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THE SOUTH WEXFORD COAST

IRELAND

-A Natural Heritage Coastline-

Jim Hurley

£1

FRONT COVER:
Main photo: Cottonweed habitat.
This plant grows on the SOUTH WEXFORD COAST; it grows nowhere else in Ireland or Britain.
Bird Above: The roseate tern, Europe's rarest breeding seabird, nests on the SOUTH WEXFORD COAST.
Plant below: Detail of cottonweed plants showing the silvery, downy leaves and the yellow flowers.

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY:
Jim Hurley.

TERN IMAGE:
Based on a photograph by Richard Mills, the image of the Wexford roseate tern on the front cover was contributed by Ciba-Geigy Ireland Limited, sponsors of the Tern Protection Scheme on the SOUTH WEXFORD COAST. This scheme is organised by the Irish Wildbird Conservancy (IWC), a voluntary organisation, in association with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of the Office of Public Works (OPW), the State conservation agency.

MAP ON INSIDE BACK COVER:
Design by SWC Promotions. Graphics by Tony Cassidy, Telecom Eireann Drawing Office, Waterford. Based on the Ordnance Survey by permission of the Government (Permit No. 5885). Data regarding the nature sites, the routes of the Coastal Path, the Ring of Hook Drive and the Bannow Drive were provided by the Office of Public Works (OPW), Wexford County Council, Hook Tourism Development Association and the Bannow Development Association respectively.

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My thoughts revert to native scenes
Which I have gazed upon
I think of mountains lakes and streams
Where brightly shone the sun
But the dearest scene my mind recalls
When all is done and said
Is my own beloved South Wexford Coast
And the rocks around Hook Head.

Jack McCutcheon.
"The Rocks Around Hook Head"
© Clongeen G.A.A. Club

INSIDE

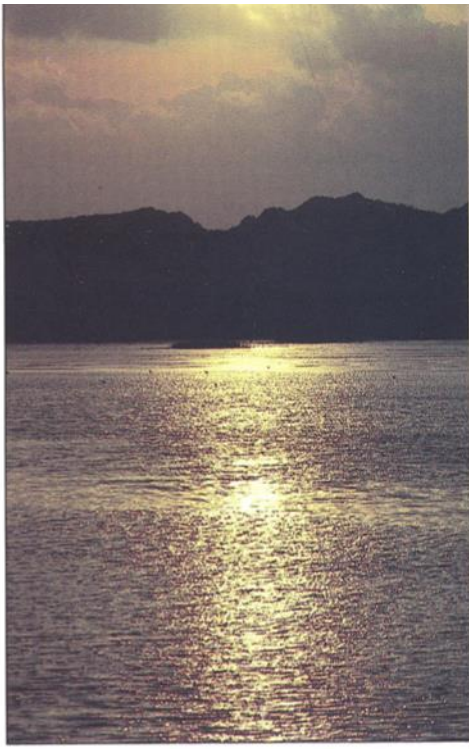
Nature sites described in this booklet as Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) are the Areas of Scientific Interest (ASIs) defined by the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Office of Public Works in its January 1992 revision of these sites.

Introduction

This booklet is a celebration in words and in pictures of the natural riches of the SOUTH WEXFORD COAST.

The SOUTH WEXFORD COAST is a natural heritage coastline. Located in 'the Model County' in the Sunny South-East corner of the Republic of Ireland, the south coast of County Wexford is one of Ireland's special places. It is special because this lovely area supports a wealth of natural heritage features and a unique cluster of nature sites.

An outstanding coastline, the SOUTH WEXFORD COAST extends from the Tower of Hook, the 13th century lighthouse at the limestone tip of Hook Head in the west, to the granite foreland of Carnsore Point in the east, a foreland called 'Hieron Akron' - the 'Sacred Cape' - in 104 AD by the Greek cartographer Claudius Ptolemaeus, Ptolemy of Alexandria. This richly endowed coastal strip, though only 40km (25 miles) long, supports fourteen Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs), ten of which are rated of international importance. All of the sites are connected either to each other or together by the inshore waters of the Irish Sea. To have so many sites of such importance clustered together on so short a length of shoreline makes the SOUTH WEXFORD COAST one of the outstanding heritage features in Ireland and a significant feature of the coastal heritage resources of North-West Europe.



The sun shines on the Burrow hills
As it goes sinking down.
It brightens up the darkening skies
From Kilmore to Cullenstown.
And shines so brightly on the sea
T'would fill your heart with joy
To see the seagulls swooping down
And on its surface lie.

Martin McCann
"Ballyteigue Bay"
© Paddy Berry.

The main natural heritage resource features of each of the fourteen sites that occur on the SOUTH WEXFORD COAST are summarised in the following fourteen, one-page fact files while the central comments section features a wide range of expert opinion regarding the value of this wonderful coastline as a heritage resource.

HOOK HEAD

Cliffs of Old Red Sandstone and sandy coves at Sandeel Bay

DESCRIPTION: This site comprises the coastal strip of the tip of a long, low limestone and sandstone peninsula jutting into the sea. Half of the site forms the western boundary of the SOUTH WEXFORD COAST; the other half is in Waterford Harbour. The site includes privately-owned coastal land and State-owned foreshore and seabed. The coastline consists of rock cliffs and sandy coves.

Stories in stone: Fossils of sea lilies in limestone rock

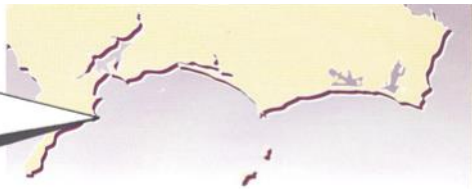
NATURE INTEREST: The main interests are the geological features, the marine life and migrating birds. The site demonstrates a great abundance of fossils and a classical example of the boundary between the older Devonian sandstones which were laid down by rivers, and the younger overlying Carboniferous limestones which originated in the sea. Marine life is exceptionally well developed both in rock pools on the foreshore and in the inshore waters. The peninsula is a landfall for migrating landbirds and is a good spot for seawatching for passage migrant seabirds in spring and autumn.

CONSERVATION / PROTECTION STATUS: Hook Head is a Natural Heritage Area (NHA) rated of international importance for its plants, animals and geology. It is also a designated Area of Outstanding Landscape and an Area of Landscape Importance.

The rough ....
Surging breakers with streaming spindrift

.... and the smooth:
crystal-clear rockpool on a summer day

BAGINBUN HEAD



DESCRIPTION: A 3km section of rock seacliffs. The western end of the section is composed of Old Red Sandstones which were formed by rivers during the Devonian Period about 365 million years ago. The eastern end of the section is composed of older Ribband Group rocks: grey and brown siltstones, mudstones and shales formed from sediment laid down on the seafloor during the Cambro-Ordovician Period some 500 million years ago.

NATURE INTEREST: Cliff-nesting birds. Selective weathering of the sandstone beds has produced holes, crevices and ledges. Depending on time of year, a selection of the following birds may be seen: fulmar, cormorant, peregrine, herring gull, guillemot, black guillemot, feral pigeon, swallow, house martin, rock pipit, wheatear, chough, jackdaw, hooded crow, raven and starling. In recent years many of these birds have bred on or near these cliffs.

