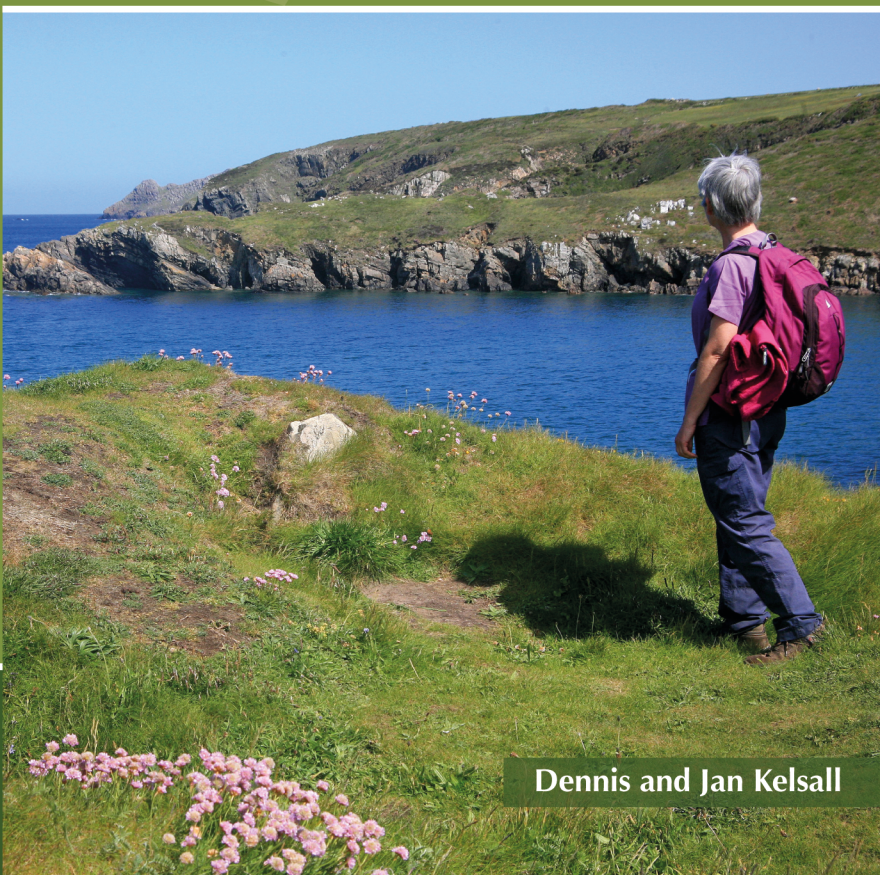


CICERONE

WALKING IN PEMBROKESHIRE

40 circular day walks in and around
the Pembrokeshire Coast national park



Dennis and Jan Kelsall

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**40 CIRCULAR WALKS IN AND AROUND THE
PEMBROKESHIRE COAST NATIONAL PARK**

Dennis and Jan Kelsall

CICERONE

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Acknowledgements

Pembrokeshire is distinct within Wales, has its own special qualities and has hung on to the separateness of its identity despite the bureaucratic urge for conglomeration over recent decades. This is a reflection of the passion emanated by its people for their county, and barely a walk went by when we did not meet somebody quietly eager to impart their local knowledge, point out secluded corners or the best place for a view and relate tales of local happenings that never appear in the history books.

Such enthusiasm is infectious and greatly added to our own enjoyment in undertaking this project. Although too numerous to mention individually, even if we did know all their names, we would like to express our thanks to everyone who offered us help in one way or another, from the benefit of their knowledge to a welcome cup of tea on a hot afternoon. We would particularly like to thank the staff of the national park and the County Council for their generous advice and practical assistance, and for their ongoing work in making the countryside and coast accessible.

Front cover: Looking across the mouth of Aber Bach to Carreg Golchfa (Walk 15)

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WALK 1

Amroth and Pleasant Valley

Start/finish	Amroth (SN 162 071)
Distance	4½ miles (7.2km)
Total ascent	800ft (245m)
Time	2¼hr
Terrain	Generally good paths and tracks with some steeper climbs and descents
Maps	Explorer OL36 South Pembrokeshire
Refreshments	Pubs in Amroth and at Wiseman's Bridge, Bothy Tea Room at Colby Woodland Gardens
Toilets	Amroth and Wiseman's Bridge
Public transport	Bus service to Amroth
Parking	National Park car park behind promenade

An unassuming little village at the southeast corner of Pembrokeshire's coast, Amroth offers one of the finest holiday beaches in the area. It is also blessed with some beautiful countryside, lush semi-natural woodland that fills the several deep valleys cleaving the hills behind the coast.

