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## Ynyslas Walk

Take a walk around Ynyslas and find out about the wildlife and history, the myths and legend surrounding the sand dunes of the Dyfi Estuary...

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Start point:</b>  | Ynyslas Visitor Centre   |
| <b>Distance:</b>   | 3 miles  |
| <b>Time:</b>   | 2 hours  |
| <b>Advice:</b>   | Sand is the main feature underfoot. A wooden boardwalk with steps crosses the first set of dunes. Wheelchairs can negotiate the first 2 points of interest using the shell path. Swimming is forbidden due to strong currents. |
| <b>Extra info:</b><br>To see what the symbols mean, please visit the <a href="#">key</a> |  |



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### Ynyslas walk - where to start

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- 2 Dune Slack Orchids
- 3 The Viewpoint
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## 1. Visitor Centre

Last updated: 26 November 2005

The walk starts at the visitor centre which has information boards and leaflets. From April - September, the centre is staffed by wardens from the Countryside Council for Wales.



**Hear more about this location with BBC Wales reporter John Meredith and Ynyslas Warden Sarah Millinger...**

(Need help with RealPlayer?)

Ynyslas sand dunes form part of the Dyfi National Nature Reserve which is one of only 234 national nature reserves in Great Britain. The Dyfi estuary has also been selected by UNESCO as a Biosphere Reserve.

The visitor centre is the best place to start this walk. There's usually a warden on hand to answer any questions you may have and there are plenty of leaflets telling you about the dunes.

Display boards on the walls of the centre highlight the main plants and animals to look out for as you walk through the dunes. There are also activity sheets for children to fill in along the way.

Outside the centre you'll see an oak sculpture in the form of a banded snail, one of the creatures which lives in the dunes. This particular snail needs crushed shells to make its own shells. The banded snail in turn is needed by birds for their food. It's worth climbing the wooden snail to look out across the estuary and the dunes.



Don't forget to look upwards too. There's an RSPB reserve just four miles up the estuary at Ynys-hir, a popular stopping-off place for many migrant birds.

Red Kites are now often seen in this sky. Only a few years ago, these birds faced extinction in Great Britain.

Skylarks are also more common here than in other areas where agriculture has disrupted their natural habitat and their song is often heard as they hover above the dunes.

Leaving the visitor centre, bear left onto the boardwalk leading to the shell path. Crushed shells make this path firm as you head south through what are known as the grey dunes, after the



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##### Sioe Frenhinol

##### Llanelwedd

Y Sioe Frenhinol 2010. Cyfle i edrych yn ôl ar ddigwyddiadau'r Sioe Fawr 2010.



colour of the lichen colonising the bare sand which is more stable here. Look out for

butterflies such as the common blue.

#### your comments

**Jo, Ynyslas**

Hello I'm a local resident and I have to say that powerboats, jetskis and all motorised vehicles are the bane of our lives.....

Tue Jul 7 11:44:41 2009

**Nigel from Staffordshire**

Ynyslas is a beautiful area and it's an ideal place to Jetski and power boat. It is unfair to tar all jetski users as lunatics! I think Ynyslas is big enough for everyone to enjoy and I hope we can continue to use our personal watercrafts there for many years to come.

Sun Aug 19 20:01:15 2007

**Emma Lewis from Telford**

We always have between one or two holidays in Borth every year and usually visit for daytrips a few times a year, infact we got engaged on Borth beach one Christmas day and we also had our honeymoon there! But I have to agree with Lynne Hughes comments about the noise and distruption of the lunatics with jet skis. Our last daytrip was on Easter Saturday and I also found them extremely annoying. What we love about Borth and Ynyslas is the feeling of it being untouched, it would be great to keep it this way and ban these people with no consideration for the ones who like to enjoy the peace and quiet.

