



# Orkney's Woodland Walks



Six varied walks in one of  
**6**  
Orkney's rarer habitats



ORKNEY  
WOODLAND  
PROJECTS

# Gyre

combine a visit to an unusual  
11th century church, a walk along  
the shore and a stroll through a  
small woodland

Starting point : Orkneyinga Saga Centre,  
grid reference HY335045.

This is an easy circular walk following a coastal path,  
a woodland trail and a minor road.  
Use OS 'Explorer' map number 463.

At the beginning (or end) of this walk, you have  
the chance to visit both the Orkneyinga Saga Centre  
to get a flavour of Orkney in Viking times and the  
11th century Orphir Round Kirk.



*Common Blue Butterfly*



*Coastal path*





*Heath-spotted Orchid*

*Gyre woodland  
from the south*



From the coastal path, there are lovely views across the waters of Scapa Flow and this is a very peaceful spot to sit and watch a variety of bird-life, including ducks and waders. You may also spot seals swimming quietly by.

A little further along the shore, look out for one of Orkney's smallest 'trees' - Creeping Willow - which grows in abundance here; it even grows splayed up against the stone dyke, looking more like a Cotoneaster than a willow!

Colourful flowers amongst the Heather and Crowberry include Thrift, Heath-Spotted and Northern Marsh Orchids, Meadow Vetchling, Birdsfoot Trefoil, Lovage, Red and White Clovers, Angelica, Wild Thyme and Tormentil. Common Blue butterflies can also be seen here.



Leaving the coast, you can walk onwards along a quiet minor road. Notice the vigorous Blackberry and Gorse bushes growing along the verges and keep a look out for the 'Woodland Footpath' sign for the route which will take you into Gyre woods.

Once inside the shelter of the woods, you will find large old Sycamore trees, Rowan, Wych Elm, Swedish Whitebeam, Wild Cherry, Hazel, Gorse, Flowering Currant, Fuchsia and Willows. The most obvious groundflora is Pink Purslane, which you will see in several other planted woodlands in Orkney.

Look (and listen) out for some typical woodland songbirds, such as Blackbird, Robin, Wren and in summer, Willow Warbler. There is a picnic table located near the burn.

To get back to your starting point, continue along the minor road, passing further mature woodland and continue past roadside hedges of Elder, Beech and *Rosa rugosa* and a good variety of young planted trees.



*Wren*

# Binscarth

explore Mainland Orkney's  
largest woodland and perhaps  
continue on past Wasdale Loch

Starting point : Kissing gate off the main A965 road in Finstown, grid reference HY355140. Please be careful of fast moving traffic at this point.

This is an easy linear walk following paths and tracks, which can be muddy at times.

Use OS 'Explorer' map number 463.

Binscarth woods were originally planted in the 1860s or 1870s - shortly after the house was built - and some of the largest trees date back to that time. In 1952, an exceptionally fierce gale hit Orkney, causing severe damage, and about 2000 trees were blown over. The area was replanted and today is a healthy, thriving and attractive woodland.

Set off down the field towards the wood. (There may be animals in this field, so please keep dogs under control.) You will see Binscarth House above the woods ahead and to your right there is an area of younger woodland which was planted in 1990 and is growing strongly in the shelter of the older woodland.



*Binscarth woods from the kissing gate*

The shelter provided by the trees becomes obvious as soon as you enter the woods. Now you can either keep walking along the main track, or turn off through a small gate to the left and have a delightful stroll amongst the many fine trees and along the burn.

Look out for Sycamore and Beech trees and also examples of Wych Elm, Ash, Hawthorn, Alder, Spruce and Larch. Under the conifers there is very little growing and this contrasts strongly with the deciduous parts of the wood, under which a range of shrubs and plants grow, including Pink Purslane, Salmonberry and Snowberry.



*Lichen*



*Pink Purslane*



*Male and female Chaffinch*



*Sycamore leaves*

In spring, the woods are a mass of Bluebells and Snowdrops. Later, as the trees come into leaf, the fresh, bright green of the young Beech leaves against a blue sky is particularly beautiful. The trees of Binscarth also provide habitats for plentiful mosses, lichens and fungi and shelter for Blackbird, Robin, Wren, Dunnock, Goldcrest, Chaffinch and many Rooks.



Passing out of the main wood, you can continue along the track. If you peek over the gate on the right, you may catch a glimpse of a Monkey Puzzle and a Copper Beech tree, both of which are quite unusual in Orkney. Continuing on, you will pass Ash and Laburnum trees to your left and large areas of Gorse, or Whin, stretching up the hill to your right. You might spot a group of native Tea-Leaved and Eared Willows on the right too. To your left, there are attractive views across the West Mainland landscape to the Hoy hills.



*The path to Wasdale*

You can now continue through a metal gate and walk in a more open landscape around Wasdale Loch, where you may see Mute Swans and various ducks and waders, to Refuge Corner. You can return by the same route.



