

# Is Scotland a country of the Arctic?

By [bellacaledonia](#) on [January 16, 2015](#) • ( 24 )



**‘Scotland is a nation of the north; it is a Nordic Scotland, it is a country of the Arctic’** argues Graham Hogg *from our friends at Lateral North*. Here he explores the old adage that *Edinburgh isn’t the Athens of the North, but the Reykjavik of the South*.

Lateral North recently attended the Arctic Circle in Reykjavik. Into its second year it brings together over 1000 delegates at the Harpa Conference Centre for discussions on the future of

the Arctic. Speakers in its first year included Ban Ki Moon and Hillary Clinton, while this year was to be headlined by the President of Iceland and Angela Merkel.

Lateral North proposes that Scotland should begin to look to the north for new resources and industries and documented this as part of their book *An Atlas of Productivity*. Here they splice together their ideas along with their experience of the conference in Iceland.



Is Scotland a country of the Arctic? That is the question that our *Atlas of Productivity* asked when we launched it back in May, and that is exactly why we were in Reykjavik. We wanted to know how Scotland was represented within the Arctic and so we took a trip to only the second Arctic Circle conference.

When we launched our *Atlas* it investigated Scotland's relationship with the Nordic and Arctic regions. Through our research it became quite apparent that we were a country of the north, a Nordic Scotland, yet it was not being reflected by our ambitions within these regions.

We are, arguably, the closest neighbour of the Arctic. It was something which was repeated throughout the British delegations presentation at the Arctic Circle. However, we (including the British delegation there) are not pursuing key opportunities that are being afforded to us by the opening up of this emerging economic region. Most people will know that the Arctic holds a wealth of oil, gas and minerals that key Arctic nations such as Canada, Russia, Denmark, Norway and USA are scrambling over ownership of (Denmark has in fact just made its biggest claim yet – it owns the North Pole).

What most people will not know though is that Arctic sea ice is receding to such an extent that shipping routes are opening up throughout the region, tourists are going in their droves to look at the polar bears and glaciers, and Russia is currently building 14 search and rescue bases along their northern coast in anticipation of this increased activity.

‘Increased Activity’ is indeed the phrase that we would use at the minimal.



NO OF SHIPS GRANTED PERMISSION TO SAIL ACROSS NORTHERN SEA ROUTE IN 2010

4

NO OF SHIPS GRANTED PERMISSION TO SAIL ACROSS NORTHERN SEA ROUTE IN 2013

204

POTENTIAL PERCENTAGE OF TIME/FUEL SAVED BY USING THE NORTHERN SEA ROUTE IN COMPARISON TO THE SUEZ CANAL

40%

TONNES OF CARGO SHIPPED ALONG NORTHERN SEA ROUTE IN 2012

1.25million

TONNES OF ANNUAL CARGO EXPECTED TO BE SHIPPED ALONG NORTHERN SEA ROUTE BY 2021

40million

PREDICTED PERCENTAGE OF WORLDWIDE CARGO USING ARCTIC WATERS BY THE YEAR 2030

25%

If we take shipping as an example there has been a huge increase in activity alone. In 2010 a mere 4 ships requested permission (because Russia, of course, charges a fee to go through ‘international waters’ close to their borders), yet in 2013, a mere 3 years later, that number had skyrocketed to 204 ships requesting permission.

