

BRISK WALKERS

BISHOP'S STORTFORD U3A

Brisk Walks on the Jurassic Coast

Three and a half days of testing walks on the Isle of Purbeck were lined up for a party from the Friday Brisk Walk group in October. The group was extremely fortunate to have dry and on most days very warm weather with good visibility for the walks, planned in the summer by Mick and Jan Scott. This was just what we needed for maximum enjoyment of the coastal path with its splendid views stretching west to Portland Bill and east to the Isle of Wight.



Start of walk – Lulworth Cove

The near-perfect circle of Lulworth Cove lay just a few hundred yards stroll from our base at West Lulworth House belonging to HF Holidays. The taster walk for some of the group on the first afternoon was anything but a stroll, as it kicked off with a route past the spectacular Stair Hole, a world heritage site, followed by a stiff circuit from the cove with a tough climb up steps to Bindon Hill. The rock formations at Stair Hole are a riot of contrasts between hard Portland stone and the once level sedimentary Purbeck Beds. These have been lifted up, tilted and twisted to form amazing patterns, vividly demonstrating powerful earth movements of many thousands of years ago resulting in what is called the Lulworth Crumple.

Rock follies

Follies featured on the first full day's walk. We stopped near one overlooking the black clay of Kimmeridge Bay with its oil well opposite, noting that the nodding donkey was static. Clavell Tower today stands close to the cliff edge and had it not been moved some yards inland would surely have fallen into the sea. This coastal lookout and folly was built in 1830/31 by the eponymous rector and landowner when he came into the land and a lot of money.

After a stretch of coast path high above Kimmeridge Ledges the group turned inland to be faced shortly afterwards with the steepest climb imaginable. The way up was by rough steps cut into the hillside before a welcome break on top of Swyre Head 203 metres above sea level. Phew! The return route along Ridgeway Hill took us past the listed Grange Arch, also known as Creech Folly, built in 1746 in the form of a triple arch of ashlar stone overlooking Creech Grange far below



Grange Arch

Chuffed

After a 13 mile trek, the longest of the holiday, we were very pleased to sit down and let the restored steam train take the strain for a ride back from Swanage to Corfe Castle. The group had opted not to take a section of coast path with three steep descents and ascents, one of which has 200 steps each side. Instead, we chose a level track leading to St Aldhelm's or St Alban's

head with its working coastguard lookout and the tiny 800 year old St Aldhelm's Chapel. The disused Winspit quarry on the coast near Worth Matravers provided a convenient site for our lunch break. There we sat in the large open space on the floor of the quarry where once nature had provided solid rock. The stone that has been removed was used to provide building materials for many **prestigious** buildings in London.



Near Durdle Door

PT cruiser

To finish we had a shorter walk but it still tested us as the ascents and descents were exceptionally steep, especially the climb up to another Swyre Head after we had passed the famous stone arch of Durdle Door. As we paused for breath we were overtaken by a couple of runners, a younger man and a woman, who cruised past us. In some amazement we watched as they both stopped halfway up the 45 degree hill for a minute or two of callisthenics before continuing their run.

Stars in their eyes

Most evenings we enjoyed some form of entertainment put on by the HF team, including the customary quiz, plus a live performance of local songs and rhymes by John Sartin, an original member of the Yetties folk group. One clear evening a few of us took advantage of the dark skies of the Dorset coast to go down to the cove to gaze at the uncountable stars. We also had a fine view of the bright red planet of Mars as we listened to the sound of seawater gently lapping on the pebbly beach.

Our thanks go to Mick and Jan for leading the walks and to Penny Mayo for handling the bookings with practised efficiency.

Richard Owen