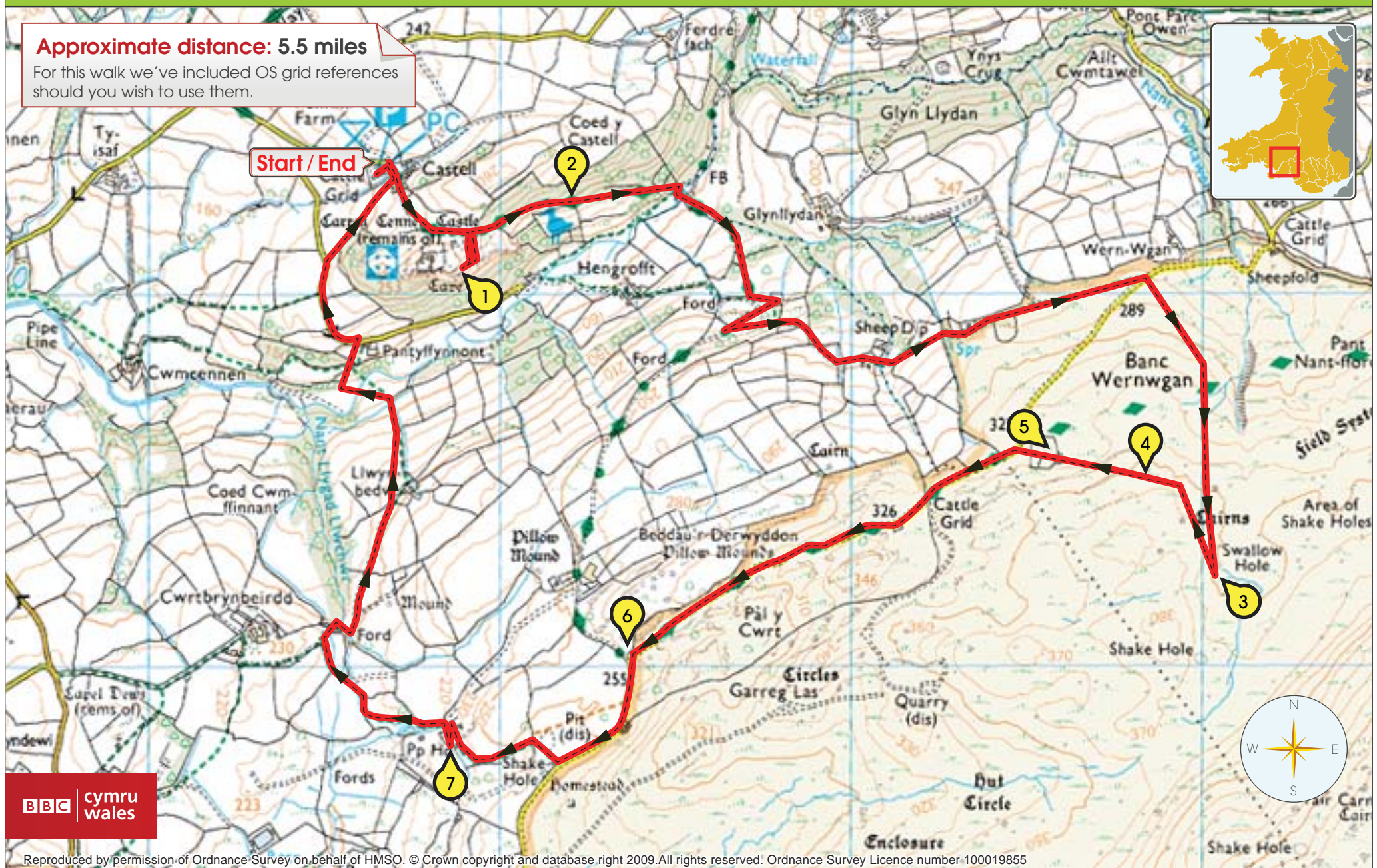


Weatherman Walking

Carreg Cennen

Approximate distance: 5.5 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

Carreg Cennen

Start: From the public car park near Castle Farm (toilets at the car park and the farm café)

Starting ref: SN 667193

Distance: About 5.5 miles

Grade: Moderately strenuous

Walk time : Allow 2.5 hours

The dramatic and very photogenic Carreg Cennen Castle was voted the most romantic castle in Wales by viewers of the BBC's Countryfile programme, and provides the focal point for this circular route. Just a few miles east of Llandeilo at the western end of the Brecon Beacons National Park, our undulating route takes us up to the castle before dropping back down to cross the river Cennen. Rising back up the other side through woods and fields onto open moorland, it then follows a short level section of quiet mountain road before dropping down to the Cennen again and back to the start.