Wed Jun 6 15:43:38 2007

**Lynne Hughes ,Pontypridd**

I visit Ynyslas appx. 8-12 times during the spring and summer season, and my first visit of this year was Easter Sunday. I took my whole family but unfortunately the visit was very short! I have grandchildren that love to paddle and also do a bit of fishing with their yearly £2.99 fishing sets. They catch nothing but never the less enjoy the experience. I was so dissapointed with the amount of noise pollution that was coming from the speed boats and dozens of jet ski's that had been launched from ynyslas beach, they were racing each other so close to the shore, one of them even beach themselves because they came to close to the shoreline. The beach was strewn with trailers. What a pity that a nature reserve is allowing the launching of such craft, surely this should be discouraged as is bound to have an effect on the birdlife. I hope, as a nature reserve, the practice of launching such craft will be stopped.

Thu Apr 12 16:58:46 2007

**Debbie from Knighton**

I have a caravan at Ynyslas and i never get fed up of the beauty of the area and the sand dunes look and have something different every time i visit them. Wild life is in

abundance and the submerged forest is a must to go and see. I feel privileged to be able to live and visit here.  
Thu Feb 22 18:14:42 2007

**Holly Jones From Oswestry**

I am doing a geography project about the management of Ynyslas. I was wondering how many visitors does Ynyslas have in a year, and what management schemes they have in place to preserve this area of such conservational value.  
Fri Sep 15 14:44:50 2006

**Hannah**

I have been told that one of the beaches in Cardigan with sand dunes has a blue shelter. Is this right? If yes please could you tell me the name of the beach?

- **Can you help?**

Tue Aug 29 11:13:29 2006

**Richard from Hereford**

Ynyslas is a great place to play or bathe on the sand so is ideal for kids. The Visitors Centre is very interesting with the sights surrounding it fantastic. Over the sea you can see the seaside village of Aberdyfi which sadly due to the sea, you can't walk over to it which is a shame because it would only be a 5 minute walk with driving there taking about half an hour. Not took the walk yet but it does sound very interesting and might take the walk on my next visit. All in all, Ynyslas is a great place and an inexpensive place to keep all ages of the family happy.  
Fri Sep 2 00:47:39 2005

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## 2. Orchids

The shell path extends a few hundred yards from the Visitor Centre to a flat area known as a dune slack. Here, during the summer months, you'll find a host of pretty orchids in flower.



 **Ynyslas Warden Sarah Millinger talks to BBC Wales reporter John Meredith about the reserve's orchids ...**  
(Need help with RealPlayer?)

The dune slack at the end of the shell path is one of several to be found across Ynyslas. These moist flat hollows are a great breeding ground for orchids, helleborines and other plants.

A major attraction is the purple marsh orchid which flowers during June and July. These have been abundant in Ynyslas since the 1960s.

Look out too for the special Welsh subspecies of the western marsh orchid which has leaves with heavy, dark brown blotches.

The northern marsh orchid has been here since 1918. Ynyslas is one of the few places where it grows beside the southern marsh orchid. The nearby dune slopes are favoured by the bee orchid and the pyramidal orchid.



The marsh helleborine - a plant which was unknown until 1965 - also flowers here in July. Around the end of August, look out for the small flowering spikes of autumn lady's-tresses - especially in the zone where dune slope and slack meet.

The water-table is never far from the surface and dune slacks can be flooded to a depth of up to a metre from October through to May. Mosses and thaloid liverworts are well adapted to this as are rushes, sedges and primitive horsetails.



Ynyslas is home to hundreds of rabbits. They keep the grass short and they're also responsible for creating the little raised mounds of earth which are dotted around the dunes. Rather than soil their burrows, rabbits designate nearby areas as latrines.

When the rabbits have moved on, these mounds of old dung are a particularly fertile growing ground for plantlife. Up to



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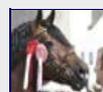


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#### Sioe Frenhinol

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40 different species can flower in just one square metre.

Go ahead along the boardwalk noticing how restharrow, whose pink flowers can be seen from June to September, binds the sand together to carpet the dunes. Fixing nitrogen like clover, it blends in with the aromatic wild thyme.



