

5. ARTEFACTS

5.1 Pottery

Melanie Johnson

A small assemblage of 64 sherds of handmade, coarse pottery was found, weighing 450g in total. A full catalogue can be found in the site archive.

Fifty-six sherds were found in Trench 3. The majority of these were small, plain body sherds but four flat base sherds, seven rim sherds and three decorated sherds were found. The rim sherds represent five different vessels and are flaring or simple rounded upright rims (Illus 42, nos 7 and 10). They are all likely to be Craggan Ware, of late- or post-medieval date, corroborating the interpretation of this structure as a possible bothy. One decorated sherd comprised a possible rim or carination decorated with parallel curved incised lines, the surface of the carination also decorated with incised lines (Illus 42, no. 32); this

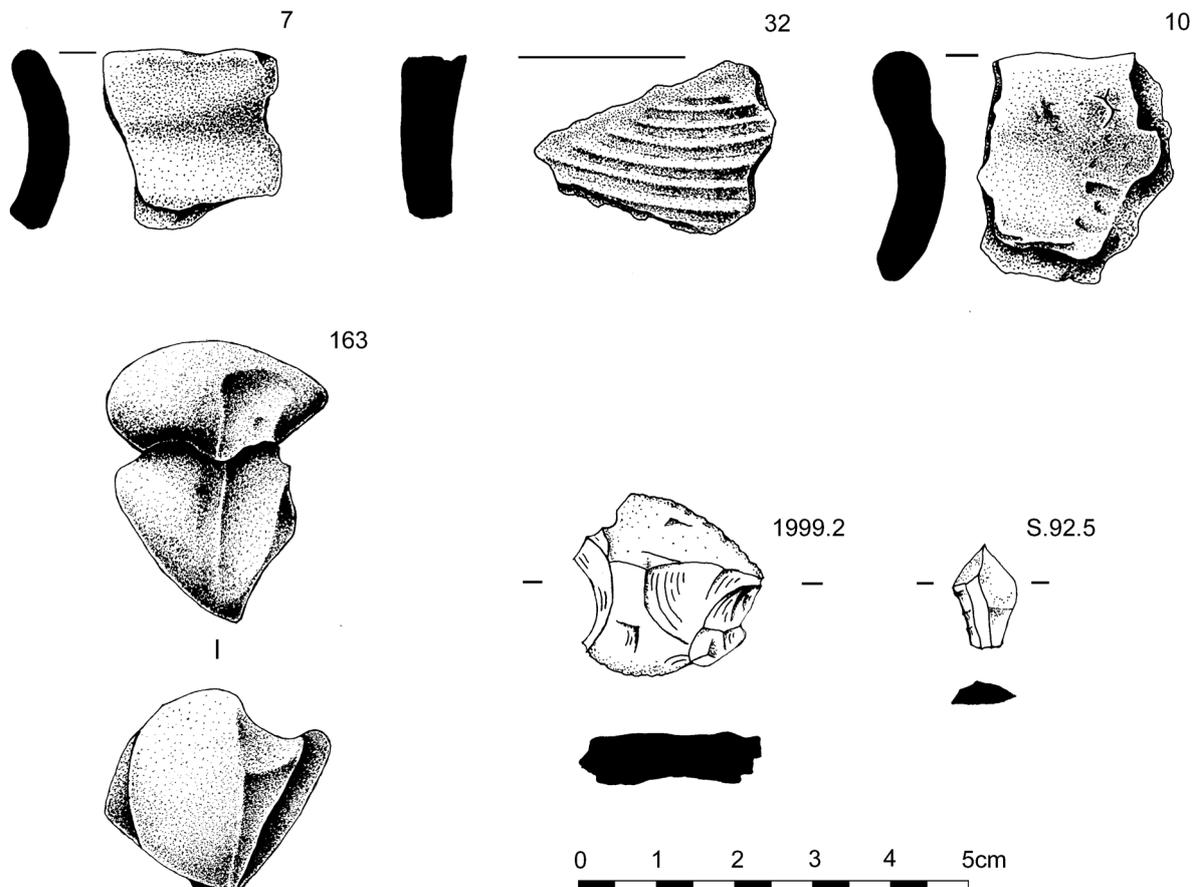
is likely to be Neolithic in date. Two other sherds were decorated with oval stab impressions and may be Bronze Age in date, indicating the mixed nature of this assemblage.

