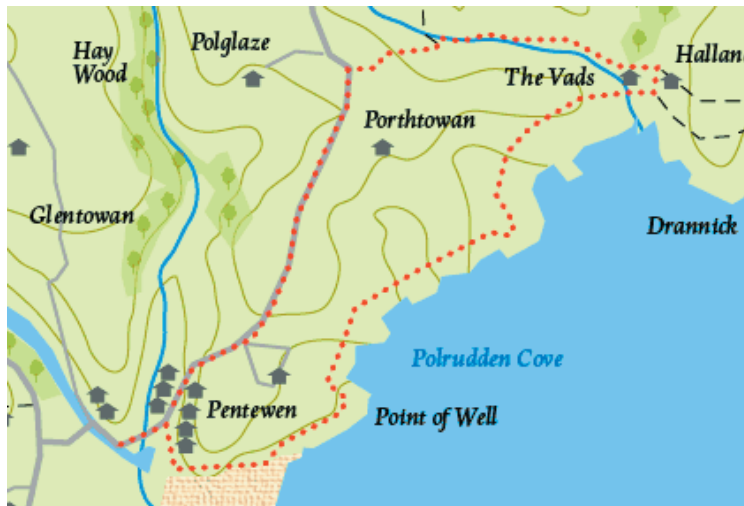




West Cornwall

Pentewan Circular



towards the farm at Trevissick then back along the Duporth lane.

Recommended map: Ordnance Survey Explorer 105 Falmouth & Mevagissey.

Distance and going: Just three miles, but fairly arduous along coastal section.

Some walks can be more exhausting than others, despite being similar in length and in terrain. It's probably to do with the walker's state of fitness and enthusiasm on the day, but certain places do seem to produce more in the way of lethargy than others.

Perhaps in the future someone will do a scientific survey into the affect different geological areas can have over the human beings walking over them. Maybe certain rocks have a greater magnetic pull and this has an effect on all that iron coursing through our bloodstreams.

We did this relatively short walk on the south Cornish coast in very dark cold weather and found it exhausting.

Apparently this area has a fairly unique geological structure. «The Gramscatho basin lay in west Cornwall and contains deep water muddy and sandy sediments of Middle and Late Devonian age,» says this www.edenproject.com PDF. «The north side of this basin is formed by a major structural feature, probably a dextral fault, which extends from Perranporth on the north coast to Polrudden Cove, near Pentewan on the south coast.»

Pentewan, the seaside village situated on the B3273 between St Austell and Mevagissey, is where this hike begins and ends. It's the sort of place that many of us tend to drive past without stopping - partly perhaps because of the large caravan site that dominates the area inland from the beach - and partly because

we might well be on our way to the Lost Gardens of Heligan, which lie just a couple of miles west.

However, once you pull off the road and enter the old village you discover a wonderfully scenic little place. In the 19th century it was a busy port exporting china clay and importing and coal, but the history of this highly protected coastal settlement dates back all the way to the Bronze Age.

We parked in the small car park just past the Ship Inn - the only remaining public house of three that used to ply a trade here. In summer the dozen or so spaces in the village car park must become rather over-subscribed, but on a cold March day there was no one else around.

There is a harbour basin at Pentewan but it looks long disused - it's waters are now the sole preserve of some swans and ducks. You can still see vestiges of the old Pentewan Railway that used to run between St Austell and this quayside. It was opened in 1830 and was at first powered by gravitational pull on the down-side, and horses on the up. After 1874 steam locomotives were introduced, but operations ceased in 1916 as the channel into the harbour became increasingly silted.

If you had all day to spend walking in the area then an ideal route would be all the way up the South West Coast Path to Charlestown and back via inland tracks and lanes. But we had time constraints and were restricted to a couple of hours at most.

So this walk takes us north the coast path almost as far as enigmatic Black Head, then back via an inland route. To begin you have to walk a little way up the steep lane that ascends north out of Pentewan then, turning sharp right where you see the sign, stroll alongside the attractive line of houses known as The Terrace.

It's rather unusual compared to most terraces, in that the village church is directly attached to one end. Ruins found hereabouts apparently suggest that a monastery once stood on the spot, but historical investigation was somewhat hampered by the fact that two German bombs were dropped on Pentewan in 1942, blowing several buildings in the vicinity to smithereens.

The coast path now climbs away from the village, offering fantastic views of the twin beach of Pentewan and Sconhoe as it goes. Now begins a roller coaster of a walk around the cliff-tops of Polrudden Cove. You can enjoy wonderful glimpses of Black Head as you go, but often you'll be climbing hillsides as steep as a house.

Past the old quarries the path dips and climbs, not that the diggings are particularly apparent, being largely overgrown. Eventually, after descending to flirt with the waves several times, the path reaches a sheltered cove, which the Ordnance Survey map calls The Vads. Here there's a junction of the ways - you could carry on along the coast path to explore the National Trust owned Black Head - you could head directly up the valley towards Trenarren - or you could do what we did, and take the route that heads up a wooded coombe to the west.

The right of way is clearly marked on the OS map but, alas, seems to peter-out on the ground. We made our way along an increasingly boggy defile until we could stay in it no more. We then climbed into the fields and found ourselves near the farm at Trevissick.

The farmer then came along in his tractor and I thought for a moment he might tick us off for leaving the right-of-way - instead, he couldn't have been more charming and helpful, saying that the district council had been promising for ages to come along and sort the signage out and that it didn't surprise him that we were lost.

Suffice to say that the westerly path from The Vads will eventually bring you onto a farm track, which in turn will take you to the Pentewan-Duporth lane at a point about a mile north of the former village. It's just a matter of persevering.

Now it is simply a matter of turning left and marching along the lane - enjoying sweeping views of Mevagissey Bay as you go - before dropping down the steep hill which ends more or less at the car park where you began. The road wasn't particularly busy and it made for a comfortable end to this three-mile circular walk - which was just as well, given how tired we felt.