

2b Schoolary 39/298686

An abandoned croft with neglected in-fields, an island of reclaimed pasture amidst the Hill of Stickly, a large area of moorland and blanket mire with considerable areas of domestic peat cutting. This patch of grassland is used frequently by geese from the Loch Heilen group, and geese have been watched flighting from Loch of Mey up towards this area.

Numbers

1980/81: 05/04: c 160
1982/83: 09/01: 75 on Hill of Stickly

Darvics

1980/81: 05/04: 1 unread

Census

This area was checked on the ground on 26 March and searched by telescope from Syster (from where the reclaimed in-bye fields are clearly visible) on 27, 29 and 30 March unsuccessfully. The area of reclaimed pasture immediately north of this area at Phillip's Mains and Hollandmey was also searched, being suitable reclaimed pasture on the periphery of peatland, but no evidence of goose feeding was found.

CAITHNESS DISTRICT

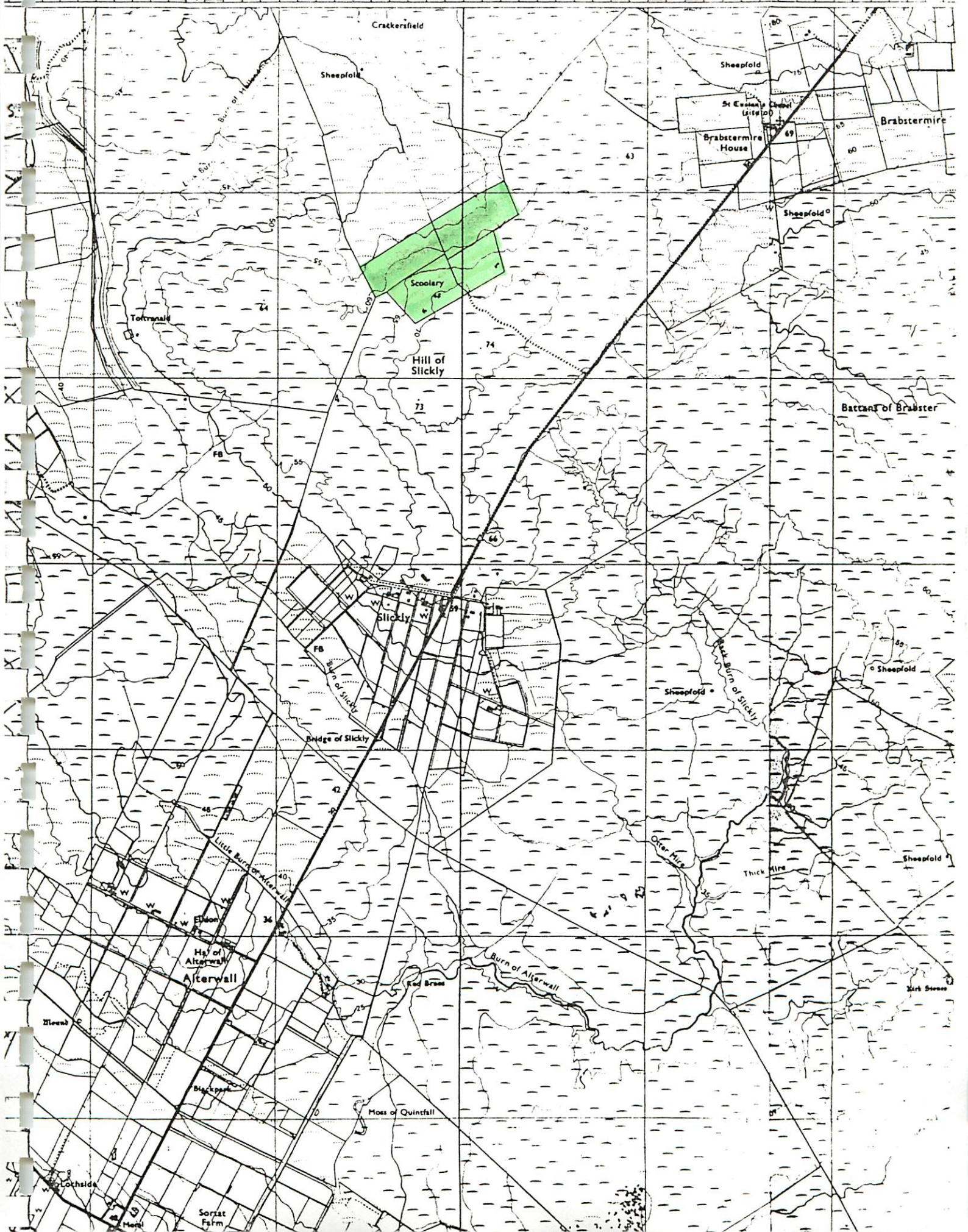
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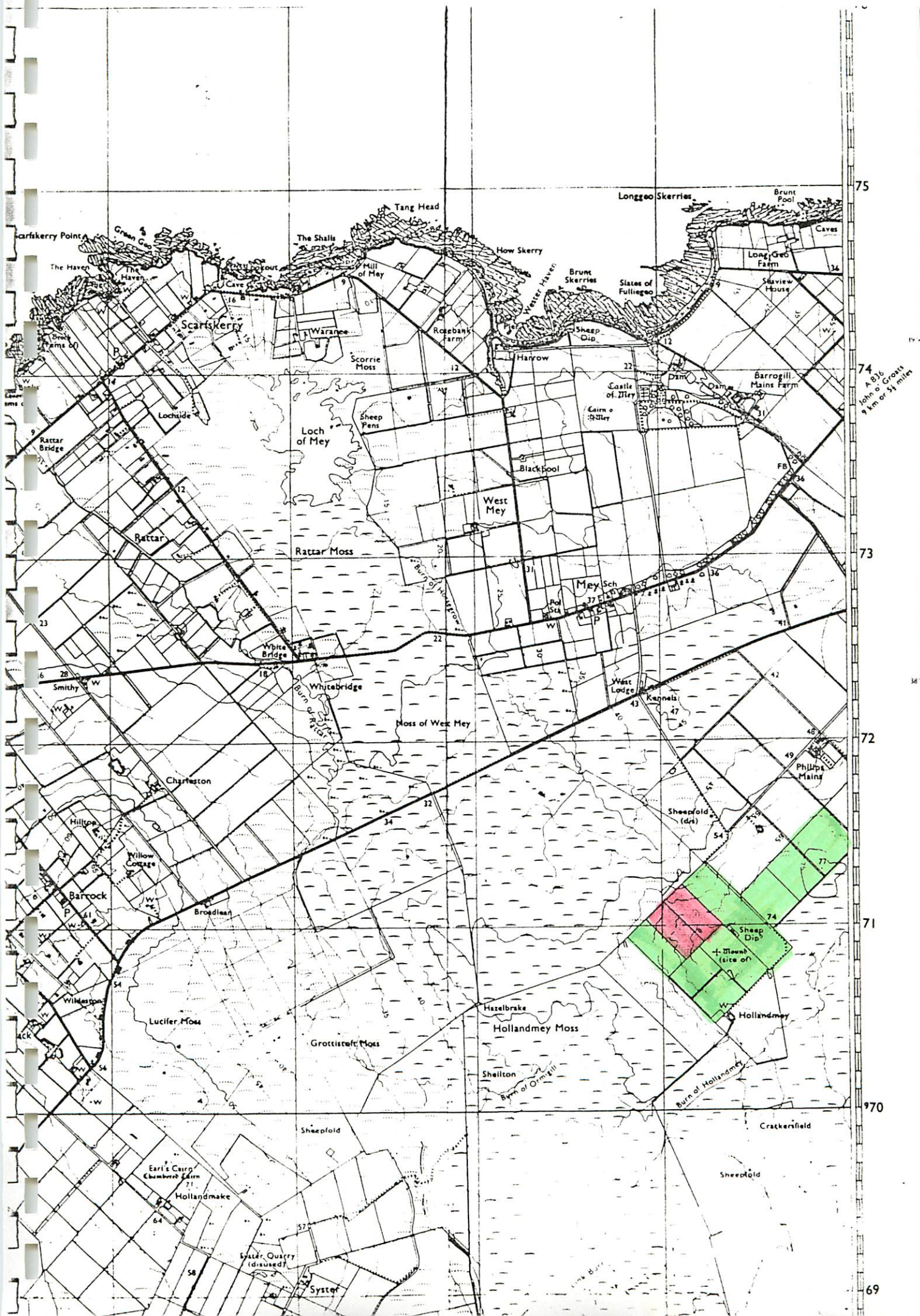


2c Brabstermore SSSI or Phillip's Mains Mire SSSI 39/310705

The site is a dubh lochan peatland system, a lowland patterned blanket mire, little burned or grazed. The area is surrounded by afforestation and so its hydrological integrity may have been affected by peripheral deep-drainage. The site is not known as a Greenland White fronted Goose feeding area, but would repay a visit since it is clearly suitable habitat.

