



↑ Red Rock Pool, Vinkie  
David Gifford



↑ Seapinks, Ness of Burgi | Grey seal  
basking on the shore David Gifford



↑ Sumburgh Lighthouse  
VisitScotland / Kenny Lam



↑ St Ninian's Isle VisitScotland / Paul Tomkins

## Useful information

### Getting around Shetland

For general travel information, including bus timetables and car and bike hire, visit [shetland.org/getting-around](http://shetland.org/getting-around)

### Ferry booking office

Mousa Boat | +44 (0)7901 872339 | [info@mousa.co.uk](mailto:info@mousa.co.uk)

### Visitor information points

Quendale Mill | +44 (0)1950 460969  
Hoswick Visitor Centre | +44 (0)1950 431406

### Geopark Shetland

Discover geosites across Shetland | [shetland.org/geopark](http://shetland.org/geopark)

### Museums and visitor centres

Sumburgh Head | Jarlshof | Scatness  
Quendale Mill | Crofthouse Museum | Hoswick  
Sandsayre | Cunningsburgh

### Public toilets

Grutness Pier | Sumburgh | Bigton  
Sandwick (seasonal) | Cunningsburgh

### Post offices

Dunrossness | Bigton | Sandwick

### Shops

Dunrossness | Bigton | Sandwick

### Fuel

Sumburgh

### EV charging points

[chargeplacescotland.org](http://chargeplacescotland.org)

### Swimming pool

Sandwick | +44 (0)1595 807719

### Health centre

Levenwick | +44 (0)1950 461222

### Police 101



**SHETLAND**  
ISLANDS COUNCIL



[shetland.org/south-mainland](http://shetland.org/south-mainland)

2026 | **Disclaimer** All details believed to be accurate at the time of going to print.

# South Mainland

Archaeological  
treasure trove



# Welcome to the South Mainland

The narrow peninsula which runs 25 miles south from Lerwick boasts some of Shetland's most attractive scenery. This includes an extraordinary concentration of archaeological sites and world-class wildlife attractions in its seabird cliffs, wildfowl lochs, seal rookeries and whale-watching viewpoints.

Attractions include Sumburgh Head Lighthouse, the stunning sandy tombolo of St Ninian's beach and ferry access to the island of Mousa, featuring a beautifully preserved Iron Age broch.

## Exploring the area

The many side roads off the A970 from Lerwick to Sumburgh make this an ideal area to explore by car or by bus. There is excellent walking around the coastline and along the ridge of hills which forms the spine of the South Mainland.

The views from summits such as the Wart of Scousburgh and Fitful Head are on an epic scale: crofts and farmland fringe beaches of shell sand and secluded rocky coves, while to seaward Fair Isle and Foula make romantic silhouettes on the ocean horizon.

The land has mostly been carved by glaciers out of ancient Old Red Sandstone rocks, some 370 million years old, although there are also deposits of soapstone and copper ores. Sandy soil and generations of careful farming have made this Shetland's most productive agricultural district.

## Things to see and do

Places to visit travelling from south to north, from the tip of the South Mainland and back up towards Lerwick.

### Sumburgh Head

**Sumburgh Head Lighthouse, Visitor Centre and Nature Reserve** is a world-class visitor attraction, providing an engaging and interactive experience for the whole family. Visit and explore the history and natural heritage of Sumburgh Head from early geological beginnings and Iron Age settlers to lighthouse keepers, whales, Puffins (April-August) and much more. See the Shetland Amenity Trust website for visitor centre opening times.

The cliffs surrounding the site are teeming with birds during the breeding season. Puffin, Guillemot, Razorbill, Kittiwake and Fulmar can all be found here. Oystercatcher, Wren and Twite are also commonly seen.

Looking out to sea, you may spot some sea mammals breaking the water's surface, including white-sided dolphins, harbour porpoises, orcas and minke whales. Closer to the shore, common and grey seals can often be seen basking on the rocks at the foot of the cliffs.

Another good birding spot is the roadside by the **Pool of Virkie**, on the north side of **Sumburgh Airport**, where your car makes a convenient hide to watch migrating waders, and sometimes Shelducks.

### Jarlshof

One of the most remarkable archaeological sites ever excavated in the British Isles, **Jarlshof** came to light over 100 years ago when violent storms exposed massive stonework under a grassy mound above the sandy beach at the West Voe of Sumburgh. The site showcases 4,000 years of human settlement, from Bronze Age buildings to an Iron Age broch and wheelhouses to a sizeable Viking village and medieval farmstead. The site is open all year round. Check Historic Environment Scotland's website for opening times and ticket information.

### Old Scatness

Less than a mile from Jarlshof you'll find **Old Scatness Broch** where an archaeological dig has revealed one of Britain's most exciting Iron Age villages. Buried for nearly 2,000 years under metres of sand and soil, the site is rich in artefacts and has remarkable preservation, allowing a unique opportunity to better understand the past. Old Scatness is managed by Shetland Amenity Trust and visitor booking is essential. See the Shetland Amenity Trust website for more details.

