Western Cornwall: a coastal photography guide

Photographing the coast between Godrevy and the Lizard via Land’s End

From lighthouse to lighthouse

by

Richard Ellis ARPS

For

Susan, Rachel and Benjamin

The author accepts no responsibility for any loss or damage arising from the use of this book. Users of this book are responsible for their own safety and use the information herein at their own risk. Users should be aware of weather forecasts, weather conditions and their own abilities before undertaking any activities.

Introduction

Cornwall is one of the most beautiful coastal counties in the UK with a dramatic and varied coast. I have been fortunate to visit the area many times and explore the rugged coastline.

I wrote this book as a guide to a photography course. I chose the western tip of Cornwall because it has a wide variety of locations and it is almost always possible to find a location which avoids the prevailing wind in the case of inclement weather. It is a photographer's paradise, base yourself in the middle and you will be easily able to access most of the locations enabling you to shoot all day.

I would recommend you pick a few locations for the day and really explore them in detail, the big advantage of seascapes is that as the tide ebbs and flows the landscape constantly changes.

I hope you enjoy your photography.

Best wishes

Richard

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Safety First

•Check the tide times before you go.

•Ensure you have a safe route out to dry land at all times. This is especially important if you are shooting with sea defences or rock structures behind you so you do not get cut off. If you go round a headland ensure you can get back safely.

•The beaches here are subject to the Atlantic swell and as such large waves can unexpectedly crash onto the shore. Be careful not to get too close to the water's edge and watch the waves for some time from a safe distance before you approach the water. This will help you to gauge the behaviour of the waves.

- Some of the cliffs are very high so look out for drop offs if you go on them. Stay clear of crumbling edges.

- If it all goes wrong and you are in danger dial 999 and ask for the coastguard.

Planning

5 Ps

Perfect
Planning
Prevents
Poor
Performance

Before you rush off and get started, some planning will really help with your trip and enable you to get the maximum out of your time in the field. There are many factors which will determine if you have a successful trip, some within your control and some not. Planning will help you minimise the variance in the events within your control.

The first thing is to ensure that you are familiar with your camera and that you have an understanding of the type of images you want to create. If you want to create black and white images do you know how to set the picture controls on your camera to display black and white images? Do you understand how to display the histogram for your images and what to do if your image is not correctly exposed? Is your tripod serviced and working?

If you cannot answer yes to these kind of questions then spend some time and sort the issues out, a windy cliff top is not a great place to be looking at your camera manual. Basic camera craft is beyond the scope of this guide but if you want this information then "The Art of Landscape Photography" by Mark Bauer and Ross Hoddinott will really help you to get started.

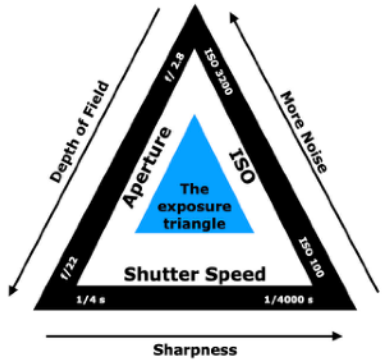
Long Exposure

To get some sense of motion in the water many of the images here are long exposures (exposure > 1/60 s). This requires its own set of techniques which will be covered next.

Long exposure is a technique to enable you to slow down the motion of an object and not render it in sharp focus. Imagine a person running, shot at 1/2000 s the runner will be in focus and sharp, as they will only have moved 0.5cm in the exposure time. If you were to expose for 0.5s they would have moved 5m and thus be rendered as a blur. The above example assumes the runner is Usain Bolt!

It is a similar story for water in motion. At 1/2000s a wave will be sharp with detail in all the droplets, at 0.5s it will be a series of streaks

So how do you go about achieving this effect. There are only three variables to play with when taking a photograph:

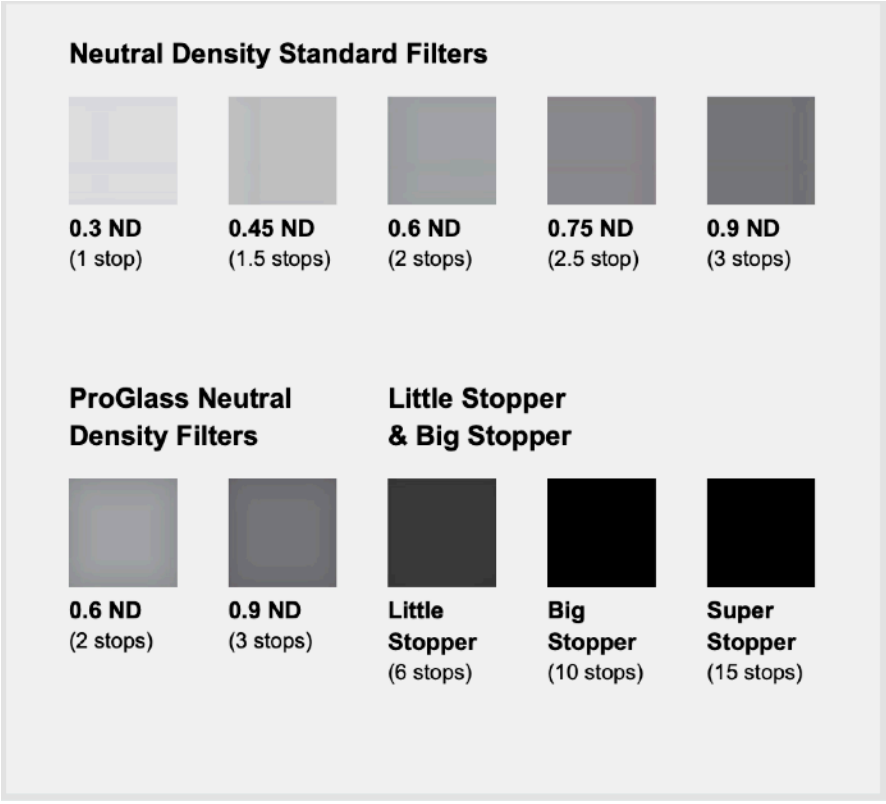


The exposure triangle

- Exposure which determines how long the shutter is open
- Aperture which determines how much light enters the camera
- ISO which determines how responsive the camera is to the light

Given normal lighting it will not be possible to get a long exposure time and thus slow the subject down so you will need to stop the light reaching the sensor by the use of a neutral density filter. These block light from reaching the sensor without altering the image.

Use of such a filter enables you to reduce the light entering the camera and thus lengthen the time the shutter is open.



Range of filters (Image © Lee filters)

Calculating Exposure Times

Calculating a long exposure can be done by two methods. One method is trial and error, start with an exposure which experience teaches you is roughly correct and use the histogram to fine tune it. Whilst some professional photographers do use

this method it is not one I recommend as I find it time consuming and frustrating. If you want to go down this route for a day time scene start with a 10 stop filter and 30s at f11. Look at the histogram. If it is too much to the right decrease the ISO or aperture (higher f stop) or exposure time. If it is underexposed increase the aperture, exposure time or ISO. Each line on your histogram is one stop of exposure so if you use the example above and want to increase by 1 stop you can either expose for 60s or move to f8 or increase the ISO to 200. You should only do one of these at once. If you do all 3 you will have increased by 3 stops of exposure.

