

North Ronaldsay

... The island time forgot

A unique assembly – the ancient sheep court of North Ronaldsay – elected by the traditional townships on the island, manages the flocks of native seaweed-eating sheep.

Although North Ronaldsay is further north than the southern tip of Norway, its climate is far less severe, having winter temperatures which are usually some 5 degrees centigrade higher than most places on this latitude. This is due to the influence of the warm Gulf Stream.

Since North Ronaldsay is the most remote of Orkney's North Isles, life is in many ways different from the other islands. Old traditions prevail. Orcadian surnames predominate and the custom of communal sheep grazing on the seashore is still pursued.

Natural history

Though only a small island with a low profile North Ronaldsay supports an extremely rich and diverse population of wild flowers, mammals and birds. It lies on the migration crossroads with birds heading north towards Iceland and Greenland as well as into Scandinavia pausing or being grounded.

Thus from late March to early June and middle August to early November there are large concentrations of migrant birds visiting the island. All classes of birds are represented and several national rarities recorded annually. In summer the island is alive with the calls of breeding birds. Areas of land are left uncultivated and corncrake may call from the hayfield.

Common and Grey Seals are numerous, both breed around the island and are easily seen and have become quite tame since culling was banned. Other sea mammals are seen offshore and porpoises occasionally accompany the local lobster boats.

Inland the island can broadly be divided into four distinct habitat types: foreshore, grazed links, marshland and agricultural land which together provide a wealth of opportunities for wildlife.



old beacon, dennis taing - charles tait



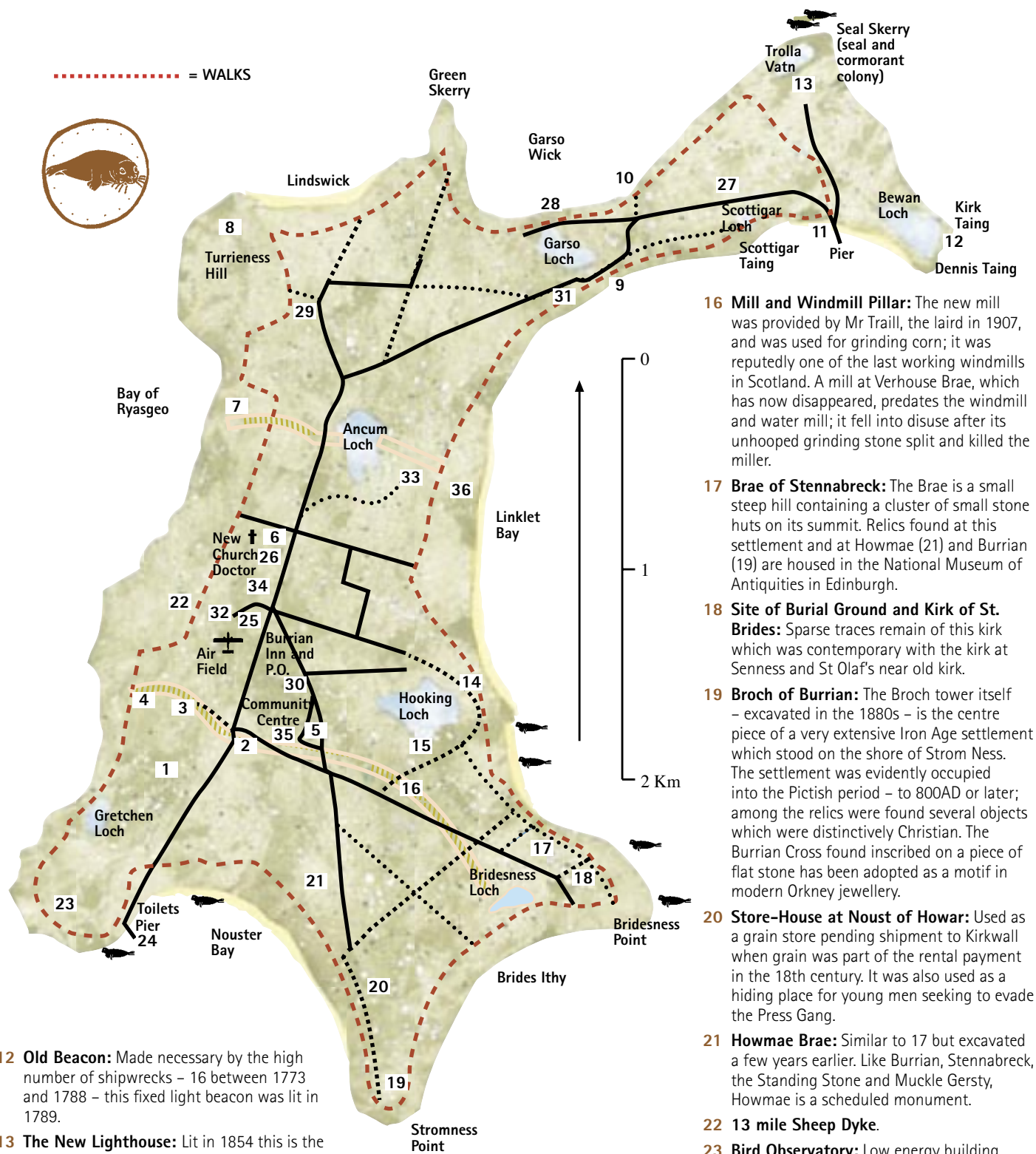
knot - charles tait

Points of interest

- 1 Standing Stone:** This lone sentinel stone over 13 feet high is unlike most standing stones in Orkney as it has a hole through its upper part. Some think the stone was an out marker for a stone circle which stood on Tor Ness.
- 2 Holland House:** Originally built by the Traill family who purchased the island in 1727 and the house is still owned by their direct descendants. Adjoining gardens have the only sizeable concentration of trees and shrubs on the island; focus for bird migration and ringing.
- 3 Old Kirk:** This church from the early 1800s predates its manse which was built in 1829.
- 4 Muckle Gersty:** According to legend, one of two dykes built of earth and stone by three brothers who apportioned the island amongst themselves. The dykes probably date from before 1000BC.
- 5 The Old School:** Evidence of education dates back to the late 18th century though formal education with a resident schoolmaster is only documented from about 1837 onwards.
- 6 Sites of Stone Burial Cists:** A number of burial cists have been found on the island, the most accessible can be seen at Antabreck and Senness.
- 7 Matches Dyke:** The most northerly of the two dykes described in 4.
- 8 Turrieness:** It is probable that at one time a stone circle stood on this plateau. Dotted over the plain are some 15 circular depressions measuring some nine feet in diameter. They have been identified as either barrow cemeteries or kelp burning pits.
- 9 Site of Store House:** This may have been used as a grain store up to the 19th century when grain was exported from the island as part of the tenant's rent payment. It is also associated with the rendering of whale blubber and the storage of kelp.
- 10 Senness:** Near this spot a stone cist containing human remains was excavated in 1872. There is evidence of a burial ground and chapel known as St Giles in the area.
- 11 The Fish House:** standing west of the pier this former dwellinghouse once used for curing fish.



old beakon at Kirk Taing - charles tait



- 12 Old Beacon:** Made necessary by the high number of shipwrecks – 16 between 1773 and 1788 – this fixed light beacon was lit in 1789.
- 13 The New Lighthouse:** Lit in 1854 this is the tallest land based lighthouse in the British Isles measuring 109 feet.
- 14 Water Mill:** Ruins of a mill driven by an undershot weir which ran concurrently with the windmill near Peckhole, until they were replaced by the new mill (see 16) in 1907.

15 Knowe o' Samilands: One of several mounds made by the dumping of burnt stones used to heat water for cooking in ancient times.

