

The Special Qualities of the East Stowarty Coast National Scenic Area

Note: Management Strategies have previously been produced for the three NSAs in Dumfries and Galloway, including the East Stowarty Coast NSA. The Strategies contain scenic qualities which were identified through a public consultation process, and the documents were adopted in 2002 as Supplementary Guidance to the Development Plan. The special qualities given here have originated from and complement those in the Management Strategies and are presented in the new format.

- A working landscape of great beauty
- A coastline of endless variety
- A landscape of woods, fields, dykes and hedges
- A sense of calm and enclosure at the heart of the NSA
- Both 'Scottish Riviera' and the 'Secret Coast'
- A dynamic coast contrasting with the static inland landscape
- The sense of the sea without seeing the sea
- A rich variety of texture, colour, light and scale
- The sound and sight of many birds
- Landmarks, contributing to the identity of the area
- The use of locally distinctive stone
- A wide horizon of the Cumbrian Fells and the open sea

Special Quality	Further Information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A working landscape of great beauty</i> 	
<p>This intimate area of farms and woods possesses an indented and complex coastline. The natural and cultural elements come together to create a gentle, working landscape of great beauty that has been a draw to visitors since Victorian times.</p>	<p>Various landscape character types meet in this NSA to create a varied and complex area. The landscape types are Peninsula with Gorsey Knolls, Coastal Granite Uplands, Narrow Wooded Valley and Estuarine Flats.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A coastline of endless variety</i> 	
<p>The coastline exhibits endless variety, from sheltered bays to long exposed shores, from mudflats and sandy beaches to rocky coasts and cliffs. Undeveloped shores, headlands, cliffs and islands add a wild feel that contrasts with the managed landscape of farm and coastal village.</p>	<p>The coast possesses: merse (saltmarsh), mud & sand flats, small beaches of shingle, sand & crushed shell, and dunes; intimate bays; wooded shorelines; rocky coasts of promontories, headlands, peninsulas, cliffs, stacks and skerries; causeways, islands, a rock arch and a tidal estuary.</p> <p>The villages are Palnackie, Rockcliffe, Kippford and Auchencairn. The indented nature of coast, together with the proximity to the Irish Sea and Isle of Man, made the coast ideal in the past for smuggling. This in turn has inspired books such as SR Crockett's <i>The Raiders</i>.</p>

- ***A landscape of woods, fields, dykes and hedges***

It is a landscape of farmland and woodland whose appeal lies through the presence of many traditional agricultural features. A network of irregular fields stretch over rolling hills and knolls, bounded by dry-stone dykes, and many fields contain the distinctive Galloway cattle.

As well as agricultural land of permanent pasture, there are also significant stands of commercial forestry.

Past agricultural improvement were carried out in a way that related to the landscape and resulted in the distinct pattern of enclosure. The nature of the landform also means the area has not experienced the enlargement of fields to the same degree as much of lowland Britain.

- ***A sense of calm and enclosure at the heart of the NSA***

The slow passage of water through Rough Firth, at the heart of the NSA, provides a sense of calm, which is enhanced by the small-scale nature of the bays and beaches, and their enclosing gentle hills and woodland.

Many of the roads to the coast are dead-end (e.g. Kippford, Rockcliffe) and this adds to the slow pace, as there is no through traffic.

Much of the coast is only accessible by path, reinforcing the sense of privacy and seclusion of the small bays and headlands.

The sense of peacefulness is reinforced by small boats and yachts moving up and down the waters and by the well-established, unhurried, attractive, traditional settlements of Rockcliffe and Kippford.

The existence of National Trust for Scotland Conservation Agreements has helped maintain the distinctiveness.

- ***Both 'Scottish Riviera' and the 'Secret Coast'***

Although the area receives numerous visitors, tourism is generally well absorbed into the landscape. Many areas have a feeling of being secret and secluded due to the complex indented nature of the coast.

Much of the coast is inaccessible by car or is on remote headlands or points, containing numerous secret bays, beaches and woodlands. This is balanced by tourist areas with hotels and caravans, which to a large extent are absorbed into the undulating and wooded landscape.

The villages of Rockcliffe and Kippford have been tourist attractions since Victorian times. The coastal path between Rockcliffe and Kippford, and onward to Castlehill Point allows an appreciation of the coast, from inland firth to wide seascape.

- ***A dynamic coast contrasting with the static inland landscape***

There is a constant movement of estuarine waters, whether the waves rippling Rough Firth and Auchencairn Bay, or bigger waves coming in over the sands of Mersehead, or crashing on exposed points and islands.

A contrast can be had between the calm of the enclosed Rough Firth, Auchencairn or Orchardton Bays, and the open, exposed sea at Mersehead, Hestan Island, Balcary or Castlehill Points.

Tidal areas can be mud (Kippford) or rippled sand (Rockcliffe, Sandyhills Bay, Mersehead).

