

New Brighton Lighthouse

The Lighthouse at New Brighton is also known as the Perch Rock Lighthouse, and is situated where the Mersey Estuary opens out into Liverpool Bay. Before the lighthouse was built there was a wooden 'perch' erected upon the rock, formerly known as the Black Rock, by the city of Liverpool in 1683.

The rock was a serious hazard to navigation because of its close proximity to the North Channel which was once the main channel used by shipping on the approach to the Port of Liverpool. Ships that passed the perch were charged 6d for maintenance costs, which were high in this case, the perch often being washed away by gales. In 1821 one of the Liverpool Pilot Boats crashed into the perch.

Building was started on the lighthouse in 1827 and it took 3 years to complete. The first stone was laid by Thomas Littledale, the Mayor of Liverpool, on the 8th June 1827. The lighthouse was built by Tomkinson and Company, to a similar design as the famous Eddystone Lighthouse of Plymouth, using granite quarried on the Island of Anglesey. Each stone was carved to interlock with its neighbor, and the whole lot was cemented together using 'Puzzellani' a substance derived from volcanic ash from Mount Etna in Sicily.

The tower rises 90 feet above the rock, the first half of which is solid. To gain access when the tide is out one needs a ladder to reach up to the first of the 15 iron rungs built in to the side of the tower, these then lead up to the door. A spiral staircase leads to the keepers accommodation consisting of a galley/kitchen, a bathroom, a living room and a bedroom and then up to the lamp room. The lamp was of the revolving kind and first shone on the 1st March 1830. The lighthouse was later connected up to the mains electricity. The lamp last shone on the 1st October 1973, a victim of modern navigation technology. The lighthouse was bought by Mr. Norman Kingham for a nominal sum, on the condition he maintained the building. It was used for a time as a honeymoon suite!



North Wirral Coastal Park

The North Wirral Coastal Park is a linear park based on the route of the coastline embracing public open space, common land, natural foreshore and sand-dunes. The park lies between Dove Point at Meols and the Kings Parade at New Brighton.



At 4 miles in length and 400 acres in area it is Wirral's largest park. It is managed by the Metropolitan Borough of Wirral Ranger service

The North Wirral Coastal Park provides for a wide variety of recreational activities, some of the more popular being: sailing, sea angling, swimming, cycling, picnicking, walking, jogging, ball games, bird

watching and horse riding. Views of Bidston, Caldy and the Welsh Hills, and out over the Irish Sea add interest to the area for the visitor

Ranger Service

The North Wirral Coastal Park Rangers are based in Leasowe Lighthouse. The Ranger Service has been present in the park since its creation in 1986. In addition to looking after and managing the park, they are available to help you when you visit the park. Whether you are a school group wanting to do a seashore search or a youth group wanting to do a practical environmental task, they can usually help. The Rangers organise a programme of public walks and other events which are usually free, and they also are available to provide a talk to your school or group on a variety of topics including natural history and local history.



Facilities

The North Wirral Coastal Park and its immediate area are very well provisioned with facilities. 8 car parking areas, 3 toilet blocks (one summer only), an extensive footpath network and public bridleways, 4 picnic areas, a childrens' play area at Derby Pool Picnic Area, 2 refreshment kiosks, a pitch and putt course, and bathing beaches patrolled in the summer by lifeguards.

Natural History

The North Wirral Coast or Foreshore is one of the country's top sites for wildlife particularly wading birds visiting during the winter or on migration in autumn or spring; in recognition of this it has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This status legally protects the area against developments which may significantly damage it's wildlife value. Birds that can commonly be seen, particularly as the tide floods in, are Oystercatcher, Redshank, Dunlin, Sanderling, Turnstone, Lapwing, Bar-tailed Godwit and Curlew. These birds visit the North Wirral foreshore because of the high numbers of fish, worms, crustaceans etc. that are found in the sand and mud. Commonly found are Shore Crabs, Shrimps, Prawns, Lugworm and Ragworm, Cockles, Tellin and Peppery Furrow shells, and such fish as Gobies, Blennies, Sole, Plaice, Flounder, Dab and Pipefish.



Landward of the sea wall are areas of sand-dune and dune meadow where Sea Holly, Marram Grass, Storksbill, Burnet Rose and rarities like the Isle of Man Cabbage can be found. Feeding off these plants can be found the very rare British sub-species of the Belted Beauty Moth, this area is one of its two only known sites in the world.

