



Pwll Du, Ilston and Three Cliffs Walk, Gower

Description:

A long circular walk beginning at the village of Southgate and following coast line to Pwll Du then circling inland up Bishopston valley to the picturesque village of Ilston before returning to the coast via Three Cliffs valley. You will need OS map Gower 164 to complete this walk as the map below will not have adequate detail to find the footpaths between Kittle and Ilston easily.

Distance covered: 8.5 miles **Average time:** 5 hours **Terrain:** varied expect some steep paths and lots of mud in winter.

Directions:

At Pennard church turn off the B4436, take the road for Pennard and Southgate follow the road all the way to the round about at Southgate. Park in the National Trust car park (SS 55310 87461) next to 3 Cliffs Coffee shop. From the car park face the coast and turn left following the cliff top path. As you walk in the direction of Hunts bay about 600yds from where you have parked your car you can find Minchin hole bone caves. Be careful if you decide to go down to the cave it is a real dangerous scramble but it is also probably the reason that the cave is in such pristine condition today.



History of Minchin hole bone caves:

The cave has been excavated on a number of occasions in the past; the first of which took place in the mid nineteenth century. The many artefacts now lie in Swansea Museum include the remains of a straight-tusked elephant, bison, soft-nosed rhinoceros, cave bear, reindeer, wolf and hyena.

Along with the animal remains which indicate residence in the upper Palaeolithic period evidence of later occupation in the form of pottery (pots, dishes, boles, spindle whorls, combs, bronze brooches and a number of coins indicate that the cave was still in use during the Romano-British occupation and later in the Dark Ages.

A little further along the coast on the Western headland of deep slade there is a second cave known as Bacon hole reportedly on account of one of the formations within the cave which bears some resemblance to streaky bacon ! The cave was first excavated in 1850 by Colonel Wood who documented the presence of various Pleistocene animals including the straight-nosed elephant and narrow-nosed rhinoceros. Later excavations also uncovered early Iron-Age pottery. The cave is also believed to have been occupied by humans during the Roman occupation, the Dark Ages and throughout Medieval times.

*Also well worth looking out for while you are exploring these cliffs is a quite insignificant looking but very rare plant known as Yellow whitlowgrass, (*Draba aizoides*) it only grows about 2 inches high and carries yellow flowers in late winter to mid spring. A member of the Brassicaceae family the plant is widely distributed in continental Europe . This is the only place in the UK where it can be found.*

Now continue along the coastal path past the large rocky cove of Hunts bay and up onto the headland, as you round the headland you will afford breath taking views of the picturesque Pwlldu bay. The path will take you down to the small group or remote cottages at the head of the beach. Im sure at this point you will want to take a detour down onto the sands before returning here to pick up the path again.

History of Pwll Du Bay:

Much of the scenery of this beautiful bay results from the Quarrying activities which existed here until the beginning of the 20 th century rights of “cliffage” were awarded to farming tenants, who could then quarry the limestone from the slopes of Pwll-Du Head which was then shipped across the water to Devon where it was cooked to make agricultural lime.

Looking to the east of the bay you can still clearly see where the limestone was removed from the cliff. The stone was then piled a short way from low water and marked with a post. Ships then sailed into the cove at high tide, locate the posts and remained there until the tide dropped leaving the ship beached and ready to be loaded before the next high tide. I have also read that some of the ships would actually scuttle their vessels before the tide had fully dropped and as the ship beached the sea cocks would again be closed, the water partially filling the hold of the ship would break the fall of the cargo of rock as it was loaded. The remaining water would be drained out before the tide returned. It is also speculated that much of the limestone making up the huge shingle banks at the head of the beach are also derived from the smaller peaces of stone left on the beach after the ships were hurriedly loaded between the tides. The houses nestling at the head of the beach were once pubs serving the thirsty workers.

When you have finished exploring the beach pick up the path again at the rear of the cottages you need to take the path directly north up Bishopston valley, make sure that you always follow the river on its west side staying for all but the very last part of the journey near to the valley floor, you are heading for Kittle village so don't be tempted to take any of the paths east for Bishopston.

At the head of the valley you will join a lane, at the first opportunity bear right. The lane will take you up to a junction with the main road, turn left down the main road. After 50yds turn right into the gravel car park of Barlands Common.

Follow the lane which heads down hill to the west. When the lane bears ninety degrees right take the footpath which leads straight on into a small woodland. It is well way marked, follow it for half a mile until you emerge at next to Kittle hill farm. Turn right along the lane and continue until you meet the main road

Cross the main road and continue down the lane and across the ford.

When you get to Court house farm take the track to the right before the farm entrance and follow the path across the fields and down into the village of Ilston.

When you meet the lane at Ilston village turn right and then left. Make your way into the church yard.

History of Ilston Church:

The Church at Ilston which you see today dedicated to St Illtyd but is just a token of the ecclesiastical history associated with this village and valley. In the 1640s fuelled by the newfound religious freedom of the civil war years and the breakdown in censorship the Baptist movement flourished. A little further down the valley you will come across the ruins of the first baptised church established in Wales . The church was established by John Miles on the 1 st of October 1649. a great deal of fascinating history in known about the area due to the survival of the 'Ilston Churchbook', now preserved in America . The book is an interesting commentary of the times, some funny titbits are for instance how Miles apparently was rather disappointed that his first two converts at Ilston were women, though consoled himself by believing that the Lord was 'thereby teaching us not to despise the day of small things'! another entry during the 1650s describes how a handful of members were expelled from the church for drunkenness and sexual misconduct!

During the 1650s miles was very successful spreading the word throught south Wales and influencing the foundation of further churches as far a field as Hay on Wye, Llantrisant, Carmarthen and Abergavenny. Ultimately due to the Restoration Miles's fortunes waned, he was ejected as minister of Ilston parish and ultimately emigrated to Rehoboth , Massachusetts , where founded the first Baptist church in that state. unfortunately he was expelled from Rehoboth in 1667, he moved on and founded a new town, which he named Swansea.

At the far end of the church you will find a gate through which you can pass taking you into Ilston valley. Don't take any of the paths which bear off to the left or right, just stay on the valley floor, roughly

following the path of the river. The geology of this area is predominantly limestone and in true form the river in this valley often finds its way below ground into the many cracks and cave systems which have been worn by the water over thousands of years. In the winter the river flows the length of the valley to Parkmill while in the summer the river often disappears leaving just a dry river bed shortly after the church.

At the Parkmill end of the valley you will emerge into the Gower in pub car park. I'm sure you will have worked up enough of a thirst to be tempted in to try an ale and maybe some lunch?

That done turn right onto the main road, after about 100yds you will see a turning on the left, cross the bridge, the road turns first left, then as it bears back to the right (only 20yds from the turning) you can take the footpath which takes you into the woods and follows the lower edge of the valley. Continue past the blue foot bridge and after about 200yds take the path to the left. It will take you up past some old wooden cottages and emerge on Pennard golf course.

Follow the path along the edge of the golf course affording beautiful views down the cliffs valley towards the bay. And Pennard castle.

History of Pennard Castle:

Pennard Castle, originally a possession of Henry de Beaumont, was established in the 12th century probably as a ringwork castle, the stone castle we see today was likely constructed in the late 13th or early 14th century and the work of the de Breose's. The castle and surrounding village were abandoned by 1400 though the church (St. Marys) continued in



use until 1532 when it finally succumbed to the encroaching sand, the sand blew in from the beaches and choked the agricultural land, records note that tithes (taxes) were lowered to help the struggling farmers survive.

With regard to the be-sanding, though a geographer may have an alternative explanation, the truth is that many hundreds of years ago there was a warlike chieftain called Prince Rhys ap Iestyn who once lived in the castle. He had won the hand of a Prince's daughter as reward for his battle exploits. A great feast was prepared to celebrate the forthcoming marriage. However the celebrations were disturbed by strange noises coming from magical lights dancing at a grassy area on the other side of the valley. Rhys ordered some of his men to discover the cause of the commotion. The men returned and said "Sire, 'tis the Tylwyth Teg (the fairies of Welsh folk lore), feasting and dancing, Rhys was so annoyed that the Tylwyth Teg would be interfering with his celebrations summoned his men. Everybody begged him not to as they knew the Tylwyth Teg were not to be medaled with, but Rhys, too drunk to think rationally and bragged, "I have nothing to fear from the little people!" The chieftain summoned his men to arms and ran down to the grassy area and attacked the Tylwyth Teg who as everyone knows can only be seen but not touched, none the less they were not very pleased that the chieftain

had spoiled their innocent fun and so cursed the chieftain sending a storm of unimaginable proportions to bury the castle under the deep sands.

Continue along the top of the valley and around the headland above the 3 cliffs

It is well worth a short detour here to walk out along the neck of three cliffs especially if the tide is in. the next bay you will pass as you continue along the coast is Pobbles. A good safe beach if you fancy a swim. Then climb back up to the costal path and following the cliff edge past fox hole. You should now recognise the national trust car park on the cliff top where you left your car.

Pwll Du, Ilston and Three Cliffs Walking Map:

