

Explore the Solway

A unique heritage landscape



Solway Coast
National
Landscape

INTRODUCTION

A watery wonderland underpins the distinctive character of England's Solway Coast. Geological processes and human endeavour have created the landscape we see today – a mosaic of marshes, raised peat bogs, wet grasslands, flooded gravel pits, sand dunes and mudflats that brim with wildlife.

The variety of habitats is reflected in the huge numbers of birds that visit this area every year, aided by the creation of areas of nature conservation where you can enjoy the wildlife spectacle at first hand.

For those seeking the treasures of the past, you will find the history of the Solway is written large upon the landscape in the form of Roman remains, churches and various defensive structures.



*St John's Church,
Newton Arlosh*



*King Edward I statue,
Burgh-by-Sands*

This booklet is in two sections.

Escape to Nature recommends places where you can spot wildlife, take in spectacular scenery and enjoy being in natural surroundings.

Delve into History looks at the rich heritage of the Solway Coast and suggests places you can visit to find out more.

*Dunlin in flight
©Judith Rogers*



ESCAPE TO NATURE



Cardurnock Peninsula

The raised mosses of the Solway are a rare and internationally important peatland habitat.

Healthy bogs are not only vital habitats for specialist plants, insects and other creatures, they are also huge carbon sinks that lock away carbon and prevent it escaping into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide.

As well as raised mires, the Solway Coast is known for its gorse-covered grassland and dunes – habitats that attract specialised species such as natterjack toads, stonechats and barn owls.

Abandoned pits have been reclaimed by nature and, with help from local conservation bodies, have since become thriving wildlife habitats.



Barn owl



Flower-rich meadow

All these habitats can be explored and enjoyed at your leisure through visiting the main sites outlined in this guide.



Lily pond, Bowness Common

1. Drumburgh Moss



Cumbria
Wildlife Trust

A peaceful oasis where curlews call, dragonflies dart and short-eared owls hunt over the mire. Various bog plants can be found here including cotton grass and the carnivorous sundew. Longhorn cattle and Exmoor ponies are used to churn up the matted peaty soil and improve plant diversity.

Drumburgh Moss is reached by a 1¼ mile (2 km) unsurfaced road from Drumburgh village, with parking near the information shelter. A waymarked trail leads to a viewing platform from where there are fine views of the surrounding area. Other trails lead further into the reserve with another entrance/exit near Whitriggles.



