

## Life on the land

Shetland's most easterly outpost, Out Skerries, has a wealth of attractions – dramatic scenery, historical interest, outstanding wildlife and, not least, the warm welcome of the Skerries folk.

A skerry is a rock in the sea or a rocky island and it's often assumed that the Out Skerries were so named because of the islands' remoteness. In fact, it stems from the Old Norse word for east, distinguishing Out Skerries from the Ve Skerries (meaning west). To islanders, it's simply known as Skerries and, today, fewer than 40 people live there, on the bridge-linked islands of Bruray and Housay. Despite their size, the islands boast two shops and a guest house.

## Out Skerries

Welcome to



## Out Skerries

The friendly isles



**Flora**

The very fertile layer of soil which in past days made the islands productive now transforms the islands in springtime into a surprisingly green oasis. A riot of wild flowers appears, and visitors will be impressed by the carpet of Sea Pinks that grows on the grassy banks and clifftops.

The rugged scenery is breathtaking, particularly in the teeth of a gale. It is then you can appreciate the special nature of Skerries and its people, not just surviving on the edge, but thriving.

All kinds of seabirds, otters, seals, porpoises and other sea life can be seen from the shore. There is a large breeding population of Guillemots and the small rocks off the south-west point, such as the **Benliffs** and **Filla**, are thronged with seals.

**Birds and sea life**

Visitors are attracted by Skerries' birdlife, and there is a wealth of airborne interest all year round. During migration, all kinds of rarities can descend, albeit briefly, due to the islands' position as the first landfall for stray birds blown in from the east.

**Walking**

Skerries' dramatic and varied coastline provides a wealth of walking opportunities encompassing beautiful scenery with rugged cliffs, arches, blow holes, steep geos, stacks, long voes and beaches with fascinating layers of smooth pebbles. Climb to the top of the **Bruray Wart**, **North Wart** or **South Wart** for sweeping views of the islands and, in the distance, Fetlar, Yell, Whalsay and the Shetland mainland.

## Things to see and do



Oystercatchers David Gifford



Bruray Alan Morris / Alamy Stock Photo



Ringed Plover Colin Nutt



Ragged-robin David Gifford



Out Skerries ferry Ivan Reid

## Getting to Skerries

A car ferry runs from the Shetland mainland terminal at Vidlin (or Laxo if there are strong northerly winds) and once a week from Lerwick. The journey takes 90 minutes from Vidlin and 2.5 hours from Lerwick and booking is essential. If you look at the timetable, you'll find that a day trip is possible on Fridays, while other day trips are possible via Whalsay. See the Shetland Islands Council website for the latest ferry timetable.

## Useful information

**Ferry booking office**  
Out Skerries | +44 (0)1595 745804

**Public toilet and shower**  
Bruray pier

**Shops**  
Bruray | Housay

**Fuel**  
Available on request

**Marina**  
Visitors' berths available

**Medical assistance**  
Resident nurse | +44 (0)1806 515225

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All details believed to be accurate at the time of going to print.





↑ Housay VisitScotland / Paul Tomkins

Out Skerries Ivan Reid ↗

### Fishing and sailing

Skerries life centres around the extraordinary natural harbour, protected on all sides and turning **Böd Voe** into a calm lagoon in even the most violent of storms. Historically, this anchorage made Skerries a desirable haven and was crucial to the development of the haaf (deep sea) fishing industry.

The open six-oared sixareens used up to the early 20th century were similar in design to the Shetland Models used today for da eela (inshore line fishing) during the summer months. You may well find someone willing to take you out in search of pillocks (saithe) or mackerel.

Visiting yachtsmen and women are welcome too. There is plenty of space for anchoring in calm water or visitors' berths are available at the marina. Water, fuel, public toilets, showers and a telephone are all available and easily accessible.

### History and heritage

Skerries' identity has been established by the sea. It is a place full of past seafaring romance and tragedy: great sailing ships like the Dutch East Indiamen *Kennermerland* and *De Liefde*, treasure-laden and wrecked in the 17th and 18th centuries, their secrets revealed hundreds of years later in rare finds of silver and gold on the Skerries shoreline.

