

## Historical Features Of Interest On Skomer Island

This information is a supplementary document which sets out some of the historical features on Skomer Island.

### Iron Age

**Harold Stone** - This is one of Skomer's mysteries. It may date from the Iron Age. It is largely unshaped by human hands, with no obvious cutting or tool marks, although the corners seem to have been smoothed, possibly by years of cattle or other animals rubbing themselves on it. As with many standing stones, its function is unknown and the origin of the name is also lost. Perhaps it was a marker for approaching boats to head towards or the sign of something or someone guarding the island.

**Iron Age settlements** - There are a number of Iron Age settlements around the Island, each one slightly different. In North Valley, looking towards North Pond when conditions are suitable the remains of a number of circular Iron Age huts in pairs can be seen. An information panel in the Old Farmhouse shows how a settlement might have looked.

Around the huts were several small enclosures probably for smaller animals such as pigs or fowl. Remains of the walls may be seen either as mounds or banks or sometimes as obvious stone slabs, and often natural rocky outcrops were incorporated into the enclosures. It is likely that some fields were used for growing crops.

Near the Garland Stone there is a short circular detour off the main path across a ridge where a group of nine small cairns have been identified. This is probably a prehistoric cemetery.

As you walk around the coast you will walk over or through the remains of many Iron Age walls. Often only the larger stones or grounders remain. The smaller stones and rubble that would have filled the gaps have long disappeared. If you take the track from Skomer Head back to the Old Farm Complex, after a short distance you will come across both Iron Age and more modern boundary walls running parallel to each other. The modern one is close to the path and the prehistoric one on the rock ridge above.

In Wick Valley, there is one of the best examples of an Iron Age hut and associated small enclosures, clearly visible all year round. Unlike the hut circles in the north of the island, this hut is a single circle and a number of small enclosures can be seen around it.

**Dams** - Between Skomer Head and The Wick, you cross Wick Stream. If you look up and down the stream you may be able to pick out six dams. These seem to adjoin and be part of the Iron Age walls but they might also be of much later origin. Their purpose is not known but most likely they were for water conservation, creating ponds for storage of water and watering stock.

## **18<sup>th</sup> Century**

**Lime Kilns** - There are two large 19th century lime kilns on the island, one below the Information and welcome Point and one just below the Harold Stone. Lime was important on the island both as mortar for the buildings and to spread on the land as fertilizer. Limestone and coal would have been imported from the mainland, landed on the beach at North Haven and moved to the kilns to be heated.

**Farm Complex** - The Old Farmhouse was once an impressive and substantial house with early pictures showing a fancy metal veranda running the length of the house. At the back, northeast corner of the building is an old smoking oven where fish and meats would have been preserved. The Old Farmhouse is built in the traditional Pembrokeshire vernacular style with small slates protecting the front of the house, fixed in mortar. The current farmhouse was built in about 1840 and was lived in by various tenants and owners of the island:

- Lord Kensington bought the island in 1897 and used it mainly as part of his sporting estate.
- Mr J J Neale, a trawler owner from Cardiff, leased the Island in 1905 with the aim of protecting the wildlife, but he had to relinquish the lease later and it was subsequently bought by a well-to-do dentist, a Mr Sturt, who stayed on the island with his family and whose daughter eventually married a local man Reuben Codd.
- The Cods farmed the Island until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939.
- The Island became a Field Study Centre for a year (1946), run by the West Wales Field Society and visitors stayed in the house.
- In 1950 the Cods finally left the Island completely and in 1954 the roof of the Old Farmhouse was severely damaged during a major storm and left it a ruin.
- The Skomer Island Heritage Project enabled the old farmhouse to be made safe, and for shelters, interpretation and a number of windows to be reinstated. This allowed the building to be used by visitors once again. The Visitor Centre would have housed machinery such as grinding and threshing machines. If you look outside the Visitor Centre, behind the buildings, there are two raised horse walks where the farm horse would have walked in circles turning wheels that would have powered this equipment. The old barn, now residential visitor and research accommodation, was a substantial two-story barn for storage and animals.

**Ploughing** - If you walk from the farm towards the Garland Stone you will follow a 19th century wall, even using it as the footpath where it crosses North Valley Stream. At the right time of year, you can see ridges and furrows with heathers, bracken and brambles growing on the ridges, and grasses and marsh plants growing in the troughs. This is evidence of an old ploughing system.