

# Guidance for walkers

## Key:

- Main route 
- Alternative route 
- Main Road 
- B Road 
- Small Roads/Tracks 
- Steep Banks 
- Rocks/Scree 
- Sandy beach 
- Rough Shore 
- Woodland 
- Parking 
- Toilets 
- Museum 
- Archaeological or Historic Site 

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



Orkney  
ENTERPRISE



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

When you are out and about on Stronsay please 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 Stronsay 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.
- Bonxies and terns will protect their nests.

### 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 Stronsay:

Daily ferry service to Stronsay from Kirkwall operated by Orkney Ferries  
tel: (01856) 872044  
web: [www.orkneyferries.co.uk](http://www.orkneyferries.co.uk)

Inter-island air service operated by Loganair  
tel: (01856) 872494  
web: [www.loganair.co.uk](http://www.loganair.co.uk)

### Further info:

Accommodation and travel information contact VisitOrkney, 6 Broad St, Kirkwall, KW15 1NX  
tel: (01856) 872856  
web: [www.visitorkney.com](http://www.visitorkney.com)

Island nicknames rhymes by the late George Scott courtesy of Mrs N. E. Bain (Scott).

Maps based upon the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office © Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes crown copyright and may lead to prosecution. OIC LA08722X.

Photo credits: SNH, RSPB, D Munn, C Tait, R Thorn  
Shell illustrations © Iain Ashman  
Design by K4 Graphics - [info@k4graphics.com](mailto:info@k4graphics.com)

# Walking Guide

# Stronsay



4 Guided Walks for the Island of Stronsay with information and illustrations on points of interest

- 1 Whitehall Village to St Catherine's Bay
- 2 Rothiesholm Circular
- 3 Holland Farm to Tor Ness
- 4 Vat of Kirbister and Odin Bay



# Whitehall Village to St Catherine's Bay

1

6km (3.7m) return walk from Whitehall Village passing two beaches



Spoot



Walk along quiet roads passing through farmland to reach the beaches. Both beaches have parking areas, so can also be accessed by car.

The Ayre of the Myres is a small beach, close to Whitehall village and is good for picnics and seal watching. The walk takes you up onto the spine of the island, above St Catherine's Bay. From here, on a clear day, you can see for miles over Stronsay and out towards the other Northern Isles.

St Catherine's Bay is a wide stretch of sand, going out a very long way at low tide. This makes it popular with locals for collecting 'spoots' or razor shells. These shellfish, although hard to



Lapwing

Black-headed Gull



Sanderling are common on the beach most of the year, with several hundred present in the winter, dashing to and fro down at the low tide.

Walking along the quiet roads is a good way to see Stronsay's farmland, with its lush green grass, grown for silage or grazed by cattle. Birds frequent the fields as well, especially curlew in the summer and flocks of golden plover and lapwing in the winter.

Seal Pup



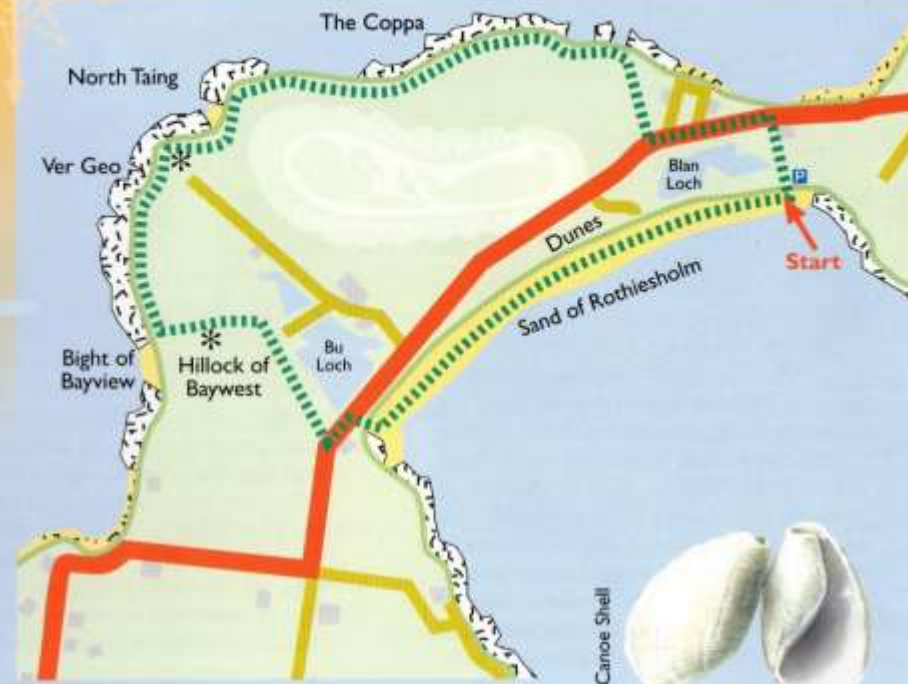
catch, are good to eat.

For summer bird watchers the bay can be like a busy road with gulls, arctic terns, and skuas regularly flying by.

# Rothiesholm Circular Walk

2

5.7km (3.5m) circular walk on sandy beach and coastline



Canoe Shell



This circular walk gives visitors a real taste of the different kinds of scenery Stronsay has to offer. You'll discover a beautiful sandy beach, lochs and wetlands and a low rocky coastline with lovely views across to Eday and Linga Holm. You can look up to the heathland on Rothiesholm Head and view its large wind turbines.

The beach is a shell collector's paradise, with many types of shells washed up here after winter storms. Look out for the very rare canoe shell - this is the only beach in Orkney where you can find it. If you prefer birds, look out for terns and skuas in the summer or waders and divers in the winter.

Northern Marsh Orchid



The Hillock of Baywest is an unexcavated mound which contains a burial chamber dating from about 3000BC.

Blan Loch near the car park is only really a loch in the winter, when it is enjoyed by visiting pintail duck. In summer it is just a damp area, but it is very good for wild flowers, especially orchids and grass of parnassus.

Bu Loch is a summer bathing spot for arctic skuas, which nest on Rothiesholm Head and its a haven for migrating waders in the autumn.



## Holland Farm

2.1km (1.3m) circular walk to bird and seal hides  
6.5km (4 m) walk, including the hides, then on to Tor Ness

3



These walks provide a unique opportunity to see how farming for wildlife really works. Combining organic farming with nature conservation and habitat creation has created a haven for wildlife on Holland Farm.

The walk takes you to a seal hide overlooking a small beach popular with common seals and then onto a bird hide next to the loch, Lea Shun.

In summer the loch is home to a variety of breeding ducks including pintail and shelduck. Herons come here to feed and waders such as redshank frequent the wetlands around the loch. In winter the loch attracts a whole new range of birds - whooper swans, geese and flocks of wigeon. Otters also frequent the loch to sample its good supply of eels.



Otter



Shelduck



Heron

The return walk to the farm takes you past fields full of wild flowers and areas specially managed to attract corncrakes.

For a longer walk take the coastal path to Tor Ness and the Sand of Crook.

Fulmars nest on the low cliffs along the coast and eider duck are common just offshore. Circular kelp pits can be seen along the shore, the only visible remains of a once thriving industry. Look out for the unusual blue flowered oyster plant when you reach the beach.

## Vat of Kirbister and Odin Bay

10.4 km (6.5m) circular walk through dramatic coastal scenery

4



This walk follows some of the best cliff scenery in Orkney. There are sheer cliffs, caves, sea stacks and a spectacular natural arch, called the Vat of Kirbister. The "Vat" is a gloop, formed when a sea cave partially collapses, leaving an arch spanning the entrance. When an arch collapses, it leaves a sea stack, of which there are several along the walk. One of the most interesting of these is Tam's Castle where there are the remains of an early Christian Hermitage.



The wind and the sea have eroded the cliffs to form good nesting ledges for birds. In summer these narrow ledges are packed with noisy sea birds - common guillemots,

Vat



Guillemots

razorbill, and kittiwakes. Burgh Head and Lamb Head are high promontories, popular with seabirds, but also interesting historical sites. The Brough of Burgh Head has the largest of Stronsay's hermitage sites, with a stone wall visible on the

landward side of the stack, symbolising its separation from the outside world. Lamb Head is dotted with archaeological sites, including Pict houses.

Past Lamb Head the high cliffs are replaced by a much gentler rocky shore, which is very popular with birds during the winter months. Look out for turnstones, purple sandpipers, eider duck, goldeneye and snow buntings.

If you want something to stick all day  
Get yourself a Limpet from fair Stronsay



This walking guide to Stronsay will help you explore the wilder corners of this lovely island. From wide sandy bays, to dramatic cliffs, lochs and wetlands, Stronsay has a wonderful variety of scenery for walkers to enjoy. Whether you are a serious Rambler or want to go for a gentle stroll, you will enjoy walking on this unspoilt island.

### A walk on the wild side . . .

Each of the walks will help you get to know Stronsay's wildlife. Whichever wild coast you explore seals will be swimming beside you as you walk, or hauled out on rocks to sunbathe. The birds change with the seasons, from colonies of cliff nesting birds in the summer, to migrants passing through in autumn or spring, and



flocks of ducks and geese arriving for the winter. In summer there are flowers everywhere you walk from coastal plants like sea pinks to wetland flowers like yellow flag. Wildlife spotting isn't confined to the walks though – it starts as soon as you arrive on the boat in Whitehall village. Black guillemots nest in the boat pier, they are very tame and are usually seen by visitors as they arrive and depart!



### A walk through history . . .

Stronsay has a long history of farming and fishing. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century Stronsay had a thriving herring fishing industry. It started in 1816 when Samuel Laing set up operations in Whitehall village with six fishing boats. The industry grew rapidly and Whitehall became a very busy commercial centre and Orkney's main fishing port, with more than 300 boats operating out of the village at peak times. The herring season lasted for 12 weeks and during this time the island's population grew by about 4000 people. At the height of herring fishing Whitehall had 10 general merchants, 5 ice cream parlours and the biggest bar north of Inverness! The herring station eventually closed in 1936.



Fishing was only ever a part time job for Stronsay folk though, the real business of the island has always been farming. Stronsay is a low lying island and the land is very fertile, with most of the island having been used for farming for many generations.

Before the days of artificial fertilisers, seaweed, cast up on the shore by frequent winter gales, was used to enrich the land. This abundant supply of seaweed, in particular kelp, enabled Stronsay to become a major centre for another profitable industry – kelp making. The kelp stalks were cut and spread to dry, then burned in circular pits lined with stones, which can still be seen today around the shores. The



resulting kelp slag and ash was valued as a source of potash and soda and bought by soap-makers and glass-makers in industrial areas. For 50 years kelp making was a mainstay of the Orkney economy, but

the perpetual smoke and fire of the burning pits must have made Stronsay look like an active volcano and a much less pleasant place than it is today!

### The Stronsay Beast . . .

As well as history Stronsay also has its legends, the most famous being the story of the Stronsay beast. In 1808 the remains of a strange sea creature were washed up on the rocks at Rothiesholm Head. It was described as a serpent-like creature, 55ft long with a neck 10ft long and three pairs of legs. It had a bristly mane of long wiry hairs which were said to glow eerily in the dark!

Tales of the monster spread far and wide and there was much speculation about its identity. However, scientists examining the remains were convinced that it was nothing more unusual than a basking shark. The 'six legs' were explained away as the remains of its lower fins, the 'neck' seemed long because the jaws were missing and the 'bristles' were the remains of the dorsal fin. Even if that were true, it was very large for a basking shark and still a monster in its own right.



Will you be lucky enough to find a Canoe Shell, found only on the Sand of Rothiesholm.

