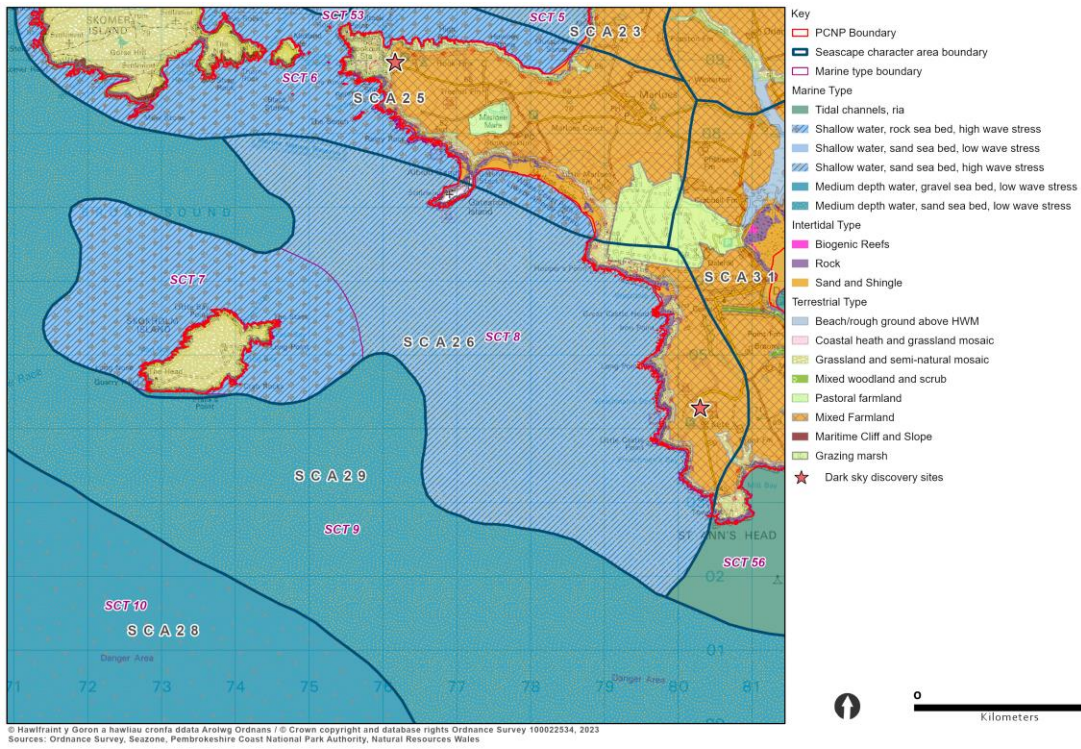


No: **26** Seascape Character Area Name: **Skokholm and Gateholm coastal waters**



SCA26:Skokholm and Gateholm coastal waters



Looking north to Skokholm (left) and St Ann's Head (right) from 2km SE of Skokholm, 3.5 km from shore



Looking east to Skokholm (left) and Marloes peninsula



Skokholm from the air (©Sid Howells)

Summary Description

This area comprises the remote island of Skokholm, the coastal island of Gateholm, and the south west facing, rocky, indented eroding coast and western half of the Dale peninsula. The near vertical bedding of sandstone produces distinctive cliffs and rock formations with cliffs reaching around 50m high. The sea has strong tidal streams and races and is often subject to strong ocean swell particularly around St Ann's Head. The Dale peninsula is an exposed plateau headland with both pasture and arable with rectilinear field pattern.

Key Characteristics

- Skokholm is a wild, remote island with a flat top and sandstone cliffs. It is an important bird sanctuary and nature conservation site.
- Rough and jagged rock exposures and high sandstone cliffs, and rocky foreshores.
- The sea is highly disturbed and exposed with many rocks and other hazards, and strong tidal streams, races and eddies.
- The sea is heavily used by sailing cruising boats and day trippers, with some sea angling and diving and occasional wildlife trips to Skokholm.
- Due to the proximity to Milford Haven there is a lighthouse on Skokholm and at St Ann's Head.
- Landcover on the western side of Dale is predominantly arable with a rectilinear field pattern. A disused airfield lies between Dale and the Marloes area.
- The Coast Path runs around the mainland cliff edge.
- The area is open and exposed and there are wide and panoramic views from many locations such as Little Castle Point and St Ann's Head on the mainland.

