

Site: Ship Rock		Ref. No.17
Location: 2 km SSW of the West Pier, Hove.		
Lat./Long. position of centre of site: 50° 47.95' N 0° 09.90' W	OS grid ref. of centre of site: TQ 293 016	Author: Robert Irving
Sea bed type: Low-lying chalk reef/cliff	Depth range (below chart datum): 9 - 11 m	Date Identified: June 2001

Summary

Ship Rock is a sublittoral exposure of low-lying chalk cliff (or ledge) approximately 2 km SSW of the West Pier, Hove. The cliff lies at a depth of 9-11 m BCD and is reported to be just over 100 m long. The maximum height of the cliff is 1.0 m (along two short sections), though it has an average height of nearer 0.5 m. It is assumed this is the same site known by some divers as Kingswest Ledge. Indeed, this may be a more appropriate name for the whole linear feature. It is reported that sections of the cliff appear to have collapsed, possibly the result of fishing gear being towed over them.

Biological description

As with the other sections of sublittoral chalk cliffs present off Sussex, the line of the cliff forming Ship Rock runs approximately WSW/ENE. The cliff face itself faces the shore (i.e. northwards), the top of the cliff being on the seaward (although shallower side).

The cliff is roughly stepped for much of its length, with many fissures, crevices and holes. Many of the exposed sheltered surfaces are heavily silted. The cliff's horizontal top has sparse foliose red algae growing on it, with occasional clumps of hydroids on the current-swept edge. The vertical chalk faces have a general covering of hydroid-bryozoan turf and are frequently riddled by piddock holes (most likely to be *Pholas dactylus*). Other fauna, such as colonial ascidians (e.g. *Aplidium punctum*), sponges and erect bryozoans cover the chalk surface. Occasional clusters of *Bispira volutacornis* tubeworms are present in places. The base of the cliff has been eroded in places to form small caves, often occupied by crustacean, especially prawns and edible crabs *Cancer pagarus*. Other mobile fauna present include occasional velvet swimming crabs *Necora puber*, goldsinny *Ctenolabrus rupestris*, ballan wrasse *Labrus bergylta*, tompot blennies *Parablennius gattorugine*, and leopard-spotted gobies *Thorogobius ephippiatus*. Triggerfish *Balistes carolinensis* have also been recorded from this vicinity and seen sheltering within the small caves. At the foot of the cliff, horizontal exposed chalk bedrock is present, with scattered chalk boulders, cobbles and mixed sediments.

Justification

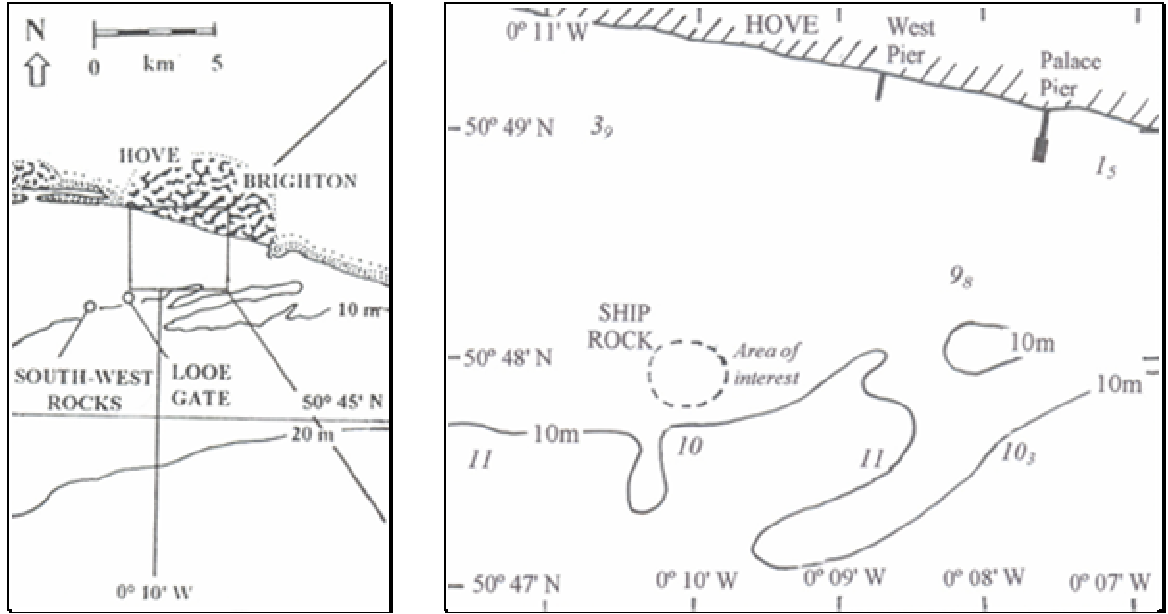
Sussex is the only location on the British Isles where chalk strata appear as offshore, linear 'cliffs' (i.e. vertical faces between 1-4 m in height). These exposures are therefore of regional, if not national, importance, more as an unusual feature rather than on account of the marine communities they possess. Other sublittoral chalk cliff exposures off Sussex include the Worthing Lumps (mSNCI ref. 8), South-West Rocks (mSNCI ref. 9) and Looe Gate (mSNCI ref.10).

References:

- Irving, R.A. 1998. *Sussex Marine Life – an identification guide for divers*. Lewes, East Sussex County Council.
- Irving, R.A. 1999. *Report of the Sussex Seasearch Project, 1992-1998*. Published by the Sussex SEASEARCH Project, English Nature, Lewes and Brighton & Hove Council, Brighton.
- McDonald, K. 1985. *Dive Sussex – A Diver Guide*. Underwater World Publications, London.
- Wood, C. (ed.) 1984. *Sussex Sublittoral Survey: Selsey Bill to Beachy Head*. Marine Conservation Society, SE Branch.
- Wood, C. 1992. *Sublittoral Chalk Habitats in southern England*. Report of the Marine Conservation Society, SE Group Chalk Cliffs project 1985-1991. Marine Conservation Society, Ross-on-Wye.

Dive nos.: Sussex Sublittoral Survey (83/30) Sussex SEASEARCH 713/49-51, 168-170, 185-187 & 202.

Site location



Diagrammatic representation of site:

