

Walking Through the Sands of Time



Walking Through the Sands of Time comprises a series of four FREE artist-led walks that will help people explore the beauty of the Sefton Coast. The walks are led by accomplished artists and a natural historian who will act as route interpreters. As a package, the walks create an interface between the coast's outstanding biodiversity (*the variety of life*) and its wider natural heritage alongside aspects of art, culture and history; as experienced through the process of walking in an 'interpreted' landscape.

The walks explore 31km of the 34km long Sefton Coastal Path over four days during July 2014. The walks are led by visual artist Mike Collier (of the University of Sunderland's WALK Research Group), and interpreted by wildlife photographer Tim Collier, sound artist Rob Strachan, poet Jake Campbell and natural historian John Dempsey. The walks have been organised in conjunction with *The Atkinson* at Southport and are funded by the *Sefton Coast Landscape Partnership Scheme* using a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.



Dune helleborine, special orchid of the sands

Background, from the Artists

To properly engage people in a greater understanding of their environment, we need to encourage both scientific *and* emotional responses to a locality. This suite of walks brings to bear a scientific approach 'viewed through' an artistic lens. The walks explore new ways of engaging with the eco-systems of the Sefton Coastline. Through this, we hope to create a clearer understanding of the impacts of change on such a landscape; a place that sits in a dynamic equilibrium between land and sea, the past and the future.

Courtesy of such new perspectives, we hope to explore, and perhaps re-configure, attitudes and approaches to the environment.



Some of the sands of Sefton

Ultimately, through this approach, we seek to develop new perceptions and understanding of what it is to be in and of 'a landscape'.

Background, The Sefton Coastal Landscape

From the Mersey's mouth north to the Ribble estuary, stretches England's largest undeveloped dune system. This is a landscape alive with special wildlife. Life that scuttles across its sandy beaches, wades in the coastal marshes and creeks, and scurries through its green pine woodlands.

Its big skies offer views across the waters of the Irish Sea to North Wales' distant promontories and mountain peaks and, to the north east, the summits of the southern Lake District. It is a land ever in motion, yet ever fixed in history; a place where the sands of time can be explored by the process of passing through its beauty, step by step.

The *Sands of Time* walks take as their guide the Sefton Coastal Path which provides the walkers with a journey through the array of habitats that constitute this sandy landscape. A landscape where Merseyside meets the Irish Sea, beside fossil forests overlaid by shifting sands held together by wind-blown grasses.

The Sefton Coast, resplendent with wildlife, contains National Nature Reserves, Sites of Special Sites and is a European Special Protection Area (SPA) as well as being of major geological importance. These wildlife jewels are strung along a chain of sand hills, dotted with pinewoods and heath.

These sandy beaches, coastal marshes, pine woods, heaths and tidal estuaries will all permeate and punctuate the experiences of the walk participants.

The Walks

The *Walking Through the Sands of Time* guided walks, take place over two consecutive weekends in mid-July (two walks per weekend, on 12th/13th and 19th/20th). They cover a distance of 31km (19.5 miles); the longest walk is almost 9km (5.6 miles), the shortest 7km (4.4 miles). For more details about the individual walks, see below.

For Health and Safety reasons, the number of participants on each walk is limited to 15; these places are allocated on a first come, first served basis.

Most sections of the walks are on reasonably level, surfaced paths, or on compacted sand; a few may involve sections on softer sand. By the very nature of dunes, some sections of the walks are undulating but none can be considered 'steep'. In some instances, depending upon weather conditions prior to the walk, sand or other debris may have been blown onto some sections of the paths.

All walk stages are covered by the 1:25,000, Ordnance Survey Explorer Maps: 275 (Southport & Chorley, Wigan, Formby & Ormskirk) and 275 (Liverpool, St Helens, Widnes & Runcorn). All walks start at 10am, the projected finish time for each being 4pm. Contact details (mobile nos.) for the walk leaders are: Mike Collier **07756 880686** and Tim Collier **07504 990469**.

Walk One – Saturday 12th July: starts near Waterloo Station and ends at Hightown Station; distance 7.6 km (4.8 miles)

- Start Time & Meeting Point – 10.00hrs at the Crosby Marina car park just past the

