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destroyed during the 19th century. There is another broch near the Lochside picnic area (HY310140) on the east side of the Loch of Stenness.

Tradition The well at Bigswell (HY345105) has the reputation of having healing properties, especially at Beltane (May Day) and midsummer. Its curative waters were thought to be effective against madness and epilepsy. The well was apparently once much bigger and had steps down into it. The potency is said to be greater if the afflicted person first walks clockwise round the Standing Stones, then around the well, before partaking of its waters.

On the ridge of Bigswell Hill a large bonfire used to be lit every Johnsmas Eve (Midsummer Eve). Fires like this were kindled on several hills in Orkney and the practice continued in Hoy until recently. There are also legends of fires being lit at Maeshowe and the Standing Stones. One idea is that household fires were relit at midsummer from sacred fires.

Happy Valley (HY327106), was created by Edwin Harrold, who lived in the house there for many years. This oasis of woodland and flowers amid a virtually treeless landscape, proves what can be grown in Orkney. It benefits from the shelter of the Burn of Russadale. The meandering path along the stream is especially pretty in spring with

STENNESS (ON *Stein-nes*, Stone Point) is on the North side of the Orphir Hills facing the centre of the West Mainland. Hills, moors, lochs, farms and ancient history all converge here. Several of Orkney's best ancient monuments are in this parish, as well as parts of the Lochs of Stenness and Harray.

isolated standing stones, including the Watchstone and the Barnhouse Stone as well as Unstan cairn. The major site at the Ness of Brodgar is currently being excavated and dramatically shows just how much may yet to be revealed from Neolithic times.

Iron Age Cummi Howe (ON *Kuml Haug*, prehistoric mound, HY283103) is a large broch mound facing the Bay of Ireland. It is in a good defensive position, with easy access to the sea, while the adjacent tidal Dead Sand is a fine sheltered place to pull up boats. Big Howe, near the Standing Stones, was the site of a large broch until it was

Archaeology Stenness lies at the *Heart of Neolithic Orkney*, a World Heritage Site, which comprises the Ring of Brodgar, the Standing Stones of Stenness and Maeshowe chambered cairn, as well as Skara Brae in Sandwick. The surrounding area includes the Barnhouse complex, several

Happy Valley is a quiet haven and makes a delightful stroll in springtime



Aerial view of Cummi Howe, The Bush, the Brig o' Waithe, Unstan chambered cairn and the Loch of Stenness

Bluebells in profusion. There is a car park, and local people now maintain the plantations.

The Brig o' Waithe, crosses the mouth of the Loch of Stenness at The Bush and is a favourite Sea Trout fishing location. Nearby, the first British civilian death by enemy action in World War II occurred in 1939 when an onlooker was killed by a stray bomb while German planes raided Scapa Flow.

Bluebells at Happy Valley



Wildlife The saltmarsh areas around the Brig o' Waithe are full of wild flowers in summer, including Thrift, Silverweed, Sea Aster, Sea Spurrey and Sea Plantain. Common Seals lie up on rocks, but sometimes may be seen surfing on the incoming tide. Otters are much shyer but also frequent the area.

Wading birds feed on exposed muddy places during the ebb, but may be more closely

The waters of Bigswell are curative



**STENNESS
ATTRACTIONS**

- Maeshowe
- Tormiston Mill & Burn
- Barnhouse Stone
- Standing Stones
- Barnhouse Village
- Watchstone
- Ness of Brodgar
- Ring of Brodgar
- Dyke o'Sean
- Brodgar RSPB Reserve
- Bigswell
- Happy Valley
- Unstan chambered cairn
- Brig o' Waithe
- Loch of Stenness
- Loch of Harray
- The Bush
- Cummi Howe broch
- Clouston viewpoint
- Millquoy viewpoint
- Lochside viewpoint



Aerial view of the Ness of Brodgar with the Loch of Stenness on the left and the Loch of Harray on the right

observed at high tide while they roost at the top of the shore. Herons and Cormorants also favour the area, no doubt for the same reason as anglers. There is space to park off the road west of the Brig.

RSPB Brodgar Reserve includes land north of Brodgar Farm to the Dyke o'Sean west of the main road and outside the Ring of

Brodgar fence. The wetland areas are particularly good for wildfowl and waders. Crops designed to provide winter food for passerines are grown on the drier parts.

