The National Trust in Purbeck looks after more than 3,000 hectares of countryside and 21 miles of coastline as well as Corfe Castle, one of the most visited historic sites in the South West. Coastal terrain ranges from sandy beaches to chalk and limestone cliffs, while inland lies a diverse mix of heaths, downs, woods and farmland.

The South West Coast Path Association (www.southwestcoastpath.org.uk) exists to help everyone enjoy the coast path.

### Other useful information

**Refreshments**
The Square & Compass in Worth Matravers;

**Further information**
For general information: Swanage Tourist Information Centre 01929 422885

**Other useful websites:**
http://www.visit-dorset.com/site/explore-dorset/areas-to-visit/swanage-and-purbeck
http://www.swanage.gov.uk
http://www.virtual-swanage.co.uk
http://www.isleofpurbeck.com

**OS Explorer Map:** OL15 Purbeck & South Dorset

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4. After Eastington Farm follow the left hand fork heading to the left-hand corner of the next field. After the second of the two fields, go over the stile onto the road, turn left and carry on downhill into Worth Matravers.

The Square and Compass dates back to 1752 as an inn, and has been in the same family for over 100 years. There is a fossil museum in the pub, including some dinosaur fossils, as well as other fascinating artefacts from local history: prehistoric tools, Roman coins, bits of 18th century shipwrecks, and agricultural curiosities like cow cake cutters and turnip crunchers.

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Eastington is a seventeenth century farmhouse built from the local limestone, and it is a Grade II listed building which is now owned by the National Trust, as is much of the area around here. The Trust manages the land with a particular interest in both nature conservation and archaeology, and it is grazed traditionally using sheep and cattle, and without the use of fertilisers. As a result, typical limestone plants thrive here, which in its turn encourages a rich variety of butterflies and insects.

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Cardinal Beetle near Worth Matravers

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Distance: 3 miles (4¾ km)

Start: Swanage Coastal Park

Finish: Square and Compass, Worth Matravers

Start Postcode: BH19 2RS

Grid ref: SZ 018 784

Difficulty level: Easy

Terrain: There are some stretches of ascent and descent, but generally the going is easy.

This is one of the many walks that can be found at www.southwestcoastpath.com
Directions

1. Exit Swanage Coastal Park, walking down the road, take the turning on the left hand side, signed Priests Way. Keep on the Priest Way until you reach Worth Matravers. Initially follow signs for Dancing Ledge and Worth.

The Priest's Way follows an old track, winding its way to Swanage, which was the route taken by the local priest as he trudged back and forth between his church in Worth Matravers and the other church in his care in Swanage.

If you wish to extend your walk, before the path to Dancing Ledge you can see a path leading to Spyway Barn on your left and to Langton House in the opposite direction. Spyway Barn, was bought by the National Trust in the early 1990's. The barn has a display room highlighting local wildlife. The fields below are managed as traditional hay meadows with no fertilizers or chemicals which ensure a plentiful supply of food for birds and bats.

2. By turning left off the Priest's Way you will be able to follow the path to Dancing Ledge. Dancing Ledge was one of many local quarries used to provide high-quality limestone for building (see the Dancing Ledge Walk). There is a small swimming pool cut into the rock by the quarrymen at the start of the twentieth century, so that local schoolchildren could swim here.

3. Continue on the Priest's Way passing the limestone quarries.

These quarries around Purbeck are important to geologists, because many of them show how the layers of limestone were laid down. The Swanworth Quarries, just to the north of Worth Matravers, show the most complete section of the different rocks on the Isle of Purbeck, from the Portland Sand on the quarry floor, to the Lower Purbeck Beds at the top (see the Corfe Castle Walk).

As a part of its role as land owner, the National Trust is also involved in the future of the quarries around Acton. Some of these are nearing the end of their useful lives, but there is still plenty of the valuable Purbeck limestone around them, so the Trust plans to infill the old quarries and reseed them with grass as it opens new ones, preserving the landscape while continuing to provide stone for building projects. It is also paying attention to the preservation of wildlife.

A small pond near the Priest's Way is home to a population of rare great-crested newts, and there are equally rare greater horseshoe bats in the old quarries.

