the National Trust for Scotland
a place for everyone

OIGHREACHD SAOGHAIL • WORLD HERITAGE • PATRIMOINE MONDIAL

The St Kilda Archaeologist's Annual Report, May 2008 to January 2009

George Geddes
26th January 2009

Supported by

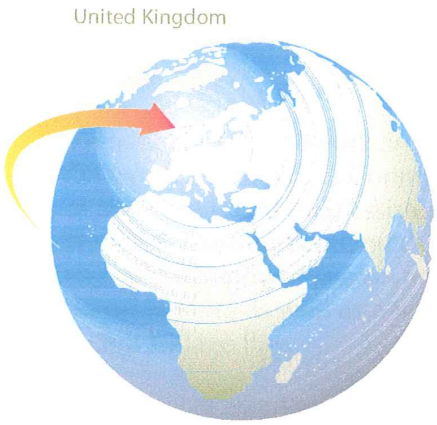
HISTORIC SCOTLAND

Table of Contents

Table of Figures

Table of Illustrations

The cover image is of Strat Halliday and Ian Parker of the RCAHMS surveying a rock shelter (Site 2222), 48m above sea level on the south-east lower slopes of The Cambir (STK08-38-134).



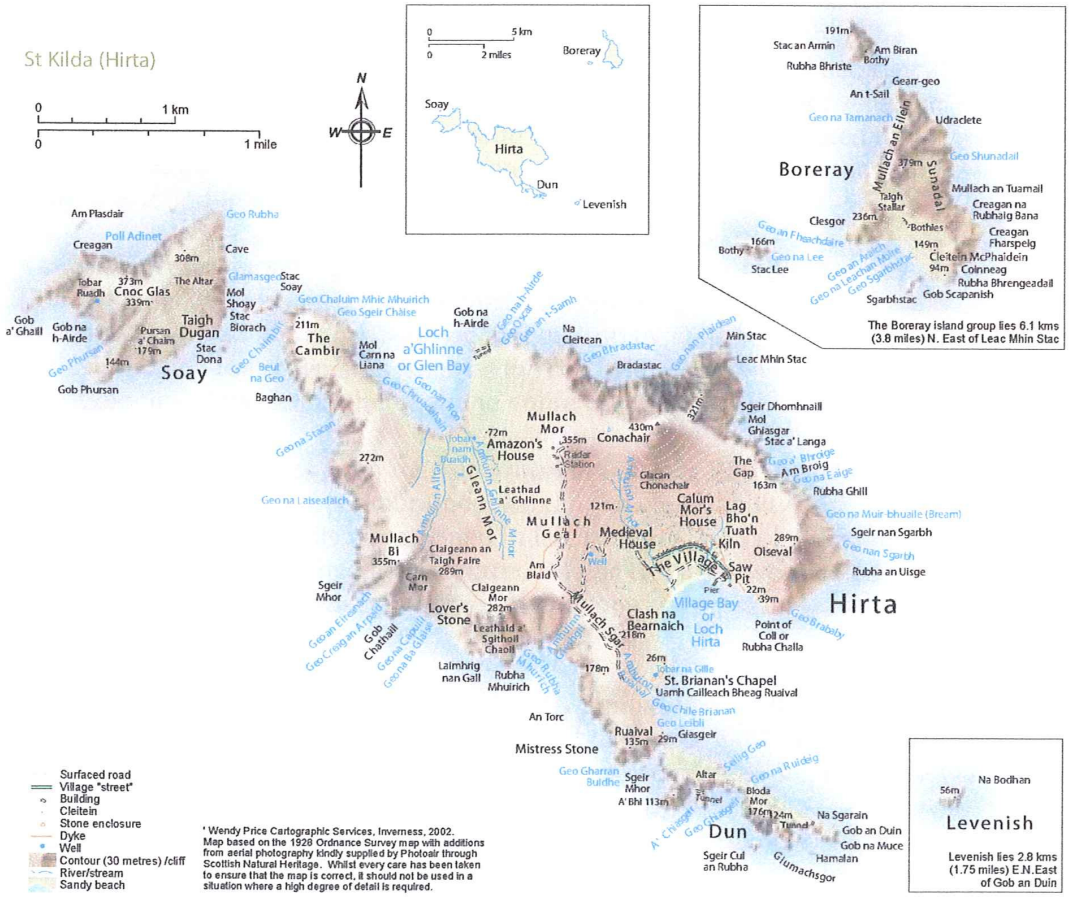


Illustration 1 - St Kilda

1 Executive Summary

This report summarises the work undertaken by the National Trust for Scotland's St Kilda Archaeologist (SKA), George Geddes, during the period of May 2008 to January 2009.

Archaeological fieldwork and survey on the island included 4 weeks of fieldwork by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) assisted by Jill Harden and George Geddes of the National Trust for Scotland (NTS). This involved accurate plotting, description and photography of known and new sites and buildings throughout the main island of Hirta as well as a reassessment of the quarrying and field systems within Village Bay.

A number of standing buildings were revisited by the SKA in order to improve our photographic records, measurements and descriptions. These included all the blackhouses, some of the later houses and the Manse and Store. More of the numerous enclosures of the Village Bay were recorded and the most well-known scree structure (Scree Structure 06) was drawn for inclusion in the forthcoming monograph on Glasgow University and GUARD archaeological investigations from 1992 to 2006. Many smaller shelters were discovered on Hirta, some with cut peats *in situ*, a group of new buildings was noted in Gleann Mór, more remote structures were revisited and a new Christian incised stone was found in the village.

A coastal erosion monitoring exercise has been undertaken in Village Bay since 1996 and this was executed and the methodology revisited. Only small areas of erosion were noted and it is suggested that the survey method be adapted to focus on impact to known sites (such as the sea dyke, store and eroding archaeological deposits), rather than the entire eroding till cliff.

A group of 313 cleits has been regularly monitored since 2001 to inform a conservation programme and our understanding of cleit stability and construction. All 313 cleits were visited in late summer, GPS plotted and photographed where change had occurred. Major collapses were noted in three cleits while minor collapses (sometimes of only one or two stones) and/or turf erosion was noted in around 10%.

Conservation on the island was undertaken by a mixture of skilled and unskilled volunteers forming three work parties. The programme of work and the timing of party visits was severely affected by a major water shortage during the early summer which a) made turf roofing impractical and b) instituted a temporary evacuation of the island. Even in these problematic circumstances, a great deal of the planned work was undertaken including large drainage projects at the Church, Munitions Store and Factor's House.

2 Introduction

This report describes the work undertaken by the NTS St Kilda Archaeologist between May 2008 and January 2009. The report covers work undertaken both on the archipelago and also back at the NTS office at Balnain House, Inverness. The archaeological resource of St Kilda has had a full-time or seasonally dedicated staff member since 1996 and a report has been produced annually by the successive incumbents (Johnstone 1996a, 1998, 1999a, 2000a, 2000b; Taylor 2001; Bain 2002, 2003, 2005; Dennis 2005; 2006a, 2007). The present writer took over the post from Samantha Dennis in May 2008 and left to join the RCAHMS in January 2009.

