

# Trail 3: Hamar: “Scotland’s best preserved Viking longhouse”

Before excavation Hamar was described as “Scotland’s best preserved Viking longhouse.” The name, Hamar is Old Norse for “rocky outcrop on the the hillside”. In Viking times there was good crop growing land below the outcrop.

**1 Hamar Longhouse** - Excavation revealed two earlier buildings under the well-preserved building which you can see today. The first building was a “pithouse”, (laid out in red gravel), it was probably early Viking, and lies under the later cross wall. The middle phase was a longhouse with a hearth in the lower end. This turned into a gully - probably due to constant cleaning. The gully runs under the walls which belong to the house which survives today. The Hamar longhouse forms the basis of the reconstruction at Brookpoint.

Hamar longhouse



This impressive longhouse with massive stonewall footings was divided into two. The lower end was probably used as a byre at this time. The hillslope would help with drainage. The Vikings cleverly kept their house dry with a ditch around the top end.

**2** Head down to the shoreline to find foundations of the **Herring Stations**- Once both sides of this tranquil harbour were a hive of bustling activity. Baltasound was one of Europe’s biggest herring fishing stations between 1901 - 1906.

Excavating Hamar Longhouse



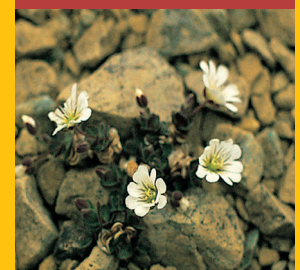
Baltasound Herring Station

In 1901, 569 boats landed herring here and the population of the island rose to 10,800 with the fishermen and gutting girls. Remains of the herring stations survive at the coast below the longhouse and elsewhere around the bay.

**3 Hamar 2** - Above the fenced longhouse, to the northwest, are more building remains. There were probably two buildings here, one downhill and one along the slope, on top of one another. These may have replaced the earlier longhouse. This area supported an exceptionally good crop of grain, but in the 17th century, the turf was stripped, changing the area forever.

Head up the hill and across the stile into the **4 Keen of Hamar** nature reserve. The serpentine rock here was formed deep under the ocean. It weathers to form a rubble rather than soil. The longhouses are on better soil because sandy material was deposited there during the Ice Age. The reserve is the only home of ‘Edmonston’s chickweed’, and the RAF, housed at Saxa Vord, have left their mark amongst the stones.

Edmonston’s Chickweed





## Getting there

By road: from Belmont ferry, follow signs to Baltasound and Haroldswick. After Baltasound turn right at "Bobby's Bus Shelter". Park at end of the road. Go through the gate and continue across the slope and over the stone dyke. Hamar is situated on the seaward-facing slope. The main longhouse Hamar1, is located in the fenced area where there is an interpretive panel. Duration: 90 minutes.

## Interpretation

- Panel at Hamar

## Access

- Parking
- Hillside walk. Moderate ground, but muddy in places with a rumbled down dyke to cross between road and longhouse. Stiles and gate.

## Facilities

Toilets and food/drink available at "The Final Checkout" just north of the turning at Baltasound Bus Stop.

## While in the area

- Hagdale (chromate) horse mill
- Follow the road along the north coast at Baltasound to see the memorial to the Norwegian Kirk and further herring stations remains.



Excavating at Hamar Longhouse, which had good views of Balta (the isle protecting the mouth of Baltasound).