CONSERVATION / PROTECTION STATUS: Baginbun Head is a Natural Heritage Area (NHA) for birds. It is also a designated Area of Landscape Importance.

View from the Coastal Path above Petit's Bay looking towards Carnivan Head. The pink flowers are thrift; the yellow ones, kidney vetch.

FETHARD

Fethard Marsh from the Coastal Path

DESCRIPTION: A developing saltmarsh behind a sand spit called the Rabbit Burrow or Little Burrow.

A saltmarsh is a community of salt-tolerant plants growing on tidal mud in sheltered conditions. The marsh is regularly flooded by the sea.

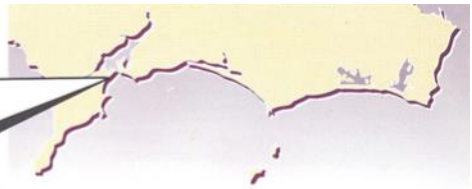
NATURE INTEREST: Protected plants. This saltmarsh supports very rare and protected wild plants that grow nowhere else in Ireland except on the SOUTH WEXFORD COAST.

Glassworts have no leaves on their fleshy, cylindrical stems. One species - perennial glasswort - is confined to six sites in Ireland. All of these six sites are on the SOUTH WEXFORD COAST

As they feed along the edges of the tidal creeks, herons, shelduck, brent geese and other wild birds may often be seen from the public road that is carried across the marsh on a causeway immediately adjacent to the village of Fethard. A species of marine cranefly new to Ireland was discovered here in 1991. In Britain, the species is confined to seven coastal sites in southern England and is listed in the British Red Data Book.

CONSERVATION / PROTECTION STATUS: Fethard saltmarsh and adjoining areas are a Natural Heritage Area (NHA) of botanical importance. The area is also part of a designated Area of Landscape Importance.

WOOD VILLAGE



DESCRIPTION: A 700m section of soft cliff extending along the seashore from Wood Village to Windy Gap. This section demonstrates the following ascending sequence: a wave-cut rock platform, a fossil beach, an overlying earthy mass called 'head,' and, at the top of the cliff, material known as 'till' which was deposited by melting ice sheets.

NATURE INTEREST: This soft cliff is derived from material laid down during the early part of the last ice age. This material dates from the Munsterian Glaciation which occurred some 200,000 - 130,000 years ago. The section contains part of the Courtmacsherry Raised Beach which is unusual in that it can be dated relative to the overlying head and till. The section is regarded as one of the finest sections of this type of deposit in western Europe.

CONSERVATION / PROTECTION STATUS: The Wood Village section is a Natural Heritage Area (NHA) rated of international importance for its glacial features. The coastline that contains the section is an Area of Landscape Importance.

The fossil beach at Wood Village may be seen to be right of the centre of the photograph; it is perched on top of a wave-cut rock platform

BANNOW BAY

Cattle being driven along the foreshore in the upper reaches of Bannow Bay with the ruins of the Norman town of Clonmines in the background

A flock of golden plover farther down the bay.

DESCRIPTION: Privately-owned and State-owned foreshore and sea bed. An extensive, shallow, drowned-river-valley-type estuary fed by two small rivers – the Corock River and the Owenduff – and a number of streams. The mouth has several offshore, mobile sand and gravel bars. The eastern side of the mouth is flanked by outcropping bedrock; the western side is limited by a sand system with dunes and hooked spits. About 75% of the 1120ha estuary bed is uncovered at low water exposing very extensive expanses of mudflats and sand flats. The estuary is fringed by a ribbon of saltmarsh with some large stands of cord-grass.

NATURE INTEREST: The bay holds up to 20,000 wintering waterfowl. The mudflats support internationally important numbers of the European population of the pale-bellied race of the brent goose. Wintering duck species occurring in internationally important concentrations include shelduck, wigeon and teal. The major wader species occurring in internationally important numbers are oystercatcher, golden plover, lapwing, knot, dunlin, the Islandic breeding race of the black-tailed godwit, bar-tailed godwit, curlew and redshank. Little terns breed irregularly in summer.

Spot the egg: a tern's nest. The single egg is below, and slightly to the right of, the white pebble.

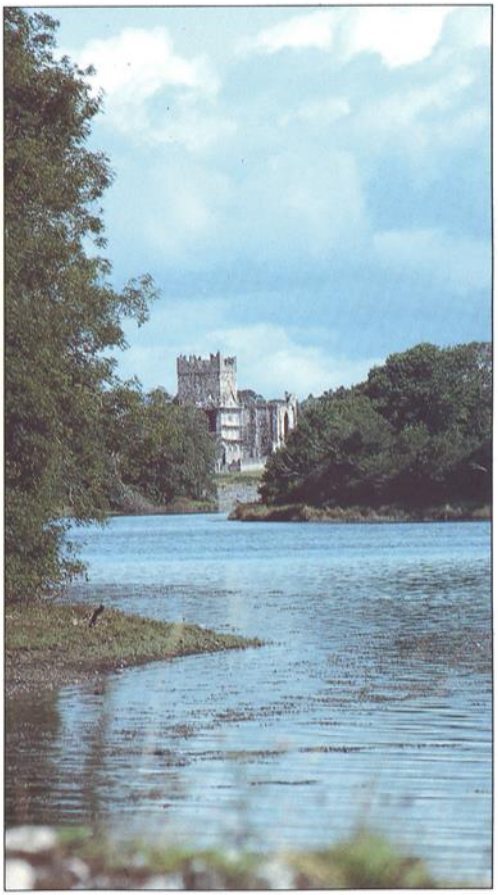
The saltmarshes and surrounding lands support plant communities which contain a number of protected and/or rare wild flowers.

CONSERVATION / PROTECTION STATUS: The estuary together with its saltmarshes and sand dune system is a Natural Heritage Area (NHA) rated of international importance for its bird life and plant life. The bay is an EU Important Bird Area (IBA) and CORINE Biotope Site because of its internationally important concentrations of wintering waterfowl. Parts of Bannow Bay are a No-Shooting Area. The bay and its environs are part of an Area of Landscape Importance.

TINTERN ABBEY

DESCRIPTION: A ruin of a former Cistercian Abbey, this National Monument is presently being restored by the Office of Public Works. On stylistic grounds, the standing remains are dated to around the year 1300 A.D., but earlier foundations have been excavated. The original building is attributed to William Marshal, Earl of Pembroke, son-in-law of Strongbow, Lord of Leinster.

NATURE INTEREST: Bats. Roosts of breeding bats have been recorded in the buildings in recent years including a colony of whiskered bats of national significance. For the casual visitor, the main nature experience is a stroll along any of the several paths that meander through the secluded woodlands surrounding the impressive old abbey. The estuary of the Tintern River supports teal, black-tailed godwits and redshank.



View from Saltmills Bridge: the estuary of the Tintern River with Tintern Abbey

CONSERVATION / PROTECTION STATUS: Tintern Abbey is a Natural Monument, a Natural Heritage Area (NHA) rated of national zoological importance and a CORINE Biotope Site. It is located in an Area of Landscape Importance.

KEERAGH ISLANDS

Outward bound: early morning with the promise of another fine day

Feed me! A big cormorant nestling begs for food

Wall to wall cormorant nests

DESCRIPTION: Two tiny, low, rocky, marine islands with an area of 2ha, lying 400m apart and 1.6km offshore. They support a maritime, wasteland community of grasses and wildflowers, and are surrounded by an extensive, boulder-strewn, wave-cut platform of outcropping bedrock.

