

The Brora Village Trail

Slighe Baile Bhrùra



Uncover Brora's secret heritage
Lorg dualchas dìomhair Bhrùra

Spy Brora's secrets

Buildings on the trail can reveal secrets about Brora's past. Some have clues as to how old they are or who built them. One shows the home of a creature who lived round here millions of years ago.

Look at the pictures below. Can you find the six buildings on which these clues appear?

Tick off the clues as you find them on the trail. Look carefully: they are not always easy to find. Turn to the back cover to check how well you have done.



Welcome to the Brora Village Trail

This gentle stroll takes you to historic buildings, beaches, the banks of the River Brora and the harbour. Look out for the seven information boards at viewpoints which tell you more about what there is to see.

The full walk takes around an hour and is under two miles long. There are alternative routes to bypass steps and slopes. You can join the trail at any point. Please see the trail map on the centre page of this booklet.



Look for the Brora
Village Trail Symbol

Start at the information board at the car park entrance.
Turn left along Gower Street towards the A9.

- 1 Walk along the timeline of Brora's industrial history from mining to electricity.
- 2 You are now standing in Fountain Square. The drinking fountain in the centre celebrates Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee of 1897. It was cast in Walter MacFarlane's famous Saracen Works in Glasgow which exported decorative iron work like this worldwide. The Sutherland Inn has served travellers with stronger brews since 1818.

Follow the route left along Rosslyn Street (A9) to the car park on the right of the bakers.

- 3 Brora's bee boles used to buzz in the wall behind the car park. Before modern beehives people kept bees in woven, straw baskets called skeps. The boles or alcoves sheltered the skeps from wind and rain. Watch the evening flypast of rooks as they head for their nests in the trees.

- 4 Children from Brora Primary School painted the banner in the car park as a summer project. They chose characters from the village's past to celebrate the Millennium.
- 5 Bernardo Capaldi opened his famous ice cream parlour in Brora in 1929.

Retrace your steps along Gower Street to the far end of the car park.

- 6 The memorial stone on your right is to Jackie MacLennan, who was Scotland's longest serving registrar of births, marriages and deaths.
- 7 In summer the library hosts local heritage exhibitions. Over the years this building has been used as a training base for the Territorial Army, a dance hall and a cinema.
- 8 Across Gower Street is the former Temperance Hall of 1893. Meetings started with the hymn 'Yield not to temptation', followed by songs, music, prayers and encouragement to persuade others to 'sign the pledge against the demon drink'. Today the hall is used for community activities.

- 9 After you cross the railway the first house on your left is one of many in the village built of Brora brick. The house's occupant was given free accommodation in return for opening and shutting the railway crossing gates.



Level crossing, 1951

- 10 In 1849 the austere-looking Free Church building, on your left, replaced a temporary wooden building where over a thousand people worshipped.



- 11 The slope at the end of Gower Street is called 'The Caa', Gaelic for Brae. You are entering Lower Brora where fishermen spoke Gaelic as their first language.
- 12 The painted brick Fisherman's Hall on your right was built in 1892. Many fishing families were very religious, praying for the crews safe return before the boats went out.
- 13 The path beside the Fisherman's Hall leads to grazing land. It was once a golf course, which the locals nicknamed Gleneagles. Fishermen and tradesmen created the original, free, five-hole golf course here as only the gentry, holidaymakers and professional classes were welcome on the exclusive Brora golf course on the other side of the river.

Turn right down Market Street.

- 14 The gardens on your right were once Brora's cattle market. In 1601 James VI granted the village the right to hold four fairs a year. Opposite are typical, mid to late 19th century fishermen's cottages.

At the end of Market Street, go up the steps and along the path to the Back Shore car park. To avoid the steps turn left into Salt Street and at the end take the signposted tarmac track.

15 Salt Street follows the route of a horse-drawn, wooden railway which carried salt from the pans on the links to the harbour.

16 Inland on the horizon, the 1st Duke of Sutherland surveys his domain from Ben Bhraggie. This giant statue (30 metres/100 ft tall) was erected in 1837. The story goes that the statue of the Duke was placed to look out to sea rather than over the land from which he had driven his tenants.



