

Fine fortifications, wonderful wildlife and colourful cliffs...

Bembridge Down - 2¾ miles

 THE NATIONAL TRUST

For over 100 more walks visit

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/walks

Although peaceful today, Bembridge and Culver Downs were once home to intensive military activity. This short, but energetic coastal walk will give you a fascinating insight into the Isle of Wight's role in wartime defence and intelligence. It is also rich in wildlife and offers spectacular views over Sandown and Whitecliff Bays.

Start: NT car park nr Bembridge Fort **Grid ref:** SZ 626859 **Map:** OS Landranger 196

Getting there...

Bus: Hourly service, Sandown-Newport, passes along the B3395

Cycling: The Round the Island cycleway follows the B3395. See www.sustrans.org.uk

Road: On the east of the Isle of Wight, just off the B3395 close to Yaverland

Facilities: Car park (not NT), refreshments at Monument Café (not NT, seasonal) and Culver Haven Inn (both close to point 2 on map). No public toilets.

1000 years of military history...

Culver Signal Station

One of a series of wireless stations built on the south coast by Guglielmo Marconi, the inventor of the radiotelegraph system; in 1899 the first ever message by wireless telegraphy was sent across the English Channel from St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight. In World War II the Culver station was used for intelligence gathering due to its good reception and was staffed by Wrens billeted in nearby coastguard cottages.

Culver Down Beacon

Part of a medieval early warning system, this was one of many on England's south coast and was designed to quickly communicate the threat of French invasion across long distances. A chain of beacons stretched across the island and were used to pass military messages, by way of a flame, to and from the mainland.

Culver Gun Battery

Built in 1893, this was part of a series of batteries guarding the Solent approaches from attack by the French. All that remains today are the gun emplacements. Elsewhere on Culver Down look out for gun platforms, War Department boundary stones, as well as fence posts, trenches and radar mast anchor chains.

Bembridge Fort

Although built in the 19th century as part of Lord Palmerston's defences against the French, it wasn't used until WWII, when it became an anti-aircraft post and head quarters of the local Home Guard. Pre-booked tours only, telephone 01983 741020.



Culver Cliff is the eastern tip of the chalk ridge which runs across the Island from the Needles in the far west. It is one of the main seabird nesting sites on this side of the Island – look out for peregrine falcons (the fastest bird in the world!) and ravens.

© Peter Beasley



Culver Down is grazed in winter by hardy black Hebridean sheep. They prefer eating the tough brambles and coarse grass to tender chalk grassland flowers, like rock rose, bee orchid and birdsfoot trefoil, that live in the shorter turf. Look for fine displays of cowslip in spring. In summer you may see bush cricket and grasshopper.

© NT/Sue Oldham



This Chalkhill Blue, pictured left, is one of many insect and butterfly species which are attracted to the warm south-facing Wealden sand cliffs and the fresh new habitats offered by cliff falls along this eroding coastline. Other insects to be found in the area include types of burrowing bees and wasps.