Census

The area was searched but no signs of geese or goose activity were found.



75

74

73

72

71

70

69

A 836
John o' Groats
9 km or 5 1/2 miles

2d Syster 39/270691

Small farmstead with complex of clean reseed, rough pasture and stubble long reclaimed on the periphery of moorland and grading to valley mire and blanket mire to the north, east and south. Frequently used pre-1981, not frequently since. The area was apparently used more regularly in the past when the fields north of the farm were sown with barley. The burn flowing south-east from here is a wide shallow valley of grass and wet pasture with rushes similar to the top end of the valley at the Lyth site, but in spite of this apparently attractive area, geese have only ever been seen in the upper fields

Numbers

1979/80: 04/01: 180-190
1984/85: 26/03: 110; 27/03: 95+; 14/04/85: 106

Darvics

1979/80: 04/01: A05
1984/85: 26/03: A05

Census

The site was counted on 26, 27, 29 and 30 March, with geese present only on the former two dates. On 26 March, 110 Greenland White fronts were feeding in the field adjacent to the barn at 39/273695 with a single pink-foot. This flock was scanned for darvics, and A05 was found to be present again and details of belly-bar pattern taken. There were 95+ birds at the same site the next day, but the geese were not seen here subsequently.

2e Loch of Mey SSSI 39/271735

Shallow eutrophic loch with marginal swamp and fen, possibly a roost site but consistent feeding area from January onwards together with surrounding lush but wet pasture and some small croft stubble fields (eg Rattar and Charleston). Many of the lochside feeding areas are wet poor pasture with much Juncus effusus.

Disturbance

There is undoubtedly winter duck shooting on the loch although the open site makes approach difficult and so disturbance from this source is likely to be minimal. The geese conspicuously use old rough rushy pasture, flying to the loch when disturbed, and two of the local farmers (Rattar and West Mey) are not at all concerned at their presence on their land.

Numbers

1982/83: 03/04: 140+ (6 j out of 80 checked); 10/04: c 160 (6, 5, 1, 2 j + 4 or 5 more j); 17/04: 80 ad, 14 j (4, 3, 2 and 2 j)
1983/84: 01/04: 80 (2, 2 and 4 j); 22/04: 52 (2 and 4 j)
1984/85: 10/02: 104 (2, 2 and 2 j); 29/03: 93+ to roost;
30/03: c 110 to roost; 31/03: c 100 to roost

Darvics

1982/83: 03/04: 1 unread; 10/04: 1 unread + another carrying metal ring on right leg seen at Loch Heilen 04/01/83; 17/04: 1 unread of c 120 checked
1983/84: 01/04: A05; 22/04: none out of 52 checked
1984/85: 10/02: 1 unread

Roost

Mainly a feeding site, but Loch Mey is used as a roost site as well. In past years, they have been seen flying towards Loch Heilen which may be an alternative roost site. However, birds present on Mey in February 1985 were not using Heilen as a roost, and during March 1985, the north-east Caithness flock was regularly using Loch of Mey as their roost, with 93+ roosting on 29 March, c 110 on 30 March and c 100 on 31 March. On each night, the geese flew in before complete darkness from west of the Loch of Mey to settle generally on the eastern side of the water.

Census

The loch was visited during the daytime on 25 and 26 March and watched until darkness for evening roost flights on 29-31 March. The loch and peripheral rough pasture was not being used as a feeding site despite their presence during the February visit. Roost flights were noted on all three nights 29-31 March inclusive, with the flock flying in from the west. Due to poor light, no accurate counts were possible: at least 93 were counted in on 29 March and the following evening two groups dropped in, c 50 at 19.25 and c 60 at 19.34. On 31 March, c 100 came in, all flying in from the west; despite quite thorough searches away to the west of the site through the Corsback/St John's Loch/Dunnet area, the feeding area was not discovered.

PENTLAND FIRTH

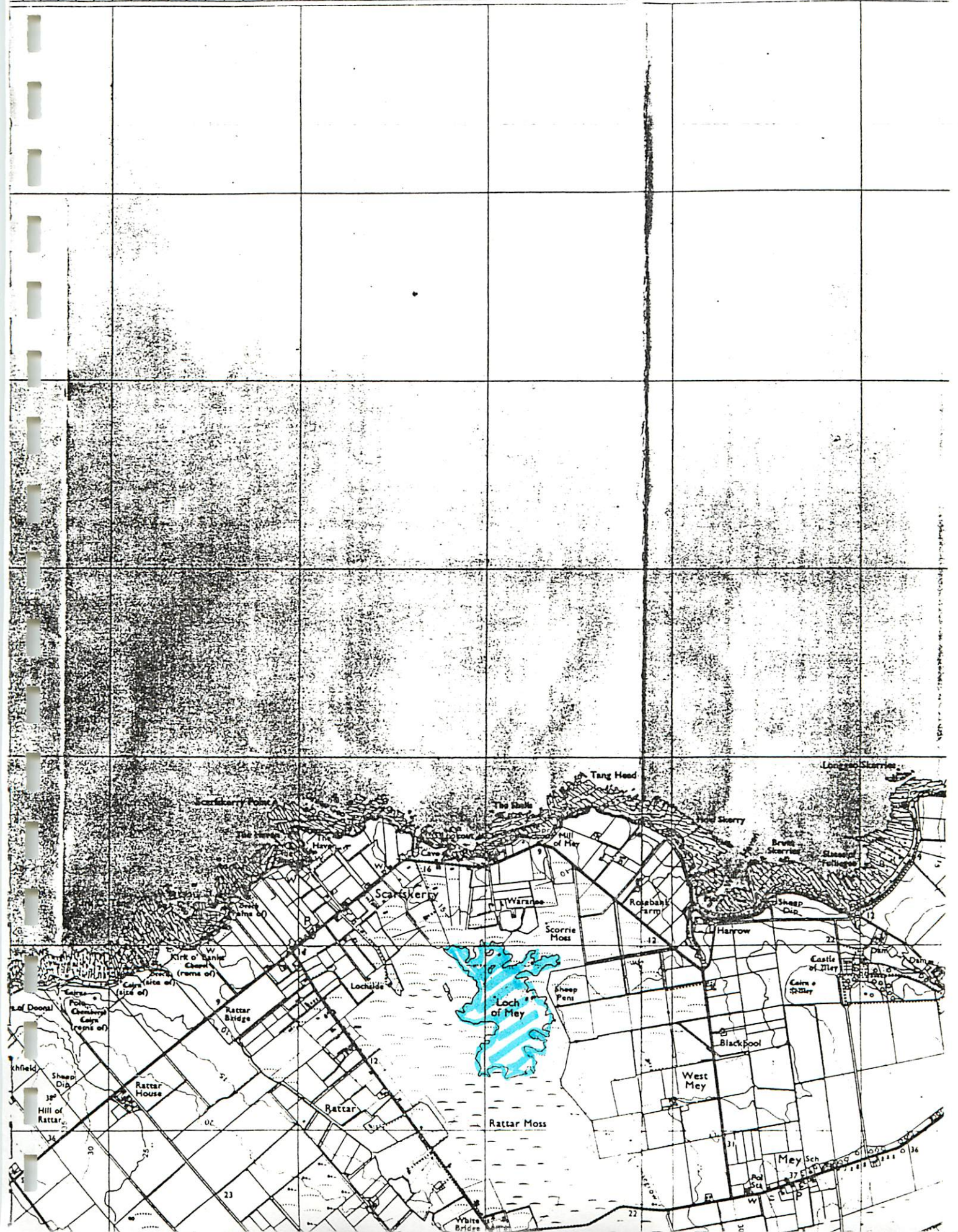
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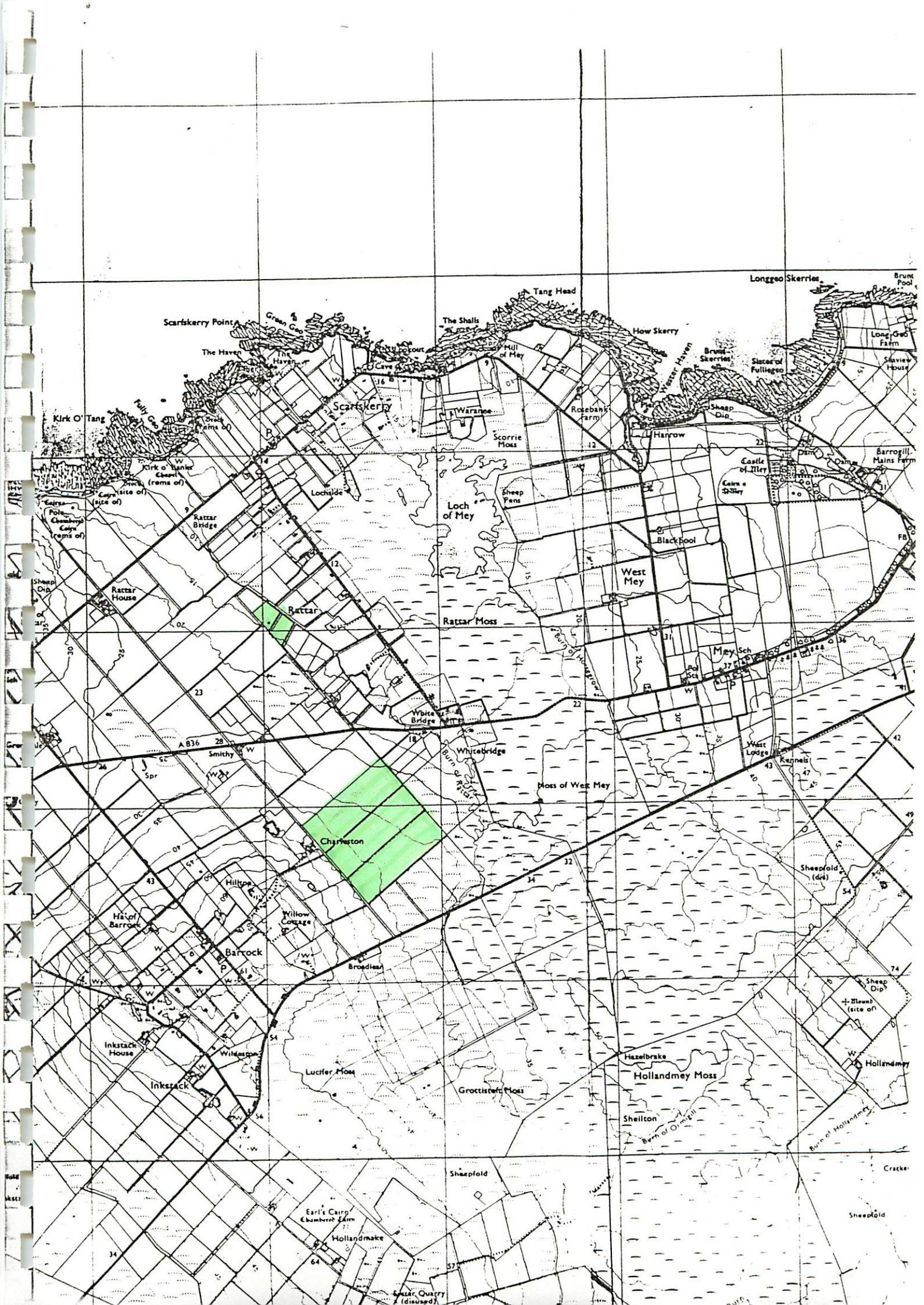
