



NESS OF BRODGAR



ROUND KIRK, ORPHIR



CORRIGALL FARM MUSEUM



BAY OF SKALL



SKARA BRAE



SEA STACK, YESNABY



EARL'S PALACE, BIRSAY



WAULKMILL BAY

1 BROUGH OF BIRSAY

A tidal settlement with 45 metre-high cliffs on its north face. Access by causeway at low tide to a small museum and ruins of a Romanesque church, Bishops Palace and several Norse Long-houses.

2 ST MAGNUS CHURCH

Built in 1064 and rebuilt in 1664 and 1760; believed to be where St Magnus's body was taken, after his murder, by his cousin Haakon in 1115. (His remains were later re-interred in St Magnus Cathedral).

3 EARL'S PALACE

Built late 16th century by Earl Robert Stewart.

4 BARONY MILL

Last example of a meal mill in working order.

5 STONE O' QUOYBUNE

A standing stone which folk-lore says went to the loch every New Year's morning for a drink – not a bad idea, even today!

6 MARWICK HEAD

Walk from the car park up to the stone-built memorial commemorating the loss of HMS Hampshire, which sank here in mysterious circumstances with the loss of all but 12 men, including Lord Kitchener of Khartoum, Minister of War, reputed to be on a secret mission to Russia.

7 BAY OF SKALL

Sandy beach with sheltering dunes.

8 SKARA BRAE

Magnificent prehistoric village. Skalla Brae Visitor Centre.

9 HOLE O' ROWE

Natural arched cliff.

10 ST PETERS CHURCH

Restored church opened to the public daily.

11 ORKNEY BREWERY AND VISITOR CENTRE

Regular tours of the Brewery, tasting hall, cafe serving local fare and a bar. Browse the Brewery shop for merchandise and local crafts.

12 STRATHBORG

Picnic area.

13 RSPB LISTENING WALL

14 YESNABY

A must for unforgettable views of cliffs, stacks ("castles"), and geos, and Primula scotica in season.

15 SKIBA GEO

Restored fishermen's huts.

16 SANDGEO

Restored fishermen's huts.

17 HMS TERN ROYAL NAVAL AIR STATION

Tours by arrangement.

18 LONGAGLEBE

A deep gorge eroded by the sea, 200 metres inwards.

19 KIRBUSTER MUSEUM

A well-kept example of an early 19th century farmhouse and steading, with central fireplace, stone neuk beds and collection of farm utensils of yesteryear.

20 DOUNBY

A small village settlement where Birsay, Harray and Sandwick meet. There is a leisure centre within Dounby School.

21 BETTY'S READING ROOM

A cosy reading space constructed in an old bothy.

22 THE ROOST

Often wild strait separating Evie from Eynhallow, where there are the remains of a monastery.

23 SWANNAY BREWERY

24 CLICK MILL

A simple type of wheel mill with horizontal wooden waterwheel of early 19th century design.

25 CORRIGALL FARM MUSEUM

Commemorates a by-gone age, recreating a mid-19th century farm-stead, with household artefacts and farm tools.

26 KNOWES O' TROTTY

Ancient burial mounds.

27 NESS OF BRODGAR

Award winning excavation in the centre of the Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage site. Open July/August.

28 AIKERNESS BEACH

Probably the longest stretch of sandy beach in the West Mainland - perfect for bathing, picnicking or beachcombing for shells, especially cowries (groatie buckies).

29 BROCH OF GURNESS

One of Orkney's best preserved brochs, from about the 1st century BC and occupied by both Picts and Vikings.

30 TINGWALL FERRY TERMINAL

Provides link with Rousay, Egilsay and Wyre. Evidence of another broch here.

31 DOOCOT

Interesting home for pigeons at the Hall of Rendall. Recently restored, it is unique in Orkney.

32 FIRTH PARK

Sheltered community garden.

33 FINSTOWN

Possibly named after an Irish soldier, Phin, who retired here after the Napoleonic Wars and set up an Inn called "The Toddy Hole".

