



# Ballard Down/Cliff

Site Code 2.065

OS Grid Ref: SZ 041 812 (Map 194)

GPS: N50:37.829 W1:56.604

Owned by: National Trust

Wind Direction SE - S (140° to 185°)  
Best: SSE (170°)

Farmed by: Mr Derek Smith  
01929 422801

Height AMSL 300ft (100m)  
Top to Bottom 300ft (100m)  
Not Recommended

Nearest Phone: Swanage

Pilot Grades HG No classification  
Ask HG safety Officer

Casualty Units: Major: Poole General  
Minor: Swanage

PG Club Pilot + 10hrs

**Site briefing advisable**

**For your own safety warn the MCA Coastguard Helicopter (01305) 760 439**

**They have been known to fly around from Studland below cliff top height**

Notes by Alastair Florence

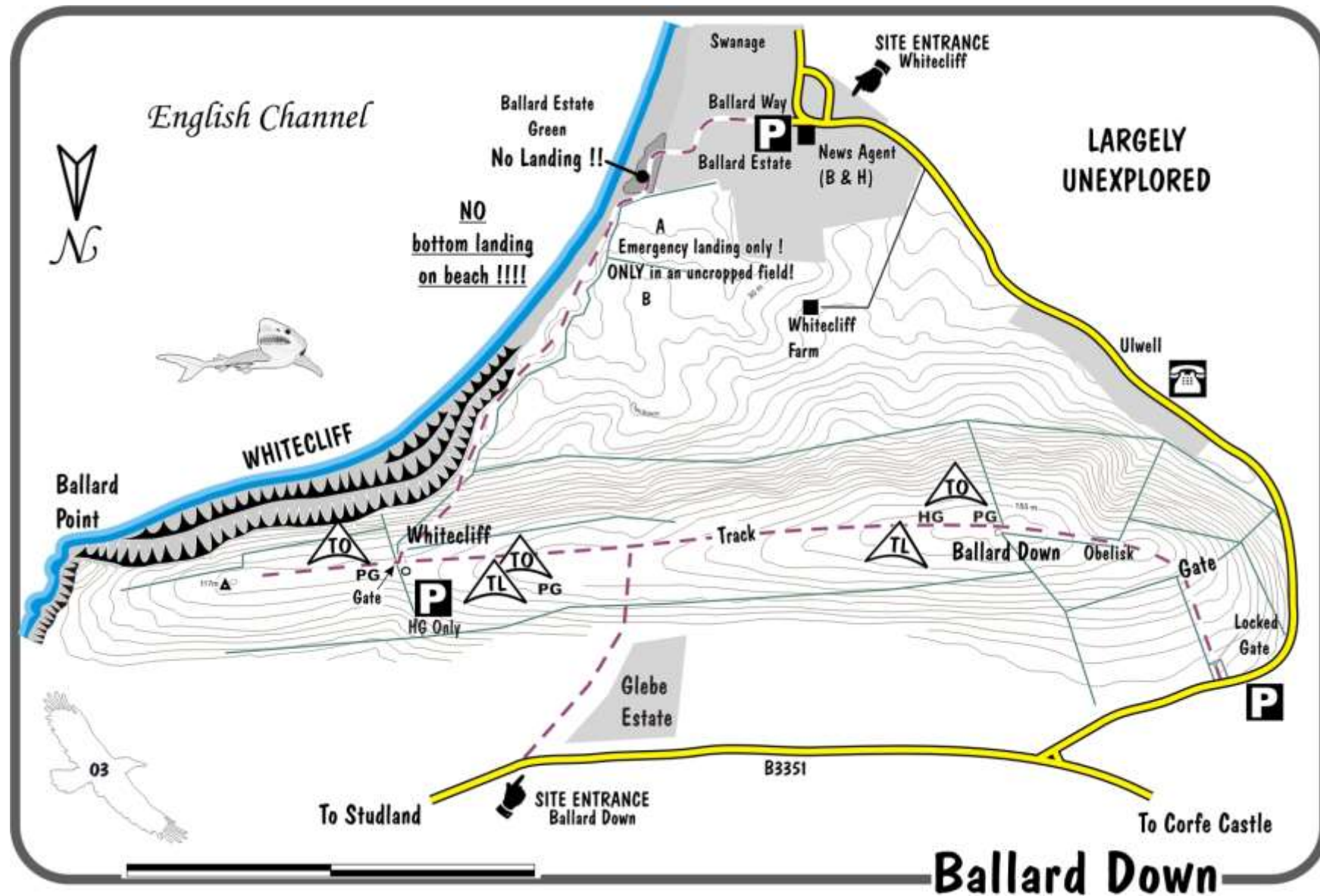
## General Site info

Ballard Down and the Whitecliff combine several sites into one. The Downs are rarely flown in their own right as SSE to SSW is required for the ridge to work well. If the wind is in this sector the cliff and ridge can be flown together. In these conditions pilots are more likely to head to White Horse or Knitson.

The Whitecliff works well from SE to South. Some excellent height gains can be achieved in smooth air. Particularly in Autumn and early winter buoyant sea air provides extensive lift. In summer, sea thermals and thermals off the cliff and beach below have a similar effect.

It is possible to fly around the eastern corner and down to Old Harry rocks when the wind is SE to ESE. **HOWEVER**, bear in mind there is **absolutely no** bottom landing around the corner, only deep water. The cliff around the corner has a significantly different angle of orientation to the rest of the site. Do Not under any circumstances fly around the corner unless you are familiar with the site or have discussed the matter with an experienced pilot on the day in question. If around the corner and you lose lift land before you get anywhere near cliff top height, You will only get one chance.

In moderate to strong SE to ESE winds, the lower cliff to the south of take off is also soarable down toward the hotels. Be watchful of increasing wind speeds here as there is no space to be blown back. Avoid lingering in front of any one building to avoid upsetting residents - the holidaymakers seem to generally enjoy watching from the hotels though.



- Directions**      **From Wareham** - take A351 through Corfe Castle to Swanage, keep on this road through Swanage until you get to the sea front, turn left and head north. The road splits into a one-way system keep right and follow round until you see Newsagents (Benson & Hedges). Take the no-through-road (Ballard Way).
