



Dingieshowe

There is much to explore in the eastern reaches of Orkney – from wild sea cliffs and empty beaches to Iron Age brochs and settlements. The Mainland of Orkney narrows distinctively at Kirkwall and the land to the east of this isthmus is known as the East Mainland.

Like most of Orkney the East Mainland is steeped in history. As you descend the steep steps into Mine Howe, surrounded by the damp rock and guided by a string of lights, you feel yourself stepping back in time to the Iron Age. The deep rock-built chamber was uncovered briefly in 1946 and then almost forgotten about until 1999 when local farmer, Douglas Paterson, rediscovered the entrance. He found a passage that sank nearly vertically into the ground to a chamber, accessed by 29 stone steps.

More recent history is evident at Rerwick and Graemeshall where the WW2 batteries can still be seen, and in Scapa Flow which was such an important naval base during the War.

Below the cliffs of Gaitnip in Holm lies a green marker buoy. This is the marker for the site of HMS Royal Oak sunk by the German U-boat U47 in 1939 with the loss of 833 lives.



Eider ducks

Bird watchers can enjoy breeding sea birds, wintering wildfowl and surprise visitors – migrants blown off course by storms at sea. Wild flowers thrive in hidden corners; in wetlands around the lochs; on the nature reserve at Mull Head; and on grassy tracks between fields of grazing cattle.

The East Mainland is divided into several parishes, each with its own character. Holm (pronounced Ham) stretches from Kirkwall south to St Marys, its coastline following the shore of Scapa Flow, where nowadays much of the activity is based on North sea oil. St Marys was notable once as a herring port but now it's more common to see sailing dinghies in the bay.



'Spoot'

they broke into the old store house. As they left in their boats James Graham fired several cannon shots at them without success!

Beyond the airport, side roads take you to the area known as Tankerness. At the far end of this is Rerwick Head, still carrying the lookouts and gun emplacements that were used to help guard the approaches to Kirkwall during WW2. Tankerness Loch is a large freshwater loch popular with wintering wildfowl and nearby is the old Tankerness mill, used in the past for grinding oats. The sheltered bay of Mill Sands is good for cockles and razor shells, locally known as 'spoots', at very low spring tides.

The old Graemeshall saw stirring scenes in June 1694 when two French privateers sailed into Holm sound. After securing three vessels they proceeded to loot everything on the little island of Lamb Holm, after which

Deerness is reached by crossing a narrow sandy isthmus at Dingieshowe. This is a unique place with sand dunes and beach on one side and a shallow muddy bay on the other. Strategically sited in the dunes is a mound containing the remains of a broch. The name Dingieshowe is derived from the Old Norse and means 'parliament mound'. Almost an island, Deerness has its own character and special places.



