

# Pembrey Country Park

## Nature Trails

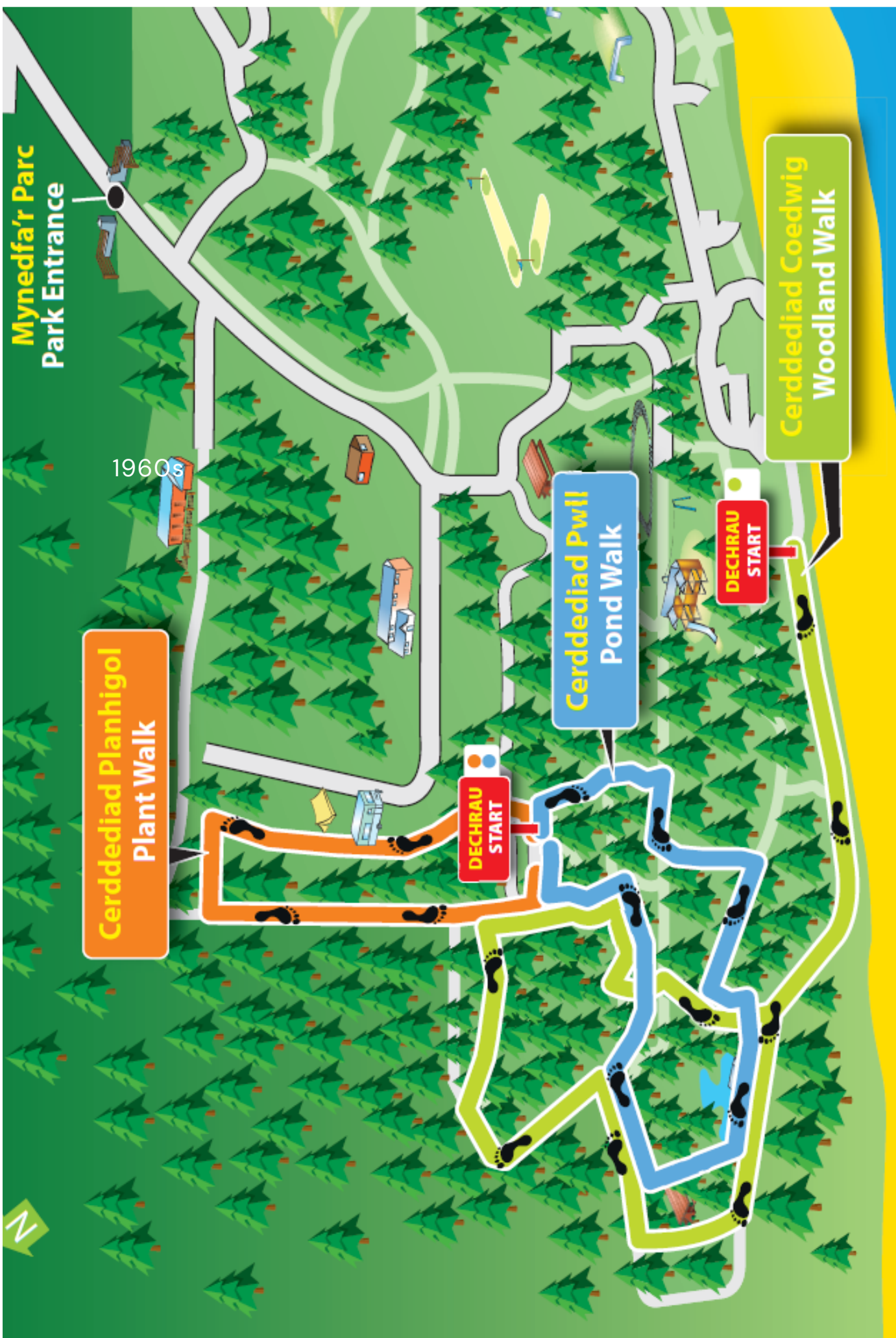


Pembrey Country Park has 500 acres of park and woodland to explore and within this space we have 3 trails that have been marked out that will allow you to explore and learn about our woodland, ponds and plants.

Join in on one of the walks and follow the signs to guide you around safely. See and learn new things within the park.







