

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.



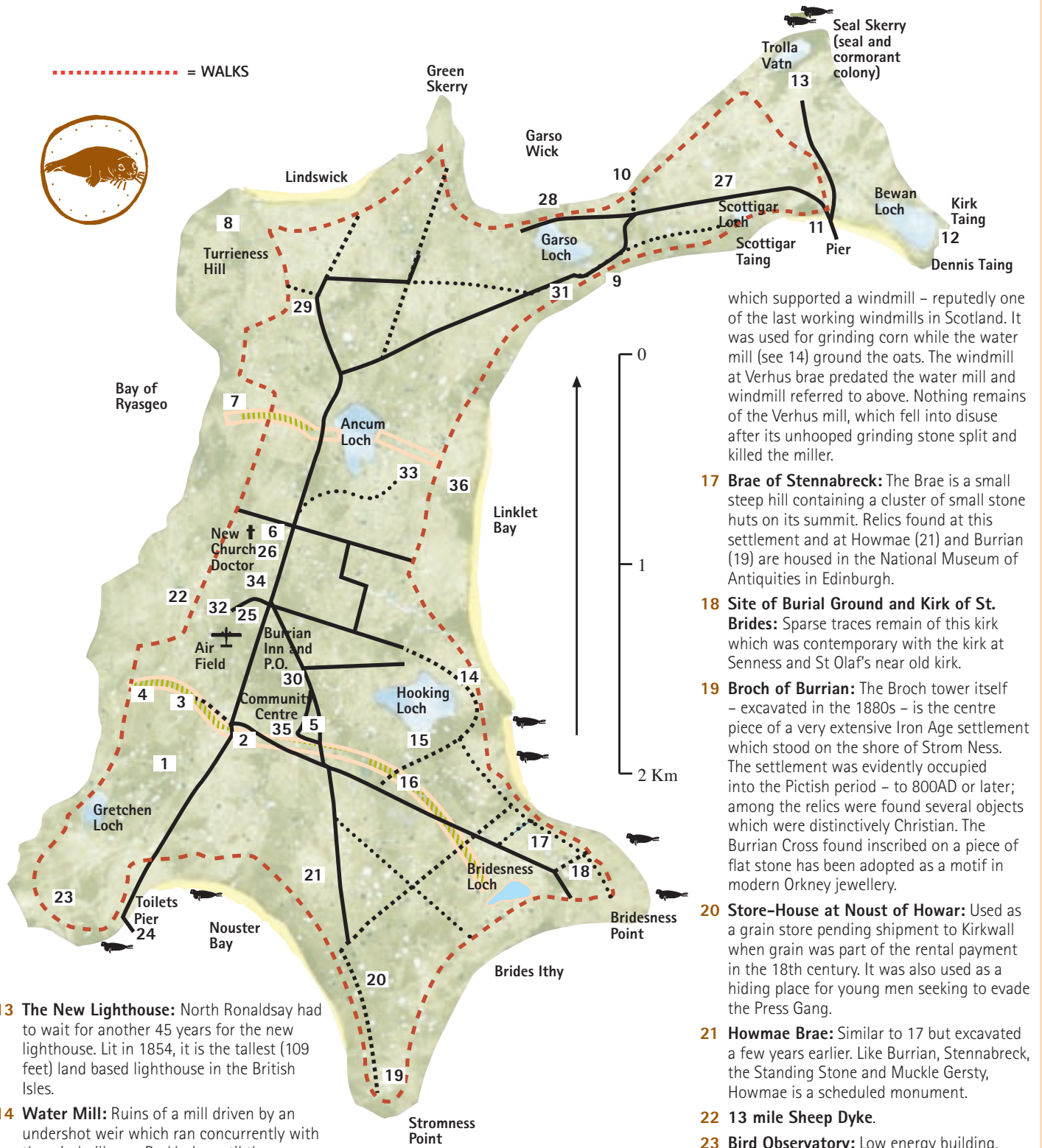
old beacon, dennis taing - charles tait

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 was, at one time, used for curing fish.
- 12 Old Beacon:** One of the first of the four early lighthouses built in Scotland. About 70 feet high, its fixed light was lit on 10th October 1789. However, ships continued to be lost and the light was extinguished in 1809. Start Point lighthouse in Sanday provided a better guide to seamen: its revolving light was lit in 1806.



