

# LearnWise: Newspaper Articles

## SHETLAND ISLANDS

The Shetland Islands are steeped in 5,000 years of history, says William Gray in Wanderlust magazine. This remote archipelago, straddled halfway between Scotland and Norway, was used as a stopping-off point for Viking raids on Britain. Before that, the islands were home to settlers from the Pictish era, the Iron Age and the late Bronze Age. "Everywhere you look there are clues to the past": neolithic burial chambers, Iron Age brochs and Viking longhouses litter the islands.

These days, the Shetlands' most hardy and populous residents are the birds. Puffins outnumber humans ten to one. For a "real pummelling of the senses" few experiences can beat a trip to one of the "seabird cities". The most spectacular is on the island of Noss, a short ferry ride from the capital, Lerwick. Visitors are given hooded oilskin coats to protect them from the "guano shampoo": as soon as you round the southernmost headland, "the cliffs turn white and a steady drizzle of bird excrement falls on your head". The noise is deafening. On the 150ft cliffs, every ledge is covered in squabbling gannets, guillemots and shags. Birds circle the skies above, like "ash spiralling from a bonfire".

The island of Unst is also well worth a visit. The scenery is "quintessential Shetland", with blanket bogs, kelp-wrapped bays, and white-washed croft-houses that "stud the peat moors like chips of quartz". There are quirky signs of remote island life, including a bus stop equipped with houseplants, armchairs and a television. The outer edge of the island is Britain's most northerly point. These gale-gnawed cliffs, white with puffins and gannets, are a fitting celebration for Britain's end.

## A PREHISTORIC MILLENIUM DOME

Archaeologists in North Yorkshire have discovered one of the largest prehistoric hill forts ever found, says The Independent. The Iron Age fortress was uncovered during survey work of Sutton Park, a 700 ft hill at Roulston Scar on the edge of the North York Moors National Park, a site already well known for its spectacular views. The fortress, which dates from 400 BC, consists of a 1.3-mile circuit of limestone ramparts spread over 40 acres, more than double the size of most other prehistoric strongholds.

Archaeologists have suspected the existence of a prehistoric fort in the area since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when a number of Iron Age earthworks were discovered here. But the new survey has revealed an array of ditches, humps and banks which is far more extensive than anyone had previously imagined. Experts are still puzzled, however, as to why the fort was built in the first place. Its dramatic location, overlooking the Vale of Mowbray, suggests that it could have been built for military reasons during a period of strong inter-tribal rivalry. Other archaeologists believe it was built purely as a symbolic gesture — a Millennium Dome of its day — to enhance the status of ancient tribal chiefs. "It's possible the fort was constructed by the Brigantes or Parisi tribes perhaps more as a statement of power than a defensive bastion," said field investigator Alastair Oswald.

## DOGS LAUGH WHEN THEY PLAY

Dog-lovers have long suspected it, and now it's official: man's best friend can laugh. A psychologist in the US has discovered that dogs produce a range of guffaws, chuckles and titters, most of which are outside the range of the human ear. Patricia Simonet took a powerful microphone to the park and taped the various noises dogs make when they interact. She recorded four sounds: barking, growling, whining — and laughter. The laughter, she says, is a "huhh, huhh" pant whose variations are too high-pitched for humans to hear. Dogs use all four noises in the course of the day, but only produce the panting laugh when they are playing. When Simonet played the dog sounds to 15 puppies, they reacted to the laughter tones by picking up a toy, or approaching another dog. Growls, by contrast, provoked no reaction.

## STIMULATING GORILLAS

Two ageing gorillas have been given their own vegetable patch to stop them becoming bored. Sambo and Nico, both 40, have lived on an island in the middle of a lake at Longleat Safari Park in Wiltshire since being bought from a Swiss circus 15 years ago. Up until now, keepers have tried to keep West African gorillas occupied by hiding their food around the island. Now, they are going a step further, by planting vegetables such as carrots and maize for the creatures to find and dig up, just as they would do in the wild.

## MOUNT ETNA, SICILY

Volcano threatens village: As the flow of lava from Mount Etna crept to within two and half miles of the village of Nicolosi this week, residents organised a religious procession to ask God to save their homes. Security forces built mud barricades to divert the lava, and were ready to evacuate Nicolosi's 5,000-strong population if necessary. The bubbling lava flow, which was travelling at a rate of two metres per minute, destroyed several lifts on the volcano's slopes, and thick layers of ash forced the closure of the airport at Catania.

