

A walk on Shetland's Westside brings you face to face with nature in all its amazing variety. You'll have good views of seals, seabirds, Skuas, and moorland species such as Skylarks, Curlews and Golden Plovers. The long, winding coastline teems with wildlife, with everything from rock pools full of hermit crabs and sea anemones to sheltered, sandy shores with razor shells and cockles.

There are hundreds of freshwater lochs, most of them in hollows carved by glaciers out of the granite and sandstone rocks. The lochs and the burns linking them to the sea are home to trout, ducks, wading birds and plants such as Bogbean and white Water Lily.

Wild flowers abound in a landscape where traditional crofting methods have preserved many plants and habitats which are fast disappearing on mainland Britain.

Things to see and do

The West Mainland, known as the Westside, offers many miles of hill and coastal walks, excellent birding, seal-watching and otter-spotting, great angling and some fascinating historical and archaeological sites.

You may hear Shetlanders say, "West is best", and it's true, many a day when the east coast of Shetland is smothered in sea fog, the Westside is gloriously sunny. It happens particularly in summer when south-easterly winds pick up moisture from the North Sea: as the warm air passes over the hills of Shetland it heats up and dries, clearing away the mist.

Welcome to the Westside



Westside

The sunny side of Shetland



Traditionally, the Westside begins at the top of the hill dividing **Weisdale** from Aithsting and Sandsting. Just below the summit, the road leading down to the leafy gardens of **Tresta** crosses a fault in the Earth's crust. The fault runs south to emerge at the charming, secluded pebble beach of **Sandsound**, a favourite picnic place. A short walk up the **Burn of Tactigill** reveals Shetland's largest deposit of china clay.

Touring the Westside

To find out more about the marinas on the Westside, see the Sail page on the shetland.org website.

The Westside is one of Shetland's main centres of the seafood industry, with many fish farms and mussel rafts and small, inshore fishing boats. As well as sheltering salmon and sea trout cages, the voes of the Westside are ideal for yachting and kayaking. Natural harbours shelter modern marinas at **Walls**, **Skeld** and **Aith** - where berths are reserved for visiting sailors.

Fishing, yachting and kayaking

The Westside also has several ruined brochs - fortified circular stone towers that crops could grow on what is now barren moorland. **Broster** and **Standydale** date from this period and show traces of ancient farmsteads and field systems are everywher. Excavated habitation sites at the **Scord of Brouster** and **Standydale** date from this period and show traces of ancient farmsteads and field systems are everywher. Excavated habitation sites at the **Scord of Brouster** and **Standydale** date from this period and show traces of ancient farmsteads and field systems are everywher. Excavated habitation sites at the **Scord of Brouster** and **Standydale** date from this period and show traces of ancient farmsteads and field systems are everywher.

Geology and history

The Westside has a classic "drowned coastline", flooded by the sea at the end of the Ice Age, some 12,000 years ago. The shoreline varies from the dramatic cliffs of the outer coast to long voes, which extend far into the heathery hills and green croft land. Whatever the wind direction, you can always find a sheltered beach.

The geology of the Westside is fascinating - displaying outcrops of granite and volcanic rocks in a heavily glaciated Old Red Sandstone. Every bend of the road reveals new facets of an ancient landscape which has been inhabited for at least 5,000 years.



Deepdale Susan Molloy

Community events
During the summer, several village halls on the Westside offer Sunday teas - terrific value home-baking, crafts and a chance to meet local people.
The annual regattas at Walls, Aith and Skeld are major events in the social calendar. Like the Skeld Sheepdog Trials and the Walls Show (the longest-running agricultural show in Shetland), these community gatherings include concerts and dances where visitors are always welcome.
Most villages in the area have a shop, post office and fuel pumps. The Westside also has a heated swimming pool, spinning mill, garages and a veterinary practice.



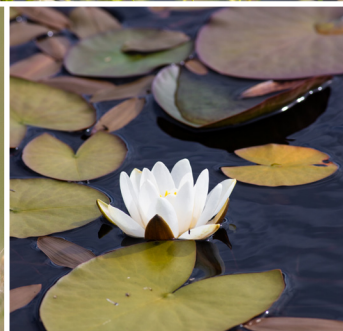
Culswick Brooch David Gifford



Orchids David Gifford



Golden Plover Water Lily David Gifford



Standydale Temple David Gifford

Useful information

- Bus services**
See the West Mainland timetable on the ZetTrans website zettrans.org.uk
- Ferry booking offices**
Papa Stour | +44 (0)1595 745804
Foula | +44 (0)7881 827636
- Public toilets**
Bixter | Skeld | West Burrarfirth | Walls | Sandness
- Post offices**
Bixter | Aith | Reawick | Walls
- Shops**
Bixter | Aith | Walls
- Fuel**
Bixter | Aith | Walls
- Leisure centre and swimming pools**
West Mainland Leisure Centre | +44 (0)1595 809352
Walls | +44 (0)1595 807713
- Health centres**
Bixter | +44 (0)1595 810202
Walls | +44 (0)1595 809352
- Police** 101

