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## 8 STAC NA CUIBHIG

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### 8.1 *Physical description and location*

Stac na Cuibhig (NGR: NB 2293 4656) is a strangely shaped, tidal island, some 30–40m in diameter and 15–20m tall, located just north of Dalbeg on the west coast of Lewis (*illus 1, 21, 22*). There is a large cairn-like pile of stones on its summit, which the CEAL project (*Burgess & Church 1997*, 213) lists as a settlement mound. The surrounding cliffs are of basement Lewisian gneiss, with overlying glacial tills, and are actively eroding (*ibid*, 214–5).

There was a curving stone-faced bank and a pile of stones on the summit of the stack (*illus 23*); the stone bank has eroded severely due to the collapse of the cliff edge.

### 8.2 *Erosion*

The active erosion recorded in 1996–7 (*Burgess*

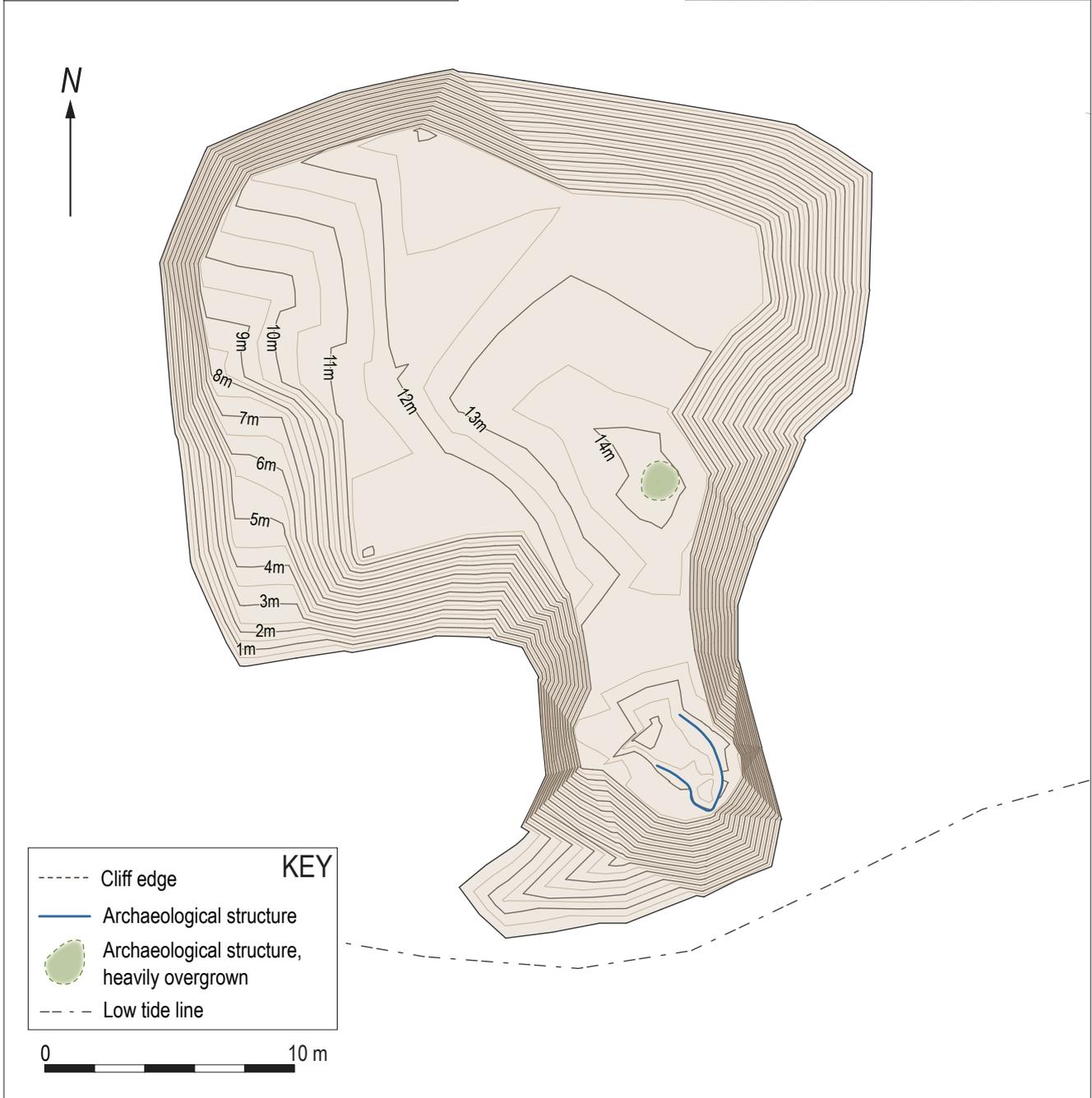
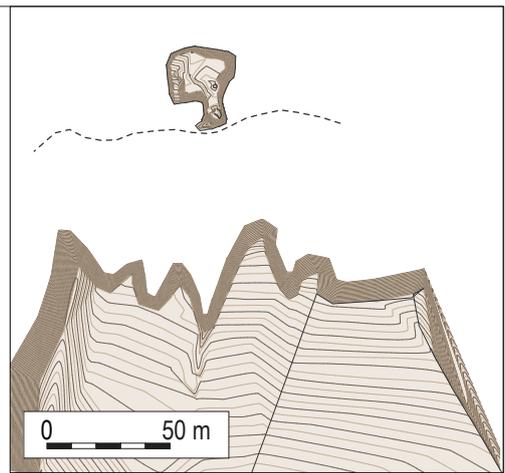
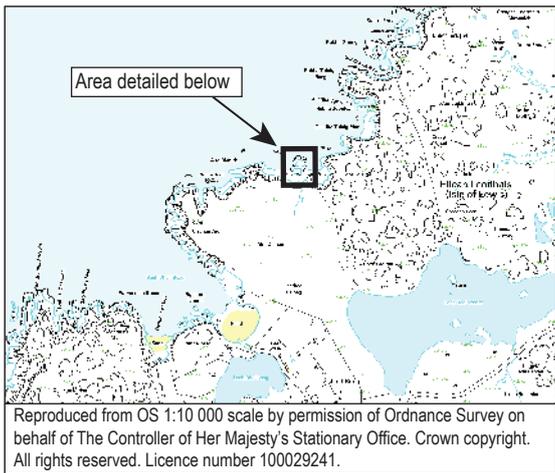
*& Church 1997*, 214) is continuing, with scars of recent falls and fallen blocks visible in the area. The summit itself is also actively threatened, with the main structure on the stack being progressively destroyed.

