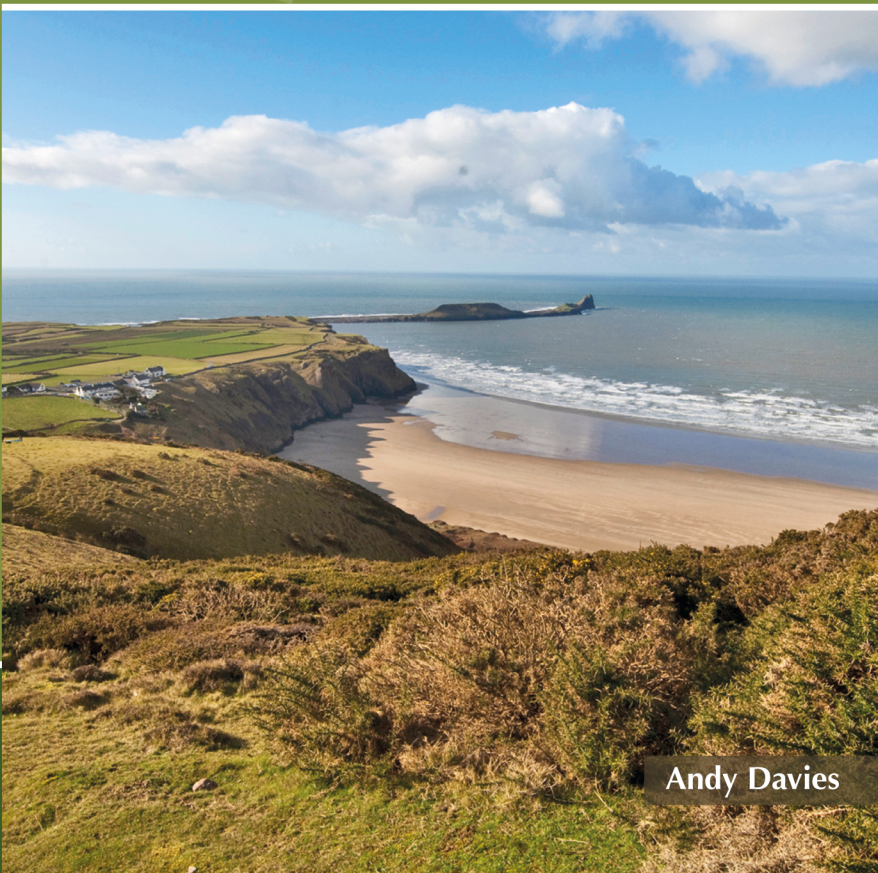


CICERONE

WALKING ON GOWER

30 walks exploring the
AONB peninsula in south Wales



Andy Davies

WALKING ON GOWER

by Andy Davies

CICERONE

JUNIPER HOUSE, MURLEY MOSS,
OXENHOLME ROAD, KENDAL, CUMBRIA LA9 7RL
www.cicerone.co.uk

© Andy Davies 2015
 Second edition 2015
 ISBN: 978 1 85284 821 7
 Reprinted 2021, 2022 (with updates)
 First edition 2012



Printed in Turkey by Pelikan Basim using responsibly sourced paper
 A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library
 All photographs are by the author unless otherwise stated



© Crown copyright 2015
 OS PU100012932

*To my mother and father, and family and friends
 who have shared this area with me.*

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Stephen Parry and Chris Dale of the City and County of Swansea, for their help in clarifying Rights of Way, and Nick Edwards, Senior Reserves Manager for the Countryside Council for Wales, for providing information on the three Gower National Nature Reserves. Sean Hathaway of the City and County of Swansea kindly supplied information regarding Local Nature Reserves, and Jonathan Price, the Community Ranger for the Forestry Commission, provided valuable information and advice regarding Parkwood and Millwood. Thanks also go to Ben Evans for his help in preparing the section on geology. Thanks to my friend Dave Whittaker for his company while researching the routes.

I would also like to thank Craig Wareham of Viewranger who very kindly supplied the digital version of the OS Explorer Map Gower Sheet 164 1:25,000. This was used in conjunction with the Viewranger app running on a GPS-enabled smartphone.

