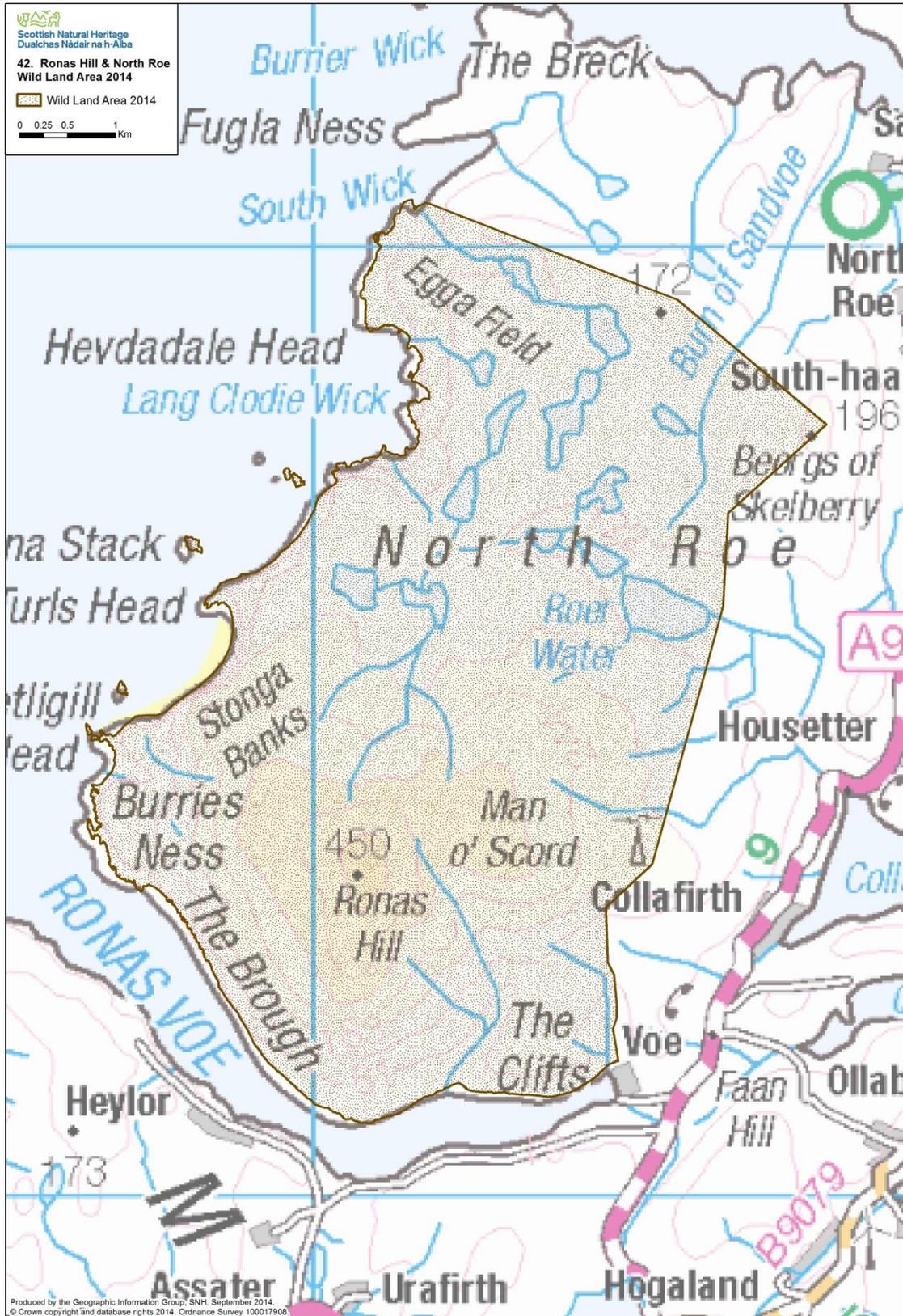


Ronas Hill and North Roe Wild Land Area



Context

One of 11 island Wild Land Areas (WLA) and covering the north western part of Northmavine in Shetland, this is the smallest (41 km²) and most northerly of all the WLAs. It extends from the sea loch of Ronas Voe in the south past Hevdadale Head in the north. One of 12 WLAs defined in part by the coast, access from the road is largely restricted to the east.

The WLA forms one part of a wider composition of peninsulas, bays, islands and sea, delineated by the coast. The whole area is very open and exposed and influenced strongly by the sea, being open to the Atlantic on the west and bordered by the long narrow inlet of Ronas Voe to the south. The remaining area of North Roe as far as the coast in the north is separated from the WLA only by a track that extends as far as the croft at Uyea. To the east, the WLA gradually merges into an area of dispersed settlement, crofting and infrastructure, in addition to prominent masts upon Collafirth Hill. Distant views also include Europe's largest oil terminal at Sullom Voe.

The WLA comprises two main parts that are all bound by a dramatic west coast: the massive granite slopes of Ronas Hill in the south; and a low-lying rocky moorland and undulating peatland with lochs within the central interior.

The WLA is influenced strongly by its geology, with prominent exposure of very hard igneous and metamorphic rocks. These were shaped by glaciation and continue to undergo freeze-thaw weathering. Soils overlaying these rocks tend to be shallow, acidic and thinly vegetated.

A large number of historic features are found on Shetland – many of which reflect the focus of past activity on the sea and farming around the coast. There is a prominent burial cairn upon the top of Ronas Hill. Land within the WLA is currently used mainly for sheep grazing.

