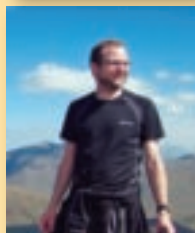




The first edition of this book was researched and written by Keith Carter, with additional information by Colin Vickerman. The following editions were updated by Tricia and Bob Hayne, Jim Manthorpe, Henry Stedman, Joel Newton and this sixth by Nick Hill.

KEITH CARTER'S interest in the great outdoors was kindled on a school trip to Snowdonia which hooked him for life. Work became what he did between walks and he explored almost every corner of Britain. In his retirement he spent 20 years mainly doing what he loved best: walking, and in 2004 wrote the original edition of this book going on to update several other Trailblazer guides. He died in 2024, aged 82.



NICK HILL is often to be found on the tracks and footpaths around Britain and abroad. As part of the Trailblazer team he is author, illustrator and cartographer, drawing many of the maps for the guides. He is the author of the *Ridgeway* and has also researched and updated the *Trans-Siberian Handbook* and *South Downs Way*. He also produces walkers' maps covering routes in the south-west of England – see nickhillmaps.co.uk.

Offa's Dyke Path

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The maps in this guide were prepared from out-of-Crown-copyright Ordnance Survey maps amended and updated by Trailblazer.

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Dedication

FROM KEITH CARTER I should like to dedicate this book to the farmers through whose fields much of this trail winds, for their patience and fortitude in difficult times. Good luck to them.

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: ✉ trailblazer-guides.com

PHOTOS – Front cover: Heading down to Gladestry with Hergest Ridge in the distance
This page: Dinas Bran © Peter Gorecki **Previous page:** Passing Eglwyseg Crags (Map 70)

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INTRODUCTION

History 9 – How difficult is the Offa's Dyke Path? 10
How long do you need? 12 – When to go 14

PART 1: PLANNING YOUR WALK

Practical information for the walker

Route finding 17 – GPS 18 – Accommodation 19 – Food/drink 22
Money 25 – Walking companies 25 – Annual events 27 – Information
for foreign visitors 28 – Walking with a dog 29 – Disabled access 30

Budgeting 30

Itineraries

Which direction? 31 – Village & towns facilities table 32
The best day and weekend walks 35 – Suggested itineraries 37

What to take

Luggage 38 – Footwear 39 – Clothes 40 – Toiletries 41 – First-aid
kit 41 – General items 41 – Camping gear 42 – Money 42 – Maps 43
Sources of further information 44 – Recommended reading 45

Getting to and from the Offa's Dyke Path

Getting to Britain 47 – National transport 48 – Local transport 48
Public transport services 49 – Public transport map 52

PART 2: HISTORY, ENVIRONMENT & NATURE

Historical background (by Colin Vickerman) 54

Conserving the Anglo-Welsh Border Country 59

Flora and fauna 62

PART 3: MINIMUM IMPACT & SAFETY

Minimum-impact walking 75 **Health and outdoor safety** 80

PART 4: ROUTE GUIDE AND MAPS

Using this guide 83 ↑ = walking north ↓ = walking south

↑ **Sedbury Cliffs to Chepstow** 85 (Chepstow 85)

↓ **Chepstow to Sedbury Cliffs** 90

↑ **Chepstow to Monmouth** 90 (Tintern 94, Brockweir 98,
Bigsweir 98, St Briavels 98, Redbrook 102, Monmouth 102)

↓ **Monmouth to Chepstow** 106

↑ **Monmouth to Llantilio-Crossenny** 106 (The Hendre 107)

↓ **Llantilio-Crossenny to Monmouth** 113

↑ **Llantilio-Crossenny to Pandi** 114 (Llangattock-Lingoed 115,
Pandi 118)

- ↓ **Pandy to Llantilio-Crossenny** 119
- ↑ **Pandy to Hay-on-Wye** 120 (Longtown 122, Llanthony 125, Capel-y-ffin 127, Hay-on-Wye 132, Clyro 136)
- ↓ **Hay-on-Wye to Pandy** 137
- ↑ **Hay-on-Wye to Kington** 137 (Newchurch 140, Gladestry 143, Kington 143)
- ↓ **Kington to Hay-on-Wye** 148
- ↑ **Kington to Knighton** 149 (Discoed 154, Presteigne 156, Knighton 156)
- ↓ **Knighton to Kington** 159
- ↑ **Knighton to Brompton Crossroads** 160 (Clun 164, Newcastle-on-Clun 164, Bishop's Castle 165, Brompton Crossroads 171)
- ↓ **Brompton Crossroads to Knighton** 171
- ↑ **Brompton Crossroads to Buttington** (for Welshpool) 172 (Montgomery 174, Kingswood 175, Welshpool 180, Buttington 185)
- ↓ **Buttington** (for Welshpool) **to Brompton Crossroads** 185
- ↑ **Buttington** (for Welshpool) **to Llanymynech** 186 (Pool Quay 187, Four Crosses 190, Llanymynech 190)
- ↓ **Llanymynech to Buttington** (for Welshpool) 192
- ↑ **Llanymynech to Racecourse Common** 192 (Trefonen 195)
- ↓ **Racecourse Common to Llanymynech** 195
- ↑ **Racecourse Common to Castle Mill** 198 (Around Baker's Hill 198, Oswestry 198, Bron-y-Garth 201)
- ↓ **Castle Mill to Racecourse Common** 201
- ↑ **Castle Mill to Dinas Bran** (and Llangollen) 201 (Chirk 203, Around Irish Bridge 204, Froncysyllte 204, Trevor 204, Llangollen 209)
- ↓ **Dinas Bran** (and Llangollen) **to Castle Mill** 213
- ↑ **Dinas Bran** (and Llangollen) **to Llandegla** 213 (Llandegla 218)
- ↓ **Llandegla to Dinas Bran** (and Llangollen) 218
- ↑ **Llandegla to Clwyd Gate** 218 (Llanarmon-yn-Ial 219)
- ↓ **Clwyd Gate** (for Llanferres) **to Llandegla** 223
- ↑ **Clwyd Gate** (for Llanferres) **to Bodfari** 223 (Llanferres 225, Cilcain 225, Llangynhafal 225, Bodfari 230)
- ↓ **Bodfari to Clwyd Gate** (for Llanferres) 230
- ↑ **Bodfari to Rhualt** 232 (Rhualt 234)
- ↓ **Rhualt to Bodfari** 234
- ↑ **Rhualt to Prestatyn** 235 (Prestatyn 235)
- ↓ **Starting from Prestatyn** 240 (↓ **Prestatyn to Rhualt** 240)

APPENDICES

- A: Welsh words & phrases 241 B: GPS/what3words waypoints 242
 C: Taking a dog 246 D: Offa's Dyke Walkers' Passport 248

INDEX 249

OVERVIEW MAPS & PROFILES 257



Admiring the impressive view from Hatterrall Ridge (Map 19).

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'd prefer an organised holiday and luggage transfer 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 challenging is it, what to pack and the approximate cost of the whole walking holiday
- Walking times in both directions, distances, GPS waypoints and what3words references
- 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.

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 Glyndŵr 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 both south-to-north walkers (starting in Chepstow) and north-to-



Llanthony Priory Hotel is set amongst the ruins of the priory (see p125).

After the inspiring views of the Marcher castle of Chirk you leave the Dyke itself and soon cross the magnificent Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, following the canals. The nearby festival town of Llangollen is well worth visiting before you enter a region that might be part of Tolkien's Middle Earth, the limestone cliffs and screes of Stack Rocks (Eglwyseg Crags) to reach Llandegla. Then come the splendid ridges of the Clwydian Range followed by the small lanes and hedgerows of the Vale of Clwyd. After a bracing walk over the Prestatyn hillside with its awesome views of the mountains of Snowdonia you descend to Prestatyn.

History

The Offa's Dyke Path was the fourth of 16 national trails to be established in England and Wales, with a further four in Scotland. The first of these trails, the Pennine Way, was opened in 1965 but it was not until 1971 that Lord Hunt, of Everest fame, officially opened the Offa's Dyke Path.

The path was originally the responsibility of the Countryside Commission, but as the path crosses the English/Welsh border many times, two-thirds being in Wales and one third in England, the responsibility for it passed to the Countryside Council for Wales in 1991. It is managed and maintained by the Offa's Dyke Path Management Service based in Knighton, with the close co-operation of the local authorities through whose land it passes.