The second method is to calculate the new exposure based from a normal exposure. Start by assessing the exposure without your filter in place. For example the normal without filter exposure may be 1/60s. If you want water that is streaky you would need about 1s exposure so would use a six stop filter, if you want water that is milky then use a 10 stop to get an exposure of about 15s.There are several ways of calculating the new exposure time:

Use a table which you print out such as one below.

Little Stopper

Normal Shutter Speed	Little Stopper +6 stops
1/1000	1/15
1/500	1/8
1/250	1/4
1/125	1/2
1/60	1 second
1/30	2 seconds
1/15	4 seconds
1/8	8 seconds
1/4	15 seconds
1/2	30 seconds
1 second	1 minute
2 seconds	2 minutes

Big Stopper

Normal Shutter Speed	Big Stopper +10 stops
1/1000	1 second
1/500	2 seconds
1/250	4 seconds
1/125	8 seconds
1/60	15 seconds
1/30	30 seconds
1/15	1 minute
1/8	2 minutes
1/4	4 minutes
1/2	8 minutes
1 second	16 minutes
2 seconds	32 minutes

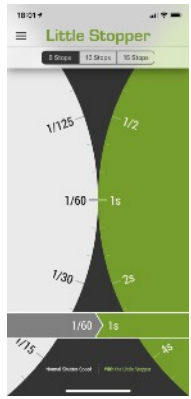
Super Stopper

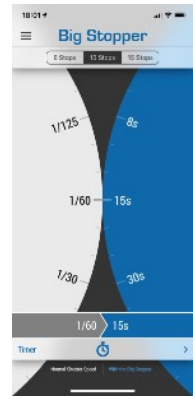
Normal Shutter Speed	Super Stopper +15 stops
1/1000	30 seconds
1/500	1 minute
1/250	2 minutes
1/125	4 minutes
1/60	8 minutes
1/30	16 minutes
1/15	32 minutes
1/8	1hr 4mins
1/4	2hrs 8mins
1/2	4hrs 16mins
1 second	8hrs 32mins
2 seconds	17hrs 4mins

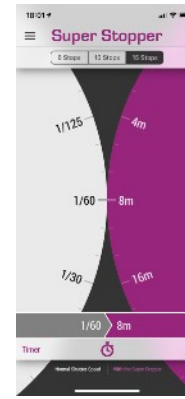
Calculate the exposure (time in seconds) arithmetically:

- 3 stop = exposure x 8
- 6 stop = exposure x 64
- 10 stop = exposure x 1064
- 15 stop = exposure x 32768

However the easiest way to calculate the exposure time is to use an app. Lee filters have one which can be downloaded free of charge and works on your smart phone as shown below with a screenshot of the Lee app.







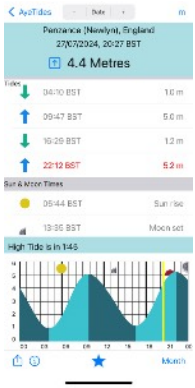
Impact of Shutter Speed on Coastal Images

Shutter speed will determine how sharply water is rendered. At shutter speeds greater than 1/1000s most water will be rendered sharply with individual droplets visible. At shutter speeds still in the fractions of a second the overall shape of the water will be clearly defined but individual droplets will not be visible. At shutter speeds of 1-2s the water will appear streaky with lines of flow in it. At shutter speeds in the tens of seconds the water will appear milky. The above are guidelines as it depends how fast the water is flowing. For example water in a vertical falling cascade moves considerably quicker than a gently lapping wave. The above guidelines will help you to start to create the effect you want which can then be further refined.

Captured at 1/2000, 1/1000 and 1/160s

Captured at 1.3, 2 and 8 sec

Tides and weather



Screenshot of Ayetides app

“Tide and time waits for no man” is a popular saying. It is something you will need to be cognisant of if you are to get the most out of the shoot. Most of the locations are best shot from mid tide to high tide and then back to mid tide. At low tide focus on the sandy beaches. To check tide times you can either do this on the web or via an app. Most providers on the web only give tide times for a week in advance which can make longer term planning difficult. To get longer term tide tables you can either purchase a paper copy or get an app. Two I recommend are Ayetide and Nautide. Nautide is more comprehensive both in locations and data but requires an annual subscription. Ayetide has fewer locations but has a nominal one off purchase price.

Weather is something you cannot control but will be critical for ensuring the success of your photography trip. There is a dearth of locations facing east here but you can still get some good sunrise shots. As the coast covers north, west and south there is plenty for you to shoot at any time of the year. There are many weather apps available but three I like are:

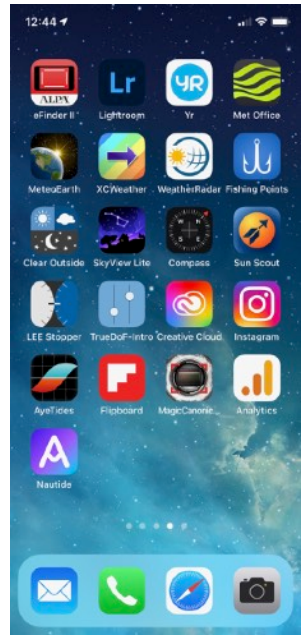
Met office

Yr.no the Norwegian weather service

Clear Outside which gives a forecast of cloud cover

Screenshot of

weather apps



Protecting Your Camera

To ensure your equipment is protected you will need a good quality waterproof camera bag. Set up away from the waters edge. You can use your body as a shield but do not turn your back on the sea if it can come close to you. To protect your gear whilst in use I find a shower cap is useful. Put over the front of the filters it can stop spray landing on the lens and filters whilst you finalise your composition. Rain hoods are also available commercially and are relatively low cost.

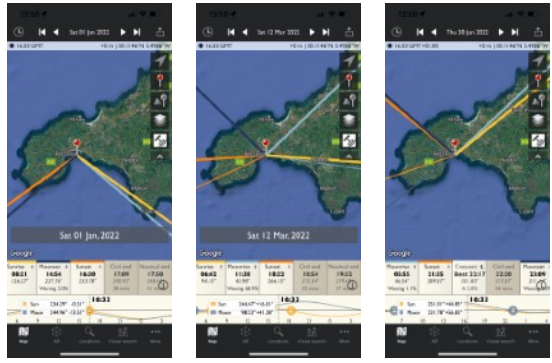
To make the set up of your camera easier you can use an app which shows you the images at various focal lengths. This can save you getting lenses out of your bag that are not needed. Two good ones are Alpla eFinder II or Magic Canonic Viewfinder. The Alpla one is a paid for app and you need to purchase data for your camera. The Magic Canonic one is free but only covers Canon cameras so you will need to match your camera to the nearest Canon one in order to get the correct field of view.