Areas of reed-bed and marsh are common with such plants as Reed-mace, and the rare Buttonweed, introduced from South Africa, and birds like the Reed Bunting and Reed Warbler can be found. New areas of wetland have been created to restore some of the areas former status.

Local History

Leasowe Lighthouse was built in 1763 by the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board as one of 4 leading lights (or beacons). Two were built at Hoylake, then a major fishing port, and 2 at Leasowe. The lower light at Leasowe was very soon destroyed by the sea and it was replaced by a lighthouse built on Bidston Hill in 1771. The lamp last shone at Leasowe on July 15th 1908, and after a period as a tea room the building remained derelict until 1989. The Last Keeper at Leasowe was a Mrs. Williams, the only known woman lighthouse keeper in her day. The other main landmark in the area is Leasowe Castle which was built in 1593 by

Ferdinando, the 5th. Earl of Derby. The original octagonal tower was probably built as a viewing platform for the famous Wallasey races, the forerunner of the Derby race.

The park has a more ancient history going back at least 5000 years when the area was forested, including parts of what is now foreshore. The remains of these trees, known as the submerged forest, can occasionally be seen at Dove Point, Meols, between the slipway and the groyne. The area was inhabited by stone-age people at that time and the remains of their houses have been found on the beach. Meols, which means 'sand hills' in Old Norse, the language of the Vikings, has been an important site from Roman times right up to fairly modern times, most likely because it was once the entrance to both the Mersey and the Dee Estuaries.

This century the area has seen the rise and fall of 'Bungalow Town'. The fields around Pasture Road, Moreton, boomed with a shanty town between the two world wars. This was in response to a housing shortage following the soldiers return from the war. The houses were sometimes old railway carriages (still with wheels!) others were built on stilts; this was necessary because the area regularly flooded on high tides. Eventually the place was declared unfit for living because of the unsanitary conditions; houses were built in Moreton to rehouse the residents, and bungalow town disappeared.

The Friends of Leasowe Lighthouse

The Friends of Leasowe Lighthouse are committed to the restoration and development of Leasowe Lighthouse and its environs, for the purpose of education and public enjoyment.

If you are interested in becoming a Friend contact the Lighthouse for details.

The Friends maintain a webcam on the top of the lighthouse.

The Friends of North Wirral Coastal Park

The Friends of North Wirral Coastal Park are a voluntary community group who are dedicated to the care of the park from the Derby Pool at Leasowe right through to Dove Point in Meols. They undertake a series of practical management tasks throughout the year and assist in providing a forum for public consultation with reference to major developments within the park. Contact the Rangers at Leasowe Lighthouse for more details.

How to get there

The Coastal Park lies within half of a mile of the M53 motorway, and is reached locally by the A551 (Leasowe Road) and A554 (Bayswater Road).

Access by Public Transport is good, the area being served by Grove Road (Wallasey), Leasowe, Moreton, and Meols Merseyrail Stations, and with bus routes along Leasowe Road, Pasture Road and Harrison Drive.

North Wirral Sand Dunes

The sand dunes of the North Wirral Coastal Park are situated between Leasowe Bay and the Gunsite Picnic Area. They are bordered on one side by the Wallasey Golf Club, and on the other by the Leasowe Golf Club. There are also some relic sand dunes at Dovepoint in Meols. Sand Dunes are one of the most threatened habitats in Britain. They once formed a natural defence against the sea and gave shelter from the strong sea winds. Recently they have been subject to considerable erosion. In order to conserve the dune habitat, we need to understand the process of dune formation.

The Formation of Sand Dunes

Sand is re-deposited by longshore drift. Dry sand is blown up the beach by the prevailing winds from the sea by a process known as saltation. This is when sand grains are lifted off the ground by high winds and moved inland 'leapfrog' fashion.

Sand becomes trapped in driftwood, seaweed, and on berms (sand ridges) usually at the high spring tide line. Plants rapidly colonise the area, the first notably being the grasses - Couch Grass, then Lyme Grass followed by Marram Grass. Marram Grass has adapted to survive in the arid, unsheltered environment of the dune ridges. It has leaves that fold to conserve water and long roots to tap underground supplies. Other plants include Sea Rocket and Sea Sandwort. The plants stabilise the sand, which results in further deposition and growth of the dune system.

