

5 – Orphir to Kirkwall Route



Theme: Forgiveness

Length: 12.6 miles (20.3km)

Terrain: Road and track walking with one challenging section of rough heather moorland and some cliff exposure on Scapa Flow.

Total ascent: 222m

Total on road: 4.75 miles (8km)

Total off road: 7.65 miles (12.3km)

Time: 5–7 hours.

Route Description

The walk starts at the Orkneyinga Saga Centre by the Bu Church where there is plenty of car parking space. Walk up the road to Orphir village. From Orphir Kirk turn right onto the pavement heading east towards Kirkwall. Follow the road back along past Cott and the track you came down from Burgir. Opposite this, the road to Nearhouse is signed to the right and just past this a track leads gently up hill at Highbreck. Follow this track up and then gently downhill to Newhouse where it joins the Kirbister road. Turn right and walk to the junction with the main road again at Old Schoolhouse. Remain on the main road past the pumping station at the Mill Burn. A couple of hundred yards after the last buildings on the left overhead electricity cables cross the road. On the right side of the road, under the cables, is a gate. Go through the gate and follow the path which takes you to the far end of the field and another gate. Pass through this gate and follow the boggy track to the shore.

At times of exceptionally high tides, the path leading to the beach at Waulkmill may be flooded and impassable. In those circumstances, walkers are advised to return to the main road and keep on it for 0.6 miles (0.9km) 'till the next road junction and turn right there. Tide times at Waulkmill are approximately the same as for Stromness. Please

see <https://www.tidetimes.org.uk/stromness-tide-times>

At the shore a track is signed to the left. Walking clockwise around the bay a set of wooden steps leads up from the shore to join the road. Turn right along the road towards the public toilets (the last ones before Scapa Beach!).

Continue down the road from the toilets past Waulkmill Lodge from where a track leads left and uphill. This track leads over the heather to Burn of Vam where a set of wooden steps leads you up and over a fence. Cross the burn and another set of steps leads you over a fence and on to open moorland. Look for fencing stabs with waymarkers as a guide but the route here is rough walking and it is easy to turn to an ankle in the many rabbit holes.

Other posts in this area can cause confusion so look for the waymarkers and they are on the posts downhill of any others. Past Moo Cliff the route leads closer to the shore line and the view opens up ahead. Continue this rough walking to the well marked descent to Salt



Pan, a useful sheltered spot when required. A short steep incline up from Salt Pan leads on to Brough where we must leave the shore. Turn left up before the fence line – don't walk up the narrow fenced corridor just after the waymarkers. The track leads up hill before a dog leg to the right at Coal Hill and then upwards again to the roadside.

Follow the main road along to the right until the sign to Foveran Restaurant on the right. Take this turning and resolve to come back of an evening (booking essential). Walk down to the restaurant and then follow round to the right past the buildings and down a track that leads to the shore. From here an established path wends around the shore, with some exposure in places. Continue on the path, which gets more used the further you proceed, snaking around Lingro to Scapa Distillery. You may have the time and inclination to hop over the wall here and take a tour (the view from the still room alone is worth the admission).

The path continues around to Scapa Beach, keeping in front of the cottages, as requested. You can then choose to walk on the beach or up on the pavement past the Royal Oak memorial where, turning to the left, a pavement leads to the Crantit Trail, signed to the left. The cathedral is clearly in view in the distance in front of you. Follow the entire length of the Crantit Trail where it leads out again at the roundabout beside the new hospital. At the roundabout the direction is straight ahead but follow the signage anti clockwise around the pavements until you are walking on the right hand side pavement into Kirkwall. Continue on this pavement all the way into Kirkwall, past St Joseph's Church.

You will see the spire of the cathedral but the route takes us to the harbour first so resist the temptation to cut up to the right and continue along to the harbour. From here turn right and then right again down Broad St which is largely pedestrianised. On the left hand side is St Olaf's Wynd and up this a little is the archway of St Olaf's Kirk. Retrace your steps along the Wynd and continue left along Broad St where it turns sharply to the right. Continue in the pedestrian zone and the Cathedral will reveal itself on the left hand side. In the paving in front of the cathedral near the road you will find a plaque with the St Magnus Way logo cast in bronze which make a good endpoint if the cathedral is closed. If it is open, follow the steps up to the front door and proceed into the cathedral. Take time to explore this magnificent space. The column with the bones of St Magnus in is up the right hand side, past the crossing (south transept) and on the left. In the south transept is the St Magnus Way Pilgrim's Table. Please sign the Pilgrim's Logbook and ask for your completion certificate if you have walked or cycled all of the route. There are prayers relating to each section of the walk on hand held boards that you may take to a quiet corner for some person contemplation. Please consider making a donation at the table to help maintain and improve the St Magnus Way. If the cathedral is closed and you wish a completion certificate please see details on www.stmagnusway.com or the St Magnus Way Facebook page.

Congratulations! There is no route description for the next stage of your pilgrimage. Where and how you go from here is for you to decide.

