



View from Mottistone Down – Winter 2004 © AONB Unit Photographer John Brownscombe

Chairman's Welcome

Welcome to issue seven of the 'Finest Landscapes' newsletter.

2004 has been a busy and successful year for the Isle of Wight AONB Partnership. The publication of our AONB Management Plan 2004-2009 was a particularly important event. The plan sets out our aspirations for the future, and the actions we need to take to maintain our wonderful Island landscapes and enhance them, where possible. After all, the quality of our lives is improved by our special countryside, and we want future generations to benefit as well.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue, and I would like to wish all our readers and their families a very Happy Christmas and good health and fortune for the New Year.

Tony Tutton *Chairman, Isle of Wight AONB Partnership Steering Committee* ■



The Isle of Wight AONB Partnership is a member of the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

AS THE YEAR draws to a close and we shut out the cold and dark of these winter evenings, the landscape of the Isle of Wight takes on a different seasonal garb. The greens and soft yellows of spring, bright colours of summer and the warmer rust tones of autumn have long passed to be replaced by a more monochrome pallet of greys, black and white.

Longer shadows pick out the detail and texture of our beautiful countryside by giving depth and height to the furrows and ridges of ploughed farmland, accentuating the height of now skeletal trees across pasture fields and highlighting the preferred well trod routes of sheep on downland.

Clear night skies offer the chance to look upon the stars with wonder and frosty mornings see early walkers often accompanied by their dogs each with steaming breath. At this time of festivals and celebrations it often occurs to me how important the winter was to our forebears. The Yule log and symbolic gathering of evergreen material to be displayed in houses clearly reflecting the closeness and importance placed upon nature and the seasons. But even now, the future promise of spring is heralded by early flowers in

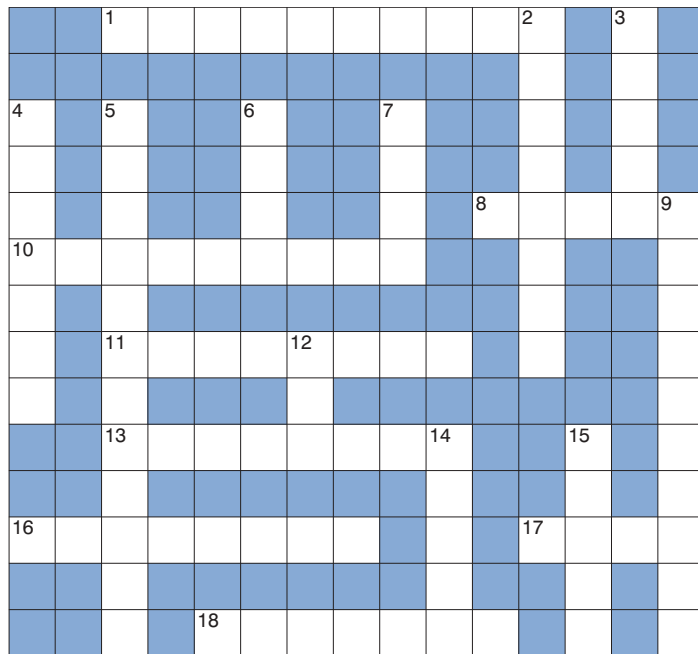
warm and sheltered locations. For me the appearance of early daffodils nestling under the south facing walls of Mottistone Manor, or along the roadside at Brook and Gate Lane Freshwater are a welcome promise of the new year to come.

So far, in our newsletters, we have looked at natural processes, how they affect the landscape and what goes into making the AONB a special place. In this edition we start to look at 'AONB people' and how their actions can impact upon the character and distinctiveness of the AONB landscape.

Please let us know if you enjoy this edition, and contact us at the AONB Unit if you have any questions about the work of the Isle of Wight AONB Partnership.

John Brownscombe
Isle of Wight AONB Officer ■

Zummet vor Nippers!!!



Across

- 1 Which religious house in the AONB was founded by Baldwin de Redvers (5,5)
- 8 Name the last remaining Island beacon dismantled in 1897 (5)
- 10 What feature of the AONB was part of a Neolithic tomb (9)
- 11 What is the name of the Heritage Coast on the North West of the Island (8)
- 13 Which queen lived at Osborne House (8)
- 16 What place of Spanish entertainment can you find in Brading (8)
- 17 Approximately how much of the Island is designated as AONB (4)
- 18 Which engineer set up the first British wireless station near Totland (7)

Down

- 2 In which coastal town in the AONB did King John stay in 1206 and 1214 (8)
- 3 Name the bay on the Tennyson Heritage Coast known as the Bay of Death due to its large number of shipwrecks (5)
- 4 What is the town whose name means 'lookout' or watching place (7)
- 5 What was the alternative name for the original capital of the Island (12)
- 6 Which product used to be worked in Newtown (4)
- 7 How many separate areas of the AONB are there on the Island (4)
- 9 Complete the phrase "Site of Special Interest" (10)
- 12 How many Heritage Coasts does the Island have (3)
- 14 What is the modern name for the part of the AONB referred to in the Domesday Book at 'Affetune' (5)
- 15 What substance are the Needles made of (5)



The Brilliant Wight Colouring Book

Full of great pictures – using the Isle of Wight as inspiration and drawn by Island Artists – just waiting for you to colour in.

Copies are available from Hannah Birks, Rural Arts Officer on 823813 or at the Quay Arts Centre, Newport. Price £3.50.

*"...O, Star of wonder, star of night
Star of royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to Thy perfect light..."*

Extract from 'We Three Kings of Orient Are' by Rev. John Henry Hopkins (1857)

At Christmas, the stories of the wise men following a bright star to Bethlehem, often make us look up to the skies to see if we can find any bright stars at night. Above us are stars, planets and an inspirational array of cosmic activity for us to watch, if we know where to look. Years ago it was much easier to sit and stargaze, or to use the stars to guide your way, but following the development of electric light, the

growth of big cities and the light requirements of the modern lifestyle it is getting harder to see through the haze.

On the Island, although we have some light impact from the mainland cities of Southampton and Portsmouth, in addition to our own towns, compared to the rest of the South East of England we are quite fortunate. Within much of the Isle of Wight AONB many areas benefit from

relatively 'dark skies' where we are able on clear nights to look up and see thousand of stars, several planets, and the occasional flashes of a meteor or shooting stars.

To find out more about stargazing and astronomy try visiting www.bbc.co.uk/science/space/stars/ or www.wightskies.fsnet.co.uk and to find out more about light pollution and dark skies visit www.dark-skies.org/ ■

Festival of the Heritage Coast

Celebrating 30 years since the Hamstead and Tennyson Heritage Coasts attained national recognition for their importance for beauty, tranquillity and scientific importance, the Festival of the Heritage Coast ran through most of September.

As part of the Festival, Dimbola Lodge Museum's Heritage Coastline Photographic Competition saw an extremely high standard of entries, reflected by the inclusion of some of the short-listed photographs, along with the winners prints, being included in Dimbola's Heritage Coast Exhibition which ran throughout most of September and October. Many entrants were from other countries, including the Childrens 2nd Prize winner from New York and an Adult Highly Commended awarded to a lady from Germany. A reflection perhaps on how inspirational the Island's Heritage Coasts and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty can be, not just to local artists, but to our visitors too.

The main Festival programme included a range of walks, talks and cycle rides by local experts and enthusiasts covering a wealth of topics including Archaeology, Wildlife, Geology, Coastal Management, and Landscape Character. These were held in a variety of locations in and around the two Heritage Coast areas ranging from Thorness Bay SSSI site to Ventnor Botanic Garden,



Tennyson Down by John Walker – Adult category first prize winner Dimbola Lodge Museum, Heritage Coast Competition

Tennyson Down (and its Neolithic Mortuary Enclosure) to Newtown, the Undercliff to Bouldnor Forest, Wightlink's Lymington to Yarmouth Ferry to the Wilberforce Hall.

Other activities saw an open day and the Official Opening of the New Visitor Point at the Needles Headland, a new path to Tennyson Down and the Isle of Wight AONB Partnership Annual Open Forum.

The Beacons, Rockets and Alarms Project explored communications along the Tennyson Heritage Coast through a local history presentation and torch & light, flag-making and story-writing workshops. This

culminated in a multiple venue celebratory evening during which activities included amateur radio communications (making contact with the rest of Britain and Europe, including conversations with France and Norway), talks, presentations, smuggling tales, live music and the symbolic firing of a rocket in recollection of the Island's role as the 'Eye of England'.

Despite the bad weather on some days, the Festival was well supported and our thanks go to all those who took part, either as event leaders or participants, for making the Festival of the Heritage Coast such a success. ■

A Festival Find Bronze Age palstave discovered



The find, is a Late Bronze Age "palstave", a form of axe that was in fashion between 1200 BC and 700 BC. Made of bronze, it was cast in a two-piece mould that was probably made of clay or stone. The butt to which the handle was attached in Bronze Age times is partially broken and the implement is heavily corroded, but it is, nevertheless, an important find. The recording of the find will contribute to an understanding of the manufacture, typology and distribution of Late Bronze Age metalwork, not only in the Isle of Wight but also nationally.

The Portable Antiquities Scheme is a national voluntary scheme for the recording of chance finds. The scheme is mainly funded by the Heritage Lottery and is directed by the British Museum. About 75,000 archaeological finds have now been recorded on the Portable Antiquities Scheme database. To view these finds go to www.finds.org.uk.

If you would like to have a find identified call Frank Basford, your local Finds Liaison Officer on 01983 823810 or email: frank.basford@iow.gov.uk ■



**PORTABLE
ANTIQUITIES
SCHEME**

www.finds.org.uk

During the Festival of the Heritage Coast a prehistoric archaeological find was discovered by Alan Fisher along the south-west coast of the Island and was reported to Frank Basford, Finds Liaison Officer of the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

AONB People – Farming and Forestry

The Impact of Farming on the Landscape

Since the creation of the Isle of Wight AONB in 1963, the impact of farming on the landscape has been subtle and slowly evolving, with some areas being altered to a greater extent than others.

The single most important factor has been the gradual decline of dairy farming, especially on the South West area of the Island. Forty years ago, nearly every farm supported a herd of cows, which provided the main income for the largely family run units. Grassland, whether temporary or permanent, covered most farms with only small areas of arable producing cereals for home consumption. During the 1960s and into the 1970s, farmers were encouraged to improve their existing buildings aided by generous government grants. Many farm steadings changed, with the building of large umbrella type sheds often on new sites. As a result less stock was wintered outside, improving grazing areas to increase stocking rates. Further grants were given for the removal of hedges and for improved drainage

of marginal areas, both contributing to a change in the landscape.

In the middle 1970s, many farmers were encouraged to give up dairy farming when government policy reversed with aid being offered to reduce milk production. The introduction of milk quotas in 1984 further accelerated the exodus of milk producers with those remaining becoming larger units. Currently, there are just a handful of dairy producers left in the AONB.

Most farmers who gave up dairying have become arable growers, with cereals produced on land previously in grassland. On the better soils, cash crops have been grown with the aid of irrigation, particularly potatoes, brassicas and sweet corn. The creation of reservoirs to collect winter rainfall for summer use has occurred. All these factors have contributed to small changes to the landscape.

Future developments, with the current changes in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) payment schemes about to occur, are

likely to make further gradual changes to the AONB landscape. Encouragement to add environmental improvements for the countryside is now available to qualify for payments. Ironically, hedge and tree replanting schemes may replace those taken out forty years ago. The impact of large areas of marginal land to be converted into long-term set-aside remains to be seen. The landscape of the AONB may change as the new rules are implemented. Cereal crops may give way to alternative non food crops as the new payment scheme takes effect.

Over the past forty years, it is clear that the landscape has changed, partly due to the constantly evolving farming practices, but also from natural phenomena such as Dutch elm disease and the onset of climate changes. The next forty years may well see as many changes if not more.

Geoffrey Case

Farming & Landowning Portfolio Holder, Isle of Wight AONB Steering Committee ■



'Cows' and 'Woodland' © Countryside Agency
photographer Joe Low.
'View through a sea of wheat' and 'Logs' © AONB
photographer John Brownscombe.

FARMLAND & WOODLAND AREAS: Taken from land use data



Forestry in the Isle of Wight AONB

Woodland is a major feature of the Island's landscape and particularly within the AONB. Each of the five component areas has significant woodlands within them though their characters differ widely. The Island is characterised by small woodlands, many of ancient origin, which are more common on the clay to the north of the central chalk ridge than the sandstone to the south. Larger woodlands are later additions to our landscape with major plantations, dominated by commercial conifer crops, on the chalk and clay.

The management of the smaller woodlands for firewood, coppice products and large timber for shipping and housing would have begun at the beginning of the last millennium and continued until the beginning of the 20th century. Small-scale exploitation of oak and ash with the hazel understorey would have retained a character that would have been in turn exploited by a wide variety of wildlife including red squirrels, dormice, bluebells and nesting birds. Major broadleaved woodlands, such as the Briddlesford complex, would almost certainly have been managed more intensively but sustainably with large canopy trees being replaced on a long term cycle through plantation or regeneration. These woodlands would have been found amid landscapes of acid grasslands and heathland on the sandy soils and flower-rich meadows

and pastures on the clay and chalk.

Relatively recent developments led to rapid changes in the character of the AONB. The rise of commercial conifer crops led to the decline in more traditional management practices, exacerbated by the reduction in manpower after WW1. Plantations appeared on the heathlands at Bouldnor, the clay pastures of Wilmingham and Osborne and the chalk grassland and heathland at Brighstone. These included many non-native species including beech, sweet chestnut and many conifers. Existing ancient woodlands, such as Burntwood and Combley Great Wood and secondary woods such as at Hamstead, were also modified by the removal of broadleaves and the planting of conifers. A landscape, which had been relatively constant for decades, underwent radical change as a result of these activities.

The great storm of 1987 was the next event that led to a different approach to forestry on the Isle of Wight. Major areas of shallow rooted conifers were windblown haphazardly leading to the destruction of conifer crops, and making extraction of any remaining timber much more difficult and expensive. The Forestry Commission was also encouraged to dispose of their smaller plantations, leading many of these to go into private hands. Large areas of fallen conifer were cleared and replanted after the storm. However these naturally felled areas also

allowed an opportunity for the restoration of semi-natural habitats, such as heathland on Mottistone Common. A forest, damaged by the 1987 storm, around the ancient Longstone was replaced by a pony-grazed heathland by the National Trust in a comparatively short period of time. At Mill Copse in Yarmouth conifers were removed by the Wight Nature Fund and replaced by oak, ash and hazel coppice, restoring a bluebell wood lost to the Island for 50 years.

Forestry in the AONB is now concentrated on the major Forest Enterprise plantations at Brighstone, Bouldnor and Combley Great Wood. Areas of conifer are clear-felled by contractors and taken to the mainland. The semi-natural woodland complex at Briddlesford and smaller broadleaved woodlands on the clay, chalk and sand are managed by various landowners for game rearing, or by conservation minded groups and individuals for wildlife conservation. This mixture of management leads to a wide variety of woodlands of different structure and character. It is this diversity that the AONB Partnership on the Island will continue to support through its management plan led activities.

Richard Grogan, *Nature Conservation Portfolio Holder, Isle of Wight AONB Steering Committee* ■

The JIGSAW Project in the AONB

In 2000, the Forestry Commission awarded the Isle of Wight their Challenge Fund called Joining and Increasing Grant Scheme for Ancient Woodland - JIGSAW. This grant encouraged landowners and farmers to apply for funds to plant major areas of woodland on the Island on currently intensively managed grasslands. The scheme, to last five years, was to plant broad-leaved woodlands of native species that would link or extend existing ancient woodland on the Isle of Wight for the benefit of wildlife, the landscape and the forest environment.

Following the success of the Isle of Wight Red Squirrel Project, co-ordinated by

Wight Wildlife, landowners were approached through the Woodland Forum and personal contact to promote the scheme over the whole Island. Bids were invited which were judged by a group formed from local experts in ecology, landscape and forestry. This panel would meet once a year to ensure the bids were acceptable in terms of landscape impacts, wildlife benefits and value for money.

With support from Wight Wildlife, the Isle of Wight Council and English Nature, the Forestry Commission has awarded grants for the planting of 121 ha (299 acres) of new broad-leaved woodland in the AONB since 2000. This has resulted in the

next major change in the landscape character of the AONB where woodland will become a more prominent feature in some areas, particularly in the south of the Island.

JIGSAW still has a year to run with bids still being received and assessed by the Forestry Commission. The next stage is to encourage the sympathetic management of these new woodlands and their ancient neighbours so that the maximum benefits for landscape wildlife and forestry, envisaged at the outset, will become a reality.

Richard Grogan, Wight Wildlife ■

‘Acting on people’s ideas’ A Forest Design Plan Update:

Most of the Island’s Forestry Commission woodlands are within or can be seen from the AONB. This year revised forest design plans are being written to help guide their management for the next fifty years.

Throughout the summer, planning forester Tom Ransom has been canvassing opinion on forestry issues at various public consultation events: Guided walks, displays in libraries and the IoW County Show and meetings with key stakeholders. These have included: Ryde Play Forum, Butterfly Conservation, and an evening discussing issues with dog walkers and invited members from dog clubs at Firestone Copse. Some of the issues gathered so far show how consultation provokes a challenging cross-spectrum of sometimes opposing points of view:

Ideas to restore some conifer plantations to native broadleaf were generally favoured by most people, but other people valued mature conifer trees as attractive landscape features in the wood and that their sudden and extensive removal could mean the loss of key Red Squirrel habitats.

Some people highlighted that they wish to see more recreation facilities, such as horse riding routes, built in the woods but have learned that this may lead to conflicts between other users and threaten sensitive wildlife habitats.

Many people thought it was generally good to leave nature to its own devices. They were surprised to learn that the survival of much of our indigenous wildlife is often dependent on human intervention. The clearest example of this is the survival of the Pearl Bordered Fritillary butterfly in its only Island location, Parkhurst Forest. Here large



© AONB Unit photographer John Brownscombe

blocks of trees have, in the past, been felled and replanted creating temporary open sites vital for its survival.

Presently, Tom is writing draft plans that will be available for people to see and make more detailed comments on. A more strategic island-wide plan will also investigate issues common to all the woods such as the economics of harvesting trees on the island, a question often raised at events, and one which may impact on the delivery of the plans. However, Tom intends the plans to focus on what is best for the

woodland without being too constrained by, often changeable, present day markets. For example a wood for fuel heating plant on the Island may well help deliver combined forest design plan and renewable energy objectives, but this type of development is subject to many complex influences outside the scope of forest design plans.

If you have views on the management of the Island’s FC woodlands write to Tom Ransom at Forestry Commission Office, Parkhurst Forest, Newport, Isle of Wight, PO30 5UL. ■

Managing hedgerows: does flailing harm hedges?



Hedgelaying Competition 2004 – © AONB Unit photographer John Brownscombe

Vigorous, healthy hedges require only regular trimming to keep them to the required height and width and to encourage bushy growth. Today this regular maintenance is almost always done using tractor mounted hedgecutting equipment. But is there still a role for traditional hedgelaying?

As all hedges grow, they gradually become more tree-like and less bush-like; gaps tend to appear lower down and they cease to provide an effective barrier. At this point, the

hedge can be allowed to grow sufficiently tall so that it can be laid, both to fill in the gaps and to ensure the long term viability of the hedge by promoting vigorous re-growth from the base of the hedge.

Hedgelaying is a traditional method of hedge management and has been practised for thousands of years. Hedgelaying involves cutting nearly all the way through the base of the stems and laying them over at an angle. The hedgelayer uses a fearsome array of axes

and billhooks and normally stakes and binds the hedge with hazel. Eventually a new hedge will grow from the established root system. In the meantime, the laid stems or 'pleachers' act as a living barrier, and protect the re-growth from browsing stock. Where the cycle of laying and trimming is repeated, hedges can thrive indefinitely. Hedges might typically be laid every 15 to 25 years, and today, the cost of maintaining hedges is broadly equivalent to that of fencing which has to be replaced about every 15 to 20 years. However, trimming is still required, and is best done in the late winter when any berries will have been eaten and should not take place annually - most plants will not flower on year old wood. Trimming should follow the direction of any previous hedgelaying to minimise damage to the wood. In fact, if done correctly, cutting twigs rather than major stems, mechanised cutting can achieve most satisfactory results, as re-growth in subsequent years will show. The wildlife value of a properly flailed hedge is usually high. So there is still a role for both mechanical cutting and traditional hedgelaying.

The Isle of Wight Hedgelaying Competition takes place on the last Saturday in February, and is an opportunity to see this traditional skill in practice. With the support of the AONB Partnership this event has provided training and support for new hedgelayers, as well as giving the more experienced ones a chance to show off their talent! Look out for more information about the 2005 Hedgelaying Competition, which will be on 26 February 2005.