Dechrau a Diwedd (Beginning and End). Marking the northern end of Offa's Dyke Path by the beach in Prestatyn is this striking stainless steel sculpture by Craig & Mary Matthews. The original marker stone and plaque is nearby.



The path passes over Monnow Bridge in Monmouth (see p102), the only intact example of a 13th-century fortified bridge in Britain.



Above: Descending Hatterrall Ridge on stone slab steps (Map 24)

the journey could be broken at Capel-y-ffin or Llanthony. You will need to think carefully about how you are going to tackle this arduous crossing.

The crossing of the Clwydian Range (see pp223-30) between Bodfari and Clwyd Gate involves several climbs and descents as well as some incomparable ridge walking. On a fine day you will romp it but in bad weather it can be a severe test of endurance. Luckily there are several escape routes enabling you to arrange a pick-up, possibly by your B&B host for the night.

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.

Anyone possessing basic outdoor competence should find themselves coping perfectly well ... but don't underestimate any part of the route



Right: Following the path down Moel y Plas with Moel Llanfair ahead (see Map 74, p220).

12 How long do you need?



© Bryn Thomas

Above: Chirk Castle (see p201).

Below: The path down Moel Fenlli (Map76; Photo © Peter Gorecki).

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,



the tourist hotspots of Prestatyn, Hay-on-Wye and Llangollen. You can lord it over the daytrippers with your rucksack and big boots: let them look and wonder. Once you're back out among the fields and hills you can leave the hordes behind.

Autumn

Late **September** and **October** are a good time to get out on the trail to appreciate the full benefit of the autumn colours in the woodland and the leaves underfoot. Although the air temperature should remain relatively mild, October can see the first frosts, and rain is an ever-present threat, intensifying as the year draws to its close. Nevertheless, many connoisseurs consider autumn, especially early autumn, the best time of year for walking.

© Bryn Thomas



Above: Sunny skies over Hatterrall Ridge (Map 20). **Below:** Plas Newydd, Llangollen (see p209), is a fascinating place to visit.

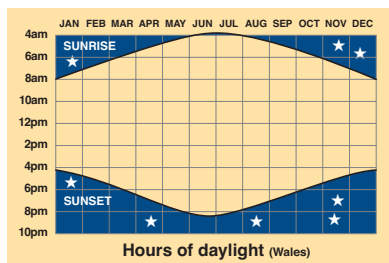
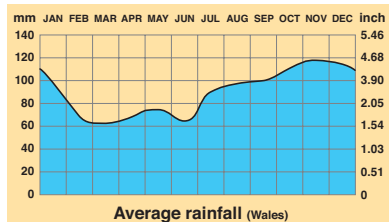
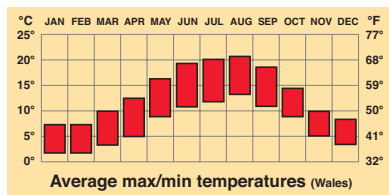




Prestatyn, the northern terminus of the path, seen from the Bryn Prestatyn Hillside.

Winter

Only the hardest 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 waymarked 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.



Waypoints and what3words

Besides those navigation options, this book offers an additional one. The maps in the book all feature at least one numbered **waypoint**, marked directly onto the map. Where a tracklog is a continuous line, waypoints are single points like cairns. These waypoints correlate to the list on pp242-5 which gives the grid reference and description. For these waypoints we've now also listed the three-word geocode used by **what3words** ( what3words.com, p81 and pp242-5) which could be useful in an emergency.

You can either manually key the nearest presumed waypoint from the list at the back of this book into your phone/GPS (a process prone to user errors), or just download the list for free at  trailblazer-guides.com/gps-waypoints.

To install these Trailblazer waypoints onto Maps.me you'll first need to convert the .gpx format file to .kml format before loading it into maps.me. Use an online website such as  gpx2kml.com to do this then email the kml file to your phone and open it in maps.me.

Note that using mapping apps drains your battery quickly, so you will need to use them sparingly or carry a spare battery pack to recharge your phone towards the end of the day. You can extend your phone's battery life by turning on airplane mode. For these reasons it's important to understand that **treating GPS as a complete replacement for maps, a compass and common sense is a mistake**. Every electronic device is susceptible to battery failure or some electronic malfunction that might leave you in the dark.

It's worth repeating that most of the people who've ever walked the Offa's Dyke Path did so without GPS, a mobile phone and digital mapping. If you follow the maps in this book you shouldn't get lost.

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 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 a few nights 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. 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.

Most 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. Only a few are right by the trail. Don't let this put you off. It is still perfectly possible to backpack the route from end to end, sometimes pitching where enterprising B&B owners have made space on their lawn, letting campers use a shower and sometimes offering meals as well.

Wild camping is not permitted anywhere, which is no help to those who prefer the great outdoors to a B&B. It may be worth asking at a farm along the

❑ B&B-STYLE ACCOMMODATION

Rooms **Single rooms** are usually poky 'box' rooms and are rarely available. **Twin rooms** have two single beds while a **double** is supposed to have one double bed though sometimes has two single beds that are pushed together to make a double when required. **Triples** generally have a double and a single, or three single beds, and **quads** – or **family rooms** – often have a double bed with bunk beds, or four single beds. A triple or quad room can therefore also be used as a double or twin.

Facilities An **en suite** room attracts a premium although often this can be just for a cramped shower cubicle squeezed in next to a loo in a corner of the room. So don't automatically turn your nose up at a **bathroom** across the corridor, which is often more spacious with a deep, inviting bath just waiting for you to turn the taps on and ease away the aches with a long hot soak. In some places the bathroom is shared with other rooms (**shared facilities**), so you may have to wait your turn, but in others it may be for the sole use of the guests in a particular room (**private facilities**).

Some B&Bs, but more usually guesthouses/hotels, also have a **sitting room** (lounge) exclusively for guest use, a real bonus at the end of a day when retiring to your room instead of relaxing in a comfy chair can seem something of an anti-climax. It also gives you the opportunity to talk to the other guests.

Many guesthouses/hotels offer an **evening meal** as do the more isolated B&Bs, though you should always pre-book this. Ring ahead if you have been delayed on the trail since meals may be served at a set time. Alternatively, B&B/guesthouse hosts may be willing to drive you to the nearest pub if it is too far to walk.

Rates Proprietors either quote rates on a per room or a per person basis. In this guide we quote rates on a **per person (pp)** per night basis based on two sharing a room; a typical B&B will range in price from £35-45pp for a room with en suite facilities, though a lot depends on location and facilities. Guest-houses will charge £40-50pp and hotels will charge more. Bear in mind that hotel rates do not always include breakfast so check in advance. See also p84.

Lone walkers occupying a twin or double room will pay the full room price unless there's a **single room rate** offered; rarely less than 70% of the full rate. If the rate quoted is for a room (not per person) it will almost definitely be the same whether one, two or more share.

It is often necessary to pay a **deposit** when making your booking online; this may be refunded if you cancel well in advance but is more commonly non-refundable unless you have a good story. Check the cancellation terms.

THE PERFECT PINT

Much of the beer found in pubs along the path is pasteurised and manufactured in millions of gallons and distributed throughout Britain. Known as keg beer, it has been reviled by real ale drinkers in its time but is invariably smooth and tastes the same wherever you are. However, traditional **real ale**, the product of small-scale local breweries, is always in demand. Real ale continues to ferment in the cask so can be drawn off by hand pump or a simple tap in the cask itself. Keg beer, on the other hand, has the fermentation process stopped by pasteurisation and needs the addition of gas to give it fizz and sparkle.

Keep an eye out for pubs with the CAMRA sticker which shows they have been selected by the **Campaign for Real Ale** (camra.org.uk). This invaluable organisation has been largely responsible for the survival of independent brewers in the UK and deserves our plaudits. Keen beer drinkers will be on the lookout for rare or unusual beers only available regionally, some even brewed on the premises of the pub where they are served. Examples of this are in Bishop's Castle, just off-route, where in-house beers are brewed at **The Three Tuns** (see p166); their Cleric's Cure, a light malty beer at 5% ABV, is well worth seeking out.

