

**I like my porridge fine and dandy
For I'm a gruellie belkie from Sanday*



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SANDAY (ON *Sand-ey*, Sandy Isle) About 20km (12.5 miles) long by 11km (7 miles) wide, Sanday is the largest of the North Isles. Flat except at its southwest end, the island seldom exceeds 20m above sea level, the highest point being The Wart (HY630378, 65m). The coastline is mostly low-lying with wide expanses of

windblown sand and flat sandy bays, but there are low cliffs (20m) on the west side of Spur Ness, while much of the north and west coasts are rocky. The flat eastern part of the island is composed of Rousay flagstone, while the hillier western part is a ridge of Eday sandstones, with mostly rough hill land.

Beaches Sanday has some of the best beaches in Orkney, with beautiful white sands. They are often backed by dunes and machair, with small loch and marshy areas, which results in a marvellous variety of wild flowers in summer.

The beaches at Backaskaill, Sty Wick, Tres Ness, Lopness, Scuthvie, Sandquoy and Whitmill Bay are particularly fine, but the Sanday beaches are so attractive that this is only a selection. Sand dunes are still a major feature of the coastline in Sanday, where they have not suffered the industrial depredations of Mainland beaches. Those along the east coast between Tres Ness and Lopness are especially impressive.

Whitmill Bay is one of the finest beaches in Orkney



Aerial view of Sanday from the south

Submerged Forest The existence of a submerged forest at Otterswick was first recorded in the 1840s after a severe gale revealed tree roots in the ebb. Old tree roots have indeed often been seen in this area at very low tides. Recent investigations have proved the presence of a substantial amount of decayed vegetation below about 0.8m of sand.

This thin layer consists of peat with branches of Willow trees which date from about 4500BC - about 1,000 years before the building of the houses at Knap o'Howar on

Papay.. Beneath the peat there is another thin stratum of glacial till on top of the underlying sandstone.

The suggestion is that relative sea level may have risen by as much as 3m during the last 6,500 years, implying that much low-lying land has been lost to the sea. This may in part explain the apparent lack of evidence for Mesolithic settlement in Orkney. This discovery is consistent with pollen studies which suggest a reduction in woodland around this time.

Long sand dunes at Tres Ness



SANDAY ATTRACTIONS "by the sun"

- Stove 19th century farm
- Pool settlement site
- Ness of Brough
- Rethie Taing
- Roos Loch
- Holms of Ire
- Orkney Angora
- Scar
- Whitmill Bay
- Ortie
- Otterswick
- Black Rock
- Bay of Sandquoy
- Northwa
- North Loch
- Tofts Ness
- Lettan WWII radar station
- Scuthvie Bay
- Start Point lighthouse
- Mount Maesry
- Buryan Broch
- Bay of Lopness
- WWI German destroyer B98
- Sanday Golf Course
- Cata Sand
- Tress Ness Farm
- Wasso Broch
- Elsness
- Quoyness chambered cairn
- Egmonds Howe chambered cairn
- Old Lady Kirk
- Kettletoft village
- Bea Loch
- Old Cross Kirk
- Backaskaill Bay
- Doun Helzie beach & cliffs
- Hacksness



Quoyness chambered cairn, Els Ness, is a particularly fine example

Archaeology Sanday has a very large number of archaeological sites and was settled before 4000 BC by Neolithic man. The fertile and easily tilled sandy soil would have been very attractive to the early farmers.

Quoyness There are burial mounds all over the island, most notable being Quoyness Chambered Cairn (HY676377, ON *Kvi Ness*, field point) on Elsness. This tomb is a good example of the Maeshowe-type of tomb and is very simi-

lar to Cuween Cairn in Firth. It was first excavated in 1867 by Farrer, after which it was used as a convenient quarry.

In 1951-52 Childe made good the damage and created the present 4m high exterior, which is impressive, but not all original due to the repairs. The outer casing may well have been part of the final sealing process as Petrie states that “the outermost wall-face seems to have been built across the door of the passage”.

