

PAPA WESTRAY

Orkney, Scotland

Distance: 20.1 km (2.2 miles)

Difficulty: easy-moderate

Terrain: Mix of easy rock and grass paths

Height gain: 176 metres

Map: OS Explorer 464

Starting point: Knapp of Howar near the airport and hostel (GR HY 483 518). Or from the ferry jetty in Moclett if arriving by boat.

Highlights

- Arrival on the world's shortest scheduled flight
- Experience two oceans meeting at the northern tip of the island
- Community coffee morning for the best home-bakes and chats
- Secret swims in rock pools of the west coast or beaches of the east
- Rare Scottish primrose and spectacular seabirds

Pubs and cafes near the route

- Excellent community coffee morning every Wednesday 10.30–11.45, St Ann's Community Room
- Beltane House hostel, weekly 'pub' on Saturday nights from 8pm
- Well-stocked, community-run shop

Dogs

- Welcome on the beach and paths

Papa Westray circular walk

This full day walk explores the best of this special island. Along the west coast the earliest north European homes still standing can be found at the Knap of Howar, the flowering machair around the Bay of Moclett and the white beach at Bothican are sublime and the low cliffs at the Head of Moclett are an excellent spot to see puffins. Along the east coast, St Tredwell's loch holds the medieval remains of a chapel, once a renowned pilgrimage centre, said to offer miraculous cures for eye ailments and, further north along the east coast is South Wick's old stone pier with 18th-century buildings, once the old kelp and coal stores, now home to a heritage and craft centre. At North Wick, the large, white-sand bay is perfect for a secluded dip before



reaching the wild and windswept northern third of Papay, which is an RSPB reserve full of 'bonxies' (great skuas), Arctic skuas, Arctic terns, curlew, and dunlin in season. The low-cliffs of Fowl Craig, undercut by sea caves and natural arches, are the summer residence for all four of Britain's auks – guillemot, razorbill, puffin, and black guillemot. Rounding the north end of the island and heading south down the west coast, the large rock flags that jut into the sea form huge rock pools that are fun to explore and the 12th-century St Boniface's Church, one of the oldest Christian sites in north Scotland, was among few to survive the reformation.

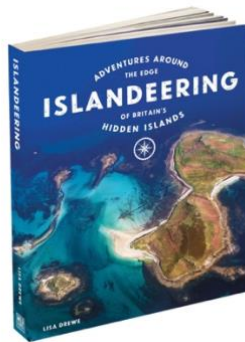
Directions

1. From the airport, leave the airfield and turn right along the lane, pass the war memorial and turn right along the track that runs through the south end of the farm complex at Holland to reach the Knapp of Howar.
2. Walk south along the west coast, after 900m reach the end of the lane at Backiskaill and continue along the coast and after another 300m, the route passes below the farm buildings. Cross various stiles, walls, and fences to walk through the fields.
3. Reach the south west tip of the island at Vest Ness and continue around the Bay of Moclett through the machair. Walk across Bothican beach and then take the minor road towards the pier.
4. At the pier, continue along the lane and then through the gate and track below a house to the south east point of the island at the Head of Moclett. Continue north on the east coast via the grassy coast path along the cliff tops.
5. After 2.6 km, just before the ruins of the mill, find the faint path inland to visit St Treadwell's Chapel on the loch. Return and continue on the coast between the ruins of the mill, then take the track to left of the house.
6. At the junction with the road turn left for refreshments at the community café or hostel. Otherwise, continue straight over the lane and head north past Southwick Pier then stay on the small lane for 2.3km to reach North Via.
7. Access the beach at North Wick, avoiding the private lane to the house, and walk onto the grass bank at its north end. Continue around the coast past the large pool of Loch of the Taing. Pass through some old sheepfolds and then follow the faint path uphill along the steep cliffs, crossing the walls via stiles. Towards Fowl Craig.
8. Continue to the north tip of the island at Fowl Flag, walk round on the grassy cliff top, then climb to the highest point of the walk near John's Boat. Continue south along the extensive flagstones of the west coast for some great rock-pooling and swimming opportunities at Geo of Odderaber. After another 2.6km reach St Boniface's Church and then head south for a further 1km to return to the Knap of Hower.



Special notes: Access around North Hill may be restricted in nesting season, April to August. Seek advice at the hostel. RSPB warden-guided walks of the reserve between May and August.

There are circular routes around 50 islands of Britain featured in our book "Islandeering: adventures around the edge of Britain's hidden islands".



Happy Islandeering
Lisa, Charlie and Goose
www.islandeering.com