This area has not always had the quiet backwater appearance it presents today, for until the beginning of the 20th century, heavy industry scarred the landscape with coal mines and iron smelters. Now abandoned, Nature has drawn a veil over the dereliction, and ruined buildings have been consolidated, creating a fascinating focus for this splendid walk.

Walk from the car park onto the sea front road and turn right. Where the road shortly curves inland by toilets at the end of the promenade, abandon it for the **Coast Path**, which climbs steeply through the trees behind onto the headland.

Emerging at the top, carry on along a narrow, bracken meadow. At a waymark, part-way along, turn out through a gate on the right. Follow a metalled track to the left, eventually joining a lane that leads downhill to the beach at



Wiseman's Bridge. Continue to the far end of the beach, leaving just beyond a bridge up steps to follow a narrow lane into the lush woodland of **Pleasant Valley**.

*Wiseman's
Bridge Beach*



THE COAST PATH

One of Pembrokeshire's finest assets is the 180-mile (290km) long-distance path that traces its entire coastal fringe, and each year, heavily loaded walkers are to be seen embarking from or arriving at Amroth, its southern terminus. There is a plaque commemorating the official opening in 1970 by Wynford Vaughn Thomas at the eastern end of the promenade next to a bridge spanning a stream near the county boundary at Telpyin Point. Although the path can be accomplished in either direction, starting here offers an infinitely more satisfying experience in the gradual exchange of the softer scenery of Carmarthen Bay for the savage beauties that are characteristic of the northern coast.

The undulating hills behind the coast overlie abundant **carboniferous coal deposits**, the source of some of the best quality anthracite to be had in the country. Much folded, the layers of black gold rise close to the surface in places and have been scratched at since the earliest times. The coal was dug from simple 'bell' pits and drift mines and their collapsed vestiges can still be traced in the innumerable hollows concealed by the dense woodland cover of both Pleasant Valley and Colby Valley. But it was the advent of the industrial age that brought large-scale exploitation, and the sea offered an easy and economic means of transport to the enterprise, which few inland sources could match. Deep mining for the richest seams began in earnest and horse-drawn tramways, later upgraded with the development of the steam engine, were laid to carry the coal to ships waiting at nearby Saundersfoot's harbour.

The route through Pleasant Valley follows the old tramway that ran to the coast and if you explore the Coast Path beyond Wiseman's Bridge, you'll pass through the tunnels that took the railway on beneath the cliffs. By the 19th century, however, the most productive reserves were becoming worked out and what remained proved increasingly

difficult to extract because of faulting. Production declined in the face of competition from the South Wales valleys, although because of its high quality, some coal was still mined into the beginning of the 20th century.

Keep right at a fork by Tramway Cottage, then continue along the line of the tramway. ► Keep to the main surfaced path, subsequently crossing the stream and eventually emerging onto a lane beside Heritage Park, a lodge development on the site of a former iron works.

The local shales also contained abundant **iron ore deposits**, and during the later part of the 19th century these sustained a burgeoning industry that produced a high-quality pig iron. The proximity of coal suitable for the smelting process and a ready means of transport made the industry highly profitable and supported an ironworks with two blast furnaces.

The tramway transported coal and iron from Stepside's collieries and smelt hearths to ships waiting in Saundersfoot's harbour.

The Stepside Iron Works



WALK 6

The Dale Peninsula

Start/finish	Dale (SM 811 058)
Distance	6½ miles (10.5km)
Total Ascent	1085ft (330m)
Time	3¼hr
Terrain	Coastal path
Maps	Explorer OL36 South Pembrokeshire
Refreshments	The Boathouse Café and Griffin Inn at Dale
Toilets	By car park at Dale
Public transport	Seasonal bus service to Dale
Parking	Car park at Dale

The Dale peninsula guards the entrance to Milford Haven and, with its counterpart across the channel – the Angle peninsula – has played an important strategic defensive role throughout history.

