

Strandline Guide

Explore the strandline
on the Rhins of Galloway
Coast Path





This guide will help you identify the weird and wonderful things washed up on the beaches along the Rhins of Galloway Coast Path. The more you look the more you will find, each treasure revealing its secrets from the sea.



This strandline guide has been produced as part of the Rhins of Galloway Coast Path project made possible with the Heritage Fund and managed by Dumfries and Galloway Council



Cover: Cockle Beach, Stranraer

How to use this guide

The Rhins of Galloway has a varied coastline to explore from sandy bays and rocky headlands to long shingle beaches. Replenished with debris twice a day, the strandline marks the turning point of the last high tide and provides endless material for the curious beachcomber. If you take time to explore the seashore you will discover something new every step of the way.

The guide identifies some of the best beaches (see route map) to find the strange combination of natural and manufactured objects gathered, sorted and deposited by the sea. Compare your discoveries with pictures in this guide to find out more.



Port Mora or Sand Eel Bay, Portpatrick



Necklace Shell

Euspira catena

Looks: Similar in shape to a garden snail the glossy shell has an attractive pattern although it is often worn away on older shells.

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What: This sea snail ploughs through sand searching for bivalve mollusc prey and is common on sandy shoreline in Luce Bay.

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Did you know? It drills a neat hole in the shell of its prey to consume the animal inside. The necklace shell gets its name from the eggs it lays in an open collar-shaped mass of jelly which are sometime washed up on the strandline in spring.

Spotted Cowrie

Trivia monacha

Looks: The flattened pea sized shell has a ribbed surface with a slit-shaped hole. The spotted cowrie has three spots while the similar Arctic cowrie has no spots.

What: This snail is found on rocky shores where it feeds on colonial sea squirts. The shells are small and easy to overlook in bays on the west side of the Rhins.

Did you know? Perhaps because they are difficult to find these shells are considered by many to give the finder good luck!

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Woody Canoe-bubble *Scaphander lignarius*

Looks: The oddly shaped shell is a distinctive spiral cone with a wood grained pattern.

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What: A species of sea snail which burrows in the muddy sea floor in search of worms and bivalves and is often washed up on the shore near Sandhead.

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Did you know? The woody canoe-bubble suffers from mass deaths in the winter. It is thought that seawater is cooled on the incoming tide as it contacts freezing sand and then stuns the creature as the water flows back with the falling tide.

Common Goose Barnacle

Lepas anatifera

Looks: Attached to objects by long black stalks it has smooth grey-white plates covering the head section.

What: Related to crabs, the goose barnacle is usually found after winter gales, attached to drifting objects that have come from the warmer water of the Atlantic Ocean.

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Did you know? In the past it was thought that barnacle geese hatched from goose barnacles attached to floating debris. This misunderstanding meant that the barnacle goose was classified as a fish and could be eaten on the many religious days when meat could not be consumed!

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Shore Crab

Carcinus maenas

Looks: An oval shell that is usually green but can be marbled with red and brown with 5 pointed teeth on each side of the eyes.

What: A common crab on the Rhins coast it lives in all intertidal habitats. The shells found on the strandline are often fragile, hollow cast-offs from growing crabs.

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Did you know? When the exoskeleton is too small for the crab it moults by splitting the back of the shell to extract itself. If you look closely at a discarded shell on the beach it hinges open at the back and the eyes look white and empty. If it has black eyes and has a nasty smell, then it's a dead crab!

Oar Weed

Laminaria digitata

Looks: Oar weed is distinguished from the other large brown seaweeds by its hand-shaped leathery blade and smooth stalk.

What: A seaweed growing below low water on rocky shores they are torn from their holdfasts by the churning sea and found on the strandline along the west and north coasts of the Rhins.

Did you know? The name kelp was first used to describe the ash produced from burning brown seaweeds. It had high potash and soda content and was once in high demand for use in manufacturing processes for glass, soap and bleach.

6





Japanese Wire-weed *Sargassum muticum*

Looks: A floating brown seaweed attached to the seafloor which has numerous small bladders that lift it to the surface to catch sunlight. It has a distinct 'washing line' of fronds when held up

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What: An invasive species which can compete with native seaweeds.

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Did you know? As the name suggests it is native to Japan and may have arrived on imported oysters or attached to the hull of a boat. First recorded in the UK in the 1970s it is rapidly spreading and can be seen all round the Rhins coast.

