



DUNNET HEAD EDUCATIONAL TRUST

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AN EXTRACT FROM “A MOST NORTHERLY WAR” by Tina Irving – first published by Scottish Provincial Press in “Caithness Capture the Moment” 2007.

Far in the north of Scotland is Dunnet Head, the most northerly point of the UK mainland. At 58° 40' 21" N latitude and 3° 22' 31" W longitude it is further north than Moscow and parts of Alaska, and 1° latitude further north than the most northerly point of the Danish mainland, Skagen. Ordnance Survey Land Ranger map LR12 OS Grid Ref: ND204766. Located at the western end of the tempestuous Pentland Firth, overlooking the Orkney Islands, with a watching brief over the entrance to the natural anchorage of Scapa Flow, scene of the scuttling of the four battleships and four light cruisers of the German fleet in WWI, the bases at Dunnet Head and Burifa Hill played an important part in coastal defences during WWII.

Burifa Hill is a mile south west of Dunnet Head with magnificent views over Dunnet Bay to Thurso. There are remains of the installation, as mentioned below, but than Dunnet Head due to its relative That is to say, the vehicular access is by

The Dunnet and Castletown areas for thousands of servicemen and women The “Gee” station at Burifa Hill and the Dunnet Head played important roles in coastal defences, and at Castletown, one airfields in Caithness (the others being Skitten and Wick) the extensive site changes to the area. For the servicemen one cannot imagine arriving in this after travelling long hours from southern England. The wild scenery, spaces, the small settlements – all been a surprise to the troops – as they newcomer to the area.

The operations centres at Dunnet Head were originally constructed and commissioned by the Royal Navy. In 1939 a scheme was devised by Vice-Admiral Sir James Somerville, Director of Anti-Submarine Weapons and Devices, to set up radar stations to cover the Fair Isle Channel against U-boats passing through the channel to or from the Atlantic. In the spring of 1940 this scheme was extended to the north of Shetland and to the Pentland Firth. The six stations, known as Admiralty Experimental Stations, in this scheme were located at Sumburgh, Fair Isle (two stations), Saxavord, South Ronaldsay and Dunnet Head and were operated by the Royal Navy.

During its operational lifetime, Dunnet Head plotted a number of enemy aircraft in the Orkney area as well as those over South Shetland and the Fair Isle passage, the latter generally meteorological reconnaissance aircraft flying out into the North Atlantic. In addition, tracks of some 35,000 friendly aircraft were plotted by the station during the three years it was operated by the Royal Navy.

In the early years of WWII, Canadians overseas served in RAF squadrons and were catered for by British cooks. Number 6 RCAF Group, commonly known as the Canadian Bomber Command, was formed in England in December 1942. The catering function was performed by an RAF Catering Officer and this caused problems for the largely Canadian personnel. Traditionally the British had four meals a day, namely breakfast, dinner, tea and supper. Tea was in fact a meal served about 1700 and supper was more like a snack served around 2000. The Canadians were not in favour of this system and,



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furthermore, preferred different foodstuffs than those favoured by the British. A study was undertaken by the Canadian Catering Officer with a view to setting up a Canadian catering system for the Canadian personnel. In 1944, 12 female Catering Officers were sent to England to manage the four main bases and 12 smaller stations of 6 RCAF Bomber Group and to provide menus more in line with the Canadian palate. Given severe problems with ration availability including coffee and fresh milk, they accomplished all and more than would have been expected. After WWII, in Jan, 1949, the ration scale was revised to allow greater flexibility in menu planning. At RAF Castletown, Dunnet Head and Burifa Hill, as undoubtedly in other areas, service rations were supplemented by local fresh produce, and a barter system with the local farmers was prevalent in the area. RAF Castletown even had its own station "garden" which boasted 800 lettuces, and some 6000 onions and leeks. The Officers' Mess also kept lobster pots in the bay. Source: <http://www.forces.gc.ca>

On "liberty weekends" the troops were taken into Thurso where they dined at the Royal Hotel, and the officers billeted at the Dunnet Hotel seemed to dine well, especially at Xmas when it was reported that at RAF Burifa Hill, the Xmas menu of 1944 boasted "Roast turkey á la Poulter, stuffing au Royal Hotel, Peat Bog pork, peas, sprouts, pickles, spuds, Xmas pud, mince pies and coffee Table decorations by Trees Ltd. , branches everywhere except Caithness."