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





↑ Burn of Lunklet VisitScotland / Paul Tomkins

Bixter to Aith

Galtafirth is one of Shetland's most sheltered voes and a winter favourite with birdwatchers - particularly for sea ducks, divers, grebes and waders. Seals often haul out along the shoreline of **Bixter** and **Effirth Voes**. The village of Bixter has a shop and a children's play park nearby. Here the road branches north to **Aith** - a large township in a scenic setting. Aith has a shop, leisure centre, the Westside's secondary school, a charity shop and a fine marina.

Take time to stop at **Michaelswood**, a small woodland with a picnic area, wildlife pond and bird hide. Just north of Aith is the hamlet of **East Burrafirth**, where a path leads up the **Burn of Lunklet** to a waterfall and on to some exhilarating hill walking with wonderful views of the Westside's lochs, hills, islands and voes. There are toilets and a shop at both the Aith and Voe ends of the road and a popular cake fridge nearby too.

Driving north along the west side of **Aith Voe** you come to **Vementry House** and a view of the uninhabited island of **Vementry**. The isle has ruins of ancient homesteads and burial cairns and, on the west side, derelict Royal Navy gun emplacements from the First World War.

An interesting walk leads from Vementry House to **Clousta** and **Noonsbrough**. This was once a quiet backwater but now the sound and voes are busy with workboats and fish farms - a major source of jobs for local people. The road leads from Clousta back to Bixter through the crofting township of **Twatt**. The place name is Old Norse and means "the clearing in the trees" - a reminder that, more than 1,000 years ago, scrub woodland covered most lower-lying parts of the islands.

Sand to West Burrafirth

The road junction at **Park Hall**, just west of Bixter, leads to another delightful corner of the Westside. Legend says sailors from the Spanish Armada built part of **St Mary's**, the pre-Reformation chapel, just above the beach at **Sand**, in thanks for deliverance from shipwreck on the off lying Kirk Holm. Only the chancel arch survives. The Haa of Sand is a fine example of a Shetland laird's house, reputedly built of stones from Scalloway Castle. **Da Gairdins** in Sand offer the rare opportunity to enjoy woodland walks in Shetland and has picnic benches and wildlife ponds.

On the other side of **Garderhouse Voe**, **Reawick** has a perfect beach of pink sand. Over the hill in **Skeld** there is a public hall, campsite, caravan park, marina and bird hide.