Birds living in the dunes include linnet, stonechat, skylarks and meadow pipit. Elder thickets, bramble bushes and large marram grass tussocks provide cover for linnets to nest in. Grasses are preferred as cover by stonechat, meadow pipit and skylark. Abandoned rabbit burrows may be exploited as nesting sites by Wheatear and Shelduck. It is the rabbits which also attract the Red Kites, especially in winter.

#### your comments

**Foxy Lady from Dudley**

We have a caravan at Ynyslas i have been coming here for the past 18 years it is so beautiful, the orchids are a wonderful flower to see

Fri Jun 19 13:11:54 2009

**Jenni from Liverpool**

This site is amazing how cool r plants?

Wed Jan 10 11:50:47 2007

**Sean Reader, Chesterfield**

Me and my family love this part of Wales. It's never changed and I have been coming for 35 years.

Tue Aug 29 11:15:22 2006

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## 3. The Viewpoint

Make your way along the boardwalk to the viewpoint platform. This is the highest point in the dunes and on a fine day, the views from here can be stunning.



 **John Morgan from Aberystwyth Ramblers tells BBC Wales reporter John Meredith what he loves about the Ynyslas walk...**

**(Need help with RealPlayer?)**

The 360 degree sweep is a view to please any pair of eyes. Look across the sea to the north-west to spot Bardsey Island off the Llyn Peninsula. Some swear they can make out the summit of Snowdon to the north, while New Quay head is prominent to the south.

Most distinguishable are the resorts of Aberdyfi, across the river on its Gwynedd shore, and Borth overlooked by cliffs to the south. Inland of Borth is Cors Fochno, which is regarded as one of the most impressive lowland raised bogs in the UK.



More immediate, to the north, are the dunes of Ynyslas itself. Notice 'blow outs' where erosion has been caused by the wind scouring the sand or the over-trampling of the protective marram grass.

Descend the steps towards the sea to come to the end of this boardwalk. At the foot of the boardwalk, look out for bee orchids which flower here during June and July. You may recognise sea spurge, a perennial capable of growing up through sand when covered in the more unstable dunes near the sea.



The boardwalk ends where the beach begins. A red flag warns you not to bathe from the beach because of the strong currents here.



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**Sioe Frenhinol Llanellwedd**  
Y Sioe Frenhinol 2010. Cyfle i edrych yn ôl ar ddigwyddiadau'r Sioe Fawr 2010.

### your comments

#### The Brysons, Birmingham

Looking at Ynyslas here at home we can't wait for a bit of sunshine so that we can visit, its especially lovely in the early evening to have a lovely stroll and watch the twinkling lights as you look over towards Aberdovey.

Sun Jul 1 19:23:31 2007

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## 4. The Beach

When the boardwalk ends, follow the short sandy path to the main beach and turn left towards the village of Borth, with the sea on your right-hand side.



You can choose to walk either on the shingle ridge or on the beach. Attractive pebbles are a feature of the shingle ridge. Many have been brought by the north-flowing current from the base of the cliffs at Borth. These grits and mudstones often contain veins of quartz (white crystalline rock) and waves grind and smooth these sedimentary rocks into rounded pebbles.

Some pebbles originate in the River Dyfi, where ballast dumped by ships could even account for exotic intruders. Others are the residue of the last Ice Age when glaciers pushed material here from as far away as Northern Ireland. If you find a flint-stone, it has come from County Antrim.



Stepping on the sand look down for jellyfish. Small ones, which soon disappear on a hot day as the 95% water content of their bodies evaporates, are *Aurelia aurita*. More excitingly, the *Rhizostoma octopus* is the largest British jellyfish and often grows to half a metre in diameter. It is harmless to humans.



If very lucky, you may spot a seal or a dolphin in the sea. Less welcome are the greater and lesser weaver fish. If found on the beach, beware of their poisonous spines.

Razor shells live in this sand. Their long shells look like a cut-throat razor. Burrowing into the sand gives them protection from birds.