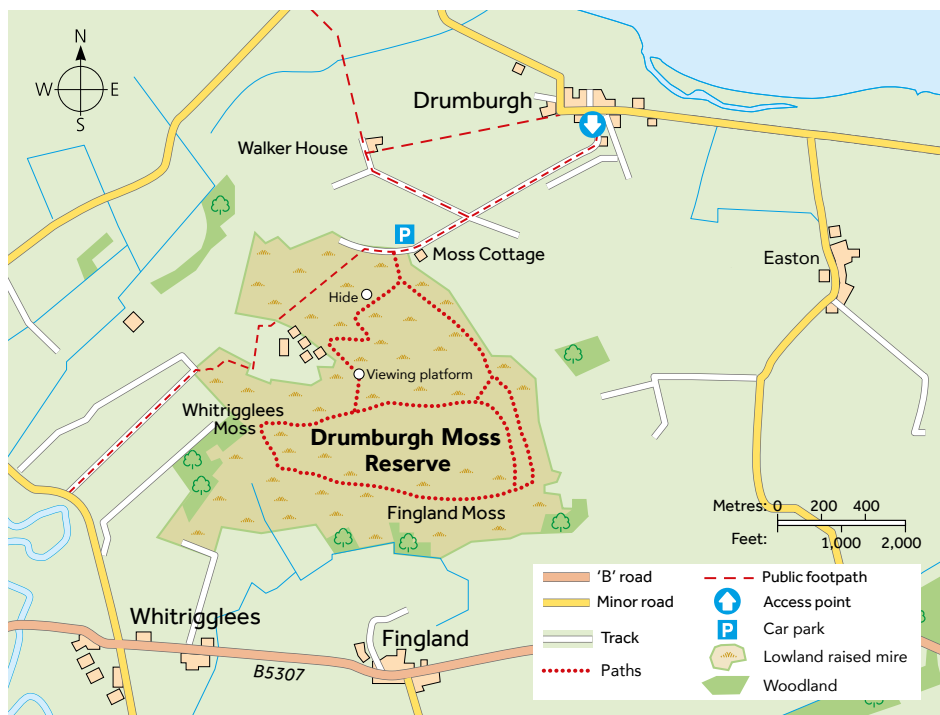
*Bird hide,
Drumburgh Moss*



Grasshopper warbler

Drumburgh viewing platform





Exmoor ponies

Things to do

- Spot Exmoor ponies and longhorn cattle grazing on the moss.
- Climb the viewing platform to survey the watery landscape.
- Visit the hide to learn more about the reserve's wildlife.

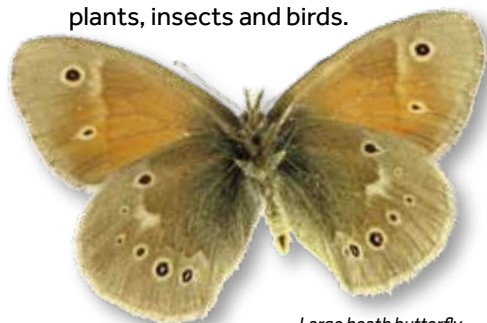
Essential information

- Part of the site is on surfaced tracks.
- Information panels at entrance point and in the bird hide.
- Dogs must be kept on a lead at all times.

2. Glasson Moss

This lowland peat bog is now a restored wetland paradise, brimming with wildlife.

The moss was once heavily damaged by peat extraction and drainage, but Natural England is working to restore the site by raising water levels to allow special sphagnum mosses to grow and create a healthy environment for plants, insects and birds.



Large heath butterfly

Glasson Moss viewing platform



Adder

A boardwalk leads to a viewing platform with panoramic views over the surrounding land. Information panels describe the importance of lowland mosses and how restoration work has created the flourishing bog that you see today.

There are several access points around the reserve with parking areas to the west and south.





Things to do

- Climb the viewing platform.
- Follow the circular trail near the viewing platform.
- Look out for lizards scurrying on the boardwalks on hot days.
- Enjoy the spectacle of butterflies and dragonflies flitting about in the summer months.

Essential information

- Level access on boardwalks from western access point.
- Information panels at entrance points and on viewing platform.
- Picnic areas.
- Dogs should be kept on a lead in bird breeding season.

Boardwalk at Glasston Moss



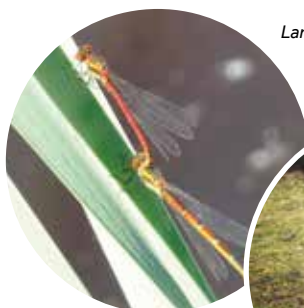
3. RSPB Campfield Marsh



Campfield Marsh is one of the most important sites for wetland birds in the UK. The reserve is made up of a kaleidoscope of habitats – freshwater lagoons, scrapes, wet grasslands, raised mires, salt marsh, mudflats and estuarine foreshore – that acts as a magnet for thousands of birds.

From October to March, this wetland paradise is literally awash with birdlife. Huge skeins of geese passing overhead to their winter-feeding grounds are a common sight. Winter visitors include pink-footed, greylag and barnacle geese, as well as redshank, dunlin and curlew.

By the spring, hedgerows and gorse bushes have burst into life, along with the trilling sounds of robins, blackbirds, thrushes, and warblers. On the saltmarsh, you can find gatherings of redshank, dunlin, and curlew, while teal, wigeon, and pintail occupy the flooded fields. Along the foreshore, you may also spot lapwing, curlew, and redshank.



Large red damselflies



Discovery Zone

© Laura Earl



Shelduck

In recent years, nesting platforms have been built to encourage ospreys to breed at the reserve.

Marsh harriers are resident all year round, whilst a more recent arrival is the little egret.

It is not only birds that are attracted to this wetland paradise. Dragonflies and damselflies can be seen hovering over the water, lizards scurrying across the boardwalks, and you may even spy an adder basking in a sunny spot.

