

GROUP HOLIDAY TO SHANKLIN, ISLE OF WIGHT : 16-20 MARCH 2026



This year with a group of 31, I was able to arrange this as a private tour with Alfa Holidays; we had the coach to ourselves and one pick-up point. Thank you to the Whitchurch Walkers and their friends from Manchester who joined us to board our coach at Crewe Railway Station. Also, to Louise travelling by train from Cardiff and met us, in the nick of time, at Portsmouth Gunwharf Ferry, so that we could take the earlier sailing.

The Isle of Wight “features several iconic ‘wonders’ often highlighted as a blend of natural beauty and quirky, riddle-like local landmarks. The landscape is not flat. The “downs” (chalk hills) are “ups” with the undulating cliffs of the Coastal Path can be steep ups and downs. The most renowned attractions include the Needles, Osborne House, the colourful cliffs of Alum Bay, Shanklin Chine and Shankin Old Village along with humorous local references like "Coves you cannot milk." The Isle of Wight Chines are coastal ravines and gorges formed by waterfalls cutting through sandstone, the most attractive of which and a tourist attraction, is Shanklin Chine.

Included in the holiday were tours to visit The Needles, Alum Bay & Yarmouth and Ryde & Cowes with a free day to explore and sightsee at leisure. I was also able to arrange, directly with our Driver Chris, a lift and pick up to Freshwater for our first walk on the far west of the Island, saving considerable travel time on the public buses.

Helen, Andy W. and Nigel helped me with planning walks and offers to lead as an alternative to the tours. The intention was that each of the routes had opt out points to shorten the walk and take public transport back to Shanklin or wherever anyone wanted to go. The Southern Vectis bus service is an excellent way to travel easily anywhere on the Island, and free if you had a bus pass!

We travelled directly from Crewe, with a coffee/comfort stop and a lunch stop on the way, arriving at Portsmouth in good time for a stroll around the sights of Gunwharf Quays; the Spinnaker Tower, Lipstick Tower and shops.



We crossed the Solent to Fishbourne in about 45 minutes and we soon arrived at our base, the Shanklin Hotel.



The staff were very helpful and welcoming. We were given drinks tokens to exchange at the bar and luggage was delivered to our rooms.

The location was within walking distance of the town, close to the Coastal Path and the welcoming Chine Inn perched above the Shanklin Chine.



Arriving earlier than expected and booked with the later dinner time [which also meant a later breakfast time – more on this below] there was time to take a stroll to the town, coastal path, or the nearby Inn.

Day 2 - Breakfast at 08:50

While some thought it would be too late for getting started on walks – we had all day – clocks had changed to BST – so lighter evenings – and later dinner. Phew you can't please everyone. BUT it seems you can!

[Paul Boniface]

08:50 for breakfast? Ten to nine? Our coach driver, Chris' information about our first meal of the day left me thinking "That's a bit late". However, it turned out to be a gift in disguise.

My early morning routine proved to be one of the many pleasures of the holiday. An early morning walk along the seashore was delightful.

The colours of the beach huts amplified by the morning light.

The sunrises contrasting with the half-light of dawn.



And when I got back fully charged for the day and ready for breakfast, I looked at my step count and thought 'that's worth at least an extra slice of buttered toast - or maybe a glass of ale later.' Here's to early mornings and late breakfasts - Cheers!



Others also embraced the later breakfast time for an early morning swim in the hotel's heated pool, a stroll or time to shop for daily supplies.

Day 2 – Weather Forecast – Great!

Trip to The Needles, Alum Bay and Yarmouth

Walk from Freshwater over Tennyson Down to the Needles and Alum Bay. 4 Miles + 5 Miles Led by Nigel

Our Coach Driver Chris took the whole group – walkers and sightseers alike - in our coach the 20 miles across the island to Freshwater Bay, skilfully negotiating numerous road closures en-route and providing informative commentary as we passed through Godshell, Carrisbrook and fine view of St Catherine's Beacon (Pepperpot)



From the coach the walkers set off in fine weather, almost immediately beginning a 1.5 mile gradual ascent across the grassy terrain of Tennyson Down to reach the Tennyson Monument at 480ft.

The monument was erected in 1897 in memory of the poet laureate who frequently walked these downs.





