

Northern Lights

INSIDE

Holborn Head Lighthouse,
Scrabster

PLUS

Fetlar in Shetland

Highlights of Orkney's North Isles

Footdee, Aberdeen



Discover more at www.northlinkferries.co.uk

Operated by **serco**

Welcome

The summer of 2019, whilst not matching the weather of last year, has been good to us here at NorthLink Ferries. We are pleased that our recent changes on-board have given us an additional two pod lounges and of course we are very proud to have fitted out a first for ferry travel with dedicated 'Changing Places' facilities on both MV Hjalmland and MV Hrossey. Ferry travel should be for everyone and we are really pleased to offer these facilities on-board.

Our booking app continues to perform well, with over 500 bookings to date. Our website now accounts for over 44% of our passenger bookings, however our call centre team in Stromness, under Susan Bruce's leadership, is available to provide guidance, support and help at any stage of your booking journey.

In our last issue I described our advertising campaign pushing out into the central belt and I'm sure you may already have caught sight of our 2019 campaign material. This summer we embarked on a new venture, with Magnus going on tour, this time however in the guise of our new #MagnusOnTour specially commissioned trailer. We've loved seeing you at a number of events including our first visit to the Royal Highland Show in Edinburgh as well as Caithness, Turriff, Orkney and Shetland.

Magnus Dixon, our E-Marketing Manager, has pulled together a really informative and readable edition of Northern Lights once again, so whether visiting a broch in Caithness, bird spotting on Orkney and Shetland, or getting the inside line from Hugh Harrop on the best tips for orca spotting, I hope you enjoy Issue Nine, and remember if you missed a previous issue then turn to our website where our back copies are all available to browse.

On reading material, have you tried our link up to the Press Reader App? Simply download, look out for the coffee cup hot spot and enjoy, with our compliments a range of interest, news and feature publications to while away your journey.

Finally, we will shortly be taking delivery of nine new Terberg tugmasters, an investment by Transport Scotland of over £1million, ensuring we remain fit for purpose in delivering our freight obligations. We are now carrying almost 42,000 freight trailers on over 600 dedicated freight sailings in a full year, and safeguarding the economic activity of the Northern Isles.

Enjoy your travel with us.



Stuart Garrett
Managing Director
Serco NorthLink Ferries

Contact Stuart

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

Contents

8 birds to see in Orkney & Shetland	04
Holborn Head Lighthouse	06
Staff Profile – Connor McGarry	08
Hufsie Cake Recipe	09
The Scuttling of the German High Seas Fleet	10
Children's Activity Page	12
The Highlights of Orkney's North Isles	14
Orca Watching in Shetland with Hugh Harrop	16
Three Brochs to Visit in Caithness	18
A Wander through Footdee	20
Island in Focus: Fetler, Shetland	22

NorthLink Ferries

Stromness Ferry Terminal,
Ferry Road, Stromness,
Orkney, Scotland, KW16 3BH

Email: info@northlinkferries.co.uk
Web: www.northlinkferries.co.uk



#MagnusOnTour

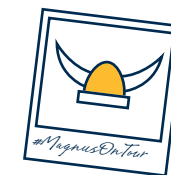


Congratulations to our latest #MagnusOnTour winner, Debra Mallett, who took a fantastic picture while visiting the impressive Angel of the North near Newcastle during the school holidays.

Debra now has two return tickets, including a car and cabin, to Orkney or Shetland for use on any of our passenger vessels.

Take a look at our back cover to see the other brilliant #MagnusOnTour entries we received.

For your chance to win a trip for two



To win return tickets including a car and cabin to or from Orkney or Shetland for two adults, simply post a picture of yourself in an awe-inspiring location with the iconic NorthLink Ferries 'Magnus' logo on any of our social media channels.

Use the hashtag **#MagnusOnTour** to be in with a chance of winning. Alternatively, you can send your photo to webmaster@northlinkferries.co.uk.

Spot the next winning picture in Issue 10 of Northern Lights.

8 birds to see in Orkney & Shetland

Very often the only noises you hear in Orkney and Shetland are those of the wind and waves. However, it's also hard to imagine the soundscape of the islands without bird calls.

The wild landscapes of the islands and the rich seas surrounding them are ideally suited for a large variety of birds. This guide to the birds of Orkney and Shetland should hopefully point you in the right direction on where to spot them.

Orkney

Curlew (*Whaup*)

The Curlew's long curved beaks make them a recognisable sight on the islands and they are usually seen on moorlands and coasts. Female Curlews tend to have longer bills than their male counterparts but both produce a beautifully bubbling song which is one of the most lovely sounds to wake up to in the morning.



Fulmar (*Mallimack*)

Routinely spotted nesting on cliffs and in ruined buildings, Fulmars are known for rearing one large fluffy chick and for having the (unpleasant) skill of vomiting fishy paste at those who get too near. Their territorial nature makes them a particular hazard for those who climb the Old Man of Hoy.



Great Skua (*Bonxie*)

Great Skuas are fierce brown birds which emit a recognisable "tuk tuk tuk" call. They will dive bomb anyone who goes near their nest. They're also dastardly in nature as they make a habit of stealing fish caught by other birds. Bonxies can be found in remote coastal and moorland areas from April to September. Hoy is home to 12% of the world's population.



Hen Harrier (*Gos hawk*)

A striking bird of prey that feasts on voles and small animals from above, Hen Harriers are a common sight above the heather moorlands of Orkney such as Cottascarth. The females are brown and the males grey, and during the spring you might even witness a spectacular aerial courtship display called "sky-dancing".



Oystercatcher (*Skeldro*)

Spring has begun in Orkney when the Oystercatchers arrive. These birds are black and white with long red legs, red eyes and a red bill. They nest in fields, loch shores, on beaches and on roadside verges, causing occasional frights for drivers. Oystercatchers also have a noisy pipping call which makes them quite distinctive.



