

A Guide to the Isle of Purbeck

Chris Jesty



A GUIDE TO
THE ISLE OF PURBECK

Chris Jesty

Illustrations by Mark Richards



Tyneham Cap from Ridgeway Hill

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Mr John Whitney for allowing me to include part of his father's poem "The Purbeck Marblers' Road", and to Robin Clark Ltd. for permission to quote an extract from "The Seal Summer".

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Uniform with this volume:
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The layout of this book is modelled on that of "A Pictorial Guide to the Lakeland Fells" by A. Wainwright.

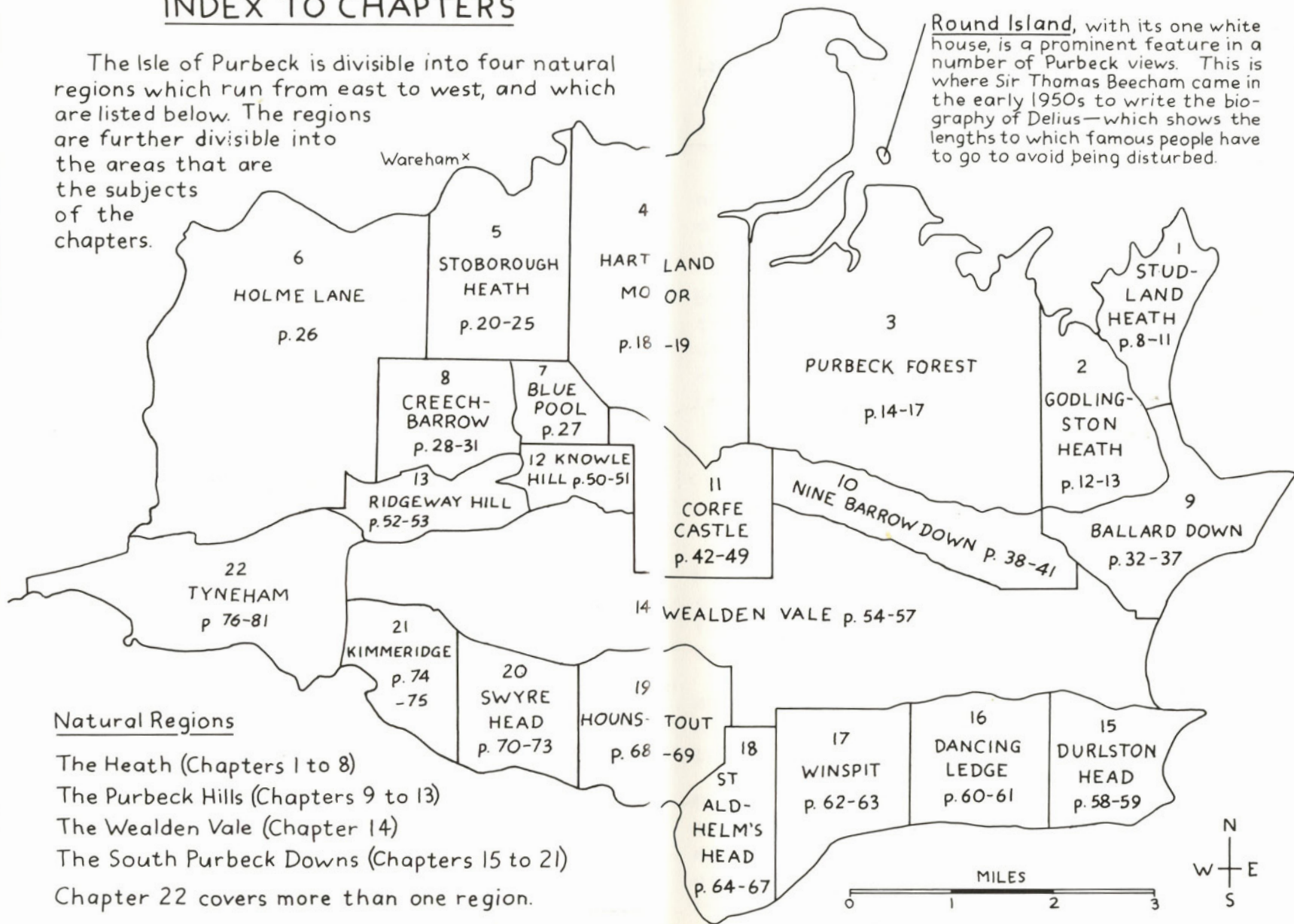
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INDEX TO CHAPTERS

The Isle of Purbeck is divisible into four natural regions which run from east to west, and which are listed below. The regions are further divisible into the areas that are the subjects of the chapters.

Round Island, with its one white house, is a prominent feature in a number of Purbeck views. This is where Sir Thomas Beecham came in the early 1950s to write the biography of Delius—which shows the lengths to which famous people have to go to avoid being disturbed.



Natural Regions

The Heath (Chapters 1 to 8)

The Purbeck Hills (Chapters 9 to 13)

The Wealden Vale (Chapter 14)

The South Purbeck Downs (Chapters 15 to 21)

Chapter 22 covers more than one region.

KEY TO THE MAPS

	Recommended for driving	Recommended for walking	Linking route for walkers
Main road			
Minor metalled road			
Unmetalled road or track			
Path			
No visible path (not used along the beach)			
Parking place			
Public convenience			PC
Highest point of hill			△
Attractive traditional buildings			
Unattractive or modern buildings			
Heath			
Slopes (thick ends at the top)			
Water			

Lettering

HILLS

TOWNS, VILLAGES AND HAMLETS

Water features

Other features

INTRODUCTION

If a road is shown on an Ordnance Survey Route-master map, or if it is coloured on a Landranger map, then you can be sure that the road is recommended for driving.

On the other hand, if a path is shown on an Ordnance Survey map, it may be recommended for walking, or it may not. Hence the need for publications of this type.

For a route to be recommended for walkers in this book, it must not be muddy in reasonable weather in the summer (though it may be muddy in the winter or after prolonged rain), and it must be of scenic interest. The question I always ask myself is "Would I come here again, for pleasure?"

For details of bus routes in the area see page II.

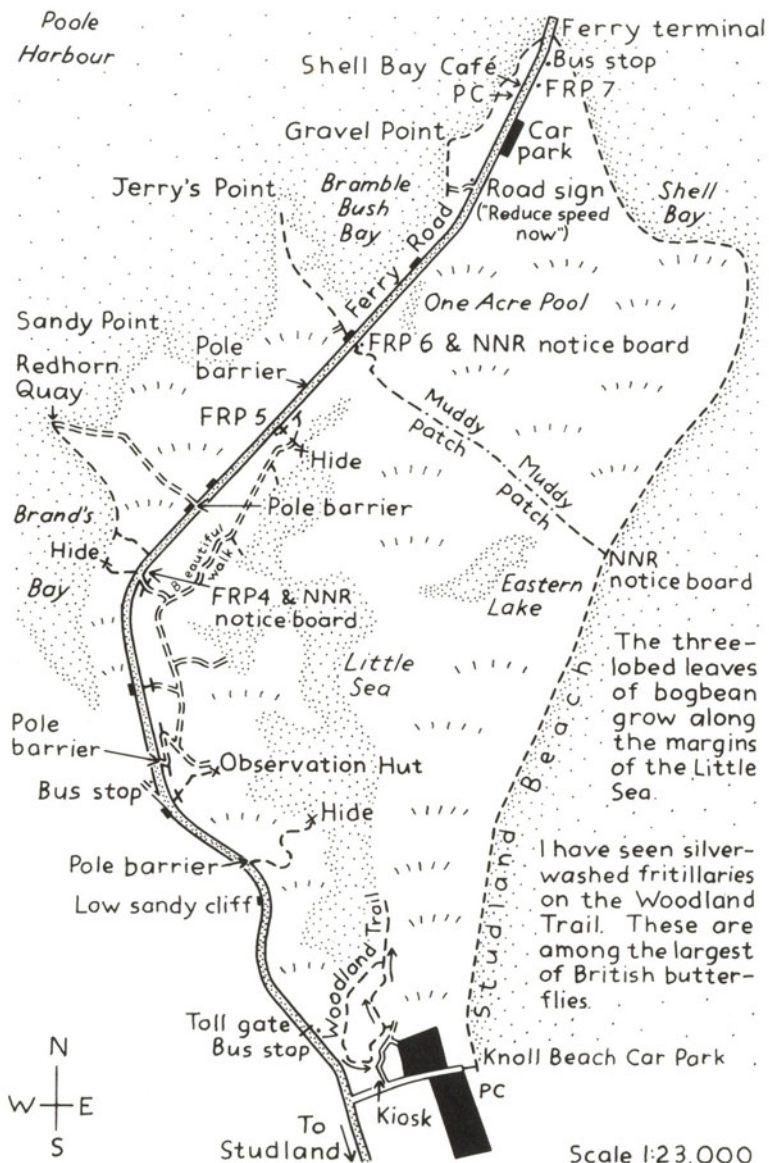
The Elusive Heath

The Great Heath of Dorset, or Egdon Heath as Hardy calls it, is noted in books on natural history as the haunt of rare birds, lizards, snakes, dragonflies and grasshoppers, but it can be quite difficult to find.

The map of Hardy's Wessex shows it in letters half an inch high stretching from Puddletown to Wareham, but all this area has been planted with conifers, dug up for gravel or churned up by tanks.

If you drive up the road from East Lulworth to Povington Hill you can actually see the heath, but this stretch is surrounded by notices asking you not to go there, and the only extensive area of attractive heath where you are free to wander lies to the north and west of Studland.

STUDLAND HEATH



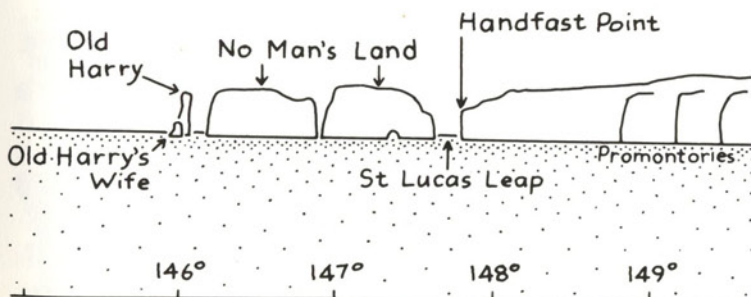
The best way to enter the Isle of Purbeck is over the ferry from Sandbanks. From the ferry terminal a perfect sandy beach stretches away to the left for nearly three miles. Between the beach and the shore of Poole Harbour are tracts of pine, birch, gorse, heather and marram grass, with smaller patches of moss and lichen.

Just south of the terminal, the road passes between white poplars, recognisable by the white undersides of their leaves, and tree lupins. Nearby, half-buried in the sand, is the signpost that marks the beginning of the South West Way, the longest named footpath in Britain.

The paths leading off the Ferry Road can be difficult to find, unless you use the FRP signs or National Nature Reserve notice boards. The FRP signs are diamond-shaped, and are sometimes fixed to telegraph poles. The letters stand for "fire rendezvous point".

At Jerry's Point there is a horseshoe-shaped shingle beach surrounding a small area of salt-marsh.

Opposite the path to Jerry's Point is another path, which crosses two areas of sallow carr that are muddy even in the driest weather. As you approach the beach, the Old Harry Rocks appear suddenly on the skyline, as shown below.



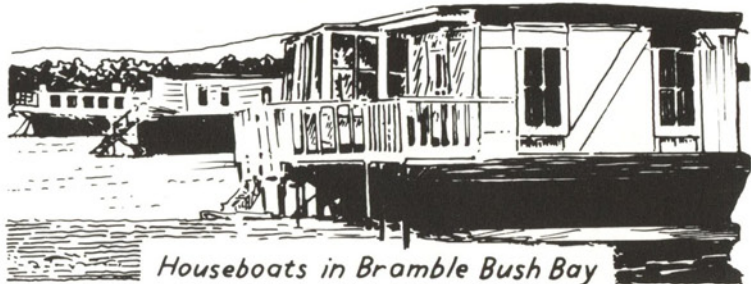
If you walk along the shore to the south from Redhorn Quay you pass a beautiful two-foot-high cliff consisting of brown and purple layers, some only a sixteenth of an inch thick. Sea campion grows in crevices in the rock. Ahead of you the Purbeck Hills rise from the dark brown of the heath, and on your right the musical notes of distant wildfowl drift across the still waters of the harbour. Shelducks are commonly seen along here, recognisable by the brown bands round their chests.

The path back to the road leaves through the only gap in the gorse.

Brand's Bay Hide The path leaves the road just north of the bend, opposite the N.N.R. notice board. It runs close to a ditch, which it eventually crosses. As you approach the hide the gorse towers overhead.

The Little Sea is a large freshwater lake, but before 1850 it was joined to the sea. The Observation Hut signposted from the Goathorn bus stop is some distance from the lake and only open on Sundays; but there is another hide further south which is built out over the lake and open all the time. The trees with small cones that are visible through the windows of the hide are alders.

The Eastern Lake is surrounded by yellow irises, pink water lilies and cotton grass.



Houseboats in Bramble Bush Bay

GUIDE TO LOCAL BUS ROUTES

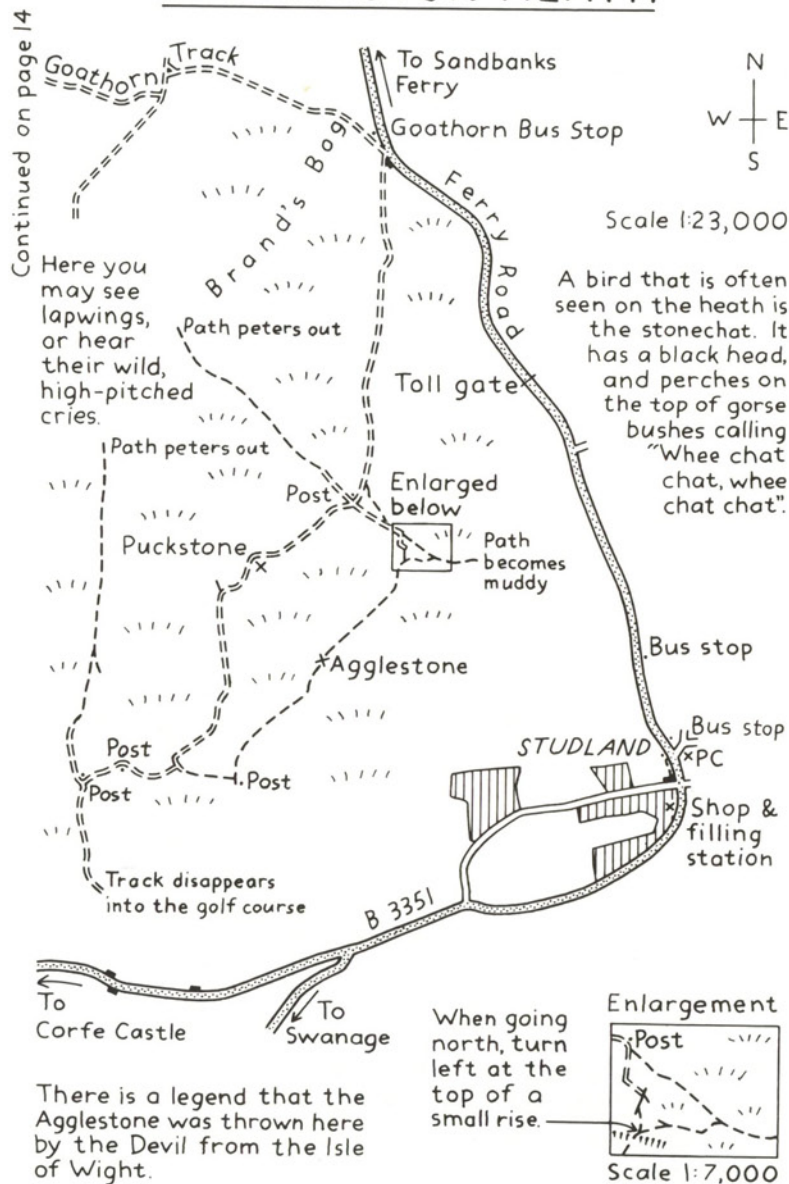


There are timetables on many of the bus stops.

The Bankes Bequest

In 1982 the Kingston Lacy estate, the largest estate in Dorset, was bequeathed to the National Trust. This was the greatest gift ever made to the trust, and it included Studland Heath, Shell Bay, the Little Sea, the Agglestone, Hartland Moor, Fayle's Tramway, Old Harry, Ballard Down, Godlingston Manor, Nine Barrow Down, Corfe Castle and village, The Rings, Corfe Common, West Hill, Cannon Cove and Seacombe Cove—in other words, some of the finest scenery in the country.

GODLINGSTON HEATH



Brand's Bog is the easiest heathland bog to get to. It is covered in green and brown sphagnum moss, dotted with the round red leaves of the sundew. Jointed rushes also grow here, as well as the beautiful yellow flowers of bog asphodel. Separating the area from the Goathorn Track is a narrow strip of bog myrtle, a knee-high shrub with a delightful scent, especially if its leaves are rubbed between the fingers.

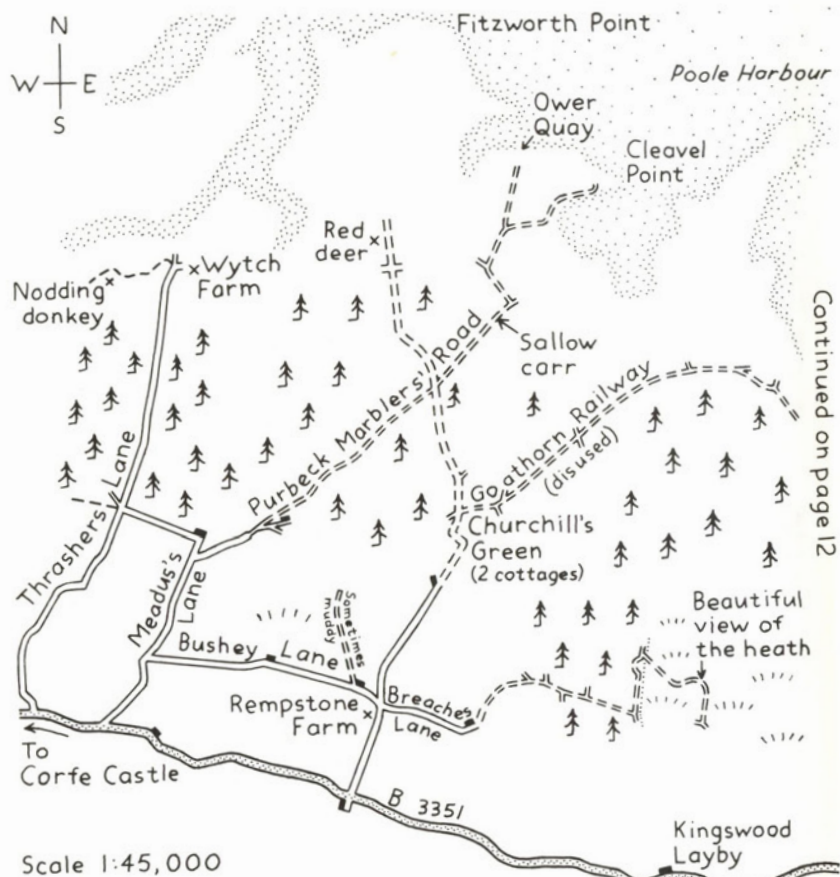
The Agglestone is an enormous boulder lying in a saucer of sand on the top of a small hill. It is 16 feet high and weighs 400 tons. The lower part is made up of brown and pink layers, and the upper part is weathered to a greenish grey colour. Stretching away in all directions is totally unspoilt heath.