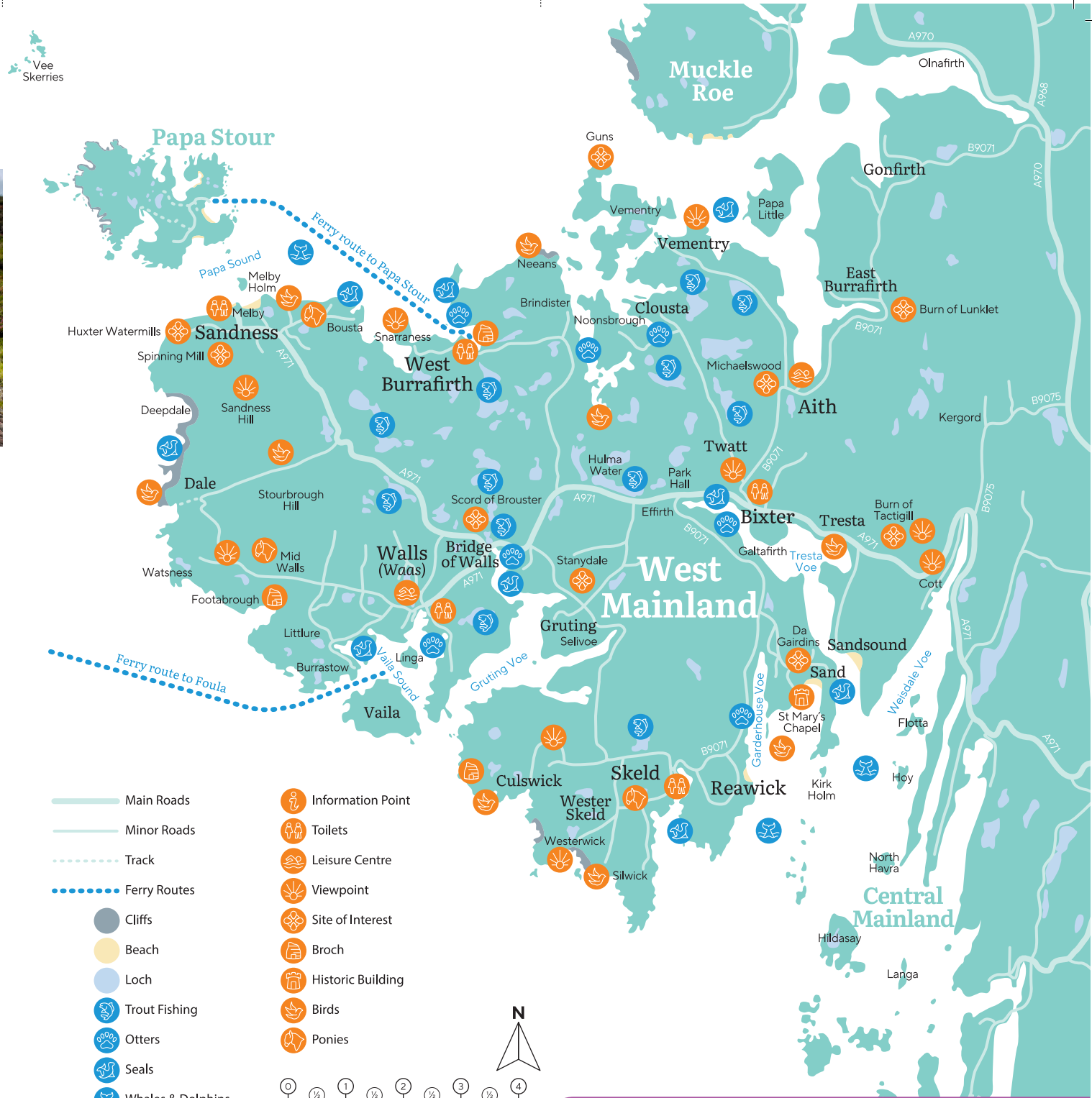
A couple of miles beyond Skeld are two of the most exquisite bays in Shetland: **Westerwick** and **Culswick**, each a narrow green valley ending in a pebble beach fringed by sea stacks, cliffs and caves. A track beside the Culswick chapel leads to the remains of **Culswick Broch**, high on a hill overlooking the entrance to **Gruting Voe** and **Vaila Sound**.

From Skeld, the road to **Bridge of Walls** (Brig o' Waas) passes the tranquil inlets of Gruting Voe, **Selivoe**, **Scutta Voe** and the **Voe of Browland**. Remains of prehistoric settlements are scattered among modernised croft houses. In early summer the roadside verges display an amazing variety of wild flowers.

Just north of Scutta Voe lies the extraordinary **Stanydale Temple**, reached by the side road from the A971 at **Hulma Water**. The heel-shaped ruins are thought to be almost 4,000 years old. Surrounded by the remains of field walls and several oval-shaped houses, this is the largest Stone Age structure in Shetland.



← Reawick Beach VisitScotland / Paul Tomkins



Map of the Westside



↑ Jamieson's Knitwear, Sandness Promote Shetland / Euan Myles

The village of **Walls** makes a good base for exploring the Westside. Sheltered by its islands, **Vaila Sound** offers safe summer anchorages and a ferry service to the island of Foula. There is also a shop, post office and a cheerful boating club which welcomes visitors.

Westerwick ↓
David Gifford

The ferry to the island of **Papa Stour** leaves from the snug fishing harbour of **West Burrafirth**, set in a landscape of tiny lochs and hummocky hills. A side road to the hamlet of **Brindister** is the start of a grand walk around the rocky headland of the **Neeans**. Folklore says a cave here was the hideout of Da Tief o da Neean - a notorious sheep thief who ended his days in a Scalloway prison cell.

Walls and Sandness

From the Bridge of Walls, the road passes the prehistoric site of **Brouster**, and winds through the hills to **Sandness**, a crofting township in a spectacular setting overlooking Papa Stour.

Sandness has a spinning mill, Jamieson's, and you can visit their shop in Lerwick. The district's many archaeological remains include watermills at **Huxter** and several burial cairns and brochs.

Sandness Hill and the coastal walk beyond Huxter have breathtaking views of the westernmost point of the Shetland mainland. The dramatic silhouette of the island of Foula sits out on the Atlantic horizon, while a maze of spectacular coves and sea stacks skirts the beautiful **Bay of Deepdale**. There is more good walking south to **Watsness**, **Footabrough** and **Littlure**.