Red-throated Diver (*Rain Goose/Loon*)

These lovely birds are grey with an elegant long neck, the front of which is red. You'll see them in Orkney in upland lochs during the summer and on the sea during autumn, winter, and spring. They like small lochs, like Bugar hill – where there is an excellent hide – and Mill Loch in Eday, because they don't need a lot of space to take off.



Short-eared Owl (*Cattie-face*)

The times you will be most likely to see a Short-eared Owl in Orkney are June and July. This is the time when their young are at their most demanding, and the parents will hunt during the daylight for Orkney voles and rabbits. The Cattie-face is light brown and can be seen gliding over moorlands and rough grasslands or perched on fence posts.



White-tailed Sea Eagles

White-tailed Sea Eagles are the largest bird of prey in the UK, with a wingspan



over 2m, and a breeding pair have returned to the Dwarfie Hamars in Hoy. They eat fish, rabbits and birds (often fulmars). Lambs are also sometimes taken as carrion.

Shetland

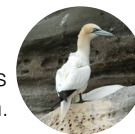
Arctic Tern (*Tirrick*)

With its shape and long tail streamers, the black-capped Arctic Tern is called a sea swallow in other places. However, in Shetland and Orkney it's named after its shrill, grating call, usually heard when it is defending its nest. Arctic Terns can be found near the coast from May to August. You might even spot one in Lerwick Harbour.



Gannet (*Solan gös*)

Gannets are known for their skilled fishing techniques; they fold their wings and shoot into the water like a harpoon. They have distinctive sharp beaks and bright blue eyes and can be found on cliff edges in spring, summer and autumn. The Noss National Nature Reserve – where there's a 23,000-strong colony – is the best place in Shetland to find the Gannet.



Red-necked Phalarope (*Mires duke*)

The Red-necked Phalarope is very rare and the Shetland island of Fetlar is home to 90% of the UK's breeding population. They like swimming in shallow open pools to stir up sediment and food with their feet. The male takes the egg incubation duties and in the winter, they live in the sea off the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula.



Great Northern Diver (*Immer Gös*)

The Great Northern Diver is a big bird and a bit of a loner, with a uniquely shaped black head, amazing neck pattern and large bill. It spends its



time in summer in Iceland, Greenland and Canada and spends the winter (September to June) in the Shetland and Orkney islands, where you can find them close to shore and in sheltered voes.

Puffin (*Tammy Norrie*)

This comical and clumsy bird lives in grassy cliffside burrows and is instantly recognisable with its colourful beak. This is not always the case though; in winter the puffin's plumage turns heavier and its bill loses its colour. Head to Sumburgh Head from May to July. Puffins are not very timid around humans; listen out for their strange mooing calls!



Razorbill (*Sea Craa*)

The cool black Razorbill has an instantly recognisable thick, blunt, chiselled bill and it can be found on rocky cliffs such as those at Sumburgh Head and Hermaness, in spring, summer and autumn. It's a seabird that likes a bit of privacy; seeking cavities in the cliff face to nest in.



Shag (*Scarf*)

Shags are often seen on cliff edges and coastlines all year, stuck in one particular pose! They like to stretch out their wings and dry them in the sun! They are green and black with a yellow patch on their bills.



Storm Petrels (*Alamootie*)

These tiny dark birds nest on stony beaches and in rabbit burrows. To avoid predators they tend to spend the day out at sea and return at night. They can be found in Shetland during spring, summer and autumn. 300-400 breeding pairs of Storm Petrels nest within the walls of Mousa Broch – it's worth trying an evening visit to Mousa to see them returning from the sea!





Holborn Head Lighthouse

A familiar site to anyone travelling by ferry across the Pentland Firth is Holborn Head Lighthouse which sits above the Scrabster pier.

For anyone curious to take a closer look, there's a fine walk to Holborn Head across muddy terrain from the Principal Lighthouse Keeper's cottage. The Old Red Sandstone headland is quite exposed, and you'll see birds, a war memorial cairn, dramatic cliffs, seawacks and ramparts.

The building itself is of the uncommon 'school house' design. This meant the tower was built on top of the two residential apartments. This is unusual because most Scottish lighthouses are separate from the Lighthouse Keeper's house.

The total building height is 23m, with a tower which is octagonal just below a circular walkway. The lantern above is of the small triangular-paned type, with a domed top.

Curiously, its former operators and custodians the Northern Lighthouse Board record the name as being Holburn Head; while Historic Environment

Scotland has it listed as Holborn Head, and also gives Holbourn Head and Scrabster Roadstead as alternative names.

The name Holborn is possibly Norse in origin, meaning hillfort, but it is more likely that the ramparts there are the remains of religious buildings.

The building has been listed as a Grade B property since 1984. It was built as part of the major programme of 1854-78 by engineers David and Thomas Stevenson, of the famous Stevenson lighthouse family (which included Thomas' son Robert Louis, who chose not to continue with their traditional profession!)

Permission to build the lighthouse at Holborn Head was granted by the Board of Trade in 1859, with work only beginning two years later in 1861. As well as the Stevenson brothers, Mr James Scott was the appointed inspector and Mr P Stewart from Peterhead was the building contractor.

Construction was completed by the following year in 1862 at a reported cost of £3,900, although it's said the Board of Trade found this unduly expensive and raised queries over every item in the schedule of works.

It was originally lighted on Monday 1 September 1862, then electrified in 1976 before being automated in 1988. However, it was permanently withdrawn from service in 2003 after its use was considered no longer necessary.

The lighthouse had a range of 21 miles (33 km), showing every 10 seconds, with a flashing white light in the direction of the Pentland Firth and a red light towards Scrabster and Thurso.