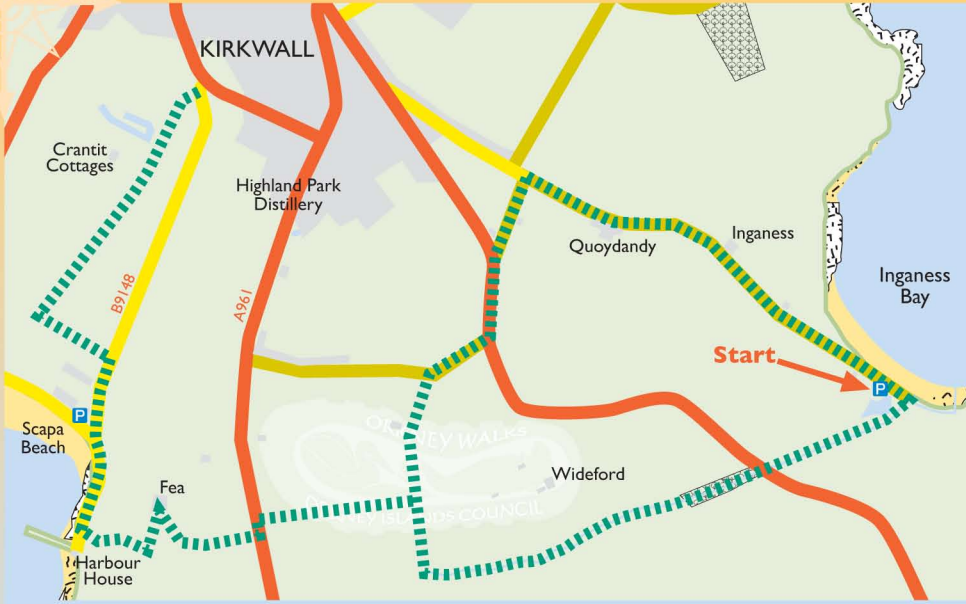
Mull Head

At its furthest point is Mull Head, totally exposed to sea and wind and tide. Here you can see the dramatic collapsed sea cave called the 'gloop.' Its name comes from the Old Norse 'gluppa' meaning chasm. Barely joined to Mull Head by a steep and narrow path is the Brough of Deerness with its Norse chapel. Much of the rest of Deerness is rolling farmland but there are bays such as Newark, which has its own slipway for small boats and is a good place for a picnic on a fine day.



Wideford Burn

A circular walk of 5.6km (3.5m) following the course of the Wideford Burn with a 3km (1.86m) extension to Kirkwall via Scapa Bay



EAST MAINLAND

Cuckoo Flower



The walk starts at Inganess Bay with its beach of silver sand - good for swimming in summer and bird watching in winter. It's an important wintering site for great northern divers, slavonian grebes and waders.

The route follows the burn through wetlands full of wild flowers such as lady's smock, meadowsweet and water

avens. Red and blue damselflies also add a splash of colour by the water on a fine day. Moorhen, mallard and teal frequent the small loch, while waders such as redshank and curlew can be seen in the wetlands. Shy birds such as the sedge warbler and reed bunting are harder to spot as they

hide in the tall vegetation. Snipe put on aerial displays on summer evenings - listen for the characteristic drumming sound made by the males.

Where the path rises above the burn near Wideford Farm, you will walk between bushes of native willow scrub, reaching only to waist height but thriving here because of the shelter and the lack of grazing. Other trees such as hawthorn, rowan and alder flourish in the valley of the burn, providing shelter, food and nesting sites for birds. The flowers change as well, here we find plants such as heather, tormentil, heath spotted orchid and meadow vetchling. The extension to Kirkwall allows you to wander on another sandy beach, this time bordering on Scapa Flow and it then follows a burn most of the way to the town.

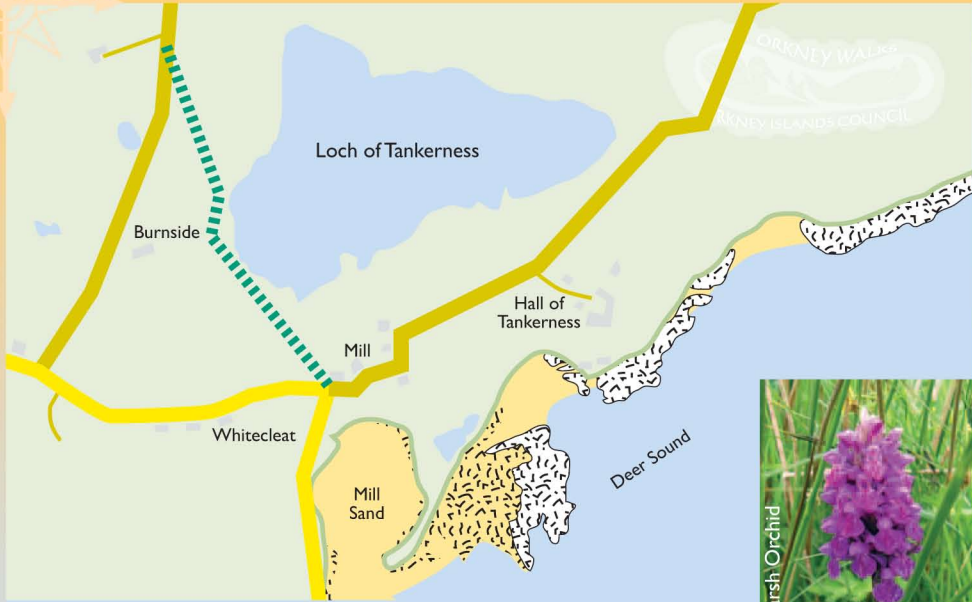


"Yardfjell"

