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4 *The Dalradian rocks of the Shetland Islands,*
5 *Scotland*
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10 *D. Flinn, P. Stone and D. Stephenson*
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35 **ABSTRACT**
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37 Metasedimentary and metavolcanic rocks to the east of the Walls
38 Boundary Fault on Shetland have lithological similarities to those
39 of the Dalradian Supergroup of the Scottish mainland. In
40 particular, the middle part of the succession, termed the Whiteness
41 Group, includes numerous metalimestones and associated pelites in a
42 shallow-marine succession that recalls the upper parts of the Appin
43 Group and the Argyll Group of mainland Scotland. Metavolcanic
44 rocks within the deeper water turbiditic sequence of the succeeding
45 Clift Hills Group might be broadly coeval with those of the
46 Southern Highland Group of Scotland. Beyond that, correlations
47 with the established Dalradian succession are tenuous and are not
48 possible at formation level. A local succession immediately west
49 of the Walls Boundary Fault is of even more-dubious Dalradian
50 affinity.

51 The dominant structure is the regional-scale, downward- and east-
52 facing East Mainland Mega-monocline. This has a vertical western
53 limb, which youngs to the east, and an eastern top limb that dips
54 to the north-west at 20-30°. Strata on the eastern limb are
55 inverted on Mainland, Whalsay and Out Skerries but are right way up
56 on the west side of Unst, having been folded around the tight Valla
57 Field Anticline. The Shetland Ophiolite-complex has been thrust
58 over the inverted limb of the Valla Field Anticline on the east
59 side of Unst. The regional monocline folds earlier small- to
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medium-scale, tight to isoclinal folds with associated planar and linear structures, which are all assigned to a single 'Main Deformation'. It also post-dates the regional metamorphism, which ranges from chlorite to garnet grade, with localized development of staurolite-kyanite, gneissose fabrics, and the emplacement of schistose granitic sheets in the Colla Firth Permeation Belt.

The GCR sites have been selected mainly to be representative of the East Mainland Succession with its associated structures and metamorphism. Highlights include well-preserved sedimentary structures, high-grade gneisses permeated by granitic material, basaltic pillow lavas and serpentized ultramafic rocks. Some of the latter contain enigmatic skeletal pseudomorphs after olivine and have been interpreted as former high-magnesium lavas.

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4 **1 INTRODUCTION**
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6 ***D. Flinn, P. Stone and D. Stephenson***
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8 The Shetland Islands lie about 165 km north-east of the Scottish
9 mainland, and are almost half way between Scotland and Norway. The
10 islands comprise an inlier of Caledonian and pre-Caledonian
11 metamorphic rocks, which is completely surrounded by Devonian (Old
12 Red Sandstone) and younger rocks (Figure 1). Correlation of the
13 metamorphic rocks with those of the Scottish mainland has been
14 based on lithological similarities, aided by some radiometric
15 dating. For general summaries of the geology see Mykura (1976) and
16 Flinn (1985).
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18 The Walls Boundary Fault, a likely northward continuation from the
19 Scottish mainland of the Great Glen Fault (Flinn, 1961) (Figure 1)
20 divides the metamorphic rocks of Shetland into two mutually
21 uncorrelatable successions associated with two distinct sets of
22 post-metamorphic granites.
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24 **1.1 West of the Walls Boundary Fault**
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26 To the west of the Walls Boundary Fault, the overall tectonic
27 arrangement is a series of structural slices, separated by thrusts
28 and shear-zones that interleave pre-Caledonian basement gneisses
29 with metasedimentary cover sequences (Flinn *et al.*, 1979; Flinn,
30 1985). Many of the component slices exhibit similarities to parts
31 of the Lewisian, Moine and Dalradian sequences of the Scottish
32 mainland and Western Isles. Quartzofeldspathic orthogneisses
33 contain hornblende gneisses that have yielded radiometric ages up
34 to c. 2900 Ma and have been correlated with the Lewisian Gneiss
35 Complex. The orthogneisses are in contact to the east with a belt
36 of predominantly schistose psammites containing zones of coarse
37 hornblende gneisses, which are locally blastomylonitized. The
38 psammites have been tentatively correlated with the Morar Group of
39 the Moine Supergroup, whereas the hornblende gneisses might
40 correspond to the inliers of Lewisianoid rocks that are common in
41 the Morar Group. A blastomylonite shear-zone, which separates the
42 Moine-like rocks from the orthogneisses has been correlated with
43 the Moine Thrust. GCR sites to represent these units are described
44 in the *Lewisian, Moine and Torridonian rocks of Scotland* GCR volume
45 (Mendum *et al.*, 2009). The Moine-like rocks, with their
46 Lewisianoid inliers, are limited to the east by the Virdibreck
47 Shear-zone, along which low-grade phyllitic to schistose
48 metasedimentary and metavolcanic rocks of possible Dalradian
49 affinity (the Queyfirth Group) have been thrust westwards.
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52 **1.2 East of the Walls Boundary Fault**
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54 On the mainland of Shetland, to the east of the Walls Boundary
55 Fault, a dominantly metasedimentary sequence has been correlated
56 with the Moine and Dalradian successions of the Scottish mainland
57 and is referred to as the East Mainland Succession. This
58 succession has been split into four major, lithostratigraphically
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4 distinct 'divisions', now formally defined as groups (Figures 1 and
5 2; Flinn *et al.*, 1972).

6 The oldest part of the East Mainland Succession, the Yell Sound
7 Group, crops out in the west, where it has been truncated obliquely
8 by the Walls Boundary Fault. It has a maximum exposed width of 10
9 km and possibly half as much again allowing for sea cover. It is
10 composed of variably gneissose quartzofeldspathic psammites,
11 alternating with major lenses of mica schist and quartzite. It
12 also contains layers of garnet-studded hornblende schist together
13 with half a dozen Lewisianoid inliers. This lithological
14 assemblage distinguishes the Yell Sound Group from the rest of the
15 East Mainland Succession and has allowed it to be correlated with
16 the Loch Eil and Glenfinnan groups of the Moine Supergroup in
17 Scotland (Flinn, 1967, 1992).

18
19 The Yell Sound Group is separated from rocks to the east by the 70
20 km-long and c. 1 km-wide Boundary Zone that extends across the
21 islands of Mainland, Yell and Unst. The western margin of the
22 Boundary Zone is marked by occurrences of a microcline-megacryst
23 augen gneiss, the Valayre Gneiss (Flinn 1992, Flinn in Mendum *et*
24 *al.*, 2009), and its eastern margin by the Skella Dale Burn Gneiss.
25 Between these two augen gneisses the Boundary Zone contains lenses
26 of locally blastomylonitized Lewisianoid hornblende gneisses, basic
27 metavolcanic rocks and a variety of other gneissose psammites and
28 semipelites together with a metalimestone.

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30 To the east of the Boundary Zone, the rocks of the East Mainland
31 Succession have very general lithological similarities with the
32 Dalradian succession of mainland Scotland and are the subject of
33 this paper. They extend the length of Shetland from north to south
34 and have been divided into three groups. From west to east and
35 older to younger these are the Scatsta, Whiteness and Clift Hills
36 groups.

37 Along part of the south-east coast of the Mainland, the Dalradian
38 rocks have been overthrust, from the east, by a tectonic nappe
39 containing gneisses and various metasedimentary lithologies. The
40 nappe overlies an imbricate zone, containing some serpentinite that
41 was termed a tectonic *mélange* by Flinn (1967). Some of the
42 constituent rock types are similar to Dalradian lithologies seen
43 farther west within the East Mainland Succession (e.g. in the
44 *Scalloway* GCR site) but, despite these similarities, the tectonic
45 style is distinct and this south-eastern fringe is recognized as
46 the separate Quarff Nappe Succession. The emplacement of the
47 'Quarff Nappe' probably took place late in the Caledonian Orogeny,
48 during the Scandian Event. Farther north, part of an Early
49 Palaeozoic ophiolite crops out on the islands of Unst and Fetlar
50 (Figure 1). This, the Shetland Ophiolite-complex, was tectonically
51 emplaced at about 500 Ma above rocks of likely Dalradian affinity;
52 its geology has been summarized by Flinn (2001, in press) and its
53 GCR sites are described in the *Caledonian Igneous Rocks of Great*
54 *Britain* GCR volume (Stephenson *et al.*, 1999). Elsewhere, across
55 much of the east and south of Shetland's Mainland, the Dalradian
56 rocks are unconformably overlain by sedimentary and volcanic rocks
57 of the Old Red Sandstone Supergroup and are intruded by late-
58 Caledonian granites.
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1.3 The Dalradian of Shetland

Dalradian rocks crop out over an area of more than 400 km² on the Mainland of Shetland, but also form smaller islands to the east of the Mainland and parts of Unst and Fetlar (Figure 1). Their lithostratigraphy, structure, metamorphism and tectonic implications have been the subject of a comprehensive review by Flinn (2007). On most of the Mainland, the succession is continuous, with a total thickness of 10-12 km, is unfolded except for minor folds, dips vertically and strikes north-south. To the south of Scalloway, the western parts of the succession (Scatsta Group) are increasingly hidden by the sea. To the north of Scalloway the Scatsta Group crops out along strike for 30 km but the eastern parts of the succession (Clift Hills Group) pass eastward beneath the sea.

The *Scatsta Group* is between 1 and 2.5 km wide. It is dominantly composed of quartzites and impure quartzites, planar laminated by muscovite partings and with lensoid layers of schistose kyanite- and staurolite-bearing aluminium-rich pelites (chloritoid-bearing at lower grade). There is evidence of soft-sediment slumping.

The *Whiteness Group* is 6-7 km thick and is composed dominantly of planar laminated psammites with some granofelsic psammites and micaceous psammites, all of biotite grade. It contains four major metalimestones, up to 500 m thick, and several thinner beds. It also contains a 1 km-thick unit of gneisses, comprising the Colla Firth Permeation Belt, which extends the length of Shetland (see the *Scalloway GCR* site report).

The *Clift Hills Group* is 3-4 km thick and is the infill of an extensional basin containing turbiditic quartzites, mafic and ultramafic metavolcanic rocks, metagreywackes, phyllitic chloritoid pelites and metalimestones (see the *Hawks Ness* and *Cunningsburgh GCR* site reports).

This continuous succession is laid out to view across the middle of Mainland Shetland (Figure 2). It is assumed that the overall younging is from west to east, although this cannot be proved and intrafolial isoclinal folding precludes any general inference from sedimentary younging evidence. However, the regional metamorphism shows a progressive decrease from kyanite-, staurolite- and garnet-grade in the west to chlorite-grade in the east and the uninterrupted sedimentary succession shows a progression in the same direction from shallow- to deep-water deposition and eventual rifting.

There is an overall similarity to the Scottish mainland Dalradian succession and the following correlations were suggested tentatively (by J.L. Roberts and J.E. Treagus in Flinn *et al.*, 1972):

Scatsta Group = the lower part of the Appin Group;

Whiteness Group = the upper part of the Appin Group and lower part of the Argyll Group;

Clift Hills Group = the upper part of the Argyll Group and the Southern Highland Group.