Also being preserved in the local area are another famous and fascinating feature revealed as a result of quarrying: fossilised dinosaur footprints! Most of these are of Megalosaurus and Iguanodon.
Corfe Common itself, a Site of Special Scientific Interest and preserved as rough grazing and a public open space, has extensive earthworks, field patterns and trackways going right back through history to prehistoric times. An axe and several small flints found in a disused sand quarry on West Common have been dated as being from the Mesolithic period, which ran from the end of the last Ice Age, about 10,000 years ago, to the start of the Bronze Age in around 2035 BC.

For a long time the common was particularly known for its eight Bronze Age bowl barrows, or burial mounds; but more recent work by English Heritage unearthed two more of these barrows on East Common. These would have been high-status burials, and their positions on hill-tops made them useful landmarks for the people who lived here. There are field systems visible here, too, from the Iron Age, which succeeded the Bronze Age a few centuries before the Romans invaded, and the English Heritage study also identified a Romano-British field system here known as “Celtic fields”. A series of parallel cuttings on the common were confirmed as ancient trackways, where carts loaded with stone were brought from local quarries to Corfe Castle.

9. At the waymarker, turn right towards Corfe Castle and follow the footpath beside the houses, heading directly towards the castle, crossing the road at Halves Cottages to carry on along the right-hand boundaries of the fields until you come to the playground at the foot of the castle. From here go left between the houses onto West Street and follow it past the Town Hall to the Square. From the Town Hall carry on around the Square onto East Street, to the bus stop on the far side of the road some distance to the right.

Text by Ruth Luckhurst

The National Trust in Purbeck looks after more than 3,000 hectares of countryside and 21 miles of coastline as well as Corfe Castle, one of the most visited historic sites in the South West. Coastal terrain ranges from sandy beaches to chalk and limestone cliffs, while inland lies a diverse mix of heaths, downs, woods and farmland.

Corfe Castle Opening Times
Castle, Shop and Tea-room
1 Jan - 28 Feb 10-4pm
1 Mar - 31 Mar 10-5pm
1 Apr - 30 Sep 10-6pm
1 Oct - 31 Oct 10-5pm
1 Nov - 31 Dec 10-4pm
25 & 26 Dec Closed

High winds can cause closure of all or parts of the castle. Last admission 30 minutes before closing. Dogs welcome on a short lead.

Other useful information
Nearest Refreshments: There are numerous restaurants, pubs and tea shops in Corfe Castle
Public Transport: The Wilts & Dorset Route 40 bus runs regularly between Swanage and Poole, stopping at Durnford Drove in Langton Matravers. Pick it up at the East Street bus stop in Corfe Castle. For details visit www.travelinesw.com or phone 0871 200 22 33.
OS Explorer Map: OL15 Purbeck & South Dorset

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Walks on and around the
South West Coast Path
with Swanage Coastal Park

Corfe Castle

A delightful stroll through a dramatic landscape rich in history, on paths and tracks that have been used by feet and wheels for many thousands of years. From the earliest days of life on earth, dinosaur footprints have been found here; while evidence of human habitation dates back to almost as far as the end of the last Ice Age. As you approach Corfe Castle, there are spectacular views across medieval field systems to the twelfth century stronghold which dominates the pass from north to south between plunging chalk ridges.
Dancing Ledge Walk).

Keat's Quarry footprints were discovered mostly from small dinosaurs, but at nearby fossilised dinosaur footprints. These are hunters, and they are famous for their fascination to palaeontologists, or fossil-hunters, and they are famous for their interest to palaeontologists, or fossil-hunters, and they are famous for their fascination to palaeontologists, or fossil-hunters, and they are famous for their

Local limestone beds are also a source of limestone. Purbeck of the many different beds of limestone. Purbeck without passing the castle. Purbeck without passing the castle. Purbeck without passing the castle. Purbeck without passing the castle. Purbeck without passing the castle.

The quarry workings on your right are the Swanworth Quarries, a major source of Purbeck limestone. These quarries are of particular interest to geologists, containing the most complete section on the Isle of Purbeck of the many different beds of limestones.

On the road, turn left and go into Worth Matravers, carrying on straight ahead at the Square and Compass Public House and continuing into the village itself.

Carrying on past the village green with its pond and pump, and continuing past the church, take the footpath on your right at the far side of the field beyond the church, leading up out of Worth Matravers and into the countryside above.