### Quendale Mill

Under the shadow of **Fitful Head**, this 19th-century watermill has been beautifully restored and houses a visitor centre with an exhibition of old farming methods and crofting equipment. The mill also offers a visitor information point, craft shop and light refreshments. See their website for more details.





↑ [Mousa Broch](#) [VisitScotland](#) / [Kenny Lam](#)

↑ [Crofthouse Museum](#) [David Gifford](#)

## Crofthouse Museum

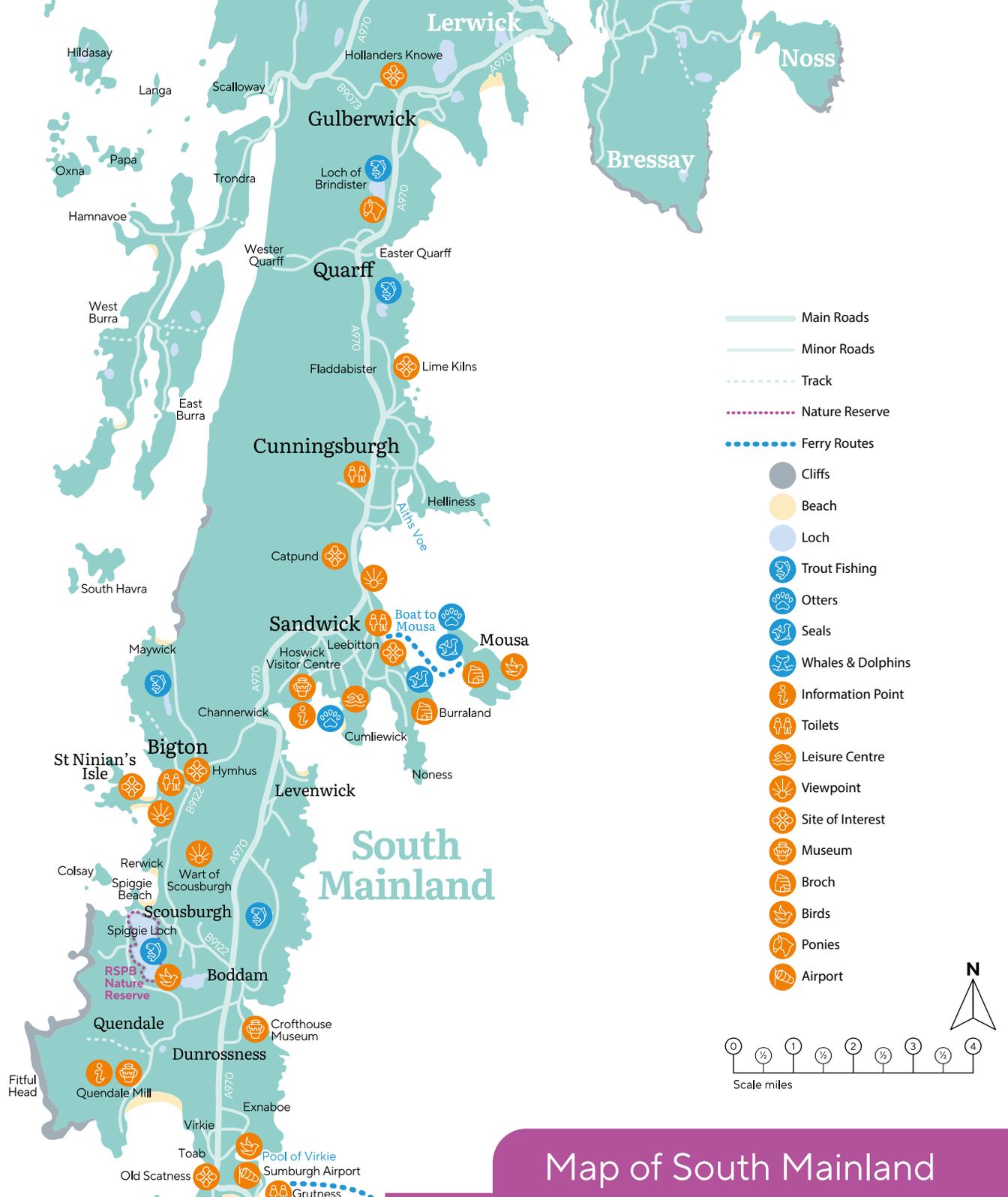
For a flavour of what life was like in Shetland over 100 years ago, a visit to the **Crofthouse Museum** is a must. Inside the restored homestead with its thatched roof cottage, barn and byre you'll find homemade furniture, such as a box bed, Shetland chairs and a spinning wheel.

Nearby is a restored watermill, typical of those which ground oats and barley for most Shetland crofting townships until larger mills such as Quendale Mill were built in the mid-19th century. For more information and opening times, see the Shetland Museum and Archives website.