Directions

Walk out of the car park and head up through the farmyard past the café, assuming of course that you can wait until the end of your walk before going inside for tea and cake!

Continue along the farm track uphill towards the castle. The track veers left directly below the castle and continues to rise until reaching a hut on the right where you can pay to go inside the castle. If you don't have time to explore the castle, it's worth just going through the gate next to the wooden hut and straight on for 50 metres for a bird's eye view of the river Cennen down below the vertical cliff on which the castle is built. However, take great care not to get too close to the edge which isn't guarded by a fence or handrail.



The café at Castle Farm, with the castle beyond

Weatherman Walking

Carreg Cennen



Carreg Cennen Castle (SN 668 190)

Perched on its dramatic cliff top pedestal, this striking 12th century fortress, which changed hands between the Welsh and the English numerous times, seems to have been more of a status symbol than a strategic stronghold. In 1403 Owain Glyndwr, with 800 men, laid siege to the castle for several months, and failed. The castle was eventually captured and demolished by a Yorkist force during the Wars of the Roses.



Walking around the east side of the castle, high above the river Cennen

Looking out from here to the south east, on a clear day you'll see the Tair Carn Uchaf Bronze Age burial cairns on top of the bleak moorland of the Black Mountain, and further away to the east the steep north-facing escarpment of the Carmarthen Fans or Bannau Sir Gaer.

Now retrace your steps back to the hut, and turn right downhill through Coed y Castell, a native oak woodland that's protected as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.



Oak Woodland SSSI (SN 672 192)

More insect species live on oak trees than any other native tree. Together with the insect life, the acorns are a valuable food source for a variety of wildlife. In days gone by commoners often held the right of pannage which allowed them to turn out their pigs in the oak woods to grub for acorns.



Derek and Bernard head down through the oak wood

Weatherman Walking

Carreg Cennen

Turn right at the bottom of the hill and cross the wooden footbridge over the river Cennen.

(Before crossing the footbridge there is an option to take a shorter walk by going straight on downstream, without crossing the bridge – take the path through fields beside the river to reach a narrow country road and then up through fields around the far side of the castle back to the start.)

However, after crossing the river, our longer route leads along the obvious path through thin woodland and over a stile. Then cross a small stream and continue uphill beside the stream, and carry straight on keeping the field boundary on the right. There are great views from here back towards the castle sitting on its lofty pedestal on top of the vertical limestone cliff. After about 300 metres, climb over another stile onto a track from Hengroff Farm and bear left up the hill. Then zig-zag upwards, turning right and then left at a hairpin where the sign-posted Beacons Way and the Castle Walk go off up to the right.



Signpost with the castle beyond

So continue left up the hill, and through a gate next to a barn. Bear left after the gate and along an indistinct path across two fields to reach a rocky track through low trees, and then across yet another small field to a stile. Climb over the stile, hop over a small stream and bear left to reach the access track to a nearby house. Follow the track to reach the tarmac mountain road.

From here one could miss out the next section which goes straight up the hillside opposite - instead turn right and follow the road south west for about 600 metres to reach a point just below Banc Wernwgan farmstead.

However if you're feeling fit, the weather is fine and you have the map to hand, continue straight across the road and directly up the open moorland above to reach a small ravine or gully on the left.



Heading uphill from the road

Weatherman Walking

Carreg Cennen

From here head due south up the hill for about 500 metres until you come to a few small trees in a large hollow in the ground on the left. This circular sunken ground with a stream disappearing into a cleft in the rocks at the bottom is what's known as a swallow hole. One look at the OS map will give you an idea of just how many of these shake holes there are in this area – when you know where and what to look for, they're everywhere.

3 Swallow hole (SN 690 182)

Rainwater is a weak acidic liquid which makes limestone soluble – this means limestone is worn away over millions of years by the rainwater trickling down joints and cracks. The cracks become progressively larger until caves and caverns are formed underground with underground rivers flowing through them. Sometimes the rocks above these caves eventually drop down or collapse leaving depressions, both large and small, on the surface which are called shake holes or swallow holes.



The large swallow hole with disappearing stream

Retrace your steps from the swallow hole for about 250 metres then bear left and contour around the hillside through an area of grassy lumps and bumps with scattered outcrops of limestone. This area is not as natural as it might seem at first because you're now surrounded by what used to be a large area of shallow limestone quarrying, with small mounds of lime waste from lime kilns dotted around.