The Purbeck Way is a 12½-mile walking route which runs from Wareham, through the best of the local scenery, riverside, heathland, woodland, downland, the imposing Purbeck Hills and the dramatic Jurassic coastline to Swanage. Another waymarked 12½-mile loop, the Purbeck Way West, links it from Wareham to Coombe Keynes, passing through Lulworth en route.

Arriving at the B3069, cross the road and pick up the track opposite, just a little to the left, and with it head downhill over farmland.

After a short distance, Corfe Castle comes into view, perched strategically on its mound in the dramatic break between the towering ridges of West Hill and East Hill, with the flat heaths and downs of the Wareham hinterland visible behind it. It was in the perfect position for a stronghold in uncertain times: no-one could travel from north to south (or vice versa) through the Isle of Purbeck without passing the castle.

Although it is thought likely that there was a Roman defensive site here, the crumbling ruins visible today are the remains of an eleventh-century limestone rebuild of a ninth-century wooden building. In the thirteenth century King John carried out extensive improvements, adding a fine hall and chapel as well as some domestic buildings; and his son, Henry III, carried on where he left off, constructing additional walls, towers and gatehouses.

In the sixteenth century it passed out of the hands of monarchs, when Elizabeth I sold it to her dancing master, Sir Christopher Hatton, and in 1635 it was sold again, to the Lord Chief Justice Sir John Bankes. When the Roundheads raged through Dorset in the English Civil War a decade later, ravaging many of the local strongholds where Royalists resisted the Parliamentary takeover, the castle survived a six-week siege and a number of half-hearted blockades.

In 1646, however, a second major siege was successful, thanks to the efforts of a treacherous inmate, and the Parliamentary forces systematically destroyed the castle. Nonetheless, like many a castle built by the Plantagenet kings, it was fairly indestructible, and an astonishing proportion of it survived the demolition.

Corfe Castle is part of the huge Kingston Lacy estate left to the National Trust in 1981 by Ralph Bankes, a direct descendant of Sir John Bankes.

Scoles Farmhouse, in the fields to the west of the footpath, is a Grade II listed building. Although the main house is early seventeenth century, parts of it date back to the thirteenth century. The manor of Afflington, over to the east, dates even further back, being listed in the Domesday Book of 1086 as the Manor of Alvronetone, held by Aelfrun. The Bronze Age barrows on Afflington lands, however, show that people were living here maybe three thousand years before that.

On Corfe Common, stay on the Purbeck Way, climbing towards the castle and then turning left onto the path heading roughly westwards towards the B3069 as it travels northwards this time towards Corfe Castle village. Reaching the road, cross it and carry on through the gate on the far side.

Directions

1. From Swanage Coastal Park, walking down the road, take the turning on the left hand side, signed Priests Way. Continue westwards on the Priest Way ignoring the tracks leading off to right and left, until you come to the National Trust sign at Eastington. Do not go onto the footpath to the left here, signed to Seacombe Bottom and the Coast Path, but carry on to Eastington Farm, where a track crosses the footpath.

2. Take the path straight ahead signed, “Priest’s Way/Worth”, and follow it to the far left-hand corner of each of the next two fields, to come out on the road into Worth Matravers.

3. On the road, turn left and go into Worth Matravers, carrying on straight ahead at the Square and Compass Public House and continuing into the village itself.

4. Carrying on past the village green with its pond and pump, and continuing past the church, take the footpath on your right at the far side of the field beyond the church, leading up out of Worth Matravers and into the countryside above.

5. At Hill Bottom the path joins the Purbeck Way. Turn right and carry on as the path winds up through the trees in Coombe Bottom and heads up onto the open ground above and onwards to the B3069 road.

6. Arriving at the B3069, cross the road and pick up the track opposite, just a little to the left, and with it head downhill over farmland.

7. Towards the bottom of the hill, among the trees, the Purbeck Way goes off to the left. Turning with it, follow the footpath through the fields and over the footbridge, onto Corfe Common.

8. On Corfe Common, stay on the Purbeck Way, climbing towards the castle and then turning left onto the path heading roughly westwards towards the B3069 as it travels northwards this time towards Corfe Castle village. Reaching the road, cross it and carry on through the gate on the far side.
as it opens new ones, preserving the landscape while continuing to provide stone for building projects. It is also paying attention to the preservation of wildlife.

A small pond near the Priest's Way is home to a population of rare great-crested newts, and there are equally rare greater horseshoe bats in the old quarries.