Figure 1 – Village Bay looking north-west

The post of St Kilda Archaeologist is recognised in the current management agreement between NTS and Historic Scotland (HS) as 'pivotal to the management of the prehistoric and historic structures of St Kilda' (2007, 11) and they are involved in a number of outline tasks undertaken including monitoring, guidance, conservation work, fieldwork and project supervision, and associated administrative tasks. The position is managed from Inverness by Susan Bain, NTS Western Isles Manager with archaeological advice and guidance from Jill Harden, NTS Archaeologist (North). It is funded by the NTS and Historic Scotland. Illustration 1 shows the location of St Kilda, approximately 45 miles west of Benbecula. Figure 1 (above) shows the Village Bay, where most of the work was undertaken.

The work of the SKA for the 2008 field season can most easily be understood as a combination of:

- Archaeological fieldwork or survey
- Condition monitoring
- Conservation work
- Research
- Additional tasks

3 Archaeological fieldwork or survey

Fieldwork and survey fell into two main groups. The SKA worked with the RCAHMS and Jill Harden (NTS) for 4 weeks undertaking survey work across the island. The SKA also undertook various recording projects, mainly photographing and noting standing structures (see Illustration 2). The only invasive archaeological work was undertaken in advance of Munitions Store drainage works detailed below. This has been reported on separately to the NTS and Historic Scotland and a full account of the work since 2005 will be produced.

3.1 RCAHMS/NTS Survey

The NTS and RCAHMS are currently undertaking a three year programme of survey on the St Kilda archipelago. The project aims to provide the basic level of information (location, character and condition) for all archaeological features on the islands using a combination of NTS and RCAHMS staff (see Dennis 2007, 9 for a summary of the 2007 season).

Figure 2 – Descending to Carn Mór

As in 2007, the SKA spent approximately 4 weeks surveying with the RCAHMS and Jill Harden on two separate fieldtrips, one in May and one in September. The survey uses the fieldwork of Mary Harman in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a basis for a modern approach, building on the RCAHMS volume produced in 1988 (Harman and Stell 1988).

For the majority of known sites, the methodology involves:

- Checking whether it has been recorded by Mary Harman or the RCAHMS
- Confirming its identity using photographs, plots and notes by Mary Harman
- Noting by RCAHMS archaeologist

- Survey as a polyline with DGPS by RCAHMS surveyor
- Photographs by NTS archaeologist for condition monitoring (4-6 usually)

There are occasions where previously known sites cannot be located and there were also occasions this year where more remote sites were visited only by the SKA; in these cases, the position was noted by handheld GPS and notes and photographs were taken by the SKA and passed on to the RCAHMS.

Figure 3 - RCAHMS Surveyors

The May trip included coverage of Mullach Geal, Carn Mór, Oiseval, Gleann Mór and Conachair. Many additional sites were noted particularly within Carn Mór, the steep boulder field below Mullach Bi (Figure 2, above). The majority of these were ephemeral rock shelters, some with *in situ* cut peats, though a small group of rectilinear buildings were noted in Gleann Mór. The May fieldtrip included Steve Wallace as Photographer, Angela Gannon and Dr Alex Hale as archaeologists and Ian Parker and James Hepher as surveyors. Jill Harden and I worked alternately with each group of two.

In September, the team completed survey of The Cambir and Gleann Mór as well as revisiting Village Bay and the scree slopes of Mullach Sgar in detail. As well as continued DGPS survey, a number of detailed paper drawings were produced with a self-reducing alidade and plane table. These drawings (at 1:500) focussed on the cellular structures on the west side of Gleann Mór, complimenting the original 1980s RCAHMS work on the eastern side (Figure 3). The September RCAHMS team consisted of Angela Gannon, Strat Halliday, Ian Parker and Georgina Brown.

Figure 4 - Incised Christian stone

On the final day of the September RCAHMS fieldtrip, Strat Halliday discovered a third early Christian incised stone reused as a drain cap by the west gable of House 10 (Figure 4).

3.2 Blackhouses

The St Kilda Village Bay settlement includes a group of 23 'blackhouses' which are mostly houses built using traditional techniques and dating from the 1830s, though some are simply ancillary buildings and some have a more specialist function (Figure 5). The buildings have all been planned by Mary Harman (nd)

Figure 5 – Blackhouse C

and some have been drawn in further detail by the RCAHMS (1988). Some have also been subject to excavation (Quine 1983; Emery 1996) and they were also described and photographed by Lorna Johnstone (1998b) as part of condition surveying.

During this summer, all of the blackhouses were surveyed by the SKA and this descriptive information has been entered into the existing NTS Microsoft Access database. A number of additional features were noted, such as surviving driftwood in Blackhouse S (Figure 6), a number of broken querns, and also the high proportion that have been modified either to cover earlier wall-beds or after a change of use to byre and store in the 1860s. Each building was also photographed completely using a digital camera allowing a re-assessment of condition. I still intend to produce a comparative paper discussing the blackhouse group with reference to similar buildings in Skye and the Western Isles during 2009.

Figure 6 – Driftwood in Blackhouse S

3.3 Houses

The street of St Kilda is lined with 3-bay houses, 16 in total. Six were restored between the 1960s and the 1990s and are now used by volunteers and researchers working on the island. These buildings have never been subject to a comprehensive survey but, as before, they have been noted in the RCAHMS volume (1988) and areas have been previously excavated. Eight of these cottages (1-6, 7 and 16) were visited in 2008. A comprehensive photograph record was collected using a digital camera and detailed notes (including dimensions) were taken and added to the existing NTS database, supplementing previous information.