Walks and viewpoints As well as archaeology, Stenness offers a variety of interesting walks. Several hill tracks can be followed into the moor to the top of the Ward Hill (268m), with various alterna-

tive return routes. There are excellent panoramic views of the West Mainland, Hoy and Scapa Flow. A good impression can be gained of the Orkney landscape.

The moorland may afford sights of Hen Harriers, Merlins, Short-eared Owls and other birds. The road which goes over the Stenness Hill has a number of fine viewpoints. From Clouston

Feeding the hens at Nether Bigging in the 1950s



The Burn of Heddle with Lesser Celandine in flower



Tormiston Mill sells tickets for Maeshowe and has an excellent shop

(HY298110) there is a panoramic view over the lochs to Brodgar and beyond, while from the top of the hill, near Hoyview (HY298107) there is an equally pleasing vista of the Hoy Hills and Stromness.

Along the Stoneyhill Road, at Lochside, there is a parking place and picnic site which has

fine views across the Loch of Stenness to the Ring of Brodgar. Otters are sometimes encountered here, especially in the gloaming. Apart from the broch mound already mentioned there is an ancient chapel site, St Mary's Kirk (HY311143) nearby.

Perhaps the best way to visit

the Standing Stones area is on foot. Apart from the archaeological sites the lochs and their margins are home to many breeding birds in summer, while in winter thousands of wildfowl come to stay. The roadside verges and lochsides also hold a diverse range of wild flowers and insects.

Standing Stones Hotel

- GATEWAY TO THE HEART OF NEOLITHIC ORKNEY -



Overlooking the Loch of Stenness, the **Standing Stones Hotel** is ideal as a base for exploring Orkney. It is located next to the "Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site". The 17 rooms are all *en-suite*, while the Restaurant has a lovely view over the loch to the Ring of Brodgar. Boats and outboards can be hired for Trout fishing.

Standing Stones Hotel, Stenness, Orkney KW16 3JX
Tel (01856) 850449, Fax (01856) 851262
www.standingstoneshotel.com



The interior of Maeshowe showing two cells, with blocking stones and the northeast buttress

MAESHOWE (HY315128), considered to be one of the finest architectural achievements of prehistoric Europe, is Orkney's largest and finest chambered cairn. The *Orkneyinga Saga* refers to *Orkabaugr*, ON The Mound of the Orks.

The name Maeshowe may derive from ON *Maers-howe*, Maiden's Mound. There is a persistent tradition that

Maeshowe was a meeting place for young lovers. Another tale says that "at one time young girls would take some ashes to the top of the mound at full moon and urinate on them". The age and veracity of these stories are open to the reader to decide.

Another derivation may be ON *Mathhaugr*, meadow mound. There is a Maesquoy about 3mi north of Maeshowe on the Netherbrough Road

(HY311166). There are also several farm names ending in -may, so this could well be right, if rather mundane.

The mound, 35m in diameter and 7m high, consists mostly of packed stones and clay, with an inner layer of stones around the chamber. A stone and concrete roof was installed after it was cleared out in 1861. Before this it was rather higher in profile. Other unrecorded repairs to the outer end of the entrance passage were also made, which means that the original entrance layout is unknown.

Maeshowe was included in the first Ancient Monuments Act of 1882, and has been in state care since 1910. It was designed and constructed with great attention to detail, the large dressed slabs being skillfully set together and finished by master stonemasons. The chamber is 4.5m square and

Maeshowe is surrounded by a circular ditch and bank

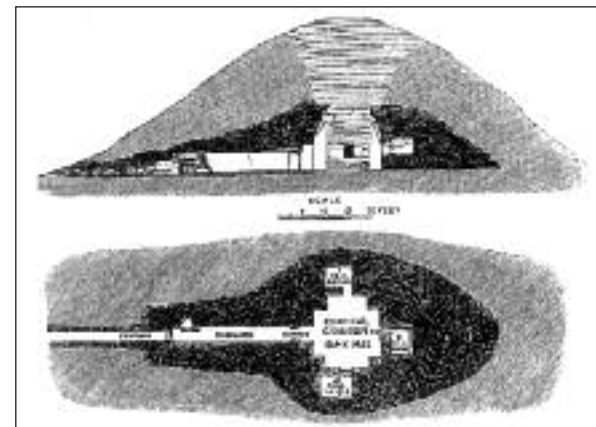


about the same in height. A tapered orthostat faces each corner buttress giving an impression of space and strength. The original roof design and height is unknown, but it may have been 6m high.