The Agglestone

The finest walk anywhere on the heath is that from the Goathorn Bus Stop to the Puckstone, and back by the Agglestone. The track wanders across the heath, exposing the soft grey sand. The Puckstone is less spectacular than the Agglestone. It looks like a tumulus from a distance, but the "tumulus" is solid rock, and there is a smaller stone on its summit.

PURBECK FOREST



At Rempstone Farm is a granary built on mushroom-shaped stones called staddle stones, which can't be climbed by rats or mice. These stones tend to last longer than the buildings they support, and are more often seen along the sides of drives, as on the opposite side of the road.

Introduction

Before 1950, nearly all the land between the Purbeck Hills and Poole Harbour was heath. Then most of the central portion of it was planted with Corsican pines. You can tell how old they are by counting the whorles of branches.

Purbeck Forest is noted for its wild sika deer, which are found in very few places in Britain, but which are common here. There are about 300 of them in the 1500 acres of forest, so in any walk through the plantations the chances of seeing one are good. They are larger than the roe deer, which are also found here, but I recognise them by their facial expressions, which are not unlike those of young cows.

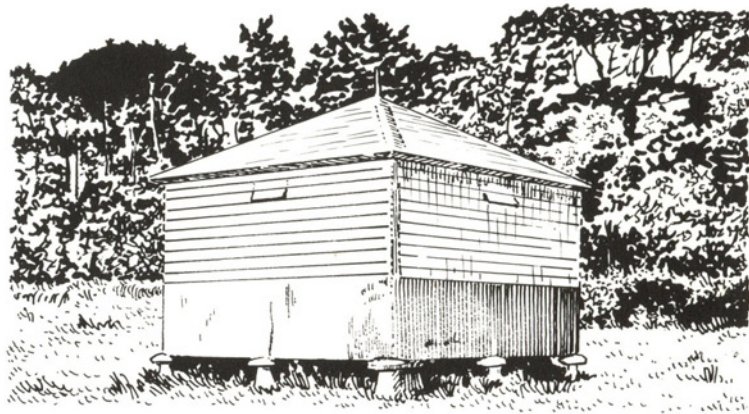
In a field beyond the forest is a herd of domestic red deer.

The Purbeck Marblers' Road is the subject of a poem by Bevan Whitney, who lived, appropriately, at Ower Quay, right at the end of the road. At one point it passes through an area of sallow carr, where the lichen-covered trunks of the trees are reflected in the dark brown water.

The Goathorn Railway was used to carry clay to Poole Harbour from 1905 to 1937. West of Churchill's Green it becomes overgrown and muddy.

The track to Cleavel Point passes close to the shore, which is fringed with sea club rush and the little blue flowers of sea lavender. Farther out are the mud flats, which are covered in rice grass.

Off Thrashers Lane, opposite the road to Meadus Lane, is an attractive grassy ride with silver birches on the left. From the end of Thrashers Lane a path leads west to an automatic oil-well, or "nodding donkey". The Wytch Farm Oilfield is the most productive in Britain.



Granary at Rempstone Farm



Red deer stag

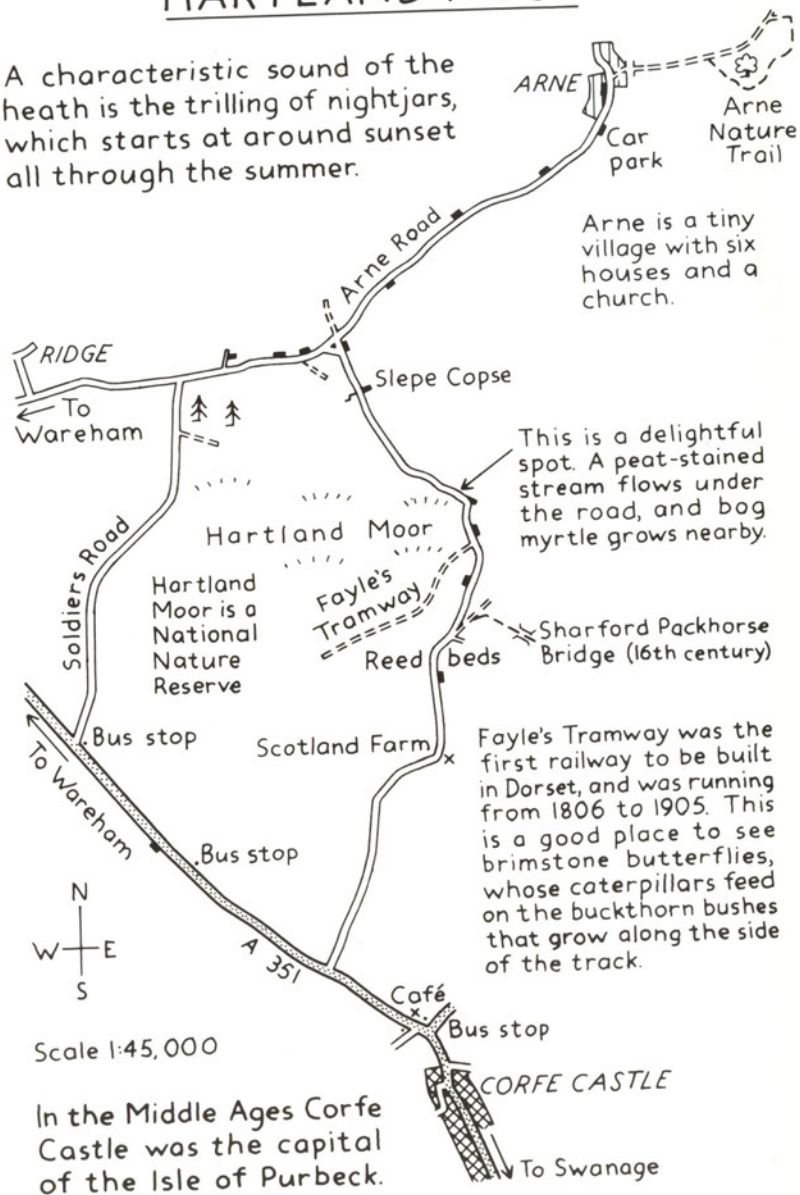
These are the finest of British deer. The main stem of the antler is called the beam. The branches are called tines. The tine nearest to the head is called the brow tine.



Round Island from Fitzworth Point

HARTLAND MOOR

A characteristic sound of the heath is the trilling of nightjars, which starts at around sunset all through the summer.



Scale 1:45,000

In the Middle Ages Corfe Castle was the capital of the Isle of Purbeck.

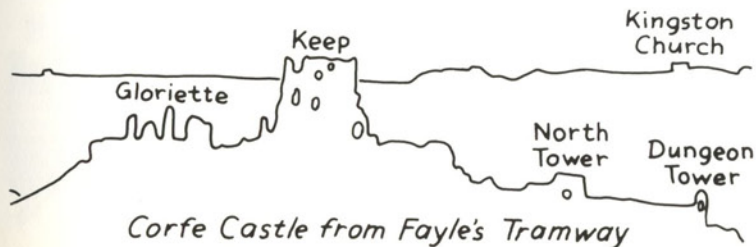
Introduction

The minor road from Ridge to Arne and the two roads that run south from it are a joy to travel, whether in a car, on a bicycle or on foot. This is the northern part of the Isle of Purbeck, where gradients are gentle for the cyclist; and the scenery is sufficiently varied to sustain the interest of the walker.

Arne Nature Trail

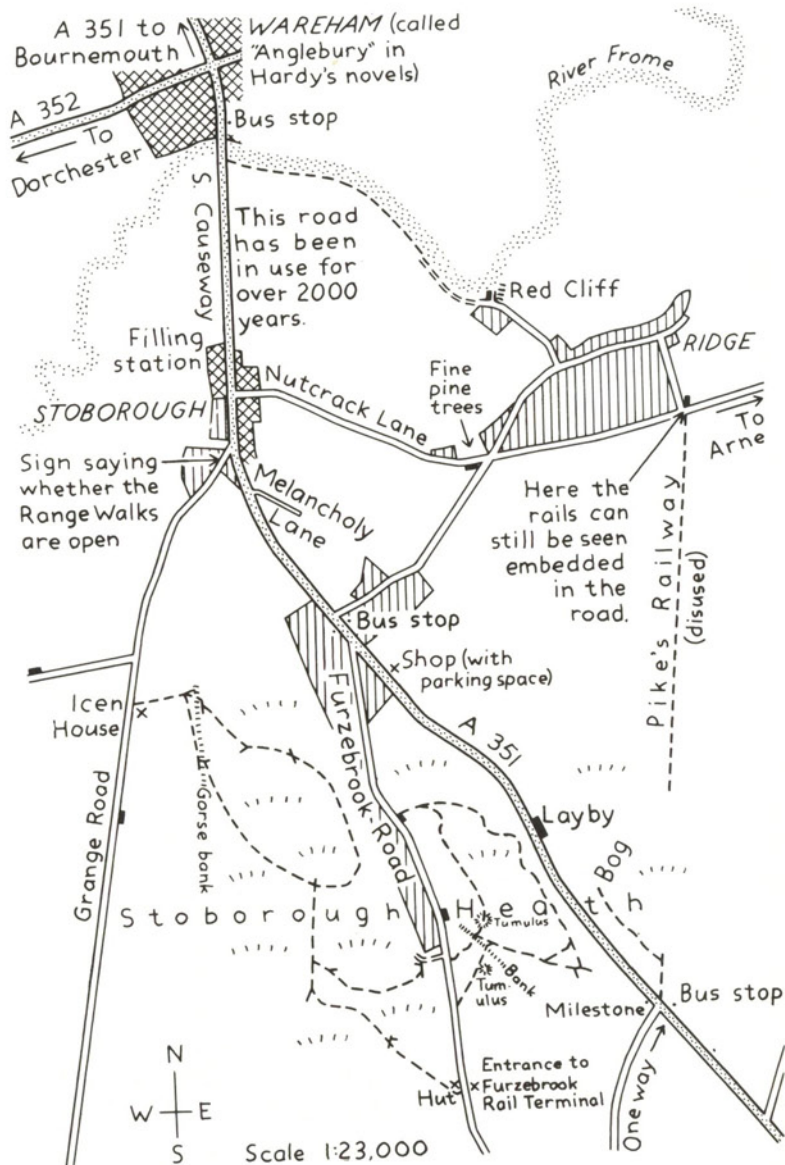
The nature trail is easy to follow. When you reach the shore, turn right and walk along the beach. Black-headed gulls, curlews and oystercatchers are common along here. Where the coastline turns left, a wooden causeway carries straight on through an area where sea club rush is dominant. This enables you to get close to this interesting plant without getting your feet wet. Sea purslane grows along the margins of the creeks. From the end of the causeway a wandering path leads back through the wood.

At Slepe Copse there is an excellent parking place under the trees. If you walk into the wood from here you come to a marshy area where royal ferns grow. There is more woodland on the other side of the road, where you are likely to see a jay or a green woodpecker.



Corfe Castle from Foyle's Tramway

STOBOROUGH HEATH



Introduction

Travellers on the road from Wareham to Corfe Castle get a glimpse of the heath on either side, but they are prevented from reaching it by two impenetrable barriers of gorse which line the road. This chapter tells you how to get to the heath, and gives details of heathland paths that have never been mapped before.

River Frome

In the summer swimming is popular in the river at Wareham, using the parapet of the bridge as a diving board.

The path along the south bank makes a convenient short cut from Wareham to Ridge. The path is separated from the river by a strip of reeds where yellow flags, wild celery and comfrey grow. The sounds you can hear, like two stones being scraped together, are made by reed warblers.



Wareham from the River Frome

Pike's Railway was built in 1866, and originally ran from the Blue Pool to Ridge Wharf. It now makes a straight level path, suitable for walking or cycling, running south from Ridge. At the far end there is access to the heath on the right.



Another stretch of the railway leaves the A 351 opposite a conspicuous white milestone. The symbol ∇ on the milestone is an Ordnance Survey bench mark, the horizontal line indicating the altitude.

About a hundred yards along the disused railway is a narrow path on the left, which leads across the heath to a group of birch trees. Running north-east from here is a strip of black bog-rushes, with black tufts about an inch from the top of their stems. These plants are characteristic of the less acid bogs on the heath. Bog asphodel also grows in this area.

Melancholy Lane

On the left-hand side of the lane are a couple of tumbledown cob-walled thatched cottages, like the one in the Thelwell cartoon entitled "Ripe for modernisation".



WAREHAM TOWN TRAIL

Wareham has special associations for me, for this is where I came, in 1958, to start my first job. I worked in Wareham Forest during the day, and in the evenings and at weekends I explored the surrounding countryside.

Wareham is just outside the Purbeck boundary, but it contains a circular walk that is too good to miss. The walk does not visit every place of interest in the town, but it includes the whole length of the Town Walls.

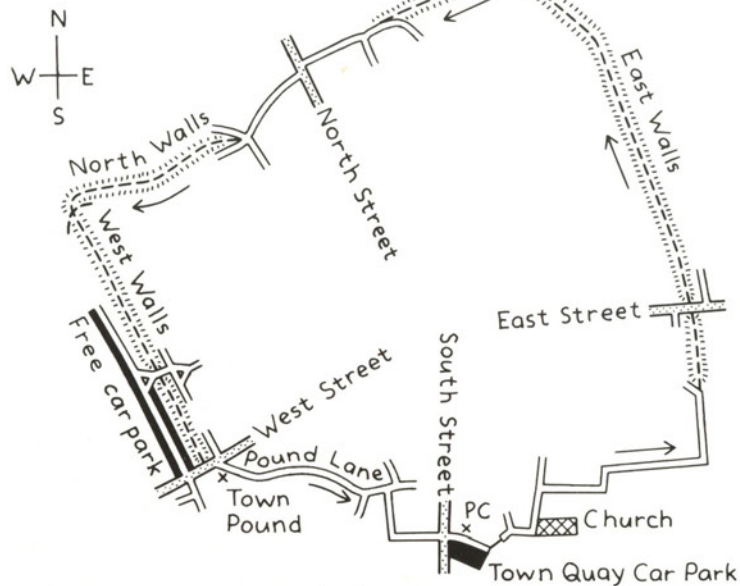
There are many examples of stone town walls, but apart from Wallingford, Wareham is the only town in Britain with earth walls. They were put up by King Alfred in the ninth century, and vary both in height and in character. Some stretches are straight and level; others wander to left and right, or up and down like a switchback.

The walk is best done anti-clockwise, but you can start anywhere on the route.



West Walls

Scale 1:9000

West Street to South Street

Turning into Pound Lane from West Street, the Town Pound is seen on the right, with a notice board erected by the Steward of the Manor of Wareham. On the right of Pound Lane is the site of Wareham Castle, and as the lane curves round to the right it follows the line of the base of the motte. On the left of the lane was the bailey, and one of the houses here is called Bailey Cottage.

Further along on the right is a little lane of unsquared cobble stones, which presumably once led to the castle. Opposite is a high stone wall, curving left, and in it is a blocked Norman doorway with a chevron-moulded arch, 800 years old. A few yards past it turn right into a narrow lane,

Tanners Lane, which leads down between high walls to the River Frome. Follow it round to the left into Abbots Quay.

South Street to East Street

Cross over South Street into the Town Quay. On the left is a map of eighteenth-century Wareham painted on tiles. The most remarkable thing about it is how little the town has changed in the past 200 years. In the far left-hand corner of the Quay, pass through a gap between the houses into Church Green. Turn right, and then left across the front of the church.

At the end of the churchyard turn right into Church Lane. The road goes round a left-hand bend (Conniger Lane), and then a right-hand bend. After a longer interval the road bends left again, and the beginning of the Town Walls is seen straight ahead. A path now leads to the top of the rampart.

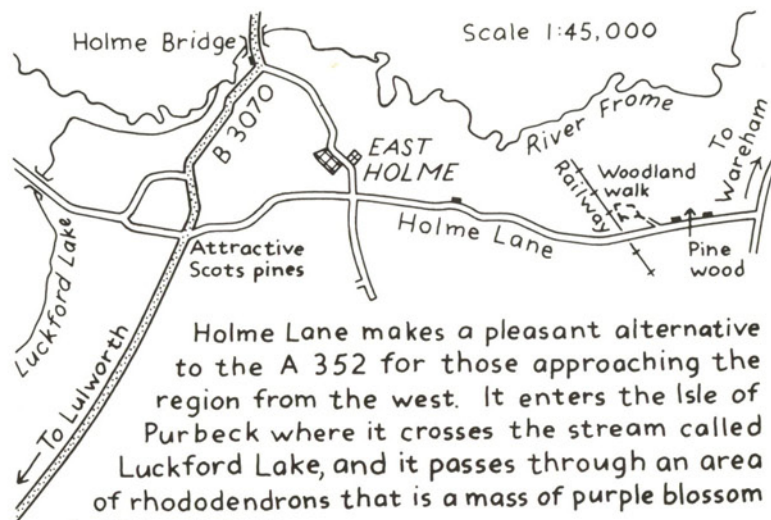
East Street to North Street

At East Street you have to descend to street level, but the walls continue the other side. At the north-east corner there is a seat on a vantage point looking across the marshes to the River Piddle. Where the path joins a road, keep straight on.

North Street to West Street

Turn left into North Street, and then immediately right. Opposite the first turning on the left a path leads up onto the walls again. From the north-west corner, looking back, you can see the North Bridge, which is an Ancient Monument.

