

Offa's Dyke PATH

98 large-scale maps & guides to 52 towns and villages

PLANNING – PLACES TO STAY – PLACES TO EAT

CHEPSTOW TO PRESTATYN & PRESTATYN TO CHEPSTOW

KEITH CARTER & JOEL NEWTON





The first edition of this book was written by Keith Carter, with additional information by Colin Vickerman. The second edition was updated by Tricia and Bob Hayne; the third by Jim Manthorpe, the fourth by Henry Stedman and this fifth edition by Joel Newton.



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Offa's Dyke Path

First edition: 2004; this fifth edition: 2019

Publisher: Trailblazer Publications (☒ www.trailblazer-guides.com)
The Old Manse, Tower Rd, Hindhead, Surrey, GU26 6SU, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-912716-03-6

© **Trailblazer** 2004, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019: text and maps

Series Editor: Anna Jacomb-Hood **Editor:** Clare Weldon **Cartography:** Nick Hill

Proofreading: Jane Thomas **Layout:** Nick Hill **Index:** Anna Jacomb-Hood

Illustrations: © Nick Hill (pp71-74) **Photographs (flora):** © Bryn Thomas

All other photographs: © Joel Newton (unless otherwise indicated)

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Acknowledgements

Thanks to my parents, Jane and Paul Newton, for the company (and the lifts & accommodation) around Welshpool & Llanmynech, and thanks to my brother, Jamie, for collecting a weary walker from Prestatyn during a heat-wave. Thanks to Nick Phillips and Pete Whaley for the introduction to mango cider in Bodfari, and the company between Llandegla and Prestatyn. I'm grateful to the staff at the Offa's Dyke Centre in Knighton who answered my questions and also to the many campsites along the trail that helped me out and offered invaluable advice. And not forgetting a big thank you to the readers who have sent in suggestions for this new edition – Mark & Liz Adams, Luc Barbe, Karen Besant, Lara Clough, Mike Fox, Stephen Funnell, Stuart Greig, John Haley, Lara Pugh, Philip Scriver, David Smith, Pam & Stephen Turner, Floortje Verhoek & Erik Weug and Dr Leszek Zdunek. Thanks, as ever, to all at Trailblazer: Clare Weldon for editing, Nick Hill for maps and layout, Jane Thomas for proofreading and Anna Jacomb-Hood for additional research and the index.

Dedication – From Joel: For Michela Prescott, for accompanying me to Chepstow, Tintern, Devil's Pulpit and Hay-on-Wye; and for Graeme Quinnell and Jos Smith, with whom I first 'conquered' Offa's Dyke a decade ago.

A request

The author and publisher have tried to ensure that this guide is as accurate and up to date as possible. Nevertheless, things change. If you notice any changes or omissions that should be included in the next edition, please contact us at Trailblazer (☒ info@trailblazer-guides.com). A free copy of the next edition will be sent to persons making a significant contribution.

Warning: hill walking can be dangerous

Please read the notes on when to go (pp14-16) and health and safety (pp80-2). Every effort has been made by the author and publisher to ensure that the information contained herein is as accurate and up to date as possible. However, they are unable to accept responsibility for any inconvenience, loss or injury sustained by anyone as a result of the advice and information given in this guide.

Updated information will shortly be available on: ☒ www.trailblazer-guides.com

Photos – Front cover and this page: Traversing Hatterrall Ridge between Hay-on-Wye and Pandy. **Previous page:** The view from Cefn Du in the Clwydian Range. **Overleaf:** The stage between Buttington and Llanymynech is by far the flattest on the path.

Printed in China: print production by D'Print (☎ +65-6581 3832), Singapore

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

This guidebook contains all the information you need. The hard work has been done for you so you can plan your trip without having to consult numerous websites and other books and maps. When you're all packed and ready to go, there's comprehensive public transport information to get you to and from the trail and detailed maps (1:20,000) to help you find your way along it.

- Where to stay – from campsites to B&Bs, hostels and hotels
- Walking companies if you want an organised tour and baggage-carrying services if you just want your luggage carried
- Itineraries for all levels of walkers
- Answers to all your questions: when is the best time to walk, how hard is it, what to pack and the approximate cost of the trip
- Walking times in both directions; GPS waypoints as a back-up to navigation
- Availability and opening times of cafés, pubs, tea-shops, restaurants, and shops/supermarkets along the route
- Rail, bus and taxi information for the towns and villages on or near the path
- Street maps of the main towns and villages
- Historical, cultural and geographical background information

MINIMUM IMPACT FOR MAXIMUM INSIGHT



Man has suffered in his separation from the soil and from other living creatures ... and as yet he must still, for security, look long at some portion of the earth as it was before he tampered with it.

Gavin Maxwell, *Ring of Bright Water*, 1960

Why is walking in wild and solitary places so satisfying? Partly it is the sheer physical pleasure: sometimes pitting one's strength against the elements and the lie of the land. The beauty and wonder of the natural world and the fresh air restore our sense of proportion and the stresses and strains of everyday life slip away. Whatever the character of the countryside, walking in it benefits us mentally and physically, inducing a sense of well-being, an enrichment of life and an enhanced awareness of what lies around us.

All this the countryside gives us and the least we can do is to safeguard it by supporting rural economies, local businesses, and low-impact methods of farming and land-management, and by using environmentally sensitive forms of transport – walking being pre-eminent.

In this book there is a detailed and illustrated chapter on the wildlife and conservation of the region and a chapter on minimum-impact walking, with ideas on how to tread lightly in this fragile environment; by following its principles we can help to preserve our natural heritage for future generations.

INTRODUCTION

Wherever I have been in Wales, I have experienced nothing but kindness and hospitality, and when I return to my own country, I will say so.

George Borrow *Wild Wales* 1862

For 177 miles (285km), between Chepstow in the south of Wales and Prestatyn in the north, the Offa's Dyke Path winds along the English–Welsh border, roughly following the line of the 1200-year-old frontier earthwork for which it is named. This magnificent long-distance footpath ranges over terrain

This magnificent footpath ranges over terrain as diverse as any you will find in Britain

as diverse as any you will find in Britain; it traverses the whaleback ridges of the Clwydian Hills, follows canal towpaths and old drovers' roads, goes beside the banks of the meandering Severn and Wye rivers, through the Shropshire hills and over the Black Mountains. The Border Country is the land of Merlin and Arthur, a land of history and legend, from which sprang Owain Glyndwr and the *Lord of the Rings*. To journey through it on foot is the finest way to discover one of Britain's best-kept secrets.

There are good reasons for walking the trail in either direction (see p31) so this book has been researched and written to be used by



Heading south through the Clwydian Hills towards Llandegla.



This simple stone and plaque, overlooking the River Severn at Sedbury Cliffs (see p86), marks the southern end of the walk.



St Cadoc's Church at Llangattock-Lingoed.



One of the most visible sections of the Dyke, just after the turn-off to Montgomery on the way to Brompton Crossroads.

both south-to-north walkers (starting in Chepstow) and north-to-south walkers (starting in Prestatyn). In the text and maps,



look for the **N** ↑ symbol

which indicates information for those walking **from Chepstow to**



Prestatyn and the **S** ↓

symbol with shaded text (also on the maps) for those walking **from Prestatyn to Chepstow**.

If you choose to walk north, you leave the South Wales coastline at Sedbury Cliffs, pass through Chepstow and by Tintern Abbey, climbing the River Wye's wooded slopes to Monmouth which is well worth exploring. On towards Pandy, you pass through a hidden world of intimate villages and quiet byways where you're likely to meet only live-stock and farm people.

The trail climbs over the Hatterrall Ridge following the spine of this fine massif to Hay Bluff. Hay-on-Wye, with its 20 or so second-hand book shops, is a welcome stop for a night. Then it's on to Kington after the Hergest Ridge, a place of heather, gorse and wild ponies, with extensive views of Housman's 'blue-remembered' hills of Shropshire and the Black Mountains of the Brecon Beacons National Park. The halfway mark is at Knighton, 'the town on the dyke'. After the aptly-named Switchbacks you continue across the Severn Plain on a more modern man-made embankment with

panoramic views of the Breidden Hills and then go up to the Iron Age hill-fort of Beacon Ring with its crown of trees.

Strangely, the distance covered by the path is a matter for conjecture: you will see various figures given for the length of the path – 182 miles according to the sign in Chepstow, 177 miles according to the official National Trail website and 168 miles if you believe what is written at Sedbury Cliffs.

How difficult is the Offa's Dyke Path?

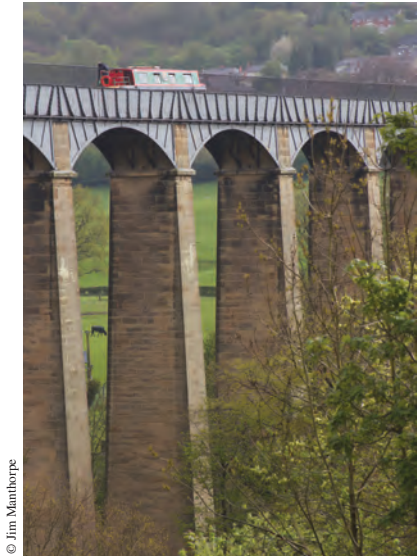
Do not be deceived into thinking this is an easy walk. A level of fitness and walking competence is required for most sections of the Offa's Dyke Path. It's 177 miles end to end and assuming you have two weeks available this will require an average of nearly 15 miles a day, based on 12 days of walking plus a day to get to the start and a day to get home. That's about five to seven hours' walking every day. On at least three days you will probably have to walk 17 miles; quite a tall order and you are going to feel a certain amount of tiredness at the end of the walking day. Are you up to it?

There are three severe and testing sections. First up, the so-called 'Switchbacks' (see north and south of Knighton, pp160-71). While most of the ups and downs on this section are par for the course, others, particularly north of the town, will pose a considerable challenge for many Dyke walkers.

The other two challenging sections involve exposed crossings well away from human habitation. First is the section along Hatterrall Ridge in the Black Mountains (see pp120-37) between



Plas Newydd, Llangollen (see p209).



Crossing the River Dee high above it on the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct is one of the highlights of the walk (see p204).

Left: Eglwyseg Crags loom above you as you pass along the trail above Llangollen.

That said, anyone possessing basic outdoor competence should find themselves coping perfectly well even with these challenging sections but don't underestimate any part of the route; it is not a doddle.

How long do you need?

This is the great imponderable. Can the path be walked from end to end in a fortnight's holiday? The answer is yes, definitely, but a lot will depend on your travelling time. If you have just 14 days but need two of those for the journey to and from the trail, you'll have to get a move on and it won't leave you much time to stop and stare. No time to visit Chirk Castle, see Llangollen, go into Montgomery, call in at the Offa's Dyke Centre in Knighton, shop for second-hand books in Hay-on-Wye, have a pint at the Boat Inn at Redbrook or the Three Tuns in Bishop's Castle. This is good country and it deserves more than a hurried glance.



Possibly the finest pub on the trail – the Boat Inn at Redbrook (see p102).

The walk will be much more enjoyable if you can spare a full 14 (or even 15) days walking, plus a day or two for travelling to and from home, so if your fortnight's holiday incorporates three weekends, you're in luck. If not, you could leave out one or two of the less-inspiring sections without losing any of the essential character of the route. Llanymynech to Castle Mill (pp192-201), Bodfari to Prestatyn (pp230-5) and the section along the Severn plain (pp184-8) are all contenders for omission if you're in a hurry, as is the southernmost section of the walk: Sedbury Cliffs and Chepstow (pp85-6). See also suggested itineraries (p37).

If you can't spare the time to walk from end to end in one go you could undertake the walk over several shorter

Left: Looking south from Hatterall Hill towards Pandy. You'll meet a lot of sheep on this walk!





Canoeists on the River Wye, seen from Hay Bridge (see p131). A day with a paddle is a great way to spend a rest day; you get a different perspective on the river and its wildlife.

May to September, although April and October often bring days that are bright and breezy when the walking and the surroundings are at their best. Typically, the seasons are likely to present the following conditions:

Spring

The weather in spring is as unpredictable as the rest of the year. In **April** it can be warm and sunny on odd days, but seldom for sustained periods. Conditions are more likely to be changeable, with blustery showers and cold spells reminding you that winter has only just passed. On the other hand, less rain falls on average in spring than at any other time of the year. This, coupled with the milder weather of **May** and **June**, and the proliferation of wild flowers early in

trips, gradually accumulating the miles until the great day comes when you have completed it in its entirety. Another option is simply to sample the highlights of the route on day walks and weekend trips; see pp35-8 for recommended sections.

When to go

SEASONS

The months when the weather is less likely to be inclement are



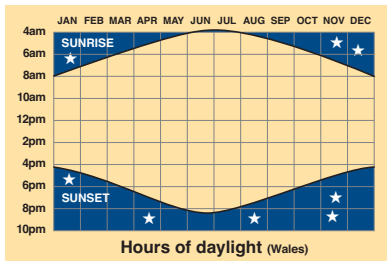
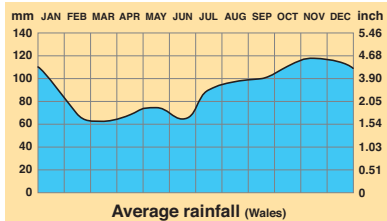
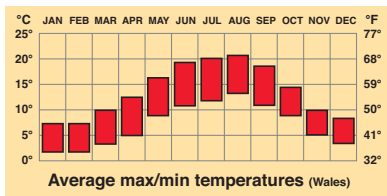


On Hatterrall Ridge. You need to be well prepared for this stage between Pandy and Hay-on-Wye as it's 17½ miles (28km) through exposed country.

Winter

Only the hardiest of souls will attempt the walk in winter. Once the days have shortened you will want to be at your day's end by 4-5pm. Colder days, wind and driving rain are not the best accompaniment for a good day on the path although

you can hit lulls when the sun comes out and you imagine things are improving. Some winters see continuous rain for several months with severe flooding when parts of the path become impassable and others see plenty of snow.



DAYLIGHT HOURS

If walking in autumn, winter and early spring, you must take account of how far you can walk in the available daylight. It will not be possible to be out for as long as you would in the summer. The table below gives the sunrise and sunset times (Greenwich Mean Time) for the middle of each month at latitude 52° North which runs through Wales, giving a reasonably accurate picture of daylight hours for the Offa's Dyke Path. Depending on the weather, you should get a further 30-45 minutes of usable light before sunrise and after sunset.

