



#### **RCAHMS**

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Cover image: The souterrain entrance opening off the wheelhouse interior at Uamh Ghrantaich, Glen Uisinis. DP171668

Back cover: Notebooks, and field drawings of RCAHMS architect Charles Calder from the 1920s. Part of the survey work for the Inventory on the Outer Hebrides, Skye and the Small Isles.

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# **Acknowledgments**

In addition to the contribution of the staff of RCAHMS and Historic Scotland, we owe particular thanks to Deborah Anderson, Regional Archaeologist at Western Isles Council and colleagues within the council. Owners and tenants alike gave our staff free access to the land, and, when previous arrangements fell through, Stòras Uibhist were able to provide transport to Uisinis. Accommodation on North Uist was secured through the good offices of Council Member Uisdean Robertson and on South Uist the team were able to use the shelter with the permission of the Mountain Bothies Association.



Fig 1 Dun an Sticer, North Uist SC1001679

# **RCAHMS Archaeological Survey: North and South Uist**

### Introduction

This report describes and summarises the results of a project undertaken on North and South Uist in 2012–13 by RCAHMS in partnership with the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council) archaeology service (CES). Brief accounts of this project have previously appeared in *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland* (2013, 205; 2014, 196). The project was undertaken with the primary aims of (a) revising the existing archaeological records for two areas of the Uists, bringing interpretations and descriptions up-to-date; (b) identifying and recording previously unidentified sites; and (c) to enhance the corpus of measured surveys for these areas of the Uists.

The two survey areas were chosen in conjunction with CES and colleagues in Historic Scotland. The first was an area on the west coast of North Uist measuring about 37km² in extent and including sizeable areas of machair, arable ground, improved pasture and moorland. The second was a much smaller area (4km²) at Uisinis on the comparatively inaccessible east coast of South Uist. The survey of the landscape on North Uist (phase 1 of the project) was undertaken in the early summer of 2012 and was followed in the autumn of that year by phase 2 – the detailed survey of a dozen sites in or close to the study area. Phase 3, on South Uist, took place in the spring of 2013 and was an exercise that combined record revision, prospective walking and detailed site survey.

The results are summarised as a series of bullet points, and then explained in more detail.



Fig 2 Buaile Ormacleit, Uisinis, South Uist. The survey at Uisinis greatly benefited from the knowledge shared by Dr Chris Barrowman, Historic Scotland Heritage Management Field Officer (standing). Also present, seated from left, were Alison McCaig (IfA bursary placement), Dr Alex Hale and Ian Parker. DP152167 Crown Copyright RCAHMS.

### **Methodology**

#### **Desk-based Assessment**

A desk-based assessment, undertaken to inform fieldwork, included a thorough search of both catalogued and uncatalogued sections of the RCAHMS archive, including the original material relating to the Inventory survey of 1914–1924, mainly undertaken by James Graham Callander (RCAHMS 1928). The other key source for archaeological information was the records of the Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division, now incorporated within the RCAHMS database and available through Canmore. The revision of the Ordnance Survey (OS) records for sites in the Uists was undertaken in the 1960s and was supported by desk-based assessments, field visits and small-scale surveys. The RCAHMS desk-based survey also saw a careful examination of both vertical and oblique aerial photographs – historic and modern, and of the first and second editions of the OS map, respectively published in the 1880s and the 1900s.

#### **Survey**

Walk-over survey on both North Uist and South Uist was undertaken by teams of two recording the details of features into a notebook, taking digital photographs and recording the location of sites (usually centre points) with a Trimble GeoXT handheld GPS unit to an accuracy of 1m. Mapping was undertaken at a small number of sites using survey-grade dGPS, which was post-processed using OS RINEX data to give mm accuracy data in relation to the National Grid.

Measured site surveys were produced to a scale that was appropriate to the size of the site and the degree of detail that required to be captured.



Fig 3 Rachel's House, Hogha Gearraidh, North Uist: Chambered Cairn. Archaeologist John Sherriff standing beside the newly identified chambered cairn. DP150701

The majority of these more detailed surveys were undertaken with a Wild self-reducing alidade and plane-table, with added dGPS control where necessary.

All sites were visited by at least two members of staff and each site description and plan has been peer-reviewed and edited before submission to Canmore.