There are three cells within the walls which were sealed with stone blocks now on the floor, while the entrance passage, 14.5m long and 1.4m high, is lined with huge slabs, the largest weighing over 30 tonnes. When opened in 1861, the building was empty bar a piece of human skull, and some horse bones, but this was certainly not the first such incursion. The Vikings visited Maeshowe during the 12th century and have left one of the largest collections of runes anywhere, as well as carvings of a dragon, a serpent and a walrus.

Maeshowe was built on a levelled area of ground with a surrounding bank and ditch, peat from the bottom of which has been dated at 2750BC, which makes it contemporary with the Standing Stones and Skara

Aerial view of Maeshowe in the snow



Excavator's sketches of Maeshowe from 1861

Brae. Since no artefacts were found in 1861, little can be deduced about its usage. The surrounding bank was rebuilt on top of an original drystone wall in early Norse times, suggesting possible reuse in the 9th century.

Evidence of sockets for large standing stones around the outside of the mound only adds mystery to the original design and purpose. Carvings on some of the stones very similar to those found at Skara Brae are also of interest. The overriding impression is of a

Neolithic Cathedral, rather than a simple tomb.

While the other Maeshowe-type chambered cairns are all very well constructed, only Maeshowe itself is truly monumental with its huge slabs of stone lining the passage. Each cell is roofed by a single massive flagstone weighing up to 30 tonnes. After 5,000 years there has been little settlement and only a few of the horizontal slabs have cracked, attesting to the competence of the engineers who built the cairn.

The large blocking stone





illuminates the passage and interior of Maeshowe for several weeks on either side of the solstice. Since the original layout of the outer part of the passage is unknown it is unclear how present events differ from those of 5,000 years ago.

The large blocking stone at the entrance seems designed to be shut from the inside, but also would leave a gap of about 20cm to allow light through. The floor of the passage slopes upwards, so that water drains outwards towards a drain. Some collects at the entrance and acts as a reflector, greatly increasing the illumination of the interior.

From mid-November until mid-January the sun shines into the chamber at sunset and lights up the back wall, gradually creeping down the passage and across the floor. At the winter solstice the shaft of light hits the back wall at about 14:40GMT, and by 15:05 the sun has set behind the Ward Hill of Hoy.

As the winter solstice approaches, the sun sets further south until eventually it disappears behind the Ward Hill of Hoy. For several days it reappears some minutes later on the north side of the hill, sending a beam of light down the other side of the passage and lighting up a patch on the back wall. About 20 days before the shortest day the sun briefly flashes

Midwinter sunset illuminating the passage and floor

Winter solstice It has for long been known that the setting sun shines directly down the passage of Maeshowe at the winter solstice, illuminating the back wall and passage

in a dramatic fashion. Much speculation has been published over the years about this.

Recent research by Victor Reijs has shown that the sun

On the winter solstice the north wall of the passage is brilliantly illuminated



before setting, but for the next 40 days it does not reappear in this fashion, as it is too low in the sky.

A similar alignment can be observed about 40 days before and after the winter solstice, when the setting sun disappears behind the Cuilags on Hoy and then briefly reappears below the Kame. Thus there are at least five days when observations can determine the actual shortest day.

Maeshowe was most carefully placed in its environment. Today it is impossible to devine the original layout, since many standing stones and other features have been destroyed, and thus further alignments may well have existed. What is clear is that the builders had a definite vision and purpose. Ceremonies were undoubtedly held here, which would have included those for the dead, but also the living.

Vikings did not seem in the least worried about using it as

The sun hitting the back wall



About 3 weeks before and after the solstice the sun shines straight in

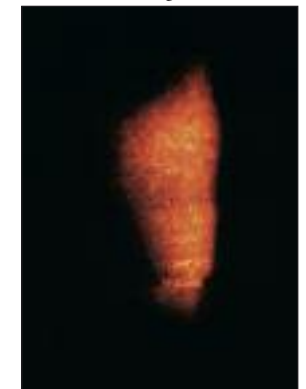
a shelter, and are known to have done so on several occasions. The author was first introduced to Maeshowe at midwinter by his grandfather, who himself had been taken

there as a young man. There is no better time to visit and view this structure than on a winter afternoon with a clear sunset.