Screenshot of Alpa app

Sunrise and Sunset

It is not necessary to shoot these locations at sunrise or sunset but should you choose to do so then the Photographers Ephemeris is very helpful to determine the position of the sun. The website version is free and if you want to use it on your smartphone then you can download the app.

These locations can be shot throughout the year. The ones on the northern coast will be better if shot after March when the sun sets over the sea, whereas those on the south coast can be shot earlier in the year when the sun will rise and set over the sea. Once the sun rises over the land you will need clouds to get reflected colour. This can make for a really stunning image.



Screenshot from Photographers Ephemeris app

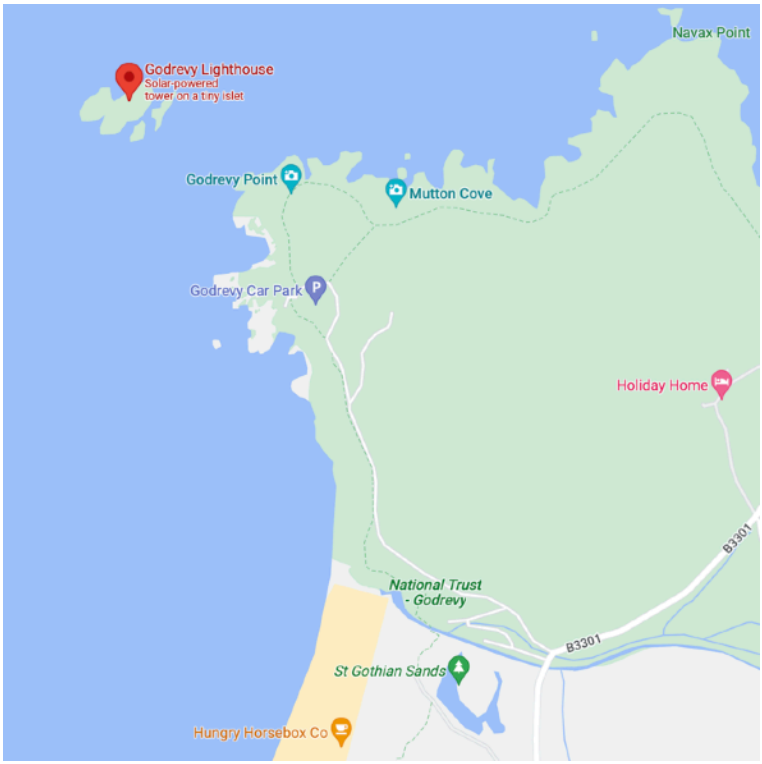
Overview of Locations

In a distance of about 65 miles as the crow flies you will be able to photograph lighthouses, beaches, dramatic cliffs and eroded boulders. This makes this area one of the most compact and diverse in the UK. It is a location that can be photographed in all seasons though in summer you may find some of the locations somewhat crowded. There is the chance to experience dramatic storms, spring flowers and a variety of marine life.

The locations face to all points of the compass with a predominance of westerly locations making it an ideal area for sunsets.

Godrevy Lighthouse

Postcode	TR27 5ED
Parking	Yes charges apply, free for National Trust members
Toilet Facility	No
Refreshments	No
Wheelchair access	No



© *Google maps*

When you turn left on the road to Godrevy there is a large National Trust car park on the left by the beach. Ignore this one and go along to the car park at the end of the road.

Walk along the road towards the lighthouse. You can shoot from the cliff above the beach or descend down onto the rocks and shoot off the ledges. If you descend onto the beach take care as the waves can wash up over the rock ledges. Find a suitable safe vantage point.

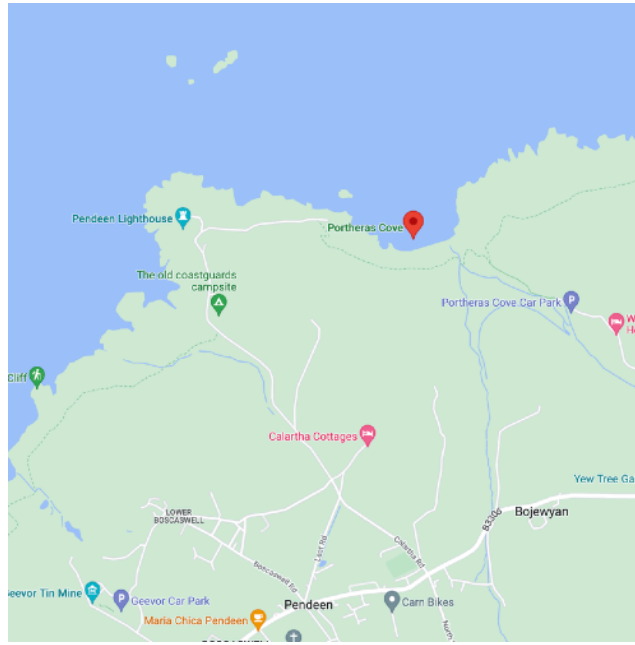
The lighthouse is best shot at a mid to high tide when the waves fill up the crevices between the ledges and wash over the edges. The beach area can be shot at low tide and features many white pebbles.

Below and overleaf Godrevy lighthouse in a variety of weather conditions

Rock ledges at Godrevy

Portheras and Boat Cove

Postcode	TR19 7ED or TR19 7EU
Parking	Yes - on the road about 500m away or at TR19 7EU
Toilet Facility	No
Refreshments	No
Wheelchair access	No



© Google maps

This is a location you will not find in a photo guidebook but is a very nice one to shoot rocks on the foreshore and out to sea. If you park near the lighthouse it a fairly steep walk down to Boat Cove. The last section on the jetty way is very steep so take care.

Boat Cove

Botallack Mine

Postcode	TR19 7QQ
Parking	Yes - charges apply
Toilet Facility	Yes
Refreshments	Yes
Wheelchair access	No

© Google maps

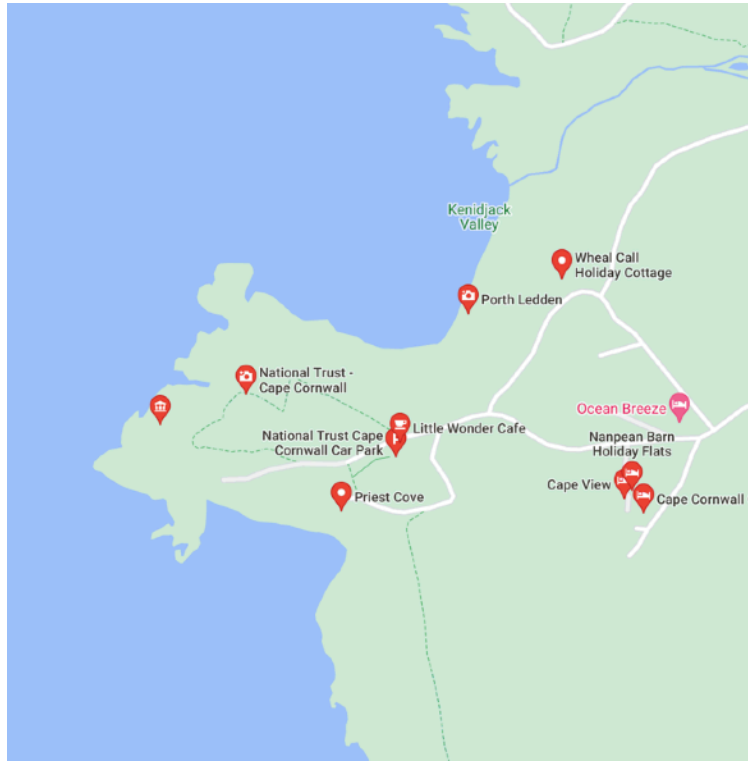
Leave the B3306 and enter the village of Botallack. As the road turns sharply, take the road on the apex of the bend. Follow the road as it turns into a track passing Botallack Manor on your right. Continue along the track to the car park just past the Count House and Workshop.