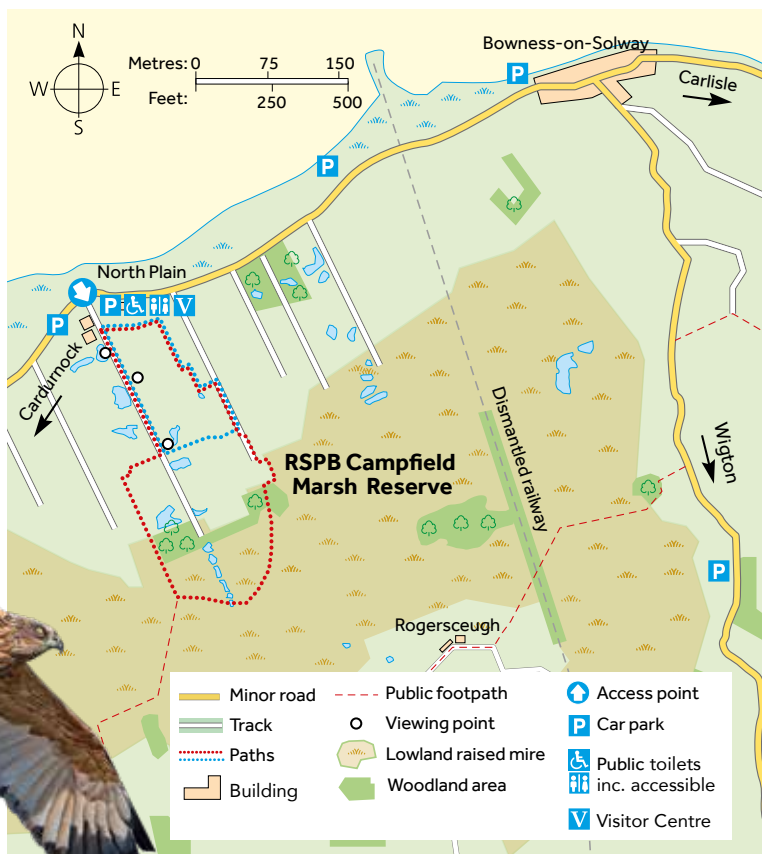


Clay dabbins at Campfield Marsh

Main hide at Campfield Marsh



Marsh harrier



Things to do

- Go pond dipping and bug hunting in the Discovery Zone.
- Visit the viewing points to spot an array of waders and other wetland birds.
- Peer inside a reconstructed clay dabbin cottage and find out how these unusual houses were built.
- Learn more about local birdlife in the Solway Wetlands Visitor Centre.

Essential information

- Parking with disabled bays.
- Visitor centre and exhibition area.
- Access to the main hide is down a ½ mile-long track.
- Two designated walking trails – a longer red route and a shorter blue circular route.
- Self-service tea and coffee available.
- Disabled toilet on site with baby changing facilities.
- Dogs are welcome on public rights of way but must be kept on a lead at all times.

4. Bowness-on-Solway Nature Reserve



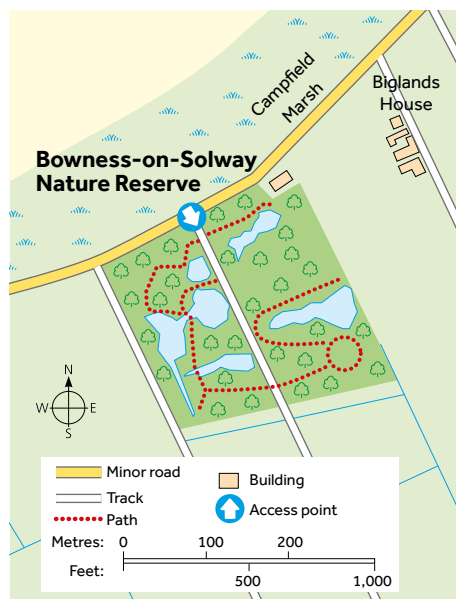
Cumbria
Wildlife Trust



Blackcap

Several old gravel pits have been transformed into a haven for wildlife by Cumbria Wildlife Trust. The quarry ponds are alive with great crested newts and dragonflies, butterflies

flit about in the open glades, whilst warblers, blackcap and whitethroat breed in the scrubland and fill the air with bird song.