old beakon at Kirk Taing - charles tait



which supported a windmill – reputedly one of the last working windmills in Scotland. It was used for grinding corn while the water mill (see 14) ground the oats. The windmill at Verhus brae predated the water mill and windmill referred to above. Nothing remains of the Verhus mill, which 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).

- 13 The New Lighthouse:** North Ronaldsay had to wait for another 45 years for the new lighthouse. Lit in 1854, it is the tallest (109 feet) land based lighthouse in the British Isles.
- 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 engine-driven mill was provided by the Laird, Mr Traill, in 1907 and was used for grinding corn and oats. Nearby stands the pillar

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.



common seal - north ronaldsay - kerry scott

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.

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 low energy building. 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

HOSTEL

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.

SELF CATERING

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.

13 - (Awaiting Grading) Accommodation available at two recently refurbished, self-catering Lighthouse Keepers' cottages at the New Lighthouse. Reservations available through-out the year. Contact the National Trust for Scotland at www.ntsholidays.com.

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.

28 - Garso Guest House, T & C. Muir, B & B, lunch and dinner. t: - 01857 633244; e: muir886@btinternet.com

29 - Brigg Self-catering, fully equipped cottage. Mrs Muir, t: 01857 633244.

30 - The Doll's House, Roadside, Self-catering and B & B and evening meals. S. Mawson t: 01857 633221.

31 - Quoybanks, Self-catering Croft or B & B, fully equipped 3 bedrooms, evening meals supplied. S. Mawson t: 01857 633221.

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.

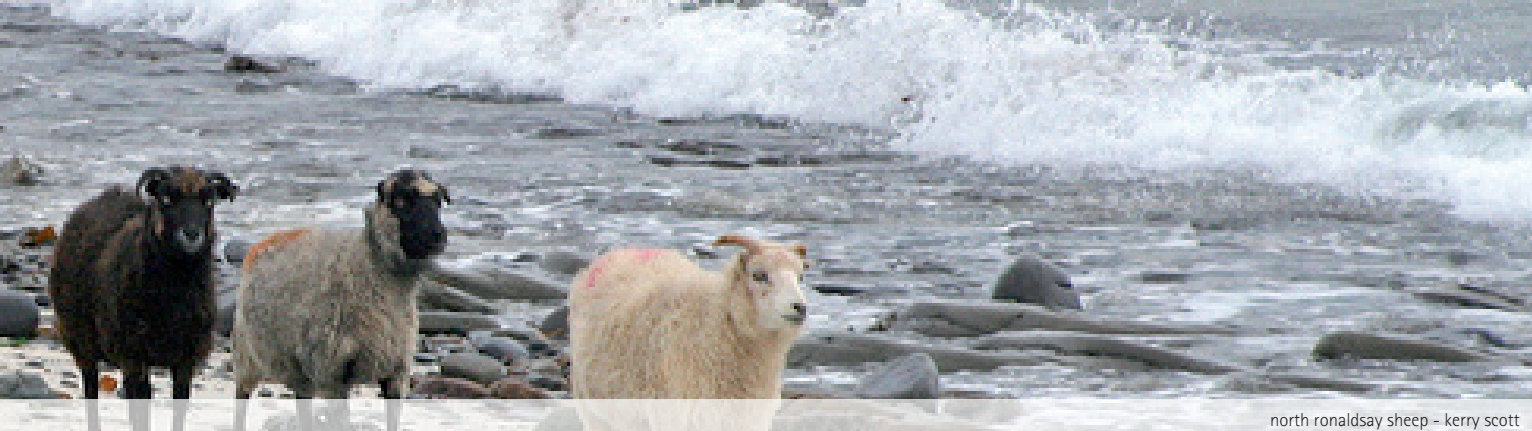
14 - Petrol - Hooking (near watermill) Mr W. Muir. t: 01857 633257.

