

Chale Bay

Summary Description

Lying on the exposed south west edge of the Isle of Wight, Chale Bay has been the location of many shipwrecks. This dramatic area is characterised by the natural chine features.

Sea Surface

This natural bay rests on the north-western side of St. Catherine's Point, on the Isle of Wight. This area is open to the prevailing winds and other erosional elements. The seaward most region of the water surface is designated as a caution area due to its numerous navigational hazards. Activity on the sea surface is dominated by navigation markers, yacht races and other marine recreational pursuits.

Seabed Surface

Most of the foreshore is characterised by sandbanks which form popular sandy beaches, consequently the area is primarily used for recreation. Cliffs and their associated Chines form the remaining coastal sections. A number of submerged isolated rocks and rock formations are clustered in the near shore area: most notably, the Atherfield Ledges. These pose a further hazard to vessels approaching the bay area.

The rocks along the base of these cliffs have claimed many ships in the past and documentary records provide details of over 180 ships lost here since 1750.

The sites of three identified shipwrecks have been recorded within the bay area. Two nearshore: *Zeemansblik* a motor trawler ran aground in 1965 and *Claremont* a steam brig with sails lost in 1881, and one at the furthest seaward extent thought to be the *Westville* a steamship sunk in 1917 which is used as a popular dive site.

Seabed Subsurface

There is nothing charted or recorded within the currently available marine datasets for the seabed subsurface. However, recent research into the development of the English Channel is beginning to reveal evidence for the potential for survival of submerged prehistoric landscape deposits within the seabed.

Coastal

Two of the most well known Chines on the island are featured within the Chale Bay area - Blackgang Chine and Whale Chine. Named after a local band of smugglers, Blackgang Chine has now been overlaid by a fantasy theme park. The chine's top is 400ft above the sea, which provides superb view of the cliffs leading north west past Whale Chine. At the base of the cliffs can be seen the Gault clay, locally known as 'blue slipper', which acts as a lubricant to the overlying layers causes continual cliff falls along this coast. Blackgang Chine shows many signs of the slippage, which in recent years has taken away the original coast road and many houses.

The cliffs in this area are clearly stratified, one of the layers within them - the Wealdon Beds formed in a lake ca. 100 million yrs ago - are famous for fossilized oysters, ammonites, and lobsters.

Archaeological Potential

The coastal archaeological resource adjacent to the study area finds includes flint working sites and scatters. The Chines have been shown to have a range of archaeological sites associated with them.

Offshore the archaeology of this area is dominated by the rich shipwreck resource. Due to the dynamic nature of the marine zone and geological features it is unlikely that submerged prehistoric landscape features will be located close to the shore, however, early landscapes features may be buried under the present day sea floor. The potential to encounter the remains of crashed aircraft must also be considered, particularly as there is document evidence of a WWII aircraft crash in the area.

Links

History of Chale - <http://www.chale.org.uk/chale/history.htm>

Blackgang Chine: Amusement Park - <http://www.blackgangchine.com/>

UK Fossils: Whale Chine - <http://www.ukfossils.co.uk/sec070a.htm>



ENGLISH HERITAGE



National Oceanography
Centre, Southampton
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON AND
NATURAL ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH COUNCIL