

## 3·4 Dounby to Finstown

47 49

**Distance** 10·3 miles 16·6 km

**Terrain** largely road walking (74%), mainly on very minor roads, the rest is on paths and tracks through field and woodland

**Grade** generally flat with some gentle gradients and very little ascent overall

**Food and drink** Dounby, Merkister Hotel, Finstown

**Summary** varied inland walking, from lochside to rare woodland via an isolated church and graveyard, ending at the coast

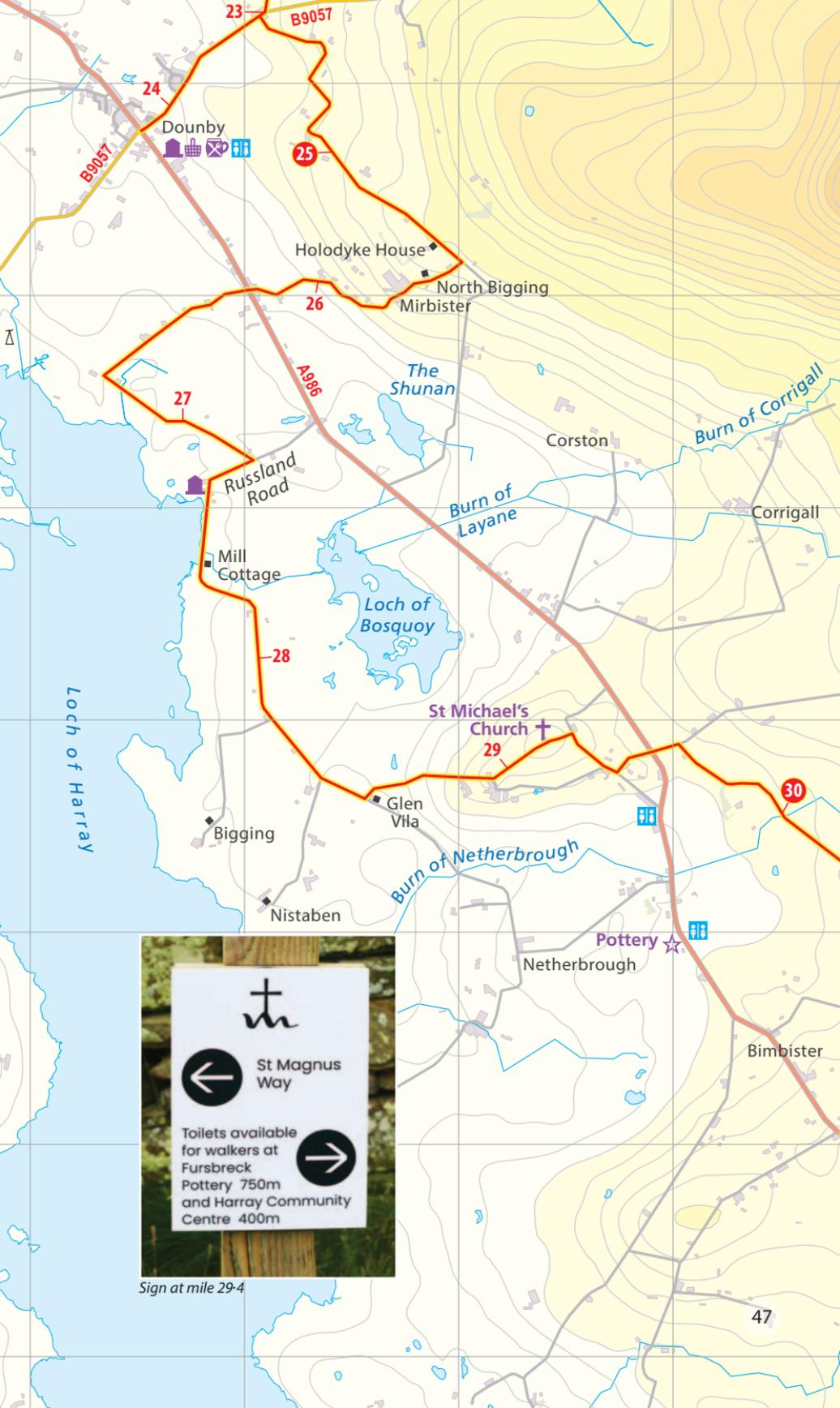


- From the Dounby crossroads, retrace your steps at the end of 3·3 for 800 m. Take the B9057 north-east out of the village, using its pavement at first, then cross over to face oncoming traffic. Turn off right on the road to North Bigging, just 40 m short of the road from Beauquoy that you used yesterday.
- Follow the road around its twists and turns, the height affording views across the Loch of Harray to the hills of Hoy. After 1·8 km it reaches its high point near Holodyke House.
- At mile 25·5 the road turns sharp right, heads downhill past the farm of North Bigging and winds down to reach the A986 within 1·1 km.
- Cross straight over the main road and continue ahead past the stables to Howaback. At mile 26·7 you meet an old drovers' track: turn left to follow this ancient route for 800 m to its end. Conyar is an indistinct mound on the left.
- Turn right at Russland Road, which soon reaches the Merkister Hotel. Follow the road around to the left and along the shore of the Loch of Harray. Pass Mill Cottage, a refurbished former water mill.



