

Life in Bressay

As the closest island to Lerwick, many of Bressay's inhabitants travel daily to the town for work and school. Islanders have a strong sense of community; there's a hotel with a pub, and each year locals get together for their own small-scale Up Helly Aa fire festival. Every Saturday, Bressay hosts Shetland's only weekly 5km parkrun and the Speldiburn Cafe is open afterwards serving hot drinks and snacks.

A short seven-minute ferry trip from Lerwick, Bressay is an island which covers 11 square miles and is home to around 360 people. Lying to the east of the town, Bressay creates a superb, sheltered harbour for shipping – the reason for Lerwick's establishment as a major trading port. From Viking times to the present day, Bressay Sound has provided safe anchorage for all types of seafaring vessels.

Welcome to Bressay and Noss

Bressay and Noss

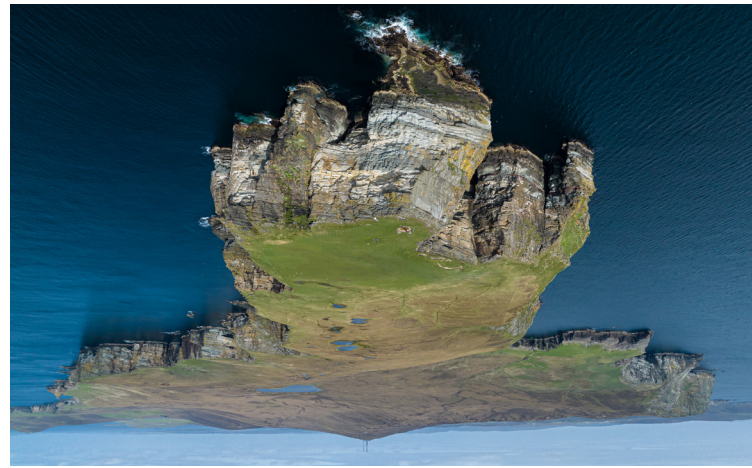
Shield to Lerwick Harbour



Flora
In summer, Bressay's roadsides and verges blaze with a colourful tapestry of wild flowers. Look out for Buttercups, Birdfoot Trefoil, Red Campion, Clovers and Orchids. Keep your eyes open as you pass ditches and wet areas for the flow of Golden Marsh Marigold and the brilliant yellows of Mimulus and Yellow Flag. On the moorland, look out for the tiny white flowers of Heath Bedstraw, the sapphire gems of Heath Milkwort, the yellow stars of Tormentil and the delicate pinks of Heath-spotted Orchid.

Geology and landscape
The Old Red Sandstone rocks that make up most of Bressay and Noss have eroded into a series of rounded hills, the highest of which is the **Wart of Bressay** at 226 metres. Along parts of the eastern coastline and particularly at the **Ord** and the **Bard** there are high sea cliffs. Elsewhere the rocky coast is fringed with fertile soils and agricultural land but much of the interior is heather moorland. The sandstone flags provide ideal building material to which the many skilfully built drystone dykes and croft houses stand testimony.

Things to see and do



↓ The Bard Andrew Simpson

Birdlife and sea mammals
Bressay provides a mosaic of habitats which support a variety of breeding birds. The summer moorland is the haunt of species such as Great and Arctic Skuas, Curlews, Golden Plovers, Common Gulls, Skylarks and Meadow Pipits. Elegant Red-throated Divers breed on some of the hill lochs, while fields and pastures echo to the calls of waders like Oystercatchers, Lapwings, Redshanks and Snipes. Tiny Shetland Wrens, Rock Pipits and Ringed Plovers breed along the coastline with Arctic Terns, Eiders and Black Gulliemots patrolling offshore. Look to the water for both grey and common seals and, in summer, large shoals of fish attract porpoises, dolphins and whales inshore. Noss Sound is one of the best areas to look out for them. The voes on the east side are best for otters.



← Noss sea cliffs David Gifford



↑ Heath-spotted Orchid Heath Milkwort David Gifford



↑ Gairie House David Gowers / Alamy Stock Photo

Getting to Bressay

Bressay is easily accessible at all times of year and frequent ferries link the island to Lerwick. The ferry arrives on Bressay near the 19th-century house and old pier at **Maryfield**. For timetables, see the Shetland Islands Council website.

Next to the car park is the **Bressay Heritage Centre**, which includes a visitor information point and hosts fascinating seasonal exhibitions on the culture, history and natural heritage of the island. The Centre is open part-time from May to September.

Getting around

Cyclists will enjoy exploring the island's network of quiet, single-track roads. Bressay is ideal for walkers too, and many interesting sites are accessible on foot.