Head towards the coast and shoot from above the mine building. You can get closer to the mine by walking along a path with a very high drop on either side - this is not for the faint hearted.

Above Botallack Mines

Cape Cornwall

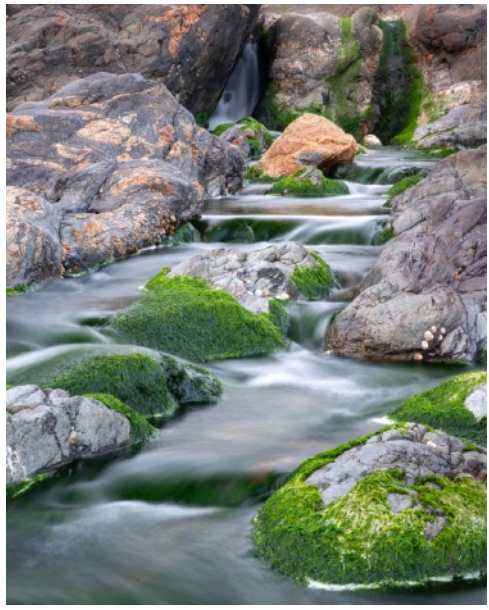
Postcode	TR19 6NN
Parking	Yes - charges apply
Toilet Facility	Yes
Refreshments	Yes - seasonal
Wheelchair access	No



© Google maps

From the car park cross the road and follow the coast path north towards the Kinidjack Valley. The walk to the beach to give a view of the headland from the north takes a good 20 mins. It is a descent so will be an ascent on the way back. After you cross the

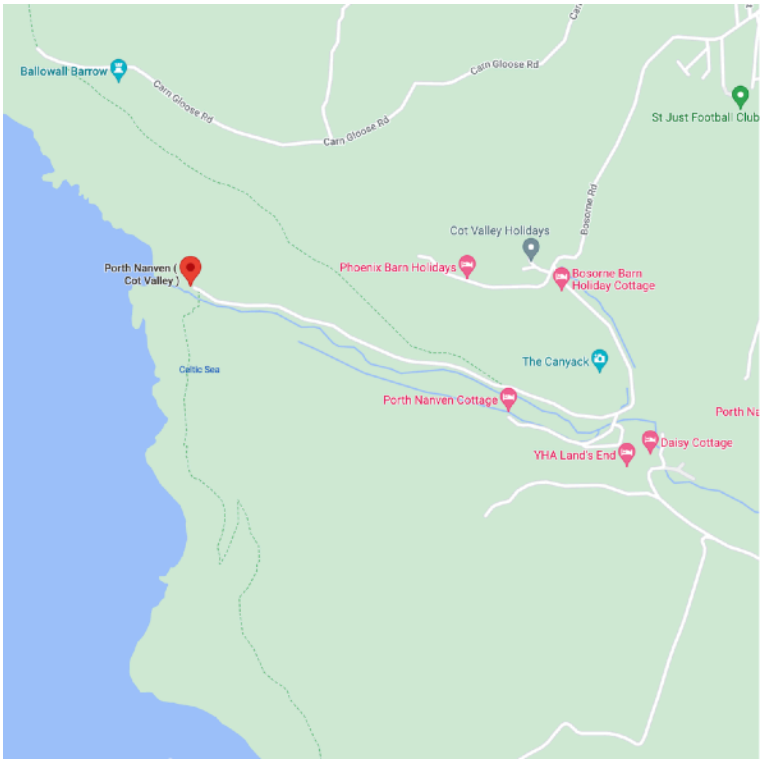
stream bear left down to the beach. After rainfall the river will be swollen and you will need wellingtons to safely cross the river. You can shoot without crossing but that does restrict your viewpoints. There is also an old tin mine engine house which makes an interesting image.



Above and previous Cape Cornwall

Porth Nanven

Postcode	TR19 7NP
Parking	Yes
Toilet Facility	No
Refreshments	No
Wheelchair access	No



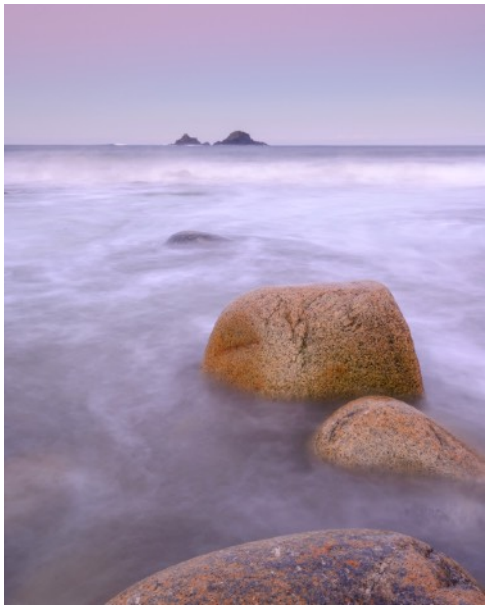
© *Google maps*

This is a prime shooting location made famous by Andrew Nadolski's book "The end of the land". The book is a series of

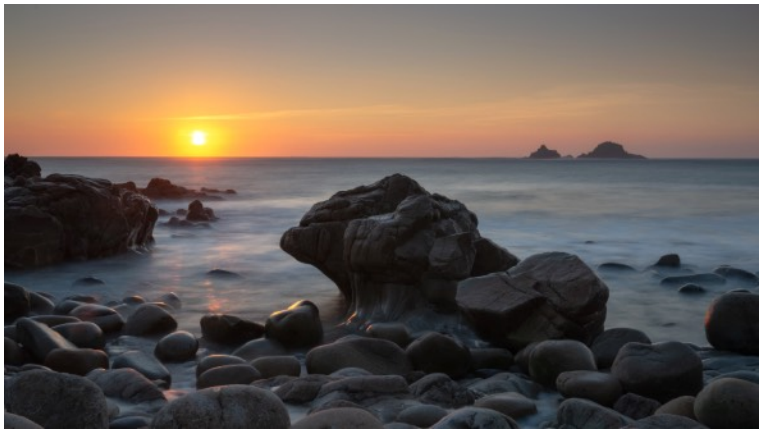
images taken on the beach with both inner scapes and more classical landscapes.