### 8.3 *Access*

Access to Stac na Cuibhig required some difficult but well-protected climbing. A steep but easy path on the landward side led down to the foreshore, from which at low tide it was possible to scramble over to the natural arch, which formed the edge of the stack. This feature formed the only dry access to the summit, which was achieved safely through the use of climbing techniques using very regular rock anchors. There were also abundant rock anchors on top of the island.



*Illus 21 Stac na Cuibhig from the WSW*



Illus 22 Location map and topographic survey of Stac na Cuibhig



*Illus 23 Detail of stone bank on Stac na Cuibhig from the north. Scale 1.2 m long.*

#### 8.4 Previous work

This site was identified as a stack with a settlement mound, by the Coastal Erosion Assessment, Lewis (Burgess & Church 1997, 213) but they were unable to gain access to the site. No other work has been undertaken on the site.

#### 8.5 The survey (*illus 22*)

The top of the island is dominated by a large pile of stone blocks, similar to the underlying geology. Close inspection of this material determined that it is possibly entirely natural in origin. Most blocks measured over 2m in length and formed no discernible structure. However, a small hammerstone of a red metamorphic rock quite unlike the gneiss was discovered amongst this material (SF51).

Directly above the natural arch on the landward side of the summit plateau, a stone-faced bank (*illus 23*) arced for approximately a third of a full circle, the remainder having been destroyed by erosion. It was impossible to determine the original length of this wall, as both ends had been lost to erosion.

The bank was regular in cross section along its length, regular in its arc and maintained a height of 0.5m. The soil between the stones in the bank was a good quality topsoil of organic silty clay, possibly indicating that the bank was originally a turf and stone wall which had slumped over time. This soil was not present anywhere else on the island. The stones of the bank included many beach cobbles of c 300mm diameter, which again were not present elsewhere on the summit. These seem all the more unusual given that the plateau was covered in large, naturally rectangular blocks, suitable for building. However, one of these large blocks was used as one of two courses at what may have been a wall termination or one half of an entrance, at the end of the arc, on the edge of the landward cliff. The bank deposits of the arc are eroding quickly and there is no evidence of archaeological deposits.

#### 8.6 Discussion

Although Stac na Cuibhig has been the site of human activity culminating in a structure, there is not enough evidence to adequately support any

further interpretation. It is possible that the low bank may have originally been part of a circular shieling-type structure, possibly with turf walls, which it resembles. There is, however, no surviving

evidence as to its age or what alternative functions the bank might have had, as it has been largely destroyed by erosion.