Weatherman Walking

Porthcawl to Southerndown Beach
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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.

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For this walk we’ve included OS grid references should you wish to use them.

Approximate Distance: 11 miles
This is a stunning linear walk, filled with variety. It passes some of South Wales’ most popular beaches before heading inland, through the picturesque village of Merthyr Mawr. The route continues back along the estuary to the sea and becomes a little more strenuous following the course of the undulating headland before dropping down onto Southerndown beach, surrounded by cliffs with incredible rock formations.

Start: Porthcawl
Starting Ref: SS 81891 76374
Grade: Easy/Moderate.
Distance: Approximately 11 miles.
Walk time: Approximately 5 hours. This is a linear route so you will need to plan your return journey in advance.
Parking: Pay and display car parks at Porthcawl, Merthyr Mawr Warren and Southerndown.
Travel information: Bus transport is available between Southerndown and Porthcawl by taking the Barry bus, 303 from the Three Cups at Southerndown to Bridgend and then changing onto the X2 at the bus station for Porthcawl.
Further information: Visit the ‘latest news’ section of the official Wales Coast Path website for more information and path diversions - https://www.walescoastpath.gov.uk
Directions
This walk along the Glamorgan Heritage Coast starts at the NCI Coastwatch station in Porthcawl, one of the smallest and busiest in the country.

The historic watch tower dates from 1860 and is manned every day during daylight hours by some 40 volunteers.

Next to the Coastwatch Station is the Lifeboat Station, again one of the busiest in the country due to unpredictable weather conditions caused by the prevailing southwesterly winds whipping up the Bristol Channel.

Start, National Coastwatch Institute (SS 81891 76374)
If the sea is calm it’s well worth a wander to the end of Porthcawl Point next to the lighthouse to take in the scenery. There’s a plaque on the wall remembering the Duffryn Llynvi and Porthcawl Railway which operated from 1825 to 1860 and linked Duffryn Llynvi, Maesteg, to the sea in the early days of the iron and coal industries. On the ground near the sign is the final section of original tram road. Next to the Coastwatch Station is the Lifeboat Station.

“The volunteer lifeboat crew have to live in Porthcawl and they must be able to respond to a call and be ready to launch inside 7 minutes. I was given a challenge to see how I would fare and raced alongside helmsmen ‘Bee’ Missen, who has to drop everything and leave his fish and chip shop when a call comes out. Several members of Bee’s family, past and present, have been involved in the town’s lifeboat service, so it’s in his blood. I managed to race down the Esplanade; got into the full gear (with a bit of help) and onto the launch in just under 5 minutes, which I don’t think was too bad.”, says Derek.
Coney Beach Pleasure Park (SS 82245 76927)

This massive amusement park opened in 1920 was built to entertain American troops returning from the First World War and was named after New York’s famous Coney Island. The site was originally the town’s old ballast tip and the park began to take shape when a ‘figure Eight’ wooden roller coaster was operated from an aircraft hangar.

The amusement park was closed from 1939 following the outbreak of the Second World War and firstly the 15th battalion of the Welsh Regiment was based there and later the Belgian Brigade’s armoured car division.

Coney Beach reopened to the public in 1946 and experienced its heyday in the 1950s.
The dunes are a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest and were once part of the largest sand dune system in Europe, stretching along the coast to Mumbles, Swansea, more than 20 miles away. Covering some 800 acres and reaching 200ft in places, the dunes form an important habitat for wildlife and plants and over a third of all species of plant and insect life in Wales can be found here. Today the site is a National Nature Reserve and managed by Natural Resources Wales.

"The highest sand dune is known locally as the ‘Big Dipper’ and is the second highest sand dune in Europe. It’s often used for military and stamina training as well as by kids big and small for sliding down."

I tried sliding down on a kitchen tray and then a proper snow sledge but wasn’t very successful. In November the sand was just too wet and sticky."
Directions
Following the waymarks and along the paved roadway for about three quarters of a mile you come to the village of Merthyr Mawr.

A few hundred yards past the church there’s a bench on the right and the pathway leads around to the right, after a hundred yards or so you will come to a small car park and a decorative bridge, often described locally as the bouncy bridge, as you cross it you will see why.

Just after the bridge there is a Wales Coast Path waymark on the left which will lead you across a field and then along the B4524 towards Ogmore. This is the recommended route and should definitely be followed at high tide.

Merthyr Mawr Village (SH 63787 80669)
A picture-postcard pretty village of thatched cottages, the path goes past the church, St Teilo’s, and it’s worth taking a quick look at the pre-Norman stone pillars, slabs and crosses, now sited at the back of the churchyard.
Directions

Alternatively, the path in front continues to the stepping stones, with Ogmore Castle, dating back to the 12th century, on your left.

From the stepping stones, follow the tarmacked footpath passing a riding stable on your right. At the top of the lane you will reach the main road and waymarks point you towards the right.

As there are no pavements along part of this mile-long stretch, the coast path has been re-routed behind The Pelican public house. As you get further down you can cross over the road onto a path. As the beach appears there are great views of the estuary. It looks like you have taken a long detour to go a very short distance, but the Ogmore River tides can change quickly and are very dangerous.

Hug the coastline as you come round the coast in front of Ogmore-by-Sea. There’s a large car park here and public toilets.

Stepping Stones (SS 88144 76986)
The set of stepping stones crosses the ford of the Ogmore and Ewenny rivers, where your efforts are likely to be watched by ducks and swans. Watch out though as you may get your feet wet if the tide is high!
Directions
Heading out of the village you will start to rise up the headland with spectacular views of the sea and dark rocks below. This section of coast is popular with local anglers, but even experienced fishermen can get caught out by the powerful waves sometimes.

Walking for about a mile, the coast path leads alongside a high stone wall and reaches a car park at the top end of Southerndown. There’s then a short walk downhill on the left hand side of the road before you reach Southerndown Beach (the OS map calls it Dunraven, but locals refer to that as the next beach on).

When you reach the bottom of the hill you can either turn left and visit the Heritage Centre (check opening times) which has outdoor toilets accessible all year, or turn right onto the beach itself.

End, Southerndown Beach (SS 88502 73117)
The cliffs surrounding the beach are majestic and multi-coloured due their incredible rock formations made up of layers of hard limestone and softer shale. But don’t get too close to the cliffs. The shale erodes more easily and leaves the limestone unsupported, meaning it often falls onto the beach below.

At a safe distance from the cliffs, this is an ideal place to sit for a rest and the perfect spot to end this walk.