

## Promontory Enclosures on the Isle of Lewis, the Western Isles, Scotland

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### Introduction

I was once told of time when Keith Blood, then working for the Ordnance Survey, on Islay in Scotland, came across a team of RCAHMS surveyors recording a site in sand dunes. Realising he had no record of the site he borrowed their plan, transcribed it in the dust on the bonnet of his Landrover, thanked the surveyors and drove off. I am not sure whether the record of that site in the National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS) is still the one transcribed onto the bonnet of that Landrover, but I am sure the transcription was of the highest quality.

By the time that I heard this I had known Keith for five years and had benefited from his tuition and opinions on accuracy, resolution and surveying in archaeology. Since that time many students have also benefited from these views, second hand. It was not only Keith's ability to improvise, but his ability to be irreverent about archaeological surveying at the same time as respecting the sites and always producing his best work under often difficult circumstances that inspired me to remain in archaeology and pursue a career as a surveyor. Perhaps one of the high points of this has been the Coastal Erosion Assessment of Lewis (here after Cea(L)) which provided much of the basic data on the location of promontory enclosures on Lewis that is used here.

### What is in a name?

While I am not one to spend a long time worrying about a name to classify a site or group of sites — titles change, after all, on a regular basis — the description of the group of site I call promontory enclosures may prove contentious to some. It has been suggested by several people, that many of these sites are not enclosed, their necks are simply barred. Most of the sites included in this group might once have been classified as 'promontory forts' though the suggestion of function has seen this description abandoned. In Cornwall we might refer to 'cliff castles', and in France 'eperon barre'

or barred spurs, but in 1996 the phrase promontory enclosure was universally chosen by the members of the Cea(L) team to describe a varied group of sites that previously might have been classified under any of the above titles.

It has been suggested that 'eperon barre' might be better terminology to classify these sites. I do not want to get into the semantics of whether a promontory is enclosed by the sea, but reject anyway the use of this term in this case as it has specific meaning elsewhere particularly in Brittany, France. Some of these features may have been better described as 'cliff castles', other as 'enclosed stacs' and yet others as 'blockhouses' similar to those seen in Shetland and Orkney (Lamb 1980). In the end I chose to continue to use the title promontory enclosure, as that was how the sites were classified in the field. All of the sites I include in this group are located on the coast and enclose or define an area of land behind a wall and/or ditch. I am still searching for the correct description for these sites, and would welcome any ideas put forward on the basis of what I describe below.

### Background

The Outer Hebrides, located to the west of mainland Scotland and the Isle of Skye consist of an island archipelago 200 km long including eight main islands - Mingulay in the south, Barra, South Uist, North Uist, South Harris, North Harris and Lewis in the north - and hundreds of smaller uninhabited islands. The Western Isles have been a constant source of antiquarian interest since the time of Martin Martin's 'tour' of the 1690s (Martin 1698). They have long been recognised and studied for their early prehistoric ritual landscapes, exemplified by that at Calanais (Calanish) and their later prehistoric monumental architecture such as the brochs of Dun Vulin (South Uist) and Dun Carloway (Lewis).

Prior to 1994 only twenty promontory enclosures were recognised in the region, of these thirteen were identified as a group by Armit during his assessment of later prehistoric structures of the Western Isles (Armit 1990; 1992). These included the sites of Berie at Shawbost on the north-west coast of Lewis, and Barra Head, underneath the Barra Head

lighthouse on the southern tip of Mingulay. As a class they were not thought to be widely represented in the region even though high sea cliffs with numerous promontories and stacs dominate the coastlines of many of the islands. However 1994 saw the discovery of two sites at Garenin near Carlaway, and 1995 saw a further two sites recorded to the north of Camas Uig (Uig Sands) on the extreme west coast of Lewis. The survey of these areas enlightened us to the richness of the coastal archaeology in the region and lead Historic Scotland to commissioning the Cea(L) survey in 1996 (Burgess and Church 1997).

Cea(L) examined over 450 kilometres of the coastline of Lewis from Aird Drollageo in the west, to Grimshader in the east, via the Butt of Lewis. A corridor between 50m and 500m wide was surveyed, except for areas where crofts ran to the shore making access difficult. Terrain encountered ranged from the sandy machair areas of Uig Sands and Barvas through the low rocky foreshores of Loch Roag to the high sea cliffs that dominate much of the island's exposed west and north-west coastline.

## Re-examination

The resulting data included more than eighteen hundred sites of which eighty were classified as promontory enclosures. Upon closer examination it could be seen that the range of sites included in this group was massive. Some sites were little more than the fragmentary remains of walls cutting promontories that had been eroded to a few square metres in size. At the other extreme records were made of sites enclosing several of hectares behind multi-vallate systems of ditches and walls. Between these extremes sites of all shape, size and complexity were recorded.

Some of these were clearly agricultural, at least in their final usage, often with good associated oral tradition attached, yet others, equally displayed many of the features associated with 'defended sites'. What was clear from the initial analysis was that the variety of features classified would justify much more detailed examination, initially as part of a field visit and then possibly later as part of a programme of topographic survey and excavation.

The following discussion is based primarily on field visits made to all of these sites during a two-week period in July and August of 1997. The sites were located, photographed and described by sketch and note. Attention was paid to physical location, terrain, the nature of the enclosure, internal features, access from the land and the sea, and the relationship with surrounding sites of all types. Excavation of sites from this class on the west coast of Scotland and in the Outer Hebrides is restricted to the two sites, Berie at Garenin (NB 1985 4485) and Gob Eirer (NMRS, NB 03 SW 21) carried out in 1995 and 1996 as part of the Garenin Landscape Survey and Uig Landscape survey. The results of these excavations were inconclusive at Garenin and have produced evidence of Norse occupation at Gob Eirer. Unfortunately the Gob Eirer site is unrepresentative as no other similar sites have subsequently been identified on Lewis. Other sites believed to be Norse have been identified, but their form is different from that seen at Gob

Eirer and they still remain to be excavated. The best example is Rubha Shildinish (NB 43 SE 01) a low stack to the north of Stornoway, attached to the shore by a narrow land bridge.