The social life improved as the War progressed – there were cinemas at the base of Burifa Hill and at RAF Castletown, each station had its own concert party and put on productions, and there were sports days and outings to keep up morale.

The bases were decommissioned immediately after the War with local firms being involved in dismantling some of the buildings. The most prominent one which remains is the operations block on Dunnet Head itself – poised on the extreme summit of the Head, it is a point of interest of visitors who, according to a recent survey carried out by the Dunnet Head Educational Trust, would like to see interpretation of the site, and information about the history of the installation.

Sources:

Ian Brown, Historical Radar Archive

Letters from a number of service personnel who served at Dunnet Head and Burifa Hill during WWII

Emails received from the descendants of service personnel who had been based at the two sites.

The Royal Canadian Air Force Web site: <http://www.forces.gc.ca>

PROJECTS FOR 2010

We are currently working on our project list for 2010 which will be available on our new web site at <http://www.dunnethead.co.uk> shortly. We would like to thank those who have sponsored the various Trust projects during 2009, and for the many kind donations received. All profits are re-invested in local projects in Caithness and north Sutherland.

CAITHNESS & SUTHERLAND WALKING FESTIVAL 1-8 MAY 2010

The main activity at present is the organization and coordination of the walking festival, now in its seventh year. The event has already been promoted in Scotland's Rural Network, in newsletters distributed by Walking World and Walk Highlands, on www.wherewecanwego.com and caithness.org. The festival even has its own Facebook page, and maps on Google maps and Google Earth. Eastern Airways have promised a mention in their new inflight magazine, and we will continue with this work and hope to attract visitors to the area, and hope of course that local people will join in the fun as well. We are delighted to have attracted sponsorship from almost 50 organisations, both public and private, including the Castle of Mey, North Highlands Tourism and Edinburgh Woollen Mills. We have also received an award from the Dounreay Communities Fund.

Walks can be booked on line at www.walkcaithness.com where you can see the exciting programme of walks, including a walk and wildlife cruise at John o Groats, a natural history walk with a local photographer, and a coastal walk from Dunnet Head to the Castle of Mey, which includes a visit to the Castle. Book early to avoid disappointment. An accompanying booklet will be freely available from mid February on request and downloadable from the web site. You can also join our new on line walking group - just email us your details and you will receive the quarterly supplement of this newsletter.

GOOGLE EARTH

We are continuing our work with South Bank University, London, on developing information which is made available on Google Earth. The first of these is the "Where are the walks" mapping for the walking festival. The University is also helping to develop databases to contain details of our walks and contacts who are interested in walking in the north.

Registered office: Windhaven, Brough, Thurso, Caithness, KW14 8YE

<http://www.dunnethead.co.uk>

Email: info@dunnethead.com

Registered charity: SC 035021

INFORMATION SHELTER

The ongoing work with the information shelter consisting of a poster cabinet under a weather canopy the enables visitors to access information about Dunnet Head. It also serves as a community notice board and community and voluntary groups are welcome to put their posters – please take care not to cover the existing posters. Commercial organizations are requested to give a donation to the Trust. There is a large scale map in the information shelter, which shows the extent of the SSSI and a few points of interest with photos.

PHOTOGRAPHIC and SOUND ARCHIVE

As part of the Local History Project a library of digitised images and recordings has been created. Access to the centre will be available three days per week from the beginning of May. Visits will be bookable via our web site, by email or by writing to us at Windhaven, Brough, Thurso, Caithness, KW14 8YE. Cost will be £5 for a tour, including a refreshment. The display includes the plans of the WWII installations on Burifa Hill and Dunnet Head, and a catalogue of information about its usage.

SEAL WATCHING VIEWPOINT

As part of ongoing maintenance, the footpath to the seal viewing platform is cleared regularly in the summer months.

CONSULTATIONS

The Trustees submitted comments to the following consultations in November and December 2009.