34 RENNIBISTER EARTH HOUSE

Well-preserved and accessible.

35 BRIG O' WAITHE

Where a stray bomb killed the first civilian to die in the Second World War. Sea trout sometimes caught here.

36 UNSTAN CAIRN

Chambered tomb excavated in 1884, when lots of neolithic pots were found. Stone-age village.

37 RING OF BRODGAR

A stone circle with only 36 stones remaining – either as upright sentinels or broken stumps.

38 BARNHOUSE

39 STANDING STONES OF STENNESS

40 MAESHOWE VISITOR CENTRE

The tours of the Maeshowe Chambered Cairn departure from here.

41 MAESHOWE

The finest chambered tomb in Western Europe. Built before 2,700BC, it was raided by the Vikings in the mid-12th century and plundered of its 'treasures'. Here are the largest collection in the world of runic inscriptions to be found in one place.

42 BUCKLE'S TOOR

Small tower built last century by a local lad while he herded sheep on the hillside.

43 BINS CARTH

Three hectares of coniferous and broad-leaved woodland planted about 150 years ago.

44 CUWEEN CHAMBERED CAIRN

Built around 2,800-2,000BC. When it was entered in 1901, 24 dog skulls were found, thought to be tribal emblems of the stone-age builders.

45 SITE OF BATTLE OF SUMMERDALE

Where the last pitched battle in Orkney was fought. The army of King James V, led by the Earl of Caithness, was defeated by the islanders who were rebelling against taxes and feudalism.

46 WARD HILL

The highest point on the Orkney mainland – 268 metres.

47 HALL OF CLESTRAIN

The birth place of Dr John Rae renowned arctic explorer.

48 HAPPY VALLEY

Garden with a short woodland walk along a burn.

49 HOUTON

A sheltered harbour used by King Haakon in 1263 and the British Navy during the First World War. Now a ferry terminal for the South Isles and the oil terminal at Flotta.

50 ROUND KIRK

Part of the Norse settlement at the Bu, this is Scotland's only circular mediaeval church, dating from the early 12th century.

51 EARL'S BU

The remains of a Norse farmstead, at one time home to some of the Norse Earls who were so important in Orkney's history.

52 THE ORKNEYINGA SAGA CENTRE

Recounts the life and times as told in the saga.

53 WAULKMILL

A beautiful sheltered beach.

54 WIDEFORD CAIRN

A forever home for rescued abused, abandoned and surplus exotic animals. Open to the public year round.

55 FERNVALLEY WILDLIFE CENTRE

A forever home for rescued abused, abandoned and surplus exotic animals. Open to the public year round.

Places of Interest in the West Mainland



Welcome to the **West Mainland**

The West Mainland of Orkney can offer the visitor a richness and variety of attractions that few other places can.

Running through the rich farm land, there is also hill and moorland scenery to compare favourably with anywhere else in Britain. Here, there is a wide variety of plant and birdlife of interest to naturalists and ornithologists from many parts of the world.

Spectacular cliff scenery along the Atlantic coastline, again full of birdlife during the summer months, contrasts strongly with

sheltered sandy bays – ideal for artists, photographers, walkers and sightseers.

Well-preserved prehistoric settlements provide a stark reminder that early settlers of these islands lived in circumstances differing greatly from today's inhabitants, who live in very up-to-date dwellings.

The West Mainland also contains some of the best known wild brown trout fishing lochs in Northern Scotland.

Access to all these locations is well signposted and served by good, surfaced roads. In most places car parking is available, free of charge.

Accommodation can be had at excellent hotels, self-catering establishments, homely bed & breakfasts and guest houses of a very high standard. Local shops offer a friendly service. Good food can be enjoyed in local hotels and restaurants, with "High Tea" a speciality in some.