Listen for the 'kee-wi' call of the oystercatcher. Its red bill makes it conspicuous. Dunlin, characterized by their black belly in the summer, also predominate. Golden plover may be seen in the Autumn.



Herring and black-headed gulls are attracted by remains from visitors' picnics in the summer. Migrants turn up regularly each spring and autumn on their familiar routes.



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Sometimes huge numbers of swallows, swifts and martins can be seen.

Beyond the Second World War Pill Box on your left, the end of the national nature reserve is heralded by the golf course car park. During the summer months, there is a portable toilet here for public use.

#### your comments

**Ray Austin, Gtr Manchester**

While on a camping holiday near aberystwyth, it was decided to take a trip to ynyslas! we had a great tour around the reserve and the visitor centre, but what stays with me was the fantastic beach and the crystal clear water of the sea, a hot day clear skys, at the time it was said why would you want to go abroad, and we used to go to borth for famly holidays too, hoping to visit again in the near future, a fan!

Thu Jul 17 09:31:59 2008

**Rosemary, Sennybridge**

I'm not the only one too then! Every year until I was about 6 we would travel by car for 1-2 weeks holiday in the summer. We're going again this year, but I'm now 13... On the way back to the train station, me and my cousin, Richard had a few minutes to mess about on those lovely rockpools right by the cliff. I did find a large scallop type shell, I'd say about 10 cm lengthways. But that was the largest one I found in Borth. I do agree that there a fewer these days, even at the age of 6 I came home with bucket loads of those really long thing shells (like those £1 glasses case shaped ones) and several others which have remained in our garden since! It is a shame, I just wonder what ones if any will be there to amaze me this year! If you really are interested in shell finding or just love looking at some unique ones, Twywn maybe a good place for that.

Fri Jul 27 16:52:55 2007

**Maggie Hammond from Solihull**

We visit this lovely place often and walk our dogs along Borth beach. We have noticed during the last few years. that there has been a distinct lack of shells whereas there used to be quite an abundance of them. It would be interesting if anyone else had notice this and the reason for it.

Sun Dec 25 15:52:12 2005

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## 5. Submerged Forest

Keep walking along the beach in the direction of Borth until you reach the fifth sand groyne along from Ynyslas. At low tide, the remains of an ancient forest can be seen in the sands here.



 [Watch a programme clip about Cantre'r Gwaelod...](#)

 [Watch another clip about the submerged forest...](#)

 [John Morgan from Aberystwyth Ramblers talks to BBC Wales reporter John Meredith about the legend of Cantre'r Gwaelod...](#)  
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It's worth making the trip to Ynyslas at low tide in the hope of witnessing this amazing sight. Tree stumps of oak, pine, birch, willow and hazel can be found embedded in peat at one metre below the normal surface between high and low water marks. Even twigs and branches are uncovered.

This submerged forest proves that the coastline used to be further west and that the sea level has risen. Radio carbon dating suggests that these trees died around 3500 BC (but others to the south, near Borth, date from 1500BC). The tree stumps were preserved by the acid anaerobic conditions in the peat.

The forest remains also hark back to the legend of a lost land - the Lowland Hundred or Cantre'r Gwaelod as it's known in Welsh.

Ruled by Gwyddno Garanhir, the low-lying kingdom was protected from the sea by a series of dykes and sluice gates. One stormy night, the appointed watchman Seithennin - a heavy drinker - was at a party and left the water gates open. The land was flooded and disappeared under the waves. Perhaps there was an earthquake and a tidal wave or tsunami.

It is said that if you listen closely, you can hear the bells of the lost city ringing out from under the sea, especially on quiet Sunday mornings and particularly if you're in Ynyslas or Aberdyfi.

To continue with the walk, retrace your steps northwards along the beach, with the sea now on your left. Notice an emergency telephone (remember no bathing!) at the first flag pole on your right. Pass the second red flag, marking where your outward boardwalk met the beach.