Coastal Strategy Plan – more in the next newsletter.

Local Development Plan

“The consultation on the Highland wide Local Development Plan – Main Issues Report closed in November and we would like to thank everyone for their fantastic responses. Over the course of the consultation the development plans team attended over 50 events and helped to raise the profile of planning for the future across the Highlands.

We held a number of events in Caithness and North Sutherland and at these we had additional information available on what we could do to help the regeneration of Caithness and North Sutherland. From responses in the area we recognise that some of the key issues for the area are renewable energy, both the promotion of the use but also the protection of the landscape, and another key issue has been transport.

Over the next few weeks and months we will be looking very closely at everyone’s response and picking out what are the key issues and this will help us to produce our Proposed Plan which is the next stage in the plan making process. We hope to have this ready by late spring and then there will be another chance to have your say. In the mean time for updates on our work progress please keep an eye on our blog at <http://hwldp.blogspot.com>. “ Source: Highland Council

Active Travel

The Scottish Parliament's Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee held an inquiry into walking and cycling in Scotland. The main point put forward was that there should be more promotion of walking and cycling, and joined up thinking between tourism / health / infrastructure providers.

QUOTATIONS FROM OUR SUPPORTERS

From the politicians:

The Trust was given monies from the SNP discretionary fund in 2008 and quoted as saying that “*the Trust does excellent work and is worthy of our support.*”

Another politician said in 2007 that “*The walking festival is a great example of projects of economic benefit to the north*” and congratulated on our success in drawing together the public and private sectors into the project.

A well known lecturer and researcher in ICIT, Orkney, said of our exhibitions on Orkney in 2009 that “*this (sic) is a great example of social and historical links between Caithness & Orkney for economic benefit*”

A recent purchaser of our booklet “Corners of Caithness – Dunnet” was delighted with his purchase and said that “*This is such a nice publication. I see you were quite instrumental yourself in creating it, so congratulations for that. I bought this because I had been visiting with my grandmother over the holidays and she gave me some specifics on her wartime service*

in Britain. When I got back to my computer, I found your site and publications and I thought it would be a nice thing to have in the family.

Much to my surprise, when I got to page 18 regarding the women at Burifa Hill, I find my very own grandmother, Ivy Read, pictured! She'll be very excited. I know she is in touch with others in her unit as well. She was stationed there part of 1942, all of 1943, and part of 1944. " Visitors to the centre at Dunnet Head (currently closed) have also commented favourably on the level of information available from the Trust. This type of information will be available in the historical archive.

We are ever grateful for donations and support from the local people around Dunnet and further afield which helps support our work.

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF BIODIVERSITY 2010

The Trust has become part of the UK partnership supporting the International Year of Biodiversity 2010 and submitted the Walking Festival to the green tourism and sustainable tourism element of the programme. In Brough village at the base of Dunnet Head there are many Highland cows which contribute to biodiversity as "Their heavy trampling of the ground can be a useful tool in stimulating seedling regeneration, and at higher grazing densities, the cattle will maintain open space in the woodland. This is good for biodiversity and will also help us to retain the stunning loch and mountain views" – see more at

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/newsrele.nsf/AllByUNID/EE48B5EB64100B6E802575AE004CDAF3>.

See more about the Biodiversity year at <http://www.morayfirth-partnership.org/499.html>.

ASPECTS OF DUNNET HEAD on <http://dunnethead.blogspot.com/>

- [Accommodation](#)
- [Archaeology - Canmore database](#)
- [Birdwatching](#)
- [Brough Castle](#)
- [Brough Bay](#)
- [Camping](#)
- [Coastal Defences](#)
- [Geography](#)
- [Lighthouse](#)
- [Royal Observer Corps bunker](#)
- [RSPB at Dunnet Head](#)
- [SSSI](#)
- [Weather](#)

If you would like to support the Trust in its work, please send a donation made payable to Dunnet Head Educational Trust to Monlettie Croft, Street of Monteach, Methlick, Aberdeenshire, AB41 7JS. You will receive a copy of the quarterly newsletter of activities. We may have specific projects you may be interested in supporting.

Name:
Address:
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Email address: