



Chines: Smuggling, Shipwrecks and Squabbles!

There are currently a total of 22 chines around the coast of the Isle of Wight. You will notice the word 'currently' – there haven't always been 22, and there won't always be 22 in the future! Chines are one of the most fascinating features that the island has to offer, so let's find out more about them...

Defining chines...

These images show two of the most dramatic chines on the island: Grange/Marsh Chine (left) where two chines merge and form the largest chine



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The word 'chine' comes from the Saxon 'Cinara'. The term 'chine' is a local one; chines are found in Dorset, Hampshire and on the Isle of Wight. If you look at the picture of Whale Chine, you will see that it does, indeed, look like a 'gap' in the cliffs.

You can just see the small river in the picture at the bottom of the chine running out to sea, and you will certainly see the larger river of Grange/Marsh Chine.

Most of the chines on the island are river valleys where a river flows through the coastal cliffs to the sea, although some are now 'dry' as their river has been diverted elsewhere, e.g. Ladder and (Old) Walpen Chines. In other places you may also see a new chine forming as a waterfall drops over the cliff edge and starts to cut a valley into the soft rock.

The majority of the Island's Chines are found on the Isle of Wight's south/south-western coast (as seen on the map, right).

All are found in soft geologies of sands and clays.



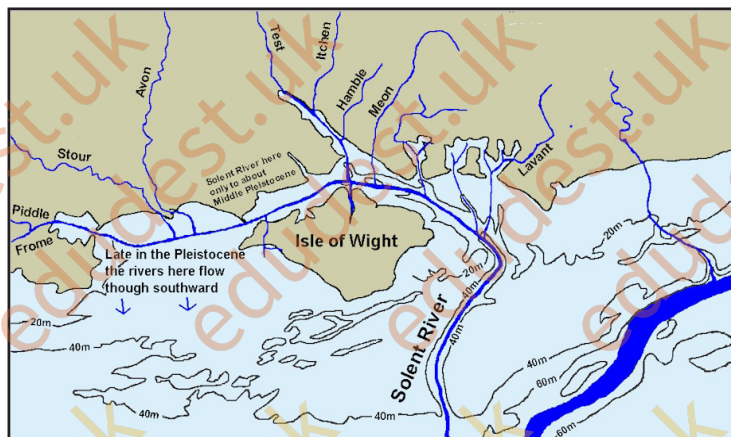
Chine Creation...

Three things are responsible for the formation of these chines: Rising sea levels, coastal erosion and river erosion. You will see from the map that chines develop at the mouths of short rivers.

These rivers originate in the chalk 'downs' a little inland that form the 'spine' of the island, and have to cut their way down to sea level in a short distance.

Therefore, vertical erosion is rapid and they cut a steep valley. In addition, the distance that they have to travel before they reach the sea has been, and still is, getting shorter...

Before sea levels rose at the end of the last Ice Age, about 10,000 years ago, the rivers on the island had a long way to go before they reached the larger rivers in what is now the Channel and Solent (see map).



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Activity: Chine Comparison

This coastal trail pack is deliberately not focused on one particular chine, to encourage exploration of a few. Each one is unique and has its own special character and it is well worth visiting a few to get a real 'feel' for their variety. The following activity is designed to highlight some of the key differences between the chines that you visit!

Name of Chine	Sketch (or take a photo!)	Main characteristics/features

Chines through time...

The chines on the Isle of Wight have a colourful past and a tale or two to tell!



Smuggling! Chines were a popular location for smuggling, with their safe sandy beaches to land on and their valleys providing a sheltered and secluded route inland. It was once big business on the Island, with the squires, wealthy farmers and estate owners organising the 'dodgy deals'!

Shipwrecks! The south-west coast of the island is exposed and the waters can be treacherous, also the coast is dotted with countless shipwrecks. At the foot of Whale Chine, on a calm, clear day, the boilers of the *Cormorant* Steam Ship can be still be seen. It ran aground in thick fog on 21st December 1886 and, over the next two years, Islanders stripped her of her cargo and sold it.

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protect against this. The steep gorge of Shanklin Chine was used as an assault course to train commandos, and a secret pipeline (PLUTO) was laid through the chine and under the Channel to carry fuel to the D-Day landing beaches in France.

Today modern technology means that shipping is safer and shipwrecks are, thankfully, very rare. The days of smuggling are in the past (or are they?!) and we are at peace rather than war. So, what are the chines used for today?

Well, **fishermen** still use them to launch boats as they provide access to the beach from the cliff top.

Equally, they provide easy access points for **tourists** and **visitors**, who want to go to the beach to go surfing, or fossil hunt along the beaches of the south west.

Settlements have grown up over time around some of the chines, e.g. Brook, and others have campsites/caravan/holiday parks for tourists, e.g. Grange Farm at Grange Chine (pictured). The chines provide shelter along an otherwise exposed coastline and birds, insects and a wide range of wildlife thrive in them, making them popular with naturalists and bird-watchers.

The future of the chines is uncertain. They are dynamic, ever-changing features and continued coastal erosion and rising sea levels could mean that some disappear altogether, while others may develop as new streams cut valleys into the soft rocks.



Activity: A Smuggler's Poem

The extract contains two verses from Rudyard Kipling's 'A Smuggler's Song'. Sit and imagine the days of smuggling in the chines. Can you make up a story or poem and read it to one another?

'IF you wake at midnight, and hear a horse's feet,
Don't go drawing back the blind, or looking in the street,
Them that ask no questions isn't told a lie.
Watch the wall my darling while the Gentlemen go by.

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