



Out & about around
**Strangford Lough and
Lecale Coast**



**Strangford Lough
& Lecale Partnership**

Welcome

This guide takes you on a journey through the rolling drumlin countryside, islands, varied shores, exceptional wildlife, pretty villages, distinctive tower houses, estates and famous ecclesiastical sites of Strangford Lough and Lecale. It accompanies a set of information panels at parking sites around the coast.



The awe-inspiring spectacle of huge, swirling, bird flocks that darken the skies in winter, having a seal pop its head out of the water beside you *p8*, a fleeting glimpse of porpoise and walking through colourful carpets of coastal wild-flowers (*especially at Killard and Ballyquintin*) are just some of the wildlife attractions.

The Exploris aquarium in Portaferry brings close encounters with enormous conger eels and unfurling octopus. Locate this and other wildlife attractions on the Map *p3* including the 'state-of-the-art' Wildfowl and Wetlands centre at Castle Espie; National Trust houses, estates and farms; and Delamont Country Park *p24*.

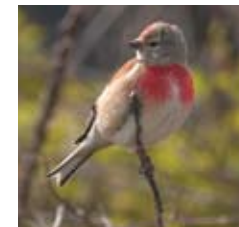
The sunsets on the Lough's eastern shores are truly memorable, when the fingers of the setting sun stroke the silken waters, the sands and the stones with a palette of fire.

Neolithic cairns, Anglo Norman tower houses, estates and great houses from the 1700s and 1800s, windmills, coastguard houses and lighthouses line the shores. The early monastic sites at Nendrum, Greyabbey *p15*, and Inch Abbey are particularly fine and the gardens at Mount Stewart are world renowned.

Enjoy unparalleled views from the high points at Scrabo Country Park *p20* at the north of the Lough, Windmill Hill in Portaferry *p10* at the tip of the Ards Peninsula, and Slieve Patrick in north Lecale *p34*.

The eight minute ferry trip across the rushing tides and swirling currents of 'The Narrows' *p10* is a favourite with children (and adults) who line the open deck to admire the views and to spot passing seals, porpoise, jellyfish, cormorants and terns.

Check out the Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership website www.strangfordlough.org for an events calendar, downloadable archaeology, literary and landscape trails, audio clips, hundreds of photographs and more besides.



www.strangfordlough.org

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Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership

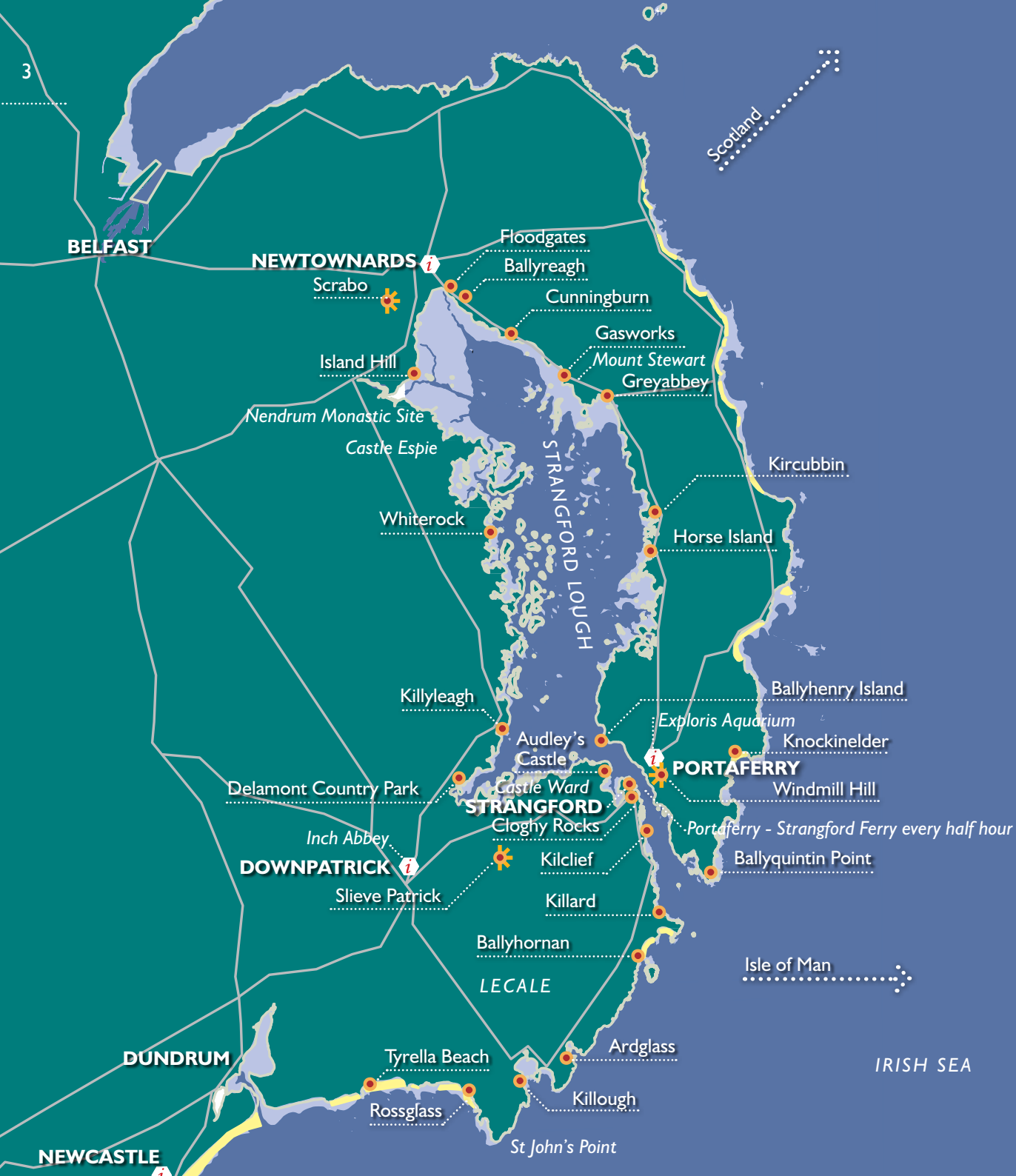
For further information go to www.strangfordlough.org

Tourist Information Centres:

Further information on the surrounding area including accommodation, attractions and activities is available from the following tourist information centres.

Downpatrick: 028 4461 2233	downpatrick.tic@downdc.gov.uk
Portaferry: 028 4272 9882 (seasonal)	tourism@ards-council.gov.uk
Newtownards: 028 9182 6846	tourism@ards-council.gov.uk
Newcastle: 028 4372 2222	newcastle.tic@downdc.gov.uk

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Strangford Lough and Lecale Coast

For more information and interactive or downloadable maps go to www.strangfordlough.org

Other Useful Links

Northern Ireland

Environment Agency

National Trust

Down District Council

Ards Borough Council

Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust

Destination Strangford

www.ni-environment.gov.uk

www.nationaltrust.org.uk

www.downdc.gov.uk

www.ards-council.gov.uk

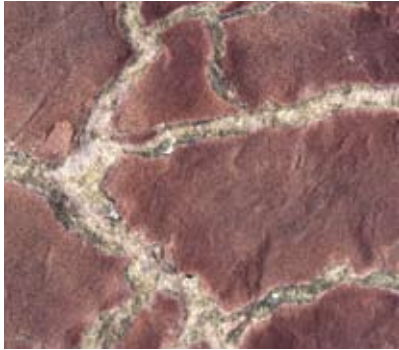
www.wwt.org.uk

www.visitstrangfordlough.co.uk

Information Points

Viewpoints

More about Strangford Lough & Lecale Coast



Scrabo Sandstone

The Rocks

The sandstones and shales of Co. Down began life in a now disappeared ocean some 450 million years ago. At that time what is now the north of Ireland (together with Scotland) formed part of the sea floor close to the north American landmass and what is now southern Ireland, together with England and Wales, lay on the other side of this ocean. The ocean floor was gradually drawn under the North American landmass until it collided with the 'European' side. The collision led to these rocks being compressed and rotated to give us the rocks we see around much of the Co. Down coast today. The collision also produced a major mountain chain of which the Sperrin Mountains are a small remnant.



Strangford Lough and drumlins

The Landscape

The distinctive character of Strangford Lough and Lecale comes from the special interplay of land and water. Patterns of enclosed lough, drumlin islands and pladdies (submerged at high tide) are echoed inland with soft rounded hills, inter-drumlin loughs and raised beaches. Landscapes of fens, scoured rocky plateaux, rocky foreshore, saltmarsh and mudflats, are punctuated by strong landmark features all around the water's edge - coastal lighthouses, headlands, rocky harbours, tower houses and windmills.

In general, the northern part of Strangford Lough is characterised by neat, fertile, hedged, drumlin farmlands, including some of the most productive farmlands in Ulster. The open skies and enclosed water of the lowlands are overlooked by the distinctive crag and tail of Scrabo Hill.

Further south the trim-hedged fields are replaced by small stone-walled fields on the upland and higher ground of Ballyquintin and Killard.

South again, the coastal farmlands of the Lecale coast once more provide richer farmland, particularly on the reclaimed marshlands and areas of

lighter soil. The coastal landscape of the Lecale has a windswept, remote character. It retains a distinctive local identity and is steeped in the past, with numerous ancient sites.

Ice, Drumlins, Raised Beaches

Strangford Lough sits amongst one of Northern Ireland's most special landscapes – the rounded hills called drumlins that were deposited when the last glaciers retreated. The Lough's islands are drowned drumlins in various stages of erosion (see p23).

As the ice melted, sea level rises created shores that later rose above the water as the enormous weight of the ice was lifted from the land. This formed the clearly defined raised beaches that notch most of the islands and coastal drumlins.

Raised beach deposits extend some distance inland on the Ards peninsula where they provide broad, fertile flats of shelly and pebbly soils amidst the heavier clays of the drumlins.

Further south, a rocky ice-scoured plateau extends across the Portaferry-Strangford Narrows into the Lecale peninsula. This southern part of Strangford and Lecale is also characterised by raised beaches, for example at Ballyquintin and Killard Points, as well as injections of volcanic rocks (known as dykes) creating a distinctive rocky shoreline and good natural harbours.

The different types of coastal scenery here contrast sharply with the gently shelving shoreline of Dundrum Bay to the west, characterised mainly by sandy beaches.

