

Wythnos Genedlaethol Berdys Cymru

One of the pleasures of trailer-sailing the Shrimper is getting to see different sailing waters and a wide variety of coastlines. And what coastline is as spectacular as that of South Pembrokeshire, with its rugged cliffs, offshore islands, and sandy coves.

The Pembrokeshire coast is a National park (established 1952), along which runs a coastal path (300 kms) providing wonderful walking and stupendous views. The towering cliffs have been created by the action of wind and waves and are made up of richly-coloured rocks, some of the oldest in Britain.



Dale Peninsular



Neyland Marina

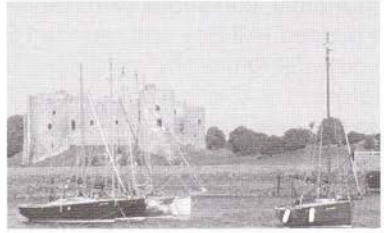
Our national week was based in Milford Haven, in a fine marina at Neyland. When the sun shone, we made passages to the entrance of the Haven and beyond, including to Dale, Angle Bay and Sandy Haven. We were also lucky enough to manage a truly memorable day trip out to the island of Skomer, which enabled the Shrimpers to enjoy exceptional views of the coastline from the water. When rain threatened and the winds became near gale force, we creek-crawled up the Cleddau River in search of beer and beauty.

The upper reaches of the Cleddau are charming and quite unspoilt, and taking advantage of the spring tides, we went up river to explore. Lawrenny is a small village with a pub, boatyard and very convenient pontoon. A short circular walk here along the river bank and through ancient oak woodlands enabled the Shrimper crews to stretch their legs before enjoying a pub lunch at the *Lawrenny Arms*. Further upstream, students of industrial archeology can appreciate the ruined quay at Landshipping, all that is left of a busy ferry point and coal port, from where high quality anthracite was shipped out. With a dinghy, it is easy enough to get ashore and visit the pub (*The Stanley Arms*) in the village.



Barry pumps up the dinghy

Other creeks worth exploring are the Cresswell River (where Roy is known to enjoy the excellent beer at the *Cresselly Arms* on Cresswell Quay) and the Carew River, which leads to a fine castle, first built by the Normans as part of a chain of fortresses to subdue the people of S Wales. Next to this fine castle is Wales' only working tidal mill. The Shrimpers took advantage of a high spring tide to raft up in the pool, cook supper, drink red wine, take photographs and savour the moment.



Shrimpers at Carew Castle



"Sire, the Gifte Shoppe has fallen!"

In the 13th C, the English were determined to unite Britain, and embarked on a programme of building castles in Wales and pacifying the Welsh by a combination of the military and diplomatic. The 'impregnable' Pembroke Castle we see today dates from this period. It was never captured, though was forced to surrender to Cromwell during the Civil War. Our night in the pool below its

walls was one of the highlights of the week - to wake up in one's bunk and look up through the open hatch to the great walls of the castle is a sight I shall not forget.



The view of the castle from Clementine's port-side berth

The Welsh got their revenge on the English when in 1485 Henry Tudor (who was born in Pembroke Castle) landed at Mill Bay, near the entrance to the Haven between Dale and St Ann's Head. From there he marched to meet Richard III at Bosworth Field, and the rest is history, as they say. At St Ann's Head, the Haven meets the open sea, there are strong tidal races and cross currents, and gales



St Ann's Head

blow an average of 32 days a year! In 1996, a fully laden tanker, the *Sea Empress*, misjudged its entry to the Haven and finished up on the rocks at St Ann's Head, spilling 72,000 tonnes of light crude oil and damaging the local ecology and wildlife.

Fortunately, conditions were more benign when we passed Mill Bay and rounded St Ann's Head on our way to the offshore island of Skomer. Skomer is said to have the finest sea bird colonies in N Europe, and on our visit we were overwhelmed by the numbers of puffins and Manx shearwaters, as well as razorbills, guillemots, kittiwakes, gannets and a variety of gulls. En route to Skomer, we saw dolphins,



Puffin on Skomer

and at our anchorage in a tiny fiord-like inlet on the south side of the island (South Haven), we watched grey seals catching fish while we ate our lunch.



Shrimpers lunching at Skomer

Some islands like Skomer and a number of the headlands along the coast (eg St David's Head) are made up of hard and resistant volcanic lavas and tuffs, pre-Cambrian (600 million years) in the case of St David's Head and Silurian (400 million years) in the case of Skomer. Lava is an igneous rock, resulting from the hardening and solidification of magma, while tuff is solidified volcanic ash. Other islands (eg Skokholm, seen clearly on our passage to Skomer) and the cliffs around St Ann's Head and between Dale and Sandy Haven (where we had our superb BBQ) are made up of old red sandstone (350-400 million years old). The red, almost purple, colour of the rocks results from the presence of oxides of iron in the rock. Sandstones are sedimentary rocks, formed over millions of years by a combination of extreme pressures and natural cementation of sand grains and other sediments at the bottom of the sea.

The red sandstone typical of the Pembrokeshire coastline was used to build St David's Cathedral, the burial place of the patron saint of Wales. This cathedral has a magnificent setting, and (in the words of the Lonely Planet guide): "if you visit only one cathedral in Wales, make it this one".



Old Red Sandstone strata at St Ann's Head

Barry Mellor

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