12th January sun on blocking stone



"Flashing" on 2nd December





No9 "Ingibjorg, the fair widow. Many a woman has gone stooping in here. A great show-off. Erlingr."

RUNES Maeshowe has one of the largest groups of Norse runic inscriptions known. They are common all over Scandinavia and the Norse colonies, with the earliest dating from about 200AD. The younger *fuzark* was developed about 700AD and was the form of runes used by the Vikings. Many inscriptions are on artefacts and tell who carved the runes. Runic memorial stones are also common, often using existing boulders to commemorate the exploits of the dead.

Few such inscriptions have been found in Orkney, possibly

because of the nature of the sandstone. Fragments only remain of what must have been a larger number. Graffiti writing has presumably been a popular pastime for many years, but is usually regarded as a mess to be cleared up, rather than something to marvel at.

Runes developed as a way of carving letters into wood, bone or stone using a blade or similar implement. They represent most of the Latin alphabet as required by Old Norse. There are many variations in the runic alphabet, but most of the characters have Latin equivalents.

Runes were used throughout the Germanic lands, but were probably developed in Scandinavia.

The Maeshowe runes were carved in the 12th century, some by returning crusaders. There are about 30 inscriptions, many of the style, "Thorfinn wrote these runes". Some gave the father's name, or a nickname, others are by women and several are about them.

Clearly the Vikings were interested in Maeshowe and left inscriptions on at least one other occasion, when stories about

No32 "...treasure was hidden here"; "Happy is he who can find the great wealth"; "Haakon alone carried treasure from this mound"



treasure were being told, as in "Haakon singlehanded bore treasures from this howe". The very long inscription on the monolith to the northwest of the entrance passage describes how "Treasure was carried away three nights before they broke this mound." In other words a lame excuse for the Vikings not finding any of what they would call treasure.

Women were also discussed, as in No9, "Ingibjorg the fair widow". "Many a woman has come stooping in here. A great show-off. Erlingr". Less polite, "Yorny fucked. Helgi carved." Or quite mundane, "Vermundr carved."



No4 Continuation to right



No10 "Yorny fucked. Helgi carved" - on the right hand side of the northwest cell

No5 "Vermundr carved" - on northwest buttress to right of long inscription



No4 That will be true which I say, that treasure was carried away. Treasure was carried away three nights before they broke this mound."



"No20 The man who is most skilled in runes west of the ocean carved these runes with the axe which Gaukr Trandilssonr owned..."

Gaukr's Axe No20 is on two separate blocks on the southeast side of the chamber. "The man who is most skilled in runes west of the ocean carved these runes with the axe which Gaukr Trandilssonr owned south of the country [Iceland]".

The carver may have been Thorhallr Asgrimsson, according to the Orkneyinga saga, captain of Earl Rognvald's ship when they returned in 1153 from the Crusades. He was the great-great-grandson of Asgrimr Ellidtha-Grimsson, who is claimed to have killed Gaukr Trandilsson in the late 900s in Iceland. If true the axe

The Maeshowe runes and their transliteration into Latinised equivalents

fuporkhniastbmllyæqøeg-

must have remained in this family for 5 generations.

Tree Runes Some, including no20, have cryptic tree runes which are easily deciphered by a numeric code based on the *fuzark*, the runic alphabet. Little could the Viking graffiti writers of 1153 have realised how interesting their runes would be today! In the magnificent setting of this 5,000 year-old tomb, the Viking visitors seem not so far away.

Simple graffiti No1 is typical of many of the inscriptions. High on the southwest wall above the

entrance passage is a very clear inscription which read, "That is a Viking...then came underneath to this place".

Maeshowe Dragon The Maeshowe Dragon is a very familiar Orkney icon, which has been interpreted in various ways. Most Orcadians consider that it is a mythical dragon. Some try to interpret it as a motif depicting pagan beliefs being killed by a Christian sword.

This seems unlikely since the Vikings had been converted for over 150 years. Others think it is a lion. That Rognvald and his

men had just been to Jerusalem and the crusades, visiting Venice along the way. Whatever the thoughts of the artist, it looks fresh after over 850 years.