After pausing for coffee and to admire the views Westwards towards The Needles and Eastwards to Compton Down we continued on level ground for another 1.5 miles to West High Down, then it was downhill to the viewpoint at New Battery to admire and photograph the iconic Needles geological marvel.

Dropping down a little further to Old Battery we found a sheltered spot to eat our picnic lunch closely observed by a fearless raven, the largest of our corvid species.

The Batteries (now National Trust) were Victorian defensive installations which were subsequently used in the world wars and more recently for missile and rocket testing.



After lunch we turned East heading along a level track above White Cliffs towards the multicoloured rock strata of Alum Bay to reach The Needles Park Visitor attraction, thankfully not too busy at this time of year.

Since we had a rendezvous to make with our coach, we didn't have time to walk down Alum Chine to the beach, so after a short break and a last glimpse of The Needles we set off again.

At this point several of the group decided to take the opportunity to shorten the walk and to return to Shanklin via Newport on the public bus.

For the rest of us it was time for another short climb up to the heather clad Headon Hill (394 ft) with its bronze age burial mound and views across to our outward route along Tennyson Down.

Descending from Headon Hill we crossed the valley on footpaths and minor roads to reach a trail skirting woodland at the base of Tennyson Down which we followed for 1.5 miles back to Freshwater Bay.

A short walk out of the village brought us to our coach and the ride back to our hotel.
[Andy Webb]

Before going inside the hotel, some of us went with Paul on his recce of Happy Hour at the curiously named "Cliff's Palace". It was closed. Had we gone a little bit further on to the Chine we would have found the Manchester contingent (Prosecco Girls) at the Inn.

Not to be disappointed, we returned to the Hotel and as it was St Patrick's day, all enjoyed a beer or Guinness and raised a toast to our John O'Keeffe. He would have like that.



The sightseers also enjoyed their tour of West Wight, with informative commentary by Chris, our Driver, visiting Alum Bay with good views of the Needles, Yarmouth and a Sweet Manufactory.

The Marconi Monument at Alum Bay is a granite obelisk commemorating Guglielmo Marconi's pioneering wireless telegraphy experiments conducted there in 1897. It marks

the site of the first permanent wireless station and the first radio telegram transmission to a ship at sea. [Helen Lea]



Day 3 – Weather Forecast – Great Again!

Free Day - Osborne House, Carisbrooke Castle, Coastal Cruise to Portsmouth and the Naval Base.

Two+ walks:

Shanklin to Ventnor 9 Miles

Shanklin to Ventnor via Donkey Sanctuary. 3 Miles + 5 Miles

Shanklin to Godshell via Donkey Sanctuary. 3 Miles + 5 Miles

Osborne House

On Wednesday, the third day of our Isle of Wight holiday, a small group of us decided to visit Osborne House, Queen Victoria's much-loved holiday home on the island. Using the local



buses, we undertook an easy journey from Shanklin to East Cowes, changing buses at Newport, and enjoying lovely views of the countryside and pretty villages with picturesque, thatched cottages along the way. In due course we were deposited at the entrance and following a short walk through the grounds in unseasonably sunny weather, we arrived at Osborne House, an imposing Italianate structure, built between 1845 and 1851, and one of Prince Albert's many design projects.

Although we had been made aware that only the ground floor of the house would be open and also Swiss Cottage, the children's garden house, would be closed due to it being off-season, we still found plenty of interest to see in the art collection and furnishings of the house, and there was an advantage in being able to view everything at our own pace without vying with large crowds of people. The guides also had time to talk and pass on information about the history of the house and its eminent visitors: 19th century politicians, foreign royalty et alia. We were shown the room where Alexander Graham Bell had given a demonstration to Queen Victoria of his new invention, the telephone. The Durbar wing of the house was particularly interesting, an ornate and exotic mixture of British and Indian decor, reflecting Queen Victoria's fascination with Indian culture.



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As it was a sunny, clear day, we had a spectacular view from Osborne House over the Solent to Portsmouth and it is easy to understand the appeal of its beautiful location. The terraced gardens were well-planted and immaculate and it was a pleasure to walk through the grounds, with their lovely collection of trees, to Swiss Cottage. Although the cottage was not open, it was still possible to get an impression of the lives of the 9 royal children, who worked and played on their allotments there. Leaving Swiss Cottage, we carried on through the woods to the private beach and sea-bathing area, where a bathing machine, used by Queen Victoria, is usually on display, but unfortunately not on this occasion.



