

Northern Lights

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Bressay Lighthouse, Shetland

PLUS

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Vikings in Shetland

St Magnus Cathedral

Parks in Aberdeen



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Welcome



Welcome to the Issue 11 of Northern Lights and I hope this finds you and your friends and family safe and well. It's been an extremely difficult time for everyone recently and although business has not been as usual, we have been, and are continuing to, run the vital lifeline service between the Scottish mainland and Northern Isles.

In late March, as the country entered lockdown, we worked closely with the Scottish Government and health officials to implement a series of restrictions which allowed us to maintain the service in a safe and efficient way. Only necessary travel was permitted, resulting in a significant fall in passenger numbers, and a revised schedule being introduced which saw Hrossey and Hjaltland operating on an off-peak single vessel timetable. Due to strong demand for daily freight services for imports and exports, the

freight vessels maintained essential connections with additional sailings introduced to address demand as it came on stream.

For passengers who were permitted to travel for reasons in line with Scottish Government criteria, including island residents, key workers and this included many NHS personnel, and I would simply look to acknowledge their contribution during the pandemic, we reduced the on board offerings to ensure the safety and wellbeing of both passengers and our crew.

It was essential that these measures were put in place and while the country has moved into the central phases of the Scottish Government's route map out of the COVID-19 crisis, we are continuing to take all necessary precautions. Again, in line with Government advice, this includes applying the advised restrictions on travel.

All of our staff, as well as many of our partners and suppliers, have been vital in helping to make these necessary changes that keep everyone safe. From our freight team who have managed an increase demand in traffic being shipped, to our terminal staff and hospitality teams who have done a fantastic job at ensuring cleanliness as well as good spirits, I would like to thank everyone for their ongoing support and hard work. Of course, I would also like to thank you, our passengers, including those who travelled with us recently as well as those who have had their plans cancelled or postponed, for showing their continued support and appreciation for NorthLink Ferries and Orkney and Shetland.

Looking forward, we are also at an exciting time for the company, having commenced the new contract for the service on 30th June. This follows eight successful years of managing and operating the lifeline Northern Isles Ferry Services for passengers and freight, providing essential access and supplies for islanders – something that we are all very proud of and look forward to continuing to do so for another eight years.

In this issue we once again celebrate many great and wonderful places, people and landmarks across the Northern Isles, as well as the North East and North Highlands. Please take time to explore with us and do let us know if you have any specific suggestions as to places or themes we could include in a future edition. Issue 10 by the way could become a collector's item as its life spanned the Covid-19 Pandemic, there are still a few copies to be had!

You are very welcome onboard, as ever my colleagues are on hand to assist you at every stage of your journey. We look forward to seeing you again.



Stuart Garrett
Stuart Garrett
Managing Director
Serco NorthLink Ferries

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#MagnusOnTour



Congratulations to our latest #MagnusOnTour winner, Fiona Barnett who took a fantastic picture while visiting amazing Uluru in Australia. Fiona and her husband Alex are captured during sunset at the massive rock formation in October 2019

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

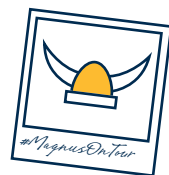
Take a look at our back cover to see some of the other brilliant #MagnusOnTour entries we received.

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 12 of Northern Lights.



Gerry MacIver, Bosun

In each issue we feature an interview with one of our NorthLink colleagues to give our passengers a chance to learn more about what goes on behind the scenes. This edition features Gerry MacIver, who has been with NorthLink Ferries for 13 years. Here, Gerry tells us more.

Tell us about yourself

I originally come from the Island of Barra in the Western Isles.

I joined the Merchant Navy in 1975 after spending a year following leaving school working on a fishing boat. Going into the Merchant Navy was a route many islanders had taken over the years. In those days you started as a 'deck boy' and then a Senior Ordinary Seaman (SOS), working up to an Efficient Deck Hand (EDH) and eventually, four years later, becoming an Able Seaman (AB).

I actually took a break from the sea for a couple of years and worked as a nursing assistant.

When I started my career, the deep sea voyages usually consisted of six month trips, visiting far flung places like China, Hong Kong, Australia, Canada and the Philippines to name a few.

How did you get into your career / current job?

As the deep sea side of things came to an end for British ABs I was fortunate to get a start on an offshore supply boat. Going from six month trips to one month on and one month off, this was far more civilised and also gave me a chance to see more of my family.