Below the dragon there is an animal which is probably a Common Seal, which would fit very well with the Norse name for Maeshowe. The fanciful have suggested that it may be an Otter or even a Walrus. Again there is common local agreement that it is indeed a *selkie*.

Further down an intricately knotted sea serpent, perhaps a *kraaken* appears almost to writhe. This worm-knot is of a similar standard to the dragon. Visitors must make up their own minds as to what these carvings may be intended to represent, but none can deny the craftsmanship and beauty of these 12th century graffiti. Today we strongly discourage such things, but at the same time these Norsemen immeasurably increased the interest of a visit to Maeshowe.



The "Maeshowe Dragon"



A coiled serpent, perhaps a "Kraaken"

No1 "That is a viking...then came underneath to this place"



A Seal, an Otter or even a Walrus?





Midwinter sunrise over the Standing Stones of Stenness at about 09:50GMT

STANDING STONES OF STENNESS (HY311125) originally formed a circle of 12 stones with a diameter of 30m and now comprises of 4 uprights, the tallest of which is over 5m high. The circle was surrounded by a rock-cut ditch 2m deep, 7m wide and 44m in diameter which has become filled in over the years. Excavation revealed a square setting of stones and bedding holes for further uprights, either stone or wooden.

Remains of domestic animals, including cattle, sheep and dog bones as well as a human finger were found in the ditch. Sherds of Grooved Ware pottery were also present. Radiocarbon dating indicates that the circle was

built about 3000BC, which is older than many henge monuments further south in Britain.

There are several possible lunar and solar alignments visible from the here. In midsummer the sun rises over a notch in the Rendall hills and sets far to the north over the Sandwick hills, while in midwinter it rises over the Orphir Hills and sets over Hoy. During major lunar standstills (every 18.6 years) the moon skims the Orphir hills, and it seems likely that observation of this event was part of the Neolithic ritual. In midwinter the moon rises over Maeshowe at sunset.

Watchstone At the Bridge of Brodgar, stands the

Midsummer sunset over the Loch of Stenness at about 22:20BST



Watchstone (HY305128, 5.6m), from which date of the winter solstice may be determined on at least four different days. About ten days before and after midwinter the sun reappears momentarily in a notch on the north side of the Ward Hill of Hoy, after setting behind its southern flank.

Another interesting alignment from the Watchstone occurs on Up Helli Day, twelve days after Old New Year, still celebrated in Shetland with Up Helly Aa. On this date at the end of January, the sun disappears behind Cuilags just before sunset and then reappears for a moment below the Kame of Hoy, before finally setting.

Odinstone This stone was destroyed in 1814 and used as lintels by the tenant farmer at Barnhouse, a ferrylooper who had become irritated by visitors to the stones. Apparently the part with the hole was used as the pivot for a horse mill but was destroyed after WWII.

Luckily the selfish farmer was stopped from demolishing the rest of the Standing Stones, but only after he had toppled two

more of the menhirs, one of which he broke up. The threat of Court action finally stopped this 19th century vandal, and the fallen stone was re-erected in 1906. Luckily the vast majority of landowners over the millennia have had great respect for our antiquities.

The Odinstone had a hole in it through which lovers clasped hands and swore their everlasting love. The *Oath of Odin* was then said and the contract was binding thereafter. The Stone was also credited with healing powers, in association with the well at Bigswell (HY345105), especially at Beltane and midsummer. Recently the probable sockets of both this stone and another were found between the Standing Stones and the Watch Stone.

Since many monoliths are clearly missing, interpretation of the remaining stones remains problematical. This of course only serves to add to the mystery of the purpose and original design of the monuments.

Springtime at the Watchstone



The Standing Stones of Stenness in the late 18th century - note the Odin Stone



Moonrise at the Standing Stones



The Odin Stone before destruction



The sun "flashing" at the Kame of Hoy - from Maeshowe

The sun "flashing" on the north flank of the Ward Hill of Hoy





Sigurd Towrie

Ness of Brodgar under excavation

NESS OF BRODGAR is the narrow peninsula north of the Bridge from which the area takes its name. In 1925 a stone decorated with

Neolithic lozenges and chevrons was found reused as the lid of a Bronze Age cist burial. This was sent to the National Museum and quietly forgotten. Luckily the field was never subjected to deep ploughing as at Barnhouse.