The general distribution of these sites (Fig. 1) covers much of the coastline of Lewis. Gaps occur for two reasons, the lack of any form of settlement caused in general by the remoteness of an area, and the lack of suitable locations for such site. They include Sgiogarstaigh to North Tolstadh where there are ample potential site locations but no recorded enclosures.

There are two areas that lack suitable potential sites. In both cases these are areas that have extensive settlement records of other types. The first is Little Loch Roag and the southern end of East Loch Roag which is dominated by low eroding rocky foreshore and has very few available promontories or stacks that could be enclosed. The second area is the stretch of coastline between Bru and North Galson including Barvas Machair where soft eroding cliffs up to 5m high formed mostly of glacial till and sand layers produce very few promontories that are suitable for occupation (Burgess and Church 1997).

In general the sites can be seen to fall into five areas around the Lewis coast line (Fig. 1)

**Area 1, Brenish, Islivig and Camas Uig (17 sites)**, typified by high eroding sea cliff with a mixture of high and low promontories and several knife edge stacks. The north end of this area includes Camas Uig. The blank area around Air Uig separates this area from area 2.

**Area 2, Bernera and the Loch Roag complex (12 sites)**, typified by low eroding edges punctuated by shingle beaches. This area includes Bernera and the Bhalto Peninsula, both of which have large machair areas on their north sides. A change in terrain to high Atlantic sea cliffs at the east side of the mouth of East Loch Roag marks the boundary between this area and area 3.

**Area 3, Garenin to Barvas (13 sites)**. Dominated by high Atlantic cliffs with frequent promontories, interspersed with small bays of sand and shingle. A large blank area from Barvas to Galson separates this area from area 4.

**Area 4, North Galson Ness and Sgiogarstaigh (16 sites)**. Dominated by Machair to the west and high cliffs to the east all backed with flat croft lands, this area is the smallest of the five discussed here. The coast has a mixture of extensive, low promontories and large eroding stacks on which sites are situated. The blank area between Sgiogarstaigh and North Tolstadh separates this area from area 5.

**Area 5, Tolstadh, Broad Bay and the Eye Peninsula (14 sites)**. This area is the most dispersed of the areas proposed here and covers the biggest geographic area. The machair beaches that form Broad Bay dominate the area, these are interspersed with low eroding cliffs formed from soft conglomerate rocks. The east side of Broad bay is formed by the Eye Peninsula which is dominated by high sea cliffs punctuated by stacks and promontories. To the south the

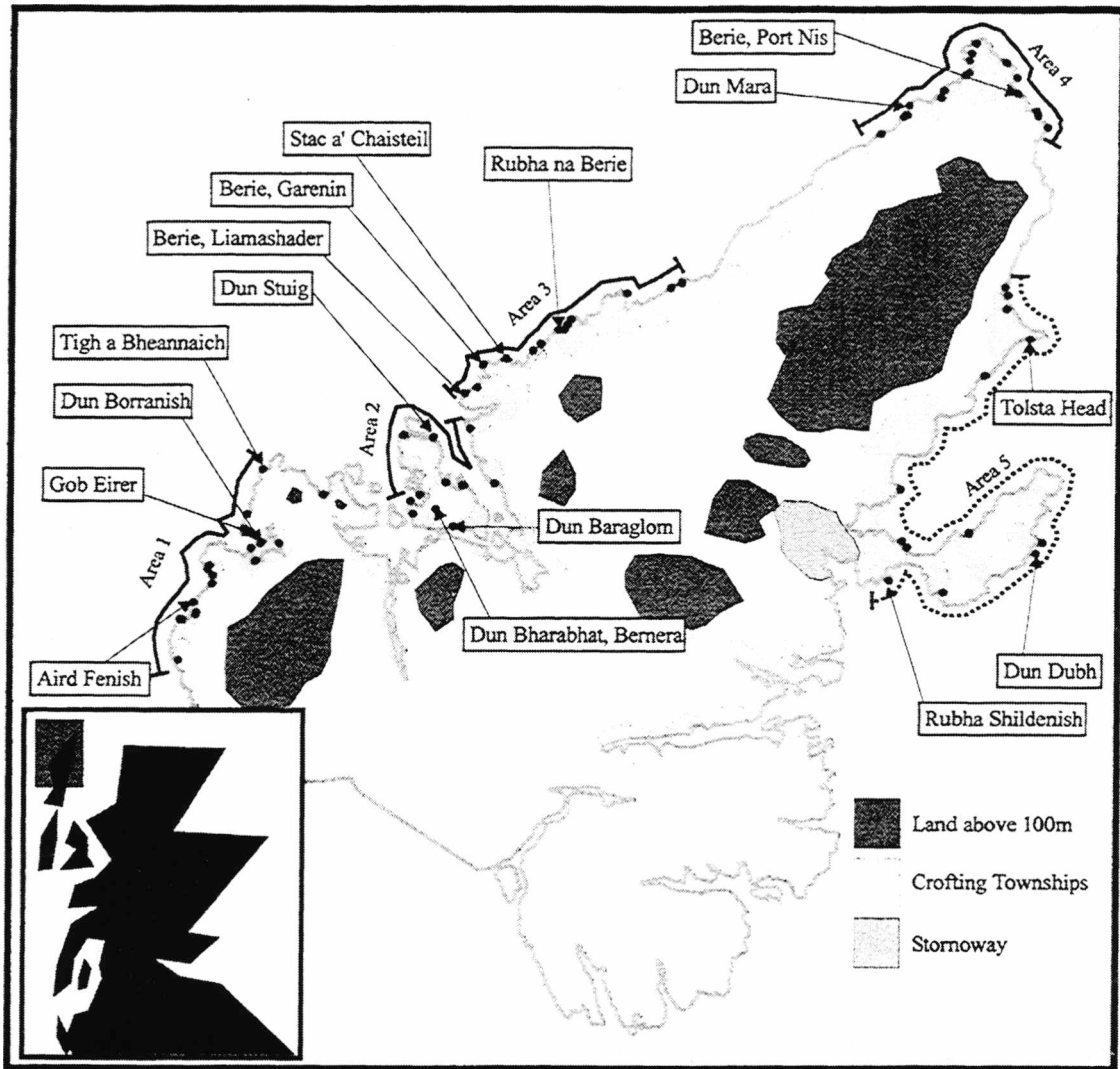


Fig. 1. Location of Lewis showing areas defined in the text and location of all sites.