In Montgomery **Monty's Brewery** (montysbrewery.co.uk) produces a range of craft beers including Dark Secret Stout (5.6%), Mischief IPA (5%), the hoppy ale Monty's Sunshine (4.2%) and also several gluten-free ales and stouts such as Gwyn a Du (4%).

Another local brewer near the path is **Llangollen Brewery** (see p214; llangollenbrewery.com), located just a few yards from Eliseg's Pillar. At the moment they do five brews including the very popular dark Welsh Black Bitter (5.5%).

Local brews well distributed in mid-Wales and the Welsh Borders are those by **Brains of Cardiff** (sabrain.com) and **Wye Valley Brewery** (wyevalleybrewery.co.uk) from Stoke Lacy. All create good pints but try the brews above 4% ABV for better taste and flavour. From the Hereford-based Wye Valley Brewery try Dorothy Goodbody's which has a lovely crisp finish, or Butty Bach.

Lovers of good beer will no doubt sniff out their own choice brews, the Welsh Borders area giving plenty of opportunity to keep their love alive. Hwyl! (Cheers!)

Self-catering

There are enough shops along the path to allow you to buy food supplies frequently. You should not need to carry food for longer than one day.

Village shops, where they still exist, are open throughout the year and on Monday to Saturday most open 8am to 8pm or even later to take full advantage of casual trade and the sale of alcohol, though they may open only for the morning on Sundays and may close early on one day during the week. Fuel for camp stoves may not always be available although Camping Gaz and meths can usually be found.

Drinking water

When walking it is recommended that you drink at least **two litres** of water a day. On a hot day you will need to increase this to replace the fluids lost through sweating. Though it's tempting, don't drink from streams or rivers as

Group/guided walking tours

Fully guided tours are ideal for individuals wanting to travel in the company of others and for groups of friends wanting to be guided. Packages usually include meals, accommodation, transport arrangements, minibuss back-up and baggage transfer, as well as a qualified guide.

● **Drover Holidays** (see p25) Drover offers bespoke guided itineraries for small groups.

□ INFORMATION FOR FOREIGN VISITORS

● **Currency/money** The British pound (£) comes in notes of £50, £20, £10 and £5, and coins of £2 and £1; even though £50 notes are available they are not often seen in circulation. The pound is divided into 100 pence (usually referred to as 'p', pronounced 'pee') which comes in silver coins of 50p, 20p, 10p, and 5p and copper coins of 2p and 1p.

A guide to currency **exchange rates** can be found on [xe.com/currencyconverter](https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/); however, the actual rate used by post offices, banks and travel agents varies.

● **Business hours** Most **shops and supermarkets** are open Monday to Saturday 8am-8pm (and sometimes up to 15 hours a day) and on Sunday from about 9am to 5 or 6pm, though again sometimes longer. Occasionally, especially in rural areas, you'll come across a local shop that closes at lunchtime on one day during the week, usually a Wednesday or Thursday; this is a throwback to the days when all towns and villages had an 'early closing day'.

Main **post offices** are open at least from Monday to Friday 9am-5pm and Saturday 9am-12.30pm. **Banks** (if you can find one) typically open at 9.30am Monday to Friday and close at 3.30pm or 4pm though in some places they may open only two or three days a week and/or in the morning only; **ATMs (cash machines)** though are open all the time as long as they are outside; any inside a shop or pub will only be accessible when that place is open.

Pub hours are less predictable although many open Mon-Sat 11am-11pm and Sun to 10.30pm; often in rural areas, particularly in the winter months, pubs close in the afternoon (from 3pm to 5, 6 or 7pm). Last entry to most **museums and galleries** is half an hour, or an hour, before the official closing time.

● **National (bank/public) holidays** Most businesses are shut on 1 January, Good Friday (March/April), Easter Monday (March/April), first and last Monday in May, last Monday in August, 25 December and 26 December.

● **School holidays** State-school holidays in England and Wales are generally as follows: a one-week break late October, two weeks over Christmas and the New Year, a week mid-February, two weeks around Easter, one week at the end of May/early June (to coincide with the bank holiday at the end of May) and five to six weeks from late July to early September. Private-school holidays fall at the same time, but tend to be slightly longer.

● **Documents/entry charges** If you are a member of a National Trust (NT) organisation in your country bring your membership card as you should be entitled to free entry to National Trust properties and sites in the UK. English Heritage (EH) also have a membership card allowing free access to their sites. Some NT and EH properties have two entry charges: one standard charge and one that is proportionately higher because it includes Gift Aid; this can only be used by UK tax payers.

● **Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA)** Since 2024 – though for European citizens this is scheduled to start in 2025 – non-UK citizens who didn't need a visa to

B&Bs, guesthouses and hotels

You should allow around £40-50 per person (pp) for an overnight stay and breakfast plus a further £20 for an evening meal. If you include a packed lunch (about £8) as well you won't be far wrong on £65-80pp per day; these figures assume two people sharing a room. If you're travelling alone, you'll have to pay the full room price unless there's a **single room rate** offered; rarely less than 70% of the full rate. Guesthouses and hotels are likely to be a bit more expensive so budget for about £70-100pp per day.

Extras

Don't forget to set some money aside for the inevitable extras, such as batteries, buses, taxis, drinks, snacks 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**.

Currently, walking from south to north – Chepstow to Prestatyn – seems to be marginally more popular than doing the walk in the other direction. The reason

(cont'd on p34)



(*cont'd from p32*)**VILLAGE AND TOWN FACILITIES****Chepstow to Prestatyn – Walking North**

PLACE*	DISTANCE* MILES/KM	ATM (BANK)	POST OFFICE	TOURIST INFO*	EATING PLACE*	FOOD SHOP	CAMP- SITE	BUNK/ HOSTEL*	B&B* HOTEL
Craignant	2.5/4								
Castle Mill (& Bron-y-garth)	2/3				✓		✓		✓
(Chirk)		✓	✓		✓				✓
(Froncysyllte)			✓		✓	✓ (limited)			
Trevor	6/9.5				✓	✓ (limited)			✓
(Llangollen)		✓	✓	TIC	✓	✓	✓	H	✓
Llandegla	11/18		✓		✓	✓	✓		
(Llanarmon-yn-Ial)					✓		✓	B	✓
Clwyd Gate	6/9.5								
(Llanferres)					✓				✓
(Cilcain)					✓				
(Llangynhafal)					✓		✓		✓
Bodfari	11/18				✓		✓		✓
Rhualt	4/6.5				✓		✓		✓
Prestatyn	8/13	✓	✓	TIP	✓	✓	✓		✓

***NOTES**

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

DISTANCE Distances given are between places directly on the route
(from Rhualt to Prestatyn, for example, is 8 miles/13km)

(*cont'd from p31*) for doing this is the view that it is easier with the sun and prevailing wind at your back. The reason for walking the path in the opposite direction (from north to south) is that the route, arguably, improves in quality as you move south. As you progress south you will get fitter and should be in fine fettle by the time you have to tackle the Switchbacks and the Black Mountains. Alternatively, if you tackle these tougher stretches as you progress north, you will be prepared for the Clwydian Hills, which are no cinch either.

Whichever way you choose to tackle Offa's Dyke Path you'll have fine scenery and challenging walking in both North and South Wales, so it may simply come down to which end of the trail it is most practical for you to start from and finish at, where you can book accommodation, and how long you have got.

The route guides and maps in Part 4 give an overview and timings for both directions. As route finding instructions are written onto the maps rather than in the text, you will easily be able to follow this guidebook in either direction.

● **Prestatyn to Rhualt** An exhilarating 8-mile (13km) walk over the escarpment with great views of the North Wales coast, Snowdonia and the Clwydian Range. See p240. There are good public transport links to Prestatyn but not to Rhualt. There is accommodation at Rhualt so you could make this a two-day walk.

Weekend walks

● **Monmouth to Sedbury Cliffs** A stunning walk of 18 miles (29km) following the winding course of the Wye Valley as the river snakes its way to the sea. There are plenty of places for refreshment, a chance to visit the atmospheric ruins of Tintern Abbey and to explore the characterful towns of Chepstow and Monmouth, both of which are well served by public transport; services to Sedbury operate Monday to Friday only. The best overnight stop is St Briavels, which is 2km off the path. See p101.

● **Monmouth to Hay-on-Wye or v/v** This is a great weekend leg-stretcher of 34 miles (54.5km) with a day wending through the by-ways of the Welsh Marches, followed by high-level walking along the spine of the Black Mountains, with a night in Pandy. On the way you pass lovely villages, country inns and the splendid ruin of the once-mighty White Castle. Hay-on-Wye and Monmouth are served by buses but services to Hay-on-Wye are more limited. See pp106-32.

● **Pandy to Kington or v/v** An outstanding 32-mile (51.5km) outing in classic Dyke Country. Start by walking along the grand sweep of the Hatterrall Ridge, stop for the night in the fascinating book town of Hay-on-Wye, then continue along the magnificent Hergest Ridge the next day. See pp119-43. Both ends can be reached by bus but Mon-Sat only.

● **Llangollen to Llanymynech or v/v** A 24-mile (39km) walk of great variety taking in the aqueduct at Pontcysyllte, Chirk Castle, the secretive Morda Valley and the minor summit of Moelydd, criss-crossed by mountain-bike trails. See pp192-209. You can stay the night at one of the B&Bs around Irish Bridge; both ends of the walk are served by buses but there are fewer services at weekends.

● **Llandegla to Bodfari or v/v** A spectacular 16-mile (26km) traverse of the entire Clwydian Range broken into two easy days by staying overnight at Llanferres (2 miles off the trail, see p225). There are bus services at both ends (Mon-Sat only).

What to take

How much you take with you is a very personal decision which takes experience to get right. For those new to long-distance walking the suggestions below will help you strike a balance between comfort, safety and minimal weight.

KEEP YOUR LUGGAGE LIGHT

In these days of huge material wealth it can be a liberating experience to travel as light as possible to learn how few possessions we really need to be safe and comfortable. It is all too easy to take things along 'just in case' and these little

essential but can keep your boots and socks drier for longer in very wet and muddy conditions.

Underwear

Three changes of what you normally wear should suffice. Women may find a **sports bra** more comfortable because pack straps can cause bra straps to dig into your shoulders.

Other clothes

A **warm hat** and **gloves** should be carried at any time of the year. Take two pairs of gloves in winter. In summer you should carry a **sunhat** and possibly a **swimsuit**; there are a few swimming pools along the route which can be nice at the end of a hot day. A small **towel** will be needed if you are not staying in B&Bs.

TOILETRIES

A small bottle of **soap** can be useful to freshen up along the way and can be used as shaving cream or laundry detergent. Add a small tube of **toothpaste** and a **toothbrush** and enough **toilet paper** to get you through to the next supply. Try to avoid doing so, but if you're planning to defecate outdoors, use a lightweight **trowel** to bury your output (see p76-7). Finally, a **razor**, **deodorant**, **suncream** and **tampons/sanitary towels** should cover your needs. You may also find some **insect repellent** useful.

FIRST-AID KIT

Medical facilities in Britain are excellent so you only need a small kit to cover common problems and emergencies; pack it in a waterproof container. A basic kit will contain **aspirin** or **paracetamol** for treating mild to moderate pain and fever; **plasters/Band Aids** for minor cuts; '**moleskin**', **Compeed**, or **Second Skin** for blisters; a **bandage** for holding dressings, splints, or limbs in place and for supporting a sprained ankle; **elastic knee support** for a weak knee; a small selection of different-sized **sterile dressings** for wounds; **porous adhesive tape**; **antiseptic wipes**; **antiseptic cream**; **safety pins**; **tweezers**; and **scissors**. Pack the kit in a waterproof container.

GENERAL ITEMS

Essential

Most people find a **smartphone** pretty much essential these days, providing camera, GPS, torch, notepad, clock and alarm as well as enabling you to look up bus timetables, accommodation details or the nearest town (and how to get to it). You can also use it as a phone(!), confirming accommodation bookings or letting them know what time you're hoping to arrive. However, reception can sometimes be patchy in this part of Wales. Just as essential as the phone itself is its **charger** and a **battery pack** for when it dies on the trail (as they always do). It could prove to be a lifesaver.

General reading

- *Offa's Dyke: A Journey in Words and Pictures* by Jim Saunders (Gomer Press, 2006) Written and photographed by a former trail officer of the Offa's Dyke Path.
- *Wild Wales* by George Borrow (Bridge Books, 2009) Quirky, opinionated yet irrepressible account of the author's visit to Wales in the mid-19th century. Not much about the areas you pass through though.
- *Kilvert's Diary* edited by William Plomer (Vintage Classics, 2012) Lovely man, curate of Clyro Church near Hay-on-Wye in the Victorian era. Well worth dipping into.
- *On the Black Hill* by Bruce Chatwin (Vintage Classics, 1998) Atmospheric, gives a good idea of what it was like to be a Welsh hill farmer after WWII.
- *Welsh Border Country* by Maxwell Fraser (Batsford, 1972) Sadly no longer in print but worth hunting for if you want a taste of this beautiful, secret area.
- *A History of Wales* by John Davies (Penguin, 2007) The best book on Welsh history from the Ice Age to the present. Honest, objective and packed with detail.
- *The Ladies of Llangollen – A Study in Romantic Friendship* by Elizabeth Mavor (Penguin, 2011) Intriguing account of the unconventional lives of the two devoted friends who set up home in Plas Newydd, attracting the greatest figures of the early 19th century to their door.
- *The Keys to Avalon – The True Location of Arthur's Kingdom Revealed* by Steve Blake and Scott Lloyd (Element, 2000) If you thought Avalon was in Cornwall or Glastonbury, here's another theory: Arthur was Welsh! This closely argued account also suggests the Romans built the Dyke; another of those ideas akin to spacemen building Stonehenge.
- *The Making of the English Landscape* by WG Hoskins (Little Toller Books, 2013) A classic work on how our countryside came to be as it is today and a provocative and eye-opening account which suggests that every change we have made to it has been for the worse.
- *Journey through Britain* by John Hillaby (Constable, 1968) The author's classic account of his walk from Land's End to John O'Groats in 1968. Some parts of Offa's Dyke are described.
- The Brother Cadfael books by Ellis Peters are a fictional account of a monk/sleuth who solves medieval mysteries in and around the abbey of Shrewsbury. You either love them or hate them but they are a good read, true to their time and place and specific to the area. Try *The First Cadfael Omnibus* (Sphere Paperbacks, 1990).

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 the Poetry Bookshop (see p132).

Getting to and from Offa's Dyke Path

Both Chepstow and Prestatyn, at each end of the trail, are easily reached by train, bus, 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/coach 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](http://heathrow.com)) and London Gatwick ([✉ gatwickairport.com](http://gatwickairport.com)). A number of budget airlines fly from many of Europe's major cities to the other London terminals at Stansted ([✉ stanstedairport.com](http://stanstedairport.com)) and Luton ([✉ london-luton.co.uk](http://london-luton.co.uk)).

There are also flights from Europe to Bristol ([✉ bristolairport.co.uk](http://bristolairport.co.uk)), Cardiff ([✉ cardiff-airport.com](http://cardiff-airport.com)) and Birmingham ([✉ birminghamairport.co.uk](http://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](http://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](http://railteam.eu)).

● **From Europe by coach** FlixBus ([✉ flixbus.com](http://flixbus.com)) has taken over Eurolines and Megabus's coach services in Europe. FlixBus's services connect many cities in mainland Europe with London, where it links in with the British National Express network (see box p50).

● **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](http://directferries.com).

● **From Europe by car** LeShuttle ([✉ eurotunnel.com](http://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.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT SERVICES – see maps on p52-3 (cont'd from p49)**Train services (note: not all stops are listed and only direct services are included)****Avanti West Coast** (📄 avantiwestcoast.co.uk)

- London to Holyhead via Crewe, Chester, **Prestatyn**, Rhyl & Bangor, daily 4-5/day
- London to Manchester Piccadilly/Liverpool Lime Street via Crewe, both daily 1/hr (see Transport for Wales for connecting services from Crewe)

West Midlands Railway (📄 westmidlandsrailway.co.uk)

- Birmingham New Street to Hereford, Mon-Sat 1-2/hr, Sun 8/day
- Birmingham to Shrewsbury, daily 1/hr (see Transport for Wales for other services)

Coach services**National Express** (📄 www.nationalexpress.com)

Note: only direct services are shown and not all stops are listed.