Scrabo Hill is also volcanic in origin and its hard basalt rock did not erode to the same extent as other drumlins leaving it to dominate the Lough's northern shores.



Mud Flats

Sand and Mud flats

Dundrum Bay, Killough Bay and further north in Strangford Lough the scenes are much calmer with a huge expanse of calm shallow water covering sand and mud flats. As the water slides out of Strangford Lough at low tide over 50km² of sandflats are revealed. These areas are the main restaurant for the thousands of birds that feed on the grasses and animals that live on or in the sand and mud.

The Narrows



Ardkeen Townland

Entering Strangford Lough from the Irish Sea you are struck by the narrowness of the channel and the turbulence of its swift flowing waters. The appropriately named 'Narrows' is a rock lined channel that is just 0.8km wide south of Portaferry. It varies in depth from 30m to about 60m at its deepest point off Ballyhenry Island.

Current speeds can reach up to 8 knots as the rising tide forces 350 million m³ of water through this channel. Six hours later the tide recedes and the water rushes out of the Lough before the cycle is repeated. Vessels use the currents to carry them in and out of the Lough. Only the most powerful motors attempt to battle against the tide but some boats use back eddies to creep along the sides of the Lough in the opposite direction to the main flow. Further challenges to navigation are the whirlpools and upwellings which tug vessels off course. These upwellings are caused by irregularities on the seabed. They play an important role in the ecology of the Lough as they churn up nutrients which feed other organisms.

Changing Influences

The moon's gravity creates tides as it pulls water through the Lough and along the Lecale coast. When it is nearest the sun the combined effect leads to the most dramatic spring tides. Spring tides at their height bring seawater seeping onto the shorefront and at their lowest reveal the huge fronds of kelp seaweed that are not usually exposed.

The light of the sun is essential to all life. In spring and summer seaweeds and other algae burst into growth, and seagrasses clothe the sand and mudflats. The slight variation between winter and summer water temperature is yet another trigger for change.

Winds also play an important role in the everchanging nature of the coast. At high tide, within the Lough, south westerly winds frequently send waves crashing onto the A20 roadway south of Newtownards – an extraordinary scene compared to the normally placid shore here. Persistent battering has led to erosion all the way along the Lecale coast, the eastern shore of the Lough and many of the islands.

Strangford Lough's water is almost fully saline except at the mouths of the rivers Comber and Quoile, and where several streams drain into it.

The area has a mild climate and the prevailing winds are west to southwest. It is one of the driest parts of Ireland with relatively low rainfall.



Birdsfoot Trefoil

Variety and Abundance



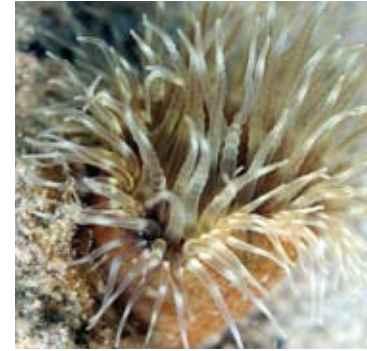
Thrift



Dunlin



Pale-bellied Brent Geese



Anemone



Marram Grass

The extraordinary variety of habitats and conditions give rise to Strangford Lough and Lecale's equally varied and abundant wildlife. This can be easily seen in the huge flocks of overwintering birds and the many kinds of life found along the shores. Important summer visitors include nesting terns. Strangford Lough is an important breeding site in Ireland for common seals, despite a decline. Grey seals are also present in the more exposed open coast of Lecale. Otters are also widespread.

With over 2000 recorded marine species, the Lough is tremendously important for biodiversity. The sides of the Narrows are draped in huge colourful sponges and brilliant soft corals. Elsewhere the seabed is carpeted with brittle stars, anemones, and sea squirts. Horse mussel beds have declined but still provide one of the richest habitats in the Lough. The more eye-catching animals include octopus, conger eels, angler fish and multicoloured wrasse.

Large quantities of dead seaweed accumulate on the strand line providing a rich habitat for sandhoppers and seaweed flies, which in turn are food for turnstones, starlings, badgers, shrews and

rats. When it rots this seaweed puts valuable nutrients back into the Lough.

Throughout the spring and summer, the strandline is dappled with the colourful flowers of sea aster, scurvy grass, thrift, sea campion, mayweed and sea lavender.

Saltmarsh is a rare habitat in Northern Ireland but Strangford Lough and Lecale have some of the best examples of it. Rock outcrops, immediately above the shore show a profusion of black, yellow and grey lichens, zoned according to the amount of wave splash.

A variety of soil types around the shores overlay boulders and rock. Wild thyme, stonecrops, and squills grow in thin soils and remnants of maritime heath with bell heather grow on acid soils. Lime-rich grassland occurs with many orchid types. On deeper soils, scrub forms with gorse, brambles, roses, blackthorn and elder.

The area's wildlife depends on complex relationships and the balance between them. For example the abundant shellfish, eelgrass and other food on the northern shores are critical for the birds that overwinter there.



Fishing



Farming

What's in a Name?

Lecale : Known by the ancient name of Magh-Inis, 'the island plain', Lecale was enclosed to the north by Strangford Lough, to the east by the Irish Sea, and to the west by the tidal estuaries of the Blackstaff and Quoile rivers. Historically Mag Inis was the core territory of the Dal Fiatach which had strong associations with the sea. Historical sources referred to this territory as Mag Inis until the early 9th century although it was later known as Leath Cathail 'Cathal's half or division' or Lecale. The name came from a compromise between the two main branches of the Dal Fiatach, the Ui Blathmeic, and the Leth Cathail.

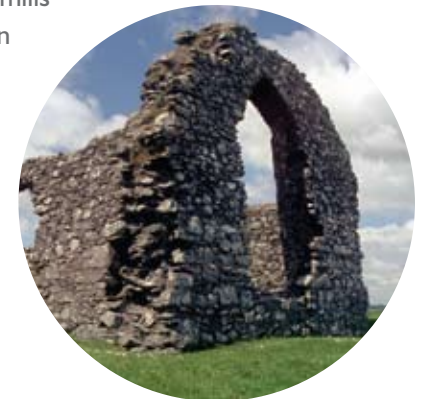
Strangford : The old Irish name for Strangford was Loch Cuan – lough of the harbours or calm waters. Literature tells that the Irish sea god Manannan Mac Lir, in grief-induced rage over the killing of his son, let forth an outburst of water which formed three Irish sea loughs, Waterford, Dundrum Bay and Strangford Lough (from the Metrical Dindshenchas Gwynn 1924, 1991, 147). However, it was the Viking invaders who arrived in their long boats through the fast flowing waters of the narrow channel at the lough's entrance that gave Strangford its current name derived from Strangfjotr or strong fjord.



Ardglass

People and the Place

People have been living in the Strangford Lough and Lecale area for around 9000 years. There are many ancient sites with remains from pre-historic times and ancient times including standing stones, chambered graves, crosses, churches, raths, and holy wells. Forts, tower houses and windmills are prominent landmarks in the open farmland and are often sited on hilltops. In Lecale there are strong and often ancient field patterns, clachans and interesting remains of early settlement, distinctive and historic harbour towns, lighthouses and castles. By contrast, settlements are generally small and tightly clustered in sheltered sites.



Ardtole Church

The Lecale area has very strong associations with Saint Patrick as he is believed to have arrived on the shores of Strangford Lough before establishing Ireland's first Christian church at Saul in the barn of a local chieftain in 432AD. Saul comes from the old Irish sabhall, meaning a barn). Christianity was spread throughout Ireland from here from the 5th century and has left a legacy of impressive monastic sites. The Vikings invaded later but little remains to be seen of their presence unlike the fine stone structures of the Anglo-Normans. The grand estates of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have also left their mark on the landscape along with the individual farms and land holdings that continue to shape our countryside still evident in field sizes and field boundaries.

Knockinelder - Ards Borough Council and The National Trust are involved in the management of this area.

Amazing rock formation

The rocks here date from the Silurian Age, 420 million years ago. The land on either side of what was the Iapetus Ocean moved together until the ocean disappeared. These rocks, that had already formed from the sediments laid down in this ocean, were scraped onto the edge of the landmass here. Pressure from the collision caused the rocks to fold and fracture creating this amazing rock formation. The power of the sea has smoothed and shaped some of the rocks as it crashes and swirls between them.

comes in the barnacles put out little feathery arms to filter passing food while the limpets can graze on the surface of the rock as they glide across it. You can explore the rock pools here and at Kearney. Anemones and crabs are some of the things you might find.

Quintin Castle

Built in 1184 by John De Courcy, Quintin Castle was later lived in by the Savage family, and then by their descendants, the Smiths. It was bought by Sir James Montgomery, in the 17th century. It later fell into disrepair but was restored circa 1850. It is still in private ownership.

BEADLET ANEMONE:
look out for the deep red ones
among the rocks



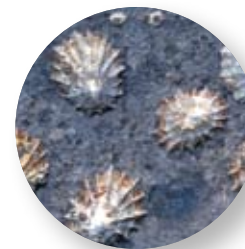
Common Seal



Hermit Crab



Barnacles



Limpets



Sea Campion

Coastal Path to Kearney

Once a fishing and farming village with several windmills for corn and flax. It had a reputation for smuggling and wrecking. Today it is owned by The National Trust.
Wildflowers - best seen May-July Seals - sometimes seen off the rocks here

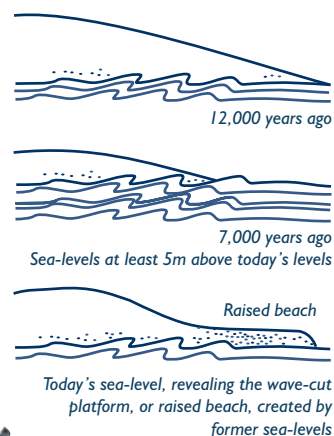
This is the outer Ards Peninsula, looking out to the Irish Sea. The entrance to Strangford Lough lies to the right.

Look out for different kinds of birds feeding at the water's edge at mid-low tide.

Quintin Castle



The formation of a raised beach



SHIPWRECK



Raised beaches

At Ballyquintin Point there is evidence of past, higher sea-levels. At the end of the Ice Age, melting ice had the effect of raising sea-levels. However, as the ice melted, the land that had been pushed down by the weight of the ice began to rise again. Large quantities of gravels were deposited as a series of beaches as the sea-level dropped. Today, we can see stranded cliffs and raised beaches well away from the action of the present-day waves.

