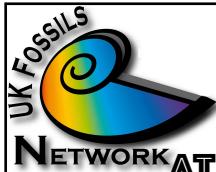




FIELD GUIDE TO FOSSIL COLLECTING AT TIDMOOR POINT & COVE IN DORSET







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in a very different part of Dorset and far from the madding crowd lies Tidmoor Point and Cove, on the Fleet; a saltwater lagoon which stretches from near Abbotsbury, all the way to Weymouth Harbour. It's one of the most tranquil spots at which to collect from Jurassic rocks and the range of fossils to be found along its shores is staggering. Moreover, it's not overly accessible. There is no direct access for coaches or cars, no ice cream vans, no McDonalds or coffee shops and it will require some degree of walking, in order to begin looking for fossils in the Oxford Clay at this site..

The Fleet lagoon shore is a good place for the individual explorers, the lone walker-geologist or a very small group. The site is much less suitable for parties. Erosion rates here are low and the gentle lapping of the lagoonal waters might often be as good as it gets in order to expose fossils, thus the replenishment rate is low. Protected by the shingle barrier of Chesil Beach, the former Jurassic coastline is now a quiet retreat away from the heavy waves, swell and storms gusting up the English Channel. It is certainly nothing like Charmouth, only a few miles further down the coast.

The Fleet Lagoon at Tidmoor Point supports rare wildlife populations, being a vital shelter and feeding area for birdlife. Geologically, it is a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), which helps protect its banks and bedrock from digging and the hammering out of fossils, which can only be collected from *ex situ* (i.e. loose) material.

At Tidmoor Point there is also an Army firing range which, for obvious reasons, cannot be passed at certain times. However, despite these somewhat daunting restrictions, it does not mean that the Fleet Lagoon cannot be used for studying the geological strata or the collection of fossils. It should be considered as a more difficult region than the main cliff sections in other parts of the county, with smaller exposures but often with important information and fossil-content for the specialist. Even so, the experience of collecting fossils from this beautiful part of Dorset certainly has its merits.

So, check the tide times (the Fleet is tidal), bring wellingtons (as it's very muddy here) and a few bags to drop your fossil finds into, a packed lunch and enjoy the peace and tranquility.

GEOLOGY

Both Tidmoor Point and Cove are in the Oxford Clay Formation, although both have different fossils within their boundaries. At the Cove, the *Mariae* biozone is found, whereas the Point has fossils from the *Lamberti* biozone. The zones are named after the dominant ammonite types to be found here, respectively *Quenstedtoceras mariae* and *Quenstedtoceras lamberti*. Both biozones yield a different fauna of ammonite types and differing fossils also. It will be wise to label each bag of finds appropriately when attempting to identify your fossils, if you intend to visit both locations in one visit.



At both Tidmoor Point and Tidmoor Cove, it's a hands and knees operation to find the fossils that are washed out of the clay along the foreshore. The ammonites are plentiful after storms and high tides, along with belemnites. Other fossils occur here including lobster fragments, crinoid stems, gastropods and bivalves, marine crocodile teeth, fish vertebra and teeth and occasional marine reptile vertebrae.



The Weymouth Member of the Oxford Clay Formation crops out in the *Q. mariae* Biozone just below the slipped cliffs of the Furzedown Clay, at Tidmoor Cove. This is the base of the Oxfordian-aged Weymouth Member. The Stewartby Member is present along the Fleet shore from the embayment at Tidmoor Cove as far as the area just beyond Tidmoor Point. This is the Callovian-aged Oxford Clay of the *Q. lamberti* Biozone. Both are famed localities and renowned for pyritous and limonitic casts of small ammonites from both the *Q. lamberti* and *Q. mariae* Biozones.

HOW TO GET TO TIDMOOR POINT

Take the Chickerell Link Road (B3157) from Dorchester and drive to the junction with the Chickerell Road. Turn left at the traffic lights onto Chickerell Road (signposted the Jurassic Coast Road), passing the Chickerell Army Training Camp on your right.

At a distance of about 1/2 mile you'll see a lay-by. It's virtually opposite Tidmoor Holiday Cottages (a holiday let). Park up here. If you overshoot turn next left into Putton Lane and park here instead. Cross over the Chickerell Road on foot and walk down the side of Tidmoor Cottages. It's a concrete path that runs all the way down past the Army Firing Ranges to The Fleet. Having walked almost the entire length of the concrete pathway, if the red flag is flying near the entrance to the Army grounds, or you hear gunfire, you cannot get to the Tidmoor Point beach, as the Army is practicing!

At the bottom of the lane, bear slightly right and go through a gate. Follow the narrow path, crossing wooden planking (which allows access over streams, until you reach the final metal gate. Bear right, through what is marked as 'No Entry'.

Again, if the red flag is flying, you'll find this gate locked and you'll have to detour at this point to your left to **TIDMOOR COVE**. For this location follow the signpost to Ferrybridge. Traverse the small, wide stream and marshy, / muddy area via the wooden bridge. Take the footpath a short distance and drop down onto the beach. This is Tidmoor Cove. You'll see Littlesea Holiday Park to the left in the next bay.

