

THE PEMBROKESHIRE COAST PATH

JUNE 2012

The Pembrokeshire Coast Path is a National Trail, one of three in Wales, running from Amroth in the south to St Dogmaels in the north. Its length is 186 miles.



Day 0. Wednesday 13th June.

The day began with a walk down the hill to Malton Station where I boarded the Trans-Pennine Express bound for Manchester. Sitting back and watching the landscape, I had time to think about what I had let myself in for. Were the cliff paths too steep? Could I cope with sixteen consecutive days of walking? Were my tide calculations correct? As for the landscape, I enjoyed the Kirkham Gorge from the train window, and likewise the flat plain into Leeds. The West Yorkshire landscape began well but ended with industrial clutter and an awful landfill site as the train approached Manchester Piccadilly. The Manchester to Swansea train passed through lowlands with rivers and high green-covered hills. At Swansea the rain began as I boarded my last train of the day which went out to Carmarthen and reversed back to Kilgetty where there is a request stop. Had the guard noted my request? I sighed with relief as the train stopped, on time at 17:25.

Now I could stretch my legs and walk to Amroth, but the route was far from simple and soon I was struggling with a fallen tree, a caravan park, a road that went nowhere and a climb. The difficulties overcome, I at last had a view of the sea far below me. The blue of the water and the gold of the sand were bathed in sunlight and I was thrilled. There was a long climb down to beach level and I then walked to the end of the sea front to the stream which marked the beginning of the Coast Path. Only then did I look for my B&B and a restaurant.

Distance 4.1 miles.

[A long day on the railways and an exciting first view of the sea and the Coast Path.]

Day 1. Thursday 14th June. Amroth to Penally.

I woke to the sound of a strong wind. From my bedroom window I could see angry waves and grey-green water. There was cloud, and mist out to sea, but at least, no rain. I made a good start after breakfast, along the windy front, up the steep slope to the cliff top and along the path. Through the gaps in the foliage there were views of the sea and the rocks below. I heard myself say "Wow" and self-consciously I turned to see whether anyone had heard me. I really had started. The path joined a minor road which sloped steeply down to the beach at Wiseman's Bridge. Just beyond the bridge I met a woman who said that she had seen me on the previous evening: she thought that I had completed the Coast Path, so I had to tell her that I had walked just two or three miles of it.



The Coast Path follows the route of a former horse-drawn railway which had brought coal to the little port of Saundersfoot, and on the beach is a strange outcrop of rock produced by wave erosion of a coal seam. At the end of the track is the first of three tunnels, quite long, very dark and lit by ankle-level red led lights, powered by solar panels mounted on the rocks. The other tunnels are shorter, and they lead into Saundersfoot, which is a busy little town with a thriving marina. Beyond the car park, I found the next path, up and up to Rhode Wood. Here the undulations, the mud and the exposed tree roots all conspired to make things difficult, but the path was close to the cliff edge and from time to time there were fine views of the sea below. A little detour led to Monkstone point, but the view through the mist was not worth the effort. The woodland gave way to open fields, less claustrophobic than the wood, and containing a wealth of wild flowers; Campion, Harts Fern, Buttercup, Bramble in flower, Dog Rose, Fuchsia both as hedge and as shrub, Valerian, Iris and Birdsfoot Trefoil.

Later, I met two young men, well younger than me, dressed in army combat gear, but with lightweight packs. They were in their eleventh and final day on the Coast Path, and looking very fit. On the whole of my trek, they were the only walkers who had walked or were going to walk, the whole of the Coast Path. After more ups and downs, the path reached a minor road sloping down towards Tenby, the town with coloured walls, and a Mediterranean look, even in the mist. Below the wall on my left was a collection of allotments and a guy tending a bonfire.



There was a path down to the beach, allowing me to walk across the sand and to view a giant lump of rock in the form of a pyramid. Having walked round the headland and the castle ruins, I looked out to Caldey Island and then turned back into the town and found a pub serving coffee, which was good and strong. As I sipped it, I watched a group of young Mums, nursing their babies and exchanging their tales of infant problems. Well, there was no underage drinking. And provided specially for them were sofas covered in floral patterns.

It was raining as I left the pub, so I reached for my over-trousers and then headed for the South Beach where there was a quiet spot for my lunch. The sand dunes gave way to a minor road leading to the golf links where there was a packed car park and golfers everywhere. Along the dune path there was a solitary walker approaching. He was very cheerful and insisted that he liked walking in rain. Next I took a path through the MoD firing range - there was no red flag - and headed towards Giltar Point. The sea was quite rough, but the rain had ceased and I enjoyed the wind and the waves. Along the MoD boundary the cliff path became steeper until I reached Valleyfield Top, where the village path doubled back, down a field track and under the railway.

Penally was my destination and the B&B was easy to find. I hung my over-trousers on a hook in a small hallway and was shown up to my room. After the ups and downs of the day I was given the top floor, the whole of the top floor, with lots of space a good shower room and a fine sea view. It was, however, a very cold room. Later, I walked to the village pub where the welcome was friendly but where the food was poor.

Distance: 11.4 miles.

[A great start, lots to see, morning mist and afternoon rain.]

