



Dunbeath Strath

North Highlands and Orkney Islands literary hiking adventure

inspired by the *Orkneyinga Saga* and the works of Neil Gunn, Iain Crichton Smith, George Mackay Brown and other writers

A literary hiking adventure through spectacular scenery, accompanied by writers from the 13th century to the present day who illuminate for us the Viking history of the islands and the Clearances of Sutherland and Caithness, not incidentally revealing what it means to grow up and live in the North of Scotland and the Orkneys..The landscapes - and weather -

Highlights

- Dunbeath Strath where Neil Gunn grew up
- Grey cairns of Camster, Caithness
- Knockan Crag explaining the geology of the North-west Highlands UNESCO Global Geopark
- The Scenery of the North-west Highlands
- Handa island with its bird colonies, including puffins
- Heart of Neolithic Orkney UNESCO World Heritage Sites on Orkney
- Hike from Rackwick to the Old Man of Hoy sea stack



of the north of Scotland, are integral to the sagas, poems and novels of its writers, and arguably also to the very character of the people who live there. If the landscape makes these the writers, the writers give it life in return.

Caithness and Sutherland

The north Highlands are sparsely populated, with most people living along the coast. This is the result of the Highland Clearances in the 18th and 19th centuries when people were forced from the interior lands to make way for sheep farming. The most notorious and ruthless Highland Clearances took place in the north of Scotland on the estates of the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland. These Clearances are a central theme of those writers that accompany us during the mainland part of our adventure across what is one of the most beautiful parts of the Highlands. From the wide open spaces and big skies of Caithness to the hauntingly beautiful west coast with its strange isolated mountains. These peaks are

1. Inverness - Brora
2. Dunbeath
3. Historical sites in the north-east
4. Brora - Lochinver
5. Handa Island and Little Assynt
6. Lochinver - Isle of Orkney
7. Skara Brae, Yesnaby and Stromness
8. Isle of Hoy
9. Heart of Neolithic Orkney
10. Kirkwall and journey back to Inverness



Letters Lodge South, Strathlachlan, Argyll
PA27 8BZ, Scotland (UK)
Tel. +44 (0)1369 860272
info@aboutargyll.uk
<https://aboutargyll.uk>



Skara Brae, Orkney

steep and completely isolated one from one another. According to Norse legend, this was where the gods practised mountain building. They certainly did it on a grand scale.

Our literary guides

- **Neil M Gunn** (1891-1973) was born on the east coast of Caithness, in the fishing village of Dunbeath. The son of a crofter-fisherman, Gunn's writing captures the essence of Highland life.
- **Iain Crichton Smith** (1928-1998). His novel, *Consider the Lilies*, is set in the time of the Highland Clearances yet the author did not consider it a historical novel as such.
- **Norman MacCaig** (1910-1996), whose Assynt poetry pays homage to the scenery, people and wildlife of Sutherland.

Orkney Islands

Orkney is a place of big open skies, rounded hills, beautiful beaches and well-kept farms. Only on Hoy does the landscape take on a wilder feel, with rolling hills and towering cliffs.

Orkney is also famously rich in archaeological remains. It is said that if you scratch the soil it bleeds archaeology. Above all, in visiting Orkney you get a feeling of continuity, the sense that for thousands of years people have worked the land and left their mark.

The Orkney Islands were under Norwegian rule from 9th century

Viking times until 1472. Evidence of the Viking presence is widespread and is an important theme of the writers that accompany us during the Orkney Islands part of the adventure. The very names of people and places here are Norse in origin, and as such are very different from the Gaelic Highlands further south.

Our literary guides

- **Orkneyinga saga** (10th-12th centuries). Not a writer, but a book written in the early thirteenth century by an unknown Icelandic author. Also called the 'History of the Earls of Orkney' and 'Jarls' Saga', it is a narrative of the history of the Orkney and Shetland islands from the foundation myth of Norway itself to Earl Harald Maddadarson, who died in 1206.
- **George Mackay Brown** (1921-1996), who spent his life living in and documenting the Orkney Isles. Born in Stromness ('Hamnavoe' in his poems and novels), he lived there for most of his life. Many of his works are concerned with protecting Orkney's cultural heritage.
- **Edwin Muir** (1887 – 1959) Born in Deerness, east of Kirkwall on Mainland, Orkney, Muir left the islands at 14, but remained strongly influenced by his youth there for the rest of his life. Time and timelessness is a major theme of his poetry, in which he also compared the idyll of Orkney with the misery of city life.



View from Knockan Crag, north-west Highlands



North coast from Ceannabeinne



Old Man of Hoy, Orkney Islands



Letters Lodge South, Strathlachlan, Argyll
 PA27 8BZ, Scotland (UK)
 Tel. +44 (0)1369 860272
info@aboutargyll.uk
<https://aboutargyll.uk>