



CW IMAGES, RICHARD O'DONOGHUE, BILLY STOCK/ALAMY



A good walk Rhossili Bay and Tears Point, Gower Peninsula

How hard is it?

7 miles; moderate/
challenging

A damp veil hung over Gower as we made our way out of Rhossili, passing the church built in 1200 by Anglo-Norman settlers. As the village faded behind us, the downs rose ahead, copper with winter bracken, a path of bright grass vanishing into cloud. We made our way up, the climb sappingly steep at times, boots skidding on rocks wet from a mist that beaded on fronds and brows.

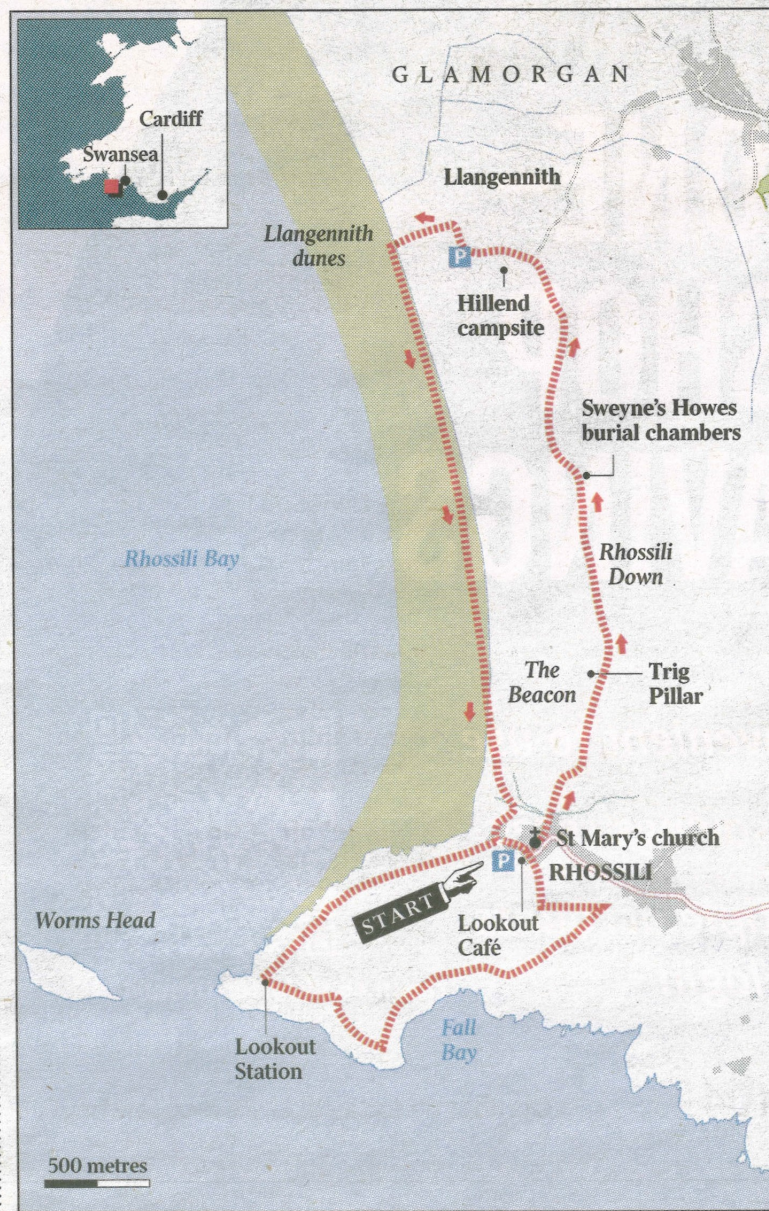
The white trig point marking the Beacon appeared out of the mist and we paused to peer out across the creamy ripples of Rhossili Bay to the dark humps of Worms Head beyond. On a clear day, the views from this, Gower's highest point, stretch to the shores of north Devon. A Bronze Age cairn also marks the summit, one of many remnants of human activity scattered across Rhossili Down, from the Stone Age burial chambers at Sweyne's Howes on its northwestern flanks to the concrete foundations of a Second World War radar station on its seaward side.

Keeping to the high ground, we traversed the rocky spine of the hills. Shaggy, dark-eyed ponies grazed on rough scrub. Two choughs, with glossy

black plumage and bright red beaks, quarrelled noisily. Reaching the northern scarp we followed a steep path down, weaving through caravans and dunes to the beach at Hillend. Three miles of sand stretch between Rhossili and neighbouring Llangennith. It's a place that feels vast and empty despite many other weekend visitors — couples, families, surfers, swimmers swallowed into the space. As we walked the water's edge a cormorant flew past, low to the ground, taking in the length of the beach. Our dog, wild with all this freedom, ran wide loops of the sand, barking with joy. Nearing the southern end, the sheer cliffs at Lewes Castle Iron Age Promontory Fort reared ahead, ponies silhouetted on the skyline.

The wreck of the *Helvetia* lies close to the path back up to the village. Its dark, crusted ribs rise from the pale sand and we threaded our way through them, minds filling in the gaps of this solid Norwegian barque, wrecked here in 1887.

Back in Rhossili, we traced the high cliffs, rounding the headland at the Lookout Station, an eager line of binoculars trained on the sea. Beyond Worms Head — a part-time island, reachable on foot at low tide — the coastline changes, turning dramatic and craggy, waves thundering into narrow inlets, kestrels poised over rocky edges. Above the hidden beach at Fall Bay we turned inland to explore the Vile, a medieval strip field system restored and traditionally managed by the National Trust. Its named fields, planted with native wildflowers, buzz with pollinators over the summer months, but in winter, walking the sunken lanes as the



Above left: Rhossili Bay. Top right: look out for choughs along the way. Above right: St Mary's church, Rhossili

mist rolls in, it's at its most atmospheric. **Start** Rhossili car park (National Trust) SA3 1PR (OS ref SS414880)

Getting there Train to Swansea, then the 118 or 119 bus to Rhossili. Road: follow the A4118 west from Swansea, then the B4247 to Rhossili

Walk Turn right out of car park then left onto footpath (FP) past church and through gate. Continue steeply uphill to trigpoint at the Beacon (419888). Follow obvious path along ridge of downland, descending at northern end to road at Hillend campsite (417908). Cross junction, following road to beach car park. Turn right, following coast path (CP) through dunes to beach (411909). Turn left, crossing beach for 1½ miles to steep FP on left back to Rhossili village. Turn right at road, follow CP through gate and around headland to Lookout Station (403874). Continue on CP around Tears Point and above Fall Bay to gate on left. Leave CP, go up steps, through gate and follow FP through fields to join track. Take sharp left and follow track then FP to right turn onto wider track. Follow this uphill to road. Turn left to return to car park.

Lunch The Lookout Café, Rhossili SA3 1PN (01792 391696, tasteofgower.com)

Accommodation South Pilton Green Farmhouse, Abertawe, Gower (0344 800 2070, nationaltrust.org.uk)

More information National Trust (nationaltrust.org.uk); Visit Wales (visitwales.com)

Jen and Sim Benson