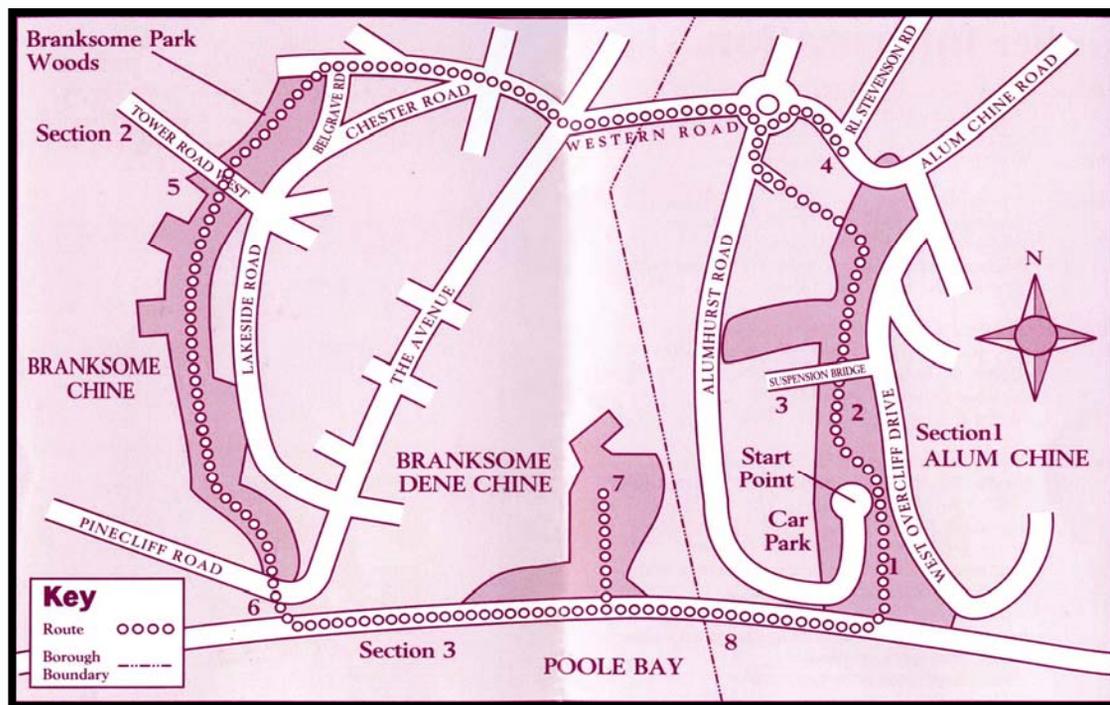


The Chines of Bournemouth and Poole



Tropical Gardens, Winston Churchill's near-death, R.L. Stevenson's House, Smugglers and Seafront - A self-guided trail incorporating Alum, Branksome and Branksome Dene Chines and a wonderful way to explore Bournemouth and Poole.

Distance: Approximately 3 miles
Approximately 3.5 miles with detour.

Time: Allow from 1.5 to 3 hours

Introduction

The word 'chine' means a 'deep, narrow ravine cut through soft rocks by a water course descending steeply to the sea'. The word is peculiar to Dorset and the Isle of Wight, chines being very much a feature of this part of the British coast.

The walk starts at the car park located at the bottom of the Alum Chine.

Section 1 – Alum Chine/Tropical Gardens

1. To the east of the car park, behind the children's playground, are the Tropical Gardens. These were first planted in the early 1920s and, after deteriorating, were replanted and landscaped in 1996. The gardens contain a wide variety of tropical/sub-tropical plants including Chusan Palms and Yuccas. Much of the chine is dominated by pines planted at the turn of the last century. There are also areas of deciduous woodland providing a mixed habitat which attracts several species of birds as well as the ubiquitous Grey Squirrel. The chine is named after a small mine established in 1564 by Baron Mountjoy to extract alum and copperas. The alum was used in manufacturing and medicine; the copperas (ferrous sulphate) was important for tanning, dye-making and ink. This was thought to be Bournemouth's first industry but it did not succeed and the Baron died penniless.

2. One slope just before the Suspension Bridge has been cleared and thousands of heather plugs have been planted by conservation officers and pupils from Portchester Boys School between 1994 and 1999. Heathland is being successfully re-established to restore this once more widespread wildlife habitat.

3. The suspension bridge was built in 1903/04 by David Rowell & Co. and cost £480! Some local historians believe this to be the bridge from which Winston Churchill fell in 1892. The 18-year-old Churchill, staying locally, was being chased by his younger brother and cousin in Alum (or possibly even Branksome Dene) Chine when he tried to jump from a bridge to an adjacent fir tree. He lost his grip and fell 30 feet to the ground below. He was unconscious for three days and bed bound for three months. History could have been dramatically different if he had not been so lucky.