The tides are constantly moving in and out over the sands and mud. At low tide, these large areas reflect and double whatever is in the sky, be it stormy

Movement can be fast or slow: the shifting channels of Rough Firth, the constant erosion and accretion along the coast, the diurnal change in the tides, the shifting patterns in the mud and sand flats; the waves crashing on the exposed coast. The tide can come in particularly fast over the flat

<p>weather or a beautiful sunset – adding to the big sky which typifies the Solway Firth and its surrounds.</p> <p>Sea and land often appear intermingled, with islands only becoming islands at full tide. The coastal areas provide a dynamic contrast to the static inland landscape, or to the apparently unmoving waters of the Solway Firth far out in the distance.</p>	<p>sands and muds.</p> <p>An important quality is that Rough Firth and Auchencairn bay are perceived as part landscape/part seascape due to the enclosed bays being intertidal and the islands becoming connected to the land by causeways at each ebb tide.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">• <i>The sense of the sea without seeing the sea</i></p>	
<p>Although always nearby, the sea itself is often invisible. Inland, though, its presence is felt through the sound of seabirds, the sight of the meandering tidal channel of the Urr at Palnackie, the smell of seaweed and mudflats, changes in light with the changing tides, or the sudden drop-off of gorse-covered knolls.</p>	<p>The muddy channel at Palnackie is not visible from any distance, but its presence is made known by the sight of a boat seemingly afloat on the fields at high tide. It is famous for the annual Palnackie flounder tramping championship held here at low tide.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">• <i>A rich variety of texture, colour, light and scale</i></p>	
<p>The land is varied and interesting, with many contrasts in form and texture. Smooth mudflat and merse are present, as are gently shelving beaches and rolling farmland; also steep cliffs, rocky islands, gorse knolls and rough moorland.</p> <p>The variety of colour and light adds further beauty to the area. The sea and the firth continually change with the weather and tides, and the mosaic of houses, water, woodland, fields and hills results in a tapestry of different colours that changes with the season.</p> <p>There are changes of scale, views varying from a small intimate bay to a vast coastal seascape, from an enclosed field to a wide vista of coast and shore.</p> <p>Together, this variety of texture, colour, light and scale is aesthetically pleasing, and has drawn many visitors and artists over the years.</p>	<p>There are many shades of green, brought about by the differing merse, improved grassland, rough grassland, deciduous trees and evergreen forestry. Great swathes of seasonally changing colour are brought about by gorse on the knolls, heather on the moorland, and flowers on the saltmarsh and coastal grasslands. Colour from many policy woodlands can be a key element of this NSA, particularly the landscapes at Munches, Orchardton and Southwick</p> <p>Tidal changes result in differing reflectivities, whether off water, wet or dry sand, or mud.</p> <p>There is a great variety of scale: from an enclosed, small scale landscape of bays such as at Port o' Warren Bay, to the medium scale of Rough Firth, with headlands, and enclosing woodland at Rockcliffe and Kippford; to vast open views along the Solway coast and inland to the surrounding Galloway hills (especially Screele), and across the Solway to the Cumbrian coast and hills, such as can be gained from Castlehill Point.</p> <p>The painter John Copeland has been one of those attracted by the visual appeal of the area.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sound and sight of many birds 	
<p>The distinctive sound of birds, whether the piping call of the waders on the coast or the melody of the songbirds inland, are an evocative aspect of this landscape.</p>	<p>Bird sounds include the honking of the barnacle geese and the cry of the gulls; the call of the oystercatcher and curlew; songbirds in wood and garden; the drumming of the woodpecker in Rockcliffe on the Jubilee trail. RSPB has a bird reserve at Mersehead and the National Trust for Scotland at Rough Island.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landmarks, contributing to the identity of the area 	
<p>There are several focal points which reinforce the identity of the area. These include Rough Island and Hestan Island, and the cultural landmarks of Orchardton Tower and the Mote of Mark.</p>	<p>Owing to the intimate and enclosed nature of this NSA, there are no features which are visible from all or most of the NSA. Instead, there are features key to certain limited areas.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of locally distinctive stone 	
<p>Granite is the local building stone, and its grey and white colour in vernacular houses and dykes adds to the distinctiveness of the area.</p>	<p>Most of the NSA is underlain by granite. Granite is used extensively for many cottages and houses, with the softer sandstone used more for lintels and quoins. The numerous dykes are mainly of granite.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A wide horizon of the Cumbrian Fells and the open sea 	
<p>Although many of the views are enclosed and intimate, particularly within Rough Firth, distant views can open up to the Cumbrian Fells of the Lake District and to the wide horizon of the Irish Sea.</p>	<p>Roadside trees along the coastal road in the east often obscure the open views over the sea. However there are occasional glimpses of the wider Solway Firth beyond, and viewpoints such as Castlehill Point give a wide panorama.</p>

Selected Bibliography

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