Useful information

- Bressay ferry booking office**
(booking only required for vehicles over 5.5m)
+44 (0)1595 745804
- Noss ferry booking office**
+44 (0)800 107 7818
- Heritage centre and visitor information point**
Bressay Heritage Centre | +44 (0)1595 820750
- Public toilets**
Bressay Ferry Terminal | Speldiburn Cafe
Gungstie (Noss)
- Post office**
Mail
- Shop**
Mail | +44 (0)1595 820200
- Police** 101

2024 | **Disclaimer**
All details believed to be accurate at the time of going to print.





↑ Puffin David Gifford

↑ Gannets VisitScotland / Paul Tomkins

Day trip suggestions

Make the most of what Bressay and Noss have to offer with these day-trip ideas...

Noss

Noss is a small island off the east coast of Bressay and is renowned as one of the most important seabird colonies in Scotland. In the summer, the cliffs come to life with breeding seabirds. The island is managed by NatureScot and is home to grazing sheep, providing a good example of conservation and agricultural practices co-existing together.

Noss is open to visitors from early May until late August (except Mondays and Thursdays). To get there you need to take the small ferry across Noss Sound, which is located 6km from the Bressay ferry terminal. There's no booking system for the Noss ferry, you just turn up at the quay and the boat will come for you (the warden keeps a regular lookout during open hours). A red flag will fly at the house on Noss if the weather is too severe to cross. Check the Noss Ferry Line (+44 (0)800 107 7818) after 8am on the morning of your visit to make sure the ferry is running. The ferry fare is cash only and £5 return for adults, £3 for children/students, under 5s go free.

There is a small visitor centre and public toilet on the island. Walking around the perimeter of Noss takes around 4 hours or you can walk to the cliff viewpoint and back in around 2.5 hours. Spring sees the arrival of breeding seabirds such as Gannets, Skuas, Puffins, Fulmars and Kittiwakes. In summer, the eggs hatch and seabirds are feeding their young. Also look out for porpoises, dolphins and whales.

North Bressay

Next to the ferry terminal waiting room, you will find the **Bressay Heritage Centre** (open May to September) and a visitor information point. An interesting attraction is the reconstruction of the central core of a Bronze Age Burnt Mound, which the Bressay History Group 'rescued' from being washed away by the sea. Taking the lower north road to **Heogan**, you will travel past the impressive building of **Gardie House** with its walled garden. Built in 1724, this is one of the principal laird's houses in Shetland. On your right is the **Standing Stone of Cruester** which dates back to prehistoric times. Along the coastline from **Cruester** to Heogan are the traces of several herring fishing stations. In the early 20th century, Lerwick was the premier herring port in Europe and these stations would have been hives of activity during the herring season.

Leading to the crofting townships of **Gunnista** and **Beosetter** the upper north road passes through **Cruetoun**. Just north of here a rough track leads to the uninhabited croft of **Globa** on the sheltered shores of **Aith Voe**. Along the valley are numerous planticrubs - circular, drystone structures used to propagate kale plants before planting out in the spring. Gunnista was the site of the **church of St Olaf**, the main church on the island until 1722. The present churchyard contains the remains of an 18th-century mausoleum.

