### Royal Commission on the Ancient and **Historical Monuments of Scotland**

Recording Scotland's Heritage

The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland is an independent non-departmental government body financed by Parliament through the Scottish Office. Its main objectives are to record and interpret the sites, monuments and buildings of Scotland's past, to promote a greater appreciation of their value through the maintenance of the National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS) and to present them more directly by selective publications and exhibitions

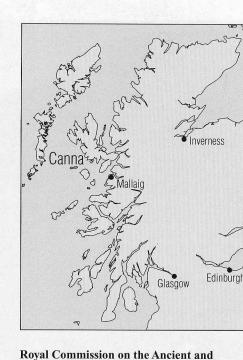
The NMRS, which is open to the public, 9.30 - 4.30 (4.00 on Fridays), at the address opposite, is responsible for the curation of an extensive collection of material relating to the archaeology and architecture of Scotland. The NMRS also contains a large collection of aerial photographs covering the whole of

Further information about the sites illustrated in this broadsheet is available from the NMRS.

#### The National Trust for Scotland For Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty

The National Trust for Scotland is an independent charity, established in 1931 to promote the care and conservation of the Scottish landscape and historic buildings, while facilitating access for the public to enjoy them. The future of this heritage relies on the ability of the Trust to meet ever-increasing financial demands. You can support this valuable work by becoming a member, making a donation, or arranging a legacy. More information on Canna and Sanday, or any of the Trust's properties or activities, can be obtained from the adjacent addresses.

This broadsheet is dedicated to Dr Ian Smith, who sadly lost his life while out walking on

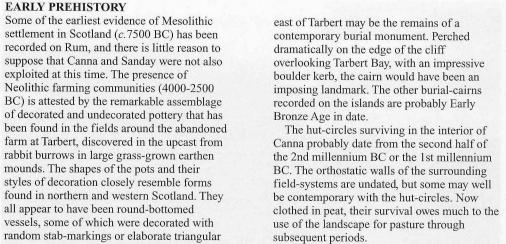


**Historical Monuments of Scotland** John Sinclair House 16 Bernard Terrace Edinburgh EH8 9NX Tel: 0131-662 1456 Fax: 0131-662 1477 Email: www.rcahms.gov.uk

The National Trust for Scotland Head Office 5 Charlotte Square Edinburgh EH2 4DU Tel: 0131-226 5922 Fax: 0131-243 9501 Email: www.nts.org.uk

Argyll, Lochaber and the Western Isles Regional Office Lochvoil House Dunuaran Road Argyll PA34 4NE Tel: 01631-570000 Fax: 01631-570011

© Crown Copyright: RCAHMS 1999 ISBN 1-902419-04-9



patterns of obliquely incised lines, while some

of the undecorated vessels had horizontally

pierced lugs. These mounds may indicate the

ocations of Neolithic settlements, while a

heavily robbed cairn on Creag a-Chairn to the

Reconstruction of the Neolithic pottery from Canna (by Marion O'Neil).





An orthostatic field-wall at the west end of Canna (NG 2126 0533).





The fort on Sean Dun, Sanday (NG 2811 0398).

LATER PREHISTORY

narrow spine of outcrop.

low mound.

The main evidence of later prehistoric settlement on

forts, but some of these might as easily date to the 1st

millennium AD. The forts are all on promontories or

isolated stacks along the coast, with little more than a

single stretch of wall and the cliffs for defence. The

impressive, its drystone wall defending the landward

Other settlements of this date may lie beneath some

side of the stack, where access is only possible by a

of the large mounds that have been recorded on the

composed of the remains of successive shieling-huts

but, in one case, a large stone structure some 14m in

dated, and the pottery recovered from rabbit burrows

cooking vessels that may date anywhere from the Iron

overall diameter protrudes from the base of the

largely comprises undecorated sherds of coarse

Age to the medieval period. The souterrain to the

north-east of Tarbert appears to be associated with a

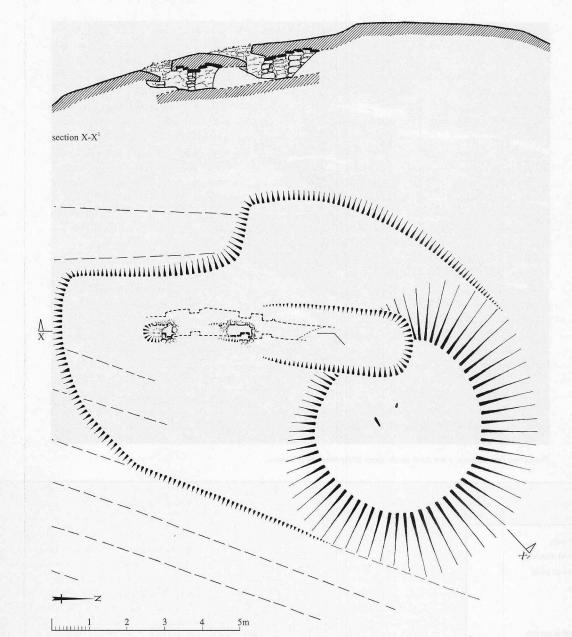
mound. The majority of these mounds cannot be

