



Axmouth to Lyme Regis Undercliffs

National Nature Reserve



Welcome to Axmouth to Lyme Regis Undercliffs

This magnificent reserve of wild woodland, land-slipped cliffs, fossils, geology and spectacular wildlife is amongst the wildest and most unspoilt tracts of countryside in southern England. It was declared a National Nature Reserve in 1955.

Part of the Dorset and East Devon 'Jurassic Coast' World Heritage Site, the reserve is one of the largest active coastal landslide systems in western Europe. It is also part of the Sidmouth to West Bay Special Area of Conservation and lies within the East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Age and Beauty

The rocks that underlie the reserve get younger as you travel from west to east. A walk from Axmouth to Lyme Regis passes through a 25 million year geological time-line spanning the late Triassic to early Jurassic Periods, with rocks between 210-185 million years old.

The beauty and distinctive character of the site derives from years of extensive and spectacular landslides, such as the Bindon landslide in 1839, which was the first ever landslide to be scientifically documented.





Silver Washed Fritillary

Safety

The seven mile walk from Axmouth to Lyme Regis is strenuous. Please take the following precautions:

- For you own safety keep to the Coast Path as there are deep holes and fissures hidden by dense vegetation. There are no intermediate paths leading to the beach or main road.
- The footpath is often muddy and slippery – stout footwear is essential.
- Rock falls can happen at any time so please keep well away from cliffs.
- Keep clear of any old buildings.
- Ticks are found on the reserve. They can carry Lyme disease, which is a potentially serious condition. To avoid bites wear light coloured clothing and long trousers, tucked into your socks. Check yourself for ticks. If you are bitten and start to feel unwell, seek medical advice.
- In an emergency dial 999 and ask for the Coast Guard.



Peregrine Falcon

Management

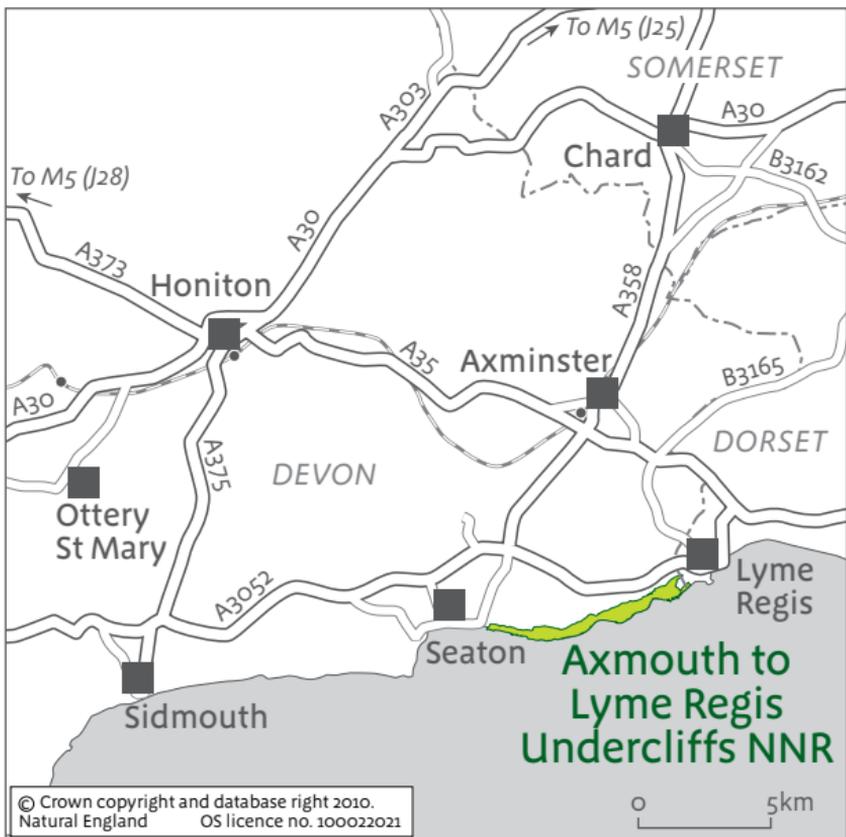
Species rich chalk grassland is cut manually and scrub is regularly removed. Some ponds have been cleared and overhanging trees cut, to maintain high quality, open water habitats.