Our successful visit was concluded in one of the Osborne House cafés, where we enjoyed coffees/teas and, with a nod to Queen Victoria, slices of Victoria sandwich cake.

[Chris Ashton]

(1) Shanklin to Donkey Sanctuary at Wroxall, on to Godshill or over the Downs to Ventnor Led by Eileen and Janet

As Helen was recovering from a bad knee and not walking this time, I led a group on a walk directly from the hotel, following the old railway line to the Donkey Sanctuary near Wroxall. This was the first opt-out point for a shorter walk.

The Isle of Wight has a rich history of donkeys. They have been used for work purposes from 'walking' the 16th century water wheel at Carisbrooke Castle, running the donkey taxi service, pulling milk carts, delivering laundry and of course donkey rides on the esplanades.



Founded in 1987, Donkey Sanctuary is run as a charity with dedicated volunteers and provides a forever home and exceptional care for donkeys and equines on the Isle of Wight. Each donkey has its own story of how they arrived at the Sanctuary.



During our coffee stop we discussed the options and next destination for a longer walk. Janet and Anne, decided to continue to **Godshill**, and see more of the picturesque village, we'd passed through on the coach yesterday and were tempted by thoughts of a cream tea!



Wroxall to Ventnor

I suggested that we might walk over the Downs to the coast at Ventnor, as the other group were doing, and take the bus back to Shanklin Old Village. We'd then head to the Chine Inn, as recommended by Janet and Anne.



So off we set, Bev, Carol, David and me. Once on the Downs (Ups) we knew we'd be committed to walking back down to the coast. It was a beautiful day for it and we had plenty of time.



From the Donkey Sanctuary, we continued on to Wroxall Village and followed the very muddy field paths up to Wroxall Down, walking along the contour to the Radio Station. Then on to St Boniface Down/Bonchurch Down for a lunch stop after which we would start our descent to Bonchurch and Ventnor.



We took one look and a few steps down the very steep path and decided it was not for us – we might have rolled down! So back up a bit and through a gate in the hedge, we found a better used path with views to Ventnor.



This turned out to be Ventnor Downs Old Shute Field. [*Shute - a steep, often narrow, sloped road, lane, or, in some contexts, a steep path*]. Glad we were heading down and not up. After that, the zig-zagging path down into Ventnor was much easier.

We ambled through the town, looking in a few shop and estate agent windows - as you do! We found a lovely viewpoint, with seats, above the bay. From that vantage point we admired the Groynes and the sea front, until it was time to walk back to catch the bus to Shanklin Old Village.

From there we walked along the Coastal Path to find the Chine Inn, already very lively with friendly locals and the Prosecco Girls. After a drink or two, it was a short stroll along the Coastal Path to our Hotel.

[Eileen Dorman]



(2) Shanklin Old Village to Ventnor Circular Returning on Coastal Path.

Led by Andy 9 Miles



Walk leader Andy set off at from the Shanklin Hotel on a glorious sunny morning followed by Nigel, Sheila, Lynn, Andy and David. The walk initially took us past some lovely thatched shops on the south of Shanklin that included one selling Xmas Gifts and the Crab Public House that we would visit on the return to Shanklin for well-earned refreshment.

Making our way across the Big Mead green space we approached the small, but lovely St Blasius Church. At the church Andy was welcomed in by a member of the church choir who were happy for us to watch whist they rehearsed a number of Hymns. We left the church and began the steady, but lengthy incline up towards Luccombe Down.

As we made our way up the steep incline, we came to a section similar to a commando training area – a steep section of very, wet muddy path squeezed between hawthorn bushes.



Thankfully, everyone got through successfully, but any hopes and thoughts of not having to clean boots at the end of the day had gone!



On making our way up to the top of Luccombe Down we stopped for a brief coffee break sheltered from the wind behind whin-bushes, before continuing onto Ventnor Down with a brief stop at the radar station that gave fantastic views over Boniface Down.





The descent to Ventnor from the Downs was very steep and we took the opportunity to rest on the wooden bench with the lovely message that said, *"Sometimes I sits and thinks; and sometimes I just sits!"*

On entering Ventnor, we zig-zagged our way down Zig Zag Road to Ventnor Park that had some beautiful flowers and ponds.