Sea rocket grows along the strand-line and, from June through to September, the yellow-horned poppy flowers



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along the area where the shingle meets the dunes.



If you want a shorter walk, turn right where you see a third red flag and you can return to the Visitor Centre via another boardwalk. To complete the three-mile walk, continue on to the northern point of the headland.

#### your comments

**Patricia Moffett from Aberystwyth**

@W.Ward, Northumberland and julia simmons worcester. I'm a local and love walking my dogs here. report and fine those that don't pick up after them - there's no excuse - but don't ban us from walking our dogs where we live. what next? ban all children because some parents don't clean up their sweet and chip wrappers?

Thu Mar 4 16:24:26 2010

**John, a Curcio from across the sea (USA)**

Cantre'r Gwaelod and the lost or buried forest may very well be some land extension from the surrounding seas remains/ruins of the existence of submerged Atlantis. One photo of the 'rocks' looks to me like pumice (volcanic rock with holes and it floats) and the comment above about a layer of clay found here is very telling (proof of this legendary land?). Have any geologist or archaeologists been there to explore the site or make some educated surmises?

Tue Apr 21 09:56:13 2009

**Frankie Jones from Birmingham**

I have been visiting Borth and Ynyslas for a number of years, I have a caravan in Llanidloes. I had never heard of the 'forest' till this year, so, last week, August 2008, I paid a visit, with a specific purpose, to witness the forest. What perfect timing...the tide was out so far and the glory of the magnificent sight was exposed. I could not believe the extent..it was fabulous. I certainly recommend a visit.

Tue Aug 26 09:26:51 2008

**W.Ward, Northumberland**

Brilliant beach, rather an anti-social notice from the golfers though. All for the dog-ban! too, beaches should be a safe and clean environment, have had a dog ban in Newbiggin, Northumberland and what a difference! no worrying about whether we've sat on dog mess or not. Black Rock and Harlech are favourites too - keep them dog free too.

Tue Aug 19 09:08:25 2008

**Colin Lythe from Oswestry**

Seen the submerged forest today and I was blown away. What a site, will be going back to look again surprised to find out how old they are.

Mon Jun 9 09:20:45 2008

**Elle Chapman**

I have been visiting Borth for years now since I was a child and I have only become aware of the legend of Cantre'r Gwaelod this year! I am visiting again in August '08 for my

summer hols (taking my partner there to see how beautiful it is as he's never been) And this time I will definitely be looking out for the submerged forest - so exciting!

Thu Jun 5 17:30:59 2008

**Shelley Stubbs, Waltham Abbey, Essex**

I,too, have been to Port Eynon and thought this was part of a petrified forest, in August 2008 we are going to Wales to see the submerged forest in Ynyslas for ourselves as the program did make it look very interesting and appealing.

Sun Mar 23 11:18:38 2008

**Sheila Roberts Shrewsbury**

I have been to Borth and Ynyslas many many times. On Wednesday 20th February took my first visit this year and was amazed at how much more of the sunken forest was visible, far more than I have ever seen before.It was exposed in a greater area than I have ever seen before. Truly a sight to see. I wonder does the season and tides govern how much is in sight at any time. There seemed to be more channels and sand movement than when I was there 5 months ago.? Would love to know why there is such a change to the beach at the moment. A magical sight indeed to see the remains of the forest. Will be heading back up very soon. Do visit if you can.

Mon Feb 25 08:16:04 2008

**Liz Rocher, Brittany**

Very interesting, for here in north Brittany and down the west coast of Normandy, there is the same thing. Historians over here have traced old texts speaking of a flood tide and the moment in the 7th century when Mont Saint Michel became an island, as before it had been land-locked. My norman mother-in-law knew where the fossilised trees in Normandy were, and also told us a pilgrimage, held yearly, in the 19th/20th century where her grandmother and many other villagers crossed to Jersey on foot (one way only, as the tides rise rapidly here) on the remains of an old paved way called St Lo's path - the saint was said to travel thus to Jersey. By the 19th century it was only possible to do this once or twice a year on the equinoctial tides.

