Towering Tennyson

**Description** A walk around the wild western tip of the Isle of Wight taking in Alum Bay, The Needles, West High Down and the magnificent Tennyson Down, with views across Headon Warren to the Solent and the mainland beyond.

**Distance** 4.4 miles. **Start** Bus terminus at Alum Bay at The Needles Park, via the No. 7 bus or the Needles Breezer. **Access Information** Many steps and some hills. Open in inland countryside with spectacular views. Often quite breezy. **Refreshments** Needles Park café, pub etc. Warren Farm tea rooms (seasonal). New Battery refreshment kiosk (year round) in Needles Park or Warren Farm tea room. **GPS users** Waypoints for this walk can be found at our web site www.iowramblers.com/page5.htm. All walks in this series can be downloaded from this website.

**The Needles Rocks**

The Needles is a row of three distinctive stacks of chalk that rise out of the sea off the western extremity of the Isle of Wight. The formation takes its name from a fourth, needle-shaped pillar called Lot’s Wife that collapsed in a storm in 1764.

**The Needles lighthouses**

This was a very dangerous coast which produced numerous wrecks, so in 1781 Trinity House was petitioned to build a lighthouse here. The first was sited 462 feet above Scratchell’s Bay but was not very effective due to being obscured by sea mists. It was manned by a keeper and wife and had 13 lanterns shining onto copper reflectors — which led to grass fires. In 1859 a new lighthouse was built at the end of the Needles Rocks. It was 109 feet high, with granite blocks three feet thick at the base and was manned by three men, with a water reservoir and an electric generator fired by coal. But even this lighthouse could not prevent the wrecks of the *Irex* in 1890 or the *Varvassou* in 1947. The lighthouse was automated in 1995.

**Headon Warren**

In Neolithic times, 5,000 years ago, trees were cleared to allow the grazing of sheep and cattle. In the 15th century, rabbits were farmed here for their fur and for food. Now rabbits are allowed to graze the site as part of its management plan. Gorse and heather give spectacular colour and a rich habitat for rare species.

**Victorian fortifications**

West Wight boasts a number of defences from previous centuries designed to protect against invasion. Some of Lord Palmerston’s forts are:

- Hatherwood Battery (1850s to 1900)
- Fort Albert (1854 to mid-19th century)
- Needles Old Battery (1860 to 1900)
- Needles New Battery (1893 to 1904).

(This was used in both world wars but the guns were finally removed for scrap in 1954).

**Into the Space Age**

In 1855, Saunders Roe, of East Cowes, designed the Black Knight, a rocket intended to carry guided weapons. Static testing was carried out at The Needles before launching in Woomera in Australia during the years 1958 to 1960. In 1966 the rockets were developed into satellite launchers: Prospero was successfully launched in 1971. The government cancelled the programme in the belief that there was no future for satellite technology!

West Wight is a fascinating area bursting with history and heritage, characterised by chalk downland geology and a unique roof-of-the-world feel. This walk takes full advantage of the far-reaching views this part of the Isle of Wight has to offer.

**The National Trust**

The Trust purchased the Needles Headland in 1975 and in 2003 the New Battery was converted to the first stage of an exhibition relating the achievements of those who worked at High Down.

**Alfred, Lord Tennyson**

Tennyson was the foremost poet of the Victorian era. Born at Somersby, Lincolnshire in 1809, he attended Trinity College, Cambridge where he met Arthur Henry Hallam, whose early death later inspired Tennyson to write *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, one of his most acclaimed works. Queen Victoria, an ardent admirer of Tennyson, appointed him Poet Laureate in 1850, a position he held until his death in 1892.

A number of phrases from Tennyson’s poetry have become common in the English language:

- “I am better to have loved and lost Than never to have loved at all.”
- “Nature, red in tooth and claw” are both from *In Memoriam*, while
- “Thiers not to reason why, There’s but to do and die” is from *The Charge of the Light Brigade* written in 1854 after the Battle of Balclava during the Crimean War.

Tennyson’s success enabled him finally to marry Emily Sellwood — they came to live at Farringford House at Freshwater Bay in 1853 and stayed for 39 years.

One of his last poems, and perhaps the most poignant, is *Crossing the Bar* written whilst returning home across the Solent to Farringford shortly before his death in 1892.

“Sunset and evening star, And one clear call for me! And may there be no mourning of the bar, When I put out to sea.”

