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Arfordir Gorllewin a Gogledd Sir Benfro – Disgrifiad cryno

Mae'r ardal yn cynrychioli hyd a lled gorllewin a gogledd cefnwlad a morlin Sir Benfro. Mae llawer o'r ardal o fewn Parc Cenedlaethol Arfordir Sir Benfro. Mae'r tirlun eithaf tonnog, cynhyrchiol, amaethyddol wedi'i ymlu gan ran o'r arfordir mwyaf garw ac ysblennydd ym Mhrydain. Fe ddaw'r tirlun i ben yn ddramatig gyda chlogwyni serth, ac yn cynnwys nifer o ynysoedd anghysbell, sef olion o ornysoedd. Mae'r ardaloedd arfordirol hefyd yn cynnwys nifer o fryniau creigiog siâp unigryw, sydd ynghyd â llethrau arfordirol, yn

cynnwys ardaloedd o grug a gweundir, waliau cerrig neu gloddiau, a theimlad llawer mwy anghysbell na llawer o'r tirweddau mewndirol cyfagos.

Mae'r ardal yn cynnwys nifer o dirweddau Hanesyddol Cofrestredig ac yn arbennig 'dinas' Tŷ Ddewi, cartref Nawddsant Cymru, gyda'i heglwys gadeiriol bwysig sydd wedi ei leoli'n mewn man tawel o fewn dyffryn cysgodol ond er hynny ger hen lwybrau môr y gorllewin. Mewn cyferbyniad mae porthladd modern Abergwaun yn un o brif lwybrau fferi o Brydain i'r Iwerddon, ac yn ganolbwynt am gysylltiadau rheilffordd a ffyrdd o Dde Cymru, yn ogystal â'r anheddle mwyaf yn yr ardal.

Mae'n ardal o bwysigrwydd rhyngwladol am ei dirwedd arfordirol a bywyd gwyllt, ac mae yna lawer o gyrchfannau 'pot mêl' poblogaidd i ymwelwyr, gyda cherdded, y traeth a nifer o weithgareddau hamdden arall, gan gynnwys teithiau cwch i rai o'r ynysoedd i wyllo bywyd gwyllt.

Summary description

The area represents the western and northern extents of the Pembrokeshire coastline and hinterland. Much of the area is within the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. The gently undulating, productive, agricultural landscape is edged by some of the most spectacular and rugged coastline in southern Britain. The landscape dramatically terminates with steep cliffs, and includes a number of remote islands, being remnants of peninsulas. The coastal areas also include a number of distinctively shaped rocky hills, that together with coastal slopes, include areas of heather and heath, stone walls or hedgebanks, and a far more remote feeling than many of the nearby inland landscapes.

The area includes a number of Registered Historic landscapes and notably the 'city' of St David's, home to Wales' Patron Saint, with it's fine cathedral set inconspicuously within a sheltered valley yet near the old sea routes of the west. In contrast the modern port at Fishguard is one of the principle ferry routes to Ireland from Britain, and is the focus for rail and road links from South Wales, as well as the largest settlements in the area.

The area is of international importance for it's coastal landscape and wildlife, and there are many popular tourist destination 'honeypots' with walking, beach and various coastal recreational pursuits, including boat trips to some of the islands to observe wildlife.

Key Characteristics
A spectacular coastal edge to part of south-west Wales – this is the main unifying characteristic of the area.
Coastal features - varied and rugged, exposed, highly indented coastline, with rocky coastal cliffs, punctuated by sandy bays and sheltered inlets, some larger bays, a number of remote islands and islets, and a number of raised beaches.
Varied geology - the coastline cuts across the geology, informing coastal geometry and the range of coastal features. Old Red Sandstone rocks in the south meet the western extent of the South Wales Coalfield at St Brides Bay. Further north around St David's, hard Cambrian rocks and igneous intrusions form craggy outcrops. Ordovician shales stretch across the north coast, interrupted by volcanic rock in places.
Tors and hill ridges – on the St David's and Strumble Peninsulas – of resistant igneous outcrops. These are distinctive visual features and vantage points.
Dissected plateau landscape – comparatively gentle, settled, farmed land, compared to the coastline.
Coastal heath - although the rugged and windswept coastal heaths are common grazed,