Finally, thanks to the team at Cicerone: Clare Croke, Dorothy Grace, Robin Pritchard, Lois Sparling, Lucy Rogers, Jonathan Williams and Lesley Williams.

CONTENTS

Map key	4
Introduction	7
Geology	9
History	13
Wildlife habitats	17
Transport to and around Gower	21
Staying in Gower	21
Using this guide	21
Walk 1 The Mumbles, Langland and Caswell	23
Walk 2 Caswell, Pwlldu and Bishopston Valley	31
Walk 3 Bishopston Valley	36
Walk 4 Pwlldu Head and Bishopston Valley	40
Walk 5 Pobbles, Three Cliffs Bay and Pennard Pill and Castle	45
Walk 6 Three Cliffs Bay, Pennard Pill, Ilston Cwm and Bishopston Valley	49
Walk 7 Pennard Pill, Three Cliffs Bay and Parc le Breos	57
Walk 8 Cefn Bryn, Broad Pool and Parc le Breos	62
Walk 9 Three Cliffs Bay, Tor Bay, Nicholaston Woods and Cefn Bryn	66
Walk 10 Millwood, Cefn Bryn, Reynoldston and Berry Wood	71
Walk 11 Penrice Castle, Cefn Bryn, Three Cliffs Bay and Oxwich NNR	75
Walk 12 Oxwich National Nature Reserve	84
Walk 13 Oxwich Point	87
Walk 14 Oxwich, Horton and Millwood	91
Walk 15 South Gower Cliffs and Port Eynon	97
Walk 16 Thurba Head and South Gower Cliffs	102
Walk 17 Rhossili Down, South Gower Cliffs and Port Eynon	106
Walk 18 Rhossili Down and Bay, Fall Bay and Mewslade Bay	114
Walk 19 Rhossili, Fall Bay and Mewslade Bay	119
Walk 20 Rhossili Down, Llanmadoc Hill and Broughton Burrows	125
Walk 21 Gower Coast NNR, Rhossili Down and Hardings Down	131
Walk 22 Mewslade Bay, Fall Bay, Rhossili Down and Hardings Down	140
Walk 23 Llanmadoc Hill, Llangennith, Burry Holms and Broughton Bay	145
Walk 24 Llanmadoc Hill, Broughton Bay and Whiteford NNR	150
Walk 25 Whiteford National Nature Reserve	156

Front cover: View of Rhossili Bay and the Worms Head from Rhossili Down

Walk 26 Landimore Marsh, Cheriton, Burry Pill and Weobley Castle 160
Walk 27 Landimore Marsh, Arthur's Stone, Llanrhidian and Weobley Castle 163
Walk 28 Cefn Bryn, Llanrhidian and Weobley Castle 169
Walk 29 Llanrhidian and Weobley Castle 174
Walk 30 Llanrhidian, Cil Ifor Top, Parc le Breos and Cefn Bryn 177

Appendix A Walk summary table. 181
Appendix B Index of information boxes. 184
Appendix C Useful websites 185





Updates to this Guide





While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website (www.cicerone.co.uk/821/updates), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time. We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to updates@cicerone.co.uk or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, LA9 7RL.

Register your book: To sign up to receive free updates, special offers and GPX files where available, register your book at www.cicerone.co.uk.

Looking west from Deborah's Hole cliff fort (Walks 16, 17 and 21)



Route symbols on OS map extracts
 route
 diversion
 start/finish point
 route direction

Features on the overview map
 County boundary
 Urban area
 Gower Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
 land over 75m

 For OS legend see printed OS maps.



Walking down the northern end of Rhossili Down (Walks 18, 20–21 and 22)

waterproof boots are recommended under these circumstances but stout walking shoes will suffice during the drier summer months.

Gower is exposed to prevailing south-westerly winds and the weather can change rapidly at any time of the year but temperatures are moderated by the relatively warm sea water of the Atlantic Drift. As a consequence, winters are seldom severe although the summits can provide a surprisingly mountain moorland experience on a hard snowy day. It is wise to carry enough clothing in case the weather changes. Multiple thin layers will give

you more flexibility to respond to changing conditions.

