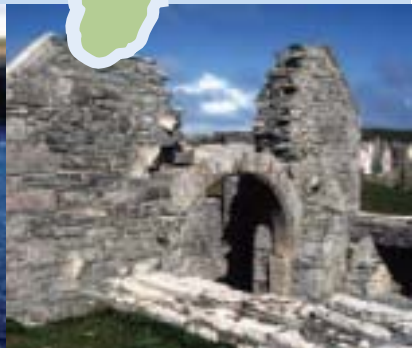
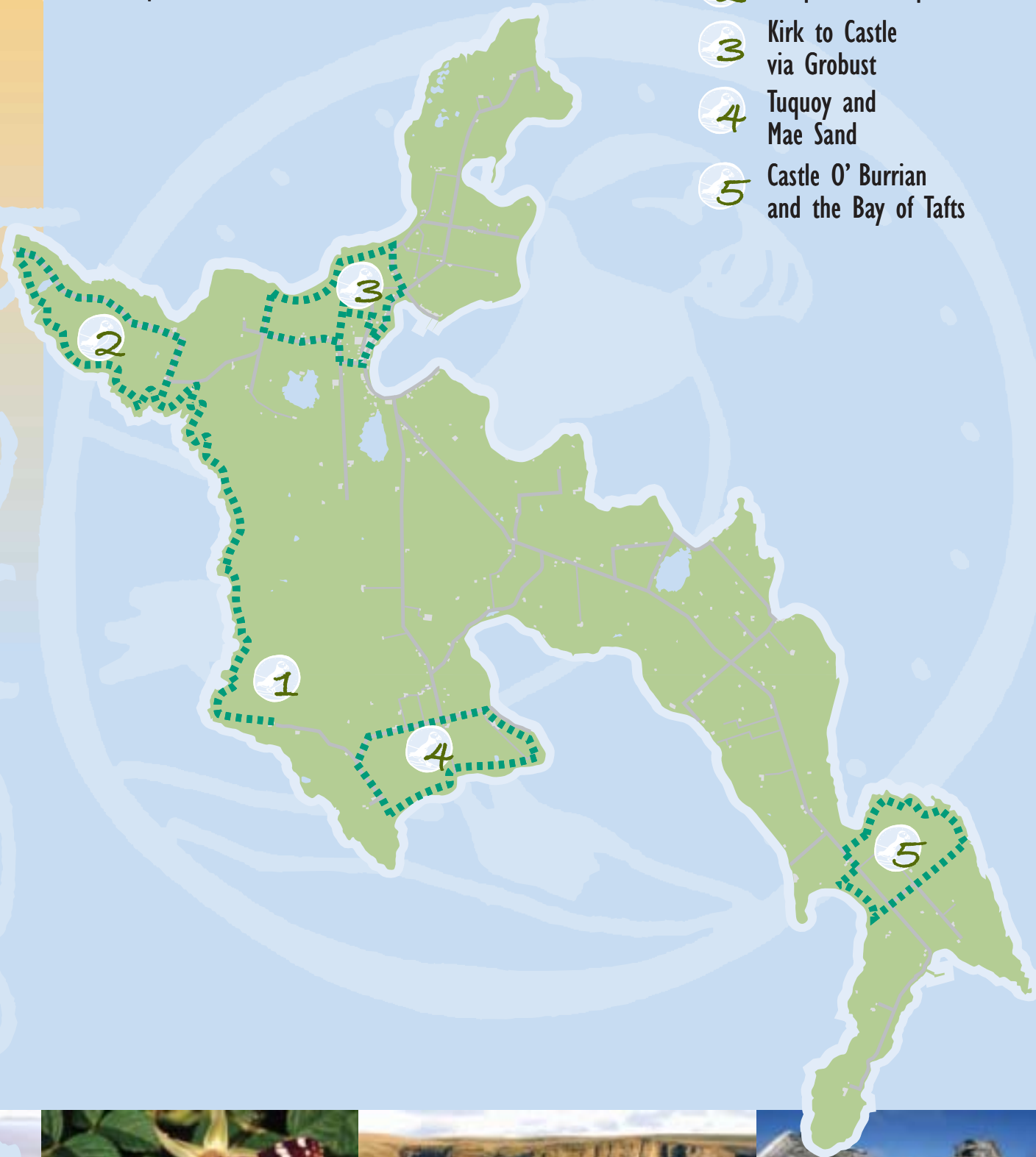


