



Making the most of the Mersey

A Leisure Guide to your Estuary



Cover photo:- Another Place by Antony Gormley at Crosby beach. Photography by McCoy Wynne.



Did you know?

The Mersey is a lot cleaner than you might think. And much cleaner than it looks. Yet however clean it becomes, the water will never appear clear because of silt and mud stirred up by the tide as it sweeps in and out twice every day. It is this mud, however, that makes the Mersey such an internationally important area for bird life.

An exhilarating blend of coast, city and countryside

The modern-day Mersey has much to offer the visitor. Every year more and more people flock in to crowd the quaysides of the Albert Dock and Pier Head, admire the area's architecture or relive its proud past in the fine museums and galleries. Yet few of them venture very far beyond Liverpool city centre and the nearby waterfront.

Fewer still realise the wealth of opportunities around the Mersey Estuary area for outdoor recreation, most within minutes of the urban areas or just a short drive, train journey – or ferry ride – away. Many local people have long been aware of these possibilities, even if they rarely sample them as often as they intend to. When they do, they are frequently amazed by the transformation of recent years. They find cleaner water in the Estuary, safe sandy beaches, improved visitor facilities and everywhere signs of care for the environment and respect for the heritage and history.

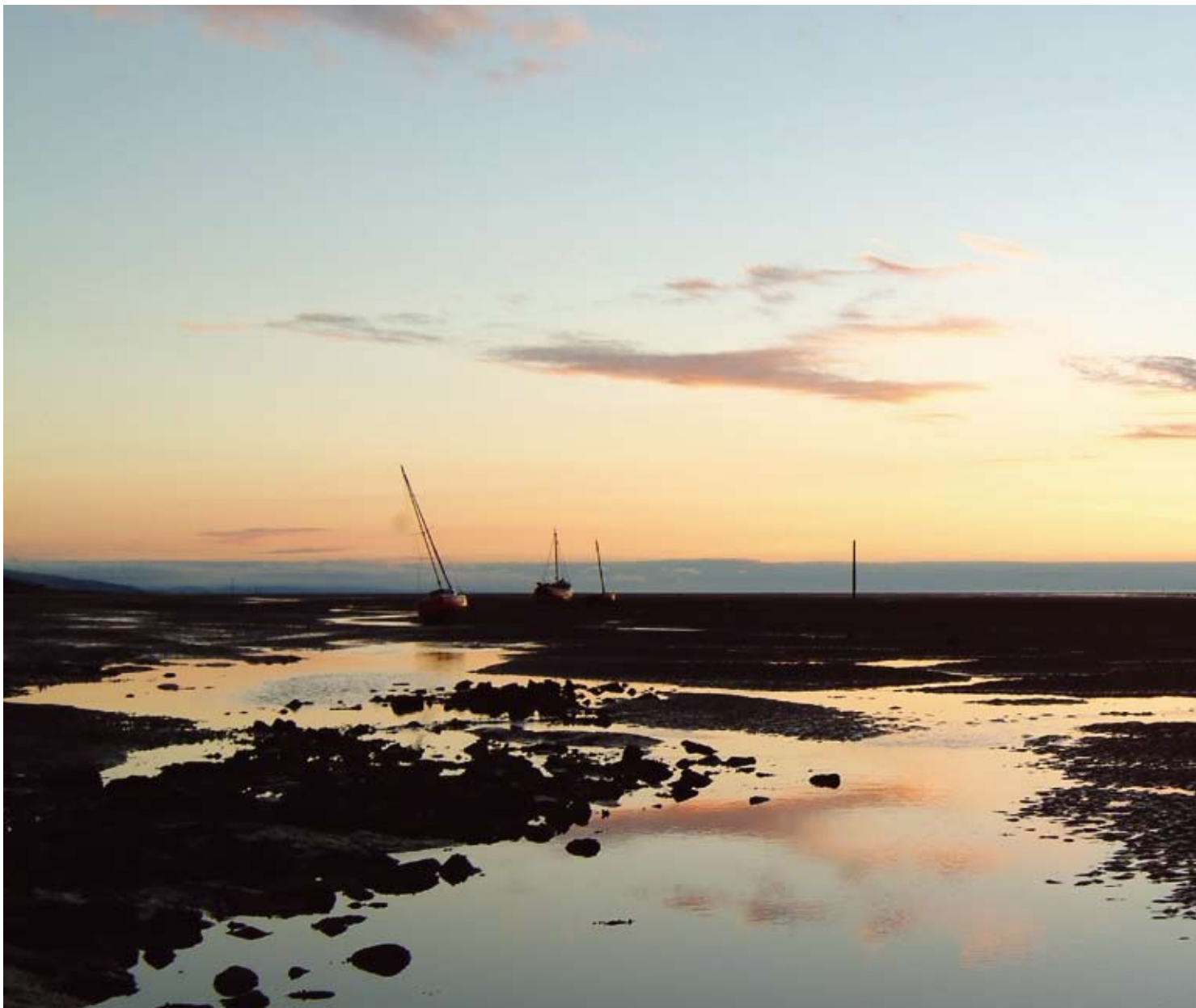
This is an area where you can combine the exhilaration of contemporary city life with the more relaxed pleasures of riverfront, coast and countryside. You may choose to sip a drink at a stylish dockland cafe, visit a major art gallery right on the waterfront or shop and sightsee till you drop. But within 20 minutes you could be taking in the peace and tranquillity of the rich and varied estuary landscape. You could explore a deserted sandy beach, feed squirrels among the sand dunes or enjoy a ferry trip into a world where you have only the gulls and the waves for company.

Wherever you go, you will enjoy the unique fascination of the ever-changing river scene animated by the rhythm of the tides. If you're feeling really active you'll find every kind of watersport available – or miles and miles of open promenade and beaches for walking, cycling or fishing. It's also been labelled the Golf Coast for its profusion of fine courses, with Royal Liverpool and Royal Birkdale hosting the world-famous Open Championship in 2006 and 2008 respectively.

For the dedicated nature lover the opportunities are all around – not least for birdwatchers who flock here as regularly as the objects of their attention. As the billion-pound clean-up progresses, more and more local people and visitors are waking up to an exceptional range of attractive natural locations on the doorstep of the city.

This Estuary was shaped millions of years ago by ice floes which flattened the area and filled the hollows with sand, clay, mud and pebbles. The result was a rich range of coastal, estuary, and riverside landscapes and a wide variety of wildlife habitats that help make this area an internationally important conservation site.

A further bonus is the mild climate, the prevailing westerly winds ensuring much rain is absorbed by the Welsh hills. The industrial revolution and the intensive development that followed may have brought pollution to the Mersey but it also assured the area a rich history, of which we now find reminders all around us. The legacy includes not only fine buildings and museums but canals, engineering landmarks and other echoes of the industrial era. Just as the fine natural attractions of the area are being recognised and protected for us all to enjoy, so the man-made environment is now being re-evaluated and renewed.



Making the most of this major asset for leisure and recreation

We hope those seeking to explore the Mersey Estuary will find the modern man-made environment complements the natural attractions of the area in a uniquely fascinating way. Twenty years ago, the Mersey, with its tributaries, was regarded as one of Europe's most polluted river systems. Today it is seen as a major asset for North West England and its people.

Thanks to the efforts of the organisations united in the Mersey Basin Campaign, the Mersey has been transformed – an achievement internationally recognised in 1999 by the award of the prestigious River Prize for the world's best river clean-up. Key factors in this improvement have

been massive investment in sewage treatment, reclamation of derelict land and better industrial processes and environmental improvements, together with the efforts of the Mersey's local communities.

Today the Estuary not only provides a vital source of relaxation and recreation for local people and visitors but acts as a catalyst for tourism, regeneration and economic development. The Mersey Basin Campaign was originally set up in 1985 as a partnership between central and local government, statutory bodies and private and voluntary organisations. In 1992, the Campaign commissioned The University of Liverpool to prepare a management plan for the Estuary. This

and the recently commissioned Mersey Waterfront Strategic Framework provide a structure to develop the Estuary's potential while safeguarding the environment and interests of existing users. Mersey Waterfront aims to transform approximately 135km of diverse and breathtaking coastline into a world-class regional park for local communities, regional businesses and visitors alike.

The region has a great public transport network. Merseytravel can help you make the most of the Estuary and can provide details of all the buses, trains and Mersey Ferries in the area.



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Sefton's natural coast

Just a mile or so from the mouth of the Mersey, you'll find broad, open, sandy beaches. This outer area of the Estuary forms part of Sefton's natural coast, one of the largest and most spectacular sand dune systems in the country, supporting a vast range of plants and animals and recognised as an internationally important habitat area.



Did you know?

Local people are playing their part in helping the conservation drive along Sefton's natural coast. For years they have been encouraged to take their old Christmas trees to Formby Point where they are used to form a barrier to the sea and slow down erosion of the dunes.



Sand dunes, squirrels and promenades

Sefton's natural coast is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the EC Habitats Directive, while part of the coastal area between Formby and Crosby lies within the Ribble and Alt Estuaries Special Protection Area and Ramsar site.

All along this coast you'll find a string of nature reserves that provide a home to many rare and interesting species. Access to the coast is remarkably easy, with miles of open beaches and numerous accessible footpaths that criss-cross the endless dunes and adjoining woodland and grassland. As a visitor, you're always welcome – provided you keep to the waymarked paths and respect the wildlife value of this area.

The major through route is the 20-mile Sefton coast path which links to various Merseyrail stations to allow easy round trips. The leisure opportunities here are endless. Children never tire of the antics of the rare red squirrels at Freshfield Squirrel Reserve while further north Ainsdale National Nature Reserve is a key location for the rare natterjack toad and sand lizard.

Another attractive area for wildlife is at Hightown, where the River Alt joins the sea. This estuary is noted for wading birds such as the bar-tailed godwit, knot and sanderling that overwinter here.

This is ideal picnic territory too, with good facilities and endless open space for youngsters to work off surplus energy. Ainsdale's bathing beach is one of the most popular on the coast and the only one in the North West to gain the International Blue Flag.

The beach is one of the UK's major sites for extreme kite activities, with zones set aside for buggy, landboard and kitesurfing enthusiasts. This area is a magnet too for golfers, boasting a string of superb links courses headed by Royal Birkdale, home of the 2008 Open Golf Championship.

Looking inland you may also catch sight of flocks of ducks or geese wheeling across the flat Lancashire plain towards the sanctuary of the internationally famous Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust reserve at Martin Mere. Closer to the urban areas of north Liverpool you can still find interesting pockets of greenery such as Rimrose Valley Country Park and Brookvale Local Nature Reserve.

With its tree-lined streets and elegant shopping arcades, Southport combines the attractions of a modern resort with a remarkable natural environment. As well as offering an entertaining tram ride, the town's restored Victorian pier is an ideal place to watch the flocks of wading birds returning from their northern breeding grounds at the end of summer.

There is little doubt that our planet is changing and this could have some serious implications to the way we live and the coastline we visit. It is estimated that over the next 40 years we could see a change in sea levels and climate. This could mean not only warmer temperatures and changed weather patterns but also loss of some of the most valuable habitats that we have on our coastlines.



IRISH SEA

Sefton's natural coast

KEY TO SYMBOLS

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------|--|-------------------------|
| | Walking | | Wildlife/nature reserve |
| | Viewpoint | | Squirrel reserve |
| | Picnic area | | Other attraction |
| | Country park | | Merseyrail station |
| | Watersports/sailing | | Car park |
| | Church | | Low tide area |
| | Golf course | | Sand dunes/beaches |
| | Shopping | | Parks/recreation |
| | Pier tram | | Prehistoric footprints |



Fisherman's Path

National Trust Formby Reserve

Sefton Coastal Path

Lifeboat Road

Lifeboat Station

Ravenmeols Nature Reserve

Sefton Coastal Path

Alt Centre

Submerged Forest

Alt Estuary

Hightown Dunes & Meadows

Sefton Coastal Path

Antony Gormley's 'Another Place'

Crosby Beach & Marine Park Boating Lake

1 mile



Crosby beach and Marine Park

Here you have the choice of promenade, beach or watersports. Keen walkers can continue along the coastal path close to the shore towards Hightown. Visit Antony Gormley's 'Another Place'. **P WC**

Waterloo, Blundellsands & Crosby, Hall Road

Hightown dunes and meadows

Near the sailing club car park a short detour from the coastal path will bring you to the remains of a submerged forest.

Hightown or Hall Road

Alt Estuary

A key location for watching shore birds and just as popular with small-boat sailors. Footpath from the Alt Centre leads to the saltmarsh and a bird hide.

Hightown (0.5km walk)

Ravenmeols Local Nature Reserve

Reached via well-marked paths close to Formby Point among quiet expanses of sand dunes and pinewoods.

Lifeboat Road

This popular spot recalls Britain's first lifeboat house built in 1776. Also a great place to watch red squirrels in their natural habitat. **P**

Formby

Freshfield dune heath

A mix of lowland dune heath, woodland and grassland restored by the Lancashire Wildlife Trust in 2005. Site offers paths around the 17ha site. Site is managed by LWT 0151 920 3769.

Freshfield

Fisherman's Path

Ancient right of way that provides one of the area's most popular walks. After following an avenue of scented

pinetrees through the Ainsdale National Nature Reserve, you encounter a huge dune of blown sand before reaching the beach. Alternatively turn left on to Dune Path South, part of the 20-mile coastal footpath.

Freshfield

National Trust Reserve Formby

The rare red squirrels have thrived in recent years at this National Trust reserve and are tame enough to be fed. 01704 878591. www.nationaltrust.org.uk. **P (pay) WC**

Freshfield

Ainsdale National Nature Reserve

Established by English Nature in 1965 to protect the special wildlife of the Sefton sand dunes. Take the circular route and see such rare, protected species as the natterjack toad and sand lizard. Wide, well-marked paths and attractive woodland walks. 01704 578774.

Freshfield or Ainsdale

Also worth visiting nearby:

Rimrose Valley Country Park

This green corridor bounded by the Leeds and Liverpool canal has been developed for recreation.

Waterloo

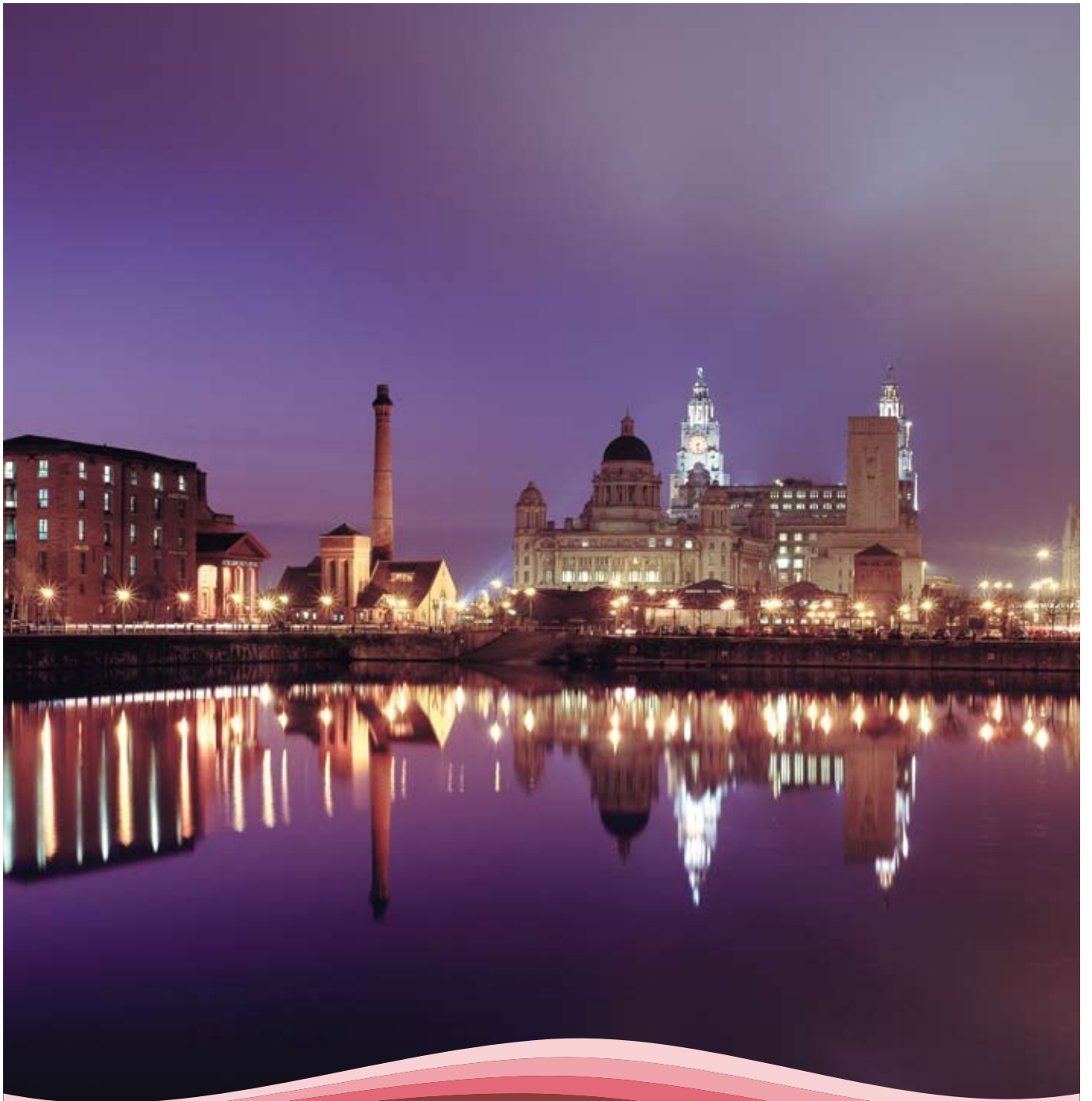
Brookvale Local Nature Reserve

Includes reedbeds and ponds supporting wildlife such as water voles and reed warblers.

Waterloo

Martin Mere (Pay)

At the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust near Burscough you can feed species of rare and exotic ducks, geese, swans and flamingoes. Visitor centre. Cafe. Gift shop. 01704 895181. www.wwt.org.uk/visit/martinmere. **P WC**



City waterfront

Board one of the world-famous Mersey Ferries on a fine day and you'll enter a different world. From the top deck, as the breeze hits your face and the gulls swoop in the foaming wake, you command a panorama of the whole Estuary and city waterscape.



Did you know?

Charles Dickens was fascinated by the frenetic activity in Liverpool's docks in the mid-19th century, vividly describing it in *The Uncommercial Traveller*:

"... there was a rattling of wheels, a clattering of hooves, a clashing of iron, a jolting of cotton and hides and casks of timber, an incessant deafening disturbance on the quays, that was the very madness of sound."

The sounds may have changed since then, but the granite-sided docks and monumental dockside warehouses are powerful reminders of the days when the Mersey became Britain's highway to the world.



An ever-changing panorama

Taking the ferry 'cross the Mersey' is an essential experience in itself and the 50-minute River Explorer river cruise offers a complete tour of this fascinating urban stretch of the river.

It's also the ideal place to plan your day from the wide variety of recreational opportunities now on offer along this lively waterfront. As the shore approaches, your eye takes in the promenades and riverfront walks alive with people who come to stroll, cycle, fish or simply enjoy the constantly changing river landscape.

On the Liverpool side, beyond the waterfront buildings that symbolised the city to generations of seafarers, lie the newly revitalised, World Heritage docklands. Grouped round the key visitor attraction of the Albert Dock you'll find shops, restaurants and bars, not to mention a national art gallery and two national museums.

One of the most exciting new additions to the landscape is the Liverpool Arena and Convention Centre which from 2008 will provide high-quality conference and arena facilities in a superb setting. And with the launch of the new Liverpool landing stage, cruise ships will soon become a regular sight in the Mersey.

Further along the waterfront you will find a chain of renovated docks that have become a focus for watersports, as well as a community of impressive new waterfront homes clustering round the masts that throng the busy marina. From here you can walk or cycle along the promenade almost to Garston, five miles away.

Over on the Wirral shore the ferry terminal at Seacombe provides an ideal stopping-off point. As well as visiting the colourful Aquarium and the newly created Spaceport attraction, you can admire the impressive Liverpool waterfront from the adjoining promenade that forms the start of a continuous waterfront route right round to Hoylake on the Dee Estuary.

From Birkenhead's Woodside terminal you can join the waterfront walk to ancient Birkenhead Priory – passing the site of the monks' original Mersey ferry over 800 years ago. Also well worth a visit are a working tramway, a historic pumping station and the other attractions of the 'Birkenhead Packet'.

Away from the waterfront, you'll find recreational opportunities everywhere on both sides of the river. Many people are surprised to learn that Liverpool is one of Britain's greenest cities with extensive areas of parkland, while across the water Birkenhead can offer both a country park and a true city park. The recently refurbished Birkenhead Park was the UK's first public park and was designed by Sir Joseph Paxton.

City waterfront

1 mile



KEY TO SYMBOLS

- | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Museums/galleries | Walking | Gardens |
| Theatres | Cycling | Miniature railway |
| Cafés/bars | Fishing | Merseyrail station |
| Shops | Country park | Car park |
| Sports venue | Watersports/sailing | Low tide area |
| Viewpoint | Golf course | Parks/recreation |
| Detail view (pg 12) | Visitor attraction | |



“Liverpool’s world-famous waterfront, with the iconic Three Graces, is at the heart of an exciting urban renaissance and played a key role in the city achieving the accolade of World Heritage Status. The opening of the new Liverpool Arena and Convention Centre at King’s Dock reinforces the lasting legacy created through European Capital of Culture Year in 2008. 2009 has also been designated a themed Year of the Environment, which will reinforce peoples’ continuing affinity with the River Mersey”.

Leader of Liverpool City Council, Councillor Warren Bradley

Mersey Ferries

The region's most popular paid-for tourist attraction - and the ideal way to discover the area's unique flavour and attractions. Regular services link Liverpool's Pier Head, Seacombe and Birkenhead's Woodside. The 50-minute round trip River Explorer cruise offers unrivalled estuary views plus a lively commentary. Call 0151 330 1444 for timetable and ticket sales. Also Manchester Ship Canal cruises on selected dates between April and September. 0151 330 1444. **P (pay) WC**

 **James Street, Hamilton Square**

Woodside Visitor and Tourist Information Centre

Attractive restaurant and souvenir shop within the Mersey Ferries terminal. Open-air activities in summer. 0151 647 6780.

P (pay) WC

 **Hamilton Square**

Riverfront promenade Wirral

From Seacombe you can walk or cycle on the promenades right round to Hoylake at the mouth of the Dee. You could then return to New Brighton by Merseyrail.

Seacombe Aquarium

Discover the unknown world under the Mersey. The improved water quality means that today even salmon, squid, octopus and lumpfish can be found in the estuary. Also unusual species picked up by local fishermen. 0151 630 1030. **P WC**

Spaceport

An interactive journey into space and beyond for the whole family. Based next to the Seacombe ferry terminal. 0151 330 1333. www.spaceport.org.uk. **P WC**

Birkenhead Park

Created by Sir Joseph Paxton and recently restored, this was Britain's first public park and the model for New York's Central Park. Landscaped with two lakes, one with a picturesque Swiss Bridge.

 **Birkenhead Park**

Hamilton Square

Exciting regenerated area with cafés, art galleries and the Wirral Museum. Located near to Woodside ferry terminal. 0151 666 5023. **P WC**

 **Hamilton Square**

Birkenhead Priory

Merseyside's oldest building which dates from the 12th century and displays the history of the monks who founded the original Mersey ferry service.

 **Hamilton Square**

Riverfront promenade Otterspool, Liverpool

Superb Estuary views and always popular with walkers, cyclists and anglers. From here you can follow the riverfront for five miles to Aigburth and beyond.

 **Brunswick, St Michaels, Aigburth**

Liverpool Watersports Centre

Expert tutoring in canoeing, sailing and windsurfing in the docks. Contact MCVR Merseysport 0151 708 9322.

 **James Street, Brunswick**

Also worth visiting nearby:

Liverpool parks

Calderstones and Sefton Park with its magnificent Grade II* listed Victorian Palm House are among the most spacious and attractive along with Stanley Park, Newsham Park, and Wavertree Botanic Park.

Croxteth Hall and country park

500 acres of woodland and parkland. Historic hall has a unique Victorian walled garden plus a working farm with rare breed animals. Free admission to park only. Café. Adventure playground. Picnics. Buses from city centre. **P WC**

Garden Festival site

The site of the 1984 International Garden Festival is due to be reopened in 2008 as a public park, with associated residential development overlooking the river. This last remaining UK Garden Festival location will offer a unique waterside parkland landscape within easy reach of the city centre. The original Oriental, Chinese and Japanese Gardens will be restored in the initial stages. The rest of the site will be laid to informal park featuring woodland sculptures, with parking giving access to the waterfront. Later stages will provide play areas and visitor facilities.

 **St. Michaels**

Bidston Hill

100 acres of woodland and heath with panoramic views of the Estuary. Attractions include Bidston windmill and the Tam o'Shanter urban farm. 0151 653 9332.
















Port Sunlight Vision – Heritage Centre

Unique Victorian garden village built by William Hesketh Lever for his soap factory workers. Heritage trail plus gardens and the Lady Lever Art Gallery, a nationally important collection of paintings and pottery. 0151 644 6466. **P WC**

 **Port Sunlight**

City waterfront detail

KEY TO SYMBOLS

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
|  Museum/gallery |  Watersports/sailing |  Tourist information |
|  Theatre/concert hall |  Viewpoint |  Car park |
|  Historic building |  Mersey ferries |  Low tide area |
|  Shopping |  Merseyrail station |  Parks/recreation |
|  Pub/bar |  Visitor attraction |  Arena/convention centre |



Liverpool's World Heritage Site was inscribed by UNESCO in 2004 as "The supreme example of a commercial port at the time of Britain's greatest global influence." Indeed, the assessor who was advising UNESCO thought that Liverpool had the largest and most complete system of historic docks anywhere in the world. The quaysides of most of the 15 historic docks in the World Heritage Site and the river-front promenade are freely accessible and provide dramatic views and unique vistas.

Pier Head

The traditional heart of Liverpool and part of the World Heritage Site including the waterfront and mercantile district. It has commanding views of the river and the trio of striking buildings that symbolise the city. The most famous is the Royal Liver Building with its mythical Liver birds.

 **James Street/Ferry**

Albert Dock

Merseyside's most popular heritage attraction with its shops, restaurants, museums and Tate Gallery. In the Merseyside Maritime Museum you can trace the fascinating story of the Mersey and its ships. 0151 478 4499. **P (pay) WC**

 **James Street/Ferry**

Beatles museum

The award-winning Beatles Story experience is dedicated to Liverpool's most famous sons – John, Paul, George and Ringo and tells the greatest story the pop world has ever known in the city where it all began! It features a full-size replica of the Cavern Club (complete with basement smells) along with the Merseybeat office, Mathew Street and Abbey Road studios.

 **James Street/Ferry**

Liverpool One

When it opens in 2008, this massive 42-acre development is set to become one of the North West's major shopping destinations. Europe's largest city centre urban regeneration scheme, it will house major stores such as Debenhams and John Lewis along with a 14 - screen cinema and a huge variety of restaurants, cafés and bars.

 **James Street/Ferry**

Liverpool Arena and Convention Centre

The new arena is scheduled to be operational by early 2008. It consists of a 9,500 seat arena, an auditorium with a capacity of 1,350 and 70,000 sqft of exhibition space.

P (pay) WC

 **James Street/Ferry**

Liverpool Marina

With over 300 boats moored close to the heart of the city, the Marina forms the colourful focal point of a new generation of stylish waterfront homes. 0151 707 6777. **P**

 **Brunswick**

Cruise liner facility

The first cruise liner is due to arrive at the new Liverpool landing stage in 2007. The public will have access to the area during Navy and other visits but not during cruise ship visits. Highlights of 2007 include the visits of the Royal Navy and Tall Ships for the Mersey River Festival in June.

 **James Street/Ferry**

Museum of Liverpool Life

Liverpool's brand new waterfront museum will be built by 2008 and open to the public in 2010. Its stunning, fully accessible building will complement the city's famous skyline and prove a spectacular showcase for the social history and popular culture of this vibrant city. As one of the biggest and most exciting museum projects in the world, it provides a bold symbol of Liverpool's ongoing regeneration and a sustainable legacy of 2008, Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture. Located at Mann Island, the museum will draw on National Museums Liverpool's vast wealth of collections, many of which have never been on public display.

 **James Street/Ferry**

Cavern and Cavern Walks

Here in the heart of the buzzing Cavern Quarter you'll find many of Liverpool's leading independent retailers. As well as Vivienne Westwood, Cricket, Drome and Kids Cavern, you can discover the original door to the legendary Cavern Club.

 **James Street**

Shopping

With some of the largest, big-name stores in the country, Liverpool can provide just about every form of retail therapy. In addition to the forthcoming Liverpool One development and the stylish Cavern Walks Centre, you'll also find leading designer names in the new Met Quarter. Church Street is home to all the major high street fashion stores, with adjoining Bold Street and Clayton Square offering further big names. The long-established St. John's Shopping Centre boasts over 100 shops plus a bustling market area while down on the waterfront the Albert Dock houses some of the city's trendiest stores together with a number of art shops and gallery outlets.

 **Central**

Also worth visiting nearby:

Theatres and venues

Liverpool's impressive range of theatres includes the Playhouse and Everyman with their rich mix of home-grown and touring productions. The Empire theatre is noted for big touring shows, the Unity hosts independent productions, while the Royal Court houses the Rawhide comedy club. The art deco Philharmonic Hall is the celebrated home of the city's own world-acclaimed symphony orchestra, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, while other key Merseyside venues include Birkenhead's Pacific Road Arts Centre and the Southport Theatre and Floral Hall Complex.





Heart of the estuary

As we move upstream from the lively waterfront of Liverpool and Wirral, the river broadens and the whole character of the Estuary changes dramatically. Suddenly we are surrounded by wide skies, salt marshes and sandbanks. Apart from the occasional freighter heading up the channel to Garston Docks or the Manchester Ship Canal, there's little to disturb the flocks of wheeling wildfowl which have made this area internationally recognised for wildlife conservation.



Did you know?

MAPS: For locating places featured in this guide the Ordnance Survey Merseyside Street Atlas is particularly detailed. Also useful is the Premier A-Z map of Liverpool. Ordnance Survey maps include Explorer 275, the Landranger series (especially 108) and the more detailed Pathfinder series. www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk

A glossy coffee table book all about the Mersey and the people whose lives are entwined with it will be in the shops from November 2007. *Mersey: the river that changed the world* features stunning photographs and chapters by top Northwest journalists. It will be published by Liverpool's Bluecoat Press.



Wild walks and wading birds

This is the heart of the Estuary and its importance is recognised by its designation not only as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) but also as a Special Protection Area and Ramsar site. Perhaps the best way to approach the impressive emptiness of this inner estuary is to walk or cycle the modern promenade that starts from the Pier Head.

The route – now part of the Mersey Way Trans-Pennine Trail – runs past the exciting new waterfront developments of the south docks before joining the older promenade extending past Otterspool and Cressington. The fast-improving prospects for fishing mean sea anglers are now a common sight all along this waterfront. Beyond Garston you can follow the Mersey Way through the newly-created Speke and Garston Coastal Reserve to the home of the Liverpool Sailing Club. From here there are amazing views of the Wirral coast and the industries of Ellesmere Port and Eastham. Hale beach has walks on low cliffs and panoramic views across the sandbanks and mudflats, where you may catch superb flying displays by oyster catchers, dunlin, knot and redshank.

Also linking into this route you will find two attractive country parks – Halewood Triangle Country Park and the local nature reserve of Pickerings Pasture which holds Green Flag status for its outstanding contributions to nature conservation and local community facilities. Close by is one of the country's most intriguing ancient monuments – Hale Duck Decoy was built in the seventeenth century to attract and capture ducks and is one of only three remaining in the country.

Speke Hall is one of Britain's finest Tudor houses, while the birdsong, rabbits and pheasants of adjoining Stockton Wood, just yards from Liverpool John Lennon Airport, typify the contrasts around the Mersey Estuary today. On the south side of the Estuary, the easiest access to the Mersey is perhaps from Eastham Country Park, a wooded waterside with craggy cliffs and a colourful history as an ancient crossing point and Victorian pleasure grounds.

The site of the old ferry pier offers superb estuary views across to Liverpool and is the ideal vantage point for watching ships enter and leave the Manchester Ship Canal. A little further on, Ellesmere Port's Boat Museum recreates the great days of the canals and affords sweeping views of the Estuary and the Manchester Ship Canal at its widest point. Here, the Shropshire Union Canal, with its links to the classic Four Counties Ring canal route, forms a major leisure gateway into the Estuary.

For the wildlife lover – as well as the wildfowl enthusiast – the real interest lies further upstream, where flocks of waterbirds feed on the teeming millions of tiny creatures along the shoreline and roost at high tides in the remote acres of Stanlow, Ince and Helsby marshes. This area also provides a prime example of industry and wildlife living in harmony.

This is one of Britain's most important sites for wildfowl and wading birds in winter, with teal and widgeon among the most numerous visitors, while you may glimpse birds of prey such as peregrine falcons, buzzards or kestrels patrolling overhead. Much of this area is private or farm land and birdwatchers must always keep to the designated roads.

Heart of the estuary

KEY TO SYMBOLS

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
|  Walking |  Country park |  Merseyrail station |
|  Cycling |  Picnic area |  Car park |
|  Fishing |  Gardens |  Low tide area |
|  Viewpoint |  Wildlife/nature reserve |  Marshland |
|  Cafés/bars |  Watersports/sailing |  Museums/galleries |
|  Lighthouse | | |

1 mile



“What’s great about Mersey Waterfront is its sheer diversity. Alongside working docks there are sand dunes, coastal woodlands, promenades and sailing clubs. I’d urge both visitors and local people to make the most of our fantastic waterside assets - walking, cycling, kite flying and simply enjoying nature.” Director of Mersey Waterfront, Louise Goodman



Otterspool Park and Promenade

Ideal for cycling and walking. Also wide areas of grassy parkland and woodland. Today it's hard to believe it was enterprisingly built on a former rubbish tip with rock excavated from the first Mersey Tunnel in the 1930s. Pub. Play area. Picnics. Buses from city centre. **P**

St Michaels, Aigburth

Speke & Garston Coastal Reserve to Hale beach and lighthouse

Breezy walks with views to Helsby Hill and the Clwyd range in North Wales. Teal, dunlin and redshank reward the birdwatchers, while wildflowers such as teasel and yellowwort thrive along the cliffs. Pubs and shops in Hale village. **P**

Hale

Ancient village noted for the grave of John Middleton, the Childe of Hale, a 9ft 3in giant who astounded the court of James I. From the village you can reach the Mersey Way footpath via Church Lane and Within Way. Extend the walk to Garston (3 miles).

Speke Hall (Pay)

One of the country's most famous and historic Elizabethan half-timbered houses with fine gardens and extensive woodlands. This National Trust property makes a fascinating day out for the whole family. Tea room. Picnics. 0151 427 7231. Buses to Speke Hall Avenue, then 15 mins walk. **P WC**

Pickerings Pasture

Local nature reserve. Wildflower meadows with panoramic views of the Estuary. Walks, picnics and wildlife. Ranger station. 0151 425 4706. **P WC**

Eastham Country Park

Woodland walks and river views on site of ancient Mersey river crossing. Adjoins lock entrance to Manchester Ship Canal. Tea gardens. Visitor Centre. Buses from Birkenhead. Ranger station. 0151 327 1007. **P WC**

Bromborough (1 mile)

Helsby Hill

Spectacular view of the Mersey Estuary and a good starting point for country walks.

Frodsham marshes

A prime location for birdwatchers. Enthusiasts are welcome but must keep to the roads as much of the area is private or farm land.

Boat Museum, Ellesmere Port (Pay)

Enjoy a taste of life afloat at Europe's leading canal heritage centre. Set in an old dock complex overlooking the Mersey Estuary. More than 60 boats afloat plus indoor exhibitions, working engines, lock demonstrations and boat trips.

Cafe and shops. 0151 355 5017. **P WC**

Ellesmere Port

Runcorn Hill and Heath Park

Local nature reserve with extensive heath and woodland.

Also worth visiting nearby:

Stadt Moers Country Park

A newly-landscaped park with formal and informal areas including nature reserve and wildflower meadows. 0151 489 1239. Picnics. **P WC**

Halewood Triangle Country Park

One of Merseyside's few remaining areas of native woodland, together with pools and meadows. This area has been re-colonised by nature within a former railway junction. Offers walkers and cyclists a network of footpaths and bridleways at southern end of footpath following the former Liverpool Loop Line. 0151 488 6151. Picnics. **P**

Pex Hill Country Park

A small peaceful park on a sandstone outcrop with oak, heathland and gorse. Astronomical observatory open by appointment. Picnics. 0151 495 1410. **P WC**



Upper estuary

The River Mersey brings a swathe of countryside into the heart of Warrington. Once you know where to go, you'll find many delightful quiet green corners tucked away in this busy urban section of the Estuary corridor.



Did you know?

The Mersey Basin Campaign is the 25-year, government-backed partnership which brings together local authorities, businesses, voluntary organisations and government agencies to deliver water quality improvements and waterside regeneration in Lancashire, Merseyside, Greater Manchester and Cheshire.

Much of our work is to repair damage done to the region's rivers by industrialisation and to foster a future that is modern and prosperous with an improved environment. Our mission is to:

- > Improve water quality so that all rivers, streams and waters in the Mersey and Ribble catchments are clean enough to support fish by 2010
- > Encourage waterside regeneration
- > Actively engage the public, private, community and voluntary sectors in the process

Porpoise, dolphins and seals are now regularly spotted in the estuary and salmon were recently discovered to be breeding in the river's headwaters for the first time in living memory.

Canals and country parks

Just yards away from major roads you can find a wealth of wildlife flourishing as the Mersey Basin clean-up gathers pace. A key to exploring much of this area is the Mersey Way, a system of paths running close to the river through Widnes, Warrington and beyond.

In many places it forms part of the country-wide Trans-Pennine Trail and you'll find access points from many of the sites highlighted on the key map.

Beyond the urban areas of the Mersey corridor between Runcorn Gap and Warrington you can find stretches of open river valley offering peace and tranquillity to the visitor. You can also enjoy the more lively waterside scene along the Sankey Canal, an increasingly popular leisure and recreation area.

The Sankey Way is ideal for walkers and cyclists and acts as a major leisure gateway while the Sankey and Bridgewater Canals offer the added interest of restored locks, wharves, viaducts and other intriguing relics of the area's industrial past.

Warrington grew up on a crossing point of the Mersey. Not only did the river provide food such as salmon and oysters but it was a leisure focus with waterside walks and a celebrated regatta. Today you can again find pleasant riverside spots where you can feed the swans, fish for the fresh water species now found in abundance or simply watch the river flow by.

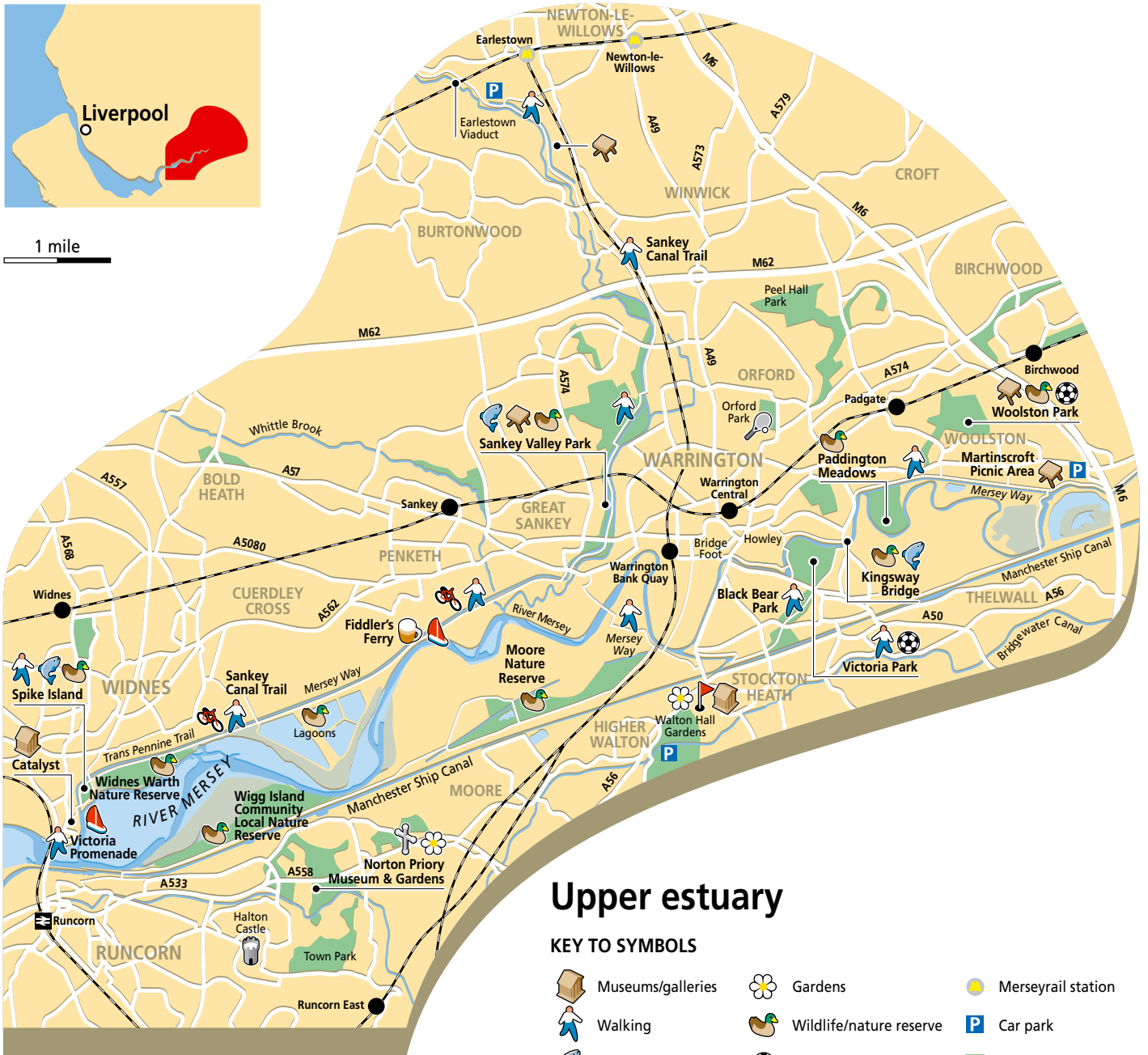
Thanks to the clean-up work undertaken by Estuary partners, salmon have now returned to the river, while the local rowing club has revived the town's historic regatta in recent years. Angling competitions are also a regular feature in the Victoria Park section of the river close to Warrington town centre.

This area lies in the Mersey Forest, the largest of England's 12 community forests designed to improve the landscape and build a healthier environment for future generations.





1 mile



“The proposed new crossing of the Mersey between Runcorn and Widnes is now very much in delivery mode. Since last March, when the Government confirmed its funding support for the scheme, all the key project resources are now in place and the delivery plans are confirmed. The next milestone will be finalising the draft scheme design so that we can put proposals out for extensive public consultation”. Steve Nicholson, Project Director, Mersey Gateway



Sankey Canal Valley Park and Trail

From Spike Island on foot or bike you can follow the towpaths of this ancient canal which runs all the way to St Helens. Look out for reminders of the rich industrial past, such as the historic Earlestown Viaduct. 01925 571836.

Fiddler's Ferry

Popular riverside location where you can watch the tide turn from a pub garden.

Spike Island

Wide-open acres of grassland, woodland and watersides for walking, fishing and wildlife watching. Yet once this was the home of the British chemical industry, dominated by factories and railway lines. **P WC**

Widnes Warth

40ha of salt marsh alongside the Transpennine trail and St Helens Canal. Area for watching birds and fishing (licence required). Access from Spike Island. **P**

Catalyst (Pay)

Hands-on family fun museum where science and technology come alive. Find out about the industries which exported their wares via the region's canals. 0151 420 1121. **P WC**

Wigg Island Local Nature Reserve

A community local nature reserve reclaimed from contaminated land previously used by the chemical industry. The site is a peaceful place to view wildlife on and around the upper Estuary. Visitor centre. **P WC**

Moore Nature Reserve

200 acres of peaceful woodland, grassland and wetland between the Mersey and the Manchester Ship Canal. The home of a variety of animals, birds and plants. Bird hides overlook a lake and woodland. 01925 444689.

Bridge Foot and Howley

Close to Warrington town centre, riverside paths link to Victoria Park via a footbridge.

Black Bear Park

Nature park linked into local countryside. Good starting point for exploring the Trans-Pennine Trail and Mersey Way. Once part of an eight-mile canal built to avoid an awkward tidal stretch of the Mersey.

Kingsway Bridge

Today you can find swans living happily by the river while kingfishers come looking for the fish life that now thrives in the cleaned-up waters. Close to town centre, south of the cemetery. Many circular walks with surfaced paths. **P WC**

Martinscroft Picnic Area

With the high banks and rural atmosphere you feel deep in the countryside at this riverside site on the Mersey Way footpath. Access: end of Battery Lane. **P**

Paddington Meadows

A green oasis of riverside grassland surrounded by a loop of the Mersey. Features include huge hawthorn trees, while in winter waterfowl may be seen roosting in the wet fields.

Woolston Park

A haven for wildlife with woodland and open parkland. The hazel coppice provides poles for woodland crafts while willow is grown for baskets and weaving. Caters for football and cricket as well as quiet walks. Picnics. 01925 824398.

P WC

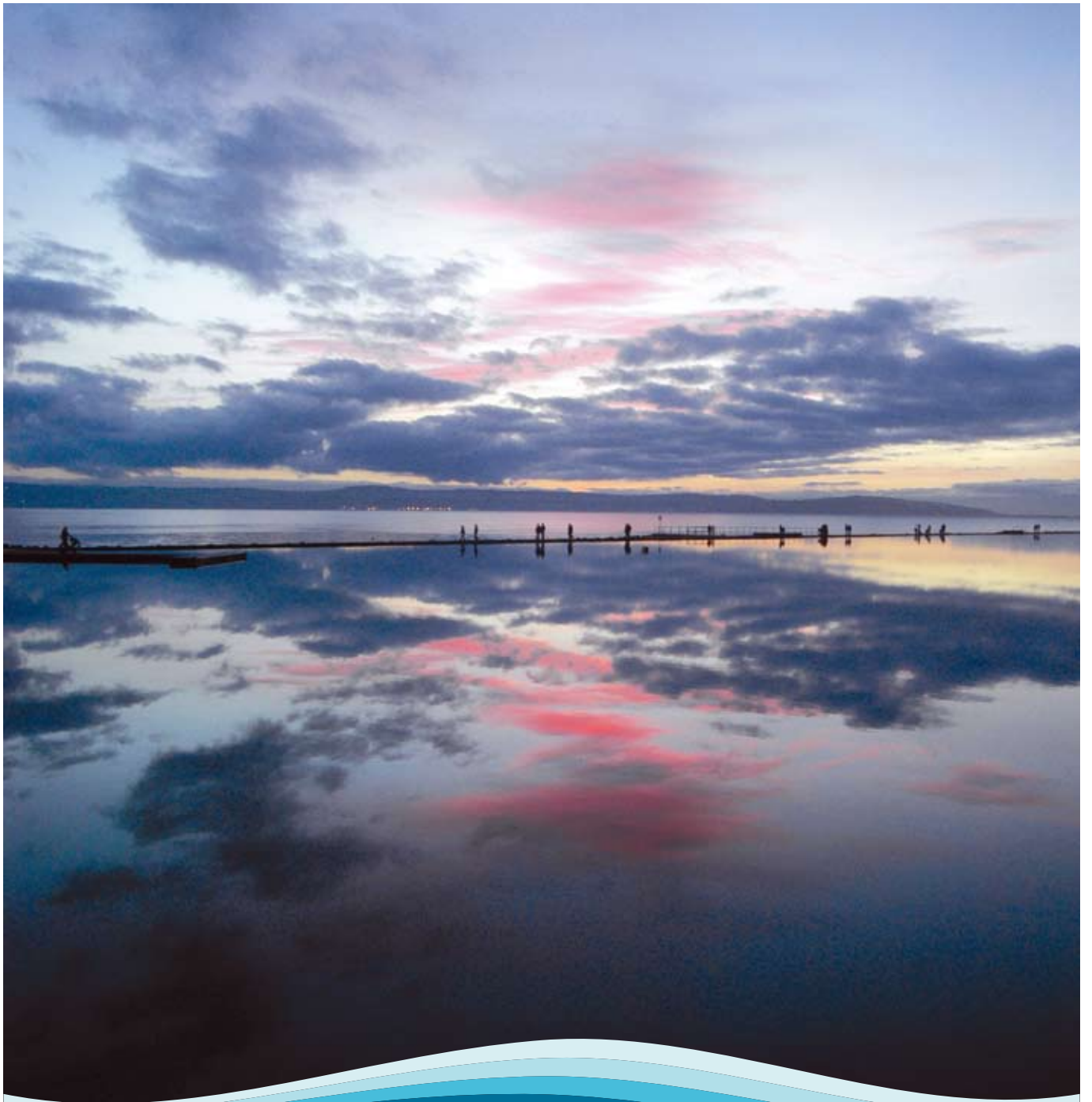
Also worth visiting nearby:

Norton Priory Museum And Gardens (Pay)

A medieval priory comes alive. 30 acres of picturesque woodland plus a contemporary sculpture collection. 01928 569895.

Halton Castle

Historic landmark offering wide-ranging views of the Mersey Valley.



Wirral peninsula

Within a mere 20-minute train ride from Liverpool city centre you can be strolling on clean sandy beaches, breathing in the sea air and savouring distant views of the Welsh coast and mountains with only the screaming gulls for company.



Did you know?

There are colour booklets to accompany this guide. Produced in association with Merseytravel, they help you explore the Mersey Estuary. In addition the Out and About Guides offer a variety of leisurely walks, activities and cycle routes and are based on local Merseyrail stations.

Booklets available from Merseytravel Centres or by phoning 0151 330 1066.



The lonely sea and sky

Starting at New Brighton, the north Wirral shore typifies the Estuary area's distinctive blend of coast, countryside and urban environment, along with its rich maritime heritage.

Poised at the point where the Mersey meets the sea, the resort of New Brighton is being transformed. Now its recreational possibilities are being re-discovered. Spacious proms, unlimited parking, grassed play areas, activities and watersports of every kind are making it ever more popular as a day-out destination.

The North Wirral Coastal Park offers open vistas of sea and sky backed by windswept sand dunes, promenades and golf links. At times the quiet of the shore is broken only by the crunch of shells beneath your feet, the cries of the waders across the wet sand and the distant roar of the sea. Then the tide will come sweeping round the sandbanks to set the small boats bobbing at anchor and bring the whole scene to life. The promenade that helps defend this shore from the sea also allows you to walk right round past Leasowe Lighthouse to Meols and Hoylake.

Hoylake is home to Britain's second oldest seaside course, the Royal Liverpool Golf Club, which hosted The Open Championship in 2006 after nearly 40 years.

Both Hoylake and neighbouring West Kirby offer sweeping sea and coastal views plus lively centres with smart wine bars, pubs and restaurants. West Kirby's massive salt water Marine Lake is popular with windsurfers and dinghy sailors, being ideal for both learners and the experts who regularly head here for national and international competitions.

This is the starting point for the popular two mile walk across the sands to Hilbre Islands in the mouth of the Dee. Careful planning is required as all three islands are cut off by the tide for hours at a time.

Little Eye, Middle Eye and Hilbre itself have a charm all their own and are local nature reserves rich in wildlife, including the area's largest seal population. They are also noted as a stopping off-point for the twice-yearly migration of birds along Britain's west coast and Hilbre's bird observatory regularly reports the visits of rare species. Closer to the shore and easily reached from either Hoylake or West Kirby lies Red Rocks, also known as Bird Island.

Re-shaping of the shoreline has helped restore the broad sandy beaches all along this coast, while the Estuary clean-up has paid dividends with water quality results that a number of more famous seaside resorts must envy.

For the energetic, a walk or cycle ride along the Wirral Way – a 12 mile stretch of reclaimed and landscaped former railway line between West Kirby and Hooton – is a rewarding experience. You can enjoy open views to the Welsh Coast, spot all sorts of wildlife and even treat yourself to an award-winning ice cream from Nicolls on Parkgate's historic quayside. As the old railway line turns to the south east, you can rest your legs on a platform bench at the restored Hadlow Road Station in Willaston.



1 mile

LIVERPOOL BAY

Wirral peninsula

KEY TO SYMBOLS

- Walking
- Cycling
- Viewpoint
- Picnic area
- Pub/restaurant/café
- Fishing
- Watersports/sailing
- Museums/galleries
- Golf course
- Amusements
- Wildlife/nature reserve
- Lighthouse
- Merseyrail station
- Car park
- Low tide area
- Sand dunes/beaches
- Parks/recreation



Coastal Promenade

Stretching from Seacombe Ferry through New Brighton and round to Meols is an eight-mile coastal promenade that combines unrivalled sea and river views with endless opportunities for walking. Cycling is also permitted along the majority of this stretch.

New Brighton

Family resort with sandy beaches, sports facilities, watersports, amusements and even an 18th century naval fort! Plus superb views of the river, estuary shipping and the Welsh coast. Small marine lake has sailing tuition (Contact Mike Jones 0151 691 0941) www.mikejoneswatersportsuk.co.uk. Resort also hosts band concerts, classic car, car and cycle rallies plus the annual Wirral Show – one of the largest free shows in the country. Visitor information: 0151 647 6780 or www.visitwirral.com. Enjoy a 30-minute walk along promenade from Seacombe Ferry. **P WC**

 **New Brighton**

Harrison Drive

Broad promenade with wide sea views for walking or cycling. A favourite with anglers or people just watching the ships coming in and out of the mouth of the Mersey. **P WC**

 **Wallasey Grove Road**

Derby Pool

A picnic area, car parks and pub make this former swimming pool site an ideal base for exploring the North Wirral Coastal Park and there's a choice of paths. Small-boat sailors will find a slipway. **P**

 **Wallasey Grove Road**

Leasowe Bay

The main coastal promenade brings you to Leasowe sand dunes car park and a secluded bay which is becoming popular with surfers and windsurfers. A path through the dunes gives access to a hay meadow and the Gunsite picnic area, a former anti-aircraft base. **P**

 **Wallasey Grove Road**

Leasowe Lighthouse

Open periodically throughout the year. Britain's oldest brick built lighthouse. www.leasowelighthouse.co.uk **P**

 **Moreton**

North Wirral Coastal Park

The key landmark is the restored 18th century beacon lighthouse at the heart of the park. In recent years, conservation work has helped protect the dunes and encourage such plants as marram grass, burnet rose and lady's bedstraw to thrive in the sheltered spots. **P**

 **Wallasey Grove Road or Moreton**

Leasowe Common

This section of the coastal park has a large area of common land with hay meadow and amenity grassland adjacent to a popular summer beach. **WC**

 **Moreton**

North Wirral Foreshore (SSSI)

From the sea wall you can view this section of coast which is a nationally important conservation area designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) that is a popular area for bird watchers.

 **Moreton or Meols**

Dove Point

A focal point for sailing enthusiasts with slipway facilities and moorings behind the East Hoyle Bank. You may spot herons feeding in the channels.

 **Meols**

Red Rocks

Also known as Bird Island. Reached from the shore at the end of the King's Gap but should be avoided at high tide. The nearby West Kirby sand dunes are home to a population of natterjack toads. As well as having SSSI status this marks the start of the Dee Special Protection Area, Ramsar Site. An area internationally designated for nature conservation.

 **Hoyleake**

Hilbre Islands

Lying at the mouth of the Dee Estuary, this small group of islands is cut off for up to five hours at high water. Great views of North Wales and opportunities to observe the islands' rich wildlife and seal colony. Permits are required for parties of five or more. To visit, check with the Ranger service on 0151 648 4371 who can supply details of guided walks. Also check the notice board at the Dee Lane slipway to ensure you take the recommended route.

 **West Kirby**

West Kirby

Known for its mile-long promenade, beach and superb marine lake, this area is popular for all types of watersports including windsurfing, canoeing, dinghy sailing and many more.

P (pay) WC

 **West Kirby**

Wirral Country Park

Based on an old railway line from West Kirby to Hooton that is now the 12-mile Wirral Way footpath. Main access via visitor centre at Thurstaston. 0151 648 4371. **P WC**

Also worth visiting nearby:

Royden Park

Country park and visitor centre. Miles of walks across Thurstaston Common local nature reserve, with superb views over the North Wirral coast, Mersey and Dee estuaries. **P WC**

Thurstaston Common/Thors Rock

Spectacular view of the estuary. **P**



Did you know?

As this guide shows, the Mersey Estuary today is a great source of leisure and recreation. And we can all help to keep it that way – and even improve it.

Make sure you:

- > Respect the natural environment
- > Protect wildlife and plants
- > Always take your litter home with you
- > Keep to marked footpaths or trails

It's also vital to protect our water environment by reporting illegal tipping, vandalism or any pollution you notice – please contact the Environment Agency 24-hour incident hotline on 0800 807060.



Record Cod weighing in at 27lb 13oz caught by Dave Roberts.

Angling

Bigger and better catches

If you're an angler, you will need little help to find the right locations – you can hardly miss them. At any time around the high tide, you'll find fishermen tending their lines at countless points along the waterfront promenades that make the Mersey so accessible. Offshore fishing is equally popular, with New Brighton and Liverpool Sailing Club as handy bases. Today, enthusiasts are being attracted from as far afield as North East England, South Wales, Southern and Eastern England and Ireland by the sea angling prospects, particularly the organised competitions.

In recent years there has been a striking increase in numbers of larger and healthier cod and whiting caught in the Mersey. Flat fish such as plaice, dab, thornback rays and flounder were once rare but these days are commonly found, while bass are now returning to the river.

Such predators as dogfish, mackerel and even tope are also found in the Mersey, feeding on the shrimp and whitebait that are now increasingly thriving in these waters. As experts predicted, we have seen a return of salmon to the Mersey and they have now been spotted spawning in the head waters in Derbyshire.

Meanwhile, following restocking by the Environment Agency, in the 1990s, freshwater fish such as roach, dace and chub are now able to survive in sections of the Mersey and its tributaries.

A big attraction of the area is the variety of locations available to the keen angler. Popular sites for shore-based sea anglers include Harrison Drive at New Brighton and Otterspool on the Liverpool side. A number of clubs also organise sea angling in Liverpool Bay while the Warrington and Sankey Canals are popular with freshwater anglers. Fishermen should always ensure they have a permit where required.

Cormorants, kingfishers and great-crested grebes have also been attracted to the Mersey in growing numbers, feeding on the improved fish populations. One irony of the improving water conditions is that the anglers are increasingly having to compete with the cormorants for their catch.

Other marine life being recorded includes octopus, squid and cuttlefish – not to mention crabs, jellyfish and shrimps. In addition, minky whales, harbour porpoise and dolphins have been spotted near the mouth of the Mersey and seals as far upstream as Warrington as they follow the fish into the rejuvenated river.

Also thriving are many other small creatures, including invertebrates, that need cleaner water to survive. It is anticipated that fishing prospects will continue to improve across the Mersey Basin's watercourses.





The natural world

A birdwatcher's paradise

Visitors interested in wildlife will find the Mersey Estuary area richly rewarding. Habitats range from field, hedgerow and woodland to heath and moorland, through to marshland, estuary and coast. This allows an unusually remarkable variety of birds, animals and plants to flourish – a total of 13 internationally important and 25 nationally or regionally important species of wildlife are regularly recorded.

Most of the inner Estuary is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), as well as being a Ramsar site and Special Protection Area. In addition, Sefton's natural coast is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the European Habitats Directive.

For the dedicated enthusiast, the area offers endless fascination. Equally, for the family simply seeking a day in the fresh air, it provides children with all the fun of playing on beaches, spotting squirrels or collecting shells to their hearts' content.

The keen birdwatcher will find the most spectacular attraction is the vast array of species which assemble during autumn and winter – together with the other estuaries of the North West, this is the second most important location in the world for migratory birds.

The Estuary supports large numbers of wildfowl and waders throughout the winter, including internationally important numbers of shelduck, teal, pintail and dunlin. It also acts as a valuable staging post for migrating birds in spring and autumn.

All round the area you can observe the flocks winging their way along the coast or study oyster-catchers, knot, dunlin and redshank scavenging in the sand as the tide ebbs. The Alt Estuary too is a location of international importance for wildfowl and wading birds.

Here you may witness such impressive sights as tens of thousands of knot flocking together or skeins of pink-footed geese flying out to roost on the mud flats in winter.

As water quality has improved and fish stocks increased, so fish-eating birds such as cormorant and great-crested grebe have become more frequent visitors. Kingfishers too can be found in the Upper Estuary.

Autumn gales can hold the promise of such exciting sights as Leach's petrel, little gull, various skuas and other seabirds blown from the Irish sea. The area has much to offer other wildlife lovers too.

The Sefton sand dunes are home to such rare, protected species as the endangered natterjack toad and the sand lizard, while at The National Trust Formby Reserve you'll find the rare red squirrel thriving – the reserve and surrounding pine woodlands are now designated as one of sixteen national red squirrel refuges.

Stroll the beaches of North Wirral or the Sefton coast and you're always sure to find something of interest, including crabs, shrimps and shells that include mussels and cockles.

The more natural conditions along the Sefton shoreline encourage invertebrates, including sandhoppers and white woodlice which in turn attract such predators as the natterjack toad and other mammals and birds. Inland, many interesting species of birds and butterflies can also be found – notably in the heathlands and woodlands scattered across the Wirral peninsula and along Sefton's natural coast.

The coastal areas also provide a habitat for a number of rare plants, including yellowwort and bristly oxtongue. Today's conservation awareness promises a bright future for the Mersey Estuary.

The Mersey Basin Campaign and Mersey Waterfront are working in partnership with landowners, conservation groups and local communities to co-ordinate a range of initiatives to create or enhance wildlife habitats and improve the water environment throughout the river system, while the Environment Agency continues to work closely with United Utilities and industry to reduce pollution and increase biodiversity.

Meanwhile, on Sefton's natural coast much has been achieved by a partnership of land owners and local interest groups – the Sefton Coastal Partnership. This includes the National Trust, Natural England, Sefton Council, landowners etc. Through partnerships, these groups look at the preservation and regeneration of the whole coastal system, from sea to dunes, to woodlands, the habitat and species these support.



Did you know?

Leaflets and information on walks and cycle routes are available from the Tourist Information Centres at:

Liverpool (The O8 Place):
0151 233 2459

Warrington: 01925 442180

Halton: 01928 576776

Wirral: 0151 647 6780

Sefton: 01704 533333

Also from Merseytravel Centres.

Merseyrail takes cycles at no charge, subject to space (0870 6082608).

Walking and cycle maps are available from Travelwise Wirral, Liverpool, Sefton: 0151 330 1294.

See page 15 for information on Ordnance Survey Landranger and other detailed maps.



Walking and cycling

Proms and country paths

Few parts of the country can rival the opportunities the shores of the Mersey present to walkers and cyclists. If you're keen to enjoy the attractions of the Mersey Estuary and coastline at close quarters, the choice ranges from modern and Victorian promenades to woodland walks, open heath and miles of firm, sandy, open beaches. A feature of the urban stretch of the estuary is the series of broad concrete promenades that offer unlimited river and seafront access for both walkers and cyclists.

From Liverpool's Pier Head almost down to Garston and, again, running north from Waterloo, you can enjoy the freedom of the river with ever-changing perspectives of the tidal Mersey and its colourful activity.

The new canal link through Liverpool Docks and Pier Head will connect the 127-mile Leeds and Liverpool Canal to the Liverpool Waterfront and allow boats to travel past the world-famous Three Graces into the Albert Dock.

You can explore the Mersey shore further via the various paths which form part of the long-distance Trans-Pennine Trail. In the Upper Estuary area, the Trail follows the Mersey Way, a system of paths running close to the river through Speke, Garston, Hale, Widnes, Warrington and beyond. On the Wirral shore the promenade from Seacombe follows the Mersey to its mouth then sweeps round the peninsula past the dunes and commons of the North Wirral Country Park to link with the seaside promenades of Meols and Hoylake. This then joins up with the Wirral Way, Cheshire and North Wales.

Inland the walking facilities are just as rewarding. The woods and heaths of the Wirral peninsula are laced with public footpaths, while the sand dunes, pinewoods and nature reserves of Sefton's natural coast are opened up by a network of footpaths linked by the through route of the Sefton coastal path. Although the southern shore of the estuary offers fewer opportunities for access, there are ample walks that explore the remote marshland areas and historic villages such as Ince and Stanlow. You can also gain access to the Estuary via Eastham Country Park.

In addition to offering a continuous long-distance route, the Mersey Way is an ideal stopping-off point for local leisure facilities and landmarks linked to the area's industrial past. Similarly, both the Liverpool waterfront and the urban stretch of the Wirral shore afford the opportunity to combine a healthy stroll with stop-off visits to features of historic and architectural interest.

Cyclists too are particularly well catered for. Both the wide range of waterfront promenades and such inland routes as the old Liverpool Loop Line, also part of the Trans-Pennine Trail, provide miles of safe, off-road cycling. Even the main road network offers many quiet country routes free of heavy traffic.

For a start, you could explore inland from the Sefton coast where you'll find easy flat roads meandering from one quiet Lancashire village to the next. Or cross to the Wirral and discover a whole network of peaceful leafy lanes hidden between the busy main routes that cut through the peninsula. You'll find most locations are easily accessed by the Merseyrail network – a particular advantage for visitors without a car.







Did you know?

You should check with the individual local authority for any current requirements (eg permits, insurance, etc) for the launching and retrieving of boats in the Mersey Estuary.

Always apply caution and commonsense when venturing onto the water and be careful to use all safety aids and the correct clothing. Tidal conditions can be extremely dangerous in the Mersey Estuary and only experienced sailors should venture into open water.

If new to the sport, you should always participate in supervised activities with qualified staff. When planning an offshore trip, it is wise to notify the coastguards. (For contacts see page 36).



Watersports

So easy to get afloat

If watersports are your interest, you'll find just about every kind catered for in the Mersey Estuary. The area's strong sailing traditions are maintained by a range of welcoming sailing clubs all round the area. Just beyond the tourist magnet of the Albert Dock, you'll find boats sitting on moorings within Liverpool's smart, modern Marina, the hub of a stylish new community where hundreds of waterfront houses and apartments have sprung up in the past few years.

For the past 25 years the Mersey River Festival has taken place in June. It features a range of activities on the river and ashore, including the colourful Parade of Sail, one of the most exciting sights of the year – both for the spectators and the local boat owners participating. The Festival has also hosted the start and finish of the Tall Ships Races which are set to return in 2008.

The docks themselves are also frequently alive with the multi-coloured sails of windsurfers and small dinghies. Courses in sailing, windsurfing and canoeing are all available at MCVS Mersey Sport in Queens Dock (0151 708 9322). Rowing facilities too are excellent, with thriving clubs in both the Liverpool and Birkenhead docks. The long tradition of rowing on the Mersey is maintained at Warrington, where the once-famous regatta has been revived.

Meanwhile Liverpool's Duke's and Salhouse Docks are popular with scuba divers keen to brush up their skills. Instructors report that the clearer water has added a new dimension these days with visitors often amazed by the size and number of crabs, eels, jellyfish, shrimps and colourful sea anemones they can observe at close quarters. Across the river lie the moorings of one of the oldest sailing clubs in the UK, namely the Royal Mersey Yacht Club and also close by, Tranmere Sailing Club, the latter best known for its annual midnight race to the Isle of Man.

Liverpool Sailing Club now has prestigious new premises at Speke and Garston Coastal Reserve, near Speke Hall, where facilities are available for all watersports activities and training, while West Bank Boat Club caters for enthusiasts in the Widnes and Runcorn area. Further upstream towards Warrington you'll find Fiddler's Ferry Sailing Club and a yacht haven with launching facilities. At the other end of the Estuary coastal sailors will find moorings in the mouth of the Alt and a welcome at Blundellsands Sailing Club.

Powerboat and jetski enthusiasts are also catered for, with expert offshore training facilities available. New Brighton (Marine Lake) and Liverpool (See page 36) can offer specialist sailing and windsurfing tuition.

From the Mersey, offshore enthusiasts can easily reach Wales, Ireland and the Isle of Man, while day sailors have over 20 miles of sheltered waters in the River Mersey and one of the North West's most attractive sailing areas off Hilbre Island in the River Dee.

Dinghy and windsurfing enthusiasts are catered for by the superbly sited marine lake at West Kirby. On Sefton's natural coast there's Crosby marina, while just a little further afield lies Southport's marine lake, the base for two sailing clubs and the home of a nationally famous 24-hour dinghy event.



Did you know?

Liverpool has more than 30 registered Blue Badge tourist guides who are available for car, coach or walking tours.

For more information contact Mersey Tourism (0906 680 6886. Calls are 25p a minute).

The guides also lead regular Sunday city walks that explore the fascinating architecture, history and culture of the city.



The living past

Landmarks that tell a story

Reminders of the past lie all around you in the Mersey Estuary. Few parts of Britain can boast such a range and quality of historic and archaeological interest, much of it stemming from the explosion of economic activity in the 19th century. Liverpool may be the focal point but both the Mersey itself and the complex local canal network were the focus of this astonishing commercial and industrial boom.

These waterways saw vast quantities of goods moving between ocean-going ships, canal boats and railway wagons. Everywhere you'll find fascinating reminders of this era that enrich the local landscape. With the decline in industry, changing commercial patterns and the rise in road, rail and air services, the former peace and quiet has been restored.

In recent times, efforts to re-develop and clean up the local environment have helped many waterways to become havens for boating enthusiasts, anglers, walkers and nature lovers.

Much of the legacy from the industrial era – from the mighty docklands of south Liverpool to waterways such as the Sankey Canal – has now been renovated and preserved for future generations to enjoy. The area's real gem has to be Liverpool's world-famous Albert Dock and the internationally-recognised waterfront.

You can admire the Albert Dock, Jesse Hartley's masterpiece, in all its original splendour then go on to visit the Merseyside Maritime Museum and discover how the Mersey has shaped Liverpool's fortunes down the years. Further aspects of the area's colourful history can be explored at other National Museums in Liverpool including the Walker Art Gallery and Lady Lever Gallery on the Wirral.

The wealth the river helped bring to the area is well illustrated by a stroll round the impressive architecture of Liverpool's city centre, acknowledged as one of the most distinguished in the country.

