



# WESTERN ISLES ISLANDS AREA

109,600 HECTARES

## EXTENT OF AREA

This extensive area stretches from Valtos in the north to Loch Eport in the south, and covers the mountainous parts of south west Lewis, all of Harris, the Sound of Harris and the northern part of North Uist which forms a backdrop to the sound and its islands. The eastern and western limits are across open sea, but the northern margin is defined by a line enclosing the western flank of Great Bernera, the eastern flank of Little Loch Roag and running south through the summits of the Caultrashals, Ascleit, Kearnaval, Beinn a'Mhuil, Beinn Mhor (572m), Gormol, and Uisenis and on to the headland of Gob Rubh'Uisenis on the Sound of Shiant. The southern limit is defined by Loch Eport as far west as Bay Sonish and then north westwards by Loch Scadavay and the summits of Marrogh, Marrival (230m) and Clettraval to Griminish Point.

## DESCRIPTION

There is a striking contrast between the subdued topography of most of Lewis and the bold rugged hills of South Lewis and Harris which, viewed from the north, rise abruptly out of an expanse of blanket bog. Around the rugged hills, there are a number of different contrasting lowland and coastal landscapes. These have been identified as knock-and-lochan, rocky indented coast, and wide sandy machair beaches contained between rocky headlands. Each type has elements of its own which combine to produce landscapes with a variety of form, colour and grain, which are further diversified by changes of scale and aspect.

North Harris has the highest peaks in the Outer Hebrides. On a clear day views from Clisham (799m) span from Cape Wrath to the Cuillins and St. Kilda. The glens are steep-sided with precipitous crags which, despite their relatively low altitude, give to the hills a mountainous character that compares favourably with better known mainland massifs. Exposure and grazing prevent tree growth, and the scenic quality depends on landform and intervisibility with surrounding landscapes, these doing much to enhance the significance of the mountains. In the east deep fjords, like Loch Seaforth, penetrate the hills, with the surprising presence of tidal water apparently far inland. The east coast of Harris is deeply dissected knock-and-lochan topography, with innumerable bays and islets, where the pattern of crofting settlement enjoys a particularly close relationship with the landform. It is a small scale landscape of detailed variety and visual pleasure that contrasts strongly with the softer, wider landscapes of the island's west coast.

The west coast is comprised of wide sandy machair-backed beaches, the bright clear colours of which lighten the dark greys and browns of inland hills and moors. These superb beaches are further enhanced by views across the vividly coloured

