



Compton Bay, Shippards  
Chine, Military Road, Brook,  
Isle of Wight. PO30 4HB

#### TRAIL

### Walking

#### GRADE

### Moderate

#### DISTANCE

**8 miles (13km) - total  
ascent is 950ft (290m)**

#### TIME

**3 hours to 3 hours 30  
minutes**

#### OS MAP

**Landranger 196 or  
Explorer OL29**

#### Contact

#### Facilities

**National  
Trust**

[nationaltrust.org.uk/walks](https://nationaltrust.org.uk/walks)

# ABC of the downs walk on the Isle of Wight

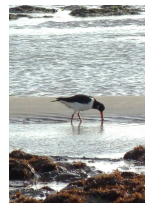
Enjoy splendid views on this leg-stretching walk over the ridge of Afton, Brook and Compton Downs. Then follow in the steps of the dinosaurs back along the coast.



## Terrain

There are 13 stiles, 3 gates, 1 kissing gate, 2 footbridges, some steps and a wall to negotiate, so this walk isn't suitable for mobility scooters. Don't go near the cliff edge. It can be very windy up on the downs, and the chalk path from the top of Brook Down can be slippery. Keep an eye open for stray flying golf balls as you pass through Freshwater Bay Golf Club. Dogs are welcome, but please keep your dog on a lead around wildlife and take any mess home with you. Dog bins are provided at Brook and Shippards Chine car parks.

## Things to see



### Downland management and flora and fauna

Various banks on the downs mark field system boundaries and quarry access tracks. Afton, Brook and Compton Downs make up one of the best areas of chalk grassland in Britain, largely unchanged since the Ice Age. The downs are now grazed by Galloway cattle, which produce a patchwork of gorse, scrub and open grassland. Controlled burning of the gorse provides nesting sites for various birds. The downs are also rich in chalk-loving flowers of many varieties. In summer you may see dark green fritillary, adonis blue, chalkhill blue and small blue butterflies.

### Fossils and the steps of Maritime history

Near Hanover Point there are some amazing dinosaur footcasts that have fallen out of the crumbling cliffs. They're about 120 million years old and were made by dinosaurs during the Cretaceous period. Look out for fossilised burnt wood that was washed down early rivers. As you walk west along the beach the rocks are younger and the fossils indicate that the sea level was gradually rising. The chalk of Tennyson Down in the distance was formed in a shallow sea like the Mediterranean, and the fossils there are just 65 million years old.

Today it's a great place for surfing, but many ships have come to grief off the notorious Hanover Point. At low tide you can still see the remains of a steam tug, 'Carbon', that came adrift while being towed to the scrap yard. The Brook lifeboat 'Susan Ashley' and her local crew were active from 1860 to 1937 and saved 381 lives. Only the boathouse remains now at Brookgreen. Local people made a living out of fishing, making willow lobster pots, and weren't averse to a bit of smuggling or harvesting the spoils of wrecked ships.



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## Start/end

Start: Car park at Freshwater Cliffs, Freshwater Bay, grid ref: SZ350856 (Nearest postcode: PO30 4TY)

End: Car park at Freshwater Cliffs, Freshwater Bay, grid ref: SZ350856 (Nearest postcode: PO30 4TY)

