

LEWIS AND HARRIS ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP

NEWSLETTER

Since our inaugural meeting on 27th August 1991, the Group has met on three occasions. The first was an evening session in the Museum in preparation for our first field trip. This was an afternoon visit to two promontory forts: Dun Dubh or 'Black Sandy' between Bayble and Sheshader, Point; and Rudha Shilldinish at Holm. Despite the atrocious weather, we were gratified that 18 enthusiastic people turned out. The contrast between the two sites was most apparent - Dun Dubh with its impressive defensive bank and absence of extant domestic remains (there may once have been turf huts in the interior, now leaving no trace above ground level), and Rudha Shilldinish with its extensive evidence of structures and buildings. Some interest was expressed in the possibility of carrying out a survey of these remains. We have since established that no drawn records or survey of this site exist at any scale.

Our most recent meeting was a visit to Valtos, Uig, on 5th October. Again, the weather did little to help, but we were delighted to meet Anna McKinnon and friends from the Uig historical society, and glad of their local knowledge of this very fascinating area. The information sheets which we prepared were also a useful innovation, and will probably form a model for future site visits. As quite a few people were unable to join the fieldtrip on that occasion, it may be worthwhile repeating a visit to the Valtos area next year, especially if there are any new archaeological developments.

These fieldtrips have been successful and will undoubtedly become a regular feature of the Group's activities in the future. However, there is also a programme of evening meetings coming up in the next few weeks.

On Tuesday 22nd October, the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland's 1991-92 Buchan lecture will be given by John Barber at the Town Hall at 8pm. The subject is 'Settlement in the Outer Hebrides: Neolithic to the Lordship of the Isles', and is not to be missed. Admission free.

On Tuesday 29th October, our own Sue Hotherhall is talking to the Natural History Society, Curacag, at An Lanntair, on the archaeology of the east side of Lewis. Admission is free to members of Curacag, £1 to non-members.

So much for informing and educating ourselves, whether by site visits or through lectures. The Group should also now begin to think about making a positive contribution to the archaeology of the island. One useful way to do this would be to help with the updating of the sites and monuments record, as discussed at the inaugural meeting. We have therefore arranged to meet on Monday 28th October at the museum at 8pm. Richard Langhorne will acquaint us with the practicalities of the job (eg, transferring

data onto maps and record cards, map-hanging, etc), so that we can start to make progress with the task. Perhaps some individuals might like to take over responsibility for one aspect of the task, which they could pursue thereafter at their own convenience.

We are also thinking about active fieldwork that members of the group might carry out. Sue Hothersall and myself have begun the recording of a blackhouse at Upper Bayble as the first part, perhaps, of a much wider study. This involves doing detailed drawings at 1:50 of the elevations, sections and plan. Anyone who would be interested in joining us in this work would be very welcome - experience is not necessary as we can give training. Please contact either one of us for details.

We are also keen to go ahead with a detailed survey of the promontory site at Rudha Shilldinish. This would be an important contribution that the Group could make, and it would also provide an excellent training ground for ourselves in the techniques of survey. Please let Sue or myself know if you would be interested in taking part.

So far we have kept the group as an informal body, with the aim of getting the most out of the archaeology with a minimum of paperwork and administration. While recognising that this blissful state probably cannot continue indefinitely, we are in no hurry to create yet another committee, with its attendant constitution, office-bearers and membership fees. 'Membership' at present extends to anyone who attends any of our meetings or takes part in any of our activities, and of course new 'members' are always welcome. We will continue to fund our fieldtrips in the meantime by taking a collection on the day to cover immediate (minibus) expenses. Copies of the information sheets can be ordered at 10p per sheet. Our next fieldtrip is proposed for the Butt of Lewis, perhaps around the middle of November, but as always we rely on you for ideas and suggestions.

Finally, do you remember the discovery of an organic object made by my husband Alan and myself during peat cutting this spring? It was taken to the Royal Museum of Scotland for conservation and analysis, and we have now received an interim statement (see next week's gazette). It appears to be a matted piece of woollen felt, attached to which are strands of presently-unidentified cord, some plaited, some twisted. Samples have been taken to test for dye and for radiocarbon dating, but its context at the bottom of the peat indicates that it is of considerable age. It may be part of a hood or a bag, although now it is thought more likely to be the felt lining for a boot, similar in function to the straw stuffing found in the boot of the recently discovered Bronze Age 'glacier man' from the Italian/Austrian alps. The Royal Museum is hoping to excavate in the area of the find in 1992.

This object has now been declared Treasure Trove, and as the

finders we are apparently to receive "an undisclosed reward", which I understand privately is to be £250. This is a very timely windfall, which we will be pleased to donate to the Archaeology Group for the purchase of equipment.

Carol Cunningham
Burncrook, Upper Bayble.
Tel. (0851) 870863

17th October 1991.