

Phil

63.

venture

44



Stones of Stenness



December 82

Number 45



Venture 44. A sort of magazine, by, for, and about the 44th Gloucester (Sir Thomas Rich's) Venture Scout Unit.

NUMBER 45

DECEMBER 1982

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The editorial staff would like to wish all our readers a happy Christmas and a successful New Year.

NOTES AND NEWS

This edition is concerned mainly with the summer expedition to the Orkney Islands, with several of the participants contributing articles.

The unit has been quite busy since the last issue was completed. A large number turned up on a bitterly cold Saturday to assist in the task of felling trees in the Barnwood churchyard. Fortunately, the rain held off, and a bonfire was constructed on which to burn the parts of the trees unsuitable for logging - it also provided welcome warmth for the workers!

A Scandanavian cook-in was organised recently and thanks must go to the AVSL and VSL for rustling up some otherwise unheard of delicacies. This evening was very well supported, as might have been expected!

Another visit was payed recently to one of the units favourite haunts - Stirchley Bowl - Ten pin bowling has become very popular despite bruised knuckles. We must teach Andy Manders the difference between this pastime and putting the shoot before the next time, however.

There have been several new faces in the hut over the past few weeks, and we are pleased to welcome into the unit Steve Catchick, Stuart James, Graham Dalby, David Williams and David Wright. The latter two are, of course brothers of present members. I am sure that they will be valuable additions to the unit.

Jer Hobbs

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Since the last magazine a very successful fundraising event has been held - a Disco at the Cambridge Suite. It has produced a healthy addition to the units funds, and has enabled us to make a contribution to the District to pay for work on the roof at Murray Hall.

The success of the venture was very largely due to a lot of hard work and diplomacy by Simon Williams, and I would like to thank Simon very much for his efforts.

F.H

ORKNEY 1982

The Party; Leaders F.Henderson and P.J.Brown
 Yosh Cowmeadow, Simon Hawkins, Nigel Holden,
 Dom Mills, Nick Poulton, Brian Symcox and
 Paddy Smith.

Itinery;

- Aug 9th. Drive from Gloucester to Blair Atholl.
 10th. On to Thurso, stopping at Inverness. Acquire a
 cigarette lighter from a friendly spaniard..
 11th. Board the "St Ola" - only just- cross over the
 Pentland Firth, and arrive at Stromness. Drive
 to Kirkwall, capital of the island of Mainland.
 12th. Exploring the past; Rennibister Earth-house,
 Ring of Brodgar, Scara Brae, The Earl's Palace,
 The Brock of Borwick and Stones of Stenness.
 13th. South Ronaldsway, Italian chapel, block ships,
 Deerness. We are buzzed by Skuas, but escape
 the Gloup...
 14th. The party divides, some to Rousay and some to
 Sanday, and one to Birsay.
 15th. Island exploration
 16th. Reunite, visit Orphir, and then to Stromness.
 17th. Hoy, the walk to Rackwick and the Old Man
 18th. Return to Stromness; a visitor.
 19th. Leave the islands; drive down to Brora.
 20th. The Great Glen, Loch Ness, Glencoe and south
 to Gretna Green
 21st. Return to Gloucester

* * * * *

In the following pages various members of the party
 record their memories of our time on the islands, a
 time during which 12 of them were visited by some
 or all of the party.

KIRK WALL

Kirkwall has been the commercial and administrative centre of the islands since the 11th century. at least, and there is evidence of its importance long before that. It was one of the earliest Norse towns - formally called "Kirkjuvagr" (Church Bay) after the church built there by the Earl Rognvald Brusason around 1040, in memory of norwegian King Olaf Haraldsson - later to become patron saint of Norway. The Norse influence is still much in evidence in this inviting little town, which truthfully could be called a city as it has a Cathedral.

