

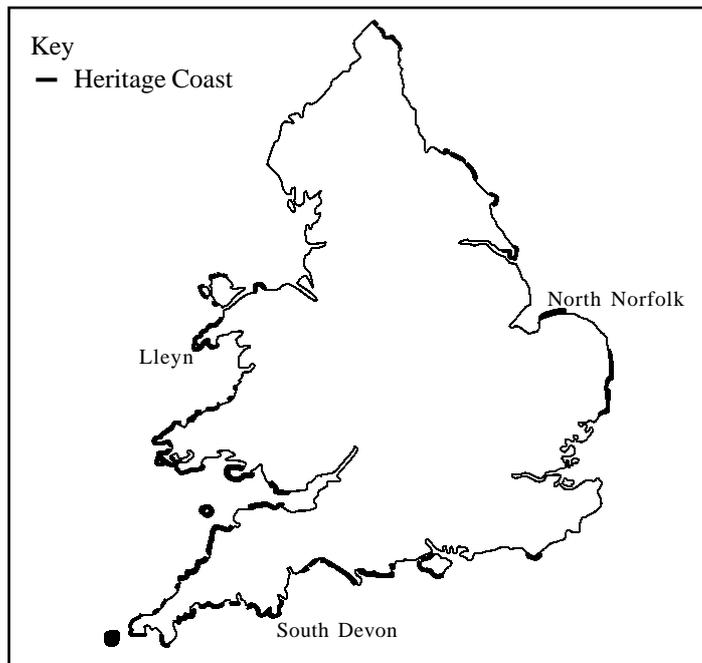


Heritage Coasts

The designation of Heritage Coasts was introduced in 1972. The Countryside Commission proposed the Heritage Coast concept as a way of protecting “stretches of undeveloped coastline of high scenic quality, whilst at the same time allowing for informal recreational use”. Thus, Heritage Coasts were designed to simultaneously provide recreational provision and to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the coastline.

There are now 45 Heritage Coasts (Fig 1), more than half of which now have their own management plans. However, 38 of the Heritage Coasts also receive protection because they are in National Parks, are designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) or are owned by the National Trust. In Scotland the equivalent designation is Preferred Coastal Conservation Zones and the 26 designations now cover 75% of Scotland’s mainland and island coastline.

Fig 1. Heritage Coasts in England and Wales



Aims of the Heritage Coasts

1. Protect and enhance natural beauty of coastlines, including terrestrial, littoral and marine flora and fauna, plus historical/architectural/archaeological features.
2. Enhance opportunities for informal recreation, including educational, sporting and tourist activities.
3. Maintain and increase water quality affecting Heritage Coasts.
4. Promote sustainable forms of economic development, especially farming, forestry, fishing and tourism.

Heritage Coasts: Success or Failure?

Many observers believe that, on the whole, Heritage Coasts have been successful, for four major reasons:

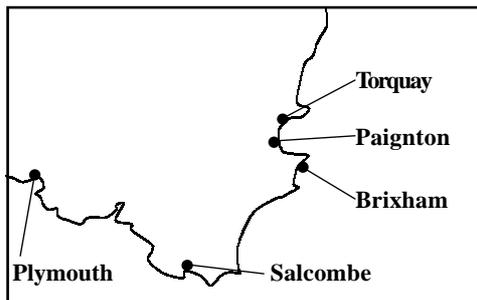
1. Heritage Coast is a management concept rather than a formal designation based on active planning control. In practice, this has meant that communities have been heavily involved and that volunteers have been used in drawing up and implementing conservation programmes.
2. Designation of an area of coastline as a Heritage Coast has increased local awareness of the issues.
3. They are cheap - local authorities have provided small budgets and most of the practical work has been undertaken by volunteers.
4. The ethos has been to protect - that is recognise and manage conflicts - rather than preserve. This has been particularly important in areas where tourism development has been essential to safeguard the local economy.

However, the designation is seen as having five major weaknesses:

1. The designation ignores many attractive but unspectacular coastlines, such as estuaries and areas where restoration work has increased the visual attractiveness of the coastline.
2. Designation offers no special planning protection over and above normal planning controls. Many observers believe that Heritage Coasts have been protected, not because of the Heritage Coast designation, but because many of them are in AONBs, National Parks, managed by the National Trust or are covered by SSSI (site of special scientific interest) designations.
3. Local authorities have been reluctant to consider making all Heritage Coasts AONBs.
4. British coast designation ends at low water mark, but it is beyond that point, in the open water just off the shore, where many development threats exist.
5. They are under-funded and too reliant upon volunteers.

The 45 Heritage Coasts cover a wide range of landscape and habitat types. However, many of the Heritage Coasts face similar pressures; all face possible threat from large numbers of tourists and the development of recreational and leisure facilities which they demand. In general, local authorities have successfully prevented inappropriate or badly designed schemes involving proposed marinas, new car parks, caravan sites, golf courses, etc.

However, those Heritage Coasts which include large urban centres, such as Plymouth, face enormous pressures to allow new residential development, along with the infrastructure which this demands, such as sewage treatment works and light industrial or retail development to provide jobs. In general, the consensus is that the Heritage Coast designation - in combination with other types of protection - has been successful in preventing major developments such as the establishment of wind farms, offshore fish farms or army firing ranges.