A plaque between the two bridges near the top of Alum Chine commemorates Robert Louis Stevenson.

To get to the site of his house, follow the arrow out onto Warren Road. Turn right into Alumhurst Road. At the roundabout turn right into Alum Chine Road. The site of the house is a short way along on the right, opposite R.L. Stevenson Avenue.

4. Stevenson came to Bournemouth as a TB sufferer in 1884. The house was formerly called 'Sea View' before he renamed it 'Skerryvore' after a lighthouse built by his family's company. The position of the house is marked by a low wall and there is a model of the lighthouse. You will find more information on display in the garden.

Retrace your steps back along Alum Chine Road to the roundabout. Proceed along the Western Road, crossing The Avenue at a safe place. Continue along Western Road until you come to Belgrave Road.

Enter Branksome Park Woods via the access point adjacent to Belgrave Road. Follow the main path through the woods, then cross Tower Road West and enter Branksome Chine. Follow the markers down through the chine.

Section 2 – Branksome Chine

5. In the 18th Century, Branksome Chine is said to have been a regular route for smugglers as they headed inland to the Kinson area. Like Alum Chine, it also has a link with a great literary character. John Betjeman, former Poet Laureate, once wrote – 'walk the asphalt paths of Branksome Chine/In resin scented air like strong Greek wine'.

The chine has numerous tree species such as pines, maples and beech as well as a variety of shrubs. Birds can be seen throughout the year including Jays, woodpeckers, thrushes, tits and summer warblers. During the summer months, many insects can be seen including butterflies and dragonflies, the latter being attracted by the stream.

6. In 1932 a solarium opened in one of the buildings where the café is situated at the southern end of the chine. It was only one of its kinds in Britain at the time and offered 'sunshine' all year round. The 'sunbathing' took place under ultra-violet lamps and drinks were served by waitresses. The lamps gave light and heat producing the same effect as warm sunshine. The rays were believed to have beneficial effects – destroying germs, providing resistance to disease and stimulating the nervous system.

Section 3 – Seafront/Branksome Dene Chine

7. In the 1850s, the lower part of the Branksome Dene Chine was owned by Mr. Charles Packe, an MP for South Leicestershire. He built a mansion on the cliffs and called Branksome Tower, which is no longer standing.



The Packe family also had a mausoleum built on the edge of Branksome Dene Chine, designed by William Burn, which contains the bodies of Charles Packe and his wife. The mausoleum was restored by the Borough of Poole in 1993. There is an optional detour from the route to see the building, which would take about a half to three quarters of an hour. The walk is uphill but good views can be enjoyed in fine weather.

NB – the mausoleum is usually open at the end of April, June and September.

To get to the mausoleum, turn left by the ice cream kiosk. Go up two flights of steps between the white beach huts, then up a third flight of steps and then follow the yellow arrow markers until you come out onto the road. The mausoleum is at the top of the hill.

Be aware of traffic when walking along the road.

Retrace your steps to the seafront to continue the route.

8. There are some interesting geological features to be seen as you walk back towards Alum Chine. Immediately east of the Branksome Dene Chine, a low cliff section has laminated pink and grey cross-bedded silts, sands and clays. Bands of sediment called Varves, left behind by water, can also be seen here. They consist of light and dark layers deposited at different seasons. In the higher cliff faces, yellow and orange layers of sand are noticeable. These are successive layers of fluvial sediments indicating the position of a former river valley.

On clear days there are fine views along the coast. Look for Old Harry's Rock to the west, and Hengistbury Head and the Isle of Wight to the east. On the beaches, watch for the various species of gulls and terns as well as the black and white Oystercatcher.

Continue along the seafront until you reach the south end of Alum Chine and the car park where the route began.

Further Information

Parking: Pay and display parking is available at the bottom of Alum Chine. There is also parking available at the end of Branksome Chine by the café if you wish to start the walk from there.

Buses: For bus service information regarding any part of this route, the following numbers will be of use;
Yellow Buses 0871 200 2233
Wilts and Dorset 01202 673 555

Terrain: Surfaced footpaths for most of the route. There are some uneven footpaths with tree roots in places. The walk through Alum Chine is uphill. There are several flights of steps on the route although most of these are encountered on the optional detour to the mausoleum. The middle section of the route includes pavements. Please take care when crossing busy roads.

For further information on activities and walks in Bournemouth visit www.bournemouth.co.uk or call 0845 051 1700.