On the opposite shore the cluster of historic visitor attractions known as the Birkenhead Packet range from the ancient Birkenhead Priory, whose monks operated the original Mersey ferry service, to a restored tramway and the Giant Grasshopper beam engine.

Other fascinating attractions include the Boat Museum at Ellesmere Port, while the Catalyst Museum at Widnes offers hands-on fun finding out about the industrial processes which founded the fortunes of the area.

Further reminders of that industrial era include the Sankey Canal trail and park which takes in such historic features as the Earlestown Viaduct where England's first true canal was crossed by the world's first passenger railway. (see page 36 for contact numbers).



Contacts and information

General

Action Mersey Estuary Partnership
Tel: 0151 237 3947

Mersey Basin Campaign
Tel: 0161 242 8200
www.merseybasin.org.uk

Environment Agency
Tel: 01925 543 345
Tel: 08708 506 506
www.environment-agency.gov.uk

Mersey Waterfront
Tel: 0151 237 3945
www.merseywaterfront.com

Traveline
Tel: 0870 608 2 608
www.merseytravel.gov.uk

The Mersey Partnership (Tourism)
Tel: 0151 227 2727
www.visitliverpool.com

Liverpool City Council
Tel: 0151 233 3000
www.liverpool.gov.uk

Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council
Tel: 0151 606 2000
www.wirral.gov.uk

Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council
Tel: 0845 140 0845
www.sefton.gov.uk

St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council
Tel: 01744 456 000
www.sthelens.gov.uk

Halton Borough Council
Parks and Countryside Service
Tel: 0151 424 2061

Warrington Borough Council
Tel: 01925 444 400
www.warrington.gov.uk

Vale Royal Borough Council
Tel: 01606 862 862
www.valeroyal.gov.uk

Cheshire County Council
Tel: 0845 113 3311 (24hr)
www.cheshire.gov.uk

National Trust NW
Tel: 0161 928 0075

Goundwork Wirral
Tel: 0151 644 4700

Goundwork Mersey Valley
Tel: 0151 257 2720

Liverpool Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Tel: 0845 145 1115

The natural world

Natural England
Tel: 01942 820 342

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds NW
Tel: 01484 861 148

Lancashire Wildlife Trust
Tel: 01772 324 129
(Seaforth Reserve)
Tel: 0151 920 3769

Cheshire Wildlife Trust
Tel: 01270 610 180
www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/cheshire

Mersey Estuary Conservation Group
www.merseyestuary.org.uk

Wirral Countryside Volunteers
Tel: 0151 645 8937

The Woodland Trust (General)
Tel: 01476 581 135

Mersey Forest
Tel: 01925 816 217

Friends of the Earth
Tel: 0207 490 1555

NW Federation for Sport, Recreation and Conservation
Tel: 01204 852 034

The British Association of Shooting and Conservation
Tel: 01244 573 000
www.basc.org.uk

Cheshire Constabulary Wildlife and Environment Officer
Tel: 01244 612 218

Lancashire Constabulary Animal/Wildlife Protection Officer
Tel: 01772 618 882

Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Martin Mere
Tel: 01704 891 222

Watersports

Royal Yachting Association
Tel: 0845 345 0400
www.rya.org.uk

Inland Waterways Association
Tel: 01923 711 114
www.waterways.org.uk

British Waterways
Tel: 01942 405 700
www.britishwaterways.co.uk

HM Coastguard (general)
Tel: 0870 600 6505
(999 for emergency)

Amateur Rowing Association
Tel: 0870 060 7100

Liverpool Watersports Centre, Queens Dock
Tel: 0151 708 9322. www.merseysport.org

New Brighton Marine Lake sailing school
www.mikejoneswatersportsuk.co.uk

West Kirby Marine Lake
Tel: 0151 625 2510

Liverpool Marina
Tel: 0151 707 6777

Crosby Marina
Surf tech: 0151 920 8855

Sefton Coast and Countryside
Tel: 0151 934 2967

Angling

National Federation of Anglers
Tel: 0115 981 3535. www.nfadirect.com

National Association of Boat Angling Clubs
Tel: 01253 591063

Freshwater Angling Directory UK
www.go-fish.co.uk

Association of Wirral Anglers (AWAC)
Tel: 0151 645 3396

Walking/cycling

The Ramblers Association
Tel: 0207 339 8500
www.ramblers.org.uk

Sustrans (for cycle routes)
Tel: 0845 113 0065
www.sustrans.org.uk

Merseyside Cycle Campaign
www.merseyworld.com/mcc

The living past

National Museums Liverpool (Maritime Museum)
Tel: 0151 478 4499
www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk

The Birkenhead Packet
Tel: 0151 647 6780

The Boat Museum
Tel: 0151 355 5017
www.boatmuseum.org.uk

Catalyst Museum
Tel: 0151 420 1121
www.catalyst.org.uk

Sankey Canal Trail
Tel: 01925 571 836

General tourist information

Liverpool (The Mersey Partnership)
Tel: 0151 227 2727
www.visitliverpool.com

Wirral
Tel: 0151 647 6780
www.visitwirral.com

Warrington
Tel: 01244 505 600
www.visitchester.com

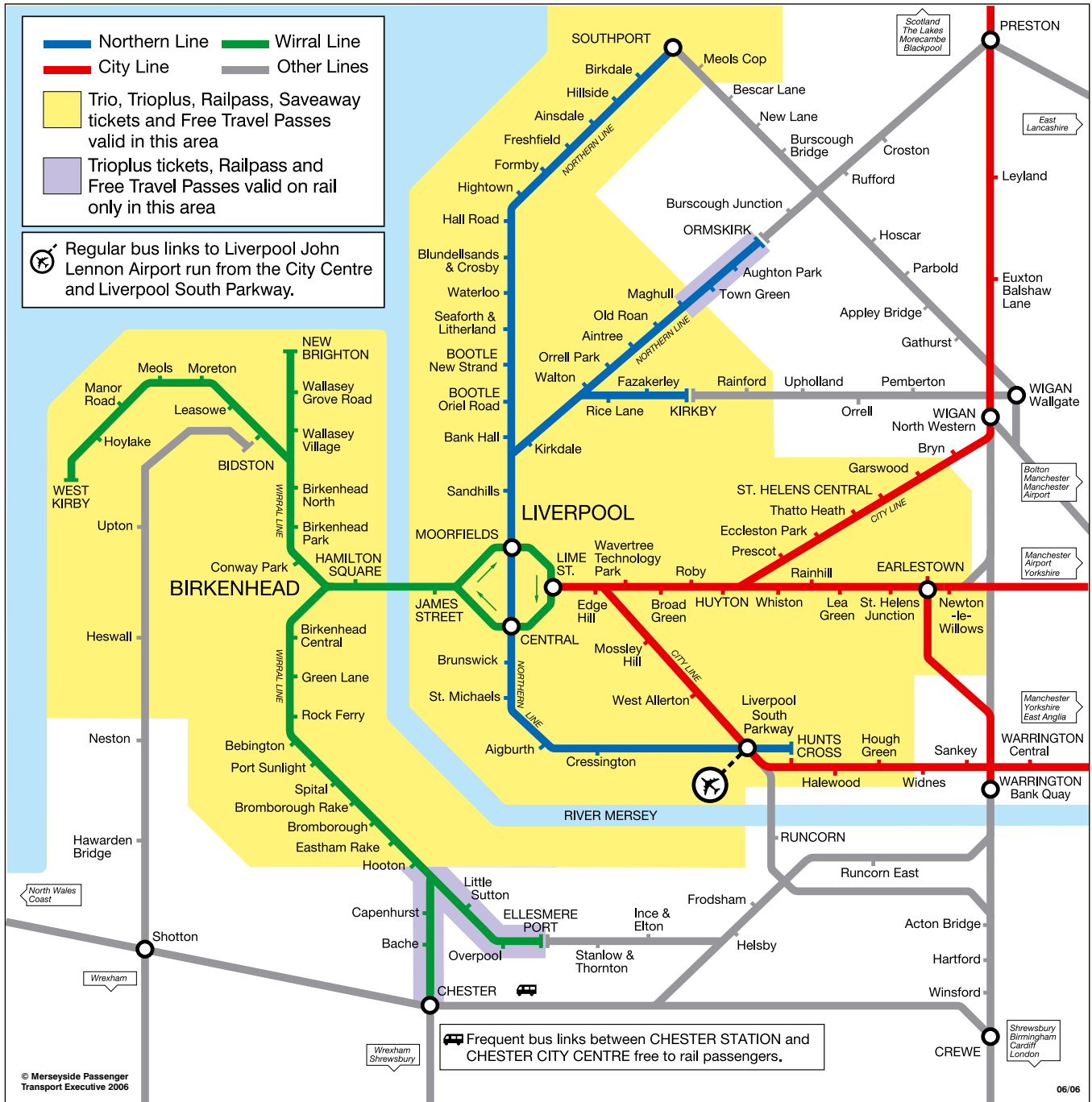
Widnes
Tel: 0151 907 8303

Runcorn
Tel: 01928 576 776
www.visithalton.com

Sefton
Tel: 01704 533 333
www.visitsouthport.com

The Liverpool Navigators
Tel: 0151 225 2925

Merseyrail route planner



If you are without a car – or prefer to leave it at home – you'll find a Merseyrail station close to most locations in the guide, particularly the Sefton and Wirral coasts and the city waterfront. The Merseyrail network will also take cycles at no charge – space permitting. For further information call the Traveline.

Travel Information **0870 608 2 608**
National Call Rate

OPEN 8AM TILL 8PM 7 DAYS A WEEK

www.merseytravel.gov.uk

Making the most of the Mersey

Explore for yourself the hidden world of the Mersey Estuary – a globally important conservation area with a unique waterfront. The Mersey Estuary has an exceptional range of opportunities for recreation and leisure waiting to be discovered.

You may be looking for a family day out... planning to go angling, sailing, walking or birdwatching... or simply seeking a breath of fresh air after shopping and sightseeing in the city. In every case, the Mersey Estuary will delight and surprise you. This book should inspire you to explore and enjoy this remarkable asset right on your doorstep.

To make the most of the Estuary, see the activity leaflets for individual areas that complement this guide. You'll find them at all Merseytravel outlets.



ACTION | MERSEY ESTUARY



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