EVIE (ON Efja, back-current in a river, referring to Aikerness Bay and the strong tide which sweeps past like a river) faces Eynhallow Sound and Rousay. The Burgar Röst, which forms between Eynhallow and Costa is a ferocious tide-race which is at its most impressive when a Spring Ebb and a north-westerly gale coincide. The Vikings called it Efjusund.

Coastline The parish has a dramatic and varied coastline. Costa Hill with the 125m-high cliffs at Costa Head lies to the west and overlooks a rugged coast which goes all the way to Grit Ness. The Sands of Evie, or Aikerness (ON Akra-nes, Arable Land Point), is one of the best beaches in the West Mainland.

Formerly there was a large expanse of sand dunes behind the beach, but these have been largely reduced by sand-extraction, and are only slowly regenerating. All the same the beach still makes a pleasant walk. It is very good for “Spoots” (Razor Fish) at extreme low tides.

The changing light affords a wide range of colours on the waters of Eynhallow Sound. This is also a good area to search for seaside plants.

The car makes an excellent hide to observe wading birds and sea ducks. Seals are often to be seen, and Otters are quite common along the more sheltered shores.

Brochs In the short distance between Costa and Woodwick, there are at least six brochs, five of which are small compared to the massive Broch of Gurness. The Broch of Costa is the most westerly and sited to be invisible from the seaward. Burgar Broch (HY353277), at the Point of Hisber, was excavated in the 19th century and a Pictish silver hoard was found.

Apparently it was thrown into the sea by the farmer so that the Crown could not claim it! One can only speculate on the folly of this selfish person, spurred on by state greed. The remains of further two brochs lie nearby at Knowe of Grugar (HY35727) and Knowe of Stenso (HY364267), while there is a further one at the Craig of Ritten (HY401249), near Woodwick.

In 1929, Robert Rendall the well-known poet, antiquarian and naturalist, was sitting on the Knowe o’Aikerness sketching the scene. One of the legs of his stool sank into a hole, and before long he had discovered a flight of stairs leading down into the knowe. What was to become known as the Broch of Gurness was soon to be excavated. The name “Gurness” is most likely a corruption of Aikerness.

Justice, 17th century-style
About 1630 a young girl was accused of child murder and sentenced to death in the manner of the times. She was “to be taken to Olly Smith, the lockman, have her hands bund behind her back,
From the hide all of Orkney’s moorland birds may be seen, including Merlin, Hen Harrier, Short-eared Owl and Whimbrel. Take the signposted road off the A966 for access. Parts of the Reserve can also be reached by the many peat tracks which lead into the hill.

**Mammals**
In recent years Basking Sharks have been seen in Eynhallow Sound, perhaps feeding on plankton stirred up by the rapid change in depth in the Burgar Röst which goes from less than 10m to more than 20m in a short distance. Common Seals are often seen hauled out along the shore, or foraging among the seaweed, especially near the Broch of Gurness. Otters may also be seen in Evie, and the Burn of Desso at Aikerness and the Woodwick Burn being likely spots in the gloaming.

**Birsay Moors RSPB Reserve** spills over into Evie, and there is a bird-hide at Lowrie’s Water (HY345257), from where breeding Red-throated Divers can be observed without causing any disturbance. The adult’s calls can often be heard as they fly back and forth from their fishing grounds.

**Aerogenerators**
Attempts to harness the energy of the wind have been made in Evie since the early 1950s, when a prototype aerogenerator was installed on Costa Hill. Unfortunately it blew down in a big gale in 1953. In the 1980s several experimental wind turbines were built on Burgar Hill (HY343261, 259m), and now three large turbines generate electricity. The location was chosen due to the high average windspeeds prevalent in Orkney. Issues such as nature conservation and amenity limit the number of possible sites in Orkney for such developments.

Research is also being conducted on the tidal flows of Eynhallow Sound to see if it would be a suitable location to install an experimental tidal generator. While the amounts of energy involved are very large, the engineering problems are also huge.

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**Woodwick Burn and woods**
**Mainland - Evie**

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A recent transliteration of this inscription suggests that it is in fact in Old Norse and reads, “INÆITTEMUN|MATS, in memory of Mats”. The context of this find is unknown, but the argument is persuasive. The knife-blade has sadly become lost since being found in 1931.

Parts of a Roman amphora which dates from AD60 or earlier were found during excavations in the 1930s. These were used to transport wine or olives. Roman pottery was also found at Oxtro and Midhowe brochs, while coins were recovered from the Broch of Lingro. Whether the artefacts are the result of trade, exchange or are the remains of booty will probably never be known.

The “well” in the broch interior is a complex structure built in a hole about 4m by 5m quarried out of the rock. It includes a 18-step stairway, chambers with corbelled roofs and a cistern at the bottom with an elaborate roof. Although it may have been used as a well the overall impression is of something symbolic rather than purely practical, especially in view of the similarities to Minehowe in Tankerness.

The grave of a well-off 9th century Norse woman who had been buried with two large matching oval bronze brooches at her breast was discovered in one of the ramparts. She wore a finely woven cloth garment and an iron necklace. An iron sickle was at her right side and a wooden-handled knife at her left.