

Trail 2: Viking Belmont: A thriving hill farm

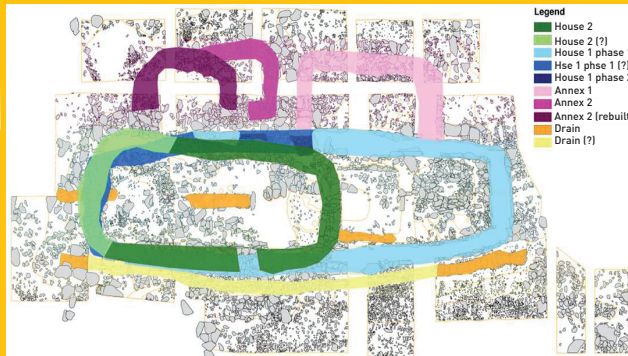
The unpromising hillside above Belmont was once a thriving Viking farm. Excavation here helped archaeologists understand the sophisticated economy of Viking Unst.

Leaving the road, head uphill towards the hut with an orange roof. Belmont longhouse is in the fenced area to the right. As you approach it, cross the substantial remains of the **1 infield boundary dyke**, on a rock outcrop immediately above it there is an outcrop which contains **1 cupmarks**, examples of Bronze Age rock-art.

Belmont longhouse



There is a good view from the **2 Belmont Longhouse**. The flatter, lower land would have been better for farming. Presumably it was already in use. In spite of the unpromising location, Belmont thrived, perhaps for centuries, and the building was altered many times. The last building wasn't even very long! The yards and fields around the house were used as haymeadows and grazing, but importantly Belmont is the only place archaeologists have found where soapstone objects were finished on a grand scale. Finds included a lamp which had broken in the final stages of manufacture and was discarded, unused, in a posthole. Beyond the modern wall above the house there are outcrops of soapstone (*kleber*). The farm also had a small-scale smithy, perhaps making tools for stoneworking.



Belmont Longhouse - Building Phases

3 Infield Dyke - Heading south, down the hill to meet the track, cross another dyke, the boundary of the Viking infield. Before you reach the track you will pass a **4 small ruined crofthouse and kaleyard**. Follow the track to a weather barometer, turn down hill towards the unroofed **5 Mula crofthouse** - the quarry holes in the kaleyard may have been created to build the dyke but may include 'tattie hols'.

Infield Dyke



6 Mula Longhouse - follow the stone rows (ridges between worked strips of croft land) and turn right following foundations of a dyke, parallel with the coast. There is an unexcavated grass-covered longhouse below the dyke. (Picture overleaf).

7 Burnt Mound or Chambered Cairn? - Just above the longhouse, beside the wall, is a crescent shaped mound with a stone lined box inside. If it is a burial cairn it is about 5000 years old. If a Burnt Mound it is Bronze Age, c3000 years old. The stone box could either be a Bronze Age water tank or a Neolithic burial chamber. A mystery to be solved.

Burnt Mound or Chambered Cairn?



Coastal Walk - From here you can see the islands of Yell and Fetlar. There is a salmon farm close to the shore. Follow the coast north: the eagle-eyed might spot the foundations of a **8 possible longhouse**. There is a **9 plantiecrub** (enclosure for growing young kale plants from seed) over one end and more building foundations beside a burn, before you drop down to the road, beyond the ferry terminal.



Getting there

Park either at the ferry terminal or c100 metres north at “Unst Welcome” sign. After another 100 metres cross road and head into hill. The walk includes rough and boggy terrain and a constructed track. Duration: 75 mins. (Or walk to longhouse and back in 20mins)

Interpretation

Information panel at Belmont longhouse

Facilities

Toilets available at the Belmont ferry terminal

Glossary

Dyke = wall (usually drystone)

Kaleyard = yard around house which served several purposes, including growing kale (a hardy type of cabbage).

Tattie hol = a pit for storing potatoes in over the winter.

Burnt Mound = Bronze Age - stones would be heated in a fire and may have been put into water to boil it - or possibly water may have been poured over hot stones to create steam.

Infield = the area of cultivated meadow closest to the longhouse.

Cupmarks = scoops cut into the rock.



Cupmarks