

Discover Purbeck Additional information

In the Purbeck peninsula, even the stones are special! Our unique geology not only shapes the landscape, but makes us part of a select group of World Heritage Sites, in company with the Grand Canyon and the Great Barrier Reef.

For the geologist, the 95 miles of the Jurassic Coast, of which the Purbeck coastline is a part, represents 185 million years of the earth's history. For all of us, the coast brings fun, beauty, drama and inspiration.

The coast of this 'Isle of Purbeck' is truly spectacular and encourages the use of a range of clichéd superlatives!

Beautiful Studland Beach provides 3 miles of soft sand from South Haven Point to Old Harry rocks. The National Nature Reserve behind the beach shelters abundant wildlife, including rare birds and reptiles. Naturists, naturalists, sailors, rambles and dog walkers will enjoy this natural haven, and families have space to relax and play too.

Round the headland is Swanage Bay. Beyond it, Durlston Country Park contains the Great Globe, video links to seabird colonies and the now unmanned Anvil Point lighthouse. Tilly Whim caves, and further on, Dancing Ledge, both hint at Purbeck's important quarrying past, and as you travel past St Aldhelm's Head, with its tiny chapel, you cannot fail to be impressed!

Further on, having passed Chapman's Pool, the drama continues at Houns-tout cliff as a stunning valley runs inland with Swyre Head in the distance.

Towards the west, clay and shale cliffs rise above Kimmeridge Bay, watched over by the 19th century folly, Clavell Tower. The Marine Nature Reserve is full of interest and a visitor centre helps to explain its importance.

Behind beautiful Worbarrow Bay, the mysterious 'ghost' village of Tyneham waits. Evacuated by the military in 1943, the promise to allow the villagers to return after the war was never fulfilled.

The church is in use, and the school is recreated as it would have been when the village thrived. Apart from this, it is a place of eerie ruins and unfinished stories.

Another gem awaits further to the west. Lulworth Cove is an archetype, perfectly formed, and surrounded by geological interest and beautiful walks. To the east of the Cove, Fossil Forest reveals remains of tree root mass, and moving forward in history, an Iron Age hill fort faces the sea from Bindon Hill.

To the west, Stair Hole is itself another tiny cove, clearly showing the Lulworth Crumple, familiar from many geology textbooks. Beyond it, Durdle Door, almost an emblem of this spectacular coast, tries to hold its own against the waves and time. The Heritage Centre helps to explain the geology and history of this exciting area.

Although Purbeck has spectacular and interesting coastal scenery, it also offers wetland, heath, forestry, farmland and welcoming towns and villages. In addition to the popular South West Coast Path, fine and varied walks criss-cross the whole of Purbeck. Access is widely available on footpaths and bridleways, and the Purbeck Cycleway provides an enjoyably scenic route for cyclists. Useful Ordnance Survey maps for the area are Outdoor Leisure 15 and Landranger 195, and leaflets are available from Wareham and Swanage Tourist Information Centres.

A popular Victorian resort, the coastal town of Swanage now provides an ideal base for exploring Purbeck, combining natural beauty, safe bathing, and a range of accommodation and eateries.

Sea-based pursuits, including diving and fishing are available, and for those who prefer their entertainment on dry land, award-winning Swanage Railway will transport you, via the steam age, back in time and inland to historic Corfe Castle.

Inhabited since 6000bc, the village of Corfe Castle nestles beneath the impressive ruins of the castle. Following a long history of bloodshed and treachery, it was eventually destroyed after the Civil War. To see how the village looked when the castle stood proud, and to learn more, visit Corfe Castle Model Village and the tiny village museum.

In the heart of Purbeck is Wareham, a charming walled market town, on the Rivers Piddle and Frome. It boasts a variety of interesting buildings, from St Martin's, Dorset's oldest church to the only gas-lit cinema in Britain, the restored Rex. An important Saxon port, Wareham was often the subject of Viking raids. The river now sustains more peaceful activities including pleasant river bank walks, and scenic boat trips to Poole Harbour.

Nearby is the RSPB reserve at Arne. Even for non-ornithologists, this is a magical area of heath and wetland. It supports many rare birds including the Dartford Warbler, a wide variety of dragonflies and all our native reptile species. Large numbers of deer also collect at the water's edge.

Purbeck is also tightly bound to the lives of two notable men – Thomas Hardy and T E Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia).

Hardy, the poet and novelist, renamed many familiar Purbeck places when they appeared in his novels: Wareham, Swanage and Lulworth Cove became Anglebury, Knollsea and Lulwind Cove, and Egdon Heath represented a wide area of heath land across the heart of Dorset. His novels give powerful descriptions of places which can still be seen, and many dramatic incidents are allied to these. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, after their disastrous honeymoon night, a sleepwalking Angel Clare carries Tess to an empty stone coffin outside their accommodation at Wellbridge. This was based on Woolbridge Manor, outside Wool, which still stands.

Later in his life, Hardy concentrated on his poetry which often drew inspiration from the beauty and history of the whole of Dorset, and filmmakers continue to use this area to represent Hardy's Dorset in film.

T E Lawrence, better known as Lawrence of Arabia, had an extraordinary role in the Arab Revolt in 1916, but opted for relative anonymity later, joining the RAF and the Tank Corps under assumed names. Preferring to be remembered as a writer, he published *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and *The Mint*. Since his death in a motorcycle accident in 1935, he has become an intriguing myth and still inspires huge interest. His last home, Cloud's Hill, near Bovington, is open to the public. Several local museums including the Bovington Tank Museum hold Lawrence memorabilia. Other places of interest include Moreton church - notable also for superb and unusual etched glass windows - and Lawrence's grave in Moreton cemetery.

Bovington's Tank Museum boasts the largest collection of tanks and armoured fighting vehicles in the world, and also stages exciting fire power and mobility displays. Nearby, kids love the chimp rescue centre, Monkey World, where some of the chimps and orang-utans recently became stars of their own popular TV programme.

This gives you a glimpse of what Purbeck has to offer - an area of diverse and beautiful landscape, abundant natural and historical interest and everything you need for relaxation or invigoration!

Courtesy of Purbeck TIC's