



Left: Seals on Tamma Skerry Right: Tuamie Nories at the lighthouse



Out Skerries



Out Skerries

The friendly isles

Some Useful Information

Accommodation:	VisitShetland, Lerwick, Tel: 08701 999440
Ferry Booking Office:	Out Skerries, Tel: 01806 515226
Air Booking Office:	Tingwall Airport Tel: 01595 840246 Out Skerries, Tel: 01806 515253
Shops:	Bruray and Housay
Fuel:	Available on request
Public Toilet & Shower:	Bruray pier
Post Office:	Housay
Public Telephones:	Bruray
Church:	Housay
Medical Assistance:	Resident Nurse, Tel: 01806 515225
Marina:	Visitors’ berths available



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Birders’ Paradise

Bird life is one of the key factors in drawing people to the islands, and year-round there is a wealth of air-borne interest. During migration, however, all kinds of rarities can descend, albeit briefly, due to the islands’ position as the first landfall for stray birds blown in from the east. In summer sheep and lambs share the hills with breeding birds. *Dunter* (Eider Duck), *Sandiloo* (Ringed Plover), *Shalder* (Oystercatcher), *Tirrick* (Arctic Tern) and gulls. Please try to avoid walking near *Tirrick* breeding colonies as they will vigorously defend their eggs and chicks. All kinds of seabirds, otters and seals can be seen from the shore. There is a large breeding population of Guillemots and the small rocks off the south west point, such as the Benelips and Filla, are often thronged with seals.



Swaabie (Great Black-backed Gull)

The rugged scenery is breathtaking, particularly in the teeth of a gale. It is then you can appreciate the special nature of Skerries and its people, not just surviving on the edge, but thriving. In Skerries you are free to walk anywhere but please remember the country code and close all gates you have opened.

Böd Voe and Grunay



The Warmest of Welcomes

Out Skerries, Shetland’s most easterly outpost, has a wealth of attractions never to be forgotten — the dramatic scenery, historical interest, outstanding wildlife and, not least, the warm welcome of the Skerries folk.



Car Ferry, Filla



Probably Europe’s best quality salmon

The first sight of the islands, whether by sea or air, is equally spectacular, entering the narrow harbour entrance with its imposing stacks or flying in over the scattered islands dominated by the lighthouse on Bound Skerry. The dramatic and varied coastline provides a wealth of walking opportunities encompassing beautiful scenery with rugged cliffs, arches, blow-holes, steep geos, stacks, long voes and beaches with fascinating layers of smooth pebbles. Climb to the top of the Bruray Wart, North Wart or South Wart for sweeping views of the islands and, in the distance, Fetlar, Yell, Whalsay and the Shetland mainland.

An Island Community

A skerry is a rock in the sea or a rocky island and it is often assumed that the Out Skerries were so named because of the islands’ remoteness. In fact it stems from the Old Norse word for east, distinguishing Out Skerries from the Ve Skerries (meaning west). Generally, it is simply known as Skerries and fewer than 80 people live there, on the bridge-linked islands of Bruray and Housay. Economically, socially, spiritually, Skerries boasts a community which has always lived for the present and the future.

The Surrounding Sea

Skerries’ identity has been established by the sea. It is a place full of past seafaring romance and tragedy: great sailing ships like the Dutch East Indianman the *Kennemerland* and *De Liefde*, treasure-laden and wrecked in the 17th and 18th centuries, their secrets revealed hundreds of years later in rare finds of silver and gold on the Skerries shoreline. Fishing was, historically, the key to a viable community becoming established; in the days before powerful motor-driven vessels, these islands provided an essential outpost for Shetland’s *haaf* fishermen. In their small open boats, powered by oars and a single square sail, they would fish out of sight of land, setting their lines overnight, with little shelter and only the warmth of a small, carefully guarded fire. It was dangerous, brutal work, but the value of landings was crucial to the entire Shetland economy. Fish is still an important industry, with thriving local boats and of course the unique, community-owned salmon farm, famed for its clear water and the fine quality of its fish.

The Land’s Gifts

Skerries has never been an easy place to glean survival from the limited amount of land. Cultivation is not as intense now as it once was, but Skerries still boasts well preserved rigs. Many of these narrow strips of cultivation are still in use for tatties, neeps and carrots. Gone, though, is the system of rotation called runrig, once essential to ensure everyone received a fair share of quality land. The planticrubs and kale yards are still in evidence although not in use. Sheep are still plentiful, as are their by-products — fragrant lamb, the delicacy known as *reestit* mutton and the wool which Skerries women still turn into the most delicate of shawls or attractive, and warm, *gansies* (pullovers).



