

2 – Birsay to Dounby Route



Theme: Growth

Length: 10.2 miles (16.6 km)

Terrain: Gentle road and track walking with some inclines but no steep sections.

Total ascent: 184m

Total on road: 6.3 miles (10 km)

Total off road: 3.9 miles (6.6 km)

Time: 4-6 hours..

Route description

Before leaving the graveyard at St Magnus Church, admire the view of the Brough from the shore wall. Coming out the graveyard turn right past the Palace Stores and over the stone bridge to the toilets.

Turn left up the road beside the Boardhouse Burn to the old kissing gate at the end of the road. This gate itself is sometimes tied up with wire but the landowner has given permission and the barbed wire beside the kissing gate is easily moved. Do please replace it as you find it. *[There are a few days of the year when cattle are in this field – if so please don't take dogs in and, instead, follow the public road to Barony Mill. It's for this reason that the route doubles back from the Mans Well and Barony Mill – you may wish to continue on to the Links and miss out this section.]*

Walk through this field to the narrowing point at the other end where another barbed wire gate takes you to a second narrower field which can be muddy at times. Continue along the cut grass to the other end where a short section of boardwalk avoids deep mud. *[please use this boardwalk – the mud can be knee deep to the right of the boardwalk].*

Turn right at the mill water wheel and go under the aqueduct to the front entrance of the Barony Mill. If you have time, the Mill is well worth a visit when open. At the junction to the public road turn left and then almost immediately right. The Mans Well is a few hundred yards up on the right hand side and there is usually a cup there for drinking from.

Retrace your steps from here to the Mill, along the boardwalk and back to the old kissing gate and the toilets, the last public toilets before Dounby.



Birsay to Dounby Route (continued)

From here take the track by the toilets marked footpath. This leads to a kissing gate into the Links where there are often cattle but they are well used to walkers. Do still take care, keep dogs under close control, and recourse to the shore if necessary. Follow the shoreline along the Links to the other side of the prominent dune. From here a gate and old stile lead you out. *[If you go too far to the right along the shore you'll come to a stile and a grass track. Turn left and you'll regain the road, turning right up the hill.]*

Follow the public road straight ahead up the hill. Just before the crest of the hill turn left along another public road that leads past the Birsay Antiques Centre (formerly the Community Hall).

At the end of this road there is a prominent standing stone (Wheebin), turn right along the main road beside the Boardhouse Loch. Walk on the right hand side of this occasionally busy road past a road to the left that leads down to the shore and the Water Treatment Works. Take care on the right hand bend of the road as it narrows here as you may need to step into the narrow verge if there is traffic. On the left hand side you'll see a standing stone in a field – this is the Strathyre Mans Stone. Continue along the road to Twatt and past the old Twatt Kirk (now a private residence). The road then leads downhill and another tight right hand bend before the sign to Kirbuster, Turn left down this much quieter road and follow it along until it forks in two.

Take the even quieter right hand fork which leads to the Loch of Hundland. Turn right as the Loch gets close to the road, past the sign to Eastside farm. Keep right, heading to Canada West and before you reach the house there is a grassy track leading directly up hill. Follow this up to where it opens out, bearing right and then left. Some rope here keeps you left to avoid a deep drainage ditch. Continue along this track to where it joins a bigger farm track which also leads straight ahead. The track returns to grass and there is sometimes a rope across if livestock have been moved recently, leave the rope as you find it. From here the going is a bit rougher and wetter with the driest route generally on the left hand side. This grass track becomes surfaced again and the views here on a good day are spectacular – giving a panorama of Birsay around into Harray. It continues straight ahead down a steep hill and at the bottom, turn left along the farm road. This leads to a house at the end of the road from where a grass track leads uphill. Follow this track, with views of the Loch of Sabiston, to Cloke Farm. From here go straight ahead uphill onto the public road.

If you wish to climb Greeny Hill, it is a 20 minute detour and clearly signed off to the left. If not continue along the road, bearing right down the hill past Beaquoy Farm where the Spences have kindly made a shed available if you need shelter and a rest.

Continue on down to the road junction, turning right on the Evie Road towards Dounby, past Quilco and then on footpath to the crossroads with the Smithfield Hotel. *{There is also a co-op and butchers and a little detour to the right leads to Castaway Crafts, the Post Office, Hardware Store and Jewellers.}* Continue on the footpath beside the road until you reach Milestone Community Church where this section ends.

