

HOY (ON *Ha-ey*, High Island) is the largest Orkney island after the Mainland, being about 20km (12.5mi) long by 9km (5.6mi) wide. Most of the island is more like the Scottish Highlands than Orkney, only the southern end being low and fertile. The

The Hoy Hills and Hoy Sound from Stromness



St John's Head and the Old Man of Hoy

north and west coasts are bounded by spectacular cliffs, while the southeast coast has so many bays that the Vikings called it *Vagaland*, Land of Voes. This became Scotticised into *Wawis*, and then Anglicised to *Walls*. The old pronunciation of *WaaS*, however, has survived.

Geology The difference in terrain is caused by the rocks. Hoy is mostly composed of Upper Old Red Sandstone, overlying the Middle Old Red Sandstone, which makes up most of the rest of Orkney. The start of the steep slopes of the Ward Hill (HY229023, 479m) and Cuilags (HY209033, 435m) mark the

boundary between the two types of sandstone, which can also be clearly seen in the cliffs to the west. The horizontal beds of sandstone have weathered to give dramatic vertical red and yellow cliffs, highest at St John's Head (HY187033, 351m), the tallest vertical sea cliff in Britain.

Old Man of Hoy Hoy is perhaps most famous for its Old Man (HY177008, 137m), a great rock stack which stands on a lava flow. This hard outcrop forms a skerry which protrudes about 200m out to sea from the base of the great stack and has been a key factor in its formation. Early in the 19th century there was a sec-

MV "Hamnavoe" passing the Old Man of Hoy on her way to Scrabster



HOY ATTRACTIONS

HOY

North Hoy Nature Reserve
Ward Hill
Whaness Burn
Dwarfie Stone
Berrie Dale
Rackwick
Rora Head
Old Man of Hoy
St John's Head
Cuilags
Braebuster Broch
The Witter
Chapel & cemetery, Bu
Greenhill Broch, Whaness

WEST COAST

Mel-Fea
Lyrie Geo
Summer of Hoy
Candle of the Sneuk
Little Rackwick
Heldale Water
Hoglinns Water
The Berry
Ha Wick
Torness
Melberry& Sands Geo

NORTH WALLS

Water of Hoy
Betty Corrigan's Grave
Lyrava Hill viewpoint
Scad Head
Lyrava Burn and Bay
Pegal Burn and Bay
Lyness
Scapa Flow Visitor Centre
Lyness Naval Cemetery
Wee Fea viewpoint
Crockness Martello Tower
Binga Fea viewpoint
Melsetter House

North Bay
Brims
Lifeboat Museum
Duncan's Geo chambered cairn
The Skeo Broch
Chapel of Brims

SOUTH WALLS

Longhope
Hill o'White Hammars Reserve
Green Hill Broch
Outer Green Hill Broch
Hackness Martello Tower & Battery
Osmondwall Cemetery
Green Hill of Hestigeo Broch
Cantick Head Lighthouse



Berrie Dale, near Rackwick, is the largest area of relict woodland in Orkney

ond leg on the landward side, showing how ephemeral our coastal features are.

Other lava flows in the area at the Kame of Hoy (HY198049) and Too of the

Head (HY192988) have a characteristic columnar formation, while there is a prominent volcanic plug at The Witter (HY224047).

Glaciation At the end of the

Ice Age the Hoy Hills retained glaciers which formed the large corries at Nowt Bield and Quoyawa on the Ward Hill, Enegars below Cuilags and small coastal ones such as Runnarto and Stours Kinora near the Old Man. Trowie Glen is a fine example of a hanging valley. Terminal moraines from glacial melt-water are prominent at the Sandy Loch and in Rackwick. Although Orkney gets little snow, the Hoy Hills are often white in winter, due to their height.

North Hoy Whether the visitor arrives on foot from Stromness at Moaness Pier, or by the car ferry via Lyness, Hoy splits into three areas, north, west and south. The north is dominated by large hills, deep valleys and precipitous cliffs, while the dramatic west side also has a very imposing coastline, as well as a remote and largely unvisited interior.

South Hoy is divided into the



The north side of Rackwick has large sandstone boulders

The spectacular beach at Rackwick has a large expanse of sand and is framed by high cliffs at each end



Climbers on the Old Man

parishes of North and South Walls, the latter usually being called simply *Longhope* locally. The east and south are mostly agricultural with many sheltered bays and much evidence of past human settlement. The interior is heather moorland, bounded by cliffs to the west and a lower rocky coastline further south.

Moaness Pier is the arrival point for the ferry from Stromness and Graemsay. Overlooking Burra Sound, the Bu has an interesting old house dating from 1615, with crow-stepped gables. Nearer the pier, Burra House was built as a manse in 1798.

An old chapel surrounded by an ancient graveyard sits above the Sands of Klibreck, facing Burra Sound and Graemsay. The broch which once dominated this bay may have stood to the north in the field called Burraquoy.

There was a twin 12-pounder site called t Skerry, next to Bu Farm. This battery is very well preserved and was built about 1941. It affords good views



The 351m face of St John's Head is the highest vertical sea cliff in UK



The 351m face of St John's Head is the highest vertical sea cliff in UK

across Hoy Sound and the skerries which are exposed at low tide. many seals lie up here.

Burra Sound In Burra Sound the blockship *Inverlaine* was a prominent wreck. This 8,000 ton tanker had struck a mine in 1940 and was eventually sunk in this position in 1944. Although seemingly solid the

ship was moved by a storm and is now under water. There are the remains of several other blockships in the area, all of which are also submerged.

The northeast part of Hoy is more fertile, and there is a ruined broch or fort at Brough of Braebuster (HY052213). The Green Hill of Quoyness

Mist covers the top of St John's Head with the Old Man and Rora Head behind





The Ward Hill (m) dominates the north of Hoy

broch (HY250028) has been half eroded by the sea, but still stands 4m high. It is in a good defensive position with commanding views of Burra Sound and the Bring Deepes.

Dwarfie Stone Below the Dwarfie Hamars lies an isolated block of sandstone known as the Dwarfie Stone (HY243004). Thought to

date from about 3000BC, this rock-cut tomb has a passage and two cells and there is a large block nearby which originally blocked the entrance. The marks of the stone tools used to hollow out the chamber can be clearly seen and there are various interesting Victorian graffiti. There is a boardwalk path across the bog so wellies are not needed.



The Dwarfie Stone lies below the Dwarfie Hamars opposite the Ward Hill

The rock-cut interior of the Dwarfie Stone is very well finished



After a serious heather fire in 1984, many sub-peat dykes, together with banks and mounds suggesting a prehistoric agricultural settlement were revealed in the nearby Whaness Burn area (HY025245).

Carbuncle From the Dwarfie Stone it is said that a "Carbuncle" can at times be seen on the northeast of the upper slopes of the Ward Hill during May, June and July in the late evening. This is said to "shine or sparkle with light when seen from below", but the source has never been found by anyone climbing to seek its source. The tale may well be fictional, especially as it is given prominence by Walter Scott, whose writings were not exactly complimentary of Orkney.

Ward Hill of Hoy (ON Varda, Beacon, 479m) is the highest hill in Orkney. With Cuilags and Knap of Trowieglen it forms the Hoy Hills, which are so prominent from all over Orkney and northern Caithness.