17 On a clear day you can see across the Dornoch Firth to the Tarbat peninsula and the Moray coastline beyond. Look to the north to see the sheer cliffs of the Ord of Caithness jutting out into the Moray Firth.

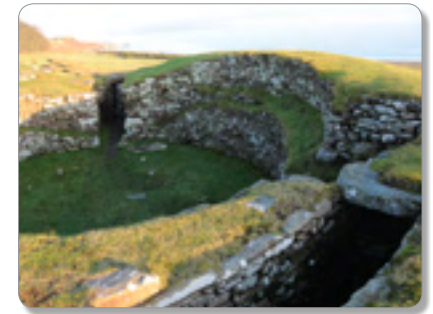
18 Take a deep breath. Can you smell coal? You are close to the site of the original coal mines and salt pans.



Excavations of the salt pans in 2008

19 The concrete building by the shore was built as a secret Government listening post during the Second World War. The station continued to operate throughout the Cold War when around forty people were posted here from all over Britain. The station closed in 1986.

20 Although not part of this walk, the coastal path (11km/6.75 miles) to Golspie starts from here. It passes Carn Liath broch and Dunrobin Castle, seat of the Sutherland family. Grey seals can often be seen basking on the rocks along the shoreline.



Carn Liath






Walk along the grass behind the beach to the mouth of the river.

21 Fishermen used to store their nets in the wooden sheds and bothies. The small brick building on the left is Brora's last remaining fish smokehouse. In 1850 the village had three herring curing stations. Lower Brora has many traditional 19th century fishermen's cottages like those in Red Row at the north end of Salt Street.

Beyond the smokehouse, continue towards the north end of Salt Street and turn right along Harbour Road.

22 The former harbour master's house, beyond the 'Cathie' boat, is the oldest building in the village dating back to 1775. The harbour master used to check his personal shipping forecast with the barometer that can still be seen beside the front door of the middle house.



- 1** Locations in booklet
-  Viewpoint
-  Trail route (some areas off the main path include inclines and steps)
- Panel Locations**
-  Welcome to Brora; A village of two halves
-  Black and white makes gold; Secret of the shoreline
-  Coal, bricks and salmon
-  Brora crossing the Brora
-  Dukes and Hunters
-  Wish you were here

23 The house on the left, Ardassie, was built around 1825 by the Sutherland Estates possibly to house the drill instructor. He trained local men as volunteers in the equivalent of today's Territorial Army. In 1907 fisherman Adam Dempster bought Ardassie which has remained in the same family for over a century.

Turn down the track on the right hand side of Harbour Road and walk to the head of the harbour.

24 Fifty men and boys worked in the Brora fishing fleet in 1850. The village did not benefit significantly from the east coast herring boom as its harbour entrance was dangerous and silted up easily. Today lobster is the main catch. This area used to be a hive of industry with a lemonade factory, a boat builder's slipway and a fish curing yard.



Walk along the riverside path to the ice house.

25 From 1820-1939 the ice house kept salmon cool in summer. In winter, blocks of ice were cut from Loch Brora and dropped down a stone chute into the vault.

Continue along the track to join Harbour Road. Turn right across the old bridge.

26 Four miles upstream from here is the tranquil Loch Brora - a popular spot for salmon fishing.



Continue along Victoria Road and take the second turning to the right into Station Square.

27 Victoria Road used to be known as Pig Street because people kept pigs in their back gardens.

28 The white building on your right as you enter Station Square was London House, the department store where, for nearly a century, Brora ladies bought the latest fashions.



29 On your left the former Sunnyside Boarding House was handy for holidaymakers arriving by train. They stayed on the upper floors above the local butcher and chemist. The building later housed the Hunters of Brora woollen mill shop.



Turn left past the station and then left again back into Victoria Road.

30 Although the railway arrived in Brora in 1871, the present station and footbridge opened in 1895. The Highland Railway's wooden shed was used to store goods. Freight trains called at Brora until 1984.