Also being preserved in the local area is another famous and fascinating feature revealed as a result of quarrying: fossilised dinosaur footprints! Most of these are of Megalosaurus and Iguanodon (both small fry at around 10 metres long), but at nearby Keat's Quarry, footprints were found which were a metre in diameter themselves, belonging to a 30-metre, 30-ton Diplodocus.

8. At the end of the field after Blacklands, when you come to where the track runs through the hedge, take the footpath to the left, and follow it northwards, along the hedge, to the lane ahead. Carry on up here, to the end of the buildings.

9. Pick up the footpath heading east, on your right. Taking this across the field will bring you out at the top of the Tom's Field Campsite. Continue walking east back across the field, turn right onto Durnsford Drive and walk a short distance back to the car park.

Text by Ruth Luckhurst

The National Trust in Purbeck looks after more than 3,000 hectares of countryside and 21 miles of coastline as well as Corfe Castle, one of the most visited historic sites in the South West. Coastal terrain ranges from sandy beaches to chalk and limestone cliffs, while inland lies a diverse mix of heaths, downs, woods and farmland.

Dorset is a rich haven for wildlife like butterflies and moths who bask in its relatively warm climate.

Other useful information

Nearest Refreshments: The Square & Compass in Worth Matravers; the Ship Inn or the King's Arms in Langton Matravers; or there are numerous restaurants, pubs and tea shops in Swanage.

OS Explorer Map: OL15 Purbeck & South Dorset

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Walks on and around the South West Coast Path

with Swanage Coastal Park

Dancing Ledge

A moderately strenuous walk around some breathtaking coastal scenery, with fascinating glimpses of the caves and quarries of Purbeck's limestone formations, and an insight into their importance to stonemasons, geologists and fossil-hunters. Once upon a time dinosaurs roamed freely here, leaving fossilised footprints as large as a metre in diameter, and in the different beds of limestone the fossils of small mammals and other living creatures have enabled scientists to piece together the story of early life on earth.

Other useful information

Nearest Refreshments: The Square & Compass in Worth Matravers; the Ship Inn or the King's Arms in Langton Matravers; or there are numerous restaurants, pubs and tea shops in Swanage.

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This is one of the many walks that can be found at www.southwestcoastpath.com
Directions

1. By car make your way to Spyway Car Park. Take the A351 out of Swanage. Fork left on to the B3609 to Langton Matravers. As you go through Langton Matravers turn left into Durnford Drive. The car park is on the left after Langton House.

2. From Spyway Car Park, head up Durnford Drive towards the main road for a short distance until you come to a turning circle with a path leading off to the left. Follow this path and at the end of the field, before you reach Tom's Field Camp Site, turn left and walk through the fields to the track at the end.

3. Crossing the track, go through the gate almost opposite, slightly to the right, to pick up the track which continues in the original direction (southwards) towards the coast. Bear left at the track to Seaspray and, ignoring the quarry on your left a short while later, continue to where the path forks again, a little way beyond.

4. Take the middle path here and with it head diagonally downhill in a southeasterly direction, through the bushes and then over the open heathland to drop directly down to Dancing Ledge. Going over the stile immediately ahead of you at the bottom will take you to Dancing Ledge itself.

Dancing Ledge is one of the many quarries in the region worked for the Purbeck limestone, which was used for building work here, as well as much further afield. Stone from Dancing Ledge was transported by ship direct from the quarry, the water here being deep enough to permit the ships to approach the ledge. Dancing Ledge is so named because the platform remaining from the quarrying is roughly the size of a ballroom floor. Ramsgate Harbour in Kent, was built using limestone from this quarry.

The stone in this part of the Dorset coast was laid down in layers, or beds, over the course of many millions of years. Kimmeridge Clay was the first layer to form, during the late Jurassic geological period (see the Kimmeridge Walk), and the Portland Sands were laid down on top of this, with the Portland Beds on top again.

After this, in the early Cretaceous period approximately 155 million years ago the Lower Purbeck Beds were deposited in shallow seas, brackish lagoons and freshwater. From fossils found in these rocks, geologists and palaeontologists have been able to work out that shellfish, shrimps and insects lived around the swampy marshlands at that time. Later, there were fish, amphibians and reptiles; and after them came the Purbeck Mammals. Over 100 different species of small vertebrates have been found in fossils in the Purbeck Beds, most of them the size of a shrew or a rat.