The first dunes to develop are known as 'embryo dunes'. As more sand accumulates the embryo dunes join up to form fore-dunes, otherwise known as 'yellow dunes'. As more vegetation becomes established the increased decaying matter alters the coloration to grey. These dune ridges are then known as 'grey-dunes'. These older dunes are less exposed and enable more species of plant to colonise e.g. Sea Spurge, Isle of Man Cabbage and Ragwort. Further inland, shrubs and trees such as Hawthorn and Balsam Poplar grow.

Due to the lack of windblown sand that would normally replenish existing dunes and create new embryo dunes, the dunes at the Gunsite area of the North Wirral Coastal Park are classed as fixed dunes. Pressure from humans and the weather has exposed large areas of bare sand. The wind is then channeled along these eroded areas, which then forms blowouts. To prevent further erosion and encourage sand accumulation, boardwalks have been laid through the dunes for public access and barriers from used Christmas trees have been 'planted' to trap windblown sand. These measures will hopefully ensure the conservation and preservation of such a unique and precious habitat.

The Gun Site

Immediately to the rear of the sand dunes is an area known as the Old Gun Site. This was once a World War Two anti-aircraft gun site but now is used as a picnic area as well as providing a home to wildlife in its grassland, woodland and shrubby habitats.

How to get there

The easiest route is to take the New Brighton exit from junction 1 on the M53 motorway. The third turning on the left leads into Green Lane, which in turn leads to the Gun Site car parks. It is possible to continue further, through the dunes, to the Sea Front car park.

North Wirral Intertidal Habitats

At first sight the sand and mud is devoid of life, but on closer examination especially in areas where the surface is wet or muddy, you will find many forms of life.

The animals that live in this habitat need to be able to burrow to escape predators, many construct burrows and line them to prevent them from collapsing. The many small holes on the surface of the mud or sand are the entrances to these burrows.

The most likely animal you are to see evidence of is the lugworm. Look for a 'worm cast' on the surface and nearby a small hole or depression - between these two is a 'U' shaped burrow with a Lugworm living in it. The worm eats any food particles that fall into the depression and excretes the undigested sand out the other end every 40-50 minutes. It breathes by pumping water through the burrow in the opposite direction, over the gills on the side of its body. Other worms to see are Ragworm and Sand Mason Worm.

Another common animal to find is the Cockle. The small shells of this mollusc litter the beach, but the animal when alive lives burrowed in the sand, with only two tubes reaching up to the surface of the sand to feed and breathe with. It does this when the tide is in and can suck in food particles from the surface of the sand, or filter out plankton, microscopic animals floating in the sea. They also have a muscular foot, which can dig the animal into the sand should danger appear, e.g. a long billed bird like the Oystercatcher. The Cockle belongs to a group of animals called 'bivalves' so called because they have two shells surrounding their body. Other bivalves you are likely to see are: tellin, mussel, razor, trough shell, and sand gapers.

Another type of mollusc are the 'gastropods', or sea snails, which have only one shell which is often spiraled. The one you are most likely to find on the sand is the Laver-spire Shell, but at 2-3mm long you will have to look closely!

The Strandline

At the top of the beach you will usually find a line of debris or rubbish washed up and left by the last high tide. This is a good place to hunt for shells etc. but be careful and wear gloves.

One of the objects you may find is a 'mermaid's purse'. This is the empty egg case of a Skate or a Dogfish. Another common find is the mass of egg cases of the Whelk (a large sea snail), which looks like a bathroom sponge. Each mass will contain the egg cases of several female Whelks, and from each egg case will hatch 10-20 Whelks.

The sea potato is the empty skeleton of the Common Heart Urchin, a type of sea urchin that is adapted to burrow through sand. When alive it is covered in spines, some of these with spade like ends that it uses to dig through the sand.

Rock Pools

Pools, especially rock pools are perhaps the most exiting habitat on the beach to study. With the aid of a dip net you can catch a variety of fish, prawns and shrimps. Rock pools can be found anywhere along the coast where there is concrete or stone sea-defences.

The commonest fish you are likely to find are young flatfish, e.g. Plaice, Sole, Flounder or Dab. These are hard to see because they are camouflaged i.e. they look like sand, and they often partially bury themselves in the sand with just their eyes showing. Other fish to be seen are Sand Eels, Gobies and Blennies. Gobies are likely to be hidden under stones, and again the purpose is the same, to avoid being eaten by a bird or larger fish.

Two other animals you will see in pools are prawns and shrimps, shrimps preferring sandy-bottomed pools and prawns rocky-bottomed pools. These animals are 'crustaceans', a group which includes crabs and lobsters to barnacles and woodlice! Prawns can be distinguished from shrimps by their more pointed heads.

