

**The past whispers to us in many ways. Sometimes you can see it, sometimes you can feel it and very occasionally you can hear it too.**

My home, the coastline around Whitehaven, has many fascinating stories to share. I listen to the tales of passers-by while I dry my wings on the rocks at Saltom Bay... sailors, seagulls, smugglers... they all have a tale to tell.

Our journey starts here in the amazing historic harbour which was once one of the busiest in the world.

Three hundred years ago it would have been bustling with tall ships unloading their cargo and sailors getting ready to voyage out to sea for months. There are clues to the cargo they carried in the names of the quays, like Sugar Tongue and Lime Tongue.

But Whitehaven isn't all about its maritime and mining history.

Let's head up to the famous **Candlestick** and I can tell you all about **Tom Hurd Rock** and **Little Hurd**. See if you can spot **The Old Fort** and **Long Tom** on the way...

**Did anyone ever tell you about the fairies, the mummies or the wishing moon!?**



1

So the story goes... a local sailor called Tom Hurd was on leave from the navy. He decided to row his sweetheart Eliza to Parton for a day out but upon their return the sea was too rough for them to enter the safety of the harbour. The stormy seas wrecked their little rowing boat on the rocks where they clung for hours, waiting for the tide to go down. Three hundred years later the rocks still hold his name. **But who was Little Hurd?**

According to local folklore, many a lost sailor has returned home disguised as a cormorant... there is one who always seems to stand on **Tom Hurd Rock**...any guesses? Also, did you know it's really good luck if you spot more than one of us together!

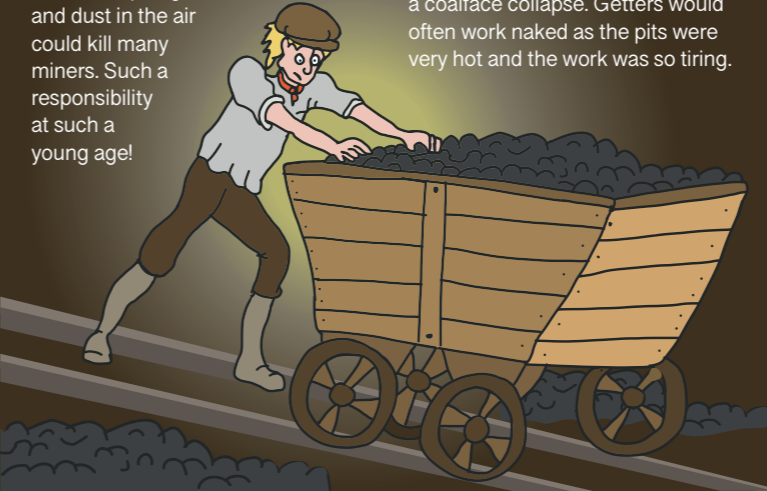
**The huge chimney towering above the harbour is called The Candlestick. It was Wellington Pit's ventilation chimney and helped keep the air breathable deep in the coal mines below. It's wonderful to be running and flying free up here now, but can you imagine what life must have been like hundreds of metres down in the coal pits...?**



2

**Would you have been a Trapper, Trailer, Hurrier or Getter?**

Children as young as five worked twelve-hour shifts alone in the darkness of the mines. At the start of the day they were lowered 1,000 feet down in a basket, and had to journey along two miles of pitch-black narrow passageways using only the light of a candle. The smallest children started work as **'Trappers'**, which meant opening a trapdoor for passing miners, carts and horses then shutting it again to keep the air as clean as possible. This job didn't need much strength but young children had to stay alert and awake in awful conditions all day, six days a week! If they fell asleep the build-up of gas and dust in the air could kill many miners. Such a responsibility at such a young age!



At around age ten, children would be strong enough to do the work of a **'Trailer'**. Baskets of coal were placed on carts and pushed along the tracks all day for just five shillings a week (about 25p nowadays).

Women and older children worked as **'Hurriers'**, pulling tubs of coal along narrow passageways with chains tied onto leather belts. All day they would haul coal from the coalface to the surface, often on their hands and knees.

The men and strong teens would be at the face of the coal seam using pickaxes to break off chunks of coal. They were known as **'Getters'**. This was hard, dirty work and there was always the constant threat of a coalface collapse. Getters would often work naked as the pits were very hot and the work was so tiring.

