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INTRODUCTION

In Purbeck, it's easy to enjoy walking. Of course, the area has many other attractions, and if you're here on holiday I wouldn't necessarily want to drag you away from the beaches at Swanage and Studland all the time. But it would be a shame to visit Purbeck and not see something of the countryside, and there's no doubt that the best way to do this is on foot. Fortunately, that's not difficult: there is a comprehensive network of rights of way, most of which are easy to find and follow.

Purbeck offers startling contrast in a relatively small geographical area, as you'll appreciate if you explore even a handful of the walks in this book. There's the long ridge of chalk hills, running coast-to-coast from Ballard Point to Worbarrow Bay. There's the coast itself, with high cliffs, little coves and, of course, fine sea views. There's the quiet valley of the Corfe river, and the limestone ridge from Swyre Head to Gad Cliff. And there's also the areas of beautiful heathland.

Fifteen walks means that you can tackle one each day of a two-week holiday, and still have one left for another visit. I've opted for variety, and have tried to include some walks which explore lesser-known parts of Purbeck as well as the obvious favourites. Don't feel compelled to follow the walks slavishly. If you have young children or just fancy a short stroll, then feel free to walk just part of the way. Alternatively, if you're a keen walker and feel let down that the longest walk here is a measly nine miles or so, then tackle two or three together.

The walks are circular and begin and end in towns or villages. I try to indicate what facilities are available to the tired or hungry walker in each place, and whether the routes are serviced by public transport (mostly they are). I also give some idea of the length of each walk, though treat the mileage distances with some caution. Two miles of up-and-down clifftop walking (as near Arish Mell, for example) easily equals three miles of heathland walking. The same applies to time: where one person might stride, another might stroll or even stop for a picnic.

Having been in print for over twenty years, *Walking in Purbeck* may now perhaps be turning into something of a local landmark in its own right; if so, it is a reflection both of the enduring beauty of the area and of the continuing popularity which walking enjoys. But for this new edition, I have approached the book as if for the first time. I have taken the opportunity to introduce two new walks and to make significant changes to two or three of the other walks, in order to cover aspects and areas of Purbeck which I felt were previously under-represented. Even where the walks remain unchanged, the detailed descriptions and instructions for them have all been carefully checked and revised where necessary. Nevertheless the countryside is a living place, and there may well be further changes which take place during the lifetime of this edition: bear in mind, therefore, that not every landmark mentioned will necessarily remain always the same.

Of the changes which recent years have brought, the balance is, I think, a positive one for walkers. The rights of way network in Purbeck is better waymarked and maintained than it once was, and more is being done by the local authorities to encourage walking. A good range of introductory leaflets are available now in visitor centres. (That doesn't mean, of course, that there aren't still occasional problems: a number of stiles on some of the walks featured in this book, for example, need urgent attention, and there continue to be problems in summer with rights of way obliterated by crops or vegetation.)

