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Pennard and Three Cliffs Bay

Starting point and OS Grid reference	National Trust Car Park at Southgate (SS554874)
Ordnance Survey map	OS Explorer 164
Distance	4.25 miles
Date of Walk	19 June 2024
Traffic light rating	

Introduction: This circular walk takes you on an interesting coastal and river walk taking the famous Three Cliffs Bay and the ruins of Pennard Castle. There are great views and Three Cliffs Bay must be of the most photographed places on the Gower Peninsula.

Three Cliffs Bay has a beautiful sandy beach behind which are three impressive limestone cliffs, hence the name. The approach to it involves negotiating a dune landscape which can make for a little slithery walking here and there!

Pennard Pill seems to be the name ascribed to the river running across the beach, although Pill itself derives from the Welsh “Pil” meaning a tidal inlet or harbour. You cross this via stepping stones which will be covered close to high tide.

The walk passes an interesting carving based on a whelk shell. It is carved from one piece of wood, including the ‘plinth’ and is to complement the landscape. There is a view finder in the back of the shell which can be fixed to a chosen view and an aluminium mirror inside the shell acting as a ‘rock pool’ reflecting light and a spiral.

The route passes the ruins of Pennard Castle. This actually looks more spectacular from below against the skyline than it does up close but it is still an interesting ruin. It was built initially in the thirteenth or early fourteenth century by Henry Beaumont, 1st Earl of Warwick. It was all about a demonstration of power. However even in the 1600s, it was described as a ruin. It is a Scheduled Monument.

The walk is mostly straightforward, the more difficult parts being a steep descent down a dune to the beach and a steep uphill section to a golf course. For those reasons, I give it an amber traffic light.

The walk starts at the National Trust car park at Southgate on the Gower peninsula. To get there, follow the A4118 from Swansea. Turn left on to the B4436 signed for “Pennard, Bishopston, LLandeilo-Ferwallt and Caswell”. At the ‘T’ junction turn right for Southgate and follow this road to the car park, which is at the far side of a roundabout. If following sat. nav. from any other direction, beware! There are some fearsomely narrow lanes, which sat. navs. seem to like!

Start: Leave the car park and turn left down the lane.

Join a tarmac path, passing a two way fingerpost indicating the coast path. You will soon see a grassy path on the left initially running parallel with it. Follow this path as it branches off left (there was a litter bin at the junction when I did the walk).

At SS 542877 pass a bench.

The path wends its way down through the sand dunes. You arrive at a two way fingerpost, one pointing back to Southgate and the other indicating the Coast Path (SS 542879). Fork right here, on the narrower climbing path. In places, there are steps but some were obscured by sand.

At the top, reach a three way fingerpost. Turn left following "Coast Path".

At SS 540880 pass another bench, followed quickly by a couple more and the carving based on a whelk shell.

Shortly after the carving, the path curves right through the dunes.

You come to a two way fingerpost, indicating the coast path in both directions. However there is another path behind the fingerpost heading downwards which is the one you want, down to the beach. It is quite a steep dune so take it slowly! You should be able to make out the line of the stepping stones across Pennard Pill (the river). Follow the line of shingle to the stepping stones (in line with the small lifeguard building).

Cross the stepping stones. Turn right following the fingerpost for "Parkmill".

You now follow the river for almost three quarters of a mile. You might think you are going to join the main road but just before it, at a five way fingerpost there is a 'T' junction of paths. Turn right following "Parkmill" and "Southgate", marked as a bridleway (SS 542891).

Reach another fingerpost after a few yards. Continue following "Southgate 1 mile". This takes you over a footbridge. Ignore the steps straight ahead and turn right.

At SS 544891 meet another path and turn right, following the course of the river.

Reach a grey concrete building (SS 545889). Bear left here uphill on a steep sandy path.

Meet another sandy path and turn left. There is a good view here down to the sea.

Follow this path to the top where you meet a stony path on the edge of the golf course. There is a post with numerous arrows on it. Turn right (SS 545888).

After a few yards, the stony path peters out. Keep straight ahead. Note this is the black dotted path shown on the OS map, not a green Right of Way but it keeps you further from the golf course.

Pass a couple of benches with a good view of the castle.

Reach the castle (SS 544885) and from it continue along the path in the seaward direction, skirting round the edge of the golf course.

Follow the path to a three way fingerpost but do not follow any of the directions indicated but turn left. This is a Right of Way which takes you across the golf course. You may have doubts but have faith and follow closely the stream on the right. There are some white painted rock further on marking the path but they are a little sparse!

When the stream stops, keep straight ahead.

Meet a 'T' junction of paths. Turn right following the sign for "Southgate" (SS549882).

The path passes the golf club house which you can clearly see.

At the road, turn right along "Southgate Drive", ignoring Bendrick Drive immediately off to the right. The road will take you back to the car park.

