

Coastal Walk – 3¾ miles

St David's Head

Explore Pembrokeshire's most spectacular coastal headland several miles away from Wales' smallest city, St David's. Look out at island-dotted seascapes against the steep backdrop of Carn Llidi, prehistoric monuments and a fantastic array of coastal wildlife on this rugged circular walk.





Start: Whitesands Beach car park – OS Landranger 157 map – grid ref: SM734272

How to get there and local facilities

On the Pembrokeshire Coast Path, 2 miles NW of the city of St David's, at the end of the B4583. Regular shuttle bus service, the Celtic Coaster, from St David's to Whitesands (April to Sept). Easy detour off the Celtic Trail, National Cycle Network route 4, which passes 1 mile away from the start of this walk.

WCs, refreshments and car park (not NT) at Whitesands Beach, National Trust visitor centre and shop in St David's. Contact us on: 01437 720385

Things to look out for...

-  **Rugged coastal scenery**
St David's Head is forged of very old volcanic rock, some of it dates back almost 500 million years! This geology is best represented by Carn Llidi, the towering jagged outcrop, or tor, that you'll skirt around on this walk, and in the rocky islands of Ramsey, Bishops and Clerks several miles out to sea.
-  **Archaeological remains**
This coastline has a rich prehistoric past. The megalith of Coetan Arthur is a Neolithic burial chamber dating from about 4000BC. There are also the remains of ancient field patterns, enclosures and defensive banks dotted all around.
-  **Coastal heath**
Heather and gorse turn St David's Head a bright shade of purple and gold in late summer. They also provide homes to butterflies, moths and beetles, plus birds like stonechat and linnet.
-  **Cliff tops and out to sea**
A range of birds breed on the cliffs here each summer, from peregrine falcon to raven, and, swift to chough. Offshore, you might be lucky enough to spot porpoise or dolphin playing in the waves.



Coetan Arthur has a huge capstone almost six metres wide and is supported by a side stone over a metre tall. It was almost certainly built this way - with one end resting on the ground - as an "earthfast" megalith. It mimics the shape of Carn Llidi behind it.

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Up to 50 Welsh Mountain ponies graze St David's Head. They keep the vegetation open and maintain the right conditions for coastal heath plants like heather (see here), gorse and the rare hairy greenweed to thrive.

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St David's Head is about 15 miles from Grassholm, one of the largest gannetries in the world with 34,000 breeding pairs of gannets. You can often see gannets feeding close to St David's Head, they plunge into the sea for mackerel, making a very large splash!

Route and directions...

1. From Whitesands car park, go through a gap in the wall on passing the 'Site of St Patrick's Chapel'. Climb a sandy slope up on to the cliff path. After about ½ mile you reach a kissing gate and National Trust sign. Continue to the crest of the hill.
2. From here, see Coetan Arthur silhouetted against the sky. An alternative route heads gently uphill round the back of Carn Llidi with fine views to the east. Adventurous souls can scramble to the summit of this peak.

Our main route sticks to the coast, descending into the valley ahead via broad steps to a spring above the tiny cove of Porth Melgan.

