



### By Anja Phoenix

# The Secret of the Sea



the young at heart for children and

the Irish Sea trail through A family story

### The bit for grown ups...

This Tale Trail explores the secrets of the Irish Sea. Out there... somewhere below the surface of the sea... lies a whole host of weird and wonderful wildlife and landscapes. Use the map to guide you through the story around the Irish Sea and spot the characters and different locations along the way.

Marvellous mud Our seascape may appear to be a blank vista – broken only by towering wind turbines and passing ships – but beneath the waves, vast muddy landscapes stretch out across the Irish Sea. Deep muddy plains are rich in nutrients, supporting an array of creatures from angular crabs to delicate burrowing anemones and strange spoon worms. On or above the mud are fish like plaice, sole, cod and whiting, which support seabirds, whales, dolphins and sharks: the circle of life in full spin.

The trouble with mud Our Irish Sea mud acts as a valuable fishing ground for Dublin Bay prawns (aka scampi or langoustine). Trawling is causing habitat damage to sensitive muddy habitats – deep scars are left in the mud. Recovery could take decades. This is not only bad news for our marine wildlife, but also the future of our coastal heritage and fishing communities. Scientific studies around the world show that protecting sensitive marine areas actually benefits fisheries, marine habitats and wildlife.



### Find out more at: www.taletrails.co.uk www.irishsea.org

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Missing links We have an opportunity to turn the future for the Irish Sea around. Slowly the UK is getting a network of Marine Protected Areas to save our precious marine life. But one of the big 'missing links' is the Irish Sea. Four important muddy areas, Mud Hole, Slieve Na Griddle, South Rigg and West of Walney (W.O.W) were proposed for protection in 2012. However, to date only W.O.W has been designated. Without these missing links we will be unable to complete the network of protected areas and safeguard our marine wildlife for the future.

Get involved So why not spread the love of mud and tell your friends about the variety of marine life hidden in the depths of the Irish Sea

- Go mad and get muddy support our campaign by tweeting us @LivingSeasNW with pictures of you and your friends/family getting muddy – **#MarineMudness**
- Become a Friend of muddy Marine Conservation Zones via www.irishsea.org/ muddyMCZfriends
- Write to your local MP telling them how much you love the Irish Sea and how you want to see its wildlife protected.



Take care This map is a fictional representation of the Irish Sea and its surrounding coasts. This is NOT a real walk and is NOT to scale. When exploring coastal areas please take care to stick to designated footpaths. Be aware of fast-rising tides, quicksand and mud and unstable cliffs.

## The Secret of the Sea

I heard an old sailor once say that "every ocean has a secret and every sea has a story"... well, the Irish Sea holds many, as do the creatures that live there and here Mylo LOVES mudlarking around! is the tale of one...

Brittle stars are amazing fivelegged creatures, covered in tiny spines.

They are sometimes called sea serpents. They catch plankton and gobble it down with a five-jawed mouth They love hanging out together in huge gangs and when brittle stars move they loo like they are rowing a boat!

With that Manannán mac Lir vanished and

once more Mylo and Brit were alone in the

vast sea. Above them, the water's surface was

turning a fiery orange colour which meant that

the day was coming to an end. They travelled

further west towards the setting sun and soon

came across a slowly moving creature with huge jaws and a wide-open mouth coming

*"At 10 metres long and a mere 7 tonnes, You can't call me puny,* 

*"I'm a gentle giant – just look within."* 

"Phew!" shouted Brit. "We weren't ready to

become shark bait! Can you tell us where we

can find Liban the mermaid? We are on our

The beautiful, bold basking shark pointed his

to their left, opened his enormous jaws and carried on filtering for plankton in the pearly blue waters.

fin towards the deep trench that dropped away

My secret's out... I filter plankton!"

way to discover the Secret of the Sea."

just look at my guns!

great 1 metre wide,

*"My mouth is a whopping* 

But my teeth are quite tiny, just look right inside.

their way.

stands for West of Walney. It's an area of sandy seabed and marine mud off the coast of Cumbria. It's near the wind turbines on your map; sea pens are very rare now in this area and need protection.