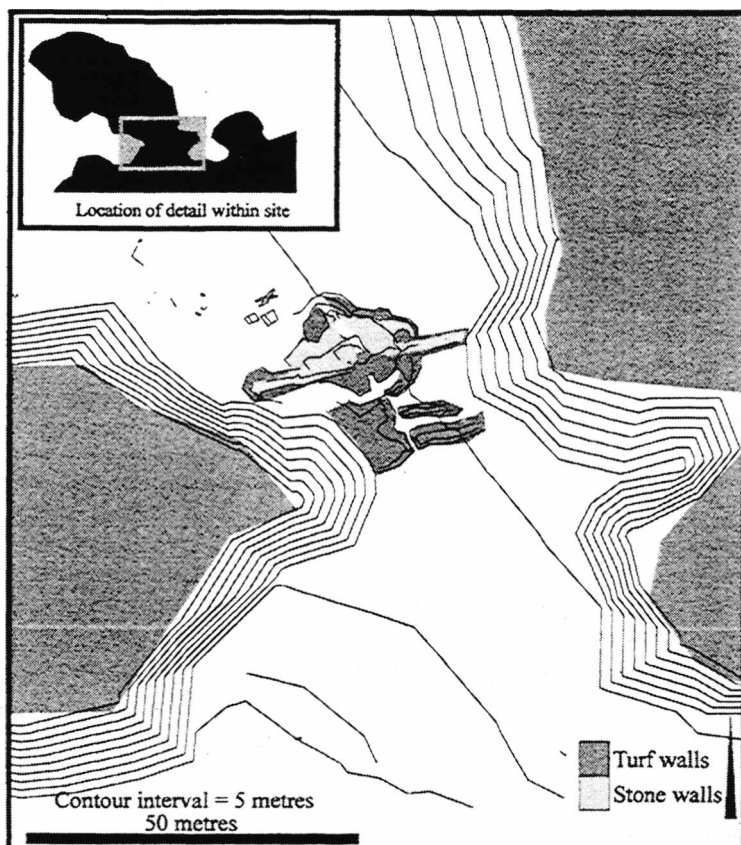


Fig. 2. Rubha na Berie, Shawbost.

terrain becomes one of low eroding edges and gentle stacks and coastal islands before running into Stornoway bay.

## Physical location

Promontory enclosures have been identified in four different situations. The traditional location, *promontories*, are typified by narrow necks of land extending from the shore and occasionally widening again. Generally the barrier is drawn across the narrowest point. The best example of this is Rubha na Berie (Shawbost, NMRS, NB 24 NW 02; Fig. 2) and these sites are the commonest on Lewis (73% of sites). Similar to these are *headlands*. These are locations that narrow beyond the barrier point and are at their widest point where the barrier occurs. The best example of this is Sheilavig at Crowlista (NB 0261 3418).

*Stacks* form the third largest group of locations (13% of sites). Such sites may be linked or separated to the shore and are barred at the obvious point of access and sometimes also have walls surrounding their entire perimeter. There are many typical examples including Rubha Shildinish near Holm (NMRS, NB 43 SE 01). The rarest location seen is that of the *cliff-edge semi-enclosures* which occupy coastal locations but do not make use of a promontory or headland. Instead large curving walls/ramparts describe a semi circular enclosure backed against the top of a cliff. The best example of this is the enclosure on the south side of Tolstadh Head (NB 5519 4672).

The choice of location may be linked to the origin or date of the site. This is particularly noticeable with sites thought to be Norse or medieval in date as they were primarily identified on stack sites and included turf or stone long houses. In area 4 stacks form 25% of the distribution and all are thought to date to these periods.

## Internal area

Promontory enclosures recorded on Lewis fall into five size bands which were generally distributed throughout the five areas in the ratio of 66% (sites less than 1 ha), 25% (sites of 1 ha) 4% (sites of 2 ha), 4% (sites of 3 ha) and 1% (sites of more than 3 ha). All of the areas have roughly the same proportion of sites under one hectare in size, though it is

likely that many of these were originally large and have suffered from heavy erosion. There are however three anomalies in this overall picture, Area 1 has all of the 3 hectare sites but no 2 hectare sites. Area 2 has the only 3+ hectare site (an enclosure of more than 1000 hectares) but this is a recent agricultural feature and Area 5 is dominated by sites of less than 1 hectare.

The presence of all of the largest sites in area 1 reflects the size of the promontories available in the area. This stretch of coastline has some of the highest cliffs and some of the largest promontories on the island. Similarly the lack of larger sites in area 5 is indicative of a coastline where low stable edges are punctuated by small stacks and low eroding promontories. The obvious exception are two sites occupying large promontories on the Eye Peninsula.

## Accessibility to the sea

Assessing whether a site has access to the sea is difficult, because erosion has clearly altered many of the sites and may have either removed the original access or created access which did not exist.

On average 63 % of the sites in each area have access to the sea (today). In practice areas 1 and 2 have a higher than average number of sites with access, and this reflects the fact that both areas have most of their sites on lower locations. Conversely area 3 has a higher number of sites without any sea access because here most of the sites are on cliffs of more than 10m OD. Judging this parameter is subjective, not only has the terrain changed, but also while access may be difficult in most cases it is rarely totally impossible if the person climbing up or down is determined enough or is aided by ropes or ladders.

## Number of enclosing walls

The number of walls or ramparts varies considerably. While the biggest group is uni-vallate, there are substantial numbers of bi-, tri- and multi-vallate sites. The average ratio of these site types in each area is 62%, 25%, 12% and 1%. This pattern is generally adhered to with several noticeable exceptions. There is a lack of any tri-vallate sites in area 3. This area does however have the only multi-vallate site in

Area	Promontories	Stacks	Headlands	Coastal Enclosures
1	14	2	1	0
2	11	0	1	0
3	11	2	0	0
4	8	4	1	3
5	9	2	0	3
<b>Total</b>	53	10	3	6

Table 1. Distribution of location types between the areas

Area	Earth	Stone	Earth and Stone	1 Stone + 1 Earth	1 Stone + 1 Earth and Stone	Natural	1 Earth + 1 Earth and Stone	Pos. Palisade + 1 Earth and Stone
1	10	2	2	1	1	1	0	0
2	3	6	1	0	1	1	1	0
3	3	7	2	0	1	0	0	0
4	11	2	0	1	0	0	2	0
5	8	3	0	0	0	0	1	2
<b>Total</b>	35	20	5	2	3	2	3	2

Table 2. Distribution of construction techniques of promontory enclosures

Area	None Segmented	Segmented
1	12	5
2	10	2
3	12	1
4	13	3
5	14	5
<b>Total</b>	56	16

Table 3. Number of segmented sites per area.

Area	None	CARH	Cells	Curvil. Encl.	Long houses	Poss block houses	Platf.	Boulder circles	Mounds	Cultiv.
1	7	1	3	1	4	1	0	0	0	0
2	8	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	5	0	3	0	0	1	1	3	0	0
4	6	1	2	0	5	1	0	0	1	1
5	10	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	36	5	9	1	13	3	1	3	1	1

Table 4. Distribution of internal structures by area.

the study (4 lines of rampart). It is certain that this site is of multi-phase construction, as are many of the others, but it is likely that after a tri-vallate phase these lines went out of use and were replaced by a uni-vallate enclosure. There is also a relatively low number of uni-vallate sites in area 5 where the bi-vallate sites (42%) outnumber the uni-vallate sites (35%).

## Construction of the enclosing walls

The construction of the wall or ramparts of promontory enclosures varies from site to site and are listed by area in Table 2. Where more than one wall encloses the site all of the construction techniques used are listed (i.e. 1 stone and 1 earth or 2 earth or 1 earth and 1 stone.) This table shows that 48% of the barriers are made of earth, 28% are constructed purely of stone and 7% are a mixture of the two. The remaining 17% of sites represent those where the individual barriers are constructed with differing materials. The figures for those barriers of earth construction may be exaggerated as it is likely that many were originally constructed with earth and stone but that the stone has been robbed. Proving or disproving this on a site to site basis would be a matter for excavation.

This predominance of earth construction is not seen in areas 2 and 3, where stone walls are common. While the number of multi-technique sites remains consistent with the other areas, there is a marked increase in the use of stone and stone and earth techniques in these areas apparently at the expense of purely earth constructed sites.

This table also shows that a small number of sites rely in part at least on natural features such as cliffs and streams for their barriers. These sites are found mostly in areas 1 and 2 and are synonymous with promontory enclosure which have Complex Atlantic Round Houses (Brochs) as internal features and are arranged in a segmented manner (see below). Two sites are singled out because they are believed to have used palisades as elements of their bi-vallate barrier systems, though these features are not visible at the surface and need to be tested by excavation. These sites are located adjacent to one another on the Eye Peninsula (NMRS, NB 53 SE 01 and NB 5613 3332).

## Sites arranged in a segmented manner

During the re-examination of promontory and cliff sites, it was noted that some sites not only have more than one barrier, but are arranged in a segmented manner, where the space within the enclosure is divided into segments separated by one or more walls to create a citadel, or nuclear effect. Generally these have a large outer enclosure and a smaller inner enclosure, though without excavation it will be impossible to tell whether the segments are contemporary (of one build) or whether they mark development, expansion or contraction of a site. These sites also frequently enclose structures that are more often than not found in the smaller

segment. Table 3 plots the number of such sites per area.

This distribution shows that the number of segmented sites in each area ranging from 1 to 5 set against a majority of non-segmented sites. Area 3 has only one such site, (NB 3124 5005) where the bi-vallation and segmented spacing are thought to be an agricultural feature, based on the form of the barrier walls, forming several enclosed fields laid out along a promontory.

