

# sea breezes and roof-of-the-world views from the downs above Shanklin and Ventnor

# Culver Cliff

Main picture View to Culver Down and the distant mainland from the downs above Ventnor  
Inset, from left Looking westwards towards Tenbyson Down, RAF Ventnor, feral goats, remains of an Isle of Wight Rifles magazine

The downs have been heavily quarried for chalk, to make lime, flint and sandstone for local buildings, gravel for roads and clay marl which was used as fertiliser from medieval times.

Parts of these downs are topped with angular flint gravel below which is a layer of chalk. Below the chalk is green sandstone and at the bottom is a layer of gault clay known locally as Blue Slipper. The pressure of weight from the chalk and sandstone on top of the gault clay has led to the collapse of the coastal cliffs in this area and has formed what is known as the Undercliff which extends from Shanklin to Blackgang.

## Downland geology

Feral goats The National Trust maintains a herd of Old English wild goats which graze scrub and prevent it from spreading. They may often be seen in Coombe Bottom and on Bonchurch Down. Although the billy goats can be very large, with huge horns, they are harmless.

The Isle of Wight Rifles were established in 1859 with part-time volunteers, but by the First World War they were conscripted men and formed part of the Hampshire regiments. They fought at Gallipoli, Turkey in 1915 and at the Battle of Gaza in 1917. Coombe Bottom was used as a training rifle range and pistol butts, where remains of their targets can be seen. The rifle targets were placed on a raised bank facing west and the pistol targets were on a brick wall, parts of which remain.

## Ventnor Railway Station

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## Isle of Wight Rifles

A steel sign in the car park (5) tells the story of the Channel Airways Dakota flight which crashed here in thick fog in May 1962. Following this accident it became mandatory for all airfields handling passenger aircraft to have radio communication.

## Dakota plane crash



RAF Ventnor This base was established in 1937 as one of 22 radar stations surveying bombers, fighters and V1 flying bombs coming from France. It played an important part in the Battle of Britain – Ventnor was heavily bombed in 1940. The site had transmitter masts, receivers and an underground operations room. After the war, another underground operations room was built at a depth of 40 feet, with walls 10 feet thick. It was designed to withstand 2,000lb bombs and was intended to meet the nuclear threat. It was an early warning station hidden by a bungalow on top that contained a guard room and the stairway entrance. In the early 1960s, the site became a joint military/civil radar station and evolved into the current Air Traffic Control Station (NATS).

Bronze Age cemetery Luccombe Down was the site of a Bronze Age cemetery. Ten bowl barrows remain – there may have been more.

St Blasius Church Founded as a manorial chapel by Geoffrey de Lisle in the reign of the Norman King Stephen (1135-1154), it became the parish church in 1853. Much of what is seen today is the result of a major restoration started in 1852.

# Ups and Downs

Shanklin to Ventnor

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**Description** A walk over the top of the downs between Shanklin and Ventnor offering fine views and passing places of historic interest from the Bronze Age to the Cold War era. **Distance** 3.4 miles. **Start** This walk can be undertaken in either direction but is described as starting in Shanklin and ending in Ventnor. There is a No 3 bus stop at each end of the trail. **Access information** Some steep inclines, steps and several stiles. Open downland countryside with splendid views, but prone to misty and breezy conditions. You may encounter cattle and goats – keep dogs on a short lead. **Refreshments** In Ventnor and Shanklin. **Toilets** Available in Ventnor and Shanklin. **Internet** All walks in this series can be downloaded from this website [www.iowramblers.com/page44.htm](http://www.iowramblers.com/page44.htm) or [www.islandbuses.info/things-do/rambles-bus/](http://www.islandbuses.info/things-do/rambles-bus/)

## Countryside Code

Respect Protect Enjoy

- Respect other people*
- Consider the local community and other people enjoying the outdoors
  - Leave gates and property as you find them and follow paths unless wider access is available
- Protect the natural environment*
- Leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home
  - Keep dogs under effective control
- Enjoy the outdoors*
- Plan ahead and be prepared
  - Follow advice and local signs

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# Ups and Downs

Shanklin to Ventnor

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## Shanklin to Ventnor



**Route** From the Big Mead bus stop walk uphill on Church Road to St. Blasius Church **1**. Go through the lych-gate on SS10 The Worsley Trail to the left of the church, leaving over some stone steps. Shortly after is a Ramblers' gate at a field. Go straight ahead to a stile. The path now crosses another field and ends at another stile leading into woodland with some steps. Go straight ahead past a noticeboard for Holme Copse on the right. Up more steps and a fairly steep incline with a chicken wire-netting fence on the left. Continue ahead to a farm gate which has a stile next to it. Carry on to another stile where there is a footpath sign SS10 Shanklin/Wroxall **2**.

Make a left turn here on to SS11 (not signposted) and then walk through a gap in a barbed-wire fence with a hedge on the left and a large ash tree on the right. Follow a fairly steep winding path up the hill to the top. The path ahead now becomes SS11a and leads to a trig point. Here is a very fine view of the Island's central chalk ridge with the white cliffs of Tennyson Down to the west and Culver Down to the east. Go straight across to a gap in the hedge with a stone bank before two stiles. The stone bank marks part of the Anglo-Saxon boundary between Newchurch and Brading parishes. It may have prehistoric origins.

There is a wooden footpath sign SS11a pointing back to Cliff Copse and Shanklin **3**. Turn left on V40. Continue south on V40 and before you reach the gate ahead there is another fine view of Tennyson Down (west) and Culver Down (east). Continue through two bridleway gates to a National Trust Omega sign,

Luccombe Down. You are now in open access land. Continue along V43. Just before V43 joins the downs road there are three Bronze Age burial mounds (bowl barrows) to the left of the trail, topped with gorse.

At **4** turn right on a rough road (V7a) with a chain-link fence on the left. Inside that fence is the highest point on the Island at 241 metres (791 feet). When the road becomes tarmaced you are at the entrance gates of the NATS civil aviation radar station which was built as RAF Ventnor in 1937 and later used for civil purposes until the 1960s.

Continue along the tarmac road where, to the right, there are several wartime shelters from RAF Ventnor, one with gun portals. On the left, through the fence, are the concrete bases of wartime radar transmitter masts. Turn left at the end of the fence where there is a trig point and fingersign V1a to St. Boniface Down **5**. Follow V1a around the chain-link fence on the left to a tall mast and signpost V122/V1 **6**. Go right on V1 and then through a kissing gate. After 150 yards take a path to the right which curves down steeply into Coombe Bottom. The remains of a brick wall on right was used by Isle of Wight Rifles as pistol butts.

Carry on down the centre of the coombe and just before the trees ahead the path divides – take the right fork which leads into the trees **7**. Now you pass by some netted fencing and immediately on the right is the reinforced ammunition store (magazine) where the rifle ammunition was kept. Follow the path along the netting fence to a kissing gate where there is a sign to St. Boniface Down. Leave public access land at the kissing gate, then take a fairly steep descent to the gate at the road below, Ocean View Road **8**. Here, Old Station Road leads into an industrial estate which was the site of Ventnor railway station (1866-1966) and the sandstone quarry from which many Ventnor houses were constructed. The bus stop here is called Old Station.

**Pictured inset, left** Remains of a reinforced ammunition store of the Isle of Wight Rifles  
**Middle** Distant views north to the mainland  
**Right** Culver Cliff from Luccombe Down, property of the National Trust

**Information**

Bus times 0871 200 22 33  
calls from landlines cost 10p per minute

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