

## **From pastoral ponds to limestone cliffs, I set off to wander the incredible landscapes of Wales’ Pembrokeshire Coast Path**

The 299-kilometre hiking path runs along the southwestern tip of Wales. I tackled a few sections, with inn stays in between.

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Writer Cathy Senecal taking in the views at Porthclais Harbour during her multi-day hiking trip in Wales.

Mark Clarke

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## By Cathy Senecal Special to the Star

After doubling back on a trail straight up a scrubby sand dune, I climbed over a final rise. There it was: the wild, blue Atlantic. It was the first of many ocean views on our weeklong hiking trip in Wales this summer.

Of all the reasons to travel, natural landscapes — coastlines, pingos, deserts — have always inspired me, and all the more if I can explore them by hiking or biking.

So, as soon as I learned about the 299-kilometre [Pembrokeshire Coast Path](#), which runs along the southwestern tip of Wales and offers some of the most incredible coastal scenery in Britain, I started planning.

I wasn't sure I could tackle the longer sections, however: Last June, while “climbing” a steep granite ledge on Newfoundland's [East Coast Trail](#), I felt a twinge that turned out to be a torn gluteus minimus. After months of physiotherapy, pain and frustration, I wondered if I'd ever be able to walk more than a few kilometres at a time.

When I was younger, injuries never crossed my mind. But now, as a 67-year-old, I always wonder if each hiking or biking trip will be my last.

As soon as I felt ready to take on a multi-day hiking trip again, my husband, Mark, and I went off to wander Wales.

We wouldn't trek the coastal path from end to end, but we still wanted to experience the diverse terrain in the [Pembrokeshire Coast National Park](#), from the pastoral ponds to vertical limestone cliffs to ancient, rock-strewn hills. We chose three places offering easy trail access, Pembroke, St. David's and Newport, and booked two nights in each.



Between  
legs of the

hike, the writer rested at accommodations such as the Stackpole Inn.

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In Pembroke, starting from the ivy-covered [Stackpole Inn](#), we found the swan-laden Bosherton Lily Ponds, a setting right out of a Richard Wilson painting. Wilson, a Welshman, is considered one of Britain's first great landscape painters. The loop also took in the historic Stackpole Estate and Barafundle Bay, a wide cove of sand isolated and flanked by limestone cliffs.

The striking expanse of gentle waters and golden sand, only accessible by coastal hiking or a one-kilometre walk from the car park, is what makes Barafundle one of the loveliest beaches in the U.K.

To reach our next spot, we drove to St. David's Peninsula and the perfectly located but hard-to-pronounce [Twr y Felin](#), a restored windmill and art hotel that was filled, wall to wall, with more than 200 pieces of art. One large canvas, by Xenz, was inspired by the woodlands we had just walked. It's completely covered with dark, woodsy smudges, save for two wee blue kingfishers in one corner. Hope, even in darkness.

In the morning, after a full Welsh breakfast, we jumped on a seasonal shuttle outside the hotel's front gate. Within minutes, we were standing over the towering cliffs of St. David's Head, which marks the divide between the Irish and Celtic seas.





The writer standing by Barafundle Bay, one of the loveliest beaches in the U.K.

Mark Clarke

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We walked for hours from Porthclais Harbour to St. Justinian's, awed by the wild offshore views and the cliffs rising more than 100 metres. We heard the constant "tchack, tchack" of jackdaws over the heather moorland while fulmars glided the thermals. We stared off at distant Ramsey Island while tasting sweet blackberries from the hedgerows. Once, tipped off by a hiker, we looked through our binoculars to spot a seal pup wriggling next to its mother in a sea cave.

For our last destination, we drove 40 minutes up the coast to [Llys Meddyg](#), our Georgian inn in Newport, to experience the eerily beautiful Preseli Hills, located in the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park (though not a part of the hiking path). Not far from the 5,500-year-old Pentre Ifan burial stone, one of the world's most dramatic stone portal tombs, we hiked up through gigantic bracken and an enchanting mossy woodland.



Within driving distance of the hiking path is the Pentre Ifan burial stone, the remains of a Neolithic tomb.

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At the summit, we found Carnedd Meibion Owen (the cairns of the sons of Owen), house-sized rocky outcrops that could be neolithic burial sites. Nothing like tombs to enhance my “Is this the last trip?” thinking.

Pipits flitted about, and the brisk wind carried the vanilla scent of purple gorse across these highest hills of Pembrokeshire, with Ireland in the distance.

On our final night, after a dash through a sideways deluge to a tiny seaside spot called Sailor’s Safety, my husband and I raised pints of Butty Bach as the sun set. “To our golden years!” we cheered.

I was thankful for every step, every stile, every incline in wild Wales. And I vowed to myself that I would keep moving, for as long as my body allows.

Cathy Senecal travelled with some trip support from VisitBritain, which did not review or approve this article.