GEOLOGY

Orkney rocks are mainly formed from mud and sand deposited in a freshwater lake (Lake Orcadia) during the Devonian (Old Red Sandstone) period – 409-363 million years ago. The sub-tropical climate, with associated evaporation and variable rainfall, led to the formation of layers of marginal sediments of sand, silt and mud and a finely laminated dark grey to black sandstone. Extensive and repeated growths of algae formed distinctive layered structures known as "stromatolites". Fish fossils are abundant, but few animal or plant ones. Outcrops of metamorphic schists and granite gneiss (Precambrian Basement Complex) can be seen at Yesnaby and Stromness. The present rolling landscape was sculpted by vast sheets of ice during the Devensian Glaciation – from 70,000-10,000 years ago. The boulder clay deposited as the ice melted can be easily seen in the small cliff sections of the coastal bays. In the landward area, where not covered by peats, unusual small, round hills – morainic mounds – of boulder clay spread over the surface, especially round Harray Loch.



BIRDS



The secret of the richness of the birdlife here lies in the four main types of natural habitat.

To the first of these – the sea cliffs – tens of thousands of seabirds return each year. Commonest are Gullmots and Kittiwakes, but Razorbills and Fulmars are also present in large numbers, while there is also the chance of seeing the occasional puffin. The best locality is the RSPB reserve at Marwick Head, but the smaller one on Brough of Birsay is also viewable subject to tides.

Maritime Heath stretches from Skara Brae to the Black Craig. Heather and other dwarf shrubs are blasted by salt-laden winter gales. This is the summer home of Arctic Terns and Arctic Skuas, and waders such as Oystercatchers and Ringed Plovers.

Marshland and loch shores are nesting habitats for nine species of duck and eight of waders. The song of Curlew and Redshank and the drumming of Snipe are still common here. Look out for the very rare Pintail; one third of all Britain's 40 pairs are found in this area. The RSPB hide at the Loons is an ideal spot to watch wetland birds. A privately-owned hide is available at Lochland Chalets.

On the heather-clad moorlands, one enters the realm of the birds of prey. Some 50 Hen Harriers still nest there; Short-eared Owls are common and there are Merlins and a few pairs of ground-nesting Kestrels. The RSPB hide at Cottascarth can provide sightings of all of these, while that at Burgar Hill is one of the only hides in the country overlooking a nesting site of Red-throated divers. Hobbister Hill is a moorland RSPB reserve in the West Mainland too.



ARCHAEOLOGY



The West Mainland has the highest concentration of spectacular prehistoric monuments to be found anywhere in Britain. Most of these date from between 4,000 and 5,000 years ago – the Neolithic Stone Age.

Skara Brae is justly famous as the best-preserved Neolithic village in Northern Europe. It is complete with stone furniture which gives a remarkably immediate impression of homely life. Close by the Standing Stones lie within the Brodgar peninsula and between the lochs of Stenness and Harray; an area which seems to have been of special religious significance to the Neolithic and succeeding Bronze Age peoples. The Ring of Brodgar is a large circle marked by a deep ditch and stones which originally numbered around 60. Single stones lead south-eastwards to the smaller circle of Stenness. There are numerous burial mounds, probably of the early Bronze Age – after 2,000 BC. Ness of Brodgar is in the process of being excavated during the summer months. Then came the Iron Age and the emergence of ruling warlords who developed an architecture of dominance – the Brochs. These had a central, tower-like building, surrounded by defensive ditches and walls, within which were clustered the dwellings of the chieftain's followers. The Broch of Gurness at Aikerness, is one of several which lined the shore of Eynhallow Sound.

About 715 AD, Orkney became part of the kingdom of The Picts. A Pictish nobleman with a taste for fine jewellery resided on the Brough of Birsay (now a tidal island). When the Vikings arrived a century later, they continued to regard Birsay as the seat from which to rule Orkney. Earl Thorfinn the Mighty spent most of his time here. The ruined buildings, which can still be seen on the Brough, date however, from the 12th century or later.