Day 2. Friday 15th June.

Penally to Freshwater East.

At breakfast I met a guy who was on a golfing holiday. He was with two balloon shaped women, obviously not golfers. He told me that there was a golfing festival, which explained the previous afternoon's crowds. There was heavy rain, so I took down my over-trousers from their hook. Perhaps I should have slept in them. After a quick trip to the village shop for a banana and a yogurt, I set out, down to the railway and under the bridge, up the grassy slope beside the MoD range and then along the next section of cliff path. At Lydstep there was a steep descent to the first sandy beach of the day and then up and along a detour to Lydstep Point where the waves were awesome. The wind was very strong and at times quite dangerous. A little later I rounded a headland called Priest's Nose and dropped down to a haven at Manorbier Bay. Here the beach was rough and not sandy. I crossed a stream outfall on a clapperboard bridge and then walked up a slope. Looking back, I could see the outline of Manorbier Castle which in better weather I would have visited. There was now a return to the cliff tops, with ups and downs all the time. At least, alone, I could climb at my own speed.

All along the Coast Path there were more wild flowers; Herb Robert, Thyme, Giant Hogweed, Foxglove, a blue coastal plant looking like Scabious but which was in fact Sheeps Bit, some forlorn Bluebells, and up on the grassy plateau some little white alpines which I could not identify. Approaching Freshwater Bay I descended first on a steep track and then some very steep steps to the dunes. An unusual mixture of dunes, sand and trees provided a pleasant walk to the road and a little bridge. There were guys dressed in wet suits and helmets, carrying surf boards, and the sun appeared for the first time. There was a long walk up the hill to my B&B, a fine Georgian house.



The B&B was well appointed and comfortable and the staff friendly. I could relax for a while before walking along the village road to the pub. This time I had a very good meal.

Distance: 12.2 miles.

[Wet and very windy, awesome views, strenuous paths. Exciting.]

Day 3. Saturday 16th June. Freshwater East to Merrion.

Yet again there were strong winds but the overnight rain had eased a little. My breakfast was excellent and the young man who served me was both chatty and helpful. He knew the Coast Path well and had as a birthday present had a one hour flight along it. The rain returned as I left and so over-trousers and rain cover were needed again. I went back to the village shop for a snack and then strode down the steep hill to the bridge and the dunes. There was a very steep climb to the cliff top, several ups and downs, a fine headland at Grenala Point and then a smoother walk along a field. The next point on the map was called Stackpole Quay. I climbed down a precarious path, sometimes with steps and sometimes just a mud slide, and sure enough there was a tiny quay with a stone built jetty and a boat safely moored. A few yards inland there was a boathouse, a phone box and a public toilet. There were more public toilets per mile on this walk than I have ever seen before.



After yet more climbing, there was a reward: my first view of the sandy beach at Barafundle Bay. There were steps down to the sands, a lovely beach walk, and steps up to the cliff top again.



Here I encountered a blowhole. It was well fenced in and it was not blowing because the tide was out, but the sides were smooth and very wet. Now came a broad open expanse of springy turf, with lots of horses; I counted fifteen horses and two foals. There was little sign of the path, but keeping close to the cliff edge - but not too close - I found my way. As the coast Path turned along the side of Broad Haven, I left the path and dropped down to the beach. Here I met a group of Ramblers. They get everywhere, don't they? I crossed the haven and struggled up the steep path to the NT information centre (and another toilet). I should have continued to St Govan's Head with a chance to see the wonderful St Govan's Chapel, but as soon as I saw the MoD red flag, I turned back, past

the information centre and along to the little bridge. Here I set out for the Lily Ponds of Bosherton, man-



made lakes with a fine display of lilies, but the down side was that I then had a long and largely monotonous road walk to Merrion where I had booked my next B&B. One lake had a narrow footbridge and a highlight for me was to see a pair of swans with two fluffy cygnets floating under the bridge. At the end of the road walk, the B&B was clearly seen and there was a warm welcome with a pot of tea. There was an extra luxury - a heated towel rail on which I could dry my socks. It is a pity that socks take longer to dry than Polos and Pants.

Distance: 13.5 miles.

[Rain, tremendous cliffs, spectacular sandy beaches, lily ponds, disappointment at missing St Govan's.]

Day 4.

Sunday 17th June.

Merrion to Angle.



Mrs F had produced a fine evening meal and so I was not surprised at the equally fine breakfast. When I left she had to drive back to Manorbier to collect five sets of baggage for the five ladies expected on Sunday evening. I set out in good time, walking along the minor roads to Warren and then to Castlemartin. At one point there was a striking road sign warning of "Sudden Gunfire", in Welsh as well as in English.

And there was a viewing tower for civilians who wanted to see things being blown up. I also heard two herds of cattle greeting me, or threatening me, as I passed by.

The air was dry and there was good sunlight as I strode down the hill towards Freshwater West. The long sandy beach came into view and I found a little path to the sand where I walked until reaching some huge sand dunes, about fifteen feet high. Here I struggled to find a way back up to the Coast Path.