There are several possible routes up the Ward Hill. The steepest and most direct is via the Burn of Quoys and Quoyawa. Earlier routes are from the south via the Nowt Bield, from the north via the Red Glen and from Rackwick.

The ridge walk is well worthwhile. Many alpine plants manage to grow in this fell field. Care should be taken to

avoid damaging them. There are fine views from all of the summits with perhaps the best being from the Howes of Quoyawa.

Cuilags (435m) makes an attractive addition to a walk to St John's Head. Its summit is a 335m straight climb from the Sandy Loch. The ramparts of Enegars (HY203038, 350m) are awe inspiring. They are best viewed early or late in the day, as they face north.

Trowieglen There are several other good walks, of which one is via Trowie Glen to the Knap of Trowieglen (ND240985, 399m) and either down Lyrawa Burn or Pegal Burn (ND294975) to the main road. This wild area includes several lochans with Red-throated Divers, which should not be disturbed during the breeding season. Trowieglen is a good example of a glacial hanging valley. Its sheltered sides are good for botanising.

Dragonfly on the Dwarfie Stone



The top of the Ward Hill



The top of the Ward Hill



Moaness Pier

Arctic Bearberry





Rackwick aerial view from the southeast in February

RACKWICK (ON Reka-Vik, Jetsam Bay) is a dramatic contrast to the rest of north Hoy with its wide sand and boulder beach, bound on both sides by 150m cliffs. This large and quiet glen, which was once well populated with crofters and fishermen, is now nearly deserted except for holiday homes. It has a beauty and a climate all of its own.

Beware, with its extensive marshy areas, it is also one of the favourite places in Orkney for the dreaded *Culicoides*

impunctatus, or Midgie. In compensation, Hoy is by far the best place to see dragonflies and damsel flies. They are common near pools and streams in late summer.

From Moaness Pier to Rackwick along picturesque single track road about 8km (5mi). This passes the flanks of the Ward Hill to the north and the Knap of Trowieglan to the south, before the opening out into the wide expanse of Rackwick Valley. The Dwarfie Stone nestles under

the precipitous and somewhat forbidding Dwarfie Hamars.

Rackwick can also be reached on foot from the carpark east of Sandy Loch. The path follows the Burn of Redglen and the Rackwick Burn, passing Berrie Dale woodland on the way. This route is strongly recommended for walkers.

Cra's Nest Museum is an 18th century croft. The house has box beds, a dresser and old wooden furniture. There is also a byre and a barn with a

The spectacular beach at Rackwick has a large expanse of sand and is framed by high cliffs at each end



a Burnmouth Cottage window

kiln. This was used to dry oats and bere as well as in making malt for ale.

Beach Like many beaches in Orkney Rackwick is very changeable. The bay is shallow and at low springs a large area of sand is exposed. The north end is always boulder-strewn but the south end has fine sands which reach past the Burnmouth.

Coastal sand dunes give way to machair then peatbog. The large variety of habitats in a small area, combined with relatively sheltered climate make Rackwick a good place for those studying insects and plants.

Rackwick panoramic in midwinter



Rackwick fishermen in the 19th century



Berrie Dale, near Rackwick, is the largest area of relict woodland in Orkney



Cra's Nest is now a museum



The Old Man of Hoy in 1815 by William Daniell

Old Man of Hoy The path from Rackwick to the Old Man is steep at first and the 6km (3.75 miles) return walk takes about 3 hours. Along the way there are panoramic views of Rackwick and the Pentland Firth, which are well worth stopping to admire. A number of interesting plants inhabit the slopes above the path including Arctic Bearberry, Dwarf Juniper and Least Willow.

There are several dramatic viewpoints from which to admire the Old Man, including from the south side of Runnarto (HY004178, ON *Hraun*, Heap of Stones), from The Knee or Tuaks O'the Boy, the nearest point to the stack and Scarsa (ON *Scard*, Notch in a Ridge).

It was first climbed in 1966, when the event was televised live, a major feat at that time.

Climbers regularly ascend the Old Man and neighbouring cliffs, but this is not an endeavour to be undertaken lightly. In former times the young men of Rackwick were well known for their climbing ability, when they went in search of birds' eggs, using *simmons* made from heather as their ropes.

It is possible to descend to the base of the cliffs in dry weather in several places by taking obvious paths down the steep slopes, but this is not recommended, and is dangerous except in dry weather. The path to the foot of the Old Man is called the *Stowar Road*. There is a fine rock-fishing stance at the Trough to the seaward of the stack, while the bay to the south is called the Sooth Loop, and that to the north, The Neuk. Both are good places for flotsam to collect.

Panoramic view with the Kame of Hoy, (300m), St John's Head (351m) and the Old Man of Hoy (137m)



St John's Head From the Old Man there are several alternative return routes to Moaness pier, depending on time and energy. The energetic walk via St John's Head, Cuilags and the Kame may be the most spectacular. Leaden Geo and *Hendry's Holes* are sites of former attempts at lead mining, while the vertiginous view from the Bre Brough and the nearby 351m drop below Sui Fea (378m) are not for those averse to heights.

Manx Shearwaters still nest in the craigs of Enegars above the Kame. The slopes into the Meadow of the Kame are very steep and a more gentle return is via the summit of Cuilags (435m), with wonderful panoramic views, to the Sandy Loch.

Other routes back from the Old Man are to head to the summit of Moor Fea (304m) and directly back to Rackwick



The Old Man of Hoy and Rora Head from the north



The path to the Old Man follows the contours of Moor Fea

or to take a detour to Berrie Dale woods. Alternatively follow the clifftops to the dramatic red rocks of Rora Head before returning to the path.

The coast here has many caves and geos and is spectacular of a summer's evening or during a winter storm.



The Sneuk from the south

West Coast Walk The really energetic can try Orkney's most spectacular walk, which goes south from Rackwick to Torness (ND254884). It can also be done the other way around, but is then mostly uphill. In view of changeable weather conditions and the chance of mist, waterproofs, map, compass, GPS and torch are recommended.

This walk takes in magnificent cliff scenery, with very fine views across the Pentland Firth. It will take a whole day due to the distance involved (12km, 7.5mi) and rough terrain. With the many cliff views to admire, care must be taken to leave plenty of time.

Starting from Rackwick there is a steep 200m climb to the Craig Gate. The route drops down into

the valleys of several valleys. Short diversions to coastal viewpoints or lochans make it longer. Midsummer is probably the best time for wild flowers, birds and colours. After passing *Willie Young's Cairn* below the summit of Mel Fea (324m), the route passes several spectacular geos. These include Geo of the Lame and Lyrie Geo, where young men from Rackwick used to catch Manx Shearwaters.

The Summer of Hoy Burn (ON *Summ-moerr*, South March or Border) when full, forms a spectacular waterfall next to the Sneuk (ON *Snokr*, Snout, 165m). There are good views northwest along the cliffs from northwest of the Burn of Forse (ON *Fors*, Waterfall, ND220948). In this case the outfall is much lower, but

Rackwick and Mel Fea with Cuilags and the Ward Hill in the background



still spectacular. There is a large colony of Great Black-backed Gulls here in summer. This is the first easily accessible beach south of Rackwick.