Ship Wrecks

Treacherous currents and jagged rocks have put an end to many a ship near here. At least 64 vessels were shipwrecked around North Rock and South Rock, between 1735 and 1768. One of the worst disasters happened in 1715 when The Eagle's Wing was driven

ashore in a terrible storm. 76 people, including women and children, were killed.

Today, beacons help vessels through the dangerous waters of the Bar Mouth, where the Irish Sea meets Strangford Lough - best seen at the turn of the tide.

The Angus Rock, constructed in 1720, was originally a 10m high stone beacon. It was damaged in 1797 when it was accidentally shot at by the revenue cutter 'Revenge'. A beacon tower was then erected in the 1850s.

Wildlife on the move

This is the southern tip of the Ards Peninsula, at the mouth of Strangford Lough. For many migrating birds and insects Ballyquintin Point is their first stop.



Irish Hare



Herring Gull

Blackthorn
(Dwarfed by wind)

Grey Lichen



Orange Lichen

Wind-dwarfed Scrub

Cobble Banks

Bar Mouth

Former
RAF Radar Station 1953-78
on the plateau of Killard Nature Reserve.

Mourne Mountains

Angus Rock

Kilclief Bay

Kilclief Castle

Cloghy Rocks
National
Nature
Reserve

Tidal energy

The Viking invaders who arrived in their long boats through the fast flowing waters at this end of the Lough bestowed the name Strangfjörth or strong fjord. The Routen Wheel is the largest whirlpool amidst the swirling waters, which are made even more turbulent by pinnacles of rock on the seabed.

The Narrows looks like a river as powerful tidal waters rush through this deep but constricted channel approximately every six hours. It is just 0.5km wide at its narrowest point, up to about 60m deep, 8km long, and is the start of a y-shaped channel that runs most of the length of the Lough.



In the centre of the Narrows is an experimental device for harnessing energy from the tides. Two propellers, suspended from a monopole, generate electricity equivalent to that needed for the towns of Strangford and Portaferry.

Savages / Nugents

The Anglo-Norman John de Courcy invaded the area from 1177 and granted the lower part of the Ards Peninsula to William Savage. The Savage family first settled at Ardkeen and built the Tower Houses there, in Portaferry and in Strangford. They also built the earliest part of Portaferry House in 1760, which continued to be the home of the Savage/ Nugent family until 1977. The Savage family also introduced the ferry service from 1180.

Portaferry Windmill

Built in 1771 by the Savage family, the windmill is now in the care of Ards Borough Council. The mill had two sets of mill stones. It was destroyed by fire on Christmas Day 1878. There is a working windmill at Ballycopeland, near Millisle, to the north of the peninsula.

VIKING INVADER



Lapwing



Black-headed Gull



Common Gull



Gorse



Birdsfoot Trefoil

Killard Point

Routen Wheel

Old Coastguard Houses
Marine Current Turbine

Mourne Mountains

Car Ferry Terminal

Swan Island

Strangford Castle

Castleward House

Castleward Bay

Audley's Castle

St. Patrick's Hall
Replica in Ulster Folk & Transport Museum

Chapel Island

Killyleagh

Walter Rock

Queen's University Marine Station

Portaferry Tower House

Exploris Aquarium

Presbyterian Church

Nugent's Wood

Portaferry House (Private)



Colourful underwater world

Huge, yellow sponges and jewel-like anemones are among the colourful creatures clothing the sides of the Narrows. Clinging tightly to the rocks, many animals feed by filtering or siphoning minute particles from the passing water.

Get a diver's eye view of the Lough's varied and colourful underwater world at the nearby Exploris aquarium and seal rehabilitation centre. Look out for the potting creels used by local fishermen to catch crabs, lobsters and prawns.

Seafaring History

Portaferry dates from the 12th century when a row of fishermen's cottages was built beside an Anglo-Norman castle.

In 1775/6 there were 30 vessels of 35-1,500 tons in the ports around Strangford Lough. Cargoes of wheat and barley were exported to Liverpool, Lisbon and Dublin.

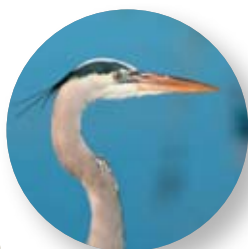
The biggest industry in Portaferry in the 19th century was shipbuilding. The Rope Walk is so called because ropes were made here until 1875.

Today, recreation and tourism are more important to the local economy. The pontoons are used by visiting and local boats. There are eleven clubs around the Lough with regattas and other events held throughout the summer.

Tower Houses

Following John de Courcy's invasion of the area in 1177 family strongholds were built for protection in turbulent times. These tower houses (often referred to as 'castles') date from the 13th and 14th century. From the shorefront you can see the towers at Portaferry, Audleys, Kilclief, Strangford and Old Castle Ward.

DIVER



Grey Heron



Black Guillemot



Cormorant



Dead Man's Fingers



Velvet Swimming Crab

Marine Current Turbine

Kilclief Castle

Pontoons

Ferry Terminal (Strangford Village)

Strangford

Strangford Castle

Compass Hill Walk

Castle Ward House
National Trust house and estate open to the public.

Old Castle Ward

Audleys Castle

Killyleagh

Ferry Slip

Nugent's Wood

Queen's University Marine Station

Lifeboat Station



Around the island

Ballyhenry Island has coastal grassland, heathy flora and gorse scrub - all valuable habitats for insect and bird life.

You can find many different kinds of seaweed on the shore here. They are a bit like the forests of the sea. Try stretching a plant to its full length - they can be as tall as a small tree but they sway in the water currents and not the wind. Look out for the root-like holdfast that anchors the plant tightly to a rock or stone.

Seaweed and stones protect crabs, small fish and other animals from drying out when the tide is out.

The dead seaweed that accumulates on the strandline plays an important role in the Lough's ecosystem. The creatures that live here are food for birds and animals.

When seaweed finally rots it puts nutrients back into the Lough. In the past, farmers used horse and cart to harvest seaweed as fertiliser for the land.

From the seaward side of the island you can sense the full force of the water as 350 million m³ rush in and out of the Lough with every tide. The very fast 8 knot currents slow down to 2-3 knots just north of here.

Lee's Wreck

The cargo liner, Empire Tana, was used in the WWII Normandy landings. It was brought here for salvage by Lee's ship breakers. Its remains can be seen sticking out of the water at low tide. Today it is home to many marine creatures including colourful wrasse, octopus and huge 4m long conger eels.



SHAG



Blenny

Survives under stones and seaweed at low tide



Wrack Seaweed

See the air bubbles that help it float in water



Sea Beet



Conger Eel



Curled Octopus

The boulder shore is home to a huge variety of plants and animals. Here is a place that even a small fish can survive out of water and there are rich pickings for birds.

Rafts
Rafts and other equipment are used in farming shellfish in this area.

Lee's Wreck

Ballyhenry Bay

North End of the Narrows
Opens into a 'y' shaped channel and finally the Lough becomes shallower and wider as you move north.

Causeway to Ballyhenry Island

Boulders

Ballywhite Bay

Marlfield Bay



Horse Island - Owned and managed by The National Trust.

Variety of habitats

This area has a mix of sandy bays and rocky outcrops interspersed with pebbly shores. There are many kinds of habitat near here, some of which are rare in Ireland, for example saltmarsh and brackish ponds. It is rich with plants, insects and birds. The brackish ponds are important for rare water beetles. The scrub and grassland provide nesting areas for many birds including linnet, wren and stonechat.

Looking after insects

The gorse and heather shelter small birds and some very unusual insects. The National Trust cuts back the gorse to create sunny sheltered glades. This provides ideal conditions for the insects to thrive.

Controlling an invader

Cord grass is an invading grass that has spread throughout much of the northern and western mudflats including Gransha Point (see panorama). It displaces local species and causes the underlying mud to stagnate, so reducing bird feeding areas. Northern Ireland Environment Agency and The National Trust work to control the spread of cord grass and research is ongoing into improved methods.

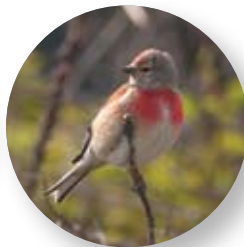
STONECHAT



Rock Pipit



Wren



Linnet



Common Blue Butterfly *female*



Sea Lavender



Cord Grass

Muddy bay with wormcasts
(avoid soft mud)

Slieve Croob
Gransha Point
Main body of Strangford Lough

Horse Island

Causeway
(best route to the island)



Winter, low tide

Commercial fishing

This is the widest and most exposed part of the Lough and the water here is still deep enough for fairly large vessels.

There was once a herring fishing fleet in the Lough. But now, the emphasis is on pot fishing for shellfish including Dublin Bay prawns and crabs. Following concerns for the decline in the horse mussel communities (see page 22) on the seabed, trawling and dredging were banned in 2001. There are plans to try to restore horse mussel communities.

Buckie whelk eggs

Buckie whelks are molluscs. The spent cases of their eggs are often found washed up along the driftline. They dry out into light, papery balls.

Shellfish on the shore

The wealth of shellfish in the sand and mud feeds much of the Lough's birdlife. Some people also come here to collect winkles and cockles using hand rakes. Mechanical harvesting of shellfish from the shores of Strangford Lough is prohibited. It is in the interest of both the public and wildlife that damage to habitat is prevented and stocks of shellfish are sustained through careful monitoring and management.

The Old Quay

In the 19th century, 40 ton vessels used Kircubbin harbour to deliver coal and to export potatoes and corn. Between 1775 and 1776 there were 30 large vessels (up to 1,500 tons) in the ports around Strangford Lough. Cargoes of wheat and barley were exported to Liverpool, Lisbon and Dublin at this time.

COCKLES AND WINKLES



Buckie Whelk Eggs



Sea Squirt



Dublin Bay Prawn



King Scallop



Queen Scallop

The Old Quay

Kircubbin Village

Monaghan Bank

Dromara Hills

Kircubbin Sailing Club

White Bank



The shore at Greyabbey is owned and managed by The National Trust.

Please do not disturb the birds

A third of Strangford Lough is exposed at low tide. On the northern shores this reveals about 50km² of sand and mud flats. These may appear empty but buried beneath the surface is a wealth of food such as worms, mussels, cockles and shrimp-like creatures. In addition, eel-grass provides grazing for birds such as geese and wigeon. Further south, seaweed covered rock and boulder shores also provide rich pickings.

