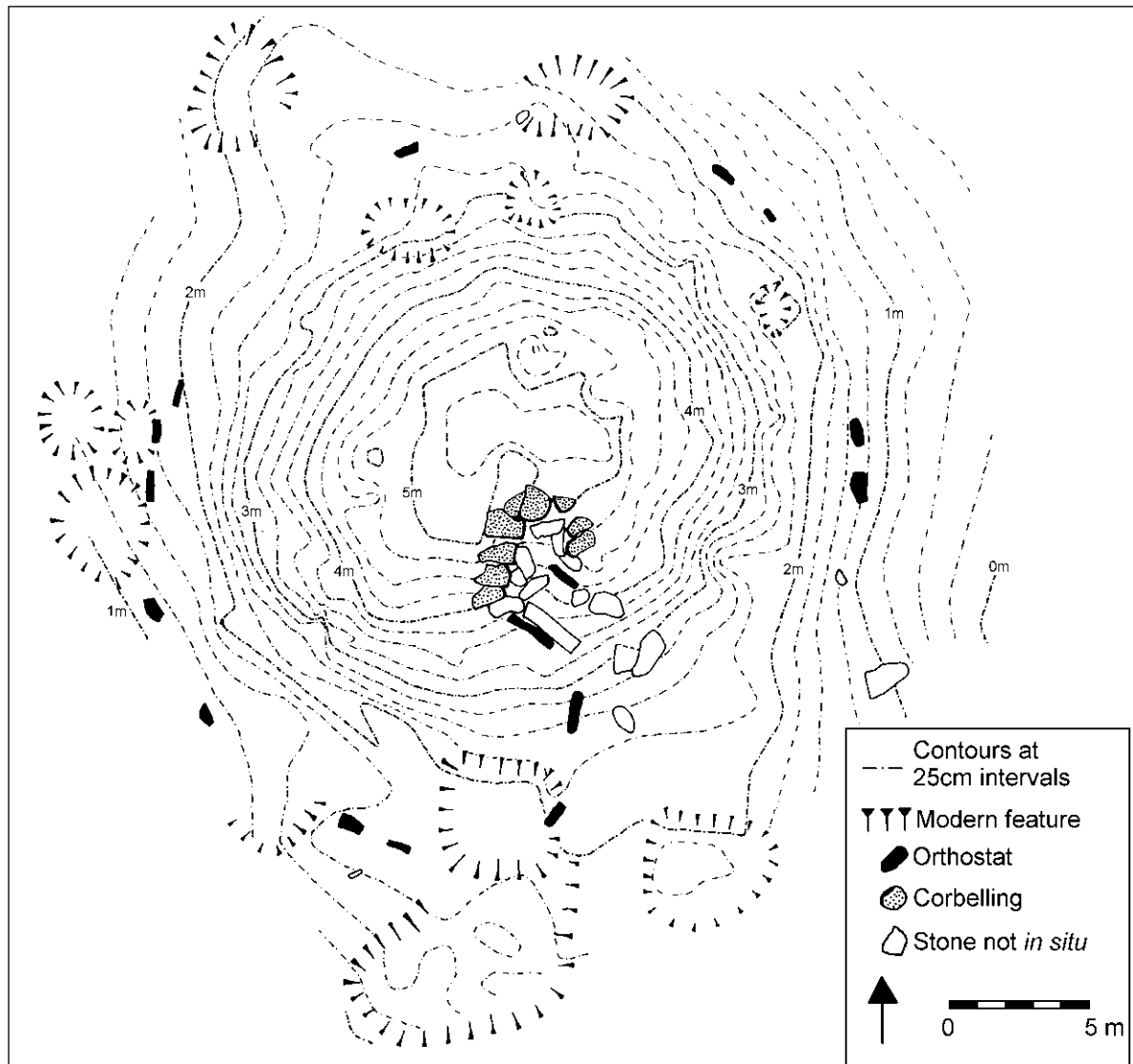


Figure 5.12. Loch a' Bharp contour plan.

clearly defined by two longitudinal stones set opposite one another, again at a distance of 0.70m. The passage appears to be roughly 2.30m in length but it is difficult to precisely define the beginning of the passage owing to the presence of a large stone that may be a displaced lintel. The chamber is roughly circular, defined by six orthostats (although Henshall identified eight) and is approximately 4m in diameter. A very prominent orthostat provides a distinctive backstone to the chamber. Many other large slabs found in and around the chamber may be collapsed corbel stones. One large slab in the centre of the chamber area may be a capstone. Three grooves on the edge of the capstone suggest it has been broken up during the recent destruction of the cairn.

Leaval (Layaval, Leac na ban Ghailseach) (Ust 21; NF71NE 4)

Although badly damaged, this site would appear to be a genuine Neolithic chambered cairn. The four surviving

orthostats, apparently *in situ*, define a rectangular chamber. The largest of these stones is 1.50m wide and 1.40m high. There is no evidence of a capstone or any kerb stones either *in situ* or in the surrounding area. However, Henshall (1972: 520) claims that the name of the cairn (*leac* meaning 'flat slab') implies that a capstone might once have been present.

This monument was the subject of small-scale excavation in 1999 in an attempt to reveal additional structural remains (Cummings and Sharples 1999). A considerable quantity of cairn material uncovered to the south of the orthostats seem to be the remains of a core cairn (Figure 5.11). Although there is a large gap between the chamber stones facing southeast, there was no evidence of a passage here, suggesting that the monument contained a sealed chamber of megalithic form. The chamber is surrounded by a low wall that appears to be the remains of an enclosure. In addition, a considerable assemblage of worked quartz and flint was recovered, suggesting that this site might have been reused in prehistory (*ibid.*).

Loch a' Bharp (Ust 22; NF72SE 2)

This is one of the best preserved cairns on the island, comparable only to Reineval in quality (Figure 5.12). Most of the cairn material is still *in situ* and the chamber is defined by corbelling that must be several metres above the floor level. Only on the southern side of the cairn, where the entrance is situated, has much of the cairn material been displaced. This destruction is the result of later settlement activity, although it is difficult to clearly define any structures. The most likely interpretation of this area is that it contains the remains of a large roundhouse which is most probably a wheelhouse. Other structures have been created in the more recent past both in this forecourt area and in the main body of the cairn.

A circle of 16 upright peristalith stones can be identified. Although some kerb stones seem to have been removed, the surviving peristaliths suggest that this cairn was roughly circular, 26m in diameter, with a funnel-like forecourt facing almost directly south. The forecourt is defined by the presence of three orthostats all situated on the western side of the entrance; none survive on the eastern side which makes it hard to define the exact shape of the forecourt. The largest of the forecourt orthostats stands 1.50m high and is 0.40m wide at the base.

Approaching the chamber, several large slabs are found that are clearly not *in situ*. These stones might have been façade stones or are collapsed corbelling from the chamber. The largest of these is almost 3m long and is situated on the western side of the chamber. This slab might once have been an entrance stone to the chamber or perhaps a lintel. There are then two orthostats that seem to be *in situ* and perhaps mark the beginning of the chamber. They are situated 1.95m apart. The slab to the west is very large and a height of 1.50m is visible before it disappears into the cairn material. The stone on the eastern side is mostly covered in cairn material, so it is difficult to approximate its height.

The chamber is well preserved; only the capstone and a few corbelling stones have been removed to expose the upper part of the corbelled roof. There is no obvious capstone, but it may be one of the larger stones that lie in the vicinity of the chamber. Henshall (1972: 520) claims that a capstone measuring approximately 3m long once existed at the site but has been removed or displaced since. Many stones in the chamber area are not *in situ* and are likely to be fallen corbelling. *In situ* corbelling is found at both the western, northern and eastern sides of the chamber and up to three courses are visible in places. The top row of these corbel stones projects 0.30m over the row beneath them. At its widest point the chamber is 3m wide, but it is undoubtedly wider at the base.

Reineval (Reineabhal; Ust 26; NF72NE 1)

This is one of the best preserved cairns on the island, comparable only to Loch a' Bharp. The cairn is about 4m tall at its highest point and is defined by a peristalith of twelve orthostats. The kerb stones define a roughly

circular monument with a diameter of approximately 20m. Compared to many cairns there has been very little recent destruction and only seven slight hollows indicate shepherds' shelters created in the body of the cairn.

The passage is clearly defined and enters the cairn from the east-southeast. The first two stones encountered in the passage are to the north and south and are 0.65m and 0.80m long respectively. The northern stone is at an angle to the other *in situ* stones which may suggest that the passage joins a shallow forecourt quite different to the deep funnel-shaped forecourts at Glac Hukarvat and Loch a' Bharp. Another transverse stone is then positioned on the northern side of the passage, although it does not have a slab opposite. Further into the body of the cairn two stones on the southern side and one on the northern side indicate that the passage was approximately 0.80m wide. Two more slabs are visible on the north side of the passage, just before a large capstone. The capstone has been reduced in size but is still 1.55m by 1.40m.

Sig More (Ust 27; NF84NW 2)

Sig More is a relatively small cairn, with a diameter of approximately 18m. The edge of the cairn is defined by a large number of recumbent orthostats and blocks (many more than are marked on Henshall's plan) fully exposed by the sea. The cairn itself survives well on the south side of the chamber but has been almost completely removed to the north.

Many of the chamber and kerb stones are visible, particularly on the north side. The entrance to the chamber is defined by two upright stones 0.50m apart. Behind this, two parallel slabs indicate a chamber or passage 1.40m wide. These are abutted by two more transverse slabs, leaving a gap of 0.45m through which one enters another chamber. This is defined by two longitudinal slabs on the north but only one slab to the south where some possible corbelling survives. A gap exists between these stones and the next slab on the north side and its partner on the southern side, which is even further to the west. In the gap is located a stone which may be collapsed corbelling that has fallen over into the chamber. The alignment of the stone on the north side suggests that the chamber might have been slightly larger at this end. There is no sign of a back slab.

*Uncertain sites**Tigh Cloiche (Ust 32; NF74SE 4)*

This site is situated in rough grazing land at approximately 6m above sea level, 2km west-southwest of Sig More and is a circular 'cairn' with a much lower rectangular tail to the west. The tail appears to consist of three roughly square buildings now surviving as grassed-over hollows. The westernmost hollow is 1.20m wide, the next 3m wide and the last 2.50m square.

The circular mound is 23.60m in overall diameter with steep sides rising to a relatively flat summit 19.50m in

diameter. Some exposed stones are visible but it is mostly overgrown with turf. Two hollows are visible, one in the centre of the mound with a slab 1m long, and one to the southwest. The latter clearly indicates the position of a roughly square building, 1.50m wide, similar to those in the tail, but that in the centre is too amorphous to be interpreted.

There is little evidence to support the idea that this site is a Neolithic chambered cairn. There are no earth-fast orthostats to indicate the presence of a façade, forecourt or a chamber. There are no large slabs of any description on the site or in its vicinity. Furthermore, the positioning of this site within the landscape is not at all consistent with the other cairns on South Uist. It lies in a flat area of moorland with extensive views in all directions. Most cairns are positioned on the edge of the uplands, normally on a hillslope, with views in one direction impeded. This site remains difficult to classify. The circular mound could be a Bronze Age cairn or even a wheelhouse. The rectangular tail is most likely to be more recent temporary shelters. Only excavation could resolve the issue.

Tota Mhòr na Leacaich (Ust 33; NF81SW 1)

This site is situated on a rocky outcrop approximately 100m above sea level in rough grazing land. The cairn is placed about three-quarters of the way up a relatively steep hillside and has extensive views over the coast, Eriskay and Barra (see also Chapter 8).

Henshall (1972: 529) described the site as an unclassified circular cairn that has been badly damaged by 19th-century settlement clearance. This site might once have been a chambered cairn but there is no surface evidence to support this. There is no sign of a capstone and no *in situ* orthostats to indicate revetment, passage or chamber. Although a number of sizeable slabs are present, they have clearly been moved to create the walls of the 19th-century dwellings.

The landscape views from this site are undeniably impressive, and consistent with the other cairns on the island. The site is situated three-quarters of the way up a relatively steep hill on what is likely to be a rocky outcrop. The hills around the site are covered in large rocks and rocky outcrops. To the north, the views are relatively restricted, looking further up the hillside on which the cairn is placed. To the south, there are spectacular views of the southern coastline and Eriskay, Barra and other smaller islands in between.

This monument is not so easy to dismiss as Tigh Cloiche. The site has been substantially disturbed by recent activity and this might have involved the removal of the principal structural stones but disturbance at the other cairns has tended to expose these stones, not remove them. The location is similar to other sites but not identical. The slope of the hill is much steeper than normal and the site is much higher in elevation. Two of us think it is not a cairn, one of us thinks it might be. Only excavation could resolve the issue.

NB

All line drawings except Figures 5.5 and 5.6 were drawn by Henley and digitized by Cummings. Figures 5.5 and 5.6 were drawn and digitized by Cummings. All photographs were taken by Sharples. This paper first appeared in 2005 in *Set in Stone: new approaches to Neolithic monuments in Scotland* (eds V. Cummings and A. Pannett, published by Oxbow Books).

Notes

- 1 In 1999 the authors undertook a superficial excavation at the tomb of Leaval (Layaval; Cummings and Sharples 1999). There has been a lot more work in North Uist. Erskine Beveridge appears to have explored Barpa Langais, Cleittraval (Cleitreabhal), Geiriscllett, Marrogh and Unival (Uineabhal) sometime prior to 1911. Unival and Cleittraval were then thoroughly excavated by Sir Lindsay Scott in the 30s and 40s and the chamber at Geiriscllett was re-excavated (Dunwell 1997). Several Neolithic settlements have also been discovered on North Uist but these all date to the later Neolithic.
- 2 The movements around the sites might have reflected the long-term movements of people at a small spatial and temporal scale. The shape of the tombs could therefore reflect the type of mobilities that people were engaged in: all but one of the sites are round, perhaps suggesting that people were involved in cyclical movements around the landscape, perhaps seasonal or yearly. However, Dun Trossary is a long cairn perhaps suggesting a different concept of space. This could also suggest that two different ideologies of time were in place on South Uist, one representing the cyclical view of space and time, and perhaps relating back to the Mesolithic, while another viewed space and time as linear, perhaps influenced by the new Neolithic concepts of being-in-the-world.
- 3 The position is so dramatic that one could think of it as an ancestral landing place for the first colonists. Presumably such an event would be mythologized and might be marked by later generations. Alternatively it could relate to contact with other communities across the Minch.
- 4 The practical reasons for siting on rocky outcrops should not disguise the fact that such outcrops may be symbolic in their own right: Tilley (1994) suggests that such outcrops might have been named and Taçon (1991) illustrates the importance of rocks in the Aboriginal belief system. Cummings (2000; 2001) has even suggested that such outcrops might have been monuments in their own right that may have a history back into the Mesolithic.
- 5 The complete excavation of chambered cairns in recent years has revealed that they are often situated on occupation sites, both Mesolithic and Neolithic in date. The most discussed sites are Hazelton (Saville 1990) and Gwernvale (Britnell and Savoury 1984) but activity is also known to precede the construction of Camster Long (Masters 1997) and Tulach of Assery B (Corcoran 1966) in Caithness.

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6 Duns, brochs and crannogs: Medieval use

John Raven

An initial survey – the ‘brochs and lochs survey’ – was carried out in September 2000 by Mike Parker Pearson and Peter Marshall. This work was then extended by the author between 2001 and 2003, when seven weeks were spent surveying the islets, islands, peninsulas and coastlines of South Uist for signs of ancient settlement. Potential areas were initially highlighted through examination of aerial photographs (held by the RCAHMS and Scottish Natural Heritage) and Ordnance Survey maps (Figure 6.1). The maps of the island by Timothy Pont (c. 1595) and Joan Blaeu (1654) also drew attention to areas with formerly occupied islands. These provided a focus for the beginnings of the study, which was then widened to survey most of the lochs in the island.

Survey was conducted above surface in all cases and below surface in some, where the opportunity allowed. Underwater survey was undertaken with Matthew Shelley. This enabled an assessment of whether the island in question is natural or artificial (*i.e.* a crannog), the discovery of any sub-surface features and whether middens or datable materials could be discovered.

The results of this survey are presented in five sections, from north to south, based on convenience and on concentrations of island sites marked on Pont and Blaeu’s maps rather than on past political divisions. A sixth short section covers an important dun on Benbecula.

1. *North End*: the district running from Iochdar and Loch a’ Charnain to Groigearraidh.
2. *Howmore (Tobha Mòr) district*: Stadhlaigearraidh to Peighinn nan Aoireann.
3. *North Middle District*: Staoinebrig to Bornais.
4. *South Middle District*: Cill Donnain to Dalabrog.
5. *Baghasdail*: Cille Pheadair to Gleann Dail.
6. *Benbecula*

The cartographic history of each area is discussed at the beginning of each section. Although these regions are arbitrary, there are clusters and patterns that may reveal some significance to these groupings.

While most of the sites surveyed have been known

since the RCAHMS’ survey (1928), seven new sites were recorded in: Schoolhouse Loch (Loch an Taigh-sgoile) at Howmore, Loch a’Phuirt-ruaidh at Howbeg (Tobha Beag), West Loch Ollay (Loch Olaidh an Iar) at Staoinebrig, Loch na Duchasaich at Ormacleit, Loch an Eilean at Leth Meadhanach (South Boisdale; two sites), and Loch Aiseabhat at Smeircleit.

North End

Pont’s map does not cover this area and, although Blaeu (1654) marks three of the lochs, he does not record any occupied islands within them. There is, however, a disproportionate number of duns and brochs in this area in comparison to the rest of South Uist and elsewhere in the Western Isles. The area was heavily over-populated after the clearances of the mid-19th century and many duns are covered by blackhouses, whitehouses and other recent croft buildings, rendering interpretation of Medieval occupation hard. However, a few of these sites do appear to have post-Iron Age occupation upon them, including possible ecclesiastical structures.

Loch an Dùin Mhòir, Iochdar

There are two lochs running up the western edge of Hornish Point, Loch an Dùin Bhig and Loch an Dùin Mhòir, which are separated by an area of low ground surrounding a raised knoll containing a large multiperiod settlement. These lochs drain to the south, and much of what is marked as Loch an Dùin Mhòir on the Ordnance Survey map is now little more than reed beds. This suggests that the water level was once much higher and the two present-day lochs might originally have been one, with the central knoll being the ‘dun’ of both loch place-names. Bald’s map of 1805 confirms this interpretation, showing one loch with a peninsula extending from the east, roughly where the dun is situated.

NF7593 4671 – NMRS number NF74NE 2: the early dun is now obscured by several phases of recent croft, and possibly earlier, buildings. In places around the edges of

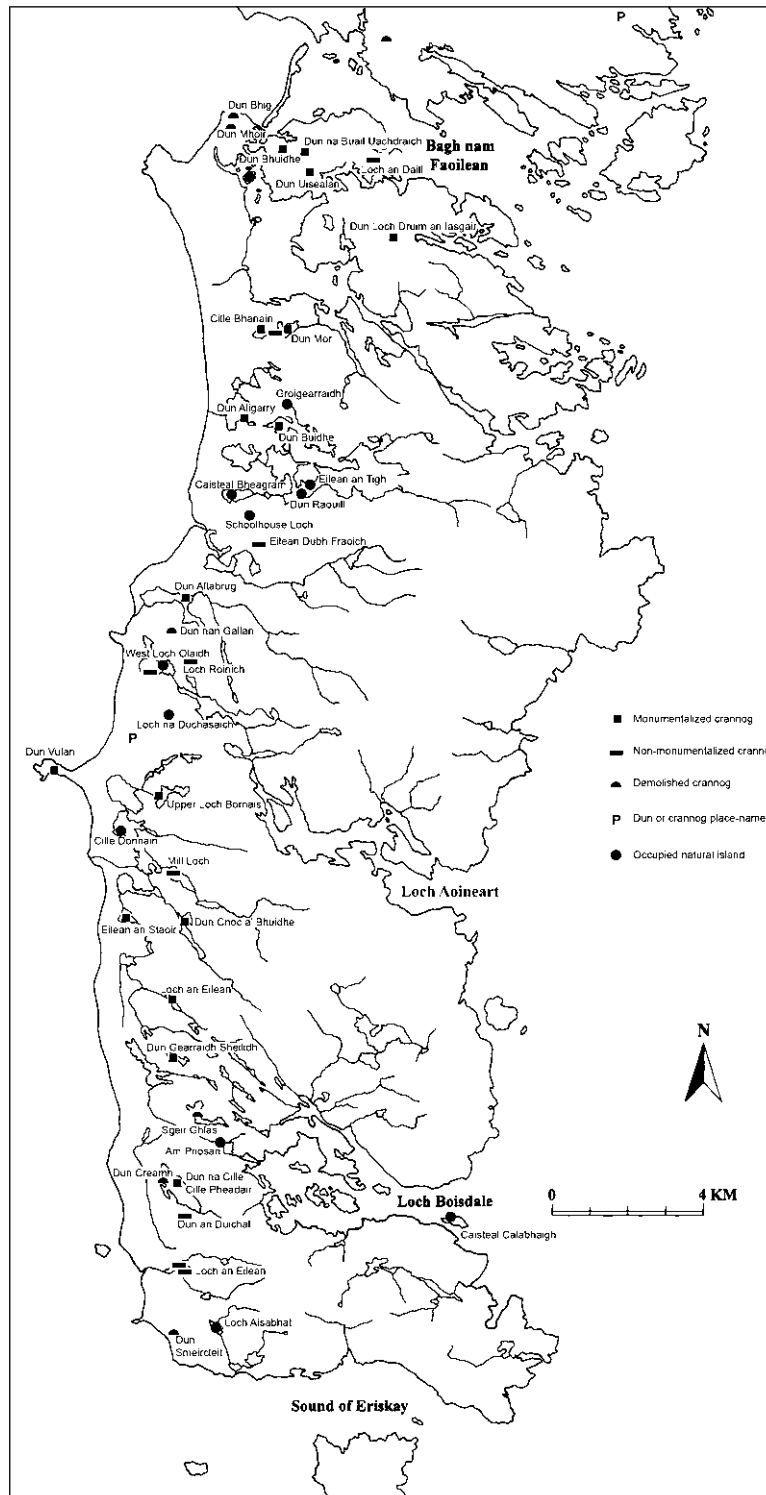


Figure 6.1. Locations of duns, brochs and crannogs in South Uist

the mound, however, there are stretches of stone which may indicate that this is an artificial or modified island. Unfortunately this phase is silted and built over to such an extent that this remains speculative.

Loch an Dùin Bhuidhe, Iochdar

When visited, this loch had dried or silted up and was

covered in spongy, boggy mosses, which were easily traversable.

NF7735 4629 – NMRS Number NF74NE 4: *Dun Bhuidhe* (Figure 6.2). On the O.S. map the site appears to sit on a peninsula into the loch but, when visited, it was evident that the site is now surrounded on all sides by boggy morass. The dun/broch rises to more than 3m from the surface of the bog, with the southern half rising fairly

sharply. At its base the main dun is *c.*12m in diameter. Around the circumference is a face of stones at the 'water' level, which may be the remains of the upper part of the artificial/modified island upon which the dun was built.

The top is heavily grassed over, so any interpretations and measurements must be tentative. The dun appears to be sub-circular, 10m in diameter on the outer upper lip of the walls that ring the top and are *c.*2m wide. The outer face of this walling is partially visible at the southern extent and the inner wall is visible to the northeast. Just to the south of this exposed area, the inner structure of the wall is revealed; it is double-skinned, with a void boxed off between its faces. On the inside of this wall, the centre drops down *c.*1m.

The northern quarter of this dun is overlain by a raised L-shape, supporting two phases of occupation, possibly one or two blackhouses. Bald's map (1805) shows a house in the vicinity, but it is hard to be certain whether they are one and the same. The structure does not appear on

the first edition O.S. map, where the site is described as a dun. There is also a raised rectangle of ground to the east of the mound.

Extending from the lower south edge of the dun is a flat line of stones. Around 5m of its length is visible, before the remains descend below the marshy surface. This may be a wall but is possibly a causeway, as it extends to the higher ground on the south of the loch, occupied by a modern farmstead surrounded by the remains of blackhouses and whitehouses, possibly those marked on the first edition of the O.S. map.

Loch Druim an Iasgair, Loch a' Charnain

NF8036 4348 – NMRS Number NF84SW 1: a walled artificial or modified island. The position of the entrances and internal buildings as recorded during this survey suggest that the orientation of the RCAHMS survey (1928) might have been skewed by 90°. It could not be ascertained how much water level changes have affected this loch. The walls of the dun come down straight into the loch. In many places the walls continue down to up to 0.50m under the present water level. The water of the loch is very peaty with limited visibility, but it appears that the walls are built directly onto a steep embankment of stones, dropping down a further 2m.

Several boulders stick out from the wall around water level, perhaps indicating that this was the water line in antiquity. However, two box-recesses appear on the outside of the wall at water level, which may suggest that the water level was originally lower. One of these may be the possible latrine opening suggested by the RCAHMS; there was no sign in the undergrowth of the rest of this feature.

The walls are still well preserved around the island's northern edge, with two possible entrances, one to the east, the other to the west. The western hole seems better

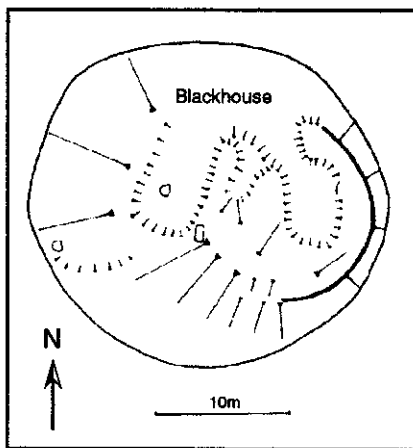


Figure 6.2. Plan of Dun Bhuidhe, Iochdar

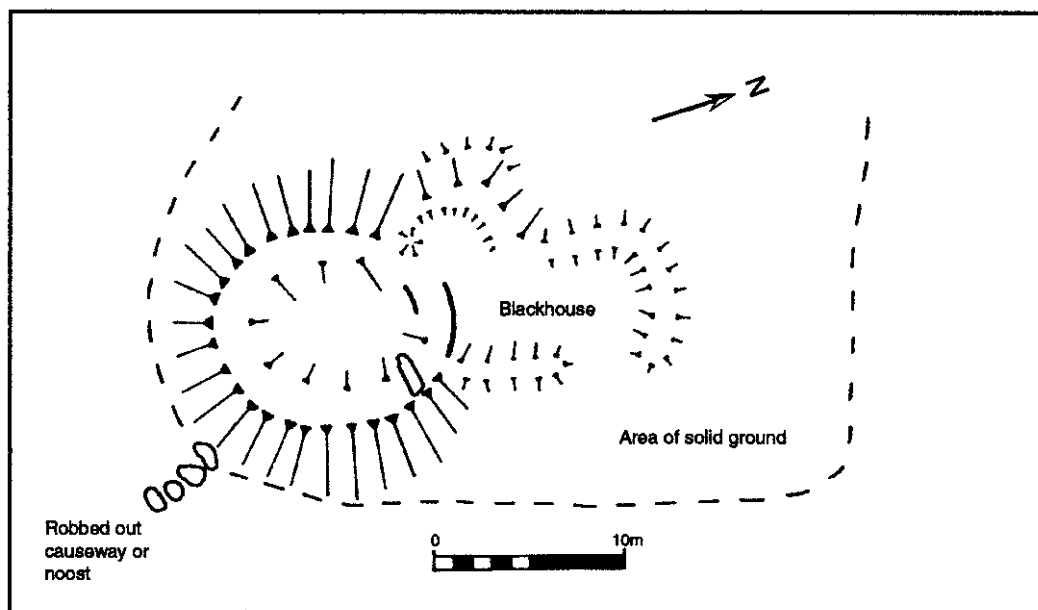


Figure 6.3. Plan of Dun na Buail uachdraich, Iochdar

constructed and has an underwater 'plateau' extending for *c.* 2m outside it, but a possible lintel stone lies at water level in the eastern hole. The wall is 1m thick, consisting of well-built outer skins, constructed from 0.40–0.50m diameter stones and filled with rubble consisting of 0.20–0.30m diameter stones. To the south, the wall has been robbed out in several places, possibly to build the two inner buildings.

These structures are at the northern and southern limits of the island and are a little over 2m in diameter, standing up to 1m tall, though largely obscured by the undergrowth. The northern structure appears to consist of one inner skin of stones, with rubble piled on its outer face. A double line of stones runs to the south of this building for 1m.

A local informant says that oral tradition holds that the dun was never finished, and that for much of the year the inside of the dun is covered with water.

Lochan Nan Carranan, Aird na Monadh, Iochdar

NF7838 4584 – NMRS Number NF74NE 7: a 9.5 × 8m wide and 0.50m high oval grass-covered stony mound, showing no further structure (O.S. cited on CANMORE).

Loch Dùn na Buail'-uachdraich, Iochdar

NF7777 4606 – NMRS Number NF74NE 5: *Dun na Buail uachdraich*, a 15m-diameter dun, with walls 3m wide by 1.50m high, heavily denuded to the north (Figure 6.3). There is also a further ring of stones 10–15m wide further out. The loch itself was a 'swamp' in 1928 (RCAHMS). Bald (1805) records the dun with a long causeway heading northeast at first, before bending in a more northerly direction; on the Bald map the loch is also much larger than it appears on later maps. The dun was very small when surveyed by the O.S. in the later 19th century.

Loch Uiselan, Iochdar

NF7776 4536 – NMRS Number NF74NE 6: *Dun Uisealan*, an oval mound *c.* 30m in diameter, surmounted by a sub-

rectangular structure, 2.80m × 2.50m, with walls 0.40m high (Figure 6.4). A further rectangular cell exists to the south of the mound (O.S. cited on CANMORE). The island is linked to the mainland by a 2–3m wide causeway, which extends from the dun to the southeast for 12m, before bending to the south for the last 8m, hitting the mainland on a low knoll. It was well exposed in 1928 when the loch level was well drained (RCAHMS). On Bald's map (1805), the loch appears slightly larger than on later maps, and the causeway is shown.

Clachan, Aird na Monadh, Iochdar

NF7723 4624 – NMRS Number NF74NE 3: a 26m × 30m wide, 3m-high pile of stones, covered in a large number of later structures, either a cairn or a dun (RCAHMS 1928).

Loch an Daill, Àird Mhòr, Loch a' Charnain

NF7969 4592 – NMRS Number NF74NE 8: a 1m-high pile of stones sitting upon an islet connected to the mainland by a deeply submerged curvilinear causeway extending to the south (RCAHMS 1928).

Loch an Dùin Mhòir, Geirinis

NF7755 4149 – NMRS Number NF74NSE 3: *Dun Mor*, an oval islet with a crannog stretching to the north. It has an outer ring of stones and a main structure 15m in diameter, with walls 3m high and 3m thick (O.S. cited on CANMORE). A number of other later structures, rectangular and oval, cover the islet, which had been robbed out not long before the RCAHMS survey (RCAHMS 1928). The causeway has been broken to allow the passage of fishing boats and the lintel stolen for building materials (Thomas 1890).

NF 7730 4150 – NMRS Number NF74SE : a burial ground with rectangular buildings beside loch (O.S. cited on CANMORE).

NF 7744 4152 – NMRS Number NF74SE 12: an island supporting three inter-linked sub-rectangular round-ended buildings, with dry-stone walls 0.80m high and 0.90m high and an enclosure in the west part of the island. A causeway has also been recorded (O.S. cited on CANMORE).

Loch Cille Bhànain, Geirinis

NF7685 4138 – NMRS Number NF74SE 1: recorded as the site of a chapel but, given its north–south orientation, this interpretation was queried by RCAHMS (1928). This rectangular structure is 17m × 8m, with walls at least 1m thick and up to 1.80m high in places. The latest phase of construction on this island is very well built and the structure is much larger than any other pre-estate domestic building on the island, so the interpretation of its being a chapel may be correct. The RCAHMS recorded lime mortar pointing on the inside of the structure, but there was no trace left of it on

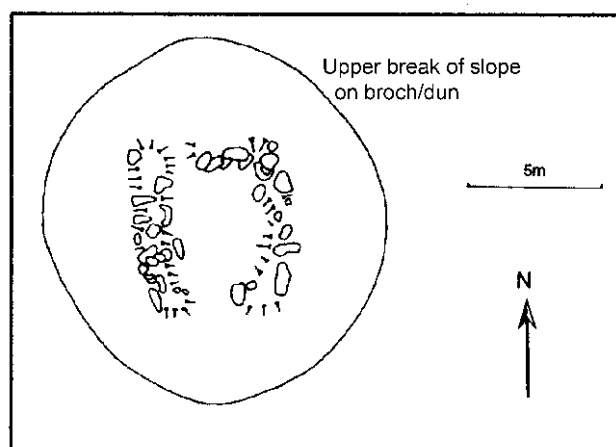


Figure 6.4. Plan of Dun Uisealan, Iochdar



Figure 6.5. Detail from Joan Blaeu's map of 1654 showing the Loch Druidibeag area (north is to the right)

the outside. This may suggest some antiquity to the structure. It was significant enough for Bald (1805) to mark on his map, but whether this means it was occupied in his time or just worth recording (similar to Caisteal Bheagram or Dun Raouill [Raghhaill]) is unclear; unlike those monuments, however, Bald neglected to name this one.

Under the southwestern extent of this rectangular building protrudes an arc of walling, three courses high. This is the remains of an earlier dun. The dun and putative chapel sit on an artificial or modified island consisting of a relatively flat shelf at its highest point that descends into the water at a shallow angle. The loch has either been well drained or heavily silted up. The island is presently joined to the land by a substantial peninsula but the stones of the upper part of a causeway extending from the dun to the north are also evident, sticking through the grass.

Loch Aligarry, Groigearraidh

NF7655 3917 – NMRS Number NF73NE 6: *Dun Aligarry*. Situated on dry land between the Groigearraidh and Aligarry lochs, although the ground separating the two is low-lying and it is possible that, if the water level has been lowered, the two lochs were originally one. This would have left the dun/broch situated on a spit of land extending

through the loch from the south. The dun is highly denuded, c. 18m in diameter and no more than 1m high. The outer 4m possibly delineates the remains of the outer wall. A few stones protrude though this ring, but no further structure is visible. To the north, there is a gap of 2m in this outwork that may indicate an entrance. A shooting butt has been built in the centre of the mound.

Howmore (Tobha Mòr) district

Pont's map does not cover this area. Blaeu's map for this area is readily interpretable, with all the major townships and lochs easily identified (Figure 6.5). He records only one definitely occupied island, which he called 'Loch Vegerin'; this is obviously Caisteal Bheagram. On Loch Druidibeag he records an island called 'Ylen Loch Truriburg' with a red rectangle marked upon it: red was usually used to indicate an important site but the symbolism is odd. Comparison to 17th-century naming practices suggests a high-status occupation site here, and given its position this is almost certainly Dun Raouill. It is obvious from the concentration of island, high-status and ecclesiastical sites that this area was of major importance throughout the later Middle Ages. There are several lochs combined at the south of this area, which are discussed in the next section.

It is clear from Bald's (1805) map that the nature of the lochs and rivers has changed much here. According to Bald's map, Loch Druidibeach and all the lochs it drained into to its west all had much higher water levels, and many of the smaller lochs of the modern landscape were merged into each other and into the larger lochs. Loch Cuilc, Loch Eilean a' Ghille-ruaidh and Loch an Taigh-sgoile (Schoolhouse Loch) were all one larger entity, named as 'Loch Rigarey'. Loch Bun an Ligidh was part of Loch an Eilein. This has many implications for communications and water flow.

Loch Druidibeach

NF 7744 3883 – NMRS Number NF73NE 5: *Dun Buidhe*. An artificial or modified island, although the loch is not deep in the surrounding vicinity. The island is 30m wide in total, rising up to 3m above the present water level. The structure rises at 45° from the loch bed, breaking to a gentler slope around the water line. This area rises *c.* 1m over *c.* 4m, becoming steeper until it reaches the 'dun' area. The outer ring-work survives to a height of 3m above the water level. Its outer measurements are 10.50m in diameter, while it is *c.* 6m on the inside, where it drops *c.* 0.50m. The walls are not clearly defined and the centre is heavily overgrown. The whole structure is said to have been robbed out to build nearby Stadhlaigearraidh House for the schoolmaster in the late 1800s (Calum Laing pers. comm.).

To the west extends a well-constructed slightly S-shaped causeway, *c.* 2.50m wide, above the water level. This is composed of two outer skins of large stones, over 0.40m in diameter, filled in by smaller stones, 0.10–0.30m in diameter, which are well compacted together to create a fairly level surface. At the landward side of this causeway, to the south, are the remains of the footings of a small L-shaped structure.

NF7784 3722: a natural island, heavily overgrown with heather, but with a large number of stones present, 0.30–0.60m in diameter. They appear to be laid out in concentric circles, and may possibly form a cairn, though they may also be natural.

NF7781 3725: a natural island with a scatter of stones over it, forming no obvious structure. Leading out to the island from the mainland is the beginnings of a causeway. It is very well built and well preserved, rising up to 0.30m above the water level. It is at least 2m wide and extends for 4m, before finishing for no apparent reason.

NF7770 3719: two natural islands linked by causeways. There is no evidence of structures on the western one. The eastern island is formed from a large knoll, covered in heather. There are no definite structures visible through the vegetation but there are various walls at the top and on the eastern slopes, perhaps indicating denuded or obscured features. Both the causeways are well built and well preserved, 1.50m wide, and 0.30m above the present water level. They both extend up the surrounding hill, beyond the loch side, for some distance, possibly suggesting a drop in water level or use later in the year. Both appear to be in line with each other and with Dun Raouill; this

is likely to be coincidental but may reveal a connection with the dun.

NF7785 3710 – NMRS Number NF73NE 3: *Dun Raouill* (Dun Raghhaill) sits on what appears to be a largely natural island, though it may be slightly modified on its southwestern side, with large boulders and walling coming down to the loch bed (Figure 6.6). The silt around the entrance contains ashes and burnt bone fragments. In places the outer wall survives to *c.* 2.50m above the water level, although the outer lower fringes are obscured in tumble.

At least three phases of building are evident. The first phase is the outer walling, 1.50–2m thick. Although slightly denuded around the northeast and southwest corners as well along the western edge, it appears to be relatively well preserved. The only gap is at the entrance on the southeastern corner. The passageway is largely overgrown and filled with rubble.

The second phase of building is the inner chambers, the larger western one being possibly earlier than the eastern one. The walls of these structures are lower than the outer skin, *c.* 1–1.50m high and 1m thick. The eastern cell appears to be lower and thinner, 0.50m high and 0.75m wide, though this may be largely due to differential survival. The walls of this smaller eastern cell and the northwestern corner of the larger western cell appear to have been consolidated at a later date, apparent in a single skin of stones creating curvilinear ends to the chambers. Both chambers are heavily overgrown with trees and shrubs. This interpretation is at odds with that of the RCAHMS (1928): they suggested that the remains were mostly of one phase, the upper 'breastworks' being designed to hold up the roof and subsequently modified as shooting butts.

Dun Raouill is a curious hybrid between a castle and a prehistoric dun. It is of an un-mortared dry-stone build but is rectangular and does not appear to have been built upon an earlier site, or crannog. The island that it sits on may be slightly modified in its northwestern corner. The loch contains a multitude of other natural islands with structures upon them; one to its east, Eilean na Taigh, contains an enclosure and a number of houses that are almost certainly related to the dun. Two islands in the loch to its north support cairns, with another two sitting upon the hillside to its south.

The remains of Dun Raouill reveal several phases of construction; it was certainly in some form of use in the 16th and 17th centuries, but little evidence survives to suggest an original date of construction. Hugh MacDonald, the 17th-century *seanachaidh*, stated that it might have been built by Ami MacRuairi as part of her mid-14th-century building program throughout the isles (MacPhail 1914: 26). The lack of mortar singles this monument out in relation to her other projects, indicating that this is an unlikely possibility. The place-name, *dun*, may hint at an earlier date, while Raouill is most likely to be a corruption of Ruairidh, perhaps providing a direct link of the dun with the Clann Ruairidh. Whilst it may have 12th-century origins, this dun can only really be considered as part of a Late Medieval and Post-Medieval landscape.

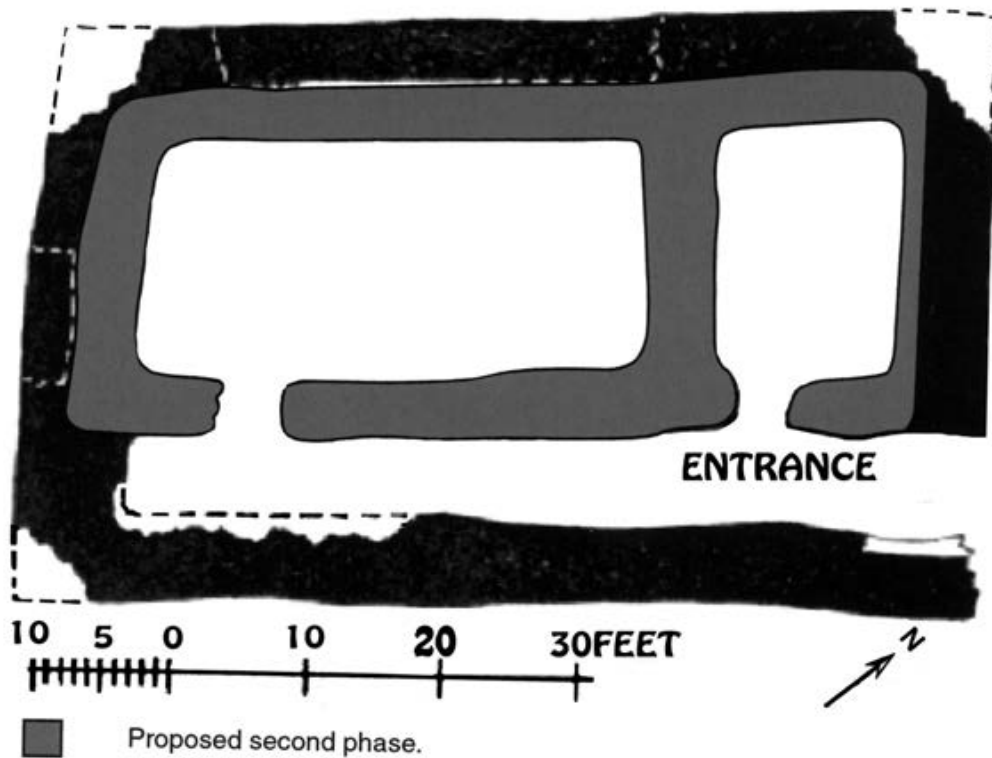


Figure 6.6. Dun Raouill in Loch Druidibeag: a) plan (from RCAHMS 1928); b) photographed from the south

NF7795 3718: a natural island. The western part is low-lying and forms a small shallow bay that is quite stony, possibly too much so to have been used as a harbour. The eastern part is larger and higher and is almost entirely enclosed by a ring of boulders that are 0.40–0.75m in diameter. In some places there are several stones loosely piled together, in others there are gaps of up to 0.30m between stones. This might originally have been an enclosure, abandoned as being too close to the water, or it might have been designed to keep high waters at bay. Within

this outer enclosure is another smaller enclosure, containing three structures. This enclosure is roughly oval, 15m × 17m wide, mostly composed of two skins of stones, surviving to an average height of 0.50–0.70m, though it does reach 1m towards the north. It is largely turfed over.

Abutting the west of the enclosure on the outer side is a sub-rectangular structure, 4m long (along the enclosure) and 2m wide. It is built of one skin of 0.20–0.40m diameter stones, surviving up to four courses high. A possible interpretation is that this was an animal pen. South of the

enclosure are the remains of another building, 8m × 5.50m external measurements, with walls up to 1.50m wide and 0.50m high, composed of a double skin of stones. This building is at an odd angle to the enclosure wall and has an undefined relationship with it. Its entrance is on the outside of the enclosure. Adjacent to the north of the building are the low remains of a sub-circular cell, 1.5–2m wide, possibly the original extent of the building. At the highest point of the island, possibly built on top of the enclosure, is another building. It is sub-rectangular with rounded ends, the walls are up to 1m high, 1–1.50m wide, and composed of two to three skins of heavily turfed-over stones. The inner measurements are 10m × 5m; this structure is filled with tumble and shrubs.

Bald's map (1805) names this island as 'Island na Taigh' (House Island), but he does not record any settlement there. This suggests that the settlement on the island had been abandoned by 1805 but that that occupation had been important enough for it to still be remembered. This name was subsequently lost to tradition and was not recorded on the first edition O.S. survey map.

Loch an Eilein, Dreumasdal

Bald's (1805) map suggests that this loch was originally much larger; it appears to have been heavily drained, and many of the islands and peninsulas of the modern landscape were underwater when Bald drew his map.

NF7611 3711 – NMRS Number NF73NE 4: *Caisteal Bheagram*, largely built on a natural island. On its northwestern edge there are a large number of stones above and below the water level that may be tumble from structures on the island but may be indicative of some modification of the island. To the southeast of the island, heading to the land, is a well-preserved causeway less than 1m wide and 0.30–0.50m under the present water level.

Schoolhouse Loch, Howmore (Loch an Taigh-sgoile, Tobha Mòr)

This loch is one of many that in 1805 (Bald) was part of one much larger loch, see above.

NF7639 3641: a natural island, named as either 'Craig un Ti Griasich' or 'Island Ni Niver', probably the latter, on Bald's map (1805). It is composed of a steep outcrop of bedrock, silted up with gravel in places. The island is densely covered in thorns and other shrubs that obscure most of the structures on the island. At the eastern end of the island are two boulders, c.3m apart, linked by a curvilinear stretch of dry-stone walling, curving into the centre of the island. There are three lines of walling roughly in line north–south, running through the middle of the island, filling a space 5m north–south and 7m east–west. The centre length is L-shaped, with the arm running east from the northern tip. These walls are at least 0.40m high and very well constructed, being 1.50m thick, with two outer skins of large well-placed stones filled with stone rubble. No interlinking walls were visible but they might have

been obscured. The presence of a causeway was recorded by a local gillie; despite there being clear water upon our visit, there was no sign of it.

Loch a' Phuirt-ruaidh, Howbeg (Tobha Beag)

This name seems to be unknown to local inhabitants today; the gillies call it Frazer's Loch, after a local fisherman and gillie who lived on the northern coast of the loch (Donald Campbell pers. comm.). Another colloquial name translates as Forester's Loch, after a Counter-Reformation missionary, said to have used one of the loch's islands as a refuge in the 17th century (Uilleam Macdonald pers. comm.). It is recorded as 'Priest's Loch' on Bald's map (1805), lending strength and some limited longevity to this association. Comparison of various maps suggests that the depth and size of this island has changed little since 1805.

NF7681 3557: named Eilean Dubh-fraoich on the O.S. map, this is a wide amorphous grassy natural island, with a knoll rising to under 2m on the western side. There are no signs of any structures built upon it. The gap between this island and the mainland is low and reed-ridden; no sign of a causeway was visible.

NF7680 3566: a natural island heavily overgrown with trees and shrubs. There are several stones scattered around the island and a variety of iron stands, of unknown function; no structure, however, was discerned. According to Uilleam Macdonald of Askernish, this smaller island is the island locally known as Eilean Dubh-fraoich, used as a retreat by a 17th-century Irish Catholic priest, Father Forester, who hid his vestments and other sacramental items there.

NF7670 3567: an artificial or modified island. The loch is c. 1m deep around this island. The circumference of the structure is composed of large stones over 0.50m in diameter, infilled with smaller stones c.0.30m in diameter. The structure rises sharply out of the loch bed for the first 0.50m before breaking to a roughly 45° slope till just above the present water level, where it rises sharply again for c. 0.40m. The top of the island is between 8m and 10m in diameter and is heavily obscured by vegetation. There are small strips of 1m-thick wall visible in places but these form no discernible structure. The water was clear at the time of survey and no sign of a causeway was evident.

Loch a'Chnoic Bhuidhe, Howbeg (Tobha Beag)

NF7662 3530: recorded as Dun Buy by Bald on his 1805 map.

Loch Altabrug, Peighinn nan Aoireann

NF7451 3441: an outcrop of bedrock covered in scrub. Iron rowlock found in water to south of this island.

NF74843423: an outcrop of bedrock covered in scrub.

NF7485 3426: an outcrop of bedrock covered in scrub.

NF7493 3402: an outcrop of bedrock covered in scrub.

NF7395 3436: a low outcrop of bedrock, surrounded with small stones and silt, covered in scrub.

NF7490 3439 – NMRS Number NF73SW 5: *Dun Altabrug* sits on an artificial or modified island. It has been recorded by RCAHMS and surveyed by the Ordnance Survey (CANMORE). Extent of island constructed from stones 0.30–0.50m in diameter, rising steeply out of loch bed, but no construction method is visible. The 10m-long causeway is heavily silted over but well preserved. It is cut off on the island side by a length of denuded walling up to 0.50m high and wide. The walling of the dun is not galleried; it is 1.50m at its highest, between 1.50m to 2.50m thick, but heavily robbed out on the southern side. The entrance faces northeast onto the causeway. The island outside the dun and its interior has been cleared of rubble, creating a flat base. Clearance might possibly have been deliberate, to create a picnic, shooting or fishing spot, or it might have been cleared to provide building material for the blackhouse settlement located to the north of the dun. Underwater survey around the island revealed that the perimeter is littered with mostly complete late 19th and early 20th-century ceramics – jam jars, tea cups and plates – as well as some tin artefacts and modern material including shotgun cartridges and golf tees.

Dun Gro Ghot, Uisinis

NF8597 3436 – NMRS Number NF83SE 1: a 10m-wide mound with an ‘old house’ constructed on the top, but no discernible defensible structure was visible in 1928 (RCAHMS). Re-assessed by the O.S. as a cairn (cited on CANMORE).

North Middle District

Pont and Blaeu’s maps of this area show three lochs with occupied islands in them (Figure 6.7). They are situated between the lochs of Bornais to the south and a five-pronged loch to the north. This is clearly an amalgamation of Loch Fada (the whole loch is marked by Blaeu as Loch Fadd), Loch Ròg and Loch Altabrug. One of these islands is fairly large and called Loch Ormakled by Blaeu; there is nothing on the Bald 1805 survey or on O.S. maps to correspond with this. So some guesswork is necessary to identify it, and through that the other two lochs:

- The larger loch is filled by three smaller lochs, two of which are referred to as Loch Holla Bin Beg. It seems likely that these are Middle and East Loch Ollay, which would make West Loch Ollay the obvious choice for Pont’s Loch Ormakled.
- However, the positions marked for Ormacleit and Staoinebrig would indicate that this loch lay south of the main Ormacleit settlement and the loch’s size is a cartographic error by Blaeu: it is one of, or an amalgamation of, the numerous smaller lochs that occupy this area.
- If this is accepted then the remaining northern lochs fall into place (as West Loch Ollay and the drained

loch to its north). Both of these lochs have islands with corresponding artificial or modified islands. There is also a loch with an occupied artificial island on one of the lochs within sight of Ormacleit Castle.

This area was obviously of some importance during the 17th century. Most of the Clanranald Papers related to Uist were signed in these townships, Ormacleit Castle was built here in the first decade of the 18th century on or near a site that had been important since at least 1585, and the tack of Bornais was associated with the position of Bailie of the island.

Loch Roinich, Staoinebrig

NF7529 3307: an irregular natural island linked to the mainland by a well-preserved causeway, lying around present water level and capped by flattish stones. No signs of occupation were visible on the island.

Dun nan Gallan, Staoinebrig

NF7386 3357 – NMRS Number NF73SW 4: this site is now occupied by a farmhouse (built in 1913), sitting on a grassy knoll in a now drained loch. Bald’s 1805 map records three buildings and some enclosures at the site, which appear to have been just above the water level. No buildings are recorded here on the 1881 first edition O.S. map, which refers to it as the ‘site of a dun’. No sign of the dun remains but walling was found in 1965 (O.S. cited in CANMORE).

West Loch Ollay (Loch Olaidh an Iar), Staoinebrig

The height of a confirmed crannog and the distance of Dun nan Gallan from the present water line and level suggest that the water level of this loch has been substantially lowered, probably by estate drains.

NF7451 3248: an island with a large knoll in its centre, formed around a bedrock outcrop but spongy in centre; there were no visible structures.

NF7455 3249: a flat islet with the appearance of a causeway leading out to it. Investigation revealed no such causeway nor any structures on the surface.

NF7443 3270: an island amorphous in plan, low and flat in section, sitting on sharply rising outcrops of bedrock surrounded by silt and small stones, almost certainly natural. In the north part of the island is a 1.50m length of dry-stone walling, composed of 0.30–0.50m diameter stones, one skin thick and up to five stones high. The stones are heavily encrusted with lichen. Extending at right angles to this wall are stones possibly forming a structure, though the most likely interpretation is that this is an old shooting butt.

NF7446 3271: a small bedrock outcrop.

NF7431 3267: a peninsula separated from the mainland by a shallow silt-filled channel. There are several apparent lines and scattered concentrations of stones but these may be natural. No definitive structures are visible except two denuded shooting butts.



Figure 6.7. Detail from Joan Blaeu's map of 1654 showing: a) the Ormaclait area (north is to the right); b) plan of the Ormaclait area today

NF7416 3261: an outcrop of bedrock covered in scrub.

NF7421 3264: an outcrop of bedrock covered in scrub.

NF7408 3264: an outcrop of bedrock covered in scrub.

NF7394 3278: a low reed- and silt-covered island. It does not appear to be manmade, nor is there any evidence for any structures.

NF7393 3290: a large island formed from boulder outcrop, covered in grass and scrub. Although two causeways are recorded on the O.S. map, there was no sign of any causeway to the west, though it may be silted up and overgrown as the ground is heavily boggy and marshy. The causeway to the east is up to 1m wide and well built, of flat and rounded stones 0.30–0.50m in diameter, 0.20–0.30m below the present water line. Line delineated for the most part by modern barbed-wire fence field boundary. Two lines

of large boulders curve around the western and northern edges of the island: although not structural, these may be the remains of a disturbed causeway or other feature. Two shooting butts are the only discernible structures but scatters of stones may suggest that further insubstantial buildings, now denuded, were once present.

NF7390 3300: similar in appearance to the above island but slightly smaller. A causeway shown on the O.S. map to the west is no longer visible but again might have been overgrown. The remains of a small, but well-built, dry-stone squatter's house or shed and two shooting butts are evident here.

NF7391 3308: a small, low and flat island, composed of smallish stones. It does not appear to be artificial, especially given how low it is compared to the present water level.

NF7405 3256: an artificial or modified island that sits on a large spit of bedrock extending and descending into the loch to the north of the island from the present water level. In plan the island is roughly circular, slightly indented to south. The top of the island is fairly flat and heavily overgrown. Although some lines of stones were evident on the surface through the vegetation, no structure was fully discernible. Underwater survey revealed that the rest of the island was formed from a base of boulders 0.30–0.50m in diameter. Although the incline is shallow at the outer extent, it gradually becomes steeper, becoming almost vertical at the upper lip. It is evident that the island was built by constructing layers of concentric stone rings. On the island's northern edge is a line of stones extending at an acute angle into the water, creating a shallow sheltered bay against the island, possibly a boat noost.

Loch na Duchasaich, Ormacleith

This dun appears to be founded on a natural bedrock outcrop but the regularity of it may indicate otherwise. The exposed bedrock and surrounding topography suggest that the present water level has changed little over time.

NF7447 3115: an artificial or modified island. Bald (1805) notes a 'Duine' here, but does not specify its location or any details. It is roughly circular in plan, constructed of stones 0.30–0.50m in diameter, rising sharply out of the loch (Figure 6.8). A causeway links it to the land. Underwater survey revealed that, just below the water level, the stones form a shelf for 1.5–2m, before dropping down to the loch bed at an average angle of roughly 45°. However, this is steeper (and well defined with rings of large well-placed stones) where it faces the causeway and is less well defined with a lower incline on the opposing side. Two metres north of where the causeway meets the island is a very well-constructed area of stones, c. 1m × 1m, extending into the loch. This possible boat landing is very level, regular and compact, composed of stones 0.30–0.40m in diameter.

The causeway is well preserved, 0.25–0.50m below the water level, extending from the south of the island to meet the mainland at a point of land. A ridge 1–2m wide and 0.40m high cuts the point off from the rest of the surrounding land.

The top of the island is relatively flat and heavily overgrown; one or two structures were, however, evident in the centre of the island. The walls are incomplete so it is hard to distinguish whether there is one rectilinear structure, with a sub-circular cell attached to it, or whether there are two denuded cellular structures. In places the walls survive to 0.40m high and are composed of two compacted skins of stones 0.20–0.40m in diameter. The core was covered in shrubby vegetation so it is hard to fully interpret.

Loch Ceann a' Bhaigh, Ormacleith

NF76 30 – NMRS Number NF73SE 7: an artificial island recorded by Blundell in 1913.

Dun Vulcan, Bornais

NF7140 2980 – NMRS Number NF72NW 1: a modified island on a brackish loch, now largely silted up. The island/peninsula contains the remains of an Iron Age dun/broch and associated settlement. Internal occupation extended well into the Pictish period but there then appears to be a gap in its use until the 19th century, when the dun was used as a fisherman's bothy. The platform outside the dun revealed use throughout the Iron Age period and beyond (Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999). The mound also appears to have retained some ritual significance into the later Medieval period, indicated by the deposit of a splayed cat and pottery dating to the 16th or 17th century.

Upper Loch Bornish (Loch Bhornais Uarach, Loch an Dùin)

NF7414 2907 – NMRS Number NF72NW 2: a largely denuded dun, of which only the northern side remains, with 2.50m-thick walls and a 10m internal diameter, mostly obliterated by two 19th-century sheep pens (RCAHMS 1928). Excavations revealed evidence for Iron Age occupation only (Marshall and Parker Pearson 1998; see Chapter 12).

South Middle District

Neither Pont nor Blaeu record any island dwellings in this region and many of the duns and artificial islands were missed by Bald (1805). Despite this, there are a number of island settlements here, ranging from that seemingly associated with the ecclesiastical site of Cille Donnain to the unusually large cluster of duns centred around Milton (Gearraidh Bhailteas).

Upper Loch Kildonan (Loch Chill Donnain Uarach), Cill Donnain

The loch contains a large number of islands. Those further north within the loch tend to be amorphous bedrock outcrops; most are low and fragmented though some are higher and grass-covered. The islands and peninsulas

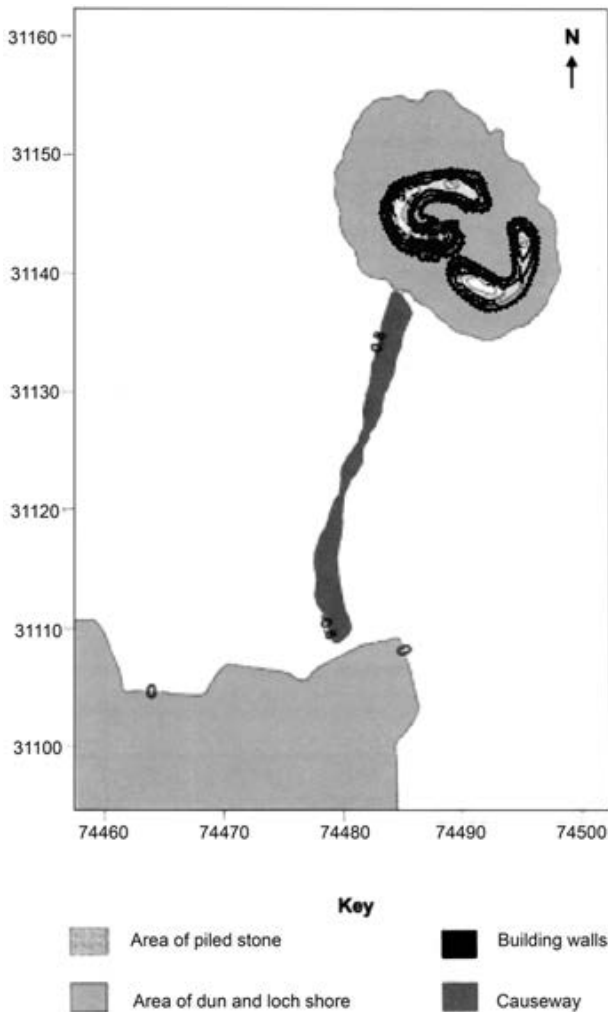


Figure 6.8. Plan of structures on Loch na Duchasaich

nearer the south end tend to be low, heavily silted and more marshy. None have any signs of structures upon them. On the western loch edge there is a site believed to contain the remains of a Norse church, possibly on an earlier ecclesiastic structure (Fleming and Woolf 1992). Excavations by SEARCH revealed that the site was in use in the 13th to 15th centuries (Parker Pearson 1995a; see Chapter 14).

NF7330 2835 – NMRS Number NF72NW 29: Eilean Mòr was surveyed by Fleming and Woolf (1992; see Chapter 3), revealing four sub-rectangular buildings. The island is a high flat-topped outcrop of bedrock, with no signs of modification; from a distance, however, the fragmentation of the bedrock gives an appearance similar to that of artificial or modified islands elsewhere. The sides of the island drop down sharply into the loch. The 1992 survey revealed that the island was linked to the mainland by a causeway that made use of another island in the middle. There was no sign of this in this survey but adverse weather conditions might have obscured it.

Mill Loch (Loch na Muilne), Cill Donnain

The water level of this loch appears to have dropped considerably: much of the stonework on the island is exposed and much of the lower lying ground at the loch edges looks relatively recently exposed. The connection to the mill is the likeliest cause.

NF7445 2724 – NMRS Number NF72NW 6: an artificial or modified island, oval in plan above the present water level, rising at roughly 45° from the loch bed before becoming shallower in incline, creating a low mound across the surface. The top is covered in fairly loose rubble and some scrub. There may be a sub-rectangular structure constructed within the rubble but it is too obscured by it to make an accurate interpretation possible. The O.S. claimed that they could make out an oval dun on top of the island, measuring 9m × 7m with 0.04–1.50m high walls. They also recorded a ‘fish yair’ to its east (1965 cited in CANMORE).

Loch Cnoc a’ Buidhe, Mingearraidh

The local topography, exposure of stones and level of archaeological deposits suggest that this loch might have had a water level 0.20–0.40m higher than it was at time of survey. Around the eastern edge of the loch there are a small number of stone alignments extending into the loch. They have no obvious connection with any land boundaries so may be false causeways, boat noosts, or something else. The depth of the loch and manmade deposits was not ascertainable as the water was very peaty, limiting visibility. In the shallows around the peninsula where the dun’s causeway connects with the land, there is a large abundance of small fragments of late 19th/early 20th-century pottery.

NF7495 2607: a natural island, round and accessible to cattle.

NF 7483 2587 – NMRS Number NF72NW 10: an artificial or modified island. Towards its southern edge a number of very large boulders poke above the loch surface. It is unlikely that these were transported to the island, which suggests modification of an existing island or islet. The man-made part of the island rises sharply out of the water before levelling off to create an oval platform for a stone structure. This platform rises gently to create a mound less than 2m above the water level. Surrounding the base of the mound is an almost circular ring of stones, delineating either the prehistoric occupation level or the basal structure of the mound. The top of the mound is heavily turfed over and covered in shrubby vegetation, obscuring much of the architectural detail. There is probably a sub-rectangular or oval structure on the outside, running north–south, with inner dimensions of 7–8m long × 4m wide. The walls appear to be stone built and may be c.0.50m wide. The structure may be roughly ‘figure-of-eight’ in shape although the ‘waist’ may be an inner partition obscured by turf growth. At its southern extent there appears to be an entrance to the structure, 0.50m wide.

A smoothly inclined S-shaped causeway, c.70m long and

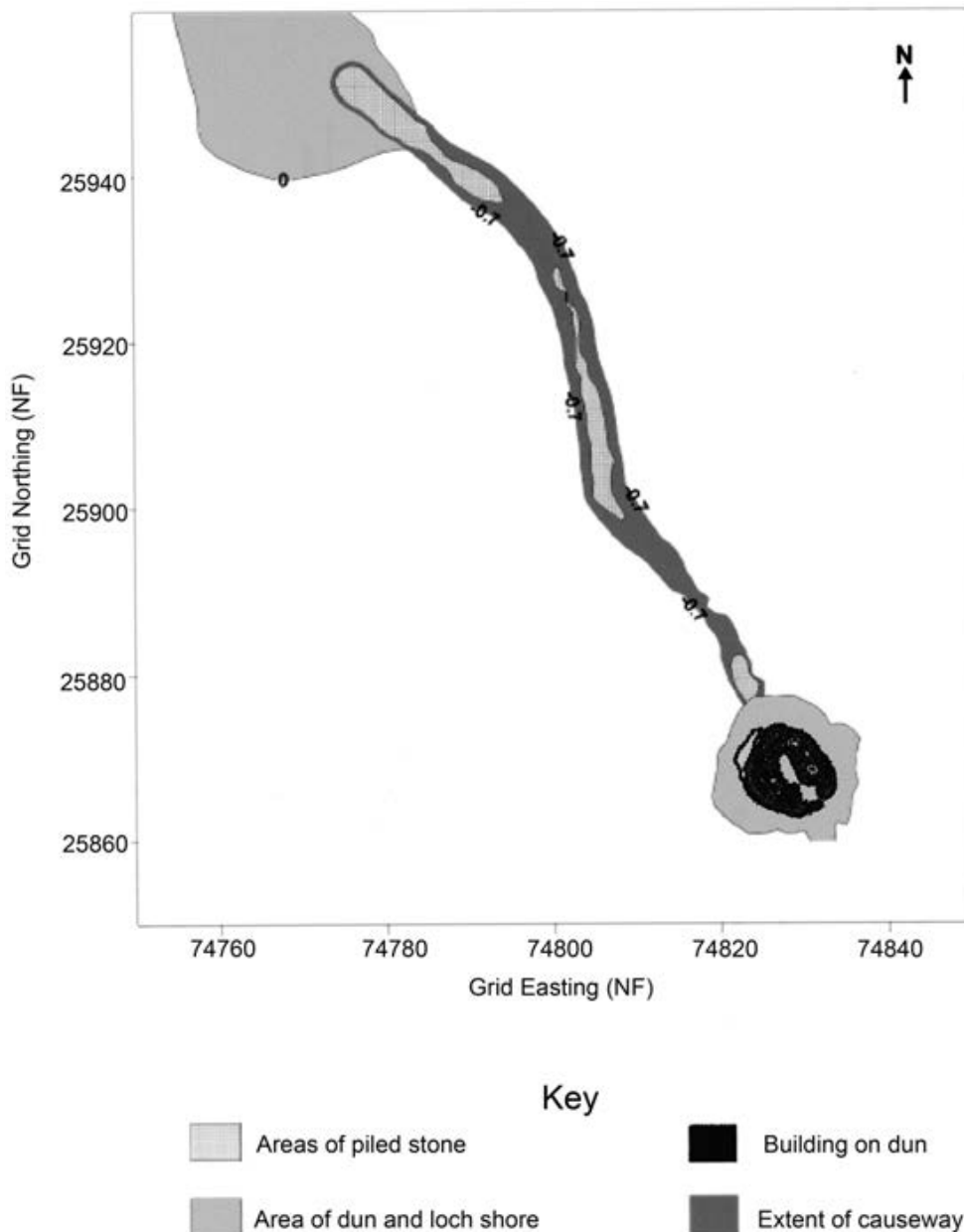


Figure 6.9. Plan of Dun Cnoc a' Buidhe

up to 2.50m wide in places, links the island to a low-lying peninsula on the mainland (Figure 6.9). In many places this causeway is well preserved and is present around the water level, although sometimes this dips to *c.* 0.30m deep. It traverses shallower depths in the loch before extending onto the mainland, up to and over the side of a 1m-high knoll. A string of large separated boulders connects this with the higher land off the peninsula. Whether this reveals that the causeway used to link the island to the higher ground, off the possibly flooded peninsula, or whether it has been joined to 19th-century field boundaries, upon which it appears to be aligned, is indiscernible.

Reineval chambered cairn (*bharp*) sits on the ridge of the hillside above the loch to its east. Viewed from the waters of the loch, and from the causeway, this cairn is obscured either by subtle undulations in the landscape or by hills

in the background. Seen from the island itself, however, the cairn is sky-lined, framed in a gap in the backdrop of hills. This may have some implications for why this point was chosen to place the island, in its earliest phase (see Chapter 5).

Loch Eilean an Staoir, Milton (Gearraidh Bhailteas)

NF7328 2597 – NMRS Number NF72NW 9: an artificial or modified island. RCAHMS in 1928 and O.S. in 1965 recorded an enclosing wall, 16m × 13m, on an island *c.* 30m wide at its greatest. They recorded a number of additional buildings on and around the island. When visited for this survey, the island was heavily overgrown and these structures were not visible. The island is composed

of stones 0.30–0.50m in diameter, rising out of the loch bed at a steady angle of roughly 45°, up to the walls of the dun. The boat noost recorded by the RCAHMS was still visible.

Loch an Eilein, Aisgernis

There are several outcrops of bedrock within this loch but only two large enough to hold settlement. One of these islands, in the north part of the loch, appears to be natural and is amorphous in plan. It has been planted with various tree species, including monkey-puzzles, which hide any possible settlement.

NF74S1 2374 – NMRS Number NF72SW 9: a natural island heavily modified on its south and west, coming up sharply from the water level for 2–3m. The structure is covered in bracken and brambles that obscure any detail, though it appears to be oval on top, dropping down in the centre. A stretch of stones extends from the island to the northwest. It is visible for c.1m, so it may be the remains of a boat noost; however, the water was very dark and this may be the causeway recorded by RCAHMS (1928) connecting to some stones at the loch edge.

Loch an Dùin, Gearraidh Sheilidh

This loch contains three natural islands composed of high bedrock outcrops, covered in grass and shrubby vegetation. None have any immediate evidence of settlement upon them. The loch contains numerous ‘beds’ of water plants that create linear ‘crusts’ that from a distance resemble causeways. None appeared to hide any sub-surface structures.

NF7448 2232 – NMRS Number NF72SW 8: an artificial or modified island. The structure rises at just over 90° from the loch bed, which is up to 1.50m deep, before levelling off just above the water level, creating a 2–3m wide shelf at the base of the structural mound (Figure 6.10). This area is now heavily overgrown with grass and reeds. The mound is c.2m high and 12m in diameter. Around the base of the mound a roughly circular face of stones may indicate that the base of the dun sat on a raised mound, delineated by this ring. Alternatively, it possibly indicates an early structural phase, such as an Iron Age dun, that was heavily denuded, robbed out or modified by later phases of occupation.

The top of the mound is defined by a sharp break of slope. The northeastern quarter is heavily grassed over and is relatively featureless. Around the western and southern edge, an area of outer walling is visible though its full extent is obscured by a later wall. The western and southern quadrants contain two cellular structures. Along the western edge is a dry-stone sub-rectangular structure, c.8m long by 5m wide and rounded at its northern end. It is filled with rubble and it is possible that the exposure of these stones creates an illusion of this structure’s shape and size. The southern extent of this structure has been truncated by a smaller sub-rectangular cell that runs at a right angle to it to the east for c.5m. Its eastern wall is double-skinned and

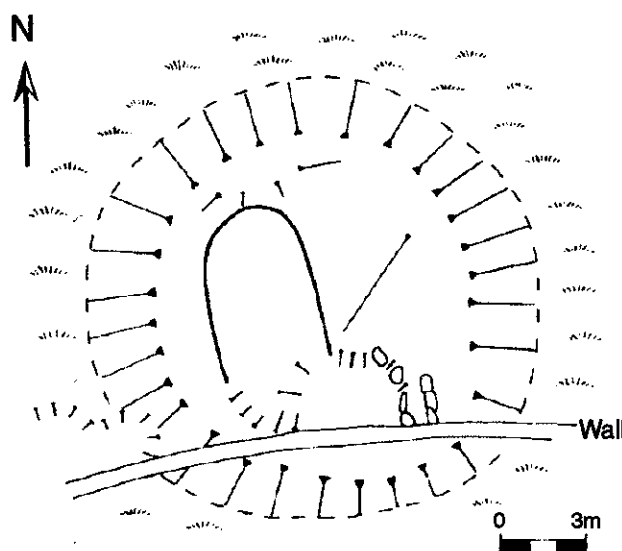


Figure 6.10. Plan of the dun in Loch an Dùin, Gearraidh Sheilidh

c. 1m wide. At the southeastern point there is a gap in the outer wall, c.2m wide, that may be an entrance, though the gap could have been created by stone-robbing. Running east–west across the southern extent of the mound is a 0.50m-thick linear stone wall that rises from the loch and crosses the edge of the upper part of the mound before descending down into the loch again.

Loch nam Faoileann, Dalabrog

For c.10m in from the north edge of the loch, near the gate, around NF7517 2118, is scattered a large quantity of broken late 19th/early 20th-century pottery and fragmented bone.

NF7515 2091 – NMRS Number NF72SE 1: an artificial or modified island, evidently highly robbed out.

Called *Sgeir Ghlas* by Blundell and RCAHMS. In 1909, Odo Blundell suggested that the dun was intact, rising four feet above the water level. He also recorded a causeway leading to the eastern edge of the loch. ‘though quite distinct ... now impassable except as a trial of skill’ (1913: 294), though there was no sign of this causeway during this survey. Although water clarity was poor, it appeared that the mound rises sharply up from the loch bed to the surface. The mound is composed of an outer skin of large, deliberately placed boulders 0.40–0.50m in diameter, filled haphazardly by smaller stones 0.20–0.30m diameter. The surface levels off at the present water level of the loch.

To the north an area has been robbed out, creating a 0.40m-deep sub-surface hollow, 3m wide at the mouth, tapering off for 4m, possibly a recent boat noost. To the southwest of this is a raised grassy oval area, c.3m long by 1.25m wide and 0.30m high. The only structures visible are five ‘cairns’. It is possible these were constructed for ease while the stone was being taken; they seem fairly regularly shaped, however, and are rounded/triangular in section.

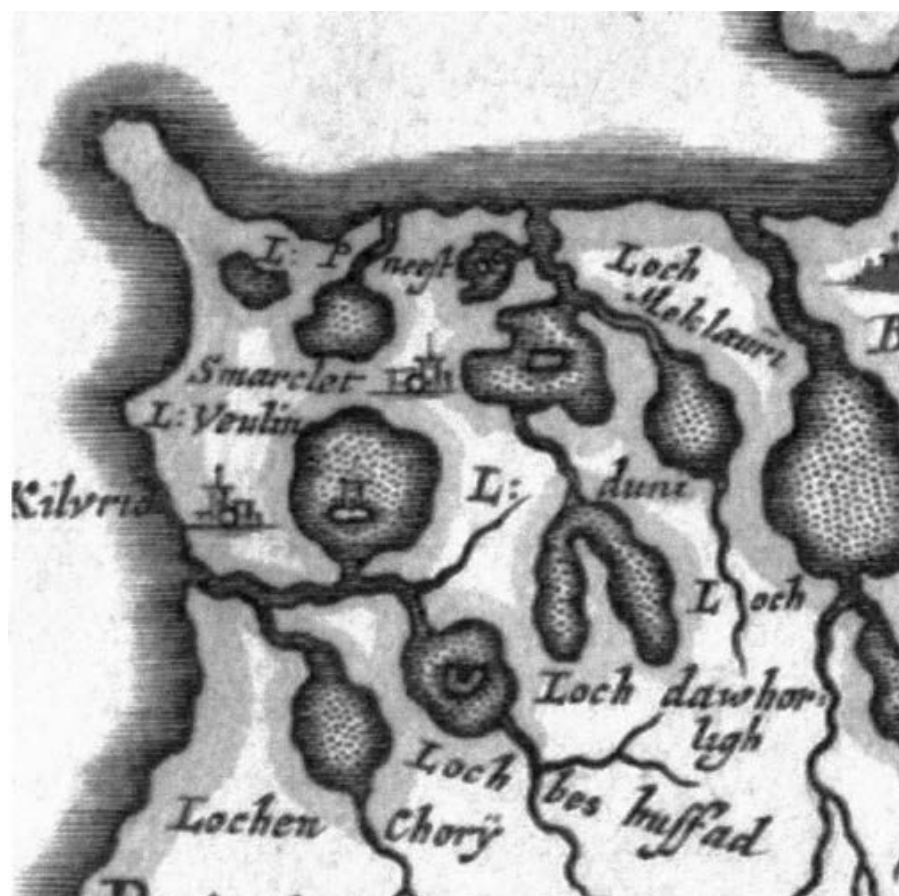


Figure 6.11. Detail from early maps, showing the Smeircleit area: a) Pont's map of c.1595; b) Blaue's map of 1654 (north is to the right on both maps)

They range in height from 0.75m to 1.50m. The island is said to have been occupied by 'tinkers' at the beginning of the 20th century (the late Effie MacMillan pers. comm.), although there are no conclusive signs of this.

Dun Ruadh, Dalabrog

NF7379 2184 – NMRS Number NF72SW 7: the site of a dun marked on the first edition O.S. map, next to the Cladh Hallan cemetery. It was said to have been dismantled prior

to the RCAHMS survey (1928), and is thought by Parker Pearson (1995b) to be a mis-identified settlement mound (see Chapter 2).

Baghasdail

In this area neither Pont (n.d.) nor Blaeu (1654) notes any occupied islands north of the Baghasdail township. Two of Pont's maps for south of Baghasdail survive: one of these was almost certainly the template for, or the forerunner of, Blaeu's publication. On that map, however, Pont marks at least three definite island dwellings in this area but did not note any names (Figure 6.11a). Blaeu (1654) chose for some reason to mark only one of these, 'Loch Veulin' at 'Smarclet', although he did inscribe a red rectangle to the north of this (Figure 6.11b). One of these links nicely with Loch an Dùin at Smeircleit.

It is not entirely clear which of the other lochs correspond to the legends, but south from Orasaigh (Blaeu's 'Soo') and the outflow next to it, round to Loch a' Choire (Blaeu's 'Lochen Chory'), the lochs roughly correspond with modern ones although there is some suggestion that they are askew, and there may be some duplication or extra lochs. This argument is accentuated when these two maps are compared to Pont's other survey of Baghasdail. This map is perhaps more 'squashed' but numerous other lochs are marked and named. The locations of these place-names are in different places to Blaeu's end product, and in many cases are blurred, but in general they appear to be more accurate and relate more closely to more modern maps.

Identification of Loch an Eilean on the Pont/Blaeu maps remains unresolved, as there are two possibilities. One line of thought, based on the Pont/Blaeu maps, can link it to being either 'Loch Veigh' or 'Logh Vin', heading to 'Loch RoBauy' (possibly Trossary? [Trosaraidh]). The alternative is that the next string of lochs down, consisting of 'Loch Maklauri', 'Loch Dune' and 'Loch Dawhorligh', corresponds to this. In both cases these names may link to other possibilities, such as a string of drained lochs, named as Lochan Robach and Dubh Lochan, between Baghasdail and Leth Meadhanach (North Boisdale and South Boisdale). There is another string of drained lochs between Gearraidh na Mònadh (Garrynamonie) and Smeircleit: Loch Fada, Loch nan Capull and Loch na Bàgh.

Pont's other map realigns Smeircleit within a more realistic setting, and reconfigures and renames all the other lochs: 'dawhorlleigh' and 'meklaurin' are in totally different areas. Many other islands are also named; the one in Loch an Dùin is unfortunately obscured, looking something like 'ylen -rgran'. This may correlate with Loch an Eilean, thereby lending it a name. A further island in a loch to the west, called 'Loch manga' is also named, but again its name is unclear, resembling something like 'ylen Sirba'.

In all these cases, there are some corresponding names and duns. If Pont's cartography is accurate and both these strings of lochs contain island dwellings, then only one has been identified. There are numerous other lochans in this area but none show any sign of island occupation.

This area was one of the earliest to be heavily drained and turned over to intensive improved agriculture. This system of drainage is still maintained and many of the lochs have probably remained small.

A further red feature is a crescent shape that Blaeu (1654) marks as 'Loch bes Huffad'. The similarity in nomenclature suggests this may possibly be an indiscernible structure on Loch Aiseabhat, named on Pont as 'Ylen Loch C'beßuffad', further indicating that the surveyors recognised some importance in it (Figure 6.11). The variances between Pont's maps may suggest Loch Veulin is not a mis-naming of Smercleit's Loch an Dùin, but a separate loch altogether, Loch a' Bhruga, which has a sub-surface conduit. The similarity of the name 'Veulin' to Gaelic *mhuilinn* perhaps reveals the presence of an earlier mill at or near the site.

Am Priosan, Loch Baghasdail

NF7585 1999 – NMRS Number NF71NE 2: a pear-shaped building, 7.50m long × 5m at its widest. The walls survive to 1m high and 1.5–2m thick (RCAHMS 1928).

Loch Dun na Cille, Cille Pheadair

NF7461 1905 – NMRS Number NF71NW 1: *Dun na Cille* (Dun na Killie), on Eilean Buidhe, is supposedly the site of an early Christian and later Norse church (Figure 6.12). A high, large flattish 'D'-shaped island, the 'flat' surface is in fact concave, and faces eastward. The island is artificial or at least highly modified. It is built of stones 0.30–0.50m in diameter, rising out of the loch bed at a sharp angle before breaking to a flat shelf 5–7m wide. This rises out of the loch bed at a steeper angle, rising 1–2m over a 2–3m area, becoming almost vertical for the last 1–1.5 m.

When visited the island was heavily overgrown with vegetation so structural interpretation was conducted with difficulty and is therefore not conclusive. It appeared that a wall surrounds the island, surviving up to 1.50m high at the northeast corner. Four sub-rectangular buildings were detected along the northern edge of the island. The easternmost is interpreted by the O.S. as being relatively modern (cited on CANMORE). On the south edge there are the remains of a building 20m long and running roughly east–west, with stone walls up to 1.50m thick. The eastern end is a large rectangle whose external measurements are 7m wide × 15m long. The western cell, also stone-built, is smaller, c.5m × 5m externally. To the southwest, a hollow (possibly a noost) has been created in the side of the island but it appears to be a later addition. A causeway c.2m wide connects the island to the land to the east; it is curvilinear, bending into the north and up to 0.50m under the present water level. It is extremely well preserved and well built, of stones 0.20–0.50m in diameter, with a gap in the surface; this gap is likely to be a late construction, for the passage of fishing boats.

NF7426 1919 – NMRS Number NF71NW 2: Eilean Chreamh. An artificial or heavily modified island, composed of stones rising sharply from the loch bed before shelving off for 5m, rising slightly until, just under the water line, it

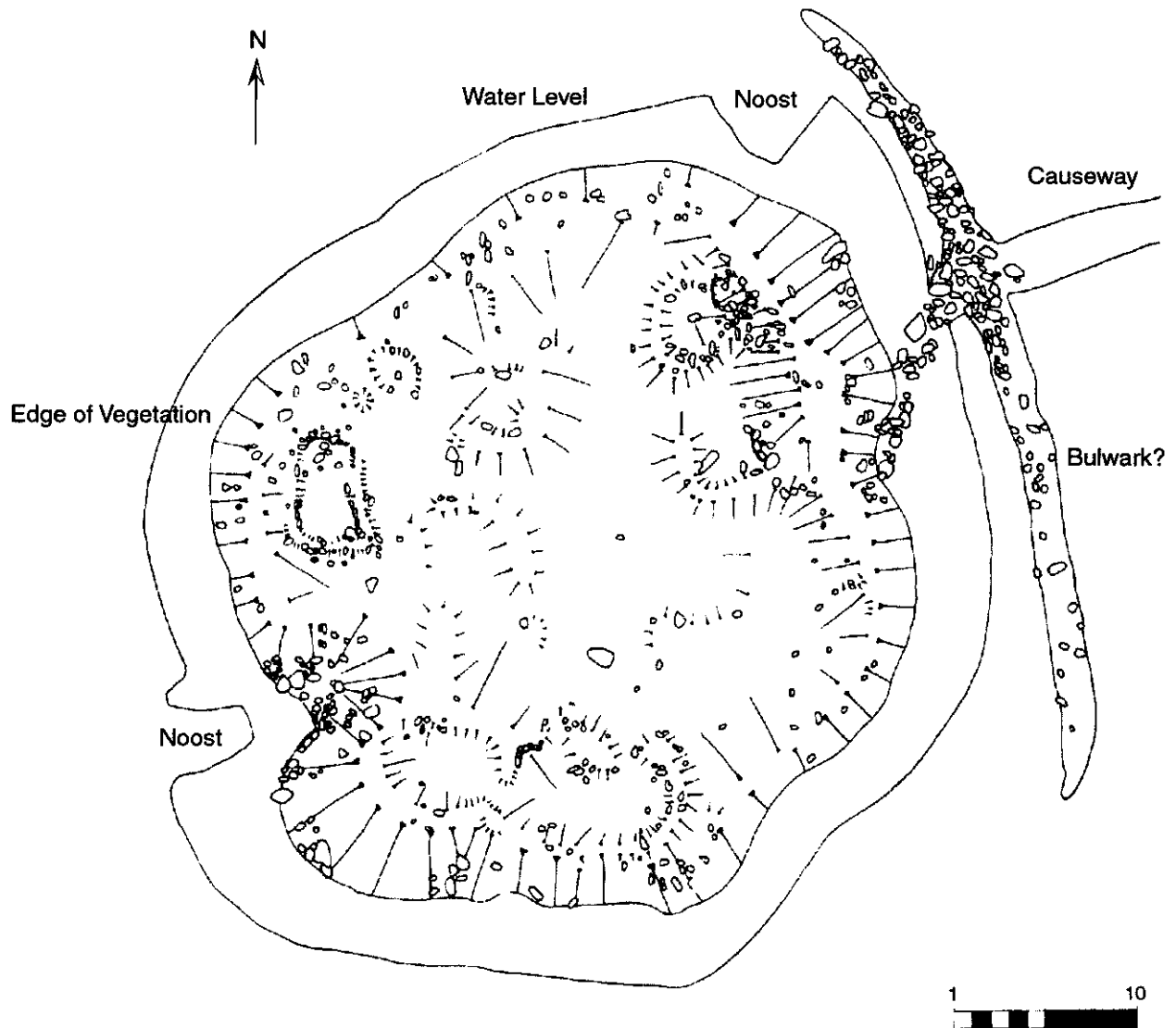


Figure 6.12. Plan of Eilean Buidhe or Dun na Cille, Cille Pheadair

gradually becomes steeper and then vertical at the island's outer extent. The island is linked to land by a causeway to the west, built from upended stones filled with compacted rubble consisting of stones 0.20–0.40m in diameter. A stone wall, surviving to five or six courses, demarcates the edge of the island. The O.S. records that this island was converted to a garden in the latter part of the 19th century and that this wall is part of that phase (cited on CANMORE). No other structures were visible on the island.

Loch Dun an Duichal, Cille Pheadair

NF7431 1885 – NMRS Number NF71NW 3: *Dun an Duichal*. An artificial or modified island, rising sharply up from the loch bed although no underwater investigation was made. The surface rises to *c.* 1m above the present water level and is *c.* 12m in diameter. The edges are heavily reed-covered. The O.S. recorded the 0.30m-high walls of a 8m × 5m rectangular building at the southern end of the island (cited on CANMORE). When visited for this

survey, however, the centre of the island was covered in spongy, tussocky grass; a few stones were visible but no structure was discernible. The RCAHMS (1928) recorded a suggested causeway, which they could not confirm; there was no sign of it.¹

Loch an Eilean, Leth Meadhanach (South Boisdale)

NF7470 1691: an artificial or modified island. A relatively flat central platform drops down sharply to a shelf of stones 0.30–0.50m in diameter, extending out up to 1.50m before dropping down at a roughly 45° angle to the loch bed. A well-preserved 20m-long causeway extends to the northeast of the island, up to 0.40m below water level (Figure 6.13). Both the causeway and the mound are shallower and wider where the water is deeper, so that in plan the construction is relatively egg-shaped, pointing into the centre of the loch. The surface of the island is roughly circular, *c.* 30m in diameter, and contains the remains of two structures.

The eastern structure is D-shaped, with an entrance in the

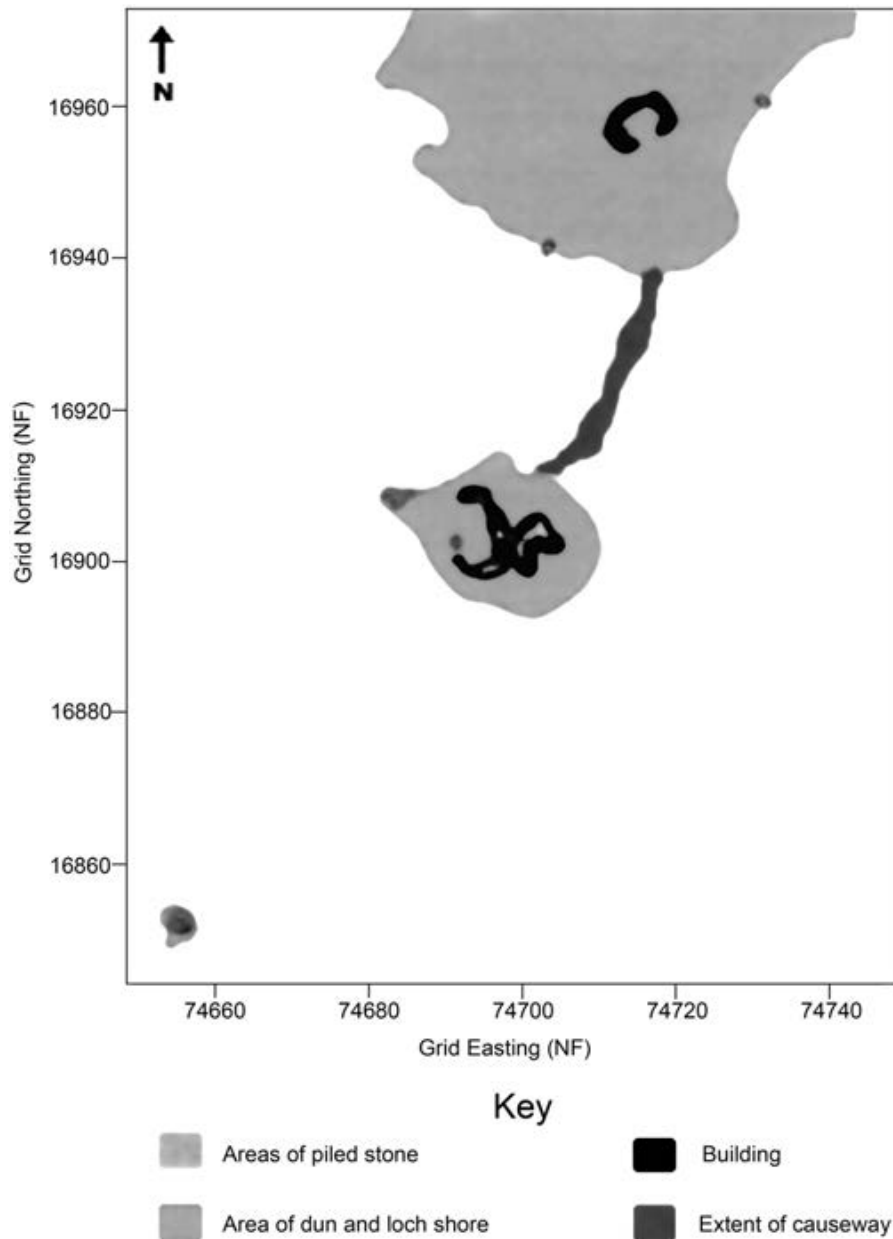


Figure 6.13. Plan of structures on Loch an Eilean, Leth Meadhanach (South Boisdale)

flat side facing northwest. The walls rise highest on either side of this entrance and gradually drop away towards the island edge; this is, however, likely to have been caused by stone-robbing. Its internal dimensions are 5m long \times 4m wide, with walls *c.* 1m wide and up to 1.75m at its highest extent. The other structure is rectangular but is squashed in at its corners to fit it on the island. It is 11m long \times 6m wide, with walls 1m wide. The D-shaped structure is heavily turfed over and shows no signs of loose stone work, whereas the rectangular structure is composed of stones 0.30–1m in diameter, also heavily turfed over.

The wall running along the loch edge has been heavily robbed out. Both end walls are *c.* 1m tall, constructed of large flat stones placed on their sides, creating a solid, well-built appearance, unlike most surviving blackhouse walls.

NF7462 1685: an artificial or modified island, formed from stones 0.20–0.50m in diameter, creating a shelf *c.* 10m in diameter, mostly under the present water line. This platform drops off at roughly 45° into the loch bed. Only a 2m–3m diameter mound of stones survives in the centre of this platform above the water level. Mostly this mound is a conglomeration of stones, though it is possible that the centre of this is a denuded stretch of walling. It is possible that this island has been heavily robbed out for material to build many of the surrounding structures, leaving just the core of the once above-water mound and structures.

Loch Aiseabhat, Smercleit

NF7570 1529: a low, amorphous, natural island formed of bedrock, glacially deposited boulders and silt.

To the north of the island lies a causeway, 0.20–0.50m below the present water level. It is composed of three sections, zig-zagging between boulder deposits. In the centre of the island is a 1.50m-high and roughly rectangular (4.50m × 5m) pile of stones 0.30–0.50m in diameter. The stones are loosely piled together and earth-fast boulders are evident to the east. Also making use of these boulders are the remains of a denuded cell, 1m in diameter, possibly a shooting butt. Although the pile is not apparently structural in appearance, there does appear to be a right angle of tightly compacted stones in the northeast corner; this may betray that this is a highly denuded or inwardly collapsed structure. Alternatively, this may be a cairn of some kind. One metre to the north of this is a 1m × 1.50m square of heather, possibly the footings of another structure.

Loch an Dùin, Smeircleit

NF7464 1522 – NMRS Number NF71NW 6: a sub-circular island, likely to have been modified. The island is low and the loch is now silted up on all sides of the dun, so it is surrounded by wet marshy ground, although it is likely that the loch has been deeper and less clogged in the past. The remains of a causeway are visible through the present vegetation. The island has large stones, 0.40–0.70m in diameter, placed deliberately around its edge, possibly forming a barrier to the water or serving to contain material designed to build up the island. On the east part of the island are a well-built and preserved blackhouse, running north–south and consisting of two chambers, and a round-ended enclosure to its south. Trees and shrubs heavily obscure the building; it is, however, possible to see that this structure is the latest of two or three phases. No settlement is recorded here on either Bald's 1805 map or the 1881 O.S. map, and the dun was no longer extant by 1915 (RCAHMS 1928).

Loch a' Choire, Cille Brighde

Not visited during this survey. See Chapter 9 for description, and survey and excavation results.

Benbecula

Loch Dun Mhurchaidh

NF7942 5458 – NMRS Number NF75SE 1: *Dun Buidhe* or *Dun Mhuirchaidh* appears to have been built on a heavily modified or artificial island, although this is largely obscured by tumble from the outer wall, one face of which survives, dropping down to 1m above water level, where it is obscured in tumble. Stones shelve out for some distance, coming down at a 45° angle to the loch bed. A causeway runs between the dun and Eilean Dubh. On the Eilean Dubh side, it rises high above the present water level, heading inland for some distance, appearing to lead around the west of the island. Only the largest stones and boulders of the causeway survive, suggesting it has been heavily

robbed out. It was perhaps once connected to the silted-up causeway between Eilean Dubh and the mainland. On the island side there are the remains of a raised 'roadway', 2m wide and 0.50m high, heading towards the centre of the island.

The remains of this dun reveal that it was the most impressive of duns in the Uists. Its circumference is surrounded by a huge stone-built outer ring-work which would have created an extensive outer face, probably descending directly into the loch. It is now almost totally obscured by rubble but, where visible, this wall is at least 2m high. The internal platform, 48m in diameter, is surmounted by an 18m-wide broch/dun, apparently with a rectangular building inserted into the rubble at a later date, and nine sub-rectangular structures of various dates; a large portion of the island is, however, obscured by a later sheep fold. Some of the buildings may be prehistoric and three are certainly 19th-century on structural grounds, also appearing on the first edition O.S. map (1851). Others, however, by stylistic comparison appear to be Medieval, especially two denuded examples with entrances in the gable ends, which is far from being a definitive feature but is often found on earlier Medieval houses. Many of the structures may be later, however, as it appears from Blaeu that this site was still occupied towards the end of the 16th century.

The place-name and a series of traditions associated with Dun Mhuirchaidh reveal the way in which these two sources can be brought together to uncover an understanding of this site as the physical manifestation of the seat of power of subsequent kin-groups. Dun Mhuirchaidh or Dun Buidhe in Loch an Dun Mhurchaidh is clearly associated with the name Mhuirchaidh. Recently, a widely held tradition stated that the Clann Ragnaill lived there at one point (Pochin Mould 1953: 71) but, as is discussed below, there may also be an association with their ancestors, the Clann Ruairidh. Whilst no fully comprehensive genealogy survives for the Clann Ruairidh, the name Mhuirchaidh does not appear to have been common among them. Alternatively, a link with the progenitor of the Siol Mhuirchaidh seems much more probable. This lineage might have been connected with the Uists in the later 13th century, before the Clann Ruairidh ascendancy (Raven 2005: 55–60). By the 15th century, their lands were probably reduced to a fraction of North Uist but, in the preceding century, this might have included Benbecula. They appear to have been closely connected with the Clann Ruairidh and the Clann Ragnaill. Tradition holds that the Siol Mhuirchaidh colluded with Clann Ruairidh and Clann Ragnaill to disinherit their mutual rivals, the Siol Ghoraidh, from territories in the Uists (Ferguson and Macdonald 1984: 9), but whether they were serving as vassals to the Clann Ruairidh or acting as their partners is unclear.

The link between the Siol Mhuirchaidh and Benbecula may be tenuous but, unless their claims had some basis in historical fact, there seems to be no alternative explanation for the Clann Ruairidh's retention of a place-name (one linked to their primary seat at that) that served to propagate opposing claims to their territories. This may be especially

relevant when rights to land might have been primarily retained within the oral record. If the Siol Mhuirchaidh were based at the dun, it would also provide some indication to why the Clann Ruairidh settled at the site. As the central dun in the Uists, its occupation would have demonstrated the occupiers' connection to the earlier naturalized power structure in the islands and placed them at the top of the social and landscape hierarchy.

Stories about the dun in Iolaraigh regarding the Mhuirchaidhs highlight the supplantation of the earlier order by occupying a former dun. It may also tentatively verify a considerably earlier presence of the Siol Mhuirchaidh in the Uists. During the 14th century when Godfrey, son of John of Islay, first came to the Uists, he went to Iolaraigh, where his mother Ami MacRuari was living. He then proceeded to 'the stronghold built by Murdoch at Fort Isle [which] had been abandoned for 50 years previously and he took the furniture' (Ferguson and Macdonald 1984: 207). It was even noted that Mhuirchaidh had built his fort on top of an earlier one, occupied in the Norse period (*ibid.*), although this could be the broch itself.

Oral tradition recorded by Carmichael holds a further key to understanding this site:

'The origin of [Borve] Castle was as follows. While one of the *Mac ic Ailein cuisteasan* or *Gillean Mora* [head servant] was returning home one night to Dun-Buidhe where the Clanrannalds had their *pist tuilieachas* [main dwelling] he saw a *loireag* or *bean nithidh* [fairy washer-woman] washing a shirt at the side of the clachan to the Dun. For whom are you washing that shirt said he? For Mac ic Ailein. For his day is doomed and he shall never again cross this clachan. The *cruistiar* went home and told his chief of the *Bean-nithi* and her threat. If early rose the sun still earlier rose ClanRanald the following morning and crossed from his Dun by a boat or *coit* or *currach* and never returned to it again. He began building his next residence on a *sgeir ruhara* – which is this Borve Castle.' (Carmichael-Watson Papers 362 II).

Fairy washerwoman and prophetic doom aside, the tale directly connects the use and status of Dun Mhuirchaidh with that of the castle at Bhuirgh (Borve). Dun Mhuirchaidh's size and complexity are far greater than those of any other Uist dun, and it may be a castle in all but mortar and name.

Discussion

The abundance of lochs in the landscape of the Uists made it an ideal region for the construction of artificial islands.

- In South Uist, at least 30 crannogs have been identified, 15 with definitive evidence for duns having been built upon them.
- Six are in such a denuded state of preservation that no structural evidence survives, with their having been either robbed of their stones to build estate houses in the 19th century (such as occurred at Dun Buidhe in Loch Druidibeag which was quarried to build Stadhlaignearraidh schoolhouse [Calum Luig

pers. comm.]), or having become the focus for settlement when population pressure became too high as crofting was imposed (as occurred around the duns of Iochdar).

- Pairs of crannogs occur in four lochs.
- Additionally, there are 11 natural islands with settlement upon them, but none of these are brochs.
- Benbecula possesses a further 11 crannogs: seven of these have evidence for brochs/duns upon them, two have denuded surfaces and another two on the east coast have not been surveyed.²

Although at least one timber-constructed crannog has been discovered in Lewis (Munro 1882: 60; also see Blundell 1913: 300–1), the vast majority in the Outer Hebrides are stone-built. A large number of these crannogs³ support brochs and duns of later prehistoric date and, in turn, many became the focus for occupation within the Medieval period. This mirrors a little explored period of re-use of duns, brochs, hillforts and un-modified crannogs throughout the western seaboard.

South Uist is conspicuously ignored in comparison to the islands in the north. After recording 41 brochs and duns in Lewis and 13 in Harris, Thomas's work (1890) tailed off in the south, noting three in North Uist, one each in Benbecula and South Uist, and two in Barra. His work was largely conducted through correspondence with MacPhaill, Otter and Carmichael. The latter, who even spent time living in South Uist, surveyed many broch remains, questioned those who had dismantled them for the construction of estate buildings, and recorded traditions associated with them. Although he took some limited notes and records for the duns in Benbecula, his work focused on North Uist and the duns of South Uist do not even appear in his surviving papers. It is possible that the lack of information recorded for duns in South Uist in the work of these antiquarians stemmed from a real paucity of oral tradition in South Uist. Many of the *seanachaidhean* or people who would have remembered the old stories might have been forced to leave during the extensive Clearances of the mid-19th century, or have left voluntarily during the emigrations of the previous century. An alternative possibility is that work in South Uist was discouraged by a hostile landlord and yet Gordon of Cluny, the new proprietor of South Uist in the 1850s, is recorded as having had an interest in archaeology (see Cowie 1994: 10).

Place-names

As early as 1695, Martin Martin noted the implications that place-names had for understanding duns in the Hebrides: 'The forts are commonly named after the place where they are, or the person that built them' (1703 [1999]: 207). Evidence for the connection of a lineage with a place – whether dun or associated land – lasting several centuries during the Medieval period also comes from Pont's late 16th-century map of South Uist, which reveals a number of contemporaneously inhabited islands. Although there seems to have been a second wave of dun reoccupation

in the 16th century, it is likely that these were occupied by the upper gentry and/or tacksmen, and that many had been inhabited for a substantial period beforehand, perhaps continuously since the Norse period.

In contrast to North Uist and Benbecula, where duns with personal names are much more common, the O.S. *Name Books* reveal that only one dun in South Uist was associated with a personal name. This was Dun Uisealan in Iochdar, one of the few townships not to be cleared prior to the O.S. survey, which may account for the preservation of this place-name. Dun Uisealan is perhaps an example of a Norse personal name, but the tradition has been forgotten. Otherwise the duns and brochs of South Uist are named according to size or by colour – *mor* (big), *beag* (little), *buidhe* (yellow) and *ruadh* (red) – or after vegetation found upon them. The *buidhe* element is extremely common: this has been ascribed to plant life, machair sand in the loch bed (M. MacGregor pers. comm.) and/or the effects of bird droppings (Mary MacLeod pers. comm.), but these do not appear to reflect the sites or their situations.

The late duns

The form of Dun Mhuirchaidh, with an outer ring-work and internal buildings, is replicated at two other duns in South Uist, in Loch Druim an Iasgair and Loch Eilean an Staoir. Both were highlighted by the RCAHMS (1928: xl) as late duns, separate in form from the prehistoric brochs/duns:

- They are much smaller in diameter, respectively *c.* 10m and 14m in diameter, without causeways, and have two dry-stone sub-oval/rectangular structures within the outer wall, between 2m and 4m in length.
- The former is much lower in the water (*i.e.* closer to the present water level) although its walls extend straight down into the loch to a depth of 2.50m in places.
- The structure on Eilean an Staoir appears to have been built into the top of a broch or dun, sitting high above the present water level with later structures sitting around the base of the broch mound.

If these buildings are later duns, it must be noted that they do not appear on Blaeu's map, although it is possible that he did not record all island duns. Additionally, Loch Druim an Iasgair is far from any routeway through the islands, being situated in the middle of the plain of blanket bog and *cnoc-and-lochan* ('hill and lakeland') at the north end of the island. The distinctive appearance of these two duns may indicate that they are late examples, similar in form to and contemporary with Dun Mhuirchaidh.

A possible parallel for this type of monument may be found at Macewen's Castle, in Cowal, where an earlier vitrified fort was enhanced by the building of an outwork rampart with timber stakes, turf and stone buildings being constructed in the resulting enclosure. Excavation revealed numerous finds, unfortunately from insecure contexts, but there was rough evidence for intermittent use in the 12th–17th centuries (Marshall 1983). Dun Lagaidh (Wester Ross; Selkirk 1969) and Dun Ringill (Skye; Miket and

Roberts 1990: 45–8) are both duns that were re-used in the Middle Ages by the insertion of free-standing structures, possibly reflecting an extension of this form. Eighteenth-century travellers' descriptions of internal divisions within Dun Beag (Skye) – but which were removed before any excavation could be made – may also fit this type of broch re-use; the finds from this dun certainly strongly suggest Medieval occupation (Callander 1921: 124–8).

Structures of outworks and internal buildings are not uniform features of Medieval patterns of dun re-use. The surviving broch/dun mounds of Dun Uisealan and the dun in Loch Cnoc a' Buidhe have small, single rectangular structures inserted directly into the top, filling up the entire space in the centre of the broch, so that the walls are no longer solely integral to either structure. The dun in Loch an Dùin (Gearraidh Sheilidh) may also fit this pattern, consisting of two or three small inter-locking sub-rectangular structures constructed into the top of a broch/dun mound. These are significantly different in size from the large buildings inserted into brochs in the later Medieval period, but may be more akin to the smaller sub-rectangular structures that appear at the end of the Middle Ages (Raven 2005: 379–83). Unfortunately, whilst it is possible to ascribe to these cells a date of construction later than the brochs into which they are built, there is no way upon present information to accurately tie in that date to a more specific time frame. Other examples of these forms of duns may be found from those heavily denuded, built over and robbed-out duns, but there is no way to prove this.

Seats and seasonality

Numerous tales survive from the 16th century regarding the use and occupation of duns throughout the western seaboard. Some stories show that there was a direct correlation of dun occupation with land ownership. The link of duns and crannogs to hereditary proprietorship of land can be demonstrated for Lewis and North Uist but not for South Uist. Duns owe their presence to their use as hideaways and refuges, and were associated with violent and treacherous acts. Tales from earlier periods are rarer, perhaps owing to the fact that acts of slaughter and heroic deeds make for more intriguing story-telling than peaceful domesticity. Where duns do appear, they are still often intertwined with murderous actions, yet it is evident that they served as much more than defences for their inhabitants.

It is more than evident that South Uist's artificial islands became prime areas for fowling and fishing in later centuries. Maps of prime angling spots, provided by South Uist Estates, frequently indicate that the best are to be found on one side or another of crannogs, and shooting butts have been constructed upon nearly all of them. The RCAHMS's (mis-) interpretation of features on the walls of Dun Raouill specifically attributes them to 'butts for sportsmen shooting the wild geese' (1928: 111). Walker noted that South Uist's proneness to plagues of geese was partially due to its islets in freshwater lakes (McKay

1980: 79). Although it cannot be stated with any certainty whether crannogs were deliberately placed to exploit these resources, or whether their construction created environmental niches that were preferred by these species, the correlation of duns and hunting resources should not be ignored in understanding their use in the Medieval period. Additionally, some of the more westerly duns, such as Dun Raouill, were placed in good situations for accessing the moors for deer hunting.

Although swans over-winter in Uist, geese are most common in the Uists in the summer (Boyd and Boyd 1996: 65–7). Similarly salmon come to the rivers from February, peaking in July, when other species such as trout also become common until August (Boyd and Boyd 1990: 178–84). This shows that, if one of the myriad functions of some duns was to provide hunting residences, occupation must have been centred on the summer months. An additional element affecting – or even imposing – seasonal activity at duns is the variation in water levels in the lochs. Heavy rains can significantly raise water levels in poorly draining lochs and this is particularly extreme over the winter months, when many lochs swell over their banks and both peat and low-lying machair become heavily waterlogged. In such circumstances, many of the lower lying crannogs, and the outbuildings around some of larger ones, might have been rendered uninhabitable for many months of the year. Seasonal increases in water levels may also provide one tentative, functional explanation for the construction of artificial islands for habitation, rather than the occupation and modification of the naturally occurring islands in many of the lochs with crannogs in them. Through using stones, a solid base was constructed, yet the spaces in between the stones could have allowed water to drain freely when flooding occurred.

Some of the crannogs are higher above the water level and it is possible that these need not have been abandoned in the winter. This raises the possibility that dun utilization might have mirrored the transhumant patterns of movement by the rest of Hebridean society. Some of the higher duns might have been lived in during the winter, being part of the lowland arable landscape, to be abandoned in the summer for those lower lying duns nearer the pastures and hunting grounds.

The suitability for seasonal hunting raises the strong probability that not all duns were regarded as seats of power, although there is no reason why the two roles could not have co-existed. Even where they did serve as seats, there is no need to necessarily presume, on the presently available evidence, that they were occupied permanently or all year round. The suggestion of seasonal occupation should in no way entail a conceptual loss of status for these sites or detract from their importance. The picture that emerges from later records is that they could have served as periodic local seats to accommodate chiefs and their retinues as they travelled around their estates. Such circuits were necessary for the payment of rents and dues, in the form of *cuidhe oidhche*, as well as dispensing judgement, both enforcing and receiving acknowledgement

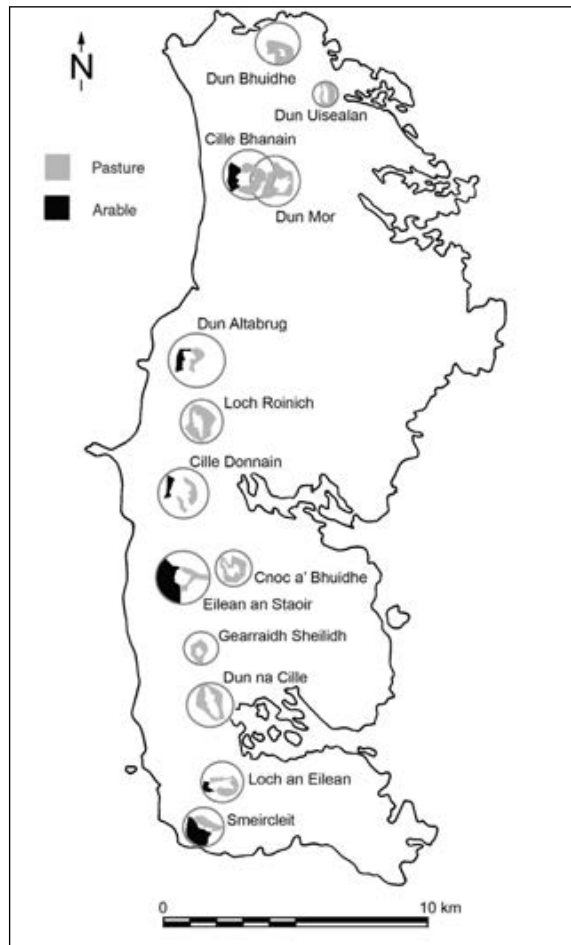


Figure 6.14. Stylized resource viewsheds of duns with probable Medieval occupation

of the elite's domination over their lands (Alcock 2003: 49–50).

A large proportion of the duns of South Uist are located in the moorlands, but only a few have any visibility across arable land (Figure 6.14). At least two, that in Loch Cnoc a' Buidhe and Dun Raouill, are located on later major routeways between the arable and upland summer grazings (Figure 6.15). Dun Raouill does not appear to have been built upon prehistoric foundations, revealing that a preoccupation with pasture was also prevalent in the Middle Ages. That duns should be associated with moorlands in a society largely concerned with cattle, and that settlement focused on seasonally exploited land, is not surprising. It is only a modern preoccupation with the importance of arable land, and the need to define permanence of occupation for summer and winter houses, that has led to a trend in modern academia that sees proximity to pasture as a signifier of a monument's *lack* of importance. It would be far more productive and perceptive to consider pasture as an important resource and to recognize the significance of the place of pasture and other grazing land in a 'cattle economy'.

It seems probable that, as the Medieval period unfolded,

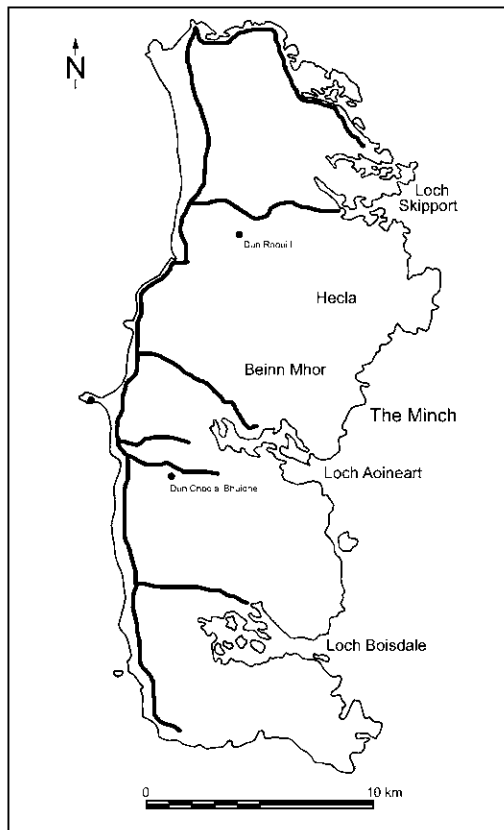


Figure 6.15. Main routeways around South Uist in historical times, showing the machair routeway and established routes into the hills

the seasonal or occasional use of duns may have increased. The occupation of a dun has been argued above to be conceptually analogous to rights over land (in some cases the *tir unga*, in others whole islands or regions), which in some instances might have been similar to the occupant's demesne. In the earlier Norse period, duns' owners might have belonged to a class of local 'chieftains', subject to a king or lord, to whom they are likely to have had some form of kinship link. However, as kin-groups expanded, the influence of an individual, seen as the head of the lineage, would have extended over wider and wider geographical areas. Additionally, ambitious lords would have used their power, both social and military, to manipulate political situations to extend their lordships through dominant kin-groups and regions often spread over wide areas. A lord whose dominance covered a number of separate areas would have had to visit each of these areas to uplift his dues and demonstrate his lordship: in each area he would have made use of a dun. Each dun would have provided him and his retinue with accommodation, but it is likely also to have been the conceptual centre of that region. Previously, the duns would have been occupied by a chiefly lineage that used it to demonstrate their own tie to the land before being dislodged by the new lord.

Throughout the western seaboard, castles were provided with individuals to occupy and run the castle while its

lord was away: in the genealogical histories and folk literature they are referred to as chamberlains, wardens and constables. Given the lateness of the sources, little can be made of specific variations in the titles: they appear to reflect a general position to which, perhaps, also might be added *castellano*. The point is that these were not merely gatekeepers, but the heads of powerful lineages. The confirmation of this position revealed the relationship between lord and subject, and allowed the lord to visit and use the castle at his will. Such a process signified the social right of both the local land-holder and the chief. In lordships with similar geographic situations, many duns could not have been occupied permanently. Although they were seen as the local seat in earlier periods, the significance of this particular function might have diminished over time, and the duns might have become more associated with other activities that took place there, such as hunting or fishing.

Castles and duns in Late Medieval South Uist

In 1596 Bishop Lesley stated: 'I will nocht make mekle talkeng of les lies, albeit they haue decore, and ar outsett in touris and litle tounes' (Dalrymple *et al.* 1888–95: I, 56), but both Pont and Martin noted the Uists, and particularly South Uist, as exceptional in the proliferation of island dwellings there, stating respectively: 'in thir Ile [Uist] ar many small towers buildt in freshe water lochis, ar strenthis in trowblesum tymes' (n.d.[b]: 90) and in South Uist 'several lakes have old forts built upon the small islands in the middle of them' (1703 [1999]: 151).

Blaeu's published work shows five duns that are likely to have been occupied contemporaneously in South Uist but there are a number of others that are likely to have co-existed alongside them:

- One, Dun Raouill, is marked only by a red rectangle, not as an occupied dun, though there is documentary and traditional evidence that it was in use around the same time as the compilation of Blaeu's map.
- A further three duns marked on one of Pont's sketch maps of Baghasdail did not make it onto Pont's finished design, drawn on the same parchment. It is not known why these duns were omitted from the final version of the map, but the sketch is slightly erroneous in its overall shape and the drawing is crowded with lochs and place-names; it is possible that Pont simplified his design to render it more decipherable.

All the island dwellings on Pont's maps are identifiable, and others not shown on that map have also been identified and recorded. Before going on to study how they related to each other and the landscape around them, it may be worth giving a brief overview of those islands that still have identifiable remains upon them. To this list is added others not on Pont's map and some other castellated features.

With the exception of the Clanranald castle on Eilean Bheagram, first mentioned in charters towards the end of the 15th century, little remains of the duns that survived

Blaeu's publication process. Yet the crannogs do still survive in the main.

- More recent buildings obscure any evidence for earlier structures at Loch an Dùin (Smeircleit) and Dun nan Gallan (Staoinebrig). Bald's 1805 map shows buildings and an enclosure upon the latter site, which had disappeared by the first edition O.S. map (1881), although some walling was discovered here in 1965 (CANMORE). This dun would probably have sat in a branch of West Loch Ollay prior to drainage, although it might not have been located on a crannog as it possibly sat on a natural knoll in the loch.
- At another of Blaeu's sites in West Loch Ollay, nothing other than the crannog with associated boat noosts survives.
- On Loch na Duchasaich there is another crannog possibly noted by Blaeu; the buildings on the island appear to be sub-circular, however, rather than the sub-rectangular buildings that could be expected on a Medieval site. Although building shape is an uncertain chronological indicator, it raises the possibility that Pont was attempting to demarcate the importance of Ormacleit, prior to the building of the present castle in 1701–8. This may tentatively verify the tradition that the foundations of the castle were laid by Iain Moidartach, and that the project was abandoned upon his death in 1593 (MacDonald 1930–31: I, 56). The place-name, Loch na Duchasaich, may derive from a Gaelic expression of the native hereditary right of lordship over territory, *duchas*. Anderson (2003) has noted the term 'duoghasa' being used in early 17th-century rentals in Ireland regarding heritable portions of land, raising a possible association of the site with expressions of ownership. However, a more sober interpretation may be *dubhchasaich*, which is South Uist Gaelic for a type of fern (McDonald and Campbell 1958: 107), and ferns do grow upon the island.
- A small crannog at Loch an Eilean, in Baghasdail, is marked on Pont's abandoned sketch map, but not on Blaeu's map. Upon it are the remains two buildings, one consisting of well-laid courses of rectangular blocks of gneiss, a feature seen in the outbuildings at Eilean Bheagram, possibly indicating an early 17th-century date as it is virtually unknown from other sites of any period.

Other island sites not included on Pont's maps with probable Medieval settlement on them have been noted above. Three other re-used prehistoric duns with later Medieval settlement have also been identified:

- Cnoc a' Buidhe (Mingearraidh; a high broch with a later rectangular building inserted into it) and
- two at Loch an Dùin Mhòir (Geirinis). The westernmost of these duns consists of a large crannog with a number of buildings clustered together in one corner: two large adjacent rectangular structures and another, separate, sub-rectangular one nearby. The other is another crannog surmounted by a large broch that appears to

have a large rectangular hall inserted into it, similar to Dun an Sticir (North Uist) although this interpretation is highly tentative given its denuded nature, and the fact that the centre is much obscured by rubble fallen from the outer broch wall. Surrounding the broch, filling the whole of the visible surface of the rest of the crannog, is a collection of seven sub-rectangular buildings, and possibly a kiln.

No tradition or archaeological evidence survives to date any of these sites but, whilst rectangular buildings around brochs have occasionally turned out to be Iron Age (see Armit 1996: 131–2; Dixon and Harding 2000: 17–20), the closest parallels to the buildings surrounding the broch in Geirinis are Late Medieval (Raven 2005: 379–83), raising the possibility that this collection of buildings belongs to this period. A natural island in the same loch supports another building of the same type.

There are a number of buildings in South Uist that bear a strong similarity to one another in that, in their surviving state, they all appear to be Medieval, none of them offering any evidence for prehistoric predecessors: Caisteal Calbhaigh (Castle Calvay), Caisteal a' Bhreabhair or Caisteal an Reubadair (Weaver's Castle), Caisteal Bheagram and Dun Raouill. To this list may be added Caisteal Bhuirgh (Borve Castle) in Benbecula. The first two are singled out from the main group as they are vaguely associated with Clann Neill and have a different type of location, on stacks situated hard by the sea.

- Bhreabhair is sited on an isolated stack, to the south of Eriskay, whose summit is crowned by a small tower, 6.50m × 6m, standing in a sea of rubble that may obscure some outbuildings. Further accommodation was provided by two denuded structures only metres away, on a lower shelf of the stack's summit. Traditions link Bhreabhair's construction and use with 16th-century pirates (MacPherson 1974: 81–3), possibly the MacNeills themselves (Pochin Mould 1953: 89) who are said to have launched attacks from there.
- Calbhaigh in Loch Baghasdail is composed of an irregular curtain wall, 21m × 15.15m, containing a number of buildings including what appears to be a hall, a latrine and a tower composed of two stories (with external dimensions of 3.70m × 3.60m and an internal space of 10.50m × 1.50m). It has been interpreted in the past to be all of one phase (RCAHMS 1928: 107). Macneil (1964: 91), who was over-keen to stress the antiquity and longevity of use of all the sites once under Clann Neill control, states that the stone work of Caisteal Calbhaigh is so similar to Kisimul's on Barra that it must have been built shortly after by the same master mason. On more recent interpretation, this would place it in the 15th century (Dunbar 1978; Morrison 2000). However, the small tower is clearly of an earlier phase, as the curtain wall abuts its sides and is not integral to it, unlike the other buildings. There is a general opinion that the site was associated with the MacNeills of Barra but this is not documented

anywhere. Macneil (1964: 91) states that it remained a stronghold of theirs until 1601 but he does not reveal his sources. Nevertheless, its occupation around this time is perhaps indicated by the place-name 'borg' on Mercator's 1595 map of Scotland in roughly the right situation.

Caisteal Calbhaigh sits on a large island commanding the access to Loch Baghasdal, which allows further comparison to the other Outer Hebridean castles, such as Kisimul on Barra and Steornabhaigh on Lewis. Its viewshed over the Minch would have placed it in a perfect position to connect with passing maritime traffic and charge vessels for the use of the protection of the bay, perhaps lending some credence to oral tradition that it was occupied by a pirate (MacIain n.d.). Its conspicuousness is revealed by MacCulloch's comments that 'except a small half-ruined tower at the entrance of Loch Baghasdal, I saw no antiquities in this island' (1824: 3, 24).

Conclusion

The landscape settings of Medieval island duns show differing concerns from those for castles. Castles in the Western Isles were concerned with fishing fleets and were sited at nodal points in a maritime landscape where the chiefs interacted with groups outwith their society. In contrast, the island dwellings were located inland, nearer pastures, hunting grounds and routeways through the island to the upland pastures and east-coast sea ports. Although still at nodal points, they were where chiefs interacted with groups within their clan. The Late Medieval island dwellings were thus more suited to Gaelic and clan-based social systems, concerned with pastoralism and inclusivity, rather than the exclusive and economically dominant European model of lordship expressed by the castle.

Duns came to be re-occupied from the 12th–13th century onwards as part of a move by landholders to mould a new independent, Gaelicized identity, and to legitimate their social position through naturalizing their position in the landscape. Violence and feuding continued in this period but do not seem to have substantially escalated (McDonald 1997); they cannot be taken as a single cause for the move to defended island dwellings. This was a time when local elites might have been consolidating their grip on the islands as the political sphere stabilized after the period of Viking raids. In tandem with the growth of connections with kingdoms centred on the Irish Sea, a new semi-Gaelicized identity was emerging; it seems possible that, through the re-occupation of Iron Age brochs, the Hebrideans were attempting to develop and demonstrate their cultural and political independence from Norway.

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Notes

- 1 Neither the loch itself nor the dun are marked by name on the 2007 1:25,000 O.S. map.
- 2 The remaining Benbecula island duns were not visited during this survey.
- 3 Following Barber and Crone (1993: 520), the term crannog is used loosely to describe wholly or partially modified islands, regardless of whether timber was used in construction.

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7 The shielings survey: central South Uist

John Raven

Introduction

Today, the eastern half of the island of South Uist is fairly isolated: an expanse of *cnoc* and *lochan* landscape is dominated by dramatic rock-strewn, heather- and peat-clad hills that are often smothered in cloud. They are sometimes referred to as mountains, though they rarely reach much beyond 300–400m in height. In the past, people moved their stock up to these hills and lived in them during the summer months. It was here, away from the main farmsteads and arable land, that they occupied their shieling huts and grazings.

The term ‘shieling’ is an Anglicization of a Norse or an Old English name for a conglomeration of both the summer pastures and the huts, or bothies, occupied when utilizing them. The term is likely to have been used rarely by inhabitants of South Uist, but will be used in this text for simplicity. The shieling tradition was a great social occasion but was also essential to, and played a vital part in, the pastoral system that was an integral part of the economy of every sector of the island community from the family to the laird.

Shielings were once common throughout upland Britain, though gradually the tradition was pushed out through the adoption of alternative agricultural techniques. In much of the Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland, shieling traditions persisted well into the 19th century and lasted later in a few cases. In order to understand the role shielings played within the economy and societies of South Uist, one has to look at evidence available from other locations. This is mainly related to the later phases of use: there is little direct information for South Uist itself and what there is concentrates on the late 19th century. Despite being amongst some of the most prolific field remains seen within any upland location, shielings as a subject have received relatively scant attention, except in their broader role as part of economic or folk studies. Although some work was undertaken in the late 1950s and 60s (Gaffney 1959; MacSween 1959; MacSween and Gailey 1961; Gaffney 1967; Miller 1967) and this interest was kept alive by Fenton (1977; 1980), recent interest in shielings

predominantly results from work by Bil in Perthshire (1989; 1990a; 1990b; 1992).

This discussion aims to look at the wider information available for shieling activities and to relate it closely to more direct evidence for South Uist, including field evidence mostly concentrated around the Uisinish peninsula and the Bornais, Cill Donnain and Gearraidh Bhailteas townships (see Figure 7.1).

Shielings within Hebridean economics

The importance of shielings in South Uist derives from

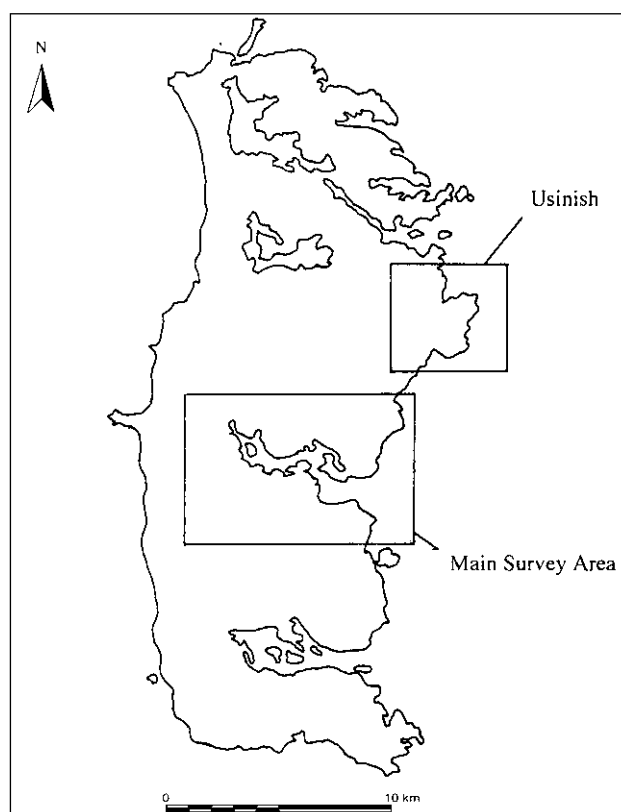


Figure 7.1. Map of South Uist showing shieling survey areas

the nature of the island's topography, which can be divided into three distinct ecological zones: the west coastal machair, central peaty 'blacklands' and the rugged mountains to the east. The character of the resources found within each region lends itself to differing forms of exploitation. Historically, the major division was between the conflicting needs of arable and pastoral land use. In fact, Smith (1996) has shown that the two types of land use are heavily inter-dependent and that one cannot successfully exist without the other. Within Post-Medieval economies, emphasis lay on maximizing arable resources in the limited lowland environment (Dodgshon 1993a; 1993b; 1993c). This was in direct conflict with the role of cattle as the centre of both social prestige and the finances of the island community. In the earlier period the social status of everyone from the cottar to the clan chief lay in the number of cattle possessed. Cattle wealth played an important part in displays of that prestige and in payment of dues in feasts, *ciud-oidhche* (political entertainment) and *tocher* (bridewealth) (Dodgshon 1988).

As the nature of tenancies changed during and after the 17th century, cattle and dairy produce (and money obtained from the sale of stock) formed a major part of rents, to the extent that in the Register for the Privy Council it is stated that: 'the said Yllismen having no utheris meanis nor possibilitie to pay his Majesteis dewyties bot by the seale of thair mairtis and horsse' (cited in Shaw 1980: 154). The Forfeited Estate Papers, after the 1715 Rebellion, note that Rorie MacDonald, tenant of 'Killipheeler', one of the bigger tacks in South Uist, paid a sum of £133/16/8, as well as three firlots of 'mealle', six stone of butter, five stone of cheese and one wether (a castrated ram). It is likely, however, that the 'siller rent' contribution was actually paid in kind.

At a subsistence level, beasts predominantly provided cheeses and butter but also, to a lesser extent, meat and blood-puddings. As cattle increasingly became a commodity, mutton became the only meat eaten by the lower classes (Gray 1957). Raw materials in the form of wool, skins, bone, leather and tallow were invaluable. The sale of beasts, hides and other derived commodities provided finances for the purchase of desirable imports such as wood, iron, sail-cloth, salt, seed, rope and other, luxury items (*ibid.*). The resources necessary for maintaining the role of pastoralism as the backbone of later Hebridean economics had to come from pastures away from the low-lying arable and main settlements. The needs of past societies in South Uist to exploit transhumant practices, together with the mechanics of how and why this was achieved, will be discussed below.

Horses were particularly important to the economy of South Uist, primarily being used for the traction of ploughs, where used, and the carrying of large loads. Horses were sold at market. Although horses were almost certainly included in transhumant practices, there is very little direct evidence for how this took place. This text focuses on primarily on cattle but the role of horses must be taken into consideration.

The earliest record for the basis of the Hebridean economy by Solinus (c. 200 AD), although perhaps dubious, emphasizes the importance of pastoralism. He states that the 'Ebudean's' diet consisted solely of 'fish and the milk of their cattle' (Kissling 1943: 78). Despite that, evidence from cattle bones from Iron Age sites would make it reasonable to surmise that transhumance was taking place from at least the Middle Iron Age if not earlier, a theory previously suggested by Roger Miket (cited in Skinner 1995). Transhumance was also a strong feature within the traditions of the Scottic (see MacSween 1959) and Norse societies (see Sveinbjarnardóttir 1989 and Mahler 1993) whose cultures significantly influenced society within South Uist. It is likely that, although the specifics of traditions might have changed, transhumance took place throughout the last two millennia. Fenton (1977) links a growth in the role of shielings with the rise in the influence of black cattle within the Scottish economy, kicked off by the falling political boundaries and export duties with England following the Union of Crowns in 1603, and after the later Union of Parliaments in 1705. Despite the hindrance the economy of the Western Isles supposedly suffered during the Lordship of the Isles (Lythe 1960), it is probable that cattle were as important prior to these changes as after.

The conflicting needs of arable and pastoral resources lie at the heart of the relationship between summer grazings and both the open-field, run-rig, and later crofting systems. The essence of the two systems may lie in the fact that land was held in common by communities or townships. From at least the early 18th century the hills were held as pasture in common by the populace. Families' rights of access to their parcel of land were included in their overall rents, which were paid directly either to the laird or to the tacksman. The 1715 Forfeited Estate Papers record that Angus McDonald held the tack of the 'Lands of North and South Garrivaltos with the houses ... Graseings sheallings and haill pairts pendules and perliments lyeing within'. Prior to the development of run-rig farming, probably sometime after the 14th century (Dodgshon 1993a; 1993b), the detailed arrangements of agricultural organization can only be surmised. Arguments for and against the likelihood that earlier societies possessed some form of similarly co-operative land-holding or agricultural systems are too complicated to indulge in here. Nevertheless, the answer to the problem of limited resources was probably not too different to the solution adopted by later, historically documented communities (see Chapter 2 for discussion of the 'proto-township' hypothesis).

As already stated, it was necessary to have access both to summer pastures – to maximize the land available for arable – and, importantly, to winter pastures. After harvest, livestock were put to graze for the winter on nearer pastures, where available, and also on the harvested arable grounds. There they were often left to fend for themselves and to subsist 'with nothing to support them but the decayed gleanings of the herbage of the former summer' (Dr. Walker, cited in Gray 1957: 37), the sparse vegetational cover further impoverished by the practice of harvesting

crops by ripping them up by the roots (Dodgshon 1993a). The cattle faced a notoriously hard winter and were left vulnerable to disease and starvation; at the end of the 18th century Sir John Sinclair recorded that on the mainland one in five cattle did not last until spring (cited in Grant 1961). Martin Martin described the animals as ‘mere skeletons ... many of them not being able to rise from the ground without help’ (cited in Whyte 1979: 80). James MacDonald, tutor to Clanranald, also noted the effects of winter on the animals, as well as the benefit provided by the shieling pastures:

‘One cannot easily believe in August, that the sleek beautiful animals which frolic among the meads ... are the same creatures which he saw in the beginning of May so miserably reduced and weak that they could not rise from the ground without help, or walk to their pastures without staggering like a drunken man’ (1811: 435–6).

The practice of souming, which Carmichael (1884) reports in South Uist, was based on the size of the croft and helped alleviate the condition of animals over winter (see Chapter 19). This was achieved by limiting the number of head of stock tenants were allowed, a restriction whose intention was to preserve sufficient winter grazing. It was only in the 19th century that winter fodder was introduced. The introduction of potatoes to South Uist, although resisted by the populace (Munro 1797), increased the dependency of cattle on grass grazings (Fenton 1980).

In addition to the fact that, during winter, upland areas are too waterlogged to be exploited, the wintering of beasts on the arable primarily served to provide manure for fertilizing the fields (see Dodgshon 1993a); it also allowed the bringing of more vulnerable animals into the protective fold of the farmstead. Old Scottish shortwool and dunface sheep had to be smeared with butter and tar, as much against the elements as against infestation (Whyte 1979). Seaweed was once used primarily as an additional fertilizer. As a result of the rise of the kelp industry, however, the reliance on animal dung for fertilizer must have increased.

Transhumant customs

It was at the beginning of spring, when the first shoots started appearing, that alternative pasturing came into its own. In 1795 the Articles of Sett stated that ‘tacksmen tenants and sub-tenants of farms on the Island of Lewis shall remove their Cattle horses and sheep to the outside of the corn dyke or Inner Dyke on or before the first day of May each year, And shall remove to their respective Sheallings and shall take their cattle horses and sheep to pasture on the same on or before the first day of June in each year’ (cited in Dodgshon 1993a: 694). Each region had its own traditional day upon which the shift was made to the summer pastures, although an emphasis on the festival of Beltane seems to predominate in earlier sources (MacSween 1959; Grant 1961).

It is possible that a similar situation, where there was

one major shift to the shielings, operated in South Uist. However, another system might have existed, in which there were two phases of upland migration. This is recorded by Fenton (1977; 1980), who places the habit in the central highlands; it possibly stems from Campbell’s investigations at Glenlyon at the end of the 19th century (1895–99). At the beginning of spring there was the first ‘small flitting’ where the young, yeld (barren) and unwanted cattle were taken to the shielings, herded by boys and accompanied by adult men who repaired the bothies and cut fuel. This was followed at a later date by the ‘big flit’ or *Latha dol do’n ruighe* when the women brought up the dairy cattle as well as other stock, including sheep and, in some cases, poultry; the men then returned to the main settlement ‘rather gloomy’ (*ibid.*: 69; see Chapter 19).

Whichever tradition took place in South Uist has not been ascertained, though Carmichael gives us this wonderful description of a single movement; the *triall* on ‘the day of migration’ or *bho baile gu beinn*:

‘The summer of their joy is come, the summer of the shieling, the song, the pipe, and the dance, when the people ascend the hill to the clustered bothies, overlooking the distant sea from among the fronded ferns and fragrant heather, where neighbour meets neighbour and lover meets lover ... The men carry burdens of spades, sticks, pins, ropes and other things that may be needed to repair their summer huts, while the women carry bedding, meal and dairy utensils ... the women knit their stockings and sing their songs, walking free and erect as if there were no burdens on their backs or on their hearts, nor any sin or sorrow in the world as far as they were concerned’ (cited in Kissling 1943: 88).

The event contained in this poetic piece may, however, only relate to the tradition as it existed when Carmichael saw it at the end of the 1800s, after the great economic and social upheaval earlier in the century.

The time of return from the shieling was also dependant on local tradition. Grant (1961) and MacSween (1959) suggest that early sources indicate the date was the festival of Samhain. Coull’s (1968) evidence that 20th-century pastures could only provide enough nutrients to sustain between two or three months’ grazing seems to substantiate sources for the two preceding centuries, with the population returning to the farmsteads when every hand was needed for the harvest. From the 17th century the responsibility of ferrying the cattle to the markets in the Clyde shifted from the tenants, through tacksmen (acting as middle-men) to the drovers. In Skye, and possibly in Uist, the drovers began to arrive before harvesting and the cattle were forced to return earlier (MacSween 1959). The milch cattle spent a shorter period at the shieling than other cattle, going and returning earlier (Bil 1992).

On the Scottish mainland during the 18th century, and probably prior to that, almost the whole population would have gone to the shielings, including the laird and his servants (Fenton 1977; Bil 1990a). Such a situation was

evident in the Hebrides, as recorded by John Knox upon his arrival on the coast of Skye:

‘seeing a decent looking house, with sundry huts at some distance, Macdonald and myself bent our way thither ... When we got to this place, a dead silence pervaded the whole village; the windows and doors of the principal house were shut; we knocked in vain, nothing that had life was seen or heard from any quarter ... we were informed by a transient traveller, that the people of the village had just gone to the shielings’ (1787: 93–4).

As chiefs removed themselves from the clan system, their large cattle herds were increasingly entrusted to servants within the community. Captain Dymes attested that ‘the most part of the common people in summer ... remain on the hills to graze their cattle’ in Lewis in the early 17th century (cited in Shaw 1980: 91). The Rev. A. Campbell (1884: 121) suggested to the Napier Commission that it had probably been the same in South Uist, although in 1700 a visiting bishop was able to confirm as many as 900 of the 1,500 Catholics in South Uist and Benbecula: the rest were reportedly away at the shielings (Nicolson 1890: 372).

Over time the role of men at the shielings diminished as they began to look to other activities to boost their incomes, such as ‘following the herring’. Indeed the role of men at the summer grazings must have always been a small one. When the clan system was in its heyday the summer was the traditional period during which dues of labour were paid on the land of the laird. *Feacht* or *sluaged* was expected, the summer being the time associated with raiding and military escapades. In more peaceful times the men sporadically returned to the main settlements to carry out routine jobs such as the re-roofing, repairing and construction of the blackhouses. John Maclean reported to MacDonald of Sleat in 1764 that improvements could not be carried out to his estate of North Uist because ‘The People have been busied about their flittings & making Houses that nothing could be expected during the Summer Season’ (Lord MacDonald Papers GD 221/414). It was also at this time that the byres were cleaned out, which was instrumental in Kissling (1943) and MacSween (1959) linking the blackhouses and folk-building of the Hebrides integrally to transhumance.

If they were not already so, shielings became the domain predominantly of women and the young. This could be attributed to the association of dairying activities with women and children. The use of shielings in Norse Iceland centred on a sheep-based economy rather than cattle yet seems to have entailed a similar gendered identity (Sveinbjarnardóttir 1989). Boys herded, fished and hunted wildfowl, while the womenfolk milked the animals and made butter and cheeses; the older women returned to the farmsteads on occasion with their produce. Parman’s studies show that, in some late cases, women stayed at the farm and travelled back and forth to collect the milk every evening (1990). In Lewis, within this century, children stayed at the shielings and walked to school from there (MacDonald 1984). Any spare time was filled with spinning

and knitting or the collection of roots, lichens and herbs for cloth dyeing.

Folk memories usually express exhilaration at the thought of going to the shielings:

‘Children and dogs went crazy – horses caught the infection. Mothers were harassed with many cares and fathers sympathised... It looked too, as if the slow bovine intelligence was stirred with memories and anticipations which added to the general turmoil’ (Campbell 1895–99: 68–69).

This pleasure probably originated in escaping from the cramped conditions in the farmsteads but, for the young, it was also ‘a time of courtship and unrestrained talk, out from the watchful eye of the village elders and gossips’ (Parman 1990: 49). Phrases such as *reiteach a bhaile* and *glanadh a bhaile*, roughly meaning, respectively, ‘disentangling’ and ‘cleansing’, further illustrate the feelings associated with going to the hills (Fenton 1980).

Yet, although there is evidence that life at the shielings was somewhat separated from life at the main settlements, there is much to indicate that these summer dwellings were integrally and conceptually interlinked with the farmstead, perhaps through some form of extension of the idea of ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu 1977). It is probably a modern misconception to emphasize one settlement as more important and substantial than the other. This point may be made by reference to the alternate naming of the main settlement as ‘wintertown’ and clusters of bothies as the ‘summertown’ (see Chapter 19). Such a system is revealed in Captain Dymes’s 1630 *Description of Lewis*:

‘The Leweis is devided into 4 parrishes, in each of which there are some 20 townes which townes are halfe a scoare cottages built togeather neare some piece of arrable land where they make their aboade in winter, for the most part of the comon people in the somer they remaine on the hills to graze their Cattle’ (cited in MacKenzie 1903: 592).

The Bald map of 1805 notes a variation on this theme: a settlement called High Town (site USS 026 in the site catalogue, below: see Figure 7.2 and Chapter 4), northeast of Loch Aoinart, might have been the ‘summertown’ for the township to the west. Secondly, given the symbolic importance that Carmichael (1884) and Kissling (1943) claim Hebrideans placed on fire, the significance of the shielings as dwellings was exhibited by the solemnity surrounding the carrying of burning peat embers from the hearth of the farmstead up to the hills to kindle the fires at the shieling (Carmichael 1884). The lighting of the fire was followed by a feast and prayers. Additionally, people at the shielings did not travel to church, the church travelled to them: open-air sermons were held amongst the hills and glens (Campbell 1895–99).

That hills, pastures and shieling grounds were considered somewhat outside the cultured norms of everyday society and settlement is evident not only in the associated freedom and exemption from social morals, recognized throughout

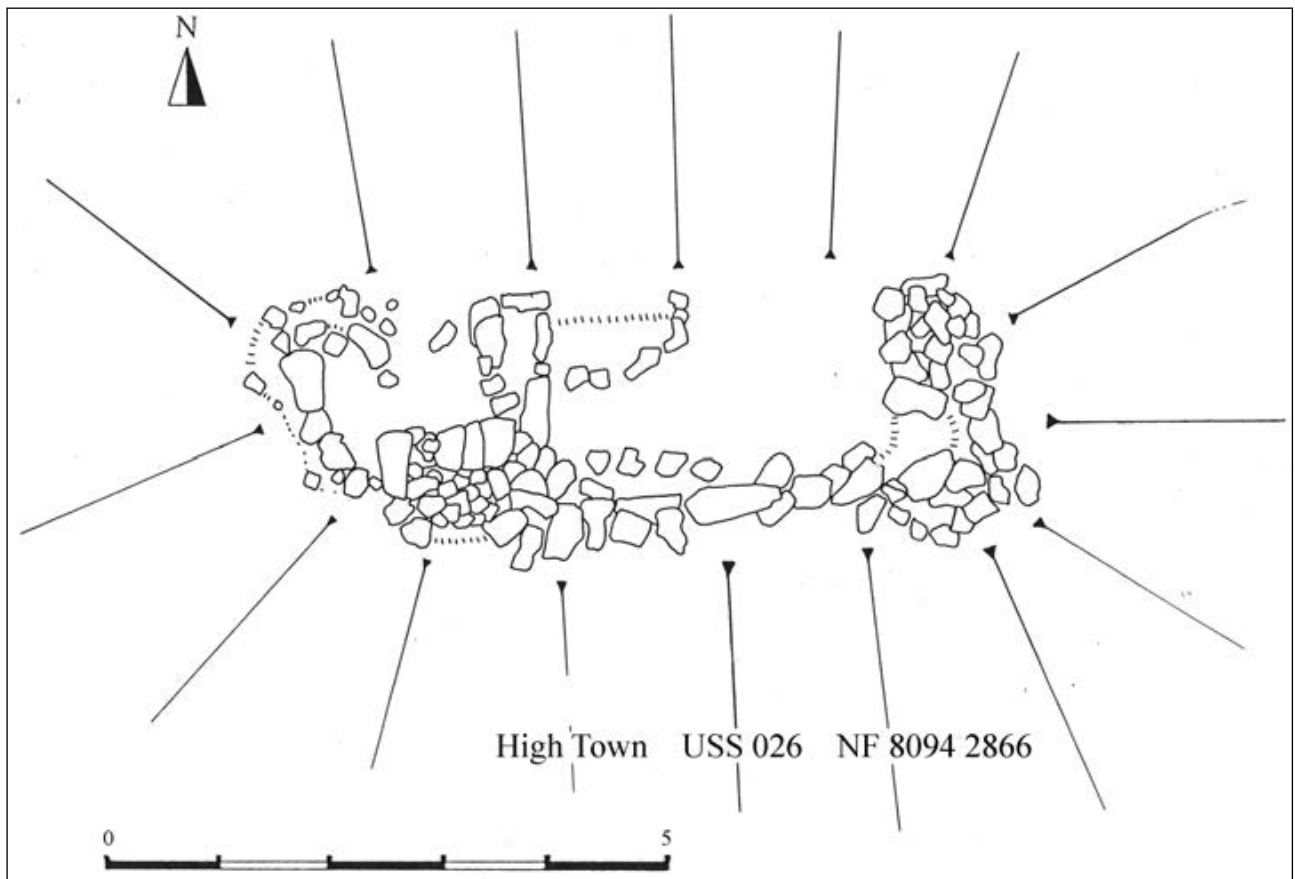


Figure 7.2. The High Town (USS 026) may have been the 'summertown' for the township to the west

Gaelic songs and stories. There are also a multitude of tales associated with shielings, linking them to supernatural creatures, such as ghosts, giants, and fairy horses to be wary of and to be outwitted (some were collected together by Mackellar [1887–88; 1888–89] and Thomas [1862a]). One tale directly associated with South Uist was recorded by Martin Martin:

'There is a valley between two mountains on the east side called Glenslyte, which affords good pasturage. The natives who farm it come thither with their cattle in the summer time, and are possessed with a firm belief that this valley is haunted by spirits, who by the inhabitants are called the great men; and that whatsoever man or woman enters the valley without making first an entire resignation of themselves to the conduct of the great men will infallibly grow mad. The words by which he or she gives up himself to these men's conduct are comprehended in three sentences, wherein the glen is thrice named, to which they add that it is inhabited by these great men, and that such as enter depend on their protection' (1698: 152–3).

At the end of the 19th century Carmichael (1954 vol. V: 386–7) heard a similar folktale, associated with Gleann Liadail, which may be a late survival of the same tradition. Only MacIsaacs could enter the glen, and not before the singing of a song to 'the little folk of the glen'. The milkmaids who used the pastures also poured 'libations'

of milk on a grave in Benmore (Beinn Mhòr), 'Reilig Ni Ruairidh'; to omit this gift was to bring down bad luck upon oneself or one's family. Carmichael-Watson translated a related song as follows, though he admits some problems with this version of the tale:

'Glen of my heart is Glen Liadail,
A glen that is not wild to see,
A glen whereto the world resorts,
A glen wherein are fields and shelter.

I will go into thee, thou green glen,
And I will go from thee as I went in,
Under compact of the safeguard of the great ones,
Who would travel the plain as well as the glen.

Ascending the Fairy-Hill of the Pass,
I saw a sight of the sun,
Going sunwise around Ni Ruairidh's Grave,
Where the spectres rise' (*ibid.*).

Building traditions

Although the outward appearance of shielings might have altered over time (see below), in Lewis there seems to have been some conformity in the interior layout from the mid-19th to the mid-20th centuries. During the 19th century Captain Thomas (1862a and 1862b) records that in Lewis part of the inside contained a seat made of a

stone and/or turf, called a *cailleach* or old woman, and the fire. The smoke escaped through the smokehole, called a *fàrlas*. Protruding from the walls, which contained holes or shelves for dairy utensils, and over the fire, was at least one long pointed stone on which to hang cooking vessels. Separated from this space, often by a shoulder of stone or turf, was a bed of heather that took up about two-thirds of the shieling. MacDonald's description (1984) of shielings in Lewis in the 20th century varies little from this.

Whether these patterns were replicated in South Uist is uncertain but the picture is similar: in both locations shielings were used for the same function. The huts only served to house people at night or in bad weather. Carmichael states that throughout most of the Hebrides 'two or three strong healthy girls share the same shieling' (cited in Kissling 1943: 88). This is further supported by Thomas's observations (1862a; 1862b). Boys and girls, in similar numbers, lived in separate bothies, though not too distant from each other.

In 1948 Ake Campbell interviewed Annie MacDonald, who was around 60 years old, in Canna. She gave an account of what is referred to as 'booleying', or 'botheying', in Loch Baghasdail, South Uist, when she was aged 15–20; she gives a detailed description of a hut, though it cannot be taken to mean that all bothies were the same:

'The shieling to which I went had only one door. The roof was of supporting couples (*ceangalaichean*) and rafters. Over them were placed sods with the grassy side facing downwards. Over the sods there was a covering of heather. The heather was tied down by means of heather ropes (*siomain fravich*). Sometimes bracken (*raineach*) was used instead of heather. The heather ropes were tied to wooden pins which were fixed well down into the sods, through the heather. The heather ropes were twisted by means of a twist-handle (*corr-shugain*). Some people twisted heather ropes with their hands.'

'The shieling hut had a hole beside the door. It was between the wall and the roof. In wet weather the hole was closed up with a sod or with heather. The wall was made of sods of turf (*pluic*). They were dug with spades and were taken from as near as possible to the place where the hut was being built. The sods were placed evenly on top of each other. They were in the form of cubes and were so placed that the grassy side faced inwards and the earthen outwards.'

'The room inside was square. The doorway was in the middle. The fireplace was at one end. At the other end there were beds of heather, on the bare floor. There was no partition (*hallan*) inside the hut. They had wooden doors but the doors were not on hinges.'

'Booleying ceased in Uist about fifty years ago.' (cited in Walker 1989: 47–8).