3

**This trail is one 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](http://www.copeland.gov.uk)

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**Want to learn more?**

The Beacon Museum is a super place to discover all about Whitehaven from prehistory to the present, with interactive galleries and exhibitions, a super harbour-side cafe and a gift shop on site.

**Directions and Parking**

The nearest parking to The Beacon Museum is at West Strand Marina Car Park CA28 7LY. Follow signs to the harbour. The train station is just five minutes' walk across the marina.

**Trail Safety Information**

This coastal trail follows a well-marked footpath from Whitehaven to the cliffs above Saltom Pit. It is part of the famous Cumbria Coastal Way. There are steep, unstable cliffs off route, so please stick to the marked footpaths.

Want to learn more about Whitehaven's coastal craters and how sustainable fishing can help protect them? Visit [www.livingseasnw.org.uk/my-local-catch](http://www.livingseasnw.org.uk/my-local-catch) for events, volunteering, and information about the seafood from our spectacular seabed!

**Route Length**

3km (1-2 hours) with an optional extra 3km loop to Barrowmouth Bay. The Tale Trail starts at The Beacon Museum in Whitehaven Harbour.

**The bit for grown ups....**

**Walks around The Lake District Coast**

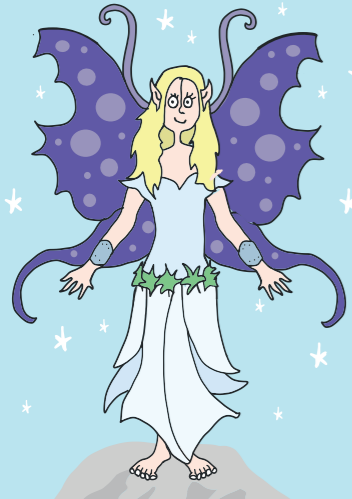
**fun local story walks**  
for children and the young at heart

**Now up past Jonathan Swift's house to Heather Bank where the view is AMAZING!**

Can you see the big blue wheel of Haig Pit? The winding gear wheel allowed the miners to reach the coal surface below and bring coal back up to the top. Haig Pit was the last deep coal mine to be sunk in Cumbria, travelling more than five miles out to sea under the Solway. Some of this type of coal would have been used to power steam trains.

**Now a bit further then turn right towards Saltom Pit and Fairy Rock.**

Saltom Pit was the first undersea coal mine dug by hand. You can still see the 250-year-old engine house on a rock platform below. Personally I prefer to rest on the Fairy Rock to



dry my wings. Let me tell you about a fairy queen who once lived there...

Long ago, before the great fairy rocks crashed into the sea, a fairy queen of great powers lived in a grotto there. She was invisible to human eyes, and the only way you could tell if she was nearby was to look out for her footprints appearing in the sand. Her tribe of fairies were unusually tall, almost human sized. They wore white robes and danced in the moonlight and were known to invite handsome young men to their monthly dances. A foolish lad once pledged everlasting devotion to the queen and promised to spend half his life in her fairy world. The only way to enter her kingdom was to wait until a full moon, but one night he became impatient and tried to visit her when only a crescent moon hung in the sky. As he called to her a deep moan came from the waves and a terrible storm lashed against the rocks. The kingdom of the fairies collapsed into the sea and the man was never seen again. Sailors say a mournful moan can still be heard as a sign that a storm is coming! It's best to leave a small offering on the bench to keep yourselves safe and chant this rhyme just in case...

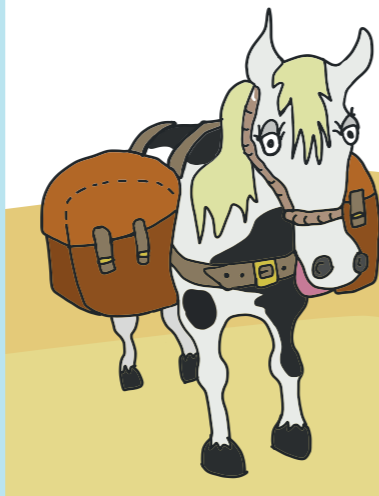
**"Oh Queen of the Fairies, Oh Queen of the Sea, Please take this wee gift and be kind to me"**

