

# Archaeological collections from sandhill sites in the Isle of Coll, Argyll & Bute

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with contributions by T Cowie, B Finlayson, A Lane & A Sheridan  
with illustrations by A Braby

## ABSTRACT

*Over the past 20 years, large collections of surface finds have been retrieved from erosion areas within the sandhills on the Argyll island of Coll. A selection of these finds has been catalogued and illustrated to draw attention to the range of evidence that is available, including material representative of virtually all periods from the Mesolithic to the recent past. A brief concluding discussion outlines the contribution that this fieldwork has made to our present understanding of the development of settlement on Coll. Together with the archaeological Inventory (RCAHMS 1980), it is hoped that the results of this field prospection will be the catalyst for future archaeological work on the island.*

## INTRODUCTION

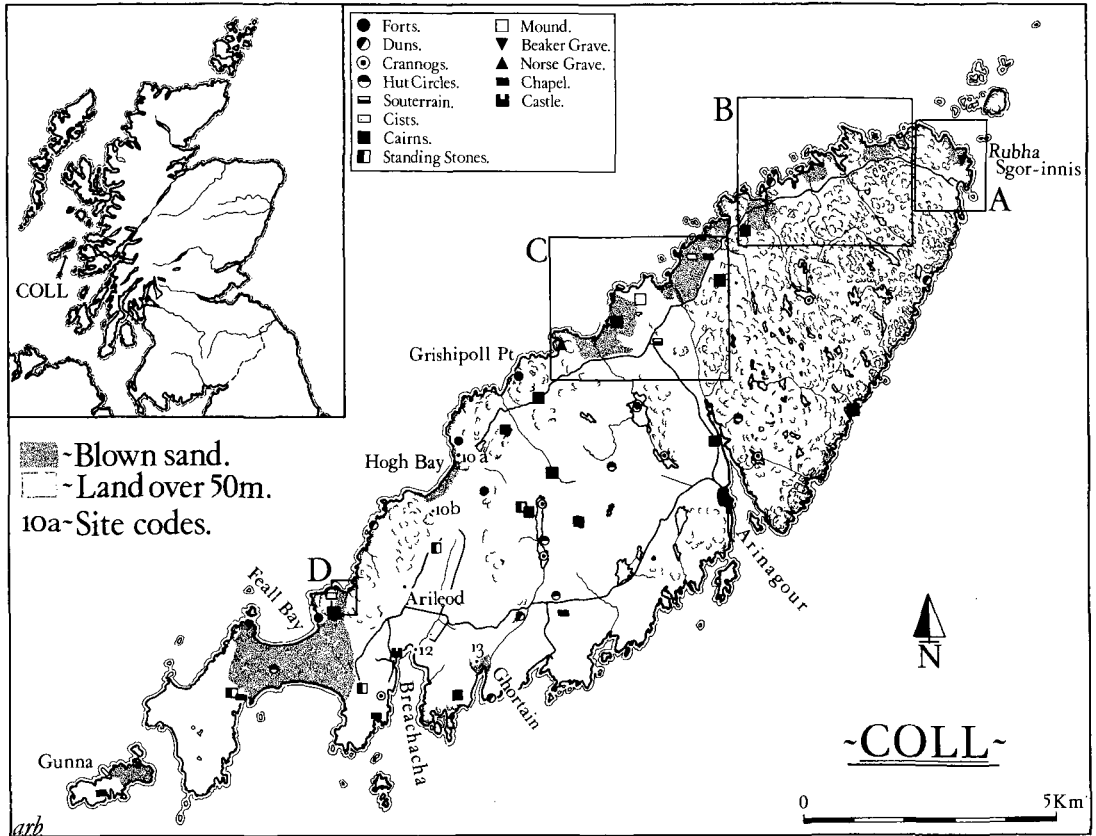
*... it is generally compos'd of little rocky Hills, cover'd with Heath.*

Martin Martin 1716, 271

The island of Coll lies in the northern Inner Hebrides, 4 km to the north-east of Tiree. The island is approximately 20 km in length and 6 km in width, with the long axis orientated NE/SW. Mainly composed of Lewisian gneiss, the terrain is rough and irregular and much of the land surface is bare rock scraped clear by glaciation. As a result, permanent settlement on the island has always been predominantly coastal. Again there are geographical constraints: the south-east coast is composed mainly of steep onshore gradients with beaches virtually absent. In marked contrast, however, the north-west coast has numerous beaches which have given rise to extensive onshore accumulations of blown sand in the form of dunes and machair (Mather *et al* 1975, 52). It is within these sand dunes and machair areas which have been subject to regular erosion that many archaeological finds of various periods have been discovered during the past century (cf Beveridge 1903, 34–44; RCAHMS 1980, 15–16).

Nearly every year since 1975, the author has collected archaeological finds exposed by erosion in the sandhills of Coll. Inventory fieldwork on the island by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS 1980) coincided with the

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ILLUS 1 Map of Coll showing distribution of principal archaeological monuments and key to detailed maps of sandhills. Numbers refer to the following locations not included on the detailed maps: Tràigh Hogh (10), Breachacha (12), Tràigh Ghortain (13) and Arileod (14). (Based on the Ordnance Survey map © Crown copyright)

presentation to the National Museum of an initial batch of finds and prompted the publication of a short paper in these *Proceedings* in which some of the more important items were catalogued and illustrated (Close-Brooks *et al* 1978). Since 1978, the surface collections have been very considerably augmented, and these have continued to be presented to the National Museum at regular intervals over the years. Cataloguing of the entire collection has highlighted the need for updating and revision of the original paper.

The present paper has been modelled on the format of the previous publication. Only material recovered from the coastal sandhill areas is included here, with the exception of some finds retrieved from an inland location at Arileod (see illus 1). The nature of the terrain, the mobility of the sandhills and the intermittent nature of the visits has precluded systematic collecting, but it has been possible to identify specific productive locations. A brief introduction to each of the areas concerned is followed by an illustrated catalogue of a selection of finds, site by site, to draw attention to the much wider range of evidence that is now available (summarized in Table 1). Further details of each of the beach units referred to in this paper will be found in Mather *et al* 1975.

All the material described here was recovered by the writer or his immediate family, with the exception of one copper alloy pin from Sorisdale discovered by Joanna Close-Brooks (catalogue no 6). The basic cataloguing of the collections as a whole has been undertaken by John Crawford under the guidance of Trevor Cowie. Thereafter, the division of work has been as follows: the lithic material has been surveyed by Bill Finlayson, while the very extensive collections of pottery have been identified and discussed by Alan Lane and Trevor Cowie. The metalwork has been catalogued and discussed by the author and Trevor Cowie, in the light of helpful comments received from Conor Newman and David Caldwell. Finally, Alison Sheridan has kindly contributed a report on a bead of cannel coal found at Feall. Where appropriate, catalogue entries have been extended to include specialist comment, but for the most part, the different categories of finds are discussed separately at the end of the paper. A brief concluding section by Trevor Cowie summarizes the contribution that this fieldwork has made to our understanding of the history of settlement on the island.

## THE SITES

### 1 SORISDALE (TRÀIGH TUATH/RUBHA SGOR-INNIS)

Situated at the extreme north tip of Coll, this beach unit is bounded by ice-scoured gneiss headlands. The machair area has been extensively deflated and cut by wind blows. Some of these blow-outs have been severe and have exposed old land surfaces and indeed, in some cases, bare rock. Several of these surfaces extend almost the full width of the machair in a series of 'finger' blow-outs running north/south (illus 2 & 14).

Sorisdale may be the site of the rabbit warren established by the Duke of Argyll and described by Boswell in 1786 (Levi 1984). However, much of the area is now coalescing as grazing has been restricted and the rabbit population has decreased to the point of near extinction. Almost all the deflated areas where finds have been recovered are therefore now being re-colonized by vegetation, and, unless a new cycle of erosion is initiated, it is unlikely that much more archaeological material will be exposed in the immediate future.

#### SORISDALE: AREA A

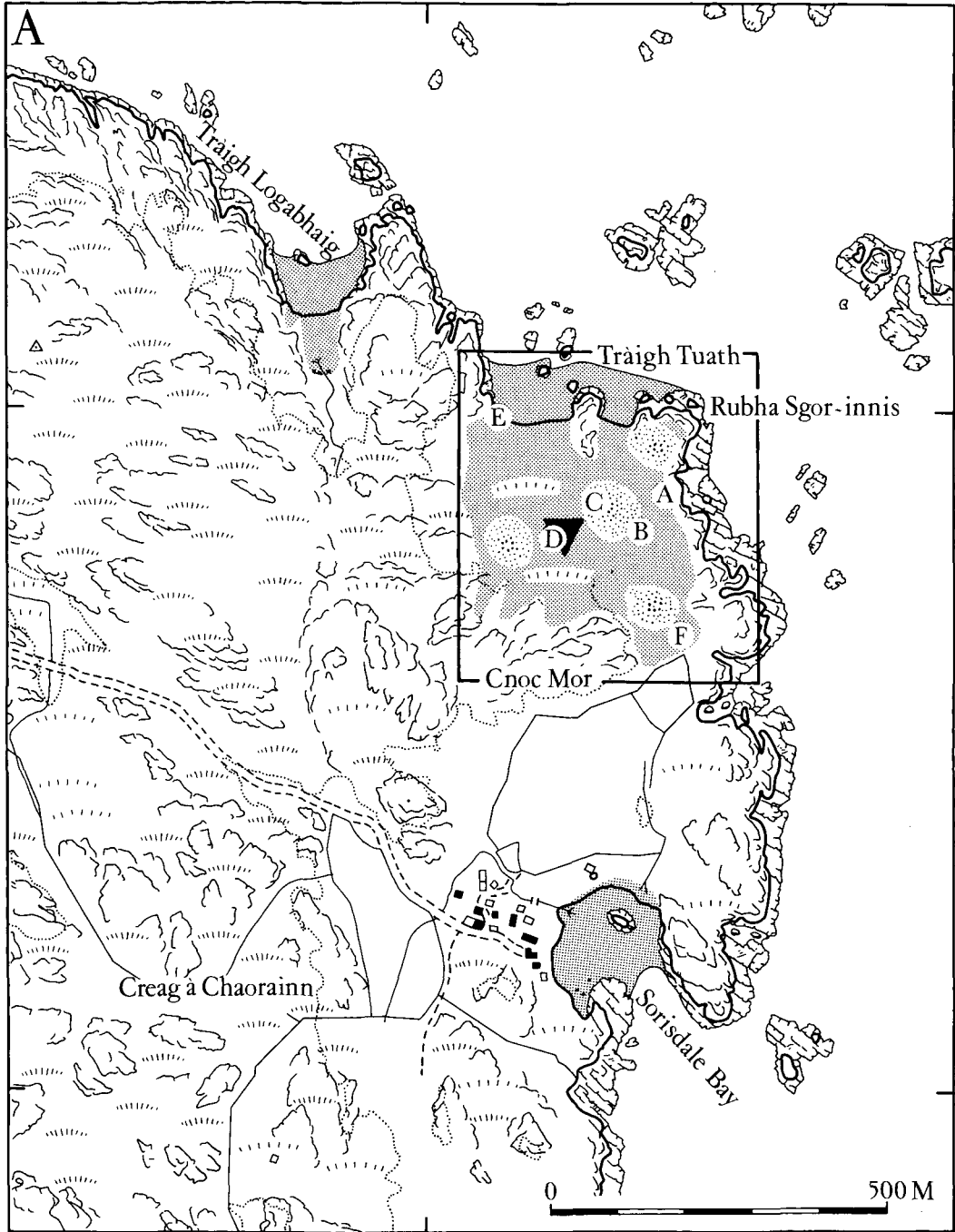
An area of deflation hollows and exposed outcrop to the east end of the dune system, close to Rubha Sgor-innis (NGR: NM 274 639).

#### *Lithics (illus 3)*

- 1 Blade with abrupt retouch forming a rough triangular microlith; a thin line of dark deposit adhering to the left face may possibly be the remains of adhesive (eg pitch).
- 2 Bifacially retouched lozenge-shaped piece, possibly tanged. While this may be an irregular Neolithic arrowhead, the presence of bifacial flaking does not preclude a Mesolithic date (cf Wickham-Jones 1990).
- 3 Pebble ground at wider end to form a cutting edge.

#### *Medieval/later pottery*

- 4 Rim sherd; upright or slightly everted; stab marks on rim top; internal surface wiped.
- 5 Body sherd, from globular *crogan*-type vessel with upright neck; hard leathery fabric (following Cheape 1988, the Gaelic word *crogan* (plural *crogain*) has been used here in preference to the anglicized form *craggan*)



ILLUS 2 Map showing location of collecting areas A-F at Sorisdale. (Based on the Ordnance Survey map © Crown copyright)

*Copper alloy metalwork (illus 3)*

- 6 Pin; cast; frustrum-headed; four incised lines form a saltire on top of the head; the faces of the head are plain; fine fillet at the junction of the head and the shank; round-sectioned, tapering shank, bent at right angles 35 mm from the point. Overall L 80 mm. This pin is included here by kind permission of the finder, Joanna Close-Brooks.
- 7 Folded scrap of sheet metal; this may be a simple 'clip' of the type used to repair the rim of a copper alloy vessel (David Caldwell, pers comm).

## SORISDALE: AREA B

Large quantities of lithic material have been recovered from a 'finger' blow-out running south from the shore for approximately 150 m (NGR: NM 273 638).

*Lithics (illus 3)*

- 8 Side- and end-scraper.
- 9 Short thick convex end-scraper.
- 10 Short thick convex end-scraper.
- 11 Edge retouched flake.
- 12 Basalt pebble; wider end double-bevelled.
- 13 Bevel-ended tool with lateral break.
- 14 Bevel-ended tool; wide bevelled end opposed to narrow end.
- 15 Bevel-ended tool; wide bevelled end opposed to narrow end.

Area B appears to contain a palimpsest of material, with 17 platform cores or core fragments, four amorphous cores and 13 bipolar core elements representing all the principal techniques. In addition to the bevel-ended tools (see final discussion), two pieces suggest a Mesolithic date: these are a crested blade, indicative of a deliberately planned blade core technique and a rolled prismatic core (not illustrated). The rolling of this last piece indicates that at least some of the Mesolithic material is unlikely to be close to its primary context. However, the retouched artefacts are generally Neolithic or Early Bronze Age in character, including scrapers (8–10), denticulates and shallow edge retouched flakes. Two pieces of bloodstone are also present, one of them a blade (for definition of bloodstone see Wickham-Jones 1986).

*Prehistoric pottery (illus 3)*

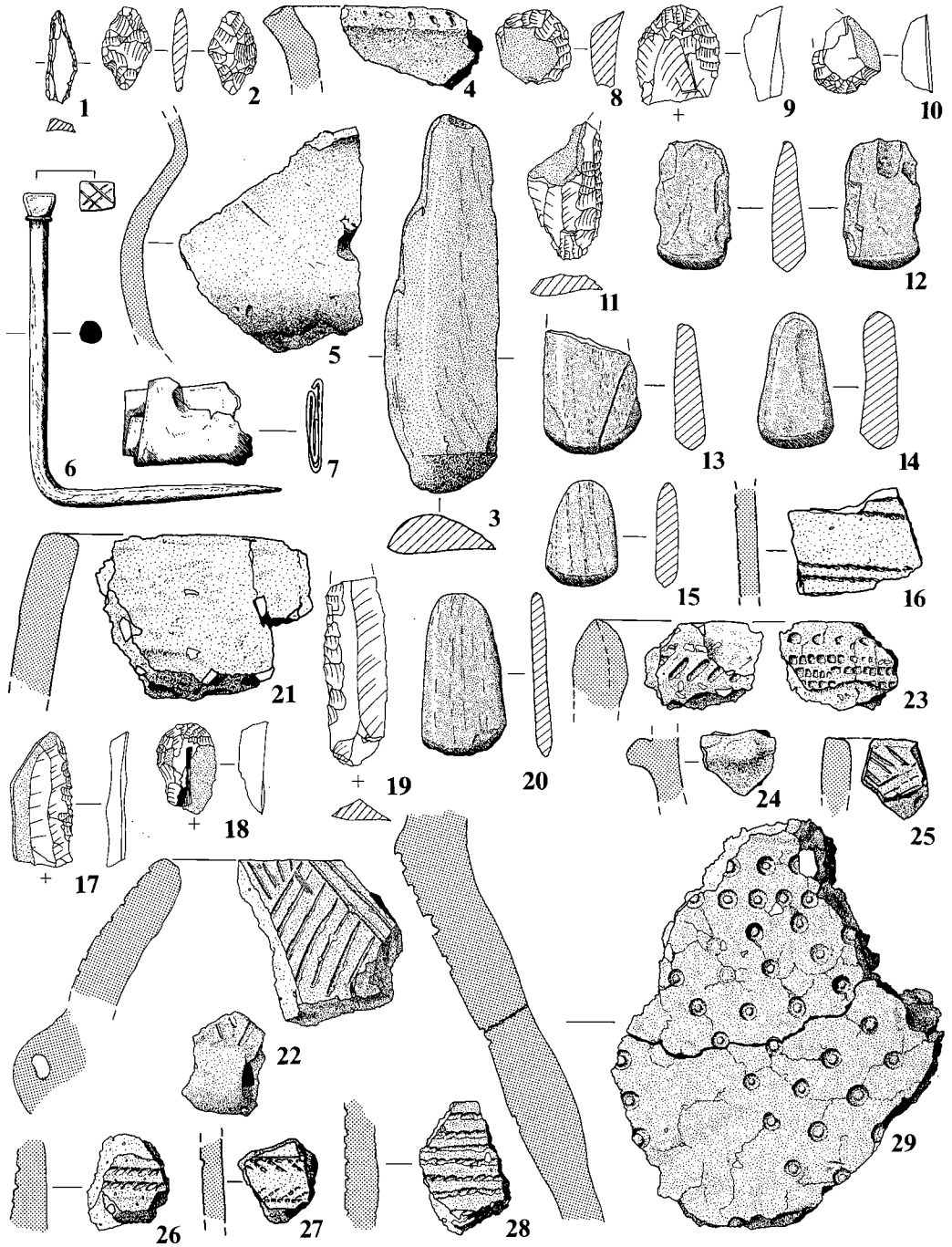
- 16 Body sherd; horizontal twisted cord impressions.