**Country Side Code**

Respect — Protect — Enjoy

- Consider the local community and other people enjoying the outdoors.
- Leave gates and property as you find them and follow paths unless wider access is available.
- Protect the natural environment.
- Leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home.
- Keep dogs under effective control.
- Enjoy the outdoors.
- Plan ahead and be prepared.
- Follow advice and local signs.

**Countryside Code**

Respect — Protect — Enjoy

- Consider the local community and other people enjoying the outdoors.
- Leave gates and property as you find them and follow paths unless wider access is available.
- Protect the natural environment.
- Leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home.
- Keep dogs under effective control.
- Enjoy the outdoors.
- Plan ahead and be prepared.
- Follow advice and local signs.

**Respect**

- Protect
- Enjoy

- Respect other people
- Leave gates and property as you find them and follow paths unless wider access is available
- Protect the natural environment
- Leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under effective control
- Enjoy the outdoors
- Plan ahead and be prepared
- Follow advice and local signs

**The Trust**

The Trust purchased the Needles Headland in 1975 and in 2003 the New Battery was converted to the first stage of an exhibition relating the achievements of those who worked at High Down.

**Alfred, Lord Tennyson**

Tennyson was the foremost poet of the Victorian era. Born at Somersby, Lincolnshire in 1809, he attended Trinity College, Cambridge where he met Arthur Henry Hallam, whose early death later inspired Tennyson to write *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, one of his most acclaimed works. Queen Victoria, an ardent admirer of Tennyson, appointed him Poet Laureate in 1850, a position he held until his death in 1892.

A number of phrases from Tennyson’s poetry have become common in the English language:

- “I am better to have loved and lost Than never to have loved at all.”
- “Nature, red in tooth and claw” are both from *In Memoriam*, while
- “Thiers not to reason why, There’s but to do and die” is from *The Charge of the Light Brigade* written in 1854 after the Battle of Balclava during the Crimean War.

Tennyson’s success enabled him finally to marry Emily Sellwood — they came to live at Farringford House at Freshwater Bay in 1853 and stayed for 39 years.

One of his last poems, and perhaps the most poignant, is *Crossing the Bar* written whilst returning home across the Solent to Farringford shortly before his death in 1892.

“Sunset and evening star, And one clear call for me! And may there be no mourning of the bar, When I put out to sea.”

**Country Side Code**

Respect — Protect — Enjoy

- Consider the local community and other people enjoying the outdoors.
- Leave gates and property as you find them and follow paths unless wider access is available.
- Protect the natural environment.
- Leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home.
- Keep dogs under effective control.
- Enjoy the outdoors.
- Plan ahead and be prepared.
- Follow advice and local signs.

**Respect**

- Protect
- Enjoy

- Respect other people
- Leave gates and property as you find them and follow paths unless wider access is available.
- Protect the natural environment.
- Leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home.
- Keep dogs under effective control.
- Enjoy the outdoors.
- Plan ahead and be prepared.
- Follow advice and local signs.

**The Trust**

The Trust purchased the Needles Headland in 1975 and in 2003 the New Battery was converted to the first stage of an exhibition relating the achievements of those who worked at High Down.

**Alfred, Lord Tennyson**

Tennyson was the foremost poet of the Victorian era. Born at Somersby, Lincolnshire in 1809, he attended Trinity College, Cambridge where he met Arthur Henry Hallam, whose early death later inspired Tennyson to write *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, one of his most acclaimed works. Queen Victoria, an ardent admirer of Tennyson, appointed him Poet Laureate in 1850, a position he held until his death in 1892.

A number of phrases from Tennyson’s poetry have become common in the English language:

- “I am better to have loved and lost Than never to have loved at all.”
- “Nature, red in tooth and claw” are both from *In Memoriam*, while
- “Thiers not to reason why, There’s but to do and die” is from *The Charge of the Light Brigade* written in 1854 after the Battle of Balclava during the Crimean War.

Tennyson’s success enabled him finally to marry Emily Sellwood — they came to live at Farringford House at Freshwater Bay in 1853 and stayed for 39 years.

One of his last poems, and perhaps the most poignant, is *Crossing the Bar* written whilst returning home across the Solent to Farringford shortly before his death in 1892.

“Sunset and evening star, And one clear call for me! And may there be no mourning of the bar, When I put out to sea.”
Go through the Rambler's gate and follow the grass track half right between the gate and the lower part of the down. To the right is Headon Warren, an area of heathland which is purple with heather in August. Pass Warren Farm - there is a pedestrian gate here for patrons of the tea room.