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4 However a comparison with tables of the Scottish mainland Dalradian
5 succession (Harris *et al.*, 1994; Stephenson and Gould, 1995;
6 Strachan *et al.*, 2002) reveals no possibility of unequivocal
7 correlation at formation level. The Asta Spilitic Formation at the
8 base of the Clift Hills Group was originally matched with volcanic
9 formations in the Easdale Subgroup, and the younger Dunrossness
10 Spilitic Formation was therefore correlated with the Tayvallich
11 volcanic rocks (i.e. by Flinn *et al.*, 1972 as followed by Harris
12 and Pitcher, 1975 and Johnson, 1991). However, more recently it
13 has been suggested that the Asta Spilite and Laxfirth Limestone pair
14 could be correlated with the lithologically similar Tayvallich
15 Slate and Limestone Formation and Tayvallich Volcanic Formation, so
16 that the Dunrossness Spilitic Formation would be equivalent to
17 later volcanic events within the Southern Highland group, such as
18 the Loch Avich lavas and the Green Beds (D. Flinn, personal
19 communication in Harris *et al.*, 1994; Flinn, 2007). On a broader
20 basis it does seem reasonable to label the Clift Hills Group as
21 equal to the topmost part of the Argyll Group and the Southern
22 Highland Group, but the Whiteness Group lacks the deepening cycles
23 of the Argyll Group and there is no tillite or any kind of 'boulder
24 bed' to indicate a possible Appin-Argyll group boundary.
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26 The correlations suggested by Flinn *et al.* (1972) have been
27 indicated on Geological Survey maps, but should be regarded with
28 caution. Current suggestions (in part after Flinn, 2007), also
29 highly tentative but adopted in this paper, are indicated in Table
30 1. However, a more-radical overall interpretation by Prave *et al.*
31 (2009a), based on C-isotope chemostratigraphy of metacarbonate
32 rocks, has implied that the Dalradian volcanism on Shetland is
33 younger than any on mainland Scotland or Ireland, being
34 significantly later than 600 Ma and possibly post-550 Ma. This
35 would cast doubt upon all previous correlations.
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37 All three of the Dalradian GCR sites in Shetland lie within the
38 outcrop of the East Mainland Succession, in the southern part of
39 Mainland Shetland (Figure 2). Together they demonstrate the
40 relatively rapid transformation of the long continuing Scatsta-
41 Whiteness shallow depositional basin into the well-developed
42 turbidite-volcanic Clift Hills deep extensional basin. The
43 *Scalloway* GCR site demonstrates the regionally metamorphosed,
44 locally gneissose and tectonized state of the sandstones and
45 subordinate limestone of probable shallow-marine facies in the
46 Colla Firth Formation in the central part of the Whiteness Group.
47 The *Hawks Ness* GCR site, father east, demonstrates the sudden
48 deepening of the basin, following the deposition of the Laxfirth
49 Limestone, with the immediate influx into the basin of the
50 volcanoclastic Asta Spilitic Formation, followed by turbiditic
51 quartzites, graded siltstones and greywackes of the Clift Hills
52 Phyllitic Formation. The *Cunningsburgh* GCR site represents the top
53 of the Clift Hills extensional basin in the south of Shetland, in
54 an area of major eruptive magmatism involving ultramafic lava-
55 breccias and locally pillowed mafic lavas.
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1.4 Tectonics and Metamorphism

Only one period of intense deformation, referred to by Flinn (1967) as the Main Deformation, has been recognized as affecting the East Mainland Succession. It resulted in the formation of a tectonic fabric ranging from dominantly planar to dominantly linear. Small- to medium-scale, tight to isoclinal, intrafolial folds with wavelengths no more than a few metres are widespread, but there is little preserved structural or stratigraphical evidence for large-scale folds. The principal planar fabric is a schistosity defined mainly by micas that is parallel to any compositional layering, bedding or lamination traces that might still be evident. It is well defined in the more-micaceous, finer grained rocks, but is less precisely defined in the coarser grained gneisses, in which it encloses lenticular resistant relics. There has been widespread boudinage of rock layers that had a marked ductility contrast to their neighbours; hornblende schists (perhaps originally intrusive mafic igneous rocks) within phyllitic sequences have been particularly susceptible.

The north-south-striking, eastward-younging, vertical beds described in the previous section extend from the Walls Boundary Fault to the east coast of the Mainland. However, on the offshore islands to the north of Bressay the whole succession is upside down, dipping at 20-30° to the north-west, and farther south the rocks of the Clift Hills Group to the east of the Cunningsburgh CGR site are overturned and dip to the west at c. 20° (Figure 2).

The overall structure of the Dalradian on and around Mainland Shetland therefore takes the form of a north-south-striking, 10 km-thick vertical limb younging east, with an eastern limb of similar thickness inclined at 20-30° to the north-west and younging downwards. The hinge region is accessible in the Cunningsburgh CGR site and is well exposed in the cliffs south of Stava Ness. In between, it is hidden by the overlying Old Red Sandstone succession and the Quarff Nappe. The fabric lineation in the vertical limb plunges gently to the south at 10-20°, while the much more poorly developed lineation in the westerly inclined limb has a near-horizontal north-easterly trend. If the westerly inclined limb could be rotated into a vertical east-facing attitude about a fold axis plunging about 20° to the north, then approximate matching of both stratigraphy and lineation would take place. Hence, the implied structure is a very large-scale, downward-facing monocline, referred to as the East Mainland Mega-monocline (Figure 3). However, apart from that monocline and a large-scale swing in strike south of Stava Ness, deformation subsequent to the Main Deformation on Mainland Shetland was limited to cataclasis, faulting and the production of kink folds. The formation of the East Mainland Mega-monocline post-dates the main regional metamorphism and deformation, currently dated, albeit with poor precision, at c. 530 Ma (see below), and is considered to have occurred in an extensional regime accompanying rifting on the passive margin of Laurentia (Flinn, 2007). However, it pre-dates the obduction of the Shetland Ophiolite-complex at c. 498 Ma (Flinn *et al.*, 1991), the emplacement of the Quarff Nappe, the deposition

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4 of the Old Red Sandstone and the truncation of the East Mainland
5 Succession to the west by the post-Devonian Walls Boundary Fault.

6 On Unst and Fetlar, structural relations are altogether different
7 due to the emplacement of the Shetland Ophiolite-complex on top of
8 inverted, shallow-dipping Scatsta Group rocks (Flinn, in press).
9 On the west coast of Unst (the Valla Field Block) the Scatsta Group
10 rocks have been folded back around the Valla Field Anticline to dip
11 east at about 45° and are right way up (Figure 3), whilst in the
12 north-east of Unst, a large tectonic lens of the Clift Hills Group
13 (the Saxa Vord Block) has been inserted between the Scatsta Group
14 rocks and the ophiolite.
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16 The main regional metamorphism in the Dalradian of Mainland
17 Shetland was coincident with the Main Deformation (Flinn, 1967) but
18 preceded the formation of the East Mainland Mega-monocline and has
19 been attributed to burial metamorphism within the depositional
20 basin (Flinn, 2007). As a result of this metamorphic episode, the
21 Whiteness and Scatsta group rocks range generally from biotite
22 grade in the former to garnet grade in the latter. The rocks are
23 all well crystallized, with the platy and elongate minerals
24 defining the dominant regional schistose foliation and linear
25 fabric. This was followed, whilst thermal gradients were still
26 high, by the localized imposition of gneissose fabrics on the
27 metasedimentary rocks to form the Colla Firth Permeation Belt and
28 by the emplacement of a series of schistose granitic veins and
29 sheets. In a slightly different interpretation of the evidence May
30 (1970) compressed the tectonometamorphic history, suggesting that
31 the fabrics in the granitic veins and those affecting the
32 regionally metamorphosed rocks had formed at the same time,
33 coincident with intrusion of the veins. From either viewpoint, the
34 age of the granitic veins is critical, as it is much closer to a
35 minimum age for the main deformation and metamorphism than the c.
36 498 Ma provided by the obduction age of the Shetland Ophiolite-
37 complex (see above). A Rb-Sr whole-rock date of 530 ± 25 Ma from
38 one of the veins (Flinn and Pringle, 1976), although imprecise and
39 possibly inaccurate by modern standards, did seem to indicate that
40 the metamorphic peak in Shetland might have occurred earlier than
41 in the Dalradian of mainland Scotland, where the peak of Caledonian
42 deformation and metamorphism occurred at about 470 Ma during the
43 intense but relatively short-lived Grampian Event (e.g. Soper *et*
44 *al.*, 1999). However, U-Pb monazite ages from pelites beneath the
45 Shetland Ophiolite-complex range from 462-451 Ma and have been
46 interpreted as confirming that both the obduction and the regional
47 metamorphism on Shetland were broadly synchronous with the Grampian
48 Event (Cutts *et al.*, 2011). The Scalloway GCR site is therefore of
49 particular importance in establishing regional tectonometamorphic
50 relationships and dating there by modern radiometric methods is an
51 obvious need.
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54 Patches of staurolite-kyanite-grade pelitic rocks occur locally
55 within the Colla Firth Permeation Belt. Flinn (1954) interpreted
56 these as 'hot spots' within the gneiss, whereas May (1970)
57 interpreted them as relics of an early, relatively high-grade
58 metamorphic event.

59 Somewhat later, development of porphyroblasts such as biotite,
60 chlorite, staurolite, kyanite, chloritoid and garnet occurred,
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4 overprinting the tectonic fabrics in the less strongly tectonized
5 rocks of the Clift Hills Group. In the Dalradian rocks beneath the
6 Shetland Ophiolite-complex on Unst and Fetlar, there is evidence of
7 a later retrograde regional metamorphic event, chiefly involving
8 chloritoid but not easily related to emplacement of the ophiolite
9 (this is the 'second metamorphism' of Read, 1934).

10 The final metamorphic effect observed in the Dalradian rocks was
11 the formation of thermal aureoles around the post-tectonic Spiggie,
12 Channerwick and Cunningsburgh granite intrusions at about 400 Ma.
13 In pelitic rocks this involved the development of such minerals as
14 staurolite, chloritoid, andalusite, kyanite, sillimanite, garnet
15 and muscovite.
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18 **2 SCALLOWAY**
19 **(HU 396 389-HU 389 408)**
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21 ***D. Flinn and P. Stone***
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23
24 **2.1 Introduction**
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26 The sea cliffs and rocky foreshore west from Scalloway, around
27 Point of the Pund and northwards into Bur Wick, provide a
28 continuously exposed and accessible traverse across the gneissose
29 Colla Firth Permeation Belt and the non-gneissose rocks on either
30 side. The belt of gneisses has developed within the psammitic
31 Colla Firth Formation of the Whiteness Group and extends from
32 Colsay (north of Fitful Head), northwards for 20 km to Scalloway
33 and then for another 30 km north to Delting where it is cut off by
34 the Nesting Fault. The belt varies between one and two kilometres
35 wide, while the outcrop of the Whiteness Group is about 6 km wide.
36 The layering throughout the outcrop is approximately vertical and
37 strikes north-north-east. The gneisses and their adjacent areas
38 are very variably intruded by granitic sheets, which are
39 characteristically less than a metre thick but in several places
40 they form substantial bodies.
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4 The importance of the Scalloway GCR site is that it provides the
5 only complete traverse across the Colla Firth Permeation Belt and
6 illustrates its relationship with the non-gneissose rocks of the
7 Whiteness Group to either side. The relative timing of gneiss
8 development and intrusion of the granitic sheets is of great
9 importance in assessing the wider tectonometamorphic history of the
10 Shetland Dalradian and the radiometric age of the granitic sheets
11 was investigated by Flinn and Pringle (1976). A detailed account
12 of the geology of this area was given by May (1970) and it is
13 included within the Geological Survey's one-inch Sheet 126
14 (Southern Shetland, 1978). Other parts of the Colla Firth
15 Permeation Belt, included within the Geological Survey's one-inch
16 sheet 128 (Central Shetland, 1981), have been described by Flinn
17 (1954, 1967).
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20 **2.2 Description**

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22 The easily accessible coastal section to the west of Scalloway,
23 exposes about 1.5 km of strata, part of the Colla Firth Formation
24 of the Whiteness Group, much of which has been rendered gneissose
25 during the development of the Colla Firth Permeation Belt (Figure
26 4). Throughout the section, granitic sheets are intruded into both
27 the gneissose and non-gneissose rocks, and they merge into a more-
28 substantial foliated granitic mass at the eastern margin of the
29 gneiss belt.
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31 Between the edge of the built-up area of Scalloway and the
32 headland of Maa Ness, the first c. 100 m of section is composed of
33 rather flaggy or laminated and lineated, fine-grained semipelitic
34 rocks alternating with sheets of pinkish or white aplitic
35 microgranite that have both a clear schistose foliation and a
36 lineation. The sheets are up to a metre thick and are mostly
37 conformable with or obliquely cross-cut the metasedimentary
38 layering. They are accompanied by pegmatitic streaks. A 300 m-
39 wide outcrop of granite follows, in which there are only very minor
40 semipelitic screens. Granitic sheets occur the length of the
41 gneiss belt, both within it and for up to 100 m or more on either
42 side. Exposure is poor inland, but elsewhere they seem to be very
43 unevenly distributed, very rarely as closely packed as here and
44 generally less than a metre thick.
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46 Gneissose development is first seen on the east side of Maa Ness,
47 to the west of the large granite sheet. It takes the form of a
48 coarsening of the grain size resulting in a loss of sharpness of
49 the schistosity, the lineation and the muscovitic laminations of
50 the flaggy semipelites. The rocks are also homogenized, so that
51 all evidence of bedding is lost and minor compositional differences
52 are destroyed. The transformation is very patchy and generally
53 partial in the east, but by the Point of the Pund the rock is a
54 magnificent example of the homogenous granoblastic gneiss that is
55 characteristic of the permeation belt as a whole (Figure 5).
56 However, even here it is just possible to find ghostly patches of
57 gneiss that retain traces of their original semipelitic character.
58 Such 'semigneiss' relics serve to distinguish this paragneiss from
59 orthogneiss, which it closely resembles.
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4 North of Point of the Pund, granitic sheets and pegmatitic veins
5 cut both the gneisses and relics of psammite and semipelite and
6 also cut across small folds associated with local shears. Beds and
7 lenses of metalimestone and calcsilicate rock become more common,
8 together with bands of fine-grained hornblende schist. The gneiss
9 formation has had no apparent effect on the non-psammitic rocks,
10 although pelitic beds, which become more common to the north and
11 west, tend to develop an array of small quartzofeldspathic
12 leucosomes. Where the coast turns west at Burwick, areas of non-
13 gneissose semipelite and of semipelite with only streaks and areas
14 of partial recrystallization ('semigneiss') become increasingly
15 common. The western edge of the island of Burwick Holm and the
16 rock supporting the Burwick Broch (HU 3880 4058) are barely
17 affected by the recrystallization. The western edge of the gneiss
18 belt is just offshore to the west of the Ness of Burwick, and
19 intersects the coast a kilometre or so to the north of Burwick.
20

21 The first deformation episode to affect the rocks (the so-called
22 'Main Deformation') resulted in the formation of minor folds and a
23 strong fabric, which ranges from planar to linear (Flinn, 1967).
24 Small, tight to isoclinal, intrafolial folds of bedding are common
25 but no larger scale folds are seen. The foliation of the rock is
26 determined by the schistosity, which is parallel to lithological
27 banding and lamination (bedding). The foliation encloses lenses of
28 hornblende schist. Most of the rocks display a prominent rodding
29 or mineral lineation that plunges to the south-south-west at about
30 40° in the area of the GCR site but at lesser angles to the north
31 and south.
32

33 The development of the gneissose fabric in the permeation belt was
34 controlled locally by the nature of the protolith, which was
35 generally banded and laminated with layers of mica-rich pelite and
36 mica-poor semipelite and psammite. Pelitic layers have been almost
37 entirely converted to gneisses by the segregation of diffuse
38 quartzofeldspathic leucosomes and the development of a strong
39 schistose fabric enclosing microaugen of large andesine crystals,
40 1-3 mm across. An inclusion of deformed kyanite in one of these
41 microaugen was suggested by May (1970) to be evidence for an early
42 phase of metamorphism prior to the development of gneisses (see
43 below). By contrast, in the dominant more-psammitic lithologies
44 the coarsening of the texture weakens the preferred orientation of
45 the mica flakes and hence weakens the schistosity, so that the
46 rocks are generally transformed into homogeneous granofelsic
47 gneisses; quartzofeldspathic leucosomes locally give a *lit-par-lit*
48 appearance and tend to merge with the cross-cutting granitic sheets
49 in places.
50

51 Important features of the Colla Firth Permeation Belt that are not
52 immediately obvious from field inspection are the mineralogical
53 effects of the gneiss formation. These have been described by May
54 (1970) for the area of the Scalloway GCR site and by Flinn (1954,
55 1967) for areas to the north and south. Microscope examination has
56 shown that, although minerals of higher grade than biotite, blue-
57 green amphibole, epidote etc are extremely rare in the Whiteness
58 Group of the Scalloway area, microcline and diopside occur in
59 calcsilicate bands and metalimestones within and adjacent to the
60 permeation belt. May (1970) has also found a kyanite-staurolite-
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4 bearing rock within the belt to the south of Scalloway, and both
5 Flinn (1954) and May (1970) have reported fibrolite and garnet as
6 present within the belt, in particular in Delting and also in a
7 small area some 10 km south of Scalloway. It is apparent that the
8 formation of the gneisses took place at a higher temperature than
9 the metamorphism in the adjoining parts of the Whiteness Group.
10 Late-stage, retrogressive effects include sericitization of
11 feldspar and chloritization of biotite.
12

13 The most widespread effect of deformation subsequent to the main
14 phase is cataclastic faulting and locally prominent kink folding.
15 Rare lamprophyre dykes are entirely post tectonic and post
16 metamorphic.
17

18 **2.3 Interpretation**

19

20 The original sedimentary protoliths to the now-metamorphosed
21 Scalloway succession were sandstones, mudstones and subordinate
22 limestones of probable shallow marine facies. No definitive
23 examples of sedimentary structure are preserved but the micaceous
24 partings, regularly spaced at intervals of a few millimetres
25 through some psammite units, and the regular division of the rocks
26 into bed-like units, commonly of slightly different composition,
27 are probably original sedimentary features. Mineralogically the
28 psammites and pelites now consist of varying proportions of
29 biotite, muscovite, quartz and plagioclase; garnet, kyanite and
30 staurolite are accessories. These minerals and others mentioned
31 above all developed during prograde metamorphism.
32

33 Three stages have been recognized in the formation of the Colla
34 Firth Permeation Belt. May (1970) recognized an earlier stage in
35 which kyanite and staurolite were formed, but since the kyanite and
36 staurolite occur only within the permeation belt they, like the
37 garnet and sillimanite elsewhere, might have formed during the
38 gneiss development. The first undisputed stage recognized in the
39 metamorphism of the area as a whole is the regional metamorphism
40 with coincident tectonizing deformation. In the second stage some
41 of the rocks within the area of the permeation belt were partially
42 or completely transformed into gneiss (Figure 5). The presence of
43 partially transformed rocks ('semigneisses') and even unaltered
44 rocks among the gneisses proves that their formation followed
45 regional metamorphism. The third stage involved the emplacement of
46 granitic and pegmatitic sheets into the folded gneisses of the
47 permeation belt and the adjacent rocks on either side.
48

49 The three stages are closely connected by having similar fabrics;
50 foliations, schistositities and lineations are all parallel where
51 they exist, although some of the granitic sheets are structureless.
52 There have been slight differences in the detailed interpretation
53 of this evidence. In the opinion of May (1970), the textural
54 evidence preserved within this GCR site confirms that the granitic
55 sheets were intruded as the gneissose fabric formed; the
56 constituent minerals in the granite have been granulated and
57 recrystallized to produce a fabric continuous with that in both the
58 gneissose and non-gneissose country rocks. May therefore
59 considered that the regional metamorphism, the gneiss development
60 and the emplacement of the granitic sheets were all 'syn-tectonic'
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4 and broadly synchronous'. In contrast, Flinn (1954, 1967)
5 considered that the gneisses formed in a distinct event immediately
6 after the regional metamorphism, while the thermal and stress
7 structure was still in place. The two events could however have
8 overlapped and the granitic sheets were probably emplaced very soon
9 afterwards. The radiometric (Rb-Sr) date of 530 ± 25 Ma, obtained
10 by Flinn and Pringle (1976) for the granitic sheets should
11 therefore indicate a minimum age for the main deformation and peak
12 metamorphism of the Shetland Dalradian. However, it is neither
13 precise nor accurate by modern standards and needs to be repeated
14 using modern techniques.
15

16 The possible causes and/or mechanisms of gneiss development have
17 been discussed by Flinn (1954, 1967, 1995). The metamorphic
18 minerals and grades involved are so low (below garnet grade in the
19 Scalloway area) that there can be no question of the gneisses
20 having formed by partial melting. He considered that the gneisses
21 are most likely the result of recrystallization in which their
22 grain size was doubled or trebled. This was brought about with
23 little or no change of composition by the percolation (permeation)
24 through the rocks of hot watery solutions from below, controlled by
25 the pre-existing vertical layering and schistosity in the Whiteness
26 Group. The water initiated the grain growth by grain-boundary
27 migration and also supplied the heat for the diopside thermal
28 aureole that occurs along the length of the belt. The granitic
29 sheets are of S-type and probably formed by melting of the crust at
30 depth. It is possible that they supplied some heat but it is
31 notable that the aureole is continuous and is entirely confined to
32 the gneisses, whereas the granitic sheets are irregularly
33 distributed and extend beyond the aureole. May (1970), however,
34 attributed the presence of diopside porphyroblasts in calcsilicate
35 rocks to a late period of post-tectonic static metamorphism that is
36 represented by the growth of various porphyroblasts elsewhere in
37 Mainland Shetland (Flinn, 1967; see the *Hawks Ness* GCR site
38 report).
39
40

41 **2.4 Conclusions**

42

43 The Scalloway GCR site provides a well-exposed and instructive
44 section through part of the Colla Firth Permeation Belt, which is
45 of national and possibly international significance. At the GCR
46 site, this gneissose zone is developed within a sequence of
47 semipelitic to psammitic metasedimentary rocks forming part of the
48 Colla Firth Formation in the Whiteness Group of the Shetland
49 Dalradian. The psammities and pelites have been recrystallized to a
50 homogeneous granoblastic gneiss with a fabric parallel to that in
51 the adjacent rocks outside the belt, which have been regionally
52 metamorphosed and deformed but are not gneissose. Numerous
53 granitic sheets and veins were intruded into both the gneiss belt
54 and the adjacent non-gneissose rocks and these too have a schistose
55 fabric.
56

57 Textural evidence preserved within the rocks of this GCR site
58 confirms that the regional metamorphism and gneiss formation,
59 although possibly originating from distinct events, were both
60 broadly coincident with the principal deformation and that all of
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4 these events only shortly preceded or overlapped with the intrusion
5 of granitic sheets. The age of the granitic sheets is therefore of
6 great national importance as an indicator of the minimum age of
7 deformation and peak metamorphism in the Shetland Dalradian. A
8 radiometric, Rb-Sr date of 530 ± 25 Ma is imprecise, probably
9 inaccurate and dating by a modern, more-precise method is clearly
10 desirable. However, the date does suggest that the deformation
11 might be radically different in timing to the deformation affecting
12 the Dalradian sequence elsewhere (e.g. peaking at c. 470 Ma in the
13 Grampian Highlands). It follows that an understanding of these
14 tectonometamorphic relationships is crucial for the wider
15 interpretation of the Dalradian succession both in Shetland and in
16 the Scottish mainland.
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18
19 **3 HAWKS NESS**
20 **(HU 447 477-HU 458 491-HU 458 473)**
21

22 ***P. Stone and D. Flinn***
23

24
25 **3.1 Introduction**
26

27 The sea cliffs and rocky foreshore around the promontory of Hawks
28 Ness provide extensive exposure through a metasedimentary sequence
29 extending from the top of the Whiteness Group through the lower
30 part of the Clift Hills Group of the Shetland Dalradian. The
31 lithologies present range from metacarbonate rocks of probable
32 shallow-water origin, to metavolcanic rocks and deep-water
33 turbidites. Sedimentary structures preserved in the turbiditic
34 strata show locally opposed younging directions which, together
35 with the exposure of fold closures, confirm the presence of
36 isoclinal folds. Deformation has also produced a pervasive
37 foliation, a linear fabric and a recrystallized, phyllitic mineral
38 assemblage. Post-tectonic regional metamorphism led to the
39 subsequent growth of staurolite and garnet porphyroblasts.
40

41 The regional importance of the Hawks Ness GCR site lies in the
42 unusually wide range of sedimentary, tectonic and metamorphic
43 features preserved in a succession that was deposited in an
44 extensional basin setting. An understanding of the processes and
45 sequence of events involved allows for a more-informed regional
46 interpretation of an otherwise poorly known part of Scottish
47 geology. A detailed account of the geology was given by Flinn
48 (1967) whilst an overview of the regional geological setting was
49 provided by Flinn and May (in Mykura, 1976); the GCR site area is
50 included in the Geological Survey's one-inch Sheet 128 (Central
51 Shetland, 1981).
52

53
54 **3.2 Description**
55

56 Around the promontory that culminates in Hawks Ness, steeply
57 inclined strata strike north-north-east. The stratigraphical
58 sequence commences with the Laxfirth Limestone (the top of the
59 Whiteness Group) on the west side of the promontory, and proceeds
60 upwards and eastwards through the Asta Spilitic Formation and Clift
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4 Hills Phyllitic Formation (the lower part of the Clift Hills Group)
5 (Figure 6). The Asta Spilitic Formation has been correlated with
6 the Easdale Subgroup in the Dalradian succession of the Scottish
7 mainland (Flinn *et al.*, 1972) but more-recently a possible
8 correlation with the Tayvallich volcanic rocks, at the top of the
9 Argyll Group, has found more favour (Harris *et al.*, 1994; Flinn,
10 2007).