The path around St Ann's Head, south of Dale, follows a long, convoluted stretch of coast, with constantly changing views as it turns from the Haven towards the open sea. The way back is across a narrow neck of sunken ground, a trench cut by meltwater released at the end of the last glacial period.

Follow the promenade down to the village, keeping left past the **Griffin Inn** to leave along a wooded lane rising along the coast towards **Dale Fort Field Centre**. When the trees clear towards the far end, look for the Coast Path leaving through a gate on the right. It follows the line of a prehistoric ditch and bank that defended a settlement on the point. Further back lie 19th-century defences, another ditch and wall to protect the landward side of a gun fort, one of several built under Prime Minister Palmerston. It now houses a field studies centre.

**Dale Fort**

is part of a complex series of defences built around the middle of the 19th century in anticipation of an invasion attempt by Napoleon. At first sight it might seem that there was little need for such a show of force,



Dale

with 15 separate forts and gun batteries being positioned along the Milford Haven waterway. Its importance, however, derived from the Haven being one of the finest deepwater harbours in the world and, perhaps more significantly, the gateway to Britain's naval dockyards at Pembroke Dock. Napoleon prudently stayed away, and the Victorian guns were never fired in anger, but the batteries were brought back into use during World War II, when Pembroke Dock was again a target for enemy attack.

Carry on above the sloping bracken-clad cliffs behind **Castlebeach Bay**, the path shortly dropping into one of the several deep-cleft valleys that drain the headland. As you climb away at the far side of the stony beach, look for a lime kiln almost hidden beneath the undergrowth. Continue around the edge of successive fields, eventually passing the tall navigation beacon on **Watwick Point**.

The **deepwater channel** of the Haven made it an ideal harbour to receive the increasingly massive oil tankers that were being developed during the 1960s. During its industrial heyday several terminals, oil refineries and an overland pipeline to Esso's main refinery at Llandarcy were built, as well as an oil-fired power station. However, the approach to the narrow estuary is difficult, and for colossal craft – that might take over a mile to stop – through passage requires both skill and accurate navigation. The soaring beacons on Watwick and West Blockhouse points help guide vessels into the inlet, but they failed to prevent the area's worst shipping disaster, when in February 1996 the tanker *Sea Empress* ran aground, spilling 72,000 tonnes of crude oil into the sea.

Following the field perimeter beyond, watch for the path swinging left behind **Watwick Bay**. The main path dips only gently above its head, but a lower path



West Blockhouse Point

descends to a small beach, exposed at low water. Further on, at **West Blockhouse Point**, the path passes behind another of Palmerston's forts, this one now owned by the Landmark Trust and available for rent as a holiday cottage with a difference. Beside it stand a trio of navigation markers, while to the right of the ongoing path are the concrete wells of the Napoleonic gun emplacements.

The view in front is now to St Ann's Head, on which stands a row of cottages built to accommodate the staff manning the station, a walled vegetable garden, and three lighthouses that at various times have blinked their warnings to passing mariners. Rounding the head of **Mill Bay** the path once more dips to the sea, passing the ruined walls of an old mill, fed from a pond formed by damming the stream above.

HENRY TUDOR

After 14 years in exile in Brittany, Henry Tudor landed at Mill Bay on 7 August 1485 with a small band of followers. Marching to England, he gathered supporters for his cause along the way and only two weeks later defeated the armies of Richard III at Bosworth Field. Crowned Henry VII, he founded the Tudor dynasty, which would last until the death of Elizabeth I in 1603.

WALK 7

Marloes Sands and the Deer Park

Start/finish	Runwayskilm (SM 779 081)
Distance	6½ miles (10.5km)
Total Ascent	1000ft (305m)
Time	3¼hr
Terrain	Coastal path
Maps	Explorer OL36 South Pembrokeshire
Refreshments	Soft drinks at Martin's Haven, Clock House Café and Lobster Pot Inn at nearby Marloes
Toilets	At Martin's Haven
Public transport	Seasonal bus service to Martin's Haven
Parking	National Trust car park by Runwayskilm

With such an extensive unspoilt coastline, it is hardly surprising that there are many splendid beaches to be found in Pembrokeshire. This walk takes you past some of the best, made even more attractive because, although readily accessible, they are often quite empty of people.

