

The Durham
**COASTAL
FOOTPATH**
through the District of Easington

The Durham Coastal Footpath is an 11 mile walking route through the District of Easington from Seaham in the north to Crimdon in the south. It leads through stunning clifftop scenery and links into settlements which have their own special stories to tell . . .

Introduction

The area through which the Durham Coastal Footpath travels is one that has been affected by constant change, both natural and man-made. It has always been a special place for nature lovers. The geology of the area is Magnesian Limestone with boulder clay above it which supports grassland with wonderful plants and other wildlife. The Durham Argus butterfly feeds on the rockrose and can be seen during the summer months. Most of the coast is designated a National Nature Reserve and there are several Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Coal mining was the dominant industry in the area throughout the 20th century but



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following the closure of the pits in the early 1990's a large regeneration project entitled "Turning the Tide" began the process of restoring pit heaps back to natural grasslands. Tipping of colliery waste onto the beaches

stopped in 1993 and the natural action of the sea began to restore the spoil covered beaches.

Many of the old pastures along the coast were ploughed up to meet increasing demands for food, particularly during the Second World War and this destroyed much of the grasslands on the clifftops. Action has been taken by a number of organisations - Durham County Council, the National Trust, District of Easington Council, English Nature and the Durham Wildlife Trust - to recreate the natural habitats from the farm land and reclaimed colliery sites as well as to improve the existing grasslands.

“Turning the Tide” is a partnership of agencies partly funded by the Millennium Commission which has not only restored the coastline but has ensured that information about the area is available for local people and visitors. To this end you will find information panels and artworks at selected sites along the Durham Coastal Footpath and directional waymarkers which, together with this leaflet, will guide you along its length.

The Footpath can be walked in either direction or you might wish to join it from one of the car parks shown on the maps.

Public Transport Information can be obtained by contacting the Traveline on (0870) 608 2 608 (open daily 7am - 8pm).

A free public transport information pack for visitors is available from: The Public Transport Group, Environment & Technical Services Dept., Durham County Council, County Hall, Durham City, County Durham DH1 5UQ. Telephone: (0191) 383 3337 (answering machine outside office hours). email:transinfo@durham.gov.uk and web site:www.durham.gov.uk

When walking the Durham Coastal Footpath please take note of weather conditions before you set off and dress appropriately. Please take note of the coastal safety signs along the route.

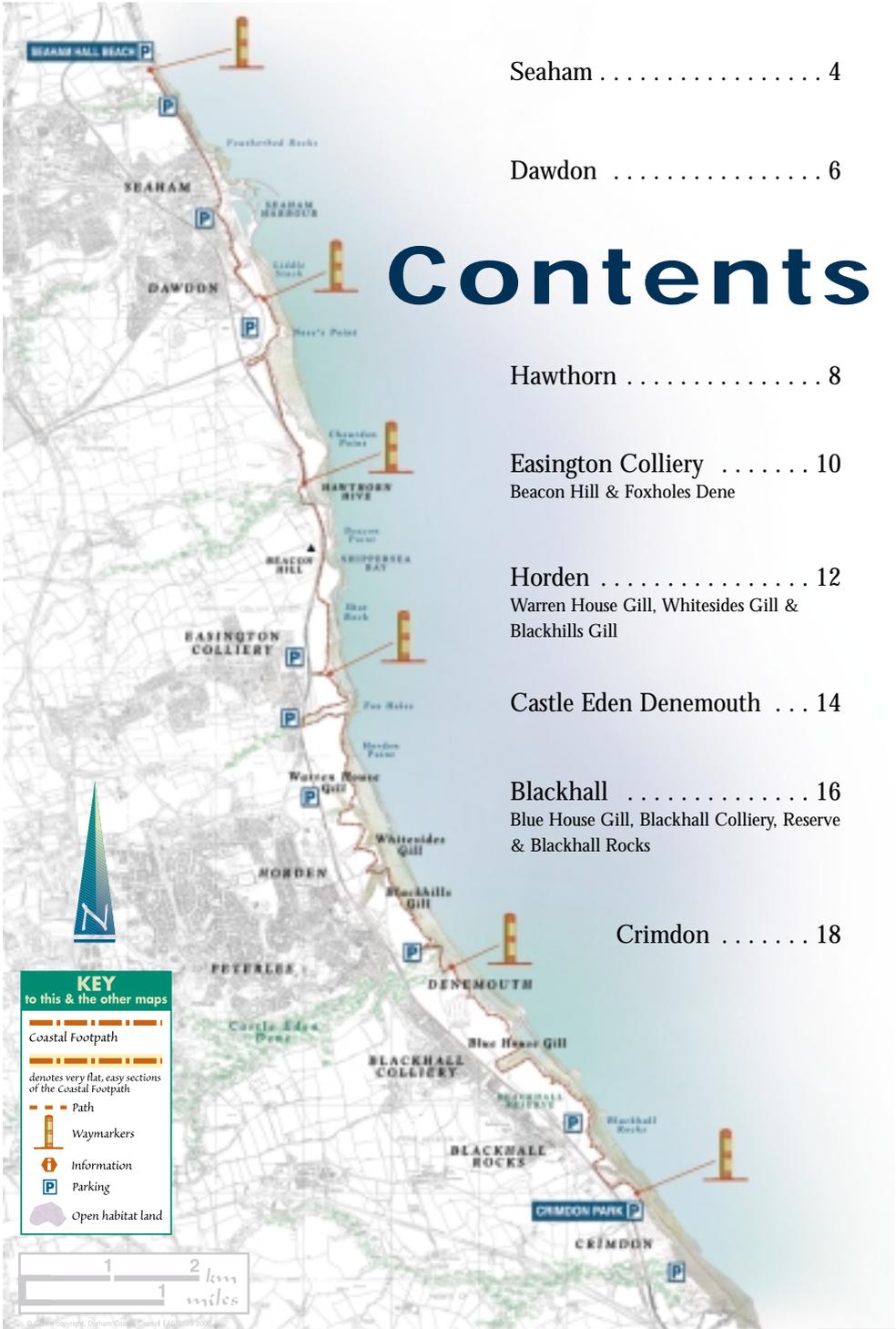


Left to right:

1. Interpretive Sculpture, Seaham Timeline.
2. Durham Argus butterfly.
3. Durham coast at Hawthorn Hive.
4. Signage at Seaham.
5. Oystercatcher, RSPB Images, Photographer Gordon Langsbury.
6. Coastal Footpath at Blast Beach.
7. Seaham Promenade.