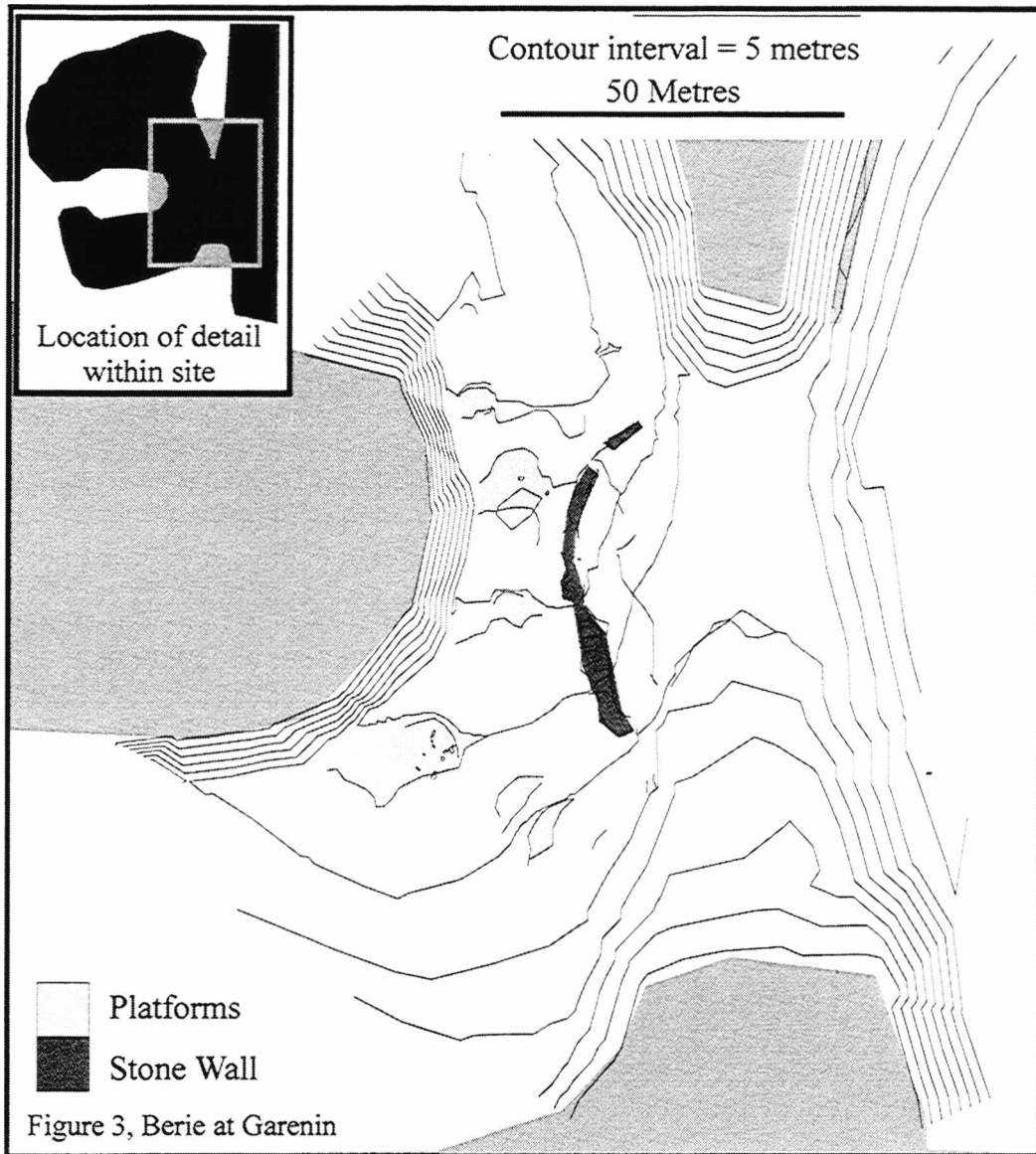
## Sites with internal features

A number of the sites were found to have structures in their interiors but it is seldom possible to say how these relate to the site history without excavation. This distribution makes no judgements and purely presents the evidence where it was recorded. Table 4 lists the numbers and types of these internal features per area. It shows that although half the sites recorded have internal features there are considerable variations between the areas. Thus in area 5, 29% of the sites have internal features, where as in areas 1 and 3 the figure rises to 59% and 62%. The commonest internal features are the rectilinear long houses which appear on 18% of all of the sites. They are confined however to three of the five areas (1, 4 and 5) where as many as 28% of the sites contain long houses. This is reflected in the postulated dates for these sites, which suggest Norse and Early Medieval/Medieval occupation based on the form and construction of the long houses.

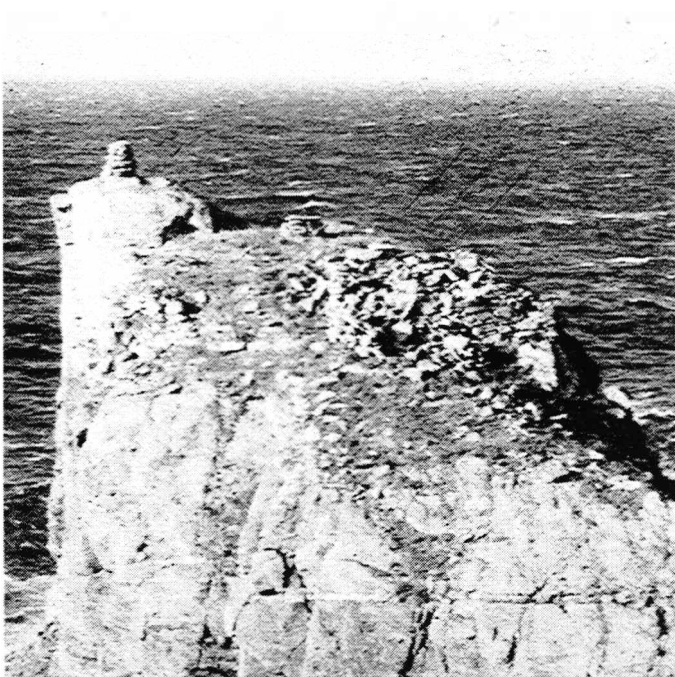
This table highlights several other interesting groups of internal features. These include three sites that have boulder circles, features seen elsewhere both on Lewis and in the wider Western Isles. All of the three fall in the same 5 km stretch of coast line on the west facing sea cliffs between Garenin and Shawbost in area 3. They are all located at exposed high points on the promontory and are constructed on bare bedrock.

A second group is that of Complex Atlantic Round Houses (CARHs) or Brochs. To date five such features have been recorded on promontories. Of these three are located in the inner enclosure of sites arranged in a segmented manner. Two of these are located on Bernera, Dun Stuirg (NB 14 SE 02) and Dun Bharabhat (NB 13 NE 02) which is located on an island at the end of a promontory in an inland loch. The third, Dun Borranish (NB 03 SE 01) is located at the back of the Uig Sands (Fig. 4).

The remaining two sites are located behind one stone barrier. The two sites are morphologically similar with the CARH being constructed on top of the wall, however one, Dun Barraglom on Bernera (NB 13 SE 05) is one of the smallest such sites on Lewis. The second, Dun Mara (NB 46 SE 05), in area 4 is one of the largest CARHs in the Western Isles and rather is believed by some to be a 'round fort'.



*Fig. 3. Berie, Garenin.*



*Plate 1. Stac a' Chaisteil, Garenin, from the east.*

## Classification and distribution of promontory enclosures

On the basis of their location, form and construction methods the promontory enclosures of Lewis, recorded during Cea(L), can be divided into eleven sub-classes. Twelve percent of the sites recorded remain unclassified, as their remains were so fragmentary that they could not be interpreted.

### *Class 1, Blockhouses.*

These sites bear certain similarities to the blockhouse of Shetland and Orkney. Lamb notes that the true Shetland blockhouses do not completely bar their promontories and have cells rather than inter-mural spaces. Slighter walls running from the main structure complete the barrier. The Orkney sites, on the other hand, do completely close their promontories and tend to have inter-mural spaces rather than cells (Lamb 1980 11-46).

On Lewis the best preserved of the five sites in this class, Stac a' Chaisteil (NB 24 NW 05, plate 1) at Garenin is inaccessible from the land, but appears to have a gallery between its external and internal wall faces. In complete contrast, Berie, at Aird Liamashader (NB 14 SE 07), located 2 km south-west does not completely close the promontory and has cells constructed in its wall thickness. The remaining three sites are poorly preserved, surviving only as foundations which makes their interpretation difficult. These sites are located both on stacks and small promontories and account for 7% of the overall distribution of promontory enclosures on Lewis.

