

Robin Leiper

Southwick Wildlife Reserve



Writers' Walks



Robin Leiper

Robin Leiper is a psychologist and psychotherapist whose poetry and creative non-fiction arise out of astonishment at the world that flows around and through a life which is lived now between Galloway and Glasgow.

He returned to Scotland, where he was born, after living in Vancouver, London and South Africa.



The Habit of Hazel

The crackle of leaf-litter underfoot, the brittle
silence of a blue November gloam –a chill
in the reception from your adopted woodland.

Yours? Your habit to come here, to intrude.

The trees have no use for you who is used
to meddling, to making use of everything.

The hazel occupies its place of quiet wilderness
here in the mid-storey, tells its rambling tale,
brings the story to an end in its own good time,
has no hungering after immortality.

It is only you who wants to set things right,
straighten the edge of everything, make it last.
Fast rooted, many stemmed, the hazel's habit
is to tangle, grow awry seeking the elusive
light. Learn the lesson of its ways, go
other wise, leave things be.



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Southwick Wildlife Reserve

The Southwick Wildlife Reserve is an area managed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust, between Caulkerbush and Sandyhills on the Colvend Coast, an area of outstanding natural beauty along the Solway Firth. The reserve consists of two areas providing contrasting but equally fascinating short and easy walks. It is an area close to my heart and to my home and I have written about it on several occasions.

Entrance to the reserve is through the wooden gate on the opposite side of the road. The two areas, the woodland and the merse, have their distinctive atmosphere but both feel simultaneously remote and near human civilisation.

Walk 1: The Woodlands Walk, About 30 minutes circular on the level

Turn right through another wooden gate and take the left fork on a grassy path which proceeds to skirt the edge of the sea cliffs with fine views through trees of the Merse below and across the Solway to the Cumbrian hills. It proceeds through mixed woodlands of sessile oak with hazel, some ash, hawthorn and holly. It eventually bends around and comes back nearer the road to the start. Poems abound in the leaf litter.

Walk 2: The Merse, About 1 to 1.5 hours there and back, good path descending to level ground

Back at the entrance, take the path descending gently for 200 meters, through a beautiful sea arch (though it is now far from the coastline) in cliffs where uranium was once mined; emerge onto the merse with wide views out across the flats to the Firth. In a further 100 meters you can turn either left or right. Left takes you in quarter of a mile to an area of Holly Grass, a rare plant for which the reserve is famous and one reason it is an SSSI. Right takes you for about a kilometre to Lot's Wife, an isolated rock pinnacle, one of several so named along this coast (clearly a polygamist, a fact not mentioned in the bible) and behind it is a waterfall where a burn pours over the cliffs – named The Mare's Braids by local poet Stuart Patterson, this charming invention has made it onto some maps.