

# ORKNEY

all seasons

## A WEST COAST WALK YESNABY TO STROMNESS

Wherever you go in Orkney, the sea is not far away. One of the best ways to experience Orkney – to get a real sense of what makes this such a special place – is to take a leisurely walk along a stretch of coast. Among the most stunning is this west coast walk which takes you from Yesnaby's tall westward-facing cliffs to the sheltered welcoming haven of Stromness.

Orkney's weather can be changeable so we recommend you wear comfortable footwear and warm clothes with suitable rainwear. Let someone know where you are going and when you expect to get back. Carry water and snacks with you. And finally, remember to bring your camera.



This linear walk is approximately 11 miles and you should allow 4-5 hours in order to have plenty of time to enjoy the views and the wildlife.



Yesnaby



North Gaulton Castle



Stromness



## OVERVIEW



- 1** **STROMNESS**  
The welcoming historic harbour town where your journey begins and ends.



- 2** **YESNABY**  
Awe-inspiring cliff-top scenery on rocks that were a lake-bed millions of years ago.



- 3** **YESNABY CASTLE**  
Photogenic two-legged sea stack, popular with experienced climbers.



- 4** **NORTH GAULTON CASTLE**  
Tall sea stack standing about twice the height of its smaller near-neighbour at Yesnaby.



- 5** **BLACK CRAIG**  
An old Coastguard lookout post on the clifftop providing great views.



- 6** **WAREBETH BEACH**  
Popular attractive beach just beside the town of Stromness.



- 7** **STROMNESS**  
Journey's end after your invigorating walk.

**DISTANCE:** APPROX. 11 MILES  
**DURATION:** APPROX. 4-5 HOURS  
**TERRAIN:** COASTAL WALKING ON MAINLY SHORT TURF, B ROAD, FOOTPATH AND STONY TRACKS IN SOME PLACES.

## 1 STROMNESS

Your coastal adventure begins in the town of **Stromness**. We recommend taking a taxi from here to **Yesnaby** to begin your walk. Details of local taxi companies are on **orkney.com** and the one-way fare is about £14. Book well in advance, especially during school term-time when taxis are sometimes busy taking students to and from school.

### THE SCOTTISH OUTDOOR ACCESS CODE

Everyone has access rights and responsibilities in Scotland's outdoors, helping the needs of different users to be balanced while our landscapes and seascapes are enjoyed and protected.

The **Scottish Outdoor Access Code** has lots of advice and guidance to help you.

### ! YOUR SAFETY

While enjoying the walk, take care on the clifftops. Pathways may be slippery when wet and the underlying rock can erode into fragments. Keep a close eye on children and pets, especially near the cliff edges.

## 2 YESNABY

At the car park at **Yesnaby**, wave a fond farewell to your taxi driver before spending some time getting your bearings and some background information from the interpretation boards placed at this popular scenic location. On fine, still, days the light on the sea combines hypnotically with the sound of the waves and the calls of birds; on stormier days the winds roar in dramatically from the Atlantic, and sea-spray can be blown over the high cliffs. Whatever the weather, Yesnaby is a place which will touch every sense.

The dramatic **Old Red Sandstone** rocks were part of the seabed 400 million years ago. Geologists love to visit the cliffs – whatever your own special interests, don't forget to chat to other walkers in case they have knowledge and enthusiasm to share.

Keep your eyes peeled for birds on the wing or roosting on the cliffs, and for seals in the sea far below you. Orkney's **Grey Seal** population breeds in October - November and **Common seals** breed in the summer, but these inquisitive sea mammals can be spotted year-round if you are observant and fortunate.

Watch out, too, for the rare and beautiful **Primula Scotica** flowers in the grass at your feet. Globally scarce, the Scottish Primrose thrives here during the spring and summer months.



Stromness



Yesnaby



Primula Scotica



Inquisitive seals

### 3 YESNABY CASTLE

From the car park, take the path southwards (to the left as you face the sea!) towards the **Brough of Bigging**, a dramatic promontory where you might be able to discern the faint remains of the defences of an ancient fort. Just south of the Brough lies **Yesnaby Castle**. Its name is misleading because you won't find a castle there. Instead you'll encounter a photogenic 35-metre tall eroded sea stack. It became famous when first climbed in 1967 and remains popular with experienced climbers, some of whom use it as a practice ascent before tackling the **Old Man of Hoy**.

From here, continue southwards following the line of the cliffs with their geos and outcrops. Along the way, don't forget to look back inland where you might see numerous seabirds including; **fulmar, great skua, arctic skua, black guillemots** and **razorbills** or solitary hunting species depending on the season and the time of day.



Yesnaby Castle



Sea Thrift



Fulmer



North Gaulton Castle

### 4 NORTH GAULTON CASTLE

In about an hour or so you'll see a second, larger sea stack. This one is called **North Gaulton Castle**, another misleading name because like Yesnaby Castle, there is no castle. North Gaulton is about twice the size of its near-neighbour, and a very dangerous climb.

Wind and water erode the Old Red Sandstone cliffs and underlying rocks to create these sea stacks. Erosion is continuous and one day these impressive stacks will collapse into the sea, but for now they are a delight for geologists and photographers.

### 5 BLACK CRAIG

Continue your walk southwards until the path leads to the ominously-named **Black Craig**. Be of stout heart, because the Craig is the harmless site of an old Coastguard lookout post with wonderful sea views, a perfect place to pause on your journey. You might occasionally bump into one of the researchers from **Orkney's European Marine Energy Centre (EMEC)** here while they carry out wildlife monitoring connected to marine energy testing. One of EMEC's wave energy test sites lies off the coast to the west. See if you can spot any devices being tested there. Energy from the tests comes ashore at **Billia Croo** on the shore below you.