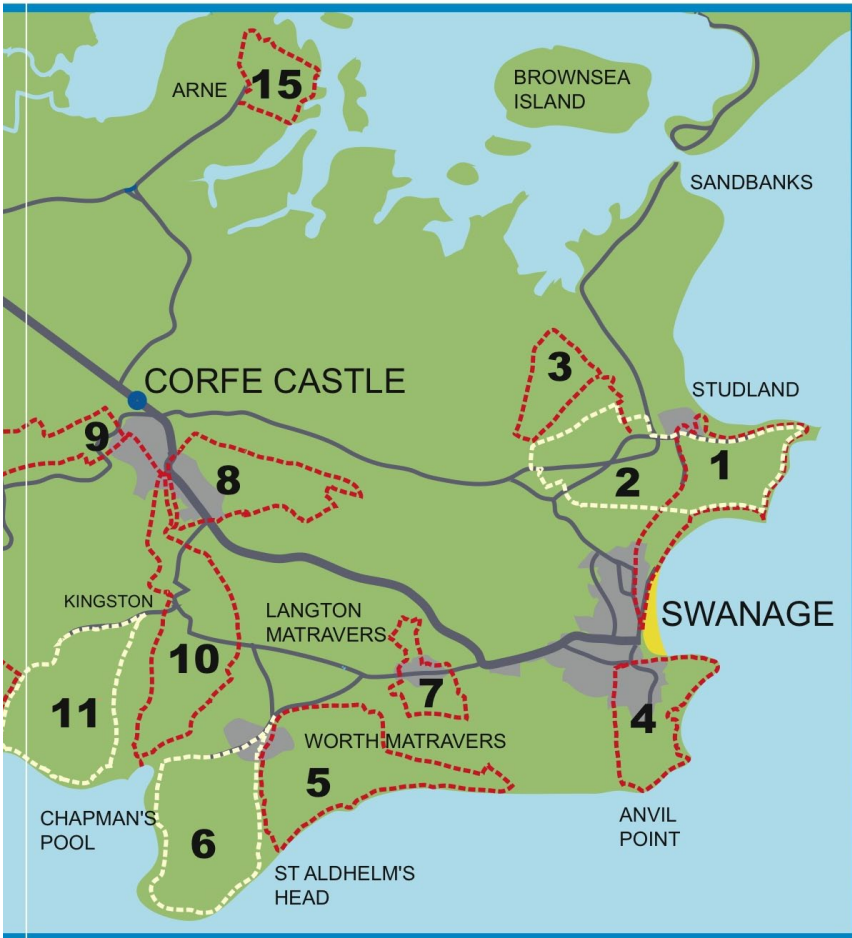
Another change for the better is that walkers have access to a number of areas of countryside in Purbeck which were not previously openly available to the public. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (the 'right to roam' legislation long sought by walkers) has introduced some areas of access land, primarily on the heathland, the coast and the Purbeck Hills. Walk 9, for example, includes a short stretch of access land walking near Creech. The National Trust and the RSPB are also to be commended for their work in creating new paths, several of which feature in this book. And although they didn't make it into the book this time, the recently created paths on Stoborough Heath and Hartland Moor nature reserves extend further the options open to walkers in Purbeck.

Looking down, say, from Ballard Down or the Corfe hill towards Poole and Bournemouth it's tempting to conclude that Purbeck, by some lucky chance, has managed to remain wonderfully unspoilt and free from major development. Nevertheless, as I hope this book will make clear, human activity has left a very profound mark on the landscape. Both in the past and certainly today Purbeck has been the



scene of considerable industrial activity – stone, clay, shale and now, most dramatically of all, oil from the massive reserves underneath Purbeck, which are being tapped by BP at their Wytch Farm site. Agriculture, too, as all walkers should remember, is a business: as one Church Knowle resident graphically put it to me once, ‘every blade of grass has a price label on it’.

But understanding that Purbeck is a place of economic activity should enhance our understanding and the pleasures to be got from walking, rather than detracting from the experience. I wish you very happy times exploring this wonderful corner of the country.



Acknowledgements

Many people have helped me in the preparation of this book. I am particularly grateful to Jane Scullion and to my father Noel Bibby for their many useful comments and suggestions.

I also acknowledge the assistance given, shortly before her death, by Mary Baxter of the Ramblers' Association in Purbeck.

1. THE CLIFFS OF OLD HARRY

Swanage – Old Harry Rocks – Studland – Ballard Down – Swanage

A classic walk of about 5½ miles (8.75 kms) taking 2-4 hours from Swanage beach past the Old Harry Rocks to Studland village, and back across Ballard Down.

STARTING POINT

Swanage beach (New Swanage end). Park in the North Beach car park (at the end of De Moulham Road), or in neighbouring roads. It's sometimes possible to find places to park in or near Burlington Road (off Ulwell Road), in which case a footpath leads directly to the beach.

Buses run along the front between Swanage and Studland and Bournemouth; and to Swanage town from Corfe Castle, Wareham and Poole.

FACILITIES

Studland has a pleasant pub, the Bankes Arms; there are also a number of shops, beach cafes, and several hotels providing meals. Teas often available at Manor Farm. Toilets.

ANY PROBLEMS?

None, although take appropriate care at the cliff edge. The return route back from Studland involves a short, but stiff, climb. Unusually, in certain conditions of tides it may not be safe to begin this walk on Swanage beach, in which case divert via New Swanage.

ABOUT THIS WALK

The Old Harry Rocks used to feature as one of the framed illustrations on the walls of railway compartments, in the days when railway carriages had such things. Nowadays, the pictures have gone and Swanage is no longer part of the national rail



Studland church

network but Old Harry remains a famous Purbeck landmark, rivalling Corfe Castle for a place on the picture postcards and on the cover of travel brochures.

I'm tempted to say that, if you think you only have the time or inclination to do one walk, this should be the one – because I suspect that, having walked around Ballard Point and down to Old Harry, you'll change your mind. Studland is a fine destination for a walk, too. The wonderful sandy beach, a well-situated village pub and the superb unspoilt Norman church should cater for almost all tastes.

Old Harry Rocks pair up with the similar chalk stacks at the Needles, on the Isle of Wight, which are often clearly visible from Swanage. In times past, the chalk downs used to continue unbroken across what is now the English Channel, and Poole Harbour and the Solent were simply a river valley. The sea, having very successfully separated Wight from the mainland still nibbles away at Old Harry. One of the stacks, which had been named Old Harry's Wife, was washed away in a storm in 1896; in exchange, the sea periodically separates new stacks from the main body of chalk, so that Old Harry's family stays much the same size from generation to generation.

The path around Old Harry is one of the most popular in Purbeck, and you won't need to worry about getting lost. The cliffs deserve respect, however, and can be dangerous to anyone foolhardy enough to leave the path, as the records in Swanage lifeboat station

demonstrate. Reckless holidaymakers are not a new phenomenon; C.E. Robinson in his book *Picturesque Rambles in the Isle of Purbeck* published in 1882 has a story from a few years earlier:

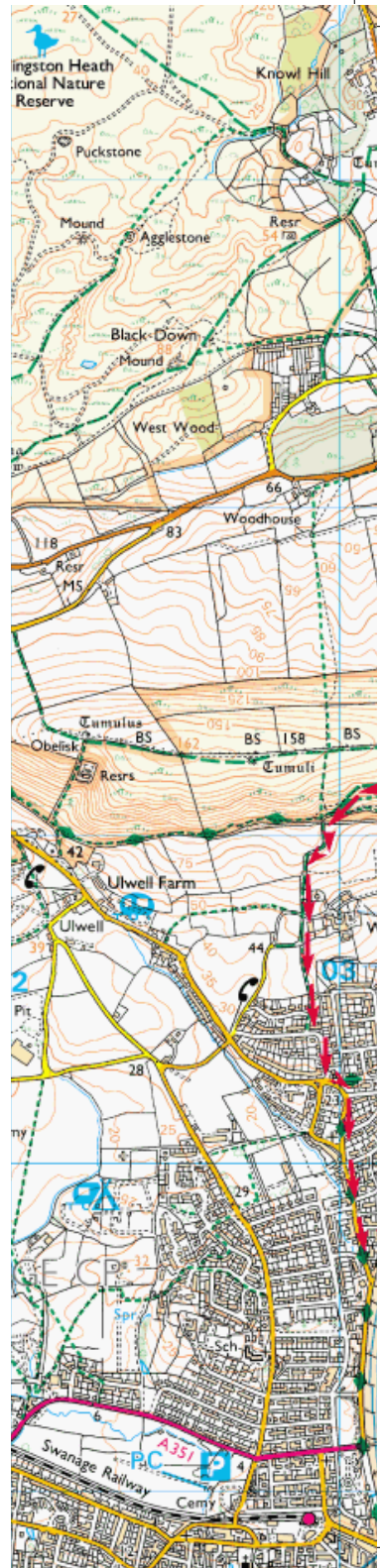
‘It occurred to a pair of Londoners, on a visit to Swanage, to try the excitement of a little home alpine climbing. Soon enough they reached the point from which ascent or descent was equally difficult. Dusk rapidly came on, and during the whole night - one of rain and wind - there they stood, hungry and cold, with their backs to the inhospitable rock. A dense mist hid them from view the next morning, but, though not seen, their cries were heard on board the steamer from Poole, and a party of coastguardsmen were sent out in search. But it was late in the afternoon before the two crestfallen victims of this unlucky adventure were rescued, by means of ropes let down from the top.’

