

# Jurassic parks

Andrew Ditton recommends a pair of sites ideally located to explore Dorset's Jurassic Coast



Ordnance Survey Landranger Maps 194, 195

**P**OETICALLY NAMED though it is, the Isle of Purbeck in Dorset isn't really an island. However, there is definitely an insular feel to the promontory that stretches out from the mainland near Poole as if to shake hands with the Isle of Wight to the east.

Enid Blyton set many of her novels in the heart of Purbeck, encapsulating its quintessentially English feel. This is the place to come and secretly live out those childhood dreams about being a member of the Famous Five, enjoying fun-filled adventures washed down with lashings of ginger beer.

Two fabulous member-only Club sites sit in the heart of the region, each offering a distinctly different experience.

Perennially popular is the Club's very own Haycraft site. Timing your arrival is

crucial – you need to turn up before 8pm as there simply isn't room for a late-night arrivals area. It's also best to arrive after 1pm (certainly not before noon), as you wouldn't want to meet a departing caravan or motor caravan on the approach road.

Many pitches on this full-facility site are hardstanding, their terraced location making them level and easy to use, but outfit length may be restricted. Call the wardens for advice before attempting to book an outfit that's over 8.5m long.

Seven miles away from Haycraft by road, but a million miles away in feel, is the delightfully relaxed and informal Smedmore House Affiliated Site. The best way to describe this location is as a 42-pitch CL. There's no facility block, just two hardstandings, and on the

majority of the pitches you will need levelling blocks.

However, the tranquil atmosphere and superb views more than compensate for any small sacrifices made. While away the days walking the surrounding area or simply sit outside the caravan drinking in the atmosphere while allowing your daily troubles to evaporate.

When checking in, ask to borrow the free laminated map that describes the 20-minute walk to Kimmeridge Bay. It's a super little stroll taking in lovely vistas. If a spot of diving takes your fancy, there is an underwater nature trail accessible from the Marine Centre in the bay. Clavell Tower – a Tuscan-style folly – overlooks the coastline from Hen Cliff nearby.

Retrace your steps back to the site or opt for a circular walk, taking in part of

the 630-mile-long South West Coast Path National Trail. A proliferation of fossils justifies this particular region's tag – 'Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site' – an honour that puts it up there on a par with the Great Barrier Reef and Grand Canyon. Durdle Door, near Lulworth, should be on your itinerary.

Be aware that access to sections of the Coast Path in Dorset are restricted due to military activity, and you should check with tourist information centres before setting off. If you head west from Kimmeridge, the path passes close to the fascinating 'lost village' of Tyneham, which was commandeered for military purposes in 1943. The locals were not permitted to return after the war as the army retained the land for training. The church and the schoolhouse have been

saved from dereliction and this 'ghost village' gives a memorable insight into everyday rural life in times gone by.

Haycraft also offers access to some wonderful locations. Just a few minutes' amble down the lane is Harmans Cross Station, from where steam trains puff (and vintage diesels clatter) their way to Corfe Castle in one direction and Swanage in the other. Members staying at Smedmore could drive to the railway's northern terminus of Norden, where a park and ride facility is available.

Wherever you're staying, a visit to Corfe Castle is an absolute must. Despite the valiant efforts of Lady Banks ('Brave Dame Mary'), Parliamentarians reduced the stronghold to the majestic ruins that survive today. Corfe Castle also lends its name to the adjacent

village, a pretty melange of tearooms, pubs and boutiques. What better way could there be to replace the calories burned on the walk up the hill to the castle than with a delicious Dorset cream tea? If it's a nice day, try the National Trust's own tearoom, where the sun-drenched garden tables take in fantastic uninterrupted views of the ruins.

Jump back on the train and head south to Swanage. Upon arrival, make a beeline for the fantastic sandy beach, opposite which you will find the tourist information centre staffed by folk who are veritable fonts of local knowledge. Swanage is a great place to visit if holidaying with children or grandchildren, as it always helps to have the distractions of a friendly town adjacent to the beach should you require them.

Durdle Door – one of the most recognisable landmarks along the Jurassic Coast

>>





Haycraft Caravan Club Site

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
Parts of Corfe Castle date back to the 11th century

**ATTRACTIONS**

- **Clealls of Corfe** – general store for essentials and luxuries, featured on TV’s *Mary Queen of Shops*. Call 01929 480170 or see clealls.co.uk
- **Burngate Stone Carving Centre** – call 01929 439405 or see burngatestonecentre.co.uk
- **Swanage Railway** – call 01929 425800 or see swanagerailway.co.uk
- **Studland Bay, Brownsea Island, and Corfe Castle** – all managed by the National Trust. Call 0844 800 1895 or see nationaltrust.org.uk
- **The Blue Pool & Tea House** – call 01929 551408 or see bluepooluk.com
- **Monkey World Ape Rescue Centre** – call 01929 462537 or see monkeyworld.org



“ A proliferation of fossils justifies this particular region’s tag of ‘Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site’ ”

However, for the ultimate beach experience, collect the car (or bike) and explore Studland. Miles of golden beach and sand dunes offer delights for sun-worshippers and wildlife-lovers alike. Kick off your visit at Knoll Beach, where a visitor centre feeds the mind alongside a chic café that nourishes the body.

The National Trust’s Brownsea Island – accessible by boat service from Sandbanks or Poole Quay – a wildlife haven in the middle of Poole Harbour, makes for a relaxing and highly-enjoyable sortie. Look out for avocets, terns, godwits and even the elusive red squirrel. Members with an appetite for even greater ornithological delights should also make tracks to the RSPB reserve at Arne.

Further natural delights may be enjoyed at The Blue Pool, a former clay pit that is now a 25-acre oasis adjoined by a museum, tearoom and play areas for children. As long as it’s not too wet, one of the main trails is accessible for wheelchair users and buggy-pushers.

To liven things up a little, and entertain children from the ages of about four to 104, continue the day with a trip to Monkey World near Wool, home to over 230 primates. The centre also features a superb adventure playground that has a purpose-built swing for wheelchair visitors.

One thing is for certain – taking a holiday on the Isle of Purbeck is like enjoying a Dorset cream tea. Once is just never enough. ■

**INFORMATION**

**SITE**

Full site details can be found on p117 (Smedmore House) and p118 (Haycraft) of the *Sites Directory & Handbook 2009/10*

**TOURISM**

- **Swanage TIC** – call 01929 422885 or see visitswanageandpurbeck.com
- **Purbeck Information & Heritage Centre** – call 01929 552740 or see visitswanageandpurbeck.com

**CYCLING**

■ **From Smedmore House or Haycraft:** The sites are close to National Cycle Network Route 2 and the Purbeck Cycleway. For a lovely ride on quiet roads, head towards Studland and take the ferry over to Sandbanks – it’s just 90p for bikes. At Sandbanks you can choose to head into Poole, or carry on to Bournemouth. See [sustrans.org.uk](http://sustrans.org.uk) for more information.

