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**A description of the principal picturesque beauties, antiquities, and geological phenomena, of the Isle of Wight**

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**London, 1816**

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Preface.

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## P R E F A C E.

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**T**HE account of the Isle of Wight, contained in the following pages, is the result of observations made in the years 1799, 1800, and 1801; of which I passed the summer months in the island, visiting repeatedly almost every part which contained any thing worthy of notice, making copious notes and numerous sketches on the spot, and measuring many heights with the barometer or line: these materials were reduced into nearly their present form, and prepared for publication in the year 1802, and many of the sketches were etched by myself in the soft varnish as illustrations of the written descriptions. Circumstances merely of a private nature occasioned me to lay aside the whole for ten years, during which period, as the Island was repeatedly visited by many persons well qualified to investigate and describe both its beauties, and the great singularity of its natural appearances and structure, I had expected that my work would have been superseded by the labours of later travellers. As, however, this was not the case, and many of the most important facts in that part of natural science lately called Geology, and which I had imperfectly noticed in two memoirs presented to the Linnæan Society in the year 1800, and published in the sixth volume of their Transactions, still remained unnoticed even by those who had visited the Island with an express view to such enquiries, I was induced

to re-examine my own work, and at length prepare it for publication.

This revision made me sensible that much yet remained to be done before I could myself be satisfied with my work, and as I felt my own strength and activity unequal to the exertions required, I requested Mr. Webster, who was not unacquainted with natural history, and who, to the talents of an expert draftsman, added the more valuable qualities of most scrupulous accuracy and patient investigation; to revisit such parts of the Island as I had examined imperfectly, to view some few points which I had not seen, and to extend his researches into that part of Dorsetshire where it was evident that the great chalk range of the Isle of Wight reappeared, after being cut off by the sea for near 12 miles. The result of his repeated visits was in every respect most highly satisfactory. The notes and drawings made by him in those places which I had myself described, agreed in general so singularly with mine, as to give me a full confidence not only in his accuracy, but my own. His further enquiries detected some errors into which I had fallen; and his survey of the coast of Dorsetshire, not only confirmed my suspicions that something curious would be found there, but discovered many appearances absolutely unparalleled in the history of the highly interesting chalk formation of this county, and its superior and inferior strata.

These observations of Mr. Webster, which I am sensible constitute the most valuable part of the book, could not without injustice to him as well as to the subject, be incorporated into my work. I have, therefore, printed my own part as it was originally written, referring in some short notes to Mr. Webster's

further observations, and given the whole of his researches in his own words: and I am well assured that every lover of science will readily pardon the few repetitions which this arrangement has occasioned, when they read Mr. Webster's masterly descriptions.

Not being satisfied with the execution of those plates I had etched, and my eyesight not permitting me to hope that I could by re-engraving mend those already done, or execute the many which yet remained to do, I thought it best to engage those two excellent artists, Messrs. W. and G. Cooke, to execute the whole of the views, under the joint inspection of Mr. Webster and myself: of the beauty of the Plates I need not speak; but it is right to observe, that in no instance has accuracy been sacrificed to the effect of the engraving. It was my wish to give them rather as finished etchings, than highly wrought engravings; as more labour would have very much increased the expense, without an addition to, perhaps with a diminution of, their spirit and accuracy.

The Maps of the Island itself, and of the part of Dorsetshire described, have been laid down by Mr. Webster from the best accessible materials. All the published surveys are very defective, both in the positions of the places given, the outline of the coast, and the shapes of the hills. Perhaps the old map of Taylor, published in the year 1759, and now grown rare, is on the whole the best. The great survey of the Island, making a part of the general map of England, now constructing by the Board of Ordnance, under the direction of Colonel Mudge, is unfortunately still withheld from the public.—I cannot too highly express my sense of the liberality with which the hydrographical

department of the Admiralty gave me every information consistent with their regulations. By their assistance, the outline of the coast was rendered much more accurate. The forms of the hills, together with the shading, expressive in some degree of their relative heights, and the greater or lesser depression of the valleys or breaks in them, have been very carefully inserted by Mr. Webster from the other maps, checked and corrected by his own observations. All those points whose positions are given in the Account of the Trigonometrical Operations, published by Colonel Mudge, are inserted from that account, and the subordinate places are taken without danger of material error, from the maps. It has not, however, been my wish to crowd the map with useless details, much less to fill it with work which, however it may improve the appearance, certainly adds nothing to the real value or usefulness of maps.

The sections which accompany the maps were made by Mr. Webster with great care, and deduced from the numerous observations made by himself and me, in many different parts of the country described; and though some errors may, perhaps, be unavoidable, they will I hope be found on the whole to give no inadequate idea of the stratification of these tracts.

Whenever, in the course of the work, measures either of altitude or distance are given in precise numbers, they are either the results of barometrical observations, or the trigonometrical operations of the gentlemen employed in the great survey; and are, of course, to be depended on within a very small quantity. Those not mentioned as being near, or about such or such quantities, are either approximate estimations by the eye, or taken from inferior authorities.

During the progress of editing this work, I have communicated several of the principal facts and many of the engraved plates to divers friends, and I am informed that several gentlemen well qualified to observe and delineate these remarkable appearances, have within these last two years visited the Island for that purpose. Under these circumstances, and without the least pretence to an exclusive right to publish on this subject, I hope I shall be acquitted of unreasonable vanity, if I claim to myself the exclusive merit of having been the first observer of the high inclination of the strata of chalk, and the adjacent beds in the Isle of Wight, and the shattered state of the flints in that chalk: a discovery which has led to so many and so important subsequent observations. I must further observe, that as the Island, small as it is, affords many rare and perhaps quite singular geological phenomena, it also is, from its very smallness and the nature of its coasts, which present almost in every part an high and precipitous front to the sea, peculiarly adapted for the investigation of its structure. It is no easy matter to obtain correct ideas of the strata even of countries of mines, and in those extensive tracts where mines are not found, so few openings are made to any considerable depth, that it is almost impossible to obtain that sort of knowledge, which in the Isle of Wight and the coast of Dorsetshire seems to force itself upon the eye, and renders it quite unaccountable that it should so long have been entirely disregarded.

Though all the plates are referred to and described in the body of the work, it appeared to me useful to give a sort of descriptive index to them in a detached form. This is not only convenient, but will enable those who may look over the plates

without reference at the same time to the text, to form a general idea of the several appearances of the objects described more at large in the work. In this view they may be considered as an abstract or compendium of the contents of the book.

So many accounts of the Isle of Wight have been already given to the public, several of them possessing very considerable merit, that it has been difficult not to repeat, in some degree, what has been said before: it has been, however, my aim to pass lightly over what has been described by others, particularly in the parts relative to the scenery and the antiquities: under the latter head, especially, I trust it will be found that most of the objects described and engraved, are either new, or had been very imperfectly noticed in previous publications. The geological part had been scarcely touched upon, or so inaccurately treated, that the Island may be considered as untrodden ground. M. De Luc alone has described with accuracy the small part of the Island which he investigated.

If what I now give to the public shall contribute to their amusement or instruction, I hope that my errors or omissions may meet their indulgence.