



Dingieshowe

There is much to explore in the eastern reaches of Orkney – from wild sea cliffs and empty beaches to Iron Age brochs and settlements. The Mainland of Orkney narrows distinctively at Kirkwall and the land to the east of this isthmus is known as the East Mainland.

Like most of Orkney the East Mainland is steeped in history. As you descend the steep steps into Mine Howe, surrounded by the damp rock and guided by a string of lights, you feel yourself stepping back in time to the Iron Age. The deep rock-built chamber was uncovered briefly in 1946 and then almost forgotten about until 1999 when local farmer, Douglas Paterson, rediscovered the entrance. He found a passage that sank nearly vertically into the ground to a chamber, accessed by 29 stone steps.

More recent history is evident at Rerwick and Graemeshall where the WW2 batteries can still be seen, and in Scapa Flow which was such an important naval base during the War.

Below the cliffs of Gaitnip in Holm lies a green marker buoy. This is the marker for the site of HMS Royal Oak sunk by the German U-boat U47 in 1939 with the loss of 833 lives.



Eider ducks

Bird watchers can enjoy breeding sea birds, wintering wildfowl and surprise visitors – migrants blown off course by storms at sea. Wild flowers thrive in hidden corners; in wetlands around the lochs; on the nature reserve at Mull Head; and on grassy tracks between fields of grazing cattle.

The East Mainland is divided into several parishes, each with its own character. Holm (pronounced Ham) stretches from Kirkwall south to St Marys, its coastline following the shore of Scapa Flow, where nowadays much of the activity is based on North sea oil. St Marys was notable once as a herring port but now it's more common to see sailing dinghies in the bay.



'Spoot'

they broke into the old store house. As they left in their boats James Graham fired several cannon shots at them without success!

Beyond the airport, side roads take you to the area known as Tankerness. At the far end of this is Rerwick Head, still carrying the lookouts and gun emplacements that were used to help guard the approaches to Kirkwall during WW2. Tankerness Loch is a large freshwater loch popular with wintering wildfowl and nearby is the old Tankerness mill, used in the past for grinding oats. The sheltered bay of Mill Sands is good for cockles and razor shells, locally known as 'spoots', at very low spring tides.

The old Graemeshall saw stirring scenes in June 1694 when two French privateers sailed into Holm sound. After securing three vessels they proceeded to loot everything on the little island of Lamb Holm, after which

Deerness is reached by crossing a narrow sandy isthmus at Dingieshowe. This is a unique place with sand dunes and beach on one side and a shallow muddy bay on the other. Strategically sited in the dunes is a mound containing the remains of a broch. The name Dingieshowe is derived from the Old Norse and means 'parliament mound'. Almost an island, Deerness has its own character and special places.



Mull Head

At its furthest point is Mull Head, totally exposed to sea and wind and tide. Here you can see the dramatic collapsed sea cave called the 'gloop.' Its name comes from the Old Norse 'gluppa' meaning chasm. Barely joined to Mull Head by a steep and narrow path is the Brough of Deerness with its Norse chapel. Much of the rest of Deerness is rolling farmland but there are bays such as Newark, which has its own slipway for small boats and is a good place for a picnic on a fine day.

