

Swandro-Orkney Coastal Archaeology Trust

2025 Information for Volunteers

Thank you for your interest in volunteering at the Knowe of Swandro Excavation.

Please read all of the information below before completing the separate application form.

If you still have questions please email us on info@swandro.co.uk

Excavation Background

The Knowe of Swandro is a rescue excavation in advance of the site's destruction by coastal erosion, situated under an eroding storm beach. The site is a scheduled ancient monument and the excavation operates under the terms of Scheduled Monument Consent. It is a complex deeply stratified site with many phases of wall and middens typical of the Northern Isles and is an extremely challenging site to excavate due both the complex archaeological sequence and to the need to cover the site with rock and sandbags at the end of the season, and to open up each year again. Our 2025 dates are from Monday 16th June until Friday 8th August 2025.

Prospective volunteers are advised to familiarise themselves with the working conditions on site, particularly during the opening up and closing up weeks which are the hardest physically, by reading the dig diary on our website: <https://www.swandro.co.uk/blog>

The role of the Swandro-Orkney Coastal Archaeology Trust

The Swandro-Orkney Coastal Archaeology Trust (henceforth 'the Trust') is a Registered Scottish Charity (no. SC047002) which supports the excavation through fundraising and logistical support. The Trust is a completely separate entity under Scottish Law and has no legal relationship with any of the academic institutions which are involved in the excavation, although the Chair and Vice Chair of the Trust are also the site co-directors (see below) and several other trustees also provide support for the project and post-excavation work. None of the Trustees receive any payment from the Trust. The Trust has full public liability and professional indemnity insurance and it is through the Trust that volunteers may be accepted to participate as part of the excavation team. More information about the Trust including our constitution may be found at: <https://www.swandro.co.uk/about-us>

Structure and Roles of the Excavation Team

Directors and Supervisory Staff

The site co-directors are Dr Steve Dockrill and Dr Julie Bond of the University of Bradford. They are supported by a supervisory team of professional archaeologists.

Skilled Professional Excavators

The project benefits each year from the services of a number of skilled excavators most of whom have been with the team for a number of years and are taking unpaid leave to return to the excavation, and have long experience of excavation with the site directors on other projects in the Northern Isles. These excavators are always required on site both for their professional skills and to instruct the student trainees.

Field School Students

The excavation serves as a field school to train University of Bradford archaeology students in all aspects of archaeological excavation and recording as part of their assessed excavation module for academic credits towards their final degrees. The majority of these students have no previous excavation experience.

Returning Volunteers

We have a small team of volunteers who have been with the project several years and have developed the necessary skills for this type of site; like many Northern Isles sites the stratigraphy at Swandro is complex and deeply stratified, and further complicated by erosion processes. Some of these volunteers return just to take part in the sieving (see below) which they have enjoyed in previous years.

General Volunteers

These can range from archaeology students (who wish to gain experience but don't require special training or reports for their institutions) to interested members of the public, with or without excavation experience. We can accept applications from general volunteers to join the excavation team free of charge. Please note that the emphasis is on the success of the excavation and we do

not want volunteers who expect to be able to pick and choose the tasks they do on site, rather than the tasks that they are asked to do by the site supervisors/directors. General volunteers with little or no previous excavation experience may not always have the opportunity to excavate on-site, as we do not have the staff resources or time to train numbers of unskilled volunteers. Similarly volunteers who have some experience of excavation elsewhere but have never worked in the Northern Isles may find themselves classed as unskilled volunteers simply due to the complexity of the site. We do however welcome people who genuinely wish to gain experience of archaeology and there are many ways in which you can help.

We do not wish to discourage prospective volunteers, and we have many tasks around site that general volunteers may participate in, and that are vital to the progress of the excavation. If you enjoy working as part of a team and wish to aid us in our race against the tide then you will be very welcome to join us.

Tasks a general volunteer may be asked to do:

(1) Sieving: the research design associated with our scheduled monument consent requires 100% sieving of spoil from the excavation to recover all of the artefacts – please see the following dig diary entry for our set up: <https://www.swandro.co.uk/post/time-to-show-the-sieves-a-little-love> Sieving is a vital part of the excavation process and the general volunteer can make a big contribution here, by freeing other members of the excavation team for other tasks. This is quite a physical task, but does not put too much strain on the knees. You will gain identification skills in recognising artefacts and faunal remains from this task; some vital finds have been retrieved from sieving.

(2) Opening and closing the site: This takes place for about the first and last five to seven days of the excavation and is very hard work but vital to the excavation, see the following dig diary entry: <https://www.swandro.co.uk/post/day-three-and-still-shifting-stone> Please note that if you volunteer during opening/closing period there is no other work on site and this is a very physical task and needs a good level of strength and fitness.

(3) Finds management, recording and packing: this is usually only available after the first few weeks of the excavation when the volume of finds has built up.

(4) General assistance around site: any other tasks that may be helpful e.g. emptying buckets, wheelbarrows, moving rocks etc.

