

Mysterious red flares

The Oradian
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Three red flares sparked off a full scale search in the Pentland Firth on Tuesday.

The air-sea search in a gale, involved a lifeboat, helicopter, plane, and two coast rescue companies.

However, the emergency operation drew a blank. No vessel in distress was located and a coastguard spokesman said: "It's a complete mystery."

The alarm was raised when a coast watcher at Barswick in South Ronaldsay reported two red flares. He sighted a third as he was speaking to Pentland Coastguards at Kirkwall.

The flares appeared to have been put up somewhere between Stroma and South Ronaldsay.

The Longhope lifeboat was launched and was joined by a Nimrod aircraft from Kinloss and an RAF helicopter. On land, Broughness coast rescue company combed the South Ronaldsay coastline. Their Duncansby counterparts were also turned out on the other side of the Firth but a combined sweep of the entire area proved fruitless.

A coastguard spokesman said afterwards that there had been no reports of any vessel in distress. He dismissed a hoax as unlikely and said that even if someone had got into difficulties and then found they no longer required assistance, a report would have been made to the coastguards.

A scaled down search involving the coast rescue units at Broughness and Longhope was continuing, as we went to press.

Kirkwall