- Alternatively** - take the B3351 from Corfe toward Studland. 200 yards after the large lay-by and lookout point on your left, turn right toward Swanage. Turn right at the next junction, again toward Swanage. As you join the one-way-system drive straight ahead into Ballard Way.
- From the Sandbanks/Studland ferry** – follow the road toward Swanage. After passing through Studland the road climbs and near the top of the hill bare left toward Swanage. As you join the one-way-system drive straight ahead into Ballard Way.
- Parking**              Park on road side in Ballard Way, taking care not to block gateways.
- Access**                Walk into Ballard Private Estate and follow the footpath signs though the estate to the coast path. Follow this to the top of the cliffs you can see to the north.
- Strictly Hang Gliders only** – Access via the track from Glebeland Estate south of Studland is possible once you have obtained a duplicate of the padlock key. Please contact the Sites Officer or Secretary for details.
- Hazards**              Considered by experienced pilots to be the Wessex's most dangerous site. Several serious injuries have been sustained by pilots attempting to bottom land on the beach and colliding with one of the many groynes. Two were lucky not to drown! Note that **THERE IS NO OFFICIAL BOTTOM LANDING.**
- There is nowhere to land below the cliffs to the east of take-off. If the wind has a westerly component the cliffs may not work. Beware of pushing too far east and not being able to get back to safety into wind.
- If the wind speed increases significantly whilst flying it can be difficult to top land as the ridge has a rounded spine back. Being blown back low will result in flying into rotor. The beach can also be very difficult to get onto in these conditions and in a southerly may well be in rotor. Attempt to fly out in front and land in a field leaving via gates - or alternatively if you have plenty of height, run over the back and aim for Studland.
- Pilots sometimes attempt to fly the cliff in an ESE wind. This can sometimes work but occasionally the Whitecliff can be in rotor in these conditions. If any wind is coming up the back of the hill do not attempt to launch and be prepared to fly straight out South for an emergency beach land if rotor is encountered.

