

Coastwise in Wales

 **Phil Curry** visits Pembrokeshire,
following the route of its scenic
coastal path and discovering many
Welsh gems along the way

C *roeso i sir benfrol* (welcome to Pembrokeshire). I learnt this phrase while sitting in the local of a small, Welsh village, head buried in a map, planning my journey. The landlord was a friendly chap,

suggesting places to visit and even teaching me snippets of the Welsh language I might encounter along the way.

I had chosen to explore the beautiful coastline of Pembrokeshire after reading about its great coastal path: a 186-mile walk around the cliffs and beaches of the Welsh county sounded too good an opportunity to miss and was bound to reveal a bumper crop of hidden gems. However, I wasn't about to walk the full length of it – I don't have that level of stamina! So, I was glad of the all-new Marquis Mercedes County Devon to put through its paces. Its compact dimensions would prove to be perfect for exploring the winding coastal roads, leading to gorgeous stretches of footpath where other vehicles might come unstuck.

After a couple of hours, I had planned my route, thanked my host for the evening, and strolled out to the 'van, ready to head for my first overnight stop at the Cardigan Bay Camping and Caravanning Club site.

Visiting Wales feels very much like visiting a foreign country on our own shores. It has its own language, and you are reminded of this by the signposts at every junction and town. It has a rich heritage all of its own, as well as plenty of beaches, scenic locations and tall mountains. I had visited before, as a child, but I've never set foot in the south of the country, so this was a true exploration.

My plan was to stop in the north for a night, before travelling down the A478 to the start of the footpath in Amroth. There, I would follow it round, to tour and walk, and enjoy the attractions on offer.

Why go abroad...?

Before leaving the Cardigan Bay site, I asked the wardens, Sue Roberts and Peter Dann why so many visitors come here each year. They said: "This area is great for all ages and there's plenty to see and do. You can explore 60 miles of coastline and coves, enjoy outstanding views and see a variety of wildlife."

Looking forward to the start of my tour along the Coastal Path I drove to Amroth to meet up with our Liz Paterson, who was as excited as I to be exploring this corner of the UK for the first time.

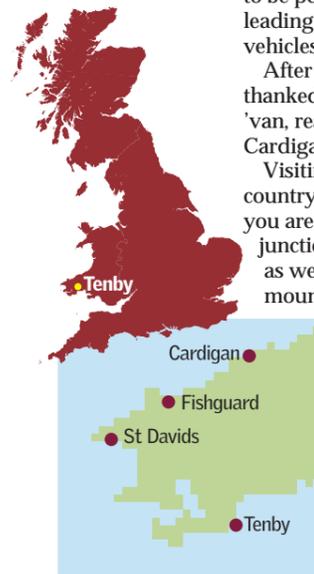
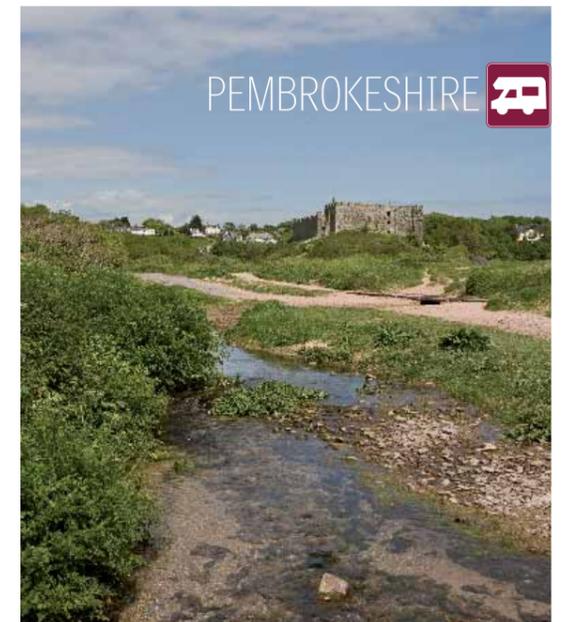
On the recommendation of others who had toured the area, we diverted from the coast and visited the little village of Carew and its great, old castle, along with a tidal mill which dates back to the early 19th century.