## How to get there

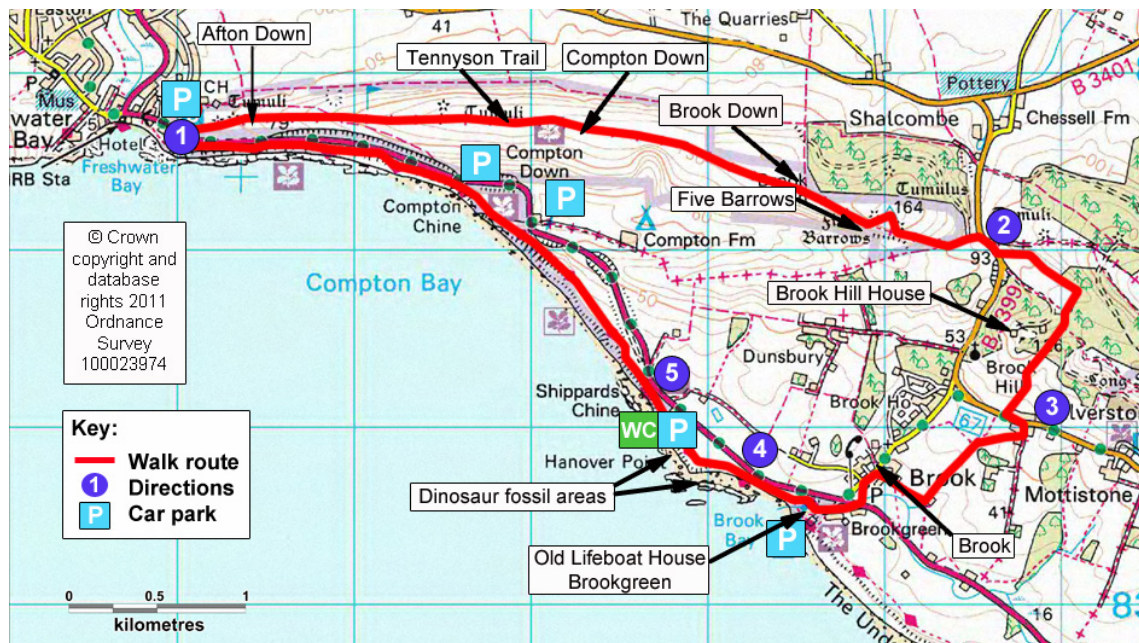
By foot: The trail follows the coastal path from route step 4 to the end, and also the waymarked Tennyson Trail between route steps 1 and 2

By bike: 'Round the Island' Sustrans regional route 67 follows the A3055 Military Road past the start car park

By bus: Two-hourly Southern Vectis service 12 from Newport to Totland passes the car park. Alight at Southdown Road (01983 827000)

By ferry/boat: Lymington - Yarmouth (Wightlink, 0871 376 1000) 6 miles; Fishbourne - Portsmouth (Wightlink) 16 miles; East Cowes - Southampton (Red Funnel, 0844 844 9988) 17 miles

By car: The Freshwater Cliffs car park below Afton Down is just above the A3055 Military Road as the road climbs eastwards out of Freshwater Bay



1. Take the well-defined track heading uphill, which passes close to the back of the car park and leads between golf course tees and greens. This is part of the Tennyson Trail, which follows the ridges over the downs. After 2.5 miles (4km), detour to the left to reach the highest point and visit the Five Barrows and trig point before rejoining the track to head downwards. Pass through a gate to reach a road.
2. Turn right and follow the road for 160yds (150m). Then it's left up a tarmac drive towards Brook Hill House. Take footpath S39 where the private drive swings right, then straight on at a path junction. 15yds (15m) before a stile leading onto the Mottistone Estate, turn right where you see the sign Private woodland, please keep to path. Go down through the wood, over a stile and into a field. Continue on, and cross two more stiles to reach the road at Hulverstone.
3. Turn left for 45yds (40m) then right along the lane. After 65yds (60m) step over a wall on your right, signed BS47 Brook. Follow the path over a number of stiles, passing to the right of a pond. Join a track and follow it as it bends right into Brook village. Turn left at the road, and then left again almost opposite a phone box and over a stile onto footpath BS54. Keep to the left of the field, cross a stile then up some steps to reach the busy Military Road. Cross carefully and then take footpath BS78 to the right of a drive. Go over another stile, cross the track leading to Brookgreen and reach a car park.
4. If the tide is low enough for walking on the sand, go left down the path to the beach. Follow the coast for about a mile to the right, around the headland. This stretch is the best area to look for dinosaur footcasts. Climb the wooden steps to Shippards Chine to rejoin the coast path. Alternatively, if the tide is high or you prefer a cliff walk, follow the coast path on the far side of the car park. The path crosses a footbridge and soon reaches the car park at Shippards Chine.
5. Follow the coast path. Cross a stile, but dont go through the kissing gate shortly after it that leads back to the road. Instead, follow the path to the left of a fence, then over a stile and footbridge to cross the chine (ravine), and then rejoin the coast path via a stile. Meet the road after some steps. The path continues to the left of the road, bending coastward after the crest of the rise. Just after a memorial stone to ELM, bear right and return to the car park on the other side of the road.

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