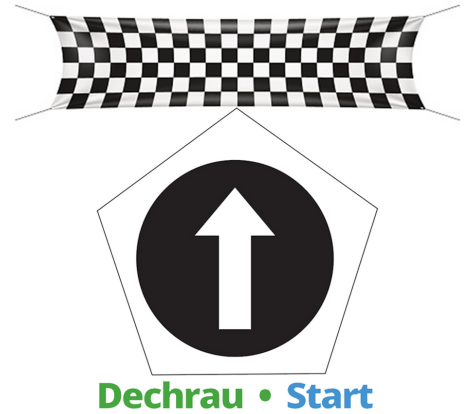




Pembrey Country Park



01 Start



Hello, and welcome to Pembrey Country Park Historical Trail. My name is Bryn, and I'm going to be showing you around the park today. There's so much fascinating history here going back hundreds and hundreds of years, from World War 2, World War 1 going back even further into the past.

We'll start here with a look at the information board.

Pembrey wasn't always the magnificent parkland that you see around you today, previously it was the site of an explosives factory going as far back as the early 1880s. The isolated sand dunes of Pembrey Burrows provided the ideal conditions for the manufacture of these dangerous explosives. The dunes provided an effective screen but also minimised damage in the event of an accident, of which there were a few over the years.

At the start of 1914, the site was turned into a TNT manufacturing facility covering some 760 acres. In fact, it was one of the first purpose-built TNT manufacturing sites in the UK. In 1917, it was taken over by the Ministry of Munitions to become a National Explosives Factory. During this time, it produced 15,000 tons of TNT and 20,000 tons of propellant. At the end of the first World War, the factory closed and the administration building became a convalescence home for the children of unemployed miners. The water supply works were taken over by the town of Llanelli and used to supply water to the town.

The trail continues now to the cabin ahead. See you there!

02 Cabin



In 1938, work started to build a new factory on the site, and the factory opened in December 1939 as an explosive Royal Ordnance Factory manufacturing TNT. However, unlike other Royal Ordnance Factories, Pembrey also manufactured tetryl and ammonium nitrate, and employed around 3000 workers.

Once World War 2 came to an end, the factory still continued to produce TNT and tetryl for military uses, and ammonium nitrate for agricultural use as a fertiliser.

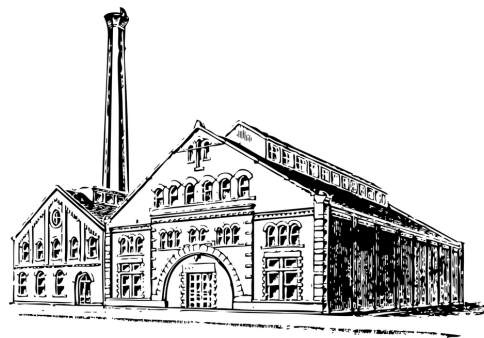
In addition, from 1944 onwards, surplus ammunition was broken down and decommissioned on this site, including 4.5 inch anti-aircraft shells and 500lb bombs. This was quite a dangerous process; the TNT had to be steamed out, then very carefully burned.

The factory eventually closed down at the end of 1964. A few years later, a campaign by the local population saw the land being returned to the Forestry Commission, and Pembrey Country Park opened to the public in 1980.

If you walk a little further now, in a couple of minutes or so you'll see a small tunnel on the

left. That's our next stop.

03 Tunnel 01



During World War 1 a young woman from London, Gabrielle West kept a diary. From nurse to caterer, she went through a few different jobs, but she eventually joined the women's police force and was posted to the Pembrey factory in 1917 to supervise the workers. Her diaries give us a wonderfully subjective view of life in and around the factory, and certainly don't pull their punches!

"Sunday January 14th 1917.

Pembrey is the back of beyond. It's a little coal mining village with a minute harbour and the remains of what was once a silver works that belonged to Joe and Austen Chamberlain, Joe being the father of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.

The factory is built on the Burrows (sand hills), the most desolate spot in this world. The factory sheds are built in amongst these sand hills, in fact, where the most dangerous work is done, the sheds are actually inside the hills. The hill is scooped out in the middle and an entrance into the crater this formed by means of a tunnel, and thus the shed is built with a large mound of sand all round it and is entered by this small tunnel through the mound. In this way, the sheds are quite invisible from outside.

This part of the factory doesn't look like a factory at all, more like a gigantic rabbit warren than anything else. In these very dangerous sheds only five or six workers are allowed in at a time, and if an extra person wants to go in, one of those inside must come out. These are the 'sieving sheds', where the powder intended for making cordite and ballistite is put through a metal sieve."

Our next stop is now a little further along. If you follow the arrows



“Saturday, 10th March 1917.

The girls here are very rough, so are the conditions. Their language is sometimes too terrible. But they are also very impressionable, shrieking with rage one minute and on quite friendly terms the next. The ether in the cordite affects the girls. It gives some headaches, hysteria and sometimes fits. If a worker has the least tendency to epilepsy, even if she has never shown it before, the ether will bring it out. On a heavy, windless night we sometimes have thirty girls overcome by the fumes in one way or another. Girls who show any signs of epilepsy ought really to be discharged or found other work, however this is not done. Some of the girls have twelve fits, one after another.

When these girls get taken ill, we take them to the surgery on a stretcher. There are only three beds there, so if they are full we take them to the dining room.

There is one girl here that gets the most appalling fits. She goes dead and stupid for a minute and then starts the most violent struggles, pulling at her own hair, scratching her own face and twisting herself into the most fearful contortions. It takes four or five girls to hold her down. The favourite ‘cures’ among the girls is to souse the sufferer with cold water, thump and slap her, shake her, pour hot tea between her teeth (she can’t swallow), stand her on her head when she is purple in face and last but not least, sit on her ‘stummick’.”

With that knowledge in mind, it’s time to head to the next location, keep going along the trail and follow the arrows to find another tunnel, but this time, one with a difference.

05 Tunnel Air Raid



Here we have another tunnel leading to a large enclosed area, but this time take note of the bricks on either side of the tunnel. These are supports for benches. That's right, during the Second World War, this tunnel was used as an air raid shelter. People would sit on the benches on each side, gas masks in hand, waiting for the all-clear siren to sound.

Working in the factory was very dangerous, as I'm sure you can imagine. There were a number of accidents between 1916 and 1918 that resulted in fatalities.

In October and November 1916, two women died after contracting jaundice as a result of contact with TNT. In June 1917 another woman died after contracting the same illness.

The 13th July 1917 saw a deadly explosion at Pembrey that killed six people. Despite an inquest, the cause of the explosion was never explained.

Even after the war the accidents continued. A week after the Armistice, on the 18th November 1918, another explosion killed three workers while they were disassembling a large high-explosive shell, and at least a further three women would be killed in the following 2 years, the last official casualty being recorded in May 1920. Many more were injured whilst working at the factory.

We'll hear some more from Gabrielle next.

Follow the arrows now out of this



“Tuesday, 3rd April 1917.

Such a day! At about six o’clock in the morning there was a tremendous explosion and then a whole succession of little bangs. The landlady wept and wailed and said we should all be killed, and the poor women police and all the girls blown to atoms.

I flew into my uniform, hired a bike (my own, of course, was punctured, just when I wanted it). When I got near the factory I met several girls running for their lives. I found the Danger Gates barred and all the girls huddled just inside them. A large shed behind the guncotton section was in flames and going off in small explosions every now and then. All the policewomen on duty were busy pacifying the girls and attending to various cases of fainting and fits.

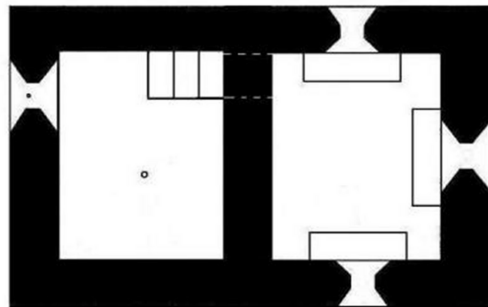
After about half an hour of this performance, the fire was put out and we were told to get the girls back to their sheds. This was easier said than done.”

The next stop on our trail isn’t far away.

**Keep going and turn left when the trail opens out.
You’ll need to cross the road, so please be careful.**

**The next stop is just across the road, at the bottom of the hill.
Follow the arrows to get there.**

07 Pill Box AA



Just up the hill from here, you can see what remains of a World War 2 pillbox. These were used during the conflict to defend the entrance of the factory.

If you look closely, you can see another pillbox on the road leading into the park, why not have a look when you leave? It'll be on your right as you leave, just after the speed bump.

This pillbox is a Type 23 pillbox, officially known as FW3/23. It was built to the same dimensions each time and remnants can be found all over the country, although it's quite rare, it is believed that only 87 are still in existence today. The pillbox itself has two main areas, both square. One is enclosed, and the other open. Interestingly, there is no door - the men were expected to climb over the wall. There probably would have been some iron rungs set into the wall - are you able to spot where they were?

The other thing to note is the small pillar set into the open area. This is a mounting for an anti-aircraft gun, a light Bren or Lewis gun. The walls are around 12 inches thick, which is a bulletproof standard.

Please be careful if you climb the hill up to the pillbox and please do not climb into the pillbox or damage it in any way. It's quite rare to see one of these now and, as you can see, the ground underneath isn't very stable, so it would be quite dangerous.

Follow the path now back towards the visitor centre, then take a left to get to our next stop.

Nitro Hill. Please be careful of the cars on the road.



Up the hill in front of you is what we call Nitro Hill. There are three tunnels up there that were involved in the production of cordite and Nitroglycerine.

During the First World War, this is where the nitroglycerine was manufactured. There are three tunnels, two similar to the ones you've already seen, and one slightly smaller. On the 1917 factory plans, this area is labelled as one of the nitrator-separator houses. It is located on a high ridge above the cordite mixing area in order to use gravity to run off the nitroglycerine.

Please be careful when climbing and coming back down the hill. It can be a little tricky, especially if it's been raining, so please be careful of your footing.

To find out more about the manufacture of these products, we turn for a final time to Gabrielle West.

"Sunday January 14th 1917.

To make gun cotton into cordite, a certain amount of nitroglycerine is mixed with it. It is then called paste, though it isn't the least like paste. It is a dry but slightly greasy powder, very like flour into which an amount of fat has been rubbed in order to make a cake. This paste is then mixed with ether and alcohol and minimal jelly into a dough, then sent to the press houses, where the dough is put into cylinders, hydraulic pressure is applied and it passes out into long tubes like macaroni, only brown."

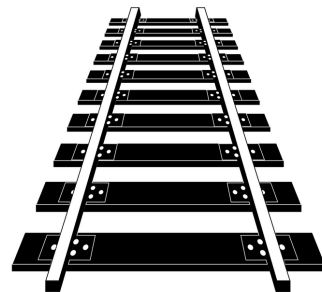
These tubes are sent to the stores, like immense linen cupboards. There they are kept at about the same heat as a linen cupboard for several days. From being very tough but pliable like string, they become hard, semi-transparent and very wiry like whalebone."

The women of the factory were known as 'Canary Girls', because their skin turned yellow and their hair turned orange or green, due to the poisonous nature of the TBT they were manufacturing. The damage inside them, to their organs, was invisible, as the yellowness of their skin masked any indications of illness due to liver damage, but would sadly become apparent during the war.

You've reached the end of the short trail now, well done. If you want, you can head back to the visitor centre, being careful when you cross the road and find the final post to end the trail. Or, you can continue on the trail to learn more about the history of the park during World War 2 and afterwards.

