

13 CREAG DUBH

13.1 Physical description and location

The site (NGR: NB 5570 6148) is a 1km walk ESE from the township of Sgiogarstaigh, Ness. It is located in an area of high cliffs composed of Lewisian complex anorthosite and metasediments (Burgess & Church 1997, 291), which stretch from Port of Ness in the north to Tolsta in the south, some 15km. The east coast south of Sgiogarstaigh is very ragged, and almost entirely made up of geos and promontories, one of which is the site itself. The site is a very small promontory, 40m long and only 5m wide. All that is left of the archaeology is a small cairn of c 3m diameter at the extremity of this promontory (illus 46 B), a small section of wall on an offshore stack, with two turf walls and a circular structure on the mainland.

13.2 Erosion

The site is rapidly disappearing, with the cliff edges being undermined by marine erosion. The area is considered to be actively eroding by the Coastal

Erosion Assessment, Lewis (Burgess & Church 1996, 289).

13.3 Access

Access was gained to the cairn at the end of the promontory by fixing stakes and rock anchors along the length of the promontory, and using climbing techniques with dynamic rope. A small stack that survives to the north of the promontory was not accessed.

13.4 Previous work

There has been no previous work on this site.

13.5 The survey (illus 46)

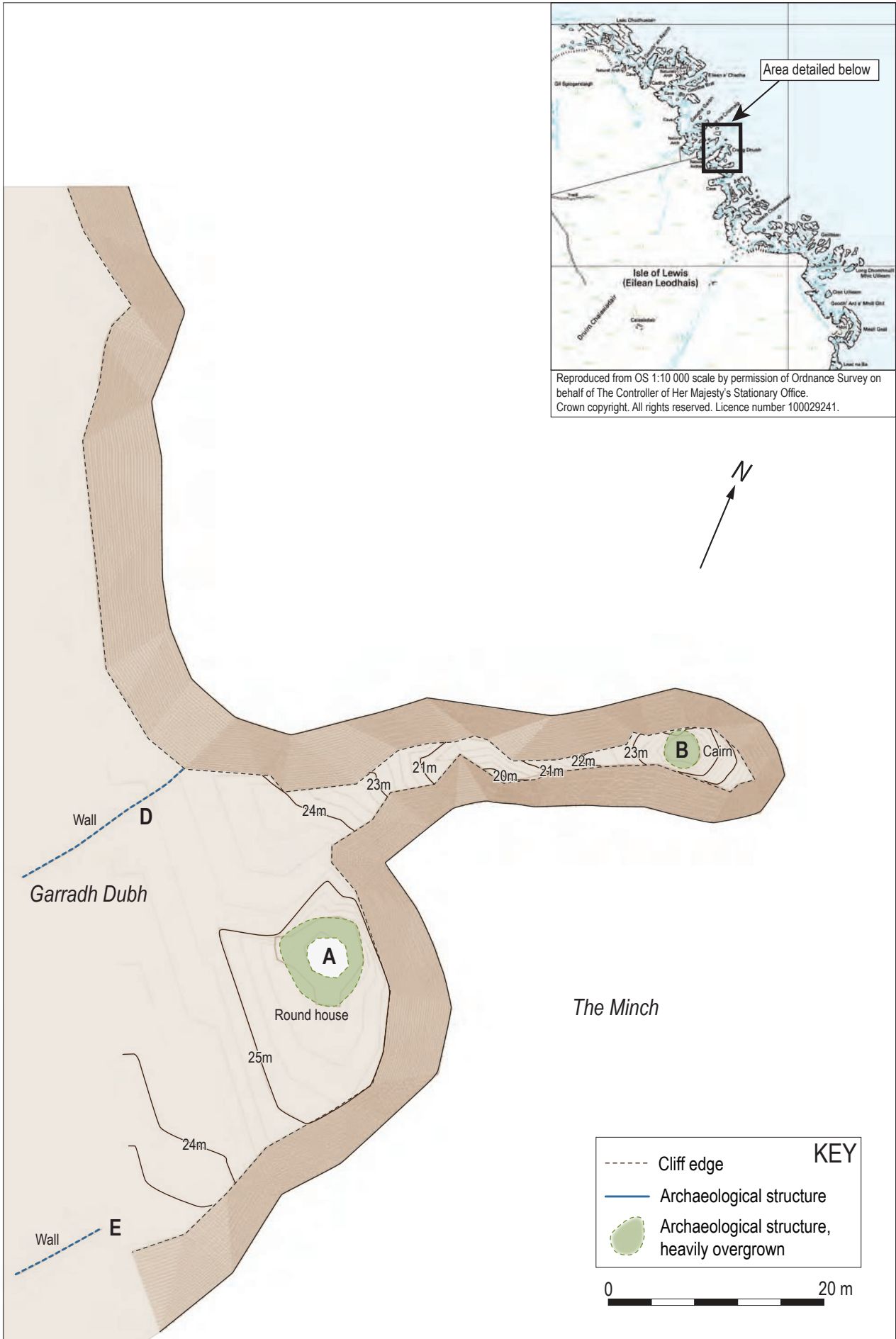
Structure A

Structure A was the slight remains of what seems to be a turf-built circular building c 10m in external



Illus 45 (above) The cairn on Creag Dubh from the east

Illus 46 (opposite) Location map and topographic survey of Creag Dubh



diameter, with walls *c* 0.4m thick. It was located on the mainland adjacent to the site.

Structure B

Structure B was the rapidly eroding remains of a stone, turf-covered cairn on the extreme eastern, seaward end of the peninsula. The surviving remains were *c* 3m diameter, but the eastern edge of the structure was heavily damaged by erosion. Two probable kerb stones lie on the south-western edge of the cairn (illus 45).

Structure C

Structure C was a stone wall fragment on the southern edge of a stack lying north of the peninsula. It was not possible to gain access to the stack without a boat, and this feature was therefore not surveyed.

Structure D