This is a remote location at the end of a single track road. Access to the beach is from the parking area. The beach is famous for its large boulders which look like dinosaur eggs.

As it faces west it makes a great sunset location and can be shot at any state of the tide. If you want the water washing around the boulders then mid to high tide is best. If there is a SW gale blowing it can be difficult to shoot here as spray comes in and coats your lens or filters.



Above and overleaf Porth Nanven



Sennen Cove

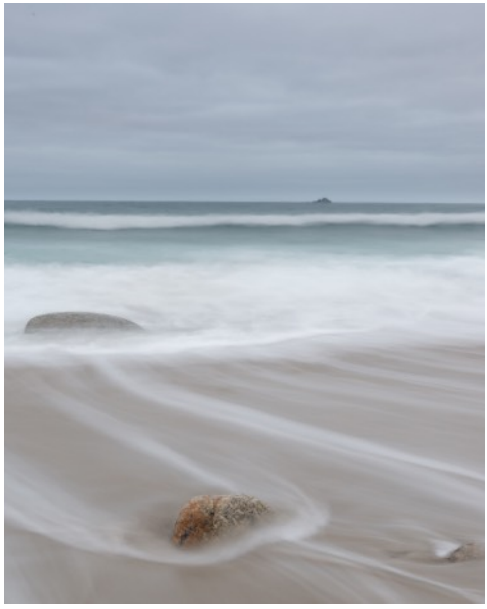
Postcode	TR19 7DA
Parking	Yes - charges apply
Toilet Facility	Yes
Refreshments	Yes
Wheelchair access	Partial

© Google maps

Sennen Cove is a little village north of Land's End. It has a small harbour and some boats but from the landscape photographers viewpoint it provides some high vantage points from which wave profiles may be shot. The cove is well sheltered from southerly gales and photography can be done from the car park thus providing some vantage points for less mobile photographers.

Shots may be taken from the harbour, car park or by walking along the coast in either direction. Along to the east is a sandy beach with interesting rock formations. About 10 mins walk south is Mayon Cliff old lookout which gives spectacular views towards Land's End. About 15 mins further on the wreck of the RMS Mulheim in Castle Zawn. This can be viewed from the cliff or you can reach the beach via a steep descent along a river bed. The gully is steep and wet and there is no mobile signal so it is not for anyone with mobility issues. This can also be reached from Land's End.

Above and overleaf Sennen Cove sea wall and beach



Mayan lookout

Land’s End

Postcode	TR19 7AA
Parking	Yes - charges apply
Toilet Facility	Yes
Refreshments	Yes
Wheelchair access	Partial

© Google maps

All roads west lead to Land’s End in this region. The actual end is somewhat touristy and unlikely to appeal to the landscape photographer. However a short walk away from the building gives

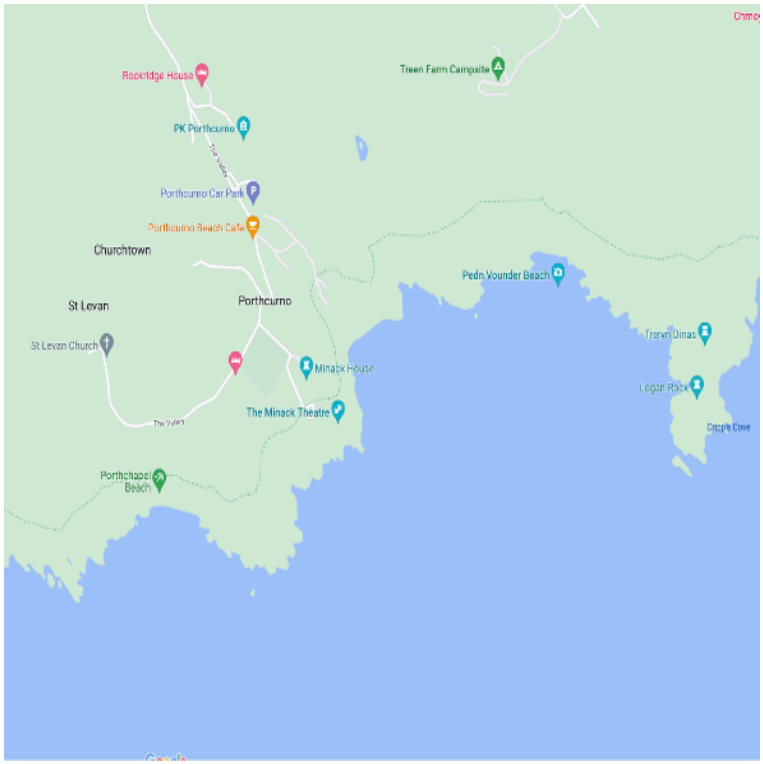
fabulous views out to sea and to the rocks below. The conventional view point is from the headland out towards the Longships lighthouse or from the southern tip towards Enys Dodnan. You can also walk a little further south toward Pordenack Point and shoot east along the cliffs for a spectacular view. About 40 minutes walk south east from Land's End is Nanjizal Beach which has a good collection of boulders, a sea arch and a sandy beach. This is good for sunsets as spring approaches.

Land's End below and previous

Wreck of RMS Mulheim details in Sennen Cove section

Porthcurno

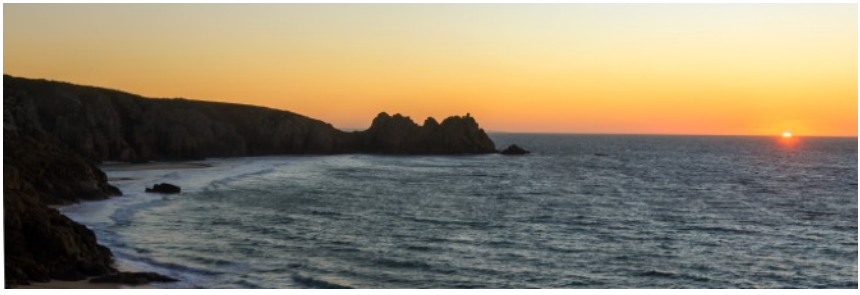
Postcode	TR19 6JX
Parking	Yes - charges apply
Toilet Facility	Yes
Refreshments	Yes - seasonal
Wheelchair access	No



© Google maps

Porthcurno makes a sheltered sunrise location with views over to Logan Rock. The views are more spectacular from Pedn Vounder. A second option is to walk up the coast path away from Logan's

