



BC	1263	Battle of Largs, King Haakon dies	1872	Education Act 1872	
c.10000	1266	Treaty of Perth	1874	Bernera Riot	
c.6000	1275	Battle of Ronaldsway	1880s	Canadian Prairies available	
Grassland, hazel-scrub, ferns cover islands	1300	Dutch already fishing Herring	1880	Steamer pier Lochboisdale	
First people arrive??	1354	John of Islay Lord of the Isles	1884	Napier Commission	
3900	1350s	Borve Castle on Benbecula built	1886	Crofting Act	
Vegetation becoming more open	1398	Henry Sinclair visits America??	1887	Paire Deer raid	
3800	1468	Impignoration of Orkney	1888	Aignish Riot	
Climate deteriorates	1492	<i>Columbus reaches America</i>	1897	Government purchases land	
3500	1493	Lordship of Isles forfeit	Kyle Railway opens	Golden Road on Harris	
Allt Crystal settlement	1506	Stornoway Castle captured	1900	Flannans lighthouse mystery	
3200	c.1520	Rodel Church built	1901	Railway reaches Mallaig	
Eilean Domhnuill house	1540	King James V visits	1904	Loss of <i>SS Norge</i> at Rockall	
3150	1547	Alasdair Crodach buried Rodel	1906	Vatersay raid	
Shulishader axe	1550s	Cromwellian garrison	1906	Harris Tweed Trade Mark	
c.3000	1598	Fife Adventurers	1910	Adabrock bronze hoard found	
Chambered Tombs being used	1601	Battle of Carinish	1912	Mingulay evacuated	
c.2900	1603	Union of the Crowns	1915	First Great Skuas breed	
Callanish Stones	1607	Stornoway Burgh of Barony	1918	Leverhulme buys Lewis	
2700	1653	Cromwellian fort built	U-boat shells Village Bay	1919	<i>lolaire</i> shipwreck
2600	1666	<i>Great Fire of London;</i>	1919	Martin Martin visits	
Not many trees left		<i>Newton realises gravity of situation</i>	1700	Treaty of Union	
c.2500			1715	Jacobite rising	
Callanish cairn			1721	Kelp-making introduced to isles	
c.2000			1722	Flora MacDonald born	
Chambered cairns sealed up			1727	Smallpox epidemic on Hirta	
Bronze age, Beaker pots			1741	Tigh Chearsabhagh built	
cremations, cist burials			1745	Bonnie Prince Charlie arrives	
1500			First emigrants leave Barra		
Peat bogs developing			1746	Battle of Culloden	
1159			1760	Sheep farming introduced	
Hekla erupts in Iceland			1764	Sir Alexander MacKenzie born	
c.800			1770	Grass, clover and turnip seeds introduced, farming reforms	
Callanish abandoned			1776	<i>American Declaration of Independence</i>	
Iron Age round houses			1786	John Knox visits	
700			1789	Eilean Glas lighthouse	
Oldest Broch deposits			c.1800	Crofting system introduced	
600			1816	Stornoway Old Pier renovated	
c.325			1820s	Start of large scale clearances	
<i>Pytheas circumnavigates Britain</i>			1830	Collapse of Kelp Boom	
214			Mermaid sighted		
<i>Great Wall of China constructed</i>			1831	Lewis chessmen found at Uig	
100			1833	Barra Head lighthouse	
Brochs at peak			1840s	Potato blight	
c.55			1841	Fudaigh Mor cleared	
Diodorus Siculus mention			1842	Harris Tweed invented	
AD			1843	Disruption in the Kirk	
33			1844	James Mathieson buys Lewis	
<i>Death of Christ</i>			Regular steamer to Stornoway		
43			1850s	Many evictions	
Roman invasion			1851	Major clearances on Barra	
c.70			1852	Amish Point lighthouse	
Pliny the Elder			1853	Annie Jane shipwreck	
83			1860	Herring fishing gets important	
Agricola's fleet visits Orkney			1862	Butt of Lewis lighthouse	
c.100			1865	Stornoway Harbour Commission	
Brochs abandoned			1867	Callanish cleared of peat	
c.150			1869	Castlebay major Herring port	
Ptolemy refers to <i>Ebudae</i>					
c.500					
Irish monks arrive					
c.620					
Cille Bharra established					
632					
<i>Death of Muhammad</i>					
700s					
Norsemen start to appear in West					
793					
Major Viking raids begin					
795					
Iona first attacked					
800s					
Norse migration					
871					
Onund Wooden Leg arrives Barra					
c.872					
Harald Fairhair King of Norway					
Sigurd of Moere 1st Earl of Orkney					
955					
Earl Sigurd the Stout baptised					
1000					
Leif Ericson discovers America					
Earl Gilli governor					
1014					
Thorfinn becomes Earl					
Battle of Clontarf					
1065					
Earl Thorfinn the Mighty dies					
1066					
<i>Battle of Stamford Bridge</i>					
<i>Battle of Hastings</i>					
1079					
Kingdom of Man & the Isles					
1098					
Magnus Barelegs expedition					
1156					
Isles partitioned					
Somerled takes Inner Hebrides					
Earl Rognvald goes to Holy Land					
1171					
Sweyn Asleifson killed at Dublin					
c.1200					
Teampall na Trionaid founded					
1231					
Last Norse Earl dies (John Harraldson)					