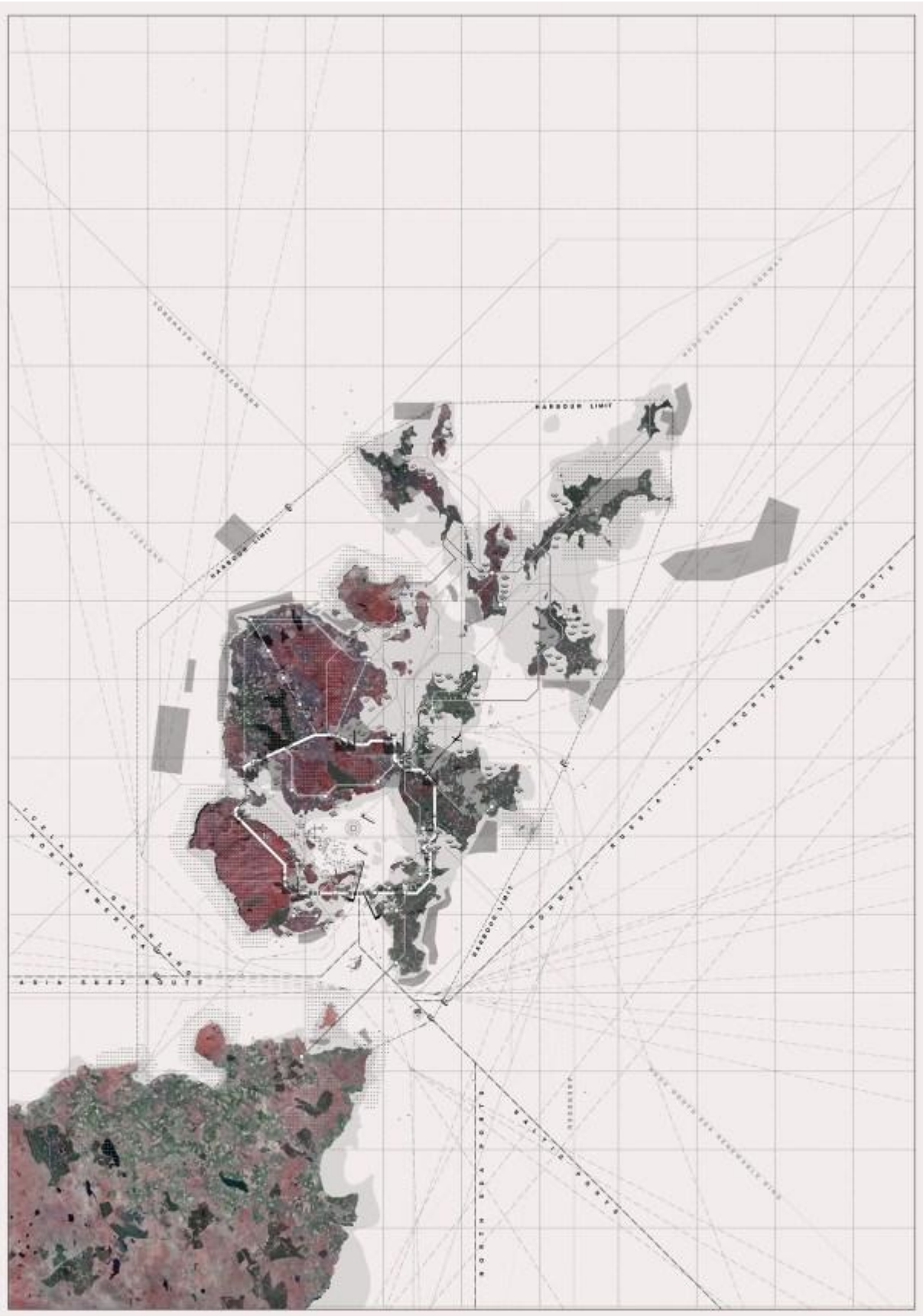
Why is this important to Scotland though? Well, to quote the British delegation we are the ‘closest neighbour of the Arctic’. We are the first significant land fall within northern Europe when coming from the Arctic. We like not to think of ourselves as a periphery of northern Europe but instead we are the gateway.



Harnessing this

increased shipping opportunity can be done in a number of ways but the most obvious is through the creation of a container terminal to capture increased trade between the east and the west. Before embarking on how this is possible though, we must first understand how shipping works within Europe.

Unlike South East Asia where all of the large cargo ships go to Singapore before cargo is distributed on smaller ships throughout the region, ships coming to Europe visit each location (Antwerp/Rotterdam/Hamburg for example) regardless of size. Herein lies our opportunity.



ORKNEY ISLANDS  
1:100,000  
0 1 5 10 KM

**KEY**

- |                            |   |                             |                              |
|----------------------------|---|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| --- SHIPPING ROUTES        | ■ LIGHT RAIL LINE                           | ■ NEW URBAN SETTLEMENT      | ⚓ PILOT EMBARKATION POINT    |
| --- TRADING ROUTES         | — WATERBUS ROUTE                            | ■ FISH FARM PRODUCTION AREA | ⚓ DIVE SITE                  |
| --- HARBOUR AUTHORITY AREA | — SUBSEA TUNNEL                             | ■ FINFISH FARM              | ⚓ CONTAINER TERMINAL         |
| --- HYDC GRID CONNECTION   | — FERRY ROUTE                               | ■ SHELLFISH FARM            | ✈ INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT      |
| --- RYA YACHT ROUTE        | — OFFSHORE ENERGY FIELD                     | ■ INDUSTRY                  | □ TRANSPORT STOP             |
| ■ NATIONAL GRID            | ■ SHALLOW WATER (<math>< 15\text{m}</math>) | ■ WASTE TO ENERGY PLANT     | □ NATIONAL RAIL CONNECTION   |
| — SUBSEA CABLE             | ■ SHH PROTECTED AREA                        | ■ HYDROGEN ENERGY STORAGE   | ⚓ NAVAL BASE                 |
| ■ SCAPA LOOP               | ■ RESERVOIR                                 | ○ SUBSTATION                | ⚓ ARCTIC COUNCIL RESCUE BASE |