### *Class 2. Large Multi-vallate enclosures with ditches.*

Four of these sites have been identified on Lewis. All are larger than 1 hectare in size and have two or more enclosing walls/ramparts with medial ditches. It is possible that in three of the four cases the sites are arranged in a segmented manner, though their interiors are indistinct making interpretation difficult. All four of these sites are located on large promontories. Three are located in the Ness area, and the fourth (the largest example) is located between Islivig and Mangesta on a headland known as Aird Fenish (NA 9930 2930). Parallels for these sites are recorded in the Northern Isles (The Landberg on Fair Isle and Brough of Windwick on South Ronaldsay; Lamb 1980, 47-64) and elsewhere including Ireland (Doon Eask in Co. Kerry). This group accounts for 5.5% of the total distribution of promontory enclosures on Lewis.

### *Class 3. Large Multi-vallate enclosures without ditches.*

Six such sites have been recorded on Lewis. These sites have two or more enclosing walls or ramparts of earth, stone or earth and stone with no apparent ditches. These sites are frequently multi-phase in construction but none have a segmented division of space. Very few indeed have internal features of any kind and all are located on large promontories. Parallels for these sites may be found in the Northern Isles (Castle Burwick on South Ronaldsay) and also in Cornwall (Giants Castle near Scilly cf. Lamb 1980 47-64).

The best example is Rubha Berie at Shawbost which

has three lines of earth and stone walls, and a fourth of stone that overlies the innermost stone and earth line. This site is illustrated in Fig. 2. It is possible that the stone enclosure may be the remains of a blockhouse of the Shetland type. This group includes 8% of the promontory enclosures sites on Lewis.

### *Class 4. Large Uni-vallate.*

Four of these sites are recorded and are characterised by either stone, or earth and stone enclosing walls with an internal area of more than one hectare and located on large promontories. Two out of the four have internal features; these are cells on the Brenish Headland (NA 8300 2550) and platforms on Berie to the north of Garenin (NB 1869 4500). This site, illustrated in Fig. 3, is one of only two excavated in Lewis, and confirmed that stone and wooden structures had been constructed on the platforms in the enclosures (Burgess and Gilmour 1995). The excavation did not, however, recover any dating evidence. There are no parallels recorded in the Northern Isles for these sites.

An additional group of sites is the *Uni-vallate enclosures of less than 1 hectare* of which there are twelve. These are for the most part probably fragments of larger enclosures that have now been eroded away. This makes their interpretation difficult and their inclusion as a separate class is doubtful. It is likely that many of the larger uni-vallate sites recorded in class 3 will eventually be reduced by erosive activity to this size.

In total these sites form 22% of the total distribution of promontory enclosures on Lewis, of these however only four survive as sites of 1 hectare in size representing 6% of the total distribution.

### *Class 5. Stack sites with stone and turf long houses.*

Eleven of these sites are present on the island, the majority in the area of the Butt or around Broad Bay. These sites are located on stacks, either free-standing or linked to the shore by natural arches. There is usually a turf or stone wall at the point of access and this feature sometimes runs around much of the circumference of the stack. Within, it is usual to find the remains of turf and stone or turf long houses. It is thought that these sites date to the Norse or Early Medieval phases, and excavations on the site of Gob Eirer at Crowlista (NMRS, NB 03 SW 21) seem to support this (Burgess *et al.* 1996). This group represents 16% of the total distribution.

### *Class 6. Monastic sites with cells.*

There are three sites in this group, including Tigh a Bheannaich (in English - *House of the Blessed*) (NMRS, NB 03 NW 05) near Aird Uig. This site consists of a substantial stone wall enclosing a rectangular stone chapel and cells on a headland. The other two are both near Eoropie on the west side of the Butt of Lewis, one on a headland and the other on a promontory, both consist of an enclosing wall constructed of regular turf cells. Within the larger of the two (NB 5123 6564) is the rectilinear remains of what is thought to be a church or chapel. These sites recorded on Lewis represent 4% of the overall distribution of promontory enclosures on the island.