# Not big scary teeth,

Mylo LOVES mud,

Mylo is a sea pen!

gloopy kind for her beautifying face packs).

Brit is a brittle star!

adventure today?"

too if you ask me!"

The gloopy, sticky kind,

The splashy, sandy kind,

His friend Brit, however, is a little more refined. Being a

very cosmopolitan, leggy, delicate kind of sea creature she

prefers a more sandy seabed (but occasionally uses the

"Morning, Brit!" Mylo shouted across the sea bed to Brit,

who was relaxing under the shade of a skate. "Fancy an

Brit calmly removed her sunglasses and looked out across

the silky sands of W.O.W. "Why on earth would I want to

leave W.O.W., Mylo? It's so beautiful here... vast sandy

Anyway I would miss the sea urchins and grey seals and

their funny tales. Probably a bit muddy and scary out there

plains, a whole city of brittle stars, ahhhh it's perfect.

The slosh it at your friends kind,

The smear it on your cheeks kind,



Mylo and Brit could see the bottom of the trench was at least 150 metres deep and seemed very dark, but Mylo had his torch to light the way down through the rocky reefs. Sitting amongst a forest of pink and orange colours, amongst delicate sea pens, sponges and urchins was a beautiful mermaid.

"I am Liban, an Irish sea maid, Give me your jewels and with you I'll trade

*"To me and the sea you must* swear your devotion And in exchange I will give you a potion.

*"When you drink this brew you will suddenly find,* You can talk with the wise and wonderful kind.

"Search though South Rigg's nooks and crannies, And there you will find quahog grandpas and grannies.

"These ancient clams have a secret to tell, So give me your gem stones and drink from this shell."



out why?

Mylo looked thoughtful... "But Brit, mud is AMAZING and anyway didn't you always say you wanted to know the Secret of the Sea? I bet the wise old quahogs of South Rigg know

Brit looked astounded. "Mylo, South Rigg is over 100 miles from here, that's too far."

"But Brit, do you remember what Old Nana Pen used to say... 'There's a whole ocean of secrets out there – you just need to go and discover them.' Well if I tell you my secret will you come with me? Just to the edge of

#### "It's a deal!" said Brit.

the secret!'

W.O.W.?"

Mylo took a deep breath and blurted out his secret. "I can glow bright, luminous green if you stroke me, and I'm a jellyfish cousin, which means I could give you a little sting if I wanted!" "Wow," said Brit. "I'd better stay on the right side of you then!"

"Do you have a secret, Brit?" asked Mylo curiously. Brit paused and looked a bit embarrassed. "Well... truth be told, I can push my stomach out of my mouth when I need to and I can drop an arm too, but don't you DARE tell anyone." Then she covered her blushing face with her handbag. "Yuk!" said Mylo. "That's cooooool."

At the edge of W.O.W. Mylo and Brit spotted a strange green sausage-shaped creature lying in the silty mud. She was anchored in place

and had a strange spoon-like tongue and didn't look like she was going anywhere fast. "Excuse me," asked Mylo. "We want to discover the Secret of the Sea and wondered which way to go next?" The strange creature slowly opened her mouth and a tongue as long as her body gradually came out!

*"I may look like a sausage* but I'm a spoon worm you see, Now come closer, my friends, and listen to me.

"Go north past the mountains to a cave near St Bees, At a place called 'Mud Hole' seek a burrowing anemone

*"Her spindly tentacles will point the way,"* To the prawns they call 'scampi' of Dublin Bay."

Mylo and Brit held tentacles and bravely headed north.

Mud Hole was a deeper and darker place than W.O.W. but Milo was a clever sea pen as he had remeberd to bring his torch to light the way The seabed was covered with tiny little volcano domes of mud, moulded into shape by hundreds of worms; what a strange and magical place this was! Soon they spotted two little pink claws and a pair of beautiful ebony eyes poking out of the

Yes it's true; brittle stars can perform these two gruesome deeds! Can you work

Mylo and Brit sipped the potion and floated down further into the rocky reefs of South Rigg. As they moved through rocky crevices between the reefs, particles of marine mud and sand glistened brightly in the waters behind them. They could hear whispers and watery words from all around and when they stopped, the muddy sand settled and the waters cleared, revealing a large and ancient quahog clam nestled into the seabed.