The limestone quarries around Purbeck are important to geologists, because many of them show how the layers of limestone were laid down. The Swanworth Quarries, just to the north of Worth Matravers, show the most complete section of the different rocks on the Isle of Purbeck, from the Portland Sand on the quarry floor, to the Lower Purbeck Beds at the top.

5. When the Coast Path heads off to the left a little way up the valley, leave it and carry on along the path up Seacombe Bottom. (The small path to your left a short way beyond will drop you back down onto the path.)

6. A little way up the valley the path forks. Take the right-hand fork. Turn right on the track at the top.

7. Ignoring the tracks and paths leading away to the right and left, carry on in the same direction (eastwards) along the Priest's Way.

The Priest's Way follows an old track, winding its way to Swanage, which was the route taken by the local priest as he trudged back and forth between his church in Worth Matravers and the other church in his care in Swanage.

As a part of its role as land owner, the National Trust is also involved in the future of the quarries around Acton. Some of these are nearing the end of their useful lives, but there is still plenty of the valuable Purbeck limestone around them, so the Trust plans to infill the old quarries and reseed them with grass.
The rock around the bowl of Chapman’s Pool is Kimmeridge Clay Shale, a versatile rock which has been exploited for its many manufacturing uses since the Iron Age. Like other local limestones, it is also full of fossils (see the Dancing Ledge Walk). The cliffs above you, however, are Portland limestone, laid down on top of the shale in a later period, before erosion and other processes reshaped the local landscape.

6. When the path from the boat house down at Chapman’s Pool joins your path from the left on West Hill, a few hundred yards after you have left the coast, it crosses yours and continues to your right. Turn right onto it and follow it eastwards, carrying on in the same direction along the track beyond where another track crosses your path about a quarter of a mile on.

7. When you come to the buildings at Weston Farm, bear left along the track and then turn right on the road to carry on in an easterly direction until you reach Worth Matravers. Carry on along the road through the village, past the village green with its pond and village pump, until you come to the Square and Compass.

The Square and Compass dates back to 1752 as an inn, and has been in the same family for over 100 years. There is a fossil museum in the pub, including some dinosaur fossils, as well as other fascinating artefacts from local history: prehistoric tools, Roman coins, bits of 18th century shipwrecks, and agricultural curiosities like cow cake cutters and turnip crunchers.

Text by Ruth Luckhurst

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Swanage Coastal Park

Walks on and around the South West Coast Path with Swanage Coastal Park

Chapman’s Pool

A breathtaking walk around a limestone coastline carved into dramatic caves and platforms by millions of years of erosion by the sea, and hundreds of years of human quarrying. From prehistoric times humans have lived here and exploited the cliffs and coves for a wide variety of purposes, ranging from prehistoric tools and burials through medieval farming to nineteenth century smuggling. Chapman’s Pool itself is a wonderfully wild beach where the stream joins the sea from a plunging ravine carved through high cliffs.

Distance: 5¼ miles (9¼ km)
Start & Finish: Worth Matravers
Start Postcode: BH19 3LE
Grid ref: SY 974 777
Difficulty level: Moderate
Terrain: The path can be steep and slippery, and the headland is exposed if the wind is strong.

This is one of the many walks that can be found at www.southwestcoastpath.com
Directions

By car leave Swanage Coastal Park. Take the A351 out of Swanage. Turn left on to the B3069. Go through Langton Matravers. After leaving the village, take the left fork signposted Worth Matravers and follow the road into the village.

1. From the Car Park in Worth Matravers, turn right into the village. Take the left turn past the Square and Compass and carry on the road uphill until you come to the footpath heading through the fields to your right.

2. Go over the stile to pick up this footpath and carry on to the far right-hand corner of each of the two fields, to come out on the track beside Eastington Farm.

Eastington is a seventeenth century farmhouse built from the local limestone, and it is a Grade II listed building which is now owned by the National Trust, as is much of the area around here. The Trust manages the land with a particular interest in both nature conservation and archaeology, and it is grazed traditionally using sheep and cattle, and without the use of fertilisers. As a result, typical limestone plants thrive here, which in turn encourages a rich variety of butterflies and insects.

3. Just after the farm, take the path to the right and follow this down. Through some trees, ignore another path joining from the right. Keep going on the main path towards the sea.