11 The Laxfirth Limestone crops out as a thin strip along the strike-
12 parallel eastern coast of Lax Firth, although the full outcrop
13 extends to the western side of the firth and the thickness probably
14 exceeds 500 m. It is a crystalline, calcite metacarbonate rock
15 containing scattered coarse grains of quartz, and with small
16 quantities of epidote, zoisite, white mica and pyrite concentrated
17 into fairly continuous laminae. On a larger scale, there is a
18 faint, millimetre- to centimetre-scale colour banding through
19 shades of pale grey and pale pink. Overall, the Laxfirth Limestone
20 is relatively fine grained compared to some other Dalradian
21 metalimestones. At its eastern boundary, it is intimately
22 associated with conformable sheets of hornblende schist up to about
23 a metre thick.

24 Conformably above the metalimestone is the Asta Spilitic
25 Formation, which crops out along the north-west coast of Hawks Ness
26 in a narrow zone no more than a few tens of metres wide. These
27 largely pyroclastic rocks range from phyllitic fine-metatufts to
28 pyroclastic metabreccias and are generally thinly interbanded with
29 feldspar-phyric hornblende schists and phyllitic pelites. Adjacent
30 to the Laxfirth Limestone, and corresponding with the pyroclastic
31 rocks, a narrow positive ground-magnetic anomaly of about 1000 nT
32 can be traced continuously, southward to the sea at Scalloway and
33 to the north-east almost as far as the Out Skerries. The
34 pyroclastic rocks are succeeded by a zone, 10-20 m wide, in which
35 beds of turbiditic gritty quartzite alternate with thin beds of
36 laminated and graded, dark semipelite. Some hornblende schists
37 commonly form boudinaged pods.

38 The north-east coast of Hawks Ness presents a continuous section
39 through more than 300 m of the Clift Hills Phyllitic Formation.
40 This unit contains phyllitic metagreywackes, thin beds of gritty
41 quartzite, phyllitic gritty psammite, pelite, calcsilicate rock and
42 sporadic lenses of hornblendic schist similar to those seen in the
43 underlying Asta Spilitic Formation. The phyllitic rocks are
44 laminated on a millimetre scale, the darker, more-micaceous laminae
45 representing metamorphosed mudstone, while the paler laminae are
46 probably derived from sandstones and siltstones. It is possible to
47 detect small-scale cross-bedding in places, usually with the
48 appearance of low-amplitude ripples (Figure 7). They have a strong
49 foliation and are pervasively recrystallized to fine-grained
50 quartz, feldspar and muscovite, together with biotite and/or
51 chlorite; some are graphitic. Staurolite, biotite and chlorite
52 porphyroblasts post-date the imposition of the tectonic foliation
53 (Flinn, 1967). Inland, in the southern part of the Hawks Ness
54 promontory, are large intrusions of hornblende metagabbro,
55 containing ophitic blue-green hornblende and recrystallized primary
56 albite. Smaller lenticular bodies of hornblende schist containing
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4 relict phenocrysts of plagioclase also attest to an igneous
5 protolith.

6 On the south-east side of the Hawks Ness promontory, the top part
7 of the Clift Hills Phyllitic Formation is the Dales Voe Grit
8 Member, which comprises 1.5 km of turbiditic gritty quartzites.
9 Excellent exposures are provided by the rocky headlands of Brim
10 Ness and Fora Ness. In this well-layered sequence, units of impure
11 quartzite, with bed thickness ranging from several centimetres up
12 to several metres, alternate with subordinate units of thinly
13 bedded laminated and graded semipelite. At Brim Ness there is a
14 thin, conformable interbed of granular calcsilicate rock, whilst
15 thin metalimestones and lenses of Asta Spilitic-like rock occur
16 sporadically. Within the quartzite units, many individual beds
17 show normal, upwards grading from coarse, locally pebbly bases,
18 through coarse-grained, gritty quartzite to finely laminated
19 semipelite. Cross-bedding is seen in the upper parts of many beds,
20 whilst evidence of channelling and current scour is preserved on
21 basal bedding planes. This abundance of sedimentary younging
22 evidence demonstrates local reversals that can be attributed to
23 tight folding; many hinges are spectacularly preserved (Figure 8a).
24 These are dominantly single-bed intrafolial isoclinal folds most of
25 which face eastwards and upwards, but a minority face westwards and
26 downwards.
27

28 On the eastern side of the Dales Voe Grit, on the opposite side of
29 Dales Voe, there is an upward transition from the gritty
30 metasandstone back into chloritic phyllites. These then continue
31 eastwards, and stratigraphically upwards until, farther south, they
32 are seen to underlie the pelitic Dunrossness Phyllitic Formation,
33 which in turn underlies the volcanic Dunrossness Spilitic
34 Formation, part of which crops out in the *Cunningsburgh* GCR site.
35

36 Post-tectonic lamprophyre dykes, one of which can be seen to the
37 south of Brim Ness, are probably of Early- to Mid-Devonian age.
38

39 **3.3 Interpretation**

40
41 At the base of the succession within the GCR site, the thick
42 metacarbonate unit of the Laxfirth Limestone suggests sedimentation
43 in relatively shallow water. The subsequent volcanicity recorded
44 in the Asta Spilitic Formation, and the closely associated
45 turbiditic metasedimentary rocks of the Clift Hills Phyllitic
46 Formation, then suggest a phase of rapid subsidence and the
47 establishment of a deep-water depositional environment. The
48 following Dales Voe Grit beds have all the characteristics of deep-
49 water turbidites. The individual beds are graded in their lower
50 parts, passing up into a laminated and sporadically cross-bedded
51 upper sector that is either abruptly overlain by the coarse base of
52 the succeeding bed or passes up into a unit of thinly bedded,
53 graded siltstones. The thicker, sandstone beds were deposited from
54 large-volume and high-density turbidity flows, whereas the
55 sequences of more thinly bedded, graded siltstones derive from a
56 series of smaller, low-density flows. The bases of the thicker
57 beds commonly carry flute and groove casts from which Flinn (1967)
58 was able to calculate an original current flow from the north.
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4 The array of sedimentary features that are preserved also allows
5 the local sedimentary younging direction to be established.
6 Throughout the GCR site area, the beds strike 030° and, in general,
7 they dip steeply to the north-west in the west and to the south-east
8 in the east. The overall stratigraphical trend is for successively
9 younger units to crop out sequentially towards the south-east.
10 This situation is confirmed by some of the localized sedimentary
11 younging evidence but is contradicted in places by unequivocal
12 examples of younging towards the north-west (Figure 7). Flinn
13 (1967) recognized this phenomenon and related it to short wave-
14 length isoclinal folding, which is shown by individual beds (Figure
15 8a). This was linked to the main tectonic deformation, which
16 produced a steep schistosity and a lineation plunging at c. 20° to
17 the south (Figure 8b); a similar fabric and orientation to that in
18 the rocks of the Scalloway GCR site to the south-west. However,
19 while the fabric lineation plunges at 20° or so to the south, the
20 axes of the folded turbidite beds plunge at 20-30° to the north
21 (Figure 6, inset).
22

23 The local syn-tectonic metamorphic mineral assemblage is dominated
24 by muscovite, biotite, chlorite, quartz and plagioclase. Post-
25 tectonic regional metamorphism has led to the porphyroblastic
26 growth of staurolite, garnet, biotite and chlorite.
27

28 **3.4 Conclusions**

29
30 The Hawks Ness GCR site provides a well-exposed and instructive
31 representative section through a metasedimentary sequence extending
32 from the top of the Whiteness Group (the Laxfirth Limestone)
33 through the lower part of the Clift Hills Group (the Asta Spilitic
34 Formation and the Clift Hills Phyllitic Formation) in the Dalradian
35 succession of Shetland. These units are currently thought to be
36 broadly equivalent to the Tayvallich Subgroup of the Scottish
37 mainland succession. The sequence demonstrates deposition in a
38 progressively deepening marine environment with sub-marine
39 volcanism marking the onset of rapid subsidence.
40

41 Structural and metamorphic features within the GCR site make a
42 significant contribution to interpretation of the deformational and
43 metamorphic history of the Shetland Dalradian. Deep-water
44 turbiditic strata (in the Dales Voe Grit) preserve sedimentary
45 structures from which opposing stratigraphical younging can be
46 deduced, confirming that the sequence has been affected by short-
47 wavelength, isoclinal folding, which is commonly shown by
48 individual beds. A phyllitic mineral assemblage (muscovite-
49 biotite-chlorite-quartz-plagioclase) formed during deformation-
50 related metamorphism and staurolite, garnet, biotite and chlorite
51 were produced during post-tectonic, regional metamorphism.
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4 **4 CUNNINGSBURGH**
5 **(HU 439 280-HU 421 274-HU 432 264)**
6

7 ***D. Flinn, P. Stone and D. Stephenson***
8
9

10 **4.1 Introduction**
11

12 This GCR site is named after the collection of hamlets on the
13 south-east coast of Mainland Shetland, some 13 km south-south-west
14 of Lerwick, that is generally known as Cunningsburgh (Figure 9).
15 There, despite relatively intense metamorphism, an unusual and
16 regionally important geological assemblage can be recognized. The
17 east-west foreshore between South Voxter and Mail provides sections
18 through the uppermost part of the Dunrossness Spilitic Formation,
19 at the top of the Clift Hills Group. The rocks are dominantly sub-
20 marine, basic pillow lavas with interbedded volcanoclastic material
21 and intrusive bodies of hornblende metagabbro. To the south of
22 Mail the north-south trending sea cliffs and the hillside between
23 the cliffs and the road are composed of metalavas alternating with
24 layers of metavolcanoclastic material and beds of metasedimentary
25 rock. The rocks are pervasively foliated and are difficult to
26 interpret in the field due to the intensity of metamorphism and
27 their general dark-coloured and fine-grained nature. Inland from
28 the north-south cliff section, the hillside drained by the Burn of
29 Catpund is underlain by a large body of variably altered
30 serpentinite, notable for its local development of highly unusual
31 and controversial spinifex-like texture, which could be of
32 considerable international interest (Figure 10). Along its western
33 margin the serpentinite is in direct contact with a sequence of
34 phyllitic chloritoid-kyanite-chlorite pelites, known as the
35 Dunrossness Phyllitic Formation. These stratigraphically overlie
36 the Clift Hills Phyllitic Formation that is displayed so
37 comprehensively in the Hawks Ness GCR site. The Dunrossness
38 Phyllitic Formation is seen to overlie the serpentinite
39 structurally at the southern end of the GCR site, although it
40 underlies it stratigraphically in the accepted order of Shetland
41 succession.
42

43 This assemblage of rocks, following on from the sequence seen in
44 the Hawks Ness GCR site, provides an illustration of the final
45 stages in the development of a late-Dalradian extensional basin,
46 when crustal disruption culminated in deep-seated intracontinental
47 to oceanic magmatism. An understanding of the processes and
48 sequence of events involved allows for a more-informed regional
49 interpretation of an otherwise poorly known sector of the Scottish
50 Dalradian. Detailed accounts of the local geology were given by
51 Flinn (1967), Flinn and Moffat (1985) and Moffat (1987) and the
52 area is covered by the Geological Survey's one-inch Sheet 126
53 (Southern Shetland, 1978). The rock assemblage was discussed in
54 its regional context by Flinn (1985, 1999).
55

56 An additional feature of this GCR site stems from its considerable
57 archaeological interest. Areas of very soft talc-magnesite schist
58 (steatite), arising from low-temperature hydrothermal alteration of
59 the serpentinite, were exploited in Norse times to be worked-up
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4 into various artefacts. Numerous tool-marked recesses have been
5 left behind by the Norse workings and it has been suggested by
6 archaeologists that there was considerable trade in steatite
7 products from these and from other such quarries in Shetland.
8

