



ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND MONUMENTS RECORD

1 SITE CODE	H	N	D	3	6	N	E	0	0	2	A
2 NGR	N	D	3	9	4	0	6	8	4	4	3 QUAL CE
6 SITE NAME	S K I R Z A H E A D I										
10 GENERIC TYPE	BROCH+OUTWORKS+CHEVAUX-DE-FRISE										
14 PERIOD/DATE	IA					15 DATING METHOD TYP					
18 SHAPE	CIRCULAR										
19 THREAT AND DATE											

4 DISTRICT	CAITHNESS		5 PARISH	CANISBAY	
7 AREA STATUS	SSSI		8 SITE STATUS	SCHEDULED	
11 CONCORDANCE	OS ND36NE2+18		9 REGIONAL STATUS		
12 FORM	STANDING STRUCTURE		13 DIMENSIONS	INT. DIAMETER 6.8m	
16 RELATIONSHIP OF ELEMENTS	ENTRANCE SSE, FACING SEAWARD		17 CONDITION	INCOMPLETE	
20 LAND USE	BACKSHORE		21 GEOLOGY		
22 SOILS			23 VEGETATION		
24 HYDROLOGY/DRAINAGE			25 RELIEF	NECK OF PROMONTORY	
			26 ASPECT	360°	
			27 ALTITUDE	30=35m OD	

- 28 EXCAVATION (EXCAVATOR: DATE: EXTENT: QUALITY)
1. TRESS BARRY, SIR FRANCIS: 1890-1901
 2. MACKIE, EW: 1972: PARTIAL: RE-EXCAVATION OF INTERIOR

- 29 BIBLIOGRAPHY (AUTHOR: DATE: TITLE: JOURNAL OR PUBLISHER: VOLUME: DETAIL)
1. ORDNANCE SURVEY: 1873: 6" MAP
 2. ORDNANCE SURVEY: 1975: 1/10,000 MAP
 3. ANDERSON, J: 1901: PROC. SOC. ANT. SCOT.: VOL. 35: pp144-45
 4. RCAHMS: 1911: CAITHNESS INVENTORY: HMSO: pp15-16, No. 35
 5. YOUNG, A: 1954: PROC. SOC. ANT. SCOT.: VOL. 95: p183
 6. FEACHEM, FW: 1963: GUIDE TO PREHISTORIC SCOTLAND: p164
 7. MACKIE, EW: 1972: DISCOVERY+EXCAVATION IN SCOTLAND: pp16-17

30 GROUND PLAN NO.	31 GROUND PHOTO NO.
32 SLIDES NO.	33 HR. AP. NO.
34 NMR. AP. NO.	35 OTHER AP. NO.: SOURCE CUCAP, A.P.: GR91
36 ARCHIVE AND LOCATION	
37 GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY	38 SAMPLES
39 PALYNOLOGY	40 NUMERICAL DATES: RANGE: LAB NO.
41 SMALL FINDS	42 MUSEUM/LOCATION
43 OTHER	

44 NAME & ADDRESS OF OWNER _____ 45 ATTITUDE OF OWNER _____


46 NAME & ADDRESS OF TENANT _____ 47 ATTITUDE OF TENANT _____


48 ACCESS & RESTRICTIONS _____

49 NAME & ADDRESS OF FINDER/RECORDER: DATE _____

50 RECORDER: DATE HSR: 2.6.1986 51 CHECK: DATE AWC: 10.5.1986

52 TEXT
 (5) "The Broch is built on a defended promontory, approx. 30ft (9.3m) separating it from the main-land. The interior diameter is 22ft (6.8m). The entrance faces the sea. Part of the building has fallen over the cliff and very little remains of the walling though there is evidence of a stairway. The well, 10ft (3.0m) deep, an unusual feature is Broch II, still holds water, Int. diameter c.7.0m, walls ave. 4.0m wide and c1.75m high. Erosion not noticeably active on the actual body of the broch but the outer walls seem to be threatened." (10, CAN 50)
 "Standing stones, extending over an area of 6.0m x 5.5m, 8 small stones ave. height 0.3m. No obvious pattern on the S. side of the Geo adjacent to broch." (10, CAN 51)