## SORISDALE: AREA C

An extensive area of deflation hollows, blow-outs and exposed rock surfaces (centred NGR: NM 273 639) in the central area of the machair.

*Lithics (illus 3 & 6)*

- 17 Flint flake; secondary, right side retouched.
- 18 Flint scraper; whitish with natural fracture.
- 19 Flint knife; retouched on one edge.
- 20 Bevel-ended tool.
- 68 Obliquely blunted blade, snapped and abruptly retouched.
- 69 Crescentic microlith.



ILLUS 3 Finds from Sorisdale, Coll (1-29). Scales: 1-2, 6-11, 17-19 = 1:1; remainder = 1:2

Area C appears to contain a mixture of pieces, including Mesolithic types (68 & 69) as well as two shallow edge/side retouched flakes (17 & 19), typical of the Later Neolithic or Early Bronze Age. There are two bloodstone pieces from this site, and it is possible that their presence also reflects a post-Mesolithic component as examination of large numbers of assemblages suggests bloodstone use increased following the Mesolithic.

*Prehistoric pottery (illus 3 & 4)*

- 21 Rim sherd; upright, flat rim; heavily gritted.
- 22 Rim sherd from vessel with perforated lug; hard, compact fabric; complex ornament, composed of deeply incised opposed filled triangles.
- 23 Rim sherd; horizontal comb impressions on exterior, with jab marks close to rim; traces of oblique impressions on interior; very worn.
- 24 Body sherd with lug.
- 25 Rim sherd; traces of a filled design composed of opposed finely incised lines.
- 26 Body sherd; horizontal twisted cord impressions.
- 27 Body sherd; comb impressions arranged in 'fringes' between horizontal lines.
- 28 Body sherd; horizontal twisted cord impressions.
- 29 Body sherd from shouldered vessel with tapering lower body; jabbed circular impressions, probably made with hollow bone.
- 30 Body sherd, with low horizontal moulded cordon worked up from surface.
- 31 Body sherd; horizontal twisted cord impressions.
- 32 Body sherd; horizontal twisted cord impressions.

*Medieval/later pottery (illus 4)*

- 33 Body sherd; reduced gritty fabric, lead glazed with wavy combed decoration. David Caldwell comments that this may possibly be from a jug manufactured in the Scottish lowlands, 14th–15th century.
- 34 Rim sherd; out-turned bevelled rim with irregular line of punctulations (possibly bird-bone) close to edge.
- 35 Rim sherd; rounded, everted. *Crogan*.

*Copper alloy metalwork (illus 4)*

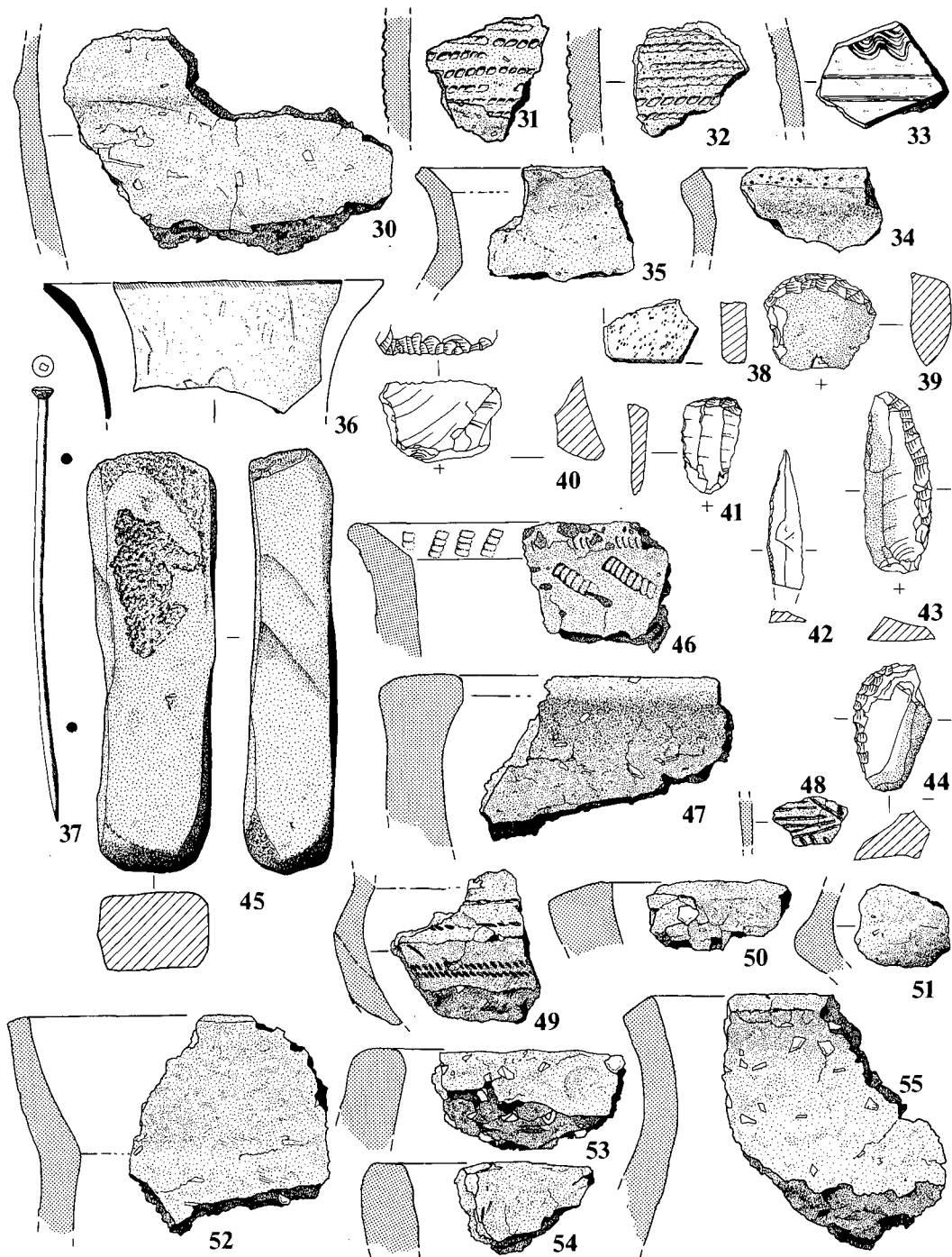
- 36 Fragment of the rim of a cast ewer or small pot; rim diameter 100 mm. Date 14th–15th century (David Caldwell, pers comm).
- 37 Pin; small circular head; cast.

*Miscellaneous (illus 4)*

- 38 Pumice; rectangular fragment; possibly part of a pendant.

SORISDALE: AREA D

An extensive spread of midden material in a severely deflated area (centred NGR: NM 272 638), immediately around the site of a Beaker burial and remains of a possible house excavated in 1976 (Ritchie & Crawford 1978).



ILLUS 4 Finds from Sorisdale, Coll (30-55). Scales: 36-37, 39-44 = 1:1; remainder = 1:2



*Lithics (illus 4)*

- 39 Short thick convex scraper.
- 40 Edge retouched flake with inverse retouch.
- 41 End-scraper.
- 42 Microlith; fine point.
- 43 Edge retouched flake.
- 44 Edge retouched flake.
- 45 Whetstone; all four sides worn with use.

The lithics from this area include several shallow edge retouched flakes (40, 43 & 44) typical of the later Neolithic and Early Bronze Age, although one definite microlith (42) and a badly burnt possible microlith fragment (not illustrated) are also present. The definite microlith appears glossy, as does one other blade, suggesting that the Mesolithic material from this area may be derived by water action from a nearby site. A piece of pitchstone is also present within the collection from this area.

*Prehistoric pottery (illus 4 & 6)*

- 46 Rim sherd; internally bevelled; coarse fabric with pumice inclusions; oblique whipped cord maggot impressions on bevel and exterior.
- 47 Rim sherd; broad flat rim with lip to interior.
- 48 Body sherd; finely incised lines forming a filled design.
- 49 Body sherd from vessel with angular shoulder; fractured along building joints; very fine horizontal twisted cord impressions above and below carination.
- 50 Rim sherd; broad flat rim; heavily gritted.
- 51 Lug or boss, position uncertain; made by pressing out clay out from internal surface, rather than applied.
- 52 Rim/shoulder sherd; heavily gritted; shiny exterior surface.
- 53 Rim sherd; upright, rounded rim; heavily gritted with angular quartz grits.
- 54 Rim sherd; upright, rounded rim; heavily gritted.
- 55 Rim sherd; flattish rim, slight shoulder; gritty fabric.
- 56 Rim sherd; horizontal twisted cord impressions on interior of rim; breaks along building joints.

*Undiagnostic pottery (illus 6)*

- 57 Body sherd; curvature suggests globular vessel; organic temper; heavily grass-marked exterior surface, with one horizontal line of incised decoration.
- 58 Rim sherd; upright; rounded.

*Copper alloy metalwork (illus 6)*

- 59 Needle.
- 60 Needle; well-formed eye.
- 61 Piece of folded sheet metal scrap.

*Miscellaneous (illus 6)*

- 62 Pumice; artificially rounded lump with shallow groove.
- 63 Pumice; pear-shaped; perforated at each end. Pendant or float?
- 64 Pumice; rectangular, flat, carefully shaped.

SORISDALE: AREA E

Area of deflation hollows and exposed rock surrounding the course of a small burn on the western boundary of the machair (NGR: NM 271 639).

*Lithics (not illustrated)*

The lithic material from this area includes two bloodstone pieces and a bipolar core.

*Medieval/later pottery (illus 6)*

- 65 Rim/neck/shoulder sherd; transverse stab-marks on rim top; oblique incised lines around exterior; hard gritty fabric.

*Worked bone (illus 6)*

- 66 Fragment of tooth-plate of single-sided bone comb.

SORISDALE: AREA F

An exposed rock knoll at the southern edge of the sandhills (NGR: NM 273 636).

*Lithics (illus 6)*

- 67 Obliquely truncated flake.

Area F has no bipolar pieces and no scrapers but includes several blades as well as numerous platform cores. The only retouched artefact is an obliquely truncated blade that may be Mesolithic (67).

Note: catalogue numbers 68 & 69 were unfortunately catalogued and illustrated out of sequence and are discussed with the material from Area C to which they should have been assigned (see 17–20).

2 EILERAIG (TRÀIGH EILERAIG) (ILLUS 5)

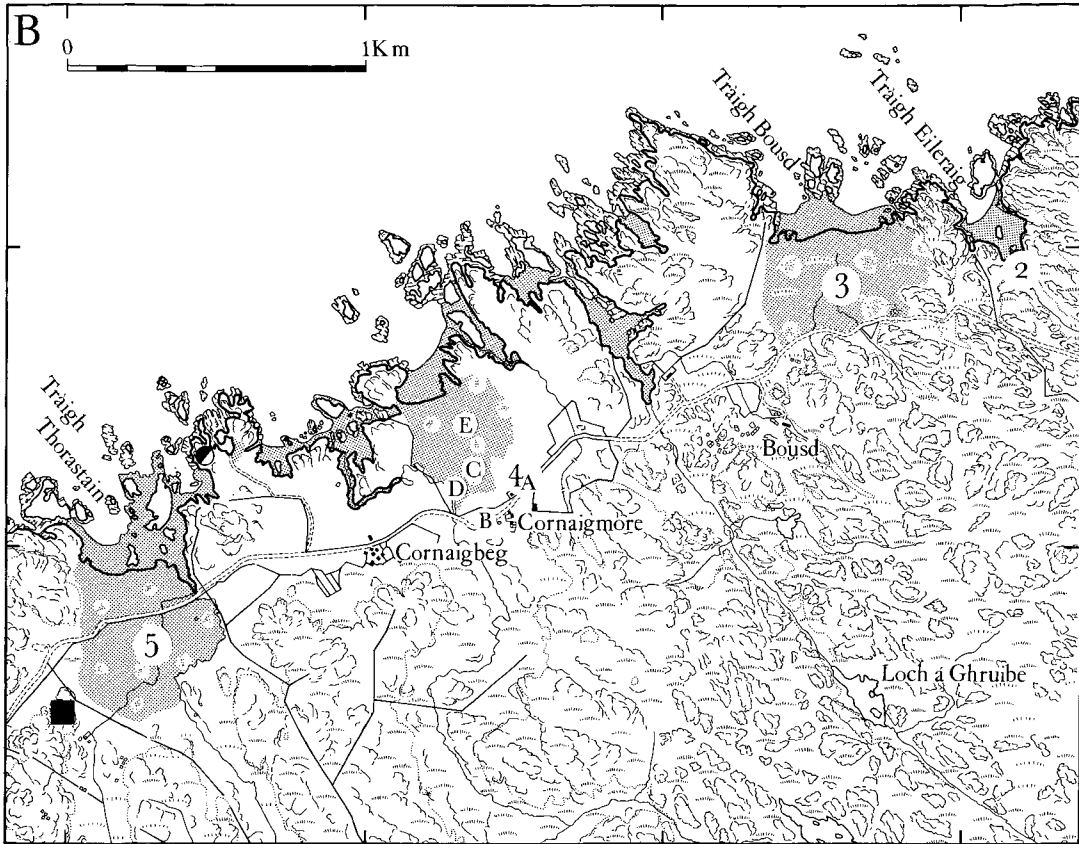
A rock-encircled bay on the north coast has a grey sandy bottom and a shingle beach. Blown sand has accumulated behind the shore between rock escarpments and this is cut by a burn. Finds from the area are from the 'burn cut' and sheep scrapes (centred NGR: NM 262 639).

*Prehistoric pottery (illus 6)*

- 70 Sherd, probably very close to rim of a collared vessel; traces of panelled motif composed of vertical and horizontal incised lines; poor condition.

3 TRÀIGH BHOUSD (ILLUS 5)

Tràigh Bhousd is a small north-facing bay with an extensive area of dunes and machair which has obviously been very unstable in the past. A number of irregular blow-outs and worn areas are still visible but are gradually coalescing and, despite fairly heavy grazing by both sheep and cattle, this process appears to be continuing. Finds from this area (centred NGR: NM 255 638) mainly come



ILLUS 5 Map showing location of collecting areas at Eileraig (2), Bhusd (3), Cornaigmore (4 A-E), Torastan (5).  
(Based on the Ordnance Survey map © Crown copyright)

from the 'burn cuts' which form the boundaries of a stone enclosure of unknown date (Beveridge 1903, 15-16, 35-6; RCAHMS 1980, 15).

#### *Medieval/later pottery (illus 6)*

- 71 Rim sherd; everted, probably shouldered form.
- 72 Rim sherd; upright or slightly everted, shouldered form.
- 73 Rim sherd; slightly everted.