Front cover images:

1. View from Noses Point.
2. Bloody Cranesbill. 3. Coastal Waymarker.



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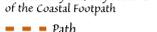
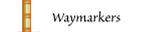
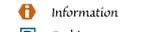
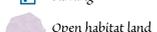
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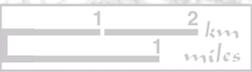
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KEY
to this & the other maps

-  Coastal Footpath
-  denotes very flat, easy sections of the Coastal Footpath
-  Path
-  Waymarkers
-  Information
-  Parking
-  Open habitat land



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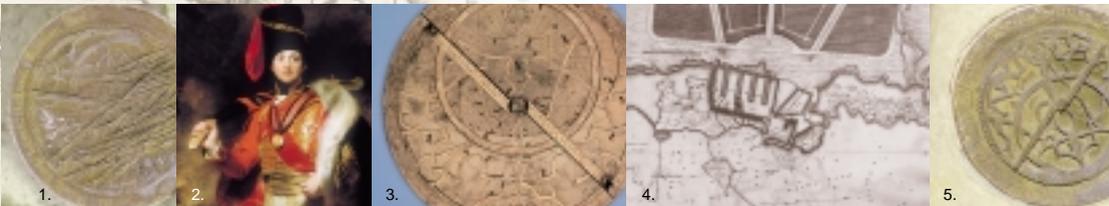
Old Seaham can be traced back to Saxon times, but the port of Seaham was founded in the 19th Century by the mine-owning Londonderry family - principally to transport coal . . .

Seaham

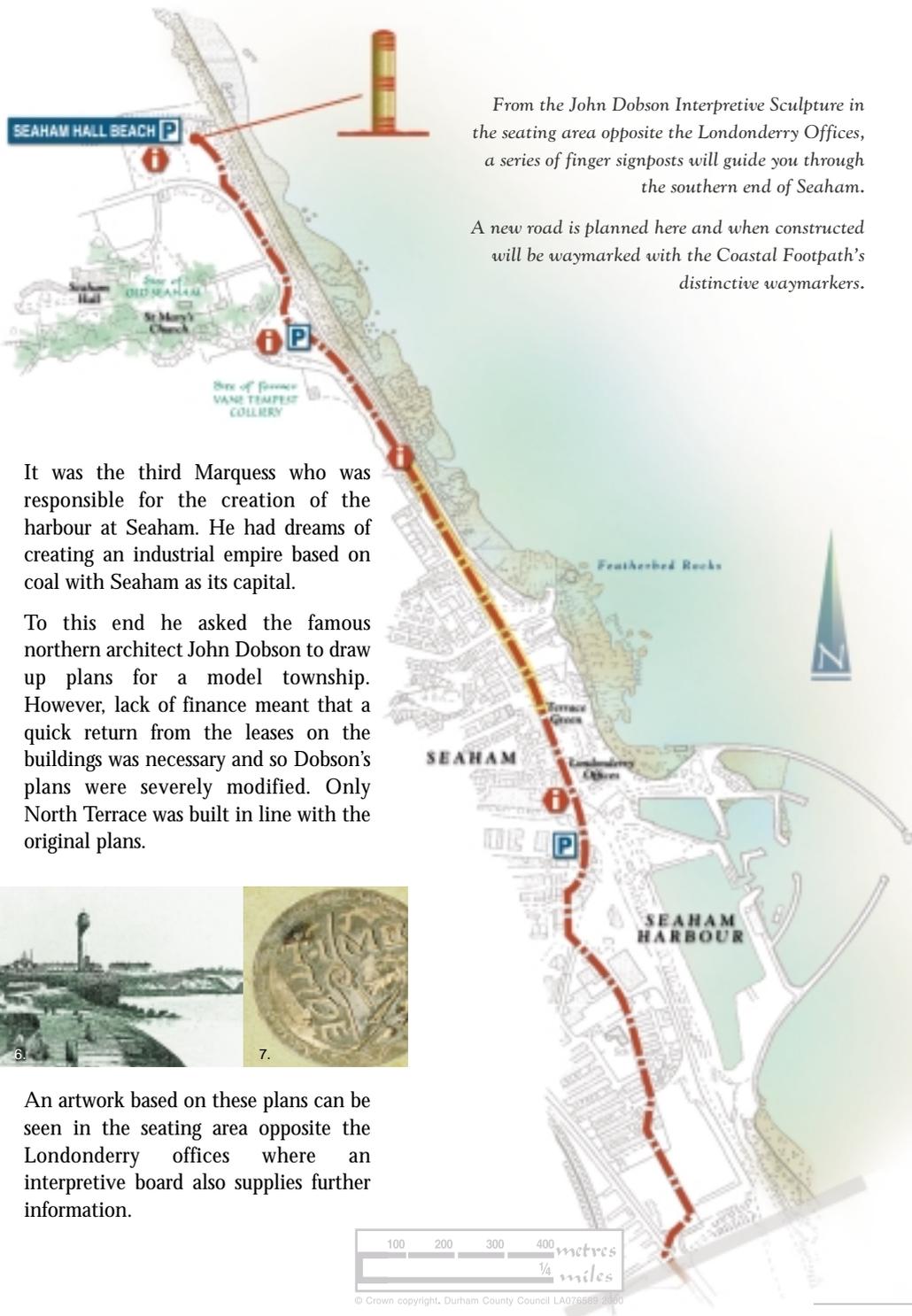
Between the Seaham Hall Beach Car Park at the northern end of the Coastal Footpath and Seaham Harbour you can follow the Seaham Time Line. This is a trail connecting four interpretive artworks which explain the history of the area. They are linked by bronze plaques in the footpath which are based upon the image of an astrolabe.

An astrolabe was a mathematical instrument designed in the 16th century which helped you to find where you were by linking the time of the sun's rising or setting and the position of the stars, to latitude.

The trail will take you along the Seaham promenade and past the Londonderry offices where there is a statue of the Sixth Marquess of Londonderry.



Left to right: 1,5,& 7. Seaham Timeline Plaques.
2. The 3rd Marquess of Londonderry, by courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.
3. Astrolabe, Museum of the History of Science, Oxford.
4. William Chapman's plan for Seaham Harbour, Durham County Record Office (D/X 29/1), Depositor Mr H.W. Marshall.
6. Seaham Harbour, circa 1860, District of Easington Past and Present Archive.



From the John Dobson Interpretive Sculpture in the seating area opposite the Londonderry Offices, a series of finger signposts will guide you through the southern end of Seaham.

A new road is planned here and when constructed will be waymarked with the Coastal Footpath's distinctive waymarkers.

It was the third Marquess who was responsible for the creation of the harbour at Seaham. He had dreams of creating an industrial empire based on coal with Seaham as its capital.

To this end he asked the famous northern architect John Dobson to draw up plans for a model township. However, lack of finance meant that a quick return from the leases was necessary and so Dobson's plans were severely modified. Only North Terrace was built in line with the original plans.



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An artwork based on these plans can be seen in the seating area opposite the Londonderry offices where an interpretive board also supplies further information.



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The Coastal Footpath passes close by the site of Dawdon Colliery which ceased production in 1991 after which the site was reclaimed. Dawdon was linked underground to the Vane Tempest Colliery in Seaham and together with Seaham Colliery they are often referred to as "Seaham's three pits" . . .

Dawdon

Now all that can be seen of the Dawdon Colliery are two structures adjacent to the car park. These are part of the equipment for monitoring conditions in the capped shafts. Information about the colliery is given on a board next to the car park.

The Blast Beach is a location for the popular sport of sea angling and the topic is the inspiration for the sculptural centre piece of a viewing area above the promontory of Noses Point. To the north can be seen Sunderland, Whitburn Point and in the far distance, Tynemouth. To the south, the coast curves to the Hartlepool Headland and beyond to Middlesbrough, Eston Nab escarpment and the Hunt Cliff.

The name of the Blast Beach is thought to come either from the 19th century iron



- Left to right:
1. Dawdon Colliery Diving Pool, *courtesy of Mr. David Angus.*
 2. Blast Beach in 1997.
 3. Detail of Noses Point Waymarker Sculpture.
 4. Seaham Docks with bottleworks in distance, *District of Easington Past and Present Archive.*
 5. Blast Beach 1999.
 6. Cliff-top grassland.

works which were situated at Noses Point or from ballast dumped here by merchant ships. Noses Point was the scene of much industrial activity in the past. Seaham Bottleworks factory was situated here in 1855, then the ironworks were established and finally a chemical works was built in 1865.

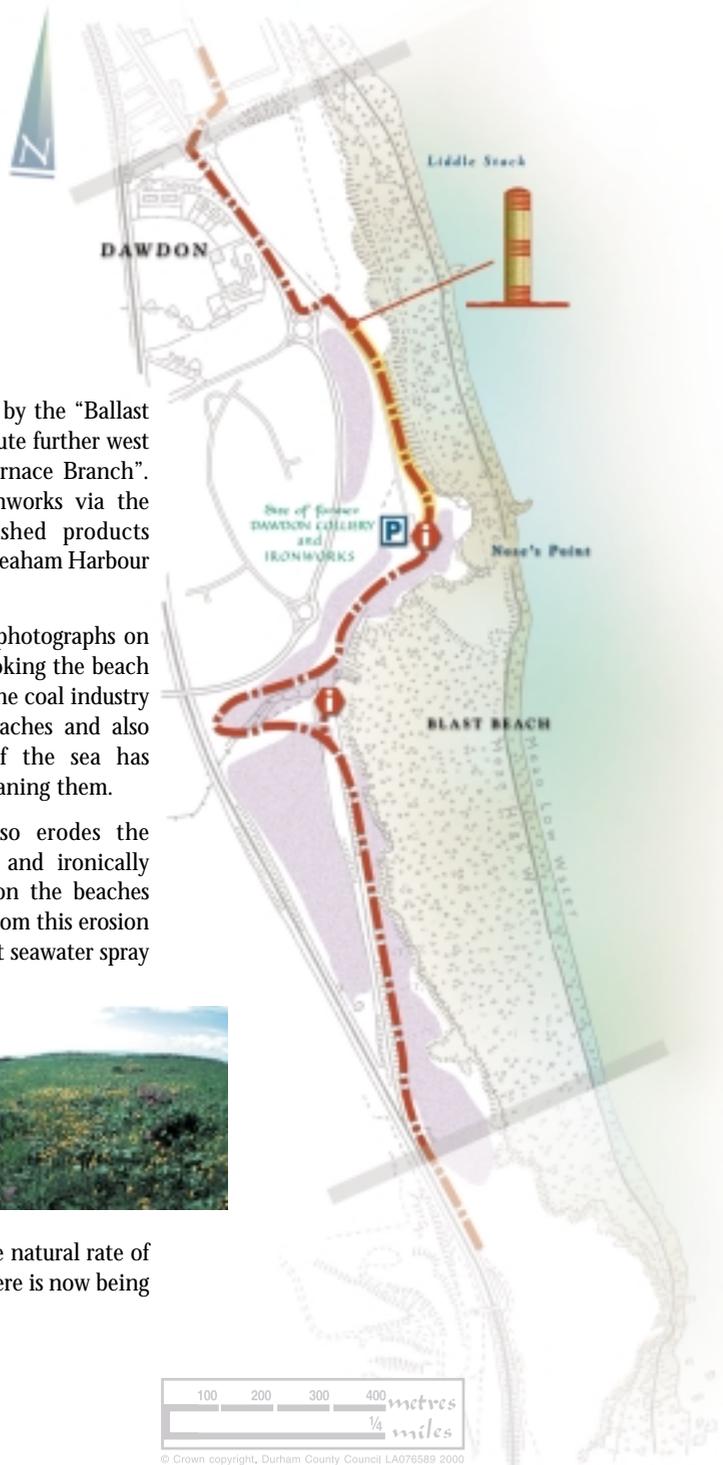
These factories were served by the “Ballast Railway” and later a track route further west was built called the “Blastfurnace Branch”. Coal was taken to the ironworks via the Blastfurnace line and finished products would be transported out to Seaham Harbour on the Ballast Railway.