Physical Influences

The islands of Skokholm (49m aod) and Gateholm (37m aod) form part of the east-west striking Old Red Sandstone that makes up the red cliffs from Red Cliff to Milford Haven. Submerged and tidally exposed rocks fringe the islands. The intertidal areas are predominantly rocky shores (94%), with minor sandy coves. Wind and wave erosion act through abrasion, attrition and hydraulic action. The mainland is a very gently undulating plateau, rising to 70m AOD, contained by high cliffs to 50m. Skokholm, is flat topped. Gateholm, with craggy cliffs and rough grazing above, is a sandstone peninsula at low water.

Old Red Sandstone underlies the sea floor sediment of gravelly sand. The shallow (<30m) sea floor shelves moderately (1-10°) away from the high rocky cliffs of Skokholm, and low to moderately (<10°) away from the peninsula cliffs. Shallowly submerged and tidally exposed rocks fringe the coasts. The seas are exposed to high wave stress and tidal currents. Tidal currents set northwest and southeast. To the west of Skokholm there are fast tidal streams and tidal races (Wildgoose Race), and eddies off Gateholm either side of shallows above the east-west submarine ridge of Old Red Sandstone. The sea can suffer rough conditions, especially with wind over tide. Tidal flow is around 4 knots but can reach 6.5knots. The tidal range is ~6m.

Skokholm is a national nature reserve, an SPA, SSSI, an important bird area and is well known as a bird sanctuary with important breeding colonies of shearwater, storm petrel, auks, peregrine falcon, grey seal, chough and with rare lichens. The waters form part of the Skomer, Skokholm and the seas off Pembrokeshire SPA and the Pembrokeshire Marine SAC. The southern fringes of the Skomer Marine Conservation Zone lie on the northern edge of the area. The marine environment is rich in habitats both sub-tidal and intertidal. The island's flat plateau and coastal grassland includes pink thrift and white sea campion.

The mainland coast landcover predominates with rectilinear arable fields running close to the cliff edge. Semi-natural vegetation is found on the edges of cliffs, headlands and islands. The cliff edge and Gateholm form part of the Dale and South Marloes Coast SSSI.

Cultural influences

An island on the western sea-ways whose Norse name makes clear its connections with the Viking polity of Scandinavia, Britain and Ireland.

Skokholm Island shows traces of at least two periods of settlement - probably from the Medieval period, evident in the form of earthworks of field systems and plough ridges, and probably from the 18th century, evident in the farmhouse. There is also a modern lighthouse at the western end of the island, and a quarry.

Gateholm Island shows traces of a hut circle settlement which is now difficult to access due to separation from the nearby mainland.

Scheduled monuments include:

- PE180 (hut circle settlement): community: Marloes and St Brides (partly also in SCA 25)
- PE195 (promontory fort): community: Marloes and St Brides
- PE322 (promontory fort): community: Dale
- PE335 (fort): community: Dale
- PE536 (promontory fort): community: Dale
- PE566 (airfield): community: Marloes and St Brides (partly also in SCA 25 and SCA 31)

There are a number of wrecks with three around Skokholm and one on the mainland which indicate the potentially treacherous nature of the waters and are dangerous themselves. The Queen, Angelica and Burry on Skokholm's shores have been sighted by divers. The Queen was a wooden hulled passenger paddle steamer outward bound from Bristol to Dublin when it grounded in thick fog on Skokholm Island in 1843. The remains of the iron hulled steamship Angelica include boiler and propeller shaft. It was lost in 1895, en route from Bordeaux to Barry with a cargo of pit wood and passengers.

The Norse name for the island indicates its Viking links. Skokholm was made famous by the naturalist Ronald Lockley, who arrived in 1927 to take up a 21-year lease. Lockley was one of the first people to study the breeding biology of storm petrels, Manx shearwaters, puffins and rabbits. His rabbit research formed the basis for Richard Adams' novel *Watership Down*.

Key landmark features include Skokholm's Trinity House Lighthouse, which is visible from the south west well before St Anns Head, which has a lighthouse, towers and a coastguard lookout point.

The sea is heavily used as a coastal cruising route linking Milford with Skomer and points north across St Brides Bay and west to Ireland and the area is visited on a 'day trip' basis by both sailing and motor craft. Skokholm Island is further offshore and, consequently, does not attract as much marine traffic as its neighbour Skomer Island. Wildlife boat trips do visit Skokholm but not as regularly or as often as Skomer. Sea angling from boats is popular around Skokholm. Diving is present along the south and west coasts of Skokholm and to the north of Gateholm. There is kayak activity around Gateholm Island. Sea conditions to the west of Skokholm can be challenging at certain states of tide and wind conditions due to the Wildgoose Race.

On Skokholm Island there is a small inlet with jetty on the island to receive goods and visitors who can stay on the island controlled by the local Wildlife Trust. Westdale beach is small but popular for beach activities and especially for surfing.

Fishing in the area comprises of set nets, whelk, lobster and crab potting [especially around Skokholm] and potential for light otter trawling.

Passing ferries to Ireland from Pembroke Dock are visible as are oil tankers and other freight ships for the terminals and the power station in Milford Haven.

Aesthetic, perceptual and experiential qualities

Skokholm Island is an isolated, wild and highly exposed island in open waters. The cliffs and rock shores, islets and rocks are dramatic, red and layered. At sea, the character is dominated by the disturbed water and tidal races and the rocky shores and cliffs can feel distant. There are wide views of the mainland and Skomer to the north. There are strong sea smells and wind exposure in most places.

The peninsula hinterland is smooth and bleak with trees limited to valleys. The red sandstone cliffs dominate the west facing coast with its exposed character and the crashing noise of waves in rough seas. Westdale is the only small beach and only access.

Overall, there is a high degree of naturalness, remoteness and tranquillity in many sea edges and the islands although ships entering Milford Haven to the south and east are apparent.

Cultural benefits and services

The area contributes significantly towards leisure and recreational services in the form of wildlife watching and marine recreation, to natural heritage in the form of the unspoilt coast, marine reserve, geological and nature conservation importance, and to cultural and spiritual services in respect of the diverse history and the sense of space and interaction with wild landscapes and seascapes.

Forces for change									
Summary	Key forces for change								
	Special Qualities	Natural processes/ climate change	Visitor pressure	Marine use- commercial and fishing	Offshore energy	Development pressure	Land management changes	MOD use	
<p>Slow coastal erosion of rocky cliffs. Shoreline management plan: Do Nothing.</p> <p>Visitor activity and use of coastal path must be monitored.</p> <p>Intensification of arable farming.</p> <p>Commercial shipping movements.</p>	Coastal Splendour								
	Islands								
	Diversity of Landscape								
	Remoteness, Tranquillity and Wilderness								
	Diverse Geology								
	Richness of Habitats and Biodiversity								
	Rich Archaeology								
	Distinctive Settlement Character								
	Cultural Heritage								
	Accessing the Park								
	Space to Breathe								
	Key			Change occurring in the area affecting the selected special quality					
	Key factors to be taken into account when assessing sensitivity to change								
<p>Remote, unspoilt rural coastline and island of importance for marine and island nature conservation and geological interest.</p> <p>Historic character of the area and openness of the terrestrial landscape.</p> <p>Focal points of headlands and islands.</p> <p>Coast Path as a receptor.</p> <p>Biodiversity, historic and landscape designations.</p> <p>More intense agricultural use.</p> <p>Large scale of views.</p>									