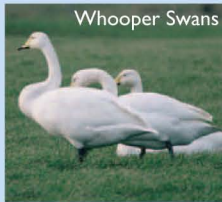


Tankerness Walkway

2.7km (1.68m) return walk between the Hall of Tankerness road end & Millhouse



This route was developed through a community led project to open up a closed public right of way. The public right of way was once used by the local farmers to get to the Tankerness mill. Locals also used the route as a short cut to Toab. It was known locally as the 'mill road'. Along the walk you get excellent views of the Loch of Tankerness. It's a good site for bird enthusiasts, with many birds over-wintering on the loch. You can see a wide selection of ducks such as mallard, wigeon, teal and tufted duck. The loch attracts large numbers of geese including greylag, white-fronted and barnacle



Whooper Swans

There is a surprising variety of plants to be found on the walk. Look out for yellow flag, marsh cinquefoil, northern marsh orchid, meadowsweet and the pleasantly aromatic water mint. If you are very lucky you even may see the elusive otter on this walk. Otters are solitary and normally active at dusk and during the night, but can occasionally be seen during the day. You are never far away from farmland on this walk. Beef cattle graze the fields surrounding the walk during the summer



Northern Marsh Orchid



Marsh Cinquefoil



Wigeon

geese. It also supports birds such as grey heron, mute swan and whooper swan.

Yellow Flag

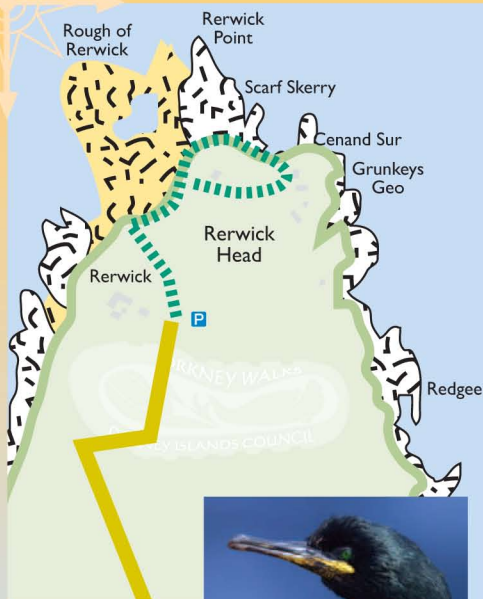


months, sharing the fields with birds such as lapwing, curlew, oystercatcher and snipe.

EAST MAINLAND

Rerwick Head

A short circular walk (1km) exploring the coastline & WW2 battery of the headland



If you are interested in geology, Rerwick Head is an ideal place to see the layered sandstone rocks that cover most of Orkney. Here great slabs of stone are exposed and you can see clear ripple marks in the rocks – evidence that they were formed in a shallow lake millions of years ago. Shags – locally known as ‘scarfies’ - are commonly seen standing on the rocks and fulmars nest on the cliffs. The lower, seaweed covered, rocky shore is popular with wading birds such as turnstones and purple sandpipers.



Rippled rocks

Offshore, look north to the island of Shapinsay and further afield to Stronsay, easily recognised by its wind

Seals basking on the rocks



turbines. Watch out for dolphins, porpoises and seals and for great northern divers, which winter in Orkney waters.

The wartime coastal battery at Rerwick Head was operational from 1940-1945, charged with covering the approaches of Shapinsay Sound and the nearby naval



Wartime buildings remain

anchorage. Two six inch guns, salvaged from an old battleship the ‘Iron Duke’ were positioned on the headland, along with powerful searchlights. The battery and associated buildings were quite extensive and much of it survives today. You can see the gun emplacements, battery observation post, engine room and magazine building.