Moonset over Callanish at the major lunar standstill

After the last Ice Age ended about 12,000 years ago, Mesolithic nomadic hunters arrived in Scotland. Many sites attest the presence of these people, but evidence in the Outer Hebrides remains sparse. Most probably this is because relative sea level was 5-10m lower than today. As a result, much land and archaeological evidence, has been lost to the sea, especially off the shallow west coasts.

By 4000BC, Neolithic farmers were settled in the area and for over 1,500 years their culture flourished. The houses, tombs and standing stones they built are among the most spectacular Neolithic monuments in Britain.

The Bronze Age succeeded the Neolithic and left behind burnt mounds, middens and ruins of small houses. Individual burial in stone cists or barrows became the norm, either as cremations or inhumations. This period was marked by a deterioration in climate and the appearance of

bronze tools and weapons as well as Beaker style pots.

About 700BC larger round houses started to appear and later the spectacular brochs, some with large settlements around them, were developed. Iron tools and weapons were revolutionary developments during this time. The Outer Hebrides remained peripheral, but later as part of the Pictish Kingdom, they started to experience more outside influence.

In the 8<sup>th</sup> century the Scandinavians began to appear. Large scale migration took place during the 9<sup>th</sup> century, followed by the *Golden Age of the Vikings*. The Norse domination lasted for nearly 500 years and this influence can still be seen in many place-names today. Orkney was of great strategic importance during Viking times, and the exploits of the Earls and their supporters are related colourfully in the *Orkneyinga Saga*.

Medieval times saw a small

influx of Lowland Scots, however the Western Isles were remote to Scotland for a long time. After the Jacobite rebellions major political changes brought them much more into the mainstream. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the notorious clearances removed thousands of native inhabitants, and created the crofting lands we see today.

The region was opened up with the advent of steam power in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when sea transport became more reliable and railways were built to ports such as Oban. During the later 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century Herring fishing, two World Wars, improvements in agriculture and North Sea Oil were all significant.

Recently an influx of immigrants from the mainland, has slowed the population decline. Wind, wave and tidal power generation are likely to make an impact on economic development in the near future.





*Bharpa Langass on North Uist is well preserved*

**NEOLITHIC AGE** The first settlers to the Western Isles were probably Mesolithic hunter-gatherers around 7000BC. However, the earliest substantial remaining structures are the many prominent chambered cairns, domestic sites and standing stones built by settled Neolithic farmers.

The introduction of agriculture brought with it a different lifestyle involving animal husbandry, as well as the planting and harvesting of crops. Natural resources such as fish, crustacea, molluscs, wild animals and plants were still exploited but no longer as the main source of food.

*Heel shaped cairn, Barra*



Everything that is known about Neolithic people has been gleaned from archaeology. The language and beliefs are unknown, but the many artefacts cast light on their way of life. These include human and animal bones, pottery, beautifully carved objects as well as stone and bone tools.

**Chambered cairns** are found throughout the islands, and are particularly numerous in the Uists. Most are prominently sited on hilltops or ridges above good agricultural land. They are monuments to the dead characteristic of Neolithic times which occur throughout the Atlantic coast of Europe.

These monumental structures are stone built and were used for funerary and ritual purposes. They were constructed from around 3500BC and some remained in use for a millennium. The large scale of many suggests that society was organised and successful before being able to spare the time and effort to create such structures. Most are ruinous, having been used as quarries over the years, or cleared out in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Chambered cairns typically have a central chamber with an entrance passage. While most in the Western Isles are round, other variations include heel-shaped and long cairns. Some

*Bharpa Langass showing entrance to passage*



have several cells off the main chamber and many have a fore-court which may be enclosed by horns.

