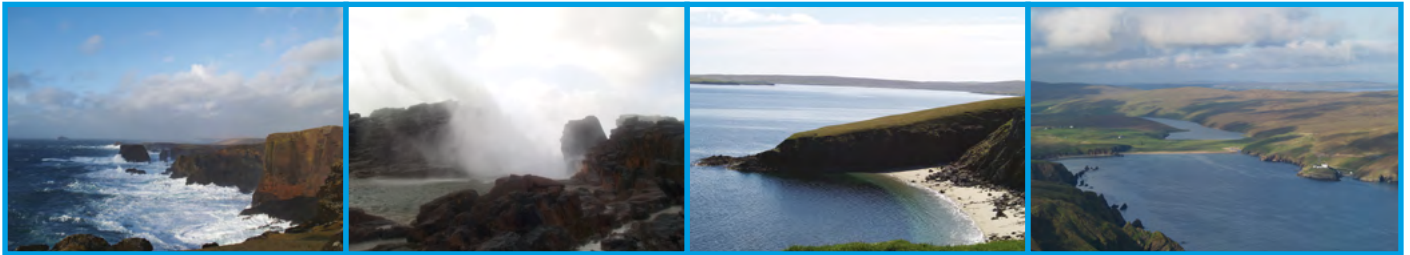


## GEPARK TOURISM TOOLKIT FOR TOURISM OPERATORS



## What is a Geopark?

Geology underpins our history, our economy and our culture. Ultimately who we are and what we are is built on the geology of the land upon which we live and the story of our geology is the story of how our homes and peoples came to be.

Geoparks are geographical areas which include sites and landscapes of international geological significance. [Geopark Shetland](#) uses its geological heritage, in connection with all other aspects of the area's natural and cultural heritage, to enhance awareness of the importance of our geology and its place in our history.

By raising awareness of the importance of an area's geological heritage, in both its history and its current society, Geoparks give local people a sense of pride in their region and strengthen their identification with the area. The creation of innovative local enterprises, new jobs and high quality training courses is stimulated as new sources of revenue are generated through ecotourism, while the geological resources of the area are protected.

The Global Geoparks Network (GGN), of which membership is obligatory for UNESCO Global Geoparks, is a dynamic network where members are committed to work together, exchange ideas of best practise, and join in common projects to raise the quality standards of all products and practises of a UNESCO Global Geopark. It functions through the operation of regional networks, such as the European Geoparks Network, that meet twice a year to develop and promote joint activities.

[Shetland was admitted to the European Geoparks Network in 2009 in recognition of its internationally important and diverse geology.](#)

## Key features and sites of Geopark Shetland

The following represent some of the key geological sites in Shetland and give a flavour of what Geopark Shetland is all about. This pack contains more detailed information about the Geopark and its place in the Drifting Apart story. The following is a list of some of Shetland's important geological sites. The descriptions are necessarily brief and further information is available in the leaflets that accompany this pack. Geopark Shetland is managed by Shetland Amenity Trust and Trust staff will be happy to discuss any aspects the geopark with you.

### The Shetland Ophiolite

In the north isles of Unst and Fetlar you can see the Shetland Ophiolite, a section of ocean floor that was forced to the surface when two tectonic plates collided. Because it was tilted on its side you can literally walk from the bottom to the top of a section of ancient earth's crust that was once beneath the sea.

### Northmavine Igneous Complex

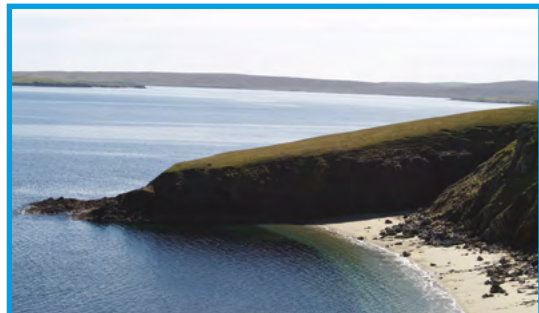
The Eshaness peninsula is a section through an extinct volcano. Today the remains of this volcano forms one of the highest energy coastlines in the world, being subject to the full force of the Atlantic Ocean, which has carved out a stunning array of stacks, geos and blowholes. The cliff top storm deposits, especially those at the Grind o da Navir can be matched at only a handful of sites elsewhere around the coasts of Western Europe.