On the slopes I met two Canadian ladies who asked the way. The way, of course, was up and up and down, on a very strenuous cliff path. There were lots of little bays, some difficult to see because the cliff path was so close to the edge. Guttle hole has a natural rock arch which I could see from the path, Parsonsquarry Bay was spectacular both in name and appearance, and Sheep Island and Rat Island were also visible.

Soon I was startled by a strange optical phenomenon: I was surrounded on three sides by water! To my left was the Atlantic ocean, ahead was the entrance to the natural harbour of Milford Haven, and away to my right was the inner harbour. All were bathed in sunlight in a quite magical way. I crossed the cliffs above West Angle Bay, rounded the headland and walked along a high level path lined with foxgloves. In the distance, inside the haven, was a huge tanker, moored at a jetty which was far out from the land. Although more than a mile away, its pumping engines were clearly audible.



When I rounded Angle Point I was greeted by another magical view. This was a Sunday afternoon, there were seats outside the Old Point House, and people sitting and drinking, enjoying the sun. Close to the track was the harbour wall, another fine seat, and the water below was still and blue. Here was my B&B and I was quick to book in, dump my rucksack and sit outside with a long cold drink. Later I had an excellent meal, cooked by my landlord, and I strolled along the track, past the mud flats, to the village of Angle and its little church. What a wonderful place.

Distance: 12.7 miles.

[Lovely beach, high cliff paths, views out to sea, wonderful Angle in sunlight.]

Day 5. Monday 18th June.

Angle to Pembroke.



The morning was chilly and the sky overcast. The breakfast was excellent and all too soon I was ready to continue my journey. I retraced the evening's route to the village, paused at the shop for a snack and then found the Coast Path. There was something of Sunday's magic about the track through the wood and along the harbour wall above the mud flats. At Fort Popton I turned aside, climbed a very steep service road and rejoined the Coast Path. Fort Popton really had been a fort at one time, but it had had several other uses. Soon, I was walking through beech trees, dipping down to beach level and up again, and walking under a gas pipeline. My guide book said "Don't go through oil refinery gates". Well, would I?

The route for the day passed through agricultural land, meadows, herds of cattle, little farms and streams, all pleasant but far from the coastal splendours of the previous day. The great tanker was again visible and audible from across the Haven and there were glimpses of the refinery, but at least the day was warm and sunny. There was a pretty water mill and a steep hill up to the Pembroke suburb of Monkton, followed by a rather dull walk along the houses. Pembroke itself was impressive. There was a park, a good one-way traffic system, very fast, and the awesome castle, high up, dark grey and menacing. My B&B was also impressive and comfortable.

Distance: 12.3 miles.

[Lovely start, rather ordinary middle and fine Pembroke finish.]

Day 6. Tueaday 19th June.

Pembroke to Dale.

This was to be the day which taxed my planning ability. I needed an early bus, and so I needed an early breakfast. Mrs W did not like early breakfasts, but she took pity on me and provided an early feast. I caught my bus at the stop below the castle walls and

travelled in style through the less slightly bits of Pembroke, round Pembroke Dock, over the toll bridge to Neyland and along the coast road to Milford Haven, the town. At Milford Tesco I started my walk. Well, isn't that cheating? Yes, of course it is but I did not come all this way to look at oil refineries. I set off along the Coast Path through Hakin and down to the cliff path. Soon I reached Sandy Haven, where my planning was to be tested again. This Haven is under water for most of the day and only for two hours either side of low tide is it passable to cross, on a set of stepping stone and a little bridge. Well, I climbed down the cliff path and there in front of me were the stepping stones, already dry and I crossed without difficulty. Ahead of me were two walkers who had already left the beach and climbed the next cliff path whilst I examined the upper tide marks on the rocks.



I climbed the steep steps and track to find a pleasant grassy area with more wild flowers. Along this track was a tall communications beacon where the two walkers sat to have their lunch. I called a greeting and they replied. They were female, French and much younger than me. They also spoke with immaculate English. The Coast Path was quite easy at this stage, the cliffs were fairly low and the views splendid. The great tanker was occasionally visible, but not obtrusive. And so I came to the last of my planning tasks. There was a second tidal haven beyond Musselwick, and again the tide was out and my timing was good.

I walked noisily along the stony beach, crossed the second set of stepping stones and tramped over more stones to reach a minor road. Pleased that my tide tables had been right - or that I had used them correctly, I continued happily. The minor road involved a stiff climb, followed by a walk down to the village of Dale.



If you look at a map of Milford Haven, you see that the great natural harbour is entered between two large projections of land, like two jaws. The southern jaw was at Angle and the northern one, which I now approached, was Dale. Just like Angle, Dale was a small fishing village with calm water, lots of boats and a beautiful collection of houses, pubs and hotels. Again, I arrived to see blue water and sunshine. At my B&B, I was greeted by Peacocks, one of them white, by a donkey, dogs, Guinea Fowl and Bantams. Mrs W showed me to a fine large room. I then sauntered along by the harbour wall and enjoyed the air. Later, I found a pub where a blackboard listed "Today's Catch" and I chose a Sea Bass for my dinner. In the pub I met the two French ladies again. They were also staying with Mrs W.



Distance: 11.1 miles.

[An exciting day, finishing with another marvellous harbour.]

Day 7. Wednesday 20th June. Dale to Marloes.

I woke to the cry of the Peacocks and to another fine morning. Breakfast was very good and I met Alec whose Mercedes was parked under the trees by the drive. He explained that he had used a travel firm who would provide taxis each morning to take him to his favourite places, so that he could walk back to the B&B. Marie and Yvonne also greeted me: they were looking forward to the next stage of their walk.

I set off along the sea front, up the hill and on the path to Dale Point, where the Coast Path went steeply up and down for a while. On Sunday I had seen St Ann's Point in the distance. Now it was in full view, looking beautiful. The headland was covered in short grass, making the walking easy. The white painted cottages looked superb but alas they were all up for sale. I was viewing them on a calm sunny morning and I tried to imagine what they would be like in winter.

Along from the cottages was the lighthouse, advertising holiday accommodation. It would "sleep ten". Rather saddened, I continued on this stunning path, with fine views out to sea and equally fine views on land: horses, cattle and haymaking with two great CLASS tractors. At Westdale Bay I could see Dale across to the east and Dale Castle across the fields. Ahead I saw a group of three walkers who were admiring the view below them. And well they might because Marloes Sands looked magnificent, stretching out below. I joined them and they pointed out a steep narrow path leading down to the beach. I could not resist it, although it proved difficult. The sand was spectacular and I removed my boots and went for a paddle. I returned to the little path, put on my boots and climbed laboriously back up to the grassy cliff path. At the northern end of the beach there is a gentle path to the cliffs, a much easier climb. Beyond Marloes Sands I could see Gateholm Island, a true island at high tide, but joined to the mainland at low tide. Skomer Island, home of the Puffins, was further out to sea. Ahead I could see the three walkers I had met earlier. Their pace was slow and I soon joined them. They said that they had seen me climb the steep path and they were amused that I had missed the easy route. As for easy routes, they now turned along the road to Marloes. I turned left along a minor path to the headland at Wooltack Point, watched the waves below, and then returned and followed the Coast Path to St Martin's Haven. The haven is very small, but it has a narrow walkway from the cliffs to the sea, where the brave can board a boat.



Still quite a long way from my evening resting place, I strode eastwards along the Coast Path until I reached a link path to Marloes. The rain began to fall as I arrived in the village, but I took a quick photo of the clock tower before reporting to my B&B. The rain was heavier by the time I went out for my evening meal at The Lobster Pot Inn. As I relaxed with my meal, Marie and Yvonne arrived. They had taken a short cut to the village, and their B&B was at a posh place down the road.

Distance: 13.8 miles.

[A fine cliff top walk, gorgeous beach at Marloes Sands and more rugged cliffs. A great day.]

Day 8. Thursday 21st June.

Marloes to Broad Haven.

The rain had ceased, but there were strong winds and dark clouds. At breakfast I met two young women who were not on holiday, but doing research into potato blight. There was also a guy who had spent three days taking boat trips to various islands. He had experienced very good weather except on the previous evening. Having booked a trip for 7 pm from St Martin's Haven, he arrived in the rain and spent two hours on a little boat in heavy rain. He was drenched, but he had nothing but praise for Mrs L, who had managed to dry all his clothes.



My morning began with a quick visit to the village shop, a return to the link path and a continuation along the Coast Path. There were fewer ups and downs as the path ran beside a stone wall. I saw, and heard some stonechats, and I spotted a whitethroat on a post. There was also a little flock of something which I could not name, but I was in luck. Two bird watchers appeared and they said excitedly "Did you see the little flock of Linnets?" Further along the path I spotted a tiny flower, or rather a plant with tiny flowers, growing up the wall. It was Toadflax, common enough in North Yorkshire, but unexpected in Pembrokeshire. Across the fields was a very grand castle, St Brides Castle, which is now an HPB residence, and as I rounded the Nab I could see St Brides Church, a fine stone building, and St Brides Haven.



Here the path went right down to the beach and back to the cliff top, just when I thought that things were getting easier. In fact, the path became ever steeper with many ups and downs. A small distraction was "The Eye of the Sea", a sculpture with a hole in it. I took a photo, but I should have put the camera nearer to the hole. Too late. A lovely change of scenery followed: the path ran through mature trees which clothed the steep slopes of the cliffs.

On the exposed cliffs the path went steeply down to Little Haven, a lovely collection of buildings, mainly pubs. The haven itself had no sand, but its businesslike nature was emphasised by a tractor on a boat ramp. The road out of Little Haven was steep and winding, followed by a down hill walk into Broad Haven. Here the sandy beach was very attractive and the painted walls of the buildings, in many colours were delightful in the sunlight. I chose a cafe and enjoyed a cup of coffee before finding the cash machine in the little supermarket. By now the sky had darkened. There was just a short walk to my B&B at the northern end of the village. Broad Haven is a fine holiday resort, but nothing else. As I arrived at my B&B the rain began. I was just in time, but later, when I went for an evening meal, the rain was heavy, the tide was in and the beach was covered with angry waves.

Distance: 11.9 miles.

[A shorter walk, not too strenuous, with a fine variety of coastal scenery. St Brides church lovely.]

Day 9. Friday 22nd June.

Broad Haven to Solva.

