



Chillerton & Gatcombe
Parish Council



Chillerton Down with Historical notes.

Original Walk directions: S Holloway
Historical notes: R Payn



This is a 'must do' walk (ramble) for visitors to the parish. Chillerton Down provides the definitive view of the village and far reaching views of the entire south of the Isle of Wight. Accessing the Down via Tolt Copse, is effectively to divide the walk in to two. The route through the copse proceeds in the shade of the trees, along a narrow, evident trail while the Down itself is open to the elements and involves a ramble with few obvious pathways.

The historical notes, accompanying this walk, are largely derived from the:
Chillerton Down, Isle Of Wight Archaeological and Landscape Survey – Volume 1
Landscape History
Prepared by the National Trust in March 2016.
By Dr V Basford MCIFA and
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Access: Brook Lane, Chillerton PO30 3BR

Grid Ref: SZ 49196 84391

Distance: 2.5 Miles **Time:** Allow 1.5 Hours

Difficulty: Strenuous ascent and descent with rugged and sometimes slippery woodland path.

This is quite a demanding walk so strong legs and sturdy shoes/boots are a must.

(1)

Terrain: The Down is open access land, owned by the National Trust, allowing free rambling anywhere. Therefore, a pathway is hard to find in many places and the surface tends to veer to the left, downhill. Downland very exposed to the weather, with little shelter.

Gates: Four **Stiles:** One

Dogs: Under close control near livestock

Bus: No: 6 Main Road, Chillerton.

Parking: Main Road, Chillerton.

Bicycles: Not for this route.