*Beech bark*

# Burn of Quoys

## explore one of Orkney's remaining native woodlands

Starting point : Kissing gates at top and bottom, grid reference HY240032 or 237031.  
Please avoid obstructing passing bays if you need to park.

This is a short circular or linear walk through sometimes long vegetation and rough ground.  
Use OS 'Explorer' map number 462.

The Burn of Quoys is probably the most accessible of Orkney's scarce remaining native woodlands. It lies alongside a small burn and has been fenced off by its owners, the Hoy Trust, to protect these special trees from sheep grazing.



*Rowan and heather*

*Birch, honeysuckle and Ward Hill*



*Hazel*

Orkney's native tree species are Downy Birch, Rowan, Aspen, Hazel and various Willows and Roses; at Quoys, you can see all of these (with the exception of Aspen). You might also spot wild Honeysuckle twining around some of the trees.

On low ground, to the south of the burn, look out for some young Hazel plants. There are only three remaining Hazel trees left in Orkney and these young plants have been propagated from these wild Hoy trees. It is hoped that they will now thrive and eventually produce nuts themselves.

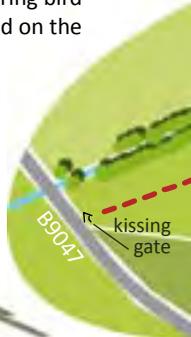
In autumn, the red Rowan berries and Rose hips give vivid splashes of colour to the wood and migrant, wintering bird species, such as Redwing and Fieldfare, love to feed on the berries and find shelter here.

Near the bottom of the wood, you can spot some 'alien' introductions - Fuchsia and Spruce trees.

On the northern side of the burn, there are some small Birch trees which are growing naturally from seed shed by the nearby trees.



*Redwing*





Honeysuckle

Downy Birch catkins

Wild Rose

**Other woods on Hoy**

It is on Hoy that you can find the bulk of Orkney's remaining native woodland and other examples can be seen at Pegal, Whanness and Berriedale.

There are also four conifer plantations which were trial plots planted in the 1950s by the Forestry Commission. One of these, White Glen, is being converted into a native woodland by the RSPB.



--- 480metre walk

Basic stile

B9049

kissing gate



Rowan flower

# Muddisdale

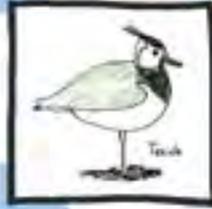
## discover a flourishing young woodland on the edge of Kirkwall

Starting point : Kissing gate off the far end of Muddisdale Road at HY437108.

This is an easy circular walk through the trees, or you could follow the path on towards Sunnybank Road, or all the way to the summit of Wideford Hill. The walk is suitable for pushchairs and wheel chairs. Use OS 'Explorer' map number 461.

Muddisdale wood is the youngest woodland in this leaflet. It was planted in 2000 by Orkney islands Council and is a large wood by Orkney standards, over four hectares in size.

As you walk, look out for Sycamore, Swedish Whitebeam, Common Alder, Sitka Alder, Ash, Wych Elm, Hawthorn, Willow and our own native Downy Birch.



On Wideford hill we saw the outline of an Cysterecatcher along with a Crow in the sky.



"Each time we go it changes, we see new things."



"It's great to find out about biodiversity at Muddisdale."



- Circular walk around trees 0.9 km
- easily accessible section
- Walk to Sunnybank Rd 1.8 km return
- Walk to summit of hill 7.2 km return

We hope that other, more unusual, trees will be added in the future and that this area will gradually become an informal arboretum for Orkney - a living library of trees that will grow in our environment.



"I thought we would only see daisies."



beware of cars

please show consideration to golfers

When someone says 'wood', you only think of trees. This shows how much stuff is actually in a wood.

Hoverfly



This field holds trial plots of biomass willows, which have been planted by Orkney College.



With many thanks to the pupils of Glaitness Primary School for the drawings and information on this page.







*waterfall*



*Turkey Oak*

Within the garden, you can find trees which are fairly unusual in Orkney. Although the backbone of the wood is composed of hardy Sycamore, there are also examples of Copper Beech, Beech, Turkey Oak, Japanese Cedar, Monkey Puzzle, Whitebeam, Sessile Oak, Lime, Yew, Alder, Birch, Hazel, Southern Beech, Juniper and many others. In spring, the woods contain a sea of Bluebells.

Such a variety of trees provides a great habitat for a range of songbirds. Try not to disturb the regularly breeding Ravens as you pass by.



*Monkey Puzzle bark*



*New Zealand Flax*

At the heart of the garden is a burn, which Edwin widened and diverted in places and which he used to create his own 'hydro-electric' scheme. He also built all the bridges, waterfalls and all the other, sometimes quirky, structures. He lived lightly on the land and, by all accounts, enjoyed life to the full. Local folk have many stories to tell about Edwin and they all bring a smile to your face!

If you return to your car across the field, you will see that Edwin's work is being continued. The 'Friends of Happy Valley', a group of local people, have not only been helping to maintain the wood, but have planted over 800 new trees to enhance and protect the existing trees. The spirit of Edwin still lingers on.