Little Rackwick has a shingle storm beach and is the final resting place of several wrecks and much flotsam. Fishermen from Rackwick and Brims used to pull up their yoles on this beach in settled weather. The Grimsby trawler *Ross Puma* was lost here in 1968, the crew were rescued.

Many of the inland lochans host breeding Red-throated Divers in summer, which should not be disturbed. Usually they are heard long before they are seen as they fly over. They may be observed discretely from a distance.

The southern part of the route is described in the South Walls section, below. The complete route visa Berry Head, Tor Ness and Brims can be followed. Alternatively return via Heldale Water. This coastline is the only really remote part of Orkney. In places the nearest house is over 8km (5mi) away so it is a good plan to inform others of your plans before setting out.

Ross Puma went ashore in Little Rackwick in 1968



Rugged cliffs north of the Sneuk



Lyrie Geo and the Sneuk



Little Rackwick, the Green Heads and Berry Head from the northwest

HOY ATTRACTIONS

WEST COAST

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Lyrie Geo
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Candle of the Sneuk
Little Rackwick
Heldale Water
Hoglinns Water
The Berry
Ha Wick
Torness
Melberry& Sands Geo



Great Skua (Bonxie)

RSPB Hoy Nature Reserve (3925ha) This Reserve covers most of the uncultivated land in the north of Hoy. The Warden can be contacted on Tel (01856) 791298. This reserve has a variety of habitats, ranging from the most northerly natural woodland in Britain at Berrie Dale (ON Berg Dalr, Cliff Valley, HY202015) to the tundra-like high tops of the hills and

the sea cliffs. The wood has Hazel, Rowan, Downy Birch and Aspen and may reflect the type of vegetation, which existed before the arrival of the Neolithic farmers.

On the hills there are Red Grouse, Curlew, Meadow Pipit, Golden Plover and Dunlin, while Red-throated Diver frequent the hill lochs. These latter should only be

watched from a distance to avoid predation of eggs and chicks by Skuas. Divers are usually heard before they are seen as they shuttle back and forth from their feeding grounds to their nests.

There is a large colony of Great Skuas, the second biggest in UK after Foula. They will certainly dive-bomb if their nests are approached. There are also Arctic Skuas, which declined steadily from over 400 pairs in the 1980s due to depredation from Bonxies and shortage of food.

Hoy has no Orkney Voles and thus not many Hen Harriers, or Short-eared Owls, but Peregrine, Kestrels, Merlin, Buzzards and even an occasional Golden Eagle or White-tailed Sea Eagles may be seen. Stonechats and Wheatears are common lower down, while Twite are also present on the moors.

The Fulmar is the commonest bird on the high cliffs, but there are also other breeding seabirds, especially at the north end, where there is a small colony of Manx Shearwaters which can be



Red-throated Diver



Stonechat



Mountain Hare

Laurie Campbell



Dwarf (or Least) Willow

seen gathering at dusk in the bay at Rackwick. Puffins nest in small numbers in grassy banks on the cliffs. Guillemots and Razorbills also breed on suitable ledges.

The Mountain Hare is quite common in Hoy, but absent from the other islands. Conspicuous in winter in their white coats if there is no snow, they revert to a normal coat in summer. Otters are also present along the Scapa Flow coastline, though many more sightings than animals are seen. Early morning or late evening is the best time to look, while suggested spots are Pegal Bay, Lyrawa Bay, Mill Bay and North Bay in Longhope.

Rackwick Burn



Mountain Azalea

The upland nature of Hoy has resulted in many sub-arctic or alpine plants at relatively low altitudes. Dwarf Willow, Purple Saxifrage and Wild Azalea are all present, while very low levels of grazing on the moors has allowed much long heather to develop.

The dangers of accidental fire in the heather were made apparent in 1984 when a Boys' Brigade group accidentally set fire to the heather near Rackwick. The fire burnt for days and travelled several miles right round to the northwest side of the Ward Hill, before being put out. A large part of a conifer plantation was destroyed in the process.

Plantation below the Ward Hill which was partially destroyed by fire in 1984



Purple Saxifrage flowers in March



Arctic Bearberry



Clubmoss

Laurie Campbell

Laurie Campbell

Laurie Campbell



NORTH WALLS (*North Waas*) is the mid parish of Hoy. It stretches from the Water of Hoy in the north to

Aith Hope in the south. The single track road winds up and down and offers spectacular views over Scapa Flow. The

area takes its name from these *waas*, or *voes* (ON *Vagr*, Bay).

Betty Corrigan On the parish boundary, near Water of Hoy lies Betty Corrigan's Grave (ND2810998). She was a girl who committed suicide after becoming pregnant to a sailor in the 19th century. She tried to drown herself but was saved so she hanged herself in the byre. Tradition has it that the father was a local man who left on a whaling ship bound for the *Nor'Waast*. Since she



Scapa Flow and Bring Deeps from Lyrawa Hill AA battery

Rowan at Pegal Burn



Betty Corrigan's Grave near the Water of Hoy



Lyrawa Hill AA battery overlooks the battery at Scad Head

Eroded rocks at Pegal Burn



could not be buried in hallowed ground she was buried here on the parish boundary.

In the 1930s peatcutters found the burial. During the war soldiers put a fence round the grave and tidied it up. The artist Harry Berry made the present tombstone and enclosure. Even the hardest heart must stop for a moment and feel something here.

Lyrawa Hill Nearby, on Lyrawa Hill, there is a panoramic view over Scapa Flow from the site of a WWII anti-aircraft battery. Lower down at Scad Head lies a coastal defence gun battery. Initially a 12-pounder, this was changed to a twin 6-pounder in 1941. No overhead protection was ever installed here.

Voes Each voe has a burn running into it. These include Lyrawa Burn, Pegal Burn, Mill Burn and the Burn of Ore. Pegal Burn (ND295976), Orkney's largest, is particularly beautiful. Sandstone boulders have been worn into interesting shapes along the shore and the contrasting



Pegal Bay and Scapa Flow

colour of wild flowers, burn and shore are dramatic.

There is a picnic site by the bridge, and the sheltered valley has a variety of trees, shrubs and wild flowers. Lyrawa, Pegal, Mill and Ore Bays are all shallow and ebb dry. The whole coastline is prime Otter territory.

Lyness Ferry Terminal The ferries *Hoy Head* and *Thorsvoe* operate regular sailings to and from Houton and also to Flotta. Booking is essential as many sailings are full long in advance. The north of the island can be conveniently explored on foot or by bike from Moaness. The south end is mostly low lying and is fine for walkers or cyclists, perhaps

assisted by a taxi or two to catch the ferry back.

Viewpoint A good panorama of the whole of south Hoy, Scapa Flow and the Pentland Firth can be had from the east ridge of Wee Fea (ND288942, 150m). A road goes up the hill from near the Hoy Hotel to the underground oil tanks and Naval Communications Centre built in WWII.