- NX201** Gatwick Airport to Swansea via Heathrow, Newport & Cardiff, 9/day
- NX409** London to Aberystwyth via Birmingham, Shrewsbury & **Welshpool**, 1/day
- NX507** London to Swansea via **Chepstow** & Cardiff, 7/day
(4/day only to Chepstow)
- NX509** London to Cardiff via **Chepstow** & Newport, 11-14/day but Fri-Mon 1/day only to Chepstow

Bus services

Note: not all stops are listed

Arriva Bus (📄 www.arrivabus.co.uk/wales)

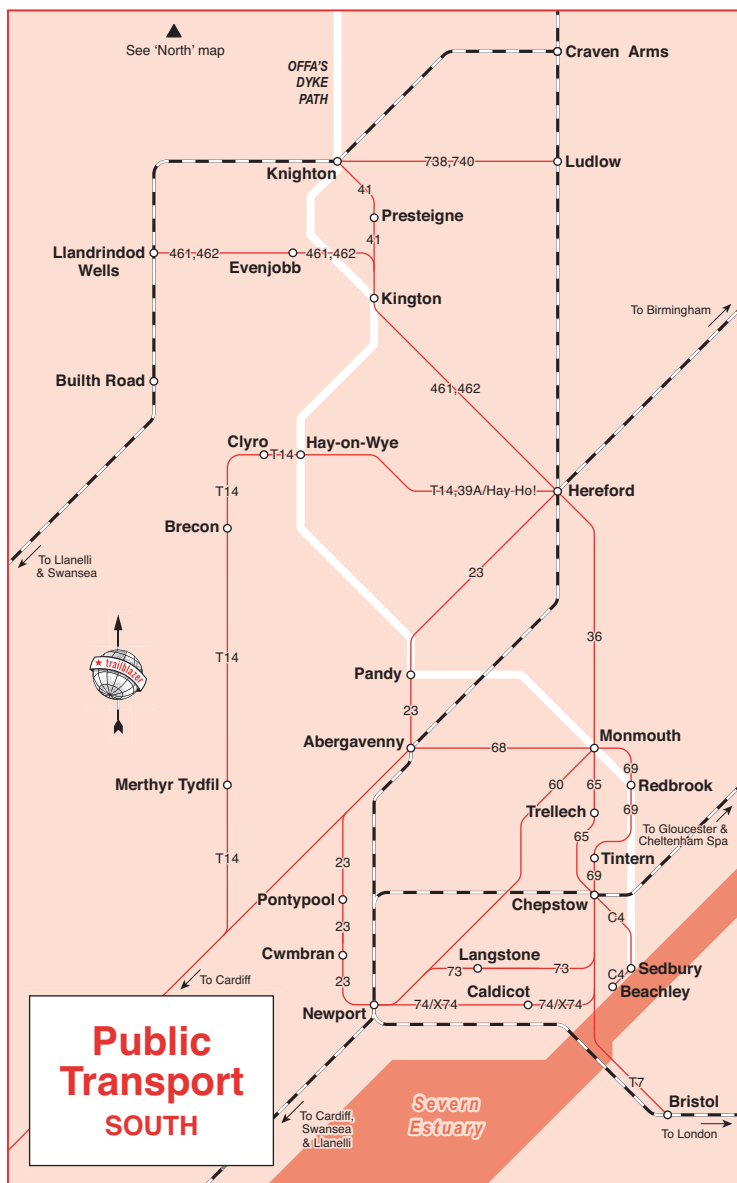
- 2** Wrexham to Oswestry via Ruabon, Chirk & Gobowen, daily 1/hr
- 2A** Wrexham to Oswestry via Ruabon & Chirk, Mon-Sat 1/hr
- 5** Wrexham to Llangollen via Ruabon & **Trevor**, Mon-Sat 2/hr, Sun 1/hr
- 11** Chester to Holywell, Mon-Sat 1-2/hr, Sun 7/day
- 11C/11M** Holywell to Rhyl via **Prestatyn**, Mon-Sat 1-2/hr, Sun 7/day (11M only)
- 35 & 36** Rhyl to **Prestatyn** circular route, Mon-Sat 2/hr, Sun 7-8/day
(the two services follow the same route but in the opposite direction)
- 51/51B/52** Rhyl to Denbigh, Mon-Sat 2/hr (52 evening service 2/day),
Sun 1/hr (51 only)
- X51** Wrexham to Denbigh via **Llandegla** & Ruthin, Mon-Sat 8/day
- Celtic Travel** (☎ 01686-412231, 📄 celtic-travel.co.uk)
- X75** Llanidloes to Shrewsbury via Newtown, Welshpool & **Buttington**,
Mon-Sat 7/day

Lloyds Coaches (☎ 01654-702100, 📄 lloydscoaches.com)

- T3** Wrexham to Barmouth via Ruabon, **Trevor**, Llangollen, Corwen & Dolgellau,
Mon-Sat 6/day, Sun 5/day + 1/day to Dolgellau
- T12** Machynlleth to Newtown (Powys), Mon-Sat 6/day
(see Tanat Valley for services from Newtown to Wrexham)

M&H Coaches (☎ 01745-730700, 📄 mandhcoaches.co.uk)

- 2** Mold to Ruthin via Llanferres & Llanarmon-yn-Ial,
Mon-Sat 5/day
- 29** Mold to Wrexham, Mon-Sat 5/day
- T8** Chester to Corwen via Mold to Llanferres & Ruthin, Mon-Sat 8/day
+ 1/day to Ruthin



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



© NICK HILL

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



ments, 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.

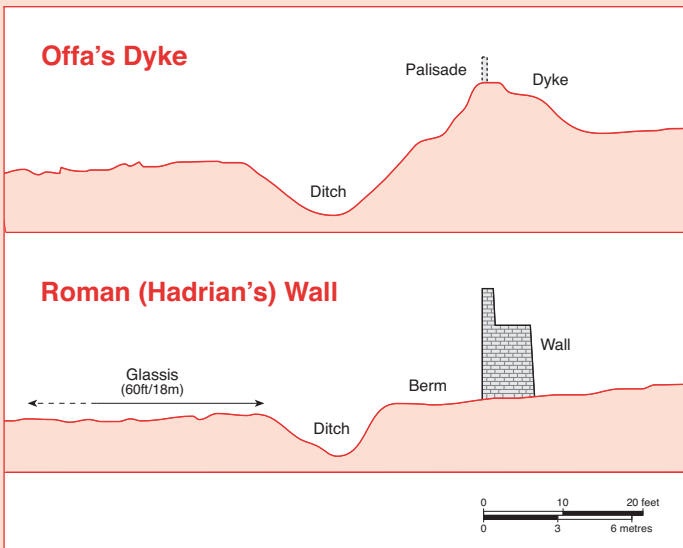
Building Once the exact line had been decided, using beacons to establish the correct alignment between adjacent sections, it would be marked out with stakes and finally a ploughed furrow. If the terrain made ploughing impossible the line would be shown by a low bank of stones. Finally, the organisers would decide the allocation of sections of the Dyke to the villages which were to pro-

❑ 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 below), although excavations have yet to reveal evidence of a palisade.



researchers suggested that this was to bring together two lines that were not otherwise going to meet, in each instance the course adopted was in fact the best way of dealing with the particular features. At Rushock it was to take advantage of the lie of the land and give the best views to the west; at Hergan Corner it was simply the need to negotiate a water-course gully. So we can give the Mercians credit for knowing exactly what they were doing.

For recommended reading on the history of Offa's Dyke, including books by the principal researchers, see pp45-6.

Conserving the Anglo-Welsh Border Country

It's the business of government to see that the countryside is preserved for the pleasure and sanity of all of us. The fatal mistake has been to imagine that the interests of the countryside are in some way different from the interests of farmers. The countryside can only be maintained by a healthy agriculture. If farming dies, a most precious part of Britain dies with it.

John Mortimer

Frequently we are made aware that hostile interests from construction, development and the transport infrastructure make demands on our woods and fields, replacing them with concrete and brick. In the words of Joni Mitchell, 'they paved paradise and put up a parking lot' (*Big Yellow Taxi*).