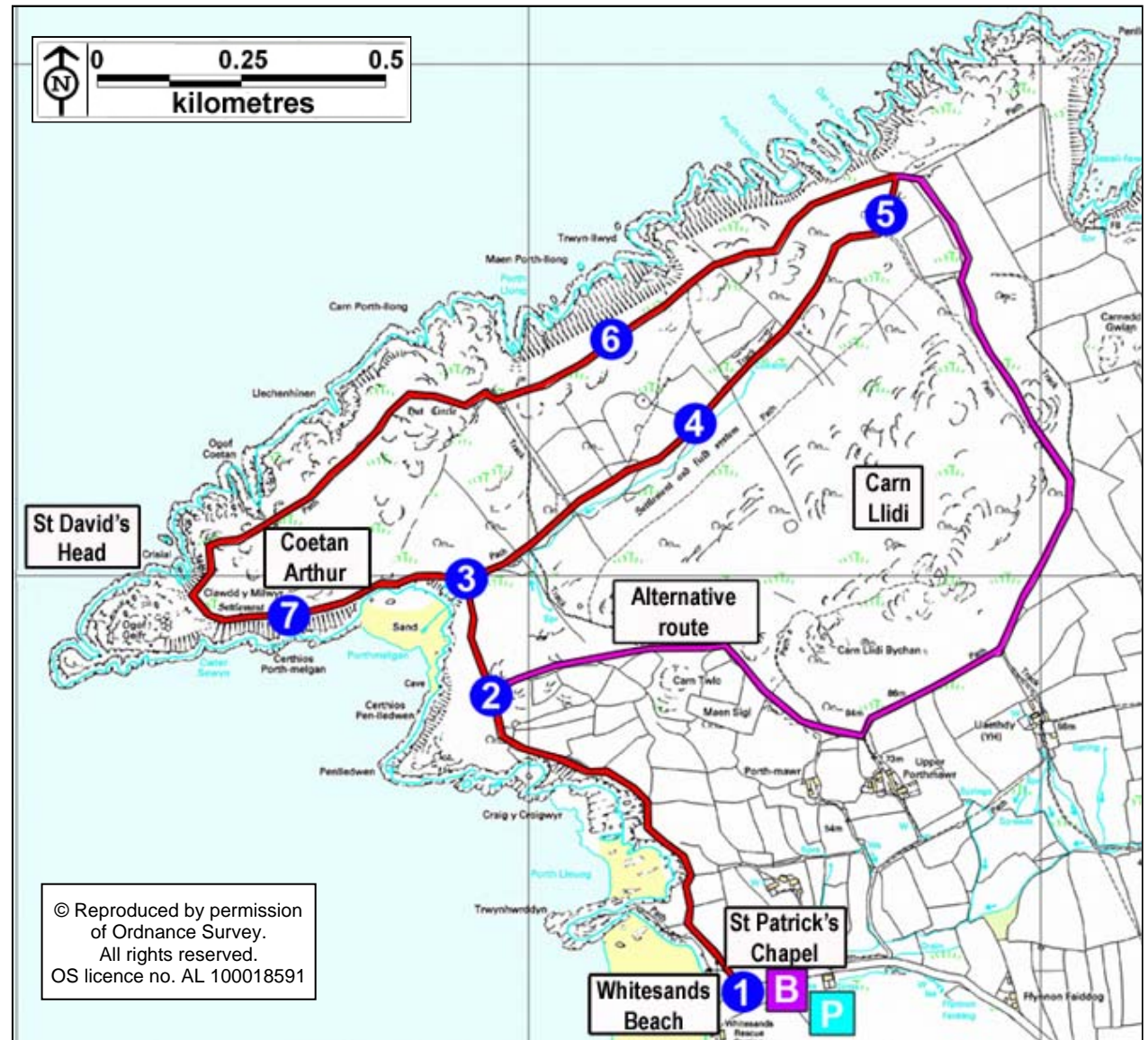
3. Cross the stream by a bridge and turn right or NE to walk up this valley. This area can be slippery and muddy in winter.
4. To your right is a marshy area with the typical "dinosaur egg" shapes of purple moor grass or "rhos pasture", green in summer and earthy coloured in winter. Higher up, on the flanks of Carn Llidi, you can see ancient field patterns.

Look out for birds like stonechat, meadow pipit and skylark in clumps of reedbed and willow. The rare Dartford warbler has also been seen in recent years.

5. At the highest point here the peak of Pen Beri and the expanse of Cardigan Bay appears in the distance. Two headlands away is the winking lighthouse of Strumble Head with the peak of Garn Fawr above it. Descend to rejoin the coast path and turn left towards St David's Head.
6. On the plateau a remarkable rockscape opens up. Jagged erratic rocks are mirrored by the rugged profile of Ramsey Island out to sea. North of Ramsey are the "Bishops and Clerks", little islets, one of which is home to a big lighthouse.
7. The route eventually passes Coetan Arthur and descends to an Iron Age coastal fort at the end of the peninsula. Continue on the coast path, returning to Porth Melgan. Retrace your route from here back to Whitesands Beach.

Walk distance, terrain and accessibility

Clear 3¾ mile route on rugged coastal paths, with some rocky bits, slopes and 70 steps.
Why not explore further on minor paths, fire breaks and animal tracks as you go?



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