From Ventnor Park we made our way down to the sea front and stopped for liquid refreshment and triple cooked chips at the Spyglass Inn overlooking the sea.

Departing the Spyglass Inn, we made our way along the lovely Ventnor



sea-front. The warm weather we were enjoying was brought home to us by the sight of people sunbathing on the sand in their bikinis!

On leaving Ventnor we headed along the front coastal path before meeting signs that demanded a re-think and route change.



The signs regarding the diversion were few and far between and so began an adventure on its own to find a way through or around what turned out to be a significant landslide. We eventually found a route through heavy woodland onto the route back towards Shanklin, but not before discovering a small, well-preserved small church that was built in 1170.

On returning to Shanklin we found a small ford close to a park that gave us an excellent opportunity to clean the dried-on mud from our boots before progressing a little further to re-hydrate at the thatched Crab Public Bar we had passed on the initial outward stages, before making our way back to the Shanklin Hotel. The walk was a great day out. Lovely weather, well-led, challenging terrain, fantastic views (over and above the bikini sunbathers!) and great company.

[David Love]



One of Paul's three-daily activities, was a visit to Carisbrook Castle. A walk that I had planned for tomorrow. Thank you for the photos, Paul:



A visit for another time.....

Coastal Cruise

Others booked the cruise from Cowes to Portsmouth enjoying fine views of Osborne House, Solent forts, and Royal Navy ships and time to visit Historical Dockyard Visitors Centre.



Day 4 – Weather Forecast – Couldn't be Better !!

Trip to Cowes and Ryde

Two circular walks: Brading Marshes to Bembridge

Again, the whole group boarded the coach at the hotel. The walkers were dropped off at the Bull Ring, close to Brading Station while the tourists went on to visit Ryde and Cowes – very kindly the order of the visits was changed, as the train times from Shanklin to Brading didn't quite suit the walkers. Thank you to our Coach Driver Chris for being so flexible.

The Bull ring at Brading, stands as a stark reminder of a brutal 'sport', popular during the medieval and Tudor periods. Bull baiting was not just thought of as an 'entertainment', it was seen as necessary to provide palatable meat. They believed that the prolonged exertion made the meat more tender. During a time when tainted meat could kill, it provided an opportunity for customers to see the meat being slaughtered to ensure its freshness and the amount of people attending the event provided ample customers to purchase the meat.



(1) 11miles, 856 feet & 8 *Grockles* (Mainlander, or person who is not from Isle of Wight but is visiting on holiday.) Led by Andy Webb.

Sunshine and glorious vistas were the order of the day, as we set off across Brading Marshes Nature Reserve and up to the ancient hillfort at Bembridge (104m) for coffee and wonderful views over Sandown. The fort was part of Lord Palmerston's defence system for the Solent.





Our next highlight was the First Earl of Yarborough's Monument on Culver Down. A massive obelisk of granite erected by public subscription in 1849. The Earl being the first commodore of the Royal Yacht Squadron at Cowes. In honour of his achievements, we partook of beer and chunky chips in the local hostelry!



Our descent was via the coastal path passing the RNLI lifeboat station established in 1867. The station has 2 lifeboats and operates 24/7 due to the commitment of over 40 volunteers. Due to extremely wet weather, there has been a lot of landslips and thus we needed to follow coastal path diversions at this point.



Our return journey took us past the Bembridge Windmill built in 1700 and the sole remaining windmill on the Isle of Wight. Two very *slappy (wet and dirty underfoot)* & muddy stiles on The Marshes and low flying aircraft landing on Bembridge Airport, did not prevent us from reaching the Brading Railway Station, although they delayed us sufficiently to make us miss our intended train. But the time was well spent cleaning our boots on the platform but leaving quite a mess behind!

Andy presented a diamond ring to the conductor on the train (which he had found at the station) but sadly his proposal was rejected 😊



Further well-earned drinks were the order of the day at The Chine Inn (One of Shanklin's oldest inn 1621) to round off a wonderful day's hiking.

Thank you to Andy for leading .