#### 4 CORNAIGMORE (TRÀIGH NAN UAN) (ILLUS 5)

The machair area behind Tràigh nan Uan rises to over 15 m in places and is quite chaotic in character. Ridges and deep blow-outs occur and although some are still active it would appear that the area is generally becoming consolidated, with vegetation now covering areas that were loose sand only a few years ago.

Finds from this area come mainly from well inland close to the present Cornaig Lodge house. These finds point to this being an area of extensive settlement but further investigation will

be difficult due to the stabilization of the dunes and the massive accumulations of sand which must now cover the original land surfaces.

CORNAIGMORE: AREA A (ILLUS 5)

Area of blow-out c 60 m to the north of Cornaig Lodge (NGR: NM 245 633).

*Medieval/later pottery*

- 74 Body sherd; jabbed marks on neck?

*Copper alloy metalwork (illus 6)*

- 75 Four examples of wound-wire headed pins (illustrative of range).  
76 Mounting; tapering length of copper alloy sheet with folded edges, with iron rivet at broader end.

CORNAIGMORE: AREA B (ILLUS 5)

A long low erosion scarp on the sand dunes to the north of the road immediately south of Cornaig Lodge (NGR: NM 244 632).

*Undiagnostic pottery (illus 6)*

- 77 Rim sherd; slightly out-turned and flattened, forming slight external lip.

CORNAIGMORE: AREA C (ILLUS 5)

A deep blow-out with exposed old ground surfaces and possible stone settings in the southern central area of the machair (NGR: NM 244 633).

*Prehistoric pottery (illus 6)*

- 78 Rim sherd; worn cord impressions on both surfaces.  
79 Rim sherd; externally thickened rim with internal bevel; very worn comb impressions.

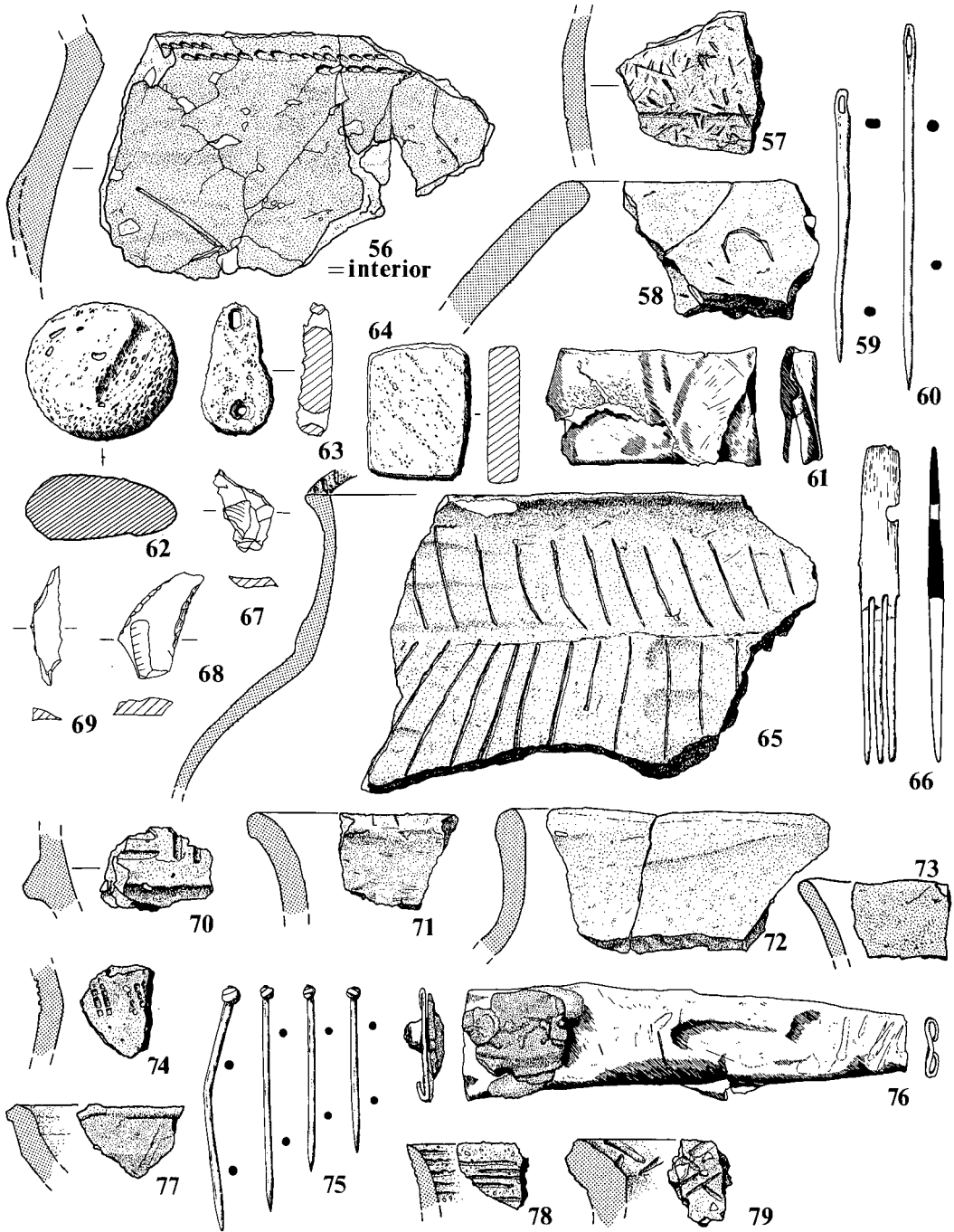
*Viking Age pottery (illus 7)*

- 80 Base sherd. Platter.  
81 Base sherd; deep finger marks on upper surface; deep groove and grass-marking on lower surface.  
?Platter.

80 & 81 are representative of 15 sherds from more than one pot, with grass-marking and organic inclusions; one sherd with stab marks, and most with fingered internal surfaces; two sherds with grit-marks.

*Medieval/later pottery (illus 7)*

- 82 Body sherd; deep round punctulations or stab marks.



ILLUS 6 Finds from various sites on Coll: 56-69 Sorisdale; 70 Eileraig; 71-3 Bhoud; 74-9 Cornaigmore.  
Scales: 59-61, 66-9, 75 & 76 = 1:1; remainder = 1:2

*Undiagnostic pottery (illus 7)*

- 83 Rim sherd; lip folded to exterior; very gritty fine fabric.

CORNAIGMORE: AREA D (ILLUS 5)

An erosion scarp (NGR: NM 243 633) on the west of the machair area, caused by sheep rubbing.

*Viking Age pottery (illus 7)*

- 84 Rim/body sherds from a bowl? with slightly inturned rim; organic deposit adhering to surface.  
85 Platter sherd; representative of 15 platter sherds mostly grass marked, with some organic inclusions, one grit marked; fingered interiors, one with stab mark.

The Viking Age pottery also includes approximately 40 body and basal sherds almost certainly all from a single vessel with rounded basal angle (not illustrated).

*Undiagnostic pottery (illus 7)*

- 86 Rim sherd; smooth flat rim; micaceous fabric.  
87 Rim sherd; flat rim, upright or slightly inturned.

*Copper alloy metalwork (illus 7)*

- 88 Pin; cast; conical head; round-sectioned, tapering shank.

CORNAIGMORE: AREA E (ILLUS 5)

A massive cauldron blow-out (NGR: NM 244 635) exposing a boat-shaped cairn of boulders at the north end of the machair complex.

*Lithics (illus 7)*

- 89 Stone axe; greenish-grey low grade metamorphic rock; numerous fine striations over the entire surface; cutting edge missing, apparently broken, but then reused as a hammer.

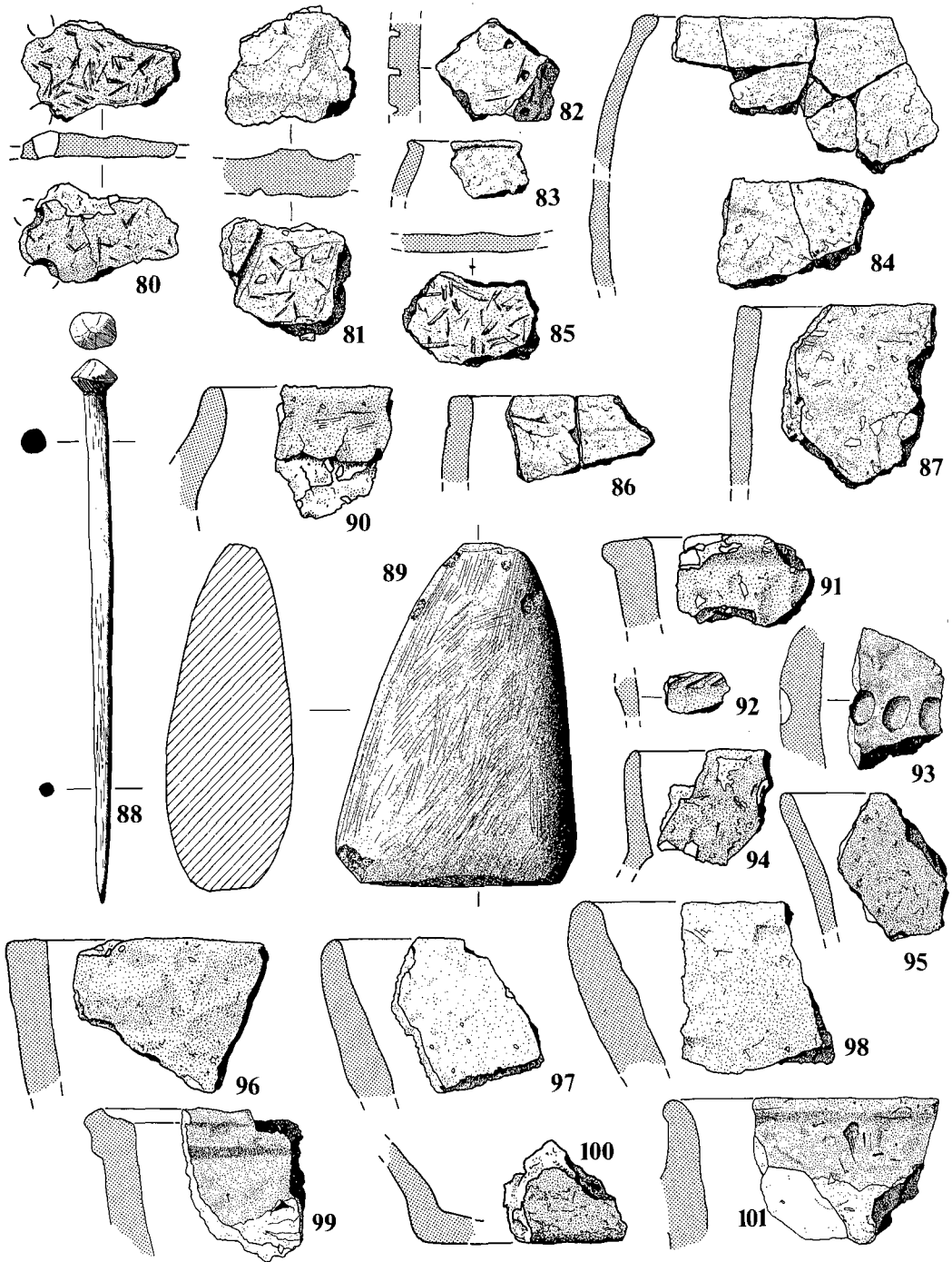
*Prehistoric pottery (illus 7)*

- 90 Rim sherds; flaky, micaceous fabric; possibly Neolithic.

5 TORASTAN (TRÀIGH THORASTAIN) (ILLUS 5)

A considerable area of hummocky machair extends inland from a small north-facing beach on the north-west coast of Coll. The road (B8072) passes through this machair area just behind the foredune ridge. The area of rough machair and low hummocks appears to have been extensively eroded and deflated at various periods (see Beveridge 1903, 36–7) but at present stability appears to be have returned and the mature machair zone is now entirely free of sand-blown patches.

The finds from this area (NGR: NM 234 627) have almost all been recovered from ‘burn cuts’. Water erosion at times can be severe and changes in the direction of water courses occasionally bisect and expose old land surfaces and midden deposits.



ILLUS 7 Finds from various sites on Coll: 80-90 Cornaigmore; 91-101 Torastan. Scales: 88 = 1:1; remainder = 1:2

*Prehistoric pottery (illus 7)*

- 91 Rim sherd; flat, externally expanded rim; large grits.
- 92 Body sherd; remains of horizontal cordon worked-up from surface with deep oblique incisions to form a cabled moulding.
- 93 Body sherd; bone-end or finger-marks.

*Dark Age pottery (illus 7)*

- 94 Rim sherd; upright or slightly flaring; plain with black organic deposit.
- 95 Rim sherd; upright slightly flaring rim; tongue-and-groove construction.

*Viking Age pottery (illus 7)*

- 96 Rim sherd from bowl; flat rim; hard fired fabric.
- 97 Rim sherd from bowl; thick wall tapering to finer rounded rim.
- 98 Rim sherd from bowl; hard fired fabric; polished exterior surface.

*Undiagnostic pottery (illus 7 & 9)*

- 99 Rim sherd; flat rim top with moulded 'collar'; large angular grits. Possibly prehistoric.
- 100 Basal angle; rounded angle, flat base; traces of white deposit in interior.
- 101 Rim sherd; rounded with irregular external beading.
- 102 Rim sherd; narrow rounded rim; irregular vertical striations.
- 103 Rim sherd; vertically fluted exterior surface; remains of perforation at break edge.

## 6 KILLUNAIG (ILLUS 8)

Among the high dunes to the north-east of Gallanach, between the present-day cemetery and the sea is a large amphitheatre-like hollow which has largely stabilized and is now well vegetated (NGR: NM 219 617). Traces of stony mounds and the remains of two cist burials are visible in the hollow (see Ritchie & Crawford 1978, 80). Some small finds have been made in rabbit scrapes.

*Prehistoric pottery (illus 9)*

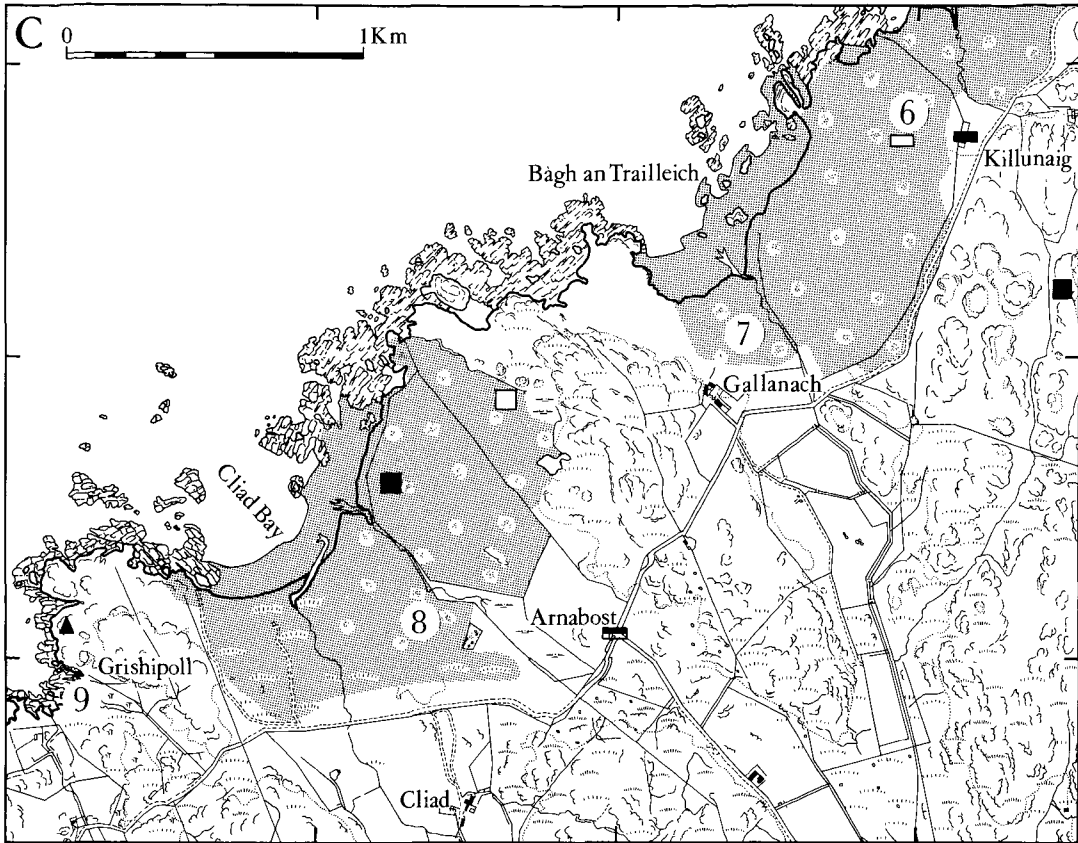
- 104 Body sherd; very fine impressed cord decoration and incised lattice pattern.