Structure D was a turf wall on the mainland to the west of the other archaeological features. It was damaged at its western end by peat cutting, but may originally have abutted wall Structure E, with which it formed an enclosure around the archaeological features. There is a ditch on the south side of the wall, and further inland, a second wall runs parallel to this ditch.

Structure E

The eastern end of a massive turf or turf and stone wall of varying width and construction, which extended well outwith the survey area. The wall had slumped heavily, and had been damaged by peat cutting and modern fencing. This was the north-eastern end of the Garadh Dubh (see discussion below).

13.6 Discussion

Creag Dubh (the black crag) is at the northern end

of the Garadh Dubh (the black enclosure wall), which forms the outfield head dyke of all the west coast townships. It runs parallel with the west coast of Lewis to Carloway in the south. As such it is one of the largest and potentially most important landscape features on the island, and is helpful in understanding the development of the island's settlement patterns.

The Garadh Dubh is of unknown antiquity, but as the major boundary feature of the west side of Lewis, it may belong to the earliest phase of coastal settlement on the west side of the island. Present evidence suggests the possibility that the coastal settlement pattern was established by the Iron Age, which may provide a possible date for the original line of the Garadh Dubh.

This has interesting implications for the round-house and cairn on the Creag Dubh. Both would fit with the known archaeological and architectural patterns of the later Bronze Age or earlier Iron Age in the islands (for example, the round houses at Cladh Hallan in South Uist, [Parker Pearson forthcoming](#); and the burial cairn at Cnip, Uig, [Close-Brooks 1995](#)). Creag Dubh is rapidly eroding and the cairn is already partially destroyed and separated from any relationships which it may or may not have had with other features in the vicinity such as the wall on the adjacent stack, which is also imminently threatened, or indeed the boundary wall, Structures D and E, with which it has the obvious place name connection.

13.7 Potential for future work

This site may well be destroyed in the next decade, depending upon the winter storm patterns. The cairn would benefit from immediate, total excavation, with trial trenching to investigate the mainland features, particularly the Garadh Dubh, the adjacent wall (Structures D and E) and the circular Structure A.