



Turn west here and proceed along Wall Lane, crossing over rail bridge, where if you're lucky you may see an ex-London tube train rattling by underneath on its route from Ryde to Shanklin. This lane eventually brings you out onto the main A3055 and amongst some of the island's finest museums that are a must to revisit.

Turn right at the main road and walk out of town looking for lane west, which is the first left past a housing area and opposite a track on the right. Walk along this lane for approx. 400yds. then take the track left on the corner steadily climbing SSW towards a wood at the top, not forgetting to look over your shoulder at the spectacular view behind. Entering the wooded section follow the well-worn track NE. Eventually you will exit the wood and the track turns and climbs SSW bringing you out on the road. Turn right, and as you continue you are met with a view hardly equalled on the island. The twin towns of Sandown and Shanklin and the spacious bay on which they stand are seen to great advantage, whilst looking in a northerly direction a great part of the Solent and the tall spire of Ryde Parish Church are seen above the tree-line. Continue on towards a sign pointing to "Ashey Sea Mark" — this stands at 450ft. on Ashey Down — and take the short track left running parallel with the road before joining a main track. Instead of going due south here, take the wide track through a gate opposite that has a steep bank to the right. Follow this until you reach a lane Knighton Shutte. Turn left here passing the waterworks and after approx. 300yds. take the track on the right heading west to reach a road at Mersley Cottages. Turn left along the road for a short way then continue right along a track keeping the fence to your left until you reach another main track heading N to S. Turn right here and sharp left to continue westerly towards Arreton Village. You will exit this path right on the lane passing Arreton Village School — a good place for a back-up vehicle to rendezvous for "elevenses". Further up the road is the White Lion where an alternative "comfort" stop may be taken.

Continue on down the A3056 and at the main junction take the signposted bridleway that leads to the top of St. George's Down, following the path on a gravel track through some gravel pits. Continue on main path before finally descending to main A3020 at Shide. Turn right and pick up footpath on left approx. 100yds. further on. On emerging with road turn right and walk down to join B3401. Follow this through the concrete jungle of Carisbrooke until you link up with the B3323. Here turn left and continue westward passing sign directions to Gunville School. Keep heading on west bearing and you will rejoin B3401 and will begin steadily out of Carisbrooke. There is a decent "Watering Hole" at GR484882 approx. 200yds before you take the left fork on a steepish bend (called Nodgham Lane) where you will begin the start of the Tennyson Trail. This disappears up a track on the right at the end of some houses — beware, it can easily be missed. By now you are at the half-way stage and to some may feel like the beginning of Day Two!

A steady climb up this narrow track soon brings you out onto Bowcombe Down with splendid views back towards the Norman and Tudor castle where Charles I was imprisoned shortly before 1649 execution. Continue SW until you reach a gate where the track bears SSW. Follow this track towards Brighstone Forest where another superb view above Redbridge — impossible to miss because of the TV mast — across the Solent looking towards the Fawley Oil Refinery.

The approach to the forest is by the side of a wood before reaching the enclosed part of Brighstone Down and a well-defined path heading SW through a continuous change of light and shade. Do not deviate from this bearing but exit the forest where the Tennyson Trail joins the Worsley Trail.

Turn right onto a good chalk track — sometimes slippery — that will steadily bring you down to Lynch Lane before crossing the road to climb Mottistone Down, a height of 667ft. with splendid views over Brighstone, Mottistone and Brook. As you descend through the Coombe Plantation a superb view of the next ascent Brook Down is sketched before you. Brook Hill House comes into view here. Dating from the 18th century, it is a large, flat roofed building that was marked as a fortress on "Gerry" maps during the Great War and where later J. B. Priestley dominated the island's literary landscape from.

Half way up Brook Down further spectacular views of the thickest chalk beds in Britain begin to unfold as views of Tennyson Down open up before you and eventually Freshwater Bay itself presents the thought of that long-awaited (p)tea stop.

The walk along here is simply magestic and in ideal weather conditions one can see why it is called the spine of the Wight. Views certainly to write home about with a "wish you were here" theme. To the south the English Channel, whilst to the north photogenic views across Freshwater itself and on down the River Yar to Yarmouth and out over the Solent ... *magic!*

As you enter Afton Down the Tennyson Trail leaves a chalk mark right down the centre of the Freshwater Golf Course where it gives one a chance to pay mutual respects to two common interests ... with a bit of give and take. Listen out for the "fore" or wear a tin helmet!

After exiting out onto the A3055 it is but a short walk into the Bay itself with enough amenities to take a well-earned break before taking the dramatic chalk ridge climb of 480ft. to the Tennyson Monument erected in memory of the Victorian poet Alfred Lord Tennyson, who used to walk here. Freshwater Bay, though small, is unlike anything else

on the island. Apparently at one time it was non-existent as the cliffs presented an unbroken front to the sea. In 1799 the only habitation in this place was a dilapidated inn known as the "Cabin".

The path to the top of Tennyson Down is signposted as you leave the bay just below the public loos. The path takes you by Fort Redoubt before you bear right and commence your final climb. With your eyes set on the summit don't forget to pause and take a rear view of the splendid scene behind. The smell of Alum Bay should now be well and truly in your nostrils. Head down the track from the monument keeping to the left and taking the coastal path round to the Needles where, if open, the Needles Old Battery is well worth a visit if you have the time. This battery is a restored old Victorian fort and by descending a spiral staircase to a tunnel within the compound one can get the closest possible view of the Needles from within the cliff face.

From here take the road east towards Alum Bay noticing the multicoloured sands in a high cliff that rises above a pebbly beach that is reached by steps or a chairlift. Continue along for a short way before you turn the left-hand corner and take a look at what must be Britain's largest garden gnome population before either collapsing into your back-up vehicle, running for the bus or if your legs won't stop walking . . . legging it back to the ferry!

To complete this walk in a day is quite an achievement and makes all the advanced planning and preparation worthwhile. One I must say that has gone down in the annals of history as one of the Purbeck Plodders all-time greats! You can now go out and buy that T-shirt with "*Been There, Done It AND Caught The Ferry Home*" printed on it! Well done.

FACT FILE

Distance — 29 miles

Time — Allow 10/11 hours

Maps

OS Outdoor Leisure 29

OS Pathfinder SZ47/57 — Isle of Wight (South)

OS Pathfinder SZ58/68 — Newport (Isle of Wight)

OS Pathfinder SZ28/38 — Western Wight

Start — Bembridge Grid Ref. 643887

Finish — Alum Bay Grid Ref. 308853

Terrain

A long but easy walk on well-marked paths and tracks. Some unavoidable road walking.

Refreshments

White Lion at Arreton; Pubs at Carisbrooke; Cafes and Hotel at Freshwater Bay;

Various amenities at Alum Bay.

Toilets

Bembridge, Arreton (White Lion), Carisbrooke, Freshwater Bay, Alum Bay, Yarmouth.

Accommodation

Hotels, and B&B's in various towns and villages.

Tourist Information

Newport, IOW (01983) 524343 :: Wightlink IOW Ferries (01705) 827744