

Trips with Zdenka

by Zdenka Chmelova



ISLE OF WIGHT, 23th July 2014, day 1

I have always been fascinated by sea and islands. Great Britain is an island too after all and this kind of isolation and exposure to forces of nature create its unique geography. On a smaller scale it is possible to apply a similar view to any of the adjoining islands dotted around the shores of the United Kingdom.

Diamond-shaped Isle of Wight is situated in the English Channel approximately 3-7km off the south coast of England. The island covers an area of 380 km² with about 91 km of coastline. And that was the reason why I decided to visit the island. The Isle of Wight Coastal Path follows the coastline closely for 107 km turning away inland only where the path is inaccessible due to the closeness to the sea. Coastal paths are excellent for walking. They are usually very easy to follow; they offer splendid views of both the sea and the land and depending on the terrain they could be either a gentle stroll or physically demanding hike.

I began my journey to the Isle of Wight on Monday 23th July early in the morning taking the train from Hereford to Portsmouth Harbour. After four and half hours I arrived at the terminal. Portsmouth Harbour railway station is adjacent to the Isle of Wight ferry terminal. The ferries sail to the island every 30 minutes and the crossing of the strait takes approximately 20 minutes.

So, here I am. The ferry is anchored to the pier and passengers leave for the town Ryde. My plan is to walk the coastal path and visit some tourist attractions along the way. The first of them is Osborne House. Considering the opening hours of the house, the length of the coastal path, the walk to the house and my time schedule, I decide to take a bus. It is midday already and moreover the costal path between Ryde and Cowes does not actually follow the coast line at all.

I join the queue for the bus going to Cowes stopping at Osborne House on the way. I do not need to worry where to get off the bus as nearly all the passengers travel to the same destination. The driver knows it and he announces loudly when we reach the tourist attraction.

Osborne House was the private seaside residence of Queen Victoria and her husband Prince Albert. Since Queen Victoria's death little has changed according to her wishes and the house was opened to public. Interiors are filled with fine furniture and works of art that display the personal fondness of the royal couple. No doubt the royal family spent many happy and relaxed days here enjoying the sea and beautiful countryside. The children played in a purpose-built cottage, where they filled up their time with cooking, gardening or looking after animals.



I have to admit I am so beguiled by the place that I leave after five hours. No wonder because there are so many things to see. The house itself is a gem but there are moreover terraces and walled gardens to explore, or you can take a stroll to the Swiss Cottage and down to the beach. It is late afternoon when I finally begin my walk. From Osborne House I walk along the main road to Cowes. Cowes is a pretty town but I am here so late that most shops are closed. I do not waste my time and as soon as I leave the town behind, I join the coastal path.

↑Thatched cottage

There is one thing I have not told you so far. I did not book any accommodation on the Isle of Wight. I carry a sleeping bag and a mat in my rucksack and I hope I will be able to find a suitable place somewhere to sleep out. A quick look at a map tells me that the path goes inland and I decide to sleep near Newbridge. I manage to find a quiet pasture next to a minor road without any houses or farms nearby. Thanks to God there are no sheep or cows close either. The night is warm, I can see stars in the sky and the place is so peaceful that I soon fall asleep.

... to be continued in the next issue.



↑Osborne House Queens Victoria bathing machine