Information Leaflet
WEST MAINLAND
ORKNEY ISLANDS

WEST MAINLAND



FISHING

The West Mainland could justifiably be called a fisherman's paradise. The wild brown trout can be agile and wary and the traditional skills of The Complete Angler are required – patience, doggedness, adaptability and cunning. Whether you are a wader or a boat man, you will be captivated by the variety of water and weather conditions and by the unique flavour of your catch when you have it fried or grilled for breakfast or dinner.

The Lochs of Harray and Stenness are obvious choices, but Swannay, Boardhouse and Hundland can yield some fine specimens. The smaller lochs of Bosquoy, Clumly, Isbister, Sabiston (Houseby) and Wasdale may be worth a try, though no boats are available for hire on these and access is not so easy. The Loch of Korbister is considered especially good for beginners, young and old.

Sea-trout can best be fished in spring and autumn in the bays and along the coast. Stenness is better in mid-summer, but you may have to compete with the seals. Sea-angling is also a popular sport with handsome prizes of halibut, skate and others.

Ask locally about flies and boat hire and remember the Countryside Code. You are recommended to join the Orkney Trout-Fishing Association – it's a relatively small subscription.



FARMING



The main occupation of people remains farming. Much of the hill land and former common has been brought under cultivation and the landscape reflects the hard work of generations of farmers and the fertility of the land. Many of the smaller units have since been amalgamated with others to make viable farm units.

The climate does not favour arable farming and so most farmers breed and rear beef cattle, although dairy cows and sheep are also kept.

In addition to silage and hay, barley, oats and turnips are also grown for fodder. Orkney beef and lamb, tender and naturally reared, is available in local shops. Bere, an ancient form of barley identified in Orkney's Neolithic tombs, is also grown in small amounts. Bere-meat, along with other home-grown produce, is readily available in local shops.

The highlight of the West Mainland farmer's year is the Douby Show, held in the showpark early in August. With the Flower, Vegetable, Baking and Handicrafts Exhibition in the nearby hall, it is an occasion to remember.

WILD FLOWERS

The West Mainland has probably the widest range of habitats of wild flowers in Orkney, from salt marsh, with Sea Aster, at the Brig of Waithe, to alpine Cloudberry on the Rendall Hills.



Primula scotica, which grows only in Orkney, Caithness and north Sutherland and nowhere else in the world, can be found in scattered colonies on several cliff-tops between Stromness and Yesnaby. Like a miniature, amethyst-coloured polyanthus, it blooms in May and again in July. With it, and in other damp places, The Grass-Of-Parnassus has green guide lines to the honey secreted in its white cups. Many species of marsh orchid in shades of purple and pink are followed by heather and ling towards the end of summer.

Early spring is the golden time with an abundance of marsh marigolds and primroses. Around the lochs and in other "fenny places", can be seen a good assortment of sedges, some quite rare, together with Orkney's most abundant wild shrub, the tea-leaved willow.

The North American Nootka lupin, once sown to improve poor quality land, still persists in blue drifts and a big, red 'Oriental' poppy, a garden outcast, brightens roadside verges. Another alien of considerable interest is the Magellan Ragwort, which has made itself at home on burn-sides.

Not all the 'alpine' cling to



the tops of hills; in many places in the West Mainland the Alpine Meadowrue's tiny, glossy leaves nestle among Black Bog-rush a few steps from the road edge. Small is beautiful, especially in the many species of Eyebright, Speedwell, Trefoil and Milkwort; but Orkney's Red Campion and the Wild Angelica of cliff-tops

are larger than their southern counterparts. The 'dales' of the West Mainland hills have a unique fern and rush flora normally associated with woodland; perhaps this is a relic of the ancient birch and hazel scrub which was widespread here before the arrival of Neolithic man.

For further information contact the Orkney tourist office on 01856 872856 or www.visitorkney.com

Ness of Brodgar photo courtesy of Hugo Anderson-Whymark. More photos can be seen on the West Mainland Community Council photographic competition web page.

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