Unfortunately, many non-native species have been introduced to the Undercliffs. Holm Oak is a highly invasive alien tree which was first planted here in the 19th century. As an evergreen tree it casts dense shade preventing native species from thriving. Holm Oak along with Laurel, Rhododendron and Pampas Grass are being controlled as a priority within the native Ash and Field Maple woodland in the western half of the site.



© Richard Bowsher / naturepl.com

Autumn Ladies Tresses orchid



Tourist Information Offices

Lyme Regis (01297) 442138

Visitor Centres

Axmouth Sea Discovery Centre (01297) 21660
Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre (01297) 560772
Lyme Regis Museum (01297) 442138

Public Transport

There is a regular bus service (X53) between Exeter and Weymouth via Seaton, Lyme Regis and Bridport. The X31 and local buses link up to the nearest train station at Axminster.

Traveline (0870) 6082608

A great way to see the whole reserve is from the sea. Boats operate from Beer and Lyme Regis.

The Undercliff – a maze of rocks, cliffs and landslides

An undercliff is the area of land between a sea cliff and an inland cliff. The inland cliff is typically a scar resulting from land that has broken free. The undercliff is torn into ridges and troughs, which are shaped by small rock falls and landslides.

Landslides usually happen after prolonged wet weather, when rainwater soaks into the permeable Cretaceous rocks, which lie on top of impermeable clays from the Triassic and Jurassic eras. Gradually, the sheer weight of water develops high pressures underground that cause the Cretaceous rocks to break away and slide downhill. Landslides can also be caused by erosion from the sea at the foot of the cliff.



Landslides have created a magnificent wilderness that has been colonised by natural vegetation. The self sown Ash and Field Maple woodland contains large areas of mixed scrub including Wayfaring Tree and Spindle, with dense entanglements of Bramble, Madder, Clematis and Everlasting Pea. In spring, look out for the Wild Daffodils near Landslip cottage.

Wet areas, including ponds and springs, have their own distinctive plants, such as Giant Horsetail, sedges and Common Reed. The cliff top chalk grassland contains a wealth of wildlife, with rarities such as Nottingham Catchfly and Early Gentian.

Hazel Dormouse and three species of shrew – Common, Pygmy and Water – have all been recorded, as have Peregrines and Ravens.

The Undercliff's warm and sheltered micro climate makes it ideal for reptiles and amphibians which include Grass Snake, Common Lizard and Great-Crested Newt.

The soft eroding coastal cliffs make this one of the most important sites in the UK for soft cliff insects such as the Ivy Bee and rare Cliff Tiger Beetle. Look out for butterflies too, including the Wood White, Chalk-Hill Blue and Small Blue.

Ware Cliffs

The landslides here are very active and create an ever-changing mixture of special habitats including slumped cliffs, grassland, ponds and wet flushes.

Bindon and Dowlands Cliffs

On Christmas Eve 1839 a massive section of cliff slid seaward in an event known as the Great Landslip. This caused a Chasm to form behind the landslide block, which is now known as Goat Island. This carried with it wheat and turnip fields, which were later harvested during a festival to celebrate the event. The landslip became very famous and was visited by Queen Victoria. There was even a piece of music composed, the Landslip Quadrille, which played on passing paddle steamers filled with tourists. This area is now managed for its herb-rich chalk grassland.

Since the 1900s the Chasm has been left undisturbed and the vegetation has grown rapidly into wild undisturbed woodland. Look out too for the remains of cottages and an old sheepwash.

This kind of habitat is good for a range of song birds, including Marsh Tits and Bullfinches.