The crow-stepped, gable ended houses which encroach upon Bridge Street, Broad Street and Albert Street form the basis of the town, and a visitor to the old town from mainland Britain cannot fail to be impressed by the foreign flavour of the narrow twisting, flagstone-paved streets, and the evocative business names that adorn them - Flett, Rendall and Kirkness.

In the old town there are few pavements, so the motorists and pedestrians co-exist happily(?) on equal terms without the benefit of modern traffic control systems, and weave, side-step and navigate their separate courses with patience and ease bred of long practice.

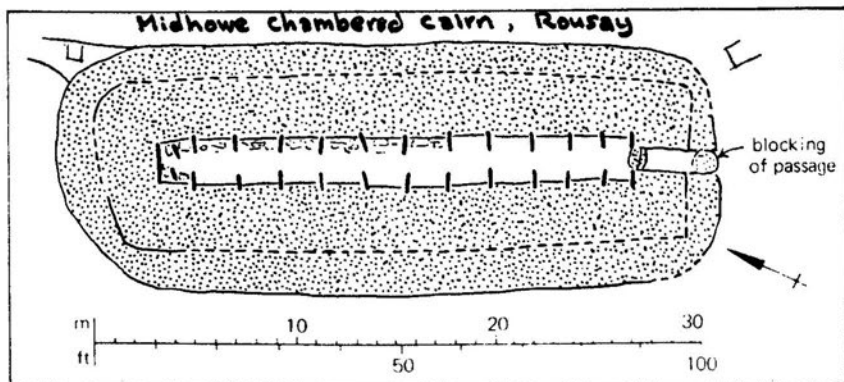
Shopping in Kirkwall still has an old-world charm about it for the most part, with friendly and personal service from family-run businesses which stock a wide, and remarkably varied, range of goods. Knitwear, especially, is widely sold and represents very good value.

St. Magnus Cathedral has dominated Kirkwall since the 12th century, and with the nearby Bishops Palace and Earl's Palace formed the spiritual and temporal heart of the town and, indeed, the islands over all. They lie together in a vicinity known as Laverock. The town once boasted a 14th century keep

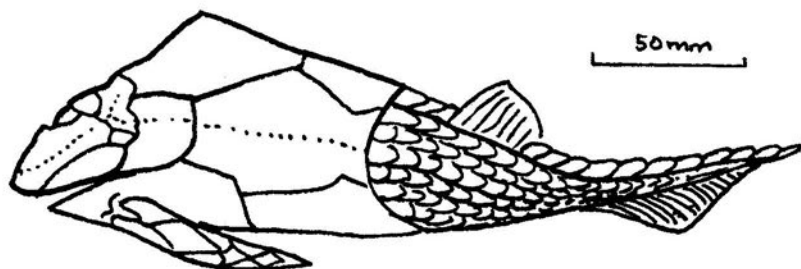
Orphir



The ruined round church on the estate of the 12th century viking Earl Paul Hakonerson. A few yards from here the ruins of the Earls drinking hall was visited. It was here that one of the most famous of all Orkneys viking heroes Svein Asleiferson started his colourful career by slaying two of the earls drinking companions

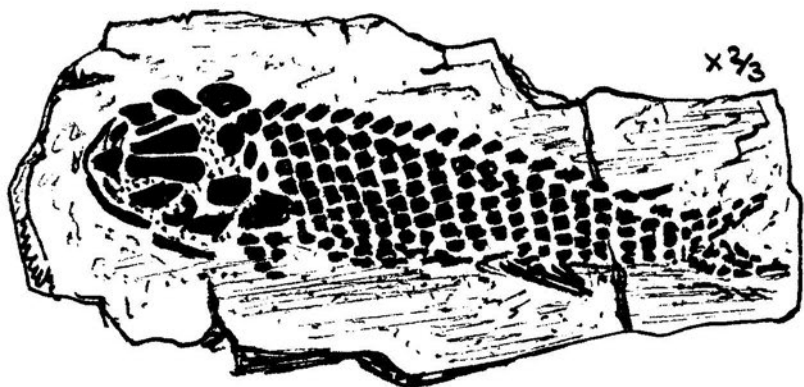


Pterichthyodes



One of the famous fossil fish of the Orkneys. About 350,000,000 years old. Complete fossils are rare, but teeth, scales, spines and head shields may be found. The above is only a reconstruction, the below is more typical.