5 Guided Walks for the Island of Westray with information and illustrations on points of interest

-  1 West Westray Coast
-  2 Noup Head Loop
-  3 Kirk to Castle via Grobust
-  4 Tuquoy and Mae Sand
-  5 Castle O' Burrian and the Bay of Tafts



# Walking Guide

Rich farmland, dramatic coastline and abundant wildlife . . .

The changing scenery, the wide sea and skylines make a short stroll or a long hike a delight not to be missed. You never quite know what you might see next. The air can be full of birds, the tide may have washed up a beautiful sea urchin or a message in a bottle, and the wild flowers can take you by surprise as they brighten your path.

Westray is the most north-westerly of the Orkney Islands. Its spreading shape provides it with a huge 80km coastline, with stunning cliff scenery and beautiful sandy bays, while its oceanic position, facing the Atlantic, gives a clue to its rich seafaring history.



The rocks of the island are made up of thick layers of flagstones, which have been much used for paving stones, roofing slates and buildings since prehistoric times.

## Walking through history

Westray has an extensive pre history, with new sites still being discovered. Recent excavations include two Viking longhouses, at Trenabie and Langskaill. At Knowe of Skea, an Iron Age funerary complex was found, containing 100 human burials. In years past digs have uncovered a Skara Brae type Neolithic house and a chambered tomb similar to Maeshowe.



The Vikings found Pierowall to be a fine natural harbour for their shallow-draughted long boats and named it Höfn meaning harbour. It was

then the only Norse village in Orkney and nearby on the Links, was the largest Viking cemetery in Britain yet found.



Other evidence of the Norse occupation can be seen at the Cross Kirk, built in 1140 by Hafliði, son of Thorkel. The remains jutting out of the cliff to the west of the church are thought to be his house and farmstead.

For more recent history Noltland Castle is well worth a visit. It's one of the finest examples of a Scottish fortified residence. It was built for Gilbert Balfour, who served Mary Queen of Scots and aided in the plot to murder her second husband Lord Darnley. The fearsome appearance is accentuated by the huge blocks of stone, array of shot holes and few windows. The large spiral staircase is the most spectacular feature, with a smaller one higher up in the living area of the castle.

After a long history of fishing Westray's economy now relies more on farming than fishing. Creel boats still fish for crabs, but beef and sheep farming have gradually gained in importance. The soils are fertile, the grass is good with a long growing season and the beef is acclaimed throughout Britain.

Today Pierowall harbour is busiest at the end of July when dozens of small boats take over the bay in fine style for the Westray Regatta.



What's the finest bird in any flock?  
Have you heard of a Westray Aak?



WESTRAY



# Guidance for walkers

## Key:

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

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



When walking Westrays paths – please remember:

You are very welcome, but this island is really just one big working farm



Mother cows are wonderfully protective, which can be unbelievably dangerous.

If you have a dog with you, even on a lead, you are an even bigger threat to her calf.

To be mothers again next year, cows have to have a partner.

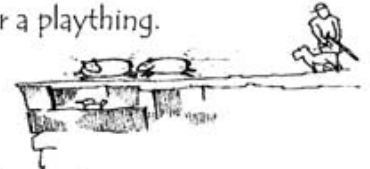
He is probably a **big** continental fellow, who is very protective of his harem, which can give him an attitude problem.