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. Transport available - contact W. Muir on 01857 633257 or 07703112224. 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. Local crafts on sale and refreshments available in cafe. Contact Mr W. T. Muir. t: 01857 633257. e: wtmuir@yahoo.com Credit card facilities available. View webcam on nlb.org.uk

Bikes for hire on a daily or weekly basis. Contact W. T. Muir on 01857 633257, m: 07703 112224, e: wtmuir@yahoo.com



north ronaldsay sheep - kerry scott

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 - Medical Services - Linklet House. t: 01857 633226.

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.

By Sea

North Ronaldsay

Effective from 10 May until 23 September 2011



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). Hot/cold drinks and cold snacks 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 North Ronaldsay and Papa Westray departure times are estimates and are subject to alteration due to cargo operations, weather and tide. All arrivals in Kirkwall subject to change due to cargo operations. Sailings are all "weather permitting" and subject to confirmation the day before sailing.

Tuesday Sailings

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

However on the following dates: 21 June, 5 July, 19 July and 2 August 2011 it will be replaced by:

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

By Air



Sunday flights operate all summer

MONDAYS

Dep Kirkwall	Arr	Dep	Arr Kirkwall
0735	0753	0758	0816
1030	1048	1053	1111
1800	1818	1823	1841

TUESDAYS

Dep Kirkwall	Arr	Dep	Arr Kirkwall
0735	0753	0758	0816
1215	1233	1238	1309
1800	1818	1823	1841

WEDNESDAYS

Dep Kirkwall	Arr	Dep	Arr Kirkwall
0735	0801	0806	0824
1215	1233	1238	1309
1800	1818	1823	1849

THURSDAYS

Dep Kirkwall	Arr	Dep	Arr Kirkwall
0735	0753	0758	0816
1400	1431	1436	1454
1800	1818	1823	1841

FRIDAYS

Dep Kirkwall	Arr	Dep	Arr Kirkwall
0735	0753	0758	0816
1400	1418	1423	1454
1800	1818	1823	1841

SATURDAYS

Dep Kirkwall	Arr	Dep	Arr Kirkwall
0800	0818	0823	0841
1530	1548	1553	1624
1645	1703	1708	1726

SUNDAYS

Dep Kirkwall	Arr	Dep	Arr Kirkwall
0915	0933	0938	0956
1600	1618	1623	1641

Timings are subject to confirmation when making your reservation

LOGANAIR 01856 872494/873457

Loganair offer special low cost fares for journeys including an overnight stay to North Ronaldsay

Friday Sailings

	Kirkwall	North Ronaldsay	Kirkwall
	Depart	Arrive	Depart
13 May 2011	0800	1040	1110
20 May 2011	0800	1040	1110
27 May 2011	0800	1040	1110
03 June 2011	0800	1040	1110
10 June 2011	0800	1040	1110
17 June 2011	0800	1040	1110
24 June 2011	0700	0940	1010
01 July 2011	0800	1040	1110
08 July 2011	0900	1140	1210
15 July 2011	0800	1040	1110
22 July 2011	0800	1040	1110
29 July 2011	0800	1040	1110
06 August 2011 (Sat)**	0900	1140	1210
12 August 2011	0800	1040	1110
19 August 2011	0800	1040	1110
26 August 2011	0800	1040	1110
02 September 2011	0800	1040	1110
09 September 2011	0800	1040	1110
16 September 2011	0800	1040	1110
23 September 2011	0800	1040	1110

** Subject to change re: Sanday Show

Sunday sailings to North Ronaldsay (weather permitting) on the following dates only: 5 June (via Eday/Sanday), 19 June (via Stronsay), 17 July (via Westray), 24 July (via Eday/Sanday), 7 August (via Stronsay), 21 August (via Westray).

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 Ferry Services Offices

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.