

After last month's window on North Wales, Craig Barnett concludes his guide to the Welsh coast with a sports boat friendly tour of Pembrokeshire, the Gower Peninsular, the Heritage Coast and the boom capital of Cardiff.

THE BIG COUNTRY



While the pitiful denizens of Windermere wring their hands over the loss of revenue from sports boaters, over the border in Wales the tourist board is rubbing its mitts together as the programme to develop the leisure marine sector begins to pay dividends.

As highlighted last month, the Welsh Tourist Board has launched an initiative called Catching the Wave, a scheme that concentrates on improving the facilities available to the watersports and marine sector. The result is that Wales is surfing along on a wave of enthusiasm for all things boating.

“It does Pembrokeshire a criminal injustice to call it merely one of the best sports boating venues in the UK”

Nowhere is this flotation of the nation more evident than in Pembrokeshire, a county surrounded on three sides by water. By utilising its natural resource of a stunning coastline (it boasts the only national park in the UK to be entirely coastal) there is lots to reward the tourist and sports boater.

With over five million ‘overnight



Tenby sparks the imagination

visitors stays’ generating £343million, it’s no surprise that 39 organisations offer water based activities in a county with a population of just 114,000. With a craggy coastline, numerous sandy beaches, picture postcard waterfronts and dozens of safe havens, Pembrokeshire is not just one of the UK’s greatest sports boating venues, but one of the most glorious boating wonderlands in the world.

MILFORD HAVEN AND NORTH

Milford Haven may appear fairly remote from the majority of urban centres, but the best treasures are always worth working that little bit harder to uncover. As its name suggests, Milford



Haven has been the centre of a thriving maritime scene for centuries on account of its sheltered waters. The Haven’s 22-mile natural deepwater harbour is well sheltered from Atlantic weather systems, but if a breeze does start to blow then you can always dive into one of the eight pubs that have direct access to the water.

The marinas at Neyland and Milford Haven offer pretty much everything a sports boater could need, from a replacement fender to a new tender. While there are watersports activity centres at either end of the Haven, plus areas for waterskiing and wakeboarding, anyone visiting for longer than a day or two should take the opportunity to go further afield.

Heading north out of Milford’s sheltered waters, set a course for Skomer, Grassholm and Skokholm (not to be confused with the Stockholm in your chart plotter). It’s a small group of islands off the Marloes peninsular and is well worth a visit at any time of year. The islands are especially popular from May to July as the sea birds take over to create the world’s largest nesting colonies of gannets and shearwaters. The islands offer a safe habitat for breeding and there is no better way to watch the bustling activity than with a pair of binoculars from your boat.

Continuing north and rounding the headland you’ll discover the quaint village of Little Haven and Broad >

Flight EZ319 takes off from Rhossili Airport





Dream Scene - St. Catherine's Island off Tenby

Haven. Both villages offer sandy beaches at low tide and make great stops on the way round to St. David's. If you fancy St. David's city itself then head to Porthclais. Just make sure you time your arrival and departure properly as the anchorage dries out at low tide.

St. David's is a curious place. Despite being the size of a village it enjoys full city status. Home to the most revered historical monument in Wales, St. David's and its cathedral have been the destination for pilgrimages since medieval times. Though having been here, you might wonder whether it was the tomb of Wales' patron saint or a spot of R&R on the beach at Whitesands Bay that attracted them.

If you do decide to venture further north of St. David's (though my advice would be to head south of Milford Haven for richer spoils), then be sure to head out around the Ramsey Island. A vicious tide race and submerged rocks could quickly spoil a great day's boating for those tempted by cutting corners.

PEMBROKESHIRE SOUTH

Unless you're planning on auditioning to replace Daniel Craig as the next Bond then it's best to avoid the exclusion area between Freshwater West and St. Govans Chapel when heading south from the Haven. The area forms part of the MOD's

“ With its 13th century fortifications and roots dating back to the Norman Conquest, Tenby is Pembrokeshire's most lovely town ”

live-fire range at Castlemartin and a 'collision' with a live artillery shell will do little to enhance the residual value of your craft or the life expectancy of your family. But having made the run past the military hardware, the pools at Bosheston will provide you with one of the few opportunities to observe wild otters in the UK.

Pembrokeshire's coastline, a collection of craggy cliffs and secluded beaches, is only matched in beauty by the >



On dolphin watch in Pembrokeshire

delicious descriptive nature of the place names. After a morning at the lily pools those wishing to redress their testosterone balance should cruise by the theatrically named and equally impressive Bull Slaughter Bay. Call into Stackpole Quay one of the UK's smallest harbours and drop anchor in Barafundle Bay where the beach was recently named the most beautiful and best family beach in Britain by the Good Holiday Guide.

We'll wrap up our visit to West Wales with the jewel in Pembrokeshire's crown – Tenby. Tracing its roots back to the Norman Conquest, Tenby was later developed as a fortified town in the 13th century as a defence against the Welsh rebellion. One of the few examples of how a fortified town can maintain a picture postcard charm, the town's walls remain intact (despite the best efforts of the Cavaliers' cannons during the Civil War) and within them lie narrow lanes

Lazy days at Tenby harbour



The golden sands of Rhossili's magnificent beach deserves to draw the punters from far and wide

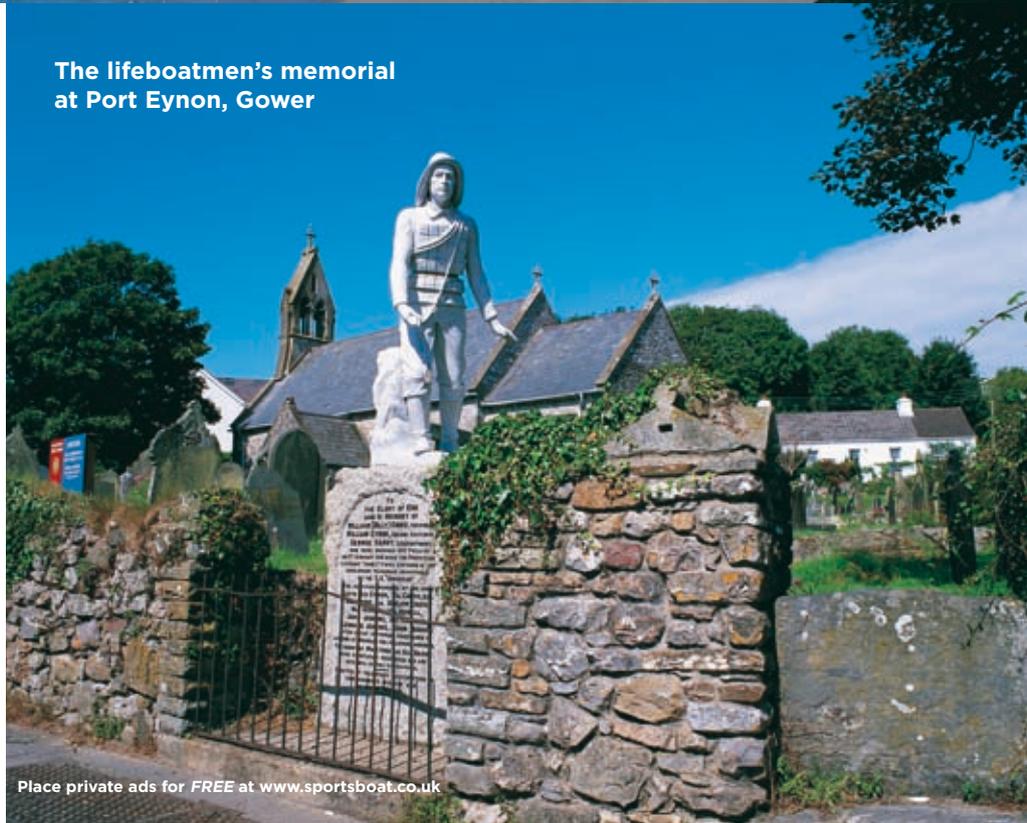


lined with pastel coloured houses.

Tenby's harbour, slipways and beaches make it a first class sports boating destination and there are several local chandleries and dealers to help with the insider knowledge. And should you find yourself in difficulty on the water, you can take comfort in the fact that Tenby's famous lifeboat station was the first in the UK to house the Tamar lifeboat.

The town's buzzing nightlife, cafes and restaurants make it a fantastic base for a family holiday, with a dozen or more great beaches to visit by boat and one of Britain's holy islands within striking distance of the harbour. Caldey Island has been a place of contemplation and prayer for over a thousand years, and the Cistercian monks who still live there today ensure the tranquility and peace continue. Visitors are welcome during the summer season and there's plenty to keep the family occupied with the medieval priory, perfumery, lighthouse and tea gardens. ➤

The lifeboatmen's memorial at Port Eynon, Gower



‘Thanks in part to the efforts of the Cambrian Boat Centre in Swansea, South Wales is rammed full of Zodiac RIBs’

Caption????