Sheep are also good mothers, but they are different from cows. They are smaller.

For dogs, sheep are the right size for a plaything.

If sheep see a problem, they run away from it and if there is a 100 foot crag, they may run over it.



A running playing dog is a problem for a sheep, it could be fatal for the dog as well as the sheep



Gates keep cattle and sheep where they are supposed to be. Please leave gates as you find them: which usually means shut.





Wildlife needs to be cherished. You can see plenty without disturbing it.

Gateways are like driveways. Please don't leave your car in the way.



Bonxies and terns especially are well known for protecting their nests. Mind your head if they are about.

Please enjoy yourself safely, and come again.

She is not drunk  She needs help 

If you find a sheep like this – please could you put her back on her feet or get help.

© Drawings By Edwin Rendall, words by Geordie Drever. With thanks to Westray Development Trust

### Getting to Westray:

Daily ferry service to Westray from Kirkwall operated by Orkney Ferries tel: (01856) 872044 web: [www.orkneyferries.co.uk](http://www.orkneyferries.co.uk)  
 Inter-island air service operated by Loganair tel: (01856) 872494 web: [www.loganair.co.uk](http://www.loganair.co.uk)

### Further info:

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

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

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# West Westray Coast

8.8km (5.5m) linear cliff top trail, maritime heath, ending Noup Head lighthouse



One of the finest and wildest cliff walks in Orkney with wonderful scenery and seabird colonies.



Primula Scotica

The trail skirts around Skea Hill then Fitty Hill, where the rare Scottish primrose grows, on an exciting cliff top trail that gets more dramatic the further north you go. It has tremendous views of headlands, caves, natural arches and geos and wild Atlantic rollers thunder against the vertical cliffs adding to the thrill.

From North Hill onwards tens of thousands of sea birds take up their nesting positions on the ledges from May to July. There are spectacular viewing points, but take very great care on the cliff edge. This seabird city with its noise and smell make an impressive experience. The most common birds are guillemots, kittiwakes and fulmars,



Gannet

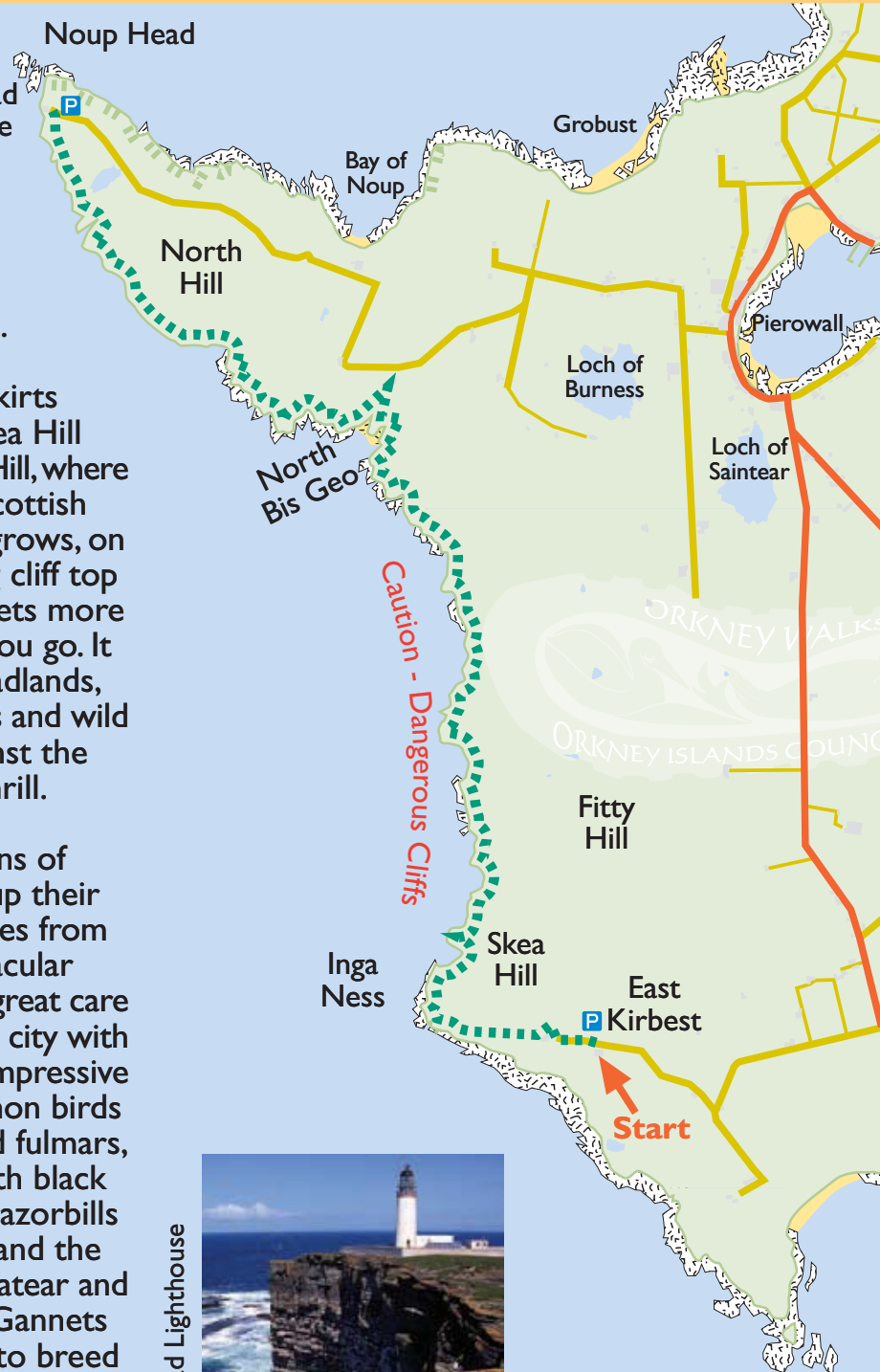
together with black guillemots, razorbills and puffins, and the smaller wheatear and rock pipit. Gannets have begun to breed on the cliffs and you are likely to see other species too, from raven to snow bunting.

From near the lighthouse look down to the skerries where, at low tide, you may see dozens of seals hauled out on the rocks. Most will be grey seals which prefer such isolated loafing sites. The large male can measure 2m and weigh in at 230kg.

Noup Head Lighthouse

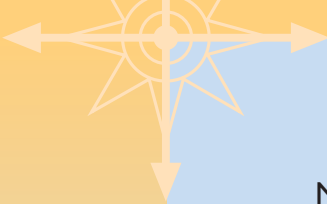


Noup Head Lighthouse (built 1898) was the first in Scotland to use mercury floatation in the revolving carriage. The tower is 24m high and the light now flashes every 30 seconds. The light was automated in 1964 when a new lens was installed and, in 2001, solar power replaced gas, with the use of 36 solar panels.



# Noup Head Loop

A circular walk of 6.4km (4m) following part of the West Westray Walk



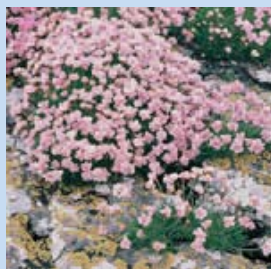
Stunning cliff scenery, maritime heath, sea birds and a classic lighthouse.

The spectacular coastal scenery begins as soon as you descend to the cliffs from Backarass. Look for a small natural arch and see how the layered flagstone cliffs tilt away and then rise again in a syncline on the far side of the small bay. Old carvings on the cliff face show local names such as 'A Flett' and 'Gavin Mowat Rendall'.



small natural arch and see how the layered flagstone cliffs tilt away and then rise again in a syncline on the far side of the small bay. Old carvings on the cliff face show local names such as 'A Flett' and 'Gavin Mowat Rendall'.

