

SIR GÂR
CARMARTHENSHIRE

The Wild Drovers' Way

Carmarthenshire's new 'slow'
rural touring route

ARAF
SLOW

The Wild Drovers' Way



Heiptro Ho!

The green lanes and winding country roads of Carmarthenshire are no longer thronged by the drovers and their mooing, honking wards – the mid-19th-century advent of the railways put paid to that traffic – however the region is still studded with reminders of the old ways.

Timeless country pubs and coaching inns, stone animal pounds, tollhouses and smithies where cattle were shod with metal ‘cues’ or ciws all afford glimpses of Carmarthenshire’s droving past.

Discover these evocative sights and many other historic nuggets – including some of the country’s most atmospheric and picturesque castles following the Wild Drovers’ Way, a new 180-mile driving route tracing a circuit around the county.

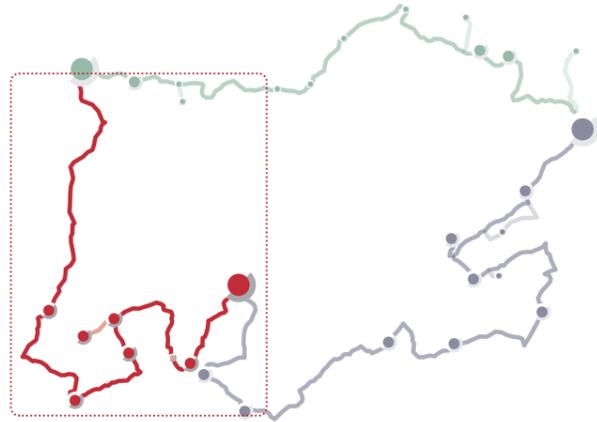
Along undulating backroads, this scenic tour takes in the county’s colourful towns and comely villages, welcoming pubs and bustling markets. And it reveals the county’s most glorious vistas, sweeping across mountains, valleys and coves. There’s also a far few detours recommended along tiny lanes which reward with even less-well-known vistas and historic insights.

The Wild Drovers’ Way is a journey deep into the heart of real Carmarthenshire. This is slow travel at its finest, and can’t be hurried – so allow at least three or four days or more to absorb the finest scenery and sights.

Download this map here
 (click/press on link):
<https://www.discovercarmarthenshire.com/explore/the-wild-drovers-way/>

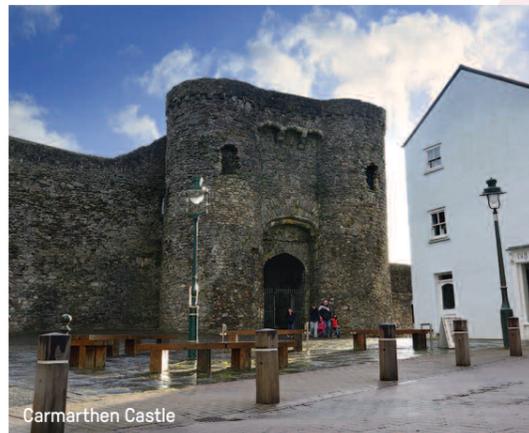
Stage One

Carmarthen to Cenarth



Carmarthen

Start with an on-foot saunter around Carmarthen, reputedly Wales's oldest town. Now a bustling commercial hub, the modern centre is ranged around the forbidding castle gatehouse, rebuilt in 1409 after an earlier incarnation was destroyed by Owain Glyndŵr. From Notts Square, site of the medieval market, descend St Mary's Street to find the indoor market, a treasure trove.



Now drive west from the centre along the B4312 between the grand houses of Picton Terrace, guarded by the looming obelisk memorial to Thomas Picton, hero of the Napoleonic Wars (and also known to have been a brutal slave holder). At the bottom of Monument Hill, follow the B4312 as it veers left southwest to Llangain and beyond.

Llansteffan

Park beneath the lowering fragments of Llansteffan's 12th-century castle, peering through the trees down its wooded scarp across broad sands to the Tywi estuary. Pastel-hued houses face the beach, and tempting aromas waft across from the famous Florries Fish & Chips stand. Tramp across the sand alongside gulls, cormorants and oystercatchers to enjoy views over the estuary towards Ferryside and out to Carmarthen Bay.

Follow the B4312 west out of the village, passing the Old Pound Gallery in a bright-yellow, curiously round building alongside the impressive square stone tower of St Stephen's Church. Forge along the narrow, winding backroad to Llanymbri; with their high banks and hedges, these lanes feel as if they've been travelled for centuries – and probably have.

Remember to glance left for fabulous views towards the Taf Estuary and Laugharne, and watch out for standing stones and other prehistoric monuments in nearby fields: this little wedge of Carmarthenshire is home to a surprising number of Neolithic relics.

St Clears

North of Llangynog, join the A40 dual carriageway for the short stretch west to St Clears. There's art at the heart of this welcoming small town: Y Gât/The Gate [www.the-gate.org], the West Wales Centre for Arts and Crafts, is housed in an imposing stone-built former mill.

Though scant remnants remain of the motte-and-bailey castle to the south of the centre, you'll find other reminders of the region's history here. Porcine symbols on ironwork and benches recall King Arthur's hunt of the enchanted wild boar Twrch Trwyth, and the Rebecca Riots memorial sculpture commemorates the townfolk's role in 1840s protests against tolls levied on travellers (including drovers) plying the region's roads.

Llandowror detour

It's a short detour southwest from St Clears to Llandowror. Here the old pound, where livestock was kept overnight, and Picton House hotel – a historic coaching inn, parts of which date from 1630 – speak of the itinerant lives of drovers and other travellers.

Laugharne

St Clear's High Street (A4066) leads south to lovely Laugharne. Best known as the last home and resting place of poet Dylan Thomas, the village would be a charming spot even without its eminent literary connections.

From the car park beneath the imposing cliff-top castle ruins, drink in the views across the Taf Estuary, listening for the whistling calls of oystercatchers and the gentle splash of kayak paddles. Follow the gentle shoreline trail north, curving beneath the hollow shell of the castle, and climb steps up to Dylan Thomas's writing shack, furnished as it was when he penned Under Milk Wood overlooking the water. Continue to the Boat Shed where he lived with wife Caitlin then, climb to the main thoroughfare King Street, lined with stately Georgian buildings. Sip a pint at Thomas's favourite watering hole, Browns Hotel, or choose from one of several other cafés and bars scattered along the road and down on the square known as The Grist.

Pendine Sands

At the convergence of the Tywi and Taf pouring into Carmarthen Bay, the broad sweep of Pendine Sands today beckons strollers and dog-walkers where once motoring pioneers vied to set land-speed records. Reached from Laugharne along the A4066, the seven-mile swathe of sand stretching east from Pendine is breathtaking, with salt spray smudging the horizon to the east and sun glinting off the shallows.

The new Sands of Speed museum will soon celebrate those daredevil pioneers, and an eco-hostel will provide rooms with views. There's a fine Asian fusion restaurant here, too – plus ice creams and fish and chips, of course.



Whitland

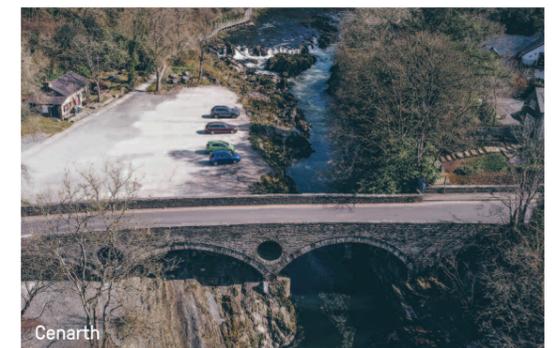
Turn northwest away from the coast along the B4314, through the evocatively named settlements of Red Roses and Tavernspite, and over undulating countryside past fields and hedges. At Tavernspite, turn onto the B4328 to Whitland. Today it's a quiet, small town, an appealing place to pick up supplies but in the 10th century it was here that King Hywel Dda set to creating a set of laws for Wales, efforts commemorated in the Hywel Dda Centre [<https://www.hywel-dda.co.uk>] and peaceful memorial gardens alongside.