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29.
 8. HBM(SDD):1985:LIST OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS
 9. MACKIE,EW:1974:DUN MOR VAUL:p161
 10. BATEY,C:1985:CAITHNESS COASTAL SURVEY:DURHAM U.P.:p60,No. CAN 50-51
 11. LAMB,R:1980:PROMONTORY FORTS:BAR 79:p74
 12. MACKIE, E:1971:DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION IN SCOTLAND:CBA(SCOTLAND):P 15



52. "ND 394 684 SKIRZA HEAD, BROCH, FRESWICK" (8)

(ND 3944 6845) Castle (NR) (Rems of) (1)

(ND 3940 6844) Broch (NR) (2)

The remains of a 2nd to 3rd century broch, situated on the neck of a promontory and isolated on the landward side by a ditch 30 ft wide. Secondary structures lie N and S (as 9.3m wide) well as inside the broch, which was excavated by Sir Francis Tress Barry between 1890 and 1901 and by MacKie in 1972.

It has measured 22 ft in diameter within a wall 14 ft (6.8m, 4.4m) thick with the checked entrance in the SSE, facing seaward. A scarcement runs round the N arc of the interior, and the exterior of the same arc has fallen over the cliff, together with part of the settlement. In 1910 the exterior wall-face stood 2 ft high, the inner 5 ft high, (0.6m, 1.5m) and in the S arc of the interior, 16 ft W of the main (5.0m) entrance, was a stair entrance although only two steps of the stair and part of the chamber at its foot remained. Three tank-like structures, one of them filled with ashes, and the other two covered with slabs, were set into the floor of the central court.

South of the broch entrance on the outside is an irregular well-like cavity which held water in 1910. It is about 10 ft deep and 10 ft by 7 ft across the top with a drain (3.0m, 2.1m) leading into it from the S. One of the outbuildings to the N partly overlay the broch wall and produced an elk-horn, which is among the finds from Tress Barry's excavation donated to the N M A S in 1908. Also in the N M A S are sherds of 2nd to 3rd century (9) Hebridean (see HND36NE002B) everted rimware with applied fillet, from the site (Acc No: GA 911). (See also ND 36 NE 18.)

The broch is generally as described. The tanks in the central court are now uncovered and contain water. The 'well-like' chamber S of the entrance is partially faced with stone slabs and is possibly the remains of a souterrain which seems to have been entered from the W by a passage which has fallen in. There is no water in it now. No surveyable remains of the outbuildings could be found. A modern wall has been built near the cliff edge SE of the broch. (OSFI:RD:9.9.1965)

The broch and secondary structures are as described by the previous authorities. The interior details of the broch are obscured by thick grass. Whether the cavity to the S of the entrance is a sump or the end of a souterrain cannot be satisfactorily determined from ground inspection. It is similar to the underground chambers associated with the broch at Oust (ND 06 NE 7). A mound to the E of the broch is probably excavation debris as is the 'modern wall' noted by the previous field investigator (OSFI:JB:10.5.1982)

CUCAP A P: GR 91



HISTORICAL MONUMENTS (SCOTLAND) COMMISSION.

PARISH OF CANISBAY.