Reference: The Isle of Wight Dictionary

[Sheila Shaw]

(2) 8 Miles 8 Walkers. Led by Andy McLaughlin. [supported...emm... hindered by Eileen at the very last mile]

A few more people wanted to go walking today and although I'd planned for a walk and visit to Carisbrooke Castle, I decided it would be a better day out to re-plan the Brading-Bembridge route, making for an easier walk. Chris, our coach driver kindly agreed to drop off all the walkers at Brading, rather than Newport, with a small re-route for the excursion visiting Ryde and Cowes. [Eileen]

[Judith Spowage]

We left the other group crossing the very muddy marshes and started our walk along a dismantled railway which ran through the RSPB Brading Marshes and Nature Reserve. There were certainly plenty of birds to observe.



It was almost mud free and flat. The only incline was the walk through St Helens leading to Bembridge Harbour on the Yar River Trail. We walked alongside the Harbour with good views across to Portsmouth and passing by a number of interesting House Boats.

This was an opt-out point for anyone wanting to shorten the walk and catch the bus back to Shanklin.

Andy spotted the very well-kept municipal toilets. After a welcome comfort stop we all decided to carry on with the walk, persuaded by Eileen that before long we would be on field paths with some more interesting points along the way!

We soon arrived on the Bembridge Trail and our return leg to Brading. We climbed up towards the National Trust Bembridge Windmill. Here we ate our lunch enjoying the March sunshine and the panoramic views over the surrounding countryside to Culver Down, the Hill Fort and the First Earl of Yarborough's Monument, though we didn't spot the other group of walkers!!



Although reluctant to leave, we began our descent towards Brading. The route also took us through a landscape of fields and woodland and water. We passed by Bembridge Airport where we observed several light aircraft taking off and landing.



What's this? In the middle of a muddy field? And how many ramblers does it take to reassemble the bits into a seat!?



Chris guessed it was a broken information board and sure enough we eventually found she was right.



The terrain was extremely muddy and slippery in places, especially around the stiles, where besides the slippery and slimy mud there were some very large puddles. Passing over and through the stiles required some skilful and careful manoeuvres. Fortunately, our feet stayed dry!

Thank you Andy for trying out all the stiles and puddles first.

We continued our walk back to Brading, from where, having just missed a train, we caught the bus back to Shanklin Old Village, walking along the Coastal Path to the now popular Chine Inn for a well-deserved drink.

Hovercraft at Ryde



Cowes



Evening Entertainment

There were several choices of what to do after dinner on each evening; listening to the vocalists singing hits from past and present, dancing, relaxing drink in the lounge, a game of darts, table football, Jenga and of course the **BINGO!** The girls did well, with their winnings funding the Prosecco and first-timer Dot, bagged a big prize on her first go.

Day 5

An early breakfast for an early start. No swimming or strolling today.

For our journey back to Crewe Station, we were taking the early ferry from Yarmouth to Lymington. This was an interesting sailing through the narrow channel of the Solent following the guide markers.



After dropping off Louise at Lymington for her train to Cardiff, we would then be taking a scenic route home via the New Forest and Lyndhurst before joining the motorway. Turned out Louise was back in Cardiff before we got to Crewe!

Again Chris, our Driver, provided some interesting information and facts about the New Forest area.

Lyndhurst the capital of the New Forest since William the Conqueror established it as a royal hunting ground in 1079. Lyndhurst has been visited by kings and queens staying at the Royal Manor throughout the centuries and is still the administrative centre for the New Forest.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, of Sherlock Holmes fame is buried at nearby Minstead churchyard.



Lyndhurst is also closely connected to Alice in Wonderland as the final home and resting place of Alice Liddell (Mrs. Reginald Hargreaves), the real-life inspiration for Lewis Carroll's stories.

After a lunch stop and comfort stop, we were soon back on our way, arriving at Crewe Station, mid-afternoon.

While this was a long journey and crossing the water, everyone remarked on how quickly the time passed and how easy and relaxing it was for us passengers.

Again, the Spring 2026 coach holiday gave us lots of options and not enough days and still more to do, even though for some, this was a second trip to the Isle of Wight. Everyone said they'd had a great and enjoyable time. As this is a much longer Blog-Diary, you can see we packed in a lot whether walking or sight-seeing and certainly filled the days.

Thank you to all the Blog contributors for their narrative and photographs and to everyone on the trip for your kind comments and much appreciated gift. Good wishes to you all.

Andy Webb, Helen Lea, Judith Spowage, Paul Boniface, Chris Ashton, David Love, Sheila Shaw, Eileen Dorman

Isle of Wight Blog
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