

Foula leaves a lasting impression on everyone who visits, for there is something very special about the island – it may be the quality of light, its unique geography, the natural beauty and remoteness, the wide range of wildlife, the community way of life, or a combination of these. It is difficult to explain this intangible quality; we hope you find it for yourself.

Life in Foula

Foula is home to around 35 islanders with residents working as ferry crew, fire crew, rangers, a nurse, a teacher, a postman, a fisherman, accommodation providers, and electricity and water maintenance workers. As with other rural communities in Shetland, islanders also work the land as crofters, keeping sheep, Shetland ponies and other animals. Tourism provides seasonal income, with several self-catering properties available. Income also comes from the island's wool spinning mill and other arts and crafts.

The island has no connection to the national grid; islanders run their own electricity scheme. This is a hybrid scheme, with three wind turbines, a hydro generator, solar panels, battery banks and a distribution network.

Welcome to Foula

Foula is one of Britain's most remote inhabited islands and its natural heritage is exceptionally rich and diverse for such a small area. The island has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) – both for its flora and fauna, and for the geomorphology of its dramatic coastline. It is also a National Scenic Area and a Special Protection Area (SPA) for birds.

Things to see and do

Geology

Foula is known for its dramatic coastline and the action of the sea on its layered sandstone has given rise to several dramatic and interesting features. When viewed from the Shetland mainland the island can make quite a spectacular scene, particularly under snow, when it is often likened to a huge iceberg on the horizon.

There are five peaks at the west of the island: **Da Noup** in the south is divided by the glacial valley of **Da Daal** from **Hamnafeld**, **Da Sneug**, **Da Kame**, and **Soberlie**, which stretch westwards until they drop sheer to over 370 metres.

The awesome 367-metre sheer drop at the back of **Da Kame** competes with **Conachair** in St. Kilda as the highest sheer sea cliff in Britain. While the sheer sides of **Da Sneuk** and **Da Smalille** – a dank, dark rock fault over 30 metres deep, cut down towards the sea at the west end of **Da Daal** – gives access to teaming seabird colonies under the cliffs. Please note: the way down is treacherous and should not be attempted without an experienced guide.

The entrance to **Da Lum** a Liorafeld, on the other hand, has long been lost – superstition and tales of strange happenings surround **Da Lum**, which was mentioned by Sir Walter Scott in his novel *The Pirate*. Folklore also tells of the healing properties of **Da Watter** **Da Sneug**, a little spring under the north shoulder of **Da Sneug**.

At the north of the island, you'll find the **Gaada Stack**, an extremely distinctive sea stack 40 metres from the coast with two arches, supported on three legs. If you're lucky enough to be in Foula at sunset it makes for a fantastic photo opportunity.

Flora

On the long midsummer days, Foula's wild flowers provide a glorious burst of colour. Sea Pinks, blue Spring Squill and yellow Tormentil carpet the shoreline while Marsh Marigolds and Wild Orchids blossom gold and purple in ditches and marshes, with white tufted Bog Cotton, Sphagnum Moss, Sundew and Strawberry making patterns across the moorland.



Shags David Gifford



Ham Voe VisitScotland / Paul Tomkins



Crofting VisitScotland / Paul Tomkins



Sea Pinks David Gifford



Da Biggins VisitScotland / Paul Tomkins

Useful information

Ferry booking office
+44 (0)7781 823 732

Ferry updates
+44 (0)1595 743 976

Air booking office
+44 (0)1595 840246

Public toilet
Airstrip shelter

Public telephone
Airstrip shelter

Shops
No general store, but postcards and small souvenirs are available from rangers and the post office. If you're flying into Foula, a good tip is to place a food order at the Hamnavoe shop in Burra before you go. They can arrange to get your supplies over for you. Otherwise, you can drop supplies at the ferry in Walls and pick them up from the terminal when you get there. Speak to your accommodation provider before you travel to discuss your catering options.