SHOWTIME

Before we traverse the width of Camarthen Bay and head to the Gower Peninsular, we must mention one of the success stories of Welsh investment in marine leisure – the South Wales Boat Show. Nominated for recognition in the first “Tourism Swansea Bay Awards” the South Wales Boat Show achieved finalist positions in four categories. It’s a fair acknowledgment of how successful the event has been in raising awareness of the region and working in partnership with local businesses.

From Friday 15 to Sunday 17 June the South Wales Boat Show 2007 is to be held on the lawns in front of the spectacular Tudor-Gothic style Victorian Mansion at Margam Park. While this show is still in its infancy, the event is proving to be extremely popular with visitors. In 2006 over £1 million worth of business was

done at the show with Cambrian Boats quoted as selling six craft over the weekend.

Last year’s exhibitors list included the likes of Cambrian Boats (authorised dealers for Rinker, Arvor, Warrior, Orkney, Zodiac and Quicksilver boats, alongside Yamaha engines and Sea Doo personal watercraft), Picton Boats (Manufacturers of Cobra RIBs and dealers for Maxum and Olympic), Quadra Boats, Stingray Boats, Boat Shed Wales (brokerage), Hydrolift and Indespension.

Outside of show time, the glorious 1,000 acre patch of parkland at Margam offers a 12th Century Chapter House, ornamental gardens, the best deer herd in Wales, a narrow gauge railway, a children’s adventure playground and even a place called Fairytale Land to keep the little prince and princesses occupied. See www.southwalesboatshow.co.uk.

PARADISE FOUND

In 1956 the Gower Peninsular was designated Britain’s first Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and 50 years on it remains one of the country’s best kept secrets. Protected and preserved for future generations, the Gower is a prime example of how tourism and environmental conservation can work in partnership.

Visitors to the area can’t fail to be impressed by the natural beauty of the place, but the area also boasts an impressive history. Castles and caves tell the Gower’s history. In fact the oldest modern human remains were discovered here in a cave at Paviland. From [▶](#)

mythical Arthur's Stone to the ancient burial mound that is the Giant's Grave, the past conspires with the present landscape to make the Gower peninsular an inspirational place for a boating adventure.

With numerous caravan and camping facilities and wide sandy beaches, Oxwich Bay and Port Eynon provide useful locations as bases for a sports boating holiday. Although only 19 miles long, the Gower packs an enormous number of bays and some of the cleanest beaches in the UK into a very small space.

On the western tip, Worms Head protects the approaches to Rhossili and Llangennith, two of the premier surfing beaches on our coast. The mile-long protrusion of rock snakes from the ocean's depths and legend has it that Viking invaders named it Worms Head when it loomed out of the mist at them like a sea serpent. When the marauders landed, intent on rape and pillage, they'd have been met by a perfect three-mile beach and, if a night out in Swansea is anything to go by, a group of very accommodating locals.

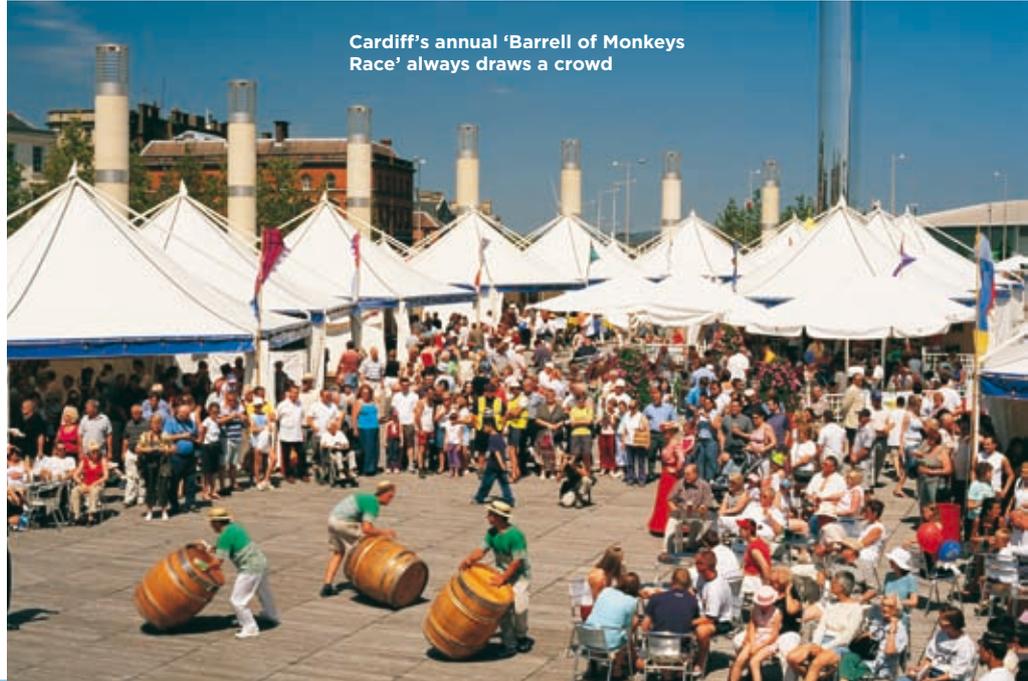
Travelling east from Rhossili, it is well worth taking your time to investigate the shoreline. Just before you arrive back in Port Eynon look out for a crevice in the cliffs with a strange construction at the back – this is Smuggler's Cove, used by wreckers on stormy nights in times past. In the 18th and 19th centuries smuggling was a career path for many of

