

# The Monk and the Merchant... 5 miles St Catherine's Down, Isle of Wight

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**Ships A-Hoy! A breathtaking walk steeped in history, with spectacular panoramic views across the Island. St Catherine of Alexandria lived here from about 287–305 AD; a Christian of beauty, brains and noble birth, she was condemned to die for her beliefs. St Catherine became popular after the First Crusade and has a number of hilltop chapels dedicated to her.**

**Start:** Blackgang viewpoint car park **Map:** OS Landranger 196 **Grid ref:** SZ491767

## Getting there...

**Bus:** Service 6 (hourly), Newport-Ventnor, passes along the A3055. Alight at car park


**Cycling:** The waymarked 'Round the Island' cycleway follows the A3055 at Blackgang


**Road:** On the A3055 in the far south of the Isle of Wight, close to Blackgang Chine


**Facilities:** Refreshment van in car park

Dogs welcome, please keep your dog on a lead around wildlife and take any mess home with you.

## Look out for...

 **St Catherine's Oratory:** Built as a maritime beacon around the 14<sup>th</sup> century, this oratory has an interesting past. In 1313 Walter de Godeton, the Lord of the Manor of Chale, was fined and punished for stealing a cargo of white wine from the ship, the *Blessed Virgin Mary*, which ran aground in Chale Bay. He was ordered to, if not to build the Oratory (which may have existed before the shipwreck), ensure it was manned, provide a lighted beacon to warn ships and a monk to offer up prayers for the souls lost at sea. The Oratory continued to serve this purpose up until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the island's chapel fell into disrepair during the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

 **The Hoy Monument:** Michael Hoy, a wealthy merchant who traded with Russia and lived in the nearby Hermitage, built this monument in preparation for the visit of Tsar Alexander I in 1814. The Tsar had successfully repelled the French invasion of Russia in 1812, dealing a serious blow to Napoleon I's campaign. Unfortunately, the Tsar did not visit Michael Hoy and ironically, the south side of the monument bears an inscription to the memory of British soldiers who died fighting the Russians in the Crimean War in 1854.

 **Wydcome:** This delightful valley lies at the head of a tributary of the eastern River Yar, which rises on the slopes of St Catherine's Down. The farmhouse has a drystone wall (an unusual feature on the island), which may have been built using stone from the chapel ruins. Look out for the rare golden-ringed dragonfly, demoiselle damsel fly, parasol fungus and green-veined white butterfly.



St Catherine's Oratory (pictured) is known locally as the 'Pepperpot'. Building began nearby on a second lighthouse, known as the 'Salt Cellar', in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, work was abandoned when the builders realised it too would be shrouded in mist. Its round stone base can be seen by the radar mast.



The landscape of St Catherine's Down is formed from acidic upper greensand and is favoured by plants, such as sheep's sorrel, heath bedstraw and common bent grass. There are two Bronze Age barrows here and a history of substantial chalk quarrying dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