Following geophysical surveys in the Brodgar area, exploratory trenches were dug in 2004. These revealed the presence of a large Neolithic settlement. Over the last few years several large Neolithic buildings have been revealed. They have a

strong similarity to the largest building at nearby Barnhouse.

The site is bounded to the north and south by well built walls. The northern one is 4m wide, while the southern one is narrower at 2m, but survives to a height of 1.7m. The walls were paved on the outside and must have been most impressive when built. They enclose an area roughly 125m by 75m.

The largest building, structure 10, is 20m square with walls 5m thick. It is surrounded by



Sigurd Towrie

Incised stone at the Ness of Brodgar

Southern Wall of Brodgar



Painted stone



Sigurd Towrie

paving and has stonework of remarkable quality. The cross shaped interior includes standing stones and in design is reminiscent of Maeshowe, with which the entrance seems to be aligned.

All of these buildings have side chambers built into the walls, central fireplaces and are aligned roughly north to south. Large quantities of Grooved Ware pottery as well as polished mace heads, carved and incised stones, a carved whale's tooth and stones with peck marks have been found.

One of the most interesting finds was painted stones. Probably iron based pigments mixed with animal fat or egg whites were used to create the yellow, red and brown coatings. Some have scratched designs which would have been very obvious when new and which resemble other incised Neolithic designs.

Evidence was found suggesting that these buildings were at least partly roofed by flagstone slates in the same manner as traditional Orkney houses. A layer of thin rectan-

gular stones which had been cut to shape was discovered on the floor of two of the structures. Perhaps these buildings would not have looked so unfamiliar to modern Orcadians.

Free standing dressers and central hearths similar to those at Skara Brae were present, but the scale of the buildings and lack of evidence for long term occupation suggests that these were not houses for living in. More probably they were used for special occasions as has already been suggested at Barnhouse. There is a general lack of household rubbish and so far no small buildings such as those at Skara Brae or the Knap of Howar have been discovered.



Brodgar Stone found in 1925



Sigurd Towrie

Carved stone object



High quality stonework and paved path

Broken roofing slates



North Wall of Brodgar





Winter sunrise at the Ring of Brodgar on a misty, frosty morning

THE RING OF BRODGAR (ON *Bruar-gardr*, Bridge Farm, HY294133) is one of the finest stone circles anywhere. This great henge monument is superbly situated on the Ness of Brodgar, in a confluence of water and sky, surrounded by the agricultural heart of Orkney. The feeling of spaciousness is enhanced by the size of the circle, which is

103.7m or 125 “megalithic yards” in diameter. Of the original 60 stones, 27 remain standing, varying between 2.1m and 4.7m in height. The site is laid out very accurately in a perfect circle, with the stones approximately 6 degrees apart.

The source of the stones has been the subject of specula-

tion but the most likely source is in Sandwick, near Vestrafiold, where quarried megaliths can still be seen. The sandstone beds here are of good quality and were clearly suitable for making standing stones. Two unused examples lie on the shore of the Loch of Stenness near Wasbister Barrow, suggesting that they may perhaps have been transported by water for part of the way.

The surrounding rock-cut ditch is now 10m across but it was originally 5m wide and more than 3m deep, though now half silted up. Radiocarbon dating from excavation of this infill places the digging of the ditch in the third millennium BC.

Despite its size there is no trace of a surrounding earth-work, although there may originally have been a bank around it originally. An estimated 4,700 cubic metres of rock must have been shifted to complete the excavation. There are two entrance causeways, on the northwest and southeast sides.

Comet Stone About 140m to the southeast an isolated menhir, the Comet Stone (ON *Kuml-stein*, Mound Stone), is set on a platform beside the stumps of two other stones. At spring and autumn equinoxes, viewed from here, the sun sets just glancing off the westernmost side of the Ring of Brodgar. Several other stones stand between this and

Moonrise over the Loch of Harray from Brodgar



The Ring of Brodgar from the northeast in 1815 by William Daniell

the Bridge of Brodgar. There are also at least eight large mounds and smaller tumuli in the area, which are probably Bronze Age. It seems that the Brodgar area remained important during the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC at least, and today it still has a magnetic attraction.