There are plenty of organisations that are determined not to let this happen, however, some of them listed on pp61-2. Thanks to the efforts of these groups, many of them voluntary, the fight-back is gaining ground. Despite the optimism, the struggle cannot be sustained without the active participation of people who care. This is where walkers can play their part. We are the ones who can see what's going on. We are the spies, the fifth column, the silent majority. We can go into the countryside with our eyes open and report back on what we see happening. If you see obvious examples of despoliation or threat to an area, let somebody know.

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND SCHEMES

Primary responsibility for countryside affairs in England rests with **Natural England** ( gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england); this organisation is responsible for enhancing biodiversity, landscape and wildlife in rural, urban, coastal and marine areas; promoting access, recreation and public well-being; and contributing to the way natural resources are managed. One of its roles is to designate national trails, national parks, national landscapes (formerly known as areas of outstanding natural beauty or AONBs), sites of special scientific interest (SSSIs), and national nature reserves (NNRs), and to enforce regulations relating to all these sites. In 2013 the Countryside Council for Wales was renamed **Natural Resources Wales** (NRW;  naturalresources.wales); this is the government body responsible for conservation and landscape protection in Wales. NRW has also taken over the functions of Forestry Commission

■ 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 by emailing odpntteam@powys.gov.uk.

after the interests of canal users; on Offa's Dyke 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 46 individual Wildlife Trusts, of which there are five in Wales (www.wtwales.org), 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

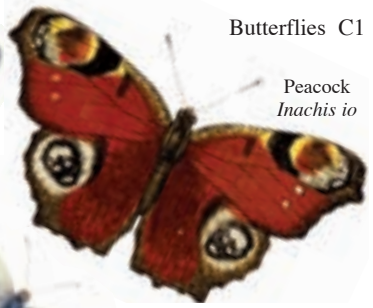
Butterflies C1



Small
Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*



Common Blue
Polyommatus icarus



Peacock
Inachis io



Small Garden/Cabbage
White
Pieris rapae



Silver-washed
Fritillary
Argynnis paphia



Brimstone
Gonepteryx rhamni
(female; male is
bright yellow)



Painted Lady
Cynthia cadui



Large
Garden/
Cabbage White
Pieris brassicae



Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*



Small
Copper
Lycaena phlaeas



Small
Heath
Coenonympha pamphilus

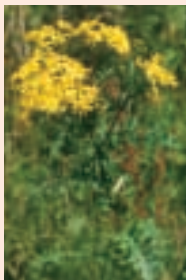


Meadow
Brown
Maniola jurtina



White Admiral
Limenitis camilla

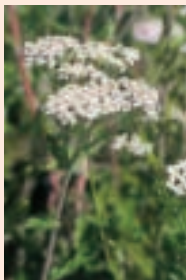
C2 Common flora



Common Ragwort
Senecio jacobaea



Cowslip
Primula veris



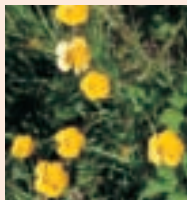
Yarrow
Achillea millefolium



Gorse
Ulex europaeae



Bird's-foot trefoil
Lotus corniculatus



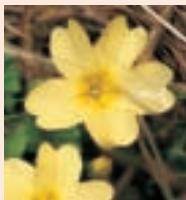
Meadow Buttercup
Ranunculus acris



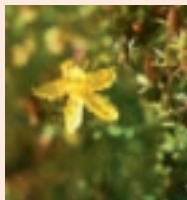
Marsh Marigold
(Kingcup)
Caltha palustris



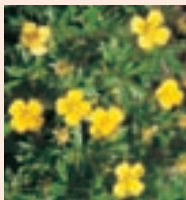
Yellow Rattle
Rhinanthus minor



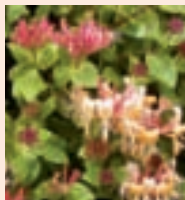
Primrose
Primula vulgaris



St John's Wort
Hypericum perforatum



Tormentil
Potentilla erecta



Honeysuckle
Lonicera periclymenum



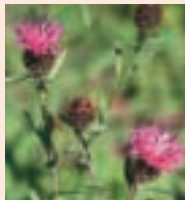
Ox-eye Daisy
Leucanthemum vulgare



Old Man's Beard
Clematis vitalba



Common Vetch
Vicia sativa



Common Knapweed
Centaurea nigra

WILD FLOWERS

Hedgerows and field boundaries

In spring and early summer the variety of wild flowers in the hedgerows and along the verges of the minor roads and lanes which you will walk along will be rich indeed.

Even those with no knowledge will soon learn to recognise the commoner species such as **red campion** (*Silene dioica*), **cowslip** (*Primula veris*), **prim-rose** (*Primula vulgaris*), **birdsfoot trefoil** (*Lotus corniculatus*) or 'bacon and eggs', **common speedwell** (*Veronica officinalis*) which can cure indigestion, gout and liver complaints, **bugle** (*Ajuga reptans*), **tufted vetch** (*Vicia cracca*) and **common dog violet** (*Viola riviniana*), all of which are easy to spot. Banks of the white **greater stitchwort** (*Stellaria holostea*) enliven the duller stretch, often interspersed with **bluebells** (*Endymion non-scriptus*).

Later, from May to September, these will be joined by **buttercup** (*Ranunculus acris*), the flowers of which when rubbed on a cow's udders were said to improve the milk, **yellow pimpernel** (*Lysimachia nemorum*), **golden-rod** (*Solidago virgaurea*) used in folk medicine to treat wounds, **viper's bugloss** (*Echium vulgare*), **harebell** (*Campanula rotundifolia*), **herb Robert** (*Geranium robertianum*), **foxford** (*Digitalis purpurea*) which is poisonous and from which the drug Digitalin is extracted to treat heart disease, **field poppy** (*Papaver rhoeas*) and **ox-eye daisy** (*Leucanthemum vulgare*), also known as dog daisy or marguerite. The tall white flowering heads of members of the carrot family such as **cow parsley** (*Anthriscus sylvestris*), **yarrow** (*Achillea millefolium*), and upright **hedge parsley** (*Torilis japonica*) will be obvious along with, occasionally, **hogweed** (*Heracleum sphondylium*) which can grow to 1.75m (6ft) high.

Summer is when the climbers and ramblers come into their own. No introduction is needed for the common **bramble** (*Rubus fruticosus*) sought out in autumn by blackberry pickers. **Honeysuckle** (*Lonicera periclymenum*), also known as woodbine, makes its appearance growing through hedges from June to September, the fruits ripening to red in the autumn.

Hedge bindweed (*Calystegia sepium*), with its white trumpet-shaped flowers, and the related pink **field bindweed** (*Convolvulus arvensis*) are a common sight during summer months, as is the pale pink **dog rose** (*Rosa canina*), which later produces rosehips, an excellent source of vitamin C when taken as a syrup.

Woodland

In late spring, deciduous woodlands are often carpeted deep blue by **bluebells** (*Endymion non-scriptus*), while in others the air is pungent with the smell of densely packed white **ramsons** (*Allium ursinum*), widely known as **wild garlic**. Equally common are two flowers whose petals close up at night and in bad weather: the **wood anemone** (*Anemone nemorosa*), and the smaller **wood-sorrel** (*Oxalis acetosella*), with its soft, light-green leaves.

From April to June **early purple orchids** (*Orchis mascula*) are occasionally to be seen, often growing with bluebells, while far more in evidence from May onwards is the poisonous **bittersweet** or **woody nightshade** (*Solanum dulcamara*).

REPTILES

The **adder** (*Vipera berus*) is the only venomous snake in Britain but poses very little risk to walkers and will not bite unless provoked; if you're lucky enough to see one, don't disturb it. You are most likely to encounter them in spring when they come out of hibernation and during the summer, when pregnant females warm themselves in the sun. They are easily identified by the striking zigzag pattern on their back and a 'V' on the top of their head behind their eyes. The venom is designed to kill small mammals such as mice and shrews; human deaths are rare.

Grass snakes (*Natrix natrix*) are Britain's largest reptile, growing up to a metre in length. They prefer rough ground with plentiful long grass in which to conceal themselves, laying their eggs in warm, rotting vegetation such as garden compost heaps, the young hatching in August. They are sometimes killed by people mistaking them for adders but are neither venomous nor aggressive and should be left alone. The grass snake's body has vertical black bars and spots running along the sides and usually has a prominent yellow collar round its neck.