The passage enters the well-built main chamber from the southeast. It was originally about 9m long, but only the inner part now remains. The chamber itself is 4m long, 2m wide and 4m high, with six cells opening off it through low entrances in a symmetrical layout. Most of the stones are beach stones, with nicely smoothed surfaces, thus giving a quite different effect to the interior than is usual in chambered cairns.

Skulls and bones were found in four of the cells, as well as two curious polished slate objects similar to those found at Skara Brae. A considerable

amount of pottery sherds were found, while the human skulls and other bones represented at least ten adults and five children. The chamber and passage were full of stones when the tomb was first opened. Recent radiocarbon dating of human bones from the tomb gave a date of about 3000BC.

Mount Maesry (HY783435, ON *Maes-reyrr*, Maes-roo or meadow of stones) on Start Island is another Maeshowe-type chambered tomb and was used by lighthouse keepers to store potatoes, . Further unexcavated Neolithic tombs are at Egmonds Howe, just south of Quoyness, on the southern point of Tresness (HY711375), and Rethie Taing (HY651442), near Roos Loch, where erosion has exposed the entrance passage of a cairn.

Bronze Age There are many barrows and cairns, at least 26 being scattered over Elsness near Quoyness cairn, and the point of Tofts Ness which has over 300 cairns, one long mound and three large mounds, combined with dykes and enclosures. The mounds seem likely to be Bronze Age burials, but some have been shown to be dwellings. Future excavation will probably reveal much information on this period.

Burnt mounds are also common, a good example being on the east side of the Gump of Spurness (HY606348), where



Mount Maesry on Start Island is a Maeshowe-type chambered cairn



Cist grave on Els Ness



Walling and midden being eroded by the sea at Pool

Entrance passage of chambered cairn at Tress Ness



Quoyness chambered cairn - entrance passage



Quoyness chambered cairn, side cell





Backaskaill Bay, the broch mound is above the shore on the right

a large knowe has burnt stones showing. Others include Butter Knowe (HY709432) and Ivar's Knowe in Sellibister. These heaps were formed from stones heated in a fire and then used to heat water to do cooking. Many other such piles exist on the

island, but most are now part of cultivated land and have been ploughed out. Nearby at Hacksness, signs of a settlement are to be seen in the face of a low cliff, which is being eroded by the sea.

Brochs Sanday has several



Broch of Wasso, Tressness

broch sites, including at Buryan (HY772434), near Start Point, where, although half has been lost to the sea, the shape can still be made out, and Wasso (HY709379) on the point of Tressness, where there is a large mound with walls and uprights showing. At Backaskaill (HY642392), a rocky outcrop has a 40m section of eroded cliff with walls and floors showing as well as a defensive ditch on the landward side, while the large mound next to the steading at How (HY661393) is most likely also a broch.

Farm Mounds Many of the larger Sanday farmsteads are

built on prominent mounds, which contain the ruins of previous buildings. Some of these are more than 3 metres high and cover over a hectare. These farm-mounds, or tells, are likely to be very ancient, and would have been quite evident in Viking times. It seems likely that this unusual type of feature is due to the large amount of blown sand. The best examples are Beafield (ON *Baejar Fjall*, Farm Hill, HY684405), Tafts (ON *Tobt*, dwelling, HY748462) and How (ON *Haugr*, mound, HY660393). Many other examples are obvious by observation.

Pool (HY619379), below North Mire, is a major settlement site, which is being seriously eroded. Excavation has revealed a long period of occupation, starting in the Neolithic and extending into the Norse period. Remains of at least fourteen Stone Age houses were found, together with a huge amount of pottery, which ranged in style from possible Unstan Ware in the earliest levels to typical Grooved Ware in the later levels. The site was abandoned by about 2000BC until about 500BC, when a large Iron Age roundhouse was built.

Further buildings were erected and by the 6th century AD the settlement consisted of a cluster of small houses with a flagged courtyard area. Pictish influence was indicated by the finding of a stone marked with a double disc



Ogam-inscribed stone from Pool

symbol and a decorated bone pin with double disc and Z-rod Pictish symbols.