See p27 for **annual events and festivals** taking place in the area.

PLANNING YOUR WALK

1

Practical information for the walker

ROUTE-FINDING

The trail is generally waymarked with scrupulous attention to detail with only a few areas where more work is needed to avoid ambiguity in route-finding. The path was devised and initiated by a band of devotees who were at pains to ensure that those who came after them could find their way. It's waymarked with the national trail symbol: an acorn. This is supplemented with finger posts and guide posts which are frequently engraved, often in English and Welsh, and many stiles have the symbol of a coin of Offa's reign. Occasionally you'll come across older engraved stone markers, and more recent variations include the 'tombstone' markers on the Hatterrall Ridge. Arrows indicating the direction of the trail are nearly always marked 'Offa's Dyke', which helps to distinguish them from other way-marked trails sharing a similar route.

Aided by the waymarks and following the trail maps in this book, the walker is unlikely to get lost to any great degree. A word of advice is not to make assumptions. If the broad inviting path ahead of you looks the obvious route, it does not necessarily follow that it is your route. Look for the waymark, especially where the path changes direction, and take particular care when crossing fields if the trail exit is not entirely clear.

It isn't safe to assume the path follows the line of the Dyke in every case. There are places where the right of way diverges from the line of the Dyke; this is true on Hawthorn Hill (Map 38, p153) between Dolley Green and Knighton and over Baker's Hill (Map 63, p197) between Racecourse Common and Castle Mill. Check the trail maps regularly and keep your eyes open when walking through towns, where waymarking can be somewhat haphazard; the area east of Chepstow is particularly poor in this respect.

The path itself is in an impressive condition, though it didn't happen overnight. A full survey of the route was undertaken by the National Trails officer in summer 2007, with a view to preparing a three-year plan to bring the trail into line with new National Trail standards for both England and Wales. In 2009 parts of the Hatterrall Ridge underwent path improvement works. Further work has taken place – and continues to take place – to combat erosion along the length of the path.





© Joel Newton

The trail is well waymarked with the familiar acorn symbol. This is the mid point.

GPS

I never carried a compass, preferring to rely on a good sense of direction ... I never bothered to understand how a compass works or what it is supposed to do ... To me a compass is a gadget, and I don't get on well with gadgets of any sort. **A Wainwright**

While modern Wainwrights will scoff, more open-minded walkers will accept GPS technology as an inexpensive, well-established if non-essential, navigational aid. To cut a long story short, within a minute of being turned on and with a clear view of the sky, GPS receivers will establish your position and altitude in a variety of formats including the British OS grid system (see p242), anywhere on earth to an accuracy of within a few metres. These days, most **smart-phones** have a GPS receiver built in and mapping software available to run on it (see box p43).


One thing must be understood however: **treating GPS as a replacement for maps, a compass and common sense is a big mistake**. Although current units are robust, it only takes the batteries to go flat or some electronic malfunction to leave you in the dark. GPS is merely a **navigational aid or backup** to conventional route finding and, in almost all cases, is best used in conjunction with a paper map. All a GPS does is stop you exacerbating navigational errors or save you time in correcting them.

Newer units may come with some inbuilt mapping, but while it's possible to buy **digital mapping** (see box p43) to import into a regular GPS unit with sufficient storage capacity, it might be considered as practical as having internet on a mobile phone – you still end up scrolling and zooming across a tiny screen.

Using GPS with this book

It's anticipated you won't tramp along day after day, ticking off the book's **way-points** as you pass them because the route description and maps are more than adequate. Only when you're **unsure of your position** or which way to go might you feel the need to turn on the unit for a quick affirmation.

Most of the book's maps feature numbered waypoints from Sedbury to Prestatyn. These correlate to the list on pp242-5 which gives the longitude/latitude position in a decimal minute format as well as a description. You can either manually key the nearest presumed waypoint from the list in this book into your unit as and when the need arises. Or, much less laboriously and with less margin for keystroke error, download the complete list for free as a GPS-readable file (but not the descriptions) from the Trailblazer website. You'll need the right cable and adequate memory in your unit (typically the ability to store 200 waypoints or more). This file, as well as instructions on how to

interpret an OS grid reference, can be found at:  trailblazer-guides.com/gps-waypoints.

It's worth repeating that most of the people who've ever walked the Offa's Dyke Path did so without GPS so there's no need to rush out and buy one. Your spending priorities ought to be on good waterproofs and a sturdy pair of boots. However, all those thousands will have had their frustrating moments of navigational uncertainty and reliable technology now exists to reduce mistakes.

ACCOMMODATION

The path is well served with both camping and bed-and-breakfast-style accommodation (as well as a few hostels and bunkhouses), allowing for some flexibility in itineraries. A comprehensive selection of places to stay along the full length of the trail is given in each section of the route guide, Part 4, though it's worth noting that pubs in particular tend to change hands with almost alarming frequency.

Always **book your accommodation**, ideally at least the night before, but for peak periods – and even weekends – considerably earlier. Not only does this ensure that you have a bed for the night but it also gives you a chance to find out more about the place, check tariffs and see what's included. If you have to cancel, phone your hosts: it will save a lot of worry and allows them to provide a bed for someone else. In some cases, particularly in more upmarket establishments, you may be liable for the cost of the room if you don't give sufficient notice of cancellation. Many B&Bs and guesthouses/hotels require a deposit, though this will mostly be refunded if you give sufficient cancellation notice.

Many walkers opt for booking their accommodation during the planning stage of their walk. The key to selecting in advance where to stay lies in anticipating your daily mileage (many walkers work on an average of 12-14 miles a day). The suggested itineraries in the box on p37 will be of help here, too.

Camping

Man is born free under the stars, yet we lock our doors and creep to bed.

Robert Louis Stevenson

There's a reasonable number of official campsites along Offa's Dyke Path but it isn't as well served as some of the other popular long-distance footpaths. Don't let this put you off. It is still perfectly possible to backpack the route from end to end, pitching where enterprising B&B owners have made space on their lawn, letting campers use a shower and offering meals as well. Almost every village has at least one place where this is possible although it can occasionally be embarrassing if you have to pitch your tent right outside the family lounge with the family sitting around watching television. The charge is between £3 and £10 per person so this is by far the most economical way to walk the trail.

For those who are never happier than when pitching their tent behind a hedge and striking camp in the morning dew before the world is up, we salute you, but Offa's Dyke Path is not ideal for what you want. Farmers used to be very amenable to the odd inconspicuous tent being pitched in a field corner but

since the catastrophic foot-and-mouth epidemic in 2001 attitudes changed. However, some farmers are now happy enough to let you camp but others less so. Always find the landowner and ask permission before camping (see p77).

A few places now offer upmarket camping – ‘**glamping**’ – options. These may range from basic wooden camping pods to better appointed and more comfortable shepherd’s huts.

Hostels and bunkhouses

Cheap **hostel**-style accommodation is severely limited along the path: there is only one YHA hostel (at Kington) actually on the trail itself, with just two more YHA hostels (Clun and St Briavels) and two independent hostels (at Chepstow and Llangollen) within relatively easy reach of the trail. However, if you have the energy to walk the extra distance you are assured of a cheaper night’s accommodation than the average B&B. All have self-catering facilities; some provide good-value evening meals too but only YHA St Briavels is open all year.

YHA stands for Youth Hostel Association: however, ‘Youth Hostel’ is something of a misnomer as visitors of any age are welcome. Membership of the **Youth Hostels Association** (freephone ☎ 0800-019 1700, or ☎ 01629-592700, 🌐 www.yha.org.uk) for an individual is £15 per year if paying by direct debit (£20 by credit card). It’s possible to join in advance of your stay or when you arrive at a hostel. If you are not a member you can still stay at a YHA hostel but generally you will be charged an additional £3 per night. Bedding is provided; towels aren’t but can generally be hired for £2.

As a rule, it’s more efficient to make **reservations** using the central phone number or via the YHA website (see above), rather than contacting the individual hostels direct, though the contact details for these are given in Part 4. For details of pricing, see under Budgeting, pp30-1.

There’s also a scattering of **bunkhouses** with dormitory accommodation; in some you will pay less if you bring your own bedding. Also be aware that some are booked by groups for sole occupancy.

Bed and breakfasts (B&Bs)

Staying in B&Bs (see also box opposite) has its own particular appeal. For anyone unfamiliar with the concept, you get a bedroom in someone’s home along with a cooked breakfast the following morning. The accommodation is invariably clean and comfortable, traditionally with the emphasis on floral patterns and chintz, and it can be excellent value for money. One night you may be in a bijou bungalow, the next on a working hill farm to be woken by the crowing of a cock. The attraction lies in the variety, which gives you a unique insight into the local culture.

Transport offered by B&B hosts As many of the places offering accommodation are not right on the Offa’s Dyke Path B&B owners are often happy to collect walkers at an agreed rendezvous and deliver them back to the trail in the morning. Since this is a service of mutual benefit it’s one which B&B owners

may provide free of charge, but do check first. Of course, the benefit to the walker is that there is no added mileage at the end of the day to reach the accommodation. It is important to agree lift arrangements with your host at the time of making the booking. Mobile phone users would find it useful to ring ahead to give their host warning of their impending arrival at the pick-up point – though plan this in advance because reception on the path is not always good.

Pubs and inns

Many rural pubs and inns (and even a couple of restaurants in Montgomery and Monmouth) offer B&B accommodation at similar prices to more homely establishments, and some have seized the challenge enthusiastically, supplying every modern convenience including, in extreme cases, four-poster beds or a pool. At least you do not have far to go to reach the bar. But the idea fails where the proprietor, with every good intention, has nevertheless to mind the bar and restaurant, so the personal touch can be lost. Pubs can also be quite noisy for those who retire early so choose carefully if you intend staying on the premises.


Guesthouses

Guesthouses (see also box on p21) are more impersonal and don't have that private life of their own that is characteristic of good B&Bs, although they can be perfectly acceptable and well run. The best guesthouses are those that 'cater for walkers', which means they understand the way walkers think and are happy to accommodate the problems walkers can bring with them; wet gear, dirty boots, huge rucksacks and a tendency to invade the place like an army on the march.

Hotels

Many walkers are prejudiced against staying in hotels, reluctant to pay the higher prices and believing, perhaps wrongly, that walkers are unwelcome in more genteel surroundings. You may want to treat yourself to one really luxurious night, possibly to mark the halfway point or to celebrate at the finish, in which case you may well choose to stay in more upmarket accommodation.

Airbnb

The rise and rise of Airbnb ( [airbnb.co.uk](https://www.airbnb.co.uk)) has seen private homes and apartments opened up to overnight travellers on an informal basis. While accommodation is primarily based in cities, the concept is spreading to tourist hotspots in more rural areas, but do check thoroughly what you are getting and the precise location. While the first couple of options listed may be in the area you're after, others may be far too far afield for walkers. At its best, this is a great way to meet local people in a relatively unstructured environment, but do be aware that these places are not registered B&Bs, so standards may vary, yet prices may not necessarily be any lower than those of a regular B&B.

FOOD AND DRINK

Breakfast and lunch

A full fry-up of bacon, eggs and sausages is considered *de rigueur* by many walkers but remember when in Wales to ask for a 'full Welsh' **breakfast** rather

- **Drover Holidays** (see p25) Are based on the path and offer the whole walk in either direction in 12- and 14-night itineraries or half the walk, and shorter breaks, and can tailor to suit requirements. Dogs can be accommodated.
- **Explore Britain** (☎ 01740-650900, 🌐 explorebritain.com; Co Durham) Walks (4-19 nights) are mostly from south to north though they also offer north to south.
- **Let's Go Walking** (☎ 01837-880075, 🌐 letsgowalking.com; Devon) Offer the whole walk from south to north or north to south, as well as half the walk. Can tailor to meet requirements.
- **Northwestwalks** (☎ 01257-424889, 🌐 northwestwalks.co.uk; Wigan) Offer the full walk from 13 nights/12 days' walking to 16 nights/15 days as well as in two halves. They do north to south and south to north, and can tailor-make as required.
- **Sherpa Expeditions** (☎ 020-8875 5070, 🌐 sherpa-walking-holidays.co.uk; London) Offer the first 80 miles of the walk from Chepstow to Knighton in 7 nights/8 days. Can tailor to suit requirements.
- **The Walking Holiday Company** (☎ 01600-713008, 🌐 thewalkingholidaycompany.co.uk) Their office is in Monmouth, which is on the path, and they offer the walk in various itineraries, from south to north and north to south, and can tailor to suit requirements.
- **Wales Walking Holidays** (☎ 01248-713611, 🌐 waleswalkingholidays.com) Offer the north and south sections in 8 nights/7 days and the full path in 15 nights/14 days, in either direction. Can tailor-make as required.

📅 Annual events

The following events may need to be considered when planning your walk especially as accommodation in the area is often booked up months in advance.

- **Hay Festival of Literature, Hay-on-Wye** The famous book and literary festival (🌐 hayfestival.com) held in the **last week in May**, with talks and readings all week from top names in the world of writing. It is an opportunity for readers to meet their favourite authors and the town's streets are thronged with visitors – although the events themselves are held in a series of marquees set up outside the town.
- **International Musical Eisteddfod, Llangollen** This major festival of music and the performing arts to which groups and individuals come from all over the world is held in the **first or second week in July**. For further information see 🌐 international-al-eisteddfod.co.uk.
- **Royal Welsh Show, Builth Wells** The **last week in July** is a big date in the farming calendar for the whole of mid and south Wales, as this show (🌐 rwas.wales) attracts visitors and competitors from a huge area. Kington and Hay-on-Wye are the two centres on the path most likely to be affected.
- **Knighton Show** The **last Saturday in August** is an important day for the local community. The show includes horticultural and floral exhibitions, vintage cars, food stalls and dog shows. See 🌐 visitknighton.co.uk for details.
- **Presteigne Festival** A festival (🌐 presteignefestival.com), **held over six days in late August**, which specialises in promoting contemporary classical music.

occupancy. Guesthouses are likely to be a bit more expensive so budget for about £55-65pp per day.

The tariff for hotels is likely to be £40 and upwards per person with some saving for two people sharing a room. Some hotels have adopted the continental system of charging for the room only rather than per person, which for a couple doing the walk together may prove an economical proposition when you consider that two people paying £60 for the room will be the same as £30 each, not much more than the rate of an average B&B. However, the room rate may not include breakfast. If the hotel charges a room rate lone walkers may have a discount. Watch out for the extras though, such as service charge and VAT, which can add to the bottom line when the bill is presented.

