

A Rocky Ramble Around the Head

An easy stroll around the dramatic cliffs of one of mainland Britain's most westerly points.

DISTANCE 3.5 miles (5.7km) **MINIMUM TIME** 2hrs

ASCENT/GRADIENT 425ft (130m) ▲▲▲ **LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY** +++

PATHS Coast path, clear paths across heathland, 1 stile

LANDSCAPE Dramatic cliffs, heather- and gorse-covered hillsides

SUGGESTED MAP OS Explorer OL35 North Pembrokeshire

START/FINISH Grid reference: SM 734271

DOG FRIENDLINESS Care needed on cliff tops and near livestock

PARKING Whitesands Beach

PUBLIC TOILETS At start

Steeped in legend, peppered with the evidence of civilisations past, and scenically stunning, it would be difficult to imagine a more atmospheric place than St David's Head. For full effect, visit at sunset and watch the sky turn red over the scattered islets of the Bishops and Clerks.

St David's Head

Carn Llidi, a towering monolith of ancient rock that has all the attributes of a full-blown mountain, yet stands only 594ft (181m) above sea level, dominates the headland. Its heather- and gorse-covered flanks are alive with small heathland birds, which chatter from the swaying ferns and dart for cover in the hidden crannies of dry-stone walls.

The coast, when you meet it, is at its intricate finest; a succession of narrow zawns (clefts), broken up by stubborn headlands that thrust defiantly into the ever-present swells. The Head itself is magnificent and a few minutes spent exploring will quickly uncover a series of rocky terraces that offer shelter from the wind and stunning views over the ocean to Ramsey Island.

The Warrior's Dyke

Despite its hostile demeanour, St David's Head was once home to a thriving Iron Age community who lived in huts and kept their stock in a field system, the remains of which are still visible. The headland, naturally guarded by the ocean on three sides, was also defended by the Clawydd-y-Milwry (the Warrior's Dyke) at its eastern edge. The dyke is actually formed by three ditches and two ramparts that cut across the neck of the headland. The main bastion, a dry-stone wall that would have once stood around 15ft (4.6m) tall, is still easily visible as a linear pile of stones and rocks. Within the fort there are a number of standing stones, stone circles and the remains of basic huts. The defences are thought to have been built around AD 100.

Burial Chambers

At least 3,000 years older, but well worth seeking out, is Coetan Arthur, a neolithic quoit, or burial chamber, which stands directly above a narrow

ST DAVID'S HEAD

zawn, bounded on its eastern walls by the red-coloured crags of Craig Coetan, a popular climbing venue. Coetan Arthur consists of a 12ft (3.7m) long capstone, propped up on a smaller rock. The quoit would have originally been covered with earth to form a mound, but this has long since been eroded away. There is evidence of several more burial chambers near the summit of Carn Llidi. Happily both the headland and Carn Llidi are in the care of the National Trust, and you are free to wander at will to investigate these fascinating sites, although you should bear in mind that they are Scheduled Ancient Monuments and protected by law.



WALK 2 DIRECTIONS

1 From Whitesands Beach head back up the road, pass the campsite, and a track on the left, and then take the second track on the left. Bear right where it splits and continue around a left-hand bend to walk up to the buildings. Keep left to walk between the houses, then carry on to a gate.

2 Turn right on to the open heathland and follow the footpath along the wall beneath Carn Llidi. Pass the track that drops to the youth hostel on the right and continue around to where the path splits. Take the higher track and keep going in the same direction until, at the corner of a wall, a clear track runs diagonally left towards the coast.

WHILE YOU'RE THERE

The views from the rocky crest of Carn Llidi are among the finest on the whole coast – especially delightful at sunset. The easiest ascent is from the western side, where a broad track leads up the ridge past the ruined wartime buildings.

- 3** Follow this to the coast path, where there's a large fingerpost, and turn left to hug the cliff tops. At Porth Llong, the path bears right to climb to a cairn. The headland is a labyrinth of paths and tracks, but for maximum enjoyment try to stick as close to the cliff tops as possible as you round a number of narrow zawns. The official coast path doesn't go as far as the tip of the peninsula, but plenty of other tracks do, so follow one as far as you wish.

WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK

Apart from a large shop selling snacks and drinks in the car park, the best place to eat and drink near this walk is St David's itself. The Farmers Arms is the pick of the bunch, boasting a wonderful patio area, which can be a real suntrap on a summer afternoon. For coffee, try Pebbles Yard Gallery Espresso Bar, in the centre.

- 4** From the tip, turn left and make your way through the rocky outcrops on the southern side of the headland. As you approach Porthmelgan you'll pick up an obvious path that traverses the steep hillside down into a valley, which shelters a small stream.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

The small islets west of the headland are the Bishops and Clerks. The northernmost and largest is North Bishop and the southernmost, crowned with a lighthouse, is South Bishop. The others all have individual names but are most often just referred to as the Clerks.

- 5** Cross the stream and climb up the steps on the other side. Continue to a kissing gate where the National Trust land ends and maintain your direction. Pass above Porth Lleuog and the distinctive rocky promontory of Trwynhwrddyn, which is worth a visit in its own right.
- 6** The path then drops steeply down to the road at the entrance to Whitesands Beach.

