

The talk reported on a project to study the environmental history of the Firth of Forth, from earliest times of human presence in the Mesolithic to the present day, and asked a series of questions of the audience. Anyone who would like to reply to any of these, please contact the author at christopher@smout.org.uk. The answer could come in the form of suggesting an article or a book to read, or a website to consult.

Slide 1. The Isle of May from Anstruther. Archaeology shows that great auks as well as monks once visited.

Slide 2. Gathering seaweed to fertilise the land was common from early historic times to the 1970s. This shows it happening in Pittenweem in the 1930s.

Q.1 Local authorities now remove weed from beaches when it is deemed a nuisance. What do they do with it?

Slide 3. The town arms of Crail, from about 1360. This may be the earliest representation of a herring fishing boat in Europe. Undecked, with seven men a single mast and a net waiting to be dropped, it was of a type still familiar in 1800.

Slide 4. Fishing boats in the Forth around 1860 when the Lammas Drave was at its height. It focussed on catching inshore spawning herring in August and September.

Slide 5. Steam drifters in Anstruther ca 1930, when the Winter Herrin' reached its peak. It focussed on a unique inshore winter-spawning population of herring between January and March

Q.2. Ring-netting probably finished off the Winter Herrin' before 1950. Do any herring at all breed in the Forth today?

Q.3. What demersal fish breed in the Forth today, and how high up?

Q.4. How well are sprats doing today?

Q.5. Where can I find published figures for the take of salmon in the Forth, in historic times or today?

Slide 6. Oyster fishing was big until the Victorians over-fished the stock. This is an attempt from 1734 to stop the export of young and brood oysters.

Slide 7. The oyster beds covered 50 square miles and up to 30 million were exported in a single year.

Q.7. Scallop dredging has now replaced oyster dredging. Are there studies of the environmental impact in the Firth of Forth?

Q.8. Nethrops is the only other large commercial fishery. Are there studies of its environmental impact?

Slide 8. The Forth Islands are another focus of my study. This is the Bass Rock when only about 3000 pairs of gannets had survived 19th century persecution.

Slide 10. This is the Bass today, when 48,000 pairs breed there.

Q.9 What is recommended reading read on the paradox that fish-eating birds and mammals expanded in the North Sea just as fisheries collapsed?

Slide 11. Land claim had a serious effect on estuarine habitats and economy. This is a plate from Caddell's *Story of the Forth* from 1913.

Q.10 Reclamation of the peat bogs above Stirling also had an effect as millions of tons of peat were thrown into the river and sank in the estuary. What visible evidence of this is there today?

Slide 12. The great connecting sewer for Edinburgh, completed in 1978, brought more than a century of gross pollution by raw sewage to an end.

Q.11. Why did society decide in the 1970s that gross pollution of this sort was no longer tolerable, and pay the bill to reverse it?

Slide 13. The story of the gannet, like the story of the sewer, is a triumph. The story of the spawning herrings and the oyster are disasters. Telling the environmental history might help us to understand how to get more triumphs and eliminate the disasters.