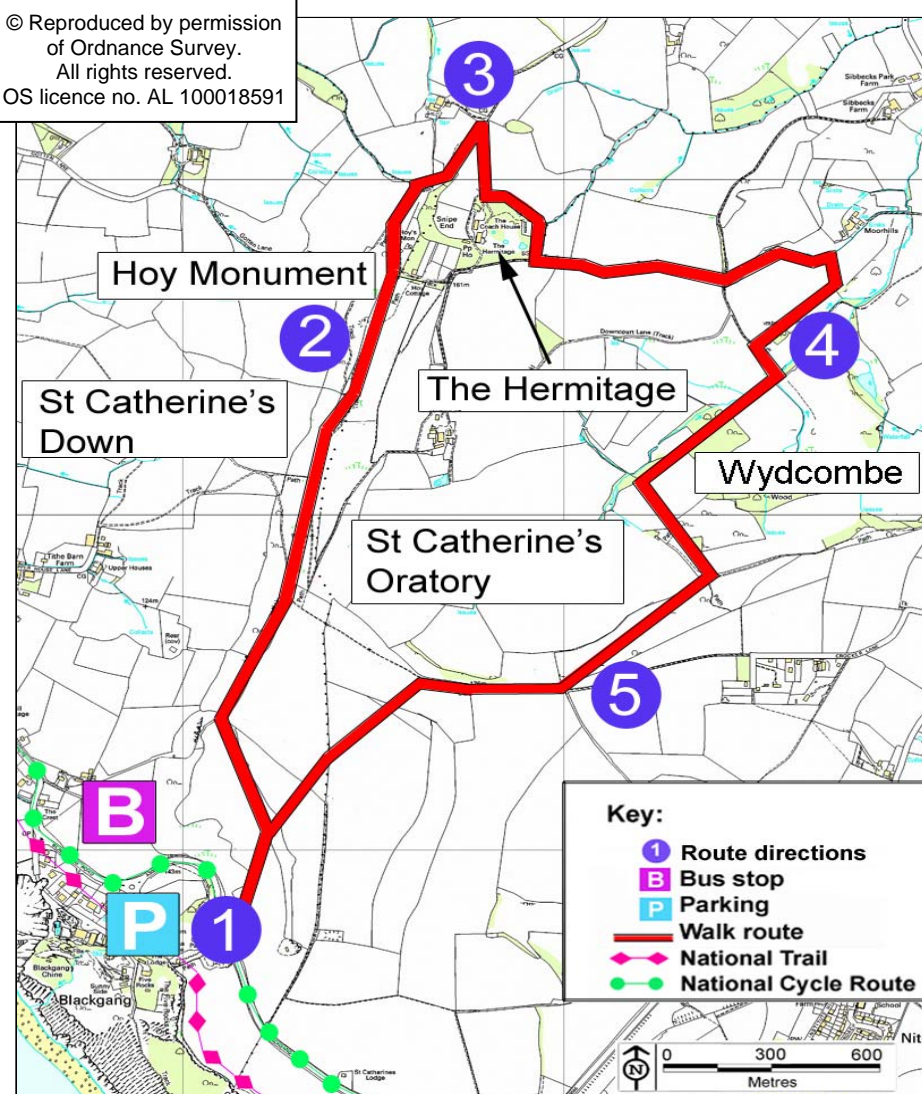


The Hoy Monument, or Alexandrian Pillar, is a 72 feet high column with a ball finial sitting atop built of local stone.

## Route and directions

1. At the car park, cross the road and go through the kissing gate to follow the path diagonally left. Turn left onto a cattle track and follow the upper edge of a quarried area. The track bends left but keep straight ahead over the crest and keep on the level following the line of the hill, bending gradually to the right. Cross a stile to the left of a gate in the fence ahead and follow the path which keeps the fence to its immediate right. Cross the next stile and the field straight ahead, passing through the gate onto St Catherine's Down. Follow the wide, grassy path to the Hoy Monument.
2. Turn left and go through the gate in the fence by the plinth. Turn immediately right and downhill, then right at the T-junction signed C3. After 60m turn right, with the fence on your left, and go through two gates. Take a straight line across the field aiming for the right-most gate in the boundary, leading onto a road.
3. Turn right, then left onto the GL26 path by the wall of The Hermitage. Follow the path round the copse until it reaches a track by a house. Turn left, taking a path through a gate to the right of the driveway and then through a metal gate, until you reach a junction. Turn left, then right through a gate. Keep the fence to your left and follow the path, continuing across a field on the track heading down the valley.
4. 50m before the field gate, take the right path crossing through the hedge by a footbridge. Keeping the fence to your left, continue on the path bending above Wydcombe House. Cross the stile to the right of a field gate and descend to a junction, taking the right-hand track through a metal gate. Before the next gate, turn left down a path between hedges which cross a stream. Turn right, following the stream along a tree-lined track. When the path leaves the valley, emerging into a field by a stile and rusted garden gate, cross through the gap in the hedges some 20m in front, aiming for the uphill corner of the field. In the field corner cross the stile on the right and turn right to join the track rising through trees on Head Down.
5. Cross the stile at the top of the slope and turn left to reach another stile 20m away. Turn right onto a level green lane and pass through a gate onto the hillside. The path goes diagonally left towards the radio mast on the skyline, passing between two small mounds before climbing to the left of an old quarry area. Cross over the stile then head straight uphill towards St Catherine's Oratory. Detour left just before the stile by the trig point to look at the Salt Cellar at the base of the radio mast, then return and cross the stile, heading downhill to cross another stile. The path aims straight for the start point, clearly visible above the Blackgang Chine car park.

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**Walk distance, terrain and accessibility:** 4.8 miles (8km) circular walk, ascent 800ft (250m), 2½ hours. A high and exposed headland; can be very windy and covered by low cloud or mist. Some stiles and gates, paths can be very muddy and slippery.

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