The crab is one animal that everyone associates with the seashore, and they may be found under seaweed or rocks The commonest one is the Shore Crab or Green Crab, and can be found up to 10cm across. Some of the crabs are very soft. These crabs have just molted (shed their shell) and the new shell has not hardened yet as it takes a few days. Many crabs appear to be dead but these are often just the empty shells left behind.

The rocks will be covered in a mixture of barnacles or seaweed. The seaweed, a highly evolved type of algae, uses the rock to anchor to and to prevent itself being washed up by the waves. The commonest seaweeds around these coasts are the 'wracks". You will find Spiral Wrack, Bladder Wrack and Serrated Wrack. These in turn are eaten by a sea snail called a winkle or periwinkle, which uses its sandpaper like tongue to scrape off bits of plant to eat.

If the tide is very low you may be lucky enough to find a starfish. These animals are slow moving but very strong with their many suckered feet they can pull apart a mussel shell, upon

which they feed. Sea anemones can also be found attached to the rocks, these are animals that use tentacles with stinging cells to catch their prey.

Wirral Country Park

For over 70 years, from the height of the Victorian era onwards, a busy railway linked Hooton, on the main Chester-to-Birkenhead line, to West Kirby, 12 miles away at Wirral's north westerly corner. For 7 of those miles the line ran close to the Dee Estuary, diverted there, away from his estate, by a rich landowner.



Steam trains brought townspeople out to Parkgate and the seaside on Cheap Day Excursions; and took back to the cities Wirral's early potatoes, rattling milk churns and coal from Neston Colliery.

But by 1962 the line was closed. The seaside resorts had long since silted up, the colliery was shut, the farms were being covered by houses, and the car had replaced the train.

For a while the track lay derelict. But in 1973, backed by money from the Countryside Commission, and after a great deal of work, the old railway line was opened as Wirral Country Park. It was the first designated Country Park in Britain.



The Dee Estuary: A Special Place

Wirral Country Park Visitor Centre at Thurstaston is open all year round and contains an information and sales desk where you can find out what's on, pick up leaflets and books of special interest or simply talk to the Rangers or Information Staff. You can buy refreshments at the adjacent snack bar, use the toilets or visit the bird hide and small exhibition area. Outside again, relax, play, picnic, horse ride or go for a stroll. Keep your eyes peeled and there's always something to see, whatever the season.

Sense of Space

Wirral Country Park is a place of contrasts. Badgers and Foxes hunt the quieter parts, birds nest in the dense hedges or feed on the berries in winter, and you may see up to 10 kinds of butterfly in summer. Head for the 60 feet high, boulder-clay cliffs and look out over the Dee Estuary and you'll smell the tang of mud and salt, feel the sea breeze and get a sense of space quite unlike the enclosed, inland Wirral Way.

The Dee Estuary dominates the park from Neston to West Kirby. Formed by a tongue of ice pushing in from the Irish Sea during the last Ice Age (between 25,000 and 13,000 years ago), in Roman times and the Middle Ages the estuary was busy with sailing ships heading for Chester. Today the Dee Estuary is one of the north-west's last surviving wildernesses. Gaze across its 31,500 acres to the Welsh shore, 5 miles away, and on a clear day you can see the

familiar outline of Moel Famau in the Clwydian Hills. The estuary's ever-changing light, broad vistas and westerly sunsets reflected in the mudflats and the sea are a constant delight.

Vital Link

Look more carefully and the estuary teems with life. The miles of bare mud and saltmarsh are twice as fertile as the best agricultural land, rich with nutrients washed down by the Dee. Ragworm, Lugworm, cockles, shrimp-like creatures and tiny spire-shells live in the sticky silt in incredible numbers hundreds of thousands per square yard. They in turn provide food for thousands of sea-birds: the waders and wildfowl that make the estuary so important.

The Dee Estuary is a vital link in a chain, a fuelling station for migrating birds like Knot, Dunlin and Oystercatcher which fatten up here on their annual journeys around the globe. In spring they stop off en-route for their breeding grounds in arctic Canada, Greenland, Iceland and the USSR; and in autumn they moult and rest here on the way back to their winter quarters in southern Europe and Africa. Others remain all winter.