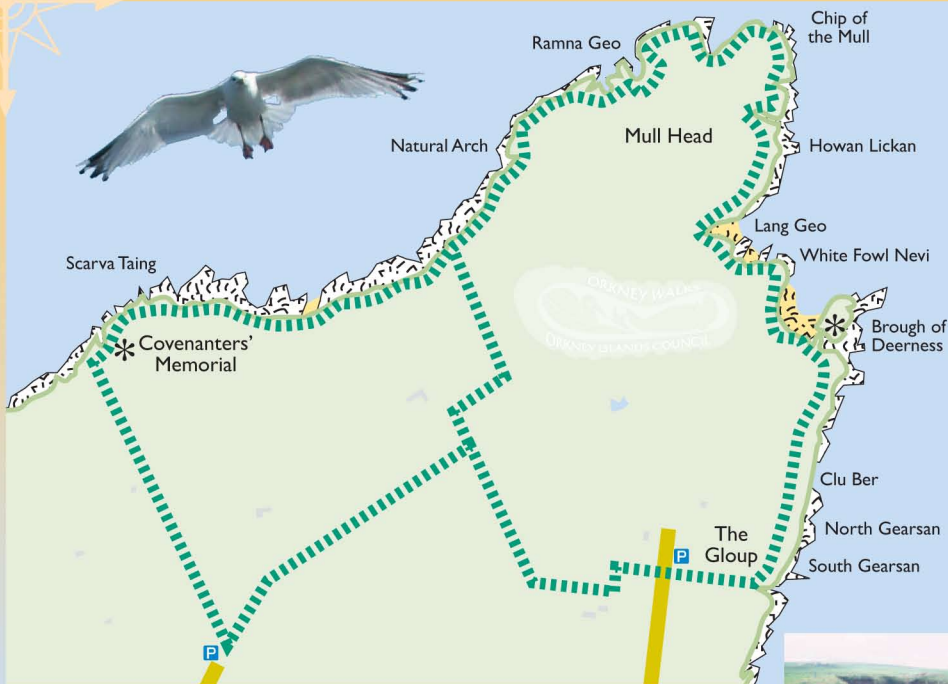


Shags

Mull Head & Covenanter's Memorial

A 5.6km (3.5m) circular walk around Mull Head Local Nature Reserve

A 9.2km (5.7m) circular walk including Mull Head and the Covenanter's Memorial.



The path to the Gloop is suitable for disabled access, allowing everyone to enjoy this spectacular collapsed sea cave. The longer walks offer you spectacular views, a touch of history and abundant wildlife. Mull Head was designated as a Local Nature Reserve in 1993, for its wildlife, geology and history. It's a place of high cliffs and wild heathland, battered by storms in winter and teeming with nesting birds in the summer.

The sandstone cliffs have been eroded by the sea to form ledges perfect for nesting birds such as kittiwakes, guillemots, razorbills and fulmars. Other birds, including gulls and skuas, prefer to nest on the open heathland, where the bushy heather provides good cover for their chicks.

Close to the cliff edge sea pinks and spring squill thrive; while the

grassland is full of the attractive grass of Parnassus and eyebright. The heath is a blaze of purple ling and bell heather in late summer.

History is all around as you walk. Farming has shaped the landscape over many years, but even earlier evidence of man's use of the area can be seen on the Brough of Deerness. Here are the remains of a small stone Norse chapel and settlement.

The Covenanter's Memorial was erected in 1888 to mark where over 200 Covenanters were drowned in 1679. They were prisoners being transported to America when their ship was driven ashore in bad weather.



The Gloop



Eyebright



Covenanter's Memorial

T MAINLAND

Newark Bay to the Point of Ayre

A 2km (return) linear coastal walk including a sandy beach, low rocky shore & cliffs



The sandy beach of Newark Bay and the low rocky shore towards Aikerskaill are frequented by wading birds, particularly during spring and autumn migrations and in the winter. Purple sandpiper, sanderling, dunlin, turnstone and ringed plover are commonly seen. In summer you are likely to see eider duck and shelduck just offshore, often with large numbers of ducklings following the adults.

Newark Bay is also the site of a Norse Age cemetery, where the skeleton of a medieval seafaring Norseman was excavated.

Wandering along the tideline you can find shells such as limpets and trough shells; while on the rocky shore turning over stones and seaweed reveals hidden shore crabs and sandhoppers. Flounders,

dabs and plaice live in the sandy bottom of the bay. The beach is backed by low sand dunes, which protect the farmland further inland from inundation by sand during winter



Waders

storms. Marram and lyme grass grow on the dunes, holding the sand grains together with a network of roots. The Point of Ayre is a fine vantage point for sea watching. Unusual birds such as Pomarine Skuas and Iceland Gulls have been spotted offshore in autumn and winter; as well as porpoises and even whales. The point is also unusual in terms of its geology with a 7m thick layer of basalt lava.

Out to sea there is a good view of the islands of Copinsay and the Horse of Copinsay. Copinsay is an RSPB reserve with good populations of breeding sea birds, such as fulmar, kittiwakes, guillemots and razorbills. Puffins can be seen on the adjacent holms.