Extras

Don't forget to set some money aside for the inevitable extras, such as batteries, postcards, buses, taxis, drinks, snacks, phone calls and entrance fees – or, rather more crucially, any changes of plan. Around £100 should be about right.

Itineraries

PLANNING

All walkers are individuals. Some like to cover large distances as quickly as possible. Others are happy to amble along, stopping whenever the whim takes them. You may want to walk the Offa's Dyke Path in one go, tackle it in a series of days or weekends, or use the trail for a series of linear day walks; the choice is yours. To accommodate these different options, this guide has not been divided up into strict daily sections, which could impose too rigid a structure on how you should walk. Instead it has been devised for you to plan an itinerary that suits you.

The **planning map** opposite the inside back cover and **table of village and town facilities** on pp32-5 summarise the essential information for you to make a plan. To make it even easier, look at the **suggested itineraries** (see box p37) and simply choose your preferred speed of walking. There are also suggestions on p35 for those who want to experience the best of the trail over a day or a weekend. The **public transport map and table** (pp49-53) will also help.

Having made a rough plan, turn to **Part 4** where you will find summaries of the route, full descriptions of accommodation options, places to eat and other services in each town and village, with detailed trail maps.

Which direction?

That's entirely up to you. There are good reasons for walking in either direction so this book has been written to be used by both south-to-north walkers (starting in Chepstow) and north-to-south walkers (starting in Prestatyn). In the text and maps, look for the **N↑** symbol which indicates information for those walking **from Chepstow to Prestatyn** and the **S↓** symbol with shaded text (also on the maps) for those walking **from Prestatyn to Chepstow**.



(cont'd on p34)

VILLAGE AND TOWN FACILITIES

Chepstow to Prestatyn – Walking North



PLACE*	DISTANCE* MILES/KM	BANK (ATM)	POST OFFICE	TOURIST INFO*	EATING PLACE*	FOOD SHOP	CAMP- SITE	BUNK/ HOSTEL*	B&B* HOTEL
Sedbury Cliffs	Start walk		✓			✓			
Chepstow	1.5/2.5	✓	✓	TIC	✓✓✓	✓		H	✓✓✓
(Tintern)					✓✓✓				✓✓✓
Brockweir	6/9.5				✓		✓		
Bigswear	3.5/5.5				✓			YHA	✓✓✓
(St Briavels)					✓				✓✓✓
Redbrook	6/9.5		✓		✓✓	✓			✓✓
Monmouth	3.5/5.5	✓	✓	TIC	✓✓✓	✓	✓		✓✓✓
The Hendre	3.5/5.5						✓		✓✓
Caggle Street	8.5/13.5								
Llangattock-Lingoed	2.5/4				✓		✓		✓✓
Pandy	2.5/4				✓✓	✓	✓	B	✓✓✓
(Longtown)			✓		✓	✓	✓	G	✓✓✓
(Llanthony)					✓✓		✓	B	✓✓
(Capel-y-ffin)							✓	G	✓✓
Hay-on-Wye	17.5/28	✓	✓	TIC	✓✓✓	✓	✓		✓✓✓
(Clyro)					✓✓		✓	H	✓✓
Newchurch	6.5/10.5				✓ (limited)				
Gladestry	3.5/5.5				✓		✓		✓✓
Kington	4.5/7	✓	✓	TIC	✓✓✓	✓	✓	YHA	✓✓✓
Discoed	8.5/13.5						✓		
(Presteigne)		✓	✓	TIC	✓✓✓	✓			✓✓
Knighton	5/8	✓	✓	TIC/ODC	✓✓	✓	✓		✓✓
Newcastle-on-C	7.5/12				✓✓				✓✓
(Clun 3 miles off route)				TIP	✓✓✓	✓	✓	YHA	✓✓✓
(Bishop's Castle)		✓	✓	TIC	✓✓	✓		G	✓✓
Brompton Xroads	7/11.5						✓		✓✓✓
(Montgomery)			✓		✓✓✓	✓			✓✓✓
Kingswood/Forden	6.5/10.5				✓✓		✓	B	✓✓
(Welshpool)		✓	✓	TIC	✓✓✓	✓	✓		✓✓✓
Buttington	6/9.5				✓	✓	✓	B (groups)	✓
Pool Quay	2/3				✓				✓
Four Crosses	7/11.5				✓	✓	✓		✓
Llanymynech	2.5/4		✓		✓✓✓	✓			✓✓✓
Nant-Mawr	3/5								
Trefonen	2/3		✓		✓	✓			✓✓
Ty'n-y-Coed	1.5/2.5								
Racecourse C	2/3								
Around Baker's Hill	½/1						✓		
(Oswestry 2½ miles off route)		✓	✓	TIC	✓✓✓	✓			✓✓

*NOTES

PLACE Places in brackets eg (Llangollen) are a short walk off the route.

DISTANCE Distances given are between places directly on the route.

(cont'd on p34)

(from Buttington to Pool Quay, for example, is 2 miles/3km)

(cont'd from p33)

VILLAGE AND TOWN FACILITIES

Prestatyn to Chepstow – Walking South

FROM PRESTATYN

PLACE*	DISTANCE* MILES/KM	BANK (ATM)	POST OFFICE	TOURIST INFO*	EATING PLACE*	FOOD SHOP	CAMP- SITE	BUNK/ HOSTEL*	B&B* HOTEL
Newchurch (Clyro)	3.5/5.5				✓(limited)				
Hay-on-Wye (Capel-y-ffin)	6.5/10.5	✓	✓	TIC	✓✓✓	✓	✓	H	✓✓
(Llanthony) (Longtown)			✓		✓	✓	✓	G	✓
Pandy	17.5/28				✓✓	✓	✓	B	✓✓
Llangattock-Lingoed	2.5/4				✓		✓		✓✓
Cagle Street	2.5/4								
The Hendre	8.5/13.5						✓		✓✓
Monmouth	3.5/5.5	✓	✓	TIC	✓✓✓	✓	✓		✓✓
Redbrook (St Briavels)	3.5/5.5		✓		✓✓	✓		YHA	✓✓
Bigswear	6/9.5								✓
Brockweir (Tintern)	3.5/5.5				✓		✓		
Chepstow	6/9.5	✓	✓	TIC	✓✓✓	✓		H	✓✓
Sedbury Cliffs	1.5/2.5		✓			✓			

TOURIST INFO TIC/TIP = Tourist information centre/point ODC = Offa's Dyke centre

EATING PLACE ✓ = one place ✓✓ = two ✓✓✓ = three or more

BUNK/HOSTEL YHA = YHA hostel H = independent hostel B = bunkhouse G = glamping

B&B/HOTEL ✓ = one place ✓✓ = two ✓✓✓ = three or more

THE BEST DAY AND WEEKEND WALKS


Day walks

- Chepstow Bridge to Bigswear Bridge or v/v** This 9-mile (14.5km) walk includes a visit to the ruins of Tintern Abbey, stunningly located below the heavily wooded slopes of the Wye Valley, a perfect spot for lunch and a chance to visit the abbey. It begins or ends at Chepstow Bridge from where the castle can be seen to dramatic effect. There are good transport links to Chepstow but buses no longer stop at Bigswear Bridge. See pp90-4.
- Monmouth to Redbrook via The Kymin and return along the River Wye** Outstanding 6½-mile (10.5km) circular walk with a climb to the top of The Kymin with fantastic views over Monmouth and the hidden country beyond, followed by a proper pint at The Boat Inn at Redbrook and return along the silvery Wye. A great walk with loads of variety (see p101). Both Monmouth and Redbrook are fairly well served by buses.
- Hay-on-Wye to Newchurch or v/v** North along the Wye at first then through the mysterious glade of Bettws Dingle, this 6½-mile (10.5km) ramble gives a

to pay in larger shops, restaurants and hotels. It's also the ideal means of paying in supermarkets, which usually provide a **cashback** facility. A **cheque book** is useful for those with British bank accounts as a cheque will often be accepted where a card is not, particularly in B&Bs. However, note that supermarkets and many other retailers no longer accept cheques.

MAPS

The hand-drawn maps in this book cover the trail at a scale of 1:20,000; plenty of detail and information to keep you on the right track. The overview maps at the end of the book help to give you the wider picture.

Ordnance Survey (OS;  ordnancesurvey.co.uk) cover the whole route at a scale of 1:25,000 on the following seven maps: Explorer series (the ones with the orange cover) Nos 265, 256, 240, 216, 201, and Outdoor Leisure series (also orange, but double sided) OL13 and OL14. Not all of these are strictly necessary if you pay careful attention to the maps in this guide. This will come as a relief as all seven weigh about 2lb (1kg) and are expensive at £8.99 each. For the sake of safety you should carry the maps of the Clwydian Range (Explorer 265 and 256) and Brecon Beacons National Park (OL13) as the path crosses rugged and hilly terrain where visibility could be restricted. In such conditions


Digital mapping


Most modern smartphones have a GPS chip so you will be able to see your position overlaid onto the digital map on your phone. Almost every device with built-in GPS functionality now has some mapping software available for it. If you want a dedicated GPS unit, Garmin are the best known and have devices from £100.

There are numerous software packages now available that provide Ordnance Survey (OS) maps for a PC, smartphone, tablet or GPS. Maps are supplied by direct download over the Internet. The maps are then loaded into an application, also available by download, from where you can view them, print them and create routes on them. Alternatively, you could just get an annual subscription allowing use of all OS mapping.

Memory Map ( memory-map.co.uk) currently sell OS 1:25,000 mapping covering the whole of Britain for £75.

Anquet ( anquet.com) has the Offa's Dyke Path available for £25.85 using OS 1:25,000 mapping but they also offer subscriptions to all their mapping including OS 1:25,000 maps from £24 per year.

For a subscription of from £2.99 for one month or £19.99 for a year (on their current offer) **Ordnance Survey** ( ordnancesurvey.co.uk) will let you download and then use their UK maps (1:25,000 scale) on a mobile or tablet without a data connection for a specific period.

Harvey ( harveymaps.co.uk) sell their Offa's Dyke map (1:40,000 scale) as a download for £20.49 for use on any device.

Smartphones and GPS devices should complement, not replace, the traditional method of navigation (a map and compass) as any electronic device can break or, if nothing else, run out of battery. Remember that the battery life of your phone will be significantly reduced, compared to normal usage, when you are using the built-in GPS and running the screen for long periods.

Poetry

The poets that have relevance for visitors to the Border Country and North and South Wales include RS Thomas, AE Housman, John Ceiriog Hughes and Gerard Manley Hopkins, all of whose works will be found in anthologies. In Hay-on-Wye the works of these poets can be found in Poetry Bookshop (see p132).

Getting to and from the Offa's Dyke Path

Both Chepstow and Prestatyn, at each end of the trail, are easily reached by train, bus, National Express coach or car. In addition, several of the towns along the trail are also on the rail and coach networks. Where towns are not directly served by train or coach there will almost always be local buses to link you to the rail network. This makes getting to any of the major points along the Offa's Dyke Path by public transport relatively straightforward and this should always be the preferred mode of travel for walkers keen to put as much back into the countryside as they take out.

Getting to Britain

● **By air** Most international airlines serve London Heathrow (heathrow.com) and London Gatwick (gatwickairport.com). A number of budget airlines fly from many of Europe's major cities to the other London terminals at Stansted (stanstedairport.com) and Luton (london-luton.co.uk).

There are also flights from Europe to Bristol (bristolairport.co.uk), Cardiff (cardiff-airport.com) and Birmingham (birminghamairport.co.uk), which are closer to the Offa's Dyke Path than London. For details of airlines and destinations served visit the website for the relevant airport.

● **From Europe by train** Eurostar (eurostar.com) operates a high-speed passenger service via the Channel Tunnel between Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam (and some other cities) and London. In London trains arrive and depart from St Pancras International. St Pancras has connections to the London Underground and to all other main railway stations in London. For more information about rail services from Europe contact your national rail operator, or Railteam (railteam.eu).

● **From Europe by coach** Eurolines (eurolines.eu) works with a huge network of long-distance coach operators connecting many cities in mainland Europe with London, where it links in with the British National Express network (see box p50). Flixbus (formerly Megabus; flixbus.com) also provides services from destinations in mainland Europe to London.

● **From Europe by ferry (with or without a car)** Numerous ferry companies operate routes between the major North Sea and Channel ports of mainland Europe and the ports on Britain's eastern and southern coasts as well as from Ireland to both Wales and England. A useful website for further information is directferries.com.

● **From Europe by car** Eurotunnel (eurotunnel.com) operates a shuttle train service for vehicles via the Channel Tunnel between Calais and Folkestone, taking one hour between the motorway in France and the motorway in Britain.