inland areas are enclosed: with larger mixed arable land in the south and smaller fields in parts of the north, some of these bounded hedgebanks with proven origins in the prehistoric period.
Inland larger mixed arable fields – with hedgerows and fences
Smaller fields in rougher ground - with hedgebanks and walls
Coastal wildlife - The coastal landscape is nationally and internationally important for marine habitats and species, including species-rich maritime grasslands. The islands off the coast are the home of internationally important sea bird colonies.
Prehistoric field systems on Skomer Island - are of significant historic importance.
Rural villages and scattered farms – nucleated villages, often around a church, and with historic character in places. Often quiet, settled, well established, agricultural, away from the coast, but busier with tourism and marine activity focus on the coast.
Coloured rendering – a distinctive tradition on some old and new buildings
Ferry port and road/rail transport terminal – major feature by Fishguard, together with nearby development and periodic busyness as ferries arrive.
Tourist related ‘honeypots’ - of activity and busyness along the coast. The area’s rugged coastline and high scenic qualities make the area a popular tourist destination. Rural roads can become busy with traffic in the peak season.
Spiritual focus of St David’s – with it’s hidden cathedral and Patron Saint of Wales.

Visual and Sensory profile

This spectacular coastal area is dominated by the influence of the prevailing south-westerly winds and the waves and tide of the sea. There are numerous fine-grained, rocky, indented sections of coast with jagged cliffs and stacks, and many small sandy coves. There are broad, sweeping beaches, notably at Whitesands Bay and Newgale, where sand can be blown some distance in land. The exposed rocky headlands at the ends of the St David’s Head and Strumble Head peninsulas take the full force of the sea and exhibit extensive sweeps of maritime heath and distinctive rocky knolls. The resulting marginal land is grazed by sheep and ponies and often evokes echoes of human occupation from prehistory onwards. A particular visual feature around these headlands are the concentrations of rugged, rocky islands, including Skomer, Skokholm and Ramsey, which, dominated by semi-natural vegetation and few if any inhabitants, result in some of the remotest and wildest coastal places in southern Britain. Along the mainland coast the wide, scenic views give a strong taste of this and people’s enjoyment is demonstrated by the popularity of the coastal path.

Although the mainland is generally quiet and rural, the draw of this scenic coastline to visitors results in a number of busy ‘honeypot’ locations, where in summer the narrow lanes and sheltered coastal villages can become busy. In addition, Fishguard’s busyness, with its main roads and railway, fluctuates with the rhythm of ferries arriving and departing for Ireland. The settlement is split between the functional, modern ferry port at Goodwick, the town centre on the hill, and the old sheltered and scenic harbour with its picturesque fishermen’s cottages and boats.

All this is in contrast to the much quieter and gentler countryside inland, whose field patterns vary from those of the rolling mixed arable landscapes in the south, to the smaller-scale, more intimate and enclosed patchwork of small farms in parts of the north, for example on the fringes of the Preseli Hills.



Newport, sandwiched between the sheltered estuary of the River Nevern and the rising Preseli Hills. © John Briggs



Fishguard harbour, set in the sheltered estuary of the River Gwaun. The main town lies up the hill to the right, and is the largest settlement in the area. © John Briggs



Goodwick, close to the ferry port. © John Briggs



Gentle agricultural landscape near Mathry, with the rising Preseli Hills in the distance.