Flowering Sea Pinks carpet the cliff-tops from May to July

A Springtime Oasis

The very fertile layer of soil which in past days made the islands productive, now transforms the islands in springtime into a surprisingly green oasis. A riot of wild flowers appear and visitors arriving by air will be impressed by the carpet of Sea Pinks that grow on the grassy banks and cliff-tops.

Aerial view of the sheltered harbour



Da eela (inshore line fishing)



Recording archaeology in Skerries



Safe Haven

The life of Skerries centres around the extraordinary natural harbour, protected on all sides and turning Bød Voe into a calm lagoon in even the most violent of storms. Historically, this anchorage made Skerries a desirable haven and was crucial to the development of the haaf fishing industry.



Bød Voe, looking north west

The open, six-oared *sixareens* used up to the early years of this century were similar in design to the Shetland Models used nowadays for *da eela* (inshore line fishing) during the summer months. You may well find someone willing to take you out in search of *piltocks* (saithe) or mackerel, and you could be lucky enough to be in Skerries for the annual *eela* competition, when all the local fishermen compete for the biggest catch. The dance and supper which follows is one of the year’s highlights, and you will be made more than welcome.



Visiting boats at the Round Skerries Yacht Race



Swedish visitor

Sailing In

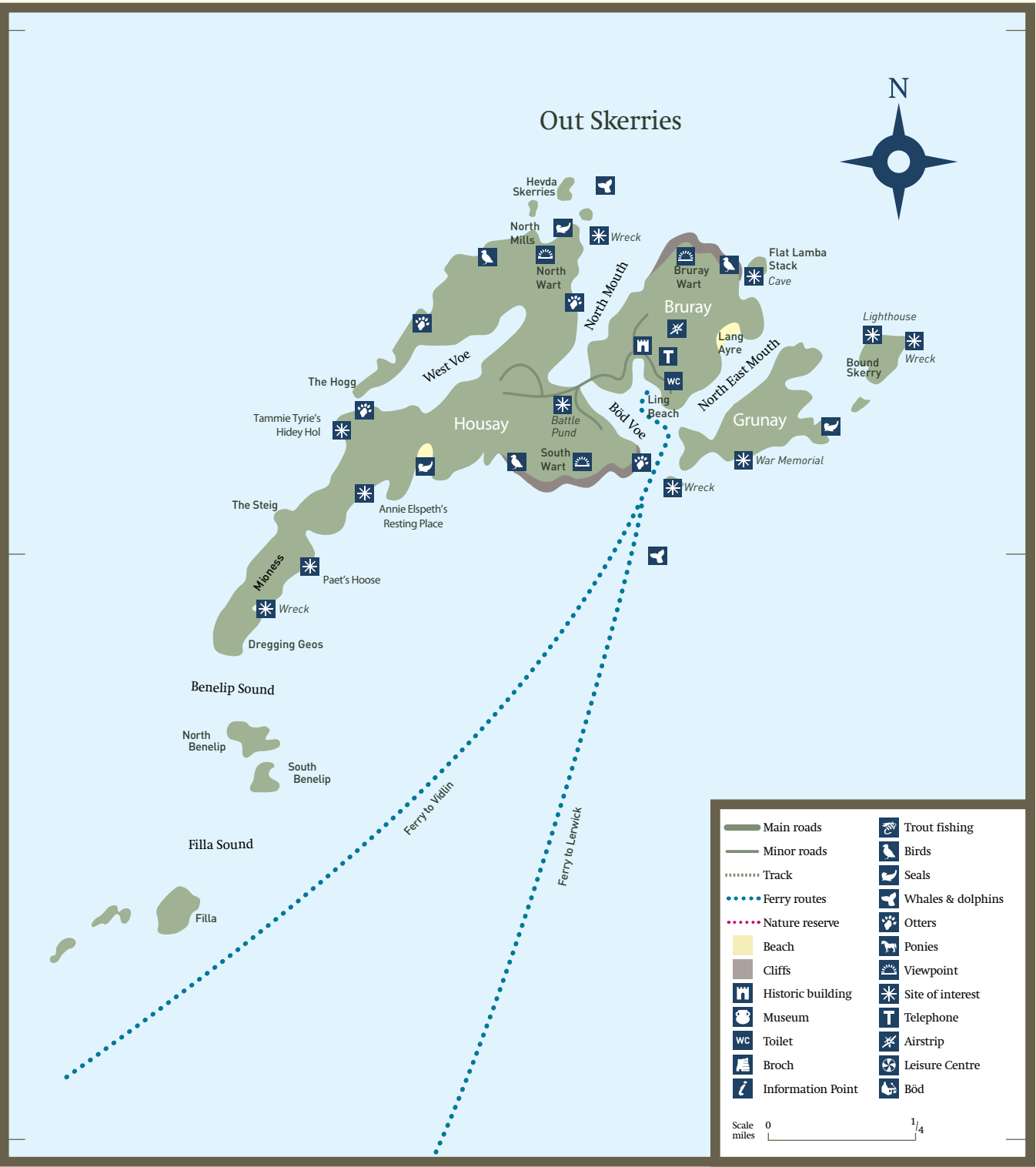
Welcome too are visiting yachtsmen and women. There is plenty of space for anchoring in calm water or visitors’ berths are available at the marina. Water, fuel, public toilets, showers and telephone are all available and easily accessible.

