

# Trail 1: Haroldswick: The Heart of Viking Unst

Haroldswick means Harold's bay, named after Harald Fairhair who reputedly landed in this beautiful inlet. Today it is the ideal starting point for visitors curious about Viking Unst.

## 1 The Skidbladner

Skidbladner is a full scale replica of the 9th century Gokstad ship found under a mound in Sandefjord, Norway. She is one of the largest replica Viking longships ever built. Like all Viking ships she is clinker-built, i.e. made of long, overlapping planks which made longships fast and flexible, able to slip into rivers and voes, taking the Pictish residents by surprise.

The Vikings invented the keel, the rudder and the suncompass. Their longships were a technological miracle, enabling the Vikings to conquer the seaways of the North Atlantic. The Gokstad ship seated 32 oarsmen and carried up to 70 men. As they rowed, the oarsmen sat on chests which contained their possessions. Skidbladner is named after a magic ship belonging to the god Freyr of Norse mythology. Experience the magic of standing at her prow.

The Skidbladner has been lovingly restored with the help of the men of Unst. Go aboard and imagine what it was like to be a Viking at sea.



Skidbladner

## 2 Longhouse replica

The replica longhouse is based on the floorplan of one of the best preserved and excavated longhouse sites at Hamar.

Local craftsmen have had to rediscover Viking skills including cutting wooden joints. The stone and turf are Unst materials, the wood which was imported from Scotland and the birchbark which "waterproofs" the roof came from Norway.



Longhouse reconstruction

Stand a moment with your back to the replicas. The boggy, rocky land in front of you was once fertile and supported several unexcavated Viking farms. Peat and turf have since been stripped; to be used for roofing, building, soil improvement and fuel.



Unst Boat Haven

## 3 Unst Boat Haven

The Boat Haven contains more information about the Skidbladner and here you can also see how the Viking clinker boat tradition has persisted in Shetland through to the present day.

## 4 Unst Heritage Centre

The centre includes exhibitions about past and recent Unst life, including information about the Vikings and various excavations in Unst.

## 5 Harald's Grave

A cairn in the hill is known locally as "Harold's Grave". Antiquarians found "bronze ornaments" in it. The easiest access is via a track south of the Chromate Quarry. The Neolithic Muckle Heog cairn is on the highest point to the north of the track and Harald's Grave lies a little north of this. Who was buried here is a mystery. Certainly not Harald Fairhair who is buried under a mound at Hauger in Norway.



## Getting there

By Car/Bike: From the Belmont ferry follow signs for Haroldswick. As you come down the hill into Haroldswick you will see the longhouse and Skidbladner on a point, beside the coast (on your right). This is where your trail starts.

## Interpretation

At the Heritage Centre, the Boat Haven and at Brookpoint

## Glossary

Clinker built - built of overlapping planks, making the boat light and flexible.

## Access

- Parking
- Wheelchair Access to longhouse
- Wooden ramp and steps into ship

## Facilities

- Toilets at both the Boat Haven and Heritage Centre
- Hot drinks at Boat Haven
- Food and shop at "The Final Checkout"
- Cafe adjacent to Boat Haven (when open)