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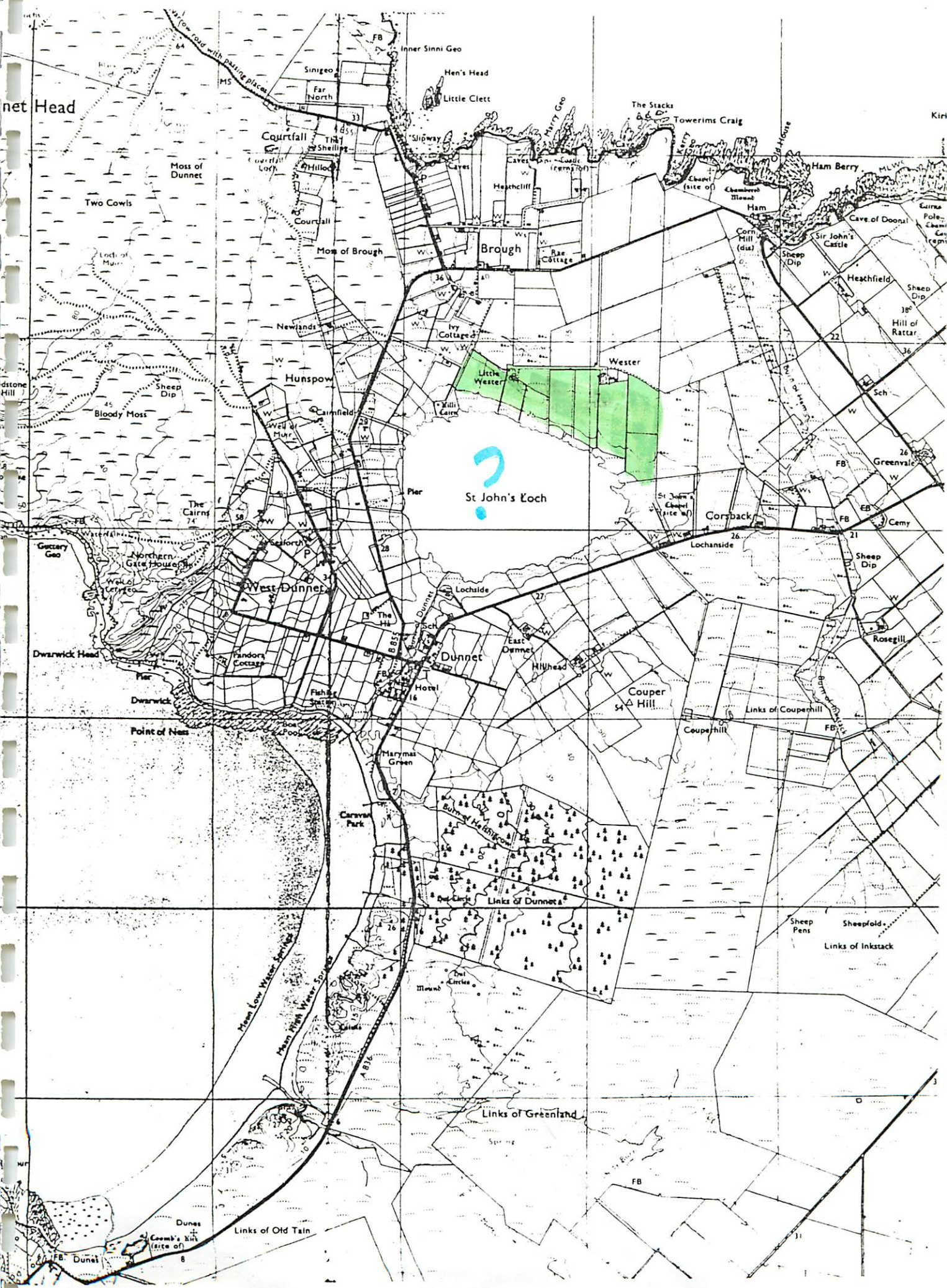
2f Charleston 39/266720 and Rattar 39/262731

The clean grassland reseed and stubble below Charleston farm was used by c 102 Greenland White fronts on 10 February 1985 and by about a half of the Mey flock on 25 March 1985 (50 birds). On both occasions, the geese had flown up here after disturbance from Rattar on the north side of the A836 road. Rattar is again lush grassland reseed, little disturbed and hardly visible from adjacent public roads. On 10 February, there were c 102 White fronts with c 40 greylags at Rattar and again on 25 March there were 50 White fronts on those fields. In addition these fields were checked for geese without success on 26, 27, 29 and 30 March



2g St John's Loch SSSI

This is a moderately eutrophic loch with a rich aquatic and marginal flora set amidst reseeded pasture. Terry Keatinge has seen the geese feeding on the reseeded ley sloping down to the loch margin on the northern side (Wester/Little Wester Farms). This area was searched on 26, 29 and 30 March during the census but no geese seen on any visit. Observations were made at dusk on 29 March, but no Greenland White fronts were seen or heard before departure well after dark.



2h Blackpark/Lyth 39/283642

Shallow valley north of Lyth, used rarely by the geese, generally only during autumn on stubble. Lower end is complex of stubble and rough pasture rapidly becoming Calluna/Molinia blanket mire towards the top end of the valley below Heilen. This area of rank vegetation looks relatively dry and unsuitable but may contain pool and hummock vegetation suitable for goose feeding.

Drainage and Agricultural Change

Drainage has apparently escalated on this area recently, but as elsewhere, this site was used by White fronts when under stubble and hence land use changes here may not drastically affect the geese in this immediate area, and the conversion of rough pasture with rushes to clean reseeded grassland does not radically affect the goose grazing available overall.

Disturbance

Probably no more than background disturbance.

Numbers

1983/84: 20/11: 118; 25/03: 4

Darvics

No records

Roost

Unknown, but almost certainly Loch Heilen/Loch of Mey.

Census

This area was visited on 25, 30 and 31 March but no geese were seen; perhaps not surprisingly in view of the date and condition of the stubble.



Rough M. with some Calluna

Rough

Aterwall

Hastigrow

Upper Hastigrow

Plover Hill

26

27

28

29

330