Golden plovers can feed at night, but most birds do not. As the days shorten the length of time that the shore is both visible and uncovered by the tide for the birds to feed is greatly reduced.

Disturbance prevents feeding and the birds may not take in enough food in a short space of time to give them the energy to keep warm. Taking flight also burns up energy. Migrants that have recently flown

thousands of miles are in particular need of rest and food. People are therefore requested not to walk on the sandflats from September to March. Please keep dogs under close control at all times.

Harvesting fish and seaweed

Curved piles of stones on the shore are the remains of medieval fish traps put here by the monks from the Cistercian Abbey. The impressive abbey remains, the nearby medieval physic garden and adjacent graveyard are well worth a visit. The monastic site at Nendrum on the other side of the Lough is equally fascinating.

Straight stone walls delineated areas where individuals had rights to collect kelp seaweed from the shore.

RINGED PLOVER



Ragworm



Worm Casts



Pale-bellied Brent Geese



Grey Plover



Golden Plover



Dromara Hills

South Island

Mid Island

Sandflats
Eel-grass grows in this area.

Skills Point

Greyabbey Village

Gasworks - Owned and managed by The National Trust.

The Gas Works

The gas works at Mount Stewart is the only surviving domestic gas works in Northern Ireland. It was built in about 1850 by the Marquis of Londonderry to generate gas for the Estate. Coal was brought to the works by boat and the gas was piped into the house, to fire ovens and provide lighting. It operated until the beginning of the twentieth century.

The Mount Stewart property at Greyabbey is owned by The National Trust and renowned for its exquisite gardens.

Swans

The expansive mud and sandflats are strewn with boulders left here as glaciers retreated northwards at the end of the last ice age.

Mute swans gather in the bay by the Gas Works throughout the winter. Some swans nest on the islands. Many freshwater sites around the Lough, such as Greyabbey Lake and the Quoile Pondage, have resident swans.

Whooper and mute swans dabble for grass fragments, seeds, fine roots, eel-grass and small invertebrates. Look out for them ‘puddling’ in areas where the sand is firm but moist. By stamping their feet on the same spot they soon make a small slushy puddle where bits of debris and vegetation float to the surface ready to be scooped up. Swans also venture onto farmland and are particularly fond of the spilt barley grain that is left behind after the harvest.

MUTE SWAN



Sandwich Tern



Oyster Catchers



Great Black Backed Gull



Redshank



Whooper Swan

Slieve Croob

Anne's Point

Chapel Island

Boretree Island East

Boretree Island West



Winter, low tide

Cunningburn - Owned and managed by Ards Borough Council and The National Trust.

Water sports

At the northern end of the Lough the water is relatively shallow and calm. Windsurfers enjoy the wide open space. Sailing and canoeing are among the other water sports on the Lough.

Bird Migration

During the winter, birds make epic journeys to Strangford Lough from their breeding grounds as far away as Siberia, Iceland, Canada and the Baltic. To them the mud and sandflats are an enormous restaurant with a rich and varied menu.

Migrations put huge stresses on the physiology of birds. By the end of the summer the Lough’s long distance travellers must have packed away enough fuel in the form of fat reserves to give them the energy to undertake their daunting flight. Knot may put on up to 80% of their lean body weight. This will be lost during the journey, which is

usually split into stages interspersed with refuelling points where a feeding frenzy quickly builds the body weight back up again. These incredible migrations are part of a strategy for survival that allows food stocks to recover in the Lough while the birds are away.

Examining ringed birds tells us more about their astonishing journeys. One ringed bird, a teal, was found to have flown 2,500km from Russia to here. Northern Ireland Environment Agency, The National Trust, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and volunteers undertake regular surveys of the Lough’s birds.

Water Quality

Water quality is essential for people and wildlife using the Lough. It is monitored to ensure that the many discharges into the Lough do not cause pollution.



Teal



Knot



Common Mussel



Strawberry Worm



Sandmason



Mount Stewart Estate Woodland

Anne's Point

Boretree Island West

Chapel Island

Pig Island
important high water roost.

Boulder Field washed down from Scrabo
after the ice age.

Rock Armouring used to prevent
erosion.

Newtownards Sailing Club

Winter, low tide

Huge flocks

The Lough supports huge numbers of birds, particularly in winter (*about 30,000 wildfowl and 55,000 wading birds*). Internationally important numbers of birds such as redshank and knot are to be seen all along the northern shores in winter, along with nationally important numbers of other species. Large flocks of knot, dunlin, curlew, redshank, oystercatcher, ringed and golden plover and bar-tailed godwit build up as the days grow colder and shorter. They provide an amazing spectacle as they perform incredible aerobatics with thousands of birds forming twisting, swirling ‘clouds’ while flying.

Birds feed with the fall of the tide and roost on the islands and saltmarsh at high tide.

Cockles are the favourite food of the 4,000 to 6,000 oystercatchers in the Lough. Each bird can eat 40-50 cockles at one feeding session. Some use large stones to smash open the cockles like a blacksmith pounding on an anvil. Near isolated stones you can sometimes see hundreds of empty cockle shells where oystercatchers have been at work. Oystercatchers may be seen on the Lough throughout the year but not always the same individuals. As spring approaches some move to countries further north to nest, while winter sees an influx of birds from more southerly shores.

Oystercatchers, along with other waders make no effort to construct a nest and their eggs are patterned so that they are beautifully camouflaged while lying on stones and shell debris.

OYSTERCATCHER



Cockle



Scrabo Tower



Bar-tailed Godwit



Black-tailed Godwit



Curlew



Sand and mud flats with eel-grass beds

Worm Casts

Scrabo Hill & Country Park

Scrabo Tower

Newtownards

Floodgates

Floodgates - Owned and managed by Ards Borough Council and The National Trust.

Floodgates

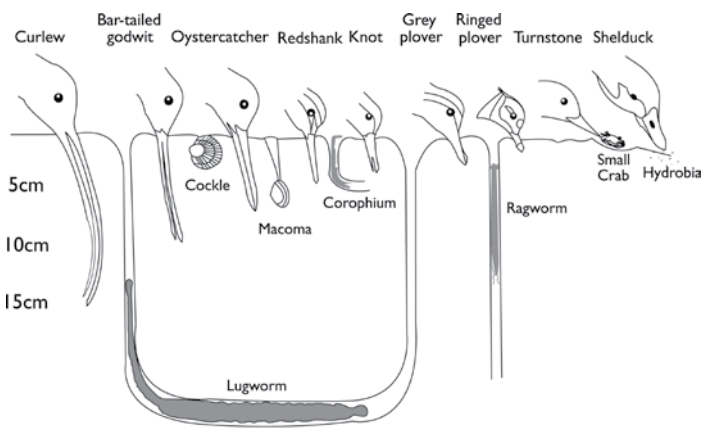
This is the most northerly point of Strangford Lough, at the foot of Scrabo Hill. In 1811 Lord Londonderry claimed 200 acres of flat land at the head of Strangford Lough by building floodgates. This area was turned into arable farmland. The sea defences were upgraded in 2000 to protect the town of Newtownards. Care was taken to minimise adverse effects on the environment and monitoring is ongoing. Coastal defences can sometimes lead to erosion and loss of habitat elsewhere as wave energy is displaced along the coast.

Bird Life

Across the sand flats south west of here lies the Wildfowl and Wetlands Centre at Castle Espie, which is one of the places you can find out more about the Lough's bird life.

The melancholy call of the curlew is evocative of wild and wet areas.

The extraordinarily long bill of the curlew is adapted to probe deep into the sand and mud in search of food that is not accessible to other predators.



Bird beaks are adapted to eat different kinds of food

CURLEW



Lugworm



Redshank



Dunlin



Shelduck



Sea Aster

Sand flats

Sea Defences

Scrabo Tower

Scrabo Hill & Country Park

Sea Defences



Winter, low tide

Scrabo Hill forms the backdrop to Newtownards and the northern shores of Strangford Lough. Its name may come from the old Irish word 'Scrabac' meaning 'Scraggy'. Early man saw the advantages of the summit's 160 metre-high vantage point above the Lough. Bronze Age hut circles, a late Iron Age hill fort and numerous related artefacts have been discovered here. Corrugations on the hill mark old 'lazy-beds' - remnants of cultivation during the Famine.

On a clear day, the summit affords views over Strangford Lough and Lecale to the Mourne, across the Irish Sea to Ailsa Craig off the Scottish coast, the Mull of Galloway and the Isle of Man, east over Belfast Lough and north to the Belfast Hills and the Sperrins.

Scrabo Tower

Scrabo Tower was built in 1857 as a memorial to distinguished soldier and politician Charles Stewart Vane, 3rd Marquis of Londonderry, purportedly financed by his tenants and friends, including the

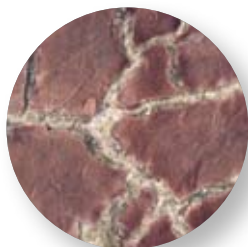
Emperor Napoleon the 3rd of France, in recognition of his concern for his tenants during the Famine. Today both it and the Country Park are managed by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

Scrabo Country Park

The Park includes the famous Scrabo Quarries. Their fine sandstone (*protected from glaciation by a volcanic dolerite cap*) has been used across Northern Ireland for building since Anglo – Norman times; Grey Abbey, Newtownards Town Hall and Belfast's Albert Clock are Scrabo stone. The old quarries, which display mud-cracks, ripple marks, current bedding and volcanic intrusions have been designated an Area of Special Scientific Interest for their important geology.

Also within the Park is Killynether Wood, an old estate woodland owned by the National Trust. Today, Killynether is made up of mature beech trees, between 120 and 140 years old, an area of mixed woodland and a hazel wood.

SCRABO TOWER



Scrabo Sandstone



Gorse



Bluebells



Kestrel



Beechwood



Chapel Island
Greyabbey Sand flats Reagh Island Rough Island Island Hill Comber Estuary Comber

Island Hill - Owned and managed by Ards Borough Council and The National Trust.

Arctic migrants

Around 20,000 pale-bellied Brent geese (3/4 of the north European population) make the 3,000 km journey from Arctic Canada from October onwards to feast on the Lough’s eel-grass. Eel-grass is also the staple food of wigeon and provides a nursery area for young flatfish. The birds will also eat a soft, green alga called Enteromorpha and farmland grass as food runs low from January onwards.

The Brent geese that breed on Canada’s Bathurst Island are one of the world’s most northerly breeding birds.