Thomas (1862b) also tells us that, hanging from the roofs of shielings in Lewis, were baskets of weeds and grass, torn from the corn and potato plots, and fish backbones to give to the cattle during milking.

The remains of shielings in South Uist today are occasionally little more than green mounds but most exhibit the remnants of stone footings for their turf walls. The mounds were created not only by the placing of the shielings on natural outcrops (which are well drained and serve as boulder and bedrock earthfast anchorages for the walls), but are also formed from a build-up of continuous or sporadic occupation on the same spot: re-buildings placed on top of wholly or partially demolished earlier structures. It is likely that concentrations on the same plot of ground originated from associations of townships or, at least in many later examples, particular individuals (see Bil 1989), and may be relevant to boundary marking (*ibid.*). A more functional explanation may lie in the ready availability of construction materials and, more importantly, in enhanced drainage. Without excavation it is possible only to surmise construction techniques.

Beveridge (1911: 318) recorded that shielings in South Uist were of an 'unusual type ... consisting of an excavated hollow with a roof little above the natural level of the surface'. Many of today's remains do not exclude this possibility but their denuded nature makes interpretation of their construction limited. Few of the shielings recorded in this survey were entirely stone-built. In the north of South Uist, at Loch Sgiopoir, there is a very late shieling marked on the 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey map, which is a 7m × 5m rectangular structure with walls made of stone and mortar. This is probably the shieling noted by Beveridge as one of the last shielings used in the island (*ibid.*).

On the east coast at Rubha Roiseal is another dry-stone bothy, at the top of a steep-sided rocky valley that descends across a stone dyke to a farmstead (marked on the coast as 'Old Shieling' on the 1:25,000 O.S. map; site USS 030: see Figure 7.3). The walls are only one stone thick, the structure's dimensions being 3m × 3.50m. The structure is unusual in that it has a 1.20m-high corbelled cell, 2m in diameter, incorporated into the wall with an opening into the main interior. Other elements of its layout, however, indicate that this building is a shieling, probably associated with the settlement below. The farm itself was likely to have been a shieling prior to the Clearances when it was taken into cultivation; the surrounding hillside is strewn with evidence of lazy-bedding. This is a pattern commonly replicated throughout the Hebrides after the Clearances (Caird 1951).

Further south, there are a number of settlements strung along the promontory on the east coast from Glacklee to Uisinis, some of which may be shielings that shared the same fate. Two other complexes exist in this stretch of ground, marked on the 1:25,000 O.S. map as Buaille Ormacleit and Scalavat. The element in the name probably derives from *buaille* which means 'fold for cattle' or *buailteach* meaning 'hut for shieling' or 'rich in cattlefolds' (MacLennan 1979). Beveridge (1911: 319) suggests that this meant a cattlefold representing a shieling on a larger scale which, given the multitude of cells on top of and around the central mound, seems most likely. Scalavat is an enigmatic prehistoric site, apparently used in the

Iron Age (today, the evidence for this is the remains of a souterrain, though some form of habitation was probably additionally associated with it: see Hingley 1996), and is covered and surrounded by numerous stone-built cells that are reminiscent of many of the shielings recorded by Beveridge in North Uist (1911), though not all of them are necessarily so. A further collection of cells exists around the Iron Age wheelhouses and souterrains to the west of Bàgh Uisinis (Usinish Bay) at Uamh Iosal.

Continuing southwards, the first edition and modern 1:25,000 O.S. maps show that nearly all of the string of valleys that come down the east coast (such as Choradail, Heileasdail and Liadail) have some structures at their base; there is an additional farmstead further down the coast at Bàgh Bholuim (Bolum Bay). Although they have not been studied, these structures may tentatively be linked to shielings that changed in function alongside the introduction of sheep farming and the Clearances. However, this is possibly contradicted by the evidence given to the Crofters Commission in 1884 by Donald MacLellan, a crofter at 'Garra-na-mony', who clumsily suggests his grandfather lived in 'Corriedale' prior to the Clearances (1884: 740–2). The *buaille* prefix appears in the place-name Buail' a' Ghoill at the top of Liadail, on the side of Beinn Mhòr, further indicating the development and pattern of cattle pasturing on the east coast suggested above.

No corbelled beehive huts, believed by Carmichael (1884) to only occur where they are well known in Lewis and Harris, were discovered during field walking, although three have been found in Skye by the RCAHMS (1993), suggesting that they do occur more widely.

The shieling huts of South Uist are generally amorphous sub-rectangular to sub-circular shapes, with inside measurements varying from approximately 1.50m × 2m to 2.50m × 3m across. Shielings occur as single or multi-cellular units and are occasionally scattered across a cluster of two or three mounds. A large 'porch' or *fosglan* is often attached to the main cell. At the base of the mounds or at least nearby, there are usually footings for a number of smaller circular cells, approximately 1m–1.50m in diameter. These are the remains of small structures for storing dairy products, or *cotain* (pens for housing young animals). No evidence was found for tathing – larger animal enclosures – with the possible exception of a 29.90m × 17.70m structure composed of large boulders and incorporating two small elongated cells (USS 008). It is not discernible whether this was a tathing compound or a fang/sheepfold, with the cells either being huts or serving to separate sheep before, during, or after an activity such as dipping or shearing.

Ascertaining how dilapidated the shieling huts were allowed to become before rebuilding is not possible: turf structures have a varied lifespan (see Dodgshon 1993c: 424) and turfs need to be able to dry out; furthermore, the timber used in providing a frame for turf and thatch roofing, although minimal, was taken off and carried back to the farms at the end of the summer season (MacKenzie 1904). The records suggest 'repairing' was more necessary than annual reconstruction, though it is a possibility that this

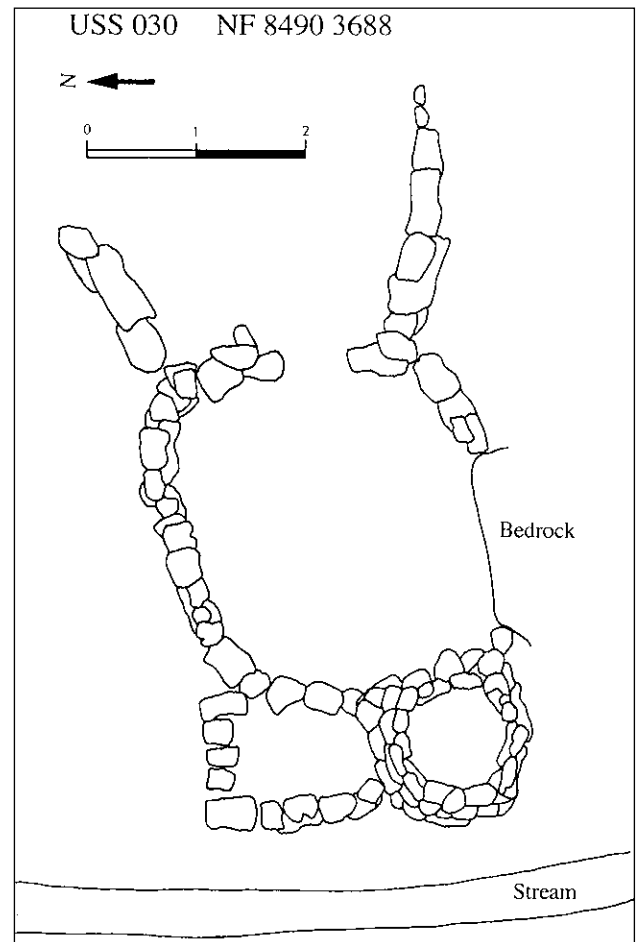


Figure 7.3. USS 030 at Rubha Roiseal was a drystone bothy

is simply a turn of phrase. The complaints of one visitor about the lack of protection against the elements (Gaffney 1959: 29) may provide some indication.

Where structures were not concentrated together in one spot, turf buildings will have left little trace and thus many shieling sites may be lost to us. Early shielings might have left no obvious archaeological trace on the surface. Shielings in Wales were often no more than tents (Bil 1992) and in 1775 Pennant recorded on the Isle of Jura wigwam-like shielings made over a faggot frame. It is possible that similar shieling constructions existed in other parts of the Western Isles at some point, especially prior to the climatic downturn of the 'Little Ice Age' beginning in the 13th century. Iron Age dates have been obtained from the base of shieling accumulations in both Skye (Roger Miket pers. comm.) and Lewis (Geraint Coles pers. comm.), although there is no definitive evidence to link these to transhumance activities. Elsewhere in the North Atlantic, Norse shielings were often turf-built (Sveinbjarnardóttir 1989; Mahler 1993) and excavations of a turf structure at Earsairdh in Barra (Keith Branigan pers. comm.) produced a steatite spindlewhorl and grass-impressed pottery of the Viking Age.

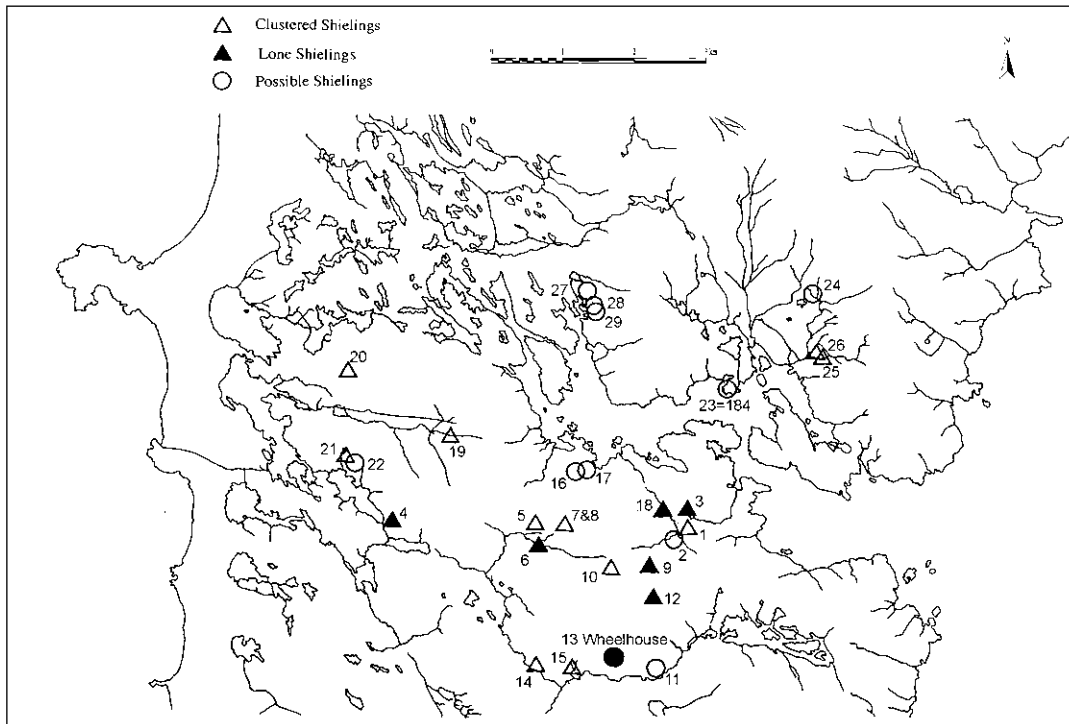


Figure 7.4. The distribution of shieling huts within the central survey area

Patterns in the landscape

Within the archetypal model settlement pattern of the Western Highlands and Hebrides, the placing of shielings just beyond the head dyke would be expected. In the township of Milton (Gearraidh Bhailteas), although a series of dykes extends out into the hills, Lund and Warren (1997) have suggested that the band of lochs, rivers, wet peaty bogs and hills acted as a physical boundary, replacing the necessity for the construction of a head dyke. Even without further substantial survey, this pattern seems replicated in the adjoining townships of Cill Donnain and Bornais and probably extends throughout most of the island. In the absence of any man-made feature, many shielings were built just beyond its topographic equivalent, above the wet peaty plains and on the lower slopes of the hills (Figure 7.4). Where possible the majority of shielings were placed along the first rise of the hills, near the main settlements, although some are found at some distance from the farmland.

The above locational strategy is disrupted by the eastern lochs that encroach substantially between the hills. Loch Aoineart lies within the survey area and there is evidence for shieling remains along the valleys that descend on the eastern half of its coast (see Chapter 4 for more survey data and place-name discussion for Loch Aoineart). Any evidence within its western half has been covered by the settlement of fishing communities in newly created crofts by the Duke of Argyll between 1799 and 1800 (Caird 1987) as well as by crofters displaced by the Clearances. The best evidence on this part of the coastline is on the north coast of the loch, associated with the settlement at Airigh nam Ban (Arinambane). The place-name appears in Bald's 1805 map as Arie-na-Bain. It incorporates the Gaelic

word for shieling, *àirigh*, and was translated by Carmichael (1884) as meaning 'shieling of the women'. Carmichael also states that this was a favoured shieling ground for the older inhabitants of South Uist (*ibid.*). On Bald's map two further hut clusters exist on the south coast of the loch, at Ru Ronach (Rubha Roinich) and Hunnasary (Unasaraidh), the *airigh* suffix of the latter place-name indicating that both of these sites were originally shielings. The word *airigh* derives from the Norse, *-eary*; it occurs in Gaelic names as a prefix and as a suffix in names of Norse origin (Iain Fraser pers. comm.), perhaps further indicating the antiquity of some of these grounds.¹ Uilleam MacDonald has suggested that the same person named 'Hunna' may be also connected to a site in Aisgernis, *Tobhta Thuna* (pers. comm.).

Place-name evidence may serve to indicate the prevalence and demise of the shieling tradition in South Uist (Figure 7.5). The presence of *buaille* has been discussed above; its meaning does, however, seem to have been lost in more recent place-names. There are more recent crofting townships within Iochdar that have this prefix: Buaille Dhubh and Buail' uachdraich, respectively meaning 'Black Cattlefold' and 'Cattlefold of the Cream'. Although these names more probably derive from cattlefolds that were permanently occupied during or after the clearances of other townships, Iochdar being spared this and turned into crofts fairly early on (Caird 1979), modern local tradition holds that *buaille* is a Gaelicization of 'bowl' (Euan Wilson pers. comm.). The physical shape of the land and the rich grazings to be had for cream production from these areas provide the descriptive terms for the naming. Buaille Dhubh is thought to have gained its ominous name from an incident

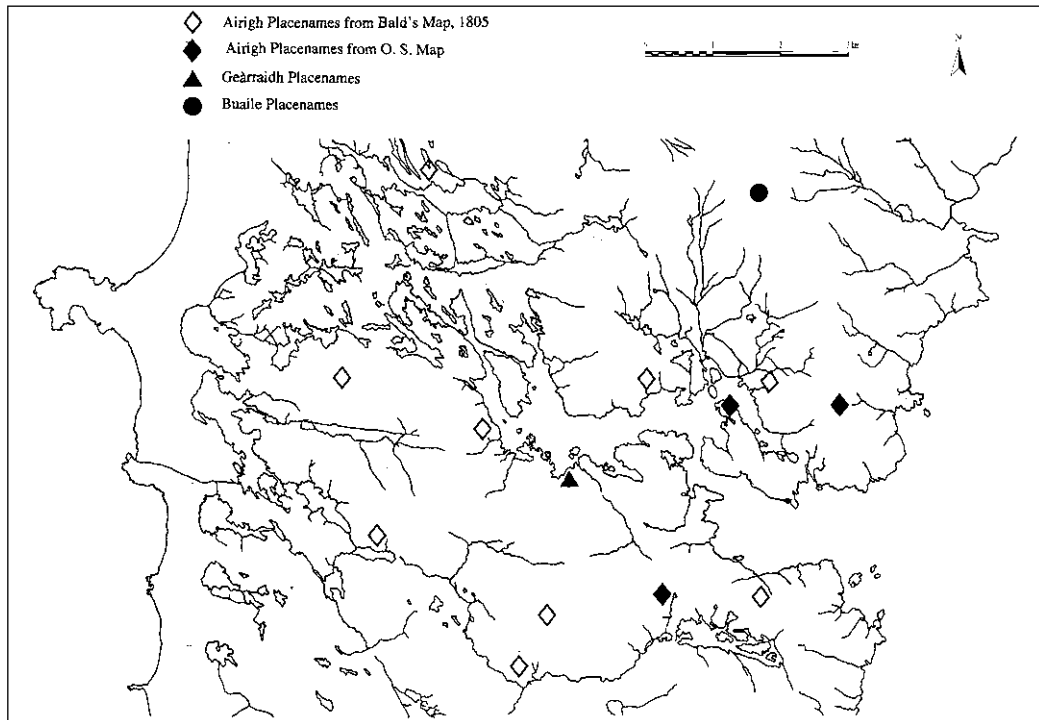


Figure 7.5. The distribution of shieling place-names within the central survey area

when a baby who was kept on the floor, as cots were not used by the poorer cottars, fell into the hearth and was badly injured (*ibid.*).

Within the survey area settlements and topographic features bearing the *airigh* suffix appear on Bald's 1805 map, Thompson's 1823 map and the first edition O.S. map. These include the hills of Ben Corary (Beinn Coraraidh), Traig Arry-More and Ariona Cappin plus the rivers of Hornary and Allt Alasary. Only some of these additional names have survived in the modern 1:25,000 O.S. map; the rest have been altered and lost this element. Modern maps, however, do record a few places with this element: Airigh na h'Aon Oidche ('shieling of the one-night stand'), Glac Airigh Hordaig, Rubh' Airigh an Sgadin ('shieling of the herring point') and Airigh an Lagain ('shieling of the little hollow'). In none of these cases was there any evidence for a shieling hut and the last is attached to an exposed rocky hilltop unlikely to have attracted settlement. Bil (1989; 1992) has noted the fluidity of the use of the term and it is possible that over the 19th century the human transhumant element might have been abandoned in favour of a distant or hill-grazing component.

The name Airigh na h'Aon Oidche is common throughout the Outer Hebrides, occurring on O.S. maps for South Uist, North Uist and Benbecula, and also recorded by tradition in Susary, off the coast of Harris (MacKillop 1988–90). Nearly all of these sites are directly associated with tales of ghosts and monsters, such as the place with this name on Benbecula near Loch Bà Una which was used by a group of Nunton men who were consumed by hook-beaked creatures in the guise of women (Burnett 1986). The reason for this common occurrence is unknown; there is perhaps

a case to be made that the name indicates a shieling occupied for one night whilst moving between more distant shieling grounds, the horror stories growing out of a need to explain the naming (Fraser 1993–94). However, none of the South Uist, Benbecula and Susary examples seems to be located on poor grazings or particularly distant from either settlement, resources or coast, perhaps negating the argument that they would be only used for one night, or even a limited period. Thus the origin of this name remains problematic.

There is some confusion over the meaning of *gearraidh*, which may mean either home pasture or shieling (MacLennan 1979), the latter being the interpretation favoured by Curwen (1938).² In South Uist the name mostly occurs as 'geary' or 'garry' on the blacklands near the western settlement areas, although these places might have been incorporated into the townships over time (see Parker Pearson 1996 and Chapter 2). Beveridge (1911) records that, in the Uists, the term referred to the intervening strip between the arable and the hill pasture; Carmichael (1884) and Fraser (1973) qualify this interpretation further. Carmichael documents this place-name element as describing a cattfold near the township that was used in dry weather, in tandem with a cattfold on the machair that was used in wetter conditions. Fraser suggests that in the Uists the term indicated out-by land, pasture-land in-between the arable and the common grazings. This seems to be the most likely meaning but further qualification is necessary for accurate interpretation. The name does occur on the Bald map on the east coast, at Frogary.

In the township of Milton, the place-names Loch Anary, Airigh-mhuilinn ('shieling of the mill') and Mingary

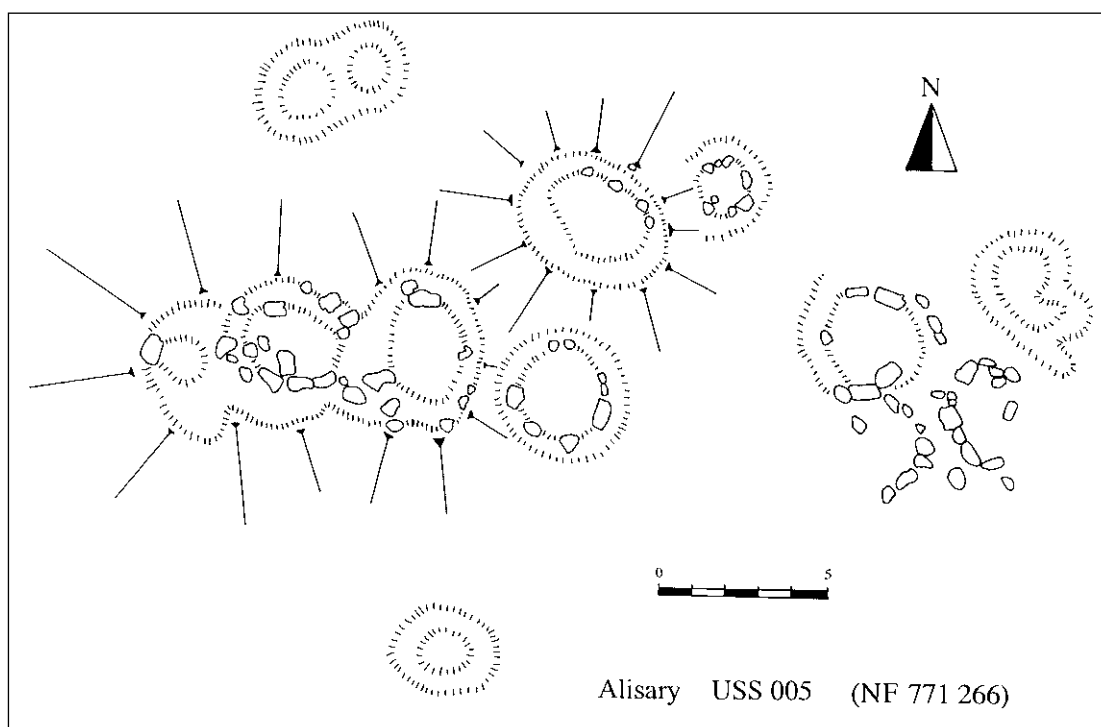


Figure 7.6. The 'summertown' probably called Alisary (USS 005)

(Mingearraidh) appear on maps from Bald to the modern O.S. map. However, there is some indication that these may stem from local myths associating the site with Flora MacDonald's introduction to Bonnie Prince Charlie (Jim Symonds pers. comm.). This area became the focus for the siting of a mill from which the township gained its Anglicized name (see Lund and Warren 1997). The journals of two men claiming to be in the Prince's entourage, when Charlie had been forced to keep to the hills for safety and had to carry his own shirts (MacEachain 1916), place the site of this romantic rendezvous at a shieling at Alisary. Captain MacDonald said that it was sited 'within a mile to Milntoun, where Flora MacDonald lived as a housekeeper to her brother, young Milntoun' (1895: 329). MacEachain was more detailed: 'on the slopes of Sheaval, ... south of Loch Eynort and rising to the north-east from ... Milton (or Arrivoulin) on the low ground near the ocean' (1916: 250). The field survey's results suggest that Alisary is an extremely numerous cluster of cells at NF 771 266 (site USS 005: see Figure 7.6).

In nearly all cases the shielings were placed beside substantial streams, from which they have often taken their name. These provided fresh water needed in the preparation of dairy products and the cleaning of utensils. Dairying activities took place near the huts, requiring the grazing of milch cattle within the vicinity. It was often the practice to put the milch cattle to pasture nearer the wintertown on what tended to be the better quality pasture. The younger animals were kept alongside, maximizing weaning and milk production, but the two groups had to be herded separately (Bil 1989). It was not necessary to keep older, male and barren animals nearer the settlements

so they were herded earlier than the other animals to more distant and less fertile grazing (Bil 1992). With these cattle needing less supervision, their herders often stayed at the summertown and took shelter amongst the rocks in makeshift windbreaks, the remains of which are common throughout Hebridean and Highland landscapes. The 'Lone Shieling' of romantic literature is manifest in attempts to utilize remote grazings where available. In Rhum (Love 1981) and Lewis (MacSween 1959), families exploited pairs of shielings at alternate distances from the farmstead; often different groups shared the same ground at alternate times (Gaffney 1967). If this practice existed in South Uist then we could suggest that the second set of shielings was in the east coast valleys, discussed above. Herding beasts to distant grazings and between alternative pastures gave access to different herbage which was essential to the animals' health (MacSween 1959).

The township boundaries recorded on the Bald map indicate that each community had access to a strip of land incorporating every topographic zone. It would seem logical to suppose that each farm grazed its cattle on the hills in its township, but the fluidity of the township boundaries and movement across them would appear to be at odds to this. Lund and Warren (pers. comm.) have oral evidence that the tenants of Milton went to the shieling in Gleann Chill Donnain. As suggested by Bil (1989), this could additionally include individual links to particular grounds passed down according to kinship. It would seem reasonable to speculate, through the place-name affix, that the east coast shieling of Buail Ormacleit was linked to the township of Ormacleit yet on Bald's map, 'Buail Ormaclett' is situated in a piece of land separated

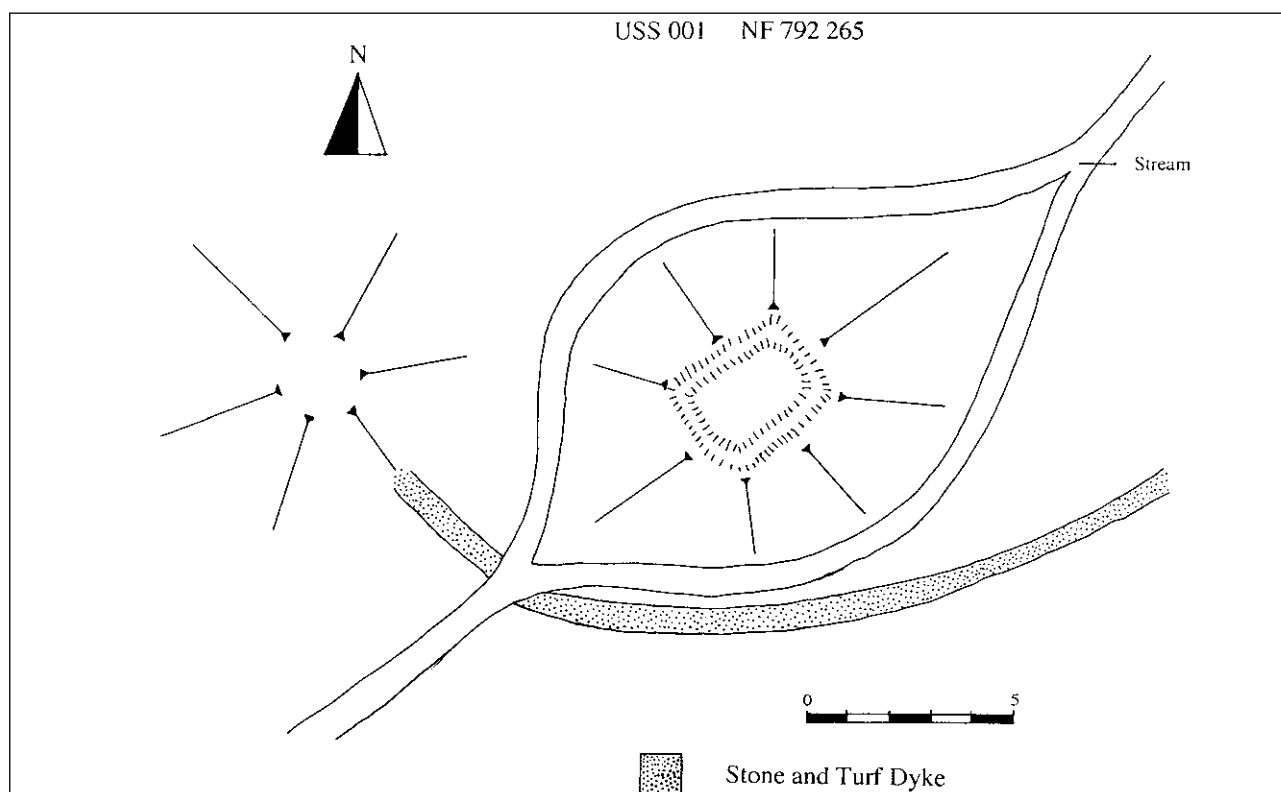


Figure 7.7. Two shieling mounds (USS 001) linked by a dyke

from the latter by five township boundaries. Furthermore, although this section of land is opposite the townships of Tobhta Mhor and Dreumasdal, it is not allocated to any settlement. If this land was reserved for summer pasture, exploited by tenants from distant townships, this argument would be furthered.

Without further investigation, particularly through oral tradition, this link must remain tentative, but the general tone of the informants to the Crofting Commission and the research of Thomas (1862) and Beveridge (1911) would seem to indicate that personal links with shielings transcended township boundaries. In contrast, Bil (1992) has emphasized a possible link of shielings in Perthshire with the marking of boundaries. The extents of townships marked on Bald's map maybe representative rather than actual (Lund and Warren 1997), and this evidence is thus problematic.

Elsewhere in the Western Isles there does appear to be some correlation of shielings with the topographical features that demarcated townships (see Love 1981; Raven 1996). The Lord MacDonald Papers, relating to the Isle of Skye, reveal the importance of the use of shielings and pastures in demarcating ownership of land. A list by Alexander MacDonald of Sleat, dated between 1733–9, of recommended programs for improvement for the running of his estates reveals the dangers posed to his position by exploitation from another estate:

‘There is a large Muir Common to a great part of Trotternish which bounds with a Common muir

belonging to Macleods Lands, which his tenants have lately Inclosed & now they send their horses to grass all summer over on Macdonald's muir, so that it is credibly Informed that frequently 2000 of the Macleods their horses will be feeding on it at once. This tho not so sensibly felt as yet by the Master as by the tenants, & will in time decrease the Rent or at least hinder the Improvement of it & lose firm the property of that muir in a few years’ (Lord MacDonald Papers: GD 221/3695/4).

A further boundary dispute, recorded in 1798, between neighbouring townships in Skye illustrates that the demarcation of ownership went beyond care and use of the ‘grass’, and that the placing of ‘shealbothies’ played a direct role in stating boundaries and land ownership:

‘there were always disputes respecting the possession betwixt Aultdarrach & Aultnamisrach as the Deponent saw one day a Shealing erected by the tenants of Sconser broke down by MacKinnon's orders and in eight days thereafter those erected by MacKinnon broke down by the people of Sconser. Depones that at the Depennents return from Inverness Shealings belonging to the people of Aird erected at Corrievrenderan were thrown down according to the information they had received from the said ... MacKinnon that the said Corry belonged to the people of Strath’ (Lord MacDonald Papers: GD 221/5078/5).

A small number of shielings found in South Uist are placed

adjacent to some of the few dykes in the hills. Occasionally dykes run directly onto shieling mounds (see Figure 7.7). However, this evidence needs to be incorporated into future landscape studies investigating the nature and development of townships on the island.

The demise of transhumance

The people of the Hebrides found no allies amongst the improvers such as the Rev. Dr Walker who visited South Uist at some time between 1764 and 1771. His disparaging advice might well have helped to seal the fate of many of the islanders:

‘The raising of Black Cattle promotes no Species of Industry among these people, but on the contrary is the very Nursery of Idleness; whereas a large Quantity of superplus Wool would support great Numbers of them in one of the most useful Branches of Industry’ (in McKay 1981: 81).

With a population increasing along with the growth of the fishing and kelp industries, there was a constant pressure on land. The failure of the kelp industry fixed the dependency of the laird on the income derived from his hill pastures to keep him out of debt. The situation climaxed in the selling of the South Uist estate to Colonel John Gordon of Cluny in 1838 and South Uist succumbed to what Prebble calls the ‘Cheviot Tide’ (1963). Even after the Clearances land pressure was further exacerbated, with displaced tenants seeking to exploit already stretched resources within even further limited ground-space.

Throughout western Highland and Island Scotland shieling grounds ‘since the introduction of sheep ... [were] looked upon as the most valuable part of a highland property’ (letter from a factor in the Breadalbane Collection cited in Gray 1957: 97–98). In Glengarry the rent for a shieling went from £15 to £350 per annum (Grant 1961). The tenants of South Uist complained to the Crofters Commission in 1884 that, of the hill pasture which had not been turned to the sheep, they had been forced to put their rightful portion of common grazing into cultivation. Alternatively it had been almost entirely squatted upon by the landless, with no reduction in the rent the tenant paid to the laird.

The role of black cattle in the Hebridean economy had been in decline since before the Clearances and, throughout most of Scotland, the shieling traditions had begun to fade. John Matheson, documenting this trend, informed the Crofters Commission in 1884 that neighbours in Lewis had started entrusting their now diminished cattle stocks to one woman for the summer (Cameron 1990: 28). Women and the old maintained what Bil calls a ‘grass roots popularity’ (1990a) for the practice, perhaps holding onto what they considered the last vestige of their domain, till it faded out in Uist in the early decades of the 20th century. Shielings have only survived in Lewis, where, since changes in beef and dairy subsidies after the Second World War (Parman 1990), they are little more than holiday homes for the urban dwellers of Stornoway.

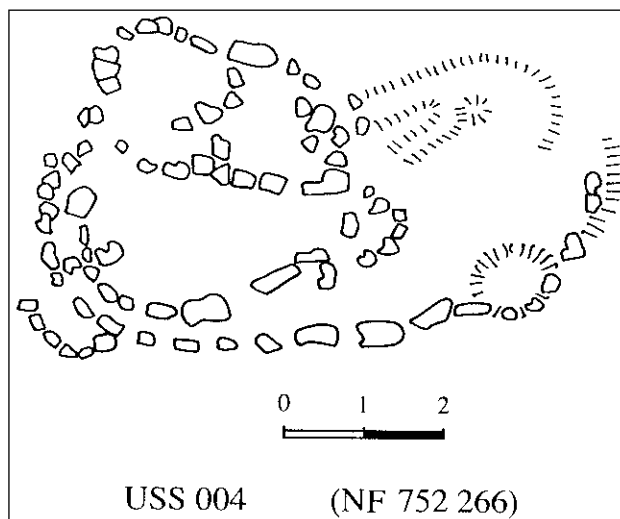


Figure 7.8. A large mound with a stone cell (USS 004)

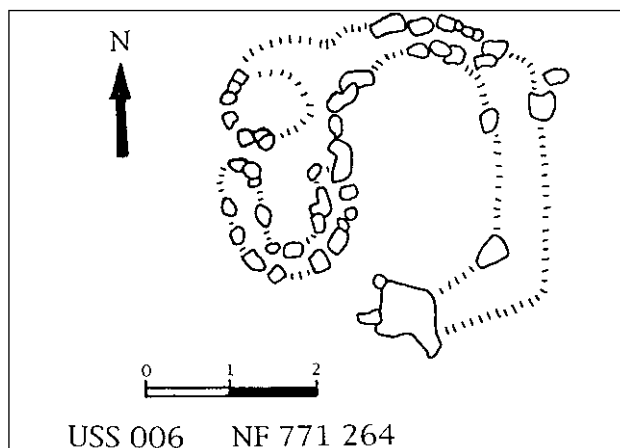


Figure 7.9. Two adjoining cells (USS 006)

Conclusion

A study of shielings in South Uist currently rises little above supposition, achieved by combining transposed theories and customs documented from other places onto a practice that is known to have taken place during the 18th and 19th centuries. Only through a continued program of study can any further concrete understanding be gained. Collection of oral traditions would be an invaluable resource, as would more detailed surveys within the hills themselves and on library shelves for documents that are often hard to obtain. Excavation of shieling cells, which are generally inaccessible and submerged under peat, may help shed some light on the more immediate problem of construction techniques, and it may also provide some evidence on the importance of shieling sites, the length and nature of occupation plus the developments, changes and transitions the tradition underwent through time. Through such projects our grasp of the social cohesion and concepts of identity mediated through shielings can only be enriched, thus adding to the building of wider pictures of the South

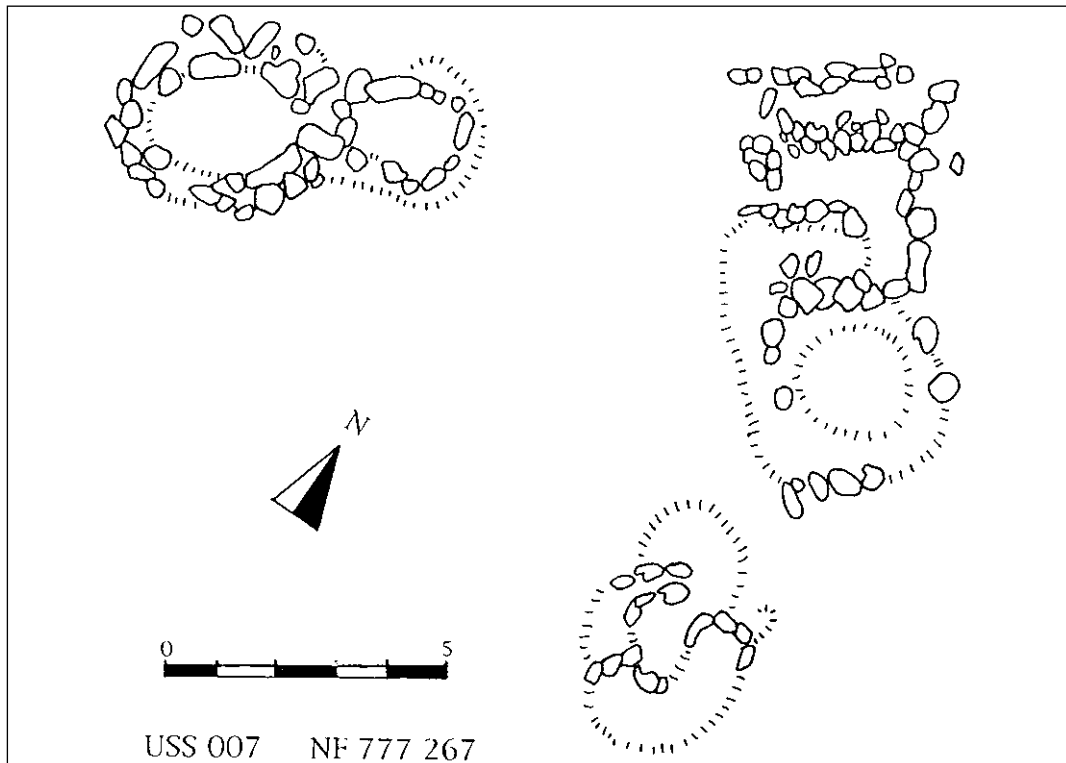


Figure 7.10. Three shielings beside a cliff face (USS 007)

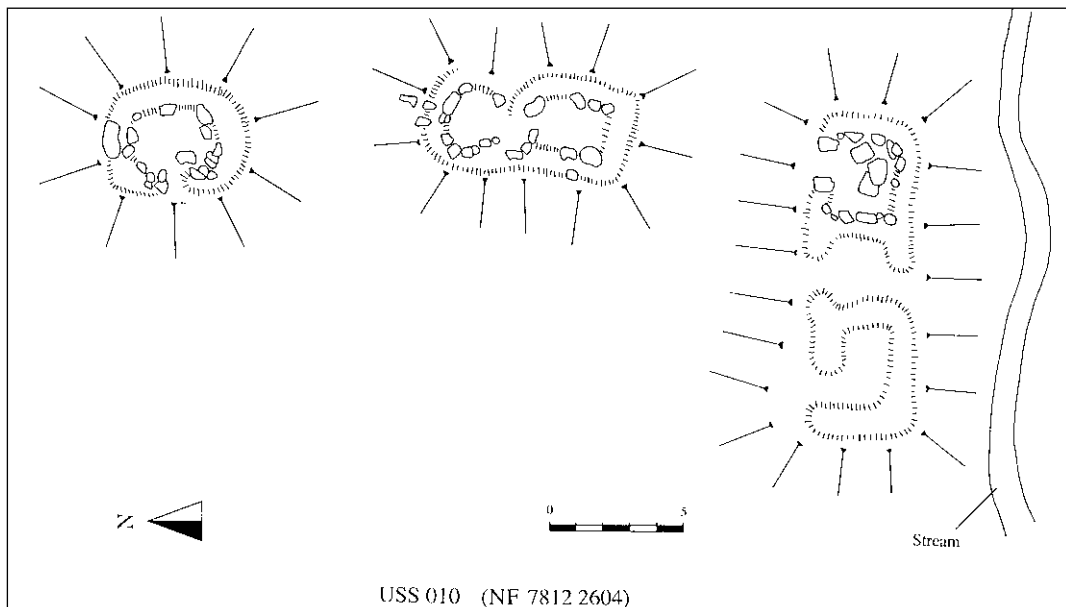


Figure 7.11. Three shieling mounds (USS 010)

Uist landscape as well as the yearly cycles and cosmologies of societies in the island's past.

Catalogue of sites

The sites are split into two main areas, the main survey area (east of the A865, the main road that crosses the island from north to south), and the east coast area (centred on the Uisinis peninsula). They are listed in numerical order

and given their N.G.R. to at least six figures, although eight were taken where possible. Not all the sites recorded are definitely shielings so an interpretation is offered at the beginning of the brief descriptions that follow. The survey was undertaken in 1996 and 1997.

Main Survey Area

USS 001 (NF 792 265) Two shieling mounds, 3m diameter.

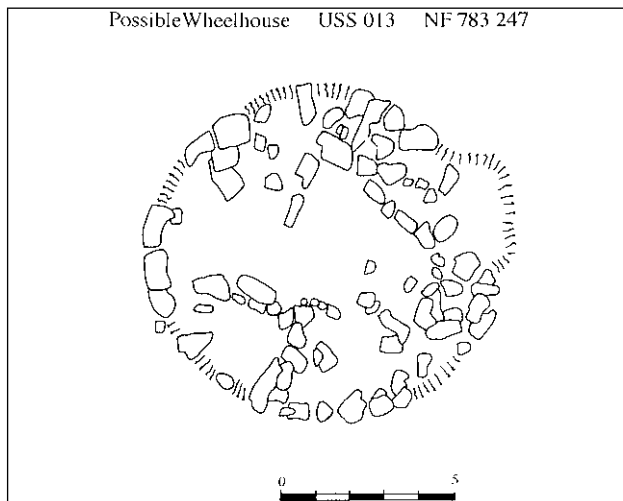


Figure 7.12. A possible Middle Iron Age wheelhouse (USS 013)

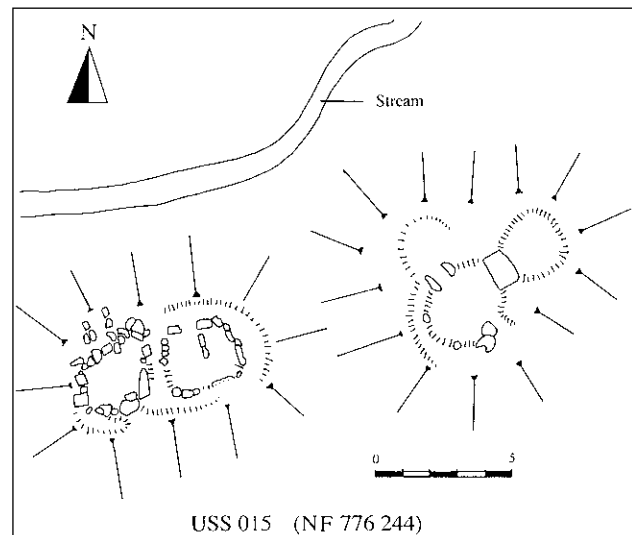


Figure 7.14. Two shieling mounds (USS 015) beside a stream

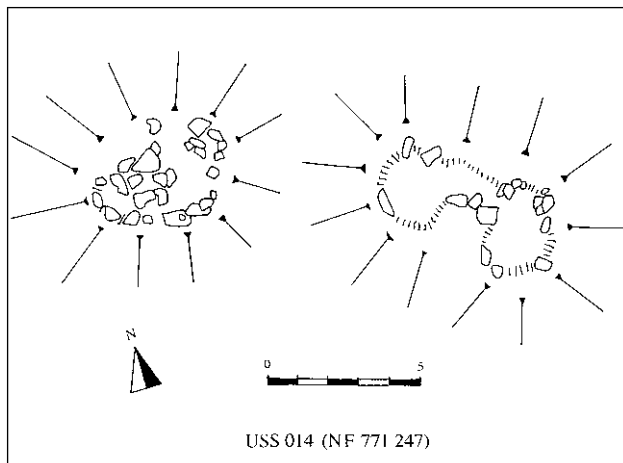


Figure 7.13. Two shieling mounds (USS 014)

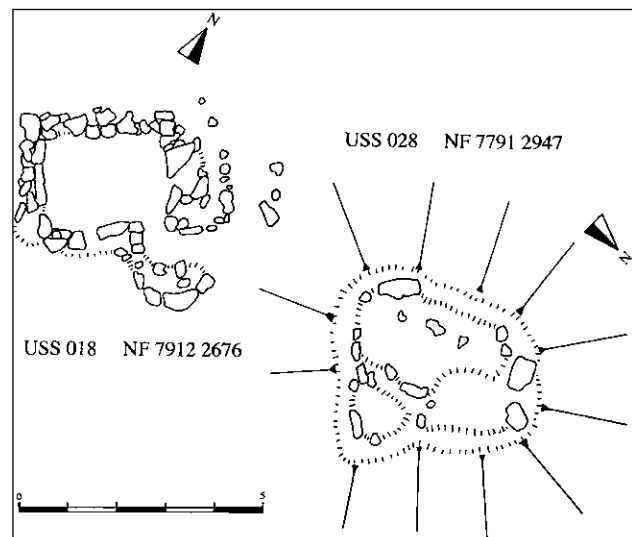


Figure 7.15. A shieling on a rocky promontory (USS 018) and a shieling covered in heather (USS 028)

Eastern mound exhibits sub-rectangular turf walls. Little structural evidence on western mound. A stream flows on both sides of eastern mound. The two mounds are linked by a stone- and turf-built dyke that roughly follows the stream's edge. Figure 7.7.

USS 002 (NF 790 265) Possible shieling mound, 4m diameter. Little visible evidence for structures.

USS 003 (NF 789 268) Large mound, 3m high, on bedrock and boulder foundations with turf and stone wall footings for sub-rectangular cell on summit.

USS 004 (NF 752 266) Large mound with sub-circular cell on summit. Double-skinned stone wall-footings around main cell. Two small ante-chambers adjoined to main cell with a further enclosure outside entrance to the east. Figure 7.8.

USS 005 (NF 771 266) Alisary? Large summertown comprising one main string of cells along two adjoining mounds and three satellite clusters. Main cluster has five main cells, 2.70m–4m diameter, and five smaller ones, under 2m. Groups to north and

south both have two cells under 2m. Eastern mound has a circular main cell and ante-chamber and additional porch, 4m × 3m total diameter. Much evidence for earlier structures underneath later phases. Figure 7.6.

USS 006 (NF 771 264) Two adjoining sub-rectilinear cells. Double-skinned stone wall-footings utilizing two large earthfast boulders. Eastern cell is 2.70m × 2m, western cell is 1.80m × 1m. Figure 7.9.

USS 007 (NF 777 267) Three shielings beside cliff-face at head of valley. Two are sub-circular with smaller cells built into them. The third is rectangular with a small rectangular ante-chamber. Latter is constructed on top of rubble of earlier structure. Figure 7.10.

USS 008 (NF 777 266) Possible tathing compound or sheep fang, 29m × 15.70m, with two cells built into the walls. Constructed from large boulders.

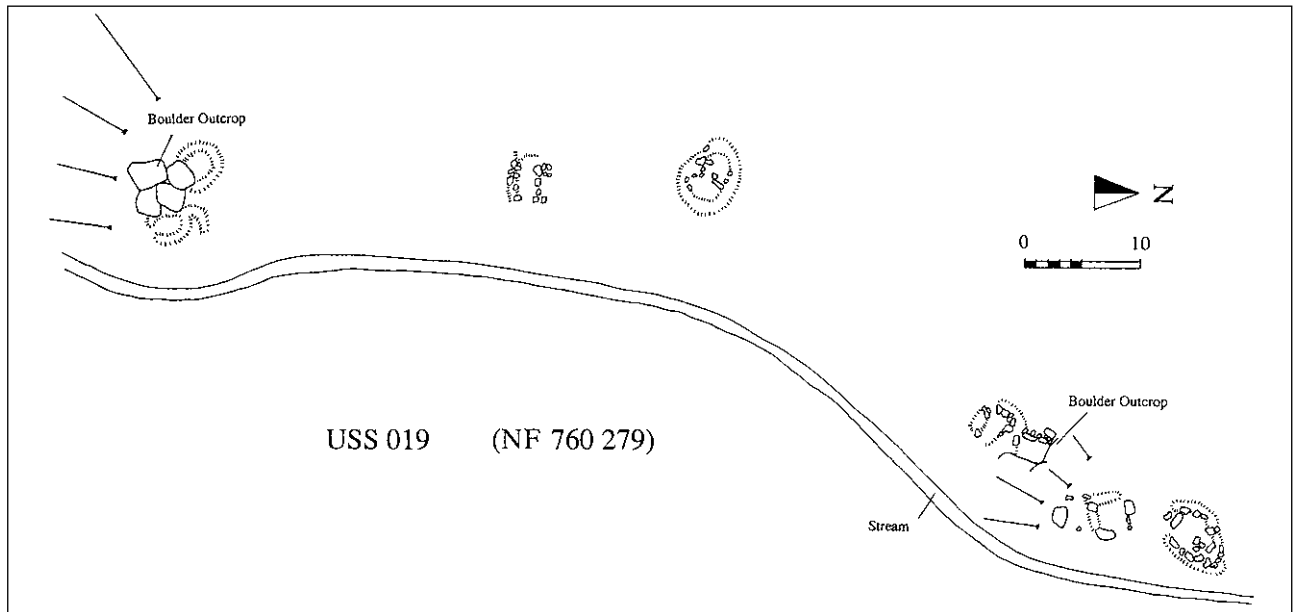


Figure 7.16. Shielings along the line of a stream (USS 019)

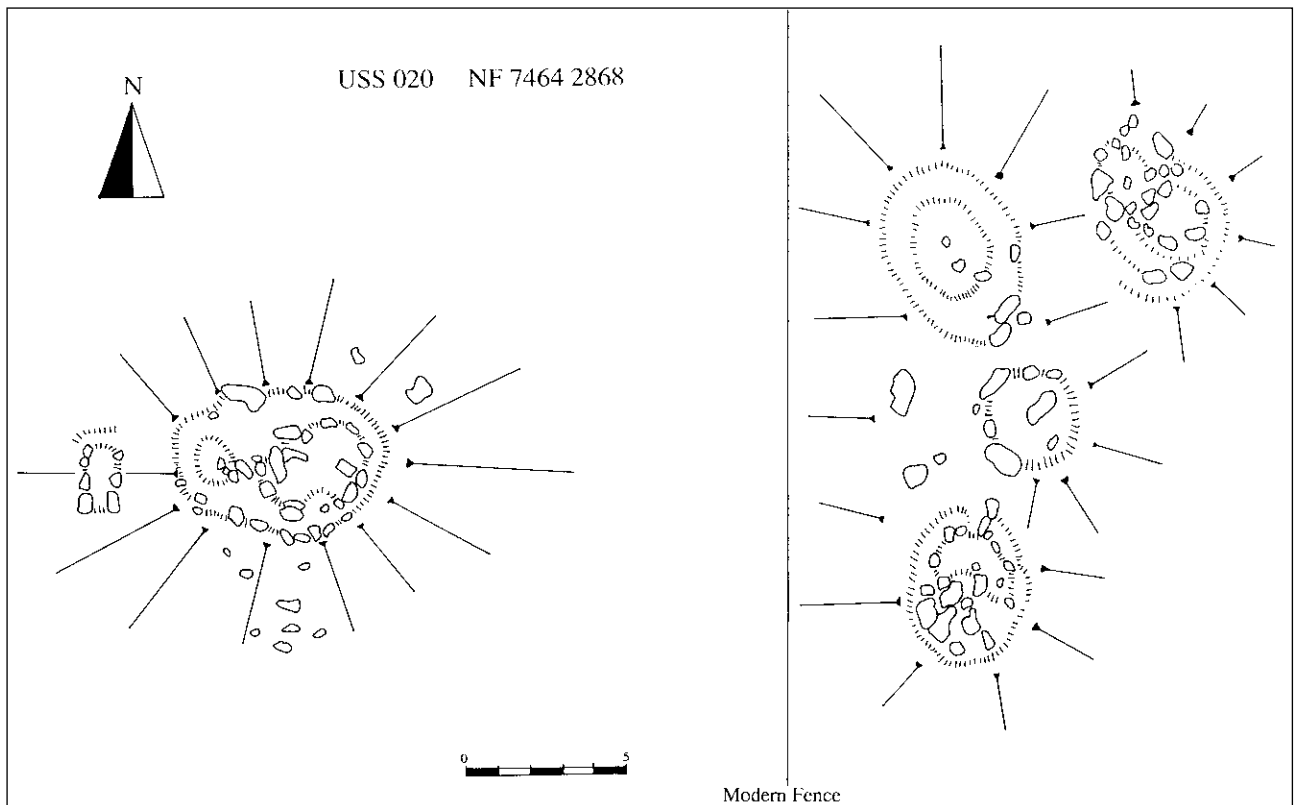


Figure 7.17. Two mounds with six cells (USS 020)

USS 009 (NF 786 261) Rectangular shieling hut nestled in crevice in cliff-face, beside river. Walls a single stone in thickness, standing several courses high.

USS 010 (NF 7812 2604) Three shieling mounds. Northern mound with sub-rectangular cell, 3m × 2m. Central mound with two cells, one circular and 1.50m diameter, the other rectangular and 2.50m × 2m. Southern mound at right angles to the other

two with two sub-rectangular main cells, 2m × 2.40m and 2m × 1.90m. The space separating them might have been a further cell, now denuded. All cells of stone and turf walls. Figure 7.11.

USS 011 (NF 788 246) Possible shieling mound with rubble on summit, indicating denuded single cell.

USS 012 (NF 787 256) Shieling mound with double skin of

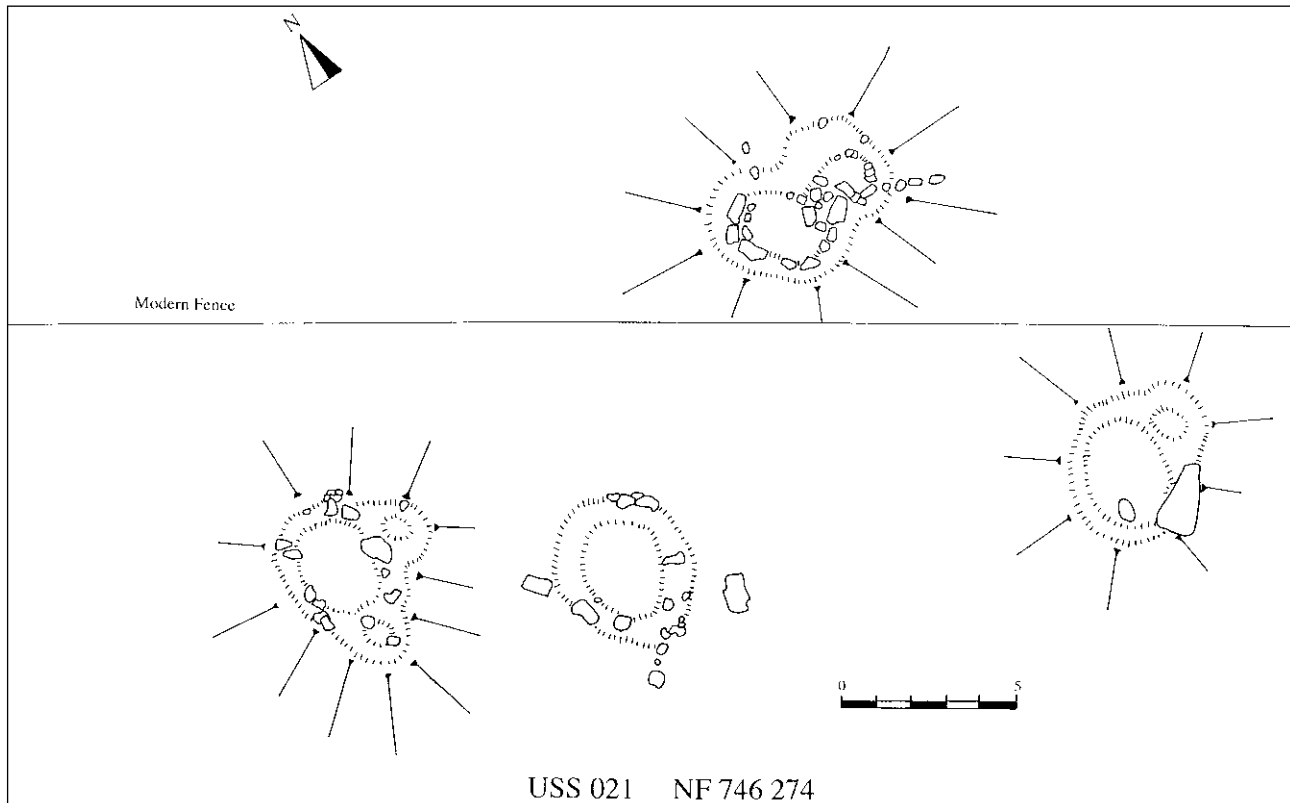


Figure 7.18. Four shieling mounds (USS 021)

stone wall-footings for sub-circular cell 3m diameter, and oval ante-chamber 1m long.

USS 013 (NF 783 247) Probable wheelhouse. Only top stones visible in heather, indicating upper skins of circular structure and inward pointing spokes, 10m diameter. Depth of at least 0.50m. Figure 7.12.

USS 014 (NF 771 247) Two shieling mounds. North mound with rubble of sub-oval cell, outer measurement 5m. South mound with evidence for turf and stone walls of two sub-circular cells, 2.30m. diameter. Figure 7.13.

USS 015 (NF 776 244) Two adjacent shieling mounds beside river. Each exhibiting 'figure-of-eight' structures constructed of stone and turf walls. Figure 7.14.

USS 016 (NF 776 274) Small mound with remnants of turf walling on surface for possible shieling cell, 3m diameter.

USS 017 (NF 778 274) Possible shieling cell, sub-rectangular turf wall footings, 2m × 2.40m.

USS 018 (NF 7912 2676) Shieling on rocky promontory above valley floor, stone footings for rectangular cell with attached porch. Figure 7.15.

USS 019 (NF 760 279) Cluster of shielings following line of stream. Main cluster composed of four separate cells, from 2m to 2.50m across. Northern cell with ante-chamber. Two sub-rectangular cells 30m to southwest, eastern cell 5m long with central partition. Two further cells 60m to south of main cluster

built against boulder outcrop, eastern cell with chamber on north wall. Figure 7.16.

USS 020 (NF 7464 2868) Two mounds linked to one another with six cells distributed over both. A further mound is situated 6m to west, with one main cell and an adjacent smaller one on summit. There is an additional small cell at the base of mound. Figure 7.17.

USS 021 (NF 746 274) Cluster of four shieling mounds, each with a main cell on the summit, three exhibiting evidence for two smaller cells near base. Figure 7.18.

USS 022 (NF 7477 2732) Heather-covered knoll with some indications of denuded structures on summit, possible shieling.

USS 023 (NF 797 284) Rubha Bhualte, a peninsula cut off from mainland by turf dyke. Remnants of turf wall-footings for small structure, possibly a shieling (site 184 in Chapter 4).

USS 024 (NF 8082 2964) Possible shieling mound, mostly covered in turf but a line of stones suggests a wall with a massive earthfast boulder. There is another mound to the west with a flattened surface.

USS 025 (NF 8097 2878) Altasary? Two shieling mounds, with rectangular cells on their summits and evidence for a large number of subsidiary cells in surrounding area. Stone dyke leads down to stream. Figure 7.19.

USS 026 (NF 8094 2886) High Town? Large mound with rectangular double-celled structure on summit. Main cell is 3m ×

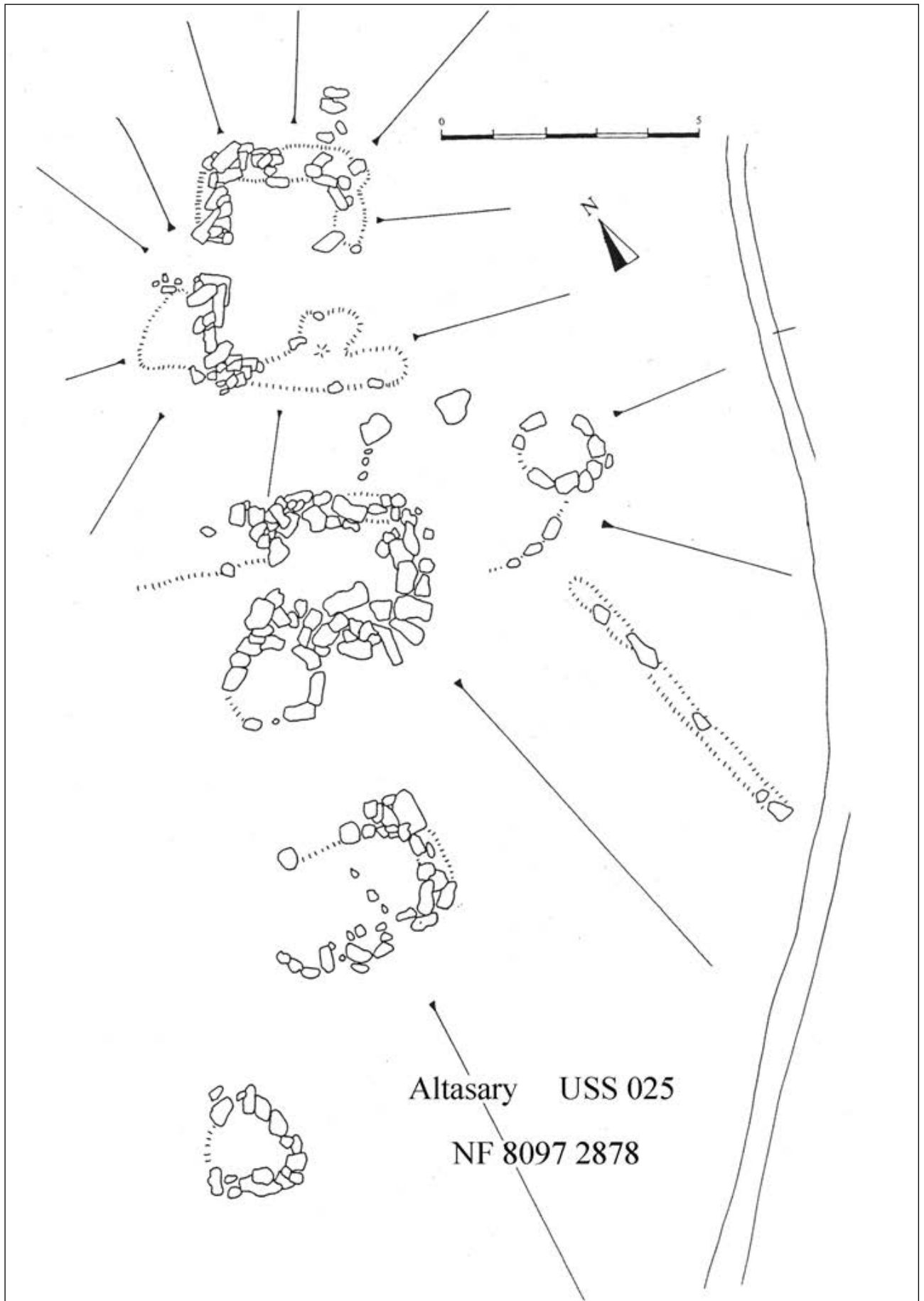


Figure 7.19. Two shieling mounds at Altasary (USS 025)

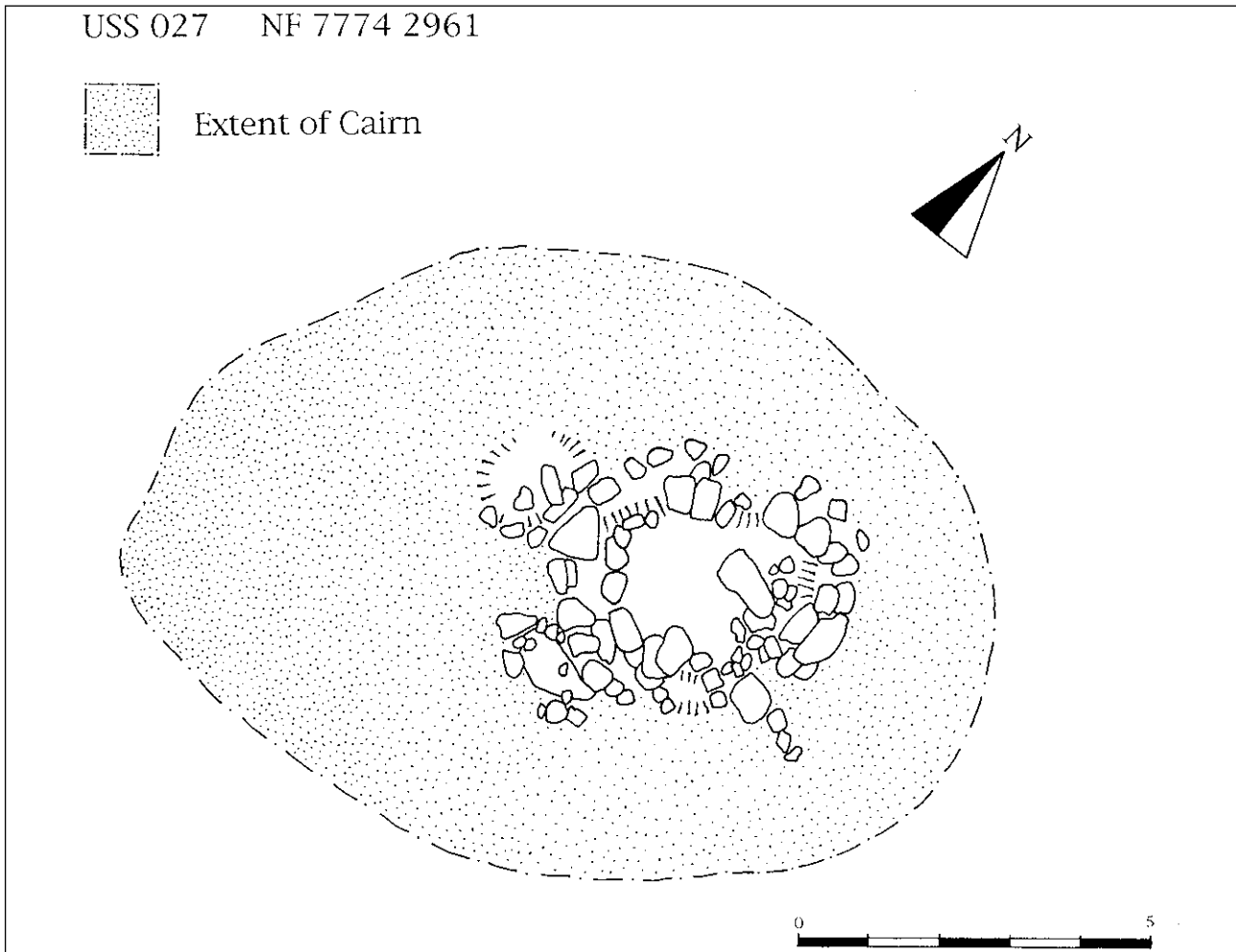


Figure 7.20. A probable shieling (USS 027)

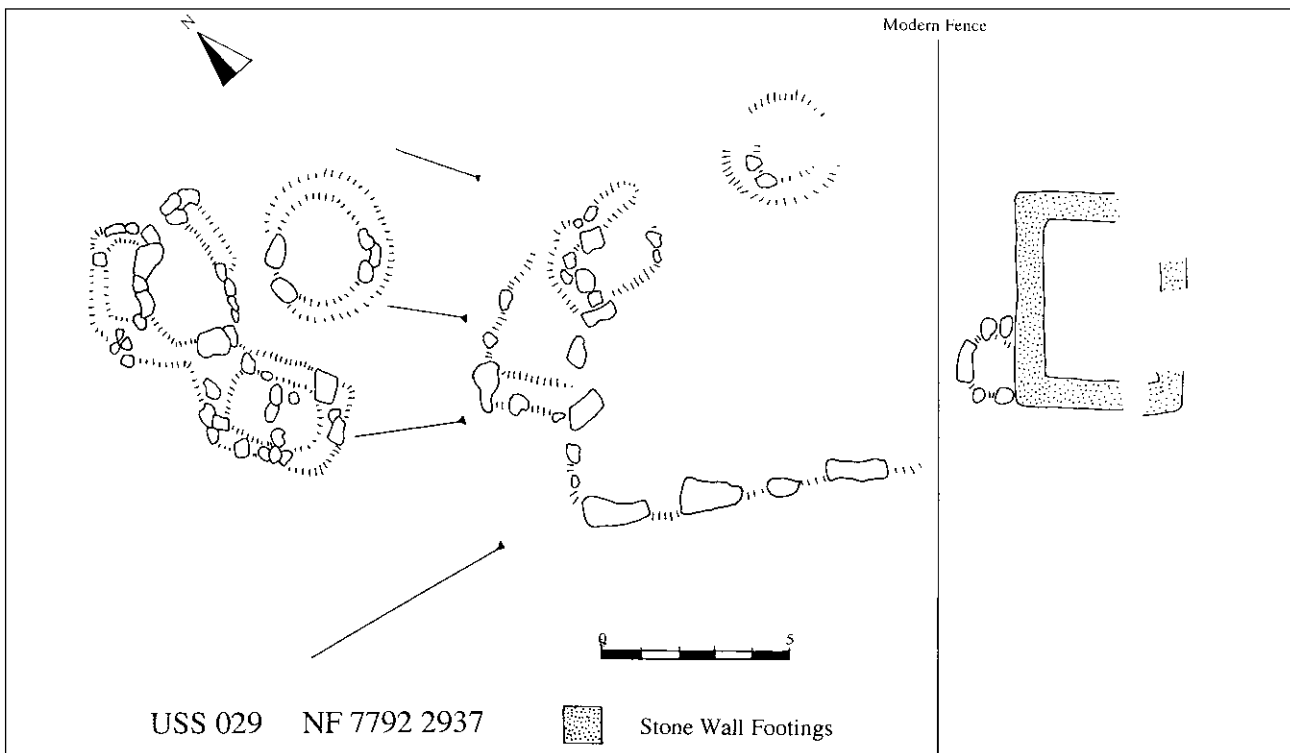


Figure 7.21. A cluster of stone cells (USS 029)

2m, the smaller one 2m × 2m. Walls constructed of stone footings, double-skinned around main cell. Evidence for earlier structures underneath. Figure 7.2 (see also Chapter 4).

USS 027 (NF 7774 2961) Evidence for possible shieling huts built on cairn marked on O.S. map. Figure 7.20.

USS 028 (NF 7791 2947) Probable shieling, substantially covered in heather. Turf and stone walls forming sub-rectangular main cell, 2.50m × 2m. Smaller cell in eastern wall. Figure 7.15.

USS 029 (NF 7792 2937) Large cluster, covered in bracken, of numerous cells of varying sizes, both sub-circular and rectangular. Beneath the vegetation at the eastern end there are footings of a stone wall, 1m wide, for a rectangular house 5m × 3m, constructed of two outer skins and rubble infill. Interpretation could be as a shieling cluster, as an abandoned farmstead, as a squatter or cottar settlement or as shieling that became one of the latter over time. Figure 7.21.

East Coast Survey

USS 030 (NF 8490 3688) Sub-rectangular shieling, 3m × 3.5 m. Walls of a single skin of stones, 0.60m wide and 1m in height at maximum. A hole in the wall links main cell to a corbelled cell 1.20m. high. There is another adjoining a rectangular cell, 2m × 2.15m × 0.40m. Situated beside stream with circular cell 8.60m to south (outside measurement 2.70m diameter).

USS 031 (NF 851 368) Wall/dyke constructed of boulders across thin crevice near top of valley.

USS 032 (NF 855 366) Upper extent of lazy-bedding, descending down to farmstead at Rubha Roiseal.

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There are a host of people who must be thanked for their assistance in the creation of this paper and the undertaking of the survey; if I have forgotten any, my apologies: Mike Parker Pearson, Helen Smith, 'Sparky' Mark Brennand, Jamie Lund, Graeme Warren, Helen Evans, Tom Ullathorne, Keith Branigan, Colin Merrony, Uilleam Macdonald, Euan Wilson, Ian Fraser of the School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh and the staff at the Scottish Records Office and Clan Donald Centre.

Notes

- 1 Editor's note: South Uist place-names appear to require the form *airigh* rather than *airidh*. It is beyond the editor's capability to comment on the differences in orthography. The O.S. map certainly contains errors: for Airigh nam Ban, for example, the current edition has the patently wrong 'Airight'. The accent on the initial *à* does not appear to be in common usage in South Uist place-names.
- 2 Editor's note: the accent in *gearraidh* does not appear to be in common usage in South Uist *Gearraidh* place-names.

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8 Upland settlement in southern South Uist

Rachel Grahame

The initial aim of the 1998 field survey on which this paper is based was to continue the fieldwork carried out by John Raven in 1996 and 1997, which involved locating and recording shielings in the northern part of South Uist. Shielings are the remains of small and relatively insubstantial seasonal dwellings, which were used by stock-herders in the summer when animals were taken to the hills to graze. The topography of South Uist consists of a strip of sandy coastal machair to the west, a belt of central undulating peatlands, and bleak mountains hiding marshy valleys to the east. This limits the potential for agriculture and cattle played an important role in the economy from the Iron Age onwards, the practice of taking cattle to summer grazing grounds remaining an essential part of the islands' economy until the 19th century (see Chapter 7 this volume). The organization of land in the Medieval and Post-Medieval periods was communal; cattle were kept on the lowlands in the winter and moved to the uplands in the spring by women and young people, for whom the summer move to the shielings was an important social event, a kind of holiday from the farmstead (Chapter 7). The construction of shielings was sometimes entirely of turf, or variations on a theme of turf walls on a stone footing and a turf roof with wooden supports, the basic form being cellular. Shielings may occur singly or in agglomerated groups, and the decay of these structures and the repeated use of the same site have created green mounds (Chapter 7).

The intention was for the area covered by the field survey to meet that surveyed by Raven but limited time and the inevitable restrictions of the weather prevented the achievement of this, and the field survey was completed where a road runs west from Poll a' Fearchadh through Crois Dùghail to the dunes, at around Northing 820000 (Figure 8.1). The aims of the field survey changed as it progressed, mainly owing to a scarcity of shielings and an abundance of other interesting sites: it was quickly decided that it was worth recording all the evidence of settlement, ranging from the prehistoric to the modern, in areas that are no longer inhabited (Figure 8.2). The general lack of habitation sites in the hills was not very surprising, as it is

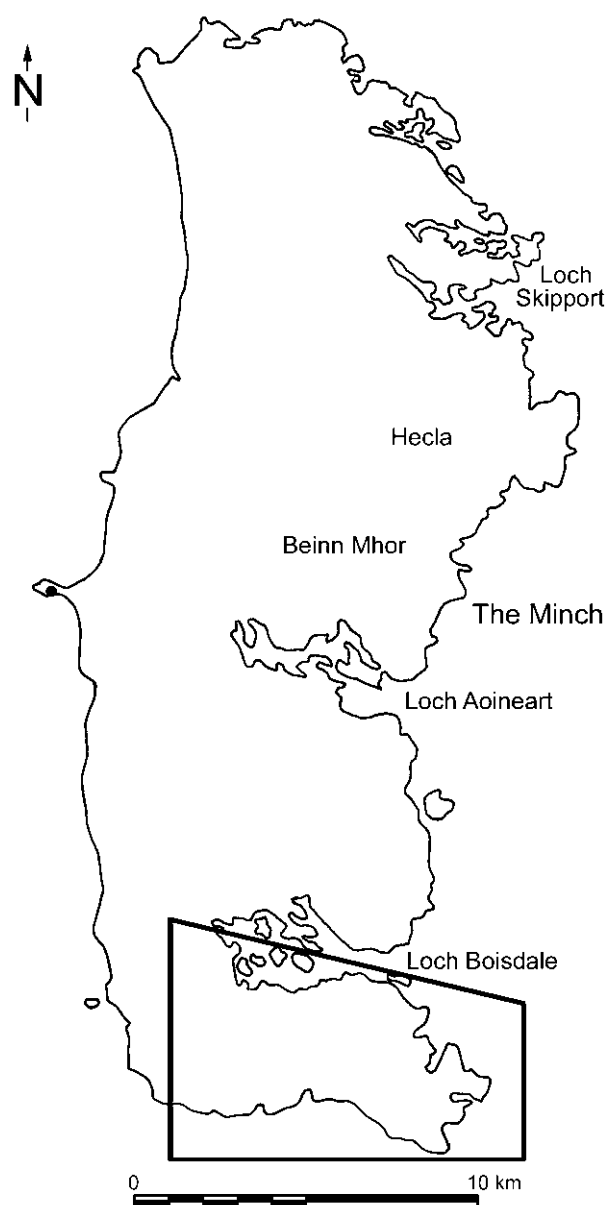


Figure 8.1. Map of South Uist showing southern upland survey area

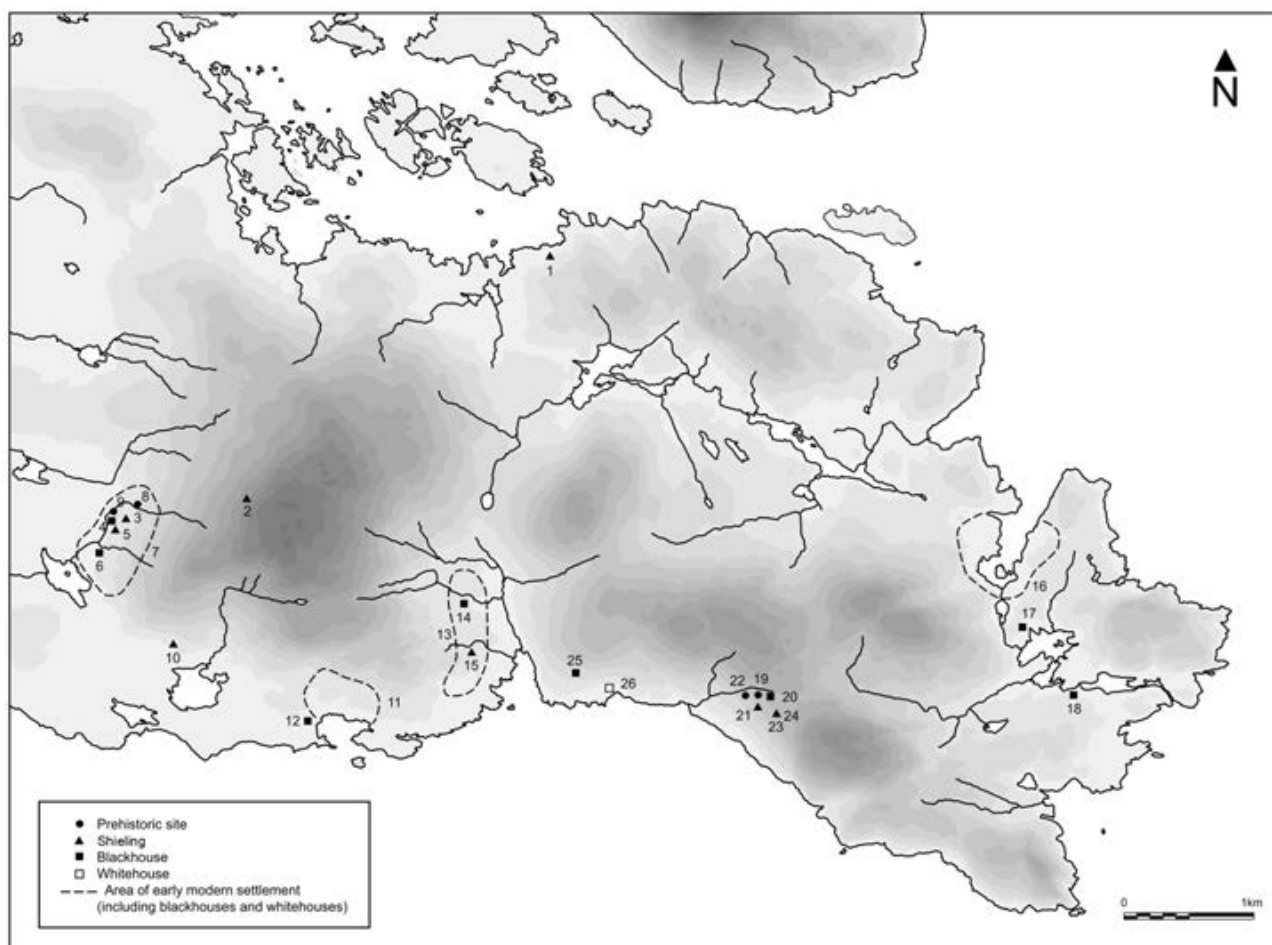


Figure 8.2. The sites identified by the survey in southern South Uist

difficult enough to find somewhere dry and flat enough to sit down and have lunch, never mind build a house.

Methodology

Both the topography and the weather of South Uist make field survey in the hills difficult at times. Even on days when it is clear and sunny over the west coast, the clouds can come down over the hills, making it pointless to look for anything. There are virtually no footpaths and the going is made more difficult by the universal boggy ground, greatest in the flat plains between the hills and, surprisingly, on top of them, where the peat has cracked into islands and great rifts filled with water. On the sides of the hills there are crevasses where the peat, eroded from below by underground streams, has collapsed and left holes small enough to be hidden by the heather but big enough to fall into. These can be incredibly deep, one of them stretching beyond the limits of my 3m tape. These inconveniences are, however, more than compensated for by the incredible views from the heights – of the islands of Eriskay and Barra to the south, the white beaches, and the sea, as blue and clear as the Mediterranean (at least when the sun was shining). The temperatures were not quite as high, but the temptation to go and swim was nevertheless almost overwhelming.

The methods employed in surveying this beautiful but inaccessible area were simple, generally involving walking over the hills close to watersheds so as to gain a good view of the ground below. It would be impossible to cover every square inch of heather except by helicopter but, where possible, a zigzag pattern was adopted so that as much ground as possible was inspected. Potential sites were located from a distance by the presence of patches of grass rather than heather or bracken, caused partly by sheep gathering on shieling sites as they provide a degree of shelter, and thus grazing them more heavily than the surrounding land.

Each site found was recorded in a field notebook with a verbal description and a conventional plan-view sketch both of the morphology of the structure and the location. Locations were determined by triangulation using a 1:25000 Ordnance Survey map¹ and compass, giving an eight-figure grid reference, and by using a Geographical Positioning System instrument (Magellan), giving a ten-figure grid reference. Scrambling systems employed by the US military at the time of the survey to prevent civilian GPS users obtaining the highly accurate position information that can be achieved today reduced the accuracy of such a system to about 100m, but in a landscape where there are sometimes few fixed points to triangulate from, this was still extremely useful. The readings given by the GPS

changed constantly and, to arrive at some sort of average, three readings were recorded for each site at intervals of a few minutes. These readings have been averaged with the map references to give eight-figure grid references for the sites: where sites are marked on the map, the grid reference is taken from the map.

Results

Place-names that include the Gaelic *àirigh*, meaning shieling, indicate places of summer pasture and possible shieling sites (see Chapter 7). A number of these were located on the O.S. 1:25000 map (Ordnance Survey current edition). At Dun Trossary (NF 7600 1665), a well-known Neolithic cairn close to the small settlement of Trosaraidh and Loch Trosaraidh, there are shielings built into the south side of the cairn which were surveyed by Cardiff University during the 1998 season (see Figure 5.10) and were not therefore included in this survey. At Airigh Varrinish (NF 7680 1880) no shielings were found but part of the area was inaccessible as it was an enclosed garden. Two lochs, both named Loch na h-Airigh Duibhe (NF 7555 2220 and NF 7685 2025) lay beyond the limits of the survey but their position in the middle topographical strip of South Uist (the peatlands at the foot of the hills) is similar to that of the other *àirigh* place-names above. At the only *àirigh* site not in this topographical zone, Poll Airigh nan Gallan (NF 7925 1795), one site (site 1) was found at NF 7941 1774. This was the remains of a small structure (4.60m by 4m) whose walls survive as turf banks 0.30m high and up to 1m wide, with an entrance (0.50m wide) on the west side. It sits on a small rocky spur, with a stream to the west, and is probably the remains of a turf-built shieling.

Most of the structures identified by the survey were blackhouses: there are many variations on the basic pattern of a one-storey rectilinear building with rounded corners and divided by partition walls, used to house both people and livestock. Changes in the design through time include a move from turf walls to drystone walls with an earth core, an increase in size, more formalized division, the replacement of central hearths with gable chimneys, and windows in the walls rather than the roof (Armit 1996). They are clearly visible in the landscape as knee-high tumbled stone walls made of undressed stone, often with later rough modifications to provide shelter for sheep, and gradually being encroached upon by the turf. The most recent modification was the use of mortar and some dressed stone for the walls; these structures, some of them still habitable, are referred to as whitehouses.

The blackhouses discovered by the survey vary greatly in size; smaller structures close to larger ones may be ancillary buildings used for storage or animals, or simply smaller houses. There was usually at least one clear entrance and sometimes a second one that had been blocked; traces of internal partition walls and external enclosure walls were also often still evident. To avoid the tedious repetition of statistics, the average external dimensions of the blackhouses, including the smaller examples, were roughly

10m by 5m, with walls about 1m thick and with one or two courses of stone surviving (the size of stone varying from 0.10m to 1m). They usually occur in clusters and will be located as such below unless they have characteristics which make them unusual, although for many there are grid references and descriptions in the original field notes. Sites of all periods cluster in certain areas, which have been used to group them below.

Easabhal

The group of sites closest to the principal modern settlement area of South Uist is on the western slopes of Easabhal (Easaval), around the streams of Abhainn Gheala-ghearraidh and Abhainn Dubh-ghearraidh. The place-name element *geàrraidh* may also mean shieling, or may refer to the land lying between cultivated land and summer pastures (see Chapter 7) – in this case either definition would be appropriate.

On the upper slopes of Easabhal, at NF 7713 1590, are the remains of a shieling (site 2; 4.30m by 2.70m) whose walls survive as turf banks 0.30m high, suggesting that it was entirely turf built, with an entrance (0.50m wide) on the southwest side (Figure 8.3). The site is covered by turf and surrounded by heather: there are another three possible shieling sites, consisting of turf-covered hummocks and suggestive stones, running down the hill 100m to the northeast.

Another small structure (site 3; 3m by 2m) further down the hillside at NF 7613 1572, which consists of one course of foundation wall, utilizing earthfast boulders at the northeast end, may also be a shieling. The southwest side has been incorporated into a dyke, which doglegs at this point to follow the course of the wall of the structure, indicating that the structure is earlier than the dyke.

There are several blackhouses in this area that may be built upon earlier shieling sites, such as a small (6.10m by 5.20m) sub-rectangular structure (site 4) at NF 7607 1573, close to a small stream. Another blackhouse at NF 7607 1567 and marked on the map overlies a larger (17.40m by 8.90m) sub-rectangular structure (site 5) which has two courses of wall surviving to the north, and is otherwise marked by occasional stones and a break of slope. This may be an earlier blackhouse, or a shieling agglomeration. There is also a small cell (2.50m by 2.50m) 13m away across a stream to the east-southeast. A blackhouse (site 6) at NF 7595 1546, heavily turfed over and vegetated, is also marked on the map.

There is some nucleation of settlement in this area at NF 7620 1580, marked on the map as a complex of walls (site 7). Immediately west of a dyke running north–south along the side of the hill, on the south side of a stream, is a well-preserved blackhouse with walls standing to 1.20m and an intact entrance and internal features. Attached to this and downslope of it to the northwest are two irregularly shaped enclosures and a whitehouse with walls standing to 1.60m, with intact entrances, windows and fireplaces. Immediately opposite this, on the north side of the stream, is another



Figure 8.3. The shieling at site 2, looking west

blackhouse with walls standing to 1.20m, surrounded to the east by a deep gully and wall/bank. There is a cairnfield to the northwest with small clearance cairns constructed on bedrock outcrops and large boulders, and enclosure walling to the west along the banks of the stream. Close to this is the remnant of what may be a kerbed cairn (site 8), a domed mound with stones set in a half circle around one side of it.

The likelihood of this being a prehistoric feature is increased by the existence of a possible double kerbed cairn (site 9) 150m to the west at NF 7606 1576, immediately east of a sheep pen marked on the map. This is a circular mound 7.50m in diameter, approximately 0.50m in height at the perimeter rising to approximately 1m in height at the centre to form a dome, with an intermittent kerb of undressed boulders (0.15m–0.60m in size), and a few turfed-over stones on the west side suggesting an inner kerb.

Saltavik Bay (Bàgh Shaltabhaig) and South Glendale (Gleann Dail bho Dheas)

Moving to the southwest and south around the lower slopes of Coire Bheinn (Chorravein), there are further blackhouses, and on a spur of the hillside at NF 7656 1475 there is a turf-covered mound (site 10; 8.50m by 8.30m) with some undressed stone boulders (0.10m–0.50m in size) emerging from the top and sides. It was difficult to ascertain both the shape and size of this feature as the northeast part is obscured by bracken but it may be a shieling, or possibly a chambered cairn (Raven pers. comm.). To the

east, on the lower slopes around Saltavik Bay, there is further settlement of at least eight blackhouses (site 11), and at NF 7755 1416 a small structure (site 12; 4.30m by 2.50m) with a single course of stone foundations that is probably a kelp collector's cottage (kelp was used until the early 19th century in the manufacture of soap and glass; see Chapter 4).²

Moving east again, there are occasional blackhouses along the road, and in South Glendale, across the valley from the modern settlement, there is a cluster of at least 15 blackhouses situated on spurs of higher land, either singly or in groups of up to four (site 13). In the centre of this settlement at NF 7872 1506 is a particularly large blackhouse (site 14; 16.80m by 6m), which incorporates some bedrock and earthfast boulders, and has two entrances at the west end, a surviving internal wall and an area of packed stone at the east end. It is built in alignment with and between two very large boulders that lie at each end of the spur and mark it out from the other blackhouses in the area. It appears to overlie a previous building, which survives only as a turf-covered wall on the south side of the blackhouse. The remains of a small outhouse lie 12m to the south.

At the southern end of this settlement towards Bàgh Mòr, at NF 7876 1469, there is a small structure (site 15; 3m by 2m) situated on a turf mound, consisting of a single course of stone boulders (0.20m–0.65m in size), with two entrances opposite each other towards the north end. This may be a shieling or another kelp collector's cottage.



Figure 8.4. The view looking north across Thairteabhagh



Figure 8.5. The whitehouse, site 16, looking southwest

Thairteabhagh and Loch Mòraibh

At the southeastern extremity of the island (Figure 8.4), around the bay of Thairteabhagh (Hartavagh), there is a small settlement (site 16) consisting of three whitehouses and a blackhouse (at NF8262 1563, NF8270 1535, NF8298 1523 and NF8291 1516) which are marked on the map (Figure 8.5). They lie along a path which is the remains of the road from North Glendale, and which continues around the bay terminating at another building shown on the map at NF8325 1563 (not visited). There are small areas of lazy bedding and pasture and one of the buildings is still

used as a sheep wash: the area was probably abandoned relatively recently, during this century.

To the south, on the northwest side of Loch Mòraibh at NF 8308 1487, there is a blackhouse (site 17) situated on a turf mound which has clearance cairns to the south and east, and has possibly been reused as a clearance cairn itself as there is a lot of rubble inside the walls. This was also probably abandoned quite recently as the walls are not yet turfed over. There is another building (site 18) marked on the map at NF8347 1440 (not visited).

These sites fall into the expected pattern of settlement

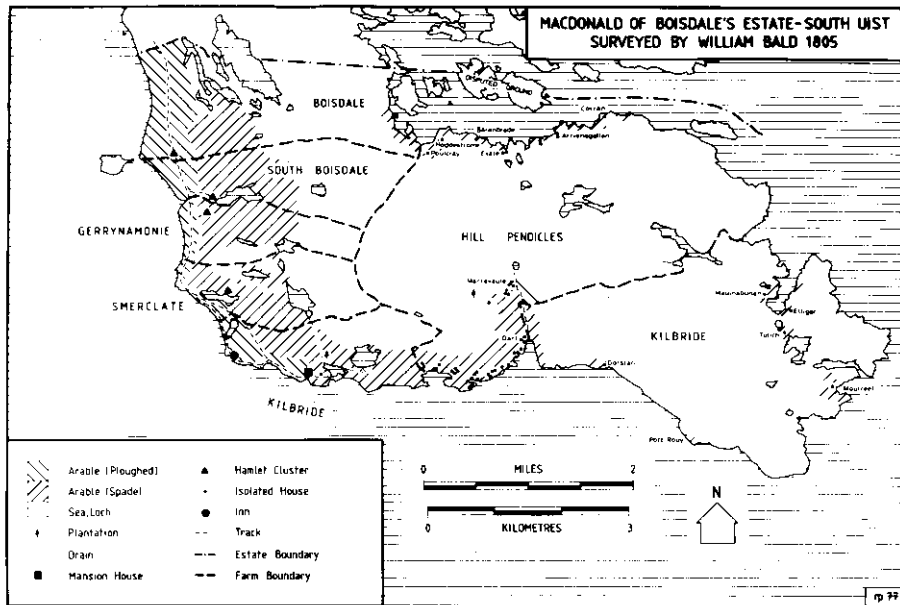


Figure 8.6. The Boisdale estate in 1805 (from Caird 1989)

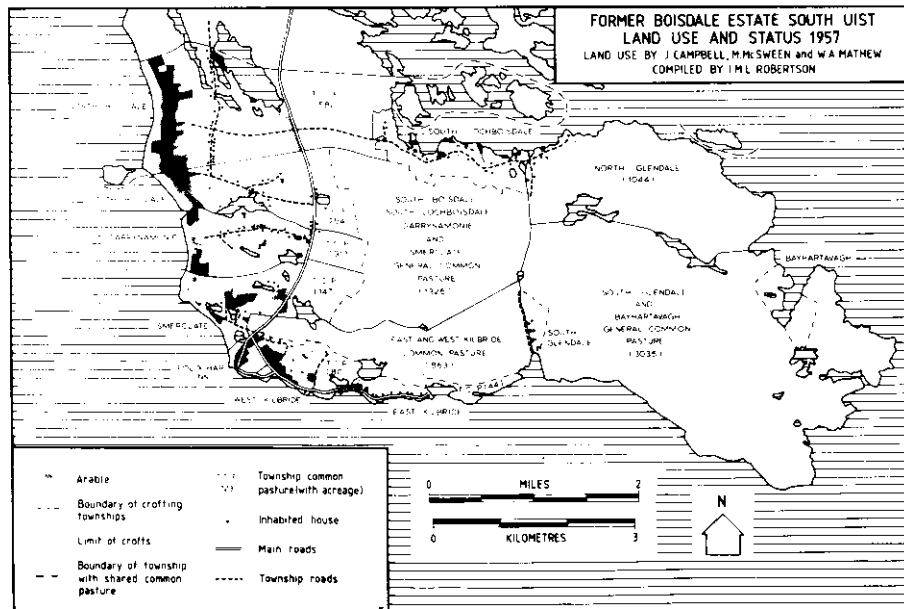


Figure 8.7. The Boisdale estate in 1957 (from Caird 1989)

in South Uist, with primary settlement on the lowlands complemented by seasonal and secondary settlements in the foothills and the more accessible parts of the eastern coast (see Chapter 7). Comparison with an early 19th-century map of the area (Figure 8.6), then the Boisdale Estate owned by Colonel Alexander McDonald, is revealing (Caird 1989). The estate was surveyed and mapped in 1805 by William Bald, who produced a detailed plan drawn at 1:6000, showing ploughed land, lazy beds, blown sand, farm boundaries and individual houses (*ibid.*). It was probably commissioned before the reorganization of the estate (*ibid.*), and shows the Boisdale Estate extending over the whole of the southern part of South Uist from the south side of Loch Boisdale, and including Eriskay.

Cultivation at this time was concentrated around the southwest, whilst the southeast was the hill-grazing of the Home Farm in Cille Bhrighde (Kilbride), and in-between was tenants' arable (Caird 1989). Bald's map shows the settlement located by this survey around North Glendale, Saltavik Bay, South Glen Dale, Thairteabagh and Loch Mòraibh. These areas became the crofting townships of North Glendale, Kilbride, South Glendale and Bayhartavagh shown on the 1957 map (Figure 8.7), probably in the 1820s (*ibid.*). They might have originated as 18th-century nucleated settlements of tenant farmers known as *bailtean*, which Armit suggests might have emerged in the late 16th and 17th centuries, replacing dispersed settlement (1996).



Figure 8.8. The possible Pictish square cairn, site 22, looking west-southwest

Significantly, the settlement on the lower slopes of Easabhal is not shown on either map, supporting the suggestion by Raven (pers. comm.) that this was a squatter settlement resulting from the Clearances in the late 19th century, after which the effects of squatters on pasture land and the decline of the role of cattle in the economy caused the decline and disappearance of transhumance in the early 20th century (see Chapter 7). All of this upland settlement is close to areas of land, however small, that can be cultivated by spade-dug lazy beds.

Cruachan

There is one area of settlement – in many ways the most remarkable found – that does not conform in any way to the expected pattern of settlement in South Uist, that is not close to land which can be cultivated, and that is not shown on the 1805 plan of the Boisdale Estate. It centres around Tota Mhòr na Leacaich, a stone cairn (site 19), possibly Neolithic but more likely Bronze Age in date, 20m–25m in diameter and situated on a bedrock outcrop on the slopes between Cruachan and Ròineabhal (Roneval) at NF 8103 1435 (NF81SW 1; see Chapter 5).

This is the only feature marked on the modern map, but there are a number of other structures in association with it. On the top of the cairn, and probably constructed from its stone, is a blackhouse (site 20), poorly preserved except for the east end wall of which five courses survive. An enclosing wall extends west then southwest for 25m downslope from the west end of the blackhouse. There are a number of ephemeral stone walls on the south side of the cairn that may be the remains of shielings, again utilizing the convenient source of stone. Another shieling (site 21;

3.90m by 2.70m) surviving as a single course of foundation stone incorporating a large boulder at the south end, with an entrance (0.50m wide) on the west side, lies 27m south of the cairn on a small eminence. To the west of the cairn, about 50m away, is another cairn (site 22; 3.25m by 3m), square in shape, which appears to have some kerbing and packing of smaller stones in the middle (Figures 8.8 and 8.9). This may be a Pictish square cairn similar to the one found on the beach close to the Cille Pheadair site during the 1998 season (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 117–21); it is certainly not an early modern structural remnant.

Another shieling (site 23) is situated about 200m southeast of the cairn at NF 8115 1418. It is ovoid in shape (4m by 2.60m) with the blunt southern end made up of large boulders and the pointed northern end surviving as turf banks; it is situated on a small flat shelf of land against a 3m-high vertical rock face that might have formed the east wall. Running away from it to the west and north is a series of stones lying in a rough semi-circle (site 24), which look deliberately placed, especially two uprights 0.50m high. These may be either the remains of some sort of enclosure for livestock, the gaps in between the stones being filled with a temporary barrier, or possibly even the remnant of a stone circle.

Further away from the cairn, at NF 7959 1450, two structures (site 25) sit on a shelf half way up the hillside (Figure 8.10). These look like blackhouses, although they are larger than the average (one is 12.50m by 6.50m and the other 15m by 6m) and far better vegetated than most blackhouses, with most the stone walls covered by turf. They are set at right angles to each other, and one has a second break of slope with a few stones set into it running parallel to and below the west side, the other has



Figure 8.9. The possible Pictish square cairn, site 22, looking south



Figure 8.10. Overgrown blackhouses, site 25, looking west

a similar irregularity at its northeast corner, suggesting earlier structures below. They may be somewhat earlier in date than the other blackhouses located by the survey,

perhaps Medieval or even Norse in origin. Between this site and the cairn, at NF7990 1440, a small whitehouse (site 26) overlooks an unnamed sandy bay, abandoned

so recently that its roof rafters are still intact – it may be the house identified as Gorstan on the 1805 plan of the Boisdale Estate.

Conclusion

The survey of the southern slopes of Cruachan demonstrates at the very least an intermittent but regular human presence, if not continuous settlement, from the prehistoric period to the 20th century. This contradicts to some extent the ideas of Armit (1996), amongst others, who postulates increasing concentration of settlement through time on the machair and the peatlands. This may be the case, but at the same time there appear to be specific areas of the uplands that have always attracted human activity: the concentration of this activity in certain places could be explained by a number of prosaic factors such as the scarcity of areas of land suitable for habitation, with ground flat enough to build on, perhaps providing a degree of shelter, with a stream close by, and stone available to build with. Settlement in the uplands to the east also tends to focus on the bays and inlets where it is possible to land a boat, a reminder of the importance of accessibility from the sea for settlers on a rocky island whose landscapes are not conducive to easy travel.

The eastern hills have without doubt been relatively under-populated in the last few centuries. The map published in 1654 in Joannis Blau's fifth volume of *Atlas Novus* appears to show the eastern part of the south of South Uist, from Easabhail eastwards, as a row of peaks occupying the extreme edge of the island, occupying far less space on paper than they do geographically (MacLeod 1989: 24). This indicates that, at the time of the survey by the original cartographer, Timothy Pont, around 1595, the east was virtually uninhabited, as Pont's work presumably concentrated on the most populated part of the island (Pont n.d.). Like the mapmaker, archaeological research in South Uist has always focused on the machair and the blacklands to the west but there appears to be a long history of settlement in the remote east as well. Excavation of the sites around Cruachan might prove rewarding in demonstrating some long-term continuity of settlement in one area, restricted as it is by the topography, and all of the individual sites on Cruachan are interesting in their own right, as well as collectively.

The results of the survey also hint at the potential of looking at the vernacular housing of South Uist during the early modern period. Most of the modern houses in the village of North Glendale, for example, where one of the shieling sites was found, have an accompanying whitehouse and blackhouse nearby, and the area would be ideal for a study of the evolution of vernacular housing

in South Uist. The large blackhouse in South Glendale, lying on a high spur between two huge boulders, and the general variation in size of blackhouses, indicate that there might have been considerable differences in status between these buildings. Many of the relatively modern structures also seem to overlie their predecessors, and one of these sites may be the 'missing link' with Viking and Norse settlement. This survey has been a preliminary and by no means complete exploration of the human presence in the uplands of southern South Uist: if nothing else, it has raised some interesting questions about this most marginal of 'marginal' areas, and highlights an area for future research.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to John Raven and Cathy Pink who assisted with the fieldwork, and Helen Smith who often drove us to our start and finish points.

Notes

- 1 Editor's note: this refers to the current edition as available in 1998; the Landranger map has since been reprinted and Pathfinder maps (single-sheet small-area 1:25,000 maps) sadly appear to be no longer available.
- 2 Editor's note: this survey was undertaken prior to the construction of the Eriskay causeway which joins South Uist immediately east of Saltavik Bay.

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9 Loch a' Choire Neolithic settlement

Cole Henley with a contribution by Amelia Pannett

At present the Neolithic of the Western Isles is poorly understood, with a handful of settlement sites dwarfed by the numerous stone monuments that remain so visible in the landscape today. South Uist is no exception, with the Neolithic primarily represented by several chambered tombs (see Chapter 5, this volume).

To address this imbalance, a survey of the lochs of southwest South Uist was carried out in the hope of identifying sites comparable to the Neolithic islet settlements Eilean an Tighe (Scott 1951) and Eilean Domhnuill (Armit 1987; 1988; 1990) found on North Uist. During this survey, Neolithic material including pottery and flint was discovered at Loch a' Choire, West Kilbride (Cille Bhrighde), with further remains revealed through brief excavation.

Survey

The ephemeral and transient nature of Neolithic settlement in this region – and indeed elsewhere in the United Kingdom (Thomas 1997) – means that settlement remains for this period are extremely elusive. In the Western Isles, all known settlement remains from the Neolithic have been discovered either as a result of peat-cutting, coastal erosion or through the excavation of later settlement overlying Neolithic remains. However, the identification of Neolithic occupation upon islands within lochs, or islets, such as is seen at Eilean an Tighe and Eilean Domhnuill, provides us with a potential focal point within the landscape for the discovery of further Neolithic settlement sites.

With this in mind, a series of lochs were visited in southwest South Uist in the hope of identifying evidence for Neolithic occupation. Lochs selected for examination were those on the 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey maps marked as featuring an island dun or fort. Where possible, depending on the condition of the causeway and the level of the loch waters, the islets were visited, in which case the shores of the islets and their surrounding waters were scoured for signs of structural remains or artefacts such as pottery or flint. Examination was also carried out around the loch

shore adjacent to each islet, usually where the causeway to the islet joins the land.

Thirteen islets in ten lochs were selected for survey. Of these only five islets were accessible, with the remainder recorded from the adjacent loch shore. The islets range in size from 5m to nearly 30m in diameter with causeways 3m to almost 50m in length. Some islets, such as the southernmost islet in Loch an Eilean and the islet in Loch Aiseabhat, are insubstantial, whilst others such as the islets in Loch Dùn na Cille and Loch Cnoc a'Buidhe are considerable in scale. None of the islets visited, nor the lochs they are in, provided any evidence for Neolithic occupation or activity (confirmed by Raven's thorough survey; see Chapter 6, this volume). It soon became obvious that if any of these sites had provided a focus for Neolithic settlement, then this is unlikely to become apparent without excavation of the later, overlying structures. This comes as little surprise considering Eilean Domhnuill on North Uist was initially thought to have been 'a rather unexceptional island dun of likely Iron Age date' (Armit 1996: 44). Only after excavation was it realized that the site represented a long history of occupation dating to the Neolithic.

One further islet was surveyed in Loch a' Choire in the township of Cille Bhrighde, after a brief visit to this particular area with local resident Paul Rae. Almost immediately, flint and pottery were found eroding out of the shores of the islet and it was decided that further investigation was required.

Background

Loch a' Choire (Loch of the Cauldron) is situated at the southern end of South Uist, east of the small modern settlement of West Kilbride and around 350m inland from the sea shore (Figure 9.1). It is a large and relatively deep freshwater loch with a small peninsula situated on its northernmost side. This peninsula is presently connected to the land by a low-lying area of boggy ground and is occasionally separated by water during periods when the water table is higher (Paul Rae pers. comm.). It is likely,

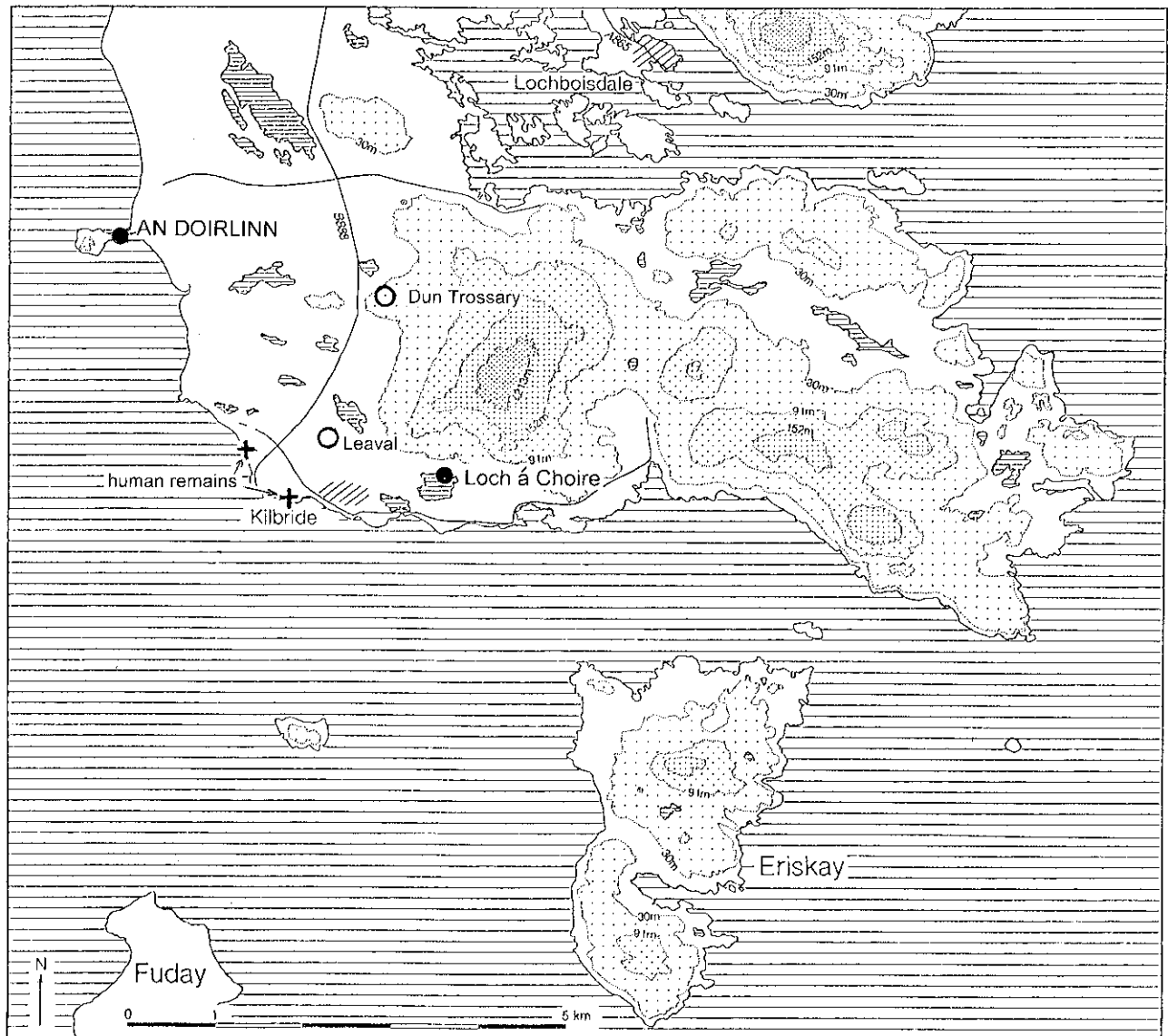


Figure 9.1. Location of Loch a' Choire

given the local development of peat, that the peninsula – hereafter referred to as an islet – would once have been permanently separated from the land. The islet is approximately 125m east–west by 50m north–south running parallel to the loch side (Figure 9.2). Its natural origin is testified by the numerous stone outcrops situated on it but it has been heavily landscaped, including the possible addition at some point in its history of soil to flatten parts of it and/or to make the islet more fertile. Evidence for occupation on the island includes a large rectilinear stone house, probably of relatively recent date, a smaller rectangular stone structure and a series of cultivation ridges (Figures 9.3 and 9.4).

Excavation

Evidence for prehistoric occupation was identified when 12 pieces of flint and four pieces of pottery were found during a survey of the shore on the northwest edge of the islet. Two trenches were opened on the islet near to these stray

finds to see if these had eroded out of a feature situated on the loch shore itself. Within Trench 1 (1.40m × 1.10m) ten more pieces of flint were found whilst Trench 2 (0.75m × 0.75m) revealed two more pieces of pottery. This second trench was extended (to 1.40m × 1.50m) and a further 16 sherds and nine pieces of flint were recovered.

In these two small-scale excavations the artefacts were concentrated in a relatively thin gritty horizon of what appeared to be decomposed stone (mainly quartz and iron pyrites) directly overlying the natural bedrock and underlying a thin topsoil. No features were found. This, combined with the abraded nature of some of the artefacts (in particular the pottery), suggested that the finds were not *in situ* but had been re-deposited, either through human agency or natural processes. It seemed possible that the artefacts were derived from activity elsewhere on the islet, probably from activity above the areas excavated in Trenches 1 and 2. Five further test trenches were therefore dug upslope from Trenches 1 and 2 as well as on the top

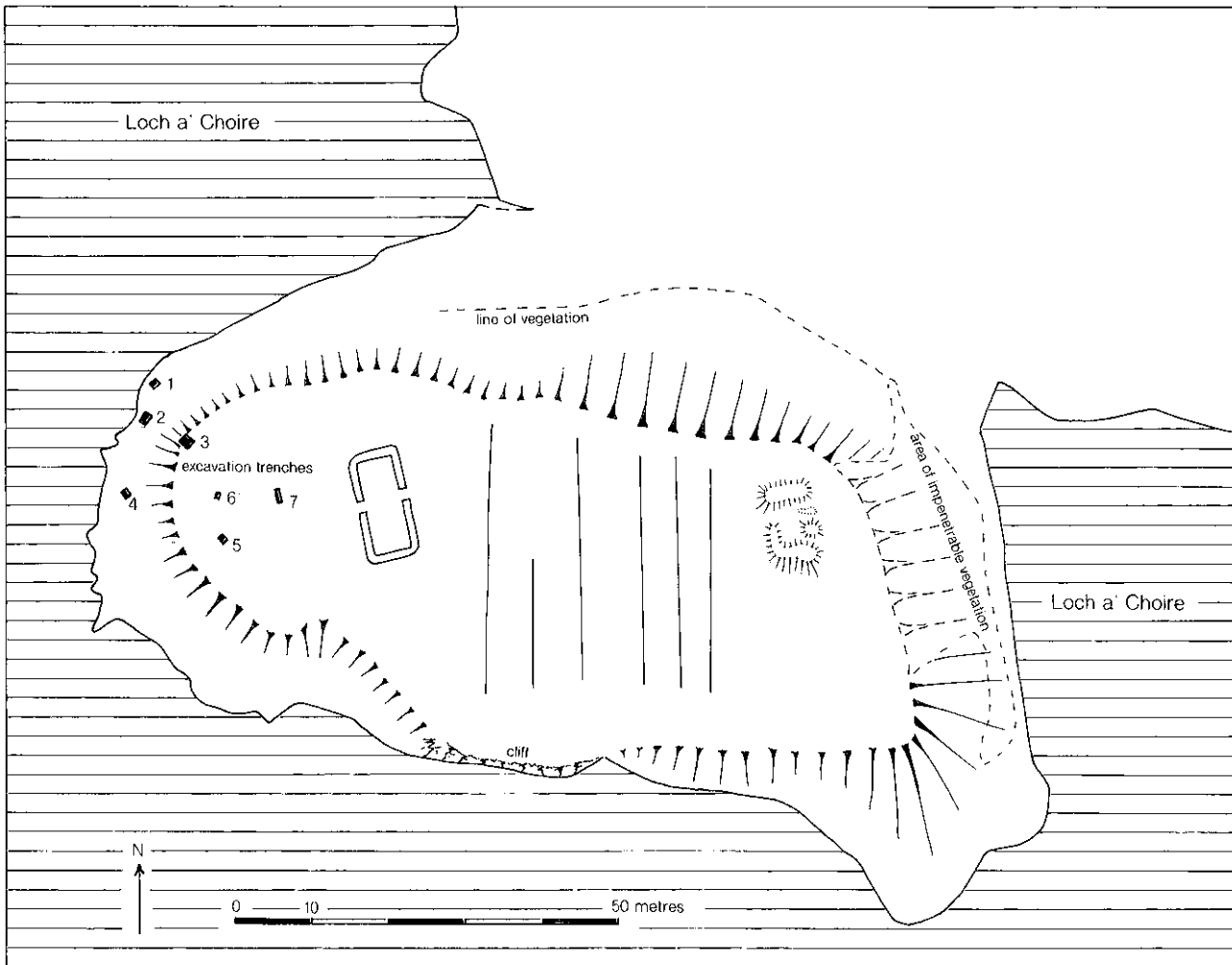


Figure 9.2. Plan of trenches at Loch a' Choire



Figure 9.3. View of Loch a' Choire from the north



Figure 9.4. Closer view of Loch a' Choire from the north

of the islet in an attempt to locate activity *in situ* and to obtain further diagnostic material that would support a Neolithic date for the finds.

Only one of these trenches yielded any finds: Trench 3 on a terrace above Trenches 1 and 2. Initial excavation of

this trench (0.75m × 0.75m) yielded four pieces of flint and, perhaps more importantly, a decorated ceramic lug (Figure 9.5.6). The trench was extended (to 1.60m × 1.35m) and a further 98 sherds and 12 pieces of flint were recovered. Although the stratigraphy in this trench was slightly more complicated than that within the initial trenches, no features were found and again it seemed that the finds, situated within a dark gritty compact layer, were not *in situ*.

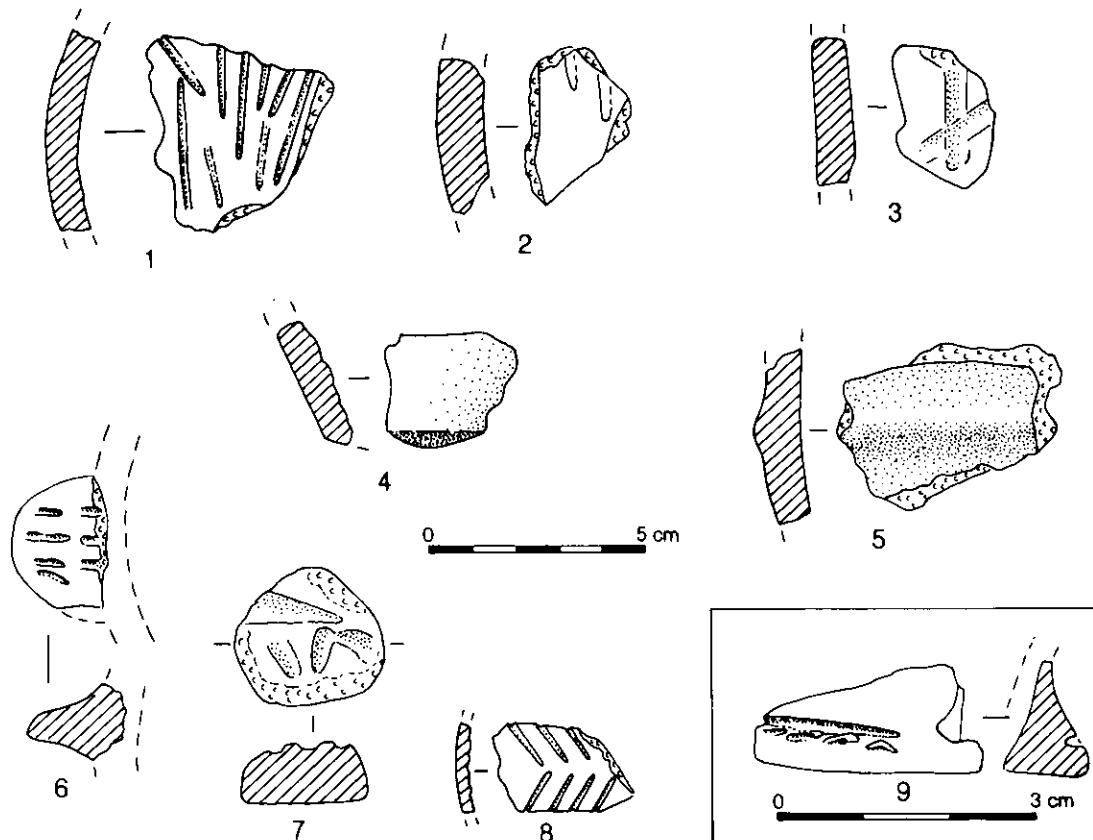


Figure 9.5. Pottery and pumice from Loch a' Choire

| Trench | Dimensions | Flint | Pottery |
|--------|--------------|-------|---------|
| 1 | 1.4 × 1.1m | 10 | 0 |
| 2 | 1.4 × 1.5m | 9 | 18 |
| 3 | 1.6 × 1.35m | 16 | 99 |
| 4 | 0.9 × 1.2m | 0 | 0 |
| 5 | 0.65 × 0.9m | 0 | 0 |
| 6 | 0.75 × 0.75m | 0 | 0 |
| 7 | 1.65 × 0.7m | 0 | 0 |
| 8 | 1 × 0.75m | 5 | 0 |

Table 9.1. Trench dimensions and finds from Loch a' Choire

During these excavations, further examination of the shoreline was undertaken and, on the other side of the island, 13 more pieces of flint were found. A very small trench (1m × 0.75m, Trench 8) was excavated, revealing five more pieces of flint. As in Trenches 1 and 2, the finds were concentrated in a relatively compact gritty layer directly overlying natural rock.

During the excavations, the islet was surveyed with an EDM to record the locations of the trenches and the islet's general topography. A list of all the trenches excavated including their dimensions and finds is provided in Table 9.1.

Finds

In all, 117 sherds of pottery and 40 pieces of flint were found

in four trenches, and four sherds of pottery and 25 pieces of flint were found on the loch shore itself (Table 9.1). There were also three pieces of pumice from Trench 3.

Pottery

A total of 121 sherds were found at Loch a' Choire with a total weight for the ceramic assemblage of 541.5g. The average sherd weight for the complete assemblage is 3.58g whilst the average maximum dimension across the sherd is 18.76mm with the average maximum sherd thickness of 5.11mm. The majority of the pottery (99 sherds) was recovered from Trench 3, providing 82.5% of the total number of sherds from the islet, with 85 of the sherds (70.9% of the assemblage) from context 305. The total weight of the pottery from Trench 3 is 471.4g, 87% of the total assemblage weight. Otherwise, four sherds totalling 7.3g were found in the loch (context 'stray') and 18 sherds weighing 62.8g were found in context 202 in Trench 2. Information on the ceramic assemblage is contained in Tables 9.2 to 9.4. Sherds of interest are illustrated in Figure 9.5. The nature of the ceramic finds from Loch a' Choire means that vessel reconstruction is impossible so the assemblage was examined in terms of sherds with comparisons made between contexts.

Methodology

Following the post-excavation treatment of pottery from

| Context | Trench | Pottery (quantity) | | Pottery (%) | |
|---------|--------|--------------------|--------|-------------|--------|
| | | sherds | weight | sherds | weight |
| 305 | 3 | 85 | 416.6 | 70.83 | 76.93 |
| 3 U | 3 | 14 | 54.8 | 11.67 | 10.12 |
| stray | - | 4 | 7.3 | 3.33 | 1.35 |
| 202 | 2 | 18 | 62.8 | 14.17 | 11.6 |
| Total | | 121 | 541.5 | 100 | 100 |

Table 9.2. Distribution of pottery from Loch a' Choire

| Context | Trench | Value | | | % | | |
|--------------|--------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|--------|
| | | Max D | Thick | Weight | Max D | Thick | Weight |
| 305 | 3 | 21.78 | 6.32 | 4.90 | 29.03 | 30.92 | 34.19 |
| 3 U | 3 | 18.71 | 5.50 | 3.91 | 24.94 | 26.91 | 27.29 |
| Stray | - | 13.25 | 3.50 | 1.83 | 17.66 | 17.12 | 12.77 |
| 202 | 2 | 21.29 | 5.12 | 3.69 | 28.38 | 25.05 | 25.75 |
| Site average | | 18.76 | 5.11 | 3.58 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Table 9.3. Average dimensions of sherds by context from Loch a' Choire

| Context | Trench | Quantity | | | | | % | | | | |
|---------|--------|----------|----|----|----|---|------|------|------|------|------|
| | | I+E | I | E | n | ? | I+E | I | E | n | ? |
| 305 | 3 | 30 | 25 | 15 | 13 | 2 | 35.3 | 29 | 17.6 | 15.3 | 2.3 |
| 3 U | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 7 | 2 | 7.1 | 14.3 | 14.3 | 50 | 14.3 |
| Stray | - | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 50 | 25 | 0 | 25 | 0 |
| 202 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 8 | 3 | 11.1 | 22.2 | 5.6 | 44.4 | 16.7 |
| Total | | 35 | 32 | 18 | 29 | 7 | - | - | - | - | - |

I+E both the interior and exterior surfaces of the sherd have survived

I only the interior surface of the sherd has survived

E only the exterior surface of the sherd has survived

n neither surface of the sherd has survived

? one surface of the sherd has survived but cannot distinguish between interior and exterior

Table 9.4. Sherd surface survival by context from Loch a' Choire

other Neolithic sites in this region, the pottery from Loch a' Choire was initially air-dried before being carefully dry-brushed to remove any residual soil (Brown n.d.; Squair 1998a; 1998b). Examination of the pottery consisted of the recording of basic measurements including weight, maximum sherd thickness and maximum dimension across the sherd. Weighing was carried out using electronic scales accurate to one-tenth of a gram whilst measurements were undertaken with hand calipers to the nearest millimetre. Sherd surface survival (SSS) was devised as a simple recording technique to record the survival of internal and external sherd surfaces (Table 9.4). It was hoped that this would provide a loose indicator of variations in taphonomic damage between contexts.

Examination of sherd fabric was not carried out for a number of reasons. In particular, it was decided that recording of vessel colour would not be helpful. Differences in colour within and between vessels may be attributed to the irregular temperatures experienced in bonfire or clamp-kiln firing of vessels (Timby *et al.* 2000). The red colour

of the majority of sherds from Loch a' Choire could result from the iron-rich clays that would have been exploited for pottery production (Sue Blair pers. comm.) but may also result from the deposition of soluble iron ore particles onto the sherds through soil leaching.

Squair (1998a) has outlined the problems with identifying fabrics when examining prehistoric ceramic assemblages, specifically those from the Outer Hebrides. In addition to the problems presented by the variable fracture profiles available for individual sherds, Squair has stressed the great degree of variability of fabrics not only between different assemblages but also within specific assemblages and even within different fracture profiles of a single sherd (*ibid.*: 200). Whilst vessel fabric can present a valuable tool in assessing and interpreting ceramic assemblages (see Jones 1999), the condition and nature of the assemblage from Loch a' Choire meant that fabric analysis was unlikely to be of significant use in distinguishing between different assemblages or identifying individual vessels.

The assemblage

The majority of sherds were from Trench 3. That 87% of the overall weight of the ceramic assemblage from Loch a' Choire came from this trench (compared to 82.5% of the total number of sherds) suggests that the pottery from this context is in better condition than those sherds from the shore and Trench 2. This is supported by the larger average weight and measurements of the sherds from these contexts and by the greater proportion of sherds with some or both surfaces surviving. Although over half of the 14 unstratified sherds from Trench 3 have no sherd surface surviving, this may be explained by taphonomic damage or by damage sustained through excavation.

The four sherds found off the northern shore of the islet (context 'stray') are heavily eroded which is reflected in the lower than average weight and dimensions of these sherds. Although the SSS index would suggest a good state of preservation for this context, the small number of sherds represented exaggerates this. The average measurements of the 18 sherds found in context 202 of Trench 2 are higher than those from the loch shore but they are still in significantly worse condition than the pottery from Trench 3. This is supported by the fact that eight of the sherds have no surviving surface (50% of the sherds from this context) whilst only two have both surfaces surviving.

It seems probable that the ceramic material, certainly that from Trench 3, represents Neolithic pottery. The few diagnostic sherds (those with decorative elements and the lug) all have parallels with pottery from other Neolithic sites in the Outer Hebrides. Lugs such as sherd 107 (Figure 9.5.6) were found on two vessels from the tomb at Clettraval (Scott 1935) and another vessel from Eilean an Tighe (Scott 1951), as well as on Neolithic vessels from the recent excavations at Rubh' a Charnain Mhoir (Squair 1998b). The herringbone and arched incisions found on sherds 100 (Figure 9.5.8) and 101 (Figure 9.5.1) are paralleled in the assemblages from Eilean an Tighe (Scott 1951), Eilean Domhnuill (Brown n.d.), Northton (Simpson *et al.* 2006) and on a single Neolithic vessel recently found during excavations on Vatersay (Branigan 2000: 50).

Sherd 106 (Figure 9.5.9) may represent a base or rim sherd from a Beaker vessel, although this is by no means conclusive (Melanie Johnson pers. comm.). Whilst Beaker vessels were not found at the excavated islet sites of Eilean an Tighe (Scott 1951) and Eilean Domhnuill (Ian Armit pers. comm.), Beaker activity is displayed at most Neolithic sites in the region (see Chapter 10), with such vessels found at the chambered tombs of Unival (Scott 1947), Clettraval (Scott 1935) and Geirisclett (Dunwell 1997) as well as at the settlement sites of the Udal (Squair 1998a), Northton (Simpson 1976; Simpson *et al.* 2006) and Allt Chrisal (Gibson 1995). Two more decorated sherds were found (Figure 9.5.2 and 3), although the sherds are too small to make conclusive comparisons with vessels from other assemblages.

Of particular interest, with the exception of the possible Beaker sherd, is the absence in the assemblage of any diagnostic base sherds. This suggests that the ceramic

assemblage is derived from round-based vessels, a characteristically Neolithic pot form in this region. To date, only two flat-based Neolithic vessels have been found in the Western Isles, a unique heavily decorated jar from Eilean Domhnuill (Armit 1988) and a small Grooved Ware vessel from the chambered tomb of Clettraval (Henshall 1972). The assemblage also includes two sherds that may represent carinations from a vessel (Figure 9.5.4 and 5). Carinated bowls are a frequent feature of Neolithic ceramic assemblages from this region. The absence of rim sherds at Loch a' Choire is paralleled at Bharpa Carinish on North Uist where rim sherds were present in only 4% of the ceramic assemblage (Armit 1993) compared to Eilean Domhnuill where rim sherds represented 13% of the total assemblage (Armit 1993). This may be explained by the friability of rims (Armit 1993) in comparison to other parts of ceramic vessels.

Discussion

Initially the pottery assemblage from Loch a' Choire was thought to be divisible into two relatively distinct groups, one encompassing the material from Trench 3 (99 sherds in total) and the other the stray pottery finds and those from Trench 2. This was inferred primarily from the better quality of those sherds from Trench 3. However, it seems more likely that the pottery from Trench 2 and the loch shore is contemporary with the pottery from Trench 3 but has been exposed to greater depositional damage, either caused by its situation or through re-deposition downslope (whether through natural or human processes). The affinity between these two groups of pottery would seem to be supported by an association with flint in all the contexts that featured pottery.

Flint

Amelia Pannett

The flaked stone assemblage collected during the survey and excavation at Loch a' Choire comprises 65 pieces (Tables 9.5 and 9.6). The majority of the material was recovered from the excavation trenches on the western side of the islet. A further 12 pieces were collected as surface finds from near the trenches and 13 from the eastern shore.

| Context | Trench | Flint (quantity) | Flint (%) |
|---------|--------|------------------|-----------|
| 102 | 1 | 10 | 12 |
| 202 | 2 | 9 | 16 |
| 305 | 3 | 12 | 19 |
| 3U | 3 | 4 | 7.2 |
| 802 | 8 | 5 | 7.2 |
| Stray | - | 12 | 17 |
| Stray E | - | 13 | 22 |
| Total | | 65 | 100 |

Table 9.5. Distribution of flint from Loch a' Choire

| | Total number of lithics | % of assemblage |
|-----------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Primary | 19 | 29% |
| Secondary | 22 | 34% |
| Inner | 24 | 37% |

Table 9.6. Nature of worked flint from Loch a' Choire

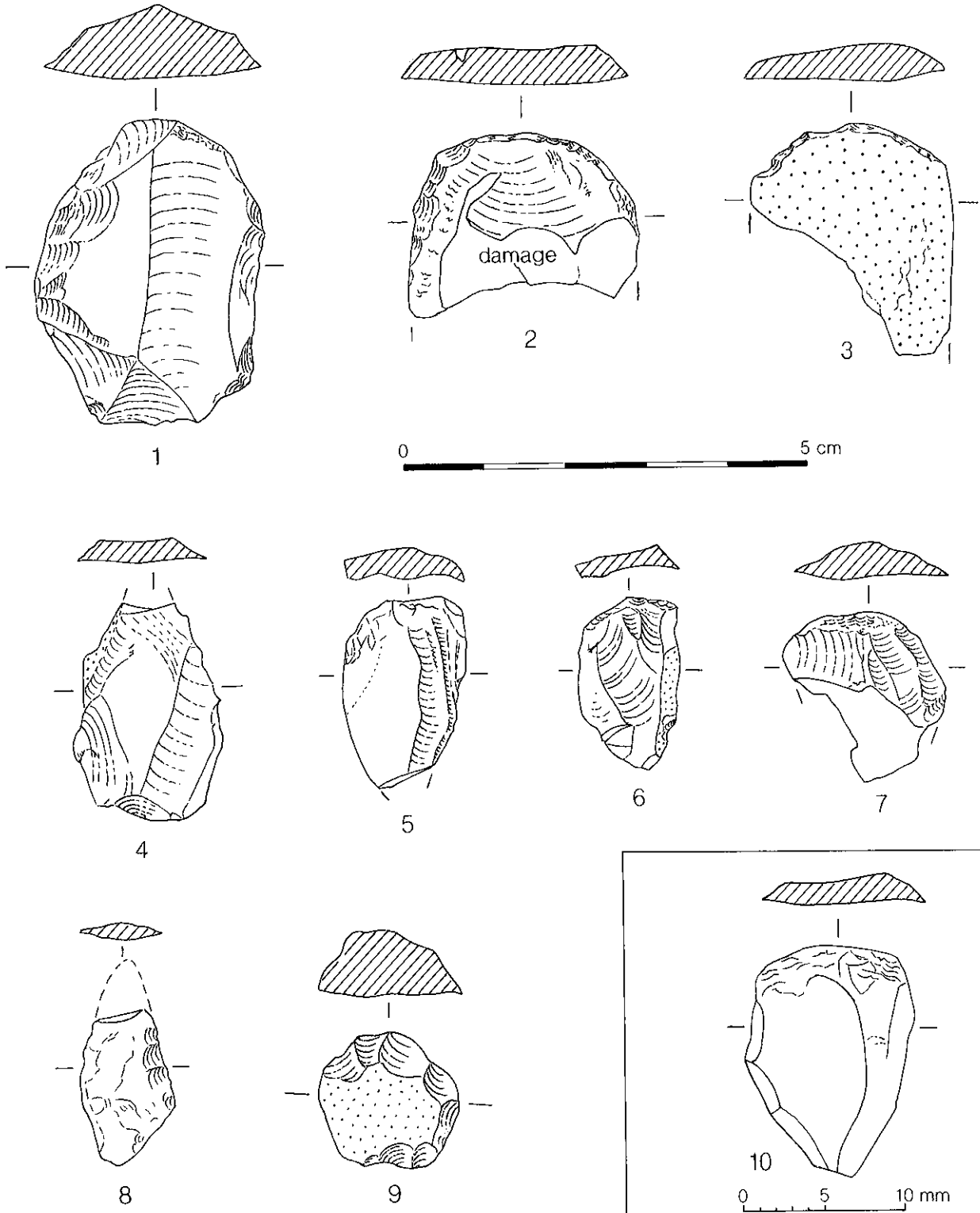


Figure 9.6. Lithics from Loch a' Choire

Primary technology

All of the material recovered from the islet is flint, with 18% of the assemblage showing signs of having been burnt. Only one piece shows signs of abrasion, although a number of un-worked rolled pebbles were recovered from the eastern shore. Analysis of the primary technology indicates that there was no real preference of material chosen for knapping. As Table 9.6 shows, the numbers of cortical (primary), secondary and inner pieces are fairly consistent, indicating that flint nodules were brought to the site whole and worked. The cortex on the majority of primary flakes is characteristic of beach pebbles, abraded and flawed. This is interesting in the context of the Loch a' Choire site because the nearest known sources of flint are beach pebbles from the Barra shore (Wickham-Jones and Collins 1978: 11). It is, however, quite possible that more immediate sources of flint might once have existed.

The assemblage is mostly comprised of irregular flakes, burnt chunks and angular shatter, but there is a single blade. The average size of the flakes is fairly small – 12.5mm in length, 10mm in breadth and 3mm thick – coinciding with the generally small size of beach flint nodules. The core trimming flakes indicate that the assemblage was knapped using both single and opposed platform cores, and a couple of flakes show signs of bipolar techniques. A number of flakes have hinge terminations, which may indicate the poor quality of the flint. However, these could also suggest low-powered knapping techniques where cores are supported in the hand or on the thigh, and struck using a soft hammer (Wickham-Jones 1997: 161).

Secondary technology

The assemblage contains 10 retouched pieces, where one or more edges of the blank have been modified using pressure flaking. There is no evidence to suggest that particular types of flake were chosen (*e.g.* primary, secondary *etc.*), and it is probable that the shape and style of these tools were dictated by the available blanks.

Six scrapers were identified within the assemblage: two from Trench 1, one from Trench 2 and three recovered as stray finds. The majority (four) of these pieces are end scrapers, with the distal end modified to form the scraping edge (Figure 9.6.1 to 3). One of these is also modified on the left side (Figure 9.6.2) and another on both sides (Figure 9.6.1). There is a single side scraper, modified on the left edge, and a small thumbnail scraper formed from the top of a pebble (Figure 9.6.9). The end scraper with a modified left side has been manufactured on a heavily burnt flake. All of the scrapers show evidence of edge damage on top of the retouch, caused perhaps through use, or post-depositional processes.

Bifacially worked point

This burnt and badly damaged example of a probable lozenge-shaped arrowhead was recovered from Trench 1 (Figure 9.6.8). Invasive retouch has been utilized on both

sides of a flake to thin the blank sufficiently and create the required shape, such that it is no longer possible to identify the original shape or form of the blank. The tip of the point is missing, and one side has been damaged. The choice of material used for the manufacture of the point, together with the rather poor quality of the retouch, suggest that this was a utilitarian tool, perhaps created quickly for an immediate purpose and then discarded.

Other retouched pieces

Three additional retouched pieces were recovered, one from Trench 3, one as a stray find and another as a stray find from the eastern shore of the islet. The piece from Trench 3 appears to be a broken scraper, with the left side, and possibly the proximal end, retouched. Edge damage is also apparent on the retouched edge, suggesting that it has been utilized. The stray find (Figure 9.6.7) has a small amount of tiny retouch along the distal edge – it is probable that this is, in fact, platform preparation rather than manufactured to produce a cutting edge. The stray find from the eastern shore (Figure 9.6.10) is perhaps the most interesting. Here platform preparation is visible on a fairly regular shaped burnt flake, and retouch has been used to blunt the top half of the left edge. The right edge is straight and unmodified, with a small amount of edge damage. This would appear to be a cutting implement, with the blunted edge designed to facilitate hafting or to enable the tool to be comfortably held.

Interpretations

It is difficult to draw many conclusions about the use of the islet site on the basis of such a small lithic assemblage that contains such a limited number of tool types. The presence of scrapers, an apparent arrowhead and a probable cutting tool do, however, point to the range of activities that might have been carried out on the site. The identification of a number of core trimming flakes indicates that knapping was occurring on the site, and the number of cortical flakes suggests that nodules of beach flint were transported to the islet for this purpose.

It is likely that the flint assemblage points to a domestic site, with the arrowhead perhaps used for hunting game or for slaughtering domestic animals whilst the scrapers and cutting tools were most probably utilized in the processing of meat and hides, together with a range of other materials. The arrowhead, however, may also indicate conflict and violence. The discovery of these tool types on a site that also produced pottery suggests its use as an occupation site. It is clear from the pottery and the diagnostic lozenge-shaped arrowhead that at least some of the lithic material dates to the Neolithic. However, in the absence of clearly stratified contexts, the date of the majority of the assemblage remains ambiguous.

Other material

In addition to the flint and pottery, there were three pieces of

pumice from Trench 3, one of which features a groove worn into the pumice (Figure 9.5.7), possibly a result of using the pumice to work antler (Niall Sharples pers. comm.).

In all the trenches excavated, save for Trench 3, the material remains derived from contexts immediately overlying the quartz-rich bedrock so that the overlying soils featured an abundance of natural quartz derived from this parent material. Unfortunately, this excessive quantity of naturally available quartz on the islet meant that in-the-field collection and/or detailed examination of quartz was not carried out. With hindsight, greater care and selection should have been made, certainly given the prominence of worked quartz at other Neolithic settlements in northern Scotland where flint sources are scarce (Bradley 1995). However, given the small scale of the excavations and the proliferation of natural quartz that was found, the collection of quartz for later examination was not thought practicable.

Soils

The soils of Loch a' Choire are an element of the islet that deserves further attention. Of note are the relatively fertile soils here and particularly the absence of any peat, contrasting sharply with the surrounding landscape and other islets visited on South Uist. Whilst there is evidence that the local soil is deteriorating, notably through the formation of iron pan and leaching of the soils, it is still quite distinct from other soils in this part of South Uist. There are a number of possible explanations as to why this is so, some closely related to the long history of occupation that the islet might have experienced.

It is possible that some of the soil on the islet has been added, either to 'landscape' it (in terms of levelling or shaping parts of it) or to make it more fertile. Arable agriculture has been carried out on the islet at some point in its history, as testified by the cultivation ridges. This then begs the question of why this location received such attention. In the Outer Hebrides, islets have often provided a focus of attention. This is certainly the case for the Iron Age in the form of brochs, and during later periods where high-status settlements and occasionally religious places were situated on islets within lochs (see Chapter 6).

In the Neolithic, islets might have provided a focus for seasonal or resource-specific bases and were perhaps even prescribed contexts for acts of consumption (Armit 1992). Locating settlement on an island within a loch emphasizes its distinction from the surrounding landscape and from other settlements. In this scenario it is not difficult to envisage why such attention might have been paid to the islet in Loch a' Choire. Already a place distinct from the surrounding landscape, the addition of soil might have served then to further distinguish the islet through expressing the ability to control its shape or form as well as its fertility.

Additionally or alternatively, the islet's separation from its surrounding landscape might have limited the onset of peat formation here. Animals too would equally have served to limit the local growth of peat as well as potentially providing sufficient organic matter to limit the acidification

of the soils. In the absence of peat, however, the soils are now deteriorating in a different way. The high rainfall and low evaporation experienced in the region, combined with the high acidity of the iron-rich local geology, has facilitated the leaching of soils involving the downward movement of soluble materials such as iron through the soil profile. These often come to be re-deposited further down the soil horizon, in most circumstances resulting in the formation of an iron pan layer, observable in some eroded areas on the islet where the soil profile is visible. It must be stressed, though, that whilst the soils at Loch a' Choire are experiencing deterioration, this is not to the same extent, nor necessarily in the same way, as elsewhere on South Uist and they certainly deserve further attention.

Summary

In conclusion, it seems probable that neither the artefacts from the lochside/shore nor those from Trench 3 are *in situ*. Both small assemblages probably reflect the movement of material downslope from an as-yet-unidentified activity or settlement locale on the islet. This would explain the heavily abraded nature of most of the sherds and the absence of any features in the excavations. This is not to dismiss, however, the potential value of the findings. The material from Loch a' Choire may provide an enigmatic glimpse of life in the Neolithic on South Uist beyond its chambered tombs. Indeed, for an island that has become noted for its wealth of later prehistoric and Medieval archaeology, the findings here offer some prospect for extending our archaeological knowledge of South Uist further back in time.

It remains difficult to draw conclusions on what the material culture from Loch a' Choire represents, because the excavations were so brief and the context and condition of the material found was so poor. As already stressed, it is unlikely that any of the archaeological material found during the excavations was *in situ*. A further complication comes from the lack of conclusive analogies to refer to in interpreting the site. The closest analogy to Loch a' Choire is Eilean an Tighe on North Uist, excavated by Lindsay Scott (Scott 1951). Here the excavation of a natural island situated within a loch revealed evidence of Neolithic occupation in the form of a large assemblage of decorated pottery and some brief hearths and structures. The excavation at Eilean an Tighe presents many useful comparisons with the findings from context 305 at Loch a' Choire, notably the abundance of pottery but also the presence in this context of flint, pumice and charcoal.

Whilst the remains and material culture were much more substantial at Eilean an Tighe, this is hardly surprising given the limited scale of excavation at Loch a' Choire. Indeed, statistically the potential resource presented by Loch a' Choire in comparison to Eilean an Tighe is promising. At Loch a' Choire a 1.60m × 1.35m trench (Trench 3) revealed 99 sherds of pottery and 16 pieces of flint, compared to 4,437 sherds of pottery and 26 pieces of flint found at Eilean an Tighe in an area approximately 10m × 6m, an area almost thirty times that of Trench 3 at Loch a' Choire

(2.08sq m compared to 60sq m). With this in mind, further survey (possibly by geophysics) and excavation of Loch a' Choire can only serve to address and provide answers to some of the ambiguities in the evidence found.

In terms of our knowledge of the Neolithic in this region and our longer-term understanding of the history (and prehistory) of South Uist, the discovery of pottery and flint from Loch a' Choire is important. Whilst the nature and context of the finds were insubstantial, the genuinely high concentration of cultural material, especially from Trench 3, suggests that more material remains to be found. The material from Loch a' Choire has potentially provided the earliest excavated evidence for human activity on South Uist but it also highlights how little we understand the character of Neolithic settlement in this region, as well as providing an example of the potential for what remains to be discovered. I have no doubt that more of these sites remain to be found.

Acknowledgments

Firstly, I would like to thank Niall Sharples for hosting me during my stay on South Uist and for his consultation and knowledge throughout the excavation, survey and post-excavation process. I would also like to thank Naomi and Suzie who conducted the EDM survey and especially Suzie for drafting the incoherent survey results into a coherent plan. Many thanks to Howard Mason for producing the illustrations for Figures 9.1, 9.2, 9.5 and 9.6. I am very grateful to the School of History and Archaeology, Cardiff University for the provision of space to examine the finds from Loch a' Choire and particularly to Alan Lane for some pointers on looking at pottery. Many thanks go to Amelia for looking at the flint assemblage from the site. Melanie Johnson kindly advised on the enigmatic sherd 106 from the site whilst the late Derek Simpson and Keith Branigan generously provided images of the pottery from Northton, Harris, and Biruaslam, Vatersay, respectively. Lastly I am indebted to Paul Rae who initially pointed out Loch a' Choire as an area of potential and interest and who provided shelter, tools, transport, enthusiasm, beverages and company during the process of excavation and survey.

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10 Early Bronze Age settlements at Machair Mheadhanach and Cill Donnain

*Mike Hamilton and Niall Sharples
with a contribution by Joshua Pollard*

The machair survey of South Uist resulted in the discovery of two sites dating to the Early Bronze Age and stimulated further work on a site previously examined (Gilbertson *et al.* 1996: 80–1). One of these sites discovered by the machair survey, Sligeanach, has since been the subject of excavation (Sharples 1998) and is described fully in Chapter 11. The present chapter is intended to describe the survey work on settlements at Machair Mheadhanach and Cill Donnain, to publish the finds recovered by this survey work, and to discuss the nature of Beaker settlement in the Western Isles.

Machair Mheadhanach

This site was first identified as a settlement mound by P.R. Ritchie in 1956. This identification was the result of a survey undertaken prior to the construction of the rocket range west of Loch Bee.¹ Details of the survey have never been published but one of the authors came across a map of the sites in a file held by Historic Scotland. Approximately 54 settlement mounds were identified in the northern part of the South Uist machair. Most of these sites were part of a group of large settlement mounds some 200m or more inland from the west coast but a distinct group of sites was set apart by its location close to the coastal dunes. None of these sites (Sites 177–185, 217–222) were excavated during the rocket range campaign and there was no indication of the date of these mounds.

The sites were relocated by Parker Pearson in 1997 and they have been visited most summers since (Figure 2.3; Parker Pearson 1996; see Chapter 2, this volume). Several of the mounds have produced little material and are impossible to date. Mound 184, however, has a rabbit burrow that consistently produces new ceramic material every year and the sherds recovered all seem to date to the Early Bronze Age. There is no indication of material from any other period on this mound but it cannot be assumed that such evidence does not exist in areas away from the finds location.

Finds

The finds collected from Site 184 by MPP consist of 18 sherds of pottery (Figure 10.1), seven animal bones and nine pieces of quartz. The quartz appears to be fractured by human agency but the coarse-grained nature of the material makes further analysis difficult (Joshua Pollard pers. comm.). All the bones seem to be from large mammals and one piece could be from a whale.

Pottery catalogue

Beaker (Figure 10.1.1). 14 sherds (plus fragments) of a single vessel. Dark grey throughout. Inclusions of *c.*3% sand, mostly small but occasionally larger than 1mm. Very fine decoration of small incisions arranged in herringbone patterns, combined with horizontal and vertical grooves. The overall motif arrangement is a metope (Clarke 1970: app.1, motif 37ii).

Beaker (Figure 10.1.2). Buff exterior and grey core. Inclusions of *c.*10% quartz, some quartzite and mica, and probably *c.*5% small iron oxides. All decoration is comb. Interior comb decoration and its carinated appearance indicate this sherd is from close to the rim. Not much survives of the exterior design but there appears to be a blank area with three horizontal combed lines above, then a rather irregular lattice (or perhaps narrow filled-triangle motif), and above that perhaps two (or more) horizontal lines. The interior decoration can be defined as Clarke (1970) motif 2 (or 9ii), horizontal lines defining a narrow band of oblique lines.

Beaker (Figure 10.1.3). One rim sherd with a slight collar. Partly buff exterior with the rest of the sherd a dark grey. Inclusions include some mica, *c.*10% small sand, some quartzite and a small amount of larger quartz (mostly around 1mm in size, but up to 3mm in diameter). Decoration is a broad twisted cord arranged in horizontal lines. The sole exception occurs on the exterior surface where some form of ladder motif may also be indicated. There is decoration on exterior, interior and rim top.

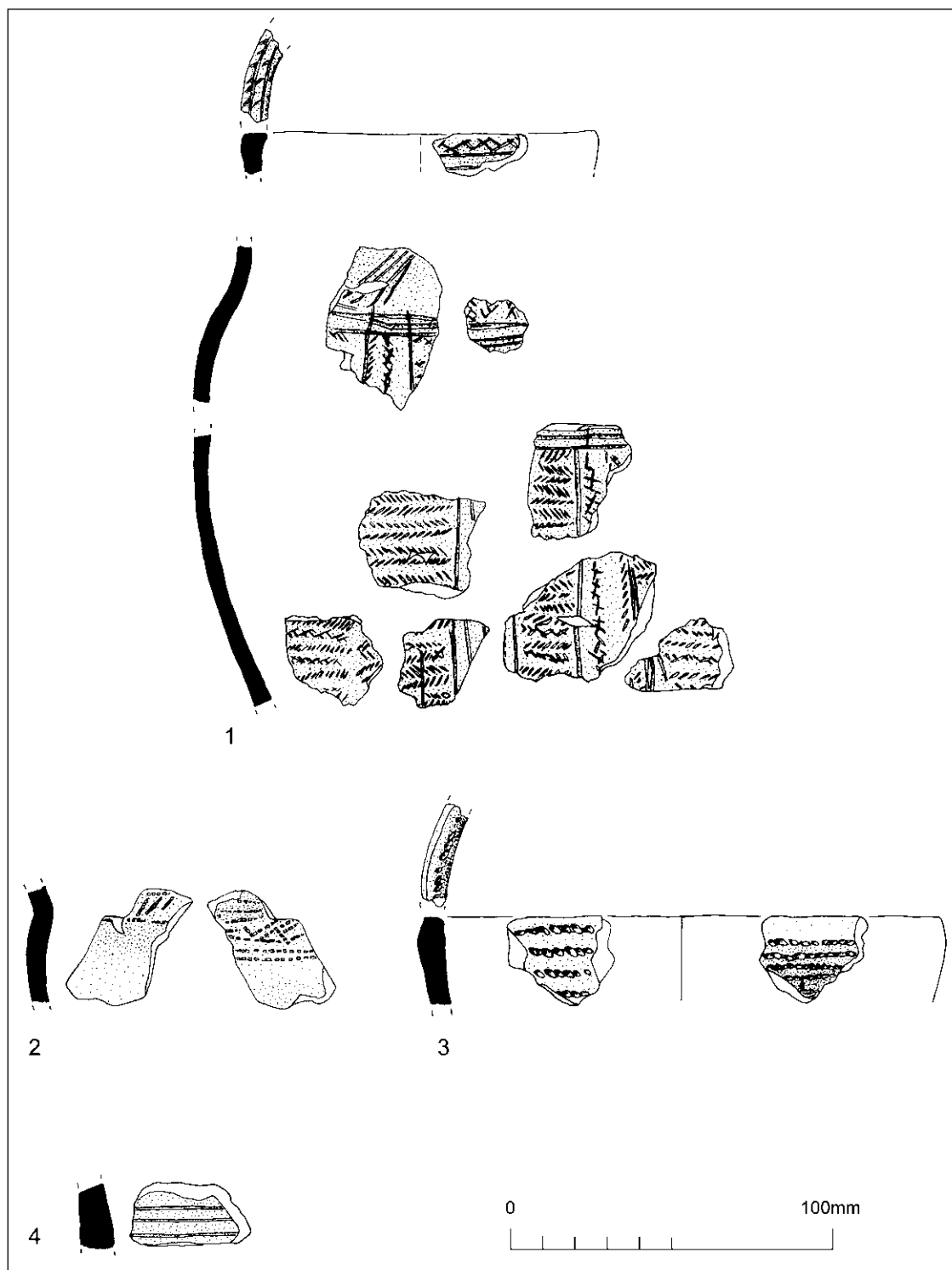


Figure 10.1. Beaker pottery from Machair Mheadhanach Site 184

Beaker (Figure 10.1.4). This sherd has the same finish and inclusions as those of the pot shown in Figure 10.1.2, but is decorated with shallow horizontal grooves. Gibson (1982: 216) notes that incision and comb decoration often occur together on the Northton sherds, so it is possible that this sherd comes from that pot (Figure 10.1.2).