Exploring the castle grounds and rooms, we were treated to a look back in time. Although in ruins, you could easily picture the castle playing host to the hustle and bustle of everyday life in South Wales. It also played a large part in the Civil War, changing hands four times between the Royalists and the Parliamentarians, before being abandoned in 1686.

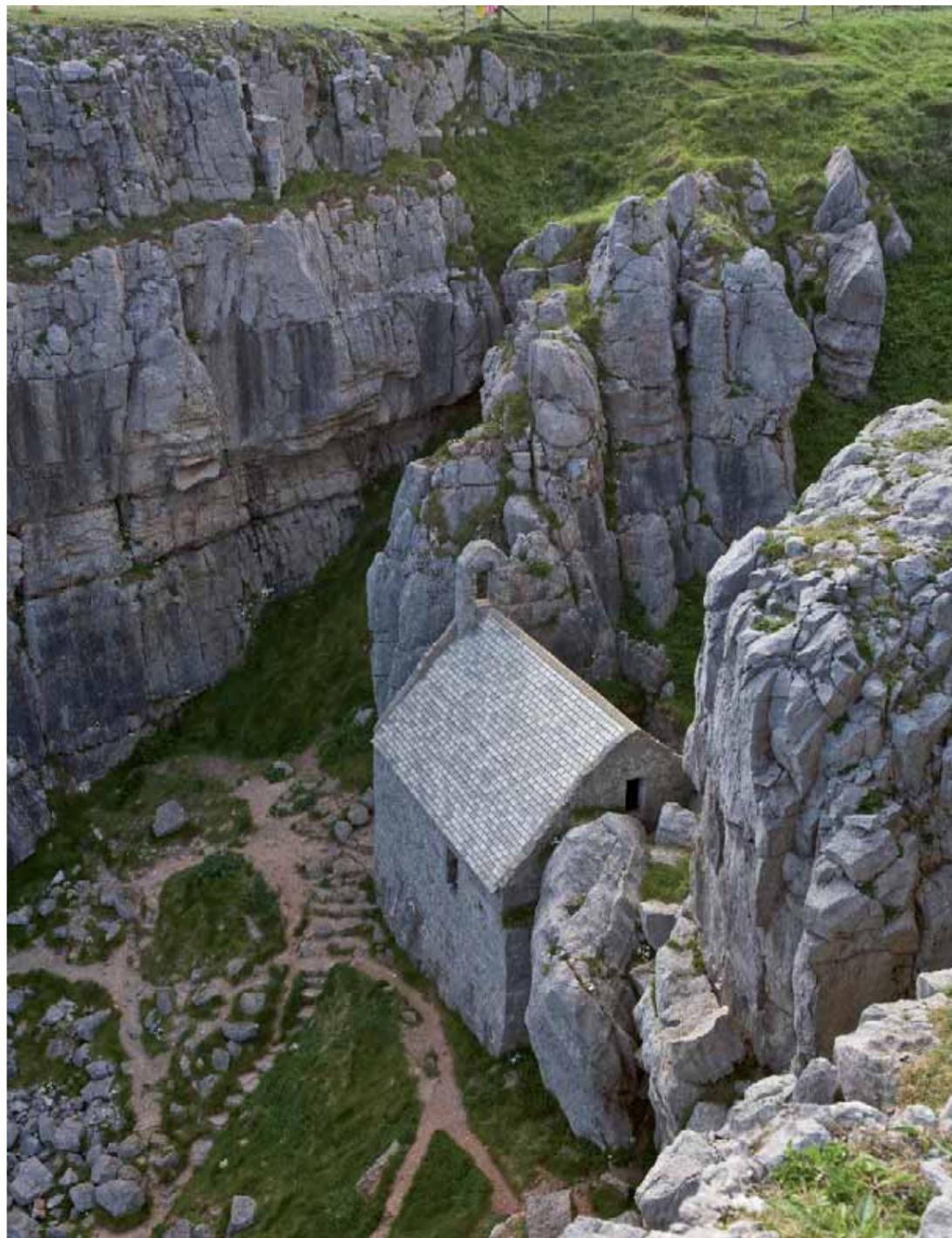
Next to the castle and mill is the village of Carew, with some great old pubs, and a superb picnic area surrounded by buttercups. You can park free in the castle car park, where there are no height restrictions.