Alignments There are a variety of astronomical alignments, which may have been intended by the builders. While many stones are missing, simple observation suggests several possibilities. These relate to the solstices and the equinoxes as well as times such as Beltane (Old May Day). At winter and summer solstices the sunrises and sunsets align with stones

and notches in the hills. Other outlying standing stones may be markers for specific times of year also. The site was undoubtedly chosen for observation of the moon. During major lunar standstills, which occur every 18.6 years, the moon appears to skim the Orphir hills as

seen from Brodgar. The phenomenon will be visible several times at full moon during 2005 to 2007.

Geophysical scans of the area have recently shown evidence of settlement to the south on the Ness of Brodgar, and to the north in the Wasbister



Autumn evening light at Brodgar

Midsummer sunrise from the Ring of Brodgar





Aerial view of the Ring of Brodgar from the southeast

area. A Bronze Age figure-of-eight house lies under one small mound, and it is probable that more Neolithic and later sites will also be found. Perhaps the most interesting finding is that there is no evidence of any buildings in the vicinity of the Ring of Brodgar itself.

Dyke o'Sean The Dyke o'Sean is an ancient turf

embankment which crosses the Ness of Brodgar north of the ring, and is the traditional parish boundary between Sandwick and Stenness. There are also references to a similar dyke to the south, suggesting that the area around the Ring of Brodgar was in some way special and demarcated from the land outside the dykes. This is consistent with the lack of finds within

the ring itself, suggesting that the area was in some way special.

The Ring of Brodgar was taken into state guardianship in 1906 and several fallen stones were re-erected. Lightning strikes have since shattered two. There is very little graffiti to deface the monoliths, but one stone on the North side is inscribed by



The Dyke o'Sean and the Ring of Brodgar from Bookan



Midsummer sunset at the Ring of Brodgar from the Comet Stone

some cryptographic Norse tree runes, thought to stand for *Bjorn*. The inscription was found on the lower side of a fallen stone when it was re-erected in 1907, and may well be genuine.

There is nothing the author likes better than a walk around the Ring of Brodgar. The variety of lighting conditions at different seasons and hours for which Orkney is justly famous, is nowhere more evident than at this ancient site. The builders certainly knew what they were doing when they chose the position at the centre of the

West Mainland.

There are few more evocative places to be at dawn or sunset at any time of year than the Ring of Brodgar, a precinct to enjoy and perhaps where one can temporarily escape from time itself. It really is special to visit whatever the season, time of day or weather. For total peace a calm, clear midsummer dawn is perfectly sublime, the only sound the birds, as the sun rises over the Rendall Hills.



The "Bjorn" runes



Details of the edge of a monolith



Midwinter sunset from the Ring of Brodgar



Unstan chambered cairn is unusual in having stalls and a side chamber

Unstan Cairn (HY283118), near the Brig o'Waithe has given its name to a class of Neolithic pottery, *Unstan Ware*. When excavated in 1884, a large amount of this pottery was found. These bowls have a characteristic shape and decoration and

were also found at the Knap of Howar on Papay, as well as in other stalled cairns of this type, including the Tomb of the Eagles in South Ronaldsay, which are referred to as the Orkney-Cromarty group.

The small side chamber has an single upright slab set into its back wall



The chamber is 6.6m long, 1.9m at its widest and the walls survive to over 2m in height. Opening onto the side of the chamber, the narrow passage is 6.5m long. There is a cell in the centre of the wall opposite the entrance, and vertical flagstone stalls divide the main chamber into five sections, three central and two shelved end compartments which have end walls formed from large slabs set on edge.

A stone with carvings and runes was put there during restoration, and while the runes may be Viking, the other shapes are more likely 20th century graffiti. A large amount of human and animal bone was found but unfortunately it was not recorded. Of particular interest is the alignment of the entry passage with the Watchstone and the large house at Barnhouse Village across the loch.

Barnhouse Stone This monolith (HY312122, 3.2m) stands in a field near the main road, inside a rather mean-looking fence put there by a

"Runes" carved on a lintel



farmer who would have preferred to have destroyed it. It is positioned such that about 22 days before and after the winter solstice the setting sun lines up with this stone and the Maeshowe passage as it "flashes" on the north side of the Ward Hill of Hoy. The stone is also in alignment with the Watchstone and the centre of the Ring of Brodgar.