In 2007 I joined NorthLink Ferries as an AB and then eventually in 2013 I became a bosun, which is a ship's officer in charge of the allocation of tasks to the Deck crew.



What do your day-to-day responsibilities include?

The duties of a bosun are varied and mainly revolve around the deck department of the ship. Supervising the deck crew is another duty of the bosun and fortunately there is a good team of sailors to work with which makes life a lot easier.

What is it about your job that you enjoy the most?

There is no one thing that I enjoy most but I do love the amount of variety I get working on a ship. No two days are ever the same and every day is a school day, as the saying goes! Aside from the variety it is also the great people I work with, that is half of what makes the job.

When you're not working, what do you like to do in your spare time?

During my leave I like to get back to Barra which I still refer to as 'home' even though I left when I was just 12 years of age. I recently bought a house there which is for my retirement but that is still a work in progress. I also enjoy sea fishing when the weather permits.

Around the Lochs of Stenness and Harray

A stone's throw from Stromness in Orkney are two of the islands' most spectacular lochs – Stenness and Harray. Both are fantastic fishing spots as well as home to a variety of wildfowl.

Both lochs play a very different role within the local environment. The Loch of Stenness is partly salty as it is connected to the sea. The Loch of Harray is Orkney's largest loch and is filled with Brown Trout!

Some of the most impressive archaeological and historic sites in the UK can be found around the shores of the lochs, as well as some lesser known sites which are well worth a visit too.



The Deepdale Stone

This Neolithic standing stone is located on a hillside overlooking the Loch of Stenness. Once thought to be placed in a significant spot, the significance is lost now. The Deepdale Stone is located on private ground and once had a partner which is now toppled.

The Brig o' Waithe

This bridge is located at the point where the Loch of Stenness meets the sea. The name comes from the Old Norse 'vað' meaning 'wading place' or 'ford'. Before the current bridge was built in 1859 it was known as a treacherous place to cross. At the start of the Second World War a nearby house was bombed by German planes. This resulted in the first civilian death of the conflict on British soil. Today, The Brig o' Waithe is renowned for its seals and otters.

Unstan Chambered Cairn

This Neolithic tomb was built between 3,400 and 2,800 BC on the edge of the Loch of Stenness. When Unstan was excavated, several crouched skeletons were found separated by stone partitions. There were also over 30 bowls with unique designs. This design was named Unstan Ware and similar pottery has since been found in other Neolithic sites around Orkney. There is evidence that Unstan was visited by Vikings and used by the Picts.

Unstan Chambered Cairn is free to enter and usually empty so you may feel like an archaeologist discovering an unexplored tomb! Can you find the lovely carving of a bird?

The Standing Stones of Stenness

One of Orkney's most famous sites, these four massive standing stones were built around 3,100 BC, with the name Stenness coming from the Old Norse, 'Stone Point'. In the past the most significant stone at the site was the Odin Stone, which featured a hole through its centre. Promises were made by holding hands through the gap. Unfortunately, the stone didn't make it past 1814, when a farmer smashed it, causing outrage in the community.

Barnhouse Village

These 15 small buildings are located 150m from the Standing Stones of Stenness, and were occupied from 3,300 to 2,600 BC. Very similar to the Neolithic



village of Skara Brae, Barnhouse buildings feature a central fireplace, box beds and a stone dresser. Unlike Skara Brae however, only the reconstructed lower walls of the houses are visible now.

There are also links with nearby Maeshowe, which faces the setting sun at midwinter. At Barnhouse, it is the setting sun at midsummer which shines directly down the entrance passage of the largest house. Barnhouse appears to have been deliberately demolished. Did the buildings belong to those who built the standing stones or to the priests who worshiped there?



The Watchstone

This solitary standing stone next to the bridge between the Loch of Stenness and the Loch of Harray is particularly imposing at 5.6m tall, and many suspect it was designed to point visitors towards Brodgar.

The Ness of Brodgar

This recent discovery features a group of important ceremonial buildings which are significantly located between The Standing Stones of Stenness and the Ring of Brodgar.

The buildings were too big to be domestic structures and contained rich artefacts, including volcanic glass only found in the Western Isles and stone only found in Cumbria.

The Ness of Brodgar was enclosed by a massive wall and was in use for nearly a thousand years, between 3,300 and 2,450 BC. At the end of its life there was a feast and a ceremonial destruction of the buildings.



