Older than the Jurassic Coast

Much older. The rocks of the Northumberland Coast are of Carboniferous age, 150 million years older than the Jurassic, and formed 350 million years ago when the first of our ancestors were colonising the land. Whilst the fossils of these primitive amphibians are extremely rare there are many other different types of fossil to be found within the layers of rock underpinning the Northumberland landscape. The most characteristic of these is a creature called a crinoid or sea-lily; not a plant, but an animal related to sea-urchins and starfish. It evolved a mini-column supporting it above the seabed to collect passing food. The column is made of lots of tiny discs which you can find on several beaches including on Lindisfarne, where their similarity to rosary beds has earned them the name of Cuthbert’s Beads.

There are lots of other fossils to be found on the coast, including corals, many varieties of shells including brachiopods, and more rarely trilobites and nautiloids. Along with these sea-creatures you can also find plant fossils, which lived in the hot steamy swamps of the Carboniferous period and which formed the coal-seams which thread their way through Northumberland and out onto the coast.

There are many other rocks to explore on the coast telling stories of our distant past, including the Whin Sill, an igneous rock whose durability has left its upstanding crags as the perfect location for building castles.

Northumbrian Earth – Reading Northumberland’s Rocks

Northumbrian Earth has been running geo-walks led by geologist Dr Ian Kille on behalf of the AONB since 2010 and below are some of the walks being run this year to explore the Northumberland Coast geo-diversity. Most of these walks take you right up the rock face on the beach and cliffs with all the scrambling and slipperiness this involves. Some walks have a more contemplative pace and stick to the coastal paths. Northumbrian Earth will be running many other events which can be found on the website www.northumbrianearth.co.uk where you can sign up for a newsletter, or contact Dr Ian Kille on 07713 893845.

APRIL: Thursday 25th April 14:00-17:00: Bamburgh; Farenheight 2019 meet by war memorial under the castle. Grid reference NU182350
MAY: Saturday 25th May 14:00-17:00: Beadnell; Life’s a Beach, meet at beach exit from main car park. Grid Reference NU234287
JUNE: Wednesday 19th June 10:00-13:00: Lindisfarne; Ley of a Liminal Landscape, meet at the Window on Wild Lindisfarne. Grid Reference NU129419
JULY: Wednesday 17th July 10:00-17:00: Spittal; Corals and Coals, meet at the south end of the promenade. Grid Reference NU010509
AUGUST: Thursday 8th August 14:00-17:00: Howick: Storm and Stress, meet at parking area by Seahouse Farm. Grid Reference NU258173
SEPTEMBER: Sunday 1st September 10:00-13:00: Cocklawburn Beach, a few miles south of Berwick; Fossil Hunt, meet in the car park, S end of the beach. Grid Reference NU027485