To continue, continue down this path and follow it around to the left, to the railway tracks.

09 Railway



The factory here at Pembrey was completely self-sufficient in terms of services, having its own plant and machinery to generate electricity. Water was obtained from two small rivers five miles away. Intake ponds were constructed, from which water was carried to the factory where it was treated, filtered and pumped to high level storage tanks. Steam was generated at four boiler stations, each having 33 boilers, capable of producing 5 million pounds of steam per day! Electricity was generated at the factory's power stations, where seven generators with a total capacity of 4,300 kW were installed.

The layout of the site had been given careful consideration with stores, acid plants and nitration buildings laid out in a progressive order enabling an effective flow of materials along the factory's own railway system.

That's right, its own railway system. There were the main railway lines into the factory, you can see traces of them around you here, all heading out of the factory in one direction, and the four different tracks heading around to the main railway yard, which we'll see later. The factory itself was serviced by a narrower-gauge railway, and we'll see the tracks for that towards the end of the trail. Keep your eyes open as you walk around the park.

You'll see many remnants of the railways still around. There's some more about 50 metres back towards the visitors centre, and we'll be seeing more later on by the storage bunkers.

The next stop is a little further along.

Keep following this path and take the right fork, then follow the arrows to learn how this park was very nearly turned into an experimental weapons facility.



Imagine living in Pembrey and hearing explosions throughout the day, and huge explosions every seven minutes five days a week from 8 in the morning until 4 in the afternoon, and some even later in the evening. That's what would have happened in Pembrey in 1969, had it not been for the Save our Sands Campaign.

Because of the expansion of London to have a third airport, it was decided to move the experimental gunnery range from Shoeburyness in Essex to Pembrey.

The Ministry of Defence were planning to buy up 15000 acres of land, all the properties, land and farms from the gold club across to Kidwelly and everything south of the railway line.

They began to bulldoze roads through the forest in order to build huge gun emplacements along the coast that could fire shells out to sea.

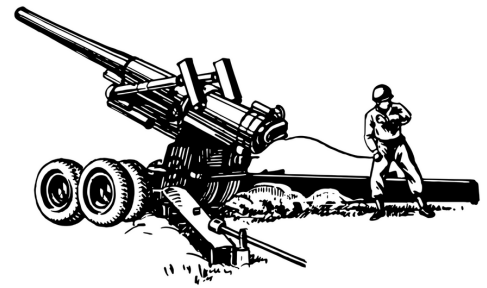
The beaches were to be sealed off and become a permanent no-go area. There would be no marine leisure pursuits from Pembrey to Tenby.

This is why the Save Our Sands campaign was set up.

People from all over the area got together, set aside all their political differences and decided to work together to fight these plans.

Soon, other opposition groups also formed and the campaign began.

To learn more about the Save our Sands campaign, check out the next location. It's just a little further along.



The Save Our Sands campaign got under way in 1969 when the women of Pembrey began lying down in front of the army vehicles to prevent access. Then, the schoolchildren got involved by fundraising for the campaign with a sponsored walk from Carmarthen to Burry Port. They held painting competitions and designed banners for the campaign.

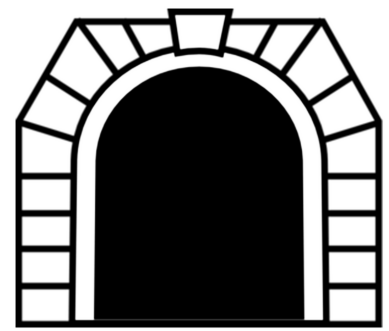
A 27000 signature petition was handed in to the Welsh Office in Cardiff. Parades of donkeys held up traffic and the Secretary of State was constantly mobbed by crowds of women in Llanelli's new market. Then it got serious. Phones were tapped, men in dark raincoats were frequenting the area, campaigners were followed and secretly photographed.

Finally, it went to London in the form of a public enquiry. The campaign hired barristers to represent them, all paid for through the fundraising of the campaigners and surrounding schools.

