
42 Ravenglass

Theme: Climate and landscape change

Location

42 Ravenglass and Drigg dunes and estuary. Ravenglass is a stop on the Carlisle—Barrow train line and on the Ratty railway [SD 084 964].

Description

The intricate spits and dunes of Drigg and Eskmeals guard Ravenglass and its estuary which is fed by three rivers.

The rivers Irt, Mite and Esk drain a huge area of southwest Lakeland, including the Sca Fell range. Their confluence is in the estuary west of Ravenglass village. The valleys of these three rivers, over-deepened by glaciers, once used to run separately to a coastline more than a kilometre to the west but were submerged as sea levels re-bounded when ice sheets melted around 15,000 years ago. The sea then re-worked the glacial debris and built up the shingle spits of Drigg and Eskmeals. The longshore drift of sediment is to the south at Drigg and to the north at Eskmeals. In the last few thousand years onshore winds have created extensive sand dunes here. Dunes are also found to the south at Sandscale, and to the north at Mawbray and Silloth. Recent research shows that today Ravenglass estuary, while dynamic, is in equilibrium; flood and ebb tides import and export similar amounts of sediment. How the estuary will respond to predicted global rises in sea level remains unknown, but current planning policy assesses the risk to human infrastructure as being of 'low impact'.

Ravenglass has a rich human history too. In the dunes Neolithic and Bronze Age flints and artefacts have been found. In Roman times the estuary mouth was wider and they maintained a port here, and also a fort called Itunocelum, plus a large bath house complex. Up to the Industrial Revolution Ravenglass continued to be a significant port, shipping iron, copper, slate and granite; all mined and quarried in the surrounding fells. Today the old mineral railway line, La'al Ratty, is a popular destination for tourists taking the ride into Eskdale. The dunes have abundant wildlife, including many hundreds of plant species, wading birds, wildfowl, insects and rare natterjack toads; this is an internationally important habitat.

Photographs

(Photo 42-1) 42 Ravensglass Estuary.



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