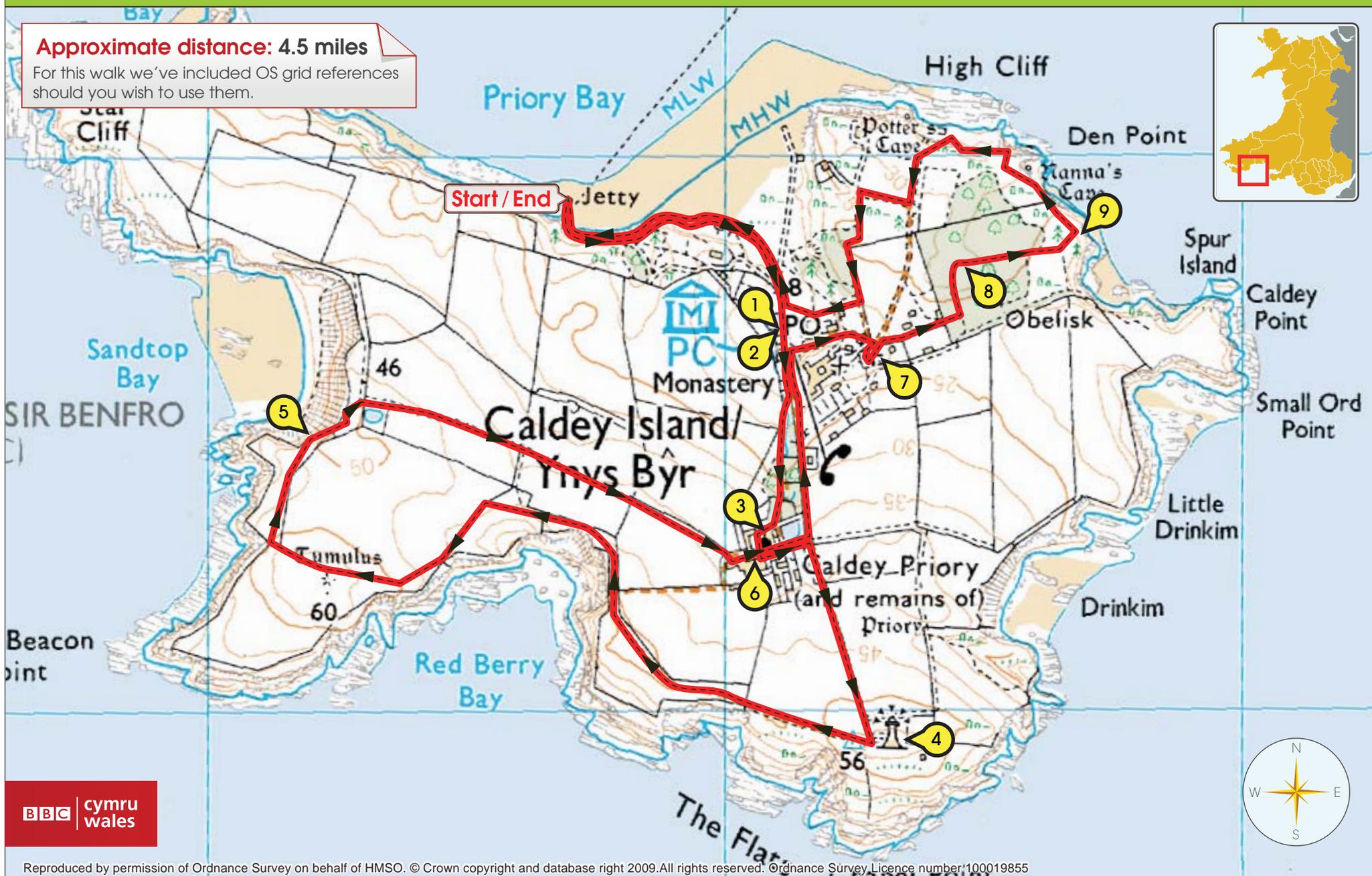


Weatherman Walking

Caldey Island

Approximate distance: 4.5 miles
 For this walk we've included OS grid references should you wish to use them.



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The Weatherman Walking maps are intended as a guide to help you walk the route. We recommend using an OS map of the area in conjunction with this guide. Routes and conditions may have changed since this guide was written. The BBC takes no responsibility for any accident or injury that may occur while following the route. Always wear appropriate clothing and footwear and check weather conditions before heading out.

Weatherman Walking

Caldey Island

Start: From the jetty at Priory Bay (the arrival point on the island for the boats from Tenby)

Starting ref: SS 137 969

Distance: About 4.3 miles

Grade: Easy/Moderate

Walk time : Allow 2.5 hours

This is a fairly straightforward and gentle walk around a delightful historic and religious island - a place to forget life's worries for a wee while. A figure of eight route gives a varied walk which includes the island's main points of interest, stunning cliff top views, and a delightful stroll through deciduous woodland to finish. If time is short, the walk can be halted at the half way point, giving you a good reason for a return visit to finish it off on another day.