Massive stones are a feature of many of these cairns. Externally they are often surrounded by a kerb of massive uprights, with especially impressive megaliths at the entrance. Internally they are frequently divided by large upright stalls. The walls and corbelled roofs are usually built with very large slabs. Although most are now ruinous piles of stones one can imagine the labour and craftsmanship that went into these structures.

Bharpa Langass on North Uist is the best preserved chambered cairn in the Outer Hebrides, with an intact chamber and pas-



*Dun Bharpa, above Craigston, Barra, is well preserved with impressive kerbstones*

sage. There are many other impressive cairns to visit throughout the isles. Unfortunately few are signposted but finding them and admiring the view is all part of the pleasure in visiting these enigmatic monuments.



*Reineval chambered cairn, South Uist*

*Bharpa Langass entrance passage from inside*



**NEOLITHIC  
TIMELINE**

- BC
- c.11000 Ice in retreat
- c.7000 First hunter-gatherers arrive?
- 3500 Settlement at Allt Chrìsal, Barra
- 3150 Unstan Ware
- Carinish hearth
- Shulishader axe
- Grooved Ware
- 3000 Chambered Tombs
- Callanish stone ring
- 2000 Callanish tomb
- Chambered tombs finally sealed up

**NEOLITHIC SITES TO  
VISIT**

- Lewis Callanish
- Carn a'Mharc
- Garrabost
- Aird Dell
- Steiniceit
- Clach an Trùiseil
- Harris Northton
- North Uist Bharpa Langass
- Pobull Fhinn
- Carinish
- Clettraval
- Unival
- Loch Olabhar
- South Uist Reineval
- Loch a Bharp
- Barra Allt Chrìsal
- Dun Bharpa





Neolithic house at Allt Crystal, Barra

**Settlements** In contrast to the large number of chambered cairns, there is very little visible evidence of domestic settlement in the islands. Several sites have been excavated, notably Eilean Domhnuill at Loch Olabhat on North Uist, which is one of many islets connected to the shore by a causeway. Machair sites at Udal on North Uist and Northton on Harris have also been studied.

These excavations yielded a large amount of material and information about life in the Neolithic and have revealed substantial footings and hearths of buildings.

Grooved Ware pottery was found which is quite similar to that from the same period in Orkney, suggesting the existence of cultural links, as well as "ritual" carved stone objects and polished stone axe blades. A com-

plete stone bladed axe with a beautifully carved Hawthorn haft was found at Shulishader on Lewis in peatworkings. The wood dates from 3150BC.

In peaty areas the generally acidic soil conditions do not allow for the preservation of bone and most organic objects, but in the alkaline machair areas preservation is much better, especially in waterlogged conditions. Since so much of the land

Polished stone axe



Neolithic Grooved Ware pottery



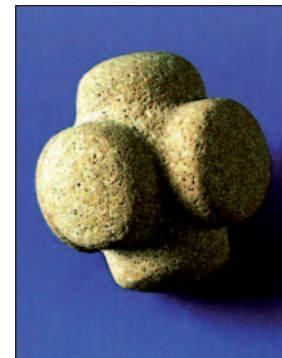
area is covered by blown sand or blanket peat, it seems likely that much remains to be discovered.

The Neolithic period was characterised by the gradual removal of trees and scrub, which had re-established after the melting of the ice. Land clearance for agriculture, combined with grazing preventing regeneration were major factors. Wood was also consumed in the construction of buildings, in the making of tools and boats as well as for fuel.

The Neolithic farmers kept cattle, sheep, goats and pigs. They also hunted deer, seals, dolphins and small whales. Shellfish, fresh water fish, deep water species such as Cod and Haddock as well as birds all featured in the diet. Six rowed Barley or Bere was grown as well as some Wheat.

Although there is no artefactual evidence about their boats, it is obvious that they had sea going craft capable of fishing offshore and of carrying people, goods and animals substantial distances. Most likely their boats were constructed with Hazel or

Carved stone object



Northton machair, Harris

Willow frames, covered with tanned hides. Tanned woven cloth, perhaps using nettle fibres, may also have been used.

Similarly, apart from the stone lower courses nothing remains to indicate what their houses looked like. Since Lewisian

Gneiss is hard to quarry, it seems probable that the upper walls were built from turves. Roofs would then have been constructed from local wood, driftwood or whalebone, and thatched with heather, reeds or straw depending on availability.