Against all the odds, they won. The Ministry of Defence scrapped their plans and Pembrey was safe. Ten years later, in 1980, Pembrey Country Park opened to the public and became the magnificent park you see before you today.

We're coming now to the World War 2 section of the park. You should see a large bunker set into a hill ahead of you. That's our destination.

12 Bunker 01



The factory buildings where nearly five thousand people worked, the majority of them women, are long gone, swept away as part of the huge regeneration of this once heavily fortified coastline, although remnants still exist. For example, on your way home, after the barrier and just as the road sweeps around to the left, look to your right. There's a junction leading down to the original factory entrance. You can still see the old entrance there. And the layby just down from the main barrier, look at the brick wall of the layby, that's original as well.

There are also signs of the darker times of the past. Principle amongst these are the huge earth-covered magazines you see before you now. Surrounded by blast embankments, these were used to safely store munitions and armaments prior to being loaded onto the site's internal railway system. If you look closely, you can still see the rails set into the concrete floor.

Each magazine follows the same basic design. They are massive concrete structures with earth and turf mounds covering a concrete structure composed of 3 internal chambers with an access walkway providing ventilation and a conduit for an electrical supply around the back of the structures. A standard gauge railway with a loading platform survives within, and some still have intact buffer stops. The chambers are noted as including a 'Boot Changing Room', and a 'Sampling Room.' If you go exploring, please be very careful and take a torch.

If you look under the platform, there is even evidence of a small room underneath. You'll need to look very closely to spot it, though!

These huge magazines are set at odd angles, another protection against aerial bombardment. There are many around the park, and not all have been discovered. There's even a rumour of one such bunker, hidden away and covered over with sand and earth, containing a complete train still inside, but this is just a rumour. No evidence has been found. Yet. There's another magazine just ahead. We can't go into this one, but head over there now to learn more about the role of the factory in the Second World War.

13 Bunker 02



With war in Europe looking again in 1938, the government proposed building a new factory at Pembrey and work on construction began that year, continuing into 1939. The factory was government owned and known as the Royal Ordnance Factory Pembrey. It was one of four factories producing TNT, and it was the largest supplier of TNT, tetryl and ammonium nitrate.

The factory opened in December 1939 and at its height employed around 3000 workers.

After the war this dwindled to 1300 and the production of ammonium nitrate which, during the war had combined with TNT to make the explosive amatol, was afterwards used to make agricultural fertiliser. The factory continued to break down surplus ammunition, although the Korean War saw a brief resurgence in production.

There was a steady decline until, in the early 1960s, there were only 400 workers left at the factory. A review concluded that Pembrey was no longer necessary, and in December 1963 the factory closed and was put up for sale.

No buyers could be found and eventually a firm from Halifax stripped the site of anything of value. After the Save Our Sands campaign prevented the whole site becoming an experimental gunnery range in the early 1970s, the site was cleared, landscaped and established as the lovely country park that you've been walking around today. It opened to the public in 1980.

We have now reached the end of the Medium trail. You can head back to the visitor centre now and find the final symbol, or you can continue to finish the longer trail and learn more about the park, including an unsolved mystery.

Please follow the arrows and be careful of the cars on the road.

14 Cabinet War Rooms



Now we come to a bit of a mystery.

There's nothing to see, no evidence to back this up, but for years there have been rumours circulating around that the Ministry of Defence built a series of underground bunkers, a bit like cabinet war rooms, underneath the grounds of Pembrey Country Park, and that they are still in existence today.

The mystery deepens because nobody knows where they are. People who have seen official plans of the area say that even the Ministry don't know where they are any more, the details have been lost. There were apparently 8 entrances to the underground rooms.

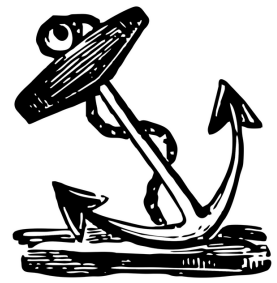
None can be found today, they've all been filled in and hidden, but if they do exist, it would be a fascinating glimpse back in time. So, when you're walking around, why not keep your eyes open and your ears peeled?