The Vikings built new houses, often using the bases of previous buildings, while the wheelhouse was still in use in the 11th century. In the early Norse settlement period there is a mixture of Pictish and Norse artefacts, but whether this is due to reuse or social interaction is not clear. Radiocarbon dating shows that the Norse arrived during the 8th century

The new arrivals brought a much more intensive style of farming, which may well have been based on dairying, as the bones of many calves were

found. The cattle bones showed evidence of wear associated with being used for traction, while horse bones showed no such pathology, suggesting that the latter was not used for heavy work. A small number of deer were also present.

Six-row bere barley and some oats were grown, while..Large quantities of carbonised seaweed were found, whose exact function remains unclear. Fish bones dating from the Neolithic to the 11th century have been found here, and suggest that some offshore fishing was taking place since early times but that there was a large increase in activity when the Norse arrived.

Bere barley



Aigmund Howe, Quoyness



Old Cross Kirk, Backaskaill





Orkney Museum

Scar Viking whalebone plaque

Scar Boat-Burial Another spectacular recent Viking excavation was on the shore at Scar (HY675457), at the north of Burness, where storm erosion exposed a Norse boat-burial. Some years earlier the farmer had found a lead item, which turned out to be a Viking weight. Excavation in 1991 revealed the outline of a boat about 6.3m long, the shape being shown by about 300 iron nails in the sand. The wood had decomposed, but the artefacts which had survived are of great interest.

Three people had been buried here, a man in his 30s, an old lady of about 70 and a child of about 10. The man was in the bow, with a sword and arrows, a bone comb, some lead weights and 22 pieces for playing some kind of game. The woman had a beautiful whalebone plaque, a gilded brooch and several small iron tools.

The plaque may have been for smoothing, used in conjunction with an oblate glass object, as found at Howe in Stromness. The burial is probably 9th century. Such boat burials are rare in Britain and this site was the first of its type to be excavated using modern techniques.

Christian Sites Sanday has many ancient chapel sites, and is still divided into three parishes, Burness (St Columba), Cross and Lady. The roofless Cross Kirk (HY653392) dates mostly from the 18th century, and was



Orkney Museum

Man's comb from Scar



Orkney Museum

Woman's sickle from Scar

abandoned by 1897. It incorporates parts of a 12th century kirk itself on the site of a more ancient chapel, built on the shore near a broch. There are several mounds inside and around the kirkyard as well as walls and midden eroding from the nearby shore. This is yet another ancient settlement site.

Lady Kirk (HY675399) on the coast road between Lady and Kettletoft, was built in 1773. The west door dates from the 1600s, and the present building is probably built on the site of a series of older churches.

At the top of the exterior steps leading to the former north gallery, there is an enigmatic impression in a stone which is reputed to be the "Devil's Handprint". It is said that "many years ago the minister had been in the habit of being tempted to have his way with more than one of his lady parishioners in what he thought was the safety of the House of God."

Until recently, folk passing along the nearby road at night, would hurry past with eyes averted from the kirk. The

Scar Viking shears and spindle whorl



Orkney Museum



Old Lady Kirk is now roofless and was built or renovated in 1773

"print" is in solid stone and serves no obvious purpose – thus there is no explanation for it other than that Old Nick himself left his clawmark while overseeing proceedings below.

A pre-reformation communion cup has survived and is still used today in the present Cross Kirk.



"The Devil's clawmarks"



Old Lady Kirk is now roofless and was built or renovated in 1773



Scar gaming pieces

Orkney Museum



Holms of Spurness from the ferry



The Black Rock is part of an igneous intrusion



Tangles were collected and dried until recently

Black Rock (HY675417), on the shore of Lamaness Firth sits on the boundaries of the three Sanday parishes and is said to be the meeting place of

three Sanday lairds. It may well have been the traditional meeting place, or *ting* of Viking times. The nearby farm of Odinsgarth and the

old name for Otterswick, Odinswick, are suggestive of a previous name for the rock being Odinstone.