The Ring of Brodgar

The stones in this stone circle may not be as tall as the Standing Stones of Stenness, but there are many more in number. There's currently 27 standing but there were once as many as 60. The Ring of Brodgar was erected between 2,500 and 2,000 BC and is much younger than the smaller stone circle at the Standing Stones of Stenness.

Maeshowe

One of the most impressive Neolithic chambered tombs in Europe, Maeshowe is found close to the east side of the Loch of Harray. Though it appears to be a grassy mound from the outside, it is quite a feat of ancient engineering on the inside. Visitors must enter crouching down a long passageway which was built aligned to the midwinter sun.

Maeshowe was built in 2,750 BC. In the 12th century it was broken into by Vikings who covered the interior with stunning runic carvings.



The Shetland island of Bressay and its lighthouse at Kirkabister Ness are an iconic sight, and sailing past these into Lerwick harbour on a NorthLink ship is the perfect start to any holiday.

Beautiful Bressay (the name comes from the Old Norse meaning 'Broad Isle') is a super island to explore, after all, it's just a seven-minute journey on the ferry 'Leirna' from Lerwick.

Bressay Heritage Centre, next to the ferry terminal, is the most popular attraction on the island and a great place to start your day. With Bressay having been inhabited for the past 6,000 years, there is plenty of history to delve into, from the very distant past to much more recent happenings.

Perhaps the most striking structure on the island is Bressay Lighthouse, located on Kirkabister Ness. Sitting at the south end of Bressay, the imposing lighthouse was designed by two brothers in an effort to guide ships through the Bressay Sound.



The Stevenson siblings didn't initially agree on the lighthouse, with David telling brother Alan that to build a lighthouse in Shetland waters simply wasn't possible.

Yet still she stands – one of four designed by the brothers and built in the four-year period from 1854 to 1858. But while the lighthouse itself remains in place, its 23-mile light went out in 2012 after some 150 years of operation, with the decision taken to create a new structure adjacent to the Stevenson site.

In the intervening years, the site has found new life with the keepers' cottages now available for short term holiday lets. While the lighthouse itself isn't accessible, it remains a must visit and a tremendous backdrop for photos.

When you're ready to make tracks, consider a walk along the coast to the Bard, where you'll notice a gun on its mounting – a stark reminder of the defences taken on the island during the First World War.

Many visitors to Bressay may wish to continue on to the neighbouring island, Noss. The summer ferry from Bressay to Noss is run by Scottish Natural Heritage, and the trip is a must for bird-watchers. The cliffs of Noss is home to 30,000 pairs of Guillemots, 20,000 pairs of Gannets and 6,000 pairs of Fulmars. The noise here in the summer is quite deafening!

Back on Bressay, if you're looking for refreshments, be sure to stop in at Speldiburn Café. Here, you can enjoy soups and a light lunch, perfect sustenance for a big walk or cycle. Before making the return journey to Lerwick, you can stop into Maryfield restaurant and bar, where local seafood is the star.

A whistlestop tour of Bressay completed, you'll be desperate to make a return to this Shetland gem, where wildlife and beauty is on display year-round.

The easiest way to get to Bressay is on the inter-island ferry from Lerwick. The service runs seven days a week, from 7am to 11pm (1am on Fridays and Saturdays).



Fascinating facts about St Magnus Cathedral

Found in the heart of Kirkwall, Orkney's capital, the 900-year-old St Magnus Cathedral is a beautiful building which continues to play a pivotal role in Orcadian life.

The cathedral still holds regular church services and, thanks to its Romanesque architecture, is also a sought-after venue for weddings and events.

St Magnus Cathedral has a fascinating history and we've selected a few interesting facts about one of Orkney's most iconic buildings.

The Cathedral was founded when Orkney was still part of Scandinavia

St Magnus Cathedral is named after Saint Magnus Erlendsson, who lived at a time when Orkney and Shetland were part of Scandinavia and ruled by Norse Earls. Magnus shared his earldom with his cousin Haakon Paulsson, and they ruled amicably from 1105 to 1114 until their followers began to quarrel. Peace was to be negotiated on the small island of Egilsay, but Haakon arrived with many more men and hostile intentions. Magnus was captured and executed by axe. He prayed for the souls of his executioners before the axe blow came.

16th April is an important day for Orcadians

The year that the martyrdom took place is disputed, it could have been 1117 or 1118, but the day is certain: 16th April. Magnus was first buried where he fell in Egilsay, and the rocky area around his grave miraculously became a green field. He was later buried in Birsay and there followed more miracles and healings. In 1135 Magnus was canonised, and 16th April became St Magnus Day.