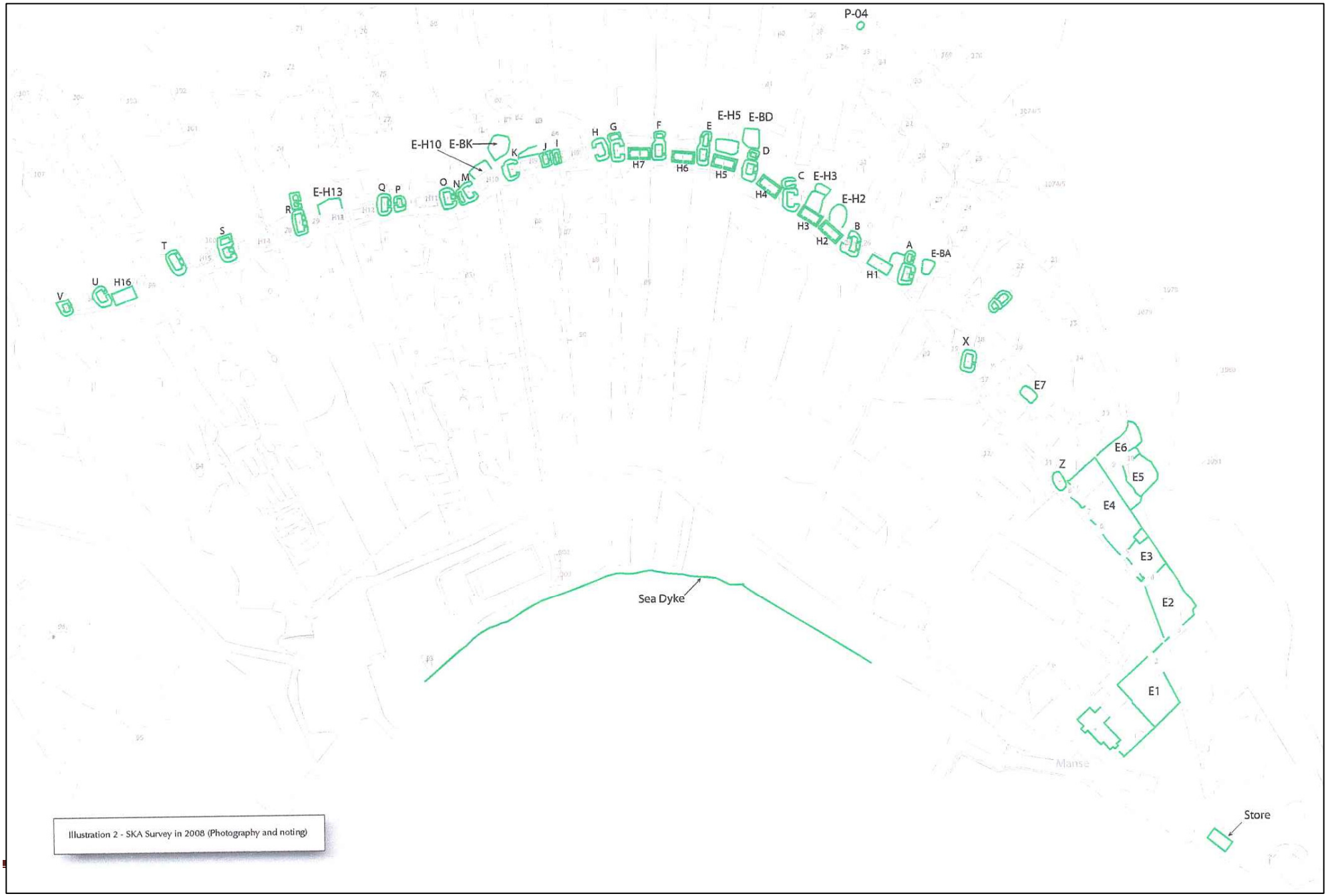


Illustration 2 - SKA Survey in 2008 (Photography and noting)

3.4 Manse

The Manse of 1827-28 on St Kilda is to be redeveloped over the next two years. The building's history and development have been discussed in detail by Jill Harden (2008), to inform the proposals for the refurbishment. The Trust subsequently produced a Conservation Management Plan, approved by Historic Scotland, in advance of applying for Scheduled Monument Consent for the first phase of works (NTS 2008). The interior has been photographically recorded by the SKA prior to stripping out this January. Around 100 photographs were taken, including areas of all the rooms, details of fittings and some of the roof space. An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Susan Bain during the works. The building had been completely gutted during the MoD works of 1970 and no unexpected features were revealed. The current interior is of little historical interest, being a low quality post-1969 refit.

During periods of rain, dampness was noted on a high proportion of the rafters and sarking boards of the Manse, particularly on the north pitch. The Building Surveyor was notified and a group of additional photographs and notes were taken. The main 2-bay original building was supplemented by a single bay extension to the east in 1903, and a lower and narrower addition in c.1970; resulting in three wholly separate roof spaces. Only the lower, ablutions, extension roof of c.1970 seemed to be dry while both of the others exhibited staining, and damp patches.

3.5 Enclosures and Dykes

The main Village Bay of St Kilda is dotted with enclosures and planticrues[1] of varying dates and sizes (Figure 7). Fieldwork in 2008 included the survey of E-H10, E-H9, E-BK, E-H5, E-H13, E-1, E-BD, E-H3, E-H2, E-H1, E-BA, E-7, E-BD, E-6, E-5, E-7, E-2, E-3, E-3b, E-4 and Planticrue 4 (Illustration 2 shows their location). 54 out of 95 sites have yet to be fully recorded i.e. they have not been photographed or described.

Figure 7 – Enclosure BA

[1] A small circular gateless yard, variously described as plantiecrue, planticrue and planticrub. Similar to those found in the Northern Isles.

