

Wildlife Walk – 1 mile


Brownsea Island, Dorset


Brownsea Island is dramatically located at the entrance to Poole Harbour in Dorset. Walks cut through mixed and pine woodland at the centre of the island, offering an excellent opportunity to see red squirrels (which are almost extinct in southern England) and red squirrel conservation in action. In winter the area is visited by huge flocks of birds including little egrets and avocets.

Getting there

Ferries: from Poole Quay and Sandbanks (every ½ hour); also from Bournemouth and Swanage.

A chain ferry travels from Shell Bay, Studland to Sandbanks every 20 mins.

Walk: Poole Quay is ½ ml walk through Poole town centre from Poole . Shell Bay marks the eastern end of the South West Coast.

Bus: Poole  to Poole Quay and Sand Banks, also Christchurch Quay to Sandbanks (June-Sept).

Road: Poole Quay and Sandbanks are clearly signposted on roads approaching Poole.

Car parks: Shell Bay NT car park and non-NT car parks in Poole and Sandbanks

Bike: signed on-road cycle routes to Shell Bay and to Poole Quay from Poole 

Map & grid ref: OS Explorer OL15: SZ022876; OS Landranger 195

Facilities and contact

WCs (accessible) and baby-changing facilities, tea room and shop, education centre, children's quiz/trail and family activity packs, all-terrain buggies and wheelchairs for loan (booking advisable - wheelchair users advised to contact ferry operators in advance), Tractor Trails (booking essential). Tel: 01202 707744; brownseaisland@nationaltrust.org.uk

Points of interest

Habitats include pinewood, heath, mixed woodland, shore and lagoon. Brownsea also has a varied human history and was once the site of a Victorian pottery and daffodil farm. The Scout movement began on the island when the founder, Baden-Powell, held the first camp here in 1907.

- **Plants:** sea lavender, common spotted orchids and marsh cinquefoil in wetland areas. There are more than sixty types of tree on Brownsea including oak, beech, holly and ash.
- **Birds:** avocet (over 1,000 roosting in winter), peregrine, little egret and kingfisher in winter and terns, gulls and oystercatchers in summer. Birds in the reedbeds include grebes, coot and the shy water rail, with its distinctive 'pig-squealing' call. Brownsea has internationally important birds such as the bar tailed godwit.
- **Animals:** common lizards, red squirrels and sika deer (in reedbeds). The Victorians introduced the deer from Japan which soon swam across the water and colonised the mainland.
- **Insects:** the lakes (which resulted from peat digging) attract many insects, including 24 species of dragonfly such as the small red damselfly and the ruddy darter. There are also green tiger beetles and many species of butterfly such as the green hairstreak and small copper.

NT places nearby

Studland Beach and Hartland Moor, Corfe Castle, Kingston Lacey, Clouds Hill,



Red squirrels must gain over 10% of their body weight to survive the winter. They are best seen in autumn when foraging for nuts on the woodland floor. They can tell if a nut is rotten by its weight

NTPL/Joe Cornish



Pine trees at Brownsea are important for red squirrels and you will often see chewed pine cones on the woodland floor. There are sixty different varieties of tree on Brownsea including many native species

NTPL/Joe Cornish



Water voles are extremely shy (and rare) so it takes a lot of patience to spot them in the wetland areas they inhabit. Not to be confused with rats! Water voles have a blunter, rounder face

Pat Morris

'We are very lucky to be looking after one of the few places in southern England where red squirrels survive'

Angela Cott, Property Manager on Brownsea Island

Distance, terrain and accessibility

This walk is 1 mile (1½ km) over gentle terrain though the paths are uneven in some places. Trail leaflets for other walks are available at the NT shop.