the local population as ships laden with tea, tobacco and spirits made their way up the Bristol Channel to Cardiff and Swansea.

Continuing on past Port Eynon and Oxwich Bay you next come to what many consider to be the finest beach in the UK. I have travelled extensively around the world, so it is not lack of comparison that places Three Cliffs Bay near the top of my favourite beaches list. It's the sheer magnificence of the place. It really does take your breath away. Bordered by cliffs either side, with dunes at the rear, a river

bisecting the sands and a rocky outcrop in the centre, Three Cliffs Bay is truly unique.

Further around the Gower's coast, towards Swansea and the Mumbles, well, Langland, Bracelet and Limeslade bays each have their own charm. But it is Pwll Du that holds a tragic secret. In 1760 a slaveship called the Ceasar ran aground off Pwll Du in a terrible storm. Unwilling to go below decks and free the prisoners shackled in the holds, the crew left the slaves to the mercy of the gods. All 60 souls >



Cardiff's annual 'Barrell of Monkeys Race' always draws a crowd

Welsh bush obscures craggy island



As part of its pro-powerboat ethos, Cardiff now welcomes the very people that Windermere spurned by playnig host to the annual Classic Motorboat Rally



Watersports of every kind are massive in South Wales



perished in horrific circumstances and the area's black waters still exude a sense of foreboding to this day. Visit at your peril . . .

SECONDS UP

On a cheerier note, our tour continues past the Mumbles, with its famous mile of public houses, and Swansea, home to Wales' largest marina. It's fair to say that Wales' second city possesses that 'Marmite' quality – you either love it or hate it. Anyone who has watched the cult classic, 'Twin Town', will have some understanding of how the city has struggled to cast off its industrial blues. To some extent it still deserves its reputation as a "a pretty shitty city".

But with the new marina development now home to bustling bars, restaurants and a lively café culture, a positive transformation is steadily taking place.

CAPITAL FUN

Passing by the post-industrial landscape of what is imaginatively described as 'The Glamorgan Heritage Coast' we finish our Welsh trip in the nation's capital - Cardiff. It may well be Europe's youngest capital city – in fairness it has only actually been a city for 100 years or so - but this has produced a place that blends historical interest with ultra-modern developments in a very compact space. ➤

NAVIGATION NOTES

When navigating in this part of the Bristol Channel you should use Admiralty charts 1182 and 1176 and the appropriate pilot books. The following information should not be relied upon for navigational purposes.

APPROACHING CARDIFF BY DAY

When approaching Cardiff by day, the Ranie Buoy (Port hand buoy) marks the extremity of the rocks and sand spit off Lavernock Point. The South Cardiff cardinal buoy marks the southern extremity of the Cardiff Grounds. From a position between the two buoys make a course for the Outer Wrach Buoy (West Cardinal Buoy). Follow the Wrach Channel and buoyage into the Cardiff Bay Outer Harbour.

NAVIGATION WITHIN THE BAY

As you enter the Bay, having passed through the locks, you will find yourself at the Penarth end of the Bay. On your Port side you will see the entrance for Penarth Marina.

As you look ahead you will see the Ely Peninsula with the Clubhouse of the Cardiff Bay Yacht Club with their moorings in front. Looking to starboard you will see the Butetown Link Road, then Cardiff Yacht Club moorings and the clubhouse. Further to starboard in sequence are the prominent St David's Spa Hotel, the Inner Harbour and visitor pontoons. You are warned to stay well clear of the line of Sluice Marker Buoys. If you wish to head towards the Inner Harbour and short stay visitor pontoons, it is recommended that you take a straight line to the Norwegian Church, the distinctive white church on the foreshore with a black roof.

ON TOUR SOUTH WALES

In downtown Cardiff, for instance, you'll see a 1,000 year-old castle directly next door to the Millennium Stadium - an iconic sports and music venue that is now recognisable around the world.