Replica Neolithic pots from Eilean an Taighe, North Uist

Shulishader Neolithic polished stone axe and haft







Callanish at midsummer dawn

**STANDING STONES** are a feature of the landscape in the Western Isles, ranging from individual monoliths and small stone circles to the large and dramatic stone setting at Callanish overlooking Loch Roag. The dates of erection are unknown as yet, but the majority are assumed to be Neolithic monuments dating from around 3000BC or later.

Callanish has a complex of standing stones. The main setting is a central ring of large monoliths with radiating stone rows which run roughly east, south and west. A double armed avenue projects slightly east of north. Unusually, there is a small chambered cairn in the centre of the ring which postdates the largest monolith.

In addition to the main setting, here are five or more smaller stone circles near Callanish, as well as chambered cairns. Excavations here have revealed Grooved Ware similar to that found in Orkney and dating from about 3000BC, as well as sherds of Beaker pottery dating from perhaps 2000BC.

Various astronomical alignments have been suggested at Callanish. These include sunrise and sunset at the solstices and moonset at the major lunar standstill. This occurs every 18.6 years, when the Moon sets at its extreme northerly azimuth and the lunar eclipse cycle restarts.

Whether such solar and lunar events are really part of the design of Callanish or other stone settings is open to speculation. The Neolithic people would have been more aware of the seasons and the regular movements of the Sun, Moon, planets and stars than many people today.

The stone circle at Pobull Fhinn in North Uist is also very dramatic. It commands a panoram-

ic view over Loch Eport, the North and South Lees and Eaval to the east, and the flat expanse of North Uist to the south. There are obvious possible astronomical alignments. The site may be connected with Bharpa Langass chambered cairn, just to the northwest.

The majority of the other monoliths throughout the islands seem to be isolated but some, as at Gramsdale on Benbecula, are the remnants of circles, or are near to chambered cairns. Some may be seamarks or mark long forgotten events.

The original function of such large standing stones as Clach an Truiseil on Lewis, the tallest in

the Outer Hebrides, or Clach Mor a'Che on North Uist is not clear but there are legends relating to them. These include mythical tales about fairies and giants, memorials to Viking chieftains and celebrations of

clan battles. These mysteries are all part of the pleasure of visiting these ancient sites. Evocative times to visit include dawn, dusk, when the moon is full, or when the mist rolls in from the sea.



Small stone circle at Callanish

Pobull Fhinn stone circle, Langass, North Uist



Clach Mor, a'Che, North Uist



Gramsdale, Benbecula

Standing stones above the bridge, Great Bernera



**STANDING STONES TO VISIT**

- Lewis Callanish
- below Steinicleit
- Clach an Truiseil
- Achmore
- Gr Bernera above bridge
- Harris Traigh Iar
- North Uist Pobull Fhinn
- Sornach Coir' Fhinn
- Clach Mor a'Che
- Carinish
- Benbecula Gramsdale
- South Uist above Stoneybridge
- Pollochar
- Barra Borve machair





NMS

Adabrock Bronze Age hoard found at Ness, Lewis in 1910

**BRONZE AGE** The period between about 2000BC and 700BC is referred to as the Bronze Age. It is characterised by changes in burial practice, from communal chambered cairns to individual interments in stone lined cists. These were frequently covered by a barrow of earth or a stone cairn. Bodies were often cremated, but inhumation was also practised.

Beaker pottery also appears

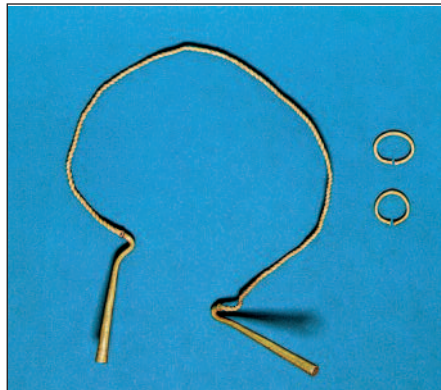
around this time. These fine containers are often found associated with burials from this period. They are finer than Neolithic pots and usually highly decorated, often with cord marks. They may have contained food or drink to accompany the deceased on their journey.

The ruins of small round houses which date from this period are quite common in the Western Isles. Middens

and field walls may be apparent. Burnt mounds date from this time. These piles of fire blackened stones are usually situated next to a watercourse and are often accompanied by a trough. Stones were heated in a fire and used to boil water, either to cook meat, or as a sauna, or perhaps both.