# Woodland walk

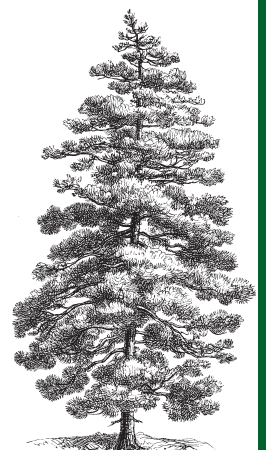
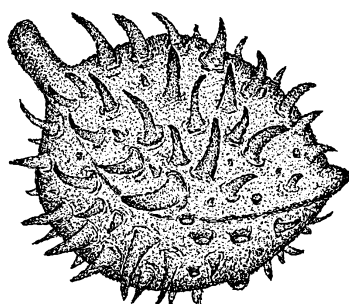
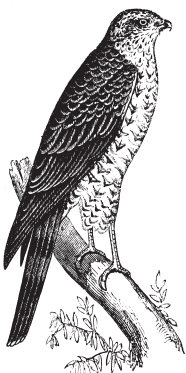
Green - 3k

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## Introduction

The woodland of the Country Park is one of the main “all year round” attractions offering opportunities for walking, cycling, orienteering, picnicking etc. Carmarthenshire County Council who manage the park, also place great importance on the amenity and conservation value of the woodland.

1. As you walk along the path we call the western ride, you may notice the tall, thin trees which make up the majority of Pembrey forest, and these are Corsican pine. Amazingly some of these non-native trees are over 50 years old, but due to their close proximity to the salt laden coastal winds and late thinning, they are very stunted in girth and height. The trees in fact were planted as a “shelter belt”, to protect the main woodland from the prevailing South Westerly coastal winds.
2. As you walk past one of our bird hides you can notice a small ditch running along the left hand side of the track. This is the park boundary separating Pembrey Country Park from NRW (Natural Resources Wales) land. The trees currently growing in the ditch are predominantly Willow. This species is normally an indicator of a water source nearby. The inner bark of this tree contains Salicin, which has since been synthesised to make what we now know as aspirin.
3. Walking through this block of woodland, we see trees have been recently thinned. Felling of one in three trees of Corsican pine will allow the remaining trees to grow bigger. This will improve the structure of the woodland and allow the remaining pines to better withstand red band needle blight – a fungus which causes the trees to shed needles and eventually die.
4. The long straight path before us is known as a Woodland Ride. Formed by cutting through a large dune ridge, it provided access for management work and timber extraction. Rides also act as effective fire-breaks and provide access for fire-fighting. The margins of rides are important in coniferous plantations as they sometimes contain the only deciduous trees and shrubs, with their associated wildlife in the whole wood. We can see as we walk along, that Oak and Holly have established on the bank.





5. As you continue along the trail through the block of dense woodland (some choked with Ivy) you'll notice a small area of coppiced Hazel. The Hazel is cut back close to the ground to encourage a rapid re-growth of numerous fresh shoots. This form of woodland management is called coppicing. Coppicing of species such as Alder, Ash, Hazel and Sweet Chestnut, provides plenty of new growth and consequently high populations of insects and birds. At the dense thicket stage, an ideal habitat is provided for small mammals. The hazel "Stools" will then be left for 12 to 14 years before re-harvesting.

6. You are now in an open clearing which is undergoing annual management to help improve the habitat for butterflies. The ranger team have been felling trees in the area to allow more light to enter the clearing and also disturbing the soil. This creates areas for the butterflies to bask whilst allowing its food plants to flourish. Some of the rarer species to look out for are the Grizzled Skipper, Dingy Skipper and the Small Blue.

7. You are now walking in between two steep banks which was formerly one of the old railway lines. This long straight section is perfect hunting area for a woodland predator such as a Sparrowhawk. These birds of prey are specialist in hunting small birds in dense woodland using their aerial agility to manoeuvre between trees and shrubs. They often leave a kill site behind, littered with torn out feathers.

8. As the trail meanders left you'll be passing one of our few sweet chestnut trees in the park. This broadleaf tree is easily recognisable when in leaf as they are long toothed with a pointed tip. During the autumn months they produce seed cases that are green and spiky, which then holds the chestnuts. This non-native species believed to be introduced by the Romans for food, their edible nuts are delicious roasted and have become a tradition at Christmas. Continuing on, as you pass one of our dune slacks towards Pembrey 2 bird hide,, on the right hand side there is an area of sunken woodland with lots of different species of broadleaf trees, but in particular Lime. This native tree throughout history has had many uses predominantly for the manufacture of rope from its inner bark. The flowers are can used as a calming tea. Slightly further along on the left hand side a small plantation of Birch. These pioneering trees are normally the first to grow in a woodland and have many useful properties. The timber is used for construction, carving and firewood, the bark has been used for basketry, clothing and canoe manufacture to name but a few. The sap has also been used as a soothing tonic. The tree is currently been studied for its anti-cancer properties.