M&H Coaches (☎ 01745-730700, 📧 mandhcoaches.co.uk)**1/X1** Mold to Ruthin via Llanferres & Llanarmon-yn-Ial,

Mon-Sat 5-6/day (2/day start in Chester)

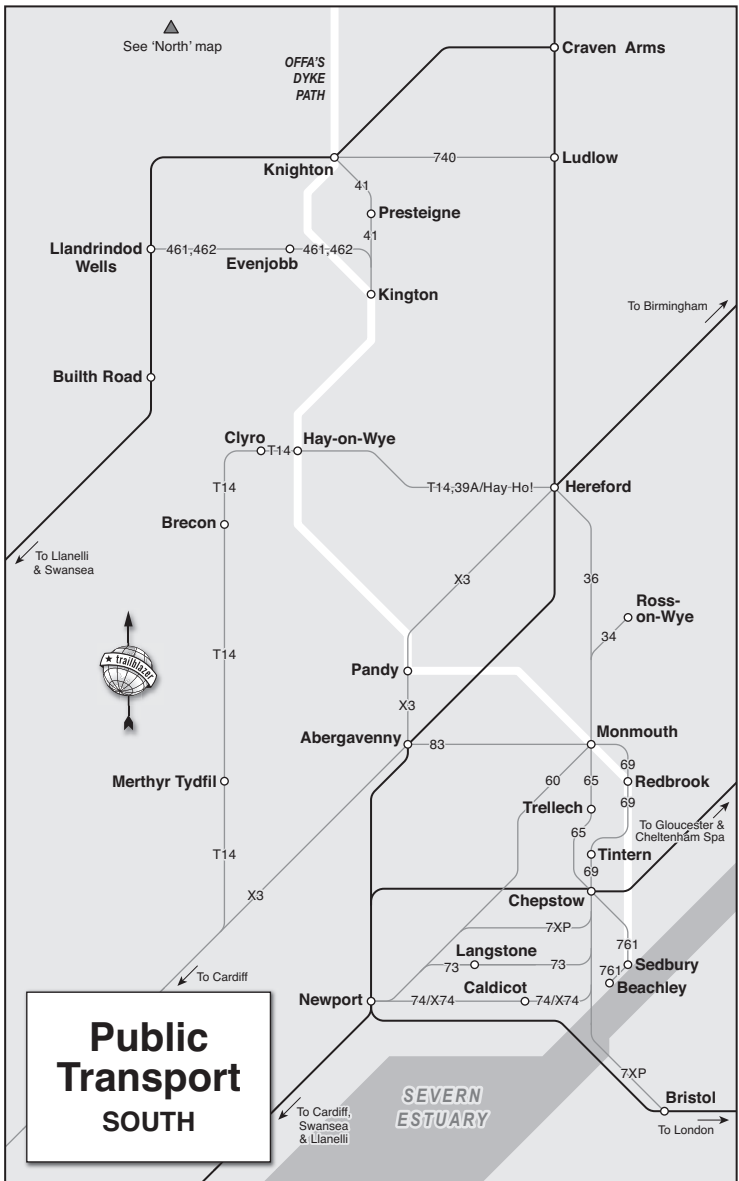
2 Mold to Ruthin via Llanarmon-yn-Ial, Mon-Sat 3-4/day**Minsterley Motors** (☎ 01743-791208, 📧 minsterleymotors.co.uk)**552/553** Shrewsbury to Bishop's Castle, Mon-Fri 6/day, Sat 4/day**Monmouthshire County Council (MCC; 📧 monmouthshire.gov.uk)****65** **Chepstow** to **Monmouth** via Trellech, Mon-Fri 6/day, Sat 4/day**Newport Bus** (☎ 01633-263600, 📧 newportbus.co.uk)**60** **Monmouth** to Newport, Mon-Fri 7-8/day, Sat 6/day, Sun 2/day**73** Newport to **Chepstow** via Langstone, Mon-Fri 13/day, Sat 10/day**X74** Newport to **Chepstow** via Caldicot, Mon-Sat approx 1/hr
(see Stagecoach for Sun service)**P&O Lloyd** (☎ 01352-710682, 📧 polloydcoaches.co.uk)**14** Mold to Denbigh via **Bodfari**, Mon-Sat 5/day**Phil Anslow** (☎ 01495-775599, 📧 philanslowcoaches.co.uk)**69** **Chepstow** to **Monmouth** via Tintern & Redbrook,

Mon-Fri approx 1/hr, Sat 6/day

Sargeants (☎ 01544-230481, 📧 sargeantsbros.com)**41** Kington to Knighton via Presteigne, Mon-Sat 5-6/day**461/462** Llandrindod Wells to **Kington** via Evenjobb, Mon-Sat 10-11/day
Kington to Hereford, Mon-Sat 10-11/day**Stagecoach** (📧 stagecoachbus.com)**36** Hereford to **Monmouth**, Mon-Sat 6/day

(connects with 34 Monmouth to Ross-on-Wye)

74 Newport to **Chepstow** via Caldicot, Sun 6/day (see Newport Bus for Mon-Sat)**83** **Monmouth** to Abergavenny, Mon-Sat 6/day, Sun 3/day**T14** Hereford to Cardiff via **Hay-on-Wye**, Clyro, Brecon & Merthyr Tydfil,
Mon-Fri 3/day plus 2-3/day to Brecon and 1/day to Merthyr Tydfil,
Sat 3/day plus to Brecon and 1/day to Merthyr Tydfil**X3** Hereford to Cardiff via **Pandy** & Abergavenny,
Mon-Sat 5/day plus 4/day Abergavenny to Cardiff**Tanat Valley Coaches** (☎ 01691-780212, 📧 tanat.co.uk)**64** Llangollen to Llanarmon Dyffryn Ceiriog (aka Llanarmon DC) via
Froncysyllte, Chirk & Glyn Ceiriog, Mon-Sat 3/day plus 2/day to Glyn
Ceiriog**72** Oswestry to Llanfyllin via **Llanymynech**, Mon-Sat 2/day**74** Llanfyllin to Shrewsbury via **Llanymynech** & **Four Crosses**, Mon-Sat 2/day**79A** Llangynog to Oswestry via **Trefonen** & Morda, Mon-Sat 1-2/day**558** Shrewsbury to **Montgomery**, Mon-Sat 4/day**T12** Machynlleth to Wrexham via Newtown, Montgomery, **Fornden**, **Kingswood**,
Welshpool, **Four Crosses**, **Llanymynech**, Morda, Oswestry & Chirk,
Mon-Sat 2/day (see Lloyds Coaches for additional services)**Yeoman Travel** (📧 hayhobus.org.uk)**39A/Hay Ho!** Hereford to **Hay-on-Wye**, Sun & Bank Hols Mon 3/day



PLANNING YOUR WALK

Public Transport SOUTH

HISTORY, ENVIRONMENT & NATURE

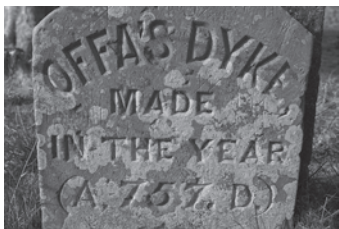
Historical background

Colin Vickerman

Who was Offa?

Offa became king of Mercia in 757AD, when he took the crown after a turbulent period of civil war, which included the murder of his predecessor by his own bodyguard. He rose to become the greatest monarch and ruler of the most powerful kingdom in Britain since the departure of the last Roman soldiers in 406AD. Of all the Anglo-Saxon kings, he was surpassed by only one: his successor Alfred the Great. Like all rulers of his time, Offa was ruthless in defending himself and attempting to extend his kingdom of Mercia, the largest of England's seven kingdoms. He bullied his weaker neighbours to the extent of having the king of the East Angles put to death while the king was his guest. Under his rule, Mercia came to cover the greater part of England, from the Thames to the Humber. In his attempts to subdue the Welsh, too, he made two brutal invasions of southern Wales but failed to establish a firm foothold there. It was after the second attempt that he seems to have decided to build a permanent barrier along the troubled frontier.

For all his limitations it would be wrong to dismiss Offa as no more than a particularly brutal but successful war lord. Although written records of his reign are very scanty and (particularly unfortunate from the point of view of this guide) non-existent as far as the building of the Dyke is concerned, there is evidence to reveal him as a leading figure in the Western Europe of his day. In the first-known correspondence between any two European rulers about trade between their countries, the great Charlemagne addressed him uniquely as 'Dearest brother ... recognising you as not simply a most



© Jim Mamborpe



the Mercian officials would probably have been allowed discretion to negotiate with them over the final course of the Dyke, taking into account local settlements, trade and other contacts. The best ways of dealing with water courses and river crossings, steep hillsides and so forth also had to be decided, recognising that the best route might involve some increase in the length of the Dyke, again as one can easily make out as one walks along the path.

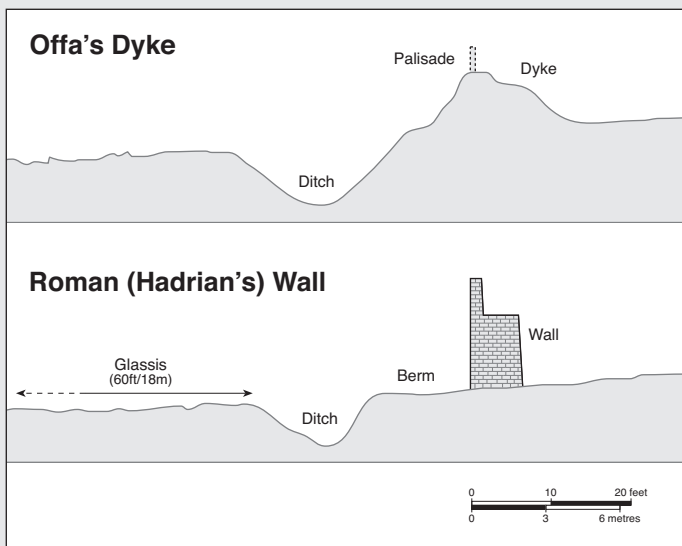
Building Once the exact line had been decided, using beacons to establish the correct alignment between adjacent sections, it would be marked out with stakes and finally a ploughed furrow. If the terrain made ploughing impossible

□ Construction of the Dyke

Comparisons are inevitably made between Offa's Dyke and the much more famous Hadrian's Wall, even to the extent of suggestions that Offa took the Roman fortification as his model. However, there is virtually nothing in the Dyke to support this. The difference between the two kinds of fortification was emphasised by Bede in his *History of the English Church and People*, written 50 years or so before Offa became king of Mercia:

'A wall is built of stone but an earthwork ... is built with sods cut from the earth and raised well above ground level, fronted by the ditch from which the sods were taken and topped by a strong timber palisade.'

This is a fair description of the way in which Offa's Dyke was to be built (see diagram), although excavations have yet to reveal evidence of a palisade.



❑ Maintenance of Offa's Dyke Path

The **Offa's Dyke Path Management Service** looks after the running of this national trail, fixing broken stiles and bridges, dealing with erosion and making sure the route is well signposted.

Any problems encountered along the way should be reported to the trail officer, Rob Dingle (☎ 01597-827580, ✉ rob.dingle@powys.gov.uk).

Path you'll walk beside the Llangollen Canal and Montgomery Canal for a distance; **The Wildlife Trusts** (🌐 wildlifetrusts.org) is an umbrella organisation that brings together the work of 47 individual Wildlife Trusts, of which there are six in Wales, and 36 across England; the trusts advise on wildlife-friendly land management; and the **Woodland Trust** (🌐 woodlandtrust.org.uk) aims to conserve, restore and re-establish trees, particularly broadleaved ones.

Increasing interest in environmental issues both from the public and the media in recent years underlines a greater awareness that such issues affect us all, and should not just be left to government agencies. What is emerging is the most powerful lobbying group of all: an informed electorate.

Flora and fauna

Perhaps more than any other British national trail, the Offa's Dyke Path runs through a wide diversity of landscape and habitats that play host to a rich and varied wildlife. The path passes from wooded hillside to canal towpath, from the swooping ridges of the Clwydian Hills to the Severn plain. It therefore offers opportunities for seeing a wide range of wildlife and wild flowers, both familiar and unfamiliar.

It would take a considerable library to do justice to the flora and fauna that you're likely to encounter on the way, so this can serve only as a brief introduction to the trail's most common species. Many of the B&Bs along the trail have field guides and environmental magazines that you can read at the end of the day's walk, while for additional input, the list of field guides on p45 should point you in the right direction.

In order to understand an environment it is important to appreciate the interactions between the plants and animals that inhabit it – and the impact of man on this fragile relationship. If a greater awareness of these issues leads to an improvement in the way that we as walkers treat the countryside, and thus to our attitudes to conservation, that can only be a good thing.

TREES

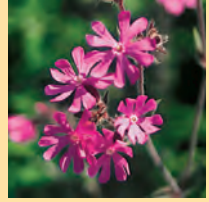
It's encouraging to see the wide diversity of trees growing in areas alongside the Dyke, with efforts being made to replant cleared plantations by introducing



Common Vetch
Vicia sativa



Harebell
Campanula rotundifolia



Red Campion
Silene dioica



Lousewort
Pedicularis sylvatica



Germander Speedwell
Veronica chamaedrys



Common Dog Violet
Viola riviniana



Common Fumitory
Fumaria officinalis



Heather (Ling)
Calluna vulgaris



Bell Heather
Erica cinerea



Foxglove
Digitalis purpurea



Rosebay Willowherb
Epilobium angustifolium



Early Purple Orchid
Orchis mascula



Rowan (tree)
Sorbus aucuparia



Dog Rose
Rosa canina



Forget-me-not
Myosotis arvensis



Scarlet Pimpernel
Anagallis arvensis



Self-heal
Prunella vulgaris



Herb-Robert
Geranium robertianum



Ramsons (Wild Garlic)
Allium ursinum



Common Hawthorn
Crataegus monogyna



Bluebell
Hyacinthoides non-scripta



Common Knapweed
Centaurea nigra



Yarrow
Achillea millefolium



Hogweed
Heracleum sphondylium

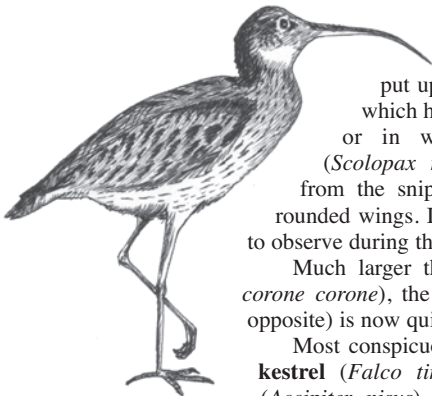
Open farmland and upland areas

The two birds you're most likely to see are the **wheatear** (*Oenanthe oenanthe*), the male of which has a steel grey back and crown and often bows and flicks its tail and perches on walls or rocks, and the **stonechat** (*Saxicola torquata*), much smaller and darker in plumage and identifiable by its call, a single sharp 'teck'.

Among the smaller birds seen on open moorland are the **meadow pipit** (*Anthus pratensis*) and the **skylark** (*Alauda arvensis*), which is often heard long before it is seen, its clear song delivered as it soars overhead. You may also see the **ring ouzel** (*Turdus torquatus*) which looks like a blackbird but with a white bib. In autumn huge flocks of **redwings** (*Turdus iliius*) and **fieldfares** (*Turdus pilaris*) fly over from Scandinavia to feed on the berries.



LAPWING/PEEWIT
L: 320MM/12.5"



CURLEW
L: 600MM/24"



SKYLARK
L: 185MM/7.25"

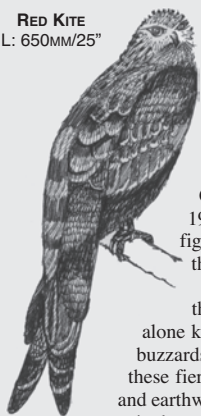
Pheasants (*Phasianus colchicus*), **partridges** (*Perdix perdix*) and **lapwings** (*Vanellus vanellus*) are likely to be seen practically everywhere. In summer in upland areas the bird whose bubbling call will first alert you before you spot its characteristic flight is Britain's largest wader, the **curlew** (*Numenius arquata*), a large brown bird with a long down-curved bill that is as at home in moorland as on the coast.