9 **4.2 Description**

10
11 The Dunrossness Spilitic Formation forms the stratigraphically
12 highest part of the Dalradian succession exposed in Shetland (Flinn
13 *et al.*, 1972). It is almost entirely composed of mafic and
14 ultramafic, lavas and volcanoclastic rocks formed in a sub-marine
15 environment. The formation has been correlated broadly with either
16 the lavas and tuffs of the Tayvallich Subgroup at the top of the
17 Argyll Group (Flinn *et al.*, 1972), or possibly with part of the
18 slightly later Southern Highland Group (Harris *et al.*, 1994; Flinn,
19 2007).
20

21 The formation dips consistently to the west at between 25° and
22 45°. There is no local way-up evidence but, accepting that the
23 overall younging of the Shetland Dalradian succession is to the
24 east, as discussed in the *Introduction* to this paper, the sequence
25 here must be overturned. The outcrop width and dip suggest a
26 formation thickness of about 1 km, with the ultramafic component, a
27 large body of serpentinite, occupying upwards of one half of that,
28 in the topographically highest but stratigraphically lowest part in
29 the west. For the most part, the sequence is thinly foliated with
30 some thicker and more-massive, less well-foliated units that are
31 probably relics of the original bedding. The metamorphic foliation
32 is generally parallel to the igneous and sedimentary layering.
33 Folding is rare but locally the layering and foliation are
34 intensely deformed by a series of small, strongly asymmetrical,
35 tight to isoclinal folds. Fold hinges are subhorizontal but show a
36 range of orientations, possibly in association with minor faulting,
37 which complicates the structure locally. Garnet appears to have
38 grown in two phases of metamorphism, before and after imposition of
39 the foliation. Overall, the rocks stratigraphically above the
40 serpentinite have been metamorphosed to lower to medium amphibolite
41 facies. This is a significantly higher grade than is seen in the
42 rocks of the Clift Hills and Whiteness groups to the west (see the
43 *Hawks Ness GCR site report*).
44

45 The serpentinite occupies most of the hillside above the road to
46 the west of the coastal sections. Its basal contact with the
47 metasedimentary, chloritoid-bearing Dunrossness Phyllites is
48 exposed only in the sea cliffs at the southern end of the GCR site,
49 immediately north of Lamba Taing. There, despite the complication
50 of minor but complex faulting, the contact appears to lie parallel
51 to the bedding traces and dominant foliation in the phyllites;
52 there is no evidence for a significant tectonic break. A major
53 lens of serpentinite, separate from the main body, crosses the road
54 and intersects the coast in the middle of the GCR site and wedges
55 out on the hillside south of the Burn of Catpund. This large lens
56 of serpentinite also lies parallel to the foliation in the spilitic
57 and volcanoclastic rocks.
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59 The serpentinite has been variably steatitized and veined by talc.
60 From several hundred metres north of the Burn of Catpund to the
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4 south end of the GCR site, the steatitization is sufficiently
5 intense for a quarry to have been opened recently in the
6 expectation of exploitation. The surrounding hillside is scarred
7 by small pits opened during the Norse occupation of Shetland, a
8 thousand years ago, for the manufacture of utensils. Some Norse
9 pits along the Burn of Catpund have been re-excavated by the burn
10 and one has been opened by archeologists for display purposes.

11 The steatite rock is about half talc and half magnesite. Where
12 the steatitization is not too intensively developed, the rock is
13 seen to be a clast-supported breccia composed of blocks up to about
14 30 cm in diameter, thoroughly cemented by the serpentinization.
15 Broken blocks within the breccia that have been little affected by
16 steatitization, have in places been weathered and etched to reveal
17 that they are composed of a mass of needle-like, parallel to
18 subparallel crystal pseudomorphs forming a distinctive spinifex-
19 like texture (Figure 10). The 'spinifex' textured rocks can be
20 traced intermittently from about 300 m north of the Burn of Catpund
21 as far as the Burn of Mail, in a zone a hundred metres or so west
22 of the contact of the serpentinite body with the spilitic rocks
23 (Figure 9). Thin sections show that the pseudomorphs have the
24 characteristic crystal terminations of spinifex-textured olivines,
25 but that they are serpentinized or steatitized, as is the matrix
26 that contains them. As is discussed below, the recognition of the
27 spinifex-like texture provides crucial support for the
28 interpretation of the serpentinite as an original quickly chilled,
29 ultramafic lava, possibly a komatiite.

30 Also present within the serpentinite outcrop are several major
31 lenticular layers of fine-grained non-serpentinite rocks that
32 possibly separate individual ultramafic lavas. These are mainly
33 metavolcaniclastic rocks, best seen on the beach at Mail and in the
34 nearby road cutting. They also include interlayered lenses of
35 metasedimentary rocks including very fine-grained, often graphitic
36 gritty psammites, quartzites and pelites; one such lens crops out
37 on the coast about 200 m south of Sands of Mail. The minerals
38 present include biotite, garnet, chlorite, chloritoid and
39 hornblende. The quartzites might be recrystallized cherts and
40 there is at least one 2 m-thick bed with a melange-like texture
41 showing tectonic stretching of the clasts within the plane of the
42 foliation (Figure 11).

43 Sporadically distributed through the serpentinite are many near-
44 spherical to sublenticular bodies of hornblende gabbro, 10-20 m
45 across and forming prominent smoothly rounded knolls. Also widely
46 scattered in this area are intrusive veins and lenses, centimetres
47 to several metres in width, of a white to greyish rock with a
48 siliceous patina. The rock is composed of minute aligned crystals
49 of albite with sparse accessory hornblende and biotite. It
50 contains 10% Na₂O and 0.5% K₂O and has been interpreted as a sodic
51 'keratophyre' (an albite felsite). It also contains abundant
52 micron-sized zircons and an analysis shows 1000 ppm Zr, but it has
53 not as yet been dated and relationships with the host serpentinite
54 cannot be determined.

55 To the east of the serpentinite, between the road and the sea, are
56 metamorphosed basic lavas alternating with volcaniclastic rocks.
57 In thin section the lavas are seen to be composed dominantly of
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4 blue-green hornblende with epidote. Some are aphyric, others
5 contain relict phenocrysts of plagioclase (now corroded albite),
6 and many are amygdaloidal. The rocks are variably tectonized with
7 phenocrysts broken and displaced in some examples and acting as
8 microaugen within the foliation in others. They are tholeiitic
9 Mid-Ocean-Ridge-Basalt (MORB), probably derived from a relatively
10 enriched mantle source (Fettes *et al.*, 2011). The volcanoclastic
11 rocks are black and commonly very fine grained. Their nature is
12 largely indeterminable in the field except where they have been
13 polished by sand along the Mail coast; identification has been
14 assisted greatly by thin-section examination (Flinn, 1967).

15 Eastwards along the coast from the Sands of Mail, the rocks are
16 exceedingly difficult to interpret. Most are black and fine
17 grained, but in thin section they prove to be basic
18 metavolcanoclastic rocks. Some weathered exposures reveal faint
19 cross-sections of pillow structures (e.g. at HU 441 282) and the
20 sequence might be largely composed of fragmented pillow lavas.
21 Also present, especially adjacent to the Old Red Sandstone to the
22 east of Aith Voe, are exposures of graphitic quartzite and
23 phyllitic pelite. Inland there are a number of hornblende gabbro
24 bosses with the same appearance as those seen to the west within
25 the serpentinite; although here some are schistose and boudinaged,
26 Flinn (1967) reported the preservation of an ophitic texture. An
27 unusually large example crops out on the coast at The Pows (HU 437
28 278). They might have originated as intrusions into the volcanic
29 sequence.
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32 **4.3 Interpretation**

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35 The interpretation of the origin of the serpentinite is crucial in
36 any assessment of the wider geological significance of the
37 Cunningsburgh GCR site in relation to the late history of the
38 Dalradian basin in Shetland. When it was first mapped in the late
39 1950s, the serpentinite was interpreted as comprising one or more
40 sub-marine, ultramafic lava flows (Flinn, 1967). However, this
41 interpretation was regarded as petrologically impossible at the
42 time and was not published until the recognition of the spinifex-
43 like texture by Flinn and Moffat (1985) suggested the possibility
44 of a komatiitic protolith for the serpentinite.

45 The term 'komatiite' was introduced by Viljoen and Viljoen (1969)
46 to describe ultramafic lavas from the Baberton Mountain Land, South
47 Africa. They are now known to be fairly widespread in Archaean
48 greenstone belts but are rare in younger geological assemblages;
49 for an overall review see Arndt and Nisbet, (1982). The high
50 concentration of magnesium (up to 32% MgO) and related elements in
51 komatiitic lavas indicates a high temperature (c. 1600°C), a high
52 degree of melting of mantle material and consequently an unusually
53 high heat flow and/or the tapping of an exceptionally deep and hot
54 mantle source. Hence the presence of the ultramafic lava within
55 the Shetland Dalradian has potentially profound implications for
56 the tectonic development of the depositional basin.

57
58 Apart from the high MgO values, the most distinctive feature of
59 komatiitic lavas is the common primary crystallization of olivine
60 as long intermeshed crystals in a glass matrix, to produce what is
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4 known as 'spinifex texture' (after the spiny intermeshed leaves of
5 Australian Spinifex grass). However, the spinifex nature of the
6 texture in the Cunningsburgh rocks was disputed by Nesbitt and
7 Hartman (1986) who thought it more likely to be an example of the
8 well-documented 'pseudo-spinifex' or 'jackstraw' texture that
9 develops through the regrowth of olivine during prograde
10 metamorphism of serpentinite (Collerson et al., 1976). The
11 distinction between this pseudo-spinifex and true spinifex texture
12 is best based on examination of thin sections of fresh samples.
13 However, the Cunningsburgh rocks are both serpentinitized and
14 steatitized, destroying these distinctive thin-section features.
15 The distinction in this case has to be based on the study of the
16 textural patterns revealed on suitably weathered rock surfaces
17 (Figure 10).
18

19 Nesbitt and Hartmann (1986) presented various arguments against
20 the presence of komatiitic lavas at Cunningsburgh and elsewhere in
21 the Caledonian-Appalachian Orogen, possibly influenced by the fact
22 that occurrences in post-Archaean rocks were at that time regarded
23 as exceedingly rare or non-existent. Proterozoic and Phanerozoic
24 komatiitic occurrences are no longer regarded as quite so rare, but
25 it is difficult to reach any conclusions about original magmatic
26 liquid compositions from rocks that are as altered as the
27 Cunningsburgh serpentinites, and the origin of the spinifex-like
28 texture remains somewhat enigmatic. However, even if the
29 Cunningsburgh rocks were not originally komatiites, it is still
30 possible that they originated as basaltic lavas, in which Mg
31 concentrations even higher than those of typical komatiites can
32 arise by olivine fractionation and accumulation (see the *Ardwell*
33 *Bridge GCR site report*).
34

35 In a robust defence of their original interpretation, Flinn and
36 Moffat (1986) pointed out that the complex metamorphic history
37 implied by the Nesbitt and Hartmann interpretation of the origin of
38 the spinifex-like texture does not fit the known geology of the
39 Cunningsburgh area. In particular, there is no evidence in
40 Shetland for a high-grade metamorphic event (of at least upper
41 amphibolite facies) that would have been necessary to produce
42 prograde olivine growth after one episode of serpentinitization but
43 before the brecciation and the final serpentinitization and
44 steatitization. They re-iterated their belief that a volcanic
45 origin for the serpentinite in the top of an extensional basin
46 requires the fewest assumptions, creates the fewest problems and
47 fits the observed structural and metamorphic history most simply.
48