St Magnus' bones are contained within a pillar in the cathedral

Work on St Magnus Cathedral started in 1137, making it one of the oldest cathedrals in Scotland. It was built by the Viking Earl Rognvald, the son of Magnus' sister. Rognvald promised to build 'the finest church the north had ever seen' and St Magnus' bones were interned within a pillar of the cathedral. Unfortunately, Earl Rognvald never saw the Cathedral in a finished state as he was killed by a rebellious Scottish chieftain in 1158.

The cathedral features a number of human and animal faces on its exterior

The great age of St Magnus Cathedral means it has smaller windows than those found in more modern churches. If you look closely you will see faces in the stonework outside, around all four sides of the tower. These include the features of men, women and animals.

St Magnus Cathedral is the only cathedral in the UK with its own dungeon

Originally prisoners would slide down a chute into a dark cell! The old hangman's ladder can also be found in the cathedral and the gallows were situated nearby, at the top of the Clay Loan.

The building avoided destruction in 1614 thanks to Bishop James Law

Many cathedrals were destroyed during the Reformation in the 16th century, but St Magnus Cathedral survived unscathed. In 1614 however, Government forces besieged and destroyed Kirkwall Castle while suppressing a rebellion and intended to destroy St Magnus Cathedral too when the rebels took refuge there. Thankfully, the bishop managed to prevent them from carrying out this plan!



The cathedral was gifted to the people of Kirkwall in 1486

After Orkney became part of Scotland, the Cathedral was given to the inhabitants of Kirkwall by King James III of Scotland. From the 17th Century, for a fee, people could be buried in the nave of the cathedral and there is an unrivalled collection of medieval stones along the interior walls decorated with symbols of death. A Mort Brod (a wooden board with a depiction of Death in the form of a shrouded skeleton) hangs from the roof, marking a grave site below the floor.

Memorials of prominent Orcadians can be found inside the cathedral

St Magnus Cathedral also contains memorials to prominent Orcadians including explorers William Balfour Baikie and Dr John Rae, writers Eric Linklater, George Mackay Brown and Edwin Muir, artist Stanley

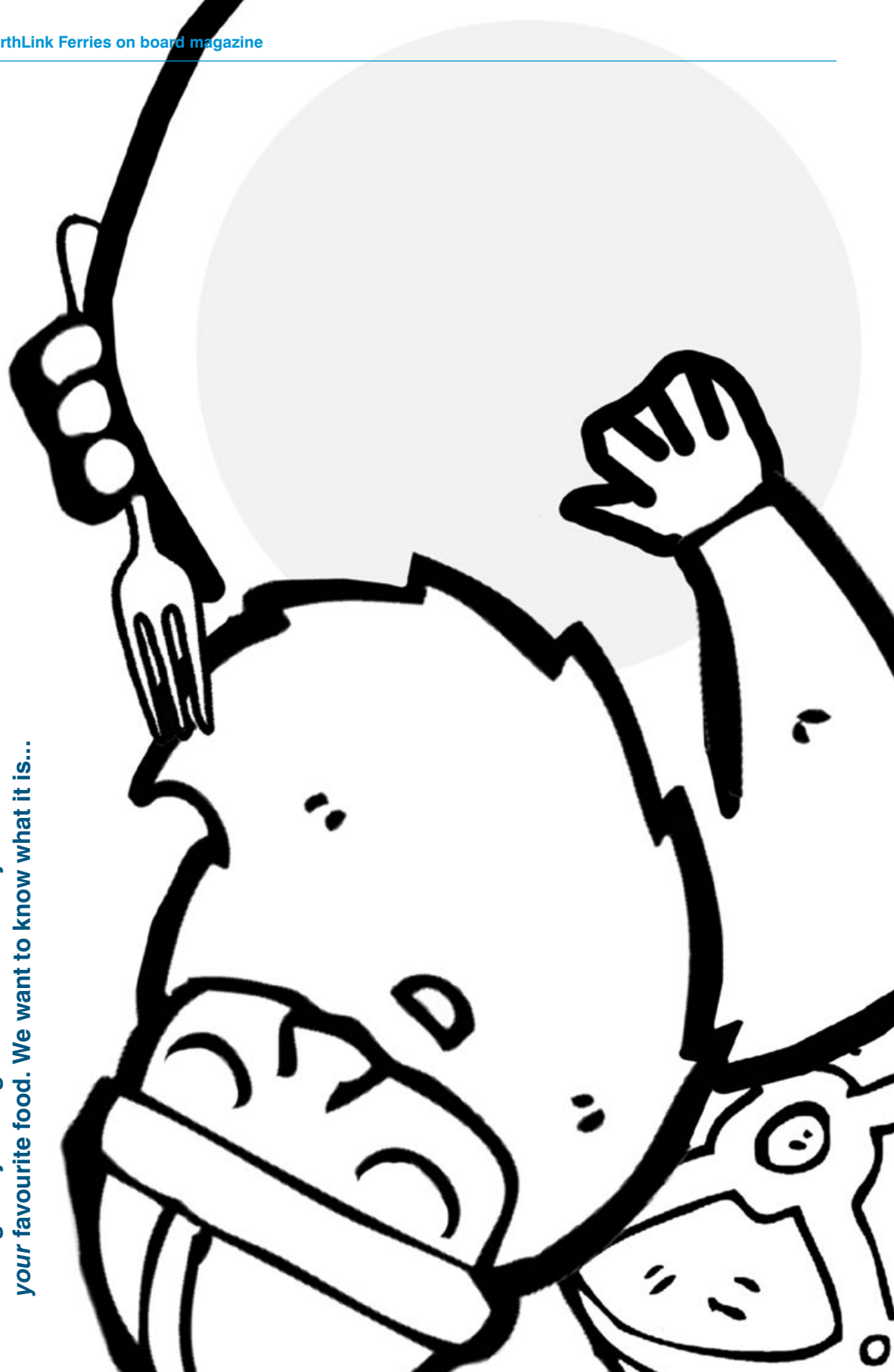
Cursiter and psychiatrist Sir Thomas Clouston. There is also a memorial and bell from the Royal Oak – a battleship sunk in 1939 with the loss of 833 lives.

