

Three Cliffs Bay on the Gower Peninsula



Park or Peninsula?

Andy Stothert takes a look at two beautifully-situated Welsh sites that may appeal to different types of caravanner

IS THERE anywhere in Wales with a shoreline to equal that of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park? Well luckily, yes, there is, and that place is the magnificent Gower Peninsula in the south-west.

Each of the sites visited this month occupies a pivotal position in one of these stunningly beautiful places and both offer comprehensive facilities. We'd better start with Freshwater East, I think, as this one

is a lot easier to pigeon-hole in regard to the variety and age of members (or indeed non-members) you can expect to find enjoying the assets on or near the site.

First and foremost, in the school holidays, this is a perfect site for young families, offering a wonderful beach within five minutes' stroll and a host of tourist attractions just a short drive away.

That beach really is wonderful – clean, beautiful and, perhaps most importantly,

offering a predominantly safe and sheltered environment for youngsters wanting to mess about in the sea.

This is just a personal opinion, but I think Freshwater East may very well be the Club's best all-round seaside family holiday site.

If there is a downside, it is that there are too many members only too well aware of this, so getting a pitch here in the peak periods involves stuff like >>



Ordnance Survey Landranger Maps 158, 159

Tenby is at its best out of season



INFORMATION

SITES

Full site details can be found on p242 (Freshwater East) and p247 (Gowerton) of the *Sites Directory & Handbook 2011/12*. To book, call 01342 327490 or see caravanclub.co.uk/searchandbook.

TOURISM

- **Tenby Information Centre** – call 01834 842402 or see pembrokeshire.gov.uk
- **Swansea TIC** – call 01792 468321 or see visitswanseabay.com

CYCLING

- **From Freshwater East:** The Pembrokeshire tourist route runs straight from the site on minor roads either round the coast or up towards Pembroke. From Pembroke you can link with National Cycle Network Route 4, The Celtic Trail West.
- **From Gowerton:** This site sits next to National Cycle Network Route 4, The Celtic Trail West. It heads north on a minor road towards Loughor Castle, and onwards to the Millennium Coastal Park. To the north is a mainly traffic-free route that will take you through Gowerton, Clyne Valley County Park and onto the coastal path. See sustrans.org.uk for more information on both routes.



Gowerton

ATTRACTIONS

PEMBROKESHIRE

- **Oakwood Theme Park, Canaston Bridge** – open Easter to October. Call 01834 891373 or see oakwoodthemapark.co.uk
- **Bosherston Lakes** – open all year. Call 01646 661359 or see nationaltrust.org.uk
- **Manorbier Castle** – open Easter to September. Call 01834 871394 or see manorbiercastle.co.uk
- **Carew Castle and Tidal Mill** – open all year. Call 01646 651782 or see carewcastle.com
- **Carew Karting** – open all year. Call 01559 384078 or see carewkarting.co.uk

GOWER

- **WWT National Wetland Centre Wales, Llanelli** – open all year. Call 01554 741087 or see wwt.org.uk
- **Gower Heritage Centre** – open all year. Call 01792 371206 or see gowerheritagecentre.co.uk
- **Swansea Grand Theatre** – open all year. Call 01792 475715 or see swansea-grand.co.uk
- **National Waterfront Museum, Swansea** – open all year. Call 01792 638950 or see museumwales.ac.uk

planning and advanced booking (impossible for spontaneous travellers, or those, like us, who live for the light falling through the lens).

Mid-week, out of season, however, this site becomes a totally different place: gone are the hordes of happy children, and gone are the words 'sorry we're full'.

Freshwater East then reverts to being a peaceful haven for those who want to explore this glorious corner of Pembrokeshire by boot or bike, and even perhaps replicate the behaviour of the children in the cool, clear, inviting waters that lap the sands just outside the site.

There are a couple of good eating places up the hill, miles of coastal footpaths to explore, a good selection of historical attractions within biking range, and overall, for a pair of romantic and active oldies, this is heaven indeed.

There is also something called Tenby just up the road. In high season the town and surrounding area can be frantic, but at quieter times the true Tenby shines through unrestrained. This is perhaps the most architecturally appealing town in Britain, and surely unique, as nowhere else in the realm is as packed with beautiful old buildings and also surrounded by such amazing seaside scenes.

So that's Freshwater East – a great family site-by-the-beach in the school holidays and during summer weekends, but brilliant for everyone else any other time. Even us itinerant, photo-taking motor caravanners.

Gowerton is very different, and doesn't seem to be under quite the same pressure as Freshwater. While this is definitely a seaside site of sorts, it could never really be described as a seaside 'holiday' site. The water does reach almost into the site, and some may say there is sand here, but it is that mysterious

mixture of marsh and mud which stretches out before the eye for mile upon mile from Gowerton.

The site sits on the edge of Swansea's rambling suburbs, and this scenic city is a quick bike or bus ride away. The cycleway along the marshes on the north side of the Gower Peninsula starts near the site, so this location is well suited to lovers of two wheels.

But all this biking and city-centre culture is, in a way, just a sideshow, with the main attraction being the remarkable scenery of the Gower Peninsula. Most of the best bits lie around the edges, but not all, and that this startling place was Britain's first officially recognised Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will come as no surprise to those lucky souls who know it.

The best way to see the scenery here is to get out on foot in amongst it, but for those who are not physically able, there are places accessible by car which can provide a glimpse of this dramatic seascape.

Enough, for there are only so many adjectives to describe the scenery which lies around these two very different sites. The trick to enjoying them to the full is to make sure you are on the right one at the right time. ■

DID YOU KNOW?

There are eight Bronze Age standing stones – or 'menhirs' – on the Gower Peninsula



Freshwater East