49 Consequently, the Dunrossness Spilitic Formation, including the
50 serpentinite, is regarded as the final volcanic infill to the late-
51 Dalradian extensional basin that is still preserved in Shetland.
52 Following the deposition of the Laxfirth Limestone, early
53 sedimentation in the basin was interrupted by a series of
54 relatively minor volcanic eruptions giving rise to the Asta
55 Spilitic Formation (see the *Hawks Ness GCR site report*). But the
56 later volcanism that created the Dunrossness Spilitic Formation was
57 an event on an altogether different scale. Not only is the
58 formation a kilometre or more thick, but it commenced suddenly with
59 the eruption of a thick sequence of ultramafic lavas. This unusual
60 event is most readily explained by a rapid acceleration of crustal
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4 rifting beneath the extending basin, causing adiabatic melting in
5 the mantle immediately below with generation and emplacement of
6 high-temperature, magnesium-rich magmas (Flinn, 2007). The
7 spinifex-like texture, the brecciation and the serpentinization
8 could all be due, in part at least, to sub-marine emplacement of
9 the ultramafic magma; certainly they are all early-formed features.
10 The emplacement of the ultramafic magma was followed by the more-
11 usual eruption of basaltic magma of tholeiitic Mid-Ocean Ridge
12 affinities in the form of lavas, volcanoclastic material and
13 eventually pillow lavas. Their higher grade of metamorphism than
14 any of the rocks in the Clift Hills and Whiteness groups to the
15 west might have been caused, at least in part, by residual heat
16 associated with the ultramafic magmas. The intrusion of small
17 globular masses of the same magma in the form of hornblende gabbro
18 would seem to require special conditions or circumstances that are
19 not fully resolved.
20

21 Apart from the sub-marine lavas and volcanoclastic deposits, the
22 original protoliths for the sedimentary components of the
23 Dunrossness Spilitic Formation were interbedded mudstones and
24 sandstones of deep-marine, probable turbiditic facies. Accessory
25 lithologies present possibly included chert and a melange-type rock
26 that might have originated by sedimentary slumping before being
27 tectonized.
28

29 The onshore outcrop of the Dunrossness Spilitic Formation is given
30 additional importance by a substantial offshore extension beneath
31 Old Red Sandstone strata, as indicated by major coincident gravity
32 and aeromagnetic anomalies. These anomalies continue as far north
33 as the island of Unst, suggesting that the extensional basin
34 eventually developed into an intracontinental rift on the edge of
35 Laurentia at the time of the opening of the Iapetus Ocean (Flinn,
36 2007). It has even been suggested by Flinn (2001) that the
37 Shetland Ophiolite could have been obducted from this basin at
38 about 500 Ma.
39

40 A possible ophiolitic association of the serpentinite and pillow
41 lava sequence in the Cunningsburgh area was noted by Garson and
42 Plant (1973) and was further hinted at by Nesbitt and Hartmann
43 (1986). This interpretation invoked limited sea-floor spreading
44 during basin extension, but also invited consideration of cold
45 serpentinite diapirism into growing oceanic fracture zones.
46 However, apart from the presence in the Cunningsburgh area of
47 serpentinite and pillow lavas, no convincing evidence has been
48 adduced which in any way suggests the presence of an ophiolite-
49 complex. At the time that these suggestions were made it was still
50 common for all serpentinite occurrences to be interpreted
51 automatically as ophiolites.
52

53 **4.4 Conclusions**

54
55 The coast to the east and south of Mail and the hillside inland
56 from the coast at the Cunningsburgh GCR site, provide excellent
57 exposures of the Dunrossness Spilitic Formation, the youngest
58 Dalradian unit present in Shetland. It is largely metavolcanic in
59 origin and comprises sub-marine lavas and various volcanoclastic
60 rocks, interbedded with minor metasedimentary lithologies of deep-
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4 water facies. The volcanic succession has been intruded by
5 comagmatic hornblende gabbro and by albite felsite ('sodic
6 keratophyre') of unknown affinity. All of the rocks have been
7 deformed and metamorphosed, up to middle amphibolite facies in
8 places; some of the finer grained rocks have a phyllitic texture.
9

10 The metavolcanic rocks include basaltic pillow lavas and
11 brecciated ultramafic rocks that are interpreted as high-magnesium
12 lavas. Clasts within the latter have spectacular and highly
13 distinctive elongate pseudomorphs after crystals of olivine, which
14 have been likened to the spinifex texture characteristic of unusual
15 high-temperature lavas known as komatiites. Unfortunately later
16 serpentinization has obliterated details of the texture and its
17 origin has been the subject of debate, but the presence of
18 komatiites in post-Archaean rocks is rather unusual, and the
19 possibility of their presence in Shetland is highly significant and
20 of international interest.

21 The rock assemblage illustrates the final phase in the development
22 of the Dalradian extensional basin in the Shetland area. An abrupt
23 increase in the rate and depth of extensional faulting is
24 considered to have caused generation of the highly unusual
25 ultramafic lavas, followed by eruption of more-typical, within-
26 plate basaltic lavas. A considerable thickness of the basaltic
27 lavas and associated volcanoclastic rocks built up as the basin
28 filled; since many of the lavas are pillowed, sub-marine eruption
29 is confirmed. The volcanic sequence can be traced offshore by
30 geophysical methods as far north as the island of Unst, and it
31 might have formed the floor of an intracontinental basin on the
32 edge of Laurentia from which the Shetland Ophiolite was obducted.
33 Hence, the geological features preserved within the Cunningsburgh
34 GCR site have profound implications for the wider interpretation of
35 the Dalradian succession both in Shetland and in the Scottish
36 mainland.
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7 **Figure 1** Map of the Shetland Islands showing the outcrops of the
8 Moine and Dalradian 'divisions' and overlying structural units. From
9 Flinn *et al.* (1972) with modifications taken from the BGS 1:50
10 0000 sheet 131 (Unst and Fetlar, 2002).
11 Proposed GCR sites: 1 Scalloway, 2 Hawks Ness, 3 Cunningsburgh.
12 BSF Bluemull Sound Fault, NF Nesting Fault, WBF Walls Boundary
13 Fault.
14

15 **Figure 2** Map of the 'divisions' of Moine and Dalradian rocks on
16 Mainland Shetland, east of the Walls Boundary Fault (the so-called
17 'East Mainland Succession'), showing main structural features and the
18 location of the proposed GCR sites: 1 Scalloway, 2 Hawks Ness, 3
19 Cunningsburgh.
20 BSF Bluemull Sound Fault, NF Nesting Fault, WBF Walls Boundary
21 Fault.
22

23 **Figure 3** Schematic cross-section of the East Mainland Mega-
24 monocline and Valla Field Anticline, Shetland (after Flinn, 2007).
25 EMM East Mainland Mega-monocline axial plane trace.
26

27 **Figure 4** Map of the area around the Scalloway GCR site.
28

29 **Figure 5** Typical homogeneous granoblastic gneiss of the Colla
30 Firth Permeation Belt, Whiteness Group, viewed normal to the
31 lineation and parallel to the foliation. Point of the Pund,
32 Scalloway (HU 3873 3889). Hammer shaft is 33 cm long. (Photo: D.
33 Flinn, BGS No. P 574422.)
34

35 **Figure 6** Map of the area around the Hawks Ness GCR site. Inset
36 is an equal-area stereographic projection showing the relationship
37 between poles to bedding, axes of prominent isoclinal folds in
38 individual quartzite beds and fabric lineations.
39

40 **Figure 7** Ripple cross-lamination preserved within the Dales Voe
41 Grit Member of the Clift Hills Phyllitic Formation. Brim Ness (HU
42 4606 4825). Hammer head is 16.5 cm long. (Photo: F. May, BGS No.
43 P 726605.)
44

45 **Figure 8** Structures in the Clift Hills Phyllitic Formation (see
46 stereoplot inset in Figure 6).
47

48 (a) Isoclinal synform in beds of turbiditic psammite of the Dales
49 Voe Grit Member. Houbie (HU 4572 4807).
50

51 (b) South-west-plunging lineation caused by tectonic elongation
52 of clastic grains in a bed of coarse, schistose psammite. North-
53 west tip of Hawks Ness (HU 4583 4909). Coin is 30 mm diameter.
54 (Photos: F. May, BGS Nos. P 726606 and P 726607.)
55

56 **Figure 9** Map of the area around the Cunningsburgh GCR site.
57

58 **Figure 10** Spinifex-like texture preserved as pseudomorphs after
59 olivine in a block of brecciated and then serpentinized ultramafic
60 rock. Hillside south-west of Sands of Mail, Cunningsburgh (HU 4261
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4 2744). Coin is 26 mm in diameter. (Photo: D. Flinn, BGS No. P
5 550134.)
6

7 **Figure 11** Tectonically stretched clasts within a debris-flow
8 deposit, probably volcaniclastic, interbedded with spilitic lavas
9 of the Dunrossness Spilitic Formation on the coast south-west of
10 Mail, Cunningsburgh (HU 429 278). Hammer shaft is 28 cm long.
11 (Photo: P. Stone, BGS No. P 726608.)
12
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14
15 **Table 1** The East Mainland Succession of Shetland, showing
16 tentative informal correlations with the Moine and Dalradian
17 supergroups of mainland Scotland. Stratigraphical ranges exhibited
18 by the GCR sites are also shown: 1 Scalloway, 2 Hawks Ness, 3
19 Cunningsburgh.
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Table 7.1

SHETLAND			GCR site	SCOTLAND	
group	formation	member		formation	group
Clift Hills	Dunrossness Spilitic		3	Loch Avich Lavas/Green Beds	Southern Highland
	Dunrossness Phyllitic				
	Clift Hills Phyllitic	Dales Voe Grit	2	Tayvallich Volcanic	
Asta Spilitic			Tayvallich Slate and Limestone	Argyll	
Whiteness	Laxfirth Limestone		1		
	Wadbister Ness				
	Girlsta Limestone				
	Colla Firth	host rocks of the Colla Firth Permeation and Injection Belt			
		Nesbister Limestone			
		Whiteness Limestone			
	Weisdale Limestone				Appin
Scatsta	Scatsta Quartzitic			Grampian	
Boundary Zone	Skella Dale Burn Gneiss				??
	Valayre Gneiss				
Yell Sound					?Loch Eil + Glenfinnan

Table 7.1 The East Mainland Succession of Shetland, showing tentative informal correlations with the Moine and Dalradian supergroups of mainland Scotland.

Stratigraphical ranges exhibited by the GCR sites are also shown: 1 Scalloway, 2 Hawks Ness, 3 Cunningsburgh.

