



## Transporting Stone



Photo: Stuart Morris Collection

**This area of Portland played an important part in the island's quarrying history. The Merchants' railway, used for transporting stone from the top of the island down to Castletown, remains a prominent feature in the landscape.**

For centuries, stone has been quarried on Portland. In 1826, to help move the stone, the horse drawn Merchants' railway was built. This was one of the earliest public railways in the world and carried 81,000 tonnes in 1865. Two parallel lines can be seen around the hillside, they join at the edge of the Local Nature Reserve for the very steep incline down to Castletown. Along the route, stone railway sleeper blocks, some still with iron pegs, are now partly hidden by grass. Original stone horse troughs have been revealed, thanks to the efforts of local volunteers.

The railway carried stone from Tout and other quarries on the west of the island, from Priory Corner to Castletown. Stone was also transported from the bottom of Yeates Incline at the eastern end of Tillycombe. On this steep incline, trucks were coupled in a continuous loop on parallel lines; the gravity of the full trucks going downhill pulled the empty ones back up to the top. Volunteers have worked hard to reveal the original track surface.

A tramway from King Barrow Quarries also linked with the Merchants' railway. The gully, with some impressive dry stone walls, has been opened up to make a pathway into King Barrow, a Dorset Wildlife Trust Reserve. Local volunteers, with the assistance of the Ministry of Defence, helped to clear vast quantities of rubbish and scrub from the route. Under the bridge, the original tramway surface has been revealed. The Merchants' railway finally closed in 1939.



Stone horse trough

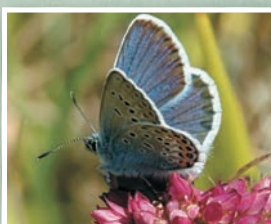
Photo: Boots Coman



## Wildlife



**The slopes and hilltops are now relatively peaceful and natural vegetation softens the landscape. Hart's Tongue Fern fills the Yeates Incline, flower-rich short grass clothes the slopes of the High Angle Battery and scrub has started to hide clues to past activities.**



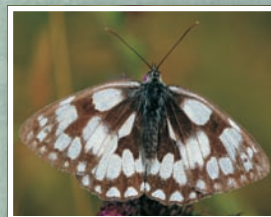
Silver Studded Blue Butterfly

Photo: Kevin Cook

Undisturbed, flowery limestone grasslands have developed with wildflowers such as Cowslip, Salad Burnet, Early Gentian and Ivy Broomrape. Butterflies thrive too, such as Marbled White, Adonis and Silver-studded Blue.

The hillside was once grazed which helped to maintain open grassland with scattered patches of scrub with species such as Blackthorn, Wayfaring Tree and Dogwood. However, without grazing, scrub has taken over, including a non-native, invasive shrub called Cotoneaster. Managing the Local Nature Reserve will help to control the Cotoneaster and ensure a balance is maintained between native scrub, important for nesting and migrating birds, and the open grassland.

In 2007, Weymouth and Portland Borough Council declared the Verne Local Nature Reserve, recognising its value for wildlife and local people. Volunteers are working to unearth its history and conserve its wildlife and paths.



Marbled White Butterfly

Photo: Kevin Cook

*Land within the Local Nature Reserve is of local, national and international importance for wildlife. It is in a Site of Nature Conservation Importance, the Isle of Portland Site of Special Scientific Interest and Special Area of Conservation.*

*This leaflet was produced by the Portland Coast & Countryside Project, a partnership of Natural England, Weymouth & Portland Borough Council, Dorset Wildlife Trust and Dorset Countryside, which aims to promote conservation, awareness and enjoyment of Portland's wildlife and landscape for local people and visitors.*



# The Verne Local Nature Reserve



The peaceful slopes of the Verne and Old Hill were once the scene of a remarkable reshaping of the landscape, creating a fascinating heritage of industrial archaeology and natural history. The land has been declared a Local Nature Reserve by Weymouth and Portland Borough Council in recognition of its value for wildlife and local people.

## Built Heritage

The four bridges built in the 1880s dominate the view looking southwards. Understanding the way stone was transported off the island helps in explaining their presence in the landscape. In the Local Nature Reserve, there are some impressive stone buildings including the Verne Citadel and High Angle Battery.

The building of the Portland breakwater in the harbour and The Verne Citadel, a military fortress completed in 1861, required huge quantities of stone.

New roads and bridges were built and a vast ditch created around the bomb-proof barracks. In 1949, the Citadel became and remains a prison hidden behind the hillside.



Reshaping of the landscape

Photo: Stuart Morris Collection

The High Angle Battery, at the top of the hill, is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. It is a fine example of Victorian military architecture and was built to defend Portland Harbour. It is now an interesting place to explore with many of its original features still visible, such as the locally known Ghost tunnels. The Redoubt, the raised square area adjacent to it, was used as a parade ground in Victorian times.