Pottery discussion

There are a number of interesting features about this assemblage. The herringbone metopes (Figure 10.1.1) represent a motif almost entirely limited to Scotland (11 out of 13 British examples, with the two exceptions from northern England; Clarke also illustrates Irish and German examples). This pattern is repeated in the local

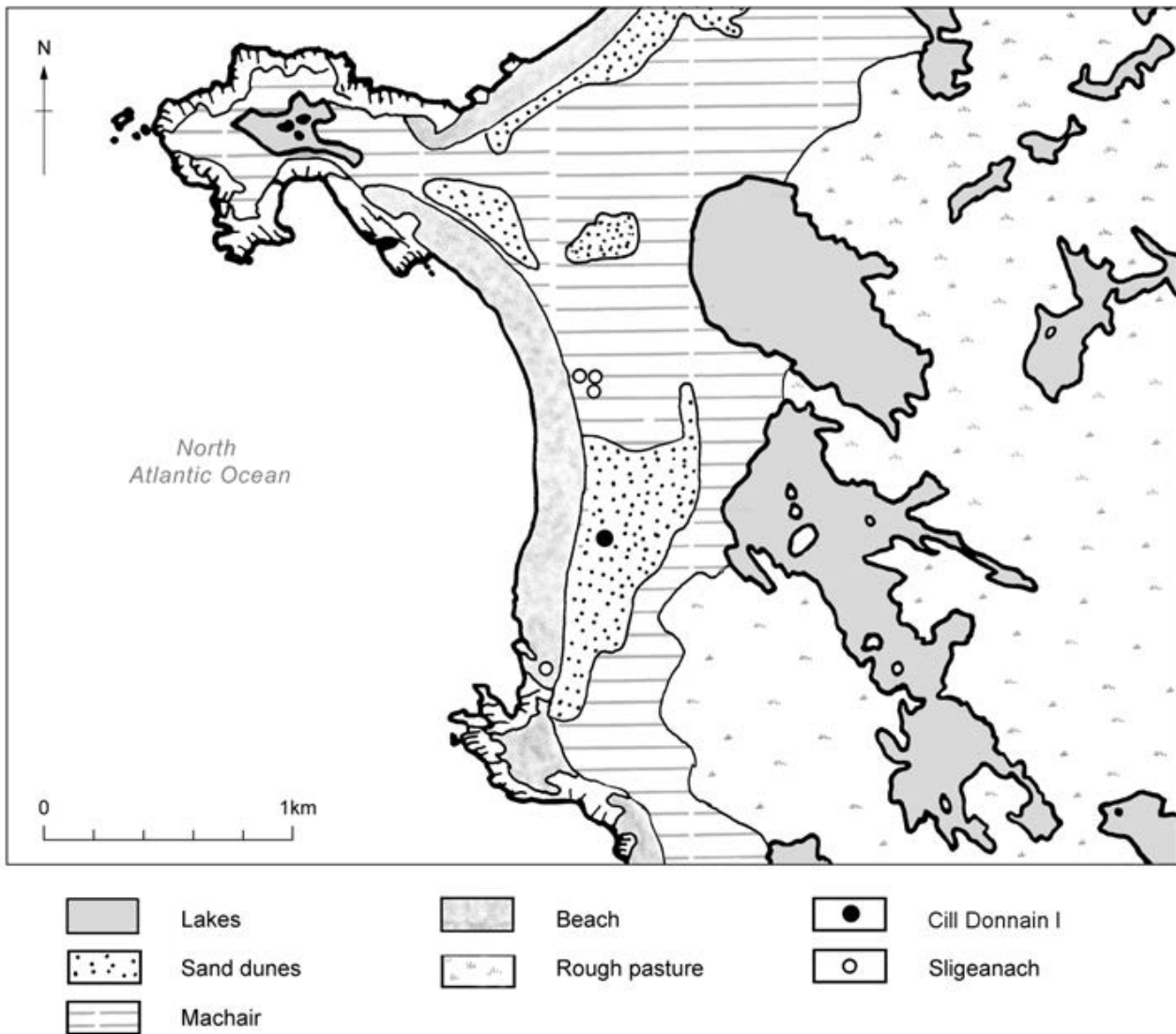


Figure 10.2. Map showing the location of Beaker-period and other Early Bronze Age sites on Cill Donnain machair

Beaker assemblages from Northton (Gibson 1982: 474, fig. NOR 5; Simpson 1976: fig. 12.2 [top right], fig. 12.4 [mid-right]; Simpson *et al.* 2006: 130–1), Rudh' an Dunain (Henshall 1972: 310, SKY 7.3), and Rosinish (Crawford 1977: fig. 54.1–54.2; Shepherd 1976: fig. 14). There are examples of the motif in comb impressions from Dalmore (Ponting and Ponting 1984: 233, photograph top right). Comparison should also be made with the Beaker pottery from Sligeanach (see Sheridan in Chapter 11).

The slight collar on the sherd illustrated as Figure 10.1.3 can be paralleled in a number of local assemblages. The use of corded decoration is uncommon but is recorded on single finds from Gorton and Paible (Gibson 1982: 161, 220). It is rare in the large assemblage at Northton (*ibid.*: 215) and is apparently absent from Rosinish (*ibid.*: 231). Rim-top decoration occurs on a number of local sites (Northton and Rudh' an Dunain), which is notable as Clarke (1970: app. 2.9) indicates that it is a very rare feature, generally found only in northern Britain. Clarke specifically notes that no Beaker has cord decoration on the rim-top, which makes vessel 10.1.3 even more significant. The large size

of this vessel is comparable with rim sizes from Northton (Gibson 1982: 216).

The comb decoration on the interior surface of the sherd illustrated as Figure 10.1.2 is another rare feature (Clarke 1970: app. 2.8), again largely restricted to northern Britain. Nothing similar occurs locally in comb, though incised decoration occurs at Rosinish (Crawford 1977: fig. 5.26) and Northton (Gibson 1982: fig. NOR 6, no. 25, NOR 7, nos. 2–5). Broad external rim bevels were present at Northton (*ibid.*: 217).

All the decorated Beaker pottery appears to be well made, with the corded Beaker the less well finished. Given the nature of recovery, it is difficult to treat the collection as a single chronological episode. The vessel illustrated as Figure 10.1.1 would certainly be Late in Case's (1977) terms. All-Over-Cord (AOC) Beakers appear to have a long life, especially as this rather large vessel with coarse cord does not easily match the classic AOC types. The well-defined carination with body and neck on vessel 10.1.2 suggests a Clarke northern Beaker with a relatively short neck, which would also generally be Late. The merits of

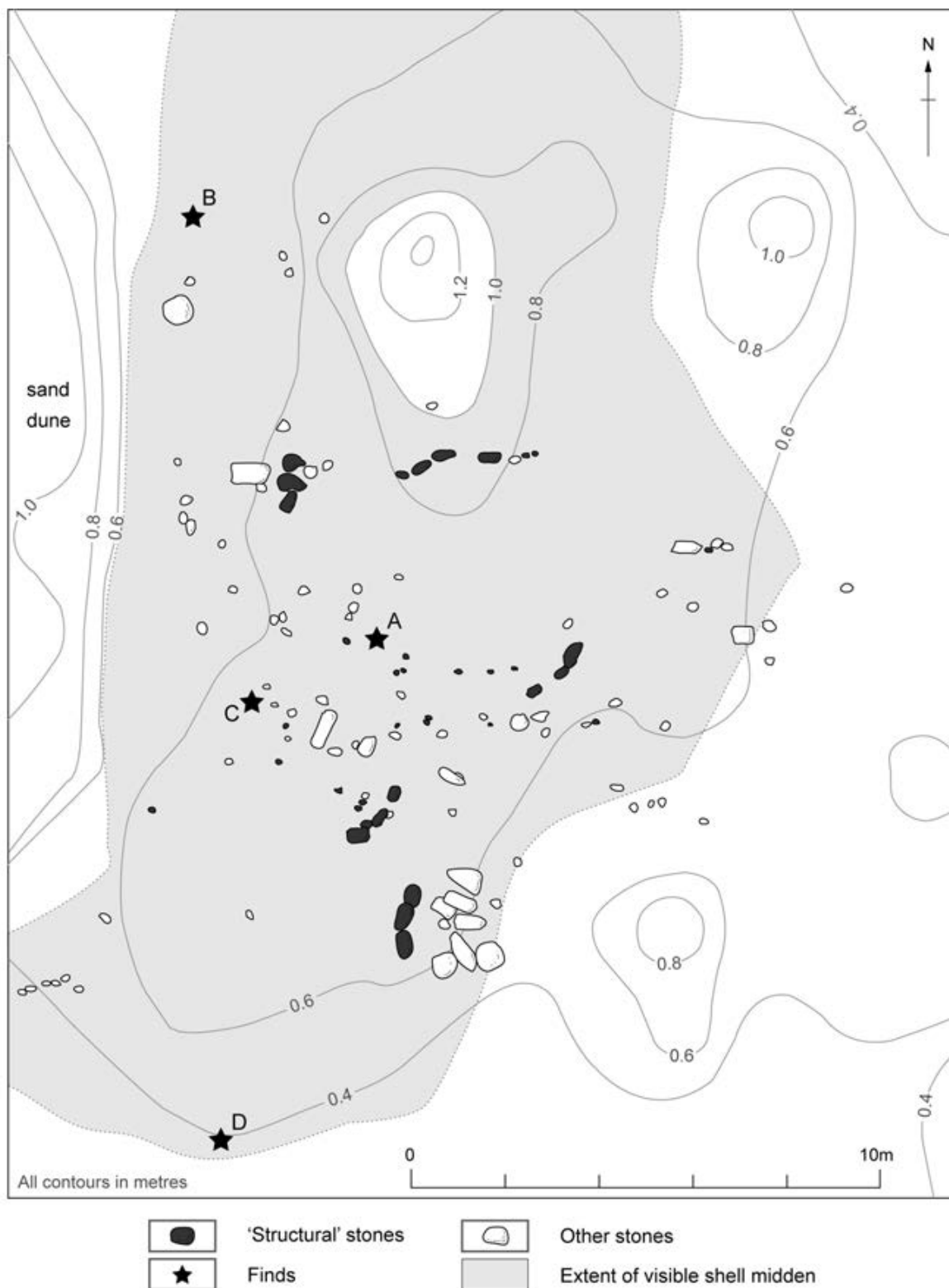


Figure 10.3. Plan of Cill Donnain I

such classifications have been debated recently (Kinnes *et al.* 1991; Case 1993; Hamilton 1995; Needham 2005).

Cill Donnain

Cill Donnain I (NF7259 2828; Site 87 of the machair survey) is located amongst sand dunes in the township of

Cill Donnain, c.100m from the sea, on the western coast (Figure 10.2; Site 87 in Figure 2.6). It was revealed in the bottom of a sand-blow that has since stabilized and partially grassed over. The site consists of a shell midden associated with earthfast orthostats (Figure 10.3). Some of the latter are clearly placed in short rows and form parts of structures. A test pit, or trench, was dug in April

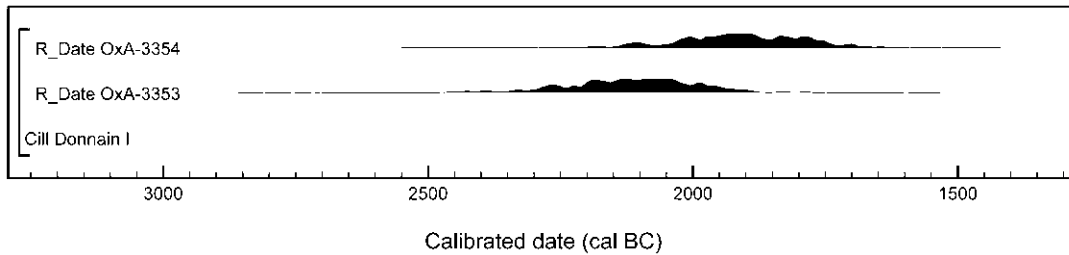


Figure 10.4 Radiocarbon dates from Cill Donnain I

1988 by University of Sheffield research student Linda Kennedy Allan (1988); this cut through *in situ* palaeosols and recovered charred barley and charcoal that were radiocarbon dated (Gilbertson *et al.* 1996). These date to 2350–1890 cal BC (OxA-3353; 3710±80 BP) and 2140–1690 cal BC (OxA-3354; 3560±80 BP) at 95.4% probability (Figure 10.4). The variation in depth of the archaeological deposit, described as ‘variously 0.5 to 1m thick’, implies either an excavation trench of some length or more than one excavation by Kennedy. Surface finds in 1988 included a barbed-and-tanged arrowhead.

In 1996 the site was surveyed by a team from the University of Wales, Cardiff. Contour, resistivity and gradiometer surveys were conducted and a plan made of the stones and midden. It was during this survey that part of a stone battle-axe was found, as well as pottery. Earlier finds had been made by Parker Pearson during the machair survey project (see Chapter 2). Cardiff University students made additional finds on their days off. These finds included more pottery, worked flint, and bone pins.

Approximately 500m north of Cill Donnain I is a group of mounds at Sligeanach (Figure 10.2) that have produced Beaker and Early Bronze Age pottery (Sites 17, 18, 21, 176 in Figure 2.6). A contour survey and gradiometer survey were conducted across these mounds in 1997 but unfortunately the solid geology appears to be close to the surface at this point and the results were not meaningful. Trial excavations were undertaken on these mounds in 1998 (Sharples 1998; see Chapter 11) and these test pits demonstrated the presence of a range of features associated with cultivation soils. Several radiocarbon dates have been obtained and the mounds produced Beaker and other Early Bronze Age pottery but no obviously later pottery.

Geology and drift geology

The site and immediate location of Cill Donnain I was described by Gilbertson *et al.* (1996: 80–1) in terms of the sand stratigraphy. The dune immediately to the west has machair vegetation on top and 1m- to 2m-deep ‘machair stratification’ below. Under this is a palaeosol, divided in two by a layer of blown sand. Beneath the blown sand, 1m to 3m of aeolian deposits rest on the part of archaeological site that is still buried. The archaeological site was described Gilbertson *et al.* as a ‘complex deposit made up of archaeological remains, palaeosols and archaeological midden materials – especially the bones of domesticated

vertebrates and inter-tidal molluscs – all in a matrix of fine-grained shell-sand’. Under the site was at least 0.50m of well-sorted sand. There is no indication by Gilbertson *et al.* of the depth of sand separating the archaeological deposits from the gneiss bedrock

Contour survey and planning

The contour survey was conducted with a Topcon GTS-303 total station. The spacing of readings depended in part on the changes of topography but, for most of the survey, the points were roughly 2m apart. The Topcon was also used to lay out the grids for the geophysical survey and for the plan of the stones and shell midden. This was done at a scale of 1:100.

The contour survey reflects the surrounding geomorphology of the site (Figure 10.5). Two large sand dunes, to the west and southeast, are the most prominent features but several small mounds of sterile sand exist within the deflation hollow. The archaeological site is defined by a roughly rectangular scatter of shells, 36m long and 14m wide. The southern half of this spread is characterized by an increased density of stone that includes four definite wall faces and another possible example. In front of the southernmost wall face lies a pile of slabs that now sits on top of the archaeological surface. Two wall faces in the centre of the area appear to define two sides of a large oval building, over 5m wide, oriented roughly northeast to southwest. The location of another wall face, to the southeast, suggests that there may be an ancillary structure linked to this structure, possibly to form a ‘figure-of-eight’ building. Alternatively this might be an entrance passage. The other two wall faces appear unrelated and suggest other structures exist.

Geophysical survey

The area that could be surveyed was very limited owing to the presence of high sand dunes immediately east and west of the site. An additional complication is the local habit of dumping old cars on the edges of sand blows to stabilize the edge. One of these wrecks was located to the northeast of the surveyed area and will have had some effect on the gradiometer survey.

Three 20 × 20m gradiometer grids were surveyed with a transverse interval of 1m and a sampling interval of 0.50m (800 readings per grid). Seven 10m × 10m resistivity grids

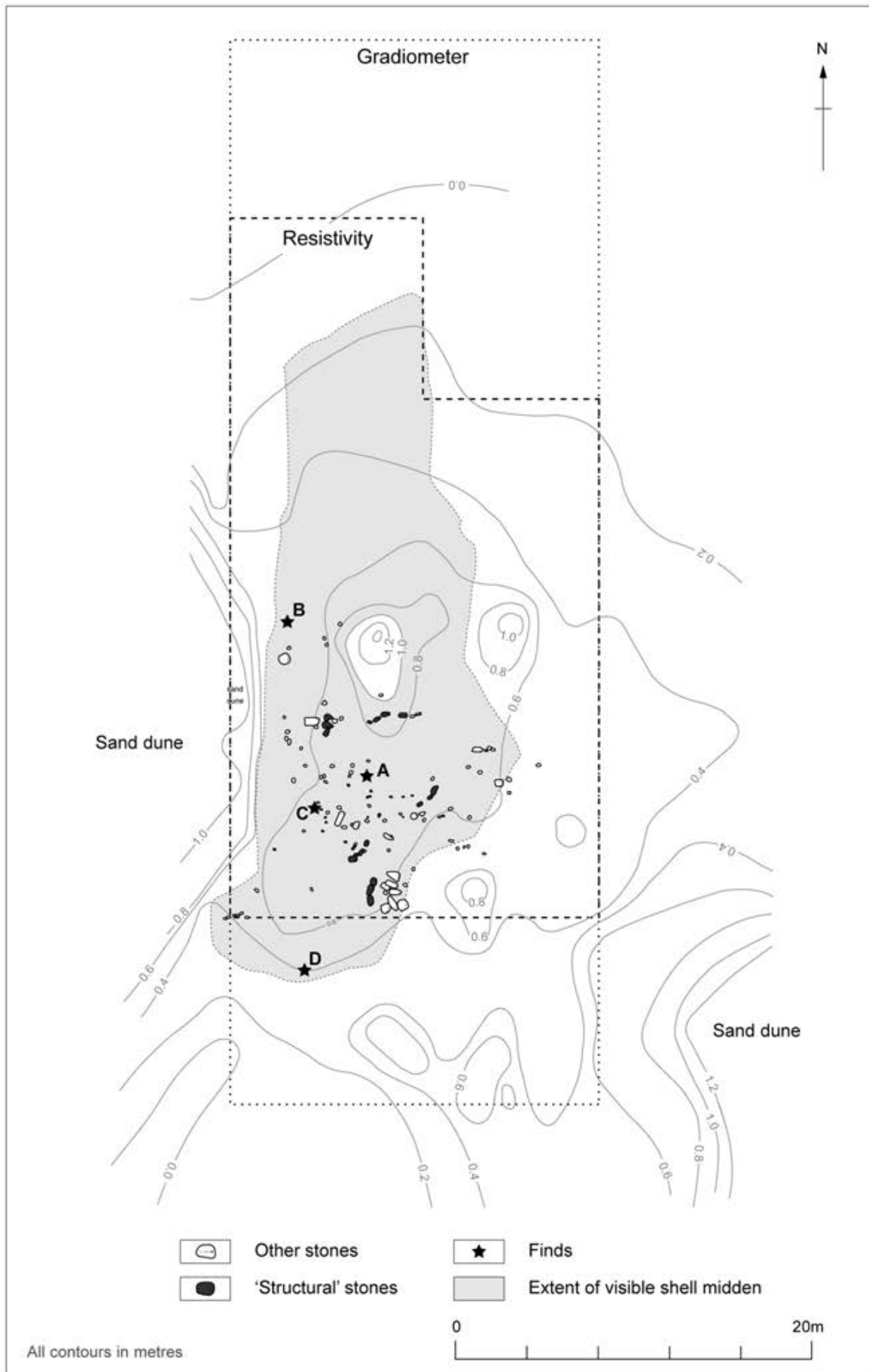


Figure 10.5. Contour map of Cill Donnain I

were surveyed with sampling and transverse intervals of 0.50m (400 readings per grid). The equipment used was a Geoscan FM36 fluxgate gradiometer and a RM4 resistivity meter with a DL10 data-logger. The data was processed on a Triumph-Adler Workstation 386 SX using Geoscan Geoplot 1.1 and 2 programmes and printed on a Hewlett Packard Deskjet 340.

The machair is essentially shell sand with a low quartz component (Boyd and Boyd 1990); when unaltered, it appears as a very neutral medium for the gradiometer. The underlying geology is strongly magnetic and, if close to the surface, will therefore obscure any archaeology (Clark 1990: 92). Some 800m to the north a survey had to be abandoned because poor results suggested that the geology is very near to the surface here. If the sand is deep enough to neutralize the underlying geology, then good results are possible. This is especially the case at sites such as Cill Donnain I where the local igneous stone has been used to create structures.

The main problem for the resistance survey is the well-drained nature of the shell sand. Throughout the survey poor probe contact was a problem.

Results

Surveying very small areas with geophysics often produces results very difficult to interpret. Usually there is not enough visible to make a truly informed assessment.

The gradiometer results (Figure 10.6a) clearly show a high level of activity over the area with the 'structural' stones. When an overlay of the plan is laid on the gradiometer printout, most of the stones can be identified to areas of high readings. This suggests that the other areas of high readings correspond to stones beneath the surface.

This has interesting implications as the survey suggests that the buildings extend further to the north and east than is visible in the topographical survey. The total area with significant readings covers 25m north-south, with 20m east-west although the edges in this direction are covered by the dunes.

The resistivity largely confirms the density of stones revealed by the plan (Figure 10.6b). It also broadly confirms the gradiometer survey in terms of the eastern extent. There is a suggestion (A) of a roughly rectangular area (c. 11m × 9m) defined by two east-west high-resistance bands narrowing towards the west. Conversely this could also be interpreted as a structure narrowing to the northeast with its broad end at the southwest. There is a suggestion of a second feature (B) partly buried under the western sand dune edge and a vaguer feature exists to the northwest (C). The resistivity did not confirm the southeastern extent of the gradiometer anomaly. The higher resistance areas to the north (D and E) have no confirmation in the gradiometer survey and therefore are unlikely to be stone. It is possible these are thicker areas of unmodified shell sand that drain very quickly and generally have high resistance (Hamilton and Sharples 1997).

Discussion

The pattern revealed by the resistivity survey suggests a rectangular building with a tapering end and has parallels in the house excavated at Northton (Simpson 1976; Simpson *et al.* 2006) and at Rosinish (Shepherd and Tuckwell 1977). Oval houses appear to be normal for this period, though the circular house at Allt Chrisal (Foster 1995) does suggest that alternative forms exist.

There are problems in interpreting any keyhole geophysical survey and this is no different. The only way to significantly improve on the survey conclusions would be trial excavation.

Finds

A reasonably large collection of material has been accumulated by recurrent visits to the site since 1997. These can be broken down into the categories of stone tools (including flint), ceramics, bone and metal.

Stone

Battle-axe (Figure 10.7.1). A fragment representing almost exactly a quarter of a stone battle-axe was found in 1996. It is not clear which end is represented by the fragment, but probably the blade. The top 16mm of the hourglass perforation survives. Running around the top is a pecked shallow groove, which creates a step up to the flat area around the perforation. The morphology and decoration suggests this is a Roe (1966) stage I (Woodhenge Group) battle-axe. By comparison with the example from Barns Farm, Dalgety, Fife, it is likely to date to the 21st–20th centuries cal BC (Sheridan 2007a: 176).

Heather Jackson comments: the battle-axe was probably made from a mafic dolerite or an actinolite. If it is a mafic dolerite, Skye, with a varied igneous geology, provides the most likely source. It could be an altered igneous specimen such as an actinolite but lacks sufficient foliation to be part of the Lewisian Gneiss complex that makes up South Uist. It is possible that similar unfoliated actinolites occur within the metabasic rocks on the northeast coast of Barra.

This appears to be the only battle-axe known from the Outer Hebrides, although an axe-hammer from Uig, Lewis (Trevor Cowie pers. comm.) seems similar in size. Conversely, maceheads, shaft-hole adzes and pebble hammers seem relatively common from the Outer Hebrides (Cowie pers. comm.). The decoration has parallels on other 'Early' battle-axes (Fenton 1988: fig. 30, LNK 29) and some axe-hammers (Fenton 1988: fig. 35, DMF 77).

There appear to be few associations of battle-axes with occupation sites in Britain: most are associated with burials or are found as single finds. An unconvincing Roe Stage I axe came from House I, Ness of Gruting, Shetland (Smith 1979), where it was associated with carbonized grain and a radiocarbon date of 2200–1520 cal BC at 95.4% probability (BM-441; 3514±120 BP), whilst a Stage II battle-axe came from the house floor. However, other shaft-hole implements have been found on Late Neolithic Scottish

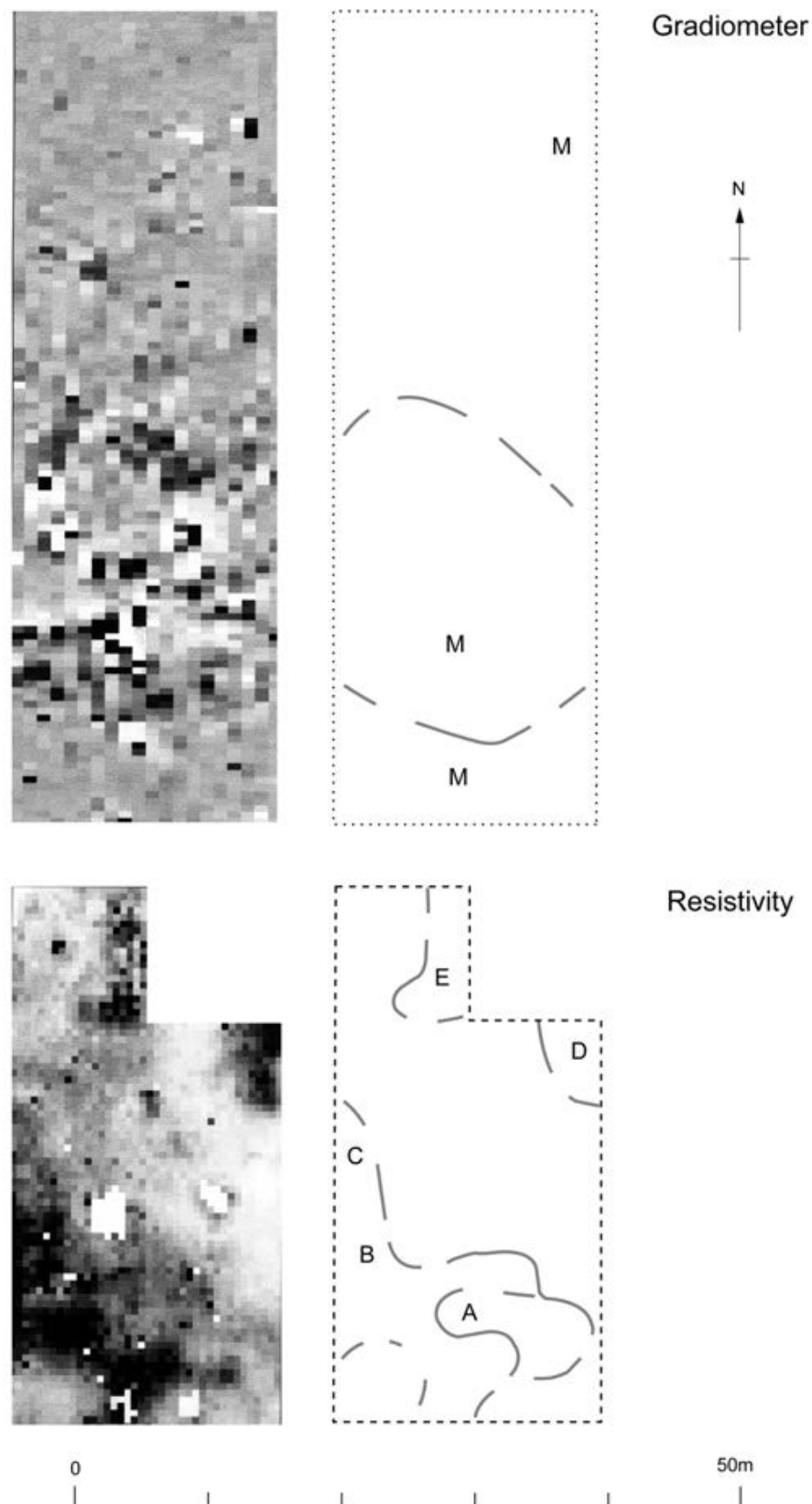


Figure 10.6. Geophysical survey plots of Cill Donnain I: a. magnetometry; b. earth resistivity survey

sites (Simpson and Ransom 1992). Maceheads have been found at Northton (Shepherd 1976) and at Barnhouse and Stonefield on Orkney (Colin Richards pers. comm.).

Pecked stone (Figure 10.7.2). The most obvious feature

of this stone is the presence of two pecked cup-marks in the middle of the two largest faces. However, the two ends also appear to be bashed and two other marks are possible on the sides.

Heather Jackson comments: the stone is a gabbro from one of the Tertiary dykes or intrusions that are a common feature of the islands and the northwest coast of Skye. The most likely source is the gabbro intrusion in the Cuillins on Skye, although other potential sources exist on Rhum and at Ardnamurchan. Although Tertiary dykes are infrequent on South Uist, they are numerous on Skye and the mainland and many contain gabbro 'kernels' of suitable size for use. Gabbro is a coarse-grained rock and it would be therefore difficult to produce detailed work or a 'refined' appearance on this material. However, its primary constituents are plagioclase, feldspar and pyroxene, which are considerably softer than quartz, so it would be relatively easy to produce a crude cup-mark using a quartzite pebble.

A similar stone was found in the Food Vessel phase of the settlement at Dalmore (Sharples pers. comm.) and such stones are recorded from Orkney Neolithic sites (Papa Westray, Ritchie 1983: no 219; Barnhouse and Pool, Clarke 1992: fig. 18.2: 2-3) in association with Unstan Ware and Grooved Ware.

Quartz

Large quantities of quartz are present on the surface of the site but no attempt has been made to collect this or to assess how much of it has been worked.

Worked flint

Joshua Pollard

Forty-five pieces of worked flint were recovered from the surface. This small assemblage includes several retouched pieces and a range of debitage, almost all produced on grey or light brown beach pebble flint of moderate quality. One artefact, a fragment of arrowhead, is on a distinctive pinkish flint of non-local origin. As much as such categories are useful, the assemblage can be defined as 'domestic' in character, with a reasonably high percentage of tools and retouched pieces.

The debitage (36 pieces in all) consists of a mixture of flakes, chips and irregular waste. Many of the pieces retain areas of cortex and all have been struck from small, water-worn flint pebbles. None of the pieces is above 40mm in size. Judging by the irregular crushing of proximal-distal ends, the principal mode of reduction appears to have been bipolar or anvil working. This is a crude and expedient technique that does not allow much control over the form of the flake produced but which is well suited to the working of such small raw material. Slight smoothing of some of the flake scars and break surfaces is probably due to sand erosion.

The implement assemblage includes a broken leaf-shaped arrowhead, scrapers and retouched pieces. A barbed-and-tanged arrowhead was recovered in 1988 but it has proved impossible to locate this.

The leaf-shaped arrowhead (Figure 10.7.13) has been produced on a large flake of pinkish flint. It has been formed

through extensive bifacial pressure-flaking, covering the entirety of both surfaces. The edges are lightly serrated. Thermal damage gives the implement a misleadingly asymmetrical shape. The arrowhead is almost certainly of earlier Neolithic date and its occurrence on the site is therefore something of an anomaly, though it may well represent a curated piece.

The scrapers include five examples of a small thumbnail type, each produced on flakes struck from flint pebbles. Substantial areas of cortex remain as 'backing' on four examples. Three (Figure 10.7.11, 10.7.14 and 10.7.15) may be defined as end scrapers, the two remaining (Figure 10.7.12 and 10.7.10) as end and side. In each instance the working edge, moderate to steeply angled, is created through regular semi-invasive retouch. One example (Figure 10.7.11) is lightly burnt. Similar thumbnail scrapers occurred at Northton (Simpson 1976; Simpson *et al.* 2006) and Dalmore (Ponting and Ponting 1984).

Of the three remaining retouched pieces, there is a broken straight-end scraper or fabricator on a thick flake, the end truncated by steep, blunting retouch, and two medium-sized flakes with unilateral retouch (marginal and semi-invasive).

Pottery

Beaker (Figure 10.7.3). Orange/red sherd exterior, partly brown in core, and interior missing. Inclusions of *c.* 15% fine quartz, *c.* 10% fine to 3mm ?grog lumps, and *c.* 5% shell. Decorated with shallow grooves, probably a horizontal line, with the start of triangle or lozenge below/above. This fragment was discovered at location B in Figure 10.3.

Beaker (Figure 10.7.4). Red exterior and 40% of core; remaining core and interior are dark. Same fabric as Figure 10.7.13. The sherd is too small to determine how it should be orientated. Decorated with comb. This could belong to the vessel illustrated as Figure 10.7.3, but the different decorative technique may suggest a second vessel. Another two fragments (unillustrated) may belong to either of these vessels.

?Beaker (Figure 10.7.5). Brown sherd. Similar fabric to Figure 10.7.3. The sherd has two diagonal grooved lines. A different vessel from those above.

?Food Vessel (Figure 10.7.6). Mostly dark grey sherd, some light grey on exterior; no interior survives. Probable inclusions of grog. Decorated with a boss. Below or above that is a horizontal band of vertical linear ?twisted cord impressions.

Plain sherd (not illustrated). Light brown exterior and interior, and dark core. Fabric has inclusions of *c.* 30% sand, *c.* 3% black stone, some mica, and possible fibrous material. This fragment was discovered at location C in Figure 10.3. There were three other plain sherds, reflecting at least two other vessels

One other sherd might have faint shallow horizontal grooves. This has a light brown exterior with a dark core and interior. Inclusions of *c.* 3% quartz and 10% large metamorphic stone (quartz with black specks).

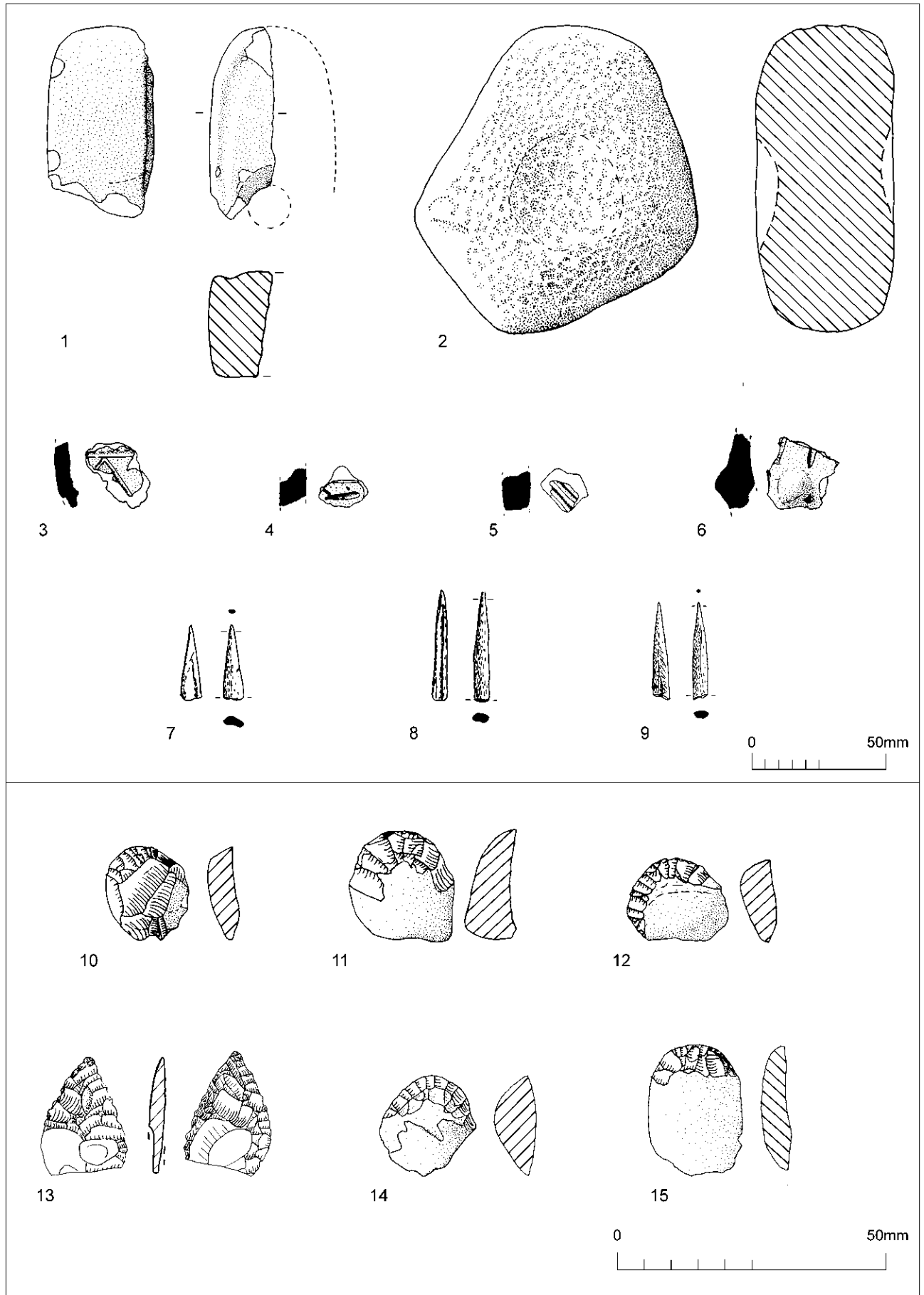


Figure 10.7. Artefacts and pottery from Cill Donnain I

All the decorated Beaker pottery appears to be well made. In general the distinction made between pottery used in burials and that found on settlement sites is overstated and well-made Beaker pottery is a common find on settlement sites across Britain. The use of triangular motifs below (or above) horizontal lines occurs at Northton (Simpson 1976: fig. 12.4; Simpson *et al.* 2006: 130–1) and Rosinish (Shepherd 1976: fig. 11.3, nos. 7 and 17). These sites also have a mixture of grooved and combed pottery, matched at Cill Donnain I. The nature of the ‘domestic’ vessels at Northton is not discussed in the interim report and it is not clear how similar these are to the plain sherds found at Cill Donnain I.

The sherd with the boss is difficult to parallel. Food Vessel Urns from Scotland have similar bosses (Cowie 1978) but their distribution appears to end well short of the Western Isles. None of the Food Vessel pottery from Dalmore (Sharples pers. comm.), or the cairns at Rosinish (Crawford 1977) and Cnip (Close-Brooks 1995; Dunwell *et al.* 1995) have bosses.

Bone

Three bone pins were found in 1996 (Figure 10.7.7, 10.7.8 and 10.7.9). They are all broken and bleached white from exposure. No. 9 has relatively fresh looking cut-marks. These pins have parallels from the Beaker pottery phases of Northton (Simpson 1976; Simpson *et al.* 2006), where bone pins were very common and Dalmore (Ponting and Ponting 1984).

Bronze

A tiny fragment of bronze was found on the surface in 1997. It appears to be broken and now consists of a flat semi-circle (6mm diameter) from which curves a small prong (3mm long). The patination suggests that it is not recent, but it could have been deposited on the site from the sea during winter storms or could even have originated from one of the abandoned cars. It is too small to be diagnostic, though the impression is that one face rested against an organic surface.

Cill Donnain summary

Cill Donnain I is an important Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age settlement on the machair plain of South Uist. The plan and geophysical surveys indicate the presence of a complex stone structure and surface collection has recovered diagnostic ceramics and other important artefacts. These, together with the radiocarbon determinations, indicate that the site belongs to the Early Bronze Age and suggest a Beaker date for most of the deposits.

Discussion

A total of sixteen Beaker settlements have now been identified on the Western Isles (Figure 10.8; see Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 43–52). Six of these sites have seen

substantial excavation; Barvas and Dalmore on Lewis, Northton on Harris, the Udal on North Uist, Rosinish on Benbecula and Allt Chrisal on Barra. The others are known from test-pitting, coastal erosion and rabbit activity. Only the settlements at Allt Chrisal (Foster 1995) and Northton (Simpson 1976; Simpson *et al.* 2006) are fully published but detailed interim statements are available for Rosinish (Shepherd and Tuckwell 1979; Shepherd 1980) and Dalmore (Sharples 1984).

Settlement location and machair formation

A distinctive feature of most of these settlements is that they are new foundations with little evidence for activity preceding their occupation in the Beaker period. Three settlements appear to have Neolithic precursors: Allt Chrisal, Northton and the Udal. The Beaker settlement at the Udal does not appear to be substantial but it is important as the excavator notes that between the Middle Neolithic and Bronze Age comes ‘the development of the shell based sand known as the machair’ (Selkirk 1996: 94). Allt Chrisal is an unusual site as it is the only Beaker settlement known that is not on the machair. However, because of this the stratigraphy is complex and the relationship between the Neolithic and Beaker settlement is unclear (Foster 1995: 72–3).

The sequence at Northton is by far the best: four separate early prehistoric cultural horizons were identified, two Neolithic and two Beaker (Simpson 1976: 221; Simpson *et al.* 2006: 19–154). The lowest level lay directly on the boulder clay but the other three horizons were separated by wind-derived shell sand layers. Radiocarbon determinations on animal bones date the Late Neolithic II occupation to 3350–2890 cal BC (Simpson *et al.* 2006: 44) and the Beaker I and Beaker II layers to 2140–1740 cal BC and 1940–1680 cal BC respectively (*ibid.*: 89–90). These suggest quite a substantial gap between the Neolithic and Beaker occupations but the limited number of determinations suggests we should be cautious in our interpretation. Nevertheless the Northton sequence indicates that the Middle Neolithic tradition of elaborately decorated round-based jars and bowls is separate from and precedes the adoption of Beaker ceramics and that the variation in form and quality within the Beaker assemblage is sufficient to provide a complete domestic assemblage.

Middle Neolithic settlements from the islands are found on the blacklands or beneath the machair. There is a noticeable concentration of settlements on North Uist with excavated settlements at Bharpa Carinish (Crone 1993), Eilean Domhnuill (Armit 1992), Eilean an Tighe (Scott 1951) and Rubh’ a Charnain Mhoir (Downes and Badcock 1998). The only substantial settlements outside of this concentration are Northton on Harris and Allt Chrisal on Barra. The location of these settlements is very distinctive. Eilean an Tighe and Eilean Domhnuill are small islands, the latter possibly artificial, in inland lochs (see also Chapter 9). Bharpa Carinish and Rubh’ a Charnain Mhoir are on peat-covered hill slopes, the former near the south coast and the latter near the north coast.

It is difficult to generalize, as these sites have been discovered by chance rather than by systematic field survey, but it seems to the present authors unlikely that the location of Neolithic and Beaker settlements on these two different soil types is accidental. In particular, in two of the three situations where the periods overlap, there was a change to a machair location only after the Neolithic settlement was established. There is also some topographic similarity between Northton and Allt Chrisal. They are both on the edge of very inhospitable steeply rising promontories, Toe Head and Ben Tangaval, where flat agricultural land is restricted.

To find an explanation for the different distributions is difficult and a number of hypotheses are listed below. All presume that settlement was relatively mobile during this period, or that a variety of environments within the island were exploited.

1. The machair plain formed in the period between the occupation of the Middle Neolithic and Beaker settlements
2. The machair was present when the Middle Neolithic settlements were occupied but was unstable and not an attractive location for settlement
3. The machair plain was present and occupied during the Middle Neolithic period but subsequently moved and the location of the Neolithic settlements was destroyed
4. The machair plain was present and stable throughout the period but only in the Beaker period did the inhabitants choose to occupy and exploit this environment.

It is difficult to decide which of these hypotheses is the most likely, given our relatively limited knowledge of the development of the machair in the Neolithic. It certainly seems unlikely that the machair was not present during the Middle Neolithic. Recent work (Ritchie and Whittington 1994; Ritchie 1985) on inter-tidal peat deposits at Cladach Mor on North Uist and Pabbay in the Sound of Harris indicates the first appearance of sand in the sixth millennium uncalibrated BC (Ritchie and Whittington 1994: 45) and the complete inundation of the site at Cladach Mor by sand sometime after 4670–4230 cal BC (5565±110 BP). The evidence from the Udal and Northton seems to support the impression that there was a major change in the Middle Neolithic, with areas that had hitherto been receiving limited quantities of sand suddenly becoming inundated by large quantities.

It seems likely that a substantial body of shell sand existed on or immediately adjacent to the coast of the Hebrides during the Neolithic but unfortunately it is not clear whether this was habitable or inhabited. It could even have been underwater? Nonetheless, the machair plain as we see it today was probably created during the Middle Neolithic and we would suspect that it was too unstable to support regular settlement in this period. Only after it had become relatively stable and soils had begun to form at the beginning of the Bronze Age does it seem to have attracted settlement.

Territoriality

The clustered distribution of the Middle Neolithic sites is also markedly different from the even distribution of the Beaker sites. From Allt Chrisal to Northton the spacing is fairly even, with approximately 15km between all the major sites. There is then a gap before the three sites on Lewis which are again roughly 15km apart. The proximity of Sligeanach and Cill Donnain I, however, and a cluster of three possible Beaker sites on North Uist (Gibson 1982) suggests that the spacing of the known Beaker sites may be fortuitous. The Middle Neolithic sites, because they are not on the machair, are much more difficult to discover and the identification of the site at Allt Chrisal on Barra suggests the clustered distribution is a reflection of archaeological fieldwork.

Settlement diversity

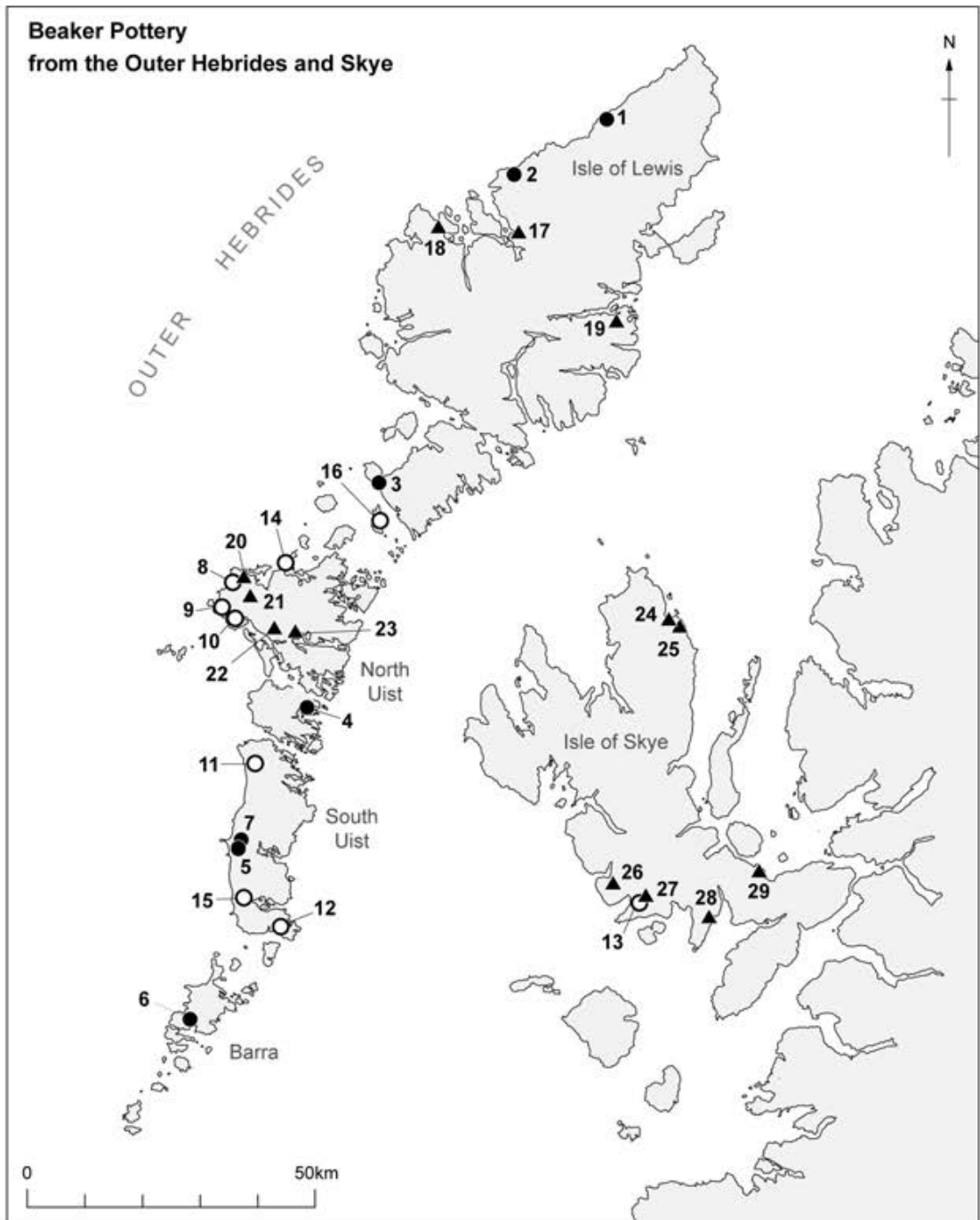
There are marked differences between these Beaker sites that do not seem to be simply the result of the small areas examined. The most obvious differences are between those sites that have substantial structures and those that do not, and between those that have evidence for ard cultivation and those that do not. There is no reason why these should be complementary features but they appear to be.

The settlements at Allt Chrisal, Barvas, Dalmore and Northton have substantial structures. These are semi-subterranean, stone-revetted houses, normally oval in shape when well preserved. The ideal form is represented by structure II in the early Beaker phase at Northton (Simpson 1976: 223; Simpson *et al.* 2006: 87–8). These structures provide good parallels for the structure at Cill Donnain I, which appears to be similar in size and shape (see Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 47).

The evidence for cultivation is more restricted but Rosinish, Sligeanach (see Chapter 11) and Cnip have good evidence for ard cultivation and no evidence for structural remains; ard-marks were also found at Cladh Hallan (Marshall *et al.* 1998; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 50–1). The association of the Cnip ard-marks with Beaker ceramics is only tentative but they are definitely Early Bronze Age (Close-Brooks 1995: 266). Admittedly, however, the area excavated was not substantial at Cnip or at Sligeanach and it is possible that substantial structures are present at these sites but await discovery. In contrast the occupation area at Rosinish was extensively excavated and exposed by erosion and there is no evidence for structural remains.

The sites of Sligeanach and Cill Donnain I are only 500m apart and it is difficult not to expect some form of relationship between the two sites. The radiocarbon dates from Sligeanach range from 2470–2200 cal BC to 1930–1690 cal BC and clearly indicate that the two sites are roughly contemporary. Unfortunately the ceramic assemblages from the sites are too small and fragmented to permit any meaningful comparison. The simple assumption that Sligeanach is a field associated with the permanent settlement at Cill Donnain I may be misleading.

There are indications that Dalmore and Northton were



- | ● Settlements | ○ Probable and possible Settlements | ▲ Beaker pottery from tombs
cairns and burials |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| 1 Barvas | 8 Scalpaig | 17 Callanish |
| 2 Dalmore | 9 An Dige, Paiblesgarry | 18 Cnip |
| 3 Northton | 10 Balronald | 19 Lochs |
| 4 Rosinish | 11 Machair Mheadhanach | 20 Geirisclett |
| 5 Cill Donnain 1 | 12 Gortan | 21 South Cletraval |
| 6 Allt Chrisal | 13 Rudh an Dunain Cave | 22 Unival |
| 7 Sligeanach | 14 Udal | 23 Barpa Langass |
| | 15 Cladh Hallan | 24 Garrafad |
| | 16 Ensay | 25 Elishader |
| | | 26 Kraiknish, Loch Eynort |
| | | 27 Rudh an Dunain |
| | | 28 Cnocan Nan Gobhar |
| | | 29 Liveras (wristguards) |

Figure 10.8. Beaker-period sites in the Western Isles

not necessarily permanently occupied settlements. Dalmore lies at the base of a hill that places the house in a shadow throughout the winter. The structure was repeatedly rebuilt and the occupation from the separate floors suggests short-term use (Sharples 1984). The evidence from the trial excavations at Sligeanach also suggests short phases of cultivation activity, separated by windblown sand (see Chapter 11). This contrasts markedly with the evidence from Rosinish where the ard-marks suggest repeated cultivation and large quantities of Beaker have been recovered from distinct midden layers.

Transitions

Settlements in the Western Isles associated with post-Beaker Early Bronze Age pottery are even more elusive, with the two certain examples occurring at Dalmore (Ponting and Ponting 1984) and Ensay (Cowie in Dunwell *et al.* 1995). If the sherd with the boss found at Cill Donnain I does indicate the presence of a Food Vessel, then this suggests that some of the structures at Cill Donnain I are later in date. The excavations at Sligeanach (Sharples 1998; Chapter 11) have also recovered post-Beaker ceramics.

The relationship of the Early Bronze Age settlements with the later prehistoric and historic occupation of the machair plain suggests that these sites might have been abandoned as part of a widespread shift in settlement. The three settlements found during the South Uist survey all lie towards the coastal edge of the machair plain. Cill Donnain I is approximately 250m west of the Early-Middle Bronze Age and Iron Age settlement at Cill Donnain III. The Sligeanach settlement mounds which date to the Early Bronze Age lie approximately 150m west of the Middle Iron Age settlements. The Machair Mheadhanach mounds lie approximately 700m in front of a line of settlement mounds of later prehistoric and historic date.

This pattern is also visible in the location of the early prehistoric settlement, X6, at the Udal on the coastline some distance from the principal later prehistoric and historic settlement locations, and at Rosinish where the Beaker sites lie 50m north, towards the coast, from the later prehistoric and historic settlements. The only Early Bronze Age site on the Outer Hebrides that is covered by a complex sequence of Iron Age and Historic occupation is Northton on Harris. It has already been noted that the location of the settlement at the foot of Toe Head restricts the settlement space available.

It is difficult to explain the separation between the later prehistoric settlement and the Early Bronze Age settlements on South Uist. If the machair gradually moved inland over the succeeding millennium, then one would perhaps expect a linear pattern of settlement – with the latest settlements further inland – but this is not the case. The earlier settlements are relatively isolated. Apart from a meagre amount of Late Bronze Age activity on some sites, all the later prehistoric and historic settlements are a significant distance inland. It may be that a rising sea level made the earlier, more low-lying locations untenable

for the more substantial semi-subterranean dwellings that become common in the later prehistoric settlements.

The absence of a recognizable burial tradition associated with Beaker pottery on the islands is noteworthy, with only a single possible burial from Lewis associated with a Beaker and a couple of sites from Skye (Armit 1996: 94–9). The blocking material for a Neolithic passage tomb at Achnacreebeag in Argyll contained cremated bone very likely contemporary with Beakers inserted into the tomb (Sheridan 2007b: 114). North Uist has a number of Beaker associations with Neolithic tombs and it is possible that these deposits were connected with burial, though elsewhere in Britain such activity is seen as ritual blocking. The only excavated ritual site for this period appears to be at the Udal (Crawford and Switsur 1977; Selkirk 1996) where pits, postholes and a standing stone are claimed. A significant feature of the settlements at Northton, Rosinish, the Udal and Cnip is the presence of later burials cutting through the Beaker settlement horizon. At Northton and Rosinish there are corbelled cists and at the Udal and Cnip cairns, the latter also with a corbelled cist. The Northton corbelled cist was used for burial during the Early and Middle Bronze Age (Simpson *et al.* 2006: 155, 161–4).

Wider problems

The presence of a distinctive group of Beaker settlements on the Western Isles has been noted by other authors (notably Gibson 1982) but they have been reluctant to examine the significance of this group. In particular, should we regard these settlements as representing an unusual and regionally peculiar manifestation of the Beaker phenomenon or is it simply the peculiar nature of the geomorphology that allows us to see clearly what is otherwise obscured by formation processes in the rest of Britain?

There is some evidence for the continuity of place at sites such as Northton and Allt Chrìsal but the bulk of the evidence suggests that the Beaker period marks a significant break with the preceding Middle Neolithic settlement pattern. The significance of the break is, however, ambiguous: it may only reflect the opportunity provided by the dramatic geomorphological changes that created the machair plain.

It is interesting to compare the sequence on the Western Isles with that on Orkney. On Orkney large deposits of shell sand exist in a number of areas. These deposits are normally not as extensive as on the west coast of the Uists but they are still sufficiently large to form a major landscape feature. The dune systems have produced evidence for important and extensive Neolithic settlements, most notably at Skara Brae, Poole, Knap of Howar and Links of Noltland (Sharples 1992) but there is no evidence for a distinctive Beaker settlement horizon and only a handful of Beaker sherds have ever been recovered from Orkney.

The settlements at Skara Brae, Poole and Knap of Howar were founded prior to the appearance of the shell sand but occupation continued as the shell sand accumulated. At Links of Noltland the shell sand deposits precede the

earliest archaeological deposits so far examined. The Links of Noltland settlement evidence suggests sand was in place before the second stage of Grooved Ware settlement, which begins prior to 3370–2630 cal BC at 95.4% probability (4360±125 BP) and this would fit with the dating from the other settlements. The chronological evidence from these settlements supports the argument put forward above that the arrival of large quantities of shell sand occurred during the later part of the Neolithic. The impact of this dramatic event was different in these areas. In the Western Isles the sand accumulated against the coast and provides an additional westward extension to the islands. In Orkney the supply of sand is reduced and, with the possible exception of the island of Sanday, it does not extend the land surface but covers the existing landscape.

In Orkney we therefore see the adaptation and development of existing Middle Neolithic settlements coming to terms with these changes whereas in the Western Isles there appears to have been little change and no attempt to intensively exploit the landscape during the Middle Neolithic. The presence of the Beaker settlements in the Western Isles indicates a process of colonization of the machair sand that could not have happened on Orkney where the shell sand deposits had been occupied and cultivated since the Middle Neolithic. It is possible that the adoption of a new ceramic style was particularly appropriate to the colonization process. Cultivation (and, particularly, cultivation accompanied by the liberal distribution of Beaker sherds across the developing soils) might have been a deliberate attempt to enculturate the landscape.

Similar movements onto new landscapes can be seen in other areas and it is significant that Beaker ceramics are found on sand dune areas throughout the British Isles (e.g. Archerfield and Hedderwick in East Lothian and Gwithian in Cornwall). There is also evidence in the more densely settled areas of mainland Britain for Beaker settlement occurring in areas that had hitherto been abandoned. At Maiden Castle, for instance, renewed activity on the site of the causewayed camp occurred only after a period of abandonment and vegetation regeneration (Sharples 1991). This activity is associated with Beaker ceramics and indicates the settlement and cultivation of the hilltop.

The Beaker period settlements of the Western Isles are thus associated with an expansive period of land-taking that occurred throughout Britain at this time. The Western Isles are exceptional only in demonstrating this with unusual clarity.

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Note

- 1 These sites are named as Iochdar and grouped as NF74SW 1 on CANMORE.

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11 The Beaker-period and Early Bronze Age settlement at Sligeanach, Cill Donnain

Niall Sharples with contributions by C. Bronk Ramsey, G. Cook, J.G. Evans[†], M. Law, R. Madgwick, P. Marshall, J. Mulville, A. Pannett, A. Sheridan, H. Smith and N. Thew

In 1998 Cardiff University's field season in the Western Isles involved the exploration of an area of machair known as Sligeanach in the township of Cill Donnain, South Uist (NF72NW 37). The area is the southern part of a noticeably level machair plain that extends from Sligeanach through the townships of Lower and Upper Bornais (Bornais) to Ormacleit (Figure 11.1).

To the north of the area explored, the flat machair plain is devoid of visible archaeological remains for approximately 0.6km before another cluster of mounds in Bornais (Sharples 2005). To the south, the Early Bronze Age and Middle Iron Age settlement of Cill Donnain III (Zvelebil 1991; Parker Pearson and Seddon 2004) lies less than 0.5km from the main Sligeanach settlements. The Sligeanach and Cill Donnain groups appear to be an almost continuous spread of settlement mounds (see Chapter 2) but, as will be discussed later, many of the intermediate mounds are of little significance.

Research aims

The area was chosen for excavation for a number of reasons:

1. It is a flat coastal plain on which settlement remains can be easily located.
2. Previous work had located a large number of settlement mounds in the area.
3. These settlement mounds are dispersed and quite small, in marked contrast with the area examined at Bornais (Sharples 1996; 2005; forthcoming a, b).
4. The area is part of the original transect area extensively explored by the SEARCH project (Gilbertson *et al.* 1996) and is close to the excavated sites of Bornais (Sharples 1996; 2005; forthcoming a, b), Dun Vulcan (Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999) and Cill Donnain III (Zvelebil 1991).
5. The initial site survey by Parker Pearson (1996; see

Chapter 2) suggested that some of the mounds date to the Early Bronze Age.

Perhaps the most important factor that attracted us to this area was the presence of Early Bronze Age settlement remains. Settlements of this date are not numerous and only three settlement locations were found dating to this period in the machair survey. Two other sites are known on South Uist; excavation at Cladh Hallan (Marshall *et al.* 1998; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004) revealed a soil horizon of this date and a site was known from earlier work at Gortan (Barber 2003).

Previous work on the island has included the excavation of:

- a Later Bronze Age and Early Iron Age settlement at Cladh Hallan (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004a: 59–82; Parker Pearson *et al.* in prep.),
- Middle to Late Iron Age settlements at Dun Vulcan and Cill Donnain III (Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999; Zvelebil 1991; Zvelebil and Parker Pearson in prep.),
- Late Iron Age to Norse settlements at Bornais and Cill Pheadair (Sharples 2005; Sharples forthcoming a and b; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004b; forthcoming) and
- Medieval to modern settlements at Bornais, Milton and other townships (Symonds 1997; see Chapters 12–17, this volume).

Only the early prehistoric period had escaped detailed excavation and it was felt that, to recover a complete picture of the development of settlement on South Uist, analysis of this period was important.

Threat

As with all the settlements identified in the machair survey, recognition indicated ongoing damage. The settlements were identified as a result of rabbit activity bringing to

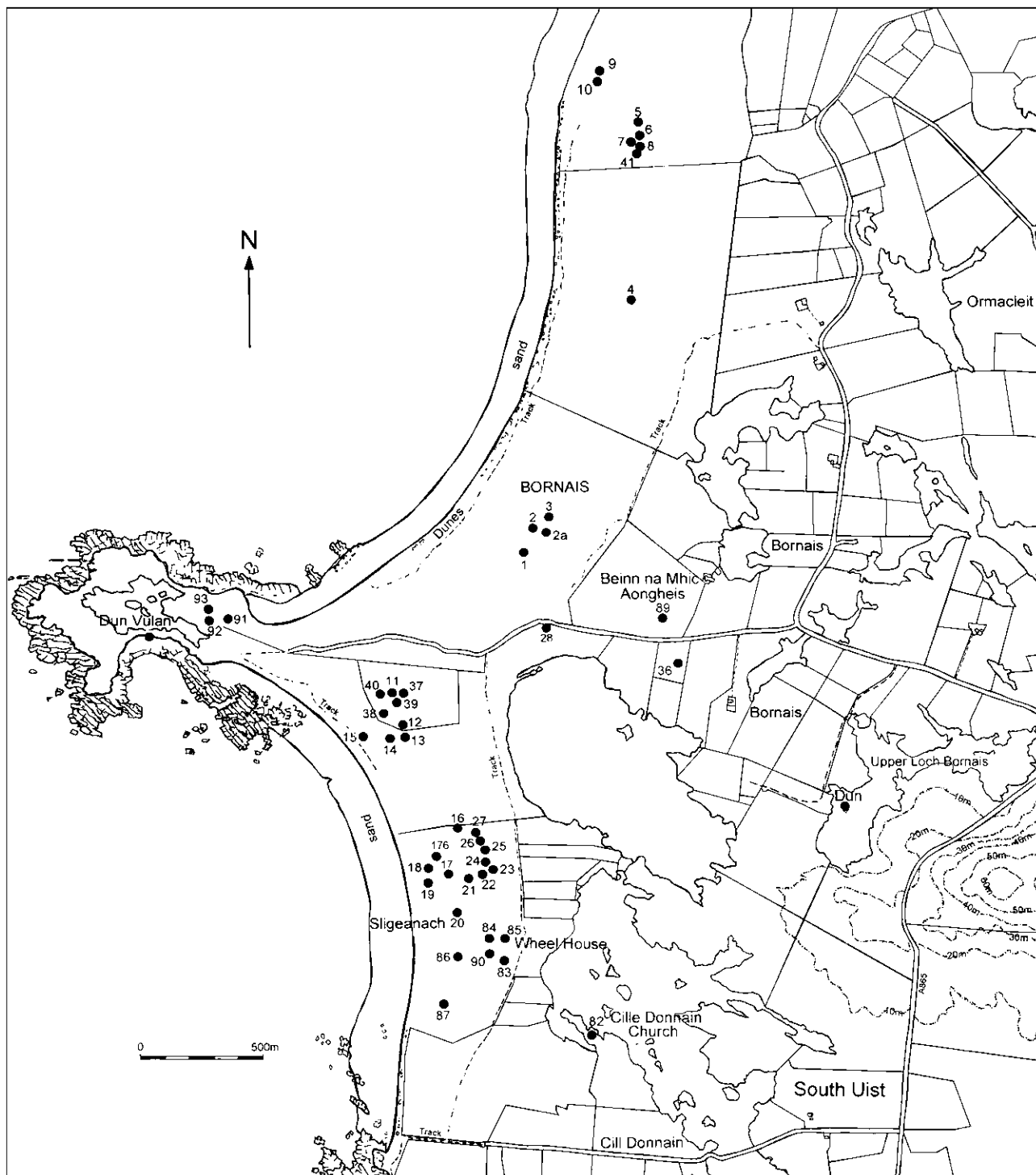


Figure 11.1. Map showing the location of the mounds at Sligeanach and their relationship to the adjacent mounds at Bornaïs and Cill Donnain

the surface artefacts and ecofacts. The settlements are regularly cultivated on a long rotation for barley and oats and also intermittently as potato patches, and this causes considerable damage to the Early Bronze Age mounds. The most important Early Bronze Age mounds also lie less than 100m from the eroding coast.

Previous work

In his survey of this area, Parker Pearson (1996; see Chapter 2) identified 13 settlements (Figure 11.2). For ease of description, the sites can be split into two groups: a coastal group and an inland group. These groups are separated by approximately 150m of apparently unoccupied machair. The coastal group consists of two quite distinct mounds (Sites 17 and 18) both 10m in diameter, which had produced

Sligeanach 1998

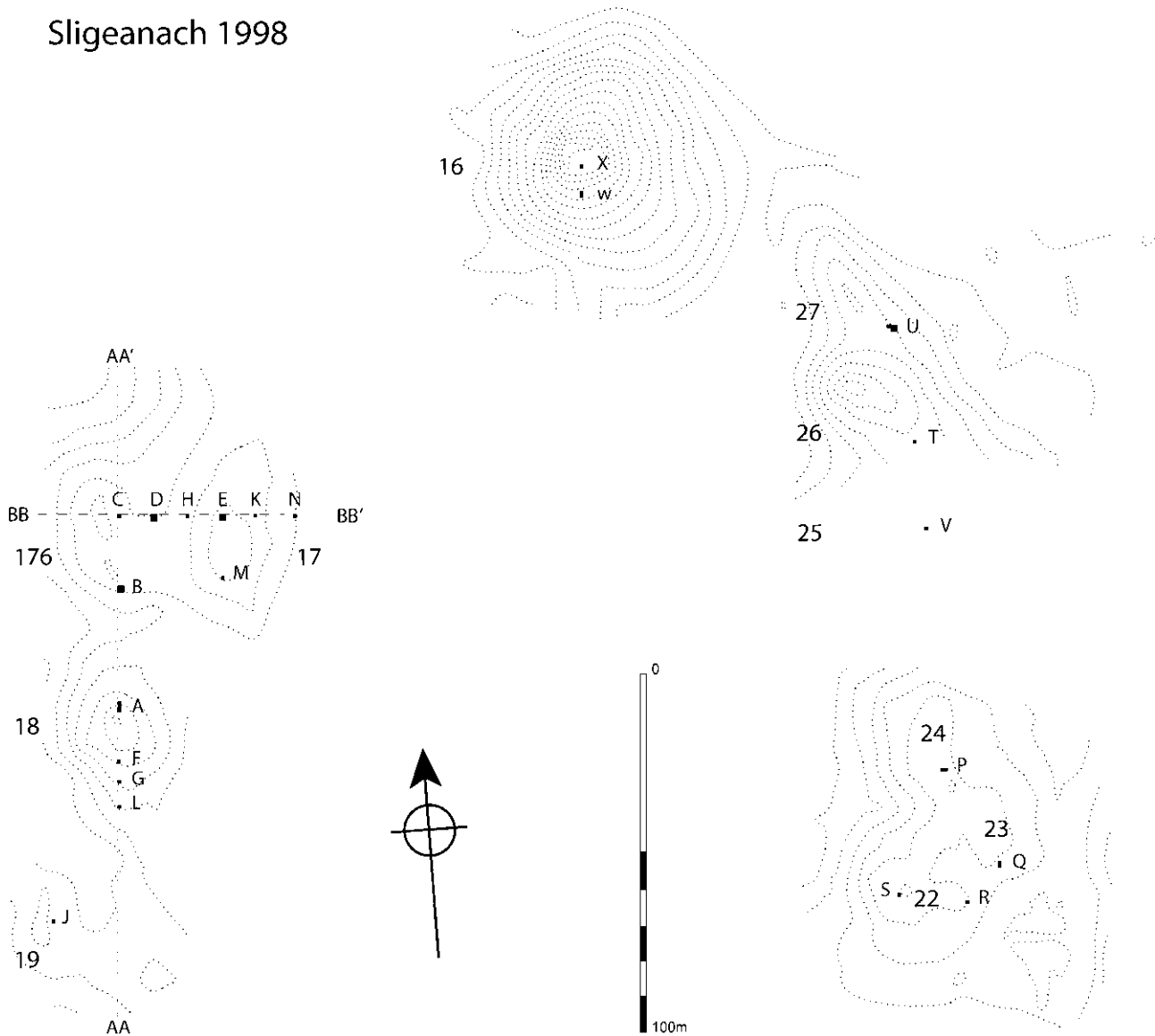


Figure 11.2. A partial contour survey of the Sligeanach mounds showing the trench locations

Early Bronze Age material including decorated ceramics, particularly from site 18. Directly in line with these, there was a much smaller mound (Site 19), 5m in diameter, which produced bone and shell but no ceramic material at all. These three mounds were identified in 1993 and then augered in 1994. The auger survey suggested that mound 18 was the most substantial with deposits 0.50m deep. The deposits in the other two mounds seemed to be only 0.20m to 0.30m deep. In 1996 another settlement (Site 176) was identified adjacent to mound 18. This consisted of a concentration of pebbles, shell and bone but with no pottery or any other diagnostic material.

The inland concentration comprises seven mounds:

- The northernmost mound (Site 16) is by far the most prominent feature of the machair plain in this area. It is a mound over 70m in diameter standing 3.25m proud of the machair plain. During the survey, settlement material was restricted to the top of this mound and,

for its size, it produced a rather meagre collection of shells and bones with a relatively undistinguished ceramic collection that may belong to the Iron Age. An iron fragment was found on the surface but was no help in dating the site.

- Three mounds (Sites 27, 26 and 25) lie in a line southeast of this mound. The northern mound is the largest, 15m in diameter and, though pottery was scarce during survey, a grass-marked base sherd initially suggested a Norse date. However, grass-marked sherds have since been found in phases 8–12 at Cladh Hallan, dating to the Late Bronze Age (c.1100–750 BC; see also Chapter 17). The next mound (Site 26) was estimated to be c. 10m in diameter and the last (Site 25) 7m in diameter. The few surface sherds present on these mounds suggested that both may be Iron Age.
- There is then a gap before a cluster of three low mounds (Sites 22, 23 and 24). None of these produced any pottery during survey and their archaeological

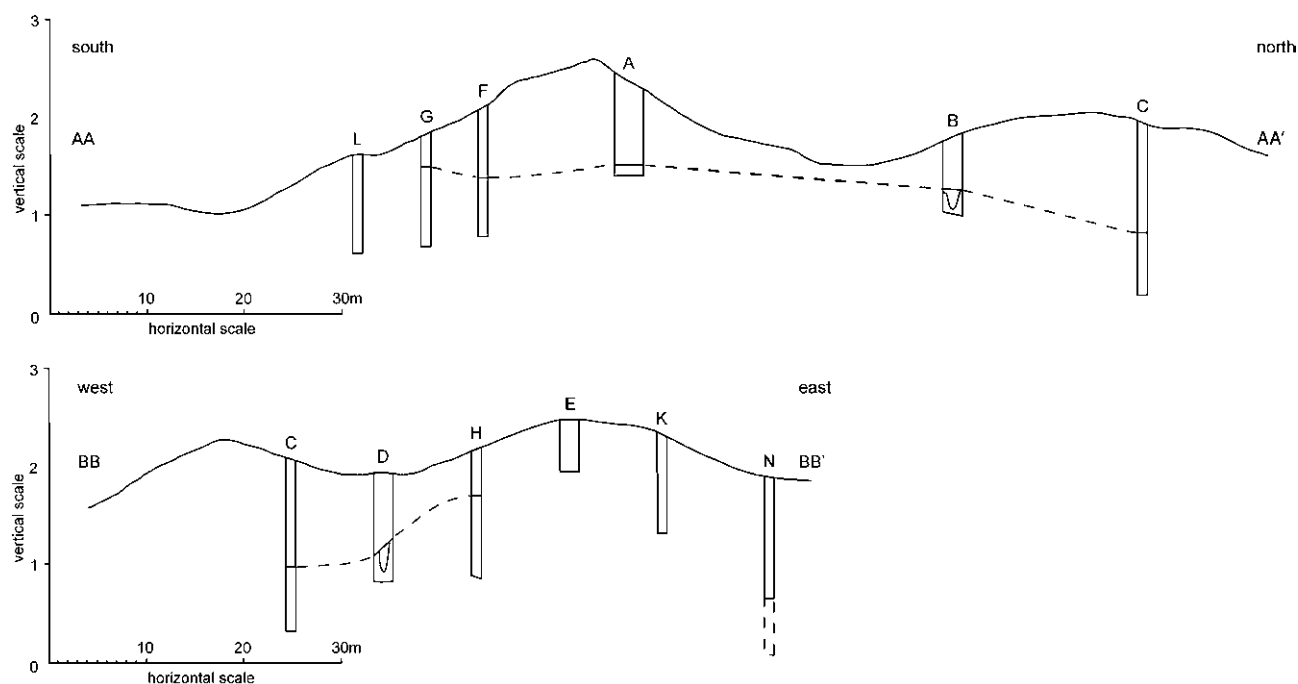


Figure 11.3. Profiles of mounds 17, 18, 19 and 176 showing the location of a significant buried soil horizon (see Figure 11.2 for location)

significance was indicated by concentrations of shell and the occasional bone fragment. The auger survey of this inland group suggested that only Sites 27 and 26 had any depth of deposits.

The remaining two settlements (Sites 20 and 21) are isolated features lying to the south of, and in the area between, the two groups discussed above. The material from these mounds is sparse, consisting largely of shell and bone, but a struck flake of igneous rock is sufficient to suggest a Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date for Site 21. These two mounds were not examined in 1998 and will not be discussed further.

The principal features of this area of machair are, therefore, the presence of a group of probably Early Bronze Age mounds close to the coastline, and a larger group of mounds of possibly later prehistoric and historical date further inland.

Excavation goals

The principal goal of the excavation was to confirm the chronology of the various mounds and to try to recover dating material, to characterize the deposits and to estimate their extent. It was also hoped to recover a small but significant amount of environmental material from the Early Bronze Age settlements, and to characterize any differences between these and the more common and extensively explored later settlements.

It was decided to explore the sites by excavating small, 1m-square pits into the mounds. The first two weeks of work concentrated on the Early Bronze Age coastal group. North-south and east-west transects were laid out to yield as much detail as possible for these important

settlements. This relatively systematic approach was not possible with the inland group because they are more dispersed and cover a much larger area. Instead, their excavation was limited to isolated pits into areas where archaeological material could be identified.

The coastal mounds

Surface survey of the mounds was carried out Mike Hamilton in 1996 and this included an unsuccessful geophysical survey (Hamilton and Sharples 1997). This survey (Figure 11.2) revealed a slightly different picture to that presented by Parker Pearson (1996). Three prominent mounds were identified which included mounds 17 and 18. The third mound, site 176, was located to the west of mounds 17 and 18, not to the east where it had initially been located. Immediately to the southwest of mound 18 was a small mound equivalent to site 19. A very similar small mound lay to the east of this mound.

It was clear from the pre-excavation surface collection and examination of these mounds that mounds 17 and 18 were, as Parker Pearson had indicated, the most archaeologically important. Only shells and quartz flakes gave any indication of activity on the other mounds.

A roughly north-south grid was laid out during the survey of these mounds and it was decided to use this as a base for the excavation of the mounds. A line of six trenches (numbered L, G, F, A, B, C) were eventually dug along a north-south line that cut across mounds 18 and 176 (Figure 11.3). All but A and B were one metre square; A was expanded to 3m × 1m and B to 2m square. An east-west line of six trenches (numbered C, D, H, E, K, N) was dug across mounds 176 and 17 (Figure 11.3).

All but D and E were one metre square; D was expanded to 2m × 1m and E to 2m square. Two further trenches were dug to explore mound 19 (J) and to expand our knowledge of mound 17 (M).

Mound 19

The information from Trench J in mound 19 was minimal. The archaeology consisted of large quantities of shells with very occasional lumps of pumice, quartz and bone fragments. This material was in the root mat of the overlying vegetation which had not stabilized into the turf and topsoil covering all the other mounds. Activity on this mound appears to have been ephemeral and might well have been considerably disturbed by recent erosion.

Mound 18

The stratigraphy in mound 18 was clearly defined by the four trenches excavated (Figure 11.3). Each trench clearly provides a sequence of layers that overlaps with the other. The lowest layers were only exposed in Trench G; the upper layers only survive at the centre of the mound and are exposed in Trench A. The limit of the archaeological deposits occurred between Trenches G and L and the latter trench contained only disturbed or sterile layers that will not be described. Sections from all the trenches are illustrated in Figure 11.4.

The sequence begins with an orange-grey sand (G/107) overlain by a pale grey sand (G/106); both layers were sterile and the almost complete absence of snails suggests they were windblown sand deposits. They were covered by light orange-brown sand (G/105, F/42), which produced no cultural material but which has a snail assemblage that indicates it was a stabilization horizon. This was covered by another sterile yellow sand (G/104, F/41) that is presumed to be a windblown deposit. It was sealed by a compact dark brown sand (G/102, F/39, A/71) which contained a snail assemblage and artefactual material that indicates human activity. A radiocarbon date of 2280–1960 cal BC (OxA-8920; 3710±45 BP) was obtained from a cattle metapodial from Trench A layer 71.

Ard marks were visible at the base of this cultural horizon in all three trenches (G/103, A/74; Figure 11.5), and in Trench F a discrete patch of light brown sand was also noted (F/40). The principal orientation of the ard marks in Trenches F and A appears to be roughly north–south but east–west ploughing is visible in Trench G and, to a lesser extent, in Trench F (but a much larger excavation would be required before a clear understanding of the agricultural regime could be presented). The sequence continues with a layer of yellow windblown sand (G/101, G/110, F/37, A/19) that marks the end of the extent of the stratigraphy in Trench G. Later deposits are present in Trenches A and F but these cannot be easily correlated.

In Trench A, the sequence continues with a compact dark brown sand (A/18) that was probably a ploughsoil but the ard marks were more difficult to identify. A copper

alloy awl (SF1506) was recovered from an environmental sample (9002) taken from this layer. Two radiocarbon measurements were obtained from this layer; OxA-8905 (3875±35 BP), on a sheep humerus, produced a date of 2470–2200 cal BC and OxA-8925 (3655±45 BP), on a barley grain, dated to 2200–1890 cal BC. The two results are not statistically consistent ($T'=14.8$; $v=1$; $T'(5\%)=3.8$; Ward and Wilson 1978) and suggest that the ploughsoil developed over a period of time. Over this is another layer of yellow sand (A/16). Between this layer and the next thick layer that completely covers the trench are a series of more restricted layers. These include a patch of grey sand (A/73) and three discrete patches of dark brown sand (A/14, A/15, A/72), and a more extensive thin layer of yellow sand (A/17) that covered the west half of the trench.

These layers were sealed by a thick and extensive layer of light grey-brown sand (A/12). A radiocarbon date of 2200–1910 cal BC (OxA-8921; 3665±45 BP) was obtained from a cattle scapula from this layer. Contemporary with this layer was a pit (75) in the southeast corner of the trench. The lower fill was sand very similar to, if not the same as, layer 12 but, at the top, a shallow scoop contained a layer of brown sand full of limpet shells (20).

In Trench F, the sequence above 37 continues with a complex of layers that were more like the layers at the top of Trench A's sequence than the cultivation soil (A/18). There was a possible small pit or scoop in the southwest corner, filled with brown sand (F/38) and a discontinuous patch of compact orange-brown sand (F/36), which looked like a floor layer. These were both covered by a more uniform brown sand (F/35) that was then covered by a discontinuous dark brown sand (F/33) which was, in turn, covered by light brown sand (F/32) with occasional patches of yellow sand (F/34).

In summary, the earliest part of the sequence consists of three soil horizons separated by blown sand deposits. The upper two soil horizons have evidence for ard cultivation and the deposition of small quantities of waste material. The lowest of these was identified in Trenches F, G and A but the upper layer is only clearly identified in Trench A. After another period of blown sand deposition there is a more complex series of archaeological layers that indicates some form of settlement activity. Pits and scoops are present as are compact occupation surfaces but there are no obvious walls in the excavated trenches or visible on the surface of the mounds.

Artefacts associated with these layers include pottery that is clearly Early Bronze Age in date and this chronology was confirmed by the radiocarbon dates. The cultivation horizons have small fragments of ceramics with grooved decoration that appear to be Beaker sherds. The occupation soils at the top have poorly fired thick sherds decorated with whipped-cord maggots and are more appropriately placed in the Food Vessel tradition.

Mound 176

The deposits in mound 176 were accurately characterized

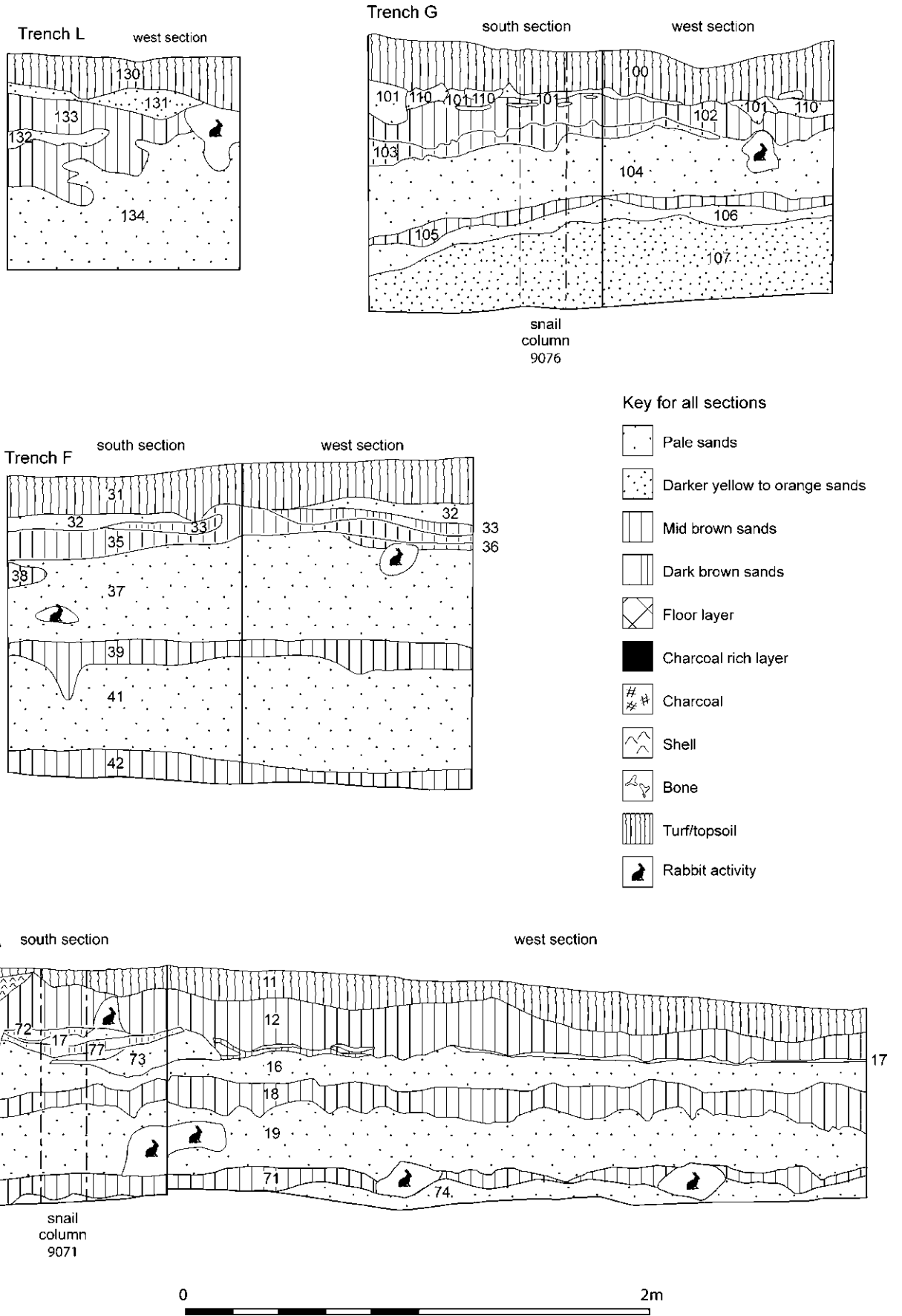


Figure 11.4. The sections of Trenches L, G, F and A dug into mound 18

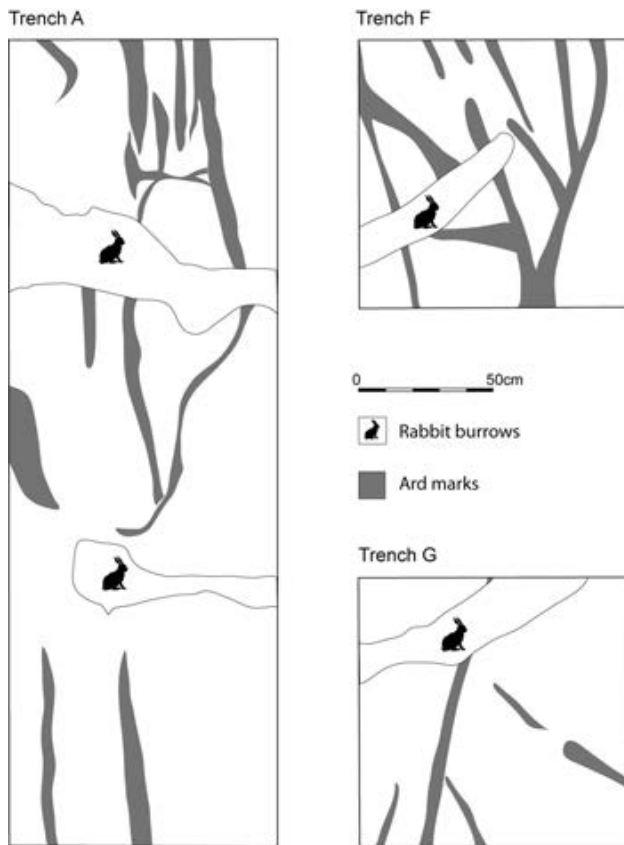


Figure 11.5. A plan of the basal ard marks in Trenches A, F and G

by Trenches B, C, D and H (Figure 11.6). Only one archaeologically significant horizon was evident. This was covered by a white windblown sand deposit (B/3, C/22, D/26, H/61) and overlay a pale yellow windblown sand deposit (B/5, C/23, D/51, D/54, H/63). In Trenches C and D, dark yellow sand was also identified (C/24, D/53) at the base of the trench.

The archaeologically significant deposit consisted of a dark brown soil horizon (B/unnumbered, C/23, D/52, D/28, H/62). This layer was cut by ditches in Trench B (6, 9) and Trench D (64). The ditch in Trench B was 0.50m wide and 0.25m deep and oriented roughly northwest-southeast (Figure 11.7). The ditch in Trench D was 1.10m–1.40m wide and 0.25m–0.50m deep and oriented north–south (Figure 11.7). Both ditches were filled with a relatively homogeneous grey brown sand (B/4, B/8, D/27). In Trench B, white ard marks were visible on the surface of this dark brown sand, clearly implying it had been cultivated. One of these marks was clearly truncated by the ditch and in no cases were any ard marks visible in the ditch fill. A small shallow scoop (10) was identified in Trench B, cutting through an ard mark. It was filled with yellow sand (7).

This soil horizon appears to be at the same level in Trenches B and D as the lowest cultivation horizon in mound 17 and a Beaker sherd was recovered that is very similar to those found associated with this horizon in mound 18. The ditch or ditches appear to have been created at the

end of the occupation of this area as they cut the cultivation soil and contain little evidence for occupation. The soil horizon clearly dips down towards the centre of mound 176 and it may be significant that the ditches are situated on the edge of this hollow.

Mound 17

The archaeology of mound 17 was explored by four Trenches (E, K, M and N; Figures 11.2; 11.6). These do not provide a particularly coherent picture of the archaeological stratigraphy and are best described individually. Trench E was on the summit of the mound and was expanded to 2m × 2m after the discovery of apparent structural remains (Figure 11.8). The trench was taken down to expose five large stones that form no obvious pattern but must indicate the presence of some form of structure. To the east of these stones, and partially surrounding the two largest stones, is a compact, dark brown sand (55) that may be a floor layer. These were overlain by a thick layer of pale grey-brown sand (30) and, along the west side, patches of sterile yellow sand (56, 57). The area excavated was clearly not large enough to understand the settlement activity in this area and it was decided that further excavation was best left to a more extensive exploration of this area.

Trench K was 1m square, only 10m to the east of Trench E. It had a relatively coherent sequence of activities though the interpretation of the lowest layers is inhibited by the small area examined (Figure 11.6). The sequence begins with white sand. Immediately above this are a series of interleaved layers that seem to be complicated by the presence of one or more features. A pale brown sand (157) and a light brown sand (160) are the lowest layers and they may well be the fills of a shallow ditch or scoop. They possibly cut a dark brown soil horizon (158). A radiocarbon date (OxA-8928; 3715±45 BP) was obtained from a barley grain from this layer and gave a determination of 2280–1970 cal BC.

These layers were sealed by a pale grey sand (156) and then a compact brown sand (155). In section, a brown sand (159) appears to lie in a feature that cuts 156 and is sealed by 155 but again this was not particularly clear given that the overlying stratigraphy had been cut by a later pit 143. A sheep radius from 159 produced a radiocarbon date of 2200–1910 cal BC (OxA-8989; 3565±70 BP).

Above 155 was a thin layer of white windblown sand (154) which was sealed by a thick layer of dark grey sand (153) and then a thick layer of light grey sand (152). There was then a group of three thin layers: orange-brown sand (151), dark brown sand (150) and pale grey sand (149) that were restricted to the north edge of the trench. These were sealed by a thick brown sand (141) that was exposed under the turf. Layers 152 and 156 produced small sherds of grooved ceramics that are likely to be Beaker pottery. Layer 141 produced a distinctive fingernail-decorated sherd and some thicker crude fabrics.

The sequence described above was truncated by a pit (143) that extended beyond the southern half of this trench. The pit was 0.54m deep and an estimated 1.50m

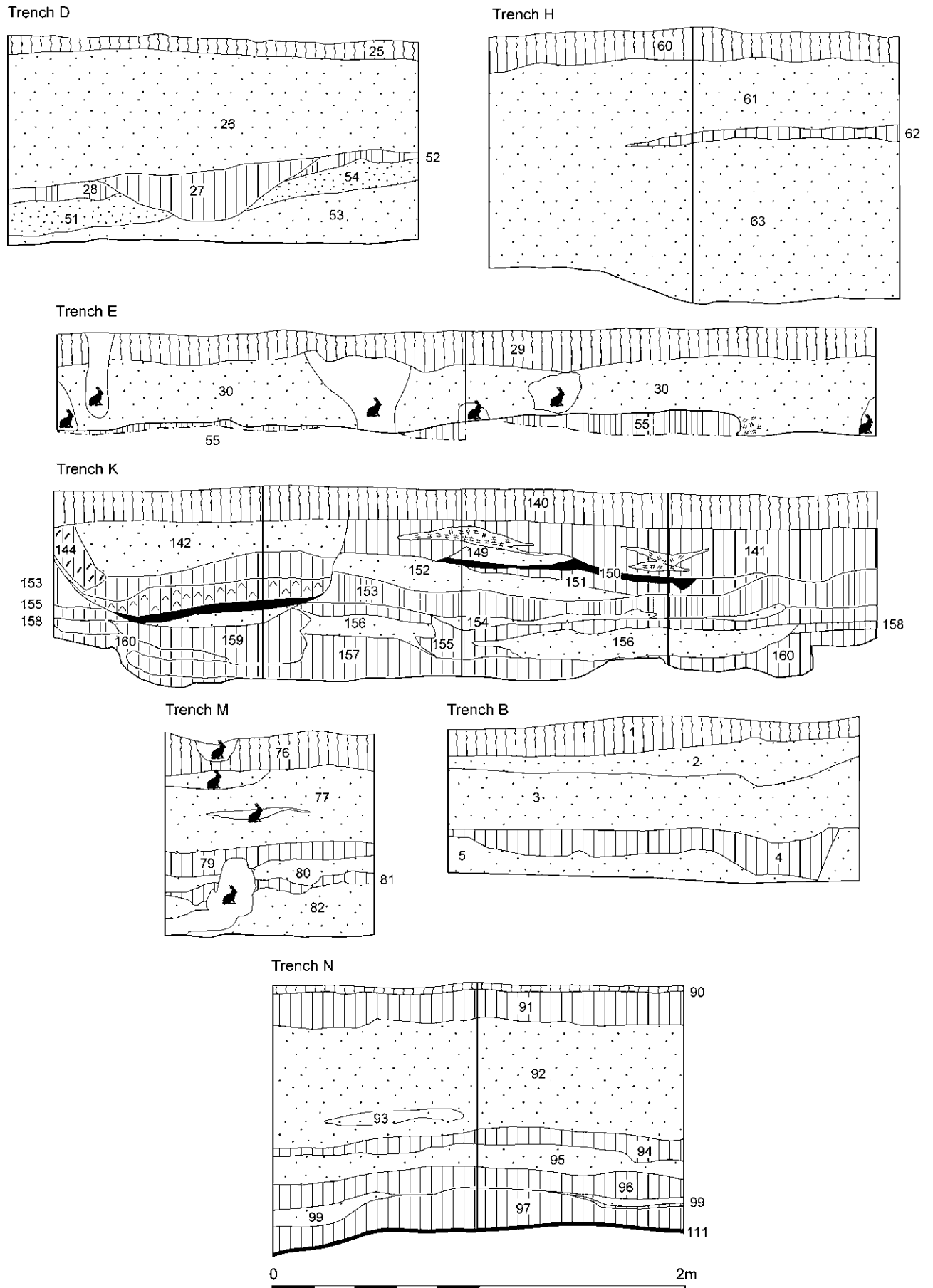


Figure 11.6. The sections of Trenches D, H, E, K, M, B and N dug into mounds 176 and 17

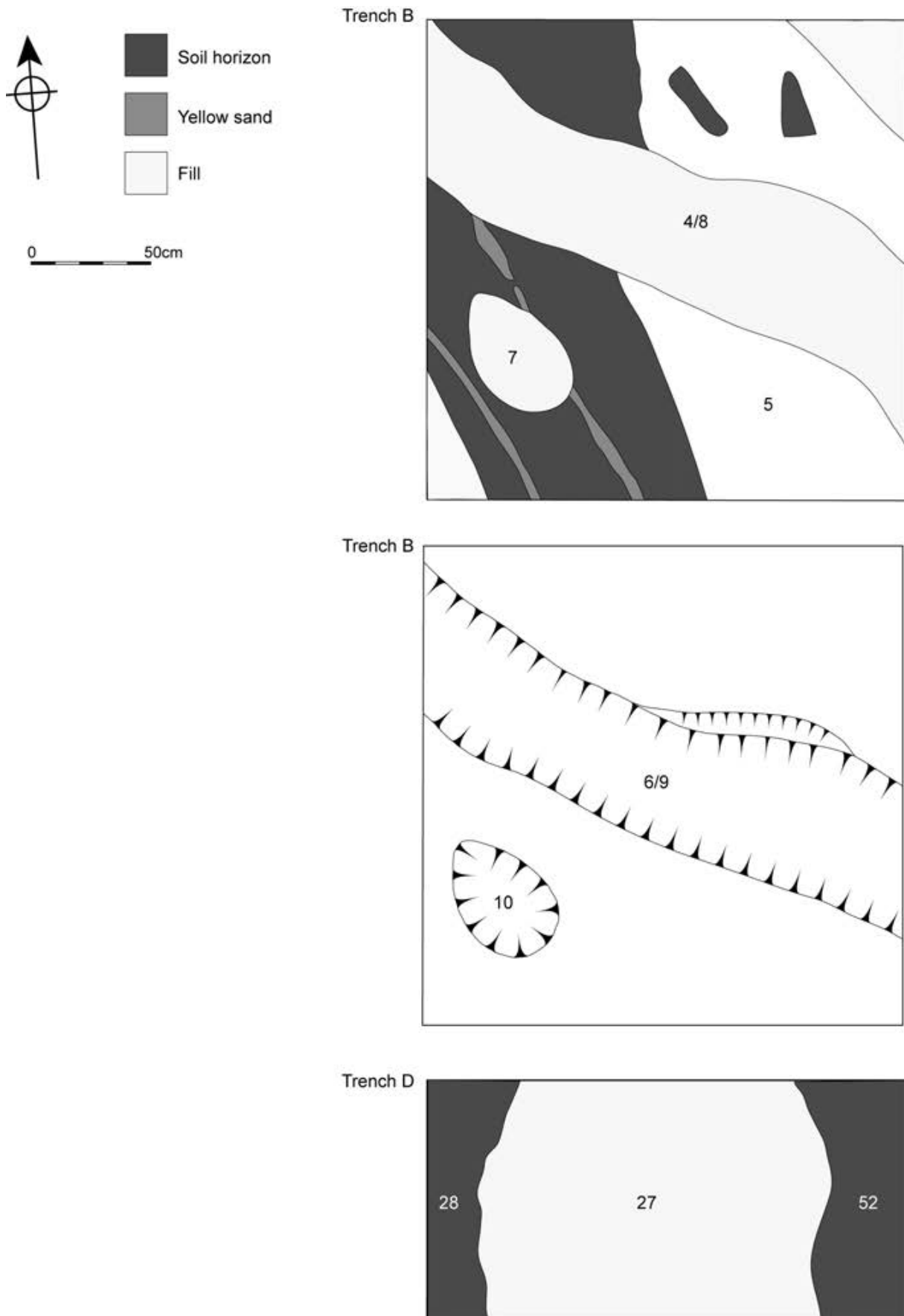


Figure 11.7. A plan of the ditch in Trenches B and D

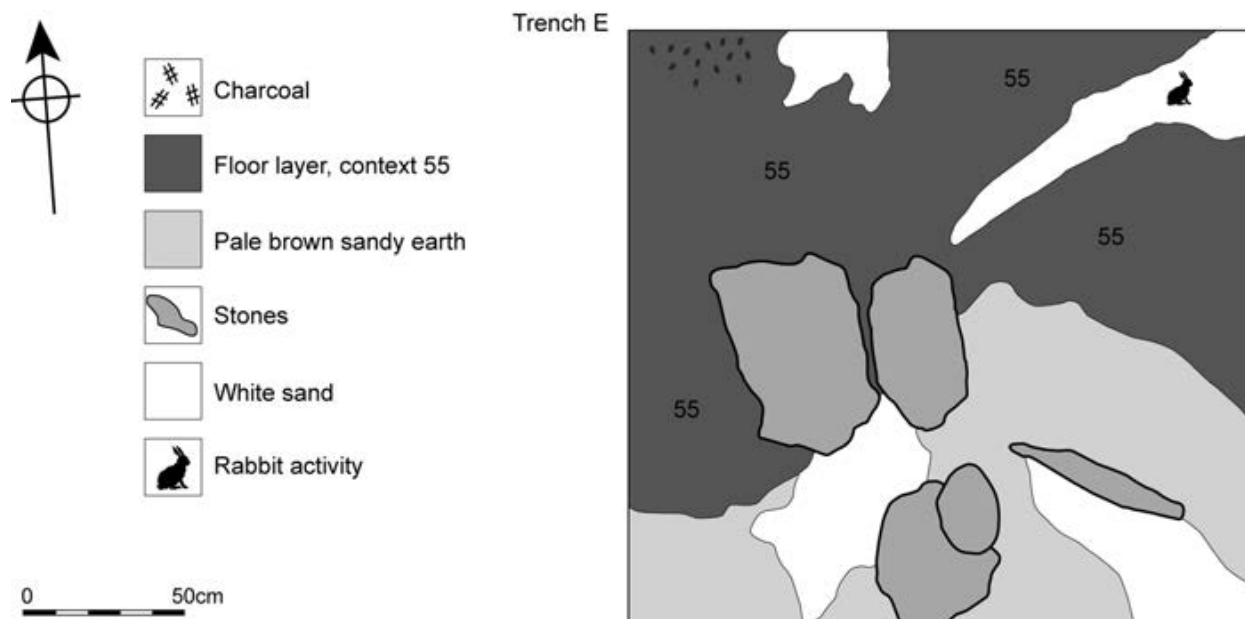


Figure 11.8. A plan of the orthostats and floor layer (55) in Trench E

in diameter. The two lower fills comprised a grey sand (148) sealed by a charcoal layer (147). These were sealed by a shell-rich layer (146) then a pair of brown sand layers (145, 144). A radiocarbon date of 2020–1690 cal BC (OxA-8927; 3520±50 BP) was obtained from a barley grain in 146 and a date of 1930–1690 cal BC from a barley grain in 144 (OxA-8926; 3490±40 BP). 144 and 145 contained large fragments of freshly broken pottery that can be reconstructed as a substantial, undecorated shouldered jar. The final fill was a yellow brown sand (142).

Trench N was a further 11m to the east and lay beyond the visible eastern edge of mound 17. This trench was excavated by hand to a depth of 1.30m then a machine continued the excavation a further 0.50m before the trench walls caved in. The basal deposit exposed by this excavation was a dark green waterlogged sand; no bedrock was exposed. The green sand was covered by dark yellow sand (112). Over this was a sequence of archaeological deposits beginning with a thin black sand (111), a thick grey brown sand (97) and another thin dark brown sand (98). These were partially covered by a yellow windblown sand (99), below another archaeological layer of pale grey-brown sand (96). There was then another yellow windblown sand (95) sealed by grey-brown sand (94). Over this was a thick deposit of golden brown sand (92), with lenses of sterile yellow sand (93).

Finally, immediately below the turf (90), there was a layer of brown sand (91). None of these layers contained large quantities of occupation material but a few small fragments of grooved pottery were recovered that suggest the sequence dates to the Early Bronze Age. However, the one radiocarbon date recovered from the trench of 740–390 cal BC from a cattle rib (OxA-8880; 2385±40 BP) in layer 97 suggests the presence of Early Iron Age activity. This may indicate that the cattle rib is intrusive or that there has been a labelling error during excavation.

Trench M was 19m to the south of Trench E and lay on the southern edge of mound 17. Two significant archaeological horizons were noted in the excavations. Above the sterile windblown sand (80, 81) at the base of the trench there was a layer of compact brown sand (79). A radiocarbon date of 2200–1910 cal BC was obtained from a cattle rib (OxA-9006; 3665±45 BP) from this layer. This was separated by a thick, sterile sand layer from a dark brown sand (76) which was exposed immediately under the turf.

In summary, the sequence on mound 17 appears to have begun in the Early Bronze Age with occupation associated with Beaker ceramics. Not enough has been explored to understand the nature of these deposits but there is evidence for structures in Trench E, whilst Trench K produced a deep and complicated sequence that included a substantial cylindrical pit. This occupation seems to have been considerably more complicated than the cultivation soils found in mounds 176 and 18.

The inland mounds

The examination of the inland mounds was undertaken by the excavation of nine trenches (Figure 11.2). Apart from mound 16, none of the mounds identified in the original survey are prominent features of the landscape. The southern group are low mounds, marked by concentrations of limpet shells. All three mounds were explored by single one-metre squares (22/S, 23/Q, 24/P) and an additional square R was placed on what appeared to be a subsidiary mound adjacent to site 22. The northern group (Sites 25, 26, 27) were explored by three trenches (V, T, U). Trenches V and T were one-metre squares, but Trench U was expanded to five metres square. Mound 16 was explored by two trenches: a 2m × 1m trench (W) on the slope and a one-metre square (X) on the summit.

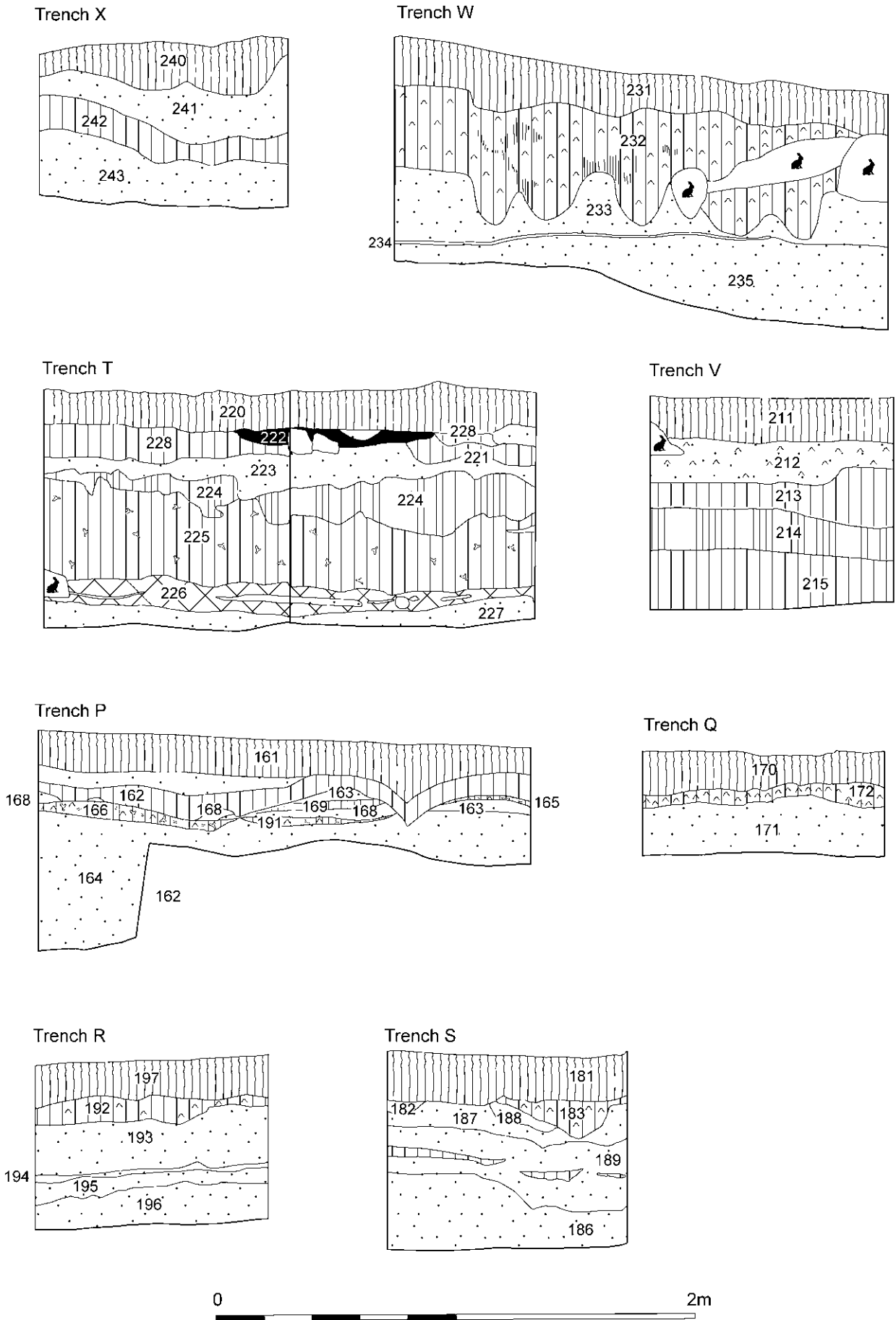


Figure 11.9. The sections of Trenches X, W, T, V, P, Q, R and S of mounds 16 and 22-27

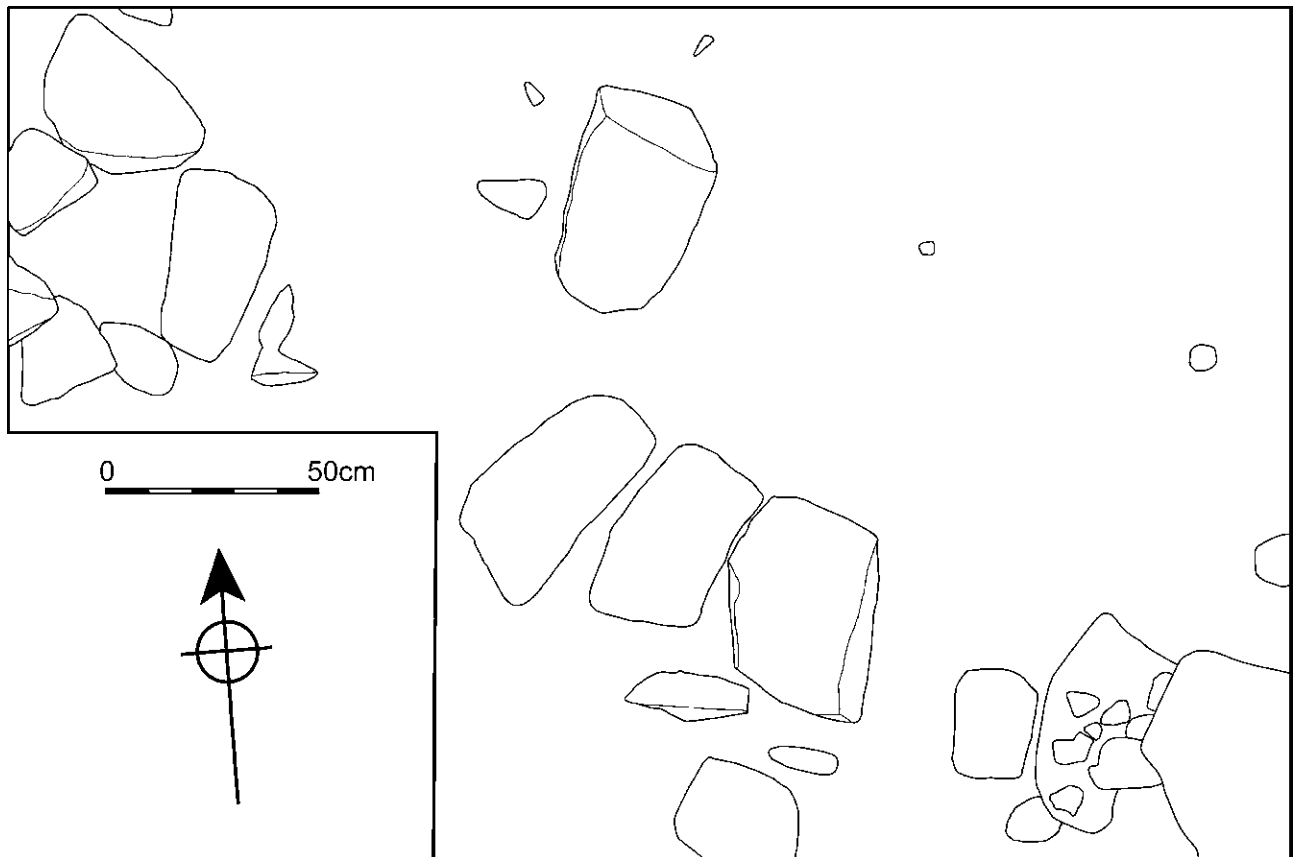


Figure 11.10. A plan of the wheelhouse wall in Trench U

All of the trenches, with the exception of those on mound 16, were placed next to the most promising exposures of archaeological material rather than in relation to the surface topography. It was particularly noticeable that the prominent mounds (25, 26 and 27) appeared to be largely natural features of blown sand. The exposed archaeology in this area lies behind, to the east of, the mounds and appears to be unrelated to the surface topography.

Mound 16

This mound was explored by the excavation of two trenches (W and X). The former was 2m × 1m and was placed on the slope just below the summit of this mound. The latter was placed in line with Trench W on the summit. It was noticed immediately that, despite this mound being covered in extensive rabbit burrows, the amount of cultural material coming from the mound was minimal. None of the upcast from the burrows on the side of the mound contained any brown sand or artefacts. Only the distinctly flat top of the mound had a surface scatter of material. It was felt that, despite its size, this mound was not going to produce complex structures or stratigraphy and this was confirmed by the excavation.

The summit trench (X) revealed a sequence of topsoil (240) and yellow windblown sand (241), which overlay a layer of dark brown sand (242) rich in winks and charcoal (Figure 11.9). The few potsherds recovered were small

and undiagnostic. This overlay another yellow sand layer (243). Two radiocarbon measurements were obtained from barley grains from 242: SUERC-2696 (2040±35 BP) and SUERC-2700 (1980±35 BP); the results are statistically consistent ($T'=1.5$; $v=1$; $T'(5\%)=3.8$; Ward and Wilson 1978) and could therefore be of the same actual age. The latest calibrated date, 50 cal BC–cal AD 90 (SUERC-2700) provides the best estimate for the settlement layer and suggests that it was deposited in the Middle Iron Age.

The trench (W) on the side of the mound did not expose any definite archaeological horizons. After removal of the topsoil (231), a thick layer of disturbed orange-brown sand (232) was exposed. Contained within this were numerous lenses of charcoal and dark brown sand which, during excavation, could not be interpreted. When looked at in section, however, this layer could be identified as a cultivation horizon containing inverted and truncated cultural layers. These traces of cultivation follow the slopes of the mound and it seems likely that they are a relatively recent phenomenon. Below this layer were two white sand layers (233, 235) separated by a thin lens of yellow sand (234). The white sand probably represents windblown sand deposits separated by a stabilization horizon.

This mound appears to be formed of largely natural windblown sand that has been preserved by the deposition of a fairly thin and horizontally restricted midden deposit. At some time in the recent past, the sides of the mound have been dug over, though for what purpose is unclear.

Mound 27

The northern of the three mounds to the southeast of mound 16 provided the most significant archaeological remains. By complete chance, the initial 1m square (Trench U) exposed several large flat stones that were obviously part of the wall of a structure. We expanded the square to a trench 2m × 3m, with the southwest 1m square unexplored. This revealed an arc of walling (Figure 11.10), consisting of eight large flat slabs, enclosing an area to the northeast. It is difficult to estimate the diameter of the inner face in such a small exposure but it is clearly a substantial enclosure, about 10m in diameter. One stone was found, apparently *in situ*, projecting into the interior and this suggests we are dealing with a wheelhouse. The wall was surrounded by a fairly homogeneous brown sand (202, 204, 206) that was covered by a windblown sand layer (203) and immediately behind the wall was a small patch of charcoal-rich sand (205). A distinctive decorated rim sherd (Figure 11.13.55) from the brown sand filling the interior of this structure (206) suggests a Middle Iron Age date around the first century BC/AD.

Mounds 26 and 25

The deposits in Trenches T and V were similar in character, containing pale brown deposits with little dramatic textural or colour changes to distinguish the layers. In Trench V on mound 25, the sequence begins with a pale brown sand (215; Figure 11.9). This was sealed by a mid brown sand (214) with possible ard marks and a lot of pottery. This layer produced a radiocarbon date of 790–400 cal BC (OxA-8922; 2485±40 BP) from a cattle vertebra. Over this was a light brown sand (213) which produced a radiocarbon date of 810–520 cal BC from a red deer astragalus (OxA-8924; 2540±45 BP). The final layer was golden-brown sand (212) with lots of shells.

In Trench T on mound 26, we reached a white sand (227), which may be the underlying windblown sand, but only a few centimeters of it was exposed (Figure 11.9). On top of this there were two thin layers of red clayey sand (226), containing charcoal and other cultural material, which appears to be a floor layer. A radiocarbon result (SUERC-2695; 2430±35 BP) from a barley grain from this layer calibrates to 760–400 cal BC. There was then a thick layer of dark grey-brown sand (225) that produced lots of animal bone. A radiocarbon date of 790–400 cal BC from a cattle tibia (OxA-8881; 2485±35 BP) was obtained from this layer. This was overlain by a compact brown sand (224), white sand with possible ard marks (223) and orange-brown sand (221). Lying on top of this were two discrete patches, one of brown sand (228) and a more distinctive black layer (222) exposed on the removal of the topsoil.

The ceramics from both these trenches were thick, crudely made and undecorated bucket-shaped vessels that are consistent with the Early Iron Age radiocarbon dates.

Mounds 22, 23, 24

Excavation of the three southern mounds in this group revealed a very similar sequence in each mound (Figure 11.9). All four trenches revealed, after the removal of topsoil (P/161, Q/170, R/197, S/181), a discontinuous layer of shells in a matrix of dark brown or sometimes red-brown sand (Q/172, R/192, S/183). Below this was sterile yellow sand (P/164, Q/171) which, in Trenches R and S, could be divided into several layers that probably represent different sand blows and intervening stabilization horizons (R/196, /195, /194, /193, S/186, /189, /185, /182, /187, /188). The only complications occurred in Trench P where the archaeological horizon could be split in two: a lower, dark brown, shell-rich horizon (166, 191) and an upper, red-brown layer (169) which were covered by a layer of blown sand (162) and by another layer of blown sand (167). This trench was further complicated by ploughing, probably recently, that had inverted the stratigraphy (163, 165).

Two radiocarbon dates were obtained from the deposits in this area: SUERC-2694 (2350±35 BP) was obtained from a barley grain within a shell layer (172) in Trench Q and produced a calibrated date of 510–380 cal BC, and OxA-8923 (2410±40 BP) was obtained from a cattle vertebra in a dark brown occupation layer (166) in Trench P and dates to 760–390 cal BC.

The interpretation of this material is difficult. It would appear that we have a fairly large area of machair covered by a thin discontinuous layer of midden, dominated by marine shells. This midden was not rich in artefactual material and it is only the radiocarbon dates that suggest that this material is contemporary with the Early Iron Age settlement that lies immediately to the north.

The finds**Pottery***Alison Sheridan*

The ceramic assemblage from all of the trenches and from the fieldwalking undertaken in 1998 amounted to around 470 sherds and around 220 fragments (*i.e.* pieces less than 10mm in their greatest dimension), weighing *c.* 2.45kg. The sherds are generally small, with most not exceeding 40mm in their maximum dimension, and in no case was there more than 10–15% of any single vessel present (and usually much less than that). This made estimation of the total number of vessels difficult, and also made it hard to attribute some of the sherds to a specific period with any degree of confidence. Nevertheless, no pottery demonstrably earlier than Beaker was noted, and the chronological range extends from the Chalcolithic/Early Bronze Age to the Middle Iron Age (Table 11.1).

The Chalcolithic/Early Bronze Age pottery is associated with the coastal mounds (17, 18 and 176) while the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age and Middle Iron Age pottery is associated with the inland mounds (16 and 24–27). The four sherds from Trench R (on an inland, undated mound

| Mound | Trench | Context (lowest to highest) | Period attribution | Associated/relevant C14 dates | Comments |
|---------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 18 | A | 71, 19, 18, 16, 14, 13, 12, 11 (plus 'mixed contexts' and unstratified) | Chalco/EBA (Beaker) | Context 18: i) 3875±35 BP (OxA-8905, sheep bone); ii) 3655±45 BP (OxA-8925, carbonised barley grains) Context 71: 3710±45 BP (OxA-8920, cattle bone) | See text for discussion of dates |
| | | 12 | EBA (Food Vessel) | 3665±45 BP (OxA-8921, cattle bone) | |
| 18 | F | 38, 36, 35, 33, 34 | EBA (Food Vessel) | None | |
| 176 | B | 8 | Chalco/EBA (Beaker) | None | |
| 176 | D | 52 | EBA (Food Vessel) | None | |
| 17 | K | 156, 152, 146, 145, 144 | Chalco/EBA (Beaker) | Context 158 (aceramic): 3715±45 BP (OxA-8928, carbonised barley grains) | Likely that OxA-8928 dates Beaker activity and OxA-8926, 8927 and 8989 date EBA activity |
| | | 141, 145, 144, 140 | EBA (Food Vessel) | Context 144: 3490±40 BP (OxA-8926, carbonised barley grains) Context 146: 3520±50 BP (OxA-8927, carbonised barley grains) Context 159 (aceramic): 3565±70 BP (OxA-8989, cattle bone) | |
| 17 | M | 80, 79, 77, 76 | Chalco/EBA (Beaker) | Context 79: 3665±45 BP (OxA-9006, cattle bone) | |
| 17 | N | 94, 92, 91 | Chalco/EBA (Beaker) | | LBA/EIA date for cattle bone from 97, but bone must be intrusive |
| 17 | E | 57, 56, 29 | EBA (Food Vessel) | None | |
| 24 | P | 164, 191, 162 | LBA/EIA | Context 166 (aceramic): 2410±40 BP (OxA-8923, cattle bone) | Dated context assumed to be contemporary with 191 |
| 26 | T | 226, 224, 221, 220 | LBA/EIA | Context 226: 2430±35 BP (SUERC-2695, carbonised barley grain) Context 225 (aceramic): 2485±35 BP (OxA-8881, cattle bone) | Context 225 overlies 226 |
| 25 | V | 215, 214, 213, 212 | LBA/EIA | Context 213: 2540±45 BP (OxA-8924, red deer bone) Context 214: 2485±40 BP (OxA-8922, cattle bone) | |
| 27 | U | 206, 204, 202, 203, 201 | MIA | None | 206 = fill inside probable wheelhouse |
| 16 | X | 242, 241, 240 | MIA | Context 242: i) 1980±35 BP (SUERC-2700, carbonised barley grain); ii) 2040±35 BP (SUERC-2696, carbonised barley grain) | |
| 16 | W | Unstratified | Prob. MIA | None | |
| Subsidiary mound adjacent to 22 | R | 192 | Indeterminate | None | Likely to be later prehistoric by analogy with other inland mounds |
| Field-walking 25.6.98 | - | - | Indeterminate | None | |

Table 11.1. Chronological attribution of Sligeanach pottery by location

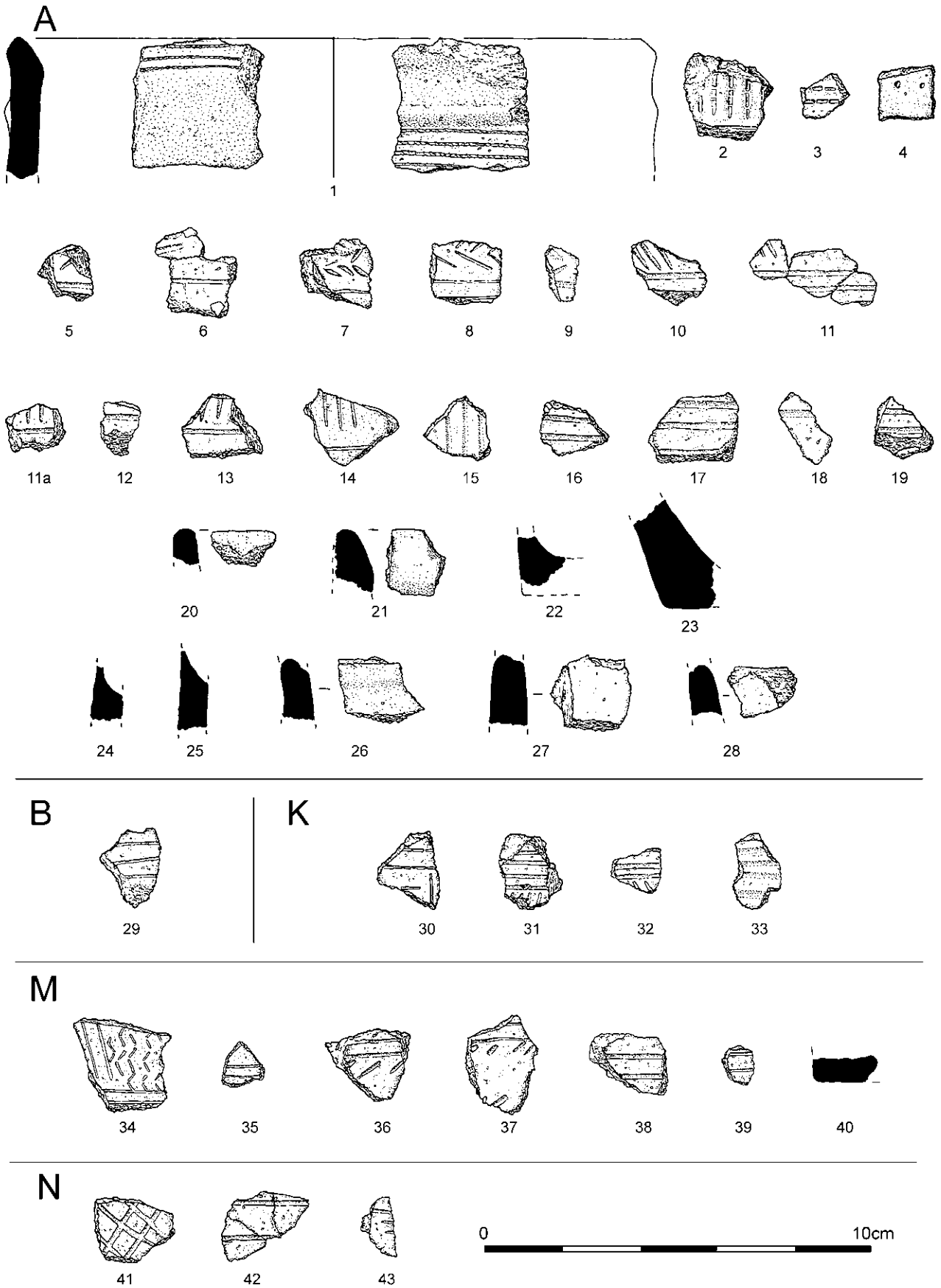


Figure 11.11. The Beaker pottery from Trenches A, B, K, M and N

adjacent to mound 22) are wholly undiagnostic and will not be discussed further, other than to say that they are likely to be late prehistoric given the date of the other pottery from the inland mounds. Also excluded from discussion below are four undiagnostic sherds found during fieldwalking in 1998, and two ‘sherds’ from Trench J that turned out to be natural fragments of stone.

No attempt has been made to classify the pottery into fabric types since this approach, in the author’s opinion, is of limited usefulness in characterizing much prehistoric pottery, all the more so in the Western Isles where, as Ewan Campbell has noted (2002: 139), ‘the bedrock is very variable in its mineralogy over very short distances’, and both the glacial clay (derived from Lewisian gneiss) and stone selected for use as filler can reflect this variability. Variation in the size and density of lithic inclusions has been noted, however, and does to some extent help to differentiate the pottery from different periods. The quartz, biotite mica and feldspar noted in many sherds are characteristic of Lewisian gneiss and there is no reason to suspect that any of the pottery was not locally manufactured.

A complete listing of the pottery is available in archive form; its main features are described and discussed below, in chronological order.

Beaker pottery (Early Bronze Age and possibly Chalcolithic)

Beaker pottery was found in Trenches A in mound 18, B in mound 176 and K, M and N in mound 17 (Figure 11.11):

- In Trench A, 144 sherds and around 100 fragments from possibly around 35 pots were found, mostly stratified below a layer in which coarse domestic Food Vessel pottery occurred; several sherds were associated with the cultivation soil 18 and it could be that these derive from midden material that had been spread on the soil to enrich it.
- Trench B produced only a single, small, abraded sherd (from a ditch/gully fill, context 8).
- In Trench K, 12 sherds from up to seven pots were found; five of these are from contexts 152 and 156, while most of the rest were found as residual material in the fill of an Early Bronze Age pit, 143, which had been dug through 152. (One sherd was found in 146, below the level of this pit.)
- Trench M produced 11 small sherds and three fragments, from up to seven pots, from contexts 76, 77, 79 and 80.
- Sixteen sherds and seven fragments, from up to eight pots, were found in Trench N, although they all came from contexts (91, 92 and 94) fairly high in the trench and lying above layer 97 in which a cattle rib of Early Iron Age date was found. While the possibility of an Iron Age date for the Trench N pottery cannot wholly be excluded, since the decorative motifs (of criss-cross and horizontal incised lines) can be found in the Iron Age decorative repertoire (e.g. at Sollas: Campbell

1991: illus. 14), nevertheless a Beaker date is equally or more likely, especially since the sherds’ fabric and finish is comparable with that of the Beaker pottery from the other trenches.

Overall, the Beaker assemblage consists of small sherds from mostly thin-walled, fine-ware pots with carefully smoothed surfaces; the core is usually dark grey (indicating a fairly rapid firing) and the exterior surfaces vary from reddish-brown to black. Wall thickness ranges from 5.3mm to 12mm, with most sherds falling in the range 6.5mm–8mm. Filler tends to be sparse (mostly at a density of less than 5%) and to consist of small, angular and sub-angular stone fragments, the commonest of which are clear quartz and a shiny black mineral (probably biotite mica); golden mica platelets are also fairly common. The use of grog as a filler was not noted. The condition of the sherds varies from minimally abraded to heavily abraded.

The sherds are so small – with the largest (SF1005) being only *c.* 35mm × 35mm – that reconstruction of overall vessel shape and size is impossible, although it is clear that one cord-decorated pot from Trench A (the aforementioned SF1005 in context 18; Figure 11.11.1) had an upright, gently pointed rim with a horizontal cordon below it on the exterior; this pot might well have been a low-carinated All-Over-Cord decorated Beaker (cf. Clarke 1970: fig. 23), with an estimated rim diameter of 160mm. In addition, a small fragment from a wall-base junction in Trench M (SF1044 in context 80; Figure 11.11.40) suggests a pot with a pedestalled base, although another wall-base sherd (from sample 9002, Trench A; Figure 11.11.23) lacks this feature. No sherds gave the impression of having come from particularly large Beakers, as are sometimes found in domestic assemblages (Gibson 1982) although, again, the sherds’ small size makes it hard to be certain. Around 25–30% of the sherds have blackish organic residue on their interior or (occasionally) exterior, and this probably indicates the pots’ use for cooking.

Decoration (Figure 11.11) is mostly by incision – usually shallow – and mostly features simple horizontal lines, although designs incorporating an incised or impressed fringe below such lines are represented (Trench M: Figure 11.11.36 and 37, from one pot; Trench K: Figure 11.11.32 and 31, from two pots), as are designs with vertical as well as horizontal lines (e.g. Trench A: Figure 11.11.11a and 13).

- Two sherds have criss-cross incised decoration (Trench N: Figure 11.11.41 and Trench A; the latter is very faint and has not been illustrated).
- A very thin sherd from Trench M (Figure 11.11.34; context 79) has a metopic design featuring a panel of herringbone decoration (probably impressed), framed by vertical and horizontal incised lines; another sherd (Trench A: Figure 11.11.5, unstratified), may have the same design. The herringbone motif, lying above horizontal incised lines, was also noted on four other sherds and had probably been impressed.
- Other types of impressed decoration are rare, and there

is no sign of the use of shell impressions (as had been noted from other Hebridean Beaker assemblages such as Northton, Harris and Allt Chrisal, Barra; Gibson 1982: 216; Gibson 1995: 114). The aforementioned pot, SF1005 from Trench A, is decorated with impressions of fine, twisted cord, under 1mm wide, with three horizontal lines on the internal rim bevel and further horizontal lines below the neck cordon; some of the latter had been smudged slightly during the pot's final buffing to a very low sheen.

- The single abraded sherd from Trench B (Figure 11.11.29) has horizontal linear decoration that is so indistinct that it is hard to be sure whether or not it was made using impressed twisted cord.
- Two sherds (Figure 11.11.3 and Figure 11.11.2 from Trench A) have linear comb-impressed decoration; in the case of Figure 11.11.2 the teeth are unusually long. One sherd from Trench K (Figure 11.11.30) appears to have pseudo-comb impression made using dashed, incised lines.
- Finally, one sherd from Trench A (Figure 11.11.4) has possible pin-prick impressed decoration.

Excepting the presence of the probable All-Over-Cord (AOC) Beaker in Trench A, there does not seem to be any significant variation among the Beaker pottery found in the different trenches.

As for the dating of this pottery, and the question of the duration of Beaker activity, the radiocarbon evidence is slightly ambiguous. The date of 3875±35 BP (OxA-8905; 2470–2200 cal BC at 2σ, using OxCal 4.1) from context 18 in Trench A – the context that produced the probable AOC Beaker – is well in line for the dating of AOC Beakers elsewhere, including the example from Sorisdale, Coll, which is associated with an effectively identical date of 3879±32 BP (OxA-14722; 2470–2210 cal BC at 2σ; Sheridan 2007: 109). However, context 12 in Trench A also produced a later date of 3665±45 BP (OxA-8921; 2200–1910 cal BC at 2σ) from a cattle bone, and a stratigraphically lower context in the same trench, layer 71, produced a similar date of 3710±45 BP (OxA-8920; 2280–1960 cal BC at 2σ, from a cattle metapodial). Furthermore, a date within the bracket c.2200–1910 BC was obtained from a Beaker-bearing context in Trench M, mound 17, and another similar date was obtained from the aceramic context 158 in Trench K. (An Iron Age date of 2385±40 BP for a cattle bone from a layer below the Beaker layers in Trench N can only be explained by the bone being intrusive.)

It is therefore unclear whether we are dealing with two phases of Beaker activity, or whether all the Beaker pottery actually belongs to the c.2200–1900 BC bracket; such a date is not impossible for AOC Beakers, whose currency is known to extend as late as this (e.g. at Eweford, East Lothian; Sheridan 2007: fig.11.8; cf. Needham 2005). Comparative dating for other Beaker assemblages from the Hebrides is unsatisfactory. The Northton assemblage – with which the Sligeanach assemblage is most closely comparable – is dated by only two dates (excepting two

wholly unreliable Gakushin dates), 3481±54 BP and 3604±70 BP (BM-707 and 706), which suggest a currency within the first quarter of the second millennium, while both of the dates for Rosinish, Benbecula and one for the Udal, North Uist, were obtained from marine shell and their calibration is therefore subject to a marine offset (*ibid.*: Appendix 6).

In terms of *comparanda* for the Sligeanach assemblage, as stated above the closest parallel is the Northton assemblage (especially, but not exclusively, the stratigraphically earlier 'Beaker I' material), which shares a predominance of incised decoration and provides exact parallels for each of the decorative motifs and schemes, including the herringbone-filled metopes. The only difference seems to be that Northton has no AOC Beaker, even though it does contain a few sherds with twisted cord-impressed decoration (Gibson 1982; 2006). All-Over-Cord Beaker is, however, known from Sorisdale (as mentioned above) and from Allt Chrisal, Barra, where some 45% of the sherd assemblage seems to belong to this type of Beaker; All Over Ornamented Beaker is also present there (Gibson 1995: fig. 4.37, 197–8, fig. 4.38, 214). The small assemblage from Calanais, Lewis, includes sherds of AOC Beaker, as well as sherds with incised decoration and a few sherds with sub-rim cordons (Sheridan *et al.* forthcoming).

Other assemblages offering points of comparison with the Sligeanach material include Rosinish, where the assemblage published by Iain Crawford in 1977 seems, like the Northton assemblage, to be dominated by incised decoration, and to include the herringbone metope motif (Crawford 1977: fig. 5); the same motif has been found at Machair Mheadhanach in Iochdar (see Chapter 10; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: fig. 17). The Beaker pottery found by Shepherd and Tuckwell in a midden at Rosinish also shares some features with the Sligeanach Beaker (e.g. in the use of incised lines and herringbone); it includes one pot with a sub-rim cordon and horizontal linear decoration, albeit executed using a comb rather than with impressed twisted cord, as was the case at Sligeanach (Shepherd 1976: fig. 11.3).

Food Vessel pottery (Early Bronze Age)

This tradition is represented by a few large, thick-walled vessels (Figure 11.12), some decorated, some plain, and was found in Trenches A and F in mound 18, and Trench K in mound 17. A single sherd from a large, thick-walled cooking vessel found in Trench D (mound 176) may well belong to this tradition as well, as may the pottery from Trench E (mound 17) discussed below.

The single vessel from Trench A (Figure 11.12.44) is represented by 17 sherds from context 12, the thick layer of light grey-brown sand overlying the main Beaker-producing layers. It had been a large cooking jar, with an estimated rim diameter around 260mm and with a wall thickness ranging between 15mm and 18mm (widening to c.30mm across the rim). The rim is T-shaped, expanded externally and internally, with a gently sloping internal bevel and, below this, the gently concave neck swells out to a sinuous belly. The exterior is decorated with large, thick whipped-cord

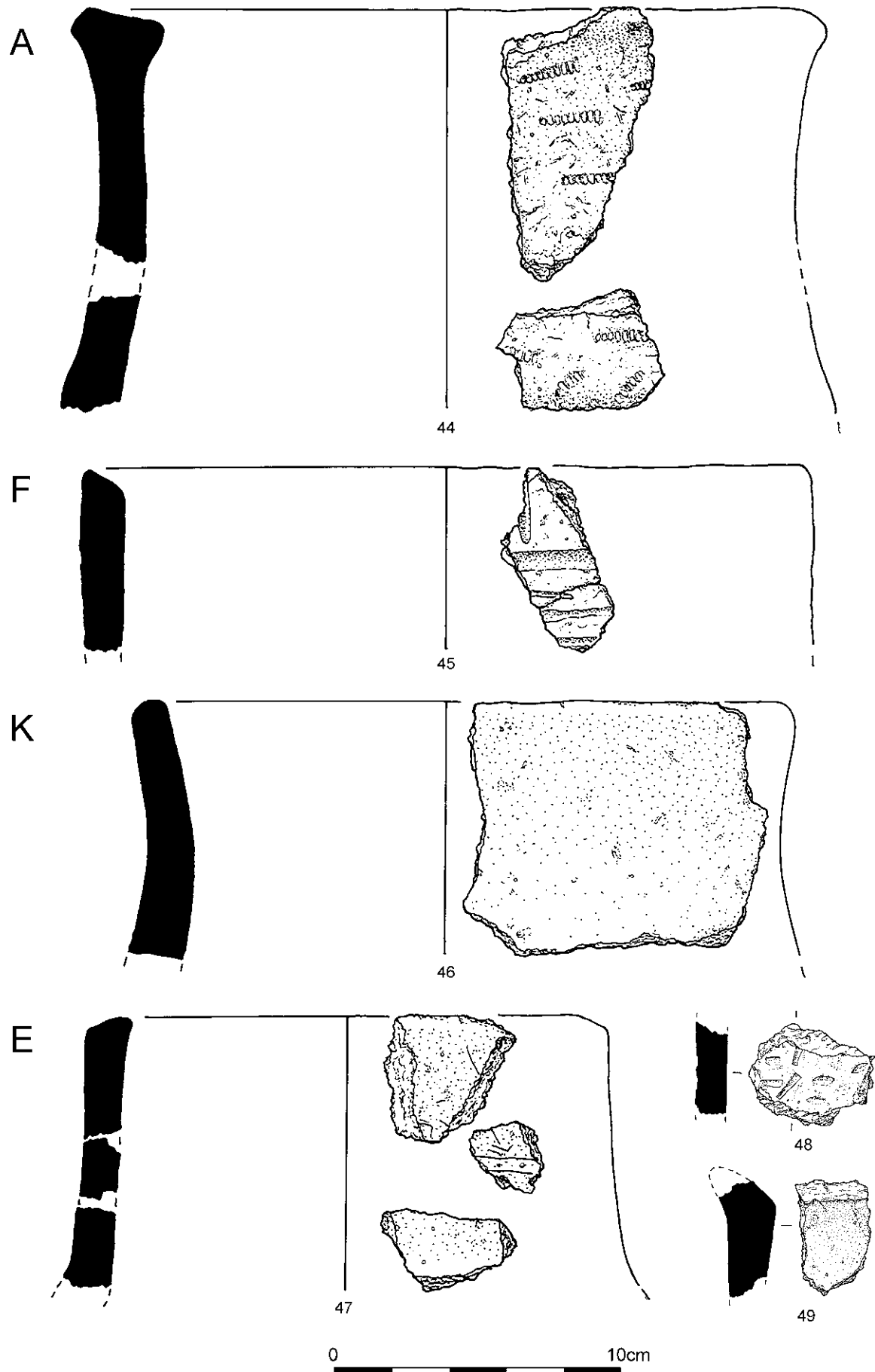


Figure 11.12. The Food Vessel pottery from Trenches A, F, K and E

‘maggot’ impressions, which are roughly horizontal on the neck and include diagonal examples on the upper belly; they are up to 5mm wide and *c.*22mm long. The exterior is red-brown; the core, blackish, and the interior, black-grey, with a thin black encrustation extending up to the rim; the surfaces had been wiped smooth. Inclusions comprise platelets of mica, a little crushed quartz, and sub-angular and rounded fragments of a hard black stone, up to 4.5mm × 3.5mm in size and at a density of 7–10%.

Trench F produced sherds from at least one, and possibly up to three pots (Figure 11.12.45) that may be attributable to the domestic Food Vessel tradition, from contexts 33, 34, 35, 36 and 38 (with 36 representing a possible floor level). The most informative pot is represented by two conjoining blackish rimsherds (SF1007 from 36 and SF1008 from 33); some of the other sherds and spalls from Trench F may also belong. This pot had had an upright, internally-bevelled rim and neck, with an estimated rim diameter of *c.*250mm and a wall thickness of *c.*15mm. Its exterior is decorated with broad, fairly shallow incised lines, with a possible fringe of vertical lines immediately below the rim and roughly horizontal lines below that. Patches of black organic residue on the exterior suggest its use as a cooking jar. The surfaces had been fairly carefully smoothed, to a low sheen on the exterior and rim bevel. Inclusions are relatively sparse (3–5%) and comprise tiny mica platelets (probably present naturally in the clay) and sub-angular fragments of a hard, dull grey stone, up to 4mm × 4mm.

Three Food Vessel-tradition pots were found in the upper layers of Trench K, with most sherds (from one undecorated large coarseware jar) coming from contexts 144 and 145, the upper fills of pit 143. This jar – whose sherds include the largest piece of pottery (Figure 11.12.46) from the entire Sligeanach assemblage, at 100mm × 85mm – had an upright, flattish-rounded rim and upright or slightly everted neck, broadening to what had probably been a globular belly; the estimated rim diameter is *c.*230mm and the wall thickness ranges between 15mm and 17.5mm. The exterior is light reddish-brown and, in places, dark grey to black; the core, mid-grey, and the interior, light red-brown; the presence of organic residue on the exterior indicates the pot’s use for cooking. The surfaces had been fairly carefully smoothed. The fabric is hard and inclusions are sparse (at a density of *c.*3%); they comprise the same black shiny mineral and quartz as seen in the Beaker pottery and some fragments that may well be of feldspar. Around 10–15% of this pot is represented; the light degree of abrasion to the fracture surfaces suggests that they had not lain around for long before being incorporated within the pit fill.

One sherd (from among SF1054) had broken along a coil joint line. A second, somewhat smaller jar is represented by a neck or upper belly sherd decorated with impressions made by a square-ended tool (Figure 11.12.48, from context 141), along with sherd SF1059 and one sherd from SF1076, from the same context. This pot, like the others, had been used for cooking, having a thick, black organic encrustation on its exterior. The diameter, as suggested by the curvature of SF1071, is *c.*120mm, and the wall thickness, 11.5mm. The fabric is hard, with a hackly fracture, and inclusions are

large (up to 8mm × 4mm) and abundant (*c.*15%), comprising angular fragments of a hard grey and grey-brown stone. The third pot is represented by a single coarseware sherd (SF1080, from 140) that does not obviously belong with the other two vessels.

The single sherd from Trench D (SF1035, from context 52 in the bottom half of the stratigraphic sequence) is comparable with the plain jar from Trench K in having come from a large, fairly thick-walled vessel; it may well be from the neck area and the pot’s diameter at this point might have been as large as *c.*320mm. The exterior is reddish-brown; the core, light to dark grey; and the interior, dark grey. The presence of black encrustation on the interior indicates its use as a cooking pot. The surfaces are uneven, with inclusions protruding; the latter are abundant (*c.*15%), large (up to *c.*8mm × 4mm), and mostly comprise angular fragments of a dark grey crystalline rock, with occasional fragments of crushed quartz.

The upper layers in Trench E (where a possible structure was found) produced 20 sherds and four fragments from three pots.

- The first is represented by an undecorated rimsherd with an internally-bevelled rim (Figure 11.12.49 from layer 57), and appears to have belonged to a large cooking pot; the estimated rim diameter is at least 240mm and the wall thickness, *c.*14mm. The fabric is hard and dark, with fairly abundant inclusions (7–10%) of angular grey stone, up to 8mm × 4mm (together with some quartz and the shiny black mineral as noted in some other Sligeanach pots).
- A second large cooking jar is represented by three sherds (Figure 11.12.47) from topsoil, context 29; this has a flattish, upright, externally-bevelled rim and a straight neck, kinking out towards the belly. The estimated rim diameter is *c.*180mm and the wall thickness, *c.*14.5mm. A thick, black organic encrustation on the exterior obscures the decoration, which is scarcely visible to the naked eye and best observed using a microscope. It consists of thin, shallow scratched lines on the neck, mostly horizontal but with a hint of a more complex arrangement towards the bottom of the neck. The fabric is very hard and only slightly abraded; the exterior is black and the core and interior, blackish-red. Inclusions are not particularly large or abundant (*c.*7%); they comprise sand, plus angular fragments of a dark grey, slightly glossy mineral and crushed quartz.
- The third pot from Trench E (represented by SF1033 and SF1086 from 57, and possibly also SF1036 from 56 and SF1016 from 29) is thinner-walled and finer than the others, being around 9mm thick, and with carefully-smoothed surfaces. The sherds are undecorated and the presence of thin black encrustation on both the interior and exterior indicates that this, like the others, had been used for cooking. Inclusions are sparse (*c.*3%) and small (up to 3.5mm × 3.5mm), and comprise sub-angular fragments of a pink and black crystalline stone, plus a dull grey stone.

Even though the Trench E pottery differs from the Early Bronze Age pottery from the other trenches – in having scratched decoration on one pot, and in including a thin-walled, fineware vessel – nevertheless, it is more likely to belong to the domestic Food Vessel tradition than to a later ceramic tradition. The shape of the rim and neck of the first pot is consistent with domestic Food Vessel pottery (e.g. at Kilellan, Islay; Cowie 2005: fig. 59; also cf. the decorated rimsherd from Trench F), and even though the finely incised decoration as seen on the second pot is known from Middle Iron Age Hebridean pottery (e.g. at Sollas; Campbell 1991: illus. 14), the vessel form is more characteristic of Early Bronze Age assemblages than of Iron Age examples.

The pottery from Trenches E, D and F is not associated with any radiocarbon dates, but elsewhere, in Trench K, one context containing this type of pottery has been radiocarbon-dated to the first half of the second millennium BC (context 144; 3490±40 BP; OxA-8926; 1930–1690 cal BC at 2σ), and it appears, from the other dates from this trench, that this post-Beaker phase of activity might have begun by the time that layer 159 was being deposited. In Trench A, a cattle bone from context 12 (in which the maggot-decorated Food Vessel jar was found) produced a date contemporary with the Beaker pottery from that trench, but the dated bone is likely to be residual.

As with the Sligeanach Beaker pottery, Hebridean *comparanda* for domestic Food Vessel pottery are fairly poorly dated. The best parallels are from Kilellan, Islay (Cowie 2005) where both decorated and undecorated large jars have been found, but unfortunately the midden in which they occurred has only one date, and that was obtained from mixed-species charcoal: 3590±60 BP (GU-3517; 2130–1770 cal BC at 2σ). The dating of the nearby Food Vessel settlement at Ardnave, Islay (Ritchie and Welfare 1983), is no better; see Sheridan (2004) for a discussion. In general, however, the 1930–1690 cal BC date for context 144 in Trench K is in line with the overall currency of Scottish Food Vessel pottery (Sheridan 2004).

Regarding *comparanda*, it should be noted that the Sligeanach domestic Food Vessel assemblage appears to represent just one element (or two, counting the thinner-walled vessel from Trench E) in the ceramic repertoire: at Kilellan, cups, bowls and vases were also present while bowls and vases were also present at Ardnave, and also at Dalmore, Lewis (Sharples 1983; T. and R. Cowie pers. comm.). The bowls and vases in these assemblages are comparable with those known from funerary contexts elsewhere, while some of the larger vessels recall Vase Urns. Domestic Food Vessel assemblages from mainland Scotland are very rare and no meaningful *comparanda* for the Sligeanach assemblage are known to the author. The assemblage is best understood as part of an insular Hebridean development, with the bowls and jars from other Hebridean Food Vessel assemblages reflecting the fact that the inhabitants participated in a network of contacts along the western seaways, sharing some design elements with other parts of Scotland and with northern Ireland.

Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age

The pottery that can be ascribed to this period (Figure 11.13) was found on the inland mounds, in Trenches P (mound 24), T (mound 26) and V (mound 25). It consists of mostly featureless body sherds from large undecorated cooking pots; rims are mostly flattish and upright or minimally inturned. Overall, a minimum of 10 pots is represented.

