

Pendennis Point to Maenporth Beach

START LOCATION: Pendennis Point Car Park

FINISH LOCATION: Maenporth Beach Car Park

DISTANCE: 4 miles (6km)

GRADE: Easy

TERRAIN: Downhill from the view point at Pendennis point. Across the flat seafront of Gyllyngvase beach around two headlands of Swanpool and Pennance points to Maenporth beach.

CIRCULAR WALK: No

FREE FROM OBSTACLES & STEEP GRADIENTS: No

WALK DESCRIPTION:

Start from Pendennis Point car park. From this prominent position there is so much to see. If one stands with ones back to the coastguard station and Pendennis Castle immediately left is the stretch of water called the Carrick Roads which is the the River Fal and the Truro River which branch off each other. Looking across to St Mawes the stretch of water between it and St Anthony Head is the mouth of the Percuil river. The source of the Percuil is in fact closer to Nare Head and only 300 metres from the sea but because of the tilt of the land of the Roseland peninsula the river takes the tortuous six mile route out past St Mawes instead of heading for the much closer Gerrans Bay.

To defend against possible invasions by the Spanish and the French, Pendennis and St Mawes castles were built between 1540 and 1545 by order of Henry 8th. During the civil war the Royalists surrendered St Mawes castle to the Parliamentarian forces without a shot whereas there was a five month siege of Pendennis where the future King Charles 2nd and Queen Henrietta Marie managed to escape.

From Pendennis point looking westwards one can see the beaches of Swanpool and Maenporth, which are the destinations along this walk. Further down the coast is Rosemullion Head, which masks the mouth of the Helford River. Dennis Point is also visible, the site of an iron age fort and where the Royalists made a brave stance before falling to the Parliamentarians at the end of the civil war in 1646. With binoculars one can also make out the Coastguard Watch building at Nare Point. Here, during the 2nd world War Ealing Studios built a film set that would act as a decoy at night when it was lit up because it was made to resemble Falmouth docks and the train depot. This was achieved with the aid of red and green coloured stop and go lights which would be visible from the cockpit of an incoming German bomber. This remotely controlled film set would also mimic the shafts of light emanating from an opening door and a poorly draped window. Explosions would also be set off to imitate trains being hit. This encouraged the Germans to drop their bombs on the false Falmouth docks. A similar film set was set up on Nare Head on the Roseland peninsula. In the 1950's Nare Point was the site of torpedo trials for the Navy at Culdrose Naval airbase.

The furthest one can see looking West is the East of the Lizard with Porthallow beach and the Manacles rocks. Manacles or Maen Eglos in Cornish means church rocks with reference to St Keverne's church where many of the drowned sailors were buried. One can see the spire of the church on a clear day from Pendennis Point. Many ships have foundered on the rocks and become wrecks including the more famous Mohegan in 1898, the Primrose in 1809 and the John in 1855 where 106, 125 and 193 people respectively lost their lives.

Regarding the walk, head down hill towards Gyllyngvase Beach. Cross the road and walk along the seafront. A seasonal cafe is opposite the Falmouth Hotel. Opposite the steps up to the Princes Pavilion one walks under a tiny building with steps that lead down from pavement level towards the beach below. This is believed to be one of two things. Either a bathing house or a chapel for the old Gyllyngvase house that no longer exists. The rock pooling here (and at Maenporth beach) is good

when the tide is out.

Follow the beach around Swanpool point to Swanpool beach. There is another beach cafe and a venue that helps you experience a wide variety of water based activities under expert instruction. The beach is stonier but sufficient parking and a regular bus route to Falmouth and Maenporth makes it a destination in itself. There is a nature reserve at Swanpool, which is an important brackish lagoon cut off from the sea. It hosts one protected species, the Trembling Sea Mat which is a rare, primitive animal group made up of tiny sea creatures 1-2mm in size. Resident swans and a variety of duck species populate this Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). At Swanvale, just behind the lagoon, in the last enemy air raid of the 2nd world War a large fuel depot was blown up, the oil destined for use in the D Day landings. The torrent of oil that emanated from the enormous fuel tank threatened a group of houses and one American Navy officer diverted the flow with a bulldozer. He was awarded the British Empire Medal.

Just up the hill is a sign to take the coast path left. Follow the path past a cliff top house and carry on uphill. One can take a small diversion on encountering a stile after the fence of the house. This takes one down to the rocks with panoramic views over to St Mawes and the Roseland. It is a pleasant diversion for a picnic.

Follow the path past the war memorial that celebrates the work of the Home Guard. It is a gentle descent to Maenporth beach. At the back of the Cove there is a lane named Fine and Brave lane reputedly named after the women of Mawnan who descended the lane to repel a French invasion. Wearing red petticoats the French thought that they were an army of redcoats and decided to sail away without an encounter. Underneath the cliff, which one descends into Maenporth, is the wreck of the Ben Asdale, an Aberdeen trawler caught up in a blizzard in 1978. At low tide the hull is still visible.

The bus stop is on the road just outside The Cove restaurant.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT INFORMATION:

First Group Bus service. Number 400 from Truro via Falmouth to Maenporth Beach. Five times a day (more in the holidays) restricted service on Sunday. Phone 0845 600 1420

NEAREST TOILETS: Maenporth, Swanpool, Gyllyngvase beaches.

NEAREST CAR PARKS:

Pendennis point, Gyllyngvase seafront and beach, Swanpool and Maenporth

NEAREST REFRESHMENTS:

Maenporth, Swanpool, Gyllyngvase Beach cafes and restaurants.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Falmouth TIC 01326 312300

OS EXPLORER MAP NUMBER: 103