St Magnus Cathedral has a connection to BBC programme, Mastermind

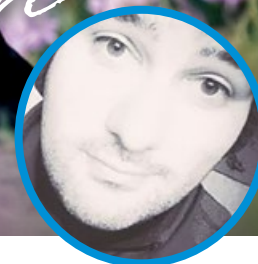
The final programme of Mastermind hosted by Magnus Magnusson, was filmed in the cathedral. At the end of the programme the famous black chair was given to the retiring host.

Behind the scenes tours are available for visitors

Tours include the hidden upper levels of the cathedral, taking place on Thursdays and Saturdays. After climbing the narrow staircases of the building, visitors will see artefacts, the cathedral clock mechanism, the bells and the base of the spire, before taking in a bird's eye view of Kirkwall.



An Interview with Colin Campbell



Colin Campbell is an amateur photographer from Caithness who won Thurso's Photographer of the Year Award for 2019/20. Getting into photography by chance, Colin is known for his nature and wildlife photography and now runs a photography business alongside his full time job.

Photography – one of the best decisions I've made

At the age of 19 I decided I needed a hobby and, browsing local adverts, came across someone selling a fancy camera, a Canon 550D and lens kit for £340. I checked my bank account and I had £355 so with little sense I went ahead and bought it.

Seven years later and I truly believe this was one of the best decisions I have made – it has changed my life. Photography has opened many doors, it has brought me a sense of pride and confidence (which helped me gain my current job as Construction Project Supervisor at Dounreay). It has also given me something to talk about and I started selling my photographs in 2016.

Wildlife 'had me hooked'

There isn't much I don't enjoy capturing but one of my highlights is wildlife. My first experience of this was a walk along the cliffs at Duncansby. A weasel popped out of nowhere and the initial excitement of seeing it and capturing it had me hooked. I wouldn't class the photograph as perfect but it definitely sparked my interest in wildlife. There is nothing quite like the buzz and fulfilment of getting 'that shot'. A bonus of wildlife photography is that it can take

place anywhere – simply open your backdoor and you'll likely find garden birds to capture.

Favourite local spots

Many people don't know that just down from the Bridge of Forss in Caithness is a beautiful mill and falls where you can see otters and leaping salmon. Forss Mill is only known locally and I don't think you'll find it in many guidebooks. It really is a dream for photographers.

Another one of my favourite places is Loch More, near Halkirk. Loch More has fantastic sunsets and dark skies. This is my go-to place for relaxing in the county and again, wildlife is in abundance in this area, although I've still not managed to capture osprey which nest nearby.