© John Briggs



The ridges and tors of the coastal area near Strumble Head © John Briggs



Whitesands Bay and Carn Llidi © John Briggs



Whitesands Bay and Ramsey Island from Carn Llidi © John Briggs



The St David's peninsula with St David's (distance, right) from Carn Llidi © John Briggs



To Carn Penberry and towards Strumble Head © John Briggs



Solva, the village (illustrating the popular tradition of colour-rendering) and the natural harbour of Solva © John Briggs



Newgale © John Briggs

Geological landscape influences

This area includes prominent features of the Pembrokeshire coastline, including the Marloes, St David's and Strumble peninsulas, and the area adjacent to St Bride's Bay. The peninsulas result from the presence of relatively hard igneous rocks which have resisted marine erosion, whilst St Bride's Bay has been eroded into cliffs dominated by relatively soft sedimentary rocks. The islands of Skokholm, Skomer and Ramsey represent remnants of the peninsulas that have been isolated by marine, glacial and fluvio-glacial erosion. Both peninsulas exhibit dissected plateau landscapes (former marine erosion surfaces). The northern coastline of the St David's Peninsula and the Strumble Peninsula are dominated by ridges surmounted by rocky protuberances (tors). Relatively short but

deep valleys open out along the entire coastline but the best-developed examples are seen in the west-facing part of St Brides Bay and on the southern coastline of the St David's Peninsula. They are all river valleys that were greatly enlarged by glacial meltwater. At Solva, the lower part of one of these meltwater channels is flooded at high tide, and forms the site of a picturesque harbour and village. To the west, St David's cathedral is situated within the confines of another meltwater channel now occupied by the river Alun, which flows into a smaller harbour at Porth Clais.

A very diverse assemblage of rocks occurs within this area, ranging in age from the Precambrian igneous rocks exposed on the south-western tip of the St David's Peninsula and along the southern cliffs of St Brides Bay, to the intensely folded and faulted Upper Carboniferous rocks in the western part of the Pembrokeshire coalfield which are magnificently exposed in the cliffs of St Brides Bay. Cambrian sedimentary rocks are also present on the St David's Peninsula whilst Ordovician rocks (slates and a wide variety of igneous rocks) make up most of the coastline from Ramsey Island to eastern side of the Strumble Peninsula. Silurian lavas and sedimentary rocks are exposed on Skomer and the Marloes Peninsula and rocks of the Old Red Sandstone sequence form the adjacent coastlines.



Skomer. © Richard Kelly

Landscape Habitats influences

This area forms an ecologically rich and varied series of habitats. Inland from the coast it is dominated by generally low-lying, gently undulating farmland, both arable and pastoral. Arable land is more prevalent along the south-western coast in association with the rich underlying brown-soils. Hedgerows and hedgebanks, many of which are species-rich, together with small deciduous woodland areas, provide more ecological interest to this area. Narrow areas of woodland or scrub are present as linear features running through narrow valleys to the coast, this is particularly prevalent in the north. There are a number of areas of more substantial deciduous woodland towards the north-east of the Character Area, associated with watercourses. Another area of particular ecological value is the wet heath and marshy grassland habitat that has formed upon poorly draining surface-water gley soils that are overlain with peat on Waun Fawr, St. David's Airfields, Tretio Common and Dowrog Common.

A feature of this western coast is the presence of a number of off-shore islands, Skomer, Skokholm and Ramsey Island, all of them of great ecological value aided by their relative isolation, with a good variety of species, not least the sea-bird colonies – 45% of the world's Manx Shearwater population live on Skomer and Skokholm.

Less agriculturally improved land with coastal grassland and coastal heath are of particular note in coastal areas, together with areas of scrub, particularly prevalent on St David's peninsula. The northern coast-line is a mix of small stretches of rocky coast with areas of intertidal sand, is also backed by cliffs in places.

Historic landscape influences

This character area displays a wealth of archaeological evidence that tells the story of its settlement, land use and religious influences over many thousands of years. The earliest remains date from the Neolithic period, including field boundaries, burial chambers and standing stones.

Skomer Island is nationally recognised as a landscape of outstanding historic interest, displaying extensive relict remains of Prehistoric settlement and farming. The survival of field boundaries, which lie in a regular square or rectangular pattern, are of particular interest – thought to delineate Neolithic divisions between arable and pastoral land. Other features relating to ancient settlement are found throughout the coastal landscape including Bronze Age round barrows and enclosed hut circles. Iron Age promontory and hill-forts overlook the sea.