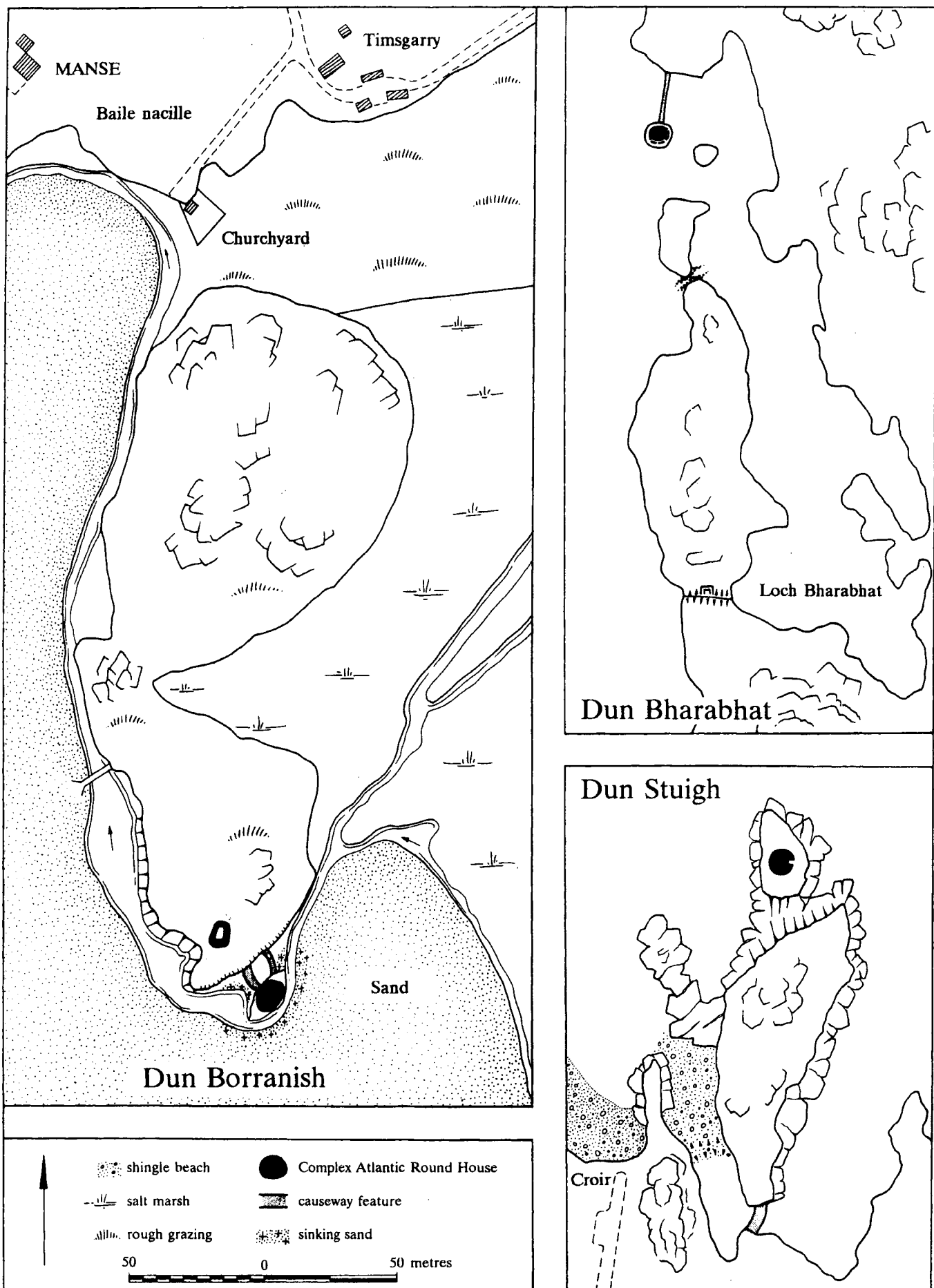


Fig. 4. Segmented enclosures with CARHs.

### ***Class 7. Bi-vallate enclosures with CARHs.***

Two of the CARHs recorded on Lewis are located within bi-vallate enclosures. These are Dun Barraglom on Bernera (NMRS, NB 13 SE 05) and Dun Mara near Swainbost (NB 46 SE 05). Both sites have an outer enclosing wall and a second internal wall located against the face of the CARH itself. But here the comparison ends as Dun Mara is one of the largest CARHs on Lewis and Dun Barraglom one of the smallest. As neither site has been excavated it is not clear whether the CARHs are contemporary with their enclosures. Also both sites seem to have been subsequently re-used which has further obscured the earlier structures and has led to the suggestion that neither of these sites are really CARHs.

These sites differ from the examples of CAHRs seen in the Northern Isles which tend not to be located on small promontories but occupy cliff edge enclosures. These sites include Houbie and Snabroch on Shetland. Broch of Burland, also on Shetland, is located on a large promontory (Lamb 1980, 47-64). This group forms 3% of the total distribution.

### ***Class 8 Segmented enclosures with CARHs.***

This group contains three sites at present though one, Bharabhat on Bernera (NMRS, NB 13 NE 02), is on an inland loch, suggesting that there is potential in other areas for identifying similar sites. These sites consist of a CARH located at the end of natural promontory, which is barred either by walls or by natural barrier such as a cliff or water feature. The promontory is also barred at its neck, forming a large outer enclosure. Dun Stuigh (NMRS, NB 13 NE 02) also on Bernera, is similar in nature, and both are illustrated in Fig. 4. This kind of segmented enclosure with a CARH as yet has no parallels in the Western Isles or in Scotland. These sites form 4% of the total distribution of the promontory enclosures on Lewis.

### ***Class 9. Large segmented enclosures.***

These five sites all have an internal area of more than 1 hectare, and are divided into two internal areas by means of an inner barrier some distance within the outer line. One site, that at Sheilavig near Mangesta (NB 0053 3056), has a further large oval enclosure within the inner segment and clearly shows evidence of multi-phase construction in both of its barriers. Two sites on the Eye Peninsula, Dun Dubha (NB 53 SE 01) and Sheshader (NB 5613 3332), are constructed on promontories consisting of several large stacks located in a line at right-angles to the shore. In both cases enclosing walls have been found on the outer stack, and it is thought that a palisade barred the inner stack. Sheshader has also produced pieces of Unstan pottery in the wall core of the rampart which are thought to be re-deposited from earlier settlement on the promontory (Burgess and Church 1997). This group of sites form 6% of the total distribution of the promontory enclosures on Lewis.

### ***Class 10. Small segmented enclosures.***

These three sites are similar in form to those of class 10 but are located on smaller promontories of less than 1 hectare. It is believed in one case, the example at Suardial (Swordale in English, NB 4968 3000), that this is nearly the original size

of the site, but that site located to the east of the Airport at Melbost (NB 4691 3341) may have been considerably larger when built; it is not clear, however, whether it would ever have been more than 1 hectare in internal area. The Suardial site has the remains of rectilinear long houses within its outer area. These three sites represent 4% of the total distribution of promontory enclosures.

### ***Class 11. Large agricultural enclosures.***

Six sites are classified within this class, consisting of large headlands of more than 1 hectare barred by a single stone or earth wall of modest dimensions. These sites are classified as agricultural on the basis of their slight barriers, which frequently extend for several hundred metres across the headland and can only have delimited grazing and stock enclosures. These sites form 8% of the total distribution of promontory enclosures on Lewis.

## **The distribution of these classes**

The distribution of these classes amongst the five areas shows that three sub-classes of promontory enclosure are more strongly represented than the other nine. These are the unclassified sites (12%), sites on stacks - class 5 - (16%) and uni-vallate sites (including those of less than 1 ha) - class 4 - (22%). The remaining sub-classes are evenly distributed each representing between 4% and 8% of the whole.