**Launching** The usual launch is now from the grass slope at the top of the footpath, once at the top of the ridge walk approx 50m West and launch from here or more westward to avoid rotor from the Gorse on the cliff edge.

It is possible to take-off above the vertical cliffs but watch out for rotor in strong winds. It is now rare for anyone to use this take off though.

If the wind is light you may not be able to stay up. Slope landing is very limited due to scrub so plan your landing options before launching.

**Top Landing** Top land anywhere along the ridge away from the cliffs. Beware the ridge is spine backed.

**Bottom Landing** This is classed as a 'SOARING ONLY' site. THERE IS NO DESIGNATED BOTTOM LANDING AREA. No deliberate top to bottom flights.

**Emergency bottom landings** may be made in the fields below launch as long as they are un-cropped. If the wind has an easterly component these fields may be in rotor. Do not exit back over the fence onto the footpath. Walk up to Whitecliff Farm and exit via the marked footpath which will bring you out near the shop on Ballard way.

**Landing on the beach is not recommended under any circumstances.**

At high tide there is very little beach remaining. The combination of sea, surf and groynes can make a fatal combination if you get it wrong.

**However, some pilots do land on the beach – and IF YOU ARE DETERMINED TO FOLLOW THEM, please consider the following as a minimum – BEFORE COMMITTING YOURSELF!**

- a) Ask yourself if you REALLY have the skills to do this. It often can be far more difficult than experienced pilots make it look. Less than 25 hours? Walk down!
- b) Be certain that you know the state of the tide, and hence the width of the beach.
- c) Appreciate the size of the surf breaking onto the beach.
- d) In easterly winds the low cliffs can provide significant lift making it extremely difficult to actually reach the beach without **losing height very low over the sea -THIS IS EXTREMELY HAZARDOUS!**
- e) The northern most stretch of the beach (almost immediately below take-off) is the widest section of beach.
- f) At high tide this beach can be cut off from the steps making a scramble up crumbling cliffs and through thick gorse necessary.
- g) Under no circumstances land in the vicinity of the groynes and make your approach to the beach either at the furthest point from the groynes or flying away from them.
- h) Land so as to be as far from the water as possible and so as to prevent your wing from over-flying you into the sea.
- i) Avoid landing near or flying low over members of the public on the beach,

you may be confident that you will not hit them but they will not know your skill level and may be concerned.

j) With a strong easterly direction element the wind can be funnelled along the cliff and Southward before reverting to its true direction. This may not be apparent until you are below cliff top height above the beach. You may find that your into wind beat changes rapidly by 180' in this case you will probably not have enough height to turn safely above the sea. Your only option may be a high-speed plough into the shingle beach.

**You Were Warned: Bottom landing is not recommended!**

**Other Rules** No matter how tempting, do not launch from or land on the Green in front of Ballard estate (see map). The estate is privately owned and residents do not wish us to use the Green.

More code of practice than a rule: on light wind days or with a more easterly wind direction you will need to skirt the cliff line closely on your eastward beat to remain in lift. Please display common sense and courtesy to other pilots when flying in these conditions.

**Ridge runs, XC** XC is not really practical here as with most coastal sites. Bournemouth airspace is close behind as is Poole Harbour.

However, with the right conditions it is possible to jump the gap at Ulwell and fly past Knitson toward Corfe and beyond.

**Flying Generally** A very pleasant site to fly with a variety of opportunities dependent on weather conditions on the day.

Possibly the most punishing walk up of all our sites.

Weather conditions can be very fickle here. Sea breeze rarely works on this site and in fact normally has the opposite effect and kills off any breeze completely.

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