Here, next to the footpath, photographs on an interpretive board overlooking the beach enable you to see both how the coal industry in the area blighted the beaches and also how the natural action of the sea has continued the process of cleaning them.

The action of the sea also erodes the Magnesian Limestone cliffs and ironically the tipping of mine waste on the beaches actually protected the cliffs from this erosion and reduced the effects of salt seawater spray



on the clifftop plant-life. The natural rate of erosion along the coastline here is now being carefully monitored.



The Coastal Footpath here follows alongside the coastal railway. Constructed in 1905 by the North Eastern Railway Company it linked Seaham with Hart junction . . .

Hawthorn

Part of the private station platform of the Pemberton family, Hawthorn Halt, remains here. Members of the Pemberton family could stop any train passing their platform and be transported to any destination along the line. The Pembertons, who were important local landowners, lived at Hawthorn Towers, a 30 room mansion, designed by architect John Dobson. It was built in 1821, originally for Major John Anderson and extended in about 1850 just after the Pembertons moved in. The "Towers" was demolished in 1969 and now only a few stones mark the spot.

Most of the Magnesian Coastal grasslands along the length of the Coastal Footpath have been designated as a Site of Special



- Left to right: 1. Hawthorn Viaduct from the coast.
2. R.L Pemberton and grandson, *District of Easington Past and Present Archive*.
3. Hawthorn Viaduct from the Dene.
4. Hawthorn Towers 1966, *District of Easington Past and Present Archive*.
5. Detail of Fragrant Orchid, *courtesy of Mr. Mike Lowe*.
6. Seed Gatherer.

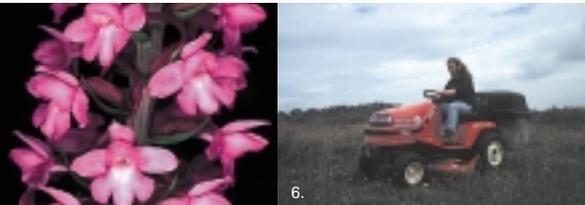
Scientific Interest because of their importance for nature conservation. The geology creates a soil suitable for species of wildflowers such as; betony, cowslip, cranesbill, rockrose, vetch and orchids. The field adjacent to Hawthorn viaduct is an

You have the option of a detour at this point. You can follow the waymarkers to the beach at Hawthorn Hive or follow the waymarkers through the western section of Hawthorn Dene.

excellent example of this grassland type and seeds have been collected from here and scattered elsewhere in the area to help re-create grassland habitats.

Hawthorn Dene & Hawthorn Hive

Some of the woodland in this dene has existed for about 400 years. Others are part of 19th century plantations of the Hawthorn estate which was managed by the Pemberton family. The area was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest due to the variety of plant species to be found here. An abundance of different types of trees can be seen including ash, sycamore, oak and yew. Shrubs include hazel, gooseberry and as the name of the dene would suggest, hawthorn. At ground level, hart’s tongue fern and the fragrant orchid are in abundance.



The footpath passes through an attractive limestone gorge and gives good views of the Railway Viaduct, opened to carry the Coastal Railway line over the Dene.



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Once at the heart of the East Durham coalfield, this is now an exceptionally attractive part of the Durham Coastal Footpath . . .

Easington Colliery

Beacon Hill

Beacon Hill is formed from an outcrop of what was originally a barrier reef laid down in a tropical sea which existed in this area thousands of millions of years ago.

It is likely from its name that a beacon site might well have existed here in the Roman period. The barn which can be seen on the top of the hill is a local landmark and was part of a bigger farm complex originally owned by the Londonderry family and let to various tenant farmers. Now owned by the National Trust, it is well worth a detour off the Coastal Footpath for the excellent views of the coastline which can be seen from there. Cross at the pedestrian crossing over the railway. Take care.



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Left to right: 1. View from Beacon Hill.

2. Shotton Rescue Team going to Easington Pit disaster, 1951, *District of Easington Past and Present Archive*.
3. Poem on the Easington Pit disaster by Steve Cummings. 4. Bird's-foot-trefoil. 5. Looking north from Foxholes.



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Easington Colliery

Easington Colliery was one of the last of the Durham collieries to be sunk and one of the last to close. Workings extended for over 5 miles under the sea. In May 1951, 81 men died following an underground explosion. The colliery site has been reclaimed and the pit cage, which contains a Time Capsule, has now been erected to form a landmark and lasting reminder to an industry that once shaped the whole of the landscape on this coast. Two time chambers are incorporated into the top tiers of the pit cage and every household in Easington Colliery has had the opportunity to store its Millennium message in these chambers.