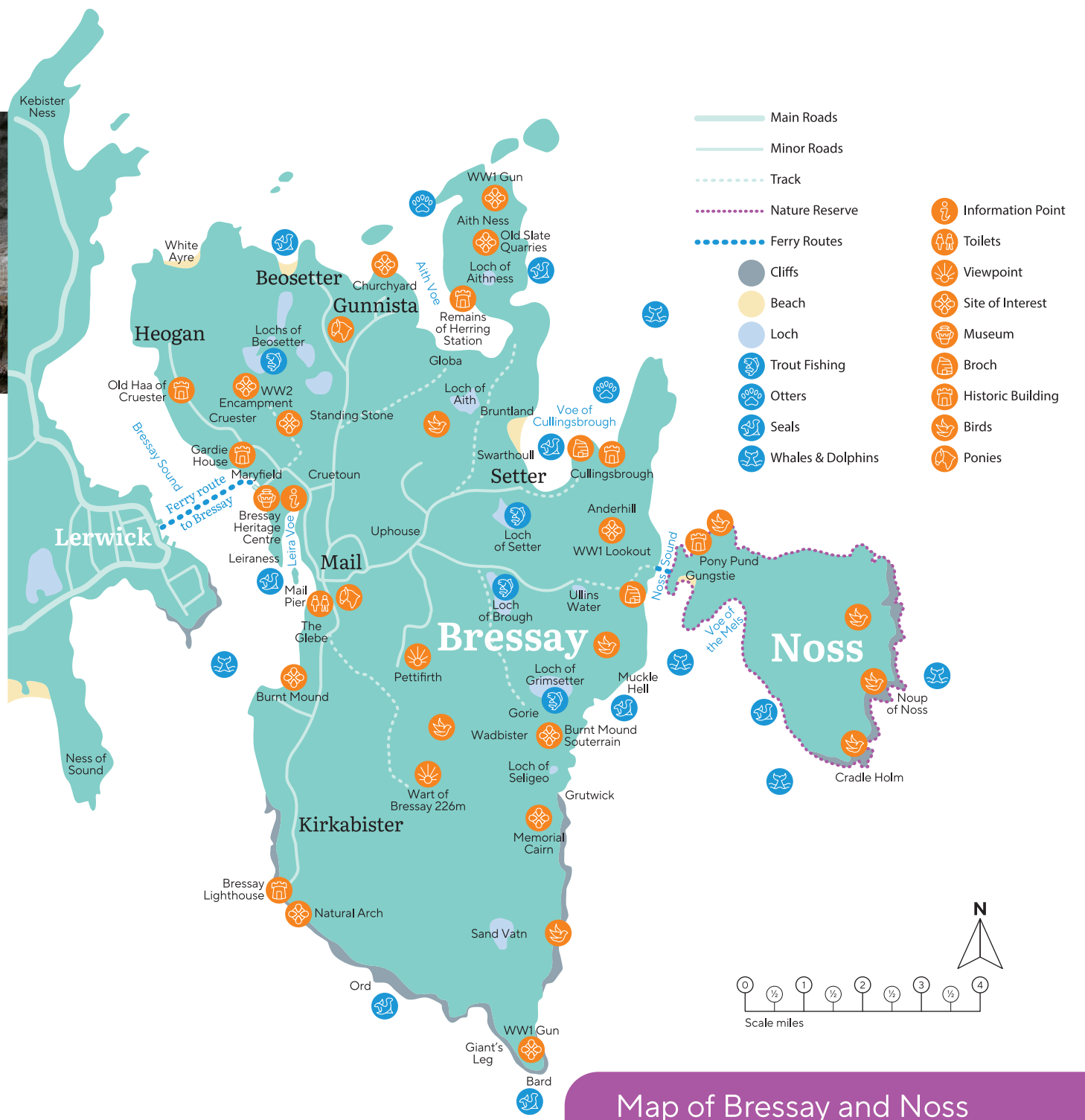
East Bressay

From the crossroads at **Mail**, a steeply inclined road crosses the island, splitting into three at the **Uphouse junction**. The main road continues to Noss Sound, passing the **Loch of Brough** which provides the water supply for the island and next to which a community woodland has been planted.

A rough track along the west side of the loch leads to the **Loch of Grimsetter** with Norse settlements which became crofting townships. A Bronze Age burnt mound and souterrain (underground stone cellar) are located at **Wadbister**, and the adjacent croft of **Gorie** is an oasis of green on a bare hillside.

At **Grutwick** there is a stone-built cairn erected to commemorate the bravery of the helicopter winchman, William Deacon, who lost his life during the rescue of the crew of the *MV Green Lily* which foundered here in November 1997. South from Grutwick the spectacular coastline with cliffs, caves and natural arches continues round to the **Bressay Lighthouse**.

The east side road ends at Noss Sound. On the shore below are the remains of an Iron Age broch, a defensive round stone tower. The prominent building on **Anderhill** is a First World War lookout.



North East Bressay

From the Uphouse junction a road leads down to the **Setter** with a rough rutted track continuing to the **Voe of Cullingsbrough**. A pleasant walk along the shore leads past the old settlement site to a walled churchyard. Within the enclosure are the ruins of the 10th-century pre-Reformation chapel of **St Mary's**. There is also an interpretive board and replica of the **Bressay Stone** - an engraved Pictish stone which was discovered nearby in 1864.

Above Setter a rough track leads towards the headland of **Aith Ness**, passing the ruins of the old school at **Swarthoull** and ending at the remote croft of **Bruntland**.

Flooded quarries on Aith Ness are the remains of the 18th and 19th-century flagstone industry that provided roofing and paving material for Lerwick. On the top of the hill is a First World War gun, placed there to protect the approaches to the harbour.

South Bressay

The area south of the **Mail** crossroads contains many of the crofts and provides fine views of Lerwick. The main population centre is around **The Glebe**. Behind the houses, a rough track ascends the Wart of Bressay with its prominent TV signal transmitter masts. From the summit on a clear day there are spectacular views across Shetland.

Between **Ham** and **Kirkabister** you'll find Garths Croft, a sustainable smallholding where croft and archaeology tours are available.

Past Kirkabister, the site of another long-vanished ancient church, the road leads down to the **Bressay Lighthouse**. Built in 1858 by the famous Stevenson brothers, the light is now automatic. South of the lighthouse, there is a picturesque natural arch and then the steep cliffs of the **Ord** and the long finger of the **Bard**, where you'll find the remains of another First World War gun.

Mail to Voieside

Before 1975 the old **Mail Pier** (mel is the Old Norse word for sand) was used by the Bressay ferry. In this area are the church, shop and post office with a public hall and the Speldiburn Cafe nearby. There's also a small caravan park next to the marina. The coastal road back to the ferry terminal leads along the length of **Leira Voe**, a shallow, sandy sea inlet and a good place to see waders.

