

5 - Orphir to Kirkwall Route



Theme: Forgiveness

Length: 11.4 miles (18.3km)

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: 3.75 miles (6km)

Total off road: 7.65 miles (12.3km)

Time: 5-7 hours.

Route Description

From Orphir Kirk turn right onto 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. From here a track is signed to the right. 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. 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 fenceline – 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. At Red Craig erosion necessitates crossing a stile and continuing inside the field for a short way before rejoining 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 before the Scottish Autism Shop 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. Follow the steps up to the front door and, if you have arrived in time (before 6pm, Apr-Sep, 5pm Oct-Mar), 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 and on the left.

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.