© NT/Simon Ovenden

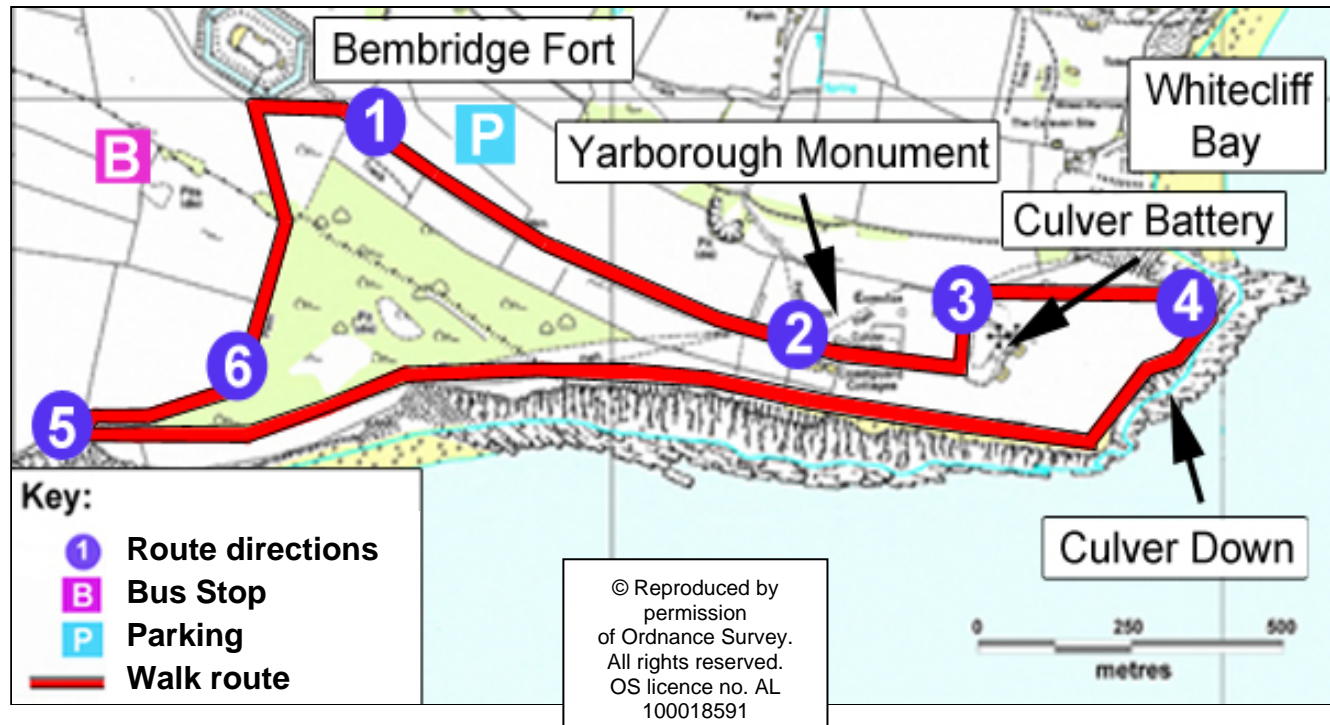
Walk directions...

1. From the car park near Bembridge Fort, follow a grassy path on the right side of the road towards the coast. Keeping a hedge on your left and taking the left fork when the path splits, you'll meet the road again by a cattle grid. Cross this road and emerge onto Culver Down. Head along the road towards the monument. Take care, this road can be busy at times.
 2. Take a look at the Yarborough Monument (a memorial to Lord Yarborough, the first Commodore of the Royal Yacht Squadron), then return to the road. Continue past the Culver Haven Inn and the site of Culver Signal Station (now a car park) to Culver Beacon and Culver Battery.
 3. Descend some steep concrete steps and cross Culver Battery car park. Continue in the direction of Whitecliff Bay, along a grassy path which bends to the right and follows the crest of the chalk ridge of Culver Down eastwards to the sea.
 4. On reaching the cliff top fence, turn right and follow the path southwest, in the direction of Sandown, for the next 1½ miles. Pass through two kissing gates before reaching the natural amphitheatre of Red Cliff, shortly before a holiday park.
 5. Marvel at the views before turning round and retracing your steps to the last gate you went through.
 6. Take the left fork in the path and follow a grassy track away from the coast. Head across the down, back towards Bembridge Fort, which is visible on the horizon. Keep a fence on your left and at the way marker follow the path uphill. Within 50m of the fort, branch right, under some electric wires, to reach the fort entrance directly. The fort is not open to the public.
- You can visit a viewpoint on the east side of the fort on the way back to the car park.

Terrain and accessibility

2¾ mile (4.5km) circular walk with an ascent of 250ft (75m).

Two kissing gates, a steep flight of concrete steps and one step-stile. Mostly well-defined grassy paths with some stony and uneven surfaces. Keep well clear of the cliff edge, it can be slippery in wet conditions. Please keep dogs under close control, especially near livestock.



Contact us: isleofwight@nationaltrust.org.uk Telephone: 01983 741020

Algernon Swinburne, the 19th century poet who grew up in Bonchurch, is said to have scaled Culver Cliff not once, but twice, one winter's day to prove he was not a coward!

As a charity, independent of government, the National Trust relies on the generosity of its supporters to continue caring for our countryside and wildlife, so that everyone can enjoy the beauty of the outdoors for generations to come.

Find out more at www.nationaltrust.org.uk