

Vectis Venture 2015

A small group of Sussex Group members enjoyed a short break on the Isle Of Wight (Roman Vectis) during the week after Easter. The weather was fine throughout, our accommodation comfortable (one establishment had an indoor pool/sauna complex and boasted liveried serving staff at breakfast time), the local ales tasty and refreshing and, when eventually we found them, the cream teas delicious. Oh, yes ... and the walking was excellent.

We began with a full day of 18miles on a route that took us inland and westwards from the Shanklin/Sandown area, where we were staying, across St. Boniface Down and via a circuitous route to the remains of the mediaeval oratory on the summit of St. Catherine's Hill; from there we descended to the coast, keenly anticipating our lunch, before returning via the coastal path to our starting point. Throughout the day the views were far-reaching, on one side to seaward and on the other side inland across the Island and, beyond, to the Solent and the Hampshire shore. Our route carefully avoided cream tea shops, instead in the late afternoon providing an opportunity for delicious ice cream on the seafront at Ventnor, and culminated with an exciting ascent of 'the Devil's chimney' atop the Bonchurch landslip. One of the topics addressed during the evening meal was the mystery of the vanishing pub at which we had intended to take lunch ...

The second day was spent on a short linear walk from the attractive village of Shorwell to Freshwater Bay, a distance of around 11miles. For much of the time we followed a chalk ridge and passed through terrain reminiscent of the South Downs – no great surprise, since the chalk cliffs and escarpments on the south side of the Island are an extension of the Downs. When we reached our destination there was little incentive to linger; the appearance of a sea mist and a cold breeze had made the afternoon chilly and gloomy and the nearby café could not provide us with cream teas (*"sorry, but we've only got cakes ... we're still out of season ..."*). We made our way by car back to our starting point via Brighstone where one of our party remembered having a delicious cream tea during a previous visit. Once again there was a topic for discussion over our evening repast ... the mystery of the vanishing tearoom ...

Our final day took us to Yarmouth for an exhilarating 13miles around the Needles peninsula. The initial riverside stage to Freshwater Bay was an opportunity to observe a variety of shore birds, then the ascent of Tennyson Down provided some solitude before descending past a variety of abandoned fortifications and a former Cold War rocket test site to a lunch stop at Alum Bay, crowded with holidaymakers. On the way back to our starting point the coastal path wended past more historic military sites and afforded excellent views across the Needles channel. On reaching Yarmouth we had time to sit and relax with more ice cream before making our way back to the car ferry terminal. Whilst sitting there one of us noticed the adjacent tearoom and its cream tea menu ...

We propose to continue The Great Cream Tea Hunt next year and a short walking break in Dorset is being planned, probably to take place at some stage in May. Perhaps an item for your diary ... if your cholesterol levels can cope ...

David Weatherley