## 7 GALLANACH (BÀGH AN TRAILLEICH) (ILLUS 8)

Bàgh an Trailleich is backed by extensive deposits of blown sand. Most of the area consists of hilly mounds and ridges which rise to a considerable height to the landward side of the area. However, on the lower ground to the north of Gallanach Farm, the machair is smoother, and although stable at present, a number of shallow blow-outs (NGR: NM 215 611) near the farm buildings have been found to contain pottery of various periods.

The burn which bounds the eastern edge of this area has cut through some stone settings and midden layers from which have been retrieved a variety of finds including a fine copper alloy pin (121).





ILLUS 8 Map showing location of collecting areas at Killunaig (6), Gallanach (7), Cliad (8) and Grishipoll (9). (Based on the Ordnance Survey map © Crown copyright)

#### *Prehistoric pottery (illus 9)*

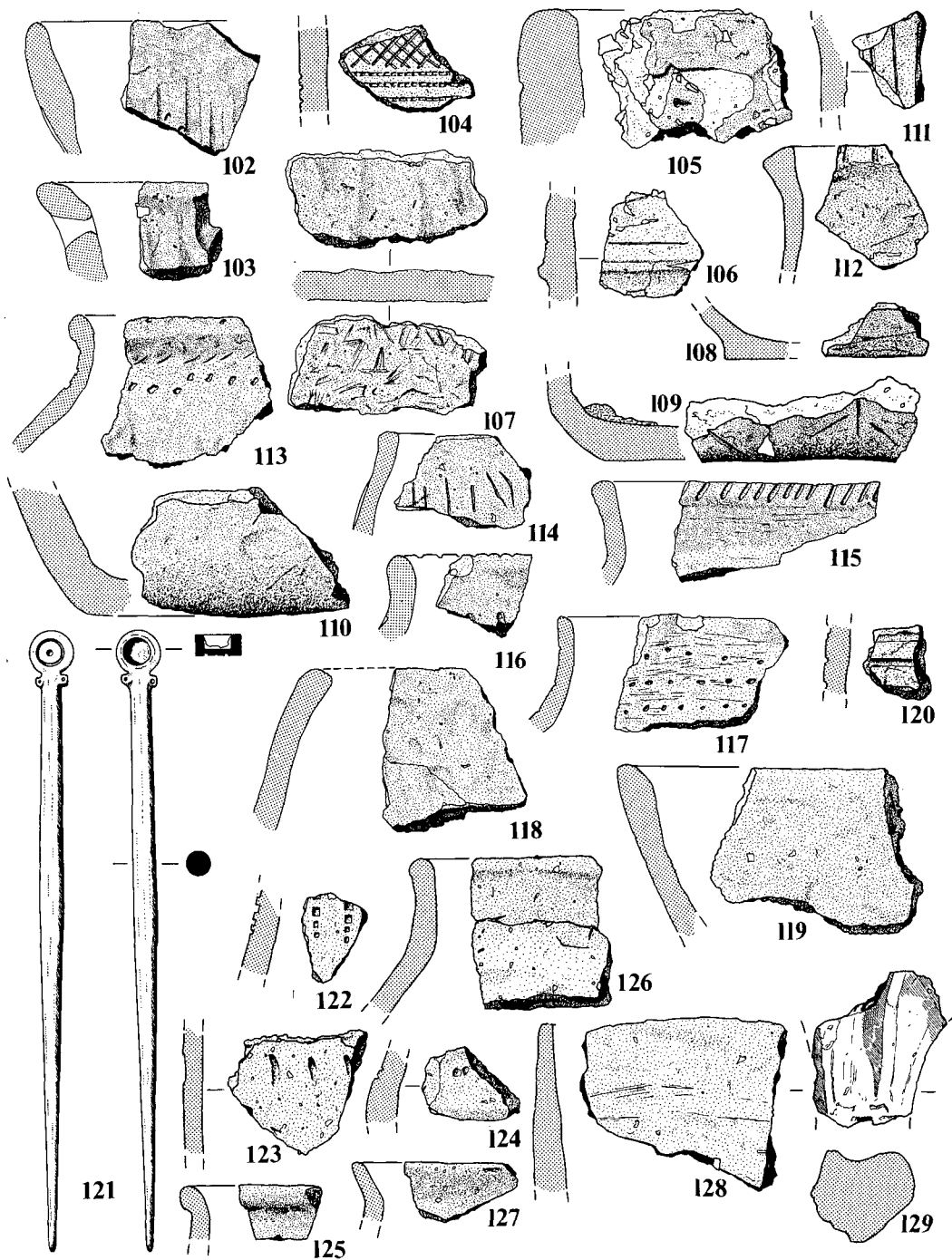
- 105 Rim sherd; heavy gritty fabric, rounded.
- 106 Body sherd from shouldered vessel; horizontal moulding or cordon worked up from surface.

#### *Viking Age pottery (illus 9)*

- 107 Base or possible platter sherd; grass marked; micaceous fabric.
- 108 Basal angle; rounded; sparse grass marking.
- 109 Basal angle; flat; roughened underside, angled construction; organic deposits on internal surface.
- 110 Basal angle; rounded; possibly from a Viking bowl form.

#### *Medieval/later pottery (illus 9)*

- 111 Neck sherd; fine incised lines of decoration.
- 112 Rim sherd; flat rim, slightly expanded, upright or slightly everted; two slash marks on rim top.
- 113 Rim sherd; everted, shouldered vessel; finger nail and stab marks on neck, stabbing on rim top.
- 114 Rim sherd; upright or slightly closed form; vertical incisions.
- 115 Rim sherd; upright rim on shouldered vessel; deep angled incisions on outwardly sloping rim.



ILLUS 9 Finds from various sites on Coll: 102 & 103 Torastan; 104 Killunaig; 105–121 Gallanach; 122–129 Cliad. Scales: 121 = 1:1; remainder = 1:2

- 116 Rim sherd; upright or slightly everted; short jabbed strokes on rim.  
 117 Rim sherd; upright or slightly everted; horizontal lines of jabbed dots or punctulations.

*Undiagnostic pottery (illus 9)*

- 118 Rim sherd; upright, plain, rounded.  
 119 Rim sherd; upright, plain.  
 120 Body sherd; deep incised lines.

*Copper alloy metalwork (illus 9)*

- 121 Dress pin; cast; the pin has a disc-shaped head, with circular fillets on either side of the shank junction; at the end of each fillet, there is a punched hole on both faces; the edge of the head is plain. One side of the head is recessed to accommodate an inlay that is now missing; traces of deposit survive in the setting but it has not proved possible to identify this material; the other face is decorated with an incised circle and a central punched hole; the shank is round in section and of even thickness for approximately half its length, but thereafter it tapers to the point. The finish of the pin is excellent and it is generally in good condition.

8 CLIAD (ILLUS 8)

Directly behind the beach at Cliad is an extensive area of marram-clad sandy hillocks becoming more machair-like further inland. This large area has a number of rocky outcrops and healed blow-outs but almost all the surfaces are now fixed under mature vegetation. Some sand movement occurs near rock outcrops, while small areas of open sand are maintained as a result of heavy grazing. It is in these areas (centred NGR: NM 204 602) that a number of finds have been made.

*?Medieval/later pottery (illus 9)*

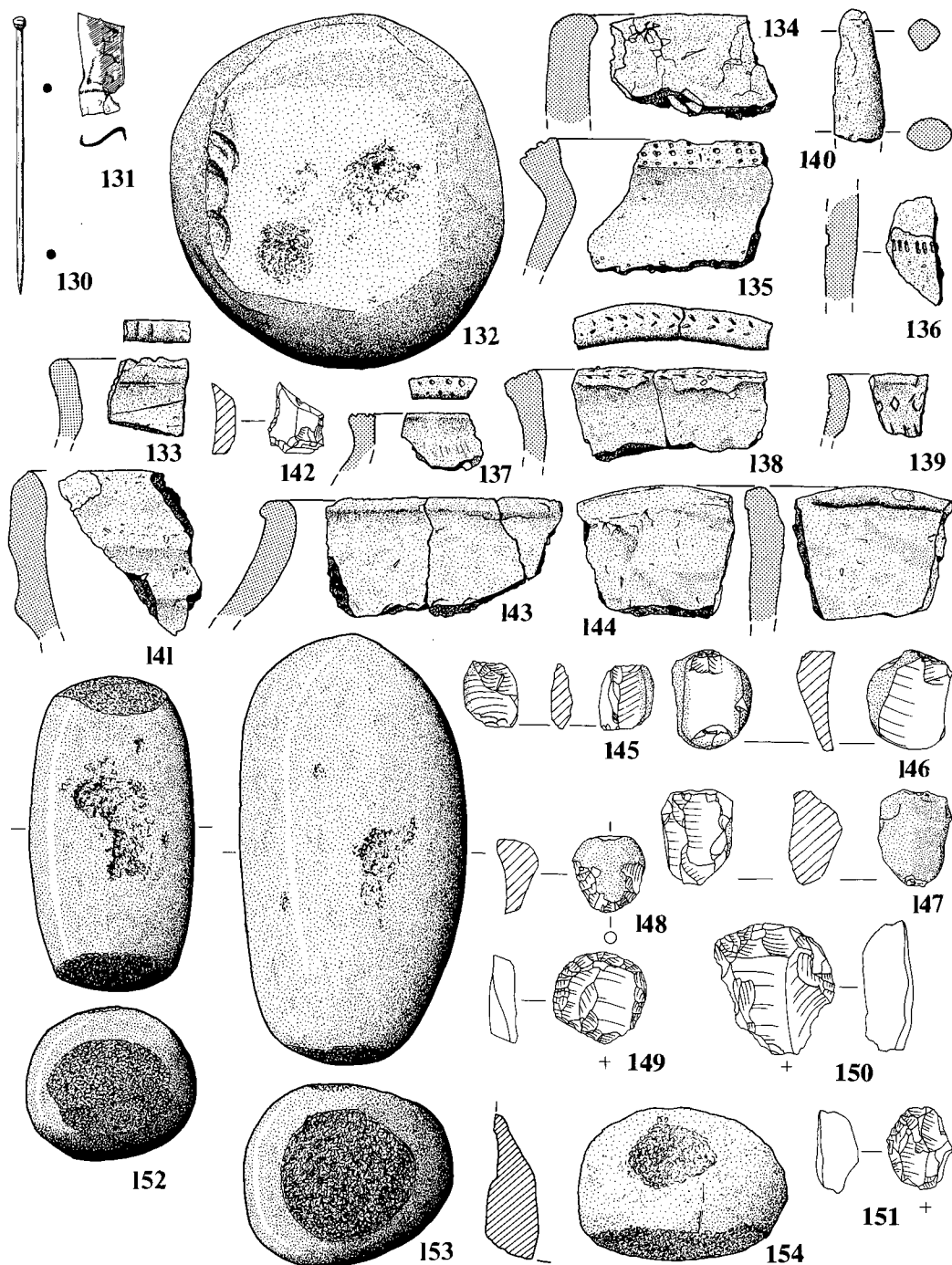
- 122 Body sherd; two rows of square jabs, possibly irregular comb impressions.  
 123 Body sherd; angled jabbed marks.  
 124 Body sherd; two bone or reed impressions.  
 125 Rim sherd; rounded, everted rim.  
 126 Rim sherd; flat rim, upright with slight shoulder; coarse gritty fabric.  
 127 Rim sherd; plain, upright or everted rim.

*Undiagnostic pottery (illus 9)*

- 128 Rim sherd; wall tapers to rounded rim; smooth, wiped exterior.  
 129 Fragment of large handle in coarse gritty fabric; probably imitation of medieval strap handle?

*Copper alloy metalwork (illus 10)*

- 130 Wound-wire headed pin (illustrative of range).  
 131 Fragment of corrugated sheet.



ILLUS 10 Finds from various sites on Coll: 130 & 131 Claid; 132 & 133 Grishipoll; 134-41 Tràigh Hagh: Ballyhaugh; 142-4 Tràigh Hagh: Cnoc Mor; 145-54 Feall. Scales: 130 & 131, 145-51 = 1:1; remainder = 1:2

## 9 GRISHIPOLL (ILLUS 8)

Lying to the south of Cliad Bay, the beach at Grishipoll Bay consists of a narrow shingle strip with a machair of blown sand immediately inland. Numerous deflation hollows are mostly now inactive and vegetated, but at the highest point above the shore where bare rock is exposed, some areas of open sand occur (centred NGR: NM 193 598) and in these some small finds have been recovered.

*Lithics (illus 10)*

132 Hammer-stone.

*Medieval/later pottery (illus 10)*

133 Rim sherd; upright or everted; transverse incisions/slashes on rim top.

## 10 TRÀIGH HOGH (ILLUS 1)

Behind the 1 km long beach of Tràigh Hogh lies a large area of dunes and machair. The largest area of smooth machair on Coll — Machair Mor — is here, and the whole area is now in the ownership of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Most of the surface is naturally vegetated although this is the area reported by James Boswell to be a ‘sand desert’ (Levi 1984). A range of finds (in Glasgow Art Gallery & Museum and the Hunterian Museum) were recovered from here in the 1930s, presumably a period of active erosion.

Recent finds from the area have been made in blow-outs towards the north-east end of the beach unit and beneath Cnoc Mor at its south-west end.

## TRÀIGH HOGH: BALLYHAUGH

An area of wind blow and animal erosion (NGR: NM 172 578), below the site of a possible dun at the north-east end of Tràigh Hogh.

*Prehistoric pottery (illus 10)*

134 Rim sherd; flattish; coarse fabric with large quartz grits.

*Medieval/later pottery (illus 10)*

135 Rim sherd; slightly everted with shoulder; rows of punctulations or jabs, or possibly comb impressions, on flat outward sloping rim top.

136 Body sherd; shell marking.

137 Rim sherd; flat rim, upright or slightly everted; row of irregular punctulations or jab marks on rim top.

138 Rim sherd; upright or slightly everted; two rows of jabs (bird bone?) on rim top.

139 Rim sherd; oval jabs and short incisions.

*Undiagnostic pottery (illus 10)*

140 Irregular elongated ceramic piece tapered at one end, possibly a spoon handle?

141 Rim sherd; horizontal finger-drawn channels around exterior.

## TRÀIGH HOGH: CNOC MOR

A deflation area (NGR: NM 167 565) immediately below the north side of the summit of Cnoc Mor at the south-west of the machair.

*Lithics (illus 10)*

142 Obliquely truncated backed bladelet segment. This may be part of a blade used for a microlith; probably Mesolithic. This is one of only five pieces of chipped stone recovered from Tràigh Hagh.

*Medieval/later pottery (illus 10)*

143 Rim sherd; upright or slightly everted; flattish rim with lip to exterior.

*Undiagnostic pottery (illus 10)*

144 Rim sherd; orientation and vessel form uncertain — drawn as upright undulating rim, but may be from a shallow dish or lid.

## 11 FEALL (PORT AN T-SAOIR) (ILLUS 11)

A small north-facing beach lying north-east of Feall Bay near the foot of Ben Feall. The beach is backed by a low rock-armoured coastal edge. Machair has built up to a thickness of 2–3 m on the ice-scoured rock knolls but has been severely eroded at various periods resulting in the exposure of a series of indeterminate stone settings (Beveridge 1903, 41–2; RCAHMS 1980, 15) and extensive spreads of midden debris, including traces of iron smelting and artefact scatters. Until quite recently a number of croft houses were situated only a little further inland.