Kelp Making Sanday was well placed to take advantage of the *Kelp Boom* of the late 18th and early 19th centuries with its miles of exposed beaches and huge offshore kelp beds. The island accounted for about 25% of the 3,000 tons which were produced annually at this time. The lairds profited greatly from the trade, but the workers also had to be paid and some part of this profit did "trickle down".

Ortie There are still many kelp pits around the coast as well as ruined shelters and houses for the kelpers. The deserted village of Ortie (HY689454) is said to have

Ortie, Burness - detail of roof construction with simmons



Ortie, Burness - detail of roof construction with simmons



been built to house some of these people, who then left when the price of kelp collapsed.

Ortie is interesting not for the age of the houses, but for the traditional manner of construction. *Simmons*, ropes made from oat straw, were placed over the couples to support thatched roofs. Thin flagstones held down the thatch and covered the wall heads to drain off rainwater.

19th century farms More recent sites of interest include the deserted steading at Tres Ness (HY704388) with an octagonal horse engine-house which worked the mill in the barn next door. The complex roof is starting to disintegrate and is home to a family of Ravens.

At Stove (HY609355) model farm, near the Loth ferry terminal, there is an unusually large steading for its time. It had a Clayton-Shuttleworth steam-driven threshing mill and a huge byre. The steading was burnt down while everyone was away at the County Show some years ago.

Walter Traill Dennison This great Sanday folklorist (1825-1894) is buried in the graveyard. He gathered up folk stories all his life and his work has preserved a large body of tales, tradition and dialect which is all the more authentic for his being a member of the community he was recording.



The original Start Point lighthouse in 1815

Lighthouses There are popular, possibly apocryphal, tales to the effect that the island ministers might sometimes pray along the following lines "Please Lord, we beseech Thee, let there be no wrecks but if, in Thy infinite wisdom and mercy, Thou wouldst suffer a wreck to happen then, may it please Thee

Lord, to let it be on our shore rather than on somebody else's".

It is also said often to have been the case that when God did indeed see fit to suffer a wreck to happen (as part of His Plan for the Best) then he was often first on the scene! As the Good Book says, "there



Roof of the octagonal horse mill at Tres Ness

19th century farm steading at Stove





The present Start Point lighthouse was built in 1870

is a time to kill and a time to heal" (Ecclesiastes 3:3).

"The inhabitants of Sanday earnestly and often desire this to happen, so that they get a supply of material for fire from the wrecked ships, for there is no moorland or peaty ground in the whole island. Now they prepare food and drink for themselves, either with straw, or with animal dung, or with long stalks and leaves, as of seaweed (of which there is a great amount both here and in all the islands

of the Orkneys) dried in the sun in summer-time, and carefully saved like treasure for this purpose.

Richer people here (as do also the more powerful inhabitants of North Ronaldsay, where there is no moorland) have peats brought to their house from Eday in large boats over the most fearful sea and at very long intervals, and sometimes at shorter ones", Bleau Atlas of Scotland 1654.

The old saying that "Sanday kye shite fire" has a basis in fact. Many of the inhabitants gathered up cow pats and dried them, stacking the results like peats. They no doubt burnt fine, especially with the assistance of some fine wood from a wreck.

Start Point The low-lying east side of the island was a graveyard to many ships before the building of the Start Point Lighthouse (HY786435). There were 22

Start Point lighthouse and Mount Maesry chambered cairn



wrecks in the period between 1788 and 1802 when an unlit beacon was finished. The light, the first revolving apparatus in Scotland, was finally installed in 1806.

Despite this new lighthouse the Dutch frigate *Utrecht* with 200 soldiers and 220 sailors aboard went ashore at the Holms of Ire in 1807, the 366 survivors surrendering to the local laird. There was considerable worry in Orkney about the presence of so many of the then enemy's men, but jubilation in Sanday at the plunder of the beached ship.