Only limited evidence of metalworking has so far been discovered here. At Northton in Harris some splashes of

Gold torc and rings dredged from near the Shiants



NMS



Bronze Age pot

bronze suggest that casting may have taken place. At Dalmore some metal fragments were found in a limited excavation on an eroding shoreline. Some evidence of bronze working has been found at Cnip in Lewis.

This period was marked by a deterioration in climate and the encroachment of blanket peat bogs over large areas. Windblown sand also covered areas which in Neolithic times were agricultural land. This lack of evidence may simply reflect the fact that most sites are covered by sand or peat.

**Adabrock Hoard** In May 1910 whilst cutting peats at

Adabrock in Ness, Lewis, Donald Murray came across a hoard of bronze artefacts. These included parts of a large vessel with a decorated rim, socketed axes, a spearhead, a chisel, a hammer and razors as well as a gold bead and amber beads. Two whetstones complete this dramatic find.

Bronze swords have also turned up in peat banks. Those from South Dell on Lewis and Iochdar on South Uist are typical *Caledonian swords*. Along with a number of socketed axes, these have also been found on Skye. These stray finds from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century may have been deposited intentionally, and

seem to date from the late Bronze Age.

Arrowheads made from quartz or flint also turn up in the Bronze Age. These tanged and barbed objects are usually beautifully made and probably unused. They are sometimes stray finds, but are also commonly found with burials. For example, one was found in Bharpa Langass as a late deposition.

The evidence suggests that during this period the Outer Hebrides were in close touch with the outside world and new fashions in technology, but that life in general was harder than in the Neolithic.



Dalmore, Lewis, site of Bronze Age domestic remains



Tanged and barbed arrowhead



Bronze Age house, Allt Chrìsal, Barra

**BRONZE AGE SITES TO VISIT**

- Lewis Callanish
- below Steinicleit
- Clach an Truiseil
- Achmore
- Gt Bernera above bridge
- Harris Traigh Iar
- North Uist Pobull Fhinn
- Sornach Coir' Fhinn
- Clach Mor a'Che
- Carinish
- Benbecula Gramsdale
- South Uist above Stoneybridge
- Pollochar
- Barra Borve machair





Replica Iron Age house at Camas Bosta, Great Berneray

**IRON AGE** The term *Atlantic Roundhouse* is often used to describe the domestic building styles prevalent in western and northern

Scotland from about 700BC to early medieval times. The shortage of timber meant that stone was used for the walls and internal divisions.



Replica Iron Age house at Camas Bosta, Great Berneray - interior

Crannog on Great Bernera, built on an islet and reached by a causeway



These houses were quite large and roomy inside. The roofs were built using large timbers which may have been imported. Driftwood or whalebone was probably also used. The roofs were lined with turves supported by straw or heather ropes (G *Sugan*, ON *Soo'an*, Straw Rope) and thatched with heather, straw or reeds as available.

Roundhouses were often built on small islands on lochs and reached by a causeway. Such dwellings are referred to as *crannogs*. They were also sited on small hills or on the machair, often just above the shore. It is thus likely that many have been lost due to erosion by the sea.

It now seems that roundhouses, duns and brochs are part of an evolution in building styles. All of the duns so far excavated have intra-mural cells, galleries or stairs resembling the larger brochs. Good examples are scattered throughout the islands from Loch an Duna in Lewis to Barra Head lighthouse.

Elsewhere in Britain massive roundhouses were constructed of wood. All that remains are post holes, visible in aerial photographs or by geophysical survey. The Atlantic Roundhouses are now thought to be a local development of a widespread style of building.

Brochs and duns in the Outer Hebrides seem to have been

isolated structures, and not usually surrounded by settlements. While those situated on islets in lochs would have had easy access to water, those on rocky knolls would not, since the local Lewisian Gneiss is not porous and wells are rare in such places.

Excavation has shown that these buildings were really farmhouses, often with long occupation histories, rather than strongholds, and perhaps more a product of fashion rather than defence needs. The broch towers had more than one internal wooden floor, which were accessed by the internal stairways.

The smaller duns did not have more than one level and indeed the blackhouses which persisted into the 20<sup>th</sup> century would not have been that much different inside. With their thick walls, massive roofs and central hearths these houses would have been quite comfortable, though perhaps not to modern taste.