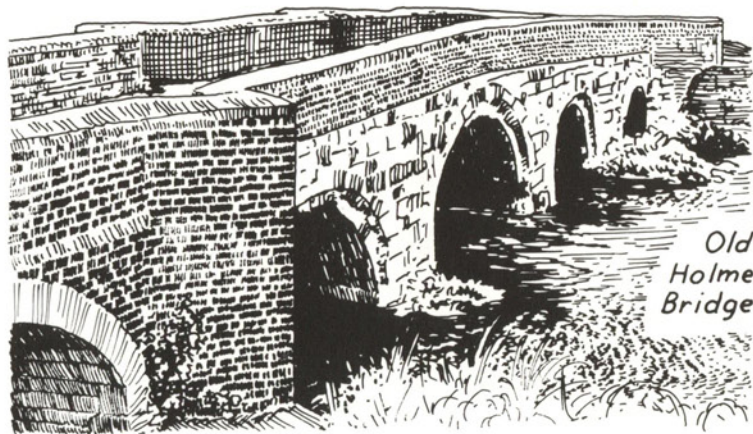
HOLME LANE



Scale 1:45,000

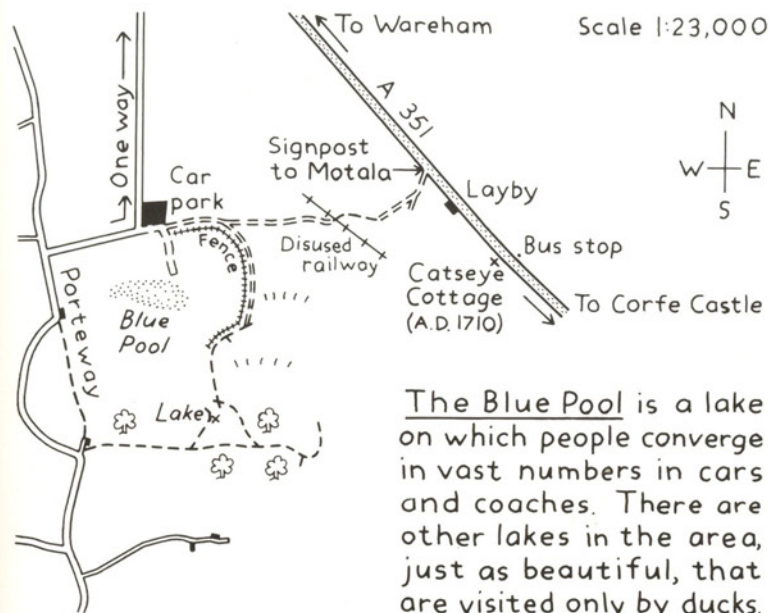
Holme Lane makes a pleasant alternative to the A 352 for those approaching the region from the west. It enters the Isle of Purbeck where it crosses the stream called Luckford Lake, and it passes through an area of rhododendrons that is a mass of purple blossom in the summer.

Another way of entering the Isle of Purbeck is by crossing the River Frame at Holme Bridge. Modern traffic uses the new bridge, leaving the old bridge as a place to stand and watch the water weeds streaming in the current.



Old
Holme
Bridge

Chapter 7 BLUE POOL



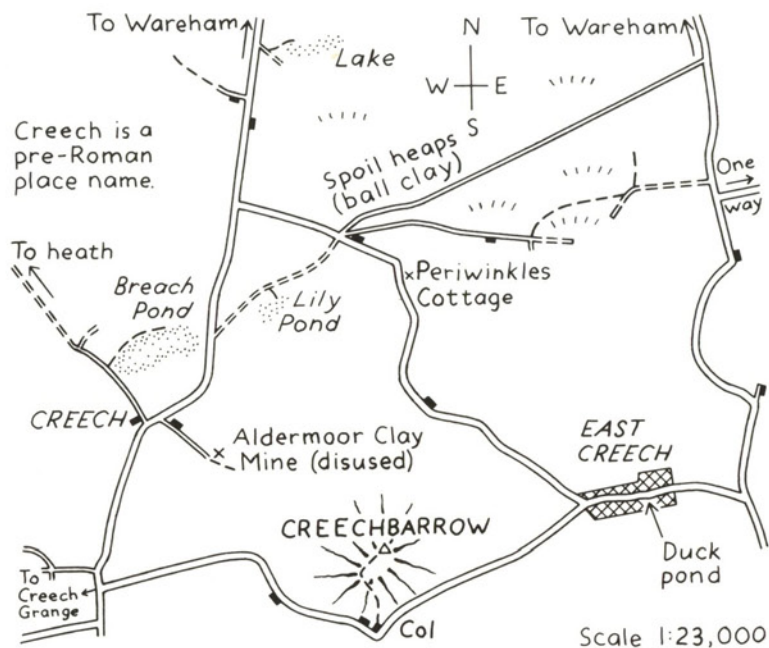
Scale 1:23,000

The Blue Pool is a lake on which people converge in vast numbers in cars and coaches. There are other lakes in the area, just as beautiful, that are visited only by ducks.

The Portway is a prehistoric road with a Saxon name. The modern road makes a detour to the west, as shown here, but the road originally went straight through. The old route is now a short cut, and is used by the Wessex Way, a long distance foot-path linking Avebury, Stonehenge, Old Sarum, Badbury Rings and Corfe Castle. There are many interesting ferns along this path.

From the south end of the short cut a well-worn and attractive path leads east into a wood. There are more interesting ferns along here. After a while the path forks. The left fork leads down a little wooded valley to a hidden lake with pale brown water.

CREECHBARROW



*Creechbarrow
from South Bridge,
Wareham*

then it wanders on, through bracken, bluebells and bilberries to the summit.

When viewed from the north, Creechbarrow is seen as a conical peak rising above the line of the Purbeck Hills. It lies about a third of a mile north of the ridge, and is joined to it by an attractive col, from which the ascent begins. The path goes straight up to a damaged tumulus, and

The Summit

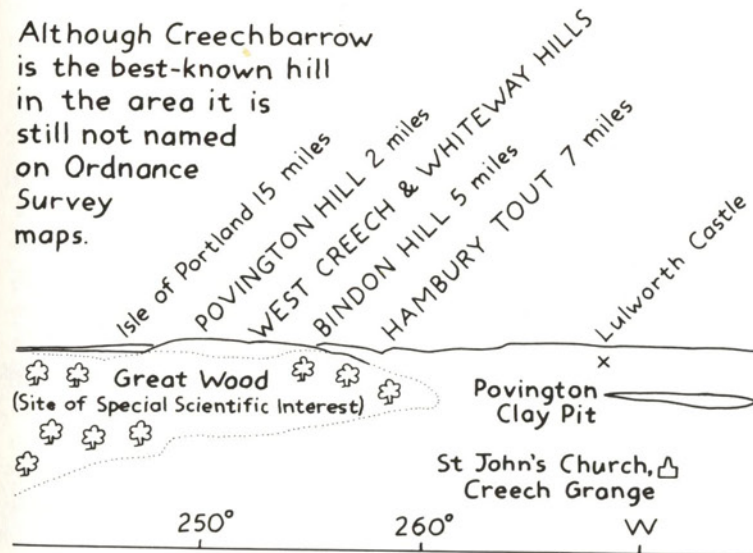
On the highest point are the foundations of a sixteenth century hunting lodge on the site of an earlier lodge used by King John. Nearby is an Ordnance Survey triangulation column.

The View

In the north is Wareham, with Wareham Forest behind it, and the South Causeway leading towards us. In the north-east is the wide expanse of Poole Harbour with its islands; and in the east are the Purbeck Hills, with Knowle Hill running from right to left, and Nine Barrow Down behind it doubling back to the right. In the distance, to the left of Nine Barrow Down, are the white cliffs of the Isle of Wight.

Looking West from Creechbarrow

Although Creechbarrow is the best-known hill in the area it is still not named on Ordnance Survey maps.



From the col a road leads westwards to a T-junction, and straight ahead is the magnificent gabled front of Creech Grange, once the home of Sir Thomas Bond, who gave his name to Bond Street in London.



Creech Grange

Breach Pond

Turn off the road by the phone box. There is room to park under the trees on the left. Where the track forks a short path leads down to the lake. A few yards farther on a second path leads all the way along the lake. Rhododendrons bloom at the far end, and blue damselflies skim over the water. Breach Pond is a Freshwater Biological Site, and it is completely unspoilt.

The track leads eventually to a pathless stretch of heath, dotted with pine trees and frequented by curlews.

Aldermoor Clay Mine

A muddy incline leads down to a network of underground passages called lanes, which are threaded by narrow-gauge railways.

Periwinkles Cottage

On either side of the drive are vertical stone slabs, each bearing the fossilised casts of three dinosaur footprints. They are about a foot across and about thirty inches apart, and quite unlike the footprints of any living animal.

The front gate of the cottage is also of interest, and incorporates horseshoes, a fork, a rake, a key and a lapping crook. A lapping crook is a piece of iron, serrated like a giant saw and used for suspending pots over a fire.

The Lily Pond is a beautiful lake with pink waterlilies and rhododendrons, but the area round it is decidedly muddy.

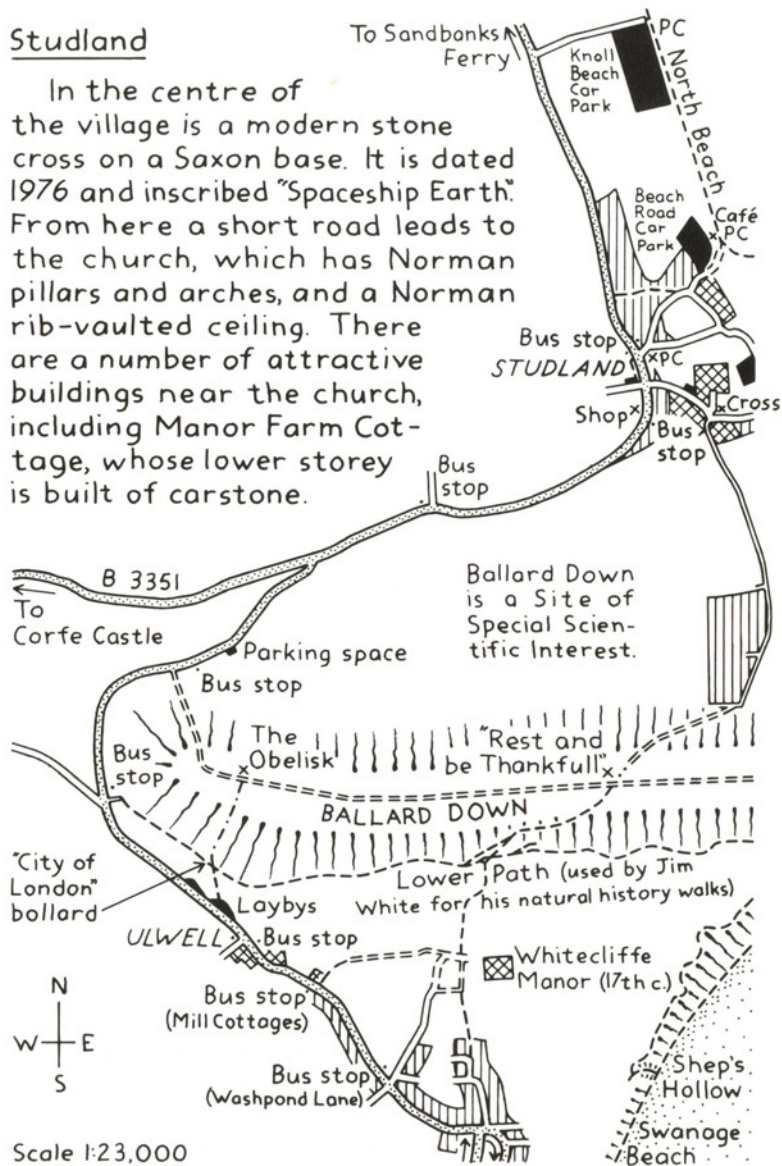


Lily Pond

BALLARD DOWN

Studland

In the centre of the village is a modern stone cross on a Saxon base. It is dated 1976 and inscribed "Spaceship Earth". From here a short road leads to the church, which has Norman pillars and arches, and a Norman rib-vaulted ceiling. There are a number of attractive buildings near the church, including Manor Farm Cottage, whose lower storey is built of carstone.



Scale 1:23,000

At Redend Point, under an overhanging tree, is a cave just large enough to walk about in. In the roof are bands of grey and yellow sand a few mm wide, like the annual rings of a tree; and at the far end is a vertical solution pipe, lined with black ironstone.

You can't see Old Harry from here, but you can see the smaller stack called Old Harry's Wife.

South of Redend Point are yellow-brown cliffs with curious red patches.



The track from Studland to Old Harry passes through a wood where ramsons, red campion and bluebells grow, and ivy arches overhead.

If you haven't seen a cormorant yet, you're sure to see one along here.



Swanage Beach

The beach is sandy as far as Shep's Hollow. From there to Punfield Cove it is shingle, which is difficult to walk on; and beyond the cove it is necessary to clamber over large blocks of chalk. The greenish rocks found along here are from the greensand, which lies below the chalk.

Ascent from Swanage

To avoid the built-up area, walk along the beach, and turn left just before the last groyne, into the ravine called Shep's Hollow. Turn right at the junction in the ravine, and then keep to the cliff-top path. From higher up there is a dramatic view of the undercliff looking back towards Swanage.

Descent The path leaves the ridge at the south end of the cross dykes near the Ordnance Survey column. Because the cliff-top path actually enters Shep's Hollow, there is no chance of missing the path to the beach.

Ascent from Whitecliffe Manor

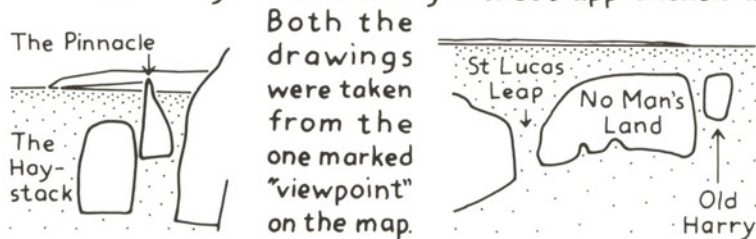
The path climbs a hillside that is alive with butterflies in the summer. There are good views of Whitecliffe Manor and Swanage on the way up.

Ascent from the west

The path to the Obelisk from Ulwell is very steep, and it is better to use the track which leaves the road farther north.

Old Harry

The cliffs are higher at Ballard Point than in the vicinity of Old Harry, but at Old Harry they seem to be higher because they are vertical. Interest is added by a number of promontories, some of which are wide enough to walk along without apprehension.

The Ridge

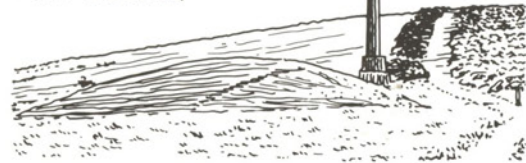
From the O.S. column to the Obelisk a green ride follows the crest of a fine hogsback ridge, the ground curving away smoothly on both sides.

Close to the junction with the track to Studland is a stone block bearing the words "Rest and be Thankful" on the side, and "DJ 1852" on the end. The Studland track is indistinct at first, but soon becomes clearer.

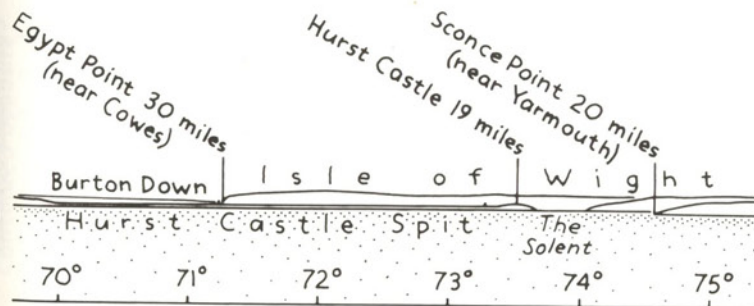
The Obelisk was erected in 1892, and is inscribed "To commemorate the introduction

of pure water from the chalk formation into Swanage." Nowadays water supplies are taken for granted.

Ulwell Barrow and The Obelisk

The View from "Rest and be Thankful"

The farthest point visible is Burton Down in the South Downs above Arundel. It is sixty miles away, and appears immediately to the left of the Isle of Wight, as shown below.



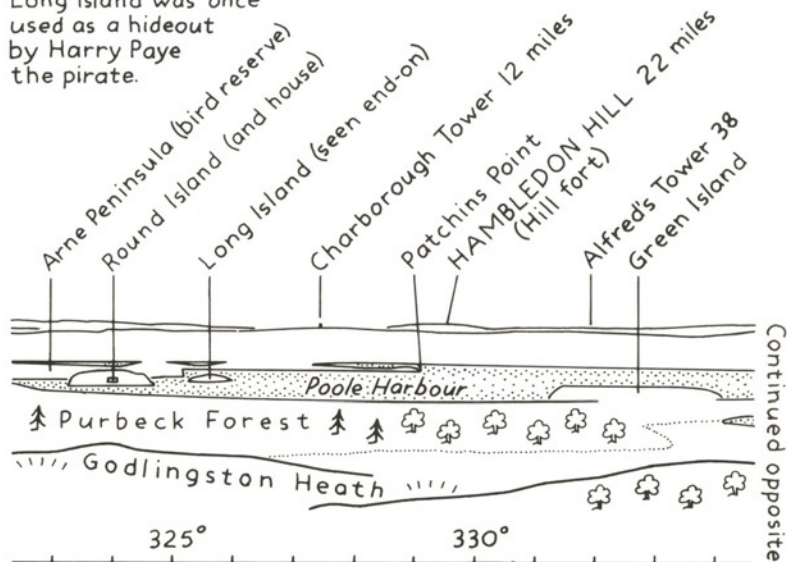
Looking North from "Rest and be Thankful"

Alfred's Tower is part of the Stourhead Estate, owned by the National Trust.

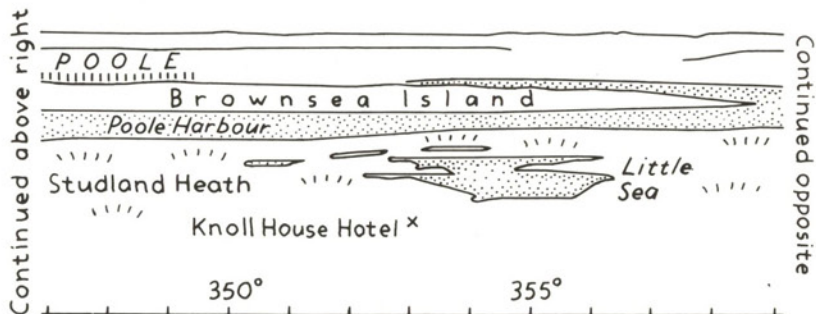


Enlargement of Alfred's Tower

Long Island was once used as a hideout by Harry Paye the pirate.



