

# Ventnor Bay

## Summary Description

This area on the SE coast of the Isle of Wight is a popular tourist area. The local beaches, pier and amusement arcades are frequently visited. The area also looks out over the south eastern Approaches to the Solent and has played a role in the defence of the area.

## Sea Surface

The location of this area means it is open to the prevailing winds and other erosional elements. The south-western 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. Local fishing craft also operate from the beach. Anchoring is permitted in the bay area.

## Seabed Surface

The area stretches from Monks Bay southward to Woody Point on the Isle of Wight, incorporating Steephill Cove and Wheelers Bay. The coastline is characterised by cliff faces and the seabed features partially submerged off lying rocks. Coastal defence structures primarily take the form of breakwaters. The bay is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Archaeological finds from the foreshore include Palaeolithic implements and Roman shell midden remains have been recorded on the foreshore, however, these are likely to have fallen from the eroding cliffs.

There are clean sandy beaches close to shore; further offshore sandbanks pose a moderate hazard to navigation. These banks have helped contribute to the maritime archaeological resource which includes six charted wrecks and obstructions, two of which are popular dive sites – the *Polo*, a passenger liner sunk in 1918 and the *Isleworth* a steamer sunk in 1918.

## 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

Ventnor resort was developed in Victorian times, and descends below the slope of the highest point in the IOW, the 787 ft St Boniface Down. The town has good bathing and seaside amusements, though the pier head was closed in the early 1980s. One mile west of Ventnor is a small secluded beach – Steephill - that can be reached only by footpath, either from shore or main road above. The gorse-and-grass summit of St Boniface Down holds a large radar and telecommunications site, with all round views of the coast and rolling inland hills.

The tiny village of Bonchurch, named after St Boniface, has a small beach with good bathing. Adjoining the village to the northeast is an area called 'The Landslip', where the effects of the underlying 'blue slipper' are obvious. Two major slips on the surface strata have occurred in the last two centuries, in 1820 and 1928, leaving the landscape a mass of contorted blocks which are now overgrown and crossed by paths.

## Archaeological Potential

The coastal archaeological resource of the area shows a particularly dense and diverse range of sites and periods. Adjacent to the study area finds include Palaeolithic implements, Roman shell middens

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.



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