

People and the dunes

Sand dunes are very special habitats and are home to many species of plants and animals. There have been sand dunes along this stretch of coastline for about 5000 years.

Over the years people have used the dunes as a place to live, graze animals, harvest food and enjoy themselves. Now the dunes are mainly used for leisure activities, but people can cause damage to these fragile habitats. Walking on the marram grass can kill it and dogs can disturb the ground nesting skylarks, so it is important to stick to the paths and keep dogs under control.

Getting involved

The diversity of plants and animals found on the Towans has led to them being designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which means they are protected by law. By following the simple code of conduct you too can help protect the dunes.



Walk, don't ride
no vehicles or bicycles



Take your litter home
no fires or overnight camping



In restored areas,
please use the paths



Be a responsible dog owner
dog fouling is killing rare plants, clear up after your dog

Conservation days, guided walks and children's activity days are held throughout the year. You can take part in the many events and activities taking place on the Towans by contacting us on 0300 1234 202 or have a look at what is happening in the area by looking at our website's environment pages
www.cornwall.gov.uk

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The Sands of Time

Hayle - Gwithian Towans



Carline Thistle

The Sands of Time

The sand dunes between Hayle and Godrevy are the second largest in Cornwall. These dunes were formed over 5000 years ago and people have had a close relationship with them ever since. Archaeological finds in the sand include the ancient St Gothian's Chapel which has been buried three times under the sand.

As with much of Cornwall, the Towans are dotted with deep depressions where mine shafts were dug in search of metal ores.

When you explore Upton Towans, locally known as Dynamite Towans, keep an eye out for remains of the National Explosives Company, which used the area to produce dynamite in the early 1900's. Ruined buildings, old tramways and a large brick chimney remain scattered amongst the dunes. Some of the dunes are square, made to store the dynamite.

Nowadays you can enjoy the Towans as peaceful and haven for wildlife and a beautiful area to explore.

National explosives factory 1919



Wealth of wildlife

The Towans are important for wildlife - one fifth of the plants that can be found in Cornwall live here, as well as a multitude of insects, beautiful butterflies and birds.

Deep-rooting marram grass traps the windblown seashell sand, rich in calcium. Plants colonise the sand to create dune grassland, kept short by vital rabbit grazing. The grazing also helps to control brambles and other scrubby plants.

In late spring, pyramidal orchids and cowslips fill the dunes with colour, attracting insects such as the six-spot burnet moth, spurge bugs and the rare silver-studded blue butterfly.

If you are lucky, glow worms will light your way on warm summer evenings as the skylarks finish their daily singing and sand martins retreat to their cliff nest holes.

Six Spot Burnet Moth on Ragwort



Pyramidal Orchid

Local nature reserves

The Towans are so important to both wildlife and people that some areas have been made Local nature reserves. Gwithian and Upton Towans, St Gothian Sands and Gwithian Green are all designated local nature reserves, providing areas for everyone to enjoy and learn about the plants and animals of the sand dunes.

Schools regularly visit the dunes to study the ecology, and guided walks are held regularly for anyone who wants to find out more about the Towans. Look out for details of walks around the Towans and in Hayle and Gwithian village.

Painted Lady



Silver Studded Blue



Birdsfoot Trefoil
St Gothian Sands Local Nature Reserve