Being the closest neighbour of the Arctic, Orkney could very easily become one of the largest container terminals in northern Europe and adopt the hub and spoke system that is prevalent throughout other parts of the world (see Singapore example above). Siting a container terminal within Orkney would mean that the container terminal would not only take advantage of arctic shipping but also has the opportunities of taking cargo in from across the Atlantic and for the already established shipping routes up the west coast of France heading up the west coast of Ireland and Scotland to feed into this container terminal – this could have added advantages as it ensures that the English channel would not be as congested as it normally is.

Such an industrial development would obviously affect the local community so we must first consider how Orkney is affected. We looked in detail at this in our project called Possible Orkney. A loop could be created around Scapa Flow where the ships would anchor while waiting to dock at the container terminal that sits at the gateway to the flow. This loop would carry along it, people, water, waste, energy, cargo, food and tourists ensuring that the archipelago takes advantage of this new infrastructure.

Going back to the big picture though, I hear you ask one question: why would ships decide to come through the Arctic rather than go through the traditional Suez canal route? The reason is quite simple – on average the journey is 40% quicker. If you go from Japan to northern Europe you are shaving off somewhere in the region of 60% from the journey. In the big money business of international shipping that is 40% less fuel, 40% less costs. It is a no brainer.



It is such a big opportunity that others are already forming their stance on it. Norway (Narvik), Iceland (Finnafjord) and most recently the Faroes have all investigated the possibility of hosting a large container terminal to take advantage of these changing patterns of international shipping. Scotland, you have been warned, do not miss this boat!

However, as mentioned before, there are so many other fantastic opportunities that are being afforded to Scotland by the increased activity within the Arctic.

Could Shetland become a key search and rescue base for northern Europe. The precedent is there at the moment with Russia building 14 search and rescue bases along its northern coast.



Scientific research is something which popped up throughout the British delegations presentation and this is of course another Arctic industry that Scotland could be involved with. However, throughout the Arctic region universities already run student exchange schemes to share and educate each other. University of Highlands and Islands and Aberdeen University are on this program and something we should continue to develop further as we learn more and more about the region.

While at the conference there was a French delegation (they weren't the furthest-from-the-arctic-delegation!) who used their time not to market their country and its possible involvement within the Arctic, but instead advertise a French company that takes cruise ships up to the Arctic throughout the summer. Scotland sits on the route between France/northern Europe and the Arctic so there is clear opportunities to bring this maritime industry to our coasts en route to the Arctic.



Our experience within oil extraction could play an obvious advantage, but we should begin to move away from oil and focus (like Scotland should itself) on renewable technologies. Scotland has a huge renewable industry and we should be looking to how we can take our skill set to our northern

neighbours. In Orkney again we have the European Marine Energy Centre. In Shetland we have Viking Energy, an inspiring onshore wind farm. Many other community schemes throughout the country can be used as key precedents for Arctic communities – we need only look to September 2015 to see that there is an Arctic Energy Summit in Alaska that Scotland should be represented at. We are going as Lateral North, but why don't we take a delegation to create international relationships and involve ourselves within this northern region.



The Arctic Circle also repeats again in Reykjavik in October 2015 and we'd hope to build on some of the many connections already made while there this year. Only in its second year the conference is still finding its feet, but there were some fantastic presentations from organisations such as Polarisk (<http://www.polarisk-group.com/>) and Arctic Futures (<http://arcticfutures.com/>) that added a different dynamic to the conference – more of that is needed.



We believe that there is a massive amount of opportunities within the Arctic for Scotland. A lot of our ideas are big and bold, but is that not what the Scotland of the present is? It is big and bold. We are asking the question of who we are and what we want to be. Our identity is being questioned and now is the opportunity for us to throw in our tuppence.



Scotland is a nation of the north; it is a Nordic Scotland, it is a country of the Arctic. We should no longer be thinking of ourselves as a country on the periphery of northern Europe, but instead a gateway to it. We challenge you and our government to join us in October 2015 in Reykjavik for the third Arctic Circle – let's take a Scottish delegation. Let's show what Scotland can contribute to this economically emerging region. Let's take advantage of New Northern Frontiers.