But who needs this sort of adventure when the walk itself has so many pleasures to offer?

THE WALK

Walk along Swanage sea-front away from the town along the promenade. When the sea-wall and huts stop, keep on the beach. Just before the final breakwater turn left up a row of steps, and then almost immediately right up some more steps.

You are now on the coast path, which climbs slowly, skirting the cliff edge. There are fine views to be had back over Swanage beach and bay. The path marks the geological transition to the chalk hills by climbing more steeply, and the fields







to the left give way to open downland. Continue on the coast path, reaching the ridgeway path at a series of earthworks.

Carry on along Ballard Down. The path drops quite steeply until Ballard Point is turned, and the first of the chalk stacks come into sight. Directly ahead now are the buildings of Bournemouth, across the water of Poole Bay. Follow the path as it slowly loses height, until finally the last chalk stacks, the Old Harry Rocks themselves, are reached.

The chalk stacks are a refuge for the sea-birds, safe from human interference. The name on the map, St Lucas Leap, commemorates not some miraculous feat of long-jumping by an early Christian saint, but (so the story goes) an unsuccessful jump by a pedigree greyhound called St Lucas which had belonged to a Studland squire, and which had been trying to catch a hare at the time. Alas, the dog was killed; let's hope the hare survived.

The path turns the corner, and shortly afterwards enters a little



Old Harry Rocks

woodland. Studland and its beach lie ahead. After a few hundred metres of dusty walking, on the outskirts of Studland, follow the alternative route of the coast path sharp right, down to the sea. Turn left past a few beach huts, and then at the beach cafe turn inland up the sunken lane to emerge in Studland village beside some toilets. Turn right on to the tarmac road and pass the Bankes Arms and a National Trust car park.

If you want to spend time in Studland, or reach the main beaches, carry on along the road at this point. But to continue the walk, turn left through a gate immediately after the small N.T. car park, beside a little meadow; the churchyard is directly ahead. Enter the churchyard and turn left once the edge of the church is reached, leaving along the tarmac approach road until the village cross is reached.

Studland church is a wonderful unspoilt Norman church, which has been described as one of the dozen or so most complete examples in the country. It seems likely that it was originally built before the Conquest but rebuilt soon afterwards. Incidentally, look out for the

carved stone faces – both animal and human – on the external north wall of the nave and the prominent gravestone of Waterloo veteran Sergeant William Lawrence.

For many years, all that was left of Studland's village cross was a stone stump. The cross you see today may look traditional but a closer look will reveal some less conventional images, including one of Concorde. The stone came from a quarry at St Aldhelm's Head and was carved by a local marble-worker Treleven Haysom; the cross itself was erected in 1976.

At the cross keep straight ahead, taking the track past Manor Farm and its outbuildings. The track rapidly becomes tarmac again, and runs ahead up to the Glebeland Estate of houses on the side of the hill. Follow the road passing a number of houses to your right until the road finally peters out. Carry on through a gate, joining an old track which runs diagonally up the side of the hill. The path crosses a meadow before reaching the brow.

Here there is an old much-weathered stone which invites you to 'Rest and Be Thankful'. The stone was erected here in 1852 by David Jardine (his initials can be seen at the side of the stone), a Londoner who also donated a clock to Swanage parish church.

Cross the ridgeway path and continue downhill, the path falling diagonally to the right. Swanage and its bay are now in view again; directly below is Whitecliff Farm. When the path reaches the limits of open downland, carry on through a little gate into a sunken track between two fields. Keep straight ahead at Whitecliff, crossing over the farm approach road.

Whitecliff farmhouse dates back to the early seventeenth century, though the site itself is mentioned in the Domesday Book. 'No more charming site for a house than that of Whitecliff can be found along the sea-coast for many a long mile', wrote C.E. Robinson in 1882. 'Such an aspect - warm, sunny, and sheltered! such beautiful views around! such fine old elms and poplars!'

Cross a stile, and take a narrow path running between two fields until finally a tarmac suburban road is reached. Carry on down Hill Road, turn left, and then follow the road down to the New Swanage corner shop. Here the main road from Studland joins from the right; follow it, initially half-left, back down to the beach.