

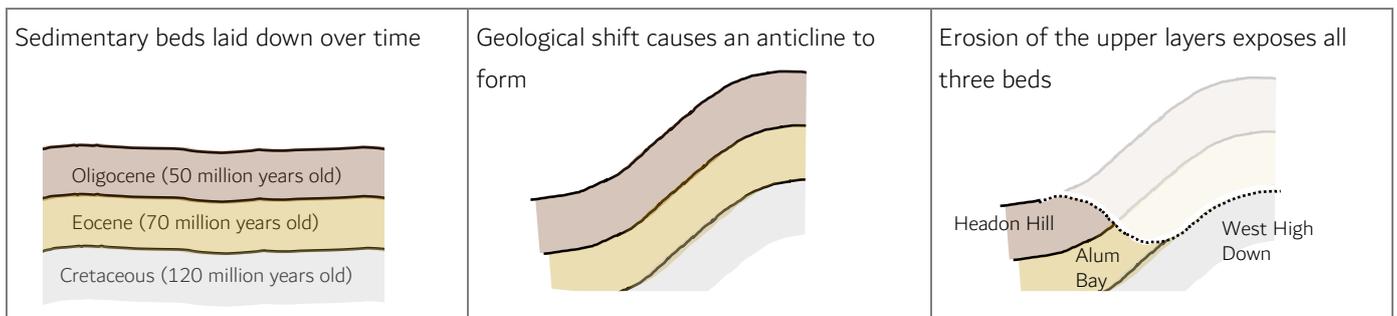
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Description

- Alum Bay is found in the far west of the Isle of Wight at the foot of the Needles Landmark Attraction and facing the Needles themselves.
- The bay is famously known for the cliffs of vertically running beds of coloured sands and clays that date to the Eocene (around 70 million years ago).
- The name Alum Bay is thought to have come from the area's association with mining for potassium aluminium sulphate (a fixing agent for dye in textile production) though it is unclear if any was actually found there ¹.

Geological history

- The vertical beds that have given the cliffs their distinctive looks became exposed as a result of a geological shift 10 million years ago. This exposed the Oligocene beds at Headon Hill and the Cretaceous beds of West High Down ².



References

¹ [The Alum in Alum Bay](#)

² [The Needles Landmark Attraction](#)

- The exposed cliffs in the bay display a wide range of coloured sands and clays - hues of grey, black, white, yellow, orange, brown, red and green are seen.
- The colours come from the sands and clays being imbued with differing amounts of certain minerals.

As a visitor attraction

- By the early 1800s tourists had started to come to the bay to see the sands, many leaving with glass vials layered with the sand - a souvenir that is still sold today.
- Taking sands directly from the cliffs is now prohibited. The cliffs themselves are protected and in some areas the cliffs are highly unstable.
- In 1837 a pier was built to accommodate steamers arriving from the mainland but suffered damage in 1926 and subsequently collapsed into the sea. A seasonal jetty remains to allow tour giving craft to dock.
- Victorian visitors enjoyed using bathing machines on the beach and would walk down the steep cliff path of the chine to reach it. A chair lift was built in 1973 taking visitors to and from the beach.
- Steps down to the beach have had to be rebuilt and repaired a number of times due to landslides and instability in the chine cliffs.



View of Alum Bay facing north east