Continued opposite

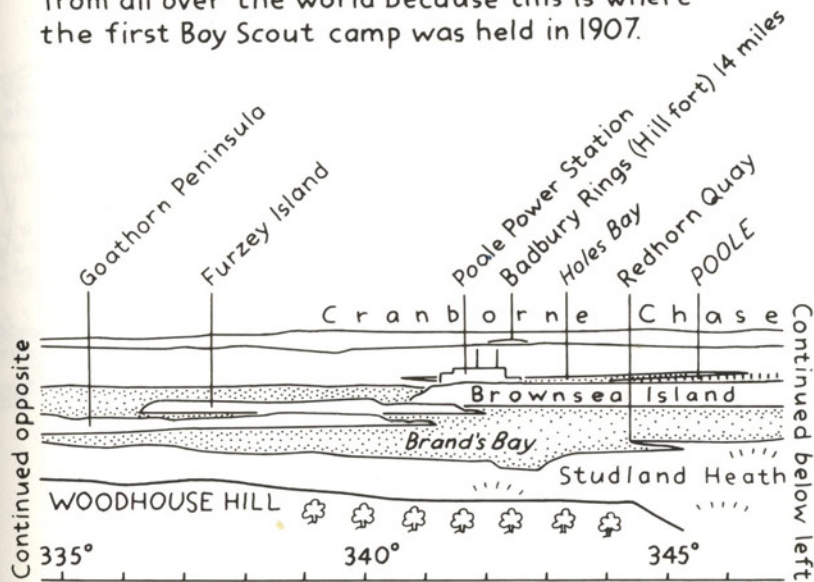


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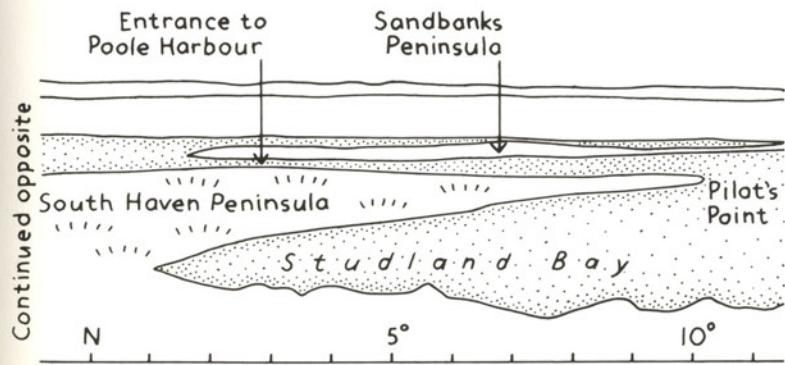
Badbury Rings was acquired by the National Trust at the same time as most of Ballard Down. The two are linked by the Wessex Way.

Brownsea Island is a place of pilgrimage for Scouts from all over the world because this is where the first Boy Scout camp was held in 1907.



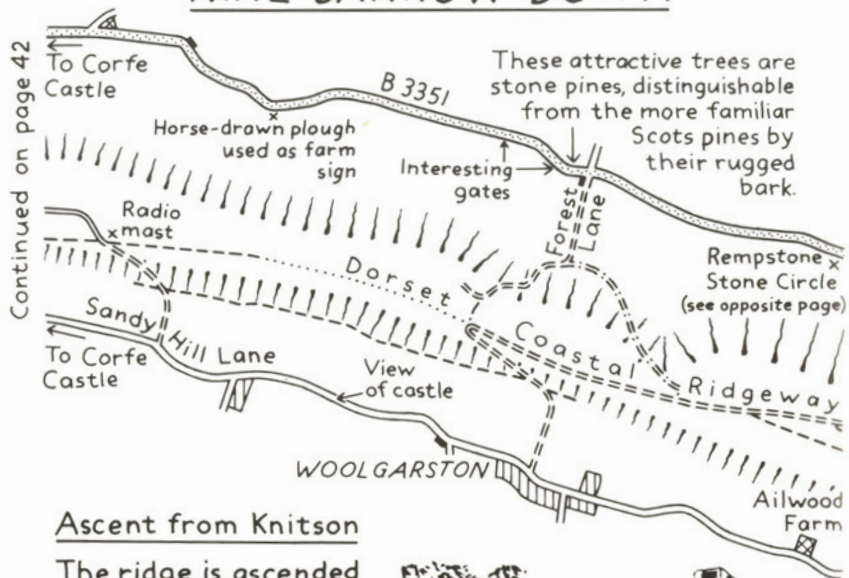
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NINE BARROW DOWN



Ascent from Knitson

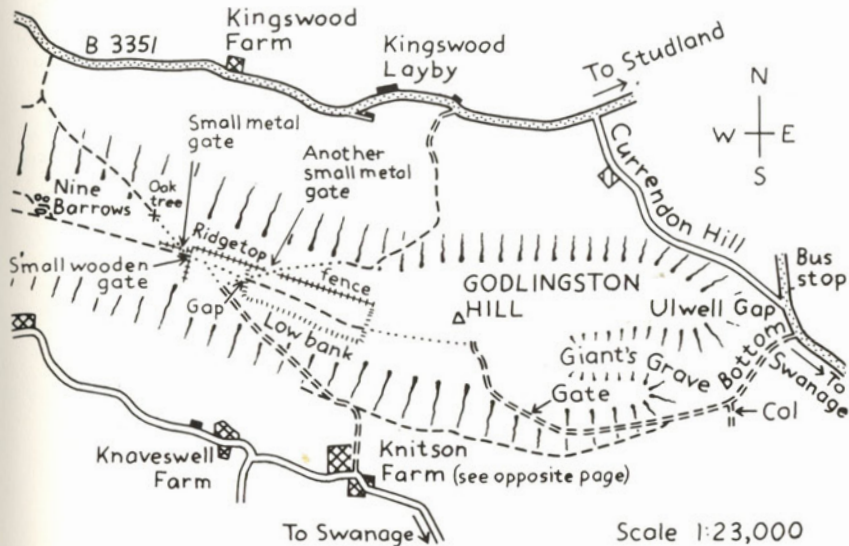
The ridge is ascended by a delightful white track with views similar to those described on page 40. At the top of the hill the line of the track continues as a slight depression, now grass-covered. To find this depression from the small wooden gate walk in the direction of the ridge path for sixty paces before bearing right. The track is more easily found from the gap in the low bank, as its course is marked by a line of gorse bushes. Aim for the right-hand end of the line.



Knitson farmhouse (17th century)

The track is more easily found from the gap in the low bank, as its course is marked by a line of gorse bushes. Aim for the right-hand end of the line.

The Rempstone Stone Circle was erected in the Bronze Age, and is the only stone circle in Purbeck. It lies a few yards from the B 3351, but it is so well hidden you could pass it every day and not notice it. One of the stones is close to a fire notice, and the others can be found from that. They do not make a complete circle.



The Nine Barrows consist of a neolithic long barrow (O on the map) and ten Bronze Age round barrows or "tumuli". Two of the round barrows (o on the map) are larger than the rest, and make good viewpoints. The path goes past the end of the long barrow, through the ditch of one of the large round barrows, and over the top of five small round barrows.

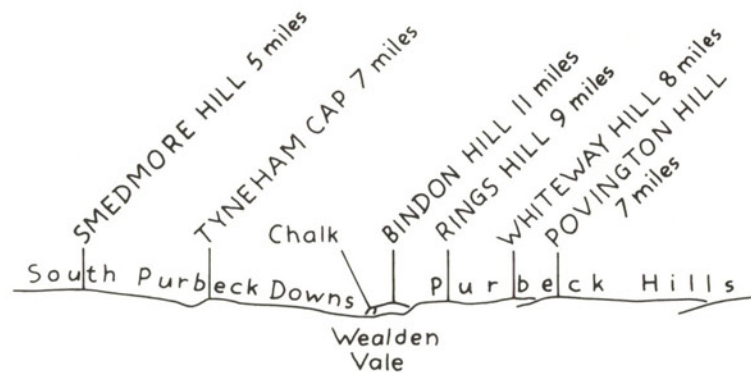
It is interesting to speculate on why these barrows were built. I like to think that it was because the Bronze Age people wanted to leave some record of their existence for future generations, in other words, for us.

Ascent from Ulwell Gap

At first the track follows the dry valley of Giant's Grave Bottom. Then it passes close to the col between Round Down and Godlingston Hill. (A lesser track cuts through the col, exposing the layers of chalk, which are seen clearly dipping to the north.)

Where the track forks bear right, inclining uphill. In May and June the hillside here is yellow with the flowers of horseshoe vetch and birdsfoot trefoil. These plants are eaten by the caterpillars of the blue butterflies that are common in this area. Sometimes blue and brown butterflies can be seen flying together. These are male and female of the same species.

Halfway up the hill you come to an aluminium gate, where there is a view along the length of the Wealden Vale with the Purbeck Hills getting closer and closer to the South Purbeck Downs. Views are generally better from the slopes than they are from the ridge.



Immediately before the next gate, bear left through a gap in the fence onto the ridge.

Ascent from Woolgarston From the road to the foot of the downs is a sunken track with hart's-tongue and male fern growing on its banks. Higher up, ridges of chalk can be seen running diagonally across the track.

Ascent from Forest Lane At the foot of the downs is a choice of routes

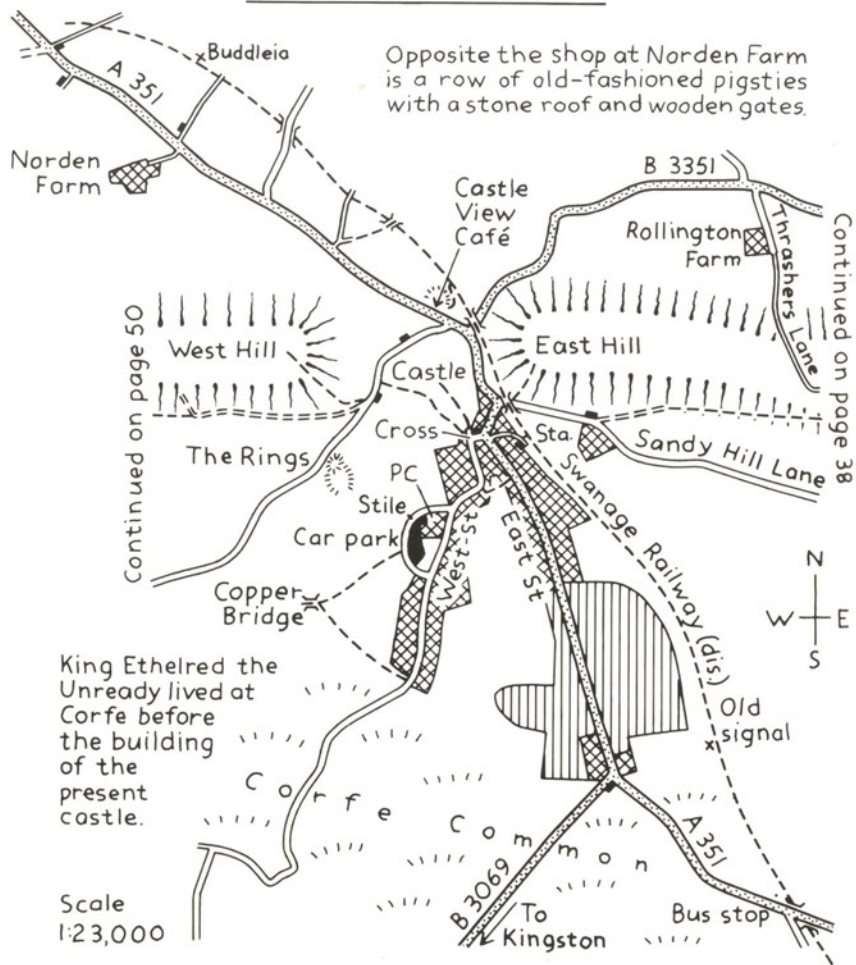
(i) Sharp left—a modern track, lacking in interest. To find it from the ridge go over a stile consisting of three horizontal bars.

(ii) Bearing right—a much more attractive route, with woodruff, lords and ladies, male fern and ivy-covered trees. Even without consulting an early map you can tell that this is an old road. After passing through a wooden gate, bear left onto a path. To find this path from the ridge, follow the fence northwards from the hairpin.

Ascent from Rempstone Stone Circle The path rises obliquely through a steeply sloping ashwood. It is recommended for ascent, but difficult to find from the ridge without a compass. It starts by an oak tree with a blue arrow on it. The tree is not visible from the ridge, but it may be found by following a magnetic bearing of 320° from the small metal gate.

Ascent from Kingswood Layby This path also rises through the ashwood. The slopes on the right are covered with ramsons, and those on the left with male fern and dog's mercury. The round black fungi seen here on dead branches are called King Alfred's cakes. The best way to find the path from the ridge is to follow the edge of the wood until you come to a path running down the hill at a very shallow angle.

CORFE CASTLE



The Model Village is situated in West Street, close to the Market Cross. It has real stone tiles, real grass, real water and miniature roses in the gardens. Subdued organ music comes out of the model church.

Corfe Castle is one of the most beautiful villages in England. Its two streets, East Street and West Street are lined by stone cottages with names like "Penny Cottage" and "Cotters Pound", many of which bear dates. Not only the walls, but even the roofs are made of Purbeck stone. The stone tiles are called "slats", and are arranged according to size, the smallest at the top.

The centre of the village is the Market Place, which links the two streets. The fine bow window above the National Westminster Bank is that of the Mayor's Robing Room, and dates from the time when Corfe Castle was a town. The base of the Market Cross is fourteenth century.

The Castle is open daily in the summer, and at weekends in the winter. It was built between 1080 and 1288, and it was blown up in 1646. At this time it was in the Bankes family, and it remained in the family until 1982, when it was bequeathed to the National Trust. In the eighteenth century the Rector lived in the North and South Towers.

A metalled path leads through the Outer Gatehouse, and Inner Gatehouse to a telescope on the ridge with views to the north. A curiosity of the Inner Gatehouse is that the left-hand half of the arch is lower than the right.

If you turn left at the telescope you will see two stretches of herringbone masonry, and two old windows, on the inside of the curtain wall on the left. These are part of the undercroft of the Old Hall, which was built in 1080.

Above the telescope a rough path climbs up through a jumble of fallen masonry to the Gloriette, which was built by King John in 1204, and the Keep.

Circuit of the Castle

From the Market Cross take the road towards the castle, and turn immediately left. On the wall of a house on the left, just below the eaves, is a stone carving of the crest of the Beaufort family, who held the castle in the fifteenth century. At the end of the road turn right into a metalled path called Oliver Vye's Lane, which is part of the Wessex Way. From here there is a fine view of the leaning mural towers of the castle.

When you reach the road, turn right. In the river on the left is a huge chunk of the Dungeon Tower, which rolled down the hill in 1866. Turn right by the Castle View Café, into the main road. Just before a left-hand bend, the crest of Alan de Plukenet, who was the Constable of the castle in the thirteenth century, can be seen above an arrow loop in a round tower high up on the right. The road eventually leads back to the Market Place.

The Swanage Railway was closed in 1972, and now wild flowers, such as valerian, honeysuckle and toad-flax grow along the line in profusion. It can be joined by ascending the bank behind the car park of the Castle View Café. The track is stony, and stout footwear is recommended.

Half a mile along the line to the left are some buddleia bushes, whose clusters of little blue flowers attract red admiral, tortoiseshell and peacock butterflies in the summer.

In the other direction (towards Swanage) the track goes over a viaduct, through a cutting, and on to an embankment. On the right is a view of the rooftops of Corfe Castle. Then you come to the station, its platforms covered in wild flowers, its waiting room covered in ivy.

West Street

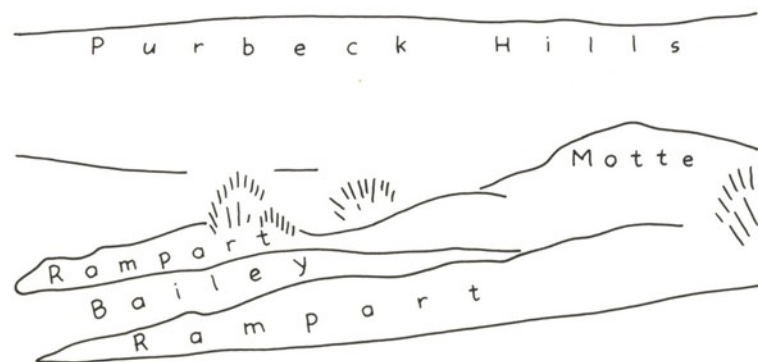
The siting of the car park in West Street means that people see the best part of the village when walking from the car park to the castle.

Corfe Common and Copper Bridge

At the end of West Street is a turning area with wooden pens for impounding animals. Beyond here a beautiful unfenced road crosses the common. From the turning area a path follows the edge of the common to a fine old packhorse bridge called Copper Bridge. The other path to the bridge leaves the car park by a wooden gate marked "footpath".

The Rings

It is not widely known that there are two castles in Corfe—a ruined stone castle, and a Norman motte and bailey called The Rings, which was constructed by King Stephen in 1139. It is unrecognisable from the road, or from the field beside it, but from the car park it is possible to make out the motte, and the ramparts that once enclosed the bailey. The drawing below is taken from the stile at the north end of the car park.

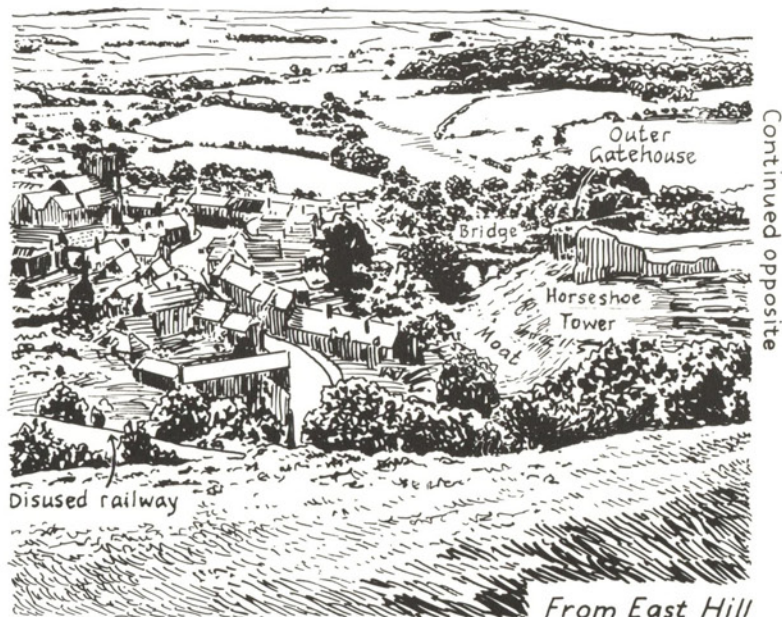


West Hill (right)

The path goes up the south-east corner of the ridge. Leave the road by the gate, and aim for a narrow path slanting up the hill to the left of a small chalk pit. In descent, follow the old fence to the south, and then aim for the church.

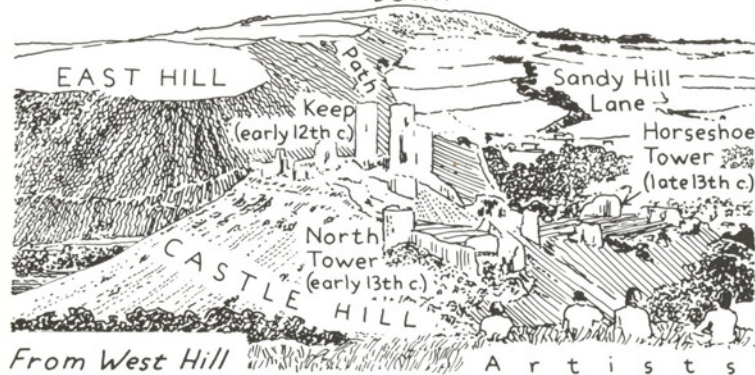
East Hill (below and below right)

The lower part of the path is quite difficult, but from the top of the path, where the gorse meets the grass, is surely the best view of any village anywhere. There is no point in going any higher than this.

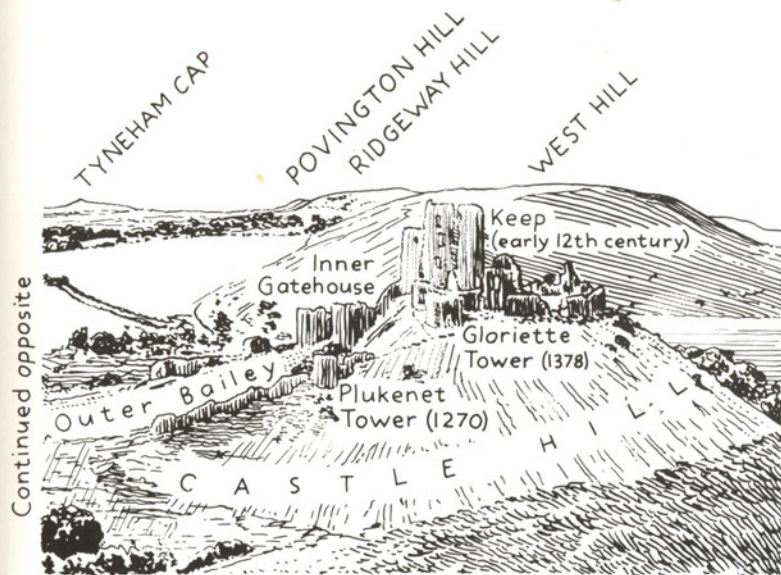


From East Hill

(c=century)

NINE BARROW
DOWN

Sandy Hill Lane follows a ridge of greensand running parallel with the Purbeck Hills.



The curfew has been rung in Corfe Castle church every winter evening since Norman times.

A CORFE CASTLE PORTFOLIO

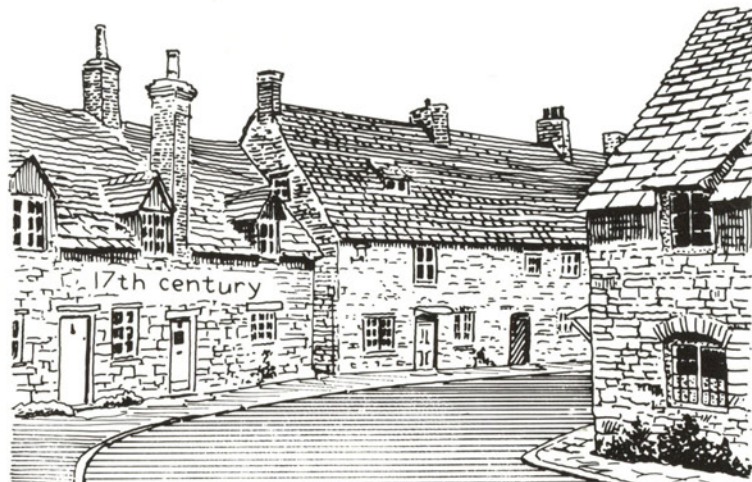


Castle Cottage, East Street



East Street

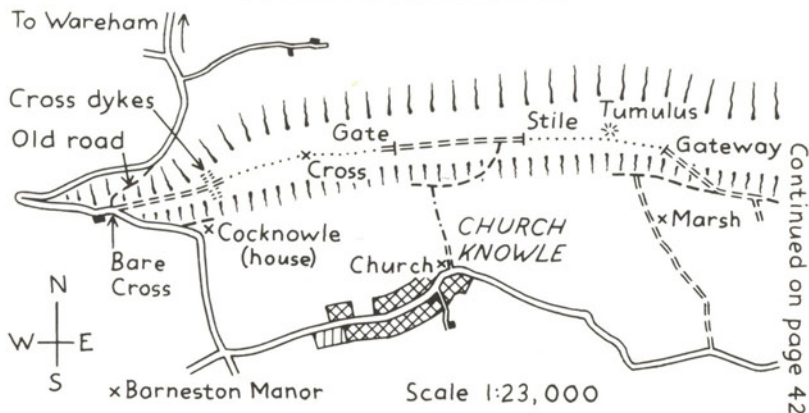
This village was used as the location for the B.B.C. television production of "The Mayor of Casterbridge".



West Street



West Street

KNOWLE HILLAscent from Corfe Castle (See map on page 42)

Leave the road from Corfe Castle to Church Knowle by the gate that is used for the ascent of West Hill, and follow the track that skirts the foot of the hill. Ignore the first track on the right, and take the second track, which goes obliquely up the hillside. A blue arrow on a gate confirms that you are on the correct route. Where the ground levels out the track ends. Aim to the left of the tumulus, and you will see a stile ahead.

Descent After you pass the tumulus, look for a gateway on the right before you get to the corner of the field.

Ascent from Church Knowle

Take the track on the right of the church. Where the track forks, take a grassy path leading straight ahead between the forks.

Descent The route leaves the track along the ridge by a gate with a tall post at one end.

The Ridge

The drawing on the left is of a recumbent stone cross on the watershed.

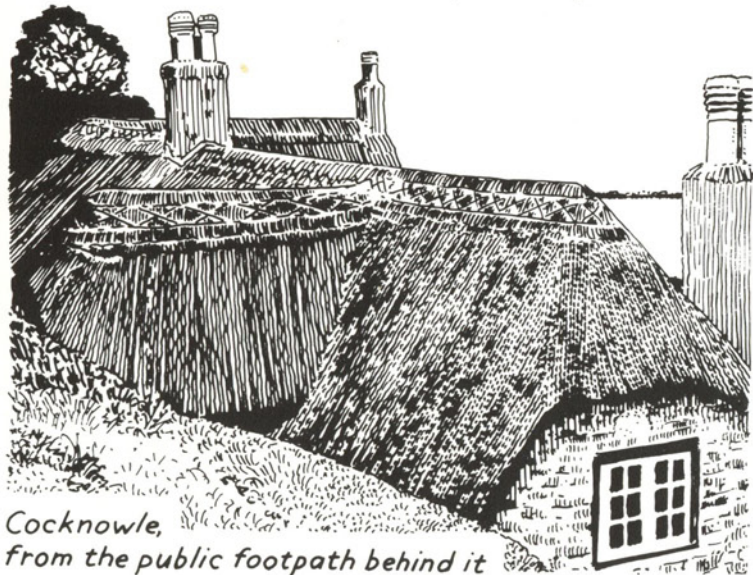
The cross dykes are two iron age banks with a ditch between them. The gap in the banks is the original gap used by the Dorset Coastal Ridgeway.

Corfe Common is easily recognisable from the ridge. It is wilder in character than the surrounding countryside and there are no trees or hedges.

From the west end of the ridge you can see a thirteenth century window in Barneston Manor, the oldest house in Purbeck. It is the tall window below the gable end.

The Old Road

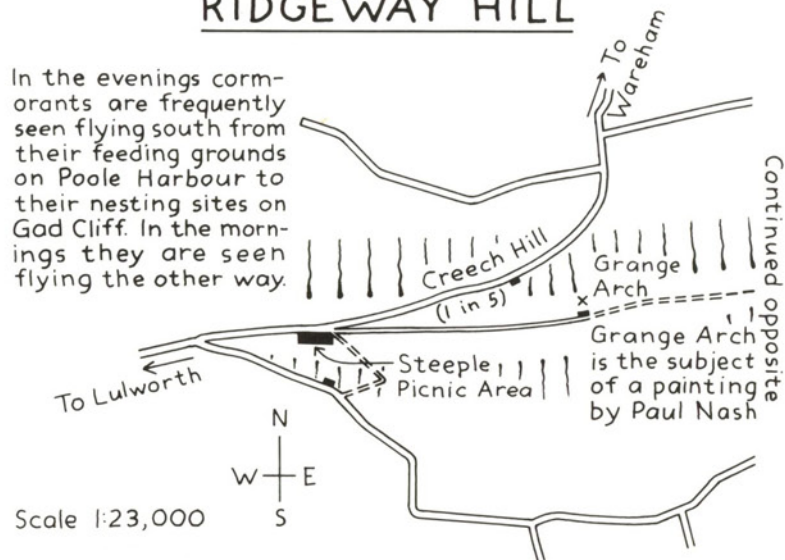
This was the original route over the pass before the hairpin was built, and is now a path. It leaves Bare Cross by a narrow wooden gate marked "footpath", goes through a tiny col, and follows a depression curving to the right.



*Cocknowle,
from the public footpath behind it*

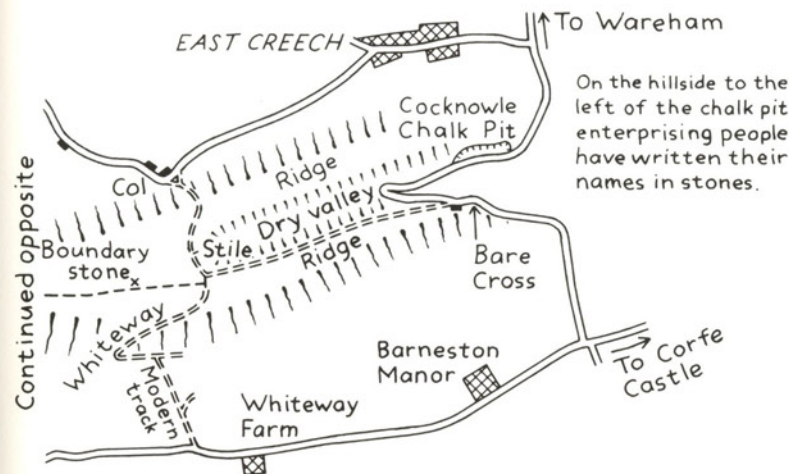
RIDGEWAY HILL

In the evenings cormorants are frequently seen flying south from their feeding grounds on Poole Harbour to their nesting sites on God Cliff. In the mornings they are seen flying the other way.



Ridgeway Hill is crossed by two prehistoric roads — the Ridgeway, running east-west along the ridge, and the Whiteway, running north-south across the ridge. The view of Tyneham Cap from the Whiteway is so good it was selected to illustrate the title page. The lower section of the Whiteway is difficult to get through, and walkers are recommended to use the modern track to the east instead.

The feature for which Ridgeway Hill is best known is Grange Arch, an Ancient Monument built by Denis Bond in 1740 and now owned by the National Trust. It was designed to appear on the skyline when viewed from Creech Grange, and is in a perfect state of preservation.



Chalk hills are noted for their dry, or streamless, valleys, which normally run at right angles to the ridge. The Purbeck Hills are too narrow for these transverse valleys, but on Ridgeway Hill there is a longitudinal valley which splits the ridge in two.

The drawing below is taken from the stile at the top of this valley.

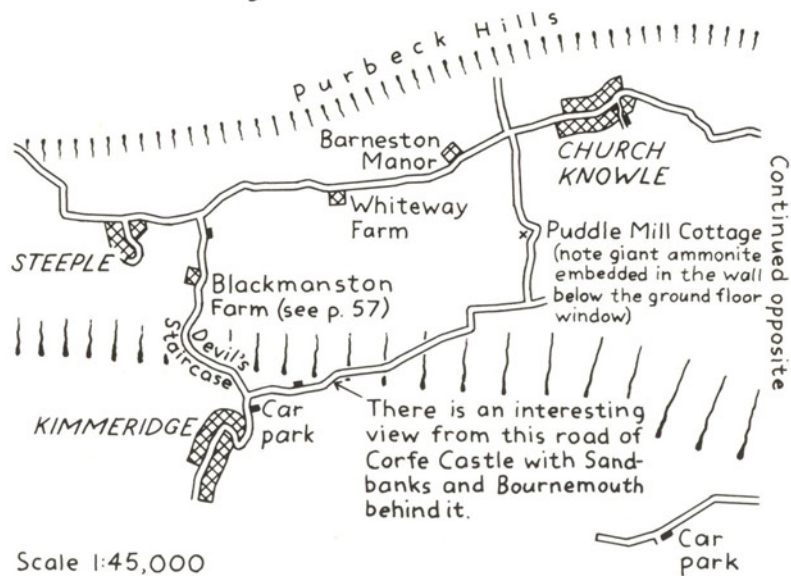


WEALDEN VALE

Introduction

All along the Purbeck Hills there is a view to the south over a beautiful patchwork of meadows, hedges and woods. This is the Wealden Vale, and here is the English countryside at its best.

The most significant thing you can say about the English countryside is that most of the villages, lanes and farms have been there for a thousand years. The roads have been resurfaced. The buildings have been rebuilt. But the sites themselves remain unchanged.

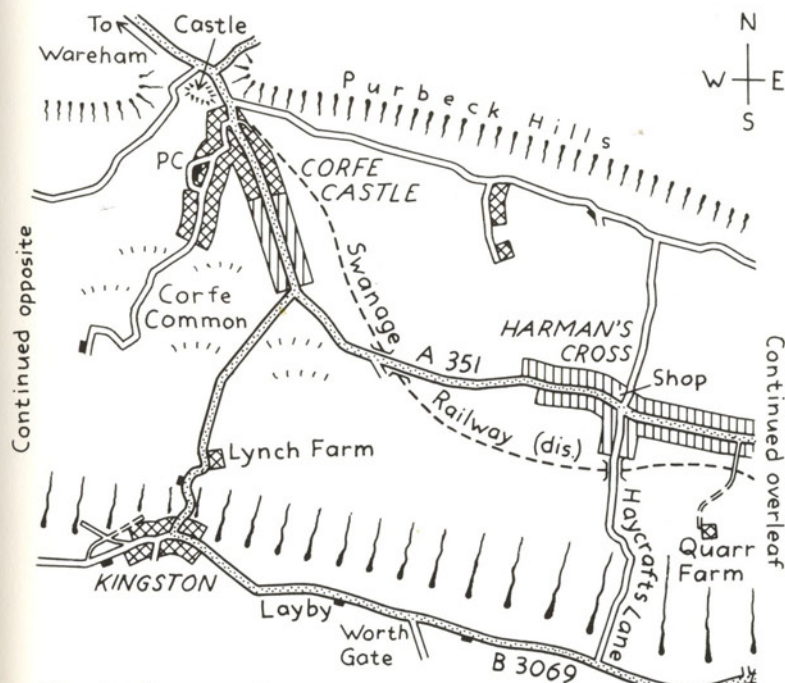


At Steeple the road is fenced on one side by wattle hurdles, which are made from coppiced hazel. A no-through road leads to the church, which, despite the name of the village, has no steeple.

For much of its length the disused railway from Corfe Castle to Swanage makes a fine footpath. Access at bridges is difficult or impossible, but the line may be joined at the former level crossing on the drive to Quarr Farm.

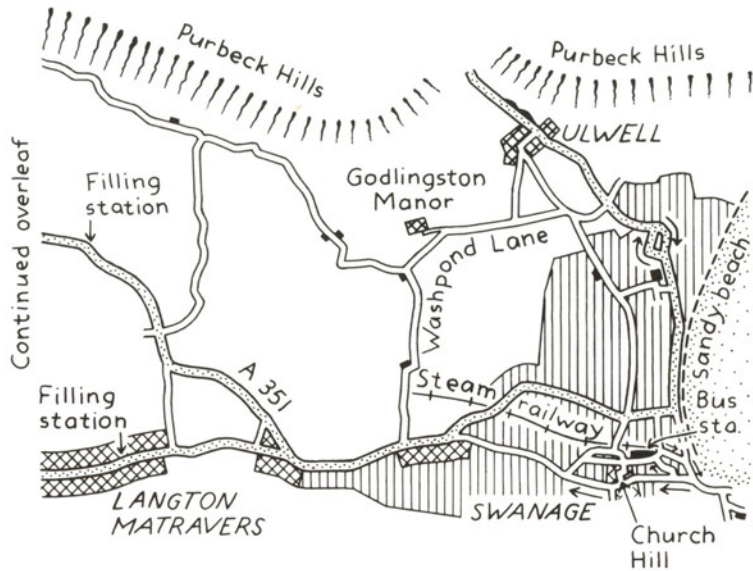
Between Quarr Farm and Haycrafts Lane there are buddleia bushes on the right, and as the line approaches the A 351, the ruins of the castle are seen framed in the archway of the bridge.

At Corfe Castle the railway may be joined at the disused station or at the Castle View Café (see p. 42).



The six-figure number on the signpost at Worth Gate is a grid reference to tell you where you are on the Ordnance Survey map.

Court Pound Cottage (a beautiful stone cottage where the Court Leet used to meet)



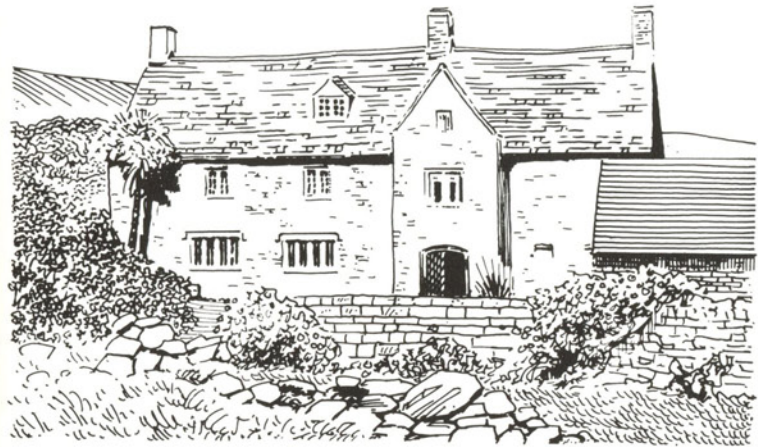
Most of Swanage is modern, but there is an old village in the area of Church Hill and the Millpond.

Outside the Information Centre on the sea front are two clocks giving the times of high water. There are also records of the previous day's rainfall, maximum temperature and hours of sunshine.

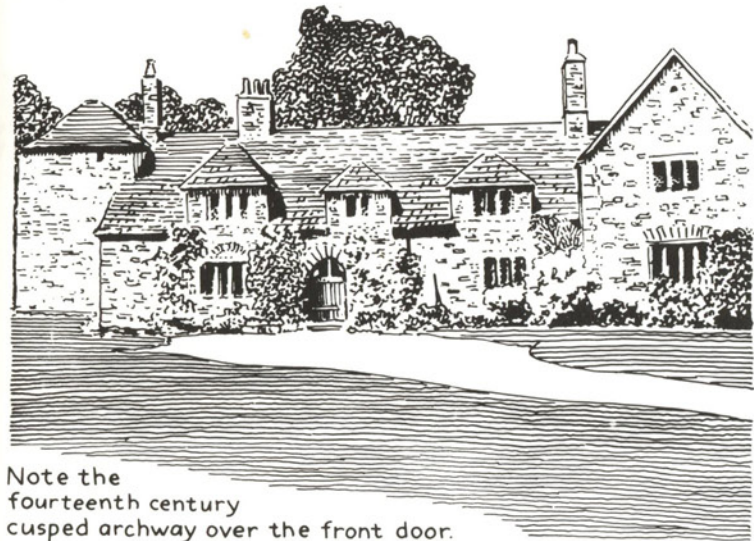
The Swanage Steam Railway is open daily in August, on Saturdays and Sundays in July and September, and on Sundays only in May and June.



