



**environmental
research
from a new
perspective**

The region:

The Highlands & Islands of Scotland
Caithness & Sutherland
Thurso

The Highlands & Islands of Scotland

Scotland combines with England, Northern Ireland and Wales to make up the United Kingdom.

The Highlands & Islands, forming the northern half of Scotland, is a distinct geographical area of more than 400,000 people with strong cultural and historical roots. Inverness, the capital of the Highlands and Islands, is a thriving modern city, home to over 55,000 people and a focus for administration, culture and transport.

Rail services go in all directions. The road network is equally comprehensive. Inverness airport, just east of the city, offers quick connections to major UK airports, regular services to Orkney, Shetland & Western Isles and handles substantial international charter traffic.

Quality of Life

The breathtaking scenery and ancient heritage of the Highlands & Islands blend with modern amenities and a progressive business environment to offer a quality of life that is second to none.

Each part of the region has its own special appeal - from Shetland in the north to Kintyre in the south, from the Moray Firth in the east to the Western Isles which fringe the Atlantic.

The Highlands & Islands covers half the land mass of Scotland, embracing a broad tapestry of landscapes - rolling hills and challenging peaks, golden beaches and lush green islands, and enchanting straths & glens through which world-famous salmon rivers rush to the sea.

Within the weave of this ancient landscape lies a network of communities each of which, in its own way, enjoys a superb quality of life. From busy, bustling towns to quiet, intimate glen & crofting townships, there is a breadth and diversity of culture & community lifestyles bound together by a common sense of living.

The area is well served by hospitals and health centres and the traditional excellence of Scottish education continues to be pursued within its schools. Extensive building programmes, in both the public and private sectors, have created a wide choice of superbly-situated, high-quality homes which offer excellent value for money. A well-developed transport infrastructure, modern amenities and a state-of-the-art tele-communications network enhance enjoyment of the opportunities the area offers.

Countless visitors come to the Highlands & Islands each year to enjoy the unparalleled range of recreational activities and facilities. For those who are lucky enough to live and work here, such attractions are part of everyday life. In addition to the range of outdoor activities, there are thriving amateur sports leagues, a wealth of music, song and dance, and a variety of performing and visual arts events throughout the year.

In the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, there is space to spread your wings and live life to the full.

(Source: Highlands and Islands Enterprise 2005: www.hie.co.uk)



Caithness & Sutherland

Caithness and Sutherland together form the most northerly counties on mainland Britain. Their combined area of 764,094 hectares is nearly half the size of Wales, and with a population about that of an average English town (less than 40,000) – the sense of freedom and space is both refreshing and inspiring. Each county has its own distinctly individual character and beauty, fashioned by their respective cultural influences and landscapes.

Caithness, by virtue of its position and relative fertility, experienced successive invasions by the Norse who maintained a stronghold around the coastal plain for centuries. A testament to the fact that Caithness was once more part of Norway than Scotland can be seen in the abundance of place names with Viking origins.

Sutherland however, with its more rugged topography, resisted the advances from the north and east and, still to this day, maintains its strong connections with Celtic traditions. These are most evident in the use of Gaelic translations for towns and villages on road signs. It could be said that Caithness has a quiet appeal when compared to the immediate attraction of its neighbouring county, but there is little doubt that the openness, the huge skies and the impressive seascapes have an intoxication of their own which is irresistible and draws visitors back to the county year after year.

However, the impression should not be given that this is simply a quiet theme park for the amusement of visitors.

The natural environment of Caithness and Sutherland does offer a very amenable backdrop to what has always been a diverse, hard working and resourceful community. And now with a much improved infrastructure, inward investment from big business has opened up excellent opportunities and allowed people to move to this part of Britain with the prospect of good and sustainable employment. If you appreciate the space to enjoy life to the full then it really is

possible to have the best of both worlds in Caithness and Sutherland.

(Source: *Caithness & Sutherland Enterprise*, 2005:<http://www.hie.co.uk/case>)



Thurso

Thurso (population c. 9000) is a long established town with origins dating back to Viking times when it was an important Norse settlement, the major gateway to mainland Scotland (Its name comes from the Norse, from *Thorsa* meaning *Thor's River*). Thurso later grew to become a market town and was noted for its trade with Scandinavian and Baltic ports from as early as the 14th century.

The importance of this trade is underlined by the fact that King David 2nd decreed that the Caithness pound weight should be the standard for all Scotland. In the 17th and 18th centuries Thurso enjoyed a considerable export trade in meal, beef, hides and fish as the local fishing resources became more fully exploited . In the early 19th century with the growth of the Caithness flagstone industry, Thurso regularly exported cargoes of paving stones throughout Britain and the continent.

Situated on the Pentland Firth in the beautiful sheltered Thurso Bay it is the most northerly town on the Scottish mainland. The bay sweeps from Holborn Head in the west to Dunnet Head in the east. Thurso has a fine harbour and beach and looks out over the Firth to the Orkney Island of Hoy and the famous towering Old Man of Hoy (A stac of rock standing out from the main island).

Just to the west of Thurso lies Scrabster, the main ferry port for Orkney.

For a town of its size, Thurso is well served with:

- A vibrant local shopping centre
- Three primary schools and one secondary school
- A college of Further and Higher education
- A number of hotels, lively bars and restuarants,
- Leisure facilities including swimming pool, tennis & squash courts, a cinema and bowling alley courts

- Numerous clubs and societies from dancing & drama to diving and from music to martial arts.
- Public library, gallery and theatre
- Railway, bus and ferry connections and airport within 30 mins.