Things to do

- Venture deep into the reserve along winding paths and boardwalks.
- Spot aquatic insects and amphibians lurking in the ponds
- Identify woodland birds from their birdsongs.

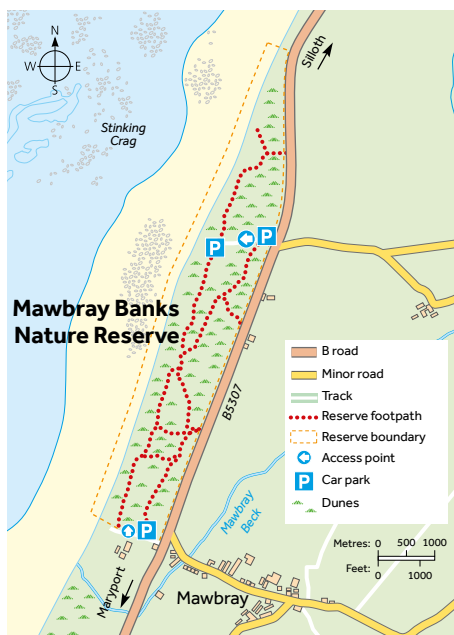
Essential information

- Limited car parking.
- The reserve is accessed by narrow footpaths, some with steep sections.
- Dogs must be kept on a lead at all times.

5. Mawbray Banks Nature Reserve



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An important nature reserve where dune grasslands merge into dune heath – a rare habitat and one that is vitally important for ground-nesting birds such as skylark and ringed plover. This is also one of the few places where the endangered natterjack toad breeds in shallow pools on the reserve. Belted Galloway cattle help to manage the reserve by churning the ground to allow wildflowers to germinate and by grazing on unwanted plants to keep scrub at bay.



Natterjack toad

Essential information

- Parking areas at north and south sides of the reserve.
- Dogs must be kept under close control at all times.

Things to do

- Breathe in fresh air on a walk through this coastal habitat.
- Be careful not to disturb ground-nesting birds.
- Look out for Belted Galloway cattle grazing on the dunes.
- Find the concrete 'arrows' that guided pilots towards practice ranges in the Solway during the Second World War.

Belted Galloway cattle

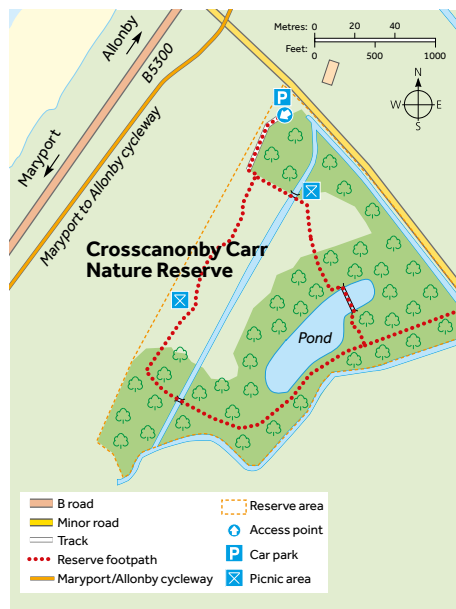


6. Crosscanonby Carr Nature Reserve



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A wetland reserve of ponds, stream, wet woodland and herb-rich meadows forming a mosaic of habitats that teem with life. A path around the reserve takes in all the various habitats.



Things to do

- Explore the reserve on a circular trail.
- Spot a variety of birds including long-tailed tits and stonechats.
- Enjoy a picnic in the open glades.

Essential information

- Small car park at western end of reserve.
- Suitable for wheelchairs, mobility scooters and pushchairs.
- Picnic tables.
- Dogs must be kept on a lead at all times.

Banded demoiselle



DELVE INTO HISTORY



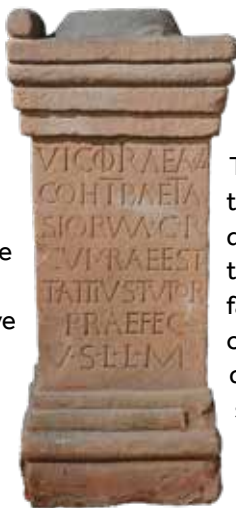
St Michael's Church, Burgh-by-Sands

For centuries, the Solway estuary has been a frontier zone, starting with the building of a Roman fort at Kirkbride around 100 AD.

