Walking in the footsteps of giants

Leave your footprints in giant sand dunes, or sledge down the ‘Giant Dipper’, on this walk from Merthyr Mawr National Nature Reserve. Throw in a legendary lost village submerged under the dunes, stepping stones across a river to a ruined castle and a stroll along the Wales Coast Path for a super seaside adventure.

**Start:** Merthyr Mawr National Nature Reserve Car Park. Grid Ref: SS861768 Note: Many paths cross the nature reserve, but some are steep, uneven, waterlogged in wet weather and, being sandy not suitable for pushchairs or wheelchairs. Check tide times before crossing stepping stones at ⑤.
Points of interest along the way:

1. **Candleston Castle**
   Quite literally a ‘sand castle’, on the edge of the sand dunes. These are the 14th century ruins of a fortified manor–house, abandoned in the 19th century as sand encroached. Local legend has it the castle stood at the centre of the lost village of Treganllaw (‘the town of a hundred hands’), which was smothered by the sand dunes of Merthyr Mawr.

2. **Merthyr Mawr village & St Teilo’s Church**
   A hundred years ago, the thatched houses of Merthyr Mawr village were threatened with a similar fate, after rabbits stripped the vegetation which stabilised the dunes. Buckthorn bushes had to be planted along the edge of the dunes to stop the advancing sand, saving the delightful collection of thatched cottages you see today around the village green. There are medieval inscribed stones, some dating from the 5th century, in the churchyard.

3. **Swing Bridge**
   Cross the ‘Swing Bridge’ to visit Ogmore Castle.

4. **Ogmore Castle**
   Built 900 years ago, this was one of three local defensive castles protecting Norman-controlled territory from attack by the Welsh.

5. **Stepping Stones across the Ewenny**
   Legend has it the stepping stones fording the river were placed here to help a romance - between a girl who lived in the castle and the man she loved who lived across the river at Merthyr Mawr. If the tide is low you can cross these stones to return to Merthyr Mawr, but take care as they vanish under water at high tides, when you must cross the river by the footbridge.

6. **Merthyr Mawr Warren**
   This is the highest dune system in Wales and a haven for rare plants and animals, such as sea-buckthorn, red–caped cinnabar moths and birds such as wigeon, found in the winter pools. Merthyr Mawr is also full of human history. Winds shifting the sands have exposed many layers of human history: Mesolithic flints, Neolithic pottery (that’s 12,000 years ago), Bronze Age burial chambers and Roman coins.

7. **Black Rock Beach**
   Many ships have been wrecked on the rocks off this beach.

8. **Newton Burrows**
   A 3000 year old burial tomb was found here, associated with the Beaker Folk

9. **Newton Village & Church**
   Knitted stockings were an important export in the 17th century, when Newton was a thriving port! Knights of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem probably founded the church about 800 years ago. It was originally a fortress with a tower, used as a look out to warn of attacks from the sea.

10. **World War II Rifle Range**
    This is a World War II shooting range, complete with dug outs and target system. Local folklore says General Eisenhower inspected American troops (stationed in Porthcawl) here, en route to Omaha Beach.

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