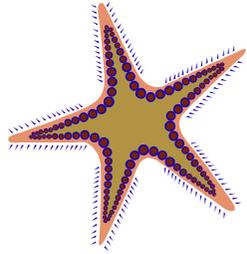


Walk No 5



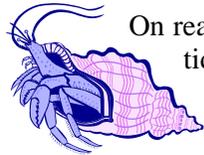
Beachcombing and Fossil Hunting

Seatown to Dead Man's Cove to St. Gabriel's Mouth to Stanton St. Gabriel to Seatown

Distance: About 4-5 miles **O. S. Maps:** WY29/39 (1:25000) or 193 (1:50000)

The outward leg of this walk lies along the foreshore, and for your own safety you are strongly advised to set out from Seatown around low tide – preferably during the last two hours of the ebb, and not later than one hour after dead low water. Also, for reasons, which will be explained later, this walk should only be attempted in reasonably dry summer weather, or in winter during a very hard frost.

For visiting motorists there is a car park just behind Seatown beach. From here you set off along the beach towards the foot of Golden Cap, which lies 1 mile to the West. The beach consists mainly of loose shingle, but quite often there is easier walking on firm gritty sand near the low tide line.



On reaching Golden Cap the shingle gives way to a complex reef of tide-exposed boulders, and you will probably be tempted away from your walk for a while to study the fascinating marine life in the rock pools.

A word of warning, though. Most weed-covered rocks are slippery, but those covered with green silk weed are particularly treacherous – so steer well clear of them if you wish to avoid broken bones!

Another hazard to beware of is the smooth expanse of blue lias bedrock on which many of the boulders are resting. When wet, this rock becomes as slippery as ice.

In many places the surface of this liassic bedrock is sprinkled liberally with fossils, like the currants in a cake. Most plentiful of all are the bullet-shaped inner shells of primitive squid-like creatures called belemnites. More decorative, however, are the whirled and ridged ammonites – the ancestors of our present-day nautilus.

Many of the ammonites found along this stretch of beach are embedded in pieces of glittering, golden-hued iron pyrites. The



smaller ones can be about the size of one's fingernail, and are much sought after for use in jewellery. Others come much larger; sometimes up to 18 inches in diameter.

After negotiating the main mass of foreshore boulders you will come to another small patch of shingle beach. The set of the inshore currents at this spot causes a wide variety of beachcombing finds to be cast ashore – lobster pot ropes and floats, broken hatch covers, and even the occasional message in a bottle!

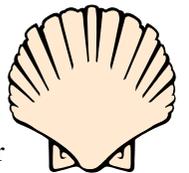


In the days of sail, when shipwrecks were all too frequent, the waves also washed in their tragic quota of human flotsam and jetsam, and that's why this patch of beach came to be known as Dead Man's Cove. Inevitably, during the German U-boat campaign of the Second World War, this cove lived up to its name again, but I'll not spoil your walk with gruesome details.

Immediately beyond Dead Man's Cove the crumbling blue lias cliffs rise vertically above the beach. **THESE CLIFFS ARE SUBJECT TO FREQUENT FALLS**, and on no account should you venture underneath them in your search for fossils. Indeed, this is the main reason why I recommended you to start your walk at low tide. If you keep as close as possible to the low watermark you can pass this danger spot in safety, but even so I don't advise you to linger too long in the vicinity!

These cliff falls really are spectacular. With a roar like thunder a complete slice of the cliff face, several feet thick, collapses in a great cloud of grey dust which can be seen for miles out at sea as it slowly expands and drifts away on the wind.

Heading on along the beach, you now come to a small flat-topped promontory, which has been formed by a mixture of spring water and semi-liquid blue lias oozing down from the cliffs above. In dry weather it is safe to walk with caution across the top of this promontory, but it is unwise to do so after prolonged rain because the blue lias then turns into a treacherous quagmire.



Beyond this promontory, you come to a long stretch of shingle beach, which extends all the way to Charmouth. However, after walking only half a mile along it, you arrive at St. Gabriel's Mouth, where a small stream comes cascading down through a deep gully it has cut in the cliffs.