Eight sherds were found in Trench 13. These sherds were all small, plain body sherds. Most of the sherds were recovered from contexts which post-date the structure, although one sherd was recovered from the wall core. The small size, degree of abrasion and undiagnostic nature of these sherds render it very difficult to make any interpretations of date or function.

5.2 Chipped stone

Graeme Warren

A total of 169 worked or probably worked pieces were macroscopically classified according to standard analytical principles (Finlayson et al 2000). A full report and catalogue can be found in the site archive.



Illus 42 Finds

Worked material was recovered from ten trenches, mainly in small numbers but with a much larger scatter from Trench 3. The assemblages are broadly similar in terms of technology and raw materials and, apart from Trench 3, the numbers are too small to allow meaningful analysis.

5.2.1 Raw materials

Four raw materials are present: flint, quartz, banded shale and pitchstone (Table 3). The flint was likely to have been available in small amounts as pebbles on local beaches. The cortex (present on 50% of the flint) is heavily battered, and the pebbles rounded. The flint has been greatly affected by post-depositional staining and patination, while some is burnt, but most of the flint was grey when fresh.

The quartz utilised in the assemblage takes two forms – a grey/white opaque quartz which is sometimes powdery and sometimes more crystalline; the latter includes occasional micaceous inclusions. It is of variable quality, but some pieces appear to be particularly friable. Quartz of this form is available widely in Lewis in secondary and primary deposits, and large quantities of this material are found as natural pieces within soil samples from the site. Twenty-two of the quartz artefacts (41% of the total) are of high-quality, clear quartz crystals: a durable and robust material. This is also likely to have been available locally, although the exact source is unknown.

There are three chips and a chunk of a metamorphosed sedimentary deposit, identified as baked or banded shale. This material, which is also known from Neolithic/Bronze Age assemblages from the nearby kerbed cairn at Olcote (Warren 2005) is presumably comparable to the mylonite identified

by Ballin (Ballin 2016) at the main Calanais ritual complex: all the materials are characterised by thin horizons of grey or blue and by notable weathering. These are poorly understood materials: mylonite for example was identified by Simpson (1976) at Northton but later described as banded mudstone from Skye (Wickham-Jones 1986: 7). Outcrops of shales to the north of the site are known, although further work is required on this raw material in order to clarify patterns of exploitation.

Two artefacts of pitchstone are in the assemblage. One is a crude pitchstone, olive-green in colouration, with large quartz inclusions. The other is a much higher-quality, dark grey material – visually much more like classic Arran pitchstone. The presence of pitchstone in the assemblage is of some interest as, although Arran pitchstone is found on prehistoric sites throughout northern Britain and Ireland, it was previously unknown on the Isle of Lewis and this find, over 180 miles from its source, is an important addition to our knowledge of the distribution of this material. Although pitchstone is used from the Mesolithic through to the Bronze Age, the widespread exchange appears to be especially characteristic of the Neolithic (see Warren 2001 for discussion). In many instances pitchstone forms only a very small aspect of assemblages and its exchange is best interpreted in terms of the results of some kind of symbolic meaning and association.

5.2.2 Review of assemblages

Most finds (82% of the total) came from Trench 3. Three contexts were particularly rich: topsoil; the putative floor of the structure; and a deposit within a bedrock hollow. Other contexts produced material in low quantities.

Table 3 Number of finds by trench

	3	4	5	9	10	12	13	15	16	18	Total
Banded shale	4										4
Flint	97	2		5		3		2		1	110
Pitchstone	1					1					2
Quartz: def	27		2	1	1		2	3	1		37
Quartz: prob	10		2	2		1	1				16
Total	139	2	4	8	1	5	3	5	1	1	169

There is one retouched and one possibly retouched flint from Trench 3. *S 92.5* is a small and unusual patinated backed piece (Illus 42). Short blunting retouch is visible on two sides of the blank, but it is difficult to interpret the overall form of the artefact as the apparent break visible in the drawing does not actually appear to be a break. It is probably best interpreted simply as a backed piece and is not chronologically distinctive. *1999.18* is a distal fragment of a secondary flake with an unusual area of irregular flake scarring, seemingly initiated from the dorsal surface. The scarring is not morphologically distinctive and is slightly differentiated from the flake surface by greater chemical alteration of the latter. This rather undistinguished flake may be an irregular retouched artefact of some kind but the scarring may also have resulted from damage.