The **oystercatcher** (*Haematopus ostralegus*) is another perhaps surprising wader that is quite common in the breeding season, with its distinctive black-and-white plumage and orange pointed bill and legs. You may also put up a **snipe** (*Gallinago gallinago*), which has a zig-zag flight when flushed, or in wooded areas the **woodcock** (*Scolopax rusticola*), easily distinguished from the snipe by its larger size and more rounded wings. Its camouflage makes it difficult to observe during the day.

Much larger than the **carriion crow** (*Corvus corone corone*), the **raven** (*Corvus corax*, see box opposite) is now quite common in upland areas.

Most conspicuous of the birds of prey are the **kestrel** (*Falco tinnunculus*), the **sparrowhawk** (*Accipiter nisus*) and the much larger **buzzard** (*Buteo buteo*), with its brown colouring and cruel yel-

RED KITE
L: 650MM/25"



☐ The Red Kite

Red kites were common throughout Britain centuries ago and were known to scavenge the streets of London but they have since been shot, trapped or poisoned to the extent that by the end of the 19th century they had retreated to a tiny colony in Wales. They were saved from extinction by a dedicated group of conservationists and, with the help of the Nature Conservancy Council, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and the RSPB, they were re-introduced from 1989 onwards. The project was a great success and the latest figures we have are that there are now 1800 breeding pairs in the UK.

Although it is commonly believed that kites feed on lambs, they do not have the strength to tear the carcass of a lamb, let alone kill a live animal. They will feed on scraps left by crows and buzzards but wait their turn, knowing better than to get involved with these fiercer birds. The main prey of kites is small mammals, insects and earthworms: it has been estimated that a growing kite consumes the equivalent each day of a small rabbit.

Offa's Dyke walkers will have no trouble spotting a kite – they're quite numerous in the skies above the path these days. The main problem is actually distinguishing them from the even more common buzzard, a similar-sized bird though one that looks heavier and is less graceful in flight. Get a close enough view of the kite and you'll also be able to spot its distinguishing features, namely its deeply forked tail and the reddish-brown-to-dull-orange plumage. Nevertheless, the RSPB continues to put the red kite on its 'amber' list, meaning it's a species with an 'unfavourable conservation status in Europe', largely due to its historical decline.

For further information see [☐ welshkitetrust.wales](http://welshkitetrust.wales).

low talons. **Red kites** (*Milvus milvus*) can now be seen once again in mid-Wales; their forked tails distinguish them quite clearly from other birds of prey in flight; see also box above.

If you're very lucky you may even spot the **merlin** (*Falco columbarius*) which has a darkish bluish back and tail and flies fast and low over the ground chasing pipits and larks.

There's also a large population of **redstarts** (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*) in Wales and you may see the tell-tale flash of the male's orange tail as it flits amongst hedgerows and bushes, especially near Eglwyseg Crags.

*Disgwylfa Hill is a gift from God
Or whomever you believe in
Please cherish it as we do
Don't dump your scrap or tin*

*We wish to preserve the beauty
Of this green and pleasant land
So don't be selfish have a heart
And help us make a stand*

*This is a heartfelt message
To all you lazy dumpees
Take away your rubbish and litter
Don't leave it here, PLEASE*

*For those of you who do not care
And ignore our message too
Just remember that these hills
have eyes
And they are watching YOU.*

Posted on a stile on the trail

MINIMUM IMPACT & OUTDOOR SAFETY

3

Minimum-impact walking

Walk as if you are kissing the Earth with your feet

Thich Nhat Hanh *Peace is every step*

The countryside through which you pass when walking the Offa's Dyke Path holds a fascination and an appeal that has attracted visitors since tourism first began. Perhaps its juxtaposition of attractive towns and easily accessible countryside makes it an ideal area for a short or long visit to recharge your batteries and call a temporary halt to the pace of life. However, as more and more people enjoy the freedom of open country so the land comes under increasing pressure and the potential for conflict with other land-users is heightened. Everyone has a right to this natural heritage but with it comes a responsibility to care for it too. By following some simple guidelines while walking you can have a positive impact, not just on your own well-being but also on local communities and the environment, thereby becoming part of the solution.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

By choosing a walking holiday you have already made a positive step towards minimising your impact on the wider environment. By following these suggestions you can also tread lightly along the path.

Use public transport whenever possible

Using public transport rather than private cars benefits both visitors and locals, as well as the environment. Unfortunately, while local buses (see pp50-1) serve many of the villages through which you pass, it's only occasionally possible to use them at the end of a day (or several days) on the trail to get back to a convenient point. To fill in the gaps, local taxi firms and some B&B proprietors are happy to ferry walkers and/or their luggage around (though this is, of course, the more expensive option). Doing this boosts the local economy too.

Never leave litter

Leaving litter shows a total disrespect for the natural world and others coming after you. As well as being unsightly, litter kills wildlife, pollutes the environment and can be dangerous to farm animals.



Using this guide

The route guide and maps have not been divided into rigid daily stages since people walk at different speeds and have different interests. Some sections fall naturally into full days such as between Kington and Knighton but more often the choice is up to the walker.



The **route summaries** describe the trail between significant places and are shown twice: for walking the path south to north and for walking the path north to south. To enable you to plan your own itinerary **practical information** is presented clearly on the trail maps. This includes walking times, waypoints, places to stay, camp and eat, as well as shops where you can buy supplies. Further service details are given in the text under the entry for each place.

For **map profiles** see the colour pages and **overview maps** at the end of the book. For an overview of this information see 'Itineraries' pp37 and the 'Village and town facilities' table on pp32-5.

TRAIL MAPS

Direction

(See p31 for a discussion of the pros and cons of walking north to south or south to north). In the text and maps that follow, look for the

	N ↑ symbol which indicates information for those walking from Chepstow to Prestatyn and the
	S ↓ symbol with shaded text (also on the maps) for those walking from Prestatyn to Chepstow .

Scale and walking times

The trail maps are to a scale of 1:20,000 (1cm = 200m; 3¹/₈ inches = one mile). Walking times are given along the side of each map and the arrow shows the direction to which the time refers. Black triangles indicate the points between which the times have been taken. **See note on walking times in the box below.** The time-bars are a tool and are not there to judge your walking ability. There are so

Important note – walking times

Unless otherwise specified, **all times in this book refer only to the time spent walking**. You should add 20-30% to allow for rests, photos, checking the map, drinking water etc, not to mention time simply to stop and stare. When planning the day's hike count on 5-7 hours' actual walking.



many variables that affect walking speed, from the weather conditions to how many beers you drank the previous evening. After the first hour or two of walking you will be able to see how your speed relates to the timings on the maps.

Up or down?

The trail is shown as a dotted line ---. An arrow across the trail indicates the slope; two arrows show that it is steep. Note that the arrow points towards the higher part of the trail. If, for example, you are walking from A (at 80m) to B (at 200m) and the trail between the two is short and steep it would be shown thus: A--->>---B. Reversed arrow heads indicate downward gradient.

Other features


Features are marked on the map when pertinent to navigation. In order to avoid cluttering the maps and making them unusable, not all features have been marked each time they occur.



ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation marked on the map is either on or within easy reach of the trail. The details for each place are given in the accompanying text.

The number of **rooms** of each type is stated, ie: **S** = Single, **T** = Twin room, **D** = Double room, **Tr** = Triple room and **Qd** = Quad. Note that most of the triple/quad rooms have a double bed and one/two single beds (or bunk beds). Consequently for a group of three or four, two people would have to share the double bed but it also means the room can be used as a double or twin.

Rates quoted for B&B-style accommodation are **per person (pp)** based on two people sharing a room for a one-night stay; rates are usually discounted for longer stays. Where a single room (**sgl**) is available the rate for that is quoted if different from the rate per person. The rate for single occupancy (**sgl occ**) of a double/twin may be higher, and the per person rate for three/four sharing a triple/quad may be lower. At some places the only option is a **room rate**; this will be the same whether one or two people (or more if permissible) use the room. See box p20 for more information on rates.

The text also mentions whether the bedrooms are **en suite**, or whether **facilities** are **private** or **shared** (in either case this may be a bathroom or shower room just outside the bedroom). In the text  signifies that at least one room has a **bath** – either in an en suite room or in a separate bathroom – for those who prefer a relaxed soak at the end of the day.

Also noted is whether the premises have: **wi-fi** (WI-FI); if **dogs** ( – see also pp245-7) are welcome in at least one room (often places only have one room suitable for dogs), or at campsites, subject to prior arrangement, and any associated requirements; and if **packed lunches** () are available (these must almost always be requested in advance – ie by, or on, the night before).

If arranged in advance many B&B proprietors are happy to collect walkers from the nearest point on the trail and deliver them back again next morning; they may also be happy to transfer your luggage to your next accommodation place on the map. Some may make a charge for either or both of these services.

The route guide



If you're doing this walk in a **northerly direction** (starting in Chepstow and ending in Prestatyn) follow the maps below in an ascending order (from 1 to 86) and the text as below, looking for the **N↑ symbol** on overview text and on map borders.



If you're walking in a **southerly direction** (Prestatyn to Chepstow) follow the maps in a descending order (from 86 to 1) and the text with a **grey background**, looking for the **S↓ symbol** on overview text and on map borders. **Turn to p240 to start your walk in this direction.**



SEDBURY CLIFFS TO CHEPSTOW

MAP 1, p86

The initial **1½-mile (2km, 30-45mins)** stretch from Sedbury Cliffs to the outskirts of Chepstow is a rather ignominious introduction to this superb walk and should certainly not be taken as any indication of what is to come.

In the shadow of the Severn Bridge sits the stone that marks the symbolic beginning of your 177-mile odyssey. Despite the stone stating that there are 168 miles between here and Prestatyn, where via riverbank, hill and towpath your journey will end, be assured – there are 177 miles to go.

Choosing to start at the southern end of the path means that you are immediately astride the Dyke (unlike the northern end where you won't see evidence of the Dyke until Castle Mill) and the trail teases you; conspiring with the ancient rampart to take you through fields and past **Buttington Tump** before anti-climatically entering suburbia – although, be assured, once you clear Chepstow and its environs, things will dramatically liven up. Be sure to follow closely either the maps in this book or the acorns dotted on lampposts and gates along this initial stretch as once you re-enter civilisation following this briefest of dices with the Dyke the path can catch you out if you're not vigilant.

Sedbury is on James Bevan Coaches' No 761 bus route (see pp49-53) and there is a Spar (Mon-Sat 7am-11pm, Sun 8am-10.30pm) with a post office but little else. *[Next route overview p90]*

CHEPSTOW (CAS-GWENT)

Map 1a, p88

*He who by land would enter
Chepstow Town*

Must quit his horse, and

lead him gently down (Engraved in the paving just below the Town Arch)

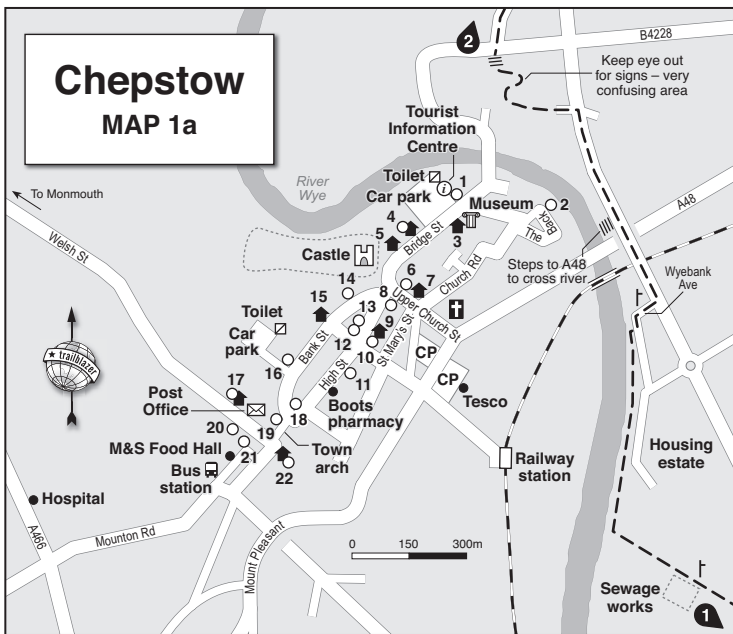
If Chepstow is your first port of call on Offa's Dyke Path then take inspiration from those you see arriving from the North; if that is you, then journey's end is in sight. If

you've walked all the way from Prestatyn you should feel in tune with the engraving on the pavement by Chepstow's Town Arch, which manfully resists the traffic pollution as it has done for four hundred years. A good bypass keeps through traffic away from the town centre, where a one-way system circulates around a central pedestrian area.

Chepstow offers everything the over-nighter could need, from accommodation to

Chepstow

MAP 1a



Where to stay

- 3 Woodfield Arms
- 4 Three Tuns Inn
- 5 Ty'r Castell B&B
- 7 The First Hurdle
- 9 The Beaufort Hotel
- 15 Greenman Backpackers
- 17 Coach & Horses
- 22 The George

Where to eat and drink

- 1 Panevino
- 2 Riverside Wine Bar
- 3 Woodfield Arms
- 4 Three Tuns Inn
- 6 Stone Rock
- 8 The Bell Hanger
- 10 Coffee #1
- 11 Greggs Bakery
- 12 Picnic

- 13 Lime Tree
- 14 The Orange Crate
- 16 Red Lantern
- 17 Coach & Horses
- 18 The Peppermill
- 19 Pye Corner & White Lion
- 20 Mythos
- 21 No 12 Fish 'n' Chips
- 22 The George

For those on a budget, **Greenman Backpackers** (☎ 01291-626773 or 07870-611979, 📧 greenmanbackpackers.co.uk/chepstow-accommodation; WI-FI), 13 Beaufort Sq, is ideal. As well as dorm beds (2 x 6, 2 x 4, all shared facilities, 1 x 5 en suite; £22pp; sgl occ of dorm from £30) there are also three double en suite rooms (£65 per room) and two twin rooms (can be Tr/Quad) with private facilities (£55-75 per room). All prices include a self-service continental breakfast and there is a large TV

lounge and a bar (Thur-Sat noon-11.30pm) to relax in.