The **slow worm** (*Anguis fragilis*) looks like a snake but is actually a legless lizard. It has no identifying marks on its body, which varies in colour from coppery brown to lead grey, and is usually quite shiny in appearance. Like lizards, they are able to blink; snakes have no eyelids. Slow worms are completely harmless, love to sun themselves and are found in old buildings under stones or discarded roofing sheets.

BIRDS

Streams, canals, rivers

The familiar sight of a **swan** (*Cygnus olor*), **mallard** (*Anas platyrhynchos*), **coot** (*Fulica atra*) or **moorhen** (*Gallinula chloropus*) may be all that is immediately apparent to the walker following the path along water courses but there will be occasional surprises to add to your enjoyment of the natural environment. The **grey heron** (*Ardea cinerea*) is a striking sight as it takes off on its ungainly and unhurried flight or is spotted standing sentinel at the water's edge.

A **kingfisher** (*Alcedo atthis*) is a rare sighting since they fly at great speed; often all that's spotted is a flash of blue, there one minute and gone the next. The **grey wagtail** (*Motacilla cinerea*) and the **dipper** (*Cinclus cinclus*) are two delightful birds which can be seen year-round bobbing up and down on boulders in fast-flowing streams. With a blue-grey head and bright-yellow underside the grey wagtail is the most striking of the wagtails. The dipper's flight is unmistakable, with its rapid wingbeat, white bib and tail held upright all helping in identification. These two are joined in summer by the **common sandpiper** (*Tringa hypoleucos*), a long-legged long-billed wader whose characteristic stance is with the body tilted forward, head lowered and the tail bobbing up and down almost continuously.

tifringilla) often mixes with chaffinches in winter but is easily distinguished from them by its distinct white upper rump. The **bullfinch** (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*) has a slow and deliberate movement and a rosy red underside as it feeds on berries, buds and seeds in the trees and bushes. A much smaller bird is the **gold-crest** (*Regulus regulus*) which is the smallest European bird, recognised by its yellow crown with black edges.

A darting movement on the trunks of trees may reveal the **treecreeper** (*Certhia familiaris*), a small brown bird with a curved bill which creeps spirally up trees searching for insects, dropping down to the bottom of another one when one is explored, or the **nuthatch** (*Sitta europaea*) which has a bluish-grey upper side and is very acrobatic, often climbing down tree trunks head first which woodpeckers cannot do.

It is highly likely that the **maggie** (*Pica pica*) will be seen and the **jay** (*Garrulus glandarius*) is becoming more common everywhere; both are highly efficient at cleaning eggs out of birds' nests and even taking young birds.

Less often seen and not heard as much now is the **cuckoo** (*Cuculus canorus*), which is grey or very occasionally brown in colour which makes it easy to confuse with birds of prey such as kestrels and sparrowhawks.

Among the dove family, **wood pigeons** (*Columba palumbus*) and **collared doves** (*Streptopelia decaocto*) are seen everywhere but you may try to distinguish the **stock dove** (*Columba oenas*) which is a darker, smaller bird than the wood pigeon, nesting in holes.

❑ THE RAVEN

There are said to be about 10,000 breeding pairs of ravens in the British Isles, and Wales is home to the largest population, supposedly thanks to upland farmers leaving their sheep out all winter. Ravens feed mainly on carrion and seem to be particularly partial to dead sheep, which get them through the winter. Ravens are territorial and having once adopted a territory they stick to it. They can be seen year-round in many of the areas through which Offa's Dyke Path passes, particularly in the few places where crags are in evidence, their favourite nesting places.

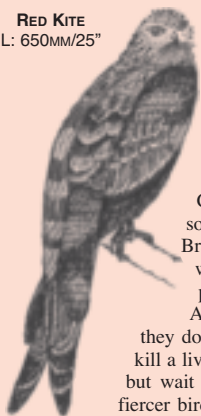
When fully grown the mature raven measures 60cm (2ft) from beak to tail, much larger than its cousin the crow with which it is sometimes confused. Its call is a lower, guttural 'kraa': once heard, never mistaken for a crow's higher pitched 'caw'. Ravens breed early in the year, making a flimsy nest of twigs lined with moss and sheep wool, usually high on a cliff-face ledge or quarry wall. The birds are often seen in pairs although they can sometimes gather in quite large numbers, with first-year birds usually flocking together. In the early months of the year ravens perform aerial acrobatics, swooping and diving and looping the loop in an extraordinary display which is part of their courting ritual.



RAVEN
L: 650MM/25"

RED KITE

L: 650MM/25"

**THE RED KITE**

Centuries ago red kites were common throughout Britain and were known to scavenge the streets of London, but since were shot, trapped or poisoned to such an extent that by the end of the 19th century they'd 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 to avian society from 1989 onwards. This project has been one of Britain's greatest conservation successes and the latest figures we have are that there are now a very healthy 6000 breeding pairs in the UK.

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

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 common buzzards, a similar bird 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 deeply forked tail and the reddish-brown-to-dull-orange plumage.

For further information see 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 **red-starts** (*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 dumppees
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.



Health and outdoor safety

HEALTH

Preventative measures

Water and dehydration You need to drink lots of water while walking: 2-4 litres a day depending on the weather. If you're feeling drained, lethargic or just out of sorts it may be that you haven't drunk enough. Thirst is not a reliable indicator of how much you should drink. The frequency and colour of your urine is better; the maxim, 'a happy mountaineer always pees clear' is worth following.

Sunburn Even on overcast days, the sun still has the power to burn. Sunburn can be avoided by regularly applying sunscreen, remembering your lips and ears, and by wearing a hat to protect your face and the back of your neck. Those with fair skin should consider wearing a light, long-sleeved top and long trousers rather than T-shirt and shorts.

Blisters You will prevent blisters by wearing worn-in, comfortable boots and looking after your feet. How many people set out on a long walk in new boots and live to regret it!

Look after your feet: air them at lunchtime, keep them clean and change your socks daily. If you feel any 'hot spots' on your feet while you are walking, stop immediately and apply a few strips of zinc oxide tape and leave them on until it is pain free or the tape starts to come off.

If you have left it too late and a blister has developed you should surround it with 'moleskin' or any other 'blister kit' to protect it from abrasion. Popping it can lead to infection. If the skin is broken, keep the area clean with antiseptic and cover with a non-adhesive dressing material held in place with tape.

Joints and muscles If you're susceptible to joint problems – in particular knees and ankles – do invest in a pair of walking poles and use one or both of them, especially during steep ascents or descents. Properly used, they can lessen the impact on your joints during long-distance walking, and thus can help to prevent injury. Even the fittest athlete warms up before exercise and stretches afterwards – and so should you. It's surprising how much easier it is to set off in the morning without aching muscles, and this, too, lessens the risk of injury.

More serious problems

Hypothermia Hypothermia, or exposure, occurs when the body can't generate enough heat to maintain its core temperature. Since it is usually as a result of being wet, cold, unprotected from the wind, tired and hungry, it is easily avoided by wearing suitable clothing (see pp40-1), carrying and eating enough food and drink, being aware of the weather conditions, and checking on the morale of your companions.

Early signs to watch for include feeling cold and tired with involuntary shivering; find shelter as soon as possible and warm the person up with a hot

drink and chocolate or other high-energy food. If possible, give them another warm layer of clothing and allow them to rest.

If the condition is allowed to worsen, strange behaviour, slurring of speech and poor co-ordination will become apparent and the victim can quickly progress into unconsciousness, followed by coma and death. Quickly get the victim out of the wind and rain, improvising a shelter if necessary.

Rapid restoration of body warmth is essential and best achieved by bare-skin contact: someone should get into the same sleeping bag as the patient, both having stripped to their underwear, with any spare clothing laid under and over them to build up heat. This is an emergency: send for help.

Hyperthermia At the other end of the scale, hyperthermia occurs when the body is allowed to overheat. **Heat exhaustion** is often caused by water depletion and is a serious condition that could eventually lead to death. Symptoms include thirst, fatigue, giddiness, a rapid pulse, raised body temperature, low urine output and, later on, delirium and coma. The only remedy is to re-establish the balance of water. If the victim is suffering severe muscle cramps it may be due to salt depletion.

