



View of Noss from Bressay

Noss

Noss, a small island off the east coast of Bressay, is a National Nature Reserve with over 100,000 pairs of breeding seabirds. The island is also part of a sheep farm and demonstrates a good example of conservation and agricultural practices working together. Noss is managed by Scottish Natural Heritage and staffed by seasonal wardens who provide a weather-permitting summer boat service.

The island is open from 10am to 5pm (except Mondays and Thursdays) from late May to the end of August. A red flag is flown on the island if it is closed. Visitors should wait at the sign on the shore at Noss Sound for the boat to collect them.

At Gungstie there is a small visitor centre and a restored Shetland Pony pund. Between 1871 and 1900 Noss was leased by the Marquis of Londonderry for breeding Shetland ponies to work underground in his coal mines at Durham.

A walk around the perimeter of the island will take at least three hours. The sandstone cliffs on the east side of the island have weathered into innumerable parallel ledges and crevices providing ideal nest sites for over 8000 pairs of Gannets, 45 000 pairs of Guillemots and smaller numbers of Kittiwake, Shag, Puffin and Razorbill. The moorland interior supports about 400 pairs of Bonxies (Great Skuas) and a few pairs of Arctic Skua.

Left: Gannets on Noss cliffs. Right: Sandy beach near Gungstie.



Bressay & Noss

heritage
Shetland
culture

Bressay & Noss

Shield of Lerwick Harbour

Some Useful Information

Accommodation:	VisitShetland, Lerwick, Tel: 08701 999440
Noss Ferry:	May - Aug, Tel: 0800 1077818
Heritage Centre and Neighbourhood Information Point:	Leiraness, Tel: 01595 820750
Shop:	Mail, Tel: 01595 820200
Petrol:	Mail
Public Toilets:	Ferry Terminal, Mail, and Gungstie (Noss)
Places to Eat:	Maryfield Hotel, Tel: 01595 820207
Post Office:	Mail
Public Telephones:	Ferry Terminal, Mail and Ham
Church:	Mail



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Welcome to Bressay

Within ten minutes you can exchange the bustle of Lerwick town for the tranquil rural atmosphere of Bressay. The island is home to around 350 people, many of whom commute to the Mainland daily on the frequent car and passenger ferry service. Lying to the east of Lerwick the island of Bressay, 11x8 km (7x3 miles), creates a superb sheltered harbour for shipping – the reason for Lerwick’s establishment as a major trading port. From Viking times Bressay Sound has provided a safe anchorage and in the mid 17th century up to 1,500 Dutch herring fishing vessels gathered here.



A Common Seal pup



Left: Bird's-foot Trefoil. Right: Roseroot – look for this on salt-enriched cliffs.

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 226m (742 ft). Along parts of the eastern coastline and particularly at the Ord and the Bard there are high seacliffs. 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 buildings stand testimony.



Rugged cliffs of Old Red Sandstone

Coastal Mammals

A combination of cliffs, rocky headlands and sheltered voes creates a varied coastal habitat for both Grey and Common Seals. In summer large shoals of fish attract porpoises, dolphins and whales inshore. Noss Sound is one of the best areas to look for them. The voes on the east side are best for Otters.

Wild Flowers

During summer there is a succession of wild flowers. Roadside verges and pastures blaze with a colourful tapestry of Buttercups, Bird's-foot Trefoil, Red Campion, Clovers and Orchids. Ditches and wet areas glow with golden Marsh Marigold and the brilliant yellows of Mimulus and Yellow Flag. On the moorland look for the tiny white flowers of Heath Bedstraw, the sapphire gems of Heath Milkwort, the yellow stars of Tormentil and the delicate pinks of the Heath-Spotted Orchid.

Birdlife

Bressay provides a mosaic of habitats which support a variety of wild flowers and breeding birds. The summer moorland is the haunt of species such as Great and Arctic Skua, Curlew, Golden Plover, Common Gull, Skylark and Meadow Pipit. Elegant Red-throated Divers breed on some of the hill lochs, whilst fields and pastures echo to the calls of waders like Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Redshank and Snipe. Tiny Shetland Wrens, Rock Piptits and Ringed Plovers breed along the coastline with Arctic Terns, Eiders and Black Guillemots patrolling offshore.