## Spiggie Loch and Beach

On the side road from **Quendale** to **Scousburgh** you pass **Spiggie Loch**, an RSPB reserve for wildfowl featuring a purpose-built hide. In late autumn, hundreds of migrating Whooper Swans and Greylag Geese from Iceland pass through here while in summer Arctic Terns and Great Skuas bathe in the shallows.

This is one of the richest lochs in Shetland, with good trout fishing. The burn leading down to **Peerie Spiggie Beach** is celebrated for sea trout. Nearby, Spiggie Beach makes a popular and sheltered bathing beach. On the road connecting Bigton and Scousburgh you'll see **Rerwick**, a sandy spot where seals like to bathe on the sand. Observe them from the road and try not to disturb them.



## St Ninian's Isle

**St Ninian's Isle** became famous in 1958, when a schoolboy helping at an archaeological dig on the island's tiny Celtic chapel discovered a hoard of silver bowls and ornaments. The treasure, believed to date from around 800AD, is kept in Edinburgh but replicas are displayed at Shetland Museum and Archives in Lerwick. The stunning, white sandy tombolo beach which leads to the island is one of Shetland's most photographed vistas. There's also a good walk over to and around the isle.

The nearby village of **Bigton** often has events in its redeveloped kirk, Hymhus. There is also a shop, cafe and weekend bakery. Three miles east of **Bigton**, **Levenwick** has a fine bathing beach. Further up the east coast is the scenic inlet of **Channerwick** and the villages of **Sandwick** and **Hoswick**, which lie on latitude 60 degrees north – the same parallel as Cape Farewell, Greenland.

## Sandwick

The village of Sandwick is home to the excellent **Hoswick Visitor Centre**, which has a range of exhibits, local arts and crafts. There is also an excellent cafe and visitor information point, as well as a knitwear factory, shops and jewellers nearby. The car park has charging facilities for electric vehicles.

There is good coastal walking around the headlands at **Cumliewick** and **Noness**. At **Burralland** the ruins of the croft houses are a reminder of how communities were cleared from their homes to make way for sheep. The nearby broch remains look across the sound to **Mousa Broch**.

## Mousa Broch

**Mousa Broch** is the finest surviving example of a 2,000-year-old Iron Age tower, or broch. It was one of about 120 built throughout Shetland. Mentioned in the Norse sagas as an eloping lovers' hideout, Mousa Broch is one of the wonders of European archaeology.

Storm Petrels nest in the broch's stone chambers. Feeding far out to sea, these tiny swallow-like birds return to their nests under the cover of darkness to avoid other larger predatory seabirds. A midnight excursion to see and hear the Storm Petrels is an experience not to be missed in the summer months.

Mousa abounds in other wildlife: a large colony of common and grey seals basks on the east side of the island; there's a chance you may see otters; Fulmars, Black Guillemots are very common; and Great Skuas, Arctic Skuas and Arctic Terns defend their nesting grounds by dive-bombing all intruders, humans included – so try to walk round the breeding colonies.



During the summer, the Mousa Boat leaves from the **pier of Sandsayre at Leebitton** in Sandwick and the trip is one of the best ways to see harbour porpoises at close range, as they feed on shoals of fish in Mousa Sound. Visit the Mousa Boat website for details of ferry times.

The restored boatsheds at Sandsayre combine the waiting room for the Mousa Boat with marine, historical, cultural and environmental displays.

## Cunningsburgh

At **Catpund**, on the hillside above the main **Sandwick** to **Cunningsburgh** road, the ancient inhabitants of Shetland worked steatite, or soapstone. The rock is soft and easy to carve but hardens when subjected to heat. Along the Catpund Burn you can still see the shapes left hundreds of years ago as bowls, urns and other utensils were hacked out of the rock.

A detour through the village of Cunningsburgh, site of the annual agricultural show (August), brings you to the quiet inlet of **Aiths Voe**, where the marina features modern hook-ups and facilities for campervans and caravans.

Throughout the summer, Sunday teas are served in the **Cunningsburgh Hall** and the adjacent History Hut and restored boat house have local history displays.

The next side road goes through the old crofting township of **Fladdabister**, where there are the ruins of lime kilns used until the early 20th century. There is spectacular scenery following the coastline north to **Quarff**.

## Quarff and Gulberwick

**Easter** and **Wester Quarff** lie at opposite ends of one of Shetland's few east-west valleys. Here the ice burst through the grain of the landscape and carved a classic glacial valley where the Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea are less than two miles apart.

Just north of Quarff, the lay-by next to the **Loch of Brindister** is one of the best places to meet Shetland ponies. Out in the loch, a tiny island holds the ruins of a dun, a prehistoric fort.

Returning to Lerwick, the main road skirts **Gulberwick**, where the Viking Earl Rognvald was shipwrecked in 1148AD. Above the farm of Wick is the **Hollanders' Knowe**, a traditional trading place between islanders and Dutch fishermen in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Puffins, Sumburgh Head  
David Gifford