Rousdon Cliffs – the half way point

These cliffs are part of the Rousdon Estate, created by Henry William Peek in 1871. The ruins of a pumping station and engineer's house can still be seen from the path. Mr Peek unfortunately planted many exotic species that have spread easily into the surrounding environment which are now being controlled. There is no public access inland or to the beach.

Whitlands and Pinhay Cliffs

The huge Whitlands landslide is over 750m wide and was formed by landslips in 1765 and 1840. The ground has slumped seaward with great fissures on the surface that can be easily seen from the path. Lime, Beech, Sycamore, Ash and Field Maple dominate the tree canopy here, with an under-story of Hard Fern, Tutsan and Ivy Broomrape.

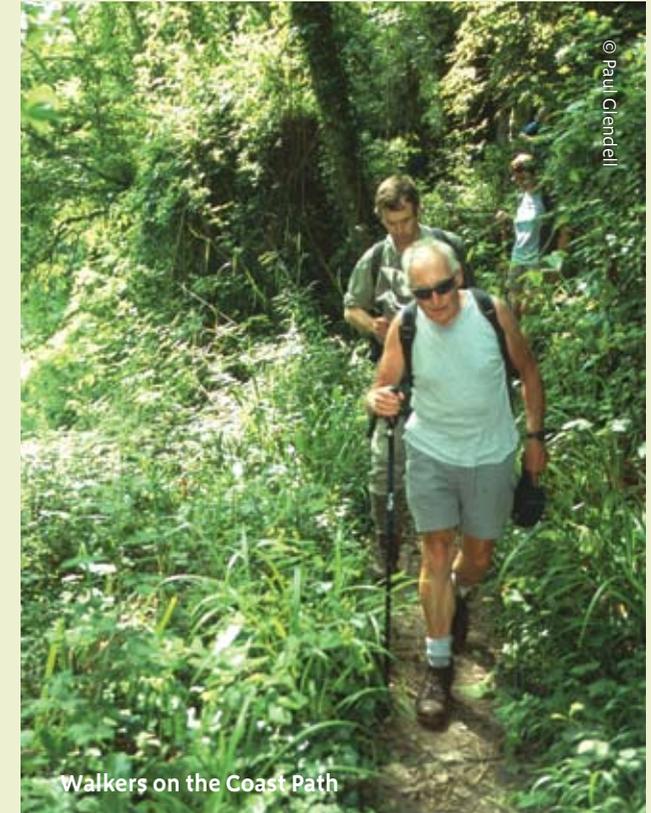
Lyme Regis and Monmouth Beach

The cliffs and the shore platform are made of Blue Lias, which is repetitive layers of hard limestone and soft clays. Rock falls and mudslides occur frequently, pushing huge boulders into the sea. Please keep well clear of the cliffs.

This area is world famous for its important geology and fossils – the ammonite pavement at Monmouth Beach is particularly impressive. Fossils can be seen amongst the beach pebbles and rock platforms.

Please be responsible when collecting fossils. Only search the loose beach material and do not dig into the cliffs or rocky ledges, or remove larger fossils.

On the slumped areas wild flowers such as Yellow Wort, Bird's Foot Trefoil, Rock-Rose and the scarce Yellow Horned Poppy, flourish.



Walkers on the Coast Path

© Paul Clendell

© Getmapping plc



Aerial view of the NNR



Front cover image: The Finger and Thumb

© Peter Wakely

Back cover image: Yellow Horned Poppy

© Alex Dalglish



Natural England is here to conserve and enhance the natural environment, for its intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of people and the economic prosperity it brings.

© Natural England 2010

Catalogue Code: NE267

Natural England publications are available as accessible pdfs from:
www.naturalengland.org.uk/publications

Should an alternative format of this publication be required, please contact our enquiries line for more information: 0845 600 3078 or email enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk

Printed on stock comprising 75% recycled fibre.

www.naturalengland.org.uk