Sea pinks adorn the cliffs, with the tiny pink flowers of sea spurrey scattered amongst them. Before ascending the slopes of North Hill, where the path crosses the burn called the Grip of Monivey, look for bog pimpnel, grass of Parnassus and devil's-bit scabious.



Sea Pinks



Grass of Parnassus

Out to sea, look for dolphins, porpoises and whales which pass this way especially in early autumn. Loch of the Stack is a shallow loch



Bird

used by many seabirds, including kittiwakes, to wash their plumage in the fresh water.

The cliffs get higher as you skirt North Hill, with a survey pillar marking the highest point at 76m (240ft). Far below is 'Gentlemen's Cave', one of two places on the island where the lairds of Westray, who supported the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion, successfully hid from the forces of law. Noup Head Lighthouse was completed in 1898 by David A Stevenson, the last of the 'Lighthouse Stevensons' and first cousin of Robert Louis.



# Kirk to Castle via Grobust

Easy circular walks from Pierowall to explore a medieval church, a broch, a castle and the finest sandy beach in Westray. Longest route approx. 6km (3.7m)



While still in Pierowall visit Lady Kirk an attractive ruin dating back to the thirteenth century and still in use until late nineteenth century when Pierowall was a busy fishing port. Opposite the Höfn centre, view Pierowall Quarry where in 1981 the beautifully decorated Westray Stone was found. It is 4,900 years old and part of a chambered cairn of the Maes Howe type. The stone can be viewed in the Orkney Museum in Kirkwall.

The walks take you over a large area of wind blown sand covered in short turf called links or machair, colourful with wild flowers in the summer. It extends from Pierowall to the beach at Grobust.

After the first stretch of sand a sloping slab of blue-grey rock has a fine collection of fossil fish fragments.

Rocks with ripple marks and mud cracks provide further evidence of the past, dating back 380 million years to a time when Orkney was covered in a freshwater lake.



Noltland Castle

For more recent history look for the Knowe of Queena Howe, a green mound on the shore, which contains the foundation of an Iron Age broch. Scattered at the western end of Grobust Sands are several low walls, covered in golden lichen. These tangle dykes are where the kelp stalks were dried after being harvested in the winter.