Osteolepis. Stromness



built by Henry Sinclair, a scottish earl of Orkney, but all that remains today is a weathered heraldic stone.

A charming 16th century building opposite the Cathedral, Tankerness House, has been converted to form an interesting folk museum and together with the Library with its large absorbing collection of historical documents in the Orkney room was well worth the visit.

P.B.

THE GEOLOGY OF THE ISLANDS

To the casual observer rock is not very evident in the interior of the islands, but along the coasts there are impressive cliffs where the characteristic rocks of area can be examined.

The Orkneys are almost entirely made up of sandstone and related rocks that were formed in a large lake at the foot of a huge apline style mountain range spanning much of Scotland about 350 million years ago. A mass of $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles thick of sediment built up. Much of the stone splits readily into convenient slabs - the flagstone has been used for over 5000 years for building in Orkney.

The most famous feature of these beds is that they contain abundant remains of some of the worlds earliest fishes. Although complete specimens are rare, it is possible to find, as we did, plenty of scales and fragments of the head-shields of primitive armoured fishes.

To the collector of fossil fish, Orkney is a paradise and for the student of coastal erosion features, it has an attraction also. The jointing of the flagstones helps erosion which has produced cliff scenery with numerous natural arches, we saw these at Yesnaby and Whitaloo, and sea stacks, of which the Old Man of Hoy is the best example in Britain.

(Continued on page 9)

SANDAY

Pop. 510. 24 miles n.e. of Kirkwall. Sandy beaches
 Birwatchers paradise; seals and otters.
 The group: Phil, Nick, Nige, Brian.

