

Dunston Staiths and Saltmarsh Garden Wildlife Walk

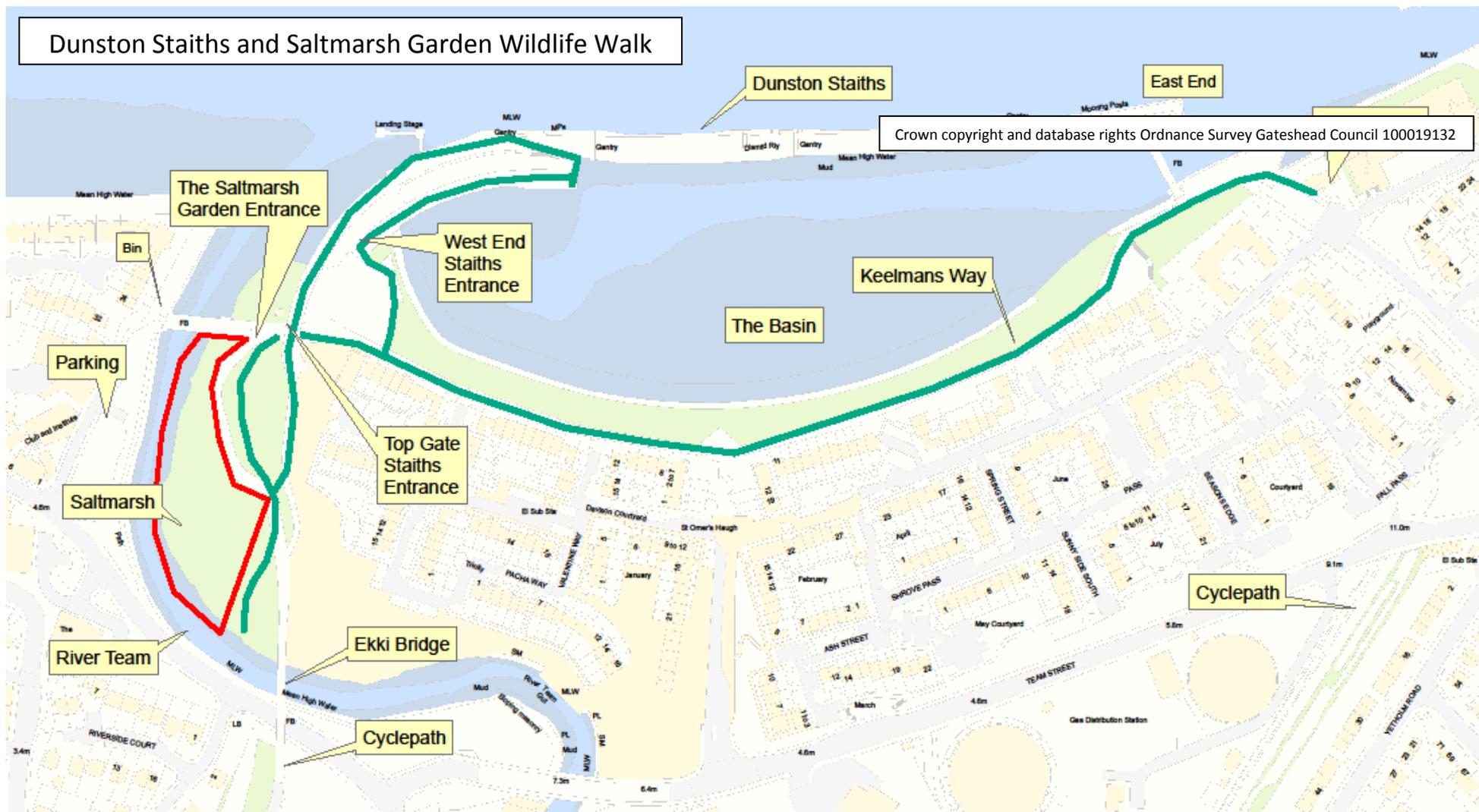


A very easy 1 km walk from the Staiths Café to the
Saltmarsh Garden and back

The Saltmarsh Project is a 3 year project to involve people in learning about and caring for the wildlife around Dunston Staiths and the Saltmarsh Garden.

Look out for a programme of events on Gateshead Council's web page
search for

'The Saltmarsh Garden Gateshead'



Starting Point at the Staiths Café: Walk down the steps or ramp onto the Keelman's Way Path and turn L and along the path. Before the age of steam the **Keelman** were a hardy bunch of men, 'Half miner, half sailor' that transported coal in little keel boats along the Tyne. **The Keelman's Way** is a 14 mile recreational path from Wylam to Bill Quay.

Dunston Staiths before us is a remarkable reminder of our significant industrial heritage. Steam engines carrying coal from the Durham Coalfield ran onto Dunston Staiths where coal was tipped into waiting ships, or Colliers, to be transported around Britain and beyond. Once a tiny village,

the 5.5million tonnes of coal that was transported from the Staiths every year made Dunston one of most important ports in the country. *Access onto the Staiths is currently from the West End only during the opening days (Wed, Sat and Sun) in summer.*

The **mudflats** in this 'basin' are protected as a Local Wildlife Site because of their importance as a source of food for the overwintering birds, **wildfowl and waders**, that spend winter here. The river Tyne water flows behind the Staiths and because the water is slowed down by the structure - mud is

dropped behind it. This mud builds up over time. In the days when coal was loaded onto ships from the Staiths the mud had to be cleaned out or 'dredged' to allow the ships to move. If we did this today it would be very damaging for wildlife.

In winter look out for redshank, curlew, oystercatcher and teal. In summer look out for birds such as shelduck and cormorants. *At the end of the Basin turn R onto the Staiths if open and onto the structure.* The wooden wall with holes cut into it is a bird screen to view animals when the Staiths is closed. *You can walk up the steps and turn L and along the Staiths and out of the top gate into the Saltmarsh Garden.*

The Saltmarsh Garden gets its name from the tiny fragment of saltmarsh habitat that was found growing here at the time of the Garden Festival in 1990. The site has been closed between then and the reopening in 2015.

The Saltmarsh Garden contains the main area of this type of habitat remaining in Gateshead and is situated on the lowest section of the River Team where it flows out into the Tyne. Over 12 miles from the sea, the existence of a sea-salty saltmarsh habitat here is remarkable and indicates the power and extent of tides on the River Tyne. PLEASE DO NOT ENTER THE MUDFLATS OR ALLOW YOUR DOG TO RUN IN THE WILDLIFE AREA SHOWN IN RED ON THE MAP.

The site has been designated as a Local Wildlife Site and the habitat is representative of 'upper' saltmarsh habitat. Species of note include sea aster and sea clubrush, which is a scarce plant in the old County Durham area. The woodland trees and plants you see growing here were all planted at the time of the Garden Festival. The reedbed was also planted then now has to be controlled to stop it taking over the rare saltmarsh habitat.

The River Team is known locally as the Gut. Once one of the most polluted rivers in England it is now much cleaner and supports species such as mute swan, grey heron and even kingfisher. The name of the River comes from an ancient celtic name similar to the Thames which means 'Black Water'.

Turn right onto a wide path then right again on the Keelman's Way returning to the Café. Before leaving the Saltmarsh Garden you can also make a short detour down a path to the River Team viewing platform shown on the map.

For more information on the Saltmarsh Garden and volunteering contact Clare Ross - clareross@gateshead.gov.uk