

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Evidence for the earlier prehistory of Lewis consists largely of ritual and burial monuments, especially the well-known concentration of standing stone sites around Calanais (Armit 1996; Ashmore 2016). While the Calanais Stones are important structures, the settlement record of the period is poorly understood; in part this is a reflection of the environmental record in the region during the period following Neolithic settlement, as the extensive growth of blanket peat during prehistory and thereafter makes it difficult to discover and identify earlier features. Conversely, it is this growth of peat that has given us detailed records of environmental change and human activity and has resulted in the preservation of relatively intact prehistoric landscape features at Calanais.

Sub-peat features of probable prehistoric date had previously been noted in peat cuttings

and natural erosion, often in a very disturbed condition, in the Calanais area (Coles & Burgess 1994). In nearly all cases, these wall fragments were badly disturbed by the processes of peat cutting or natural erosion which had brought them to light. At Tob nan Leobag (NGR: NB 218 326), a low-lying peninsula projecting into upper Loch Roag immediately south of the Calanais Standing Stones, work on a series of field walls and possible enclosures exposed by peat cutting was able to demonstrate that they dated to the Late Bronze Age (Cowie 1979; Cowie 1980; Bohncke 1988; Canmore ID 4162). Traces of similar sub-peat 'field walls' were also recorded beside Loch Roag (NGR: NB 142 248) (Bohncke 1988). It was anticipated that the features identified at Calanais during the cable trench watching brief (Coles et al 1998) would provide further examples of prehistoric activity in the area, sealed beneath undisturbed peat.