EAST MAINLAND



Marram Grass

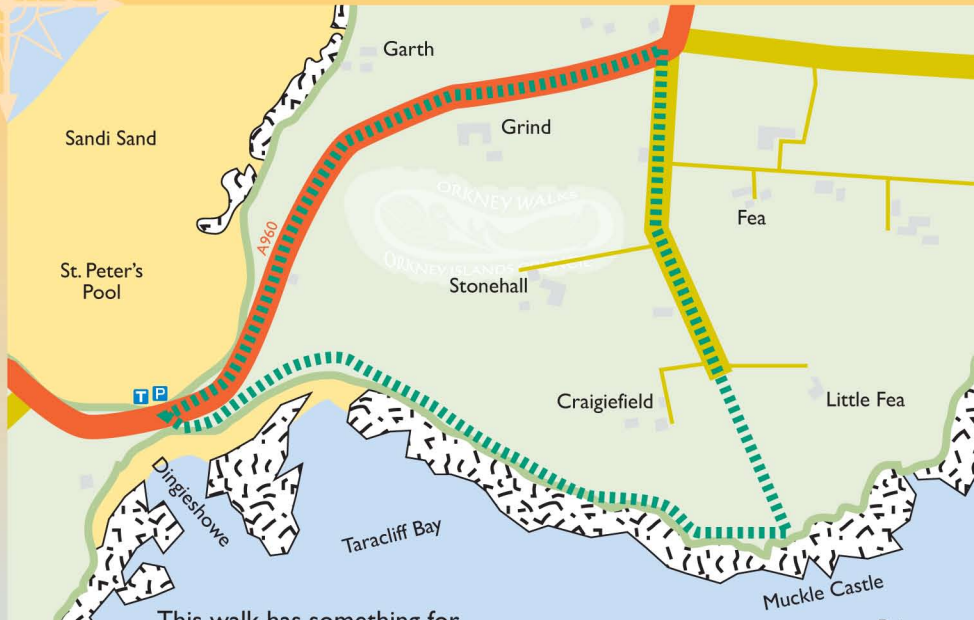


Porpoise

Dingieshowe Circular Walk

3.7km (2.3m) circular walk taking in a sandy beach and stunning coastline

EAST MAINLAND



This walk has something for everyone. From the car park you can wander along the beach or follow the path through the dunes. As you reach the steps there is a seat half way up where you can sit and admire the views. You have a stunning view of the beach from here, together with views of the Holm coastline and the green farmland of St Andrews. In the summer this walk is very colourful with hundreds of sea pinks. Other plants you may spot include primrose, red campion and devils-bit scabious. Further along the coast look for heathland plants such as crowberry, bell heather and dwarf willow. With the sea constantly pounding the rocks, caves have formed, with an impressive example towards

the end of the coastal part of the walk. Also near here is a sea stack called Muckle Castle. This is a volcanic plug just like the rock which Edinburgh Castle sits on. It has a very different

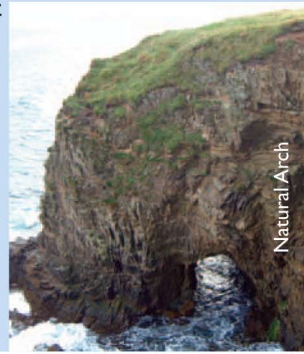
appearance from the sandstone rocks on the nearby cliffs. Away from the coast the walk takes you through farmland with fields grazed by beef cattle and frequented by birds such as oystercatcher, lapwing and curlew. As you approach the car park, the shallow, muddy bay of St. Peter's Pool is straight ahead of you. Birds such as bar-tailed godwit, knot and dunlin are found here in large numbers at low tide.



Oystercatcher



Primroses



Natural Arch

Graemeshall Circular

A circular walk of 2.2 km from Graemeshall Loch to the Holm Coastal Battery



Wartime relics

One night in October 1939 a German U boat slipped silently through Kirk Sound, past the abandoned Holm battery into Scapa Flow and torpedoed the battleship 'Royal Oak'. As a result of this two 12 pounder, quick firing guns were emplaced on the site of the old WWI battery. Further guns and searchlights were added and a camp developed at the site. Holm battery survives almost complete – the gun and searchlight emplacements and the observation post can all still be seen. Along the walk you also have a good view of the first of the Churchill Barriers.

The barriers were built on the order of Winston Churchill after the sinking of the Royal Oak, in order to close the channels between the islands. The Barriers were formally opened on 12 May 1945 - ironically just in time for the end of the war.

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As a result their main role has not been for wartime defence, but to link the south isles to the Orkney mainland.

