

Swanage Bay

Summary Description

This area is a highly popular tourist destination and the town of Swanage is often visited. The relatively shallow bay is utilised for a range of watersports and fishing, and Swanage Pier is a very popular site for SCUBA diving. In addition to modern leisure activities the area has a history of maritime trade and transport including fishing and stone export.

Sea Surface

Situated at the foot of the Purbeck Hills, Swanage Bay sits at the eastern end of the Purbeck Peninsula. The area is adjacent to Durlston Bay which lies to the southwest. The sheltered nature of the bay means that it is popular for bathing, sailing, windsurfing and SCUBA diving. Its clear unpolluted water, has won the European Blue Flag Award many times, as well as the Encams Tidy Britain Seaside Award.

Other marine activity includes a small commercial fishing fleet and coastal pleasure cruises through the summer season.

To the south of the bay the environmental conditions change and there is a significant tidal race over Peveril Ledge.

Seabed Surface

On and close to shore the environment is dominated by the shallow and sheltered nature of the bay. There are a number of sandbanks which feature in this area. The area is designated as part of a marine Special Area of Conservation and is part of the World Heritage Coast.

The nearshore area features 3 identified wrecks: *Alexandrovna* (driven ashore during a hurricane), *Fanny*, and *Fleur De Lys*, in addition to 4 other unidentified wrecks, and 1 obstruction.

At least 30 other known wreck sites are located further offshore. One of the most popular is the *Coquetdale*, the remains of a British steamer sunk by a Stuka in 1940.

The offshore area is also utilised for deep sea fishing and as a dumping area. Dredging used to take place in the 1930s but has not occurred recently.

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.



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Coastal

A prominent coastal building is Durlston Castle built on Durlston Head in 1886. The corbel-turreted building is built completely from local stone. Surrounding the castle are stone tablets inscribed with various statistics and poetry which reflect the Victorians interest in the sea and the forces of nature. The castle overlooks the bay which was heavily quarried throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, with many tunnels dug into the cliff faces. Most of these tunnels have since been covered by land slides which regularly occur in the bay.

To the north of Durlston Bay and separating it from Swanage Bay is Peveril Point. This stone headland is formed of a hard bed of limestone (known as Purbeck Marble) which runs from Herston to the west of Swanage to Peveril Point and then eastwards under the English Channel. The small building on Peveril Point is currently used by National Coastwatch as a lookout.

Throughout the second half of the 19th century, Peveril Point was a base for the Dorset Artillery Corps who were a part of the voluntary force that made up Britain's home defence. The Corps built a fort on the headland which contained two, thirty-two pound cannons which fired 6.4 inch balls. The coastal area also features extensive sewage treatment works facilities.

Archaeological Potential

The history of Swanage is fairly typical of many coastal towns that once relied on fishing and stone export.

Offshore the archaeology of this area is dominated by the shipwreck resource. However, the potential for the survival of submerged prehistoric landscapes should be highlighted. Such deposits can reveal important evidence of sea level and climate change and the development of Britain as an island. The potential to encounter the remains of crashed aircraft must also be considered, with many recorded losses which date to the Second World War.

Links

Worth Matravers Parish Website: <http://members.iinet.net.au/~suegar/wthmat.htm>

Durlston Country Park & Marine Project World Heritage Site: <http://www.durlston.co.uk/>

Durlston Marine Project: <http://www.durlstonmarineproject.co.uk>

Swanage Town Council: <http://www.swanage.gov.uk/>

Virtual Swanage (including links to museums etc.): <http://www.virtual-swanage.co.uk/>

Swanage Museum at the Tithe Barn Museum and Art Centre: <http://www.swanagemuseum.org.uk/>



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Images



IoE number:	108174
Character Area:	Swanage Bay
Description	Durlston Head Castle
Photographer:	Mr Martin Roberts
Date Photographed:	03 June 2002
Date listed:	21 March 1983



IoE number:	109121
Character Area:	Swanage Bay
Description:	St Aldhelm's Head (nr Worth Matravers) – St Aldhelm's Chapel
Photographer:	Mr David Scott
Date Photographed:	12 October 2002
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Date of last amendment:	20 November 1959
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