Life Between the Tides

As the tides alternately expose and cover the mudflats, so the wheeling flocks of birds move in harmony about the estuary. It's not daylight but the tides that determine when they feed and when they roost. Favourite feeding grounds for waders are Dawpool Bank off Heswall, and Caldy Blacks, just off Thurston; while Hilbre and Red Rocks are two of the better-known roosting areas. Take care not to disturb the birds.

Many other species of bird nest on the estuary; among others, look out for are Redshanks, Shelducks, Lapwings, Skylarks, Meadow Pipits and Terns. And, particularly at high spring-tides, you may see birds of prey like Peregrines, Hen Harriers and daytime-hunting Short-eared Owls. The Dee Estuary is not only a priceless and beautiful wilderness but also a place of vital international importance. We all have a duty to protect it.

...Around the Year

Spring

- Days lengthen and waders in bright summer plumage stop at Dee Estuary on way to Arctic to breed. Wheatears return.
- Fox and badger cubs emerge from their dens.
- Toads, frogs and newts spawn in the ponds. 'Pondwatch' and pond-dipping.
- First butterflies appear and Dog Violets, Buttercups and Primroses flower.
- Beach cleaning parties begin.

Summer

- Up to 10 species of butterfly in park. Dragonflies and damselflies lay eggs in ponds.
- Thousands of finger-nail sized froglets and toadlets emerge from ponds and head for undergrowth.
- Birds feeding newly-hatched young. Fledglings best left where they are.
- Children's and adults' activities including: pond-dipping, seashore searches and guided walks and talks.

Autumn

- Summer bird visitors leave: warblers, swallows, swifts return to Africa.
- Waders and wildfowl, with young, returning from arctic breeding grounds, at peak numbers. Some pass through, some stay.
- 'Fungal forays' with the Rangers. Mushrooms, fairy rings and bracket fungi.

- Seabirds' passage off Wirral's Irish Sea coast, especially spectacular during gales.

Winter

- Hardest time of year for wildlife; little daylight and food. Shore sometimes freezes. Many creatures die.
- Redwings and Fieldfares from Scandinavia visit gardens. Stock bird tables and provide unfrozen water.
- Frogs, toads, hedgehogs hibernate. Foxes, Badgers, squirrels, bats feed on good days.
- Look for footprints early on snowy mornings. Follow the animal adventures of the night.
- Estate management work by Rangers. Hedging, ditching and footpath maintenance. Cold work!

For a full calendar of events see the 'Events & Activities Program' or the notice boards at Wirral Country Park Visitor Centre.

The Ranger Service

The Rangers wear distinctive green clothes and are there to help you and to protect the park. Feel free to ask questions; they won't bite!

Much of their work nowadays is interpreting the history and nature of the park: guiding walks, giving talks, explaining wildlife and showing children and adults what to look for at different times of the year. They also run a Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre.



About 250,000 people visit Wirral Country Park each year, so the Rangers have got their work cut out.

For educational visits, talks, lectures, slide shows, walks contact: Wirral Country Park Visitor Centre, Station Road, Thurstaston, Wirral, Merseyside CH61 0HN. Telephone 0151 648 4371 or 3884,

or e-mail us at: wirralcountrypark@wirral.gov.uk

Walks Around Thurstaston

Whether you prefer the sheltered inland Wirral Way with its wildlife and flowers, or the dramatic light and birds of the open estuary, there's plenty to see. Search for crabs and seashells on the sandy shore, count the different birds, watch for Weasels in the hedgerows or explore the waterfall and old oak woodland of the 'Dungeon'

You'll find all sorts of useful guides and books at Wirral Country Park Visitor Centre. You can also buy tide tables to work out the best times for birdwatching on the estuary, and maps of the area so you can plan your own walks, too.



Why the Dee Estuary is of International Importance

The Dee Estuary is at a crossroads of bird migration. Amazingly, the pattern was fixed around 18,000 years ago as the birds followed the edges of the Ice Age glaciers. Each species has traditional routes with traditional stopping places. The birds return year after year to the same estuaries. Many have no choice: they must come here.

As many as 82,000 waders, or up to 10% of the UK population, are counted at any one time on the Dee Estuary during the winter months; while 7 species are present in sufficient numbers to be of international importance.

The Dee Estuary also regularly holds up to 24,000 wildfowl (ducks) at any one time; 3 species are present in numbers of international importance. The Dee Estuary is recognised by a number of international and national conventions. It is:

- A Special Protection Area (European Community directive)
- A RAMSAR Site (International designation for wetlands)
- A Site of Special Scientific Interest (UK government)

The Government has an international duty to protect our estuaries.