The assemblage from Trench 3 demonstrates the use of bipolar and platform techniques to utilise local flints and quartzes and produce small flakes (Table 4). Banded shales and pitchstone were also used, although the small quantities do not allow any classification of the technology employed in their manufacture. The retouched pieces offer little indication of the age of the assemblage. Local parallels include the flint, quartz and mylonite assemblage from the main Calanais ritual complex (Ballin 2016) and the assemblage from the Olcote kerb cairn (Warren 2005). Both assemblages include Bronze Age and Neolithic elements, and demonstrate a mixture of platform and bipolar technologies. The Calanais Fields assemblage therefore has good

local parallels suggesting a Neolithic or Bronze Age date. Looking further afield, flint and quartz industries utilising bipolar and platform techniques are recorded on Barra in late Neolithic/Bronze Age contexts (Wickham-Jones 1995). Quartz is found on many sites, for example Northton and Rosinish (Shepherd 1976; Simpson 1976; see Saville & Ballin 2001 for discussion). The presence of pitchstone may be evidence of an earlier date for the assemblage – possibly Neolithic rather than Bronze Age – although such a conclusion can only be tentative.

The assemblages from the other trenches (Trenches 9, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18) are all too small to allow meaningful analysis, and include examples of flint and quartz flakes, cores, chunks and bashed lumps. An irregular flake of pitchstone was recovered from the palaeosol in Trench 12. A scraper (*1999.2*) manufactured on a bipolar flake, with both convex and concave working edges (Illus 42) was one of two flakes found in Trench 4. Trench 15, the core of the excavated prehistoric features, contained two flint chips and a regular quartz flake found in the palaeosol within the oval structure, a further crystal quartz flake in the palaeosol, and six further quartz pieces were found within the peat. It is striking that so few chipped stones were found in the largest area exposed. Generally comparable in type to the larger collection from Trench 3, they give further evidence of the use of local raw materials and bipolar technologies. Most of the finds are from palaeosols, or sometimes within peat deposits, and much of the material may be disturbed or secondary.

Table 4 Composition of assemblage from Trench 3

	Flint	Quartz definite	Quartz probable	Banded shale	Pitchstone	Total
Bashed lump		1				1
Bipolar core	4	3				7
Blade	2	1			1	4
Chip	20			3		23
Chunk	15	2	5	1		23
Core		1	1			2
Flake irreg	40	10	4			54
Flake reg	16	9				25
Total	97	27	10	4	1	139

5.2.3 Conclusions

The small lithic assemblage offers another example of an increasingly well-documented Neolithic/Bronze Age lithic tradition in the Calanais region which utilises a mixture of bipolar and platform techniques to work locally available flint, quartz and banded shale/mylonite. The assemblage is generally dispersed, and only found in significant numbers in Trench 3. The presence of pitchstone at Calanais Fields is of interest, and may imply that a Neolithic date is appropriate for aspects of the assemblage. It is possible that at least some of the less diagnostic lithics may be later in date.

5.3 Pumice

Anthony Newton

Six pieces of brown pumice, one of which has probably been worked (Illus 42), were found in Trench 3 and are typical of the pumice found in the Western Isles. There are at least 11 sites in Lewis where pumice has been documented and a total of 48 sites (over 780 pieces) in the Western Isles (Newton 1999). Except for a single site, all the sites

in Lewis are found along the western coast of the island, although these excavations have produced the only recorded pumice find in the Calanais area. All of the sites in Lewis where pumice has been found are Bronze Age or younger.

The pumice found at Calanais Fields is dacitic in composition and is physically similar to other pumice found in the Western Isles and the rest of Scotland. It was erupted from one of a series of eruptions of the Katla volcanic system, southern Iceland (Newton 1999); the eruptions which produced the type of pumice found at Calanais Fields occurred between *c* 6600 ¹⁴C years BP and *c* 1626 ¹⁴C years BP. It is difficult, however, to correlate a pumice piece to an individual eruption even after undertaking geochemical analyses and so pumice can be difficult to date, but can still be useful

The pumice would have provided a useful abrasive to the people who lived at Calanais. Other sites have produced pumice which shows signs of having been used for sharpening objects such as antler, bone and wood and it was probably also used to prepare hides. Due to its low density there is also evidence that pumice was used as a fishing float.