Taking a break from our search for hidden gems, we headed back to the coast and the town of Dinbych-y-Pysgod, the Welsh name for the seaside town of Tenby, and enjoyed some of the town's historic culture.

A wander along the path parallel to the beach, on a bright sunny day, made us question why people rush to leave the UK for foreign shores when there are



Clockwise, from top left: Phil and Liz relax in a field of buttercups, within sight of Carew castle; Manorbier castle, on the A4139 was once home to a Norman knight; Carew castle is on the tidal reaches of the Carew river; the seaside town of Tenby boasts a large, sandy beach



beautiful stretches of beach here. "It's almost as if we're in the French Riviera," exclaimed Liz as we wandered around a corner and saw an expanse of bright, blue sea ahead of us. In fact, the air was so clear we could see over the bay to Pendine Sands in neighbouring Carmarthenshire. We ate some lunch in a small café, while I showed Liz the route I had planned.

Threading the Marquis Devon through the streets of Tenby we left the town and joined the main road to our next stop. Manorbier Castle is on the A4139 coast road from Tenby. It was built as a home for the Norman knight Odo de Barri, who was awarded land in Manorbier, Penally and Begelly, in gratitude for his military help in capturing Pembrokeshire.

While driving along the southern coast, we pulled into a car park at St. Govan's Head. Here, we took a short walk to the cliff edge where we were able to look down on St. Govan's Chapel, built in the sixth century at the base of the cliffs where the saint was said to have hidden from pirates who were trying to capture him. We walked down the stone steps from the clifftop, and counted 73. However, it is apparently impossible for a mere mortal to count the number of steps accurately (maybe due to how they are cut in the rock?). Some say it's 74, others say 72 - whatever the number, it is quite a long climb.

At the bottom, all thoughts of 21st-century life were banished. Here we were, standing in a small chapel inside which is a fissure in the rock. Its sides show rib-like characteristics and legend has it that they are the imprints of St. Govan's body, as he lay hidden there.

Further around the coast is Freshwater West. Well known by surfers, there is a great parking place at the side of the road which allows you a view of the sea, and the surfers in their battle against the elements. After a walk along the clifftop, we headed further round, to Angle, taking in the spectacular sand dunes, before driving back to Freshwater East for our overnight stop.

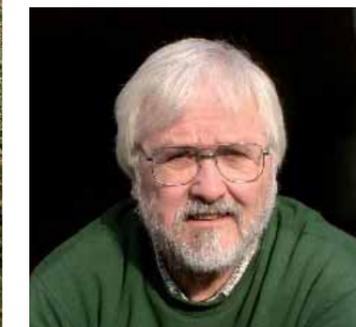
After a day's driving and fresh sea air I was glad to see the campsite ahead. Having dropped Liz off at an hotel (there is no spare bed in the Devon) I found a free space at the back of the site, parked up and cooked dinner.

Unfortunately, I had not brought an aerial cable with me, and TV reception was poor, meaning I couldn't use either analogue or digital on the flip-down monitor that comes as standard with the Devon. Still, no matter, I pulled out the easy-to-make-up lounge double bed, plugged my laptop PC into one of the electrical sockets, and sat back to watch a DVD.

