

## Skipsea Withow Mere August 2023 Beverley u3a Wild Things visit

Holderness didn't exist before the last Ice Age, and as you walk to the shore from Mr Moos and look back to the fast-eroding cliffs, you can see why. The cliffs are entirely made of glacial till, also known as boulder clay, as the clay is full of erratics of various sizes, carried by the ice sheets and deposited as they melted.



Above: Eroding cliffs at Skipsea and erratic pebbles on the foreshore

We looked at some of the fossils along the shoreline, such as oysters and corals, many carried from the Jurassic areas around Whitby, but others from older carboniferous rocks. We looked too at igneous and metamorphic pebbles, that may have come from further afield and be much older. These included coarse-grained granites and diorites formed deep underground, porphyry that may have come from inside the extinct Cheviot volcano in Northumberland, and metamorphic gneiss, melted into flowlines by unimaginable pressures, that may have travelled from Scotland or Norway.

Skipsea Withow Mere itself is an SSSI because of its rich archaeological and geological remains. One of the many meres left after the ice melted, layers of clay, gravel, peat and woody debris can clearly be seen forming a shallow bowl above the till. It's thought that the Withow Gap, which provides this route to the beach, was a channel linking two bigger meres, one of which has now disappeared into the sea. It has certainly been blocked by much woody debris, and one theory is that this was a beaver dam. Beaver hairs and gnawed wood have been found here by archaeologists. It's exciting to find six-thousand-year-old hazelnut shells buried in the dam. No human remains have been found here, but Mesolithic bone harpoon heads have been found nearby.

While most of the 21-strong group, a record attendance, roamed the shore, John and I explored the vegetation on the cliff face. Thistles are much maligned but such a draw for insects. We glimpsed a Wall butterfly and a colourful Carrion beetle, and I chased a Southern Cuckoo Bumblebee from flower to flower. Cuckoo bees are hefty bees which parasitise the nests of bumblebees, killing the



queen and letting her worker offspring do all the pollen collecting to feed their own young. They have no need to produce workers, just males and new queens.



Left: The peat layer marking the southern edge of Skipsea Withow Mere

Page 3:  
Looking at the wooden debris trapped in Withow Gap above a layer of lacustrine clay and silt.





Below: looking towards Flamborough







Above: a Southern Cuckoo Bumblebee and a Buff-tailed Bumblebee, its host bee.



Left: four pollinators on Thistle from top: Common Carder Bumblebee, a tiny Flower Beetle, a *Rhingia campestris* Hoverfly and a Common Flower Bug



Below clockwise from top: Candy-striped Orbweaver, Peacock, Silver Y moth, Red-eyed Damselfly, Pterostrichus sp. ground beetle.





Sand and House Martins wheeled above our heads, Little Plovers fished on the shoreline, and the combine harvesters droned. We enjoyed the sunshine and later ice creams at Mr Moos. But we did take home a sobering thought: as Holderness did not exist fifteen thousand years ago, so in less time than we think it may cease to exist again, drowned by sea level rise due to climate change.



Report HK. Photos by HK and John Coish