4. When you come to Seacombe, take the right hand fork. This is the Coast Path which has headed inland, around the inlet. Going through the gate, continue along the Coast Path to the next inlet at Winspit.

There are more caves and quarries in the limestone here. Quarrying has been carried out around the Worth Matravers area since medieval times, and in the thirteenth century Purbeck Marble from the parish was used for the pillars of Salisbury Cathedral.

The curious-looking ridges on the hillsides around Winspit also date back to medieval times. Called strip lynches, they were carved into hillsides to provide more arable land for farming.

The coves and beaches on this part of the coast were popular with smugglers in the nineteenth century. The smugglers went unnoticed in the constant activity around the coast as the limestone quarried from the cliffs around here was carried away by sea, and it was very easy to make an escape through the trenches and passages of the quarry workings if they were spotted. The caves were also good for storing contraband.

The coastline had its share of shipwrecks too. In 1786, the India Trading Company vessel Halsewell hit the rocks at Winspit and was wrecked. A member of the crew managed to climb the cliffs and raise the alarm, and the men of Worth Matravers rescued 82 men that night.

5. At Winspit the path again heads inland around the inlet, and a path heads away to the right; but once again, turn left to follow the Coast Path westwards, this time to the lookout station at St Aldhelm’s Head.

The track to your right at the lookout station heads past St Aldhelm’s Chapel, just a few yards up from here.

As well as being noted for its square shape, St Aldhelm’s Chapel is unusually aligned, with its corners - and not its walls - facing the four compass points. It also stands within a low circular enclosure of an earlier date, leading to speculation that originally it may not have been a chapel at all, but possibly a watchtower for Corfe Castle (see the Corfe Castle Walk), or a beacon for passing ships.

There are records of it being used as a chapel in the thirteenth century, however, and although there was a period of perhaps two centuries when it went out of use and fell into disrepair, at the end of the nineteenth century local landowners had it restored and it reopened for services in 1874.

St Aldhelm was Abbot of Malmesbury and Bishop of Sherborne at the end of the seventh century, and was a noted Latin poet and ecclesiastical writer.

Carrying on around the headland on the Coast Path from the lookout station, you begin to head northwards, along a steep-sided valley.

People have been farming, fishing and quarrying in the Purbeck area for many thousands of years (see the Kimmeridge Bay walk), and evidence has been found of human habitation right back to Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age) times. On the top of Emmett’s Hill, above the cliffs to your right as you leave the point and start to walk inland, there are several burial mounds, or tumuli, from the Bronze Age (around 1000 BC).

Much more recently, the flat area on the top of the cliffs was the nerve centre of UK radar development from 1940-1942, when top radar scientists were working on systems with a longer range, and aircraft navigation systems. The first rotating aerial and map display was built here.
Towards the end of this stretch of path is Clavell's Tower, built in 1830 as an observatory and a folly. The local coastguards used the tower as a lookout until it was gutted by fire in the 1930s; and PD James, struck by its desolate condition in 1975, used it as the setting for her novel, “The Black Tower”. Before that, Thomas Hardy used to visit, with his first love Eliza Nicholl; but when he did, the tower was located on the stone ring in the grass to the seaward side of where it stands now. It was moved to its current position by the Landmark Trust, stone by stone (and there were 16,272 of them) and at a cost of £900,000, to protect it from the crumbling of the cliffs where it stood. It was refurbished at the same time and is now used by the Trust as a holiday cottage.

The Clavells were a local family, descended from Walter de Clavile, who arrived in England with William the Conqueror.

5. Going down the steps after the Clavell Tower, at the bottom you come to the handful of buildings and boats at Kimmeridge Bay. Turn right and go past the Purbeck Marine Wildlife Reserve building, turning left through the car park just afterwards to follow the path as it winds around the bay.

6. From the top of the car park turn left onto the lane which heads west, and pick up the second footpath crossing the fields to your right after the buildings here, just beyond the hedge after the first signed footpath, and follow it towards Kimmeridge Coppice, just to the west of the picturesque village of Kimmeridge.

7. When the path forks as it approaches the coppice, bear left, and then take the second path on your right, heading past the church and into Kimmeridge village.

8. On your left as soon as you pass the church is a footpath leading uphill beside the churchyard. Take this as it climbs steeply through the field, and at the top turn right, going over the stile and onto the road beyond. Cross the road to return to the Quarry car park.

