

Hannigarth Visitor Information – July 2020

The general idea of this document is to produce a concise guide to Hannigarth so that your stay runs as smoothly as possible. No longer would I get emails saying things such as “Hey, you didn’t tell me that I would have to bring my own toothbrush!” Well, as you will read, the information starts off well; nicely organised under headings based on things that we needed to know when we first came to the house. However, you will then see that it becomes progressively more disorganised as we have added things. Strictly speaking, this should not affect your stay, you may just decide to ignore some of it and use common sense instead.

There is more at www.hannigarth.co.uk.

The Basic Stuff

You are welcome to move in after 7 p.m. In previous years this was much earlier. However, in a Covid-19 world, the changeover cleaning takes a great deal longer and this gives Margaret (the housekeeper) time to follow the recommended procedure. If we find that the cleaning takes a shorter time, we will let you know if you can arrive earlier. Please make sure that you read the risk assessment document as there are some procedures that you will need to follow to protect Margaret.

Margaret will leave the property unlocked with the key in the inside of the front door or on the kitchen table. Margaret also has a spare set of keys. If you get there and find the house locked go into the shed and look above the door. Margaret is very well organised so you can guarantee that it is my fault. It would also be unusual as folk on Unst have a relaxed view on security (probably because of the low level of crime).

If there are any problems during your stay, our phone number is 01539 821514. We may be out but leave a voicemail message and we will ring back as soon as we can and will pass on any things that we cannot sort out over the phone to Margaret.

Please vacate the property by 9 a.m. on the day of your departure. Again, this is all about getting the maximum time to make the house as safe as we can.

The furniture is organised for our typical group size – between 2 and 4. If there are more of you, put the tables in the kitchen and the living room together. There are spare chairs in the porch. Feel free to move a chair from the kitchen or from upstairs into the living room so everyone has a seat.

You will find towels and linen (if needed) on the shelves in the double bedroom next to the bathroom or above the washing machine in the bathroom. In the past, we have asked for £7 a bed to cover Margaret’s laundry costs. However, cash isn’t very popular at the moment so, we will take care of that cost for this year.

Some people do a bit of shopping in Lerwick (Cooperative and Tesco) before travelling up the islands but we find that the local shops will provide just about anything, although not necessarily every day.

Please try to avoid leaving spare food. Sealed containers such as tins and unopened packets are probably safe but, please use your common sense. This is mentioned in the risk assessment.

The house sits in the middle of farmland. Follow the Country Code and you will be fine.

Please do phone us with any problems and do let us know about breakages so that we can replace them quickly. We don’t blame or charge people. Treat the house as your own and have a lovely time.

When you go

Please leave the key on the inside of the front door. Please could any payments (e.g. bed linen) be left on the kitchen table.

Please check that lights, heaters, hot water, TV etc. are off and windows are closed. Leave the fridge on.

Places to visit

Here are a few suggestions but the best way is to set off on foot or in the car and explore the island.

Hermaness – birds, birds and more birds.

Lund and Westing – Sandy beach, Brochs and sunsets.

Norwick and Skaw – Beaches, an unconformity, coves and some WW2 history.

Baltasound – shops, post office and hotel.

Haroldswick – Tea room, recreated Viking long house and longboat.

Muness – Castle, seals and rugged rocky coastline.

Keen of Hamar – Arctic-alpine plants (because I am a botanist).

Saxa Vord – Brewery, restaurant.

As you might expect, many of these visitor attractions are not open this year.

For many years, there has been a visitor's book at the house. However, we have removed it along with the small collection of wildlife guides, novels and books about Unst. We would be grateful if you don't leave paperbacks etc. There is a laminated map at the house to help you plan. Don't forget that you must wipe it down with hand gel or a bleach based cleaner before and after using it.

The Sheep and ponies

Now don't get me wrong, I like sheep. I even eat them occasionally. The trouble is that they very sensibly like to use the dykes around Hannigarth to shelter from the wind and driving rain. This leaves a fair amount of poo around the outside of the house. So, apply the rule that outdoor shoes get no further than the porch and all should be well. Mostly, the sheep cannot get into the garden but the lambs at the end of summer are big and springy enough to jump onto and over the walls into the garden. You may have to chase them out. There is one particular brown sheep that seems to think that Hannigarth is its personal grazing area.

If your family includes a dog, it goes without saying that it will need to keep you on a lead when you walk through the field. Your dog may be the best-behaved in the world but the sheep don't know that and nor does the crofter.