Figure 7.1

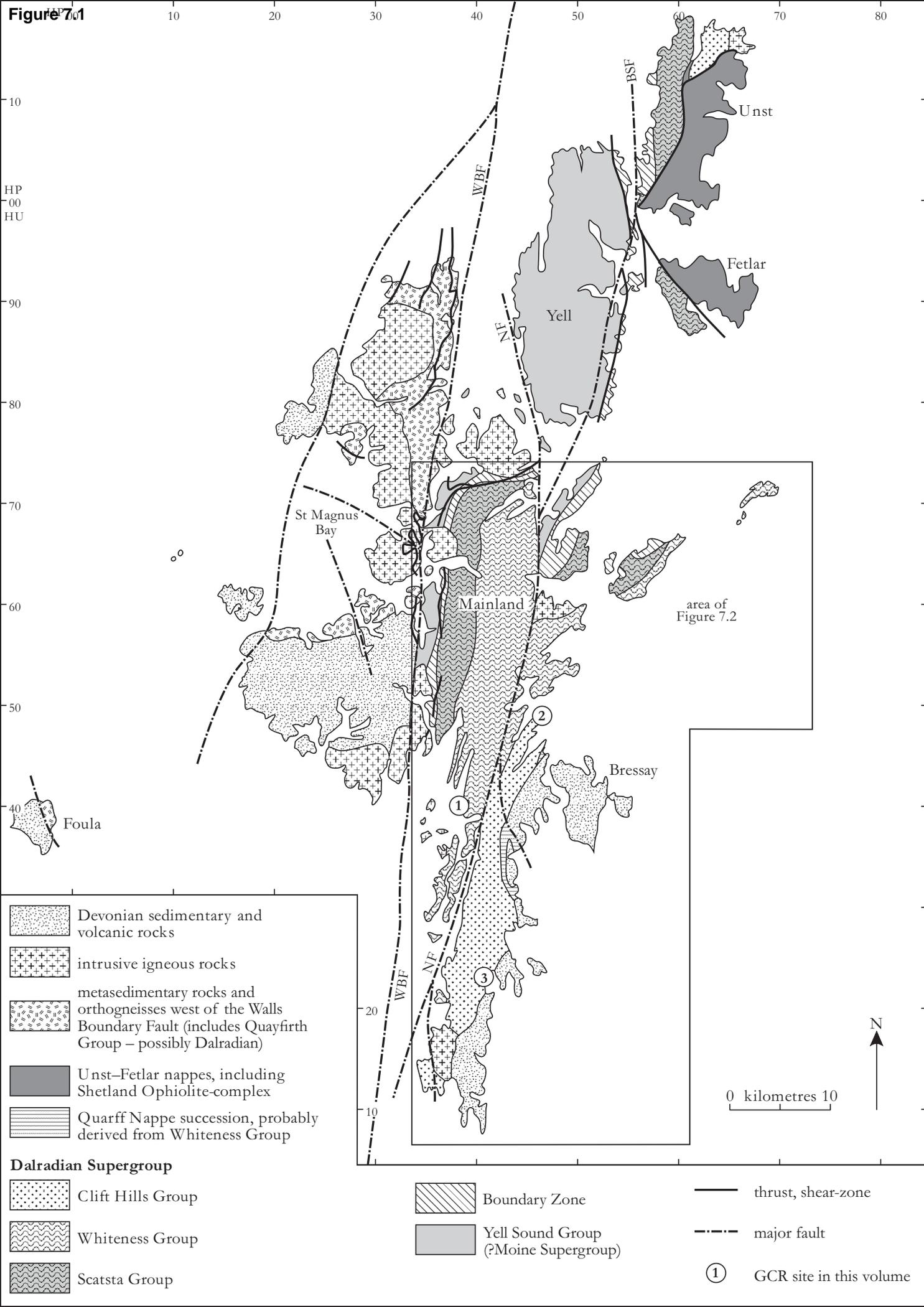


Figure 7.3

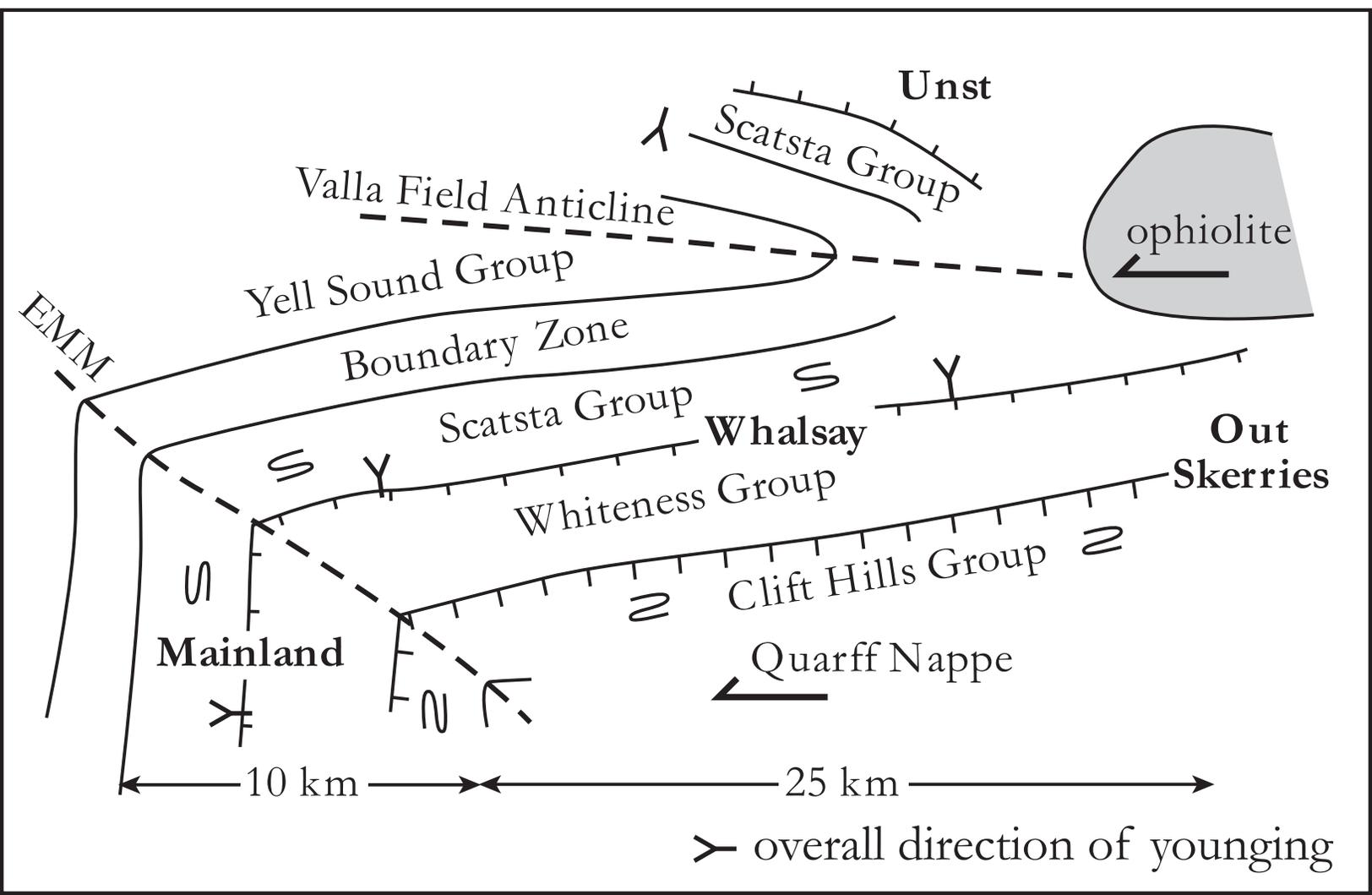


Figure 7.4

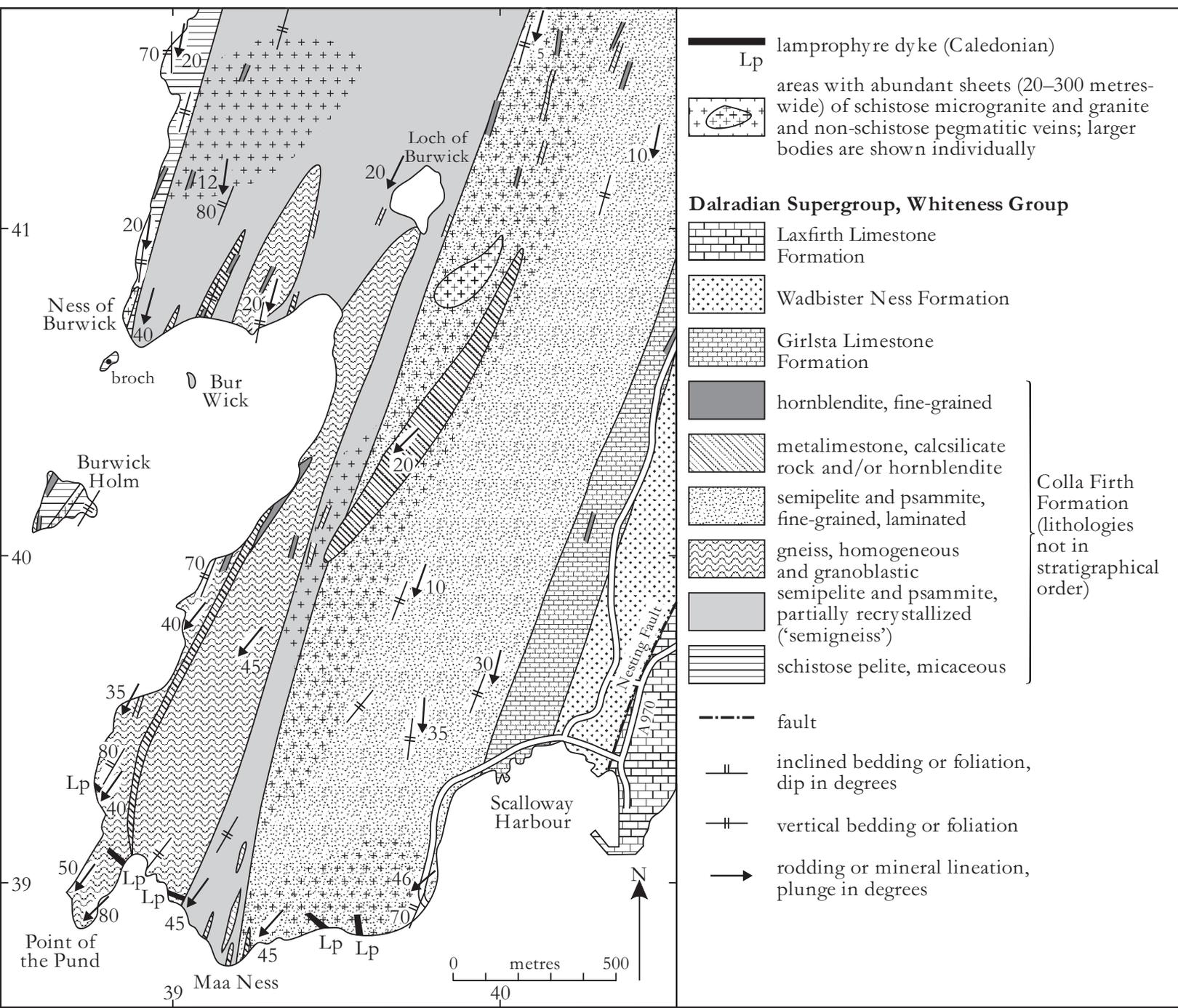


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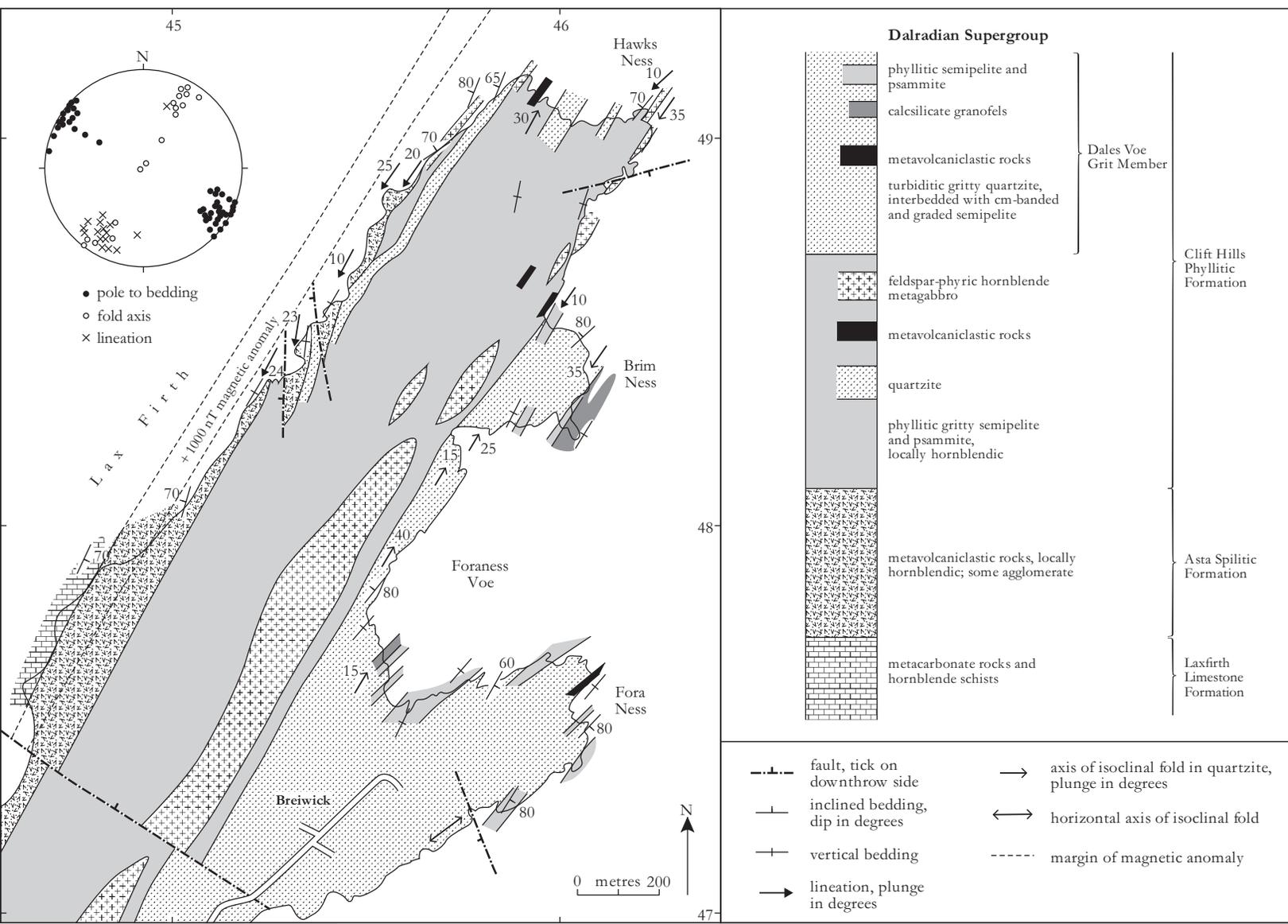


