

The Lizard

National Nature Reserve





Shetland ponies on Predannack Cliffs

Welcome to The Lizard National Nature Reserve

Ma'n Lesard goz dinerby

On the most southerly tip of Britain sits The Lizard peninsula; a place of special beauty where land and sea meet in a landscape of spectacular cliffs, rolling heathland and hidden coves – one of the most stunning places in the country to enjoy the outdoors.

The Lizard National Nature Reserve stretches across nearly 2,000 hectares of the wild peninsula. An amazing diversity of wildlife thrives here, including especially rare and unusual plants. The heathland, coastal cliff vegetation and temporary ponds are of international importance.

Natural England works with partners to manage the reserve and ensure important habitats and species are safeguarded for the future and that the special plants, animals and geology remain protected for everyone to enjoy.

The mild climate means you can visit year round, and the cliff top rambles, scenic beaches and stunning heathland provide an opportunity to enjoy nature at its very best. Come prepared though... it's not unusual to experience several seasons in one day on the Lizard.



Visiting the reserve

The whole reserve is Open Access land – which means you are welcome to explore. But be aware that the terrain can be rough and wet away from the main tracks and paths so wear sturdy shoes.

The South West Coast Path follows the perimeter of the peninsula giving good access to the reserve. Visit www.southwestcoastpath.com for information on walking the coast path.

Take time to explore the beaches which are among the most picturesque in Britain. It's a good idea to check the tide times for the coastal sites as some beaches are covered at high tide.

You are welcome to picnic on the reserve, but please take your litter home with you.

Many of the firebreaks on the reserve are waymarked as permissive bridleways; contact the reserve office for more information.

Dogs are welcome but please respect other visitors, wildlife and livestock by keeping them under close control at all times and ensuring that dog mess does not become somebody else's problem.

For up to date wildlife sightings, advice on places to visit, downloadable walk information and details of events please visit www.the-lizard.org.

What makes The Lizard special?

The mild oceanic climate and unusual geology have created a distinctive landscape of outstanding nature conservation interest. Over 250 species of national and international importance are found here – many of which are found only in this region of Britain.

The extraordinary rocks from which the Lizard is formed erupted from the earth's core 400 million years ago. They were shoved and cooked by geological forces and stuck in a series of multicoloured layers onto the southern tip of Cornwall. These rocks – including serpentinite, schists, gabbro and gneiss – all have a strong influence on the local flora. Serpentinite is particularly distinctive, named after its resemblance to reptile skin. The soils derived from serpentinite are high in magnesium and low in calcium resulting in the unusual sight of chalk and limestone loving plants growing alongside acid loving heathland species making this an essential place for any botanist to study.



Coastal cliffs

The ancient rocks at the Lizard now form spectacular cliffs, outcrops, caves and offshore islands. In early summer the cliff top grasslands have a vibrant carpeting of flowers – including squill, vetches, trefoils, thrift and oxeye daisies. Rarer plants include green winged orchid, wild chives, spring sandwort and the fringed rupturewort. Thirteen species of clover can be found if you look hard enough. The cliffs are also a good place from which to see seals, ravens, fulmars, kestrels, peregrines and choughs, if you are lucky.

Heathland

The Lizard has some of the most extensive areas of lowland heath in the UK. Early summer brings a beautiful carpet of orchids, violets and the cruelly named lousewort. In July and August pink and yellow abound as gorse and heather come into full flower. Four native species of heather grow here – ling, bell heather, cross-leaved heath and the rare Cornish heath. Look out too for harebells, dropwort and great burnet.

Puddles, ponds and wheel ruts

The 'mild oceanic climate' really means that The Lizard is wet for much of the year. This wetness provides the habitat for some of the rare plant species in the area, and many of these ponds are formed in ruts of the trackways that have criss-crossed the downs for generations.



Internationally important temporary pond habitat

Habitat management

To conserve and promote their unique wildlife value, the coastal grasslands and the heaths need a cycle of seasonal grazing and controlled burning. Natural England works in partnership with many local farmers and landowners to make this happen. Burning takes place in the winter under strictly controlled conditions. It is important in maintaining a mosaic of heathland plants of different ages so there are more habitat niches for less competitive plants and more open ground for insects.

Almost all of the reserve is now grazed at varying times of the year. Hardy traditional breeds are often used, such as Welsh black or highland cattle, or Shetland and Exmoor ponies, which are able to thrive despite the difficult terrain and limited nutrients. They do not mind having their photographs taken, but please don't be tempted to feed them or approach closely, especially if they have their young with them.

Generations past

People have been leaving their mark on the landscape here since prehistoric times, turning heath into farmland and grazing animals on the downs. There are ancient tumuli, barrows, hut circles and peat drying stacks scattered throughout the area, though take care not to mistake the rows of Second World War anti-glider mounds for something more ancient. The Bronze Age settlement on Kynance Downs and the standing stone at Dry Tree are especially noteworthy. Unlike much of the rest of Cornwall there is little to mine on The Lizard – though soapstone and serpentine have been quarried and there is the beginnings of a mine in the middle of Goonhilly... but this was the result of a scam to swindle would-be investors!



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Cornish chough

Cornish chough

In 2001 three wild choughs took up residence on the Lizard. Two of the birds nested and to everyone's delight have reared young from 2002 onwards. Flocks of up to a dozen birds are now a regular sight on the coast of the Lizard. These were the first choughs to breed in Cornwall and England for 50 years. Hopefully they will continue to thrive on the short turf and insect-rich dung produced by coastal grazing.



© Natural England / Steve Townsend

Walking the west coast

Places to visit

Goonhilly Downs

This broad expanse of heathland looks its radiant best in July and August when the heather and gorse are in full flower. Buzzards, owls and other birds of prey hunt across the downs. In summer the open pools are home to many different species of dragonfly, whist adders and lizards bask on sunny bare ground and rocks. The prominent satellite dishes and wind turbines that border the downs provide a dramatic backdrop to the landscape. This is a superb place to find the radiant Cornish heath – it occurs practically nowhere else in the UK, yet here it thrives.

Mullion and Predannack Cliffs

In early summer the cliffs are bright with squill, vetches, oxeye daisies, thrift and trefoil. Green winged-orchids, wild chives and chamomile also grow here and July sees the heathers and western gorse begin to flower profusely.

Winter grazing by Shetland ponies and highland cattle helps to maintain this abundance of wild flowers. You may also see stonechats, seabirds, ravens and if you are really lucky, a peregrine falcon.



Mullion islands



Kynance

Discover a coastline of stunning beauty – a turquoise sea in a shallow cove with islands, white sand beaches, caves and rugged serpentine cliffs. This part of Cornwall really feels like it might be in the Mediterranean.

Kynance has some of the most rare and exotic sounding plants including: wild asparagus; Cornish heath; bloody cranesbill; hairy greenweed; land quillwort and autumn squill. Traditional breeds of cattle range widely in this rugged landscape. These cliffs can be a good place to see and hear choughs.

Caerthillian

In the mid 19th century this is where the pioneering botanist Reverend Johns performed his famous “hat-trick” – so many rare clovers and associated plants grow here that he was able to cover at least ten species with his straw hat. These plants, including long headed, twin-headed and upright clover, still occur here – though they are best appreciated by getting close and personal... on your belly with a magnifying lens.

Gwendreath and Kennack Sands

Kennack is one of the finest and most accessible beaches on the Lizard. The area is famous for its geological features such as exposures of gneiss in the cliffs and red serpentine pebbles on the beach. It's an ideal place to explore fascinating rock pools if the tides are low. In summer the world's second largest fish, the plankton eating basking shark, can often be seen close inshore.

A walk inland can take you past old quarries, across grazed heaths, and along the wooded elm valley. The eastern heathlands, such as Main Dale near St Keverne, have a character of their own, with large boulders scattered across the heath. These rocks are known as crusairs and look like manmade sculptures. This is another good place to see four different types of heather along with heath-spotted orchids in the spring and a yellow haze of bog asphodel in summer.



© Natural England / Steve Townsend

Kennack Sands



The work of volunteers is invaluable

Health, outdoor learning and volunteering

Medical evidence shows that contact with the natural environment improves health and wellbeing, prevents disease and speeds recovery from illness. The reserve's large network of paths and tracks caters for all levels of fitness and ability.

The Lizard National Nature Reserve is a very special place to learn about wildlife. It's a 'living laboratory' with a long history of scientific research and monitoring undertaken by staff, volunteers, universities and students of all ages.

Natural England runs an education and community engagement programme at The Lizard in addition to public events and activities.

There are many opportunities to get involved in managing the reserve; from helping with events and visiting groups to monitoring wildlife and historic features. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact the reserve office at the address on the back page.

For information on how to get involved with Natural England and our partners please visit www.the-lizard.org.

Taking care of the reserve

This is a working nature reserve where wildlife conservation and peaceful enjoyment of nature are paramount.

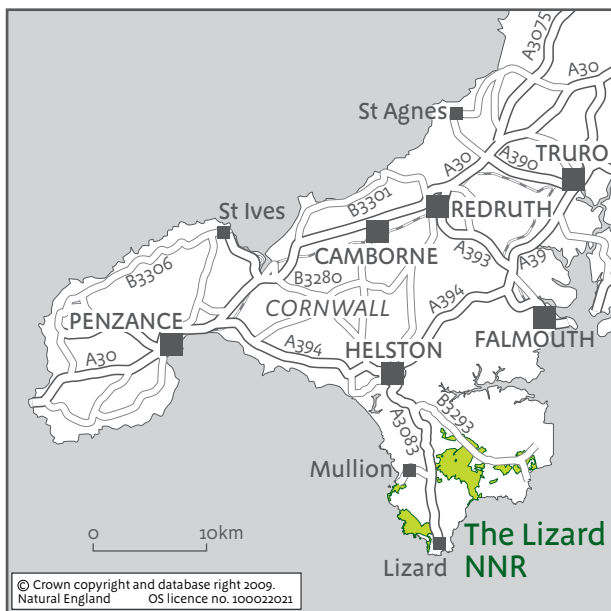
Please remember to follow the Countryside Code and be aware of grazing livestock.

In particular:

- Keep dogs under close control.
- Do not touch or feed the animals.
- Try not to startle or surprise animals.
- Avoid getting between cows and their calves.

Please do not disturb wildlife, take any plants or disturb nests or eggs.





Getting to The Lizard

By road: the Lizard peninsula is accessed via the A3083 (from the A394) and the B3293.

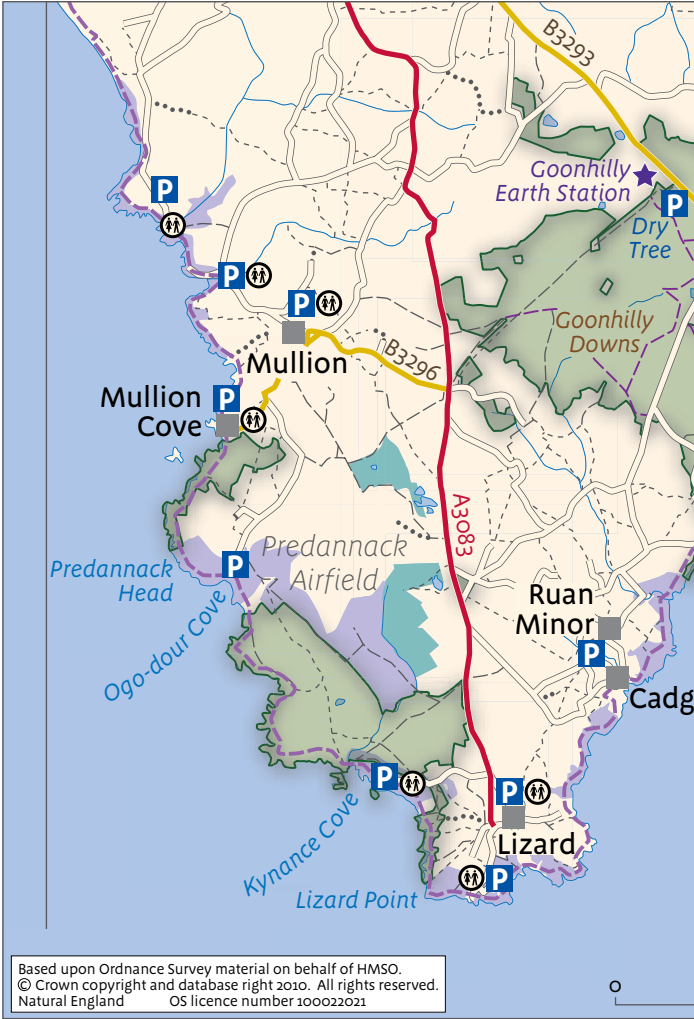
By rail: the nearest station is in Falmouth.

By bus: a bus service runs from Helston to Lizard village and St Keverne.

On foot: much of the coastline of The Lizard peninsula can be accessed on foot via the South West Coast Path.



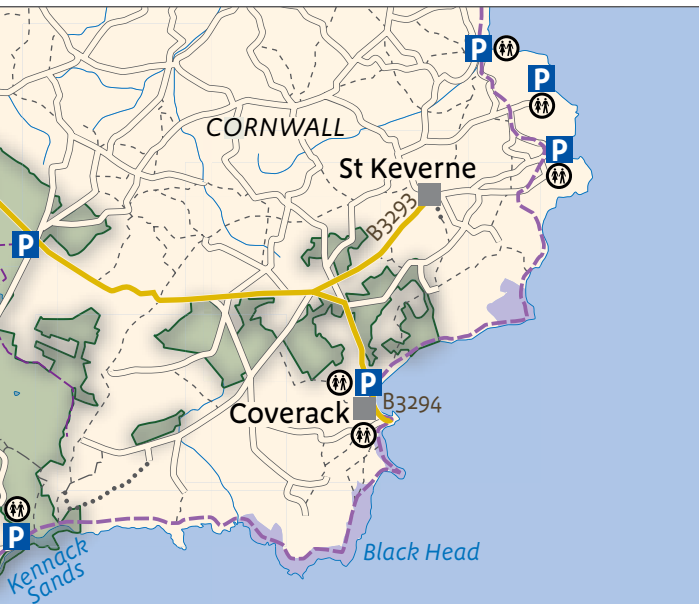
Birds foot trefoil and thrift



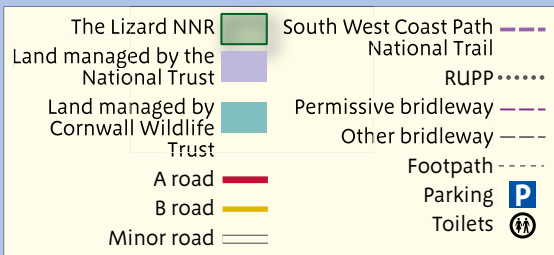
The map highlights the more spectacular and accessible paths.

Parking areas are indicated on the map with links to paths.

The Dry Tree area on Goonhilly Downs has parking, a 1 km path, and access to a network of paths and bridleways.



with



parts of the reserve.

and bridleways.

level surfaced path with self guided trail and access

Please follow the Countryside Code

- Be safe, plan ahead and follow any signs.
- Leave gates and property as you find them.
- Protect plants and animals and take your litter home.
- Keep dogs under close control.
- Consider other people.

For further information please contact the NNR team:

The Lizard National Nature Reserve
Higher Bochym Rural Workshops
Cury Cross Lanes
Helston, TR12 7AZ
Tel: 01326 240808

Front cover image: Vellan Head, west coast of The Lizard
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Natural England is here to conserve and enhance the natural environment, for its intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of people and the economic prosperity it brings.

Catalogue Code: NE281

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Printed on stock comprising 75% recycled fibre.

www.naturalengland.org.uk

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