The Comber Estuary

The Comber River is the second biggest fresh water input to Strangford Lough (the main one being the Quoile River). The Comber Estuary is one of the few places in Northern Ireland with rich and extensive salt marsh. Its rarity makes it particularly valuable. These flat, open damp areas appear bleak but

are rich in plants specially adapted to live in salty, waterlogged soil. They are a nutrient store for the Lough and an important part of the ecosystem.

The main threat to salt marsh comes from development near the shore and erosion.

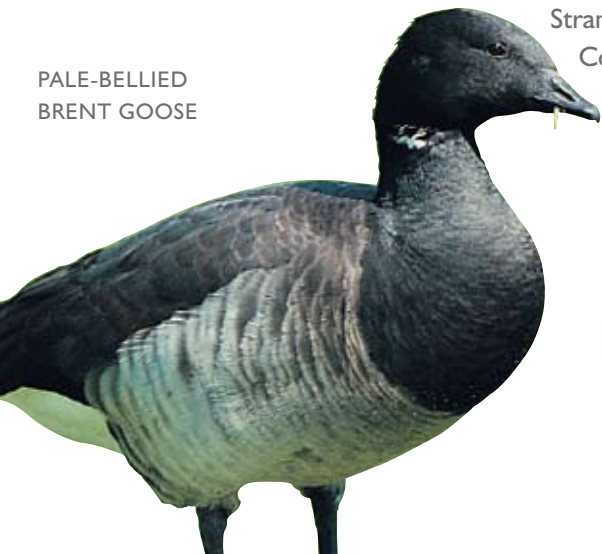
Rough Island

Rough Island was inhabited within the past 100 years. The remains of a cottage and orchard can be seen. Farming ceased here in the 1950s and the vegetation has reverted to bramble and hawthorn. Archaeological evidence suggests habitation of the island as long ago as 4,000 years B.C. Prehistoric pottery remains, including Neolithic bowls and a quantity of flints and axe heads, have been found.



Flint Arrow Heads

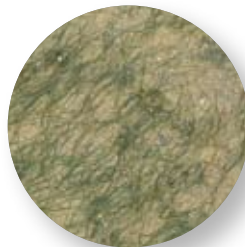
PALE-BELLIED BRENT GOOSE



Ringed Plover



Wigeon



Eel-grass



Salicornia



Sea Milkwort

Totem Pole
Symbol of the area’s links with Canada, summer breeding ground for the pale-bellied Brent geese.

Causeway to Island

Rough Island

Ogilby Island
It is a great high water roost for birds.

Sand flats

Pladdy
(like an island but covered at high tide)

Wading birds

Comber Estuary
The navigable channel is used by the local sailing club.



Winter, low tide

Sea bed

The Lough's seabed teems with life. Horse mussels provide a hard surface for other creatures to live on and are the basis for tremendously rich communities of international importance. Colourful sponges, sea squirts, scallops, predatory starfish and crabs are just some of the creatures living there. By contrast, Dublin Bay prawns prefer fine mud areas to make their burrows.

Shellfish farming

Near here is an established oyster farm. Scallops and mussels are also grown in the Lough and native flat oysters have

Whiterock - The car park and shore at Whiterock is owned and managed by Ards Borough Council.

been ranched. Shellfish are usually grown on trestles between the tides, laid on the seabed, or cultivated on ropes held up by buoys. Unlike fin-fish farming, shellfish cultivation does not require the use of antibiotics or artificial feeding.

Sailing

There are eleven sailing clubs on Strangford Lough, Strangford Lough Yacht Club (Whiterock) being the largest. Boats at these clubs range from dinghies to large cruisers. Competitive sailing takes place throughout the summer and annual regattas and other events are held.

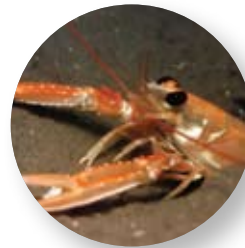
MUSSELS



Thrift



Horse Mussel Community



Dublin Bay Prawn



Native Oyster



Lobster

Sketrick Castle
A 16th century castle captured in 1536 by John Prowse, who was constable of Carlingford Castle. Open all year.

Trasnagh Island

Bradock Island

Strangford Lough Yacht Club



The walkway and shore at Killyleagh are owned and managed by Down District Council and The National Trust

Islands

The Lough’s seventy or so islands are in fact drowned drumlins. There are also numerous rocks and pladdies that are submerged at low tide.

Some are no more than a patch of pebbles and coarse grasses at high tide, though even these can be highly sought after nesting sites for birds such as terns. Others are large enough to be grazed by cattle. The National Trust use a barge to carry livestock and maintain the tradition of farming on some islands. Grazing keeps the grass species-rich and full of herbs. Knapweed, scabious, yarrow and sorrel are abundant. These in turn provide a nectar and food source for butterflies. In winter, short grass is more palatable for ducks and geese.

Surrounded by water and at a safe distance from predators such as foxes, islands are a haven for ground

nesting birds such as terns, gulls and skylark. Birds that feed on the shore use these islands to roost when the tide is high.

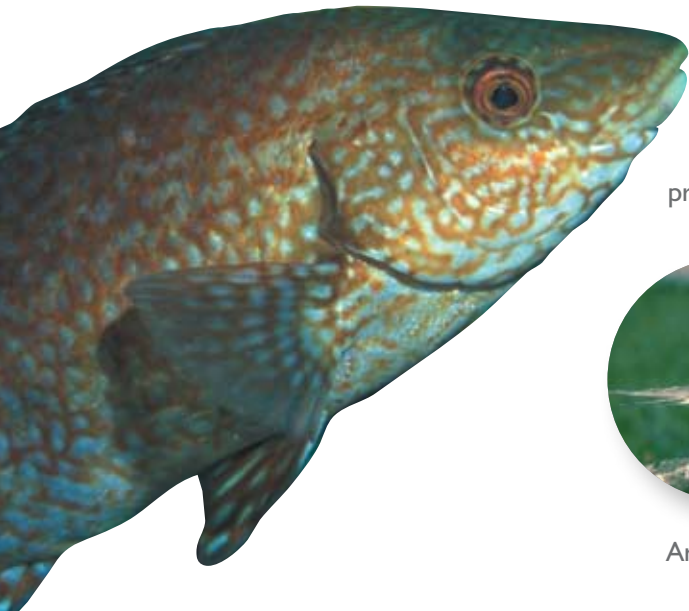
The island of Dunnyneill derives its name from the fort of the Neills. There is evidence of an artificial rampart and defence system on the island.

The small lakes and marshy areas lying between the drumlins around Strangford Lough provide excellent winter feeding for greylag geese, mute swans, mallard, teal and snipe.

A former commercial harbour

The impressive brick tower, the Town Rock Light, at the entrance to the harbour, was built to guide commercial vessels from a more industrial past. (See also ‘Kircubbin’ page 14). Today it is more often used by recreational craft.

BALLAN WRASSE



Arctic Tern



Common Mussels



Anemone



Common Starfish



Brittlestars

Killyleagh Castle
Dating back to the 1600s,
this is the oldest castle still
inhabited in Ireland.

Shore Walk

Dunnyneill

Town Rock Light

Jackdaw Island



Winter, low tide

St Patrick

St Patrick is credited with having brought Christianity to Ireland and he is said to have landed at the mouth of the River Slaney in 432 AD having sailed into the Lough through the Narrows. The church at Saul marks his first Christian meeting place and from here monks spread Christianity throughout Ireland and much of Europe.

Quoile Pondage

The Park is situated beside the entrance to the Quoile, the biggest fresh water input to Strangford Lough and a haven for birdlife. The freshwater Pondage is a National Nature Reserve managed by Northern Ireland Environment Agency. It was formed following the construction of a tidal barrier to protect the town of Downpatrick from flooding.

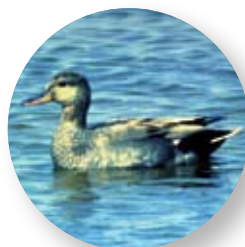
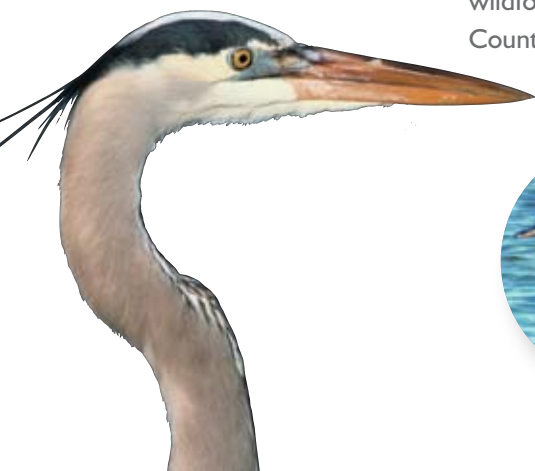
Migrating waders pass through in spring and autumn. However, wildfowl are most numerous in the winter. Find out more at The Quoile Countryside Centre.

Hérons

About 70 pairs of herons have made their homes in woodlands around Strangford Lough. They live in groups and the wood at Kinnegar has the largest heronry. Herons build huge, untidy nests – up to a metre across, using twigs and branches. They favour scots pines but other trees are also used. Despite their great size the birds are able to land with precision on these precarious looking structures even when they are buffeted by the wind. Strangford, Portaferry and other shore fronts are good places to see herons fishing. The heron's long legs allow it to stand patiently in shallow water, carefully watching out for its prey. It is worth waiting quietly to see the previously motionless bird suddenly spear a fish with its long sharp beak.

You can follow the Long Walk path to the bird hide where there is a good vantage point for the heronry. People are asked not to go too close to the heronry so as not to disturb the birds. It is, at any rate, easier to see them from a distance than from the bottom of the trees looking up.

GREY HERON



Gadwall



Turnstone



Mute Swan



Mallard



Goldeneye



Kinnegar Wood

Launches Little

Launches Long

Salt Island

Site where St. Patrick
landed

St Patrick's Statue
at Saul

Gore's Island

Quoile Yacht Club

Gibb's
Island

Causeway
to
Gibb's
Island

Mourne
Mountains

Quoile
Pondage

Slieve
Croob

Ringwood

Audley's Castle - Owned and managed by The National Trust and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Colourful underwater world

Sunstars, sponges and jewel-like anemones are just part of the colourful underwater world of Strangford Lough. You can see these for yourself if you visit the Exploris aquarium in Portaferry, which takes you through the underwater world of Strangford Lough and the Irish Sea.

Castle Ward Estate

The first house built by the Ward family, in about 1610, was a tower house designed with defence rather than comfort in mind. The house, which stands in the farmyard, is typical of those built by the Anglo-Irish at that time and was surrounded by a fortified farmyard or bawn.

The present Castle Ward house was built in the 1760's on a gentle slope overlooking Strangford Lough. It was remarkable for having been built half in the classical Palladian style and half in the Gothic

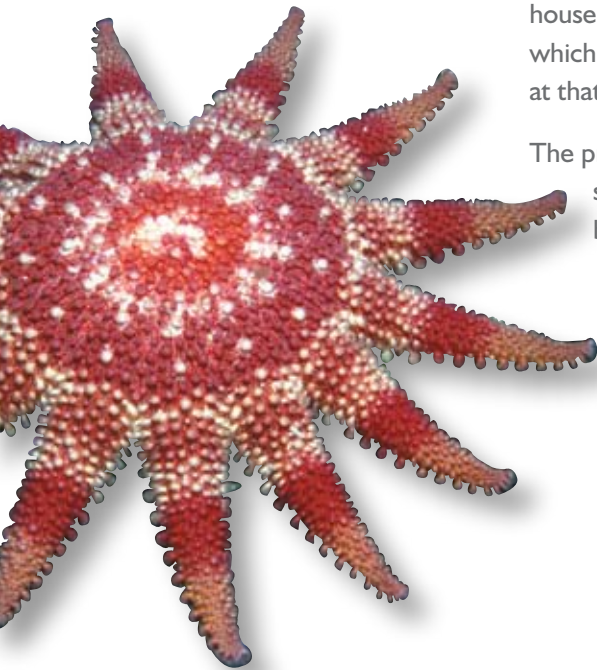
style. It is said that this arose because the first Viscount Bangor and his wife could not agree and each insisted on a different style. The curious division is carried through the interior of the house.

Audley's Castle

Audley's Castle (Northern Ireland Environment Agency), is a 15th century tower house built by the Anglo-Norman Audley family. In 1646 it was sold to the Ward family by John Audley.

The castle overlooks the fork in the underwater 'y' shaped channel that runs most of the length of the Lough. To the south is the Narrows where water rushes through a deep narrow passage connecting to the Irish Sea.

STARFISH - SUNSTAR



Common Seal



Otter Footprints



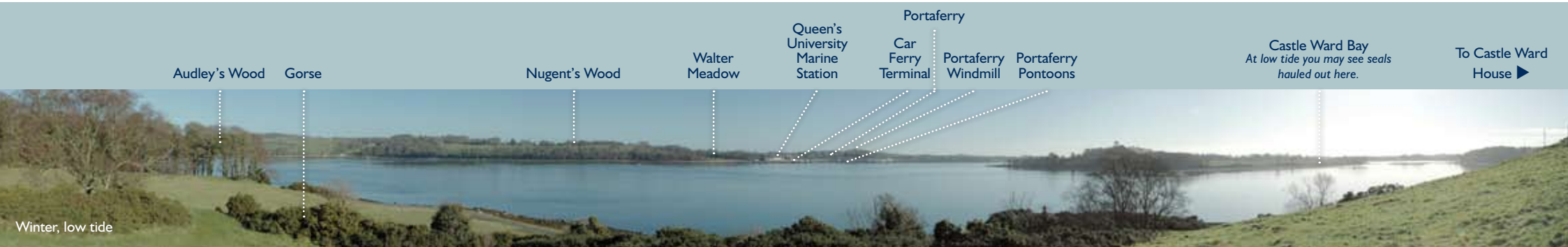
Beadlet Anemone



Encrusting Sponges and Soft Sponges



Brittle Stars



Audley's Wood Gorse

Nugent's Wood

Walter Meadow

Queen's University Marine Station

Portaferry
Car Ferry Terminal Portaferry Windmill Portaferry Pontoons

Castle Ward Bay
At low tide you may see seals hauled out here.

To Castle Ward House ►

Winter, low tide

Terns

Terns may be seen hurtling from the sky to catch fish under the water. Sand eels are a favourite prey.

Each spring, upwards of 2,000 Sandwich, Arctic and common terns arrive from the edge of the Antarctic or Africa to breed on the Lough's islands. Surrounded by water and at a safe distance from predators such as foxes, islands make good refuges for birds that nest on the ground.

In some years Swan Island, just in front of the harbour, is a favourite nesting place for terns.

Jellyfish and other plankton

Lion's mane and moon jellyfish may be seen drifting in the water past Strangford and Portaferry in summer. They are the largest of the plankton, which are more usually microscopic plants and animals.

Jellies are often washed up on the shore as, like all plankton, they have no control over where the tides and currents take them. The lion's mane jellyfish is much larger than the moon jellyfish and is red brown in colour. Its long stinging tentacles are used to stun prey and can also give human bathers a nasty sting.

Microscopic plants (*phytoplankton*), along with other plants, capture the sun's energy and form the basis for all life in the Lough. Huge quantities of plankton are swept into the Lough with every tide. They flourish in the swirling waters of the Narrows that mix them in a nutrient cocktail and they in turn provide a rich food source for other animals. Huge basking sharks (up to about 10m and the second largest fish in the world) are regular visitors to the Lough but they feed only on plankton and are harmless to humans.

ARCTIC TERN



Grey Seal



Sandwich Tern



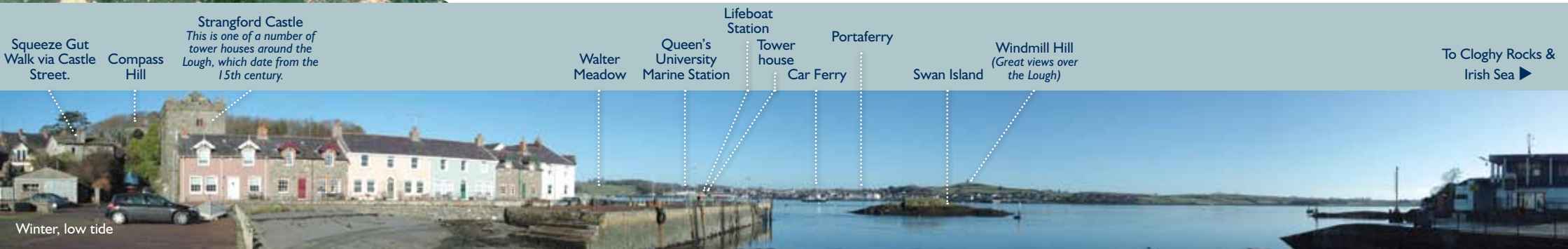
Sea Urchin



Dead Man's Fingers



Moon Jellyfish



Strangford Castle
This is one of a number of tower houses around the Lough, which date from the 15th century.

Squeeze Gut
Walk via Castle Street.

Compass Hill

Walter Meadow

Queen's University Marine Station

Lifeboat Station

Tower house

Portaferry
Car Ferry

Swan Island

Windmill Hill
(Great views over the Lough)

To Cloghy Rocks & Irish Sea ►

Cloghy Rocks - Owned and managed by Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

Cloghy Rocks National Nature Reserve covers part of the western shore of ‘the Narrows’, the channel which connects Strangford Lough to the Irish Sea. It includes groups of weed covered rocks off shore which disappear at high tide, to reappear as the tide falls.

Except for brief periods of still water at high and low tide, the sea in the Narrows is always on the move as 350 million m³ flow in and out of the Lough with every tide.

Common and grey seals haul out to rest on the rocks at low tide. Seals are generally grey-brown, lighter as their fur dries out. It is easier to see them if you have binoculars, since they are well camouflaged against the seaweed.

Seals hunt for fish in Strangford Lough and the open sea. Common seals come into the shelter of the Lough to pup in June and July.

The seals come very close but can be disturbed by a few people walking on the shore, so please be considerate and stay off the beach.

Along the shore, birds search for food. Most birds are here in winter: a scene that looks bleak may be full of life.

COMMON SEAL



Common Seal



Grey Seal



Grey Seal
(adult male bull)



Grey Heron



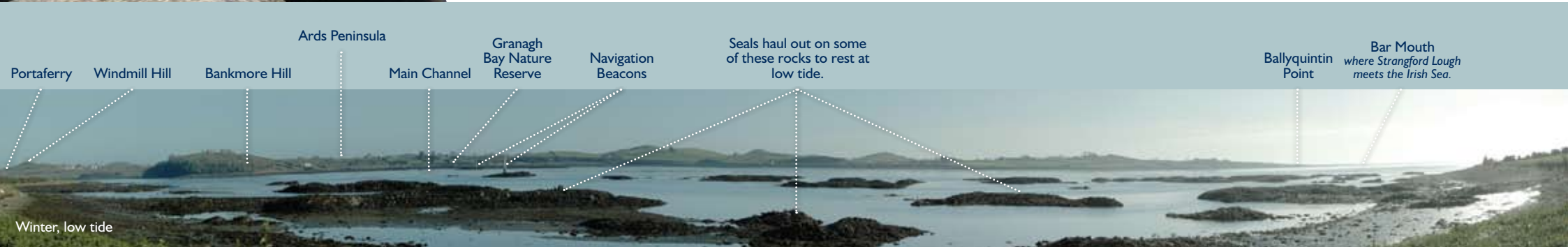
Oystercatcher



Shelduck



Bladderwrack



Ards Peninsula

Granagh Bay Nature Reserve

Navigation Beacons

Seals haul out on some of these rocks to rest at low tide.

Ballyquintin Point

Bar Mouth where Strangford Lough meets the Irish Sea.

Kilclief - The beach at Kilclief is owned and managed by Down District Council and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

Seaweed

The shore here is characterised by rocky and sandy bays with views across the Narrows. The seaweed on the shore with its natural debris is home to all sorts of animals, beetles, crabs, insects, sandhoppers, and fly larvae. These all provide food for birds and other animals.

Look out for white and pink coral weed and many kinds of seaweed in the rock pools on the lower shore when the tide is out.

Kelp seaweed grows a bit like an underwater forest. You can see it at very low tide near the water's edge.

Without the water to buoy the kelp fronds up it collapses, but if you extend it you will see just how tall it grows.

Seaweeds shelter many other creatures. Wrasse fish even build a kind of nest in it. The edible red coloured dulse seaweed grows on kelp. Some people have the rights to harvest seaweed in the Lough. They cut the kelp to harvest the dulse, taking care not to permanently damage the kelp.

