



Paragliders are out in force when the wind is blowing; walkers are a presence in all weathers.

still pokes evocatively through the sand at the south end of the beach – a poignant reminder of Rhossili's elemental grandeur. A greater calamity occurred 500 years previously, when the original village of Rhossili was buried by the sand in a storm.

The current village was wisely built on the top of the cliffs. On a stormy day, it resembles a tiny, forlorn frontier community: man against the elements. But in summer, the place becomes a living, breathing postcard. No wonder the new village was placed above. Its builders knew what subsequent walkers, photographers and romantics have discovered: getting high is the best way to appreciate Rhossili.

OTHER BEACHES

Broughton Bay, round the corner from Rhossili on the Gower's north shore, is another big, bold and beautiful beach, backed by large dunes. Off the beaten path, it rarely gets crowded. But if Rhossili is occasionally dodgy for swimming, Broughton Bay is downright treacherous; its tides can be fearsome. Surfers, however, are not deterred.

Port Eynon, on the south-western corner of the Gower, is the region's grittiest beach – in more ways than one. The sand can be mucky, covered in seaweed and rocks. Caravan parks and campsites abound. And the village pub is just plain rough. But this beach has a down-to-earth appeal. It's a hive of activity, with watersports galore, a lifeguard in the summer and a chippie on the front. The swimming is safe, if you don't get run over by a jet-ski, and the water quality is better here than at Rhossili (it is MCS recommended and has also been awarded a Blue Flag). The dunes backing the mile-long beach are enormous, and there's a lovely boardwalk through them.

Mewslade Bay, a rugged hike along the coast from Worm's Head, offers striking views of the Head. Remote and deserted, it has the air of a best-kept secret. The craggy cliffs and virgin sands are seductive, but don't swim here in strong surf; there's an undertow.

The Gower does not have a monopoly on the region's best beaches. Cefn Sidan, about an hour's drive north in Carmarthenshire, is the biggest beach in Wales: a staggering seven miles long. The wide, pancake-flat sand lures kite buggies and walkers, who also frequent the nature trails in the pine forest. Swimming is safe within designated areas, but be warned – it's a long walk to the water's edge. *See also pp184-191.*