Weatherman Walking

Fall Bay to Oxwich Bay
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.

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For this walk we’ve included OS grid references should you wish to use them.
The Gower Peninsula is officially designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is a go-to destination for walkers, often starting or finishing at Rhossili Beach or Worm’s Head, with its large car park and welcoming cafes. But this walk ignores that well-trodden route, starting just south of Worm’s Head above Fall Bay.
FALL BAY TO OXWICH BAY

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Directions
You can start from Rhossili car park near Worm’s Head or alternatively you can park near Rhossili bunkhouse at Middleton and take the pathway next to the hall, which initially follows a farm track down the side of a field heading towards the sea. About half a mile on through a wooden gate, you will join the coast path.

With the sea in front, turn left and follow the marked route, it’s an easy walk along the headland with just gently undulating grassy cliff tops.

The next bay along is Mewslade Bay. If you have the time you can veer off the pathway and follow the steep track down to the shoreline but check the tide time as there’s no beach at high tide - just waves crashing onto the rocks. If the tide is out, it’s well worth venturing in to Giant’s Cave, a massive blowhole.

Mewslade Bay (SH 61044 77303)
“If you want a different perspective of the coastline you could put aside a few hours to take part in a coastal activity exploring the textures and make-up of these spectacular cliffs.

I had a go at ‘weaselling’, crawling in and out of the tightest tunnels with no room to manoeuvre, and abseiling into Giant’s Cave by rope.

My breath was blown away by the sight as I emerged from the top of the cliff and the view of the sea opened up in front of me.”
Goat’s Hole Cave  (SS 43730 85880)

It was at Goat’s Hole Cave (also known as Paviland Cave) that in 1823, an excavation team looking for the remains of mammoths discovered the partial remains of a human covered in red ochre and surrounded by shell beads and carved ivory.

She became known as the Red Lady of Paviland, but was later revealed to be a young man, about 33-34,000 years old and one of the oldest examples of a ceremonial burial in Western Europe. Entrance to the cave can be tricky and is only possible at low tide.

Directions
Continuing along the headland, the path occasionally heads inland for short distances. For about four miles you will be passing above wonderful bays, coves and caves with names like The Knave, Goat’s Hole and Blackhole Gut.

The coastal path drops down to shore level near Overton and when the tide is out, the pebbles and sand give way to sharp, eroded rocks.
Culver Hole (SS 46550 84600)
Believed to date back to the 13th or 14th century, Culver Hole is built into the cliff face and has various large ‘doorways’ at differing heights. Some think it is simply a pigeon loft where the pigeons would nest and their valuable eggs would be collected to supply the local communities.

Many feel it had a much more clandestine purpose. The different height doorways correspond to different tides and would have made a good subterfuge for smuggling. There are even rumours of tunnels linking the caves to the nearby village of Port Eynon, about a mile away.
There is evidence that the Salt House dates back to the 16th century and was used in the production of salt. It was an ideal spot as there was a high salt content in the water in the bay with very little fresh water contamination.

Salt was an important commodity and the site was enlarged and fortified in the 17th century. There are rumours that it was also used as a cover for hiding loot from wrecks and smuggled goods. At one stage it is thought that eight excise men were stationed in the village to try to curb the practices.
Directions
From the Salt House continue east towards the village of Port Eynon. With its abundance of cafes, a pub, public toilets and car park, this would make a good starting point if you choose a shorter walking route.

Follow the waymarks along the top of the beach reaching some steps that lead up to the neighbouring village of Horton. The path continues along the front but Horton is another pretty village worth a brief detour.

From Horton the route continues along the beach skirting the slipway and RNLI lifeboat station before turning left and passing a small village green and several houses. There’s then a short stretch across more rugged terrain and a slight incline.

Port Eynon (SS 47232 85395)
It’s said Port Eynon was named after the 10th century Welsh Prince, Einion ap Owain, and is one of Gower’s most popular tourist beaches, despite its rough waves.

The village once enjoyed a booming trade in limestone quarrying, crabbing and oyster fishing, the remains of the oyster pools and the old harbour wall can still be seen at low tide.
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“Horton is a popular spot for swimmers in the summer… but I braved the sea in November, along with local poet Jim Young who swims on Gower every day of the year, whatever the weather.

I followed his example and went in without a wet suit but I can tell you, those waves were cold!”
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St Illtyd’s Church (SH 57182 80840)
The path skirts the ancient St Illtyd’s Church. St Illtyd is one of the most revered saints in Wales and founded a monastery at Llantwit Major in the 6th century along with a divinity college, believed to be Britain’s earliest seat of learning. It’s said that among his pupils was St David.

The chancel is the oldest part of the church and it’s the smallest to be found in Gower. Some speculate it could actually be the original Celtic cell, although there is little evidence to support this theory. The font is hewn from a block of Sutton stone and legend has it that it was brought to Oxwich by St Illtyd himself. One particularly unusual feature of the church is the chancel ceiling. It was painted in 1931 by Leslie Young, a scenic artist at Sadler’s Wells and paid for by Dame Lilian Baylis, Director of the Old Vic who used to visit Oxwich and loved the little church. It’s decorated with clouds and a rainbow – a perfect ceiling for a Weatherman. For access to the church coincide your visit with one of the regular services or you may be lucky and obtain the key from the rector.

“Just inside the church is the porch and 14th century bell tower. On the left hand side is a bell rope which tolls the single church bell and calls the congregation to prayer. At one time it is likely that the village was much closer to the church on land now covered by the sea, today it’s a bit further back. I was allowed to have a go at tolling the bell which was harder than it looked – you have to build a rhythm to get a good ring.”

Directions
As you turn the headland, the path gently rises with spectacular sea views. Then as you round the point, into a stretch of woodland there’s a sudden and unexpected climb of about 200 feet. It’s enough to leave you breathless but also stunningly pretty. As you drop down the other side the first views of Oxwich Bay are glorious.
In 1911 the beach hosted the first aeroplane flight in Wales when Mr E Sutton took off in his Bleriot monoplane. The Bay is bordered by a combination of sand dunes, salt marsh, woodland and cliffs, and beyond them is the imposing old red sandstone hill of Cefn Bryn, known as the backbone of Gower.

Oxwich itself is well worth a visit with its colourful former quarrymen’s cottages, some of them thatched, including one called The Nook, where Methodist founder John Wesley stayed in the 1760s and returned to preach to the growing Methodist community.

There’s also the remains of Oxwich Castle, operated by Cadw (there is an entrance fee). It’s a magnificent Tudor mansion created by Sir Rice Mansel and his son Edward in the 16th century and was made to look like a real fortress but with the mod cons of the day, including inside toilets.

“As my walk nears its end, I like most weary travellers, could do with a bit of a rest and something to eat! I met up with local chef Hywel Griffith at his restaurant on the sea front and learnt how he forages for the best local ingredients including herbs, seaweed and cockles, which he combines into his cooking. He took me foraging for the soft, dark green variety of seaweed and then brought me back into his kitchen while he prepared it and turned it into laver bread and from there into a rich and creamy sauce for fish. Delicious!”

End, Oxwich Bay  (SS 50317 86965)

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