The next stop is a little way ahead now.

You need to head down towards the beach, following the arrows, until you see the two large anchors.

Please be careful when crossing the road.

15 Shipwrecks



We come now to Cefn Sidan beach, one of the longest beaches in Wales. Cefn Sidan translates to 'Silken Back' and is a spectacular 8 mile stretch of beach. However the pristine gold-coloured sand hides a secret past that, over the years has started to reveal itself.

Said to be Wales's equivalent to Africa's Skeleton Coast, parts of the bay have begun to reveal the remnants of shipping vessels long since wrecked on the shores and point to a past that is anything but ordinary.

Actual numbers are unknown, but there are thought to be anywhere between 300 to upwards of 800 wrecks along the coast, dating as far back as Roman times. Due to the shifting nature of the dunes and the coastline, most of these wrecks are now buried up to a mile inland.

Most of the wrecks were a result of the weather, the shoreline or sailor error, but it is documented that many of the wrecks were lured to their doom by merciless thieves and looters.

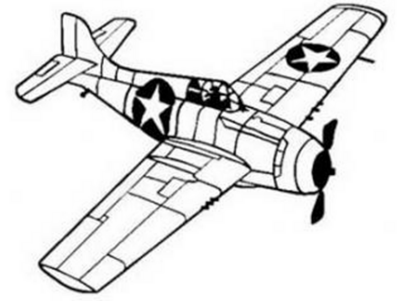
Five wrecks are now visible, the largest of which, down on the other side of the beach around 5 miles from here, is the SV Paul, a ship that left Nova Scotia in 1925 and eventually ran aground on October 20th of that same year. The closest wreck is about a twenty or thirty minute walk from here along the beach.

In 1828, the vessel Le Jeune Emma, originally headed towards Le Havre with a cargo of rum, sugar and coffee, ran aground. Thought to be the work of the wreckers, 13 people drowned, one of whom was Adeline Coquelin, the 12-year-old niece of Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, her mother being the sister to Josephine.

The anchors you see here were discovered on the beach some years ago, and look to be from very large ships, although the where and when of these particular wrecks are unknown.

From the sea to the air next. The next location is back towards the park. Look for the symbol to find out more about the airport that's close by and how it was central to the capture of a Luftwaffe plane in 1942.

16 Airport



In 1942, during the Second World War, the Focke-Wulf FW190 fighter plane had recently arrived on the front lines and its superior performance was causing the Allies many problems, so much so that Churchill had decreed that one needed to be captured. They were considering mounting a commando raid on a French airfield to get one.

Then, in June 1942 there was a battle over the English Channel between a squadron of FW190s and a squadron of Spitfires. Two 190s were lost and seven spitfires.

Flying that day was Oberleutnant Armin Faber, an administrator to the squadron commander who was given special permission to fly a combat mission. During the combat, he became disoriented and separated from the rest of his squadron. In his efforts to shake off a spitfire, he flew north over Exeter.

After some high-speed manoeuvring and with only one cannon working, he managed to shoot down the spitfire pursuing him. Faber, now completely disoriented, mistook the Bristol Channel for the English Channel and flew north instead of south. Thinking South Wales was France, he turned towards the nearest airfield - RAF Pembrey, around 5 miles from here and now home to a motor-racing circuit. Observers on the ground couldn't believe their eyes when Faber waggled his wings in a victory celebration, lowered the undercarriage and landed at Pembrey.

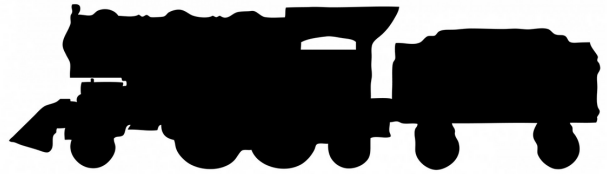
Of course, he was immediately arrested and his plane impounded. They couldn't believe their luck - a pristine Focke-Wulf FW190 with perhaps around only 16 flying hours. It was transferred to Farnborough for testing and research, a priceless asset.