Eighteenth century cottages in Church Hill, Swanage

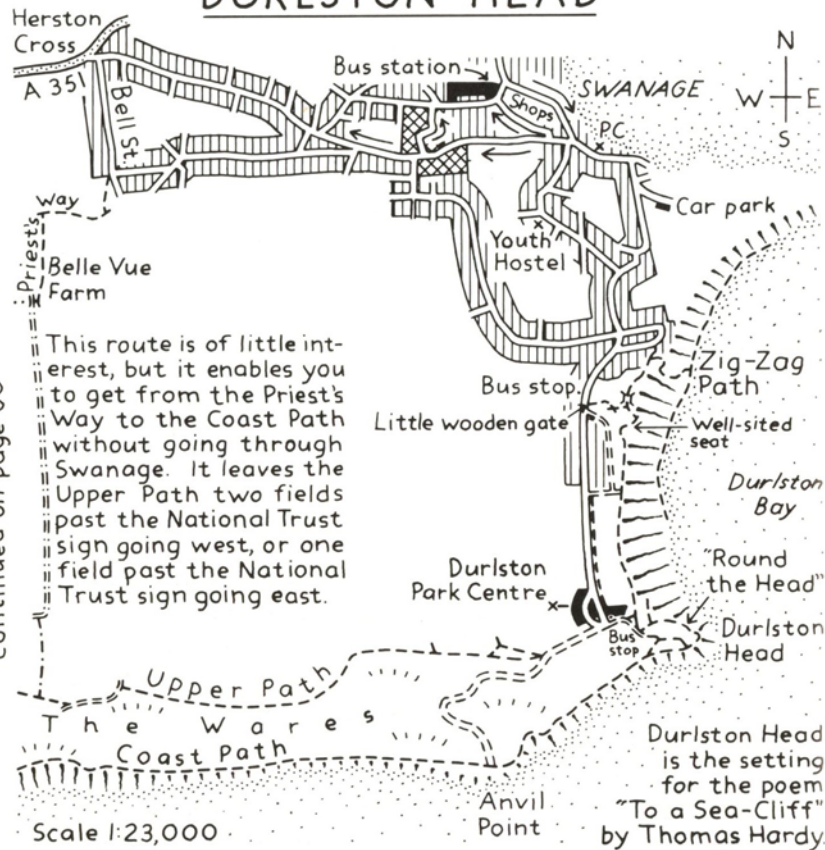


Most of the farmhouses in the vale are seventeenth century, but Blackmanston (above) is sixteenth century, and the oldest parts of Godlingston (below) are fourteenth century.



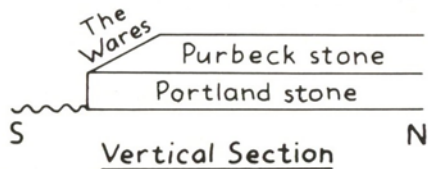
Note the fourteenth century cusped archway over the front door.

DURLSTON HEAD



Continued on page 60

The coastline from Durlston to St. Aldhelm's Head consists of vertical cliffs of Portland stone, with grassy slopes of Purbeck stone above them. The cliffs are popular with climbers, and the grassy slopes, which are called the Wares, offer fine scenery for walkers.



The area round Durlston Head is full of interest, with various carved stone tablets, and a stone globe weighing forty tons. There are a number of London bollards in the area. These were brought back by ships carrying stone to London.

A visit to the Durlston Park Centre is particularly recommended. There is much information about the natural history of the area, and a simplified geological model.

Durlston Bay

The bay is reached by the Zig-Zag Path, which leaves the Coast Path by some iron railings just north of the Durlston Country Park sign. The path joins the beach near a row of red-painted rocks.

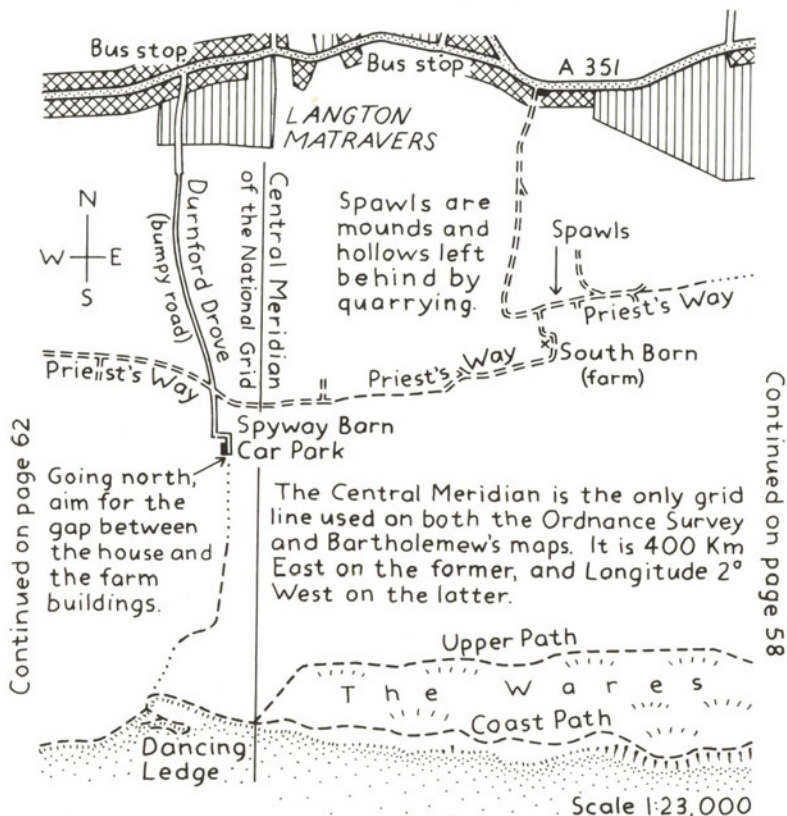
The Upper Path crosses some interesting old walls, covered in sprawling vegetation and splashed with grey and orange lichens. The two pylons at Anvil Point and two more farther along the coast are "nautical mile markers", used to test the maximum speed of ships. The lighthouse at Anvil Point is sometimes open to the public.

The Priest's Way has been designated a Countryside Treasure. It was used by Saxon priests travelling between Worth Matravers and Swanage. From Belle Vue Farm it heads west, passing between two posts.

Some circular walks based on Durlston Car Park

- (1) Durlston — Coast Path — Dancing Ledge — Spyway Barn — Priest's Way — Belle Vue Farm — Upper Path — Durlston (6 miles)
- (2) Durlston — Coast Path — Seacombe — Eastington — Priest's Way — Belle Vue Farm — Upper Path — Durlston (8 miles)
- (3) Durlston — Coast Path — Winspit — Worth Matravers — Priest's Way — Belle Vue Farm — Upper Path — Durlston (10 miles)

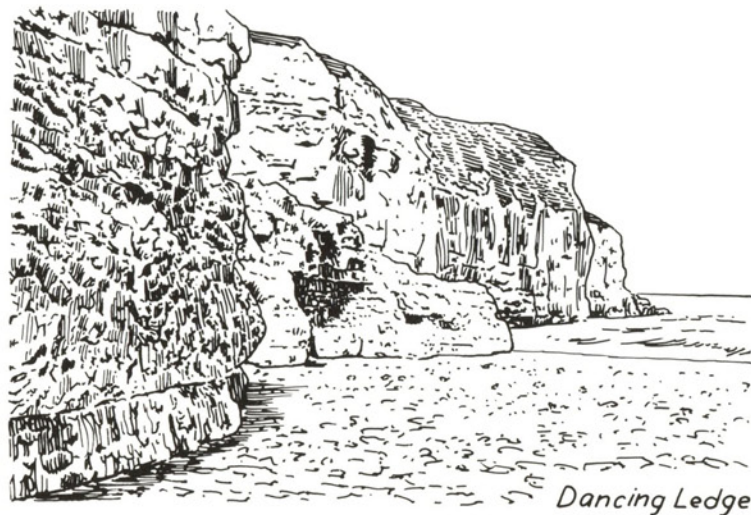
DANCING LEDGE



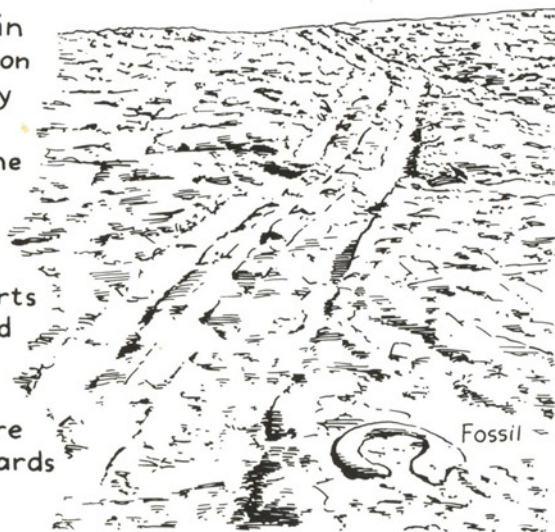
Dancing Ledge

There is a wide ledge at water level, and a narrow ledge halfway up the cliff. The weed-choked pool on the lower ledge is a swimming pool, excavated in 1893 for the pupils of Durnford House School. It is filled by the tide. The lower ledge can only be reached by climbing.

In the angle of the cliffs is a large cave with a level ceiling supported by stone pillars. This was created by quarrying, and is known as a gallery.

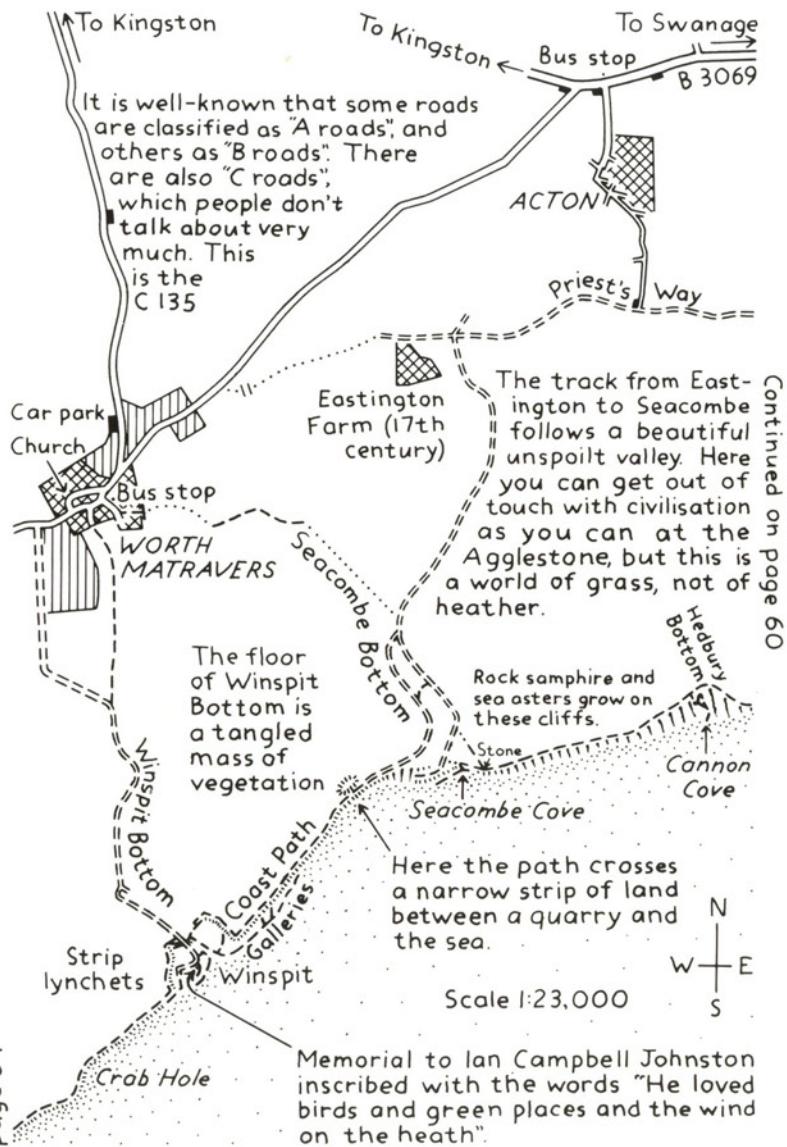


The ruts in the illustration were made by horn carts, carrying stone across the ledge to be loaded onto ships. The carts were so called because the poles used to pull them were curved outwards like horns.



"Dancing Ledge" is the title of a play by Paul Hyland which is set in this area.

Chapter 17 WINSPIT



Cont. on
page 64

Worth Matravers is a very attractive village, and worth walking round. In the church is a Norman archway with chevron moulding. It is in such a good condition it is hard to believe that it is 800 years old. Through this archway on the right is a tiny door leading to a curious little tunnel called a squint.

In the churchyard is the grave of my ancestor, Benjamin Jesty, who inoculated his wife and sons against smallpox in 1774. Twenty years later the technique was developed by Dr Edward Jenner, and by 1979 the disease had been eradicated throughout the world. Jesty's pioneering work is recognised in the report on eradication issued by the World Health Organisation.

The Priest's Way

From Worth to Eastington there is no path, but the route is well signposted. When going from east to west, aim first for the gap in the wall, then for a stile in front of a modern barn.

Worth Matravers to Seacombe

Going from the car park, turn left into the bus stop. At the end of the bus stop bear right into a narrow metalled road, then bear left into a walled footpath running along the side of an unmetalled road. At the end of the path aim for a stile on the far side of the valley, a little to the left of the corner of the field. (In the other direction aim for the stile between two modern stone houses.) As the path descends the hill into Seacombe Bottom there is a fine view of the mediaeval strip lynchets, or cultivation terraces, on the right.

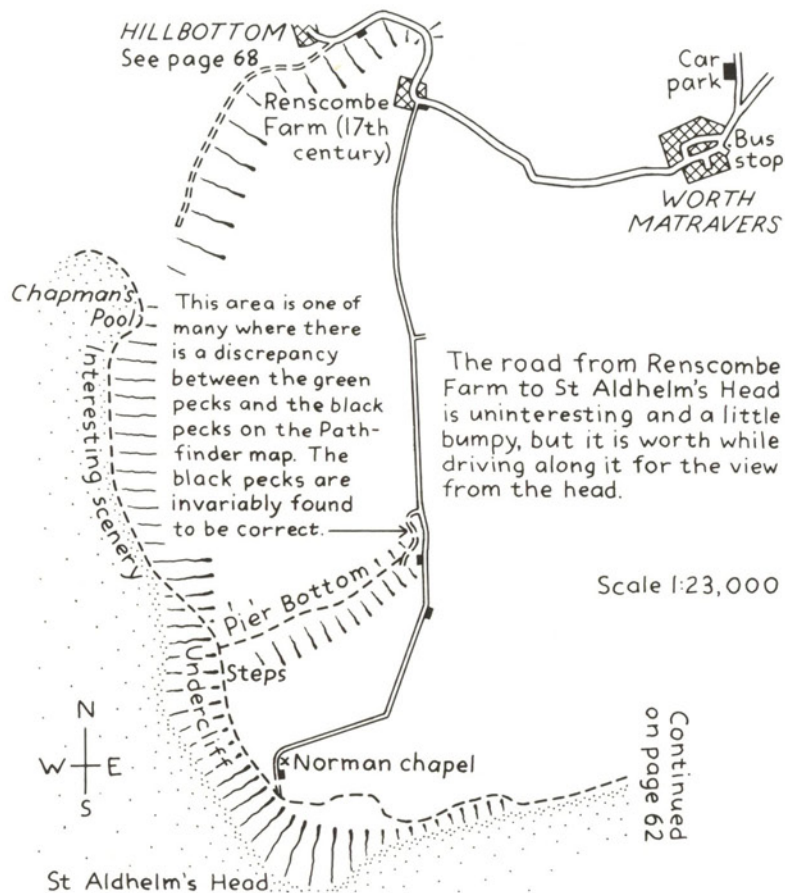
To reach the sea, go down a rocky gully to a ledge. At the east end of the ledge is the cave described on page 69.

Worth Matravers to the Winspit

Do not turn left into the bus stop, but keep straight on, past the pump, and turn left into London Row. At the end of the lane, the path continues straight ahead.

To get to the sea turn left before you reach the memorial stone, then left again down some steps.

ST ALDHELM'S HEAD



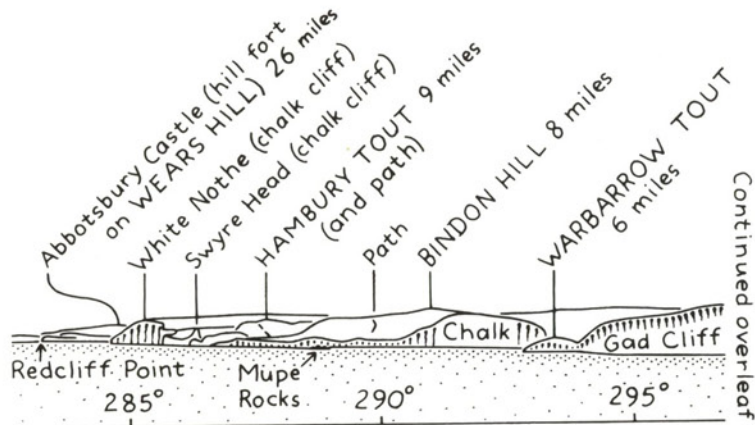
From the lookout on St Aldhelm's Head you can scramble down to a grassy ledge overlooking a magnificent jumble of rocks and vegetation. From the east end of the ledge you look across at the pillar of rock that is illustrated here. The pillar is man-made, having been left behind when the rocks all round it were quarried.