NATURE INTEREST: Breeding cormorants and other seabirds. (The SOUTH WEXFORD COAST supports the two largest cormorant colonies in the southern half of the island of Ireland.) Formerly the Keeragh Islands held all five species of terns that regularly breed in Ireland. In 1917 the Big Keeragh supported the largest known roseate tern colony in Ireland. The islands are used in winter as a refuge and roost for wigeon, brent geese, mallard, teal and other wildfowl and for dunlin and other waders.

CONSERVATION / PROTECTION STATUS: The Keeragh Islands, which are privately owned, are rated a Natural Heritage Area (NHA) of international importance; they are an EU Important Bird Area (IBA) and CORINE Biotope Site because they hold 5% of the Irish, 2% of the EU, and 1% of the European population of breeding cormorants. They are also an Area of Landscape Importance.

COMMENTS . . . .

"The National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department is appreciative of the great scientific value of the South Wexford coast. The aim of the Service would be to foster a strong co-operative link between conservation and other interests within the region, which would help to secure this invaluable natural heritage resource for present and future generations while providing for continued suitable use for the benefit of residents and visitors."

(Mr. Noel Dempsey, T.D., Government Chief Whip and Minister of State at the Department of Finance)

"South Wexford is particularly well endowed. The ranges of flora and the many habitats which the coastal zone supports are sometimes robust but often fragile, so care is called for."

(Mr. David Andrews, T.D., Minister for Defence & the Marine)

"I fully welcome the publication of the South Wexford coast booklet. Simple and easy to read local information packs play a major role in attracting tourists to this country and in educating natives and visitors alike to the delights and preciousness of our natural heritage."

(Mr. Michael Smith, T.D., Minister for the Environment)

"The coastal strip of South Co. Wexford, from Carnsore Point to Hook Head, forms a unique and internationally important assemblage of sites of great scientific interest."

(Mr. Michael D. Higgins, T.D., Minister for Arts, Culture & the Gaeltacht)

"Our heritage and culture is fundamental to the development of the Irish tourism product. South Wexford incorporates a number of important sites which are of considerable value to the heritage of Ireland."

(Mr. Charles McGreevy, T.D., Minister for Tourism and Trade)

"As a Wexford man I am quite familiar with the beauty of the South Wexford coastline. This booklet will play an important role in sharing this splendour with others."

(Mr. John Browne, T.D., Minister for Environmental Protection)

"The unique flora and fauna of these sites of national and international importance challenges us all to understand and respect the balance between us and our natural environment."

(Ms. Avril Doyle, T.D., Fine Gael spokeswoman)

"There are many areas of national significance which require a greater degree of protection . . possibilities include . . some coastlines of heritage quality, for example S.E. Wexford . . "

(Report to the Taoiseach, Mr. Albert Reynolds, T.D., from the Green 2000 Advisory Group)

"The coastal zone between Hook Head and Tacumshin, including the Keeragh Islands and Saltee Islands, contains a remarkable concentration of vitally important ecological sites. The range, diversity and importance of these sites provides a kind of ecological synergism not found elsewhere around our coastline."

(Dr. David Cabot, Special Adviser to the Taoiseach on Environmental Affairs)

"Bórd Failte is concerned that the unique and varied natural heritage of the Wexford coast is adequately recognised and protected for future generations apart from the obvious attraction of this resource to out-of-state visitors."

(Bórd Failte: Irish Tourism Board)

"South East Tourism acknowledges the variety and richness of the nature sites along the South Wexford Coastline. These sites represent a valuable natural resource to be enjoyed by local residents as much as visitors to the area. These natural resources must be carefully and sensitively utilised, not just for tourism purposes, but for the benefit and enjoyment of everybody."

(South East Tourism, The South Eastern Regional Tourism Organisation Limited)

"South Wexford is an area of exceptional interest and importance both from a heritage and an environmental aspect. It must be handed on to future generations as pure and unspoiled as possible. It is a great tourist asset."

(Wexford Tourism Council)

"I welcome the publication of this booklet about the South Wexford Coast which helps us to focus our attention on the extraordinary natural habitat to be found there."

(Mr. Séamus Dooley, Wexford County Manager)

"The South Wexford Coastal Zone, from Carne to The Hook, is for me, an area of special charm with a quality environment. We must all work together to keep it so."

(Mr. Noel Dillon, Cork County Manager)

"I believe that the South Wexford Coastline with it historical associations, its wildlife and its unspoiled environment is an area which deserves to be widely known and appreciated. It is worthy of careful study to ensure that, while providing for today's educational, leisure and economic needs, it is also preserved for future generations.

(Senator Michael D'Arcy, M.C.C., Chairman, Wexford County Council)

". . . unique in that a substantial portion is as yet undeveloped."

(County Wexford Development Plan, Wexford County Council)

". . we consider that the area is unique and that there are a number of issues deserving of special study. Accordingly we recommend that detailed action plans are prepared and, amongst other measures, that consideration be given to the possible use of Special Amenity Area Orders. The detailed study, analysis and planning required to support the making of such orders would need to be put in hands at an early date."

(Wexford Coastline Coastal Zone Management Plan, Brady Shipman Martin, Planning Consultants to Wexford County Council)

"South Wexford has a remarkable assemblage of coastal sites with a high wildlife interest; many have been assessed as having an international importance. If a sufficiently large number of people know and value these sites they will survive for future generations to enjoy."

(County Wexford Heritage Committee)

"The natural habitats which form a chain along the south Wexford coast are like the jewels in a diamond necklace. Individually they are fascinating but together they make a priceless treasure which could be a natural resource for tourism."

(Mr. Richard Nairn, Environmental Consultant)

"SWEEP welcomes the publication of this booklet for use in schools to raise awareness of the beauty and value of the nature sites in South Wexford."

(South Wexford Environmental Education Programme)

"The Bannow Development Association welcomes this well-informed book about the natural resources so widely available along this stretch of Wexford coast and hopes it will encourage people to come and appreciate what it has to offer. The Bannow Bay area is of outstanding importance for wildlife enthusiasts. It is a beautiful stretch of coastline situated on the Bannow Drive with plant species and wildlife found nowhere else in Ireland."

(Bannow Development Association)

"For a quarter of a century since its foundation, our Association has treasured the compact, yet diverse, uniqueness of the Hook - Bannow Bay area which forms a very eminent part of the South Wexford Coast. We wholeheartedly welcome all measures which bestow protection, benefit and enhancement on this whole region and its occupants."

(Hook Tourism Development Association)

"One of the best preserved fishing villages in Ireland, Kilmore Quay has a natural magnetism for tourists. Its placid, old-world tranquillity, enhanced by the neat whitewashed houses, the busy quayside and the traditional thatched cottages, leaves an indelible imprint on any visitors mind. Jutting out to the sea at Forlorn Point are some of the oldest rocks in Ireland, or Europe, while just a few miles offshore are the Saltee Islands, once Wexford's only inhabited islands and now a world-famous bird sanctuary."

(Kilmore Quay Community Development Association)

"The South Wexford area contains some of the most varied geology in Ireland. The coastal section at Hook Head displays one of the finest sections through the Devonian-Carboniferous boundary in Europe; additionally it is one of the most fossiliferous sections through the Carboniferous Limestone in Ireland."

(Geological Survey of Ireland, Department of Energy)

"The South Wexford coast is a living textbook of bedrock geology. From the ancient rocks of Carnsore to the rich wealth of fossil shells in the limestones of Hook Head there is a sequence of rocks recording several hundred million years of Ireland's geological history."

(Dr. Nigel T. Monaghan, Assistant Keeper, Natural History Division, National Museum of Ireland)

". . . a first class area that encompasses a spectrum of classical geological features. The rocks exposed at Kilmore Quay provide a unique glimpse into our geological past and help us to understand the development of one of the geologically oldest parts of Ireland. It is an area that must be preserved for future generations."

(Dr. Pat Shannon, Department of Geology, University College Dublin)

"The number, accessibility, and clarity of the geological sites exposed along the south coast of County Wexford makes the area of special significance for geomorphological studies."

(Dr. Edward Culleton, author of "The South Wexford Landscape")

". . . the combination of gravel beach, crestal sand dune, overwash throat and fan found along the coastal barriers of Lady's Island Lake, Tacumshin and Ballyteigue are without parallel in Ireland."

(Dr. Julian Orford, The Queen's University of Belfast)

"The coast line between Hook Head and Carnsore Point contains many features of prime interest to earth scientists. The coastal zone here is a truly diverse environment."

(Dr. R. J. Devoy, Geography Department, University College, Cork)

". . . the classic coastal sites in Britain and Ireland include . . the Wexford coast . . "

(British Sedimentological Research Group)

"I would consider this area - especially from Carnsore Point to Ballyteigue Bay - as one of the most scientifically interesting in western Europe, as it incorporates a unique blend of coarse sediment barriers, perched (dry-core) dunes and lagoons. In short it has outstanding scientific and educational qualities which should not be ignored."

(Professor R.W.G. Carter, University of Ulster at Coleraine)

"The coast of South Wexford provides excellent examples of gravel-based barrier landforms. In particular, the sequence of back barrier washover and seepage structures are among the best examples in Europe."

(*Irish Geography:* The Geographical Society of Ireland)

"Based on habitat quality and diversity, the south Wexford coast should become a key area for European coastal zone research and education."

(Ms. Karin Dubsky, International Co-ordinator, Coastwatch Europe Network)

"On the south coast of Co. Wexford areas of cultural and natural interest combine to create a unique environment which must be protected and preserved."

(Mr. Billy Colfer, Slade Heritage Services)

"The south Wexford coast is among the richest areas of natural heritage in Ireland and urgently needs a network of protected areas to conserve these values."

(Irish Wildlife Federation)

"These lonely shores are a paradise for sea-birds, and some plants very rare in Ireland . . . have here their headquarters."

(Mr. Robert Lloyd Praeger: "The Way That I Went.")

"There is no doubt that the south Wexford coast is of great heritage resource value and needs to be kept unspoilt."

(Major R. F. Ruttledge, Ornithologist)

"This region, my homeland, is very special - not just for its unique topography and wildlife, but for its people and way of life that still cherish nature's gifts and man's contribution to nurturing those gifts in a feeling way."

(Mr. Richard Roche, Historian, Author & Lecturer)

"A favourite area of mine, where I can always be sure of filming spectacular wildlife sequences in beautiful surroundings."

(Mr. Éamon de Buitléar, Wildlife on Film)

"After 28 years of photography, filming and painting wildlife, south County Wexford has provided me with more footage than any other county in Ireland."

(Mr. Gerrit van Gelderen, wildlife film-maker)

"It is imperative to protect our internationally renowned ecosystems on the South Wexford coast, because our environment is our most important resource, our unique legacy for future generations."

(Cllr. Helen Corish-Wylde, M.C.C., Public Representative)

"A key area of the maritime and marine heritage of Ireland, the North Atlantic and the World."

(Professor David Bellamy, The Conservation Foundation)

"The Sunny South East is one of the most exciting and outstanding heritage resources in Ireland, so packed with adventures and human drama of the past, that one writer called it "a well aired museum in the sun."

(Mr. Bill Kelly, Kelly's Resort Hotel, Rosslare)

"Having been brought up in South Wexford, I find it one of the prettiest and most inspirational parts of Ireland, indeed Europe, and I always find peace and spiritual regeneration whenever I visit the area. It has been, and will remain one of the most important places in my life."

(Mr. Chris de Burgh, Singer / Songwriter)

"For cruising yachtsmen the unspoilt character of the South Wexford Coast provides that unique sense of remoteness for which so many of us feel a need."

(Capt. Roger A. Lankester, Marine Ecology & Sailing)

"Eleven important coastal habitats, including islands, rocky promontories, mud flats and sand dunes, all in a thirty mile stretch of coastline, is a great asset for all those who are interested in nature in Ireland."

(An Taisce: The National Trust for Ireland)

"... the brackish water lagoons ... are examples of formerly widespread systems which are fast disappearing from western Europe. They contain species of flora and fauna unique to these habitats and the ecosystems are of particular interest to ecophysiologists and evolutionary ecologists because of the variability of conditions and the degree of isolation."

(Dr. Brenda Healy, University College, Dublin)

"In promoting our corner of the County, have we laid too much emphasis on Wexford's "sun and sandy beaches"? - and should be give equal prominence to our riches of bird life, plant life and historic sites - to mind and enjoy."

(Wexford Association of An Taisce)

"... 60% of the total number of Irish maritime species have been recorded here, and again 60% of the total number of Irish maritime Atlantic and Atlantic-Mediterranean species."

(Drs. Schouten & Nooren, The Netherlands)

"Wexford has some of the most interesting wild flowers in Ireland. The SE part of the county has an almost continental climate, which adds some rare species to the more oceanic Irish flora. Coastal and estuarine vegetation is especially well developed."

(Lady Rosemary FitzGerald, Director, Field Botany Research, Somerset)

"The south Wexford coast has very special and important plant species and communities found nowhere else in Ireland. Priority should be given to the protection of the sites which have unequalled botanical significance."

(The Dublin Naturalists' Field Club)

"... a synthesis of natural and cultural elements, of reef rocks rich in seaweeds, of lagoons and raised beaches with diatoms, rare lichens and other plants."

(Ms. Mary J.P. Scannell, Botanist)

"Lamprothamnium papulosum, *an exceedingly rare and interesting brackish-water alga, is known in Ireland only on the South Wexford Coast and in Co. Clare. The marine algal flora of the Wexford coast is very diverse, particularly in the area around Carnsore Point where notable species occur in the intertidal."*

(Professor Michael D. Guiry, The Martin Ryan Marine Science Institute, Galway)

"Fulgensia fulgens *is an extremely rare Irish lichen which is known only from the South Wexford Coast where it occurs on dune mosses."*

(Professor Michael Michell, University College, Galway)

"In my opinion the dunes at Ballyteige have an assemblage of Hymenoptera Aculeata species which ranks the site as a major national importance. The dunes are the only site in Ireland where Tetramorium caespitum *(Formicidae) is common."*

(Dr. John Breen, University of Limerick)

"A stretch of unspoilt coast that rivals the Burren in its variety of bird and flora habitats and sites of scientific interest."

(Irish Wildbird Conservancy, County Wexford Branch)

"This is a coastline packed with Important Bird Areas, a jewel for Ireland to take pride in and protect."

(Royal Society for the Protection of Birds)

"... seems to be very rich in insect life. A marine species of cranefly (and) the very rare backswimmer Notonecta viridis have been recorded."

(Dr. J.P. O'Connor, Keeper, Natural History Division, National Museum of Ireland)

"... especially important (for bird conservation) in an international context."

(Irish Sea Study Group)

"... site of international significance for seabirds and waterfowl, priorities for European Bird Conservation."

(BirdLife International)

"The South Wexford Coast is studded with magnificent sites - not just in the Irish but in the European context."

(British Trust for Ornithology)

"A star site which should be part of a network of marine protected areas."

(Marine Conservation Society)

"The South Wexford coast is an unusually important heritage site, combining an area of outstanding importance for wildlife, especially birds, with a distinctive human tradition and way of life."

(Irish Section, International Council for Bird Preservation)

"The Commission is aware of the importance of the South Wexford coast for nature."

(DG-XI: Commission of the European Union)

"A site of significant coastal and marine biological diversity and importance, requiring statutory protection."

(World Wide Fund for Nature)

"Some sports divers consider the Saltee Islands to have the richest marine life on the east coast of Ireland."

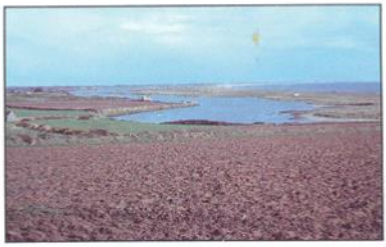
(Irish Sea Study Group Report)

"... initiatives to conserve the south Wexford coastline are in conformity with the major recommendations of the recent World Congress on National Parks and Protected Areas ..."

(IUCN: The World Conservation Union, Switzerland)

THE CULL

DESCRIPTION: A 170ha area of State-owned foreshore and seabed, this complex, brackish wetland with saltmarshes is composed of the estuary of the Duncormick River, the outlet of the Bridgetown Canal, the spillway for waters pumped from the Kilmore Slob drainage channel and runoff from two minor streams and several agricultural storm drains, all partially lagooned behind the Ballyteige Burrow barrier. The combined waters disgorge via a long, narrow, river-like outlet channel - the Bar o' Lough River - which runs westwards behind the barrier until it finds an outlet at the point of lowest wave energy in the lee of the Keeragh Islands. There is an ebb delta complex at the inlet/outlet.



The Bar o' Lough River

NATURE INTEREST: Wetland birds and plants. The estuary is rated of international importance as a wintering ground for waterfowl. Wildfowl species occurring in internationally important concentrations include pale-bellied brent geese, shelduck, wigeon and teal. The major wader species occurring in internationally important numbers are oystercatchers, ringed plover, golden plover, grey plover, lapwing, knot, dunlin, black-tailed godwit (Islandic-breeding race), bar-tailed godwit, curlew and redshank. The site also supports rare plants whose distribution in Ireland is confined to the South Wexford Coast.

A huddle of brent geese on the saltmarsh

Henbane, a very rare wildflower, grows on sandy ground

CONSERVATION / PROTECTION STATUS: The Cull is a Natural Heritage Area (NHA) rated of international importance, an EU Important Bird Area (IBA) and a CORINE Biotope Site. It is also part of the Ballyteige Burrow Special Protection Area (SPA), a Council of Europe Biogenetic Reserve, a Statutory Nature Reserve, an Area of Outstanding Landscape and an Area of Landscape Importance.

BALLYTEIGE BURROW

Sand dunes with The Cull on the right and the Irish Sea on the left

Wild asparagus has red fruits in autumn

A six-spot burnet moth feeding on common ragwort flowers

DESCRIPTION: A 9km-long, fringing, coarse-sediment barrier topped with well-developed sand dunes many of which exceed 15m in height. Comprising 240ha, it is the finest sand dune system in south-east Ireland. The spit-like western end is owned by the State and is managed as a nature reserve; the eastern end, which is butted against the mainland, is privately owned by the Kilmore Quay Community Development Association.

NATURE INTEREST: Flowers, insects and birds. There is a good diversity of sand and light soil plant communities and associations; these include several protected and Red Data Book species. There is also a rich invertebrate fauna: the abundance of sand and the climatic advantage of the extreme southerly location favours ants, wasps, beetles, butterflies and moths. These dunes are the only site in Ireland where the turf ant is common. Some rare birds breed irregularly.

CONSERVATION / PROTECTION STATUS: Ballyteige Burrow sand system is a CORINE Biotope Site and Natural Heritage Area (NHA) rated of international importance. The State-owned western end is a Special Protection Area (SPA), a Biogenetic Reserve and a Statutory Nature Reserve. The eastern end is a local amenity area. The coastal strip extending eastwards from Ballyteige Burrow to Carnsore Point has been rated the most impressive barrier coast in Ireland and is a designated Area of Outstanding Landscape and an Area of Landscape Importance.

KILLAG

DESCRIPTION: An extensive area of privately-owned agri-polder at Kilmore Slob and Killag with large, flat, improved pastures and tilled fields.

NATURE INTEREST: Feeding ground for Bewick's swans in winter. The Killag flock is the largest in Ireland; it holds about one third of the overwintering population of these birds in Ireland and about 3.5% of the European population.

CONSERVATION / PROTECTION STATUS: Killag is a Natural Heritage Area (NHA) rated of international ornithological importance. It is also an EU Important Bird Area (IBA), part of the Ballyteige Complex CORINE Biotope Site and an Area of Landscape Importance.

As winter stalks out of the north gripping the tundra in its chilly embrace, these wild swans migrate from their summer breeding grounds in Siberia to their wintering quarters in north-west Europe. The onset of colder weather in Holland and Britain drives them westward in search of milder climes. They usually arrive in Wexford in November. They stay until March and may be watched from the public road.

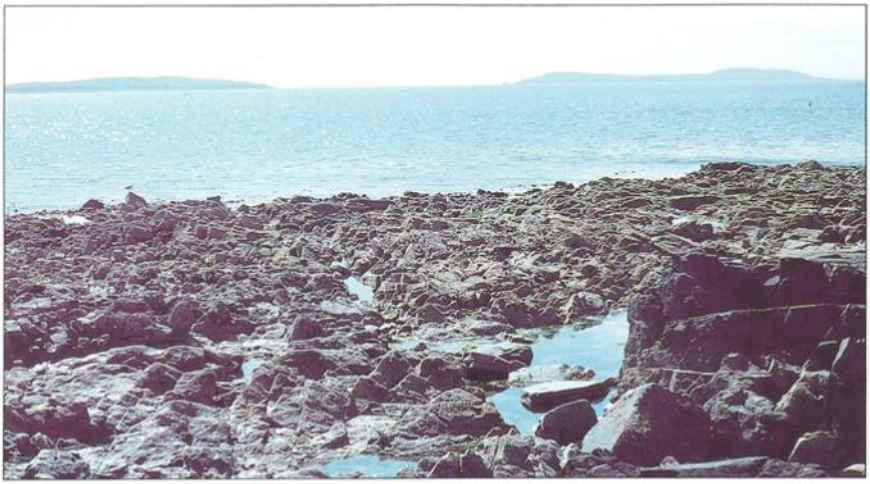
KILMORE QUAY

Drainage channels at Kilmore Slob attract wildfowl in winter

DESCRIPTION: 35ha of outcropping bedrocks on State-owned foreshores on both sides of the fishing port of Kilmore Quay.

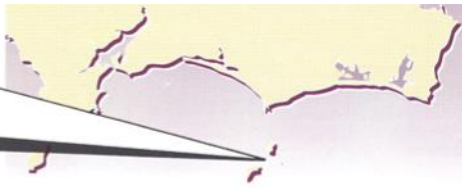
NATURE INTEREST: These rocks are Rosslare Complex gneisses of late Precambrian age. Apart from an exposure at St. Helen's near Rosslare Harbour, the Kilmore Quay one is the only other substantial exposure of these rocks in the country. Formed about 1,700 million years ago, they are the oldest rocks in Ireland, are among the most ancient in Europe and are believed to be the remains of part of the primevial super-continent that fragmented to form the continents we have today.

CONSERVATION / PROTECTION STATUS: The rock outcrops at Kilmore Quay are a Natural Heritage Area (NHA) rated of regional geological importance. The surrounding coastline is an Area of Landscape Importance.

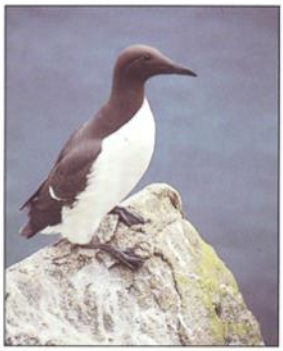


Precambrian gneiss rocks at Kilmore Quay with the Saltee Islands in the background. The upstanding black rock on the right is a basic dyke.

SALTEE ISLANDS



DESCRIPTION: Two large, privately-owned, uninhabited marine islands with fringing rock cliffs. Inhabited and farmed to 1943, the abandoned fields are now overgrown with bracken and bluebells. The islands have an area of 126ha; 146ha if foreshores are included. The larger island - Saltee Island Great - is the most famous bird sanctuary in Ireland and has great popular appeal for day-trippers and birdwatchers alike.



The guillemot is the most numerous breeding seabird on the Saltee Islands

NATURE INTEREST: The islands support an internationally important number of breeding cormorants. They also support a gannet colony, a grey seal colony, and a range of breeding seabirds including fulmars, Manx shearwaters, kittiwakes, guillemots, razorbills and puffins. Composed of fine brown granite, the islands also support breeding landbirds, an interesting maritime flora and outstanding underwater marine life. Saltee Island Great is a well-known landfall for migrating birds arriving in Ireland in springtime; a Bird Observatory was in operation 1950-1963 and a wide variety of species was recorded. The National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Office of Public Works (OPW) carries out a long-term seabird population monitoring and research programme together with a long-term ringing programme.

High summer: looking along the long axis of Saltee Island Great from the South Summit

CONSERVATION / PROTECTION STATUS: The Saltee Islands are a private bird sanctuary. Designated a Natural Heritage Area (NHA) of international importance, an EU Important Bird Area (IBA) and a CORINE Biotope Site, the Saltee Islands are also a Special Protection Area (SPA).

TACUMSHIN LAKE

Bee Orchid

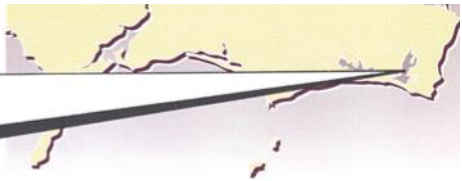
DESCRIPTION: A privately-owned, back-barrier, slightly brackish water, coastal lagoon fed by rainfall, several minor freshwater streams, saltwater seepage and occasional crestal overwashing of the fringing barrier. The 483ha lagoon had a tidal outlet until the winter of 1972/73 when it closed naturally. The lagoon is now drained by a system of excavated surface channels converging on a one-way pipeline running under the barrier to the sea. This drainage regime results in normally high water levels in winter alternating with periods of dry lagoon bed in summer. There is a number of islands - the Patches and Sigginstown Islands -, extensive reed swamps, large stands of rushes and sedges, freshwater marsh and sand flats. The fringing barrier - Tacumshin Burrow - is decorated by a series of simple sandhills and hummocky dunefields. At its western end, the site incorporates the White Hole and the Island Marsh.

NATURE INTEREST: The lagoon holds internationally important concentrations of waterfowl during the winter. The most significant species are Bewick's swans, brent geese (pale-bellied race), wigeon, scaup, oystercatchers, golden plover, grey plover, lapwing, dunlin, black-tailed godwit (Iceland race), bar-tailed godwit and curlew. It is also a well-known site for vagrant American waders in autumn. The western end of the fringing barrier demonstrates a magnificent series of washover breaches, channels and fans; these landform features are regarded among the best in Europe. Also noteworthy are some protected species of rare flowers, changes in the flora in response to fluctuating water levels, and the rich invertebrate fauna.

CONSERVATION / PROTECTION STATUS: Tacumshin Lake is a designated Natural Heritage Area (NHA) rated of international importance. This low coast of deposition is also a designated Area of Outstanding Landscape and an Area of Landscape Importance. The lagoon is an EU Important Bird Area (IBA) for wintering wildfowl and wading birds and a CORINE Biotope Site; parts of it are a No-Shooting Area.

Tacumshin Lake dries out in summer

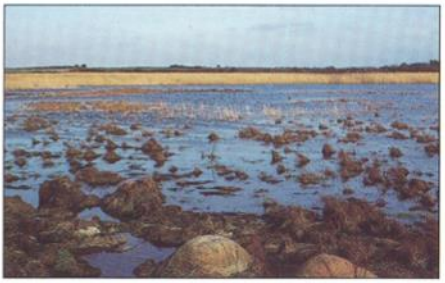
LADY'S ISLAND LAKE



DESCRIPTION: A 466ha site comprising a 356ha, shallow, back-barrier, brackish water, coastal lagoon, with three islands (Lady's Island, Inish and Sgarbheen), an adjoining area of reed swamp and freshwater marsh (Ring Marsh) which drains into the lagoon, and a 200m-wide gravel barrier, decorated with low sandhills, that separates the lagoon from the Irish Sea. The lagoon is regarded as State-owned foreshore; the islands in it and adjoining areas are privately-owned. Rainfall, twelve feeder streams, and saline intrusion fill the lagoon; seepage through the gravel barrier and evaporation are the only natural outlets. To prevent and/or relieve flooding, the gravel barrier is breached mechanically each spring.