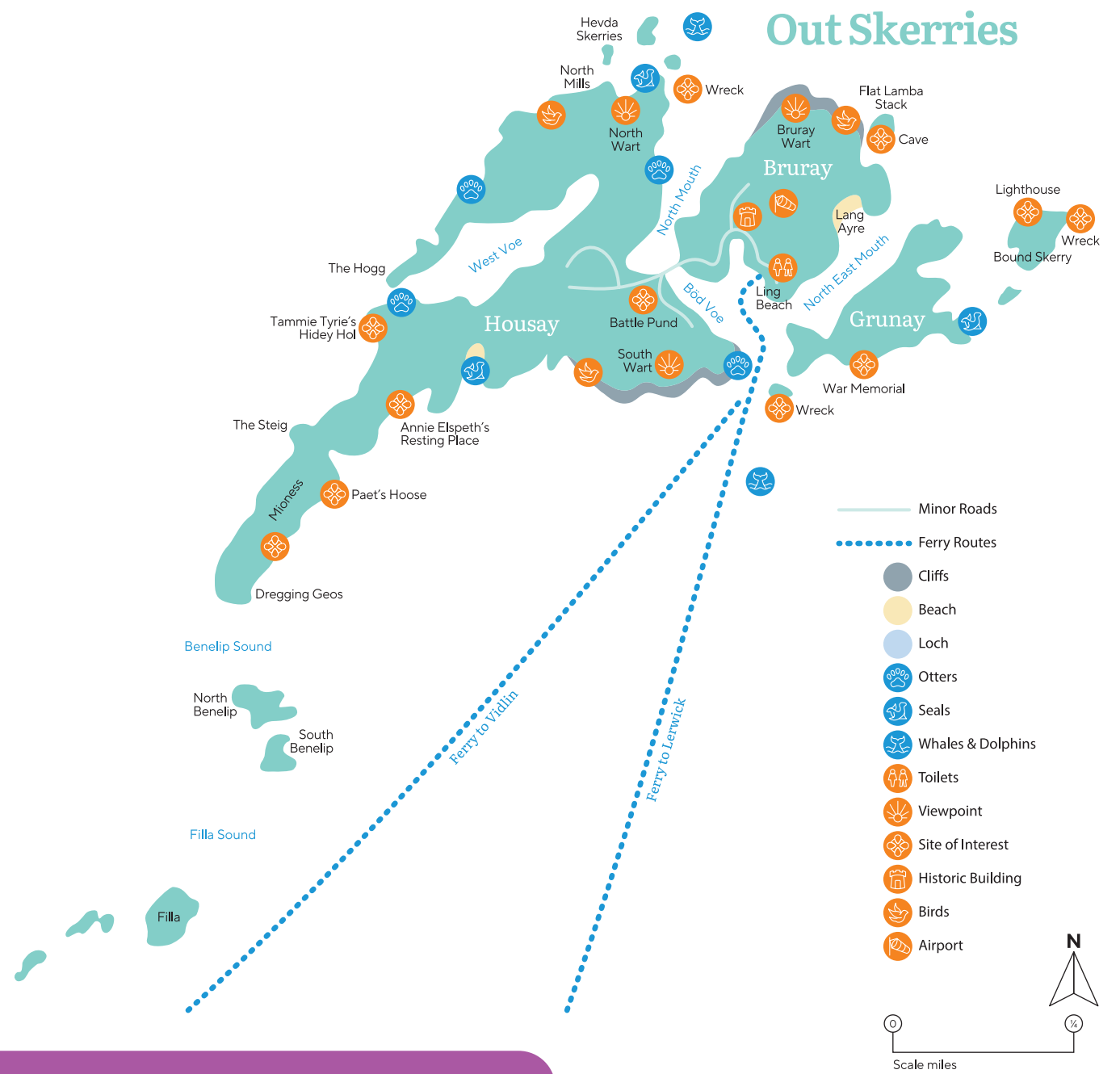
The shores in and around the harbour bear the signs of Skerries' fishing heritage: at the **North Mills** on the **West Isle** and the **Lang Ayre** on **Bruray**, you can see the remains of the lodges lived in by haaf fishermen during the summer season; by the pier sits one of the last iron kettles in Shetland, once used to melt fish livers and later to prepare cutch bark for coating fishing lines and nets by those same intrepid fishermen. You can still visit the now disused **Ling Beach**, so called because this artificial construction was used to dry fish, which were then exported.

There are unexpected historical sites to investigate too, such as **Battle Pund**, on the West Isle, where it is thought that bloody feuds were once settled.

On the currently uninhabited island of **Grunay**, once home to the keepers of the now-automated **Skerries lighthouse**, a Canadian bomber crashed during the Second World War. A plaque commemorating the event was placed on the island in 1990.



↑ Out Skerries Church VisitScotland / Paul Tomkins



Map of Out Skerries

### Smugglers and the press gang

Shetland's reputation of having many excellent seamen made the isles an obvious target for the press gangs, particularly during the Napoleonic Wars. Naval officers intercepted boats returning from the whaling and entered houses even at night. To avoid them, men often fled to hideouts in the hills or to caves along the shores where they remained in hiding until the ships had left the area. Some Skerries landmarks remind us of these activities. The stone called **Annie Elspeth's Resting Place** is where a woman stopped, and scanned the sea for ships, on her way to deliver food to the men hiding in the **Paet's Hoose** on **Mioness**. Another hideout on **Queyness** was called Tammie Tyrie's Hoidy Hol, but it has now been washed away by the sea.

Smuggling was once a useful source of additional income, and the caves and inlets were handy for storing all kinds of contraband. Skerries' far-flung easterly position made it a handy isolated landing point for smugglers from Scandinavia and Holland.

### Dreaming of treasure

Out on the south-westerly tip of the **Point of Mioness** you can dream of treasure, for it was here, in 1960, in the **Dregging Geos**, that old Skerries stories about gold and silver coins being found came home to roost.

A silver ducatoon and a 1711 gold ducat were found, prompting a mini-treasure hunt. They had come from the gold-laden wreck *De Liefde*, and since then she, the *Kennermerland* and the Danish warship *Wrangels Palais* have been excavated over many years and are the subject of legal protection.

Skerries remains a popular destination for underwater explorers, as well as more casual beachcombers hoping for the glitter of gold in the sand.



Out Skerries Lighthouse VisitScotland / Paul Tomkins