- 16 Mill and Windmill Pillar:** The new mill was provided by Mr Traill, the laird in 1907, and was used for grinding corn; it was reputedly one of the last working windmills in Scotland. A mill at Verhouse Brae, which has now disappeared, predates the windmill and water mill; it fell into disuse after its unhooped grinding stone split and killed the miller.
- 17 Brae of Stennabreck:** The Brae is a small steep hill containing a cluster of small stone huts on its summit. Relics found at this settlement and at Howmae (21) and Burrian (19) are housed in the National Museum of Antiquities in Edinburgh.
- 18 Site of Burial Ground and Kirk of St. Brides:** Sparse traces remain of this kirk which was contemporary with the kirk at Sennes and St Olaf's near old kirk.
- 19 Broch of Burrian:** The Broch tower itself – excavated in the 1880s – is the centre piece of a very extensive Iron Age settlement which stood on the shore of Strom Ness. The settlement was evidently occupied into the Pictish period – to 800AD or later; among the relics were found several objects which were distinctively Christian. The Burrian Cross found inscribed on a piece of flat stone has been adopted as a motif in modern Orkney jewellery.
- 20 Store-House at Noust of Howar:** Used as a grain store pending shipment to Kirkwall when grain was part of the rental payment in the 18th century. It was also used as a hiding place for young men seeking to evade the Press Gang.
- 21 Howmae Brae:** Similar to 17 but excavated a few years earlier. Like Burrian, Stennabreck, the Standing Stone and Muckle Gersty, Howmae is a scheduled monument.
- 22 13 mile Sheep Dyke.**
- 23 Bird Observatory:** Low energy building, visitors welcome.
- 24 Pier**
- 25 Airfield**
- 26 New Kirk:** (North Ronaldsay Archive Exhibition).

Sheep

There is little evidence of the true origin of North Ronaldsay's seaweed-eating sheep. They live on a narrow strip of beach and foreshore outside the 13-mile stone dyke which surrounds the island, being brought inside the wall only at lambing. When the clipping and dipping seasons arrive the sheep are herded off the beaches into the stone-built 'Punds' by the collective efforts of the island's sheep farmers. The act of punding is perhaps one of the last remaining elements of communal farming in Orkney.



north ronaldsay sheep - charles tait

Seaweed

The scarcity of natural resources, together with the island's isolation has taught the inhabitants the value of its abundant supply of seaweed, washed up on the shores by the strong tides. Initially the only use made of seaweed was as a fertiliser (applied untreated to the land) and for burning when supplies of coal and peat were low. The kelp-making industry began in the 1720s generating a huge demand for both seaweed and labour. The seaweed was hauled up and dried on the beaches then burned in shallow stone pits. Look for them on your shore walks. It was further processed in the south to obtain chemicals. North Ronaldsay fishermen are said to have felt the aroma of kelp 'half roads to Foula'.

Shipwrecks

There were many shipwrecks on the island and one of the first recorded was the Swedish East Indiaman 'Svecia' grounded on the Reef Dyke in 1740 with the loss of some 90 lives.

Four years later the Danish East Indiaman 'Crown Prince' was wrecked at Savie Geo; on this occasion all the crew and its cargo of silver coins were saved. In 1908, the sailing ship 'Isle of Erin' was lost with all hands off North Ronaldsay. The subsequent Board of Trade inquiry led to the installation of the Post Office Wireless Station on the island within a year or two.

Fishing

Before the trawlers came, good hauls of cod, ling and halibut were caught off the shores of North Ronaldsay. In the Firth, saithe were frequently taken though this posed many dangers as the fish were found where tides ran strongest. Lobster and herring were also caught but today there is less fishing from the island.



bird observatory - charles tait

Services

(see map for locations)

Accommodation

Accommodation providers listed below are members of VisitScotland's Quality Assurance Scheme and have been graded as part of the national scheme. Please refer to the disclaimer on the inside of the back cover.