HOY ATTRACTIONS

NORTH WALLS

Water of Hoy
Betty Corrigan's Grave
Lyrawa Hill viewpoint
Scad Head
Lyrawa Burn and Bay
Pegal Burn and Bay
Lyness
Scapa Flow Visitor Centre
Lyness Naval Cemetery
Wee Fea viewpoint
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Binga Fea viewpoint
Melssetter House
North Bay
Brims
Lifeboat Museum
Duncan's Geo chambered cairn
The Skeo Broch
Chapel of Brims

Lyness with the ferry and Crockness Martello Tower in the background





Lyness from Wee Fea

LYNESS (ON *Hlidar ness*, Slope Ness), the site of the great Royal Naval Base developed in WWII, is in the middle of the area the Vikings called *Vagaland*. The flat land, with relatively deep water close to the shore and with much sheltered anchorage nearby was ideal for such a base. Although the Navy moved to Lyness briefly in

1919, the Longhope Hotel was their base during World War I, with smaller vessels mooring at Longhope, and larger ships north of Flotta.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Lyness became the base for salvage of the German fleet, Mill Bay being used to beach and strip the hulks before they were towed south for break-

ing. The last to be lifted, SMS *Derfflinger*, lay off Rysa all through WWII, not far from her erstwhile adversary, HMS *Iron Duke*, which was herself bombed and beached in 1940.

In 1939, with war looming, Lyness soon became busy and a rash of camps and buildings mushroomed on the landscape. HMS *Prosperine*, as the base was known, had civil contractors as well as Naval, Army and Air Force personnel. All played their part in setting up the base.

The proliferation of unplanned and largely wooden buildings would have been an excellent target for an incendiary raid, but none came.



Repairing boom defence netting at Lyness

Aerial view of Rinnigill and Ore Bay



One oil tank has been retained as part of the Visitor Centre



There was a Barrage Balloon Centre at Ore Hill, which in 1941 maintained 81 balloons, and was supplied with hydrogen from a portable unit at Rinnigill. The permanent factory there took so long to build that it hardly saw use before the balloons left in mid-1944. The remains of the factory and its special pier can still be seen today (ND318938).

Boom defence was very important, and the nets were maintained at Lyness. The wharf was too small in 1939 and the cost of extension was so great that when completed in 1944, it was called *Golden Wharf*. With a length of 185m and a least depth of 9m, this pier could berth very large ships. Today one pier supports a Tern colony and on another many Tysties nest in the crevices.

The oil storage tanks on the surface were considered vulnerable and in 1939 underground storage tanks under Wee Fea were started. Norwegian miners from Spitzbergen were employed to excavate the huge reservoirs. The first was ready in

Lyness from Wee Fea Naval HQ & Communications Centre



Lyness in 1979 before the removal of the oil tanks

September 1942, but it was August 1943 before the full 100,000 ton capacity was filled with oil. Piers were also a problem but finally three were built, one at Rinnigill for hydrogen, the North Pier for ferries and supplies and the West Pier for tugs and small craft.

Virtually no shore facilities and few telephone lines existed in 1939 and HMS *Iron Duke* was used as HQ. Shore offices were completed in 1942, but it was 1943 before the Naval HQ and Communications Centre on Wee Fea, overlooking Lyness, was ready. This centre finally put all defence sectors in Scapa in direct communication with 270 staff handling

nearly 9,000 calls per day during 1943 and 1944. This impressive building even has round porthole-like windows.

Anti-aircraft batteries, search-light batteries, radar stations and supply depots were all established. In addition there were depot ships, stores ships, a hospital ship, a converted train ferry with a cinema onboard and everything else needed to keep a huge military establishment operational.

By mid-1944, after the invasion of France, the base was already running down and in September 1945 many of the huts were given to the French for temporary accommodation in their war-ravaged towns. Finally, on 29th March

Entrance to one of the Wee Fea oil tanks





Scapa Flow Visitor Centre, Lyness

1957, the Lyness Naval Base was officially closed.

Scapa Flow Visitor Centre

Today much has been tidied up at Lyness. Many of the dilapidated buildings and hut bases left from WWII have gone and all but one of the large oil tanks have been cut up for scrap. The Orkney Islands Council has retained this tank and the pump house.

The latter has been converted into a museum and interpretation centre, the pumping machinery and boilers having been cleaned up and restored. Interpretation displays and small artefacts make this a very interesting visit.

The inside of the oil tank has been transformed into a display area, with an ever-increasing selection of military

equipment and artefacts from both World Wars now on display, including vehicles, guns, searchlights and other larger items. Outside are several guns off WWI German ships, AA guns of the type used in WWII, one of the propellers from *HMS Hampshire* and some of the railway stock used on the *Golden Wharf* in WWII.

Lyness Naval Cemetery

(ND301947) is the last resting place for brave naval personnel from many famous incidents. There are graves of people who died at Jutland, on *HMS Hampshire*, *HMS Vanguard*, of Germans killed during the Scuttle, and of crew from *HMS Royal Oak*. There are also graves of German submariners from WWI and aircrew from WWII.

Russian Convoy Memorial

In August 2009 the Arctic Convoy Memorial was unveiled near the Visitor Centre. Between August 1941 and May 1945 78 convoys operated from the UK and the USA to arctic Russian ports. In all about 1,400 merchant ships and nearly 400

naval escorts. In all 85 freighters and 16 Royal Navy warships were sunk. The German losses included many aircraft, over 30 U-boats and several surface ships.

The convoys assembled initially from Iceland, but from September 1942 they sailed from Loch Ewe. Scapa Flow was the home base for all of the naval escorts.

Marine Energy

Work commenced in 2010 to refurbish the base as a centre for the assembly, storage and servicing of marine renewable energy devices. Research and development plus deployment of these devices can also take place at Lyness. The existing berth has been refaced and fendered giving 265m of mooring space.

4000m² of hard standing has been laid to assist with assem-

Memorial to HMS Vanguard crew



Lyness Naval Cemetery

bly and servicing devices. Future plans are to provide steel framed buildings in secure compounds with office

and communication facilities as the site and the industry develops.

Russian Convoy Memorial



Scapa Flow Visitor Centre, Lyness - Pumping House

Propeller raised from HMS Hampshire



WWI German gun at Scapa Flow Visitor Centre, Lyness





Melsetter and the Pentland Firth from Binga Fea



Melsetter House Chapel

Melsetter House (ND270893) and Rysa Lodge were designed by William Lethaby for the Middlemore family in Arts and Crafts style. At Melsetter the original L-shaped house from 1738 was incorporated into the 1898 design, and the whole forms perhaps the most attractive country house in Orkney, which was described by William Morris' daughter as "a sort of fairy palace on the edge of the northern seas".

The walls are harled with sandstone dressings and gables have crow-steps. The roof is Caithness slate, while

the light and airy interior remains mostly original. There is a paved courtyard and a fine old walled garden as well as a small chapel dedicated to St Colm and Margaret.

The chapel roof is a vault of unreinforced concrete in the shape of an upturned boat. Nearby, the farmhouses echo the boat theme and are also worth a look. Visits are by appointment only, Tel (01856) 791352.

Melsetter There is an excellent sandy beach below Melsetter (ON *Melr Setr*, Sand



Melsetter House was built in 1898 in "Arts and Crafts" style



Victorian mail box

Homestead), with sand dunes and a fine walk out to the point at Torness (ND255885), where there is sometimes a large Arctic Tern colony in the breeding season. The beaches, dunes and machair are full of wild flowers in summer. Care should be taken here if cattle are grazing.