B&B-wise, **The First Hurdle Guest House** (☎ 01291-622189, 📧 thefirsthurdle.com; 5D/ST/2S, all en suite; ♥; WI-FI), 9-10 Upper Church St, is a deceptively spacious establishment where B&B costs from £35pp (sgl occ £70).

Closer to the river and with views of the castle, **Ty'r Castell** (☎ 01291-627191 or ☎ 07977-038027 or ☎ 07958-207580, 📧 tyrcastellbandbchepstow.co.uk; 1D en suite,

01291-628300, ☒ theriversidewinebar.co.uk; Mon-Thur 10.30am-11pm, Fri & Sat to midnight), a Spanish tapas bar with dishes for £3.95-5.95. Main meals such as Brazilian spicy prawns (£13.95) are also an option.

Centrally, **Lime Tree** (☎ 01291-620959; Mon-Fri 9am-9pm, Sat & Sun 8.30am-9pm) has an interesting and diverse menu (for example, Pimm's salad for £8), well worth checking out, and **The Peppermill** (☎ 01291-630572, ☒ peppermillchepstow.co.uk; Sun noon-3pm, Mon-Fri noon-2pm, Sun-Fri 6-10pm, Sat noon-10pm) is also worth considering (steaks £14.95-24.95).

If you fancy something different, head for **Mythos** (☎ 01291-627222, ☒ themythos.co.uk; Tue-Thur noon-midnight, Fri & Sat noon-2am, Sun 5pm-midnight) and feast on Greek specialities such as moussaka (£11.95); the rest of the menu is magnificent too.

If you just want a chippie, you'll find **No 12 Fish 'n' Chips** (Mon-Sat opens 11.30am, closes Mon 10.30pm, Tue & Thur 10pm, Wed 9.30pm, Fri & Sat midnight, Sun noon-9pm) next to the bus station and there's a Chinese, **Red Lantern** (☎ 01291-627726; daily 5.30-11.15/30pm) centrally too.



CHEPSTOW TO SEDBURY CLIFFS

MAP 1, p86

The final **1½ miles (2km, 30-45mins)** from the bridge over the A48 to Sedbury Cliffs gets off to a poor start, a rather ignominious end to a superb walk. The trail takes you along suburban streets, past a sewage works and into more streets, before eventually emerging in fields at **Buttington Tump**. From here, though, you are back on top of the Dyke, able to celebrate the last few yards with a triumphant, albeit often muddy, climb to the edge of the Severn Estuary and the stone that marks the symbolic end of your 177-mile journey – even if the engraving on the stone states that you've completed just 168 of them! If you've carried a pebble all the way from Prestatyn, toss it into the estuary from the top of the cliffs – a fence bars your way down to the foreshore and there's little to draw you down there.

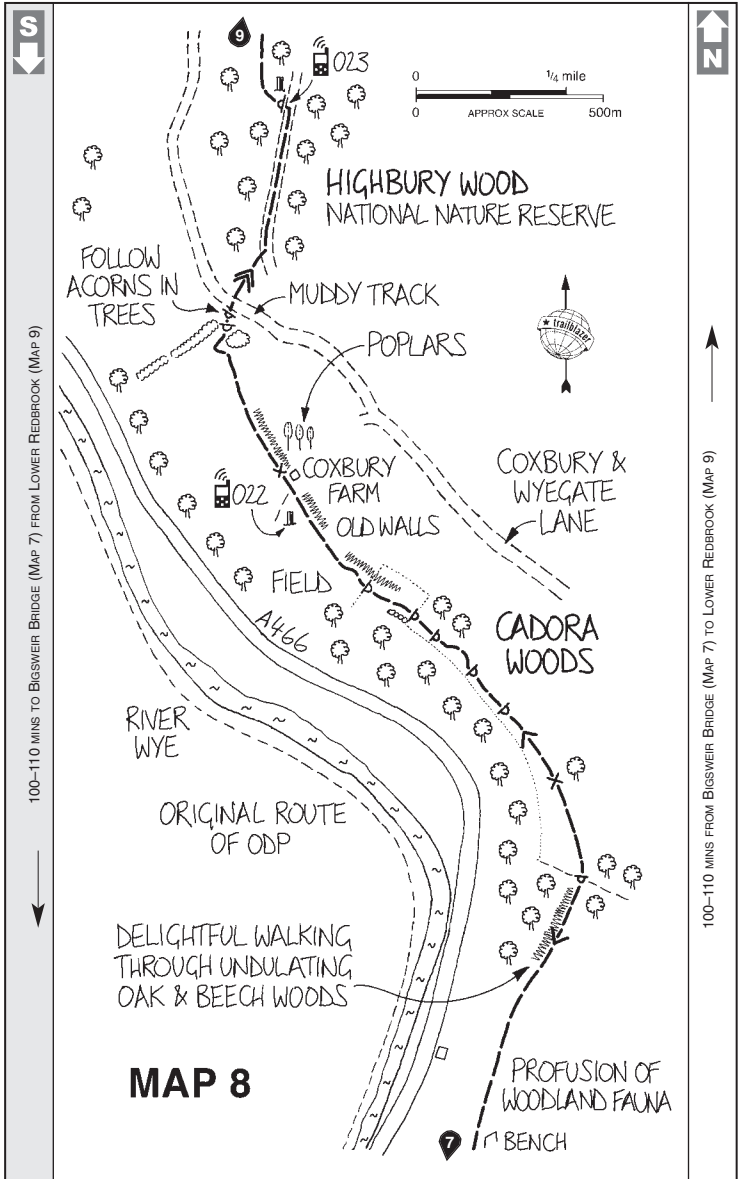
Sedbury is on James Bevan Coaches' No 761 bus route (see pp49-53) and there is a Spar and a post office but little else. So, unless you just happen to have a bottle of champagne and a picnic in your rucksack, you'll probably want to return to the pubs of Chepstow to celebrate your achievement and contemplate the ups and downs, literal and metaphorical, of this magnificent walk.

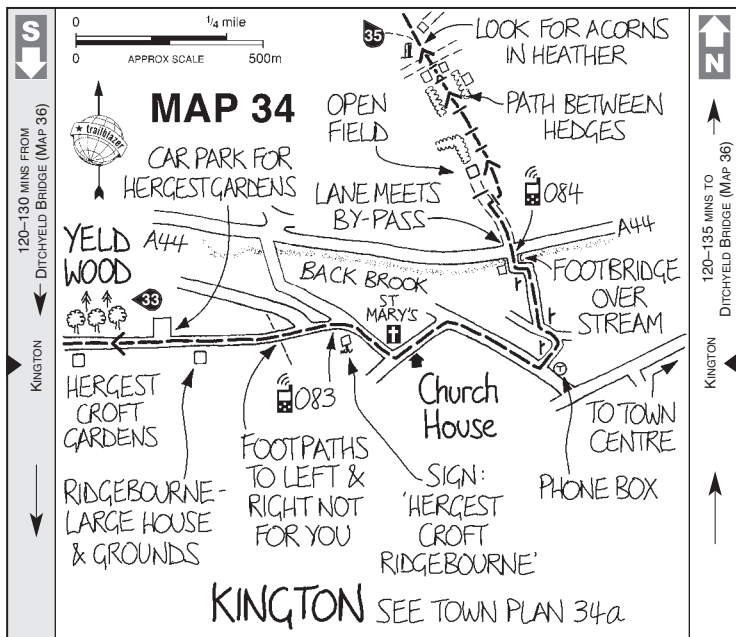


CHEPSTOW TO MONMOUTH

MAPS 1-10

[Route section begins on Map 1, p86] This **16½-mile (27km, 9hrs 25mins-10hrs 10mins)** section is long and can be arduous. Don't forget that the walk from Sedbury Cliffs (see p85) will make this an 18-mile opener to Offa's Dyke Path, and with that in mind and despite your thirst to trek northwards, as your first day on the trail you may wish to split this into two stages in order to ease in your ankles and ameliorate your calves. Tintern is a fine option for an overnight stop. Stopping there, you may feel that you have not ambled overly far, but this feeling will soon dissipate as the path sucks you in: don't forget that there are some long, hard – but ultimately, rewarding – days to come, and that this early stop may be the decision that ensures your success in completing the whole trail.





Taxis are available from Julie's Cabs (☎ 07899-846592).

Services

As with so many towns along the Dyke, Kington has all the essentials that the walker might need.

The **tourist information centre** (☎ 01544-230778, kingtontourist.info; Easter-Sep Mon-Sat 10am-4.30pm, Oct Mon-Sat 10am-4pm) is on Church St. The volunteer staff are very helpful and they have plenty of leaflets and suggested walks.

The High St has **cashpoints**, as does the large Co-op **supermarket** (Mon-Sat 7am-11pm, Sun 10am-4pm) off Mill St. There's a second supermarket, Nisa (Mon-Sat 8am-8pm, Sun 9am-6pm), on High St, and a third, Spar (Mon-Sat 7am-11pm, Sun 8am-11pm), on Church St.

There's a **pharmacy**, Rowlands (Mon-Fri 9am-1pm & 1.30-6.30pm, Sat to 5pm only) on High St and there is a **launderette**

(Mon-Sun 7.30am-9pm) near the **post office** on Bridge St.

For **walking/camping gear** including maps, The Walking Hub is opposite the clock tower; contact Ali there (☎ 07756-172160) regarding what hours the shop is open. The shop is quite limited stock-wise so if there's something particular that you need you may need to check with Ali that she stocks it.

Market day is Tuesday and **early closing day** for many independent shops is Wednesday – and, believe me, when they say 'early' closing they mean it. Many of these shops shut on Saturday afternoon, too, though the main supermarkets stay open.

Where to stay

YHA Kington (bookings ☎ 0800-019 1700 or ☎ 01629-592700 or online, general ☎ 0345-371 9053, yha.org.uk/hostel/yha-kington; 28 beds – 1 x 2-, 1 x 3-, 4 x 4-beds,

2 x 5 beds, some rooms have double beds and some are en suite), on Victoria Rd, is the nearest hostel to the path and only a short walk off route. It's housed in a renovated cottage hospital on the edge of town but is self-catering only. There are laundry facilities and a drying room. Beds cost from £15pp (private rooms from £25). Credit/debit cards are accepted.

Camping is available at *Fleece Meadow Campsite* (☎ 01544-231235; Apr to end Oct), Mill St, on the River Arrow. It's owned by Sargeants Buses and is next to their depot; it's an efficient site with toilet & shower facilities and they charge £8pp.

B&B-wise, our favourite is the delightful *Old House* (☎ 01544-239127, ☐ theoldhousebandb.wordpress.com; 1D/1T each with their own private facilities; ☹; WI-FI; 🐾), a lovely place where guests have their own lounge, there's a terrific veranda overlooking the pleasant garden and the neighbouring cattle market – and the breakfasts are great. B&B costs from £35pp (£40 sgl occ) and it is highly recommended.

The elegant *Church House* (☎ 01544-230534, ☐ churchhousekington.co.uk, Church Rd; 1T/1D, shared bathroom; ☹; WI-FI; 🐾; 🚰) is right on the route, only a short walk from the centre of town and costs from £40pp (sgl occ £50-55).

By the River Arrow is the appropriately named *Arrowbank Lodge* (☎ 01544-231115, ☐ arrowbanklodge.co.uk; 2D en suite/1T private facilities; ☹; WI-FI; Apr-Oct), down a track (Tanyard Lane) off the bridge over the river. A little way from the path, nevertheless they are used to catering for walkers and have the full complement of facilities. B&B costs £37.50-42.50pp (sgl occ £50).

'Eco-friendly' B&B can be found at *Castle Hill House* (☎ 01544-209066, ☐ castlehillhousekington.co.uk; 1T/2D/1Tr en suite; ☹; 🚰; WI-FI; from £40pp, sgl occ £70); the owners here can organise massages should your muscles feel in need of rejuvenation (30 mins £35, 60 mins £55, 90 mins £80), although note that there is generally a two-night minimum stay policy at the weekend. They also offer luggage transfer.

The Walking Hub (☎ 07756-172160, ☐ kingtonwalkinghub.com; 2D/1T bunkbeds, shared facilities; ☹; WI-FI; 🚰; 🐾; Apr-Dec), opposite the clocktower, is a great option for walkers and has been set up specifically to cater to their requirements. Rates (from £38pp, sgl occ £65) include a self-service continental breakfast.

On the path as it makes its way through town is *The Swan Hotel* (☎ 01544-239433, ☐ theswanonthesquare.co.uk; 3S/2T, all en suite; WI-FI; 🐾; from £35pp, sgl £50). A pub with rooms worth considering is *The Oxford Arms* (☎ 01544-230322, ☐ the-oxford-arms.co.uk; 3T/3D, mix en suite & private facilities; ☹; WI-FI; 🐾; £35-37.50pp, sgl occ £50-55).

Where to eat and drink

Kington has a declining array of eateries but you won't go hungry.

Café-wise, centrally, *Border Bean* (☎ 01544-231625; Mon-Sat 9am-5pm; WI-FI) has friendly staff and a small but tasty menu including, unusually but delightfully, Marmite on toast (£1.50). Almost opposite is *Regency Café* (☎ 01544-231344; Tue-Fri 7am-5pm, Sat 7am-4pm), High St, which opens early.

A similar service is offered by *Sally's Pantry* (☎ 01544-239000; summer Mon-Sat 8am-5pm, winter Mon-Sat 9am-4pm), a really lovely place with great sandwiches and fresh coffee served in the tearoom; the only disadvantage with this place is its location, on Bridge St outside the town centre. You could also try *Grumpie Grumpies Café & Takeaway* (sandwiches, paninis, hot rolls; from 10am), Bridge St, if the others are full.

Evening dining in Kington is not likely to be an experience to remember but there are three pubs worth considering.

The Swan (see Where to stay; food Wed-Mon noon-2pm, Wed-Sat 6-9pm) is reasonably priced and has a pleasant atmosphere (mains: daytime £5.95-9.95, evening £8.95-£15.95). They also serve a lunchtime menu including sandwiches (£4.50).

At the other end of the town centre, *Oxford Arms* (see Where to stay) is a

friendly, locals' place which serves simple pub grub (food daily noon-2.30pm & 6-9pm) with main meals for around a tenner, real ale, and a good selection of vegetarian options.