The sands along this stretch of coast are backed by spectacular runs of cliff that offer fine views to the offshore islands, and in spring and early summer are a splendid vantage from which to watch the thousands of seabirds that come to breed in the area. From spring until early autumn boat trips leave the tiny cove at Martin's Haven, and – if you can drag yourself away from walking for the day – offer an unforgettable experience.

On a glorious day you might be tempted to go no further, but the cliffs to the west have an equal attraction.

Leave the car park by the entrance near the **Youth Hostel**, following the lane away left, signed to the beach. After about 50 metres turn off right onto a bridleway, a narrow track squeezed between flower-rich banks that eventually drops to Marloes Sands along a shallow, overgrown gully. ◀ The onward route follows the Coast Path to the right, marked just before you reach the beach.

Near-vertical slabs of striated grey slate lie below the path, becoming more broken as you advance, but as you



The path down to Marloes Sands

approach **Gateholm** (or Gatesholm) you will notice that the island is composed of old red sandstone, an entirely different rock. Erosion has exploited the weaker interface between these two, and although almost separate from the mainland, Gateholm is as yet an island only at high tide.



OFFSHORE ISLANDS

The red sandstone first seen on Gateholm runs below the cliffs, a chaos of fractured slabs and broken boulders hammered by the full force of the Atlantic waves. The island off the point ahead is Skomer and to the left is Skokholm, while further out to sea, about 7 miles (11km) away, is Grassholm Island. Both Skomer and Skokholm have been occupied in the past, the former still bearing traces of an Iron Age settlement and field enclosures, while the Normans managed Skokholm as a conyger or rabbit warren. They were farmed again from the 18th century but along with Grassholm are now protected as bird reserves, Skokholm being the first of its kind in the world. It was founded by author and naturalist Ronald Lockley, who undertook the first survey for the proposed coastal footpath in 1951. Skomer is noted as hosting the earth's largest population of Manx shearwaters, while Grassholm is the third largest gannetry in the world, where the birds nest in such numbers that the swarming gannets have the appearance of a volcanic plume of smoke when seen from the mainland.

Gateholm was inhabited during the middle centuries of the first millennium and a complex of around 130 small cells arranged in rows around a rectangular courtyard has been identified. The layout suggests an early monastic settlement, but archaeologists have found no trace of a church.

About 400 metres after passing the short spur above the tidal island of Gateholm, the path winds through an Iron Age coastal **fort**. Its multiple defensive banks, enhanced by a tangle of bramble, are easily recognisable and enclose a relatively large area.

Before long the cliffs turn above **Deadman's Bay** and the path passes through a gate onto the western tip of the Marloes peninsula, crossing the head of a glacial melt-water rift that separates it from the main run of the land.

This **natural gulf** was exploited by Iron Age folk, who added to its defensive capability by building an earth and rubble wall to secure the headland. In the 19th century Lord Kensington enclosed the



Boats leave Martin's Haven for the offshore islands

promontory with a second wall, when it became known as the 'deer park', although there is no evidence that such animals were ever kept here.

Several paths meander across, but the best views are to be had from the one perambulating around the point above the much-fractured cliffs, climbing at the far side to the former **coastguard lookout station**. Dropping from there, the way crosses the rubble of the prehistoric defences and emerges through the park wall onto a lane above **Martin's Haven**.

Lockley Lodge, just up the hill, was the temporary refuge of Ronald Lockley when the sea proved too rough for him to cross to his island home on Skokholm, and is now a gift shop and information centre for the South and West Wales Wildlife Trust. Another information centre lies beside the path down to the cove, where there is a small exhibition about the Skomer Marine Nature Reserve.

The sea surrounding Skomer is rich in **wildlife** of the underwater kind; starfish, sea slugs, squirts, sponges and coral, a marine abundance that some



• **Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, the Daugleddau and the Preseli Hills** • beautiful coastal scenery, wooded gorges, prehistoric hillforts and medieval castles

The spectacular coastal scenery of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park is only one aspect of this county's many attractions to be explored in this collection of walks. The routes take you through the Preseli Hills (from which ancient man took the 'bluestones' for Stonehenge), the Daugleddau's hidden tidal reaches, deep wooded gorges, prehistoric hill forts, medieval castles and isolated churches.

This guide describes a varied collection of day walks, from 1 to 12 miles long, right across this much-loved region.

- routes clearly marked on 1:50,000 OS mapping
- some walks can be strenuous with steep climbs and descents



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