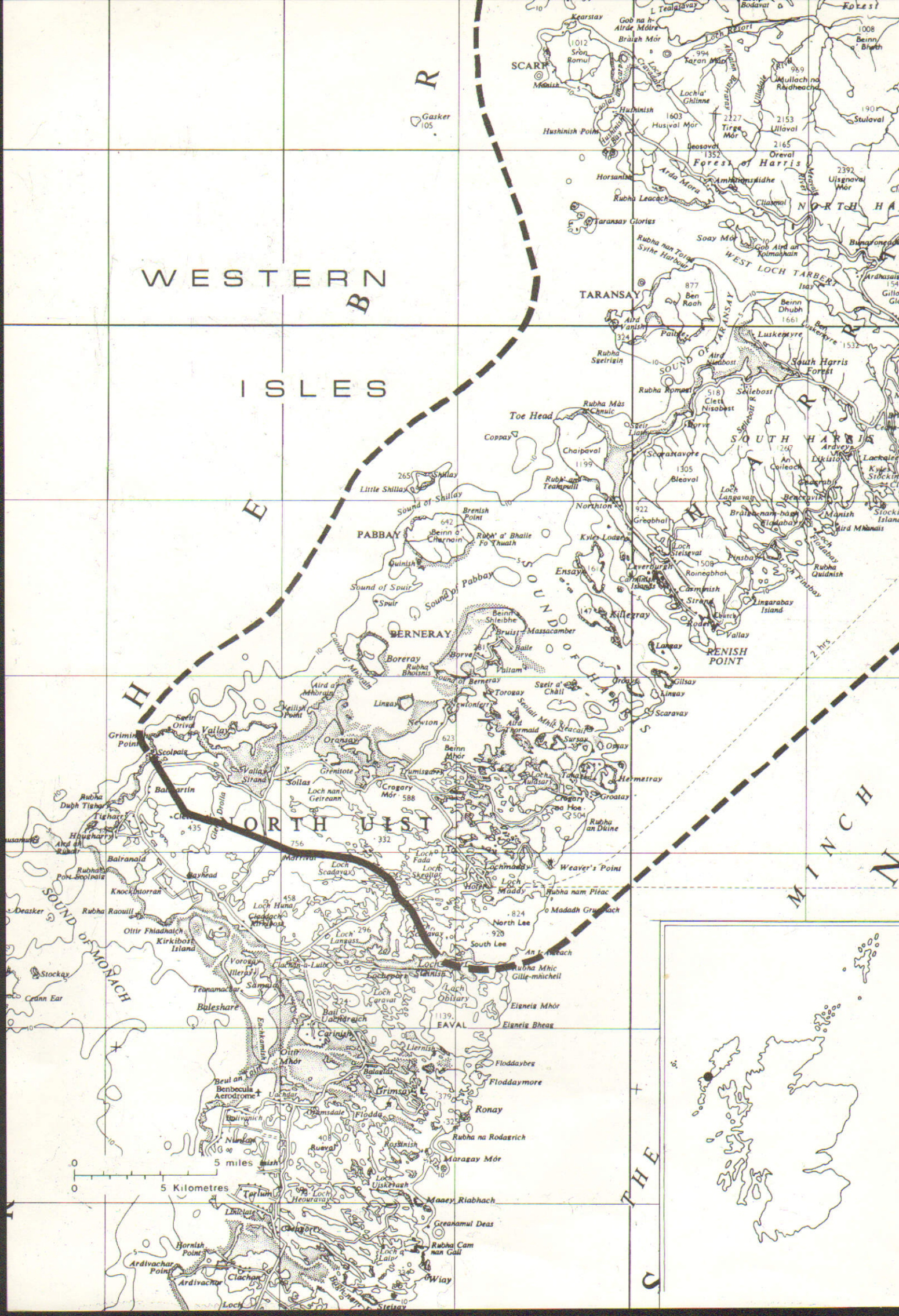
# SOUTH LEWIS, HARRIS AND NORTH UIST

inshore waters to islands and the North Harris mountains, which add not only visual interest but scale and enclosure. The rocky headlands that separate the bays have been sculptured by the ocean with geos and stacks. The scatter of islands in the Sound of Harris acts as a visual link between South Harris and North Uist, as well as creating a seascape of scenic beauty. The wide sandy strands of North Uist reflect much of the character of the west coast of South Harris, and similarly afford views across the sea to the mountains of North Harris. Loch Maddy and Loch Eport are indented sea lochs penetrating areas of low hummocky relief, containing much exposed rock and many fresh water lochans. Points within the area afford views north across the Sound of Harris, and only at the ridge of Marrival does this very diverse island scenery change.

## OTHER NATIONAL INTERESTS

The Forestry Commission owns land near the head of Loch Seaforth, and the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland owns land to the north of Lochmaddy, in South Harris at Uig and Langavat in Lewis. There are Sites of Special Scientific Interest at Glen Valtos, North Harris, Luskentyre, Northton, Loch an Duin, Loch Scadavay and Griminish.







# WESTERN ISLES ISLANDS AREA

900 HECTARES

## EXTENT OF AREA

The area comprises the whole island group of St. Kilda, including Hirta, Soay, Boreray, Dun and the stacks of Stac an Armin, Stac Lee and Levenish.

## DESCRIPTION

The description of St. Kilda which does not contain superlatives has not been written. Situated 41 miles west-north-west of Griminish, the islands are of volcanic origin and have been weathered by the ocean into profiles which never fail to impress all who set eyes upon them. The three larger islands are all in excess of 370m (1,200 feet) high and each exhibits precipices which plunge from that height into the sea. Stark, black, precipitous cliffs contrast with steep grassy green slopes and every element seems vertical. Caves and stacks are a feature of every coast except the smooth amphi-theatre of Village Bay on Hirta, and the cliffs are thronged with sea-birds, gannet and fulmar being more prolific here

# ST. KILDA

than anywhere else in Britain. Sir Julian Huxley called Stac Lee '... the most majestic sea rock in existence' and Geikie has described Conachair as follows:

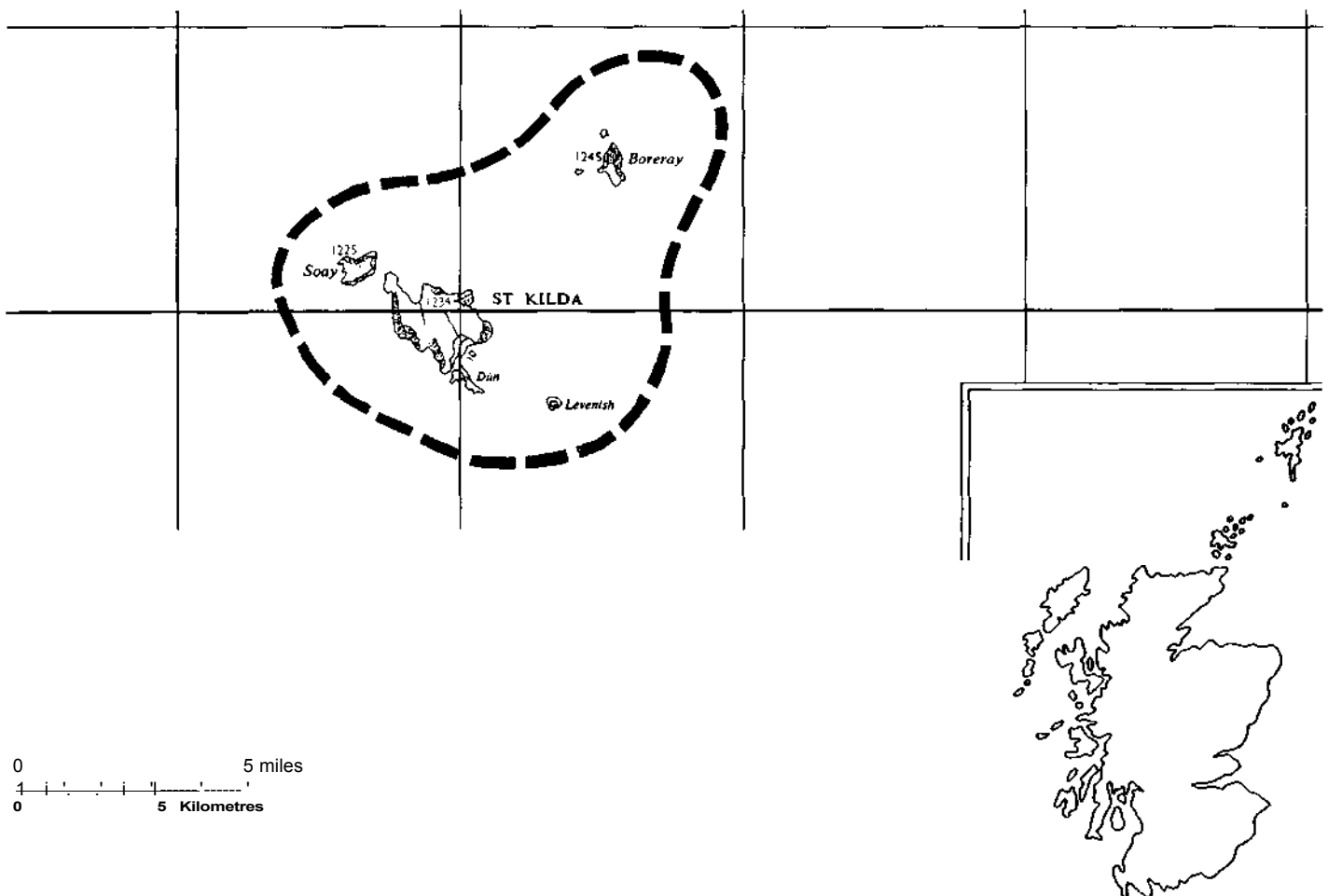
'Nowhere among the Inner Hebrides, not even on the south-western side of Rum, is there any such display of the capacity of the youngest granite to assume the most rugged and picturesque forms. It is hardly possible to exaggerate the variety of outline assumed by the rock. To one who boats underneath these cliffs the scene of ceaseless destruction which they present is vividly impressive.'

Boreray and Soay are no less impressive with their cliff-girt green turf pasture, and Dun has a highly crenellated profile.

## OTHER NATIONAL INTERESTS

The group is owned by the National Trust for Scotland and leased to the Nature Conservancy Council as a National Nature Reserve.

## WESTERN ISLES



# WESTERN ISLES

BENBECULA

SOUTH ULSA

IRISKAY

BARBA

VATERSAY



# WESTERN ISLES ISLANDS AREA

6,100 HECTARES

# SOUTH UIST MACHAIR

## EXTENT OF AREA

This area covers the machair coast of western South Uist from Drimsdale, south of the rocket range, to the southern extremity of the island. The western margin is seaward, but inland the main public road B888 defines the eastern limit as far south as Loch Aisavat at Smerclate, where the south face of Easaval as far as Bagh Mor marks the limits of the area.

## DESCRIPTION

The outstanding physical characteristics of the machair are its low altitude and flatness, rarely exceeding 30 feet in height. The land is interspersed with shallow lime-rich lochans which make up about one third of the surface area, and on the machair itself between the lochans there is a pattern of prosperous crofting settlement. This two miles wide strip of lime-sand pastureland and water meadow is a cultural landscape of strong individual character and identity, not the least important element of which is its flora. W. H. Murray has written (1973) 'Until a man has seen a good machair. . . he may find it hard to realise that. . . it grows not grass but flowers. Amongst the most common are buttercup, red and white clover, daisy, blue speedwell, dandelion, eyebright, birdsfoot trefoil, hop trefoil, harebell, wild thyme, yellow and blue pansy and silverweed.' From May until August these flowers follow in seasonal succession, but by August they have been cropped by grazing so that green is the only surviving colour. This succession of bloom, the dunes, the green pasture, the pleasing pattern of settlement and the beaches combine to form a landscape of great character.

## OTHER NATIONAL INTERESTS

A small part of the Loch Druidibeg National Nature Reserve is included at the northern extremity of the area, where the Howmore Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest also lies. Further SSSI are at Rudha Ardvule and the Askernish Coast.