GUEST HOUSE

23 - Bird Observatory, (★★★★GH) - open all year. Range of accommodation including dormitory, family and en-suite rooms in solar and wind-powered buildings. Lounge bar, Café and Restaurant open to non-residents. t: Alison at 01857 633200, e-mail alison@nrbo.prestel.co.uk, www.nrbo.co.uk

SELF CATERING

23 - Modern Hostel (★★★★Hostel) - annex to the Bird Observatory with self-catering kitchen, etc. Ten bed spaces in three dormitories. Contact details as for Observatory Guest House above.

HOSTEL

27 - Dennishill, Self-catering. (★★★SC) - Renovated croft house, fully equipped. Ideal for a quiet stress free holiday. Weekend lets available. Free cycles provided. Jennifer Smith, t: 01856 874486. e: island-cottage@hotmail.com, www.island-cottage.co.uk

Accommodation providers listed below are not participants of VisitScotland's Quality Assurance Scheme. Please refer to the disclaimer on the inside of the back cover before booking.

Shops & Transport

28 - Garso No. 1 - taxi, self-drive cars, minibus hire and tours; lunch by arrangement. T. & C. Muir. t: 01857 633244.

32 - General merchant and North Ronaldsay woollen products - Airfield Goods & Services, Trebb, Mrs H. Swanney t: 01857 633220.

30 - Burrian Inn and Restaurant, Orkney's most northerly pub. S. Mawson, 01857 633221.

28 - Calor Gas, Garso No. 1 - Mr T. Muir. t: 01857 633244.

14 - Petrol - Hooking (near watermill) Mr W. Muir. t: 01857 633257.

30 - Off Licence/Tea Room, North Ronaldsay woollen products and jewellery. t: 01857 633221.

Tours

13 - The North Ronaldsay Lighthouse is the tallest, land-based lighthouse in Scotland - 109 feet high with 176 steps to the top. First lit in 1854, it was automated in 1998. The North Ronaldsay Trust organises lighthouse tours, available on Orkney Ferries' Sunday excursion trips to North Ronaldsay (see timetable) and at other times by arrangement. On the same basis, tours are organised for the Yarn Company's workshops (13) where fleeces from the unique, native sheep are spun into yarn. Contact Mr W. T. Muir. t: 01857 633257. e: wtmuir@yahoo.com. Credit card facilities available.

Bikes for hire on a daily or weekly basis. Contact W. T. Muir on 01857 633257, e: wtmuir@yahoo.com.



seals, north ronaldsay - moya mckenzie mcdonald

Crafts

33 - A Yarn from North Ronaldsay Ltd. Local knitwear and yarn spun from the unique North Ronaldsay sheep available on the island. Contact Mrs J. Donnelly. t: 01857 633242.

Other Services

34 - Doctor - New Manse. t: 01857 633226 or at home Twingness. t: 01857 633267.

35 - Bank - Monthly, please inquire at Post Office.

30 - Post Office - Roadside. t: 01857 633221.

36 - Golf Course, nine-hole links course, clubs available for hire; Inquiries to Mr P. Donnelly. t: 01857 633242.

35 - Community Centre.

Further Reading

A Window on North Ronaldsay, by P.A. Tulloch. Island Saga, by M. Scott.

Orkney Days, by C. Muir.

Transport links



Sunday flights operate all summer

MONDAYS			
Dep Kirkwall	Arr	Dep	Arr Kirkwall
0735	0750	0757	0812
1030	1045	1052	1107
1405	1420	1427	1442
TUESDAYS			
Dep Kirkwall	Arr	Dep	Arr Kirkwall
0900	0915	0922	0937
1225	1240	1247	1314
1450	1505	1512	1527
WEDNESDAYS			
Dep Kirkwall	Arr	Dep	Arr Kirkwall
1005	1020	1027	1050
1215	1230	1237	1303
1645	1708	1715	1730
THURSDAYS			
Dep Kirkwall	Arr	Dep	Arr Kirkwall
0900	0915	0922	0937
1340	1407	1414	1429
1650	1705	1712	1727
FRIDAYS			
Dep Kirkwall	Arr	Dep	Arr Kirkwall
1005	1020	1027	1042
1340	1407	1414	1429
1650	1705	1712	1727
SATURDAYS			
Dep Kirkwall	Arr	Dep	Arr Kirkwall
0805	0820	0827	0842
1530	1545	1552	1619
1650	1705	1712	1727
SUNDAYS			
Dep Kirkwall	Arr	Dep	Arr Kirkwall
0915	0930	0937	0952
1600	1615	1622	1637