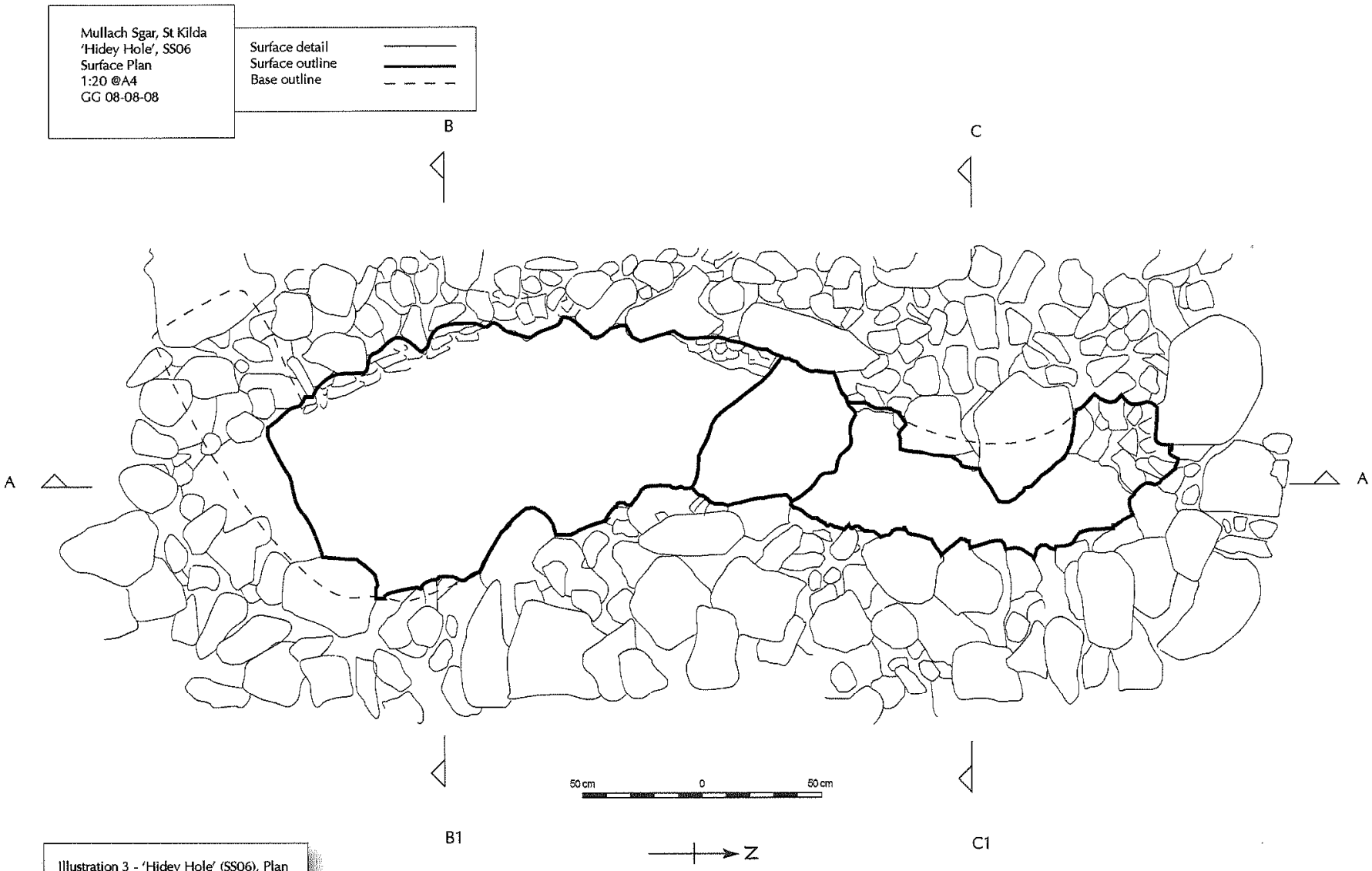


Illustration 3 - 'Hidey Hole' (SS06), Plan

Mullach Sgar, St Kilda
'Hidey Hole', SS06
Sections
1:30 @A4
GG 08-08-08

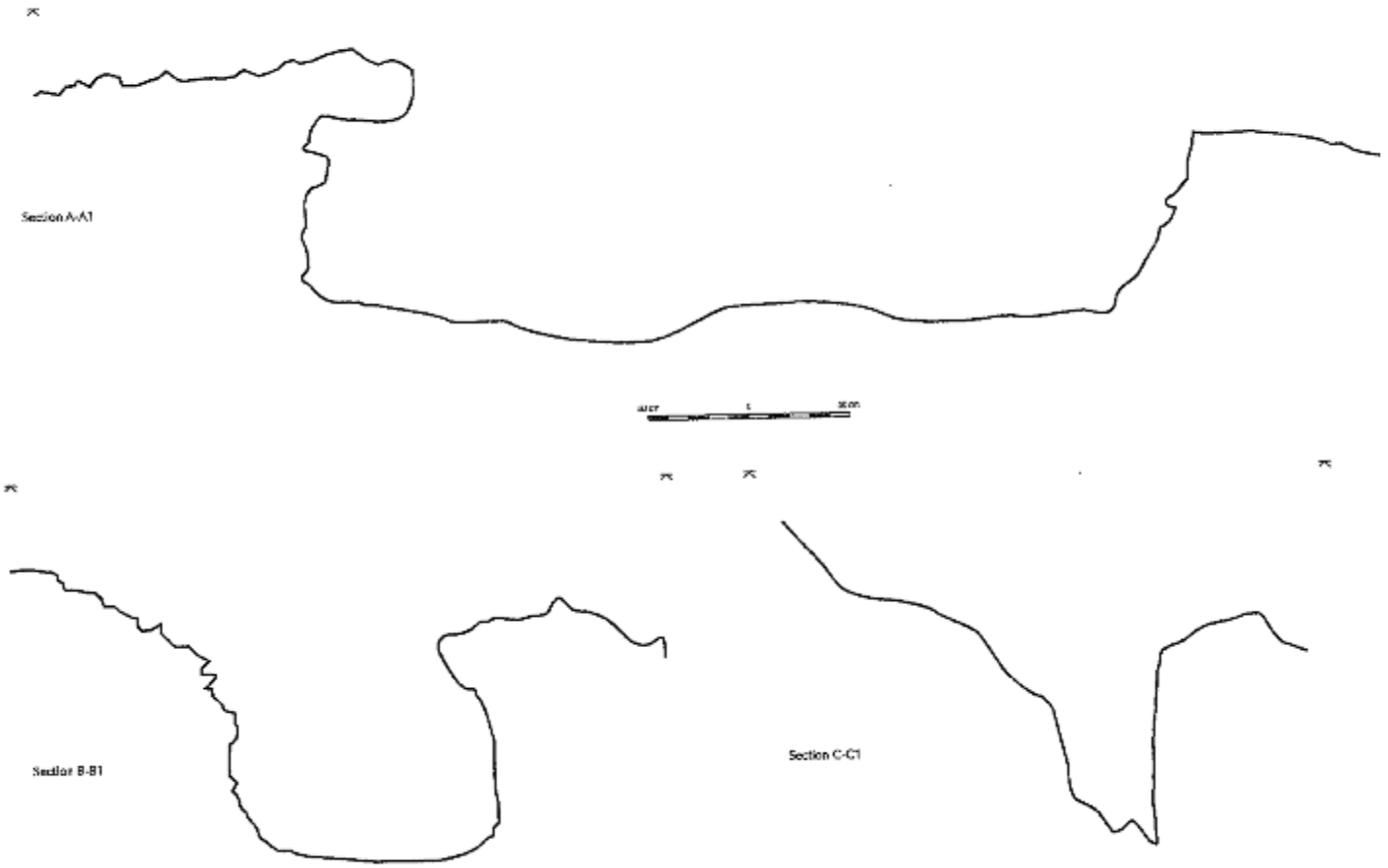


Illustration 4 - 'Hidey Hole' (SS06), Sections

The sea dyke that forms part of the original improvement enclosure of the 1830s was re-photographed. The dyke is subject to coastal erosion and has been significantly reduced in height and adversely affected by erosion and post-1957 works at both ends. The Rev. Neil Mackenzie described how *"this latter portion was built still higher than the other* (the head dyke)*, and proved of great use, not only in protecting the growing crops but in preventing the gales from blowing away the seed and blowing the cut grain into the sea"* (Mackenzie 1911, 22-23).

Figure 8 – 'Hidey Hole' Scree Structure 06

3.6 'Hidey Hole' (Scree Structure 6)

Drawings of the most well known of the Mullach Sgar scree structures were produced for inclusion in the forthcoming St Kilda monograph (Figure 8). The 'building' was planned at 1:20 and three sections were drawn (one longitudinal and two cross-sectional) at 1:50 and 1:20 – see Illustrations 3 and 4. Sketch drawings at 1:50 were produced as an aide memoir and these included sectional elevations which show the character of the internal masonry. This project was undertaken with the able assistance of Graeme Black, a 13 year old from North Uist who was visiting the island. The drawings were scanned and digitised to produce A3 illustrations by the SKA.

4 Monitoring work

4.1 Coastal Erosion

4.1.1 Methodology

A coastal erosion survey of Village Bay was undertaken by the SKA during August 2008. This has been a regular occurrence since 1996 (Johnstone 1996a, 6-7) and has been repeated regularly (Johnstone 1999b; Bain 2002b, Dennis 2006B). In addition, a professional survey was

Figure 9 - The coast in Village Bay

undertaken in September 2002 by representatives of Scottish Natural Heritage and the University of Glasgow for SNH and the NTS (Lees 2002; Hansom 2003). Figure 9 shows part of the Village Bay coastline.

A coherent methodology for the monitoring work was established in 1999, with specific areas of coastline labelled A – H and photographed regularly (Johnstone 1999b). The approach developed out of a specific concern about 'cliff erosion' of exposed soil profiles and related built structures and deposits in the north and east areas of Village Bay. A 'full' set of photographs was taken by the SKA in 1996, 1999, 2002 and 2006, supplemented each year by additional images taken if change was noted. This was repeated this year. Illustration 5 shows the recent erosion.