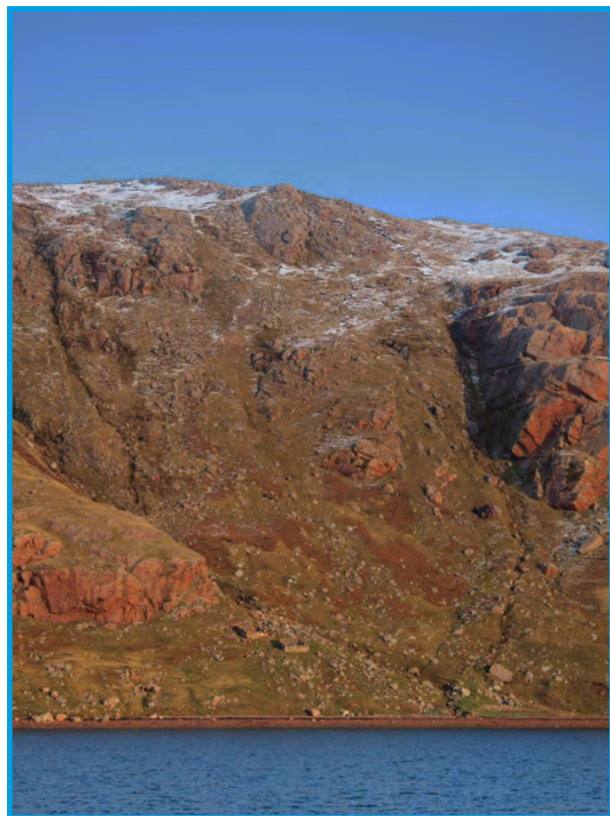
## Walls Boundary Fault

The Walls Boundary Fault has a long and complex history and is likely to have been linked to the Great Glen Fault, the major fault that cuts through mainland Scotland along the line from Fort William to Inverness. A trip to the Back Sands at Ollaberry will allow you to see and touch the surface of the actual fault line.



## St Ninian's Isle

The beautiful sand tombolo (known locally as an ayre) at St Ninian's Isle is the largest active sand tombolo in the UK, and one of the finest in Europe. St Ninian's Isle became famous when a schoolboy helping at an archaeological dig on the island's tiny Celtic chapel discovered a hoard of silver bowls and ornaments believed to date from around 800AD.



## Ronas Hill

The highest point in Shetland, at only 450 meters, the climate is officially designated as sub Arctic by the Scout Association and a full suite of peri-glacial features can be found, some of which are not found anywhere else outside the Arctic Circle.





## Keen of Hamar National Nature Reserve

The barren serpentine slopes of the Keen have changed little since the last glaciation. The skeletal soil has remained almost bare for the past 10,000 years and provides a refuge for arctic alpine plants left behind as the ice cap retreated. One such plant - Edmondston's chickweed - grows nowhere else in the world.



## Hagdale Chromite mine

The Hagdale chromite mine was the largest in Britain. Here you can see the last surviving horse powered chromite crushing circle of its kind in the UK.

Additional information enclosed with this pack will give you a much more detailed view of how geology has shaped the landscape and culture of the islands.



## The Drifting Apart Project

The Drifting Apart project aims to unearth and strengthen our understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the fascinating and interconnected geological heritage of the Northern Periphery and Arctic region, and its many links to natural, built and cultural heritage. The project will support the development of new and aspiring Global Geoparks, the promotion of innovative products and services for social and economic prosperity and to continue to build a strong network of geological heritage destinations in the Northern Periphery and Arctic Region.

The project brings together a series of partners from Northern Ireland, Ireland, Scotland, Norway, Iceland, Canada and Russia. The total value of the project is €1.6 million with €1.03 million provided through the Northern Peripheries and Arctic Area Programme under the European Regional Development Fund. It is the programme's vision to help generate vibrant, competitive and sustainable communities, by harnessing innovation, expanding capacity for entrepreneurship and seizing the unique growth initiatives and opportunities of Northern and Arctic regions in a resource efficient way.





