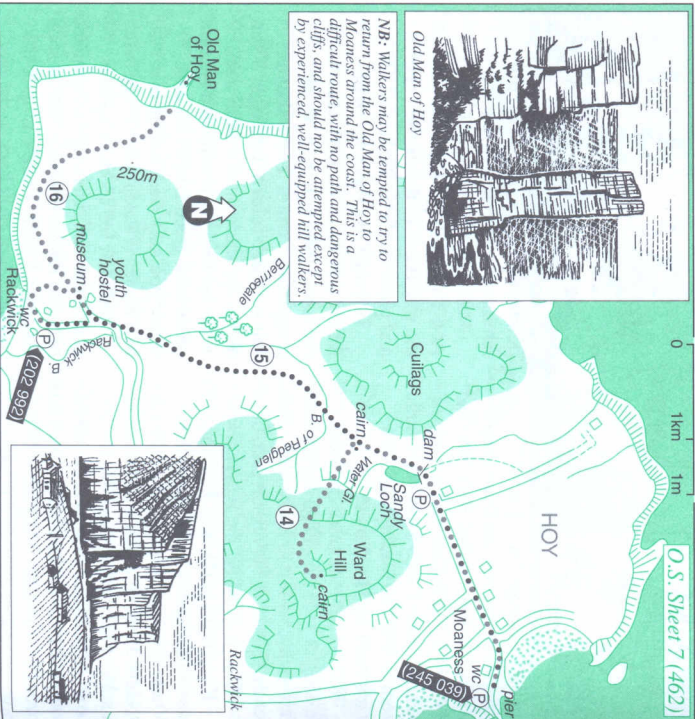


14/15/16 Hoy: Ward Hill / Rackwick Glen / The Old Man of Hoy A+/A/A

Three strenuous walks in the north of Hoy. 14) A steep climb to the highest point in Orkney. The view is superb but the weather can change rapidly and there are crags to the north and east, so pick a clear, settled day and take appropriate equipment. Length: 6 1/2 miles/10.5km (there and back); Height Climbed: 1550ft/470m. 15) A rough path through the hills to Rackwick. Length: 8 3/4 miles/14km (there and back); Height Climbed: 800ft/240m. 16) A coastal walk leading to a spectacular sea stack. Length: 6 miles/9.6km. Height Climbed: 550ft/165m. Walks 15 and 16 combined. Length: 14 3/4 miles/23.6km (there and back).



The passenger ferry from Stromness lands at Moaness pier. (NB: Mini-buses and taxis are available to take you to/from Rackwick for walks 15 and 16. Details available from Stromness TIC).

Walks 14 & 15 Follow the road from Moaness pier uphill, ignoring all side turnings, until the road bends right below steep-faced Ward Hill and Cullags. There is some parking here, at the start of RSPB's North Hoy Nature Reserve. (NB: If you have driven this far, subtract 2 1/4 miles/4.4km from the walk lengths).

Keep straight ahead on a hard track with a footpath sign for Rackwick. Cross the burn draining Sandy Loch by stepping across stone gabions downstream of the dam. Continue along the sunken, sandy path beside the loch, where great skuas come to bathe their plumage in freshwater.

A small cairn is soon reached, marking a shallow col.

Walk 14 At the cairn, turn left off the path and walk across rough moorland. As the slope steepens, walk directly uphill between Water Glen and the Burn of Redglen. When the gradient flattens, walk about 300m to the left to reach the trig point and large summit cairn. Enjoy the breathtaking view then return by the same route.

Walk 15 Beyond the cairn the rough path runs downhill, mainly on one side or the other of the indented old track. Berriedale is the deeply-incised stream valley across the glen.

Its lower stretches contain a remnant of the native scrub woodland that once covered much of Orkney.

Beyond a bridge over Rackwick Burn, join a tarmac road and turn right for Rackwick, an old crofting settlement on a dramatically beautiful bay. At a fork, branch left for the car park behind the beach or right for the Youth Hostel and Old Man of Hoy path (see below).

Walk 16 If on foot, walk past the Youth Hostel and follow a path signposted for the Old Man of Hoy. The first building on the left contains a folk history display. The path then weaves uphill between croft houses and forks right below a turf-roofed building – the Crow's Nest Museum.

If arriving by car, start from the car park near the beach and follow the hard track that is a continuation of the road then bend right up a green lane to meet the Old Man of Hoy path just below the Crow's Nest Museum.

The path passes a final cottage then goes through a kissing gate on to the open heather-covered hillside. It steadily climbs above the cliffs on the west side of Rackwick Bay. At the crest there is suddenly a view to the Old Man of Hoy. The path crosses stony ground, keeping its height above the lower ground to the left, then veers towards the sea stack.

Take great care by the cliffs, especially on the natural promontory that juts out towards the Old Man – a great place for photographs if you have a head for heights.

Return by the same route.