Excavated aisled wheelhouse at Kilphedar, South Uist

Another development was the wheelhouse, which was usually built on the machair. A large circular hole was dug in the sandy soil, which was lined with a drystone wall. Supports were then built radially to prevent the exterior walls from collapsing inwards and the structure was roofed over. Unfortunately the only well preserved examples are at Jarlshof in Shetland. A wheelhouse at Kilphedar on South Uist was excavated but is now partially collapsed.

There are a number of promontory forts in the Outer Hebrides. The best examples

are at Rubha na Beirgh near the Butt of Lewis, Caisteal Odair on the north-west point of North Uist, and near the lighthouse on Barra Head.

Wheelhouse at Allt Chrìsal, overlooking Vatersay Sound, Barra



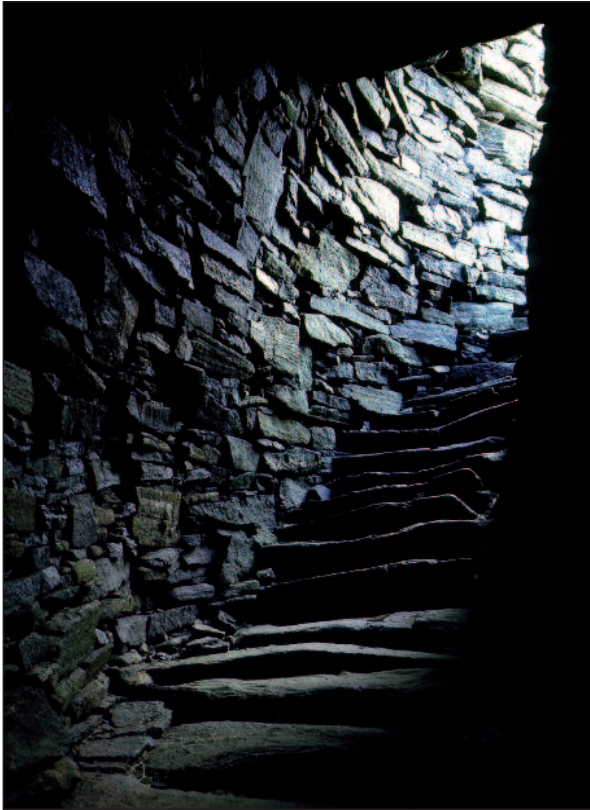
**IRON AGE TIMELINE**

- 700 Iron Age round houses
- 600 Oldest Broch deposits
- 100 Brochs at peak
- 100AD Brochs abandoned

**IRON AGE SITES TO VISIT**

- Lewis Callanish
- Dun Carloway
- Riff
- Loch a Dun
- Barvas
- Gt Bernera Dun Bharabhat
- Houses, Bosta
- Harris Northton
- North Uist Clettraval
- Dun Torchuill
- Dun Sticir
- Benbecula Dun Buidhe
- South Uist Loch a Bharp
- Dun Mor
- Dun Uiselan
- Kilphedar Aisled House
- Dun Vulcan
- Barra Allt Chrìsal wheelhouse
- Dun Scurruival
- Dun Cuier
- Allasdale wheelhouse
- Dun Ban
- Pabbay
- Barra Head





Dun Carloway intramural stairway

**Dun Carloway** The most prominent and best preserved broch is Dun Carloway, not far from Callanish. It is built on a rocky hillock, in common with many other similar mon-

uments. As in all brochs, the walls are hollow. The inner and outer walls are bound together with large lintels. These form the floors of the intramural galleries, which are

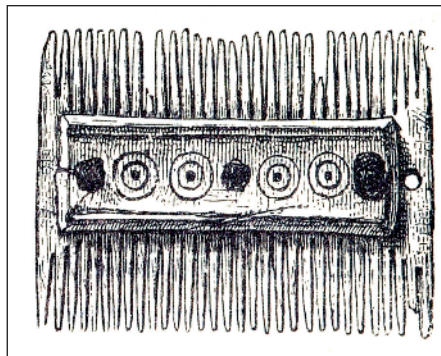
accessed by stairs. The walls are over 3m thick at the base, and the interior walls rise vertically from the scarcement at about 2m above the floor.

The exterior walls have a marked batter and slope inwards considerably. The maximum surviving portion is about 9m high, while the missing north side reveals the construction. No doubt many of the stones are in the ruined blackhouses below.

**Brochs** remain conspicuous in the landscape and there are many throughout the Outer Hebrides that are worth visiting. Most are now robbed out and reduced to piles of rubble. However, in many cases, intramural galleries and stairs can be discerned. Some remained in use for many centuries, even into medieval times.