Matthew Chatfield, *Countryside Services Manager, Isle of Wight Council* ■

STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS

3 stage photographic project to record The Island's Heritage in 2005.

Dimbola Lodge Museum is pleased to be able to announce that we have been successful in securing a grant from the Local Heritage Initiative Fund to enable us to promote a series of photographic workshops to young and disabled people free of charge. The aim of the workshops will be to encourage them to enter their work into an exhibition, which will take place in August 2005.

20 selected images will be published in a high quality album which will be presented to the County Records Office and the

AONB Unit. The next phase of the project will be to work with a local school to add poetry to the images and publish a booklet.

For details of times and dates for the workshops please contact Mary Jennings at Dimbola Lodge on 756814 (Fridays). ■

Western Yar Estuary Management Plan

The *Western Yar Estuary Management Plan* has been revised and is now available on the website www.iwight.com/estuaries.

The Plan covers a wide range of issues relating to the estuary and policies and actions to encourage sustainable management. ■



Isle of Wight County Archaeological & Historic Environment Service, Wight Wildlife, Forestry Commission and, Isle of Wight Council Countryside Section are members of the IW AONB Partnership and we would like to thank them for their contribution to our work. Additionally, we would like to thank Geoffrey Case and Richard Grogan for their contributions to this newsletter.



© Countryside Agency – Photographer Joe Low

Following the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, through new rights of Access, people will have the opportunity walk freely across areas of open country, mountain, moor, heath, down and registered common land where it is mapped as 'Access land'. As part of a national rolling programme, a few areas of 'Access land' on the Island, including some areas within the AONB, will become accessible from the 14th December 2004.

Duncan Mackay, Countryside Agency regional director for the South East, says: "The Southern part of England has some of the most beautiful landscapes which are now more accessible than they were. Whilst there is less new Access land here than there is in

some other parts of England, people do now have new rights for open-air recreation, including walking, climbing, and bird-watching, on some high quality sites in some of the most beautiful parts of the area. We are now working with landowners and access authorities to ensure that the public can make the best use of this new access land. Much of it is sensitively farmed, and it is important that those who walk in these areas bear in mind their responsibilities as outlined in the new Countryside Code which we launched in July."

The new rights of Access will add to the Island's already exceptional Rights of Way network, providing an additional freedom in

these specified areas of moving away from the footpaths. However, these rights are for people on foot and do not extend to cyclists, motor vehicle drivers or horse riders straying off the bridleways or byways onto these areas. Additionally dog owners are requested keep their dogs on leads at certain times of year and in some circumstances. Full details on this and other useful information can be found on the website www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk

Details of where the new Access areas are can be found on the website, and will be shown on new Ordnance Survey Explorer Maps. Additionally at ground level, there may be new symbols highlighting where access areas start and end. ■

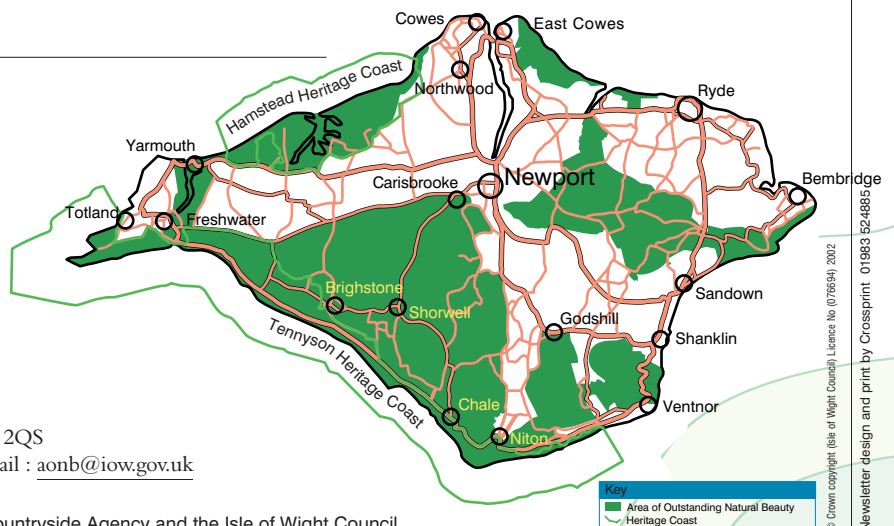


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