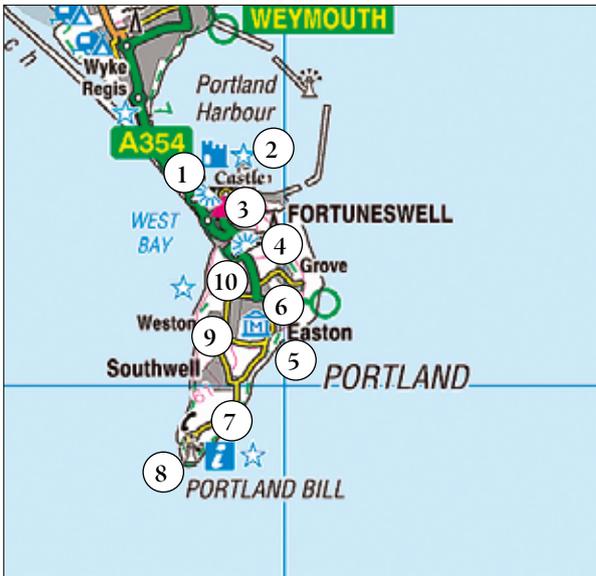


ITINERARY #7 - THE ISLE OF PORTLAND



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but erosion-resistant, stone has been much used in London and elsewhere for centuries. Extraction continues today, mostly by mining, and not open cast quarrying. The numerous abandoned quarries are now given over to nature. Many limestone-loving plants and insects thrive here. These include Portland Sea-lavender and Spurge as well as rare butterflies such as the Adonis, Chalkhill and Silver-studded Blues.

Portland Harbour was developed into a huge, sprawling naval base by the Royal Navy between 1860 and 1892. This took over a large part of the north of the Isle for the gun batteries, harbour works, accommodation blocks, workers' housing and the essential HM Prison. Vast quarries were opened up to supply the stone for the forts, piers and breakwaters. The harbour proved untenable in both WWI and WWII and was abandoned completely by the Royal Navy in 1999.

Portland Bill was a major hazard for shipping due to its tide race and associated eddies. The Shambles, a large sandbank to the southeast, claimed many ships. Lyme Bay, with its adverse currents, was also a serious danger for sailing ships. The first two lights were lit in 1716 and replaced by the present tower in 1906.

The southern tip of Portland remains much as it has for centuries, with its field system of "lawnsheds", small coastal quarries and a general lack of development. It seems a world apart from the now-abandoned 19th century military installations and their associated sprawling quarries. The South West Coast Path circumnavigates the Isle of Portland, taking in the Portland Heights viewpoint and Portland Bill.

ISLE OF PORTLAND

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THE ISLE OF PORTLAND (popn. 2011, 12,844) is 4mi (6km) long by 1.5mi (2.5km) wide. Until 1839 the only access was by a small ferry over the Fleet estuary, or by sea. As a result the Portlanders had an island culture, and referred to incomers as "kimberlin".

From Saxon times until the 19th century Portland was a Royal Manor, under the Crown and not the local authority. The ancient system of land tenure still holds today in Southwell, where narrow strips of land can be seen fenced off near Portland Bill.

Portland Sheep (page 197) were once the main agricultural product, both for their fine wool and exceptional meat. By the mid 1800s over 4,000 lambs were exported every year. The last flock was sold in 1920, and the breed nearly died out but is once more in demand and no longer threatened.

Quarrying for Portland Stone has been a major industry here since Roman times. This easily worked,