

Northern Lights



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Fraserburgh
Lighthouse Museum

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Orkney Fly Fishing
North Coast 500
Fun Activities



Discover more at www.northlinkferries.co.uk

Operated by **serco**

Welcome

A warm welcome to NorthLink Ferries and to *Northern Lights* – our on board magazine.

Just recently I was in Rosyth with a group from the Scottish Government's Transport Scotland team viewing MV Hildasay in dry dock. It is fair to say that those who haven't had the opportunity to see a vessel sitting on the blocks in the bottom of a vast dry dock are always somewhat overwhelmed by the size and magnitude of the undertaking.

My thanks and appreciation go to my Technical Manager, Mr Graham McKenzie and the on-board teams who also successfully dry docked MV Hrossey and MV Hjaltland in the opening months of 2017.

As we press on into 2017 and the Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology take some time to check out our website at www.northlinkferries.co.uk and social media feeds on www.facebook.com/NorthLinkFerries and www.twitter.com/nlferries to catch up on all the latest information on what is happening on our route network. The commemoration of the martyrdom of St. Magnus is being celebrated in Orkney with the events surrounding Magnus 900 and the Stromness 'Per Mare' celebrations of 200 years as a Burgh of Barony both look to provide new visitor opportunities on Orkney.

The Portsoy Traditional Boat Festival, which this year welcomed participants from both Orkney and Shetland, was a real nautical occasion. The beginning of August then brings with it Shetland Boat Week, and we are proud to be supporting the construction, in real time, by Jack Duncan and Robbie Tait, of a new, traditional clinker built boat, so why not pop along to The Boat Shed at Hay's Dock in Lerwick to see for yourself.

In and around Aberdeen the progress on the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR) is there for all to see, remember though to check travel updates and where new or temporary junctions have been installed please take care, particularly if you are not a regular traveller and leave yourself enough time to arrive safely at Jamieson's Quay for check-in or to ensure a safe journey out of the city.

As ever, enjoy your time on-board. My colleagues are on hand to assist you at every stage of your journey, both ship and shore.



Stuart Garrett
Managing Director
Serco NorthLink Ferries

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Contact Stuart

I would welcome your feedback at any time. If you have any questions, then please contact me at speaktostuart@northlinkferries.co.uk



#MagnusOnTour

Congratulations to our most recent #MagnusOnTour winner Sally Sanford and her lovely Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever 'Lace'. The pair, from Shetland, entered after travelling to England to take part in a canine rally obedience competition.

Sally is now in receipt of two return tickets to Orkney or Aberdeen to enjoy a holiday courtesy of NorthLink Ferries.



Lace, a Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever, posing with her copy of Northern Lights



Lace and Sally receiving their prize

Your Chance to win a trip for two

For your chance to win, simply post a picture of yourself in an eye-catching location with a NorthLink Ferries product featuring the iconic Magnus logo on social media. Use the hashtag #MagnusOnTour to be in with a chance to win. Alternatively send your photo of Magnus on Tour to webmaster@northlinkferries.co.uk

Enter by 31st December for your chance to be entered into the prize draw.

Terms & Conditions:

One prize available: Entries must be made by 31 December to be eligible. Package includes return travel on any route for two including car and standard cabin, valid for 12 months from the date of the draw. Cabins are available on overnight sailings only. The prize is subject to availability, non-transferable or refundable and no cash alternative will be offered. Upgrades available on request.

Northlink Ferries' Local and Award-Winning Offering

Working closely with suppliers across the North East of Scotland, Highlands and Islands, NorthLink Ferries continues to offer passengers a taste of Scotland's best ingredients.

With a network of over 30 food and drink producers, the company provides passengers travelling between mainland Scotland and the Northern Isles a menu of fresh produce including premium Orkney beef, Shetland salmon and local sweet treats.

VisitScotland's Taste Our Best Award

Our commitment to food and drink has been recognised by VisitScotland who awarded us with its Taste Our Best Award for the third consecutive year.

The quality assurance scheme identifies ingredients of Scottish provenance, companies keeping food miles to a minimum and menus which offer information on where food has come from.

We are proud to hold the Taste Our Best Award across all three passenger vessels, where visitors can sample local produce in the comfort of the Feast Restaurant or Magnus Lounge as well as purchase items such as Shetland fudge from the on board shop.

