

ORKNEY

PLAN YOUR ESCAPE

WORLD HERITAGE ORKNEY

Welcome to one of the world's special places, the **Heart of Neolithic Orkney**, a group of Stone Age monuments forming a UNESCO World Heritage Site. UNESCO inscribed the Heart of Neolithic Orkney in 1999 for the *outstanding testimony the monuments bear to the cultural achievements of the Neolithic peoples of Northern Europe*.

This one-day touring itinerary, involving less than twenty miles of driving, will give you the opportunity to explore the Neolithic village of Skara Brae, the massive chambered cairn of Maeshowe and the twin stone circles of the Ring of Brodgar and the Standing Stones of Stenness. You'll also see other related Stone Age sites in this ancient landscape, part of a story stretching back five thousand years.

OUTLINE

- 1 STANDING STONES OF STENNESS
SMALLER COUSIN TO THE RING OF BRODGAR
- 2 BARNHOUSE NEOLITHIC SETTLEMENT
A LAKESIDE VILLAGE
- 3 NESS OF BRODGAR
WORLD-FAMOUS EXCAVATIONS OF A MONUMENTAL COMPLEX
- 4 RING OF BRODGAR
ONE OF THE MOST SPECTACULAR PREHISTORIC SITES IN BRITAIN
- 5 MAESHOWE CHAMBERED TOMB
NORTHERN EUROPE'S FINEST CHAMBERED TOMB
- 6 SKARA BRAE NEOLITHIC VILLAGE
SMALL HOUSES WITH HEARTHES, BOX-BEDS AND STONE DRESSERS
- 7 STROMNESS MUSEUM
SEE A SPECIAL WINTER EXHIBITION OF NESS OF BRODGAR ARTEFACTS



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Skara Brae



Maeshowe



Ring of Brodgar

SEE MORE ITINERARIES AND SPECIAL OFFERS AT [ORKNEY.COM/SPRING](https://orkney.com/spring)

YOUR ITINERARY

SPRING

TIME: 1 DAY'S TOURING
(OR SPLIT OVER 2 DAYS)

DISTANCE: 20 MILES

1 STANDING STONES OF STENNESS

Arriving at the 5000 year old **Standing Stones of Stenness** it is hard not to be awed by the size of the four standing stones, each about 5 metres tall, all that remain of the twelve original stones surrounded in prehistory by a bank and ditch. Our Neolithic ancestors quarried, transported and erected the stones without the aid of metal tools or machinery, in order to create an open-air ritual centre in the vast natural amphitheatre in the heart of Orkney's Mainland.

In common with the nearby **Ring of Brodgar**, the **Standing Stones of Stenness** monument is in the care of **Historic Environment Scotland** and there is no charge for access. World Heritage Rangers lead informative **walks at both sites** throughout the year.

2 BARNHOUSE NEOLITHIC VILLAGE

A short walk down a track from the Standing Stones of Stenness is the **Barnhouse** settlement, the Neolithic occupants of which must have been among the monument builders. Imagine living here near the freshwater loch of Harray as the stone ring takes shape nearby. The stonework you see now at Barnhouse is reconstructed, but follows the plan of the original prehistoric settlement.

There is a bird hide nearby, from which you can watch noisy flocks of over-wintering birds on the loch.

3 THE NESS OF BRODGAR

As you make the short journey towards the Ring of Brodgar, you will pass a tall standing stone by the roadside. Known as the **Watchstone**, this is one of several isolated standing stones which once stood between the lochs, probably part of an extensive ritual landscape.

Further along the road, its world-famous archaeology covered over during the autumn and winter months, lies the **Ness of Brodgar**. Excavation work began here in 2003, and has revealed a monumental complex of buildings surrounded by what has been nicknamed the **Great Wall of Brodgar**, more than 100 metres long and 6 metres wide. Was this perhaps the home of priests of the Neolithic religion?

Each summer's excavations have revealed unexpected and exciting finds, and the Ness has featured extensively on television and in print. If you want to see the archaeologists at work, please return in July or August when **daily guided tours** are available.

4 THE RING OF BRODGAR

Originally consisting of 60 standing stones (36 of which survive today) and surrounded by a deep rock-cut ditch, the **Ring of Brodgar** has been described as one of the most spectacular prehistoric sites in Britain, rivalling Avebury and Stonehenge.

As you walk round the ring, just think about the scale of the effort required to create it and the strength of belief that motivated the builders. Orkney's Stone Age farming communities were organised and industrious enough to undertake massive construction efforts, perhaps involving people from far and wide in communal projects.



Standing Stones of Stenness



The Ness of Brodgar



The Ring of Brodgar

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5 MAESHOWE

Standing just a mile away from the **Ring of Brodgar** is **Maeshowe**, one of Europe's finest chambered tombs and a triumph of Neolithic construction ability. The low entrance passage leading to the burial chamber within, is aligned so that the midwinter sunset illuminates the interior. Perhaps Maeshowe and the other monuments in the Heart of Neolithic Orkney had astronomical purposes, helping these early farmers mark the changing seasons on which their lives depended.

Maeshowe is in the care of **Historic Environment Scotland**, which provides access to the atmospheric interior of the tomb on a daily basis, by paid guided tour only. Tours, which must be **booked** well in advance, start from the **Maeshowe visitor centre** in nearby **Stenness Village**.

6 SKARA BRAE

The fourth location comprising the Heart of Neolithic Orkney is **Skara Brae** in the scenic **Bay of Skaill**. Here a Neolithic village was abandoned five millennia ago when it was overwhelmed by a sandstorm. The small houses preserved beneath the sand were exposed by a storm in the 19th century and the village, now in the care of **Historic Environment Scotland**, has been described as the best-preserved Neolithic settlement in Western Europe.

It is open daily for an entry fee, and has a small visitor centre telling the story of Orkney's Stone Age prehistory alongside a replica house which you can walk inside in order to see how our ancestors lived.

7 STROMNESS MUSEUM

In Stromness, the **Stromness Museum's** permanent collection includes fascinating artefacts found at Skara Brae. The museum's opening hours are restricted from Monday to Saturday in the winter months so you should **check before visiting**, and there is an entry fee.

OTHER PLACES TO VISIT IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME

The **Orkney Museum** in Kirkwall is open Monday to Friday all year round and tells the story of Orkney from the earliest times to the present day.

You'll find Neolithic sites throughout Orkney on the Mainland and the isles. Local guide books will help you make choices about which to visit depending on the time you have available.

The **Tomb of the Eagles**, a famous Neolithic tomb on South Ronaldsay, provides a unique hands-on experience. Note, however, that it is closed from November to February so please **check** regarding opening times.



Maeshowe



Skara Brae



Artefacts discovered at the Ness of Brodgar

© Antonia Thomas



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FINDING OUT MORE

Local bookshops have an excellent selection of books about Orkney's rich prehistory and our World Heritage sites.

Our one-day itineraries are designed to give you a taste of what Orkney has to offer. With so much to see and do we hope you are inspired to spend more time exploring Orkney

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