The A40 and A478 offer a fast route to northern Carmarthenshire but instead The Wild Drovers' Way heads northeast into the hinterland. Pause at Whitland Abbey, where faint grass-clad outlines betray the site of the 12th-century abbey church and other walls.

Cenarth

Continue north past Jabajak Vineyards [<https://jabajak.co.uk>] – call ahead to arrange a visit and tasting – and consider the detour along narrow lanes to pick up some of the finest Perl Las, Dol Las and Perl Wen cheeses from Caws Cenarth [<https://www.cawscenarth.co.uk>].

But make time to enjoy the waterfalls and historic centre of little Cenarth village.



Stage Two

Cenarth to Llandovery



Cenarth

Straddling the border with Ceredigion, Cenarth is the site of picturesque namesake falls on the River Teifi. Overlooking the cascades, the National Coracle Centre celebrates the traditional rounded vessel made from animal skin or waterproofed canvas stretched over a woven willow frame, long used in these parts to fish for sewin (sea trout).

Stroll up into the village to find the Ale House, an ancient whitewashed, thatched stone cottage alongside the Three Horseshoes pub, opposite the smithy. Nearby, an ancient, leathery coracle hangs outside the White Hart, another whitewashed old stone tavern dating from the 16th century.

Newcastle Emlyn

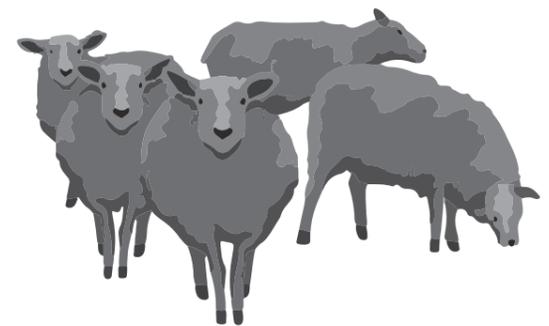
Driving east on the A484, dip down to the valley floor to follow the meanders of the Teifi through a tunnel of trees and roll down your windows to drink in the gurgles and chatter of the river en route to Newcastle Emlyn.

The town was long defined by its castle, perched on an outcrop embraced by a bend in the Teifi; today only tumbledown remains survive, dominated by the 14th-century gatehouse. Legends tell that the Wyvern, reputedly the last dragon in Wales, killed here – and a wooden dragon sculpture now peers imperiously down over wooded slopes into the valley.

The large livestock market speaks of the trade that brought the town its wealth for centuries, a major stop on the drovers' routes from west Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire to Llandovery. Once the inns serving drovers and others involved in the trade would have been countless, and numerous pubs still line the streets, not least the venerable Emlyn Hotel, which now incorporates the Petit Biarritz Basque deli. Look out for nearby Cawdor Hall, the clocktower-topped market building, which houses the Hanes Emlyn local history centre and The Attic theatre.

Henllan and Dre-fach Felindre detours

Continuing east along the southern bank of the Teifi, short detours from the road lead half a mile north of Henllan to the narrow-gauge heritage Teifi Valley Railway, and the same distance south to the National Wool Museum at Dre-fach Felindre. Beyond Henllan, take the B4335 to stick close to the river before eventually the route climbs out of the valley, revealing sweeping views east across to wilder hills, rust-tinged orange with bracken.