islands. Many of these mounds are evidently

westernmost on Canna, Dun Channa, is the most

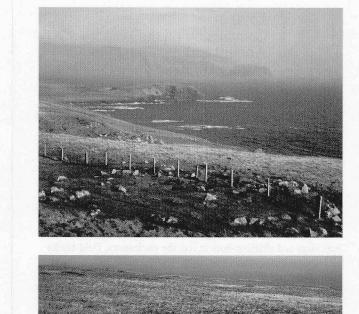
the islands comprises a souterrain and a handful of

The wall and entrance at Dun Channa give a good impression of the strength of these small forts (NG 2058 0478).

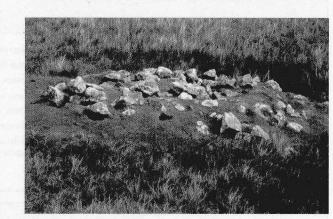


The souterrain lies on a low rise at the edge partly supported on pairs of opposing of an enclosed field (NG 2444 0625), and drystone piers. The edges of its associated survives in two sections, both of which are mound have been trimmed by later accessible through the roof. Its sides are rock-cut and the stone lintels of the roof are

The souterrain, its associated mound and the surrounding lazy-bed cultivation.



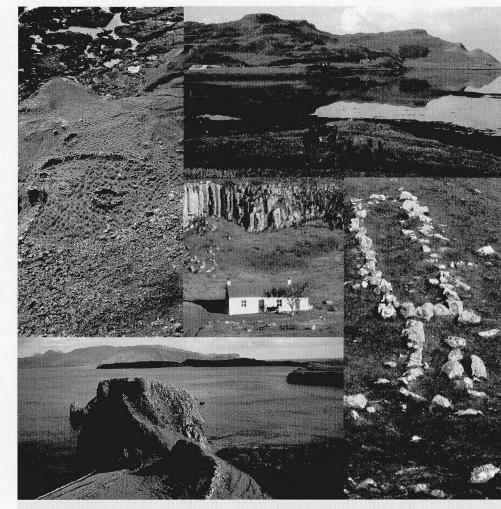




Contrasting mounds: the upper (NG 2493 0562) incorporates the remains of a large circular stone structure; the centre (NG 2155 0534) a rectangular building; and the lower (NG 2461 0463) a shieling-hut.