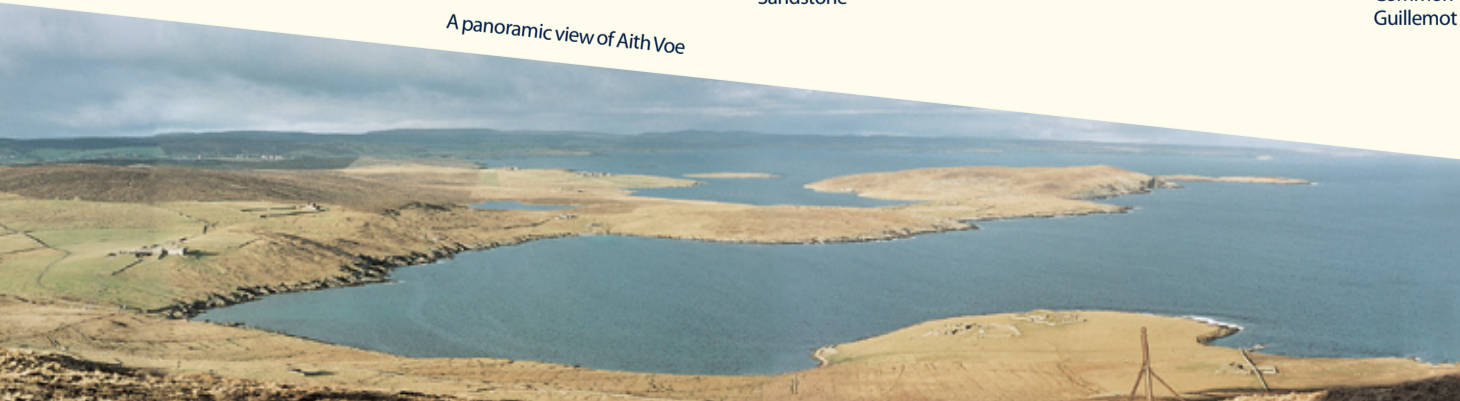


Common Guillemot

Getting Around

Motorists will enjoy exploring the island's network of single-track roads, but please do not drive on unmetalled tracks. Bressay is also an ideal island for walkers and many interesting sites are only accessible on foot. Please keep to paths or the edges of fields when crossing crofting areas and close any gates which you have opened. Also, to prevent disturbance of livestock and wildlife, dogs should be kept on leads at all times.

A panoramic view of Aith Voe



Shalder (Oystercatcher), a colourful summer visitor

Arriving

The ferry arrives on Bressay near the 19th century house and old pier at Maryfield. Next to the car park is the Bressay Heritage Centre, which includes a Neighbourhood Information Point and houses fascinating seasonal exhibitions on the culture, history and natural heritage of the island. The Centre is open part-time from May to September (details from VisitShetland).

North Bressay

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 and home to the present Lord



The Old Haa of Cruester

Lieutenant. 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 with workers gutting, processing and packing the fish into wooden barrels of brine for export.

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 prior to planting out in the *voar* (Spring). Used as winter feed for stock, kale plants from Bressay were reputed to be the best and always in demand. 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 built by the Henderson family.

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Gardie House - impressive 18th century mansion

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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.

A rough track along the west side of the loch leads to the Loch of Grimsetter with Norse settlements which became crofting townships. During the mid to late 19th century, the population of Bressay was between 800 and 900 with many thriving settlements on the east side of the island. A Bronze Age burnt mound and souterrain 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 walk to the lighthouse is outstanding, but please be careful near the cliff edges, especially in wet weather and in poor visibility. 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 World War I lookout.



Ruins of 19th c. croft houses

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North East Bressay

From the Uphouse junction a road leads down to 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. At the north-west corner, the churchyard wall intersects the remains of another broch.



The Bressay Stone



World War 1 gun at Aith Voe

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 an old World War I 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 of Bressay, Lerwick and the distant islands.