31 The number of churches in Brora reflects the different faiths of locals and incomers. On your right is the red-roofed 'tin tabernacle' of the Scottish Episcopal Church, erected in 1909. Services were held in these 'flat pack' wood and corrugated iron buildings until the congregation could raise money for a more permanent church.

Turn left along Victoria Road.

32 Horse-drawn wagons used to hold up traffic here as they crossed the main road on their way from the mine and brickworks to the station.



33 A branch of the Aberdeen Town and County Bank opened in Bank House, on your left, in 1907. The bank manager and his family lived 'above the shop'. The elegant villas around here reflect Brora's prosperity in the Edwardian era.

34 Opposite is a unique terrace of ten Brora brick houses built by the 3rd Duke of Sutherland for his workers. Railway terrace is a legacy of Brora's own industrial revolution and seems out of place among the traditional Clynelish sandstone buildings.

Turn left into Golf Road.

35 Villas like Bayview House were built at the beginning of the 20th century as holiday homes or guest houses. According to a 1902 guidebook: 'Many natives, possessed of that kindness and courtesy natural to Highlanders, own garden-surrounded, well-built houses where the visitor can be accommodated.'

36 Famous Arts and Crafts architect Robert Lorimer designed The Royal Marine Hotel as a private house. Its elegant interiors include fittings from Aultnagar Lodge, the holiday retreat of millionaire philanthropist Andrew Carnegie.

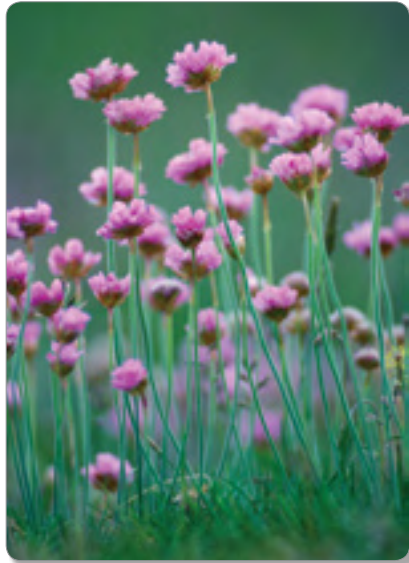


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Go straight ahead into the golf course car park.

37 On the mound on your right the direction indicator gives the distances from Brora to various geographical points. A craftsman with a sense of humour, who worked on the indicator, added Tigh Osda Arnagh – 300 yards. This translates as 'Annie's Bar' in Gaelic and refers to the distance to a bar in the Sutherland Inn.

38 If you have time to spare, take a stroll on the beach. Go through the wooden gate to the right of the club house and take the path over the links. Wildflowers like sea pinks and bird's foot trefoil thrive on its shell sand which also provides a perfect surface for golf. Watch for waders picking through the seaweed and the Arctic terns wheeling overhead. Look out for signs that you may have shared the beach with an otter or seal.



Sea pinks

© Laurie Campbell

39 Visit the wooded river bank along the Silver Jubilee Walk. Go through the gate at the riverside end of the car park. The footpath follows the river bank and rejoins Golf Road. To avoid steps return along Golf Road.

Turn left over the bridge towards South Brae (A9).

40 Look for the ammonite fossil, like a giant snail, on the base of the war memorial clock tower, built of local Clynelish sandstone.

Continue up South Brae to revisit Fountain Square where the images and poetry inscribed on the flagstones depict Brora's unique cultural past – a fitting conclusion to the village trail.

You can discover more about the village's fascinating past at the Brora Heritage Centre, Coal Pit Road, Brora, Sutherland KW9 6LE. Tel: 01408 622024. Seasonal opening.

The Brora Trail has been developed in partnership between Clyne Heritage Society, Brora Community Council and Highland Council.

The Scottish Access Code

Please remember Know the Code before you go. 'Enjoy, Respect and Protect'.
www.outdooraccess-scotland.com

All photographs supplied by Clyne Heritage Society and Highland Council unless individually credited.

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**Spotted all six clues?
You are a true Brora spy.**

*(Temperance Hall, Fisherman's Hall, Old bridge, Sunnyside,
Railway Terrace on Victoria Road, War Memorial)*