Post office
South of pier | +44 (0)1595 753236

Foula ranger service
+44 (0)1595 753233 | +44 (0)1595 753236

Medical assistance
Resident nurse | +44 (0)1595 753238,
Walls doctor | +44 (0)1595 809352

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



shetland.org/foula

Foula

The edge of the world





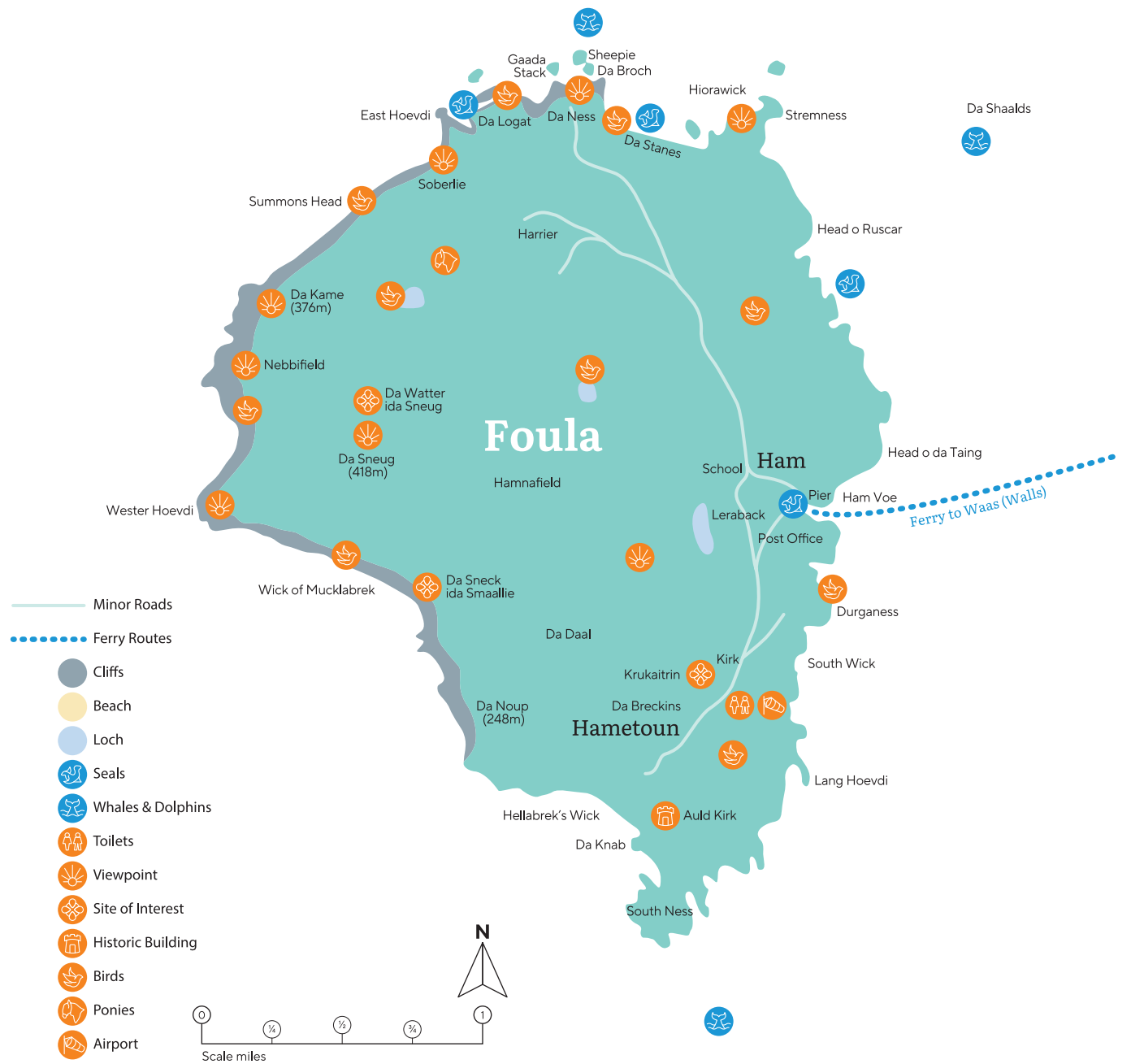
↑ East Hoevdi VisitScotland / Paul Tomkins

