

Silecroft- The Oystercatcher's Tale



How to be a super spy
 When you first spot a rock pool it can seem like nothing lives in there, but if you have eagle eyes you can spot the most amazing creatures. Firstly, approach the pool quietly and try not to cast a shadow over it, as the creatures might think you are a predator and will quickly hide. Carefully turn over the stones and see who is living underneath; if you have a bucket you can gently place the creatures in it so you can study them closely. Replace all the creatures gently and leave the pool as you found it.

Silecroft
 The name Silecroft comes from the old English word 'croft' meaning field and possibly the Old Norse word 'selja' meaning willow or 'syle' meaning smoked herring.

Old clay pits
 and brickworks were located next to the car park. You can still find old bricks with 'Sylecroft' (the old spelling) written on them, washed up as far away as the Solway estuary.

Can you spot...
 any blue/indigo-coloured mudstone carried by the glaciers down from Black Combe Fell? Mudstone was formed millions of years ago as clay particles fell and settled at the bottom of the oceans and lagoons in the area

Galloping horses
 can often be spotted along the beach but many moons ago parents told their children not to enter the sea at night because the wild white horse would grab you and take you away forever!

Marvelous Meadows
 The area forms part of an SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) The coastal meadows and sea pastures are covered in beautiful wild flowers in spring and summer.

Kirksanton village
 (the Church of St Sanctun): its name probably derives from the Gaelic Irish Saint 'Sanctan', who was the son of Sawyl Penuchel, a powerful king in Northern Britain

At the southern point of the beach you might spot huge honeycomb structures sticking out of the sand. These are the amazing homes of the honeycomb worms. The reef is a collection of hundreds of individual worm apartments where they hang out and filter feed.

Life on the edge of the ocean can be tough...one minute you are baking in the sun and the next you are being battered by stormy seas! The little creatures living in the rocky pools around the beach need to be very adaptable. Limpets hold onto the rocks so tightly that they create a mark called a 'home scar' and whelks have tongues that are so strong they can burrow into the shells of other creatures, pump in a digestive enzyme and suck them up like a mollusc milkshake!!

My beach at Silecroft is wild and beautiful. There are golden sands as far as the eye can see and amazing creatures hiding in the rock pools.

Natterjack toads sing to me in the springtime, swallows tell me tales of their trips to Africa and gannets show me how to dive for fish. I still prefer eating mussels and cockles though!



But there is another side to Silecroft and its neighbouring village of Kirksanton. A mysterious and ancient side from long ago when stone circles rose from the ground under the shadow of Black Combe and giants roamed the land. This really is the magical place where mountains meet the sea.

Let me tell you some tales from the baffling beasts at the ocean's edge to the ancient stones on the wild, windy fells. Let's see if you can spot any captivating clues from our past and solve some unspoken mysteries from times gone by...

The Kirksanton Giant

There has always been lots of talk in Cumbria about giants who once roamed the land and it might be just here where one of them is buried. Two very ancient and very tall standing stones, possibly 4,000 years old, stand proud on the coastal plain. Travellers have spoken of strange white orbs of light that can be seen floating mysteriously above them after dark!

Last winter solstice, on the shortest day of the year I was resting on top of the giant stones. Suddenly the rising moon shone brightly in my eyes and I imagined a glistening lake between me and the sea. I heard a grumbling, rumbling sound from deep within the ground and I am certain the ghost of a giant rose from the earth and walked towards the lake. He threw something into the shimmering water

then stomped up to the 'Giant's chair' on the fellside. I couldn't believe my eyes... maybe I will try it again this year! I've heard that tall pointed standing stones like these are linked to the moonrise and moonset at certain times of the year. It's great to have such magical moonstones on my doorstep.

If you look carefully you might spot cup marks (rock art) on the stones, showing how important they were. Cup and ring marks are often found at very special prehistoric sites. Maybe this place was an entrance way to the sacred places on the fell above called Laca Bank? Some folks say that the hollow in the ground by the stones is where a chapel was swallowed up by evil forces! Why do you think the stones are here?



Rocky Pools and Baffling Beasts

The sun is setting, the sea is calm and beneath your feet a rock pool glimmers. Little creatures zoom from shells to seaweed, and goggle eyes look up at you wondering... In the dusky glow you can spot luminescent flashes and creatures changing shape. This is the side of a rock pool that is very rarely seen. Let's look into the waters and see if you can solve these revolting riddles...