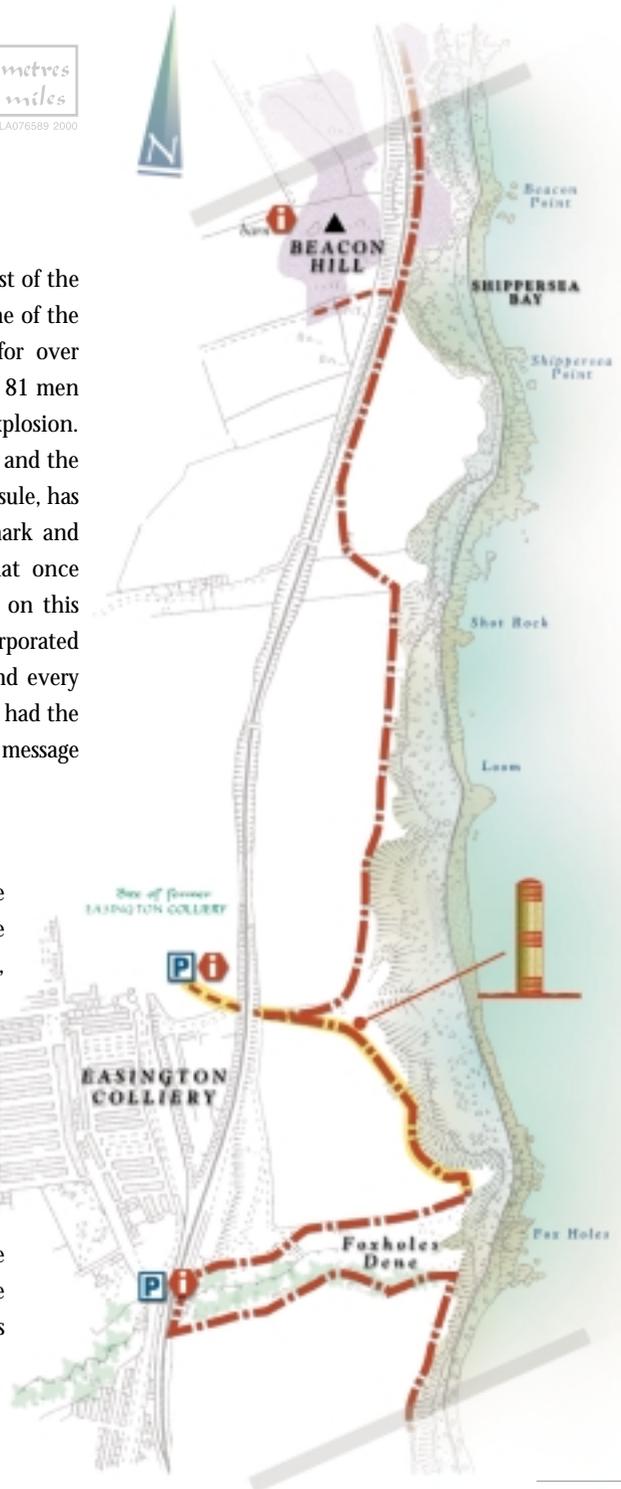
Foxholes Dene

Part of a longer dene bisected by the Coastal Railway and the road, the name is thought to refer to “the fox”,



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a hermit who reputedly lived in the caves. Foxholes Dene is one of the steepest and deepest of the denes along this stretch of coast.





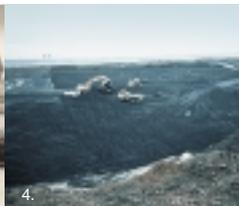
Popular once for seaside days out, the coast at Horden was very badly scarred by the tipping of colliery spoil. It is now returning to its natural beauty . . .

Horden

Horden

Once the site of Horden Colliery, which was sunk in 1900, the area has been reclaimed for leisure and industrial uses since the colliery's closure in 1987. An enormous heap of black spoil was slumping down over the cliff onto the beach below. Its removal involved the relocation of 500,000 tons of material, which was used to reclaim the 23 hectare (57 acre) colliery site and create the rolling grasslands you can see today.

As part of their programme to improve the quality of the sea water along the Durham coast, Northumbrian Water has constructed a new sewage treatment works at Horden. This plant takes sewage and waste water from the area around Easington, Horden



Left to right: 1. Spoil Heap at Horden before reclamation.
 2. Horden Coastline after reclamation.
 3. 1920s postcard from Horden, *District of Easington Past and Present Archive*.
 4. Beach cleaning at Horden. 5. Creating the Coastal Footpath.
 6. Landscaping at Whitesides Gill.

and Peterlee, which was previously pumped straight into the sea.

The waste water after treatment is now released through a 1 kilometre-long pipeline laid along the seabed off Horden beach and will not pollute the local beaches.

Warren House Gill

This gill is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest because of its geological importance. There are Scandinavian rocks here which were deposited by ice-sheets hundreds of thousands of years ago.

