

TIDE ISLANDS & SHIFTING SANDS

Scotland's Southern Coast

Where every
name tells a story

Solway Firth

Partnership



Hestan Island

This guide is an introduction to some of the stories that have inspired place names on the long and varied coast of Dumfries and Galloway.

The shallow seas in the Solway combined with a large tidal range means vast sand flats are uncovered twice a day and the sometime islands surrounded by sea become accessible on foot. Strong tidal currents can shift sediments dramatically, changing the shape of sand banks and location of channels, making the Solway difficult to navigate.

Explore the seashore and imagine what it would have been like to live on an island or discover the dramatic seascape revealed by the tides but remember to take care on the Solway coast. Ask people who know the area where the good places are to visit or get a detailed Ordnance Survey map and tide timetables to plan your own adventure.

ISLANDS AND SANDBANKS



All names begin by describing a place to another person or group of people, as a way of helping us find our way in the world. Some place names have existed for hundreds of years, while others are a modern phenomenon, but they all tell a story. Place names can provide clues about the history of our coast and reveal what people considered noteworthy.

Place names can help to identify places of historical importance, such as Redkirk Point and the Altar Stone, or identify landmarks that are the setting for tales of mishap, Marion's Isle and Richardson's Rock, or adventure, Isle of Whithorn.

Find out more about the connections between place names and social history, local customs and beliefs by visiting:
www.solwayfirthpartnership.co.uk/solway-coastwise



EVERY NAME TELLS A STORY

Rough Island



Enjoy your visit to the coast, but always remember to be careful especially if you are visiting a tidal island or exploring tidal flats.



Scottish weather can be unpredictable. Check weather forecasts and take appropriate clothing and footwear.



The coast can be rugged and remote, so tell a family member or friend where you are going and when you expect to be back.



The Solway coast has one of the largest tidal ranges in the world. Remember to check the tide times to avoid becoming stranded on the vast sand-flats or in tidal bays.



The coast is bursting with life so try to avoid disturbing wildlife, particularly shore-nesting birds in spring.



The coast is beautiful and to keep it that way please take your litter home with you.



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TAKE CARE



The name Scar originates from the Scandinavian word sker, meaning rock in the sea. In southwest Scotland, it is mostly used to describe reefs littered with rocks which are exposed at low water. The Scar shelters The Wig, another Scandinavian place name word derived from vik, meaning small bay.

The Scar sheltered seaplanes during WWII but now is a haven for wintering ducks, geese and wading birds. In the summer, one of the largest flocks of eiders in Scotland consisting of over 1,000 moulting ducks can be seen from the Scar.

NAME MEANING:

A spit of gravel
sheltering The Wig



The Wig NX044676



THE SCAR

1



A local tale tells us that Marion's Isle got its name from an unfortunate event. Marion was collecting shellfish on the shore when the rising tide cut off her route back to land and she drowned. Some say it was a punishment for working on a Sunday! This raised area of boulders, which at mid-tide forms a temporary island and is then swallowed up by the sea, is close to the bay at Maryport and the ancient site of Kirkmaiden church. The less dramatic explanation for the name is that the temporary island is a landmark associated with religious connections where Mary, Maiden and Marion are interchangeable.

NAME MEANING:

.....
Raised area of stony shore
where Marion drowned

2

MARION'S ISLE

Near Maryport, Drummore
NX145336



Although not immediately obvious today, an island sheltered the bay to create a safe haven for shipping. It was only in the late 1700s that the tidal causeway that connected the island to the mainland was raised and a row of houses built upon it.

A tale is told of smugglers sailing into the harbour behind the island while being chased by customs men. The customs men thought the smugglers were trapped but when they tied up there was no sign of the vessel they were pursuing. It was high tide and the smugglers had made a daring escape over the flooded causeway to avoid capture.

NAME MEANING:

Island at the port
of Whithorn



Isle of Whithorn NX479362

ISLE OF WHITHORN

3



Garvellan Rocks are a group of small islands in Fleet Bay made up of several rugged islands poking up above the sea. While some of the rocks are tidal islands (surrounded by water at high tide), one of the islands is a tied island, (attached to the mainland by a strip of sand except on the highest tides).

Waves washing around the island meet on the landward side and deposit sand to create the causeway. This unusual feature is known as a tombolo, an Italian word, derived from the Latin tumulus, meaning mound.

NAME MEANING:

Derived from Gaelic Garbh
eilean = Rough Rock



The local name for Ardwall Island is Larry's Isle, named after an Irish fisherman and shepherd, Lawrence O'Hagan who lived on the Island 150 years ago. Known locally as Larry Higgins, it was rumoured that he lived in poverty and to supplement his income was involved in smuggling or gained from wrecking. In one of several stories about Larry, he finds a fortune in the form of jewellery on the washed up body of a captain's wife. Although known to be a good boatman Larry drowned one morning in June 1867 when returning to the island.

NAME MEANING:

Where Larry
Higgins lived



Ardwall Island NX571493



LARRY'S ISLE

5



A local story tells us of the day when Janet Richardson went to the shore to collect mussels at low tide. Preoccupied in her task, she did not notice the incoming tide and was stranded on a rocky island.