Shopping opportunities, quality hotels and a laid back atmosphere are all available in the city centre, but it's the newly developed Cardiff Bay area that will have sports boaters salivating. With the construction of the Cardiff Bay Barrage the city now possesses a sheltered inlet covering 200 hectares. The one-kilometre barrage has created a freshwater lake with a waterfront of over 13km. The project may have cost £220 million, but the reclamation has sparked a period of regeneration that will see over £2 billion spent in total.

Over 1,000 resident and numerous visitor berths have been created in the two new marinas and this provides a useful launch pad for the aquatically minded to explore the new docklands. The waterfront already bustles with activity in the bars, cafes and restaurants as visitors take in the futuristic Wales Millennium Centre, a flagship arts and cultural centre and host to some of the world's biggest productions - from West End and Broadway musicals to ballet and opera.

Having invested heavily in the development of the area, Cardiff City Council is trying to make sure the bay has lots of attractions. In 2006 the RYA chose Cardiff to host its National

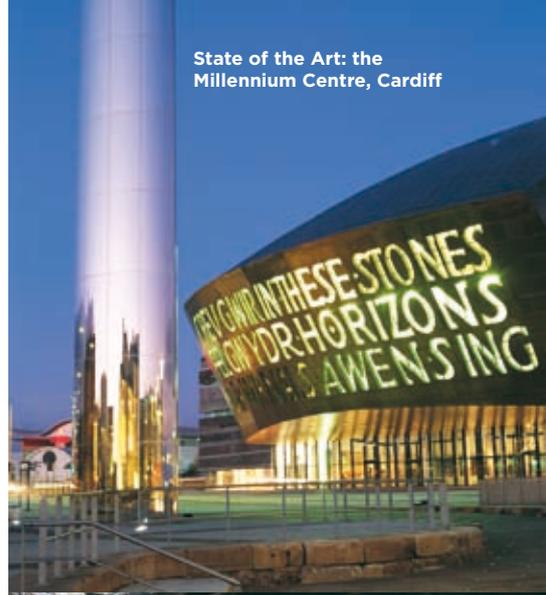
Powerboat Finals - a free event that saw over 80 boats compete in Offshore, Circuit and Jet Sport categories.

If 120mph action in the Formula 500 World Powerboat Grand Prix isn't quite your bag then Water Ski Racing, Honda Powerboat Championships and the Classic Motor Boat and Car Rally all feature on the calendar of events. In addition to the watersports competition weekends Cardiff Bay also packs the calendar out with diverse cultural and family events, so whenever you visit there will be something for you to get involved in.

“ It's a peculiar sight to see a 1,000 year-old castle directly next door to an edifice as modern and commercially astute as the Millennium Stadium ”

The pace of development in Cardiff continues unabated and work has begun on the International Sports Village site. An ice rink, retail developments, international-sized swimming pool and Olympic standard canoe slalom facility are all due to come online in the next couple of years. ■

State of the Art: the Millennium Centre, Cardiff



Recycling history in Tenby



GENERAL

www.visitwales.co.uk - Welsh Tourist Board
www.rcahmw.org.uk - Royal Commission on the Ancient and

HISTORICAL MONUMENTS OF WALES

www.boatlaunch.co.uk - Slipways and launching in Wales
www.southwalesboatshow.co.uk - 2007 Welsh Boat Show news
www.thislandwales.com - Great guide to Wales and its history

PEMBROKESHIRE

www.visitpembrokeshire.com - Tourism in Pembrokeshire
www.pcnpa.org.uk - Pembrokeshire National Park Authority
www.mhpa.co.uk - Milford Haven Port Authority
www.stdavids.co.uk - Local info website for St. Davids
www.venturejet.co.uk - Boating opportunities in Pembrokeshire
www.virtualtenby.co.uk - Tenby Guide
www.tenbyguide.com - Does what it says on the tin!
www.caldey-island.co.uk - Guide to the island and attractions

THE GOWER

www.enjoygower.com - Official Tourist Board site
www.gowerheritagecentre.co.uk - Historical information on the Gower
www.the-gower.com - Guide to all things Gowerish

CARDIFF

www.visitcardiff.com - Official Tourist Board site
www.cardiffharbour.com - Harbour Authority official webspace
www.bigcardiff.co.uk - Includes handy events calendar
www.cardiffcastle.com - Guide to the city's castle
www.millenniumstadium.com - Forthcoming events
www.wmc.org.uk - Wales Millennium Centre website
www.cardiffbay.co.uk - Info and news on the latest developments