Crosby Lakeside Adventure Centre, 400m from Waterloo Station

- Route - Starts at Crosby Marina car park then heads towards the Coastal Footpath, at the entrance to Marine Park. From there, the path heads north west along the coastal footpath towards the Coastguard Station. From here, the path orientates north, adjacent to the golf links then along the River Alt, to the west. The route heads north to the Alt Centre, before turning inland towards Hightown centre and the station
- What to look for – Singing skylark, meadow pipit and farmland birds species, such as linnet and yellowhammer. Abundant wild flowers, including common species, such as the brilliant yellow of bird's-foot trefoil and the scarcer, pink, restharrow; as well as a number of orchid species. Amongst the latter there will be common spotted and perhaps the more exotic, such as bee and pyramidal orchids and perhaps the rare dune helleborine. Wading birds will be present at the mouth of the River Alt
- Degree of difficulty: Relatively easy, on largely flat, surfaced paths. No significant ascents
- Toilets – Available before the beginning of the walk, at the station, and also at the end of the walk
- End point - Hightown Station
- Car Parking – Available at the Crosby Marina car park, just past the Crosby Lakeside Adventure Centre (free) at the bottom of Cambridge Road, off Crosby Road South



Natterjack toad, one of the important amphibian species found around the 'dune slacks' of the Sefton Coast

Walk Two – Sunday 13th July: starts near Hightown Station and ends at Freshfield Station; distance 9km (5.6 miles)

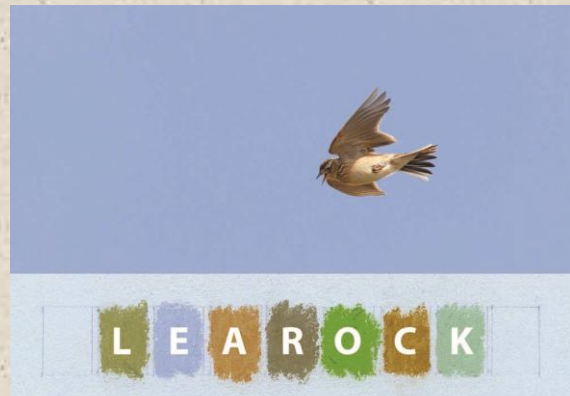
- Start Time & Meeting Point – 10.00hrs at the Alt Centre (IMPACT Design and Technology Centre) at the bottom of Lower Alt Road, 200m from Hightown Station
- Route - Starts at the Alt Centre from there heading west, out of the town and on to the Coastal Path. Turning north, the route skirts the town and heads roughly north, parallel to the railway line. The route then dog-legs west before heading north again, towards Cabin Hill; once 'the largest dune' on the coast. The route then zigzags northwards until turning inland at Victoria Road, towards the station and endpoint
- What to look for – The chance of seeing common lizard, and perhaps the rarer sand lizard, in the dunes during fine weather, red squirrels in some of the dune pine woods
- Degree of difficulty: Relatively easy, on largely flat, sometimes compacted sand paths. No significant ascents
- Toilets – Available before the beginning of the walk, at the station, and also at the end of the walk
- End point – Freshfield Station
- Car Parking – Roadside parking is available on Lower Alt Road, towards the boat yard and the river Alt

Walk Three - Saturday 19 July: start near Freshfield Station and finish at Ainsdale Station; distance 7km (4.4 miles)

- Start Time & Meeting Point – 10.00hrs meet at the 'Squirrel Walk' opposite the public toilets in the National Trust car park, 500m from Freshfield Station
- Route – From the National Trust car park, the Coastal Path is accessed via Victoria Road. From there the path runs north towards Formby Hills, around an area of dunes and dune slacks, and abundant coastal pine woods. The route turns inland, towards the railway line, before striking north west in the direction of Ainsdale-on-Sea and from there, inland towards the end point of Ainsdale Station
- What to look for – The possibility of red squirrels in the dune pine woods. If the sun shines, there will be many common butterflies including 'dune specialists' such as grayling and dark green fritillary. Amongst the yellow-flecked gorse scrub

and in areas of heath, stonechats may be perched and kestrel hunting. Shorebirds should abound on the Alt's tidal mudflats

- Degree of difficulty: Relatively easy, some of the walk passes through farmland though this is largely flat; much of the walk is on surfaced paths. No significant ascents
- Toilets – Available before the beginning of the walk, at the station, and also at the end of the walk
- End point – Ainsdale Station
- Car Parking – Available at the National Trust Red Squirrel Reserve (£5.50, free if Nat. Trust member). This car park fills up rapidly at weekends, so arrival early!



'Learock' – a photograph and pastel montage of the Skylark by Mike Collier (Skylark image by Tim Collier)

Walk Four – Sunday 20th July: start at Ainsdale Station and finish at the RSPB Centre at Marshside, Southport; distance 7.5km (4.7 miles)

- Start Time & Meeting Point – 10.00hrs on the 'shore side' of Ainsdale Station
- Route - Starts outside Ainsdale Station, then heads west towards the coastal path, north past the Railway Cottages. It then runs north to the west of Birkdale Hills, and the Royal Birkdale Golf Course, before approaching the coastal fringe of Southport. Finishing at the Weld Road car park at Birkdale. At this point a mini-bus will transfer participants from Birkdale to Marshside RSPB reserve
- What to look for – Wildflowers adding splashes of colour to the sheltered dune-slack wetlands, such as the scarce Grass of Parnassus and various marsh orchids, including abundant northern and southern marsh orchids. It is these wetlands that

provide the breeding haunts for nationally important populations of Natterjack Toad. At the Marshside RSPB Reserve, there will be large numbers of coastal wading birds (oystercatchers, lapwing, ringed plover, lapwing, redshank and curlew) and some wildfowl

- Degree of difficulty: Relatively easy, on largely flat, surfaced paths. No significant ascents
- Toilets – Available at the beginning of the walk, at the station, and also at the end of the walk
- End point – Weld Road car park at Birkdale, followed by a visit, by mini-bus, to the RSPB Centre at Marshside
- Car Parking - Roadside parking is available at the far end of the south side of Cambridge Road, which runs parallel to Ainsdale Station

General Considerations for Participants

To take part in any of the *Walking Through the Sands of Time* walks, you MUST book in advance (see below); places are limited. All walks are FREE.



Stonechat

All participants should be physically able to complete the walk they have signed up to (based upon advertised 'degree of difficulty') and should come prepared for the rigours of such a walk. This includes providing for themselves the appropriate equipment and sustenance, and the means to transport these through the day.

Please note the strength of mobile phone signals may vary along the length of the walks, depending upon network used. Toilets are available at the beginning and end points of most of the walks, but, in most cases, not along the routes.

What Participants Will be Doing Along *The Sands of Time*

- Walking and experiencing the landscape, of coastal and dune habitats, with its

abundant wildlife

- Learning more about the history and heritage of the Sefton Coast
- Contributing their thoughts and impressions (in words and images) so these can be used by the artists to inform artwork growing out of the 'experience' of the walks

What to Wear/Bring

- Sensible, 'outdoor' clothes (covered legs – not shorts), two or three layers - so that you can take things off if you get hot or put them on if you get cold
- Water/wind-proof jacket and over-trousers
- Hat/gloves, in case of cold weather or wind
- Strong, comfortable shoes (e.g. walking shoes or boots)
- At the very, least an additional thin jumper and dry pair of socks
- Enough food and drink for the whole walk
- Digital camera or camera phone (if you have one - optional)
- Binoculars (if you have them - optional) – a small number will be available to borrow
- Rucksack to carry your equipment
- Personal welfare kit, which, depending on conditions, might include: suntan lotion, sticking-plasters, toilet tissue, drinking water and a sun-hat
- Any medication you may require (if you experience severe allergic responses, please make sure you bring your emergency kit)

Participants are encouraged to bring cameras to document the walk in their own images. In this respect, expert photographer Tim Collier will be available to provide advice and support.

Walkers will also have the chance to make their own sound recordings along the way, schooled by Rob Strachan.



Bee orchid



A sliver of Sefton's endless dunes

Walking Through the Sands of Time

Why not join the artists who will guide you across the sand hills of Sefton, through time and into a greater understanding of what connects landscape, art and wildlife, in this series of walks that explores the wildlife of the special place that is the Sefton Coast?

Subsequent to the walks, the artists involved will be producing artwork inspired by the walks and the walkers' experiences of the landscape and the wildlife they have encountered. This will include the creation of a video about the walks that will form part of an exhibition at The Atkinson. This film will include the reflections of the participants, their photographs and interviews about the unique nature of the Sefton Coastline - its natural and social history. If you would rather not be filmed then please make yourself known to the walk leaders at the start of the walk.

For more details about the artists, walk interpreters and organisations involved in *Walking Through the Sands of Time*, see:

- Mike Collier, (www.mikecollier.eu)
- Tim Collier (www.timcollierphotography.com)
- Rob Strachan (www.liv.ac.uk/music/staff/robert-strachan)
- Jake Campbell (www.jakecampbell1988.blogspot.co.uk)
- The Sefton Coast Landscape Partnership Scheme (www.seftoncoast.org.uk).
- The Atkinson (www.theatkinson.co.uk)

If you wish to attend one, or all, of the *Walking Through the Sands of Time* walks, booking is essential. To book a place on the walks or for more details please call The Atkinson Box Office on 01704 533333 or email Jane Brown at Jane.Brown@Sefton.gov.uk giving the following information:

- Your name
- Contact telephone number, mobile number and email address
- The walk you wish to attend
- The number of places you require on the walk

You will receive confirmation, or otherwise, of your place by email or/and telephone.

The walks have been timed to coincide with the showing of *Walk On: From Richard Long to Janet Cardiff - Forty years of Art Walking* at The Atkinson (from 12 April to 9 August 2014). This exhibition includes work by walk leader Mike Collier and is co-curated by him.

**THE
ATKINSON**

Walking Through The Sands Of Time