The deflated area where most of the material has been recovered is now beginning to recover and low marram-clad hummocks are building up behind the coastal edge and the floors of the eroded areas are being colonized first by nettles and thistles and later by plants such as silverweed. A cutback in grazing by both sheep and cattle is probably hastening this process. Since 1991, this has formed part of an area of Coll owned and managed by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

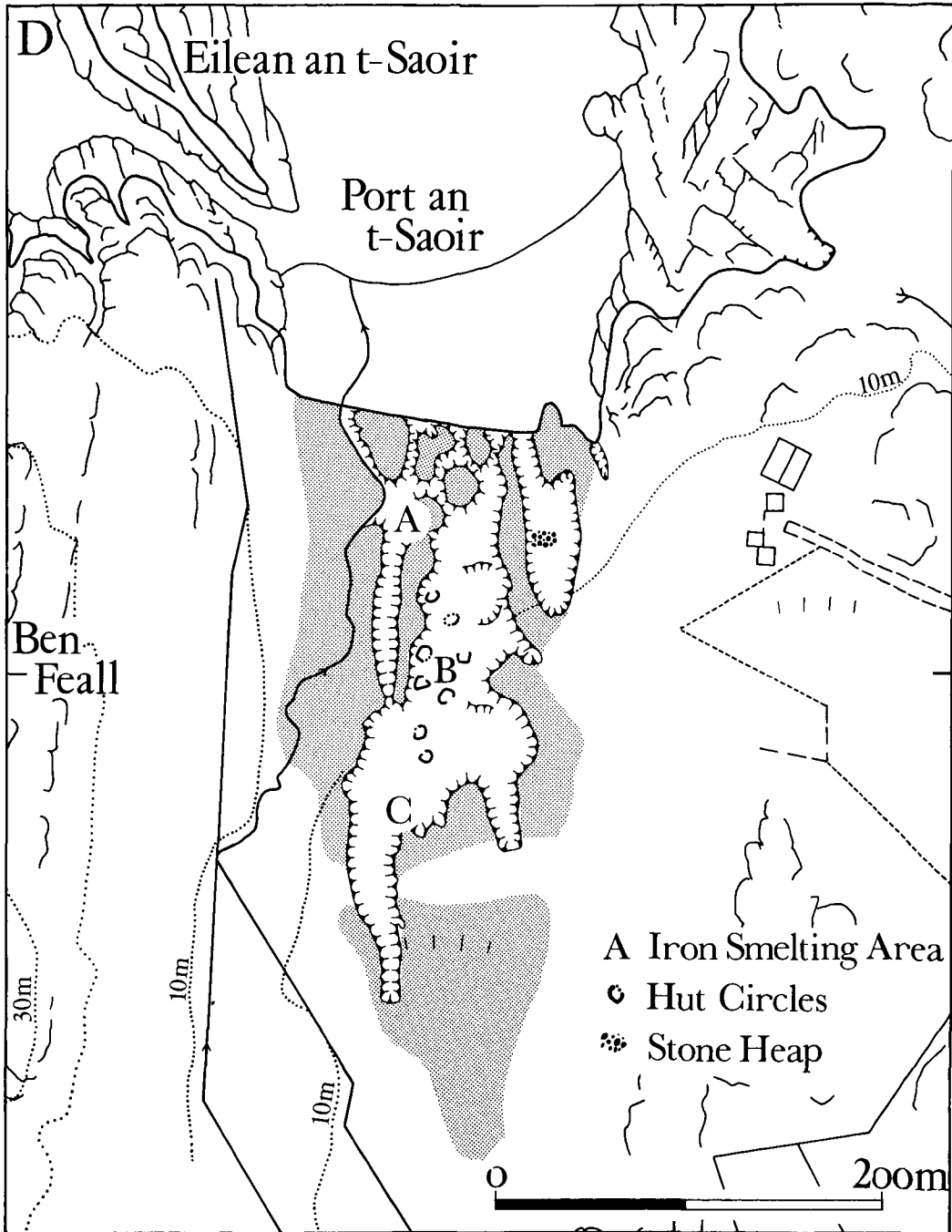
Three locations have been productive in recent years: Area A (NGR: NM 148 552), where an old ground surface has been exposed by wind and water action close to the burn at the north-west end of the site. Sizeable quantities of iron slag and a number of furnace bottoms have been recovered from this area, but the date of this small-scale industrial activity is uncertain. No ore source is known on Coll and the nearest sources other than ‘bog-ore’ would be at Kilchoan in Ardnamurchan. The more central Area B (NGR: NM 149 550) is an extensive deflation area where erosion has exposed irregular structures and midden deposits, although the surfaces are now being recolonized by vegetation. Lastly, Area C (NGR: NM 149 549) comprises a series of minor deflation hollows and ‘finger’ blow-outs towards the southern end of the site.

All the material catalogued is from Area B unless otherwise specified.

*Lithics (illus 10)*

145 Bipolar core.

146 Bipolar core.



ILLUS 11 Map showing location of collecting areas A-C at Feall. (Based on the Ordnance Survey map © Crown Copyright)

- 147 Bipolar core.  
 148 Short convex end-scraper made on the proximal end of what was probably a primary flake produced by hard hammer direct percussion.  
 149–154: from Area A:  
 149 Short convex scraper made on an inner flint flake produced by hard hammer direct percussion. The retouch continues around the circumference of the tool with the exception of the proximal end.  
 150 End-scraper.  
 151 End-scraper.  
 152 Quartzite hammer-stone: pebble; both ends smoothed by abrasion; flat surfaces used for hammering.  
 153 Quartzite hammer-stone: pebble; abraded at one end and pitted on the smooth sides.  
 154 Quartzite flake; flake from broken hammer-stone; abrasion at end and pock-marking on side.

Examination of the range of lithic material from Feall suggests that it is generally Neolithic/Bronze Age in character; it includes a typical wide convex scraper (eg 149) and evidence of bipolar flaking (145–7) as opposed to only one platform core.

*Prehistoric pottery (illus 12)*

- 155 Body sherd; irregular triangular jabs and horizontal comb impressions.  
 156 Rim sherd; pointed bevelled rim; very worn.  
 157 Body sherd from shouldered vessel; heavy gritty fabric; horizontal comb impressions, triangular jabs and grooves.  
 158 Body sherd from shouldered vessel; horizontal comb or whipped cord impressions and triangular jabs on shoulder.  
 159 Rim sherd; incisions on exterior and rim top.  
 160 Rim sherd; horizontal comb impressions above oblique comb impressions forming vertical zigzags.  
 161 Rim sherd; externally expanded bevelled rim; coarse grits; very worn oblique whipped cord impressions and triangular jabs on internal bevel; maggot impressions on exterior.  
 162 Body sherd, possibly from shoulder, or possibly a detached fragment of an applied stop or strip; comb or whipped cord impressions, with triangular jabs at one end.  
 163 Body sherd from shouldered vessel; coarse fabric; oblique grooves to either side of a horizontal cordon with neat vertical finger-tipping.  
 164 Rim sherd; coarse gritty fabric; whipped cord or possibly comb impressions and triangular jabs; very abraded.  
 165 Body sherd; comb impressions below a false-relief zigzag.  
 166 Rim sherd; comb impressions; probably a complex filled design but now very worn.

*?Dark Age pottery (illus 12)*

- 167 Rim sherd; upright, tapering to rounded rim, possibly flaring.

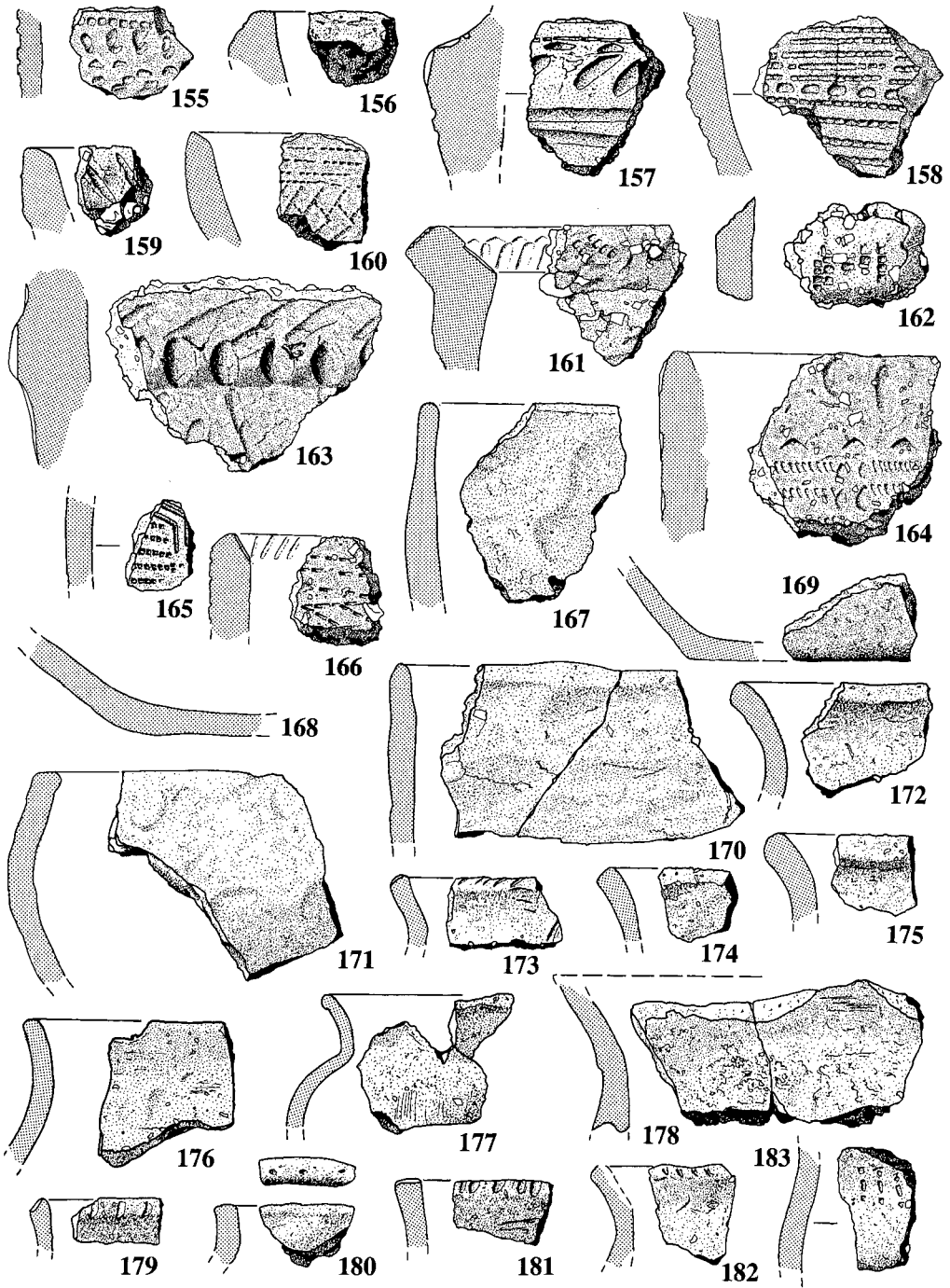
*Viking Age pottery (illus 12)*

- 168 Basal angle, rounded; roughened base. Possible bowl form.  
 169 Basal angle, rounded; slightly sagging base.  
 170 Rim sherd; upright with undulating wavy rounded rim. Possible bowl form.  
 171 Rim sherd; inturned bowl form; organic deposit on internal surface.

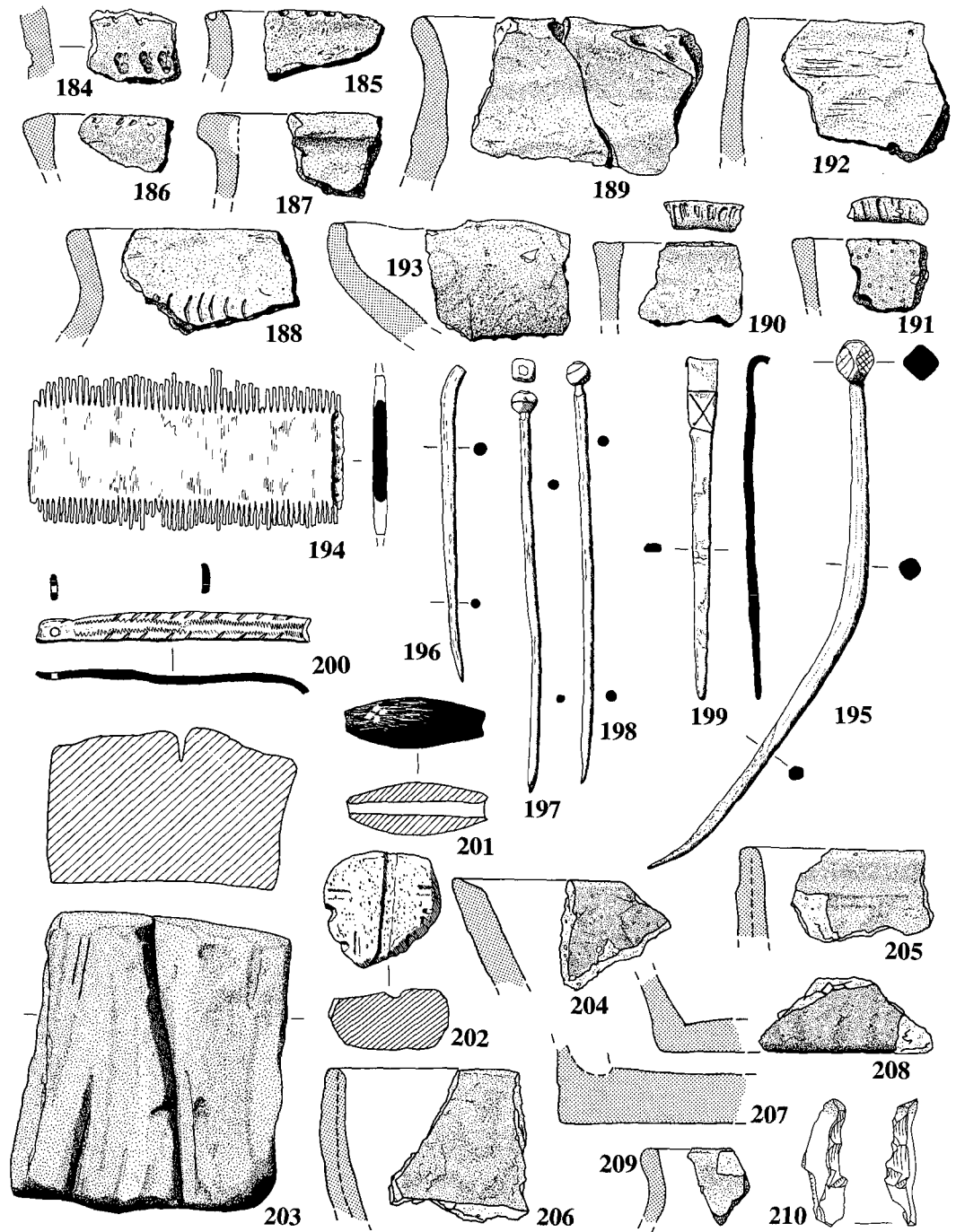
*Medieval/later pottery (illus 12 & 13)*

- 172 Rim sherd; rounded, slightly everted.  
 173 Rim sherd; everted; oblique slashes on rim top.





ILLUS 12 Finds from Feall, Coll (155-183). Scale: all at 1:2



ILLUS 13 Finds from Feall, Coll (184-210). Scales: 195-201, 210 = 1:1; remainder = 1:2

- 174 Rim sherd; everted, flattened rim top with abraded slash marks.
- 175 Rim sherd; rounded, slightly everted.
- 176 Rim sherd; upright or slightly everted.
- 177 Rim and shoulder sherd; upright rim, rounded shoulder; fine thin walled vessel.
- 178 Rim sherd; everted or out-turned, broken just below rim; finger-tipped exterior; white deposit on internal surface.
- 179 Rim sherd; slash marks on rim top; abraded.
- 180 Rim sherd; everted; punctulations on rim.
- 181 Rim sherd; flattened rim with transverse slash marks.
- 182 Rim sherd; upright or slightly everted rim and rounded shoulder; neat stab marks on rim edge.
- 183 Body sherd; jabs, or possibly comb impressions, on neck.
- 184 Body sherd; deep jabs applied with bone-end.
- 185 Rim sherd; neat punctulations on rim top.
- 186 Rim sherd; crescentic jabs on rim top.
- 187 Rim sherd; everted and externally expanded; abraded impressions on flat rim top.
- 188 Rim sherd; upright or slightly everted; faint incised lines on flat rim top (not shown) and on shoulder.
- 189 Rim sherd; upright/plain; rounded; orientation uncertain. ?Late *crogan*.
- 190 Rim sherd; transverse jabs on flat rim.
- 191 Rim sherd; transverse jabs (?bird bone) on flat rim top; very abraded.

#### *Undiagnostic pottery (illus 13)*

- 192 Rim sherd; upright/plain, rounded and tapering to rim.
- 193 Rim sherd; drawn as undulating rim; form of vessel uncertain, possibly from a fairly shallow dish or even a lid.

#### *Worked bone (illus 13)*

- 194 Fragment of single-piece double-sided comb.