Sail to America - £3 only

A fine morning awaited me as I pulled down the blinds. I quickly rearranged the lounge, stowed my belongings beneath the seats, and went to collect Liz. We decided to head west again, and visit Dale and the surrounding 

Clockwise, from far left: it's a steep climb to the tiny chapel at the foot of the cliffs, at St Govan's Head; Stackpole Quay was built in the 18th century, to ship out limestone; St Govan's Head faces Stackpole Head across the bay; following the coast road at Freshwater West; this natural rock arch is at St Govan's Head



IN THE KNOW

 **Patrick Jones**
Reader Team Member
and local resident

"Perched high on the cliffs above St Brides Bay is the Druidstone Hotel (www.druidstone.co.uk) - a Mecca for food lovers. You won't be served chips here, only mouthwatering home-cooked food. And, during late evening, you will experience one of Pembrokeshire's magical moments - a spectacular sunset over the sea."

Top row, left & middle Marloes Sands, cared for by the National Trust, is a beautiful, isolated stretch of sand with rocky outcrops along its length
Top row, far right Many Pembrokeshire roads are narrow, like this one near Nolton Haven
Main pic Marloes Sands is rarely busy, so you may well have it all to yourself

area. This is one of many points along the coastline and, while not offering the best views – the oil refinery at Angle does spoil the skyline somewhat – it provides some spectacular walking routes. And, the National Trust area of Marloes Sands is further up the coastal path, so parking in the National Trust car park (it has no restrictions) we walked about half-a-mile-or-so along the trail and stopped at Martins Haven. From there, you can catch a boat to Skomer Island. But if you don't like water, fear not – the reserve has a number of cameras installed which you can control from a panel to see the area on a big screen – a kind of virtual tour, Big Brother style! Due to rough seas the boats were not sailing that day so we stood at the screen, looking for the puffins that inhabit Skomer but sadly they were camera-shy that day.

From here, we went to the seaside town of Broad Haven, another little tucked-away village. This was where we had to deviate from the road following the coastal path. The local, un-named roads were not suitable for anything longer than 4.9m so we had to follow the B4327 to Haverfordwest and go back along the B4341. From there, we decided to visit Nolton Haven where we used the (unrestricted) car park and enjoyed the small, peaceful, pebble beach.

Our next stop was Solva. While here, we wandered around the craft shops that fill the little streets before walking along to the harbour. In the early part of the 20th century, Solva was a bustling port with many warehouses for the storage of cargo, and lime kilns for burning limestone. At the time, it was possible to book passage on a ship sailing from the port to America, for a fare equating to £3 in today's money.

From Solva, we decided to call it a day and headed up to our campsite just outside St. Davids (the smallest city in the UK). This time, I was able to make use of my TV, although all I could pick up were Irish channels. So, after a short stroll to enjoy a spectacular sunset, I settled in early for a peaceful night's sleep.