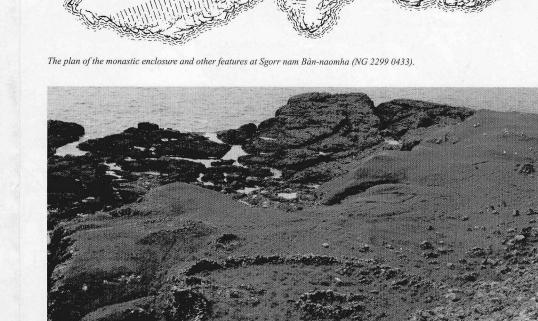
## Ancient and listorical Monuments of

CANNA The Archaeology of a

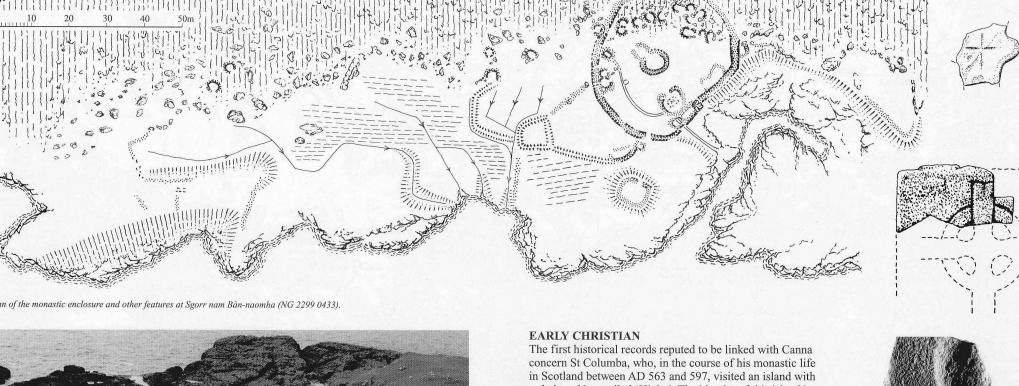


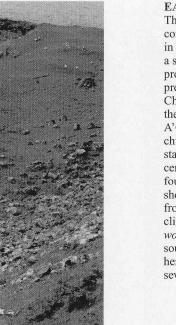
The National Trust for Scotland Urras Nàiseanta na h-Alba

# 30088 PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE CAN CE RCAHMS BROADSHEET 5 Hebridean Landscape



The monastic enclosure viewed from the cliffs above.

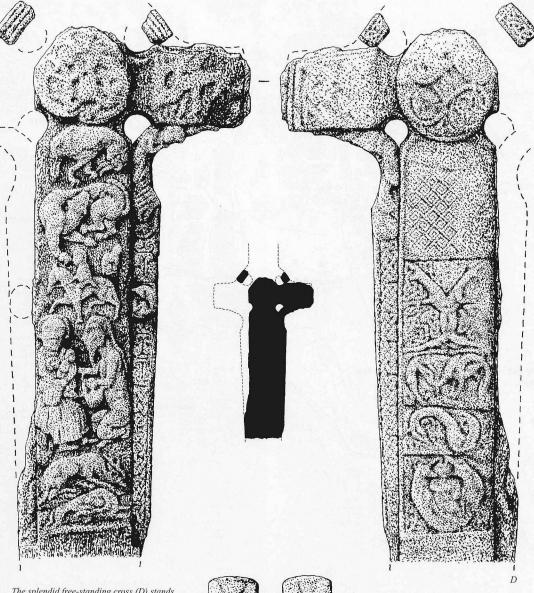




a sheltered bay called 'Hinba'. The identity of this island has proved elusive, but it has been suggested that this was the pre-Norse name for Canna. A remarkable collection of Early Christian sculptured stones has been found in the vicinity of the free-standing cross and the medieval parish church at A'Chill, near the harbour. Dedicated to St Columba, the church is known only from excavation, but the cross still stands in what is probably its original base, and almost certainly indicates the site of an Early Christian monastic foundation. At least one carved stone has been found on the shore near Tarbert, and three others have been recovered from within the stone-walled enclosure at the foot of the cliffs named Sgorr nam Bàn-naomha - the cliff of the holy women - on a remote, rock-bound coastal terrace to the south-west of Tarbert. This may have been an associated hermitage or penitential station, and is the best preserved of several such sites in the Hebrides.

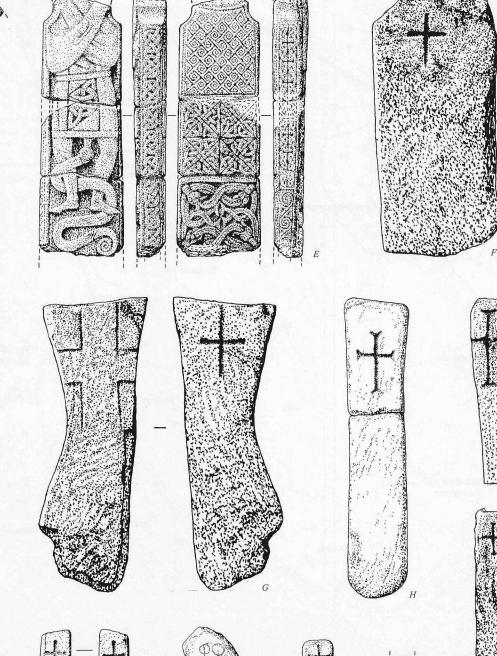


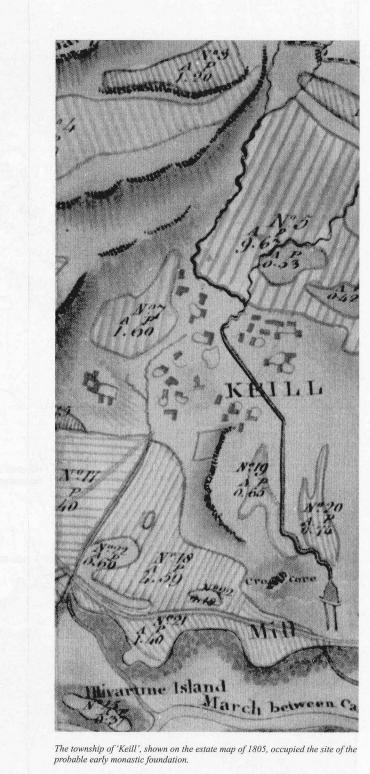
The three carved stones (A-C) from the monastic enclosure were first identified during the survey in 1994 (scale 1:15)



The splendid free-standing cross (D) stands at A'Chill, in the natural amphitheatre once occupied by the township of 'Keill'. It shows the Adoration of the Magi and animal rnament. Fragments of another ornate cross-shaft (E), which were discovered in the wall of the present burial-ground, are now in safe keeping on the island, together with six smaller stones (K-P), one of which (P) was found on the shore near Tarbert.

still be seen in the burial-ground





INTRODUCTION Canna and Sanday are the most westerly of the Small Isles and were gifted to the National Trust for Scotland in 1981 by the late Dr J L Campbell. They lie to the north-west of Rum, midway between the mainland and the Outer Hebrides, and possess a natural harbour that has long provided a sheltered haven in these stormy waters. Unlike the mountainous terrain of Rum, Canna and Sanday are relatively lowlying, and their soils support a rich flora and fauna. As such, the islands have attracted human occupation for thousands of years, from earliest prehistory to recent times. Canna itself is divided into two distinct

portions by an isthmus at Tarbert. To the west of Tarbert, the interior is largely given over to moorland and peat bog, and rises in a series of crag-defined terraces and ridges. The coastal cliffs drop sheer to steep scree slopes that descend to narrow grass-covered terraces immediately above the shore. These terraces provide a strip of relatively fertile ground, but are only accessible by narrow paths that drop down through the screes. To the east of Tarbert, the island is cliff-bound on the north and east, and the southern coast around the harbour is bordered by low-lying agricultural land, which has been enclosed and improved. This land now forms the nucleus of the modern farm, and gives way northwards to a flight of basalt terraces and crags rising up to the highest point of the island on Carn a'

Ghaill (210m OD). Sanday is linked to Canna by a footbridge spanning the narrow tidal channel at the western end of the harbour. With the notable exception of the fringe of fertile, low-lying ground within the crofts along the southern shore of the harbour, the island is largely moorland girt by cliffs.

Glimpses of earlier patterns of settlement and land-use can be seen all over both islands,

and it is only in the fields around the harbour and at the isthmus at Tarbert that more recent cultivation has largely obliterated the earlier remains. Outside these fields, the basalt terraces provided ready-made fields and bear extensive traces of lazy-bed cultivation, most of it probably relating to the period when the population reached its peak in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Subsumed within the plots of lazy-beds, there

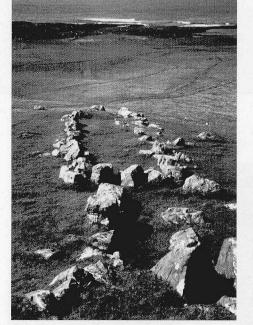
are all manner of earlier remains, from old walls and shieling-huts to substantial mounds and structures of unknown date and function. To the west of Tarbert, however, beyond the head-dyke that encloses all the lazy-beds on this part of the island, there are traces of a much earlier landscape. Prehistoric hut-circles can be found in the lee of crags, in the same sheltered locations favoured by later groups of stone- and turf-built shieling-huts. The surrounding landscape is largely shrouded in peat, but protruding through the surface there are numerous old field-walls, their courses marked out by rows of boulders set on end (orthostats).

An estate map of 1805 shows that, at the

beginning of the nineteenth century, the eastern end of Canna was split between the farms of 'Keill', 'Corrygan' and 'Tarbet', while the western end included 'Garresdale' and a large area of common grazing. The township at 'Corrygan' had already been cleared, probably to Grèod on Sanday, and, by the middle of the century, the tenants at the other townships had either emigrated or been evicted. From a peak of about 400 people in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the combined populations of the two islands were reduced to little over 100. Today, it has fallen to under 20, and the islands are farmed from the steading at The Square on the north shore of the harbour. The enclosed fields are now only cultivated to provide feed

for the sheep and Highland cattle, which form

the mainstay of the islands' economy.