Leaving the swallow hole

Weatherman Walking

Carreg Cennen

4 Small scale old limestone works (SN 688 185)

During the 1800's this place was a hive of industrial activity where limestone was quarried and processed to make lime. It was dug by hand and carried away by horse and cart to be used by farmers to transform acid soils into productive farmland, or to make whitewash and mortar for building.



Walking through the area of small-scale limestone works

Continue to traverse in the same direction around the hillside until the ground drops more steeply away down towards the mountain road with the castle coming into view directly ahead across the valley. It's worth stopping here to look down towards the road at a rectangular area, about the size of a football field and marked by low grassy embankments, that has more to it than meets the eye.

5 Old Enclosure (SN 685 185)

This was Banc Wernwgan farmstead, a post-medieval enclosure for animals with a few remains of dwellings or buildings. It could date back to any time between 1500 and 1900, but it most likely dates back to the 18th and 19th century when some farming might have been combined with small-scale limestone extraction.



The grassy embankments indicating the boundary of the old enclosure

Weatherman Walking

Carreg Cennen

Head straight downhill through the old enclosure and turn left along the quiet mountain road for about three-quarters of a mile to a farm track on the right. In the middle of the field immediately to the right of the farm track is a rather indistinct grassy mound that once again has more to it than meets the eye.

6 Beddau'r Derwyddon pillow mounds (SN 673 180)

This area of ground is known as Beddau'r Derwyddon which means Druids' Graves. The rectangular grassy mounds probably got their name because they were mistaken for Bronze Age barrows or burial mounds in years gone by. However they are in fact what are known as pillow mounds which were an artificial warren for breeding rabbits in medieval times. Back then rabbits were rare in the countryside, and rabbit meat had quite a high status and the animals were farmed using these flat-topped mounds, often with a series of internal stone-lined tunnels.



Beddau'r Derwyddon – a low rectangular grassy mound with surrounding shallow ditch

Continue along the quiet tarmac road for about 400 metres until you reach a stile on the right with the red castle signpost next to it. Cross over the stile and go straight ahead through the field keeping to the right of a large fenced-off depression in the ground which is another shake hole. Turn left around the far side of the shake hole and follow a path downhill for 300 metres. Just past the old lime kiln on the right, further down on the left there's a stile. If you want to take look at the Llygad Llwhwr resurgence then cross over this stile on the left. However extreme care is needed because of the steep drop down to the river. Walk very carefully down a narrow, and sometimes slippery path for about 50 metres until you can see the already quite sizeable river flowing from the mouth of the cave.

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7 Llygad Lluchwr (SN 668 177)

Llygad Lluchwr, Welsh for Eye of the Loughor, is the source of the river, or rather where it first sees the light of day after flowing approximately four or five miles underground. From here it flows on to become a sizeable river by the time it reaches the Burry Inlet and the sea.



The mouth of the cave with the river flowing out

In the rocks above the end of the path is a small hole which is in fact the tiny entrance to the Llygad Lluchwr cave system. But please beware as this is for experienced cavers only

7 The Llygad Lluchwr cave system (SN 668 177)

These days this is a very popular area for caving but amazingly the 'Llygad Lluchwr' caves were first explored way back in 1841 by an adventurous and remarkable young local man called Thomas Jenkins. As well as being a caver, carpenter and diarist, Jenkins was an architect, astronomer, and musician, an inventor of a cast-iron passenger-carrying tricycle, a scientist, and an undertaker. This is a man who made coffins, boats, violins, artificial legs, and wax figures for the Great Exhibition of 1851.

Even with modern caving equipment, the cave system should only be explored by experts.



Derek and Bernard standing next to the river, below the very narrow Llygad Lluchwr cave entrance.

Weatherman Walking

Carreg Cennen

Return back over the stile and turn left along the track with a stream on the left. Head downhill along this track for about half a mile, fording a stream at one point, until, just before Llwyn Bedw house, a path bears off to the left into a field. With Carreg Cennen Castle directly ahead, walk down a steep indistinct path to the bottom of the field where it flattens out near the river Cennen. Bear left and cross a footbridge over the river before climbing steeply up the bank on the other side, heading to the left of a house where the path emerges onto a narrow country road. Turn left uphill and carry on for approximately 300 metres, between hedgerows with beautiful wild flowers in Spring and Summer, then turn right onto a footpath up through fields heading directly towards the farm and back to your starting point.