(5) Site tours: we are open to the public daily and offer free site tours to anyone who walks down to the site, if you think that you would enjoy this aspect of the excavation then we can give you some basic training.

(6) Excavation: depending on level of previous experience you may be able to excavate or photo clean but this is not guaranteed.

Volunteers are valued members of the Swandro team; you will be part of the directors site tours that take place weekly, as we explain to the team how the site is developing and what we think is happening and we will always be open to queries and happy to explain what's going on in the excavation. If you are happy with assisting the excavation in the above roles then please read on for more information.

General Information

Accommodation

You will need to arrange and pay for your accommodation, either in Rousay or in Mainland Orkney. Please DO NOT BOOK your travel to/accommodation in Orkney before we have confirmed that you have a place on the excavation, unless of course you are intending to visit Orkney in any case.

Accommodation in Rousay

We have already booked some of the self-catering accommodation and all of the Trumland Hostel for our existing field team but see <http://www.discoverrousay.co.uk/accommodation.shtml>

Hotels

The Taversoe Hotel in Rousay <http://www.taversoehotel.co.uk/> offers good dinner, bed and breakfast accommodation at reasonable rates and will also provide you with a packed lunch and you won't need a car if you stay here – we can pick you up from the hotel's car park. *Please note that the*

hotel has been sold to the local community and will be under new management for 2025, so you should check at the time of booking what facilities may be offered.

Camping

There is a campsite in Rousay but this shares the limited hostel facilities (i.e. 2 toilets/showers and a small kitchen with one small fridge) with the hostel, where we already have 12 students. **We therefore ask that you do not book camping there unless you have a camper van (see below), as it will make the experience very crowded and stressful for both you and the students.**

Camper Vans

There is parking for Camper vans at Trumland Farm (email: trumland@btopenworld.com tel: 01856 821252, or 0754 537 4029) but please note that the facilities are limited and shared with the hostel (see above) so your camper van should as a minimum have a cooker and fridge which you should use during your stay. (Please note that there is no parking for camper vans at the site, which is on private farmland, nor are there any public car parks which could be used in this way).

Accommodation in Mainland Orkney

There is plentiful and varied accommodation, including campsites, available in Mainland Orkney and a daily boat service to Rousay, and we would recommend considering this option, especially if you have your own car, see <https://www.orkney.com/plan/accommodation>

Public transport is limited. There is a public bus service from Kirkwall/Stromness which connects with the Rousay ferry (bus route 6: see <https://www.orkney.gov.uk/our-services/transport/bus-services/>) but this is quite a lengthy roundabout journey in some directions. Although the morning bus does a loop round the West Mainland, the evening bus goes directly back to Kirkwall, so if you are relying on this bus you can only stay in either Kirkwall or Finstown if you want to get home again in the evening. Otherwise you will need your own transport, and if you intend to hire a car you will need to do this well in advance.

Getting to Rousay. If you are staying in Mainland Orkney, we will meet the arrival of the first Tingwall to Rousay ferry (currently 8.20am from Tingwall on weekdays; 8.40am on Saturdays and 10.45am on

Sundays but see: <http://www.orkneyferries.co.uk/timetables.php> for up-to-date information) and transport you to the excavation, and we will return you to the pier for the 5.30pm boat back to Tingwall. There is a free car park at Tingwall. You are responsible for paying your own ferry fares. A day return fare as a foot passenger is currently £6.10 for an adult, £4.60 for a senior citizen. It is not practical to take your own car across daily to Rousay both due to the expense and the limited size of the ferry.

Insurance

We have public liability/professional indemnity insurance but you are advised to take out travel and cancellation insurance which would also cover you for any expenditure already incurred (e.g. accommodation or travel costs) in the event that you have to cancel your trip through ill-health etc. **Should unforeseen circumstances intervene and the 2025 excavation season have to be cancelled or the dates amended for any reason then the Trust is not liable to you for any costs you may have incurred in connection with your participation in the excavation e.g. non-refundable travel or accommodation and you may wish to take out suitable insurance to cover you in this event.** If you are from outside the UK you should ensure that you have medical insurance to cover you in the event you require treatment whilst in the UK, and that your insurance also covers you for medical repatriation if necessary.

General site information and conduct

(1) We work nominally a five-day week, usually from Sundays to Thursdays with Fridays and Saturdays off, but at the discretion of the site directors we may work a 6-day week if circumstances make this necessary. Similarly, it may be necessary to change the days worked at the discretion of the directors (for example, if there is bad weather forecast and we need to swap the days off).