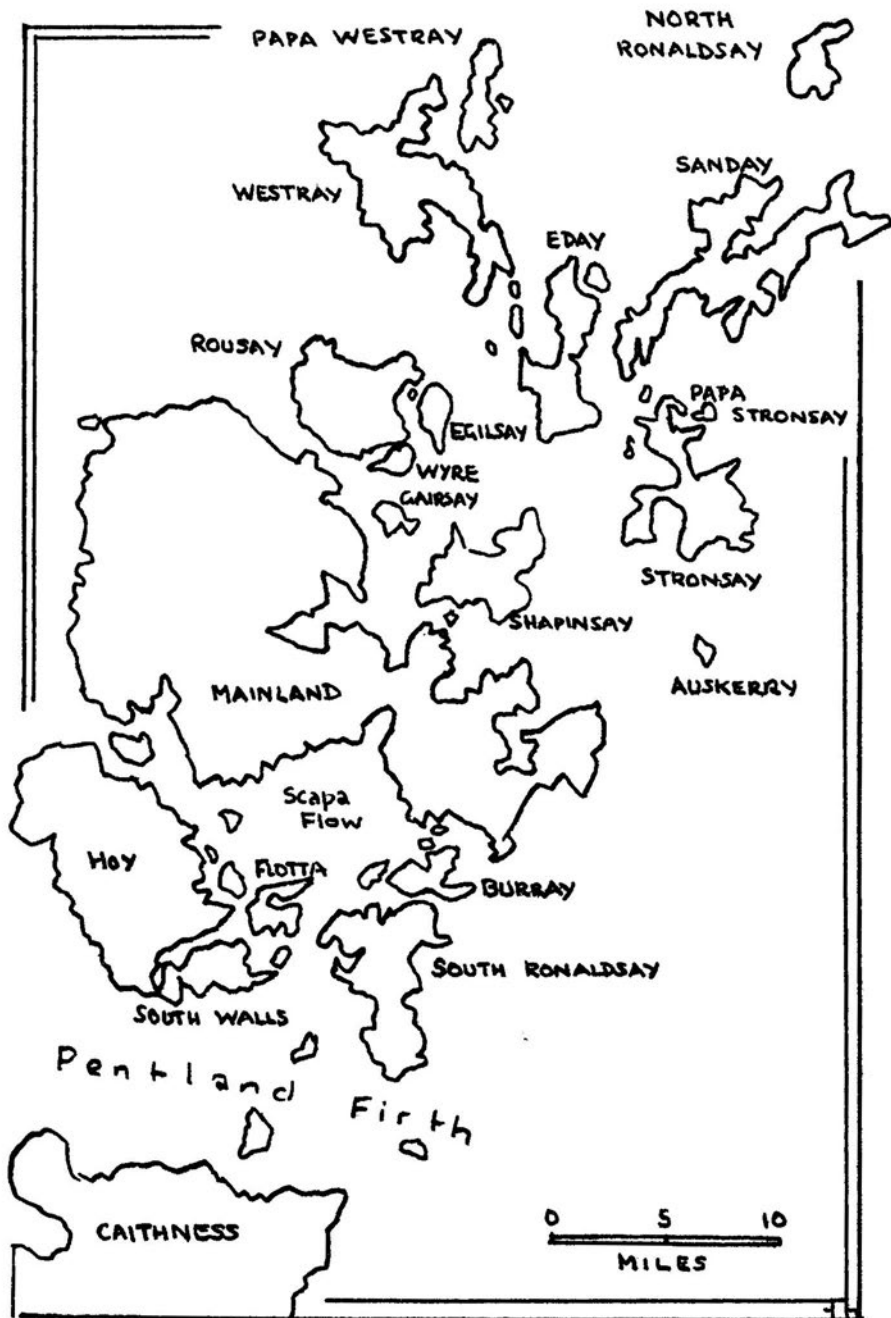
The four of us walked towards the ship with some trepidation, dreading the North Sea. Inside, the boat was just like a bus with one exception, they did bacon butties, of which we had our fair share.