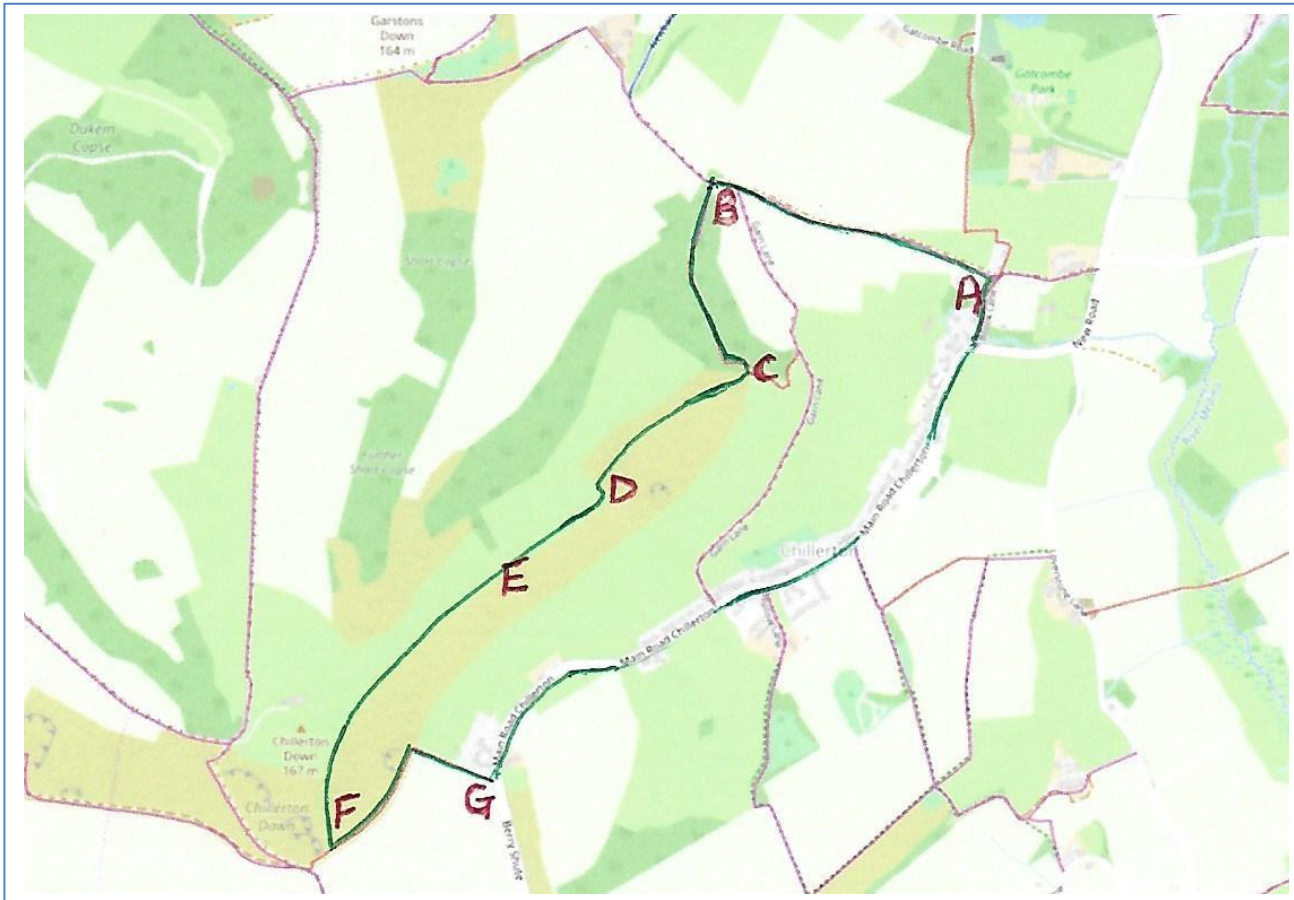
Toilets: None **Refreshments:** None

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A. Leave the main Road, crossing the small footbridge over the stream and continue up Brook Lane, passing a few houses on the left. At the signpost take route G6 on the left. Take this track and follow uphill, until more open countryside is reached, after about ¼ mile. The large expanse of Tolt Copse **(i)** now appears across two fields ahead towards the left. Note your destination which is to the right hand end of the copse where you can probably discern an entry point at an intersection of paths. **B.** Once there, take the clear, broad track which leads past a large gate in to the Copse. *Note the 'Dogs must be on leads' sign.* After about 50m a fingerpost points to a path on your left, follow this away from the main track.

The path through Tolt Copse may prove to be challenging due to its narrowness in places and the numerous exposed tree roots which are a potential tripping hazard. It can also be slippery when wet. The edge of the path drops away steeply to the left.

(2)



Tolt Copse (i)

A copse, or coppice, was once an area where young stems were harvested (coppiced) for uses such as hurdles or wattle (app 1). This process ensured the longevity of the plant and provided the additional benefit of allowing light through to the ground beneath which, in turn, ensured the regeneration of woodland-floor vegetation. The practice of management of woodland by coppicing is now a rarity. However, as recently as the 1980s, some older residents were still utilising hazel stems for bean poles!

Largely hidden from view, to the right of the path into the copse, is the first of the disused chalk quarries to be encountered on this route. (More about quarries later) Completely hidden, at the top of Tolt Copse – and generally unknown – is a feature discovered through LiDAR (app 2) imagery showing what is believed to be a substantial rampart of the Chillerton Iron Age Hill Fort. Furthermore, this imagery appears to reveal this rampart being breached by an entrance. Evidence of another part of this hill fort will be encountered later in the walk.

Today, on privately owned land behind the copse, is a game-bird hatchery.



5.

[Type text]

3

4

Appendix

1. **Hurdles** were an early type of fencing, often used to keep animals contained.

Wattle was used for forming the walls of early houses (wattle and daub)

2. **LiDAR** Light images, from air photographs, record hard to detect features.

The narrow trail ascends through the trees and your vista very much depends on the time of year. In Spring the entire floor of the wood is carpeted in wild garlic with aromas to match the spectacle! In summer, the sunlight is diffused by the heavy overhanging canopy and in winter the wood becomes a wild place littered with broken tree limbs.

Regardless of timing it is a magical half mile although often slippery, always uneven and the steep slopes that fall away from the path need attention.

Pass through the wooden gate at the end of the path and follow the fence for a short while downhill. Almost immediately there is a kissing-gate leading up on to the expanse of Chillerton Down

C. Pass through this gate and start your steady climb up hill.

The Down is an open access land owned by the National Trust, so you are free to pick your path but keep your eyes skinned for the best one which veers off left, at a 45-degree angle, passing through the gorse. It is a very narrow path and you may lose sight of it, especially during the summer when the ground becomes overgrown since it is not grazed.

6.

Once at about the same level as when you exited Tolt Copse, stop to look over the land below of you where you will see some of the houses in Chillerton Village. Look for a thatched cottage and behind this take note of some thin strips of land bounded by hedges and trees. These pieces of land are examples of Strip Lynchetts **(ii)** Keep an eye out for more of these during your walk.

