

Trail 4: Scatness

Scatness is a narrow peninsula that projects southwards at Shetland's southern tip. The landform is strongly influenced by the eastwards dip (inclination) of the sedimentary rocks from which the headland has been carved. The dip is fairly gentle at first but gets greater as you head south, so that the eastern coastal slopes, which generally follow the bedding, become progressively steeper and more dramatic, and the western cliffs higher.

The remains of a 19th-century fishing station can be seen at Tumblewick **1**, with stone-lined **noosts**, in which the open boats would be secured in winter, behind the shingle beach where cod and ling would have been dried for

export. From here to the point of Tonga the coastal rocks are the familiar river sandstones, but at the Geo of Tonga this changes abruptly. A geological **fault** runs along the geo, on the far side of which is a sloping bed of conglomerate **2**.

The Slithers



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The next geo to the west reveals a section across this conglomerate and we see that it is different from the alluvial fans around Lerwick. Instead of thick wedges of cobbles and boulders, here the beds are thin and even, and separated by layers of cross-bedded sandstone - the product of repeated powerful floods, each one washing vast quantities of stones out across the flood plain and then, as the flow decreased, depositing sand on top.

Conglomerate layers



A fixed chain provides a handhold as you cross a narrow ridge of bare rock, aptly named "The Slithers", onto the Ness of Burgi **3**. This natural defensive position, almost cut off from the mainland, is the site

Red Mudstone



of an enigmatic Iron Age fortification that gives it its name: the headland of the fort. The cliffs opposite the fort again show a section cut across the strata, revealing coarse, orange sandstone beneath a thick bed of dark-red **mudstone 4**. This was probably laid down as fine, iron-rich sediment in a shallow lagoon which periodically dried out, allowing the heat and air to turn the iron minerals to red oxides.

Mudstone





Directions

By car / bike: From Lerwick, take the main A970 south for approximately 38 km (24 miles). Take the junction on the right, signposted to Scatness. Park considerably at the far end of the road, ensuring that the turning point is not blocked (HU38830959). Continue the trail on foot.

Access



- The access route is uneven and may be wet/muddy in places
- The coastal walk includes a number of two-step/ladder stiles
- The cliffs are high in places

Interpretation

- On-site Historic Environment Scotland information panels at Ness of Burgi

Facilities



- Nearest public toilets at Grutness Pier (HU40551010)

Glossary

Noost: (Shetland) a place, usually a hollow at the edge of a beach, where a boat is hauled up.

Geo (Shetland): a long, narrow, steep-sided cleft formed by erosion in coastal cliffs.

Fault: a fracture in the rocks of the Earth's crust, where forces cause movement of the rocks on opposite sides of the fracture.

Mudstone: a sedimentary rock mainly comprising particles smaller than 0.0625 mm in diameter.