General photographs were also taken of the Village Bay coast line west and south of the current survey limit since there are a number of archaeological structures that are being affected by cliff and/or coastal erosion, whether by direct wave action or not (Figure 10). Dykes and enclosures at the west end of the storm beach are negatively affected by the movement of the boulder beach and by dumped material from the military occupation.

Figure 10 – Revetted track to Ruaival

4.1.2 Results

In Section A, there had been further erosion in the section immediately east of the Store gabions, where an area of pottery and burning is exposed. Recently dumped material in House 7 (silt and decomposed vegetation from clearing out the open water course nearby in 2007, as well as previously accumulated rubble and broken concrete) was added behind the gabions at the Store (Section B)[2]. An additional gabion was constructed this season (with Scheduled Monument Consent) as part of volunteer conservation works. As happens every year, the area of larger boulders immediately south and east of the slipway has undergone movement, partly due to storm damage and partly to MoD relocation of stone from the pier/slip. As recognised in previous reports (e.g. Dennis 2006b), the outlet for the *Abhainn Illishgill* is in severe need of repair; a

[2] See Bain and Harden 2003 for a full discussion of the dumped material in House 7. Some of the material moved this year was post-2003.

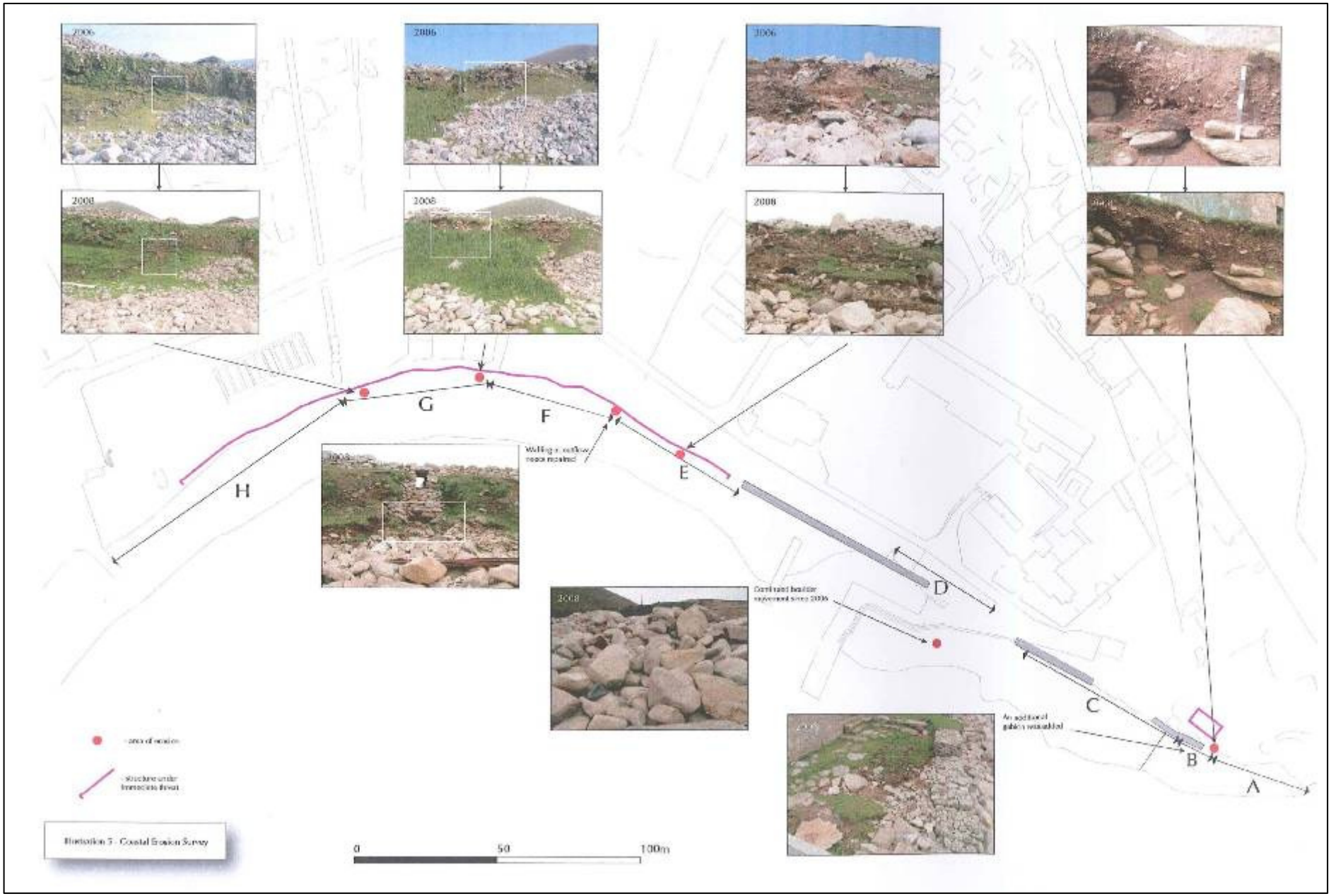


Illustration 5 - Coastal Erosion Survey

lack of timely repair will result in a major collapse of historic fabric which would make it considerably more difficult to reconstruct in the future. There are also smaller areas of collapse in Section G and H, but neither are indicative of major change.

4.2 Cleit Preservation Project

4.2.1 Methodology

The Cleit Preservation Project (CPP) has been undertaken since 2001 as an attempt to monitor cleit condition and feed into a programme of repair (Taylor 2001b). The project builds on the work of Lorna Johnstone (1996b; 1998c) and particularly Mary Harman, whose survey, notes and photography, are an outstanding example of fieldwork and form the basis of any understanding of these iconic structures.

313 cleits were chosen for regular monitoring and repair and a programme of maintenance and visits has been reported on annually since 2001 (Bain 2002a, 3; Bain 2003, 2; Bain 2004, 3; Dennis 2005, 3; Dennis 2006, 3; Dennis 2007, 4). The number of cleits that have been visited each year since 2002 has been 68, 30, 117, 59, 293 and 279.

Figure 11 – Cleit 442, one of the CPP cleits

The numbers and photographs held as part of the CPP have been updated to reflect improved identification (using Mary Harman's photos and number sequence) and to reflect changes in condition and repair. For example, the structure originally identified as Cleit 797 is actually 796, and Cleit 530 is 531.

4.2.2 Results

313 cleits were visited during the 2008 season – a task which took approximately seven days. The position of each cleit was recorded using a handheld Garmin GPS[3], accurate to around 3 metres, although in 2009 this information will be available even more accurately following the RCAHMS survey work across Hirta. This will make it easier to plan trips and locate sites.

[3] An eTrex Vista HCx was used, with a high sensitivity receiver and barometric altimeter. This is significantly more accurate than the standard eTrex H, particularly older units.

Photographs were taken where any change was noted. Change is categorised as major collapse, minor tumble of two or three stones, or turf erosion.

Major collapses were noted in three cleits: 26 (Figure 12), 27 and 63.