#### *Copper alloy metalwork (illus 13)*

- 195 Pin; cast; polyhedral head with brambled ornament on the facets; the upper portion of the shank is squarish in cross-section, while the lower portion is round and tapers from the mid-point.  
196–200: from Area C
- 196 Broken shank of pin; round cross-section, tapering to the point.
- 197 Wound-wire headed pin.
- 198 Wound-wire headed pin.
- 199 Pin from medieval ring brooch; incised saltire design.
- 200 Mounting from unidentified object; incomplete; flat strip perforated for attachment at surviving terminal; two rows of fine rocker-pattern design and a series of oblique nicks along the edges.

#### *Miscellaneous (illus 13)*

- 201 Cannel coal bead, from Area A. The following description has kindly been contributed by Alison Sheridan: the bead is basically barrel-shaped, but flattish on one side; the ends are quite heavily and asymmetrically worn; one end has a small facet which probably resulted from abrasion by another bead; perforated from both ends. L 20.9 mm; Th 6.8 mm; diameter of perforation: 2.1–2.7 mm. The bead is black, slightly laminar, and with some natural surface pitting. Smooth but unpolished; low satiny sheen. Compositional analysis using X-ray fluorescence spectrometry (undertaken by Alec

Livingstone, NMS Geology Dept) indicated that the raw material is cannel coal. Source unknown, but not local, and probably impossible to pinpoint exactly; significant deposits are known from Ayrshire.

- 202 Rounded lump of pumice; grooved from use as a float or possibly as a result of use in bone awl/pin manufacture.
- 203 Rectangular block of sandstone; grooved by use as a sharpening stone.

## 12 BREACHACHA (ILLUS 1)

At the head of Loch Breachacha is one of the few sandy beach complexes on the south-east coast of the island. Landward drainage ensures that much of the beach area remains wet; only to the east side of the shore does the sand dry out sufficiently for sand blow to occur. The machair behind this eastern section is dry and mainly stable but some localized blow-outs are present and it is from these areas (centred NGR: NM 165 541) that finds have been retrieved.

### *Undiagnostic pottery (illus 13)*

- 204 Rim sherd; internally bevelled.
- 205 Rim sherd, rounded rim; black fabric.
- 206 Rim sherd; long slightly inturned rim; black gritty fabric.
- 207 Base sherd; flat; hard gritty fabric.
- 208 Base sherd from a small vessel; flat.

## 13 TRÀIGH GHORTAIN (ILLUS 1)

On the south-east coast of the island, this small beach has a small area of machair between the two streams that drain into the bay. Numerous shallow blow-outs mostly facing south-east are still active but appear to be coalescing. Finds from the area mainly come from sheep scrapes below the rocks towards the western extremity of the beach unit (NGR: NM 175 536).

### *Medieval/later pottery (illus 13)*

- 209 Rim sherd; upright or slightly everted; organic marks on internal surface.

## 14 ARILEOD (ILLUS 1)

Finally, mention may be made of material from one *inland* site as it provides a useful counterpoint to the material retrieved from the coastal sandhills. In the spring and summer of 1992 an area of rough, hill grazing land at Arileod Farm (NGR: NM 162 554) was ploughed and harrowed preparatory to re-seeding. During these operations, a number of flints was observed and it was decided to take the opportunity provided by the ploughing to systematically walk the area. This exercise resulted in the recovery of 406 flints and some sherds of undiagnostic pottery.

### *Lithics (illus 13)*

- 210 Core rejuvenation flake.

No diagnostic retouched tools were observed in the lithic sample from Arileod. However, the collection is characterized by platform cores and their products, while there is no evidence for bipolar knapping. A

platform rejuvenation flake is present (210), apparently struck from a blade core. In the writer's experience, such rejuvenation techniques are most common in the Mesolithic in Scotland, while the absence of bipolar working also tends to suggest a Mesolithic date.

## DISCUSSION OF THE FINDS

### THE LITHIC COLLECTIONS

Bill Finlayson

#### *Introduction*

The material, totalling over 3500 pieces, has been collected by fieldwalking. This is a powerful means of site prospection, but it should be noted that the nature of the collection method will result in sample biases owing to the near inevitable recovery of larger, more easily identified pieces. This bias works in favour of recovery of lithic material of later prehistoric periods and against the Mesolithic where the diagnostic microliths are less likely to be observed.

#### *Raw material*

The chipped stone material from Coll is manufactured mostly on beach pebble flint (see Close-Brooks *et al* 1978, 85–7 for a general discussion of the local flint). The apparent quantities of lithics present suggests a reasonably plentiful source of raw material on the island and this accords with experience of flint industries further south, on Islay and Colonsay (Mithen & Finlayson 1991; Mithen *et al* 1992). There are some other materials present, including quartz, bloodstone (probably derived from Rhum: cf Wickham-Jones 1986) and some pitchstone (probably from Arran: cf Williams Thorpe & Thorpe 1984).

#### *Technology*

Three principal techniques of working the material are evident. These are: a prepared platform technique, where a split pebble is worked from one or more platforms, often to manufacture small narrow blades, but also to produce flakes; an amorphous flake core technique, where flakes are struck off all over the core, with removals being based largely on opportunistic selection of platforms and continual turning of the core; and a bipolar technique, where pebbles and split pebbles are hammered vertically on an anvil, producing an impact at both ends of the core. There is no rigid separation of techniques and some pieces may show evidence of a succession of techniques being applied. All three techniques are well documented on beach pebble flint industries throughout prehistory, however, it appears generally clear that prepared platform cores are favoured in the Mesolithic, while bipolar cores, at least on flint, are most common in the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age.

As well as the chipped stone, there are a number of hammer-stones in the collections and several of these show the battered hollow face which is typical of bipolar knapping (eg 132; 152–4).

#### *Retouched tools*

In addition to the cores and large numbers of unretouched flakes, there are a number of retouched tools present. The majority of these are probably of Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date. Tools

typical of these periods include shallow edge retouched flakes (eg 17 & 19), and well-made scrapers (eg 8–10). A few pieces are probably Mesolithic in date, including one atypical microlith (1) and some obliquely truncated pieces (67, 68 & 142). There are also a large number of miscellaneous retouched flakes which are not diagnostic of any particular period.

### *Bevel-ended tools*

In addition to the chipped stone pieces, there are a number of bevel-ended tools (eg Sorisdale Area B: 12–15; Area C: 21; and see also Close-Brooks *et al* 1978, 85, fig 5.3–6). These are conventionally ascribed to limpet collection and have formerly been called limpet-scoops or hammers. Other interpretations have been offered, including their suggested use as hide-working tools (Finlayson 1995). Examples occur made from elongated pebbles, bone and antler. A number of the examples from Coll are rather different, being made on short wide pieces of basalt, some being apparently made on entire pebbles, others on flakes from larger rounded pebbles, which have been thinned by crude invasive retouch. The bevel-ends, whether double, single or faceted, generally conform to the bevel typical on all other such tools. It appears that the bevel has probably formed through use (Connock *et al* 1993). In Scotland, such tools are most commonly associated with shell midden sites, mostly dating to the late Mesolithic. However, examples have been found on non-midden sites, such as Kinloch on Rum (Wickham-Jones 1990), while in some regions, such as Cornwall, they are never found on midden sites (Roberts 1987). Their general distribution stretches along the western coasts of Britain and Ireland.

### *Conclusions*

Some doubts can be cast on the chronological affinities of all the above pieces. It has been argued recently that the Mesolithic and Neolithic are not sharply divided in western Scotland, and that they may be part of a continuous process (Armit & Finlayson 1992). We should therefore be wary of making too rigid determinations on the basis of surface collections. Surface collections from both Kinloch on Rum (Wickham-Jones 1990) and Bolsay on Islay (Mithen *et al* 1992), the two largest Mesolithic excavations in recent years, both suggested post-Mesolithic sites were present. The experience of the Southern Hebrides Mesolithic Project (Mithen 1990) suggests that fieldwalking will tend to emphasize the later components of a site, as they are generally larger and more easily identified. Relatively few microliths are recovered by fieldwalking and the identification of Mesolithic sites often requires at least some excavation, or a tentative identification based on general technological patterns rather than diagnostic artefacts.

## THE POTTERY COLLECTIONS

Alan Lane & Trevor Cowie

### *Introduction*

It is the presence of quantities of diagnostic pottery on eroding sites in the Hebrides that makes the recording of surface collections a useful exercise, frequently flagging up the potential significance of even quite minor erosion foci. Of course, it must be admitted that dating is not entirely straightforward. Hand-made pottery may have been used near continuously for some six millennia in this region without the introduction of the wheel or any advanced kiln technology (Lane 1990). For much of this time, similar clays and tempering inclusions may have been used

and undecorated bodysherds may be impossible to date unless they are sufficiently well preserved to indicate vessel forms. For some periods, fabrics may be distinctive due to a combination of sherd colour, texture, thickness and inclusions (eg Beaker pottery) but this is relatively rare. Generally, Hebridean pottery requires the survival of decorative features and/or vessel forms if it is to be correctly assigned to particular periods and dates.

However, if we are wholly dependent on decoration or the survival of substantial pieces of pottery — both rare on settlement sites — our ability to recognize the ceramics of different periods may be heavily distorted. Periods without decoration and without burial customs involving ceramic grave goods will be seriously under-represented in the known assemblages. In addition, sites of periods which have not been subject to substantial excavation may be virtually unidentifiable, either because they have hitherto been peripheral to archaeological research (as with the medieval and later periods), or because they have been hard to locate (as with the Late Bronze Age/Earlier Iron Age). The result is of course a vicious circle inhibiting research, since the inability to identify sites arises from ignorance of the distinctive pottery assemblages which would allow the sites to be located and excavated. In assigning the pottery from the Coll collections to periods, therefore, we have occasionally had to make subjective judgements based on knowledge of the general range of the pottery sequence rather than on secure published parallels.

#### *A summary of the Hebridean pottery sequence*

The pottery of the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age periods can be identified reasonably readily on the basis of domestic and funerary assemblages known from the region and by comparison with pottery elsewhere in Britain (eg in the case of Beaker pottery). However, little is known of the plain wares of the second millennium/early first millennium BC in the region: some heavily gritted fabrics may prove to be reasonably diagnostic though small undecorated bodysherds may not be distinctive. The situation may be partly redressed once the repertoire of plain pottery in use on a number of second millennium BC domestic sites is available in published form (for a short summary of the present situation see Dunwell *et al* 1995, 285–6).

Ceramic traditions during the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age are also very poorly understood and pottery can only tentatively be assigned to this period. Again, several as yet unpublished assemblages of domestic pottery from Hebridean sites (eg Barvas, Lewis; Udal, North Uist; Cladh Hallan, South Uist: Parker Pearson & Roper *nd*) may presently throw more light on this issue. Clearly the problem is related to the date at which the classic and commonly decorated Hebridean Iron Age pottery first appears (conventionally marked by the appearance of the Balevullin ceramic phase: MacKie 1974). Some writers have argued that the whole of the Hebridean Iron Age is wrongly dated and the common monuments — brochs, wheelhouses and other forms of roundhouses — should all be pushed back to fill the apparent gap in the settlement record in the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age. However, no radiocarbon dates or site sequences have been published which demonstrate this convincingly (Lane 1990, 108–16); rather, the recently published sequence and radiocarbon dates from the Sollas wheelhouse have tended to reinforce a more traditional chronology which would place the decorated Iron Age phase of pottery in the last few centuries BC and the early centuries AD (Campbell 1991, 167–9). Campbell has suggested some chronological phasing in the decorated Iron Age sequence (*ibid*, 155–8) but only the presence of finger channel decoration is useful in this context, since the everted rim form alone is not securely dateable in unstratified assemblages as similar rims occur in Viking and perhaps medieval periods (Lane 1990).

The end of the decorated Iron Age tradition is also a matter of dispute since Crawford & Switsur (1977, 129–30) have claimed there is an abrupt shift from classic decorated forms to the undecorated vessels of the Dark Age settlement at the Udal. The reasons why this seems unlikely have been argued elsewhere (Lane 1990, 121–3) and it is preferable to think in terms of a more gradual evolution. The pottery of this ‘Late Iron Age’ phase shows the continued use of cordons on flaring rim vessels and it remains to be demonstrated when decoration is finally abandoned. Publication of Ian Armit’s excavations at Eilean Olabhat, North Uist may demonstrate that cordons continue till the sixth or seventh centuries.

The subsequent Plain Style is defined most clearly at the Udal, Sollas, where it appears to be current for some centuries from perhaps as early as the fifth century to the beginning of the ninth (Lane 1990). Characteristic vessel forms include simple undecorated buckets and shouldered jars which would probably be regarded as Late Bronze Age if they were found in England. Since the pottery is difficult to recognize in small fragments it will inevitably be under-represented in surface collections, though it has been possible to identify it tentatively within old excavated assemblages (Lane 1990, illus 7.3 & 7.5). Distinguishing it from the preceding ‘Late Iron Age’ cordoned ware is obviously particularly fraught unless dealing with stratified assemblages, and the possible discrepancy in dates between the Udal and Eilean Olabhat evidence is yet to be resolved.

At the Udal, the Plain Style is terminated by the creation of the Viking settlement on the site (*ibid*, 123). The new Viking Age style has distinctive production techniques and distinctive forms with bowls and cups, straight and everted rims and some sagging bases and grassmarking. Some decoration also occurs in the form of rim slashing and fingering. The most distinctive form is the flat perforated platter (*ibid*, illus 7.6).

Decorated pottery continues in the subsequent medieval and later periods but this pottery has as yet scarcely been studied. Iain Crawford refers to ceramics of these periods at the Udal as having a range of forms and decoration up to the 18th century (Crawford & Switsur 1977). One published assemblage is known from Coll itself (Turner & Dunbar 1970) and the occasional dateable vessel has also been reported, such as that from Ensay (Lane 1989, 24–5): among the erosion assemblages from Coll, pottery of this period has been identified tentatively on the basis of Alan Lane’s limited handling of stratified material. Following the decorated medieval and later pottery, come the so-called *crogan* forms which eventually became the delight of tourists and anthropologists during the 19th and early 20th century (Lane 1983, 14; Cheape 1988).

It will be clear from this general discussion, and the review of the collections from Coll which follows, that much of the pottery discovered on erosion sites is not susceptible to close dating, while some sites have no diagnostic sherds at all. Nevertheless, by publishing what we believe is distinctive and cataloguing and drawing some of the less distinctive material, it should be possible for future workers to identify and re-date the erosion assemblages as new excavated assemblages are published.

### *The chronological range of the pottery from Coll*

**Neolithic/Bronze Age** Only two finds of pottery have been identified as Neolithic, and even then only tentatively. Although the poor condition and small size of the sole piece of pottery found at Tràigh Eileraig (70) leave its identification in some doubt, the sherd in question probably derives from the neck or collar of a decorated Neolithic bowl (possibly similar to ‘Unstan bowls’). If so, its condition belies its significance as a possible indicator of intact deposits in the immediate vicinity of the findspot, especially as the soft fabric of the sherd would not have survived prolonged exposure. Some crumbling rim and body sherds from



Cornaigmore Area E (90) also seem to be distinct from the other pottery from Coll, with a soft micaceous fabric best paralleled among ceramics of Earlier Neolithic date.

Beaker sherds decorated with simple horizontal comb or cord impressions or incisions have been retrieved from Sorisdale (Area B: 16; C: 25–8, 31 & 32 D: 48). Particularly in Sorisdale Area D, in the area around the structure and burial excavated in 1976 (Ritchie & Crawford 1978; RCAHMS 1980, no 82), attrition of the midden deposits has continued to reveal a range of Beaker and perhaps contemporary plain Bronze Age pottery. Cornaigmore Area C has a single abraded rim sherd with very worn cord impressions on both surfaces. Traces of more complex ornament occur on a few sherds: one sherd from Sorisdale has traces of a fringed motif while a fine body sherd from Killlunaig (104) bears three lines of impressed cord decoration to one side of an incised lattice pattern, a combination known on many Northern beakers.