East of Llanfihangel-ar-arth, the road veers north through the implausibly long village of Llanllwni – flanked to the east by the looming flanks of Mynydd Llanllwni, glimpsed from the road through gaps in hedges and houses – to Llanybydder. Two centuries ago the streets would once have rung with the clatter of shod cattle and the cries of drovers; today it's another peaceful rural Carmarthenshire village, its inns largely gone.



Llanllwni Mountain

From Cwmann, just south of Lampeter, turn southeast onto the A482 then swiftly fork left at the former Ram Inn, a whitewashed 16th-century edifice, onto meandering, steeply undulating lanes. Lined with high, hedgy banks adorned with ferns and moss, hemmed in by rounded hills, you're plunging into the thick of drover country. Take it slow, not just because the lanes are winding and narrow, but also because the views east towards the southern foothills of the Cambrian Mountains are spectacular.

Ffarmers

Pause in Ffarmers, named for the now-closed Farmers' Arms. Today this little hamlet is blessed with the Drovers' Arms, a community-run pub that would long have been a favourite watering hole for those tough travelling men. Word has it that the grander house opposite – formerly the village shop – was also a pub in times gone; the wealthy stock owners would drink in one inn while the lowlier drovers congregated in the simpler tavern across the road.

South of Ffarmers, and continuing to rejoin the A482, the road is curiously straight – betraying its origins as a Roman road, built to link forts at Moridunum (Carmarthen) and elsewhere in Wales with the nearby gold mines. Unsurprisingly, drovers also followed this handy route, though by the 19th century they were forced to pay for the privilege – the tollhouse, now a private dwelling, still stands on the road north of Pumsaint.



Rhandir-mwyn

Pumsaint and Dolaucothi

In that hamlet itself, opposite the Dolaucothi Arms, is the old forge, established in 1756. Long before it became an important drovers' stop, Pumsaint's fortunes were tied to the Dolaucothi Gold Mines.

Worked since Roman times, Pumsaint is built over the site of the Roman fort of Luentinum. Today you can explore the mines, off the main A482 and now managed by the National Trust, on a guided tour.

Caio

Past Dolaucothi, continue along steep, narrow roads to Caio, once another important spot for dealing livestock, now a hamlet of colourful houses hidden in a side valley with an impressive old church.

Rhandirmwyn detour

The road beyond rises and dips through round-shouldered hills, with red kites flapping and hovering above, to reach the Tywi Valley north of Llandovery.

Here, across the narrow stone Dolauhirion Bridge on the outskirts, another worthy detour beckons: turn left to follow the Tywi upstream to Rhandirmwyn, guarded by forested hills to either side, to discover some of the most gloriously verdant scenery in west Wales.

Llandovery

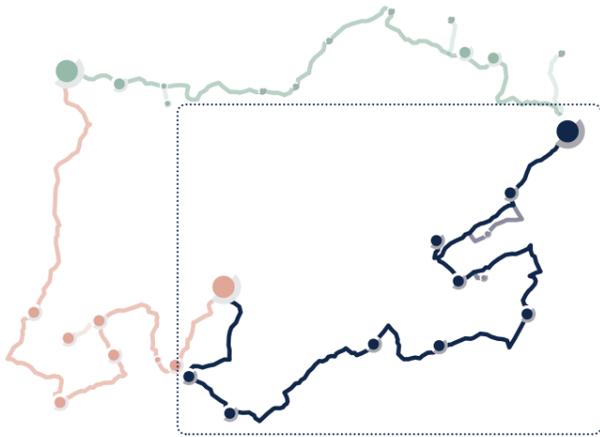
Otherwise, turn right to reach Llandovery – the beating heart of drover country. Even today, weekly livestock sales are big business, and the centre retains numerous reminders of its drover heritage. The 13th-century castle is now just a fractured stump on a grassy knoll, guarded by a sculpture representing Welsh resistance hero Llywelyn ap Gryffydd.

