
2 Fleswick Bay

Theme: Rivers, seas and life

Location

2 Fleswick Bay, St Bees Sandstone and erosion. There is a train service to St Bees, or you could park near the beach. It's a 3 kilometre walk from there [NX 945 133].

Description

Fleswick Bay, St Bees Head, is one of the best and most accessible places to see the St Bees Sandstone and to understand the way it was formed.

For these reasons St Bees Head is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (an SSSI). The red sandstone in the sheer cliffs, and forming the rock platform of the foreshore, is magnificent. The rock is from the Triassic Period, around 250 million years ago. The way the size of the sand grains changes within the rock layers and the angles of the layers tell a story of sand and mud being carried down braided rivers flowing across a desert plain. Sometimes the rivers flooded violently, at other times the flow was much less. The rocks show ripple marks and cracks where mud has dried out. When these rocks were being formed England was only about 25 degrees north of the Equator; the same latitude as the deserts of Arabia today.

The wave cut rock platform has been eroded into strange but beautiful undulating patterns. They look like ripples but are most likely caused by the intersection of natural cracks in the sandstones, which result in lines of weakness. Above the rock platform, and moving every day with the tides, is a beach of small, rounded pebbles made of many different rock types. These stones were brought here by ice sheets that flowed down the Irish Sea and across northern England 20,000 years ago, then they were tumbled and polished by the sea.

This area is an SSSI for its wildlife too. The cliffs are home to guillemots along with fulmars, kittiwakes, razorbills, cormorants, puffins, shag, herring gulls, tawny owls, sparrowhawks, peregrines, ravens and rock pipits. There is sheep's bit in the coastal turf; it's very much a western British plant.

Photographs

(Photo 02-1) 2 The Triassic sandstone cliffs and wave-cut platform of Fleswick Bay.

(Photo 02-2) 2 Fleswick Bay.



(Photo 02-1) The Triassic sandstone cliffs and wave-cut platform of Fleswick Bay.



(Photo 02-2) Fleswick Bay.