

Drigg - Gulleries and Gunneries

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Drigg's Coastal Dunes

From the 8, 000 year old flint scatters found in the dunes to the wartime buildings nearby, this coastline invites us to explore its past life. Today, the 11km long dune system supports a wide variety of plants and animals, and offers people a chance to enjoy some stunning views.

[Click here to listen to the locally recorded audio files and learn about Drigg's rich history](#) [5]

Protecting Britain

These sweeping dunes performed a significant role during Britain's war effort. WWI observation posts allowed soldiers to track shells from Eskmeals.

You can still see the Observation Posts that were used by Eskmeals for sighting and locating shells and by the army guarding the beach.

During the Second World War, mines and barbed wire defended the dunes, but sheep have been known to wander over the mines at their cost - the craters are still visible. The mines were placed to guard the Royal Ordnance Factory.

Lady Carlisle had a holiday home at the beach which was billeted by war time workers, however they left wet clothes unattended by the fire which set a blaze and destroyed the bungalow. These dunes were also famous for their gulleries (breeding places). Wardens were brought in to patrol the dunes during the 1950s to protect the eggs from predators and poachers as the eggs were collected and sent by train to London for a gourmet treat!

Animal Life in the Dunes

Listen out for the rasping croak of the rare Natter Jack Toad. These small toads run rather than hop and can be hard to spot. West Cumbria accounts for over half of the UK's population of natterjack toads. Its success here lies in its liking for pools that dry out during the summer, after the toadlets have left. This, and the lack of vegetation in the pools, deters the Common Toad.

In summer you can find Six-Spot Burnet Moths hatching by the Burnet Rose bushes. Small fritillaries (a type of butterfly) flutter about feeding on flowers. Their name comes from the Latin, fritillus, a chequered patterned dice box used by the Romans. Six-Spot Burnet Moths also display a striking wing pattern - glossy black with six red spots. In spring, you can find them hatching by the Burnet Rose bushes.

Birds by the Shore

With up to 100 Oystercatchers foraging by the shore, winter time can be quite a sight. You'll also find Curlews (*Numenius arquata*) at the water's edge. Their long beaks are perfect for digging in the sand as they search for worms, shrimps and small crabs. Look too for Herons, Gulls and Cormorants on the beach.

Stonechats, Sand Martins and Skylarks are also often seen and heard flying above the dunes. Look more carefully to spot adders and lizards; both enjoy sheltering in the warmth of the sand.

Salty Sands

Sands range from very wet to relatively dry, so it's little surprise that the coast has some great examples of salt marsh habitat. The salty conditions enable salt tolerant plants such as heather, ling, lichen, carline thistle, sea holly and marron grass to thrive. The silvery leaves of the Creeping Willow (*Salix repens* ssp. *argentea*) are most obvious amongst the dunes. Just like its name this willow grows long elongated branches that 'creep' along the sand.

The Drigg Coastline gained European and English SSSI Status (Site of Special Scientific Interest) in 1986.

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