The Ronas and Collafirth Hills form a backdrop to many views from outside the WLA, including from the settled communities and roads along the east side of Northmavine and to the south of Ronas Voe, as well as from the surrounding sea. Within the WLA, the main focus for hillwalkers is the top of Ronas Hill (the highest point on Shetland at 450m AOD), although Ketligill Head and Lang Ayre also attract some hillwalkers. All access within the WLA is off-path.

North Roe is one of the seven separate parts of the Shetland National Scenic Area. The descriptionⁱ for this area describes special qualities that include *'the stunning variety of the extensive coastline'*, *'the hidden coasts'* and *'a sense of remoteness, solitude and tranquillity'*.

Key attributes and qualities of the wild land area

- **A relatively small area of wild land that sits within an exposed wider composition of islands, sea, voes, bays and sounds**

Shetland comprises a complex land and seascape of islands, sea, voes and narrows, and this WLA follows this composition at a more local scale. On account of its small size, the experience of its wild land qualities are strongly influenced by the surrounding area - the sea never being far away, but also a changing island backdrop whilst moving through the WLA.



Within an open land and seascape that contains little shelter, this WLA is very exposed to high winds that strongly influence natural processes such as the wind pruning of vegetation and rock weathering, as well as being illustrated by the nature of waves. This all contributes to a strong *sense of naturalness*, whilst expansive views under 'wide skies' appear *awe-inspiring* in their horizontal extent and revelation of changing weather.

- **A dramatic coastline with cliffs, islands, stacks, geos and beaches that convey a strong sense of naturalness**

Dramatic cliffs occur along the coast, although these are not always easy to see from inland and tend to be revealed most clearly when looking from the sea or across bays or voes. The coastal edge illustrates very clearly a range of dynamic geomorphological processes, with exposed rock cliffs, stacks, geos and beaches, as well as waterfalls, rock falls and scree that all amplify the *sense of naturalness*. The cliffs appear *arresting*, towering up above the sea - their vertical dimension emphasised by strong contrast with the horizontal waters. On account of their precipitous height and steepness, access to the shore is usually difficult and of *high risk*; but, where possible, these attributes also mean there is a strong sense of seclusion and *sanctuary* along the sea edge.



Within the south of the area, there are views to *human artefacts and contemporary land uses* outside the WLA that influence the *perceived remoteness, naturalness* and *sanctuary*. This includes aquaculture developments in Ronas Voe which have cumulative effects.

- **An open coast to the west where the sea contributes strongly to the wild land qualities, in contrast to a more complex land and seascape viewed in other directions**

The western side of the WLA adjoins the open sea, and this contributes to its wild land qualities - not only by making the area seem more *extensive*, but by also contributing to the *sense of awe* and *naturalness*.



Although not so open, views from the WLA to the peninsula of The Faither and the mouth of Ronas Voe also contribute to the wild land qualities, particularly due to the very *rugged* coastline of these with high cliffs, arches, stacks and skerries.

In contrast, to the north, east and south, open and distant views reveal an arc of *human artefacts* and *evidence of contemporary land use* located outside the WLA that influence its perceived *extent* as well as the *sense of remoteness and sanctuary*. Close by, these include the Collafirth masts and aquaculture elements whilst, further away, there are also houses, roads, agricultural fields and the oil terminal at Sullom Voe.



- **Rounded hills that are rugged and rock strewn at a local level, and highlight the natural processes of erosion and weathering**

Ronas Hill is the main hill within the area, comprising a massive rounded landform that is fairly simple at a broad scale, but *rugged* and strewn with granite rocks at a local level and thus *physically challenging* to cross. The landform slopes contain shallow lochs and pools which, in combination with the exposed rocks, contribute to a strong *sense of naturalness*. This is emphasised further by evidence of dynamic natural processes such as fellfield (areas of sparsely vegetated rock fragments) and sliding terraces, where repeated freeze-thaw causes patches of earth to creep slowly downhill.



At the broad level, the elevated hill ground offers wide views over the surrounding land and seascape. However, at a local level, the convexity of slopes may limit visibility. This can result in views being directed beyond the foreground horizon directly towards distant foci which, in turn, can result in the amplified prominence of human elements in the distance.



The openness of the landscape means that paths have not tended to form over time upon the hills. In combination with little land cover differentiation, this results in a difficulty to perceive distance and scale in the landscape and a heightened *sense of risk* when walking over the area.

- **A remote interior of undulating moorland, peatland and lochs**

Within the interior is an area of open, *rugged* and rocky moorland and peatland with numerous waterbodies. The seemingly random pattern of water, rock and knolls within this area results in a strong *sense of naturalness*, whilst the irregularity of the ground cover means movement tends to be indirect, *physically challenging* and time-consuming. This all amplifies the *sense of remoteness and sanctuary* within the area, which is also reinforced by a prevailing absence of paths (just one from North Collafirth and one from North Roe) and few visitors. Within this interior, there are few *human artefacts* and little *evidence of contemporary land use*, apart from where this is seen upon elevated ground in the distance, such as the Collafirth Hill masts.



- **Some key attractions for walkers, but few people within the remainder of the area and a strong sense of solitude**

The main focus within this WLA is Ronas Hill, as described above, which is visited by a relatively high number of people due to its status as being the highest point in Shetland and offering panoramic views over the surrounding land and seascape. Walkers are also attracted to the cliffs north of Ronas Hill along to Lang Clodie Wick and, in fewer numbers, to Ketligill Head, over the top of The Brough (via Abram's Ward). The large remainder of the area, however, tends to be visited infrequently, with a resulting strong *sense of solitude* - especially the interior moorland and lochs.



Endnotes and select references

ⁱ SNH (2010) *The special qualities of the National Scenic Areas*. SNH Commissioned Report No 374.
Shetland Amenity Trust (undated). *Northmavine – The wilds of the North*. Shetland Amenity Trust.

Site assessment carried out August 2014