"My name is Canute, a wise old clam of the sea, And this secret you seek... well, you hold the key. The seabed you see, precious to the beholder, Is this you discover as you get gradually older.

"Tis the sea bed itself that holds secrets of past, A precious manuscript that can only last If we protect it and cherish it, creatures and all, And don't take too much and don't over trawl!

"A seabed holds fragments of memories and tales, Bygone shipwrecks, secrets and the whispers of whales. Stories, rare creatures and all things good Lie deep in the heart of this glorious mud.

"Commotion in the ocean as you realise your surprise, The truth behind your secret is right before your eyes! So please spread your story and share this news, As the future you see lies in everyone's shoes."



The beautiful shell of the quahog.

ribes; these precious shells are a beautiful purple-blue colour. Curious quahogs feed using a siphon-like tongue and can live for *an astounding 500 years!* 

Lamp shells are a type of brachiopod

(from Ancient Greek words meaning "arm" and "foot"). They are called 'lamp shells' because they look a bit like Roman oil lamps.



who travelled over both land and waves with his horse Enbarr ('imagination'). He is said to have rotected the Isle of Man with a magical cloak of invisibility, conjuring up mists and illusions of warriors to warn off Viking invaders.

"Welcome to Mud Hole. I'm a Dublin Bay prawn, A little fish told me you've been walking since dawn.

"For this part of your journey you must be brave, Collect a shiny gem stone from St Bega's sea cave.

"The stone will protect you as you cross Solway Firth, Past the great Solway worm and its gigantic girth.

"Dolphins and turtles will guide the way, To Manannán mac Lir through his cloak of grey."

Brit wriggled and jiggled and Mylo fanned his way west across the open sea, both clutching their shiny gem stones for protection. The clicks of the dolphins and porpoises helped guide them westwards and the flippers and fins of the leatherback turtles and sunfish pointed the way to the Isle of Man through Manannán mac Lir's cloak of grey.

### Dublin Bay prawns...

omely crustaceans that rarely trave tunnel into the sandy mud and emerge at night to feast on little fish an worms. These muddy places and all the creatures found there are under the creatures found there are under threa from intensive trawling and dredging.



guess why?

As dawn broke, shafts of sunlight filtered through the reefs and corals, revealing an aquatic wonderland. A small, round creature covered in fine yellow hairs spoke softly to them.

*"I'm a humble heart urchin,"* my name is Spud, I can see you're good souls and both truly love mud.

*"Please follow me now past the giant McCool,* To Slieve Na Griddle and the Pisces Reef pool."

The humble heart urchin guided Mylo and Brit through the deep labyrinth of lava-cooled reefs and hidden crevices of Slieve Na Griddle and the Pisces Reef. Ancient rocky towers soared above them, full of mysterious creatures: colonies of sea squirts in squishy tunics above and hundreds of brittle stars 'mud-bathing' below!

The Secrets of the Sea were all around them but they hoped the Irish giant McCool was not!

As they reached the edge of Slieve Na Griddle the humble heart urchin waved Mylo and Brit goodbye and sunk gently back into the sea bed. They knew that W.O.W. lay east of here across the open sea.



"Who are these creatures who come to my land? Through my cloak of grey you have found my hand.

"Prove to me now you are brave as can be, Venture forth to the basking shark alone in the sea.

"Only he knows the way to Liban the sea born, A mermaid of wisdom to the oceans sworn.

"Pass the Mull of Galloway and its lighthouse tall, To a deep sea trench and 82-fathom fall."





Listening to the cries of gannets and gulls and the barks of seals that ushered them home, they made their journey past wave-battered cliffs and sunken shipwrecks. Looking skyward through the white crests of the waves Mylo wondered whether the creatures who lived above the surface of the sea knew of its secrets too. "Maybe one day they will," he thought.

That night, as they snuggled down into the soft, homely, muddy plains of W.O.W. the two friends held tentacles and dreamt of the true wonder that was all around them and hopefully always would be... the great Secret of the Sea.



# The Secret of the Sea





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