With over 80% of dishes featuring locally sourced produce, passengers can find out more about the origins of their meal by noting the local flags located next to each option or by speaking with a member of the on board crew.

Taste of Grampian

We were pleased to continue our support of local food and drink suppliers through the sponsorship of Taste of Grampian 2017.

Taking place in June at Thainstone Centre in Inverurie, the annual one-day festival offered visitors the chance to sample the wide range of high quality food and drink products from the North East of Scotland.

We were on hand alongside local producers to offer more information about the region's wealth of suppliers as well as a taste of mouth-watering shortbread, prime roast beef, delicious ice-cream and a dram or two of the best Scottish whiskies from local distilleries.

With a festival programme which featured live music, street performers, children's entertainment, celebrity cookery demonstrations and arts and crafts workshops, the event was enjoyed by more than 15,000 people.



Buy North East

Since the launch of the Buy North East campaign by partners across Aberdeen City and Shire, the message of encouraging local procurement in the region has been hugely successful.

We are working closely with Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council as well as Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce to provide stimulus and practical advice to buyers and sellers on the importance of selecting from companies based locally.

Our commitment to the campaign includes our passenger food and drink offering. Currently 90% of suppliers to our on board hotel services are businesses based within 50 miles of the ports in which we operate from. Examples include our longstanding partnership with luxury mattress manufacturer and social enterprise, Glencraft.

Based in Aberdeen, the company has provided more than 400 new mattresses to our passenger vessels over the past 12 months and was also named Social Enterprise of the Year at the UK Private Business Awards.



Cast Away the Cobwebs

The vast sparkling lochs of Orkney's West Mainland don't just offer a picture-perfect view for visiting tourists. These lochs are also a draw for fly fishermen, lured to the crystal waters by the chance to catch some of the island's resident brown trout.

Wild and thriving, the trout found in Orkney are some of the country's finest.

NorthLink Ferries Freight Supervisor and resident fishing pundit Neil Chalmers offers his top tips for fishermen who are keen to tackle Orcadian waters.

Location, location, location

The Loch of Harray would be the first place I would recommend for visiting anglers. With over 14 miles of shoreline it covers more than 2,500 acres and is known for the sheer volume of fish found along its shores.

The fish are an average of 10oz to 12oz in weight, but it's not unheard of to land a fish in the 1lb to 2lb range.

At Harray you're surrounded by Neolithic archaeology including the Standing Stones of Stenness, the Ring of Brodgar and Maeshowe - it's breath-taking.

Another of my favourite fishing spots is Boardhouse Loch. This is especially picture-perfect on a still, crisp summer's evening. There can be hundreds of flies hatching along the calm waters and the fish rise freely offering a chance to catch them.

Boardhouse Loch is most atmospheric just as the sun sets over the horizon and travels down over the back of the Brough of Birsay, the uninhabited island which is home to the remains of Pictish and Norse archaeological settlements.

Hooked on Orkney

To secure the best catch make sure you speak to the locals. Fly wise I would always recommend using local options – Sinclair's shop in Stromness or Shearer's in Kirkwall have trays and trays of local flies which will help attract trout and they also have some great advice and tips.

Coincidentally there's a fly called the 'NorthLink cat'. It was a fly invented by a friend of mine called Stephen Breivik when he was on his way to Orkney from Shetland with NorthLink. It turned out to be a cracking fly, so when they looked to name it, NorthLink was the obvious option!

For holiday anglers with limited time or those lacking experience it could be useful to consider hiring the services of a local angler guide to get the most out of a fishing expedition. Depending on the time of year fish can be found quite deep into the water and at these times a boat is often the preferred method for securing a catch.



Neil Chalmers



Loch of Harray

Preserving Orkney's loch habitats

Fishing in Orkney is free – visitors can fish in almost any of the lochs and there are no fees. However, to help contribute to the maintenance of these very special habitats, fishermen are encouraged to join the Orkney Trout Fishing Association (OTFA).

Just a small contribution of £20 covers the whole fishing season, which is particularly useful for those who decide to visit a few times and gives members access to site huts around the lochs as well as shelter and toilet facilities. More importantly, the money also goes towards keeping the lochs stocked with fish through the association's hatchery programme.

To join just visit Sinclair's in John Street, Stromness or Shearer's shop in Victoria Street, Kirkwall or alternatively the website offers a chance to join in advance and means all you have to do when you arrive is pick up your key.