On the subject of livestock, there are sometimes cattle in the field. The young stock are inquisitive but they aren't aggressive. However, if there are cows and calves, don't go into the field with a dog. If you find yourself in a field with a dog, calves and cattle, let the dog off the lead and then head for the nearest way out. Don't get between the cattle and your dog.

The Clock

The clock was made for the previous owner. Here are the instructions on how to wind it.

The keyhole on the right winds the timekeeping – turn it to the left.

The keyhole on the left side winds the striking – turn it to the right.

Never move the hour hand backwards to set the time.

You can move the minute hand freely to set the time.

Don't over wind – it takes around 14 turns for a week's worth of time.

The striking may get out of sync with the hands. Wait until you get to the hour and then turn the hour hand to it.

Oddly, most people don't bother.

The Rubbish

With the best will in the world, you will produce some rubbish. Cans and glass bottles can be recycled in the banks near Uyeasound village hall and the shops in Baltasound. There are wheelie bins for paper, cardboard and plastic at the end of the track, but please do your best to reduce or reuse as much as you can. You only need to take a walk on the beach to be convinced of that. You may become so convinced that you start to take a (reusable) plastic bag whenever you visit the beach.

Compostable stuff goes in the compost bin at the front of the house but remember that meat is likely to encourage rats. Rats! Don't be alarmed, Hannigarth is surrounded by farmland so you would expect there to be some in the area. The trick is not to attract them away from their other sources of food. In any case, if you come from a city, there are likely to be fewer than you have at home. So, vegetable matter only and no embers from the fire!

At the end of your stay, please put any rubbish bags (very) securely tied into the wooden crate at the end of the track. Please make sure that the netting is in position and a (huge) rock is on the top. All this is to deter the (pesky) gulls until the next collection happens.

The Electricity

The supply comes in at the back of the house and this is why the consumer unit with its trip switches can be found in the shed at one end of the work bench. The storage heater (opposite the bathroom) runs off a separate meter, being there to provide a little background heat to stop the pipes freezing in the winter. Please avoid the temptation to turn it on and then dry clothes on top of it, it has a thermal fuse which melts requiring a very expensive visit from an electrician.

The immersion heater switch is below the cooker switch in the kitchen. The cost of electricity is included in the rental fee. Back in the day, we had an ancient slot meter that people fed with pound coins but it died a couple of seasons ago. So, if it's a bit chilly, could we respectfully ask that you don't turn the oven up full and open its doors to warm the house but otherwise use the power as you need it – you **are** on holiday.

If the bills get too high we may have to leave copies of the most recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in every room, as a reminder about the bigger picture, and fit a new slot machine!

The Heating

The heating is not so much central as distributed. It is provided by the various electric heaters (one of which is fixed to the wall in the big bedroom), a towel rail, an electric blanket and a Butane gas heater. Mix and match as you need them. Please only use the Butane gas heater downstairs and you should ensure that there is good ventilation. The electric heaters need space around them for convection and must not have wet clothing draped over them! The ancient storage heater outside the bathroom is there for the winter.

The Condensation

Condensation is a constant problem. This is explained by the external temperature being (almost) always lower than the internal temperature and the interesting fact that we each lose around a cup full of water each day when we breathe and through our almost waterproof skin. Added to this there is of course, the cooking and the bath and the shower. Sadly, we are running out of windows that will open. However, the bathroom, double bedroom (back), kitchen and upstairs Velux windows still work (when it isn't raining or blowing a gale!) There is also a dehumidifier which uses some sort of magic to pluck the water molecules out of the air and throw them into a small tank at the bottom.

Things you may miss

If you have checked out the website, you will be aware of the amenities that Hannigarth does not have. In brief: LED high definition TV, Internet, reliable mobile phone signal, stress (unless you create your own).

The Neighbours

Well, that would be the seals, birds, otters, ponies, sheep and cattle. At the time of writing, the land around the cottage is let to a local crofter, so you might see them too.

The Shops

It used to be that there were six shops and three post offices on Unst. There are now three shops and one post office, all based in Baltasound. Visit all three shops if you get the chance, they have different things to offer.

The Ferries

The phone number for the inter-island ferries is 01595 745804. We generally don't worry about booking because we usually have time to wait if we can't get on the first time. Actually, that isn't true. I worry a lot about getting to places on time but compensate by setting off a long time before I really need to.

If you phone and book you will be invited to do it for both ferries between Lerwick and Unst. You will need a time for the first ferry and your vehicle registration. They will give you a reference number.