A number of sites have produced decorated sherds of vessels which defy easy classification. The ornament on some of the pottery clearly owes much to the Beaker repertoire, while lacking typical features of form and fabric; other sherds, with maggot impressions or triangular jabs, invite much closer comparison with Food Vessels. Such 'sub-Beaker' and Food Vessel pottery has been retrieved at Sorisdale (Area C: 23 & D: 46, 49, 56); Cornaigmore (Area C: 79); Gallanach (106) and Feall (155–66). The heterogeneity of the material from Feall is noticeable, with decorative techniques including cord, comb, jabbed and incised patterns. Particular attention may be drawn to the use of crushed fragments of pumice as the filler in the case of a rim sherd from Sorisdale (Area D: 46). Pumice also occurs as a filler in the fabric of a plain rim from Torastan (91) suggesting that at least some of the other undecorated rims of this form may be of similar date. A large body sherd from Sorisdale area C has jabbed circular impressions made with a hollow bone, apparently forming some form of pendant motif on the tapering lower body of a large vessel. Whether part of a domestic vessel or cinerary urn, the type most likely to have jabbed ornament extending below the shoulder in this fashion would be a Food Vessel Urn (cf Cowie 1978, 28).

Material possibly attributable to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age includes examples of pots with upright or slightly closed mouths with simple rounded rim top (Sorisdale: Area C: 21; Area D: 53 & 54; Gallanach: 105; Tràigh Hagh: Ballyhaugh: 134) or others with broad flat rims (eg Sorisdale: Area D: 47, 50).

**Iron Age** Only three of the sandhill sites have produced pottery which can be tentatively identified as Iron Age. The finds from Sorisdale Area C include a rim sherd with a perforated lug and complex incised cross-hatched ornament (22), a further body sherd with incised decoration (25), and an undecorated carinated vessel (30) comparable to MacKie's Ballevullin vase type (MacKie 1963; MacKie 1974, fig 20). Sorisdale Area D has one sherd with deeply incised lines of complex decoration on its outer surface (48). Finally Torastan produced a body sherd with deeply incised marks on a narrow cordon (92) and a body sherd with deep finger mark decoration (93).

**Dark Age** There are no examples of the cordoned flaring rim pottery which, it has been argued, is transitional between the classic Iron Age styles and the Plain Style known from the Udal (Lane 1990, 122–3). Two sites produced what may be Dark Age Plain Style. Torastan has two rims, one an upright or slightly flaring shouldered vessel (94), the other a slightly flaring jar of tongue-and-groove construction (95). Feall has one upright, possibly flaring, rim which could be Dark Age (167).

**Viking Age** Five sites produce what may be Viking Age material. Cornaigmore Area C has sherds of grass- and grit-marked platter, most with fingered upper surfaces and one with stab-marks (80 & 81). Cornaigmore Area D has rim and base sherds from open bowl forms (eg 84) and sherds of grass- and grit-marked platter (85). Gallanach has one possible platter sherd (107), a basal angle with an angled construction join and roughened underside (108), a rounded grass-marked base (109), and another rounded basal angle from a

possible open bowl form (110). Torastan has three rims from possible open bowl forms (96–8) and a grass-marked or grass-tempered base (not illustrated). Feall has two ‘wavy’ rims (170 & 193) from possible open bowl forms, a rim from a bowl (171), a rounded base with a roughened lower surface (168) and a slightly sagging base (169). A grass-marked sagging base from an open bowl form was illustrated in Close-Brooks *et al* (1978, fig 10.2).

Of these, the two Cornaigmore sites with platter can be regarded as certainly producing pottery of Viking date, Gallanach and Feall as fairly certain, and Torastan as probable.

**Medieval/later** The pottery of the medieval and later periods is the least known and the identifications made here are fairly tentative though there can be no doubt that many of the sites with pottery, perhaps even most of them, belong to this period. Some sites where there is ambiguity about the date of the pottery have already been noted. Within the catalogue, sherds have tentatively been grouped according to date, but only sites with reasonably diagnostic features will be commented on here.

Sorisdale Area A has one upright or everted rim with stabbing on the rim top (4) and a shoulder sherd with an upright neck in a hard leathery fabric (5) comparable to late *crogan* pottery. Sorisdale Area C has produced a glazed sherd of wheel-thrown pottery with wavy comb decoration (33), while coarse ware includes an out-turned bevelled rim with stab marks, possibly bird bone close to the exterior edge (34), and an everted rim (35). Sorisdale Area E has a upright rim on a shouldered vessel with incised linear decoration on its external surface (65). Bhoud has two upright or slightly everted shouldered vessels (71 & 72), and one slightly everted rim (73).

Cornaigmore Area A has a stabbed neck sherd (74), while Area C has a stabbed bodysherd (82). Gallanach has upright or slightly everted rims with slashed rim-tops (112 & 115), an everted rim on a shouldered vessel with finger-nail and stab marks on the neck and slash marks on the rim (113), a neck sherd with fine incised decoration (111), an upright rim with vertical incisions on its exterior surface (114), an upright or everted rim with stab marks on the rim (116) and an upright or slightly everted rim with three horizontal lines of stab marks on its exterior surface (117).

Cliad has upright or everted rims (125 & 127), an upright rim with a slight shoulder (126), and bodysherds with stab marks (122 & 123) or bone/reed impressions (124). Grishipoll has an upright rim with a slashed rimtop (133). Ballyhaugh (Tràigh Hagh) has a slightly everted shouldered rim with stab marks (135), a bodysherd with shell marks (136), two upright or slightly everted rims with stab marks (137 & 138), a rim with stab marks and linear decoration on its exterior surface (139), and also a wheel-thrown green-glazed sherd (not illustrated). Feall has three everted rims (172, 175 & 178), two possible wavy or undulating rims (170 & 193), three everted slashed rims (173, 174 & 187), two simple slashed rims (175 & 190), an everted rim with stab marks (180), a stabbed rim (possibly with bird bone) (191), a rim with possible shell decoration (181), an everted rim from a shouldered vessel with a stabbed rimtop (182), stabbed bodysherds (183 & 184), two stabbed rims (185 & 186), and an upright or slightly everted rim with incised lines on the rim and shoulder (188). One upright rim appears to be comparable to late *crogan*-type pottery (189). Tràigh Ghortain has an upright or slightly everted rim (209).

Among the undiagnostic pottery, specific mention may be made of one or two pieces. The finds from Cliad include what is clearly the remains of a large strap handle (129), while a fragment of what may be a further coarse strap handle was found at Cnoc Mor, Tràigh Hagh (not illustrated). A tapering fragment of pottery found at Ballyhaugh, Tràigh Hagh, is of uncertain date and function (140); it could possibly be the handle of a coarse ceramic spoon. The orientation of one ‘rim sherd’, from Cnoc Mor, Tràigh Hagh (144), is uncertain: although drawn as an undulating or uneven rim, this sherd may actually be a portion of a bowl or a pottery lid, with very shallow profile in either case.

The distinction between medieval/later and late medieval/early modern material is not one that can be made easily. However, *crogan* pottery can occasionally be tentatively distinguished from earlier material and does appear to be later than the decorated pottery reported by Crawford from his latest levels (Crawford & Switsur 1977, 132–3; Cheape 1988). Two sites, Sorisdale and Feall, have been mentioned as having pottery that could post-date the decorated medieval/later material.

*Discussion*

Twenty sites (or sub-sites) have produced pottery which seems to be reasonably diagnostic and attributable to one or more pottery phases. Two sites have possible Neolithic, four sites have Bronze Age, three sites have possible Iron Age, two sites Dark Age, five sites Viking Age, 12 sites medieval/later, and two sites possible post-medieval/modern material. Several sites appear to be multi-phase: for example, Torastan has Iron Age, Dark Age and Viking material; Feall has Dark Age, Viking, medieval/later and modern; Cornaigmore (Areas C & D) and Gallanach have Viking and medieval/later material. In addition, all of these have produced some prehistoric material.

The rarity of Iron Age occurrences and the frequency of medieval/later occurrences is striking, for example by comparison with coastal erosion sites in Lewis and Harris, which contain a much higher frequency of distinctive Iron Age material. Since decorated Iron Age pottery is known from settlement sites on Coll and Tiree this rarity could reflect either a different pattern of machair exploitation on Coll during the Iron Age, although possible differences in patterns of subsequent erosion and discovery also have to be taken into account.

Two sites have produced possible Dark Age pottery, representing the first recognition of the Udal Plain Style in the Inner Hebrides; prior to the recovery of these Coll sherds this pottery had been recognized only in the Outer Isles (Lane 1990, 117–23). If this Dark Age pottery has been correctly identified it is important for study of this period and a striking re-affirmation of the continuity of pottery use throughout the islands from Coll to Lewis from at least the Iron Age to the post-medieval period.

The relative frequency of occurrence of Viking pottery — five sites — and the medieval/ later pottery — 12 sites — is similarly striking. These figures may be regarded as tentative since there is no major published assemblage of either group. Although platter- and grass-marked bowls are distinct features of the Viking assemblage at the Udal we must await publication of medieval and later pottery from that site or from others before we can be absolutely certain these features are type fossils of a narrow Viking phase (?9th–11th century) or whether they actually continue into the medieval period. Likewise the base forms and construction techniques of Viking pottery have yet to be shown to be restricted to that phase, although they are distinct from the earlier Plain Style. Simple rim and body decoration is found in the Udal Viking Age levels and is known to be a feature of the medieval/ later period (Lane 1983). Thus, Coll sites with comparable simple decoration may be attributable to either phase. This could alter some of the more tentative attributions; thus both Cornaigmore and Gallanach might have only Viking Age pottery and not have medieval/ later material, and some of the slashed, rippled and stabbed rims and bodysherds could be attributable to either phase. However, the occurrence of glazed medieval pottery at Sorisdale (Area C) and Ballyhaugh, Tràigh Hogh, tends to suggest that at least some of the decorated coarse pottery is correctly attributed to the medieval period.

Until stratified medieval/ later assemblages are available from the region the precise status of this pottery will remain in doubt. However, it is worth noting that T C Lethbridge reported hand-made pottery, decorated with impressions of bird bone, associated with 12th/13th century glazed pottery from an eroding rectangular building at ‘Hogh Bay’ on Coll (Lethbridge 1950, 96–7; 1954, 193). A small, but significant, assemblage of similarly decorated pottery is now reported from a late context at Eilean Olabhat (E Campbell, pers comm). Shell-edge decorated pottery similar to that from Feall is known from Iona where it was mistakenly thought to be Iron Age, though found in medieval or later layers with 14th/15th-century pottery (Redknap 1977, 237). Finally a shouldered vessel with a bevelled decorated rim was found on Ensay loosely

TABLE 1  
Summary of archaeological finds recovered by J Crawford from sandhill sites on Coll (to 1994)

Site	Pottery					Flint	Stone	Pumice	Bone/ antler	Copper alloy	Iron	Other
	Rim	Body- feature sherd	Body- plain	Base	Total pottery							
Sorisdale	217	147	2302	22	2688	2723	41	65	81	17	39	12
Eileraig	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bhousd	21	11	176	4	212	3	0	0	6	0	0	0
Cornaigmore	60	81	837	34	1012	89	1	18	27	17	2	2
Torastan	53	20	474	12	559	6	1	1	47	0	0	1
Killunaig	0	1	2	0	3	0	1	0	2	0	0	0
Gallanach	49	19	446	12	526	15	1	3	21	1	0	0
Cliad	45	21	551	2	619	6	0	0	1	3	0	0
Grishipoll	14	3	72	4	93	4	3	7	0	0	0	0
Tràigh Hagh	58	30	807	2	897	8	2	6	14	0	10	0
Feall	129	70	1004	21	1224	320	11	5	19	27	19	11
Breachacha	8	1	110	7	126	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Tràigh Ghortain	1	4	7	0	12	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
TOTALS	656	408	6788	120	7972	3177	61	105	218	65	72	26

associated with a coin of 1488–1513, a buckle of medieval date and radiocarbon dated burials of medieval/later date (Miles 1989, 23–7).

These Coll erosion assemblages significantly augment the small selections of sherds from the island published previously (Close-Brooks *et al* 1978). In particular, they bring into sharper focus problems of identifying sites of poorly understood phases such as the Dark Age, Viking Age and medieval/later periods. Further work on these aspects of the settlement record could be regarded as a priority in view of their rarity in the southern Hebrides and the wider need to refine the pottery chronology of these phases throughout the area.

#### COPPER ALLOY METALWORK

John Crawford & Trevor Cowie

A wide range of metalwork has been recovered from the sandhills (see Table 1), but only the more diagnostic finds are discussed here.

The collections from Feall include a fine polyhedral- or polygonal facet-headed pin (195) with brambled decoration (cf Laing's 'faceted-headed pin': 1975, 331). Laing has plausibly suggested that this type may be related to ringed pins with polyhedral-heads (cf Fanning 1994, 25–36). If so, the *floruit* for ringed pins of this form in Viking Age Dublin appears to have been the mid-10th century; outside Ireland, the Insular distribution of such pins is almost entirely associated with the settlements and trading routes of the Hiberno-Norse throughout the 10th and early 11th centuries (*ibid*, 31–2).

The finds from Cornaigmore include a small copper alloy stick pin with conical head (88). The type has been described as mushroom- or domical-headed by Laing, who favoured a seventh- or eighth-century date for most, while recognizing that the type may have had a currency of several centuries (1973, 69; 1975, 327, 331). A pin of this form was found at Jarlshof but the supposed 9th-century date is not secure. The dating evidence has recently been reviewed by

Caldwell (in Greig & Greig 1989, 285–6). Stratified finds provide no support for Laing's early dating, and pins of broadly similar form have been found in medieval contexts dating to as late as the 14th/15th century. In Dublin, such pins appear in 11th-century levels, probably as ringed pins went out of fashion (Fanning 1994, 56), and a broadly similar date for the Cornaigmore example would be in keeping with the occurrence of Norse platter ware from the site.

The finest of the pins in the collection from Coll is a large cast copper alloy dress pin from Gallanach (121). The finish of the pin is excellent and it remains generally in good condition despite the loss of the setting in the head. It belongs to a well-known series of disc-headed pins characterized by a pair of fillets on either side of the pinhead. Two types have been distinguished on the basis of whether the fillet is integral with the head or projects from the shank (Laing 1975, 329). Laing has suggested that the simpler versions may date from the eighth or ninth century while admitting that developed examples may be later. However, the value of this distinction has recently been called into question: reporting on a pin found during excavations at Carn Dubh, near Pitlochry, Perthshire, Newman (1995, 155–7) has suggested that there are better grounds for dating the most accomplished examples of such pins to the 11/12th centuries. Traces of deposit survive in the circular recess in the head of the Gallanach pin but it has not proved possible to identify this material; examples from Ireland have settings of glass, or in the case of a pin from Beginish, County Kerry, mother-of-pearl (O'Kelly 1956, 175, fig 3.1).

Catalogue no 6, from Sorisdale (Area A), is a fine example of a frustrum-headed pin, following Laing's classification (1973, 71; 1975, 328). Thought by Laing to be a Viking type, the dating evidence has recently been reviewed independently by Batey (1992) and by Close-Brooks (1995, 272–3). Although hampered by the absence of securely dated contexts, both writers have come to a similar conclusion, and suggested that the balance of probability supports a 13th/14th century date. It may also be noted that rather than representing accidental damage, the bend in the shank of the Sorisdale pin may possibly have been done deliberately to help hold the pin in place on the garment (cf Fanning 1994, 124). Catalogue no 196 from Feall is likely to represent the broken shank of a dress pin bent in similar fashion.

Later medieval metalwork includes a fragment of the rim of a cast ewer or small pot found at Sorisdale (36) and the pin of a ring brooch from Feall (199). A 14th- or 15th-century date would be in keeping for both (David Caldwell, pers comm). Copper alloy wound-wire headed pins have been found at several of the Coll sites (Sorisdale Area C: 37; Cornaigmore Area A: 75, Cliad: 30; & Feall 197 & 198). Such pins appear to have had a long currency: the earliest examples appear to have been found in 14th-century urban contexts (eg London: Egan & Pritchard 1991, 299–301; Southampton: Platt & Coleman-Smith 1975, figs 240, 243–5) while such pins have been recovered by the thousand from some 17th- and 18th-century sites. In addition to finds from Scottish urban sites (eg Cox 1996, 767; Cox 1997, 131), wound-wire headed pins are among the commonest metalwork finds from several other Scottish sand dune areas (eg Culbin Sands, Moray; Luce Sands, Galloway). Recent analysis by Caple (1991) has shown that such pins were produced on an industrial scale, presumably to meet the demands of female fashion — specifically the intricate folds and tucks of garments and head-dresses of the period, as depicted clearly in 15th-century art (Egan & Pritchard 1991, 298). Eventually the wound-wire headed pins were superseded by pins of cast manufacture (eg 37). Simple copper alloy needles (eg 59 & 60) had a long currency and are undiagnostic.

Much of the copper alloy metalwork recovered from sites in Coll comprises miscellaneous fragments of scrap and a small selection has been catalogued to give an impression of the range. Some may possibly be folds of scrap for repair of copper alloy vessels (7), while others remain unidentified (eg 61 & 76).