Figure 7.9

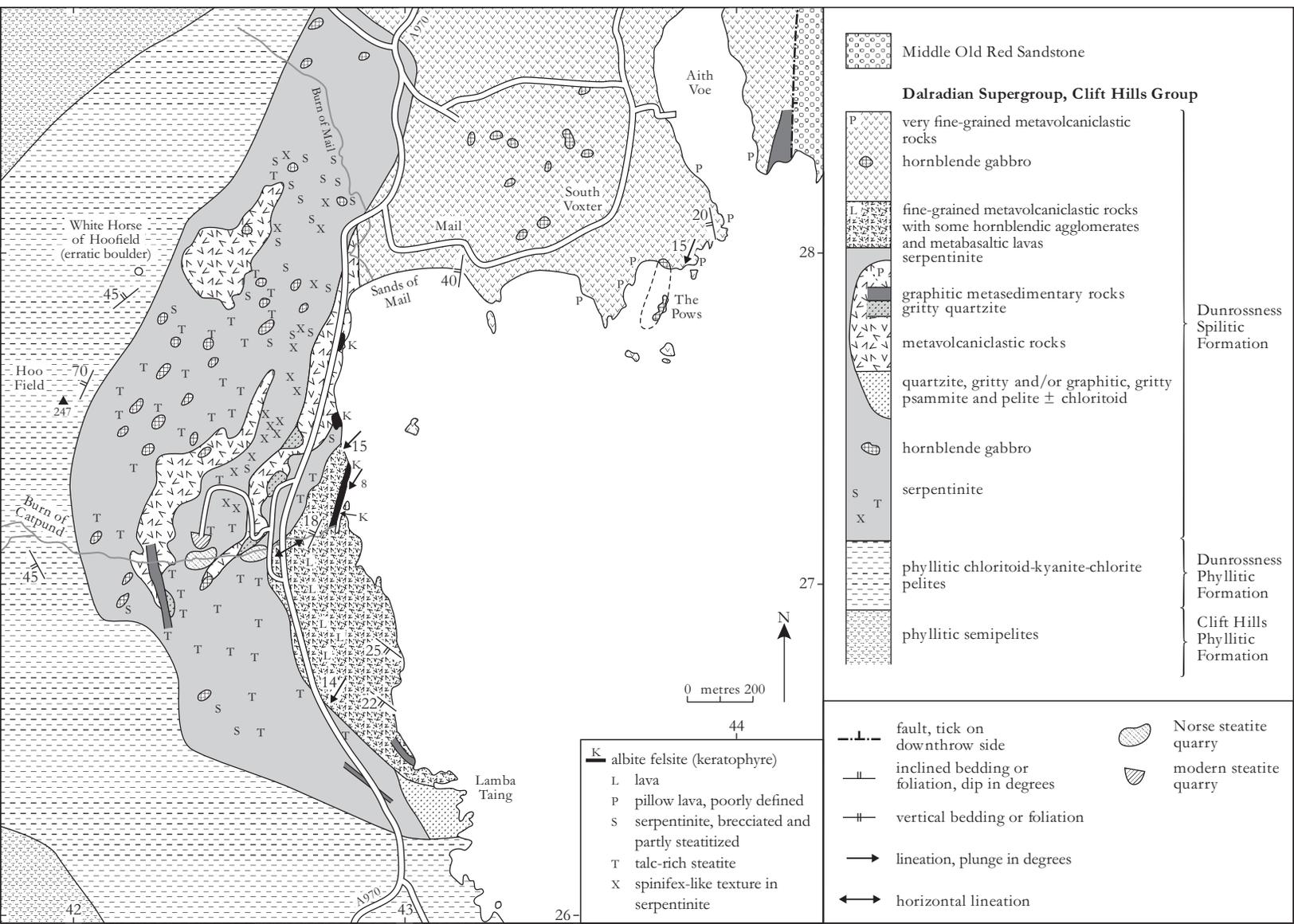


Figure 7.5 B&W
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Figure 7.7 B&W
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Figure 7.8a B&W
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Figure 7.8b B&W
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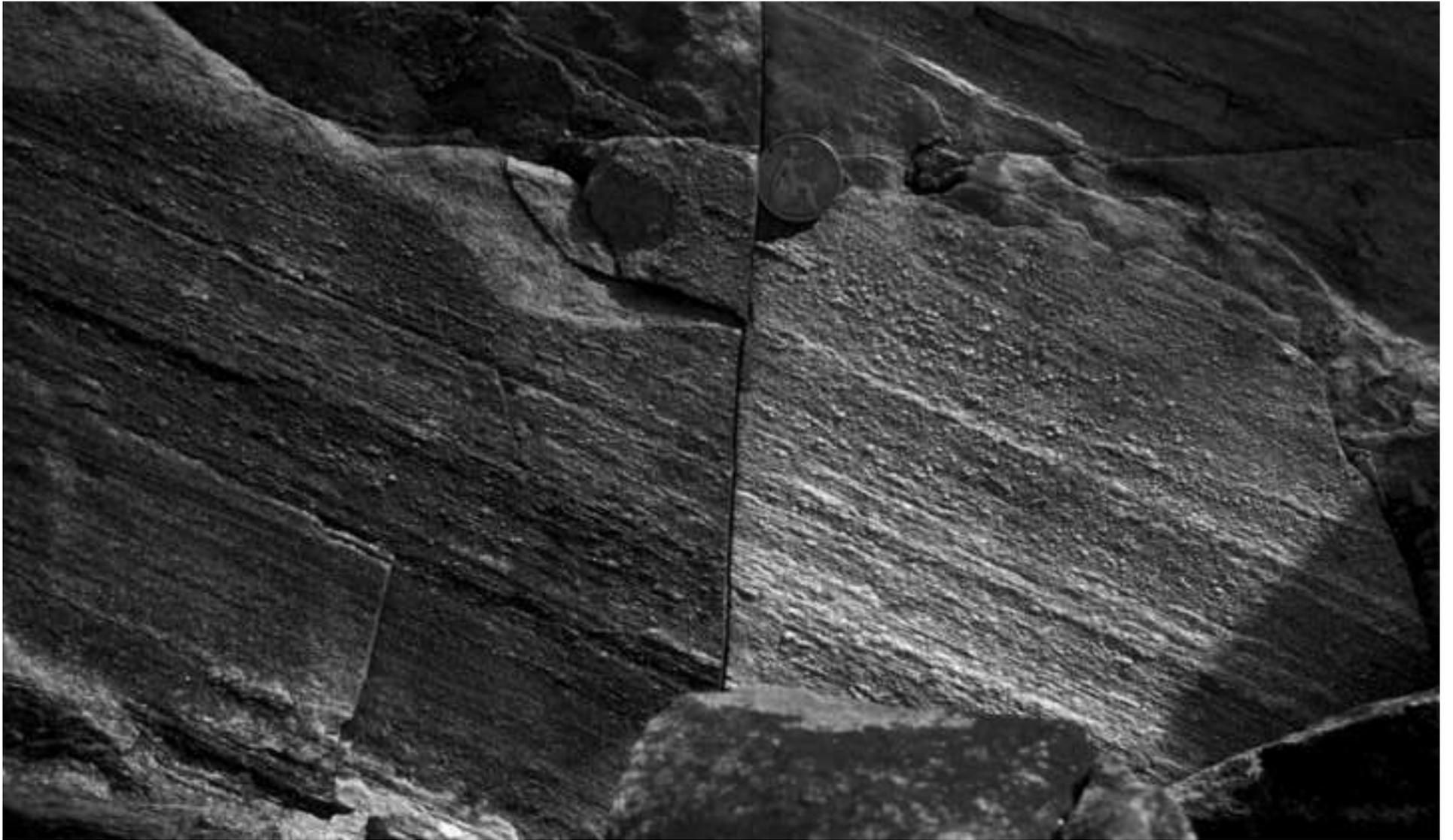


Figure 7.10 B&W
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Figure 7.11 B&W
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Figure 7.5 colour

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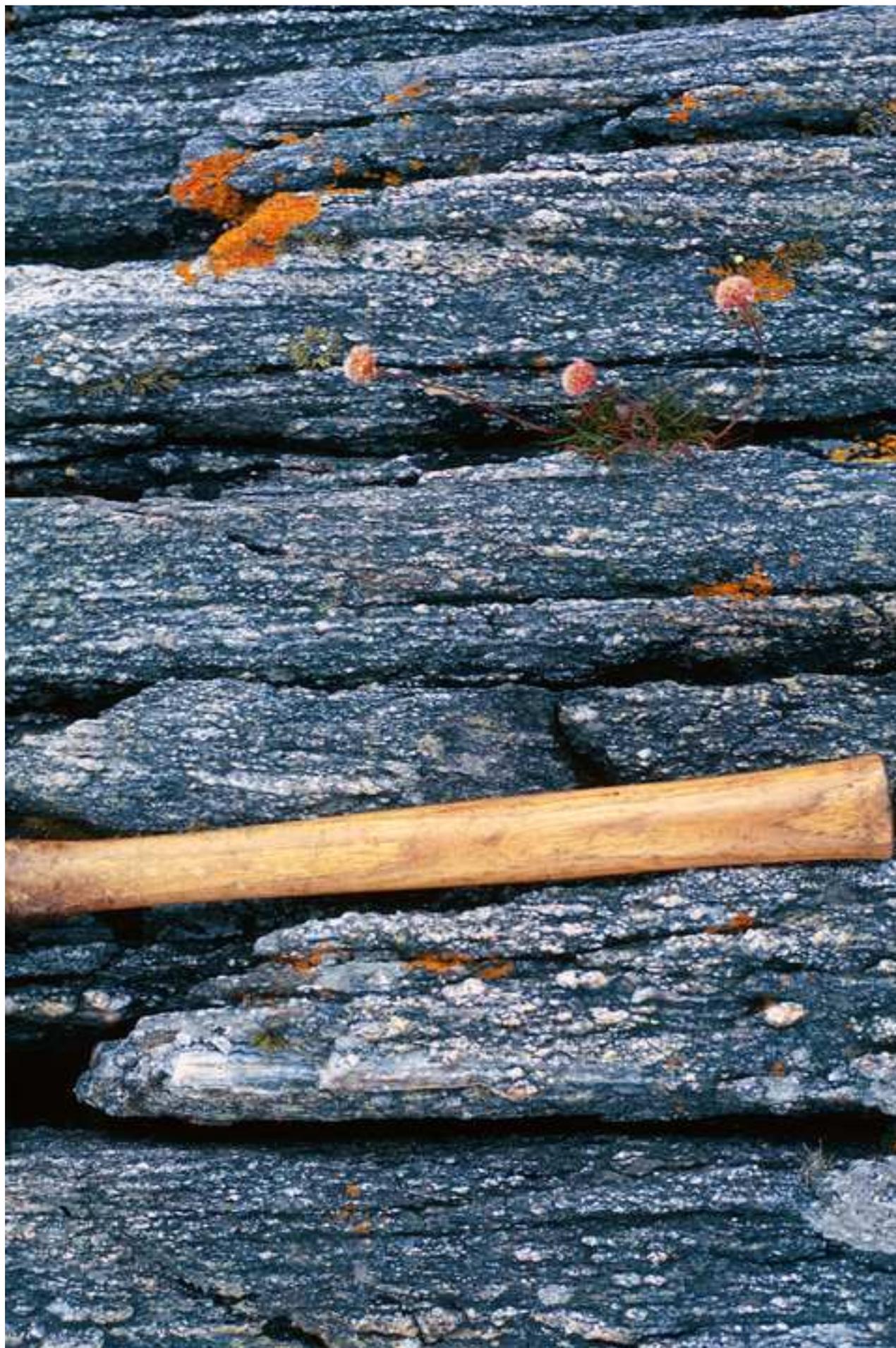


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Figure 7.8a colour
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Figure 7.8b colour
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Figure 7.10 colour
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