For a short period of time seaweed was burnt in kelp kilns and processed for use in makeup, jellies, and glass making. The remains of kelp kilns can be found on Taggart Island and in other places around Strangford Lough.



VELVET SWIMMING CRAB



Thrift



Sea Aster



Kelp



Coral Weed



Ballan Wrasse



Bankmore Hill

Granagh Bay

Ards Peninsula

Ballyquintin Point

Angus Rock

Garret Rock

Killard (National Nature Reserve)

Kilclief Castle
One of the first to be built in this area from before 1440

Killard - Owned and managed by Northern Ireland Environment Agency

BEE ORCHID



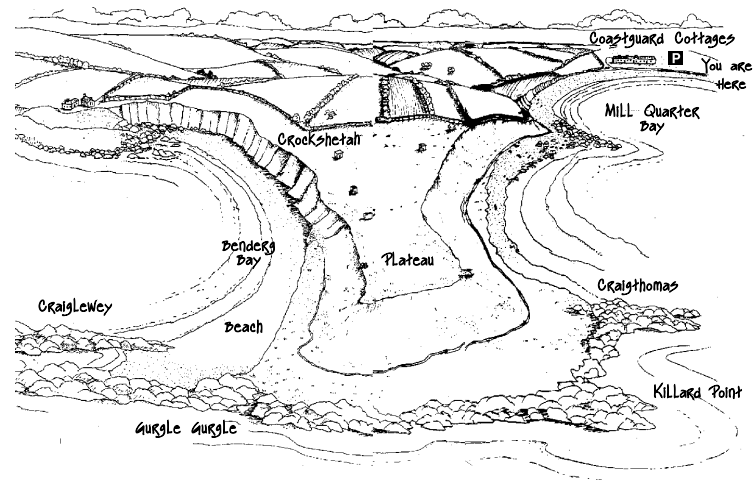
Coastal grassland

To the south (right) of this bay is one of the most interesting places along this part of the Down coast, Killard Point. Its interest lies not just in its mixed terrain of rocky and sandy shorelines, dune grassland and plateau, but in the huge variety of flowers that grow upon it. Throughout summer a succession of flowers colour the grassland first blue, then yellow, pink and purple.

Such variety exists because the land has never been ploughed or re-seeded – the natural grasses and plants have survived, unaffected by cultivation, fertilisers or herbicides. In winter Killard is grazed by cattle. This is essential to keep the grasses short, which encourages the growth of the wild flowers. Orchids flower in June and July – not the large tropical ones you see in the florists, but small spikes of flowers from white to mauve and deep pink.

In summer the grassland is alive with the sound of bumble bees, grasshoppers and skylarks. Clouds of butterflies are a common sight.

The soft eroding cliffs provide nest sites for fulmars and sand martins.



Fulmar



Skylark



Common Blue Butterfly (Female)



Pyramidal Orchid



Common Spotted Orchid



Wild Pansy

Strangford Lough

Angus Rock

Ballyquintin Point

Isle of Man
Can be seen on a clear day

Killard Point
The rocks that jut out to sea are about 500 million years old. They are covered in colourful lichens

RAF Radar Station 1953-78
on the plateau of Killard Nature Reserve

Walk to the Reserve



Winter, low tide



Ballyhornan – Carpark is owned and managed by Down District Council.

Gun's Island

Gun's Island is uninhabited and privately owned. It has a thriving colony of shag and some kittiwakes on the seaward cliffs. Terns sometimes nest here. To the north lies the wreck of a French ship, the *Amitie*, which was carrying arms and cannons for the 1798 rebellion. Formerly there was an RAF camp at Ballyhornan.

Along the Coast

From the beautiful sandy beach here a path winds along the coast - sandy bays and rocky outcrops are populated with pink sea thrift in summer and colourful seaweeds. The ruins of a former coast guard station lie close to the village.

The townland of Sheepland (*can also be reached from the Rock Road between Ballyhornan and Ardglass*) has ancient field patterns and boundaries, a corn mill, and a natural rocky inlet harbour. Isolated and hidden even from the sea, it was a centre for smuggling tobacco, rum and brandy from the Isle of Man.

Further along are the holy well of St Patrick and the ruins of St Nicholas's church at Ardtole with its medieval souterrain (*underground*) passage refuge

Special Rocks and Flowers

The 420 million year old rocks here provide insight to the important geology of the area (p4). Saltmarsh and shingle beaches have developed in sheltered bays and inlets. You'll find lichen-covered rocks, then grassland on shallow soils, while plants like buck's-horn plantain and stonecrops cling to rocky outcrops. In early summer slopes are ablaze with spring squill, common-spotted orchids and primrose. Inland there is a lovely mix of maritime and grassland plants. This is the only known site in Northern Ireland for rock sea lavender.

The Wall Butterfly

Look out for butterflies on the flowery, warm south-facing slopes on the cliffs in summer. Sheepland Coast is a special place for the rare wall butterfly.

ROCKS AND LICHENS



Kidney Vetch



Wall Brown Butterfly



Spring Squill



Biting Stonecrop



Ardtole Church

Benderg Bay

Killard Point

Ballyhornan Beach

Irish Sea

Gun's Island

Coastal Path To Sheepland Coast ►



Winter, low tide

Ardglass Harbour – owed and managed by Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority

Fishing

The natural deepwater anchorage at the foot of the green hill that gives Ardglass its name (*ard-high, glas -green*) has been used by people since the earliest times of hunter gathering. 150 years ago, some four or five hundred sail-powered craft crowded into the harbour, fishing during the summer months for herring - the ‘silver darlings’ of the Irish Sea - and in the winter for whiting and cod. Today Ardglass is a fish marketing and processing centre.

Castles and Fortified Houses

The colourful houses that curve round the harbour road are the peaceful successors to a chain of six tower house castles and fortified warehouses. They were built by local merchants to protect the harbour in the troubled times of the 14th to the 16th centuries, when Ardglass was the busiest port in Ulster. William Ogilvy transformed the town during the 1800s.

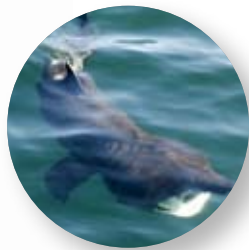
A Conservation Area

A Conservation Area was designated in Ardglass in 1996, focusing on its early 19th century street pattern. The village has many archaeological and historical sites one of which is the forbidding Jordan’s Castle, which was held under siege for three years during the Tudor Wars in Ireland.

Gulls and Marine Mammals

Some of the best possible views of gulls can be found here including black-headed gulls, herring, and common gulls. It’s also a favourite spot place for spotting seals where cheeky, well-fed grey seals can sometimes be seen taking fish off the boats in the harbour! In the winter time you can see turnstone and ringed plover and in summer gannets, with their distinctive black wing tips and spectacular vertical dives. If you are lucky you may even see bottle-nosed dolphins, harbour porpoises, basking sharks and minke whales.

HERRING



Basking shark



Orange Lichen



Sea Beet



Gannet



Black-backed Gull

- Ardglass golf course
- Ardglass Castle (now Ardglass Golf Club)
- Margaret's Castle
- Cowd's Castle
- Jordan's Castle
- St Nicholas, Church of Ireland
- King's Castle
- Phennick Cove Marina
- North Dock Lighthouse

Irish Sea ►



Killough Bay

A great place to see pale-bellied Brent geese close up. They come here to feed during late winter and spring, once the main wintering flock from Strangford Lough has eaten all the eelgrass there. The mudflats are full of maritime invertebrates - food for many fish and other birds. They also support algae and sponges which are very sensitive to habitat disturbance. The honeycomb worm is especially important here. They build reefs that are vital for biodiversity. The many different seaweeds and marine animals that live in rock pools and crevices are specially adapted to the incoming and outgoing tides. Look out for wading birds such as golden plover.

Grain and Fishing

Killough, from the Irish: Cill Locha - 'church of the lough', bustled in the 18th century. The village and port were the creation of Michael Ward of Castleward, who renamed it Port St. Anne in honour of his

wife, established a salt works and greatly improved harbour. When the production of cereals like barley increased in Lecale, Killough expanded to deal with the export, until its population was almost double what it is today. The village prospered and the grain merchants built their imposing houses in Castle Street, and their stores on the narrow lane leading to the quays.

The village also had one of the biggest fishing fleets on the coast. In 1886, fifty families worked in the fishing trade with most of the men spending the winter months away on merchant vessels. The cottages of Fisherman's Row are still here today. The old coastguard station lies south of the village.

Rocks and Flowers

The coast from Killough to St John's Point is a veritable rock garden in summertime. Inland the maritime grassland is a rich tapestry of colourful wild flowers.



DUNLIN



Worm Casts



Rock Sea Spurry



Grain Barley



Coastguard Station



Pale-bellied Brent Geese



Killough Rope Walk

Lime Kiln

Killough Pier

Killough Bay

Isabella's Tower

Coney Island Pier

Coney Island

Ardglass Bay

Irish Sea

Winter, low tide

Tyrella Beach and carpark is managed by Down District Council

A Beacon of Light

St John's Point lighthouse perches on a rocky headland guarding a busy shipping lane. Dundrum Bay's half moon shape and on-shore wind made it almost impossible for ships to get off a lee shore during gale force winds. After much pressure from merchants and ship owners, it was built with a foghorn in 1844. In 1893 they raised its height and built houses for the lighthouse keepers and their families. The light was electrified in 1980. Peregrine falcons may be spotted here.

The ruins of St John's Point Church are at least 1000 years old – a place of worship for generations. The historic landscape has remained largely intact. Walk the distinctive small roads with their high hedges, and you are probably walking the original ancient paths and roads used by people from 300 years ago and earlier still.

Bring your Binoculars!

Look out for redshank, oystercatchers, and dunlin. The area is renowned for the large autumn gathering of meadow pipits and

skylark before their departure southward. In nearby farmland listen for the rapid twittering of the linnet or catch a yellow flash of yellowhammer. A Medieval stone tidal fish trap can be seen on the foreshore.

Tyrella Beach

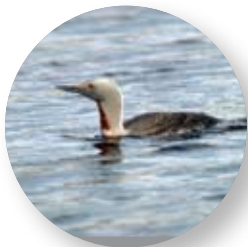
Round the coast lie Minerstown and Tyrella - a wide sandy beach backed by mature sand dunes. Controlling access to the dunes has helped conserve its flora and fauna. Look out for razor or cockle shells, lugworms and sand masons – often merely a cluster of sea shell fragments with no sign of the tiny tube below sand level to which they are stuck! This is also a great place to fly your kite!