The former fog signal house can still be seen, bordering the lighthouse.

The light was still very much in use when it was bombed – unsuccessfully – by German aircraft in the Second World War. Today's lighthouse has a much more peaceful existence as a private home. Its prominent location affords a magnificent view overlooking Scrabster Harbour, along the coast and across the Firth to Orkney, not to mention a unique perspective on the travels of our very own MV Hamnavoe.



Meet Connor, our 2nd Officer



Originally from Glasgow, Connor McGarry joined NorthLink Ferries as a freshly qualified Cadet at the age of just 20 years old. Today, he is Second Officer on board MV Hjaltland and here he shares his experiences of working at sea.

Starting a career at sea

I was first introduced to the idea of a career at sea by a neighbour who worked for a shipping company. Their life sounded so interesting and the timing coincided with the completion of my fifth year exams at school, providing the perfect opportunity to get my foot on the career ladder. I left school and went into a cadetship – I haven't looked back since.

Upon completing my cadetship, which took me on travels around the world, I was fortunate in finding employment at NorthLink Ferries. Since joining the company in 2011, I have worked on all three passenger ferries and I'm now Second Officer on board MV Hjaltland.

In 2018 I successfully attained Chief Officer Certification and I am now due to sit a Master Mariner exam in October this year. I hope this will allow me to progress my career at sea further.

A very varied job

My role is extremely varied so it's often hard to summarise what my job involves. My responsibilities can include everything from the loading and discharging of cars and freight to navigational watch keeping. I am also responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the ship's navigational equipment and publications and inspection of lifesaving and firefighting equipment.

The variation of everyday tasks is what I love most about my job. No day is ever the same and that is exciting to me. I also love having a glimpse of sea life such as whales and dolphins which we often spot on our travels. Killer whales are the most impressive and always bring much excitement to passengers and crew alike.

Taking some time out

When I'm not at work I enjoy spending as much time as possible catching up with family and friends. Weather permitting, we love to get outdoors either paddle boarding or wild swimming in one of Scotland's many lochs. There's nothing quite like it.

I also try to make time for trips abroad to discover, and rediscover, new parts of the world. My favourite destinations are in Greece and Spain with Croatia next on my travel list.

Hufsie Cake

A favourite amongst Shetlanders, hufsie cake is a simple recipe and one perfect for the summer months, enjoyed alongside a cup of tea in the sunshine.

Here, Rachel A Davies – a blogger and photographer at Vaga Bond Baker – shares her guide to baking your own hufsie cake at home.

After devouring a slice of hufsie cake during the first week of a month long summer adventure to Shetland, I looked for it at every cafe, Sunday tea and cake stall throughout the rest of the trip. This light spiced fruit cake is usually baked as a tea loaf and is delicious sliced and buttered.

Hufsie appears on the treat-laden tables of Shetland's wonderful Sunday teas. Look out for signs advertising the events in village halls across the islands over the summer months – they are great community get-togethers where you can feast on local home-baking whilst getting to know some lovely new people.

Eager to bake this cake myself, I asked some islanders and discovered that hufsie cake originates from the Shetland island of Whalsay. Generously, I was given a number of different recipes, including a chocolate one, and the following recipe is a culmination of those. The cake can be made with either white sugar or light brown sugar, the latter of which gives a darker loaf.

Ingredients

- 200g dried fruit
- 100g unsalted butter
- 150g granulated sugar or light muscovado sugar
- 200ml water
- 2 tsp mixed spice
- Two free range eggs, beaten
- 225g plain flour
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 1/2 tsp bicarbonate of soda



1. Preheat the oven to 160°C and line a large loaf tin with parchment paper.
2. Place the dried fruit, butter, sugar, water and mixed spice into a large pan and gently bring to the boil, stirring occasionally. Simmer on a medium heat for around 10 to 12 minutes until the mixture turns syrupy and coats the back of a spoon. Try not to rush this step.
3. Remove from the heat and allow to cool – the mixture will thicken further on cooling.
4. Add the beaten eggs to the cooled batter and mix well.
5. In a separate bowl, combine the flour with the baking powder and bicarbonate of soda. Sift into the batter and fold in without over beating.
6. Transfer the mixture to the lined loaf tin and bake for around 45 minutes until a cake tester comes out clean.
7. Leave to cool in the tin before slicing and serving with plenty of butter.

Words and photography by Rachel Davis
www.vagabondbaker.com



100 years ago, the German navy did the unthinkable: it deliberately sank 52 of its own ships in one day.

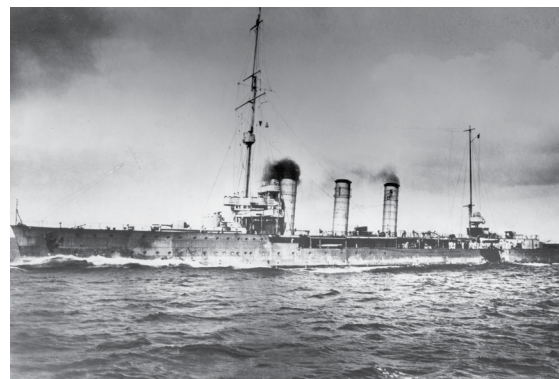
The scuttling of the German High Seas Fleet at Scapa Flow on 21 June 1919 was a deliberate act of sabotage carried out on the orders of Admiral Ludwig von Reuter, who feared that the fleet would fall into the hands of the victorious Allied powers of the First World War.

After the fighting of WW1 ended in late-1918, the entire German fleet was "interned" by the Allied forces and eventually moved to the sheltered natural harbour of Scapa Flow. There were 70 ships in total, including nine formidable battleships, 49 destroyers and five battlecruisers and each was held at Scapa Flow while their fate was decided in Versailles.