**DO NOT ATTEMPT TO CROSS FROM TIDMOOR POINT
TO THE COVE BY WALKING ON THE FORESHORE.
THERE IS DANGEROUS DEEP MUD HERE!!**

Visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/chickerell-firing-times> to check Army Firing Times at Tidmoor Point.





To continue to **TIDMOOR POINT** bear right through the metal gate and keep bearing right, walking more or less parallel to the coast, until you finally reach Tidmoor Point. There is a concrete slipway where you descend to beach level

Don't be too eager to get onto the beach. Wait until you see the concrete slipway ramp, which means you're in the right spot. Turn right along the beach, where the Oxford Clay is washed out on the foreshore.



Above: The beach entry point at Tidmoor Cove.



Above: The beach at Tidmoor Cove.

A selection of fossils from Tidmoor Point, Lamberti Biozone



*Quenstedtoceras
lamberti*



*Quenstedtoceras
leachi*



*Kosmoceras
spinosum*



*Kosmoceras
tidmoorensense*



*Quenstedtoceras
intermissum*



*Quenstedtoceras
henrici*



A further selection of fossils from
Tidmoor Point, Lamberti Biozone



*Quenstedtoceras
(Eboraciceras)
sutherlandiae.*



*Hecticoceras
punctatum*



Peltoceras sp.



*Distichoceras
bicostatum.*



Hibolites hastata

A selection of fossils from Tidmoor Cove, Mariae Biozone



**Quenstedtoceras
mariae**



**Cardioceras
praecordatum.**



**Creniceras
renggeri**



**Taramelliceras
richei**



**Plesiosaurus cervical
vertebra**



Gryphaea (bilobissa) lituola.



Lobster fragment



Crinoid stems



Notidanus muenster



Sphenodus sp

CLEANING & STORING YOUR FINDS

Cleaning & preservation

Most of the fossils that you will find at Tidmoor Point and Tidmoor Cove have already survived between 161.2 and 155.7 million year! They have been buried in sediment and washed around by the tides. However, treat them with care, as some can be fragile and will need to be cleaned and treated, to allow them to be handled.

Loose clay can be removed very carefully with a toothbrush. Leave them to dry naturally and not on top of a radiator. Pyritic ammonites may, in time, begin to show signs of pyrite disease. If this happens it will be best to discard your specimen as the disease can spread to other fossils in your collection. Preventing the disease is not possible but keep the ammonites dry and preferable stored with a sachet of silica gel.

Any fossil found on a beach or exposed to salt water will need desalination. You do need to wash the seawater out of your fossils as the absorbed salt may lead to long-term damage, Do not be tempted to varnish your fossils as this can leave unsightly surface coating.

Storage

Storage is a matter of preference and small boxes of card or plastic are probably a good place to start (See <https://earthlines.com>). Most importantly, your specimens need a label. A fossil collection will be worthless if you do not, at least, record where you found the fossil, even if you don't know the fossil names - you can always name them at a later time. A simple label like this example will be useful.

Name: *Quenstedtoceras lamberti* (ammonite)

Location: Tidmoor Point, Dorset

Geology: Oxford Clay Formation

Age: Jurassic, Oxfordian Stage, Lamberti Biozone

Date found: November 2024

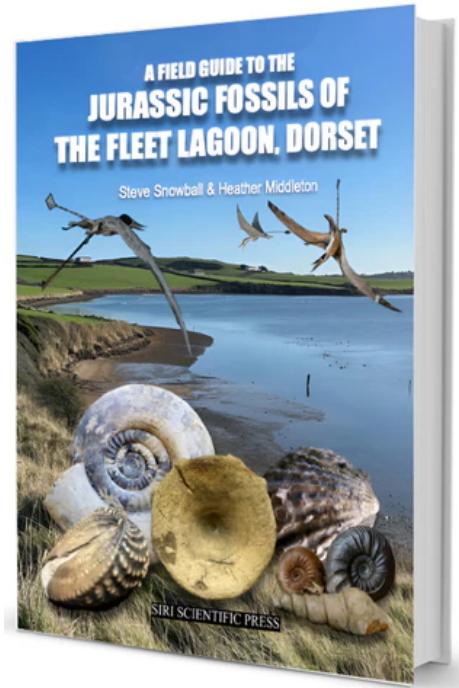
DISCLAIMER

This downloadable PDF is one of a series of general guides to fossil collecting localities and not an extensive manual for health and safety when visiting such sites.

Furthermore, because potential hazards may change over time, prior to undertaking any fossil collecting activities, you need to make yourself aware of any RISKS, DANGERS, HAZARDS and LEGAL IMPLICATIONS associated with visiting and collecting fossils at any particular site.

UK Fossils, authors or any associated parties cannot be held responsible for your failure to do so, nor any consequences thereof.

Enjoy your fossil collecting safely and responsibly.



If you enjoyed fossil collecting along the Fleet, this book is a comprehensive guide to all of the Fleet locations and identification of any finds you might make.

Available directly from Amazon.