Mermaids Purse

Spergularia rupicola

Looks: The egg cases of sharks and rays are anchored to the seabed by spiral tendrils, or curled horns, until the tiny fish hatch. Different species have distinctly shaped egg cases from the small rectangular cases with tendrils laid by dogfish, or cat shark to the much bigger but similar shaped egg case of the Bullhuss, or Nursehound.

What: The empty leathery pockets drift onto the strandline as mermaids' purses.

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Did you know? The baby shark spends up to 9 months in the egg case before it hatches!

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Sailor's sponge

Looks: Like balls of yellow or white bubble wrap on the strandline they are clusters of empty common whelk egg cases.

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What: Each capsule contains thousands of eggs – although only a few snails crawl away, having first dined on their siblings.



Did you know? Caught in pots off the coast of Dumfries and Galloway the common whelk is mostly exported to the far east where it is a delicacy.

Balloons

Looks: Colourful latex balloons held together with plastic strings are associated with celebrations of all kinds.

What: A free flying helium balloon quickly becomes litter and can harm wildlife. They can be found anywhere but are surprisingly common on the strandline.

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Did you know? Bobbing along on the seas surface a discarded balloon can be mistaken as a jellyfish by a leatherback turtle that has migrated great distances to arrive in the Solway in the search of its main food source.

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Plastic Ducks

Looks: Duck shaped toys, traditionally yellow but also found in other colours often with a number written on it.

What: These buoyant plastic ducks are surprisingly common on the strandline and join a wide range of plastic toys that are regularly washed up on the seashore.

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Did you know? Duck races are a popular fund-raising activity but sometimes the ducks escape recapture and are washed out to sea.

Shoreline nests

Looks: Almost invisible, many ground nesting birds have eggs that are camouflaged and blend into the shingle or sand on the sea shore.

What: Oyster catcher, ringed plover and tern all nest on the beaches on the Rhins of Galloway. They usually avoid beaches popular with holiday makers so it is a good idea to avoid remote beaches during the Spring nesting season.

Did you know? Almost as soon as they are hatched the chicks of ground nesting birds will run and hide when they hear the warning call of the parent birds.

12





Bottles

Looks: Plastic drinks bottles are a common find on the strandline. Very rarely a bottle washes up with a message inside.

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What: A message in a bottle is a metaphor for a 'cry for help' usually asking a stranger to assist when in a desperate situation. A message in a bottle is most likely sent by a child in the hope that they receive a reply from a far-off place.

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Did you know? A shipwreck at Corsewall Point in 1898 released a cargo of bottles destined for Australia. Hundreds of bottles of whiskey and beer were washed up on beaches much to the delight of local people.

Jellyfish

Looks: Free-swimming marine creatures with umbrella-shaped bells and trailing tentacles they look like blobs of jelly when washed up. They vary in size and colour. The largest is this barrel jelly fish and although the sting is usually harmless to people it is a good idea not to touch them.

What: In the sea or washed up in the shore, occasionally in great numbers.

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Did you know? These amazing creatures feast on plankton that drift in sea currents. Jellyfish contract and relax their umbrella-shaped body to propel themselves through the water.

14





Sand hopper

Talitrus saltator

Looks: Close up they have a marbled grey body with striking eyes.

What: Also known as sand fleas because when they are disturbed they hop around frantically to escape being eaten. Mostly active at night these creatures are nature's beach cleaners breaking down the natural debris in the strandline.

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Did you know? During the day sand hoppers live in burrows up to 30 cm deep which they can backfill to avoid being flooded by the incoming tide.

Enjoy your strandline search

The more you look the more you will find on the Rhins of Galloway coast. The strandline is a wildlife habitat as well as the depository of mysterious artefacts that have inspired myth and folklore. It is always a good idea to take a photograph of your find which you can refer to for later identification.



Port Logan Bay



83 mile

circular walking route
on Scotland's south
west coast

Find out more about
the Rhins of Galloway
Coast Path by visiting:
dgtails.org



Route Sections

- 1 Stranraer - Corsewall
- 2 Corsewall - Portpatrick
- 3 Portpatrick - Port Logan
- 4 Port Logan - Mull of Galloway
- 5 Mull of Galloway - Ardwell
- 6 Ardwell - Stranraer