A few of these sites have the remains of extensive outbuildings or settlements. Dun Vulan on South Uist as well as Dun Torchuill and Dun Sticir on North Uist also have outlying ruins.

Pictish comb



Penannular brooch



**Pictish Period** There is very little influence so far of direct Pictish influence in the Outer Hebrides beyond two symbol stones. Both are Class I stones with well known Pictish symbols. Neither have an archaeological context.

The Benbecula stone could be related to the monastery at Balivanich. It has a disc with three small discs inside, perhaps representing the Holy Trinity, and a decorated rectangular comb box. The Pabbay stone has a crescent and V-rod, or broken arrow, as well as a flower symbol. It also has a later crude and more deeply incised cross.

Excavations at Dun Cuier, Barra, Eilean Olabhat, North Uist and Loch na Berie, Lewis have revealed many Pictish-style artefacts, such as combs. Evidence of metalworking included moulds, ingots, metal fragments, pins and penannular brooches. Fine quality jewellery was obviously being made in the Outer Hebrides during Pictish times.

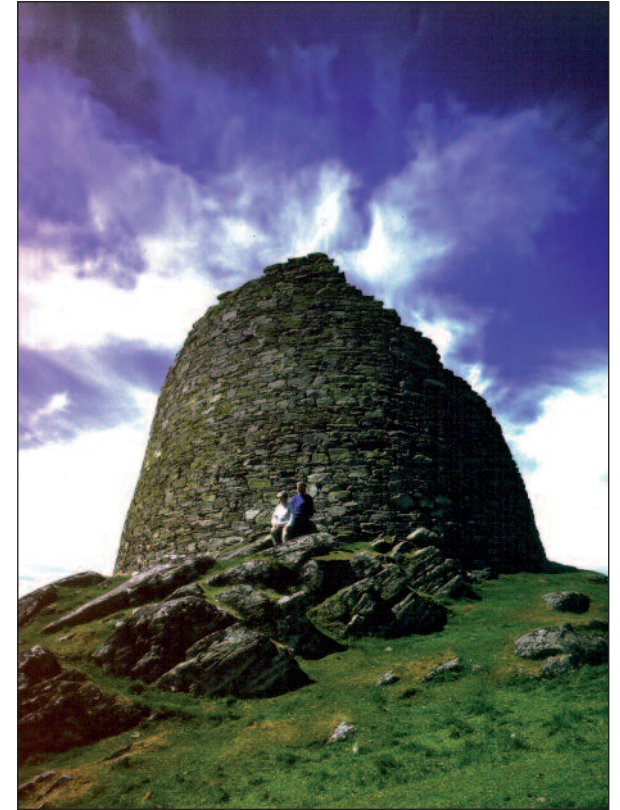
Pictish spindle whorl



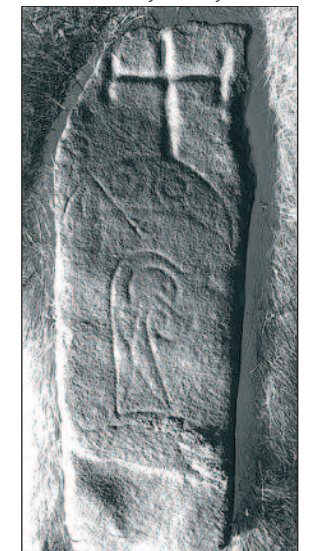
Benbecula Pictish symbol stone



Dun Carloway survives to a height of 9m



Pabbay Pictish symbol stone



Although the evidence is sparse it is clear that cultural, and presumably trade, connections with the outside world were active in Pictish times. It is likely that more awaits.





Viking gilt bronze brooches and necklace from Cnip, Lewis

**VIKINGS** The islands were perhaps Pictish at the time of the first Viking incursions. The existence of several islands named *Pabbay* implies that Celtic monks were present when the Norsemen arrived.

The Vikings were already settling in Orkney by the late 8<sup>th</sup> century, and first attacked Iona in 795AD. They must therefore already have been familiar with the Western Isles by that time. Norse domination of the western seaboard of Scotland was to continue for nearly 500 years.

Excavation of a Norse settlement at Bornish, South Uist



ment. This is very apparent in Lewis where a large proportion of townships and natural features have names of Norse derivation. Western Isles Gaelic also incorporates many Norse words.

Very few distinctively Norse artefacts have been found, apart from several pagan burials at Cnip on Lewis and on Hirta. Two Norse silver hoards have been discovered in the Western Isles, at Oronsay, North Uist (c.1780) and in the Castle Grounds, Stornoway, in 1988.