At breakfast I talked to Mr M who explained the queuing system of the tankers. The large tankers stay out at sea until called into Milford Haven to unload. They call it stacking. I had counted six of them on the previous afternoon. The weather forecast was not good but I was well fortified by my breakfast. Outside, there was a strong cold wind and waves covering the sand and pounding the sea wall. The Coast Path was a clear narrow thread, going steeply up the cliff side and the wind coming off the sea made walking difficult. High up, I had no shelter, and often I was obliged to stop and use my walking poles for balance. With the path so close to the cliff edge, this became a frightening experience. Very briefly I moved along a road, away from the cliff, but there was a rapid return and tough walking until I descended to Nolton Haven.

I examined the harbour wall and the boats on the shingle, before crossing the road to look at the Mariner's Inn. The wind was again intense and so I pulled up my hood. With both wind and hood, I failed to hear a Land Rover and boat trailer coming down the hill. The driver stopped, hooted and waved to me with a broad grin. No damage. There are similarities between Little Haven and Nolton Haven, and perhaps I have mixed them up. Oops! More cliffs, more ups and more downs. On a grassy upper path there was suddenly a red brick chimney, relic of mining activity. This brought me to the splendid Newgale Sands. I descended to beach level, left the Coast Path and walked along the sand, which was hard and firm as the tide receded, and quite spectacular. Ahead, the cliffs were close to the water's edge and so I climbed back, over the shingle and up to the road. Here I joined the

official Coast Path, and crossed the bridge over a little stream. So far, the walk had been tough, and the cafe beckoned. I enjoyed a cup of coffee and a scone before the next hill.

The remainder of the day was also tough. From the cafe the path went steeply to the cliff top, and almost immediately down to beach level again at Cwm Bach. And so it went on. The day was still overcast but the views were always enjoyable. A little detour to Dinas Fawr allowed me to see far along the coast, in both directions. It was almost like being on a boat. Back on the Coast Path, I rounded the headland and found my way through undergrowth to a path through woods, down to a bridge and the village of Solva. Solva has a large inland mooring area with, perhaps, sixty or seventy boats, but my woodland path obscured this. It was not until the evening that I was able to walk along the quayside and appreciate the calm of this water.



My evening meal was at one of the waterside pubs, where a very large man, perched on a high stool with a tiny seat, was holding forth to a group who had no chance of a word of reply. He left before my food arrived. The pub also had a "dogs welcome" policy.

Distance: 11.5 miles.

[Wonderful cliff views, hard walking and another glorious beach.]

Day 10. Saturday 23rd June.

Solva to Whitesands Bay.

Saturday was dry, warm and sunny. Breakfast was good and before I left, I met a couple from Christchurch in Dorset. They had been to Skomer to see the Puffins. The walk along the harbour wall was enjoyable. Solva harbour has a narrow entrance channel

between cliffs. After a short distance, this channel changes direction so that the remaining long channel is well protected. The shape became clear as I climbed the cliff path and looked back. The harbour was filled with boats and looked impressive.

The high path continued with minor undulations to the next haven where it plunged down to a stream, a lime kiln and another upward path.. All taxing and all exciting. Caerfai Bay was terrific. The car park on the cliff top lead to a caravan park, and my Coast Path was hidden by a large van. I went straight ahead through the caravans until I realised my mistake. By the time I returned, the van had gone and the path was obvious. A short distance ahead was a little diversion to the chapel of St Non, mother of St David. The cliff path itself was very close to the edge and deserved special care.



There was another small harbour ahead. This was Porthclais, and as I turned to follow the rock path, I saw a group of children, wearing wet suits and helmets, and carrying paddles. They went down the steep path and further inland to the area of toilets, refreshments and information kiosk.



Beside the inlet were large lime kilns. As I crossed the stream and headed up hill, I saw a pile of coloured canoes, stacked by the harbour wall. They were not yet in use. The Coast Path continues westwards, past the headland called Ogof Mrs Morgan, (yes, really) and then ahead of me was a large strip of land beyond the water. I asked a guy who was walking towards me. "Yes, it's Ramsey Island" he replied. I was amazed that it was so big - and so close.



The day was still dry, warm and windy. I walked northwards towards the St Justinian's Lifeboat Station, another one with a red roof. At several points, I could not look down. I had to concentrate on the path. Then the long sandy beach of Whitesands Bay came into view. There were steps down to the sand and I watched wind surfers making everything look easy. At the northern end of the beach I could see a cafe: the coffee was lovely and I waited for the Coastal Cruiser which took me on a ten minute trip to St

David's. There was time for a brief trip round the cathedral - it deserved far more time - and I found my B&B. On my way there I met Marie and Yvonne. We met yet again at The Farmer's Arms, where Mr Mercedes was also dining. We talked about the forthcoming Shakespeare series on TV. Yvonne had read about it in the *Guardian*, and she is able to receive the English television in Brittany. Later I found a small supermarket where I bought a snack and a *Times*.

Distance: 14.2 miles.

[A wonderful day - Solva harbour, St Non's, PorthClais, St Justinians and Whitesands Bay, yes and St David's.]

Day 11. Sunday 24th June.

Whitesands Bay to Trefin.

The Weekend Review section of the *Time* had a long article on the Shakespeare series *The Hollow Crown*. What a coincidence. After breakfast I gave the article to Marie and Yvonne and we said farewell as they were ending their walk. I walked to the bus stop, ready to return to Whitesands Bay. Waiting for the bus were a mother and two young boys, aged ten and eight. They were going to St Justinians for a boat trip to Ramsey Island for an organised walk with other children. The younger boy told me "And the best bit is that we have sausages and beans after the walk".

The Coastal Cruiser was soon back at Whitesands Bay. The wind was strong and chilly but the sun appeared as I climbed. To the right, a little way inland was a rocky outcrop called Carn Llidi.



There was a path up to it but I chose to keep to the Coast Path which became rough with heather, bracken and outcrops of boulders. Here, the route was unclear and there were many alternative paths, all, fortunately leading in the same direction. Below, the waves

beat at the cliff face and the rocks were splendid, and it was here that I saw seals. There were four of them, their dark, almost black, shapes under water contrasted with the grey faces, like mine, as they surfaced. I wanted a better look, but the path was very close to the cliff edge. It really was my day.



Earlier I had seen horses, sure-footed as they grazed close to the cliff edge, and a field of Llamas. Despite some ups and downs, there was plenty of higher level turf, ideal for striding along. Another sandy beach came into view below me and I climbed down a tricky path. Suddenly there were people, lots of them, around the car park and toilet. Beyond the lime kiln, the path once again climbed to the headland where a sign pointed to the Blue Lagoon. I walked to take a look: it was no more than a flooded quarry where the water had a pleasing clear blue colour.

For some time I had been walking in full sun on a smooth grassy cliff top. It was a surprise to see a dainty little harbour below and I descended the rocky steps with excitement. Porthgain harbour was a delight. There was a small quay, a fine pub called The Sloop and a bistro called The Shed, with benches outside, a happy crowd and some young girls with ponies. I stopped and enjoyed some coffee. The upward path on the north side was very steep, and I relied upon stops to look back at the harbour and regain my breath. The remaining cliff path was a joy to watch and the rock formations were incredible.



At Aber Draw, the next haven, I turned away from the sea and walked up the road to the village of Trefin. My excellent B&B was at the far end of the village: I was warmly welcomed and ready for a little rest. Later, I walked back to the village pub for a friendly atmosphere, a chat with two young walkers travelling southward and camping, and a very ordinary meal. Back at the B&B, I could see from my bedroom window the coast and the route for the next day's walk.

Distance: 13.2 miles.

[Beautiful weather and beautiful views. Pity about the food.]

Day 12. Monday 25th June. Trefin to Pwll Deri.

Because I intended to spend a second night at Trefin, there was a chance to remove much from the rucksack and carry a lighter load. My breakfast was excellent and I set off in high spirits, back down the hill to Aber Draw. On the hill I met a lady with a dog: she was heading south. As I turned north I could see the staggeringly beautiful cliffs and the steep downward path to Abbercastle. What wonderful rocks: I wish that I had studied geology. The next downward path was through gorse and shrubs to a gate. Immediately beyond the gate was a wide patch of deep mud. I spent a while finding a way through it without filling my boots with mud. I continued downwards to a long shingle beach with a steep rake. It was bright in the morning sun and noisy as I tramped across it



On the next shingle beach I met a couple who had been at breakfast with me. They warned me of a difficult ford ahead and so I warned them about the mud. I tramped over the shingle and on the northern end found a stream, quite deep and fast flowing, with some rocks forming a poor set of stepping stones. Up stream there was no sign of a better crossing, so I looked carefully, chose a route and walked as fast as I could. I survived with dry feet.

A little further ahead, I could see below me a delightful little sandy beach called Pwllcrochan. The only way down was by a cleft in the cliffs and a rope! I checked my guide book which declared that this was not a recommended route. So far on my journey I had tried all of the detours and extra paths that came my way, but as I have already indicated, I have always been a bit of a coward. I therefore continued along the official cliff path. There was still a little excitement in the form of some rocky outcrops and scrambles. The ridge of rock, heather and bracken proved to be fairly tough. Only the third of the summits merited a name: Carn Ogof.

The Coast Path reached a road, beyond which was the Pwll Deri Youth Hostel, but I was returning to the comfort of the B&B at Trefin. I therefore turned back, southwards, and walked along the road for about three quarters of a mile to a road junction and bus stop. In the hedge I spotted a plant which was rare in Yorkshire, but quite common on the south coast. It was called Navelwort. After a long wait, the Strumble Shuttle collected me and returned me to Trefin, stopping outside my B&B gate. Service. The evening brought a coolness and an overcast sky. A warning for Tuesday? My pub meal, carefully chosen, was a little better.

Distance: 11.6 miles.

[Another superb day with sun and spectacular views.]

Day 13. Tuesday 26th June.

Pwll Deri to Goodwick.

There was rain overnight, and in the morning there was no sign of the coast from my bedroom window: just a grey mist. At least there was another good breakfast and a sandwich, for lunch. I put on my over-trousers and went out to catch the bus. I was expected and the Strumble Shuttle stopped outside the gate. I was soon back at the road junction and I walked up the road to Pwll Deri Youth Hostel. The path was rocky and muddy. There were short sections of scrambling and at times, in the mist, the route was unclear, but eventually I had my first glimpse of the Strumble Head Lighthouse. It was annoying that there was no chance of a clear photo. However I realised that the lighthouse is there only because of fog.



A metal walkway joins the lighthouse to the mainland, where there is a small car park. Grouped around was a party of walkers, some eating and some just waiting. I walked ahead, through more boggy grass and over more rocks. Again, the path was unclear. At Porthsychan Bay I descended and crossed no less than four streams, and beyond, as I climbed, I could see another steep rocky mound. The path went round it but I chose to climb and to see the stone monument. According to the guide book, four French vessels landed at Carreg Wasted in 1797. The French soldiers captured a nearby pub, became very drunk and were themselves captured. I don't know what happened next, but the lump of stone, the monument, records the last invasion of Britain. A strange story.

The next section was quite strenuous, with lots of ups and downs, some very narrow cliff paths and a few paved areas. The paving had already sunk into the bog and was useless. Despite the obstacles, the views out to sea were exciting. There was still some mist, but a little sun had appeared, and the path retained its interest. Variety was maintained, with heather, then fields of cattle, and trees. Through a gap I could see the harbour breakwater but this became hidden again and I walked down a residential street,

rapidly losing height. On my left was a bank of mature trees, and suddenly a path zig-zagging steeply downwards. Below me was the railway station and the ferry terminal, and dimly further below, the breakwater.

Goodwick has a cluster of shops, pubs and cafes, still on a slope, and I stopped for a cup of coffee. My walk had been strenuous but not long and I had arrived early. I was able to buy a Times and book into my B&B. Later, at a nearby pub there were characters to watch, bar staff to endure and, eventually, a fine dining room down below and a properly run kitchen. A large table had been set out for ten people, and as they appeared, I recognised some of the walkers I had seen earlier at Strumble Head lighthouse. They were part of a large group from West Yorkshire, except for one lady who lived in York. They were walking some sections of the Coast Path, and like me, they had enjoyed their day despite the mist. Later I walked along the sea front for a while and then returned to my B&B. There was a hot radiator for my socks. I read the Times and did the Killer before bed.

Distance: 10.8 miles.

[A mixed day, with a fine path but too much mist.]

Day 14. Wednesday 27th June. Goodwick to Newport.

The morning was overcast and further rain seemed likely. The Coast Path continued along the sea front, up to marine drive, now called Pembrokeshire Coast Path, and down to the little harbour of Old Fishguard. This was all a great surprise to me. The ferry terminal, often called Fishguard, is in fact in Goodwick, by the breakwater. The old port of Fishguard is a delightful little place with quaint painted cottages, boatyards and boats everywhere. For me it was a step into the past. Through the little village and up a steep road I found Castle Point, a grass covered mound with three old cannon, pointing menacingly out to sea. The path here was very close to the cliff edge, and then the ups and downs began. Three small inlets had the name prefix Aber: Aber Grugog, Aber Howel and Aber Bach. The last of them, Aber Bach was the largest, and of course, Bach means small!

I can't pronounce Pwllgwaelod, the next landmark along the Coast Path. There is a road, a drinking water tap, public toilets and an attractive restaurant. There is also an attractive haven and furthermore a path across to the east provides a short cut, avoiding a steep hill and a walk round the peninsula of Dinas Island. Choosing the long route, I struggled up the hill as the sun burst forth. I stopped for breath by a stone wall and talked to a couple who were out for the day. Over the wall I could see the sea on the other side of the "island": it was looking spectacular. From the headland the coastal views were a joy and the grassy path provided easy walking, mainly down hill. On reaching the other end

of the short cut path, I found more toilets, a small car park but no sign of refreshments. A small shingle beach had attracted a number of young bathers, some of them diving off the harbour wall. There was also a ruined church, very close to the sea wall and I learned that one end of the building had been washed away during a storm.



Finding no cafe and not even an ice cream van, I turned up the hill, a steep one, and made for the Coast Path again. It was a splendid path, with foliage, narrow tracks lined with Foxgloves and tunnels of arching Hawthorn. It was also very close to the cliff edge, and there were numerous descents to cross streams, and, of course, ascents to regain the cliff tops. The path dropped down to the shingle and mud flats of Newport Sands where I took the high tide route by the harbour wall. The coffee shop was a welcome sight, but for once I ignored the coffee and chose iced spring water. (My water bottle was still half full, but a chance to sit down, and to drink something cold was good. My route left the mud flats and the sun, turning into a leafy lane and eventually up a hill to the residential part of Newport. There my B&B was easily found. That evening, as I went out to find an evening meal. I was surprised to find that two eating places had closed, and that two others were open on selected evenings only, and NOT on Wednesdays. Well, I did not starve, and I found a very good pub nearby.

Distance: 14.0 miles.

[Mist over Goodwich mud flats, Sun over Dinas Island and lovely cliffs. Quite hard work.]

Day 15. Thursday 28th June

Newport to Moylegrove.

