

REVIEW:

A St. Kilda Handbook, ed. Alan Small (95pp, £1.30, The National Trust for Scotland, Dundee, 1979).

This is the fifth in a series of occasional papers published by the Department of Geography of the University of Dundee, for the National Trust of Scotland. The writers who have contributed to the publication include John Miller on 'The Physical Landscape', Alan Small on 'Weather' and 'Norse and Post-Norse St. Kilda', John Morton Boyd on 'Natural History', M. Barry Cottam on 'Archaeology', John Nimlin on 'Historical St. Kilda', 'Exploring Hirta' and, with John Barry, 'Military Aspects of St. Kilda'.

As one might expect from a publication such as this, the information is presented in a concise and readable form. The illustrations and maps are excellent, and the cover photograph must surely epitomise the character of St. Kilda — sheer, rocky cliffs, lashed by a stormy and foam-crested sea. The chapter on archaeology is particularly comprehensive, with several clear and detailed maps, and Alan Small's brief chapter on the Norse presence includes a list of the most important Norse place-names in the group.

The natural history of the St. Kilda group is dealt with by John Morton Boyd in his usual effective manner. As well as photographs of native plants and species, there is a well-nigh comprehensive list of recorded plants, and a guide to seabird breeding colonies.

For such a small and remote island group, St. Kilda has attracted a great deal of attention, as well as a large body of literature since the publication of Martin Martin's account of his visit in 1698. This booklet inevitably brings together only the basic ingredients of what makes up the uniqueness of the archipelago, but one reads it with an appreciation of what Philip Sked writes in his tailpiece, "Therein lies much of its attraction for the present generation. To us it seems impossible that man

could defeat that bleak, savage environment; yet man did so for perhaps two thousand years, continuing almost to our own days".