Nearby, opposite the Castle Hotel and outside the Llandovery museum, stands an earthier stature: a plump, glowering drover with hearty whiskered chops, a long coat, hat and stick – every inch the tough, independent country man. At the Kings Head, opposite the old market, the Banc yr Eidion Du (Bank of the Black Ox) was founded in 1799, providing services for drovers; open the door to see its ancient timber frame. Today the town is studded with appealing places to stay, eat and drink – try the Bear Inn for vegetarian treats, the Castle Hotel for fine pub fare or La Patisserie for excellent cakes.



Llandovery

Stage Three ● Llandovery to Carmarthen



Llandovery

From Llandovery, epicentre of drover country, two roads lead southwest along the Tywi Valley. The main A40 largely follows the route of the old Roman Road; instead, take the A4069 that runs higher along the hillside to Llangadog, providing beautiful views right across the valley and ahead to the far western edge of the Black Mountain.

Llangadog

Llangadog itself was another important stop on drovers' routes, and up to the end of the 19th century every other building was an ale house or inn of some kind. Even today you'll find more pubs than you might imagine a village of this size would support: huddled close together stand the Castle Hotel, Red Lion Hotel, Black Lion and Goose & Cuckoo (formerly the Carpenter's).

Continuing south, the A4069 soon traverses the large common at Felindre, where since the 13th century livestock were grazed under the watchful eye of Castell Meurig – the site of the motte and bailey castle now revealed only by a flattened patch of hillside.

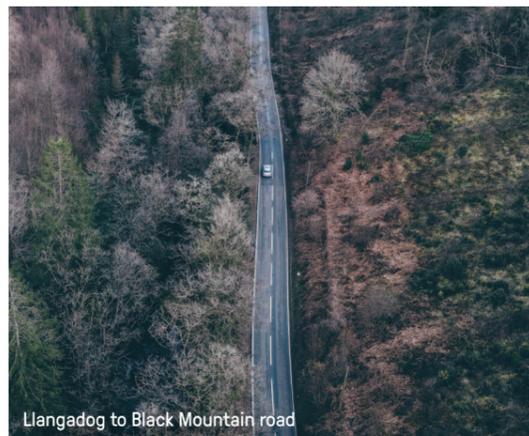
Garn Goch detour

Cross the Sawdde, a tributary of the Tywi, to follow the road to the hamlet of Bethlehem; detour here to reach the impressive double hillfort of Garn Goch, dating from the Iron Age and affording even more far-reaching views across the valley.

Llandeilo

As you approach Ffairfach, the colourful merchants' houses of Llandeilo come into view, tumbling down the hillside. It's an inviting place to pause for a snack or coffee: the Cawdor Hotel is the grandest coaching inn in the area, and the Heavenly Chocolate Emporium a few doors down offers sweeter temptations. The White Lion hosts live music, while the Ginhaus deli around the corner is well stocked with gourmet fare and, naturally, juniper-flavoured spirits.

Nearby, the Old Bank was a branch of the drovers' Bank of the Black Ox; this outpost, founded in 1752, even issued Llandeilo banknotes. Up the hill stands Abbeyfield House, once the George Hotel, which accommodated troops billeted here during the Rebecca Riots of the 1840s.



Llangadog to Black Mountain road



A short but lovely walk west from Llandeilo brings you to the impressive ruins of Dinefwr Castle, gazing imperiously along the Tywi Valley, and the deer park surrounding Newton House, a fascinating National Trust mansion with a welcoming tea room.