*I love eating rotten seaweed and dead mussels that really stink
I zoom about with lightning speed and you'll miss me if you blink
I'm bioluminescent, with score legs, three claws and goggle eyes
I like to sneak up on the fishies and give them a cheeky surprise
I use my antennae to feel for food and am great at keeping water fresh
I can give birth to eighty babies who'll use this pool as a salty creche.*

I am a common prawn

*I am sometimes called 'The Fighter' and have two bright red eyes
My skeleton's on the outside and my legs hide a tattoo disguise
I'm covered in velvety hairs and my blue claws help me to feed
My legs are shaped liked paddles, I propel through water with speed
At night I hunt for hermit crabs, snack on little fish and worms
I'm a very feisty fella who can nip you and make you squirm.*

I am a velvet swimming crab

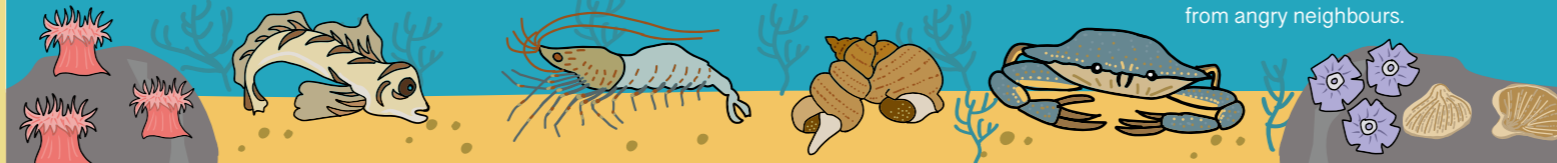
*I have spiny skin all over me and five long arms that really wriggle
I feel funny when I'm on your hand and can make you really giggle
I love to eat mussels, chunky clams, sometimes a poopy snack
If I get in a fight and lose a limb I can be amazing and grow it back!
I'm a pinky orange colour, very strong and my stomach's in my middle
I prise open shells, turn my tummy inside out and digest prey in a diddle.*

I am a starfish

*Some say I'm like a ball of jelly or a marble very clear
My feathery combs flap around to help me move and steer
My tentacles trail behind me, two fishing lines with hooks
I'm very colourful at night, come find me and take a look
My bright coloured cells glow in the dark but please worry not
Luckily I'm not a jelly stinger, I just use my sticky snout.*

I am a sea gooseberry

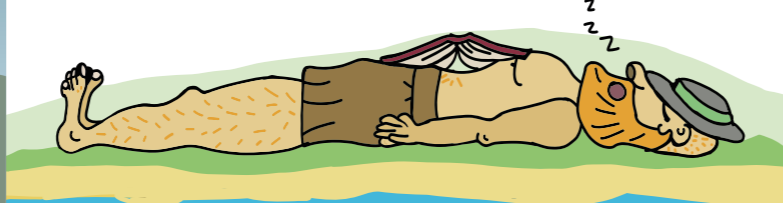
Also look out for sea urchins, whelks, periwinkles and limpets who cling to the rocks. There are also little fish living here called shanny. They are very camouflaged and quite shy, so you will have to look very carefully. They have large heads and big eyes and like to hide under the seaweed. Shanny can leap in and out of the water and are sometimes called sea frogs... watch out too as they can give you a nasty nip! If you spot a red blob of jelly it might be a beadlet anemone. As the tide rolls in, they unfurl little tentacles that can sting their prey and defend themselves from angry neighbours.



Do you have legs like a hardy Herdwick sheep? If the answer is yes, you can fly up the fell for 1km and see some amazing sites. Laca Bank overlooks the sea and the view is amazing; there are mysterious stone circles, spooky burial cairns and an ancient stone avenue, hidden on the hillside. Sacred springs bubble out of the ground and an eerie deserted farmhouse is at the centre of it all!

The word 'leikr' is an Old Norse word for sport, play, game or contest. The flat area of ground near the old farmhouse certainly seems like a great spot for some Viking games.

Can you see 'Kirksanton Moss' on your map? In the Bronze Age it was probably a beautiful lake. Stone circles and prehistoric burial sites are very often near lakes, marshes and springs. You'd better watch out for Jenny Greenteeth!