(2) Rousay is a remote island with limited access to medical assistance, consisting of a resident nurse-practitioner and a visiting doctor, but transfer to hospital in the event of an emergency could take several hours. We have qualified first-aiders on site but facilities are necessarily basic. You should consider your personal health and safety and not apply if you have any potentially life-threatening medical condition which might require urgent hospitalisation. Depending on the availability of site

transport getting to the site requires a 1km walk in each direction from the main road, and is uphill on the way back. The site is located at the sea's edge away from any settlement and there are no facilities on site apart from a chemical toilet and limited shelter. We continue to work in bad weather unless it is unsafe to do so. The safety and wellbeing of the team is of utmost importance, so please make sure you are physically able to cope with this kind of environment.

(3) We have no drinking water on site so you MUST bring your own, and make sure you bring enough given that you may be undertaking physical tasks in warm weather. You may wish to bring a flask with a hot drink, and you need to bring your own lunchtime food every day. There is only one shop in Rousay, with restricted opening hours, and it is nowhere near the excavation.

(4) Consumption of alcoholic drinks is prohibited on site and anyone caught in breach of this rule will be required to leave site immediately and may only return at the discretion of the Trust. Similarly, anyone found to be in possession of/consuming any substances that are illegal under Scottish Law will be immediately and permanently excluded from the excavation and reported to the police.

(5) It is broadly an offence under Scots Law to carry fixed blades or lock knives of any size, and pocket knives with a folding blade longer than 7.62cm (3 inches), in a public place without a reasonable excuse, so please ensure that you comply with the terms of this law and do not bring such items to site with you.

(6) All members of the Swandro Excavation Team are required to respect their colleagues and we will not tolerate any kind of discriminatory behaviour, racial or sexual harassment, bullying or violence towards any member of the excavation team or the visiting public. The Trust reserves the right to exclude anyone deemed to be acting inappropriately from the excavation at our discretion and without compensation.

(7) There is a Risk Assessment for the excavation which you will be given to read and you will need to sign to say you accept. Full training will be given in respect of any on-site activities that you are required to undertake. In order to ensure your safety on site, you must declare any medical conditions on our application form and this will remain confidential (for use by the First Aiders only),

and be destroyed at the end of the excavation. If you require an EpiPen you must bring this with you every day and bring it to the attention of the site first aiders.

(8) Smoking is only permitted at breaks and must be well away from the rest of the excavation team and also downwind so the smoke does not drift over anyone else. Please dispose of any cigarette butts appropriately and *not* on the ground; tobacco from discarded butts can be walked back on site and contaminate samples.

(9) The site rubbish bin is for the Finds Hut only, not for general use as we have to carry all the rubbish back to the Orkney Mainland. Please take away with you any rubbish you have created e.g. sandwich wrappers, cigarette butts etc. The exception is sanitary products, which may be disposed of in the designated bin in the portable toilet cubicle.

Things you will need to bring

(1) Stout boots with safety toe caps i.e. steel or composite conforming to current standards (i.e. EN ISO 20345:2011). Safety boots should preferably give you good ankle support due to the uneven ground and stony beach. **SAFETY FOOTWEAR IS COMPULSORY NO MATTER WHAT TASK YOU ARE REQUIRED TO UNDERTAKE AND THERE ARE NO EXCEPTIONS TO THIS REQUIREMENT.** If you attend without safety boots you will be excluded from the excavation until you have acquired a pair as we will be in breach of health and safety law to allow you to continue.

(2) A full set of robust working type waterproofs i.e. both trousers and jacket, these are widely available via online workwear outlets, and may be purchased locally on Hatston Industrial estate in Kirkwall at e.g. Birsay Farmers, or Highland Industrial Supplies. You will need these to keep out the wind even on dry days.

(3) Warm clothing, plenty of warm layers and preferably windproof, including a warm hat and gloves, plus sunscreen and a sunhat – it's surprisingly easy to get your ears and nose sunburnt in Orkney and the weather can change from hot to cold and back again very quickly. Please do not underestimate

how cold and miserable a typical Orkney summer's day can be, the windchill factor is always high in Orkney.

(4) If you have your own 4-inch WHS pointing trowel you can bring it with you although you probably won't need a trowel (see above description of the tasks for general volunteers). If you do need a trowel we can lend you one.

(5) Any medication you need - **please make sure that you have enough of any prescription drugs to cover your whole stay in Orkney.** There are no pharmacy facilities in Rousay, only in Mainland Orkney, so you may wish to bring a selection of over-the-counter drugs with you e.g. paracetamol, ibuprofen, hay fever remedies etc. We do have an approved First Aid kit and qualified first aiders on site, but please note that by law we are not allowed to give you any medicines on-site, even over the counter painkillers.

(6) Midge repellent and/or a midge net– it's often too windy for midges, but they are a nuisance if the wind drops.

(7) We have a portable toilet and limited washing facilities on-site, consisting of cold water and hand cleaning gel, and you may use these to clean your hands before eating, drinking (or smoking a cigarette at tea breaks/lunchtime), but please feel free to bring your own wet wipes or hand sanitiser as preferred.

(8) A water bottle and thermos flask, as mentioned above.

*If you have read and are happy with all the above then please complete the separate
Volunteer Application form and return by email.*