Birds and wildlife

Foula's Old Norse name was Fugla-ey, meaning 'bird island' which is apt as the world's largest colony of Great Skuas competes fiercely with Arctic Skuas for breeding territories. Every small loch on the island is occupied by a pair of nesting Red-throated Divers, and the cliffs teem with Puffins, Guillemots, Razorbills, Shags, Fulmars, Kittiwakes and Gannets. Leach's Petrel, Storm Petrel, and Manx Shearwater have also bred. Many shore and moorland birds, including the dainty Ringed Plover, nest in the stony places and in the bog grasses. During migration periods unusual birds from as far away as America and Siberia can be seen, making Foula a birdwatcher's paradise.

As well as fantastic birdlife, Foula is home to a unique subspecies of fieldmouse and an island variety of house mouse. Both Atlantic grey and common seals haul up around the shore and can be watched at close quarters in **Ham Voe**. Schools of orcas are sometimes seen close inshore and porpoises often follow the ferry.

Look out for the native and hardy Foula sheep too. Their great variety of coloured fleeces is much in demand by hand-spinners for wool, ranging from moorit (brown) to fawn, grey, creamy white and black, and many have attractive markings. The sheep are an important part of Foula's economy, and the islanders work hard to continue to keep this native breed going. A new spinning mill facility on Foula means high-quality yarn can now be produced on the island from the fleeces, a much sought-after product for knitters.



Map of Foula



↑ Sunset over Foula David Gifford

Shipwrecks

There are many interesting shipwrecks surrounding Foula, one being the *RMS Oceanic* of the famous White Star Line, owners of the *Titanic*. Launched in 1899 the 'Queen of the Ocean' was called into the Navy shortly after the outbreak of the First World War but, unfortunately, within a fortnight of its maiden voyage of naval duty the vessel was run aground on da Shaalds, three miles east of Foula. If you're interested in hiring a diving charter to explore Foula's coast visit the Dive page on shetland.org for details.

Visiting Foula

Travel

Foula lies about 20 miles to the west of the Shetland mainland. The small harbour is exposed, and the airstrip can be affected by crosswinds and fog, making both sea and air travel to Foula dependent on suitable weather conditions. Significant delays are sometimes unavoidable. It is strongly recommended that you check with the ferry or airline before you travel.

By sea

The *New Advance* ferry sails between Walls and Foula and has room for 12 passengers. Booking is essential. The ferry timetable is updated seasonally. For the latest timetable and booking information, see the Shetland Islands Council website.

You can also do a day trip to Foula with the tour company Shetland Sea Adventures. See their website for details.

By air

Airtask run regular flights to Foula from Tingwall, weather depending. For the latest timetable, see the Airtask website and for up-to-date flight information, call the airport booking line on +44 (0)1595 840246.

Guided tours

The Foula Ranger Service is available from mid-April to October and can arrange guided walks and provide information for self-guided walks. Contact +44 (0)1595 753233 or +44 (0)1595 753236.

History and culture

Neolithic field systems, Bronze Age burial cairns, burnt mounds and a mysterious stone circle testify that Foula has been inhabited for millennia, despite its remoteness. Sometime after 800AD, the Norse settled here and, although they left little visible trace, their presence can still be felt in the wealth of descriptive Norse place names. On **Da Broch**, a stack at the north end, an ancient stone wall was thought to be a monk's cell, indicating the early spread of Christianity from Scotland. The island was under Norse ownership until 1572, when Gorvel Faddersdatter gave all her land in Shetland, including Foula, to Robert Cheyne, who was of Scottish descent.

Foula's rich culture is evident in the Norse dialect and a strong tradition of folklore, music and special festivities. Foula folk celebrate Christmas and New Year according to the feast days of the old Julian calendar, Yule on 6th January and Newerday on 13th January. The whole way of life in the island is based on a strong tradition of caring community values.



Foula Ponies VisitScotland / Paul Tomkins →