# Pond walk

Blue 1.8k

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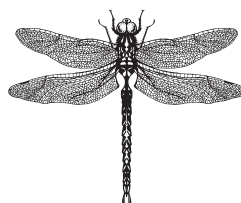
## Introduction

Freshwater is important for all aspects of wildlife. The networks of ponds in Pembrey Country Park have been extended in 2014-15 working with Amphibian and Reptile Conservation.

1. After descending down a steep slope you're now in between two dune slacks have been excavated. The slacks have been created in an area where the water table is close to the surface and where large dune slacks would have been located when the whole area was a large dune system. The ponds sometimes dry out during the summer months but are still important habitats for all kinds of wildlife especially amphibians and reptiles.

2. Down on the left hand sized in an open clearing you can see another dune slack that's been excavated. The trees have been thinned on the south side so that the sun can reach the refugia that has been created on the north side. Refugia have been created by stacking the wood that had been felled and covering it with the soil that has been dug out from the pond. This creates a range of basking opportunities, provides shelter from predators and the elements for reptiles and amphibians.

3. Having dropped down another steep slope you approach one of our bird hides. As you look outside the hide you can see our large conservation pond in front of you. The pond itself varies in depth throughout the year as it is dependent on an underground water table, but this does not prevent many forms of wildlife making use of it. From the early spring its fringes are full of frog spawn and by the time the first swallows are skimming the pond's surface tadpoles have developed. As the fringes of the pond are regularly walked along, the pond is not a regular venue for wildfowl, but the ground disturbed by trampling does create an excellent habitat for dragonflies to lay their eggs.



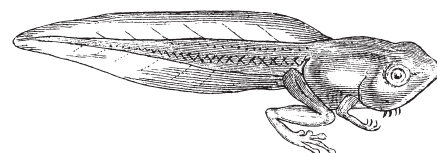
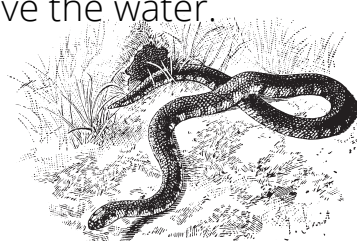
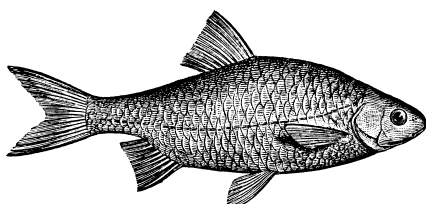


4. You are now outside our next bird hide, looking out onto the pond from here will give a different perspective and will give you the first glimpse of the island. During the winter months otters are occasional visitors to pond. Otter's populations have increased over the last few years and are now believed to be in every county in Wales and England. In early spring sightings of coot, moorhen, mallard, little grebes and mallard are not unusual. In late spring, life in the pond has a boost with thousands of tadpoles along the pond, and waterside plants begin to shoot. Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler may be heard as summer sees the emergence of Damsel and Dragonflies together with a host of flowering plants around the area.

5. Here at the rest bench we have an open view over ponds. This "man- made" pond was originally a dry dune slack, i.e. an area where the water table lay just below ground level. Removal of many tons of sand (to make the pond embankments) created the pond you see today. Fleabane a brilliant yellow flower attracting hundreds of butterflies during August is a lover of damp ground and thrives in this area. You may also notice in the shallows small shoals of fish, these are called roach. There a small silver fish with red fins and eyes which feed on small invertebrates and can often be seen just below the surface.

6. As you follow the trail right be careful where you place your feet as during late spring as adult toads migrate towards the pond for the breeding season. During the summer the young toadlets will leave the pond and head out into the woodland in search of food and shelter. During this time hundreds of toadlets can be seen crossing the paths surrounding the pond.

7. As the path continues forward, on the right hand side are another two dune slacks. They're in a clearing in of woodland which allows more light on to the ponds and woodland floor. There are steep banks on the far side which is perfect for burrowing insects. During the summer months dragonflies such the emperor and the broad body chaser can be seen hovering around looking for prey. The former being Britain's bulkiest dragonfly is identifiable by its large bright green thorax and blue or green eyes. These types of open waterbodies are also very valuable at night, species of bats such as the daubentons, feed on midges, caddisflies and mayflies just above the water.



# Plant walk

## Orange 1.4k

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### Introduction

In earlier centuries it was for the usefulness of flowers more than their beauty that people went out into the fields and woods to look for them, as most medicines were made from plants. Wild flowers' leaves and roots provided a natural food supply; petals and fruits were crushed to make dyes; and many plants were thought to give protection against all manner of evil in a superstitious age.