In later years, Hadrian's Wall was built between Wallsend in the east and Bowness-on-Solway in the west. Roman forts were built at Bowness (*Maia*), Drumburgh (*Congavata*), Burgh-by-Sands (*Aballava*) and Carlisle (*Uxellodunum*). Further down the coast, the Romans established forts at Beckfoot and Maryport, with smaller milefortlets stationed in between.

Norse people began to infiltrate the area in the 10th century. Many place names are indicative of Norse settlement (such as Allonby). Recently, the largest Viking hall ever found in Britain was discovered at High Tarns near Mawbray.

With the arrival of the Normans in the late 11th century, churches and other stone buildings often incorporated Roman masonry as can be seen at St Michael's Church at Burgh-by-Sands. In 1150, Holme Cultram Abbey was founded as a daughter house of Melrose Abbey in Scotland and, from this time on, monastic activities began to shape the landscape.



The Anglo-Scottish Wars of the early 14th century targeted the undefended abbeys of northern England. The continuing threat led to the building of numerous defensive structures such as tower houses, bastles (fortified farmhouses) and thick-walled church towers that could double-up as places of refuge such as at Burgh-by-Sands.

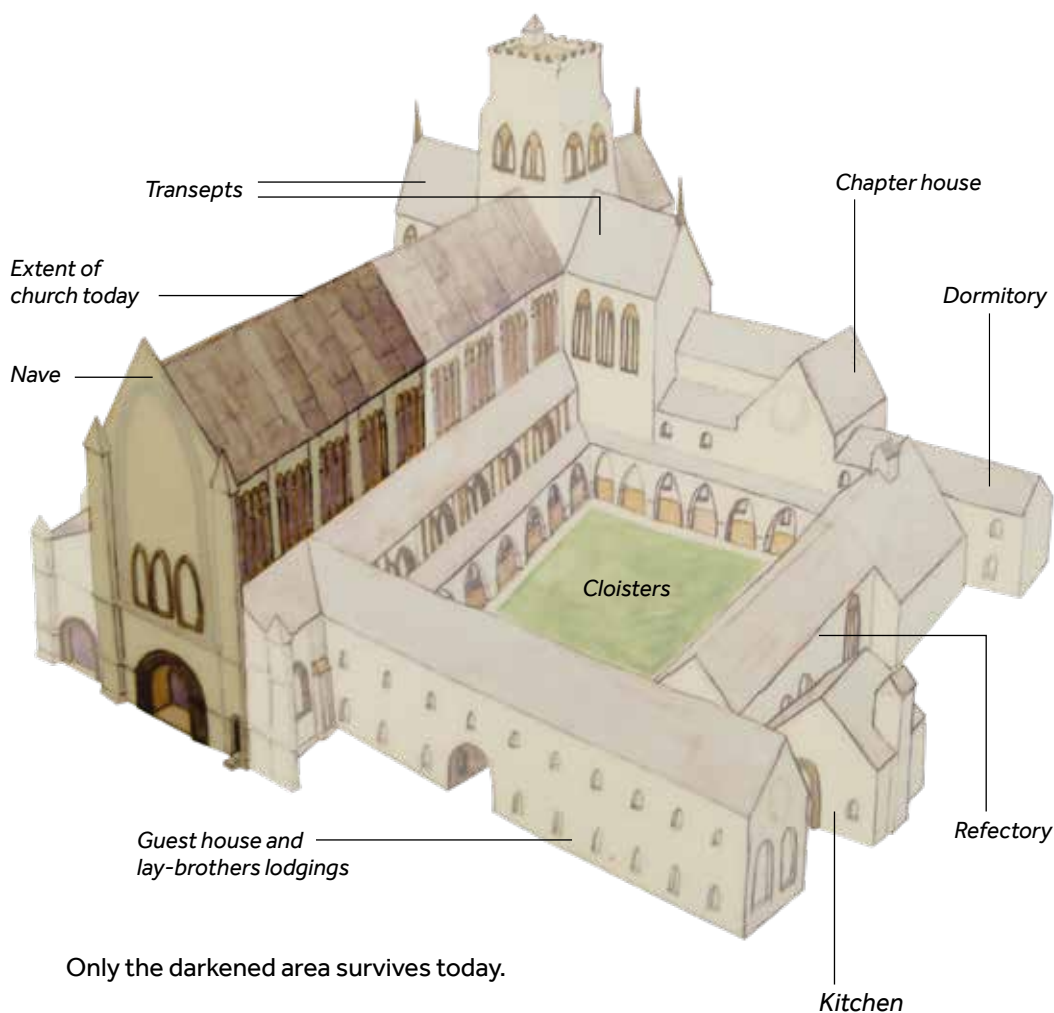
Roman altar Senhouse Museum

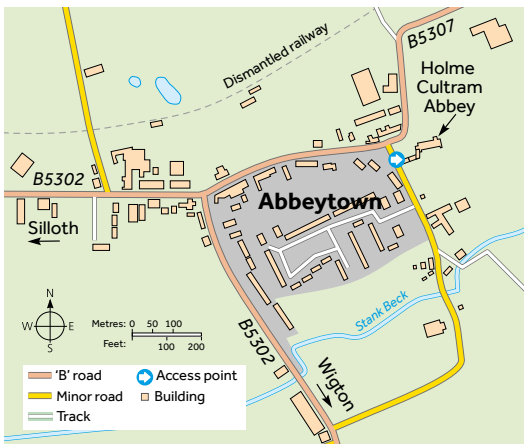
7. Holme Cultram Abbey

The abbey was founded around 1150 by Cistercian monks from Melrose Abbey in Scotland. Once the monks arrived, they began to cultivate the land by draining the marshes, felling trees, planting crops, introducing sheep and establishing granges (monastic farms). The abbey grew wealthy on the proceeds, extending

its influence over the whole area until the Act of Dissolution in 1538. The abbey buildings were demolished, but the church still remains as a place of worship.

An interactive exhibition area explains how the monastery transformed the landscape into what we see today.





Things to do

- Explore the church and its surroundings.
- Learn how archaeology helps in understanding the role of the abbey in medieval times.

Essential information

- Limited road parking outside.
- Ground-floor toilet accessed through the exhibition area.

8. Milefortlet 21 and Saltpans