Top tips

- Keep a spare battery and memory card in the glovebox of your car
- It can be far too easy to get frustrated and caught up in the technical jargon. The professionals talk about F numbers and exposure, but I like to remind people to just go out and take photographs – you will learn from your mistakes
- My personal quote "If you can't see a photograph then you simply won't capture it". You need to close your eyes and imagine what you are going to take before you go and take it. I believe it is developing this mentality that gives personal style to images

To see more of Colin Campbell's photos make sure you 'like' www.facebook.com/ColinCampbellPhotography/ or 'follow' www.instagram.com/colincphoto/

Shetland - The Land of Vikings

The late 8th and 9th centuries were periods of Viking expansion, brought about in part because of an increasing population and the resulting shortage of land in Scandinavia.

When the Vikings decided to move and settle in Scotland, their arrival to the country was anything but peaceful. The Irish Annals from 794AD mentioned that Iona and Skye were devastated by Viking raids, and the Vikings who settled in Shetland and Orkney, as well as other northern parts of Britain, used these as bases from which to attack.

Between 875AD and 1469, Shetland and Orkney became part of Scandinavia. The language of the islands changed to Old Norse and the islands were ruled by Viking earls.

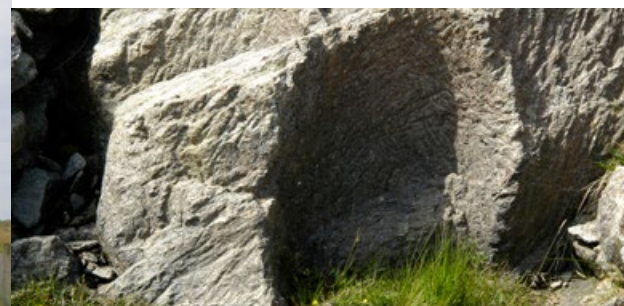
Though now part of Scotland, the influence of the Vikings is still keenly felt in Shetland. A visit to Europe's largest Viking festival, Lerwick's Up Helly Aa, is a glimpse into how islanders embrace their Viking heritage. There are many places worth visiting in Shetland to see the influence of the Norse settlers.



Underhoull, Unst

Unst is the most easterly and northerly of Shetland's islands. It is thought to have been the first foothold for Vikings in the North Atlantic. At Underhoull there are the remains of Viking longhouses which were excavated in 1960 and again in 2008. There are more rural longhouses – 30 in total – in Unst than anywhere else in the world, including Scandinavia.

It is easy to see why Unst was popular with the Vikings. The island had good harbours, the land was fertile and there was plenty of soapstone available.



Catpund Soapstone Mine

The Catpund Soapstone mine is located just south of Cunningsburgh on Shetland's mainland.

Soapstone or steatite is a soft rock, known as kleber in Shetland, and can be worked with stone or metal tools to make bowls, utensils, pots, plates and weights for fishing or looms. When soapstone is put in the fire it becomes hard and heat resistant and was used in large quantities by Vikings instead of making pottery.

Chisel marks and hollows where bowls had been fashioned and extracted can be seen in the hillside, though many of the scars from quarrying are now hidden under the turf. You can even spot traces of quarrying in the bed of nearby Catpund burn, under the reddish-brown peat water.

The quarry covers a 1km long area, from the shore below the road to the source of Catpund burn on the hill. At Jarlshof, 24km away, steatite bowls were found that match the blank areas cut out of the rock. Examples of soapstone artifacts can be seen in the Shetland Museum and Archives in Lerwick.



Ting assembly sites in Shetland

Law and order was important during the Viking period and assemblies would be called to discuss important items of the day – these were called 'Things' or 'Tings'. These took place at Thing assembly sites, on stone seats, sometimes using the rubble of an older site, such as a broch.

Law Ting Holm, a promontory on Tingwall Loch, was one such meeting place, and visitors to the site can still see the stones on the small island, which is joined to the shore by a stone causeway. Other place names in Shetland hint at assembly sites which have since been lost: Aithsting, Delting, Lunnasting, Nesting and Sandsting.



Skidbladner replica longship, Unst

Haroldswick is a sheltered bay on the east side of Unst. The story goes that the area is named after King Harald Fairhair who had to bring the Shetland Vikings under control in 875AD. These wild creatures had not only been raiding Britain and Ireland but had also unwisely begun raiding Norway!

At Haroldswick there is a beautiful replica Viking longship, named the Skidbladner which is a model of the famous 9th century Gokstad longship (which was found in a Viking burial mound in Norway in 1880). It has massive oars and a beautifully carved figurehead.