See www.orkneytroutfishing.co.uk for more information and to read more about each of the lochs suitable for fishing.



NorthLink cat



Stenness trout



Neil Chalmers

Meet our Customer Service Supervisor Paul Sinclair

Born and bred in the historic Orcadian town of Stromness, Paul Sinclair is based on board NorthLink Ferries' MV Hamnavoe vessel, which offers passengers travel between Stromness and Scrabster in the north of mainland Scotland.

Well versed in everything that island life has to offer, Paul talks to Northern Lights about why he returned to Orkney after seven years on the mainland and his current role with NorthLink Ferries.



Tell us about yourself

After growing up in Stromness, I left for the mainland to study physiology and sports science in Glasgow. It was here that I caught the fitness bug and worked in the health industries in both Glasgow and London after graduation.

In 2004 I decided to travel back home to Orkney and was offered a role on MV Hamnavoe as a steward for the summer season, which I gladly accepted. I've been with NorthLink Ferries ever since and haven't looked back.

What do your day-to-day responsibilities include?

My role is very varied. I could be working as a supervisor in the ship's Brinkie's bar and gift shop one day, while the next I might be preparing the B&B service and cabins in advance of our next guests checking in.

Overall my main role is to offer each passenger a safe and comfortable journey across the Pentland Firth. I love making sure that each passenger enjoys their experience of travelling with NorthLink Ferries.

What is it about your job you enjoy the most?

We carry thousands of passengers every month and they all have fascinating stories to tell.

Meeting new people from different walks of life is the thing I enjoy the most. Whether they're browsing in the gift shop or relaxing in the Brinkie's bar, it's a good opportunity to hear about their stories and travel plans.

When visitors talk about how amazing Orkney is, it's a proud reminder that I live in a special and unique place.

How do you spend your free time?

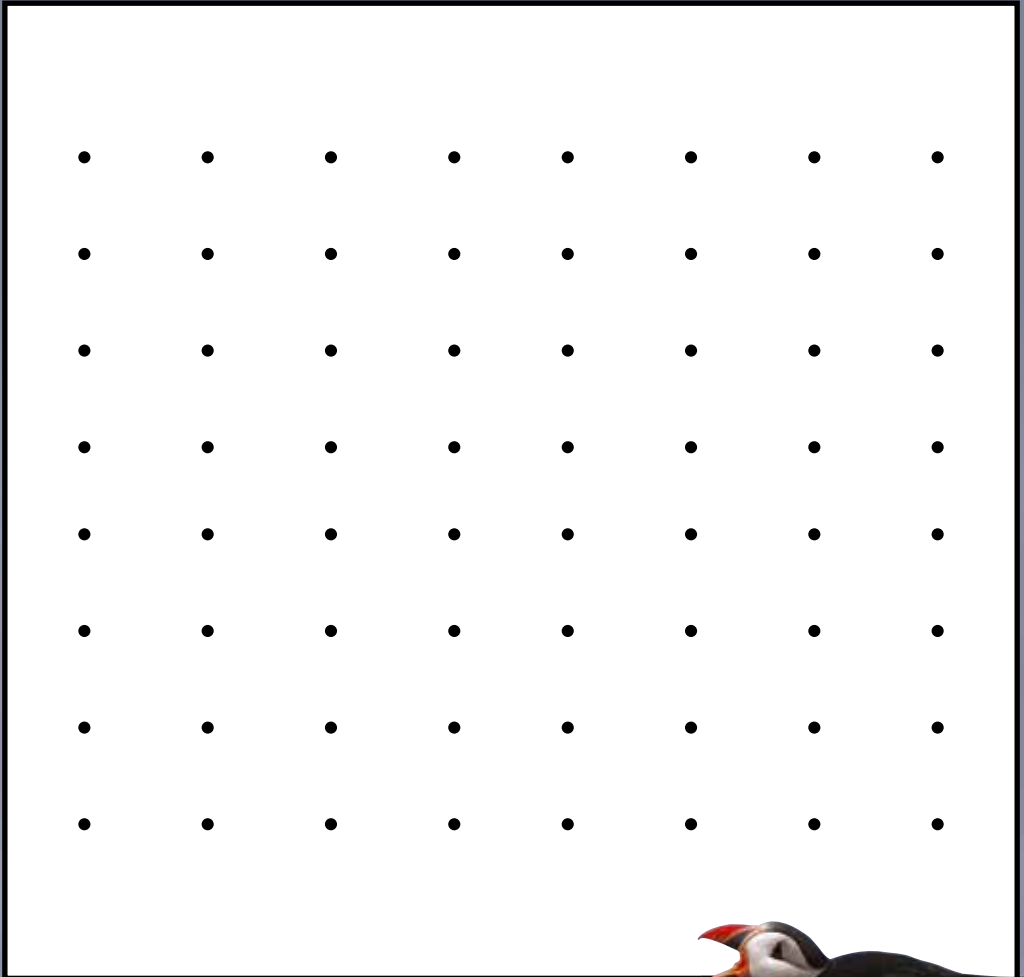
In the past I played a lot of football and spent a winter season on the slopes in France. I still love keeping active but nowadays I choose more peaceful pastimes such as golf and pool. My absolute favourite thing to do is spend time with my two kids, Elliot and Estelle.

