

Westray to Kirkwall

We hope you find these notes helpful and of interest to you while planning your sailing trip to Orkney. Please note they are not intended to be used for navigation

The quickest journey is to leave Westray so that the last of the flood takes you into Kirkwall Bay. If the weather is okay and you do not go too early the tide should be going west through Weatherness and Fersness. Unless the wind is strong there should be no problem crossing the Westray Firth on the flood. There can be a bit of a roost during strong SE wind and flood tide running SE from Kili Holm. If the weather is suitable and you go west of Rusk Holm give Rusk Holm a good berth and let the flood help you down the middle towards the Galt Buoy. Do not go too near the Egilsay shore as there will be a strong eddy running north (very handy if you are going out against the flood). If you come down the west side of Pharay or out through Fersness hold up for the SW corner of Rusk Holm before standing out across the firth.

When going from Westray to Kirkwall during ebbing water after passing through either Weatherness or Fersness keep down along the west side of Eday to Seal Skerry here you will meet a strong ebb tide. If you can crab across to the Muckle Green Holm you will get some benefit from an eddy until you again come into a strong tide at the SW corner of the little Green Holm this one will help a bit as you hold up toward the Galt buoy. If the tide carries you west to between the Green Holms and Egilsay you will have a strong tide against you for much longer than if you use the eddy close to the Green Holms. When proceeding towards Kirkwall along the west side of Shapinsay it is advantageous to keep well inshore in the bays where you will find small eddies and only meeting the full strength of the tides against you on the corners of Saltness, Vasa and Stromberry. If you can get your times right of course you can depart to cross the Westray Firth near slack water which would possibly be best of all. The tides turn very prompt at streams but at neaps can drag on for maybe 45 mins longer. Also if the tides are making and bad weather is imminent the flood can come in a bit early.

A passage can also be made though the sounds of either side of the holm of Scockness, between Rousay and Egilsay but the tides are strong here and local knowledge should be sought.

Journey time at 8 knots between Pierowall and Kirkwall is about 3 hours.