The annual Round Skerries Yacht Race is another enormously enjoyable social occasion, again featuring music, dancing, eating and drinking at the hall.

Exploring The Heritage

There are unexpected historical sites to investigate, such as the Battle Pund, on the West Isle. It is thought that blood feuds were once settled here. Happily, on this crime-free island, any feuding these days is usually confined to the indoor bowls carpet. The shores in and around the harbour bear the signs of Skerries’ fishing heritage: at the North Mills on the West Isle and the Lang Ayre on Bruray, you can see the remains of the lodges lived in by *haaf* (deep sea) fishermen during the summer season; by the pier sits one of the last iron kettles in Shetland, once used to melt fish livers and later to prepare cutch bark for coating fishing lines and nets by those same intrepid fishermen. You can still visit the Ling Beach, so called because it was used – indeed constructed artificially for the purpose of drying fish, which were then exported. The Ling Beach is now disused and overgrown, but fish are still caught and dried on Skerries. However, today you are more likely to see fish drying on a washing line.

Piltocks are salted, dried and preserved for use later in the year



War and Peace

On the currently uninhabited island of Grunay, once home to the keepers of the now-automated Skerries lighthouse, tragedy of a different kind is remembered. Here a Canadian bomber crashed during World War II. A plaque commemorating the event was placed on the island in 1990.

Smugglers and the Press Gang

Shetland’s reputation of having many excellent seamen made the isles an obvious target for the Press Gang, particularly during the Napoleonic Wars. Naval officers intercepted boats returning from the whaling and entered houses even at night. To avoid them, men often fled to hideouts in the hills or to caves along the shores where they remained in hiding until the ships had left the area. Some Skerries landmarks remind us of these activities. The stone called Annie Elspeth’s



A natural arch in Flat Lamba Stack on the north-east coast

Resting Place is where a woman stopped, and scanned the sea for ships, on her way to deliver food to the men hiding in the Paet’s Hoose on Meoness. Another hideout on Queyness was called Tammie Tyrie’s Hoidy Hol, but has now been washed away by the sea.

Smuggling was once a useful source of additional income, and the caves and inlets were handy for storing all kinds of contraband. Skerries’ far-flung easterly position made it a handy isolated landing point for smugglers from Scandinavia and Holland.

Dreaming of Treasure

Out on the south-westerly tip of the Point of Mioness, though, you can dream of treasure, for it was here, in 1960, in the Dregging Geos, that old Skerries stories about gold and silver coins being found came home to roost.

A silver ducatoon and a 1711 gold ducat were found, prompting a mini-treasure hunt. They had come from the gold-laden wreck *De Liefde*, and since then she, the *Kennemerland* and the Danish warship *Wrangels Palais* have been excavated over many years and are the subject of legal protection.

Skerries remains a popular destination for underwater explorers, as well as more casual beachcombers hoping for the glitter of gold in the sand. Who knows? You may be lucky.

Pottery from one of the many ship-wreck sites around the coastline



Majestic underwater scenery

The 1930’s mail boat, Palm