St David's cathedral © Richard Kelly

The 6th century saw the development of religious settlement patterns, with chapels, holy wells and open cist cemeteries, which are still preserved in the modern landscape. The location of St David's foundation became a cult centre of great significance. Sited in its deep narrow valley, it was hidden below the surface of the surrounding plateau yet close to the Irish Sea. Examples of early Christian inscribed stones and chapels are found throughout the character area.

The later Norman invaders largely adapted the pattern of settlement and religious sites laid down previously, as well as adding their own castles and defensive enclosures, such as at Porthgain. The 16th to 19th centuries saw the development of the area's potential for coastal trade and exploitation of its natural mineral resources. The use of limestone for agricultural improvement during the 18th and 19th centuries is in evidence around Solva with the location of group of large, circular kilns. Abercastle was developed as a port for coastal trade across the Atlantic, and coal was mined from the seams around Druidston.

All these industries, however, declined by the end of the 19th century, although their remains are still strong features of the landscape. Today's dispersed settlement comprises a series of small nucleated hamlets and villages, linked by a network of rural lanes often enclosed by flower-rich banks or small linear woodlands. Villages are compact in form, often centred on stone churches, with traditional buildings of coloured render or whitewash. The main settlements that serve this area are the towns of St David's and Fishguard.

Cultural landscape influences

Historically, fishing, farming and in a few places quarrying were the main occupations and the associated ways of life are reflected in the locations and forms of the settlement and land use. However in various places along the coast, typically where there is a sheltered harbour or sandy beach, there have been contemporary influences through tourism and associated service facilities. Thus today the quiet and in places remote character, which still prevails almost entirely on the islands, is interrupted on the mainland by busy 'honeypots' of holiday-making, where local lanes become busy in peak times and beaches, surf and coastal waters become busy with recreational activities. The designation of much of the area as a National Park reflects the international importance of this landscape, but equally reflects the pressures of visitor numbers and the need to manage the area to avoid over development. Promotion of the area through enticing descriptions of scenery, wildlife and living on an island were by the famous naturalist and writer Ronald Lockley, who one was of the first people to study the breeding biology of storm petrels, Manx shearwaters, puffins and rabbits – on the island of Skokholm.

The St David's peninsula forms one of the most important cultural landscapes in Wales and is the spiritual home of the patron saint of Wales (Dewi Sant). The 'city' of St David's (Wales' smallest and of the size of a village), was an important early religious capital on the Celtic seaway. It is a reminder of the close links between British and Irish Christianity in the 6th and 7th centuries. The Norse names of Ramsey, Skokholm and Skomer islands also emphasise the way in which this peninsula was accessible by sea - St David's and the islands were only 'remote' if one was starting from London in the first place. The story of St David's is also the story of its bishops and its clergy over the centuries – of Sulien in the 11th century, who was also associated with Llanbadarn Fawr, Henry Chichele, later Archbishop of Canterbury, the martyr Robert Ferrar, burnt at the stake at Caermarthen under Queen Mary, Connop Thirlwall – liberal, heterodox and sarcastic but who nevertheless learnt Welsh well enough to preach in the language, and John Owen, who led the Welsh church through disestablishment.

Historically the north and south of the area were settled by people with different linguistic and cultural identities and today that diversity is still reflected in the place names with dominance of Welsh to the north of the dividing 'Landsker Line', and Flemish and Norse to the south. In a more general way, related to terrain, the more rugged lands of the north result in areas with smaller farms with pastures compared to larger and often arable fields on the better soils of the south, which in turn effect the farming way of life.

Other cultural stories include the once hard-working harbours at Porthgain and Aberiddy, the functioning harbour at Fishguard with its modern-day links to Ireland, and the abortive French 'invasion' of 1797.