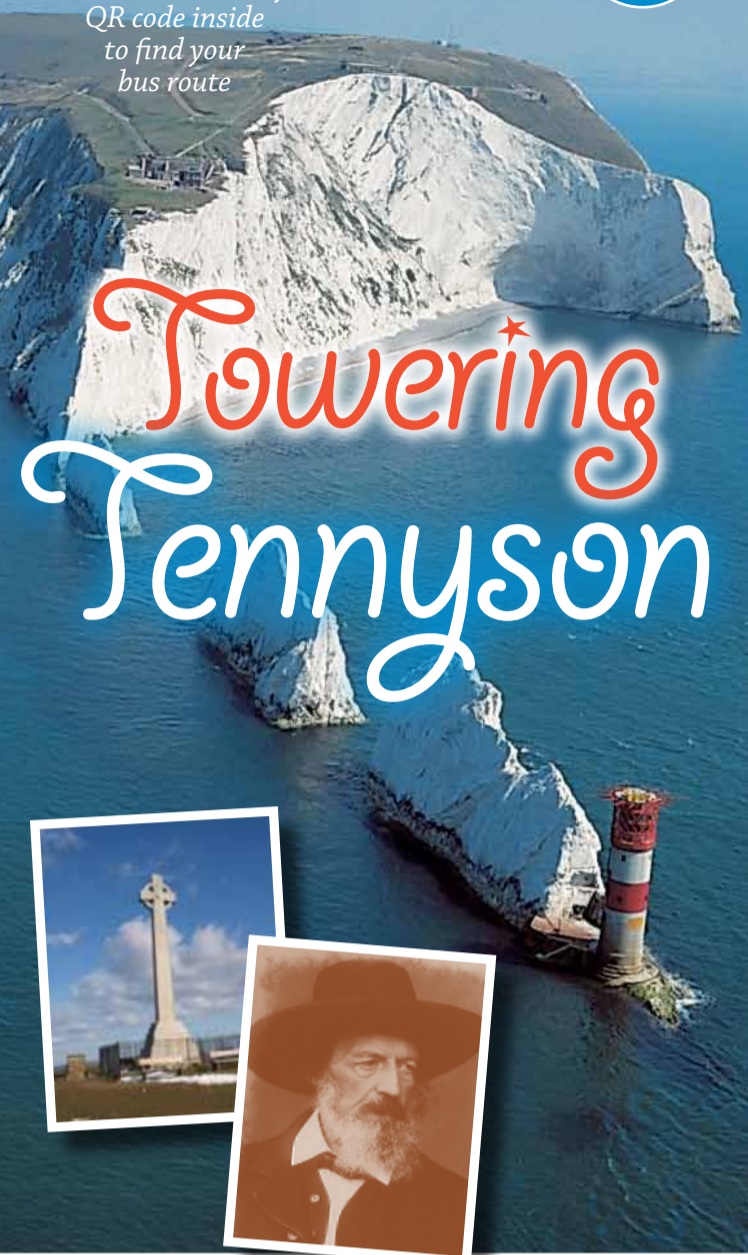
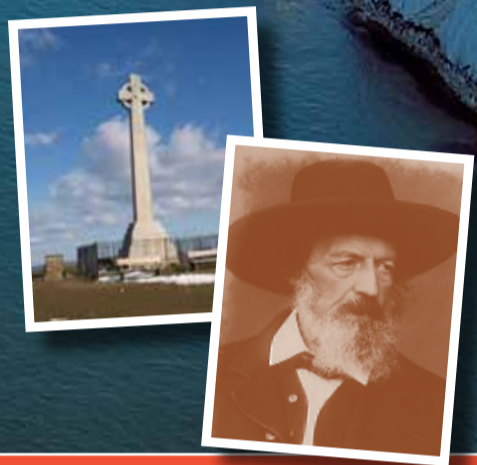