This timetable is subject to contract. Visitors should check with the Airline for full details and reservations.

LOGANAIR 01856 872494/873457

Loganair offer special low cost fares on their scheduled services from Kirkwall to North Ronaldsay.

Transport links

North Ronaldsay

Effective from 8 May until 26 September 2009

The services to North Ronaldsay are carried out by the vessels **m.v. Earl Thorfinn** (190 passengers and 25 cars) and the **m.v. Earl Sigurd** (190 passengers and 25 cars). Canteen facilities are available on all vessels at modest prices.

Bookings should be made at the Kirkwall Office: t: 01856 872044, f: 01856 872921, e: info@orkneyferries.co.uk Proposed Sailing Times from Kirkwall for North Ronaldsay and Return

All departure times are estimates and are subject to alteration due to cargo operations. All arrivals in Kirkwall subject to change due to cargo operations. All "weather permitting" and subject to confirmation on the day before sailing.



Tuesday Sailings

Kirkwall		North Ronaldsay		Papa Westray		Kirkwall				
Depart	Arrive	Depart	Arrive	Depart	Arrive	Depart	Arrive			
1030		1310		1340		1455		1525		1715

However on the following dates: 12 May, 19 May, 26 May, 2 June, 9 June, 8 September and 22 September 2009 it will be replaced by:

Kirkwall		Papa Westray		North Ronaldsay		Kirkwall				
Depart	Arrive	Depart	Arrive	Depart	Arrive	Depart	Arrive			
1030		1220		1250		1405		1435		1715

Friday Sailings	Kirkwall		North Ronaldsay		Kirkwall	
	Depart	Arrive	Depart	Arrive	Depart	Arrive
08 May	0915		1155		1225	1505
15 May	0800		1040		1110	1350
22 May	0830		1110		1140	1420
29 May	0830		1110		1140	1420
05 June	0830		1110		1140	1420
12 June	0715		0955		1025	1305
19 June	0700		0940		1010	1250
26 June	0730		1010		1040	1320
03 July	0730		1010		1040	1320
10 July	0615		0855		0925	1205
17 July	0700		0940		1010	1250
24 July	0645		0925		0955	1235
01 August (Sat)	0730		1010		1040	1320
07 August	0515		0755		0825	1105
14 August	0915		1155		1225	1505
21 August	0545		0825		0855	1135
28 August	0915		1155		1225	1505
04 September	0515		0755		0825	1105
11 September	0800		1040		1110	1350
18 September	0915		1155		1225	1505
25-September	0800		1040		1110	1350

Sunday sailings to North Ronaldsay (weather permitting) on the following dates only: 14 June (via Eday/Sanday), 29 June (via Stronsay), 12 July (via Westray), 26 July (via Eday/Sanday), 9 August (via Stronsay), 23 August (via Westray).

North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory: Wind and solar powered buildings. Lunches, teas, evening meals, lounge bar and beer terrace, information; Visitors welcome.

Burrian Inn Restaurant: Teas, Snacks. Visitors Welcome.

NOTES:

- 1) Vehicle check in time: **20 minutes** before departure. Passenger check in time: **10 minutes** before departure.
- 2) **No Show Charges** - All cancellations must be made not less than 24 hours before the intended date of travel or full charges may apply.
- 3) For conditions of carriage of passengers and cargo see notices exhibited in the Company's vessels, offices and premises.

For full fares please enquire at Orkney Ferries Offices