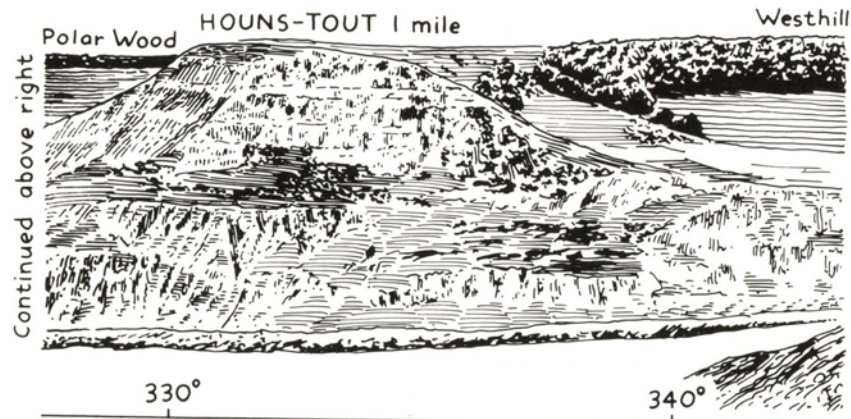
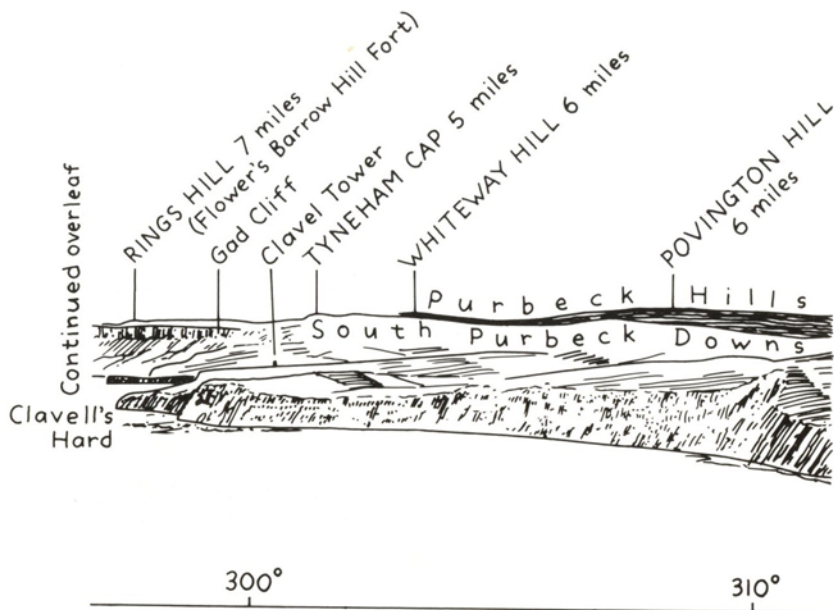
The lane from Renscombe Farm to Hillbottom

Chapman's Pool is the setting for the book "Seal Summer" by Nina Warner Hooke. Access to the pool from Hillbottom is difficult because of an area of sticky clay, and it is better to go down from St Aldhelm's Head or Pier Bottom.

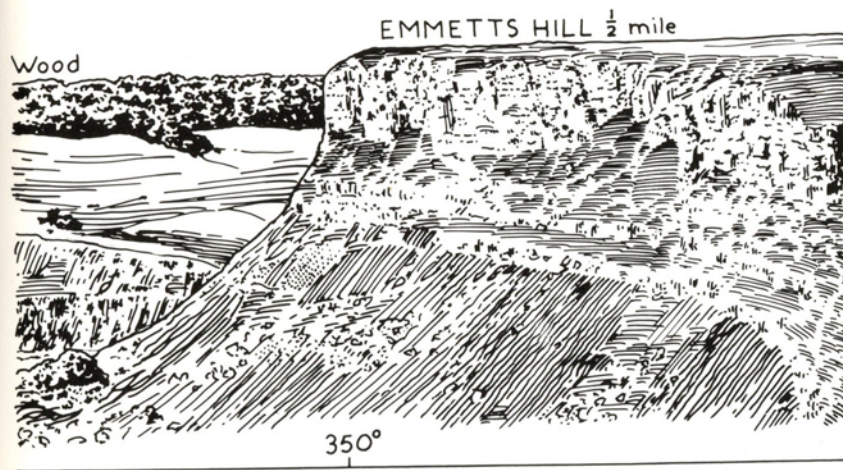
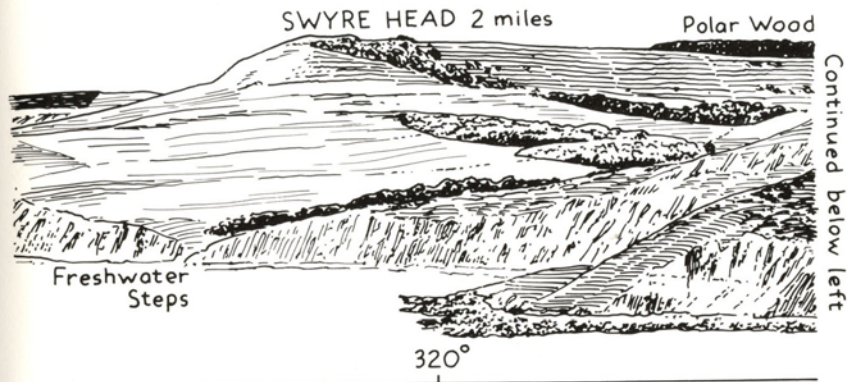
Panorama from St Aldhelm's Head

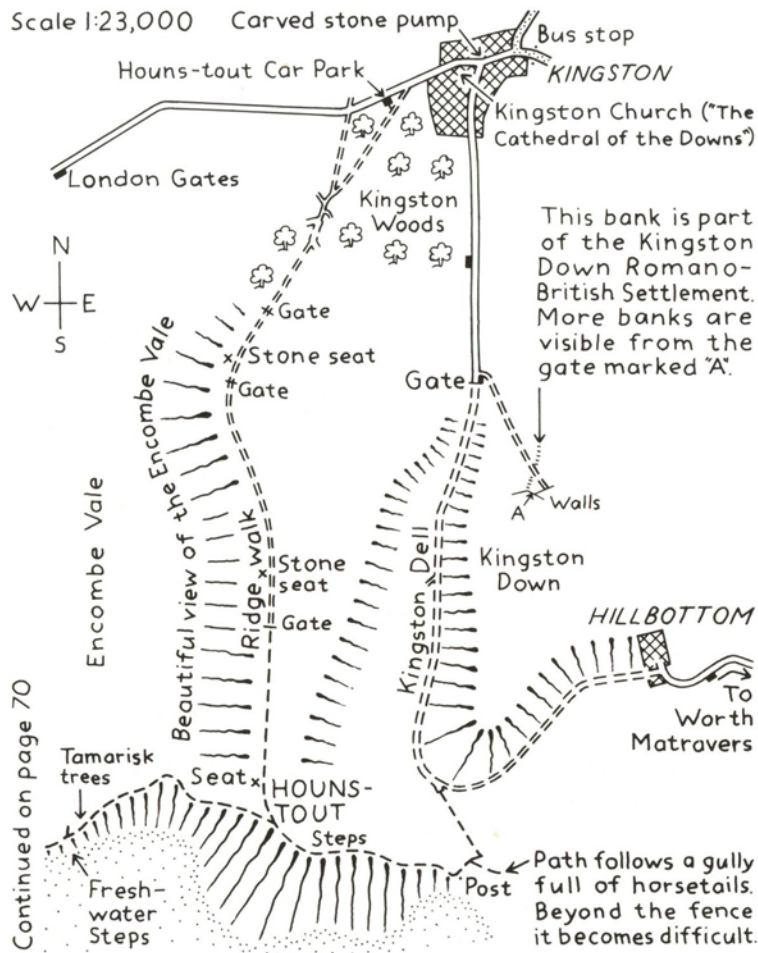


Panorama from St Aldhelm's Head, continued



The view from St Aldhelm's Head is better than that from anywhere else on the south coast of Purbeck because it projects into the Channel. For the best view, turn right at the lookout, and follow the Coast Path to the top of the steps.

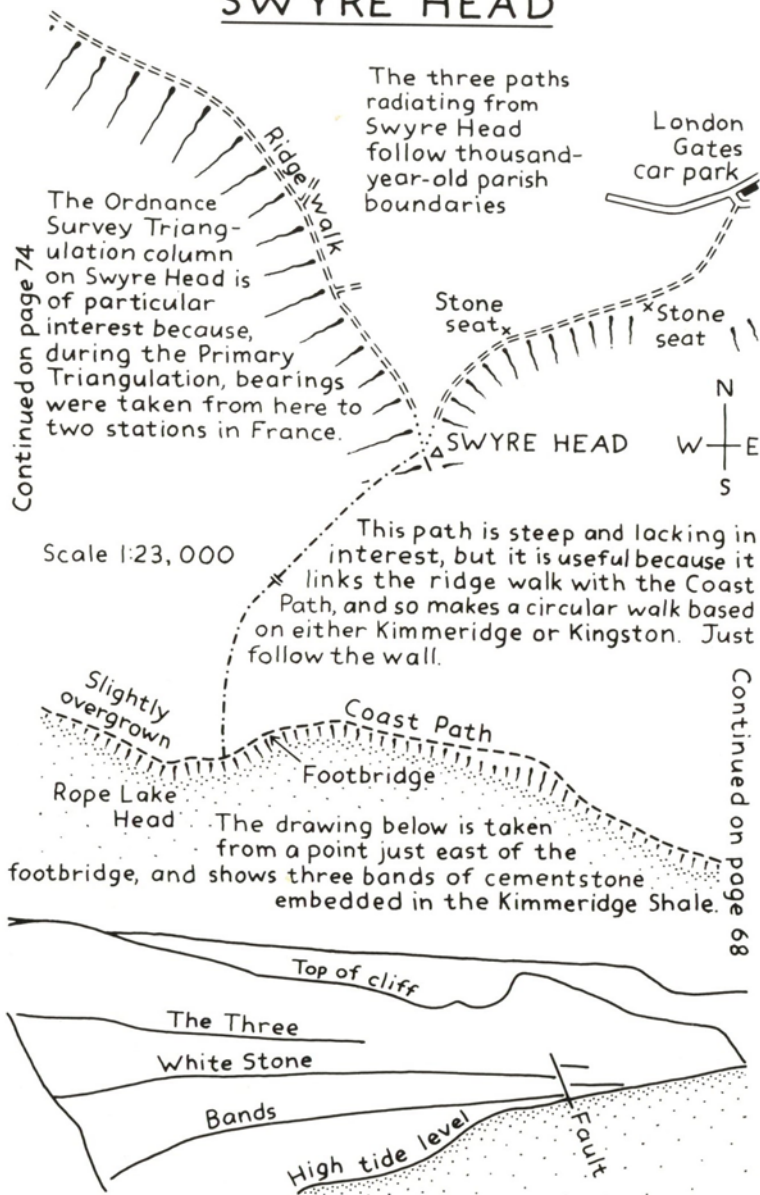


HOUNS-TOUT

The route from Kingston to Houns-tout is very pleasant, and level most of the way. A short path leads to it from the end of the car park.

The walk from Kingston Dell to Hillbottom is never muddy, as it is surfaced throughout.

SWYRE HEAD



Ascent from Kingston

The road from Kingston to London Gates is uninteresting, and it is best to drive as far as the car park if possible. The climb is not steep, and seats are provided at intervals.

Turn left at the car park, and instead of turning immediately left again, follow a track across a field. Beyond this field, the route follows a fine dry-stone wall, with the ground falling away on the left to the Encombe Vale.

Ascent from Kimmeridge

The route starts on the map on page 74, and follows an old stone wall along the crest of the South Purbeck Downs. It is best used for descent, as the views to the west are magnificent, and constantly changing as you lose height.

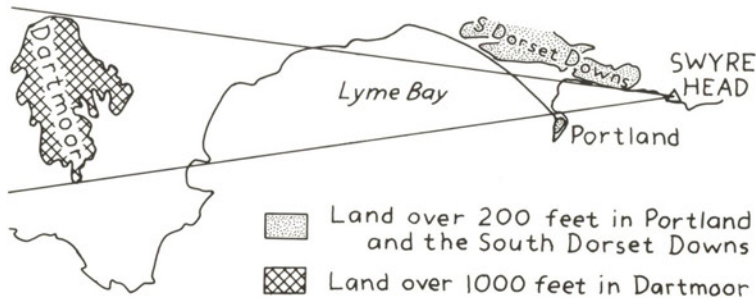
The Summit

On the highest point is a large, flat-topped tumulus capped with a square stone block. North of it is an Ordnance Survey triangulation column, and south of it is a wooden seat facing the Isle of Portland. Behind the seat you look down on Encombe House, which Hardy calls Enkworth Court, the home of Lord Mountclere in "The Hand of Ethelberta". The altitude of the tumulus is 682 feet (208 metres).

Swyre Head is the highest point in Purbeck, and the only point over 200 metres. (According to the Landranger map Ridgeway Hill and Godlingston Hill are both 199 metres.) It is therefore fitting that it should also be the best viewpoint. You can see farther from here (84 miles) than from any other point, and this is the only place in Purbeck from which you can see France.

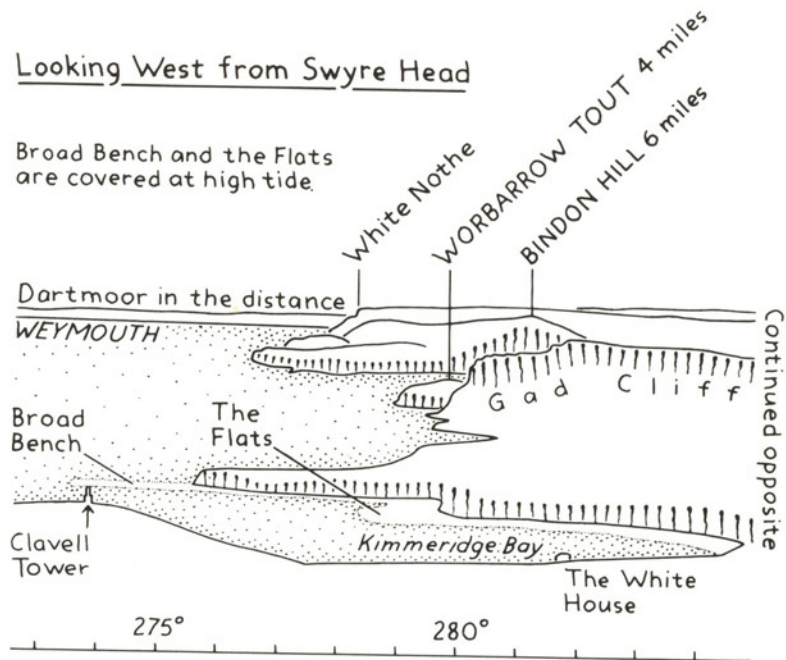
The View (from the stone block on the tumulus)

The map shows how Dartmoor exactly fits the gap between Portland and White Nothe. The farthest point, High Willhays (84 miles), is also the highest point in the south of England.

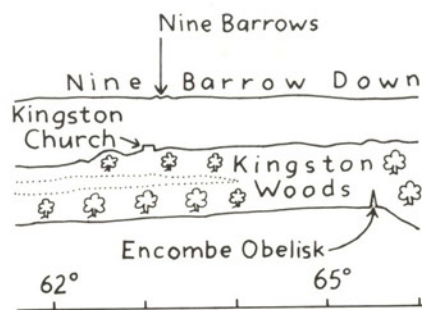


Looking West from Swyre Head

Broad Bench and the Flats are covered at high tide.

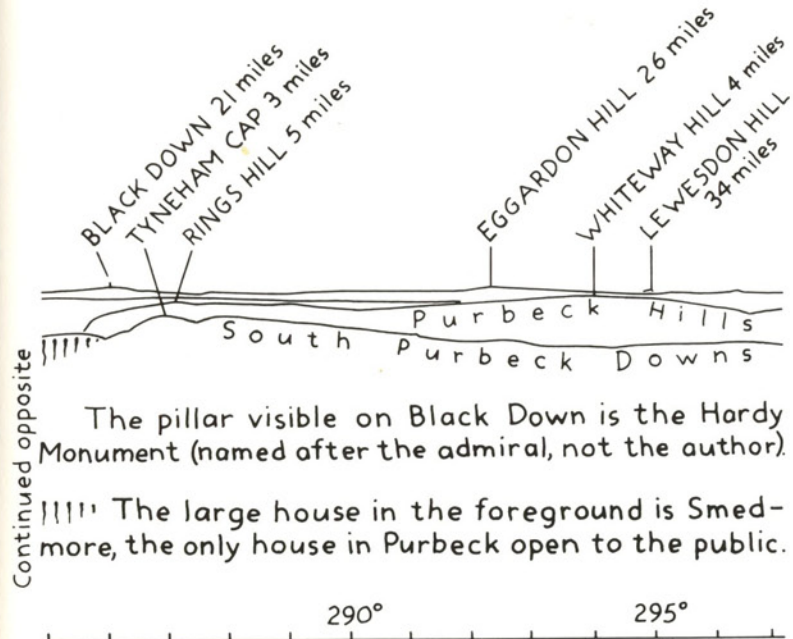


The white stripe along the Purbeck Hills in the north is the Cocknowle Chalk Pit. Behind it is Wareham.



A mile away in the east is the Encombe Obelisk, which is illustrated here. It was put up in 1835 in memory of Lord Stowell. Farther right, in the distance, is the Isle of Wight, terminating in St Catherine's Point.

In the south is part of the Cotentin Peninsula in Normandy, 65 miles away. It is very low on the horizon, just to the right of the wooden seat.

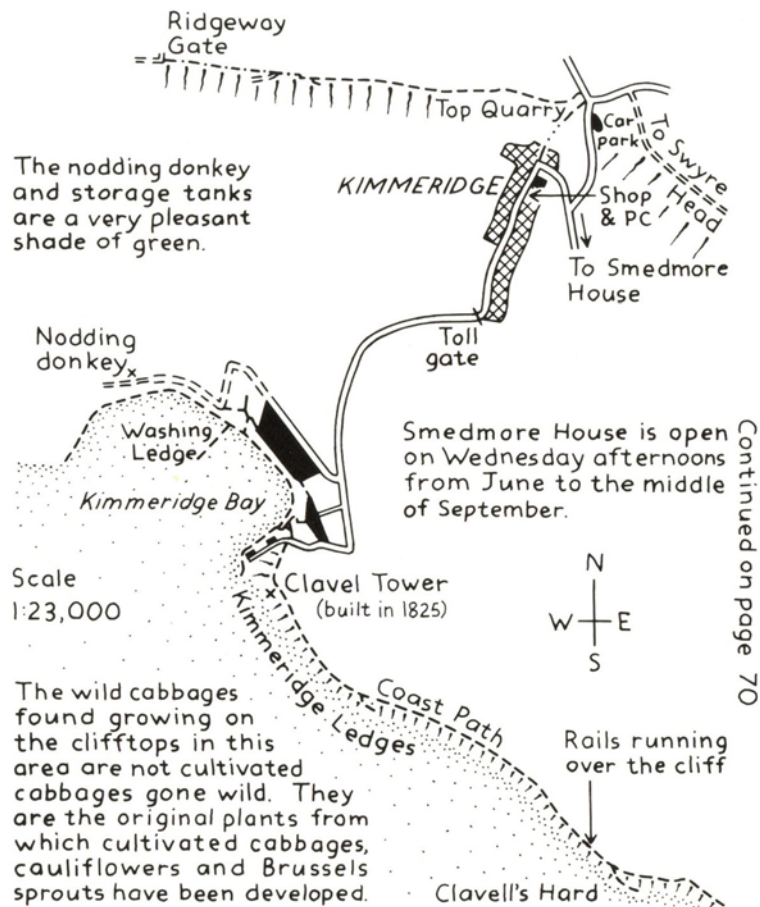


The pillar visible on Black Down is the Hardy Monument (named after the admiral, not the author).

||||| The large house in the foreground is Smedmore, the only house in Purbeck open to the public.