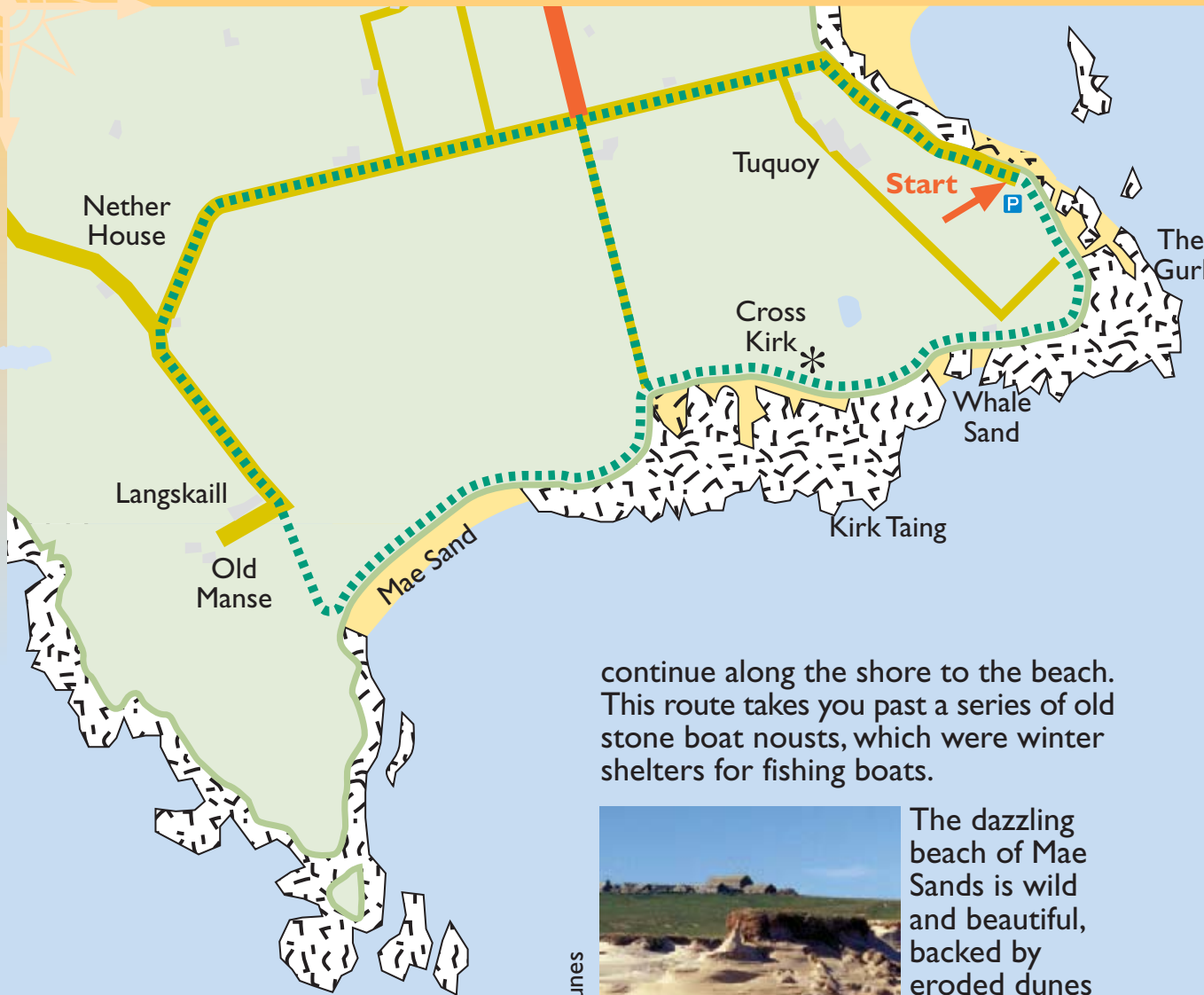
The impressive Noltland Castle is well worth a visit on the way back to Pierowall. (Key available from the farm opposite.)

Otter Shell



# Tuquoy and Mae Sand

A 3.6km (2.2m) circular walk from the Bay of Tuquoy to Cross Kirk or a longer 6.2km (3.85m) walk including the beach at Mae Sands



continue along the shore to the beach. This route takes you past a series of old stone boat nousts, which were winter shelters for fishing boats.



Eroded dunes

The dazzling beach of Mae Sands is wild and beautiful, backed by eroded dunes that form a white 'badland' reaching far inland.

The broad shallow Bay of Tuquoy is a good habitat for the edible cockle and creeling for crabs is carried out from here. From the path you can usually spot turnstone, redshank, eider duck, dunlin and ringed plover, and further out on the rocky point, shag and seals. In summer, sea mayweed and corn sowthistle decorate the shore.

Cockle Shell



Cross Kirk was built by a Westray Norseman about 1140 and was partly dismantled in the nineteenth century. The graveyard is still in use with familiar Westray names on the headstones.

Past the Kirk the shorter route follows a track back to the road or you can

Behind the farm of Langskaill, a Norse longhouse has been discovered, in use in about the twelfth century with an Iron Age souterrain or earth house beneath it. Nearby is the Old Manse, an interesting Grade B listed building.

Along the road there's a wonderful view of the 'abandoned village' of Nether House with Fitty Hill behind it, and beyond the crossroads, South Hamar is a rare survival of an old Westray croft or 'but and ben', with outbuildings and barley-drying kiln.