Dots and Boxes

Players take turns in drawing lines between dots on a grid of boxes.

Each player takes turns to join two adjacent dots with a horizontal or vertical line.

When a player completes the fourth side of a box they should initial that box and take another turn to draw another line. When all boxes have been completed the winner is the player who has initialled the most boxes.



Super Sudoku

Relax in one of many comfortable areas on board with this brain teaser Sudoku puzzle.

Good luck!

		1				2		
3	7	2						8
	9		4	2	6	3	7	1
	3		2	5	7			
		7				5		
			1	6	8		3	
4	1	3	6	8	2		5	
7						8	6	3
		8				1		



Vikling Word Search

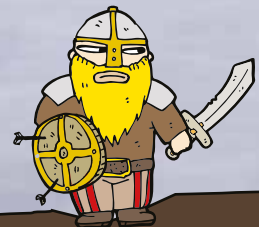
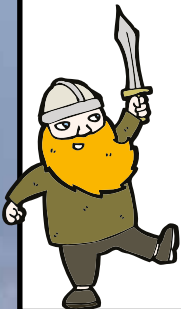
Can you find ten Orkney and Shetland words in our Northern Lights word search?



See how many of the below you can spot:

ISLAND CASTLE LIGHTHOUSE FORTRESS FISHING
MUSEUM FERRY VIKING DOLPHIN PUFFIN

E	L	J	S	P	M	D	G	C	S	E	B
W	S	U	I	Y	T	N	A	A	S	Y	S
N	F	U	F	S	I	F	S	S	E	R	V
V	I	B	O	H	L	L	C	T	R	R	Y
I	E	F	S	H	L	A	E	L	T	E	X
U	U	I	F	A	T	M	N	E	R	F	D
V	F	R	S	U	U	H	I	D	O	A	E
D	K	A	R	S	P	I	G	B	F	K	W
B	Y	Q	E	L	N	G	N	I	K	I	V
G	X	U	M	N	K	K	K	S	L	C	P
E	M	J	O	D	O	L	P	H	I	N	J
R	X	D	H	G	G	Y	O	T	B	X	V



Scotland's Fortress Lighthouse



Erected within a 450-year-old castle, Kinnaird Head Lighthouse in Fraserburgh was the very first lighthouse built on mainland Scotland and today functions as the location for The Museum of Scottish Lighthouses.

Legendary beginnings

Positioned on the tip of a headland overlooking the vast, awe-inspiring expanse of the North Sea, this blustery spot was originally home to Kinnaird Head Castle.

Built in the 16th Century, the castle was designed to demonstrate the Fraser family's dominance and power over the new town they were planning - Fraserburgh.

Built by Sir Alexander Fraser, 8th laird of Philorth, the castle was set to be his legacy, and was a chance to highlight his family's commitment to the protection of the surrounding lands.

However what started as a legacy later turned into Sir Alexander's curse. The cost of developing the castle bankrupted the 8th laird, who had to sell his family home of Philorth Castle to ensure the future survival of his family.

The loss of the Frasers' original family home of Philorth Castle was finally put right over 300 years later, when the castle was purchased by one of Sir Alexander's descendants. It is now safely back in family hands.

Let there be light

As times changed, so did the requirement for a castle. Kinnaird Head Castle and its accompanying buildings were sold to the Northern Lighthouse Board in 1787.

