

FOULA HERITAGE

Ranger service

The North End



The Gaada Stack

Guided Walk No. 3

Distance **2.7km**
Difficulty **Moderate**

Leave from the concrete Cruie and walk up to the top of the main road at **Bloburn (1)**. The section of the road from just north of the Burns to Bloburn was built in 1956 – 58. Peter Manson, the last man to live in Bloburn, said the old path was like a bloody snake with its tail in Hell. Stones were dug up for building the Bloburn house from the small quarry at the side of the road.

Walk over the slabs of rock above Bloburn. Sandstone was laid down in the Old Red Sandstone period, 360 – 400 million years ago. This part of Foula is all sandstone and mudstone. The burn above Bloburn runs down a gully formed by softer mudstone eroding away.



Mouldie kus

Walk up to Steven's renovated **mouldie kus (2)** and look for the ruins of others. This area has been scalped and the dry peat dust carried in for bedding for the cows in the winter.

Look for Tormentil, Squills, Heathrush, Great Woodrush, Mat Grass (*Nardus stricta*) and Heath Bedstraw.

Walk to the green painted **water tank (3)**. Water is pumped up to here, to supply the north end. Here you can find plants common on peat moorland, such as Common Cotton Grass, called Luk a Minnie's Oo in Shetland (meaning Grandmother's wool), Hare's Tail Cotton Grass (growing on drier areas), Common Sedge, Wavy Hair Grass, Purple Moor Grass, Crowberry, (called berry heather in Shetland) and Sphagnum moss. Look for bonxies nesting here. Listen for skylarks singing.

Look down at the old rigs cutting up the crofts, or toons, below, showing up well from here. The Nort Toons were broken out at the beginning of the 19th century, when the population increased again after the smallpox or Muckle Fever epidemics.

Look at **Tamson's Crub (4)** used by Bloburn for growing kale. It is unusual in that the foundations are rectangular, unlike the other Foula crubs, which are circular, so it may have been built from some much older structure.

Walk along faint traces of an ancient dyke that circles the mound in this area. Its age is unknown.

A little way below and to the east see if you can find the remains of a possible late **Bronze Age burial mound**, 4000-3000 years old.(5) with the remains of the cist where the urns of cremated ash were interred.

Go east and down a small **snaa bul(6)**, built to shelter sheep in the winter. They were fed kale to encourage them to gather here in snowy weather.

Go down and cross the next style to the back of the dyke and follow along it to the ruined house of **Soberlie(7)**.

Look for Marsh Dandelions, Common Dog Violets, Milkwort, Spotted Heath Orchid, Butterwort, Common Sedge, Field and Heath Woodrush. Look at the house with its

thick, dry stane walls, small windows and waa presses (cupboards built into the wall). The dwelling house was built in the position traditional to Foula, onto the front of the outhouses. It was built by James Manson in the first half of the 19th century. His granddaughter and her husband, James Umphray, were the last people to live there. They moved out to Scalloway at the end of the 19th century.

Look for fulmars nesting in or around the house. Watch they do not spit foul smelling oil at you. It is hard to wash off.

Look for Lady's Smock, Sorrel, Buttercups and Soft Rush, known as Floss. The pith was used for wicks for oil lamps. Try splitting a stalk with your nail and scoop out a section so you can see what it was like.

Walk along to the **Logit house (8)**. This has been built to a design traditional to the Shetland Mainland, with the dwelling house built alongside the byre and barn, unlike the Foula design. Notice the big stone that rolled down the hill and came in through the roof, just the year after the folk left (in 1884). The house was built by James Ratter, who came from Ollaberry with his wife. They lived at first at the Long Lee, over at the foot of the Logit, but after their son Fraser was lost, when he climbed down the cliffs to go fishing from the rocks, they moved further away from the scene of the tragedy. Another son, James, was later lost at the North Ice (the Greenland whaling).

The walls of the house are covered with the grey, hairy lichen known as Old Man's Beard. It was dried and used as tobacco when supplies ran out during bad winter weather.

Walk along the dyke and out to the cliff edge at **Selkie Geo (9)**, watching for Rock Pipits and Wheatear. The remains of a cooie dyke, age unknown, runs at right angles to the croft dyke, across East Hoevdi.

At Selkie Geo, look for Grey Seals or selkies, Guillemots, Kittiwakes, Razorbills and Eiders.

Examine the maritime sward, made up of Sea Pinks, Scurvy Grass, Sea Plantains, Buckshorn Plantains, Ribwort Plantains, all plants adapted to survive salt spray.

Go over the style and walk up to the view point, on the north west edge of **East Hoevdi. (10)** From here, you can look along the spectacular Nort Bank to the Kame. Look for ravens, known as corbies, that nest in the face of Soberlie. Puffins may be sitting up along the edge.

Go back down to the style over the fence but BE CAREFUL. Keep well up from the lower edge of the cliff on your way back to the style, because the grass here is short and slippery and on a steep slope. Climb back over the style and walk across the foot of the Logit to look at the ruins of the **Long Lee (11)**.

