

Studland - Ballard Down - Old Harry Round Walk

Ordnance Survey Map: Explorer OL15. Grid ref: SZ 038 834
Length of walk: about 7km (just under 4.5 miles) Allow 2 hours

A diverse walk with breathtaking panoramic views across Dorset's coast and countryside. The walk includes a large proportion of access land crossed by Rights of Way, you can check up on access land and any restrictions on www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk. The area is owned and managed by the National Trust. It is part of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site and the South West Coast Path starts/finishes at nearby South Haven Point. The Purbeck Way also crosses the area.

Getting there:

This area is very popular, especially in the summer, so in high season in particular the car parks may be full and it's best to avoid travelling by car. The Purbeck area would really benefit if people used public transport when possible so please consider giving your day an added dimension by using public transport if you normally use a car – details below.

If you do have to use a car and are approaching from the ferry at Sandbanks, take the left turn after the Post Office in Studland to South Beach car park. Follow signs to beach then to car park.

A. If you came by car, park in the National Trust car park next to the Bankes Arms pub – no formal charge out of season but there is a box asking for a donation.

As you come out of the car park turn right down the road, past the pub and the toilets. Follow the road around the bend past the stone cross and thatched hut (look inside for local information) at B.

B. You can take a shortcut here by taking the track left in front of Manor Farm tea rooms and past the Glebeland Estate onto the down. This takes you on to the down just after **E**.

To follow the longer route, follow the road round the bend, turning left at the footpath signed 'Woodhouse/Main Swanage Road'. Where the path forks, veer left, following the holloway (high banks, hedge and bramble with lots of old hollies). Hedges turn to trees and to your left you can see farmland on the lower slopes changing to gorse scrub on the steep part of the downs, with grass downland on the top.

C. At Woodhouse go through the kissing gate and down to the gate at the bottom right of the field. There's a little pond nearby so the ground may be boggy. Go

through the gate, following the line of the path straight up the field towards the downs – you may hear skylarks.

As you climb higher you'll be increasingly aware of the variety of the landscape around you – hedged farmland, coast and sea, scrubby downland, rural dwellings, with heath and wooded areas behind you.

D. A stile separates the gorse scrub downland from the farmland and marks the transition to Open Access land. (For information go to the open access section on www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk).

Increasingly spectacular views unfold behind you as you tackle the steepest part of the downs, so look forward to seeing Poole Bay, Brownsea Island, Studland and the Dorset heaths stretching inland, Sandbanks and right around the coast of Bournemouth and the Isle of Wight.

E. From the very top of Ballard Down you will also be able to see over the other side, to Swanage, with the coastline curling around to Peveril Point.

If you plan to visit the nearby lower-lying areas (such as the National Trust Visitor Centre, Studland beaches or heathland, or 'Little Sea', (which is now a land-bound freshwater lake) this is a great way to put the whole landscape in perspective and give you a more complete sense of what is around you.

Head along the top of the downs (there is a bridleway and there are often cyclists) towards the sea at Ballard Point, passing a stone seat marked with '1852' and weathered to an intriguing half-phrase: 'Rest & thee shall'. Carry on past the crossroads (at **F**) linking Swanage and Studland to either side of you. A little further on you may come upon some unexplained 'modern arteology' - a large spiral of flints laid on the ground.

[Alternatively at **E** for a long day's walk you could turn inland along the ridge of the downs (the Purbeck Ridge) to Corfe Castle, to make a round trip of about 20 km].

F. Passing through an earth bank you reach a trig point. If you pass to the left of this and diagonally down aiming for the far left corner of the field you will be following part of the Purbeck Way. Otherwise, hugging the coast more closely, pass to the right of the trig point and on through the gate taking you to part of the South West Coast Path. You may have seen the metal marker for the Start/Finish of the SWCP when disembarking from the ferry at South Haven Point.

Most of the path is fairly near the cliff now until you're heading back into Studland, so for those who really don't like heights you might choose to follow the Purbeck Way at **F** and keep comfortably far back from the cliff on the access land

at Old Nick's Ground! It's then possible to enjoy the panoramic view without the fear! For others, take care, but enjoy a closer view of the renowned chalk cliffs, stacks, arches and the sea birds. (G)

Having admired Old Harry, turn to pass through the resilient little mixed woodland, full of small bird life, called Studland Wood. If you have been windblown along the way this may abate a little now. You leave the access land area, still following the South West Coast Path, as you traverse a long grassed area with the cliff edge masked by scrub to one side.

H. Near the final approach down to Studland there is an alternative coast path signed down to the beach. Following this, a permissive path can be taken for a little way along the beach to add a final bit of variety to your walk before turning up the track (rejoining the SWCP again) between the beach huts. This takes you back to the road, from where you usually have a good choice of places to go for refreshment, including the National Trust Visitor Centre as well as the nearby pubs, cafes and hotels.

Public Transport:

- There are frequent bus links to this walk from the B3351 running through Studland Village (Beach Road). Bus 150 from Bournemouth or Swanage, 152 from Poole and change at Sandbanks ferry to 150. Open top buses run frequently during the summer season. For details check www.wdbus.co.uk or call: 01202 673 555.
- For details about the car/passenger ferry call: 01929 450 203 or check out www.sandbanksferry.co.uk.
- For details about public transport in Dorset call 0870 608 2 608 or visit www.traveline.org.uk.

Nearby Facilities:

- There are 4 National Trust car parks and 4 public toilets along the Studland peninsula. Car parks get very full in summer, there is a charge.
- There are a number of cafes, pubs and hotels, many are open all year round. The National Trust visitor centre (see www.nationaltrust.org.uk) includes a café and a shop (with an extensive range of walks books and also fascinating information about the local area).

Dogs:

Please remember that on access land you should keep dogs on leads between 1st March and 31st July to protect the young of ground-nesting birds (and other wildlife) and at all times near livestock (let them go if you are being chased!) On Rights of Way (on or off access land) the rules are different – dogs must be 'under close control' at all times.

Accessibility:

This isn't a good route for people with limited mobility due to the steeper stretches, but there are opportunities nearby, for example many of the heaths are good for those who find climbing up and downhill difficult and there are often options for much shorter walks. Also:

- For downland views across Purbeck that are accessible to those even with very limited mobility, try the viewpoint car park near Grange Arch at the other end of the Purbeck Ridge (this is on the edge of MOD range land, the range walks to the west may be closed but eastwards there is a track along the Ridge).
- Durlston Country Park (near Swanage) is a stunning coastal downland site with an accessible visitor centre and some degree of access to the wider site for disabled visitors depending on conditions - check at www.durlston.co.uk or call 01929 424 443.
- The National Trust visitor centre at Knoll Beach has wheelchairs for the beach and all terrain pushchairs for free loan with a boardwalk making access easier to Knoll beach - check details on 01929 450 500.
- Check out countryside in Dorset with disabled access on this website at <http://www.dorsetforyou.com/index.jsp?articleid=2632>.

Wondering where else to go? Try:
www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk