



AN EVENING AT THE WAPOKAI CULTURAL PARK



Parking

The car park at Rhossili Bay is free for NT members during the day. Non members are currently charged £5 per day (car). There is no overnight parking/camping. All profits from the car park go towards keeping the area beautiful. Please note that the toilets are owned and operated by Swansea Council. and the disabled toilets require a RADAR key

Following the Sun

THE SUNFLOWERS AT RHOSSILLI BAY

They stood in their thousands like the terracotta warriors, all facing in the same direction and like the warriors of old they appeared from a distance as identical, but closer inspection revealed that each had its own identity. They were abundant and almost omnipresent but there the similarity ends for unlike the warriors which were found below ground these are to be found above ground and they cover the hills around Rhossili Bay in South Wales, over 5,000 miles from Xian in China. They are not red with a yellow ochre tinge but bright yellow with a black centre emanating from a sea of green. They are not an uncommon

sight in Europe but here they are more of a rarity and the fields of sunflowers planted by the national trust attract visitors in their thousands

The name sunflower comes from its tendency to reposition itself to face the sun. It really is uncanny to watch them turn in unison towards its brightness. It's genus, *Helianthus*, is rooted in two Greek words — “*helios*” meaning sun and “*anthos*” meaning flower. The ancient Greek myth of Apollo and Clytie is one explanation of why sunflowers turn towards the sun. The story tells how Clytie, a nymph, adored Apollo and her love was returned but he later

fell in love with Leucothoe. Because of her jealousy, Clytie told Leucothoe's father of the relationship and he punished her by burying her alive. In his anger Apollo turned her into a flower, but her love endured and she would spend her days watching him as he moved the sun across the sky in his chariot, just like sunflowers move to face the sun.

Rhossili Bay lies at the western end of the Gower Peninsula not far from Swansea. It consists of 3 miles of golden sands flanked by an awesome iconic landscapes which includes Worms Head where seals can often be seen basking in the sunshine. It is cared for by the National Trust who have been committed to recreating old farming methods in an endeavour to transform it into a haven for animals, birds and wild flowers. It began with four rangers and eighty volunteers who faithfully recreated the 12th Century patchwork of fields on The Vile. They were responsible for 2,000 metres of new banks and hedges which had previously been removed after the Second World War in favour of modern, intensive farming methods. In 2021 there will be a quarter of a million plants!

Like everybody else we walked amongst them and like every-

body else we had to have a selfie. It is now, whilst moving amongst them, that their uniformity takes on a new perspective as each plant becomes an individual. They vary in size and shape and the number of bumble bees they attract becomes apparent. The bees are no cause for concern for they have no attraction for anything but those brilliant circles of yellow petals with their giant centres which slowly darken as their giant black seeds develop. They continue to flower throughout July and August and in recent years visitors can pick them and pay for what they pick. Then in September a 1970's combine harvester is put to work. Unlike modern harvesters it is small enough to turn in the new narrow fields. Most are harvested but some are left behind to attract birds and over the winter their seeds feed many

There is something very special about the sight of these fields of sunflowers. We seem to have a affinity with them and they make us feel happy. Plants have a habit of doing that so in the future you might be returning again to the same strip of national trust coast line as they add fields of lavender and other wild flowers.

THE MEANING OF THE WORD SUNFLOWER

Because of the myth of Clytie and Apollo, the sunflower most commonly means adoration and loyalty. However, sunflower meanings can vary across cultures.

In China, people associate sunflowers with a long life, good fortune, and vitality.

To Native American groups, sunflowers represented harvest, bounty, and provision because they provided seeds, pigment, and more.