35. *Broch, Skirza Head.*—This broch was also excavated by the late Sir Francis Tress Barry and described by Dr Joseph Anderson. It is situated on the promontory of Skirza, some 3 m. S. of Duncansby Head. Like the brochs of Nybster and Ness, it occupies the neck of the promontory and is cut off from the land by a ditch some 30' wide. The broch has had a circular wall some 14' in thickness enclosing an area 22' in diameter. On the N. side, where part of the wall has fallen over the cliff, there is a scarcement on the interior about 2' 9" wide at its widest part. The entrance passage is from the seaward end of the promontory. It is 14' in length, 3' in width at the exterior end, and has checks for a door at 8' inwards. Within these it expands some 6" on either side and thereafter narrows to about 3' at the inner end. The wall in the interior is considerably broken down, but still maintains for a short distance a height of about 5'. At a distance of 16' round the wall in the interior to the left of the main entrance is the entrance to the stair in the thickness of the wall 2' 7" wide, with a small chamber opposite the stair foot. Only two steps of the stair remained when excavated and these are not now visible. On the right of the entrance to the stair in the interior court is a tank-like construction sunk in the floor 3' 8" long, 1' 9" broad, and 2' deep, covered with slabs, and adjacent on the N. is another of similar dimensions. In the centre of the interior area was a hearth covered with ashes. The wall on the exterior is now about 2' in height. As well as a portion of the broch wall, a part of the outbuilding has also fallen over the cliff forming the N. side of the promontory. On the seaward side of the broch, to the S. of the entrance, is an irregularly shaped chamber or well, measuring across the top some 10' x 7' and some 10' in depth, with a drain leading into it from the S. This well-like cavity still retains water. In one of the outbuildings on the right of the entrance was found a palmated horn of the true elk now preserved in the National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh. There were also found quern stones, several flat circular discs of slaty stone, and a number of pounders—oblong pebbles wasted at the ends by use.

Above the cliffs on the S. side of the geo which flanks the promontory on which the broch stands, and at the landward end, is a group of stones—some square in section, some oblong—extending over an area of about 25' x 16'. These appear to be the remains of four rows roughly set in alignment some 3' to 4' apart. The stones vary in breadth from 1' to 2', projecting about the same extent above ground, and are from 2' 5" to 4' apart. Their object is not apparent.

See *Antiquaries*, xxxv. p. 144.

Skirza Head broch, Canisbay

National Grid reference ND 395684

This was one of the many brochs excavated at the turn of the century by Sir Francis Tress Barry. It stands on a cliff-promontory defended by a broad artificial ditch with a low rampart inside of it. On the S side immediately outside the ditch is a setting of erect slabs. Curle (RCAMS) reported these as covering an area 25 feet x 6 feet (7.62 m x 1.83 m), appearing to be "the remains of four rows roughly set in alignment some 3 feet to 4 feet (0.91 m to 1.22 m) apart". The stones themselves were 1 foot to 2 feet (0.31 m to 0.61 m) high and set 2 feet 5 inches (0.74 m) to 4 feet (1.22 m) apart. Today the stones survive but are utterly obscured by hummocky tussocks, and it is uncertain whether they can be claimed as chevaux-de-frise.

Anderson 1901, 144

RCAMS 1011a, 15, no. 35

(SEE HND 36 NE 018)

(4)

(11)

Skirza Head Broch.—The broch at Skirza Head, like those at Nybster and Ness, is situated on the neck of a promontory of the cliff jutting out into the sea, and cut off from the land by a ditch nearly 30 feet wide.

The broch has a circular wall 14 feet thick, enclosing an area 22 feet 6 inches in diameter. There is a scarcement about a foot thick, above which the interior diameter would be about 25 feet. The entrance passage lies S.E. by S., and is thus on the side which looks out to sea. It is 14 feet in length, 3 feet wide at the exterior entrance, and has checks for a door at a distance of 8 feet from the exterior; beyond these it widens about 6 inches on each side, but the sides are not quite straight and the interior aperture is narrowed to about 3 feet. The height of the wall remaining is scarcely more than 4 feet all round. At a distance of 16 feet round the interior wall to the left of the main entrance is the entrance to the stair in the thickness of the wall with a small chamber in the usual position opposite the stair-foot. This entrance is 2 feet 7 inches in width. The stair is gone, but the remains of two steps are still traceable. The length of the chamber in front of the stair-foot is uncertain, only part of the side-walls remaining at the entrance. Between it and the exterior of the main wall there is a large oblong tank like construction of four slabs set in the floor of what would otherwise have been a passage outwards. Inside the area in front of the main entrance doorway is a fireplace composed of four slabs set on edge in the floor like a tank, but filled with ashes. At the opposite side of the area are two similar constructions in the floor, about 4 feet long, 3 feet wide, and 18 inches deep.