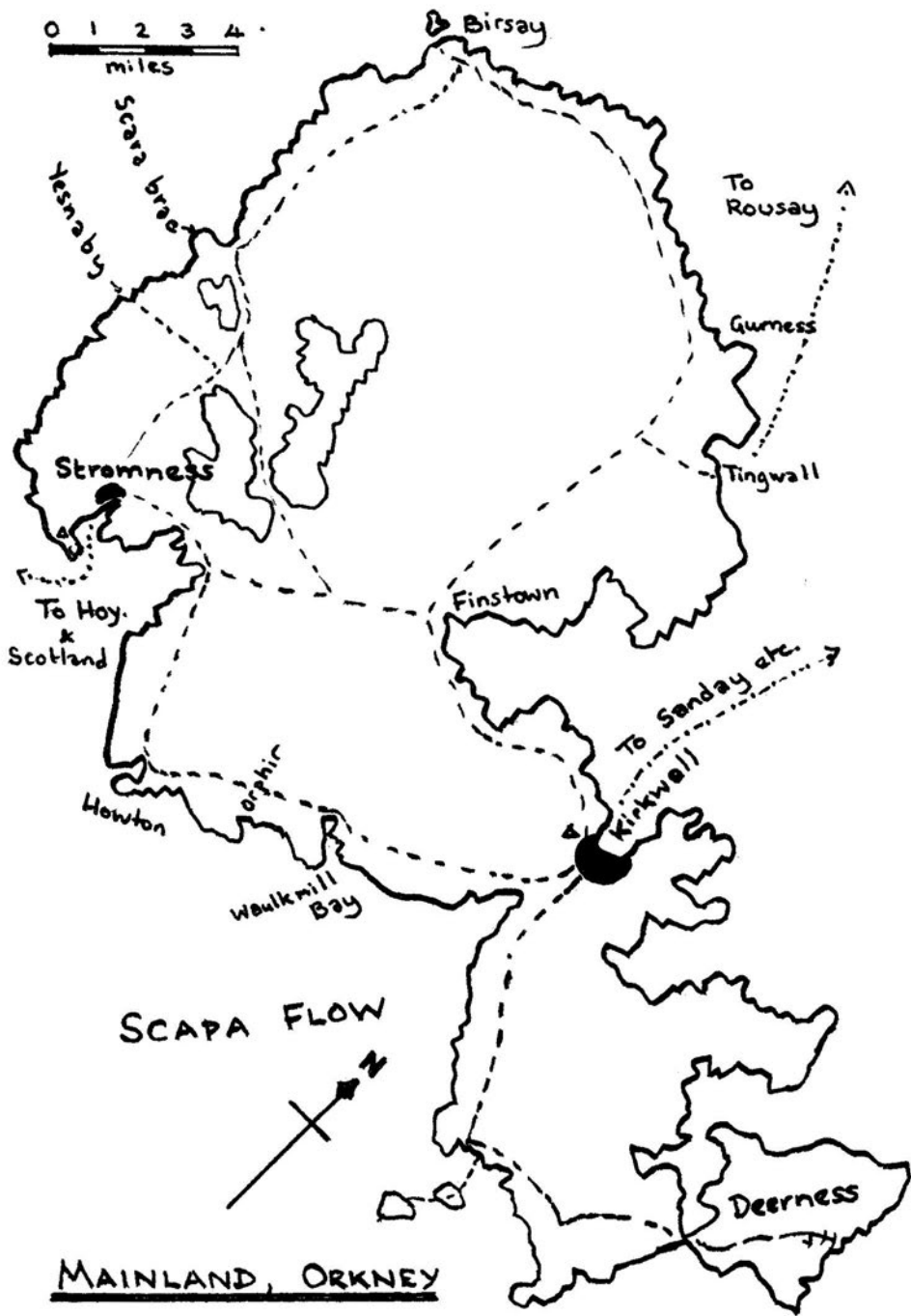
We arrived on Sanday about 5 p.m. and asked the first person we saw where we could camp - we were shown a tarmacked car-park. When Phil diplomatically pointed out 'we'd have a little trouble getting our tent pegs in' we were told to go to Home Farm. It was perfect if you just ignored the cemetery on our left, silage heap, the bulls, and the copious evidence of sheep we were in. Pitching our tents, we wandered on to the very tropical style beach, it was really just like the one in the well known Bounty advert, but we had no Bounties. At about 11 p.m. we crawled into bed, Phil planning to have a dawn dip - did he have one? You may guess.

Next day we decided to try and walk round the North part of the island, with Nick and Nige wanting to see the wrecked german destroyer. Many weary road and beach miles later we were trudging the seven miles back when a couple of hippies offered us a lift in their van. We said we were going to Home Farm and they dropped us off. They must have gone at least 15 miles out of their way, and our feet were very much in their debt!

As it was so windy, we decided to eat our meal in the cemetery behind the wall, and what should happen as we were tucking into our baked beans? Two people started to lay wreaths on a grave, to our intense embarrassment. Nick managed to fall over the wall, causing his ankle to swell alarmingly.