Torness Many ships attempted to avoid the worst part of the Pentland Firth, the *Merry Men o'Mey* or the *Auld Ebbs*, by skirting the coastline of South Walls. In darkness or poor visibility it was all too easy to miss the low-lying shores of Ha Wick or Torness and be carried ashore by tide and sea.

The installation of the light in 1937 was itself the probable cause of the loss of the *Johanna Thorden* on Swona that year. The master was unaware of the new light, mistaking it for the south Swona light. Before the beacon was installed this was a veritable graveyard for ships,

St John's Kirk was built in 1883 as a counter attraction to the nearby Free Kirk. It was built by public subscription and often referred to as *The Fisher Kirk* owing to the esteem in which its longest serving Missionary was held. Except for gas heating, all the fittings, including the pews and oil lamps, are original. It is open daily. Services and recitals are held here occasionally.



Melsetter Beach with Tör Ness in the background



St John's Kirk is now in the care of the St John's Church Trust

Heldale Water is up to 50ft deep in places. It has been stocked by Orkney Trout Fishing Association, with Brown Trout and Arctic Char. The steep banks make wading difficult and anglers need to take their own boats. The loch provides the mains water supply for Hoy and Flotta, including the Oil Terminal.

The Berry (ON *Ber*, Headland ND237908, 175m) is the most southerly high headland on the west side of Hoy. This prominent landmark is the highest point of the spectacular coastline between Little Rackwick and Torness. From Green Heads to Broughs o'the Berry there is a series of geos, caves, waterfalls and dramatic scenery to explore.

Heldale Water from the east end





Berry Head (175m) faces the Pentland Firth

Viewpoint Binga Fea (ON ND281926, 156m), the hill which overlooks Longhope, has a mast on its summit. A track goes up past watertanks to the top. There is a grand panoramic view from here stretching from most of Scapa Flow and the Pentland Firth to Cape Wrath in the west.

North Bay, the inner part of Longhope, is very shallow. The muddy shores are excellent for waders. Many waterfowl, including a flock of Barnacle Geese overwinter in this area. Otters frequent the shores, and seals are always present, especially on the skerries when ebbbed dry.

Longhope Lifeboat Station (ND291887) at Brims is now a

North Bay, Longhope from the Ayre



museum, with its prime exhibit the former lifeboat *Thomas McCum*, the Watson boat which served here from 1933 to 1962. This craft undertook several daring and dramatic rescues and is now in course of restoration.

The station here has saved over 500 lives since being established in 1874. In many long and difficult services rescues were carried out with much skill by the crews, who until 1926 had only oar and sail as power. Trawlers returning from Icelandic waters to home-ports such as Grimsby and Aberdeen were frequent casualties in the Pentland Firth.

Coxswain Dan Kirkpatrick was perhaps the most deserving of

fame with his rescues of crews from the *Ben Barvas* on the Pentland Skerries in 1964 and the *Ross Puma* at Little Rackwick in 1968. On 17th March 1969, the lifeboat *TGB* was capsized in violent seas, with the loss of all 8 crew while on a mission to the Liberian freighter *Irene* during a very strong southeasterly gale.

The *Tamar* class lifeboat *The Helen Comrie*, 16-05, arrived in October 2006, and is based in Longhope Harbour. She has a speed of 25 knots and a range of 250nm, with twin 1,050hp caterpillars. Her crew of 6 can operate all systems from any of 6 seats.

Brims Brims Ness (ON *Brim*, Surf) has a rugged west coast, which was the graveyard of many sailing ships. The names of coastal features attest to this. One of the few known chambered cairns on Hoy is at Duncan's Geo (ND287878). Wall facings can still be seen as well as four orthostats, one of which may be the back-slab.

Nearby, Skeo Broch occupies a very good vantage point over the western approaches to the Pentland Firth. Part of the tower can be made out, as well as an outer bank and ruined outbuildings. Just along the shore the ruined Chapel of Brims (ND283883) measures about 9m by 3m internally and is surrounded by an enclosure.

The Hillock of Salwick, is a small bump in a field on the way to the Lifeboat Museum. This burnt mound probably used a nearby spring as the water source.

Walks North Walls has much to offer the walker. The old military sites around Lyness have already been described. Three walks in are suggested, in order of difficulty.

Brims Walk Start from the west end of The Ayre where "Vote for Jo" can still just be made out on a shed. Follow the road to the Old Lifeboat Shed and then the coast to Brims Ness. From here there are a series of geos and archaeological sites, with fine views across the Pentland Firth. Return via a track past The Witter and an old quarry.

Heldale & Hoggins Water A 2km track leads from near St John's Manse to the waterworks at the east end of Heldale Water. From here follow the loch shore northwards and climb Bakingstone Hill (160m) for a fine viewpoint. Descend to the Greenheads Burn and climb to Hoggins Water before descending back to the pumping station.

Little Rackwick to Torness From the summit of Bakingstone Hill descend to Little Rackwick. Follow the rugged coastline to Green Heads, from

Longhope Lifeboat Museum, Brims



Brims Lifeboat Shed from The Ayre



Aith Hope from The Ayre

where there are fine views to the north. In wet weather the burn here has a good waterfall. After the diverted Hoggins Burn it is a steep but very worthwhile 100m climb to Berry Head.

The coastline to the south is very spectacular but the slope is also very steep so care needs to be taken here, especially in wet weather. A diversion via the

Berry Lochs and The Berry (199m), descending via Little Berry to the coast is less precipitous. Continue southeast to Ha Wick and Tor Ness. Return to the public road via the Melsetter beaches and dunes and farm roads.

Longhope Lifeboat Museum, Brims





The Ayre looking west

SOUTH WALLS is the official name for the peninsula universally known as Longhope. It is attached to Hoy by The Ayre (ON *Eyrr*, Gravel or Sandy Bank). In former times this became flooded at extreme tides during storm surges.

Longhope village is situated on the South Ness. Across Moasound it is only about 500m by sea to the

North Ness, but nearly 8km (5mi) by road. Longhope boomed during the 20th century wars when Lyness was a major naval base. Today it has the only general store on Hoy, a pub and a sheltered little harbour. The RNLi Longhope Lifeboat is based here.

Archaeology A Standing Stone, several burnt mounds and brochs as well as a number

of tumuli are indicated on the OS map. Until recently very little investigation had been done here. Recent surveys and excavations are set to remedy this situation.

Neolithic Outer Green Hill (ND343896) was assumed to be a small broch or round-house. Excavation has revealed revetment walls, enclosing a chamber with a corbelled roof. Late Neolithic pottery and a stone scraper were found. This may be a Maeshowe-type chambered cairn. Some Bronze Age. Worn beach stones were used in some of the internal construction.

Bronze Age The Roeberry tumulus, west of the lighthouse, was also investigated. This had upright stones exposed from previous digging. A number of stone cists were found surrounded by walling. An inner round wall was surrounded by a well-built rectangular outer wall. Both cremated and unburnt human bone was present, but no pottery. Fish and Vole bones were also found, suggest that Otters used the mound as



Longhope Harbour with the previous RNLi Lifeboat, small boats and the Hoy Head

Longhope RNLi Lifeboat at its berth in Longhope Harbour



WWII AA battery site, Hill of Wards

a holt.