The standard walk from Newport to St Dogmaels is long and arduous. I had chosen to break my journey and therefore I did not hurry in the morning. My "substantial continental" breakfast was excellent, but the morning was overcast and damp. I set out in hope, along the leafy lane to the iron bridge. Here I admitted defeat and put on my over-

trousers whilst watching the greys of the mud flats. They had a charm of their own. The first hill took me to the golf links where the rain was so hard that I had no fear of flying golf balls. Wet vegetation spilled across the path, hiding the mud and the exposed rock which was as slippery as an ice rink. There were more ups and downs, and in places there were warning signs saying "Danger, path close to edge". What could I do? Pack up and go home? Well, this is not a posthumous account. My biggest worry was the state of the downward paths. They were all wet. They were muddy. Frequently they had stretches of exposed rock with surfaces polished by walking boots. And sometimes there was a right-angled turn below a slope. Would my brakes work? Well, yes they did.

At last the rain eased and I sat on a stile for a bite of lunch. Close to the path was a trio of ponies and a foal, whose antics were most entertaining.



Then, although the path remained very wet, I felt less worried. Ahead of me were the most awesome rocks of the whole walk, and I was also approaching the Witch's Cauldron.



Here, there had been a cave which collapsed, leaving a small trapped pool and a rough bridge made from the roof of the old cave. I crossed the bridge and climbed the steps to the cliff top path. I had just passed one of those moments where one says "What

am I doing here?" The path now followed the cliff edge but mainly on firm grass, round the little promontory with a close up view of those awesome rocks and down to the road for a few yards.



The next section of road took me to the village of Moylgrove. The narrow road was itself quite monotonous, but it was firm, non slippery and not close to a fearsome cliff. In other words it was quite relaxing. On the way up to the village, about a mile from the path, I heard a strange sound, smooth and fairly high in pitch. I paused at a gate to see a large male Angora Goat, with blue eyes, long ringlets and impressive curled horns. He had been calling to a flock of females on the opposite side of the road. I learned later that their owner sells the wool and uses some of it to make garments to order.

In the village, the B&B was very good and I was able to rest. Because the place is remote, Mrs G provided my evening meal. At dinner I met a couple from Romsey in Hampshire. They had walked the northern half of the Coast Path, using a travel firm for accommodation and for baggage transport. They had enjoyed it and were determined to return to walk the other half.

Distance: 9.8 miles - but it felt like more.

[Tough, wet and frightening, with marvellous Witch's Cauldron. And those cliffs!]

Day 16

Friday 29th June

Moylgrove to St Dogmaels.

My last walking day, and the overnight rain had ceased. The dark clouds suggested that there would be more rain before long. I said goodbye to Sue and Tony and set off. The road was mainly down hill, past the Angora and I rejoined the Coast Path without incident.



It was much drier underfoot and far less slippery but I had read the guide book reference to this section:

"The path here begins to spasm in a series of excruciating descents and ascents. In places it climbs quite improbably steep slopes"

Well, I was lucky that in the morning the path was drier underfoot. Visibility was good and there were more stunning cliffs to see. The last sections of climbing were tough, but there must have been an extra flow of adrenalin and I reached the highest point without difficulty. At Cemaes Head the view was not the best, but the grass was short and the walking was easy. The nature reserve was pleasant, and as I gazed out to sea I was conscious of a calm from within me. The last climb had been accomplished and now was the time to relax. The walk down was soon accomplished. The path went through a farm yard, past a Youth Hostel and down to Poppit Sands, where there were boats, a lifeboat station, a cafe and, of course, sand. At one time this small hamlet must have been the end point of the Coast Path. There is a plaque recording that Wynford Vaughan Thomas opened the path in 1970. However, the present end point is at St Dogmaels, a further 1.6 miles along the road. Here was the beginning of the anticlimax.



Opposite the Ferry Inn there is a slipway and beside it a small memorial and a mosaic recording the official end. Walkers expecting a brass band and fireworks will be disappointed. Furthermore, apart from a couple of pubs, there is little to see. I strode, in the rain, along the road for about two miles to the river bridge at Cardigan. Over the bridge was a cafe/outdoor shop serving good coffee, and I chose this as my personal End of Pembrokeshire Coast Path. I had booked a B&B in Cardigan because it would take me a full day to return home. I therefore had time to explore the remarkable town.

Distance: 10.3 miles.

[Strenuous and exciting, almost to the end, but a pity about the dull finish.]

Summary.

For anyone who, sensibly, has skipped to the end of my log without bothering to read the day by day account, I record now that my walk has been a great pleasure, full of glorious views and exciting cliff top paths.

I walked for sixteen days, carrying my own pack. Navigation was quite easy on this National Trail, and accommodation was always acceptable and usually very good.

I walked a total distance of 197.7 miles, an average of just over 12 miles per day and, although the trail was indeed strenuous, it was never a burden and I always arrived feeling quite fresh.

The sense of elation with which I ended the trail remained with me for many days and the thrill will never be forgotten.

Highlights:

There were so many that I cannot list them all: the beaches, the havens the harbours the cathedral, the rock formations and the sheer physical sensation of cliff-path walking.

And lowlights?

Well, apart from the poor finish, there were none.



John Williams. July 2012.