Ye Olde Tavern (off Map 34a; ☎ 01544-231945; bar Mon-Thur 6.30pm-midnight, to 10.30pm on Mon in winter, Fri 3.30pm-midnight, Sat & Sun noon to midnight), near the bypass on Victoria Rd, is a proper olde worlde pub serving Wye Valley (see box p24), Hobsons, Ludlow and a guest beer, the food is popular, however the hours are more limited (Thur-Mon 6.30-8.30pm) than some of your other options.

The Burton Hotel (☎ 01544-230323, 📧 hotelherefordshire.co.uk; food daily noon-9.30pm; Wi-Fi) is highly thought of, with mains in the restaurant for £11.95-21.25. Food is available all day but there is a reduced menu 2-6pm.

There's fast food, with a reliable chippy, **Angel Fish Bar**, on Bridge St, and **Kingston Fish & Chips**, on the High St, to choose from.

For Chinese try **Bamboo Garden** (☎ 01544-231089; Tue-Thur & Sun 5-10pm, Fri & Sat to 10.45pm) on Church St; and for Indian, **Taj Mahal** (☎ 01544-231999; Wed-Mon 6.30-10.30/11pm). Both do takeaway.



KINGTON TO HAY-ON-WYE

MAPS 34-27

[Route section begins on Map 34, p145] This **14½-mile (23km, 6hrs 20mins -7hrs 20mins)** walk includes possibly the best part of the entire trail, the route over **Hergest Ridge** (Map 33), an open common grazed by sheep and wild ponies. From the ridge there are lovely views of the Shropshire Hills and ahead to Hay Bluff and the Black Mountains, the next day's challenge.

The going is delightfully easy on springy turf, cropped by sheep for centuries and indeed raced on in the past. Farmers cut the bracken on the ridge and bale it like they do grass elsewhere, but not for fodder – it's poisonous. Instead, it is used as bedding for their animals. Once the bracken has been cut, the grass can grow through more freely, thus improving the grazing.

Beyond the tiny village of **Gladestry** (Map 32), more open country follows as the trail crosses the much smaller expanse of the **Disgwyfla Hill** (Map 30), before descending to **Newchurch** (Map 30).

Towards the latter stages of the day is **Bettws Dingle** (Map 28), a dark and shaded glen sadly blighted, at least on the first half, by some indiscriminate tree felling. When you emerge on to the A438 you have to walk along the verge, but fortunately it's not long before you cross over to meet the languorous **River Wye**. Instead of a riverside walk, there follows a series of fields before the trail returns to the river on the edge of the book town of **Hay-on-Wye (Map 27, p131)**. After a longish day, it's likely to be time to head straight for your accommodation, leaving a browse among the dusty volumes until later.

[Next route overview p137]

☐ Important note – walking times

Unless otherwise specified, **all times in this book refer only to the time spent walking**. You will need to add 20-30% to allow for rests, photography, checking the map, drinking water etc. When planning the day's hike count on 5-7 hours' actual walking.



KINGTON TO KNIGHTON

MAPS 34-40

[Route section begins on Map 34, p145] This **13½-mile (22km, 6hrs-6hrs 55mins)** section fits conveniently into a day's walking, inconveniently book-ended by two golf courses. Fortunately, the miles trod between them, away from the purr of golf buggies and the whizz of golf balls, include some marvellous walking, minimal habitation, and plenty of time spent with only the Dyke for company. There are several stretches of the Dyke on view, in places high and formidable and with a well-defined ditch.

Leaving Kington, open hilltops beckon, but first you must negotiate your way to the east of Kington Golf Course: the highest 18-hole course in England. The clubhouse (☎ 01544-230340, 🌐 kingtongolf.co.uk) is surprisingly welcoming to walkers; you can pop in for a bacon roll for £3 (food is available throughout the day from 11am); they have a shop selling waterproof clothing and hats and are also happy for walkers to play a round of golf if they want.

Over **Rushock Hill** (Map 35) you encounter extraordinary scenery, bracken and gorse, heathland and wooded country, that is full of variety, with nothing but the wind and soaring buzzards (with possibly the odd red kite too) for company. More switchbacks follow and more agricultural perambulations with plenty of walking on top of the Dyke. **Dolley Green** (Map 37) is little more than a point on the map but it is close to the attractive little town of **Presteigne** (see p156), worth a detour in its own right if time isn't tight.

Two hills are crossed, **Furrow Hill** and **Hawthorn Hill** (Map 38), fine open airy walking that will raise your spirits and put a spring in your step, before the route becomes agricultural with more of the all-too-familiar stiles to add to your tally and you arrive to the west of the day's second golf course following which a stiff descent leads you into **Knighthon** (Map 40, p155).

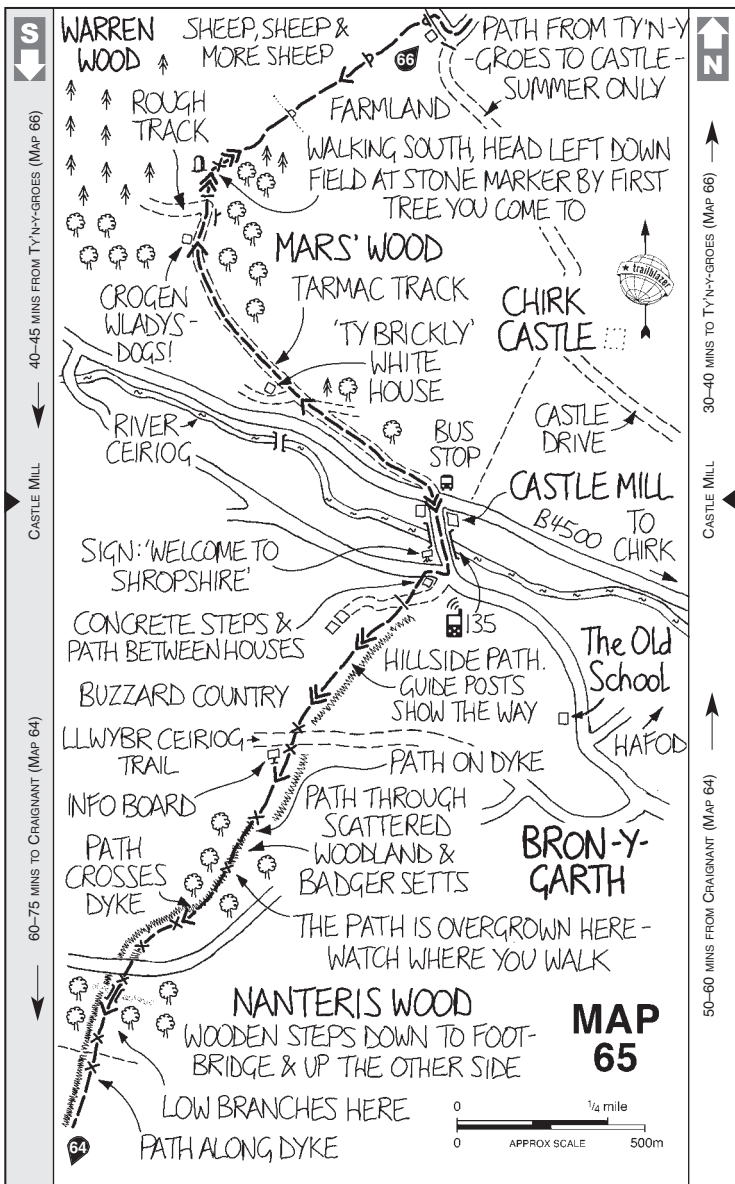
[Next route overview p160]

📌 The Marches

The Marches refers to the border country between England and Wales. Contested and fought over for centuries, the area has now become a kind of peaceable middle ground, partly Welsh, partly English, characterised by its rounded hills, wooded river valleys and secluded fields and lanes.

The term 'March' derives from the Anglo-Saxon word *mearc* meaning simply 'a boundary'. It was William the Conqueror who resolved to sort out the lawless Welsh once and for all by granting Marcher lordships to his followers. These were virtually independent fiefdoms with the authority to act as they saw fit, owing only their final allegiance to the king. They could impose the force of law on the country, raise taxes and build castles, many of which remain in places such as Chepstow, Monmouth, White and Chirk, all milestones along Offa's Dyke Path. The Marcher lords were a significant factor in the control of England and names such as Roger Mortimer, William Fitzosbern and Gilbert de Clare remind us of turbulent times.

Today, with a population described as Anglo-Welsh, the Marches has a unique identity, with the border towns of Oswestry, Montgomery, Knighton, Kington, Presteigne and Hay-on-Wye all ports of call along the Dyke.



BRON-Y-GARTH Map 65, p200

Currently still open, there's **camping** at *The Old School* (☎ 01691-772546), some 20 minutes' walk south-east of the village of **Castle Mill**, for £4pp plus £1 for the use of the shower or bath. Booking is requested and you'll need to have food with you. Note that after September 2019 they may close.

Follow the lane almost opposite the Old School (see Map 65) to reach *Wren Cottage at Hafod* (☎ 01691-778750, ✉ sueefoster@googlemail.com; 1T en suite; WI-FI; 📶; Apr-end Oct). B&B costs from £36pp). If requested in advance an evening meal (£15) is also available.

**CASTLE MILL TO RACECOURSE COMMON****MAPS 65-63**

[Route section begins on Map 65, p200] For most of the next **4½ miles (7km, 2hrs-2hrs 35mins)** you follow the line of **Offa's Dyke** for the first time, sometimes beside it, sometimes on the very top itself, as it climbs steeply away from Castle Mill. The path drops down to **Craignant** (Map 64), a secretive little settlement in the depths of the countryside, and then climbs over the shoulder of **Selattyn Hill**. At the foot of **Baker's Hill** (Map 63) the Dyke leaves you and you are forced to follow the tarmac, a tedious plod, to the crossroads at **Racecourse Common (Map 63, 197)**. Don't worry that you might arrive on race day; the course closed in Victorian times and the turf resounds to the thud of horses' hooves no more.

[Next route overview p195]

**CASTLE MILL TO DINAS BRAN (& LLANGOLLEN)****MAPS 65-69**

[Route section begins on Map 65, p200] This **8½-mile (14km)** section takes about **3hrs 50mins-4½ hrs**. The stage begins by leaving the delightful River Ceiriog, climbing up away from the valley through mixed woodland and farmland and passing the 'garden gate' of **Chirk Castle** (see box below); which allows summertime access to the grounds (Apr-Sep). You join the road here at **Ty'n-y-groes** (Map 66) and although you may no longer be able to walk on the Dyke it remains a companion, skulking amongst a line of trees to your east; until you reach the A5 that is, when the Dyke finally disappears for good.

At **Irish Bridge** (Map 67; presumably built by Irish navvies), where the B5605 crosses the canal, you join the **Llangollen Canal**, which is followed to

Chirk Castle**Map 65, p200**

Chirk Castle (☎ 01691-777701, ✉ nationaltrust.org.uk/chirk; Mar-Oct castle approx 10am-6pm, estate approx 7am-7pm; visit website for winter opening times; entry £12.60, National Trust members free) was built around 1300 by Roger Mortimer and has been lived in by the Myddleton family since 1595. The medieval tower and dungeon stand alongside state rooms dating from the 18th century and a servants' hall where the tables were so arranged that the most important servants sat nearest to the fire. There is also a bedroom in which King Charles I was said to have slept when visiting the castle in 1645. The gardens are delightful with their topiary hedges and views to the surrounding countryside.



CLWYD GATE (FOR LLANFERRES) TO LLANDEGLA

MAPS 75-73

[Route section begins on Map 75, p222] From **Clwyd Gate** (Map 75), for the next **6 miles (10km, 2¾hrs-3hrs 10mins)** the route continues through the southernmost peaks in the **Clwydian Hills** (see box p228), with a final climb to contour round the broad shoulders of **Moel Gyw** (467m/1531ft), and from **Moel Llanfair** (Map 74; 447m/1466ft) to the col between it and **Moel y Plâs** (440m/1443ft), where the road comes up from the peaceful village of **Llanarmon-yn-Ial** (Map 74a). From Moel y Plâs the hills peter out in the valley of the River Alun and Llandegla.

Leaving the hills behind, you follow field paths with some road walking until, at the **River Alun**, you find yourself among water meadows on the approach to the attractive village of **Llandegla** (Map 73, p217), arriving beside the church dedicated to St Tegla after whom the village is named.

[Next route overview p218]



CLWYD GATE (FOR LLANFERRES) TO BODFARI

MAPS 75-81

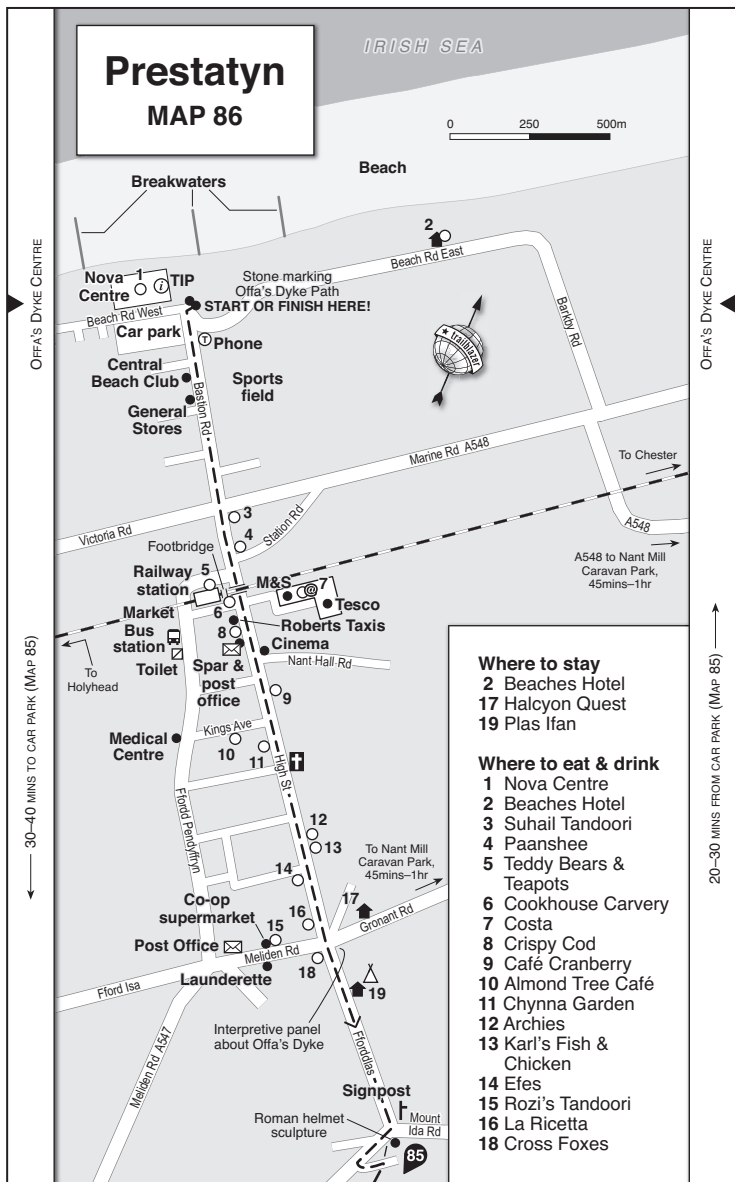
[Route section begins on Map 75, p222] This is a challenging **11-mile (18km, 5½hrs-6hrs 20mins)** stage which involves crossing the northern ranges of the **Clwydian Hills** (see box p228). Traversing the spine of the hills there are several escape routes should you wish to retreat to the safety of a village pub or a warm B&B if the weather closes in.