Approximate timings are: Sumburgh to Lerwick - 30 minutes, Lerwick to Toft - 60 minutes, Toft ferry - 30 minutes, across Yell - 30 minutes, Gutcher to Belmont ferry - 15 minutes, Belmont to Hannigarth - 10 minutes.

By the way, the Bluemull ferry terminal has free wifi. Not that you would ever wish to use it on account of being on holiday but you could download all those missed emails on your way back home to cheer you up. You can also book the inter-island ferries using the internet at <https://ferry.shetland.gov.uk/booking/>. However, you cannot book the next ferry. Relax, you will likely get on.

Shetland Islands Council (SIC) has changed its pricing rule for the Bluemull Sound ferry. Previously, it was free, which made a day trip to Yell or Fetlar very attractive. It is assumed that you will be crossing both ways across the sound at some point and so you are only asked for money on the way up the islands. However, if you decide to take a day trip by car to Fetlar, you will be charged again.

The Water

The water is mains and very soft so, use detergents sparingly. Waste water and sewage go into a soak-away and septic tank. Please avoid using bleach as the microorganisms then don't do their job properly. Take care with the hot water, it is very hot. If there is a water emergency, the stopcock is behind the tumble dryer. It is the one with the red wheel (no, not the tumble drier!). The external stopcock is under an iron cover at the corner of the car park all the way back through both gates, next to the road.

The Beach

Walk out of the house and head downhill towards the nearest bit of sea! It is approximately 200 metres. Do this often, it is very good for your wellbeing. There is a good track down to the right but something of a bog to the left.

The Shed

The shed contains fuel and driftwood for the stove in the sitting room. There are a few tools, two rusty bikes, a defunct mower and an assortment of other bits and pieces that you are welcome to use. Keep an eye out for driftwood if the weather is good enough for a fire on the beach. However, remember that a pile of wood above the high tide mark has already been claimed by someone else. Please leave the beach as you find it so clear up the embers the next day.

Given the range of interesting things in the shed, you must make it no-go area for youngsters until you have done your own risk assessment of its contents (see risk assessment).

The Bath and shower

I am guessing that you know how a bath works and the same goes for the shower over the bath. It has only been installed this year and so it should work!

If you need some stuff

If you need something, such as some Sellotape, a screwdriver or a light bulb, here are some places where you can sometimes find what you need.

The various cupboards and drawers in the kitchen. The drawers in both small tables. The cupboard in the passage to the bathroom and double bedroom. The shelves in the bathroom. The shed.

How to work the...

Television.

Firstly, check that both the Philips freeview box and the Mitsubishi TV are plugged in and switched on at the wall socket and you have both remote controllers. There is a third controller for the DVD player; it is there to confuse you. Next, turn on the TV by pressing in the button on the front. "Hang on" I imagine you saying, "surely I just use the remote to switch it from standby". See later. Now press the red button near the top of the Philips remote, rapidly followed by pressing 1. Back to the TV remote to press the white button because it will likely be on standby anyway and then press the AV button on the same remote and cycle through until you get AV1. Unless of course, the previous visitors watched a video and swapped the SCART lead (I assume that it is an abbreviation for something or is it an acronym?). At the end of watching the half dozen or so channels, remember to turn it all off because even though standby mode converts only a very small

amount of electrical energy into heat energy, “many a mickle makes a muckle” and you should always “sweat the small stuff”.

Butane heater.

There is a small, black, plastic lever on the regulator at the back of the heater. Flick it up and it opens the gas valve and down closes it. You will hear a short psst sound when it opens. Once that has been done, you can go back to the top of the heater and turn the black knob to the ignite setting. Press the inside part of the knob down and press the spark making button thingy a few times until the burner ignites. You can then turn the knob to your desired setting. If the Butane runs out, there is a replacement in the shed. Be careful, it is very heavy. To change the canister, make sure that the lever on the regulator is on the down / off position and then press it firmly towards the regulator and the regulator should come off. This can then be pressed down onto the replacement canister; it will click into position.

Electric heaters.

There are a number of convector heaters and an electric fan heater disguised as a stove. The bad news is that, inevitably, the electric heater came with its own remote control (however, it also has buttons low down on its right-hand side).

... and finally

We are aware that the facilities are not very posh. The sitting room is rather cramped if there are six in your group. The telly is unfashionably square and definitely not flat. The sofa isn't leather and you may need to sit on a cushion until we get it re-upholstered. The cooker has some quirky habits (but it will serve you well if you follow its rules).