The King of Norway's Grave at Rubha Langanes

NORSE

The Norse raids across the Hebrides began in the ninth century and religious foundations were considered especially attractive targets by the pagan Norsemen. Apart from a ring-

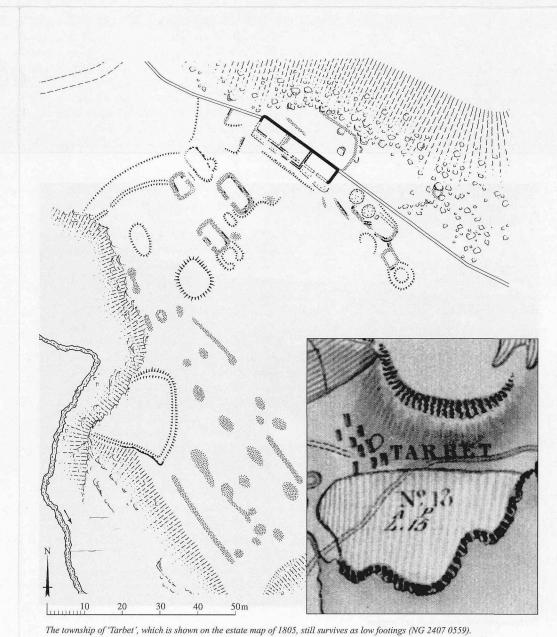
headed bronze pin found near the church on the east shore of Canna Harbour, archaeological evidence of their presence on Canna and Sanday is scant. Sanday, however, is a Norse name, as are many other placenames across the islands, and Norse traditions have become attached to structures such as the King of Norway's grave at Rubha Langanes. Similar enigmatic structures have been found elsewhere on the islands, but there are no

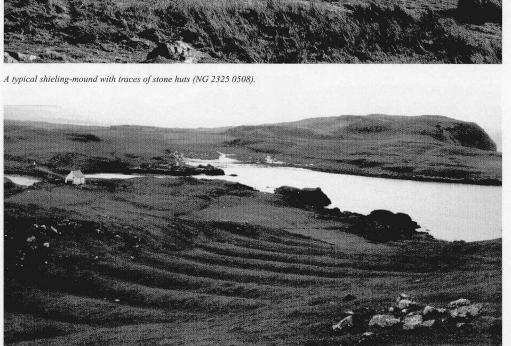
grounds to identify them as Norse burials, and some of those close to the shores are undoubtedly kelp kilns of more recent date.

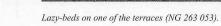
THE LATER LANDSCAPE The estate map of the islands drawn up in 1805 provides a snapshot of the structure of the

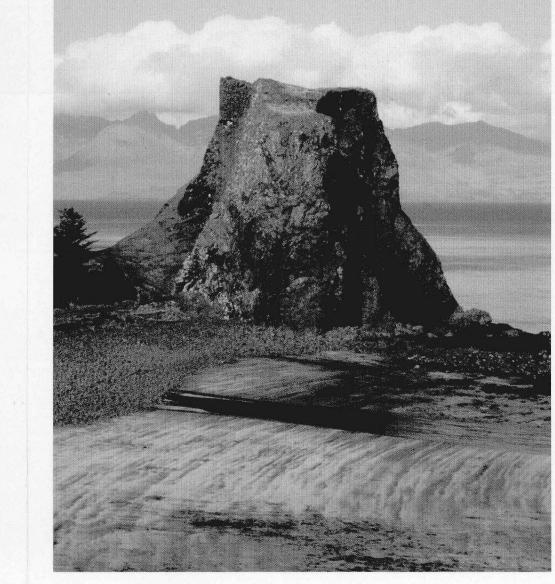
landscape at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the islands were divided between six farms. At that time the population was at its peak, and it is evident that every usable inch of ground was under cultivation. Today, the townships have been largely swept away, but their fields are substantially intact, the plots of lazy-beds forming one of the most striking elements of the landscape. Comparison of the surviving fields with the map of 1805 shows that the majority of these lazy-beds date from 1805 or later. Subsumed amongst them there are numerous structures, many of which appear to be the remains of shieling-huts relating to an earlier episode of land-use. Further clusters of shieling-huts lie out beyond the fields, nestling in sheltered hollows or under the lee of crags. Many of these sites have been in use for extended periods of time, and the shieling-huts are often set upon substantial mounds of turf and rubble derived from earlier occupation. The composition of the mounds has proved ideal for rabbit warrens, which honeycomb many of these sites. Pottery and artefacts discovered in the upcast from the burrows clearly demonstrate that some at least are of medieval

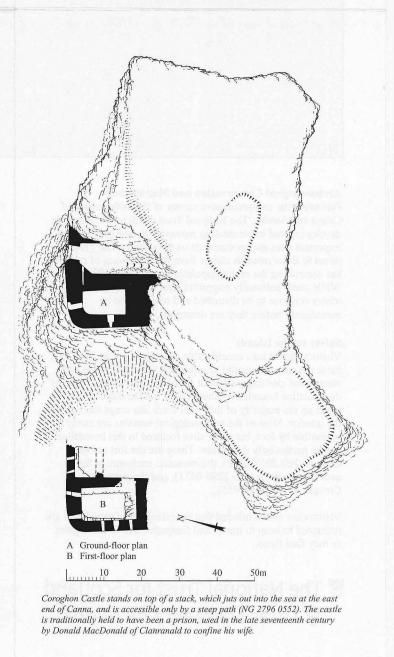
**Further Reading** J L Campbell (1994) Canna, the Story of a Hebridean Island (Third Edition) RCAHMS (1999) Early Medieval Sculpture in the West Highlands













## CANNA The Survey of a Hebridean Landscape

This survey of Canna and Sanday was undertaken by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland in partnership with The National Trust for Scotland. All the archaeological remains are shown, the buildings and shieling-huts in red, the enclosures, field-banks and township boundaries in black, and the areas of lazy-bed cultivation and field-clearance cairns in green. In all, over a thousand structures were recorded in the course of the survey.

The locations of all the monuments illustrated on this broadsheet are annotated on the map, along with the best examples of various classes that have been recorded. The latter include the hut-circles and field-systems towards the west end of Canna, several groups of shieling-huts across the length of the island, the townships for which there are surviving remains, and a cluster of kelp kilns above the shore on Sanday.



The fort on Dun Channa, a low stack on the shore at the west end of Canna.



The dramatic cliffscape along the south-west coast of Canna.



Stone-built structures amongst lazy-beds to the west of Tarbert.



Compass Hill and the east end of Canna from Coroghon Castle. Sanday and Rum from Cnoc Mór.



Buildings (unroofed) Shielings (huts and mounds) Enclosures, banks or walls :. Clearance cairns Lazy-beds King of Norway's Grave Burial-cairn Kelp kilns and other narrow rectangular structures Carn a' Ghaill Dùn nam Berbh Dun Channa, fort Sanday Based upon Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. RCAHMS licence GD03127G/007/98.

Archaeological Conservation and Management Following the comprehensive survey of the archaeology of Canna and Sanday, The National Trust for Scotland has been developing and implementing measures to conserve the most important sites and monuments on the islands. The greatest threat to these remains comes from the burrowing of rabbits, but controlling the rabbit population is proving difficult. While some nationally important sites are being protected, others continue to be disturbed and will need to be

investigated before they are destroyed.

Safety on the Islands Visitors should take considerable care when out walking in these islands, and should be equipped with both warm and waterproof clothing, and stout footwear. Not only is much of the coastline bounded by sheer cliffs, but the basalts that make up the majority of the rocks form low crags throughout the interior. Most of the archaeological remains are easily accessible by foot, but three sites featured in this broadsheet can be particularly dangerous. These are the fort at Dun Channa (NG 2058 0478), the monastic enclosure at Sgorr nam Bàn-naomha (NG 2299 0433), and the castle at Coroghon (NG 2796 0552).

Visitors are also reminded that the islands are farmed, and are requested to keep to tracks and footpaths, and to leave gates as they find them.

The National Trust for Scotland 💆 Urras Nàiseanta na h-Alba





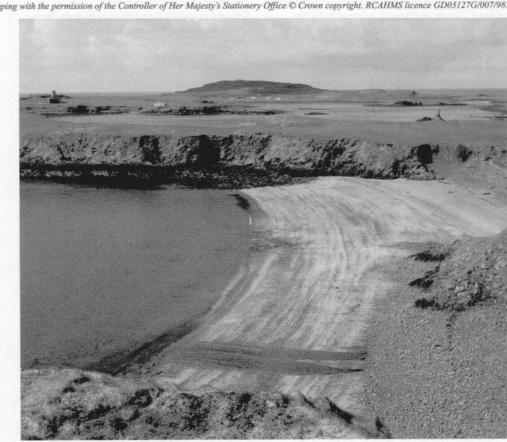
The Presbyterian Church (1912-14) overlooking Canna Harbour.



The late-eighteenth century barn at Coroghon.



The imposing landmark of the Roman Catholic Church (1886-90) on Sanday (now deconsecrated).



Coroghon Bay and Canna Harbour from the castle.