The 20 sherds and 12 fragments from Trench P (contexts 162, 164 and 191), from at least one cooking pot with a wall thickness of c.10mm and with sparse (<3%) lithic inclusions, are indeed featureless, the only characteristic of note being a ‘false rim’ ring joint on one sherd from SF1068. The Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age date of this pottery is, however, indicated by the radiocarbon date of 2410±40 BP (OxA-8923; 760–390 cal BC at 2σ) from a cattle bone found in context 166, which appears to be contemporary with 191.

The Trench T pottery is similarly sparse, being represented by just nine sherds and 13 fragments from three to four pots, from contexts 220, 221, 224 and 226. The most informative sherd (Figure 11.13.54), from context 224, is a rimsherd, most of whose external surface has spalled off. The rim is flattened, minimally inturned, and very slightly expanded towards the interior; the wall thickness is c.8.5mm, and the surviving surface is uneven. The sherd is too small to allow the rim diameter to be estimated. The thickest sherd from Trench T is from SF1714, from context 226 (14mm). This is from a large cooking pot with a hard fabric and a thick black encrustation on its interior.

Trench V provided the most informative and numerous sherds: around 100 sherds and 50 fragments, from six or seven large and mostly coarse cooking pots, were found in contexts 212, 213, 214 and 215 (including c.60 sherds and c.30 fragments from a single pot, SF1706, in 214). Most of the pieces are only slightly abraded.

- Pot 1 (Figure 11.13.50), comprising conjoining rimsherds SF1705 from 214 and SF1093 from 215, had been a very large vessel, with an estimated rim diameter possibly as large as c.380mm and a wall thickness of c. 14mm. The rim is upright, flat, and slightly expanded towards the interior on one of the sherds, and there is a distinct band of thin black encrustation on the rim top, extending a little way down the exterior, indicating its use for cooking. The sherds are medium brown throughout, slightly grey and reddish on the interior. The surfaces are uneven and the fabric is hard, with fairly numerous (c.10%) lithic inclusions comprising sand, golden mica platelets, biotite mica, quartz and angular fragments of a dull grey stone, up to 16mm × 9mm.
- Pot 2 (Figure 11.13.53), represented by a single small rimsherd (SF1704 from 214), had been another large, flat-rimmed cooking pot; its rim diameter had been at least 230mm, and possibly considerably more, and the wall thickness is c.13mm. The exterior is black, with a thin organic encrustation; the outer half of the core is dark grey, and the inner core and interior are light

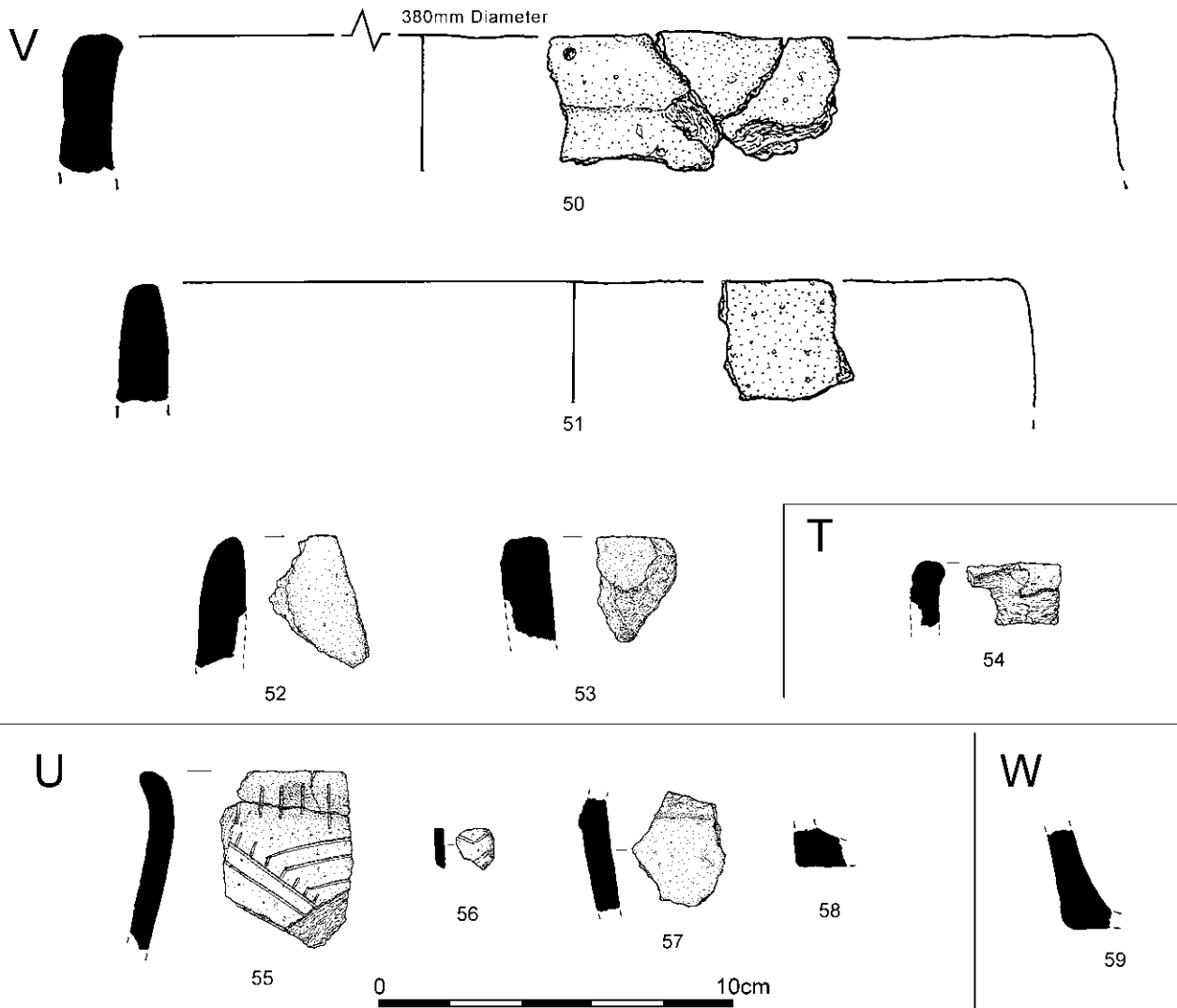


Figure 11.13. The Early Iron Age pottery from Trenches V and T and the Middle Iron Age pottery from Trenches U and W

red. The surfaces are slightly uneven. Unlike Pot 1, this pot has a slightly soft, medium-abraded fabric, with sparse inclusions (*c.*3%) comprising sand, mica platelets and sub-angular fragments of grey stone.

- Pot 3 (Figure 11.13.52), represented by a single small rimsherd (SF1705 from 214), had also been a large pot but its rim diameter cannot be estimated; wall thickness is *c.*14mm. The rim is slightly pointed and upright or slightly inturned. The exterior is light brown with a black band of very thin encrustation below the rim; the core is dark grey, and the interior, light brown. The surfaces, though smoothed, have protruding lithic inclusions; the latter include fragments of dull grey stone up to 8mm × 5.5mm, and some sand.
- Pot 4 (Figure 11.13.51), represented by rimsherd SF1092 from 215, comes from a pot *c.*250mm in estimated rim diameter, with an upright, flattish rim and wall thickness *c.*17.5mm. The exterior is dark grey-brown with a thin patch of organic encrustation; the core, medium to dark grey, and the interior, light brown. The surfaces are slightly uneven. The fabric

is hard, with sparse inclusions (3%) comprising some sand, sub-angular quartz up to 6mm × 4mm, a few tiny mica specks and fragments of dull grey rock.

The other pots from Trench V are represented only by featureless body sherds but are from the same kind of vessels, with wall thicknesses ranging from 10mm to 17mm (both from SF1706 from 214).

The dating for this pottery is provided by five radiocarbon dates from Trenches P, T and V, of which three are from contexts containing sherds (see Tables 11.1 and 11.8); together they suggest a date bracket between *c.* 800 and 400 BC. Undecorated tub- or bucket-shaped pots are believed to have become the only kind of pottery in use in the Hebrides for around a millennium from *c.* 1500 BC (Campbell 2002: 140; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 53), as shown, for example, by the large assemblage from Cladh Hallan, South Uist (*ibid.*) and by a virtually complete pot found under peat at Cleascro, Lewis (Anon. 1956: 459, fig. 2.3). Encrusted organic residue on the interior of the latter has been dated to 1400–1130 cal BC (OxA-11242; 3032±33 BP; Sheridan 2002: 155).

Middle Iron Age

Pottery that can definitely or probably be dated to the Middle Iron Age (Figure 11.13) was found in Trench U in mound 27 (associated with a probable wheelhouse) and Trenches W and X in mound 16. Once again, only a small amount of pottery was found (namely 41 sherds and three fragments from around four pots from Trench U, two sherds from one or two pots from Trench W, and 10 sherds from around six pots in Trench X). This pottery is significantly thinner and finer than the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age assemblage and is mostly of a hard, slightly sandy fabric.

The most diagnostic pottery comes from Trench U, where a decorated rim and neck sherd from a large globular pot with an everted rim (Figure 11.13.55; SF1708 from 206) can be paralleled closely among material from the Site B (Periods B1 and B2) wheelhouse at Sollas, North Uist (Campbell 1991: illus. 17). The Sligeanach sherd has incised decoration arranged as vertical lines immediately below the rim and an arcaded and fringed design on the neck; it is thin-walled (7mm) and the estimated rim diameter is *c.*200mm. It is of a hard, slightly gritty fabric; its outer surface has been very carefully smoothed and buffed to a very low sheen, while the interior shows signs of probably having been scraped to achieve its thinness. The presence of a thin black encrustation on a belly sherd confirms that this had been a cooking pot, and there is a small base sherd (Figure 11.13.58) which confirms that it had had a flat base. Also present in Trench U is a belly sherd from another pot that might have the remains of a detached cordon (Figure 11.13.57; SF1702 from 202); again, this feature can be paralleled among pottery of the same phase at Sollas. A third pot, represented among SF1098 from 204, has an upright, pointed rim with horizontal stab decoration below (not illustrated).

The only sherd of note from Trench W comes from the wall–base junction of a thin-walled (7.5mm), fine pot of hard, slightly sandy fabric resembling that seen in Trench U. The base is flat and the wall splays slightly (Figure 11.13.59); the sherd is too small to estimate base diameter, but the pot is likely to have been a large vessel comparable with the Middle Iron Age pots from Sollas.

Little can be said about the few sherds from Trench X, other than that they range in thickness from 6mm (among SF1719 from 242) to *c.*12mm (among SF1722 from 241) and are generally comparable in hardness and fabric with

those from Trenches U and W. One, from among SF1719, has a corrugated exterior with a trace of organic material in one of the corrugations. If the latter does not represent subsequent rootlet growth, then this may be an example of the dung tempering as observed elsewhere in the Hebrides by Ewan Campbell (1991: 150) – although it should be emphasized that the possible organic impressions are only on the outside surface, and do not pervade the body of the sherd. (In this respect the sherd is closer to Norse grass-marked pottery than to the Iron Age grass/dung-tempering as discussed by Campbell [*ibid.* and 2002: 140]).

Some time depth among the Middle Iron Age pottery from Sligeanach is suggested by the radiocarbon dating evidence from Trench X and by the *comparanda* for the Trench U vessels. The former suggests activity within the time bracket of the last one or two centuries BC and the first century AD (which, incidentally, is contemporary with Campbell's period of Iron Age grass/dung-tempering at Sollas), whereas the latter suggests a second or third century AD date for the pottery, and the wheelhouse, in Trench U (Campbell 2002: 141).

Copper alloy awl

Niall Sharples and Alison Sheridan

A copper-alloy awl (SF1506; Figure 11.14) was recovered in an environmental sample from a ploughsoil (18) in Trench A, mound 18. The awl was broken at both ends but appears to be a double-pointed awl (Class 1D; Thomas 2005: 221). Similar awls are well known from Early Bronze Age burial contexts in southern Britain and in Scotland (Annable and Simpson 1964; Clarke 1970) and, in Scotland, they are normally associated with Food Vessel burials. The Sligeanach example is unusual in coming from a settlement context and is also relatively small.

1506, A/18. A small copper-alloy point. It thickens in the centre but is broken at either end. The cross-section is noticeably rectangular to one side of the waist but becomes circular on the other side. It is probably a double-pointed awl (Thomas 2005: 221, class 1D) but there remains a slight possibility that the rectangular side is a tang (Thomas 2005: 221, class 2C). The awl was analysed by Phil Parkes using a Camscan maxim 2040 Scanning Electron Microscope with Oxford Inca EDX analysis software. This revealed that the approximate composition of the alloy was 60% copper, 35% tin, 4% arsenic and 1% silver. Length 11.3mm, dia. 0.9mm.



Figure 11.14. A copper alloy awl

Worked bone

Niall Sharples

A fine bone point (SF1636) was recovered from a sterile yellow sand layer (186) in Trench S. The only information about its presence in this layer is that it came from a rabbit burrow. Extensive rabbit activity was recorded in this trench. The surface of the bone has been heavily root-etched and weathered, which suggests the object spent some of its life near the surface. Comparable bone points have been recovered from Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age contexts at Cladh Hallan, and it is quite possible that this object was associated with the Early Iron Age activity in this area.

1636, S/186 A finely worked bone point made from a fragment of long bone from a large mammal. The area around the point is heavily polished and the polish extends on the inside about halfway up the body but on the outside only about 30mm up the body. The rest of the surface is heavily weathered and root-etched. The side of the point has clearly been carefully squared off in this area. The end is quite roughly finished, with the cancellous tissue exposed. The sides taper in slightly. Length 116.25mm, width 13.00mm, thickness 6.3mm

Lithics

Amelia Pannett

A total of 21 struck flints and a single probable struck piece of quartz were recovered during the excavation (Table 11.2). The material was restricted to the trenches (A, B, D, E, K, L and N) excavated in the coastal mounds that date to the Early Bronze Age.

The majority of the pieces are the result of tertiary working and do not retain any cortex. Five pieces, however, retain abraded cortex typical of a beach pebble resource. The assemblage is flake-dominated, with a single core. Twelve of the flakes are complete, the remainder missing

either platform, termination or both. The complete flakes are small, on average 22mm in length, 14.7mm broad and 5.9mm thick. Dorsal scar patterns are generally indeterminate; however, four of the flakes have been struck from single-platform flake cores.

The single core is 20.1mm in length, 13.4mm broad and 8.2mm thick and represents the last vestiges of a worked-out flake or blade core. The distal end of the core is missing and the platform is abraded (Figure 11.15.5).

Four flint flakes have been retouched, as has the quartz flake. The retouched assemblage comprises two scraper

| Trench | Flint | Burnt flint | Quartz | Pumice |
|--------|-------|-------------|--------|--------|
| A | 7 | 1 | | 3 |
| B | 1 | | | 1 |
| D | 1 | | | |
| E | 2 | | | 1 |
| H | | | | 1 |
| J | | | | 9 |
| K | 5 | | 1 | |
| L | 1 | | | 1 |
| N | 3 | | | |
| O | | | | 1 |
| V | | | | 1 |
| W | | | | 3 |
| X | | | | 1 |
| total | 20 | 1 | 1 | 22 |

Table 11.2. The distribution of worked lithics from Sligeanach

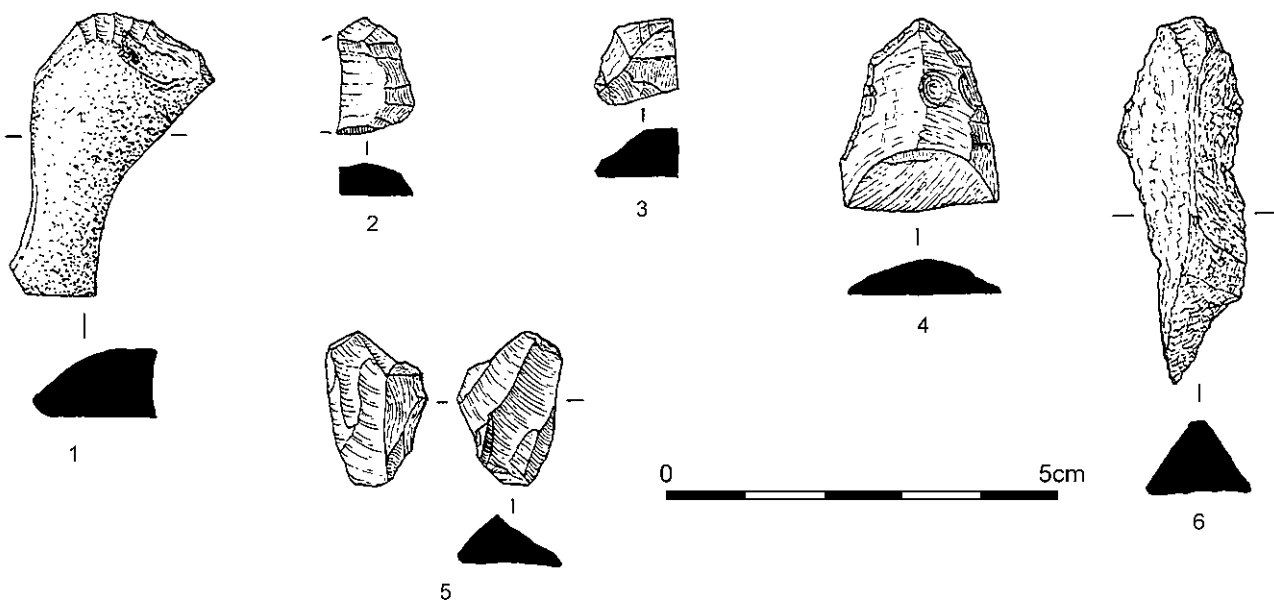


Figure 11.15. The worked flint (1-5) and quartz (6)

fragments, an end scraper, a knife fragment and a piercer. The scraper fragments (Figure 11.15.2 and 3) probably derive from small thumbnail scrapers. These have semi-invasive and abrupt retouch forming rounded distal ends. The end scraper (Figure 11.15.1) is formed on the distal end of an irregular flake, with a short stretch of abrupt retouch forming a curved edge. The knife fragment (Figure 11.15.4) comprises a flake fragment with two large scars, one on the dorsal and one on the ventral surface, the surfaces of which have patinated. The unifacial retouch is semi-invasive and identified along one lateral edge. Retouch is difficult to positively identify on the quartz flake (Figure 11.15.6) given the coarse-grained nature of the raw material. However, the distal end of the flake forms a narrow point that is clearly abraded, probably through use.

The assemblage contains no clearly diagnostic pieces and is typical of a technology based on a beach flint resource. It is likely to date to the Chalcolithic/Early Bronze Age, with the intensive use of the core, untypical of this period, demonstrating that the most was being made of a limited supply of raw materials.

Pumice

Niall Sharples

Twenty-two pieces of pumice were found and several pieces have flat surfaces that indicate use as an abrasive surface for smoothing and polishing. The largest collection of objects came from Trench J, an otherwise unprepossessing trench that produced no other cultural material, simply a collection of shells. The concentration may reflect the fact that this trench is close to the beach where the pumice would have been collected. The three large pieces came from Trenches A, E and X which does not indicate any spatial or chronological concentration of the best quality material.

1201, E/29 Pumice

A large piece of pumice with a roughly triangular cross section. It has three flat surfaces probably deliberately created but not obviously smoothed from use. Length 47.60mm, width 44.85mm, thickness 30.20mm, grey-brown.

1202, J/120 Pumice × 2

A medium-sized piece of pumice with one flat surface that has been smoothed through use. Length 36.7mm, width 27.35mm, height 22.65mm, black.

A small fragment. Length 12.2mm, width 11.00mm, thickness 6.50mm, black.

1203, A/12 Pumice

Missing.

1204 B/3 Pumice

Irregular fragment. Length 33.8mm, width 15.6mm, thickness 13.95mm, black.

1205 J/120 Pumice × 7

Four rounded pebbles and three broken fragments of pumice. None show definite signs of use.

Length 30.2mm, width 27.15mm, thickness 21.6mm, grey.

Length 26.55mm, width 18.35mm, thickness 14.25mm, black.

Length 30.9mm, width 27.75mm, thickness 20.06mm, black.

Length 24.3mm, width 18.45mm, thickness 13.8mm, grey.

Length 23.6mm, width 23.1mm, thickness 14.85mm, grey.

Length 18.75mm, width 16.45mm, thickness 12.1mm, grey.

Length 18.4mm, width 13.75mm, thickness 11.6mm, grey.

1206 A/11 Pumice × 2

A large oval pebble with no obvious evidence for worked surfaces.

Length 72.2mm, width 51.5mm, thickness 34.3mm, black.

A small faceted pebble with evidence for numerous polished surfaces and a small groove that suggest intensive use. Length 20.5mm, width 18.9mm, thickness 16.75mm, black.

1207 H/61 Pumice

An irregular triangular shaped piece with possible evidence for use on one face. Length 42.5mm, width 37.2mm, thickness 16.5mm, grey.

1208 L/134 Pumice

A small irregular piece of pumice. One concave surface appears smoothed by use. Length 28.5mm, width 14.00mm, thickness 10.05mm, black.

1209 V/22 Pumice

One half of a small rounded pebble of pumice. One surface might have been used. Length 24.25mm, width 17.00mm, thickness 11.8mm, black.

1210, Q/172 Pumice

A small fragment. Length 10.94mm, width 9.2mm, thickness 9.8mm, black.

1211 W/unstratified Pumice × 3

Three small irregular fragments.

Length 10.2mm, width 10.0mm, thickness 9.8mm, black.

Length 9.55mm, width 8.8mm, 5.3mm, black.

Length 8.45mm, width 6.2mm, thickness 4.4mm, black.

1212, X/242 Pumice

A large irregular lump of pumice with one smooth surface stained red. The surface has been broken and was clearly bigger when used. Length 57.3mm, width 43.0mm, thickness 36.5mm, black.

The animal bones

Jacqui Mulville and Richard Madgwick

Identifications were checked against reference skeletons held by the Department of Archaeology and Conservation, University of Cardiff. Sheep/goat bones have been speciated where possible using the criteria of Boessneck (1969) and Payne (1969; 1985). The criteria described by Lister (1996) have been used to confirm that all large cervid bones belong to red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) rather than fallow deer (*Dama dama*). Fragments of mammal bone that could not be identified more precisely were classified to size groups such as 'cattle-sized' (horse, cattle or red deer size) or 'sheep-sized' (sheep or pig size).

The recording method used is a modified version of the diagnostic zone system described by Serjeantson (1996) in which, for each identifiable fragment, a zone is recorded only where over 50% is present. Lateral

| Phase | cattle | sheep/goat | domestic pig | dog | cat | red deer | rabbit | cow/horse size | sheep/pig size | hare/rabbit | small mammal | cetacea | bird | fish | Grand Total |
|-------|--------|------------|--------------|-----|-----|----------|--------|----------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|---------|------|------|-------------|
| EBA | 23 | 27 | 6 | 1 | | 12 | 10 | 4 | 8 | 7 | | 5 | 11 | 27 | 141 |
| EIA | 13 | 47 | | | | 2 | | 4 | 11 | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 16 | 96 |
| MIA | 5 | 10 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | | 1 | | 1 | | | 22 |
| Total | 41 | 84 | 7 | 1 | 1 | 15 | 11 | 9 | 19 | 9 | 1 | 6 | 12 | 43 | 259 |

Table 11.3. *The animal bones from Sligeanach*

metapodials, fibulae, and carpals or tarsals other than magnum, astragalus, calcaneum and naviculo-cuboid were not recorded; of these only the calcaneum was zoned. The remainder were treated as one zone and thus only recorded when more than half was complete, as were all the phalanges. Ribs were only recorded when the head was present, and vertebrae when over 50% of the centrum was present (except axis, atlas and the first sacral segment which, for practical purposes, were treated as a single zone). Only certain cranial fragments were counted: occipital, horn core (base or tip), antler (burr/pedicle or tine), zygomatic, premaxilla, mandible, isolated mandibular teeth and hyoid; other fragments might have been recorded (for example, fragments from rarer taxa or antler beam fragments) but have not been used for quantification purposes. Pig and deer maxillary canines have been recorded for sexing purposes. Similarly, most of the cetacean bone present could not be identified to element, let alone species, and has therefore been recorded but not used for species quantification.

This produced a basic fragment count, or number of identifiable specimens (NISP), for all the taxa present (Table 11.3). Given the small sample sizes, the Minimum Number of Individuals and Elements was not recorded.

Tooth eruption and wear data were recorded for mandibles, loose deciduous fourth premolars, fourth premolars and third molars of cattle, sheep/goat and pig using Grant (1982); in addition, the Grant diagrams for cattle were adapted to record this information for red deer. The data were then grouped into age classes following Payne (1973) for sheep/goat and O'Connor (1988) for the rest. The fusion state of post-cranial bones was recorded as 'neonate', 'unfused' or 'fused' and age groups were derived from the time of epiphyseal closure given by Sisson and Grossman (Getty 1975) for domestic mammals. The unfused total for each element was derived from either the unfused epiphysis or shaft, whichever figure was greater.

Where possible sexes were separated using morphological characteristics of the pelvis in sheep and cattle (Grigson 1982), the horn core in sheep, and the canines in pigs (Schmid 1972).

Bones of all species were measured, where possible, following von den Driesch (1976) and Davis (1992).

For all identified bones (including those in the general size categories), gnawing and butchery marks were noted where present. Both carnivore and rodent gnaw marks

were observed; butchery marks were described by type and location. The incidence of burning was recorded for all fragments, identifiable or otherwise.

Results

The small assemblage derives from three phases – Early Bronze Age, Early Iron Age and Middle Iron Age. Whilst the dispersed nature of the assemblage makes it problematic to interpret these remains in any meaningful manner with regard to economic activity and spatial distribution, this material can still provide some new data on the zooarchaeology of the islands.

A total of 3,121 fragments were recorded, and the majority of this material (70%) is derived from the Early Bronze Age (Beaker), with lesser quantities from the Early Iron Age (24%) and Middle Iron Age (6%).

Only 259 (8%) of these are recorded as identified specimens (Table 11.3). In all phases the number of identified specimens (NISP) present are dominated by the major domesticates (cattle, sheep and pig) along with red deer (Table 11.3). Other domesticates present are dog in the Early Bronze Age and cat in the Middle Iron Age, both represented by single elements. Additionally, wild species are represented by cetacea, rabbits (probably intrusive – see below), murid species (mouse/rat) and a small quantity of fish and bird bone.

Preservation, butchery and burning.

Within the identified assemblage, the bone is generally well preserved; no elements are recorded as worn and, of all the identified bone, only 17 fragments (<1%) are gnawed, burnt or butchered.

Relative abundance

The NISP for these assemblages fall below the recommended size for detailed analysis of the relative abundance of species (300 NISP; Hambledon 1999) and thus can only be discussed in general terms. Sheep and cattle are of equal abundance in the Early Bronze Age with cattle less common in the Iron Age. Red deer are the third most important species in all but the Middle Iron Age. A calculation of the Minimum Number of Individuals (MNI) indicates that only up to three of each species is represented but that, overall, these figures reflect the NISP.

Body parts and ageing

The nature of the assemblage makes it difficult to draw all but the most general of conclusions for these data. The dental ageing is presented in Table 11.4. Only brief comments are appropriate, with any unusual or noteworthy characteristics highlighted.

Sheep

Elements from across the carcass are represented in each phase. The only evidence for ageing is derived from a few records of unfused/fused bone and a small number of mandibles/loose teeth derived from older animals of three years or above.

Cattle

The cattle assemblage also derives from a range of cattle elements, from the head to the phalanges. There is only one unfused bone, and tooth wear indicates younger and adult individuals.

Pig

Pig is only represented by seven fragments, all but one in the Early Bronze Age. The few body parts range from teeth to toes, with dental data indicating animals over one year of age.

Red deer

The few red deer elements are mostly small fragments. In the larger group of Early Bronze Age deer remains, few derive from prime meat elements, *i.e.* a small fragment of scapula, a patella and two tibia fragments. Other elements are of lesser quality (*e.g.* metapodia, phalanx, loose canines, mandible) and point to the entire carcass being present on site. An antler tine tip was also recorded. In the later phases, a butchered (knife-cut) adult right scapula and an antler tine fragment are present.

Dog

A single dog right upper first molar was recovered from the Early Bronze Age. The earliest Uist record of dog is a single element from Neolithic Udal (Finlay 1984), with a further dog element recorded from the Bronze Age levels. Elsewhere there is a single record of a Bronze Age dog at Northton (Finlay 1984), and a larger number of dog remains (including two complete dog skeletons) from Cladh Hallan (Mulville 2010).

Cat

A cat juvenile right mandible is present in the Middle Iron Age deposits with deciduous first and second molars. The separation of wild cat from domestic cat by size is possible in adults but is particularly difficult in young individuals (O'Connor 2007). However, the presence of this juvenile individual at the site is suggestive of a domestic animal. Cat has been recorded from other prehistoric Hebridean sites but, to date, none of these have been definitely confirmed as domestic.

The earliest records for cat derive from Cladh Hallan;

the earliest is a humerus (Late Bronze Age) and a single upper canine (Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age, phase 11 around 1000–700 cal BC; Mulville and Powell in prep.). In the Iron Age there is a single cat bone recorded from the wheelhouse at Cill Donnain (ul Haq 1989), six bones from larger animals from Dun Vulcan (Mulville 1999: table 10.31) and three more elements (including the premaxilla of a larger individual) from Late Iron Age Bornais. There are no cats recorded by Thoms (2003) for Bostadh or Beirgh (although immature individuals were noted by O'Sullivan 1997). In Orkney, cats are reported from Late Iron Age Howe (Smith 1994) and Pool (Bond *et al.* 2006). Based on the size of these individuals, O'Connor (2007) has argued that the cats at Howe are a mixture of both wild cat and domestic cat; the Hebridean records of larger animals may reflect a similar situation.

Cetacea

Five fragments of cetacean bone were recovered from the Early Bronze Age deposits and one from the Middle Iron Age. It was not possible to identify five of the fragments to species or element; the sixth was derived from a vertebra of a medium-sized animal.

Murid

There is a single murid femur (mouse size) identified from the Early Iron Age. This could be wood mouse or house mouse; the former is more common in prehistory but house mice have been recovered from Norse deposits at Bornais (Powell pers. comm.).

Rabbit/Hare

A number of rabbit and unidentifiable lagomorph (rabbit/hare) elements were recovered. Previously, a single hare tibia was recovered from Dun Vulcan but records of rabbit to date have been dismissed as intrusive on the basis of the preservation and context of burial. Rabbits have not yet been independently dated as a prehistoric introduction (Sykes 2010) and, on the islands, rabbits are thought to have been very late introductions (Harman pers. comm.) As a result, all of these elements are therefore likely to be intrusive rabbit specimens.

Worked bone

There is a single worked longbone fragment (see SF1636 above).

Measurements

The measurements (Table 11.5) all fall within the range of variation present at other prehistoric sites on the islands.

Discussion

Although small, these assemblages show general characteristics similar to those of the more substantial contemporaneous assemblages, with a predominance of domestic food animals and red deer (Smith and Mulville 2004). The presence of red deer within the assemblage in similar or greater quantities than pig is a common feature on

| SNO | CTX | phase | trench | sample | anatomy | side | dp4 | P4 | M1 | M2 | M3 | mandible stage | age |
|--------|-----|-------|--------|--------|-----------------|------|-----|----|----|----|----|----------------|---------------|
| Cattle | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 25 | 16 | EBA | A | 1358 | Lower dp4 | R | e | | | | | | |
| 62 | 56 | EBA | E | 1351 | Lower P4 | R | | b | | | | B | 1–8 months |
| 85 | 77 | EBA | M | | Lower 3rd Molar | R | | | | | g | G | Adult |
| 351 | 211 | EIA | V | 1654 | Lower P4 | R | | f | | | | | |
| 335 | 202 | MIA | U | 1653 | Lower dp4 | R | c | | | | | | |
| 336 | 202 | MIA | U | 1653 | Lower P4 | R | | a | | | | | |
| Sheep | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 344 | 57 | EBA | E | 1349 | Mandible | R | g | | | | | | |
| 120 | 29 | EBA | E | 1345 | Mandible | R | | j | k | g | g | G | 4–6 years |
| 359 | 164 | EIA | P | 1655 | Lower P4 | L | | j | | | | | |
| 353 | 164 | EIA | P | 1655 | Lower 3rd Molar | R | | | | | c | E | 30–36 months |
| 354 | 164 | EIA | P | 1655 | Lower 3rd Molar | L | | | | | g | G | 4–6 years |
| 392 | 225 | EIA | T | 1660 | Lower 3rd Molar | R | | | | | g | G | 4–6 years |
| 338 | 202 | MIA | U | 1653 | Lower dp4 | L | k | | | | | | |
| Pig | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 242 | 12 | EBA | A | 1347 | Lower 2nd Molar | L | | | | d | | D? | Sub-adult |
| 63 | 56 | EBA | E | 1351 | Lower dp4 | L | e | | | | | | |
| 171 | 243 | MIA | X | 1633 | Lower 3rd Molar | R | | | | | U | | <14–21 months |

Table 11.4. The dental ageing data for Sligeanach

| SNO | context | phase | trench | sample | anatomy | | | |
|----------|---------|-------|--------|--------|-----------------|------|------|------|
| Cattle | | | | | | | | |
| 404 | 225 | EIA | T | 1660 | Astragalus | GLI | Bd | |
| | | | | | | 60.5 | 35.3 | |
| | | | | | | Bp | Bd | |
| 407 | 225 | EIA | T | 1660 | Tibia | 43 | 55.6 | |
| Red Deer | | | | | | | | |
| 398 | 225 | EIA | T | 1660 | Scapula | GLP | BG | LG |
| | | | | | | 48.7 | 34.7 | 35.5 |
| Sheep | | | | | | | | |
| 126 | 32 | EBA | F | 1350 | Metatarsal | | | |
| | | | | | | Bd | | |
| | | | | | | Gl | SD | Bp |
| 313 | 191 | EIA | P | 1647 | First phalanx | 32.8 | 11.2 | 9.6 |
| Pig | | | | | | | | |
| 92 | 71 | EBA | A | 1318 | Radius | 28.5 | | |
| | | | | | | M2L | WA | WP |
| 241 | 12 | EBA | A | 1347 | Lower 2nd Molar | 21 | 12.5 | 13.6 |
| | | | | | | M3L | WA | WP |
| 171 | 243 | MIA | X | 1633 | Third Molar | 29 | 12.9 | 12.3 |

Table 11.5. The measurements of animal bones from Sligeanach

the islands (Mulville 2010). Ageing information indicates a reliance on older sheep and very young and older cattle, as seen on other Uist sites (Mulville *et al.* 2005). The presence of cat (wildcat or domestic) in the Middle Iron Age deposits adds to our existing records.

Plant remains

Helen Smith

The flot components of 49 bulk samples were assessed for their charred plant content. The samples were taken from a series of deposits excavated in test trenches across the machair at Sligeanach. Deposits have been dated to three

broad periods: the Early Bronze Age, the Early Iron Age and the Middle Iron Age. The majority of samples (34) are from Early Bronze Age deposits, with 13 from Early Iron Age deposits and only two samples from a Middle Iron Age deposit.

Methods

The bulk samples were processed in the field using a water separation machine. Flots were collected in sieves with mesh sizes of 1mm and 300 microns. The heavy residues were collected in 1mm mesh but the content of these is not included in this assessment. Sorting took place using a low-power stereo-microscope. Identifications to species

were checked using modern reference material housed at the University of Sheffield. Nomenclature follows Stace (1997) and Pankhurst and Mullin (1991). Results are shown in Tables 11.6 and 11.7. The numbers of cereal grains are recorded as whole grain equivalents (where the greater number of either embryo or apex ends of half grains has been added to the number of whole grains).

The Early Bronze Age

The plant remains recovered from the samples are limited in number and range (Table 11.6) and, in general, the preservation is poor. Most material is distorted and vesicular and the remains are also highly fragmented. Cereal grains dominate the plant remains and, of those grains that are identifiable beyond family level, barley (*Hordeum* sp.) is the only genus recorded. The majority of the barley grains are of the hulled variety although grains of naked barley (*Hordeum vulgare* L. var. *nudum*) are also present. Those grains ascribed to the possible naked barley category (*Hordeum vulgare* L. cf. var. *nudum*) display some of the characteristics of naked barley (i.e. they are very rounded in shape, with no visible glume scars) but poor preservation has limited identification (i.e. showing no signs of the characteristic transverse 'wrinkling' on the dorsal surfaces).

In some samples (indicated by *) there are possible asymmetric (twisted) grains of barley. The likely occurrence of asymmetric grains would indicate the presence of six-row barley (*H. vulgare* L.) although the number of grains where it has been possible to determine if grains are asymmetric or symmetric is very low (in 6-row barley, a 2:1 ratio of twisted to straight grains would be expected). Six-row barley (*Hordeum vulgare* L. var. *hexastichum*) is consistent with other sites in the area and it is the most common cereal found on all Scottish archaeological sites (Greig 1991).

In nearly half of the samples (12 of the 34 samples) no plant remains were recovered. In the majority of the other samples, cereal grains are the most frequently occurring items, although the numbers recovered are still low (most samples contained fewer than 10 grains [or no grain at all] and little or no chaff; only two samples contained 10–50 grains). Charred seeds of wild plants were also found in the samples, although these are very limited in number and range. Also, preservation is often poor. These include silverweed (*Potentilla aserina*), plantain (*Plantago* sp.), sedge (*Carex* sp.) and grasses (Poaceae) that could represent weeds of cultivated fields or grassland.

At Sligeanach, hulled barley (*Hordeum vulgare* L.) is the dominant cultivated species identified. In comparison, naked six-row barley (*Hordeum vulgare* L. var. *nudum*) was the most frequently occurring cereal found at the Neolithic and Beaker site of Allt Chrisal, on Barra (Boardman 1995) and at the Beaker site of Rosinish (Shepherd and Tuckwell 1977). At both Rosinish and Allt Chrisal a few grains of hulled barley were recovered, and at Rosinish some emmer wheat (*Triticum dicoccum*) was also recovered (Shepherd and Tuckwell 1977). At Late Bronze Age Cladh Hallan,

cereals are dominated by hulled six-row barley (*Hordeum vulgare* L.; Smith in prep.). These sites all reflect the general pattern that is seen at other Scottish sites (Dickson and Dickson 2000) and elsewhere in Britain (van der Veen 1992).

The wild plants represented in the assemblage are consistent with those found at other sites in the area. The poor preservation of much of the material limits the level of identification and, in turn, the information that can be gleaned. As previously mentioned, the taxa recovered could represent weeds of arable fields or grassland, brought in accidentally or incidentally with crops or other materials for use on site. Silverweed is common on waste land, meadows and sand dunes. Grassland and heathland species could include the grasses, plantain (*Plantago*) and sedge (*Carex* spp.).

There are no obvious edible food plants represented although, interestingly, the roots of silverweed have been used historically in the Highlands and, specifically, the Western Isles (Carmichael 1884). The thin roots were dug in late summer or autumn, dried and ground into a powder that was used as a food (flour) or for medicinal purposes whilst the leaves were harvested in early summer and dried for later use as tea (Milliken and Bridgewater 2004). The numbers occurring at Sligeanach are too few to say anything conclusive.

In-depth identification beyond assigning wild taxa to broad ecological categories is not possible given the limited nature of the assemblages (in terms of sample size and overall preservation). Given these restrictions, interpretations based on the plant remains are similarly limited.

The Early and Middle Iron Age

The plant remains recovered from the Early Iron Age samples are very limited in number and range (Table 11.7). Of the 13 samples studied, only five contained any cereal remains and these were in very low numbers. Cereal grains were identified as barley (*Hordeum* sp.) of the hulled variety. The likely occurrence of asymmetric grains would indicate the presence of six-row barley (*H. vulgare* L.), although the low number of grains has made it impossible to determine this accurately. Only one rachis internode was recovered and, given the poor preservation, it has been impossible to determine if this represents six-row (*Hordeum vulgare* L. var. *hexastichum*) or two-row (*Hordeum vulgare* L. var. *distichon* L.) barley. Six-row barley is consistent with other sites in the area and it is the most common cereal found on all Scottish archaeological sites (Greig 1991).

Very few charred seeds of wild plants were found in the Early Iron Age samples; the seeds that were recovered include Brassica, Rosacea (*Rubus* sp.) and Caryophyllaceae (*Stellaria* sp.). Similarly, there were only a couple of charred seeds of wild plants in the Middle Iron Age sample, which were of sedge (*Carex* sp.). The taxa represented include plants that are common on arable land and waste ground or grassland and heath.

| Sample no | 9032 | 9033 | 9034 | 9035 | 9039 | 9041 | 9043 | 9045 | 9046 | 9047 | 9048 | 9049 | 9052 | 9050 | 9051 |
|----------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Context no | 172 | 162 | | 182 | 172 | 183 | 192 | 202 | 222 | 214 | 225 | 226 | 221 | 242 | 242 |
| Period | EIA | EIA | EIA | EIA | EIA | EIA | EIA | EIA | EIA | EIA | EIA | EIA | EIA | MIA | MIA |
| Mound/Trench | 5/Q | P | P | S | Q | S | R | U | T | V | T | T | T | X | X |
| Litres | 11 | 4 | 18 | 22 | 18 | 8 | 10 | 18 | 7 | 17 | 28 | 20 | 24 | 18 | 17.5 |
| * = twisted grains present | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Taxon list | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Cereal Plants | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Hordeum vulgare</i> | | | | | | | | | | | 3 | 2* | | 87 | |
| <i>Hordeum vulgare</i> var <i>nudum</i> | | | | | 1* | | | | | | | | | 1 | |
| <i>Hordeum vulgare</i> cf. var <i>nudum</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 7 | |
| <i>Hordeum</i> | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | | | | |
| Cereal indet. | | pres | | | | | | | | pres | 2 | pres | | 27 | pres |
| Total cereal grains (whole grain equivalent) | 0 | pres | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | pres | 5 | 2 | | 122 | |
| Wild Taxa | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Stellaria media</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | | | |
| <i>Carex</i> sp. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 | |
| Leguminosae indet | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Plantago</i> sp. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Poaceae indeterminate | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Poaceae | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | | | | |
| <i>Potentilla anserina</i> | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | | | | |
| type 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| indeterminate, round | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Other/indeterminate | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Fungal sclerotia | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Other/indet | | | | 3 | | | | | | | | | | | |

Table 11.7. The carbonized plant remains from Early and Middle Iron Age contexts at Sligeanach

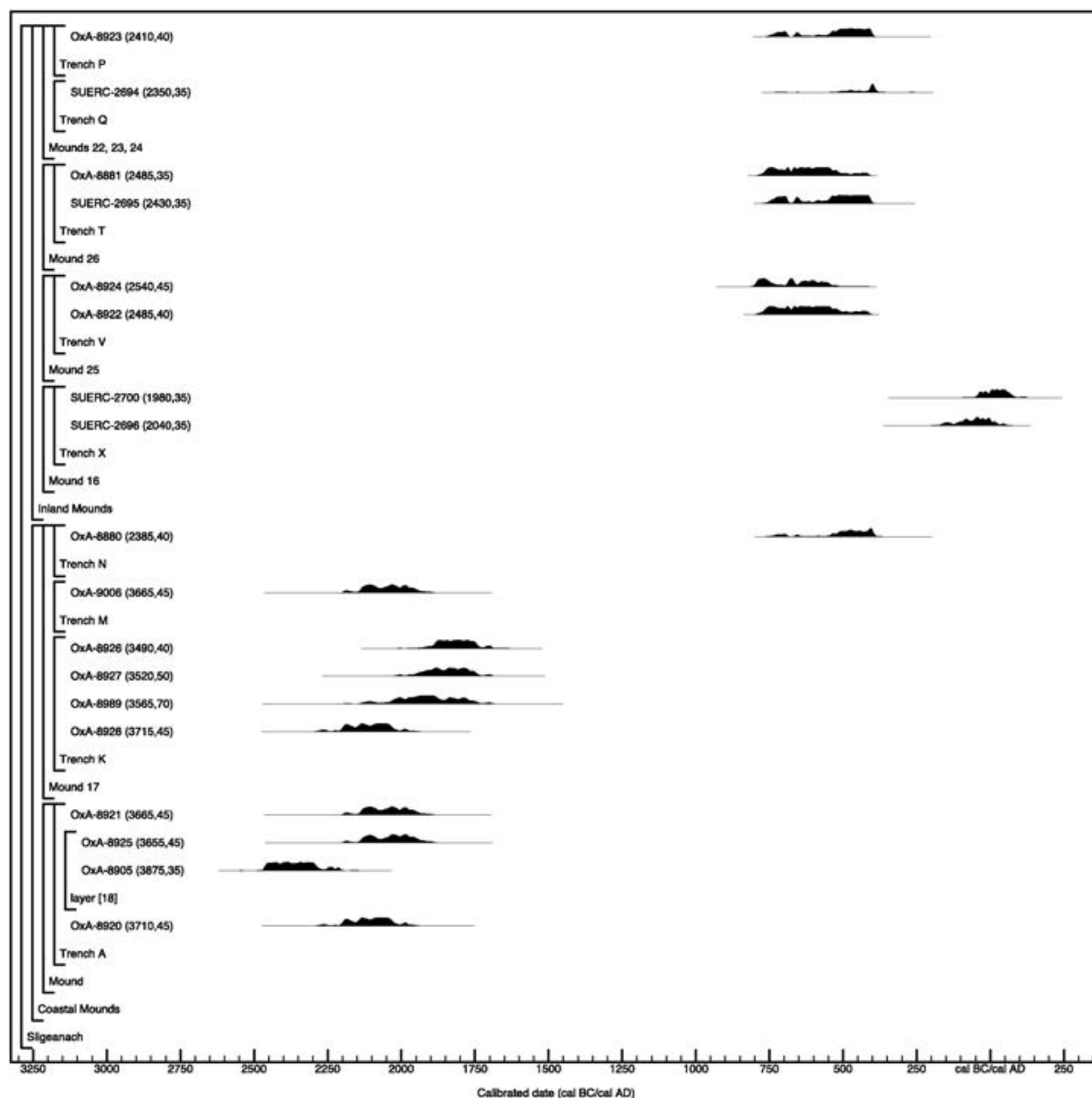


Figure 11.16. The radiocarbon dates for Sligeanach

Of the Middle Iron Age deposits, one sample was quite rich in cereal grains (100+) compared to the earlier deposits. Sample 9050 contained hulled barley (*Hordeum vulgare* L.) and naked barley (*Hordeum vulgare* L. var. *nudum*). In Iron Age Sligeanach deposits, hulled six-row barley (*Hordeum vulgare* L.) is the dominant cultivated species identified. Six-row hulled barley is consistent with other Iron Age sites in the area, at Dun Vulcan (Smith 1999), Cill Donnain (Grinter and Valamonti 1998), Baleshare (Jones 2003), Hornish Point (Jones 2003), Allt Chrisal (Smith 2000) and other Scottish sites (Greig 1991; Dickson and Dickson 2000). The very limited range of taxa and the small number of seeds of wild plants recovered from all of the Iron Age samples mean that any interpretations are difficult to make.

The radiocarbon methods

Peter Marshall, Christopher Bronk Ramsey and Gordon Cook

Fourteen samples were submitted to the Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit for radiocarbon analysis. The four carbonized barley grain samples were pre-treated according to procedures described by Hedges *et al.* (1989; 1992). The ten animal bones were processed using collagen extraction (Law and Hedges 1989; Hedges *et al.* 1989) followed by filtration (Bronk Ramsey *et al.* 2000). All the samples were dated by Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (Bronk Ramsey and Hedges 1997).

Four carbonised barley grains (*Hordeum vulgare*) were submitted to the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre (SUERC) in East Kilbride. They were pre-

| Laboratory no. | Context | Material | $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ (‰) | Radiocarbon age (BP) | Calibrated date (95% confidence) |
|------------------------------|---------|--------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Mound 18 – Trench A | | | | | |
| OxA-8921 | A/12 | Bone, cattle | -22.4 | 3665±45 | 2200–1910 cal BC |
| OxA-8925 | A/18 | carbonized seeds, barley | -23.3 | 3655±45 | 2200–1890 cal BC |
| OxA-8905 | A/18 | Bone, sheep | -21.1 | 3875±35 | 2470–2200 cal BC |
| OxA-8920 | A/71 | Bone, cattle | -20.9 | 3710±45 | 2280–1960 cal BC |
| Mound 17 – Trench K | | | | | |
| OxA-8926 | K/144 | carbonized seeds, barley | -23 | 3490±40 | 1930–1690 cal BC |
| OxA-8927 | K/146 | carbonized seeds, barley | -23.1 | 3520±50 | 2020–1690 cal BC |
| OxA-8989 | K/159 | Bone, cattle | -21.3 | 3565±70 | 2140–1690 cal BC |
| OxA-8928 | K/158 | carbonized seed, barley | -23.6 | 3715±45 | 2280–1970 cal BC |
| Mound 17 – Trench M | | | | | |
| OxA-9006 | M/79 | Bone, cattle | -20.7 | 3665±45 | 2200–1910 cal BC |
| Mound 17 – Trench N | | | | | |
| OxA-8880 | N/97 | Bone, cattle | -20.5 | 2385±40 | 740–390 cal BC |
| Mound 16 – Trench X | | | | | |
| SUERC-2700 | X/242 | carbonized seed, barley | -24.4 | 1980±35 | 50 cal BC–cal AD 90 |
| SUERC-2696 | X/242 | carbonized seed, barley | -24.5 | 2040±35 | 170 cal BC–cal AD 60 |
| Mound 25 – Trench V | | | | | |
| OxA-8924 | V/213 | Bone, red deer | -20.9 | 2540±45 | 810–520 cal BC |
| OxA-8922 | V/214 | Bone, cattle | -20.4 | 2485±40 | 790–400 cal BC |
| Mound 26 – Trench T | | | | | |
| OxA-8881 | T/225 | Bone, cattle | -20.5 | 2485±35 | 790–410 cal BC |
| SUERC-2695 | T/226 | carbonized seed, barley | -22.4 | 2430±35 | 760–400 cal BC |
| Mounds 22, 23, 24 – Trench Q | | | | | |
| SUERC-2694 | Q/172 | carbonized seed, barley | -24 | 2350±35 | 510–380 cal BC |
| Mounds 22, 23, 24 – Trench P | | | | | |
| OxA-8923 | P/166 | Bone, cattle | -20.6 | 2410±40 | 760–390 cal BC |

Table 11.8. Radiocarbon dates from Sligeanach

treated using the acid-base-acid protocol (Stenhouse and Baxter 1983), converted to carbon dioxide in pre-cleaned, sealed quartz tubes (Vandeputte *et al.* 1996), graphitized as described by Slota *et al.* (1987) and measured by AMS (Xu *et al.* 2004).

Both laboratories maintain a continual programme of quality assurance procedures, in addition to participation in international inter-comparisons (Scott 2003). These tests indicate no laboratory offsets and demonstrate the validity of the precision quoted.

Results

The radiocarbon results are given in Table 11.8 and are quoted in accordance with the international standard known as the Trondheim convention (Stuiver and Kra 1986). They are conventional radiocarbon ages (Stuiver and Polach 1977).

Calibration

The calibrations of the results, relating the radiocarbon measurements directly to calendar dates, are given in Table 11.8 and in Figure 11.16. All have been calculated using the calibration curve of Reimer *et al.* (2009) and the computer program OxCal v4.1.5 (Bronk Ramsey 1995; 1998; 2001; 2009). The calibrated date ranges cited in the

text are those for 95% confidence. They are quoted in the form recommended by Mook (1986), with the end points rounded outwards to 10 years. The ranges in Table 11.8 have been calculated according to the maximum intercept method (Stuiver and Reimer 1986). The probability distributions shown in Figure 11.16 are derived from the probability method (Stuiver and Reimer 1993).

Shellfish and coastal exploitation

Matthew Law

Eleven bulk samples taken from shell-rich contexts throughout the mounds were processed and the larger shells from the residue extracted using a 10mm mesh sieve. For each gastropod taxon within a sample the most commonly represented non-repetitive element (usually the shell apex, umbilicus, or body whorl with mouth) was counted to determine the minimum number of individuals (MNI) present. This avoids the underestimation reported when only shell apices are counted (Giovas 2009). The bivalve taxa present are represented only by a few fragments of shell in each sample, which could be accounted for by an MNI of 1. Shells were identified to species where possible and brief notes made on preservation of the shell and the presence of any epibiont organisms. A hundred intact limpet

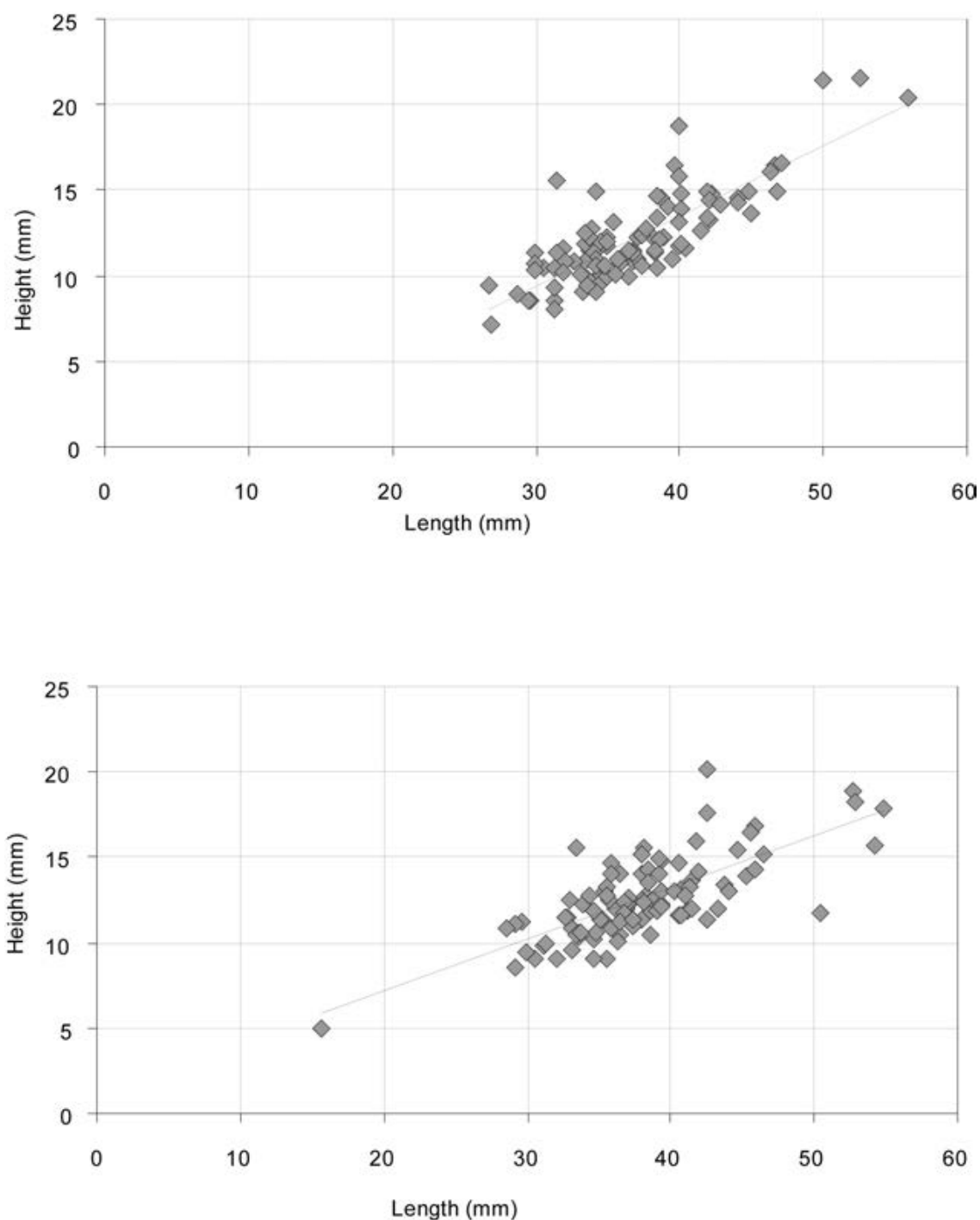


Figure 11.17. Limpet dimensions from two Early Iron Age samples: 9042 (top) Trench P and 9039 (bottom) Trench Q

shells from two samples were also measured (length and height at the apex) to enable comparison with other limpet assemblages. Shells were identified as closely as possible by comparison with a reference collection. Principal sources consulted for ecological information were Oliver *et al.* (2009), and Hayward *et al.* (1995). Nomenclature follows CLEMAM (Checklist of European Marine Molluscs, online at <http://www.somali.asso.fr/clemam/>).

Limpets

With the exception of samples 9050 and 9051, both

from context 242 in Trench X (mound 16), limpets are the dominant shells in the samples. The limpets in these samples are likely to be food waste, although limpets have also been used as animal fodder, especially for pigs, and as fishing bait. As Sharples (2005: 159) has previously argued, however, large deposits of relatively intact limpet shells are unlikely to be waste from use in fishing, as shells used for bait are generally crushed.

Limpets are found between the low and high tide marks on rocky shores in temperate water, where they graze seaweed. They tend to have more pointed shells at higher

| Sample | 9000 | 9002 | 9031 | 9032 | 9039 | 9041 | 9042 | 9045 | 9050 | 9051 | 9052 |
|-----------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Context | 4 | 18 | 158 | 172 | 172 | 83 | 191 | 202 | 242 | 242 | 221 |
| Trench | B | A | K | Q | Q | S | P | U | X | X | T |
| Mound | 176 | 18 | 17 | 23 | 23 | 22 | 24 | 27 | 16 | 16 | 26 |
| Litres sieved | 29 | 28 | 4 | 11 | 18 | 8 | 24 | 18 | 18 | / | 24 |
| GASTROPODA | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Littorina littorea</i> (L.) Common periwinkle | 4 | 3 | 4 | 6 | 18 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 76 | 120 | 2 |
| <i>Littorina obtusata</i> (L.) Flat periwinkle | - | - | - | - | 3 | - | - | - | 1 | - | 1 |
| <i>Patella</i> spp. Limpets | 6 | 8 | - | 972 | 1102 | 16 | 1051 | 3 | 60 | 70 | 2 |
| <i>Gibbula cineraria</i> (L.) Grey topshell | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | - | 1 | - |
| <i>Buccinum undatum</i> (L.) Common whelk | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| BIVALVIA | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Cerastoderma</i> sp. Cockles | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| <i>Solenidae</i> sp. Razor shells | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - |

Table 11.9. The distribution of marine shells from samples producing material over 10mm

tidal levels and previous work has attempted to match the ratio between length and height of the shell with position on the shore from which the limpet was harvested. As Campbell (2008: 117) notes, however, this can be too simplistic as, in addition to increased tidal level, limpets also cope with decreasing dampness at a constant tidal level by becoming more pointed. Additionally, limpets growing at a higher tidal level may be squatter than expected if they are growing in sheltered locations such as rock pools or crevices where the risk of desiccation is lower. The main factors influencing shell shape are local environmental conditions rather than tidal level (Campbell 2007).

One hundred intact limpet shells from two Early Iron Age samples (9039 [172, Q] and 9042 [191, P]) were measured; the measurements are plotted in Figure 11.17. The size range within the two samples is broadly similar, suggesting little difference in environmental conditions. A paired t-test revealed that neither the difference in mean shell length between the two samples nor the difference in mean shell height between the samples is statistically significant (for length $p = 0.2$; for height $p = 0.39$). The limpets from Sligeanach are fairly consistently small and quite squat, suggesting a harvesting location on the mid to low shoreline. The mean limpet sizes from Sligeanach are slightly smaller than those reported from the Norse period settlement at mound 3 at Bornais, and also from Iron Age and Post-Medieval contexts at Dun Vulcan (Sharples 2005: 159–61), which are also rather small. It is clear that

shells were not being selected for maximum individual meat yield.

A small number of the limpet shells recovered bear patches of encrustation from spirorbid worms, mostly the larger, more pointed shells. Most species of spirorbid worms live below the mid tide mark, suggesting that the limpets whose shells bear their tunnels are unlikely to be high-shore limpets. Campbell (2007) found a similar situation at Le Yaudet in Brittany and concluded that, as spirorbids are associated with seaweed, limpets were more stressed under seaweed cover and so were growing more pointed shells.

Other marine shell

MNI (Minimum Number of Individuals) values for marine molluscs from the samples examined are listed in Table 11.9. Apart from limpets, periwinkles (*Littorina littorea*) are the only other taxon to occur in any great quantity, and are the dominant species in the two samples from Trench X (mound 16). On mound 3 at Bornais, winkles were the dominant species in most of the samples from all but one stratigraphic block (Sharples 2005: 89); unlike limpets, they continue to be eaten to the present day. Other shells occur only as incidental finds. The cockle and razor shell fragments are likely to represent food waste harvested from a different source location as they are found on sandy shores rather than on rocks. The other species recovered might have been brought to the site accidentally and are all

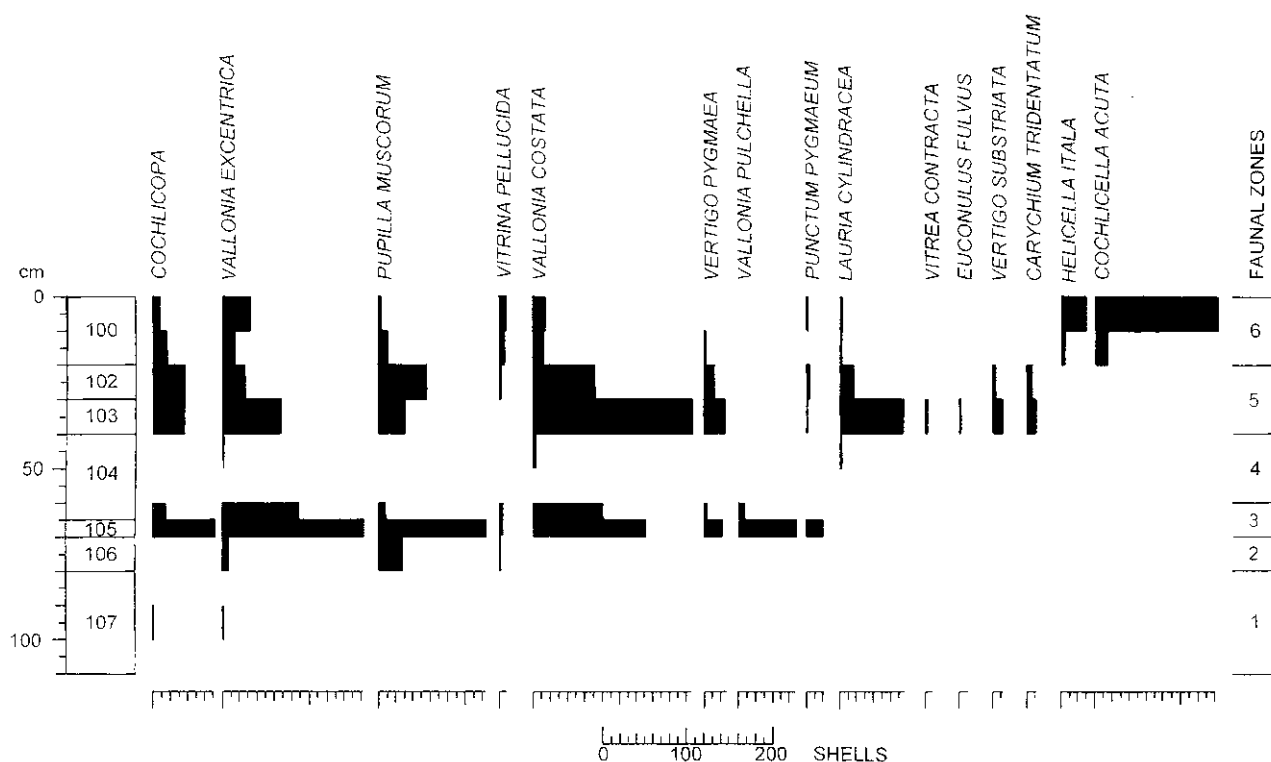


Figure 11.18. The snail assemblage from column 9076; Trench G

small shells (the individual shell of *Buccinum undatum* is of a young individual). They represent inter-tidal species, although *Buccinum undatum* and *Gibbula cineraria* are more usually sub-littoral and lower-shore species (Hayward *et al.* 1995: 506, 535), perhaps lending support to the idea that the lower shore was preferred for harvesting.

Stability and flux in the dune environment

J. G. Evans[†], Matthew Law^l and Nigel Thew

Sample columns were taken for molluscan analyses during the excavations. After extraction, the snail shells from columns 9071, 9072 and 9076 from Trenches G and A (mound 18) were counted, grouped into Faunal Zones, and the molluscan diagrams plotted by Dan Stansbie and the late Professor John Evans in 2003. John's work at Sligeanach coincided with the publication of a synthesis of the molluscan evidence from four other sites located in the Outer Hebrides (Thew 2003; manuscript completed in 1987), which placed substantial emphasis on the importance of land snails as indicators of site formation processes. John investigated this theme further in an article published in 2004, which examined the relationship between *Pupilla muscorum* and *Lauria cylindracea* in windblown sand contexts. Evidence from Sligeanach was discussed in this paper, which presented the molluscan diagram for sample column 9076 (Figure 11.18).

The stratigraphic sequence from mound 18 has been discussed above and it is clear that the lowest layers were excavated in Trench G, while Trench A cut through the

highest deposits within the mound. Contexts 102 and 103 of column 9076, in Trench G, is equivalent to context 71, which lay immediately below the lowest sampled context (19) in column 9071, Trench A. The overall sequence consists of four or five darker, more organic horizons, separated by layers of clean windblown sand. The second horizon is associated with ard marks and small sherds of Beaker period pottery, the third with ard marks and the fourth with Early Bronze Age occupation material, including pottery, and pit features.

The environmental sequence

Column 9076: Trench G: Figure 11.18

The lowest sampled deposit (grey-orange sand, context 107) has a very poor snail fauna, typical of rapidly accumulating dry windblown sand, with only poor vegetation cover (Faunal Zone 1). The succeeding layer (pale grey sand, context 106) has a slightly more abundant fauna, indicating slower sand accumulation and greater stability, associated with a somewhat denser but still patchy cover of grassland (Faunal Zone 2).

The orange-brown sand of context 105 has a much more abundant snail fauna, with peaks in *Pupilla muscorum*, *Vallonia excentrica*, *V. costata*, *V. pulchella* and *Cochlicopa* spp, accompanied by less common *Punctum pygmaeum* and *Vertigo pygmaea*, pointing to still greater stability and a covering of fairly dry, short-turf, probably sheep-grazed grassland (Faunal Zone 3). The absence of a more organic horizon suggests that it was removed by subsequent

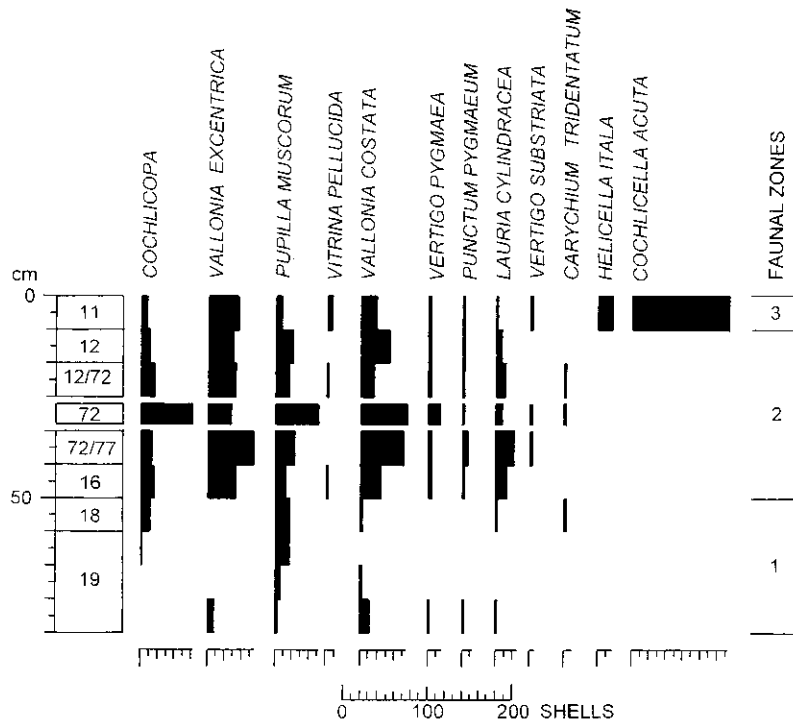


Figure 11.19. The snail assemblage from columns 9071 and 9072; Trench A

erosion, consistent with the succeeding layer of clean, yellow windblown sand (context 104), which includes shells redeposited from the previous soil horizon in its basal part (Faunal Zone 3), but which then has virtually no shells, suggesting an absence of vegetation and rapid deposition in dry conditions (Faunal Zone 4).

The abrupt change to the more organic sand of context 103 indicates a return to more stable conditions, although this layer is associated with ard marks and therefore represents a ploughsoil. Nevertheless, the 11 species in this layer represent a peak in molluscan diversity for the sequence. Although dominated by grassland taxa, the numerous *Vallonia costata*, fairly abundant *Lauria cylindracea*, and the presence of more shade-demanding species such as *Carychium tridentatum* and *Vitrea contracta*, suggest that the ploughing regime was non-intensive, with significant fallow periods between episodes of ploughing when taller herbs were allowed to grow (Faunal Zone 5).

Context 102, a brown organic sand, has a similar fauna (also Faunal Zone 5), but the decreases in *V. costata* and *L. cylindracea*, together with a rise in *Pupilla muscorum*, may suggest that ploughing had given way to short-turf grazed grassland, though some patches with tall herbs remained. Given the extremely organic nature of contexts 102 and 103, it seems likely that some organic material was added to the surface, which may explain the presence of *Vertigo substriata*, that prefers fairly damp conditions. This organic material was probably of vegetable origin, as few animal bones and none of the omnivorous snail species *Oxychilus alliarius* were found in the assemblages. The absence of small marine gastropods indicative of the spreading of seaweed, and of marsh plus freshwater aquatic molluscs

that would have been introduced with reeds or rushes cut from the edges of nearby freshwater lakes and marshes, means that the plant material might have been either straw or tall herbs gathered from nearby. This could have been used for matting, roofing, bedding for animals *etc.*, which would explain the presence of small sherds of pottery. Alternatively, this organic material might have been animal excrement, or more likely a mixture of these elements.

Columns 9071 and 9072: Trench A: Figure 11.19

Context 71, a compact, dark brown sand at the base of column 9071 (not sampled) which, in turn, overlies a whitish sand with ard marks, is equivalent to contexts 102 and 103 of column 9076 and is therefore a ploughsoil. The succeeding layer, context 19 (Faunal Zone 1 of Col. 9071), is a clean, yellow, windblown sand with very few snails. In its basal part this sand includes a variety of snail species probably redeposited from the eroded surface of the underlying ploughsoil, whereas the middle and upper parts have just three species, typical of poor, tall grass vegetation growing on dry, accumulating, dune sands.

The succeeding context, 18, is a compact, dark brown organic soil, again associated with ard marks. The origin of this layer is probably similar to that of contexts 102 to 103, with the presence of *Carychium tridentatum* indicative of taller herbs, though the fauna is numerically much poorer, suggesting more intensive ploughing activity. Moreover, there is little archaeological material, possibly advocating a different origin for the plant material spread over the cultivated surface, though marine, marsh and freshwater molluscs were again absent. The yellow sand

that follows (context 16) indicates a brief period of blown sand accumulation, although the snail assemblage is very similar to those from the overlying deposits and can thus be considered with them.

Context 77 is a dark organic layer, context 72 a brown sand and context 12 another dark organic soil. These three contexts are inter-layered in a complex series of deposits associated with Early Bronze Age settlement activity. An additional sample, from context 72 in column 9072, has been inserted in the mollusc diagram. Important increases in both snail abundances and species diversity are linked with notable rises in *Pupilla muscorum*, *Vallonia excentrica*, *Vallonia costata*, *Cochlicopa* spp and, to a lesser extent, *Lauria cylindracea*, accompanied by smaller numbers of *Punctum pygmaeum*, *Vertigo pygmaea*, *V. substriata* and *Carychium tridentatum* (Faunal Zone 2). The picture that emerges is of both increased stability, associated with short-turf grassland, and some disturbance linked with the accumulation of organic material and patches of tall herbs, together with damper surface conditions. Again, the absence of *Oxychilus*, marine shells, marsh taxa and freshwater molluscs, shows that the organic material was probably of vegetable origin and/or animal excrement but did not include seaweed, or reeds and rushes cut from nearby freshwater lakes and marshes.

The topmost part of the sequence in columns 9071 and 9076

In both columns there is a very important hiatus that coincides with an erosion surface at the base of the subsequent layer, which includes the modern turf horizon. In column 9076, this layer is 200mm thick (context 100), while in 9071 it is just 100mm thick (context 11) suggesting that, in the former column, the lower 100mm represents an earlier part of the same layer not represented in 9071. Indeed, the assemblage from the base of context 100, although it closely resembles those from the summit of 100 and from context 11 with which it belongs, has far fewer shells, suggesting that much of the sample was made up of windblown sand.

These three assemblages (column 9076 Faunal Zone 6; column 9071 Faunal Zone 3) are rather diverse, with 11 species represented. These include very abundant *Cochlicella acuta*, frequent *Vallonia excentrica*, and significant numbers of *Helicella itala*, *Vallonia costata*, *Pupilla muscorum* and *Cochlicopa* spp. The relative abundance of *Vallonia excentrica* suggests that the relatively deep turf horizon (100mm) was probably formed over a fairly considerable period, with intervals of more stable short-turf, relatively damp (*Vertigo substriata*), grazed grassland (with *Vertigo pygmaea* and *Punctum pygmaeum*), alternating with phases of less stable, taller grassland associated with windblown sand, as *Cochlicella* is particularly well adapted to such a biotope, being able to climb the stems of marram grass to avoid the accumulating sand particles.

The molluscan evidence in its regional context

The majority of the sampled sequence is without *Cochlicella acuta* and *Helicella itala*, with these two species appearing in abundance after the hiatus at the base of contexts 100 and 11. The faunal sequences at the sites of Baleshare, North Uist, Hornish Point, South Uist (Thew 2003: 167), and Northton, south Harris (Evans 1979: 20), suggest that these snail taxa arrived in the Outer Hebrides towards the end of the Late Bronze Age or early in the Iron Age and then became widespread during the Iron Age. Their abundance at the top of the sequence at Sligeanach, above the Early Bronze Age occupation level, fits with this chronology.

When compared with contemporary snail assemblages from Northton, south Harris and from the small island of Ensay, which lies between south Harris and North Uist, the molluscan assemblages from Sligeanach are seen to be rather poor in terms of species diversity, with a maximum of just 11 non-marsh terrestrial taxa in the Beaker period to Early Bronze Age deposits. At Northton, species diversities for the same time interval reach 18 non-marsh taxa, while Ensay has similarly diverse faunas. At both these sites, there are two phases of Beaker-period occupation. The lower levels at both sites have snail faunas typical of a fairly stable grassland environment with patches of tall herbs, while the upper Beaker levels have assemblages indicating woodland regeneration, with a rather dense mix of tall herbs with bushes and scattered trees. The faunas from both sites also include elements (abundant *Oxychilus alliarius* etc.) that suggest that middening was taking place.

At Northton, there are no Bronze Age occupation levels, but in the layer of pale brown, fairly humic sand that succeeds the upper Beaker level, clearance led to an environment of fairly stable short-turf grassland with patches of tall herbs intermittently present, interrupted by episodes of modest windblown sand accumulation. At Ensay, the upper Beaker level is followed by a thin layer (100mm) of clean windblown sand, with a poorer fauna indicative of unstable broken ground, which may suggest that clearance had taken place. This is succeeded by an Early Bronze Age shell midden deposit, that consists of abundant marine shells in organic sand, with scattered large boulders that probably come from collapsed walled structures. The snail faunas point to an environment of broken ground associated with patches of tall herbs where middening was taking place.

Unlike Sligeanach, there is no evidence for ploughing at either Northton or Ensay, although as both these sites were studied in section and not excavated in plan, the presence of ard marks cannot be ruled out. At Baleshare, North Uist, however, numerous ard marks were noted, associated with the lowest excavated layer at the site (Block 22), consisting of thick dark brown sands with small sherds of Bronze Age pottery, which have been interpreted as having been produced by manuring with midden material (James and Duffy 2003: 66–7). Radiocarbon dates of 3285 ± 60 BP on marine shells and 3360 ± 80 BP on animal bone suggest a Middle to Late Bronze Age date for this plough soil. The associated snail fauna suggests a mix of grassland and

broken ground, indicating that ploughing was not very intensive, despite the large number of ard marks (Thew 2003: 297).

It is worth noting that there is no evidence in the snail assemblages from Sligeanach for the use of seaweed to fertilize and stabilize the machair surface. Similarly, no small marine shells were found in contemporary assemblages from Northton and Ensay. This may be linked with the development of agricultural practices in the Outer Hebrides, as Thew (2003: 176) reports that, although large numbers of small marine gastropods indicative of seaweed were recovered from Iron Age contexts at Baleshare and Hornish Point, few were found in Late Bronze Age levels.

There are also no marsh or aquatic molluscs indicative of flooding at Sligeanach, suggesting that the choice of location for the Early Bronze Age occupation was a good one. There is, however, evidence of increased dampness in the Early Bronze Age and especially in the Beaker-period levels. Similarly, at both Northton and Ensay there is evidence of considerably damper conditions associated with the upper Beaker-period levels, with an increase in the frequency and diversity of marsh snails indicative of seasonal flooding, although both sites have evidence of similar but less intense flooding before and after this Beaker level. The question that arises is whether this dampness is associated with middening practices or if this may be due to a damper climate, or perhaps a combination of these two factors. As there is what seems to have been a contemporary increase in dampness at three sites across the Outer Hebrides, a wetter climate seems likely, although the practice of dumping organic midden material would also have led to a local increase in surface humidity. More sites need to be investigated and the dating of the various Beaker levels should be carefully controlled, to ensure that this pattern truly represents a synchronous regional climatic event.

Discussion

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The chronological sequence at Sligeanach begins with the Beaker-period activity in the coastal mounds 17, 18 and 176. This is followed by activity associated with the use of Early Bronze Age Food Vessel ceramics on mound 18. Following this, the ceramic sequence is poor and it is not possible to recognize Middle Bronze Age activity. Radiocarbon dates and ceramic forms indicate renewed occupation in the first millennium BC, during the Later Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. Two mounds have produced ceramics belonging to this period (Sites 25 and 26) in the inland group, and appropriate radiocarbon dates have been obtained from these mounds and from ephemeral deposits on mounds 23 and 24. This appears to be a fairly extensive Early Iron Age settlement. A Middle Iron Age wheelhouse has been tentatively identified on mound 27 and further Middle Iron Age activity was responsible for

the creation of mound 16. There is, as yet, no evidence for Late Iron Age or Norse settlement except for Sites 83, 84 and 85 over 200m to the southeast (see Chapter 2); the one sherd of grass-tempered pottery found on mound 27 during the survey could well date to the end of the Late Bronze Age (Parker Pearson pers. comm.).

The presence of an important Early Bronze Age settlement complex has been confirmed by the excavations. A cultivation horizon, approximately 30m by 45m, survives on mound 18. This horizon extends under mound 176 and probably into mound 17. Though it is difficult to estimate the extent of the layer under these two mounds, it is at least as large as the area under mound 18. Associated with this cultivation horizon are ditches, certainly identified on mound 176 and probably identified on mound 17. There is no clear evidence for structures similar to those at the Beaker settlements of Dalmore (Sharples 1984), Northton (Simpson 1976; Simpson *et al.* 2006) and Cill Donnain I (see Chapter 10) but there is evidence for a structure at the centre of mound 17 that also has evidence for a well-defined storage pit.

The cultivation horizon is very important as it is the largest area of demonstrably Beaker-period cultivation marks known to survive in the British Isles. Part of another Beaker-period cultivation horizon was revealed beneath Later Bronze Age roundhouses at Cladh Hallan (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 51). The best Beaker-period cultivation was recorded at Rosinish on Benbecula (Shepherd 1976; Shepherd and Tuckwell 1977) and another area of cultivation marks probably dating to this period was identified under the cairn at Cnip (Close-Brooks 1995) on the west coast of Lewis. The former was under severe threat when it was extensively excavated in the late 1970s and is probably now destroyed. The extent of the Cnip ard marks is unknown but this area has seen severe erosion since the original excavations and the cultivation horizon is unlikely to have survived intact.

Beaker-period cultivation soils are also known from southern England and they are most notably preserved in the sand dunes at Gwithian, Cornwall (Megaw 1976; Nowakowski 2007). Settlement and cultivation activity is probably the stimulus for most of the Beaker material in the upper fills of many other long barrows and causewayed camps (Gibson 1982) but conditions are seldom good enough for ard marks to survive, and most occurrences are not remotely comparable to the excellent conditions created by the machair soils of northern and western Scotland. The Beaker deposits at Sligeanach are therefore of national if not international importance.

The presence of a sequence of deposits continuing into the Food Vessel period on mound 18 is rare for the Western Isles. There is some evidence for later ceramics at Rosinish (Shepherd 1976) but these are isolated sherds and do not seem to indicate a significant settlement in the later part of the Early Bronze Age. The most important settlement associated with Food Vessel ceramics is that at Dalmore (Ponting and Ponting 1984; Sharples 1984) but the excavations were only able to explore the later phases



Figure 11.20. A view of the wheelhouse wall in Trench U

of this settlement and the early Beaker deposits are known only from exposures subjected to coastal erosion. Neither Northton (Simpson *et al.* 2006) nor Allt Chrìsal (Foster 1995) provides evidence for Early Bronze Age activity after the Beaker settlement.

The discovery of three settlement locations associated with Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age ceramics was unexpected as none of the mounds had given any evidence for activity of this date in the preliminary survey. The machair survey (see Chapter 2; Parker Pearson 1996) had revealed a tightly clustered distribution of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age settlements in the north at Machair Mheadhanach, at Staoinebrig in the middle of the island, and at Cladh Hallan in the south. It had been thought that the settlement clusters in between these sites were genuinely free of settlements belonging to this period. However, the work at Sligeanach suggests that there are a lot more LBA/EIA sites than would at first appear. The most likely explanation for this problem is that the quality of the pottery is so poor that it decays very quickly when exposed by rabbits or by ploughing. The settlements are therefore identifiable during field survey by surface concentrations of shell, bone and brown sand but do not provide any dating evidence. There are still a large number of settlements identified by the machair survey that have not produced any dateable pottery.

The presence of three settlement locations dating to this

period need not imply a particularly dense or nucleated settlement as the period covered by the term Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age lasted over a millennium and is perhaps the least precisely dated of all periods on the islands. It is likely that we have several distinct periods of activity and different locations within this period. Radiocarbon dating will be particularly useful in distinguishing settlement mobility during this period.

The discovery of a Middle Iron Age wheelhouse (Figure 11.20) was less surprising, though it was thought more likely that it would be on mound 16 than on the relatively inconspicuous mound 27. Nevertheless this discovery confirms the belief that all of the settlement clusters identified on the machair strip have a Middle Iron Age component. The density of settlement clusters in this area south of Bornais is particularly close and yet it is clear that all contain a Middle Iron Age component. At Bornais, mound 1, and South Bornais mound 15 (see Chapter 2; Parker Pearson 1996), the settlements are identified by diagnostic Middle Iron Age sherds of pottery but, at Sligeanach and Cill Donnain III, wheelhouses have now been discovered by excavation (Zvelebil 1991).

The density and regularity of the Middle Iron Age settlements was thought to indicate the establishment of a regular settlement pattern on the island with territories extending west to east across the island, spaced approximately 1km apart. The Sligeanach excavations

certainly confirm that this pattern was in existence in the Middle Iron Age but it also suggests it might have begun earlier in the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age. The likelihood that surface collection will not identify settlements of this date may mean that the settlement clusters actually began sometime during this phase.

The presence of an Early Bronze Age settlement at Sligeanach opens up the possibility that these settlements began very early in the third millennium. The distribution of Early Bronze Age settlements is very sparse and only four settlements are known along South Uist's west-coast machair: Cladh Hallan, Cill Donnain, Sligeanach and Machair Mheadhanach (see Chapters 2 and 10). These settlements are all noticeably placed apart from the main clusters of later prehistoric mounds and, when associated with later settlements, these almost always date to the LBA/EIA period. They are normally located to the east of the later prehistoric settlements closer to the present coastline. These points suggest that there was no direct continuity between these earlier settlements and the later prehistoric pattern. The locations of the Early Bronze Age sites are more susceptible to coastal erosion, and some settlements may also lie undiscovered beneath the substantial coastal dunes of certain stretches of South Uist's machair.

Conclusion

The excavations at Sligeanach have been successful in clarifying the nature and date of the settlement in this part of the machair and go some way towards identifying the settlement history of the area throughout prehistory. The excavation clearly demonstrates the importance of the settlement evidence from this part of the machair. The evidence for an extensive buried Early Bronze Age landscape is of considerable international significance. This landscape is being actively destroyed by cultivation and by rabbit burrowing (this is particularly clear in the section of Trench A illustrated in Figure 11.4). Further work is needed to rescue the upper levels of the Early Bronze Age deposits and to ensure the preservation of the cultivation horizon.

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Note

1 This paper was written by ML and NT, based on the data and notes of JGE.

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12 Excavations of an Iron Age islet settlement in Upper Loch Bornish

Pete Marshall and Mike Parker Pearson with a contribution by Helen Smith

Summary

A small islet in Upper Loch Bornish (Loch Bhornais Uarach; Figure 12.1; NF72NW 2) was evaluated in July 1997 by test pitting, a contour survey and the excavation of two trenches. The aim of the fieldwork was to ascertain if any archaeological deposits or structures survive on the site and, if so, to establish their date and character. The work formed the final part of the investigation of archaeological sites within the Dun Vulan environs in the township of Upper Bornish, exploring changing settlement patterns over the last 3,000 years.

Test-pit digging across the site revealed considerable differences in soil depth, ranging from 0.19m to 1.01m. Of the 17 test pits excavated on the islet itself, 11 produced deposits typically associated with midden material from peat fires – a red and yellow sandy clay with large inclusions of charcoal and partially carbonized peat. Test pits on the eastern side of the site produced a greater amount of

pottery than those excavated on the western side. The coarse plainware found in them can be dated typologically to the Early Iron Age, later than the Cladh Hallan sequence (which ends *c.*500 cal BC; Parker Pearson *et al.* in prep.) but prior to the second to first century BC construction phases at Dun Vulan, South Uist (Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999). This is confirmed by two radiocarbon dates from barley grains within a midden layer (053 in Trench 2) which date most probably to the early fourth century BC.

The islet is either a crannog or a natural island that has been artificially enlarged. The contour survey map shows clearly the extent of midden deposits in the gently sloping areas to the east and west of the centre of the site. Upstanding walls and large amounts of rubble in this central area are the result of a series of building phases, the last of which involved the construction of two stone-walled enclosures. In the north trench (Trench 1), a stone-revetted turf wall was associated with Middle Iron Age pottery,

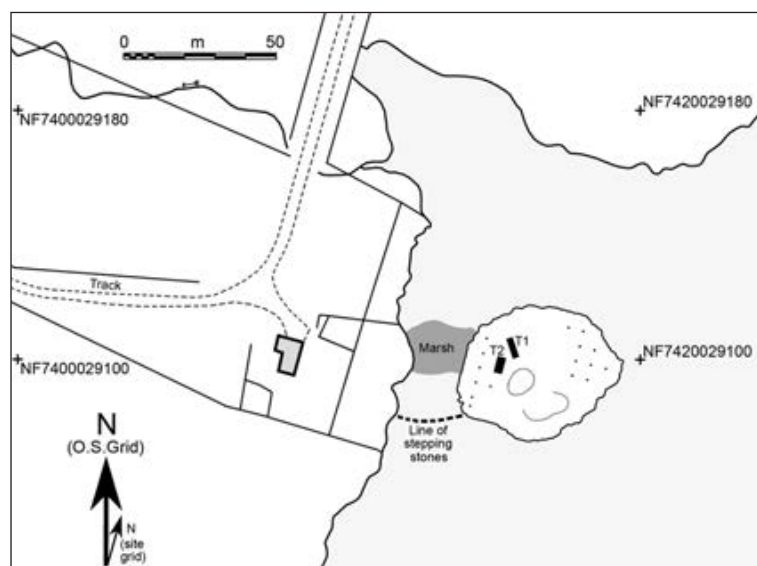


Figure 12.1. The location of the islet in Upper Loch Bornish showing locations of trenches and test pits



Figure 12.2. The islet viewed from the west, with its causeway at the bottom right

similar to that from Dun Vulcan. In the south trench (Trench 2), no structures were located.

Location

The site is located in Upper Loch Bornish (NF742 291; NMRS Number NF72NW 2 at NF7414 2907; RCAHMS 1928) at 3.60m OD. The islet is probably a small natural island which has been reinforced to provide a greater occupation area (Figure 12.2). It is approached from the western edge of the loch by a causeway 20m long, where a line of stepping stones and outcropping bedrock provide access to the site. The islet is roughly circular in shape, 48m east–west and 44m north–south. Its summit is 6.36m above sea level. The central part of the site is covered by a large amount of loose rubble and a number of upstanding walls that are probably sheep folds or cattle pens dating to the 18th–20th centuries. Away from the centre of the site, the land on the islet’s western and eastern fringes gently slopes away to the waters of the loch.

The site’s location, on an islet within a freshwater loch, is similar to that of the vast majority of brochs in South Uist and other parts of the Western Isles. We suspected that the rubble might have derived originally from a broch at the bottom of the sequence but such islet sites were also occupied at many different times and in many different forms in the prehistoric and historical periods.

Aims and objectives

After the excavation of the Dun Vulcan broch (Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999), the South Uist component of the SEARCH project focused on the investigation of Dun Vulcan’s environs. The aim was to establish a

landscape setting and settlement context for Dun Vulcan by investigating and characterising the settlement sites in its vicinity, particularly within the township of Upper Bornish (Bornais Uachdhrach). Located on the eastern edge of the peatlands, on the western margin of the moorland and mountain zone, the Upper Loch Bornish site lies well to the east of both the machair settlements and sites such as A Beinn na Mhic Aongheis (‘Hill of the Son of Angus’; see Chapter 16) on the western fringe of the peatlands. As such, it appears to lie outside the settlement pattern postulated by the ‘proto-township’ hypothesis (see Chapter 2) and its location is more akin to the small island duns with rectangular, perhaps Medieval or Post-Medieval structures in freshwater lochs to the south and north (see Chapter 6).

Should the site in Upper Loch Bornish prove to be older than these Medieval or later island duns then it might be considered specifically in relation to Dun Vulcan, either as a broch or roundhouse contemporary with Dun Vulcan or as a predecessor. Were it to have been a broch earlier than Dun Vulcan, it would potentially push back the origin of brochs in the Western Isles to before the second century BC (*contra* Parker Pearson *et al.* 1996).

The aims of the 1996 field season were to:

1. produce a contour survey of the site that might provide evidence for the existence of ‘monumental architecture’ *i.e.* a broch, below the later structures;
2. investigate the nature and distribution of surviving archaeological deposits by test-pitting on the rubble-free eastern and western sides of the islet;
3. employ small-scale trenching to locate structures and dating evidence.

The test pits

Seventeen test pits based on a grid set out in September 1996 were cut into the 1920sq m of the islet (Figure 12.3). These were located outside the central part of the site because of the large amount of loose rubble and upstanding walls, which would have hampered excavations. The depth of test pits excavated varied from 0.19m–1.01m. In general, the stratigraphy was similar to the expected soil development on ‘blackland’ areas of the Uists, *i.e.* a shallow sandy loam and loamy sand soils derived from the underlying Lewisian gneiss and humus – iron podzols and peaty rankers (Hudson 1991).

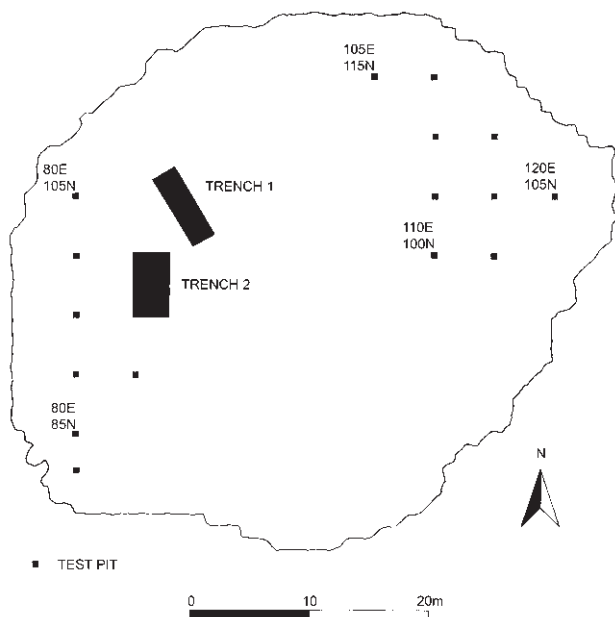


Figure 12.3. The locations of the test pits and Trenches 1 and 2

A number of test pits did produce evidence for relatively thick ‘archaeological deposits’ – typically these comprised red and yellow charcoal-rich clayey sands. Such deposits are commonly associated with archaeological middens in the islands and are thought to represent the remains of peat fires and midden deposits. Within these deposits, finds of coarse plain pottery were common, along with very small burnt bone fragments. The survival of bone fragments was very poor owing to the acidic nature of the soil.

Of the eight test pits excavated on the western side of the site, five produced prehistoric pottery (71 sherds in total). The greatest sherd numbers on the west side came from the central area whilst average sherd sizes were greatest towards the north. The three test pits without pottery were located in the southern area of the west side. On the eastern side of the site, nine test pits were dug and all but one produced pottery (78 sherds in total). The greatest number of sherds came from the north side and the larger sherds were also found in that area. This may indicate that there was less trampling or disturbance in the midden areas furthest from the islet’s centre on its east side. The test pits revealed that the deposits lay upon angular rubble which was probably deposited during initial construction. Thus the outer extent, if not the whole islet, appears to have been artificially built up as a crannog-like structure.

Table 12.1 contains a detailed description of the stratigraphy from the individual test pits, along with a summary of the finds.

The contour survey

A contour survey was carried out across the site using a site grid set out in September 1996. The initial survey and laying-out of the grid was undertaken with a Zeiss Delta 5 EDM; tapes and a dumpy level were then used for the

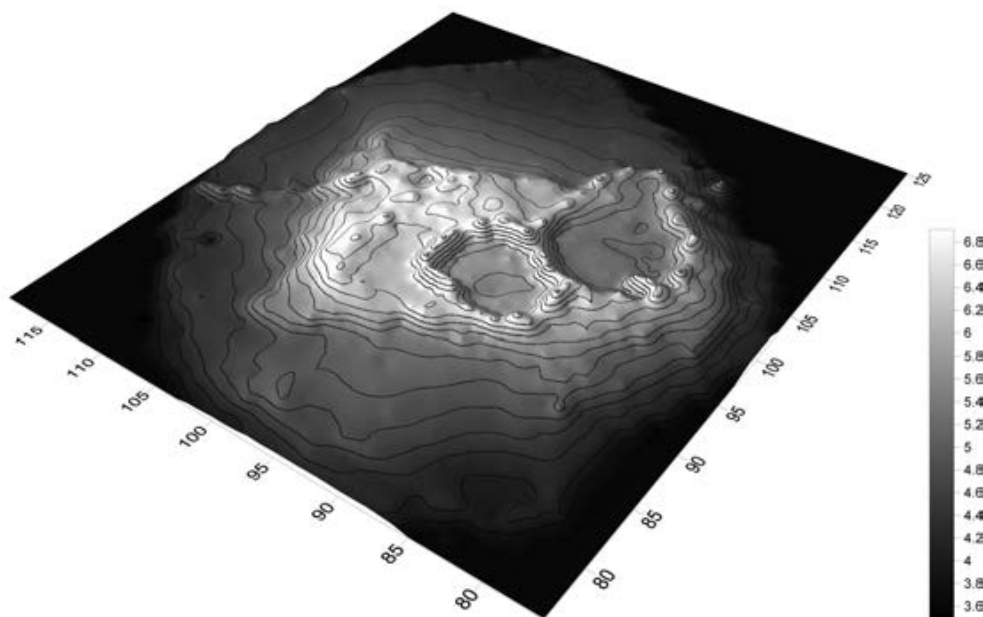


Figure 12.4. A contour map of the islet

| East | North | Cntxt | Description | Finds |
|------|-------|-------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 80 | 100 | 001 | Turf layer | |
| | | 002 | Dark brown fine peaty sand | 22 sherds |
| | | 007 | Yellow/red sandy clay lenses in a dark brown peaty sand increasing to 50% by 0.65m. At the base gives way to very large loose boulders. | 28 sherds (inc. 2 large base sherds) |
| 80 | 95 | 001 | Turf layer | |
| | | 002? | Dark brown fine peaty sand | |
| | | 003 | Dark reddish brown fine peaty sand (Fe staining?) | |
| | | 012 | Light reddish brown loamy sand | |
| | | 014 | Dark orange brown sandy clay matrix with numerous charcoal inclusions (40%) | |
| | | 016 | Grey sandy clay matrix with charcoal inclusions and lenses of strong orange clay, which increase down profile. | |
| | | 017 | Very dark grey compact sandy peat. | |
| 80 | 90 | 001 | Turf layer | |
| | | 005 | Medium brown peaty sand with visible SiO ₂ , very rooty and contains <1% stones | |
| 80 | 85 | 001 | Turf layer | |
| | | 006 | Dark brown peaty sand with visible SiO ₂ , very rooty and contained 1–5% stones | |
| 80 | 82 | 001 | Turf layer | |
| | | 004 | Dark brown peaty matrix, large quantity of roots | 2 modern sherds |
| 80 | 105 | 001 | Turf layer | |
| | | 010 | Dark brown sandy clay with 20–40% degraded rock (gneiss), and a high SiO ₂ . Red staining probably represents Fe deposition. | 5 sherds |
| 85 | 90 | 001 | Turf layer | |
| | | 008 | Dark brown sandy peat with visible SiO ₂ and <1% stones | |
| | | 009 | Dark brown sandy peat with visible SiO ₂ , 1–5% stones and 1–5% charcoal | 4 sherds |
| | | 011 | Dark brown sandy peat, >50% rocks, voids appear at base. | 6 sherds |
| 85 | 95 | 001 | Turf layer | |
| | | 013 | Dark brown sandy peat with visible SiO ₂ , and contains 1–5% stones | 3 sherds |
| | | 015 | Mixed deposit comprising black/brown peaty clay and variable amounts of red/orange sandy clay, with small lenses of charcoal (1–5%). | Small fragments of burnt bone. 3 sherds (1 with grooved decoration) |
| 110 | 105 | 001 | Turf layer | |
| | | 018 | Dark brown/black loamy peat with charcoal inclusions <5% | 3 sherds + 1 whiteware and 1 red/black glaze |
| | | 023 | Dark brown/reddish sandy peat | 6 sherds |
| | | 024 | Dark orange peaty clay with charcoal inclusions 5–25% | 2 sherds |
| | | 027 | Dark brown slightly reddish loam | 6 sherds |
| | | 028 | Bedrock | |
| 110 | 110 | 001 | Turf layer | |
| | | 019 | Dark brown/black peaty sand with <5% charcoal inclusions | 5 sherds + whiteware rim |
| | | 020 | A mixed matrix with a dark brown/black peaty loam and yellow/red clay. A large burnt stone may indicate <i>in situ</i> burning. A possible hearth. | 1 sherd (less coarse fabric) |
| 110 | 100 | 001 | Turf layer | |
| | | 021 | Dark brown sandy peat matrix with visible SiO ₂ fragments and 1–5% stones. | |
| | | 022 | Mixed matrix made up of orange sand; grey/black clay; black highly organic component with 1–5% charcoal. | 2 sherds |
| | | 026 | Black highly organic deposit, very soft orange sand and 1–5% bone fragments. | |
| 110 | 115 | 001 | Turf layer | |
| | | 025 | Dark brown sandy peat matrix with small amounts of charcoal <5%. At 0.47m red/brown sandy clay makes up 10% of the context. This inclusion ceases at 0.55m. | 35 sherds (incl. 2 base fragments) + 2 sherds sponge ware. 3 bits charcoal/peat |
| 115 | 100 | 001 | Turf layer | |
| | | 030 | Dark brown sandy peat matrix with visible SiO ₂ fragments and 1–5% stones. | |
| | | 031 | Very compact rusty red layer (deposition of iron pan 1–2mm thick). | 1 sherd |
| | | 032 | Mixed matrix made up of orange/red sand, black peat, orange/grey clay; <1% stones increasing to 50–70% at the base of the context. Boulders and large voids. | |
| 115 | 105 | 001 | Turf layer | |
| | | 029 | Dark brown sandy peat. At 0.23m inclusions of dark red clay appeared along with a small <5% amount of charcoal | 1 sherd |
| | | 033 | Dark red clay layer | |
| 115 | 110 | 001 | Turf layer | |
| | | 034 | Dark brown sandy peat with <5% charcoal inclusions. becoming increasingly clay-rich with depth, red/yellow sandy clay lenses appear at 0.35m | 2 sherds + 2 sherds whiteware |
| 105 | 115 | 001 | Turf layer | |
| | | 035 | Dark brown sandy peat with visible SiO ₂ and <1% stones | |
| | | 036 | Less compact than above, dark brown sandy peat with visible SiO ₂ , 5–10% stone and <1% charcoal | Decayed bone. 4 sherds |
| | | 037 | Mixed matrix comprising black organic sand; orange-brown stony sand; red sandy clay, with inclusions comprising 1–5% stone, 1% charcoal, c. 1% decayed bone and pottery. | 10 sherds (3 in finer grey fabric, harder with smaller inclusions) |
| 120 | 105 | 001 | Turf horizon | |
| | | 038 | Dark brown peaty layer with numerous roots and small lenses of sandy clay with charcoal flecks from 0.3m | Ceramic crucible frag. |

Table 12.1. Upper Loch Bornish test pit data

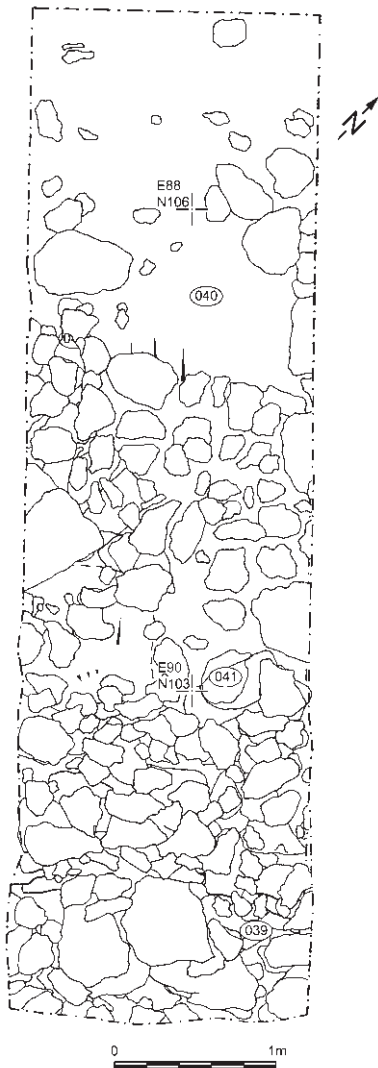


Figure 12.5. Plan of Trench 1's upper layers

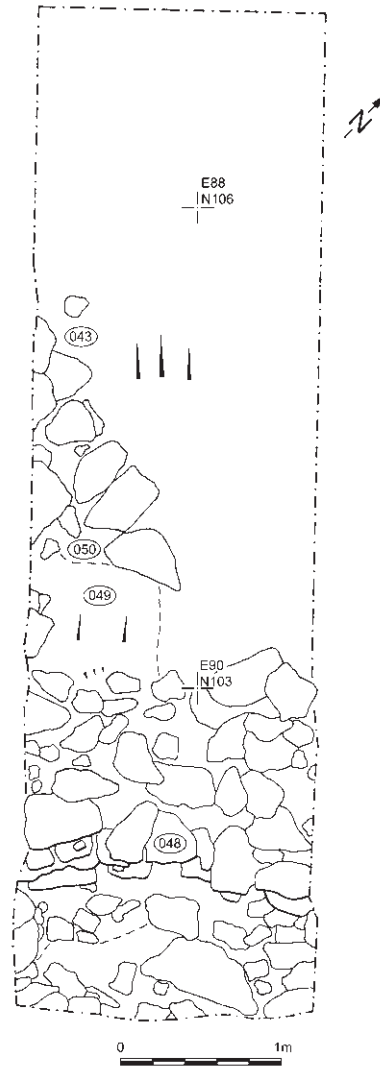


Figure 12.6. Plan of Trench 1's lower layers and wall

contour survey. The method used was based on Hogg (1980) with readings taken at 1m intervals across the site.

The contour survey shows the two upstanding enclosures in the southern part of the site, thought to be former animal pens (Figure 12.4). These lie in the southern part of a raised central area, which was initially thought to be the remains of a large prehistoric building. Away from this central raised area, the land gently slopes away to the east and west, with the break of slope being far more pronounced on the southern and northern edges. The eastern side of the site slopes very gently away from the centre.

The excavations

Two trial trenches were laid out after the test pitting and contour survey with two main objectives:

1. To ascertain the extent of the 'ash' archaeological deposits on the western side of the site, and to see how they related stratigraphically to the rubble that occupies the central part of the site (Trench 2).
2. To see if any evidence existed for earlier structures,

such as the walls of a broch, underneath those immediately visible on the surface (Trench 1).

Trench 1

This measured 7m north–south and 2m east–west and was located on the northern part of the site across an area with a sharp break in slope that looked as though it might be the remains of a rubble-covered wall. Twelve layers and features were recorded in this trench, which was only partially excavated owing to time constraints. Covering the sequence were three layers of topsoil: 001, 039 and 040 (Figure 12.5). Layer 001 was the humus-rich turf horizon and 039 was a dark brown-black loamy peat, found in the southern part of the trench, while 040 was a dark brown sandy peat found in the northern part. Layer 039 covered a large amount of loose rubble (041) in the southern half of the trench. Surrounding and infilling the rubble horizon (041) was a layer of dark brown-black peat ash with small patches of red peat ash with charcoal inclusions.

Removal of the rubble (041) and layer 039 in the southern part of the trench exposed a section of wall 0.30m



Figure 12.7. East-facing section of Trench 1



Figure 12.8. The stone and turf wall under excavation in Trench 1, viewed from the south

wide, running east–west across the trench (048) (Figure 12.6). This wall was poorly faced and constructed for the most part of relatively small stones, compared with most of the rubble (041) removed from above and around it.

Layer 042 was a very thick (0.70m) horizon with relatively small amounts of stone present (Figure 12.7). Its uniform nature and the fact that the wall (048) seemed to have been banked into it, together with the lack of evidence for an

outer face to wall 048, indicate that 042 was the remains of an earlier turf wall (Figure 12.8). Below layer 042, there was a brown sandy clay (049) with small lenses of orange clay and charcoal; this in turn overlay a line of boulders and a dark black sandy clay (050).

The finds from Trench 1 included a sizeable amount of pottery (176 sherds) and a small number of burnt bone

fragments. The pottery assemblage consisted of fragments made of a similar coarseware to that found in the test pits, but also some with a much finer and harder fabric. Contexts 042 and 039 produced 24 and 17 pieces of this finer ware along with a small number of Middle Iron Age decorated sherds (three and four pieces).

Trench 2

This measured 5.50m north–south and 5m east–west and was located on the western side of the site where test pitting had shown the existence of thick ash deposits. Excavations in Trench 2 only allowed for the removal of the turf horizon 001 and a small amount of the topsoil 047 (Figures 12.9 and 12.10). Lack of time did not permit any further investigations but the remains uncovered seemed to be loose rubble, with no obvious structures visible.

Finds from Trench 2 included a mixed assemblage of 83 coarse and fine plain sherds, along with a very small quantity of burnt and unburnt animal bone. Among these bones were two cattle teeth. A bulk sample of peat ash (053) was taken from the southwest corner of the trench at its intersection with test pit 85E 95N, and flotation of this produced a small quantity of carbonized plant remains. Radiocarbon determinations were obtained from two barley seeds in layer 053. SUERC-10863 (GU-14274) dated to 400–340 cal BC and 320–200 cal BC at 95.4% probability (2265±35 BP) and SUERC-13590 (GU-14273R) dated to 540–350 cal BC at 93.9% probability (2340±35 BP). These dates fall within the Early Iron Age.

The finds

The pottery

Mike Parker Pearson

The pottery is mostly undecorated and is made of a coarse ‘handmade’ fabric that contains coarse inclusions of up to 20mm (along the longest axis). Most of the inclusions, however, are between 2mm and 10mm in size, and they include pieces of quartz, mica and gneiss.

Rims

From the test pits, sherds from layer 002 include two flat

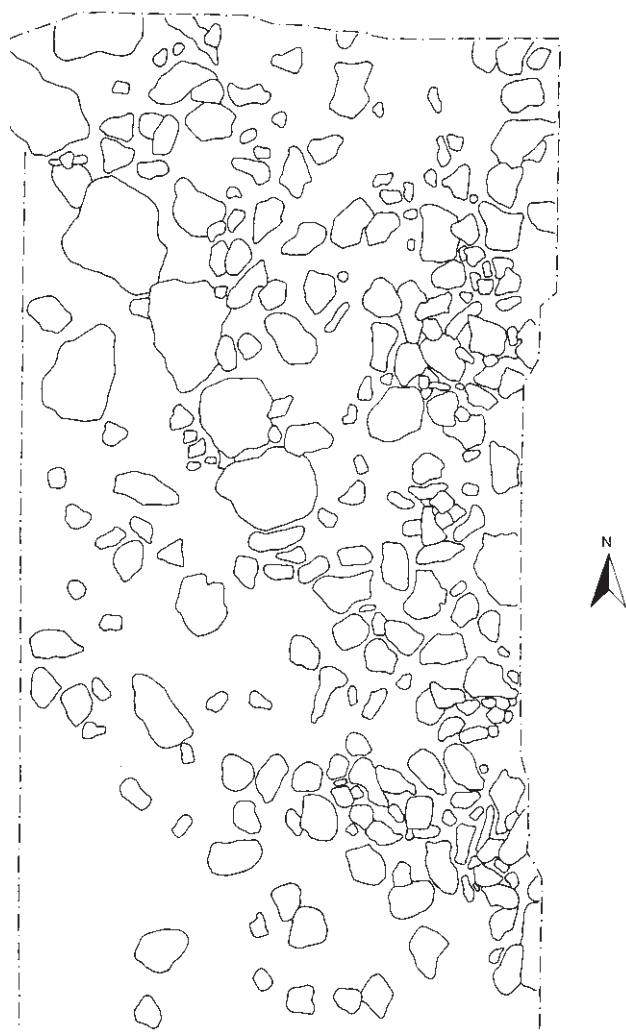


Figure 12.9. Plan of Trench 2

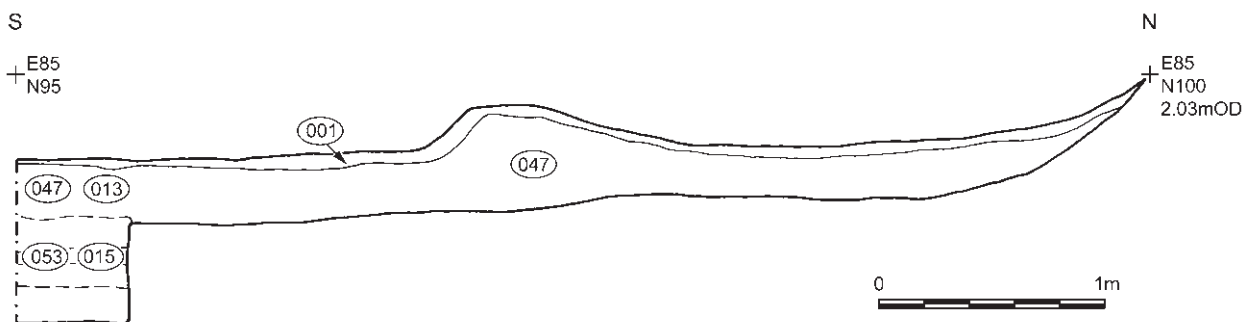


Figure 12.10. East-facing section of Trench 2

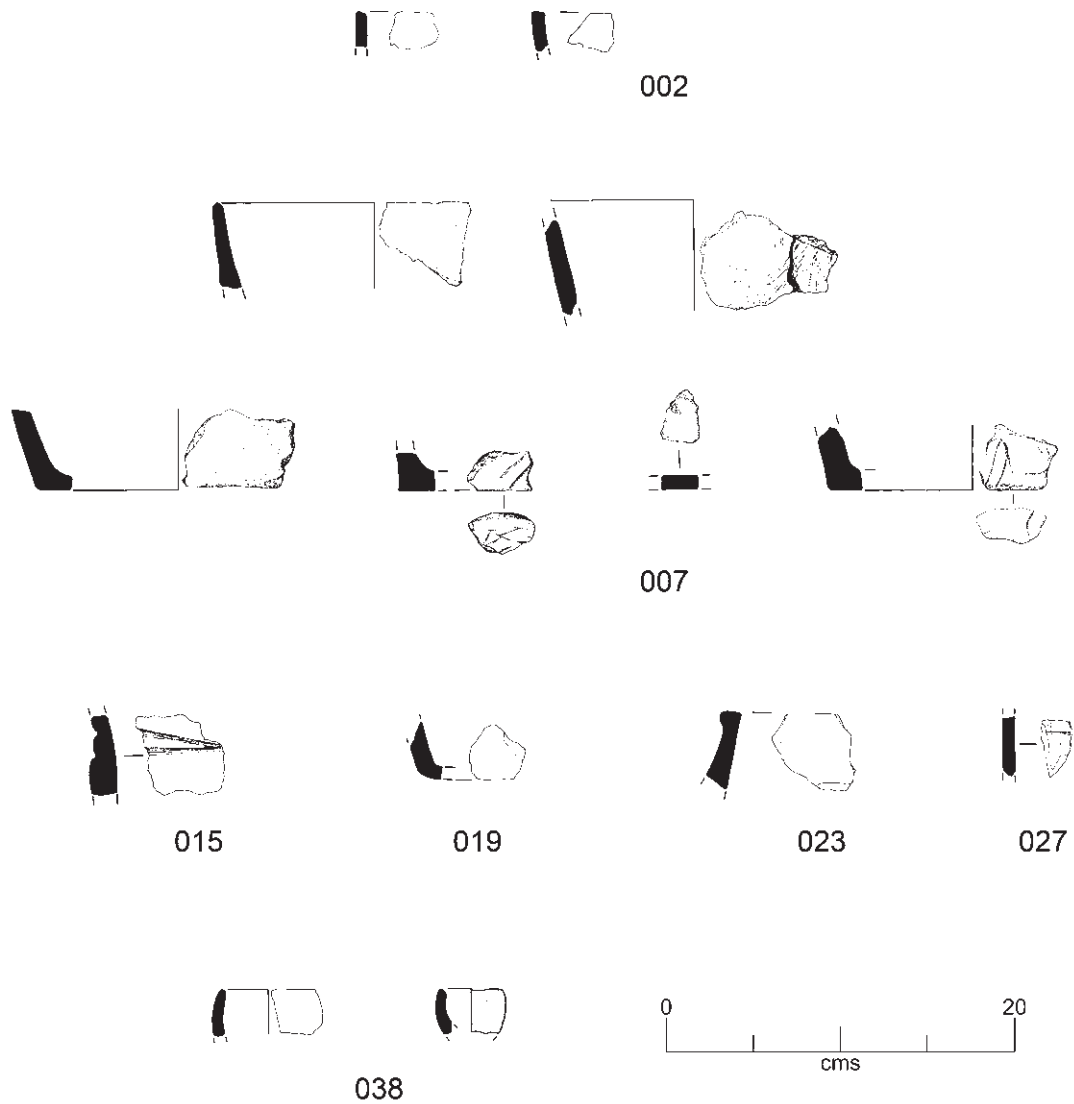


Figure 12.11. Early Iron Age ceramics from Upper Loch Bornish

rims. From layer 007 there is a round rim sherd. The large, T-shaped flat rim from 023 is decorated along its top with a line of five crude dot impressions (Figure 12.11). Two round rims from 025 are from vessels with convex mouths, likely to date to the Early Iron Age. A thin, flat rim from 037 is decorated with two shallow, vertical channels on the exterior of the pot and dates to the Middle Iron Age (Figure 12.12).

In Trench 1 there were five rims. Three from 040, probably from the same vessel, are flat and slightly expanded (one is not illustrated). A rim from 045 is similarly flat and undecorated. A tapered and slightly everted rim with a horizontal line of stabmarks on the exterior, from 042, is of Middle Iron Age date.

From Trench 2 in 047 there was a tapered, everted rim, decorated on the exterior with vertical channelling.

Bases

From the test pits, there are four base sherds (from a slightly

footed base) from layer 007, possibly from the same pot, with finger impressions on the base, and irregular, angled scorings up the exterior sides of the base. Two base sherds from 025 derive from a small pot with a base diameter of 130mm. There is a small base sherd from 019.

In Trench 1, there was a footed base in 040 with a crude lattice of poorly executed vertical and angular incised lines.

From Trench 2 in 047 there is a base sherd whose exterior is decorated with vertical smoothing and horizontal, irregular lines of impressed but untwisted cord or thong.

Surface treatment and decoration

From the test pits, three lower body sherds from 007 have a wiped and scored exterior surface. Two conjoining lower body sherds from 015 have two horizontal but converging lines of impressed but untwisted cord or thong. A sherd from 027 is decorated with a narrow linear channel or impression. A sherd from 025 is decorated with a horizontal

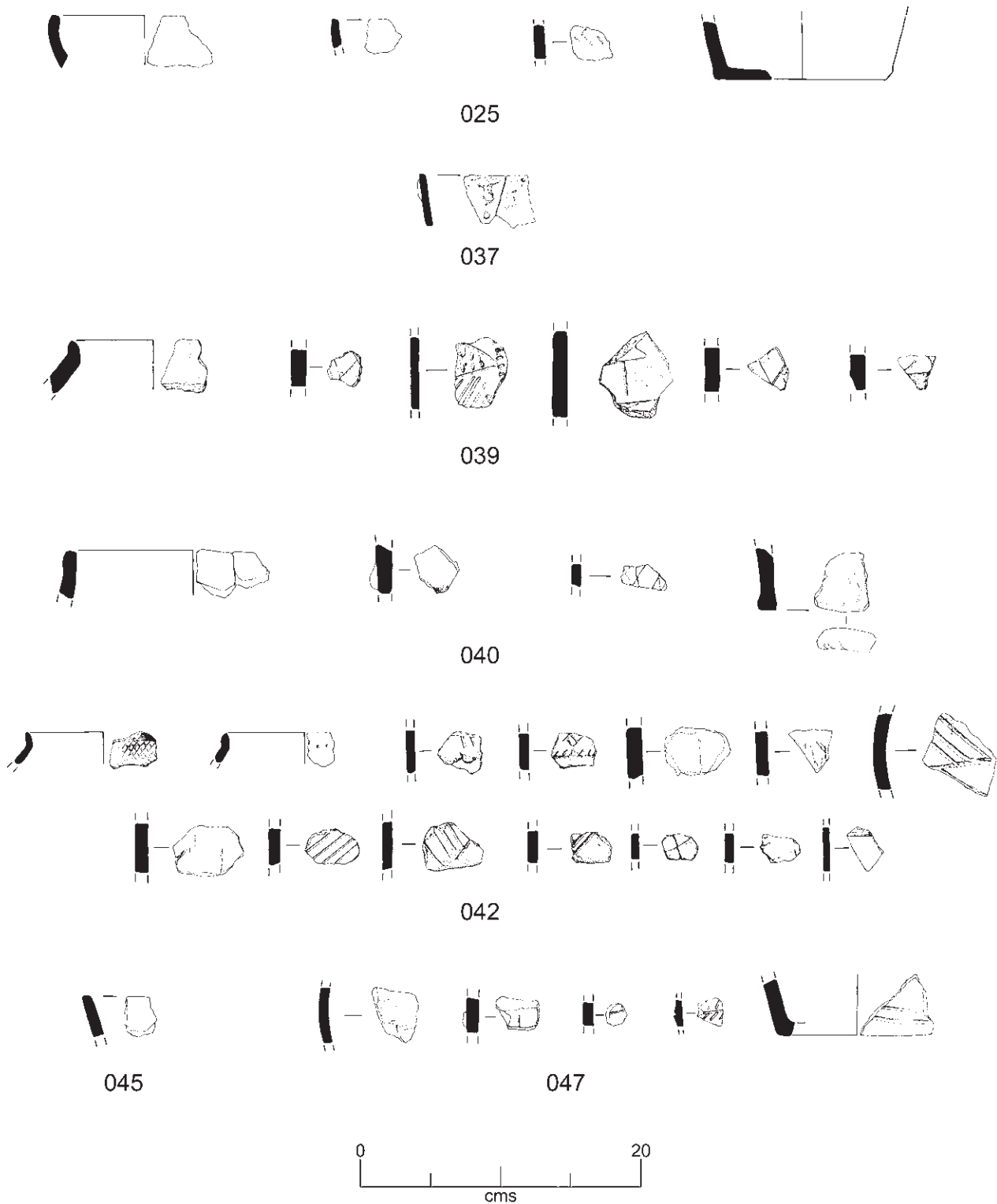


Figure 12.12. Middle Iron Age ceramics from Upper Loch Bornish (the two rims from layer 025 are probably Early Iron Age)

row of angled slashes or incisions. This dates to the Middle Iron Age but the other sherds from this and other test pits are probably earlier.

From layer 040 in Trench 1 there are two sherds from the same fine pot with incised lattice decoration. The pot is dateable to the Middle Iron Age. From the same layer,

a heavily abraded sherd with a thick cordon is probably of the same period. There are 11 decorated Middle Iron Age sherds from 042 (not including a decorated rim) and three that have more irregular scoring or linear impressions. Two of the decorated sherds have S-shaped cordons with incised lines above the cordons. Another has a thin cordon. One

| Context | Location | No. | Weight | Av. gms |
|--------------|-------------|------------|----------------|------------|
| Layer 002 | Pit 80 100 | 22 | 183.3g | 8.3 |
| Layer 007 | Pit 80 100 | 28 | 317.4g | 11.3 |
| Layer 009 | Pit 85 90 | 4 | 13.2g | 3.3 |
| Layer 011 | Pit 85 90 | 6 | 44.7g | 7.4 |
| Layer 010 | Pit 80 105 | 5 | 19.7g | 3.9 |
| Layer 013 | Pit 85 95 | 3 | 8.1g | 2.7 |
| Layer 015 | Pit 85 95 | 3 | 70.7g | 23.6 |
| Layer 018 | Pit 110 105 | 3 | 24g | 8 |
| Layer 023 | Pit 110 105 | 6 | 55.6g | 9.3 |
| Layer 024 | Pit 110 105 | 2 | 13.2g | 6.6 |
| Layer 027 | Pit 110 105 | 6 | 55.7g | 9.3 |
| Layer 019 | Pit 110 110 | 5 | 28g | 5.6 |
| Layer 020 | Pit 110 110 | 1 | 3.6g | 3.6 |
| Layer 022 | Pit 110 100 | 2 | 6g | 3 |
| Layer 025 | Pit 110 115 | 35 | 471.1g | 13.5 |
| Layer 029 | Pit 115 105 | 1 | 14.3g | 14.3 |
| Layer 031 | Pit 115 100 | 1 | 7.6g | 7.6 |
| Layer 034 | Pit 115 110 | 2 | 26.7g | 13.3 |
| Layer 036 | Pit 105 115 | 4 | 89.5g | 22.4 |
| Layer 037 | Pit 105 115 | 10 | 217.3g | 21.7 |
| Layer 001 | Trench 1 | 20 | 99.1g | 4.9 |
| Layer 040 | Trench 1 | 54 | 409.3g | 7.6 |
| Layer 042 | Trench 1 | 97 | 884.6g | 9.1 |
| Layer 043 | Trench 1 | 2 | 11g | 5.5 |
| Layer 045 | Trench 1 | 5 | 30.9g | 6.2 |
| Layer 001 | Trench 2 | 4 | 10.8 | 2.7 |
| Layer 047 | Trench 2 | 76 | 460.4g | 6.1 |
| Layer 053 | Trench 2 | 3 | 49.6g | 16.5 |
| Total | | 410 | 3625.4g | 8.8 |

Table 12.2. Earthenware ceramics from Upper Loch Bornish

sherd is from the neck of an everted-rimmed pot and has a small incised lattice pattern on its shoulder. The remaining sherds are decorated with parallel incised lines and two of these are large enough for these lines to be recognised within infilled triangle motifs.

From layer 047 in Trench 2 there are three decorated sherds (in addition to the decorated rim and base). One has an S-shaped horizontal cordon (similar to the thicker examples from the first–second centuries AD layers at Dun Vulcan). One has angled stabmarks either side of an incised line. The third has a single incised line. These are all Middle Iron Age motifs but they occur in a layer that also includes 19th-century ceramics. The crude and thick sherds from 053 at the base of Trench 2 date to the Early Iron Age.

Conclusion

There is a major contrast in the ceramics from the test pits on the one hand and from Trenches 1 and 2 on the other. With the exception of decorated Middle Iron Age sherds from 025 and 037, the majority of test pit sherds appear to date to the mid first millennium BC. The decorated rim from 023 is of a style in use between the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, and can be paralleled at Cladh Hallan. The pottery from Trenches 1 and 2 (possibly with the exception of the few sherds in 053) is mostly of Middle Iron Age date though the appearance of a sherd of

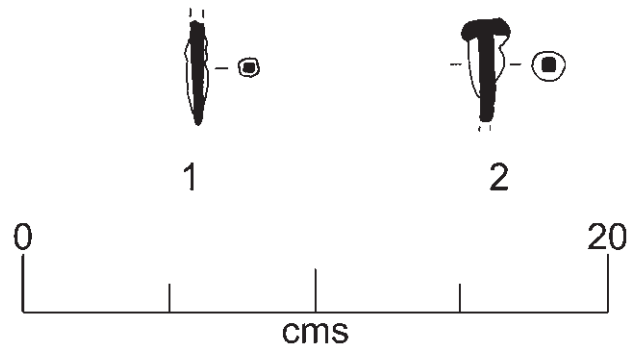


Figure 12.13. Iron artefacts from Upper Loch Bornish

19th-century factory-made whiteware and of an iron rove in layer 047 indicates that the upper layer in Trench 2 has been subsequently disturbed in more recent times.

The character of the Early Iron Age assemblage is mostly of plain style with a mixture of flat and round rims. There is some surface treatment that indicates careless impression of untwisted materials (grass or leather?). These sherds date to the latter half of the first millennium BC since such treatment is not found at Cladh Hallan.

In summary, the midden areas on the southwest and northeast sides of the islet are likely to have been created during the mid first millennium BC, presumably deriving from a dwelling in the middle of the crannog which was buried and/or heavily disturbed by Middle Iron Age activity almost half a millennium later.

Metalworking crucible

A single fragment (6.7g) of a ceramic crucible was recovered from layer 038 in Test Pit 120 105 (Figure 12.11). It has a glazed red exterior with similar patches on the interior, presumably from molten copper, and appears to have had a small lip. It is a rim sherd that constitutes about one-fifth of the circumference of the vessel. The crucible was originally 45mm in diameter and up to 7mm thick. There was no trace of any refractory material from clay moulds or of any metalworking slag. Iron-bearing concretions from layers 031 and 037 are most likely of non-anthropogenic origin and can be matched with similar deposits within the boot-shaped chamber of the Dun Vulcan broch.

The ironwork

Mike Parker Pearson

The two iron nails from the site are likely to post-date the Early and Middle Iron Age occupation and may be only a few centuries old (Figure 12.13). The rivetted plate may be a triangular rove and is likely to date to within the last 1000 years.

Context 013. An incomplete nail (35mm long) with a square cross-section (4mm × 4mm; Figure 12.13.1).

Context 025. An incomplete nail (34mm long) with a square cross-section (5mm × 5mm; Figure 12.13.2).

Context 047. A triangular plate (21mm × 21mm × 2mm) with a broken-off rivet (9mm long with a circular shaft 4mm

| <i>Area</i> | | Test Pit | Trench |
|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Context no. | | 22 | 53 |
| Period | | EIA | EIA |
| * = <i>twisted grains present</i> | | | |
| Taxon list | Plant parts | | |
| Cereal Plants | | | |
| <i>Hordeum vulgare</i> L. | hulled barley grains | 14* | 15* |
| Cereal <i>cf</i> <i>Triticum</i> | | | 2 |
| Cereal indet. | | 14 | 6 |
| Total cereal grains | (whole grain equivalent) | 28 | 23 |
| | | | |
| Wild Taxa | | | |
| Caryophyllaceae <i>cf</i> <i>Stellaria media</i> | | 1 | |
| <i>Carex</i> sp. | trigonous | 2 | 2 |
| <i>Carex</i> sp. | biconvex | 1 | |
| <i>cf</i> <i>Danthonia decumbens</i> | | | 1 |
| Poaceae indet. | | | 1 |
| Ericaceae | buds | 4 | |
| <i>Polygonum</i> sp. | | 2 | |
| <i>Galium</i> sp. | | | 1 |
| | | | |
| Other/Indeterminate | | | |
| Moss brophyte | | 2 | |
| storage organ frags | | | present |
| indeterminate | | 1 | 1 |

Table 12.3. Plant remains from Upper Loch Bornish

dia.) though its centre. This may be an unusual triangular rove or, less likely, a damaged square rove.

The carbonized plant remains

Helen Smith

The flot components of two bulk samples were assessed for their charred plant content. The first bulk sample was taken from an organic-rich deposit (context 022) from test pit 110 100 on the eastern side of the site. The test pit deposits were generally dated to the Early Iron Age, with a few dating to the Middle Iron Age (based on the pottery). The second bulk sample (context 053) was taken from a deposit of peat ash found in the southwest corner of Trench 2. This was latterly dated to the Early Iron Age (based on pottery typology and confirmed by radiocarbon dating of two cereal grains from the deposit).

Methods

The bulk samples were processed in the field, using a water separation machine. Flots were collected in sieves with mesh sizes of 1mm and 300 microns. The heavy residues were collected in 1mm mesh but the content of these is not included in this assessment. Sorting took place using

a low-power stereo-microscope. Identifications to species were checked using modern reference material housed at the Institute of Archaeology, UCL. Nomenclature follows Stace (1997) and Pankhurst and Mullin (1991).

Results

The plant remains from both samples are similar (Table 12.3). Cereal grains dominate the plant remains in both samples, although these still occur in low numbers. Cereals are represented by barley (*Hordeum* sp.) of the hulled variety. The presence of some twisted grains indicates the presence of six-row barley (*H. vulgare* L.). Two (possible) wheat grains (*cf* *Triticum*) were also found in context 053, an Early Iron Age deposit. Hulled six row barley is consistent with other sites of this period in the area (Greig 1991). A few weed seeds were also found in the samples including those of chickweed (*Stellaria media*) and knotgrass (*Polygonum* sp.), heath grass (*Danthonia decumbens*), bedstraw (*Galium* sp.) and sedge (*Carex*). The very low numbers of weeds do not allow any in-depth interpretation regarding the type of environment from which they may have originated although those listed could have occurred as weeds of cultivated fields, grassland or moor.

Conclusions

Survey, test pitting and excavation on this islet in Upper Loch Bornish have shown the existence of an Early Iron Age building with extensive midden deposits of peat ash. Occupation of the site seems to have been limited to the Early and Middle Iron Age and it was only re-used much later, probably for penning animals, in the 18th–19th centuries. There is no evidence of any activity in the intervening period.

There is no structural evidence of concentric wall lines to indicate the former presence of a broch. However, the majority of the rubble had accumulated prior to the construction of a turf and stone wall containing Middle Iron Age pottery. Although this Middle Iron Age pottery could have been residual, the plain wares from the midden deposits on the eastern and western sides of the central area indicate that the earliest occupation was in the Early Iron Age, probably around 400–350 cal BC. It is most likely that the turf and stone wall is part of a heavily robbed Middle Iron Age circular building which itself lay on top of or within an Early Iron Age stone building.

The form of the Early Iron Age stone-walled building could not be ascertained and there was no trace of any substantial foundations of the kind associated with brochs. We envisage this structure more probably as a free-standing roundhouse akin to that on an islet in Loch Bharabhat in Lewis (Dixon and Harding 2000; Harding and Armit 1990) but only further excavation can clarify this. The radiocarbon dates from the associated Early Iron Age midden indicate that this occupation post-dates the settlement sequence at Cladh Hallan (Parker Pearson *et al.* in prep.) and pre-dates the broch at Dun Vulcan (Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999). As such, it provides an important stage in the chronological sequence of settlement in South Uist and it also offers the possibility that the site was a predecessor to the later islet settlement of Dun Vulcan (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 87–8).

Acknowledgements

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13 Excavations on Aisgernis and Frobost machair

Mike Parker Pearson with contributions by David Barker, Richard Madgwick, Jacqui Mulville and John Raven

Summary

A number of machair settlement mounds remained undated after the machair survey project (see Chapter 2) because of the lack of diagnostic pottery found on their surfaces. Two important groups of sites are situated on Aisgernis and Frobost machair (Figure 13.1), between the more intensively investigated research areas of the Dun Vulcan environs to the north and the Cladh Hallan/Cille Pheadair area to the south. A main aim of the final years of the project was to characterize these settlement mounds and, secondly, to identify Norse-period activity so as to provide a match between the settlements and their Norse place-names.

Frobost

At Frobost there are three large mounds (Sites 45, 46 and 47; Figure 13.2). Site 45 has been damaged by quarrying

(Figure 13.3) and has produced Pictish-period (or pre-Viking Late Iron Age) pottery, as well as a broken saddle quern (Figure 13.4) which probably dates to the Later Bronze Age or Early Iron Age. Site 46 is the southern extension of Site 45 and its uppermost layers are dated by Norse-period pottery from Trench 2, one of three small test trenches into that mound. In the area immediately east of Site 45, a partially buried settlement mound (Site 238) produced a Norse-period bone pin. Within Site 47 two test trenches failed to locate diagnostic material but a Middle Iron Age sherd was recovered from a rabbit scrape.

Frobost is one of South Uist's most distinctively Norse place-names, with '-bost' deriving from 'bystadr'. The late Neil MacMillan related the story of Thorfinn, an unscrupulous Norse landlord who lived at Frobost. The Norse-period bone pin from Site 238, near Site 45, provides evidence for occupation at that time on Frobost machair.

Frobost is named on Timothy Pont's map of c. 1595 and is shown not on the machair (the location of its Norse and Iron Age predecessors) but on the peatland on the southeast shore of Loch Eilean an Staoir, together with an unnamed settlement immediately south of the loch. A third settlement (also unnamed) is marked on Pont's map, on the machair to the southwest of Loch Eilean an Staoir, just to the northwest of the unnamed settlement. Blaeu's map of 1654 records the Frobost settlement and the mysterious third settlement, but not the unnamed second settlement. It also names the third settlement as 'Gill' (Figure 13.5). Had Blaeu known of a *cille* or chapel on this site and transcribed it as Gill? Or did he mistake the settlement symbol used by Pont for the word 'Gill'? There is no indication today of any remains of a chapel within the machair of Aisgernis or Frobost, although Blaeu's 'Gill' settlement is in the approximate location of Frobost Sites 45–46.

Site 45

Large quantities of plain ware have been recovered since 1995 from an eroding sand quarry, about 10m in diameter and 2m deep, dug into Site 45, a mound about 40m in diameter and 3m high (NF 7286 2569). A few decorated

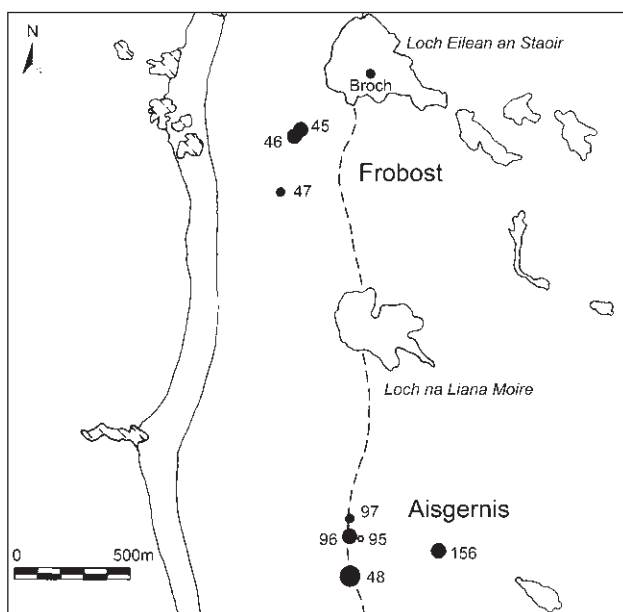


Figure 13.1. Map showing locations of the sites on Frobost and Aisgernis machair

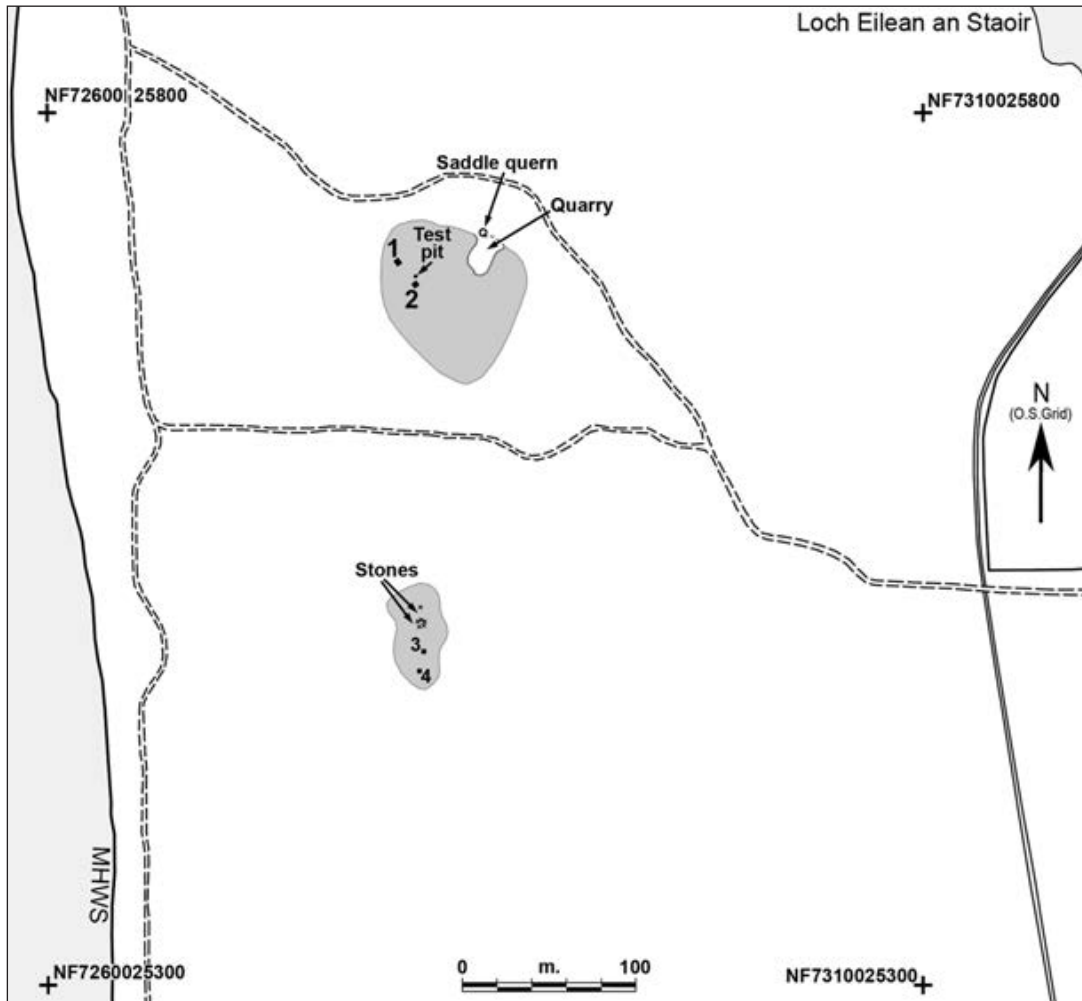


Figure 13.2. The locations of test pits and the sand quarry on Frobost machair



Figure 13.3. The eroding quarry edge at Frobost Site 45, viewed from the east



Figure 13.4. A broken saddle quern in the foreground and the quarry behind at Frobost Site 45, viewed from the north

sherds hint at some Middle Iron Age occupation whilst 'wiped' sherds and flaring rims indicate a Pictish-period (pre-Viking Late Iron Age) presence. The discovery of a Norse-period bone pin in this quarry is the only indication of activity from that date.

Site 46

Adjoining Site 45, to its west, is a second large mound (NF 7282 2568), also about 40m in diameter and 3m high, in the top of which can be seen a few blocks of quarried stone. Two shallow trial trenches, Trench 1 and Trench 2,

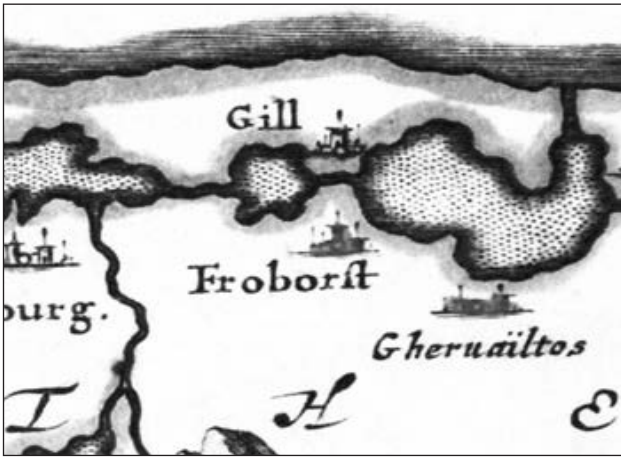


Figure 13.5. Detail from Blaue's 1654 map (north is to the right), showing Frobost between Dalabrog (to the south) and Gearraidh Bhailteas (to the north). The place-name 'Gill' (either 'cille' or a typographic mistake) marks a settlement in the location of Frobost Sites 45 and 46

and a smaller test pit were dug in June 1998 in order to date the mound's upper layers. Trench 1 (3.30m NW-SE by 1.50m SW-NE by 0.40m deep) was located on the mound's northwestern slope whilst Trench 2 (1m square and 0.48m deep) was dug into the top of the mound 13m south-southeast of Trench 1. The 0.30m-square test pit was dug midway between the two.

Within Trench 1 the topsoil and the layer of grey/brown sand immediately below it were heavily disturbed by roots. There were considerable quantities of animal bone from these disturbed layers but very little pottery. A rim sherd may date to the Norse period. The trench cut across a northeast-southwest line of stones but these appear not to have been part of a structure. The trench was dug no deeper than 0.40m so as to minimize damage to stratified layers below those affected by root action.

Trench 2 was a 1m × 1m square trench. Below the topsoil there was a brown shelly sand containing animal bone and a few conjoining pieces of Norse-period pottery, found at a depth of about 0.30m within a brown soil layer that was excavated to 0.48m deep.

The small test pit measured 0.30m by 0.30m and was dug to a depth of 0.50m. No finds were made.

Site 47

This large mound (NF 7280 2547), formerly about 80m in diameter and up to 4m high, has been largely obscured by deep sand dunes and is deeply eroded in its centre where there is now a large, grassed-over blow-out or quarry within which six large stones lie. Shells have been found in rabbit holes to the north and east of this hollow. Sherds of pottery came from a rabbit scrape to its south. One of these has a filled chevron motif of Middle Iron Age date.

Two 1m-square test trenches were dug on the south side of the hollow to obtain further dating evidence. One of these, Trench 3, was located on the slope of this

hollow. Beneath 0.50m of windblown sand there was a homogeneous layer of brown sand with shells 0.90m deep and capped with a 0.05m-thick dense shelly layer. Only two small pieces of bone were found in this layer.

Trench 4 was dug 10m to the south of Trench 3 but was abandoned after 0.50m depth of windblown sand. No occupation layers were encountered.

Site 210

This midden (NF 729 259) was located in 1987, about 200m to the north of Sites 45 and 46, but has not since been re-identified. It produced sherds, pumice, iron and a small copper alloy sheet (12mm × 7mm with two 1mm holes drilled at either end). Further investigation may reveal whether this is a settlement from the Norse period.

The pottery

Mike Parker Pearson

Site 45

There are 199 sherds (2,272.3g) of which four are decorated, 13 are rims and seven are base fragments (Figure 13.6). Six of the rims are thin, flaring forms (four flat, one round and one flat with round corners). Six sherds are from thicker, flaring or concave rims (four flat, one round and one flat with round corners) and one is sharply everted. Of the bases, six are simple and steep-angled. The four decorated sherds include two with S-shaped cordons from around the belly of the pot (one of these is heavily burnt). One sherd is decorated with a curved linear incision and another has a narrow cordon at the neck of the vessel.

The pots were made using the tongue-and-groove technique of fitting slabs of clay together. This is characteristic of the Pictish period (c. AD 300–800), as is the flaring, concave shape of all but one of the rims (Lane 1990: 120–3, illus. 7.3). The everted rim is characteristic of the third–fourth centuries AD and this sherd is heavily abraded. The two sherds decorated with S-shaped cordons – also of Middle Iron Age date – are similarly heavily abraded but the other two decorated pieces are not. The assemblage from the sand quarry within Site 45 is thus predominantly from the Pictish period with some Middle Iron Age material that is probably residual.

Site 46

A single rim sherd (4.3g) from Trench 1 is from a convex vessel with a flat rim with round corners (Figure 13.6). A large base sherd (115.2g) from Trench 2 has a single horizontal line of finger-channelling (Figure 13.6). Its thickness, channelling and overlap construction are consistent with Norse-period convex bowls and it matches vessels from the Cille Pheadair Norse-period farmstead (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 244; Parker Pearson *et al.* forthcoming). The remaining nine sherds (15.8g) are surface finds from the mound and are unremarkable except for two rim sherds (Figure 13.6) from convex vessels with flat rims with rounded corners.

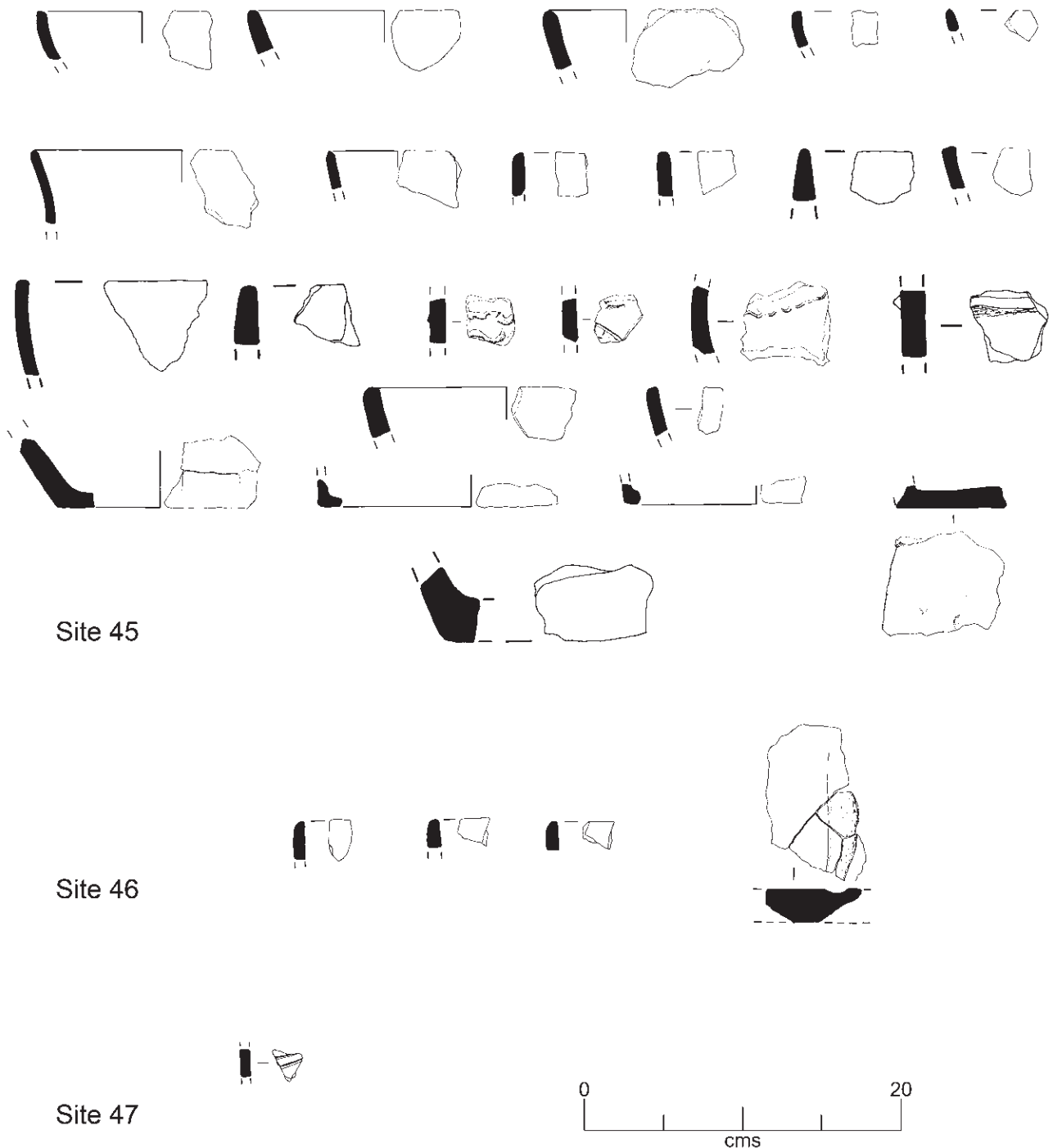


Figure 13.6. Pottery from Frobost Sites 45, 46 and 47

Site 47

There are just four sherds (21.2g) from this site, all from unstratified contexts. One is decorated with three incised lines that form the converging elements of a filled chevron (Figure 13.6) and can be securely dated to the Middle Iron Age.

Other artefacts (Site 45)

Mike Parker Pearson

There is a small assemblage of bone and antler tools and

stone and iron artefacts recovered from the surface of the sand quarry (Figure 13.7).