The broch is placed so near the margin of the northern side of the promontory that a portion of its exterior wall on that side has fallen over the cliff, with part of the outbuildings on the same side. On the other side the outbuildings include an irregularly-shaped chamber or well about ten feet in depth, which still retains water.

In one of the outbuildings, partly built on the remains of the wall, on the north side of this broch, was found a palmated horn of the true Elk (*Alices malchis*). The other objects found were of the usual character, including several socket-stones for the pivots of doors, two oblong and two round stone vessels made of unshaped boulders with cavities roughly hewn in their upper sides, two quern stones, several flat circular discs of slaty stone of various sizes, and a number of hammer stones or oblong pebbles wasted at the ends by use.

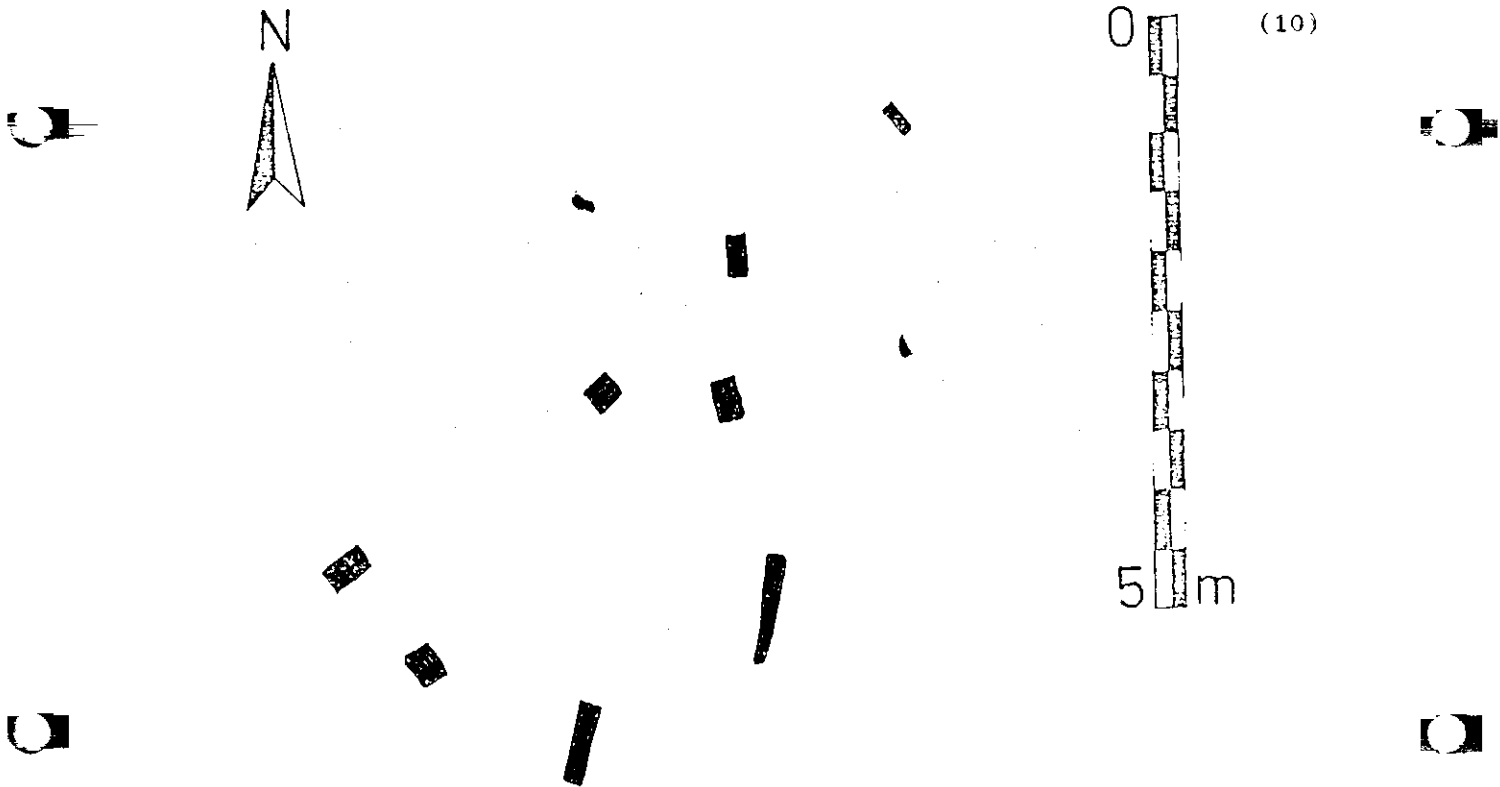
"A plan was made of the central court of the broch at Skirza Head (PSAS xxxv (1900-1) PP 144-5). This broch is martadly egg-shaped, the maximum internal measurements being 7.40m and 6.70m it has been laid out mainly as a circle some 3.3m in radius but one sector, including the main entrance, is extended to include what could be a much smaller circle approx. 1.4m in radius. If this was the basis of the design the centre of the small circle would be about 2.8m away from that of the larger one."