The *Orkneyinga Saga* tells us that the first immigrants to Iceland included people from the Hebrides, no doubt of Norse-Pictish descent, who left to avoid paying Norwegian taxes. It now seems that the Norse settlement may have been relatively peaceful, but the takeover total, unlike the violent Viking raids.

A most interesting inscribed stone was found at Cille Bharra, on Barra. This has Christian Celtic symbols and Norse runes which read, *After Torgeth, Steiner's daughter, this cross was raised.* The stone is a replica.

The island site now occupied by Kisimul Castle is said to have been the site of 11<sup>th</sup> century Viking fortifications. It seems likely that something similar may have existed at Stornoway with its excellent harbour and fertile surrounding land.

Several Norse domestic sites have been excavated, at Barvas in Lewis, at Udal in North Uist as well as at Bornish, Drimore and

Kildonan in South Uist, but no Norse era building is on public view. No doubt many have been built over or reused by succeeding generations. Perhaps most were built using imported wood and local turf with stone footings.

During the early Norse period the Western Isles were used as Viking bases, and at various times came under the nominal control of the Earl of Orkney or the King of Man, themselves under the King of Norway. The Norse influence in the west stretched from Lewis to the Isle of Man and settlement towns in Ireland.



Viking grave at Traigh na Berie, Lewis



Silver hoards usually include amounts of hack silver which would have been weighted

Celtic/Norse stone at Cille Bharra



Viking grave at Traigh na Berie, Lewis



**VIKING AGE TIME-LINE**

- AD
- c.500 Irish papae arriving
- 795 Iona first attacked
- 995 Sigurd the Strong baptised by force
- c.1000 Sigurd makes Earl Gilli Governor
- 1014 Battle of Clontarf, Isles under Kingdom of Man
- 1066 Stamford Bridge
- 1098 King Magnus Barelegs' expedition
- 1156 Loss of Southern Hebrides
- 1263 Battle of Largs
- 1266 Treaty of Perth

**SITES TO VISIT**

- Lewis Uig Sands
- Lewis Castle grounds
- Cnip
- Stornoway
- St Olav's Church
- Harris Northton
- North Uist Udal
- South Uist Bornish
- Drimore
- Kildonan
- Calvay Island
- Barra Kisimul Castle
- Cille Bharra
- St Kilda Village Bay





King (one of 8)

The Lewis Chessmen are said to have been found in sand dunes on the east side of Uig Bay on Lewis in spring 1831. The British Museum purchased eighty two of the gaming pieces in early 1832 from an Edinburgh dealer called Forrest. The Scottish Antiquaries then acquired the remaining eleven in 1851.

Pawn (one of 19)



The pieces are carved from Walrus ivory and probably date from the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Nothing is known of their provenance but there are many colourful tales. Most likely they belonged to a prosperous person who hid the collection for safekeeping from marauders. Whether this was a merchant, cleric or wealthy Lewisman is open to imagination.

There has been much speculation about the origins of the Lewis Chessmen since their mysterious appearance in 1831. It is generally agreed that they are in the tradition of art from Trondheim. There are strong similarities with other carving and artwork made in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century



Queen (one of 8)

in this northern seat of the archbishop.

There are also suggestions that the objects may originate from Iceland. At this time skilled craftsmen and artists were employed by the church to produce fine works. Many of these were trained in Trondheim and Walrus ivory was readily available in Iceland.

Regardless of their place of origin the 93 pieces represent almost 4 complete chess sets of extraordinary craftsmanship. They are the earliest to look familiar to chess players today. The Bishops seem to be an Icelandic innovation, later taken up in Britain.



Knight (one of 15)

The so called Warders are in fact Berserkers, which in Icelandic refers to fighters wearing bearskins. They are mainly depicted biting the tops of their shields as they prepare to make a frenzied attack. Their function seems to have been similar to castles today, to make fast brutal attack.

Warders or Berserkers (three of 12)



Bishop (one of 16)

It has been suggested that some of the chessmen may have had a dual role in both chess and the Scandinavian game, *Hnefatafl*. In this board game the king is in the centre and is defended by his warriors.

There is no evidence of colouration on any of the

pieces to differentiate the sides. This of course may have worn, or been washed off whilst deposited under the sand at Uig. Regardless of all the mysteries the Lewis Chessmen merit a trip to the British Museum or the National Museum of Scotland to see the marvellous craftsmanship.

Knights (two of 15)