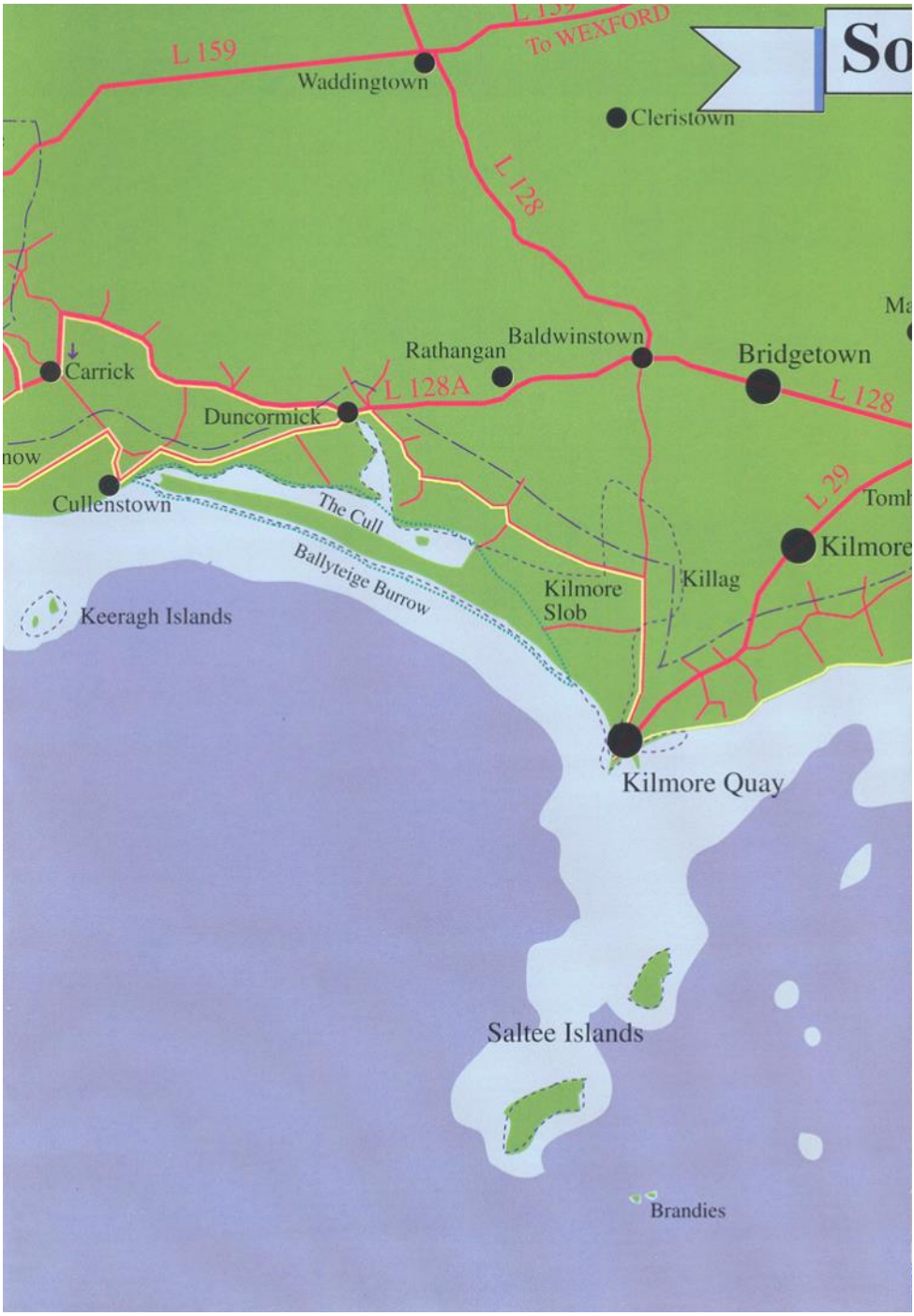
NATURE INTEREST: The lagoon is rated of international geomorphological importance: it is the sole surviving major example in Ireland of a back-barrier seepage lagoon. It's islands support Ireland's largest mixed tern colony including the roseate tern, which is regarded as the rarest breeding seabird in Europe, together with internationally important numbers of sandwich terns. The lagoon is an important waterfowl site in winter especially for mute swans, Bewick's swans, whooper swans, wigeon, teal, shoveler, pochard, scaup, tufted duck and coots. The only stand of cottonweed in Ireland, and the largest in northern Europe, is to be found on the gravel barrier. The southern and eastern shores of the lagoon have a well-developed flora of annual herbs. Bearded stonewort and foxtail stonewort, two Red Data Book green algae, grow underwater. Ring Marsh is a small but ecologically diverse freshwater marsh and is an important area for breeding duck; most of the duck species that regularly breed in Ireland have been recorded breeding there.

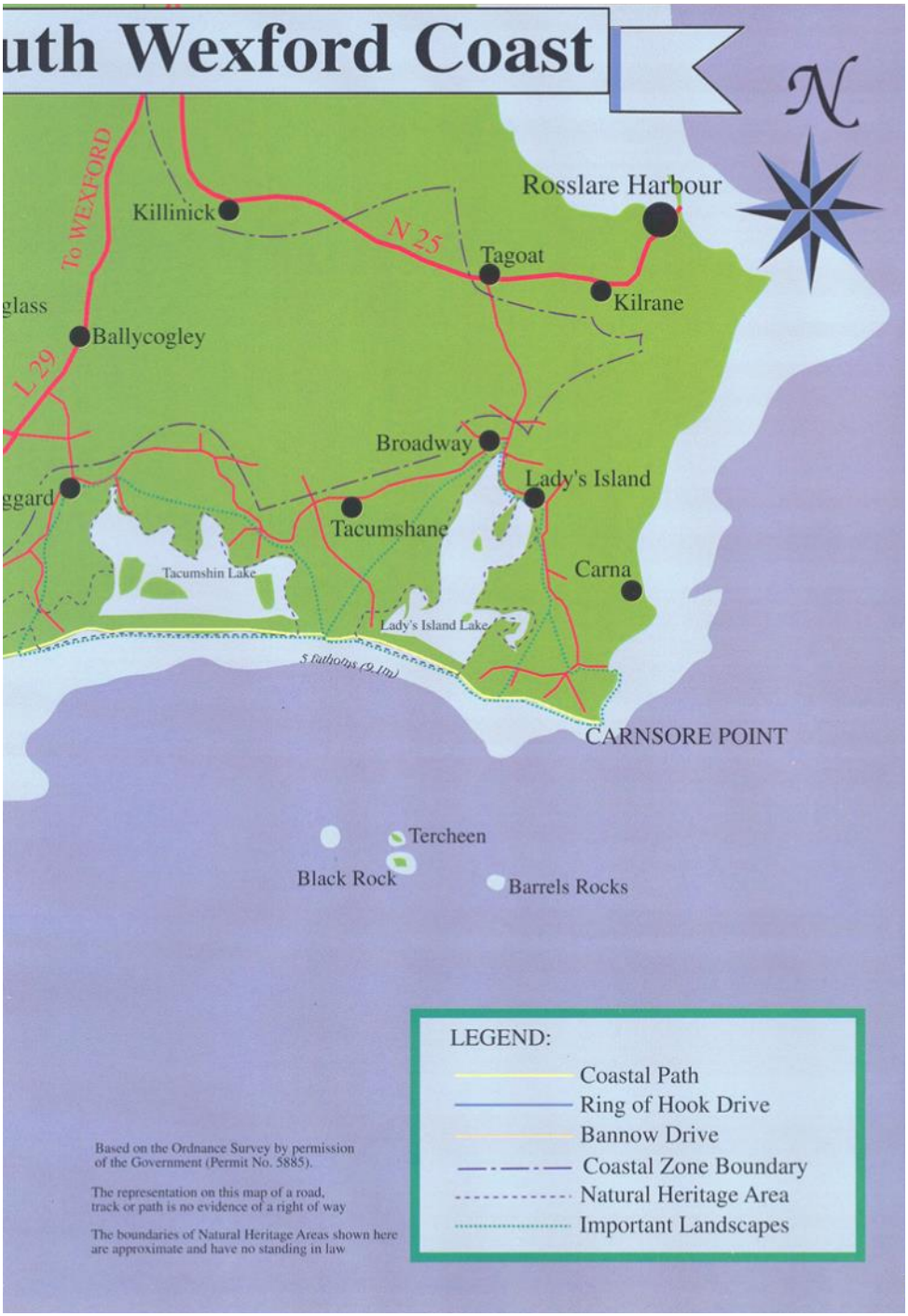
CONSERVATION / PROTECTION STATUS: Lady's Island Lake is a Natural Heritage Area (NHA) rated of international importance, an EU Important Bird Area (IBA), a CORINE Biotope Site, a designated Area of Outstanding Landscape and an Area of Landscape Importance. The lagoon is a Special Protection Area (SPA). The islands of Inish and Sgarbheen (4ha) are another Special Protection Area (SPA); they are also a Refuge for Fauna. The coastal strip from Lady's Island Lake to Carnsore Point is an Area of Landscape Importance.