Leaving the A494, you skirt to the east of **Moel Eithinen** (Map 75; 434m/1424ft) and have the option of ascending a footpath to the summit of **Foel Fenlli** (Map 76; 511m/1676ft), as the path contours its western shoulder. You descend to **Bwlch Penbarra** where there is a **seasonal café** (Maps 76 & 77; **The Hut**; summer 10am-4pm; hours may differ over winter) with hot and cold drinks and ice cream available. You can opt to walk to **Llanferres** (Map 76; see p224; 2 miles; 40-50 mins) from here where bus services (see pp49-53) and a pub can be accessed.

Choosing to continue, you climb **Moel Famau** (Map 77; 555m/1820ft). ‘The mother mountain’, is the highest point of the range and is protected as an AONB (see p60). Its summit is crowned with the squat blockhouse of Jubilee Tower, built in 1810 to mark the jubilee of George III but rebuilt many times since, being no match for the fierce winds (but a welcome shelter for passing walkers). Although you may have been teased with the odd glimpse of the Irish Sea prior to this day, the wind turbines which line Prestatyn’s seafront are in full view from here and you get the sense that the end edges ever closer.

Descending from the tower, the challenges keep on coming, and you pass **Moel Dywyll** (Map 78; 472m/1550ft) and **Moel Llŷs-y-coed** (465m/1524ft).

A dramatic loss in height on each side of **Moel Arthur** (Map 78; 456m/1496ft), a striking, conical hill surmounted by another hill-fort that you’ll miss unless you divert from the path to visit the summit, follows before you top out on the next hill, **Pen-y-Cloddiau** (Map 79; 440m/1442ft), the site of an Iron



Starting from Prestatyn

Start here if you're walking Offa's Dyke Path from Prestatyn to Chepstow. Look for the **S**↓ symbol with shaded overview text (as below) and followed the **S**↓ symbol with the shaded timings text on one edge of each map, working back through the book.

The shaded text **route summaries** below describe the trail between significant places and are written as if walking the path from south to north. To enable you to plan your own itinerary **practical information** is presented clearly on the trail maps. This includes walking times, waypoints, places to stay, camp and eat, as well as shops where you can buy supplies. Further service details are given in the text under the entry for each place. See also p83-4.

For **map profiles** see the colour pages and **overview maps** at the end of the book. For an overview of this information see the 'Itineraries' box on p37 and the 'Village facilities' table on pp32-5.



FROM
PRESTATYN

PRESTATYN TO RHUALLT

MAPS 86-83

[Route section begins on Map 86, p239] Offa's Dyke Path starts on the seafront at **Prestatyn** (Map 86). Traditionally walkers remove their boots and paddle in the sea as an introduction to their walk. Since the act is purely symbolic, there's no need to go barefoot: just go down to the water's edge; that'll do!

After ascending out of the town, this **8-mile (13km, 3½-4¼hrs)** stretch gets off to a fine start across the **Bryn Prestatyn Hillside**, a gorse- and bracken-covered escarpment with fine views to the sea and Snowdonia, as well as to the challenging Clwydian Hills ahead. Most of the walk, though, involves navigating a network of fields, tracks and lanes, and with numerous stiles to cross it should not be underestimated. In the wet it will be slippery in places, particularly in the early stages. However, the waymarking is good and route-finding is unlikely to be a problem though take care leaving Prestatyn where the path initially avoids the obvious trail through Hillside Gardens, past the Roman helmet sculpture, preferring instead to head right (west) along Bishopswood Rd and then left up Hillside. Be warned, too, that there are no places for refreshment along the way so you will need to carry your own water and food.

At **Tai-Marian** (Map 84; Marian Cwm) there are some houses but no services – even the phone's been decommissioned (though the box is still there).

This somewhat agricultural introduction to the trail is not untypical of what you are going to meet as you move south. Field paths, woodland, enclosed lanes, heathland and deep countryside are all encountered, relatively easy terrain for the first day but sufficiently taxing to ensure that you will have tired legs by the time you reach **Rhuallt** (Map 83, p233).

[Next route overview p234]

MAP REF	GPS WAYPOINT	DESCRIPTION
71 145	53°02.270' -03°08.451'	Path leaves/meets road
71 146	53°02.575' -03°09.569'	Cyrn-y-Brain path junction
72 147	53°03.454' -03°11.604'	Llandegla (south)
73 148	53°03.790' -03°12.055'	Llandegla (north)
73 149	53°04.351' -03°12.908'	Cross the B5431
73 150	53°04.348' -03°14.133'	Path joins/leaves road
74 151	53°05.136' -03°14.591'	Path to Llyn Gweryd
74 152	53°06.083' -03°14.819'	Join/leave track; leave/join path on Moel Llanfair
75 153	53°06.885' -03°14.818'	Clwyd Gate
75 154	53°07.566' -03°14.218'	Corner of field
75 155	53°07.773' -03°14.888'	Path junction; sign Moel Fenlli
76/77 156	53°08.148' -03°15.254'	Cross road at Bwlch Penbarra
77 157	53°09.266' -03°15.358'	Jubilee Tower
78 158	53°10.049' -03°16.775'	Cilcain path junction by Moel Famau Country Park sign
78 159	53°10.943' -03°16.664'	Cross road on south side of Moel Arthur
79 160	53°11.508' -03°17.411'	Cross road after leaving / and go through car park on north side of Moel Arthur
80 161	53°12.631' -03°19.049'	Track junction
80 162	53°13.108' -03°20.658'	Path joins/leaves road by Grove Goch
81 163	53°13.221' -03°21.206'	Kissing gate, Bodfari
81 164	53°14.436' -03°21.139'	Lane and path meet by Cefn Du hill
82 165	53°14.866' -03°21.535'	Corner of lane; continue straight
82 166	53°15.381' -03°21.791'	Turn left off / right onto lane
83 167	53°15.916' -03°22.999'	Footbridge over A55
84 168	53°17.269' -03°23.345'	Cross road at Tai-Marian/Marian Cwm; steps
84 169	53°17.761' -03°23.788'	Path crosses lane
84 170	53°18.333' -03°23.637'	Cross A5151
84 171	53°18.666' -03°24.229'	Bend in lane
85 172	53°19.745' -03°23.697'	Path meets/leaves road on edge of Prestatyn

Note: Where two instructions are given above (eg 'Turn onto/off road'), the first is for walkers travelling from Chepstow north and the second for walkers travelling from Prestatyn south.

APPENDIX C – TAKING A DOG

Many are the rewards that await those prepared to make the extra effort required to bring their best friend along the trail. But you shouldn't underestimate the amount of work involved. Indeed, just about every decision you make will be influenced by the fact that you've got a dog: how you plan to travel to the start of the trail, where you're going to stay, how far you're going to walk each day, where you're going to rest and where you're going to eat in the evening etc.

But if you're sure your dog can cope with (and will enjoy) walking 10 miles or more a day for several days in a row, and you can cope with the responsibility of looking after him or her, then you need to start preparing accordingly.

Looking after your dog

To begin with, you need to make sure that your own dog is fully **inoculated** against the usual doggy illnesses, and also up to date with regard to **worm pills** (eg Drontal) and **flea**

❑ Offa's Dyke Walkers' Passport



If you'd like to collect inked stamps from stamping stations to form a souvenir of your progress along the Path, the

Offa's Dyke Association (☎ 01547-528753, 📧 offasdyke.org.uk, see p44) have announced that from spring 2019 you can buy these passports from their website or by phoning the number above. They cost £5 plus 99p

for postage. You can also get a new achievers' certificate and

badge. The passport has been developed with the support of Cadw, Historic England and Natural Resources Wales. It's in an excellent cause as proceeds from the sales will go to a fund to be used on the conservation of the Dyke.



The **12 stamping stations** have been confirmed, as follows, from north to south:

- **Prestatyn Nova** (NOVA) Sports Centre*
- **Knighthon** Offa's Dyke Centre*
- **Bodfari** community notice board
- **Hergest Croft Gardens**
- **Llandegla** community shop
- **Hay-on-Wye** Tourist Information Centre
- **Carreg y Big** Oswestry Equestrian Centre
- **Llangattock-Lingoed** church
- **Beacon Ring hillfort**
- **Redbrook** village store
- **Mellion Lodge** – at the gates
- **Chepstow** Tourist Information Centre*

* You can also buy the passport from these centres

Every one sold will help to look after the Dyke

'The Passport has two aims: we want it to be a great deal of fun for walkers and every one sold will help to look after the Dyke. The more

Passports that we sell the more projects that we will be able to support. We want to help Rob Dingle the National Trail Officer manage the Trail and Dyke sustainably and in a way that protects our heritage for this and future generations. ... The Offa's Dyke Passport is seasonal, operating each year between 1st May and 31st October. The season has been carefully chosen based on data published by Natural Resources Wales and the Environment Agency which shows that the Dyke's soils tend to be driest in this six month period. When soils are drier the risk of damage and erosion to the Dyke is reduced'.

David McGlade (ODA Chairman)



Images © David McGlade / ODA

Stamping stations provide a stamp and an ink pad, sometimes housed in a green wooden box

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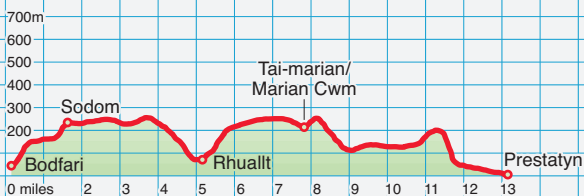
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Prestatyn
Rhualt
Bodfari



Maps 81-83, Bodfari to Rhualt

5 miles/8km – 2hrs 20mins-2hrs 40mins

Maps 83-86, Rhualt to Prestatyn

8 miles/13km – 3hrs 50mins-4hrs 35mins



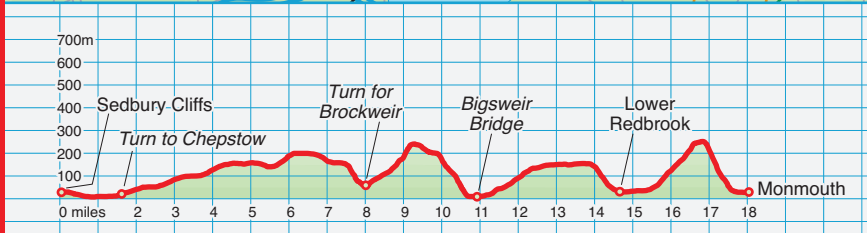
Maps 86-83, Prestatyn to Rhualt

8 miles/13km – 3½-4¼hrs

Maps 83-81, Rhualt to Bodfari

5 miles/8km – 1hr 50mins-2hrs 10mins

NOTE: Add 20-30% to these times to allow for stops



Map 1, Sedbury to Chepstow

1½ miles/2km – 30-45mins

Maps 1-10, Chepstow to Monmouth

16½ miles/27km – 9hrs 25mins-10hrs 10mins



Maps 10-1, Monmouth to Chepstow

16½ miles/27km – 8½hrs-9¼hrs

Map 1, Chepstow to Sedbury

1½ miles/2km – 30-45mins

NOTE: Add 20-30% to these times to allow for stops



- Map 48 – p173 Lower Gwarthlow
- Map 49 – p173 Lymore Park grounds
- Map 49a – p174 Montgomery
- Map 50 – p176 River Camlad crossing
- Map 51 – p177 Forden & Kingswood
- Map 52 – p178 Offa's Pool
- Map 53 – p179 Beacon Ring
- Map 54 – p180 B4388 road crossing
- Map 54a – p182 Welshpool
- Map 55 – p184 Buttington
- Map 56 – p186 Pool Quay
- Map 57 – p188 Breidden Hills
- Map 58 – p189 Four Crosses
- Map 59 – p191 Llanymynech
- Map 60 – p193 Porth-y-waen
- Map 61 – p194 Nant-Mawr & Trefonen
- Map 62 – p196 Ty'n-y-coed
- Map 63 – p197 Baker's Hill
- Map 64 – p199 Craignant
- Map 65 – p200 Castle Mill
- Map 66 – p202 Ty'n-y-groes
- Map 67 – p203 Fronsycyllte
- Map 68 – p205 Trevor
- Map 69 – p206 Castell Dinas Bran
- Map 70 – p207 Eglwyseg Crags
- Map 70a – p208 Llangollen Canal
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- Map 71 – p215 World's End
- Map 72 – p216 Llandegla
- Map 73 – p217 Llandegla
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- Map 74a – p221 Llanarmon-yn-lal
- Map 75 – p222 Clwyd Gate
- Map 76 – p224 Foel Fenni
- Map 77 – p226 Moel Famau
- Map 78 – p227 Moel Dywyll
- Map 79 – p228 Pen-y-cloddiau
- Map 80 – p229 Slopes of Moel-y-Parc
- Map 81 – p231 Bodfari & Sodom
- Map 82 – p232 Moel Maen-Efa
- Map 83 – p233 Rhualt
- Map 84 – p236 Tai-Marian
- Map 85 – p237 Meliden
- Map 86 – p239 Prestatyn



See next page



5
EDN

'...the Trailblazer series stands head, shoulders, waist and ankles above the rest. They are particularly strong on mapping...'

THE SUNDAY TIMES

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