KIMMERIDGE

The ridge walk from the Top Quarry to Ridgeway Gate leads eventually to Tyneham Cap, but it's not worth using when the Range Walks are closed, because the best parts are all within the ranges. There are good views from the path of Kimmeridge village and (on the way back) of Smedmore House. Leave the road by the gate, not the stile.



Short cut from the Top Quarry to the village

Descent Leave the road by the stile. When the path peters out, aim for the kissing gate at the left end of the churchyard.

Ascent At the end of the churchyard you can see the path the other side of the field slightly to the right of straight on.

Smedmore House is still very much lived in, and the man who welcomes you at the entrance is the owner. Among the interesting objects that he will show you are a pole that opens up into a ladder, and a walking stick that conceals a long thin whiskey bottle. There is a very attractive small garden that is approached through the outbuildings.

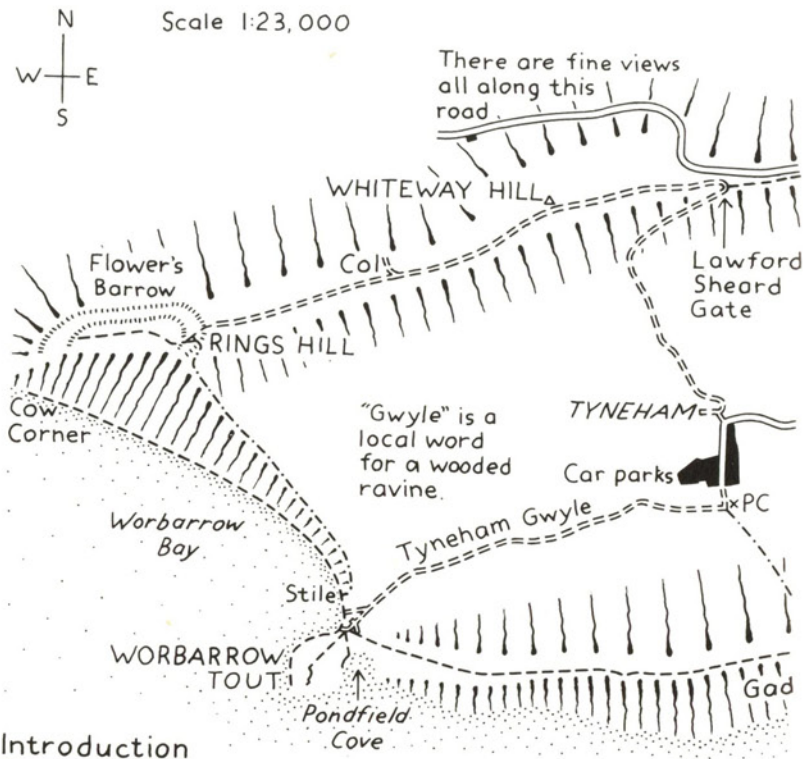
Kimmeridge Bay is the only place on the south coast of Purbeck where there is easy access to the sea. It lies in the Purbeck Marine Nature Reserve, the first marine nature reserve to be set up on the mainland of England, and it is popular with divers at weekends.

The cliffs here consist of wide bands of shale, a grey rock like slate but softer, interbedded with thinner bands of cementstone, which form the ledges. The Washing Ledge makes a good platform from which to study the wildlife of the seashore.

From the Clavel Tower you look down on the brown of seaweed-covered ledges and the green of the open water in the bay. The ledges are littered with rectangular blocks of rock, and farther along the coast you can see these blocks being created as the ledges crack and break up.

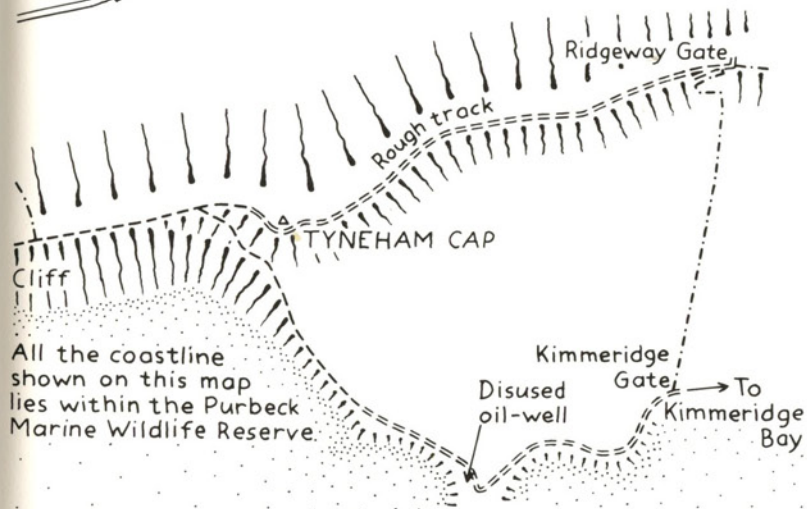
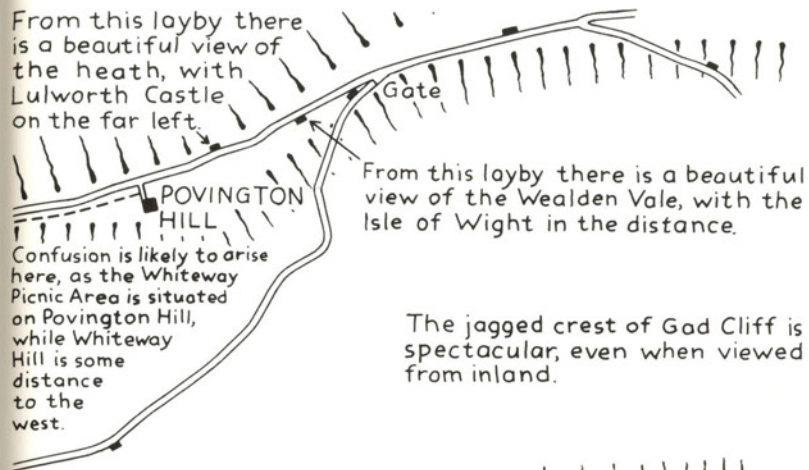
High on the cliffs above the ledge at Clavell's Hard are some red rocks, the result of the spontaneous combustion of Kimmeridge coal in 1973.

TYNEHAM

Introduction

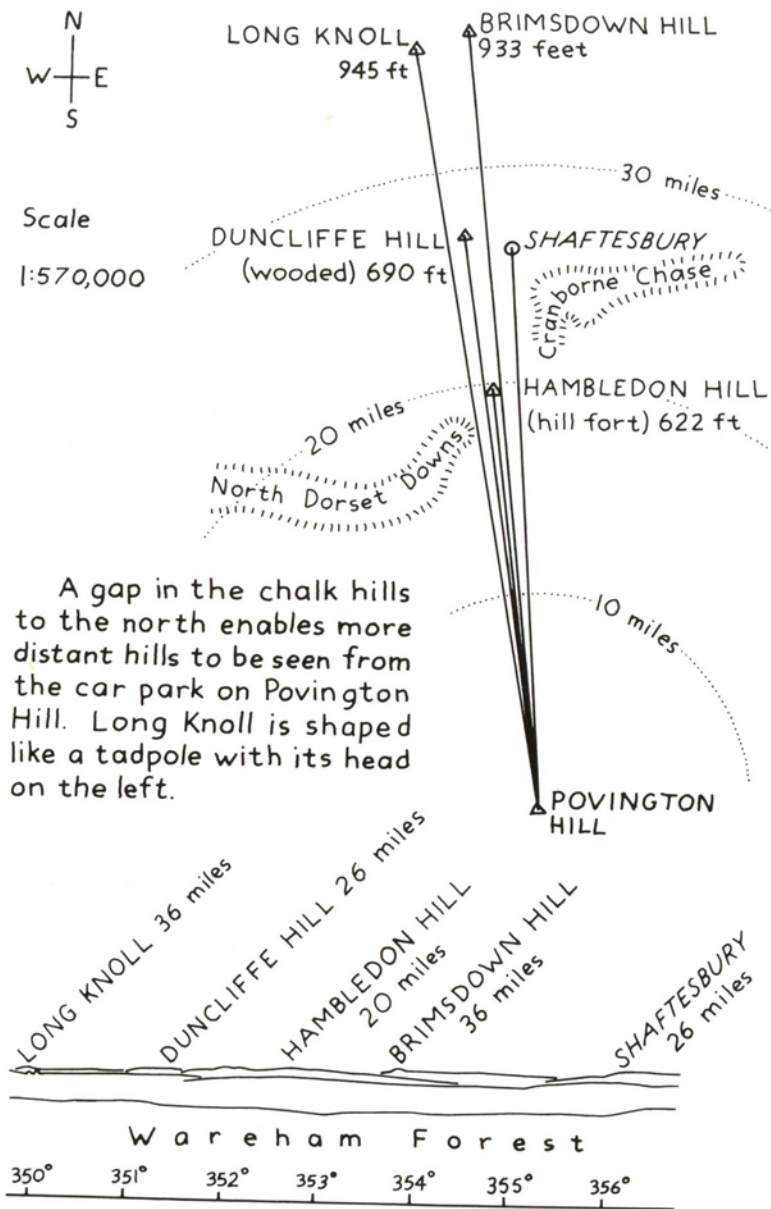
This final chapter covers those parts of the Purbeck Hills, Wealden Vale and South Purbeck Downs that lie within the army ranges, and that are only accessible at certain times of year. The two ridges are closer together than in the eastern part of the Isle, and the scenery is generally more spectacular.

There are some signs of army occupation, but they are not obtrusive. Crops are grown in the valleys, and sheep graze the hills, but all the houses are ruined or derelict.



The Range Walks are open at the following times:

- One week at Easter
- One week at the Spring Bank Holiday
- The last week in July to the second week in September (inclusive)
- Two weeks at Christmas
- Most weekends



A gap in the chalk hills to the north enables more distant hills to be seen from the car park on Povington Hill. Long Knoll is shaped like a tadpole with its head on the left.

Flower's Barrow

The best of the Range Walks follows the ridge from Povington Hill over Whiteway Hill to Rings Hill, and the hill fort of Flower's Barrow makes a worthy objective. This is the only hill fort in Purbeck, and is remarkable because roughly half of it has fallen into the sea.

Between the inner and outer ramparts the path forks, the left fork descending a very steep hill to Worbarrow, and the right fork crossing the fort and leaving the area covered by this book. From the far end of the fort there are magnificent views looking east towards Worbarrow Tout and west to the knife-edge of Bindon Hill.

Tyneham

The village was taken over by the army in 1943, and all the buildings have now fallen into disrepair, except for the church, which houses the exhibition.

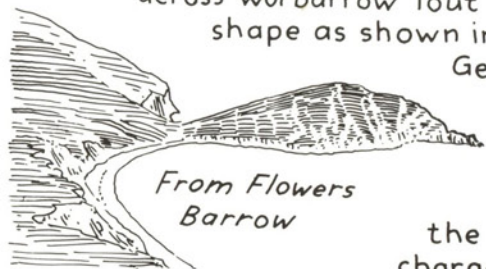
Inside the church, on the wall opposite the entrance, is a beautiful map of Tyneham and Worbarrow surrounded by photographs of the houses as they used to be. To the right of the map, at the end of the wall, is a plan to help you find your way round the rest of the exhibition.

In the school, opposite the church, are forms where you can record the species and locality of any animals or plants you have seen for the benefit of the Lulworth Range Wildlife Records. Nearby is a pre-war telephone box complete with "Button A" and "Button B". It can't be used for making phone calls, of course.

All the facilities in Tyneham are provided by the Army free of charge. The army have taken a lot from this area, but they have given back a lot.

Worbarrow Tout

The two contours drawn on the Pathfinder map across Worbarrow Tout give no idea of its shape as shown in the illustration.

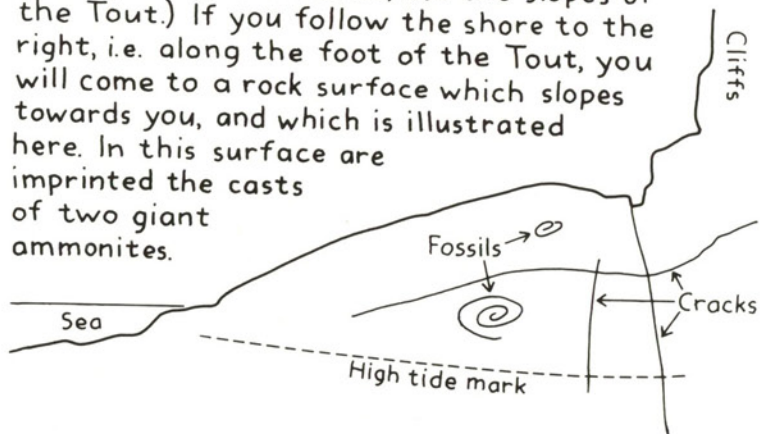


Geologically it is an outlier of the South Purbeck Downs, and the south cliff of the Tout is similar in character to Gad Cliff.

If you follow the north shore of Worbarrow Tout you will see how the angle of the grassy slope is taken up by the angle of the rocks underneath; and as you follow the coast farther round, more and more layers of rock are revealed.

Pondfield Cove

From the neck of land joining Worbarrow Tout to the mainland, a way leads down to Pondfield Cove. (To avoid the mud, use the slopes of the Tout.) If you follow the shore to the right, i.e. along the foot of the Tout, you will come to a rock surface which slopes towards you, and which is illustrated here. In this surface are imprinted the casts of two giant ammonites.

Worbarrow Tout (Summit)

A steep path leads up to the highest point and continues beyond it along a ridge. The illustration is taken from this ridge, looking back towards the mainland.



Worbarrow Bay is worth visiting for its multi-coloured cliffs, but walking on the shingle beach is tiring on the feet.

The easiest way up Tyneham Cap is along the ridge from the Top Quarry (see page 74), but the coastal route from Kimmeridge Bay is recommended for its views of Gad Cliff.



Gad Cliff consists of a series of buttresses, each one corbelled out like a turret on a Scottish castle.

Some personal notes in conclusion

I have been going to produce a book of this sort for almost as long as I can remember, but I have always had something else to do. In October 1981 I made up my mind to go ahead. I decided that this was a bad time of year to begin, so I spent the winter driving taxis; but all the time I was driving I felt a warm glow because I knew that in the spring I would be going to the Isle of Purbeck.

By September 20th 1982 I had investigated every possible track and path in the area. Then I got down to the task of condensing 1000 pages of notes into 88 pages of book. At first the sentences refused to fit the pages properly, but after a time they learned to behave themselves.

The best time to be in the countryside is between five and eight a.m. in May, June or July, when the mist is on the meadows, and the air is full of the sights and sounds of wildlife. I remember one day in late May when I left Arne at 4.30 a.m. and walked across the heath to Scotland Farm. When I set off all the birds were singing, and as I went on my way I heard cuckoos, wood pigeons and pheasants. I saw four deer, four ducks, two partridges and a lot of rabbits. Orchids, toadflax and white campion were growing at the roadside, and there were

splashes of white cotton grass on the heath. Beyond Hartland Moor the larks were singing, and I saw my first stonechat. When I returned to the area later in the day the deer and the rabbits had gone.

One thing that impressed me wherever I went was the wide variety of wild flowers, butterflies and birds that I came across. To get the best out of bird-watching, I found that I needed two things—a pair of binoculars, and a friend who is good with birds. Most of my exploration was done on my own, but on one occasion I went with Jack Robson. We walked along the cliff-top from the Winspit to St. Aldhelm's Head. I had been there before and seen nothing but gulls; yet Jack pointed out guillemots, kittiwakes, fulmars, rock pipits, a puffin and a shag's nest. We also went to the lakes in the Creech area, and he showed me a tufted duck and a mandarin duck, neither of which I would have noticed if I had been on my own.

The land area of the world is about a million times that of the Isle of Purbeck. To describe it all would require enough volumes to fill a bookcase four shelves high and a mile long; so if ever you walk for a mile along Studland Beach or Ballard Down, imagine your route lined with bookshelves, and ponder on the amount of world there is out there waiting to be explored.

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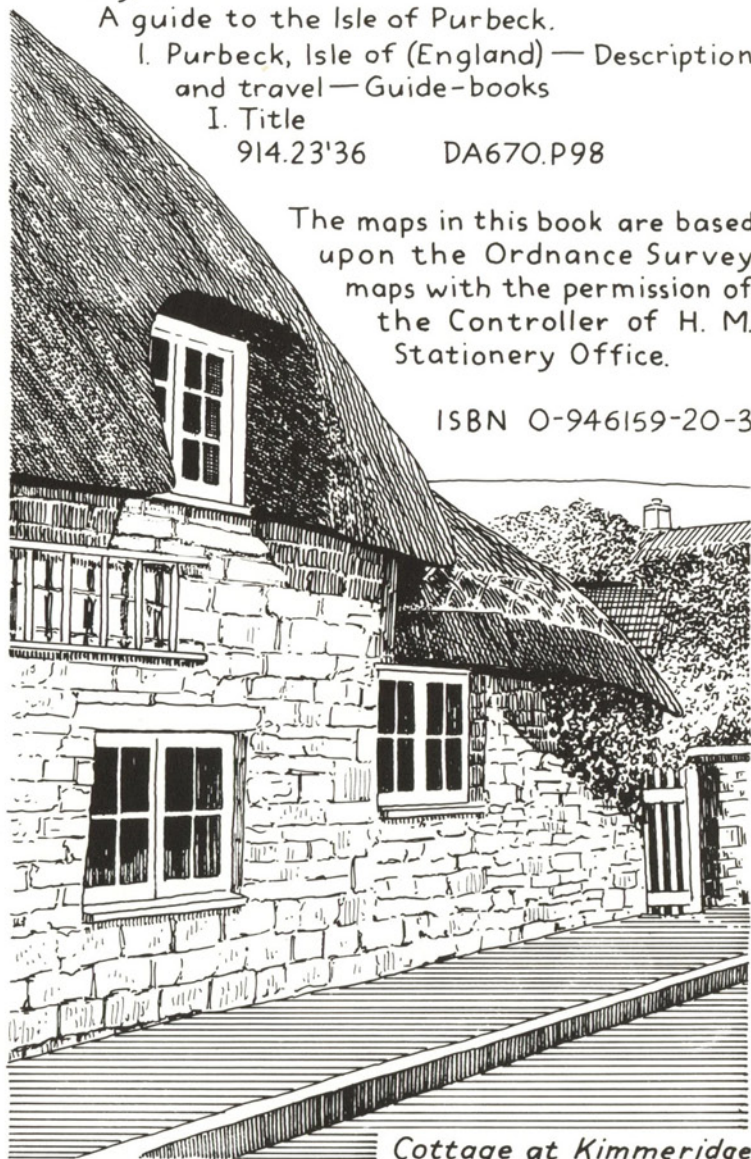
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