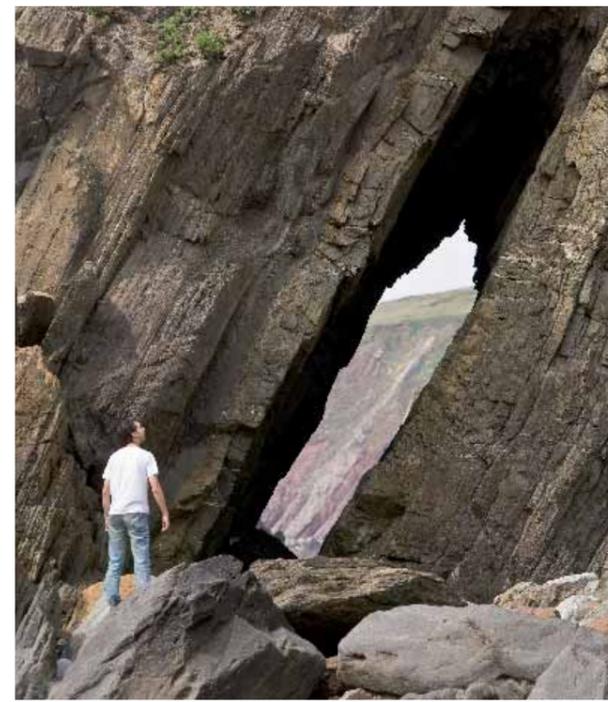
Houses of slate

I awoke to yet another sunny morning and views of the cliffs on the other side of the road. Having collected Liz from the farmhouse B&B next to the site we headed to Whitesands bay, the next stop on our coastal tour.

With its sandy beach, Whitesands is a popular location. But if you prefer fewer people around, scramble to the other side of the rocky promontory and you will find a smaller, more sheltered part.

We headed back into the city of St. Davids another Welsh gem which you must visit, not least for its striking cathedral. However, we couldn't park in the small car park there as it was full when we arrived.

A short drive later, on the advice of my campsite hosts (see panel, p22), we arrived at Abereddy to visit the Blue



WAY TO GO

Generally, Pembrokeshire has narrow lanes with just a few main roads thrown in.

Follow the coastal path

If you are looking to track the coastal path, take the A477 to Tenby and follow the A4139 along the coast. If you have a small 'van, you can follow the B4584 to Freshwater East, and then the B4319 around the southern part of the coast.

Pembroke to Milford Haven

A toll bridge, on the A477, crosses from Pembroke Dock to Milford Haven. The charge for 'vans is 75p and passengers can enjoy a spectacular view over the harbours of both towns. If you don't want to take the bridge, follow the A4075 through Carew.

Marloes Sands

Getting to Dale can be tricky for big 'vans as the B4327 leads to a single-track lane with tight turns. However, you're rewarded with free parking and a nice walk to the beach of Marloes Sands.

Fuel for thought

'Van Marquis County Devon*
Total mileage 1005
Fuel used 147 litres
Avg diesel price £1.32 per litre
Total fuel cost £194
Fuel economy 31mpg



IN THE KNOW

**Pat and Peter Sherwood
 East Trewent Farm B&B,
 Freshwater East**

"Freshwater East is within Britain's only coastal National Park and is listed as an area of outstanding beauty. There are walks along the coastal path and lots of special places to discover. East Trewent Farm is ideal for beach and water sports and is also convenient for Tenby and South Pembrokeshire's many attractions."



OUR VAN
 Marquis County Devon
 Cost new £42,495 (as tested)
 Base vehicle Mercedes-Benz
 Sprinter 311 SWB
 Berths Two
 Engine 2.2-litre CDI
 MTPLM 3200kg
 Unladen mass 2825kg
 Payload 375kg
 Length 5.94m
 Width 2.26m
 Height 2.85m
 (See page 136 for our review)



Above In the early 20th century, Solva was a bustling harbour
Far right St Justinians lifeboat station at Porthstinan
Below right (left to right): St Davids Cathedral; the prettily painted houses of Solva

Lagoon. It is an old slate quarry into which seawater has poured and the water is probably the bluest you will find in the UK. Along the path to the lagoon you can see the ruins of the slate-built houses used by the miners. The buildings are cordoned off, though, due to danger of collapse as they are made entirely of slate slabs. More narrow roads led us to Porthgain. This little quay was once a hive of industrial shipping and was linked to the slate mine at Abereiddy via a small tunnel under the cliff, through which slate was moved on small trucks – it is still visible but is now blocked off. The stone building there looks like some kind of fortress, with its hoppers which once funnelled slate into the waiting ships. Today, Porthgain is a small village with great views from the nearby clifftop. We stayed on in the village for lunch and ate at The Shed, a small, seafood bistro in a building that used to be a machine shop. The family-run business specialises in cooking their own freshly caught fish, and it was

delicious. Nearby, a little public house called the Sloop Inn, serves some of the best local ales in the area.