Initially a giant lamp was positioned on the top of the castle's roof, however structural problems became apparent and it was then that Robert Stevenson, of the renowned Stevenson engineering family, carefully constructed a permanent lighthouse structure, which was built within the confines of the existing castle walls in 1824.

Engineering a day out

With a new lease of life, the lighthouse now acts as The Museum of Scotland's Lighthouses. Those planning a trip to the site can roam the castle grounds, share in the wonder of the lighthouse structure, and spend time learning about the lifestyle and courage of the lighthouse keepers who managed the building for almost 200 years.

Inside, the museum is home to the largest collection of lighthouse equipment in the UK, which includes a nationally recognised collection of glass lenses from lighthouses across Scotland.

Guided tours of the buildings and museum allow history enthusiasts to get a real sense of the building's prominence, legacy and design. The Lighthouse Tea Room offers those with tired feet a chance to take in the breathtaking landscape and architecture while sampling a selection of locally-sourced food and drink.

And nearby...

Fraserburgh Heritage Centre is just down the road and provides an opportunity to find out more about the development of Fraserburgh as a fishing town, as well as its role as the first RNLI Lifeboat Station in Scotland. Well-suited for families, there are activities for children located throughout the centre.

Further afield, visitors to the North East can find Fraserburgh Waters of Philorth Beach. Considered one of the region's best, the beach is in receipt of a coveted Blue Flag Award and is named after the nature reserve that runs along the back of the beach. Here, keen wildlife lovers can spot a range of waders, wildfowl and seabirds.



To find out more visit www.lighthousemuseum.org.uk



Immerse Yourself in Scotland's History, Heritage and Archaeology



As Scotland celebrates its Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology, now is the ideal time to discover the country's legendary heritage sites, ancient monuments and historic battlefields.

The North East of Scotland and the Northern Isles lay claim to a fascinating range of historic assets and cultural icons which can all be explored with NorthLink Ferries. Here are some of the regions' most fascinating hidden gems which will get your history adventure off to the best start.

Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire



Dunnottar Castle

Perched upon a towering cliff top at the edge of the North Sea, Dunnottar Castle, close to the town of Stonehaven, offers an unforgettable glimpse into Scotland's colourful past.

The dramatic and evocative ruined fortress was once home to the most powerful families in the area and was also graced with the presence of some of the country's most famous figures including William Wallace and Mary Queen of Scots.

Most famously Dunnottar Castle was the site of a small garrison which held out against the might of Cromwell's army for many months, saving the Scottish Crown Jewels from destruction.

Explorers can visit Dunnottar Castle all year round. For more information and opening times, see www.dunnottarcastle.co.uk



Tolbooth Museum

The Tolbooth Museum in the centre of Aberdeen is one of the city's oldest buildings and this year celebrates its 400th anniversary.

One of the best preserved 17th century jails in Scotland, the now museum features displays on local history and the role of crime and punishment through the centuries. Visitors can take in the historical facts of the area by touring the atmospheric 17th and 18th century cells finished with original doors and barred windows.

Information stands also tell the tales of some of the building's earliest residents including Quaker protestor Lilius Skene and murderer Margaret Campbell alongside the blade display of Aberdeen's 17th century guillotine.

For more information and opening times, see www.aagm.co.uk

To find out more about the historic sites across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, visit www.northlinkferries.co.uk/aberdeen

Caithness



Achavanich Standing Stones

Set close by to Loch Stemster, South-West of the town of Wick, is the intriguing location of a number of standing stones known as Achavanich.

Forming a horseshoe shape, the stones are unlike many others due to their non-circular setting and narrow sides which each point to the centre. Although not completely unique in Britain, this arrangement of stones can only be seen at a few sites elsewhere including the famous Stonehenge.

Erected roughly 4,000 years ago, the stones today measure across an area of 260 ft length-wise and 110 ft width-wise with 35 stones still standing and another six fallen.

Visitors are welcome to wander amongst the stones, of which the tallest is over two metres, whilst reading from the helpful information panels which bring to life stories of the local area and its residents.



The Castle and Gardens of Mey

The Queen Mother first visited what was Barrogill Castle in 1952 while mourning the death of her husband, King George VI. It was here that she fell for the building's charm and decided to bring the castle and its gardens back from abandonment. What stands today is a lasting tribute to her commitment to the local community.

Located between Thurso and John O'Groats, The Castle and Gardens of Mey provide enjoyment for all ages with visitors able to see the rooms of the castle used by Her Majesty when she stayed.

Outside, the Walled Garden is home to marigolds, pansies, shrub roses and climbers, which were regularly tended to by The Queen Mother, and provide the perfect summer picnic setting.

To find out more, visit www.castleofmey.org.uk

For more information about Caithness and its unique locations, visit www.northlinkferries.co.uk/caithness



Orkney



Kirbuster Museum

Kirbuster Museum and Corrigan Farm Museum

Since opening to the public in 1986, The Kirbuster Museum and Corrigan Farm Museum have been offering visitors a fascinating glimpse into rural island life in years gone by.

Whilst influences from mainland Britain such as wallpaper can be seen, these buildings remain uniquely Orcadian with box beds and peat fires on display. The room layout visible at Kirbuster is similar to what visitors will see at the Neolithic UNESCO settlement of Skara Brae, with a central hearth and beds at the side of the room. From this it is clear that this design remained popular in Orkney for thousands of years.

For more information on the museums and what life was once like in Orkney, visit www.northlinkferries.co.uk/orkney



Kirbuster Museum



Midhowe, Rousay

Island of Rousay

Known as the Egypt of the North, the island of Rousay boasts over 100 identified archaeological sites and chambered tombs. The most significant is the large Midhowe Chambered Cairn which is 100ft long, 40ft wide and contained 25 crouching corpses.

Visitors can also see the impressive Iron Age broch which was occupied from around 200BC to 200AD. A circular tower structure, often surrounded by houses, the broch is thought to be where people fled to safety when the area came under attack.

To find out more, visit www.discoverrousay.co.uk

For more information about Orkney's history and iconic sites, visit www.northlinkferries.co.uk/Orkney



Midhowe, Rousay

Shetland



Tangwick Haa Museum

The Tangwick Haa Museum tells the history of Eshaness, one of the more rural parts of Shetland.

Originally built in the late 17th century, the museum was once a Laird's house and offers an insight into what life was once like in Shetland. The Laird's room is furnished as it would have been in the 19th century and is filled with a variety of Victorian artefacts while the reception room displays agricultural tools and household objects from the period.

Visitors can also look into their Shetland ancestry via the museum's family history section which allows visitors to trace their genealogy by consulting parish records displayed on microfilm.

For more information about the Tangwick Haa Museum, visit www.tangwickhaa.org.uk



Tangwick Haa Museum



Foula

The name of the island of Foula comes from the Old Norse Fuglaey meaning 'Bird Island' due to the popular landfall for migrating birds.

Situated 20 miles to the west of Shetland, many of the island's traditions have remained due to its remote setting. One of the isles least affected by the modern world, Foula still abides by the Julien calendar meaning that Christmas Day falls on 6th January each year. The island's secluded location has also led to its own subspecies of field mouse.

For more information about the unique island of Foula, visit www.shetland.org/plan/areas/foula

To find out more about Shetland's history, visit www.northlinkferries.co.uk/shetland



The Hardships of Shetland's Haaf fishermen



Shetlanders have always had a close relationship with the sea as a source of food, transport, trade and as a way to escape the poverty of the croft.

Through history, Shetlanders fished the water around the islands – but most of this was subsistence fishing, done inshore with handlines and small boats, the catch being for their own consumption.

Later on Shetlanders began to trade fish for goods and money. However this ended with a change to the law. Greedy merchant-landlords seized upon this, and Shetlanders were forced to turn to risky Haaf fishing in order to survive.

Ancient trading

From the 15th to the 17th century, Shetlanders would trade salted cod, ling, herrings, butter and wool with German merchants in exchange for hooks, lines and nets, biscuits, beer, fruit and money. However in 1707 the Act of Union introduced high duties on imported salt, a crucial ingredient for curing whitefish, and this meant that German merchants could no longer afford to trade in Shetland.

The truck system

Following the Act of Union, local merchant-lairds seized upon this new opportunity and began exporting fish to Europe. Crofters were tied to these merchant-lairds, many of whom owned the crofts which housed the crofters' families. As their landlords had already divided crofts into smaller units which were much less profitable for their tenants, crofters were forced to turn to fishing to prevent their families becoming homeless.

The merchant-lairds supplied boats and gear in exchange for the right to buy the men's catch at rock

bottom prices. What's more, the men were often paid in credit notes for the fish they brought ashore. When they came to deposit their catch at fishing stations, all of which were owned by merchant-lairds, the men were also charged for the things they bought, such as tobacco.

