
3 Location

Cnoc Dubh, meaning ‘*the black knoll*’ in Gaelic, is a small hillock situated approximately 1½ km south-west of the village Gearraidh na h-Aibhne, Uig parish, and a few hundred metres from the southern shores of Loch Ceann Hulabhig (NGR NB 2318 2998) (Illus 1). There is some discussion as to whether it is most correct to spell the names of the sea loch Ceann Hulabhig, and the stone circle by the same name, with an initial ‘H’, as Hulabhig, or with an initial ‘Th’, as Thulabhig (Mary MacLeod *pers comm*). To avoid confusing matters, the author has chosen to spell the two names with an H, as this is the form used on most Ordnance Survey maps.

The knoll is roughly D-shaped, with an approximately rectilinear rockface running parallel with, and facing, the road between Gearraidh na h-Aibhne and Tuimsgearraidh (the B 8011) to the northwest (Illus 2), whereas the curved, and gently sloping, lee of the knoll faces the boggy interior of the island. The quartz vein covers part of the said rockface, with full view of the sea-loch and, at a few kilometres’ distance, the Calanais ritual complex (Illus 3). The site is situated almost exactly on a SE-NW line connecting the stone circles Ceann Hulabhig, or Calanais IV (in front of the knoll), and Airidh nam Bidearan (behind the knoll). If this line is extended further to the northwest, and across Loch Ceann

Hulabhig, it almost meets the Calanais ritual complex and the stone circle Calanais I.

As briefly touched on in the Introduction, the site is situated in a rich ritual landscape, surrounded as it is by stone circles, standing stones and cairns (Illus 1). The focal point of this landscape is the ritual complex of Calanais approximately 3.5 km to the north-north-west. Most known prehistoric settlements are situated further away from the vein, the most prominent being Berie Sands (Lacaille 1937), Dalmore (Sharples *in prep.*) and Barvas (Cowie *in prep.*), cf. Table 1. Most probably, one or more prehistoric settlements are to be found in the area around Calanais, as suggested by Patrick Ashmore’s work at Calanais (Ashmore *in prep.*) and the Calanais Field Project (Flitcroft *et al.* 2000).

The immediate surroundings of the Cnoc Dubh quarry include a number of features, such as, stone structures and signs of agricultural activity. The most prominent stone construction is a beehive structure (corbelled shieling) on the north-eastern slope of the knoll; it is in the process of being re-constructed by Mr Crawford. North of the knoll, and c. 6–7 m from the corbelled shieling, is a small oval structure of unknown date and function (prehistoric dwelling / modern sheep shelter?).

Agricultural remains include extensive dyke



Illus 2 View of the Cnoc Dubh rock face and vein, from the north-west.



Illus 3 View towards the stone circle Ceann Hulabhig and, across the sea loch, the Calanais ritual complex; from the terrace above the Cnoc Dubh quartz vein.

systems in the area around Cnoc Dubh, mainly in the hinterland to the south-east. Systems of rigs are to be found not only in front of the site, between the vein and the road (B 8011), and across the road, but also on the terrace above it, and behind it (Illus 3). Parts of the knoll (the gneiss), primarily south and south-west of the vein, has been quarried for building material, probably for the structures north of the site. This activity may explain an iron object lodged in a crack in the gneiss above the vein.

Corbelled shielings are of unknown construction date, but continued to be used until the late nine-

teenth century (Strachan 1999; Crawford 2003) – the other stone structures cannot be dated without further investigation, and finds of datable material (diagnostic artefacts or structures, or organic material for radiocarbon dating). The agricultural remains are of unknown date as well. It is therefore not possible at present to relate any of these features to the quartz vein at Cnoc Dubh. The vein itself, and the activities associated with it, cannot be dated more precisely than to the period before the abandonment of flaked lithic technology, which on Lewis may have happened in the Late Bronze Age / Early Iron Age.