1 -Evie to Birsay Route

Theme: Loss

Length: 12.5 miles (20 km)

Terrain: Rough coastal walking with some recourse to the road. There are some very steep sections at Costa Hill and Whitaloo Point.

Total ascent: 260m

Total on road: 2.1 miles (3.4 km)

Total off road: 10.4 miles (16.6 km)

Time: 7-9 hours..

Route description

Begin at the Broch of Gurness, where there is ample car parking and, if you wish, take the opportunity to visit the Iron Age fort, which is Scotland's best preserved broch village. Walk south along the road to the Sands of Evie. At low tide you can cross the burn and walk along the beach, but at high tide you'll need to continue a little further along the road to where it turns sharply left. Take the track to the right and this will lead you above the beach to the car park and public toilets at Aikerness, at the west end of the Sands.

This is the last public toilet until Birsay and the bothy at the shore is a good place to wait on others if it is raining.

From here the track continues along the coast. The walking here is some of the roughest in the entire route and it is sometimes easier on the shore than the rocky grass but take care in the wet. There will be some clambering over large rocks which may be slippery. If the tide is very high it may not be possible to do this first coastal section. The alternative is to take the road from the toilets up to the main road, turn right and re-join the route where there is a beautiful carved bench at the road up to Feolquoy. The grass route improves again onto the remains of the Knowe of Grugar. At this point the coast becomes too treacherous to navigate, especially at high tide, and so a fenced track leads up to the road at Grugar. This means that the remains of St Peter's kirk at Urrigar are not currently accessible until the path can be improved. Walking along the road affords a different view of the uninhabited island of Eynhallow with its ruined twelfth century church. Continue along the road past Crismo to Costa Hill. Go through the kissing gate to the track which leads up the hill, bearing left to the summit, from where you can bear north west to the cliffs, joining the coastal route from around the back of Costa Head. The cliffs here are high and dangerous – do keep well back from the edge and follow the fence line around Ramma Geo to Inyama Hellia. If you

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are unsure if you are heading in the right direction you can't go wrong if the sea is on your right. There are no barbed wire fences to cross.
A gate leads you on westwards around the coast and downhill to Oyce where a narrow bridge takes you over the burn and on up the coast to Ramly Geo. Again there is significant exposure and care should be taken especially if it is windy. A gate at Ramly Geo keeps you well back from the cliff edge. Continue along the coast, to Crustan – marked on the map as Tumulus - this is where travellers would have had first sight of the Kirk and the Brough.

Keeping back from the cliff edge continue downhill past the Loop of Crooie to Whitaloo Point. At Greenhill you will be inside a sheep field. Please keep to the edge of the field past a wartime building and at the end of the field, through a gate onto the coast again. The path here is narrow in places but with stunning views of the Hesta Geo before broadening again and leading past the Whalebone and the nousts (scalloped earth for storing small fishing boats) at Skibbigeo.

The next section can be muddy, especially in winter, taking you round the coast to the Brough of Birsay. You may wish to visit the Brough at low tide via the causeway but it is important to check the tide times as it is only safe two hours either side of low tide. The tide comes in very rapidly and it is dangerous to attempt crossing whilst it does so.

Birsay Tide Times

From the Brough car park continue on road past Zanzibar cottage to a sharp left hand turn. Turn right at the remains of the Earl's palace and watch for cars as the road narrows at the south end of the Palace. You can explore the ruins before finishing your pilgrimage at St Magnus Kirk Birsay, on the right hand side of the road. *[The Palace Stores next door and the Birsay Bay Tearooms further up the road are both well worth a visit.]*The church is usually open and you are welcome to explore it.

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