Bone and antler

Bone pin (74mm long) with 'astragaloid' grooved head, the plan of which has four radiating grooves, forming a Maltese cross, below a central protrusion (Figure 13.7.1). It has a broken-off tip. The cross is formed by four radiating fins, about 2mm from its end. The shank is circular in section and expands from a slender neck into a swollen central portion. A similar groove-headed bone pin was found on

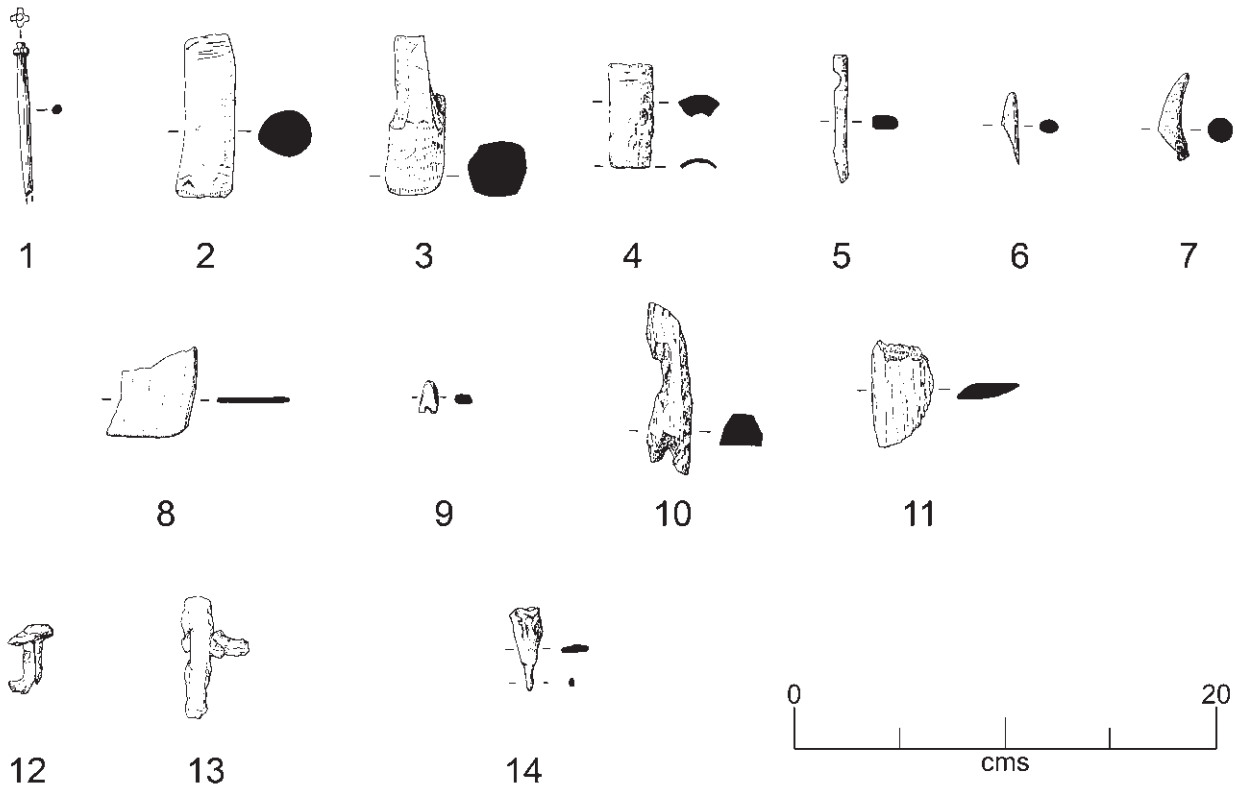


Figure 13.7. Bone, antler and iron artefacts from Frobost Sites 45 and 46

the floor of a late 11th-century longhouse at Cille Pheadair (Paterson in Parker Pearson *et al.* forthcoming: SF1974). According to Caroline Paterson, 'the form of this pin-head with its astragaloid head has its best parallels in metalwork stickpins, with copper-alloy examples of this class having been excavated from late 12th to early 13th-century contexts in Waterford (Scully 1997: 442, fig. 15.2.17). Bone parallels include an example from possible Late Iron Age levels at A'Cheardach Mhor [Young and Richardson 1960] but the length and swollen hip of this example and another parallel from Cnip, Lewis suggest a Norse date is more likely (Foster 1990: fig. 13, 328)'.

Antler handles. The three examples include a complete item (76mm × 27mm dia.; Figure 13.7.2), a near-complete handle (75mm × 28mm dia.; Figure 13.7.3) and a fragment of a third (51mm × c.25mm dia.; Figure 13.7.4).

Drilled antler peg (61mm × 12mm; Figure 13.7.5). Its tip is broken off and it has split longitudinally and across the 7mm-dia. hole near its sub-rectangular sectioned, proximal end.

Antler tips. There are two broken-off antler tips. One is highly polished (Figure 13.7.6) and the other has an irregular pattern of striations down one side (Figure 13.7.7).

Bone scraper (44mm × 38mm × 3mm dia.; Figure 13.7.8). Two worked edges, at right angles, are visible on this broken fragment of a tool made from a cattle scapula. One edge is smoothed flat and the other is bevelled on both sides to form a sharp edge.

Bone needle. The proximal end of a needle, broken across its eye (7mm × 4mm × 1.5mm dia. with the eye 2mm dia.; Figure 13.7.9).

Bone point. The broken end of a bone point (58mm × 11mm) made from a split longbone, probably a sheep metapodial (not illustrated).

Whale bone toggle or peg. This broken artefact (81mm × 21mm × 15mm) has snapped longitudinally and across one end (Figure 13.7.10). It was originally c.30mm wide and was cut by an hourglass-shaped slot (25mm × c.8mm) 19mm from its end.

Whale bone tool. A sliver of a broken tool (50mm × 27mm × 8mm) with two flat surfaces at an oblique angle to each other (Figure 13.7.11).

Whale bone artefact. Two fragments of whale bone (52mm × 41mm × 13mm and 44mm × 34mm × 12mm) with one of the sides smoothed (not illustrated).

Iron

Nail. An incomplete, bent nail (32mm long) with a square-sectioned shank (5mm × 5mm) and a flat, oval head (21mm × 15mm; Figure 13.7.12).

Tapered strip. An incomplete tapered strip (57mm × 16mm–10mm; Figure 13.7.13). It was originally thought to be a knife but does not have the appropriate cutting edge in section.

Riveted plate. An incomplete plate (16mm × 10mm × 3mm) broken off across the rivet hole (5mm dia.). It is probably a rove for a clenched nail (not illustrated).

Slag

There are two pieces of iron smithing slag from Site 45. One is a fragment from the base of the furnace.

Flint

There are six pieces of flint, three of which retain their cortex and are fragments of beach pebbles. One of the other pieces has the heavy edge damage of a strike-a-light.

Stone

A broken saddle quern (400mm × 380mm; Figure 13.4) was found in the base of the sand quarry, on the northern edge of the former settlement mound, in May 2007. It is made of gneiss. Saddle querns normally date to the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age and its presence on this site suggests an early phase of occupation in the first millennium BC or slightly earlier. This broken quernstone remains *in situ*.

Other artefacts (Site 46)

The only non-ceramic find is a bone point or peg (35mm long) whose tip has been broken off (Figure 13.7.14).

Other artefacts (Site 47)

A broken fragment of iron plate (24mm × 22mm × 3.5mm) and an unidentifiable piece of burnt animal long bone are the only non-ceramic finds from unstratified contexts. Two other pieces of unidentified animal bone were found in the shell layer within Trench 3.

The animal bones

Jacqui Mulville and Richard Madgwick

The assemblage comprised 28 recorded fragments of bone, all of which were derived from the trenches of Site 46, associated with Norse-period pottery. For methodology, see Chapter 11. The majority (25) of the bone fragments are of domestic species, dominated by cattle, with two bird bones (one crane?) and a single fish vertebra present (Table 13.1). There is evidence for both adult and juvenile cattle, and one old sheep, represented by an extremely worn maxilla. The small size of this assemblage allows few conclusions to be drawn but the species present are similar to those found at other Late Iron Age and Norse-period sites.

| Site no. | Cattle | Sheep/goat | Domestic pig | Sheep/pig size | Fish | Bird | Total |
|----------|--------|------------|--------------|----------------|------|------|-------|
| 46 | 16 | 7 | 2 | | 1 | 2 | 28 |

Table 13.1. Animal bones recovered at Frobost

Aisgernis

At Aisgernis (Askernish) there is a line of low settlement mounds occupying a north–south sand ridge between the machair and the peatland (NF72SW 21). One of these (Site 96) can be dated to the Medieval period as the result of digging seven small test pits and one test trench. Another (Site 97) is likely to date to this period as well, on the basis of another test trench. Site 48 has produced much pottery from rabbit scrapes and, from test trenching, a complete rotary quernstone, indicating a date during the Medieval period or later. Another test trench was dug in Site 232, a site not recorded until 1998, but no diagnostic material was found. To the south, along the ridge, Sites 234 and 233 are probably low settlement mounds; they remain uninvestigated. Site 233 is known as the ‘Old Town’. Inland from Site 96 there is a fallen standing stone (Site 95) and, in the garden of Askernish House, a shell midden (Site 156).

The origin of this place-name is not as clear as that of Frobost. None the less, ‘-nis’ probably derives from the Norse word ‘ness’. There is a report of bone pins being found on the machair of Askernish Golf Course but no sites have been found there, possibly because of a combination of its many sand dunes and the prevention of rabbit burrowing on this part of the machair.

Aisgernis is not named on the maps of Pont or Blauie but there is an unnamed settlement marked that is probably identifiable as Aisgernis. It is marked on these early maps as lying just west of the inland waterway and immediately north of a small freshwater loch. This approximates very well to the locations of Sites 48, 96, 97 and 232 on the northern edge of a reed swamp and at the easternmost limit of the machair.

The pre-Clearance settlement of Aisgernis was mapped by William Bald in 1805 on the edge of the peatland beside the walled garden to the west of Askernish House, and the old road out to the machair track can be seen running north of the present road. Between them, close to the present road, is a fallen standing stone (Site 95), just over 2m long and 0.40m wide and thick. It has a pecked groove around one end (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: fig. 24). Whether it lies close to its original location is unknown but there are stories of its former incorporation into the outhouses of Askernish House to which it brought misfortune.

To the west of Askernish House and the standing stone there is a sand ridge that runs north–south, separated from the machair and from the edge of the peatland by short stretches of marsh. On top of this ridge are a series of six low settlement mounds, three of which (Sites 232, 233 and 234) were not recorded until July 1998. A limited trial-trenching programme was carried out by Parker Pearson on Sites 48, 96, 97 and 232 in order to date and characterize them (Figure 13.8). Earth resistivity survey of mounds 96 and 97 by John Raven identified a series of high-resistance anomalies that are likely to represent the remains of stone-walled, rectangular buildings, with the area between the mounds used for rig-and-furrow cultivation (Figure 13.9). Further excavations were carried out on these mounds by Raven during his PhD research (Raven 2005).

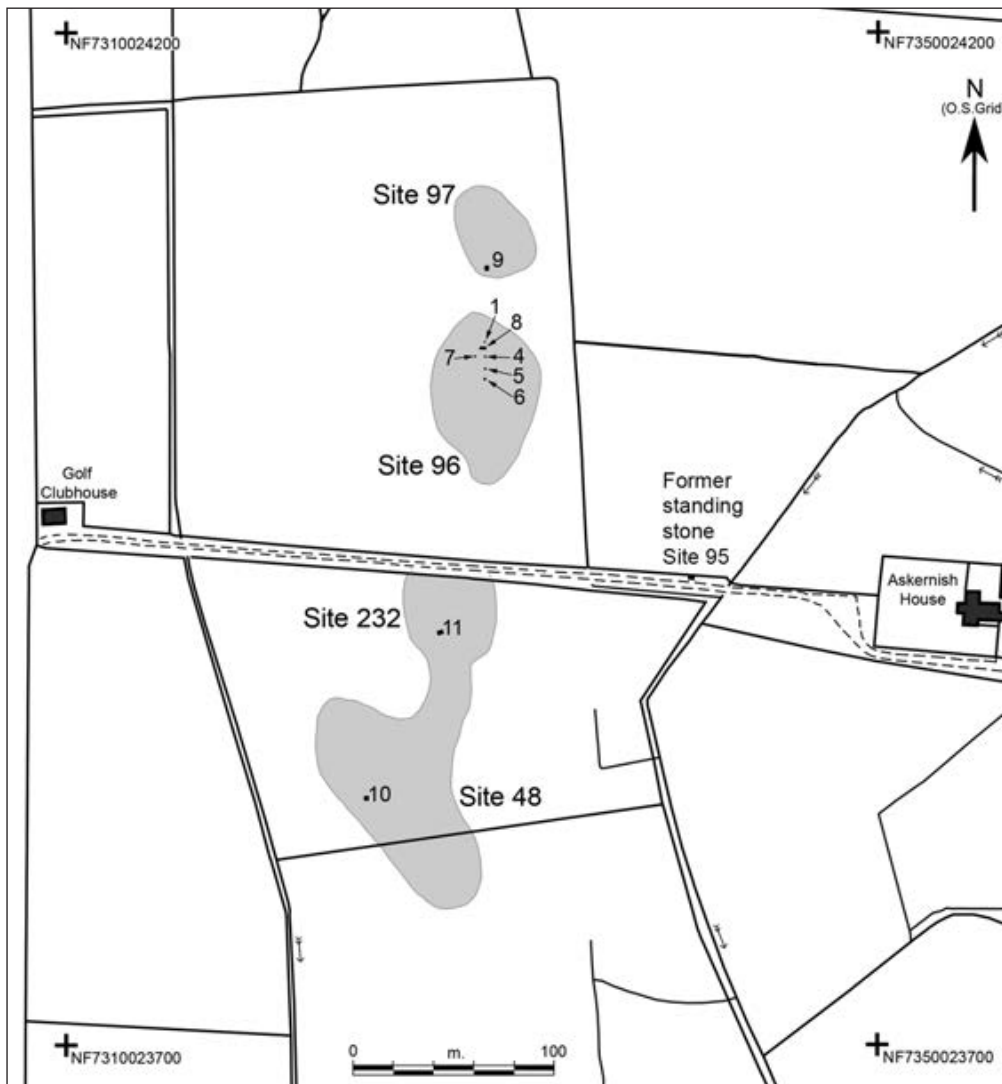


Figure 13.8. The locations of trenches and test pits at Aisgernis

Site 96

This low mound (NF 7328 2402), c.30m in diameter and c.1m high, was identified in June 1996. Despite being ploughed on its west side in 1997, it produced few finds other than shell, animal bone, modern glass and iron. On 15 February 1998 a small trial-trenching exercise was carried out by M. Parker Pearson, J. Symonds and Ramilisonina. Six trenches (each 0.50m × 0.50m) were dug in a north–south line 50m west of and parallel to the north–south open field drain to the east of the site, with a seventh trench to the west of the line. These trenches ran from the middle of the mound to its northern edge.

- The northernmost trench (Trench 1) lay due west of the junction between the north–south and east–west field drains to the east of the site.
- Trench 2 was 2m south of Trench 1.
- Trench 3 was 1m south of Trench 2.
- Trench 4 was 4m south of Trench 3.
- Trench 5 was 5.50m south of Trench 4.
- Trench 6 was 6m south of Trench 5.
- Trench 7 was dug c.5m west of Trench 4.

The southernmost trench (Trench 6) produced a single sherd from the grey sand beneath the topsoil. A small group of sherds, including one with small triangular impressions on the vessel's shoulder and neck, came from a thin orange and black midden layer in Trench 2. Stones in Trench 3 might have belonged to a structure.

The triangle motifs on the sherd from Trench 2 indicated a probable early Post-Medieval date for this material and it was decided to excavate a slightly larger trial trench, Trench 8 (Figure 13.10), in the vicinity of Trench 2, so as to further sample the thin orange midden layer for diagnostic pottery. Trench 8, 2m E-W by 1m N-S, was dug in July 1998 adjacent to Trench 2 (Figure 13.11). Beneath the topsoil (layer 001) there was a 0.30m-thick layer of grey silty sand (layer 002), beneath which was the 0.05m-thick orange midden layer (layer 003). This lay on top of a grey/white sand that was not excavated. A line of four stones in the northwest corner of the trench, set into layer 002, might have formed part of a wall line, possibly the east wall of a structure. Pottery from layers 002 and 003 included sherds with short vertical incisions and with

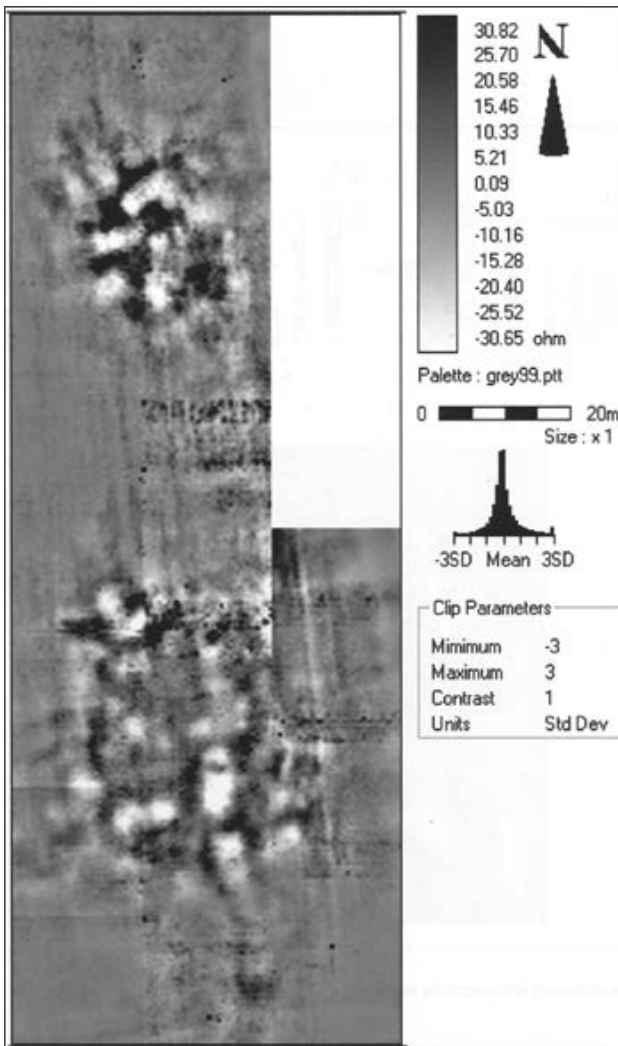


Figure 13.9. The earth resistivity survey of Sites 96 and 97 at Aisgernis

angled incised motifs on the vessel shoulder, similar to those found in Late Medieval/early Post-Medieval contexts at Dun Vulcan (Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999: 199), Bornais Site 89 (see Chapter 16) and Eilean Olabhat (Armit *et al.* 2008).

Site 97

This smaller mound, *c.*20m in diameter and *c.*0.50m high, lies immediately north (NF 7331 2410) of Site 96. It had also produced no diagnostic material other than bone, shell and modern/recent material, having been ploughed in 1997.

In July 1998 a test trench, Trench 9, was excavated on the southern edge of this mound in order to find artefact-rich midden layers without disturbing any structures that may be placed more centrally within the mound. Trench 9 was initially 2m north–south by 1m east–west but it was extended on its west side to 2m N-S by 2m E-W so as to avoid stonework that appeared to form the west wall of a possible building.

Beneath the topsoil (layer 4) there was a grey-orange mixed sand layer (layer 5) through which was cut a shallow



Figure 13.10. Trench 8 on Site 96 at Aisgernis, looking southeast to Askernish House

pit (feature 7) containing disarticulated animal bones within a grey sand (layer 6). Beneath layer 5 there was a grey sand layer (layer 8) with a small amount of pottery. Porcelain was found in the ploughsoil but only earthenware sherds came from layers 5 and 8. None of these sherds are decorated but their thin fabrics and hard-fired surfaces suggest a Late Medieval or early Post-Medieval date.

Site 48

Site 48 is a low mound, about 100m N-S and 70m E-W and *c.*1m high, south of the road (NF 7324 2382). It was found by Don MacPhee in 1995/1996 and this discovery was confirmed by Mary Harman. Known as the 'Hill of the Old Kiln' according to Uilleam Macdonald, it was deliberately flattened earlier this century, hence the long, low shape. To the southwest, about 30m from the mound, drains have been cut *c.*0.50m deep into the waterlogged sand, revealing shells and a piece of land drain tile. The waterlogged conditions provide potential for organic survival close to the settlement mound. Copious but undiagnostic sherds had been recovered from rabbit scrapes in previous years and it was hoped that a trial trench in 1998 might recover more pottery and establish the date of this site.

Trench 10, 2m NE-SW by 1m NW-SE, was dug on the southwest side of the mound, where rabbit scrapes indicated the darkest midden soils, to a depth of *c.*0.70m. Within the

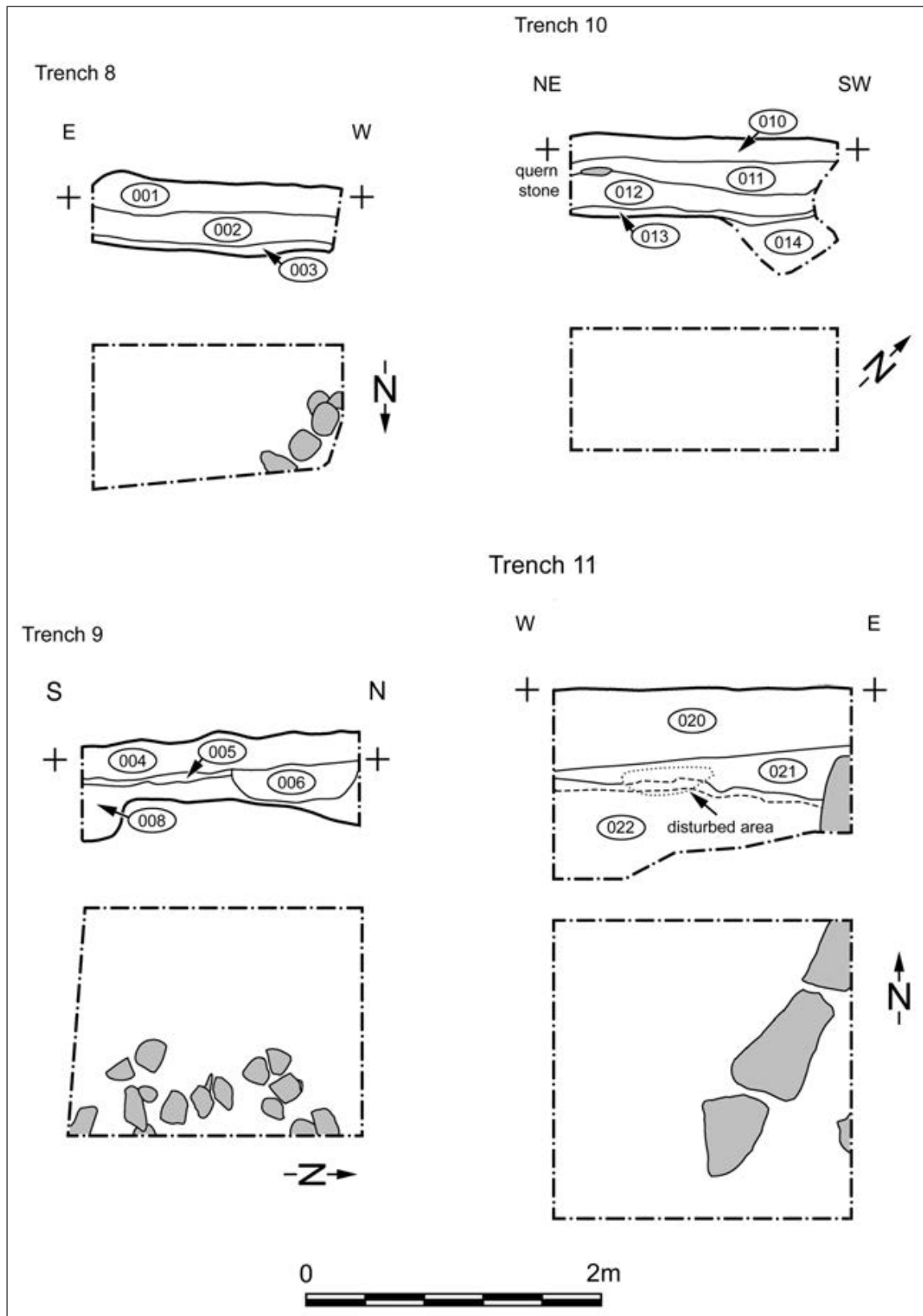


Figure 13.11. Plans and sections for Trenches 8, 9, 10 and 11 at Aisgernis

various layers there were large quantities of animal bones but very few sherds. Below the topsoil (layer 010) there was a light brown sand with shell and bone (layer 011). This lay over a white and black ashy layer at its southeast

end (layer 12) and both lay over a bone- and shell-rich brown-grey sand (layer 013) in the upper part of which was a complete rotary quernstone. Beneath layer 013 was a fine, ashy light grey sand with some animal bones but

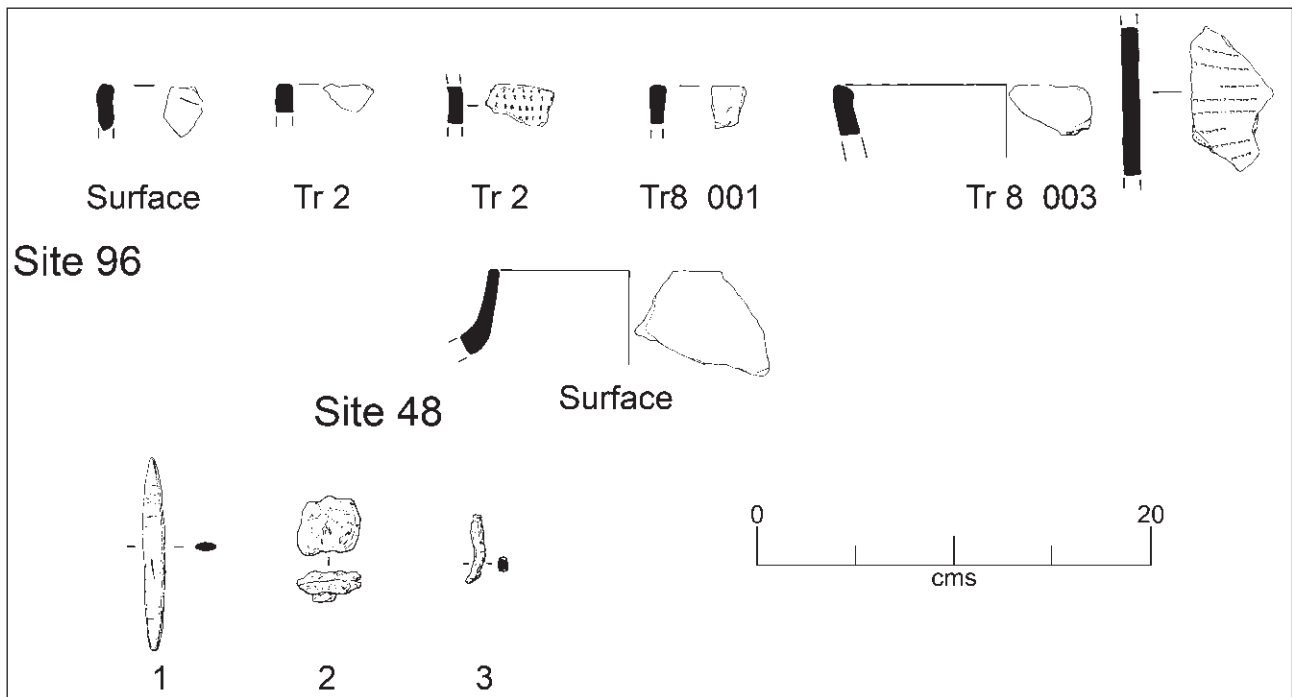


Figure 13.12. The pottery and finds from Aisgernis Sites 48 and 96

few shells (014). This was bottomed in the southeast end and clean sand appears to lie below.

Site 232

This low mound, c.30m in diameter by 0.50m deep, was recognized during the Aisgernis trial-trenching exercise in July 1998 and investigated immediately. It lies immediately south of the gate onto the golf course road within the same field as Site 48. It appears to be a northern extension of Site 48.

Trial Trench 11 (1m square) was dug into the middle of this low mound. It revealed three main layers (topsoil layer 020, mottled sand 021 and beige sand 022) but only two sherds were found, along with shell and bone. A line of three stones (feature 023), running northeast–southwest, may be the remains of a house wall. The site remains undated.

Sites 233, 234 and 156

In the field to the south of Site 48 lies Site 234, a long low mound c.60m north–south by 20m east–west and 0.30m high. Shell from the only rabbit scrape on it suggests that it is a settlement mound. Three fields to the south of Site 48 is Site 233, a low mound c.30m in diameter and about 0.30m high. According to Uilleam Macdonald, this is the site of the ‘Old Town’ which has been robbed of its stones. Since there is no rabbit activity or other surface disturbance, the oral tradition cannot be confirmed as yet. Both these sites are undated as is Site 156, a midden deposit of shells east of Askernish House on the peatland. Site 233 lies just inside the township of Gearraidh Sheile and may be the machair precursor of the peatland settlement of Gearraidh Sheile that is marked on the 1805 Bald map as being in ruins.

The pottery

Mike Parker Pearson

Site 48

Some 56 sherds (297.2g) are from unstratified contexts, recovered from rabbit holes between 1996 and 1999. The pottery is entirely undecorated and includes a single rim, slightly everted with a high collar and a flat top (Figure 13.12, surface) and two snapped pieces of footed bases (not illustrated). Nearly half of the sherds (25 items) have hard-fired, black surfaces. One sherd has evidence of manufacture using overlapping clay slabs, a technique found in the Norse period. Within Trench 10, two sherds came from 010 (15g) and one from 012 (5g). The scarcity of sherds, the presence of footed bases, lack of decoration and high proportion of hard fabrics (27 out of 59 sherds) indicate a likely date after the end of the Norse period in the 13th–14th centuries, comparable with assemblages from Phase 9 at Cille Pheadair (Bond forthcoming) and from the latest layers on mound 3 at Bornais (Sharples 2005: 171–2).

Site 96

Ten sherds (29.8g) were found on the surface of the mound. They include a snapped everted rim (not illustrated) and a round rim (Figure 13.12, surface) that may also come from an everted form. Of the nine sherds (33.1g) from Trench 2, one is from the neck of a vessel with an everted rim and its exterior is decorated with four horizontal rows of small impressed triangles (Figure 13.12, Trench 2). Another is an uneven flat rim (Figure 13.12, Trench 2). There was a single sherd (4.1g) from Trench 6. There were 13 earthenware sherds (29.6g) from the topsoil (001) in Trench 8, of which

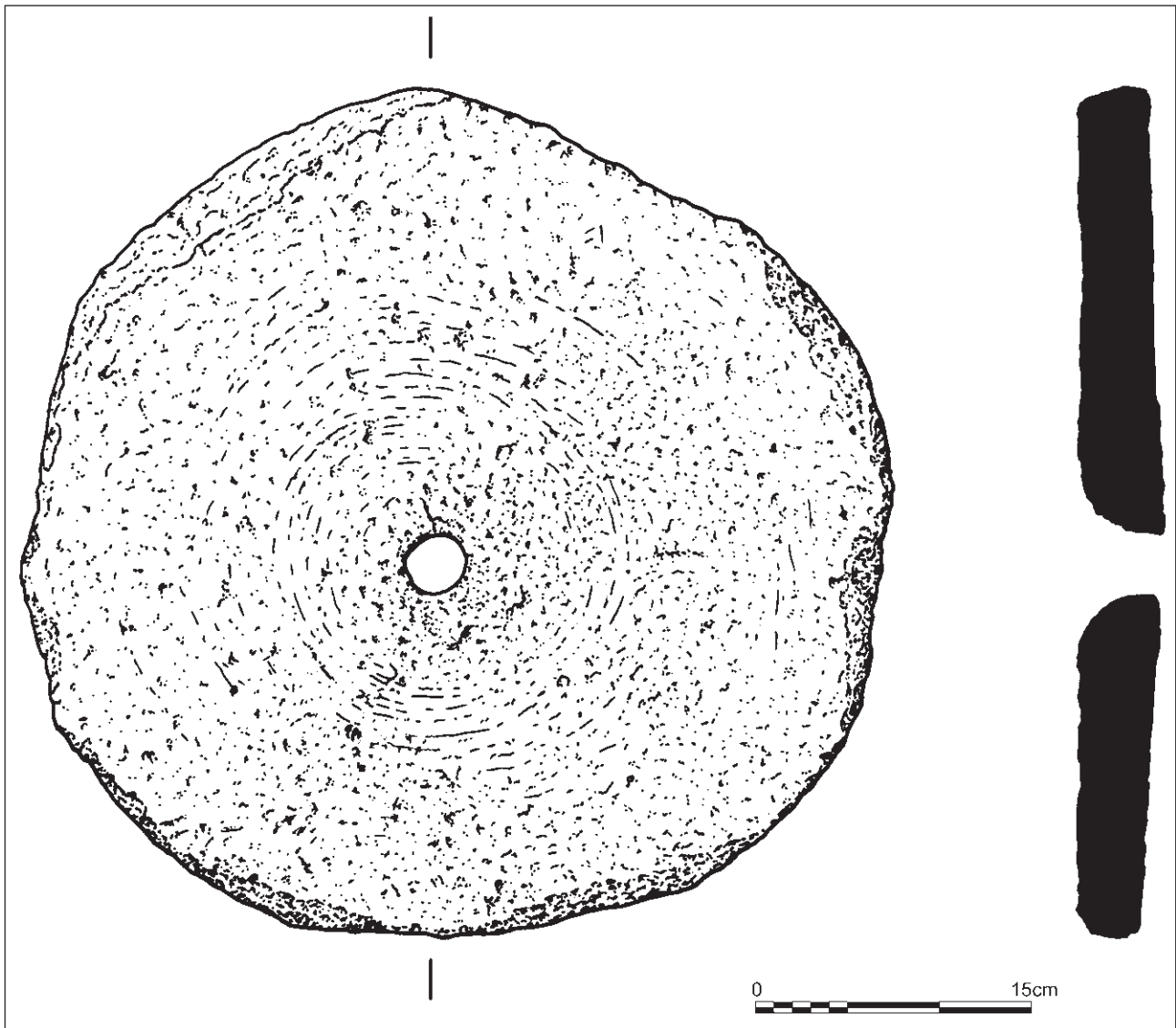


Figure 13.13. The rotary quernstone from Aisgernis Site 48

one is a flat rim (Figure 13.12, Trench 8 layer 001). There is also a pearlware body sherd from 001, possibly from an early 19th-century saucer (see below). There were five sherds (22.9g) from 002 and nine (195.1g) from 003, both in Trench 8. One of the sherds in layer 003 is from a concave, round rim (Figure 13.12, Trench 8 layer 003). This small number of sherds prevents any firm characterization but the high proportion of hard, black fabrics (27 out of 47, including five with red-orange surfaces) and the decorated sherd may indicate a date in the 14th–15th centuries.

Site 97

Three sherds (6.2g) were found on the surface of the mound and another 12 sherds (41g) came from the topsoil (layer 004) within Trench 9. There were single sherds in the lower layers 005 and 008 (2.4g and 5.1g respectively). All are plain body sherds except for a base sherd (featureless and of medium angle) from the surface. Hard, black fabrics characterise 10 of the 17 sherds.

Site 232

Two sherds (7.8g), both of hard black fabric, were recovered from layer 021 in Trench 11.

Factory wares

David Barker

Site 96, Trench 8, layer 001. A pearlware body sherd, possibly from a saucer, broadly 1780–1830 but more likely to be c.1800–1830.

Other artefacts

Mike Parker Pearson

Glass

Site 96. A fragment of olive-green bottle glass from the surface of the mound. A sliver of clear glass came from the topsoil (layer 001) of Trench 8.

| Site no. | Phase | Sheep/goat | Cattle | Domestic pig | Cat | Red deer | Cervid sp | Cow/horse size | Sheep/pig size | Bird | Fish | Total |
|----------|-------------------|------------|-----------|--------------|----------|-----------|-----------|----------------|----------------|----------|-----------|------------|
| 48 | 13th–14th century | 24 | 14 | 3 | | 16 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 14 | 79 |
| 97 | Late–Post med | 1 | 2 | | | | | 1 | | | 3 | 7 |
| 96 | 14th–15th | 24 | 9 | 3 | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 3 | | 5 | 47 |
| | Total | 49 | 25 | 6 | 1 | 17 | 1 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 22 | 133 |

Table 13.2. Animal bones recovered at Aisgernis

| | Layer | Anatomy | | | | | | | Age |
|-------------------|-------|----------------------|-------|---|--|---|---|---|--------------|
| Sheep/Goat | 013 | Deciduous premolar 4 | Right | g | | | | | |
| | 011 | Mandible | Left | | | f | f | F | 3-4 years |
| Pig | 013 | Mandible | Right | | | f | d | c | E |
| | | | | | | | | | 21-27 months |

Table 13.3. Ageing of teeth of sheep/goat and pig in Trench 10 on Site 48 at Aisgernis

Worked bone

Site 48, Trench 10 layer 011. A complete double-ended bone point (97mm × 11mm × 2mm) with well-polished ends (Figure 13.12.1).

Iron

Site 48, surface. An incomplete clench nail (14mm long with a rectangular rove 30mm × 25mm; Figure 13.12.2).

Site 96, surface. A complete clench nail (61mm long) with a circular head (24mm dia.) and a broken rove (18mm × 17mm). The shaft is heavily corroded but the distance between nail head and rove is 18mm.

Site 96, Trench 2. An incomplete square-sectioned (4mm × 4mm) nail 34mm long with a circular head (15mm dia.).

Site 96, surface. Unidentified iron lump (34mm × 22mm × 18mm).

Site 97, Trench 9 layer 004. An incomplete nail shank (44mm long) with a circular cross-section (5mm dia.; Figure 13.12.3).

Slag

Site 96. A fragment of slag (20.7g) from the surface of the mound and another from Trench 6 (11.8g) are fuel ash slag.

Stone

Site 48, Trench 10 layer 013. This rotary quernstone (Figure 13.13) is 510mm in diameter and between 20mm and 35mm thick, with a single, central hole 32mm dia. It is made of local gneiss and, although one face is smooth from wear, it is a relatively poorly made piece. It could date as early as the Middle Iron Age–Late Iron Age though its thinness suggests that it may be Medieval or later. The

| | Layer | Anatomy | | |
|-----------------|-------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| Sheep | | | GLI | Glm |
| | 013 | Astragalus | 26.5 | 25.0 |
| Red Deer | | | | |
| | 013 | Astragalus | 45.0 | 42.2 |
| Cattle | | | GLPe | Bp |
| | 012 | 2nd Phalanx | 35.8 | 25.2 |

Table 13.4. Measurements of astragalus and phalanx bones in Trench 10 on Site 48 at Aisgernis

lack of channels cut into the grinding surface suggests that it is pre-19th century.

Fired clay

Site 232, Trench 11 layer 020 (topsoil). A small fragment of brick, probably modern.

The animal bones*Jacqui Mulville and Richard Madgwick*

The material is presented in Table 13.2, with measurements and ageing data in Tables 13.3 and 13.4. For methodology, see Chapter 11. Attention is drawn to unusual or interesting specimens. The assemblage comprised 133 identified specimens of bone. The majority of material was recovered from Site 48 (13th–14th century), Site 96 (14th–15th), with smaller quantities from Site 232 and the Late Medieval or early Post-Medieval Site 97 (Table 13.2). A small number of fragments bore evidence of butchery (4%) and a single bone was burnt.

In the larger samples (Sites 48 and 96), there is a predominance of sheep, with lesser quantities of cattle and pig present as found on many Uist sites. In addition, Site 48 (13th–14th centuries) has the majority of an articulating red deer left hock joint (calcaneum, navicular cuboid, cunniform and proximal metatarsal) and a right astragalus, as well as bones of bird and fish. Site 96 has a single record of juvenile left cat mandible and a fragment of butchered red deer scapula, bearing a cut and a chop mark.

The small size of this assemblage allows few conclusions to be drawn. The red deer finds are of interest as they are the most recent skeletal evidence for red deer; they are reported to have become extinct in the 18th century before being reintroduced around 1974.

Conclusion

The three settlement mounds on Frobost machair appear to represent a continuous settlement sequence over a thousand years or more from the Middle Iron Age to the Norse period, beginning with Site 47 (Middle Iron Age), followed by Site 45 (Later Iron Age or Pictish period), Site 238 (Norse and possibly Pictish) and by Site 46 (Norse period). It is likely that this settlement shifted eastwards during the Medieval period to the adjacent blacklands where the recent and present township of Frobost is located.

The three mounds at Aisgernis (Sites 48, 96 and 97) were probably occupied, either separately or relatively continuously, from the Early Medieval to the Post-Medieval period. Raven states that he found Middle Iron Age pottery as well, suggesting a potentially longer sequence of occupation (Raven 2005: 476–8). These mounds certainly provide a valuable record of pre-Clearance *bailtean* on South Uist's machair.

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14 Excavations at Cille Donnain church

Mike Parker Pearson with contributions by Liz Pieksma and Helen Smith

Summary

The site of the church and disused burial ground was rediscovered in 1989 (Fleming and Woolf 1992; see Chapter 3). The complex, located on a promontory and island within Loch Chill Donnain Uarach (NF7330 2835; NMRS Number NF72NW 29; Figure 14.1), is comparable to the political centre of Finlaggan on Islay and might have been the seat of a bishop (Fleming and Woolf 1992: 329). The shape of the church is comparable to plans of others in western and northern Scotland and may be dated to around 1100.

Two small trenches were excavated over three days in June 1995 as part of a special ‘open weekend’ to encourage public involvement in archaeology on South Uist. One of the trenches (‘loch-side trench’) was located on the loch edge on the south side of the promontory and the other (‘top trench’) was placed across Fleming’s Building C and the eastern part of the platform on which the church complex is located (Figure 14.2). The purpose of the loch edge trench was to recover waterlogged deposits of rubbish dumped from the promontory complex. In the deposits contemporary with the platform were the remains of a leather artefact and ceramics including a piece of Medieval green-glazed pottery.



Figure 14.1. Cille Donnain promontory viewed from the west.

The trench on top of the platform (‘top trench’) revealed that Building C, supposedly the earliest of a range of cells north of the church, did not exist as such. Although the putative walls of this structure are visible on the surface, on excavation they were seen to be lines of stone uprights that were not part of a single building. Instead they are interpreted as boundary walls of a late date in the sequence, perhaps yard walls. They are set in a deep, richly organic soil which must have been imported to the promontory from nearby infields. The adjacent Building D, and presumably the others in the range of four cells, was constructed on top of this organic soil which contained pottery including Medieval wheelturned green-glazed sherds dating to the 13th to 14th/15th centuries. The buildings and this part of the platform presumably date to the later Medieval period, somewhat later than the church. The organic soil was deposited against a rubble slope that might have formed the edge of the platform on which the church was built.

The excavation

The aims of the excavation

Since the site’s rediscovery there had been considerable interest in finding out more about its date and character. The publication of the survey results raised a series of questions and possibilities about the site’s ecclesiastical importance, about the purpose of the cells, the lifestyles of the inhabitants, the fluctuation of the water levels in the loch and the putative existence of a large broch or dun beneath the church site (Fleming and Woolf 1992).

The excavations were also carried out as the focus of a public presentational project on the Vikings and Christianity, accompanied by a special exhibition in the Kildonan Museum. Although relatively few people made the long walk to the site, the museum exhibition was well attended.

The trench locations were carefully chosen. Since the church was identified with some degree of certainty it was felt that other questions might be answered more profitably

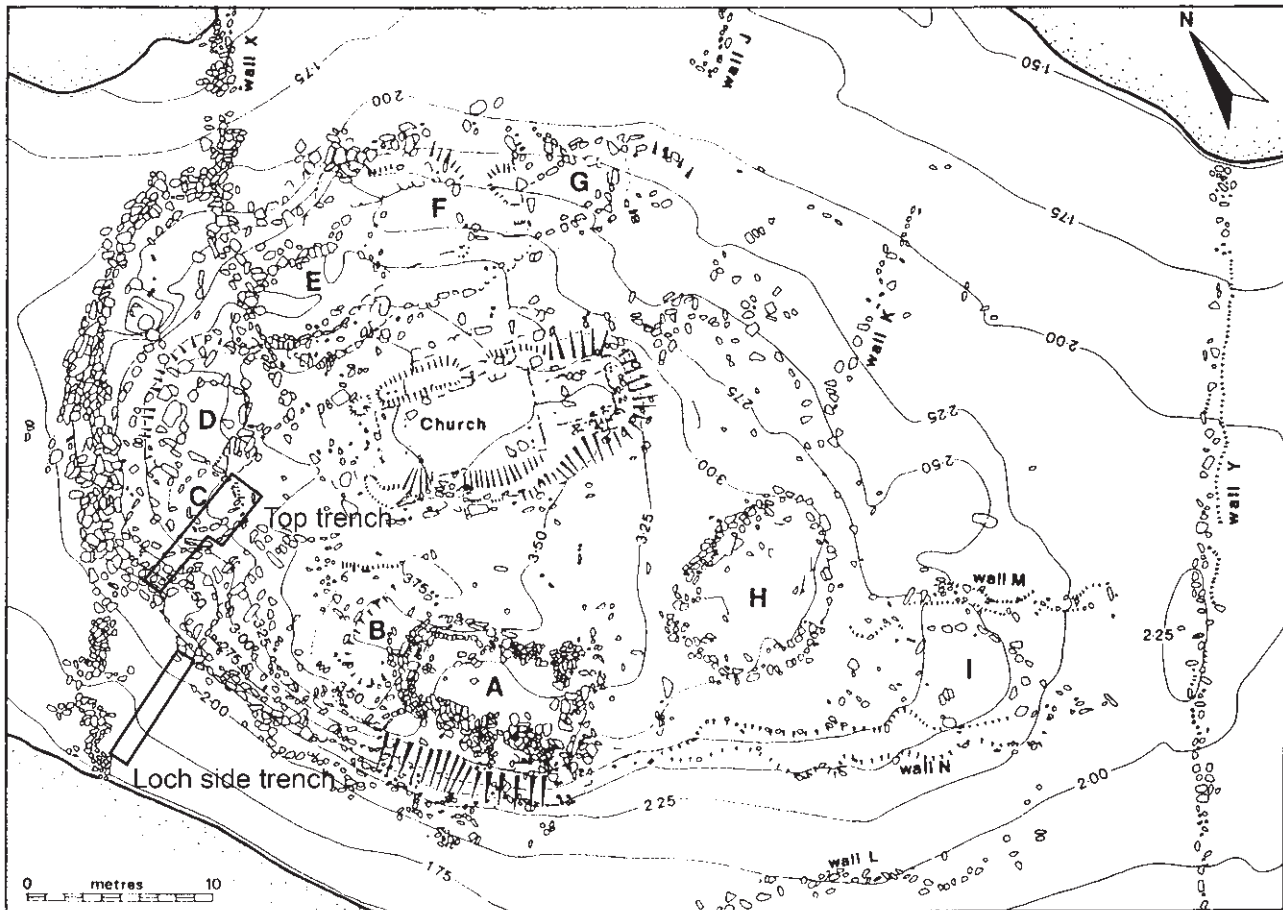


Figure 14.2. Earthwork plan showing the location of the two excavation trenches

with a minimum of disturbance. The existence of a burial ground around the church is also accepted since it is marked as such on the 1881 Ordnance Survey Map and is known locally as the *cladh* (cemetery).

As a result, the areas chosen for investigation were the range of cells, the stone platform on which the complex sat and the potentially waterlogged levels at the loch's edge. In this way we hoped to characterize and date the various activities and buildings accompanying the church, and to gain some idea of the social and economic importance of the complex.

There were specific questions that the location of the top trench, over Building C, was designed to answer:

1. What was the date and purpose of the earliest cell in the range?
2. What was the date of the other cells?
3. Were these cells built on a platform surviving from an earlier dun or broch?

The specific questions to be answered by the trench down by the loch side were:

1. What could the rubbish thrown from the church complex tell us about the activities and lifestyle of those living there?
2. How suitable might these waterlogged layers be for

the preservation of a wide range of organic remains, notably domestic rubbish and insect remains, allowing analysis of lifestyle and environment?

3. Was there any evidence of earlier activity associated with the putative dun?
4. Could changes in water level be ascertained from the sequence of deposits?

The top trench – Building C

The top trench was 8m long, aligned east-northeast–west-southwest, and was widened to 2m in the easternmost 3m of the trench over 'Building C' (Figure 14.3). Its west end reached the edge of the stone platform or 'dun', immediately north of the putative entrance or slipway (Figure 14.4). Beneath the dense surface cover of nettles, coarse grass and flag irises and the topsoil cleaning layers of 100, 101 and 102 were two distinctive soils. Within and immediately west of Building C was a homogeneous dark brown fine loam with few stones (104). Along with a modest assemblage of small pottery sherds, animal bones survived but were in too poor condition for their recovery to be worthwhile.

Sandwiched within this layer of dark organic soil was a thin layer of light brown sandy loam full of winkle



Figure 14.3. The top trench viewed from the east



Figure 14.4. The west end of the top trench viewed from the north



Figure 14.5. The top trench viewed from the west.

and limpet shells but with no other cultural debris (106). This was probably the same as layer 103, a shelly deposit amongst the stones forming the 'dun' wall. Another small patch of soil with shells (105), 0.40m in diameter and 0.15m thick, was also sandwiched within 104. Layer 104 did not change much with depth except that animal bones were more common below the top 0.20m. Excavation of this deposit stopped at a depth of about 0.50m although it clearly continued much deeper (Figure 14.5).

A series of stone features were set into this dark organic soil (104). The most evident were two lines of stones set on edge, one running east–west (107) and the other north–south (108) forming a corner within the trench. Parallel to 107 but outside the south side of the trench was another apparent line of stones set on their sides. Feature 107 might, therefore, have been the north side of a simple field wall faced with upended stones and originally filled with turf. It was evident that these stones had been mistaken on the surface for the walls of a putative cell, 'Building C', lying underneath Building D, whereas they are part of a more ephemeral and late feature.

The southwest corner of Building D (110) was located in the east end of the trench. The two large stones forming its corner were deeply bedded into layer 104 and were clearly later than this layer. At the west end of the trench the edge of the 'dun' and its associated shell layer (103) were separated from the rest of the trench by another alignment of stones on edge (111) running north–south. This was bedded into the shell layer (103, 106) sandwiched within 104.

The only feature earlier than the deep layer of organic

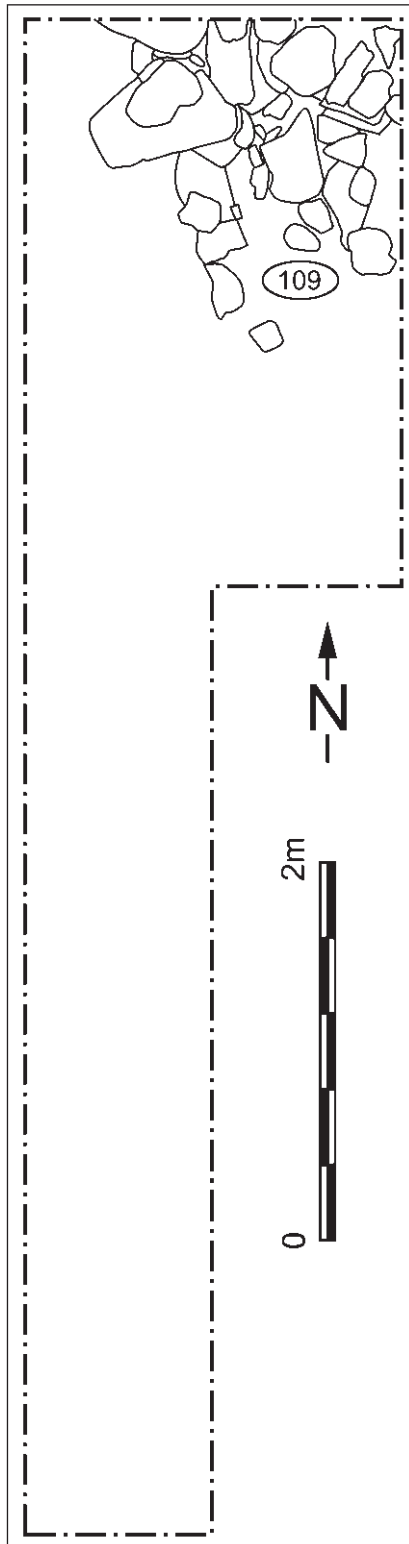


Figure 14.6. Plan of layer 109 within the top trench

soil (104) was a layer of heaped stone (109) pitched downwards from east to west at an angle of about 45° (Figure 14.6). There was no evidence of a wall face to indicate that this rubble had tumbled from a boundary wall around the churchyard. Instead, it might have formed the edge of a platform on which the church was originally constructed.



Figure 14.7. The loch-side trench viewed from the west

The loch-side trench

This was cut on a similar axis to the top trench and was 1m wide and 8m long, stretching from the base of the 'dun' wall to the water's edge (Figure 14.7). It was located immediately south of the putative entrance or slipway. Beneath the turf (layer 001) was a layer of recently grown peat (002) in the west half of the trench and reaching a maximum thickness of 0.20m at the west end. This entire half of the trench was located in an area submerged during the winter. At the base of the thin peat layer was a brown coarse sand (003). At the interface between these layers 002 and 003 were a short wooden stake (SF1001) and a decayed strip of leather (SF1000), along with animal bone and pottery. In the top of layer 003 and directly under the leather artefact there was a thin and slightly curved sheet (c.0.60m across) of a brown, brittle material. This might have been a localized layer of mineralization formed on a thin mat of iris roots, since it was not apparently organic. Within layer 003 there was a broken blue glass bead (SF1003). At the east end of the trench, a shallow layer of coarse grey sand and soil (004) also lay over layer 003. Pottery from layer 004 included a piece of wheelturned green-glazed ware, similar to sherds from 104. Layers 003 and 004 butted up against the 'dun' wall and were thus laid down after it was constructed.

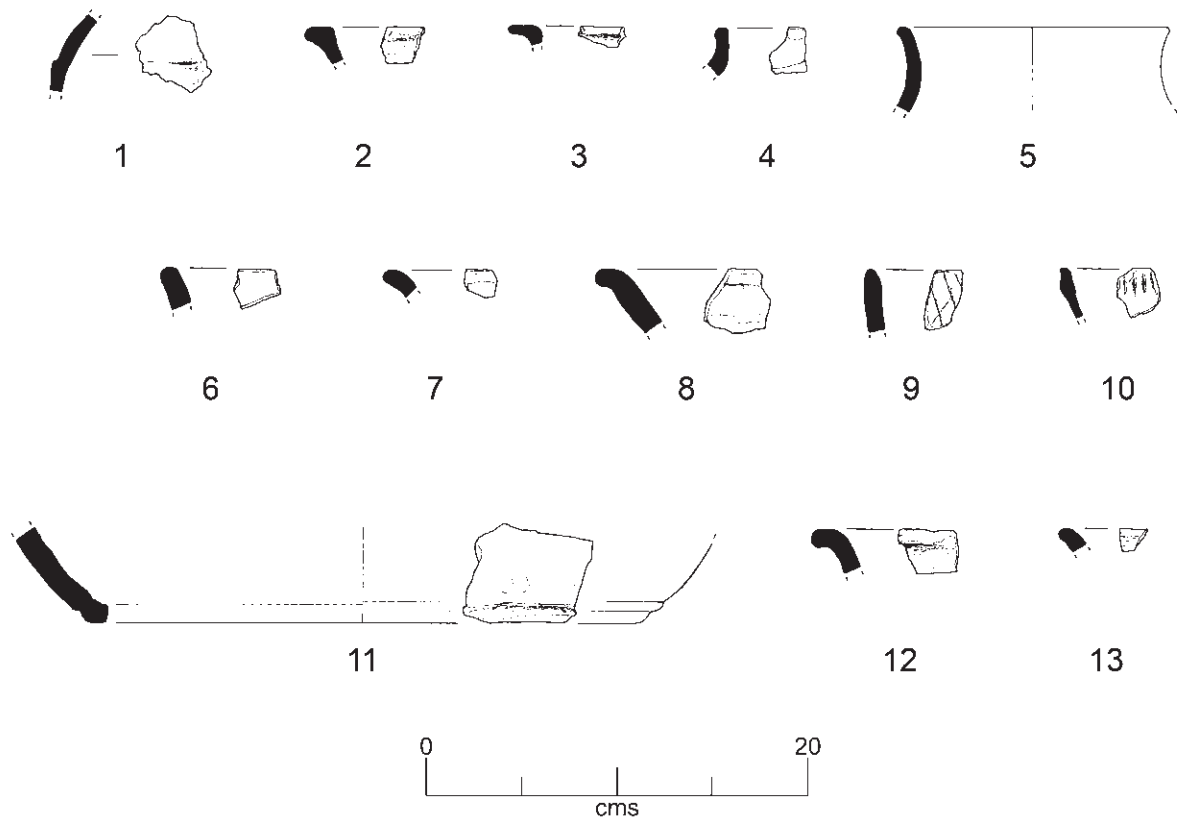


Figure 14.8. Pottery from Cille Donnain

Beneath layer 003 was a shallow but complex sequence of organic and sandy layers that all predated the construction of the 'dun' wall (Figure 14.7). The uppermost of these was a heterogeneous dark silty sand (008) that contained patches of burnt soil. Within it were sherds of pottery. Beneath this layer was a thin (0.05m) deposit of very coarse light grey sand (005). This, in turn, sealed two organic layers: a deep brown, compacted organic silt (006) and a brown, mottled organic silty sand (009). Beneath layer 006 was a dark, compacted organic silt (007), resting on bedrock.

The pottery

Local pottery

A total of 236 sherds (average weight 6.4g: total weight 1516g) was recovered during the excavations from both trenches and a further six sherds (34.8g) were found on the surface at the south side of the site at the water's edge prior to excavation. Their thickness varies between 5mm and 13mm.

Fabric

The fabric is generally of the gneissic-gritted type characteristic of the handmade Iron Age to Post-Medieval pottery found on South Uist. In contrast to Iron Age and Viking Age pottery, the assemblage contains 116 sherds (49%) that are generally harder fired than those found in first millennium AD assemblages. Most of these are black or dark grey but 40 have red or orange surfaces.

Top Trench

| Layer | No. | Weight | Av. g | Hard |
|-------|-----|--------|-------|------|
| 100 | 26 | 165g | 5.4 | 23 |
| 101 | 1 | 8g | 8 | 1 |
| 102 | 1 | 7g | 7 | 1 |
| 104 | 78 | 546g | 7 | 33 |
| 105 | 4 | 14g | 3.5 | 2 |
| 106 | 7 | 59g | 8.4 | 5 |

Loch Side Trench

| Layer | No. | Weight | Av. g | Hard |
|-------|-----|--------|-------|------|
| 001 | 7 | 27g | 3.8 | 3 |
| 002 | 39 | 138g | 3.5 | 21 |
| 003 | 37 | 251g | 6.8 | 21 |
| 004 | 11 | 90g | 8.2 | 0 |
| 008 | 25 | 207g | 8.3 | 6 |

| | | | | |
|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|------------|
| Total | 236 | 1516g | 6.4 | 116 |
|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|------------|

Table 14.1. Local pottery from Cille Donnain church

Date

The two sherds of green-glazed pottery from layer 104 and the single green-glazed sherd from layer 004 date to the Medieval period (see below). The absence of Viking Age rim forms and Udal platter ware from the site indicates a post-Norse date for this material.

| Context | | 103 | 104 | 104 | 106 | 107 | 108 |
|---------------------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------------|------|-------------------|--------------------------|------|
| Sample | | 5510 | 5511 | 5512 | 5513 | 5514 | 5515 |
| Context type | | Shell layer | Dark organic soil | | Shell layer = 103 | Matrix for stone setting | |
| Taxon List | Plant Parts | | | | | | |
| <i>Hordeum vulgare</i> L. | Hulled barley grains | 2 | c. 100 | c.50 | c.50 | | 3 |
| <i>Avena</i> | Oat grains | 1 | | | 10+ | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| Rumex/Polygonum | | | | 1 | | | |
| Seaweed fragments | | | | 1 | | | |

Table 14.2. Carbonized plant remains from Cille Donnain church

Pottery from the top trench

The largest assemblage came from layer 104, the deep organic soil into which Building D is set. This included the two wheel-turned, glazed sherds, four rims, one base and a decorated sherd. One of the rims (Figure 14.8.3) and possibly another (Figure 14.8.2) are slightly everted. Another (Figure 14.8.5) is concave as are probably the other two (Figures 14.8.4 and 14.8.6). Five other sherds from layer 104 are from vessels with similar concave, high necks. The base sherd is from a flat-bottomed footed pot whilst the decorated sherd (Figure 14.8.1) is ornamented with a single thumb pinch to produce a narrow ledge, probably halfway up the pot.

Pottery from the loch-side trench

The sherds from the uppermost layers (001 and 002) are small and abraded. A small rim sherd was found in layer 001 (Figure 14.8.7). The 37 sherds from layer 003 include two base sherds from flat-bottomed vessels, an everted rim (Figure 14.8.8) and four decorated sherds. One is incised with straight, angled lines spaced 7mm apart (Figure 14.8.9). There appears to be a single incised line at an angle to these lines so as to form a lattice design. Another sherd (not illustrated) is badly worn but has a single straight, thin, angled incised line. Another decorated sherd (Figure 14.8.10) appears to be a rim sherd decorated with a thin applied horizontal cordon that has been cut through by a line of short vertical incisions. A sherd from the neck of one vessel has faint finger/fingernail impressions that might have formed a ring of slight indentations, at 10mm intervals, around the neck.

The sherds from layers 004 and 008 are amongst the largest from the site. One of the sherds from layer 004 has a fine orange fabric and a yellow-green glaze, and is a Medieval wheelthrown import (see below). Layer 008 contains a slightly footed base sherd decorated with a crude horizontal incision (Figure 14.8.11) and two rim sherds from concave necked vessels (Figures 14.8.12 and 14.8.13). The pottery from this layer was thought initially to date to the Iron Age (Parker Pearson 1995: 6) but there is actually no material that is diagnostically of that period. Five of the 25 sherds have hard red or orange surfaces, a characteristic presumably resulting from high firing temperatures and which is Norse or post-Norse in date.

Conclusion

With the exception of the possible lattice-incised sherd from layer 3 (Figure 14.8.9), none of the six decorated sherds has ornamentation that can be matched in the Middle Iron Age assemblage from Dun Vulcan (La Trobe-Bateman 1999). The hard-fired black, red and orange sherds are also distinctively different. The high-necked upright rims, which are a feature of this Cille Donnain assemblage, are comparable to those on the two vessels from the abandonment phase outside the entrance of the Dun Vulcan broch and are loosely dated to the 16th–17th centuries (and not the 14th–15th centuries as suggested in Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999). However, the rim-top decoration and the use of pinprick motifs on that pottery and on the sherds from Beinn na Mhic Aongheis (the Hill of the Son of Angus) in Bornais (see Chapter 16; Marshall *et al.* 1996) are not present at Cille Donnain. The imported pottery is later than the early 12th-century Minety-ware pottery from the Norse settlement of Cille Pheadair (Pieksma forthcoming; Parker Pearson *et al.* 1996; Brennand *et al.* 1997).

The footed bases within this assemblage may be comparable to those associated with undecorated forms from the last, 13th century phase (Phase 9) of the Late Norse-period farmstead at Cille Pheadair (Parker Pearson *et al.* forthcoming) whilst the everted rims are comparable with those on plain vessels from the 14th century in the final phase of the nearby machair settlement at Bornais mound 3 (Sharples 2005). A comparable assemblage is that from Loch Olabhat, North Uist, whose decorative motifs and hard, black fabric place it within the 14th–16th centuries (Armit 1996: 208; Campbell 1997; Armit *et al.* 2008). We can conclude that this assemblage probably dates from the period of the 13th–15th centuries, possibly from the 15th century.

The average sherd weights indicate a much lower degree of fragmentation in comparison to the later assemblages from Gearraidh Bhailteas (see Chapter 15) and Beinn na Mhic Aongheis (see Chapter 16). This is no doubt due to the fact that the Cille Donnain material was not subject to the same long-term processes of trampling and abrasion within a continuously occupied settlement on thin peat soils. Instead, the high average weights support the stratigraphic evidence that this was material brought in from the midden

of a Medieval settlement and piled up here, presumably to form a graveyard soil. As such, the assemblage is most likely to represent a short-term accumulation – almost a closed assemblage – in contrast to the long-term and mixed groups from the other two sites.

The decoration and rims of the Cille Donnain pottery are well matched by Medieval everted-rim pottery from Northern Ireland (Davies 1950; McNeill 1980: 109–13; Ivens 1988). In particular, the sherd with the slashed cordon (Figure 14.6.10) is closely matched by one from Dunshammer Fort, Co. Antrim (Ivens 1988: fig. 1.27) and the thin incised lattice decoration (Figure 14.8.9) is matched by sherds from Island MacHugh (Davies 1950: fig. 7.W sq. 51; fig 11.NE48). There are also broad similarities with Medieval granite-tempered ware from the Isle of Man, which includes everted rim forms and some stab, slash and incised decoration (Davey 2000: 32).

Our initial confusion as to whether there was a Middle Iron Age component in the Cille Donnain assemblage reflects the extent to which this Medieval pottery copies the rim forms and decorative motifs of that earlier age. Future research will need to consider the extent to which there was a conscious reinvention of that ancient past in the Medieval present.

The imported pottery

Liz Pieksma

Three wheelmade, undecorated body sherds weighing 9g were submitted for analysis. Characterization of their fabrics was carried out using a binocular microscope with $\times 10$ magnification. The fabric analysis followed the method described by Peacock (1977). A provenance for the sherds was not sought.

The two sherds from layer 104 – top trench

The sherds, weighing 6g, have the same fabric type and surface treatment. Though they do not join it is probable they are from the same vessel. Both sherds have oxidized internal surfaces that are reddish brown (5YR 5/3) in colour, with a dark grey core (5YR 4/4). Their outer surfaces have been coated in a light grey (5Y 7/1) all-over slip and this in turn has been completely covered by a clear lead glaze. The sherds are thin walled (3mm) and their fabric is hard and well fired. Though the sherds are rough to the touch the fabric is fine textured and most of the inclusions present are small and well sorted. The most common inclusions seen are clear, sub-rounded, well-sorted flecks of mica ranging in size from 0.16mm to 0.33mm. Clear, sub-rounded, well-sorted quartz grains are also present in moderate amounts; they range from 0.16mm to 0.83mm in size. Sparse black inclusions (0.16mm–2.33mm) of burnt-out organic matter and sparse, rounded grains of red and black iron, 0.16mm–0.83mm, in size are also present.

The general characteristics of the sherds suggest that they are from an item of domestic tableware such as a jug, probably 13th–15th century in date.

The sherd from layer 004 – loch-side trench

The sherd, weighing 3g, is yellowish-red (5YR 5/8) in colour throughout and it has a thick, clear lead glaze all over its outer surface. It is fairly thin-walled (3mm) and the fabric is hard and well fired. The feel of the fabric is rough and it has a fairly coarse texture. The inclusions present are limited to two types, quartz and mica. There are abundant, well-sorted, sub-rounded clear and white quartz grains ranging in size from 0.16mm–1.33mm. The clear, rounded mica flecks are common and range in size from 0.16mm and under.

The general characteristics of the sherd suggest that it is from an item of domestic tableware, such as a jug, and it is likely to be 13th–14th century in date.

Other artefacts

Glass

Half of a deep blue, circular glass bead (SF1003; Figure 14.9) was found in layer 003. It is 9mm in diameter and has an uneven thickness, varying between 4mm and 6mm.

Iron

Seven fragments of iron were recovered from the top trench. Five of these were complete or near-complete flat-headed nails with oval or rectangular heads. On other Norse and Medieval or Post-Medieval sites in South Uist very few nails survive so completely, making this a notable exception. The other finds were a bent strip and a flat fragment of plate.

Catalogue

Context 100. An incomplete bent strip (38mm \times 5mm \times 5mm) probably a nail shank (Figure 14.10.1).

Context 100. A near-complete nail (33mm long with a sub-rectangular head 30mm \times 27mm) with a square cross-section (6mm \times 6mm), missing its tip (Figure 14.10.2).

Context 104. A near-complete nail (37mm long with an off-centre oval head 25mm \times 16mm) with a square cross-section (4mm \times 4mm), missing its tip (Figure 14.10.3).

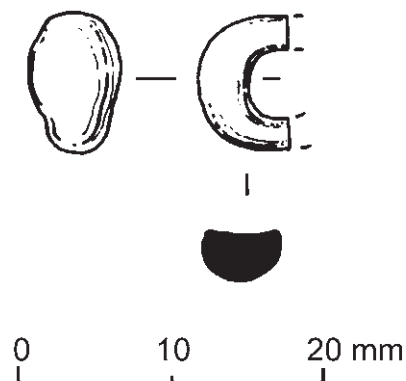


Figure 14.9. The blue glass bead from layer 3 in the loch-side trench

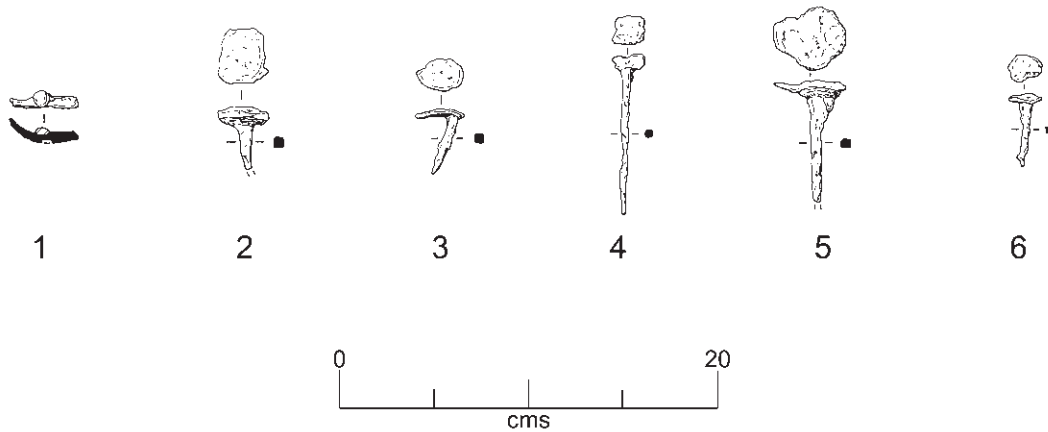


Figure 14.10. Ironwork from Cille Donnain

Context 104. A nail (84mm long with an incomplete head) with a square cross-section (4mm × 4mm) (Figure 14.10.4).

Context 104. A nail (65mm long with a sub-rectangular head 29mm × 28mm) with a square cross-section (5mm × 5mm) (Figure 14.10.5).

Context 104. A nail (38mm long with a circular head 18mm dia.) with a square cross-section (5mm × 5mm) (Figure 14.10.6).

Context 104. A flat, irregular piece of iron plate, 38mm by 33mm and up to 9mm thick.



Figure 14.11. The piece of wood from the interface between layers 2 and 3 in the loch-side trench.

Slag

No iron artefacts were recovered from the loch-side trench except for two lumps of iron-smithing slag, weighing 150g and 154g, in layer 002. In the same layer a small dark grey lump of fuel ash slag, weighing 11g, was recovered. This might also just possibly have resulted from smithing but might have resulted simply from hearth-side burning or conceivably in the making of soap (David Dungworth pers. comm.). Two other lumps of iron-smithing slag (139.8g and 71.5g) were found prior to excavation at the water's edge close to the loch-side trench.

Stone

Single small pieces of broken flint were found in layers 001 and 002. Two very small pieces of quartz were also found in layer 001. A burnt piece of sandstone, probably from a broken cobble, was found in layer 002 whilst a small piece of grey pumice was recovered from layer 100.

Wood

A short, square-sectioned length of wood (SF1001; 396mm long by 43mm wide) was found at the base of layer 002, the peat that has recently formed in the loch (Figure 14.11). It may date to the Medieval period since the sherds from layers 001 and 002 are apparently the same as those from the rest of the site.

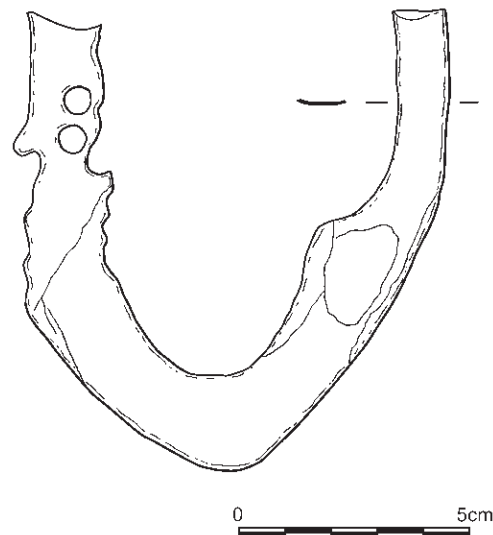


Figure 14.12. The leather artefact from the loch-side trench

Leather

A single leather artefact (SF1000; Figure 14.12) from the base of the peat, layer 002, was examined by Diane Friendship-Taylor of Northampton City Museum. She confirmed that it was leather but was not part of a shoe,

as had been thought during excavation, since there was no trace of stitching or stitch holes around its edges. Instead its edges were indented by small, 8mm-wide depressions whose centres were placed approximately 12mm apart. These indentations might conceivably have been caused by shrinkage but their apparent even spacing on the edge of the artefact suggests that they might have been a decorative feature of this leather item. Whilst *in situ*, this artefact was horseshoe-shaped, 75mm across and 53mm long, being slightly pointed at its apex. It was formed of a leather strip 7–10mm wide and 120mm long. It could conceivably have formed part of a belt or thong. It was extremely fragile and disintegrated during lifting and again during cleaning. As with the wooden stake, the leather artefact's date is uncertain.

Environmental materials

A few animal bones in very poor condition were recovered from the excavation. Their deterioration, no doubt caused by the acidity of the soil, was so severe as to render them otherwise unidentifiable. Winkle shells and some limpets survived in layers 103, 105 and 106, where they had been deposited in large quantities. Systematic sampling for plant remains from every context led to the recovery of small quantities of carbonized material. Despite the waterlogging in the loch-side trench there was an almost complete absence of beetle remains.

The carbonized plant remains

Helen Smith

Six bulk samples were taken from five different contexts (103, 104, 106, 107 and 108), all from the top trench ('Building C'). The samples were processed using a water separation machine. Flots were collected in sieves with mesh sizes of 1mm and 300 microns. The heavy residues were collected in a 1mm mesh. Sorting of flots took place using a low-power stereo-microscope.

The coarse flot components of the bulk samples were assessed for their charred plant content and the richness of their charcoal content. A full analysis of the remains has not been undertaken and results are based on approximate numbers and broad taxonomic groups.

The plant remains recovered from the samples are generally limited in the taxa represented and preservation of the remains is mostly poor, with distortion of some material. Samples 104 and 106 are dominated by the grains of hulled barley (*Hordeum* sp.), with some oat (*Avena* sp.) in sample 106 and possibly oat in sample 103. Contexts 104 and 106 contained large quantities of charcoal, although this has not been identified to species. Charred seeds of wild plants were recovered from the samples, although these are limited in number and range and preservation is poor. The presence of hulled barley is consistent with other sites for this period. It has not been possible to determine whether the oat grains are common oat (*Avena sativa*) or bristle oat (*Avena strigosa*) given the absence of diagnostic

features (*i.e.* distinctive horseshoe-shaped scar on floret bases). Further interpretation regarding the origin of the deposits or plant remains is not possible.

Discussion

The main surprise from the top trench was that the layer (104) beneath the cell buildings (D, E, F and G) was probably deposited in the 13th–15th centuries. This would have been one or two centuries later than the church itself, if its foundation in the Late Norse period is accepted. Another unexpected discovery was that the putative 'dun' wall was built at a similarly late date, presumably extending the original platform on which the church was built. The presence of organic and shelly soils (104 and 103) is another unusual feature. The former would have been very fertile soil for growing vegetables and crops but it was being used here to make up the ground of the extended platform. It was clearly brought from elsewhere, perhaps from garden plots or fields close to settlement and it contained Medieval pottery. The most likely explanation of its presence is that it was brought in to extend the burial area, although no grave cuts or human remains were found within it. None the less, this still leaves an unsolved mystery as to why such fertile soil, rather than sterile sand, was used to build up this ground.

Within the loch-side trench, organic layers were sampled unsuccessfully for beetle remains and plant remains. No cultural debris was found in the layers beneath layer 008. Cultural remains are restricted to a very narrow band of the upper layers of peat, sand and silt, indicating that there was very little accumulation of deposits on the loch side. There is no evidence that allows us to establish whether these deposits are the remnants of thicker layers subsequently scoured. Unfortunately, it seems that relatively little rubbish was thrown here from the buildings but it was just enough to provide evidence of activity in the Medieval period. The question of a fall in the loch's water levels, raised by Fleming and Woolf (1992: 345–6), could not be resolved.

The 'dun' wall is not part of an unusually large Iron Age dun, as was suspected before excavation. The presence of Medieval pottery in the layers beneath this wall indicates that it is a later extension to the church platform. It could conceivably have formed a simple quayside within water with a depth of about 1m. But the archaeological sequence can be interpreted otherwise. The silts at the base of the sequence, prior to human occupation, might have developed in relatively deep open water. The thin layers on top, with no surviving organic remains except in their very uppermost surface, would seem to have been laid down by water action in shallows that would have been dry on a seasonal basis. Finally the growth of peat on top of these sandy layers must have occurred when water levels were no higher, or not substantially higher, than they are today.

Conclusion

The excavations shed no further light on the church's form

or sequence of construction, nor on the identification of this site as an ancient burial ground. They have, however, provided some dating evidence in the form of green-glazed sherds, probably of 13th–15th century date. In the top trench these were found in layers of imported soil (layer 104) on which Building D rested. In the loch-side trench, a single glazed sherd was found in layer 4, post-dating the construction of the wall that runs around the south side of the promontory. The church building cannot be tied into this sequence with certainty but layer 104 lies above a layer of rubble (109) that conceivably forms part of the platform on which the church was constructed. We may tentatively propose a construction sequence of four phases:

- a) The building of a church, perhaps on made-up ground, on the promontory which was surrounded by a rubble platform (109);
- b) the importation of organic soil to enlarge the extent of made-up ground and perhaps construction of the perimeter wall around the base of the promontory;
- c) the construction of the range of cells known as Buildings D-G;
- d) the construction of the latest stone-walled features, Buildings A and H.

The absence of any diagnostic Early or Middle Iron Age sherds reduces the likelihood that there is a brooch or dun buried beneath the later structures on the promontory, a relationship found at the seat of the Lordship of the Isles at Finlaggan on Islay (Caldwell and Ewart 1993).

Clearly, there is much that remains unresolved about the church's dates of construction, about the extent to which the promontory has been augmented with imported materials, about water level changes, and about the date and reasons for abandonment. We also do not know whether the site was that of a bishopric, though this is perhaps unlikely given the significance of Howmore in the Medieval period as an ecclesiastical and monastic centre. Cille Donnain church may be considered as one of between six and eight Medieval churches on South Uist, perhaps each serving about four or five townships. Further investigation is required to explore these issues and to understand the history of the Christian Church within the Norse period within the Western Isles.

Acknowledgements

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Scotland and by Evelyn Baker and the Bedfordshire County Council Archaeology Section. John Raven provided the references to the Northern Irish ceramics.

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15 Excavations at Medieval Gearraidh Bhailteas (Garryvaltos), Milton

James Symonds with contributions by David Barker, Mike Parker Pearson, Victoria Parsons, Liz Pieksma and Helen Smith

Five hand-dug trenches were excavated at the Scheduled Ancient Monument (5902; NMR no. NF72NW 27) of Gearraidh Bhailteas (Garryvaltos) in June and July 1998. The site, comprising 12 visible sub-rectangular structures and three enclosures, had been noted during field survey by Andrew Fleming in 1992 and was interpreted as the remains of a possible multi-phased Medieval and early Post-Medieval settlement. The presence of inter-cutting buildings with a potentially unusual ‘chronological depth’ spanning the Lordship of the Isles to the unification with Scotland led Fleming to suggest that this was a site worthy of further investigation (see Chapter 3).

The five trenches were widely spaced across the site, and were located to sample an enclosure wall and structure (Trench 3), enclosure walls (Trenches 2 and 5) and yard areas (Trenches 1 and 4). It should be noted that, as the site had been designated as a scheduled ancient monument prior to the investigations in 1998, the decision was made to generally avoid investigating the interiors of structures to limit any potential damage to stratigraphic relationships by narrow interventions. The evidence gained by trenching generally confirms, but also refines, Fleming’s provisional dating of the site, suggesting occupation in the 14th–17th centuries.

In this respect, the site would seem to be broadly contemporary with the site investigated at Beinn na Mhic Aongheis (see Chapter 16; Marshall *et al.* 1996), although the proportionately larger assemblage of Late Medieval ceramics and related finds recovered from Gearraidh Bhailteas hints at a slightly earlier foundation date, possibly overlapping with the final phases of Norse-period occupation at Bornais (Sharples 2005) and the use of Cille Donnain church in the 13th–15th centuries (see Chapter 14).

Location

The site of Gearraidh Bhailteas (NF 735 265) is located on a low knoll amid a patch of boggy ground in Milton township. The land slopes away sharply to the south and east, and is likely to have been covered with standing

water, at least seasonally, prior to 18th- and 19th-century improvements and the lowering of water levels in Loch Chill Donnain and Mill Loch (Loch na Muilne), separating the knoll, on the inside of the former inland waterway of conjoined lochs, from the machair trackway and the coast. The approach from the west and north is less steep and the enclosures and structures sit on a shallow plateau that extends to the shore of Loch Aird an Sgairbh.

The 1805 Bald map of the middle district of South Uist shows three distinct clusters of buildings named Milton, Garryvaltos, and Mingarry. The name ‘Garryvaltos’ is written beside a large square structure with four outbuildings, and this complex is linked to the coastal path by a short trackway. Excavations at Bornais have shown that information on the size and location of structures shown on the Bald map is often schematic and should be treated with caution (this volume *passim*; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 171). This complex would, nevertheless, seem to correspond to the location of present-day Milton House, although the extant structures are more recent in date. The enclosures and structures that now form the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Gearraidh Bhailteas lie c.250m north-northeast of Milton House but are not shown on the Bald map.

Aims and objectives

The remains of Gearraidh Bhailteas, identified during field survey by Andrew Fleming in 1992, were judged to be of critical importance for an understanding of Medieval and later settlement and land-use in the middle district of South Uist. Trial trenches were therefore excavated in 1998 in an attempt to recover information on the structure, date, and state of preservation of the settlement and enclosures, in an effort to confirm or refute Fleming’s provisional interpretation, and to clarify the research potential of the site.

The excavations

Five trial trenches were laid out within the area of the settlement and enclosures (Figure 15.1).



Figure 15.1. Earthwork plan showing the locations of Trenches 1–5 at Gearraidh Bhailteas (Garryvaltos)

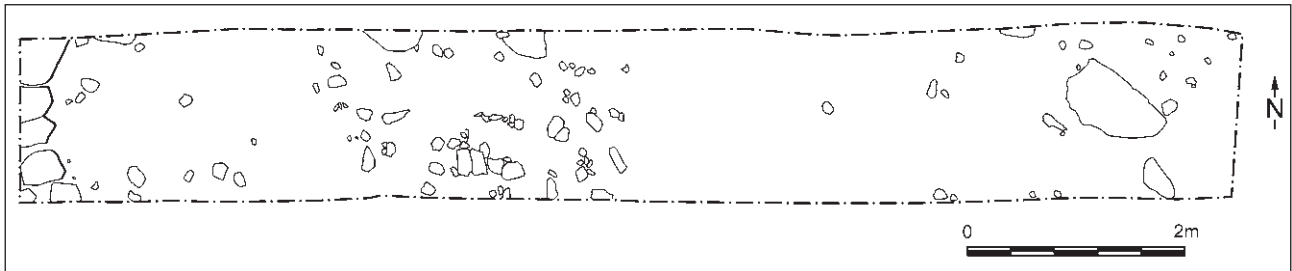


Figure 15.2. Plan of Trench 1 at Gearraidh Bhailteas

Trench 1

This trench was *c.*11.20m long and *c.*1.50m wide and was located within a flat open area on the crest of the hill (Figure 15.2). The trench was placed to investigate a possible yard area between Fleming's structures A, J, K and L (see Chapter 3). Three layers were recorded: turf (1001), a compact greyish-brown sandy peat with charcoal and evidence of burning (1002), and a greyish-brown sandy peat (1003) that was deeper and darker in colour than (1002). These layers were stripped to reveal an uneven bedrock surface. The finds from this shallow trench were consistent with what one might expect from a yard area that was subject to constant trampling and mixing with thin peat soil overlying bedrock.

Trench 2

This measured *c.*11.0m long and *c.*1.50m wide (Figures 15.3 and 15.4). The trench extended for a distance of *c.*3m into the interior of Fleming's oval enclosure X (see Chapter 3) and cut through the enclosure wall before running downslope for a distance of *c.*7m through hill deposits. Eleven contexts were recorded. In the upper portion of the trench, removal of the turf (2001) revealed a grey, sandy peat soil (2002). This layer was bounded and retained by the enclosure wall (2003) of gneiss boulders and pebbles and had a dark sandy peaty fill (2007). The wall overlay a layer of reddish-brown sandy soil and degraded bedrock (2006), and a shallow scoop in the bedrock surface (2009). Layer 2002 was interpreted as a cultivation horizon that had built up over time with the admixture of shell sand from the machair, and possibly tangle from the coast. It appears that the makers of the enclosure selected a slightly higher patch of bedrock, built a retaining wall around it, and then filled the interior with soil to create a garden plot. It was noted during excavation that the surface within the enclosure sloped at an angle of *c.*45° from the north down to the south. This would have assisted surface run-off and drainage within the cultivated area.

On the hillslope below the enclosure wall, a buried soil horizon of sandy peat with bedrock inclusions (2004) was stripped to reveal a layer of sandy peaty soil (2005) containing very fine gravel and larger fragments of re-deposited bedrock, up to 0.15m in size, probably the remains of terracing activities. A shallow gully (2008) cut across the lower reaches of the trench at an angle of 45°.

This feature contained stones and charcoal; it bounded a compact deposit of greasy black ash and silty clay (2010), which was most likely a floor deposit, lying directly over a loose wet layer of sterile yellow-brown sand (2011). A second, irregularly shaped, shallow cut feature (2012), up to 0.85m wide, also contained stones and charcoal within its fill (2013) and might have formed part of a possible stone- and turf-built structure, in association with 2008 and 2010.

Trench 3

Trench 3 measured *c.*7.50m by *c.*1.50m (Figure 15.5) and sampled a small enclosure or possible animal pen and an adjoining structure (C) at the northern end of the settlement (see Chapter 3). Seventeen contexts were recorded in this trench. Removal of turf (3001) revealed a soft, dark brown peaty soil containing charcoal, slag and occasional fragments of bedrock (3002). A soft, dark brown peaty soil with fewer stones, mixed with abraded artefactual material, (3003) covered the central portion of the trench, in the open area between the enclosure wall and the structure. The removal of turf at the eastern side of the trench exposed the double orthostatic wall (3009) of the structure running north-south, perpendicular to the trench. The wall had been constructed of angular gneiss stones ranging in length from 0.15m to 0.50m, with an average length of 0.25m–0.30m. The interior stones of the double orthostatic wall stood vertically, whereas the exterior facing stones sloped inwards from their base. The gaps in between the stones were filled with sandy silt (3008).

The inside of the structure had been sub-divided at some time after its primary inhabitation by the addition of a line of large angular stones (3005) running northeast to southwest, with a sandy peaty fill (3005). A layer of fire-reddened clay, charcoal flecks and burnt peat (3004) adhered to the edges of the interior walls, evidence of a clay floor modified by an intense conflagration that probably destroyed the original structure. Further discrete patches of orange and red burnt clay (3007) were also found in the interior of the structure on the west and east sides.

The remains of three small, probably sequential hearths were located and sectioned. Context 3012 was a semi-circular deposit of burnt clay with evenly distributed charcoal flecks that contained fragments of ceramic cooking vessels in a bowl-shaped cut (3014). A second small hearth

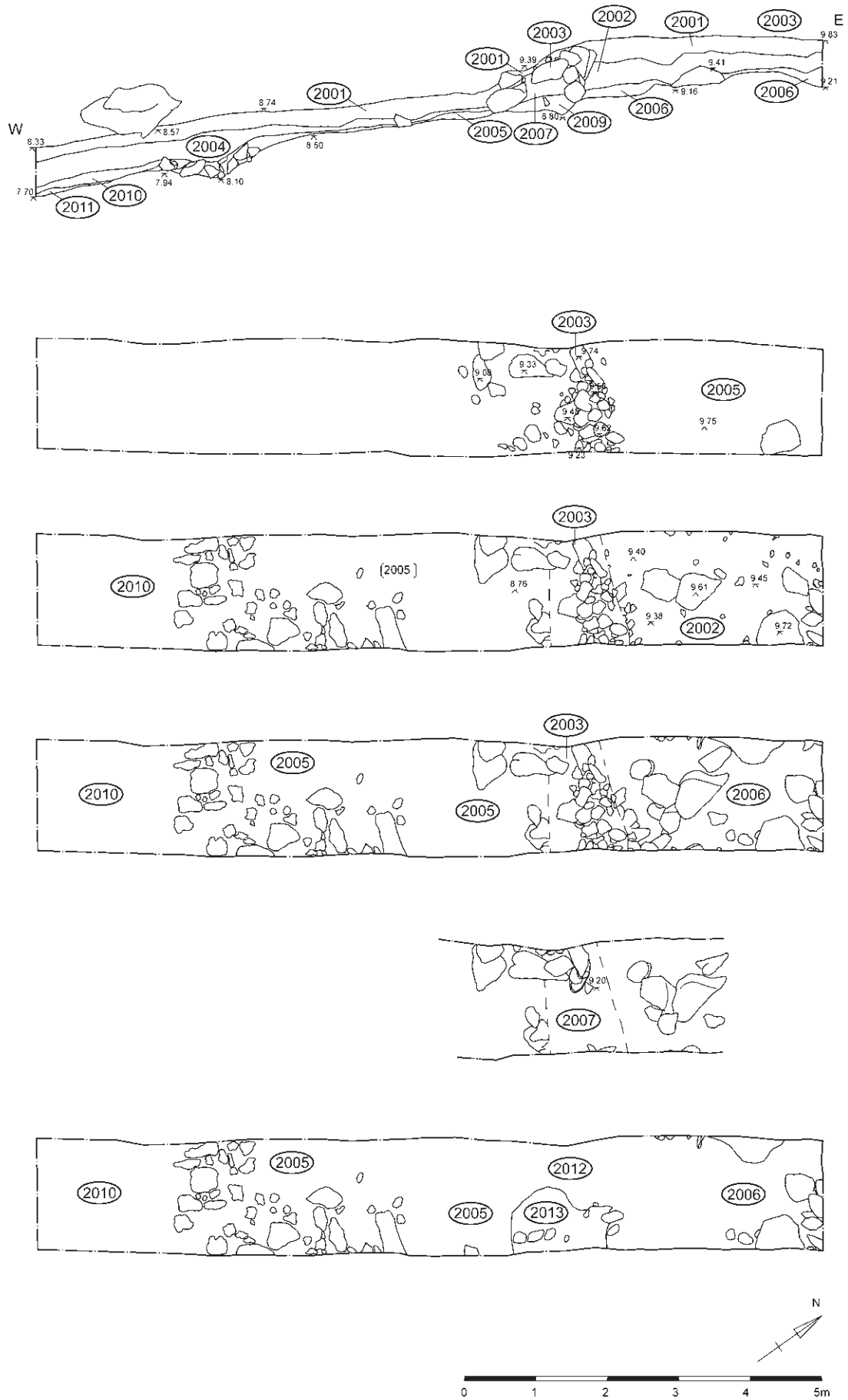


Figure 15.3. Plan and south-facing section of Trench 2 at Gearraidh Bhailteas



Figure 15.4. Trench 2 at Gearraidh Bhailteas, viewed from the southwest

deposit (3015) comprised a circular area of orange and red-brown burnt peat with burnt clay on the outside (Figure 15.6). This bowl-shaped feature was less regular in form than 3012. The cut for this hearth (3014) ran up to the walls of the structure on the east and north sides and had concave sides and a rounded base.

Traces of floor deposits were also located within the structure. A layer of dark greyish-brown clay containing occasional burnt clay flecks, burnt stones, and charcoal (3013) extended beyond the base of the internal walling, perhaps indicating a re-lining of the internal space after an earlier floor had been worn down by use. A second possible floor deposit of thin burnt clay (3017) was found lying directly over the bedrock at the base of the structure.

Trench 4

This measured *c.*10.50m by *c.*1.50m and was cut across an open area towards the northern end of the site between Fleming's structures B and F (Figures 15.7 and 15.8). Only two layers were recorded: turf (4001) and, directly beneath this, a greyish-brown sandy peat (4002) that contained a moderate amount of root matter and some sub-angular stones, particularly at the west end of the trench. The absence of features and the mixed nature of finds, which included early 19th-century teawares in the topsoil (perhaps evidence of an unfortunate incidence of breakages at a Georgian summer picnic among the ruins) makes any further interpretation difficult.

Trench 5

This trench measured *c.*12m long and ranged in width

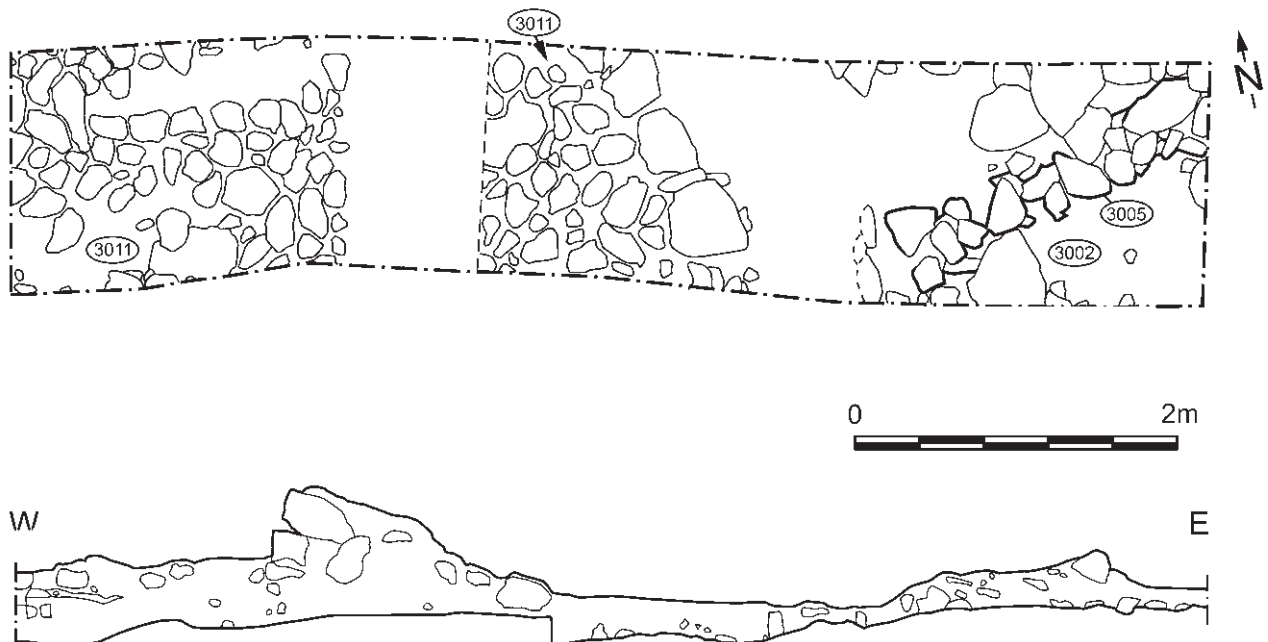


Figure 15.5. Plan and south-facing section of Trench 3 at Gearraidh Bhailteas

from c.1.50m to c.2.20m (Figure 15.9). It was located opposite Trench 4, running on the same alignment across an enclosure to the west of Fleming's structure B. Four contexts were recorded. Removal of turf (5001) exposed the unbonded gneiss stones of the enclosure wall (5002) at the west end of the trench. These orthostats were up to 0.90m in length and were part of the outer circuit that enclosed the hilltop and structures. A layer of loose grey sandy peat (5003) was found directly beneath the topsoil within this enclosure. At the eastern end of the trench, close to the visible structures, context 5004 contained small angular stones and peaty soil that was probably a spread of re-deposited midden material.

The earthenware pottery

Victoria Parsons and Mike Parker Pearson

There were 468 sherds of earthenware (2,823.5g; Table 15.1; Figure 15.10) together with a Late Medieval green-glazed sherd (see below) and a small assemblage of 19th-century factory wares (see below). The green-glazed sherd is probably contemporary with the earthenware assemblage but the factory wares were deposited long afterwards.

Fabric

The fabric of the earthenware is of gneissic grit in the manner of Iron Age and later pottery from South Uist. Like the assemblages from Cille Donnain church (see Chapter 14) and Beinn na Mhic Aongheis (see Chapter 16), there is a small but substantial proportion of hard-fired black

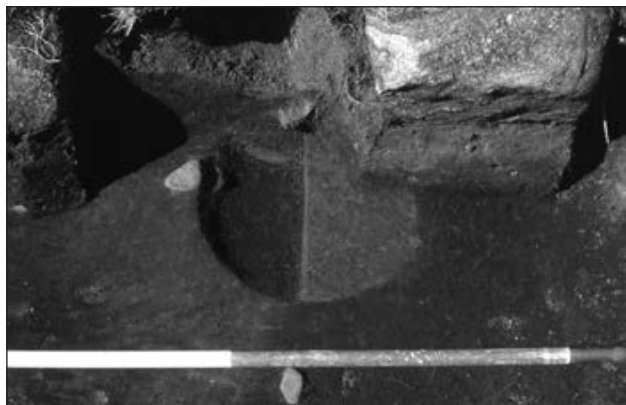


Figure 15.6. Half-excavated circular hearth (3015) filled with burnt peat, in the northeast corner of Trench 3, viewed from the south

TRENCH 1

| Layer | No. | Weight | Av. g | Hard |
|-------|-----------|--------------|------------|-----------|
| 1001 | 38 | 115.9 | 3.0 | 17 |
| 1002 | 22 | 70.5 | 3.2 | 4 |
| 1003 | 21 | 93.8 | 4.5 | 10 |
| | 81 | 280.2 | 3.5 | 31 |

TRENCH 2

| Layer | No. | Weight | Av. g | Hard |
|-------|------------|--------------|------------|-----------|
| 2001 | 11 | 39.7 | 3.6 | 4 |
| 2002 | 55 | 350.8 | 6.4 | 11 |
| 2004 | 8 | 16.6 | 2.1 | 2 |
| 2005 | 12 | 79.7 | 6.6 | 10 |
| 2006 | 2 | 21.3 | 10.6 | 2 |
| 2007 | 17 | 104 | 6.1 | 0 |
| 2010 | 6 | 35.6 | 5.9 | 1 |
| | 111 | 647.7 | 5.8 | 30 |

TRENCH 3

| Layer | No. | Weight | Av. g | Hard |
|-------|-----------|------------|------------|-----------|
| 3001 | 5 | 19.7 | 3.9 | 0 |
| 3002 | 15 | 104.8 | 7 | 1 |
| 3003 | 8 | 115.7 | 16.5 | 3 |
| 3006 | 5 | 26.8 | 5.4 | 3 |
| 3007 | 14 | 131.4 | 9.4 | 7 |
| 3009 | 2 | 8 | 4 | 1 |
| 3010 | 5 | 81.2 | 16.2 | 2 |
| 3011 | 2 | 10.4 | 5.2 | 0 |
| 3012 | 4 | 16 | 4 | 0 |
| 3013 | 24 | 108 | 4.5 | 13 |
| | 84 | 622 | 7.4 | 30 |

TRENCH 4

| Layer | No. | Weight | Av. g | Hard |
|-------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| 4001 | 86 | 483.2 | 5.6 | 21 |
| 4002 | 34 | 321.8 | 9.5 | 9 |
| 4004 | 3 | 35 | 11.7 | 2 |
| | 123 | 840 | 6.8 | 32 |

TRENCH 5

| Layer | No. | Weight | Av. g | Hard |
|-------|-----------|--------------|------------|-----------|
| 5001 | 65 | 417.1 | 6.4 | 30 |
| 5003 | 4 | 16.5 | 3.3 | 4 |
| | 69 | 433.6 | 6.3 | 34 |

| Layer | No. | Weight | Av. g | Hard |
|--------------|------------|---------------|----------|------------|
| Total | 468 | 2823.5 | 6 | 157 |

Table 15.1. Earthenware from Trenches 1 to 5 at Gearraidh Bhailteas

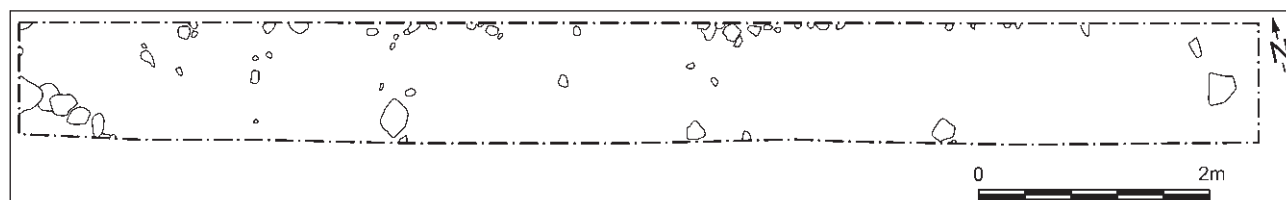


Figure 15.7. Plan of Trench 4 at Gearraidh Bhailteas

| Context | No. | Ceramic Type | Surface decoration | Moulded/ other decoration | Gl.? | Vessel form | Part | Date | Notes |
|---------|-----|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|------|---------------------|--------------|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2004 | 1 | Pearlware | | | Gl. | Bowl (London shape) | Body | 1820–1830 | Lower body sherd below low carination |
| 2004 | 1 | Pearlware | | | Gl. | ? | Body | 1780–1830 | Possibly same vessel as above |
| 3003 | 1 | Pearlware | | | Gl. | ? | ?Body/base | 1780–1830 | Flake only |
| 3007 | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. painted (blue) | | Gl. | ?Teabowl | Rim | 1780–1820 | Undiagnostic int. rim pattern; sherd discoloured (through burning?) |
| 4001 | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ? | Body | 1770–1820 | |
| 4001 | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. Slip-banded (brown and blue) | | Gl. | ? | Body | 1820–1830 | Round-bodied hollow ware vessel – jug or bowl? |
| 4001 | 1 | Redware | Internally slip-coated (white); ext. u-gl. printed (yellow) | | Gl. | ? | Body | 1810–1830 | Round-bodied vessel – jug or similar. So-called 'Portobello ware'; pearl glaze to interior, ext. printed design fragmentary and indeterminate |
| 4001 | 2 | Redware | Internally slip-coated (white) | | Gl. | Jug (or teapot) | Rim/shoulder | 1800–1830 | Joining. Pearl glaze to interior |
| 4001 | 4 | Redware | Internally slip-coated (white) | | Gl. | ? Jug (or teapot) | Bodies | 1800–1830 | Same vessel as above? Two sherds have hint of handle (or spout) junction; pearl glaze to interior |
| 4001 | 1 | Coarse redware | | | Gl. | ?Dish | Base | 19th c. | Hard orange fabric; int. brown glaze |
| 5001 | 1 | Delftware | Painted (green and purple) | | Gl. | ? | Body | 1750–1790 | Round-bodied vessel. So-called Fazakerly colours. Glasgow? |

Table 15.2. Factory wares from Gearraidh Bhailteas

and grey fabrics that are characteristic of Late Medieval elements in these assemblages as well as at Eilean Olabhat on North Uist (Campbell 1997; Armit 1996: 208). Only



Figure 15.8. Trench 4 at Gearraidh Bhailteas, viewed from the west

14 of the sherds of hard fabric have orange-red surfaces (compared to 40 at Cille Donnain) and the percentage of hard sherds (33%) is rather less than that at Cille Donnain (49%). A closer proportion is that of 29% from Trench 2 at Beinn na Mhic Aongheis but, in broader terms, the overall proportions from that site are much lower.

Form

The sherds derive from vessels between 6mm and 15mm in thickness, with most between 8mm and 12mm. It was not possible to construct any complete profiles or to establish any vessel diameters but many of the vessels were probably rounded and bag-shaped pots.

Rims

There are 20 rim sherds. Three of them are from decorated rims. One (in 2001) is an upright rim decorated on the rim top with wide incisions almost at right angles to the line of the rim. The other two are small, sharply everted rims, from concave vessels, decorated below the neck with near-vertical thin incised lines (in 2005) or angled, wider incisions (in 4002). There are three plain, sharply everted rims in 3010, 4002 and 5001. Four upright rims are from thick-walled bowls, having slightly rounded (in 3006, 3010 and 4004) or a flat and angled rim top (in 4002). There are plain upright rims, mostly with flat tops (in 2002, 4001 and two in 5001), with round tops (in 1001, 1003 and 5001), tapered rims (two in 5001) or an expanded rim (in 5001).

Bases

There are 10 base sherds, with examples found in each of the five trenches, although the single one from Trench 5 (in

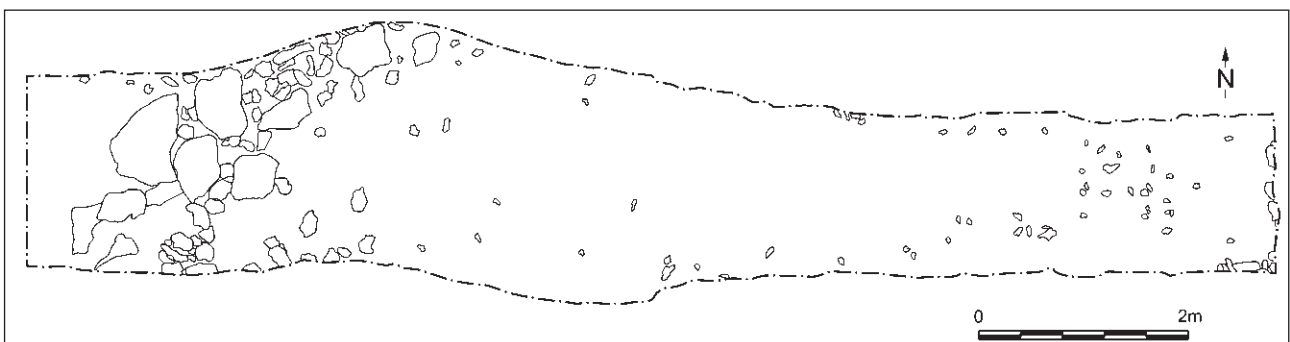


Figure 15.9. Plan of Trench 5 at Gearraidh Bhailteas

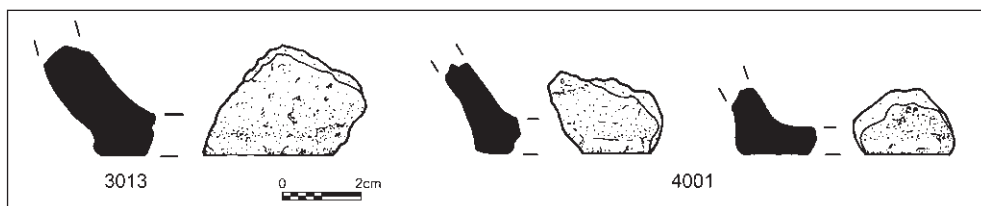


Figure 15.10. Pottery from Gearraidh Bhailteas

5001) is not definite. One of the two from 3013 in Trench 3 is from a footed vessel. The others are unremarkable (in 1001, 2002, 3007 and 4001). The low base:rim ratio of 1:2 suggests that a certain proportion of vessels were round-bottomed. Several of the thicker body sherds have abrasion patterns consistent with their being base sherds on round-bottomed pots.

Decoration

Only five body sherds are decorated, making a total of eight when added to the decorated rim sherds (less than 2% of the assemblage). Three sherds (in 1003, 4002 and 5001) are decorated with a horizontal line of shallow stabmarks around the belly of the pot, similar to S-shaped wavy cordon motifs on Middle Iron Age pottery. Of the other two (both in 4001), one is decorated near the neck with an irregular arrangement of small impressed circles and the other has a probably vertical, thin incised line.

Three sherds (from 2007, 3002 and 4002) have grass-impressed exterior surfaces but on only one of these (2007) is this dense enough to have been deliberate.

Fragmentation

The assemblage is heavily fragmented and abraded. The 227 abraded sherds form 48% of the total number of sherds and the average sherd weight is 6g (Table 15.1). This compares closely with the results from Beinn na Mhic Aongheis (5.5g; see Chapter 16) and Cille Donnain church (6.4g; see Chapter 14) and is similarly likely to be the result of constant trampling and mixing within the thin peat soils on top of natural rock. The sherds in Trench 1 are the most fragmented whilst those in Trench 3 are least fragmented. Layers with high average sherd weights (3002, 3003, 3007 and 4002) may derive from eroded middens whereas those with low values (1002, 1003 and 3013) could be directly or indirectly from house or yard floors.

Conclusion

This is a small and highly fragmented assemblage but it has a number of characteristics that indicate a date range in the Late Medieval and early Post-Medieval periods. There are flat- and round-bottomed pots represented, and a third of the sherds are of the hard fabric typical of the Late Medieval period. Rims are predominantly upright and a quarter are sharply everted. The latter (and the green-glazed sherd; see below) are characteristic of the Late Medieval period whereas the upright rims are much more a feature of 16th- and 17th-century assemblages (Campbell 1997). Decoration is limited to less than 2% of the assemblage but it compares reasonably well with the incised and impressed motifs found at both Cille Donnain church and Beinn na Mhic Aongheis. Rim-top decoration is not present at the former site but is found at Beinn na Mhic Aongheis and is represented by a single sherd at Gearraidh Bhailteas.

The sharply everted rims compare well with those of

14th-century date from Bornais mound 3 (Sharples 2005: 171–2) and the footed base with pottery from the 13th-century final phase (phase 9) at Cille Pheadair (Bond forthcoming). The decorated body sherds indicate a date in the 15th century or later whilst the round-bottomed vessels and upright rims indicate 16th–17th century activity similar to that at Druimm nan Dearcag on North Uist (Campbell 1997). The assemblage is broadly contemporary with that at Beinn na Mhic Aongheis except that Gearraidh Bhailteas has a much larger and earlier Late Medieval component which makes its beginnings contemporary with the last days at Norse-period Bornais in the 14th century and with the Cille Donnain church assemblage in the 13th–15th centuries. Occupation continued into the 16th and 17th centuries but possibly not thereafter.

The variable stratigraphic positions of characteristically Late Medieval sherds indicate a high degree of mixing of deposits. This is also the case at Beinn na Mhic Aongheis and undoubtedly results from lengthy occupation on these thin peat soils. There are no particular chronological distinctions between the pottery assemblages from each trench. Those with the lowest proportions of hard fabrics (Trenches 2 and 4) have the highest numbers of flat bases and sharply everted rims. The pottery provides an overall time frame for Gearraidh Bhailteas's occupation in the 14th–17th centuries but its mixed distribution suggests that care must be taken when assessing the stratigraphic integrity of different layers within the site.

The Medieval glazed pottery

Liz Pieksma

A single wheelmade body sherd weighing 7gms from context 5001 was submitted for analysis. Characterization of the sherd fabric was carried out using a binocular microscope with $\times 10$ magnification. The fabric analysis followed the method described by Peacock (1977).

The sherd fabric is pinkish-white (Munsell 7.5YR 8/2). The internal surface is grey (Munsell 10YR 6/1) whilst the outer surface is covered in an all over clear/yellow glaze. The lead glaze is fairly thick and cracked and has fallen off the vessel surface in some places. There appears to be a very shallow combed or impressed parallel line decoration on the outer surface under the glaze.

The sherd is fairly thick-walled (6mm) and the fabric is hard and well fired. The feel of the fabric is rough and it has a coarse texture. There is a limited range of inclusions present: quartz, iron and a black shale-like material. The quartz grains (clear and white) are common, sub-rounded and well sorted, ranging in size from 0.16–1.16mm in size. The black rounded grains of iron are also common and range from 0.16–0.50mm in size. The sub-rounded grains of shale-like material are rare and range from 0.50–4.3mm in size.

The general characteristics of the sherd suggest that it is from an item of domestic tableware, such as a jug, and is probably 13th–14th century in date. A provenance for the sherd was not sought.

Factory wares

David Barker

This small assemblage (Table 15.2) is fairly consistent with the finds from nearby Airigh Mhuillin, although that site included only one house with polychrome-painted Delftware; the Gearraidh Bhailteas piece was probably made in Glasgow. The refined redwares are present in greater numbers than at other South Uist sites, though these sherds probably derive from only one or two vessels. The name 'Portobello ware' given to the yellow printed sherds need not imply a Scottish provenance; it was manufactured widely. A date of around 1830 may be given for the Gearraidh Bhailteas material but this is cautious since none of the sherds are very diagnostic.

The small finds

Mike Parker Pearson and Victoria Parsons

Metal finds (Figure 15.11)

Copper alloy artefacts

305. Context 3001. A fragment of a plain annular brooch (36mm diameter and 4mm × 2mm thick) with a constriction for a pin, although the pin is missing. It is comparable to a brooch from London (Egan and Pritchard 2002: 248, fig. 160.1307) and is likely to date between the 12th and 15th centuries, although annular brooches remained in use until the 18th century (Egan and Pritchard 2002: 270).

271. Context 2002. A complete thistle-headed pin (89mm long, 3.5mm D [shank], 5mm D [head]). The thistle head has a moulded collar beneath its swelling, and the top of the head is decorated with radially arranged incisions (1.5mm long). The shank has a slightly swollen mid-portion. According to Caroline Paterson (forthcoming): 'thistle-headed pins are a Scottish peculiarity (MacGregor 1985: 120); the form was popular in the pre-Norse period, but long-headed examples are specifically Norse.' A bone example was found on the Cille Pheadair farmstead (SF1051/1302), dating to the early 12th century.

Iron arrowhead

274. Context 2006. A complete socketed arrowhead (70mm l. × 21mm w. × 8mm t., broken in three pieces) with a triangular head and slight barbs curving down from the shoulders. This belongs to Jessop's type MP6, a multi-purpose type for both hunting and warfare, dating to the mid-12th century (Jessop 1997: 197).

Iron nails and unidentified iron fragments

001. Context 1001 (Trench 1). An incomplete nail (22mm long) with an oval head (21mm × 17mm) and a square cross-section (9mm × 9mm).

003. Context 1001 (Trench 1). An incomplete nail (18mm long) with a circular head (20mm dia.) and a square cross-section (6mm × 6mm).

006. Context 1001 (Trench 1). An incomplete nail (30mm long).

012. Context 1001 (Trench 1). An incomplete nail (25mm long) with a circular head (21mm dia.) and an unknown cross-section.

020. Context 1001 (Trench 1). An incomplete nail (23mm long) with an oval head (17mm × 13mm) and an unknown cross-section.

023. Context 1001 (Trench 1). An incomplete nail (24mm long) with an oval head (17mm × 15mm) and a square cross-section (7mm × 7mm).

030. Context 1001 (Trench 1). An incomplete nail (20mm long) with a circular head (18mm dia.) and a round cross-section (7mm dia.).

034. Context 1001 (Trench 1). An incomplete nail (25mm long) with an oval head (20mm × 15mm) and a square cross-section (9mm × 9mm).

045. Context 1001 (Trench 1). An incomplete nail (30mm long).

065. Context 1001 (Trench 1). An unidentified fragment (25mm × 15mm).

087. Context 1002 (Trench 1). An incomplete nail (19mm long) with a circular head (18mm dia.) and a rectangular cross-section (8mm × 6mm).

205. Context 2002 (Trench 2). An unidentified fragment (20mm × 20mm).

208. Context 2001 (Trench 2). An unidentified curved fragment, probably a nail (50mm long × 10mm dia.).

268. Context 2001 (Trench 2). Two unidentified, adjoining fragments.

270. Context 2004 (Trench 2). An unidentified fragment (40mm long × 40mm wide × 20mm dia.).

Context 2004 (Trench 2). An incomplete nail shank (33mm long) with an unknown cross-section.

233. Context 3007 (Trench 3). An incomplete nail.

242. Context 3007 (Trench 3). An incomplete, bent nail (26mm long) with a circular head (15mm dia.).

244. Context 3007 (Trench 3). An unidentified object, corroded into many small pieces, possibly from a curved or circular plate.

304. Context 3001 (Trench 3). An unidentified lump (20mm × 30mm dia.).

310. Context 3002 (Trench 3). An incomplete nail (70mm × 15mm dia.).

313. Context 3010 (Trench 3). An unidentified fragment (100mm long × 40mm wide × 20mm dia.) with wood adhering.

246. Context 4001 (Trench 4). An incomplete circular nail head (6mm dia.).

601. Context 4002 (Trench 4). An unidentified lump (80mm long × 40mm wide × 30mm dia.).

Unstratified (surface Trench 4). A clench nail (30mm long with a damaged nail head and a square rove 30mm × 30mm) with a square-sectioned shank (9mm across). The distance from nail head to rove is 12mm.

Context 5001 (Trench 5). An incomplete nail (18mm long) with a circular head (22mm dia.) and a square cross-section (4mm × 4mm).

Glass

067. Context 1001. A fragment of brown glass, probably from a beer bottle.

073. Context 1002. A fragment of glass (30mm across).

071 and 076. Context 1002. Two fragments of vitrified glass.

273. Context 2007. A fragment of vitrified glass (30mm long × 20mm wide × 10mm dia.).

241a. Context 4001. A fragment of green glass.

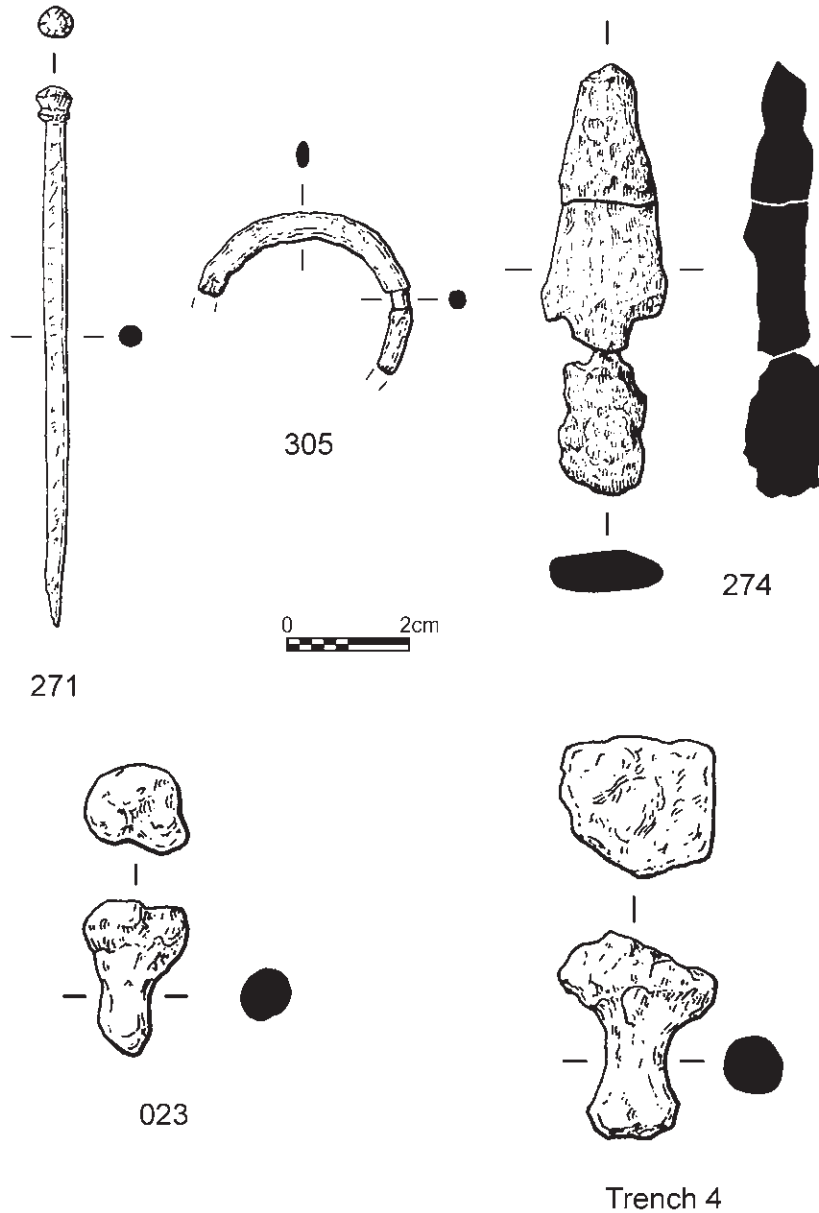


Figure 15.11. Metal artefacts from Gearraidh Bhailteas

241b. Context 4001. A partially vitrified rim shard of clear glass.

Clay pipe

247. Context 4001. A fragment of the stem of a clay pipe.

Slag

Fifty-one pieces of metalworking slag were recovered from all five trenches, mostly from Trenches 3, 4 and 2. Unfortunately, only 11 pieces were available for analysis (the remainder having gone missing). A further five pieces identified on site as slag (SF245 in layer 4001) were found to be pieces of burnt coal or coke, casting doubt on some of the original identifications.

Categories and criteria for identification are those currently used by English Heritage’s Centre for Archaeology

and employed on the assemblage from the Norse farmstead at Cille Pheadair (Dungworth forthcoming). A total of 1.37kg of iron-working slags have been identified from the 11 surviving pieces from Gearraidh Bhailteas; these are smithing hearth bottoms, vitrified lining, undiagnostic iron-working slags (Table 15.3). In addition, there was a

| Slag Type | Weight (g) |
|----------------------------------|-------------|
| Smithing Hearth Bottoms | 890 |
| Vitrified Hearth Lining | 480 |
| Non-diagnostic Iron working Slag | 22 |
| Vitrified Glass Slag | 76 |
| Fuel Ash Slag | 2 |
| Total | 1468 |

Table 15.3. Types of slag from Gearraidh Bhailteas

single fragment of fuel ash slag and a fragment of dense, glassy slag of unknown origin. A full list of all the slags is given in Table 15.4.

Worked flint and chert

081. Context 1002. A flake of worked chert (20mm × 30mm).
 220. Context 2001. A flint flake (20mm × 35mm × 15mm).
 222. Context 2001. A flint flake.
 223. Context 2001. A flint flake (12mm × 8mm × 1mm).
 201. Context 2002. Small fragments of worked chert.
 212. Context 2005. A flake of worked chert.
 239a. Context 4001. Seven fragments of worked stone.
 239b. Context 4001. Four fragments of quartz.

Imported stones

Seventeen pieces of slate were found (two from 1001, one from 2008, six from 3003, six from 4001 and two from 5001). The only other imported stonework was a piece of siltstone from 2005.

Whetstone

253 and 255. Contexts 5000 and 5001. A complete but broken whetstone and its fragments. This is of recent date.

| SF | Context | Trench | Type | No. | Weight | Comments |
|-----|---------|--------|------|-----|--------|----------------------|
| 68 | 1001 | 1 | ? | 1 | ? | |
| 63 | 1001 | 1 | ? | 1 | ? | |
| 48 | 1001 | 1 | ? | 1 | ? | |
| 56 | 1001 | 1 | ? | 1 | ? | |
| 33 | 1001 | 1 | ? | 1 | ? | |
| 77 | 1002 | 1 | ? | 1 | ? | |
| 69 | 1002 | 1 | ? | 1 | ? | |
| 265 | 1003 | 1 | ? | 1 | ? | |
| 76 | 1002 | 1 | VGS? | 1 | ? | 50mm × 70mm |
| 71 | 1002 | 1 | VGS | 1 | 76 | |
| 217 | 2001 | 2 | ? | 1 | ? | |
| 272 | 2002 | 2 | ? | 1 | ? | 40mm × 60mm × 20mm |
| 277 | 2006 | 2 | ? | 2 | ? | |
| 269 | 2010 | 2 | ? | 3 | ? | |
| 209 | 2002 | 2 | ? | 4 | ? | Large pieces |
| 249 | 2004 | 2 | ? | 1 | ? | 40mm × 60mm × 20mm |
| 301 | 3001 | 3 | ? | 1 | ? | 40mm × 40mm × 20mm |
| 303 | 3001 | 3 | ? | 1 | ? | 20mm × 20mm × 8mm |
| 250 | 3001 | 3 | SHB | 1 | 578 | 200mm × 200mm × 50mm |
| 250 | 3001 | 3 | ND | 1 | 6 | 20mm × 40mm × 10mm |
| 207 | 3002 | 3 | ? | 2 | ? | |
| 311 | 3002 | 3 | ? | 1 | ? | 40mm × 70mm × 30mm |
| 243 | 3002 | 3 | VHL | 3 | 480 | Large pieces |
| 243 | 3002 | 3 | FAS | 1 | 2 | |
| 208 | 3003 | 3 | ? | 1 | ? | |
| 242 | 3007 | 3 | SHB | 2 | 312 | |
| 242 | 3007 | 3 | ND | 2 | 16 | |
| 220 | 4001 | 4 | ? | 6 | ? | Possibly not slag |
| 281 | 4004 | 4 | ? | 3 | ? | Possibly not slag |
| 274 | 5001 | 5 | ? | 4 | ? | |

SHB = Smithing Hearth Bottom

VHL = Vitrified Hearth Lining

ND = Non-diagnostic Ironworking Slag

VGS = Vitrified Glass Slag

FAS = Fuel Ash Slag

Table 15.4. Catalogue of iron-working debris and other slags

| Context | Burnt bone | Tooth |
|---------------|------------|----------|
| 2001 | 1 | |
| 2002 | 11 | 1 |
| 2005 | 3 | |
| 3004 and 3007 | 26 | |
| 4001 and 4002 | 20 | 1 |
| 5001 | 2 | |
| Total | 63 | 2 |

Table 15.5. Unidentified animal bone from Gearraidh Bhailteas

Burnt stones

There were 83 fragments of burnt stone and 62 burnt cobbles. Most of these (52 burnt stone fragments and 52 burnt cobbles) came from contexts 2001, 2004, 2002 and 2005 in Trench 2. The remainder were almost equally distributed in Trench 3 (16 heated and burnt stones), Trench 4 (three fragments of burnt stone and 10 burnt cobbles) and Trench 5 (11 fragments), with just one fragment of burnt stone from Trench 1.

Animal bone

Animal bones were poorly preserved in this acidic soil. An almost complete lamb skeleton, of recent date, was found beneath a rock in the topsoil (3001) of Trench 3. Fragments of unburnt bone, presumably also of recent date, were found in two contexts (five fragments in 1001, and fragments in 3002). Otherwise, faunal remains survived only as fragments of teeth or burnt bone, none of which were identifiable to species (Table 15.5).

The carbonized plant remains

Helen Smith

The coarse flot component from one bulk sample was submitted for assessment: sample 008 from context 3015 (a burnt peat deposit) in Trench 3. This was a large sample composed almost exclusively of burnt organic material with very few identifiable plant remains, with the exception of some very small twig fragments and possible root fragments. No cereal grains or other seeds were identified. The material represents the remains of charred peat.

Conclusions

J. Symonds

The evidence of field survey and trial excavation would seem to confirm the presence of Medieval and later habitations and cultivation plots at Gearraidh Bhailteas. The term *geàrraidh* is a Norse loan-word into Gaelic (Old Norse, *garor*) meaning an enclosure, fence or farmyard (Nicholaisen 2001: 141). The word may be recognized in English, and Welsh, as ‘garth’ or ‘garden’: in essence, an area that is protected and cultivated, usually by hand. In South Uist the term is specifically used to describe the inner

or ‘home’ pasture, between the arable and the hill pasture. Some corroboration for the use in Gaelic of loan-words of Scandinavian origin is provided by the name of the loch beside Gearraidh Bhailteas, Loch Aird an Sgairbh. The Gaelic *sgarbh* is derived from Old Norse *skarfr*, meaning ‘cormorant’.

Settlers from Norway colonized South Uist around AD 800, and Old Norse will have been spoken in South Uist for at least five hundred years. The use of Gaelicized loanwords nevertheless suggests that the loch and enclosure names were both coined by Gaelic speakers. Anke-Beate Stahl has suggested that the collapse of Norwegian overlordship in AD 1266 led to a resurgence in the use of Gaelic place-names, particularly in the southern Hebrides (Stahl 2010). This toponymic evidence, along with the Gaelic word *bhailteas*, representing a *baile* (i.e. a township), lends support to the hypothesis that Gearraidh Bhailteas was a Medieval foundation, and it may be noted that the residents of Milton still refer to the area as ‘the old township’ (the late Angus MacMillan, pers. comm.). A sizeable farming complex was certainly operating at this location towards the end of the 15th century, when the name of Gearraidh Bhailteas was mentioned in a land charter dated to 1498 (Fleming 1992: 88).

Taking a wider perspective, Parker Pearson has observed that the none of the *geàrraidh* townships in South Uist (e.g. Gearraidh na Mònadh, Gearraidh Sheilidh, Gearraidh Bhailteas) contain any machair, and all have failed to produce any evidence of pre-Medieval settlement when examined by field survey (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 163; see Chapter 2). Notwithstanding the difficulties of identifying the remains of structures earlier than the Post-Medieval period on the blacklands, there does appear to be a *bona fide* case for regarding the *geàrraidh* as pasture that was first taken into cultivation in the Medieval period; Raven (2005) suggests that this occurred as early as the Late Norse period in the 12th century. The *geàrraidh* townships occupy a narrow strip running north–south down South Uist, on a line to the east of the lochs that mark the inner edge of the machair. Evidence from excavations at Bornais and Cille Pheadair indicates that these two machair settlements were abandoned sometime in the 13th or 14th century AD (Sharples and Parker Pearson 1999). It is likely that the majority of other sites on the machair plain were also abandoned at this time, leading to a significant change in the settlement landscape, as new farms and enclosures were created on the *geàrraidh* to replace the earlier Norse farms on the machair (Raven 2005).

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16 Excavations at A Beinn na Mhic Aongheis (the Hill of the Son of Angus), Bornais

Mike Parker Pearson, Pete Marshall and Helen Smith with contributions by David Barker and Liz Pieksma

Summary

A programme of test pitting in February 1995 and June 1996 within Bornais (Bornish) township, on the knoll of Bornish House (NF73SW 12) and the knoll between Bornish House and Bornish Church led to the identification of the latter as a Post-Medieval settlement site (Parker Pearson and Roper 1995; Site 89 of the machair survey; see Chapter 2). According to oral tradition, this large grassy knoll, known as A Beinn na Mhic Aongheis, is the site of the 19th-century tacksman's house, once occupied by MacDonalds.

Two trenches were excavated here in June 1996 (NF72NW 30). The west trench (Trench 2) was shallow and came down to bedrock within 0.30m of the surface. Nevertheless, there were single-course wall lines of possibly three buildings, associated with porcelain and some earthenware pottery. In the east trench (Trench 1), the walls, floor and hearth of a stone-founded building lay within a deeper stratigraphic sequence of 0.50m, which included greater quantities of earthenware as well as some glass and factory-made ceramics.

The finds can be dated mainly to the 16th–19th centuries and the settlement broadly occupies the period between the abandonment of the Bornais machair settlement in the 14th century (Sharples 2005) and the construction of Bornish House in the late 19th century. It is likely to be the township settlement of Upper Bornish marked on the late 16th- and 17th-century Pont and Blaeu maps and on William Bald's map of 1805.

Aims and objectives

After identification and trial excavation in 1994 of the Norse-period settlement on Bornais machair about 600m to the west (sites 1–3 of the machair survey; see Chapter 2; Sharples 2005), this was the first of two excavation projects within the peatlands east of the machair to investigate the environs of Dun Vulcan. The other Dun Vulcan environs excavation was on an Iron Age islet within Upper Loch Bornish (see Chapter 12).

- The first aim of the excavations was to date and characterize settlement in the vicinity of the Dun Vulcan broch (Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999) in order to gain a better understanding of its landscape setting and settlement context.
- The second aim, which developed from the first, was to test the 'proto-township' hypothesis that arose out of the findings of the machair survey (see Chapter 2).

The 'proto-township' hypothesis

Results of survey on the machair in the environs of Dun Vulcan (from Cille Donnain to Staoinebrig townships) demonstrate a marked regularity in the spacing of Middle Iron Age non-broch settlements at roughly 1km intervals along the machair. This machair pattern matches the latitudinal distribution of nucleated township communities on the peatland as mapped by William Bald in 1805 (prior to considerable changes in township territories; Caird 1979). A chronological link between these two periods almost two millennia apart is provided by the identification of Norse-

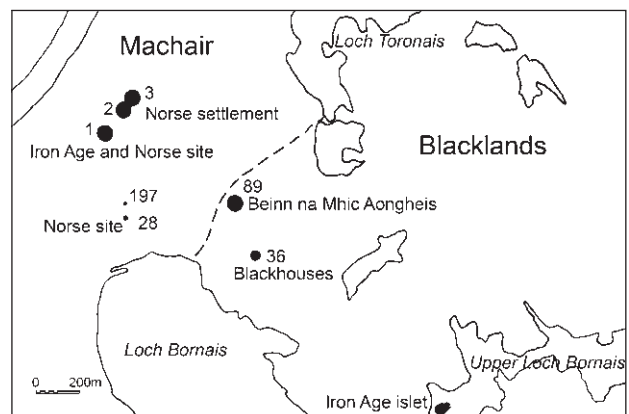


Figure 16.1. Map showing location of A Beinn na Mhic Aongheis and neighbouring sites

period settlements on the machair close to or on top of the Middle Iron Age sites (Figure 16.1).

On the basis of these observations, it was proposed that the townships recorded in 1805 may have an ancient origin 2,000 years ago in the Iron Age (Parker Pearson 1996a). The distribution of Iron Age and Viking settlement clusters could thus represent a ‘proto-township’ distribution and organization prior to the shift of settlement onto the edge of the peatlands. According to this model, the shifts from one mound site to another (and eventually onto the peatlands) were minor discontinuities within a long-term continuity of territorial organization for township communities living in predominantly nucleated settlements from the Iron Age until the Clearances. This model contrasts wholly with Dodgshon’s notion of dispersed Medieval and Post-Medieval settlement in western Scotland prior to nucleation (1993). It is, however, in broad accordance with his notion that the basic framework of settlement was already established by about 1100 but with interstitial settlement still to develop (1981: 174–5).

It appears, however, that South Uist’s basic framework was in place from the Middle Iron Age, considerably earlier than previously considered for western Scotland as a whole. In this respect, it is interesting that the extents of arable land within the South Uist townships, notably Bornais, are amongst the largest in the whole region (Dodgshon 1992). This may possibly reflect the townships’ more ancient origin during the Iron Age, when farming yields and perhaps population levels were lower. From then until the 19th century, the Iron Age framework was modified by the expansion of settlement through the creation of *gearraidh* townships, probably in the Late Norse/Medieval period, and others in areas without machair, probably in the Post-Medieval period, and by the splitting of townships, a constant process not restricted to any one period (*cf.* Dodgshon 1981: 174–204).

Two strategies were developed to examine and test the ‘proto-township’ hypothesis:

- One was to increase the scope of the machair survey to cover the whole of South Uist.
- The second was to select a single township, Upper Bornish (Bornais Uachdhrach), and evaluate the settlement sites within it to determine whether or not there was a long-term continuity of nucleated settlement (*i.e.* houses concentrated in particular places rather than dispersed across the landscape), broken only by wholesale relocations.

The excavations at Beinn na Mhic Aongheis were designed specifically to explore whether the abandonment of the Norse-period settlement mounds on Bornais machair was followed by relocation onto the adjacent peatland until the Clearances and after.

Documentary sources and oral history

A Beinn na Mhic Aongheis is the grassy knoll (NF 735 299) located just north of the Bornish-Ardvule road and

midway between Bornish House and Bornish Church. It is known as the site of the 19th-century tacksman’s house (the late Neil MacMillan and Uilleam Macdonald pers. comm.) although there is no surface indication of any previous settlement on this location. Upper Bornish was cleared of all its inhabitants in the first half of the 19th century, save for the MacDonald tacksman’s family, and today nobody in Bornais is a descendant of that pre-Clearance population.

Bornais is first recorded on a charter recording a grant of land in South Uist in 1498 (Munro and Munro 1986: 228). It is the most northerly of the five townships mentioned, Aisgernis, Frobost, Gearraidh Bhailteas (Garryvaltos) and Cill Donnain being the other four. Prior to that date, Howmore is mentioned in a land charter of 1469 (*ibid.*: 153).

Upper Bornish appears on Timothy Pont’s map of about 1595 as Borranesh Ocrach, between Kildonnen to the south and Borranesh Vcrach (Lower Bornish) to the north. The map is too schematic to be used to pinpoint settlement locations but it does show that this settlement lay clearly to the east of the freshwater lochs and the waterway that skirt the eastern edge of the machair. It was thus located on the blackland by this time, along with most of the other townships. Joannis Blaeu’s 1654 map identifies the same settlements of Borranesh Yerach (Bornais Iodhraich; Lower Bornish) and Borranesh Ocrach (Bornais Uachdhrach; Upper Bornish) located between Kildonnen (Cill Donnain; Kildonan) to the south and Ormakled (Ormacleit) to the north. The Bornais settlements are shown at either end of, and east of, an unnamed loch (presumably Loch Toronais [Torrornish], on the ends of which they are shown on Bald’s map), in the same relationship as in Timothy Pont’s map.

In 1672 Upper Bornish was granted in feu charter to Ranald MacDonald who inherited from his father the hereditary title of factor (land agent or *bailie*) to the clan (MacLean 1989: 2.21; 1994: 30–1). Clanranald’s debts in the 17th century could be offset by using land as collateral and granting it as in feu charter or, in other cases on South Uist, as wadset. As the factor’s farm, Upper Bornish was one of the most prosperous 17th–18th century communities on the island, second only to Clanranald’s main farm. After the Statutes of Iona in 1609 this was at Howbeg in the earlier 17th century but by 1654 Ormacleit had become the South Uist residence of Donald, 13th Clanranald.

Upper Bornish included lands on either side of Loch Aoineart, South Uist’s principal harbour at that time. With a tax-collecting house (*taigh maile*) at the head of the loch and an inn on the north side opposite Bàgh Lathach (see Chapter 4), it was one of the most prosperous farms on the island. The availability of sea trout, seaweed and perhaps salt in the loch added to the bounty of trade. Ranald MacDonald was required by the 1672 charter to pay annually to Clanranald twelve bolls of meal, ten stones of butter and five stones of cheese.

William Bald’s map of 1805 shows a nucleated settlement of six houses at Upper Bornish in the environs of Bornish

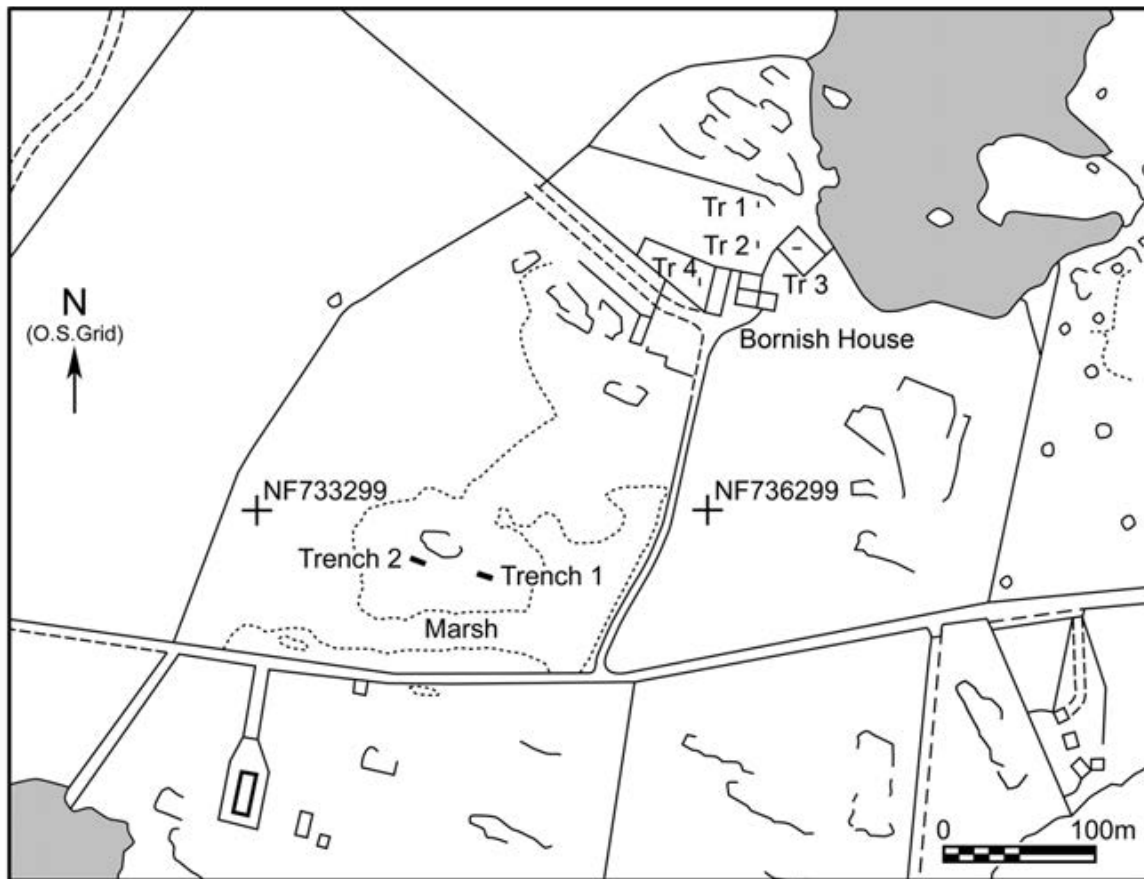


Figure 16.3. Map showing locations of trenches at A Beinn na Mhic Aongheis and Bornish House

black loam with no stones, containing large quantities of porcelain but few animal bones. At a depth of 0.20–0.25m, there was a 0.20m-thick layer of windblown machair sand (layer 2). At least one piece of porcelain came from this otherwise clean layer but was added to the finds from layer 1. Layer 2 sealed another layer (layer 3) of black loam, identical to layer 1. This thin layer (0.15–0.20m thick) lay directly on the gneiss bedrock and contained further pieces of porcelain or china.

Trench 3

This trench was located within the walled yard immediately north of the farmhouse. It was 2.5m east-west and 0.60m north-south. Its east end cut a low turf mound of recent origin, running north-south. Beneath this was a layer of organic black peaty soil (layer 1), about 0.25m deep, containing large quantities of china, glass, bone and iron as well as a plastic model racing car. This soil had formed over a well-laid stone surface made up of irregular blocks. This stone floor (layer 2) might well have formed a yard surface (though it might have been the floor of a building) and probably dates to the early 20th century or the late 19th century: it had never been seen by the elderly resident of Bornish House (the late Kate MacMillan). The stone surface was removed in the west half of the trench. Beneath it was a reddish grey-black soil (layer 3), 0.20–0.25m deep. The lowest layer was a grey-black sandy loam (layer 4), low

in organic content and partly formed out of weathering products from the underlying bedrock, 0.50–0.60m below the ground surface. The only finds in layer 3 were a small, plain sherd of earthenware and a handful of small pieces of red-fired clay.

Trench 4

This was excavated to the west of the farmstead, immediately west of the long barn. It was 3m east-west and 0.60m north-south. Beneath a topsoil layer (layer 1) of dark, peaty soil (containing a few finds of china, glass, metal and bone) there was a thin layer of broken slates in a matrix of dark grey sandy loam (layer 2) at a depth of about 0.15–0.20m, probably deriving from the construction of the long barn when its slate roof was put on. Beneath this was a grey-black soil (layer 3) with low organic content and no finds. This lay on bedrock at a variable depth between 0.10m and 0.30m deep.

Conclusions

Large quantities of late 19th- to 20th-century refuse were found in three of the four trenches but only one trench (Trench 3), located immediately north of the present farmhouse, produced evidence for earlier activity. This consisted of a single small sherd of earthenware pottery. Bald's map of 1805 shows a cluster of buildings on the knoll of Bornish House but, in the light of these results,

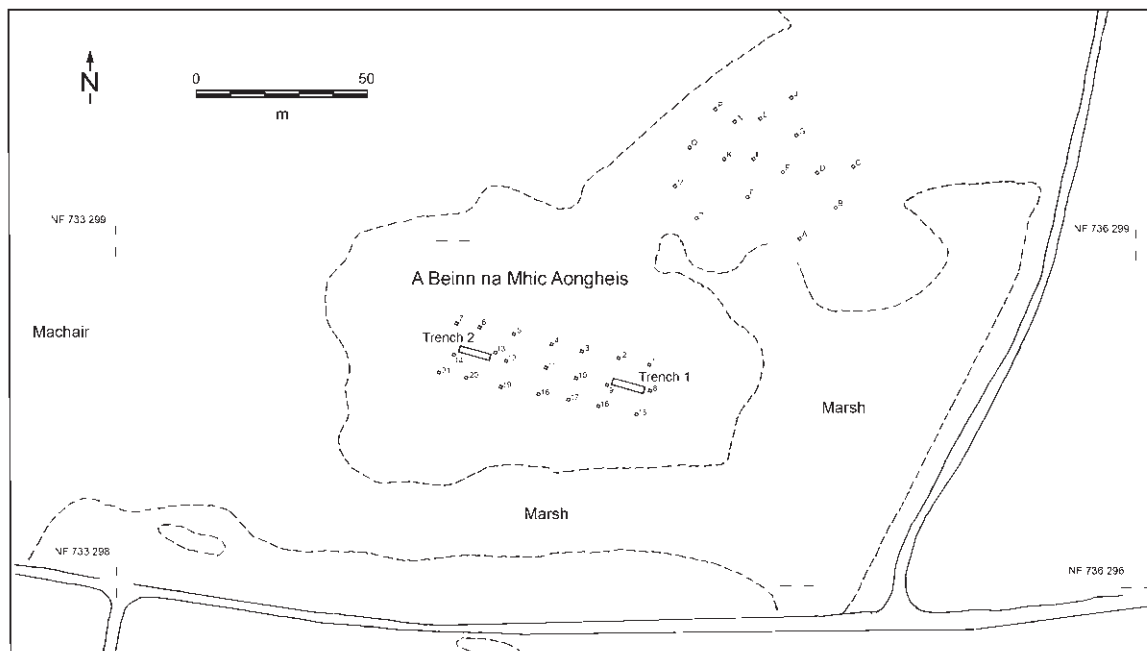


Figure 16.4. Plan showing locations of test pits and trenches

it appears that this depiction of a concentration of pre-clearance settlement at Bornish House is in error. In view of the excavation results, Bald's mapping of the pre-Clearance settlement at Upper Bornish must be seen as figurative and schematic.

The lower knoll

The lower knoll to the south of Bornish House and north of A Beinn na Mhic Aongheis is about 90m east-west and 50m north-south. Sixteen test pits (test pits A–P; 0.35m × 0.35m square) were dug on a systematic grid (Figure 16.4). Each was excavated to bedrock which lay between 0.17m and 0.45m below the surface (on average about 0.25m–0.35m deep). Beneath the black topsoil there was a light brown and rust-coloured layer that lay above the bedrock. Pieces of iron were found in two pits (F and H) and sherds came from a third (I). However, there was no indication of the occupation layer sequences found on A Beinn na Mhic Aongheis. There might well have been one or two buildings in this area but it was not a centre of ancient settlement.

A Beinn na Mhic Aongheis

The knoll is a roughly oval piece of raised ground, 98.5m east-west and 62m north-south, dipping gradually westwards towards the machair. The bedrock protrudes through the grass cover in various locations but otherwise this is the only part of the Upper Bornish peatland where a substantial area of the bedrock is not visible. The knoll is bounded on its south and east sides by a steep drop into a bog that is dryish in summer. The north side slopes gently towards the smaller, previously uninhabited knoll

south of Bornish House. The west side slopes gradually towards the machair and is separated from the machair by a canalized stream.

Twenty-one test pits, 0.35m × 0.35m, were dug on a systematic grid across the 5400 square metres of the site (Figure 16.4). They indicate that depths of archaeological deposits vary considerably across the site: their depth varied from 0.15m to 0.62m and some clearly cut occupation features such as floors (Table 16.1). The dips and hollows in the western and central parts of the site have the deepest stratigraphic sequences (generally over 0.50m) whilst the high east end also has an appreciable depth of build-up which, in one place (just west of Trench 1, see below) sandwiches a layer of windblown sand.

The magnetometer survey

A magnetometer survey was also carried out at A Beinn na Mhic Aongheis using a fluxgate gradiometer. Since the gneissic rock is relatively magnetic, the results are not presented because they seem broadly to indicate the varying depth of soil above bedrock rather than the locations of particular archaeological features such as houses and hearths.

The excavation

Trenches 1 and 2 were laid out prior to the test-pitting exercise on A Beinn na Mhic Aongheis, such was our confidence that this would be the principal archaeological site. Both trenches were 10m east-west by 2m north-south. The trenches were placed so as to investigate those parts of the knoll where the soil was relatively deep. Trench 1 was located across a slight depression on the summit of

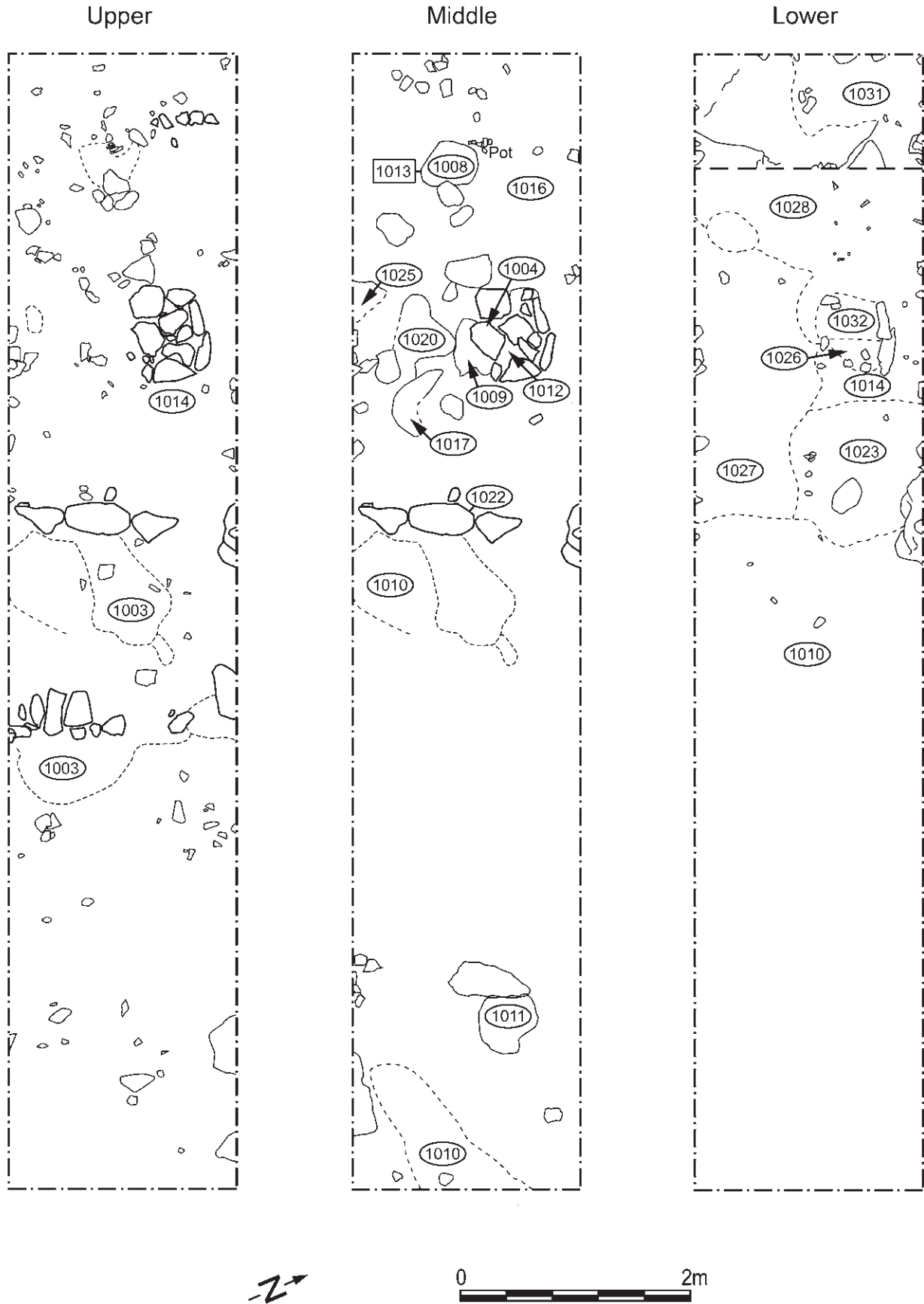


Figure 16.5. Plan of Trench 1, showing upper, middle and lower layers (including the west end excavated to bedrock)

the knoll, at its east end. Trench 2 was located towards the west end on the high ground between the central hollow and the slope westwards towards the machair.

