

# 3 – Dounby to Finstown Route



**Theme:** Change

**Length:** 10.3 miles (16.6 km)

**Terrain:** Mostly gentle road walking with few inclines, some track walking through field and woodland.

**Total ascent:** 130m

**Total on road:** 7.6 miles (12.2 km)

**Total off road:** 2.7 miles (4.4 km)

**Time:** 4–6 hours..

## Route description

The walk starts at the crossroads in the centre of the village and car parking is available beside the interpretation board and waystone there. Public toilets are across the road. Walk up the footpath to Quilco and then cross the road to walk on the right hand side until you reach the turn off to North Bigging on the right, just before the Beaquoy Road on the left which is the final part of the Birsay to Dounby Road. *[You can opt to continue from the previous section from Beaquoy to North Bigging and miss out Dounby but it is a long day – 20 miles.*

Follow North Bigging Road around a few twists and turns, the height affording views across Harray Loch to the hills of Hoy. Once past Holodyke House on the right the main road turns sharply to the right, leading downhill past the farm of North Bigging. At the bottom of the road, cross the main road and continue straight ahead past the stables to Howaback.

Here you meet the Old Drover's Track, turn left and follow this ancient track along to Conyar, an indistinct mound on the left of the track. At the end of the track turn right down the road to the Merkister Hotel. Follow the road around to the left along the shore of the Harray Loch and past an old water mill. The road then leaves the lochside and continues inland. At Glen Villa turn left off the road onto a farm track that leads uphill to Quean. Continue up the track past some farm buildings and take the grassy path to the left that leads to St Michael's Church.

At St Michael's Church it is worth taking a moment to visit the war memorial, located on the top of a broch. Enter through the gate at the near side of the church and take care on the steep sides of the hill. The view from the memorial affords a panorama of Harray in every direction.

From here return from the graveyard, turning left and follow the road down to the junction where turning right leads you downhill. At the bottom, either take the next



left uphill again before coming to a junction with the main road or turn right for toilets at the back of Harray Community Hall or the St Magnus Toilet at the Fursbreck Pottery. (If using the toilets you can retrace your steps or carry on following the main road for nearly a mile to re-join the route). If you have not taken the route to the toilets cross the main road straight ahead onto the Lyde Road and take the first right signed Howe.

This quiet single track road leads over the Burn of Nettleton and onwards, bearing right past Howe Farm. At the end of the road the official route for now is unfortunately by road, turning right to meet the main road and then turning left along the busy Harray Road to Refuge Corner. At this sharp right hand turn in the road continue straight ahead on a potholed track. [*The preferred route, which we cannot waymark at present as only one of the two landowners involved has given consent, leads straight ahead from the Howe Road end, on a peat track that meanders first to the left and then to the right. You do have the right to roam here but we can't sign the route and there is a fence to negotiate as well as occasionally cattle in the final field. Once over this fence – whose top line of barb is conveniently absent – cross the field diagonally to exit by the gate that leads onto the track at Refuge Corner.*]

Follow the track along past the Loch of Wasdale and then uphill through a kissing gate. Continue along the grassy track which then joins with the farm track at Binscarth. Where the farm track has a hair pin bend to the right, the gate into Binscarth Woods is directly ahead and clearly marked. The Woods can be muddy – the easiest route is to continue straight down the track but you will see gates off to the right and going through these gives a beautiful if muddy woodland walk beside a burn before leading back again to rejoin the track you started on.

At the bottom of the hill the track crosses the burn and leads out of the woods through a kissing gate. There are sometimes cattle in the next field, which leads you along a muddy track to a kissing gate that opens onto the main road. Cross the road with care, turning left downhill into Finstown, past Baikie's Stores. Keep on the footpath downhill on the right hand side of the road and curving to the right past Firth Church. At this point, cross the road to the footpath on the left hand side, along the shore side to the car park at Finstown where the section ends.

