

Walking with princes, saints and legends

A circular walk around Nevern in Pembrokeshire — from the medieval castle and ancient crosses in the churchyard over the northern slopes of the Preselis to view sites spanning more than 5,000 years.

Pentre Ifan Neolithic Burial Chamber (E) — Wales's first scheduled ancient monument — is one of the highlights of this walk in northern Pembrokeshire

The walk begins at Nevern Castle (A), which is owned by the community council and has benefited from Cadw's Welsh Cultural Heritage Initiative. Most of the site has been conserved and interpreted for visitors after recent archaeological excavations (as reported in *Heritage in Wales*).

The Norman, Robert fitz Martin, seized this part of Pembrokeshire in the early twelfth century to create the Marcher lordship of Cemais. He built an earth-and-timber castle here, perhaps on the site of the *llys*, or court, of the local Welsh prince.

The Norman hold on Cemais did not go unchallenged and the great prince of Deheubarth, Rhys ap Gruffudd (d. 1197) — the Lord Rhys — seems to have been in control of Nevern in

the 1160s. William fitz Martin regained the castle in the 1170s and he probably rebuilt it in stone, using the local slate bonded with clay — a traditional Welsh building technique.

The Lord Rhys recaptured Nevern in 1191, and for a period in 1194 he was imprisoned there by his sons. The castle was evidently destroyed by one of the Lord Rhys's sons in 1195 to prevent its recovery by the Normans.

A detour on the way down to Nevern village will take you to the 'Pilgrims' Cross' (B). Carved in relief on a rock face, it cannot be dated, but there is a strong tradition that it is associated with the medieval pilgrimage route from Cardigan to St Davids.

The solid tower of St Brynach's Church (C) appears on the left as you descend into

Nevern. The dedication suggests that this may have been the location of an early monastery founded by the saint, but the existing building is late medieval, much restored in 1864.

The Nevern Cross, which stands in the churchyard, is one

of Wales's outstanding early Christian monuments. Its intricate decoration and details of its construction show close parallels with the Carew Cross (the inspiration for Cadw's logo). Both were probably produced by the same artist in the second half of



The round tower on the motte at Nevern Castle (A) with one of the new interpretation panels informed by recent archaeological discoveries



The Pilgrims' Cross (B) is linked to the pilgrimage to St Davids



The Nevern Cross (C) is one of Wales's outstanding early Christian monuments



The College (D) at Felindre Farchog incorporates parts of an early seventeenth-century school

the tenth or the early eleventh century.

Nearby is a much older monument — the fifth-century 'Vitalianus Stone', which is inscribed in Latin and Ogam, an early Irish alphabet. The churchyard also boasts many more recent memorials and a celebrated 'bleeding yew'.

A short walk brings you to the wooded valley of the river Nanhyfer, a place mentioned in the account of King Arthur's hunt of the great magical boar, Twrch Trwyth, in the tale of 'Culhwch and Olwen' in the *Mabinogion*.

You emerge from the valley at the village of Felindre Farchog. At its eastern edge stands a gabled building known as the College (D). Above the door a plaque identifies it as LLYS-DŶ ARGWYDDI CEMMAES (Courthouse of the Lordship of Cemmaes) and three date stones — 1626, 1852 and 2000 — provide clues to its history.

The earliest came from a school that was begun by the noted Pembrokeshire antiquary, Sir George Owen (d.1613). That building was incorporated into the present Tudor Gothic structure, built in 1852 as a manorial court for Sir Thomas Lloyd, Lord Marcher of Cemais and an enthusiast for things

medieval. It continued in use until 1976 and now serves as holiday accommodation.

On the open northern slopes of the Preseli range, your climb is rewarded with views of Newport Bay and the summit of Carn Ingli, where St Brynach is said to have conversed with angels. Then you arrive at Cadw's Pentre Ifan Burial Chamber (E), one of the best-known prehistoric sites in Wales — in 1884, it became the first monument in Wales to be accorded protection under the Ancient Monuments Protection Act of 1882.

