



West Dorset

Portland Bill South

The Isle of Portland is a cape rich in walks, though when we were there extreme gale force winds made putting one foot in front of another difficult if not, at times, impossible – as can be seen in our video featured on the Western Morning News website.

But we made a stab at achieving half a circumnavigation of the peninsula anyway, and enjoyed every step of the wind-blown route.

Our hike starts at the very tip of the isle that is not an isle. Portland Bill is joined to the mainland at its northern extreme by a very slender isthmus, that I'd like to explore another day.

Down at the southern tip there are superb views to be had from the top of the lighthouse, which is open to the public everyday, except Saturday. For some 300 years a lighthouse has stood hereabouts (there have been three) guiding vessels around Portland into Weymouth – the light is also an important way-mark for ships navigating in the English Channel, warning of the hazardous Shambles Bank lying three miles offshore.

You'll see the island's very own coast path flagged up on a stone near the lighthouse and to begin this walk it's merely a matter of turning left. Almost immediately the walker is confronted by Portland's most famous industry - stone quarrying is what this peninsula is all about and straightaway you will see a disused derrick perched on the low clifftop which is actually the edge of an old quarry.

The Isle of Portland is one massive block of limestone that juts four and half miles out into the channel - it is three quarters of a mile wide and rises to a height of just over 400 feet – but down here at the end of the cape is the place where you can see how quarrying even went on along the wave-slapped sea cliffs.

Our path runs along these low cliffs, but once we're past the old crane we find ourselves in a maze of weird and wonderful beach-huts. This shanty town has a wonderful 1920s cloth-capped build-it-yourself holiday home feel to it, but a woman sheltering from the gale told me that the humble properties sell for astronomical sums nowadays.

Past the huts we enter a grassy down, along which we continue around a handful of small bays - each created by the quarrymen of yore. After a while the path descends to the



Basic walk: from Portland Bill lighthouse up eastern coast to Church Ope Cove, then inland to Easton, crossing peninsula to Weston past cemetery to reach west coast, then south back to lighthouse.

Distance and going: six miles, easy going.

Recommended map: Ordnance Survey OL15 Purbeck and South Dorset

brink of one of these quarries and you can now see the vista of Dorset's east coast begin to unfold to the north. The most noticeable part of this littoral are the white cliffs around Lulworth.

Past a few more old quarries and we arrive at Freshwater Bay which is where the path heads inland, climbing to join the road for a short section. This takes us past an area known as Southwell Landslip – for obvious reason – until we are able to regain the path, which leaves the road and descends back towards the waves.

Now we are approaching the shingle beach of Church Ope Cove – a cosy little maritime nook, complete with wooden beach huts and its very own fantasy-book ruined castle.

The path doesn't quite go down to the beach - although you can make a detour if you wish – but ascends up to the remains of Rufus Castle and its neighbouring ruin, Old St Andrews Church.

The castle (now privately owned) was built sometime between 1432 and 1460 as part of the isle's defences against the French. The ivy-clad remains look rather spooky and dejected, but wonderfully romantic. I couldn't help but feel that, if this were in Devon or Cornwall, the whole shooting match would have been turned into a tourist attraction, and was rather glad to see a ruin being left to be just that. A ruin.

The lane now becomes a lane, which passes between some charming old cottages and brings us out on to the road at a corner where Portland Museum is situated in an ancient thatched house.

We turn right up the extremely wide main-street that leads up to Easton Square – Easton being the old quarrymen's village adjacent to Weston – both names indicating the fairly obvious locations of these twin communities.

Walking around the southern edge of central Easton Square, look out for Lady Mead Close, walk the few yards down it and turn left into Station Road – this changes its name to Channel View Road halfway along – and from here we walk along St George's Estate Road, passing the school.

Now it's a matter of crossing the main Weston road and finding the footpath which runs briefly along the side of the cemetery and heads west, past Bowers Quarry, to the coast path. This route allows you to skirt the village of Weston and enjoy the spectacular views that are to be had above the point at Blacknor.

Now we head south along the coast path past Mutton Cove and the sprawling community of Southwell to gain the airy downs above Wallsend Cove. From here we climb the gentle hill above the old cliff-top look out station and eventually reach the top of the central ridge at a place called Rocket Post.

Before us, the hillside sweeps south and seawards. There is the lighthouse where we began, surrounded on the inland side by its roomy carparks and accompanied to the left by the low slung building which houses an excellent café.

At least we thought it pretty excellent as we enjoyed its warmth and hot soup in our wet clothes while looking out at

the perfect storm which was creating mayhem just a few feet away in an English Channel which was doing its best to make Portland Bill look like Cape Horn.