From August onwards you may spot an off-shore flock of scoter (sea duck) diving for shellfish or a red throated diver.

ST. JOHN'S POINT LIGHTHOUSE



Ringed Plover



Red-throated Diver



Common Seal



Otter



Marram Grass

St John's Point Lighthouse

The Mourne Mountains

Slieve Donard

Newcastle

Dundrum

Minerstown

Tyrella Beach



A Special Landscape

The panoramic views from Slieve Patrick – with its giant statue of Saint Patrick, erected in 1932 - are heart-stopping. The old name 'Magh-Inis' - the island plain, refers to a time before the first sea barriers were constructed (*about 200 years ago*) and drainage began, when the waters of Strangford Lough, the Irish Sea and Dundrum Bay, almost encircled the area.

The Lecale Hills extend from Downpatrick, to Portaferry on the Ards Peninsula. Sheep and cattle graze the foothills patterned with well maintained stone walls and white-rendered buildings. Small conifer forests and large wooded estates with parkland along the shoreline also feature in this scenic landscape.

A Holy Place

This area is steeped in ecclesiastical history – from the 5th Century Monastery at Nendrum in the north to Inch Abbey close by. Look towards Myra and Ringbane and to the mouth of the Slaney River

where in 432AD it is said St Patrick landed on this foreshore. The round tower of St Patrick's parish church, a replica of an early church, rises out of the hills nearby at Saul where St Patrick was reputed to have been given a barn by the local chieftain Dichu and where he established his first church.

Struell Wells, nearby, is an early Christian site with the remains of an old church, a drinking and eye well and bath houses for men and women.

St Patrick's Way and Lough Money

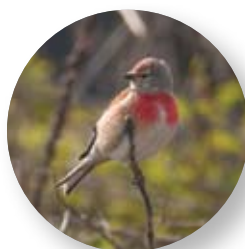
Ramble along St Patrick's way - a network of paths through peaceful countryside with beautiful stone dykes and green fields or visit the restored ruins of St. Tassach's church at Raholp, the saint who reputedly administered the last rites to Saint Patrick.

Lough Money is popular with licensed anglers but also an important habitat for wildlife with the forested side of Slievnagriddle rising steeply beyond.

ST. PATRICK'S STATUE



Gorse



Male Linnet



St. Patrick's Church (Saul)



Stone Walls



Lough Money

Quoile Pondage Drumlin Hills Quoile River Castle Island Gore's Island Salt Island Strangford Lough Ards Peninsula Irish Sea

Recommended Walks

KNOCKINELDER



See Page 8

Park at Kearney village or Knockinelder and follow the path and country road. The route is circular but the end of Knockinelder Bay is subject to erosion and you may have to leave the path and cross rocks.



PORTAFERRY



See Page 11

Walk north along the Lough Shore Road to Marlfield (approx 8.5 km, about 2 hours) with the option of taking in Ballyhenry Island.

Take the path into Nugent's Wood (1.6km, about 1 hour).

Take the circular route up over the Windmill Hill with magnificent views over the Lough and Irish Sea (1.6 km, 1 hour).

For the more energetic there is a circular route via the Lough Shore Road and Mountain Road (9.5 km, 2-3 hours).

In the opposite direction you can walk to Ballyquintin Point along the Shore Road. (12.2 km return, about 2.5 hours)

BALLYHENRY ISLAND

See Page 12

You can walk around the island. Be careful as the terrain is rough. Seaweed is very slippery and you should only go onto the shore with suitable footwear.

Note that at high tide the island is cut off from the shore for about half an hour.

HORSE ISLAND

See Page 13

You can walk out to the island via the causeway. Avoid the muddy channels which can be very deep and dangerous. At high tide the island is cut off from the car park for up to one hour.

SCRABO

See Page 20

Scrabo Country Park (managed by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency) has various paths around the tower, through Killynether Wood and around the disused sandstone quarries that all offer the opportunity for quiet countryside enjoyment.

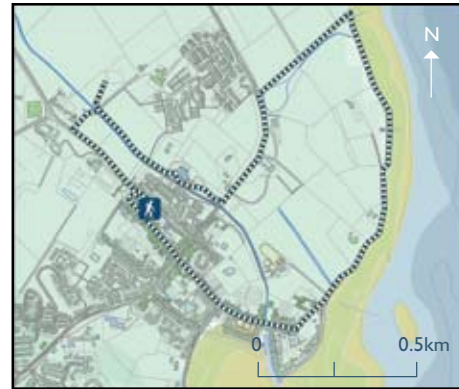
WHITEROCK



See Page 22

There are magnificent views of the islands from some of the back roads near here. You can also go across the causeway to Sketrick Castle and the island.

KILLYLEAGH



See Page 23

Shore Loney Walk, approx 3.6 km circular route, takes about 1.5 hours. The shore part of this walk is rough underfoot. To avoid getting wet, it should only be walked at low tide.

DELAMONT

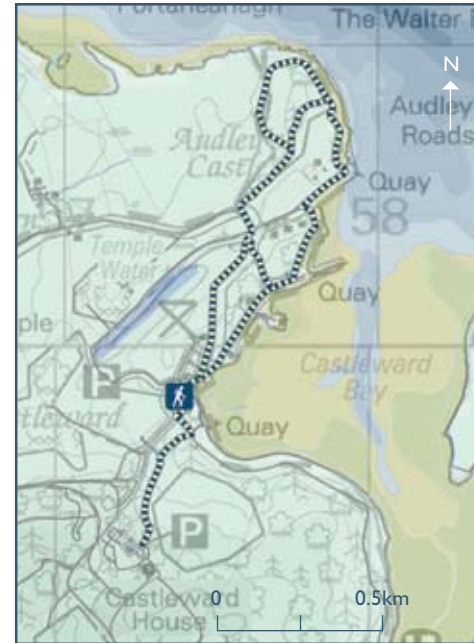
See Page 24

Fantastic views over the Quoile and the Lough. Follow the waymarked arrows for walks and views without disturbing wildlife on the shore. Nearby Gibbs Island can be accessed by Island Road. Café, playground, model railway.

Also:

Boat trips around the Lough embark from the Quay during the summer.

CASTLEWARD & AUDLEY'S CASTLE



See Page 25

You can follow the paths around the Castle Ward Estate (National Trust) through parkland, woodland and along the shore from the estate house to Audley's Tower. Playgrounds, shop and café.

STRANGFORD / COMPASS HILL



See Page 26

Walk from Strangford around Compass Hill to Black Causeway.

Take a sharp left at the end of Castle Street through the Squeeze Gut.

Mainly through the village and woodland this circular walk is approximately 1.2 km and takes about 40 minutes.

KILLARD



See Page 29

Access to Killard is by walking around the shore or across the field by the wooden kissing gate.

The first part is very stony but there is a path once you reach the base of the plateau.

Stay safe - keep clear of the soft eroding cliffs and cliff edges.

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THE LECALE WAY

The Lecale Way is a 65 km way-marked track that extends from the shores of Strangford Lough to the seaside resort of Newcastle. It can be done on several parts and full information on the route is available on our website and in leaflet form at the tourist information centres.

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BALLYHORNAN COASTAL PATH



See Page 30

This walk is part of the Lecale Way but can be made into a circular route. (9.6 km, approx 3 hours).

From the car park, at the northern end of Ballyhornan, you can walk down to the sea and along the foreshore. This will take you onto grassy tracks towards Sheepland and St Patrick’s Well. A lane will take you onto Sheepland Road and then turn left towards Ardglass. Keep right at a fork and past the ruins of St Nicholas Church at Ardtole. At the Strangford Road turn right towards Chapeltown. From Chapeltown continue along the Strangford road until a sign directs you onto the Killard road and back to Ballyhornan.

KILLOUGH COASTAL PATH

See Page 32

Part of the Lecale Way but can be made into a circular route. (6.4 km, 2 hours)

Start at Scordin car park south of Killough village. Walk toward the former coastguard station. A sign will direct you towards St John’s lighthouse over grassy tracks and stiles along the foreshore and higher grassy or rocky promontories. Arriving at Point Road it is worth taking a short diversion to visit the lighthouse and rocky coast before rejoining the road and heading onwards to St Johns Church. Continue uphill, past the junction with Rossglass Road South, and back towards the village of Killough.

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ST. PATRICK’S TRAIL

See Page 34

The St. Patrick’s Trail is a driving route that covers 148 km through a host of religious sites at Bangor, Newtownards, Strangford Lough, Portaferry, Downpatrick, Newry and Armagh. The trail links 15 key sites, identified as having some connection to St. Patrick’s life, mission or legacy.

Looking after Strangford Lough and Lecale area

- Use bins provided for all your litter or take it home.
- Keep your dog under control and on a lead. Scoop the poop!
- The creatures on the shore and in the rock pools are living - try not to damage them and always replace stones and seaweed. Do not remove wildlife or disturb habitat.
- At high tide Ballyhenry Island and Horse Island are cut off from the shore.
- Many areas of Strangford Lough have soft mud and are potentially dangerous. Err on the side of caution.
- Light no fires.
- Please be aware that any activity, from horse riding to dog walking is likely to disturb shorebirds.
- Please avoid large concentrations of wildfowl and waders between September and March. Please behave responsibly - respect the environment.
- NO vehicular access to the shore without permission.
- Seals are sensitive to disturbance. Avoid walking on the shore near where they are hauled out. Avoid taking boats close to haul outs.
- Avoid breeding sea bird colonies.

Protecting the environment while at the same time encouraging sustainable use of Strangford Lough and Lecale is a complex task involving a range of authorities, local people and the area's users. This booklet was produced by the Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership, supported by Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Ards Borough Council, Down District Council, the National Trust and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

The Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership

A long history of scientific research has confirmed the importance of the area to nature conservation. There are many sites that are part of a network of European conservation sites and have special protection under EU as well as Northern Ireland legislation. The built and cultural heritage of the area is also extremely important. The area has been used by people for business and pleasure over the centuries. The aim is to ensure that it continues to be used and enjoyed in a way that is environmentally sustainable. Many organisations are engaged in looking after the Lough's wildlife and landscape and some own or manage areas on or adjacent to the Lough.

The Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership bring many of these interests together.

www.strangfordlough.org



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Shipwreck Illustration by Andrew Davidson

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