Until a decision was reached, German sailors were kept on board their ships, not knowing if the vessels would be broken down for parts, or shared amongst the victorious navies they so furiously fought during the war.

The ships were never surrendered and remained the property of the German government during their stay in Orkney but commanders weren't kept up-to-date with the latest news from France. Instead, they relied on old newspapers with outdated updates from the peace conference.

When the original deadline for the peace talks approached on 21 June, with no update, Admiral von Reuter assumed they had failed and the Royal Navy was preparing to seize the fleet. Unbeknown to the Admiral, the deadline for talks had been extended. However, it was too late.



A man of duty and honour, the Admiral vowed to his men that he would not allow the fleet be boarded and sent letters to all his commanders with news of his plan and secret instructions. At around 11:20am on 21 June 1919, the Admiral transmitted the code "To all Commanding Officers ... Paragraph Eleven of to-day's date" from his flagship Emden.

One by one, from north to south, the ships that were spread across Scapa Flow received the message. Below decks, sailors started opening seacocks – valves that allow water in – and smashed pipes.

It wasn't immediately clear what was happening but after a couple of hours, it became obvious that the Germans had deliberately sunk their ships.

As the Germans escaped their sinking ships in small boats, a small force of Royal Navy sailors struggled to work out what to do. Most of the Royal Navy in the area had taken advantage of the good weather and sailed out for training – something Von Reuter used to his advantage.

Unfortunately, in the confusion, a boat of unarmed Germans didn't fly the white flag of surrender and was fired upon by the British. This disastrous mistake was witnessed by a group of schoolchildren from Stromness who were on a trip to see the German fleet. As a result of the actions on that day, it is believed that nine Germans died. They were the last to fall during WW1.

By the evening of that day, almost the entire fleet had disappeared beneath the waves, with the mammoth Hindenburg battlecruiser the last to sink. Royal Navy sailors were successful in beaching some of the sinking ships but the vast majority lay on the seabed.

Some of the ships were so large and the water so shallow that their funnels and upper works were

visible above the surface. It was decided that those that had sunk were to be left where they lay. The aftermath of WW1 had seen an abundance of scrap metal and plenty of other warships were being broken up.

Despite the Admiral's best efforts, the ships that were saved were eventually dispersed to the allied navies and it wasn't until complaints from locals that salvage works really got underway in the 1920s and 30s.

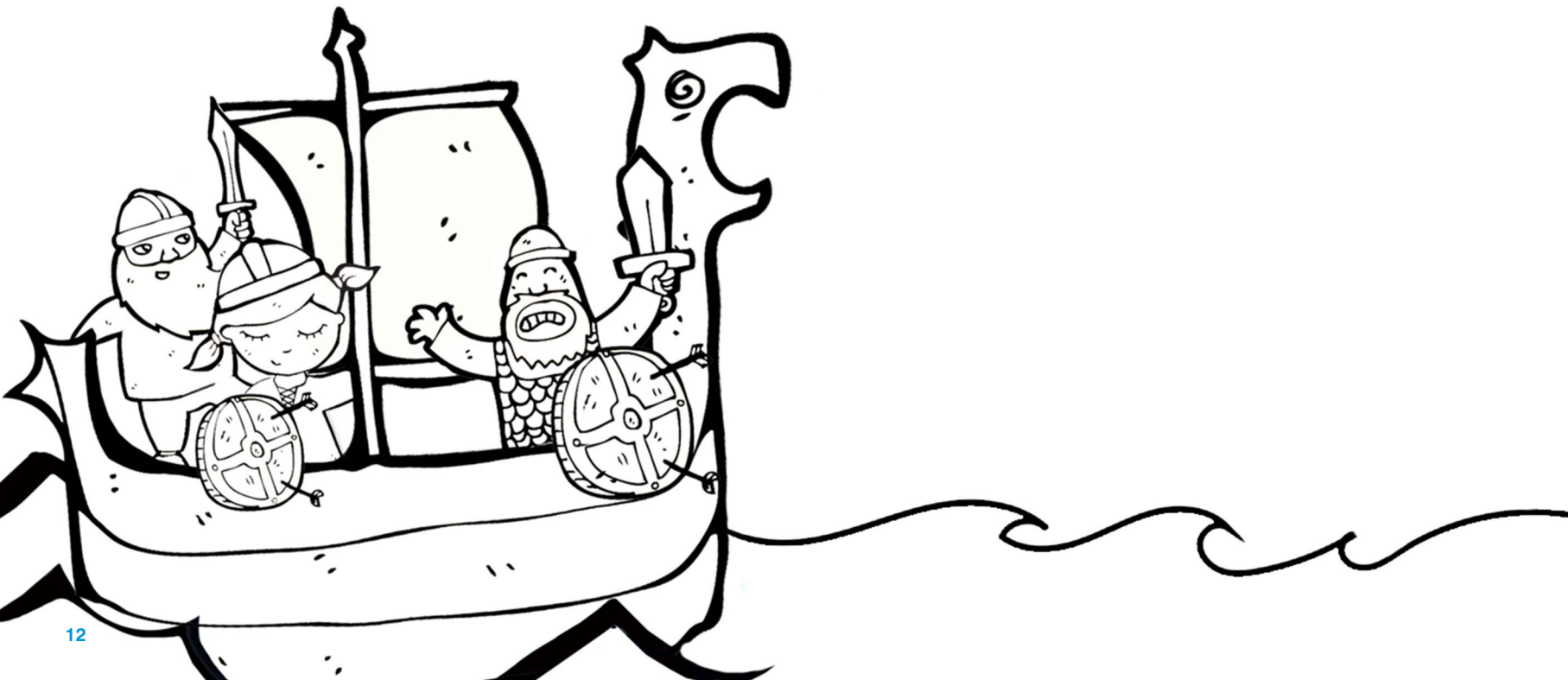
At the time, the British considered the scuttling an act of aggression but in Germany it restored a sense of pride during a period of national humiliation.