All about oystercatchers

I can't be telling you all about the folklore of my home and not tell you a bit about me! My Gaelic name is 'Gille brighde' which means servant of the bride... the bride being Saint Brigid. She is linked to an ancient Celtic goddess whose festival is celebrated at 'Imbolc' on 1st February. Imbolc celebrates the return of the light after dark winter days. We got our name when my ancestors helped to hide Saint Brigid from some shifty fellas who were chasing her. We covered her from head to toe in slimy seaweed!

You might spot large flocks of us along the coast, especially when rough weather is coming. We help guide the local fishermen home when Saint Brigid sends us out to warn them that wild storms are on the way.

It's easy to spot our black heads, backs and wings and white underbellies. We also have bright red bills and pinky-red legs and move across

the beach looking for limpets; we use our powerful beaks to prise open the shells. After Valentine's Day you might spot us flying up the rivers inland looking for a mate. We always pair and make nests in the spring.

If you ever spot a beautiful speckled green egg (which I think are the prettiest in all of Cumbria) it might be one of my babies. We often lay them in little rocky hollows and on drystone walls. Please admire them but leave them alone as we have probably just popped out for some lunch.

Listen for our 'peep peep' calls as we dance over the waves... Happy exploring and I hope you manage to solve some mysteries today!



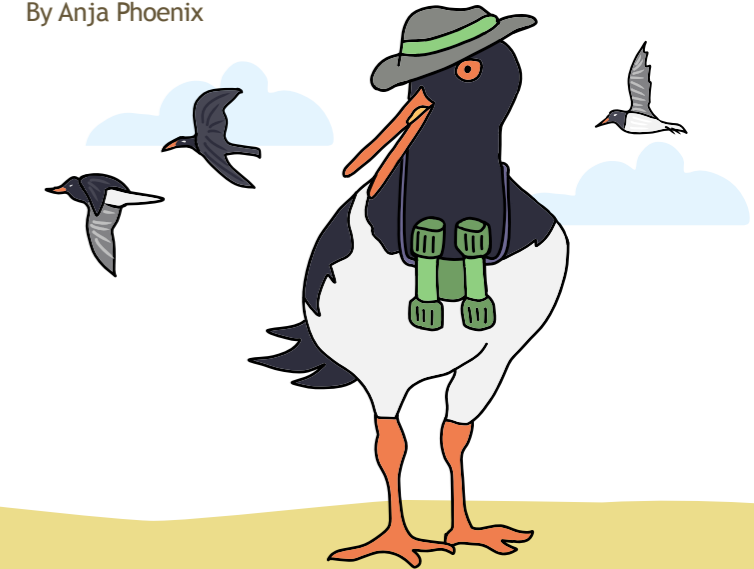
fun local story walks

for children and the young at heart

The Oystercatcher's Tale

A story walk from Silecroft

By Anja Phoenix



Easy to follow Map & Story

Explore, spot things & search for clues on the way

Tale trails

The bit for grown ups....

Silecroft beach is within the Lake District National Park. There are 5km of golden sand here to explore and often you will have it all to yourselves. These two longer walks can be joined to make a longer walk or completed separately.

Route Length

Coastal meadows and beach trail:

This shorter trail (1.5km) starts and finishes off the A593 road, 3 miles north of Millom. Turn

at Silecroft beach car park. There is a new cafe (opening soon) and toilets here. The

route passes through rare lowland heath

and then back along the coast.

Standing stones heritage trail:

This longer trail starts at the edge of Silecroft

village and follows a beautiful green loam (opening soon) in the car park right by the

shore. The sea views are amazing.

Refreshments

There is a wonderful new beach cafe

either head to Kirksanton and up onto Laca

or head back to the beach past Layrags,

creating a 5.5km route.

Kirksanton village up to the prehistoric

remains on Laca Bank.

Trail Safety Information

The terrain is a mixture of sandy/pebbly

beach, grassy footpaths, gravel tracks and

Footgolf is a fun game for all the family. Visit the golf club just 500m south of the

car park. Visit www.silecroftgolfclub.co.uk

for paths and avoid unstable ground along

the coast.

This trail is five of six developed with Copeland Borough Council and The Outdoor Partnership as part of the

Connecting Cumbria's Hidden Coast programme.

Find out more www.copeland.gov.uk

Published by Tale Trails

Illustrations and design by Custard Graphic Design

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