1. Flowering plants are diverse in form, some being long lived (perennial plants) whilst others grow and die in a single season (annuals), leaving their seed to overwinter and grow the following year. The majority of flowers may be seen from May to August.

2. As descend down the bank towards the road you may observe Herb Robert, an annual red-tinged plant also known as "stinking bob" due to the strong geranium type odour it produces. The leaves turn a fiery red in autumn or when growing in dry places. The logic in medieval times believed any plant with a curative property would reveal the purpose for which it was intended through its shape or colour, so Herb Robert was considered suitable for the treatment of blood disorders. Its leaves have been known to have been chewed for the soothing and healing of oral bleeding and gum inflammations.

3. As you cross the road and onto the border of our campsite you may notice a long, stout, perennial plant. Rose-bay Willow Herb with its pyramidal clusters of rosy-purple flowers is one of the first plants to brighten up disturbed ground.

4. Here on the border of the woodland, a remnant of a dune slack exists – (a hollow between sand dunes). As the water table is closer to the surface the soil is richer and damper. This provides a habitat for the Southern Marsh Orchid, (*Dactylorhiza majalis*, subsp *praedermissa*). A perennial it flowers between late May and July. The colour varies from pink to deep purple.

5. Here we walk alongside a thorny shrub with grey-green leaves and, later in the year bright orange berries. This is Sea Buckthorn. Originally planted to stabilise the dune system in preparation for woodland planting, this shrub has spread from the dune frontage to all parts of the Park. Its benefits include shelter and food for birdlife, but its invasive nature is second to none.



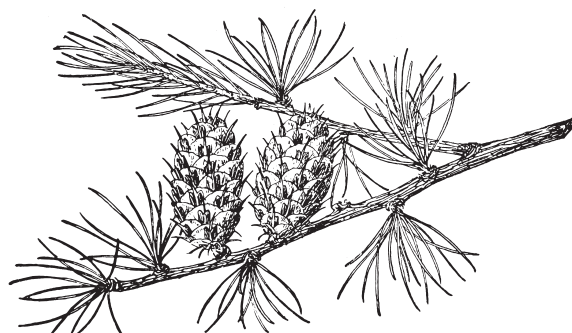


6. As we bear left leaving the edge of the campsite we see how Nettle and Bracken invade the disturbed ground. Bracken, a fern and non-flowering plant prevents interesting and diverse plants from growing in its shadow. Nettle on the other hand is a flowering plant. Although an enemy to farmer gardener and naked flesh it is a friend to the Small Tortoise shell, Peacock and Red Admiral Butterflies as it is their larval food plant. A wild flower with many uses, the Nettles young shoots are eaten as a vegetable supplying a rich source of vitamin C. In Homeopathy, a Nettle decoction is given for rheumatic pain, a Nettle essence used for eczema and it's freshly presses juice given for anaemia and exhaustion. During the second Word War it was harvested to supply chlorophyll for medicines and dyes for uniforms.

7. As we walk through this section of woodland towards park boundary you'll notice common plants such as dandelion and plantain. Dandelion is easily recognisable with its yellow single flowering head called a floret which opens in the daytime but closes at night. When the flower head matures it turns into spherical head full of seeds. Dandelions has been used a diuretic, skin toner, blood tonic and digestive tonic. Also as salad greens and in soups, teas and wines. Plantain is a common and widespread medicinal herb which has been used in poultices to promote healing. It can be identified by its broad, oval shaped green leaves which grow in a rosette. It has astringent properties and can treat diarrhoea.

8. Having continued further along the boundary we discover a species of rose populating the verges. The Burnet Rose with its creamy white flowers perched on short stems, densely thorny and bristly is found on Britain's heaths and dunes. A characteristic of the Burnet Rose is its purple-black hip. All other wild rose hips are red or scarlet. Its ability to form a dense ground covering up to 60cm in height has made varieties of this species a popular gardener's plant. Turing left up to the woodland car park we see the relatively bare banks alongside the path being colonised by Dewberry and Wild Strawberry.

Creeping amongst the short grass selected forms of Wild Strawberry are the small and deliciously flavoured "Alpine Strawberries". The word "straw" from Anglo-Saxon days meant to strew over the ground, which Wild Strawberry does with its creepers. It may also refer to the scattered nature of pips on the fruit surface.





[www.pembreycountrypark.wales](http://www.pembreycountrypark.wales)