

U3A Retreads walking group Isle of Wight October 2025

As I start to write this I can't begin to think how I can capture in writing the amazing time and atmosphere that our I.O.W. Retreads walking week gave to the 22 of us. The days were divided into different activities for members depending on who wanted to complete all of the everyday walks and those who did part walks and visited other parts of the island by different buses etc.

Our journey began with the ride through the New Forest with its changing Autumnal colours, ponies and the pigs released for pannage to eat the fallen Acorns of which there were plenty this year and larger in size than normal.

Monday 13th

We caught the Lymington to Yarmouth ferry and all arrived safely at Warner's Norton Grange and discovered our various chalets number for the week some of us took the opportunity to visit Yarmouth Castle and explore the surrounding area as we were not allowed into our chalets until 3 p.m. The Tudor castle was built in 1545 and the final one built by Henry V111 to defend us from French invasion, the castle remained in service for 350 years and the 700ft pier is the longest timber pier in England. Some lucky walkers saw the daily parade of two Swans through Yarmouth streets. We met up in the bar that evening at 6p.m. before dinner for Tony to tell us the route for tomorrows walk and bus times and numbers if shorter walks were required. Disappointingly the Number 7 bus that usually stopped at Norton Grange had a change of route because of road closures so this meant everyone had to walk the half mile to Norton Grange from Yarmouth. At this first meeting we arranged to sit in a large circle and took it in turns to introduce ourselves. It was then 7p.m. time to visit the restaurant and enjoy the excellent choice of food that continued throughout the week. Very sadly Carole and Phil at the last minute couldn't join us for this week.

Tuesday 14th

After a hearty breakfast, scheduled for 8.15a.m. 20 walkers met at 9.30am to begin the walk. It was a grey and overcast morning as we left Norton Grange we first walked through woodland to Victoria Country park and re-joined the coastal path at Totland Bay but first whilst walking inland we had interesting views of Fort Albert (since 1986 luxury flats) and Hurst castle built by Henry VIII for fortification of the western side of the island. From Warden Point we walked along the beach front around Totland Bay providing easy walking before then tackling the very steep stairs and hill of Headon Warren so called Warren because this was where rabbits were first introduced to the island by the Normans, Hares came later and anyone who introduced a Fox was sentenced to deportation. Our hard efforts in the exhausting climb were well worth it when we saw the views of the Needles and Alum bay chair lift. The descent down from the Warren was slightly precarious being very steep but we all managed it without mishap. Once reaching Alum Bay we found a very welcome refreshment stop. Starting off again we walked along the base of Tennyson Down to Freshwater Bay where we turned off onto a woodland path to the amazing 1908 thatched St Agnes Church built on land donated by the son of A F Tennyson. The Church was built from stone rubble from a demolished farmhouse and was dedicated by the Bishop of Winchester. We were lucky enough to be entertained by finding a young lady playing a harp, beautiful music to listen to after our walk. From the church we walked to a number 7 bus stop from Freshwater back to Yarmouth and then the half mile walk back to Norton Grange. Walk distances 4.8 Miles in the morning and 3.1 in the afternoon.

Wednesday 15th

Again a misty morning but the sun came out later although we started off with a strong breeze. Fourteen of us walked to Yarmouth to catch the Breezer bus. We managed to negotiate with the bus Driver that we were all National Trust members so obtained cheaper fares. Two group tickets for five people each and four seniors so that worked out at £7.70 each instead of £9.50 each. There was a good commentary as we sat atop the bus, some people braved the outside topless level. We were given details as we passed scenic or interesting places such as the site of the IOW Pop festival in 1970 referred to as The Mother of Pop Festivals this was where Jimmy Hendricks played and died nineteen days later. We were told about red squirrels being introduced to the Island and anyone introducing grey squirrels would be fined £5000. We passed the entrance to Farringford House that was Tennyson's home for 40yrs which he bought in 1855 and in Totland in the 1890's Marconi introduced the first Marconigram. Famous Robert Hooke (1635-1703) was next mentioned he was a Scientist, Astronomer, Engineer, London City Surveyor and Geologist. He was the first to write that the moon might have gravitation. There are craters on the Moon and Mars named after him. He supplied instruments to the new Observatory at Greenwich in which he collaborated with Sir Christopher Wren to design. We descended from the Breezer at the Needles New battery and climbed steps and commenced our walk to the top of Tennyson Down in a very strong wind. The Needles New battery was used as a secret Rocket test site but is now owned by the National Trust. At the Tennyson memorial erected in 1897 we paused to admire the spectacular views across the Solent. We continued on down to Freshwater Bay the strong wind had now dropped. We had a lunch break at Dimbola the home of Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron that is now a museum and café where ten walkers enjoyed refreshments with