Seven wrecks are all that remain at the bottom of Scapa Flow. They are now classed as scheduled monuments with divers needing a permit to explore these unique memorials to the one of the world's worst conflicts.



The Vikklings have made a discovery!

What would your island paradise look like? Make sure you hand in your artwork to NorthLink staff and we'll display it on board and on our social media channels. Happy drawing!



The Highlights of Orkney's North Isles



Exploring Orkney's North Isles is an experience unlike any other. Each island is a treasure trove of historical, cultural and natural finds.

A journey to any island will prove to be rewarding but we've selected several highlights that definitely can't afford to be missed.

The Stone of Setter, Eday

This massive Neolithic standing stone is the tallest in Orkney.

Its atmospheric position, amongst a heathery moorland surrounded by chambered cairns, adds to the mystery of the landmark and makes it an unmistakable focal point.



At 4.5m tall, the Stone of Setter dwarfs those at the Ring of Brodgar and centuries of weathering means that it has been eroded from the top, giving it a distinctive, lichen-covered profile.

Top off your visit to Eday with a walk to Mill Loch, Vinqoy Chambered Cairn, the Red Head and the historic Carrick House.

St Magnus Church, Egilsay

This distinctive landmark, with its tall round tower, can be seen from almost everywhere on the surrounding islands.



The church is dedicated to St Magnus and its 20m tall tower served as a beacon for pilgrims for generations.

In the years since it was built, the church now misses its flagstone roof and the tower is 5m shorter due to a missing conical roof.

A visit here is a must, as is the cenotaph in Egilsay which marks the spot where St Magnus was martyred.

The Old Beacon, North Ronaldsay

When visiting Orkney's most northerly isle, you'll experience a sense of isolated tranquillity as many of its traditions and old ways have remained.

The island is surrounded by dangerous skerries (rocks) and is only 23m above the sea level at its highest point. It was once considered too dangerous for ships and many failed to see the low-lying island until it was too late.

The Old Beacon and light keeper's dwellings were constructed in 1789, and it was the first lighthouse in Orkney.

It is quite different to other lighthouses; the rough local undressed stonework and the low tower (at 21m) look almost medieval.

When the light was extinguished in 1809, after Start Point lighthouse was built on nearby Sanday, its beacon was replaced by a large round stone ball, which gives Old Beacon a chesspiece-like appearance.



The Knap of Howar, Papa Westray

Not only is Papa Westray filled with sprawling beaches and seabird cliffs, it also has the oldest surviving houses in Northern Europe at its western shore.



For over 500 years, the Knap of Howar was home to Neolithic farmers and was eventually covered in sand as the once-open grassland between Westray and Papa Westray gave away to open sea.

Further erosion in the 1930s uncovered the two oblong houses and archaeologists discovered intact doorways, hallways and walls as high as 1.6m.

Knowe of Yarso Chambered Tomb, Rousay

This tomb contains four stalled compartments, and is where Bronze Age pottery was found along with the remains of at least 29 people and many animals. The Knowe of Yarso sits on a ridge 100m above sea level with the most spectacular view over Eynhallow Sound and the Mainland of Orkney, so it's well worth a visit.



Tresness beach, Sanday

Sanday is the largest of the North Isles and it has a low lying coastline of sandy beaches and bays. There's probably no place that better sums up the island than the spectacular stretch of sand found at Tresness.



Photographers will enjoy visiting the beach but should prepare themselves for aggressive arctic terns. The sand dunes at Tresness are so impressive we'd recommend taking a sledge! Other fantastic beaches on Sanday include Whitemill Bay, Lopness and Backaskaill Beach, and a visit to Start Point Lighthouse and Quoyness Chambered Cairn is also recommended.

Balfour Castle, Shapinsay

Shapinsay is one of the easiest islands to reach as the ferry from Kirkwall takes less than 30 minutes. It's a lovely island with the impressive Balfour Castle dominating the north. The original House of Sound was built in 1674 and Colonel David Balfour bought the Sound estate in 1784. Descendants of



the family went onto buy the rest of the island and eventually enlarge and remodel the house to its current form. The Balfours also brought about a series of agricultural improvements on Shapinsay and founded Balfour Village.

The Vat of Kirbister, Stronsay

A highlight of a visit to Stronsay is a trip to the Vat of Kirbister. This is a collapsed sea cave which has formed the best natural arch and gloop (ravine) in Orkney. The Vat of Kirbister is approximately 20m high with an 11m span and a walk to it between the headlands of Odness and Lamb Head is particularly recommended.



The Castle O' Burrian, Westray

Westray is often referred to as the 'Queen O The Isles' as there is so much to see. The Castle O' Burrian is a highlight; it is actually a sea stack in the south of the island. This grassy lump of rock (and the surrounding cliffs) is known as the best place in Orkney to see puffins. As many as 200 to 300 birds nest here between May and July and the best time to visit to see them is in the afternoon and evening.



Cubbie Roo's Castle, Wyre

Perched on top of a small hillock on the tiny island of Wyre, the foundations that remain of this thick walled square fortress leave you with the impression that this was an impressive building that would've made any attacker think twice.



It was one of Scotland's oldest stone castles, built around 1145 AD by Kolbein Hruga. Kolbein was a Norse chieftain and a powerful warrior from the Orkneyinga Saga. This stronghold has an 8m square stone tower with 2m thick walls, surrounded by a wall and ditch. Quite how tall the tower was in the Castle's heyday is unclear, but when visiting you'll notice there are no entrances. This is because the entrance was previously on the first floor, which no longer survives.