Mon Feb 4 08:04:17 2008

**Evan Keir from Annan**

On the Solway coast near Annan you can see tree stumps and roots sticking out of the mud flats. They've always amazed me and it wasn't until I saw similar ones on coast that I realised how old they could be. I recommend visiting this sunken woodland but be cautious of the rising tide.

Thu Aug 16 10:58:24 2007

**Naomi Roberts, Worcester.**

I have been visiting Borth since 1949 - childhood holidays and now visiting with grandchildren staying at Morlais, the Youth Hostel. The dunes have been looked after so well over recent years - it used to be the home of old air raid shelters but now is a beautiful place and the views up the estuary are stunning. This year for the very first time I have seen the forest. It was wonderful seeing it - I had heard about the forest many times but it seemed like a myth until I saw it on BBC Coast. The reality is fantastic. I would also add I saw a few remnants near the beach rockpools ! at the other end near the cliff.

Mon Apr 30 11:11:20 2007

**Timothy Ansell, Aberystwyth**

I have visited Ynyslas beach several times, and Borth beach

as well. I have never seen the tree stumps, but would love to see them. I find the legend of Cantref Gwaelod very fascinating, and I am interested in the remains of the old forest.

Mon Apr 30 10:12:39 2007

**Sue, Coleford**

Never ever ban dogs from the beach - if you do the tourist trade in west wales will be devastated. I love to see tourists coming to wales as a family - dog and all. Children and adults should always wear shoes on any beach - glass, wood and the like are much more harmful to the feet that dogs mess - which can of course be washed off in the endless supply of sea water!

Tue Feb 13 13:39:12 2007

**Mike Williams, Hereford**

We visit Aberdovey, Ynyslas and Aberystwyth annually. Looking generally at this site this evening 1st Feb 2007 and longing for the summer. We'll be back again during the year. Glynis, if you return to read more comments, recognise my name from hft.

Fri Feb 2 09:54:53 2007

**Tywyn**

Due to the heavy seas and winds the submerged forest is more visible than I have ever seen it. The area covers the beach south of the 'prom' upto the land drain outlet and beyond for about 400 metres. Great tree roots and whole felled trees can be seen as well as the old peat beds with bark and twigs clear to see. Well worth a visit before Xmas day.

Thu Dec 21 10:00:01 2006

**Glynis Homer, Penegoes**

I live close and visit often it is a very special place which is not spoiled by dog muck (theres always someone moaning about something!) I just can't understand why this perfect part of wales is bypassed so much by the tourist industry. We have so much here, if time is spent getting to know the area. So much history, legend and nature. I am biased It is now my adopted home.

Fri Oct 27 09:23:42 2006

**Lizzie From Aberystwyth**

I would ignore all the comments left by Julia Simmons, I walk the beach every weekend and there's no more dog mess than in any other public area. Also I actually think it's a lovely site to see the dogs racing on the beach playing. I think it would be a great disappointment if dogs weren't allowed there, but maybe to stop these moaners more bins should be provided. However the beach is lovely, the sand dunes are a great place to explore. The submerged forest is amazing with all the exposed branches that have survived.

Mon Jul 31 10:54:40 2006

**julia simmons worcester**

Yes we come every year however every year I am amazed at the amount of dog muck that stupid dog owners leave not only on the dunes but also on the shingle and rocks. I think every day last year there would be at least 1 child who got dog mess buried between her toes. I'm glad also to see the marine conservation society have passed the beach this year and it reaches EU regulations. Last year when it failed and bathing was not advised there was not one public notice anywhere, not even the locals knew and the beach by the golf club car park was full every day. Why was that? We

told as many people as possible with young children and went nearer the borth end. Anyway despite my moans it still is a lovely place just put some more signs up about dog mess or better still ban them in the summer months.