The Skidbladner was bought by the Shetland Amenity Trust after a brave group of Swedish and Norwegian sailors failed in their attempt to emulate their ancestor Leif Erikson's trip from Scandinavia to America. At one time in history, longships at Haroldswick would have been a common sight.

Next to the Skidbladner is an impressive replica of a Viking longhouse, beautifully constructed using the same techniques as the Vikings would have used.

A recipe for delicious and easy oatcakes



Recipe

Laurie Goodlad is a writer and tour guide at 'Shetland with Laurie'. Here, Laurie shares her favourite recipe for oatcakes which are made from just a few simple ingredients. This is a delicious treat for the larder and is great for making with children.

Oatcakes are similar to a savoury biscuit or cracker and are perfect with a slice of cheese or slather of butter. They're traditional to Scotland and can be traced back to Norse times in Shetland and Orkney.

Laurie's oatcakes recipe was given to her by her Grandad who took up baking during retirement – proof that it's never too late to start a new hobby.

Ingredients:

- 3 cups of medium oatmeal*
- 3 cups of self-raising flour, plus a little extra for dusting
- ½ to 1 small cup of sugar
- A splash of milk
- ½ tsp of salt
- 8oz margarine or butter
- 1 beaten egg

Method:

Pre-heat the oven to 180°C. Rub the margarine into the dry ingredients, or you can use a food processor if that's available. Add the beaten egg and a tiny splash of milk until the mixture binds together into a dryish consistency.

Next, turn the mixture out onto a floured surface and use a rolling pin. Flatten to about ¼ inch thick. Using a cookie cutter, cut small circles and place onto a tray lined with greaseproof paper.

Bake for around 20 minutes in the pre-heated oven – if you're using an AGA oven then bake on a rack in the foot of the top oven with the cooling tray above to prevent burning.

Remove from the oven and allow to cool on a rack. Enjoy with plenty of cheese, butter or Laurie's personal favourite, sweet chilli jam.

We hope that you'll give this recipe a try and enjoy a little taste of the Northern Isles. To find out more about Laurie, her tours and other recipes visit www.shetlandwithlaurie.com

**Oatmeal is a type of coarse flour made from hulled oat grains that have been either milled, steel-cut or rolled. For this recipe you can use any kind of oats and depending on the type you will have a coarser or finer oatcake.*



We've all been enjoying time outside, and for many of us it's been more important than ever to take in the fresh air and embrace the outdoors. Even in cities there's plenty of green space to discover, and this includes Aberdeen, which boasts a range of parks and gardens.

Here, Shona Lawrance who is NorthLink's E-Marketing Officer, rounds up some of her favourite parks to explore in the Granite City.

Seaton Park

Home to a vast green space steeped in history, the park was formerly the grounds of a private house built in the 17th century, known first as Middleton House and then Seaton House. At the south entrance you will find St Machar's Cathedral. For the many who have seen Braveheart, it was here that one quarter of William Wallace's body was sent after his execution in 1305 as a warning to other rebels.

Victoria Park

Victoria Park is just five hectares in size and considerably smaller than other parks across the city. However, despite its size it remains a beautiful spot. The park was Aberdeen's first and today features a sensory garden and an impressive fountain formed of 14 different types of granite from local quarries.

Westburn Park

Westburn Park is just across the road from Victoria Park and although it is not filled with flower

gardens, it is still beautiful with large, towering trees throughout. A favourite for children, it also hosts a cycling proficiency track to practice road safety and has links with the Press and Journal, Scotland's oldest daily newspaper.

Hazlehead Park

Another favourite in Aberdeen is Hazlehead Park, which has a petting zoo and is near the Hazlehead Golf Courses. Robert the Bruce gifted the land to the city in 1319 and, after falling into private ownership, was bought back by Aberdeen Town Council in 1920. Visitors to the park can wander through two rose gardens, one of which pays tribute to the Piper Alpha disaster of 1988.

Duthie Park

If I were to choose a favourite park in Aberdeen it would be Duthie Park. I love everything about this grassy area which is just a short stroll from the NorthLink terminal.

Duthie Park is most well known as being home to the David Welch Winter Gardens – one of Europe's largest indoor gardens with the largest collection of cacti in Britain. The park is an easy favourite of parents thanks to the recently renovated play area, ideal for children to enjoy the many slides and climbing frames. It is also a great place to enjoy a picnic – there are benches in abundance as well as grassy spots to lay blankets.