4

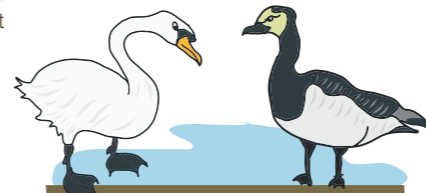
**If you are getting tired, it's time to head back along the 'Old Wagon Way', but if you are still feeling adventurous you can head to Barrowmouth Bay (3km loop). TAKE CARE as the cliff path is exposed and the bay is wild and remote.**

Whether you make it all the way to Barrowmouth Bay or can just spot it in the distance you can see that nature is happily taking over... the wild woodland is returning!

Barrowmouth Bay was once a Georgian gypsum and alabaster mine; they used the minerals for making pottery and carving statues. Pack ponies were used to carry the minerals up the steep slopes in saddle baskets. The bay is wild and



isolated with a secretive little cove that appears at low tide. The old mine buildings and tramways are crumbling back into the sea and wild heather and willows are hiding the industrial scars. It feels so wild there, almost a bit prehistoric... like me!



**Have you spotted any other birdlife yet? Around the harbour you might spot barnacle geese and swans. Also, jackdaws live in Wellington Terrace making nests in the old drainage holes. From the top of the cliffs near the Candlestick you can often see redshanks and oystercatchers on the silty shores and of course cormorants like me resting on Tom Hurd's rock. The wildflower meadow areas are a great place to see swirling starlings, swallows, goldfinches and skylarks and the old mine buildings at Saltom Pit provide homes for kestrels and barn owls which you might spot hunting around the clifftops.**



5

**In 1820 a lady called Dora Harcourt travelled up from London to stay with her 'country cousins' near Whitehaven. She was mesmerised by the local traditions and wrote back to her father telling him all about us strange northerners! Some of these traditions are still practised today. I like the first one...**



**When a new moon is rising it is time to pay your respects to the sky. You must fold your arms (or wings), smile and curtsy to the moon. For extra good luck, turn a silver coin in your pocket and make a wish!**

**As the nights drew in and Halloween came calling, a bundle of mountain ash was tied to the front door to protect against witches. Don't worry... if you can't find any mountain ash, a rosemary wreath will do the same job!**

**At the start of August a Lammis Fair was held in Whitehaven. Sailors would come along 'newly rigged' in smart clothing and offer blue ribbons to their sweethearts. Also, if you spotted a man with straw in his mouth it meant he was seeking work!**

**In June during Midsummer festivals, huge 'Baal fires' were once lit to keep away bad spirits. Animals were walked through the smoke to keep away diseases, and people once jumped the flames for good luck. If the jump didn't go too well and the Grim Reaper came calling you always had to make sure you 'told the bees'. It was customary to drape the beehives with black ribbons and let them know a household member had died. If you didn't tell the bees they might stop making honey!**



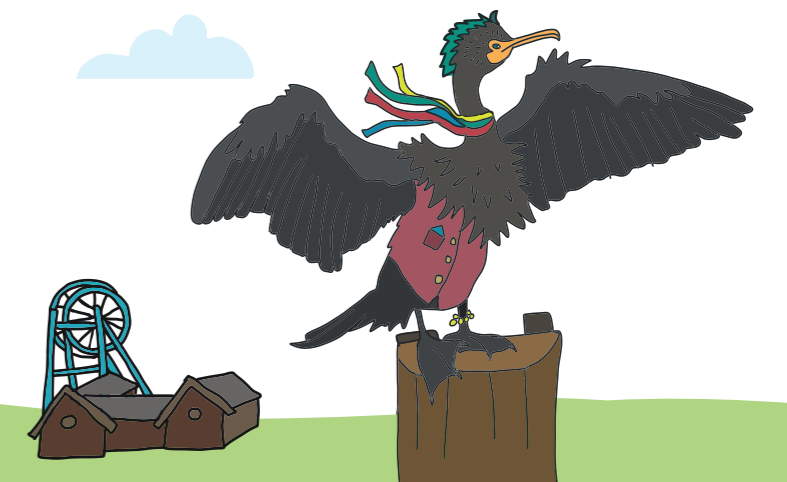
**Some traditions are similar to those we still use today. Can you think of any?**