(ND 3939 6841) Stones (NAT)

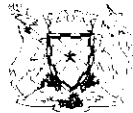
(2)

The nine upright stones are as described above. The elderly resident of the adjacent farm related local tradition that the stones mark the graves of shipwrecked mariners who were murdered by an old lady when they reached the cliff top. All were killed except the cabin boy who was spared. They may mark the graves of shipwrecked sailors; they are not the remains of stone rows. Published survey (1:2500) revised. (OSFI:JB:10.5.1982)

It is uncertain if these stones can be considered to represent a chevaux-de-frise defending the broch. (11)



HIGHLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL



ARTEFACTS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND MONUMENTS RECORD

1 SITE CODE	H	N	D	3	6	N	E	0	0	2	B
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2 NGR	N	D	3	9	4	0	6	8	4	4	3 QUAL
											CE

4 DISTRICT	CAITHNESS	5 PARISH	CANISBAY
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6 SITE NAME	S	K	I	R	Z	A	H	E	A	D
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8 CONCORDANCE OS	ND 36 NE 2	9 MUSEUM/LOCATION OF FIND(S)	RMS (QUEENS STREET)	10 ACCESSION NO.	ACC. NO: GA 911
NMR					

7 GENERIC TYPE	POTTERY, SHERDS+BONE OBJECT+ STONE OBJECTS
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13 FIND CIRCUMSTANCES	EXCAVATION OF BROCH HND 36 NE 002 A	14 CONDITION	
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11 PERIOD/DATE	IA	12 DATING METHOD	TYP+ASS
15 EXCAVATOR AND DATE			
16 EXCAVATION RECORD NO.			

17 LAND USE		18 GEOLOGY	
19 SOILS		20 VEGETATION	
21 HYDROLOGY/DRAINAGE		22 RELIEF	
		23 ASPECT	
		24 ALTITUDE	

25 DETAILED DESCRIPTION/ DIMENSIONS
 "Pottery, Hebridean everted rimware with applied fillet and domestic object, 2nd-3rd C. sherds, bone objects, worked and antler, elk and whore, spindle, sandstone and whetstone and lamp, stone; sandstone and discs, stone and lump of slag

26 BIBLIOGRAPHY (AUTHOR: DATE: TITLE: JOURNAL OR PUBLISHER: VOLUME: DETAIL)
 1. DONATIONS: 1909: PROC. SOC. ANT. SOC.: VOL. 43: pp16-17

27 GROUND PLAN NO.		28 GROUND PHOTO NO.	
29 SLIDES NO.		30 HR. AP. NO.	
31 NMR. AP. NO.		32 OTHER AP. NO.: SOURCE	
33 ARCHIVE AND LOCATION			
34 GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY		35 SAMPLES	
36 PALYNOLOGY		37 NUMERICAL DATES: RANGE: LAB NO.	
38 OTHER			

39 NAME & ADDRESS OF OWNER		40 ATTITUDE OF OWNER	
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41 NAME & ADDRESS OF TENANT		42 ATTITUDE OF TENANT	
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43 ACCESS & RESTRICTIONS

44 NAME & ADDRESS OF FINDER/RECORDER: DATE		45 RECORDER: DATE	HSR: 2.6.1986	46 CHECK: DATE	4.02.10.2.1196
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47 TEXT
 "See continuation card for text of (1)."