Trench 1 – the east trench

Thirty-two layers and features were recorded in this trench, which was excavated to bedrock only at its west end. Covering the sequence of archaeological deposits were two layers of topsoil (1001 and 1002) that contained large quantities of iron objects, porcelain, glass and some earthenware. Beneath 1002, in the west end of the trench, were the remains of a north-south aligned, 3.35m-wide building consisting of a largely demolished west wall, the lower course of an east wall (1022), a small oval central hearth (1004 and 1012; 0.74m N-S × 0.82m E-W) and a compacted brown/black earth floor (1005) (Figure 16.5). This oval hearth was constructed directly on top of an earlier, rectangular hearth (1014 and 1026; 0.62m N-S × 0.64m E-W) that lay over an ash layer (1032), either an earlier hearth or the pit for hearth 1014. Within the floor area of the building there were two shallow pits or scoops 60–70mm deep (1019 filled by 1017=1006 and 1018; 1013 filled by 1008), and a small spread of burnt peat ash (1020 and 1025) (Figure 16.7). The finds from these layers included glass and glazed wares, suggestive of a date in the later 18th or early 19th centuries, as well as earthenware sherds.

Floor 1005, running north-south across the western end of the trench, was set into a compact black/brown peaty loam (1007) on its west side and an orange/brown peat ash layer (1003) on its east side, both about 0.20m



Figure 16.6. The house floor in Trench 1, viewed from the east

| Test pit | Depth | Description | Pottery |
|----------|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| 1 | 0.15m | Dark peaty soil | |
| 2 | 0.45m | Dark peat with coarse sand; shell layer (0.15m) and sand layer (0.24m) | |
| 3 | 0.37m | Dark peat with some large stones and an iron object | 1 sherd |
| 4 | 0.28m | Dark peaty soil | |
| 5 | 0.34m | Dark peaty soil with shells at 0.23m | |
| 6 | 0.33m | Dark peaty soil with a few stones | |
| 7 | 0.60m | Dark peaty soil with large stones (0.20m) and smaller stones (0.48m) | |
| 8 | 0.20m | Dark peaty soil | |
| 9 | 0.50m | Dark peaty soil with coarse sand layer (0.26m) | 2 sherds |
| 10 | 0.19m | Dark peaty soil | |
| 11 | 0.53m | Dark peaty soil with loose stone (0.30m) | |
| 12 | 0.29m | Dark peaty soil | |
| 13 | 0.55m | Dark peaty soil with sand layer (0.28m) | |
| 14 | 0.62m | Dark peaty soil with some sand, two large stones (0.40m) | 1 sherd |
| 15 | 0.37m | Dark peaty soil | |
| 16 | 0.33m | Dark peaty soil | |
| 17 | 0.28m | Dark peaty soil | 4 sherds |
| 18 | 0.36m | Dark peaty soil with very slight trace of sand | |
| 19 | 0.58m | Dark peaty soil, sand traces, large stones (0.13m) and shells (0.33m) | |
| 20 | 0.55m | Dark peat, sand traces, large stones (0.10m), brown clay floor (0.38m) | 1 sherd |
| 21 | 0.48m | Dark peaty soil with slight trace of sand | |

Table 16.1. A Beinn na Mhic Aongheis test pit data

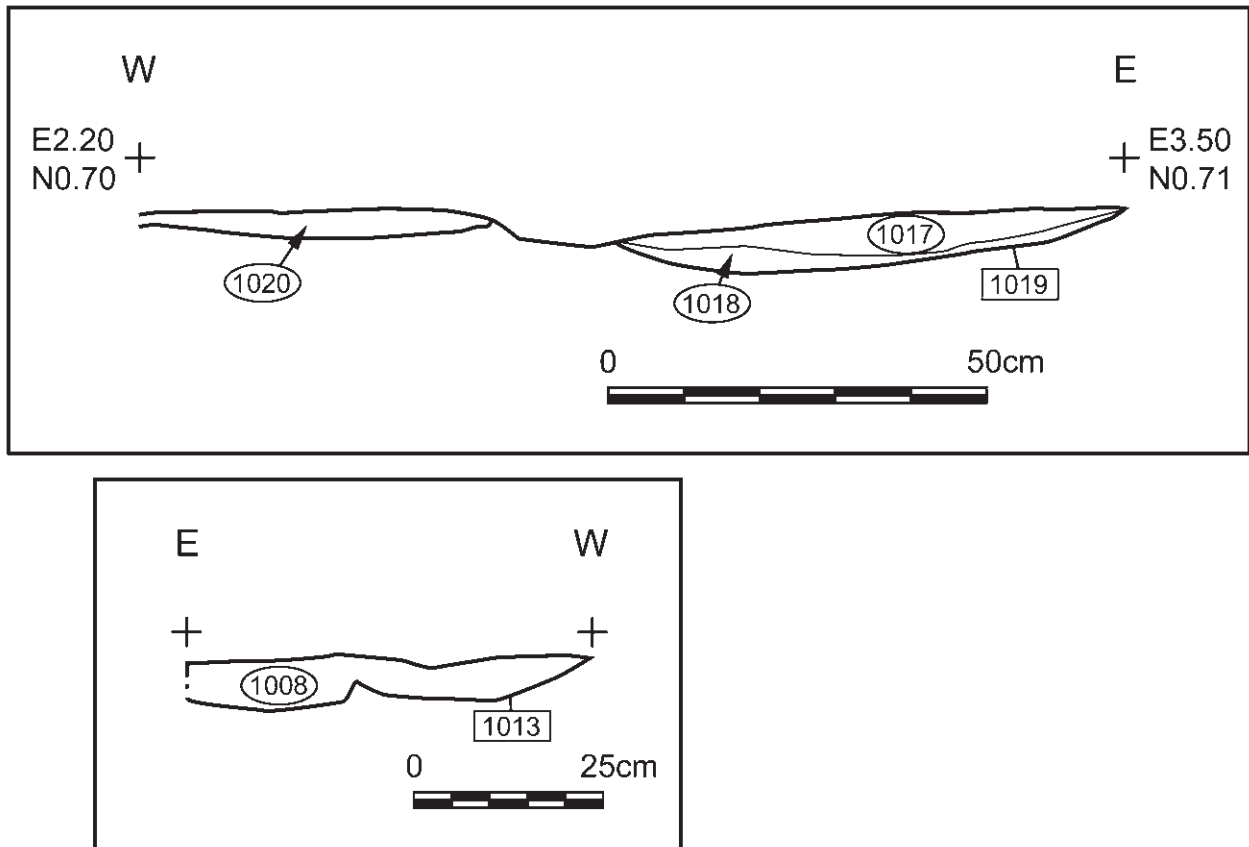


Figure 16.7. Sections of the features in the house floor in Trench 1

below the ground surface (Figure 16.6). Within 1007, on the very edge of the house wall, there was a large piece of earthenware. Layer 1003 lay over 1011 (a localized spread of brown clayey loam with orange inclusions) and over 1015 (an extensive spread of light brown clayey loam). This lay over a light brown clayey loam with orange inclusions (1010) in the eastern part of the trench and over a dark brown sandy loam (1016) in the western end. There was a group of large, conjoining earthenware sherds from a single vessel in layer 1016. Sealed beneath 1015 were a localized sandy layer (1024) and a spread of light brown clay loam (1010). Beneath 1016 were small spreads of sandy loam with burnt orange peat ash (1021, 1023, 1025) and a dark black and orange ash layer (1027 beneath 1025; Figure 16.5).

Only the west end of the trench (an area 2m × 1m) was taken down to bedrock, 0.56m below ground level, with a series of thin brown loam layers (1028, 1029 and 1030) above the naturally occurring yellow clay and degraded rock (1031) that lie over the gneiss (Figures 16.8 and 16.9).

Fragmentation

Most of the pottery from Trench 1 and, in fact, from the whole site, was severely broken up, producing an average sherd size in Trench 1 of 5.8g (Table 16.2). This is much lower than the average weights for Upper Loch Bornish (8.8g) and for Dun Vulcan (8.8g). It probably indicates the degree of continuous disturbance and trampling of these

shallow deposits over four centuries or more. The only contexts with high average sherd weights are 1007 (the fill layer into which floor 1005 is set) and 1015 (another fill layer). A similar value is found for the near-complete pot lying smashed within 1016. As might be expected, the lowest average weight of 3.8g is for pottery in floor layer 1005.

Discussion

We may identify four broad stratigraphic phases within Trench 1:

- Phase 4 the house and associated features (18th–19th centuries)
- Phase 3 layers 1003, 1007, 1011 and 1015
- Phase 2 layers 1010 and 1016
- Phase 1 layers beneath 1016.

The finds from these layers include clay pipe fragments, glass bottle fragments, ironwork, copper alloy artefacts and a wide variety of factory-made glazed wares, stoneware and earthenware. There are clay pipe stems from 1001 and 1005, and a late 17th-century clay pipe bowl from 1002. The imported glazed wares are restricted to layers 1001, 1002, 1005, 1012 and 1007. Bottle glass was found in these as well as in 1016. Contexts containing only earthenware are 1008 and 1017 (house phase; Phase 4), 1003, 1011, 1015 (Phase 3) and 1016 (Phase 2), 1021, 1023, 1028, 1029 and 1030 (Phase 1).

Test pits

| Location | No. | Weight | Av. g | Hard |
|--------------|-----------|--------------|------------|------|
| TP 3 | 1 | 10.1g | 10.1 | |
| TP 9 | 2 | 11.3g | 5.6 | |
| TP 10 | 2 | 12.1g | 6 | |
| TP 14 | 1 | 0.8g | 0.8 | 1 |
| TP 17 | 3 | 34.7g | 11.6 | 3 |
| TP 20 | 1 | 2.2g | 2.2 | |
| Total | 10 | 71.2g | 7.1 | |

Trench 1

| Layer | No. | Weight | Av. g | Hard |
|--------------|------------|---------------|------------|-----------|
| 1001 | 101 | 532.5g | 5.3 | 15 |
| 1002 | 197 | 1080.3g | 5.5 | 21 |
| 1003 | 45 | 244.3g | 5.4 | 2 |
| 1005 | 60 | 228g | 3.8 | 6 |
| 1007 | 24 | 246g | 10.2 | 3 |
| 1008 | 15 | 64.1g | 4.3 | 1 |
| 1009 | 1 | 0.6g | 0.6 | |
| 1010 | 1 | 6.5g | 6.5 | |
| 1011 | 1 | 4.2g | 4.2 | |
| 1015 | 13 | 137.1g | 10.5 | 2 |
| 1016 | 64 | 288.9g | 4.5 | 4 |
| 1016 pot | 56 | 519g | 9.3 | |
| 1017 | 1 | 10.5g | 10.5 | |
| 1021 | 2 | 8.5g | 4.2 | 1 |
| 1026 | 8 | 32.8g | 4.1 | |
| 1028 | 6 | 26.4g | 4.4 | 5 |
| 1030 | 2 | 24.2g | 12.1 | |
| Total | 597 | 3453.9 | 5.8 | 60 |

Trench 2

| Layer | No. | Weight | Av. g | Hard |
|--------------|-----------|--------------|------------|-----------|
| 2001 | 4 | 12.8g | 3.2 | 1 |
| 2002 | 33 | 169.2g | 5.1 | 9 |
| 2004 | 15 | 62g | 4.1 | 9 |
| 2007 | 30 | 111.5g | 3.7 | 5 |
| Total | 82 | 355.5 | 4.3 | 24 |

Unstratified

| | No. | Weight | Av. g |
|--|-----|--------|-------|
| | 77 | 336.2g | 4.4 |

Table 16.2. The pottery from Beinn na Mhic Aongheis

We may tentatively infer that the house phase began in the late 18th century, the third phase in the early 18th century, the second phase in the late 17th century and the earliest phase some time before.

Trench 2 – the west trench

The depth of soil above bedrock in this trench was much shallower than in the other; in its centre a large boulder came up to just below the surface (Figures 16.10 to 16.12). In contrast, however, excavation of this trench revealed four wall foundations forming at least three and possibly

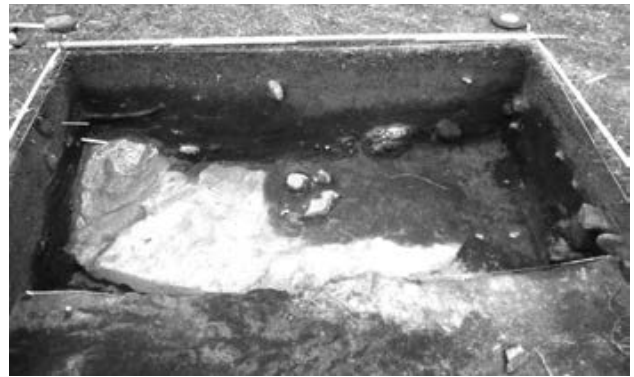


Figure 16.8. The west end of Trench 1 excavated to bedrock, viewed from the east

four structures. The sequence of layers was simpler than in Trench 1, with two layers of topsoil (2001 and 2002) above a dark brown sandy loam (2004) that covered most of the trench. Sandwiched between 2002 and 2004 was a localized spread of dark brown/orange sandy loam with burnt peat and charcoal inclusions (2003) that might have been a secondary floor on the east side of wall 2005. Otherwise, there was little trace of any layers or features resembling the ash and loam floors and deposits found in Trench 1.

The most impressive of the buildings, located in the western half of the trench, was composed of a stretch of walling at least 4.60m long, being apparently the north wall of an east-west aligned house (Figure 16.12). At 3.30m east of its northwest corner there was a 0.45m-wide alcove, extending north of the wall by 0.80m. In retrospect this can be interpreted as the doorway in the north wall of the building. The house's interior was filled with a dark brown sandy loam (2014), indistinguishable from 2015 outside the wall. There was no trace of a floor other than the bedrock and a layer of crude cobbles (2012) packed in a dark brown loam matrix with patches of burnt peat and charcoal (2016).

To the east of this building there were traces of three other walls. Wall 2010 was a short stretch of single stones forming a curved line; it may be interpreted as the southeast corner of a north-south aligned building partially constructed up against the protruding bedrock (Figure 16.11). This irregular and small structure, no wider than 1.80m within the trench, might be interpreted as an outhouse or ancillary structure. It was filled with another dark brown sandy loam (2011) and there was no trace of any floor. Walls 2006 and 2005 (with wall fill 2008) might have composed the south and west sides respectively of a rectangular building enclosing an area of dark brown sandy loam (2007). Alternatively, since wall 2005 appears to turn west at the south section edge, enclosing dark brown sandy loam layer 2009, it may be the west wall of a north-south building, utilizing the bedrock foundation in the same way as 2011. Wall 2006 could also be the north wall of a building that lies to the south of the section. Clearly not all the buildings could have been contemporary and the walls will undoubtedly have been partially rebuilt and modified in ways that are not comprehensible within such a small trench.

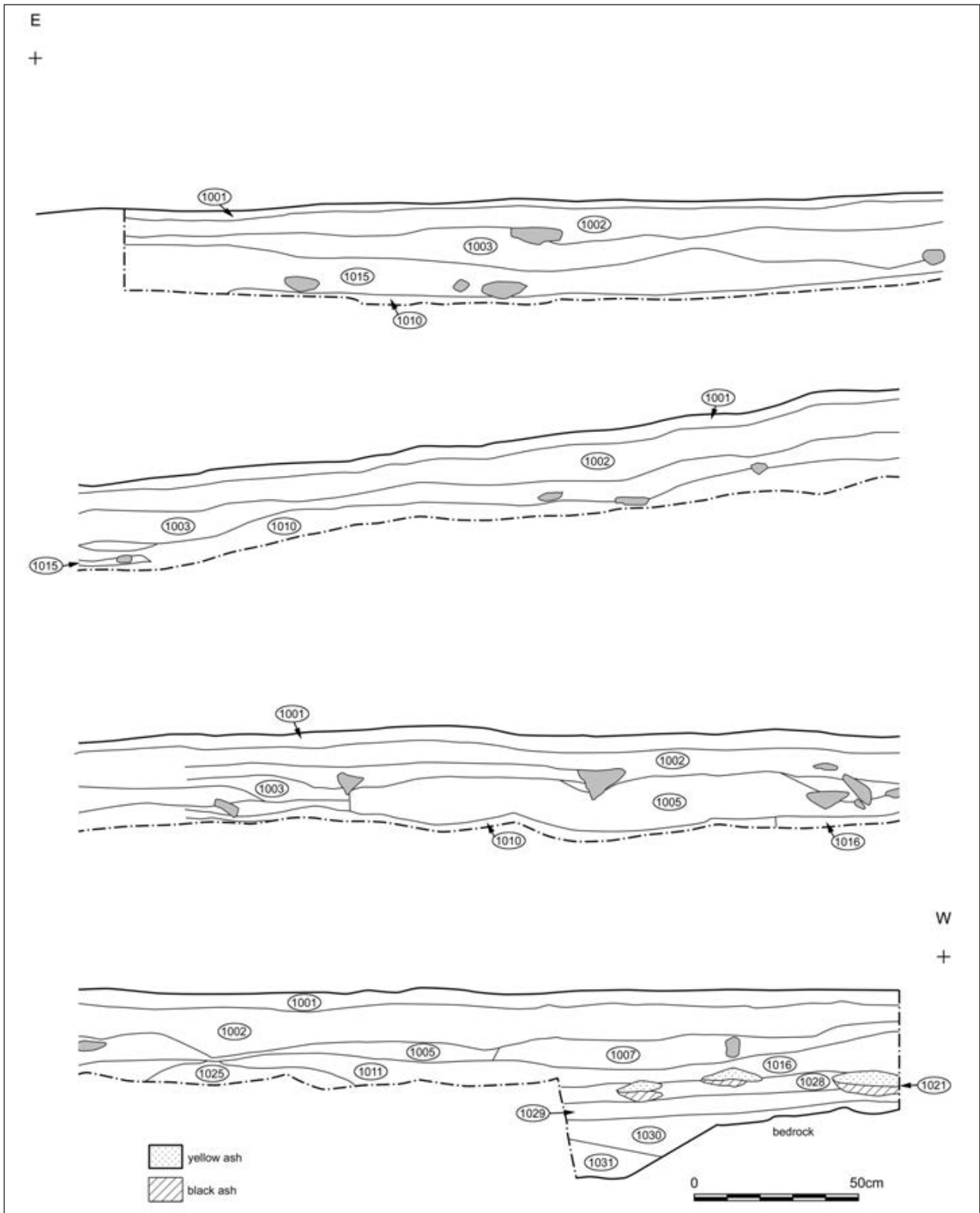


Figure 16.9. North-facing section of Trench 1

Fragmentation

Sherd quantities were much lower and sherds on average smaller in Trench 2 than in Trench 1 (Table 16.2). The low quantities are no doubt partly attributable to the smaller volume of soil in these shallow layers. The smaller average

sherd weight of 4.3g is probably due to greater long-term damage to the earthenware sherds in such thin soil. The very low average weight of 3.7g in layer 2007 confirms its identification as a floor layer within a building.

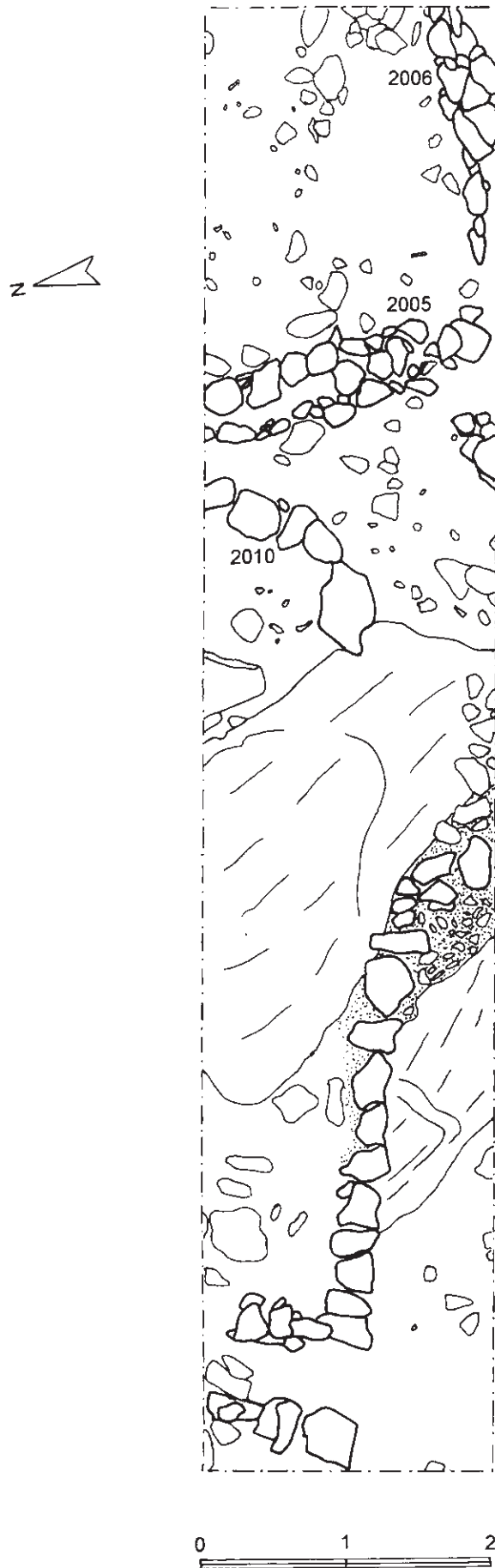


Figure 16.10. Plan of Trench 2



Figure 16.11. The east end of Trench 2, viewed from the west

Discussion

The trench was taken down to bedrock in its east end where it was no deeper than 0.45m (Figures 16.11 and 16.13). It was clear that wall 2006 was set within layer 2004, above layer 2007. In contrast to Trench 1, there had been little accumulation of deposits here, even though the wall lines were better preserved. There were finds of porcelain, ironwork, bones, glass and some pottery, especially in the upper layers. However, the quantities of earthenware are considerably smaller than those found in Trench 1. Glazed sherds were found in 2001, 2002, 2004 and 2006. The shallowness of deposits and scarcity of finds preclude any attempts to securely date these buildings within the Late Medieval or Post-Medieval period though they are probably late, of the same period as the house in Trench 1.

The finds

The earthenware pottery

Mike Parker Pearson

The earthenware assemblage consists mostly of plain sherds but exhibits a wide variety of rim forms and decoration.



Figure 16.12. The west end of Trench 2, viewed from the east

There are 766 sherds (4,216.8g) of which 29 are rim sherds and just two are base sherds. Seven of the rim sherds are decorated, mostly on their tops, and 11 body sherds are also decorated, mostly at the shoulder of the vessel.

Trench 1

Trench 1 produced a much larger assemblage than Trench 2; within Trench 1, pricked dot patterns are found especially on vessel necks in 1016 (twice), 1005, and 1003, with pricked rim-tops in 1001 and 1016 (Figure 16.14). Other vessel neck decoration consists of vertical incised lines on sherds in 1005 and 1016 (twice), with other incised decoration from 1001, 1005 and 1002 (twice). Stabmarks are found on pottery in 1002 (twice) and 1015 (with crude triangular grooves). Finger impressions below the rim are found on a sherd in 1001. A slashed horizontal cordon similar to one from Cille Donnain church's layer 003 (see Chapter 14) was found on a sherd in 1002.

Trench 2

Within Trench 2, there were no layers with only sherds of earthenware as opposed to factory-made ceramics. Decorated earthenware sherds were found in 2002, 2004

and 2007 (Figure 16.15). The motifs were pricked dot patterns (2002), fine comb dots (2007), crudely incised lines (2004) and finger impressions below the rim (2004).

Fabric

Like all earthenware from South Uist in the prehistoric and historical periods, the sherds contain gneissic grits. The pottery is more highly fired than that of the Middle and Late Iron Age from sites such as Dun Vulcan. A small proportion (9%) of the assemblage consists of a hard, black, gritty fabric found in higher proportions in Late Medieval contexts at Cille Donnain church (see Chapter 14) and at Loch Olabhat on North Uist (Campbell 1997). Four of these harder sherds have a red-orange surface. No sherds in this hard, black fabric are decorated but two are rim sherds – plain and flat-topped (one slightly everted and the other upright), from layers 1001 and 1016.

The hard fabric is more common in the layers of Trench 2 where it comprises 29% of the assemblage. In contrast it is only 10% in Trench 1 and does not rise much above this proportion except in the earliest layers (Phase 1) where it comprises six out of the 19 sherds.

Rims

There are nine rim sherds, almost all from everted and flaring mouths, from 1001 in Trench 1. Four of these are plain (two flat and two flat with round corners; one is not illustrated) and one has lost the upper surface of the rim (not illustrated). One is a round rim with a line of finger impressions on the exterior immediately below the rim. The other three are flat-rimmed and are decorated along the top of the rim. One has short angled stabmarks along the interior half of the top. Another has one or possibly two lines of dot impressions along the edges of the rim. The third appears to have small lines across the rim at right angles to the line of the rim.

There are six rims, again from everted and flaring mouths, from 1002. Two are from thin-walled vessels (one round and the other flat). A larger rim is round and another is flat. The other two flat rims are decorated on their tops, one with angled slashes and the other with irregular pinpricks on an undulating surface formed by finger impressions.

There is a single rim sherd of tapered form from 1005. In 1007 six sherds are from a single large everted and flaring rim with a taper, bevelled on the outside edge. A seventh sherd comes from a slightly everted rim. There are five rims from 1016. Two are round (one of which is of a very thin fabric) and one is flat. One rim is sharply bevelled and may be part of a flat, rectangular, out-bevelled ceramic plate. The other is a flat rim with round corners, decorated on top with a line of widely spaced pinpricks. None of these rims are everted. A rim sherd from 1026 is everted and flaring and its flat top is decorated with incised lines at right angles to the line of the rim.

From Trench 2, the single rim from 2002 is slightly everted and flaring with a round profile. A flat rim from Test Pit 3 is decorated with an irregular, possibly curving, line of pinpricks on its top surface.

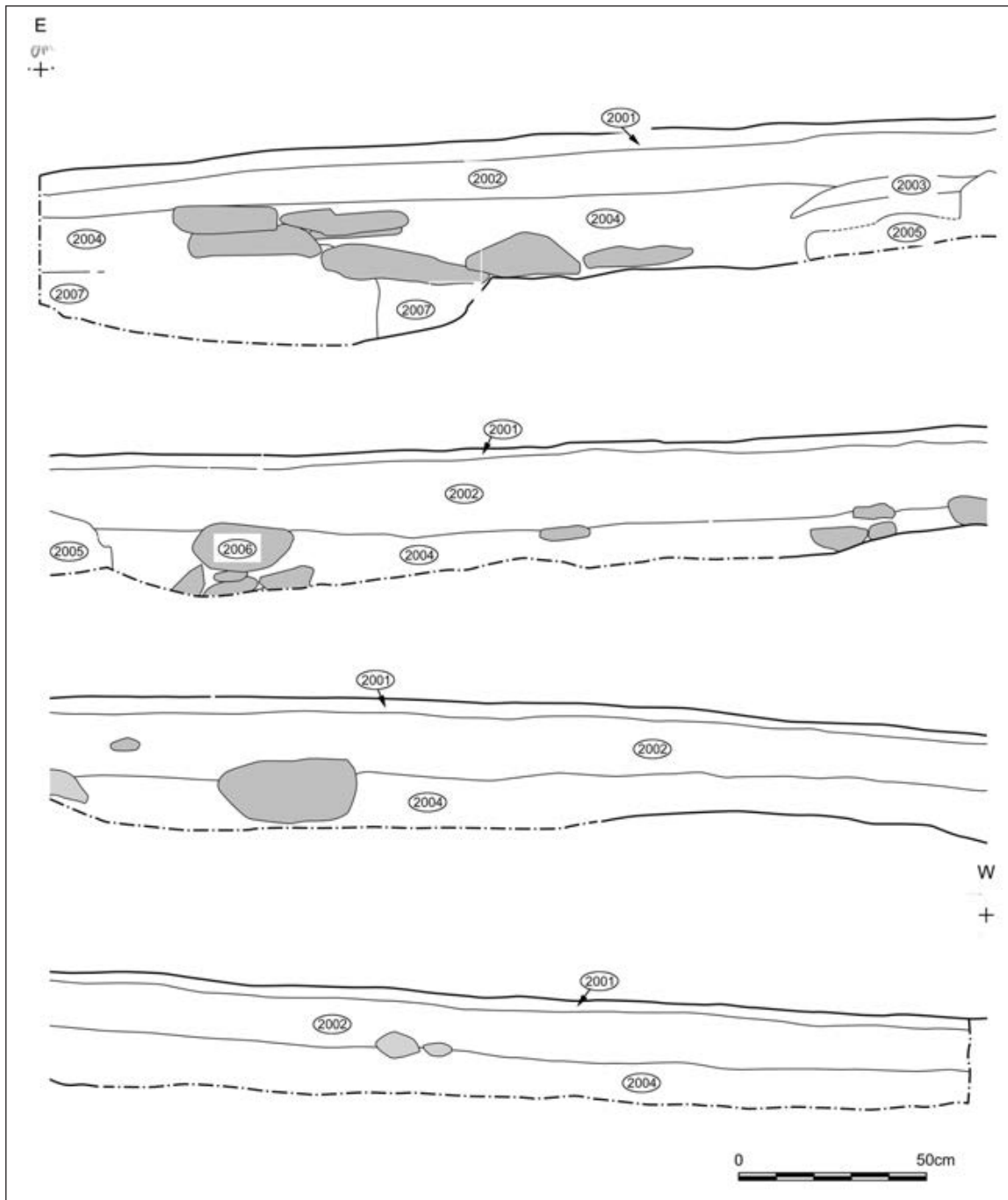


Figure 16.13. North-facing section of Trench 2

Bases

Base sherds are entirely absent from the assemblage with two exceptions. Within Trench 1 there is a shallow-angled base sherd from 1002. The only base sherd from Trench 2, in 2007, is from a thin-walled footed base.

Decoration

Within Trench 1 two sherds from 1002 are decorated, one with a low horizontal cordon cut with vertical slashes, and the other with a wide and crude incision forming a zig-zag pattern. The two decorated sherds in 1005 are ornamented on the shoulder, one with widely spaced vertical, thin

incisions and the other with two horizontal rows of pinpricks. The decorated sherd from 1010 is also decorated on the shoulder but with vertical lines of pinpricks. The decorated body sherd from 1015 is most unusual, having a crudely executed motif of incised triangles filled with lines of large, rectangular impressions. The thickness of the incised lines and impressed rectangles is unusually crude. The three decorated sherds from 1016 are a horizontal line of pinpricks on the shoulder of a pot, a series of faint, thin vertical incisions on the shoulder (not illustrated), and a sherd with a single thin incised line (not illustrated).

Within Trench 2, a body sherd from 2004 has thin,

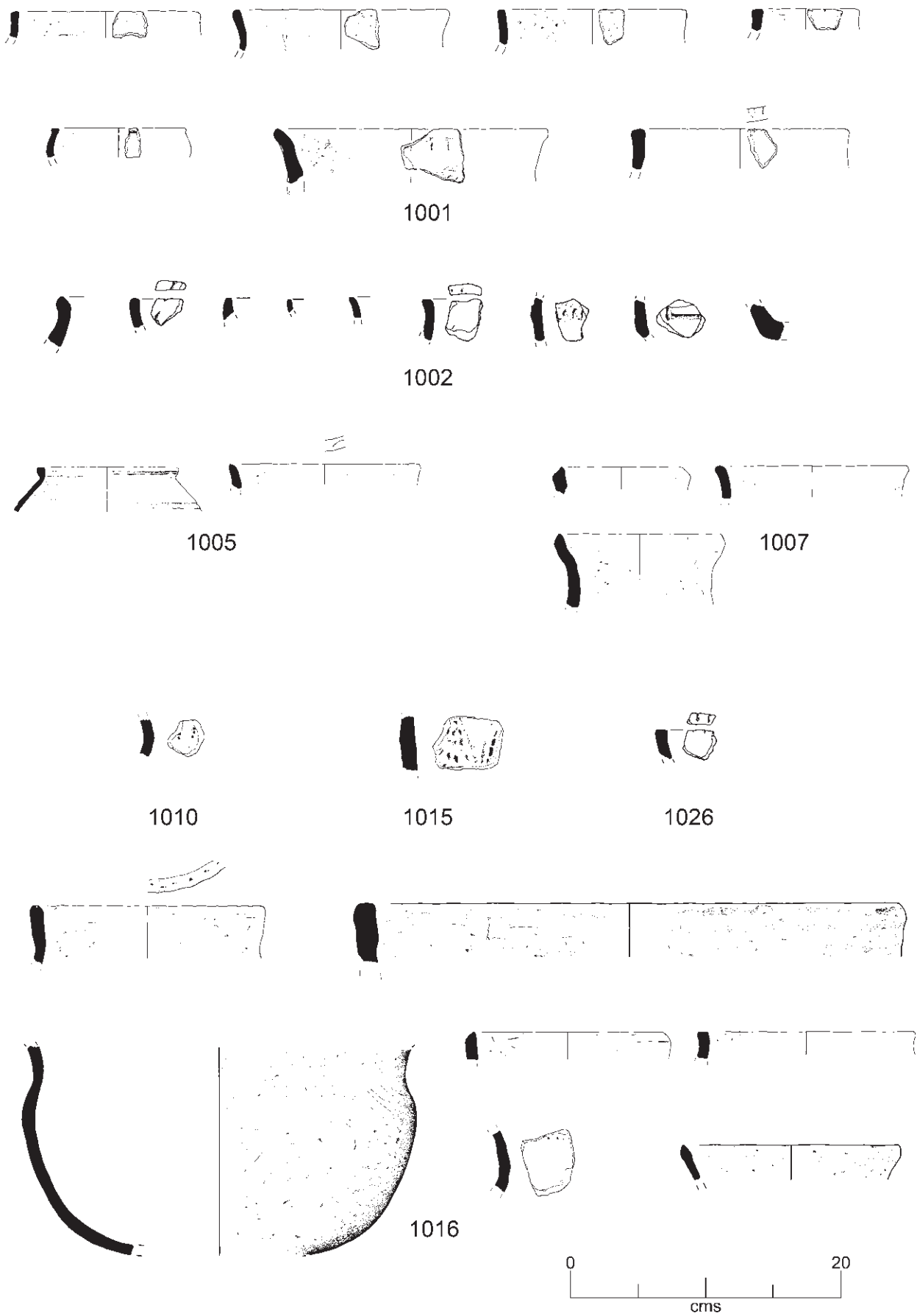


Figure 16.14. The earthenware pottery from Trench 1 at Beinn na Mhic Aongheis

curving incised lines (not illustrated) that may be decorative. From 2007 a body sherd has a horizontal line of pinpricks spaced so closely as to form an almost continuous line.

Conclusion

This pottery is unlike that from any other site excavated on South Uist, except for the prick-decorated Medieval pot from the upper layers at Dun Vulcan (Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999). The absence of most of the decorative motifs found on pottery from the 13th- to 15th-century layers at Cille Donnain church indicates that the sherds from A Beinn na Mhic Aongheis mostly date to the 16th century and after. However, the presence of hard-fired local earthenware sherds and of a mid-13th/mid-14th-century Saintonge vessel (see below) indicate a likely start of occupation in the 14th and 15th centuries.

The virtual absence of earthenware at Airigh Mhuillin, which dates to *c.*1790–1820 (Symonds 1999), indicates that this pottery was out of use on South Uist by the late 18th century, perhaps by about 1750. The craggan ware of Lewis and other parts of the Western Isles (Cheape 1988; 1994) seems not to have been a feature of late 18th and 19th-century South Uist life. The presence of earthenware in the floor (1005) of the house in Trench 1, however, raises the possibility that it was still in use in the late 18th century though these sherds could have been residual.

The high proportion of sherds with a hard, black fabric in Trench 2, similar to the proportions in Phase 1 layers within Trench 1, suggests that these may indicate the earliest activity on the site in the Late Medieval period. The shallow peat soils, however, are susceptible to contamination from later disturbance which may explain why the layers in Trench 2 also have sherds and slivers of 19th-century glazed ceramics and glass.

The rims are mostly slightly everted and flaring, with high collars. However, some of those from the earliest layers are more upright. A quarter of the rims are decorated, mostly along their tops with pinpricks or incised lines. Similar decoration is found on the shoulders of vessels but, overall, decoration occurs on a tiny percentage of body sherds. The almost complete lack of base sherds indicates that the pots were nearly all round-bottomed, a major change from Norse and Medieval assemblages.

The most evident comparisons for this material within the Western Isles are from Borve and Allasdale on Barra (Branigan and Foster 2002: 122; Young 1953), Eilean Olabhat and Druimm nan Dearcag on North Uist (Armit 1996: 208–11; 1997; Campbell 1997) and the Udal on North Uist (Lane 1990: 129). Unfortunately these are either small assemblages or, as in the case of the Udal, remain unpublished. The Druimm nan Dearcag assemblage compares closely in size and form with that from Bornais. Its pottery is entirely undecorated and is derived from globular-bodied and bag-shaped vessels with rounded bottoms and simple rims (flat and rounded) on upright or slightly everted necks. It is dated, with the aid of some imported sherds, to the 16th–17th century (Campbell 1997). Otherwise, the rims and vessel shapes closely parallel the

Bornais material and indicate a degree of overlap with it, in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Within the Inner Hebrides, Breachacha Castle on Coll has produced similar material (Turner and Dunbar 1970). Further afield, the pottery can be closely compared with Late Medieval and 16th to 17th-century Crannog Ware in Northern Ireland (Davies 1950; Ivens 1988). Of Late Medieval type is the sherd with the slashed cordon (Figure 16.14), closely matched by one from Dunshammer Fort, Co. Antrim (Ivens 1988: fig. 1.27) and by another from Cille Donnain church (Figure 14.8.10 this volume). Decorated rim tops and undulating rims are well represented in Irish Late Medieval assemblages from Lough Island Reevy, Co. Down and Dunshammer Fort (Ivens 1988: fig. 1. 4, 17, 29) and from 16th- to 17th-century material from Island MacHugh (Davies 1950).

In summary, the Bornais earthenware appears to derive from a lengthy period of occupation, most probably between the 14th–15th centuries and the end of the 17th or early 18th century.

The Medieval glazed ware

Liz Pieksma

A single wheelmade body sherd weighing 1g from context 1012 and three joining wheelmade rim sherds, weighing 9g, from context 1005 (Figure 16.14) were submitted for analysis.

Characterization of the fabric for all the sherds was carried out using a binocular microscope with x10 magnification. The fabric analysis followed the method described by Peacock (1977).

The fabric for all four sherds is similar and it is possible that they are from the same vessel. The fabric is pink (Munsell 5YR 8/5) in colour throughout. The internal surface has been coated in an all over, thin, pale green copper glaze. The glaze is very badly cracked and large areas of the glaze have fallen off the inner surface. The same type of glaze is present on the outer surface but it is limited to the rim and to a margin just below the rim. The fabric is very soft and fine textured, and the exposed surfaces have a soapy feel. All the sherds are thin walled (3mm), and the three joining rim sherds form about 16% of a vessel with a rim diameter of 90mm. The inclusions present are limited to common flecks of clear mica (0.33mm and under) and sparse grains of milky rounded, well-sorted quartz grains 0.66mm in size.

The fabric and rim form characteristics suggest that the sherds are from a small Saintonge jug, from southwest France. The fabric of these sherds closely matches the fabrics of Saintonge vessels recovered from excavations in Southampton (Brown 2002: 26). The date range given for Saintonge wares in Southampton is mid-13th to mid-14th century. A similar date range can be assumed for these sherds. The presence of Saintonge jugs, usually regarded as high-class tablewares associated with the French wine trade, is not unknown from ceramic assemblages in Scotland; for example a polychrome jug was recovered

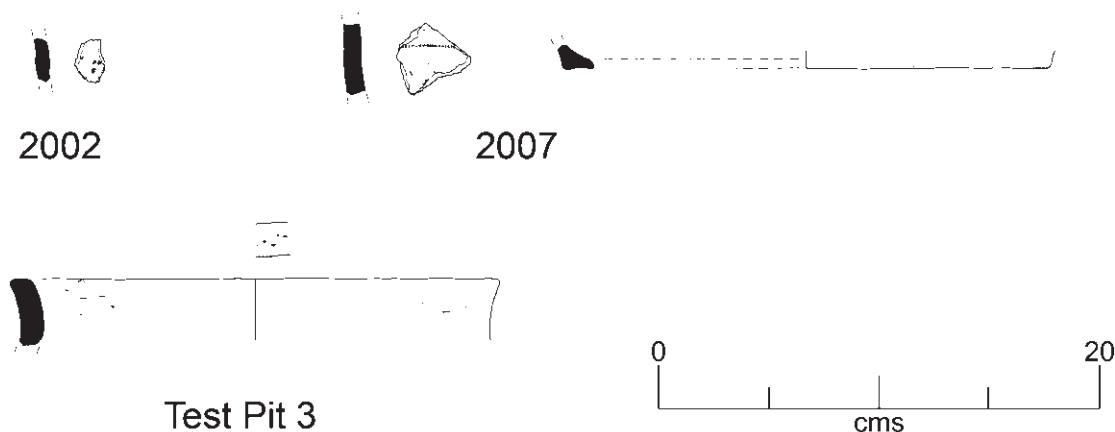


Figure 16.15. The earthenware pottery from Trench 2 at Beinn na Mhic Aongheis

from excavations at Carrick Castle (Ewart and Baker 1998: 960).

The factory-made glazed wares

David Barker

This small assemblage of factory wares dates mostly to the end of the 18th century and first half of the 19th century. A variety of plates and bowls are represented.

Unstratified

1. One creamware 10-inch plate rim with 'royal' edge pattern.

The 'royal' edge was used on plates and platters between c.1770 and 1820. The lighter cream colour of this sherd suggests a 19th-century rather than 18th-century date for this vessel.

Trench 1, unstratified

1. One whiteware body sherd (?bowl) with slip decoration in blue, comprising large dots.
2. One whiteware body sherd of moulded vessel (form indeterminate) with trace of blue-(?)printed decoration.

The slip-decorated sherd could date to the 1830s–1840s. The other, printed sherd can only be assigned broadly to the mid-19th century.

Trench 1, layers 1001, 1002, 1005 and 1006

- 1001 ?Creamware ?small bowl, or teabowl with cut or moulded flutes (?late 18th century).
- 1001 Moulded shell edge plate, probably 1810–1850/1860.
- 1001 ?London shape bowl in ?pearlware. Seems to be slip decorated, 1820s–1830s.
- 1001 ?Bowl foot
- 1002 ?Bowl or basin. Blue-printed ?whiteware (?or pearlware), 1830s–1850s.
- 1002 ?Redware
- 1005 ?Whiteware bowl base (if so, could be 1830s or later)
- 1006 Green painted moulded shell edge vessel (?plate, dish or basin) – in which case c.1810–1830.

Trench 2, layer 2002

1. One base sherd of creamware 10-inch plate (probable) with distinctive rounded footrim that is less pronounced on the inner edge and than on the exterior.
- 2.–3. Two base sherds of creamware vessels, the largest of which – at least – is probably a plate.
4. One body sherd (just below rim) of pearlware bowl or saucer, with trace of under-glaze painted band to interior. Too little survives to be certain of the vessel's form.

The richer cream colour of (1) suggests an earlier (*i.e.* pre-1810) date. The other creamware sherds are not so readily datable but are likely to be of the early 19th century. Pearlwares decorated in this manner, with 'earth' colours used under-glaze, date to the 1790s–1820s.

Trench 2, layers 2002 and 206

- 2002 Creamware plate – probably should be c.10-inch diameter – 'royal' edge pattern (broadly 1770–1820, but more likely c.1790–1820)
- 2006 Moulded shell edge plate, broadly 1810–1850/1860.

Test Pit 7

Brown printed ?bowl – ?whiteware (19th century)

The clay pipes

Mike Parker Pearson

There are three fragments of clay pipe, including a complete bowl from 1002 (Figure 16.16.1). Other than having milling below its rim, it is plain and dates to the late 17th century. The two other fragments are of pipe stems from 1001 and 1005.

The metalwork

Mike Parker Pearson

There is a fairly substantial collection of ironwork as well as copper alloy and lead finds from the site (Figure 16.16.2–12). A single piece of iron slag was also recovered. The

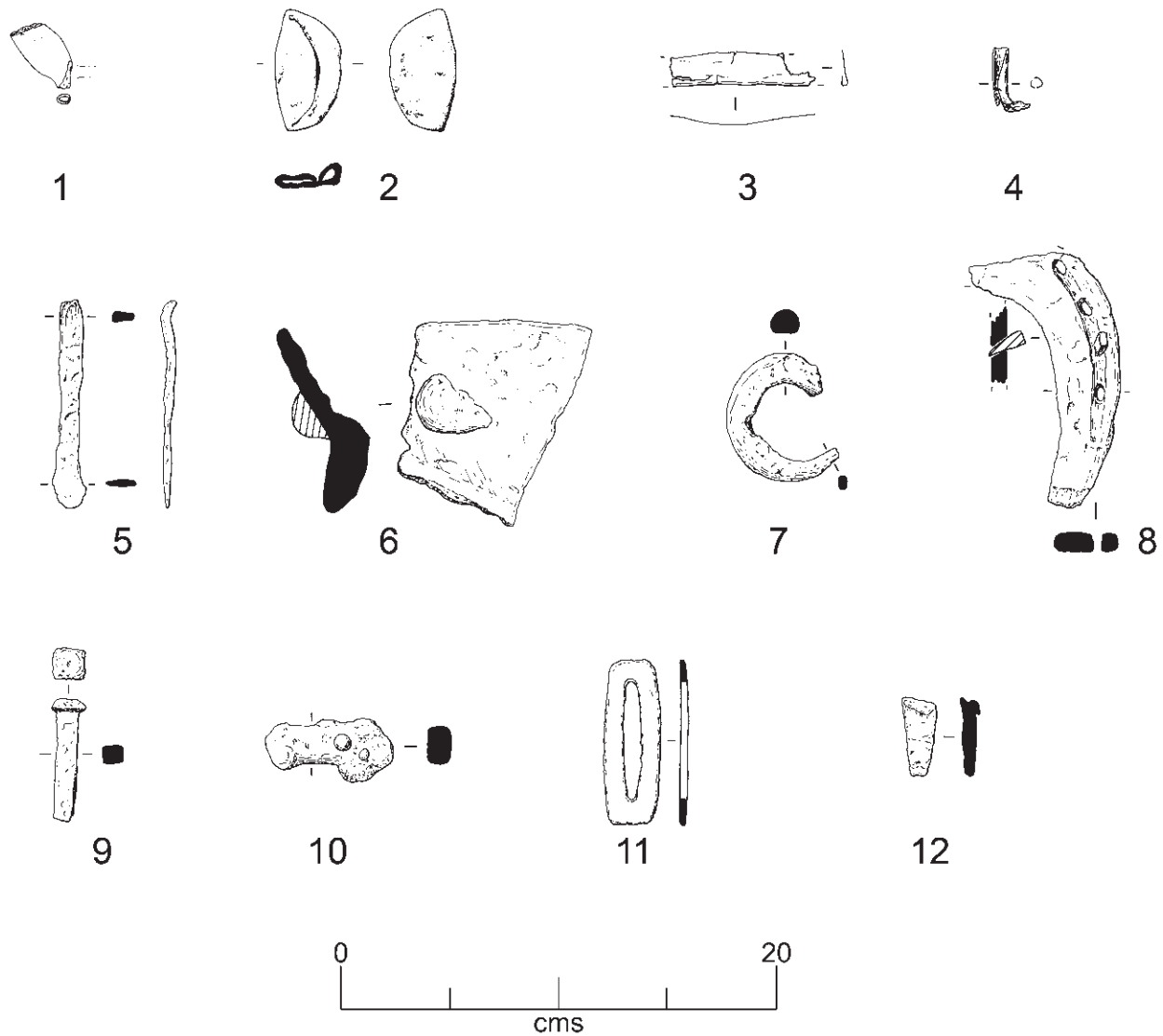


Figure 16.16. Other artefacts from Beinn na Mhic Aongheis

assemblage is dominated by nails. Unlike those from Cille Donnain church, all are incomplete. Where identifiable, they all have square or rectangular cross-sections through their shanks, as do the two bolts. The iron cauldron fragment is of note as are the wedge and the spatulate tool. The only dateable item is the probable lead pistol ball that may date to before the late 19th century.

Copper alloy artefacts

Context 7-1 (topsoil). A copper alloy circular disc (54mm dia.) folded in half (Figure 16.16.2).

Context 7-1. An incomplete rectangular copper alloy strip (67mm × 16mm × 0.2mm) with a fold along one long side (Figure 16.16.3).

Context 7-1. An incomplete rectangular copper alloy strip (40mm × 10mm × 0.2mm) bent and rolled over itself (Figure 16.16.4).

Lead artefact

Context 1002. A lead ball (10mm dia.). This is probably shot for a pistol.

Iron tools

Context 1001. A wedge-shaped bar (44mm × 19mm × 11mm–2mm). It is possibly a wedge for splitting wood.

Context 1028. A strip (94mm × 10mm × 4mm) with one end flattened (15mm × 1mm) to form a spatulate end. The other end is slightly curved. This is a spatulate tool (Figure 16.16.5).

Iron fittings and cauldron remains

Test Pit 3. An incomplete iron ring, originally 21mm in diameter and circular (6mm dia.) in section (Figure 16.16.7).

Test Pit 6. A large fragment (100mm × 80mm × 5mm) of a cauldron with a flared rim. There is a 3mm-wide horizontal raised cordon 10mm below the rim. The cauldron's rim diameter was c.300mm in diameter (Figure 16.16.6).

Context 1002. An incomplete plate (63mm × 33mm × 4mm) with a rivet (50mm long with a rectangular cross-section (15mm × 9mm) through it.

Context 7-1 (possibly Test Pit 7). An incomplete penannular coil (58mm × 49mm) starting at one end as a square-sectioned bar (11mm × 11mm) and finishing at a circular-sectioned bar (broken-off) at the other.

Iron horseshoe

Context 7-1. An incomplete horseshoe (114mm from front to back) (Figure 16.16.8).

Iron nails

Test Pit 12. A rod (73mm long and 5mm dia.) with a sub-cube-shaped head (9mm × 9mm × 8mm) placed off-centre to the shaft. It is probably a modern nail.

Context 1001. An incomplete nail (46mm long with a circular head 16mm dia.) with a square cross-section (7mm × 7mm).

Context 1001. An incomplete bent nail (40mm long).

Context 1002. An incomplete nail (29mm long with a circular head 15mm dia.).

Context 1002. A probable nail shank (18mm long).

Context 1002. A probable nail shank (18mm long).

Context 1005. An incomplete nail (61mm long) with a square cross-section (9mm × 9mm).

Context 2001. An incomplete bent nail (30mm long).

Context 2001. An incomplete bent nail (30mm long).

Context 2001. An incomplete bent nail (30mm long).

Context 2002. An incomplete nail (72mm long) with a square cross-section (6mm × 6mm).

Context 2002. An incomplete nail (49mm long) with a square cross-section (6mm × 6mm).

Context 2002. An incomplete nail (47mm long) with a square cross-section (8mm × 8mm).

Context 2004. An incomplete nail (36mm long with a circular head 25mm dia.).

Context 2004. An incomplete nail with wood grain on either side (19mm long) with a rectangular cross-section (5mm × 4mm).

Iron bolts

Context 1028. An incomplete bolt or nail (53mm long with a square head 13mm × 13mm) with a square cross-section (9mm × 9mm) (Figure 16.16.9).

Context 2002. A bolt (83mm long with a circular head 25mm dia.) with a rectangular cross-section (12mm × 11mm).

Iron strips

Test Pit 2. A tapered strip (34mm × 15mm–7mm × 6mm) with a V-shaped notch along its longer end (Figure 16.16.12).

Context 1001. A rectangular strip (74mm × 26mm × 3mm) with a lozenge-shaped hole (56mm × 9mm) through its centre (Figure 16.16.11).

Context 1001. An incomplete strip (55mm × 14mm × 10mm) (Figure 16.16.10).

Context 1002. A strip (29mm × 15mm × 4mm).

Context 1005. An incomplete strip (38mm × 20mm × 6mm) with a rivet (17mm long × 9mm dia.) through one end.

Context 2002. An incomplete tapered strip (23mm × 14mm–8mm × 2mm).

Lead shot

Context 1005. A 3mm-diameter lead shot, presumably from a shotgun cartridge.

Unidentified ironwork

Context 1002. An unidentified lump (33mm × 27mm × 15mm).

Context 1016. An unidentified lump (31mm × 12mm × 6mm).

Iron slag

Small fragments of iron smithing slag were recovered from the following contexts:

Context 1002

Context 1003

Context 1008 (four fragments)

Context 1009 (five fragments)

Context 1016 (four fragments)

Six small fragments of a non-metallic slag were recovered from context 1008.

*Stone and building materials**Mike Parker Pearson*

There is a small assemblage of stone and building materials besides the gneiss stones and occasional beach cobbles found on the site. The pumice and flint are likely to have been used as artefacts, the latter for fire-lighting; they come from the deeper layers.

Pumice

2007. A small oval piece of fine-grained pumice, worn smooth but with no facets.

Flint

1005. A spall of burnt flint.

1025. A spall of red-black flint.

Quartz

1002. A large primary flake detached from a beach cobble.

2004. A small quartz flake.

Brick

2002. A small, irregular lump of brick.

Slate

1001. A complete, sub-rectangular slate trimmed on all sides (120mm × 104mm × 6mm).

1001. An incomplete, ovate-shaped slate, trimmed on three sides (149mm × 101mm × 7mm).

Topsoil. Two small unworked fragments of slate.

All four pieces are dark grey rather than green like the local Stuley slate, and their topsoil contexts indicate that they probably derive from the slate used to roof Bornish House and its barns in the late 19th century.

*Carbonised plant remains**H. Smith*

The flot components of ten bulk samples were analysed for their charred plant content. The samples were all taken from the west end of Trench 1, within the remains of the north-south aligned building. Samples were examined from four different phases and a variety of contexts. These included the floor (1005), hearth (1026) and associated floor deposits (1020 and 1008) in phase 4; an ash layer (1003) and loam spread (1011) underlying the floor (both phase 3), a loam deposit (1016) in phase 2, and an earlier ashy loam (1025) in phase 1.

Methods

The bulk samples were processed on site, using a water separation machine. Flots were collected in sieves with

mesh sizes of 1mm and 300 microns. The heavy residues were collected in a 1mm mesh, but the content of these is not included in this assessment. Sorting took place using a low-power stereo-microscope. Identifications to species were checked using modern reference material housed at the Institute of Archaeology, UCL. Nomenclature follows Stace (1997) and Pankhurst and Mullin (1991).

Results

The plant remains recovered from the samples were generally limited in the taxa represented and preservation of the remains was mostly poor, with distortion of some material. In the majority of cases, this limited the identification of taxa to generic rather than species level (Table 16.3). Samples were dominated by the grains of domestic cereals, comprising hulled barley (*Hordeum* sp.), common oat (*Avena cf sativa*) and rye (*Secale cereale*), with hulled barley dominating in all samples. The presence of some twisted grains of barley (marked in the table by *) indicate the presence of six-row barley (*H. vulgare* L), although the number of grains where it was possible to determine if grains were asymmetric or symmetric was very low (in six-row barley a 2:1 ratio of twisted to straight grains would be expected).

The oat grains were very variable in size and state of preservation and, as a result, it was not possible to determine if they were of common oat (*Avena sativa*) or bristle or black oat (*Avena strigosa*), as the grains of these two species overlap. A very distinctive scar on the spikelet base of bristle oat (*Avena strigosa*) can help to determine which species is present, but no florets were present in the assemblage from A Beinn na Mhic Aongheis. A few rye (*Secale cereale*) grains were also present in samples from phases 1, 3 and 4, but these were in very low numbers. The only other crop plant present was flax (*Linum* sp.), which was present in samples from all phases although only a few seeds were recovered. Flax would have uses as a fibre plant or oil plant (Dickson and Dickson 2000).

Charred seeds of wild plants were recovered from the samples, although these were limited in number and range, and preservation was sometimes poor. Seeds of edible plants included blackberry (*Rubus* sp.) and plants with potentially edible green leaves (*i.e.* cabbage (*Brassica* sp.), goosefoot (*Chenopodium* sp.) and docks/knotgrasses (*Rumex/Polygonum*)). Other weed seeds found in the samples included those of common chickweed (*Stellaria media*), heath grass (*Danthonia decumbens*), bromes (*Bromus* sp.) and sedge (*Carex* sp.). The very low numbers of weeds do not allow any in-depth interpretation regarding the type of environment from which they may have originated, although those listed could have occurred as weeds of cultivated fields, grassland or moor.

Discussion

At A Beinn na Mhic Aongheis, hulled barley is the principal cereal crop represented in the charred remains, with oats in smaller numbers and rye only present in very low numbers. This corresponds with the evidence from written records

of agriculture for the time, where the cultivation of hulled barley (or 'bere' as the local variety of six-rowed barley was called in Scotland), oats and rye is noted in the Western Isles by several travellers, including Martin (1716), Walker (1764–1771), Blackadder (1800) and MacLean (1837).

The dominance of hulled barley as the principal cereal crop, with oat and rye accompanying, reflects a pattern that is first seen in the Norse period in the Western Isles (Smith and Mulville 2004) at the nearby sites of Bornais (Smith and Colledge 2005) and Cille Pheadair (Smith and Boardman forthcoming).

The cultivation of oats noticeably expanded in the Norse period in this area (having only been present at the nearby Iron Age site of Dun Vulcan), whilst rye became established as a deliberately cultivated crop for the first time. Similarly, flax (*Linum* sp.) – which is also present in very low numbers in samples from A Beinn na Mhic Aongheis – was first introduced to the area in the Norse period, occurring in significant numbers at nearby Bornais (Smith and Colledge 2005) and Cille Pheadair (Smith and Boardman forthcoming).

Each of these crops is suited, in differing ways, to the difficult conditions posed by the poor soils and difficult climate of the Western Isles. Barley is a hardy cereal with a short growing season; it is tolerant of inclement weather and is generally well-suited to cultivation in the Hebrides. It can be grown in a wide range of soils although it will thrive best in fertile loamy ground (Dickson and Dickson 2000). Oats are also tolerant cereals and can grow well in poor soil in cool, moist conditions (Dickson and Dickson 2000). Historically, oats were often grown in outfield locations whilst barley was sown in the infield and was well fertilised. Indeed, the bulk of the farmyard manure was saved for the infield and the barley crop (as this was the main crop, and because the rents and tax were often paid in 'bere', and also because it was crucial for the production of beer and whisky – often called the 'drink crop' (Dickson and Dickson 2000; Campbell 1965)).

Avena strigosa (bristle or black oat) was particularly tolerant of harsh conditions and poor soils and, as such, was even better suited to the outfield, whilst common oat (*Avena sativa*) would sometimes be sown on the well-fertilized infield along with barley. Common oat grows better on well-drained soils, but it was not suited to the shell sands of the machair, due to manganese deficiency. As a result, in many places common oat was not grown without appropriate treatment or was grown only on well-drained land. The cultivation of oats, and especially bristle oats, is well documented in historical records by travellers to the islands. Rev. John Walker noted the cultivation of bristle oats on the Hebridean islands he visited in 1764 and 1771.

Rye is suited to the light sandy machair soils of the Western Isles. It is tolerant of poor and especially dry soils, and will thrive on the drier areas of the machair. Flax is not tolerant of overly heavy or light soils or of heavy rainfall, but will otherwise thrive in the free-draining soils found on the Hebridean machair, as long as soil fertility is

| <i>Sample no.</i> | 5652 | 5651 | 5640 | 5602 | 5637 | 5630 | 5632 | 5639 | 5653 | 5634 |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|-----------|------------|------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|----------------------|----------|--------------------|
| <i>Context no.</i> | 1025 | 1016 | 1016 | 1003 | 1011 | 1005 | 1005 | 1020 | 1026 | 1008 |
| <i>Phase</i> | | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| <i>Context type</i> | Loam and peat ash | loam | loam | Ash layer, under floor | loam | floor | floor | Burnt peat ash layer | hearth | Adjacent to hearth |
| <i>Litres</i> | 8 | 4 | 39 | 15 | 7 | 19 | 33 | 10 | 5 | 20 |
| Taxon List | Plant parts | | | | | | | | | |
| Cereals | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Avena cf saiva</i> | 30 | 31 | 12 | 23 | 1 | 28 | 14 | 35 | 2 | 22 |
| <i>Hordeum vulgare</i> | 45 | 21* | 161* | 42* | 7* | 40 | 85* | 72* | 2 | 66* |
| <i>Hordeum</i> sp. | | | 1 | | | | | 1 | | |
| <i>Secale cereale</i> | 2 | | | 2 | | 5 | | 4 | 1 | 1 |
| <i>cf Secale</i> | | 1 | | 2 | | | | | | |
| Cereal (indeterminate) | 11 | 5 | 88 | 20 | 5 | 11 | 1 | 21 | 2 | 6 |
| Total cereals | 88 | 58 | 265 | 89 | 13 | 84 | 101 | 132 | 7 | 115 |
| Oil plants | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Linum</i> sp. | 7 | | 1 | 2 | | 1 | 1 | 2 | | 3 |
| Wild taxa | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Brassica</i> sp. | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Stellaria media</i> | | | 1 | | | | 1 | 3 | | 2 |
| Caryophyllaceae indeterminate | | 1 | | | | | | 2 | | |
| <i>Chenopodium</i> sp. | | 1 | 2 | 1 | | | | | | 1 |
| <i>Carex</i> spp | | | 2 | 1 | | 2 | 1 | | | 1 |
| <i>Carex</i> sp. | | | | 1 | | | | | | |
| <i>Bromus</i> sp. | | | | 1 | | 1 | | | | |
| <i>cf Danthonia decumbens</i> | | | | | | | | | | |
| Poaceae indeterminate | 3 | 1 | 10 | 1 | 2 | | 1 | 3 | | 3 |
| <i>cf Rumex/Polygonum</i> | 2 | | 2 | 1 | | 4 | 1 | 4 | | 3 |
| <i>Rubus cf fruticosus</i> | | | | 2 | | | | | | |
| Other/indeterminate | | | | | | | | | | |
| Seaweed | | | 8 | 1 | | 2 | 2 | | | 1 |
| Moss bryophyte/fungal sclerotia | 1 | | | 1 | | 1 | | | | 2 |
| Other/indet. | 2 | 1 | 5 | 6 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | | 3 |

Table 16.3. Carbonized plant remains from Beinn na Mhic Aongheis

maintained and weeds are minimized (Dickson and Dickson 2000; Bond and Hunter 1987).

Martin mentions the cultivation of rye in the Western Isles (1716), along with oats and barley and he records the cultivation of flax in Lewis (1716). In his *Report on the Hebrides* (1764–1771), Rev. Dr. Walker described the use of the machair as outfield: the land was fertilized with seaweed, it was sown with barley in the first year followed by two years of rye, with no additional fertiliser added, and then the land was left fallow for another two or three years. In general, across most of Scotland, rye was the cereal that was suited to the poor ground, such as the outfield areas where wheat or barley would not thrive. It appears to have been grown where something more preferable would not produce good returns (Dickson and Dickson 2000). According to Walker, however, in the Hebrides they valued the rye crop more than oat.

It is interesting, therefore, that the cultivation of rye, a crop seemingly so well suited to the area, dropped off so distinctly by the 17th and 18th centuries, as noted in historical accounts and as confirmed by the remains from this site.

It would seem that cultivation of rye and flax in the Norse period was made possible by expansion onto higher and drier areas of machair. In the case of rye and bristle oats, if these areas could be cultivated without the addition of any organic material, it would result in that land being more prone to destabilization.

Walker notes that rye was grown on Harris prior to 1772 in great quantities, but it was stopped because it was apparently prejudicial to the soil (Walker 1764–1771). There are many other historical references for South and North Uist and Barra to the instability of the machair, and its being prone to flooding, wind erosion and sand drift in the winter months. Occasions are noted in the historical documents of sudden blowouts during storms, causing arable fields and settlements to be desolated by the blowing sand. Walker (1764–1771) notes a sudden event on South Uist where some arable crops were covered by up to a metre of sand within a few days; in 1756, the houses of Bailesear (Baileshare) were buried up to their roofs in sand (Walker 1764–1771). In the early 19th century, the islands of Heiskeir were virtually abandoned for fifteen years due to storm damage which denuded the land of grass and soil (Otter 1867). In South Uist, the digging up of rue (*Galium verum*) which was used for dyeing cloth, was banned by magistrates as it was seen to threaten the stability of the land in many areas (MacLean 1837).

Sharples (2005) proposes that the shift in settlement from the machair to the blacklands, as seen in the township of Bornish and elsewhere, could be due to the de-stabilisation of the machair after an extreme weather event as described in the historical accounts. The susceptibility of the machair to de-stabilisation may have been exacerbated by the expansion onto formerly undisturbed areas of machair with the cultivation of the relatively new crops such as rye and flax and possibly bristle oats, which were all more suited to the higher, drier machair (Sharples 2005). If this were

the case, then the drop in rye cultivation as a deliberate strategy is logical, despite the many benefits afforded by this crop so well suited to this unusual Hebridean land type. The effects of over-cultivation of the outlying areas of machair that could have started in the Norse period were possibly beginning to show a few centuries later in the Medieval period.

If other pressures were coming to bear at the same time (the diversion of seaweed away from the fields for use in the production of potash and higher population levels) then land could also be put under greater pressures. If seaweed had a more immediate monetary value as potash then it was not available to provide the vital organic matter that helped to bind the soil matrix of the machair whilst a higher population could put greater demands on the available land and result in less fallow time for the outfield. It must be noted, however, that the cultivation of rye dropped off elsewhere in Scotland by the end of the 18th century, not just in areas where unstable machair plains were worked for arable (Dickson and Dickson 2000). It should also be remembered that other changes were taking place in the agrarian system around this time, with the introduction of potatoes from Ireland to South Uist in 1743 (Beveridge 1911).

At the Norse sites of Bornais and Cille Pheadair a more varied range of weed taxa have provided a glimpse of where some of the cultivation may have been taking place. The limited weed taxa from A Beinn na Mhic Aongheis unfortunately do not allow interpretations of this sort. Nor is it possible to speculate about the nature of the domestic activities centred on the cereals and flax. The plant remains found at the site are likely to represent accidental loss of cereals into and around the hearth during cooking and food preparation. There is little variation over time in the plant assemblage recovered, with only slight differences in the quantities and range of material. Despite the limitations of the material, a picture emerges that is consistent with historical accounts of agriculture at this time.

Conclusions

Despite careful excavation, the different layers within both trenches contained mixed deposits of early and later Post-Medieval material. It is very likely that the areas excavated had been consistently disturbed over the centuries of occupation as each new phase of house construction damaged the layers formed by previous phases of occupation on this shallow soil.

The lines of low walling found during excavation could be interpreted as the surviving, unrobbed basal courses of 'blackhouse'-like longhouses whose walls might have been constructed substantially of stone, like those of the late 18th and 19th centuries at Airigh Mhuillin in nearby Milton (Gearraidh Bhailteas) township (Symonds 1999). However, the walls found at Beinn na Mhic Aongheis are made of small stones unlike those at Milton. Our favoured interpretation is that lengths of stone walling are the surviving foundations or footings for turf-walled longhouses.

The trenches were too small to determine the dimensions of each building but there appears to have been a longhouse oriented east-west in Trench 2 and a north-south longhouse in Trench 1. Additional structures detected in Trench 2 include part of what appears to have been a square outhouse.

The dating of the commencement of occupation at Beinn na Mhic Aongheis is problematic because of the apparent depositional mixing of deposits but may be as early as the 15th century. The earliest imported finds are from Trench 1 and include a 13th- to 14th-century Saintonge jug, and a late 17th-century clay pipe bowl from layer 1002. The earthenware pottery assemblage from both trenches is coarse and handmade, with round bottoms, wide bellies, high collars and slightly everted, flared rims. Some of it has a matt black surface finish that is distinct from any sooting patterns. The assemblage includes prick-decorated vessels similar to that found at Dun Vulcan in 1991, a style that may now be considered to date to the 16th–17th centuries (*contra* Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999: 199). This makes the assemblage broadly later than the excavated 13th- to 15th-century deposits at the Cille Donnain church site (Parker Pearson 1996b; Chapter 14), although certain shared motifs and rim forms suggest a possible chronological overlap. The Beinn na Mhic Aongheis earthenware assemblage is also later than the 13th-century end of occupation at the Cille Pheadair Norse-period settlement (Parker Pearson *et al.* 1996; 2004), or the 14th-century end of occupation at the Norse-period settlement mounds on Bornais machair (Sharples 2005).

Upper Bornish was the factor's farm from about 1620, if not earlier, and was thus one of the principal farms of South Uist in the Post-Medieval period (MacLean 1989: 2.21; 1994: 30–1; Chapter 18 this volume). Imported ceramics, and the smoking of tobacco in the late 17th century, indicate a certain level of affluence. The longhouse plans indicate sizeable houses, much larger than the shieling-sized structures at Druimm nan Dearcag on North Uist (Armit 1997). However, the Bornais houses cannot be dated precisely. Nonetheless, Upper Bornish seems to have been a relatively well-off but small community throughout the Post-Medieval period, even if it was much less grand than in its Norse heyday when over 20 building complexes were constructed on its machair site.

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17 Excavation of early modern, early historic and prehistoric sites in Kirkidale

John Moreland with contributions by David Barker and Mike Parker Pearson

As described in Chapter 4, our investigation of the lands around Loch Aoinart was designed around, and moved through, different scales of analysis – from the broad, regional scale that encompassed the whole of the loch’s littoral, through the investigation of particular locales (especially the valley of Kirkidale), down to the detailed measuring and drawing of individual sites (Kirkidale East and West, and Frigary). One of the most problematic aspects of the survey, however, was our inability (in the field and later) to date the human constructions we recorded. As emphasized in Chapter 4, this contributed to the merging of large stretches of the history of the region as ahistorical

palimpsests. In order to overcome this difficulty, and in the spirit of the multi-scalar approach we had adopted, we decided to excavate the two sites we had recorded in Kirkidale. We hoped that these more detailed interventions would both provide us with firm dating evidence and allow us deeper insights into the lives of the people who lived here in the past.

Kirkidale East (site code KDL1)¹ lies in an area of open ground at the mouth of the valley, close to the stream and looking out over the Minch (see Figure 4.5).² We focused our attention on House 2 in the complex, a structure about 9m long by 4m wide (Figure 17.1). At the time of the survey

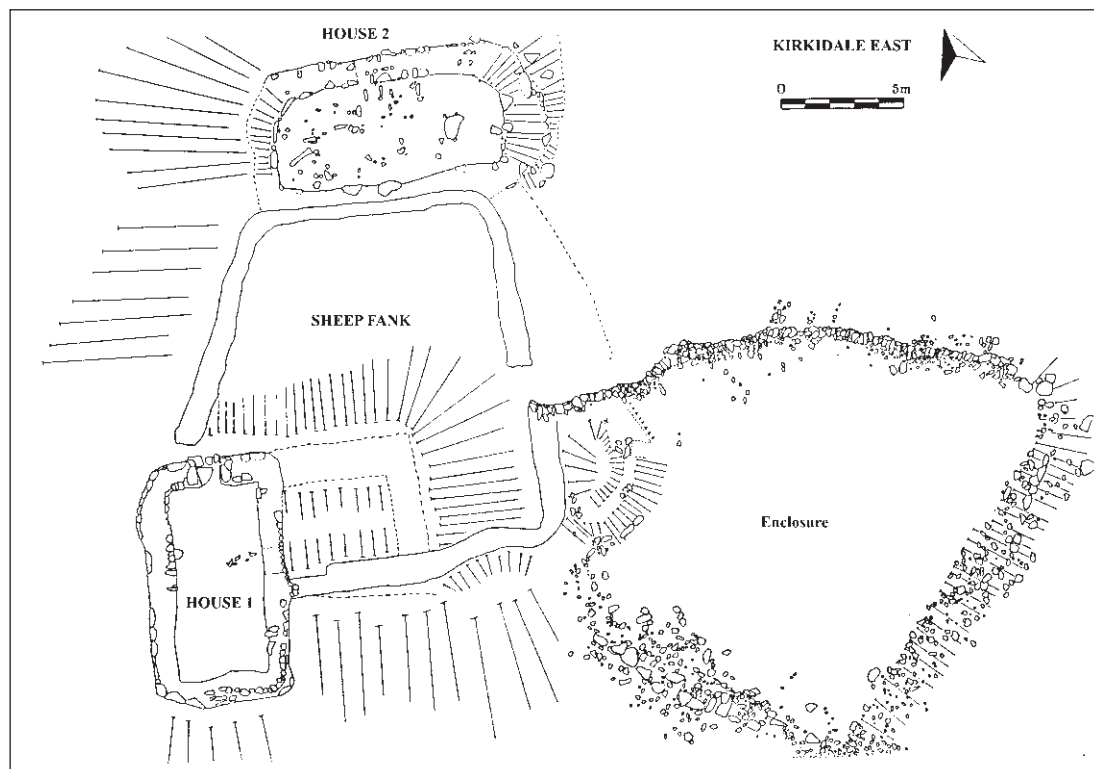


Figure 17.1. Kirkidale East (the blackhouse) site plan



Figure 17.2. A detail of the Kirkidale area on the 1805 Bald map

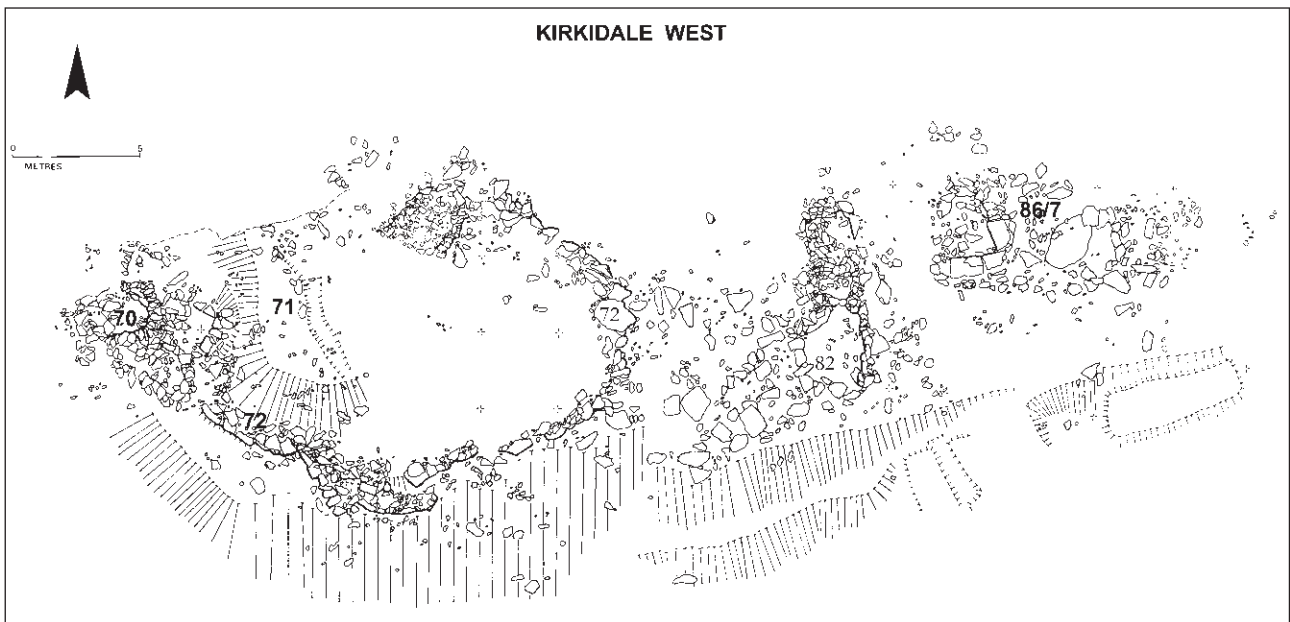


Figure 17.3. Kirkidale West site plan

(1990), we thought this was a Norse building – we were influenced by its bowed walls and by the apparent presence of a central hearth. We decided to excavate to determine if this was indeed the case and in the hope that, having dated this kind of structure, we could apply that knowledge to others found in the survey. As I have indicated in Chapter 4, and as we will see in more detail in a moment, this structure was, in fact, a classic island blackhouse and the excavations add significantly to our understanding of the early modern history, as well as the prehistory, of Loch Aoinart and South Uist (see below).

The map of the island prepared by William Bald in 1850 shows two houses with an associated enclosure in the area of Kirkidale East, although the enclosure on his map is to the west of the houses, not to the southeast, as we found it (see Figures 17.2 and 17.1; Bald might have used a series of conventions to depict what he found on the ground). The excavated blackhouse is almost certainly one of the houses plotted on his map. The other may lie to the south and be represented by the ‘earthworks’ we recorded underneath

and to the north and east of the southern wall of the early modern sheep fank (see Figure 17.1). Alternatively (and perhaps more likely), the second house depicted by Bald could be our House 1, the substantial remains of another blackhouse – in which case, the earthworks mentioned above may be the product of the use of the area as a garden. A well-built stone wall separated the settlement from an extensive area of lazy beds stretching south and east down to the sea.

Kirkidale West (site code KDL2)³ was another settlement complex, consisting of a series of circular and rectangular structures some of which were associated with a large sub-circular enclosure (see Figure 17.3). Some of the structures (especially the rectangular ones to the east – 82, 86–7 in Figure 17.3) had obviously been reused in the recent past in connection with sheep-rearing, but we believed that the core of the complex (the enclosure and cell-like buildings) dated from a much earlier period.

As noted in Chapter 4, the shape of the cell-like structures and enclosure, the isolated location, and parallels



Figure 17.4. Excavations in 1992 at Kirkidale West after de-turfing, from the northwest

with others sites suggested that this might have been an early monastic settlement. Our excavations were focused on the cell-like buildings at the western end of the complex but were very small-scale (see Figure 17.4). Heavy rain, combined with the peaty soil, meant that the site had to be continually re-cleaned. This, combined with extremely difficult access (it took about an hour to walk from South Loch Aoineart, carrying all our equipment each day) contributed to the slow progress and the limited scale of the excavations. We did, however, produce some very significant results – especially the discovery of a number of sherds of Late Bronze Age (1100–750 BC) and Late Iron Age pottery (dating to between the fourth and seventh centuries AD; see below).

Excavations at Kirkidale East

Before the blackhouse

We always knew that people lived at the mouth of this valley in early modern times – as we have seen, a settlement is marked on the early 19th-century Bald map (see above, and Figure 17.2), and House 1 (Figure 17.1) was very obviously the remains of an 18th–19th century blackhouse. We excavated in this area in the hope of finding evidence for earlier settlement, and in this we were successful – but the finds pointed to prehistoric, rather than the early historic occupation we had been expecting.

As we will see in a moment, the floor of House 2 was (in part) roughly paved. When we removed this, and the ‘bedding’ layers on which it had been laid, we found several post-holes and hollows cut into the bedrock/natural (947). In some cases, these might have been natural depressions

in the bedrock (941) but the nature of others was less clear (942 and 958). Some, however, were certainly man-made. Feature 955 was a man-made ‘hollow’ that was only partially excavated as it ran under the northern wall of the site. Feature 956 was a ‘sub-square’ post-hole, *c.*0.22m in diameter. It was fairly shallow, but this was because it was truncated, probably in the construction of the later blackhouse (this may also be true of 955; see below). Feature 951 was a post-hole *c.*0.30m deep and 0.50m in diameter. Its D-shaped plan suggests that it held a split timber, the size of which may imply that the feature dates to a period when fairly large trees were readily available and, for South Uist, this would be sometime in prehistory (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 21–8).

The discovery of 12 pieces of worked flint, a core for producing blades, and numerous small flecks supports the possibility of prehistoric occupation at Kirkidale East. While the core could belong to the Neolithic, the rest of the assemblage is likely to date to the Late Bronze Age, as do the sherds of prehistoric pottery (these have close parallels with the material from Late Bronze Age phases at Cladh Hallan, 15kms southwest of Kirkidale (see below and Figure 17.5; also Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 59–82). This dates the sherds, and the site, to between 1100 and 750 BC.

It is noteworthy that the pre-blackhouse post-holes (and other cut features) are concentrated in the northwest quadrant of the site (Figure 17.6) and, while there is not a direct connection between these features and the sherds (most of which were found in disturbed contexts), it is likely that they belong to the same phase of human occupation. One cannot with any confidence ‘create’ any structures from these early cut features (and that is not surprising, given

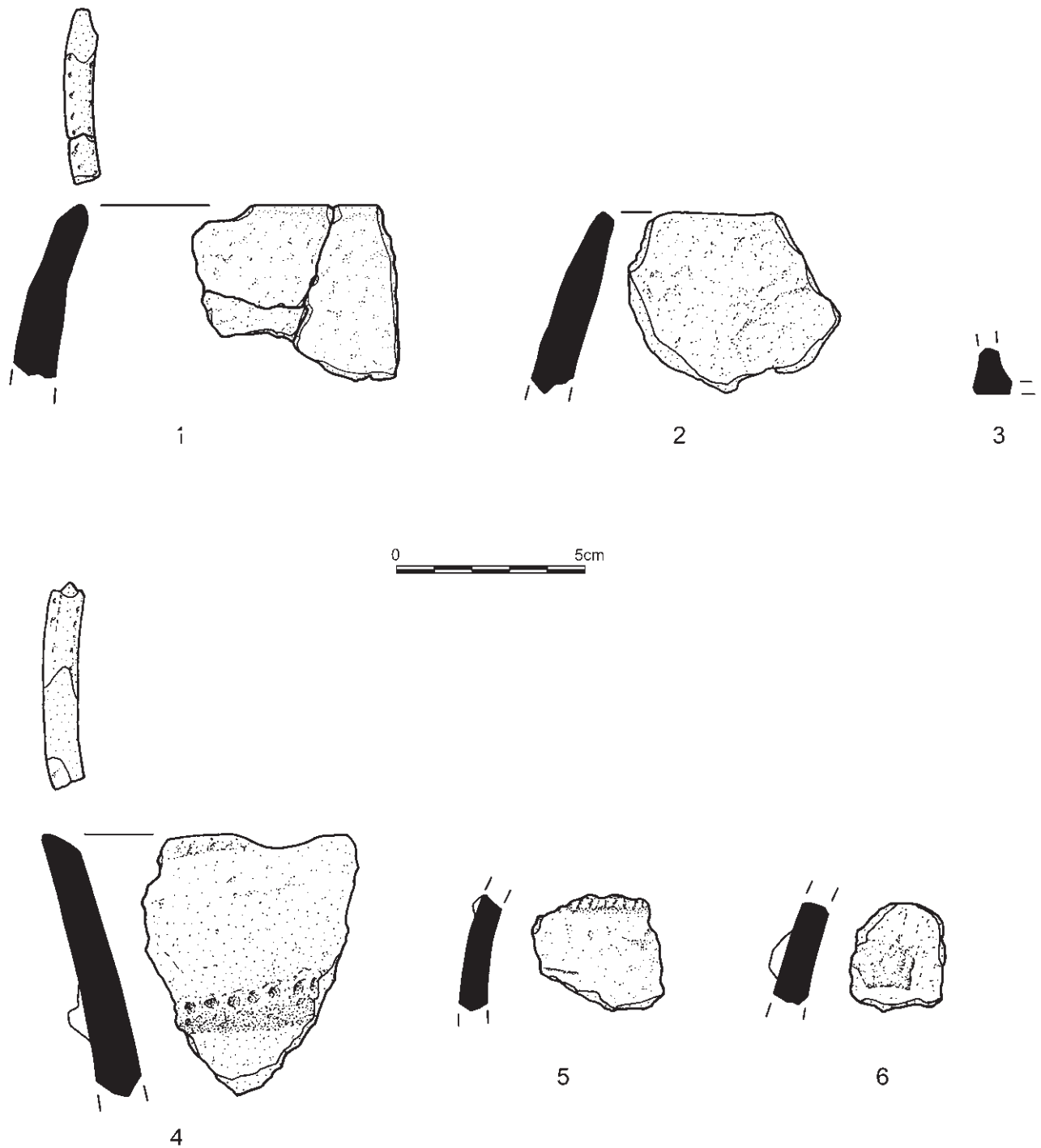


Figure 17.5. Prehistoric pottery from Kirkdale (both sites)

the limited area excavated and the disturbance caused by the later structure), but it would not be unreasonable to conclude that we do have evidence for some sort of Late Bronze Age settlement at Kirkdale East (see below).

Clearing the site, appropriating the past

Hebridean blackhouses are a well-defined architectural type whose roots may go back to the Norse period on the islands (see Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 153, 194; Branigan and

Merrony 2000: 13–15). From the 18th century onwards, a range of visitors to the islands anthropologically described their form and the ‘primitive’ mode of human life they supposedly contained (see Branigan 2005c: 22; Bumsted 2005: 115–16). One of the best such descriptions was provided by Dr Werner Kissling, a product of his earlier visit to the islands in the 1930s:

‘their plan was rounded-rectangular; the walls, rounded at the corners, had a receding slope from the ground



Figure 17.6. Possible prehistoric features at Kirkidale East

upwards; their roofs had no perceptible ridge and did not reach the outer edges of the walls; with their thatched gables, their roofs continued the rounded contour, so that the houses looked like mounds. ... Built entirely from local material, they so harmonised with the background that they seemed part of Nature. There was only one room. The floor was of earth, typically of two levels, the lower end being used a cow-byre, the upper end, with its open hearth, as the dwelling for the family. Thus man and beast not only lived under the same roof, but shared a single room' (Kissling 1943: 42).

Kissling's affection for the islands and the people is clear in his descriptions of their lives (and in his photographs – see figures in Chapter 19 and http://futuremuseum.co.uk/Collection.aspx/werner_kissling/Description). For others, the 'low' standard of these houses, with neither chimney nor window, reinforced stereotypes of the islanders' primitiveness and contributed to the idea of an archetypal blackhouse (see Branigan 2005c: 22–3; Branigan and Merrony 2000: 2; Bumsted 2005: 115–16; also Symonds 1999: 102–06; 2000: 279). This 'idea' has been reinforced, Keith Branigan argues, by the constant resort to 'the evidence of a very small sample of surviving "conserved" examples such as those at Arnol, Lewis and Sollas, North Uist' (Branigan and Merrony 2000: 1). So while (as we shall see) there can be little doubt that the

building we excavated at Kirkidale West was a blackhouse, we are probably as much interested in the ways in which it deviates from 'what we think we know' (*ibid.*) about this form of habitation, as about the ways in which it conforms to the archetype.

The construction of the house seems to have involved both the destruction and the appropriation of the prehistoric past. While we can only speculate as to whether this was intentional or not, it is clear that the house was constructed on top of the Late Bronze Age features described above. The shallowness of some of the 'post-holes' suggests (and this was noted already at the time of excavation) that they had been truncated, pointing to the levelling of the site in advance of the construction of the blackhouse. The possibility that this 'reuse' of the prehistoric past was not accidental is enhanced by the fact that the same phenomenon is found on blackhouse sites on Barra. There too, prehistoric features were 'levelled during the construction and occupation of the blackhouse and we have only the bases of them' (Branigan 2005a: 100). In fact, in some cases there is evidence that the prehistoric past was incorporated into the fabric of the new building. House L8A in the township of Balnabodach, Barra had been built on the site of a Middle Iron Age settlement. The recovery of 'about 80 sherds [of Iron Age pottery] from the wall fill and tumble suggests that the deposits in the centre of the

area occupied by the blackhouse were dug out to provide material for the core of the blackhouse wall' (*ibid.*: 85).

The builders of the Kirkidale blackhouse seem to have made the same use of the material they excavated from this location – sherds of prehistoric pottery were found in the fills of both the northern and eastern walls (604 and 616). It is, of course, possible that on both South Uist and Barra this incorporation of the past into the present was an accidental product of the fact that similar forces governed people's choice of settlement location across the ages. But it is also possible that not all those forces were 'environmental'. Given what we now know of the complexity of the relationship between past and present, in both the prehistoric and the historic past (see, for example, Bradley and Williams 1998; also Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 194), it would not come as any surprise if early modern Hebridean islanders had also sought to surround themselves with, and almost to embed themselves within, the comfort and protection of antiquity.⁴

Building a home

Having cleared the site, and reserved the past for future use, further preparatory work had to be undertaken before construction of the blackhouse itself could begin. At the eastern end of the site we located a group of large boulders (527) set in an arc or semi-circle. They appeared to run under, and butt against, the outer face (513) of the eastern wall of the blackhouse (Figure 17.7). Our interpretation at the time was that this represented a small platform constructed as part of the process of levelling the site – and there seem little reason to see things differently now. Kissling tells us that the builders of Hebridean blackhouses avoided 'level building sites'; 'houses were so placed upon sloping sites that one end was higher than the other' (1943: 82) – as we shall see below, this was also true of the Kirkidale builders. However, it is also the case that walls had to stand on solid, level footings and it is our argument that feature 527 provided these.

In terms of the sequence of construction, it may be that the walls were built next. There are, however, some signs that further preparatory work on the interior might have taken place first (or at the same time). A series of 'bedding' layers (628, 629, 935, 943, 953, 954, 955 and 967), some filling hollows (955) to create a level surface (943), and others containing significant quantities of stones/gravel (967 and 954) to aid drainage (?), were deposited on the cleared area preparatory to the creation of the floor of the house. In the central and western parts of the house, this floor was mostly earth (936) and bedrock but, at the eastern end, cobbled and paved areas (933, 945 and 952) were set on top of the bedding layers. The area in the northeast corner of the house was particularly well-paved (933; Figures 17.7 and 17.9), utilizing locally available flat rocks, two reused quernstones, and green slates – the latter almost certainly from the nearby island of Stulaigh (Stuley). The area just to the south of 933 was also fairly well-paved (945), and a stone-lined pit (627) was integral to its make-up.

Most significant for my argument here is the fact that this latter area of paving runs under the southern wall of the house (510), suggesting that it (the floor) was laid down first. The stone-lined drain (619/949) that runs in a northward curve from the west end of the building to exit under the middle of the north wall (505) might also have been constructed before the walls were built. Despite these stratigraphic distinctions, however, it is probably more reasonable to see the floor, drain and walls as part of the same build.

The walls conform to the blackhouse stereotype. They are of drystone construction and comprise an inner and outer face with an earthen core – the latter almost certainly for insulation (and perhaps protection; see above). The walls are between 1.10m and 1.35m wide, with a fill of between 0.50m and 0.80m in the middle, making them very similar to those excavated in blackhouses on Barra (Branigan 2005a: 76, 87, 88, 101) – though it should be noted that much of the south wall (510) was obscured by the later sheep fank (509) and that we never found the outer face of the west wall (506) which seems to have been built into the hillside.

When we first planned the site (see Chapter 4) we were fairly confident that the doorway into the house was in the middle of the north wall (at the point where drain 949/515 exited; Figure 17.7; see also Figure 17.1 where a doorway is marked in this position), but this looked much less certain after the area was excavated (and see below for the possibility that any door at this point might have belonged to a later phase in the use of the building). Excavations close to the middle of the south wall (510), however, suggested that there had been a doorway (511) here (possibly infilled when the wall (509) of the later sheep fank was constructed). While it is (just) possible that there was also a doorway in the northern wall (40% of the 18 houses included in Keith Branigan's survey of south Hebridean blackhouses had opposed doorways [Branigan and Merrony 2000: 4–5; see also below]), the provision of a cobbled/paved area (designed for the inevitably heavier wear this area would have seen) inside the proposed southern door makes the argument for it much stronger (see Branigan 2005a: 87). This southern doorway was c.0.80m wide, much the same as those on Barra (*ibid.*: 78, 87, 102). A doorway in the southern wall also makes sense in terms of the layout of the overall settlement, as it would have facilitated communication with House 1 to the south as well as providing better access to the enclosure to the southeast (see Figure 17.1).

It is very difficult to put a precise date on the construction of this house because, as we shall see in more detail below, the whole of the early modern ceramic assemblage dates to the period between the 1770s and the 1830s. It may be worth noting, however, that sherds of creamware (dated to 1770–1820) and pearlware (1780–1830) were found in the fill of the eastern wall (616) and sherds of creamware (1770–1820) were found in the drain (619), suggesting that the house was constructed at some point in the late 18th or early 19th century.

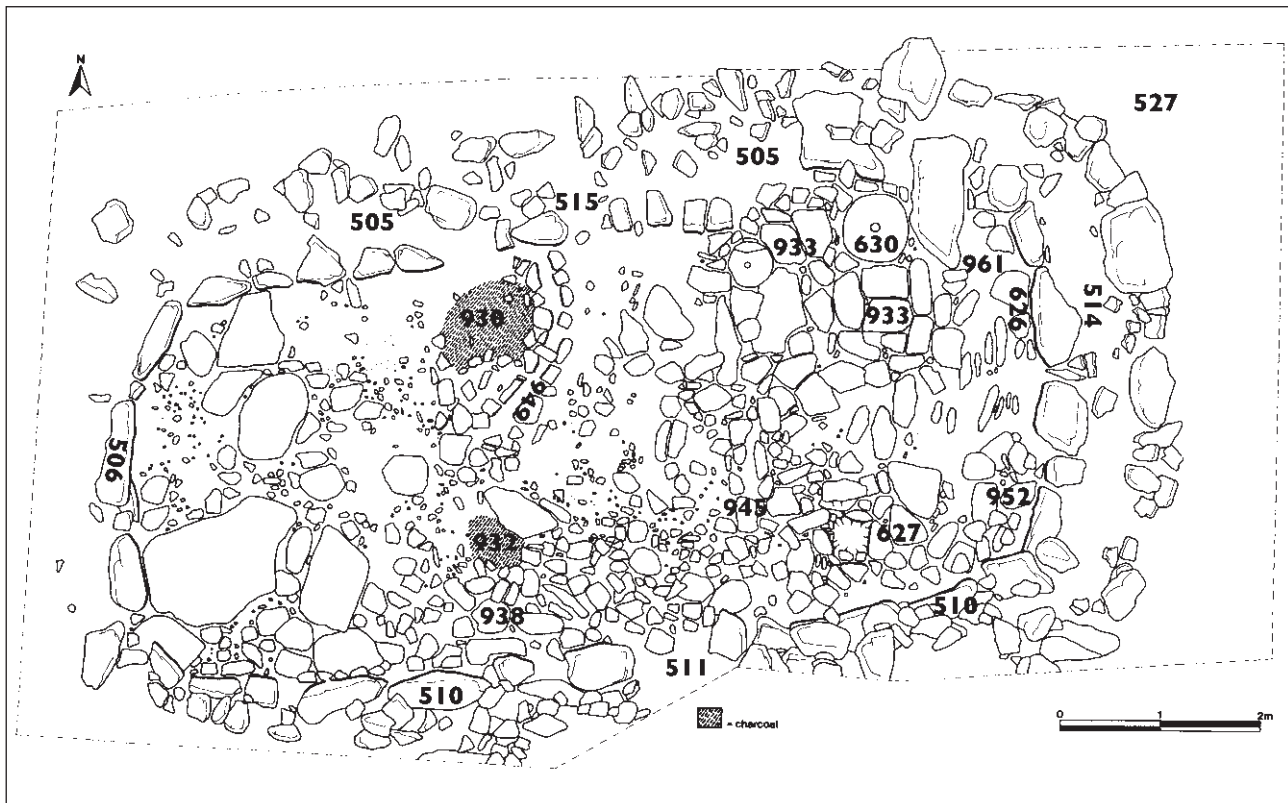


Figure 17.7. The main blackhouse phase at Kirkidale East

Living in the house

The archaeological evidence suggests that the house was divided into two parts. As we have already seen, the eastern end (about 40% of the house) had a paved floor and various ‘facilities’, including a stone-lined pit and a hearth area (Figure 17.7). This (roughly) paved area continued westwards along the south wall, perhaps to facilitate movement both east and west from the doorway in that wall. In the western 60% of the house, the floor consisted only of sub-soil, with rocks protruding through it – though some attempt had been made to flatten the surface of the largest one.

Although hard to distinguish from the post-occupation deposits (because of the homogeneous [peaty] nature of the soil), we were able to isolate ‘occupation layers’ in both parts of the house. Layer 936 was the most significant of these, in the sense that it covered the whole of the interior (apart from the paved areas). It was a dark soil (with flecks of charcoal), had a clay/silt texture, and was between 30mm and 140mm thick. Unfortunately it contained no artefacts. A series of other (more discrete) deposits with higher charcoal content were found in various parts of the house – 618/930, 931 and 932 were in the western end, just beyond the drain; layer 944, described as ‘rich black burnt material’, was found close to the door in the south wall, and 961 lay in the northeast corner (Figure 17.7). A fragment of an early 19th-century coarse earthenware jar was recovered from layer 618.

It seems clear that the eastern end, with its cooking and heating facilities, was the heart of the home. It might have

been here, as Kissling recounts, that the family maintained ‘a perpetual glowing fire’, not just as a source of light and heat but also as an apotropaic force (1943: 85; see also Glassie 1982: 355–6). This would have been where the family gathered at night, to eat, drink, take comfort from the heat of the fire, and to tell stories about the day (but not, apparently, to smoke – we found no tobacco pipe fragments, see also Branigan 2005a: 106). From time to time, even in remote Kirkidale, the fire might have attracted others to the house for a *ceilidh*, where ‘songs were sung, stories told and news exchanged’ (Kissling 1943: 87):

‘ceilis are not planned. They happen. At night you sit to rest or perhaps a neighbour or two will lift the latch and join you at the hearth. Or perhaps you will rise to your feet after supper and go out along the back lanes to one of the local homes known as a “ceili house”. If a “company” forms in a kitchen, and if strength remains to lift talk into chat, a ceili arises. Tea draws, chat turns, and the night gathers as a good one’ (Glassie 1982: 71).

We can never know the stories told or the songs sung by the early modern islanders. Kissling suggests that they might have included those about ‘saints and ... typical Celtic heroes, such as Fingal and Ossian’ (1943: 87), but the region’s association with Bonnie Prince Charlie (see discussions of Corodale and Hafn in Chapter 4, above; also Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 176–7) might also have prompted the re-telling of stories of more recent times.

A notable feature of the hearth (630) in the paved area (933) is that it was ‘founded’ upon a large, complete

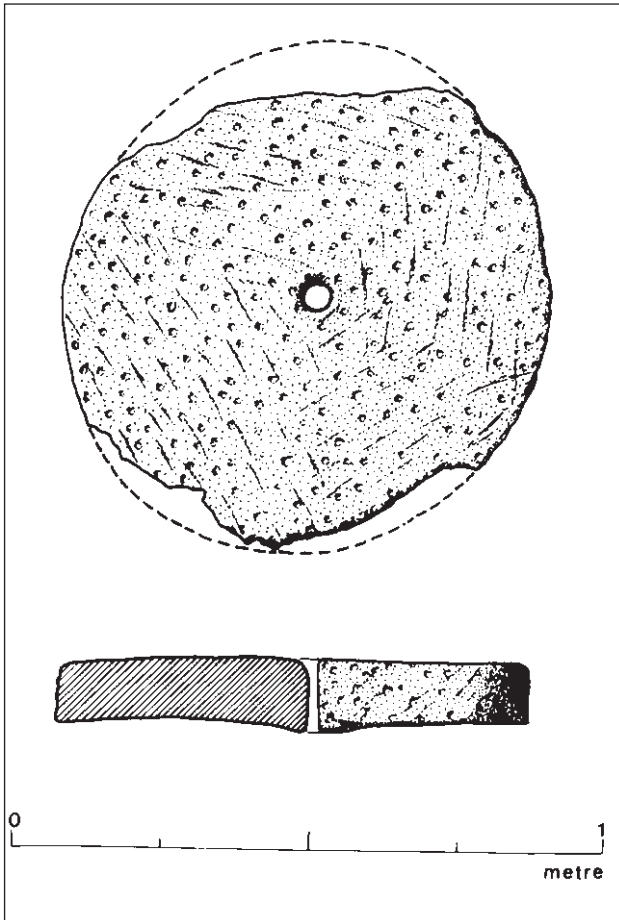


Figure 17.8. The larger of the two quernstones from Kirkidale East, reused as the base for a hearth

quernstone (Figures 17.7 to 17.9). The juxtaposition of two such potent symbols of prosperity and plenty is unlikely to have been coincidental or entirely functional (see above). Another quernstone formed part of the paved area (Figures 17.7 and 17.9), and another (broken) piece was found close to the south wall of the house (Figure 17.10). Their presence at the heart of the home recalls, and *might* be explained by, an incident that is still part of the oral (and, now, written) tradition of the island. As James Symonds notes, when new water mills were constructed in South Uist in 1836, in a further attempt by lairds to ‘capitalise estates’ (Dodgshon 1998: 240), tenants were ordered to use the new facilities and to destroy the querns they had used for hand-grinding. Given that the miller ‘kept every 17th peck of grain in return for the service of milling’, they were reluctant to do either and many, ‘particularly on the less fertile east coast of South Uist, continued to hand-grind their own grain’ (Symonds 1999: 115).⁵ The story is taken up by Angus MacLellan, a crofter born in Loch Aoinart:

‘it was then that the ground officers began to go through the houses breaking the querns, and the querns were thrown into a loch down at Ormaclate beside the main road. The loch has never been called anything since but “Loch nam Braithntean”, the “Loch of the Querns”’ (MacLellan 1997: 7).⁶

One can imagine that the knowledge that the material signs of refusal were hidden in the floor must have enhanced the relish with which such tales of oppression and resistance were told around the Kirkidale fire!⁷

If the eastern end was the heart of the home, then the



Figure 17.9. The two quernstones (right) incorporated into the paved floor of the blackhouse at Kirkidale East, viewed from the east

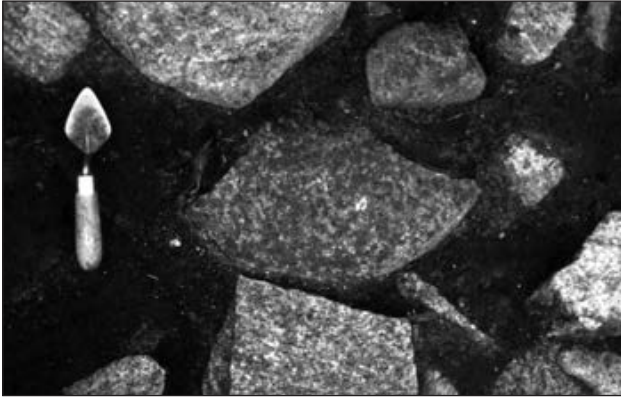


Figure 17.10. A broken quernstone close to wall 510 at Kirkidale East

animals must surely have been kept in the western part – that, at least, is what one would expect if the stereotypes held true. Towards the end of the 19th century, the *Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Class* described a traditional Hebridean blackhouse as a structure whose

‘entrance is common to the cattle and the human inhabitants, and in which there is no partition between the byre, the kitchen, and sleeping apartment: in which all the inhabitants, humans and bestial, live under the same roof in the same open space’ (1885: 104, cited in Branigan and Merrony 2000: 2).

Kissling attributes the fact that ‘man and beast not only lived under the same roof, but shared a single room’ to the ‘close association between man and animal in the Celtic mind’ (1943: 83). So strongly associated did this ‘co-habitation’ become with the blackhouse that a witness had to remind the Royal Commission that ‘it is not a rule they have a cow in the house’ – ‘except in Lewis!’ ‘These customs are very local’, he pointed out (1885: 97, cited in Branigan and Merrony 2000: 7). At Kirkidale the evidence suggests strongly (if not overwhelmingly) that the local custom was *not* to act like the people of Lewis.

In the first place, if the stereotype were to fit, the house is the wrong way round. I noted above that blackhouse builders favoured sloping sites so that ‘one end was higher than the other’ (Kissling 1943: 82). This preference was intimately linked to man/animal cohabitation – the upper end of the house was intended for human occupation, the lower end for animals. Symonds reads this symbolically, with the house as a metaphorical body – ‘the upper half where people ate, worked and slept and the lower section, the animal half, associated with excrement and urine’ (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 179). Kissling more prosaically pointed out that ‘the importance of the sloping floor for the draining of the byre is easily appreciated’ (1943: 82; and well-illustrated in the photograph of the blackhouse excavations at nearby Airigh Mhuillin [Milton]; Symonds 2000: 278). The problem at Kirkidale is that any byre in the upper (western) part of the house would, despite the best efforts of the rather shallow drain (619/949) curving under the north wall, have drained towards the living quarters.

The ‘close association’ between man and animal in ‘Celtic mind’ would surely not have resulted in the former putting the latter above them!

In any case, the Kirkidale house might have been too small to accommodate animals. In their study of south Hebridean (Barra and southern South Uist) blackhouses, Colin Merrony and Keith Branigan demonstrate that those on Barra are significantly shorter, and have less internal floor space, than those on Uist. The overwhelmingly majority (89%) of the 121 blackhouses recorded on Barra:

‘... are under 12m in length, and over half (58%) ... are less than 10m long. This provides a sharp contrast with the Uist blackhouses, where the comparable figures are 33% and 6% respectively. ... Whilst over 60% of the Uist examples have internal areas of 40sq m, only 12% of Barra houses are as large as this’ (2000: 4).

Kirkidale (House 2) measures 9m east–west by 4m north–south, creating a floor area of 36 sq m, very close to the norm for a Barra blackhouse (see histogram in Branigan and Merrony 2000: 5) – and it may resemble its southern ‘cousins’ in other ways too. Branigan and Merrony point out that most Barra blackhouses have a single doorway ‘placed in the centre or near-centre of one long wall’, whereas on South Uist ‘the doors seem to be positioned off-centre in the long walls, to provide direct access to the byre on one side and the living area on the other’. Finally, they also note that ‘stone-founded partition walls are twice as common in the Uist blackhouses as they are on Barra’ and conclude that ‘these differences surely signify not only a lower provision of household space on Barra, but almost certainly a different use of that space’ (2000: 5–6; see also Branigan 2005c: 21). That difference, they suggest, lay in the fact that, on Barra, over-wintering of animals in blackhouses was not widely practised (2000: 8). The similarities between our Kirkidale blackhouse and those on Barra (size, floor area, single doorway in the middle of a long wall, absence of a partition), combined with the details of its internal layout (described above), suggest that this was also true of this part of South Uist.

If the western part of the house was not a byre, then what was it used for? Given the paucity of archaeological features and objects from this part of the house, it is hard to say. The excavations produced few finds – the metalwork assemblage comprised three copper-alloy discs that might have been tokens or buttons, an iron axe, two pieces of iron plate, and some nails; some of these, including the axe, were found in what are probably ‘abandonment’ contexts such as 612 (for similar assemblages from Barra, see Branigan 2005a: 83–4; Branigan 2005d: 65). This material cultural poverty seems to be characteristic of blackhouses and, taken together with an assumed man/animal cohabitation, is frequently seen as emblematic of primitiveness. Kissling, characteristically, sees things more sympathetically, arguing that the absence of tables (for example) was a cultural choice rather than an imposed hardship – ‘traditional rather than due to the environment’ (1943: 86). Nevertheless, in the absence of other evidence, it is difficult to do other than

suggest that the western part of the house would have been used to store the tools required to extract a living from the surrounding sea and land, and to store the products of human exertions in this harsh environment.

The ceramics are one very conspicuous exception to this poverty of material culture. As David Barker notes, the early modern pottery from Kirkdale East is similar in many respects to assemblages found elsewhere on South Uist and Barra. It is dominated by factory-made tablewares and teawares. While the mugs and plates tend to be plain, many of the bowls, tea-bowls, saucers and jugs carried painted decoration (see below). These vessels can probably be directly related to the foodways of the residents of the Kirkdale house at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century. The large number of bowls can be accommodated within ‘what we think we know’ about blackhouse living. James Symonds, for example, uses the prevalence of small bowls and shallow dishes at Airigh Mhuillin as evidence for the importance of:

‘...oat or bere-meal porridge, and boiled potatoes in the diet. Meal times are likely to have been a hand-to-mouth affair in more ways than one. Portions of food were dispensed from an iron pot on the central hearth and eaten from a bowl cradled in the lap’ (Symonds 2000: 279; also Kissling 1943: 86).

Barker illustrates the association commonly made between bowls and poverty by referring to the fact that, on 19th-century plantation sites in the United States, ‘bowls typically form a significantly higher proportion of the ceramic vessels recovered in the cabins of the plantations’ slaves than in the houses of either the overseer or the plantation owner’. The latter consumed their more varied diet from ‘a wider variety of contemporary table wares’ (2005: 113). The connection between blackhouse occupation and poverty is enhanced, it is argued, by the fact that many of the factory wares found at places like Airigh Mhuillin had been repaired, in the end ‘being held together with thin strips of lead’ (Symonds 2000: 279; also Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 181; see also Chapter 4) – the assumption here is that the islanders could not afford to buy replacements.

The evidence from Kirkdale does not entirely support this picture. There were certainly bowls, and we can assume that some meals were eaten from a ‘communal’ pot heated over the hearth at the eastern end of the building (see above). But there were also a significant number of plates (almost a third of the assemblage) and these must point to others patterns of consumption. In fact, Barker’s recent study has demonstrated that plates were a significant feature of many southern Hebridean ceramic assemblages, suggesting that ‘our preconceptions of foodways in the Western Isles may not be entirely well-founded’ (Barker 2005: 113). The presence of teawares (but, admittedly, no teapots) at Kirkdale leads to the same conclusion. The assumption has been that, for at least the early part of the 19th century, tea was a luxury beyond the means of most Western Islanders – ‘in 1840 the Reverend John Mackinnon complained of the recent introduction into Skye

of tea-drinking’ (Barker 2005: 113). The structure of the Kirkdale assemblage suggests that it was deposited before 1830. Perhaps our reliance on historical sources has led us to misdate the introduction of this important stimulant, and so to misread the social and cultural habits of early modern Hebrideans – as well as their cuisine.

We need to make two other points about the ceramics. Firstly, as I noted in Chapter 4, the Kirkdale assemblage differs from that found at Airigh Mhuillin in that none of it shows any sign of having been repaired (see below). Following the logic of the argument that links repair with poverty (above), this might lead us to suggest that we have over-estimated the ubiquity of privation in late 18th- and early 19th-century Hebridean society, and that we have not been sufficiently attuned to variations in the scale and distribution of wealth. It is also possible that the need to repair stemmed from problems with supplies coming into the island, rather than from people’s inability to afford what was available. The fact that the dates of the Kirkdale assemblage (c.1770–1830) roughly correlate with the height of the kelping industry which, Jack Bumsted argues, contributed to a ‘generally improved standard of living’ (2005: 128) might suggest that, when wealth was available, people chose to spend some of it on these imported goods from Glasgow, Stoke-on-Trent or Edinburgh (but see Chapter 4 for how, ultimately, kelping sapped the islanders’ labour and resources).

Finally, we have to consider the possibility that these imports were valued more for display than for their use-value. This belief seems to owe something to the very presence of these (sometimes) highly decorated objects in a world of material cultural poverty, and something to the importance of the dresser (as an item of furniture) in Hebridean society. Thus Keith Branigan and Colin Merrony highlight the presence in one of the blackhouses at Balnabodach (Barra), ‘opposite the door against the rear wall ... [of] a rectangular area marked out by a kerb’ (2000: 11). On the basis of parallels with a blackhouse at Arnol (Lewis) they argue that this was most probably the stand for a ‘dresser with plate rack. ... Opposite the entrance, it was ideally placed to display the household’s prize crockery to visitors’ (2000: 12). We can see something of how this might have looked, and gain an insight into how the occupants of these blackhouses might have felt, by looking at the picture of Mrs Anne Cutler’s dresser (she lived in Ballymenone, County Fermanagh) and hearing her words: ‘Delph is not to use. No. It is for passin on to people that won’t use it’ (Glassie 1982: 362–3).

We cannot, however, transport these images and feelings directly to Kirkdale. Recent research has questioned Kissling’s assertion that dressers made an ‘early appearance’ in Hebridean blackhouses (1943: 86). David Barker points out that ‘the documentary evidence for the use of dressers, and therefore for their use in the display of ceramics, within the blackhouses of the Western Isles is lacking before the middle of the 19th century’ (2005: 115) – the Kirkdale assemblage, remember, was deposited *before* 1830. Barker also points out that assumptions about the presence of

dressers, and their use for display, are founded on much later examples – the Arnol blackhouse, for example, was not constructed before about 1875 (2005: 115).⁸ This does not, of course, mean that the Kirkidale ceramics were not displayed, and that the family who lived there were not as proud of their collection as Mrs Cutler was of hers. And it certainly does not mean that they could not have been *both* used and displayed. As Henry Glassie observes, it is easy to be confounded by the ‘order’ of the dresser and by comments on its ‘loveliness’ – but:

‘... stay awhile. Though most of the crockery put daily to use hides in the pantry, you will see some of the dresser’s sideplates break out for service at dinner, and other of its pieces constantly at work. ... The resplendent dresser is a work of art, but it gracefully incorporates utility too’ (Glassie 1982: 363–4).

I should point out here that it is also easy to transpose modern geographical marginality onto the past. There can be no doubt that, by land, Loch Aoinart is a long way from Sheffield, or Stoke and even Edinburgh – today as much as in the early 19th century. However, I well remember an old man in a pub in Galway telling me that the saddest sight he ever saw was, years ago, a French trawler coming back into harbour – the captain had asked him if he wanted to go to France (to see the dancing girls in Paris), but he had refused as he was worried that the boat just might not bring him back. His sadness stemmed from the missed opportunity to see Paris (and the girls!). The point here is that the maritime highway connected even the remotest parts of these islands to each other and to the mainlands, bringing not only the crockery but also the green wine bottles found in the Kirkidale house (wine-bottles were also found at Airigh Mhuillin, see Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 179). We do not know if the occupants actually consumed the wine (fragments of the bottles were found in the fill of the southern [607] and eastern [614 and 616] walls of the house), but the presence of the bottles are testimony to the interconnectedness of the early modern world, itself a product of the imperialisms of the age.

The end of the blackhouse

Mrs Cutler of Ballymenone so loved her dresser that she hated to imagine what would happen to it after she had gone. ‘Fearing the next generation will not understand, she said, “Sometimes I feel like takin an axe and breakin it all up”’ (Glassie 1982: 361). It is unlikely that this is what happened to the Kirkidale ceramics but it does seem clear that, at some point before the middle of the 19th century, the blackhouse was abandoned and fell into ruins. The walls as we found them were less than a metre high, and had probably been robbed to build those of the sheep fank – one of which (509) sits on the southern wall of the house (Figure 17.1). Within the house a thick layer of dark, peaty soil with many bracken roots (520, 525 and 612) had accumulated on the floor surface and there were piles of tumbled rocks along the inside of the walls (521, 523,



Figure 17.11. A late structure inserted into the northwest corner of the abandoned blackhouse, viewed from the east

524, 620, 621 and 622). It seems that some use was later made of the abandoned building as a small sub-rectangular structure (c.3m east–west by 1.50m north–south; walls 518 and 519), containing at least one well-made hearth (530, 536 and 541; other burnt areas were also found in and around the structure), was inserted into its northwest corner (Figure 17.11). It is just possible that the ‘doorway’ (515) in the north wall was inserted to facilitate access to this structure (rather than to the blackhouse itself, see above). It is hard to know what its function might have been, but it does look similar to late buildings inserted into the remains of blackhouses elsewhere in the region. On Barra, Keith Branigan argues that they ‘represent the use of the abandoned houses as lambing pens’ (Branigan 2005: 86, 88, 101) but, as we shall see below, there are other possibilities.

The connection between ‘abandonment’ and ‘sheep’ is painfully evocative in the context of mid-19th century Scotland and, in Chapter 4, I outlined the process by which the ‘aborigines of the soil’ were cleared from the lands around Loch Aoinart and the landscape ‘turned under sheep’ (Dodgshon 1998: 240–1). There I also suggested that the construction of the wall of the later sheep fank (509) over that (510) of the blackhouse might be seen as capturing this shift from an inhabited landscape to a capitalized one. In fact it is difficult to link the abandonment of the Kirkidale house *definitively* to the Clearances. As we see elsewhere in this volume (see Chapters 4 and 18), that process began in this area at Milton in 1827 and Kildonan in 1831, with many of the evicted being resettled on the poor hill-lands of the east coast (including around Loch Aoinart), and culminated in August 1851 in the ‘dispossessed poor being loaded onto boats at Lochboisdale pier while those who tried to escape were hunted down and brought by force to the pier side’ where they were put on board *The Admiral* and ‘forcibly migrated’ to Canada (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 175; Symonds 1999: 111).

The early modern ceramic assemblage at Kirkidale was almost certainly deposited before 1830 and therefore probably before the Clearances began. As such, it would seem unlikely that the abandonment of the house was a

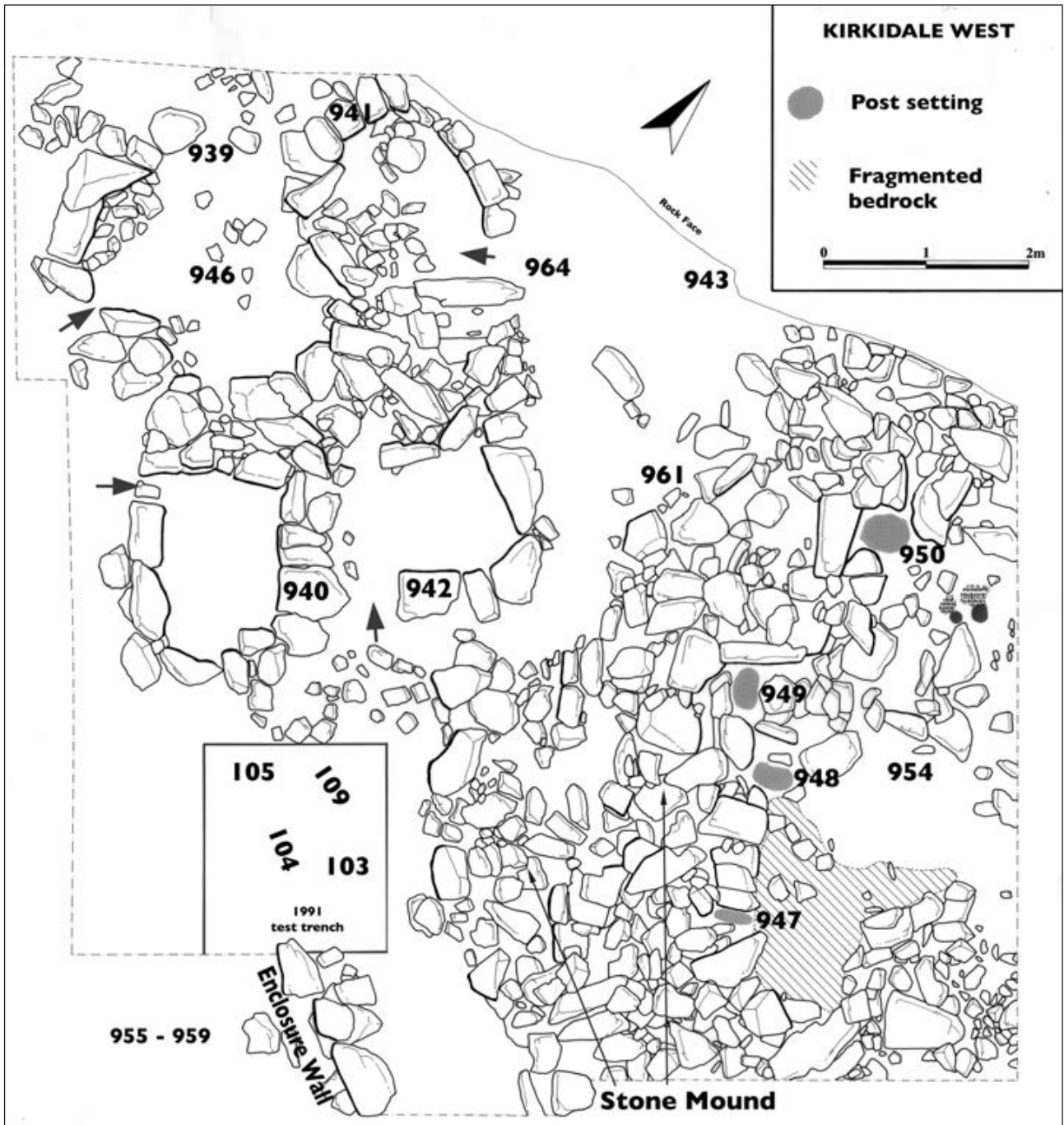


Figure 17.12. Plan of excavations at Kirkdale West, 1991–93

product of Clearance – if anything, the locale should have become more populous in the late 1820s and early 1830s as those dispossessed from the west coast settled there. Gill MacLean (see Chapter 18) argues that these unfortunates had only ‘the shielings and the bothies’ as a base – but perhaps they also built ephemeral structures like that constructed within the abandoned house at Kirkdale. The problem with this interpretation is that sherds of pre-1830s pottery were found in contexts 519 and 530 associated with this late structure, dating it too to pre-Clearance times. Read literally, the ceramic evidence would suggest that the Kirkdale house was built, occupied, abandoned,

reoccupied, and abandoned again – all between 1770 and 1830.

However, the context in which the excavation took place, and the social and economic context of the mid-19th century, mean that this is not the only way the evidence can be read. The excavation notebooks for Tuesday June 25th 1991 record the ‘worst possible conditions – rain, mist, midge frenzy, site puddled’; those for the 26th tell us that ‘the site is an atrocious mess, the whole area is water logged’. The point here is that the upper layers of the site, including the features associated with the late structure, were excavated under extremely difficult conditions – and



Figure 17.13. Excavations at Kirkdale West, from the northwest

stratigraphic discrimination was not helped by the dark, peaty nature of most of the deposits, or by the fact that these deposits were badly disturbed by bracken roots. It is perfectly possible, therefore, that the ceramics used to date the late structure belong in earlier contexts, and that the later structure dates to after *c.*1830.

But we should also remember that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. The ceramic sequence stops *c.*1830, but this does not mean that occupation did – it may just mean that the people who lived there could not afford, or no longer had access to, ceramics. As I argued in Chapter 4 (and above), a real measure of the poverty of blackhouse residents might not be the fact that they repaired their crockery but the fact that they did not have any. This absence, a product of the penury that both preceded and accompanied the Clearances, foreshadows the way they themselves would soon be removed from the land.

Excavations at Kirkdale West

At the time of the excavations (and still!) my research interests focused on Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages and, while in the course of the Loch Aoineart survey we recorded all the archaeological features we encountered in this Hebridean landscape, I was particularly interested in locating sites from the early historic period – hence the excavation of the supposed ‘Norse’ house at Kirkdale East, and of the structures we had previously surveyed and recorded at Kirkdale West. As I noted above (see also Chapter 4), the combination of cell-like structures with an enclosure in this isolated location encouraged us to believe that this may be the site of an early Christian monastery. Our limited excavations were designed to retrieve dating evidence to assess this possibility.

In the summer of 1991, we opened a small test trench at the point where the wall of the enclosure approached the ‘hut circles’ at the western end of the site (see Figures 17.3, 17.12 and 17.13). The aims here were to establish the relationship between the buildings and the enclosure, to determine the depth of archaeological deposits and to acquire dating evidence for the major phase(s) of settlement – we were successful in two of the three.

De-turfing and cleaning revealed a pile of stones (103) running west from the large stone mound/cairn to join enclosure wall 104 (Figure 17.12). At the time, we thought this might have been another wall, perhaps sub-dividing part of the interior of the enclosure. However, subsequent excavations, particularly in 1993 (see 961, below), suggest that this might, instead, have been a rock fall or spread from the mound. Alternatively it may be part of the mound itself – if so, this could support the suggestion that the ‘cells’ were cut into (and were therefore later than) the mound (see relationship between the mound and cell 942; Figure 17.12; also below). While we never uncovered a ‘physical relationship’ between the enclosure and the cells, or between the latter and the mound, excavations in later years enabled us to propose a stratigraphic sequence (see below).

Removal of wall 104⁹ and feature 103 revealed a considerable depth of archaeological deposits (with sherds of ‘grit-tempered pottery’), and two significant features. A ‘pit’ (109) was found in the northern corner of the test trench, running away under the sections. The deposits were shallower in the western corner of the trench and their removal uncovered two ‘lines’ of flat, rectangular stones (105), separated by a gap of *c.*0.20m, cut into the bedrock. These looked very much like a drain – apparently running downslope from the hut circles. We were unable

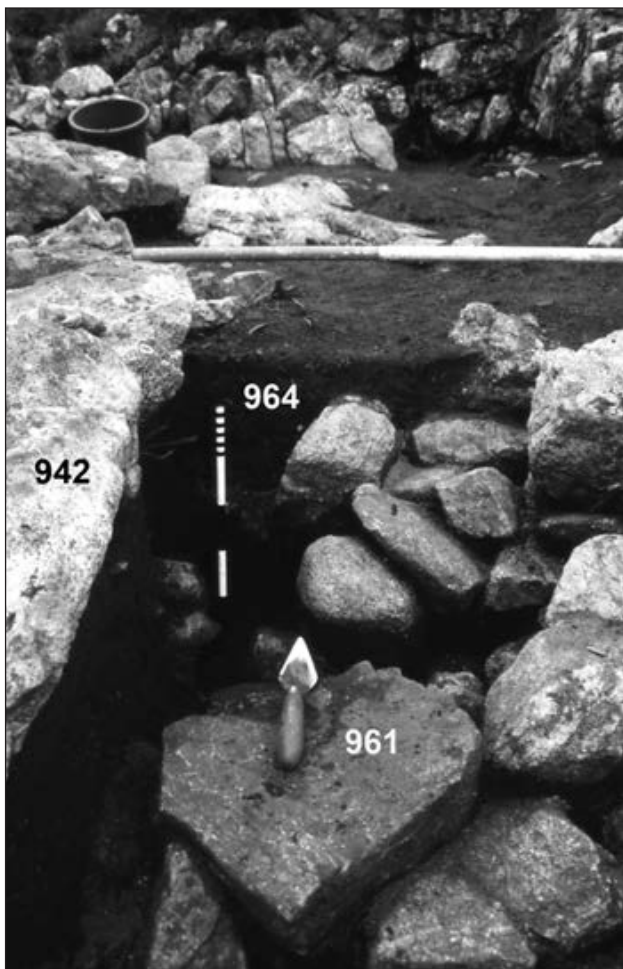


Figure 17.14. The relationship between cell 942 and the stone mound/cairn at Kirkdale West, from the south

to demonstrate, in this or subsequent excavations, that this was the case but the presence of this ‘drain’ and of pit (109) suggests that this site was of greater complexity (and deeper antiquity?) than we had supposed (see below).

Such was the promise of the 1991 excavations that we returned in 1992 to open a larger area (8m by 7m, seen in Figure 17.4). However, weather conditions and the need to prioritize work on the Kirkdale East blackhouse meant that we never really progressed beyond de-turfing and cleaning.

Work in 1993 was more productive, though the weather (and the long walk to and from Kirkdale, see above) again hampered progress.¹⁰ We had (perhaps rather optimistically!) opened a larger area than in 1992 – and included all of the large mound that lies at the western end of the enclosure, and the buildings to the west of that (see Figure 17.13). We also extended the 1991 test trench to the south (contexts 955–959).

De-turfing and cleaning cast doubt on the rather complex sequence of construction we had envisaged for the cell-like buildings during the survey (see Chapter 4). While there may be some phasing within the group, it now seems more likely that there were four small, cell-like buildings (939, 940, 941 and 942), with entrances (marked with arrows

on Figure 17.12) to the south (939), northeast (941) and southeast (942) – there was no obvious entrance to 940. We excavated (through quarter-sections) two of these – 939 and 940 – but, apart from a hearth (946) in the middle of 939, we found no obvious cultural features and no way of dating them. One can, however, make an argument that they are quite late in the sequence of the site.

The rather straight wall of the northwestern side of 940 and the jumble of rocks that runs away from it to the north (and forming one of the walls of each of the other cells) might imply that the latter were reusing parts of an earlier structure (see Figure 17.12). Further, as I have already noted, one of the huts (942) seems to ‘encroach’ on the mound. This was noticed at the time of the excavations and can be read from Figure 17.12. Excavations in the area between cells 941 and 942 and the mound confirmed the stratigraphic sequence, if not the physical relationship. Here we could see that cell 942 was constructed on top of a compact brown layer (964) that had accumulated on top of stones (961), which were either part of, or had fallen from, the mound/cairn (see Figure 17.14). This cell (at least), therefore, is later than the mound.

A similar brown earth deposit had accumulated over the area to the east of the mound. Excavation exposed a series of hearths/burning deposits (932, 954 and 972), which may parallel the 933, 943, 945 sequence close to the rock face west of the mound (Figure 17.12). Again, we have no means of dating these features, apart from the fact that they post-date the mound. The same is true of the four post settings (947, 948, 949 and 950) that ran in a north–south line along the top of the mound – although it is, of course, possible that they were an integral part of that feature.

So where does that leave us in terms of date and function? The first thing to note is that, even in cleaning the upper layers, we found no early modern pottery or glass. Given its relative abundance just down the valley at Kirkdale East, this would seem to suggest that no extensive use was made of this site in recent times, and would encourage us to argue that even the latest features (the cells and hearths) are of some antiquity.¹¹ Secondly, the pottery we did find seems to belong to two quite discrete periods – the Late Bronze Age (1100–750 BC), and the Late Iron Age (AD 300–600+). Few of these sherds were found in stratigraphically secure contexts, with the exception of those recovered from the test trench in 1991 (contexts 100–109). Significantly, these date to the Late Iron Age and into the early historic period (c. AD 600). While we do not have stratigraphic proof, the fact that large stones (similar to those that made up the mound) protruded from the base of the southeastern section of the test trench (marked by an arrow on Figure 17.15) suggests that (like 964, above) the layers in which these sherds were found had built up on top of the mound.

This tells us two things:

1. that the mound pre-dates the Late Iron Age and, given the presence of Late Bronze Age sherds, we may confidently place it in that earlier period.

2. that both the cells and the enclosure wall (104 in the test trench)¹² probably post-date the Late Iron Age.

We cannot be sure by how much they post-date it and, given our chronological imprecision, they might actually belong in that period. However, the fact that the latest datable pottery from the site (sherds with pin-prick decoration) is dated to *c.* AD 600 or later (see below) encourages me to place these features in this early historic period.

What then of function? About the Late Bronze Age mound, we can say little, as it was not excavated (but see below). We are almost as ignorant about the use to which the early historic site was put but the dating evidence does nothing to undermine our suggestion that it may be an early monastery. What we can say is that this is a site of rich promise, whose further excavation would contribute significantly to our understanding of the human presence in and use of this Hebridean landscape.

Factory wares

David Barker

This is a small assemblage with a range of finds well known from other sites in the Outer Hebrides (Table 17.1). These include a mixture of tablewares and teawares, but no teapots. Plates are in creamware (royal edge) or pearlware with blue-painted moulded shell edges. A range of decorated wares is present, including factory-made slipwares, under-glaze painted wares and blue-printed pearlwares. However, other types common elsewhere on South Uist (as at Airigh Mhuillin) are not present here, such as oriental porcelain and wares with sponged decoration (which was in use by the 1820s). Even so, decorated ceramics were favoured by the occupants of this blackhouse.

There is sufficient material to indicate an early deposition date for this material (*i.e.* before 1830). Firstly, both scalloped and rococo moulding is to be seen on the pearlware shell-edge plates: the rococo moulding generally gave way to more regular scalloped plate edges around 1810. Secondly, there are no obvious ‘London shape’ bowls, which became common in earthenware after about 1820 (after the initial introduction of the ‘London shape’ for teawares in porcelain bodies around 1810). Thirdly, there is a large quantity of creamware – larger as a percentage than in any of the Airigh Mhuillin assemblages, even though these are largely undecorated tablewares. Fourthly, none of the sherds are so-called ‘whiteware’, which appeared as a variant or development of the blue-tinted pearlwares during the 1820s (‘whiteware’ is a modern term that actually describes a range of earthenwares that, in the main, have lost the blue tint of pearlwares). Finally, there are none of the new range of brighter under-glaze colours, which include chrome green, red *etc.*, that were introduced in the late 1820s. Even allowing for a lengthy period of use for the Kirkidale wares, it is difficult to imagine that they could have been discarded any later than about 1830; in fact, an earlier date of deposition is more likely.

The most common forms are plates (almost a third of the total), bowls and jugs. There are smaller quantities of jars,

mugs, soup plates and tea bowls, and just a few pieces of stoneware bottles, saucers and a dish fragment. Pearlwares are slightly more common than creamwares, although most of the plates and all of the mugs are of creamware. Most of the bowls and jugs and all of the tea bowls and saucers are of pearlware. The jars have coarse earthenware fabrics, the bottles are made of brown salt-glazed stoneware and the one sherd of a dish is of redware.

All of the mugs and most of the plates and soup plates are plain except for nine sherds of under-glaze painted pearlware. The tea bowls, saucers and nearly all the jugs are under-glaze painted pearlwares. Nearly all of the bowls are decorated; most of the pearlware bowls are under-glaze painted whilst the remainder have slip-banded decoration. Most of the creamware bowls are decorated with a fanned slip and there is a single example with slip-banded decoration. There are just three sherds of undecorated creamware bowls.

It is interesting that the wares show no evidence of having been repaired, unlike examples in the assemblage from Airigh Mhuillin.

Other artefacts

Mike Parker Pearson

Handmade earthenware

Thirty-nine sherds of handmade earthenware (300g) were recovered from Kirkidale (Table 17.2). These included three rim sherds and one base sherd. Their coarse fabric is typical of the gneiss-based clays that characterize South Uist earthenware from the Bronze Age to the 17th century. The sherds appear not to date to the Post-Medieval period because they lack the leathery surfaces and hard-fired texture of such pottery (see Chapter 20).

Even with such a small assemblage, there are sufficient diagnostic sherds to indicate that at least two periods of occupation are represented at Kirkidale. The earliest elements in the group – the generally thick sherds, the closed-mouthed vessel forms (contexts 200 and 601; Figures 17.5.1–2), the grass-impressed sherd (context 612) and the pin-pricked rim (context 200; Figure 17.5.1) – can be most closely paralleled with phases 8–12 of the Late Bronze Age at Cladh Hallan (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 66–82; *in prep.*). This dates them to within the period *c.* 1100–750 BC; sherds of this type are found on both Kirkidale East and West.

The sherds from Kirkidale East (contexts 100–109) include three with applied horizontal cordons. One of these has a line of pin-pricks along the cordon, placed around the neck, as well as pin-pricks along the rim top of this flaring-mouthed vessel (context 109; Figure 17.5.4). The cordons on the other two sherds are decorated with vertical incisions (context 109, Figure 17.5.5; see Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999: fig. 4.24.1) and with finger impressions to form the characteristic S-shape cordon decoration of Iron Age ceramics (context 107; Figure 17.5.6; *ibid.*: fig. 4.25.1–2). These features are characteristic of the cordoned Plain Ware of the Late Iron Age *c.* AD 300–600, whilst

| Ctxt | No | Ceramic Type | Surface decoration | Moulded/other decoration | Gl.? | Vessel form | Part | Date | Notes |
|------|----|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|------|-------------------|--------|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ?jug | Handle | 1770-1820 | Medium size vessel. |
| 2A | 2 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Plates (10-8inch) | Rims | 1770-1820 | Royal edge |
| | 2 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ?plates | Bases | 1770-1820 | |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ?mug | Body | 1770-1820 | |
| | 3 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ? | Bodies | 1770-1820 | |
| 501 | 2 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Bowl (hemis) | Rims | 1780-1820 | CWE 3. Joining. |
| | 1 | Creamware | Slip-banded (brown) | | Gl. | Bowl (hemis) | Body | 1790-1820 | CWE 4. Lower body with single slip band. |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ?mug | Body | 1770-1820 | |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ? | Base | 1770-1820 | |
| | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. printed (blue) and u-gl. painted (brown) | | Gl. | Saucer | Rim | 1800-1830 | PLW 4. |
| | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. printed (blue) | Moulded faceted body | Gl. | Tea bowl/cup | Body | 1800-1830 | PLW 5. |
| | 1 | Pearlware | Slip banded (dark brown) | | Gl. | Bowl (hemis) | Body | 1800-1830 | Probably PLW 6. Broad and narrow bands to lower body. |
| | 1 | brown salt-glazed stoneware | | | Gl. | Jar/bottle | Base | e. 19th c. | BSG 1. Joins 2 bodies from 601 /19; badly overfired/reduced grey body which is beginning to bloom on interior; dull brown ext. glaze. |
| | 1 | Redware | Trailed slip (cream) | | Gl. | Dish | Base | e. 19th c. | RWE 1. Orange body, brown glaze. |
| | 4 | Coarse earthenware | | | Gl. | Jar | bodies | e. 19th c. | ?CEW 2. 2 x 2 joins; pronounced horizontal ridges; coarse orange-pink body, black to dark brown glaze. |
| | 1 | Coarse earthenware | | | Gl. | Jar | Body | e. 19th c. | ?CEW 1. Orange body, black glaze, slightly matt on ext. |
| 519 | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Plate (10-inch) | Rim | 1770-1820 | CWE 1. Royal edge. |
| | 1 | Coarse earthenware | | | Gl. | Jar | Rim | e. 19th c. | CEW 1. Joins rim and body from KDL 7/501 (2); orange body, lustrous black glaze. |
| 520 | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Plate (10-inch) | Rim | 1770-1820 | CWE 5. Royal edge. |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Mug | Base | 1770-1820 | CWE 6. Joins base from 601 /20. |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ?Mug | Body | 1770-1820 | |

Table 17.1. Catalogue of factory wares from Kirkdale (continued over the next six pages)

| Ctxt | No | Ceramic Type | Surface decoration | Moulded/other decoration | Gl.? | Vessel form | Part | Date | Notes |
|---------|----|--------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|------|-----------------|---------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ? | Body | 1770-1820 | |
| | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. -printed (blue) | | Gl. | ? | Body | 1800-1830 | |
| | 1 | Pearlware | | | Gl. | ? | Body | 1800-1830 | |
| | 1 | Pearlware | | | Gl. | ?plate | Base | 1780-1830 | |
| | 1 | Pearlware | | | Gl. | ?jug | Body | 1780-1830 | Possibly PLW 2. |
| 525 | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Plate (10-inch) | Rim | 1770-1820 | CWE 2. Royal edge. |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ? | ?base | 1770-1820 | |
| 525 | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. printed (blue) and u-gl. painted (brown) | | Gl. | Jug | Rim | 1810-1830 | PLW 2. Flower and leaf pattern; joins bodies from 601 /4, and /14. |
| | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. printed (blue) | | Gl. | ?saucer | Body | 1800-1830 | Pattern indeterminate. |
| 528 | 12 | Pearlware | u-gl. painted (brown, green and orange) | | Gl. | Bowl | 2 rims, 3 bases, 8 bodies | 1800-1820 | PLW 1. Joins. Joins also with KDL 7 /501 (1). |
| 530 | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. printed (blue) | | Gl. | Jug | Body | 1810-1830 | PLW 2. |
| 531 | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. printed (blue) | | Gl. | Jug | rim | 1810-1830 | PLW 2. Flower and leaf pattern; joins rim from 601 /4 and body from 601 /17. |
| | 2 | Pearlware | u-gl. printed (blue) | | Gl. | Jug | bodies | 1810-1830 | PLW 2. 1 body joins 601 /6,, 601 /8,, 1 body joins 601 /8,, 601 /17,, and 530. |
| 533 | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Plate (10-inch) | Base | 1780-1820 | No footrim |
| 601 /2\ | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. printed (blue) | | Gl. | Jug | Body | 1810-1830 | PLW 2. Joins bodies from 601 /6 and 601 /8. |
| 601 /3\ | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. painted (yellow, orange, brown and blue) | | Gl. | Saucer | Body | 1800-1830 | PLW 15. Stylised floral pattern. |
| 601 /4\ | 3 | Pearlware | u-gl. printed (blue) and u-gl. painted (brown) | | Gl. | Jug | rims, | 1810-1830 | PLW 2. Flower and leaf pattern; 601 /17 and rim from 531. |
| 601 /6\ | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. printed (blue) | | Gl. | Jug | body | 1810-1830 | PLW 2. Joins bodies from 601 /8, 601 /14 and rim from 525. |
| | 5 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ? | Bodies | 1770-1820 | 2 joins. |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ?plate | Base | 1770-1820 | |
| | 2 | Pearlware | u-gl. printed (blue) | | Gl. | Jug | Bodies | 1810-1830 | PLW 2. Joins with 531, 601 /4 and 601 /2. |
| | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. printed (blue) and u-gl. painted (brown) | | Gl. | Jug | Handle | 1810-1830 | PLW 2. |
| | 1 | Pearlware | | | Gl. | Soup plate | Base | 1780-1810 | PLW 3. Joins body/rim from 601 /17. |
| 601 | 3 | Pearlware | u-gl. printed (blue) | | Gl. | Jug | Body | 1810-1830 | PLW 2. Joining, join bodies , 601 |

| Ctxt | No | Ceramic Type | Surface decoration | Moulded/other decoration | Gl.? | Vessel form | Part | Date | Notes |
|----------|----|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|------|------------------|---------------|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| /8\ | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ? | Handle | 1770-1820 | /2\, 601 /4\ and 601 /6\. |
| 601 /12\ | 1 | Brown salt-glazed stoneware | | Turned lines (3) | Gl. | Bottle | shoulder | e. 19th c. | BSG 2. Grey purple body with lustrous dark brown ext. glaze; int glaze is thinner and lighter in colour. |
| 601 /14\ | 1 | Creamware | Fanned slip (brown, dark brown and white) | | Gl. | Bowl (hemis) | Body/base | 1790-1820 | CWE 11. Joins body/base from 601 /17\ |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Bowl | Base | 1770-1820 | |
| | 6 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ? | Bodies | 1770-1820 | |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ? | Base | 1770-1820 | |
| | 2 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Plate (?8-inch) | 1 base, 1 rim | 1770-1820 | CWE 9. Joining; no footrim. |
| | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. printed (blue) | | Gl. | Jug | Shoulder | 1810-1830 | PLW 2. Joins body from 601 /4\ and rim from 525. |
| | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. painted | | Gl. | Bowl | Body | 1800-1820 | PLW 1. Does not join. |
| | 1 | Pearlware | | | Gl. | Plate/soup plate | Base | 1780-1830 | |
| 601 /17\ | 2 | Creamware | Fanned slip (brown, dark brown and white) | | Gl. | Bowl (hemis) | Bodies/base | 1790-1820 | CWE 11. 1 Joins body/base from 601 /14\. |
| | 1 | Creamware | Fanned slip (brown, dark brown and white) | | Gl. | Bowl (hemis) | Body | 1790-1820 | CWE 11. |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Mug | Base | 1770-1820 | CWE 7. Diameter 210mm. |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Jug | Base | 1770-1820 | CWE 10. |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Plate | Rim | 1770-1820 | Royal edge. |
| | 2 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Mugs | Bodies | 1770-1820 | |
| | 2 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ?plates | Bases | 1770-1820 | |
| | 2 | Pearlware | u-gl. printed (blue) and u-gl. painted (brown) | | Gl. | Jug | Rims | 1810-1830 | PLW 2. Joining; join sherds from 530, 531, 601 /4\ and 601 /8\. |
| | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. printed (blue) | | Gl. | ? | Body | 1800-1830 | |
| | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. printed (blue) | | Gl. | ? | Body | 1800-1830 | |
| | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. painted (blue, brown and green) | | Gl. | Teabowl | Rim | 1800-1830 | PLW 16. Stylised leaf decoration to ext.; brown band to rim int. and ext. |
| | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. painted (blue) | Shell edge (rococo) | Gl. | Soup plate | Rim | 1800-1810 | PLW 3. Joins body from 601 /6\. |
| | 2 | Pearlware | u-gl. painted (blue) | Shell edge (scalloped) | Gl. | Plate (10-inch) | Rims | 1810-1830 | PLW 7. Joining. |
| | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. painted (blue) | Shell edge (scalloped) | Gl. | Plate (10-inch) | Rim | 1810-1830 | PLW 9. Narrower rim than PLW 7. |
| | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. painted (blue) | | Gl. | Teabowl | Rims - base | 1800-1830 | PLW 10. Stylised flower sprigs and band to int. rim; joins sherds |

| Ctxt | No | Ceramic Type | Surface decoration | Moulded/other decoration | Gl.? | Vessel form | Part | Date | Notes |
|----------|----|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------|------|-----------------|-----------------|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | 1 | Pearlware | | | Gl | Plate | Base | 1780-1830 | from 601 /20\ |
| | 7 | Pearlware | | | Gl | Plates | Bases | 1780-1830 | Rounded foot 2 x 2 joins |
| 601 /19\ | 2 | brown salt-glazed stoneware | | | Gl. | Jar/bottle | bodies | e. 19th c. | BSG 1. Joining, join base from 501; badly overfired/reduced grey body which is beginning to bloom on interior; dull brown ext. glaze. |
| | 1 | brown salt-glazed stoneware | | | Gl. | Jar/bottle | Base | e. 19th c. | BSG 1. Joins body from 612 /53\; badly overfired/reduced grey body which is beginning to bloom on interior; dull brown ext. glaze. |
| | 1 | Coarse earthenware | | | Gl. | Jar | Body | e. 19th c. | ?CEW 2. Pronounced horizontal ridges; coarse orange-pink body, black to dark brown glaze. |
| 601 /20\ | 1 | Creamware | | | | | | | |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Plate (10-inch) | Base | 1780-1820 | No footrim, well worn underside. |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ?plate | Base | 1770-1820 | |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl | Mug | Body | 1770-1820 | |
| | 2 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ? | Bodies | 1770-1820 | |
| | 1 | Pearlware | Slip-banded (dark brown) | | Gl. | Bowl | Rim | 1800-1830 | PLW 6. Broad and narrow slip bands to rim. |
| | 4 | Pearlware | u-gl. painted (blue) | | Gl. | Teabowl | 2 rims, 2 bases | 1800-1830 | PLW 10. Joining; stylised flower sprigs and band to int. rim; joins rim/body from 601 /17\. |
| 601 /21\ | 1 | Pearlware | | | Gl. | ? | ?body | 1780-1830 | |
| 601 /85\ | 1 | Brown salt-glazed stoneware | | | Gl. | Bottle | Neck | e. 19th c. | BSG 3. Mottled ext. brown glaze; buff-grey body. |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Plate | Rim | 1770-1820 | |
| | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. printed (blue) | | Gl. | ? | Body | 1770-1820 | |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Bowl | Rim | 1800-1820 | PLW 11. Oriental type pattern. |
| 602 /86\ | 1 | Coarse earthenware | | | Gl. | Jar | Body | e. 19th c. | ?CEW 2. Pronounced horizontal ridges; coarse orange-pink body, black to dark brown glaze. |
| 612 /29\ | 1 | Coarse earthenware | | | Gl. | ?Jar | Base | e. 19th c. | ?CEW 2. Orange body, dark brown int. glaze. |
| 612 /34\ | 4 | Creamware | Fanned slip (cream, brown and dark brown) | | Gl. | Bowl | Body | 1790-1820 | CWE 11. Joining. |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Plate | Shoulder | 1770-1820 | |

| Ctxt | No | Ceramic Type | Surface decoration | Moulded/other decoration | Gl.? | Vessel form | Part | Date | Notes |
|----------|----|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------|------|------------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 612 /37\ | 1 | Creamware | Fanned slip (cream, brown and dark brown) | | Gl. | Bowl | Body | 1790–1820 | CWE 11. Joins sherd from 601 /17. |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Plate | Base | 1770–1820 | No footrim |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Plate | Base | 1770–1820 | |
| | 5 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ? | Bodies | 1770–1820 | |
| | 2 | Pearlware | u-gl. painted (blue) | Shell edge (rococo) | Gl. | Soup plate | Rims | 1800–1810 | PLW 3. One joins base from 601 /14. |
| | 1 | Pearlware | Slip-banded (dark brown) | | Gl. | Bowl | Body | 1800–1830 | Possibly PLW 6. Narrow slip bands to body. |
| | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. painted (blue, brown, green and yellow) | | Gl. | Bowl | Rim | 1800–1830 | PLW 8. Stylised floral pattern; single painted brown line below int. rim |
| | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. painted (blue) | Shell edge (rococo) | Gl. | Plate | Rim | 1780–1810 | Probably PLW 12. Thin body, light coloured glaze, almost white. |
| | 1 | Pearlware | | | Gl. | Plate/soup plate | Base/lower body | 1780–1830 | |
| | 1 | Pearlware | | | Gl. | Plate | Base | 1780–1830 | |
| 612 /46\ | 1 | Coarse earthenware | | | Gl. | ?jar | Body | e. 19th c. | ?CEW 2. Pronounced horizontal ridges in places; coarse orange-pink boy, black to dark brown glaze. |
| 612 /53\ | 1 | brown salt-glazed stoneware | | | Gl. | Jar/bottle | body | e. 19th c. | BSG 1. Joins base from 601 /19; badly overfired/reduced grey body which is beginning to bloom on interior; dull brown ext. glaze. |
| 612 /60\ | 1 | Creamware | Fanned slip (brown, dark brown and white) | | Gl. | Bowl (hemis) | Base | 1790–1820 | CWE 11. |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Plate (10-inch) | Rim | 1770–1820 | |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Plate (10-inch) | Base | 1770–1820 | Recessed foot |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ?Plate | Base | 1770–1820 | |
| | 2 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ? | Bases | 1770–1820 | |
| | 4 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ? | Bodies | 1770–1829 | |
| | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. painted (orange, green and brown) | | Gl. | ?Bowl | Body | 1800–1830 | |
| | 1 | Pearlware | | | Gl. | ? | Body | 1780–1830 | |
| 612 /61\ | 1 | brown salt-glazed stoneware | | | Gl. | Jar/bottle | body | e. 19th c. | BSG 1. Badly overfired/reduced grey body which is beginning to bloom on interior; dull brown ext. glaze. |
| 612 | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ?plate | Base | 1770–1820 | |

| Cxt | No | Ceramic Type | Surface decoration | Moulded/other decoration | Gl.? | Vessel form | Part | Date | Notes |
|-------------|----|----------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|------|-------------|-----------|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| /88\ | | | | | | | | | |
| 614 /67\ | 1 | Coarse earthenware | | | Gl. | Jar | Body | e. 19th c. | ?CEW 2. Pronounced horizontal ridges; coarse orange-pink body, black to dark brown glaze. |
| 614 /77\ | 1 | Coarse earthenware | | | Gl. | Jar | Body | e. 19th c. | ?CEW 2. Pronounced horizontal ridges; coarse orange-pink body, black to dark brown glaze. |
| 616 /51\ | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | | Body | 1770-1820 | |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ?plate | Base | 1770-1820 | |
| | 1 | Pearlware | | | Gl. | Plate | Shoulder | 1780-1830 | |
| 616 /69\ | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | | Body | 1770-1820 | |
| 618 /65\ | 1 | <i>stone Not pot</i> | | | | | | | |
| 618 /83\ | 1 | Coarse earthenware | | | Gl. | Jar | Rim | e. 19th c. | CEW 2. Everted rim; slightly rounded upper body; pronounced horizontal ridges; coarse orange-pink body, black to dark brown glaze. |
| 619 /82\ | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Plate | Shoulder | 1770-1820 | |
| 619 /84\ | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ? | Body | 1770-1820 | Large, round-bodied vessel. |
| 624 /76\ | 2 | Creamware | Fanned slip (cream, brown and dark brown) | | Gl. | Bowl | Body | 1790-1820 | CWE 11. |
| Kirkdale 2 | | | | | | | | | |
| | 2 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Mug | Bases | 1770-1820 | CWE 7. Joining; diameter 210mm. |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Mug | Base | 1770-1820 | CWE 8. Small; diameter 140mm. |
| | 2 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Plates | shoulders | 1770-1820 | |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Soup plates | shoulder | 1770-1820 | |
| | 3 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Plates | Bases | 1770-1820 | |
| | 3 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ? | Bases | 1770-1820 | 2 joins. |
| | 4 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ? | Bodies | 1770-1820 | Discoloured through burning. |
| | 1 | ?creamware | | | Gl. | ? | Body | 1770-1820 | PLW 5. Painted line to rim. |
| | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. printed (blue) and u-gl. painted (brown) | Moulded faceted body. | Gl. | Teabowl | Rim | 1800-1830 | |
| | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. painted (blue) | Shell edge (rococo) | Gl. | Plate | Rim | 1780-1810 | PLW 12. Thin body, light |

| Ctxt | No | Ceramic Type | Surface decoration | Moulded/other decoration | Gl.? | Vessel form | Part | Date | Notes |
|------|----|-----------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|------|-------------------|-----------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. painted (blue) | Shell edge (scalloped) | Gl. | Plate | Rim | 1810–1830 | coloured glaze, almost white. PLW 13. |
| | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. painted (blue) | Shell edge (slightly rococo) | Gl. | Plate | Rim | 1780–1810 | PLW 14. |
| | 1 | Pearlware | u-gl. printed (blue) | | Gl. | ? | Body | 1790–1820 | ?Oriental type pattern; round-bodied vessel. |
| | 2 | Pearlware | | | Gl. | Plates | Bases | 1780–1830 | Rounded foot. |
| | 1 | Pearlware | | | Gl. | Plate | Base | 1780–1830 | Recessed footrim |
| | 1 | Pearlware | | | Gl. | Plate | Base | 1780–1830 | Hint of a footrim |
| | 1 | Pearlware | | | Gl. | | body | | |
| 501 | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | Plate (10-inch) | Base | 1770–1820 | Rounded footrim. |
| | 2 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ?plate | Bases | 1780–1820 | No footrim. |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ?plate | Base | 1770–1820 | |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ? | Base | 1770–1820 | Small vessel – perhaps mug. |
| | 1 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ?mug | Body | 1770–1820 | |
| | 2 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ? | Bodies | 1770–1820 | |
| | 2 | Creamware | | | Gl. | ?jug/?chamber pot | Handles | 1780–1820 | Joining, large vessel. |
| | 1 | Pearlware | | | Gl. | ? | Body | 1780–1830 | Very small sherd. |
| | 2 | Brown salt-glazed stoneware | | | Gl. | Bottle | Bodies | Early/mid 19th c. | BSG 3. Joining, good, dense grey body; light brown ext glaze, pink/brown int. glaze. |
| | 2 | Coarse earthenware | | | Gl. | Jar | Rim, body | e. 19th c. | CEW 1. Joining and join rim from 519. |

| Context | Body | Weight | Rim | Weight | Base | Weight | Decoration |
|--------------|-----------|------------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|-------------------------------|
| 100 | 1 | 6 | | | | | |
| 101 | 2 | 7 | | | | | |
| 107 | 6 | 40 | | | | | Cordon |
| 109 | 5 | 63 | | | | | Cordon, cordon and pin-pricks |
| 200 | 2 | 10 | 1 | 34 | | | Pin-pricks on rim |
| 201 | 10 | 20 | | | | | |
| 202 | 4 | 21 | | | | | |
| 601 | | | 1 | 30 | | | |
| 604 | 1 | 11 | | | | | |
| 612 | 3 | 31 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | Grass-impressed |
| 616 | 1 | 23 | | | | | |
| Total | 35 | 232 | 3 | 65 | 1 | 1 | |

Table 17.2. Handmade earthenware pottery from Kirkdale

pin-prick decoration is normally dated to around AD 600 or later (see Chapter 20).