While each of the five areas display the same general trends of distribution, each also displays some anomalies at present. *Area 1* includes four sites with long houses (class 4) and two possible blockhouses (class 1). This area, dominated by high sea cliffs also includes the largest multi-vallate ditched site at Aird Fenish and two of the larger segmented sites (class 10). The only class 7 site (CARH with a segmented arrangement) outwith area 2 is located at Careamas Uig. This site, Dun Borranish (NMRS, NB 03 SE 01) has been partially surveyed and is illustrated on Fig. 4. This area has no records of large multi-vallate enclosures without ditches (class 3).

*Area 2* includes four unclassified sites, with remains so fragmentary as to be impossible to interpret. Also included is one small segmented site on the western edge of the area at Traigh na Clibhe (NB 0804 3648) and two large agricultural enclosures. One of these, Aird Mor, on the east coast of Bernera encloses *circa* 500 hectares with a wall of *circa* 100m in length. Three enclosed CARHs are seen on Bernera, of these two are class 7, with a segmented arrangement of enclosed area. These are Dun Stuigh and Bharabhat on Bernera, both of which are illustrated on Fig. 4. This area has no records of classes 1,2,3,5 or 10 (these sub-classes are thought to be big settlements).

Included in *area 3* are the two best preserved examples of blockhouses (class 1) at Berie at Aird Liamshader and Stac a Chaisteil. This area also includes two examples of multi-vallate ditchless (class 3) sites including the fine example of Rubha Berie at Shawbost. Two large uni-vallate enclosures (class 4) may be seen, one of which, Berie at Garenin, has been the site of trial excavations

(Burgess and Gilmour 1995). This area has no enclosed CARHs (classes 7 and 8) or any segmented sites (classes 10 and 11) or any multi-vallate ditched sites (class 2).

*Area 4* has more sites than any other area and yet is one of the smallest areas stretching around the Butt of Lewis from North Galson to Sgiogarstaigh (Skegersta in English). It includes three (75% of the sub-class) multi-vallate ditched enclosures. This includes the impressive site of Berie at Ness (NB 5420 6400) which has two large glacis ramparts hidden under heavy Post Medieval cultivation. Also included are five (42% of the sub-class) stack sites with long houses (class 5). These include Dun Eoradale (NMRS, NB 56 SW 13) and Dun Eistean (NMRS, NB 46 SE 05) neither of which are accessible from the shore. This area is also the site of two of the monastic sites (class 6) recorded. These are both located at Eoropie on the west side of Ness (NB 5123 6564 and NB 5109 6516). One enclosed CARH (class 6) may be seen at Dun Mara. The exact nature of the CARH on this site is unclear. The area has no records of segmented sites (classes 10 and 11), multi-vallate ditchless sites (class 3) or large uni-vallate settlements (class 4).

*Area 5* is the most dispersed of the areas and includes four (67% of the sub-class) multi-vallate ditchless (class 3) enclosures and three (25% of the sub-class) stacks with long houses (class 5). These include the impressive and accessible site of Rubha Shildinish (NMRS, NB 43 SE 01) which encloses three rectilinear and one figure-of-eight structures on a stack linked to the shore by a natural spur of land.

Four segmented sites (two class 10 and two class 11) may be seen, three on Eye Peninsula and one to the east of Stormoway Airport. These sites include Dun Dubha (NMRS, NB 53 SE 01) which is located on a large bulbous stack up to 70 metres in height that is enclosed by stone-faced walls surviving up to eight courses high. This area has no blockhouses (class 1), no large multi-vallate ditched sites (class 2) and no large uni-vallate settlements (class 4).

## Summary

As has already been indicated promontory enclosures are found in to five discrete areas (described above). These are each separated from the other by blank areas in the distribution that relate to the general lack of settlement in the record and to large areas of unsuitable terrain. Twelve sub-classes of promontory enclosure have been identified and defined on the basis of form, location and construction. These sub-classes are distributed all around the coast within the five areas.

Three of the sub-class, 2, 3, and 4, might point to the presence of major settlement activity. These are large non-segmented enclosures and tend to be mutually exclusive. Class 2 is found mostly around the Butt of Lewis, class 3 is found on the east coast and in the area between Garenin and Bru and class 4 is found in all the west coast areas but not at the Butt or on the east coast.

Classes 1 and 5 are smaller sites mostly located on stacks and involving major stone constructions, notably blockhouses and also long houses. There are only five

blockhouses, of which four are located on the west coast. Sites with long houses are found mostly around the Butt of Lewis and on the east coast but also in a concentration around Camas Uig.

Finally classes 8, 10 and 11 are segmented sites and may also mark a major class of settlement activity. These sites have internal space divisions between their enclosures and in three cases a CARH constructed within the inner enclosure. These sites are found in every area except for the areas around the Butt of Lewis and between Garenin and Bru. In general three interpretations may be placed upon the development of these sites, firstly that they expanded or contracted but remained essentially one enclosed area, secondly that they started out as single enclosures that were later either sub-divided or added to in order to create a site with two or more areas or segments. Finally it is possible that these sites were deliberately constructed to form linear nucleated enclosures such as major Scottish sites like Dunadd and Dunagoil. Ultimately only excavation will provide the answer, and even this may prove problematic due to the exposed and eroded nature of many of the sites in question.

## Conclusion

The two phases of study carried out to date, along with the two excavations, have shown that this class of site is not one homogeneous unit but rather a complex group of features with common locations that potentially span a time period from the Bronze Age to the post medieval period. Furthermore, their functions may be seen to range from the traditional 'defensive site' to agricultural and it cannot be ruled out that some performed a ritual function or were a symbol of status in society.

Further research is required to answer many of the questions that have arisen. This research will become harder as time and erosion takes its toll on the archaeological remains. So many uncertainties remain, but perhaps most notably is that of the relation of many of these sites to later prehistoric settlement. Much has been written, and is still being written, on the monumental architecture of the region, particularly relating to brochs or CARHs. However, here I have described a major class of monument which remains comparatively unstudied. This is particularly noticeable as the surviving remains indicate these structures would have, in many cases been equally as impressive or monumental as many of the CARHs. Some even enclose CARHs, though this relationship has either not been noted, or has been ignored previously.

Finally I would like to pose two of the questions that might be germane to the study of these sites in the future. Where do these sites fit chronologically? And if they did exist contemporaneously with the CARHs what was their relationship with, and interaction with those sites?

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