

RISING TIDES Orkney's contribution to NORCE

The islands of Orkney have always had international connections via the sea. From western connections with Ireland in the Neolithic, some 6000 years ago, to our place in the Scandinavian kingdoms of the Viking period, the sea has provided connections rather than barriers. Attempts at understanding this must, until the most recent of times, rely on archaeology alone.



Archaeology is not only important for understanding our roots and our relationships, but also lies at the heart of our tourist industry. Tourism now is worth a third of Orkney's economy, and in independent surveys archaeology is the most common reason given for visiting.

Sea levels in Orkney have been rising since the last Ice Age, when compared to the land. This means continuous loss of land and therefore archaeological sites, to the sea. The precise sea-level changes are not yet clearly mapped, but this is an observable process, which may be speeding up. Many of Orkney's archaeological sites are located on the coastal fringes of the islands because people have been reliant on both sea and land since they first came here some 6,000 years ago. Very few of these sites are excavated or explained to visitors.

The types of site being gradually taken away by the sea range from funereal (chambered cairns and burial cists, cemeteries) to domestic and agricultural e.g. 6,000 year old farm settlements, with their buried soils and visible plough marks. Other examples include monks' hermitages on cliff stacks; Viking farms; Iron Age tower houses called brochs; cemeteries from the later Iron Age and so on.

This project is to enable some of the unsustainable (loss of information and sites) to be transformed and sustained through *understanding, involvement* and *enjoyment* by both local and visitor.



"Julie Gibson at Iron Age funerary site under excavation in Westray"

This will take place through a variety of means:

1. A superbly illustrated guide book in which sites accessible from beach walks will be interpreted and the reader empowered to observe changes and report back to the museum etc.
2. A two centre scientific seminar on Rising Tides – Sea level changes past and future.
3. A programme of guided walks and site visits.
4. Partnership meeting attendance and contributions to work already underway, to ensure international cohesion of all the parts of the projects.

Orkney College <http://www.orkney.uhi.ac.uk> is a partner in the University of the Highlands and Islands Millennium Institute. We have a particular research interest and expertise in archaeology and heritage.

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"Bronze Age cooking or sauna site exposed by storms"

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