the company of a very friendly Robin and statue of Jimmy Hendricks. After a rest period twelve of us set off again along the River Yar, we walked along the right hand side or east side of the river until we reached a bridge called The Causeway (part of the Robert Hooke trail). Here the River was wide and very popular with masses of Birds, Ducks, Geese, Swans and birds we couldn't identify. At this point we now joined what was the old Freshwater to Newport railway opened in 1889. This disused line now provided a peaceful path that followed the tidal river back to Yarmouth. Eight of us reused our Breezer tickets once again to complete the whole circuit, thanks I think to the stiff breeze we were afforded magnificent views. I for one thought the bus ride down from the New Needles a little scary. Walk distances 3.1 Miles in the morning and 3.7 in the afternoon.

Thursday 16th

We woke to a beautiful sunny morning, at breakfast some walkers mentioned that already that morning they had seen a Rabbit and a red squirrel on the camp site. Fifteen walkers left at 9.30 in a coolish breeze from the rear of the Grange down to the sea front before shortly turning off through the woodland at the north of Norton Grange to Norton village then across open fields to join a footpath at Norton Green, we did have to negotiate the first of stiles on this week, here again we stopped to admire the Siberian Crab Apple tree full of red berries not seen by any of us before encountering it on the IOW. We continued towards Golden Hill Country park and met up with the carpenter come bench maker for a chat having met him before some 6\8 yrs ago when Jackie and Stewart had bought one of his benches. We set off again to Golden Hill Fort passing horses and a very photogenic pony on the way. Golden Hill Fort was built between 1862 and 1871 as part of the Palmerston chain of defences in response to a perceived French invasion threat. It was a barrack for soldiers stationed at Warden Point, Cliff End, and Fort Victoria but is now a very posh apartment block. We stopped at a splendid view point with a post telling us could we imagine the hillside filled with soldiers from many different regiments training during the First World War and accommodating recruits in a hutted camp around the fort. Continuing on a downward walk to Freshwater we reached All Saints Church where Emma Tennyson is buried and there is a bust of Alfred Tennyson. Once again we were fortunate on our church visits to be entertained this time by an organist who was practising before playing for a wedding that coming Saturday. It is one of the oldest buildings on the IOW, evidence suggests it was begun in the 8th or 9th century. This Church built on the banks of the Yar would have succeeded a temporary building like a timber barn. One Rector was imprisoned for loose talk in the Red Lion Pub next door about Oliver Cromwell. We continued back to Norton Grange from the Church.

Arriving back at Norton Grange at 12.30am we had a snack lunch before starting the afternoon walk. Eleven walkers met at 2.00p.m. again taking the rear exit from The Grange onto the shingle beach we walked along to Fort Victoria Country park. The Fort was a much larger building than I had expected but although run down still had a tea room there where three walkers enjoyed an ice cream whilst Tony gave the rest of us a playtime to examine the canon and views of The Solent, so clear today. Fort Victoria built between 1852-1855 was the first of many coastal defences built on the island originally as a massive gun battery to defend the Needles passage from an imaginary threat from the French. It is now the centre of the islands popular country park housing a 68 pounder canon. We walked back across a sunflower seeded field, the walk shortened to two and three quarter miles not three miles as walkers by now were a little weary.

That evening at our gathering in the bar very nice thanks and gifts were given to Tony for planning and leading the walks for which he was very grateful and we all said how much we had missed Carole after she had booked the holiday and ferry crossings. Walk distances 4.8 Miles in the morning and 2.75 in the afternoon.

Friday 17th

Walkers loaded their cars before and after breakfast as we had to leave our chalets by 10.00 a.m. Walkers were catching ferries back from Yarmouth at various times. Nine walkers gathered at Yarmouth harbour car park at 10.30 a.m. to start our final walk of the week. We walked down to the Old Yarmouth Station Building and Platform and from here through woodlands and narrow bridleways across fields stopping to enjoy apples picked from an isolated tree. We visited the New St Swithun's Church in Thorley, Virginia was excited to find a book in there that she wanted and left a generous donation. Just a little over half a mile away and to the west of the New Church we scrambled through a dense overgrown churchyard to find the original Old Church, it was almost certainly a memorial chapel built close to the then Manor House and farm and at the head of the then navigable tidal creek running down to Yarmouth, the first building was probably timber and thatch. It was known that there was some rebuilding of this old church in 1683 but ten years later it was decided because of its ruinous state a new church needed to be built, the new church was consecrated by The Bishop of Winchester in 1871 at a cost of £1,350. The pair of medieval bells are of utmost historical importance. Back on the walking route we finished for refreshments at the café in Old Yarmouth Station before leaving to catch our ferries home. Walk distance 3.4 Miles.