From the jetty the route leads up to the monastery and small village, then passes the Old Priory on the way to the lighthouse at Chapel Point. From there a new extended section takes you along the cliff tops on the south side of the island to reach the south western corner near West Beacon Point. Then it's back to the village for the next loop around the woodland, returning to the jetty before the last boat back to Tenby.

Information about boat departure dates and times is available from the Caldey Island website at www.caldey-island.co.uk/boats.htm. Boats run Monday to Friday, from Easter to the end of October, and also on Saturdays from May to September. The island is closed to day visitors on Sundays.

Boats leave every twenty minutes or so from approximately 10am until 3pm, and the crossing takes about twenty minutes. At high tide boats depart from Tenby harbour and at low water from the landing stage on Castle Beach. The last return boat is usually at 5pm. Although Caldey Sound is relatively sheltered by the mainland, all sailings are subject to weather and sea conditions, so you're not guaranteed of being able to cross to the island every day.

Directions

Starting from the jetty and keeping the beach on your left, head straight up the vehicle track towards the monastery and village. There are very few vehicles on the island so the track is very safe. One word of warning though, there can be few beaches in the whole of Wales as stunning as Priory Bay, so resist going down onto the sand until the end of your walk or else you may not want to leave.



Setting off from the jetty at Priory Bay

Weatherman Walking

Caldey Island

About 600 metres from the jetty the road emerges from an avenue of trees to reveal a striking view of the monastery directly ahead. The Abbey overlooks an idyllic village green with a pond, post office, museum, perfume shop, café and a picturesque row of terraced cottages.

1 The Monastery (SS141 966)

The Monastery was built in 1913. It was designed by John Coates Carter from Penarth, one of the most talented Welsh architects of the twentieth century and a leading light of what was known as the Arts and Crafts movement of design and architecture. The present Abbey was in fact intended to be merely the gatehouse for a much larger monastery; however those ambitious plans were shelved when the Benedictine community behind the project ran out of money.



The Monastery and village green

This might be a good time to grab a quick cuppa from the cafe, otherwise continue straight on, stopping briefly perhaps to check out the perfume shop on the right.

2 Caldey Island lavender perfume (SS141 966)

In the early 1950's bunches of Caldey lavender were sold to visitors, which gave the monks the idea of creating perfume using the lavender and other island plants. These early scents proved popular and they decided to produce perfumes on a more commercial scale.

Today, most of the initial process happens in external laboratories and the essences are then used in the island's perfumery, where products are made and perfumes bottled



Signpost near the perfume shop.

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Caldey Island

Passing the post office on the left, head straight on up the single track road. After 120 metres bear right off the road and through a gate signposted 'To Old Priory'. The pleasant grassy path meanders through trees and past an old well before reaching the Old Priory.

Turn into a courtyard on the left and then through an archway to reach the entrance to St Illtyd's Church.



The path to the Old Priory

3 The Old Priory and St Illtyd's Church (SS140 963)

The Old Priory and St Illtyd's Church next door, with its 14th century leaning spire, sit on the site of the original 6th century Celtic monastery. The Priory was home to the Benedictine monks who lived on Caldey in medieval times. The monastic buildings have been unoccupied since the Dissolution of the Monasteries, but St Illtyd's Church is still a consecrated Roman Catholic church.



St Illtyd's Church

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Caldey Island

Inside St Illtyd's Church, set against the wall on the right, is an ancient stone slab carved with Latin script and a cross. But if you look at the top left hand corner you can see a few marks of the original Celtic Ogham script, the language of Irish tribes who settled on both sides of the Irish Sea.

The Caldey Ogham Stone

Ogham was a very early form of writing in Ireland with an alphabet of simple strokes along a line. Ogham stones are mostly found in Ireland, but also up the west coast of Britain, carved by Celtic tribes who settled on both sides of the Irish Sea about fifteen hundred years ago.



The Ogham stone inside St Illtyd's Church

Turn immediately left out of the church and walk back to the road that leads up the hill from the village. At the T-junction turn right and head up the road to the lighthouse which you can see about 400 metres away. Even if you don't go any further it really is well worth a stroll up to the lighthouse.

4 The lighthouse (SS 143 959)

Built in 1829, the lighthouse works in conjunction with one of the lighthouses on Lundy Island to aid navigation in this part of the Bristol Channel. It was originally powered by oil and needed resident-keepers to keep it in operation. On either side of the light tower are two identical old lighthouse keeper's cottages. In 1927 it was converted to an automatic acetylene system, after which the station was unmanned. In 1997 the lighthouse was fully modernised and converted to mains electricity.



Caldey lighthouse

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Caldey Island

This is one of the highest points on the island and on a clear day there are fine views from here. You can see the Gower Peninsula's Rhossili beach and Worm's Head to the east, the South Pembrokeshire coast to the west, and on a very clear day you can see Lundy Island to the south, off the Devon coast.

From here head west along the wide grassy path, and on through a wooden gate. In spring and early summer the carpet of pink and yellow sea-cliff flowers along this section are simply beautiful. About 600 metres from the lighthouse there's a gateway on the right with a grassy track that leads back to the Old Priory. Until 2013 this was as far as the general public were allowed to walk, however it's now possible to continue along the obvious wide grassy path along the cliff top towards West Beacon Point. Just before the path turns right, you'll find a convenient bench over on the left hand side where you can take a break and admire the view across to the South Pembrokeshire coast.



Heading west from the lighthouse towards West Beacon Point

The path now bears right and heads north for a short section along the west side of the island. Just off the path on the left there's a great a view over gorse bushes down into Sandtop Bay and over to St Margaret's Island with its ruined old limestone quarry buildings and workers cottages just visible on top of the island.

5

Sandtop Bay and St Margaret's Island (SS 131 964)

As beautiful, secluded and enticing as Sandtop Bay looks, it is off-limits to the general public - there have been fatalities here over the years after swimmers have become victims of strong tidal currents. In contrast with the sandstone cliffs on the south side of the island, the cliffs on the far side of the bay are limestone. Many important archaeological finds have been discovered in the limestone caves along the north side of the island, some of which are on display in Caldey's small museum which is housed in the post office.



Sandtop Bay

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Caldey Island

Continue along the path which now turns slightly inland and around a small pond, which may be just boggy ground in dry weather, then turn right through a gateway and along a farm track back towards the Old Priory. Go through the farm gate at the end of the track, past farm buildings and turn right opposite the Old Priory and around the end of the white painted building with a corrugated roof. The sign-posted entrance to the Caldey chocolate factory is tucked in the corner on the right.



Monks and chocolate making (SS 140 962)

The monks started making chocolate here on Caldey in the 1980's but Spanish Cistercian Monks were making chocolate way back in the 1500's, when cocoa beans and a recipe were sent back from Mexico to a monastery in Spain, and so started the 500 year old tradition of chocolate making by the Cistercians.



Chocolate factory entrance

From the chocolate factory head back to the road which led you up to the lighthouse earlier in the walk, but now turn left downhill and back to the village. Turn right at the post office and walk along behind the row of pretty terraced cottages below the Abbey. Continue straight on up the incline past a charming timber house with wooden veranda which used to be the village school. At the top of the hill is a statue of Saint Samson, the second Abbott here back in the sixth century before he left the island to work as a missionary in Cornwall and later Brittany. Following the sign for St David's Church, turn right and enter the churchyard.

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Caldey Island

7 St David's Church (SS 142 966)

St David's, the island's parish church, stands on a pre-Christian burial ground probably going back as far as 2000 years. Today the simple wooden crosses mark the graves of both monks and islanders, but the Celtic burials may have been of people from the mainland, in keeping with the Celtic belief that islands represented a bridge, or stepping stone to the afterlife.

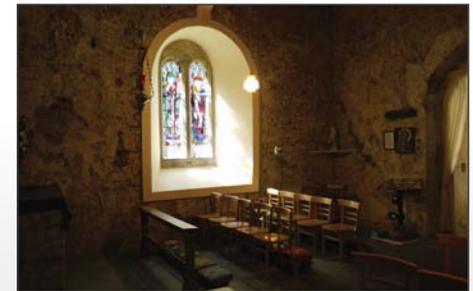


St David's Church

Enter the beautiful little church which has a delightful charm and peaceful atmosphere, and take a look at the striking stained glass windows. Some, like the Tree of Life window high above the main entrance, look quite contemporary.

7 The stained glass windows of St David's Church (SS 142 966)

All the windows were in fact designed and made by Dom Theodore Bailey, one of the Benedictine monks who lived on Caldey in the early 1920's.



The window with the two Davids – David, patron saint of Wales and King David of Israel

Turn right out of the churchyard and walk straight on into the woodland, bear left past a small grassy clearing, then bear right and follow a winding path through the woods.

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Caldey Island

8 The woodland (SS 144 968)

The trees of this old monastic enclosure are unusual on an island in western Britain. None of the other islands off the Welsh coast for example, Skomer, Skokholm, Ramsey or Bardsey, have the volume of woodland that Caldey has. This is because generations of monks coppiced sycamore, ash and willow to provide fuel for the Abbey before an electric heating system was installed in 2004.



Bluebells in the woodland

The meandering path emerges on the east side of the island onto a cliff-top path overlooking a wide bay known as Paul Jones Bay.

9 Paul Jones Bay (SS 146 968)

Born in Scotland, Paul Jones was a ruthless marauding pirate akin to the legendary Blackbeard, and he regularly moored up in this sheltered bay, hidden from the mainland, to take on fresh water.



Paul Jones Bay

Continue along the cliff top path with views opening up north towards Tenby.

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Caldey Island

Down below the path on this north eastern corner of the island is a rocky beach which is in fact the site of an old limestone quarry that supplied the stone for building the monastery.

The path now winds its way along the edge of the woodland back to the village. From there retrace your steps back along the road down to the jetty before the last boat leaves the island for the return trip back to Tenby.



Old quarry at High Cliff