

Hurst Spit

Summary Description

Hurst Spit is a highly distinctive feature of the Western Solent. The gravel spit is over two kilometres long. Its strategic position at the entrance to the Solent has been recognised and used for defence with the building of Hurst Castle. The coastal area also has a history of use for the exploitation of marine resources, particularly salt working.

Sea Surface

The marine area is a popular site for marine recreation activities, most notably sailing, windsurfing, and water-skiing. The potentially hazardous nature of the waters off the spit are recognised through a range of navigational aids which include: Hurst Point Lighthouse visible for 14 Nautical Miles to the east, and 18 Nautical miles to the west; and 2 floating buoys that demarcate the main navigation channel.

There is a local ferry crossing that connects Keyhaven to the castle on the end of the spit.

Seabed Surface

Hurst Spit is formed from a gravel spit running out into the western channel into the Solent (Tubbs, 1999). The area is exposed to prevailing winds on the western shore of the spit and the seabed is characterised by gravel. The eastern shore is sheltered although bordered by overfalls and strong currents at the mouth of the channel. The spit projects some 2.1 km towards the Isle of Wight, it is reached by ferry from Keyhaven or a long walk along the pebble causeway.

The extensive intertidal mudflats and salt marshes, contains shellfish resources, primarily oyster beds. Most of the area has been designated as a Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Conservation Area (SAC), and a RAMSAR designated area.

There is a historical and archaeological record of salt working remains in this area, including the remains of sites which are periodically uncovered as the shingle spit moves.

The extensive sandbanks present in the area are considered to be high risk navigational hazards. Such conditions have contributed to the four wrecks and two obstructions recorded in the area. One wreck site, the *Toccatina* a yacht sunk in 1977, is dived by recreational divers.

Seabed Subsurface

At Solent Bank a lot of seabed material has been removed by aggregate dredging (Hydraulics Research, 1977, 1981). The extensive intertidal mudflats and salt marshes, contain shellfish resources, primarily oyster beds which can impact the seabed subsurface.

Diving investigations have identified the presence of peat deposits outcropping in the marine zone close to the spit. These have the potential to reveal evidence of prehistoric environments for human occupation and for the development of the Solent as tidal water ways.

Coastal

The coastal zone characterised by the two kilometre long spit housing a castle at the end. The central area of the castle was built by Henry VIII in 1544, this was added to the in the Napoleonic period with two heavily armoured wings. Hurst castle is a national historic monument and tourism asset.

The village of Keyhaven which connects to the spit via a ferry service features a small tidal inlet or salt marsh with mud at low tide. It is also the terminal for the Hurst castle ferry. Keyhaven Nature Reserve is located adjacent to the creek, within the reserve are the substantial remains of Post Medieval salt workings which include the old dock where ships landed coal and exported salt.



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Archaeological Potential

The Western Solent study area has been significantly affected by changing sea-levels during and since the last glacial period. This has left a trail of gravel deposits along the shoulders of the Pleistocene river valleys of this region. Later Holocene sea level rise affected the human populations inhabiting the area through changing climatic conditions. This led to the development of peat deposits which were subsequently covered by marine sediment and preserved. Such peat deposits have been located in this area and indicate the potential of the area for submerged prehistoric landscapes.

More recent changes in the coast line have been observed at Hurst Spit where storm events cause the gravel to shift exposing remains of wooden structures believed to be associated with salt making industry which was once behind the spit. This highlights the affects of coastal change and sea level rise on archaeological features.

On shore the more modern archaeological features are related to military defence such as pillboxes, gun emplacements and decoy sites.

The maritime archaeological resource of the area has the potential to be significant. There are a high number of recorded shipwreck losses in the area, but to date relatively few of these have been located. The potential to encounter the remains of crashed aircraft must also be considered, with many recorded losses which date to the Second World War.

References

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- Barrey, H.G. *Pre-historic Lymington and people : with brief notices of other places and times*. Devizes : pr. by H.F. Bull, 1885.

Links

- Hurst Castle - <http://www.hurst-castle.co.uk/>
- English Heritage, Hurst Castle - <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/conProperty.191>
- Lymington – Keyhaven Nature Reserve - http://www.rspb.org.uk/policy/marine/saline_lagoons/lymington_keyhaven_nature_reserve.asp
- Lymington – Keyhaven Nature Reserve - http://www.rspb.org.uk/policy/marine/saline_lagoons/lymington_keyhaven_nature_reserve.asp
- Lymington Local Information and Tourist Guide - <http://www.lymington.org/>
- A Brief History of Lymington - <http://www.localhistories.org/lymington.html>
- Lymington Harbour - <http://www.lymingtonharbour.co.uk/>
- St Barbe Museum - <http://www.stbarbe-museum.org.uk/>



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Images



HWTMA Photo Number	HSS – A16
Character Area	Hurst Spit Area
Description	Hurst Spit stakes – stakes in shallow water
Photographer:	
Date Photographed:	
Date listed:	



HWTMA Photo Number	HSS – A09
Character Area	Hurst Spit Area
Description	Hurst Spit - Beach
Photographer:	
Date Photographed:	
Date listed:	



IoE number:	413119
Character Area	Hurst Spit Area
Description	Hurst Spit - Lighthouse
Photographer:	Mr Peter Howard Harris LRPS
Date Photographed:	24 January 2003
Date listed:	28 October 1974



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