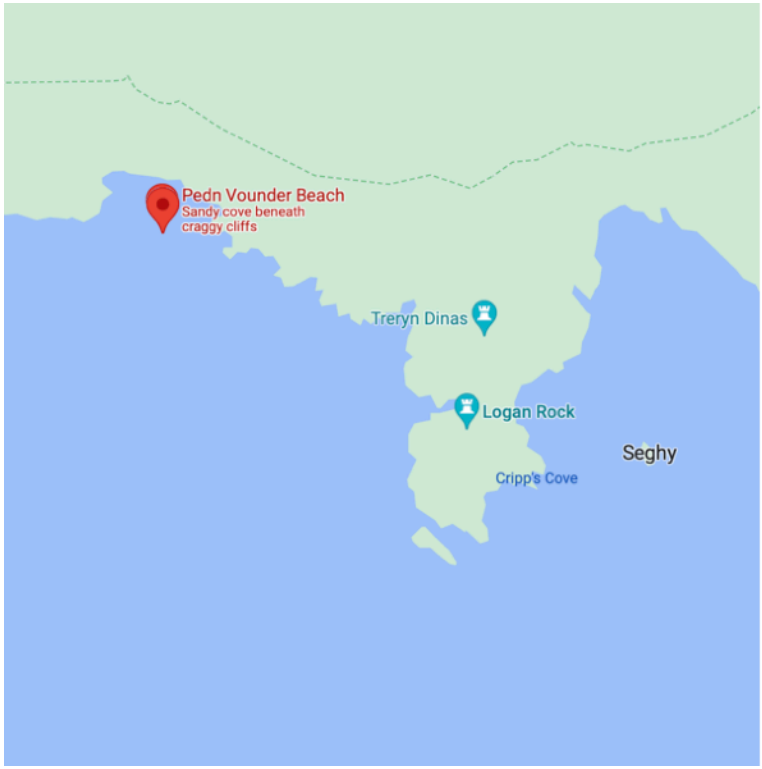
Rock towards the Minack theatre and shoot the whole bay and the headland.



Above and previous Porthcurno sunrise

Pedn Vounder

Postcode	TR19 9LQ
Parking	Yes
Toilet Facility	No
Refreshments	No
Wheelchair access	No



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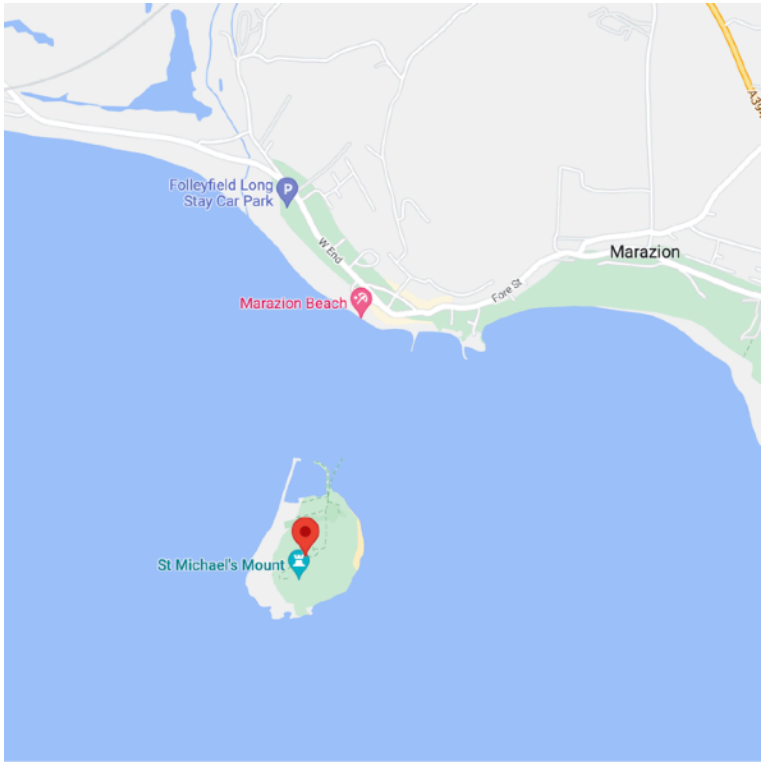
Pedn Vounder is a great sunrise location in winter or a sunset location when the light hits the cliffs. From the car park at Treen

Farm walk back along the road leading out of the car park and at the campsite turn left towards the sea. At a T-junction turn right and follow the path to the cliffs. You will end up on some slab rock above the bay. The lines in the rock make great leading lines.

Pedn Vounder sunrise

St Michael’s Mount

Postcode	TR17 0EQ
Parking	Yes - charges apply
Toilet Facility	No
Refreshments	Yes - in Marazion
Wheelchair access	No

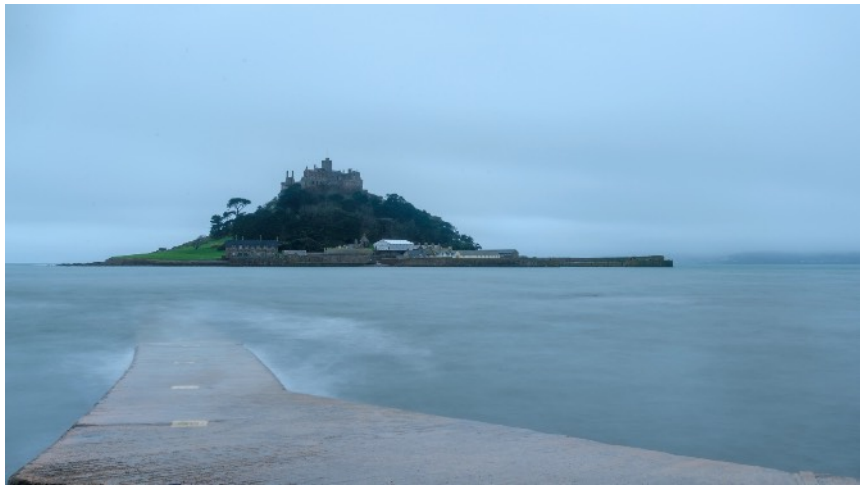


© Google map

St Michaels Mount and the causeway make an excellent sunrise subject. The mount can be shot at any state of the tide, though I prefer a rising tide and to retreat back with the causeway

gradually getting covered in water. The beach to the east makes an interesting foreground also.There is parking near the causeway and in the village.

There has been a monastery on the site since the 8th century and the current castle owned by the National Trust can be visited either by walking over the causeway or by boat/amphibious craft.

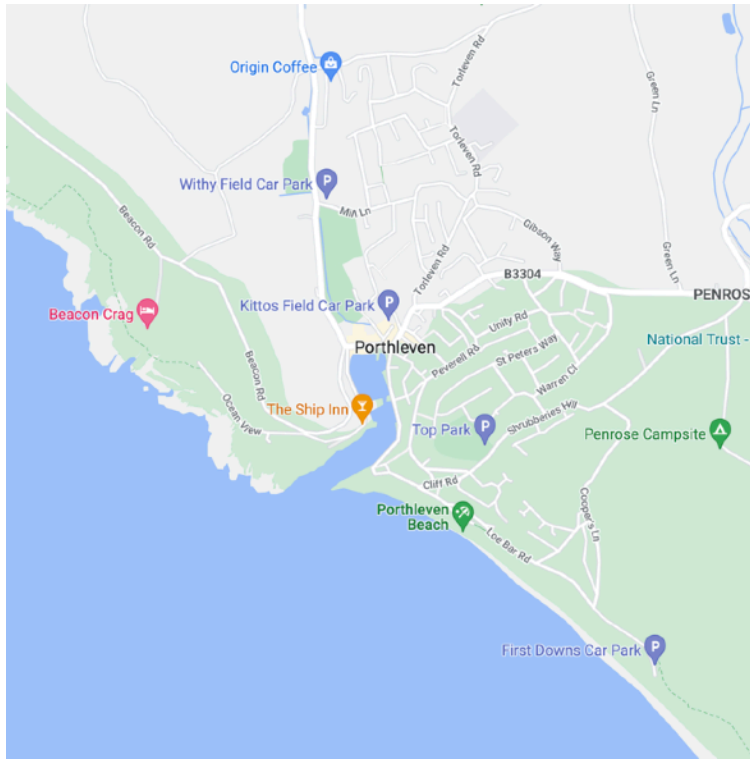


St Michaels Mount from east above and west below

St Michael’s Mount foreshore

Porthleven

Postcode	TR13 9JX
Parking	Yes - charges apply
Toilet Facility	Yes
Refreshments	Yes
Wheelchair access	On harbour