Ring Marsh: a top site for breeding duck


L 159A
to NEW ROSS
Wellingtonbridge
Ramsgrange
L 159
Tintern Abbey
Saltmills
Bannow Bay
L 1594
Duncannon
Wood Village
Waterford Harbour
Fethard
Templetown
Baginbun Head
5 fathoms (9.1m)
Slade
Churchtown
HOOK HEAD
0
5
10km
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7miles
Map: Tony Cassidy


L 159
To WEXFORD
So
Waddingtown
Cleristown
L 128
Rathangan
Baldwinstown
Bridgetown
Carrick
L 128A
L 128
Duncormick
Cullenstown
The Cull
Ballyteige Burrow
L 29
Kilmore
Killag
Kilmore Slob
Keeragh Islands
Kilmore Quay
Saltee Islands
Brandies


uth Wexford Coast
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Rosslare Harbour
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glass
Ballycogley
L 29
Broadway
Lady's Island
ggard
Tacumshane
Tacumshin Lake
Carna
Lady's Island Lake
5 fathoms (9.1m)
CARNSORE POINT
Tercheen
Black Rock
Barrels Rocks
LEGEND:
Coastal Path
Ring of Hook Drive
Bannow Drive
Coastal Zone Boundary
Natural Heritage Area
Important Landscapes
Based on the Ordnance Survey by permission of the Government (Permit No. 5885).
The representation on this map of a road, track or path is no evidence of a right of way
The boundaries of Natural Heritage Areas shown here are approximate and have no standing in law

SUMMARY TABLE OF THE PROTECTION / CONSERVATION STATUS OF THE FOURTEEN NATURE SITES THAT OCCUR ON THE SOUTH WEXFORD COAST

	PROTECTION / CONSERVATION STATUS																	
NATURE SITES	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	n	o	p	q	r	s
01 HOOK HEAD	P	Y	Y	N	Y	Int	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	–	N	Y	N	N	Y
02 BAGINBUN HEAD	N	N	Y	N	Y	N.R	N	N	N	N	–	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y
03 FETHARD	P	N	Y	N	Y	N.R	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	–	N	Y	N	N	Y
04 WOOD VILLAGE	N	N	Y	N	Y	Int	N	N	N	N	–	N	N	–	N	–	–	N	–
05 BANNOW BAY	P	N	Y	N	Y	Int	N	N	Y	P	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
06 TINTERN ABBEY	Y	N	Y	–	Y	Nat	N	N	N	N	–	N	N	–	Y	Y	N	N	Y
07 KEERAGH ISLANDS	P	N	Y	Y	Y	Int	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
08 THE CULL	P	Y	Y	N	Y	Int	P	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	P	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
09 BALLYTEIGE BURROW	P	Y	Y	P	Y	Int	P	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	P	Y	Y	P	N	Y
10 KILLAG	N	N	Y	N	Y	Int	N	N	N	N	–	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y
11 KILMORE QUAY	Y	N	Y	–	Y	Reg	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	–	N	–	–	N	–
12 SALTEE ISLANDS	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Int	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
13 TACUMSHIN LAKE	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Int	N	N	Y	P	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
14 LADY'S ISLAND LAKE	P	Y	Y	N	Y	Int	N	P	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y

NOTES:

1. CODE LETTERS USED FOR PROTECTION / CONSERVATION STATUS:
   - **a** State-owned site.
   - **b** 'Area of Outstanding Landscape' (National Heritage Inventory, 1977).
   - **c** Local Authority 'Area of Landscape Importance'.
   - **d** Private 'Nature Reserve'.
   - **e** A 'Natural Heritage Area' (NHA); 'Area of Scientific Interest' (ASI) listing of January 1992 by the Office of Public Works (OPW).
   - **f** The 'importance rating' of the ASI / NHA. International/National/Regional/Local/Not Rated.
   - **g** A statutory 'Nature Reserve' under the Wildlife Act, 1976.
   - **h** A 'Refuge for Fauna' under the Wildlife Act, 1976.
   - **i** A site that supports wildflowers listed in the Flora (Protection) Order, 1987.
   - **j** A 'Wildfowl Sanctuary' (no-shooting area) under the Wildlife Act, 1976.
   - **k** An area specifically excluded for foreshore shooting.
   - **l** A site that supports species of birds whose habitats require 'special conservation measures' under Annex 1 of the EU Birds Directive, 1979.
   - **m** An 'Important Bird Area' (IBA); listing of 1989.
   - **n** A 'Special Protection Area' (SPA) under the Birds Directive.
   - **o** A 'CORINE Biotope Site' [European Environment Agency].
   - **p** Site supports Red Data Book fauna species protected under the Bern Convention, 1982.
   - **q** A 'Biogenetic Reserve' [Council of Europe programme].
   - **r** Site supports species and habitats identified as requiring conservation measures under the Bonn Convention, 1979.
   - **s** Sites containing habitats and/or species requiring protection under the EU Habitats Directive, 1992.

2. SYMBOLS USED:
   - Y = Yes
   - P = Partly
   - N = No
   - – = Does not apply.

The Country Code

This booklet is a celebration in words and pictures of the natural riches of the SOUTH WEXFORD COAST. If you visit any of the sites described in this booklet please be careful not to damage them. While you are enjoying the coastline follow the Country Code:

- Respect the environment. Do not remove foreshore material or hammer on rock outcrops.
- Bring your litter home. Leave nothing but footprints.
- Respect other living things. Kill nothing but time. Take nothing but memories. Leave wild flowers for others to enjoy. Get expert advice on when to visit and on how to do so without disturbing wildlife.
- Respect landowners' property. Do not enter private lands without permission.
- Take care where the Coastal Path runs along country roads. Walk on the right, in single file. If cycling or driving, give way to people in charge of animals.
- Keep well back from cliff edges.
- Beware on mudflats and sand flats of being cut off by flooding tides.
- Be careful with fire, especially on sand dunes in very dry weather.
- Beware of freak waves and blowholes at Hook Head.
- Do not bring dogs into the countryside unless they are kept under control.

Thank you.

Local contacts:

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