Once at the bottom of the Black Craig, follow the path onto the public road. Follow the road straight ahead and then down the hill to the right. Towards the bottom of this road you will see a footpath sign (showing Stromness on a tall fencing stab on your right-hand side). Take this footpath down towards Warebeth beach. Take care when passing the stream.



Black Craig

## 6 WAREBETH BEACH

Follow the path towards **Warebeth Beach**, an attractive and popular beach close to **Stromness**. Warebeth is named after the abundant seaweed (ware) that gets washed ashore from Hoy Sound. The views looking across to the **Hoy Hills** or to **Breckness** are delightful, especially in the softer afternoon light. You'll see lots of wildlife here too, keep an eye out for **oystercatchers**, **ringed plovers**, **eiders** and **inquisitive seals**.

There is an easy walk onwards to Stromness, along the coastal footpath, which takes you past the **Point of Ness Camp Site**, with a choice of route by shore or road depending on your mood.

## 7 STROMNESS

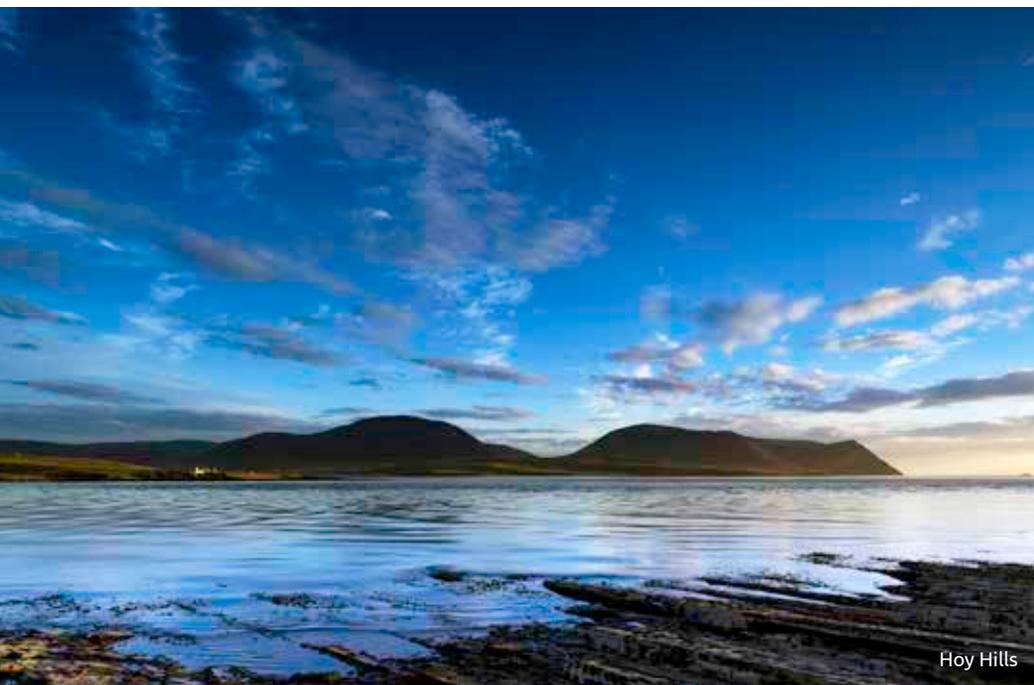
Historically, **Stromness** was a place of many departures and arrivals along the sea road, and its character reflects that rich heritage and tradition of welcoming travellers. You may want to come back and spend time browsing the craft shops and the world-famous **Pier Arts Centre**, but you will surely want to mark the end of your coastal walk by some quiet reflection while enjoying a suitable refreshment in a café, restaurant or bar.

## FINDING OUT MORE

Local bookshops have a good selection of books and maps to help you explore our landscapes and seascapes and the native wildlife which thrives here.



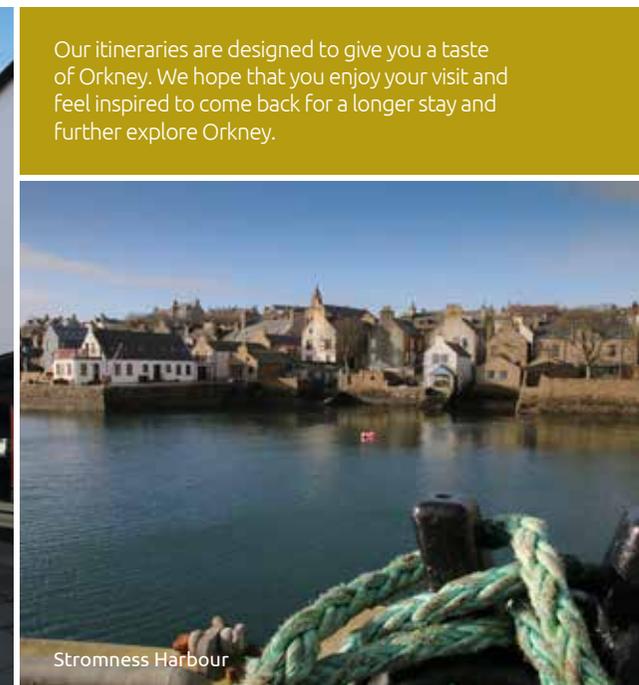
Warebeth Beach



Hoy Hills



The Pier Arts Centre



Stromness Harbour

Our itineraries are designed to give you a taste of Orkney. We hope that you enjoy your visit and feel inspired to come back for a longer stay and further explore Orkney.