

# Things to do in the great outdoors



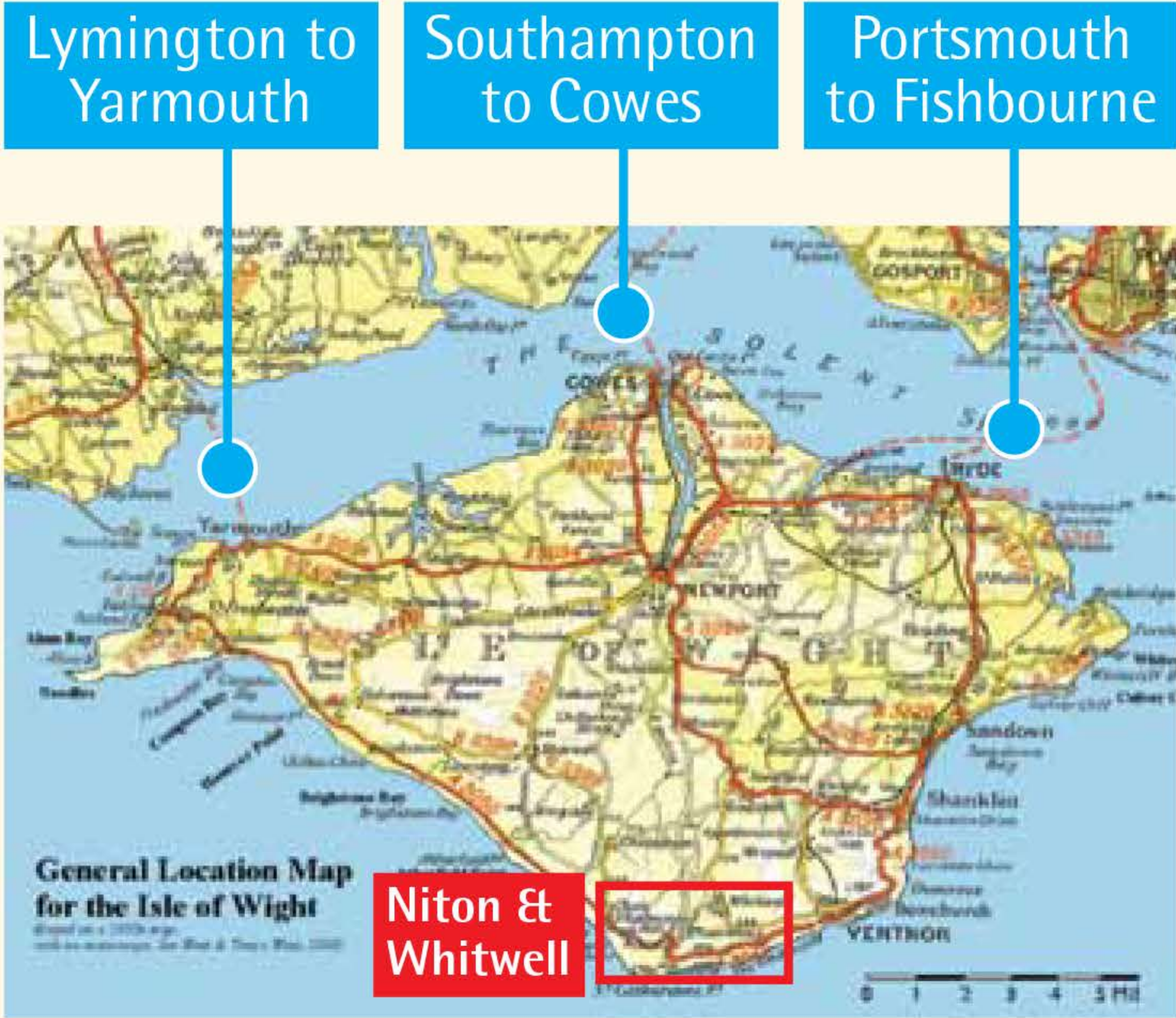
This area of the South Wight offers excellent conditions for a wide range of outdoor pursuits from walking and cycling to more extreme activities like paragliding and surfing. There are extensive walking trails throughout the area and both Niton & Whitwell act as start and finish points for a range of circular walks. The villages offer great stop off points on some of the Island's major walks including dramatic sections of the Isle of Wight Coastal Trail. For the more adventurous cyclists there are tough hill-climbs and bridleways as well as winding country lanes and the unique Undercliff Drive for those more inclined to sticking to the roads.

For the extreme sports enthusiast Niton boasts one of the Island's premier surf breaks in Reeth Bay. The right-hand point-break can be hazardous and so is not recommended for beginners. This same venue provides some excellent wave sailing conditions again suited to more advanced sailors.

In addition, the area offers great paragliding and for those keen to learn there is a local centre based in Chale - for details see box 31 on map.

For families with children, Blackgang Chine offers an entertaining day with a wide range of activities to suit all tastes, for details see Box 32. Finally the area is a great location to do nothing except relax, have a picnic, chill-out on the beach, read, paint or simply watch time pass by.

# How to get there...



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# Niton & Whitwell

## Surf, Smuggling & Shipwrecks



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## Niton & Whitwell's Early Years

Niton manor is recorded in the Domesday survey (1086) as being held by King William. The village is a large, somewhat scattered community with a mix of thatched and attractive buildings lying at the foot of the down of the same name, about 5 miles west of Ventnor.

There are many good class houses in the neighbour-hood, as Niton and the Undercliff became, in the middle of the 19th century, a favourite locality for residence owing to its sheltered position and mild air. Here fuchsia and myrtle flourish as nowhere else in the Island. Puckaster Cove in the south of the parish was the scene of the landing of Charles II in 1675, (fn. 1) and the lighthouse on St. Catherine's Point is of world-wide reputation. Begun in 1838, following the loss of the ship Clarendon, and completed two years later, it was one of the first lighthouses to be illuminated by electric light, with which it was fitted in 1888.



Orchard House, Niton



Appuldurcombe House

Whitwell Manor does not appear by name in the Domesday Survey, but was probably included in the manor of Gatcombe. "White" is derived from an Old English word meaning clean or pure, and the village of Whitwell is likely to take its name from a well or spring with a reliable supply of fresh water.

The original White Well, located towards the south end of the village was once a place of veneration as a 'holy well' and a site of pilgrim-age in the Middle Ages. The tradition of Well Dressing was started and now occurs annually at the site of the well. Each year the well is dressed and blessed by the local vicar giving thanks for water and a blessing for the village.

In the village, six quite prominent red iron water pumps can be seen at various intervals. These were built in 1887 by William Spindler, a prominent figure in St Lawrence.

Much of Whitwell was owned from the 1500s by the Worsley family of Appuldurcombe. Many of the village's buildings such as the White Horse pub date back to this period. The Church has portions dating back to as far as the 12th century, with newer additions built in the 13th, 15th and 16th centuries.

## St Catherine's Lighthouse



The long succession of wrecks on the southern coast of the Isle of Wight had led in very early times to the idea of a warning beacon-light on the downs, but it was not until 1314 that the wreck of the Ste. Marie, of Bayonne, brought about the building of the first " lighthouse ". This ship was carrying a cargo of wine belonging to a monastery, and when she was wrecked in Chale Bay the wine was seized as " wreck of the sea " by Walter de Godeton, a local landowner. The Church authorities, hearing of this, ordered de Godeton as a penance to build and endow a lighthouse and chapel on St. Catherine's Down.

Thus the Oratory of St. Catherine came into being, and the resident priest kept a brazier burning in the upper storey of the tower, and said Masses for the souls of shipwrecked mariners. The tower, octagonal outside and square inside, with a pyramidal roof, is all that now remains of the building, though the foundations have been traced out. There are eight openings in the top storey, each splayed outwards to emit the light from within. The tower, which is 35ft. 6in. high, was struck by lightning in 1957 and severely damaged, but being now listed as an Ancient Monument it was quickly repaired. Locally known as the "Pepper Pot ", it is actually just outside the parish boundary, but is always associated with Niton.

A few yards away, in Niton Parish, is the " Salt Cellar ", the local name for the remains of a later lighthouse; this one was never completed as it was realised that the dense fogs which often cover the Down would render it useless, but the walls have survived to house experimental radio and television work.

After this abortive effort in 1785, Trinity House left it alone until in 1836 the wreck of the Clarendon in Chale Bay, with the loss of nearly all her company, so shocked public opinion that the building of a new lighthouse close to sea-level on St. Catherine's Point was begun in 1838, and the light was first displayed in 1840.



## Discover the natural wonders

Niton and Whitwell are located within some of the Island's most unique landscape and host some of the Island's rarest species of wildlife. Niton is the source of the River Yar and the area is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The coastline is designated Heritage Coast and the Undercliff is an extensive Special Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI) Notorious for coastal erosion this area is classified as Europe's largest urban landslip. This leads to a spectacular landscape that evolves from season to season and can dramatically change over the course of the year. The Undercliff due to its physical geography is a natural microclimate; this allows many exotic and lush plants to flourish and gives the area an almost tropical feel at certain times of the year.

The sections between Niton and St Lawrence in particular conjure images of Hobbits and Middle Earth. The local landscape supports extremely rare species of butterfly such as the Glanville Fritillary and plant species such as the Bee Orchid. It is home to birds of prey such as Peregrines, Buzzards and Ospreys and is a great location to see Ravens. If you are lucky you may even spot the odd seal out in Wheelers Bay.