We decided to get up at 8.45 the next day, thinking the boat was coming back at 9.30. As we poked our heads





MAINLAND, ORKNEY

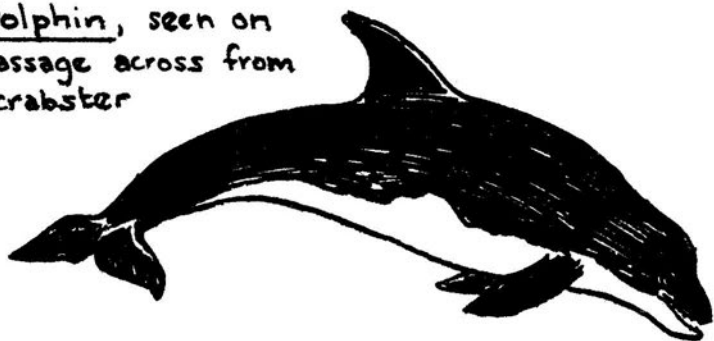
Skara Brae. One of Britain's most remarkable monuments, the remains of stone age village of eight houses, discovered buried under sand in 1850. The well preserved remains of the houses are constructed of the local flagstones. In the tiny museum we saw fragments of tools and pottery dating back perhaps to 3000 B.C. Perhaps the most impressive of the many sites of archeological interest visited whilst we were on the islands.



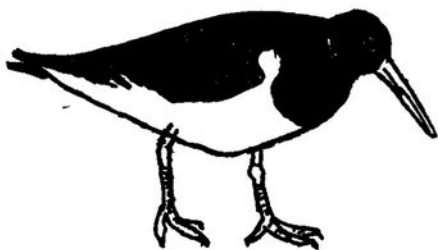
Skara Brae, House 1

Among the other sites were the earth-house at Rennibister..... All visitors to Mainland are strongly advised to visit this. Large parties are particularly welcomed....

Dolphin, seen on
passage across from
Scrabster



Great Skua,
Hoy



Oystercatcher, Sanday



Grey Seal, seen everywhere!

out of our tents we saw the boat in the bay steaming towards the quay, so we ate cold baked beans, broke camp with the greatest speed possible and ran, walked, hobbled, or in Nicks case crawled, the two miles in about 10 minutes, only to wait for half an hour whilst they loaded animals.

We left Sanday wishing that we could stay longer and as every island on the six-hour voyage back seemed to invite us to stay for a few days, we could have spent weeks before eventually landing back at Kirkwall.

Brian S.

ROUSAY

Pop 200. Famous for its brochs and burial chambers, fish fossils - "Queen of the Isles".
The group: Dom, Simon, Paddy and Yosh.

From the small jetty at Tingwall we caught the ferry to Rousay, a crossing notable only for the huge jelly fish in the sea and the greasy leather-jacketted lads (not us) returning from Kirkwall fair.

The tiny harbour on Rousay boasted a ten-yard square shop and P.O. - obviously the islands social centre for the natives. We camped at a farm about half a mile along THE road, and having set the tent up gave the nearby old cairns the once over. They were scattered all along the coast, all round barrows and well kept, but all fairly similar.

The next day we awoke to a baffling mystery - the front of the tent was soaked but everything else was bone dry. The evidence pointed to one conclusion, an evil old goat with a knowing look seemed to be the solution.

After breakfast we decided to have a look round the island and, after a failed attempt to hire bikes, we set off, pretending to be intrepid venture scouts, and we saw several more cairns before eating our lunch on a headland where we saw a herd(?) of about twenty seals fishing.

Following the usual meal of ryvita and jam we saw an excellently preserved broch, about the best we saw on the Orkneys. By the time we reached the tent again, we were staggering like cripples, and only had the strength to cook some dogfood for dinner and collapse into our bags asleep.

Our laziness reached unprecedented heights next morning when we had breakfast in bed but still managed to stumble back to the ferry to get us back to mainland, where we were eventually met by the Bedford.

Y.C.

Footnote... From "The Orcadian" (the local newspaper)
Thursday August 19th, 1982.

No application had been received for the job of gravedigger and undertaker on Rousay. It was decided to continue the advertisement until the next Community Council meeting with investigation by Mr C. Soames into the responsibility for the undertaking duties.

HOY

The sunshine and the lack of wind brought a welcome change on the morning of our departure from Mainland and in this sunshine stood Hoy, protruding above the surrounding islands. With the loss of Nick and Nige, the party now consisted of a magnificent seven members.