This so called 'truck system' was almost a form of legalised slavery and meant that at the end of a dangerous summer of work out at sea, some men ended up going home in debt to merchants.

A Haaf life

Dangerous, isolated and bleak is what days on a Haaf fishing expedition at sea could be described as.

Fishermen had to overcome a prevailing wind and could usually only sail in one direction, travelling up to 40 miles offshore to set six miles of lines. They knew Mother Nature was on their side if they could row out with a relatively light boat and sail back with a full load of fish.

While waiting for their catch, older men would tell stories to their young trainees. A metal kettle fuelled by peat allowed them to warm a cup of tea, and men usually took brönies with them to eat - oatmeal or beremeal cakes. It was simply a matter of waiting; there wasn't much else they could do.



Those who wanted to sleep would take it in turns and crawl under the sail. Haaf boats were open, which meant that this was the only shelter they had. To get home they navigated by the sun, stars, and 'da moder dy' – an underlying sea swell that always moved towards land.

The six-oared Haaf fishing vessels looked like large traditional rowing boats. While difficult to handle, these boats allowed more fish to be caught in one sailing and therefore were a necessity.

Crewed by six men, the boats were called 'sixareens' and had a square sail which was used if the wind was blowing in the right direction. There were between 300 and 500 sixareens in Shetland, with the boats generally lasting five to six years due to the harsh sea conditions that they travelled in.

The end of Haaf fishing

Two major fishing disasters in 1881 and 1900 signalled the beginning of the end for Haaf fishing. The herring fishery of the 1880s and the Crofter's Act of 1886, which put an end to the truck system, were two more nails in its coffin.



Larger, safer boats were made and fishermen could finally install a few home comforts. However, when the steam trawler was introduced, longlining in large sailing boats simply couldn't compete economically.

There are few sixareens left in Shetland. One of the only surviving boats can be seen in Shetland Museum and Archives. She was built as the Foula mail boat, which fished for a little while and then ended up as a flit boat for shifting peats.

Shetland Museum and Archives is also home to a replica sixareen called the Vaila Mae which sails regularly in Lerwick Harbour. Those keen to learn can take a trip to the archives and even take a trip on her during Shetland Boat Week celebrations in August.

With grateful thanks to Davy Cooper from the Shetland Amenity Trust for his help in writing this article.

Five Fascinating Finds Along the NC500



Dunrobin Castle



Applecross



Inverewe gardens

One of the most awe-inspiring touring routes in the UK, the 500 miles of stunning coastline that make up Scotland's North Coast 500 (NC500) features everything that visitors to the country are looking for.

With mountains, glens, crisp white beaches, cliff-top castles, archaeological treasures and little picture postcard villages, there's nothing that can't be found along Scotland's answer to Route 66. From the Highland capital of Inverness to some of the most remote locations in the Highlands, the North Coast 500 is also perfectly located for those looking to take in nearby Orkney.

Inspired by travel writer Charles Tait's new release, *The North Coast 500 Guide Book*, these five fascinating finds offer a hint of the treasures waiting to be discovered along this picturesque route:

The Applecross Pass, Wester Ross

Bealach na ba, also known as The Applecross Pass, was introduced to the masses by infamous motoring show *Top Gear*. Popular with those keen to tackle the windy hairpin bends of the road to Applecross Village, the route offers mesmerising and panoramic views to Skye and the Western Isles on a clear day.

Inverewe Gardens, Wester Ross

Thanks to the warmth of the Gulf Stream, Inverewe Gardens is a lush oasis of tropical plants brought to Scotland from as far afield as the Himalayas, Australia and India. Over 100 acres of woodland provides shelter to fabulous thriving international flora, and the recently opened Inverewe House offers an interactive twist for visitors who are keen to take in the garden's new museum.

Sandwood Bay, Sutherland

This two mile long beach has been described as the most beautiful and unspoilt in mainland Britain and is nestled between two rugged cliffs which offer protection from the North Atlantic. Legends tell of a mermaid who lived in the bay and lured seamen to the area, resulting in several ship wrecks. Further tales refer to a roofless house in the area haunted by the ghost of a drowned mariner.