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Milefortlet 21 is one of several small Roman structures that were built to defend the Cumbrian coast. The turf rampart and ditches are clearly visible, as well as an east–west road crossing through the centre.

The milecastle overlooks historic saltpans – remarkable survivors from an age when salt-making was a highly important industry. There were many saltpans along the Cumbrian coast but these at Crossscanonby are the best-preserved. The saltpans were built around 1650 by the Senhouses of Maryport.



Crossscanonby Saltpans

Things to do

- Imagine being a Roman soldier stationed at this milefortlet, keeping watch over the sea.
- Enjoy a birds-eye view of the medieval saltpans from the top of Swarthy Hill.

Essential information

- Small car park at southern end.
- Short accessible uphill walk to the milefortlet.



Roman Milefortlet 21



9. *Alauna* and Senhouse Museum, Maryport



Dramatically sited on cliffs overlooking the Solway Firth, this award-winning museum is adjacent to the Roman fort of *Alauna*, first established around AD 72. Excavations in 1870 uncovered numerous altars to Jupiter that had been re-used as foundations for a large building. These altars and many other Roman artefacts are now on display in the museum.

Outside is a reconstructed observation station, complete with information panels that describe what can be seen from all four sides of the tower.



Things to do

- Lots of family-friendly activities within the museum.
- Climb the observation tower to view the fort from above.
- Walk down the cliffs to the newly landscaped promenade along the sea front.

Essential information

- Adjacent car park.
- Suitable for wheelchairs, mobility scooters and pushchairs.
- Picnic tables.



Aerial view of the fort at Maryport.



Solway Coast National Landscape

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Remember the Countryside Code

Respect other people:

- Consider the local community and other people enjoying the outdoors
- Leave gates and property as you find them and follow paths unless wider access is available

Protect the natural environment:

- Leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under effective control

Enjoy the outdoors:

- Plan ahead and be prepared

This booklet includes suggested walking routes. Solway Coast National Landscape is not responsible for issues arising as a result of conditions on the footpaths and roads.