Continue along the path with telegraph poles. The path eventually leads to a viewpoint overlooking the Needles. Go down a few steps to carefully reach the National Trust road. Go right to return to the Needles Park.

Retrace your steps to the Rambler's "Half a league onward" kissing gate. This phrase is taken from Tennyson's poem, "Charge of the Light Brigade." You are now in "access land" and can roam freely. There are several tracks leading towards the distant monument. The higher tracks give views of the southern coast as well as Alum Bay and Headon Warren.

Proceed along West High Down and reach a Rambler's "Rotary" gate. Follow the path half right up the hill to the Tennyson Monument. Here go directly left passing scrub to find a long series of steps descending to the chalk pit car park. This path goes through the Ramblers gate and follows the grass track half right between the gate and the lower part of the down. To the right is Headon Warren, an area of heathland which is purple with heather in August. Pass Warren Farm - there is a pedestrian gate here for patrons of the tea room.

Continue along the path with telegraph poles. The path eventually leads to a viewpoint overlooking the Needles. Go down a few steps to carefully reach the National Trust road. Go right to return to the Needles Park.

Retrace your steps to the Rambler's "Half a league onward" kissing gate. This phrase is taken from Tennyson's poem, "Charge of the Light Brigade." You are now in "access land" and can roam freely. There are several tracks leading towards the distant monument. The higher tracks give views of the southern coast as well as Alum Bay and Headon Warren. Proceed along West High Down and reach a Rambler's "Rotary" gate. Follow the path half right up the hill to the Tennyson Monument. Here go directly left passing scrub to find a long series of steps descending to the chalk pit car park.

To reach the High Down Inn continue to the bottom of the steps and turn left into the car and coach parks. Continue on the National Trust road and follow this as it turns right. Alum Bay with its 24 coloured sands can be seen on the right. Keep on this path up the hill to a Rambler's kissing gate. Keep left and turn right to pass the Needles New Battery and Coastguard Station. Continue on to the rocket testing site and proceed to a viewpoint overlooking the Needles. Go down a few steps to carefully reach the National Trust road. Go right to return to the Needles Park.

Retrace your steps to the Rambler's "Half a league onward" kissing gate. This phrase is taken from Tennyson's poem, "Charge of the Light Brigade." You are now in "access land" and can roam freely. There are several tracks leading towards the distant monument. The higher tracks give views of the southern coast as well as Alum Bay and Headon Warren. Proceed along West High Down and reach a Rambler's "Rotary" gate. Follow the path half right up the hill to the Tennyson Monument. Here go directly left passing scrub to find a long series of steps descending to the chalk pit car park.

To reach the High Down Inn continue to the bottom of the steps and turn left into the car and coach parks. Continue on the National Trust road and follow this as it turns right. Alum Bay with its 24 coloured sands can be seen on the right. Keep on this path up the hill to a Rambler's kissing gate. Keep left and turn right to pass the Needles New Battery and Coastguard Station. Continue on to the rocket testing site and proceed to a viewpoint overlooking the Needles. Go down a few steps to carefully reach the National Trust road. Go right to return to the Needles Park.

Retrace your steps to the Rambler's "Half a league onward" kissing gate. This phrase is taken from Tennyson's poem, "Charge of the Light Brigade." You are now in "access land" and can roam freely. There are several tracks leading towards the distant monument. The higher tracks give views of the southern coast as well as Alum Bay and Headon Warren. Proceed along West High Down and reach a Rambler's "Rotary" gate. Follow the path half right up the hill to the Tennyson Monument. Here go directly left passing scrub to find a long series of steps descending to the chalk pit car park. This path goes through the Ramblers gate and follows the grass track half right between the gate and the lower part of the down. To the right is Headon Warren, an area of heathland which is purple with heather in August. Pass Warren Farm - there is a pedestrian gate here for patrons of the tea room.

Continue along the path with telegraph poles. The path eventually leads to a viewpoint overlooking the Needles. Go down a few steps to carefully reach the National Trust road. Go right to return to the Needles Park.

Retrace your steps to the Rambler's "Half a league onward" kissing gate. This phrase is taken from Tennyson's poem, "Charge of the Light Brigade." You are now in "access land" and can roam freely. There are several tracks leading towards the distant monument. The higher tracks give views of the southern coast as well as Alum Bay and Headon Warren. Proceed along West High Down and reach a Rambler's "Rotary" gate. Follow the path half right up the hill to the Tennyson Monument. Here go directly left passing scrub to find a long series of steps descending to the chalk pit car park.