## **Summary of Results**

- The project resulted in an increase in 132% in the number of recorded archaeological sites
- 20 detailed interpretative surveys were undertaken of the most significant sites
- A previously unrecorded Neolithic chambered cairn was discovered at Hogha Gearraidh
- At least four new prehistoric houses were discovered at Uisinis
- 397 site visits were undertaken.
- Over 400 photographs were added to the National Collection
- All of the material is available are online through the website Canmore
- A short article was published in *Current Archaeology*



Fig 4 Rachel's House, Hogha Gearraidh: Chambered Cairn. The publication drawing of the chambered cairn, showing the *in situ* slabs of the burial chamber and the remaining cairn material. SC1322578

### **Detailed Results**

### Phase 1 (North Uist)

Survey was undertaken on North Uist between 28 May and 8 June 2012, with a team comprising archaeologists John Sherriff, Alex Hale and Adam Welfare and surveyor Ian Parker, eventually covering an area measuring about 37km² in extent. 160 sites had been identified in the desk-based assessment and to this 212 new discoveries were added. Notable new discoveries included the chambered cairn (Rachel's House) at Hogha Gearraidh (NF77SW 161) and a possible example at Corary (NF77SW 100), situated below the west flank of Clettraval. Other new discoveries include a sub-peat field-system immediately north of Loch Eubhal (NF77SW 349), a standing stone at Garry-Baleloch (NF77SW 110) and at least four probably later prehistoric round-houses at various locations throughout the survey area. Within the later landscape one of the more interesting aspects of the survey was the identification on the north shore of Loch Eubhal and on Gearraidh Gall of the grass-grown footings of hen-houses.

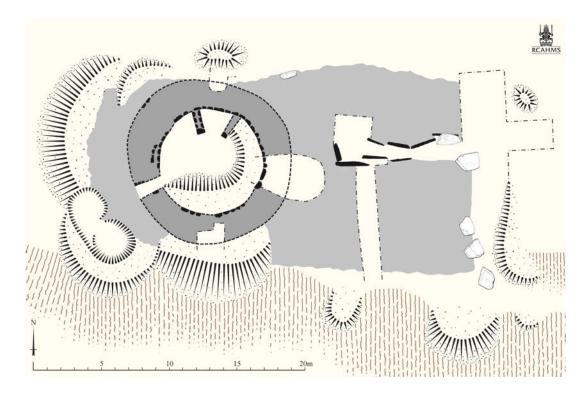


Fig 5 Clettraval, North Uist: Chambered Cairn and Wheelhouse. An example of a publication-standard illustration, this was included as part of an article that appeared in Current Archaeology, May 2013. Here, an Iron Age wheelhouse, excavated in the middle of the 20th century, has been built within the remains of a Neolithic chambered cairn, a relationship that has also been observed, for the first time, at Tigh Cloiche nearby. SC1319055

All 372 sites were visited and the location, classification and site name of each was checked; where necessary, new site descriptions were prepared. Attempts were made to digitally photograph all of the sites but in many cases this proved impractical.

Members of the local community were provided with a conducted walk around the various monuments at Clettraval and two were integrated into the team that surveyed the newly identified chambered cairn (Figs 3 and 4). The team attended the opening of an exhibition on the excavation on the Udal at Taigh Chairsabhaigh and Alex Hale gave a talk at Claddach Kirkibost Community Centre.