Whitesides Gill

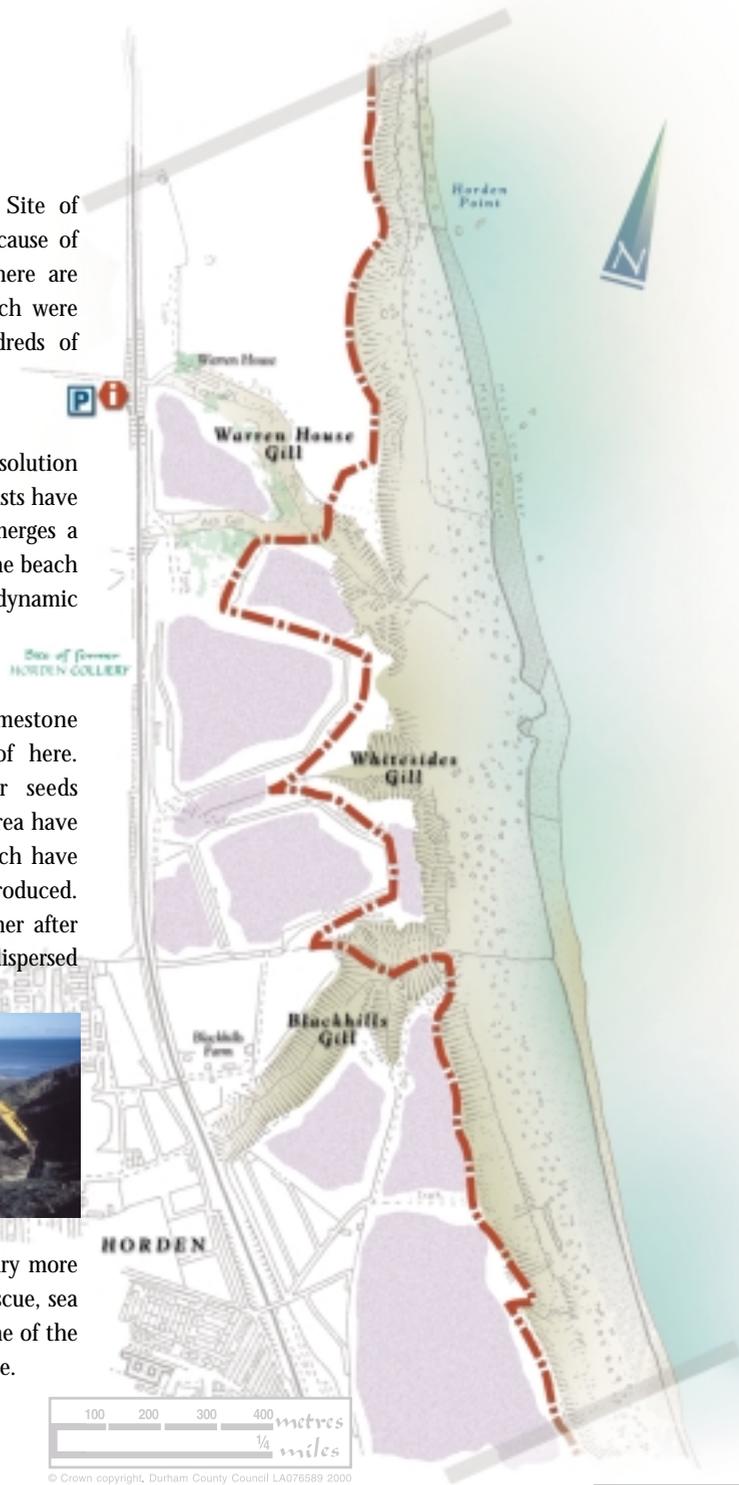
Here you can see an ingenious solution to a landscaping problem. Artists have created a land form which merges a surface drainage system into the beach by using natural elements in a dynamic way.

Blackhills Gill

A re-created Magnesian Limestone grassland exists just south of here. After ploughing, wildflower seeds taken from elsewhere in the area have been sown. Some species which have died out have also been introduced. The grass is cut in late summer after the plants have flowered and dispersed



their seeds, and when necessary more seeds have been sown. Red fescue, sea plantain and sea thrift are some of the plants which can be found here.



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Castle Eden Dene is one of the most important natural areas in the North East. The Dene is a four mile long steep sided valley cut into the Magnesian Limestone . . .

Castle Eden Denemouth

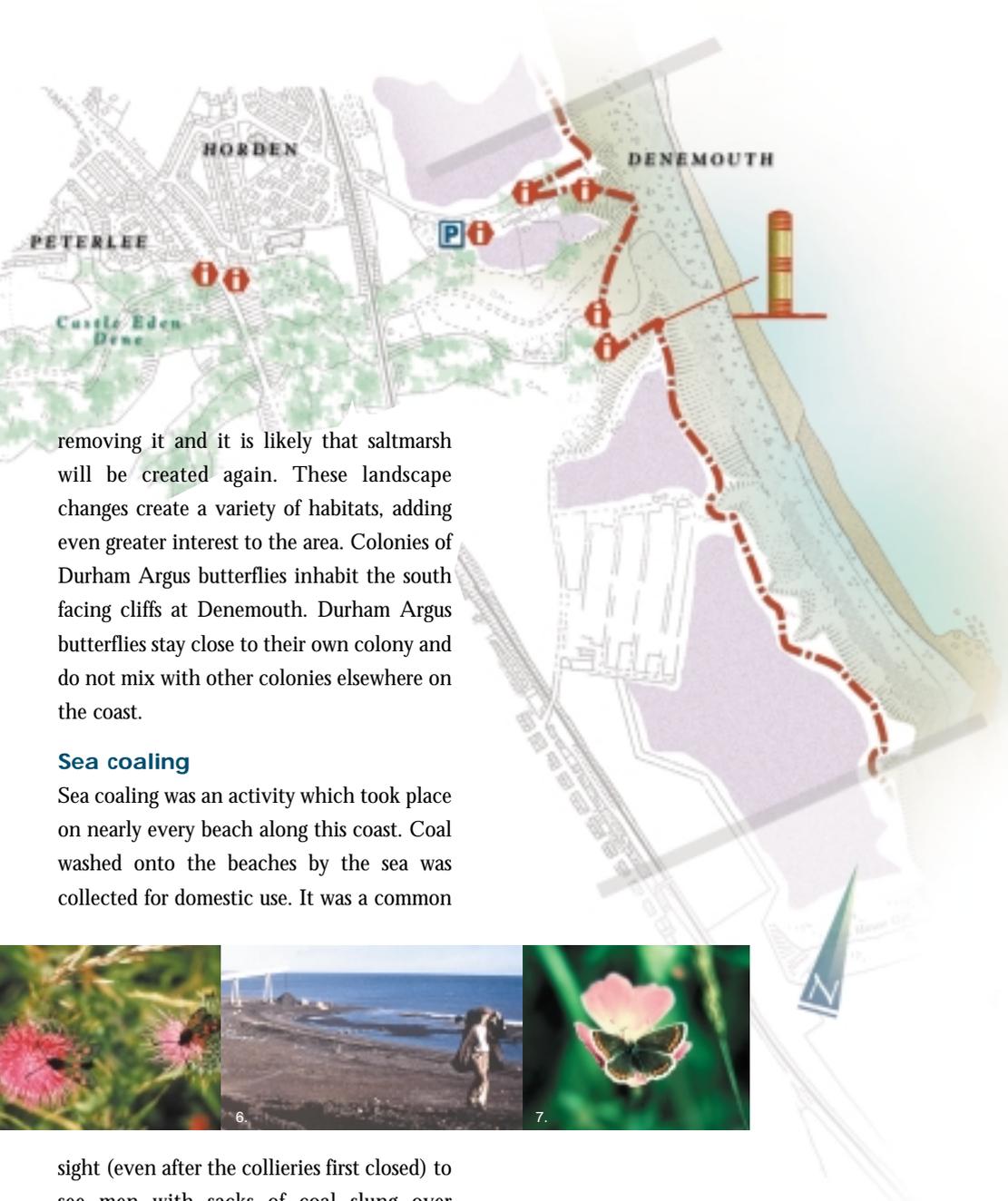
This area is a National Nature Reserve, valued amongst other things for its yew trees, insects and botanical variety. The Dene was owned by the Burdon family for about 200 years. In around 1850 the Rev John Burdon allowed the public to visit on payment of a small fee. By the first part of the 20th century the Dene was one of the most popular places to visit in the area. It is now owned and managed by English Nature.