*Drovers' track*

*Across Loch of Harray to the Merkister Hotel*



Sign at mile 29.4

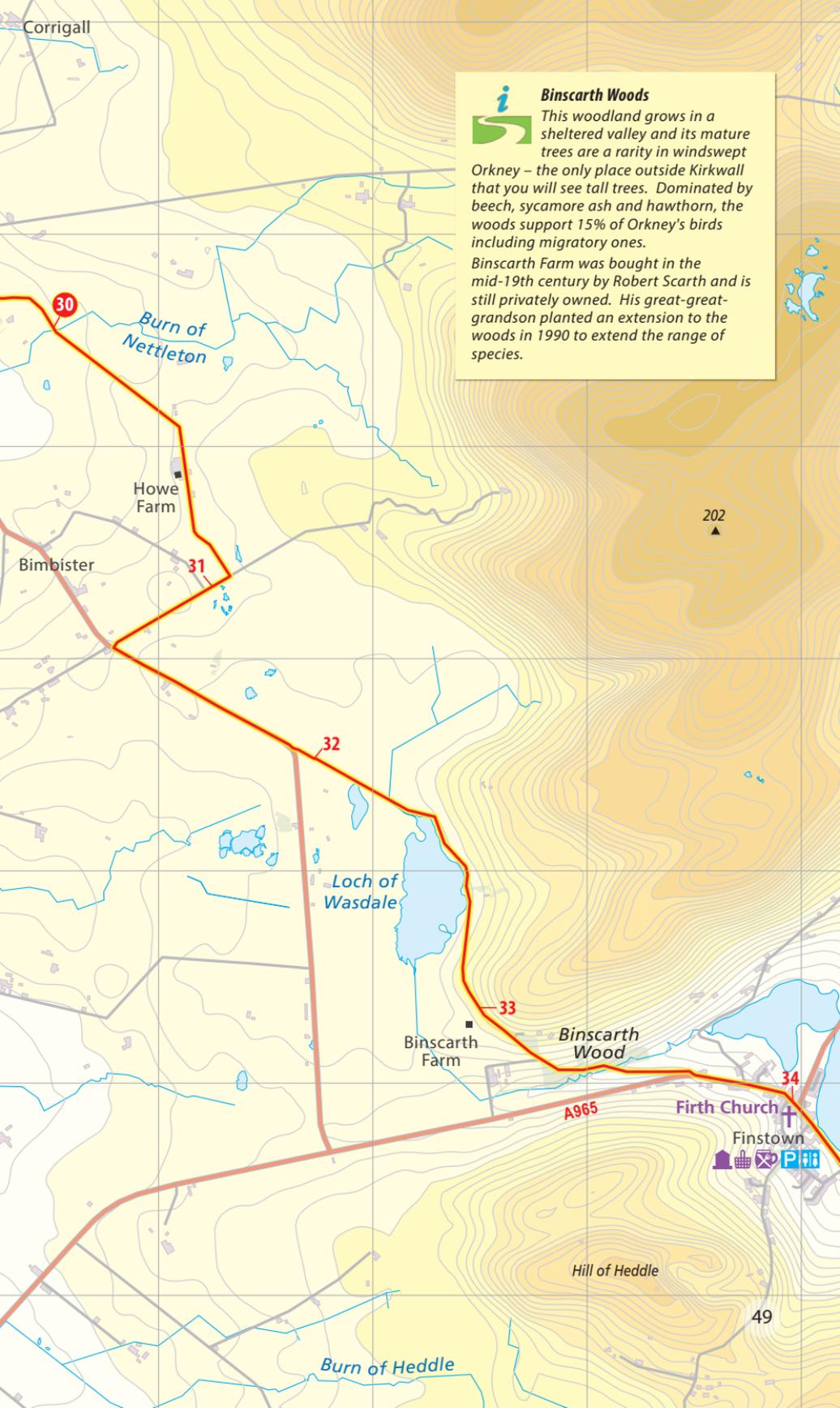


*Across the graveyard to St Michael's Church*

- The road then leaves the lochside and continues inland. Ignore roads to the right (signed for Bigging and Nistaben), but just after the latter, at mile 28.6 (Glen Villa) a waymarker points you left onto a farm track uphill to Quean.
- Continue up the track past some farm buildings, then take the grassy path to the left that leads to St Michael's Church. This stands on a spectacular site, but sadly it is generally kept locked except for services.
- However, there is plenty of interest in the graveyard. Visit its war memorial, located on top of a small broch (grassy mound) which provides a panorama of Harray in every direction. Among many interesting graves, those of the author Eric Linklater (1899-1974) and his wife Marjorie (1909-97) rest side by side at the wall: see below.
- After you exit the graveyard entrance, turn left and follow the road down to the junction (100 m). Turn right downhill for 300 m, then take the next left uphill to reach the A986 – unless following the sign for a toilet detour (mile 29.4).

*The graves of Marjorie and Eric Linklater*





### **Binscarth Woods**

This woodland grows in a sheltered valley and its mature trees are a rarity in windswept Orkney – the only place outside Kirkwall that you will see tall trees. Dominated by beech, sycamore ash and hawthorn, the woods support 15% of Orkney's birds including migratory ones.

Binscarth Farm was bought in the mid-19th century by Robert Scarth and is still privately owned. His great-great-grandson planted an extension to the woods in 1990 to extend the range of species.

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A965



*Loch of Wasdale*

- Cross straight over onto Lyde Road and after 140 m turn right, signed for Howe. This quiet single-track road soon crosses the Burn of Nettleton and bears right past Howe Farm.
- At the T-junction (mile 30.9), turn right opposite a small car park and continue on the minor road for just over 600 m to the A986.
- Turn left along the busy Harray Road. After 1 km, the road turns sharp right at Refuge Corner, but the Way goes straight ahead on a broad, loose-surfaced track (mile 31.9).
- Follow the track beside the Loch of Wasdale, keeping watch for teal, wigeon and mute swans on its waters. Head uphill through a gate and continue on the grassy path as it climbs and joins the Binscarth Farm road, where you bear right.

*Finstown and Wideford Hill across the bay*





*Binscarth Woods*

- Where the road bends right, leave it to go through the waymarked gate onto a track through Binscarth Woods directly ahead: see the panel on page 49.
- The woods can be muddy: the direct route continues straight down the track, but if you go through any of the gates off to the right you may enjoy a beautiful if muddy woodland walk beside a burn before returning to the main track.
- At the bottom of the hill the track crosses the burn and leads out of the woods through a kissing-gate. There are sometimes cattle in the next field, which leads you up a grassy slope to another kissing-gate (mile 33.7).
- Exit onto the main road for the final 900 m into Finstown, crossing the road with care, and turning left downhill past Baikie's Stores. Keep on the pavement down the right hand side of the road past Firth Church.
- Then cross the road to the pavement along the shore side to reach the car park at Finstown overlooking the Bay of Firth. The section ends at the interpretation board and waystone.

*North-west over the Bay of Firth (right),  
Finstown to the lower left*