Orca watching in Shetland with Hugh Harrop



If you have ever researched the wildlife of Shetland you will certainly have encountered pictures taken by Hugh Harrop. Hugh set up Shetland Wildlife in 1993 as a wildlife and photography holiday business offering a bespoke range of itineraries for individuals and groups. Over the years Hugh and his team have given his customers some unforgettable experiences with Shetland's wildlife and now, via social media, Hugh's spectacular pictures and footage of orca are available for all to see.

Hugh very kindly answered our questions about Shetland Wildlife and orca in Shetland.

Q. Can you tell us a bit about yourself? When did you first become interested in the wildlife of Shetland?

A. I'm originally from South Wales and moved to Shetland in 1991 after visiting several times. I initially took up a position at the Fair Isle Bird Observatory. Wildlife has been a passion of mine since a young age and my earliest memories are of watching birds when I was 6 or 7.

Q. What made you decide to set up Shetland Wildlife?

A. Part of my work in Alaska and British Columbia in the 1990s was acting as an eco-tourism consultant to tour businesses overseas, so it seemed logical to go ahead and set up something similar in Shetland.

We were running small scale trips in between my work overseas, but in 1999 we pretty much formed the company as it stands today – and have never looked back.

Q. What are your favourite things about Shetland?

A. First and foremost, my favourite thing about Shetland is the people. Like anywhere in the world, it's the people that make the place.

The beauty of the natural landscape speaks for itself; it's a really special place to be. Whatever the weather, there's always something beautiful about Shetland.

Q. This year looks to have been another incredible year for orca sightings around the shores of Shetland. Are we seeing more orca in Shetland or has our awareness of them being there just increased?

A. It's a bit of both really. We are definitely finding more animals but we are finding more animals as result of people being more aware of them. The reason why they're more aware of them is down to social media and the ability to communicate a good deal quicker than we could 20 or 30 years ago.



There are definitely more orca; we are seeing new animals and the increased number of reported sightings means we are finding new individuals. Typically we have two Northern Isles community pods between Shetland, Orkney and Caithness and then we also have the influence of three or four Icelandic pods as well, which are creeping into our local waters. Year-on-year we would typically expect to see anything between 5 and 6 distinct pods of orcas.

Q. How do you tell orca apart?

A. Like human fingerprints, all orca are unique with regards to their fin shape, size, and the markings – the little notches or indents – on their fin and on the grey dorsal 'saddles'.

Photo identification was first used in Canada to catalogue orca and it's still used today. It's a very benign way of researching these animals but it helps us to work out which animals we are seeing each year.

As well as keeping track of populations it also helps us to work out if there is any movement of animals between each pod, if there are new members coming into the pod if we are finding animals that we haven't seen for three or four years, and if calves are being born.

Q. Do you think there's anything particular that draws the orca to Shetland?

A. The semi-resident populations of orca in Shetland are predominantly seal and marine mammal hunters and that's why they are here. They hunt near to the shore and we regularly photograph or witness this behaviour with drones. Orca will take harbour and grey seals, harbour porpoise and also fish.

Q. Do you have any tips for anyone hoping to visit Shetland to see orca?

A. Well, first of all, join the Facebook group that we run – Shetland Orca Sightings – to get the latest updates.

The best time to visit to see orca is between mid-April to mid-September. Not only is the weather better but the seas tend to be calmer.

A sighting is never guaranteed so if you don't see them on your first visit, come back another time.

Q. What is your best experience of an orca sighting in Shetland?

A. I'd always say that the best experience I have had of an orca sighting in Shetland is the one I last had! There are so many threats to the marine environment you don't know what's going to happen from one day to the next. I've had many amazing encounters



with orcas and have seen pretty much everything an orca can do, but an encounter with these incredible animals never ceases to amaze me.

Q. Many people are very eco-conscious these days – how do you ensure minimal disruption to wildlife balanced with spectacular experiences?

A. Nobody is going to disturb orca if they are watching them from the land. Orkney, Shetland and the north coast of Caithness are fantastic platforms where you can easily watch orca from a cliff or pier.

Scottish Natural Heritage has produced a Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code. It offers great advice on how to enjoy marine wildlife responsibly and it's worth a read.

Q. What kind of tours do Shetland wildlife offer?

A. We run three- and seven-day trips throughout the summer season – all inclusive of accommodation, meals etc. and they concentrate on showing people the very best wildlife and scenery that we have in Shetland – with the very best guides.

Q. What's the nicest feedback you've heard from one of your customers about your tours?

A. We are sometimes overwhelmed by the positive feedback we receive and to say goodbye to folk with happy, smiling faces or read a lovely TripAdvisor review is very special. But the best compliment is when we see that happy smiling face joining us for another trip.

However, a business like Shetland Wildlife could not do what we do without inbound operators like NorthLink Ferries which not only give our business – but our customers – really good service. Transport providers on the islands provide the means for customers to experience what Orkney and Shetland have to offer.

To find out more about Shetland Wildlife and to book a tour, please visit www.shetlandwildlife.co.uk

Three Brochs to Visit in Caithness



Dunbeath

Brochs are huge round thick-walled towers that were built in the Iron Age, 2,000 years ago. Caithness is home to more than anywhere else in Scotland, with around 200 of these impressive buildings, which are thought to have been status symbols at the time.

The Caithness broch project is a charity dedicated to promoting brochs and the amazing archaeological landscape of Caithness. As well as organising community excavations, outreach programs at schools and conservation packages, their ultimate aim is to build a replica broch! This would serve as a dry stone dyking workshop and a new major tourist attraction in Caithness.

Kenneth McElroy is a director of Caithness Broch Project and we asked him about some of the great brochs to visit in the area.



Dunbeath

Nybster

This is located on the east coast of Caithness, signposted off the A99 at Nybster, half way between Wick and John O' Groats. It is easy to reach and is maybe the premier broch attraction in Caithness. There is a lovely cliffside walk to it, where it stands dramatically out on a promontory, with a nice view out to sea.

The broch has an internal diameter of 7m and a wall thickness of roughly 4m! It was in use during the Iron Age, and possibly afterwards. There are many interlinked outbuildings surrounding it which were built before and after the broch. Some of the outbuildings have been lost to coastal erosion. These days the broch walls left are only 1.5m high.

Nearby there's the Caithness Broch Centre, and the stone tools, metal objects and pottery found at Nybster are there. You can also learn about the several excavations of Nybster Broch through the years at the Caithness Broch Centre. During the late 19th century there was an excavation by Sir Frances Tress Barry and this is one of the most interesting aspects of this broch.

At Nybster broch you will find a very bizarre looking monument called Mervyn's Tower. This is possibly a dedication to Tress Barry's nephew Mervyn. This tells you quite a lot about Tress Barry, who took stones excavated from the broch and made his own monument out of it. This would be frowned upon today.

Nybster is a really great place to not only learn about brochs but also about the local characters and the history of archaeology in the area. I think that makes Nybster one of the top brochs to visit in the area.

Dunbeath

In the south of Caithness, Dunbeath broch is one of the best surviving examples of a broch in the area. Compared to Nybster, Dunbeath is much more of a broch in the traditional sense. Surrounded by trees and a wall, it is over 3m high on the west side. The entrance has a guard cell and there is a corbelled cell in the opposite wall. The broch also has a scarcement ledge; which is evidence of another floor.

It is hidden within the Dunbeath Strath (river valley), where there is a lovely walk to it which is part of the Dunbeath Strath Heritage Trail. This starts at the car park beside the Meal Mill and follows the river upstream, passing many interesting sites including prehistoric cairns, a drovers inn, standing stones and fantastic geology. Dunbeath broch is a quarter of a mile from the car park but you could easily go on a four to six-mile hike here.

The Strath is a lovely river and in summer it is absolutely gorgeous, with lots of gorse and flowers in bloom. There are excellent views over the strath from the broch. It's amazing that there is so much to see in terms of animals, and examples of prehistoric settlements within the space of a few miles.

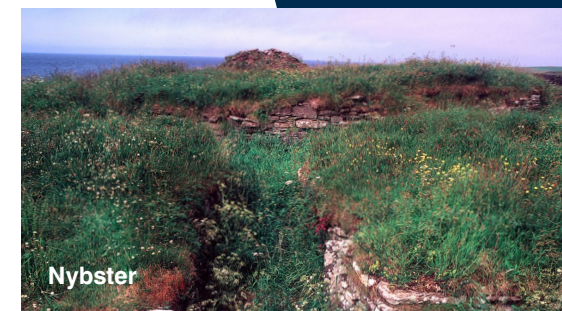
Make sure you also visit the fantastic Dunbeath Heritage Centre, especially if it is too wet to explore the strath!

South Yarrows

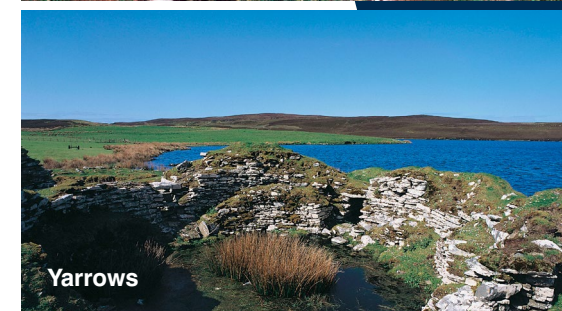
Part of the Yarrows archaeological trail (signposted off the A99 in Thrumster), the Broch of South Yarrows is a really nice example. It is very picturesque, but as it is situated on the banks of the Loch of Yarrows, it is quite often waterlogged. Some of the walls in the broch are over 2m high, and the stairs and the passages within it are still visible. The entrance to the broch has a guard cell and lintel in place, and a carved stone ball was discovered nearby.

The Yarrows archaeological trail is one of the gems of the North Highlands in Scotland because it's absolutely littered with 3,000 years of history. Along the trail, there are three long and two round neolithic chambered cairns, several Bronze Age homes, standing stones, and possibly a crannog. A crannog is an artificial island, which had been formed in prehistoric or medieval times, by dumping timber, earth and stones into a loch, wetland or estuary.

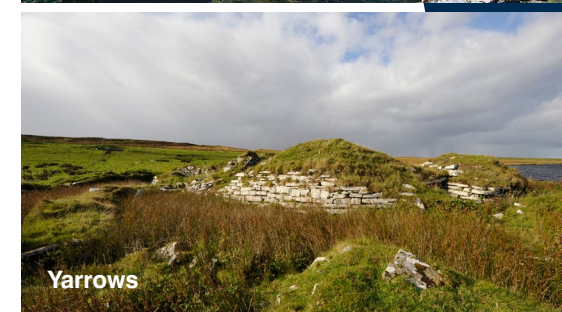
It's a really fantastic place to visit and often you'll be the only person there. This gives you a real sense of what the landscape might have been like 3,000 years ago.



Nybster



Yarrows



Yarrows



Dunbeath



Dunbeath



If you are planning a trip to Aberdeen, then it is worth taking a stroll through Footdee, which is a hidden gem of the Granite City.

Footdee, or Fittie as it is pronounced locally, is a small fishing village at the mouth of the harbour, tucked away just off the Beach Esplanade, and can be spotted from NorthLink's ships MV Hjaltland and MV Hrossey on the journey in and out of Aberdeen.

You could be forgiven for thinking the name of the village comes from its location at the 'foot of the Dee'. However, the name is actually derived from St Fittick, the patron saint of gardeners, who is believed to have landed at nearby Nigg Bay in the 7th century.

