

Dorset National Park - Short Case Study Series

To supplement evidence submitted in 2013, 2014 and 2018 on the environment, heritage and biodiversity, and the recreational opportunities in the proposed National Park.



2. Dorset is a Centre for Climbing

The countryside and heritage of Dorset are amongst the best in Britain, as all those who enjoy being outside in the countryside and on the coast well know. If proof were needed, successive studies by the RSA have ranked the landscapes of West Dorset and Purbeck in the top 4% nationally. The coast and countryside provide outstanding opportunities for recreation, relaxation and the appreciation of Dorset's internationally important wildlife. At a personal level this great scenery and biodiversity offers real benefits for our health and wellbeing as well as enjoyment for all the family.

The Dorset coast is one of the most important areas for rock climbing in Britain and attracts many visitors from across the UK and from overseas. There is a wide variety of climbing available, and the mild climate of the South Coast allows climbing all year round. Climbing has a long heritage in Dorset. Sport Rock climbing started in the 1960s on the limestone sea cliffs near Swanage, which extend for 8 km between Durlston Head and St Aldhelm's Head.

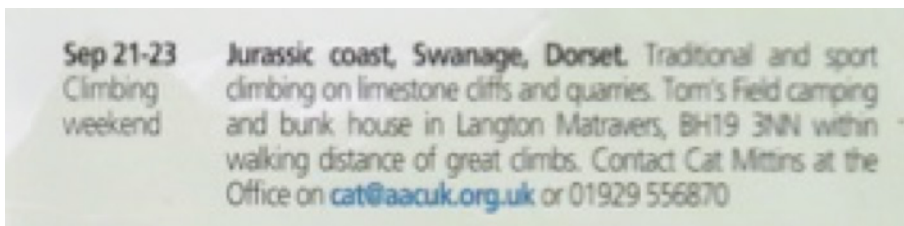
There are over a thousand climbs of all standards, from easy routes suitable for beginners to some of the hardest and most adventurous routes in the country, mostly climbed in the traditional British style (known as 'trad climbing'), where protective equipment is placed by the first climber and removed afterwards. The finest cliff in the area is reputed to be Boulder Ruckle, which lies in the Durlston Country Park near Swanage, almost a kilometre of vertical or overhanging rock up to 40 metres high. First ascended by US Marines practicing for D-Day, it now includes several classic climbs that are recognised as among the best in Britain.

The last 20 years have seen the Dorset coast developed as a major venue for 'sport climbing' where steel bolts or staples are drilled into the rock and left in place for the climber to clip their rope. There are over 1500 routes in this style, mostly on the Isle of Portland but also in the old quarries near Swanage. Portland is now the most popular sport climbing venue in the country. Dorset is also the best location in Britain for a third style of climbing - 'deep-water soling'; this involves climbing without ropes on cliffs that fall straight into the sea, where the water is deep enough to prevent injury in the event of a fall. There are opportunities for this style of climbing on some of the Swanage crags, at Stair Hole near Lulworth, and on the cliffs near Portland Bill.



Above is an extract from The British Mountaineering Council's database relating to Dorset. See <https://www.thebmc.co.uk>

The Austrian Alpine Club (in their Spring 2018 Newsletter) also notes the opportunities in this area:



Dorset has its own well established climbing club, The Wessex Mountaineering Club (WMC) and if you are visiting the area it's worth checking on its website www.wessexmc.org.uk.

The popularity of the coastal areas in Dorset has led to various pressures which agencies currently struggle to manage. The National Trust has started to issue licenses for parties climbing on the cliffs in the areas of Purbeck that it owns. Other areas of Dorset are under pressures from a wide range of operators offering adventure activities and holidays.

National Parks recognise that there is a need to balance recreation with respect for the environment and the wildlife. Several of the climbing areas are important nesting grounds for birds such as guillemots, shags, kittiwakes and peregrines. The British Mountaineering Council works with local conservation bodies to prevent disturbance to nesting birds by restrictions on climbing in these areas during the nesting season. These restrictions are publicised in climbing magazines and websites and by on-site notices. Climbers have an excellent reputation amongst conservation bodies, with this voluntary restriction system which is upheld as an example of how recreation and conservation can work together.

The Dorset National Park would bring a more coordinated, managed approach to these and other initiatives. Its responsibility to promote enjoyment alongside understanding, would provide the strategic context supported by advice, expertise and conversation. It would promote good practice and partnerships across the currently disparate players.

Prepared by the Wessex Mountaineering Club (WMC) March 2018