

1. INTRODUCTION

The Calanais Fields Project was conceived as a research and training project through the archaeology department of the University of Edinburgh, with excavations undertaken in 1999 and 2000 on land at Calanais, Isle of Lewis (NGR: NB 2125 3265; Illus 1). The site lay to the south-west of the Calanais Standing Stones (Site no.: NB23SW 1; Canmore ID 4156), on a triangular peninsula extending into Loch Ceann Hulabhig, a sea loch to the south of East Loch Roag; the land formed part of the former holdings of the University of Edinburgh, was used as rough grazing at the time of the excavations, and had been used for peat cutting in the past (Illus 2). The study area measured approximately 400m by 400m at *c* 10m AOD and comprised an area of deep peat attaining depths of up to 3m.

In January 1998: a watching brief (Coles et al 1998; Canmore ID 140912) was conducted during the excavation of a trench for an underground cable by Scottish Hydro-Electric in an area of previously undisturbed blanket peat immediately adjacent to Calanais Farm (Illus 1). The remains of at least three stone features were recorded, associated with a potentially prehistoric ground surface beneath *c* 1.4m of peat. These features were interpreted as walls, and limited excavation was carried out within the confines of the cable trench. The apparently good preservation of these features and their associated buried soil provided an ideal opportunity to further explore their extent and attempt to characterise/date them. Additionally, the close proximity to the Calanais Standing Stones complex provided a chance to examine the use of the landscape around a well-known and prominent monument. The Calanais Fields Project was established for that purpose and two seasons of excavation were carried out with undergraduate students.

From the outset it was intended that both the walls found during the watching brief and the areas they enclosed should be examined in an effort to determine their function. It was thought that excavation could reveal structures associated with agricultural activity, providing complementary information on the nature of occupation and economy. The overall objective was a better understanding of the settlement, subsistence and domestic landscape to contrast with the already well-explored ritual setting of the Calanais Stones.

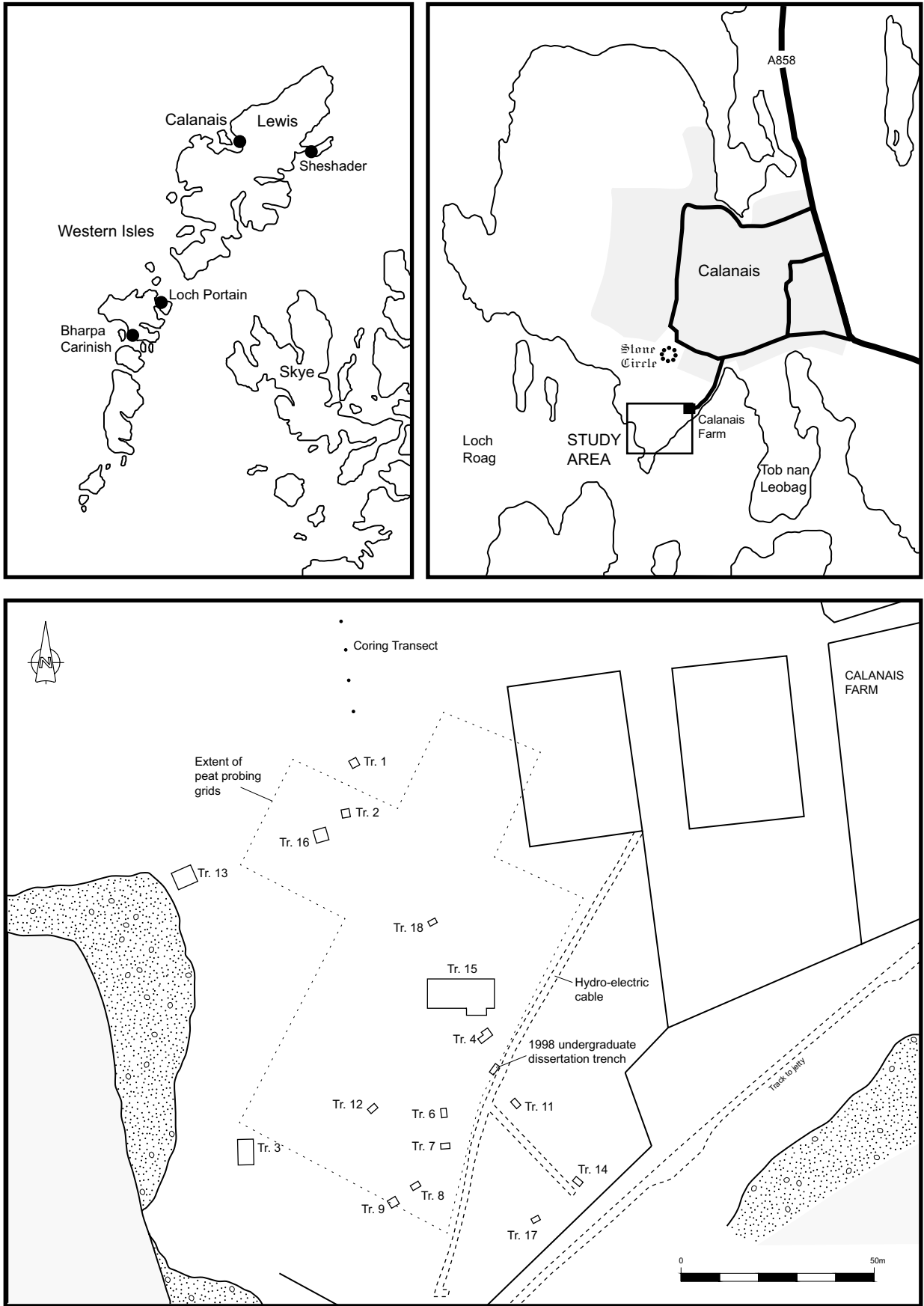
Fieldwork in 1999 was designed to evaluate, through trial trenching and a system of testing with a 2m steel peat probe, the nature, extent and potential of the archaeological features buried beneath the peat. It soon became clear that there was a complex and well-preserved field system and associated structures beneath the peat. The second season, in 2000, further explored the areas of interest partially uncovered in 1999 (Canmore ID 140912).

1.1 Post-excavation reporting

The fieldwork and post-excavation analysis was undertaken while the authors were postgraduate students at the University of Edinburgh and a draft publication report was produced in the years immediately following. After graduation, the authors moved on to other studies and full-time jobs, some of which were outside archaeology. As a result, the publication of this work was delayed.

The archaeological background and the specialist reports contained herein have not been revised since the original analyses and draft reporting were undertaken in the early 2000s, while some light revision of the discussion has occurred. A section on further reading is provided, highlighting relevant articles which have come to publication since this paper was first drafted.

Unpublished aspects of the analyses are contained within the archive.



Illus 1 Location map and trench plan



Illus 2 General view of Calanais Fields study area