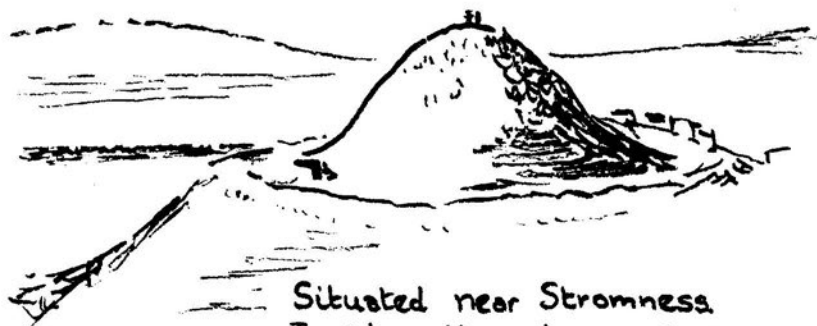
Once on Hoy, our task was to walk the width of the island, but this was preceded by a half hour ferry trip which enabled us to get close to a wreck smothered in sea birds, and see numerous seals on Graemsay.

On Hoy the glacial valleys and deposits provided us with some interesting scenery, and strewn with aircraft wreckage gave our walk an air of mystery. The five mile walk ended at the almost deserted village of Rackwick at which we consumed our lunch, and left our rucksacks.

The Old Man of Hoy. 450 ft high, the highest sea stack in Britain. Carved from the Old Red Sandstone. Reached by a walk over the cliffs from Rackwick.



Maeshowe. Chambered burial cairn 115 ft in diameter. Perhaps 4000 years old, a superb example of neolithic construction...



Situated near Stromness.
Inside, the stonework is remarkable, marked only by viking graffiti.



We left our kit at the outdoor centre and set off on a cliff walk to visit The Old Man of Hoy, a 450 foot sea stack which was standing erect and majestic in the sunshine. For those of us that lasted the walk the view proved really worthwhile.

On returning to Rackwick, we set up camp near the shore in a small and tranquil bay. Once camp had been established the thought of food quickly swept into our minds. This anticipation was somewhat ruined when it was discovered that only one gas cylinder had been packed. Thus the next half-an-hour was spent searching the beach for pieces of driftwood. Despite all this the evening proved very enjoyable as we sat around the fire and consumed our food and shared the tea bag.

After the meal various members tried their hands and feet at crossing the nearby deep river on a commando type bridge that someone had thoughtfully left behind. Don and Pad both safely completed the two way journey, but did not gain many points for style.

The following morning, we awoke to an invasion of midges - the only time they really bothered us during the whole expedition. This fact speeded our packing up before the brisk walk back across the island to board the ferry, pausing only whilst the V.S.L. disappeared to visit the "Dwarfies Stone" - another ancient monument.

S.H.

* * * * *

(Cont from page 4) As well as these outstanding features the sea has also excavated narrow steep sided inlets which can penetrate far inland, called "geos" and in one case at Deerness a remarkable feature which in effect is a long tunnel with part of the roof caved in called the "Gloop". A noticeboard nearby carries the warning that 'Persons visiting the Gloop are asked to note that they do so at their own risk. No dogs!' Well, the Gloop didn't claim any of us, but it did remind us of the power that the sea can turn on when it has a mind to!

F.H.

THE SOUTHERN ISLES

A chain of islands ending with South Ronaldsay is linked by the "Churchill Barriers". These were built in the 1940s by British civilians and Italian P.o.W.s from huge ten ton concrete blocks. These replaced the sunken blockships, which can still be seen, and were placed to prevent enemy submarines entering Scapa Flow. A road now runs over the barriers and allowed us to gain access to the southern isles.