Brochs At The Green Hill of Hesti Geo (ND337890) a mound covers a large broch, some of which has been eroded by the sea. The remains of an outer bank and outbuildings can be made out. Further small brochs at Outer Green Hill on the way to Cantick Head and Green Hill, Longhope show the importance of the area in Iron Age times.

Osmondwall, (ON *Asmunda-Vagr*, Asmund's Bay of the *Orkneyinga Saga*), or Kirk Hope, is the first sheltered bay after Cantick Head, and a very useful anchorage for ships using the Pentland Firth. There are several burial mounds, burnt mounds, brochs and religious sites.

Outer Green Hill revetments



HOY ATTRACTIONS

SOUTH WALLS

Longhope
Hill o'White Hammars Reserve
Green Hill Broch
Outer Green Hill Cairn
Hackness Martello Tower & Battery
Osmondwall Cemetery
Green Hill of Hestigeo Broch
Cantick Head Lighthouse



Green Hill of Hestigeo is a large broch mound near Cantick Head



Outer Green Hill was thought to be a broch

Outer Green Hill central passage

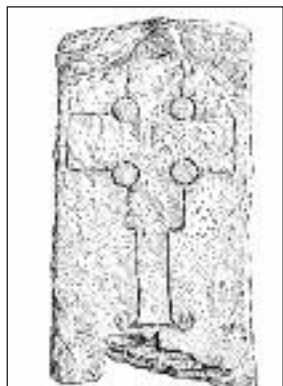




Cantick Head Lighthouse was completed in 1853

The fertile ground and good fishing mean that this area has for long been an attractive to live.

Cross Slab An ancient chapel dedicated to St Comb stood in the Osnawall graveyard west of



Pictish cross slab

the current vault until 1887 when it was demolished. An ancient cross slab was found at this time, which is now in the NMS. The Melsetter chapel wall has a replica. The current Moodie Mausoleum was built to keep the bodies of this fam-



TGB Memorial

ily who were landowners in the area from the 16th to the 19th century.

Viking conversion It was here that Olaf Tryggvason forcibly caused Earl Sigurd the Stout to be baptised in 995. According to the *Orkneyinga Saga*, "Olaf sent a messenger to him, asking Sigurd to come over to his ship as he wanted a word with him."

'I want you and all your subjects to be baptized,' he said when they met. 'If you refuse, I'll have you killed on the spot, and I swear that I'll ravage every island with fire and steel.'

The Earl could see what kind of situation he was in and surrendered himself into Olaf's hands. He was baptized and Olaf took his son, called Hvelp or Hundi, as a hostage and had him baptized too under the name of Hlodvir. After that, all Orkney embraced the faith. Olaf sailed east to Norway taking Hlodvir with him, but Hlodvir didn't Live long and after his death Sigurd refused to pay homage to King Olaf."

Kirk Hope or Osmundwall from near Cantick Head



The *Orkneyinga Saga* says that though converted, Sigurd continued to use the magic Raven Banner, woven by his mother, the symbol of Odin. But it was to be his undoing, as he was killed at the Battle of Clontarf, in 1014, whilst holding it aloft.

Longhope Lifeboat Memorial

This poignant sculpture by North Ronaldsay artist, Ian Scott, commemorates the loss of the Longhope Lifeboat TGB and all her crew on 19th March 1969. They were on their way through the Pentland Firth against a ferocious easterly gale to assist the ship *Irene*, when the lifeboat became overwhelmed between South Ronaldsay and the Pentland Skerries.

A sandstone obelisk is a memorial to the crew of the Grimsby trawler, *ST Leicestershire*, which was lost on 28th January 1938. She was only 2 years old when she went ashore on the Tift near Tor Ness, in a storm. She was 162ft long, 432GRT and carried a crew of 15.

Martello Towers were copied from the design of towers built in Corsica as defences

September sunrise from Cantick Head



Cantick Head Lighthouse was completed in 1853



ST Leicestershire GY241 lost on the Tift in 1938



Moodie family mausoleum at Osmundwall



Aerial view of Longhope from the east in midwinter

against North African pirates. In March 1794 two Royal Navy warships, Fortitude (74 guns) and Juno (32 guns) attacked one of these forts at Portella Point. After a cannonade lasting over 2 hours the ships had to retire. The tower was only taken after 2 days of fighting.

The British were so impressed that they ended up building nearly 200 Martello Towers. Of these 103 were in south-

east England, bout 50 around Ireland and 3 in Scotland. The forts at Hackness and Crock Ness are two of these. The former is now restored and maintained as a visitor attraction by Historic Scotland.

Cantick Head Lighthouse (ND347894) was the fourth tower to be built in the 1850s in Orkney. The light was completed in 1858 by David Stevenson and was designed

to make for safer passage into Longhope and Scapa Flow from the west. It was made automatic in 1991. The 22m tower has 49 steps, while the light has a nominal range of 18 miles.

The Lighthouse and accommodation are grade B listed for their architectural and historic interest and the keepers' cottages are now high class self-catering units. There are sweeping views of the Pentland Firth from here. Pods of Orcas have been seen close-in on several occasions.

WWII sites South Walls has several remaining World War II sites of interest including anti-aircraft gun positions, and the remains of a radar station near the Stromabank Hotel. This was one of several such sites around Orkney which could detect low-flying aircraft and ships.

Wildlife Aith Hope, North Bay and Long Hope are home to wintering waterfowl. A flock of Barnacle Geese stays most winters and roosts on Switha. The low lying shorelines and beaches which ebb dry are excellent for waders,

Spring Squill



Sea Plantain



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which can be observed from the car in many locations.

Hill of White Hamars is a Scottish Wildlife Trust Reserve and "has attractive coastal cliffs with caves, natural arches, stacks and a large blow-hole. The many narrow inlets provide good opportunities for short-range viewing of cliff-nesting seabirds. This was the first SWT reserve established to protect the maritime heath, which is a blaze of colour in early summer. *Primula scotica* is one of the many plants to be seen here. It flowers twice, in May and then in July and August.

Primula scotica



THE HOY HOTEL

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Tel/Fax 01856 791377

South Walls and Longhope together have a varied selection of habitats which include most typical of Orkney with the addition of the plantations around Melsetter and above Lyness. The area merits more than a flying visit if the visitor wishes to sample its many delights.

HOY SERVICES

Getting to Hoy & Flotta Orkney Ferries car ferries Hoy Head and Thorsve run numerous services from Houton in Orkney. Advance booking is essential for vehicles. Tel 01856 811397. See current timetable for details. **Bus Service to Houton** from Kirkwall operated by Stagecoach Tel 01856 870555

Accommodation see adverts and latest Islands of Orkney and VisitOrkney brochures.

Where to Eat and Drink Stromabank Hotel, ***SMALL HOTEL, in Longhope, family-run hotel evening meals and lunches Tel 01856 701494

Royal Hotel, Longhope - traditional pub serving meals Tel 01856 701276

Hoy Hotel & Anchor Bar, Lyness lunches May - Sep, bar open daily from 7pm Tel 01856 791377/701273

Scapa Flow Visitor Centre Cafe, Lyness (summer only)

Benethill Cafe, Moaness open daily in summer Tel 01856 791119

Tours and Local Transport

Several operators run taxis, minibuses and tours. See the latest *Islands of Orkney* brochure for details.