Continue on to Trolligeo, habitation of trows or trolls. Walk up the little burn a bit to look for Potamogetum (Pondweed), Calytriche (Water Starwort), Spike Rush, Blinks, Marsh Pennywort, Lesser Spearwort and Carnation Sedge.

Climb over the style into **Ristie (12)** and walk along the coastline on the maritime sward.

Go to **the Pier (13)**. Point out the glacial moraine, deposited here during the last Ice Age, which is being gradually eroded away. Look at the stones lying on the grass that the sea has flung up in the winter.

Walk along the cliff edge opposite the stacks **(14), the Gaada Stack**, the Sheepie and the Broch. Gaada comes from gaad meaning a hole. It is not known what Sheepie means, but it is probably nothing to do with sheep. One theory is that it comes from the old Icelandic word chypr meaning a sail. The Broch was an arch which fell in January 1970. It is recorded as having had a small Monastic Cell on the top of it. The early Christian monks built hermitages on precipitous headlands and stacks, in remote places, probably as retreats for solitude and meditation. Climb over the style and the second hole in the Gaada Stack will come into view.

Pass the Ordinance Survey marker, a ring of white painted stones. The island was surveyed in 1901 and 1960.

Where the coast lowers to rocks you will see the remains of old **boat noosts (15)**, shallow boat shaped depressions cut into the ground, where the boats were pulled up in bad weather and through the winter. They are being eroded away by the weather now they are no longer in use. In fine weather, Jimmie Umphray, the old man who lived in Ristie, used to row to the shop (near the harbour) to fetch his errands, when he was in his seventies. There were no vehicles in those days so it was easier than walking.

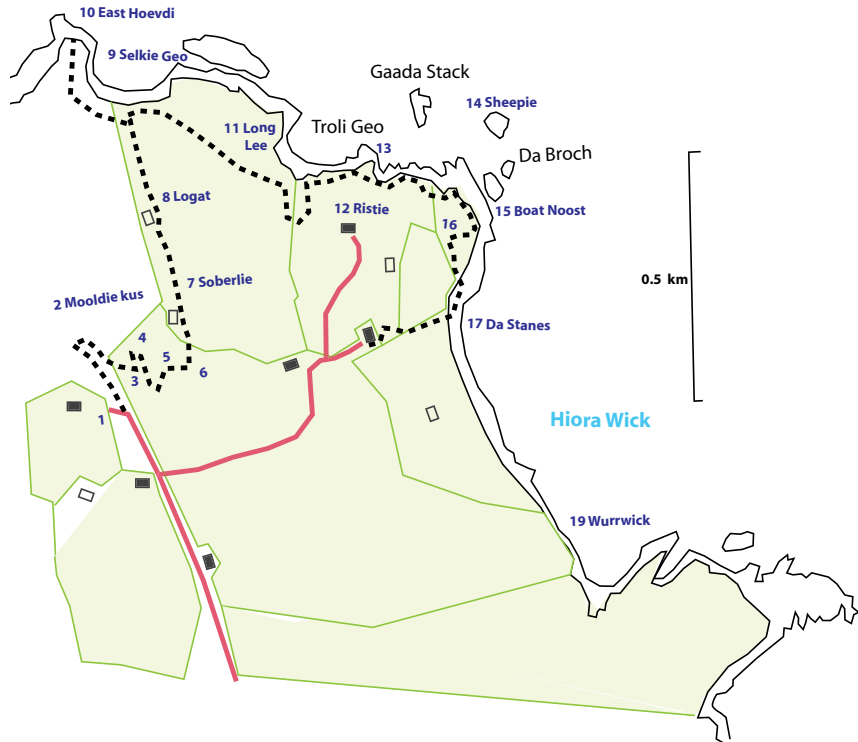
Point out **the old kale yard (16)**. Seedlings from the plantie crubs were transplanted to here when they were a year old.

Watch out for the Oyster Catchers which usually nest down here. You may find small piles of empty limpet shells where they have carried up limpets to eat. There may also be a pair of Arctic Skuas – they have to battle hard to keep their chicks from marauding Bonxies.

Look along **da Stanes (17)**, a storm beach of boulders, for the remains of the Walrus, a seaplane which crashed in the first year of the War. Visibility was poor in a snow shower, when they attempted to land on what looked like a nice pebble beach. Fortunately, no one was injured.

Make your way up to the house at the **Freyers (18)** where you will meet up with the road. Or instead, if you have time to go further, walk along the coast to **Wurwick (19)**, looking for Tysties on the way.

Wurwick is the other end of the fault line that separates the metamorphic rock from the Old Red Sandstone. Notice the bands of porphyritic microgranite (pink because of the felspar) alternating with grey micaschist. At the fault, the sandstone has been altered to quartzite by the heat caused by friction.



KEY	
	Road
	Croft / feild boundary
	Walk route
	Dwelling house
	Structure

North

