

THE TOP CLIFF WALK

It is less than two miles along the top cliff from St. Lawrence to Niton. There is only one stiff climb, one stile and, except immediately after heavy rain, very little mud. So it is a relatively easy walk, yet exhilarating at all times of the year, with a winter bonus of sunsets over the English Channel.

Although the flora is not as varied as on the bottom cliff, wildlife is abundant, especially birds, with raptors frequently riding the thermals and skylarks common in summer.

Officially, the walk is a section of the Isle of Wight Coastal Path.

From St. Lawrence village shop, head up Spindlers Road and turn left at the junction with Seven Sisters Road.

About a hundred yards along Seven Sisters Road you will see a signpost to Whitwell on your right. Follow this path, which crosses the route of the former railway then climbs quite steeply up the cliff face. The entrance to the old St. Lawrence railway tunnel is hidden in the dense vegetation below.

When you emerge on the cliff-top you will see a signpost ahead of you at a grassy crossways. Turn left here, following the sign to Niton, and just keep going!

As you cross this first field, with the communications mast on your right, there are fine views south across the Undercliff towards the "Sugar Loaf" beside Woody Bay. Soon you will reach the only stile on the route and for a while the view south is obscured by the cliff-top hedge, but looking north you can see across Whitwell to Newport, ten miles away.

As you reach the top of "High Hat," the highest point on the top cliff, the beautiful views south open up again towards the rocky coastline between Binnel Bay and Puckaster. In the distance straight ahead is St Catherine's Down with its ancient oratory known as the "Pepperpot."

After a mile or so, the path is joined from the left by a crooked track which has climbed from the Undercliff Drive below. This is "Cripple Path," once well-trodden by smugglers. Be careful as you continue after this point because the path becomes very close to the cliff edge for a while.

Ignore the next signpost you come to, pointing across the field to Niton. Continue west instead along the cliff-top.

As the walk nears its end you will pass between high hedges of blackthorn, which in summer produce a magnificent amount of sloes.

When the path descends to its next junction, bear right until you come to a further signed crossways. Continue on the Coastal Path towards Blackgang.

Here you have choices:

Continue on the Coastal Path towards Blackgang.

Return exactly the way you have come.

Or for a slight variation on this, turn right towards Niton Village.

After a couple of hundred yards this Niton Village path will bring you to a spaghetti junction of unmarked tracks, with the school on your left.

To return to St. Lawrence, take the track immediately on your right and follow it uphill. Soon you will see a redundant stile on the skyline. Aim for this, follow the path from it across the field, and you will find yourself back at the cliff-top.