The narrow cobbled streets are surrounded on every side by small houses with charming gardens huddled in squares, all with their backs to the sea to protect them from the wild storms that can roar along the coastline.

The village dates back to medieval times and at the time would have been quite distinct from the rest of the city. The tight group of houses and jetties built up around St Clement's Church (which was founded in 1498) on the north side of the River Dee estuary. On the other side of the River Dee estuary, there was a similar fishing village – Old Torry.

In 1809, the Superintendent of the Town's Public Works was a John Smith who went on to become one of the city's key architects. He laid out a development to re-house Aberdeen's local fishing community in the area. Initially, 28 single-storey thatched houses were built and laid out in uniform rows, and this was originally called 'Fish Town'. 'Footdee' referred to the wider area from St. Clement's Church to 'Fish Town', but this soon



became the name to refer to all the houses, with 'Fish Town' becoming forgotten.

Rumour has it that the houses would have had two storeys but the fishermen refused to live upstairs for superstitious reasons and because it would have been inconvenient for them to drag their long lines and baskets up stairs. They also refused to have anything other than an earthen floor in their houses, again due to superstition and keeping a wooden floor clean would have been impossible for them.

Extra houses were added in 1837 and in 1855. William Smith (who was the son of John and the architect of Balmoral Castle) added entrances to Footdee and additional storeys to some of the buildings in the 1870s. This eased the overcrowding caused by an influx of fishing families from other less prosperous areas. Footdee now has over 80 homes.

Many of the properties at Footdee look similar because they were all built to the same dimensions. However in 1880, when the Town Council started selling the dwellings to their occupiers, some individual touches began to be made.

Among these were modifications made to 19th century outhouses known as 'tarry sheds', which were added to the squares opposite each dwelling in Footdee. These were originally created using driftwood and other materials, but have since been rebuilt in a number of different ways.

Bright colours and imaginative decorations are all on display, and you'll spot maritime objects including buoys, nets, life rings, model boats, fishermen and glass fishing weights decorating the facings of sheds and the front of the houses here.

Footdee is now a Conservation Area where properties are all individually listed as being good examples of traditional early 19th century, North-east of Scotland fisher cottages. Homes here are now among the most sought after in the city.

If you are in Aberdeen then it is well worth taking some time to explore off the beaten track. But, as there are surprises around every corner, be sure to bring your camera.



Island in Focus: Fetlar, Shetland



The island of Fetlar makes up one of Shetland's three North Isles, neighbouring Yell and Unst. With a landscape just seven miles in width, which is carpeted in wild flowers during the summer months, this picturesque island is known as 'The Garden of Shetland'.

A haven for wildlife, this destination can be reached by taking a ferry from the Shetland mainland to Yell and then a second sailing from Gutcher to see the wealth of birds and wildlife that call the idyllic island their home.

The Clearances

Despite being the fourth largest of the 100 Shetland Islands, Fetlar has one of the lowest populations. Around 60 people live on this island, mainly due to clearances which took place during the 19th Century.

Back in the first half of the 1800s almost 1,000 people lived on Fetlar, however as the 19th century progressed, a Laird made the decision to move people off the island and make room for profitable livestock: sheep.

Hundreds of people were evicted from their homes and crofts, a place that they solely relied on for food and income, leading to a steep decline of the island population and eventually vast areas became uninhabited.



Garden of Shetland

The man-made wilderness of Fetlar boasts the perfect habitat for ground nesting birds. This grassland is rich in wildflowers which spring into bloom from April until August. Rare species such as frog orchid, creeping willow, water aven, knotted pearlwort and lesser twayblade can all be spotted covering the island during these warmer months.

In summer, the moorland, lochs and hills of Fetlar come alive with birds. The UK's first and only breeding pair of snowy owls made Fetlar their home from 1967 until 1975. In recent times, Fetlar

has become home to 90% of the UK's breeding population of Red Necked Phalarope. These are beautiful little waders who predominantly breed in the Arctic. However a small number fly to the Loch of Funzie on Fetlar to feed, bathe and begin their courtship in June and July.

Red Necked Phalarope are quite unusual in that it is the male birds that incubates the eggs and rears the chicks.

Red Necked Phalarope are quite tame, and it is possible to get up close for a photo from the roadside shore or from the nearby RSPB hide at the Mires of Funzie.

Recognising Fetlar's importance as a bird sanctuary, a large part of the island is now a RSPB reserve, with access restricted from 1st May – 11th August to protect breeding birds. It is however possible to see birds elsewhere on the island during these months. Fetlar is also an excellent place to see otters.

Additional Highlights

Despite being a small mainly uninhabited island, there is plenty to see and do on Fetlar. Some of our suggestions include:

- **Funzie Girt** – is an ancient dyke which divides Fetlar into two roughly equal parts. No one is quite aware of when or why it was constructed, but at 1m wide and 4 km long. Possibly it was a way of dividing up land equally.
- **The Hjaltadans Stone Circle** – a ring of stones with two larger stones at the centre. Folklore has it that the stones are a fiddler and his wife surrounded by dancing trolls who, when surprised by the sun, all turned to stone.
- **The Fetlar Interpretive Centre and Museum** – a place to discover everything about Fetlar's past, economy and culture.





Thank you to all the runners up of the #MagnusOnTour competition. To see the winning image, please visit page 3, and make sure you take a copy of this magazine or a 'Magnus' logo on your next holiday.

For an opportunity to win return tickets including a car and cabin to or from Orkney or Shetland for two adults, simply post a picture of yourself in an awe-inspiring location with the iconic NorthLink Ferries 'Magnus' logo on any of our social media channels.

Use the hashtag #MagnusOnTour to be in with a chance of winning. Alternatively, you can send your photo to webmaster@northlinkferries.co.uk

Good luck!



www.northlinkferries.co.uk

Operated by **serco**