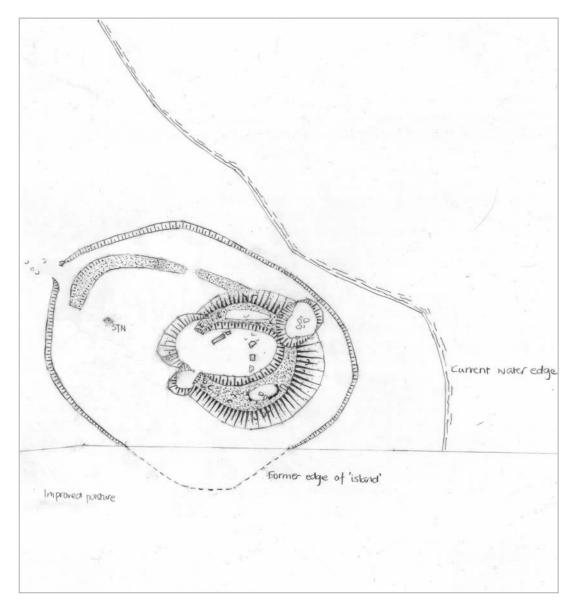
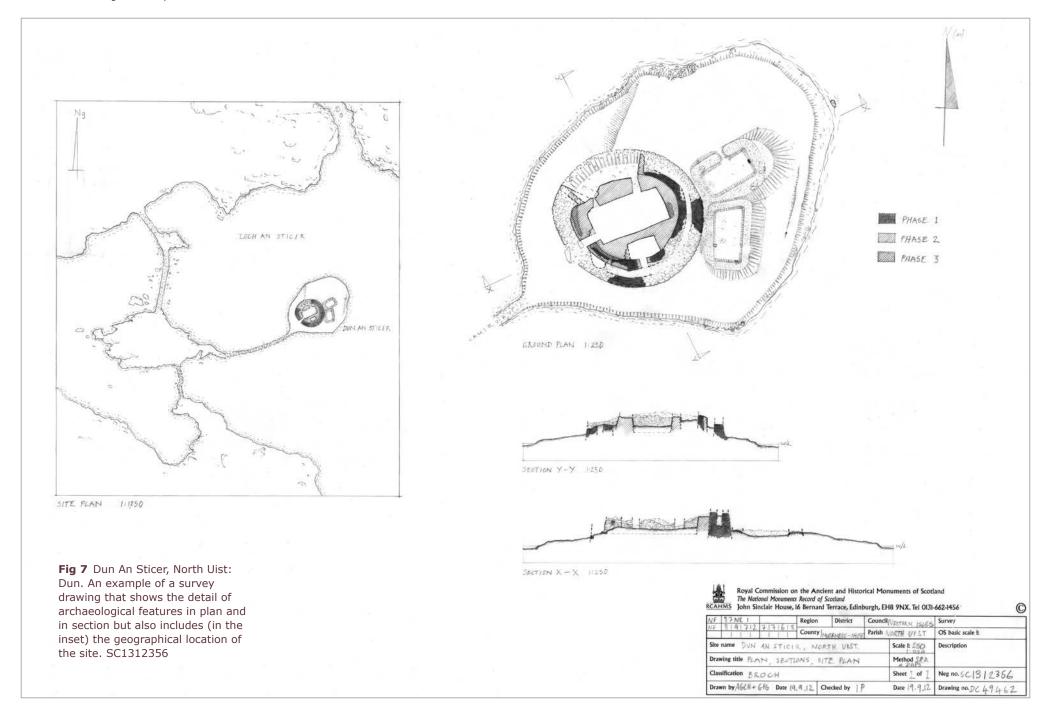


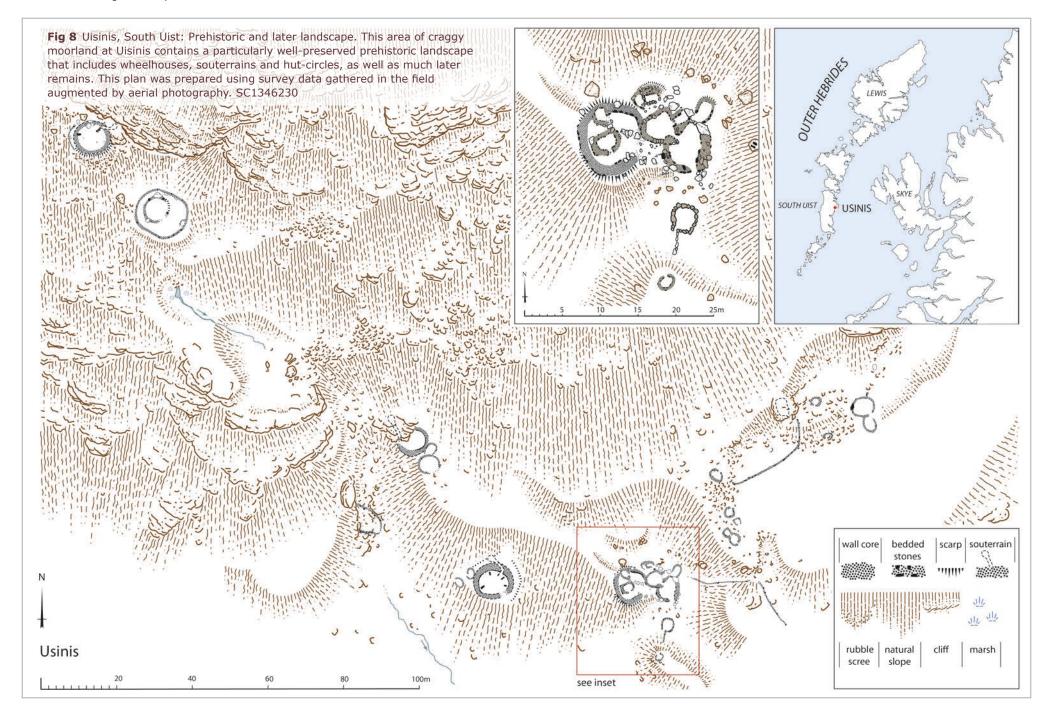
Fig 6 Dun Grogary, North Uist: Dun. An extract of a pencil survey drawing, this one showing the remains of the dun and its outwork, the walls of both having been quarried, and a causeway linking the island to the western shore of the loch. SC1312367