Typological dating of the earthenware pottery provides a potential dating for the use of the cellular stone buildings of Kirkdale West to the Late Iron Age, with some evidence for earlier (Bronze Age) occupation. The early first-millennium BC sherds from Kirkdale East hint at the presence of a Late Bronze Age building or settlement disturbed by the construction of the early 19th-century blackhouse.

Glass

There are 45 shards of glass (weighing 1153.5g; Table 17.3). All came from Kirkdale East. Except for one small shard of clear vessel glass, all are fragments of green wine bottles, comprising a minimum of four vessels (three of which were SF16 in context 601). Shards of one or more thin-walled bottles were found in 601 (SF16 and SF24). Two necks of thick-walled bottles came from 517 (SF27) and 612 (SF52), and bases from 601 (SF16; two bases) and 607 (SF9). Two of the bases (one from SF16 in 601 and one from context 607) date to the late 18th–early 19th century. The other two date to later in the 19th century (Hugh Willmott pers. comm.).

Tile

Three fragments of fired ceramic tile were recovered from context 612. Two pieces (122g) are unglazed and the third is glazed (46g).

Copper alloy artefacts

Three thin, circular artefacts were recovered. One is probably part of a button and the other two may be tokens. All are heavily corroded.

SF38 context 612. A pair of very heavily worn and corroded circular discs (25mm dia. × 0.5mm), one more corroded and less circular than the other. These may be tokens but there is no trace of any features on their surfaces.

SF58 context 612. A heavily worn and corroded circular disc (19mm dia. × 0.5mm) with traces of a circular rivet (2mm dia.)

in the centre of one side. This is presumably a button or other dress fitting (Figure 17.16).

Iron

The 12 iron artefacts include an axe, a suspension loop, five nails, two clench nails and two fragments of plate. The clench nails indicate the presence of boat timbers.

Context 602. Complete nail (62mm long) with circular head (22mm dia.) and square-sectioned shank (16mm × 16mm).

SF18 context 601. Incomplete nail shank (85mm long) with a rectangular cross-section (5mm × 4mm; Figure 17.16).

SF31 context 612. Complete axe blade (135mm × 94mm × 6mm) with a curved blade and flaring sides; the rectangular socket (internally c.35mm × 20mm) is broken (Figure 17.16).

SF33 context 612. Incomplete clench nail shank (28mm long and 6mm × 6mm square cross-section) and broken diamond-shaped rove (34mm × 25mm; Figure 17.16).

SF39 context 612. Incomplete nail shank (40mm × 8mm) with unidentifiable cross-section.

SF42 context 612. Incomplete fragment of plate (c.260mm × 180mm × 6mm).

SF47 context 607. Complete clench nail with oval head (32mm × 29mm) and a rectangular rove (25mm × 21mm) with a distance of 29mm between nail head and rove; the shank's cross-section is unidentifiable (Figure 17.16).

SF49 context 612. Incomplete fragment of plate (34mm × 27mm × 3mm).

SF55 context 616. Incomplete object (58mm × 18mm × 13mm), broken at both ends, with an incomplete triangular section.

SF59 context 612. Incomplete nail shank (89mm × 15mm) with unidentifiable cross-section.

SF62 context 612. Complete suspension loop (34mm long) of wire, folded to form an eye at one end (external dia. 19mm, internal dia. 8mm).

SF80 context 618. Incomplete nail (47mm long) with circular head (21mm dia.).

Flint and quartz

Twelve pieces of worked flint and a quartz flake were recovered from Kirkdale East (Table 17.4). These include a core for producing small blades and a retouched flake, both indicative of prehistoric activity. Whilst the core could

| SF no. | Context | No. of shards | Weight | Type |
|--------------|---------|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| 5 | 601 | 5 | 102 | Green bottle |
| 9 | 607 | 1 | 74 | Green bottle |
| 13 | 601 | 4 | 16 | Green bottle |
| 16 | 601 | 19 | 782 | Green bottle |
| 22 | 529 | 1 | 3 | Green bottle |
| 24 | 601 | 3 | 4 | Green bottle |
| 27 | 517 | 1 | 24 | Green bottle |
| 48 | 612 | 5 | 46 | Green bottle |
| 48 | 612 | 1 | 0.5 | Clear vessel |
| 52 | 612 | 2 | 94 | Green bottle |
| 56 | 616 | 1 | 2 | Green bottle |
| 68 | 616 | 1 | 2 | Green bottle |
| 78 | 614 | 1 | 4 | Green bottle |
| Total | | 45 | 1153.5 | |

Table 17.3. Glass from Kirkidale



Figure 17.15. The stone mound and cells at Kirkidale West, from the south

date to the Neolithic, the technology employed in producing the remainder of the assemblage would be consistent with a Late Bronze Age date, in keeping with the ceramics from this part of the site.

Stone artefacts

There are only two artefacts of polished stone.

SF11 context 601. A well-worn hone (84mm × 18mm × 10mm; 23g) of micaceous phillite, with four well-used sides (Figure 17.17).

SF81 context 623. A beach cobble (165mm × 71mm × 53mm; 1,285g) of basalt, unmodified except for slight polish on one of its sides (Figure 17.17).

Slate

Two types of slate were present on the site (Table 17.5).

All of the slate is grey (19 pieces weighing 4,468g) except for five small pieces (weighing 12g) of green slate. The latter is obtained from the nearby islet of Stulaigh on the island's east coast, and is known from prehistoric sites on South Uist's machair. In contrast, grey slate is known only on settlements of the Norse period and later. The slate from context 612 is too thick to have been used for roofing.

Burnt bone

A single fragment of white, calcined bone (SF26; 0.2g) was recovered from context 517.

Fuel ash slag

A single piece of fuel ash slag (SF28; 0.2g) was recovered from context 612.

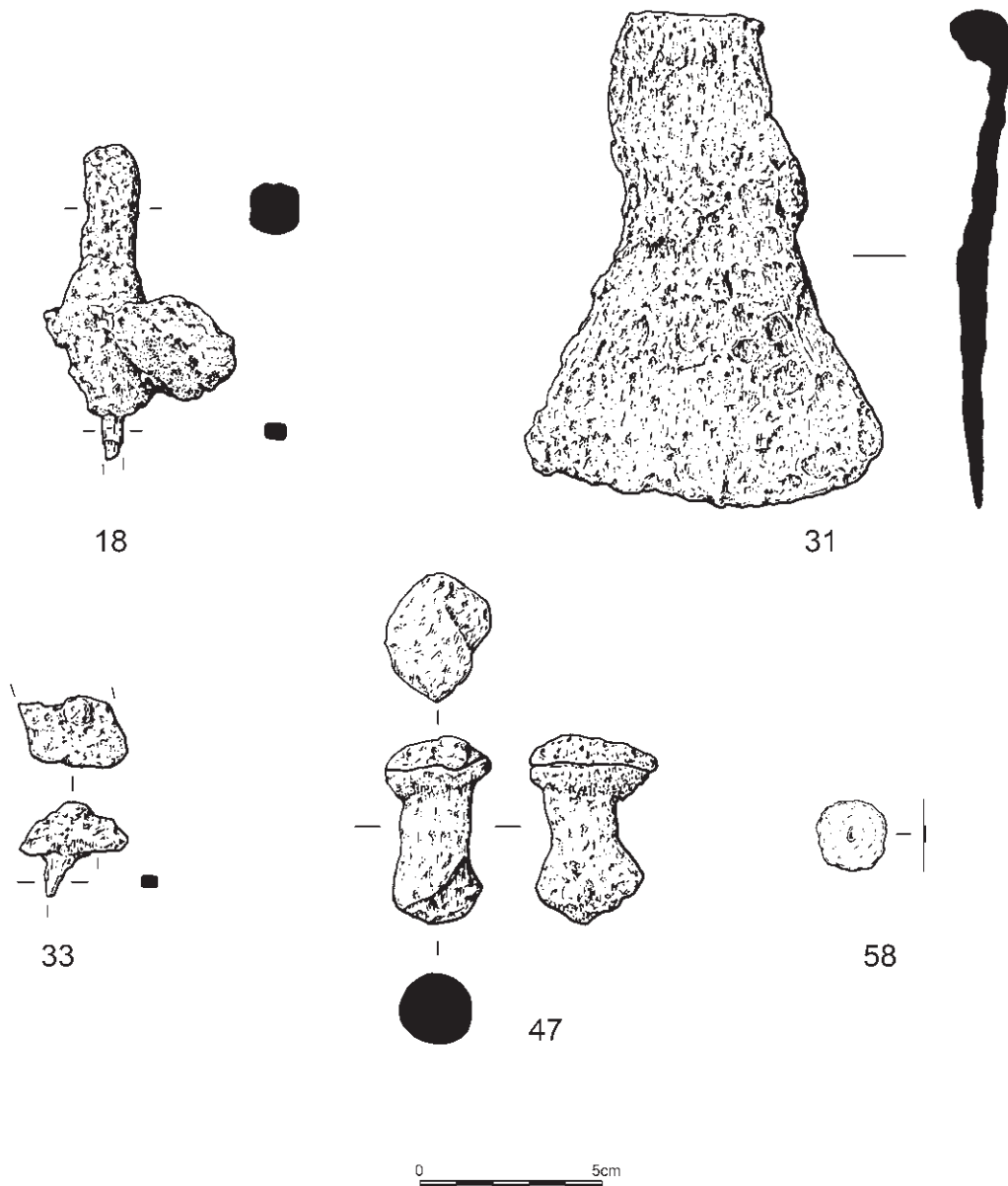


Figure 17.16. Metal artefacts from Kirkdale East

Burnt peat

Three lumps of burnt peat were recovered from context 601 (two lumps weighing 14g) and from 616 (one lump of 14g).

Conclusion: Kirkdale – connected across time and space

To the modern mind, the Outer Hebrides have been associated with marginality, isolation and low levels of population. What our work in the Outer Hebrides has demonstrated is that this says more about us than about the worlds we are trying to reconstruct. Kirkdale is the archetype of those assumptions – it is isolated (it took us more than an hour to walk there every day) and no-one lives there today. Yet our excavations have revealed that

it was a focus for human settlement from at least the Late Bronze Age and that, more often than not, it was connected to the wider world by the great maritime highway that flowed past its ‘doorstep’.

As I noted above, we can as yet say little about the character of prehistoric settlement in this valley. What we do know is that, for the generations of people who lived here, the past was not so much a foreign country as a world to be domesticated and familiarized. Those who built the blackhouse did so on the remains of a prehistoric settlement. More than this, they incorporated some of the remains of that settlement into the very fabric of their home. And there are indications that those who built the early historic settlement at Kirkdale West did something similar. Regardless (for the moment) of whether this was a monastic community or not, it is noteworthy that the

| Context | No. | Type |
|---------|-----|----------------------------------|
| 501 | 2 | Flake & spall |
| 517 | 1 | Broken flake |
| 534 | 1 | Quartz flake |
| 535 | 1 | Single-platform blade core |
| 612 | 5 | Retouched flake, flake, 3 spalls |
| 618 | 2 | 2 spalls |
| 622 | 1 | Spall |

Table 17.4. Worked flint and quartz from Kirkidale

| Context | Weight | Green slate | Grey slate |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| 107 | 36 | | 1 |
| 201 | 16 | | 1 |
| 202 | 202 | | 2 |
| 530 | 4 | 3 | |
| 601 | 4 | 1 | |
| 612 | 2500 | | 2 |
| 614 | 38 | | 1 |
| 616 | 4 | 1 | |
| 630 | 1664 | | 12 |
| Total | 4468 | 5 | 19 |

Table 17.5. Slate from Kirkidale

cellular architecture they used is similar to that found on sites of this date on the machair to the west, and also found spread more widely across the Uists, western Scotland and the north of Ireland (Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999: 1; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 106–11). Such cellular buildings were often fitted, ‘rather like a contortionist squeezing into a trunk’, into the remains of earlier structures, as at the broch at Dun Vulcan, situated on the Atlantic coast to the west of Loch Aoinart. This makes the suggestion offered by Alex Woolf at the time of the survey – that some of the features at Kirkidale West could represent the remains of a robbed-out souterrain – much more interesting. Might it be that here, too, a late cellular structure(s) was inserted into an earlier building/settlement, perhaps paralleling the ‘wheelhouse with souterrain’ found at Uisinis, further north along the east coast of South Uist (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 107; Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999: 14, 345–48)?

Significantly, in terms of arguments about marginality, Mike Parker Pearson argues that the ‘Pictish’ period inhabitants of Dun Vulcan ‘lived at the hub of a network of searoads that could take them south to Ireland, southeast to Dalriada, east to Skye and north to Orkney and Shetland’ (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 115). This network was even more accessible from Kirkidale (on the east side of the island). It must also be remarked that these routes south and southeast would also have been travelled (in the opposite direction) by those who carried with them one of the great ideas of the age – Christianity – which would eventually bind the islands much more firmly into the European mainstream.

The structures at Kirkidale West could be entirely ‘secular’ in origin but, at a time on the islands when Christianity ‘might well have been characterized more by communities of hermit monks living in remote locations ... than by proselytizing priests going out to convert the populace’ (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 122), it is perhaps more likely that they were created and inhabited by eremitic monks. The location, by a river and close to the sea, suits what we now know of such apparent recluses. In theory, they sought to use the isolation of islands and mountain fastness to ‘recreate’ the real desert into which St Anthony, their spiritual father, once retreated (Le Goff 1988); in reality they remained close to centres of power and networks of communication (Bitel 1990: 37; Foster 1996: 79–88; Stout 1997: 128–9). Only further excavation will determine if this, and the similar settlement at Bun an Amair, is evidence for an early monastic presence on South Uist.

The connections that bound the residents of Kirkidale to the wider world are perhaps most immediately recognizable in the early modern factory-made pottery and in the glass bottles associated with the blackhouse. But here we may want to take a moment to situate those objects in their domestic context and to imagine scenes like those at Ballymenone described by Henry Glassie. This was the world of the familiar, the local, the domestic, the ceilidh. Even if they had been isolated from the rest of the world (as they surely were, at least some of the time), the people who lived in Kirkidale were close to those they cared about, who shared their traditions and way of life, and with whom they had created a community. The great tragedy is that it was the inter-connectedness of the world (with its demand for kelp that eventually impoverished the islanders, with its relentless shift towards capitalism which made it possible to think of replacing them with sheep, and with its overseas colonies) that ultimately destroyed those communities, fractured their connections with the past, and produced a landscape which accords with our preconceptions of it – marginal, isolated and devoid of human presence.

Acknowledgements

I am very pleased to have this opportunity to thank all those who took part in the excavations at Kirkidale – including Patti Alcamo, Lesley Baitup, Jonathan Bateman, Emily La Trobe Bateman, Sue Boulter, Andrea Burgess, Mike Bramley, Michael Cawood, Sarah Clarke, Alison Easterling, Colin Forcey, Alan Gough, Alex Hunt, Jodi Mattes, Sharon Mason, David Mather, J. Mathers, David McMahon, Sarah Mellars, Mike Parker Pearson, John Percival, Chris Pickard, Michael Pye, Tim Read, Tom Rogers, Ian Rutherford, Jim Symonds, Hilary Valler and Alex Woolf. Apologies to those whose names I have forgotten – I can only plead the passage of time! I am especially grateful to acknowledge the help and friendship of Alex Woolf, and the support and encouragement of Mike Parker Pearson without whom this chapter might never have been written. My deepest debt in bringing this report to publication, however, is to Robert

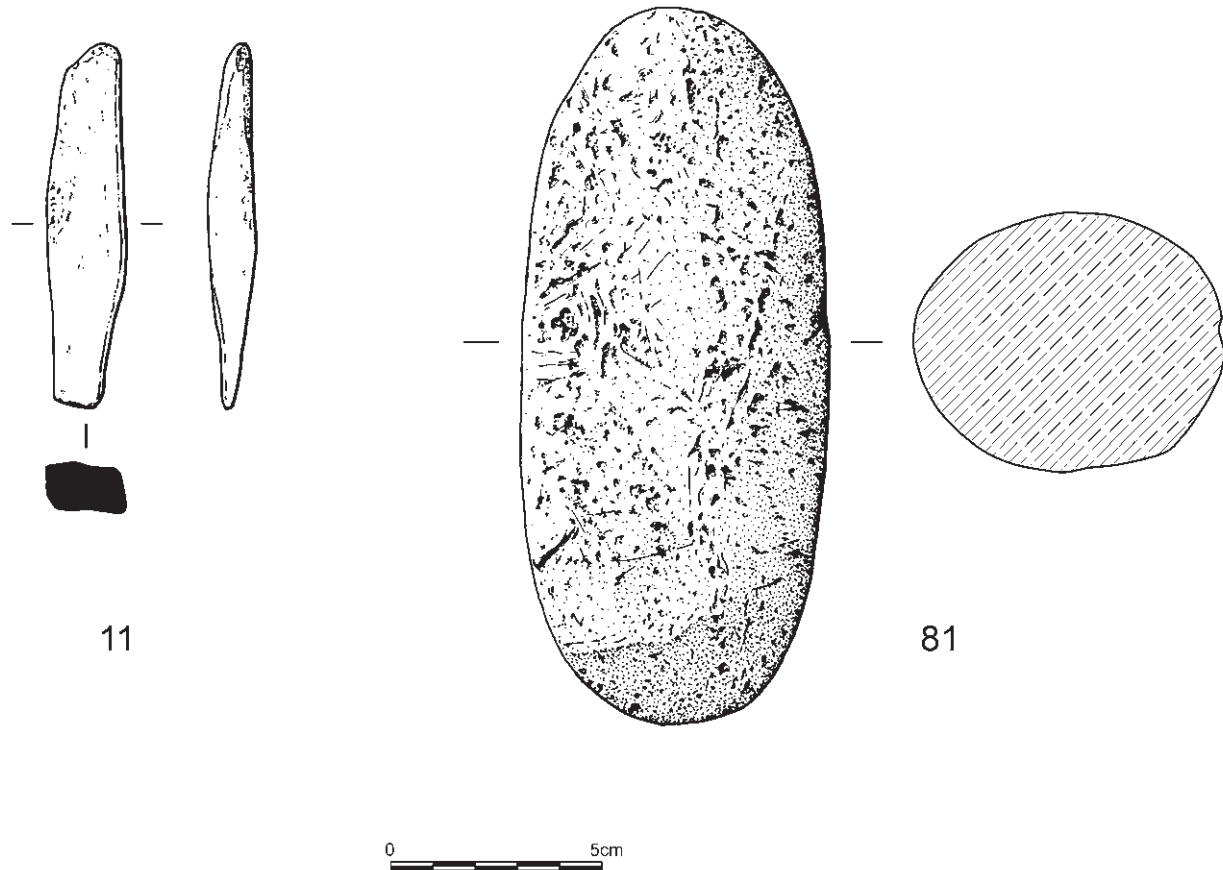


Figure 17.17. Stone artefacts from Kirkidale East

Tye – a source of genuine support, friendship and advice throughout our excavations. Thank you, Robert.

Notes

- 1 Context numbers in the 500s date to 1991, those in the 600s to 1992, and those in the 900s to 1993. In part because this was a training excavation and students were being introduced to the principles of archaeological recording, and in part because of those principles, the features uncovered each year were given new context numbers, even if they had already been recorded in previous years. It is, therefore, possible for a feature (a wall, for example) to have a number in the 500s, 600s and 900s.
- 2 The place-name of Kirkidale is marked in the wrong place on the 1:25,000 O.S. map: on the map it appears to mark a small valley running north–south. Local usage attaches the name to the small valley running east–west.
- 3 Context numbers in the 100s date to 1991, those in the 200s to 1992, and those in the 900s to 1993. Unlike Kirkidale East, there are unfortunately some gaps in the records for this site.
- 4 In the middle of the 19th century, F.L.W. Thomas recorded that the ‘interspace’ between the walls was ‘filled in with rubbish’ (cited in Kissling 1943: 79).
- 5 One of these mills (at Mingary – 4.5km west of Kirkidale) was still in operation in 1936; see <http://www.buildingsatrisk.org.uk/BAR/detail.aspx?sctID=1506®ion=Western%20Isl> es&div=&class=ALL&category=AT%20RISK&Page=5&NumImg=5.
- 6 Sadly the Ordnance Survey have changed the name; it appears on the 1:25,000 map (2007) as Loch na Brathain.
- 7 We have to admit that this might never have happened – it is possible that the Kirkidale house was already abandoned by the time the watermills were built (see p. 342). There are other examples of the seizure of handmills in an attempt to overcome peasant resistance to commands to use the lord’s mill; see, for example, Justice 1994: 158, 168.
- 8 In this context it may be significant that most of the ceramics from the Barra blackhouse with the putative dresser date from between 1830 and 1850 (Branigan 2005a: 78, 82).
- 9 In an attempt to preserve the atmosphere of this beautiful place, we reinstated the enclosure wall at the end of the excavation.
- 10 Sample entries in the site notebook for June 1993 record the following:
 - 15.6.93 Weather dull and overcast. Continual rain in the afternoon. Cleaning continued under difficult conditions.
 - 16.9.93 Weather dull and overcast, intermittent rain.
 - 17.6.93 Abandoned owing to bad weather.
 - 18.6.93 Weather dull, with frequent heavy showers. This caused work to be frequently interrupted and caused problems with flooding.

Editor’s note: JM is, if anything, understating the conditions in

which he and his team worked at Kirkidale. Other SEARCH excavations taking place during these years (long before the advent of mobile phones) were working on the free-draining machair soil, with vehicles or site huts, and could even retreat to the Borrodale during very heavy rain; the Kirkidale team (and Fleming's survey team) were isolated and on foot, with no shelter of any kind and no easy line of retreat. Worst of all were the midges.

- 11 It is, of course, possible that these structures were built/occupied by impoverished (aceramic) Clearance-period settlers – but it is hard to know why they would have done so in this very unpromising terrain. Re-occupation of the structures at Kirkidale East is much more likely.
- 12 The layers in which these sherds were found were exposed after the removal of wall 104.

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18 Locheynort (Loch Aoineart) in the historical period

Gill MacLean[†]

Sources

Detailed documentation for research in Uist is restricted, although there is a growing collection of published material in Lionacleit library. Census returns and some parish records are also held here but the earliest date to about 1815. South Uist Estate¹ office also has material but the earliest found is 1844 and records are by no means complete, although the crofting era from 1886 is well covered. Unfortunately this is too late for all but the most modern structures in Locheynort.²

Pre-Reformation material

Inspection of the material available, together with some knowledge of local history, has led to the choice of 1600 as a starting date. Prior to this time records are mainly in Latin. This is also about the time of the first real attempt to map the area, and to survey and describe the social, economic and environmental conditions. It is also about the date that the Western Isles are beginning to be politically incorporated into Scotland and a wider world.

During the period of the Lordship of the Isles several charters record grants of land in South Uist and these have been collected in Volume 22 of the Scottish History Society (Munro and Munro 1986: 208). The Middle District, an area from Frobost to Drimsdale inclusive of Locheynort, is on record in 1469 – Howmore (*ibid.*: 153), in 1498 – Askernish, Frobost, Garryvaltos, Kildonan and Bornish (*ibid.*: 228), and in 1505 – Caisteal Bheagram (*ibid.*: 232).

From *c.*1500 onwards no summary of documentation exists. Histories written around 1900 obviously draw on primary material but the sources are not always acknowledged (Gregory 1881; Mitchell 1900; MacKenzie 1903). They give varying interpretations of the socio-economic background of the islands but, as far as can be ascertained, there is no mention of Locheynort.

Sources not consulted

The unpublished *History of South Uist* (MacDonald n.d.)

is a secondary source written around 1900 but it is not available for consultation in Uist. Many primary sources are also in mainland collections and would repay examination; the extracts published prove that considerable local detail is available. Held in the Scottish Record Office are the ClanRanald papers (ref. GD 201), and also the relevant registers of Sasines and exchequer returns. The Red and Black books of ClanRanald are in the National Museum of Scotland (ref. MCR 39 and 40); the Black book, according to Thomson (1983: 42), contains geographical material in English. Church records are also on the mainland, the Church of Scotland in Edinburgh and some Roman Catholic records in Oban. Before the Reformation, the Western Isles were part of the diocese of Sodor and Man so Manx records may contain some information.

For the period 1797 to 1837 Robert Brown was first factor and then consultant to ClanRanald and his papers are in the National Register of Archives (Duke of Hamilton's muniments, Lennoxlove Survey 332). The estate was in trusteeship for much of this time and, as this time was a period of considerable change, these papers are of importance. The factor must have had knowledge of the minutiae of estate administration but how much detail is preserved is unknown.

I know of no primary documentation in Uist dating from before 1840 although there are the occasional private letters and papers, and copies of parts of national records have been obtained for private research. This is due partly to accident: the fire at Ormaclate castle in 1715 must have destroyed many ClanRanald records and the Protestant parish records were lost in a shipwreck. However, throughout the 18th and 19th centuries administration was mainland-based, and even today records are scattered and not easy to obtain. Vested interests may be the main cause of the paucity of local documentation given the complex history of imposition from outside.

Gaelic sources

Few official records are or were kept in Gaelic but, from a

| Settlement | Duration of lease (from 1798 records) | 1798 | | | 1817 | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------|-------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|
| | | Type of holding | Rent (£.s.d.) | Tenant nos. | Type of holding | Rent (£.s.d.) | Tenant nos. |
| Dremisdale and Ballaloch | {Incumbancy + 19 years {Incumbancy | Farm lease | 40/-/- | 1 | Farm lease | 80/-/- | 1 |
| Howmore | | Lease of church land | 40/-/- | | | | |
| Howbeg | {25 years from 1789 | Tack | 60/-/- | 1 | Lot | 48/-/- | 8 |
| Snishivale | {25 years from 1789 | Tack | 30/10/- | 1 | Tack | 25/-/- | 1 |
| Pennerine | 30 years from 1789 | Tack | | | Tack | 30/-/- | 1 |
| Stoneybridge | - | Joint tenants | 80/-/- | 17 | J.T. | 144/-/- | 25 |
| Ormaclate | - | Joint tenants | 80/-/- | 10 | J.T. | 122/11/6 | 18 |
| Lower Bornish | 25 years from 1793 | Tack | 90/-/- | 1 | Lot | 112/15/- | 20 |
| Bornish (upper) | In perpetuity from 1672 | Feu charter | 24/9/5 | 1 | No record | | |
| Kildonan | {24 years from 1774 | Tack | 59/6/7 | 1 | Lot | 140/-/- | 23 |
| Milton and Garryvaltos | {24 years from 1774 | | | | Tack | 130/-/- | 1 |
| Ruanaglac | 19 years from 1786 | Pendicle | 4/-/- | 1 | Pendicle | 10/10/- | 1 |
| Bayhead | No record | No record | | | Lease | 7/7/- | 1 |
| Rubha na meine | No record | No record | | | Lease | 15/-/- | 2 |
| Calway | No record | No record | | | Lease | 6/-/- | 1 |
| Ruallt | No record | No record | | | Lease | 8/-/- | 1 |
| Corodale | No record | No record | | | Lease | 12/-/- | 1 |

Table 18.1. Holdings, rents and tenants in South Uist, 1798–1831 (continued on the opposite page)

| Settlement | 1822 | | | 1830 | | | 1831 | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|-----------------------------|---------------|-------------|-----------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| | Type of holding | Rent (£.s.d.) | Tenant nos. | Type of holding | Rent (£.s.d.) | Tenant nos. | Type of holding | Rent (£.s.d.) | Tenant nos. |
| Dremisdale and Ballaloch | Farm lease | 80/-/- | 1 | Farm lease | 80/-/- | 1 | Farm lease | 150/-/- | 1 |
| Howmore | | | | | | | Farm lease | 42/-/- | |
| Howbeg | Lot | 59/2/- | 9 | Lot | 59/2/- | 9? | Lot | 59/2/- | 9? |
| Snishivale | Tack | 48/-/- | 1 | Tack | 48/-/- | 1 | Tack | 48/-/- | 1 |
| Peninurine | Tack | 60/-/- | 1 | Tack | 75/-/- | 1 | Tack | 60/-/- | 1 |
| Stoneybridge | J.T. | 160/17/- | 28 | J.T. | 157/2/- | 28? | J.T. | 157/2/- | 28? |
| Ormaclate | J.T. | 127/11/- | 23 | J.T. | 130/1/- | 23? | J.T. | 122/11/- | 23? |
| Lower Bornish | Lot | 118/-/- | 21 | Lot | 159/16/- | 27? | Lot | 159/16/- | 27? |
| Bornish (upper) | No record | | | No record | | | Feu charter | 37/9/5 | 1 |
| Kildonan | Lot | 200/8/- | 26 | Lot | 196/11/- | 26? | Farm lease | 130/-/- | 1 |
| Milton and Garryvaltos | Farm lease | 85/-/- | 1 | Farm lease | 120/-/- | 1 | Farm lease | 120/-/- | |
| Ruanaglac | Pendicle | 10/10/- | 1 | No record | | | ? | 10/10/- | 1? |
| Bayhead | Lease | 7/7/- | 1 | Included with Lower Bornish | | | Included with Lower Bornish | | |
| Rubha na meine | Lease | 15/15/- | 2 | Included with Lower Bornish | | | Included with Lower Bornish | | |
| Calvay | Lease | 6/6/- | 1 | Included with Lower Bornish | | | Included with Lower Bornish | | |
| Ruallt | Lease | 8/8/- | 1 | Included with Lower Bornish | | | Included with Lower Bornish | | |
| Corodale | Lease | 9/-/- | 3 | No record | | | Lease | 9/-/- | 3? |

Sources: The table was compiled from Clan Ranald papers held in the Scottish Record Office. 1798 Judicial Rental GD128/49/3/2X, 1817 Rent Roll GD237/120/1/5, 1818 Rent Roll GD237/120/1/4, 1822 Rent Roll GD201/1/3/51/20, 1830 Rent Summary GD201/3/51/23, and 1831 Rent Summary GD201/3/51/24.

| | 1841 | 1851 | 1861 | 1871 | 1881 |
|----------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------|----------|------|
| Lamsay | 2 | - | ¹ | - | - |
| Corodale | 1 | 1 ² | ¹ | 1 | 1 |
| Hellisdale | 4 | 1 | ¹ | - | - |
| Liadale | 3 | - | ¹ | - | - |
| Glen | 2 | - | ¹ | - | - |
| Bolum | 2 | - | ¹ | - | - |
| Hafn | 2 ³ | 2 ² | ¹ | F? | F?F? |
| Ruanaglac | 1 | - | ¹ | - | - |
| Rubh alt | 1 | - | ¹ | - | - |
| Portskeig | 3 ³ | - | ¹ | - | - |
| Arinambane | 5 ³ | 2 | ? | 1 | 1 |
| Rubha na meine | - | 1 | - | - | - |
| Stromdubh | 3 ³ | 3 ^{2*} | 1 | 3 | } |
| Bayhead | 1 | 6 * | 6 | 5 | } 11 |
| Tigh mhail | 2 ³ | 3 * | - | - | } |
| Poltoran | 1 | - | 1 | 3 | } |
| Unasary | 1 | 3 ² | - | - | |
| Aird Bhuidhe | - ³ | 2 | 3 | 1 | - |
| Craigavagh | 1 | 2 or 1 | 2 | MF? | - |
| Kyles Stuley | 1 | 1 ² | 1 | MF | MF |
| Calvay | 7 | - | - | - | - |
| TOTAL | 43 | 26 or 27 | 14 or >14 | 14 or 15 | 13 |

Key:

| | |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| ¹ | Microfilm fogged and pages missing |
| ² | Not born in South Uist |
| ³ | Former Bornish land |
| F | Bothy of fishermen from eastern Scotland, position uncertain |
| * | Moss crofter |
| } | Enumerated as Locheynort, probable locations |
| MF | Enumerated with Milton Farm, probable locations |

Occupation of head of household

Where this is shepherd, fisherman, cotter, agricultural labourer or, if female, weaver, this is not noted. Other occupations are:

| | 1841 | 1851 |
|-------------------|----------|-----------------------|
| Hafn | tailor | shoemaker |
| Arinambane | publican | grocer |
| Bayhead | | carpenter/boatbuilder |
| Craigavagh | | carpenter/boatbuilder |

Table 18.2. Number of households in Locheynort, 1841–1881 (from microfilms of census returns)

very slight knowledge of local Gaelic literature, I think this could repay study. It would give a picture of the social and economic background. Environmental changes could be deduced from descriptive writings, even to details of plants and wildlife. The MacMhuirichs were hereditary bards to ClanRanald and their story has been published. Local literature ranges in time from Cathal MacMhuirich (*fl.* 1625; Thompson 1983: 186), to Donald John MacDonald (1919–1986; MacDhomhnaill 1981). I know of no geographic description of Locheynort as exists for Howmore in *c.* 1675 but three examples are cited to illustrate the type of material available (Carmichael 1954: 39):

- In Cathal MacMhuirich's poem 'The Hebrides – a forest of learned men', Black (1978: 394) translates part of verse 10 as 'should you not be in the shelter of lime-washed dwellings if your house is a turf hut on the shore'.
- There are various translations of the great 18th-century sea poem 'Birlinn of ClanRanald' by Alisdair MacMaighstir Alisdair. An accessible source with the background is in chapter 3 of 'The Discovery of the Hebrides' (Bray 1986). The poem describes the ship, how it was worked, and details a voyage from Locheynort to Carrickfergus near Belfast.

- The Beatons were hereditary physicians and doctors in the highlands (Bannerman 1986); Martin Martin (1703) met the Uist doctor in 1690. Some of their manuscripts are preserved, including translations of Latin and Greek into Gaelic, and contain considerable information on treatments, remedies and medical conditions found on the islands.

Primary sources consulted

I have had access to the register of Sasines for 1798, to the South Uist rent rolls of 1817, 1818 and 1822 and to the rent abstracts of 1830 and 1831. These form the basis for Table 18.1 and are noted in the chronology (see below). For brevity they will be referred to under the year which applies, as will the census years of 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871 and 1881 that form the basis of Table 18.2. The information contained in these returns varies with the enumerator involved. In no census was Locheynort returned as a single district. In 1841 and 1851 the division ran east–west through Bayhead. In subsequent censuses there was a three-way split, based on the farm boundaries; that is Ormaclate, Bornish and Milton. Milton farm in particular is confusing as no addresses are given. There are pages missing from the 1861 census and the microfilm is fogged.

For this period, rent rolls are of no value: residents in Locheynort paid rent to farmers as their subtenants but I know of no record of this. The total farm rent can be ascertained but the numbers and whereabouts of subtenants cannot. The involvement of the Crofters Commission (CC), together with the Congested Districts Board (CDB), in the formation of crofts in Locheynort in 1906 has led to the availability of considerable material – both official publications and estate letters and memoranda – in the South Uist Estate Office at Askernish. Later, this administrative role was taken over by the Board of Agriculture (BoA) and by the Scottish Land Court (LC); these were involved with the crofting of North and South Locheynort in 1914. South Uist estate papers are not catalogued so reference is made in the following form.

- 1899 Shepherd's cottage Ormaclate Farm S.U.E. Ormaclate bundle
- 1907 Notification of Fishermen's holdings CDB S.U.E. Locheynort
- 1909 Confirmation of Fishermen's crofts LC S.U.E. Locheynort
- 1913 Valuation of farms S.U.E. Bornish Bundle.

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland (DAFS) have an office in Benbecula where matters relating to land holding are now recorded. The fisheries department is in Stornoway and they have not been consulted, although it should be possible to abstract all boats registered for fishing in Locheynort since about 1900. Comhairle nan Eilean (the Western Isles Council, WIC) has certain local government information at Balivanich. The authority was only set up in 1913 and many local government records for Uist are in either Inverness or Stornoway.

Maps and charts

The first survey that deals with South Uist in any detail is that of Timothy Pont who was in the islands c. 1590 (manuscript in the Advocates Collection of the map department of the National Library of Scotland; Pont n.d.). The resulting map of the Southern Isles was published by Blaeu in 1654. This gives little information about Locheynort although it does indicate that this was the principal harbour of South Uist at that time. By the style of lettering, the places named by Blaeu as *Orma:kled* and *How M:* seem to be more important than other settlements and it appears that Ormaclate extended to the north side of Locheynort. At that time, Ormaclate was the principal Uist residence of ClanRanald and Howmore the village containing the parish church.

Navigational access to Locheynort has always been difficult, but this would have been of advantage at a time of inter-clan warfare. Another point of interest is the existence of a settlement called Totanamasken somewhere to the north of the Roe Glas on Kildonan or Bornish machair.³ After 1745 the government realized that no adequate charts existed for the Western Isles so a survey was commissioned (Munro 1794). Murdo MacKenzie was appointed and, for the next 20 years, surveyed the coastline. He published his map, which shows Locheynort, in 1776. The western end of the loch was not surveyed and the name *Loch Arinabam* (Arinambane) suggests that this western area was the main trans-shipping point.

About 1800 the trustees of ClanRanald commissioned a survey of his property as an aid to future planning. The mapping was carried out by William Bald and published in 1805 (Scottish Record Office RHP 3074; Bald 1805). Both Benbecula and Boisdale were surveyed on a large scale with considerable detail of settlements, roads and land use. If the bulk of South Uist was mapped in this way, copies have not survived. The map was reissued in 1836 when the estate was on the market. Despite the small scale of the map of the Middle District, it is a major reference and contains considerable information, especially when used with other contemporary sources. Boundaries between tenancies are marked; the land is 'parcelled' and averages given. These parcels are described as arable, pasture, hill pasture and loch so, for much of South Uist, a land use map can be constructed. Unfortunately much of the land in Locheynort was held by Bornish, and this land is not parcelled or described.

In 1863 Captain R.C. Otter carried out a marine survey of the waters around Uist. East coast lochs Skipport, Eynort and Boisdale were published on a scale of about 6" to 1 mile but with little land detail. The published chart of the west coast of South Uist is on a much smaller scale but there exists in manuscript in the Royal Nautical Survey Office the survey at 6" to 1 mile. On the manuscript seen (the west coast from Ardnivacher to Bornish), there is a considerable amount of land detail omitted from the published versions. This includes buildings with their use, roads and tracks, and an indication of land use (ploughed, pasture or hill grazing). The pre-publication manuscript for Locheynort has not been seen.

The first edition of the Ordnance Survey was published in 1881 from surveys in 1813–1875. All of South Uist is on the 6" to 1 mile scale but only the west side of the island on the 1:2500. The second edition was published in 1903 (copy in the South Uist Estate Office), and then there is a gap before the publication of the 1:25000 maps in 1917. The 1:2500 were updated and reissued at this time. The whole of Uist was covered by aerial survey in 1948, although earlier photographs exist. It has been resurveyed at various heights since, the latest known in 1987.

Landholding and population

History is divided into eras that are given convenient labels. In the islands the most useful are post-Reformation clanship, the Jacobite uprisings, the kelp industry, clearance and evictions, the sheep farmers, and crofting. To use these labels in a purely local district is difficult as changes did not take place at the same time everywhere and this is especially true of Locheynort because it was never an entity. Further, use of these labels presupposes a good general background of highland history; this knowledge is rarely found in the casual visitor. Such terms can also be emotive or romantic: perhaps it is only in the Highlands that the 'land question' can generate much discussion 400 years after the start of the problem. Individual structures in Locheynort are the result of the changing land use of the area and this, in turn, is partly the result of changing policies and economic impositions. Therefore the demography of the area is considered first. As Locheynort for most of the 400 years under consideration was part of other areas, so it is put in local as well as national context. For the first 200 years documentation is difficult to obtain and there are large gaps for various reasons later. Inferences are therefore drawn from similar sites elsewhere in Uist where documentation is available. Later primary sources are easier to obtain but Locheynort was depopulated so there are few direct references.

Land and population before 1600

An understanding of the clan system is needed before details of documentation are investigated for this period. The clan system was not feudalism: land was not the property of the clan chief. The clan were those who gave devotion to the chief. Often, but not always, there was a blood relationship but what was important was that this allegiance was freely given. A chief did not stop being clan chief because he lost possessions or these were forfeited, whereas a feudal baron, if he was deprived of his land, lost all title to it and all claim on the services of the people. This is the most fundamental difference between the Highlands at this time and other parts of Britain where feudalism was accepted and land ownership established.

In the Western Isles the idea that all the environment and resources are in trust for the community is not a 20th-century concept: it is implicit in the clan system. Inter-clan warfare was not a defence of land: it was the

defence of subsistence and a way of life. Those able to enhance community life – bards, musicians, physicians, priests and church people – were rewarded by the clan. They were endowed with desirable possessions and this included terrain. Endowments were at will and could be reallocated. No-one had to prove ownership title because it was not a personal possession. Naturally children were encouraged to follow the family profession, so sometimes these endowments appear to be hereditary, but the fitness of the man for the job was the sole criterion. This type of loan/gift is rarely documented unless the donor wished to put restrictions on use or to explain the reasons for this donation to others. Most of the early documentation has these motives for putting pen to paper. The lack of documentation was an embarrassment to some Highland chiefs in 1610 when feudalism was imposed on the islands. It was also a problem to those sent from Edinburgh to investigate the affairs of the post-Reformation church.

The parish boundaries of the pre-Reformation church can be established. Dean Monroe lists five parish churches in Uist in 1549 (cited in MacKenzie 1903: 501; see also Monroe 1774). In 1560 there were two parishes in South Uist, with parish churches at Howmore for the northern parish and at Kilpheder for 'Kandish' (MacDhomhnaill 1981: 13). The parish boundary went from Ard Mhicheil in the west to Bayhead Loch Eynort in the east. Chapels or 'prayer houses' were associated with each parish; there was one at Ard Mhicheil for Howmore and others at Kildonan, Clachan Cumhaig and Kirkidale for Kilpheder. No lists of church lands are known to have survived from this time, which is somewhat surprising as the post-Reformation legal history is complex and the situation must have been reviewed several times before the minister gave up all tiends and taxes in 1710 (MacDonald 1938: 205). South Uist was part of the diocese of Sodor and Man and the islands south of Barra are known to have been in the gift of the Bishop.

The geographic association of the place-names Arinambane and Eilean an Easbuig suggest but do not prove church involvement with this area of Locheynort. Undatable further evidence of Christian interest is the cross carved on Rubha Bhuaite opposite Riskay (NF797 284) and Carmichael's description of Arinambane (1884: 457). The ineffectiveness of the Protestant churches in South Uist during the late 16th and 17th centuries (MacKenzie 1903: 529) means that church records are not a source, and that Roman Catholicism is the predominant Church today (Giblin 1964).

The ClanRanald of the time did not subscribe to feudalism so it is no surprise that there are few records of land holding and none that are specific. External political pressure was to change this in 1610, and by then a new chief had inherited the ClanRanald lands of Moidart, the Small Isles, Benbecula and South Uist north of Boisdale which was held by MacNeil of Barra. Locheynort was probably important in the clan economy at this time because many early sources name places in the Middle district in association with ClanRanald; Castle Begram was inhabited by Ronal Allansoun in 1505, Howmore was the burial place

of John Moidartach in 1584, and Howbeg was chosen as ClanRanald's mains farm in 1610.

There are no population estimations for this time, but Pont's survey (c.1595; Pont n.d.) shows the main settlements as being along the west coast machair in this part of South Uist around Locheynort.

Clanship and lairdism c.1600–1715

In 1609 the Scottish parliament passed the Statutes of Icolmkill (Iona); these were meant to bring Highland chiefs into the mainstream of Scottish landowning feudalism and, naturally, to collect revenue for the crown. Before any chiefs could sign in agreement they had to provide proof that they had title to the land (Murray 1973: 197). This changed chiefs into lairds and land registration became compulsory. This alone was to have social effects but the statutes themselves had long-term consequences. It was a condition that every man owning 60 cattle must send his eldest son to a lowland school; in 1616 this was extended to every child over the age of nine (MacKenzie 1903: 278; Murray 1973: 202). Every year the chiefs had to report to Edinburgh and for the rest of the year they had to reside on a mains farm. These conditions introduced chiefs to mainland society and divorced the families of the gentlemen of the clan from the ordinary folk; they also introduced the idea of land as an investment for the laird rather than a resource for the people of the clan.

In South Uist there were two short-term effects of the statutes. One was the choice by ClanRanald of Howbeg as a mains farm. This focused the power base of the clan firmly in the Middle District of South Uist. The second was the requirement that inns be established to provide hospitality. If Locheynort was the principal port for ClanRanald, and the place where taxes were collected, it would seem almost inevitable that a religious house with a tradition of service to travellers be turned into a commercial '*tigh change*'.

It is established that ClanRanald was in debt fairly early in the 17th century (Shaw 1980: 44). A way was now available for raising money: land could be used as collateral. An area of Upper Bornish was granted in feu charter in 1672 to John MacDonald, 1st of Bornish (MacDonald and MacDonald 1904: 259). Bornish was appointed hereditary *bailie* (land agent or factor) to the clan (Register of Sasines 1797, SRO). A second way of raising money was to grant a wadset. Land could be wadsetted to a retainer in exchange for a loan, and ClanRanald mortgaged his lands in 1633 to MacDonald of Sleat for 27,000 merks (Shaw 1980: 43). In 1654 ClanRanald redeemed a wadset granted to Donald MacMhuirich of lands in the Howmore District. Examination of the primary sources may discover other wadsets granted or redeemed that might have bearing directly on Locheynort. The MacMhuirich wadset was witnessed and dated at Ormaclate, so it can be presumed that by then Ormaclate was the principal residence of ClanRanald in South Uist, although Donald 13th ClanRanald mainly lived in Castle Tirrum in Moidart before his death in 1686.

To obtain a regular annual income, lands were leased as tacks. In 1625 and 1626 John ClanRanald gave a series of five tacks, the duration to be two lives and 11 years more (Shaw 1980: 51). As the primary source has not been seen, it is not known if the agreements give geographic details or just terms. Many of the early tacksmen would be relatives of the chief but later the leases were of much shorter duration and let to the highest bidder. There exists for the year 1721 a complete rental for ClanRanald land (Exchequer records, SRO) but this has not been consulted and it is impossible to say how much information can be obtained from this source. From other sources certain Middle District settlements were let as tacks in the 17th and early 18th centuries: they include Drimsdale, Howbeg, Peninerine, Lower Bornish and Garryvaltos (MacDonald and MacDonald 1904). Other areas of land were let as farms to joint tenants. This land was held from year to year by a number of shareholders in common. In the absence of other evidence, Kildonan and Stoneybridge would appear to have been farmed in common run-rig at this time (Bray 1986: 58).

To sum up, by 1715 Upper Bornish was the factor's farm held by feu charter, Ormaclate was the home farm of ClanRanald and the rest of the Middle District was in farms either held jointly or by a tacksmen with subtenants. Farm boundaries are not known, nor the relationship of east coast land or settlements with those on the west side of the island.

The place-names of Locheynort give the best indication of activities in that area in the absence of detailed analysis of primary sources. That Locheynort was an important port can be accessed from these, and from passing references in the sources consulted.

In 1658 the minister of South Uist was given a reward for sheltering a Royalist general from Cromwell's troops (MacKenzie 1903). Martin, writing some 30 years later, notes that 'There was staved to peices a frigot of Cromwells' on the rock in the Struthan Beg (1703: 84). The iron rod NF799 277 marked on the 6" maps is said to be connected with this. Martin does not name any other east-side lochs but Locheynort. This negative evidence may be taken to indicate that trade was concentrated here, under the direct control of ClanRanald and his factor Bornish. Martin also notes the finding of a gold buckle in Locheynort (1703: 88), while in 1669 ClanRanald accounts contain a bill for over £700 for expensive lace, cloth, ribbons and silver buttons (Shaw 1980: 46). ClanRanald certainly made a living from piracy and for this Locheynort was ideal as the entrance requires detailed local knowledge to navigate (Shaw 1980: 126). All this trade and activity must have required buildings, structures and services. Records may give an idea of where these were sited but many local records of this time were probably destroyed in the fire at Ormaclate castle in 1715, and it is unknown if Bornish muniments exist. The scale of trade can, however, probably be assessed from the records known to be preserved.

Exports would have been primary produce and the type and quantity will be considered later with land use and the environment. Nothing consulted contradicts the picture of

Locheynort and the east coast of South Uist having several small permanent settlements. These were probably hamlets of one to three households inhabited by people who made part of their living from the land but were also specialist tradesmen or craftsmen. Boat builders, herdsman, tally clerks and port workers would all have been needed. Foresters (gamekeepers) were definitely employed. To this permanent population was added in summer the transient occupants of the shielings from the larger villages of the arable west side (see Chapter 7).

The Jacobite risings c.1715 to 1750

Allan, 14th ClanRanald, built Ormaclate Castle in the early 1700s and it was inhabited from 1707 until destroyed in 1715. Building material was imported through Locheynort and transported along the channels linking the various parts of Loch Ollay. Mylonite slates from the flinty crush-fault plane were quarried on Stuley and used for the roofing (Pochin Mould 1953: 94). Allan was killed at the battle of Sherrifmuir, according to tradition on the same night as his castle was burnt down. He was succeeded by a brother who lived and died unmarried in France. The title passed to Donald of Benbecula and the focus of estate matters shifted to Nunton House. This was detrimental to Locheynort as a port although there were still commercial exports until 1934. The Act of Union also altered affairs. No longer was business conducted through Edinburgh but London. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, a period of stagnation can be postulated for Locheynort and South Uist.

Material about the 1745–46 uprising is extensive but mainly biographical. As has been noted, Charles Edward Stuart spent some weeks in Corodale; there are many descriptions of his activities on the east coast of South Uist and of his ultimate escape masterminded by Lady ClanRanald of Nunton. Of the other local personalities, two were children of tacksmen, Flora MacDonald of Milton and Neil MacEachen of Howbeg. A drinking companion was Lauchlan MacDonald, tacksman of Drimsdale. During the May and June of 1746 the east coast shielings were occupied and there are several descriptions of meals consisting mainly of dairy produce (*e.g.* MacLean 1982).

'Improvers' and kelp 1750–1815

'What distinguished the defeat at Culloden from previous reversals... was that it was merely an overture to a massive assault on the social and political institutions of clanship' (Hunter 1976: 11). By a combination of circumstances and a quirk of fate, the defeat affected South Uist more than most of the Highlands, although initially life seemed undisturbed. The estate was forfeited after the '45 and later it was inherited by a minor. Administration therefore passed to mainland-based lawyers and accountants who appointed their own agents as resident factors. Chiefs were stripped of judicial powers and the clans disarmed; this left ClanRanald with no role in local society. With the clan chief alienated by education from the rest of the

inhabitants, the land was merely an investment and the title an entry into London society.

Leadership in the local community devolved to the tacksmen but their position was changing. Within the clan system many had been military officers in regiments led by the chief. Now this was denied to them and some opted to buy commissions in the British Army. A list of tacksmen from South Uist in 1799 has six of 12 with military titles. The young men enlisted with their officers and saw service in many parts of the world. Regimental lists have not been consulted but it is possible that a distribution map of population in South Uist could be constructed from this source. For reasons of preferment many officers/tacksmen became Protestant (*e.g.* MacLeod 1984). Another source of population statistics is the emigrant ships' passenger lists. These sometimes have the place of birth recorded as well as the reason for emigration (Bumsted 1982: 168). Canadian and U.S. records of marriage and deaths have been found useful in tracing the place of origin as well.

The break-up of the clan system was pursued with vigour by the British government, often using as agents ministers of the Church of Scotland. In South Uist this means that reports were written by incomers with vested interests so they should be used with caution.

The Rev. Dr John Walker reported on South Uist in 1764 (McKay 1981: 73) and the Rev. George Munro in 1794. Both give population statistics (Figure 18.1) but with hindsight it is easy to see propaganda for the ideas of the 'improvers', which advocated sheep and arable farming to the detriment of the existing pasture/cattle economy. These ideas were to have an effect on the ecology of Locheynort.

Table 18.1 summarizes what is known about land holding in the Middle District around 1800. It could well be that the unconsulted MacKenzie charts and nautical descriptions would add more detail as to marine structures in the loch at this time. For an excellent description of the differences between a joint tenant farm and a tack, reference can be made to the Old Statistical Account for North Uist (MacQueen 1793: 309–11).

By 1800 over 50% of the Middle District was in Protestant hands. Some incomers had outbid the hereditary tacksmen and others were converts. These men were educated, travelled and cultured and they formed a class that was increasingly unsympathetic to subtenants and other residents of their land. In South Uist this was compounded by religious bigotry and discrimination. The most notorious example is Colin of Boisdale and the 'religion of the yellow stick' (Bumsted 1982: 36; MacKenzie 1903: 481). In Howmore the Rev. George Munro, having got all the lands of Howmore and Drimsdale, imported several Protestant families to the responsible posts on the farm and in the congregation (Bill Lawson pers. comm.). The Edinburgh-based estate administration preferred gentlemen farmers who would pay in cash not in casualties, so the export trade of Locheynort diminished and the need for specialists and craftsmen was not as great.

Bornish was a traditionalist and remained staunchly Catholic but the 'salt laws' affected his east coast tenants

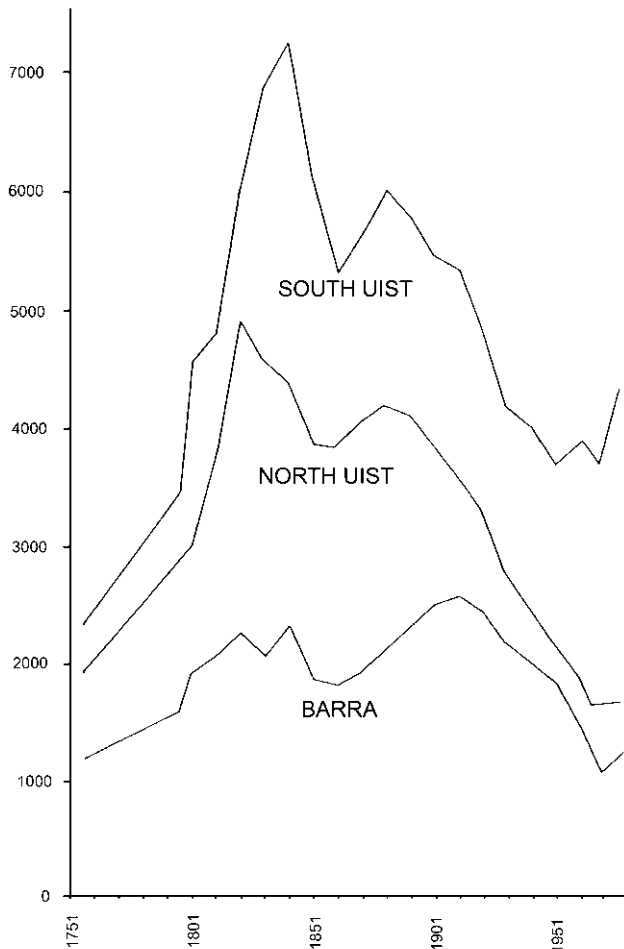


Figure 18.1. Population numbers in the Uists and Barra, 1850–1980.

as well. According to the minister these laws ‘put a stop to the industry of the poor inhabitants of the parish’ as they could not afford to buy salt to preserve fish (Munro 1794: 296).

Overshadowed by later evictions and forced emigration, it is often forgotten that between 1750 and 1800 there was considerable emigration from South Uist. Some soldiers took their discharge in North America, and for others religious intolerance was the main motive. For a third group it was a choice between the known difficulty of bidding for a lease against outside competition and the unknown economics of the other side of the Atlantic. Emigration, international politics, pressures for agricultural change and estate policies must all have had an effect on the population of Locheynort. This effect is now impossible to quantify or even assess as it is hidden by later developments, the first being the rise of the kelp industry. By 1803 lairds were so upset by the ‘fever for emigration’ and the consequent loss of the work force that a bill was passed severely curtailing emigration from the Highlands.

Kelp had been processed in a small way since about 1725 (Morrison 1982: 20). In 1764 Walker gives export figures for kelp of £975 for 300 tons at £3/5/- per ton (MacKay 1981: 73). At that time kelp constituted 45% of

the total exports, black cattle were 45% and the rest was dairy produce and fish. By 1794 Munro says that 1100 tons are manufactured and that this is by far the greatest export (1794: 299). The land rent is £500 in 1764 and £2200 in 1796. However these figures are read, they indicate a radical change in occupation for the whole of ClanRanald estate and they are reflected in estate policies to land holding. The kelp industry has left archaeological and environmental traces throughout the Western Isles.

From the start every aspect of this industry was controlled from the mainland on behalf of ClanRanald. The foreshore was part of the land and individual rights over this became increasingly important. The factor had always arranged the collection of casualties and rent, and the disposal of surplus. Thus the price paid for the labour of making kelp could be set against rent. From the beginning the trustees saw that the way to clear ClanRanald’s debts was to raise the rent. As payment of rent was the first charge against an inhabitant, few saw cash as the result of their labour. Rent increased eightfold between 1760 and 1840. For much of this time the price paid to the maker of the kelp (put in the balance sheet as ‘cost of manufacture’) was £2/10/-; it never exceeded £3/3/- even when kelp was selling in Liverpool for £22 per ton. Rent paid by joint tenants who were tenants at will could be raised every year but that paid by tacksmen had to wait for the end of the agreement. Thus the ‘gentlemen farmers’ were insulated against this racketeering but the ordinary people were not.

Kelp made from bubble weed (*Ascophyllum*) cut on the east side of the island was of better quality than that made from tangles (*Laminaria*) cast ashore on the west coast. Sheltered shores with good growth became desirable; parts of the east coast were detached from the traditional *baile* summer pasturage and formed into pendicles. A typical pendicle (see glossary, below) would have one or two permanent dwellings with associated structures for household subsistence farming. In summer migratory workers lived in small poorly constructed bothies. Unlike the cattle shielings, these bothies are close to the shore. They were made of stone or turf or even dug out of a bank. A typical size is 2m × 1.5 m. In winter most workers returned to the west side to collect the cast ware, to harvest their own crops and to put in hand the spring cultivations.

Much of the west coast work is a winter activity as this is when tangle can be collected and dried. East coast seaweed was harvested in late spring and summer. Land cultivation, stock management and harvesting crops had to be fitted in to the few weeks between working kelp. East coast weed has to be cut. Although this can take place every second week all year round when the low spring tides permit access to the shore for five or six days, the best weed is cut in spring and early summer when it is in ‘bloom’. An area of shore was cut at low tide and surrounded with a rope, often made of heather. This rope was bound around with some of the cut weed to make it buoyant.

At high tide this raft of cut weed was pulled or towed to the shore and landed. Where there was no suitable landing place, seaweed platforms were constructed. From here it

was lifted in creels and spread to dry on the land. Only in late spring and summer was the weather good enough to dry it properly. When dry it was collected again and burnt on rock platforms (see survey inventory in Chapter 4). Where there 'were no suitable outcrops of bedrock these platforms were also built. Burning was a round the clock job. Finally the kelp had to be taken to a depot, weighed, and exported. Small boats were used to reach offshore reefs and for towing the rafts, and horses were used where the terrain made this possible'⁴ but much of the work involved manhandling.

By 1800 shore-rights to seaweed were important. The Bald map clearly defines marches by the shore. If grazing and pasture had retained their former importance, then the hill marches would have been equally well marked. As it is, 'arable' marches are defined because, at that stage, the kelp industry was in depression and the trustees were thinking of selling to 'improving' farmers. In the Register of Sasines for 1798, four examples of pendicles occur, including that of Roanaglac. In the rentals of 1817 and 1818 Bayhead, Rubha na meine, Calvay and Rubha Bhuaite are named separately, with a much higher rent than an individual joint tenant was paying (Table 18.1), and in 1844 Liadale, Bolum, Hafn, and Rubha na meine are described as pendicles.

The method of land valuation changed between 1798 and 1805. Pennylands is a qualitative measure of valuation, and reflects the diverse nature of the land in South Uist, but acreages are quantitative and show the desire of the estate's administration to ask for the maximum rental, irrespective of the land's agricultural potential.

Estate policy to land holding is difficult to follow at this time. Already income was tied completely to the ups and downs of kelp. To simplify a complex interaction, when agriculture was profitable or when there was pressure from the 'improver' lobby, then farms were amalgamated and the land leased to a go-ahead tacksman in large parcels. When kelp was profitable, then joint tenancies were left intact and the large parcels broken into lots which were the proto-crofts. Tacksmen also followed this policy of lotting but this is unrecorded in estate documentation. The lots confined an individual tenant to one plot of land and were thought to improve the land because the tenant had the same area from year to year, unlike run-rig where land was distributed by balloting at the start of each year. Some of these lots were very small; if the land was poor, it was almost impossible to provide for the needs of a large family, the fodder for stock and the horses needed to work the kelp. It was the start of exploitation of man and land in the interest of a balance sheet.

For most of the residents of South Uist the conditions were worse than slavery; this was recognized at the time but nothing could be done (Bumsted 1982: 36). In good kelp years profits went straight to ClanRanald and there was no investment in the island. In poor years a little meal was sufficient to keep people alive to make more kelp. Land and stock were neglected to satisfy the auditors. An industrial society, held in thralldom by dependence on land for basic

subsistence, on the market value of one commodity and, increasingly, on the monoculture of one crop – potatoes – had developed in South Uist. There was no way that dissatisfaction with conditions could be expressed. All the official positions were held by Protestant nominees of the estate (if they were not employees such as the factor or ground officer), so any mutterings could not go beyond this alien middle class.

Although the fate of Bornish tenants was connected with those of the larger neighbour, they can be considered better off as they could not be subjected to rent racketeering. Unfortunately this merely meant that several removed themselves from ClanRanald land and settled permanently in Bornish.

It is tempting to place most of the unrecognizable structures in Locheynort in the kelp era and, no doubt, many do date from this time but some small dwellings may be earlier (the traditional shielings of the pastoral economy; see Chapter 19), and some are definitely later, such as fisherman's bothies from the late 19th century. Similarly seaweed platforms can be much earlier, especially when associated with cultivable land. Boat landing quays and slips can be of any date too, as boats were used extensively to go to offshore islands to look after stock. Without a sampling technique to date structures – and it is hoped that this may be forthcoming – then some reliance must be placed on the total assemblage in a geographic sense (see Chapters 4, 7 and 17).

Overpopulation and evictions

At the end of the first decade of the 19th century kelp prices peaked. The end of the Napoleonic war and the later lifting of import restrictions on the raw materials used in the chemical industry led to a continual fall in prices for the next 15 years until kelp became unprofitable by 1829. In 1816 as prices dropped, estate policy was to keep the labour force in South Uist and to make more kelp. As tacks became vacant they were lotted, Kildonan and Howbeg in 1816. Rents for joint tenancy settlements and for lotted townships could be raised each year. Tacksmen too were faced with a rise in rent so they encouraged sub-tenant settlement to pay this demand. Estate policy also involved the importing of extra workers mainly to the responsible jobs; these Protestant incomers can be identified from the records. Children of known Protestants from the Locheynort area are recorded in Catholic baptismal records (MacLean 1984: 510). Figure 18.1 and Table 18.1 both indicate an increasing population and this increase must have affected Locheynort.

By 1822 the situation was one of increasing indebtedness, whether rent was paid direct or as a subtenant to a tacksman. 'When a tenant is sensible he owes the factor more than he is able to pay he becomes quite desperate and ceases to make any effort' (Hunter 1976: 38). The estate did make efforts to provide employment by promoting road-making and ditching so that rents could be paid (*ibid.*: 36). Detailed inspection of the records is required to discover if

any of these improvements were carried out in Locheynort. The estate was in a dilemma: kelp manufacturing had to continue because tenants were completely unable to pay rent from the produce of the land. The outcome was devastation to both land and people. There was a prohibition on the use of seaweed in any other way but for the manufacture of kelp. Rules, strictly enforced, governed the collection of weed and the deployment of the labour force.

The next stage of estate policy definitely affected Locheynort. In 1827 Shaw, the factor, was of the opinion that it was ‘absolutely necessary to arrange [the] estates so as to draw a revenue from the lands independent of kelp’ (SRO GD 201/1/351/25). This meant letting the tacks as sheep runs and clearing the resident population, as no farmer could be expected to ‘keep a swarm of lazy idle tenants’. Milton was let as a farm and cleared at Whitsun 1827, and Kildonan in 1831 (Table 18.1; Hunter 1976: 39–41). Following the practice of other Highland estates, the dispossessed population were settled on poor east coast land; others found refuge where they could. Many are known to have settled on Bornish land (MacLean 1984: 496). These are noted by enumerators in 1841 and 1851 and by the Rev. Donald MacColl in Eriskay and Bagh Hartavagh in 1886, having been moved on later (MacColl n.d.).

The resettled people had as a base the shielings and the bothies and very little else. It was planned to move 550 people from the west side farms in the Middle District to the east side and, although this was not carried out exactly as planned, considerable numbers did move. The effect of this influx of people on the landscape and ecology of the east side is considered later but, after years of indebtedness, they had few resources to invest in a new life and the environment was markedly different from the west side *bailtean*. They were also semi-industrialized and had become used to imposed management policies, so the transition was by no means an easy affair.

In 1838 the Rev. R. MacLean, the parish minister, contributed to the Statistical Account (MacLean 1845: 182). This gives a picture of the parish of South Uist at that time and is an important social document. Overpopulation by both people and horses is noted (*ibid.*: 189), the estate policies for the past 30 years are summarized (*ibid.*: 190) and there is a good description of farming practice (*ibid.*: 192–3). Locheynort is specified as one amongst three principal harbours, so it is no longer the only/main port of the island; the others are Lochboisdale and Loch Skipport. The disadvantage of Locheynort as a harbour is ‘a rock in the middle of the narrow entrance’. There is a good road connecting Locheynort to the main road, which at that time was the machair track.

In that year ClanRanald sold the estate and, after sundry tactics to avoid the inevitable, Bornish was also compelled to sell out. The buyer was Colonel John Gordon of Cluny, a man whose epitaph is ‘the unlamented Aberdonian... who wished to turn the isle of Barra into a convict settlement... by clearing off the whole population as was done in ClanRanald’s other islands of Rum and Canna’ (Richards 1982: 403).

Gordon of Cluny – famine and forced emigration 1838–1852

The next 15 years are ones of extreme change in South Uist. At the start Cluny continued the policy of clearance of the west side with resettlement in the east. The 1841 census gives the position in the Locheynort area and is summarized in Table 18.2. In 1844 the estate was advertised for leasing. At this stage Liadale, Bolum, Hafn and Rubha na meine are described as pendicles, so it can be presumed that the intention was to make some sort of permanent settlements in these places. The boundaries as fixed in c.1850 are not those of the advertisement, nor are they the same as those on the Bald map. The Rev. Maclean suggests that boundaries were defined before 1838 except for the hill land between ClanRanald and Bornish (1845: 190).

In 1846 the potato crop failed: the varieties then planted had no natural resistance to blight (*Phytophthora infestans*). Although the traumatic years of famine that followed are of great interest to the social historian, a full documentation of all sources is inappropriate here (see Hunter 1976; Murray 1973). In the summer of 1847 Norman Macleod visited South Uist and described the condition of the people thus: ‘The scene of wretchedness which we witnessed as we entered on the estate of Col. Gordon was deplorable, nay heart-rending... I never witnessed such countenances – starvation on many faces – the children with their melancholy looks, big looking knees, hollow eyes, swollen bellies – God help them, I never did witness such wretchedness’.

Cluny’s plans for the indigenous population before the years of famine are not known. Richards, commenting on the famine and post-famine years, says that ‘the contemporary record of Cluny’s eviction policies is relatively rich and thorough, and compensates for the paucity of evidences from the relevant estate papers’ (Richards 1982: 402–18). Hunter quotes Col. Gordon as saying that he was ‘neither legally or morally bound to support a population reduced to poverty by the will of providence’. The fate of many residents of South Uist, together with those of the rest of Cluny’s Long Island Estate is known, documented and preserved in oral tradition. Many were forced onto emigrant ships to arrive in Canada destitute and starving; others were removed yet again and resettled on almost bare rocks. The population of Eriskay increased from eight in 1764, to 80 in 1841 and was 405 by 1851.

For population and landholding in Locheynort in these years there are three primary sources: the censuses of 1841 and 1851 and the 1844 advertisement. Changes in population and an indication of estate policies can be made from a detailed analysis of census returns. For both years Locheynort was divided into two, the line being through Bayhead. The northern district was from Lochskipport, via Ushenish and Corodale to the north side of the loch, while the southern district was from Bayhead along the south shore of Locheynort and via Kyles Stuley to North Lochboisdale. In 1841 this southern district included Calvay. The returning officer for the whole of the parish of South Uist was the minister, the Rev. R. MacLean.

Commenting on the north enumeration district in 1851, he writes 'In this district there has been a decrease in population since 1841 of 152. This considerable decrease was ?caused? by the removal of tenants to other parts of the parish in order to turn this district into a sheep farm' (Richards 1982: 402–18). In passing it can be noted that the sheep farm was tenanted by the reverend gentleman's own son, Charles. For the southern area the comment is 'In this district there is an increase of population of 219... the families being removed from other parts' (1851 census). Inspection of Table 18.2 will show that much of this increase must have been in the Lochboisdale area although, with the exception of Calvay, there is an increase in South Locheynort.

The details of population movement in the Middle District from c.1830 to 1852 may never be known completely. Individual families can be identified from parish records and census returns; the enumerator of the southern Locheynort district in 1851 is helpful as he provides the village of birth whereas the northern enumerator provides merely the parish. Bill Lawson's genealogical research project may ultimately, with information recorded from other sources, provide some useful data, but this is on-going and the information is not easy to extract at this stage.

Certain points of interest can be obtained from the census returns. In the area covered in the present study, only four families are definitely in the same place in 1851 as they were in 1841; two others may be. Three of these households are known to be Protestant. Confirmation that displaced people found refuge on the east side is found both in the 1851 census and from the Rev. MacColl (MacColl n.d.). It is also suspected that the greatest number of population in the Locheynort area was not in 1841 but somewhat later, about 1845. It is too facile to state that every 'primitive' structure found in Locheynort was inhabited between 1841 and 1851 but many must have been in use at that time. Turf houses and lean-to houses provided a modicum of shelter (Murray 1973: 190). The 1851 census shows that the redundant population was being moved to the Lochboisdale area. Cluny had asked for this.

St Mary's Roman Catholic church had been built on Bornish land in 1836. By 1851 evictions had halved the local population and in 1880 an incoming teacher comments on the isolation of priest and church (Rae 1964: 117). There was a second influx of Protestant workers, coming in to be shepherds for the farmers who were taking the leases of the farms. In 1851 Corodale had a shepherd from Argyle, Hafn had one from Raasay, Kyles Stuley one from Bracadale, and Craigavagh one from Kintail, Rosshire. Older workers were moved around: a shepherd born in Glengarry was in Stromdubh in 1841 and on the opposite side of the loch in 1851. A Lewisman moved from Corodale to Unasary, and Arinambane was inhabited by a widow MacDonald who, although born in South Uist, had a daughter born in Glasgow. She called herself a grocer, but what happened to the whisky still? Hector MacLellan had moved from Ruartaglac to Rubha na meine and a son was in Hellisdale.

A few older people were permitted to have 'moss' crofts

of four acres at Locheynort-side, Bayhead, Stromdubh and Carra Bayhead, and others recorded in 1851 are those with a trade: a shoemaker, two boat builders and a weaver. The later census returns show that, when the moss crofter tenant died, the family was removed from the house. A farm tenancy agreement of 1906 states 'he shall not permit any cotters except those on the farm at his entry to settle thereon' (SUE Ormaclate bundle). Locheynort was split between three sheep farms – Milton, Bornish and Ormaclate – and only farm or estate workers were officially allowed housing in the area.

Sheep farms 1851–1907

There is considerable documentation for South Uist for the next 50 years but it mostly consists of reports on the lives of crofters, not the employees of sheep farms, so much of the material is inappropriate for Locheynort. Farmers kept their own records of the management of the farms and none for South Uist are known to have survived.

South Uist estate papers record Cluny's investment in the infrastructure of the island but again this had little effect on Locheynort. The main road through the Middle District was constructed between 1854 and 1856. Piers were built at Lochboisdale and Lochskipport. Mills were improved or built, and others invested in hospitals and lighthouses and hotels. In the farming areas of the island the population decreased; in the crofting townships there was an increase. This led to a demand for more land by the dispossessed cotters and the formation of the Land League. The autobiography of Angus MacLellan may be written oral tradition but the life of a cotter or crofter on or near a sheep farm was not an easy one (1962). There was pressure on land at Stoneybridge in 1890; this was the nearest crofting township to Locheynort. The political background to the formation of the Land League is well covered (Hunter 1976; Grigor 1979); locally its activities manifested themselves by raids on the sheep farms, in Locheynort on Calvay island (MacLellan 1962: 4; Grigor 1979: 128). This was in 1885; some raiders were imprisoned for this offence. The ground on Calvay was broken for potatoes and, according to Angus MacLellan, the yield was 80 bags.

By 1871 many of the east coast dwellings were abandoned for permanent inhabitation but, both in that year and in 1881, bothies of fishermen are returned. These give Banff or Buckie as their place of residence. Angus MacLellan and other oral sources make it clear that these bothies were also used by locals. 'The Silver Darlings', a novel by Neil Gunn, gives a fictional account of east coast fisherman's activities in Lochskipport.

In 1884 the Napier Commission took evidence in South Uist. This evidence is source material for many social and political histories but, as there were few crofters in the Middle District, no verbal evidence was given that has any bearing on Locheynort. The lack of opportunity to express local feelings led directly to the land raiding, and indirectly to the two written submissions that are preserved, those of Alexander Carmichael (1885: 451) and

Fr. Alexander Campbell, the Bornish priest (1885: 449). Both contain requests that the cotter and crofter should be granted more land, especially hill land. As both too chart environmental change, and changes in agricultural and fishing practice, they will be considered later. As a result of the Commission the Crofting Act was passed in 1886, giving security of tenure to crofters. This had little effect on the Middle District and less on Locheynort, as there was no land available for crofting. Some Highland estates were generous in making land available as farm leases became vacant but Lady Gordon Cathcart, Cluny's daughter, was not.

The Crofters Commission was set up as the result of the Crofting Act. In 1903 they published a report on 'The social conditions of the people of Uist, compared with 20 years ago'. With the fear of eviction removed, crofters had invested in better housing. Cotters of course did not have this security but farm workers, seeing the improving living standards, wished to have the same standards of housing and services. Arinambane was abandoned in c.1900, when a shepherd's house was erected at Ormaclate crossroads, and Corodale and Kyles Stuley soon afterwards (HMSO report to the Secretary of State for Scotland). Being a Parliamentary Report, the Crofters Commission report quotes extensively from previous government reports and papers. It has 125 pages and 41 pages of appendices. Besides giving a picture of life in the Uists in 1903, it often charts the historical development of the subjects and is almost essential reading as background. But its value to the history of Locheynort or to the identification of structures in the landscape is entirely negative. Locheynort is not mentioned as a port, or under fishing, industry, agriculture or population.

Crofting 1907–1950

Political pressure on the estate by the Crofters Commission and by the Congested Districts Board led to a change in policy. In 1907 nine cotters between Bayhead and Poltoran became crofters. The correspondence and ultimate agreements for the creation of these fishermen's holdings are filed in South Uist Estate Office. The second period of crofting at Locheynort, together with the break-up of Milton, Bornish and Ormaclate farms, was in 1914. The Board of Agriculture had been established with powers of compulsory purchase; the farm valuation shows that the buildings at Ormaclate, Bornish and Milton were valued at £1180, £800 and £1115 respectively.

The new croft tenants were cotters or the sons of crofters. Many came from Stoneybridge but others were from east coast townships such as Lochboisdale and Lochcarnan. There was a big increase in population; land was broken and worked although many adult men were almost immediately called up into the services. The difficult and neglected terrain, together with experience elsewhere, led in the 1930s and 1940s to a further depopulation. The Board of Agriculture and the estate had to provide a school for the township. No croft was more than three miles from the school; for Locheynort this was at Bayhead, although not

exactly where shown on the 1914 estate map. 'School' paths were built and naturally any loose stone might be used in construction. As the path goes straight through Arinambane, ruins might have been destroyed or disturbed here.

A condition of croft tenancy at that time was residence on the land. Therefore on most crofts there is the construction of the 'typical' three-roomed croft house of the time. This might have been thatched, felted or slated. Where older buildings existed they were turned into byres, barns or fishing stores; where they did not exist, these had to be built.

Improving infrastructure 1950 to present

Roads were constructed to North Locheynort and to South Locheynort. The road from Ormaclate crossroads to Bayhead was improved in the early 1950s. The road from Bornish to Tigh Mhàil remained a track. Croft houses beyond the reach of these roads were abandoned. Later water and electricity reached the length of these roads. New houses incorporating the public services were built and others were extensively reconditioned. All the land remains in crofting tenure.

Documentation and environmental change

It is unrealistic to expect documentation for the majority of structures but if evidence can be found for changes in land use, then it should be possible to form an 'assemblage' of structures related to these changes. The requirements of cattle pasturage and dairy production leave different traces from those of kelp manufacture; structures associated with extensive sheep farming are different from those of a crofter settlement. The social and economic factors causing change have been noted. There is a 'natural' aspect to change that it is hoped will be charted by environmental survey and sampling. Documentation for natural change can, at best, only provide clues as to what might have been happening on one site at any one time: only with a fuller analysis will the unique picture emerge. Contemporaneous descriptions provide clues for changes in climate, in diet, in agricultural techniques, in housing style and in the way that the marine environment was used. They do not provide proof that a specific site was affected by these changes.

Climatic changes

When early descriptions of Uist are compared with those written around 1700, we can study them for evidence of the climatic fluctuation known as the Little Ice Age (Murray 1973: 75). Dean Monro in c.1549 uses such words as fertile and fruitful but he also describes change, with the sea gaining access to fresh water lochs (Monro 1549). Martin Martin c.1695 gives a description of climate that appears to be colder with more frost and snow than present (Martin 1703). From North Uist there are records of great storms and damage in 1697 (Crawford 1986: 15). In 1751 ClanRanald the younger wrote to his father saying 'We have the worst Spring ever was seen or heard in this

part, immense floods which have done more havoc and dreadful storms, and there is a great starvation and more scarcity of every kind of victual ever known in the memory of any alive in this part.' (MacDonald 1941: 395). In 1764, the Rev. Dr Walker describes devastation to crops and land from blowing sand (McKay 1981: 74).

Weather and climate affects the whole inland. A drop in temperature of 1°C–3°C makes a considerable difference. It has been estimated that sub-alpine vegetation would descend some 120m in altitude (Murray 1973: 182). Yet all the traditions, together with every description, insist that the hill land of South Uist was good summer pasture. This is especially true of the north side of Locheynort; taxes and export records confirm that, during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, the principal products were cattle and dairying. Only in 1770 did kelp exceed cattle as the main export.

Agriculture and economy

Fish traps

Both Dean Monro and an unknown writer in French (translated in 1987 by Fr. John Angus MacDonald of South Uist) describe fish traps as 'dykes [made] by placing rocks badly united together'. Monro lists flukes, pollock, skate and herring; sea trout were also caught. These descriptions were written apparently before 1600.

The place-name Carra denotes a fish trap. Carra Lochskipport occurs in 1818 as a desirable rental and Carra Bayhead, Locheynort is an address in the 1851 census. Salt fish is known to have been paid as part of church teinds and rent was paid in salt fish later. It is therefore tempting to suggest that the fish trap at NF 802 281 was concerned with the payment of these dues to the bishop, or that these traps may be found near Bishop's Island. In 1660 ClanRanald paid for goods from an itinerant dealer with 13 barrels of cured salmon (Shaw 1982: 164). Other than saying that 'Ywst is fruitfull in cornes', Dean Monro describes no other produce.

Black cattle – management and trade c. 1700

All secondary sources stress that rearing of cattle, both for meat and for dairy produce, was important in the Highland economy. Shaw (1980) devotes chapter 8 of his book to the animals of the farm, and chapter 11 to trade. Numerous other sources also deal with stock management and trade, including Fraser Darling (1955: 239) and Murray (1973: 183). They present a picture of the export of store cattle on the hoof as two-year-olds for sale at fairs in Falkirk, Perth and Carlisle, for finishing before slaughter on lush mainland pastures. This does not quite fit the evidence of Uist trade at this date. There is firstly the geographic situation of Uist: cattle would have to be ferried, unlike some islands such as Skye where cattle could be swum across narrows, and Uist is better endowed with arable land than most of the Western Isles. This means that beasts can be 'finished' locally.

There is also Martin's description (1703: 69) of the trade:

'The Natives are accustomed to Salt their Beef in a Cows hide, which keeps it close from the Air, and preserves as well, if not better, than Barrels, and tastes they say best when this way used. This Beef is transported to Glasgow, a City in the West of Scotland, and from thence (being put in Barrels there) exported to the Indies in good condition.'

Given that Locheynort was the principal port and tax collecting port for South Uist, there should be archaeological evidence for this activity. There is Rubha Bhuaite, the headland of the cattle enclosure (NF 797 285). This, together with Rubh Airigh an Sgaidan (NF 804 284) and Aird Bhuidhe are headlands cut off by turf walls known as *gearraidh ploc*. These enclosures are obviously connected with cattle, but not necessarily with the export trade. No sources describe the ferrying of cattle from the Outer Isles at this date but Shaw (1980) notes the wrecking of two vessels from 'Lews' laden with cured beef and herring in 1696.

Cattle enclosures could be associated with winter stock management, as well as stock control while loading or slaughter. The question arises whether Uist cattle were inwintered or outwintered. According to Martin they were kept outside and fed on seaware (1703: 69). Most would be kept near the west side settlements, where structures and place-names attest to this, but any permanent settlement on the east side would have the same requirement for an enclosure.

It is beyond question that cattle were moved in summer to the upland pastures and Martin refers to this practice in what must be Glen Liadale (1703: 85). Many people migrated together to these shielings and, for three to four months from May to August while crops were growing on the inbye land, they made butter and cheese at the shieling for the winter, and for the payment of rent (Carmichael 1885; see Chapter 19). The place-name *àirigh* is absolute proof of the seasonal use of a building but it is not evidence for cattle transhumance, as there are bothies with other seasonal uses (see Chapter 7). What is required is good pasture, and it is hoped that environmental experts may establish what kind of pasture is best, as the *Calluna* or *Molina* near many shielings today seem unsuitable. The first spring 'flush' occurs in boggy ground and sheltered areas.

Shielings were small, with often a smaller dairy alongside, but they were built close to a good water supply for the dairying and where there was a good view of the permanent settlement. In Locheynort, High Town might have been a permanent settlement but the situation is typical.

On the east side of South Uist, any permanent households mainly concerned with cattle rearing would have just such a situation. Those concerned mainly with other activities such as fishing or kelp are located in a different place, often right on the shore. The land sloping down to the sea would be cultivated as seaweed could be added as manure. Such a settlement would certainly have an enclosure as a stackyard and could have a cattle enclosure as an additional

precaution. Purely seasonal shielings would have no need for such enclosures. Murray (1973: 232–3) gives a general description of shieling life and Carmichael describes Arinambane (1885).

The land around a permanent farm settlement is divided into inbye and outbye, and the division marked with a stone dyke or a turf wall, to prevent cattle straying in summer and to define the inbye shares for run-rig (see Chapter 19). It is suspected that walls noted in the area might have served such a purpose at some stage before the area was abandoned but this is not to say that they do not predate the period under consideration, nor that they might have had a very different purpose.

In Uist there are six ecological environments, machair, inbye land, outbye land or pasture, mountain land or hill pasture, freshwater lochs and marshes, and the marine environment. Before 1818 the inbye land was shared annually by balloting between the residents of a settlement. This was the run-rig system, and the number of rigs allocated depended, in part, on the number of households in the settlement. Rigs are long and narrow, but they are wider than lazy beds (see Chapter 19 for details of run-rig and lazy bed cultivation). After lotting, the run-rig system persisted on the machair in some townships until 1950. With a single household settlement the individual could decide which part of the available land he wished to cultivate and it is likely that some settlements in Locheynort were single households.

According to Martin and Shaw bear or bere barley was the most important crop but Angus MacLellan says that they could not grow barley in South Locheynort. Modern two-row varieties of barley grow on peat soil. Oats and rye were also grown in Uist (Martin 1703: 84; MacKay 1981: 78).⁵ Grain is often recorded in rent payment, and there would have been straw as a by-product, but thatching would have used some of this.

How much of the cereal crop would be available for cattle feed after man and horse had been fed is unknown. Cattle were not used as draught animals in the islands. To finish a beast for slaughter requires the stockman to keep it over two winters and Martin says that they were not slaughtered until December. From the evidence available, the trade, cattle management and amount of fodder had totally changed when the statistical report was written at the end of the 18th century.

Trade and production c.1800

Stock management around 1800 is difficult to describe as neither the Rev. Dr Walker nor the two ministers contributing to the 'old' Statistical Account mention the breed of cattle or any details on how they were kept. Yet Walker was an agronomist and the ministers were moderates with large farm tacks. They must have been fully familiar with the subject, as they both received income from the sale of cattle at the July fairs. The Rev. G. Munro asked for the date of synod meetings to be changed as they clashed with the Ormaclate fair (Murchison 1937: 107).

| | £ | s | d |
|---------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------|----------|
| 7,719 bolls of bear, oats, and rye at £1 per boll | 7,719 | 0 | 0 |
| 82,760 barrels of potatoes at 2s. per barrel | 8,276 | 0 | 0 |
| 10 acres of turnips at £11 | 110 | 0 | 0 |
| 23,000 stones meadow hay at 6d. per stone | 575 | 0 | 0 |
| 1,000 stones cultivated hay at 8d. | 33 | 6 | 0 |
| 1,600 cattle at an average of £3 | 4,800 | 0 | 0 |
| 400 pigs at 10s. | 200 | 0 | 0 |
| Eggs sent to Glasgow at 2s. 6d. per 100 | 625 | 0 | 0 |
| 25 tons of cod and ling fish at £20 per ton | 500 | 0 | 0 |
| 1,570 tons of kelp at £3 | 4,710 | 0 | 0 |
| | | | |
| Total value of yearly raw produce | £27,548 | 6 | 0 |

Table 18.3. South Uist raw produce in 1837

Trade certainly seems to have changed radically. In 1793 the minister MacQueen of North Uist wrote that 'the number [of cattle] exported yearly will not exceed 300, owing to the numbers that die of want' and that 'the risk and expense of ferrying cattle to the Isle of Sky [*sic*] makes them of less value' (1793: 306). Munro merely comments on the expense of ferrying to the mainland. Nowhere in the three primary sources is there any suggestion that export was in any other way but on the hoof. In the 1798 Register of Sasines there is no mention of an allowance for cattle or dairy produce (except Bornish), just for kelp.

This suggests that tacksmen, stockmen and ordinary joint tenants had to make their own arrangements for the sale of cattle: the estate was no longer interested in organization, merely in money payable in rent. Furthermore, the cattle that were sold were no longer finished: they were sold in July as store beasts or even calves. No longer was there an autumn fattening period, and certainly there was no longer any surplus grain or fodder as many were dying of starvation.

Men were in want too: in 1802 ClanRanald sent 2,000 bolls of meal and 60 tons of seed potatoes (Bumsted 1982: 140). All this is indicative of change. It is not within the scope of this report to put a relative value on the causes of change, especially those over which residents had little control such as climate and outside politics. Insular changes are noted from sources, however, because these are relevant for interpreting social and landscape change in Locheynort and elsewhere in Uist. The population was increasing, causing pressure on the land. Human foodstuffs were grown at the expense of fodder and pasture. The people were an industrial society leaving no time for proper stock management or for making dairy produce as the spring and summer was the kelp-making season.

Sheep farming was becoming important. Larger breeds of sheep had been imported and, although the experiment was not totally successful in South Uist, the competition for summer pasture and the changes in vegetation as a result of sheep grazing had started. Horses were needed for the kelp industry and competed for land, grazing and fodder. Both 'old' and 'new' Statistical Accounts report overpopulation of horses. Potatoes were replacing bear barley as the main subsistence crop; these require a different land management

regime. Hay was made but it is not clear whether this hay was made from 'natural' or cultivated grass mixtures. Walker says that hay was not made until 1756 (McKay 1981: 78). In Uist grass requires manuring or a fertilizer, so there could have been over-cropping. The traditional run-rig system was breaking down as a consequence, partially, of manpower problems as all were engaged in the kelp industry. The 'salt laws' worked to the advantage of kelp profits but to the disadvantage of manufacturing other products; as a result, there was no incentive to diversify.

All these changes made a difference to South Uist but the effect on a specific site is impossible to quantify. High Town seems to have been abandoned in the first decades of the 19th century.

Housing from c.1800 to 1930

In South Uist terminology the absolute diagnostic characteristic of a 'blackhouse' is that it has no chimneys. The construction of the wall is of no importance; although frequently it is of stone, it is un-mortared and un-rendered but it can be of turf or a mixture. A turf house at NF 769 281 was still in use until about 1955. Neither is the presence or absence of windows or the roof style of importance. A house with chimneys and a thatched roof is simply a 'thatched house'. Again the presence or absence of windows and the wall construction are of no diagnostic importance. Thatched house walls often contain mortar, especially around the chimneys, and are frequently rendered and lime-washed. A 'white house', in local parlance, is – typically – used for farmhouses built c.1800–1850, with chimneys and a slated roof, and frequently rendered and lime-washed.

In 1805 there is the Bald map, and in 1817–1822 there are rentals. Knowledge of east coast ruins and sites such as Carra Lochskipport, Onish, Mol a tuath, Corodale and Ronaglac suggests that the main blackhouse of the settlement was longer than that described by Kissling (1943: 75–99). This is confirmed in the 1881 census where houses on the east side of South Uist are typically described as having three or four rooms with windows, with those on the west side in the crofting townships as having only two. In these houses the windows were skylights, not set into the wall. According to the 1903 Crofters Commission report it seems that wall windows and chimneys were added together no matter whether the house was modified or if it was built new. The houses built after the 1886 Crofting Act are mostly all the three-roomed type and the roof could be of thatch as late as 1930. From about 1900 other roofing materials such as felt, corrugated iron and slate were used and this dictated the building of gable ends. Houses with gable ends could be thatched but they are not common in South Uist; they are more frequent in North Uist. Unlike thatched houses in Lewis and Tiree, the thatched roof of a Uist house invariably overlapped the outer wall.

The milch cow(s) and calves were kept at the lower end of the house, near the door. It has been suggested that the buildings on the east side of the island were longer

because the dairy was incorporated under the one roof, as residents would have no need to practice transhumance. The formation of sheep farms ended the practice and the shieling life. Separation of man and beast was started by the 'improvers' and was accelerated when security of tenure gave a boost to housing improvements.

Pre-emigration economy c.1840

In 1837 the minister states that there are 2,145 horses in the parish, 5,254 cattle including stirks and 7,042 sheep. There are also about 100 goats. This gives proportions of 1 horse : 2.4 cattle : 3.3 sheep. In 1911 the proportions were 1 horse : 3.2 cattle : 11.2 sheep. These figures indicate that, in 1837, sheep were not very important in the economy and that foraging by sheep had not yet significantly altered the 'natural' vegetation. By 1911, after seven decades of increasing sheep numbers and the almost total lack of grazing by cattle, the 'natural' vegetation climax was sheep-induced, rather than induced by cattle or mixed farming.

The Rev. R. MacLean (1845) also recommends liming of peat soils with machair sand to grow bear barley and oats. This was certainly done on the west side of South Uist; liming is still integral to re-seeding but it is unlikely to have happened before clearance in Locheynort. MacLean comments on the effect of lotting, the most significant effect being that meal had been exported from Uist since land had been divided. In the statistical account the minister gives a table of gross raw products for the parish (Table 18.3). At that time in Locheynort there was considerable pressure of population because the farms had been cleared. Because ploughable land is severely limited, most cultivation was by spade or *cas crom* (see Chapter 19).

Locheynort is not the land for the small oats (*A. strigosa*) commonly grown in Uist (Fraser Darling 1955: 217; see Chapter 19) and, if barley is grown, it requires heavy manuring. Varieties of large oats will grow but in 1837 potatoes were the main crop; this is confirmed in Table 18.3. Although potatoes were, according to tradition, introduced by ClanRanald in 1743, Martin notes them as being grown in the islands c.1695.

Implements used for cultivation are described by MacQueen in 1793 and by MacLean in 1837 (MacQueen 1793: 307; MacLean 1845: 191; see also Chapter 19). In Locheynort the use of a plough of any sort before the clearance would have been most unlikely so all cultivation was in lazy beds, whether this was for cereal or potatoes (Crawford 1962: 244). On the east side of South Uist traditionally the land was broken by growing potatoes before combining two lazy beds for a cereal crop (MacLellan 1962: 4). This means that abandoned cereal beds are twice as wide as abandoned potato beds; as an approximation, potato beds are 0.75m to 1.25m wide and cereal beds are 2m to 3m wide. On the west side of the island old rigs are found both in machair and inbye land. These are usually wider than the lazy beds on the east side. Potatoes have been planted in drills on this land since 1837.

Sheep and cotters

After a period of land neglect resulting from the industrialization of the coast area in the kelp era, followed by about two decades of intense cultivation, Locheynort was finally abandoned to shepherds and sheep, except for a few cotters at the extreme west end. There appears to be no ecological study that compares the un-crofted areas of Locheynort such as Ronaglac with similar areas in South Lochboisdale or Loch Carnan that were lotted in 1818 and were receiving areas for displaced people. Biologically the differences in habitat may be worth investigation. At places where shepherds and cotters were resident, the traditional cultivation and farming practice continued but transhumance was forbidden (Carmichael 1885: 459; Campbell 1884: 470). Sheep fanks were built to handle the flock but, when dipping became normal and then compulsory, dipping baths were constructed near water.

Seaweed and kelp

The kelp industry flourished between *c.* 1760 and *c.* 1825 but there was a resurgence around 1900. Although ‘puffers’ such as the *Glen Shirra* called at Locheynort to collect kelp, it is not known how much cutting there was around the shores of the loch at that time, as payment was credited to crofters only with the opening of the seaweed-drying factory in Boisdale in about 1935. With the construction of roads from the 1950s onwards there was some commercial cutting.

Marine activities

Locheynort was the only harbour noted by Martin (1703: 84); it is one of three principal harbours in 1837 (MacLean 1845: 195) but it is not recorded in the Crofters Commission report for 1903. This indicates a decline in importance. As Locheynort was most important in the early period, identification of port structures must await access to primary sources not available in Uist. Published place-names may help to locate sites and unpublished place-names such as Sgaile na Ramh (‘the fissure of the oars’) and Tobata chom (‘the bent wall or pier’) could give more indication of maritime activities within the loch.

Small boats were used for fishing, to reach larger vessels at anchor, for seaweed cutting and to reach islands for stock management. Martin (1703) says that seal was important in the diet. Larger vessels used the loch, from the ClanRanald birlinn to the puffer *Glen Shirra*. Naturally, much fishing was for home consumption but the export trade was important too. It is suspected that Locheynort residents contributed to the export trade from the start of the period but all reports stress either Boisdale’s interest or those of mainlanders from the east coast. In 1764 the Rev. Dr Walker describes the importance of east coast ling fishing for trade with the ports of the Clyde. In 1794 Munro talks of shark oil, and of cod and ling; he also talks of Peterhead fishermen (Munro 1794: 296–7). Forty years later, the Rev. R. MacLean blamed lack of capital for the displaced crofters of the west side not pursuing the fishing.

In 1903 the Crofters Commission comment on fisheries but the only port mentioned is Lochboisdale, although it is known that locals from other east coast communities were selling through agents based in South Lochboisdale and Lochmaddy. Locally it is generally accepted that Boisdale cornered the commercial market by the 17th century, and that agents have always been based at the ‘south end’ no matter where the home port of the fishing boat might be. The internal ‘swap shop’ of Uist economy has probably gone on through the ages. Where fish were or are regularly processed, the waste manures the ground and this can be seen in the vegetation.

Fishermen’s cottages are close to the shore and the store is even closer, just above a mooring or beaching place. Often the store was cut from peat or glacial drifts if there was a low cliff of this type. Use was also made of clefts and fissures in solid rock.

Wildlife and flora

Martin (1703), Walker (McKay 1981), Munro (1794), and MacLean (1845) all give lists of wildlife and flora. There are also several Victorian and Edwardian descriptions of shooting and fishing activities, including the fishing book of Lochboisdale Hotel. The Nature Conservancy Council has much material (Allt Volagir [Bholagair] is an SSSI). Martin in particular describes the natural products and their use by the natives. Hunting was a pastime of chiefs in the 16th and 17th century and foresters were appointed to protect game, especially deer. There were no deer in South Uist in the 19th century; they were not re-introduced until about 1974. Falcons were also important before the introduction of firearms. Virtually every report used as a primary source mentions geese in connection with damage to crops and this is an ongoing problem. In 1798 one tacksman was given an allowance for protecting fishings; this was salmon or sea trout in the Howmore River but most lochs in Uist contain brown trout that, as far as can be ascertained were not protected until the mid-19th century.

Chronology

- c.* 1549 Dean Monro, Sir Donald, description of Uist.
- c.* 1560 Description of two parishes in South Uist.
- c.* 1560–1580? Description in French.
- c.* 1585 Rev. Timothy Pont map survey (MS 36 National Library of Scotland).
- c.* 1597 Chief asked to produce land title. Battle between MacDonalds and MacLeods.
- 1609 Statutes of Icolmkill; inns to be established.
- 1616 ClanRanald enters bond and selects Howbeg as mains farm.
- 1626 First record of a minister in South Uist, Donald MacMillan ‘a very old man’ according to Bishop Knox.
- 1638 Establishment of Presbyterianism as established Church in Scotland.

- 1654 Blaeu map. *Atlas Novus* published.
- c.1658 Cromwell's frigate wrecked in Locheynort. Minister shelters Royalist general.
- 1662 Episcopalianism established in Church of Scotland.
- 1672 Bornish becomes factor to ClanRanald.
- 1683 Feu charter to Bornish from ClanRanald.
- 1695 Presbyterianism finally established as Church of Scotland.
- c.1695 Martin Martin from Skye researching for 'The Western Isles'.
- 1697 Records of severe storm damage in the Uists.
- 1707 Ormaclate castle built.
- 1710 Rev. Aeneas MacDonald renounces church lands in South Uist.
- 1715 Ormaclate castle burnt.
- 1726 ClanRanald title passes to Donald of Benbecula, resident at Nunton.
- 1746, May–June Prince Charles Edward Stuart in South Uist.
- 1764–1771 Rev. Dr John Walker's 'Report on the Hebrides'.
- 1776 Publication of Murdo MacKenzie's 'Charts of the Western Isles'.
- 1794 'Old' Statistical Account (Rev. George Munro for South Uist, Rev. A. MacQueen for North Uist).
- 1798 Register of Sasines (GD 128/49/3/2x).
- 1799 Construction of road from Ormaclate to Locheynort to take carts.
- 1805 Map by William Bald published.
- 1811 Publication of J. MacDonald's 'General view of Agriculture in the Hebrides'
- 1817–1818 Start of lotting (rent rolls GD 237/120/1/4 & 5). Start of Bornish parish records.
- 1822 Rent abstract (GD 201/1/351/20).
- c.1830–1831 Start of evictions for farm leases (GD 201/351/23 & 24).
- 1836 Re-issue of Bald map. Building of St Mary's church, Bornish.
- 1837 'New' Statistical Account (Rev. R. MacLean for South Uist).
- 1838 ClanRanald sells estate to Col. John Gordon of Cluny.
- 1841 Census.
- 1844 Advertisement by South Uist estate for grazings to let.
- 1846–1850 Potato famine.
- 1848 Building of Howmore church.
- 1851 Census. This year was the height of the forced emigration from South Uist. The *Admiral* sailed from Lochboisdale after the census.
- c.1855 Construction of main road that replaced the machair track.
- 1861 Census.
- 1863 Publication of chart surveyed by Captain H.C. Otter.
- 1871 Census.
- 1873 Survey of South Uist by Ordnance Survey.
- 1881 Census. Publication of some 6" to 1 mile O.S. maps.
- 1884 'Napier' Commission – parliamentary enquiry into the condition of crofters.
- 1886 Crofting Act.
- 1896 Collection of oral tradition by the Rev. Fr. Allan MacDonald of Eriskay. Rev. Donald MacColl's notebook on evictions and emigration.
- 1903 Publication of the second edition of O.S. map of South Uist.
- 1905 Publication of 1903 Crofters Commission report.
- 1907 Crofting of Locheynort. Fishermen's holdings created.
- 1914 Crofting of North Locheynort and South Locheynort. Building of houses, paths and a school.
- c.1951 Road construction to North and South Locheynort.

Glossary

Because landholding and land use are complicated in South Uist, a short glossary is provided to define words used in this report.

General

Gearraidh ploc

a turf or peat wall.

Lazy bed (*feannagan taomaidh*)

a long narrow, raised bed of peat or black soil used for cultivation, often of potatoes. Not a rig.

Middle District (*Na Meadhanan*)

the area of South Uist between about Howmore and Milton, the hinterland to Locheynort. The community council represents residents from Frobost to Drimsdale.

Moderate ministers

those clergy of the Church of Scotland more interested in agriculture than their religious responsibilities.

Bailie (*baillidh*)

the factor or land agent.

Settlement patterns and land division

Baile (town)

used here for a pre-clearance or unlotted nucleated settlement. The inhabitants could be joint tenants or sub-tenants.

Township

used here for an area that has been lotted or crofted. This often gives a linear settlement pattern as each croft has one house.

- In-bye**
the area of arable or improved land available to residents of either a *baile* or a township. It was formerly held in common (see also Chapter 19).
- Out-bye**
the area of pasture shared between the residents of a *baile* or township. Formerly this was good pasture as well as the hill grazings (see also Chapter 19).
- Run-rig**
a method of land allocation where strips of land (rigs) were reallocated each year to shareholders in the *baile* (see also Chapter 19).
- Rig**
a long, narrow cultivated strip of ground. These marks can be seen both on blackland where they are usually wider than lazy beds, and on machair and semi-machair. Each tenant had several separate rigs (see also Chapter 19).

Land holding

- Feu Charter**
land held by charter with obligations to a feudal superior with payment in service, kind or cash.
- Tack**
a farm held by one tenant for a limited period of time, with the land being worked in run-rig by sub-tenants.
- Farm**
a farm held by one tenant with other residents being employees.
- Joint tenancy**
a farm worked by tenants who were shareholders.
- Pendicle**
an area of land separated from a farm's common grazing and leased to one tenant in sole occupancy.
- Lot**
a division of land of the *baile* giving each shareholder a fixed share.
- Croft**
similar to lot but with security of tenure.

Landowners

- ClanRanald (*Clann 'ic Ailein*)**
the hereditary chief of most of South Uist, Moidart and the Small Isles, from 1373 to 1838. The land owned by the chief.
- Boisdale**
the hereditary minor chief of the south end of South Uist.
- Bornish**
the hereditary minor chief of the lands of Upper Bornish (*Uachdar Bhornais*).

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Editor's note: Gill MacLean died in 1998. This paper

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The 1989 report was divided into three sections, of which the historical sections Part 2 and most of Part 1 (acknowledgements, glossary, chronology and bibliography) are published here. The introduction in Part 1 and the conclusions in Part 3 have not been included since they are not part of the historical analysis and address matters of policy and the then current state of information availability. A copy of the 1989 typewritten manuscript was deposited in Kildonan Museum.

Notes

- 1 Now Stòras Uibhist. NB: all footnotes have been added by the editor.
- 2 Place-names in this chapter have not been Gaelicized but retain the form in which they appear in Gill's manuscript; the place-names therefore derive from the documentary sources. The reader is referred to the Glossary of Place-Names in the Appendix to this volume to identify modern Gaelic equivalents; other chapters of this volume (particularly Chapters 2, 4 and 7) also contain relevant information on many place-names mentioned in this chapter.
- 3 The editor reads this name as *Totsnamaekan* = Totenamachair ('Ruins on the machair'), probably a machair settlement at Cill Donnain recently abandoned at the time of Blaué's map-making. See Chapter 2.
- 4 There is no indication in the MS of the source of this quotation.
- 5 As well as being reported as the major crop in the historical accounts (see Chapter 19), barley is also found commonly amongst the carbonized plant remains retrieved from both prehistoric and historic sites, with oat occurring occasionally on historic period settlements. See, for example, contributions by Smith *passim* this volume.

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19 The ethnohistory of Hebridean agriculture

Helen Smith

This chapter examines the environment and traditional farming practices of the Western Isles, with special reference to South Uist. Drawing on historical and ethnographic documentary sources, the traditional system of land organization and the agricultural regimes in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland are discussed. Secondly, with specific reference to the Outer Hebrides, the methods of tillage, crop processing and animal husbandry are described.

Machair cultivation

Machair, although productive when fertilized, is problematic to cultivate. The alkalinity of the shell sand base means pH is above the optimum for most crops whilst nitrogen, phosphate, potash, copper and manganese are deficient. The low organic content means the soil's capacity to hold water is low and, in dry periods, these conditions are exacerbated. Most of the machair is exposed so that not only is wind erosion a problem to the soil itself but the seed and crops suffer from the lack of shelter and can suffer damage from salt sea-spray (Grant 1979).

The unstable sand dunes and machair are particularly prone to wind erosion and sand drift in the winter months. Occasions are noted in the historical documents of sudden blow-outs during storms, causing arable fields and settlements to be desolated by the liberated sand. Such an incident was noted by Walker (1764–1771) on South Uist, where some arable crops were covered by up to a metre of sand within a few days. In the early 19th century, the islands of Heiskeir were virtually abandoned for 15 years as a result of severe storm damage that denuded the land of grass and soil (Otter 1867). Digging up rue (*Galium verum*), used for dyeing cloth, also threatened the stability of sand in many areas and the practice was banned by magistrates in South Uist (MacLean 1837). Further recommendations to prevent destabilization were to plant marram or to place turf sods taken from adjacent ground on the affected area (MacLean 1837).

Agricultural organization and farming regimes in the Highlands and Islands

The sources

In considering the historical aspects of agriculture in the Outer Hebrides, the physical and climatic characteristics specific to this region need to be recognized, for these will have influenced the nature of the agrarian systems evolved over the many years of occupation. In particular, poor and intractable soils and the short growing season pose serious problems. Land shortage and abundant labour supply also directly influenced the methods that were developed. The resultant agricultural regimes should, however, be considered within the framework of local bye-laws, regulations and customs, some obviously sensible, others latterly restricting but all adopted as a means of maintaining these communal activities within the challenging environment.

The evolution, execution and effectiveness of the Hebridean farming system can be elucidated by a detailed study of the available historical documentary, testamentary and statistical evidence. For the 16th, 18th and early 19th centuries, the bulk of this information is provided by travel writers such as Monro (1549), Martin (1716), Walker (1764–1771), the Rev. J.L. Buchanan (1793), MacDonald (1811) and Pennant (1776); and from the Old and New Statistical Accounts such as those written by the Rev. G. Munro (1793) and the Rev. R. MacLean (1837).

At the end of the 18th century estate surveys were commissioned by many landowners, with a view to improving land utilization; the report by Blackadder (1800 and 1813) on North Uist and the South Uist estate plans by Bald (1805) clarify land use and the state of agriculture at this time. Later testimonies are descriptive of 'crofting', that is the modified system of land tenure and use imposed on these communities by the landlords in the early 19th century, based on the recommendations of the earlier estate surveys. Crofting was intended to improve the agriculture, by ending the traditional system



Figure 19.1. A turf-walled blackhouse on Eriskay, photographed by Werner Kissling in 1934

of run-rig in favour of fixed tenure and by extending the areas cultivated whilst maintaining a high population to process the kelp, which was lucrative to the proprietor. Such descriptions were provided earlier this century in Carmichael's detailed account for the Crofters Commission (1884) and in a second report by the Crofters Commission 20 years later (1905).

Ethnological studies made this century are an invaluable source of extra information and provide comprehensive descriptions of agricultural activities, often unobtainable from the historical literature. Studies such as those made by Fenton (1978a; 1978b) for the Northern Isles and Lewis in the Western Isles clarify the workings of these localized farming systems. The former is a detailed compilation of historical and ethnological data and highlights the extent of specific differences between these disparate, marginal agrarian communities, each with individual adaptations suited to localized conditions, where the pressures of land availability and growing population were unique for each region.

In the Shetland Isles, conditions were the hardest: with limited arable land producing meagre crops, the situation was only offset by the possibility of raising enough stock on the rough upland pasture to supplement both diet and rent (Shaw 1980). In the low-lying Orkney Isles, fertile arable land was not limited but pasture was, which led to the development of a strong arable base and less emphasis on the pastoral element of the economy (Shaw 1980). In most of the Outer Hebrides, however, although the varied terrain resulted in sufficient arable land in most places, with some areas as productive as Orkney, the abundant hill grazing easily provided for a large number of stock and the system that developed reflected a more balanced mixture of pastoral and arable farming.

The arable land

The agricultural communities in Post-Medieval Scotland were commonly grouped together in multiple-tenancy farms (Fenton 1980), though not exclusively (Devine 1994: 9–10, 24–9). The size varied, depending on the availability of land and plough power to work it, but was usually only the size of a hamlet or small village, containing on average about a dozen farmers (Smout 1969; Fenton 1980; Shaw 1980). This was the farming township, variously known as the *toun*, *kirk-toun*, *wintertoun* or *clachan*.

The township acted as the base for most arable activities. The land within it was used for open-field cultivation, wherever it was possible or appropriate to till and, where not, the land was used as pasture or natural meadow. In the Highland and Island regions the township settlements were usually scattered, following the best available arable land (Smout 1969), which in most places tended to be near the coastal fringes. In the Outer Hebrides, the majority of settlement was situated along the western side of the islands, the location of the prime arable ground, the machair and blackland (Fenton 1980; Caird 1979).

The entire *toun* was usually leased by the proprietor directly to a group of joint tenants or to a tacksman, who in turn rented out the land to tenants who actually practiced the farming. The tacksman was often a kinsman of the landowner (in later years, often an outsider) and he was responsible for the collection of rents from the tenants, as produce, labour or money (Lythe and Butt 1975; see also Chapter 18). An alternative to this arrangement was for the proprietor to manage his own land directly (MacDonald 1811). The systems of leasing have implications for the reliability of the Old and New Statistical Account as a means of gauging the number of tenants, because the true



Figure 19.2. Creels were used for collecting peat and dung; here in Kissling's photograph they are slung on an Eriskay pony for moving peats

number working a *toun* could be concealed by ambiguities in the rental accounts.

The summer pasture

In winter months, when the inclement weather dictated mostly home-based activities, the animals would graze on the unplanted open fields within the township. Once crops were sown and had started to show through the soil, it was vital to keep the animals off the arable land. Within the township there existed a certain amount of permanent pasture – the droveways and ground too wet or difficult to cultivate and the semi-permanent pasture of fields under fallow. These were inadequate, however, for the needs of the entire herd, in both quantity and, by this stage, quality. In early summer, therefore, the animals were moved beyond the designated limits of the township to the common grazing, the area of rough moorland adjacent to and surrounding the settlement.

The common grazing was co-ordinated with the main settlement as a complementary pastoral base, providing 'unlimited' supplies of grass in the summer months, at a safe distance from the growing crops, and also constituted the main source of turf and peat used for fuel, building and fertilizing (Fenton 1976). With the exception of the door land of the central Highlands (Fenton 1980), *tounmal* of the Northern Isles, the occasionally documented *kailyard* of the Outer Hebrides and small but permanent adjuncts of land allotted to tenants for use as kitchen gardens and

general grazing (Shaw 1980), it appears from the historical records that the township pasture land was held in common, both within and outside the settlement. *Plantiecrues* or *plantiecrubs*, in the *scult* or common grazing areas of Shetland, Orkney and Caithness, used for bringing on *hail* seed, were also allotted to individual crofts (Fenton pers. comm.). Together with communal tenure came the need for organization; general dates were often assigned for the removal of stock from the township land, thus scheduling the movement of stock to coincide with the need of the arable sector.

In the Highlands and Western Isles, where the hilly and often mountainous terrain also provided important areas of extensive upland grazing, there were situated secondary and more remote bases for summer pastoral activities: these were the shielings, in Gaelic *àirigh*, the temporary huts of which formed a nominal *summertoun* (Fenton 1980; see also Chapter 7). The development of a system of transhumance to the shieling bases, by the people and stock, was a natural and sensible adaptation to the resources of the region, and did not detract from the necessary role of the nearer moorland grazings. Together with the arable base, the moorland grazings and shielings were essential components of the rhythmical subsistence economy in these regions where, owing to the nature of the environment, great emphasis was placed upon pastoralism, and the importance of the summer grazing base.

Historical records do not directly report the use of shielings in the Northern Isles although, as Shaw (1980)



Figure 19.3. Thatching a blackhouse, photographed by Werner Kissling

points out, this does not negate the possibility of such transhumance and it by no means lessens the importance placed upon pastoral activities. The low-lying Orkney Isles do not have the same upland regions as the Highlands and Western Isles, and the Shetland Isles, although rugged, do not provide grazing areas of either the same extent or at as great a distance from the farm base (Shaw 1980). Instead, it can only be inferred that the different terrains dictated development of regimes more suited to the local geography, with grazing requirements satisfied where possible by the moorland pastures, without 'wholesale' removal to the distant hills.

An interesting feature of the Hebridean transhumance system concerns the grazing practices on the smaller islands, where the amount of upland grazing was limited. The people would instead move their stock to other small uninhabited islands or mainland areas adjacent to their settlements for the duration of the summer months, in order to take advantage of the grazing land. This was noted to have taken place in Lismore, in the Inner Hebrides, in the 17th century (Shaw 1980) and is also documented for the islands of Heiskeir, off the west coast of North Uist (Beveridge 1911; MacGregor 1969), and those of Great Bernera, off Lewis (MacGregor 1949; Fenton 1980). Nevertheless, despite the similarity of terrain, there is no record of this same practice on the Northern Isles.

The head dyke

The head dyke was the crucial line that divided the township land from the common grazing areas (see Chapter 7). A significant territorial boundary, it was important, where open-field farming was in operation, as a means of separating the frequently hungry animals from the struggling crops. In these areas it normally took the form of a broad stone and earthen dyke, and could be in all stages of repair and disrepair (Smout 1969; Shaw 1980; Fenton 1980).

In the spring the head dyke was closed; most of the animals would be kept outside the boundary during the cereal growing season, except for the milk cows and draught animals, which could be tethered inside buildings, yards and droveways, or within 'folds' or 'pounds' for convenience. In the autumn, when the crops were harvested, the head dyke would be reopened to allow the animals freedom to graze the township lands along with the common grazings and, in this respect, the head dyke acted more as a 'control valve' than a barrier (Fenton 1980).

In some areas, more time and labour were invested in the building of dykes than in others. For example, a second dyke, the 'march dyke', was sometimes erected between the lands of neighbouring farms. This was more common in areas where arable areas lay close together, in the flatter, more fertile islands (Shaw 1980). The whole

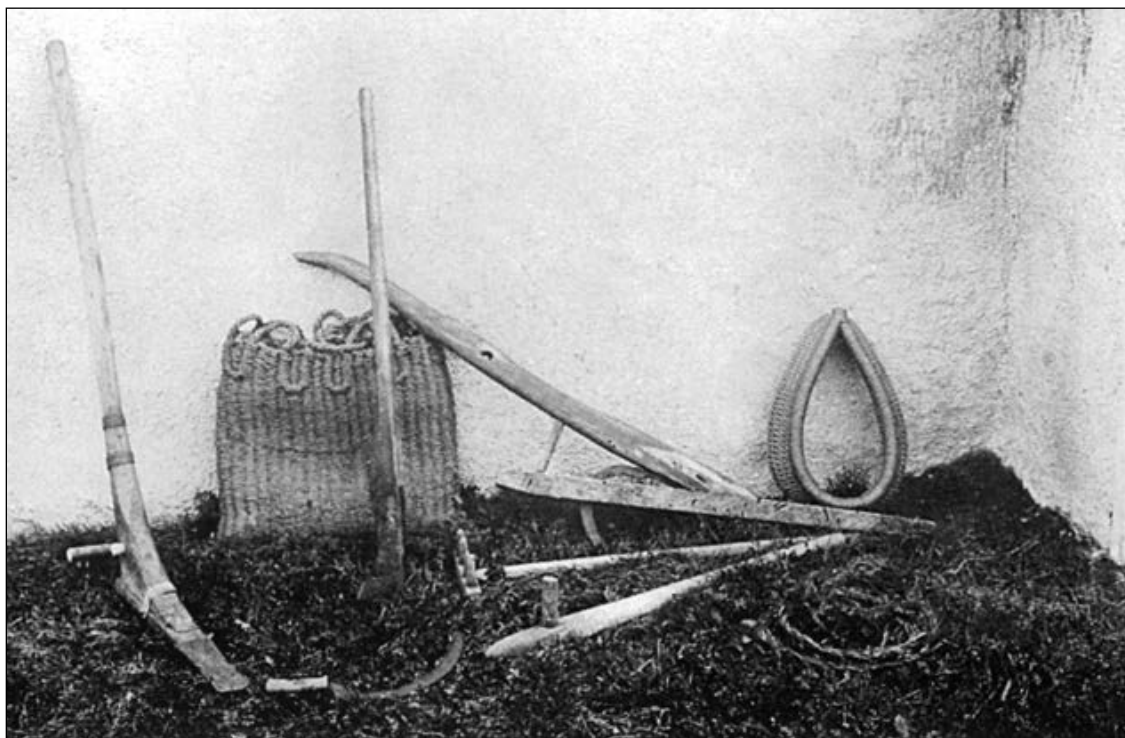


Figure 19.4. A ristle, cas-chrom and other agricultural equipment, photographed by Erskine Beveridge (1911)

practice of dyke-building was more extensive, and their maintenance more conscientious, in the Northern Isles than in the Outer Hebrides, a feature often noted in the historical documents and one which most likely reflects a geographical phenomenon rather than adherence to old custom. Such labour-intensive tasks were mainly developed and retained if they had relevance, and the difference most probably relates to the availability of pasture; in the Western Isles the distant hills and shielings provided physical distance between the crops and the hungry animals until harvest time, when the cereals were removed from the open fields and the animals could once again return to the township land and the refreshed pastures within, thereby diminishing the necessity for a head dyke.

The geography of the Northern Isles differs from most of the Outer Hebrides: the lack of extensive upland grazing at sufficient distance from the settlement and crops prevented the development of a safely separated pastoral base. This emphasizes the importance of dyke-building in the Northern Isles as a means of keeping the animals away from the arable land. This is well demonstrated in Shetland in the 17th century, where the very limited amount of arable led to regulations ordering the erection of dykes. Likewise, in Orkney, bye-laws decreed the 25th March as the date by which dykes should be effective (Shaw 1980), around which time the sowing of crops began.

The neglect of dyke-building in the Outer Hebrides was noted by the early agricultural observers and the lack of any form of enclosure was blamed for the recorded poor state of farming (MacDonald 1811). The 'march dyke' was evidently important in some areas, however, which may reflect the greater importance of separating stock belonging

to one farmstead from a neighbouring farmstead rather than the need to set in place a barrier between crops and hill pasture on any one farm (for Shetland, see Fenton 1978a: 38–9, 70). Martin describes in detail the custom employed in North Uist to pass on the knowledge of the 'march dyke' location where such boundaries were in danger of being lost:

'They lay a quantity of ashes of burnt wood in the ground, and put big stones above the same; and for conveying the knowledge of this to posterity, they carry some boys from both villages next the boundary, and there whip'em soundly, which they will be sure to remember, and tell it to their children'

(Martin 1716:114)

Most recommendations for agricultural improvement involved the enclosing of land, for open-field farming was broadly considered retrogressive, and so the lack of head dykes in the Outer Hebrides was poorly regarded. The logic behind the Hebridean response to environment, entailing the replacement of these protective barriers with the practice of transhumance, was not recognized by the agricultural improvers who recommended the enclosing of land. Head dykes became more necessary when commercial sheep-farming began to close off the shieling grounds and *summertoun* and *wintertoun* were separated.

Land organization

The most important component of the township was the farmland. This was all the land enclosed within the head dyke: arable, pasture and meadow. The system of land



Figure 19.5. Women and children working in the fields, photographed by Werner Kissling

use that developed varied depending on the conditions of land tenure, the nature of the terrain and the availability of land.

The traditional system of land tenure and farming was abandoned in the majority of areas very early on, yet was still practiced in parts of the Hebrides until the late 18th to early 19th centuries (Walker 1764–1771; Pennant 1776). In this system, all the land was held in common by the husbandmen; cultivation and crop sharing were communal and the rent was paid as one lump sum. Common cultivation preserved a strong collective interest in the land, important in this area in the years prior to the 17th century when raiding by neighbouring clans was possible. The sophistication of agricultural methods came second to the security of the settlement (Shaw 1980).

More usually, the type of farming that developed in these areas was similar to that practised in lowland Scotland, although tailored to suit the different environments of the Highlands and Islands. Instead of completely collective arrangements, the arable component of the township land was divided between the tenants, who held their own share as a number of strips and patches, scattered amongst the land of their neighbours. The areas of pasture and meadow were not usually divided but utilized on a communal basis.

The arable land was generally classified into two types, 'infield' and 'outfield', the former usually farmed continuously and the latter given over to periods of fallow.

Areas of land within these categories were apportioned between the farmers, and the tenancies of individual shares were rotated according to township regulations. In this way each tenant farmer had a share of the different land types, in equal proportion and for an equal length of time as his neighbour.

The subdivision of the arable land did not preclude joint tenure and, whether the tenants were working the land collectively or on an individual basis, the nature of joint tenure established the role of the tacksman as intermediary between the farmers and landowner (Lythe and Butt 1975).

Run-rig

Run-rig was a method of land organization that allowed fair allocation of good and poorer soils by physically dividing and dispersing the land between the farmers, and then rotating the tenancies. The strips of land that formed the basis for allocation and working were known as 'rigs'. The cultivation usually took the form of ploughed ridge and furrow but this was dependent on the terrain and, in some places, spade cultivation would be employed (Slaven 1975; Fenton 1976).

Ridge cultivation was not unique to Scotland. It was partly the result of ploughing the cultivation strips of soil inwards, the furrows always being turned towards the crown, which created the crested appearance of the ridge

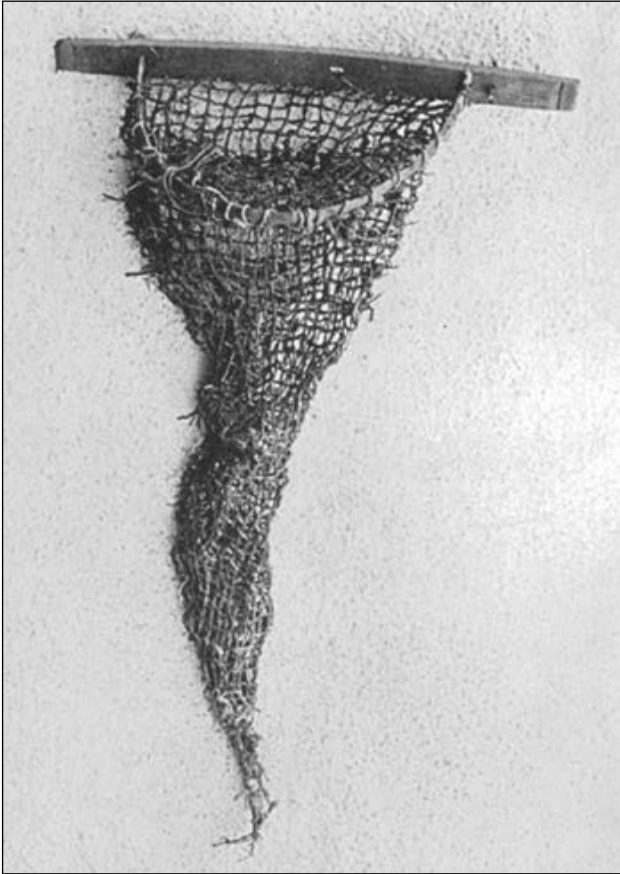


Figure 19.6. A *tabh* (net) made of grass roots, photographed by Erskine Beveridge (1911)

on which the crops were grown. This enhanced the growing bed and also created the furrows that served as ditches for draining the surface water. Even on land that drained naturally, however, the rig was still the basic working unit, as its width was particularly well suited to the use of hand tools and hand techniques of sowing *etc.* (Fenton 1976).

The rigs varied in width according to the local organization of the land, the nature of the terrain and the soil type. Overall, they varied from 5.5m to 11m in width, rose to 1.20m at the crest, were often curved and generally ran up and down hill, thereby providing a minimal form of drainage (Fenton 1976; Slaven 1975). The special feature of the run-rig arrangement was that the tenancy of the rigs was initially re-allocated every one to three years, thus giving each a fair share of all the soil types, especially as the strips were always scattered, each one between those of different joint tenants. In this way, run-rig disallowed any specific or continuous holding of arable soil on an individual basis.

It is from the system of rotating the rigs that the name run-rig is derived. Carmichael (1884) defines the term run-rig as a modification of the Gaelic *roinn ruith* meaning 'division run' or parallel divisions. He suggests the word 'run' is used in the sense of common, as in Gaelic the system was also called *mor earann* or *mor shearann* meaning 'great division' and 'great land' respectively (Carmichael 1884).

His account is direct evidence for the longevity of this ancient system and for its persistence still in the Outer Hebrides at his time of writing:

'The system of Run-Rig prevailed of old over the whole British Isles and the continent of Europe. It was common in Ireland, it is extinct in England, and obsolete in Scotland, except to a limited extent in the Western Isles. There the system still lives in three different forms, more or less modified – two of these being gradations of decay'

(Carmichael 1884:452)

Carmichael describes in detail the exact procedure of the land sharing on the run-rig basis according to custom on the islands of Heisker, one of the places where a remnant form of this system continued to survive until abandonment of the islands in the 1940s. He relates the stages of the operation, from the initial choice of the area of land to be divided amongst the members of the community, through the role of the constable in dividing this into the appropriate number of strips, to the drawing of lots from a hat (Carmichael 1884).

Run-rig was discontinued at different times and in different places in the Hebrides but generally came to an end in the first half of the 19th century, particularly with the imposition of crofting. The old-style communal land division is often referred to disparagingly by the writers of historical testimonies, especially those written around the time of the Improvements. MacDonald, in his *General View of the Agriculture of the Hebrides* recommended that 'run rig and co-partnerships in tillage and paying rents, ought, in every case, to be done away' (MacDonald 1811: 568), for he saw these arrangements of land tenure as the main obstacles to the improvement of the agricultural state of the Hebrides. MacLean (1837) is equally disapproving of run-rig, which continued in South Uist until 1818 according to his testimony. He describes the system as:

'attended with ruinous effect; the people were not so industrious as they have been since [the Improvements] nor did they preserve their corn and potatoes from being damaged by cattle'

(MacLean 1837: 190)

The lazy bed (feannag)

Lazy beds were basically the spade-dug equivalent to ridge and furrow (*cf.* run-rig), as they consisted of a series of raised beds with ditches in between (Fenton 1976). The lazy bed technique was used most commonly where ploughing was not possible, either because the nature of the terrain precluded the use of the plough (as for example on the peaty blackland, or ground too wet or stony), or simply because the technology was not available or had not been obtained (for example in Lewis, as noted by Walker 1764–1771). Lazy beds were also invaluable in the Hebrides as a means of artificially creating a cultivation bed on land that otherwise had insufficient depth of soil in which to grow anything (notably, the rocky areas around the lochs, where soil occurs



Figure 19.7. Gathering sheep for shearing and dipping, photographed by Werner Kissling

only in patches and even then is very shallow). Equally important, as a technique suited to the Hebrides, is the way in which lazy beds facilitate drainage so effectively, vital on the peaty areas where they are often situated.

To construct lazy beds, manure or seaweed was laid out onto the untouched ground in parallel 1m-wide strips, with approximately 1m between each strip. Turf was pared and flipped over onto the fertilizer from either side, and the newly exposed earth also piled up on top of the line of inverted turves and fertilizer (Fenton 1976). This operation was repeated for several strips, to form neat patches of prominent ridges, the total size of the area determined by the amount of land available and the requirements of the farmer. John Buchanan (1793) mentions the practice of lazy bedding in his *Travels in The Western Isles*, giving it a different Gaelic name, *taomadh*. He also describes the practice of *taomadh a broin*, that is when the middle of the ridge was cut out and spread to the sides, which was necessary when the crown of the bed became too sharp and needed flattening. He observed that, when the corn was sown on the ridge, it would be either harrowed or raked in preparation.

The digging of lazy beds was best performed as early in winter as possible, so that the newly dug wet peat could be exposed to the maximum amount of frost, in order to aid its reduction to a mould (MacDonald 1811). It was claimed by MacDonald (1811) that, if the same were done in summer, the 'moss' thrown from the furrows would immediately turn into hard peat. If the beds were prepared in advance, as

recommended by MacDonald, then the seed would have to be planted by dibbling holes and filling these in afterwards with a rake (Buchanan 1793). This was not always the case, however, and the lazy beds would often be dug in the spring, when either the seed corn or the seed potatoes would be placed onto the layer of dung or seaweed, and then covered with the earth out of the furrows (Buchanan 1793).

After their introduction to the islands in the mid-18th century (from Ireland to South Uist in 1743; Beveridge 1911), potatoes are the crop most commonly associated with lazy beds but before this date, at least in the 16th century (Fenton 1976), they proved to be excellent growing beds for a whole variety of crops. Bere was particularly suited to these beds, benefiting from the almost horticultural intensity (Fenton 1976).

The technique was also a good way of breaking up and reclaiming peat or waste land, for the previously compact earth would disaggregate with root action and the furrows aided drainage. Potatoes were especially suited to breaking up the soil surface and, once the crop had been pulled, the soil needed only to be raked over in preparation for barley or oats, with no extra manure necessary. Sometimes two lazy beds would be raked together to form a larger cultivation bed for the succeeding crop. This may account for why in some places, such as Lewis, quite large beds can be seen on slopes, permanently in place, and with retaining walls on the downhill side to counter the natural processes of soil creep (Fenton 1976).



Figure 19.8. Mary MacInnes and Bean Iagain Mhoir carding wool, photographed by Werner Kissling

The infield – outfield divide

The arable component of the township land lay entirely within the bounds of the head dyke and was usually divided into two categories: the ‘infield’ and ‘outfield’ (or ‘in-bye’ and ‘tillage’ after Darling 1955). These terms are descriptive of different arable land types, and hence different cultivation intensity; the two types could lie in intermingled blocks rather than as spatially separated fields (Smout 1969). There was no definitive pattern for the nature of the system was dictated by the terrain: some areas had no infield whilst others had no outfield.

The infield was the most intensively cultivated ground, whereas the outfield land rotated between short periods of cultivation and longer periods of fallow. In this way elements of simple shifting cultivation and the basic ‘one-field system’ of agriculture (in which land is utilized continuously in a rotation of arable, pasture and fallow) are combined as a rudimentary ‘two-field system’ (Slaven 1975). It has been argued that, given the intermittent cropping of the outfield, the agriculture practised in this form was in reality a variation of the one-field system (*ibid.*).

Where ground was poorly drained, as is common in these regions, the blocks of arable land were frequently

scattered and interspersed with a large proportion of pasture, so that the overall organization was a tripartite division of the townland: infield, outfield and permanent pasture – complemented by a fourth element, the common grazings and shielings (Dodgshon 1980). It is not possible to see such divisions in all areas of the Hebrides from the historical records, either because the divisions were not made or, possibly, because they were never documented.

The infield

The infield was the best available arable land, normally a quarter or less of the total cultivable land, usually farmed continuously in a crude rotation of crops. It commonly lay adjacent to or at least near to the settlement. In the case of the Outer Hebrides this was usually the sandy machair, where the fertile, light and well drained soil allowed plough cultivation, and the blackland, whose peaty and stony nature dictated spade cultivation in association with the lazy bed technique. Local variations did exist, and sometimes the land would be fallowed for several years after exhaustion by intensive cropping.

The infield was planted with a greater selection of cereal crops than the outfield, though even then the range was limited. It carried the ‘drink-crop’ of the community, ‘bere’ a local species of barley (4-row, hulled *Hordeum vulgare*), oat (the small black variety, *Avena strigosa*), and in some places rye (*Secale cereale*). The small black oats were well suited to exposed areas such as the Outer Hebrides because their light-weight nature meant they were better adapted than the heavier white oats to the harsh winds and rain (Campbell 1965).

In the Outer Hebrides, the machair was most commonly associated with oats but also supported bere and rye, while the blackland was best suited to bere, oats and, later, potatoes. The great extent of local variations within the Outer Hebrides can be demonstrated here for, although rye was grown on the Uists, it was not grown on Lewis according to Walker (1764–1771) and yet was grown on Harris prior to 1772 in great quantities, but its cultivation there stopped because it was apparently prejudicial to the soil (*ibid.*).

The most basic cropping regime was an alternation between bere one year and oats the next, as recorded for the blackland of South Uist by Walker (1764–1771) and also for Lewis and Harris (*ibid.*). More usually, the infield was farmed as a three-break system, where the whole area would be divided into three equal parts, one section only receiving manure but all three sections continually cultivated. The usual cropping schedule, the Outer Hebrides included, was bere in the first year, sown in spring (May) on the newly manured section, and then oats, also sown in spring (but earlier than the bere), with no extra fertilizer for the next two years. Again, local variations existed.

For example, rye could be included within the three-break system. Later, with the introduction of wheat and peas, a four- or five-break system existed, though this was not overly popular in the Outer Hebrides (Fenton 1976). This could possibly be connected to sowing times of wheat: if sown in the infield in November or December, it would

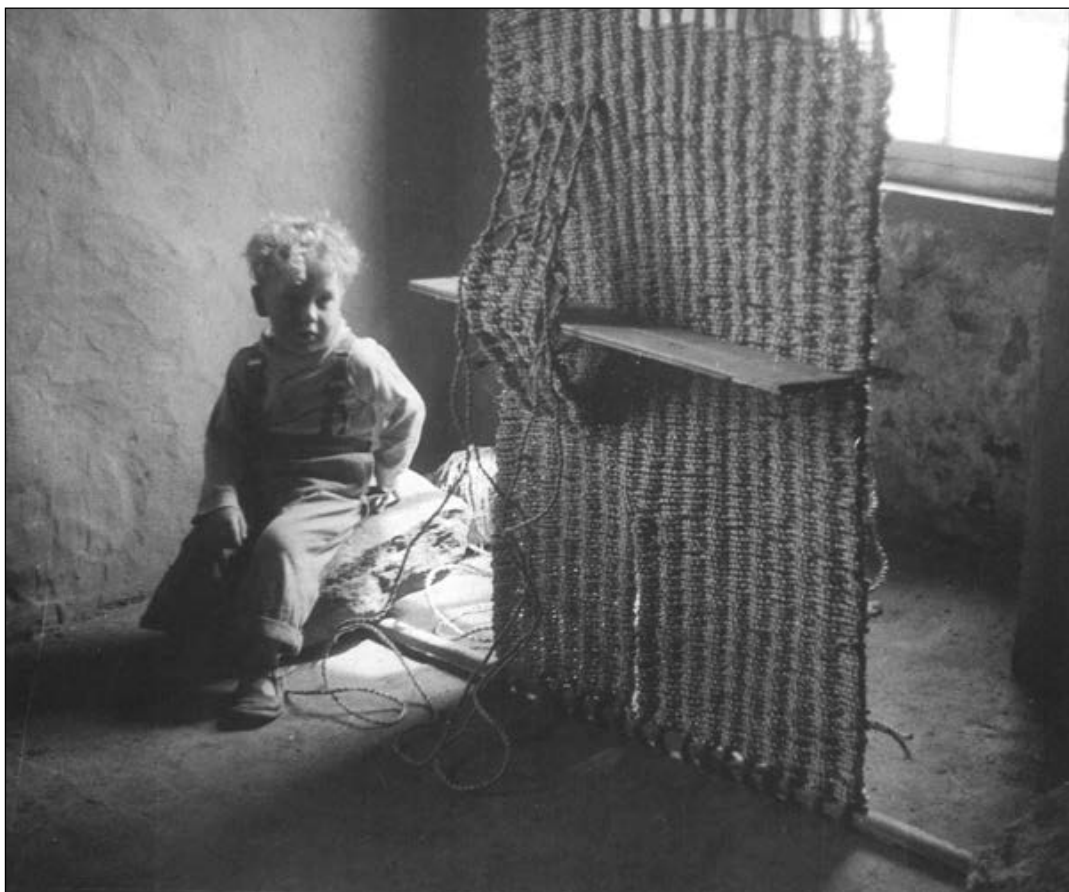


Figure 19.9. Weaving on the vertical loom, photographed by Werner Kissling

preclude the use of those areas for general grazing by the common herd during winter and would force the sown areas to be enclosed as individual units, contrary to the open-field arrangements of run-rig (Fenton 1976). This would be incompatible with the Hebridean system where the shortage of food for the animals in the winter months was so critical.

To achieve a useful level of soil fertility in order to maintain the continual cropping, the infield was the most regularly and intensively manured land, receiving the majority of the dung from the byre and stable – hence the alternative Lowland names ‘mucked land’ or ‘croftland’. It was quite usual in coastal areas for the more fertile and low-lying land near the shore to be the most intensively cultivated as the coast provided seaweed, vital not only as a way of returning moisture to the soil but also as an important additional source of fertilizer to that from the animals, albeit a burden to carry on the backs of either horses or humans (Shaw 1980). Consequently the nature and success of arable cultivation would have been influenced by the availability of fertilizer types and the logistics of their dispersal; such factors must have contributed to the many local variations that appear to have existed in infield rotation. The fact that coastal areas were the most intensively cultivated, even on low-lying islands where the whole area was fertile, confirms the importance of the availability of seaweed (Shaw 1980).

The outfield

The outfield consisted of a number of irregularly strewn and discontinuously cultivated patches of land, further from the settlement and often higher up the slope. The outfield land was usually of an inferior quality compared to the infield and of greater extent. In the Hebrides it was quite often located on the peatlands, where ploughing in rigs was not possible, and instead the lazy bed technique was employed. The unstable machair could, however, also be designated as outfield, the fallow periods affording it an opportunity to rest.

The outfield was worked extensively on a form of rotation in which a number of scattered patches could be under crop or fallowed as pasture at any given time, usually as a seven- or eight-break system. The most common regime was to alternate several years of fallow with only a few years of a less demanding, more tolerant crop, usually oats although bere was also grown in some places. Even so, the average return was often only three to one. The outfield has been likened to shifting cultivation because in some places it was cropped to the point of temporary exhaustion, when the grain returns no longer justified the cost of planting (in both effort and seed grain), and then abandoned (Campbell 1965; Smout 1969; Slaven 1975; Lythe and Butt 1975).

In areas of the Highlands and Outer Hebrides where pasture was plentiful, less emphasis was placed on the

outfield as a source of grass. Consequently, outfield cropping could be more frequent but, even so, theoretically no township would crop more than half of the outfield at any one time (Dodgshon 1980). The areas that had been cropped were left fallow so that grass would regenerate for pasture. Usually, as the cycle moved on, this ground was used as a temporary fold, receiving manure from the grazing animals in the process and being thus prepared for the next cropping (Fenton 1976). Because the Hebrides had an emphasis on stock rather than crop cultivation, however, the use of hill pasture and shielings meant there was less opportunity for regular outfield folding, for the herd would have been absent for three months of the year (Fenton 1976).

Infield and outfield should not be considered as inseparable from run-rig; they could and did exist apart (Dodgshon 1980). There has been much discussion on the origins of these systems of land division (Whittington 1973; Dodgshon 1975; 1980; Baker and Butlin 1973) but, as yet, no consensus of agreement. Whittington's (1973) hypothesis links outfield to shifting cultivation, with the development of the infield at a later date. Baker and Butlin (1973) suggest infield-outfield develops out of an infield system. There is little historical evidence available to clarify the matter and problems exist with both arguments. Dodgshon (1980) suggests a tenurial distinction, with infield as assessed land in the township records and outfield as non-assessed land, thereby establishing a sequence of development. Infield logically acquired an intensive character, being the initial nucleus of the toun. Explaining outfield is more difficult but it could have developed from use of the incidentally manured pasture land.

Farming practices in the Outer Hebrides

Agricultural regimes

The exact cropping rotation employed for the infield and outfield in the Outer Hebrides had local variations depending on the soil type and geography, as for everywhere else. In his *Report on the Hebrides* (1764–1771), the Rev. Dr Walker described the state of agriculture on South Uist, including the details of the cropping regime he observed, although this is obviously generalized for the whole island.

The machair was fertilized with 'sea wrack' and had one year of bere, followed by two years of rye with no extra fertilizer. It was then fallowed and, at the end of five, six, or seven years, cropped again in the same manner. The blackland he claims to have 'afforded crops of Grain immemorially, without respite' (Walker 1764–1771:77), with crops of bere and oats being taken alternately, the sea wrack being put to the bere crop only. This implies the standard infield practice of constant cropping, unlike the machair which, if left to fallow, implies it was being treated as the outfield. The yields are not consistent with this, however, for the machair is the more productive of the two land types: 25 or 26 pecks of barley meal per annum (the unit of land is not specified) from the machair as opposed to 12 or 14

pecks from the blackland although, as Walker points out, this land was kept in constant tillage. The yields of oats and rye were both seldom above fourfold; of the two, the inhabitants valued the rye crop more (*ibid.*). The yield of these crops was very much affected by the annual weather patterns for, after a wet summer, grain would be exported yet, after a dry summer, it would have to be imported.

Walker (1764–1771) gives details of the sowing times of these crops, which he obviously regards as late, considering the Hebrides do not experience much frost or snow and that much of the ground is in general sandy and dry. The rye and oats were not sown until the beginning of April, and the bere in the latter half of May. Reaping began on or about the 15th August.

Comparing this regime to those observed on Lewis and Harris by the same author and during the same tour, differences are apparent but are too scant to draw firm conclusions. Walker reports only the cultivation of bere and grey oats in both places, but with no information as to which land type they were cultivated on. Reference to the machair is made when he reports that rye was grown in the past on Harris but stopped because of the damage inflicted on the light sandy soils (see above). Martin's account in 1716 is different to that of Walker. He records Lewis to be fruitful in barley, oats and rye, as well as flax and hemp; he describes the west side of Harris to be productive as arable, if manured with seaware, yet reports only rye and barley as growing there. The only reference he makes to the east side of Harris is to describe some parts of the hills as 'naked without earth' (Martin 1716: 31).

For North Uist, Martin (1716) reports a return of 10- to 30-fold yield of barley in a good year, providing the soil was manured with seaware and enough rain fell. If the plot of land had 'lain unmanur'd for some years' (Martin 1716:52), it would in a good season produce the extraordinary return of 14 ears of barley from one grain. He reports barley, oats and rye as the crops grown, and considers the soil able to support wheat.

Martin describes South Uist as quite similar, the western side being the plain arable land, where the sandy soil yielded good returns of barley, oats, and rye, of equal quantities to those from North Uist. The arable lands here were apparently much damaged by the overflowing lochs, which he does not mention for any of the other places.

Another reference to land utilization and cropping regimes is a recommendation made by MacLean (1837: 192) for an area of machair in South Uist. If reclaimed with the use of 'seaware' (seaweed), and cropped with barley in patches sequentially, with those having been cropped put to fallow for a few years, he predicted the whole area to eventually yield abundant grass.

The estate plans drawn up by Reid (1799) for North Uist indicate the main arable areas as the inner machair and some low-lying areas of drift-covered ground. There are also some areas of peatland cultivated, on the east side of the island. In the report associated with this plan, Blackadder describes the machair as 'producing the most abundant crops of grain and rich pastures or meadows'

(Blackadder 1800: 127 in Caird 1979). He reports on the organization of land tenure and use:

‘one half of the arable land is kept in tillage, cropped three years and allowed to turn to grass. The part to be broken up is covered with sea ware, and for two years successively with Bear, then Oats (small grey oats) and the fourth year is allowed to run to grass, the first crop is for the most part good, the other two, owing to the bad culture, are often worth little or nothing.’

(Blackadder 1800: 127 in Caird 1979)

A similar estate survey was commissioned for South Uist at this time but only the plans drawn up by Bald (1805) remain. For the whole of South Uist generally, the machair is again distinguished as the most cultivated area. In a more detailed plan of Boisdale, however, settlement and cultivation are clearly shown on the eastern side away from the machair plains. These plans are especially useful because they differentiate between ploughed and spade-dug land. The areas of machair and the well-drained peatland near the coast were ploughed, but only constituted 27% of the estate, whereas the inland acidic peaty areas, despite the labour-intensive nature of spade-digging, were more widely utilized, forming 73% of the estate (Caird 1979).

Descriptions of agricultural practices in the historical sources highlight the localized differences in cropping regimes even within the different islands of the Outer Hebrides. They also highlight how difficult it is to determine any regular and definite patterns of land use, such as infield and outfield. A widespread and recurrent pattern, however, is the use of the sandy machair areas, when fertilized and fallowed, and also the use of the black ‘croft’ land that, although fertile, was more difficult to cultivate because of its rocky, shallow and patchy soil.

Fertilization – the farmyard midden

The farm midden was one of the most important elements of the whole Hebridean agricultural system, as the soil would have been unable to support any form of regular cultivation had it not been frequently fertilized.

The animal dung was the most obvious source of fertilizer. Traditionally this accumulated inside the byre over the winter, or was cleared out of the byre and stable to form the midden heap, immediately outside these buildings or somewhere within the farm compound. The time and frequency of mucking out, and the volume of the midden, are not recorded in the older historical literature but in the early photographs taken of farm compounds near the beginning of this century (in Macaulay 1984), these characteristic midden heaps can be seen. The midden would be composed of the actual dung of cattle and horses and the bedding on which they were stalled. The bedding material could be formed of almost anything available, including straw (although most was used as fodder), turves and possibly peat ash from the hearth.

The process of composting is essential to the efficient management of certain resources, where the combination of

material types will affect the success of organic decay and nutrient release. For example, it is necessary to accumulate cattle dung with absorbent materials, not only to reduce the large proportion of water contained within the manure (over 75%) but also to encourage the process of fermentation and nutrient release (Darling 1945). The accumulation of manure with bedding material *in situ* within the byre, as in deep-litter stalling, is a particularly efficient method of composting. First, minimal losses are incurred through rain fall and run-off, which from unprotected middens may be up to 30% of the value of the manure and, secondly, the trampling of the cattle contributes to the breakdown of the bedding material (Darling 1945). Evidence suggestive of cattle stalling dates from the Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age in continental northwestern Europe although in northern England and Scotland the tradition of byre-dwellings dates from the Viking period (Fenton 1981). In the Northern Isles, variations on this method are the accumulation of dung, composted with turf, peat and/or ashes, inside the byre but mounded against a back wall away from the animals’ feet, and the formation of outdoor middens constructed of alternate layers of dung with turf, earth, seaweed and/or ashes (Fenton 1981).

The midden dung would have been moved out to the fields in large wicker baskets called *creels*, on the backs of horses, or women and men, in preparation for spreading. This dung could be spread immediately, by itself or mixed with seaware.