PROCEEDINGS OF THE SOCIETY, DECEMBER 14, 1908.

DONATIONS TO THE MUSEUM AND LIBRARY.

(1)

From Skirza Broch.—Oblong plaque of bone, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length by 1 inch in width, pierced by four holes; needle of bone, 6 inches in length; four borers or pointed implements of bone, from $4\frac{1}{4}$ to 3 inches in length; spoon-shaped article of bone, $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches in length, broken, and with three grooves on one side; handle-part of a weaving comb of bone, 3 inches in length, notched at the butt end; palmate portion of an antler of the Elk (*Alces Malchis*); whorl of sandstone, $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter; lump of sandstone, $5\frac{1}{4}$ by $4\frac{1}{8}$ by 2 inches; whetstone of grey quartzitic sandstone, 6 by $1\frac{3}{4}$ by $1\frac{1}{8}$ inches; fragment of another whetstone; disc of sandstone, $3\frac{3}{8}$ inches in diameter, smoothed all over; small thick disc of sandstone; lump of slag.

IN THE MATTER OF THE ANCIENT MONUMENTS ACTS, 1913 AND 1931.

To Admiral Sir Edwyn Sinclair Alexander-Sinclair of Freswick, G.C.B., M.V.O., Dunbeath Castle, Dunbeath,

the owner of the Monument known as the Broch (or Brough) occupying a circular area of ground at the landward end of a promontory on the east coast of Caithness between Effies Goe and Rushy Goe to the north of Skirsa Head measuring 50 yards in diameter, the northmost point of said area being situated 150 yards south by east of the point where Green Mire flows into Long Goe at high water-mark, 200 yards east-south-east of the eastern termination of the road from Freswick to Skirsa and 860 yards north-east by east of the north-west corner of the building at the north end of Skirsa Pier,

being the subjects indicated in red colour on the annexed plan and being part of the property known as Freswick Croft

situated in the Parish of Canisbay and County of Caithness.

In accordance with the provisions of Section 6 of the Ancient Monuments Act, 1931, the Commissioners of His Majesty's Works and Public Buildings hereby give you notice that it is their intention to include the Monument above specified in a list of monuments to be published by them under Section 12 of the Ancient Monuments Consolidation and Amendment Act, 1913.

Dated this 17th day of February, 1938.

By Order of the Commissioners.

Patrick Duff

Secretary.

I, Henry Everett (Officer in Secretariat) in the Office of the Commissioners of H.M. Works and Public Buildings duly authorised by them in that behalf hereby certify that the notice of which the foregoing is a duplicate together with a copy of the plan annexed and signed as relative hereto was served on the before named Admiral Sir Edwyn Sinclair Alexander-Sinclair

by posting on the 17th day of February, 1938

between the hours of 9 o'clock and 10 o'clock fore noon at the Edinburgh George Street Post Office, London, a copy of the same to him,

in a registered letter addressed as follows:— Admiral Sir E.S. Alexander-Sinclair, of Freswick, G.C.B., M.V.O., Dunbeath Castle, Dunbeath, Caithness.

Henry Everett

Register on behalf of the within named Commissioners of His Majesty's Works and Public Buildings in the Register of the County of Caithness.

Walter Hunter

W. S., Edinburgh, Agent.

2/48

REGISTERS and RECORDS of SCOTLAND

GENERAL REGISTER OF SASINES.

County of Caithness.