Minor tumbles were found in 30 cleits (10%): 2, 6, 7, 15, 17, 23, 36, 45, 48, 58, 61, 65, 66, 70, 73, 75, 84, 86, 95, 104, 159, 163, 500, 555, 686, 805, 832, 908 and 933 (29 in total).

Turf erosion was noted beyond the head dyke in 26 cleits (9%): 122, 134, 135, 137, 138, 147, 157, 159, 161, 164, 165, 166, 169, 442, 492, 493, 543, 791, 942, 964, 1021, 1043, 1044, 1048, 1075, 1146.

Figure 12 Cleit 26, with collapsed roof above compared with 1996

4.3 Other monitoring

Other collapses were noted at:

- The rear wall of the campsite (Enclosure 4) (Figure 13)
- The enclosure wall immediately below Cleit 3
- The *Abhainn Illishgill* exit through the sea dyke (noted previously)

Figure 13 – Enclosure 4 collapse

5 Conservation work

5.1 Work Parties

The SKA is directly involved in conservation work on St Kilda, which is undertaken both by the individual and by Conservation Work Parties with experienced leaders. In 2008, there were three Work Parties, two in May and one in September. An unprecedented water problem on St Kilda caused the cancellation of the planned third work party in May/June and its replacement with a smaller hand-picked group in September. Work Parties 1 and 2 were led by Andrew Cordier and Bobby Douglas. The drought resulted in part of the works schedule being abandoned – the weather throughout the summer was too dry for repairing any cleit roofs.

5.1.1 Cleits

Minor repairs are undertaken where one or two stones have fallen or slipped. Minor cleit repairs were undertaken by work parties and the SKA at Cleits 606, 1157, 1167, 1215, 1231.

Major repairs are undertaken where numerous stones have fallen or slipped or there is significant damage to lintels. Major cleit repairs were undertaken by work parties and the SKA at 92, 104, 288, 483, 486, 513, 531 and 554.

Both Cleit 92 and 104 were within the head dyke, and were subject to major repairs this summer. The south end wall (D) of Cleit 92 was partially rebuilt,

stabilising it – an important prerequisite at this site as it is adjacent to a frequently used pedestrian route. However, the style is not in keeping St Kildan work and it will have to be rebuilt in 2009. The sounth end wall (C) of Cleit 104 collapsed further during repair and it was rebuilt as well as it could be without substantial down takings.

5.1.2 Drainage

As in previous years, a significant amount of time this year was spent on drainage works, either maintaining existing drainage or improving drainage to existing buildings (Illustration 6). A previous report described problems and attempted solutions to drainage on Hirta (Bain 2002c) and the RCAHMS plan of 1988 showed most of the main drainage channels. Drainage work concerned individual buildings (the Manse, Munitions Store and Factor's House) and also general drain maintenance.

5.1.2.1 Church

The Church suffers from dampness and it is hoped that this will be alleviated by the insertion of a French drain along the north-east (rear) gable. A dehumidifier was installed and ran all summer using power from the Manse. This produced around 2 litres of water every 48 hours and its use made the building and its contents noticeably dryer.

The French drain was dug from the steps immediately to the north corner of the church and along the gable to the centre of the enclosed area to the east. The slot was dug to a spade width and approximately 350-400mm deep and checked for a run with a dumpy level. The slot was lined at the base with builder's sand and the main fill of the drain was composed of loose pebbles collected from near the Store, combined with sieved stone from the excavated material. The uppermost layer is composed of gravel to prevent a trip hazard. The water drains away to the east. Paving stones donated by Amey were used to complete and repair the paving along the Church gable.

The fill of the drainage trench was brown moderately compact sandy silt with inclusions of stones smaller than 0.3m in diameter. Finds included fragments of glass, a modern glove, fragments of china and modern gravel, suggesting this area had been disturbed recently. Beneath this layer, reddish-brown compact sand formed a natural base for the drain.

Cleaning the gulve drain at H15

Cleaning a street drain

Cleaning the byre drain at Blackhouse 8

Upgrading and improving drains at the factor's house

A new drain at the church

Replacing work by Dell 7

A new drain at the Hamborsvaan

Illustration 6 - Drainage works

Figure 14 – Church drainage

5.1.2.2 Factor's House

At the Factor's House, a number of changes were made to try to improve the current drainage situation. Firstly, at the rear of the building, the current ground surface was cleared slightly to improve a natural run from the centre to the corners. Secondly, the ground along the west gable was cleared of turf, a rubble slot channel was introduced and the run checked to the front of the building. Thirdly, turf was cleared away at the east gable exposing existing stoneware drains and a concrete lip against the found. The existing stoneware pipes are too high at the north-east corner of the building; it may be relatively simple to remove them to part way along the gable and improve water flow from the rear and along the east gable. This would necessitate breaking out the downpipe which is set roughly in concrete.

At the front of the building, the old drain pipe that took water from the west corner of the building across the street was removed and replaced with 4" uPVC, with a silt trap rubble pit at its north end (Pipe 1 – Figure 15a). The rubble soak-away outside the Factor's House door was added to by expanding it to the south. The pipe from this soak-away running westwards was found to be completely blocked (due to it being split and not covered). It was replaced as far as levels would allow, giving accumulating ground water an escape route to the west (Pipe 2 - Figure 15b). The two ground water pipes were jointed by the low dyke, bedded in sand and taken to the existing open drain which heads south-west.

Figure 15a - Factor's House drainage – inserting Pipe 1, facing north-east

Figure 15b - Factor's House drainage – inserting Pipe 2, facing west

Figure 16 - Munitions Store Drainage

5.1.2.3 Munitions Store

A small drainage channel was opened along the Munitions Store access path to allow seeping ground water to drain away to the west. This was informed by investigative works in 2007 (Dennis 2007) and 2008 (Geddes 2008). This channel is a maximum of 300mm wide and 100mm deep and was filled with loose local pebbles from storm damage erosion scars by the Store.

5.1.2.4 Other drainage

Other drainage work included clearing drains at House 14, House 15, Blackhouse R and between Cleits 14 and 15. Investigative works were undertaken at the campsite and Cleit 7 due to a repetitive problem of flooding on the street. A small area on the street and another below the street were checked for existing drainage but failed to reveal anything. The existing drainage visible below the street could be cleared but it is apparent that the line of the drains above Blackhouse Z has been altered. Further investigation here would help and the capped drain that runs down the wall, under Blackhouse Z, and across the street could be cleared.

5.1.3 Coastal Erosion

Scheduled Monument Consent was given to allow the construction of an additional gabion basket by the Store (Figure 17). This was built from beach rubble by the SKA and an experienced building contractor. Behind the line of gabions a large eroded hollow was filled with mixed material from House 7. This dumped material included silt and rotted vegetation from clearing out the open water course behind House 8 in 2007. The pile of rubble identified as post-1957 and suitable for removal (Bain and Harden 2003) was also used.

Figure 17 – A new gabion at the Store

6 Research

A small intrusive research project was undertaken to inform decisions about the drainage of the Munitions Store pathway. This was reported on separately (Geddes 2008).