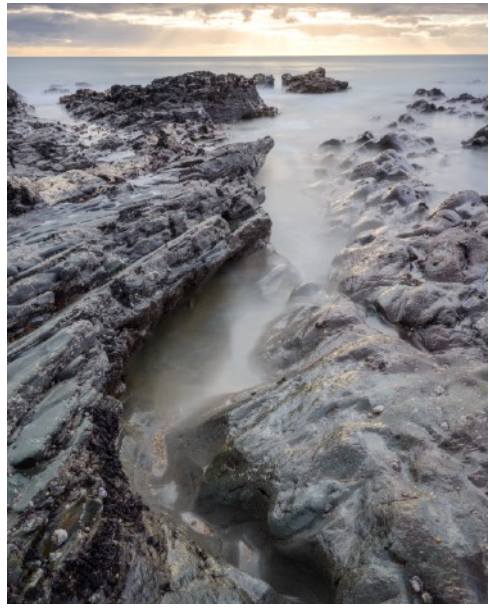


© *Google maps*

Porthleven is best known for the spectacular images of waves breaking over the seawall and council offices. To get these images you need a south-westerly gale and a high tide and any images need to be shot from the western side of the town where

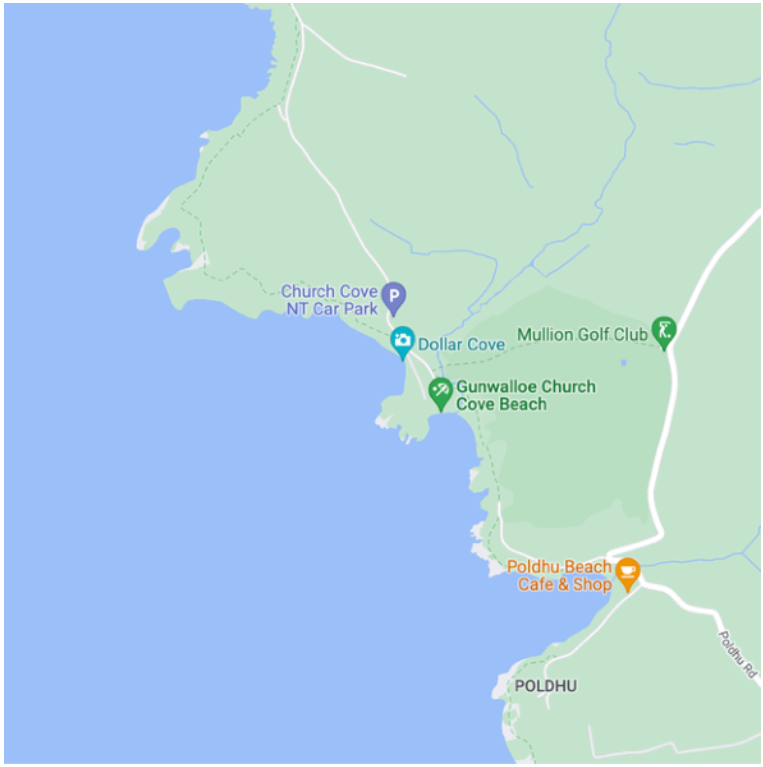
you can shelter behind walls. The sea wall and breakwaters are dangerous in stormy conditions and sadly there have been fatalities. On more benign days the beach on the eastern side has a series of rock ledges which make great leading lines for a sunset on a rising tide.

Above and overleaf Porthleven rocks



Gunwalloe

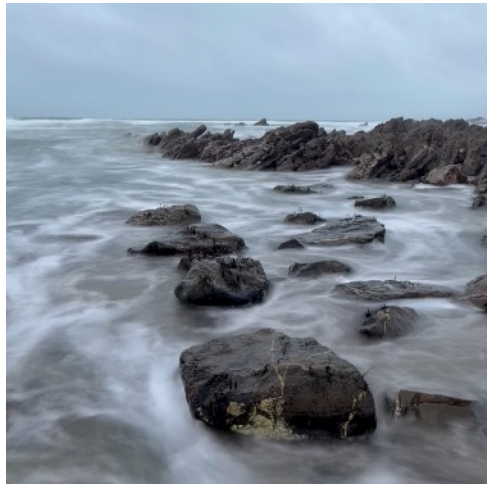
Postcode	TR12 7QE
Parking	Yes - charges apply
Toilet Facility	Yes
Refreshments	Yes - seasonal
Wheelchair access	No

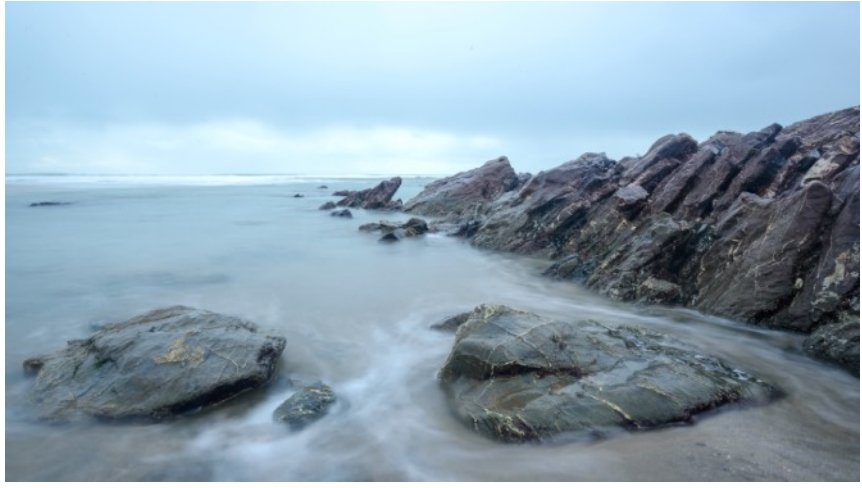


© *Google maps*

Gunwalloe is at the end of a single track road and as you descend to the beach you will see the car park on your left. Exit the car park at the bottom and follow the road for a few yards until you see a track. Follow the track and take the first exit onto the beach. Continuing along the track leads to a second beach but it

has much less photographic potential. Church Cove is the first beach and has excellent potential on a mid to low tide with lots of jagged rock formations. This is a great location on an overcast day allowing for mid-sized to intimate landscapes.





