



↑ Aisha Head Colin Nutt



↑ Campions David Gifford

## Getting to Papa Stour

Papa Stour can be reached by ferry from West Burrafirth on Shetland's Westside. The ferry takes about 40 minutes to reach Housa Voe on the east side of Papa Stour. Although the ferry to Papa Stour carries cars, there is little need for one as there is only one short road on the island and the best way to see the sights is on foot. See the Shetland Island Council website for the latest ferry timetable and up-to-date sailing information.

The island doesn't have a shop so if you are going in for the day, you'll need to bring your own refreshments. There are excellent facilities at the ferry terminal, including information about the island, toilets and a kettle if you want to make a hot brew. There's also fast internet, a heater, a selection of books, and space outside for wild camping.

## Useful information

**Ferry booking office**

+44 (0)1595 745804

**Public toilet**

Ferry terminal

**Medical assistance**

Walls Health Centre, +44 (0)1595 809352

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



[shetland.org/papa-stour](https://shetland.org/papa-stour)



# Papa Stour

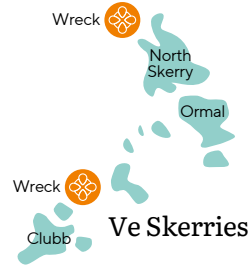
Sculpted by the sea







↑ Lyra Skerry off Papa Stour Calum Toogood

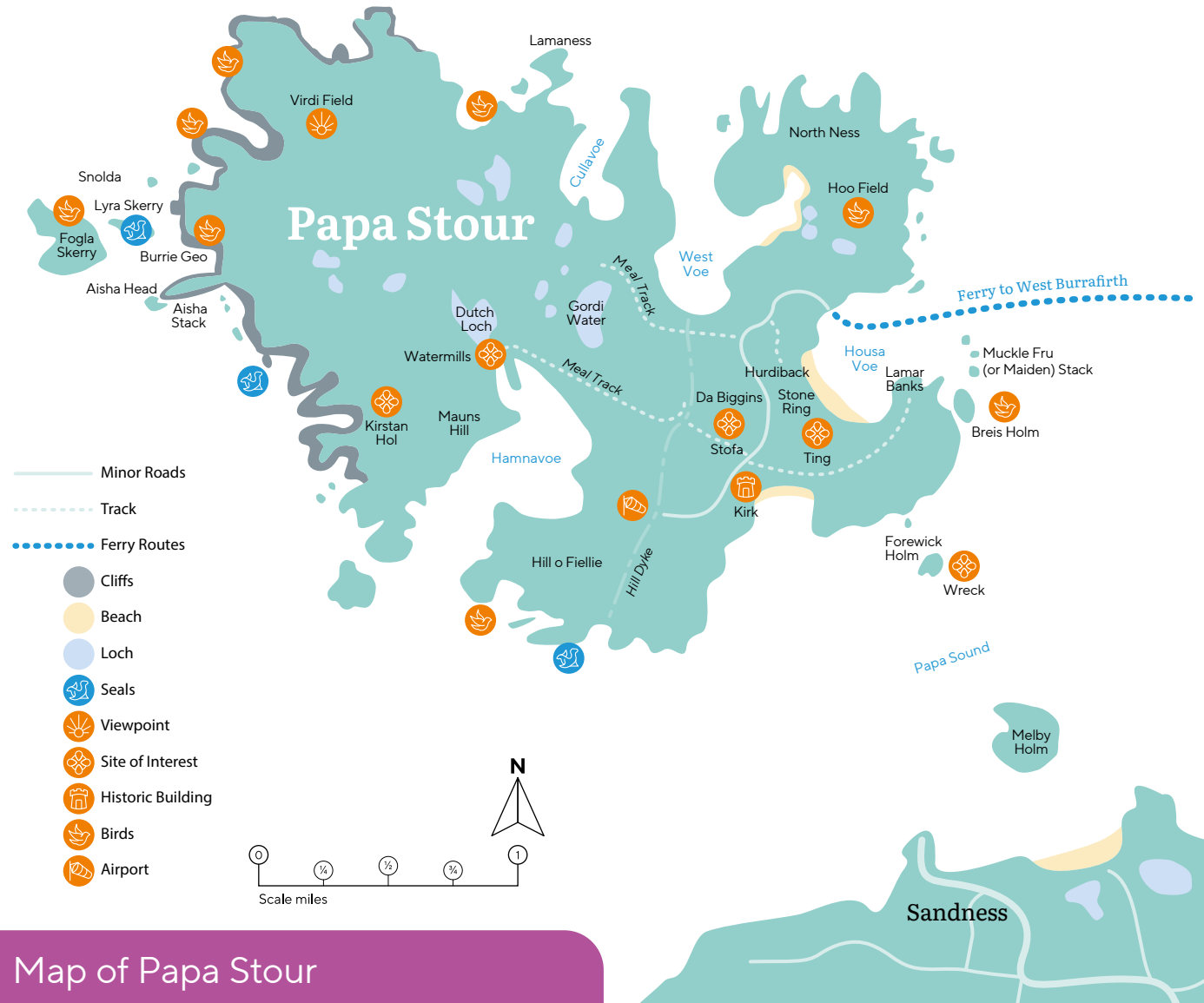


## Exploring Papa Stour

On the approach to Papa Stour from West Burrafirth the ferry passes **Breis Holm**, where you will get your first glimpse of the island's impressive sea caves. At the foot of Breis Holm a large tunnel cuts right through the rock. In calm weather, it is possible to travel through the tunnel by boat or kayak.