Barnhouse Village lies on the shore of the Loch of Harray about 100m from the Standing Stones. Despite deep ploughing, enough of the foundations remained to show a remarkable series of buildings. The small structures closely resemble the older houses at Skara Brae with central fireplaces, stone-lined drains and bed spaces set into the walls. The larger house has echoes of Maeshowe, but measures 7m square on the inside and has a large central hearth.

Grooved Ware pottery was found here and the oldest date seems to be about 3200BC, making it contemporary with

Maeshowe on 21st December from the line of the Barnhouse Stone



One of the small houses at Barnhouse resembles the older ones at Skara Brae



An Unstan Ware pot



A Grooved Ware pot



Midsummer sunset at Barnhouse

the nearby Standing Stones. The houses may have been used for communal activities related to those at the stone circle. The small house nearest the loch and the entrance to the large house are aligned with midsummer sunset,

while entrance of one of the other houses is in line with the midwinter sun as it rises over the Heddle Hill.

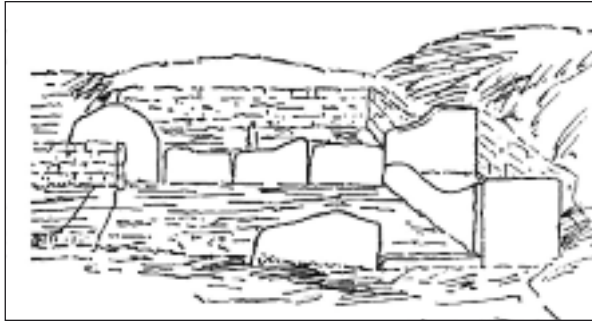
Bookan To the north of Brodgar the Ring of Bookan

Barnhouse Stone from southwest





The chambered cairn at the Ring of Bookan faces midsummer sunrise



Drawing of Bookan chambered cairn after excavation in 1861

(HY283145) is of particular interest. This henge monument has a ditch over 2m deep and 10m wide, which is partially filled-in. There is a central mound, about 42m by 38m, with a much-robbed chambered cairn at its centre, whose entrance faces the midsummer sunrise. Sweeping views over Lochs of Harray and Stenness to the Hoy hills

and to Sandwick suggest that the site may have played an important part in the overall Neolithic plan.

To the southwest a substantial mound called Skae Frue is possibly a Bronze Age burial mound, but it also lies in a direct line with the midwinter sunset seen from the centre of the Ring of Bookan. This may

The view towards Brodgar from Bookan chambered cairn



well be another observation site for solar and lunar events.

To the southeast lie a series of mounds and a substantial quarry of unknown date which was presumably the source of stone for the nearby monuments and the buildings nearer Brodgar. Whether it was also a source for monoliths is unknown.

Bookan Cairn Facing the Ring of Brodgar, and about 400m southeast of the Ring of Bookan, little remains of Bookan chambered cairn (HY287141). It is unusual in that the interior divisions were wholly made up of vertically-placed flagstones set in a rectangular drystone building about 4m square with a short entrance passage. The main chamber comprised a central area about 2m by 1.3m, with five compartments, each about 1m square, two on each side and one at the far end.

Each compartment could be sealed off by means of an upright flagstone. In addition the cairn is surrounded by a stone wall, making the whole arrangement akin to Maeshowe-type tombs. Some pottery and bones were found and "lost" during the 1861 excavation. Bookan is different to most of the other chambered cairns in Orkney, but it does resemble Taversoe Tuick (Upper) on Rousay and Huntersquoy (Upper) on Eday. There are also echoes of house interiors at Skara Brae and Knap of Howar.



Map of the "Heart of Neolithic Orkney" (excluding Skara Brae)

Deepdale stones The large 2m-high monolith at Deepdale (HY272118) overlooks the Loch of Stenness and the Brig o' Waithe, with its flat side facing the Ring of Brodgar. It may well have played a role in midsummer sunrise observations, and could be related to Unstan chambered cairn.



Deepdale standing stone overlooks the Loch of Stenness from the west

Until recently there was another one nearby but it has disappeared. It remains popular today as a convenient rubbing post for cattle, and is worth visiting for the panoramic view of the centre of the West Mainland alone.

November sunset over the Cuilags on Hoy and Skae Frue from the centre of Bookan