Case Study 1. South Devon**Characteristics**

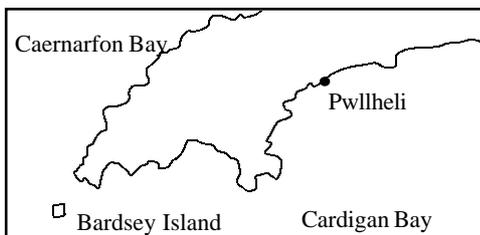
Stretches from Plymouth to Torquay and, as a ria coastline, is one of Britain's most valuable landscapes: pre-Cambrian cliffs, sheltered coves, long expanses of scenic sands, five wildlife-rich estuaries, e.g. Dart and Kingsbridge and includes reedbeds and freshwater lakes of Slapton Ley. Also designated as an AONB (landscape) and includes many SSSIs (wildlife).

Pressures on landscape and Management

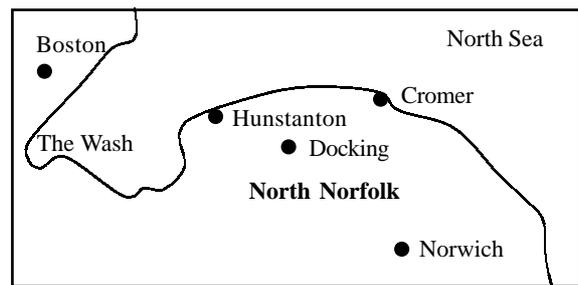
Entire coastline is a very popular day-trip destination. Dartmouth and Salcombe are well-established holiday/sailing centres and the South Devon Coast Path is becoming increasingly popular. Major problems include road and parking congestion, footpath erosion, litter, trespass. Suburbs of Plymouth and Brixham are expanding and pressure to accept limited residential building is growing. South Hams area is expected to take 11000 new dwellings between 1995-2011. Commuters and immigrants increase pressure on local housing stock.

Both the Devon Structure Plan and the South Hams Local Plan state that landscape preservation and enhancement will be given priority over any other consideration. However the South Hams Plan recognises that continued provision of tourist facilities is needed and that pressures for conversion of rural and derelict buildings will continue.

Detailed management plans exist for nine local sites, including the Dart Estuary, Kingsbridge/Salcombe estuary, Torbay and Yealm Estuary. There is very active community and NGO (non-governmental organisation) involvement (e.g. Whitley Wildlife Conservation Trust). Erosion control has been implemented by temporal and seasonal zoning and the creation of new paths such as the Dart Valley Trail. Wildlife protection has often been achieved by community and/or voluntary initiatives, such as the Wembury Marine Conservation Area.

Case Study 3. Llyn Peninsula**Characteristics**

The north coast is characterised by low cliffs and headlands. The south coast landscape includes wide sandy bays and rocky headlands. The coastline of Bardsey Island (Ynys Enlli), an important bird sanctuary and home to grey seals, is included within the Heritage Coast designation.

Case Study 2. North Norfolk**Characteristics**

The Heritage Coast is made up of salt marshes, grazing marshes, shingle beach flats and dunes. The coast is protected by national designations, e.g. AONB, SSSI, and by international designations, e.g. it is a Ramsar Site, Biosphere Reserve and candidate Special Area for Conservation (SAC). One of the reasons for this are the world-famous bird reserves at Titchwell and Clay Marshes.

Pressure and Management

The north coast is popular with day and weekend visitors. Major activities include sailing, walking and fishing. Dunes have been subject to erosion and increasing visitor pressure threatens to disturb the internationally important nesting colonies of seabirds.

The Heritage Coast received special protection in Norfolk's Strategic Plan and the North Norfolk Local Plan explicitly precludes any development detrimental to the character and appearance of the area. It is the importance of the latter designation which is seen as the most important mechanism for ensuring protection. The Norfolk Coast Project partners (County and District Councils and Countryside Commission) produced a Visitor Management Strategy document in 1995 and this continues to be the basis of Heritage Coast management.

Conservation strategy includes: preservation of boardwalks across sand dunes, footpath and bridge repair, carefully landscaped bird hides.

Pressures and Management

Former fishing villages are now thriving tourist centres, the majority of whom arrive by car, and many with caravans. Tourism, especially water sports, is the major industry and the south coast is one of Britain's leading sailing centres.

Congestion of roads, car parks, launch sites and coastal waters is a major problem. Conflicting demands of water users, e.g. divers vs. fishermen vs. jet skiers, are increasing. Erosion of coastal paths, disturbance and trampling of dunes has occurred and inadequately screened caravan sites have created visual intrusion.

Besides being designated as a Heritage Coast, the peninsula is also designated an Environmentally Sensitive Area and is the subject of a LANDMAP Landscape Assessment process supported by the Countryside Council for Wales. In fact the coast is protected by a spectrum of overlapping designations and plans. The Gwynedd County Structure Plan explicitly makes landscape conservation the primary planning consideration and the Gwynedd Countryside Strategy Plan sets out ways in which local authorities can enter into conservation-oriented management plans for local landmarks. Particular emphasis has been given to footpath management including erosion control, provision of picnic sites, rebuilding of dry stone walls and traditional 'cloddiau'. Visitor management policies include beach zoning, access limitation and water speed restrictions.