However, it all works and we think that the character of the house is an important part of the holiday. We also dislike throwing things away when they still do the job (see my earlier rant about the IPCC).

Here are some dos and don'ts to make your stay run smoothly.

- Do go out with waterproofs even when it is sunny!
- Don't write-off a day – it is normal to get several weathers.
- Do move the furniture around to suit you but please return it so that Margaret can get on with the cleaning.
- Do use the washing machine to keep on top of towels and tea towels. We struggle a bit when each person has a fresh towel on each day of their stay.
- Do use all three shops and any other facilities that are open. You support these local services with your hard-earned cash. Sadly, new ventures on the island often struggle to make it past their first year.

So finally, here are ten(ish) reasons why teenagers may not like Hannigarth (with apologies to my children who both love it – or at least say they do. Now I come to think about it, neither has been up to the house recently.)

- There is no wifi. Internet access is restricted to your phone and the ferry terminals.
- Mobile phone signal is low (Vodafone) or non-existent (EE). Actually, I do get some signal on the window sill in the kitchen but haven't found a way to use the phone in that position (yet).
- Most activities involve walking.
- People occupy the same room for meals and in the evenings.
- The TV is neither flat nor widescreen and there is no Sky or cable. There is Freeview with a limited range of channels but the transmitter is prone to having a rest every so often.
- The weather presents many opportunities for reading books and playing board games.
- The radio is permanently set to Radio 4 (although Radio 2 can be found with a bit of effort).
- There are two gates to be opened and closed (and guess whose job that will be).
- White trainers and sheep poo don't mix (well, they do but ...).
- It's the wrong sort of beach (well, it's the right sort of beach but in the wrong place).

One reason why teenagers may like Hannigarth

- There are a lot of bus shelters on the island.

Getting to Unst

Aberdeen to Lerwick

There are two ways to get to Shetland: the overnight Northlink ferry (around 12 hours) and a flight from Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow or Inverness (between 1 and 1.5 hours + booking in etc).

Again, the Visit Shetland site has links to Northlink and Flybe so that you can find out current prices and book online.

We have tried flying, and most of the various ways to approach the ferry journey, from treating it as a mini-cruise (en-suite cabin, meal in the restaurant, film in the "cinema") to roughing it on a reclining seat or bar settee. We have also slept on deck chairs on the deck - but that was a long time ago before the current posh ferries started operating. I understand there are now "pods" so at some point I may try one (did you notice that there was no "we" in the last bit).

Lerwick to Hannigarth - Travelling by car

If you are coming from Sumburgh, follow the signs for Lerwick. If you are setting off from the ferry terminal, Lerwick (and its shops) are left or turn right onto the A970 to travel North. This road takes you past the power station. Follow this road up through Mainland until you get to Voe. You then need to take a right turn onto the A968 which heads towards the first of the roll-on roll-off inter-island ferries at Toft. When you get to the ferry, park up in the appropriate lane and wait until you are directed onto the ferry. There are two ferries between Mainland and Yell. You can generally get across first time without booking however, you can find links to the booking phone number and timetables on our web site. The current fares can also be found by following the link on the website.

Once you have arrived at Ulsta on Yell, continue along the A968 through Yell to Gutcher where the ferry to Unst operates. Again, you can book onto the ferry or take a chance. The ferry transports you to Belmont on Unst.

Once you are off the ferry, travel up the A968 (the only road). You will pass Loch of Snarravoe on your left as you go up the hill. After around 4 kilometres, take the first right - signposted to Uyeasound. Follow the road towards the harbour and turn left to follow the road that runs along the bay close to the sea. You will pass the village hall on your left and then Easter Loch also on your left. The road then cuts away from the bay and heads towards Muness. You pass the church, primary school (now closed), a standing stone and then, just after you cross a cattle grid, take the left turn signposted to the Easting (Sandwick beach). Keep on this road as it passes a couple of crofts and a crofters shed until the road stops at a small car park with a bit of interesting signage telling you about the local history. Go through the gate to get onto the track that takes you to Hannigarth. There is one more gate to open to get onto the parking area.

Lerwick to Hannigarth - Travelling by bus

There is a bus service from the ferry terminal all the way up the islands. You don't have to book onto the service but a phone call to the operators to check is probably the safest option. The operator's phone numbers and timetables can be found on the website. The cost all the way to Unst is around £6. The last stage takes you to Uyeasound which leaves you with a 2 mile walk. We suggest you have a chat with the driver on the minibus that takes you up Unst and ask if you can be dropped at Hannigarth.