Routes are illustrated with extracts from the 1:50,000 OS maps, with the main route marked in orange and any alternative routes marked in blue and extensions in green. Alternative and extended routes are described within the main route description. Features along the walk that appear on the map are highlighted in bold in the route description. The route descriptions are also accompanied by information boxes which are cross-referenced to other route descriptions, using the walk number.

WALK 1

The Mumbles, Langland and Caswell

Start/Finish	Bracelet Bay (SS 6250 8715)
Distance	11.5km (7¼ miles)
Total ascent	290m
Time	3hrs
Refreshments	Forte's Ice Cream Parlour, Plunch Lane; cafés in Rotherslade and Langland; shops and pubs in The Mumbles.

The walk follows the cliff path west from Bracelet Bay to Langland and Caswell before heading inland through Bishop's Wood, returning to the start via Oystermouth Castle and Mumbles Head. The footpath to Caswell is along a tarmac surface with the route becoming a little boggy crossing a short section of Clyne Common. There are plenty of opportunities for refreshments along the way and two beautiful beaches for a swim.

With the ice cream parlour on your right, take the road to the west that soon becomes the cliff path. In the rocky cove of **Limeslade** there is a sandy beach at low tide with interesting rock pools. ►

The rocks here are made of Carboniferous limestone.

Just up Plunch Lane is a house built by Catherine Zeta-Jones and Michael Douglas. On the headland to the east is the aerial and building of the Mumbles Coastguard station. Beyond is Bracelet Bay and **Mumbles Head**. The lighthouse was built on the Outer Head, the last island of three, in 1794 and is accessible by foot at low tide. The light was originally lit by two open coal fires arranged vertically to distinguish it from other beacons. These were replaced by an oil lantern and lens creating two beams.

Mumbles Head Fort was constructed next to the lighthouse in 1860 in anticipation of an invasion

by Napoleon III of France which never came to fruition. It was used again during the Second World War by a small battery of soldiers. Bob's Cave can be found at the tip of Mumbles Head. Normally only noticeable from the sea, it is possible to reach the cave during low tide. **Exercise extreme caution with the incoming tide.** Remains of bison and buffalo from the Neolithic period and signs of human habitation were discovered during excavations in the cave, which was named after a member of the Mumbles Lifeboat crew, Bob Jenkins, who was found sheltering there two days after a tragic rescue attempt in January 1883.

Looking back east along this path you can see that the rocks, arranged in parallel layers or beds, have been tilted by around 45 degrees to the south. Inland there is a **Local Nature Reserve** covered mainly in gorse.

The path climbs steeply up to **Rams Tor**, giving great views of the coastline to the west of Caswell Bay, Pwlldu Bay and, finally, Oxwich Point. From Rotherslade, where there is a café, you can either continue along the path



*Bracelet Bay and
Mumbles Lighthouse*

to Langland or walk across the beach if the tide is low enough.

Langland Bay is a designated conservation area with 75 Edwardian beach chalets overlooking the sandy beach. Notice an impressive building with a green turret behind the beach. This is a Scottish Baronial-style mansion built in the mid-19th century by the Crawshay family, the Merthyr Tydfil Ironmasters, as their summer residence.

Continue along the coastal path towards Caswell Bay. To the right are **Newton Cliffs** and Summerland Cliffs Local Nature Reserve. ►

The path climbs up to Whiteshell Point from where there is a fine view west of Caswell Bay, Brandy Cove and Pwlldu Bay. Notice the furrows running down the cliffs between the bay and Pwlldu Head. These were once quarried for limestone (see Walk 2). ►

Rare plants such as hoary rockrose exist within this calcareous grassland, itself a rare habitat within the UK.

Brandy Cove was famous for smuggling.



Nature Reserve' indicating the route up some stone steps alongside a row of old cottages. This steep climb brings you to a path at the top where you turn left. Follow the top of the cliff with a great view of the sweep of Swansea Bay and Port Talbot.