# Widford Burn

walk from a sandy beach, through a small woodland and perhaps continue on along minor roads

Starting point : The car-park at Inganess Bay, grid reference HY475086.

This is an easy circular walk along grassy paths, boardwalks and minor roads, which can be shortened to reach the woodland section only.

Use OS 'Explorer' map number 461.



Inganess Bay is a lovely sandy beach and a good place for a walk at low tide. Looking out to sea, over the old wrecked boat, you can see some of the north isles of Orkney in the distance and depending on the season, a variety of seabirds and ducks.

Turning inland to follow the small burn, you can see a peaceful lochan, on which there might be a range of wild fowl.

Swathes of the yellow-flowered flag Iris are evident along many parts of this walk and in mid summer, they are joined by sheets of sweet-scented Meadowsweet.

After some distance the path crosses the main A 960 road. (Traffic moves very quickly along this road, so please take great care at this point)

Once across the road, you enter the woodland and the sudden increase in bird song is surprising. In Orkney, even small woodlands seem to attract a range of breeding species, including Robin, Dunnock, Blackbird, Wren and Willow Warbler. However, the largest object flying overhead is likely to be a plane taking off from the nearby Kirkwall airport!

*Willow Warbler*



You will pass through large thickets of native willow - mainly Eared Willow, but with some Tea-Leaved Willow. These willows are usually lower growing than the non-native willows, but are much denser and longer-lived. This natural willow 'carr' is the backbone of the wood and a variety of other trees have been planted in and around it. They include Alder, Downy Birch, Poplar, Hawthorn, Swedish Whitbeam, Sycamore, Rowan, Dog Roses and various non-native Willows.

*Hawthorn*



*Meadowsweet*





Eared Willow



Inganess Bay

In open areas amongst the trees, you may find Heath-Spotted and Northern Marsh Orchids, Bell and Ling Heather, Water Avens, Tormentil and Blaeberry.

Beyond the trees, the path passes through open farmland and you can complete a circular walk by continuing along quiet minor roads, where the verges are full of colourful flowers in summer.



# Treeless or Well-Wooded Orkney?

*It's all relative, as the following quotes show :*

*"These treeless islands set  
Where the wild-goose flies,  
Lest men should e'er forget  
The sea and the skies."*

Robert Rendall

*"Orkney has no trees.*

*That's the thing that seems to blow first-time visitors away. Orkney, yeah, it's got no trees."*

Luke Sutherland 'Venus as a Boy'

*"In the town of Kirkwall and its neighbourhood, where houses afford shelter, trees readily attain a height of 35 and 40 feet, and by their numbers add not a little to the picturesque appearance of the place; so much so, that not very long ago, the Prince of Orange, who had been on a visit to Iceland or the Faroe Islands, and on his return touched at Kirkwall, remarked, much to the surprise and gratification of his hearers, that it was delightful to get back to a well-wooded country once more."*

Dr William Traill (1868)

'On Submarine Forests and other Remains of Indigenous Wood in Orkney.'

## Did you know?



Orkney's largest wood surrounds Balfour Castle on Shapinsay and is over 10 hectares in size.



Berriedale wood on Hoy is the most northern remnant of native woodland in the British Isles.



'Tatter flags', which are still used today by the Forestry Commission to find the most sheltered places to plant trees, were pioneered at Binscarth woods, where Robert Scarth used them to locate the most sheltered location for his house.



Between 1998 and 2009, over 120 new woodlands were planted in Orkney. Many of them include native species propagated from trees in Orkney's remaining native woodlands. *Hopefully there will be more woods to walk in in the future!*

## Enjoy our woods

6 Simple Steps    
to conserving the environment and sharing access responsibly:

 stick to the path 

 leave things as you found them 

 don't disturb animals 

 keep your dog under control 

 respect other users 

 don't start fires 

Found something new you can't identify?  
 Draw it and find out later. 



Bird Illustrations, courtesy of RSPB Images  
Butterfly illustrations: Tracy Hall  
Design: Iain Ashman Design

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Alder

Ash

Aspen

Bird Cherry



Downy Birch

Elder

Grey Willow

Larch



# Orkney's Woodland Walks

Yes, there ARE woodlands in Orkney!  
Discover one of Orkney's rarer habitats with these six varied walks. Great for a breezy day.

Orkney Woodland Projects are funded by



**Forestry Commission**  
Scotland



**ORKNEY ISLANDS COUNCIL**



**Scottish Natural Heritage**  
All of nature for all of Scotland



Supported by  
**The National Lottery**  
through the Heritage Lottery Fund



Front cover main image: Bluebells, Happy Valley

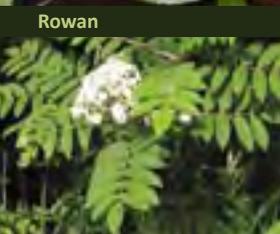


Lime

Lodgepole Pine

Oak

Poplar



Rowan

Sitka Alder

Tea-leaved Willow

Whitebeam