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Description

- The A3055, more commonly known as the Military Road, is a 17km stretch of coastal road running between Freshwater Bay in the west to Chale in the south of the Isle of Wight.
- It is frequently cited as being one of the most picturesque roads in Europe due to its stunning views of the chalk cliffs of the island seen when one heads west along it. Its beauty makes it an extremely popular route for visiting cyclists and motorbike riders to take.
- Records of a coastal track appear in 1860 when it was used as a means of moving troops during the Napoleonic wars. The road remained in private ownership until 1930 and was then formally built as a road in 1936.¹

The problem

- In 1980, during resurfacing work, a number of fissures were found under the road, running parallel to the coastline in the area closest to Compton Bay. These were between 30 and 60 metres long and in some places 200mm wide, showing worrying evidence of cliff movement and possible collapse, as well as destruction of the road, in the future.
- It is now believed that it is unlikely that, without intervention, the road will be viable or safe beyond 2030. In some sections the road is now fewer than five metres from the cliff edge.²



The discovery of the faultlines underneath the road surface.

References

¹ [Geotechnical Study - Afton Down](#)

² [PLANS TO STOP 'LIFELINE' MILITARY ROAD FALLING INTO THE SEA REFUSED BY COUNCILLORS - Isle of Wight News - Island Echo](#)

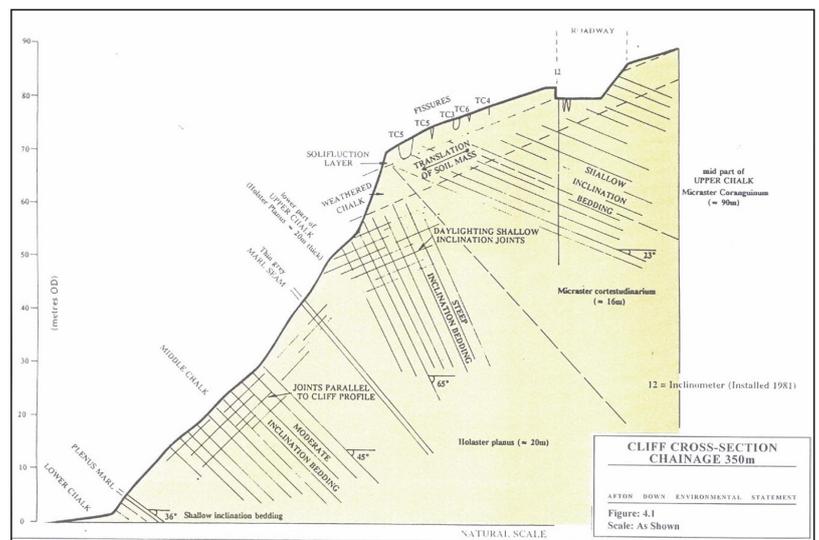
Management

- On discovery of the faults, tilt monitors were installed which, when triggered, sent direct alarms to Newport police station. In 1997, 44 inclinometers and 6 extensometers were secured into the cliff face to allow for further monitoring and automated road closure signs were put in place to allow for the immediate closure of the road should any movement be detected.³
- A series of ground anchors were also installed to try to halt any large scale movement and 27 piles were dug into the cliff face to try to hold the road in place. A large section of the popular coastal footpath that rises onto the downs alongside the road from Freshwater Bay was closed in 2023. A campaign group 'Save Our Military Road' has been established which aims to advocate for the road and for local people who do not want to see it fall into the sea.⁴

Secondary problems

Many local people are frustrated by the seeming lack of drive by local authorities and local land owners to protect the future of the Military Road, but management of the area is extremely complex⁶:

- Erosion is needing to be managed from two directions. Both the actions of the sea and subaerial processes are at work on the cliff and the road. Erosion from strong south westerly waves is undercutting areas of the cliff and there is the creation and enlargement of chins that destabilise the cliffs as a result of overland flow off the Downs.⁵
- The faults are not isolated to one area and different parts of the road are experiencing different rates of movement. Therefore it is difficult to find one solution that will suit all areas of the road.
- The land around the road is owned and managed by a variety of different stakeholders, each with their own vision of how the road should be used and managed. Some of the surrounding land holds national designations such as being Sites of Special Scientific Interest and a large section falls under the designation of Heritage Coasts. Any works will likely have an adverse effect on sensitive wildlife habitats and the beauty of the area.



An examination of the fault lines underneath the Military Road show how complex they are and how difficult it is to predict future movement.¹

- The Shoreline Management Plan for this section of the Island is 'no active intervention'. The value of the land neighbouring the Military Road is deemed not high enough to warrant a change in strategy.

References

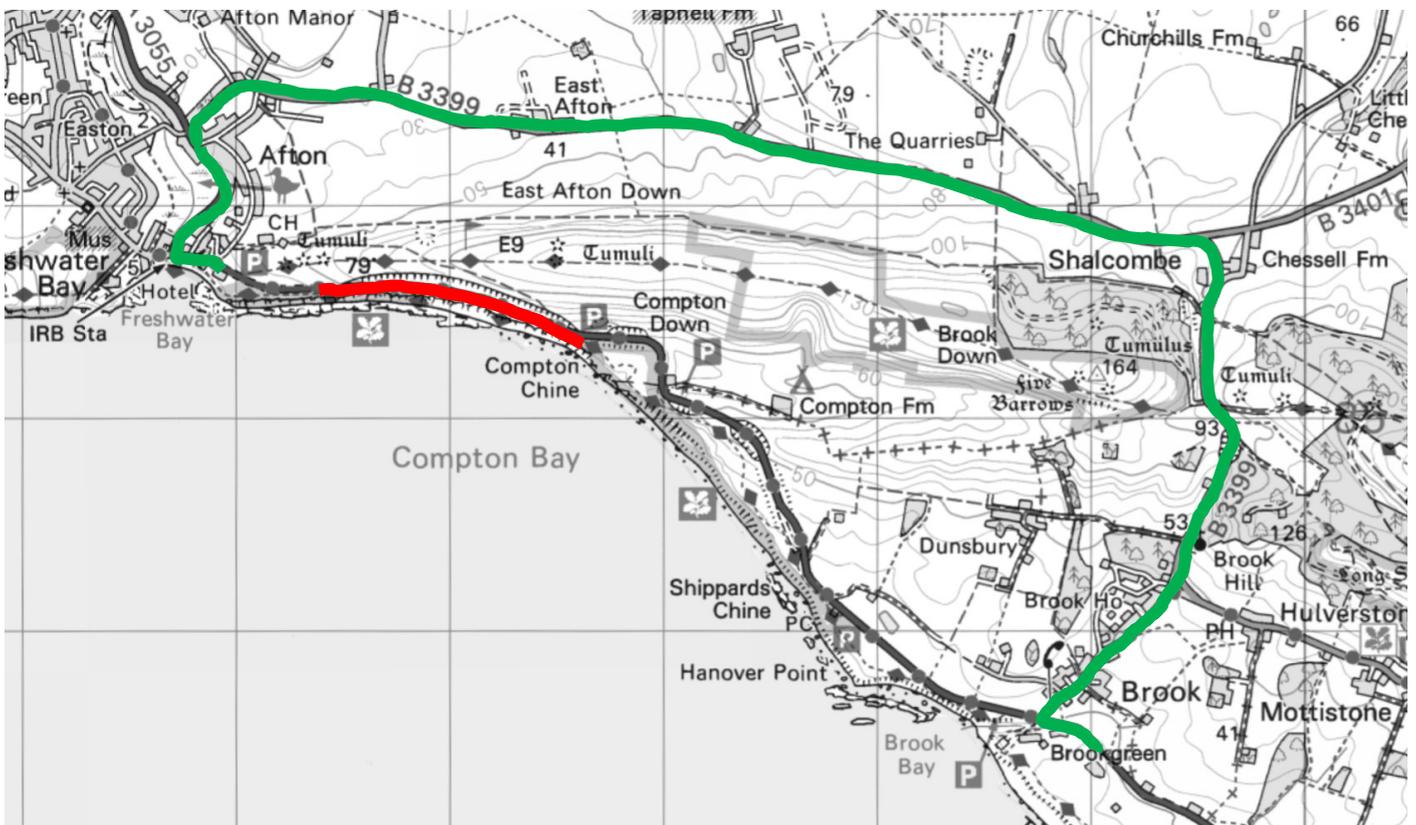
- ³ [Revealed: 'Early warning system' on Military Road hasn't worked for over a decade](#)
- ⁴ [Military Road: Potential inland rerouting to guarantee route for a further 20 years being discussed](#)
- ⁵ [BBC - Isle of Wight Military Road faces erosion threat](#)
- ⁶ [Military Road | IOW | National Trust](#)

- The landscape is a complex pattern of topography and geology that make it difficult to model how the landscape will change in the future, especially as a changing climate is likely to bring more extreme and less predictable weather events.
- Any management plan will be extremely expensive and funded through the Isle of Wight council rather than central government. It is unclear how the local authority would be able to raise sufficient funds to protect the Military Road given their current levels of debt (£182 million in 2025) and the limited payback that any management of the road would bring.



Management strategies under consideration

- A 26m long wall to surround the most vulnerable section of the Military Road and 21m deep piles to be put in place to stabilise the cliff edge. This is deemed a temporary solution while other options are considered.²
- Build a by pass around the most dangerous area (> £0.5 million)
- Create a permanent rerouting of the road, encompassing a much larger area (> £20 million)
- Close the largest and most dangerous section of the road and divert all Military Road traffic through the village of Brook. Brook village is currently not designed for large volumes of traffic so some road restructuring will likely have to take place.



Section of the Military Road that is most vulnerable to collapse

Proposed rerouting of traffic through Brook village