Graemeshall Loch, along with the wetlands and reedbeds surrounding it, is a popular site for a variety of birds.

Gulls and terns use it for bathing; ducks and waders nest there; migrants shelter in the reedbeds and wildfowl winter on the loch. Large numbers of swallows roost near the loch in summer.



Curlew

Meadowsweet



EAST MAINLAND



Churchill Barriers



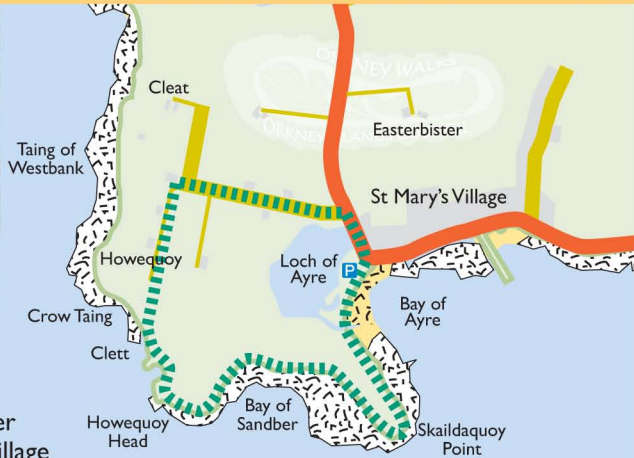
Graemeshall Loch

St Mary's Circular

An interesting 3.2km (2m) circular walk from St Mary's village



Scapa Flow



St Mary's was developed in the latter half of the 19th Century to support the booming herring fishing industry. It became an important fishing station, especially after the pier was completed in 1877. The village grew steadily and at one time had four shops which sold supplies to the crews of the herring vessels. However, at the outbreak of WWI ships were deliberately sunk to block the four channels on the eastern side of Scapa Flow. This meant that boats could no longer take an easy route to the North Sea from St Mary's and the herring industry collapsed.

On the night of the 13 October 1939 the German U-boat U47 entered Scapa Flow by squeezing past the sunken block ships in the Holm Sound and sneaked unnoticed round the Point of Skeldaquoy and Howequoy Head. It then manoeuvred itself into position and torpedoed the battleship HMS Royal Oak. This resulted in the loss of 833 lives.

Mute swan and mallard breed on the Loch of Ayre by the village and it also attracts migrants and overwintering wildfowl.



Nesting Swan

Near the loch of Ayre is a large Nissan hut which housed a cinema during WW2 to entertain troops from the local batteries.

Close to the northern end of the loch is a low mound which is the site of the Broch of Ayre.



Grass of Parnassus

Enjoy nature as well as history along the walk - look out for plants such as bog asphodel and grass of Parnassus.

Bog Asphodel



St Mary's Village



EAST MAINLAND

Guidance for walkers

Key:

Main route



Alternate route



Main Roads



B Roads



Small Roads/Tracks



Steep Banks



Rocks/Skerries



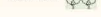
Sandy beach



Rough Shore



Woodland



Parking 

Toilets 

Museum 

Archaeological
or Historic Site 

Orkney Islands Council would like to thank East Mainland landowners for their support in developing these walks for the public.

The best way to enjoy the East Mainland is to keep to the paths in this leaflet. The paths will take you to the most interesting places and allow you to enjoy exploring while East Mainland folk get on with farming.

When you are out and about in the East Mainland remember:

- Keep dogs under close control at all times.
- Avoid disturbing livestock or damaging crops.
- Leave gates as you found them
- Do not pick wild plants or disturb wildlife.
- Take your litter home with you.
- Do not block gateways or access tracks.

For your safety:

We want you to enjoy your visit to the East Mainland so please follow these simple guidelines:

- Cliffs can be dangerous
- Be careful at all times near the cliffs and make sure children and dogs are closely supervised.
- Avoid cliff walks in very windy or foggy conditions.
- Be aware of the tides.

The weather:

Weather in Orkney can be unpredictable and can change very quickly.

- Always be prepared and take warm and waterproof clothing.



Paths not pavements:

- The walks go over rough ground, so wear sturdy footwear.

Getting to East Mainland:

Deerness and Tankerness -
take the A960 from Kirkwall

Holm -
take the A961 from Kirkwall

Further Info:

Accommodation and travel information contact
VisitOrkney, 6 Broad St, Kirkwall, KW15 1NX
tel: (01856) 872856
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