#### Phase 2

This phase of the project comprised a return to North Uist to revisit a number of sites which were identified in Phase 1 as being worthy of more detailed recording. The majority of the sites are situated within the Phase 1 survey area but three other monuments (at the bottom of the list below) were also included on the basis of their significance and research interest. These surveys were undertaken with the specific aims of both aiding the understanding of the sites (by highlighting and illustrating the various components and relationships that are visible) and providing an illustrated record that can be compared with surveys undertaken elsewhere in Scotland.

In addition to the list of sites surveyed in detail, four example illustrations are provided. Two of these are copies of pencil site survey drawings (all twelve are available on Canmore) and two are examples of finished, publication-standard, illustrations (also available on Canmore). Each survey was undertaken by two members of staff and peer-reviewed by a third on site. The survey of Balranald was undertaken with the volunteer Alexander Crawford.





### **List of Sites Surveyed**

Sithean Tuath, Burnt Mound (Possible), NF77SW 6 http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/10126/

Dun Scarie, Dun and later buildings, NF77SW 8 http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/10128/

Dun Grogary, Dun and causeway, NF77SW 10 http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/10101/

South Clettraval, Chambered Cairn and wheelhouse, NF77SW 15 and 24 http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/10106/

http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/10118/

South Clettraval (Tigh Cloiche), Chambered Cairn and later prehistoric buildings, NF77SE 14

http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/10081/

St Clement's Chapel, Medieval Chapel, NF77SW 11 http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/10102/

Loch Scarie, Farmstead , NF77SW 63 http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/278055/

Balranald, Tacksman's House, NF77SW 166 http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/318499/

Pobull Fhinn, Stone Circle, NF86NW 7 http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/10237/

Loch A'Phobuill, Sornach Coir'Fhinn, Stone Circle, NF86SW 28 http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/10269/

Dun an Sticer, Broch (possible), Dun, NF87NE 1 http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/10294/

### Phase 3

The final trip to the Uists (to Uisinis on South Uist), which was undertaken in late-April 2013, proved to be extremely successful, with the team undertaking GPS mapping work, detailed plane-table survey, noting and photography. Several monuments, including a wheelhouse and three souterrains first recorded in the 1860s and noted by RCAHMS in 1915, have been accurately mapped for the first time. One of the souterrains, measuring some 14m in length, was effectively rediscovered having been missed by successive teams since the 1860s. In addition, the team identified two previously unrecorded hut-circles and two wheelhouses: the 'shielings' noted by previous authorities turned out to include medieval buildings, shieling-huts and peat-houses as well as pens and huts used for milking sheep. About 60 structures in total were noted, mapped and photographed. The area included five



Fig 9 Uisinis, South Uist: Prehistoric settlement and later remains. A publication-standard illustration showing a prehistoric roundhouse (drawn in a grey stipple), which had been previously misinterpreted as the remains of a souterrain, and later huts and enclosures and huts probably associated with the milking of sheep. This type of illustration allows the relationships between features in what is a relatively complex site to be clearly demonstrated. SC1346231

Scheduled Monuments and fieldwork was undertaken in conjunction with Chris Barrowman, the Historic Scotland Heritage Management Field Officer for the area.

### **Additional Tasks**

In addition to the creation of site descriptions and the update of classification and positional information, site area polygons were created for all of the records, defining the limits of the site as visible to the survey team. These polygons will be available through our webservices in due course. Improved survey information was also provided to the Ordnance Survey to allow the update of their map depictions of some antiquities. Detailed information was provided to Historic Scotland with respect to one Scheduled Ancient Monument at Buaile Ormacleit.

