Coastal Features

The United Kingdom is a series of islands that are surrounded by sea. Where the land meets the sea is called the coast. No one living in the UK is more than 80 miles away from the seashore at any time. The UK has just over 11,000 miles of coastline, many of it has been chosen as 'Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty' (AONB), which means it is a precious area and is protected from damage. The coast is a haven for wildlife, including birds, mammals, minibeasts, fish and plants.

Some of the features that occur on the coastline are caves, arches, stacks, beaches and estuaries.

Wildlife

The UK coastline is home to many different species of animals and plants. Birds are a common sight at the coast, feeding on fish from the sea and nesting high up on the cliffs away from humans and other predators. In fact, 80% of the world's gannets breed on the UK coastline! In many places around the UK, you can spot different species of birds including different gulls, puffins and herrings.

The UK has a long coastline.

From the shoreline you can also spot different mammals, such as seals and porpoise. On rare occasions, dolphins can be spotted too! You may see seals on the rocky shores as well as out at sea. There are lots of different minibeasts located along the shorelines of the UK. When visiting the beaches, you can spot them whilst rock pooling, which is a popular thing to do when at the seaside.

You may see seals and other mammals on the shoreline of the UK.

Features of a Coastline

Beaches are formed when materials are moved from one place to another by the sea. The sand, mud and rock (materials) travel by the sea and is dumped in a new area. When this happens over and over again, a beach is formed.

An estuary is one of the most inhabited coastal features for plants and animals. An estuary is where a river, or more than one river, meets the sea at the coastline. Estuaries are tidal and the level of water can rise and fall because of the sea tides.

Stacks are caused by erosion.

Stacks and caves are made by the force and power of the sea. Erosion means that the sea wears away the rock, making strange shapes. The land at the coast is made from lots of different types of rock, some are harder to erode than others.
A stack is made when rock is worn away leaving a strip of harder rock in the middle. It looks strange because it is often seen just off the coastline in the sea.

Caves are formed in the same way as coastal stacks. The strong sea erodes away the softer rock leaving a hole underneath. The hole gets bigger and bigger over time making a cave.

Arches form in the rock at the coast just like caves; the difference is that the water erodes all the way through the rock to form a channel. As the tide rises and falls and the water travels through the opening at the bottom, the arch will get bigger and bigger.

Arches are a common feature of the shore.

Tourism

Tourism is the name given when lots of people visit an area to enjoy the scenery and towns or villages. Tourism is important in coastal areas, because it brings in money and provides jobs for the local people. When tourists visit a coastal area they often want to enjoy the beaches, sometimes swimming or surfing in the sea. They will spend money in cafes and buy gifts for friends and family. Most facilities on the UK coastline are open all year round, however, the most popular time for tourists to visit are during the school holidays and on weekends in the summer months.

Conservation

The main problem for the UK coastline is litter and rubbish. When rubbish is dumped or gets washed into the sea, it travels with the tides and washes up on beaches. There are many charities that organise regular 'beach cleans' on beaches that are affected. The best way to avoid unclean beaches altogether, is to make sure that rubbish is disposed of correctly. Children and adults need to be educated on what can happen when animals and plants get trapped in the rubbish that travels in our seas, so they understand why it is so important not to drop litter.