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Gleann Mor Barabhais, Barvas

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Walk-over survey

A walk-over survey was conducted along Gleann Mor Barabhais, with the aim of identifying potential Mesolithic sites in the interior of Lewis. Mesolithic sites have successfully been identified around the coastline by investigating the interface between glacial till and machair (DES 2010:178; 2011:187, 194-5). This strategy was therefore employed during the interior survey. Evidence for Mesolithic activity would be expected to occur above the glacial till deposits but below the peat, which is likely to have formed in the mid-Holocene. Substantial sections of the river bank were actively eroding, providing fresh, clear sections for inspection. However, in most instances either peat formations or thick alluvial deposits were situated directly above the till.

A single potential site (DLS'13#30) was identified at NB 3746 4648 (Figure 1). A dark brown/black possibly organic silty-clay layer with charcoal flecks was identified, overlying a thin layer of grey clay and glacial till and was in turn overlain by a series of alluvial laminations. The layer is visible for c.5m along an eroding section of the river bank and sheep scrape. A 0.95m stretch of the section was drawn and photographed before two soil micromorphology samples and a 3.5l bulk sample were taken for routine soil tests. The sample contains charred remains including small round-wood charcoal and small seeds of heathland varieties. A radiocarbon date will be obtained following the submission of suitable dating material to establish the date of this deposit. At this stage it is unknown whether the site represents in situ anthropogenic occupation or re-deposition of carbonised material from a heathland fire in prehistory. It is also unknown whether this possible fire in the landscape could have been the product of anthropogenic fire ecology or a natural event. The environmental analysis of the samples will focus on these research questions.

Numerous post-medieval to modern features were also identified during the survey. These included stone walls believed to function as revetments for the stabilisation of the river banks, lazy beds and associated structures. Structures that had previously been recorded within the NMR were also investigated. Three of these, SMR 3200, 3201 and 12154 were not identified. The remainder were present as described in the NMR, or significantly reduced in number. A handheld GPS was used and all GPS points were recorded to <10m accuracy.

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Figure 1: Recording in progress at Gleann Mor Barabhais