Every walk tells a different story; beneath your feet are thousands of legends and myths and tales of people and creatures who, just like you, have walked alongside this precious landscape. This bog has been holding secrets and stories for millennia… come with me and explore...

I am Nixie, the wild water spirit of all of the plants and animals that have ever lived here since the end of the ice age. With precious rainfall, I can be the keeper of secrets and stories for ever. And as the wheel of the seasons slowly turns, I will reveal some of these, but only those who REALLY watch will see them.

I began as a huge lake, formed from melted glaciers nearly 10 thousand years ago. I have carefully collected and stored away the whispers of every piece of nature's jigsaw since then, woven together into a great dome of soft, pickled, organic brown. People call this PEAT, but careful travellers will take time to know what I really am.

Hidden beneath my skin of bog moss there might be antlers of giant elk that once roamed the land, aurochs horns, swords and even bog bodies! I cannot show you all of these... of course some secrets must be kept quietly forever.

Within these building blocks of sphagnum moss, sedges and wildflowers my stories are stitched together.

I talk with creatures of folklore in the Grove of Pine Trees, and together we decide on what will be revealed to travellers, like you. In spring, water nymphs and kelpies speak softly to the damselflies and in autumn the Oakmen whisper to the berries and mushrooms to wake up.

Jenny Greenteeth, the bog witch, watches on quietly; her green, weed-ridden hair and sharp, pointy teeth hidden just below the water's edge.

Those who disrespect the bog or leave litter might be tricked by the Will-o'-the-Wisps and get lost amongst the marshes and sinking pools! But we also bestow great blessings and luck upon those who treat our bog with respect.





As winter gives way to spring, the Green Man unfurls his long mossy fingers and I begin to awaken. Spring is the time of renewal, when the light returns after the dark, colder months. The animals and plants celebrate the blossoming of flowers and the greening of the earth, and one by one the little creatures begin to wake up.

I gently persuade the lizards to sunbathe on the boardwalks... look for their silky amber and green bodies and beautiful ebony-black eyes peering up at you. They will let you get very close to them if you are quiet. I nudge the adders out of their winter dens to warm up in the spring sunshine; you might spot one curled quietly in the heather but they are hard to spot, as their markings camouflage them perfectly.

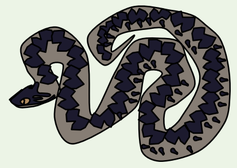


Bolton Fell hasn't always looked like it does today. When the glaciers melted after the last Ice Age, this area was a huge deep lake! Stone-aged people lived in shelters on the bog edge, hunting for berries and meat and using plants and turfs for shelter. Since medieval times people living locally had a 'stint' of bog to cut with a peat spade, drying their peat in the sun then using it for fuel for cooking.

Skylarks begin to sing very sweetly in the big blue skies above you and the cuckoo's arrival in April marks a very special day... the start of nature's spring! The kelpies sing songs to let the frogs and toads know that it is time to spawn and the Green Men blow a warm breeze across the land that awakens the butterflies. I might send you a green hairstreak on a warm May day.

Hares box in the meadows that surround us and curlew and wheatear nest where machinery and engines once whirred. I send meadow pipits fluttering up into the sky and invite redshanks from the Solway to rest and eat here.

This is an enchanted landscape, a mysterious gateway to other worlds, where water and earth meet. Do not be surprised if you seem transformed after your visit. Afterall, people believed that peat bogs have a special power, and would sacrifice animals and even children for good weather and protection against their enemies!



A snake's winter den, where they hibernate, is called a hibernaculum!





Beautiful summer bursts into life and I am in my full glory. I call to the large heath butterflies to take wing, and to the bog cotton grass to reveal its tufty white head. Standing here in the warm breeze, white wishes darting past, swallows swooping and snipes drumming is a gift of real beauty.

I hum tunes to the chaser and hawker dragonflies and damselflies to reveal their jewelled wings, so colours of blue, azure and emerald dart across the pools. Swifts dance acrobatically in the skies, catching insects on the wing... they have travelled here from Saharan Africa.

Pond Skaters dart across the ponds, crickets and grasshoppers play their fiddles in the long grasses and warblers sing magical songs from the reeds. The land is a carpet of yellow, star-shaped bog asphodel flowers, pink bells of bog rosemary and a cloud of fluffy coltsfoot flowers.

At night, tiny sprites lay their heads on a bed of pixie-cup lichen and drink from bog moss dew and owls hoot through the moonlit trees. Lunar thorn and emperor moths come out at dusk and play with the light of the wisps in the shadows, and one day I will entrance you with the song of a mythical nightjar.



For 50 years until 2013, the peat here was used to make garden compost. So much peat was taken it was easiest to use a train! The locomotives that worked on the bog were named after the local rivers… Lyne, Gelt, Esk, Eden, Sark and Liddel. The tracks they ran on were temporary and were moved around depending on where the peat was being cut. The central woodlands were a sheltered spot where the workers often stopped for lunch. Maybe they talked with the folklore creatures too.



As summer days wane and long autumn shadows cast their spells across the land, diamond-tinted spider webs appear on dewy mornings. This is a signal to the Oakmen to ask the plants and trees to give away their gifts. Autumn is a time of harvest and now beautiful, red and deep purple berries of bog cranberry and crowberry appear, to help feed little creatures before winter.

If you walk with me in autumn, I will delight you with earthy smells, bog myrtle scents and fabulous fungus. My colours of ochre, amber and lemon are revealed in the equinox sunlight, where cloud lights dance around shadows. My fingertips are covered with sweet, sticky, red sundew plants, and morning mists blanket the cool land.

The hawker dragonflies are still awake, as too are the snuffling badgers and russet foxes who run their noses across the land. I ask the reed buntings to sing, so all is not quiet, and out of the damp earth, devil's matchstick lichen add a minty green and red surprise to passers-by.

Some say time works differently in a bog, and I can assure you it does. I am timeless, and if you listen carefully you can hear the bog workers' tools cutting the peat and the ticking of the locomotives' engines as they cool after a long day. Autumn is still and peaceful, a time for reflection; look at yours in a pool… are you getting to know me yet? There is a quietening of the land now and I can feel myself getting sleepy.



Beautiful Hawker Dragonflies are still awake!

A healthy bog is full of water. This is the only way special bog mosses and water creatures can survive. To restore a bog that has been drained dry, we block the old ditches and make sure all the rainfall stays to keep the bog wet. People once believed that, when you look at your reflection in a bog pool, you are looking into your own soul... SPOOKY!



Winter is a time to rest and renew; as hibernation begins, Father Frost covers me in a white, crisp quilt and I settle into the earth and rest within a delicious chocolate pudding of peat. My skin is clad in purple and pink heather and very little stirs above.

Roe deer quietly move across the woodlands looking for snacks, and barn owls hunt during the day. They look like beautiful ghostly white spirits swooping across my sphagnum-covered skin. I can almost feel their wing tips stroke my cheeks.

Dusky-downed pink-footed geese arrive in giant 'V' formations and along with emerald-headed teal visit my ponds to rest and feed. Herons search the edge of waterways looking for a meal; listen for their prehistoric squawks.

Hares leap in huge bounds across my back, taking the same trods each day, then lying flat and still as the marsh harriers' shadows pass above. The beautiful jet-black ravens watch on and croak to the marsh witches... they are always watching.

Some ponds are frozen now, and shapes and patterns form across their surface. I paint pictures of the creatures that live here for you to see. Cattail reeds poke up into the horizon, their fluffy seed heads swaying in the breeze. Lapwings still talk to me with their pee-wit calls.

I am in a deep limbo... frozen in time.



It has been many years since the marsh workers downed their tools and the huge mechanical beasts retired to their sheds. I shared with them what I could and we spent many seasons together but it is time for me to rest, recover and help our planet, as a new dawn arrives.

As the sounds quieten and the machinery fades, new sounds will appear; those of curlew calls, skylarks singing and children's laughter. Buzzing insects on a warm summer's day will hum to you, grasshoppers will chirp for you and in winter, geese will honk from the big, blue, wide-open skies above.

My bed is called 'black gold' for a reason. I am precious and I have a heart and a soul just like you. I want you to watch carefully to see what magic lies in the pools and which little creatures are hiding in the heather, and please remember to run with joy when they sing to you.

Crouch down low like a wild child and see what mysteries are hiding in the green. Smell the scents and listen to the heartbeat of the earth. It is easy to care about something you know and love.

You have walked with me and now you will be a part of the next chapter in this story.

You too are a storyteller...

Healthy peat bogs are natural carbon capture factories! Like all plants, bog mosses capture carbon from the atmosphere, using it to make leaves, stems and tissues. As long as the bog is wet, when the mosses die they are pickled underwater, forming new carbon-rich peat that is locked safely away from the air. Wet, healthy, wildlife-rich bogs will cope better with potential climate change, so let's all help to look after them...





Find out more:
www.solwaycoast-nl.org.uk

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www.taletrails.co.uk

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Parking There is a small, free parking area on the left as you enter the track to the reserve. Please do not park beyond the barriers, as the area is now used by many nesting birds. The boardwalk trail and toilet can be found 500m from the parking area.

How to get there Bolton Fell Moss is located 12 miles north-east of Carlisle. Leave the A7 north of Carlisle at Blackford and continue past Kirklinton on unnamed roads. The nearest postcode is CA6 6JL.

Wonderful Wildlife The story highlights some of the amazing wildlife that you might spot here. Keep a look out for dragonflies, butterflies and lizards on the boardwalk in the warmer months and deer all year round. Listen out for birds such as curlews, lapwings and geese during winter.

Explorer Extra West of Carlisle you can find Fingalandring National Nature Reserve and the Solway Mosses, all of which have areas of raised bog, similar to the landscape at Bolton Fell and Watton Mosses. You can find more information about The Solway Coast National Landscape and other local National Nature Reserves at...
www.solwaycoast-nl.org.uk

Top Tips for using this trail The story is divided up into 6 parts, which represent different seasons on the moss. You can read it all in one go or read a section of the story in different places along the route. Use the map to help you find features from the story along the way. There are also a series of signs along the trail to help explain more about the moss and include some fun facts and quiz questions to think about as you explore.

Terrain A 3km circular trail along a flat boardwalk.

Trail length 3.5km to and from the car park.

Bolton Fell and Watton Mosses are lowland raised bogs, which are Europe's rarest habitat. They are also Sites of Special Scientific Interest and National Nature Reserves, so it is really important that we look after them. Since 2013 Natural England and a team of volunteers have been restoring and caring for this rare landscape, so that the wildlife that lives here can thrive.



fun local story walks
for children and the young at heart

Places to visit around
Carlisle, Cumbria

Secrets of the Seasons

A Story Walk around Bolton Fell Moss

By Anja Phoenix



Easy to follow Map & Story
Explore, spot things & search for clues on the way

Tale trails