Armin Faber survived the war and, in 1991 visited the Shoreham Aircraft Museum where the surviving parts of his aircraft were on display and presented them with his officer's dagger and pilot's badge.

Back across the road now, please be careful when crossing the road.

We're heading towards the final location, which is the railway yard.

17 Railway Yard



Over the years, there have been several railway networks in and around Pembrey Factory and park. This part of the park is unique as you can see evidence of four separate railway systems, some dating back to the First and Second World Wars.

Let's take a look at the largest gauge railway. This is the single railway line coming into this yard and stopping around halfway down. This is the standard gauge for the British railway network and connects to the main line system. These trains would have brought supplies and raw materials to the factory, and transported finished products out and distributed around the country. Earlier in the trail, you saw the area where four railway lines could be seen converging into one as they exited the park and connected to the British railway network.

Close to the main railway line is a smaller gauge system. These rails can be seen around the main one, heading back in the same direction towards where the factory would have been. This narrow-gauge railway was the internal railway network of the factory, and it would have transported raw materials, supplies, shells and other dangerous items around the factory to wherever they needed to go. The factory was that large that it needed its own railway system!

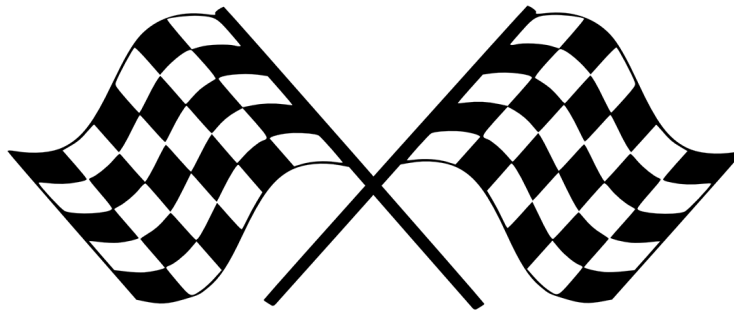
There is an even smaller gauge railway here as well. This is not historical, although it does cross this yard into one of the old original World War 2 sheds. This is our miniature railway system, looked after by a team of volunteers. They operate on weekends, so if you're lucky, why not take a ride?

The final railway system can be found on the other side of the yard. It's another narrow gauge system, like the internal one you've already seen. This track comes into the yard from the forest, does a 180 turn and then heads back out the same way. This is our old miniature railway that existed in the park when it opened in the 1980s and was, in many ways, the predecessor of the miniature railway you see today.

Well, that's it. You have reached the end of the longer trail. Well done!
Please now head back towards the visitor centre to find the final symbol.

Thank you for completing the Historical Trail

18 End



Well done, you've reached the end of this Historical Trail around Pembrey Country Park. I hope you've learned some fascinating things about the park today. If you've completed the short or the medium trail, then why not come back and walk around the full trail?

There are two final things to bring to your attention. First, as we look at the visitor centre, there is a commemoration of the women of the Ordnance Factory on a blue plaque, and there's also a commemorative stone of the Save Our Sands campaign that we talked about over by the ski slope.

Talking of the ski slope, Pembrey Country Park has many other activities to get involved in: the ski slope, toboggan run, crazy golf, full golf, great walks, camping and a miniature railway to name just a few.

You can also walk along the beach to see some of the wrecks, take a trip over to the airport when they have a day of motor racing, or there's also the riding stables for the more adventurous among us.

Once again, I thank you for downloading this app and taking the time to learn the fascinating history of this park. As you now know, there's far more to it than first meets the eye.

**We'd be grateful if you'd review or mention us on Social Media. And next time, bring your friends!
Goodbye!**