Surrounded by the sea, she pulled up her skirt and plunged into the water. Luckily, her clothes acted as a buoyancy aid and finding herself floating in the sea, she was washed ashore by strong currents to Milton Sands, near the beach at The Doon. From that day onwards the rocks became known as Richardson's Rock.

NAME MEANING:

.....
A rock where Janet Richardson
had an accident

6

RICHARDSON'S ROCK

Rocks in the sound of Little Ross
NX655432



Auchencairn Bay and Hestan Island are in one of the three National Scenic Areas on the Dumfries and Galloway coast. Perhaps the island is named after the horses that once grazed on the island or may simply follow a Scandinavian habit of using the word for horse, hestre to identify rocks or islands.

This tidal island can only be reached on foot at very low tides. It is linked to the mainland by the Hestan Rack, perhaps derived from Scandinavian rak meaning direct or straight and sometimes used to describe a pathway. Beware! The tidal island of Hestan should only be visited with a thorough knowledge of the Solway tides.

NAME MEANING:

Derived from Sandinavian
Hestr = horse



Kirkandrews churchyard NX838502



HESTAN ISLAND

7



8

ROUGH ISLAND

Between Kippford and Rockcliffe a stretch of hardwearing rock is exposed to create a rugged shoreline. Outcrops of granite on the craggy hillside form an uneven landscape that is well described by the place names Rough Island and Rough Firth.

The island is linked to the mainland at Kippford by a tidal causeway made up of stones and shells. Managed for nature conservation by the National Trust for Scotland, the island provides a safe haven for beach nesting birds, such as ringed plover and oystercatcher. To avoid disturbance, Rough Island should not be visited from May to mid July.

NAME MEANING:

.....
Uneven land

Rough Island NX843532



The shallow waters, gently sloping seabed and a tidal range over 8.5m during big spring tides means vast tidal sand flats are exposed twice a day.

Powerful tides sculpt sediments into shifting sand banks and channels, making navigation treacherous. In the days of sailing ships many vessels were blown onto hidden banks and the wrecks ended their days on the sands of Mersehead.

Today the wind blows sand to form dunes and the low lying merse of the RSPB reserve provides an ideal refuge for overwintering geese and ground nesting birds.

NAME MEANING:

.....
Tidal sands beyond a projection
of low lying land



Mersehead Sands NX925537

MERSEHEAD SANDS

9





The name Scar originates from an old Scandinavian word, sker meaning rock in the sea. Describing a stony reef exposed at low water, Scar Point joins many other Scars named in the inner Solway including Corbelly Scar, Bowhouse Scar, Rough Scar, Brewing Scar, Powfoot Scar, Howgarth Scar and Whan Scar. Phyllis Laurie lived in a shack on the point until she died in 1942 at the age of 72. Remembered by local people as a character, she was feared by children who played on the shore. Phyllis now lends her name to both the promontory and a muddy creek that flows into the Nith estuary.

NAME MEANING:

Stony reef promontory /
where Phyllis lived



On Whan Scar lies an enigmatic boulder which has been hidden below shifting sands for many years. The extremely dynamic environment below the water's surface means huge quantities of sand and mud can be moved in a single tidal cycle. The large stone marks the parish and burgh boundary of Annan as well as defining the limit of fishing rights.

The name Altar Stone may have derived from it being the outer boundary stone. Every year, when the tides allow, Annan Riding of the Marches ride out to the place where the stone lies out of sight.

NAME MEANING:

Boundary marker



Altar stone NY216639

ALTAR STONE

11



The funnel-like shape and shallow depth of the Solway creates strong tidal currents and occasional tidal bores. At Redkirk Point the tide falls remarkably slowly and rises quickly with enough force to erode the land. The parish church of Redkirk was built in the late 12th century but fell into the sea in 1675 and was washed away. Imported rocks now protect the sea embankment but the foreshore continues to be eroded by the tides to reveal layers of sand, clay and peat with ancient tree stumps. Some tree stumps exposed lower down on the shore have been carbon dated and are believed to be 8,000 years old!

NAME MEANING:

.....
Church of red coloured stone



Many different words describe coastal features on our shores.

Small islands may be called; Isle, Inch, Rock, Stone, Craig, Clachan or Allan

Stony or sandy areas exposed at low tide may be called; Reef, Scar, Spit, Bank, Sands and Flats. If they lead to an island they may be called Causeway or Rack.

Low lying land next to, and sometimes covered by, the sea may be called; Salt Marsh, Saltings, Merse, Inks or Carse.

Cat Craig in Fleet Bay, pictured, was also known as Whale Rock perhaps because it looked like a beached whale.



COMMON WORDS





- 1 THE SCAR
- 2 MARION'S ISLE
- 3 ISLE OF WHITHORN
- 4 GARVELLAN ROCKS

- 5 LARRY'S ISLE
- 6 RICHARDSON'S ROCK
- 7 HESTAN ISLAND
- 8 ROUGH ISLAND

- 9 MERSEHEAD SANDS
- 10 SCARPOINT OR PHYLLIS'S
- 11 ALTAR STONE
- 12 REDKIRK

Solway Firth Partnership

Cover: Ardwall Island

Photography:
Riding of Marches at
Altar Stone by Kelly Barty.
All other photographs:
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