

Armchair Adventurers

Have been exploring the smaller Orkney islands the last few months. A few snippets..

The North Ronaldsay sheep

The breed is thought to be over 5000 years old and are farmed within North Ronaldsay where they are kept on the seashore for most of the year. In 1832 the Laird of North Ronaldsay decided that his pastureland should not be wasted on native sheep and a dyke was built round the island to keep them on the shore and off the land. It was most probably this separation that resulted in the preservation of the breed, as it prevented cross breeding which had been the downfall of other Orkney sheep. The North Ronaldsay Sheep are the only animals in the world aside from a certain Galapagon lizard to be able to subsist entirely on seaweed, leading to its nickname 'seaweed sheep'.



Berriedale Woods on Hoy

Berriedale Wood is the UK's most northerly native woodland and a reminder of what would have once covered most of Orkney. Berriedale is found at the heart of the RSPB's Hoy reserve and is a small oasis of green in the middle of the island's moorland and glens. It survived serious damage following a devastating fire on the island, continuing a woodland that is believed to date back thousands of years before the arrival of mankind on the isles. It is composed of downy birch (*Betula pubescens*), with aspen (*Populus tremula*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*), rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) and willow (*Salix* spp), with an understorey of heather, roses, honeysuckle, ferns and blueberry.



The world's shortest flight

If the winds permit, passengers can travel between Westray and Papa Westray in just 53 seconds. Regional UK airline Logan Air celebrated its millionth passenger in 2016. The flight takes policemen, teachers, students, and doctors in an eight-seater Britten Norman Islander aircraft, and has been operational since 1967.

The alternative to this 1.7 mile flight is a rocky boat ride, which lasts 20 minutes.



Cubbie Roo's Castle, Wyre

Cubbie Roo's (or Row's) Castle is the oldest medieval castle known to exist in Scotland, located on the island of Wyre. It was built in the mid-12th century by Kolbeinn Hruga, a Norseman who owned land on the island. The stone fortification originally consisted of a small, central tower within an oval enclosure, surrounded by a stone wall and an earthen rampart; it was scheduled in 1929. The tower is approximately 8 metres square and the remaining walls are about 2.5 metres high and 2 metres thick. The ground floor is all that remains.



Meur Burnt Mound on Sanday

Burnt mounds are piles of shattered stones. They are normally adjacent to a hearth or trough, the latter made watertight by being rock-cut or wood or clay-lined. Stones would have been heated in fires and then dropped into water when thermal shock caused shattering. The used stones form the mounds. The best example on Sanday is on the coast near Tofts Ness at Meur (Mour.) This mound was excavated in 2005 after it was exposed by storms. The surviving structural components are two tanks defined by orthostats (upright stones or slabs), a corbelled water cistern with an outflow drain and some stone paving. The site was dismantled in 2012 to be moved to a safe location inland.



If anyone would like more information on the Orkney Islands please contact me and I will be happy to email it out to you...especially if you are planning a trip...the work is full of useful information.