Denemouth is an interesting area because of the numerous changes which have occurred here. In the past, high tides have flooded the area creating saltmarshes. More recently the action of the sea has caused colliery waste to



Left to right: 1. Scout Camp at Denemouth, 1910, *District of Easington Past and Present Archive*.
2. Common Spotted Orchid, *courtesy of Mr. Mike Lowe*.
3. Castle Eden Dene. 4. Castle Eden Dene Viaduct.
5. Burnet moths. 6. Sea Coaling.
7. Durham Argus butterfly.

be transported down the coast and dumped here at the beach at Denemouth. This has raised the beach and prevented further inundation by tides causing the saltmarshes to dry up. However, with the ceasing of the dumping of colliery waste, the sea is now



removing it and it is likely that saltmarsh will be created again. These landscape changes create a variety of habitats, adding even greater interest to the area. Colonies of Durham Argus butterflies inhabit the south facing cliffs at Denemouth. Durham Argus butterflies stay close to their own colony and do not mix with other colonies elsewhere on the coast.

Sea coaling

Sea coaling was an activity which took place on nearly every beach along this coast. Coal washed onto the beaches by the sea was collected for domestic use. It was a common



sight (even after the collieries first closed) to see men with sacks of coal slung over bicycles. Often such collections were franchised out and the coal was then resold creating quite profitable businesses.



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The sight and sound of skylarks rising above the short Magnesian Limestone grassland is very noticeable in this area. The grass is kept purposely short to encourage them . . .

Blackhall

Blue House Gill

Blue House Gill is an important area due to its sheltered aspect. Eight species of orchid have been found here.

Blackhall Colliery

The sinking of Blackhall Colliery began in 1909 and the pit was one of the most modern in the country at the time. Underground emergency shafts connected Blackhall, Horden and Easington collieries.