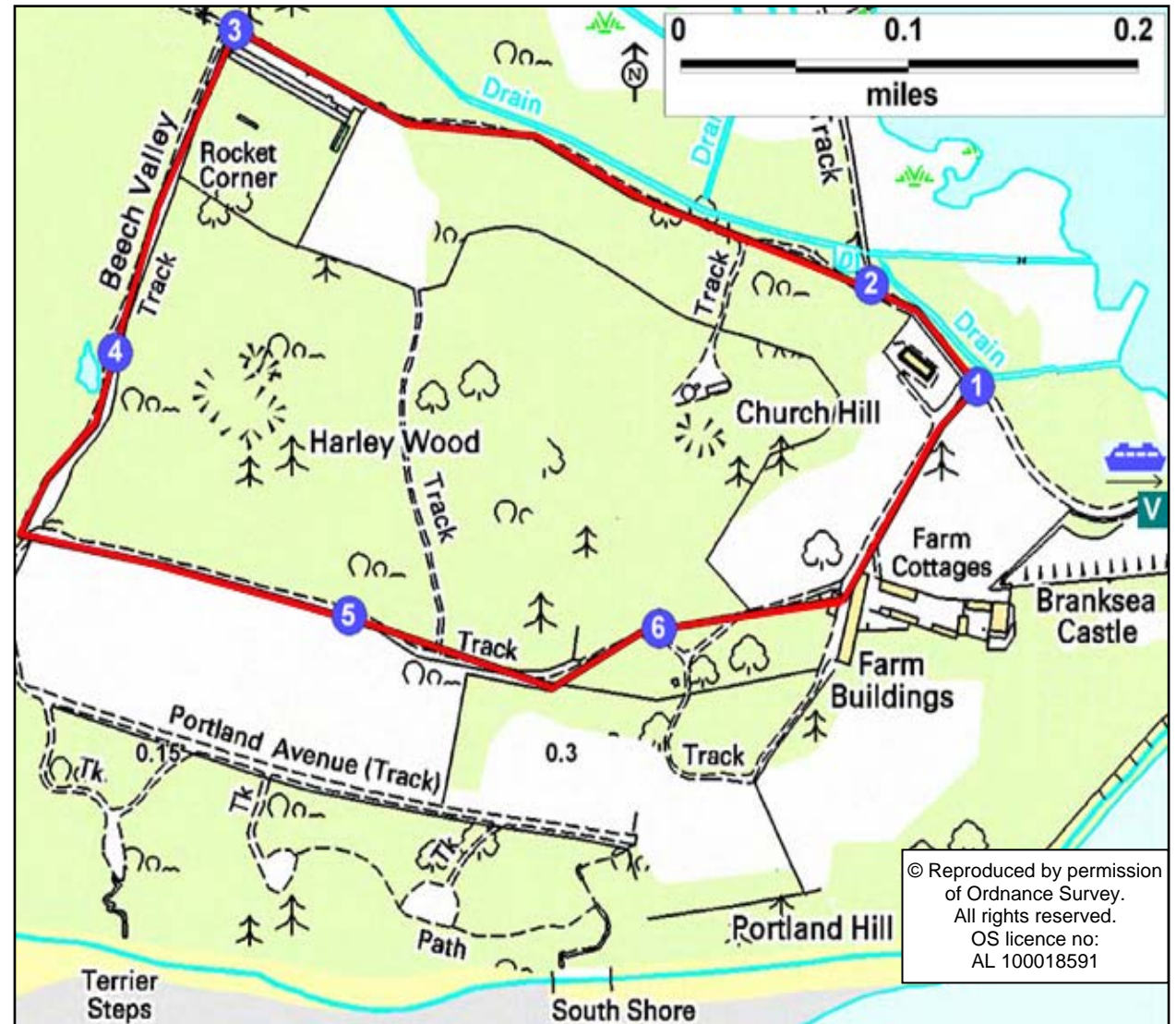
Route and directions

1. Start the walk from the path next to the church and walk in the opposite direction from Brownsea Castle. Take the left fork in the path.
2. In autumn, this is a good place to see red squirrels as they feed on sweet chestnut and beech tree nuts. Carry straight along this path.
3. At Rocket's Corner, take the second left and continue through ideal red squirrel territory, with mature Scots pine trees on your left. Look out for signs of them, like partly eaten pine cones. There are no grey squirrels on Brownsea even though they are usually better adapted to survive in this type of woodland than red squirrels.

Also look out for goldcrests in the woodland – distinguished by a bright yellow stripe on their head, they tend to live high up in the canopy. They are the smallest European bird and have a suitably small call – more of a high-pitched squeak.

4. Note that the pine woodland here is regenerating. This must be managed carefully to conserve the red squirrel population. Take the next path on your left.
5. Pass a track on your left, and then take the path that bears left. In this area, volunteers have recently removed rhododendron (an invasive foreign plant) to maintain the diversity of native plant and animal species.
6. At the farm buildings turn left then follow a path until you again reach the church at the start of your walk.

Alternatively, take a right towards Brownsea Castle. Here there are facilities including a National Trust shop, toilets and café.



Don't forget: make sure you keep a look out for the birdlife around the lagoons and harbour!

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