The Neolithic inhabitants of the region constructed Pentre Ifan 5–6,000 years ago. A long cairn of stones that would have covered much of the chamber and created a curving forecourt has long disappeared. The site was excavated in 1936–37 and again in 1958–59, but few artefacts were found and no traces of burials.

Evidence from similar sites suggests that Pentre Ifan would have been a communal burial place over a lengthy period. Yet, archaeologists believe that Neolithic tombs were much more than simple repositories for the remains of the dead; they may also have been important

ceremonial and ritual centres and statements in stone of territorial control.

Lower down the flanks of the Preselis, the route enters the ancient woodland of Tŷ Canol National Nature Reserve. The entire area would have been cloaked in forest during the Neolithic period save, perhaps, for occasional clearings created by the early farming communities.

A pleasant walk through the woodland brings you to the buildings of Pentre Ifan Farm with a prominent former barn, now a hostel for the Welsh youth organisation, the Urdd (F). This impressive building, with its massive Tudor arches, was part of a mansion of the Bowens, an

important local gentry family. It may have been a gatehouse or the main residence with a courtyard beyond and preserves a fine 10-bay timber roof. The hostel is not open to the public, but pictures of the roof can be viewed online at www.urdd.org/pentreifan.

Pentre Ifan was one of several important gentry houses in the neighbourhood. Heading back to Nevern, you pass the entrance to another, Trewern (not open to public view), which was home to the Warren family.

Nearing the end of your walk, before you cross the river and climb back up to Nevern Castle, notice the well-built bridge (G) of the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. ✚



The former barn at Pentre Ifan Farm (F) is all that survives of the Tudor mansion of the Bowen family

Before you start

Distance: 11.5km (7 ¼ miles)

Time: 4 ½ hours.

Maps: OS Explorer OL35.

Start/Parking: Neverm is about 3km (2 miles) north-east of Newport, Pembrokeshire, and is signposted off the A487. Drive into the village on the B4582. After passing the Trewern Arms Inn, cross the bridge and take the first left. The road climbs and bends sharply to the right, and about 230 metres (250 yards) after the bend, there is a lay-by on the right at the entrance to Neverm Castle (grid reference SN 081401).

Nearest town: Newport.

Cadw site: Pentre Ifan Burial Chamber — unstaffed site, open 10am–4pm

Terrain: Riverside and woodland paths, quiet lanes. This is a moderately challenging walk. Some paths may be rocky or wet/muddy and there are some long climbs. On the lanes, be alert for vehicles.

Refreshment:

Salutation Inn, Felindre Farchog

Tel: 01239 820 564

Trewern Arms Inn, Neverm

Tel: 01239 820 395

Public Toilets: Behind Neverm Village Hall

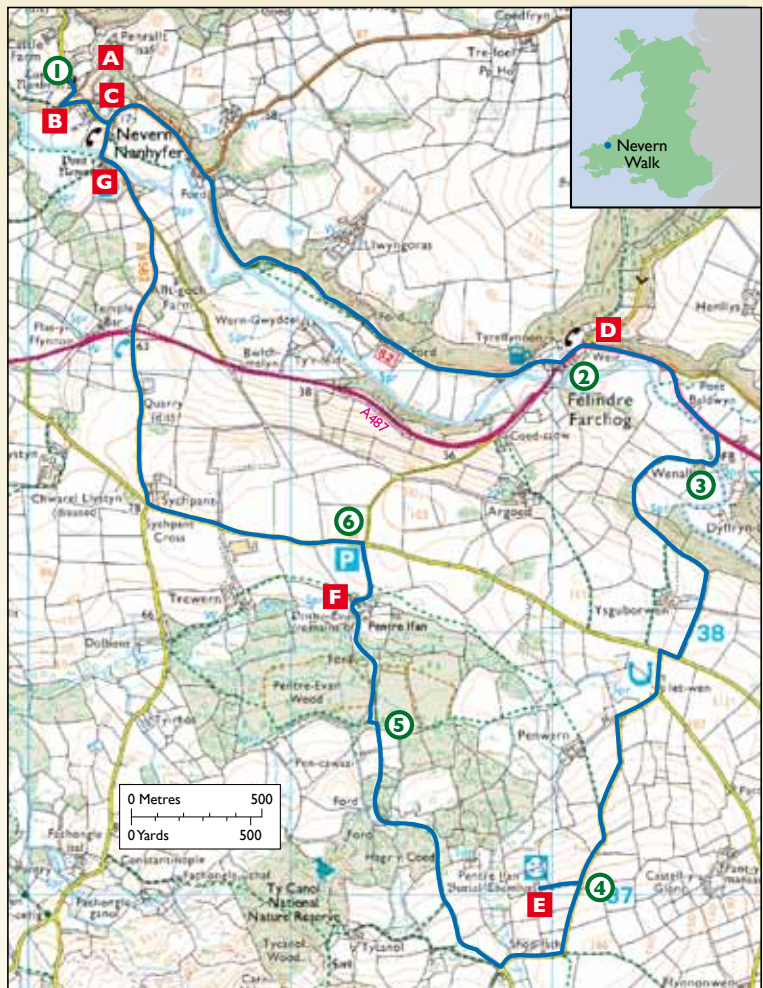
Public Transport. Rail:

Fishguard. Buses:

Traveline Cymru —

Tel: 0870 6082608.

Be sure that you have stout footwear and suitable clothing. Please follow the Countryside Code: www.countrysidecode.wales.org.uk



Route of the walk

The Walk

(1) After visiting Neverm Castle (A), return to the road and turn left. At a sharp bend in the road, take a signposted path on the right to the 'Pilgrims' Cross' (B).

Return to the road and continue downhill. At a T-junction, turn left and continue to St Brynach's Church (C).

Return to the road and turn left. Shortly before the road bends sharply left, join a bridleway on the right signposted Felindre Farchog.

After passing a house on the right, cross a footbridge and go through a gate. Almost immediately the track forks; take the right-hand track and continue to another gate.

Pass through the gate, ignoring a waymarked footpath to the right, and keep ahead on the bridleway.

After going through another gate, join a metalled track and go through a car park to join the A487.

(2) Go left through the village of Felindre Farchog, noting

the College (D). Cross to the right-hand side of the road and continue on the wide verge.

Immediately before the road starts to climb steeply and just after a house, go right at a finger-post and pass to the left of a garage to join a bridleway that crosses a bridge over the river:

(3) Pass a house on the left, then bear left and go through a metal gate to join an enclosed grass track.

Pass through another gate to a rough track that climbs steadily. Nearing the hilltop, ignore a waymarked path to the right and continue to a gate across the track.

Pass through the gate and follow an enclosed metalled track to a metalled lane. Go right and then turn left on a lane signposted 'Siambur Gladdu/Burial Chamber'.

Follow the lane for about 1 km (2/3 mile) to Pentre Ifan Burial Chamber (E).

(4) Return to the lane and go right. At a sharp left-hand corner, go right through a waymarked gate

with a sign to Tŷ Canol, and join a wide metalled track.

Immediately before the track bears right at a bridleway finger-post, pass through a gateway to the right of the track and keep ahead to another finger-post.

Go right to pass through a gate and continue on a rocky, tree-lined track to reach the gated entrance to Tŷ Canol National Nature Reserve.

Go through the gate and keep ahead through woodland. When the track forks, take the waymarked right-hand track and follow the clearly waymarked path

through woodland and clearings until it descends to a gate.

(5) Pass through the gate and bear left to a finger-post. Turn right on the bridleway and follow it to the buildings of Pentre Ifan Farm (F). Join a metalled track that leads to a road.

(6) Turn left and continue, past the entrance to Trewern mansion, until you reach a crossroads. Turn right, following the sign to Neverm, to return to the village.

After passing the Trewern Arms Inn, cross the bridge over the river (G), turn left and climb to the castle.



The bridge at Neverm (G)