Above Gunwalloe beach

Mullion Cove

Postcode	TR12 7ER Cliff top opposite hotel
Parking	Opposite hotel and walk down to harbour
Toilet Facility	No
Refreshments	Yes - seasonal
Wheelchair access	No

© *Google maps*

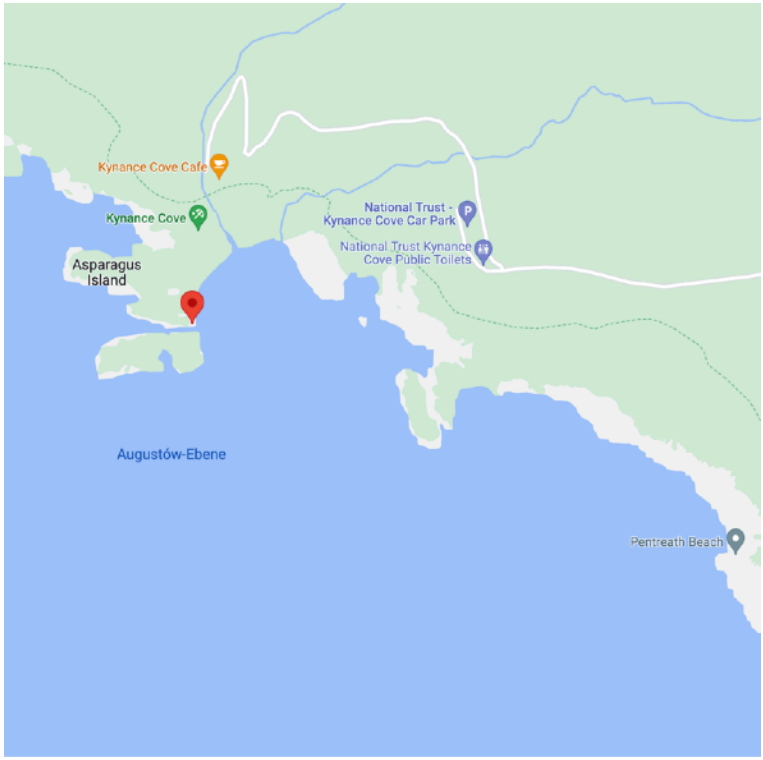
Mullion cove has a variety of interesting viewpoints. From the car park walk out onto the headland for views of the harbour below. In my opinion shooting from within the harbour is more

interesting with the two jetties and the Mullion Island interestingly juxtaposed.

Mullion Harbour

Kynance Cove

Postcode	TR12 7PJ
Parking	Yes
Toilet Facility	No
Refreshments	No
Wheelchair access	No



© Google maps

Kynance Cove is a beautiful location which can be photographed at either sunrise or sunset. Park in the National Trust car park and then walk along the headland to the cove. The cove has a pebble beach but when you go at low tide you can go around the

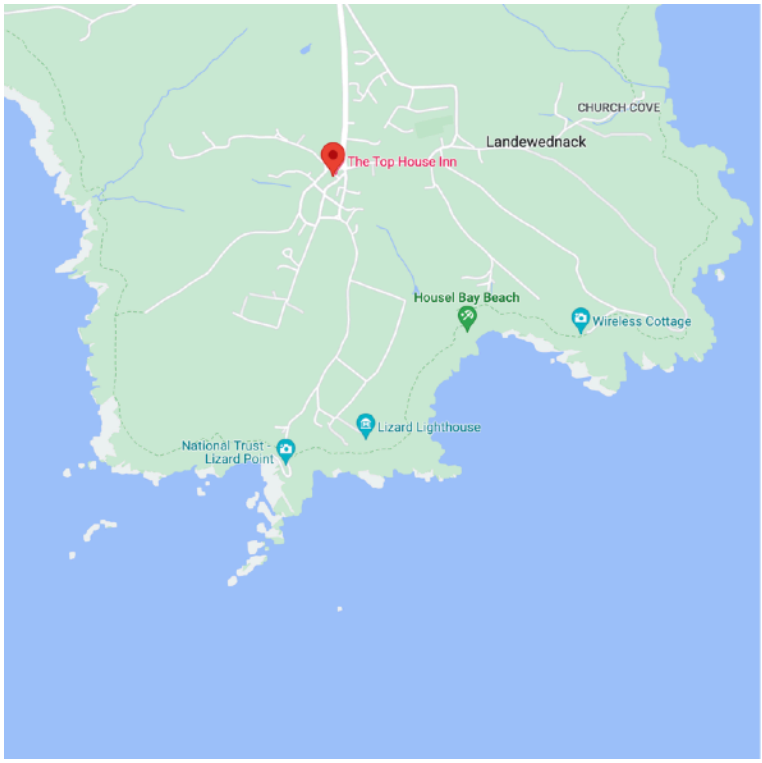
headland to the sandy beach and stack. To access the beach you need to go around the rocks with the routes becoming uncovered as the tide recedes. To access route A you will need wellingtons. Routes B and C are accessible as the tide goes out.

If you do not fancy the descent to the beach then there are many great shots from the cliff tops.

Above and overleaf Kynance Cove area

The Lizard

Postcode	TR12 7NT
Parking	Yes
Toilet Facility	No
Refreshments	No
Wheelchair access	No



© Google maps

The Lizard used to be viewed as the end of England but is now recognised as the most southerly point. With sweeping views and majestic cliffs it is a great photography location. There are two main views. The first from the west involves walking along the coast path for about 10 minutes. After crossing a stream the path

rises up and there are a couple of flat areas where you can get off the path and shoot.

The second location to the east involves walking along the coast path for about 25 minutes until you are just past the Housel Bay hotel. There is a nice stone bench which makes a good place to set up. On your way back from shooting a sunrise you can descend to Housel Bay which is good on a receding tide for rocks in the sand and views along the cliff.

Above and overleaf scenes of the Lizard

Housel Bay beach details

Old Lizard Lifeboat House

Car Park Coordinates

Location		Car Park Coordinates
Godrevy Lighthouse		50.238031, -5.393264
Boat Cove		50.164911, -5.669588
Botallack Mine		50.140862, -5.688749
Cape Cornwall		50.132342, -5.701730
Porth Nanven		50.118948, -5.699417
Sennen Cove		50.077834, -5.704703
Land’s End		50.068744, -5.714661
Porthcurno		50.043428, -5.651429
Pedn Vounder		50.045561, -5.642758
St Michael’s Mount		50.123920, -5.475785
Porthleven		50.086010, -5.315707
Gunwalloe		50.041853, -5.270240
Mullion Cove		50.016545, -5.252718
Kynance Cove		49.975018, -5.225089
The Lizard		49.959485, -5.206395

About the Author

Richard Ellis is an enthusiastic amateur photographer based in Berkshire. He is an Associate of the Royal Photographic Society and chair of the Royal Photographic Society Landscape Special Interest Group.

He enjoys all aspects of landscape photography but especially coastal photography on islands.

Notes