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Towering Tennyson

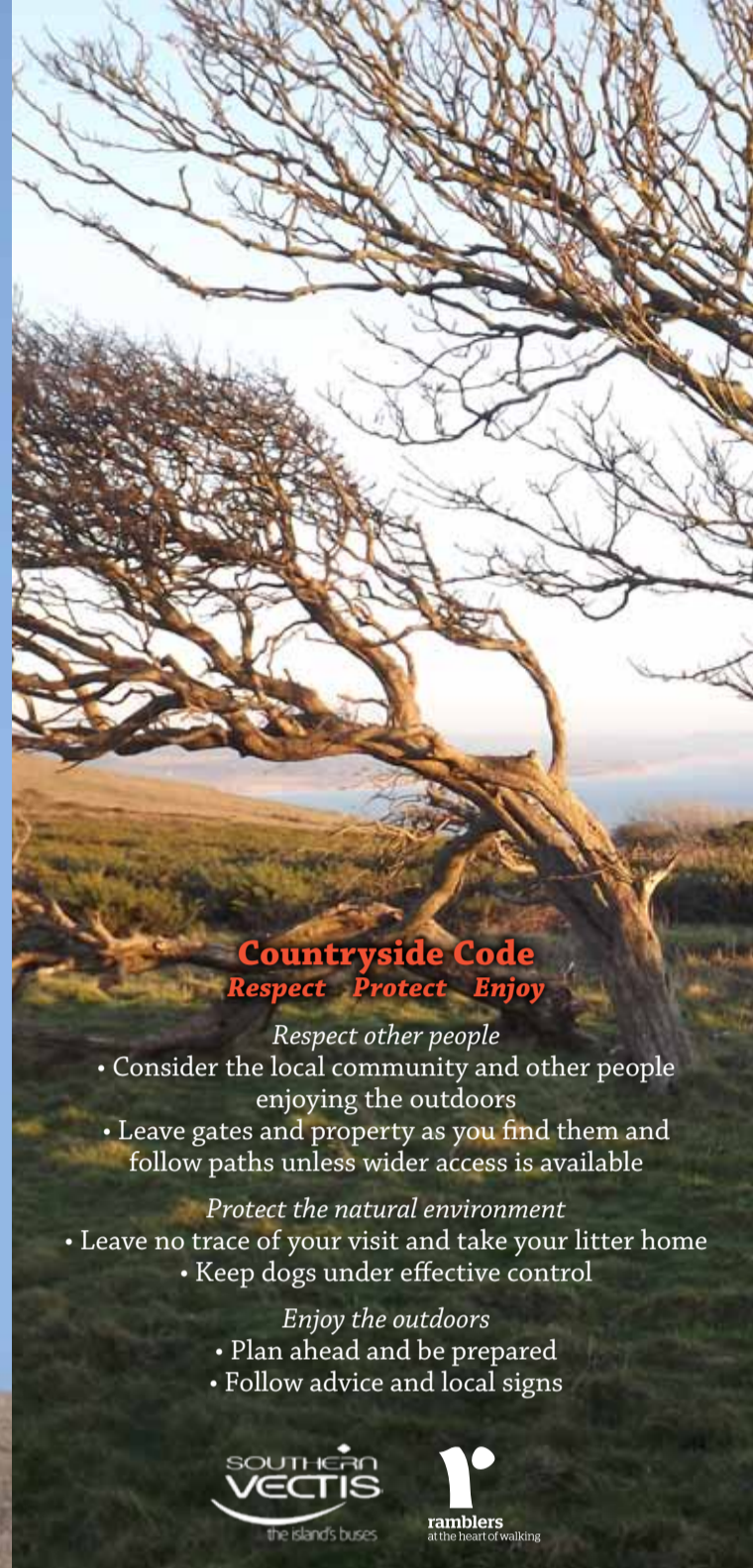


This is the Wild West – with soaring coastal scenery, Victorian fortifications, a Poet Laureate – and a Cold War rocket site!

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 downland countryside with spectacular views. Often quite breezy. **Refreshments** Needles Park café, pub etc. Warren Farm tea rooms (seasonal). New Battery refreshment kiosk (seasonal). **Toilets** 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.



Countryside Code Respect Protect Enjoy

Respect other people

- 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



Towering Tennyson

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 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 *Varvassi* 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.

Main picture Roof-of-the-world views from Tennyson Down towards West High Down and the mainland. The phrase “sixpence a pint” was coined by the poet, who regularly walked on the downs above Farringford

Inset The Tennyson Monument as seen from Freshwater Bay.

A Bronze Age barrow, 3,500 years old, was excavated in the 13th century, during the reign of Henry III. A local chieftain was believed to be buried inside, with jewellery, ornaments and weapons, but nothing was found.

Chalk geology

A central chalk spine runs right across the Island to The Needles, which reappears further west at Old Harry Rocks at Swanage. This line of rocks was eventually breached by the sea about 8,000 years ago, creating the Island and the spectacular chalk formations we see today. The sea bed here is largely shingle and quite shallow, but a 60 metre-deep channel does allow some large ships to steam in and out of the Solent. Most, though, go to the east of the Island at Spithead to access the south coast ports of Southampton and Portsmouth.

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 1860s to 1903.

Fort Albert 1854 to mid 20th 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 1955, 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!

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 AHH*, 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:

“’Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all.”

and;

“Nature, red in tooth and claw”

are both from *In Memoriam*, while

“Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die.”

is from *The Charge of the Light Brigade* written in 1854 after the Battle of Balaclava 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 moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea.”

Where the air
is worth
Tennyson Down sixpence a pint

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Information

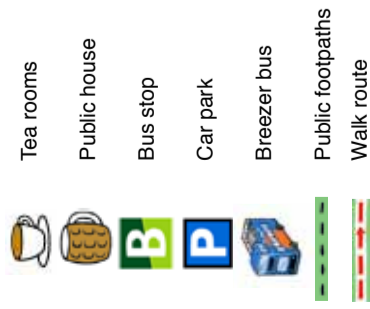
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Route From the bus terminus **1** walk up the hill to pass the car and coach parks. Continue on the National Trust road and follow this as it turns right. Alum Bay with its 24 coloured sands can be seen on the right. Follow the coastal path up steps **2** and over a stile. Keep on this path up the hill to a Ramblers kissing gate. Keep left on a tarmac road to pass the Needles New Battery and Coastguard Station. Continue on to the rocket testing site and proceed to a viewpoint overlooking The Needles **3**.

Retrace your steps to the Ramblers "Half a league onward" kissing gate **4**. 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 Ramblers "Rotary" gate **5**. Follow the path half right up the hill to the Tennyson Monument **6**. Here go directly

left passing scrub to find a long series of steps descending to the chalk pit car park **7**.

To reach the High Down Inn continue to the bottom of the car park access road. Otherwise turn left along a track passing a National Trust barrier and then a gate. The chalky path can be muddy after wet weather. The track ends by Node Beacon. This was originally situated on Tennyson Down and used as a navigation aid. In 1897 when the Tennyson Monument was built, the Beacon was moved to its current location.

Go through the Ramblers gate and follow the grass track half right between gorse. Keep to the main path following 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 stile by more telegraph poles **8**. Go down a few steps to carefully reach the National Trust road. Go right to return to the Needles Park.



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