Orkney, from Scrabster, Caithness

Taking in the archaeology-filled archipelago of Orkney is an easy trip to make for those touring the North Coast 500 route. From Scrabster, the 90 minute NorthLink Ferries' crossing to Orkney's historic market town of Stromness opens up access to some of the finest archaeological sites in Europe. WWI and WWII relics including sunken vessels and the stunning Italian Chapel add to the appeal, with the finest seafood and locally produced food and drink on menus across the islands.

Dunrobin Castle, Sutherland

With the appearance of a French chateaux and sharing the same designer as the Houses of Parliament, Dunrobin Castle has an enchanting fairytale elegance as visitors approach its gates. One of Britain's oldest continuously inhabited houses, the property dates from the early 1300s. With guides available, visitors can tour the French style gardens, a Garden Museum and lunch in the Tea Room before continuing their North Coast 500 journey.



MV Hamnavoe passing the Old Man of Hoy

Charles Tait's top tips

- Getting out of the car and walking a few hundred yards from the car park will mean you get to see a very different view of some of the route's most well-known landmarks
- There's no best time to visit – each season offers something different. For example May and June are the driest, July to September are the sunniest but late September to early June is usually Midge-free!
- Take it easy. The North Coast 500 is not a race so take your time, stay safe and enjoy it!

*With thanks to Charles Tait. Charles' book, *The North Coast 500 Guide Book*, is available online and at book shops across the UK.*

Catch a Glimpse of Scotland's Bottlenose Dolphins



Orkney and Shetland are known for their fascinating array of wildlife. From seaweed-eating sheep to otters, visitors flock to the Northern Isles to see natural wonders that can be caught in a setting unlike any other.

However, one of Scotland's most popular wildlife species can often be spotted before even stepping foot onto Orkney or Shetland. NorthLink Ferries passengers can catch a glimpse of the immense yet playful bottlenose dolphins as they leave Aberdeen and set sail for the Northern Isles.

Ian Hay, who is the Project Manager for the East Grampian Coastal Partnership, has been working closely with NorthLink Ferries for some time to ensure that passengers make the most of their trip and spot these iconic creatures. Here, he shared his tips for dolphin spotting en route to Orkney and Shetland with Northern Lights.

Aberdeen's dolphins

Leaving the quayside in Aberdeen is one of the most exciting opportunities when it comes to wildlife spotting on a trip to the Northern Isles. Not only does the beginning of the journey offer scenic views of Aberdeen Harbour and the mouth of the River Dee, but also a prime viewing point for seeing bottlenose dolphins.

This picturesque area is one of Scotland's most populated salmon rivers with tens of thousands of fish passing between the breakwaters to access the river beyond, and this hasn't gone unnoticed by preying dolphins.

Large males often arrive at the scene of travelling fish first. Well-built and powerful, the species has a range of senses far more advanced than humans, such as sonar that can pick out a shoal of fish at long distances.

Soon joined by the rest of the pod including females and calves, the adults work to round-up groups of salmon together. The sea's surface can often be calm and quiet, before an eruption of activity with leaps and backflips from the dolphins and fish leaping from the water.

When and where to spot

During the warmer spring and summer months it's not uncommon for up to 60 dolphins to be seen hunting around the harbour.

Whilst on board passengers should make the most of the ferry departing Aberdeen Harbour with prime

viewing opportunities often being around locations close to the harbour control tower. This is one of the best places to spot pods of dolphins, and their fins can often be seen breaking through the water.

Local residents

It's not unknown for dolphins to quarrel, leaving them with a range of scars which can often be seen on their tall dorsal fin. These markings are used by scientists to identify individual dolphins helping to keep the equivalent of a dolphin phonebook of almost all of Aberdeen's dolphins.

Bottlenose dolphins close to Aberdeen Harbour are one of the largest of their kind with a male reaching over four metres in length compared to the average three metre dolphin found elsewhere. These mammals have grown in size due to a strong diet of large fish as well as the cold conditions of the North Sea which result in excess blubber.

Carter is one of Aberdeen's most famous dolphins. He has been seen almost every year since 2000 and was a large adult then. Passengers can often spot this male far up the shipping lane in the main harbour basin.

NorthLink Ferries is currently offering families a wildlife spotting pack equipped with pop-up binoculars and a wildlife calendar helping younger passengers to make the most of their journey. Ask the on board crew for more information.



Leaving Aberdeen Harbour. Photo by Fiona Emslie



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