THE ITALIAN CHAPEL

Near St. Mary's on the tiny island of Lamb Holm which is connected to Mainland by the first of the Churchill barriers is a unique memorial to Orkney's inhabitation by 550 Italian prisoners in the last war. The chapel is all that remains of 'Camp 60', where they were interned - a corrugated iron nissen hut that was internally transformed into a beautiful little catholic chapel. It is adorned with much free-hand painting and wrought iron work. A few years ago it was restored by the ex-prisoner who originally planned and executed most of the work, Sr Domenico Chiochetti.

In my opinion the Alterpiece - a representation of the Madonna and Child based on the famous Italian painting, 'Madonna of the Olives' by Niccolo Barbino - is far more beautiful than many an alterpiece adorning the great cathedrals of the world. Perhaps it achieves it's effect due to the lowliness of its surrounds and their humble origins, I cannot say for sure; yet illuminated by the sun's rays, it seems to glow with a brilliant radiance that draws one closer along the dark cavern like chapel to admire its simple beauty.

Phil B.

SCAPA FLOW

Scapa Flow is bounded by the south coast of Mainland to the north, by Hoy to the west, by the islands of Burray and South Ronaldsay to the east, and is open to the sea to the south. This area of roughly 80 square miles served as the principal anchorage for the Royal Navy in both world wars.

The name is derived from the Norse word "scalpaye" a term meaning 'something cleft in two' an apt description of this feature. It has been called the 'finest natural roadstead in Britain or Ireland except for Spithead' by the maritime surveyor Graeme Spence as far back as 1812.

For all its connections with the navy little remains to suggest such a past. Those that do remain include the rusting hulks of blockships sunk in the eastern channels and the remnants of the German High Seas Fleet which was scuttled here by its officers in 1919. Relics of this were seen in the museum at Stromness.

Perhaps the most poignant memories of its history are of those who died in and around the Flow, for although it offers safe anchorage, it is part of one of the most heavily populated maritime graveyards of all. One or two of the ships of the Armada were lost in the area and Lord Kitchener was drowned when H.M.S. Hampshire was struck by a mine when leaving the Flow in 1916. In 1917 the battleship H.M.S. Vanguard blew up with the loss of all but 3 of its crew of 700. In 1939, H.M.S. Royal Oak was sunk by a U boat killing 833 men. This action caused the construction of the Churchill Barriers. More recently the Longhope Lifeboat was lost with all hands on a mission from its station on the southern extremity of Hoy. The Flow does not see many warships now but it does see supertankers at the large oil terminal at Flotta.

Although the Flow looks beautiful on a sunny day, it takes on a menacing appearance when it is overcast and stormy bearing out its sinister reputation

Nick P

STROMNESS

We spent two nights at Stromness, the second town of Mainland, camping on a promontory beside the harbour with the hills of Hoy rising behind us.

The town is remarkable in that it consists largely of a single narrow flagstoned street which winds between old houses along the waterside. From the main street yet narrower alleys snake up the hill, one aptly named the Khyber Pass!

The town developed mainly during the 18th and 19th century as a final port of call for ships setting off to cross the Atlantic. We walked past Login's Well on our way into town, the main watering place visited by such famous mariners as Captain Cook, and the legendary old whaling captains who sailed to the Davis Straits.

We spent some time on the last day visiting the small museum which boasted a good collection of relics of the whaling and fishing days, and the wartime activity in Scapa Flow.

Whilst at Stromness we received a visit from the local Venture Scout, who told us about scouting in the islands - and a lot more as well!

On the final morning, whilst waiting for the St Ola to take us from Mainland to the mainland, some of the party climbed to the hill top behind the town, Brinkies Brae, to try to find some Uranium ore, but returned without visibly glowing. Then the van was loaded and those who had a penchant for bacon butties disappeared towards the cafeteria, and we said farewell to Stromness.

P.S.&F.H.

POSTSCRIPT

We are told that a good expedition depends on good planning. That may be so in some cases, but I hold that two more important requirements are a good party, and of course, an interesting and stimulating venue.

F.H.