The end in sight
 After driving through Fishguard, we doubled back a bit along our route to get to Strumble Head, home to the Strumble lighthouse, and a well-placed bird-watching shelter. The rocky coastline allows you to stand and admire the view of two uninhabited islands, and east to Fishguard. If you have a large motorhome it is worth parking at Fishguard and taking the pleasant five-mile walk to Strumble, otherwise you may have trouble negotiating the narrow roads and very tight bends. Finally, we headed along the northern path, stopping for a bite to eat at Newport Sands before rejoining the coastal path to Cardigan and heading for home. While looking for small, hidden-away places, it is usually best to visit the larger towns for supplies. While staying at the Caravan Club site in Freshwater



Clockwise, from top left: Strumble Head lighthouse stands imposingly on Ynysmeicil (St. Michael's Island) to the west of Fishguard; the small quay at Porthgain is linked to the slate mine at Abereddy via a small tunnel through the cliff; the Blue Lagoon at Abereddy is stunningly colourful; Phil and Liz walk to the smaller beach adjacent to Whitesands; Fishguard may be a large port but it does have its quaint corners

East, I took a trip to Pembroke Dock, a large retail complex, to visit its supermarket and was easily able to park the 'van as there are no vehicle or height restrictions there. I found another supermarket, in Cardigan, although the car park there was small. As I drove through Pembrokeshire, I particularly noticed the number of houses painted in pretty, pastel colours. It seemed as if they were everywhere – in Solva, Freshwater and St. Davids. It all makes Pembrokeshire one of the most colourful places I've been to, comparable with the Cornish town of St. Ives, or the French town of Douarnenez, which our Rob Ganley visited (*July issue*). Pembrokeshire has many hidden gems, and its coastline in particular is something to behold. From scenic views to relaxing beaches, and great places to stop, eat, and pitch, and rewards those with a spirit of adventure and a sturdy pair of walking boots. My best bit of advice is to throw away your sat-nav, take a road atlas and simply explore the area. 📍

WHERE WE STAYED

Cardigan Bay Camping and Caravanning Club Site,

Cross Inn, Landysul, SA44 6LW. Tel 01545 560029

Web www.thefriendlyclub.co.uk Price £16.80 (two adults plus hook-up, high season)

This site is approached along a narrow road but is easy enough to negotiate as long as you come at it from the Cross Inn village end. The site has full facilities, a motorhome service point, and a children's play area. The village of Cross Inn offers a number of pubs, and a shop.

Freshwater East Caravan Club Site, Trewent Hill, Pembroke, SA71 5LJ. Tel 01646 672341

Web www.caravanclub.co.uk Price £18.10 (two adults plus hook-up, high season)

This great site is just across the road from a large, sandy beach, and not far from Stackpole Quay, St. Govan's Head and Castlemartin. A combination of grass and hardstanding pitches are available. The area has poor TV reception and almost no mobile phone coverage. Television aerial sockets are available at hook-up points and there is a payphone at reception.

St. Davids Camping and Caravanning Club Site,

Dwr Cwmwdig Berea, St. Davids, SA62 6DW

Tel 01348 831376. Web www.thefriendlyclub.co.uk

Price £16.80 (two adults plus hook-up, high season) Just up the road from St. Davids, this is a lovely site with great views over the cliffs. The 40 serviced pitches, are grass or hardstanding (but take your levelling ramps). There are toilet and laundry facilities on site and a small shop at reception.



IN THE KNOW

Malcolm & Shirley Blackman, St. Davids C&CC site

"The small village of Abereddy, north of St. Davids, is home to the Blue Lagoon, which boasts crystal-clear blue waters and some great views. It is a truly hidden gem in this area. After your visit, venture further down the road, to Porthgain, where there is a small village tavern called the Sloop Inn – it is the perfect place to sample the local ale."