Mon Jul 17 09:37:35 2006

**A Jones from Llandoverly**

Have not been here yet but will be going soon. I have seen evidence of what looks like a submerged forest on port eynon beach on the gower. When the tide goes out, it looks like the beach is covered in flat rocks, but these seem to be the remains of trees with roots and branches in parts. Below this layer is a layer of light grey clay (I presume it was silt). There appears to be lots of upright thin pieces and some very strong roots - like you would find in a mangrove swamp. Has anyone else noticed these?

Thu Sep 22 21:35:12 2005

**Pete Barton - Neston**

We've just come back from visiting this site today (Saturday 3 September). Whilst only a few inches of many of the trees were showing, there were a number of roots and stumps that were clearly exposed. Never seen this before and went because we'd seen the programme. A great beach to walk on for hours and the trees are an excellent highlight.

Sat Sep 3 22:08:01 2005

**Christine James from Bristol**

The walks around Ynyslas are wonderful. There are a wide variety of habitats full of varied wildlife and plants and the scenery is beautiful. The Wardens on the reserve are extremely friendly and helpful and they are great with children, encouraging them to take an interest and happy to answer any questions. The submerged forest has to be seen to be believed!

Sun Aug 14 20:30:22 2005

**Ron Webb**

I have seen the submerged tree stumps a number of times they never look the same. There are some more at Tywyn south of the prom' also some v. old peat beds. Well worth a closer look

Fri Aug 12 16:07:37 2005

**Andrew Morris, Leeds**

After talking with the locals we found that the best time to see the submerged forrest is in winter when storms remove the layers of sand. During the summer the sand covers the forest entirley as I found out!! Still well worth a visit anytime of the year.

Wed Aug 10 16:56:30 2005

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## 6. Marram Grass

Last updated: 24 November 2005

As you head back along the beach towards Aberdyfi, take a closer look at the marram grass which covers the area. With its deep roots system, it's one of the most important plants on the dunes.



### **Ynyslas Warden Sarah Millinger talks to BBC Wales reporter John Meredith about the importance of marram grass ...**

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The area around the headland is known as Twyni Bach ('small dunes') and this is new land. The 1902 map shows that the beach here is an extension of what was a small island. Today, this is where new or embryo dunes are formed.

Dunes start growing when dry sand is blown in by the wind and becomes trapped behind an object on the beach. This could be flotsam, pebbles or seaweed. Ynyslas has pebbles brought north by longshore drift, forming a shingle ridge offering some shelter from the sea.

When the wind blows from the north west, sand from sand banks in the estuary is lifted and deposited in such traps. Stability is brought when some hardy plants begin to grow on the pile of sand and hold it in place. Thus we have embryo dunes.

Living plants grow sideways and upwards, binding the heap of sand and, each spring, they send out new shoots to collect more sand on top of the previous year's pile. The young dunes grow to meet each other and join up to form ridges at right angles to the direction of the prevailing wind.

Sea rocket and prickly saltwort have the thick fleshy leaves and tolerance of seawater for this initial phase. Then the old embryo dunes are colonised by the most important plant of the British dune systems, marram grass.



Marram grass thrives on being buried now and again. When new sand blows over it, the plant simply grows upwards more quickly and branches out sideways for effective binding. Extremely deep roots are sent down. Can you imagine 12 metres? That's almost the height of three double deckers! This tall, spiky-leaved grass is one of nature's wonders.

The first dunes at Ynyslas are thought to date back to the fourteenth century. These older dunes can be seen behind the Visitor Centre.



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- 4 The Beach
- 5 Submerged Forest
- 6 Marram Grass
- 7 Old Ferry
- 8 Traeth Maelgwn

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## 7. Old Ferry

As you round the headland, you'll see an old telegraph pole in the sand. This marks the spot where a ferry used to take passengers across the Dyfi estuary to Aberdyfi.



Across the estuary from Ynyslas is the pretty seaside town of Aberdyfi. It's less than a mile away as the crow flies but it's a journey of more than 20 miles by road or rail.