# Castle O' Burrian and the Bay of Tafts



A short 1.2km (.75m) walk, to the Castle O' Burrian to view puffins  
or a longer 5.5km (3.4m) circular walk to Stanger Head and the Bay of Tafts



Puffin



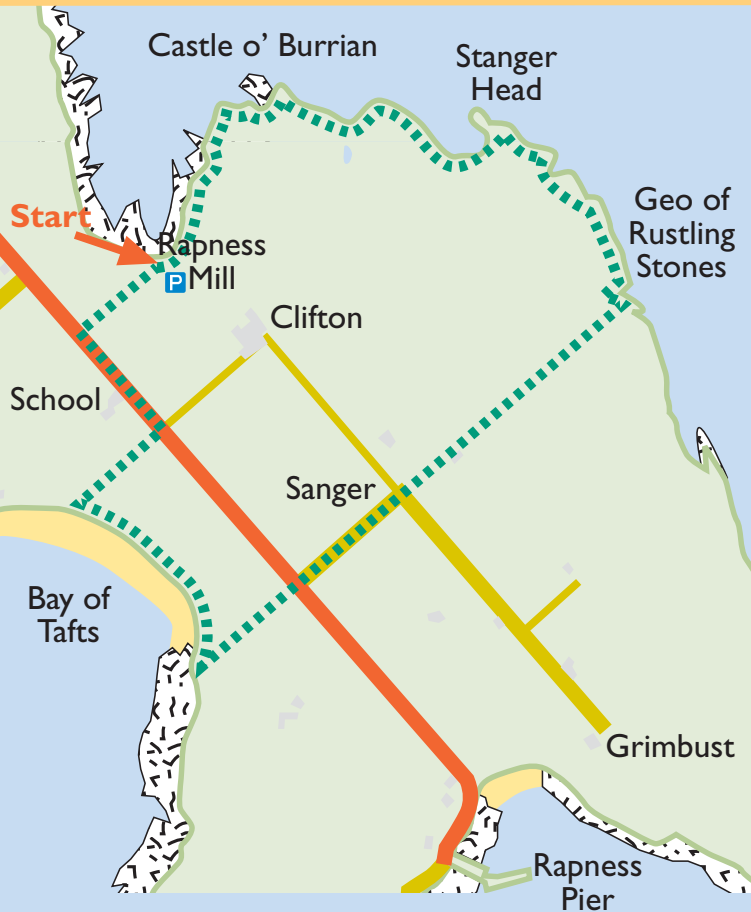
Wild Angelica

Rapness Mill, built about 1850, was powered by a large waterwheel to grind beremeal and oatmeal.

The Castle o' Burrian is well known in Orkney as one of the best and easiest places to see puffins close up. Here, between late April and mid August, as many as 200-300 birds nest on the stack and can be viewed from the adjacent cliffs. Building remains on the top of the stack are said to have been an early Christian hermitage.

Stanger Head is an impressive headland and at high tide, with a good swell, the sea penetrates two small windows in the cliff, spurting out as waterfalls. Razorbills, fulmars, guillemots, kittiwakes and shag are summer residents and the cliffs are decorated with a rock garden of sea pinks, sea campion, sea mayweed and wild thyme. The Geo of Rustling Stones, a

Castle of Burrian



narrow break in Rapness Crag, is covered with wild angelica in late summer and primroses in the spring.

The farmland track has gorse or whin along its bank and in August, purple heather, blue devil's-bit scabious, pink lousewort and tiny eyebright all grow here. Sanger Mill is an old windmill used for threshing oats and bere barley with a kiln to dry the grain ready for grinding at Rapness Mill.

Having reached the Bay of Tafts, you have just walked from the North Sea to the Atlantic. Near the water's edge there are usually small waders such as ringed plover, dunlin and sanderling. In summer there is a wonderful display of sea rocket in mauve and white, with a heady perfume.