6

**The Cormorant's Tale**

**A story walk from Whitehaven**

By Anja Phoenix



**Easy to follow Map & Story**  
Explore, spot things & search for clues on the way



# Whitehaven - The Cormorant's Tales

**Barrowmouth Bay** (wild and remote)  
Secret beach  
Barrowmouth Wood  
The really wild side  
Crop fields  
Baal fires and witches  
The old track to where 'Dora Harcourt' stayed  
Cliff top walk to Barrowmouth Bay 3km loop (extra)

**Wildlife:** Falcon, Basking shark, Porpoise, Burrowing anemone, Gormorant, Dublin Bay prawns, Redshank, King penguin, Solway worm, Lion's mane jellyfish, Seals, Turtles, Sea potato (heart urchin), Sea pen, Brittlestars, Tom Hurd rock and little Hurd.

**Historical Sites:** The Red Flag Inn, Duke Pit, King Pit, Old Wagon Way, Wellington Lodge, John Paul Jones, The Beacon museum, The candlestick, Mosaic, Old fort, Site of Half Moon Battery, Long Tom, Outer lighthouses, Flag house, Watchtower, Old Quay, Sea lock, Swans and geese, Sugar tongue, Lime tongue, Bulwark Quay, Queens Dock.

**Other Landmarks:** Raven Hill, Haig pit, Saltom pit, Fairy rock, Viewing spot, Can you spot any waste from the mines?, Old wagon way (3km loop), Meadow path, Old incline, Can you spot the sailor looking out to sea?, Can you spot the old wagon and machinery?, King pit, Wildflowers, Spooky sounds, Duke Pit, Steps 100?, Whitehaven Harbour, Train station (5mins walk).

**Information Boxes:**

- The Red Flag Inn**  
The Red Flag Inn was once an inn and was also where the famous writer Jonathan Swift possibly stayed. Locally it is known as The Jonathan Swift House and some folks think it is where he got his ideas for the 'little people' in Gulliver's Travels. Can you imagine staying here on a stormy night with candlelight and lanterns flickering in the windows!
- Duke Pit**  
The fan house was built to look like a medieval castle. Some say you can hear strange sounds coming up from the depths... or is it just the pigeons?!
- Long Tom**  
This gun is known as Long Tom and was dug out of the beach behind Tom Hurd Rock about sixty years ago. It was probably in use at the Half-Moon Battery which huddled into the rocks below. The other guns were melted down or returned to the armouries.
- The Old Fort and Half-Moon Battery**  
Can you spot an old anchor? These old foundations mark the spot of the 18th-century fort. There were once ten cannons and lots of gunpowder here, used to defend the harbour! Just around the corner by Tom Hurd Rock was another defence post called Half-Moon Battery where John Paul Jones spiked around eight cannons.
- John Paul Jones**  
In the 18th century, this promising young man started his career at Whitehaven but ended up founding the American Navy. He returned to Whitehaven to attack the port in 1778 in his ship Ranger... but apparently half his crew went to the pub, so his big plan to burn Whitehaven's fleet didn't actually happen. But this surprise attack really shook the English, who kept a close eye on him after that. Later on, he changed sides again and became an admiral in the Russian Navy. In this statue he is spiking a cannon so it can't be fired.
- The wildflower meadows**  
around Haig Pit are buzzing with life in spring and summer. You can spot bee orchids, cowslips and scarlet pimpernel flowers, and if you are really quiet you might see lizards, slow worms and orange soldier beetles! There is also a chance you might spot a shiny thick-legged flower beetle on the buttercups.
- King Pit**  
was sunk in the 1750s and later became the deepest mine in the world at 160 fathoms deep. The grasslands planted here now are idyllic in spring when the wildflowers are out, but life underground was very different back then (see page 2).
- Old Wagon Way**  
where trucks full of coal used to be shunted down to the harbour on 'bogies'
- 'End of an Era' memorial statue**  
During a three-hundred-year period, more than seventy pits were sunk around Whitehaven. Sadly, over five hundred people, including young children, were killed in pit disasters and mining accidents.