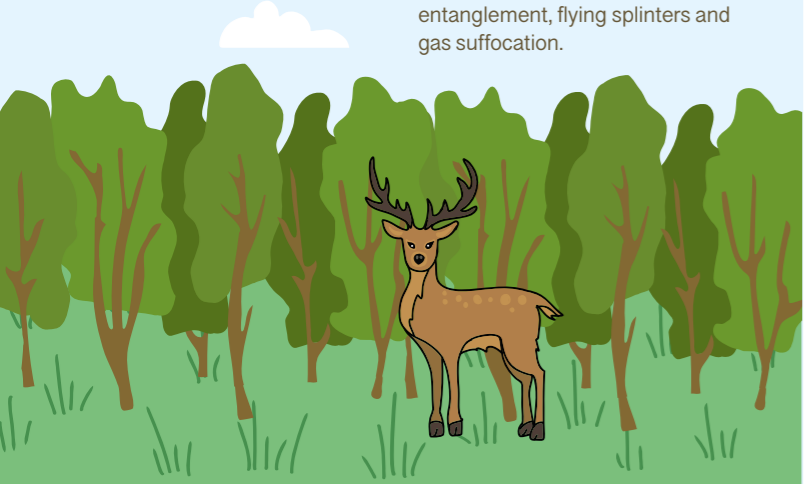


# Walkmill Colliery

1

The beautiful woodlands and heather-clad valleys at Walkmill once looked very different to what you can see today. Until the 1960s there was a huge coal pit and quarry here, with busy railway tracks, dams and hundreds of miners travelling to and from home. The earth was dark with coal and drained dry. But in the last 25 years, something magical has happened. Nature has been left to turn the land green again and the local community have come together to make Walkmill Community Woodland a fantastic place for both people and wildlife. To understand a bit more about this incredible site it helps to turn back the clock...

One hundred years ago there were two main choices of employment in the area: farm work or pit work. Workers were hired at Cockermouth and Whitehaven hiring fairs, twice a year; Whitsuntide in spring and Martinmas in November. They would often 'haggle' over their wages, being paid twice a year for farm work and weekly for pit work. Both jobs would have been really tough, especially in winter... 'Scoldered' clog feet were a real problem back then! Although farming accidents did happen it was in the mines where most casualties occurred; accident records include lowering cage slips, runaway coal tubs, falling rocks, rope entanglement, flying splinters and gas suffocation.



# Folklore above and below

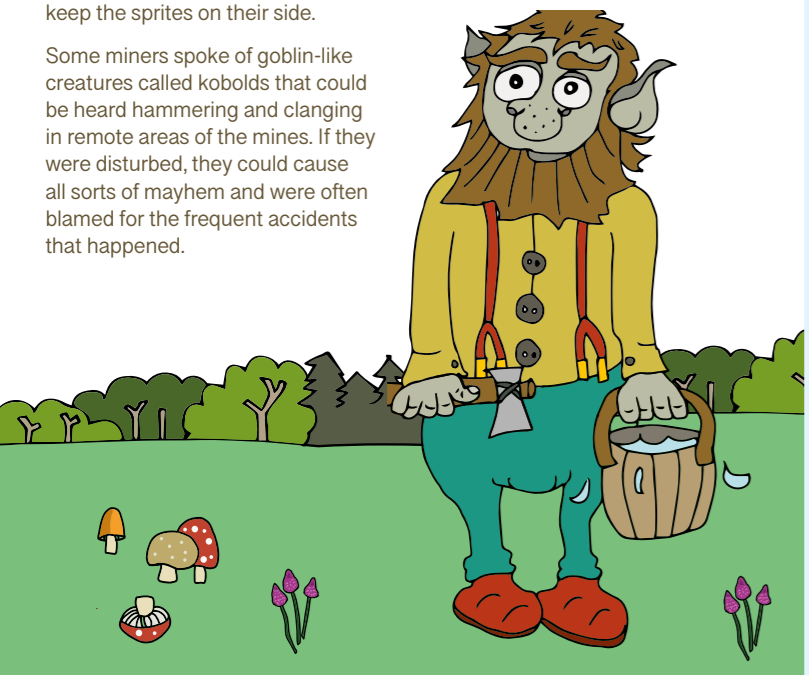
4

It seems perfectly natural that dark and dangerous places like mines should be surrounded by superstition and folklore. Victorian miners believed that strange, pale, long-fingered sprites lived deep underground, mimicking the sounds of miners knocking on the walls. They could warn miners of an imminent roof collapse or rockfall but they did not like swearing or whistling! In fact some miners left crumbs from their packed lunches to keep the sprites on their side.

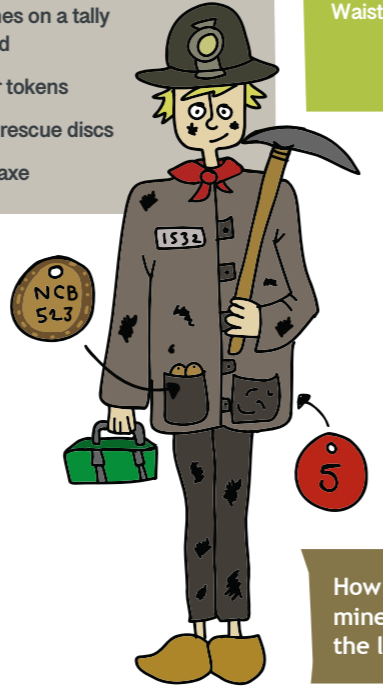
If you believe in folklore you might want to watch out for kelpies around the marshes, nixies in the ponds and stray sods in grassy areas. They all have tricky ways of confusing explorers like yourselves. Everyone knows where the elves and fairies live... deep in the woodlands where no humans can disturb them.

Here's a helpful guide to Walkmill's mythical side...

Some miners spoke of goblin-like creatures called kobolds that could be heard hammering and clanging in remote areas of the mines. If they were disturbed, they could cause all sorts of mayhem and were often blamed for the frequent accidents that happened.



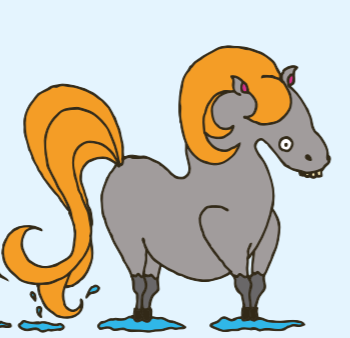
- Coal Miner age 16**
- Miner's hat and lamp with a tally number to check who was underground
- Neckerchief to stop coal dust
- Thick shirt and jacket
- Lunch in a bait box
- Names on a tally board
- Beer tokens
- Red rescue discs
- Pickaxe



- Farm worker age 45**
- Clogs and leggings for ploughing
- Clay pipe with tobacco from America
- Flat cap
- Reaping hook or sickle for grain harvest
- Waistcoat



How do you think farm and mine work has changed in the last hundred years?



**Kelpies** are water spirits that take the shape of a horse, with a dripping mane and tail. They take great delight in enticing people to stroke them, then dive into the marshy waters forever!!



**Nixies** are guardians of ponds and lakes. They float near the surface of the water and are green with frog-like legs. They love to play wooden instruments made from reeds and are very friendly.



**Elves** are the hidden people of the forest. They love singing and dancing, and some people say that each tree has a different spirit inside it. Fairies also live around trees. Watch out for small flickering lights and mushrooms that grow in a circle, both signs that they are close by.



**Stray sods** are mythical creatures that live inside tall, enchanted clumps of grass. If you stand on one you are bound to lose your way and feel very confused. Wearing your jacket inside out prevents this!

Clue: Look for signs of mythical creatures near The Giant Spruce!

5

# The Wildlife of Walkmill Community Woodland

2

These woodlands and valleys are a perfect place for wildlife to call home. Although most of the trees are only around 25 years old, the wildlife is thriving here and amazingly most creatures are extremely friendly. It's possible to get really close to deer, herons, red squirrels and all sorts of birds... as long as you are quiet and calm.

If you walk here at dusk you might spot Natterer's and pipistrelle bats and tawny owls. Smaller birds include grasshopper warblers, lapwing, kestrels, buzzards and long-tailed tits.

Around the pond you can see dragonflies, damselflies, frogs, toads, the friendly heron and occasionally newts.

In summer you can spot some amazing reptiles like adders, grass snakes, slow worms and lizards with the great scientific name Zootoca vivipara, which means a lizard that gives birth to live young. Check out your map to see where they hang out.



**DANGER: curly water weed!!** This is an invasive species that can really harm our ponds and waterways. Please don't dip in the pond, as it can spread the weed to other places.

6

# Over the last hundred years Walkmill has changed drastically.

During the Second World War workers would get up at 4am, cycle up the hill to work a full day in the pits, then practise manoeuvres as part of the Home Guard in the evening. They would learn how to navigate by the stars, protect the lighthouses, and keep supplies of milk and vegetables distributed to the local community... as well as looking after their children and elderly relatives! The community had to be really strong and work together when times were tough.

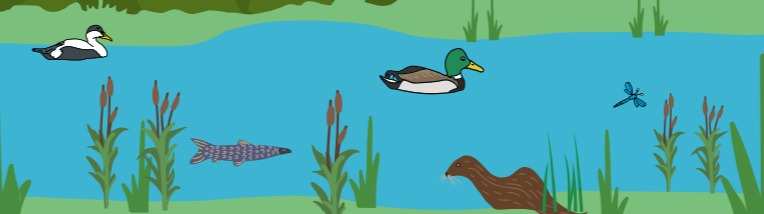
started to come back. People helped out by planting more trees and then volunteers from the community began to breathe new life into the woodlands. The sound of laughter, lapwing calls and squirrels chattering filled Walkmill again and soon the deer would return too.

Now it's time to think about the waterways! Rivers and woodlands make a great team, but only when they can interact naturally. The little beck needs to be re-wiggled so lazy pools and faster flows can form, and then we will see the fish return and hopefully an otter or two as well!

Twenty years later the pits closed at Walkmill and the land fell quiet. It rested a while, crumbled a little and fell into a long, deep sleep. For ten years the land was barren and lifeless but then there were different whisperings from within the earth. Little seedlings began to take root, rushes, mosses and willow trees covered the valleys in a carpet of green and the wildlife

Walkmill Community Woodland really is a fantastic place for people and wildlife, so let's look after it and cherish it and give what we can, when we can. A walk in the woods is good for everyone.

Please get in touch with West Cumbria Rivers Trust to find out how you can get involved. Visit [www.westcumbriarivertrust.org](http://www.westcumbriarivertrust.org) to find out more.

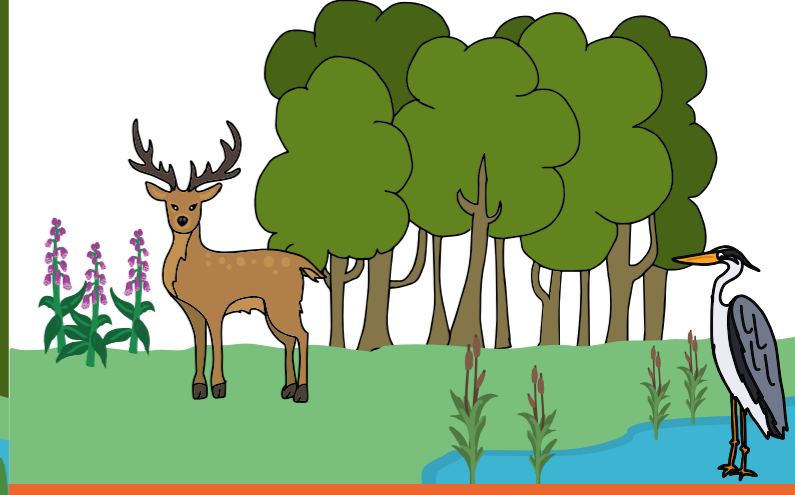


**fun local story walks**  
for children and the young at heart

**Walks around Cumbria**

# Walkmill Community Woodland

A Story Walk Through Time  
By Anja Phoenix



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

**Tale trails**

**The bit for grown ups....**

**Directions and Parking**  
There is a small car park just 1km south-east of Moresby Parks. Heading south out of the village, turn left on a minor road signposted to Frizington. Follow this road for 0.6km, before you reach Walkmill Bridge turn left into the car park, which is right by the road. The West Cumbria Rivers Trust in partnership with Moresby Parish Council and the Walkmill Activity Group. Find out more at [www.westcumbriarivertrust.org](http://www.westcumbriarivertrust.org)

**Trail Length**  
There are a variety of paths and trails to follow at Walkmill. Expect to walk 2-3km to fully explore the site. Please see the map for route options.

**Trail Safety Information!**  
This site is being developed over time to improve visitor experience. Bridges, boardwalks and paths are being updated, so please take care on slippery and uneven surfaces. The main trails are well surfaced but smaller pathways may be deep water, fast-flowing becks that can muddy in parts. After rain there may be flood and boggy areas. Wellies are advised when exploring off the main tracks.

**Extra Explorations**  
The nearby Moresby Church and Roman fort are fantastic heritage sites in the area. There are plenty of beaches including Parton and St Bees. Whitehaven has a super harbour, where you will also find The Beacon Museum.

This trail has been developed with Copeland Borough Council and The Outdoor Partnership as part of the Levelling Up programme.  
Published by Tale Trails [www.taletrails.co.uk](http://www.taletrails.co.uk)  
Illustrations and Design by Custard Graphic Design  
[www.custard-graphic-design.co.uk](http://www.custard-graphic-design.co.uk)  
Copyright © Copeland Borough Council 2023