Hopefully, the next time you are in Aberdeen you will schedule some time to visit at least one of these beautiful parks. Make sure you tell a NorthLink staff member about your favourite – perhaps it is an Aberdeen park that we have not written about yet.



Foula is one of around 300 individual islands that form the Shetland archipelago, and is one of Britain's most remote inhabited islands.

As dramatic as it is remote, Foula is located 20 miles to the west of the Shetland Mainland and has a coastline which is almost completely rockbound, featuring only one beach. Close to the beach is the island's exposed pier, where boats are winched out of the water when not in use to prevent them being damaged in the choppy seas that hit the island's shores.

For those who might be planning a visit, a trip to Foula is best taken in the summer. Once on the island, a visit may need to be extended by a few days as a result of rough seas or fog, so make sure your plans are flexible.

The foot passenger ferry operates twice a week (three times in summer), sailing from Walls on Mainland Shetland to Ham on Foula in two hours, with space for 12 passengers. Booking is essential. In the summer there are some sailings from Scalloway.

There are also flights from Tingwall Airport in an eight-seat aeroplane. Taking this option will allow you a few hours to explore the island.

Five dramatic peaks

Foula has an amazing shape. The island is only 2.5 miles long and has a narrow and fertile coastal strip to the east and north. This is Hametown and Ham and it is where all 16 crofts belonging to Foula's (approximately) 30 inhabitants, are located.

The rest of the island is dominated by five dramatic peaks called Da Noup, Hamnafield, Da Sneug (highest at 1371ft), Da Kame, and Soberlie. Foula is definitely an island for keen walkers and birdwatchers.

Birdwatchers paradise

The name Foula comes from the Old Norse Fuglaey, "bird island". The island is remote, surrounded by rich feeding grounds, lightly inhabited by people, has few predators and much of the land cannot be farmed, so it is the ideal habitat for birds. The island is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its seabird colonies and blanket bog.

On the west of Foula, Da Kame is a cliff which rises to 1233ft and visiting here is a highlight of any trip to Foula. Da Kame and the other cliffs on the west are home to thousands of nesting seabirds. The rest of the land is occupied by moorland birds (Foula has the world's largest colony of bonxies) and waders occupy every small loch on the island. The remote location of Foula means that migrating birds often make landfall here, and unusual birds from America and Siberia have been spotted.

The Gaada Stack

Other highlights include the Gaada Stack, a 131ft sea stack punctured by a hole, or Da Sneck ida Smaallie, a 98ft deep dark rock fault which cuts down towards the sea.

Foula's coastline became famous briefly in 1914, when RMS Oceanic hit fierce tides at the Shaalds o' Foula two miles east of Foula. The Shaalds are a reef which comes to within four feet of the surface at low tides, causing the RMS Oceanic to sink. The vessel was owned by White Star Line, the shipping company who lost the Titanic two years before and between 1899 and 1901, it was the largest ship in the world. RMS Oceanic was the first passenger ship to be lost in the First World War.

Foula's wildlife, industry and history

In addition to birds, the island has a host of other wildlife for nature lovers. It is easy to spot families of Grey and Common Seals and schools of Killer Whales, and you may even find Harbour Porpoises following the Foula ferryboat!

Foula is so remote that it has its own subspecies of fieldmouse, and some of the many wildflowers that cover the island are remnants of ancient woodland plants. Shetland ponies roam freely and the sheep on Foula are multi-coloured native Shetland sheep that graze on the cliffs but can also eat seaweed.

Foula's inhabitants are crofters who get their income from fishing and shellfish as well as sheep farming, Shetland ponies and ornithological tourism.

Being remote

Foula is so remote that it is often the last place to be influenced by changes which have affected the rest of Shetland. For instance, it was one of the



last places Norn was spoken, and the last place in Scotland where Udal Law was upheld. In fact, Foula still uses the Julian calendar even though the rest of the UK adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1752. As a result, in Foula, Christmas Day is observed on 6th January and New Year's Day on 13th January!

Foula was used as a location for Michael Powell's 1937 film, 'The Edge of the World' – a fictional account of the evacuation of St Kilda. The title of that film sums up Foula very well.

Foula is remote indeed, but it is well worth the effort to reach the island – especially if you are a birdwatcher. Please note that Foula has accommodation, but no pub or shop (aside from a post office), so make sure you bring supplies for your visit. For more details on Foula, please visit www.foulaheritage.com





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