## Why should I work with a Geopark?

As a tourism provider the first question you will be asking yourself is how your company is going to benefit from a relationship with [Geopark Shetland](#) and the UNESCO Global Geopark network as a whole. It's a good question and one which you should answer to your satisfaction before you take the plunge into the geological world.

You will have received this pack because you have been identified as a potential partner in increasing the tourism footfall at [Geopark Shetland](#). In order for this to work any relationship needs to be mutually beneficial and this document should take you through a process of identifying where the benefits to you will lie.

There is no single approach to the marketing of geological sites for tourism purposes that can be identified as the 'best way to do it'. Current experience of GeoSite marketing ranges from small single sites close to major cities to Geoparks covering the whole of relatively remote island groups. What suits one location may be totally inappropriate elsewhere.

[In the case of Geopark Shetland the whole of Shetland is designated as a Geopark and there is therefore a mixture of "honeypot" and niche sites which will appeal to different market segments.](#)

In addition to individual site marketing the Geopark network can also be marketed as a brand. The UNESCO Global Geopark network represents 35 countries, some containing many more than one Geopark. Within this overarching network there is capacity for building regional marketing such as that proposed by the Drifting Apart project which can build on joint branding and a shared geological inheritance within a defined area.



## GEOLOGY AS PART OF THE PACKAGE

Geology is currently, for the most part, a relatively niche market and may struggle to create a mass market appeal if it is not combined with other attractions to create a “critical mass” sufficient to attract the visitor. In order for this “critical mass” principle to work it will be necessary for all the parties involved in tourism for a particular area, including local tourism providers and the wider community, to work together. Such co-operation matches in with the holistic approach advocated in the official definition of a Geopark and the Geopark needs to play its part.

In the past, destinations relied on airlines, ferry companies, tour operators and travel agents to achieve sales. These companies were backed by national, regional and sometimes local tourism organisations which carried out destination marketing aimed at creating an image or brand.

This traditional model has broken down to a major extent with the dramatic growth of online booking. This has led to much more independent travel and the rise of segmented and niche marketing. An individual can now put together their whole trip on the internet, booking flights or ferries, car hire, accommodation, tour guides and even restaurants on their own initiative.

A characteristic of this new freedom to shop around is the use of the internet for research in advance of travel – with arguably those places with excellent on line information receiving most chance of a visit. The growth in new technologies, particularly smart phones and tablets, means that the younger generation (and in some cases the not so young) access information in ways which would have been impossible even a few years ago.

Google searches, social media, blogs etc. form an everyday part of life and are the way many individuals both get and pass on information. The use of interactive elements in websites and apps has led to a massive increase in consumer based review sites and a consequent need for visitor attractions to be constantly vigilant regarding quality control. [The UNESCO designation scores highly with the independent traveller ensuring that sites are of recognised international significance and providing a quality standard.](#)

[In the case of Geopark Shetland, because of our relatively remote location and the relatively high cost of transport, the number of niche tourists willing to travel to the islands purely for their geology is limited and therefore it is particularly important that Geopark Shetland is seen as offering added value to a more comprehensive high quality tourist package covering different aspects of the islands natural and cultural heritage. The ability of the geological story to integrate into almost all elements of the islands’ heritage makes it a valuable tool in the hands of innovative tour operators and craft producers and consequently retailers and accommodation providers.](#)





## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

All tourism providers should consider the following questions:

- Will some of my customers be interested in what Shetland's geology has to offer?
- What aspect of Shetland's geology would be most relevant to my business?
- Can I make use of Geopark Shetland sites as part of an itinerary for my customers?
- Could Shetland's geology and Geopark Shetland provide the basis for a new product for my company or enhance an existing product I already offer?
- Can Geopark Shetland provide knowledge and training that would enhance my business.
- What is the cost/benefit balance of an involvement with Geoparks?

If these questions lead you to believe that you could use Geopark Shetland, the Global Geoparks Network as a valuable resource in the marketing of your particular aspect of Shetland's tourism then please get in touch. We are able to offer introductions to our sites, additional information on specific areas and training for your staff and would be happy to meet and discuss how we can help you develop your business by adding Geopark Shetland to your recipe for success.

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