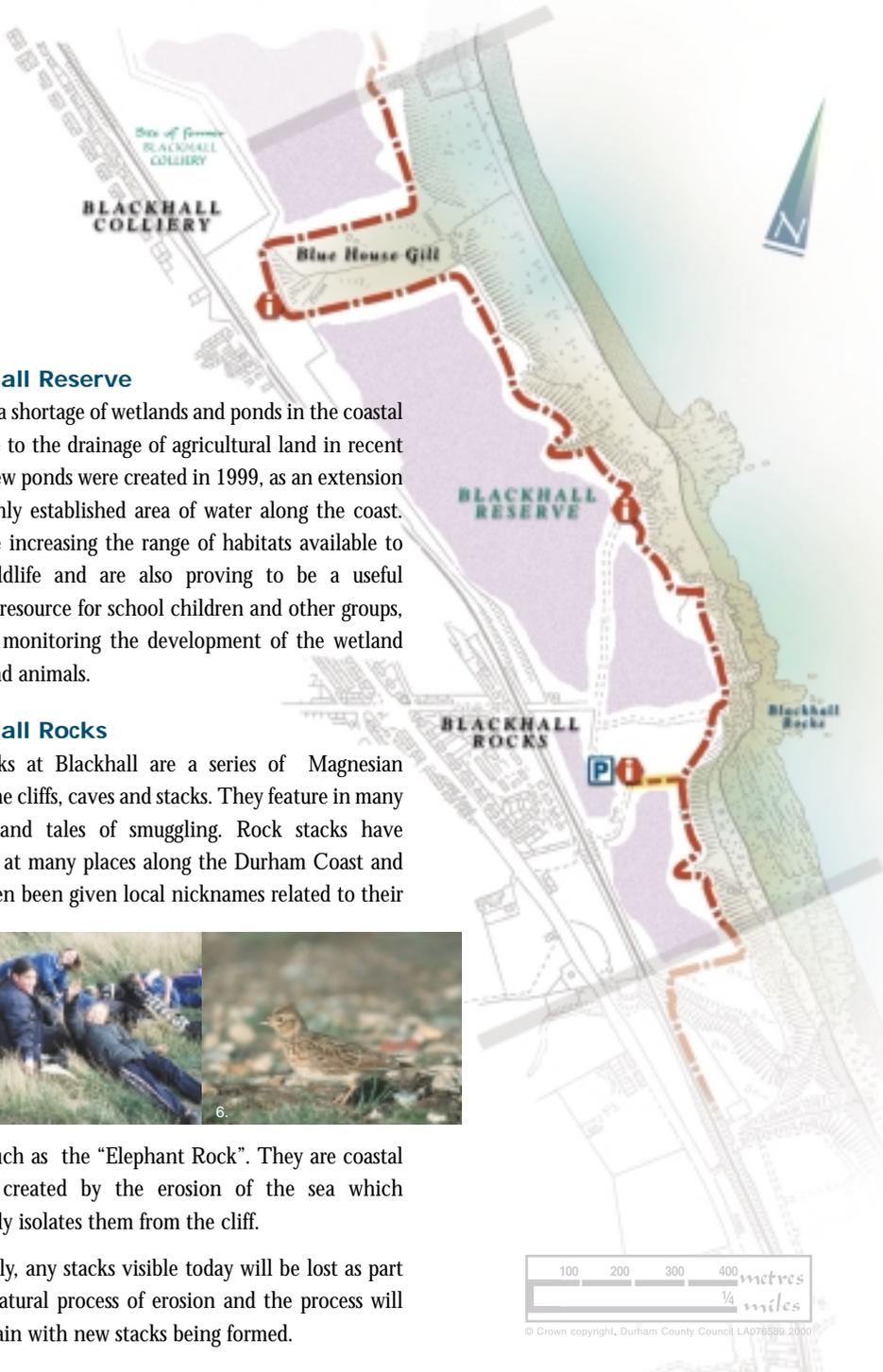
In 1981 the colliery site was reclaimed and landscaped. There is only a shallow depth of soil over the coal shales and the trees have struggled to survive. Plants from the nearby



Left to right: 1. Blackhall Rocks, early 1900s, *District of Easington Past and Present Archive*.
2. Fragrant Orchid, *courtesy of Mr. Mike Lowe*.
3. Blackhall Colliery Sinkers, *District of Easington Past and Present Archive*.
4. Local People involved in site clearing.
5. Children on the coast.
6. Skylark, RSPB Images, *Photographer Rob Glover*.

cliff edges have now spread naturally into the grassed areas enriching them substantially.

The beach just south of Blackhall was one of the main areas for the dumping of colliery spoil.



Blackhall Reserve

There is a shortage of wetlands and ponds in the coastal area, due to the drainage of agricultural land in recent years. New ponds were created in 1999, as an extension of the only established area of water along the coast. They are increasing the range of habitats available to local wildlife and are also proving to be a useful learning resource for school children and other groups, who are monitoring the development of the wetland plants and animals.

Blackhall Rocks

The rocks at Blackhall are a series of Magnesian Limestone cliffs, caves and stacks. They feature in many legends and tales of smuggling. Rock stacks have occurred at many places along the Durham Coast and have often been given local nicknames related to their



shapes such as the “Elephant Rock”. They are coastal features created by the erosion of the sea which eventually isolates them from the cliff.

Eventually, any stacks visible today will be lost as part of this natural process of erosion and the process will begin again with new stacks being formed.



Crimdon is once again becoming popular as a recreational destination . . .

Crimdon

The wide flat sandy beaches at Crimdon, together with the beautiful Crimdon Dene just to the South, became very popular with holiday makers and day trippers after the 1914-18 War. This area was particularly popular with miners and their families from the nearby mining villages especially after the miners were granted two weeks annual holiday a year.

Crimdon caravan park was established in the 1920's and 1930's to cater for caravans and tents.

A very pleasant walk can be taken through Crimdon Dene and under the dramatic arches of Crimdon Viaduct. This was built



Left to right: 1. Crimdon Dene, *District of Easington Past and Present Archive*.
2. Crimdon Banks, 1920s, *District of Easington Past and Present Archive*.
3. Crimdon Beach 1999.
4. Little Tern, RSPB Images, *Photographer Chris Gomersall*.
5. Coastal Waymarker.

for the North East Railway Company to carry the Seaham to Hart stretch of the Coastal Railway which opened in 1905.



The Haswell to Hart Cycletrack and Walkway, part of the National Cycle Network can be joined just to the south of Crimdon Dene.

Turning the Tide - A Millennium Project

Partners:

The Millennium Commission
Durham County Council
District of Easington
The National Trust
One NorthEast
The European Union
The Countryside Agency
Northumbrian Water
English Nature
Durham Wildlife Trust
Groundwork East Durham
The Environment Agency
Northern Arts
Seaham Harbour Dock Company

Following the success of the Turning The Tide project, The Countryside Agency designated the newly regenerated coastline as a **Heritage Coast** in April 2001.

Further Information

For further information about this area and things to see and do please contact:

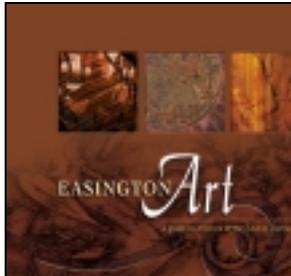
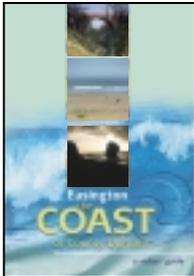
Durham County Council

Tel. 0191 383 3354 (*answering machine outside office hours*)

District of Easington

Tel. 0191 527 0501 ext. 2238/2281

Other leaflets in this series are:



As well as a selection of **village walks** leaflets.



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