Trap and Carreg Cennen

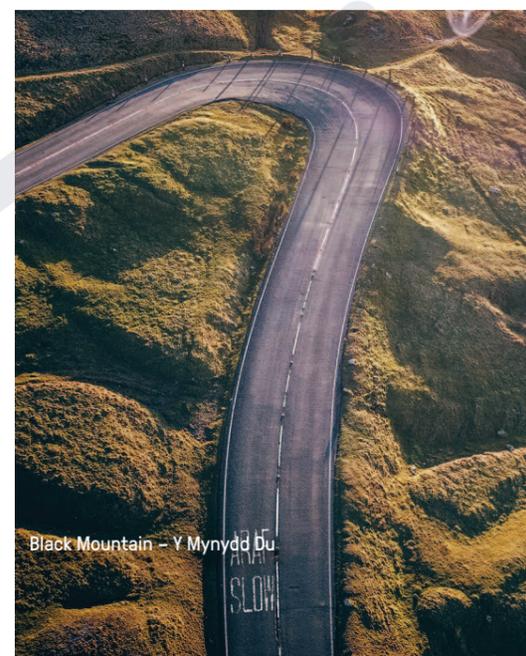
Steer south now to Trap and more narrow, winding lanes yielding tremendous views over the fields to the Black Mountain and the brooding hulk of Carreg Cennen castle. Perched on a hill folded and rumpled like a shrugged shoulder, the jagged outlines of the castle walls are silhouetted black and stark against the sky.

Though now in picturesque ruins, this 13th-century bastion is impossibly atmospheric and has been voted the most romantic ruin in Wales.

East along increasingly winding and undulating lanes brings you to Gwynfe, where you can continue a short distance to Llanddeusant to visit the red kite feeding station and walk to magical Llyn y Fan Fach lake. Instead, turn right onto the A4069 to dip into the valley then climb onto the Black Mountain, with ever more dramatic vistas opening up as you ascend.

Black Mountain

Cross a cattle grid and suddenly you're on the mountain with the road snaking upwards alongside a rocky stream. This wild, bleak, exposed stretch of mountain road is among the most dramatic drives in Wales. Take care on the tight hairpins as you traverse moorland landscapes, with evidence of quarrying all around.



Black Mountain – Y Mynydd Du

A series of carparks offer varied panoramas: first north and east over the flanks of the Brecon Beacons from the Mountain Road viewpoint, then into the guts of Herbert's Quarry, and finally across burn-stripped slopes towards the Carmarthen Fans and the towns of the Amman Valley.

Upper Brynamman

The A4069 descends to Upper Brynamman, where the Black Mountain Centre café is the place to pause for a brew, learn more about local industry and history. Brynamman is also home to the historic Public Hall Cinema, founded using funds from 'check-off' system deducting weekly contributions from miners' wages – opened in 1926, it's still going strong!

Ammanford

Turn right onto the A474, following the Amman River through Garnant and Glanaman, to find the Coaltown Coffee Roastery on the outskirts of Ammanford – producing Wales's finest locally roasted brews, with beans and takeaway coffees available on site.

Ammanford was the epicentre of the local mining industry, but its past has much deeper roots. Legend has it that King Arthur hunted wild boar on the slopes rising from the river, a myth recalled on noticeboards and metal boars around town and farther afield.

Cross Hands

Zigzag west to Cross Hands, a busy retail centre where the popular Bean on a Bike café in County Cycles bike shop serves up delectable cakes. Beyond Tumble, Pontyberem and the Ffos Las Racecourse you'll reach Kidwelly.

Kidwelly

From the Slaughterhouse carpark, stroll along the river beneath the castle, its burly round towers exuding a palpable sense of might – no wonder it's been a popular location for films including *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. Climb the steps up to the castle, then back through the 14th-century Great Gatehouse to the high street to browse the treats at Kidwelly Deli and Edan Nash Fine Chocolates.

Leaving Kidwelly, the road climbs rapidly to reward with tremendous views left across Carmarthen Bay, ahead towards the hills north of St Clears and, finally, across the Tywi estuary to Llansteffan and its snaggle-toothed castle ruins on their hilltop eyrie.



Kidwelly Castle

Ferryside

Descend into Ferryside, a compact community with a fine beach and, just north of the centre, the Pryd o Fwyd [pryd.co.uk] restaurant and café – an indulgent spot to toast the end of your circuit, and to raise a glass to those historic drovers whose legacy still resonates around Carmarthenshire before completing your circular tour, returning to Carmarthen.



Ferryside