Shop & Fuel JMF Groat in Longhope is the only general store and petrol station. Tel 01856 701272. No shop at the north end.

STROMABANK HOTEL



Situated ear Longhope Village with expansive views of the islands and the Pentland Firth. Conservatory Restaurant and four en-suite bedrooms - one suitable for the disabled. The Stromabank Hotel is an ideal and comfortable base from which to explore Hoy.

Stromabank Hotel, Longhope, Orkney KW16 3PA
Tel 01856 701494

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www.stromabank.co.uk



Hackness Battery from the Martello overlooking Longhope and Crockness

Hackness Martello Tower and Battery (ND339112), along with another tower on the north side of Longhope at Crockness (ND324935), is an early 19th century military fort. They were built between 1813 and 1815 to guard Longhope against attack by American Privateers during the Napoleonic Wars.

The United States had declared war against Britain in 1812 and due to the threat of action by the French in the Channel many vessels were taking the northabout route through the Pentland Firth. Ships collected at Longhope until a warship escort arrived and were vulnerable to attack while they waited.

During times of war privately owned British, Dutch, US and French vessels were authorised to terrorise enemy shipping, and presented a severe threat to trade. Escorted convoys became standard practice during this time.

These officially-sanctioned pirates had been a danger for centuries. Indeed Earl Patrick Stewart had a warship, the *Dunkirk*, ostensibly to defend against privateers in the early 1600s, but which may well have been used for some independent piracy of his own.

As in 1914 and 1939, Scapa Flow defences were non-existent at the time of greatest danger and fully effective only after peace was declared. The 10m towers contain living accommodation for the gun crew, a magazine below and a revolving gun carriage on top.

The original 24-pounder gun had a 360° arc of fire and a very good view of any approaching ships. The towers thus commanded approaches to Longhope from seaward and the rear.



Martello Battery at Hackness showing embrasures and ready use magazine

Hackness Gun Battery Magazine with blast-wall



Hackness Battery Barracks Room with beds, racks and original table



The battery nearby had eight 24-pounder guns covering Switha and Cantick Sounds and was protected by an embankment and stone parapet. Behind the guns were the barracks and stores, while the magazine was partially underground and surrounded by a blast-wall.

In 1866 the guns were replaced with more powerful 68-pounder guns firing through embrasures and extra accommodation was provided at the battery. During WWI the tower was used as a signal station, while in WWII a radar scanner was mounted on top.

Stone for the fortifications came from Bring Head in the north of the island. The walls of the towers are 3m thick on the seaward and 2m thick on the landward side. The Hackness Tower and Battery are now under the care of Historic Scotland, and considerable renovation has taken place, including the reinstallation of a 68-pounder gun on the parapet, which is occasionally fired.



Martello Tower at Hackness overlooking Switha Sound



68-pounder gun on Hackness Martello Tower



Officer's room in the Martello Tower



Graffiti in the Martello Tower

Hackness Martello Tower barracks with folding beds



Hackness Martello Tower magazine





Crown copyright

zines defending Hoxa Sound which were enclosed in a permanent structure similar to Ness Battery at Stromness. This was mostly destroyed in quarrying operations.

Buchanan (ND375935), faces the Sound of Hoxa, and during WWII covered the inner boom defence net. Initially it mounted an open-sited 12-pounder, but this was replaced with a twin 6-pounder in a standard enclosed battery. The battery is typical of such installations with a concrete observation tower, gun emplacement and protected magazine, plus searchlight housings on the shore, all powered by a generator house.

At Roan Head in WWI there was a twin 12-pounder in a concrete parapet to cover the boom defence net. From Gate/Innan Neb (ND349923) another covered the boom in WWI, while in WWII a twin 12-pounder concrete gun house, with a single tower and underground magazine was installed. In addition there were several AA and barrage balloon sites on the island.

The Golta peninsula also saw much wartime activity. In WWI the stone St Vincent Pier on Roan Head was built by men from that battleship. The nearby and now ruinous YMCA building dates from this time.

During WWII a rocket battery with 66 launchers and a grid of over 100 shelters was installed on Golta. Although never fired in anger the flames and noise during tests were apparently

impressive. Large quantities of boom defence netting were dumped in Calf Sound at the end of the war and are slowly corroding away.

For most of WWII Flotta became a huge army camp, with huts, roads and facilities all over the place to cater for the large number of personnel manning all the installations. New piers were also built and now Gibraltar Pier is used by the ferry linking Flotta to Houton and Lyness, while Sutherland Pier is used by the Oil Terminal.

Two wreck buoys which the ferry passes on the approach to Flotta recall incidents in WWI. In January 1916 the oiler *Prudentia* dragged her moorings, ran across the bows of *HMS Iron Duke*, and later sank. A much more serious incident occurred on 9th July 1917, when the battleship *HMS Vanguard* blew up at her moorings with the loss of over 800 men.

A hut dating from WWI recalls the detection and sinking of the German submarine, *UB116*, on 28th October 1918. She was detected by hydrophones, which were being monitored from this "Silent Cabin" at Quoyness.



The battleship "HMS Vanguard" blew up off Flotta in 1917

After the war the hut was dragged to Peerie Lurdy for use as an extra room.

North Sea Oil The discovery of oil under the North Sea in the early 1970s was to lead to much longer-lasting and economically beneficial developments on the island. Flotta Oil Terminal (ND350950) was developed originally by the Occidental Oil Company in 1976, to take crude

oil from the Piper and Claymore fields in the North Sea, the former starting in 1976, the latter in 1977. It was then taken over by Elf Enterprise and is now run by Talisman Energy.

The Terminal exports a sizeable fraction of Britain's oil, and has given a big boost to the Orkney economy over the last 35 years through employment and royalty payments. Large ships are



Innan Neb Coastal Battery

Innan Neb Coastal Battery, Flotta



Royal Navy Port Signalling and Observation Station



Stanger Head, Flotta





Scapa Flow and Flotta Oil Terminal from Wideford Hill

again part of the scene in Scapa Flow.

Production fell dramatically in 1989 after the Piper Alpha disaster, when the platform exploded with the tragic loss of 167 men. Following installation of the Piper B platform in 1992 and addition of several smaller fields, output was over 10 million tons of oil and gas in 2002, of which about one third was from Foinaven. A peak of over 13m tons was reached in 1995.



Kirk Bay and the Head of Banks, Flotta

Flotta lost the Foinaven contract in 2008. In 2009 it handled about 3m tons of crude oil out of a total of just over 68m tons for UK as a whole.

Oil-developments have been confined to Flotta, which means that Orkney has benefited from the new jobs and royalties brought by the oil, without having to suffer much change to the life of the community. New technology is being applied to maximise the older fields, and it

is to be thought that the terminal will continue to benefit the community for a long time to come. Hopefully its excellent record in avoiding pollution will also be maintained.

Visiting Flotta Despite the oil developments and relics of wartime, Flotta makes an interesting visit. Compact enough to explore on foot, this little island has many contrasts of old and new, past and present. Well served by ferries, there is still a substantial local population. The Orkney Ferries vessel *Hoy Head* calls at Flotta several times per day and connects to Houton and Lyness.

Archaeology Nothing now remains of the supposed standing stone at Stanger Head or at the eponymous farm near the kirk. In the 19th century an altar slab dating from the 8th century

was found on Flotta, implying the presence of a Pictish chapel. The old farm name of Hallywell suggests the presence of a holy well. Traditionally there is one, Winster's Well on Roan Head.

An altar front with a fine cross carved on it was found many years ago on the island. This implies the existence of an early chapel somewhere on Flotta, but the provenance of the stone is unknown and there is no such site visible today.

Wildlife As on some of the other smaller islands the less intensive farming results in beautiful pastures of wild flowers in summer time. The verges, coastline and uncultivated areas all allow plants to thrive. Although not famous for its birdlife, the quietness of Flotta makes viewing of many common species easy.

Seals lie up on many of the flat rocks around the shore, and Otters are regularly seen near the Oil Terminal. Stanger Head



Aerial view of Flotta Oil Terminal from the north with Pan Hope on the left



Flotta from West Hill

is a good place from which to see the Harbour Porpoises which are resident in Hoxa Sound for much of the year.

There are several panoramic views across Scapa Flow and the

South Isles, especially from Stanger Head and from West Hill (ND352939), one of the few places in Orkney from which both Kirkwall and Stromness can be seen.

Carved 8th century altar front found on Flotta now in NMS



NMS

"Gibson's Folly", Pan Hope, Flotta



Creels at Pan Hope, Oil Terminal in the background





Laurie Campbell

Greenland Barnacle Geese roost on Switha in the winter

CAVA (ON *Kalf-ey*, Calf Isle). This small island has a lighthouse on the north end. The capital ships of the German High Seas Fleet were moored and scuttled around the north of the island. Cava is now uninhabited.

There is a record of a murder taking place in 1774, when William Mallich killed Hugh Inksetter after a fight. Pirate Gow is said to have left two Stromness girls on the island after leaving Stromness in 1725. They were said to be "well treated" and to have been put ashore with a pile of presents. Whether they had "unwanted gifts" nine months later is unrecorded.

The lighthouse was installed in

1898. Originally it was a 9.5m cast-iron tower, but this was replaced by a modern fibreglass structure in 1988. Materials and men were transported in by helicopter.

FARA (ON *Faer-ey*, Sheep Island). is situated between Hoy and Flotta. It was formerly inhabited by several families, but was deserted in 1947. The island is well named as sheep are its only inhabitants today. It is quite lightly grazed and in summer the grassy heath is full of wild flowers. Waders, Red Grouse, Eiders and a few Arctic Terns nest here.

A large detachment of troops looked after six barrage balloon sites and an anti-aircraft gun

position on Fara in WWI. A narrow gauge railway partially encircled the island. It was used to move ammunition for the guns and hydrogen bottles for the balloons.

Small flat cars were towed by a 20hp Ruston Hornsby locomotive. Although it and all of the track were scrapped in the late 1970s, the route of the track can still be made out. The hydrogen was shipped across from Rinnigill on Hoy. A large gas-production plant was built there, and was ready for operation in 1944, just in time for the barrage balloons to be relocated to London.

Aerial view of Fara from the south



Ruined farmstead, Fara



"Hoy Head" passing Cava Lighthouse on its way to Lyness

SWITHA (ON *Swein-ey*, Sweyn's or Sow Isle) is small island to the east of Cantick Head. It is the winter roost for a large flock of Greenland Barnacle Geese (*Branta leucopsis*), which feed on neighbouring South Walls. About 1,000 of these geese winter here, or about 4% of the UK population. Switha is designated as an SPA to protect them.

There is an Arctic Tern colony and Leach's Petrel have been seen here in the summer. The coastline is mostly rocky with low cliffs but there is a shingle beach at the southeast end, The Pool, where seals haul out. A few Grey Seals come ashore on Switha to pup and mate in autumn.

Two standing stones and a possible chambered cairn suggest that Switha may possibly have been used in Neolithic times for burials. The Noust of Switha is less than 2km from Kirk Bay on Flotta, while The Pool is the same distance from Kirk Hope, making the island easily accessible by small boat.



Lifeboat helicopter installing a new minor light on Cava



Aerial view of Cava, Fara and Longhope from the northeast

Aerial view of Switha and Cantick Head from the northeast





GRAEMSAY (ON *Grims-ey*, Grim's Isle) lies between Hoy and Stromness and remains completely unspoilt. It is separated from the Mainland by Hoy Sound and from Hoy by Burra Sound, both of which have strong tides, and thus it guards the western entrance to Scapa Flow. The ferry which serves Moaness in the north of Hoy also serves Graemsay.

Geology Outcrops of basement rocks occur rarely in Orkney, but these very old granite schist rocks, often with lumps of whitish quartz are prominent on the north coast of Graemsay, between the Point of Oxan and the Bay of Sandside. The same rocks form Brinkie's Brae in Stromness and also appear at

Yesnaby. The rest of the island is composed of Lower Stromness flags, as is much of the western part of Stromness parish. This does not weather to very fertile soil and as a result much of Graemsay is grassy heath.

Lighthouses In the late 1840s two lighthouses, Hoy High and Hoy Low, were built to act as leading lights to the western approaches of Hoy Sound to clear the submerged Bow Rock of Hoy and Kirk Rocks off Warebeth. At that time there was no pier on the island, so a slipway was built at the Bay of Sandside. Stone from the North Isles was cut at the Point of Ness in Stromness and by 1851 the lights were operational.

Hoy Low was automated in 1966, while Hoy High waited until 1978. Graemsay is quite different to any other island in Orkney and has a charm all to itself. Covered in wild flowers in summer, it makes a very pleasant stroll on a fine day. The Bay of Sandside is particularly attractive for a picnic lunch, and never crowded!

In the past many of the Graemsay men went to sea, but with the demise of the Hudson's Bay connection, Arctic Whaling and the Iceland Fishery, the population has now dwindled from over 200 to under 30.

Shipwreck The full-rigged ship *Albion* became a total loss on the Point of Oxan, with the loss of 11 people on 1st January 1866. Graemsay man Joseph Mowat was drowned during the rescue in the buried in the Graemsay kirkyard. Broken pottery from the ship's cargo can still be found along the shore at Oxan. The event led to the basing of a lifeboat at Stromness the following year.



Aerial view of Graemsay from the west with Hoy Low Lighthouse, Bay of Sandside and Hoy High Lighthouse

Coastal Defence Hoy Low must be the only lighthouse anywhere with its own gun battery! The twin 6-pounder battery, with watch tower and magazine was installed at the Point of Oxan in 1943, as they were no longer needed in Burray once the Barriers had reached sufficient height.

Four searchlights mounted on twin mountings were also positioned there, but the gun emplacement had no overhead cover. The whole complex makes an interesting visit and

there are good views of the Hoy Hills, Stromness and Hoy Sound from the director tower. The guns here, as well as those at Skerry and Scad

Head on Hoy, were controlled from the BOP at Ness Battery on the north side of Hoy Sound.



Hoy Low Lighthouse and Coastal Defence Battery, Point of Oxan

The ferry "Graemsay" serves Hoy and Graemsay



Hoy High Lighthouse from the Point of Ness, Stromness



WWII twin 6-pounder mounting, Point of Oxan, Graemsay