Fertilization – seaware

Seaweed was the other predominant form of manure for the land and of vital importance in the Hebrides. Seaweed is rich in nitrogen and potassium and poor in phosphorus, while dung is richer in phosphorus and contains less potassium, an element in short supply on the machair (Fenton 1978a). The seaweed used was of two main species, tangle or ware (*Luminaria: L. digitata; L. saccharina*) and wrack (*Fucus vesiculosus*). Tangle was the most commonly used form of seaweed for it was by far the most easily obtained, washed up on the shores of the west coast after heavy storms. Where supplies of loose weed were not available, seaweed would be cut. Wrack grew on rocky places, mainly on the east coast (MacLean 1837), and sometimes on rocks purposely placed to encourage growth (see Chapters 4 and 18). It was cut from the rocks using a small sickle, notched with a file along one edge, like a saw (Beveridge 1911).

The seaware is often cited in the historical literature as giving the best returns when used on the crops, but it is possible that this result is related to the greater availability of seaweed (usually) rather than to a qualitative difference. The only instance of the two manure types actually being compared with one another appears in MacQueen’s (1837) account of North Uist. He cites seaweed as the chief manure which, though favourable to the production of barley, does not enrich the ground as much as dung, which was also used but not in such great quantities. Munro, however, has no doubts about the value of the seaware:

‘were it not for the immense quantity of floating seaware that is thrown a-shore during the winter-storms, the inhabitants never could manure the ground, so as to raise a crop that signified, of any kind’

(Munro 1793: 293–294)

Likewise, Buchanan (1793) speaks favourably of seaweed as a source of manure good for barley and potatoes, on any kind of soil, although oats do not do so well, producing only a small grain. He reports the seaware to have the:

‘effect of making the deepest and coldest moss keep a firm sward, even when applied by men whose judgement in farming is by no means of the first rate’

(Buchanan 1793: 19)

The seaweed was so well valued that a watchman was appointed for the different villages to report when it had been washed ashore; each holding was then allotted an area from which to collect their weed (MacKenzie 1957). There were various methods employed to get the weed to the arable land, according to the local circumstances. In some cases a boat was required in the initial stages, although this would later need to be supplemented by the more usual forms of transportation which, for Boreray, in North Uist, Beveridge describes as:

‘a small procession of women ascending from a geo, and laden with sea-ware in sacks slung across their shoulders, while upon the same island another system was observed, the manure being borne in panniers on horseback’

(Beveridge 1911: 325–326)

When horses were being used, the tangle was put into baskets on each side and also heaped across the pony’s back, protected by a long mat made of marram. At Lieravay on North Uist, the panniers were made of wood, with a device that enabled the quick release of the seaweed from out of the bottom. Later, when carts became more widespread, these were used for moving the tangle to the fields (Beveridge 1911). Martin reported the ground in North Uist as being manured until the 10th June, if they had enough of the ‘*Braggir*’, which he describes as ‘the broad leaves growing on the top of the *Alga-Marina*’ (Martin 1716: 54).

Alternative fertilizers

Martin also noted a different local technique for fertilizing the land, on an island he names as Bernera in the south of the Hebrides. In addition to the use of seaware, which the inhabitants carried in ropes upon their backs, over the high rocks, they would

‘fasten a cow to a stake, and spread a quantity of sand on the ground, upon which the cow’s dung falls, and this they mingle together, and lay it on the arable land’

(Martin 1716: 94)

In Lewis, Martin noted that they also ‘fattened’ the land with soot but this method apparently contaminated the

corn grown on it, so that the people suffered from jaundice (Martin 1716: 2). On Lewis, the common practice was to spread old roofing material from the houses onto the land (Fenton 1978b), material that would have mainly consisted of soot-impregnated straw, or straw roots, for roofs were constructed from the roots cut off the bottom of the sheaves once uprooted at harvest time. With no turf beneath, because the scarcity of wood made the timbers too feeble to support the extra weight, they threw the stubble on to the top, and tied it all down with ropes made of heather (Walker 1764–1771: 128). The roofing material would have been replaced every year in most cases (Fenton 1978b).

Another unusual source of manure for the land was cockles, also used as cement and food. This method was practised on Barra, where they had more cockles than the other islands, and noted by Martin (1716), Munro (1793) and MacDonald (1811). At one time, even fish were put on the land. This was not the normal practice but followed the catching of an unusually large shoal of herring.

Manuring for land reclamation

In later accounts by those people concerned with land and agricultural improvements, the correct fertilization of the land was an important issue. MacDonald (1811) describes how he went about reclaiming a piece of moorland and the dressings he applied to produce good returns. In the first year he applied either dung or seaware and followed this in the second year ‘with a top dressing compost, made the summer before of sea-sleech, or mud, dung, drifted sea-weeds, and rubbish of lime’ (*ibid*: 797). In the third winter, this was covered with shell sand (10 tonnes to the acre) and the land thereafter proved to be a valuable source of rich hay.

This confirms the value of alkaline substances on such acidic soils for, where patches of sand or lime had accidentally been dumped, there was always a rich cover of clover and daisy, as observed by MacDonald (1811) on South Uist. MacLean (1837) also recommended the use of shell sand as a manure on peat, for the production of oats and bere. He promoted the need for road-building to the eastern areas of moorland, where land could be reclaimed, as then sand and seaware could be taken from the shore directly to the peat with greater ease and peat brought back in return. Overall this would mean more cultivable land (MacLean 1837: 193).

It was not only the moorland areas that it was considered necessary to bring into cultivation. MacLean (1837) recommends the use of seaweed as a means of reclaiming some 600 acres of machair land in South Uist that, prior to 1837, had lain waste for over 100 years. He implies this action was possible owing to the proximity of the seaweed (MacLean 1837: 192). He also accuses the local tenants of being ‘backward....to commence cropping this waste, under the idea that they should have nothing for their labour’ (MacLean 1837: 192). Given the frequency and intensity of the use of seaweed elsewhere, however, it seems unlikely that the local people had not attempted cultivation of this tract of land if it were at all possible.

Tillage

‘The Hebrides having been for ages chiefly devoted to grazing, the cultivation of crops requiring regular tillage was not a primary object. Agricultural implements were accordingly simple and imperfect, and the system of ploughing or tilling the ground made no progress for several centuries. Even to this day, the idea continues to prevail in some parts of these regions, that it is unwise to turn the soil at all, because the moisture of the climate, the poorness of the land, and the consequent insecurity and lateness of corn crops, render every mode of management inadvisable, excepting that followed by their ancestors, namely, corn-cropping the rich infields and grazing the natural old pasture with the indigenous live stock of the country’

(MacDonald 1811: 174)

The traditional implements for cultivation seem rudimentary on first appearance, and were often criticized by the agricultural observers for their simplicity and lack of evolution. As pointed out by Fenton (1976), however, these tools had actually evolved to best suit the environment in which they were used and other, more complicated and standardized designs would not necessarily have proven advantageous, let alone able to cope with the difficult and localized terrain of the Hebrides.

Plough cultivation: crann-nan-gad and crann ruslaidh

Land to be prepared for the seed grain was tilled from the beginning of March to the middle of May (MacDonald 1811). Although recommended by MacDonald (1811), no autumn or winter tillage was ever practised but this is understandable in an open-field system in which the animals grazed on the arable land over the winter months.

The ordinary horse-drawn plough was employed where at all possible. In the Hebrides this was often a single-stilted form called in Gaelic the *crann-nan-gad*. This was adapted to rocky conditions and shallow soil, the predominant local conditions. The front end of the beam skidded along the ground, making it easier to lift over obstacles such as stones; the share with its broad cutting feather allowed the implement to carve off shallow slices of earth. It was quite a labour-intensive device, needing four or five horses in the traction team and two people to control it, an indication of the communal nature of such ploughing (Fenton 1976).

The *crann-nan-gad* was often worked in unison with the ‘ristle’ (Gaelic *crann ruslaidh*), of Norse origin, suggesting its antiquity (Fenton 1976). It was very simple in construction, consisting of an iron blade, like a plough coulter, that was mounted into a wooden beam. It was worked by only one or two horses, pulling it from the front with one man to guide, while another man walked alongside to control the direction using the handle fixed at the rear. The effect was to slice through the earth, cutting the mat of roots and vegetation that often built up on waste or fallowed land, and which was especially tough on the sandy machair. The narrow channel it produced prepared the way for the *crann-nan-gad* (Fenton 1976).

The *crann-nan-gad* was allegedly only a recent introduction to Lewis around the time of Walker’s tour (Walker 1764–1771) yet it was used frequently in Harris and the Uists; it is, in fact, an old type of plough. The ristle likewise is found all over the Hebrides, except possibly Lewis (*ibid.*), and therefore coincides with the main oat-producing areas of the Hebrides (Fenton 1976). Both of these ploughs relied on communal activity to use them most efficiently. The teams employed were large, in spite of the implements’ rather small size, which is why they are often criticized, in the historical documents written around the time of the ‘improvements’ as being one deterrent to agricultural improvement (MacQueen 1837).

The shallow cultivation beds, where the seed is sown on the surface and then covered by harrowing, help to prevent sand drift, as the root mats holding the soil together are not disturbed as much as they would be by deeper ploughing (Grant 1979). Weeds have always been a big problem and, despite the frequent manuring, the crop was usually so full of weeds that the yield was hampered by the weeds as well as by the harsh climate. Perennials, causing most trouble, are couch grass (*Elytrigia repens*) and silverweed (*Argentina anserina*); the annuals comprise charlock (*Sinapsis arvensis*), runch (*Raphanus raphanistrum*) and corn marigold (*Chrysanthemum segetum*) (Grant 1979). The type of cropping on the machair, often with periods of fallow, and the shallow cultivation do nothing to counter, and if anything encourage, weed growth (Grant 1979).

Spade cultivation: cas-chrom or cas tilgidh

In many areas the land abounded with natural obstacles, thus impeding the use of the drawn plough. In such cases the *cas-chrom*, meaning ‘crooked leg’ or ‘crooked spade’, was an invaluable implement. Essentially a specialized form of spade, this simple-looking instrument was effectively adapted to break up earth consisting of solid peat interspersed with rock and small stones, and to till areas that drained badly, in preparation for almost any crop. Once tilled the usual choices and methods of manuring and cropping applied (Fenton 1978b).

The *cas-chrom* consists of a stout curved wooden handle, usually of oak or ash, about 1.6m to 1.8m long. This is set at an obtuse angle (approximately 120°) into a straight wooden footpiece, some 0.80m long, and tipped by a rough iron coulter of quadrangular form. A strong wooden foot-peg was inserted at the junction of the shaft and head, used for driving the blade into the soil when in use. With strong leverage and a certain knack, the sod was flipped up and over, always to the right. The movement was repeated one step backwards, and so on to complete the furrow (MacDonald 1811; Beveridge 1911; Hamilton 1963).

A different form of *cas-chrom* used to exist, the *cas-direach* or ‘straight leg’; this had a much slighter bend and was seemingly obsolete by the time Beveridge (1911) visited the islands. These implements are equivalent to the ‘delling’ spade of the Orkneys and Shetland Isles, as described by Fenton (1978a).

MacDonald's thorough research into all forms of indigenous Hebridean agricultural implements rated the *cas-chrom* extremely highly, as an effective means of tilling mossy and boggy ground where no horse could walk, and stony ground inaccessible to ploughs (MacDonald 1811). After careful comparison of a variety of circumstances and places, he ascertained that:

'12 labourers will turn an acre of land in a day with the caschrom, and that so completely, that the operation is nearly equal, in effect of pulverising the soil, to two ordinary Hebridean ploughings.'

(MacDonald 1811: 152)

If used in conjunction with the ristle, the team could be reduced to ten men per acre. The *cas-chrom* was especially efficient when used in a team but was equally feasible as an effective means of tilling on an individual basis, playing an important role within single family farming units. Examples show that it was possible to support a family by *cas-chrom* alone:

'He can till in one day as much ground as will sow a peck of oats; and if he works tolerably from the end of January till the middle of May, he will cultivate ground enough for supplying himself and a family of six children and his wife, with meal and potatoes all the year round. This is done without any expence, but merely the half crown paid once in 10 or 12 years for his caschrom'

(MacDonald 1811: 153)

Although extremely effective as a means of working this type of poor uneven ground, it was still labour-intensive to use and, therefore, not so advantageous on level land, unless to dig the first furrow when reclaiming it from waste. MacDonald (1911) calculates the relative financial merits of the foot plough versus the horse-drawn plough and concludes that, where the larger team plough could be employed, it was a better financial option. This assumes that an ordinary plough would be available for use, which was usually the case, sometimes with farmers sharing such large items of equipment. It was not the case everywhere, however, according to documentary evidence: on Lewis Walker reports the scarcity of 'any instruments of agriculture, but the Carschrome, which is a crooked spade, and a little Harrow with Wooden Teeth which is drawn by a man' (Walker 1808: 127).

If the ground were to be tilled by hand, the *cas-chrom* easily proved its superiority to any common trenching spade that penetrated the ground perpendicularly, given its ease of use and the long length of clod it was possible to lever over. The design and strength of the implement allowed stones of up to 200lbs to be levered out of the soil. With an improved coulter, these factors made the *cas-chrom* ideal for the cutting of drains, another practice highly recommended by MacDonald (1811) but at that time not common in the Hebrides.

A characteristic, noted repeatedly in the documentation, concerns the higher productivity of land tilled by *cas-*

chrom (e.g. Darling 1945). This factor would offset the labour-intensive nature of the implement: for example, although a man working from January to April could only deal with five acres of land, the yield would be five seeds per seed planted, compared to only 3:1 from ploughed ground (Hamilton 1963). Martin (1716) refers to this fact for both Lewis and Harris, describing the locals as very industrious in the task of spade-digging, some 500 people being employed daily for some months:

'This way of labouring is by them call'd Timiy; and certainly produces a greater increase than digging or plowing otherwise'

(Martin 1716: 3)

A peculiar though consistently stated fact was that, when the crop failed, it failed totally. This was reiterated to MacDonald throughout the northern Hebrides, with no satisfactory reason given (MacDonald 1811).

While especially suited to and latterly most associated with the cultivation of potatoes in lazy beds, the origin of the *cas-chrom* may pre-date the introduction of the potato to the Hebrides, although precisely when it was introduced is unrecorded. The Old Statistical Account for Sutherland (Volume 7) describes the *cas-chrom* as 'of great antiquity' (1793: 288–9), and MacDonald describes the implement as 'probably the very oldest tool known in these districts. It has been in general use from the most ancient times' (MacDonald 1811: 151).

As Beveridge (1911) points out, since both these references date to a period when the potato had not been cultivated for longer than 70 years in the Hebrides, greater antiquity for the *cas-chrom* itself is implied. Either way, it is an extremely important implement, of great simplicity yet great effectiveness, being so well adapted to demanding terrain. All writers and observers seem equally impressed, to the extent that MacDonald had already introduced it to a wine district in Hungary, where the implement was successfully used on the hard rocky ground; he also recommended it for the West Indian colonies (MacDonald 1811: 154).

Harrowing

The land was harrowed once, and this immediately succeeded the broadcasting of the seed, so that the harrowing served to implant the grain, affording it a little more protection (MacDonald 1811). Harrows were simple in design, made entirely of wood, and usually pulled by hand across the fields. Martin (1716) describes the harrows in use on Lewis:

'They have little harrows with wooden teeth in the first and second rows, which break the ground; and in the third row they have rough heath, which smooths it. This light harrow is drawn by a man having a strong rope of horse-hair across his breast'

(Martin 1716: 3)

Buchanan (1793) describes an alternative method, where the implement was drawn by a rope or thong fastened to

the tail of the horse. The primitive harness consisted of ropes, backbands and traces made of twisted horse hair, cut from both the mane and tail. Sometimes, instead of ropes for the halter and harness, sticks and birch were twisted and knotted together (Hamilton 1963).

Beveridge (1911) noted the occurrence on North Uist of the *racan* or clod breaker (*racan-buntata* or potato rake), a different implement, although seen in regular use on soft ground as a substitute for the harrow. This was a strong, heavy, wooden rake, with a handle 1.2m–1.6m long. The head was sharpened at both ends and, along its middle, it was fitted with six or seven thick teeth. According to MacDonald (1811), the teeth continually broke or loosened from the head, a factor he considered detrimental to efficient use.

Beveridge also described two implements, both c.1m in length, specially designed for joint use in the planting of potatoes, particularly in connection with lazy beds. The first was a rake, similar to the *racan* but with a blunt-ended head and only four teeth; the second was effectively a long-handled dibbler, with a pin fixed in the side to function as both treader and stop. In North Uist, the Gaelic for dibbler is *sliobhag* but in Harris and Skye it is known as *pleadhag* (Beveridge 1911).

Harvesting and crop-processing

Harvesting

Throughout the Hebrides, according to the historical documents, the common method of reaping the crop was to up-root. Buchanan (1793) and Martin (1716) both report this method, notably for barley.

Later, the sickle was commonly used for cutting the crops (MacDonald 1811; Hamilton 1963), despite MacDonald's strong recommendation that the scythe would be preferable to the sickle, given the scarcity of straw and fodder and the lightness of the crop.

In his description of the barley harvest, MacDonald (1811) recorded that one labourer for every five reapers would follow and tie the crop into sheaves or *dorlach* (c.30–35lbs each), using bands or strings made of the longest barley culms. These were then placed with heads upright, and left until the evening when they were grouped into stooks (small stacks). A *threave* was a specific number of sheaves, usually 12, forming two stooks. If the weather was bad they formed narrow rectangular stacks instead, known as *dash*, approximately 3m–3.5m long, 1.8m high and 1.2m broad. These were designed to aid the drying of the grain, for the corn ears were placed in the centre where they received air but avoided rain.

The crop was left dashed for two to three weeks and then taken to a dry part of the field where it was stacked cylindrically, with a cone on the top, typical of hay stacks. When all the crops were harvested, the big stacks were finally taken on sledges, carts or horse back to the stack-yard of the farm, a process named *croghadh* and one attended with great festivity (MacDonald 1811). Virtually the same operation was applied to the other grain crops

although the different cereal types were stacked and moved separately.

The sickle is recorded by Buchanan (1793) as being used to cut oats and the grass hay. The hay was carried on the backs of horses where they could be employed and, where not, on the backs of women and men.

Threshing, winnowing and drying

Buchanan (1793) describes one flail as a hand staff and a short supple length of tangle but there were many variations the form the flail could take. According to his account, the oats and barley were threshed by the women. When the straw was needed for thatching – most useful with as long a culm as possible – alternative methods for threshing were employed. One technique known in the Hebrides (Fenton 1976) was to rub the corn head, called *suathadh*. The operator would stand with one bare foot on the knotted part of a sheaf of barley and insert the other foot under the ears and rub until the grain had worked loose. This was a method better suited to barley owing to the difficulty in removing the grain from the chaff (Beveridge 1911; Fenton 1976). Oats generally fell out with a good shake but, if they did need loosening, a notched stick *maide froisidh* was banged against the upturned sheaf. Even more simple was for the whole sheaf to be knocked against a resistant object, possibly a stone designed to protrude from the wall of the barn (Fenton 1976) or the rungs of a ladder.

The winnowing operation needed a gentle draught of some sort in order to blow away the chaff and broken straw 'sheelings' from the heavier grain (Fenton 1976). This could take place in barns with two opposing doors, or a door and a wall opening, to produce a through-flow of air, or outside in places where the breeze would not be too strong. On South Uist, the corn was taken out into the fields to be winnowed because the little barns had no back doors to let in the wind. In some instances the inhabitants had no barns at all (Buchanan 1793). The method of separating the straw from the grain was to let the threshed corn fall slowly from a sieve or basket, or to let the grain and straw fall from the hands, whilst exposed to the draught. By doing this, the chaff was blown backwards and the clean grain dropped onto a skin or cloth on the floor. Given the nature of barley, with the tough awns attached to the grains, a further process of 'hummelling' was necessary to remove the awns (Fenton 1976). This could be done with the feet, or by using a plunger of some sort, or even with a flail (Fenton 1976).

Sieves made out of sheepskin were used during the winnowing operation or, after grinding, when the meal was sifted onto plates made of grass or onto large goat skins placed on the floor. This latter procedure was carried out in the evening and morning, when the family had ground as much grain as their diets required (Buchanan 1793: 22)

Buchanan (1793) describes the use of small kilns on South Uist for the drying of grain. Here they did not spread the threshed and winnowed barley on the surface above the straw to be dried but instead cut the ears off the barley and laid them in order upon the bare ribs, as

| | |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| 1 horse was equal to | 8 foals |
| | 4 one year old fillies |
| | 2 two year old fillies |
| | 1 three year old filly or 1 one year old filly |
| | 2 cows |
| 1 cow was equal to | 8 calves |
| | 4 stirks |
| | 2 two year old queys |
| | 1 three year old quey or 1 one year old stirk |
| | 8 sheep |
| | 12 hogs |
| | 16 lambs |
| 16 geese | |

Table 19.1. Equivalences of stock values according to Carmichael (1884)

Walker (1764–1771) also implies was the practice in North Uist. Once dried, ‘they are hauled down on the floor, and immediately thrashed, and winnowed, and “clapt” up hot in plates, ready for the quern’ (Buchanan 1793: 22). Another method of drying was ‘graddaning’, in which the ears of corn were turned in flames, over the hearth, in order to harden the grain prior to grinding (Fenton 1976).

Grinding

Very often, especially when only small amounts of corn were produced, grinding was done at the farmhouse on the quern. Two distinct types of quern were noted by Beveridge (1911). The first – the rotary quern – consisted of two round flat stones, the upper one being turned by hand using a stick placed vertically in a peripheral hole, whilst the grain was poured in through a central hole. The second type was the saddle quern, formed of two oblong stones, the smaller, upper one of which was worked to and fro over the grain that lay in a hollow groove on the lower stone.

A third variety of quern, called *abrach*, was noted on North Uist. Smaller in form than the other two varieties, it also differed in lithology. The softer material in the stone could be washed out if set under a waterfall overnight and left the surfaces roughened (Beveridge 1911).

Later, the grinding was done at the mills, where the millstones were moved by water power. Mills were owned by the landlords and tenants were ‘thirled’ (tied) to a particular mill and had to pay ‘multures’, a heavy payment that might amount to one-twelfth of the un-ground corn, besides paying about one forty-eighth of the meal after grinding. The payment to the miller was separate and consisted of a certain quantity of meal out of every measure. That the miller might be the most hated man in the parish is not surprising, especially as his opportunities for fraud were numerous.

For making oatmeal, the straw of the sheaf could be burned in the process of graddaning, in order to dry the oats for meal. This caused the grain to be blackened but did not affect the taste of the oatmeal (Buchanan 1793).

Pasture and hill-grazing

The arrangements for the sharing of pasture land within

townships in the Outer Hebrides are unclear, although it seems likely that, where cultivated land was held in common, so too would have been the pasture of the township (Shaw 1980). The rough hill-grazing and the shielings were communally held and the move to the summer pastures was based on community organization. Beveridge (1911) noted two extra types of pasture in North Uist that may also occur in other places. From the Gaelic name *buaille* or cattle fold, he inferred areas representing shielings on a larger scale, and from the Gaelic *gearraidh* or ‘garry’, the enclosed area of land intervening between hill pasture and arable land, he inferred common grazing (Beveridge 1911).

The ‘soum’ or ‘suim’

The ‘souming’ or *sumachadh* was the number of animals that any one tenant was allowed to keep, a figure fixed by tradition in accordance with the size of the holding, and designed to avoid overgrazing of the township pastures and problems with lack of fodder in the winter months. The soum or suim was equivalent to a cow and her progeny, the *bo le h-al*. The number of progeny the cow was entitled to keep, however, was not the same everywhere: only one calf; a calf and a stirk; a calf, stirk and two-year old quey; or a calf, stirk, quey and three-year old heifer (Carmichael 1884). The number of soums a farmer could send to the communal grazings was fixed for each township individually. Each farmer’s entire stock was known as *leibhidh*.

If a farmer was over-stocked in one species and under-stocked in another, then the surplus in one species could be balanced against the deficit in the other, a process called *coilpeachadh* in Gaelic. The same process was applied to young and old stock and, if a farmer still had more animals than he was entitled to, he had to buy grazing rights from a farmer who was under-stocked. The *coilpeachadh* varied from one island to another but Carmichael (1884) presented a table that he believed was representative of the whole of the Outer Hebrides (Table 19.1).

There were still more variations on this theme. The cattle and horses were never bred from until they reached full maturity, which was at four years of age, and the names applied to each age cohort of animals was changed on the

first day of winter. The number of different types of animal was not extensive but suited the needs of the farmers and their families. Most of the species were small breeds, generally because this equated to an ability to withstand the harsh environment. Horses occurred more frequently in the Hebrides than in the Northern Isles, because they were the traction and plough team animals, unlike in the Northern Isles where oxen were traditionally used for pulling the plough.

The sheep on South Uist are described by Walker (1764–1771) as having four or six or even eight horns. MacLean (1837) reported new sheep, the Cheviot and Blackface, introduced around the time of his writing, but noted that small tenants continued with the old breed of sheep, which were small but yielded good-flavoured meat and wool that, though small in quantity, was of fine quality. Goats were well suited to the hilly terrain of the Outer Hebrides and were able to reach areas of the mountain pasture inaccessible to the other livestock. Another reason for the popularity of goats in the Outer Hebrides was that they were less vulnerable to the fox than sheep (Shaw 1980). (This explains the absence of goats in the Northern Isles, where there are neither mountains nor foxes [Shaw 1980].)

Shielings

The annual movement of stock to the shielings was usually operated in two stages, beginning about midsummer. The first step was to move the stock over the head dyke to the common grazing immediately next to the 'toun'. Once this was exhausted then there was the big flit to the hills.

In early June, when the cultivation of the fields was completed, the farmers, their wives and families took their stock and all retired to the hills for the summer to live in the shieling huts. The stock would have consisted of cattle, native sheep and goats up until the 17th century but, thereafter, the main emphasis would have been on cattle (Fenton 1980). The different families brought their animals together, so that they could be treated as one herd. The sheep led the way, cattle followed, the younger beasts proceeding, and the horses went last.

The whole assemblage while on the move was known as the *triall*. The horses and men would carry the equipment (bundles of sticks, heather rope, and spades) necessary to repair and re-roof the huts, while the women carried the bedding, meal and dairy equipment. On arrival at the shieling, the stock of each farmer was inspected to check he had not exceeded his souming. The men would usually return to the main farmstead once the transport of the cattle and equipment was complete, to tend to repairs at the winter bases and also to fish.

The women and children remained, living in the temporary earthen huts, tending to the flock and making butter and cheese from the produce of these rich pastures. This was a prime opportunity for them to spend time spinning and weaving. The whole operation was embroidered with custom and folklore, songs being sung for different stages of the operation. By the time of their return to the common

grazings outside the township, at the beginning of harvest, the grass around the fields was replenished (Buchanan 1793) so that the higher yields of milk could continue for a while longer, before the scarcities of winter set in.

The summer grazing areas were an essential element of the open-field, run-rig agricultural system, for the annual movement of stock meant that pressure on the winter grazings was alleviated and that the herd had a new source of plentiful fresh pasture. It also allowed the crops to ripen in their unenclosed fields with no threat of illicit grazing (Fenton 1980).

The whole use of shielings and the rich hill pastures ties in with the production, or rather lack of production, of hay. In earlier times, when the shieling system was fully functioning and true run-rig in operation, little attention was paid in the Highland and Island areas to the making of hay for winter fodder. It is noted in a few instances, especially the tufted vetch noted by Walker (1764–1771) that grew naturally in South Uist and was good for hay and pasture. The vetch apparently had the added advantage of making the cow take to the bull more readily and earlier in the season.

Such hay as was cut tended to be reaped after the grain crop had been harvested, from the areas of boggy ground near to the settlement but, even then, it was fairly haphazard, for it coincided with the potato work and the seasonal rain. The making of more hay, to help carry cattle over the winter season, is consistently one of the improvements recommended by the agricultural writers of the time. A sown hay crop needed to be enclosed to prevent the animals from invading the crop and, as such, this did not co-operate with the run-rig system:

‘under unfenced run-rig conditions, there was little profit in artificial grasses, and the crofter’s ultimate solution was to change over to an economy with the main emphasis on sheep’

(Fenton 1980: 106)

The shieling system, and with it run-rig, largely disappeared in the first half of the 19th century as the grazing areas were taken over by the new sheep farming (less dependent on supplies of winter hay) that proved to be more profitable to the landlords. At Loch Skipport, on South Uist, and on Lewis, the summer shielings were noted to still be in use at the beginning of this century (Beveridge 1911). The two were so closely interlinked, however, that if one element was removed the other could not survive in the same form and, even then, only if the nearer grazings around the township could be developed (Fenton 1980).

Regulation

Community decisions

Each tenant was responsible for his own share of rigs and the produce from them yet few individuals possessed the resources to work the land on their own, so it was inevitably held and worked in common. This dealt with the logistical problems created by landholding on a run-

rig basis (Dodgshon 1980). The type of crop and dates of ploughing, sowing and harvesting on the community's intermingled strips had to be decided; the contribution of draught animals to the community's plough, and the nature of the grazing routine, had to be agreed upon and adhered to. Respectful behaviour and 'good neighbourliness' alone were unfortunately insufficient for the smooth running of the system and the regulations had to be enforced by the local Baron or *birlaw* court.

The constable 'constabal'

The constable (Gaelic *constabal*) would be elected from the resident farmers, one or even two for every township, to represent the proprietor and the crofters. The post was unpopular amongst the people: apparently a man proposed for the position would sometimes decline and another would have to be elected. The same thing might recur, to the extent that lots would be cast in order to get a man to accept office, 'the duties of which are distasteful to them' (Carmichael 1884). Once elected the new constable would either remove his shoes and socks or take some earth in his hands, and recite a promise in Gaelic to the effect that, by bodily contact, he is conscious of being made of earth, to which he will return. These old customs disappeared along with the old agricultural system.

The job of the constable was the same in essence as the 'birlayman', *i.e.* to oversee the execution of the community regulations – hence the distastefulness of the job, for it would undoubtedly enter a personal level at times. He could always rely upon the support of his fellows, however, as and when needed.

Duties included in the constable's job were to mark out new peat bogs, when old cuts were exhausted. He would then divide this new area into the necessary number of stances for the tenants of the township. In the same way that they cast lots for the rigs of land, so too they would cast lots for the peat stances; again, these would be recast every three, five, seven or nine years in case of unfair advantage. It was the job of the constable to check that each tenant contributed the relevant number of free days' work to build the new road needed to reach the fresh bog.

The constable had to oversee repair work to township roads and the ditches running parallel to them, again organized on a communal basis. When, after a storm, new seaweed washed ashore, no farmer was allowed to begin carting the weed until his neighbours had a reasonable chance to get there too, nor would the constable allow a crofter to cut the weed from wherever he chose. He had to check that no horses were worked too hard in the exhausting work of carting seaweed from the shore. When he ordered them to stop, they had to cease work there and then. The constable was also responsible for buying new stock, in order to bring fresh blood into the community's herd, and for checking that each tenant adhered to his allotted souming.

Stock management

The management of the stock was the most critical area,

needing strict and careful regulation through all the various sectors of the toun, at all times of the year. It was here that the role of the birlayman or constable became indispensable, arranging for the proper herding of the animals on the settlement's common land (Smout 1969). The constable regulated herding generally, essential as few enclosures of any sort existed, except for the temporary earthen dykes that were fashioned from the soil as it was ploughed and were insubstantial as barriers. Animals wandered around the settlement and arable plots under the watchful eye of the herdsman who, at best, attempted to keep them on the allotted pasture and, at worst, off the crops.

Beef cattle and sheep spent the summer on the rough pasture and in the hills, and were admitted to the stubble after the harvest. They could remain there all winter until spring, after which time all animals had to be removed from the arable lands lest damage be done to the crops. The dates for releasing and controlling the animals, and the areas where they could graze, had to be adhered to. Any selfish farmers who disregarded the community regulations were brought to reason by the constable.

The milk cows and horses were generally kept closer at hand nearly all the year round. They would be tethered, to the weedy baulks between the ridges, or put out to the pastures nearer the settlement, that were often of better quality (Fenton 1976). The winter was the most desolate time of year for all the farm animals, a time when many were killed or sold so that the meagre food resources could be stretched a little further. It was a case of eating anything that could be found, supplemented with a small amount of fodder or seaweed. The animals were so weak that, when the grass on the pastures began to grow, 'Lifting Day' became established as a date when the people would carry their animals from their homes and byres to the pastures (see quotations from Martin Martin [c.1695] and James MacDonald [1811] in Chapter 7)

The operations involved in the 'big flit' were made easier by regulating the souming and consequently the size of the common herd, thereby allowing better control of stock movements. This was especially important over the head dyke, the crucial line that separated the settlement and arable land from the common grazing, producing spatially separate units, all of which were essential components on whose integration the economic balance of the farming communities relied (Fenton 1976).

Obviously the arable and pastoral activities were complementary to, and dependent upon, one another, and were not as primitive as many writers have implied when looking at the system from the angle of 'improved farming'. 'It was a highly-sophisticated, long-evolved response to environment and resources' (Fenton 1987: 18) that had developed 'a kind of ecological cycle that could conserve resources, as long as it was not pressed too hard by factors like population growth' (Fenton 1987: 18).

All of the resources were channelled through the system in an efficient and cyclical manner, converting food source to manure, and so to food again. The only items leaving the system were the surpluses in any year, from either

stock or crops, which would be used to pay the rent and buy extra fodder, clothes and other necessities that could not be made on the farm.

Other industries

Fuel

With the present almost total absence of any wood other than driftwood in the Western Isles, peat – plentiful on most islands – is recorded in historical and recent times as being the main source of fuel. An essential task of each family was the cutting of enough peat, approximately 50–60 loads, to maintain a single fire throughout the whole year. Beveridge (1911) estimates it would take one man a full month's work to cut, dry, and stack this quantity of peat. Usually, however, two neighbours would cut peat together for 10 days, using peat spades or *treisger*. These were specially adapted to the purpose of cutting uniform blocks of peat. Each man would then allow four days for the drying and turning of the fresh peats, and another 14 days to transport his own share home from the peat-hag.

Some low-lying, sandy islands such as Heiskeir were relatively deficient in peat and, to compensate, the inhabitants were allotted peat stances on North Uist. In August, boats were brought over from the islands to cut and collect peats for the following year. Fuel was sometimes still a problem, as noted by Martin (1716) who reports the burning of cow dung, barley straw and seaweed on Heiskeir when fuel was scarce. On Heiskeir, bread baked with seaweed was considered superior in taste to that baked on a normal peat fire; the ashes of barley straw were also used for the salting of cheese (MacGregor 1969).

Fishing

Fish abounded around the shores of the islands and did serve to supplement the diets of the people, when time was available and the weather permitted. The latter was a perpetual problem, especially as landing on the west coast was hindered by the dearth of harbours, and consequently fishing was not established as a main industry until later years, and much of the fish for home consumption was caught close inshore and from rocks.

Rods with fixed lines, flounder spears or *brod-leabag*, round 'poke-nets', conical nets called *tabh*, and even blankets sewn end to end, were all used to catch fish from coves, river mouths and streams (Fenton 1976). The *tabh* were placed within a *cabhuil* or dam made from small stones piled in the bed of a narrow burn, into which the fish were driven as they swam downstream (Beveridge 1911; see also Chapter 18). The flounder spears were used by the women, who waded in the shallow tidal runs at the ebb of spring tide, using their feet to feel where the flounders lay half-covered by sand (Beveridge 1911). Commonly found upon the rocks were the 'shell-bait basins' or *toll-solaidh* (known as 'knock-soe' holes in Shetland), which were hollows in the rocks 120mm–150mm wide and

70mm–120mm deep, used for pulping the shellfish into suitable bait. Hammerstones were commonly associated with these places (Beveridge 1911).

Species known to have been fished were herring, ling, cod, mackerel, turbot, skate and flounder, but the coalfish were the main catch from the inshore regions where 'craig-fishing' or rock-fishing was practiced. The catches of these fish were especially good towards the end of harvest and were noted to provide oil, as well as food, for the people of Broad Bay and Canna in Lewis who caught them (Fenton 1976). The lochs provided more accessible fishing grounds and were also less weather dependent, the most common fish being salmon and trout. In general, July, August and the beginning of September were the most successful times to fish, according to MacLean (1837). Inhabitants on the east coast of South Uist, near Loch Aoineart (Locheynort), were noted by Martin (1716) as using ashes from burnt seaweed as a substitute for salt, for preserving mackerel, which sometimes came into the sea lochs in large shoals.

There was also an abundance of crustaceans and shellfish such as lobster, crabs, cockles, oysters, mussels and spout-fish (Munro 1793). Cockles were noted for their abundance on the shores of North Uist, Benbecula and South Uist. They were collected every summer, especially in years of scarcity when cockles might have been the only food for two months (MacLean 1837). Cockle-shells were sometimes burned whilst encased within layers of peats, to provide lime and plaster for buildings (Beveridge 1911).

Seals were also utilized by the islanders. The flesh, known as *carr* in Gaelic, as was whale meat, was eaten by the people of Uist in the past (Carmichael 1884), and most likely by people from other islands. This is confirmed by an old proverb:

'Good food it is for sea-weed worker,
Rye bread and blubber of seal'

(Carmichael 1884: 262)

The blubber was cut into long thin strips and had a weighted board placed on the top in order to press out the oil. The oil was used as lighting fuel and the seal skin was used for making harnesses, bridles (Beveridge 1911) and shoes (Buchanan 1793).

Cloth

The making of cloth, mainly linen, was a cottage industry in the 18th century but previously had been organized for family needs. Linen had been woven from locally grown flax, and hemp was also cultivated and used for cloth, but the most ubiquitously produced materials were woollens and tweeds. All stages of the operation were carried out according to local technique and tradition, from the plucking of the wool from the backs of sheep (noted for Lewis by Martin 1716), through the carding, spinning and dyeing of the wool, to the weaving and 'waulking' (shortening and thickening) of the cloth. Many descriptions of these processes occur in the historical literature.

The looms used were either upright, or the smaller,

horizontal variety that would have been easier for transporting, presumably on moves such as those to the summer grazing bases. The equipment was mainly wooden except for the little *pirns* that acted as bobbins inside the shuttles; these were commonly made of either sheep metapodials, quills or the stems of hogweed (Beveridge 1911).

Plant materials

Marram (*Ammophila arenaria*) was abundant on the sand dunes and machair regions of the west and north coasts of the islands. Good growth of marram was noted especially for Heiskeir, from where it used to be 'exported' to the main islands. This tough grass was used for many purposes including ropes, mats, baskets, chairs, roofing and for the padding in horse collars. It was also used for making sacks, *plata-shil* or *plata-mhuilinn*, which were still made and used at the beginning of this century on Heiskeir, for carrying grain and meal to the mills. Marram produced a thick fabric that was particularly well adapted for this purpose, being impervious to the sea-spray and rain (Beveridge 1911). Marram was planted on unstable sand dunes from at least the 19th century, to prevent blow-outs and sand drift, as recommended by many observers (Beveridge 1911).

Sedge roots (*Carex flacca*) were used for thatching (Walker 1764–1771), making tethers (which proved to be extremely strong) and the *tabh* fishing or poaching nets (Beveridge 1911). The conical nets, woven with a 25mm mesh, were 1.2m long and 0.50m wide at the top, tapering to a point.

Heather was commonly used in thatch. When laid above marram, it was considered a long-lasting combination, but rushes and iris leaves could also be used. Heather was another plant material from which strong rope was twisted. This was preferred for the thatch fastenings and was also used for boat ties and as general rope for use on the farm. Poaching nets could be made from heather rope but this proved to be a time-consuming operation (Beveridge 1911).

Plants and plant by-products were used for dyeing the yarns and cloth produced on the islands. Lichen or *crotal* gave reddish-brown colours; heather tips combined with iron sulphate, rue and peat soot produced yellows; heather tips gave green; iris root, grey; and *lus-mor* meaning 'big herb' produced blues. Not indigenous, but used to produce pale greens, were tea leaves.

The imposition of crofting

The crofting system was created between 1814 and 1818, and steadily introduced to the Western Isles during the first half of the 19th century. The aim was to improve agricultural standards by giving each tenant farmer a longer lease on his 'own' land for a 'useful' length of time, to encourage investment of time and labour in the new techniques believed to be beneficial to the farmer, the landlord and the land. The second purpose was to encourage

the farmers to stay on the islands, and thereby secure the landlord a workforce to manufacture the lucrative kelp. Blackadder, who was commissioned to survey the estate on North Uist, advised that:

'As kelp is the staple of the country, the encouraging of a number of the inhabitants to settle or remain in it, is the sure means of keeping up the advantages and Revenue to be derived from the manufacture of that Article. But the improvement of the land cannot be affected or brought about while the present system of run-rig possession exists...But if everyone had his separate share of the arable land inclosed with a comfortable house built on it, and...by ensuring the possessors the full enjoyment of their extra labour and improvement by terminating that careless method of dressing their fields, which now disgraces the Husbandry of the Island.'

(Blackadder 1800: 131–3 in Caird 1979)

This changed the traditional system, for the whole essence of run-rig, with the rotation of tenancies, meant that individual farms were never enclosed as separate units. Once the land was packaged into separate holdings, the traditional nature of the agricultural activities was altered, where previously it had been mainly communal, in terms both of the spatial organization of the land and the organization of people. The whole tenure of the land was altered, each tenant being given his own strip of land to work that stretched from the blackland down to the machair coast and, in this way, giving each an area of both arable land types, but preventing any form of land rotation. An area of common grazing still existed on the hill side but was much reduced compared to the extensive grazings of previous years (Caird 1979).

This arrangement was intended to give the incentive to the tenants to farm their land more 'conscientiously' but a lot of the tenants' time was taken up by kelp manufacture, which occurred during the summer and part of the autumn (see Chapter 18). The land also suffered, as there was less seaweed available for fertilizing the fields. Thus the good husbandry recommended by Blackadder (1800) was not carried out because, as kelp prices and cattle prices dropped after the Napoleonic wars, the new, and increased rents, were even more difficult to meet. Much of the old pasture land, within the former townships, was brought into cultivation in order to cope with expansion in population (Caird 1979).

The second change in the island way of life was the formation of many large farms in the 19th century, for the purpose of sheep grazing (see Chapter 18). This proved a more profitable way of raising money from the estates than extracting rents from the tenant farmers via the tacksmen. The result was devastating, for whole families were moved, from their homes of centuries, and either squashed onto the crofts of relations, where there was insufficient land to support the enlarged number of people, or they were put onto crowded boats and sent to the New World, when many died in transit. For those who remained (and managed to survive the potato famine), there was a complete change

in the organization of their farming and previous economic system.

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20 Settlement, agriculture and society in South Uist before the Clearances

Mike Parker Pearson

Before the SEARCH project started in South Uist and Barra, certain periods and types of monument were well known but others were identified only sketchily, if at all. Ian Armit's excellent synthesis *The Archaeology of Skye and the Western Isles* (1996) provides the best index of that prior state of knowledge. There was no categorical evidence of a Mesolithic presence in the Western Isles. A few Neolithic chambered cairns, stone circles and standing stones were almost all that was known from the fourth and third millennia BC (e.g. Henshall 1972; Scott 1935; 1947) except for Armit's own islet site of Eileen Domhnuill in North Uist (Armit 1992; 1997; Armit *et al.* 1998) and the settlements at Rosinish (Shepherd 1976) and the Udal (Crawford and Switsur 1977; Crawford 1986).

Almost the entire second millennium BC and the first half of the succeeding millennium were archaeological blanks, filled only by a handful of chance finds and a handful of sites of settlements and burials (e.g. Simpson 1976). The wheelhouses and brochs of the Middle Iron Age had received much attention from archaeologists (e.g. Lethbridge 1952; Young and Richardson 1960; Fairhurst 1971) but there was very little understanding of the chronological and social relationships between them. The Norse period and its transition from the Pictish Late Iron Age were known only from Drimore (MacLaren 1974) and the Udal, and the full results of the latter had remained the excavator's closely guarded secret.¹ Similarly, the Medieval and early Post-Medieval sequence had only been excavated to any satisfactory extent at the Udal and there was limited dissemination of those results.

The South Uist project whose results are reported in this volume has by no means completed the island-wide reconstruction of the complete settlement sequence but it has helped to fill in some of these blanks and to provide pointers as to how the remaining ones may be addressed. There is a better understanding of the landscape settings of settlement of different periods and of the pattern and organization between as well as within those settlements. There is also now a substantial archive of excavated settlement sites of different periods, providing hitherto

unattainable information on activity patterning in house floors as well as close contextual information for structures, finds and environmental samples.

Perhaps the most important feature of the South Uist research is that it was performed not in a vacuum but in a climate of support and enquiry. Not only were we sharing and discussing results with our colleagues working on Barra and the southern isles as well as colleagues in ARCUS carrying out contract work, but we were also building bridges with the Centre for Archaeology and the Department of Archaeology in Edinburgh as well as with other researchers working in the Western Isles. Conferences such as the Hebridean Forum held on Skye and on Rhum and the Viking conference in Stornoway provided valuable opportunities to exchange information and to discuss interpretations. The appointments of a local authority archaeologist for the Western Isles and a museum curator for the Uists also made an enormous difference; a small locally-based contract unit, Uist Archaeology, has also been established. Locally, the increased interest and involvement of people with detailed knowledge of the land and its traditions, as well as the continued support of Comann Eachdraidh Uibhist a Deas (CEUD, the South Uist Historical Society), have also made a valued contribution.

There has been a veritable renaissance of archaeological endeavour in these islands, to which our work in South Uist is one small contribution. Member of the South Uist project have published two books aimed at a general audience (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004; 2008) and post-excavation work on the major excavations at Cladh Hallan, Bornais and Cille Pheadair is nearing conclusion.

Great expectations

When we first started research on South Uist in the late 1980s and early 1990s we brought a certain amount of intellectual baggage and prior expectations, which perhaps hindered progress as much as helped. We had come looking for field systems and essentially there were none in evidence

as earthworks earlier than the lazy beds and dykes of the last few centuries. We had not reckoned that the ‘middens’ within the machair might be the actual settlement remains that we were seeking, having identified them initially as casual rubbish produced by temporary encampments. As a result, we did not wake up until 1993 to the revelation that South Uist’s machair had been densely occupied and contains settlement mounds of many different sizes and periods. We also at first overestimated the potential significance of the east coast as a settlement area, especially for the Norse period. Simply because that coastline had the appearance of fjords was not a good enough basis for expecting Viking habitation here.

Excavation in the machair and in the peatlands is fraught with problems not experienced in other soils, and the project members had to adapt to these new conditions. Iain Crawford has detailed some of the difficulties of digging in machair sand (1986; Crawford and Switsur 1977). Strong winds destroy tall sections and turn open excavation areas into sand blow-outs, which then erode the surrounding thin, protective grass layer, potentially causing large-scale sand drift. The complex and deep stratigraphy of machair sites is also something of which many British prehistorians have little experience. Cut features (pits, postholes, gullies, ditches) – the basic archaeological components of sites elsewhere in the British Isles – are relatively uncommon on the machair settlement mounds. Here the formation processes are accretive rather than erosive, so that settlement sites are an accumulation of successively laid sand layers as well as networks of cut features.

We soon learned that large open-area excavations could be conducted without any serious sandblow by battering and turfing trench edges to form an arena-like excavation area. Long and deep sections are essential for understanding the complex stratigraphy but these can be obtained with running sections, recording, removing and reinstating the section so that it never stands too tall. Machair sand is one of the most satisfying soils in which any archaeologist can have the pleasure of working. Layer colours and boundaries are mostly very clear. Finds are all too numerous and floor layers are often perfectly preserved, their soft matrix having incorporated the micro-debris of daily activities dropped on their surfaces. Although the brochs and wheelhouses of the Middle Iron Age provide a semblance of the stone-walled prehistoric houses of Orkney and Shetland, there are two reasons why such striking, surviving prehistoric architecture is rare in the Western Isles. The first is that the Lewisian gneiss is a less satisfactory building stone than the Caithness flagstone of the Northern Isles. The second is that all stone for any structure built on the machair had to be brought onto this sandy plain; any such architectural stone has then been robbed out and re-used for millennia.

Excavation on peat is bedevilled by problems of stratigraphic mixing. Soils are thin and are prone to reworking by subsequent phases of occupation, causing contamination and residuality. Even where sequences have survived undamaged, the uniform colour and texture makes identification of layers and boundaries sometimes

very difficult. Rarely do sites have just a single phase and a prehistoric house may be reused many times well into the historic period as a modified shelter or other structure, producing a confusing and often unravellable sequence of reworked deposits.

The ceramic sequence: towards a basic chronology

One of the most fortunate aspects of the archaeology of the Western Isles is the significance that pottery had in prehistory and through to the 18th century (Campbell 2003). Whereas the Scottish mainland seems to have been virtually aceramic for long periods of time, there was – as far as we can tell – no point from the Neolithic onwards when it was not produced and used in great quantities, in Uist. Unfortunately, the quality of this earthenware, apart from the Beaker ceramics, is often shockingly poor and considerably worse-made than equivalent wares in other parts of Britain, even in the Late Bronze Age when ceramics throughout the British Isles seem to have reached an all-time low! Although archaeologists must reduce their expectations of fabric quality, firing and form, ancient Hebrideans fortunately produced prodigious quantities of pottery and, as a result, have left an extremely important signature of where and when they lived.

Had the results from the Udal been publicly available when the SEARCH project began its work in South Uist, then there would have been little need to construct a ceramic typology almost from scratch (although Alan Lane was able to publish details of the Pictish late Iron Age and Norse-period sequence; 1990).

Neolithic and Early Bronze Age ceramics

Little needs to be added to Armit’s outline of the Neolithic range of Unstan Ware, Hebridean Ware and Plain Bowls (1996: 56–9). His excavations at Eilean Domhnuill in North Uist have demonstrated that not only were all three styles contemporary but also that this tripartite categorization hides a large degree of variation. In the Uists and southern isles, sites of this period from Allt Chrìsal on Barra (Gibson 1995; Branigan and Foster 1995: 29–160) and Otairnis causeway on North Uist (Downes and Badcock 1998; Squair 1998) have produced Neolithic assemblages more recently. With the publication of the Neolithic phases at Northton (Taobh Tuath) on Harris (Gibson 2006) and the Udal in North Uist, a major advance has been made in this field. The only ceramics of this period from South Uist itself are from Loch a’Choire (see Chapter 9) and An Doirlinn (Sharples 2005c). The assemblage from An Doirlinn includes plain and decorated forms likely to date to the Mid to Late Neolithic (c.3400–2700 BC; Figure 20.1).

The Beaker pottery of the Western Isles is some of the best in Britain in terms of the fineness of its decoration. The adoption of Beakers in this region is as early as anywhere else in Britain, with the earliest forms from the period 2400–2200 BC (Stuart Needham pers. comm.).

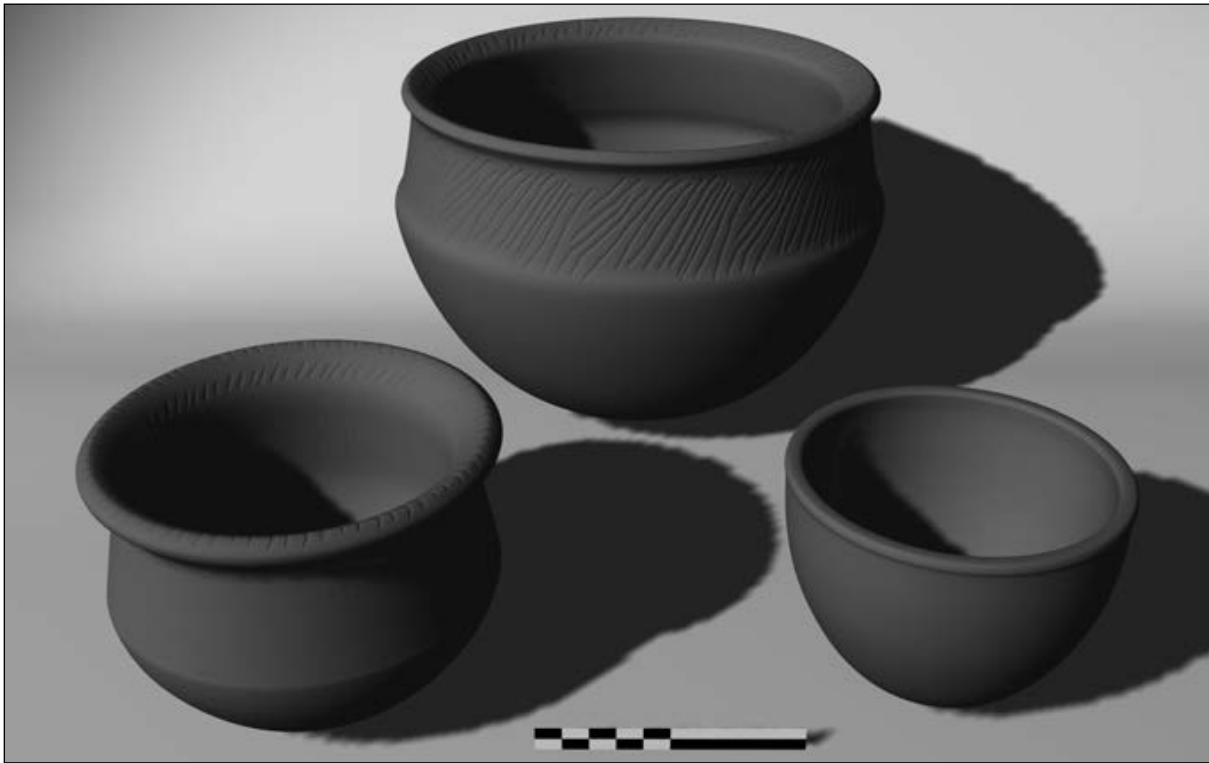


Figure 20.1. Reconstructions of Mid to Late Neolithic pottery (c. 3400–2700 BC) from South Uist

Beakers come from burials, as elsewhere in Britain but, more importantly, the Western Isles have yielded remains of Beaker settlements that are among the most prolific and well preserved of any in Europe. On Lewis and Harris, the sites of Barvas, Callanais, Cnip, Dalmore and Northton have all produced important Beaker assemblages whilst, in Barra and the Uists, Allt Chrìsal, Rosinish, Gortan (Barber 2003) and the Udal have been augmented by excavated Beaker assemblages from Sligeanach at Cill Donnain (see Chapter 11), from Cladh Hallan (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004: 50–1; in prep.) and from Machair Mheadhanach (see Chapter 10) (Figure 20.2).

Beakers probably continued in use until about 1700 BC and were largely contemporary with Food Vessels (c.2300–1700 BC). Both forms might also have overlapped with the use of Cordoned Urns and variants (c.2000–1500 BC). These are large biconical pots with applied cordons around their middles and cord-decorated zones below their rims, and have been described as local variants of the Collared Urn tradition (Armit 1996: 96). Although well known throughout Scotland as containers of cremations, well recorded examples are rare in the Western Isles; however, these pots have been found with inhumations and cremations at sites such as Roisinis (Rosinish; Crawford 1967), Cnip (Kneep; Close-Brooks 1995; Armit 1996: 96–9) and Cladh Hallan (Wedderspoon 1912).

Despite these Early Bronze Age Food Vessel and Cordoned Urn types being well known as cremation urns more widely in Britain, they are extremely rare as settlement ceramics. The Western Isles is one of the few regions where settlement mounds survive from this period;

Food Vessel pottery has been excavated at Sligeanach (Site 18; see Chapter 11), with Cordoned Urn sherds from Cladh Hallan (Sites 54 and 55) and Cill Donnain III (Site 85; Parker Pearson and Seddon 2004).

Later Bronze Age and Early Iron Age ceramics

From c.1600 BC to c.200 BC the pottery of the Western Isles was largely plain. This plainware is dated as early as 1740–1520 cal BC and occurs in inhumation and cremation burials as bucket-shaped pots in the islands at Cnip (Armit 1996: 99) and elsewhere in Scotland (Sheridan 2003). It is known in a settlement context at Cladh Hallan where it spans the entire period of that site's use, from the Middle Bronze Age (Figure 20.3) onwards. By 1100 BC the Late Bronze Age pottery from Cladh Hallan shows a limited degree of decoration, consisting of finger impressions along the rims and single lines of pinpricks either on top of the rims or immediately below them (Figure 20.4). Thereafter, it is entirely undecorated throughout the whole Cladh Hallan sequence to c.400 BC (Figure 20.5). Similar plain pottery of the Early Iron Age (c.700–400 BC) has been recovered from excavations at Sligeanach and Dun Vulcan in South Uist (Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999) and from Borve in Barra (Branigan and Foster 2000: 216–24).

The large inclusions of gneiss and the poorly fired fabric make this plainware otherwise distinctive. Like the non-Beaker Early Bronze Age ceramics, it does not survive well when exposed to the elements and is often under-represented on the surfaces of settlement mounds. The Cladh Hallan stratigraphic sequence demonstrates



Figure 20.2. Reconstructions of Beaker-period pottery (c. 2400–1700 BC) from South Uist

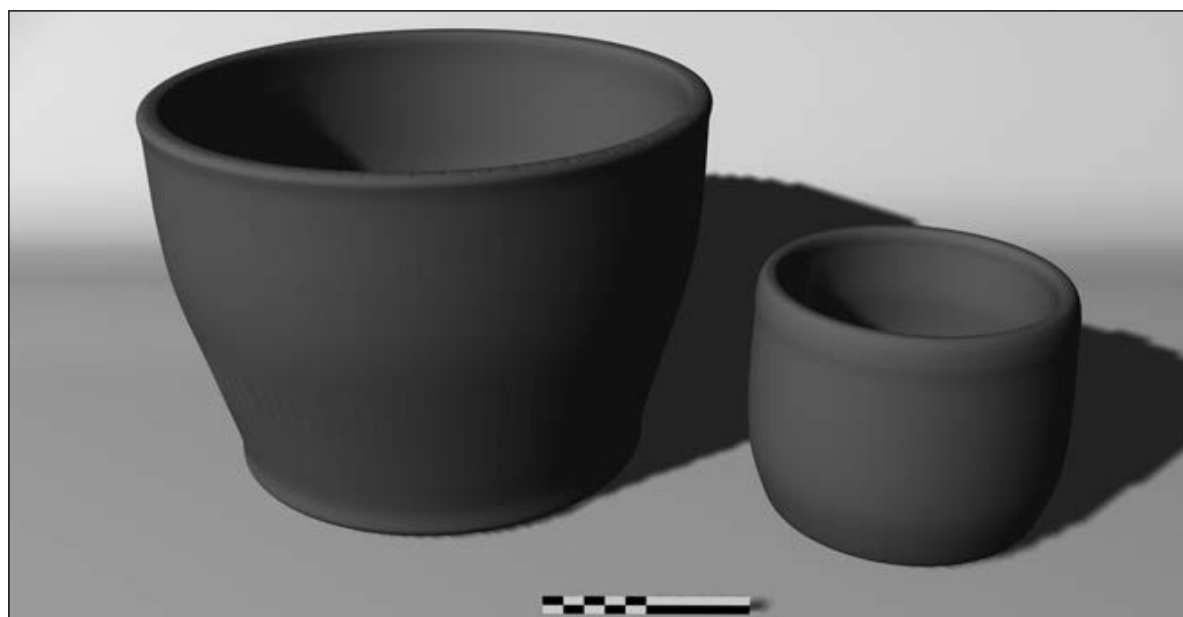


Figure 20.3. Reconstructions of Middle Bronze Age pottery (c. 1600–1100 BC) from South Uist

changes in rim shape so that the primarily flat and angled rims of the Late Bronze Age are replaced by rounded and sometimes thickened rims later in the Early Iron Age. Late Bronze Age forms are mostly buckets, jars and bowls, with bucket shapes of different sizes predominating into the Early Iron Age.

After c.400 BC, the pottery changed to thinner-walled, squatter forms with limited decoration in the form of incised lines, applied strips and cordons and stabbed dots (Figure 20.6). This is exemplified by the Phase 2 assemblage at Eilean Olabhat in North Uist (Armit *et al.* 2008: 73) and by the ceramics from the Early Iron Age layers at Upper Loch Bornish in South Uist (see Chapter 12). These new

styles probably developed gradually into those of the Middle Iron Age (Campbell 2002: 141).

Middle Iron Age ceramics

The distinctive decorated pottery of the Middle Iron Age has been recovered from many excavations in South Uist and elsewhere in the Western Isles. Rounded vessels now appear in significant numbers along with the buckets, jars and bowls (Figure 20.7). Decoration is mostly incised, grooved or channelled (chevrons, ladders, zig-zags, ‘feather’ patterns, dots, arcades) together with the pinched (S-shaped) applied cordons around the middle of the vessel.



Figure 20.4. Reconstructions of Late Bronze Age pottery (c. 1100–700 BC) from South Uist



Figure 20.5. Reconstructions of Early Iron Age pottery (c. 700–400 BC) from South Uist

The Dun Vulcan sequence, building on the results from the wheelhouses at Sollas in North Uist (Campbell 1991), provides a chronological framework for changes within this ceramic repertoire between *c.*200 BC and *c.*AD 300 (La Trobe-Bateman 1999). Applied cordons are rare in the earliest phases where decoration mostly consists of relatively simple angled incisions. Certain ladder and feather motifs did not appear until *c.*AD 200 whilst sharply everted rims were introduced after AD 300. Recent radiocarbon dating shows that everted rims were employed as early as the second century AD at Sollas (Campbell 2002: 141; Campbell *et al.* 2004) and by the first century BC at Cnip (Macswheen in Armit 2006: 101).

Late Iron Age ceramics

After AD 300 the only decorative feature remaining is the pinched applied cordon, which is found around the belly of the pot and also around the neck. By AD 250 rims develop a characteristically flared shape (Figure 20.8). By the later period, after *c.*AD 600, Plain Style consists of a series of bucket forms that may be occasionally decorated by finger impressions or lines of pinpricks along the rim (Figure 20.9).

Stratigraphic sequences at Dun Vulcan, Bornais mound 1 (Sharples forthcoming a) and Cill Donnain have contributed to our understanding of Plain Style pottery, notably its earlier forms before *c.*AD 600 (LIA 1). Outside South Uist,

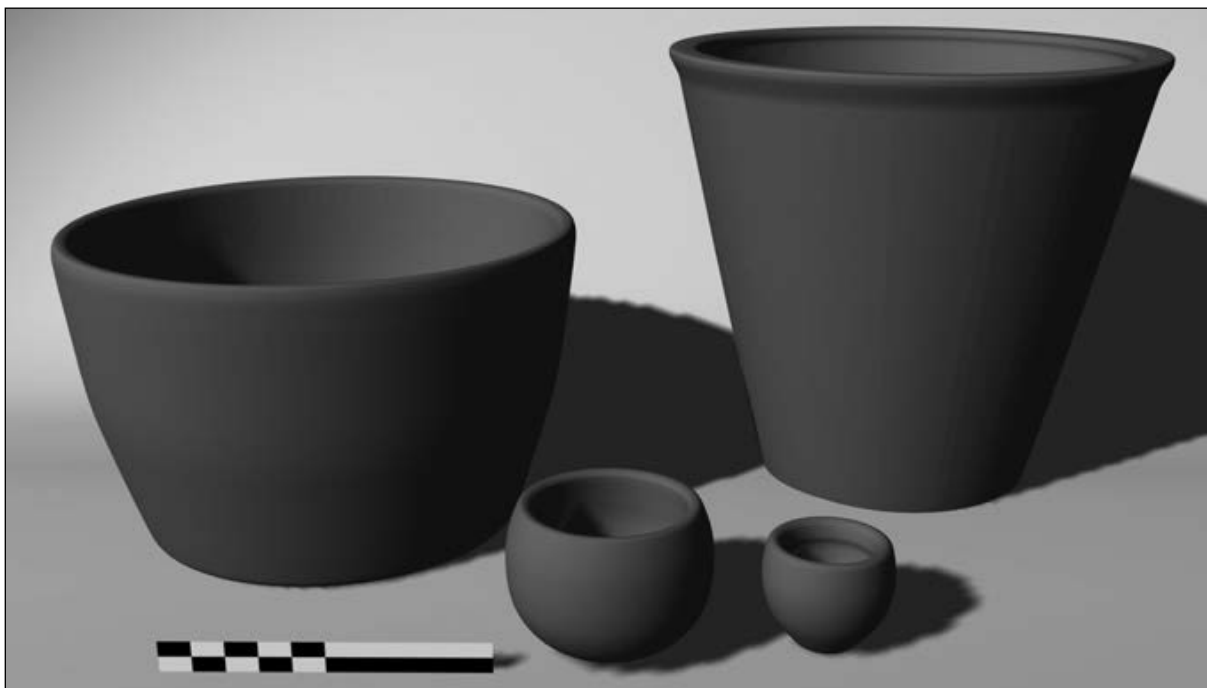


Figure 20.6. Reconstructions of Early Iron Age pottery (c. 400–200 BC) from South Uist

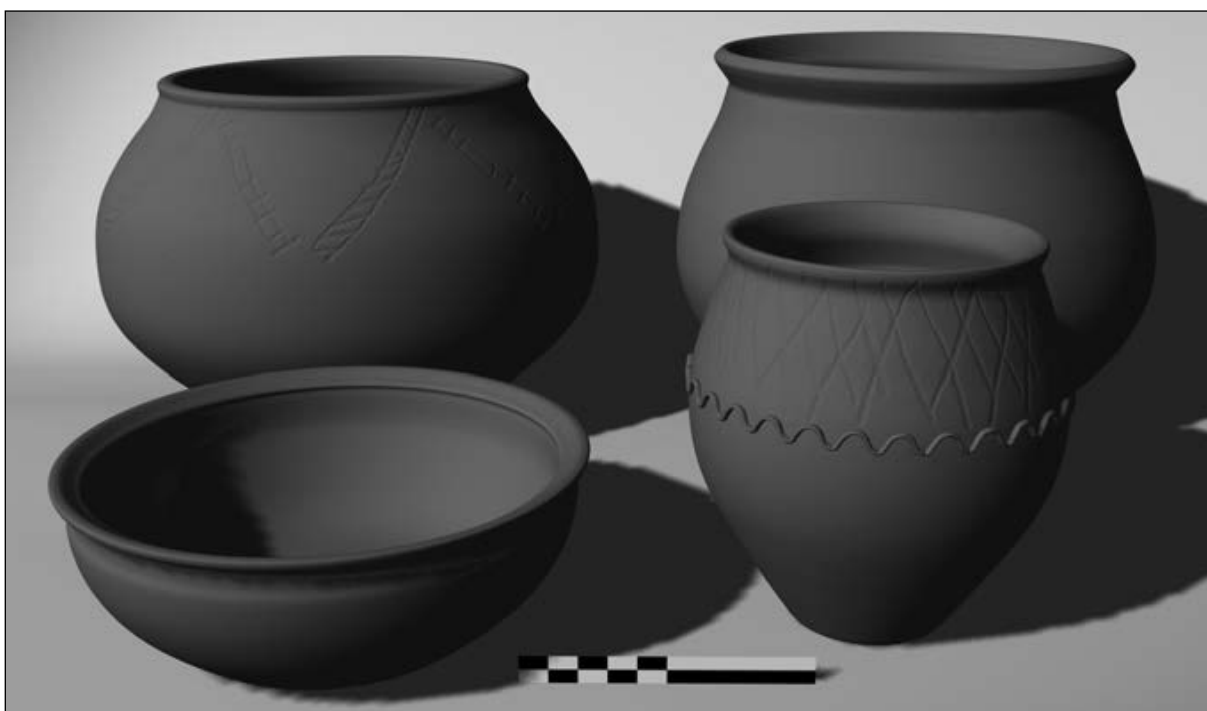


Figure 20.7. Reconstructions of Middle Iron Age pottery (c. 200 BC–AD 300) from South Uist

similar assemblages have been excavated at Loch na Berie (Beirgh), Dun Cuier, the Udal, Eilean Olabhat and Cnip (Lane 1990: 117–23). The settlement at Bostaidh Beach is also an important context (Neighbour and Burgess 1996). However, the later undecorated ceramics (LIA 2; c. AD 600–900) are not well known outside of the Udal North Hill (Lane 1990: 117–23; Campbell 2002: 142) and the only

such finds from South Uist are from pre-Viking levels at the bottom of Bornais mound 2 (Sharples forthcoming b).

The similarity of Late Iron Age Plain Style wares to those of the Late Bronze Age about 1500 years earlier is uncanny. Other than the slightly higher firing temperatures of the Late Iron Age pottery, there is very little difference between the two. For some time, we were misled on



Figure 20.8. Reconstructions of Late Iron Age pottery (c. AD 300–600) from South Uist

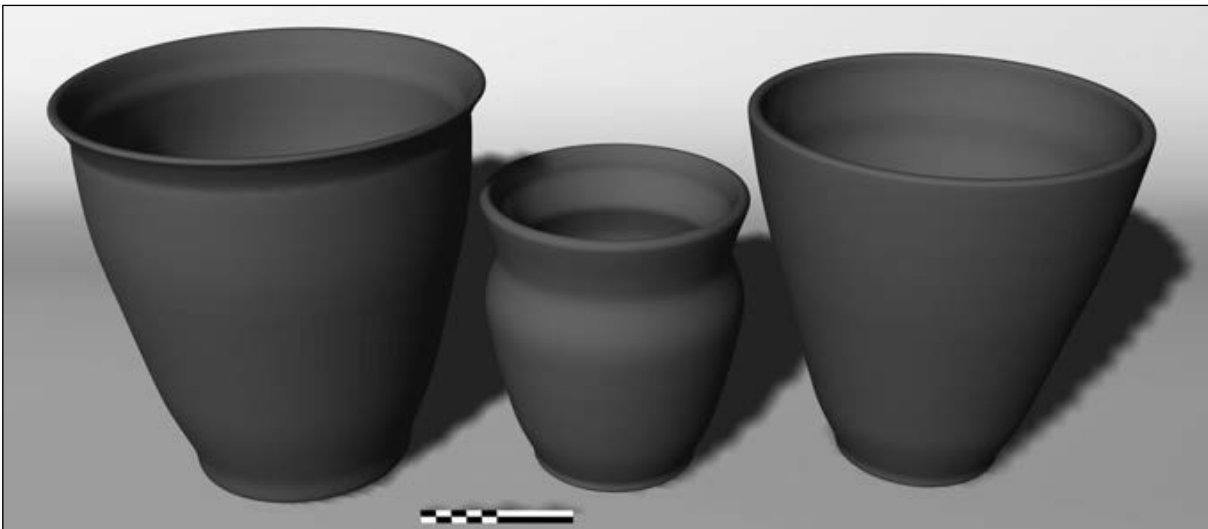


Figure 20.9. Reconstructions of Late Iron Age pottery (c. AD 600–800) from South Uist

certain sites such as Frobost (see Chapter 13), ascribing their Late Iron Age ceramics to the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages. This revisiting of the pottery of a much earlier era is potentially extremely interesting, perhaps indicating a movement towards cultural retrenchment in the Pictish period in the face of encroaching hegemonies from eastern Scotland, Scandinavia, southwest Scotland and Ireland.

Norse-period ceramics

Although a large assemblage from the Udal was reported on by Alan Lane (1990), there was no opportunity to analyse

its chronological development within the Norse period. The Udal Norse-period ceramics are largely plain and consist of convex pots with flat or angled bases, open and bucket-shaped pots as before and characteristic flat, circular platters decorated on one side with grass-marked impressions and on the other with finger impressions, stabmarks, piercings and channelling. Some of the pots also have grass-marking along with a variety of surface treatments.

Excavations at Cille Pheadair and Bornais have provided a fine-grained stratigraphic phasing of Norse-period ceramics (Figure 20.10), showing that platter ware formed only a small proportion (5%) of the assemblage by c. 1050 but

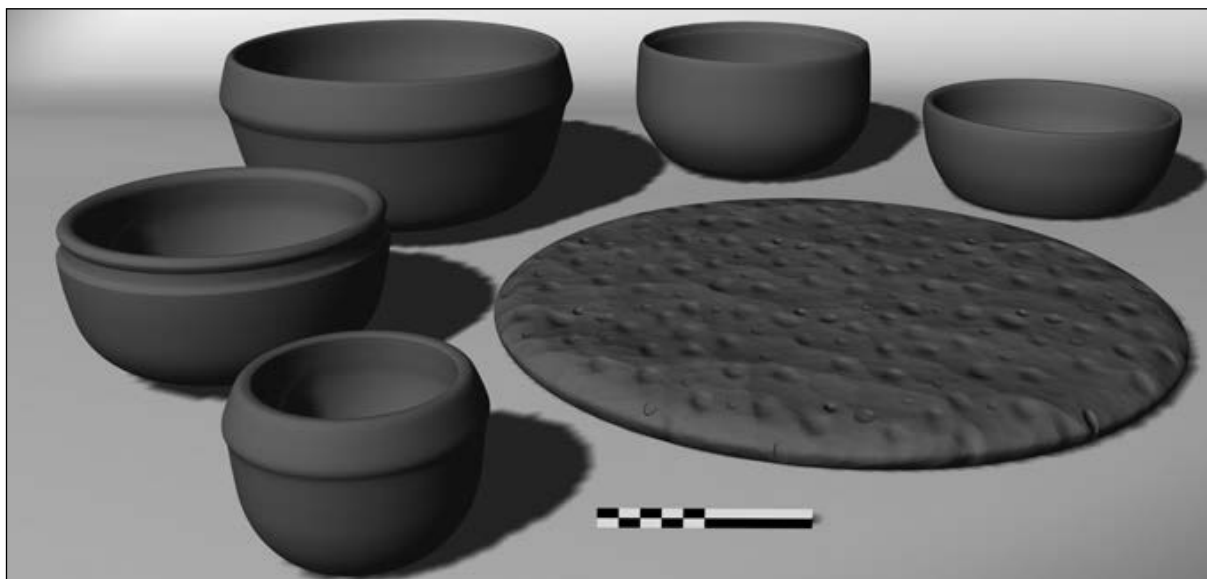


Figure 20.10. Reconstructions of Viking Age pottery (c. 800–1200) from South Uist



Figure 20.11. Reconstructions of Medieval pottery (c. 1200–1500) from South Uist

rose to almost half (46%) by c.1300. Chronological changes in platter rim form permit a finer series of distinctions within this sequence. Platters may have continued in use at Bornais until c. 1400 (Lane in Sharples 2005b: 194). Other changes include the development of thin, straighter-walled wares from c.1100 (Bond forthcoming; Sharples 2005b).

Late Medieval and early Post-Medieval ceramics

Probably more cubic metres of stratified deposits from

this period of South Uist's past have been excavated than from any other and yet, paradoxically, it is the phase about which there is most uncertainty. With the results from the Udal being unpublished, the ceramic sequence has had to be largely rediscovered through new excavations. Many of these have been on peat where stratigraphic security is difficult or impossible to attain.

The final phases at Bornais, dating to after 1200, see the introduction of locally made 'Medieval' ceramics with everted rims and footed bases (Figure 20.11). These are



Figure 20.12. Reconstructions of Post-Medieval pottery (c. 1500–1750) from South Uist

plain wares, which continue at Bornais to around 1400. They can also be paralleled in the small assemblage from Gearraidh Bhailteas (see Chapter 15). The Medieval assemblage from Cille Donnain church probably dates to this time and a little later, say 1400–1500, on the basis of imported pottery; everted rims are still present but high-necked rims are dominant (see Chapter 14). Decoration with angled incised lines, interrupted applied cordons and thumbprint impressions are now introduced.

The pottery of the early Post-Medieval period (c.1500–c.1750) remained of earthenware (Figure 20.12). Its characteristic decorative motifs are rim-top impressed decoration, pinpricks here and on the neck and upper body of the vessel together with stabbed decoration, slashing and triangular impressions. Within South Uist it has been found in excavations at Dun Vulcan, A Beinn na Mhic Aongheis (see Chapter 16), Aisgernis (see Chapter 13) and Machair Mheadhanach (Raven 2005: 482–4; see Chapter 2). Elsewhere it has been found at Eilean Olabhat and Druimm nan Dearcag in North Uist (Armit *et al.* 2008; Armit 1997).

Excavations of blackhouses at Airigh Mhuillin (the Flora MacDonald birthplace) have established their dates of occupation as being after 1750 (there being no trace of the late 17th-century settlement in which Flora MacDonald grew up; Symonds 1999a and b; 2000). Less than a handful of earthenware sherds were recovered, the ceramic assemblage being composed almost entirely of imported slipwares. This suggests that the traditional earthenwares went out of use in South Uist perhaps before or around 1750. The use of the well-known craggan ware would seem to have been short-lived in South Uist, confined to the 17th

century rather than continuing later into the 18th and 19th centuries as documented for Lewis and Harris.

The settlement sequence

As Armit has observed, the unique character of the Western Isles' archaeology lends itself well to studying the long-term processes of change and continuity (1996: 233). Deep stratigraphic sequences provide remarkable evidence of continuity as well as abrupt changes, and many buildings were later re-used. The faunal assemblages from machair settlements can be compared with the palaeoenvironmental evidence surviving in nearby peat bogs. The good survival of the floor plans and floor layers of dwellings also provides insights into long-term changes in the everyday routines of daily life.

Were the islands inhabited in the Mesolithic?

The Inner Hebrides were extensively settled from the eighth millennium BC (Mellars 1987; Mithen 2000) and yet there is still very little evidence for Mesolithic occupation of the Outer Hebrides. The Minch formed a deep sea barrier to movement overland throughout the Post-Glacial period and has been regarded by some scholars as having formed an impassable barrier until the arrival of boat-using farmers after 4500 BC.

One of the SEARCH project's initial aims was to demonstrate that Mesolithic hunter-gatherers had indeed reached these shores but it was realized very early on in the project that major transformations of South Uist's landscape have hidden or destroyed the ground surfaces

where Mesolithic people would most likely have lived. The Mesolithic west coast, whose gentle bays would have provided seafood from shellfish, fish and seals, has been entirely inundated and now lies miles out to sea. The western coastal plain is similarly beneath the waves except for its eastern margins, which are now covered by many metres of machair sand. Up in the hills, the passes and routeways for deer (that would have to have been brought from the mainland if the herds were not established from individual animals swimming the Minch) have been covered by the growth of thick layers of blanket peat. No likely looking rock shelters have been located in the mountainous areas of South Uist and so there seems little chance that systematic survey will locate Mesolithic remains.

The palynological evidence from Loch Antsil in South Uist provides evidence for woodland clearance and charcoal deposition during the sixth millennium BC (Brayshay and Edwards 1996; see also Edwards *et al.* 2005). Although this is not the only evidence for modification of the forest in the Mesolithic, it still does not constitute definite proof of a human presence in the islands. Such patterning could be caused by lightning strikes having set fire to small patches of forest.

More convincing evidence of Mesolithic occupation has been found at Northton in Harris, however, in pre-machair deposits beneath Neolithic layers (Simpson *et al.* 2006: 78–9). Initial identification of Late Mesolithic remains (within a Late Mesolithic–Neolithic sequence) in deposits excavated in advance of road construction at Langais in North Uist (Holderness 2007), downslope from the Neolithic cairn of Bharpa Langais, was subsequently refuted when radiocarbon determinations confirmed that none of the activity dated to before the Early Neolithic (Anna Badcock pers. comm.).

On South Uist, any evidence from excavations for a Mesolithic presence is still lacking. Excavations around the Neolithic chambered cairn of Leaval (Cummings and Sharples 1999) and on a small islet in Loch a'Choire (see Chapter 9), both at the southern end of the island, located Neolithic flintwork but there were no Mesolithic microliths in the assemblages.

Neolithic settlement

Pollen sequences from South Uist lochs show a continued clearance of the woodland during the fourth and third millennia BC until *c.*2500 BC when most of the trees disappeared (Brayshay and Edwards 1996). Evidence that South Uist was settled by farming communities in the previous millennium comes from the seven chambered cairns at Glac Hukarvat, Reineval, Barp Frobost, Loch a' Bharp, Sig More, Leaval and Dun Trossary (see Chapter 5). A large cairn at Gleann Dail bho Dheas (South Glendale; NF 8103 1435) may possibly contain another chambered tomb but the lack of visible stones for a chamber or peristaliths points to it probably being an unusually large Bronze Age cairn (see Chapter 8).

Most of these tombs are located on high ground, often



Figure 20.13. The Mid to Late Neolithic settlement at An Doirlinn, Orosay, viewed from the south

beneath a pass or area of mountains linking through to the east coast. How they relate to the distribution of habitation sites is still unknown. The Loch a'Choire finds (see Chapter 9) indicate that islet settlements like Eilean Domhnuill in North Uist (Armit 1992) might not have been uncommon. A fortuitous survival is the Neolithic settlement of An Doirlinn, perched upon a narrow, eroding stack on the tidal causeway to the west-coast tidal island of Orosay (Figure 20.13). Stratified deposits survive to a depth of 0.90m in a strip 16m long by 6m wide (Sharples 2005c). This would once have been located at some distance from the sea, positioned in the lea of Orosay on a piece of high ground, possibly formerly surrounded by a freshwater loch.²

The discovery of a Neolithic settlement at Allt Chrìsal on Barra (Branigan and Foster 1995: 49–160) is a likely indication of how dispersed Neolithic activity was across the islands, particularly within the small valleys of the hill margins. Two small sites at Otairnis in North Uist were discovered fortuitously as a result of topsoil stripping in advance of the construction of the Berneray causeway (Downes and Badcock 1998), demonstrating the difficulty of either predicting such sites' locations or finding them by non-invasive survey.

Neolithic settlements may lie buried beneath the machair. We had hoped that there might be situations similar to Northton on Harris (Simpson *et al.* 2006) where the Beaker-period settlement in machair sand lay directly above the Late Neolithic settlement covered by the sand (see Chapter 10 for detailed discussion). However, the cutting of a machine trench at Sligeanaich (see Chapter 11) failed to reach the base of the machair sand several metres below the Early Bronze Age deposits.

At this stage, it seems that Neolithic settlement was dispersed across the gneiss-based soils of the island and that any on the west side were either inundated by rising sea levels or buried beneath deep layers of machair sand that arrived in its present position during the Neolithic (see Chapters 2 and 10 for discussion of the dates of machair formation). Islets and valley locations therefore offer the most promising locales for finding Neolithic habitation sites.

The Beaker period and Early Bronze Age

Settlements of this period (2400–1500 BC) are among the Western Isles' most important archaeological sites (Sharples 2009). Throughout Europe, Beaker and Corded Ware houses are almost as rare as hen's teeth. More than half of the number of excavated houses of this period in Britain are in the Western Isles. Sadly, excavators have been slow to publish the details of these houses other than in interim form. It is also in the Western Isles that Beaker-period cross-ploughing is so well preserved, as seen at Rosinish, Cladh Hallan and Sligeanach. The latter is the largest extent so far discovered but the small scale of the test pitting in all three cases hinders any attempt at characterizing the extent and divisions of these fields. The evidence from Cladh Hallan suggests that the cultivation soil not only had to be specially prepared as a mixture of machair sand with peat and household waste but might also blow away and require replenishing (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004a: 50–1).

The pattern of settlement in South Uist took on an evenly spaced structure at this time, aspects of which continued throughout the Bronze Age. The earliest settlements on the machair are Beaker sites and are found in three large concentrations at Cladh Hallan, Cill Donnain and Machair Mheadhanach (see Chapters 2, 10 and 11). These locations are of interest because each lies close to the head of the three east-coast sea lochs that feed into the Minch. At the same time, the western locations of these settlements also provided immediate access to the west coast. The spacing also intimates a largely tripartite territorial division of the island into north, middle and south. However, the Early Bronze Age settlement clusters appear to be generally further west than sites of later periods (*i.e.* currently nearest the sea) and other examples from this date might well have been washed away.

A small Beaker-period settlement has been excavated on a small patch of machair at Gortan (Barber 2003) at the extreme south end of South Uist and another may be indicated on the peatland by a thumbnail scraper and other flints from Gleann Chill Donnain (Site 188). No doubt these are some of the smaller-scale habitations that would have been present throughout the island during that period.

The almost complete lack of dwellings from this period is a major gap in our knowledge and raises the need for a programme of research on the settlements of the first half of the second millennium BC. Early Bronze Age settlement deposits with Food Vessels or Cordoned Urns have been partially excavated at Cladh Hallan (Sites 54 and 55), Sligeanach (Site 18) and Cill Donnain (Site 85). Sadly, the Cladh Hallan complex appears to have included a large Early–Middle Bronze Age settlement (site 54) that was mostly destroyed by sand quarrying in the late 1980s. Among the remains, according to local reports, were half a dozen inhumations of which only one was recovered.

At Cill Donnain (Site 85), a small mound, about 20m NW-SE by 15m SW-NE and with up to a metre of stratified deposits, lies about 1m beneath the site of an excavated wheelhouse (Figure 20.14). Although buried

under windblown sand beneath the Iron Age levels, its extent and depth were determined by hand augering. It was initially found by trenching in 1991 (Zvelebil 1991) and was later recorded after damage by sand quarrying in 2003 (Parker Pearson and Seddon 2004). Among the finds were sherds of Cordoned Urn, a bone point and a possible fragment of a ceramic metalworking mould.

The distribution of stone circles and standing stones assumed to date to this period is somewhat unusual. They are almost entirely located within a 4km radius of the Cill Donnain settlement complex and consist of two stone circles in the hills east of Aisgernis and Cill Donnain, standing stones on Cill Donnain machair and at An Charra, and possibly later settings of single stones at Aisgernis and Cnoc a Breac. The exception to this distribution is the Polochar stone at the south end of South Uist though, like the Aisgernis stone, it has probably been moved from its original position. In any case, some of these stones may date to the Pictish period; if so, the pecked Aisgernis stone (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004a: fig. 24) and the crucifix-like Cnoc a Breac stone are prime candidates.

This concentration of stone monuments around Cill Donnain points to the possibility that this area had become the ceremonial centre for the island. This pattern is markedly different from the dispersed arrangement of Neolithic tombs although the only two tombs that are close together are those nearest Cill Donnain. The nearest comparable complex on other islands is the stone circles and standing stones of North Uist, which show rather less clustering.

Some of the most distinctive Early Bronze Age monuments throughout the British Isles are the round barrows and round cairns. Where they have been excavated in the Western Isles, they are kerbed cairns and appear to date to anywhere within the second millennium BC (Branigan and Foster 2000: 192–216). There are surprisingly few in South Uist – single examples from Gleann Chill Donnain, Loch Aoineart and Loch Druidibeag – but the islands to the south such as Fuday, Eriskay and Barra have many more.

An interesting observation about South Uist in this period comes from Clive Ruggles' research into stone settings and alignments on the mainland. He provides intriguing evidence that South Uist might have been invested with a certain sacredness since it appears to have been the spot on which certain Inner Hebridean stone monuments were aligned (Ruggles 1999). Similar though less certain claims have been made for the alignments of particular South Uist standing stones with the island of St Kilda, and for their being placed on the axis of sunrise and sunset at important moments (solstices and cross-quarter days) in the annual calendar (Curtis 2009).

The Middle and Later Bronze Age

Sites of this period were almost entirely unknown in the Western Isles prior to our research (Armit 1996: 99; fig. 6.5). The only find type was the very occasional deposit of bronzes: the Adabrock hoard at the Butt of Lewis, four

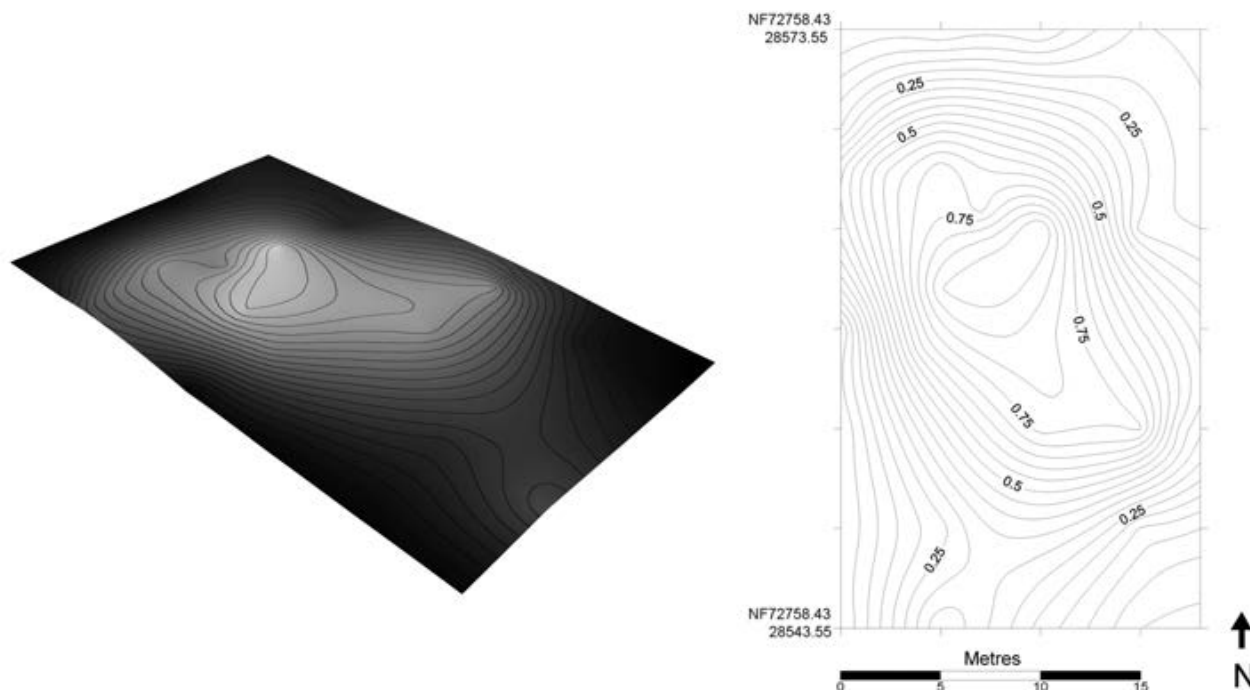


Figure 20.14. Contour plot of the Early Bronze Age Cordoned Urn-period settlement mound at Cill Donnain III (buried by windblown sand beneath a Middle Iron Age wheelhouse, and revealed by coring)

spearheads from Cairinis in North Uist and two stray swords from Iochdar in the north of South Uist.

Our only knowledge of what Middle Bronze Age houses looked like has come from the Cladh Hallan excavations (Parker Pearson *et al.* in prep.), which uncovered the damaged remains of a Middle Bronze Age post-built, boat-shaped house or shelter, 6m long and 3m wide, with a central hearth close to the doorway (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004a: 62–3). It is very similar in shape and dimensions to the Beaker-period house at Northton (Simpson *et al.* 2006: 85–7) and in shape to a larger eroded structure of similar date at Rosinish (Shepherd 1976).

Cremation burials at Cladh Hallan demonstrate a likely sequence from Earlier Bronze Age inurned types (Wedderspoon 1912) to Later Bronze Age cremations within stone ring settings. There are also inhumations, including those of formerly preserved and composite bodies, which were found beneath the Cladh Hallan Late Bronze Age roundhouses (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004a: 64–82; 2005; 2007).

These structures were built as part of a terraced row and exhibit a marked discontinuity with the past, by replacing the boat-shaped island style of house with the pan-British large roundhouse (Figure 20.15). This shift was as much ideological as economic and sees the arrival of the sunwise arrangement of interior activities at around 1100 BC (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004a: 198–201). The large increase in floor size may also be linked to changes in household structure, with the living area being enlarged so that extended family groups could live under one roof. The association of metalworking debris with the largest roundhouse also

highlights institutional inequalities between households for the first time.

There are two other areas with Late Bronze Age settlement, at Machair Mheadhanach and Cill Donnain–Staoinebrig. Important changes in agriculture and sedentism are indicated at this date by the sizes of settlement mounds from this period and thereafter. Whereas the earlier settlements survive as mounds no more than knee-high, those of the Late Bronze Age are sometimes 3m high or more. This probably reflects an increased degree of sedentism and fixity of dwelling as well as the generation of more household debris. It may be that household waste was no longer going into specially prepared cultivation soils and that agriculture was actually becoming less intensive rather than more so. Instead of cultivating a small plot, farmers were ploughing much larger areas (including onto the settlement mounds themselves!) of both machair and blackland and possibly letting land lie fallow for longer periods.

Animal bone assemblages indicate that dairying appears to have been an important strategy that was to continue without substantial modification until the Norse period (Mulville *et al.* 2005). Lamb, venison and pork were the other prime meats accompanying veal and the young ages of the deer indicate some form of herd management closer to domestication than hunting – red deer fauns shelter passively in undergrowth, from which they can be gathered rather than hunted (Jacqui Mulville pers. comm.) Seafood and birds constituted minor elements of the diet although isotope levels indicate that perhaps as much as 10% of protein might have come from the sea (Mulville *et al.* 2009).

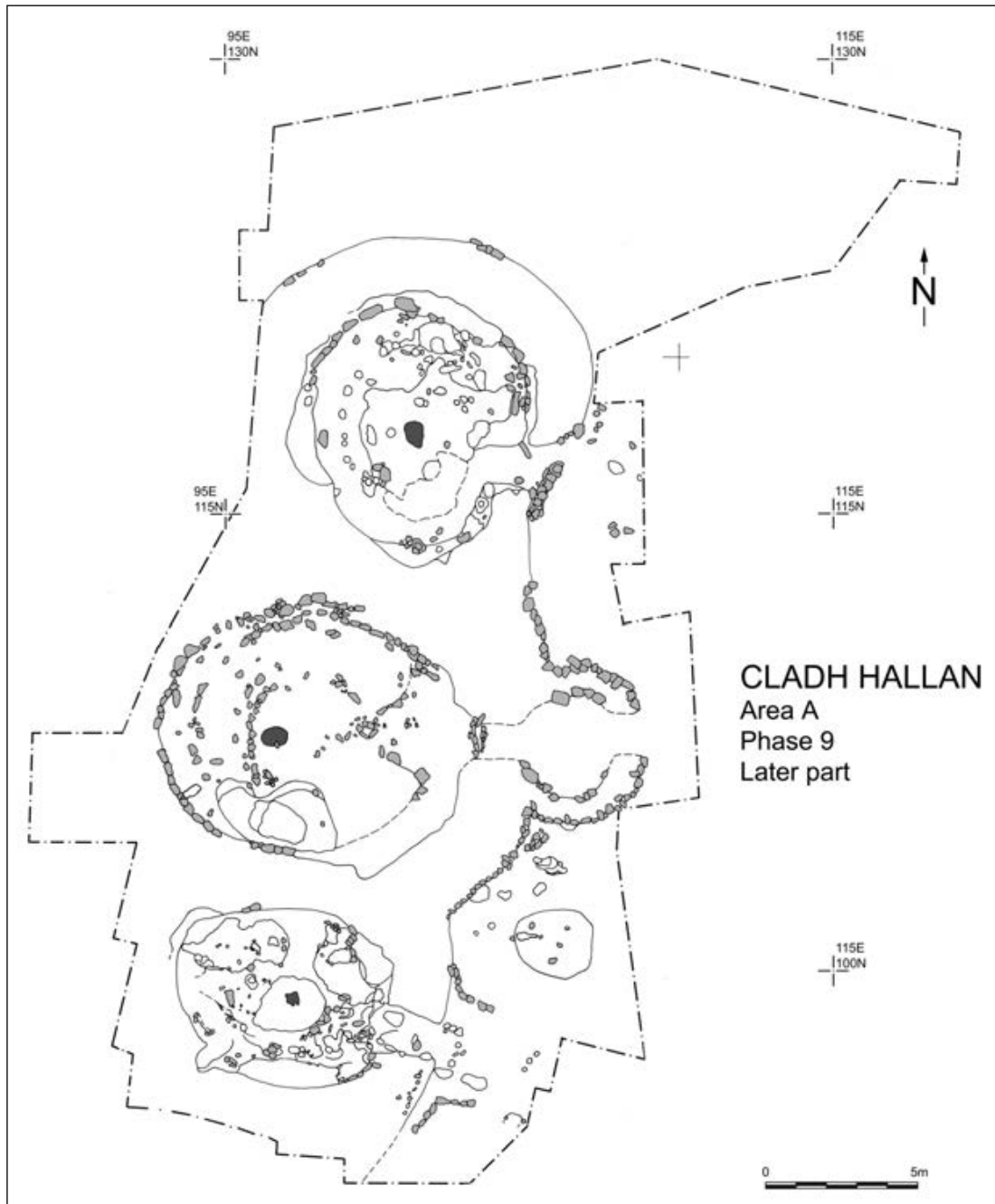


Figure 20.15. The row of three Late Bronze Age roundhouses at Cladh Hallan

The Machair Mheadhanach complex appears to be a most impressive group of at least five large settlement mounds with an outlier in the basal deposits at Hornish Point. Cladh Hallan is probably also a large complex of three or four mounds. Whereas the Cill Donnain area seems to have been so important in the Early Bronze Age, only two mounds on Staoinebrig and Ormacleit machair appear to date to this period and the latter is a small one. However, two of the Middle Iron Age mounds in this area (Sites 9 and 15) are very large and may easily conceal Late Bronze Age origins.

Elsewhere, there are few traces of settlement of this period. The presence of Late Bronze Age pottery at Kirkidale (see Chapter 17) indicates occupation on the

east coast in this period. Otherwise there are no traces of roundhouse dwellings off the machair except for the later, Middle Iron Age wheelhouses.

The Early Iron Age

The Cladh Hallan excavations have demonstrated that there is no cultural break between the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age, since the large, middle roundhouse shows continuous occupation and refurbishment across these centuries. The ceramic styles are similarly continuous with only the slightest of modifications in rim forms to indicate any changes. Thus this period is very much a continuation of the former.

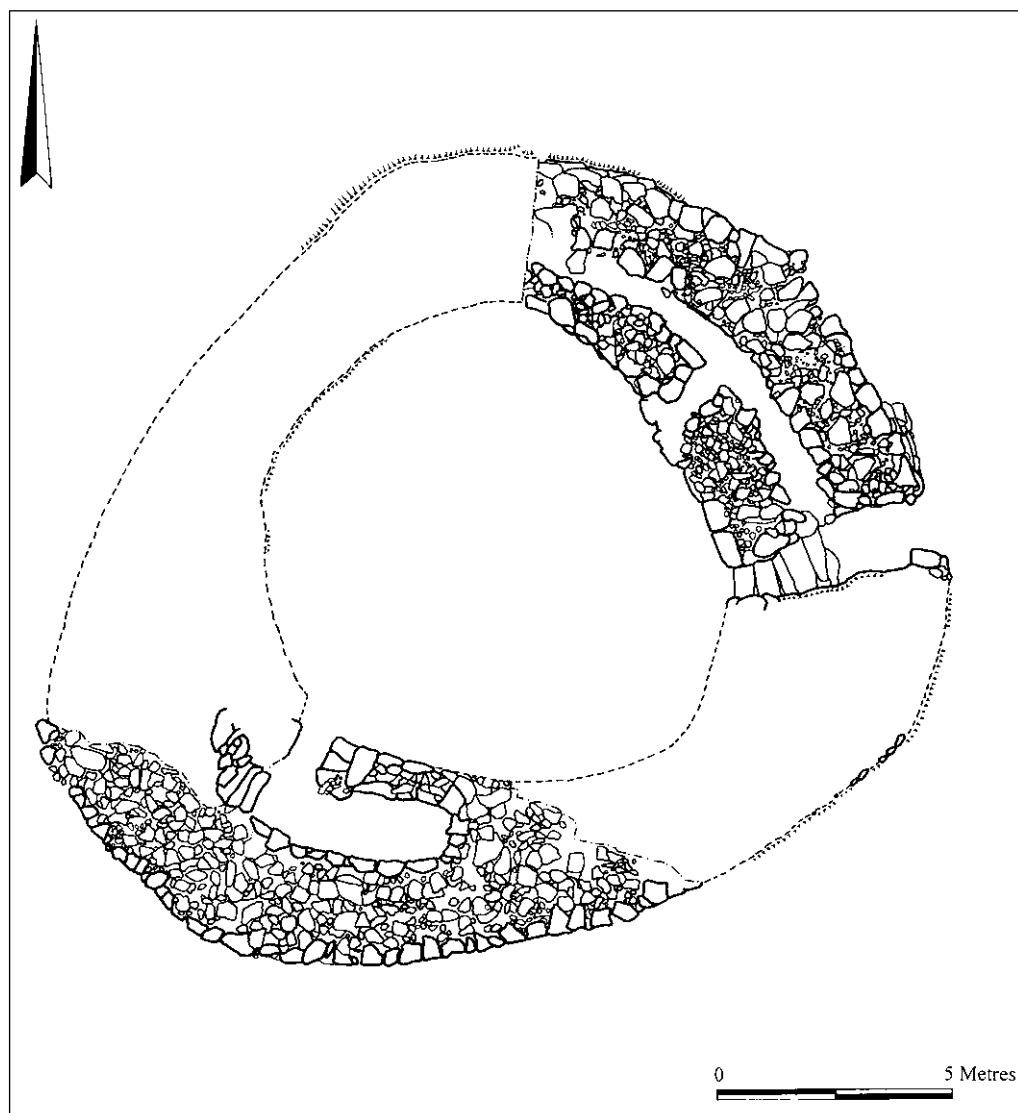


Figure 20.16. The Middle Iron Age broch of Dun Vulcan

Other Early Iron Age deposits but no buildings have been located in test pits at Sligeanach and Machair Mheadhanach as well as under the broch at Dun Vulcan. Towards the middle of the Early Iron Age, in the fourth century BC, a substantial stone-walled structure was built on the islet in Upper Loch Bornish, possibly the predecessor to the broch of Dun Vulcan which was itself built in the second or first century BC (see Chapter 12). This arrangement recalls the juxtaposition of the structures at Loch Bharabhat and Loch na Beirgh in Lewis (Dixon and Harding 2000; Harding and Gilmour 2000).

The Middle Iron Age

Thus certain brochs (or monumental stone roundhouses) seem to have appeared in the middle of the first millennium BC, several centuries prior to the wheelhouses, although others such as Dun Vulcan (Figure 20.16) were largely contemporary with wheelhouses in both their construction and their use. Brochs appeared at a time of major reorgan-

ization of access to land. The distribution of Middle Iron Age settlements is profoundly different to the largely concentrated clusters of earlier settlement mounds. The whole extent of the machair from north to south is covered by mounds of this period, indicative of both a population growth and also a reorganization into dispersed small communities each with their farmland in the immediate vicinity.

As argued in the Dun Vulcan monograph (Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999), the brochs were constructed within an era of settlement expansion as new land rights required formulation, negotiation and agreement, especially in relation to the hitherto more communal areas of moorland and upland grazing, loch fishing and access for sea fishing. The brochs were placed within freshwater lochs (even Dun Vulcan) and were located at some distance from the Early and Middle Iron Age machair settlements, generally in the zones of rough pasture. Furthermore, they were placed in the zones between the east–west strips farmed by the Iron Age machair settlements.

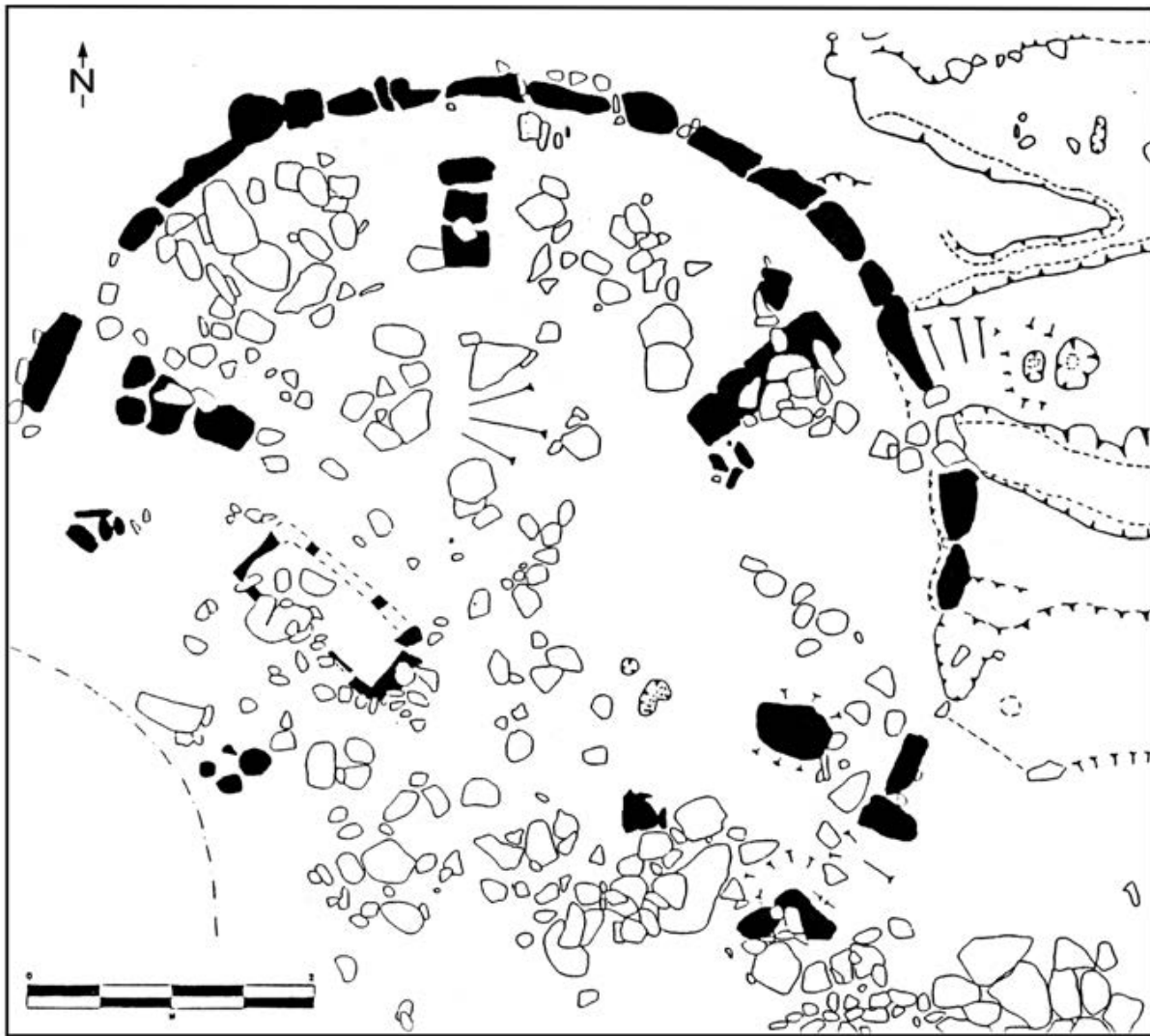


Figure 20.17. The Middle Iron Age wheelhouse at Cill Donnain III

Whether this process of dispersal happened gradually or suddenly is unknown. Mounds are generally dated during surface survey by pottery recovered from their later deposits and so the process might have begun a few centuries prior to the adoption of the distinctive decorated wares of the Middle Iron Age. The characteristic dwelling of this period was the wheelhouse, so-called because of the spoke-like arrangement of its stone piers. There is an impressive number of excavated wheelhouses on South Uist's machair, including the rocket-range sites of A' Cheardach Mhor (Young and Richardson 1960) and A' Cheardach Bheag (Fairhurst 1971), Hornish Point (Barber 2003) and Kilpheder (Lethbridge 1952). More recently, wheelhouse remains have been excavated at Bornais mound 1 (Sharples 1997; 1999), Sligeanach mound 27 (see Chapter 11) and Cill Donnain III (Zvelebil 1991). The Cill Donnain III wheelhouse, now re-sited in the grounds of Cill Donnain museum, is unusually small at little over 7m in diameter (Figure 20.17).

The expansion in settlement numbers appears to have

occurred primarily within the Middle Iron Age, though the excavations at Sligeanach hint at the possibility that this process began in the Early Iron Age. It was not entirely limited to the machair since a small number of roundhouses were also established on the peatlands, the most notable being at Glen Uisinis on the east coast. One might have been built on the islet in Upper Loch Bornish. Another was constructed at the Loch a' Bharp chambered tomb, in a similar arrangement to that at Clettraval in North Uist (Hingley 1999: 236). Where complete plans have been recovered, these peatland wheelhouses have unorthodox doorway orientations, facing not towards the east or southeast but mostly towards the west (see Branigan and Foster 2000: 147–67; Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999: 348–53). This cannot be explained in purely practical terms since their hillside locations leave their doorways exposed to the fierce Atlantic westerlies. Rather, they may be best understood as symbolically 'rotated' houses with special associations of ancient places and perhaps also certain times of the diurnal cycle and moments of the year such as the

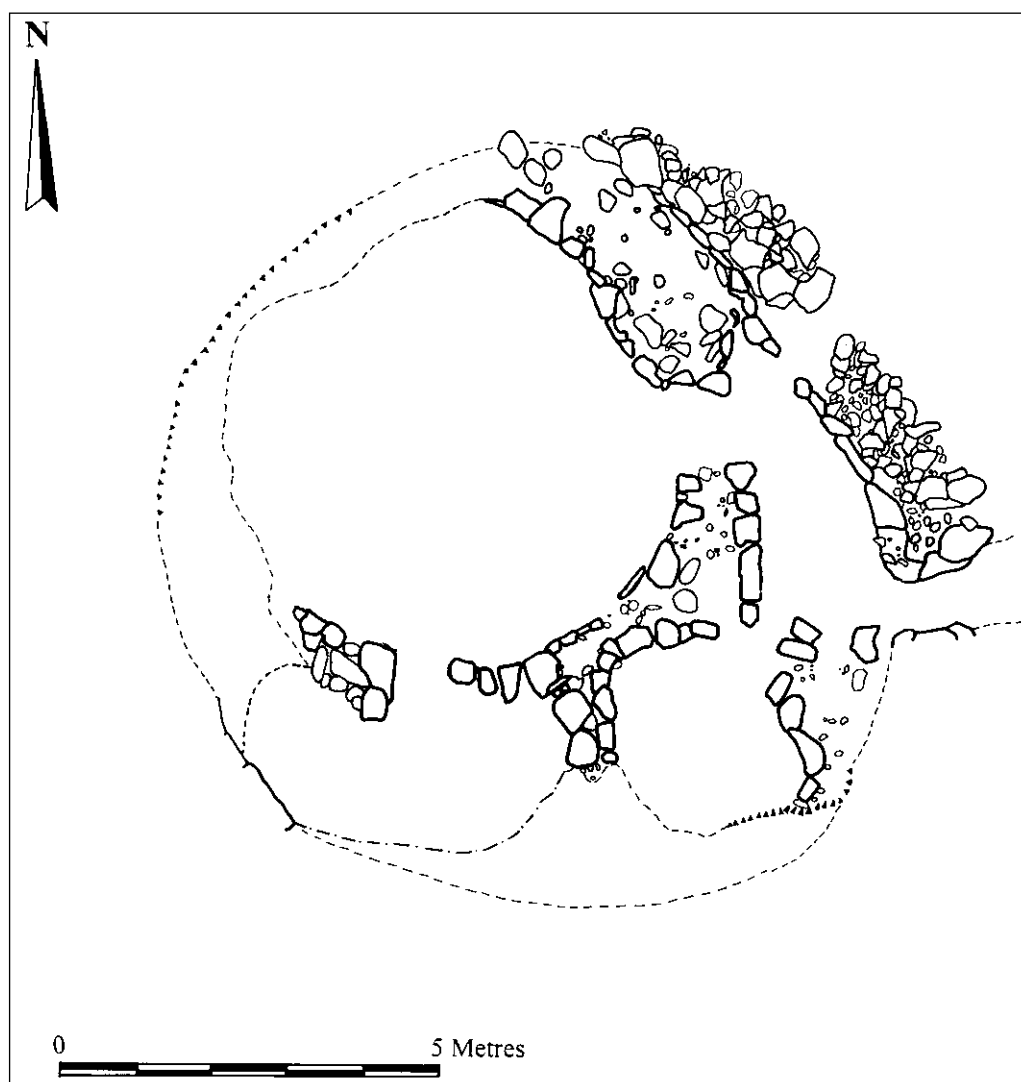


Figure 20.18. The Late Iron Age multi-cellular building within Dun Vulan

summer when people moved to the hills with the animals. It is possible that a number of the shielings, particularly those in the area east of Cill Donnain, might have also come into use at this time.

Another type of construction that probably dates to this period is the souterrain. There are six of these buried stone passages recorded for South Uist and only one of them, in Glen Uisinis, has been found in close proximity to a dwelling. Four are located a kilometre or less from the east coast and the other two are by the sea at Ludag and Baile Gharbhaidh on the southern and northern ends of the island. They are conventionally thought to have been hiding places and this is consistent with their coastal distribution.

The density of wheelhouse settlements remained greatest in the three core areas of Machair Mheadhanach, Bornais/Cill Donnain/Sligeanach and around Cladh Hallan–Cille Pheadair. It is possible that one or all of these continued to be a political centre for the island. In the longer term, this tripartite division of the island into three settlement nuclei is demonstrable later on in the continued densities of settlement in these three machair areas until the end of the

Norse period and, later on, in the administrative division of South Uist into three blocks as recorded by Monro in the 16th century (Monro 1549). This raises the possibility that these three territories might have had some significance that began in the Early Bronze Age and continued with modifications into the historical period.

The Pre-Viking Late Iron Age (Pictish period)

The broch of Dun Vulan continued to be lived in after AD 400. A three-celled structure was built within its ruined interior (Figure 20.18) and another dwelling (Building C) was built outside. Occupation also continued on the nearby Middle Iron Age settlements at Cill Donnain and Bornais. The dietary differences that divided the Middle Iron Age broch from these adjacent wheelhouse sites were still in evidence (Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999: 353–5; Parker Pearson *et al.* 1996; 1999). One interesting aspect of the broch's re-use is that it appears to have conferred status on its inhabitants even in its ruined state.

There are strong signs of settlement continuity from the

previous period, with many ruined buildings remaining in use or being re-occupied. As Armit notes, this is hardly evidence for a Pictish migration of people (1996: 166–7). There were some substantial new settlements such as the one on Frobost machair, just a couple of hundred metres from its smaller Middle Iron Age predecessor (see Chapter 13), and it might well have been larger than the extensive, new-founded settlement excavated at Bostaidh Beach (Neighbour and Burgess 1996). The physical re-use of the past might also have been a feature of other forms of material culture, notably the Plain Style ceramics which seem to have been closely modelled on styles from over a thousand years before.

Whereas roundhouse and curvilinear architecture became rare in the rest of Britain, this tradition continued in the Western Isles although the rectangular outhouses at Dun Vulcan indicate that this alien architectural form was acceptable for storehouses. The three-cell arrangement of the re-used Dun Vulcan and certain other buildings consisted of a ‘guard cell’ to the side of the entrance that led into a circular or oval room with a central hearth and thence into a circular backroom. This format can also be described as the ‘jelly-baby’ house plan and further examples are known from the Udal and Bostaidh Beach. This use of space may have its origins in the Middle Iron Age, in which certain wheelhouses such as the Kilpheder example have an entrance area and a small circular backroom (Lethbridge 1952). Not all Late Iron Age buildings had this tripartite structure and buildings might also consist of just one or two cells. The house in mound 1 at Bornais was a single, curvilinear structure that re-used an existing wheelhouse (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004a: 111–12; Sharples forthcoming a).

The overall impression is of increasing diversity in house plan. There seems to have been a move away from the east–west orientation of doorways that was such a strong feature of earlier Iron Age architecture. Whether this accompanied an abandonment of the ‘sunwise’ use of space in the main room has not yet been ascertained.

One of the most interesting associations with these architectural developments is the rise of body-related artefacts – pins and combs – at the same time as houses became much smaller and less monumental (Sharples 2005a). Whereas the cavernous interiors of brochs and wheelhouses had formed impressive social arenas for gatherings and displays, the Late Iron Age houses were far more modest by comparison. In contrast, presentation of the body became strongly marked, with a new emphasis on the presentation of the self through associated ornaments and combs. This may indicate a shift of power from its manifestation in the architecture to its direct association with individuals. It might also signify the establishment of a growing world of strangers in which long-distance sea travel was more commonplace, resulting in people being judged by personal appearance more so than by the architecture and ancestral connections of their dwellings.

South Uist has not produced much evidence for funerary practices but there is just enough material to make certain observations (Mulville *et al.* 2003; Barber 2003).

Human remains, especially skull fragments, were fairly commonplace in Middle Iron Age deposits at Dun Vulcan and some bits of skull were curated for over 500 years before being placed as foundational or ‘closing’ deposits within buildings. There was no evidence for this practice in the South Uist wheelhouses and it may further highlight the broch’s social significance in that period. These depositions of human body parts seem not to have occurred in the Late Iron Age. At the same time, the deposition of articulated animal burials in settlements seems also to have ceased.

How most of the human population was disposed of remains a mystery. There are cremations and long cist inhumations from the first half of the first millennium AD in the Western Isles but these are far too few to indicate the prime mortuary rite. One of the interesting finds of recent years has been a seventh- or eighth-century square cairn at Cille Pheadair, containing the burial of a woman whose body had been subjected to a certain degree of post-mortem interference (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004a: 117–23). Her monumentalized burial indicates that she was one of a few individuals who enjoyed continued remembrance after death in this highly visible form.

The Norse period

Around AD 800–1000 there were profound changes in the Hebridean way of life that mark a watershed which separates the Iron Age way of dwelling from the longhouse lifestyle that continued for a thousand years through to the blackhouse tradition. This transition has been portrayed as a cataclysmic event in which Scandinavian invaders killed the menfolk and enslaved the women and children (Crawford 1981). Our own view is that there was a greater degree of intermixing and continuity than has hitherto been recognized (Sharples and Parker Pearson 1999).

The changes were many and sweeping. Curvilinear architecture was replaced by rectangular longhouses, with new uses of interior space owing more to Scandinavian than local traditions. Dairying was replaced by beef farming. The largely terrestrial diet was replaced by more varied diets, especially greater consumption of marine fish, and herring fishing became a major activity. The language of the new elite was Norse and many of the township names retain Norse elements today. This was also the earliest period for which we have archaeological evidence of Christianity in the form of carved bone crosses from Cille Pheadair (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004a: fig. 83), and a church site at Cille Donnain (see Chapters 3 and 14), although Christianity had been established on Iona many centuries before.

For all these changes there were surprising continuities. Ceramics, normally rare in the rest of the Viking world, continued to be made in quantity (though not as prolifically as before) and, alongside the new convex bowl and platter forms, the Late Iron Age bucket-shapes continued. The Iron Age settlement pattern was not abandoned but retained, with most Norse-period settlement mounds emerging adjacent to, or even on top of, Middle to Late Iron Age settlements. A few farmsteads such as that at Cille Pheadair,

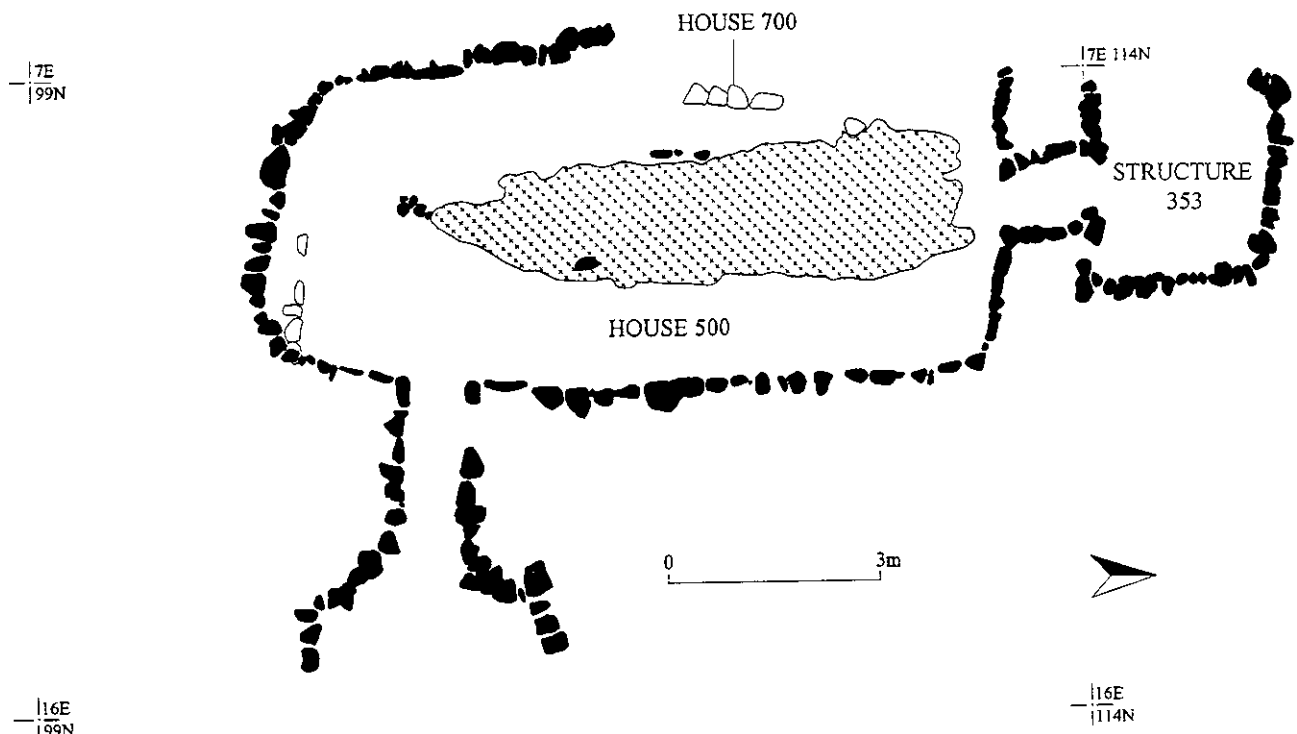


Figure 20.19. The Viking Age farmhouse at Cille Pheadair

however, might have been located at some distance from any Late Iron Age predecessor.

The distribution of township place-names with Norse elements corresponds closely with the distribution of Norse-period settlements along the machair. If Frobost was the largest pre-Norse Late Iron Age settlement in South Uist, then Bornais was most definitely the central settlement area in the Norse period. Here was the largest single settlement, a group of three large mounds at the centre of which was a boat-shaped stone-walled long hall that may have served as an administrative centre for the whole island. This is also the only rural comb-making site so far found in Britain and this specialised activity may hint at Bornais' superior position in the settlement hierarchy (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004a: plate 14). In the area to the immediate south of this complex, there were another five smaller settlements. These and the 15 other Norse-period settlement mounds are most likely the remains of single, long-lived farmsteads that were dispersed along the west coast except for concentrations at Machair Mheadhanach and perhaps Cille Pheadair–Baghasdal (see Chapter 2). The Drimore longhouse is unusual in apparently having a single, early phase only (MacLaren 1974).

The sequence of nine phases at Cille Pheadair provides a detailed view of farmhouse life between *c.* AD 1000 and *c.* 1220. The first dwelling was a stone- and turf-walled longhouse sunk into the sand. This was enlarged in the late 11th century by the addition of a square room on the north end of the longhouse (Figure 20.19). The use of space within this farmhouse focused on a long, central hearth with cooking at the end of the hearth furthest from the doorway (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004b). To the righthand-side of the cooking

area was an activity zone for fire-lighting, sharpening, and bone and antler working. We interpret these activities in terms of gender distinctions, with the housewife sitting and working in the principal place within her domain and her husband placed to her right. Sleeping areas and storage were arranged along the house's long sides. Later modifications included the provision of a small byre at the doorway end of the longhouse and the appearance of a second 'male' activity area on the lefthand-side of the cooking area.

Cille Donnain is a church with a likely Late Norse foundation. Its shape and dimensions are almost identical to longhouses of the 11th–12th centuries except that it has its main entrance at the short end rather than along the long walls. Early church sites are mostly evenly spaced north–south along the island at about 5km intervals and their formation may date to this period (or even earlier). Likely church sites are Cille Bhrighde, Cille Pheadair (on the crannog in Loch Dun na Cille; see Chapter 6), Frobost (marked on the 1654 Blaue map as 'Gill' [*Cille*]), Cille Donnain, Howmore, Cille Bhànain (built on top of a broch) and Cille Amhlaidh (Cille Olaf, perhaps under the large house at Kilauley). The location of 'Gill' is unknown.

The Norse period saw a gradual swing from long-distance trade goods arriving from the north (Norway and Shetland) to goods coming from the south (England and Ireland). South Uist's Norse settlements are thus a microcosm of the political and economic world of the British Isles as they detached themselves from the Scandinavian world and began looking south to mainland Europe. This economic shift in trade links was finally followed in 1266 with the political transfer of the islands from the Norwegian crown to Scottish control.

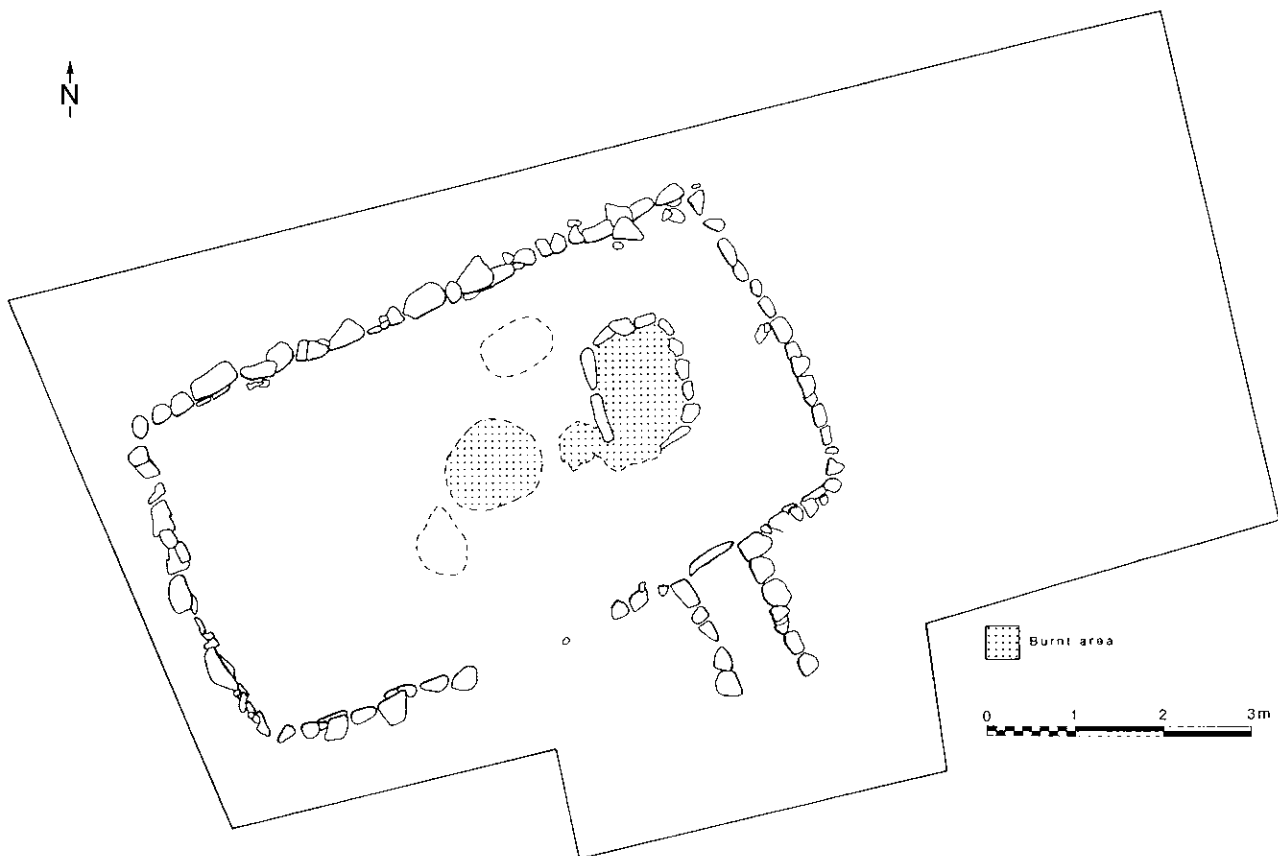


Figure 20.20. The Medieval house on Bornais mound 3

The Late Medieval period

Around 1200–1400 there was a major settlement shift off the machair and onto the peatlands. Settlements remained on the machair at Smercleit, Baghasdal, Cille Pheadair, Staoinebrig and Machair Mheadhanach but the majority seem to have become deserted. Baghasdal remained on the same site until the 19th century and Machair Mheadhanach is recorded into the 17th century (another example is the Udal on North Uist).

Late Medieval settlement sites have continued to prove elusive and there is a possibility that substantial depopulation occurred in this period, presumably as inhabitants left for the mainland. Even where Late Medieval settlements have been found, as in Bornais (Figure 20.20; see Chapter 16) and Gearraidh Bhailteas (see Chapter 15), they tend to be much smaller than their predecessors.

We still know little about Howmore's (Tobha Mòr) origins other than its being one of the five early church foundations and its Medieval name of Hof Mariae. By the mid-16th century Monro (1549) recorded it as the principal centre of South Uist. Caisteal Bheagram presumably has late 15th-century origins but could be sited on a much earlier broch. The large machair settlement mounds at Howmore are undated but one supposedly has wheelhouses within it. It is likely that Bornais was replaced by Howmore as the island's political centre. Alternatively, the three regions retained relative local autonomy until this period. The disappearance of this tripartite organization (whose origins

may lie in the Early Bronze Age) in the early Post-Medieval period is presumably related to the feudal appropriation of land as private property by the Clanranald chieftains.

Robert Dodgshon has argued that the Hebridean *bailtean* – nucleated settlements of tenant farmers – were formed no earlier than the 18th century to rationalize a system of previously dispersed settlement. In South Uist, *baile* place-names are rare and there seems not to have been a change of this sort. In any case, Dodgshon's characterization of western Highland townships as consisting of dispersed farmsteads in the Medieval and later periods appears to be very much at odds with our results for South Uist up to 1200–1400. Although dispersed along the machair into proto-townships, settlements were nuclear within each township. Even in the Post-Medieval period at A Beinn na Mhic Aongheis (the Hill of the Son of Angus) in Bornais, this settlement on the blackland was similarly nucleated in contrast to the 19th-century blackhouses in its vicinity (see Chapter 16).

From the Late Medieval period onwards there seems to have been considerable fissioning of townships and creation of new townships out of infield areas. The Bald map of 1805 shows South Uist divided into over 30 townships arranged as narrow strips (c.1km wide) east–west from machair to mountains. Many of these have Iron Age–Norse settlements on the machair within them but a certain number do not. These are the seven townships with the place-name element *gearraidh* (including Gerinis), and Peighinn nan Aoireann



Figure 20.21. House E, a late 18th to early 19th-century blackhouse at Airigh Mhuilinn

(‘pennyland’ derivation), Sniseabhal, Totahur and Tobha Beg (which have no machair), and Leth Meadhanach (its English name South Boisdale perhaps indicates a split from North Boisdale). *Geàrraidh* means ‘fertile’ or ‘infield’ though Beveridge records its use on North Uist as meaning land between the fields and the hills (see Chapter 7 for further detail). More important here is the fact that *geàrraidh* and most of the other place-names listed above are of Gaelic origin and thus post-date the Norse-named townships (there are two exceptions, Sniseabhal and Peighinn nan Aoireann). Research in Gearraidh Bhailteas indicates that this particular township was formerly part of Frobost.

This ‘linguistic stratigraphy’ corresponds well with the archaeological evidence to suggest that the *geàrraidh* townships and certain others did not come into being until after the shift off the machair at the end of the Norse period. Many are marked on the 16th-century Pont and 17th-century Blaue maps, indicating that the Late Medieval period was one of considerable expansion when many ‘blackland townships’ came into existence in the interstices between the original ‘machair townships’ whose origins lay in the Iron Age.

The Post-Medieval period

Earthenware continued in use until about 1700 and the decorated forms of the 16th–17th centuries provide a useful diagnostic tool for identifying settlements of this period. The other useful guides are the Pont and Blaue maps which, despite their inaccuracies, provide a list of townships at around 1600.

A settlement of the period between 1500 and 1700 has been excavated at Beinn na Mhic Aongheis (see Chapter 16). This is a large knoll perched on the edge of the peatland adjacent to, and overlooking, the Norse and Iron Age machair mounds of Bornais. Although it is not in the precise position of the 1805 community mapped by Bald, the range of 16th–19th century finds and oral histories indicate that it was this community that was evicted in 1840.

Gearraidh Bhailteas might also have been occupied during this period (with origins in the Medieval period) as was, presumably, Father Duigan’s Chapel in Cill Donnain township. The fortified house at Ormacleit has a short but dramatic history at the beginning of the 18th century. Airigh Mhuilinn, Flora MacDonald’s birthplace, might also have come into being around 1700.

The Pont and Blaue maps mark a number of loch islets as settled in this period and there are many of these crannogs

or enlarged islets with rectangular buildings upon them. Good examples are the Mill Loch at Gearraidh Bhailteas and the crannog in Loch Dun na Cille at Cille Pheadair (see Chapter 6).

The 18th and 19th centuries were periods of population increase and the pattern of settlement became increasingly dispersed with many small and scattered crofts being built all over the blacklands. The large 18th–19th century blackhouses with massive stone walls at Airigh Mhuilinn (Figure 20.21) and Frobost contrast with the turf-walled blackhouses at Beinn na Mhic Aongheis and perhaps indicate changes in the architecture of the wealthier people. It is from the late 17th century onwards that we begin to recover many details of the farming regime from Martin Martin and other commentators.

A distinctiveness of place

Though part of an island chain, each island in the Outer Hebrides has its distinctive physical and cultural characteristics. South Uist has its own particular settlement history that intersects in various ways and to different degrees with those of Barra or the islands to the north. At the same time, island identities have been continuously moulded through relationships with the outside world, in between the extremes of incorporation and exclusion (Figure 20.22).

South Uist seems not always to have shared in the main trends affecting the Western Isles or the Hebrides in general. In the Post-Medieval period it seems to have been largely ignored in the creation of nucleated *baile* communities and had a rather different settlement pattern to the dispersed single farmsteads scattered across the blacklands of most parts of the Hebrides. Conversely, the movement off the machair after the Norse period seems to have been a general trend throughout the Western Isles (Armit 1996: 233) which was true to a large degree for South Uist but not for North Uist where there was a progressive concentration onto the machair (Armit 1996: 228). South Uist, and probably the other islands of the south, did not suffer the degree of settlement dislocation that occurred in Lewis with the Norse period. It seems also to have kept its indigenous roots to a far greater extent than was the case for Lewis and Harris, where Norse place-names are more pervasive.

South Uist's extensive tracts of machair have had a different impact on settlement to that which can be found on Barra. There the narrow and patchy machair zone has influenced a different pattern, with settlements located either on the blacklands or on the very edges of the machair hard up against the rock. South Uist also lacks the extraordinary plethora of kerbed cairns, boat-shaped cairns and small monuments that cover the hills of Barra and its southern isles (Branigan and Foster 1995; 2000). Many of these are prehistoric and point to the possibility either that there were different funerary practices for the inhabitants of the southern islands or, perhaps, that these islands were in some measure places specifically associated with the dead into the Bronze Age.

South Uist was, conversely, a landscape first and foremost of settlements. The continuous erosion of the west coast might well have destroyed many of the island's burial places; this could mean that monuments such as the Cille Pheadair Pictish period square cairn are the last few not yet claimed by the waves. Today the machair is almost entirely uninhabited by the living. Graveyards at Baghasdal, Cladh Hallan, Aird Mhicheil, Aird a Machair and Lionacuidhe contain the dead of the last couple of centuries and others such as Cladh Pheadair may be considerably older. This tradition of burying the dead out on the western edges 'behind' the living may have a considerable antiquity. It used to be traditional that houses should have no openings to the west since these could be entered by the banshees, the undead.

Language contains numerous interesting clues to the phenomenological understandings of South Uist's geography. Whilst east may be 'front', north 'left' and south 'right', one walks *up* to the south end and *down* to the north. This matches the notion of walking up to the hearth and down to the doorway in a house and may have its origins in the Late Norse period when doorways were re-sited at the north ends of the longhouses so that one moved southwards to the hearth. Martin Martin noticed the tradition of setting sail always by first turning the boat in a sunwise direction, a practice found until modern times in the Western Isles and Orkney, and there are many other surviving instances of sunwise movement at the 'domestic' scale, from the construction of haystacks to the winding of wire around a fence post. These traditions probably come from Scandinavian concepts of *solskifte* (Dodgshon 1975; 1985) but may well have a much greater ancestry going back to the roundhouses of the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004a: 196–201).

In the long-term prehistory and history of the islands, there are four particular moments that stand out as marking profound social change.

- The first is the initial settlement and cultivation of the machair in the Beaker period. At this particular juncture the islands had changed out of all recognition in comparison to what they had been before. The woodlands were largely gone, blanket bog was spreading in the uplands and the entire west coast was engulfed in machair sand. Within this changed world, settlements were located in new places along the machair.
- The next major social transformation occurred at about 1100 BC with the adoption of roundhouse life. Dwellings were more massive and permanent and could accommodate larger household sizes than before. The use of space was also transformed, with activities arranged in mimicry of the sun's passage. Another substantial change was agricultural, with a move to more extensive methods of cultivation and developing a dairying strategy.
- The third transformation occurred with the arrival of the Norse. New houses and ways of living, stock-



Figure 20.22. The wreck of a 60-foot ship in the inter-tidal zone on the island of Fuday, south of South Uist. It was found in 1992 by the late Michael MacInnes, Iain MacInnes and Peter Campbell, and was later investigated by an archaeological team from Headland Archaeology and the University of Saint Andrews. It is thought to have been a Dutch vessel, dating to the 16th or early 17th century

rearing for meat and the importance of fishing were among the significant changes.

- The fourth and last change was during the Clearances when every single township on South Uist except for Eriskay and Iochdar was cleared and the inhabitants shipped off to Nova Scotia and Cape Breton.

Each of the three major transformations – in the Beaker period, Late Bronze Age and Norse period – involved substantial agricultural innovation as well as cultural and ideological changes. These were also times of ‘inclusion’ or ‘incorporation’ when identities were re-worked in terms of adopting the ways of the outside world, when local and regional identity was temporarily and largely subsumed beneath more wide-ranging notions of identity. Beakers were widespread across Europe and accompanied new ideas about drinking, warriorship and metallurgy. The Late Bronze Age roundhouse embodied a new pan-British reordering not only of domestic space but also universalizing ideas about time and the movement of the heavens that were at odds with local cults of ancestor worship. The Norse longhouse represented a Scandinavian way of life that was successfully exported across the North Atlantic seaways, connecting the Western Isles with distant lands to the north, west and south.

Island communities are often characterized as inward-looking, turned away from the outside world and developing strong local identities. Yet these times when cultural anchors are dropped (Cohen 1985) are historical moments rooted in particular circumstances. These times of retrenchment are embodied by the fostering of local traditions and by the re-use of the past in the present. The developments in shipping and marine technology over the millennia made the Western Isles more accessible to the outside world. This would not always result in greater incorporation of that world but could instead lead to a rejection of non-island values. A good example is the lack of penetration of Roman pottery or other trade goods into this part of the world, even though the frontier was only a few days’ sail away (Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999: 22). On the other hand, the purging buckthorn and badger skull from Dun Vulcan indicate that non-Roman items were being brought from afar (*ibid.*: 258). At certain times, long-forgotten styles of pottery were re-invented: Pictish Late Iron Age Plain Style is very similar to Late Bronze Age styles whilst Late Medieval–Early Post-Medieval decorated wares appear to imitate Middle Iron Age rim shapes and body decoration.

At particular moments long-distance alliances and connections were forged with mainland Scotland or with other island groups to embrace a regional identity. In the

last few centuries BC broch architecture was shared with this broader region. Later on, elements of Pictish symbolism – symbol stones and burial monuments – were employed in Skye and the Western Isles, linking this area to the Pictish political heartland in eastern Scotland. The strongly local associations of wheelhouse architecture embodied a self-conscious local identity re-working the Britain-wide values of roundhouse life that were under assault in the new Roman Britain to the south. It is also interesting that Shetland is the only place outside the Western Isles that has wheelhouses and that has also produced the closest comparisons to the Pictish cairn at Cille Pheadair. Branigan has also suggested much earlier links between these two island groups on the basis of Neolithic tomb architecture (Branigan 2000: 325).

Involvement in large-scale, long-distance political alliances and formations was always mediated through local networks of power and authority. In South Uist this is first apparent in material form at Cladh Hallan in the 11th century BC where metalworking debris, produced by using metal that must have been brought from far away, was associated with the large central house. One of the most interesting outcomes of the machair survey is that authority was not dispersed amongst the different communities but was centralized in many if not all periods from the Beaker period onwards. Secondly, that geographical centre did not remain the same but shifted from one place to another through time. Cill Donnain seems to have been at the centre of the zone of stone monuments in the Early Bronze Age but was not similarly outstanding later on. Machair Mheadhanach was the largest community in the Late Bronze Age and this north end of the island remained important into the Middle Iron Age, supporting the densest cluster of brochs and wheelhouse mounds. Presumably South Uist was at this time the southern arm of a power network or polity that extended northwards to Benbecula and even North Uist.

In the Norse period the northern end of the island remained a large community but a new centre appeared on the machair of Bornais and Cill Donnain, inland from Dun Vulcan. Its central position suggests that it might have controlled the whole of South Uist and that the island was once more a single political entity amongst the other islands owing allegiance to Norway. By the Late Medieval period Howmore had become the ecclesiastical centre of the island and Caisteal Bheagram nearby was the seat of the Clanranalds.

This chapter has, of necessity, been a thumbnail sketch. It has attempted to bring together some of the main themes of our research in South Uist and to show how the new evidence of the surveys and excavations (the more extensive of which have been or will be published in separate monographs) has helped us to explore those themes. There are still considerable blanks and areas where understanding needs to be improved. Let us hope that they can be addressed in the not-too-distant future. Above all the Beaker period and Early Bronze Age sites of South Uist still remain insufficiently investigated.

Notes

- 1 The Udal is now being written up by Beverley Ballin Smith.
- 2 An Doirlinn is threatened by coastal erosion and should probably be excavated, since it cannot be protected. Other threatened sites on the machair are listed in Chapter 2.

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ENGLISH–GAELIC GLOSSARY OF PLACE-NAMES

The spelling of place-names differs on all editions of the Ordnance Survey maps of all scales. Furthermore, different versions of some names are used by the present-day community on South Uist. To add to these difficulties, there are occasional typographical errors on the 2007 edition of the 1:25,000 Explorer map (sheet no. 453); this map cannot therefore be considered definitive beyond all question. CANMORE records alternative place-names; it too contains a few errors.

Only place-names mentioned in this volume are listed here. We have attempted to record both the Gaelic name as shown on the O.S. map and all the variants used in the archaeological literature but even so this list is probably not exhaustive.¹ Accented letters are marked in this glossary as they are shown on the 2007 1:25,000 O.S. map but the map's use of these accents does appear to be a little inconsistent. Accents are rarely reproduced in the archaeological literature (this volume included) or on CANMORE.

Since the Gaelicization on maps and road signs of all place-names (even those derived from Norse) probably outstrips the linguistic capabilities of some readers, this glossary is also intended to be a basic guide to pronunciation, since the English place-names are usually roughly phonetic versions of the Gaelic.

| English or Anglicized name | Gaelic name |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Allt Volagir | Allt Bholagair |
| Alt Chrysal (Barra) | Allt Chrisal |
| Ardivachar, Ardnivachar ² | Àird a' Mhachair |
| Ardmichael | Aird-mhicheil, Airdmhicheill |
| Ardvule | Rubha Àird a' Mhuile |
| Arinambane | Airigh nam Ban ³ |
| Arnaval | Airneabhal |
| Askernish | Aisgernis, Aisgeirnis |
| Askervein | Aisgerbheinn |

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Balgarva | Baile Gharbhaidh |
| Baleshare (North Uist) | Baile Sear |
| Balivanich (Benbecula) | Baile a' Mhanaich |
| Barpa Langas | Barpa Langais |
| Bayhead | Ceann a' Bhaigh, Ceann na Bàgh |
| Ben Corary | Beinn Coraraidh |
| Ben Mor | Beinn Mhòr |
| Boisdale | Baghasdal, Baghasdail |
| (<i>see also</i> South and North) | |
| Bolum | Bholuim |
| Bornish (<i>see also</i> Upper) | Bornais |
| Borve (Benbecula) | Borgh, Bhuirgh |
| Calvay | Calbhaigh |
| Carinish (North Uist) | Cairinis |
| Carnan | Charnain |
| Carrisaval | Càireasbhal |
| Castle Begram | Caisteal Bheagram |
| Chorravein | Coire Beinn |
| Cladh Hallan | Taighean Cruinn Cladh Halainn ⁴ |
| roundhouses | |
| Clettraval (North Uist) | Cleitreabhal |
| Corodale | Choradail, Coradail |
| Crossdougall | Crois Dùghaill |
| Daliburgh | Dalabrog |
| Drimore | Driomor, Druim Mor |
| Drimsdale | Dreumasdal |
| Dun Vulcan | Dùn Vùlan, Dùn Mhulan |
| Easaval | Easabhal |
| East Kilbride | Taobh a' Chaolais |
| East Loch Ollay | Loch Olaidh an Ear |
| Eochar | Iochdar |
| Eriskay | Eirisgeigh, Eiriosgaigh |
| Flora Macdonald's birth-place | Airigh Mhuillin, Airigh-mhuillin ⁵ |
| Garryheillie | Gearraidh Sheilidh, Gearraidh Sheile |
| Garrynamonie | Gearraidh na Mònadh |
| Garryvaltos | Gearraidh Bhailteas |
| (<i>see also</i> Milton) | |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Gerinish | Geirinis | North Boisdale | Baghasdail, Baghasdal |
| Glendale | Gleann Dail | North Glendale | Gleann dail bho Tuath |
| Glen Kildonan | Gleann Chill Donnain | North Locheynort | Taobh a Tuath Loch |
| Glen Liadale | Gleann Liadail | | Aoineart/Aineort |
| Grimsay | Griomasaigh | Ormaclate, Ormaclete, | Ormacleith |
| Grogarry | Groigearraidh | Ormicleate | |
| Haarsal | Hatharsal | Orosay | Orasaigh |
| Hartavag, Hartavagh | Thairteabhagh | Otternish (North Uist) | Otairnis |
| Hecla | Thacla | Peninerine, Peninirine | Peighinn nan Aoireann |
| Hellisdale | Heileasdail | Pollachar, Polochar | Pol a' Charra, Poll a' |
| Hornish Point | Rubha Hornais, Thoirnìs | | Charra |
| Howbeg | Tobha Beag, Tobhta | Reineval | Reineabhal |
| | Bheag | Risgay, Riskay | Riosgaigh, Riosgaidh |
| Howmore | Tobha Mòr, Tobhta Mhor | Roneval | Ròineabhal |
| Hunnasary | Unasaraidh | Rosinish | Ròisinis |
| Kallin (Grimsay) | Ceallan | (Benbecula, Eriskay) | |
| Kilauley | Cill Amhlaidh | Rubha Bhuaite | Rubha Bhuaite |
| Kilbride, East | Taobh a' Chaolais | Rubha Ronich | Rubha Roinich |
| Kilbride, West | Cille Bhrìghde | Rubha Rossel | Rubha Roiseal |
| Kildonan | Cill Donnain | Rudha na Mheine | Rubha na Meine |
| Kildonan Church | Cille Donnain | Rueval | Ruabhal |
| Kildonan Glen | Gleann Chill Donnain | Ru Ronach | Rubha Roinich |
| Kilpheder | Cille Pheadair | Saltavik Bay | Bàgh Shaltabhaig |
| Kneep (Lewis) | Cnip | Schoolhouse Loch | Loch an Taigh-sgoile |
| Kyles Stuley | Caolas Stulaigh | Sheaval | Heabhal |
| Lamsay | Lamasaidh | Smerclate | Smeircleith, Smercleit |
| Leaval | Layaval | South Boisdale | Leth Meadhanach, |
| Liadale | Liadail, Liathdail | | Leth Mheadhanach |
| Linique | Lionacuidhe | South Glendale | Gleann Dail bho Dheas |
| Loch Aisavat | Loch Aiseabhat | South Lochboisdale | Taobh a Deas Baghasdail |
| Loch Aynort | Loch Aoineart, Loch | South Locheynort | Taobh a Deas Loch |
| | Aineort, Loch Ainort | | Aoineart/Aineort |
| Loch Bee | Loch Bi | South Uist | Uibhist a Deas |
| Lochboisdale, | Loch Baghasdail/ | Stilligarry | Stadhlaigearraidh |
| Loch Boisdale | Baghasdal | Stoneybridge | Staoinebrig |
| Loch Bornish | Loch Bhornais | Stornoway (Lewis) | Steornabhaigh |
| Loch Carnan | Loch a' Charnain, | Struthan Beg | Struthan Beag ⁶ |
| | Loch Càrnain | Stulaval | Stulabhal |
| Loch Druidibeg | Loch Druidibeg | Stulay | Stulaigh |
| Locheynort, Loch Eynort | Loch Aoineart, Loch | Totahur | Tobhtahur |
| | Aineort, Loch Ainort | Trinival | Trinneabhal |
| Loch Grogarry | Loch Groigearraidh | Trossary | Trosaraidh, Trosairaidh |
| Loch Kildonan | Loch Chill Donnain | Unasary | Unasaraidh |
| Loch Kilivanan | Loch Cille Bhànain | Unival (North Uist) | Uineabhal, |
| Loch Moreef | Loch Mòraibh | | Leacach an Tigh |
| Loch na Berie (Lewis) | Loch na Beirgh | | Cloiche |
| Loch nam Braithntean | Loch nam Brathain | Upper Bornish | Bornais Uachdhrach |
| Loch Ollay | Loch Olaidh | Upper Loch Bornish | Loch Bhornais Uarach |
| Loch Skipport, Lochskipport | Loch Sgiopoir | Upper Loch Kildonan | Loch Chill Donnain |
| Loch Stilligarry | Loch Stadhlaigearraidh | | Uarach |
| Ludag | Ludaig | Ushenish, Usinish | Uisinis |
| Middle Loch Ollay | Loch Olaidh Meadhanach | Weaver's Castle (Eriskay) | Caisteal a' Breabhair, |
| Mill Loch | Loch na Muilne | | Caisteal an Reubadair |
| Mingarry, Mingary | Mingearraidh | West Gerinish | Geirinis |
| Milton | Gearraidh Bhailteas (<i>also</i> | West Kilbride | Cille Bhrìghde |
| (<i>see also</i> Garryvaltos) | Airigh Mhuillin, Airigh- | West Loch Ollay | Loch Olaidh an Iar |
| | mhuillin) | | |
| Monach islands | Heisgeir, Heiskeir | | |

Notes

- 1 This glossary does not include the spellings used on the Pont, Blaue and Bald maps. Refer to relevant chapters for information on these. The O.S. website has a policy statement on Gaelic place-names, as Ainmean-Àite na h-Alba.
- 2 There is an incorrect entry on CANMORE giving Ardvichar.
- 3 The O.S. map has a typo, giving 'Airright' [*sic*]; CANMORE has an incorrect entry giving 'Airidh'
- 4 This site is marked for the first time on the 2007 Ordnance Survey map but unfortunately has been described as 'Wheelhouses'. This is entirely incorrect: the LBA/EIA houses excavated and reinstated here are *not* wheelhouses. The Gaelic translation is correct, however, as it reads 'round houses'.
- 5 There is an incorrect entry on CANMORE giving Airidh Mhuillin
- 6 The 1:25000 O.S. map has a typo – 'Sruthan' (*sic*)