## WORKED PUMICE

John Crawford

The initial review of material from Coll included details of a pumice pendant from Sorisdale (Close-Brooks *et al* 1978, 97, fig 10.3). Further examples of worked pumice have been recovered from several of the Coll sites, including Sorisdale Areas C (38) and D (62–4), and Feall (202). Of these, no 63 is a pear-shaped piece perforated at both ends, possibly a further example of a pendant, although the double perforation and relatively irregular shape also invite interpretation as a float. On the other hand, no 64 is a carefully shaped rectangular plaque, while no 38 appears to be a broken fragment of a similar object; although possibly a tool in its own right (skin-working?), no 64 could be an unfinished blank for a pendant.

In discussing the pendants from the chambered cairns at Unival, North Uist and Taversoe Tuick, Rousay, Henshall (1972, 186–7) also drew attention to a find from Stanydale, Shetland. To these examples from Neolithic sites, may be added the pendant from a cist at Golspie, Sutherland, associated with fragments of clay moulds presumably of Iron Age or Dark Age date (Woodham & Mackenzie 1957) and a sub-rectangular pendant from the later prehistoric site at Garry Iochdrach, North Uist (NMS: GT 516). Finally an unstratified rectangular pumice pendant was found at Rosinish, Benbecula (Crawford 1977, not illustrated).

The grooves present on several rounded lumps of pumice (eg 62) may indicate their use as an abrasive during the manufacture of bone/antler pins or points, although once again the possibility of their use as floats should be borne in mind. More detailed interpretation is currently hampered by the absence of a detailed published study of the occurrence and use of pumice from archaeological sites in Scotland.

## THE CANNEL COAL BEAD FROM FEALL

Alison Sheridan

The material from Feall includes a fusiform or barrel-shaped cannel coal bead (201). That this bead had originally been part of a larger item of jewellery, strung tightly and worn for some time, is suggested by the wear pattern. The bead is most likely to have come from an Early Bronze Age spacer plate necklace; a cluster of such necklaces is known from Argyll and Bute. The nearest example to Coll is that found in a cist at Melfort (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 19 (1884–5), 134–6).

Research undertaken by the author with Mary Davis (Sheridan & Davis 1995) has revealed that cannel coal and lignite were indeed used as substitutes for Whitby jet in the spacer plate necklaces of south-west Scotland. In most cases, these materials were used to make replacements for broken jet beads, but there is a suspicion that here, as elsewhere in Scotland, local craftspeople may have attempted to make entire new necklaces from local materials. The practice of wearing spacer plate necklaces for a long time is well attested; indeed, in the Melfort example, the necklace buried in the cist had been made from parts of three necklaces.

Isolated fusiform beads have been found at several Scottish locations, the most similar findspots to Feall being the sandhills at Culbin Sands, Glenluce and Shewalton Moor. At Balneaves, Angus, a single fusiform bead (apparently of cannel coal, *contra* the published report) was found in a Middle Bronze Age Collared Urn cremation burial (Russell-White *et al* 1992). Other examples of single beads, or small numbers of beads, being incorporated in urn burials are known (eg Ford, Northumberland, with Collared Urn: Kinnes & Longworth 1985, cat no 186). The possibility cannot be ruled out, therefore, that this bead may have been deposited at a time when the practice of urn cremation burial was popular.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Trevor Cowie

The primary aim of this paper has been to convey the range of evidence recovered by John Crawford in the course of his assiduous fieldwork on Coll over a period of nearly quarter of a century. The catalogue has necessarily had to be selective given that the total number of items in the collections amounts to some 12,000 pieces (see Table 1), but we believe that it is representative of the range and quality of the better-preserved material recovered from the sites. In this concluding section, the material is assessed briefly in terms of its contribution to our understanding of the early settlement of Coll and to offer some pointers for further fieldwork.

## PREHISTORIC SETTLEMENT

In a previous paper describing material from the sandhills of Coll, attention was drawn to the distinctive series of bevel-ended stone tools from Sorisdale and their significance as possible pointers to Mesolithic settlement (Close-Brooks *et al* 1978, 85, 90). The evidence of Mesolithic activity has been reinforced by the present survey (Finlayson, above): several sites have now produced material that is almost certainly Mesolithic, in that it is made on prepared platform cores and includes narrow blades and pieces with microlithic retouch. However, there are problems and biases inherent in dealing with surface collections of this kind owing to reworking and conflation of deposits by erosion (particularly when their 'time-depth' is clearly very considerable). Geomorphological changes around the western coastline of Coll may well have resulted in the loss of early Holocene landforms, and the location of *in situ* Mesolithic material in areas of soft coastline may no longer be a realistic prospect (cf Sutherland 1997, 23–4). However, the discovery of a lithic scatter following ploughing at Arileod is of some significance in that it provides a valuable counterpoint to the sandhills evidence and holds out the promise of location of sites further inland. Coll would clearly repay systematic prospection using the range of techniques employed to good effect in the course of the Southern Hebrides Project (Mithen & Lake 1996), while pollen analysis might also help to clarify the nature of early human impact on the environment of the island.

Early Neolithic finds are virtually absent from the Crawford collections (and from existing museum collections from the island): the meagre evidence includes some plain rim sherds from Cornaigmore (90) tentatively distinguished on the grounds of fabric, and a decorated sherd from Eileraig (70). Among the flint collections, the single bifacially retouched point from Sorisdale (2) is the only lithic piece identified as being of possible Neolithic date (and even then with some qualification). The unusual stone axehead from Cornaigmore (89) has apparently been broken and then reworked (possibly at a much later date); it currently appears to be the only recorded example of a ground and polished axehead from the island. The near-absence of recognizable Neolithic artefacts among the existing sandhill collections has been commented upon by previous writers, and, taken with the absence of monuments of this date, it has been suggested that the island may have been only intermittently settled until the arrival of beaker users (Close-Brooks *et al* 1978, 97). In part the absence of Neolithic sites may also be a direct reflection of geomorphological change, comparable to the situation in the Western Isles where neolithic finds from machair-type locations are also at a premium. However, there the picture is balanced, if unevenly, by the distribution of funerary monuments and islet settlements (Armit 1992; 1996, 43–85), whereas on Coll, as noted above, recognizably chambered cairns are absent. The absence

of Neolithic sites may also reflect the fluid nature of the transition to farming in the west of Scotland (Armit & Finlayson 1992; Ritchie 1997, 43–4).

By the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age, however, the number of locations producing diagnostic material is more widespread, in keeping with the pattern for the region as a whole (Ritchie 1997, 44). Bill Finlayson has noted the presence of recognizably Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age tool types among the lithic collections from Sorisdale, while pottery ranging from classic Beaker to as yet ill-defined plain wares has been retrieved from several of the Coll sandhill sites. These have augmented the collections acquired by Ludovic Mann and Erskine Beveridge earlier this century (Beveridge 1903; Close-Brooks *et al* 1978, 90). Despite the severity of the reworking of the sandhills (illus 14), the fresh condition of some of the pottery tends to suggest that intact deposits still survive, holding out the possibility of intercepting structural remains. Even collapsed or truncated structures can result in ‘islands’ of enhanced survival in otherwise severely deflated areas as shown by the small-scale though informative excavations at Sorisdale in 1976 (Ritchie & Crawford 1978, 75–84).

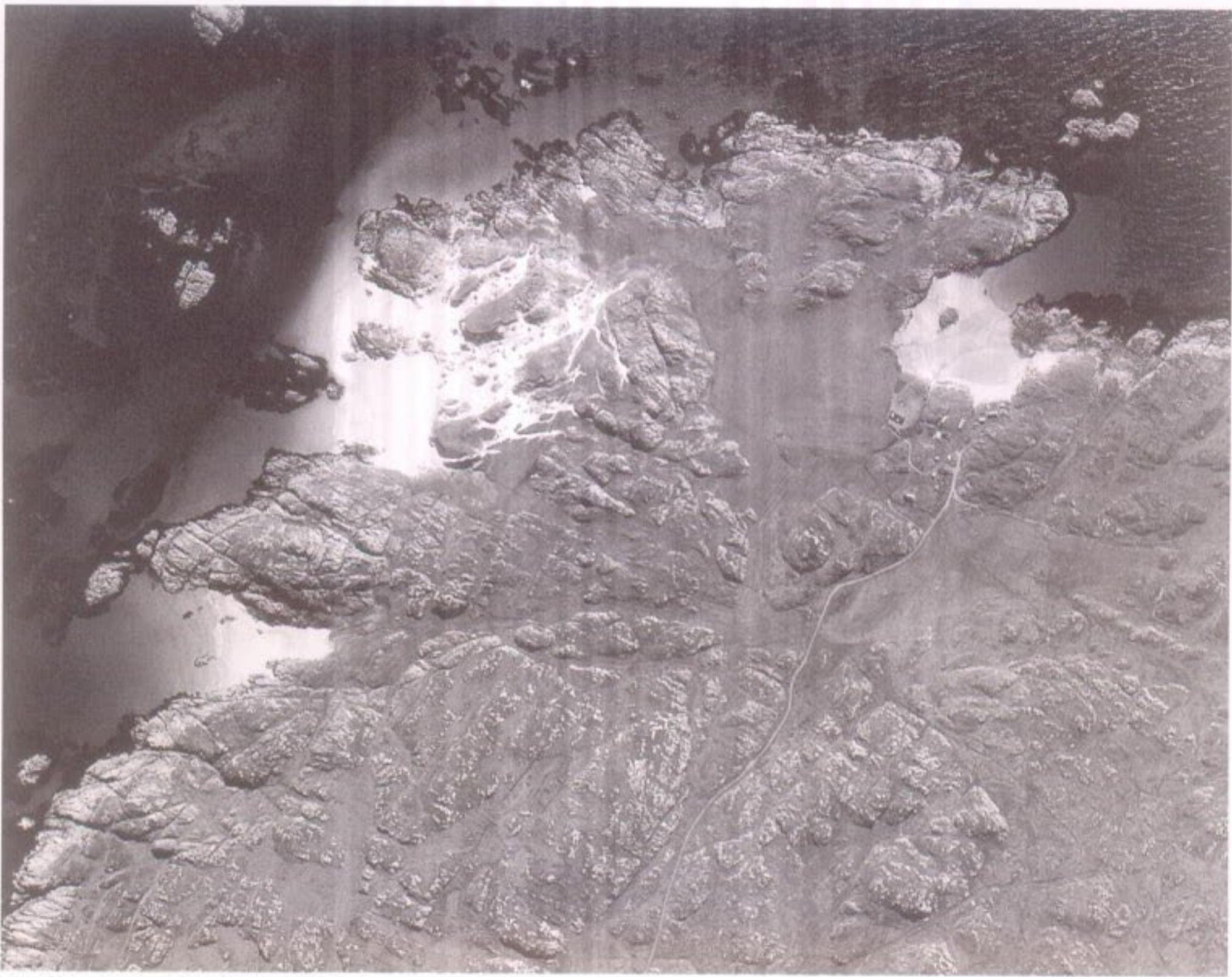
While several sites have produced pottery tentatively attributed to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age, classic decorated Iron Age pottery is noticeably absent from the material from these sandhill collections. This cannot simply be explained as a failure to recognize material, for typical decorated ‘Hebridean’ and other Iron Age sherds are present among the collections from the forts and duns on the island (eg Beveridge 1903, 8, 173–7). At the very least, had the areas of machair been under cultivation, we might have expected to have found abraded sherds introduced through middening. This would therefore seem to be a real absence, possibly suggesting that the contemporary machair areas were exploited in other ways or that the foci of Iron Age settlement may have lain off the machair (with the possible exception of Feall). Given the limited carrying capacity of a relatively small island, the pattern of settlement may in large part be accounted for by the known distribution of forts, duns and crannogs (RCAHMS 1980, 17–27, fig 5; Holley 1996; see also this paper, illus 1), and in this respect perhaps, Coll bears closer comparison with mainland Argyll than with the Western Isles.

#### EARLY HISTORIC: DARK AGE AND VIKING

By contrast, a small number of the sandhill locations have produced pottery identified as Dark Age in character (Lane & Cowie, above). The precise nature of the sites remains uncertain in the absence of fuller contextual information, but their recognition again holds out the promise of interception of intact structures and associated deposits, and possibly a tier of settlement complementary to the known monuments. The settlement at Machrins on Colonsay (Ritchie 1980) perhaps offers clues as to the type of relatively insubstantial structures which might be encountered.

One of the most significant results of John Crawford’s fieldwork has been to cast welcome new light on the pattern of Norse settlement on the island through the recovery of diagnostic pottery identified as a result of Lane’s research on the crucially important stratified ceramic assemblage from the Udal, North Uist (Lane 1983). It is to this period that some of the metalwork finds can be assigned (eg the fine pins from Cornaigmore and Gallanach). Once again, the nature of the sites may for the present be uncertain in the absence of contextual information, but the recognition of areas of archaeological potential means that future fieldwork can be more narrowly targeted. As noted in the introduction, the aim of this paper has been to lay the foundations for future fieldwork, in which suitable techniques for site prospection may be deployed.





ILLUS 14 Vertical aerial photograph of the sandhills at Sorisdale © *Crown copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland*



ILLUS 15 Aerial photograph of Sorisdale township from the east © *Crown copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland*

#### MEDIEVAL AND LATER SETTLEMENT

Some of the more significant finds of metalwork dateable to the 14th/15th centuries have been discussed above. Hitherto, the only published medieval pottery from Coll has been the assemblage from Breachacha Castle (Turner & Dunbar 1970). Apart from the very occasional sherd of imported wheel-thrown pottery (eg 33), coarse hand-made medieval or later pottery forms a major element of most of the pottery scatters. The recovery of parts of two strap handles in local coarse ware is of particular interest — recalling the locally produced imitations of wheel-thrown pottery found at Freswick, Caithness (Batey 1987, 275–80). The nature of the original contexts is often uncertain, but the abraded and comminuted nature of the sherds leaves little doubt that much of it results from land-use practices resulting in the middening of cultivated areas of machair. In some cases, however, the sherd scatters again flag up the possibility of locating nearby occupation sites, and hold out the promise of redressing the biased picture of medieval/late settlement on the island. In this respect, the medieval church at Killunaig (RCAHMS 1980, no 301) warrants special mention since the nearby tract of dunes may well mask contemporary settlement evidence, even if the locality has yielded little archaeological material to date.

Although there may be various explanations for biases in survival of the evidence, it is possible that the high proportions of medieval/late material really do reflect greater exploitation of the machair areas from the medieval period, and it is tempting to speculate whether intensive use, and perhaps ultimately over-exploitation of the machair, may have been significant factors in the initiation of episodes of severe erosion. Almost every beach complex on Coll bears signs of former episodes of wind erosion. The dating of phases of erosional activity and identification of their causes are not straightforward. In discussing these problems, Mather *et al* (1975, 81) suggested that it was unlikely that the peak of instability occurred less than a century ago. They noted that Coll may have been undergoing an active phase of erosion at the time of the visit of Samuel Johnson and James Boswell in 1773, quoting Boswell's references to sand blow and 'sand deserts' (Levi 1984). The problems of sand blow are also mentioned in the Statistical Accounts (Stat Acct 1794, 394–5; NSA 1845, 211). In seeking to identify causes, Mather (1975, 81) speculated whether there might be a link with the growth of population in the late 18th and early 19th centuries (illus 15), and went on to suggest that agricultural pressures on the machair areas may have been at least partially responsible for initiating erosion. If so, this would be in keeping with a pattern that has been recognized in other sand-dune areas and machair-type environments, where major episodes of erosion and catastrophic sand-blows consistently appear to be of post-medieval date (cf Angus & Elliot 1992).

#### THE FUTURE

Over the past half-century, the changes in the erosion pattern can be judged by reference to the aerial photographs held by the National Monuments Record of Scotland (RCAHMS); for example, the 1947 photographs show considerable areas of blown sand on almost all the relevant sites while by 1991 the same areas appear to be coalescing and very little blown sand is visible. Today the beach and dune systems appear to be in a relatively quiescent phase, and many of the scars of erosion are now vegetated making this an opportune time to take stock of the archaeological material from the machair areas on the island. Of course, wholly unstratified surface collections have their limitations; however, it is our hope that this brief review will provide the catalyst for further archaeological fieldwork on the island, ranging from continued monitoring of the machair areas to more detailed, targeted fieldwork designed to assess the quality of the

surviving archaeology. Although the sandhills may be quiescent today, such information will be invaluable should new cycles of erosion commence in the future.

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