



Tennyson Down, Isle of Wight

**TRAIL**  
**Walking**

**GRADE**  
**Hard**

**DISTANCE**  
**7 miles (11km)**

**TIME**  
**2 hours 30 minutes to 3 hours**

**OS MAP**  
**Landranger 196;  
Explorer OL29**

### Contact

01983 714020

[isleofwight@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:isleofwight@nationaltrust.org.uk)

### Facilities

**National  
Trust**

[nationaltrust.org.uk/walks](http://nationaltrust.org.uk/walks)

# Tennyson Down: a meander with Maud

An invigorating downland walk with a splendid view of the iconic Needles and the chance to visit a 19th-century fort, a Cold War rocket test site and a monument to a Victorian poet laureate. Note: This 7 mile (11km) figure-of-eight walk can be split into two shorter walks of 3 and 4 miles (4.5 and 7.5km).



## Terrain

A figure-of-eight circuit built from 4 mile (7.5km) and 3 mile (4.5km) loops. Total ascent 1450ft (450m). Four stiles. This is an exposed headland and the winds can be ferocious. The chalk paths can be very slippery, and the path from the car park to the Tennyson Monument is steep. Do not go near the cliff edge! Dogs are welcome, but please keep on a lead around wildlife and take any mess home with you.

## Things to see



### The Tennyson Monument

The Tennyson Monument marks the highest point of the chalk cliffs of West Wight, 482ft (147m) above sea level. The poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson came to live in West Wight in the 1870s and, robed in his distinctive black cloak, walked daily on the downs, composing some of his most famous works. It was with the income from his poem 'Maud' that he was able to purchase nearby Farringford, his family home. The Cornish granite cross was erected in 1897.

### The Needles

These stacks are all that remain of the chalk ridge, which once extended to Dorset. An earlier lighthouse once stood on the headland.

### The Old and New Batteries

A fascinating fort perched on the very edge of the Island, the Old Battery was built in the 1860s to guard against the threat of French invasion. A 200ft (61m) tunnel through the cliffs leads to a searchlight position with a unique panorama of the Needles. The Battery was purchased from the Ministry of Defence in 1975 with Enterprise Neptune funds. Built in the 1890s, the New Battery played an unlikely role in Britain's secret Space Age programme between the mid 1950s and 1970s. A rocket test site was built and used for static test-firings of the Black Knight and Black Arrow rocket engines.



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## Start/end

Start: High Down Chalk Pit car park, grid ref: SZ325856

End: High Down Chalk Pit car park, grid ref: SZ325856

## How to get there

By foot: This route follows the coastal path from Freshwater Bay to Alum Bay

By bike: The 'Round the Island' Sustrans Regional Route 67 passes through Freshwater Bay

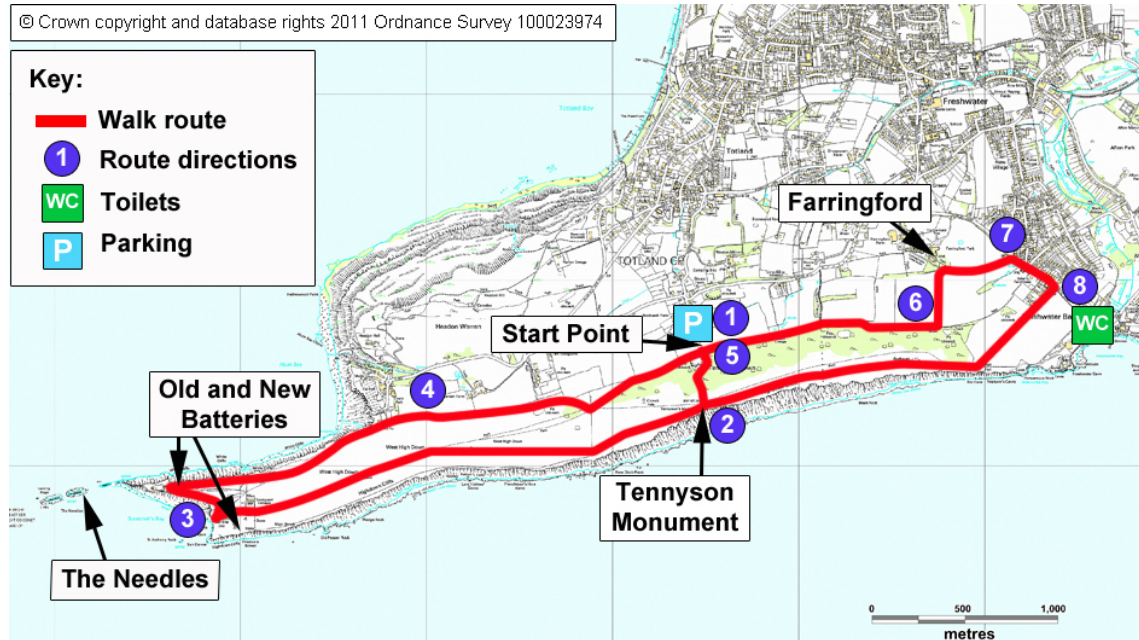
By bus: Southern Vectis (01983 827000) service, Newport to Alum Bay, hourly

By ferry/boat: Wightlink (0871 376 1000) from Yarmouth, 5 miles (8km); Red Funnel (0844 844 9988) from East Cowes, 16 miles (26km)

By car: B3322 from Yarmouth/Totland or Alum Bay road from Freshwater Bay. Nearest post code is PO39 0HY

**National Trust**

[nationaltrust.org.uk/walks](http://nationaltrust.org.uk/walks)



1. Facing the quarry, take the left-hand path out of the car park. After 45 yards (40m) turn right and climb the steps by a wooden bench. The steep upward path continues through a gate to the top of the hill.
2. By the Tennyson Monument turn right and follow any of the cliff-top paths, aiming for the aerial mast visible on the skyline to the far west. Skirt the right boundary of the aerial building then head diagonally left and downwards to a concrete road, by the corner of the Coastguard Station. Cross over and follow the signs to the Needles viewpoint.
3. Return to the road, turn left and climb the steps on the left just beyond the Coastguard, just before the New Battery. Follow the path down to the Needles Old Battery, then the tarmac road towards Alum Bay.
4. At the corner where the road bends sharply left towards Needles Park, go straight ahead and climb a few steps then cross the stile. Keep to the path along the lower boundary of the slope, with fence on the left, passing the farm, until it starts to rise by a gate. Follow the track diagonally upwards to a beacon. Cross the stile and take the rutted path gently downhill on the left, returning to the car park after a gate.
5. For the longer walk, follow the outward track from the car park but go straight on instead of turning right to climb the hill. Pass through a gate and follow the path at the bottom edge of the trees, ignoring two footpaths on the left and a rising path branching right.
6. At a four-way junction by a marker post, turn 90 degrees left through a gate and down the bridleway. Turn right at the T-junction and go along the path, with golf course and glimpses of Farringford on the left.
7. Turn right towards Freshwater Bay at the road, passing the thatched church of St Agnes.
8. Just after Dimbola Lodge, turn right through a gate into a field and go straight up the hill and through the gate on the skyline. Bear gently right and carry on uphill until the Tennyson Monument is reached. Turn right and head to the gap in the trees and retrace your steps down the steep path back to the car park.