The present lighthouse was built in 1870 by Thomas Smith and Robert Stevenson, when the vertical black and white stripes were painted to distinguish it from North Ronaldsay. It was made automatic in 1962. Start Island can be reached at low tide across Ayre Sound.

20th century Wartime relics include the German Destroyer B98 from WWI at Lopness Bay (HY746441). This was one of the boats



Lopness Bay from the west

from the German Grand Fleet scuttled in Scapa Flow in June 1919. It had been salvaged and was driven ashore in 1919 during a gale., while under tow to the scrapyard. Only the turbines and boilers remain visible above the sand at low tide.

RAF Whalehead During WWII there was a Chain

Home radar station at Lopness (HY 763439). which formed part of the aerial defences of Scapa Flow and the coast of Britain. The station was called RAF Whalehead, after a whale's head that is built into a dyke here. There were 2 steel transmitting towers, each 107m high and 2 wooden receiving towers of 73m.



WWII Chain Home reserve radar station at Lettan

WWI German destroyer, B98, was wrecked at Lopness Bay in 1919





Wetland at the north end of Sanday is very attractive to waders

The station was operational in March 1942. It was one of the first CH sites to have all round coverage and had a power of 2MW. The site was defended by 3 AA batteries and a minefield.

Nearby, at Lettan there was a reserve radar station for back-up in case of attack. Several concrete buildings survive, including a radar block, power



Orchids thrive on the machair

Ring Plovers are common on Sanday



shallow bays and sandy beaches backed by dunes, machair, small lochs and marshes. The farmland provides feeding and roosting areas for many birds

Birds The island is very attractive to waders, both as breeders and migrants. In spring, Turnstone, Redshank, Dunlin, Ringed Plover, Grey Plover, Purple Sandpiper, Sanderling, Bar-tailed Godwit and Knot pass through on their way to their northern breeding grounds. Many will be changing into their resplendent breeding plumage.

In late summer waders return on passage to their wintering areas in large numbers. Knot and Bar-tailed Godwit are the first to arrive, and besides the species previously mentioned, Little Stint and Curlew Sandpiper may also be seen.

The east end of Sanday is a staging point for migrants, with Start Point and the North Loch being particularly good watching places. The extensive flat sandy beaches such as Cata Sand (HY700410), Otterswick (HY680430) and The Ouse (HY670395) are examples of

Bar-tailed Godwits particularly like Cata Sand



places where the car can make a good hide. Before and after high tide are usually best.

In the absence of hedges and woodland, patches of vegetation, field dykes and ditches can be hiding places for many different species. Robins, Wheatears, Red-backed Shrikes, Willow Warblers, Chiffchaffs and Redstarts tend to be the most common with perhaps a few Bluethroats. Rarities also regularly turn up, especially during spells of easterly winds and poor visibility.

In summer the lochs have a good selection of wildfowl, while there are Tern colonies at Westayre Loch, Start Point and Els Ness, as well as Arctic Skuas on the Gump of Spurness. Wheatears and Meadow Pipits are common breeders as are waders, with over 100 pairs of Ringed Plover on the island.

In autumn rarities frequently appear and numbers are augmented by large numbers of immature birds. The species are similar, but may also include Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Black Redstart,

Sanderling in winter plumage



The inks are covered with a carpet of wild flowers in summer

Garden Warbler, Blackcap, Goldcrest, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Redwing, Fieldfare, Ring Ouzel, Yellow-browed Warbler, Red-backed Shrike, Barred Warbler and others.

Start Point is good for sea-watching especially with an east wind. Sooty and Manx Shearwaters Kittiwakes, Fulmars, Gannets, and Skuas pass daily while Pomarine Skuas are seen occasionally.

Flora Sanday has a wide variety of plant habitats including machair, lochs with marshy surroundings, farmland and some moorland. The coastline is mostly low and exposed. The machair in particular is a sea of colour during the summer, changing subtly as different species and colours dominate in turn.

Much of the land is not intensively farmed which helps to



Otters are quite plentiful but rarely seen except in the gloaming

Sanday has 4% of the UK population of Common Seals





Sanday croft with meadow

preserve these pretty swards. Ladies Bedstraw, Grass of Parnassus, Daisies, several species of Buttercups, Eyebright and Orchids are some of the plants which make the island so outstandingly beautiful in summer.

Common Seals in Scotland, with over 4% of the UK population. The breeding groups haul out on skerries around the island, especially off the north coast. There are extensive kelp beds here, which are important foraging areas.

Seals Sanday has the largest discrete population of

The shallow seas with gently shelving beaches around much



Kettletoft from the pier today

Sanday Show is held in early August - the year's biggest community event



of the island also probably discourage the Common Seal's principal predator, the Killer Whale. Smaller numbers of Grey Seals come ashore to breed on the Holms of Spurness and the Holms of Ire in the autumn.

Otter Along the shore, or round the small lochs, especially in the early morning, or late evening, the elusive Otter may be seen. The island has a considerable population, and their tracks with five toes and the scuffmark of the tail may often be seen on the sand or at the edge of lochs. They also leave their fishy spraint on prominent places. Otters have poor eyesight but excellent hearing and sense of smell so stealth is crucial.

Whales are occasionally stranded on Sanday. Single beachings are most common, but in 1994 several young male Sperm Whales came ashore at Backaskaill Bay and died. Possibly they became disorientated in the shallow waters. Orcas and other dolphins are occasionally seen.

Crafts and Industry As in other islands, the main industry is beef production, although some sheep are also kept. The Sanday Show in early August is a good opportunity to see the quality of the local livestock as well as a great range of local produce. Several boats, which fish for crabs and lobsters, are based in Sanday.



Kettletoft pier in 1900

Orkney Angora at Breckan (HY674450) specialises in the Angora wool products, and welcomes visitors to the craft shop. This unusual cottage industry was established, from the ruins of a derelict croft, by William & Elizabeth Sichel in 1982. Their thermal clothing products and other garments are sold by mail order throughout the U.K and abroad using a catalogue and website, Tel 01857 600421.



"Orcadia" at Kettletoft pier in 1981

Renewable Energy In 2004 three large wind turbines were installed on Spur Ness next to the ferry terminal. The 60m towers support three-bladed turbines with 40m blades giving a maximum generating capacity of 8.25MW.

To quote a Sandayman, "The wind turbines have completely transformed the Sanday skyline in the South End. The general opinion seems to be that they are quite attractive and certainly not an eyesore. They do not appear to be noisy, but even if they were, they are a good distance from the nearest homes, so they aren't going to annoy anyone."

SANDAY SERVICES

Where to Stay and Where to Eat Kettletoft Hotel comfortable small hotel serving home-cooked meals. Fish & chip take-aways Wed & Sat. Tel 01857 600217. The Belsair Guest House has en-suite rooms and serves homebakes, bar snacks and evening meals. Tel 01857 600206 B&B and Hostel accommodation is also available. Check the current Islands of Orkney brochure.

Shops Sanday has a wide range of shops and services available, including general stores with fuel at Kettletoft, Lady and Cross. There is an excellent butcher in Kettletoft.

Ayres Rock has a ****Hostel, campsite and B&B accommodation Car Hire, Bike Hire and Tours Tel 01857 600410

SANDAY TRANSPORT

Getting To Sanday Both Orkney Ferries, Tel (01856) 872044 and Loganair, Tel (01856) 872494, operate daily services to the island from Kirkwall. Please refer to their latest timetables for details.

Sanday Dial-a-Ride meets scheduled ferry arrivals. To book a connection call Tina Flett on (01857) 600467

Getting around on Sanday Taxis, Car and Bicycle hire are available on the island. Minibus tours are also run. Tel 01857 600410

Sanday Bus Service Regular service to and from the ferry terminal to meet ferries. Tel 01857 600344

Sanday Bus Tours Every Wednesday in summer - lunch, followed by tour by Sanday Ranger historic and natural heritage. Tel 01857 600344