Text by Ruth Luckhurst
Directions

Leave Swanage Coastal Park by car. Take the third road on your left, Cow Lane. At the junction turn left onto the High Street. At the junction bear left onto the A351 and drive to Corfe Castle.

After leaving Corfe Castle, take the next left towards Church Knowle. Continue through Church Knowle. Leaving the village, take the second left and go through Blackmanston. Immediately after the next road on your left, is the quarry car park, located just before Kimmeridge village.

The journey from Swanage Coastal Park to the car park is 9¼ miles and in normal traffic conditions takes 20 minutes.

1. From the quarry car park above Kimmeridge, walk a few yards back up the road, turn right and then take the track on the right a moment later, running above and behind the quarry. This will lead you up over Smedmore Hill, giving fantastic views out over coast and countryside. (Ignore the first spur to the right, which comes to a dead end moments later above the quarry.)

From the vast quantity of flint scatters and tools found around the area, archaeologists have been able to establish that people have lived and hunted here since the Mesolithic period, some 6000 or more years ago. Many Neolithic sites have been identified, and there are extensive Bronze Age barrows around Purbeck, including the spectacular one to be seen a little later in the walk, at the end of this ridge.

During the Iron Age, from roughly 700 BC to the middle of the first century AD, the area was quite densely populated, and there is evidence of Iron Age people manufacturing and exporting jewellery such as rings and bangles, made from Kimmeridge Shale on rudimentary lathes. To your left as you walk along the track here, on the north-eastern slopes of Smedmore Hill, there are the remains of a settlement from this period, and an early field system.

2. At the end of the track go through the gate onto the path beyond, carrying on in the same direction to the mound at the end of the ridge.

The last gate before the trig point at the end of the ridge is inscribed “Heaven's Gate”, and it's easy to see why. There are tremendous views in all directions from here: inland to the Purbeck Hills, and over to Corfe Castle, the jewel in the Isle of Purbeck's crown (see the Corfe Castle Walk); or out to sea, over the World Heritage Jurassic Coast.

Twenty million years ago Purbeck’s Jurassic and Cretaceous rocks were pushed up into a huge fold by great earth movements, and the chalk ridge of the Purbeck Hills was forced into an almost vertical position by the power of the movements (see the Dancing Ledge Walk). On the coastal fringe of Purbeck to your right, are the dark shales of the Kimmeridge Clay which was used by the Iron Age people, and the Romans after them, to make the ornaments already mentioned.

Shale was exploited for an astonishing number of purposes through the ages, from grease, pitch and fertiliser to wax and varnish, as well as larger items like table tops and furniture legs. There was even an Oil Shale Workshop as far back as the Roman times, and there was mention of local oil being used to light the streets of Paris, as well as nearby Wareham. In the sixteenth century local oil powered a glassworks here.

On the northern shores of Kimmeridge Bay, to the west of the car park, is BP’s Kimmeridge Wellsite, thought to be the UK's oldest continuously producing wells. It was first drilled in 1959, but the area had seen repeated attempts to drill for oil since before World War II. Oil is extracted by beam pump, or the “Nodding Donkey”, and produces some 80 barrels a day (12,720 litres).

Back here on Smedmore Hill, the dramatic mound in front of you is a Bronze Age tumulus, or burial mound. Take the time to go to the top for breathtaking panoramic views.

3. From the tumulus, turn back towards the way you came, and go back to the stile, now on your left, just a short distance away. Crossing this will take you down a steep path towards the coast.

When you come to the waymarker on the right, towards the bottom, cross the stile into the field, but stay on the left-hand edge of the field as you head towards the coast, turning left over the next stile to follow the path through the field beyond to the South West Coast Path.

4. On the Coast Path turn right, heading past Rope Lake Head and Clavell's Hard and beyond them to the wonderfully-named Cuddle, and Hen’s Cliff.

The cliffs along this part of the Dorset coast are of international geological importance, containing fossil-bearing rocks from the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods which have helped to shape our understanding of evolution. The Kimmeridge rocks, in particular, are famous for their fossil reptiles and ammonites.

The cliff top vegetation is also noteworthy, and includes the country’s most prolific wild cabbage population, which grows abundantly around your ankles as you walk through here. Other interesting plants around your feet are the pink-headed thrift, white sea campions and the creeping rock samphire with its rubbery leaves.

Attracted by the vegetation, unusual white and blue butterflies also thrive.