***(ii)** Strip Lynchetts (narrow terraced fields) are thought to have been first formed by ploughing in medieval times during a period of 'land hunger'. It may be assumed that that hunger must have been severe to plough on such steep land!*



It is likely that Chillerton Down was used for sheep pasture in the 16th Century and that this continued thereafter. The Wootton Tithes Survey of 1844 referred to the area of Chillerton Down as 'Sheep Down'.

7.

To continue your route, use the mast ahead in the distance as your landmark to aim for until you find a kissing gate in the tree/fence line ahead of you. On the other side of this gate is a much broader section of grassland stretching all the way to the mast. *This is sometimes grazed by sheep, so owners should check first before letting their dogs loose.*

D.

***(iii)** If you stop here and look down in the valley you will be able to see the last of a line of houses. This area is known as Quarry Close. It is between here and where you are standing that, according to a wartime village resident, Hilton Taylor, a WW2 bomb was dropped. Apparently, the German pilots would dump bombs in the countryside on their way home after raids on Cowes or Portsmouth. The overgrowth of trees and bushes, below you on the left, now hide the crater.*

Once again, pick your path but any route gives amazing views over Chillerton and far beyond. At about the half way point there is a convenient bench towards the right-hand edge of the plateau.

E.

***(iv)** This is the site of another part of the Iron Age Hill Fort referred to in Tolt Copse It is known as Five Barrows. Unfortunately, the visible earthworks are situated on private land behind the fence. The 'barrow' was last visible during the late 1980s but has become overgrown during the past thirty years. It is actually one rampart which is sunken in places – hence its name. Whenever the land, on which this feature is situated, becomes available the National Trust will aim to purchase it since it is considered the 'Island's highest upstanding prehistoric monument and arguably its most significant prehistoric defensive structure with visible earthworks'*

8.

When you are ready continue, you will find the short climb to the top of the ridge worthwhile for a flatter path, next to the fence on your right. Keep walking in the direction of the aerial mast until you come to a fence running down the hillside, in front of you. Look for another kissing-gate about half way down this fence line.

Pass through the gate and then join in the game enjoyed by many visitors over the years; it's called guess where the path has gone! There are no right and wrong answers, but the easiest solution is to make your way up the ridge again to continue alongside the fence beside the mast. Go past the mast to where the fence turns to the right. Here there is a stile type structure. Do not climb over this but instead, start to make your way downhill, aiming at the tree lined bridleway you see ahead of you, in the distance.

Walking here, at an angle, is demanding and even precarious in the wet. Soon you will see a hedge/tree line immediately below you. Aim to reach this, choosing an angle of descent to suit your ability.

(v) *There are old quarries/chalk pits to the right, at the foot of Chillerton Down and another on your walk back to Chillerton village. Virtually nothing is known about the operation of the quarries but is assumed that the quarried chalk was utilised for the production of lime and cement.*

A lime kiln was first shown, in the area within the quarry, on the 1896 map and suggests that the quarry was operational at this date.

9.

In the 1980s, story passed down by local resident, Harold Gerret who had been born in the late 1800s - was of an itinerant worker who lived in a dilapidated building next to the kiln, in the early 1900's. He, reputedly, used to walk through the village whistling whilst spinning a coin. Hilton Taylor had heard that this character repaired chairs and was known as 'Chair Bottomer Jack'.

Records suggest that the Seeley family was still carrying out some quarrying in the area in the 1920s. A later use of the quarries was as a site for target practice during WW2 by Uffa Fox, the well-known boat builder.



F.

When you reach the hedge/tree line, turn left and begin you walk back to Chillerton Village, keeping thee hedge/tree line to your right. It is advisable to choose a sheep track a little way up from the fence because it is easier to walk on.

10.



At the end of the path, there is a stile set at the foot of a short, steep descent. Once you have clambered over this, follow the grassy path down to Chillerton main Road. **G.** Turn left here, and make your way down to Chillerton Village which is about ½ mile.



The No 6: bus stop for Newport is a short walk away on the left, opposite Lisle Barn Cottage. The bus stop he bus stop for Ventnor is on the other side of the road.

(vi) *On the way back through Chillerton Village, look out for Garn Lane, on your left. This lane, formerly 'Garden Lane', was an access to another quarry.*

Walk the length of the village to your starting point.

11.