The RCAHMS programme of survey continued and it is to be hoped that elements of the project will reach publication. An undergraduate from Glasgow University, Alice Watterson, is undertaking a thesis on cleits and the present SKA intends to undertake and publish a paper on Hirta blackhouses during 2009. A researcher from Italy, Marco Bianco, got in touch with regard to 'caselle' in the area of Alto, Liguria, Italy as a possible parallel for cleits. We hope to take this comparison further in 2009.

The Soay Sheep Project undertook its regular fieldwork programme and made every effort to consult and involve the SKA. Small concerns were raised informally with Jill Pilkington over the sea dyke and Enclosure 2 and these should be dealt with before next summer. With regard to the former, it has been suggested that catch netting should be erected away from this feature and the eroding cliff edge. With regard to enclosure 2, it was suggested that the head dyke should be carefully monitored here and possibly protected during the catch; the trap causes sheep to jump the wall.

7 Finds

A mixture of finds, including modern material, came from the Church drain and Munitions Store drain excavations; these have been returned to Inverness for processing (STK08-2 and STK08-3). A large collection of screw pickets for supporting barbed wire (with a 1957 patent number) were removed from Cleit

Figure 18 - 1957 Screw Pickets

17 by the Factor's House (Find STK08-3), after notification by Jill Pilkington (Figure 18). After detailed recording, selections were taken to the museum in Stornoway, and the remainder were disposed off. Other finds included a fragment of quern with two peg holes (STK08-4).

There are a number of timber fragments in buildings within Village Bay area that are degrading all the time, as well as a fragment of leather shoe (in Enclosure BA) – some of the timbers are probably reused driftwood or ship timbers, some retain evidence for locks and carpentry techniques. We must consider whether materials such as leather and wood should be properly recorded if being left to decay, or whether in some circumstances they should be taken in for preservation and research.

St Kilda has a large social history collection, the majority of which will move from Glasgow Museums to *Museum Nan Eilean* in Stornoway during 2009. The larger, awkward objects without provenance have tended to remain on the island and a group of these were deposited in Stornoway this summer, freeing up space in House 5 and House 6. In addition, an anvil and quern that were in storage were moved to display in the museum though there is no associated interpretation. ESS and Movecon were particularly helpful in the transport and temporary storage of these items.

A small number of items remain on the island – a fireplace surround, a recent roof light, guttering, the old graveyard gatepost and the old Munitions Store door. Two iron pegs were found during Factor's House drain repair and are temporarily stored in House 5 (Find STK08-5).

8 Visitors

An important part of the Trust's staff workload is concerned with the management of visitors, described in detail in Ranger Bill Shaw's Annual Report. All three of the Trust staff take some part in the various tasks which include:

- Meeting visitors at the pier or helipad
- Manning the St Kilda Club shop
- Giving guided tours
- Answering specific queries

- Answering media queries

I met a few of the day trip boats (the Orca and the Enchanted Isle) when Bill was unavailable. I manned the shop on a handful of occasions. I gave 15 guided tours to cruise ship guests, work party members and RCAHMS staff. I answered a few specific questions from visitors to the island, and also fielded a lengthy interview by a filmmaker from MacTV and a shorter one by journalist David Keyes of BBC History magazine and the Independent; David was interested in a possible tsunami caused by a 16th century earthquake. The MacTV production was broadcast on BBC Alba on 22nd December 2008.

9 Winter Work (September 2008 to January 2009)

9.1 Archival research

Two research trips were undertaken to the National Archives of Scotland at West Register House in Edinburgh, and to the National Archive at Kew in London. Both hold a wealth of valuable information about St Kilda, but the main thrust of this research was focussed on the gun and magazine and the jetty. A copy of the digital photographs of documents at Kew was deposited with the NTS archivist in Wemyss House, as well as being retained by the SKA. Detailed notes should help any future researchers with Admiralty records.

9.2 Database re-design

An analysis was undertaken of the current use of Microsoft Access databases. The conclusions led to their re-design into a new unified database which should help with management of all aspects of St Kilda's archaeology and built heritage. The main challenge is to integrate the existing databases into this new database before spring 2009.

9.3 Conservation Statements

A Conservation Statement was written for the Magazine and Gun including a very detailed historical analysis, assessment of significance and suggested future management. Background research was undertaken for a Conservation Statement on the Jetty, which will be authored during the spring.

9.4 Manse

Assisted Jill Harden with the Manse Conservation Management Plan, attended meetings with Historic Scotland and produced a model for a watching brief during stripping out works.

9.5 Miscellaneous

Attended the St Kilda Club meeting
Aided Alice Watterson with her undergraduate research
Aided John Love with some requests about photographs
Attended Access training at Wemyss House
Spoke to Phil Abramson, Archaeologist at Defence Estates
Wrote two articles for the St Kilda Mail (see Appendix 4 for one)
Assisted Jill Harden with Manse Conservation Plan

10 Future work highlighted in this report

10.1 The 1860s houses

Eight of these cottages (1-6, 7 and 16) were visited in 2008, and a comprehensive photograph record was collected using a digital camera as well as detailed notes (including dimensions) being taken and added to the existing NTS database. This work will be completed in 2009.

10.2 The enclosures and planticrues

Fifty-four out of ninety-five of the enclosures and planticrues have yet to be fully recorded i.e. they have not been photographed and they have not been described. This work will be continued in 2009. In addition, the RCAHMS survey has mapped further examples that will need to be drawn into this record.

10.3 Coastal erosion

The triennial photographic survey of the glacial till cliff around Village Bay was undertaken a year early in 2008. The methodology adopted was to replicate all the images from 2007 and 2006 so as to allow the photographs and judgement to be scrutinised at a later date by any individual. It was felt that such an intensive approach would provide a better comparison over time.

However, in retrospect, cumulative evidence seems to suggest that the main cause of concern is major storm events which are variable through time, rather than a continued annual erosive effect (see, for example, Appendix 1 in Hansom 2003). It is clear that a group of archaeological deposits and upstanding structures are at risk and that the coast is eroding at a variable rate. The real challenge is deciding what to do about this. It ought to be considered whether it is worth continuing a fairly subjective and regular photographic survey when the basic facts are well understood.

The SKA coastal erosion report issued in 2006 included a detailed list of recommendations which continue to ring true (Dennis 2006b, 29). They are included here, with notes where relevant:

1. Extend the survey
    a. Further south and west in Village Bay
    b. To include Gleann Mór
    c. To include Ruaival
    d. To include views of the coast other than directly facing the eroding till cliff
2. Produce sensitivity guides for the features at risk
    a. Buildings
    b. Dykes
    c. Deposits
3. Triennial coastline survey

With regard to metric survey, there have been proposals that a DGPS or Total Station survey of the coastline should be undertaken at regular intervals (Johnstone 1996a; Hansom 2003, 23, Dennis 2006b). This, when compared to the RCAHMS survey (1988), and with adequate survey control, would provide a more objective record of actual coastal loss. This could be undertaken every five years in 2-3 person days with equipment available to hire cheaply. It was undertake in 1996 and 2003 but a programme of regular survey still needs to be introduced.

4. Re-assess the methodology

One further suggestion may be to change the focus of the current survey to archaeological sites rather than areas of coastline, like C, G, E and F for example.

These issues need to be addressed and a way forward agreed with Historic Scotland so that survey, monitoring and/or invasive works can be instituted from 2009 onwards.

10.4 Cleit monitoring

This will continue in 2009, using the suite of cleit monitoring prints. However, these need to be reviewed and corrected as necessary, to take account of the RCAHMS accurate mapping programme of 2007-8. Some of the identified cleits have been ascribed the wrong number in the various catalogues – reports, prints and scans – but the full extent of this has not yet been assessed. Once this has been done the monitoring work can continue.

10.5 Repairs to drystone features and turf roofs

The active zones of management of decay are identified in the NTS/HS Management Agreement 2007-2011. To date the following features have been recorded as requiring work:

Major repairs are required at cleits 26, 27 and 63. Further work needs to be done to cleit 92.

Minor repairs will be required at certain cleits. A detailed assessment of the monitoring photographs will provide the identifications based on the minor tumbles noted at 2, 6, 7, 15, 17, 23, 36, 45, 48, 58, 61, 65, 66, 70, 73, 75, 84, 86, 95, 104, 159, 163, 500, 555, 686, 805, 832,and 908. Various tumbles of enclosure dykes are bound to have occurred during the winter. Those noted while on island were parts of the rear wall of the campsite (Enclosure 4) and the enclosure wall immediately below Cleit 3. As recognised in previous reports (e.g. Dennis 2006b), the outlet for the *Abhainn Illishgill* is in severe need of repair; a lack of timely repair will result in a major collapse of historic fabric which will be considerably more difficult to reconstruct in the future.

Turf erosion within the head dyke within Village Bay was noted in 2008 at cleits: 3, 6, 15, 18, 23, 30, 33, 39, 40, 44, 47, 48, 55, 59, 60, 62, 64, 65, 66, 71, 72, 74, 99, 101, 104, 108. The phased programme of repairs has been agreed with HS and proposals will, once again, be made for this work.

However, turf roofs should probably be repaired earlier in the year, perhaps by a dedicated work party. This would ideally be at a time when the weather is wet and before spring growth. Undertaking roof repairs at any other time potentially compromises the success of the repair, (as noted by Bain 2006, 21).

10.6 Drainage

The drainage work between the campsite enclosure and the back of the base has not been completed. The existing drainage visible below the street should be cleared but it is apparent that the line of the drains above Blackhouse Z has been altered. Further investigation here would help and the capped drain that runs down the wall, under Blackhouse Z, and across the street should be cleared.

The drainage works around the Factor's House will be continued in 2009. The existing stoneware pipes are too high at the north-east corner of the building but an agreed methodology needs to be confirmed before works begin.

10.7 Finds

The significance of the larger items (old door and gatepost, fireplace surround, modern roof light and 20th-century guttering) needs to be re-assessed. They should then be removed from the island and stored or disposed of as appropriate.

10.8 Interpretation

The anvil and quern that were in storage were moved to display in the museum in 2008 but as yet there is no associated information.

11 Acknowledgements

The work of the SKA would not be possible without the financial support of Historic Scotland, and the support and co-operation of NTS island staff Bill Shaw and Sarah Money. Volunteers did the vast majority of the conservation work and their enthusiasm and hard work was much appreciated. Archaeological guidance was provided by Jill Harden and the post was managed by Susan Bain. Invaluable logistical support and advice was provided by QinetiQ, Amey and ESS and particular thanks are due to their respective managers on site. An excellent introduction to the island was provided by the RCAHMS and Mary Harman. In addition, I would like to thank members of the Soay Sheep Project and seabird researchers for good humour throughout the summer.

12 Bibliography

Bain, S **2002a** St Kilda Archaeologist Annual Report 2002, NTS Internal Report Dec 02
Bain, S **2002b** Village Bay, St Kilda Coastal Erosion Survey, NTS Internal Report
Bain, S **2002c** Drains and Drainage on St Kilda, 2002, NTS Internal Report
Bain, S **2003** St Kilda Archaeologist's Annual Report 2003, NTS Internal Report Oct 03
Bain, S **2005** St Kilda Archaeologist's Annual Report 2004, NTS Internal Report, Jan 05
Bain, S **2006** Construction and Maintenance of Turf Roofs in the North Atlantic, Report to Winston Churchill Memorial Trust
Bain, S and Harden, J **2003** Proposals for the removal of the remaining rubble from the roofless houses: a discussion document, NTS paper
Dennis, S **2005** St Kilda Archaeologist's Annual Report, NTS Internal Report, Oct 05
Dennis, S **2006a** St Kilda Archaeologist's Annual Report, NTS Internal Report, Oct 06
Dennis S **2006b** Village Bay, St Kilda Coastal Erosion Survey, NTS Internal Report
Dennis, S **2007** St Kilda Archaeologist's Annual Report, NTS Internal Report, Oct 07
Emery, N **1996** *Excavations on Hirta*, HMSO: Edinburgh
Lees, G **2002** Internal Report on Coastal Erosion at Village Bay, Report for SNH by the Earth Science Group
Geddes, G **2008** St Kilda Archaeologist: Munitions Store – Interim Report, NTS Internal Report to HS, June 2008.
Hansom, JD **2003** Assessment of Coastal Erosion, Village Bay, Hirta, St Kilda, Report for the NTS by the Coastal Research Group
Harden J, **2008** The St Kilda Manse – a review of its development circa 1820 – today, Report for NTS

Harman, M **1997** *An Isle Called Hirta*, MacLean Press, Isle of Skye.
Johnstone, LH **1996a** St Kilda Archaeology Warden's Annual Summary (GUARD 362)
Johnstone, LH **1996b** St Kilda Archaeology Warden: Report on Cleit Condition (GUARD 362)
Johnstone, LH **1998a** St Kilda Annual Report 1997 (GUARD 362.2)
Johnstone, LH **1998b** The Ruinous Dwellings of St Kilda (GUARD 362.2)
Johnstone, LH **1998c** Report on Cleit Condition (GUARD 362.2)
Johnstone, LH **1999a** St Kilda 1998: Annual Report (GUARD 362.3)
Johnstone, LH **1999b** St Kilda Archaeologist: Report on Cliff Erosion in Village Bay (GUARD 362.4)
Johnstone, LH **2000a** St Kilda, Annual Report 1999 (GUARD 362.4)
Johnstone, LH **2000b** St Kilda Archaeology Warden Annual Report (GUARD 362.5)
Mackenzie, JB (ed) **1911** *Episode in the Life of the Rev. Neil Mackenzie at St Kilda from 1829-1843*. Privately printed.
NTS **2008** The St Kilda Manse Conservation Management Plan, Unpublished Document
NTS/Historic Scotland **2007** Management Agreement 2007-12, Unpublished Document
Quine, TA **1983**, Excavations on Village Street, Hirta, St Kilda 1983, Ms. Report to NTS, Edinburgh
RCAHMS **1988** *The Buildings of St Kilda* (Mary Harman and Geoffrey Stell), Edinburgh, HMS0.
Taylor, M **2001** St Kilda Archaeologist Annual Report 2001, NTS Internal Report
Taylor, M **2001b** Cleit Preservation Project NTS Internal Report