The beauty of **Swansea Bay** has often been compared with that of the Bay of Naples and was described by Dylan Thomas, as 'a long and splendid curving shore'. Part of the Bristol Channel, it has one of the largest tidal ranges in the world at 10.5m.

This area is a Local Nature Reserve and habitat types include maritime heath, limestone grassland, limestone scrub and woodland, each supporting different plants and animals. Over 200 species of plants and fungi, 40 species of birds and hundreds of species of insects have been recorded on the Hill.

A Neolithic stone axe head was discovered in an allotment in 1938 and a fissure on the hill has also revealed prehistoric human bones and teeth. A military camp was established during the Second World War and remnants of the 623rd Anti-Aircraft Battery gun emplacements and control bunker are still visible.

Drop down the seaward side of the hill along the obvious track to the road above Bracelet Bay.

This bay is a geological Site of Special Scientific Interest and is worth exploring. The rocky outcrops provide excellent exposures of **geological structures** formed during the Variscan mountain-building episode up to around 280 million years ago. The exposures show a cross-section through the core of a major upward fold structure, the Langland Anticline, which extends across the whole Gower Peninsula, bringing the Carboniferous limestone to the surface. The study of this area has greatly increased our understanding of this period of geological activity in South Wales.

Turn west to return to the start.

WALK 2

Caswell, Pwlldu and Bishopston Valley

Start/Finish	Car park, Bishopston (SS 5791 8926)
Distance	9km (5½ miles)
Total ascent	255m
Time	2½hrs
Refreshments	Joiners Arms and Valley Inns and Spar in Bishopston; The Plough and Harrow Inn and Village Stores in Murton; cafés in Caswell.

This route gains the coast via Bishop's Wood Nature Reserve at Caswell Bay and then runs along the base of the cliffs to Brandy Cove and Pwlldu Bay. Tales of smuggling and ghosts abound here and one can just imagine the locals dodging the excise men by bringing their illicit booty ashore under the cover of darkness. Pwlldu Bay is also steeped in industrial history, as is Bishopston Valley which once had a working lead mine. The stream plays cat-and-mouse by disappearing and reappearing again a number of times.

From the car park in **Bishopston** walk up the road, past the Valley Inn and Joiners Arms on Bishopston Road.

The house called Marston, no. 133, was **Dylan Thomas' father's home** when he moved from Cwmdonkin Drive following his retirement from teaching at Swansea Grammar School in 1937. Dylan and his wife Caitlin were frequent guests and it was here, in 1941, that Dylan wrote the poem *The Ballad of the Long Legged Bait*.

Turn left just past the Spar down Providence Lane. Follow this and cross over a road in a housing estate to the Plough and Harrow Pub. Bear left and then right around the pub to Murton Green. Turn right just past the Wesleyan Methodist Church and follow the road to a

Further along this sunken lane you can see a turf-roofed roundhouse.

This is Lanwell where courses in traditional woodland management are run.

bend. Follow the footpath sign to Caswell Bay ignoring the turn to Clyne Common.

The track comes to a Y-junction where you bear left and keep left again a few metres on. Drop down the sunken track, and when it bends to the right, continue on the main track between the two hedges. On your left you can see a stone building which is the remains of a chapel at St Peter's Well. ◀

Once you reach the valley floor turn right, pass the roundhouse and follow the path to **Caswell** through **Bishop's Wood** Local Nature Reserve. Cross over the road and see if the tide is low enough to walk around the rocks on the right. If not, walk right up the road and turn left onto the Coast Path next to the entrance to a majestic house.

Drop down to the beach and skirt along the base of the pebbles and climb up the steps in the corner. Turn left at the top and follow the path above the tops of the cliffs, taking care here as there is a steep drop adjacent to the route.

Coming around the point, if the tide is low, there

is a superb view of

the inclined rock layers in the intertidal limestone reef. On your right is **Redley Cliff**, a nature reserve

owned by the Wildlife Trust for South and West Wales and is part of the Caswell Bay Site of Special Scientific Interest.



