



ELEMENTS OF THE NORTH NORFOLK COAST

INTRODUCTION

The only thing constant on this coast is change. Tides sweep in and out over the huge open sands of Holkham bay. They swirl up and down sinuously-winding muddy channels at Morston, and ooze out again leaving glistening mud for beaks to probe and geese to leave their footprints in. Waves breathe in and out, sighing against Cley shingle and displacing seals from their slumbers on Blakeney sand bars. Storms sweep in off the North Sea and gnaw away at Weybourne and Runton cliffs, changing geography in a night.

This play of light and tide, wind and wave, changes not just daily but quite literally from moment to moment. You can never walk the same beach twice, part of the magic that makes this coast so special. The coast responds to

many rhythms: twice daily tides, the monthly lunar cycles of springs and neaps, and the changing seasons. These bring a different kind of tide – tides of birds which ebb and flow across continents making North Norfolk their international meeting place. Autumn geese in skeins fill skies with their sound, spring swallows twist and turn over reedbed and marsh before vanishing inland over sea walls with an energy which belies their 6000 mile journey to reach our shore.

There are rhythms which are so beyond our human time scales that to us they remain largely hidden, though their reality is written in coastal geography.

The tides of climate change once brought tropical seas to cover the land here, allowing

the chalk which underlies this coast to form. During the Ice Age great glacial tides of ice deposited the sands, gravels and flints that form the soft cliffs of Weybourne to Cromer and Norfolk's hill country, the Cromer Ridge.

The North Norfolk coastline is loved by many people – people who live and work along this coast, people who travel many hundreds of miles to birdwatch here and the thousands who holiday here. This is a book for anyone who has a relationship with this unique area, a celebration of just some of its qualities, and a quirky but hopefully fascinating look at its wildlife, history and villages. The coast will continue to change but, with the care of all who visit, its beauty and magic will remain.



Opposite: Dawn at Morston creek. Above: Pink-footed geese at sunset – Brancaster.