The two sides of the estuary used to be connected by a ferry which carried passengers and freight back and forth.

When the railway arrived in the first half of the 19th century, Victorian railway engineers had visions of a bridge spanning the Dyfi estuary. They even constructed a line alongside the Afon Leri at Ynyslas.

The bridge was never built but the Cambrian Coast railway did eventually link the two places by way of Dyfi Junction and the ferry service ended. However, the cost of a ticket from Borth to Aberdyfi (23 miles) was originally cheaper than a ticket from Borth to Machynlleth (12 miles) in order to reflect the distance by the ferry which the train replaced.

There have been unsuccessful attempts to revive the old ferry across the estuary in the 1980s and 1990s, including a hovercraft service.

Today, the estuary is popular with windsurfers and kitesurfers although bathing here is forbidden because of the strong currents. With its wide open and often windy spaces, Ynyslas is also a great place for kite-flying and the skies above are often dotted with colourful delta or diamond-shaped kites.



Here too, you'll also notice a roped-off zone here between March - August. This is one of the areas along the foreshore where the ringed plover - a small wader - breeds. Please keep away from these nesting spots.



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#### Steve Browne, Frimley

Did much research on the dunes here. Always return when visiting Wales, take time to look eastward up the river

towards Macynlleth for an outstanding view, breathtaking.  
Wed Oct 10 08:39:31 2007

**Tom from Trallwng**

ynyslas is fantastic!! i am going there on a school trip to  
investgate psammosere succession on the sand dune  
ecosystem.

Thu Jun 22 17:24:51 2006

**Margaret Westwood from Southampton**

I just love this place - been coming regularly for around 30  
years. It has a special magic all its own. My advice to new  
visitors: pop into the visitor centre to discover the wildlife  
and unique flora of the dunes, and PLEASE keep to the  
paths to avoid erosion. Happy walking!

Sat Aug 6 17:51:40 2005

**nicky from kidderminster**

i have been visting ynyslas for my hioldays for 20 years or  
more. i love the place for its peace & quite, no packed  
beaches i just love it.

Mon Aug 1 20:11:39 2005

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## 8. Traeth Maelgwn

Make your way back up along the beach towards the Visitor Centre. From here, you'll see at low-tide a vast expanse of sand on the southern shore of the Dyfi estuary known as Traeth Maelgwn - a tract of land steeped in legend.



The River Leri used to flow into Cardigan Bay at Aberlerry, just to the south of Ynyslas. Its route was diverted in 1824 to provide a sheltered harbour for the local shipbuilding industry. Traeth Maelgwn is now the other side of the river but its vast sands can be seen clearly from Ynyslas.

Historically, these vast sands were a popular meeting place for major assemblies. The area was strategically positioned where the three counties of Ceredigion, Powys and Gwynedd met. It was also easily accessible by sea and by the ancient road known as Sarn Helen which linked Carmarthen in the south with Caerhun near Conwy in the north.

From 517 to 547, Gwynedd was ruled by the mighty Maelgwn, a great-grandson of Cunedda. Legend has it that he called a gathering of princes on the sands along this part of the Dyfi Estuary in 537.

Each prince had to sit on a throne as the tide rolled in. Whoever remained seated longest would be declared the winner and the overall ruler of Gwynedd.

Maelgwn's throne had been made by Maeldaf Hen who coated it with waxed feathers so that it floated. Not surprisingly, Maelgwn won the contest and was recognised as the new pendergon. This story is 500 years older than that of King Canute.

The ritual of sitting in a chair against a rising tide is re-enacted every August as part of Borth's annual carnival.

The walk ends where it began at the Visitor Centre.



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### your comments

#### John Wilding, Hull

We like to dive on the sand and eat lunch! The visitor centre is great. Are people allowed to climb up that stair case?

Fri Aug 11 11:17:23 2006

#### Lyn & Mick Thomas, Presteigne

Spend a lot more of your holiday down on the dunes as we do. Our dogs love it.

Thu Jan 5 18:13:04 2006

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