
40 Inner Solway

Theme: Climate and landscape change

Location

40 Inner Solway. Park at the west end of the village and walk the shoreline [NY 220 627].

Description

Seen from space there are two features that dominate Cumbria's geography. One is the Lake District and the other is the Solway Firth.

Unlike its prominent neighbour to the south, the Solway may appear passive; a flat land devoid of much appeal, and certainly any geological interest. But to adapt a quote about the land around The Wash 'Any fool can appreciate mountains, it takes someone of true discernment to appreciate the Solway'.

The inner Solway is perhaps one of Cumbria's most active environments. The estuarine system of mudbanks, sandflats and saltmarshes is dynamic, with shifting channels and multiple episodes of erosion and deposition. This place is one of the youngest 'rocks' in our book and it continues to change dramatically. In the late 19th century tidal flows and then thick ice moved at such speed that they damaged the iron piers of the Solway rail viaduct near Bowness-on-Solway, a precursor to its ultimate demise. Within a decade of 1880 the channel to the harbour at Port Carlisle shifted, leaving the harbour and canal to the City of Carlisle, silted up and marooned.

The foreshore muds and sands change their distribution daily and tides can strip them bare to reveal scaurs (or scars); banks of stones and clay. These were deposited by ice sheets around 20,000 years ago, when the Solway was a junction for glaciers flowing across northern Britain. On occasions the stumps of a submerged forest, around 7000 years old, are revealed. Today the Solway is of international importance, to wildlife and to naturalists. It is home for migrating, wading and wintering birds and is the third largest intertidal habitat in Britain. Tranquil it may be, passive it is not.

Photographs

(Photo 40-1) 40 Remains of the rail bridge across the estuary west of Bowness-on-Solway.

(Photo 40-2) 40 Inner Solway.



(Photo 40-1) Remains of the rail bridge across the estuary west of Bowness-on-Solway.



(Photo 40-2) Inner Solway.