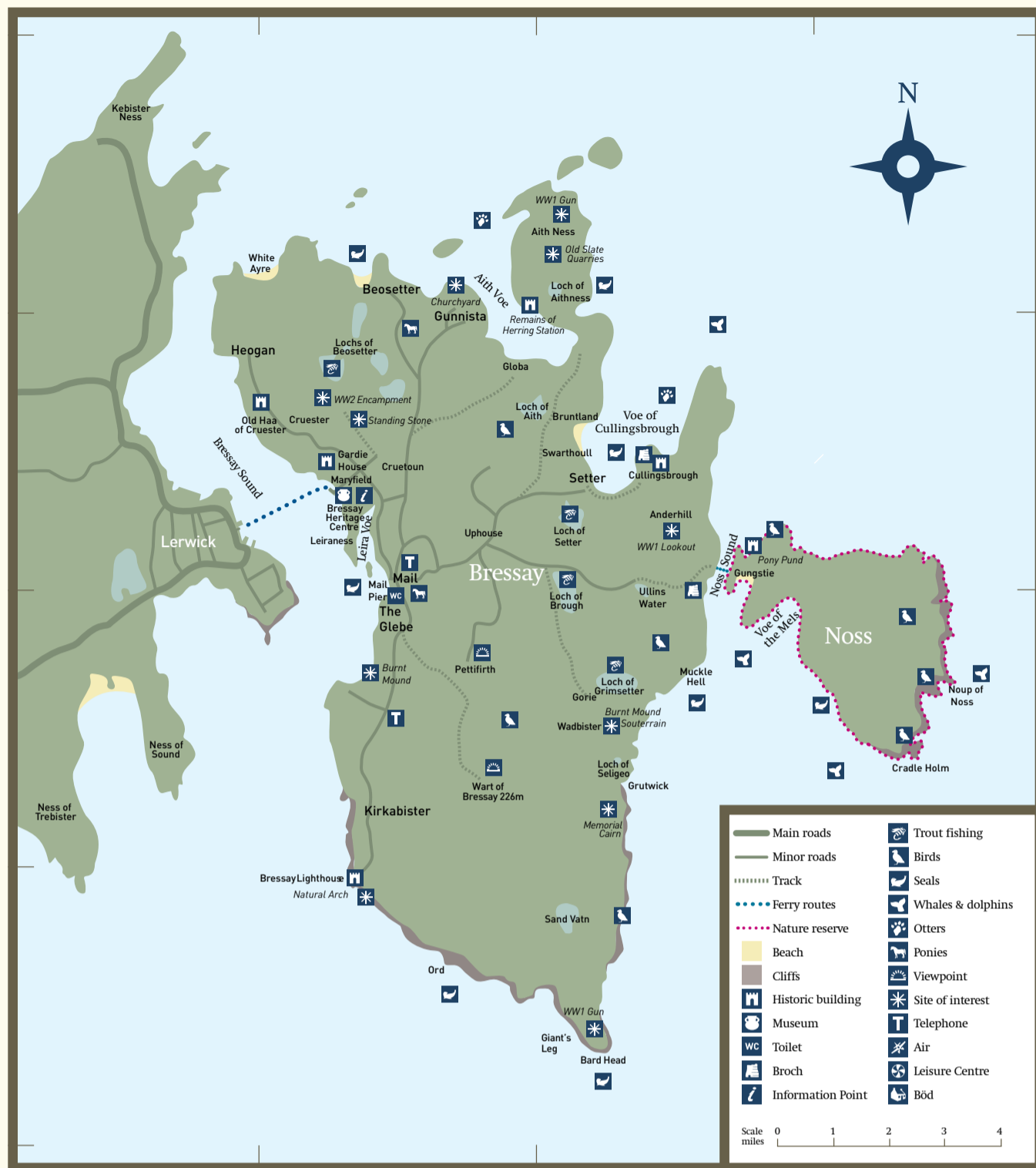


Bressay lighthouse

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 and some of the buildings have been converted into self-catering accommodation. 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 with the remains of another World War I gun.

Mail-Voeside

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, post office with public hall and school nearby. 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.



Tammie nories (Puffins) breed in small numbers along the eastern coastline



Boats at Noustigarth near Mail, 19th century



Leira Voe