Caswell Bay at low tide



Continue along to the next inlet of **Brandy Cove** which gets its name from stories of smugglers using the bay to unload their illegal tobacco and alcohol during the 18th century. ▶

There are a couple of **legends of the supernatural** associated with the beach. One is about a witch called 'Old Moll' who lived in the caves near the beach and spent much of her time wandering through the many small villages and farms on Gower. The other story is connected to a chilling real-life murder that took place near the beach in 1919. Nearby villagers claimed that they could hear screams coming from the caves near the beach at night.

Coming around into **Pwlldu Bay** there is a good view of the tilted limestone rock strata along the foreshore at low tide and the old quarry in the cliff on the western side of the bay. Turn left where the path joins a track and cross the stream using the bridge. The bay is worth exploring by turning left here for its shingle beach

There is a raised beach exposed below the path and an area of scree on the western side above the path.

PWLLDU QUARRYING

The cliffs to the west of this beautiful bay have been extensively modified by quarrying up to the beginning of the 20th century. Rights of 'cliffage' were awarded to farming tenants who could quarry the limestone from the slopes of Pwlldu Head, which was then shipped across the water to Devon where it was burned to make agricultural lime.

The quarried stone was piled a short way from low water and marked with a post. Ships then sailed into the cove at high tide, located the posts and remained there until the tide dropped, leaving the ship beached and ready to be loaded before the next high tide. Some of the ships may have actually been scuttled by opening the sea cocks before the tide had fully dropped. As the ship beached the sea cocks would be closed with water partially filling the hold of the ship, breaking the fall of the cargo of rock as it was loaded. The remaining water would be drained out before the tide returned.

The houses nestling at the head of the beach were once four pubs serving the thirsty workers. The large white house was the Beaufort Arms and opposite it was the Ship Inn, but the Bull and New Inn are no longer in existence.

and past history associated with quarrying and with smuggling (see Walk 3).

Continue by turning right once over the bridge, following the path past the National Trust sign along the western bank of the stream. Ignore the sign to Southgate where a valley joins from the left, once used to smuggle contraband to the Highway Farms in Southgate, and follow the sign to Bishopston and Kittle.

Continue following the path in the valley signposted Kittle Church, ignoring the two bridges. Look out for where the stream divides into three and disappears underground. Shortly after, ignore the sign for Kittle and continue along the valley floor, signposted Church Lane. Notice that the stream-bed is dry but it will hold water in extreme spate conditions.

The path crosses the stream-bed and passes over an old stone wall. ◀ Just beyond up to the right is an old mine adit.

Look out for some stone ruins well disguised with moss.

Listen out for the sound of falling water which is coming from **Guzzle Hole** over to your left. Again, in times of spate, water gushes out of this cave, and also comes in from the right if the massive sink hole further up the valley cannot cope with the extreme flood.

Continue along the dry stream-bed, ignoring the sign for Kittle on the left up the steps. Just after this, turn right and climb the steep slope out of the valley. Once you have climbed out of the valley, ignore the footpath on the right and continue following the wall to a stile. Follow the footpath across the field and, at the dwellings, take the track straight ahead which brings you to the Joiners Arms and The Valley pub in **Bishopston**.

Alternatively, it is worth carrying on a little way further up the stream-bed in the valley to see the sink hole and, if conditions have been dry, you can continue to follow the stream-bed to St Teilo's Church where you turn right and up to the Joiners Arms and The Valley pub in **Bishopston**.

Turn left back to the start.

The dry stream-bed upstream of Guzzle Hole





- huge variety of landscape in a compact, accessible area
- world famous coastal scenery
- the UK's first Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

Measuring only 25km long and 13km wide, the Gower peninsula in south Wales nevertheless offers a huge range of walking. Famous for its coastline – long stretches of golden sand, towering cliffs, bird-filled saltmarshes and hidden coves – Gower also provides plenty of interest inland so walkers can explore the whole of this stunning peninsula.

The routes in this guidebook range from 4km to 22.5km (2½ to 14 miles) and are suitable for walkers of all abilities.



- OS maps for every route
- information on Gower's unique geology, including strata diagrams
- plenty of detail on the peninsula's history, key sights and places of interest
- advice on public transport to and around Gower

CICERONE
www.cicerone.co.uk
 WALKING | WALES