BOOK **220** FOLIO **128**

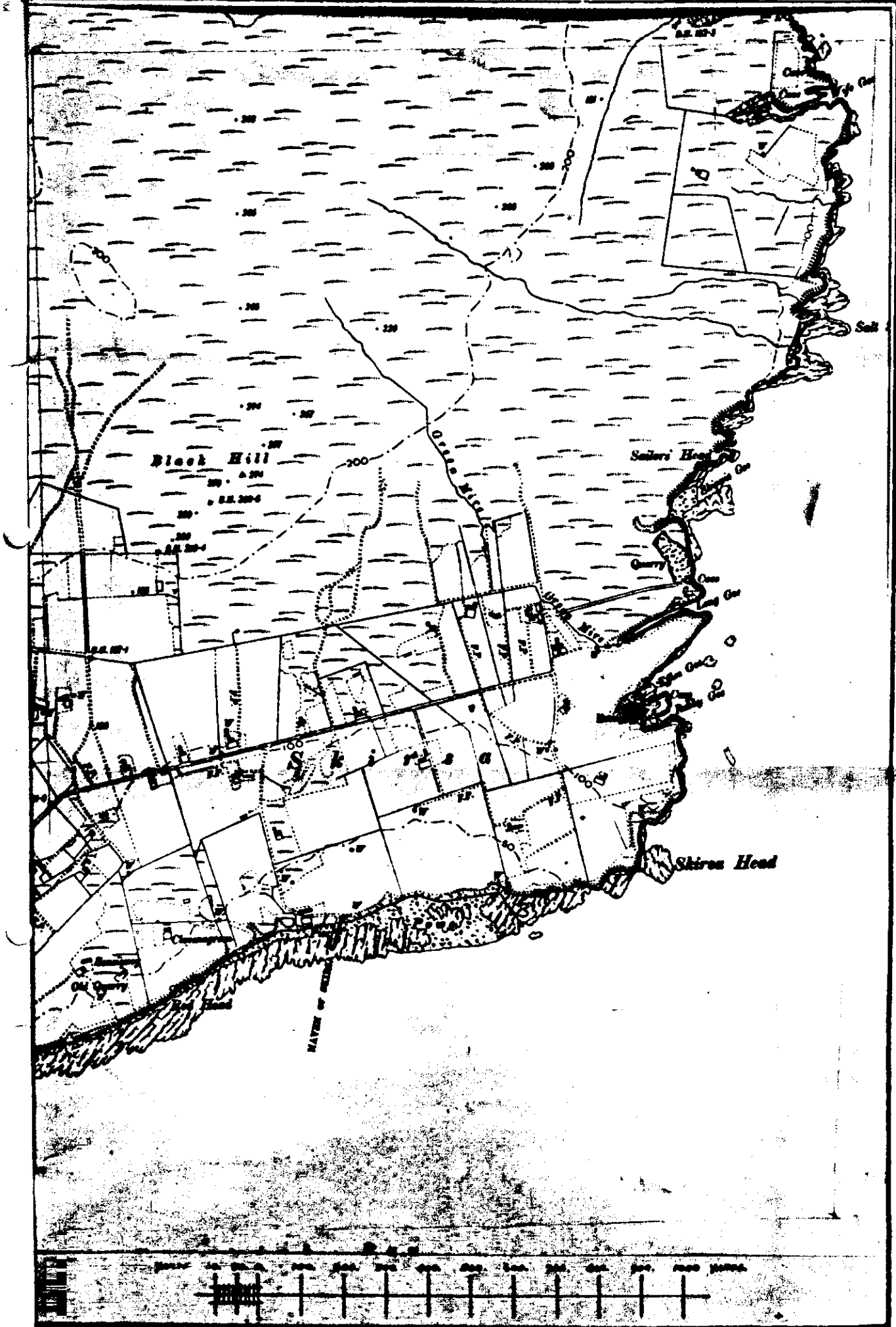
PRESENTED AND REGISTERED **28 March 1938**

W. Smart **Keeper**

W. Smart
18/64463

CA 123

W. Smart
15/



SKIRRA HEAD

Patrick Duff

H.M.
OFFICE OF
WORKS.

This is the plan referred to in my Certificate of Service of

Notice affecting Broch, Skirsa Head

dated 17th Feb., 1938 and is signed as
thereof.

T. H. Overett

REGISTERS and INDEX
GENERAL REGISTER OF CASHIERS
Duplicate of this Plan
received 28 March 1938.
W. H. Smart KEEPER.