The tallest of the stacks that cluster around the entrance to **Housa Voe** is known as **Muckle Fru** or **Maiden Stack**. It was here that the only daughter of a Norwegian lord was imprisoned by her father for refusing to agree to an arranged marriage. She had given her heart instead to a humble fisherman who, legend has it, rescued her from her solitary confinement on the stack with the help of his friends.

Behind the beach at Housa Voe are the supposed remains of **Ting**, believed to be a site where Norse assemblies were held. It is reputed that Lord Thorvald Thoresson, the man accused of corruption in the 1299 document, fought and won a duel within this circle.



Map of Papa Stour

Excavations in the 1970s and 1980s at **Da Biggins**, alongside the road just before the kirk, uncovered the foundations of a medieval Norse house. In 2008 the Papa Stour History Group in partnership with the Norwegian Craft Academy undertook a partial reconstruction of this Stofa. This involved an exchange of students and craftsmen between the two countries. Log timbers were brought over from Norway and assembled on-site in Papa Stour. It was officially opened by the Lady Mayor of Hordaland, Norway. Interpretation at the site gives more details of the findings.

The **Papa Stour Kirk** was built in 1806. On the west wall is a memorial window to the memory of six Papa men who lost their lives in the First World War. This stained glass window is the only surviving work of artist Victor Noble Rainbird. The Kirk is now run by the Papa Stour History and Community Group.

Continuing past the kirk and primary school, the road leads to the airstrip and the open scattald. To the south, you will find the remains of several Neolithic burial chambers known as heel-shaped cairns because of their shape when viewed from above. The remains of more recent buildings can also be seen here.

Suspected leprosy sufferers from the west mainland used to be sent to live in isolation in huts, the remains of which can be seen on **Hill o Fiellie**. To survive, they relied on the islanders to leave food for them by the dyke. However, it is now thought more likely that these people suffered from malnutrition or elephantiasis rather than leprosy.

↓ **Da Biggins** Colin Nutt



The small stone buildings around **Dutch Loch** are good examples of horizontal water mills. Originally these were two-storey buildings with turf roofs. They were built into banks to give access to the upper floor where the millstone was sited. Many were still in use on Papa Stour in the early years of the 20th century.

To the west of **Hamnavoe**, the island's spectacular western cliffs come into view, carved with arches and caves and punctuated with stacks and skerries. Please take care when walking near the island's cliffs as the rock is often loose and crumbling or you may come across a deep geo or hole. Two large holes, set back slightly from the cliff edge, drop through the roof of perhaps the most famous of the Papa Stour caves, known as **Kirstan's Hol**. Look down through the hole and you can see waves breaking on the beach at the back of the cave, but take care, it's a long way down.

Nowhere on the island is the power of the sea more evident than in the three-legged **Aisha Stack, Aisha Head** - pierced by the **Hol o Burrie Geo** - and the sea caves that penetrate **Fogla** and **Lyra Skerries** - all of which are excellent to explore by sea kayak when conditions permit.

The waves do not always have their way though and to the north of Lyra Skerry the solitary **Snolda** (whose name comes from the Old Norse word for a pinnacle) reaches precariously out of the sea, with waves crashing around the base and boulders balanced on top.

**Virdi Field** is the highest point on Papa Stour, providing a panoramic view of the island. To the north-west, the tips of the **Ve Skerries** can be seen just above the sea surface. From this distance they look small, but the shallow baas (submerged reefs) reach out much further and have proved treacherous on many occasions.

This was the scene of a shipwreck, in December 1977, when the *Elinor Viking* was blown into the skerries, the rocks tearing a large hole in her side. Fortunately, the crew were rescued, but the event prompted the building of a lighthouse on Ve Skerries which is clearly visible from Papa Stour.

Norse Watermills Colin Nutt →

In contrast to the rugged coastline of the west, the sheltered voes along the north coast, **West Voe** and **Cullavoe** provided shelter for 19th-century herring fishing stations. Before refrigeration, herring needed to be processed quickly and packed in salt to preserve it for export to Europe. Herring stations were set up close to the fishing grounds to speed the process and herring gutters and packers came to work in the island from all over Shetland and mainland Britain.