Heat stroke is caused by failure of the body's temperature-regulating system, and is extremely serious. It is associated with a very high body temperature and an absence of sweating. Early symptoms can be similar to those of hypothermia, such as aggressive behaviour, lack of co-ordination and so on. Later the victim goes into a coma or convulsion, and death will follow if effective treatment is not given. Sponge the victim down or cover with wet towels, then vigorously fan them. Get help immediately.

Dealing with an accident

- Ensure that both you and the casualty are out of further risk of danger, but otherwise do not move someone who may be seriously injured.
- Use basic first aid to treat the injury to the best of your ability.
- Work out exactly where you are in case you have to send for the emergency services, and write down the details.
- Try to attract the attention of anybody else who may be in the area. The **emergency signal** is six blasts on a whistle, or six flashes with a torch.
- If you have to go for help, ideally leave someone with the casualty. If there is nobody else, make sure that the casualty is warm, sheltered and as comfortable as possible, and leave spare clothing, water and food within easy reach, as well as a whistle and/or torch for attracting attention.
- Telephone ☎ 999 and ask for the police or other rescue service.

WHAT3WORDS

On the app **What3words** ( what3words.com) the world is divided into three-metre squares and each has its own three-word geocode so it makes it easy to tell people where you are.

See pp242-5 for the what3words references for the waypoints in this book.

ROUTE GUIDE & MAPS

4

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' p37 and the 'Village and town facilities' table on pp32-5.

TRAIL MAPS

[for key map see inside back cover;
for map symbols key see inside front cover]

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; 3 1/8 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

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.



DIRECTION INDICATORS ON MAP SIDE BARS



Walking in a northerly direction from Chepstow to Prestatyn



Route to Prestatyn continues on Map 5



Walking in a southerly direction from Prestatyn to Chepstow



Route to Chepstow continues on Map 8

tool and are not there to judge your walking ability. There are so 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 red dashed 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.

Nowadays almost all places to stay or eat, including many campsites, have **wi-fi** which is free unless otherwise stated. If a business has a Facebook page (**fb**) it can be useful to check this for updates to opening times, especially for small and seasonal businesses. Also noted is: whether **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 **red 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, 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 lamp posts 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 Newport Buses' C4 (Chepstow to Beachley) bus route (see pp50-3) 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

MAP 1a

0 100 200m

To Monmouth
16 miles

Castle

River
WyeTourist
Information
Centre

Toilets

CP

Museum

St Ann St

Lower Church St

Church Rd

Upper Church St

Nelson St

Mount Pleasant

A48

Forest Sand

Railway station

Tesco

Superdrug

Boots pharmacy

Post Office

M&S Food Hall

Bus station

Town arch

High St

Bank St

Hocker Hill

St Mary's St

St Ann St

The Back

The Back

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

Where to stay

- 3 Woodfield House
- 4 Three Tuns Inn
- 5 Ty'r Castell B&B
- 7 Stone Rock Lodge
- 11 The Beaufort Hotel
- 15 Greenman Backpackers
- 17 Coach & Horses Inn

Where to eat and drink

- 1 The Boat Inn
- 2 Panevino
- 4 Three Tuns Inn
- 6 Stone Rock
- 8 Mango House
- 9 Una Vita Italian
- 10 The Bell Hanger
- 12 Coffee #1

- 13 LT16 Lime Tree
- 14 Sitar Balti
- 16 Greggs
- 17 Coach & Horses Inn
- 18 No 12 Fish 'n' Chips
- 19 The George

Where to stay

Chepstow has a reasonable choice of accommodation, which can get booked up in the high season due to its prominent position as the gateway to Wales.

For those on a budget, **Greenman Backpackers** (☎ 07773-553397, 📧 greenmanbackpackers.co.uk), 13 Beaufort Sq, off Bank St, is ideal. As well as dorm beds (2 x 6-, 2 x 4-bed, all shared facilities, 1 x 5-bed en suite; from £25pp; sgl occ of dorm from £30) there are also three double en

suite rooms (£70 per room) and two twin rooms (can be Tr/Qd) 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 3-11.30pm) to relax in.

B&B-wise, **Stone Rock Lodge** (☎ 01291-622189, 📧 stonerocklodge.co.uk; 7D/5T, all en suite; 🍷; 🐾), 9-10 Upper Church St, is a deceptively spacious establishment with B&B from £45pp (sgl occ room rate). Formerly called 'First Hurdle'.

lt16.co.uk; **fb**; Mon-Thur 11am-10pm, Fri & Sat 11am-midnight, Sun 11am-6pm) restaurant, offering small plates and sharing platters (£5-18) under headings such as Crispy, Farm, Cold, Sea & Land, as well as Sunday lunch (from £20).

You'll find **No 12 Fish 'n' Chips** (Mon-Thur noon-9pm, Fri & Sat noon-10pm, Sun 1-6pm) next to the bus station.

Una Vita Italian Restaurant (☎ 01291-624666, 📧 unavitavenue.co.uk; **fb**; Mon-Thu 11am-11pm, Fri/Sat 11am-midnight, Sun 11am-10pm) 14 Nelson St, is a family-run place with some outdoor seating.

Serves pizza, pasta and Italian favourites from *frito misto* to *saltimbocca alla romana*. Main dishes from £11.95 to £25.95.

There are two good Indian restaurants in the centre of town, both open evenings only and also offering takeaways. **Sitar Balti** (☎ 01291-6627351, 📧 sitarbalti.co.uk; **fb**; Sun-Thurs 6-10pm, Fri/Sat 6pm-midnight) has the usual menu but also specialises in baltis (£12.95-17.95). **Mango House** (☎ 01291-620497, 📧 mangohouse.co.uk; Wed-Mon 5.30pm-late), at 15 Nelson St, is similarly popular.

FROM
PRESTATYN

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 Newport Buses' C4 bus route (see pp50-3) 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.

FROM
CHEPSTOW

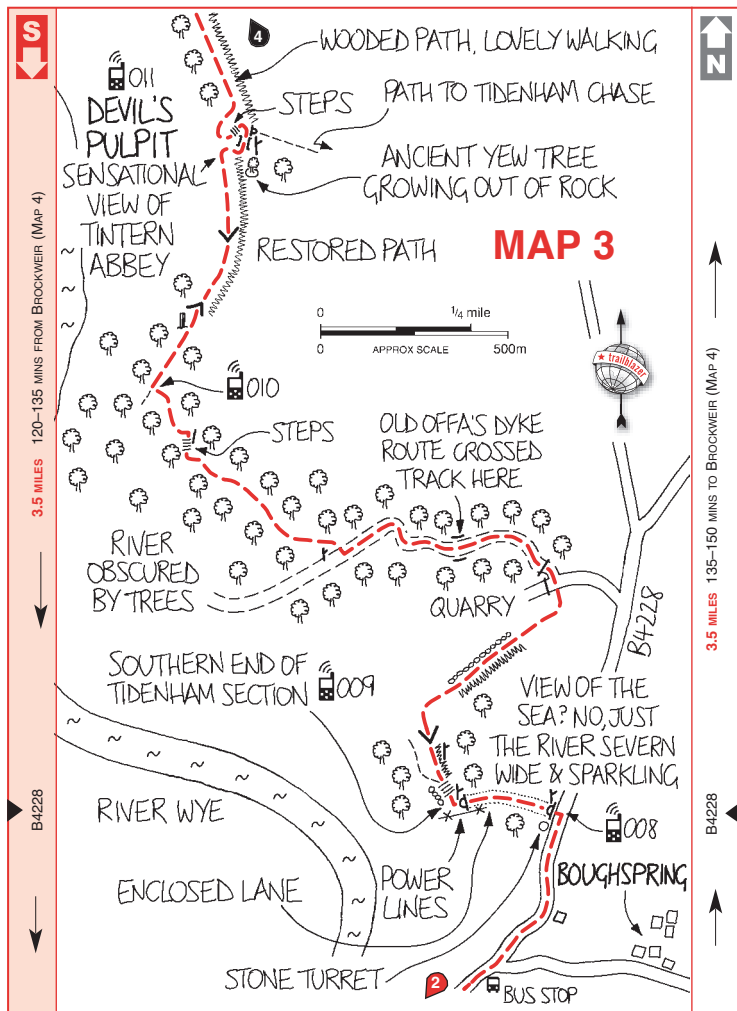
CHEPSTOW TO MONMOUTH

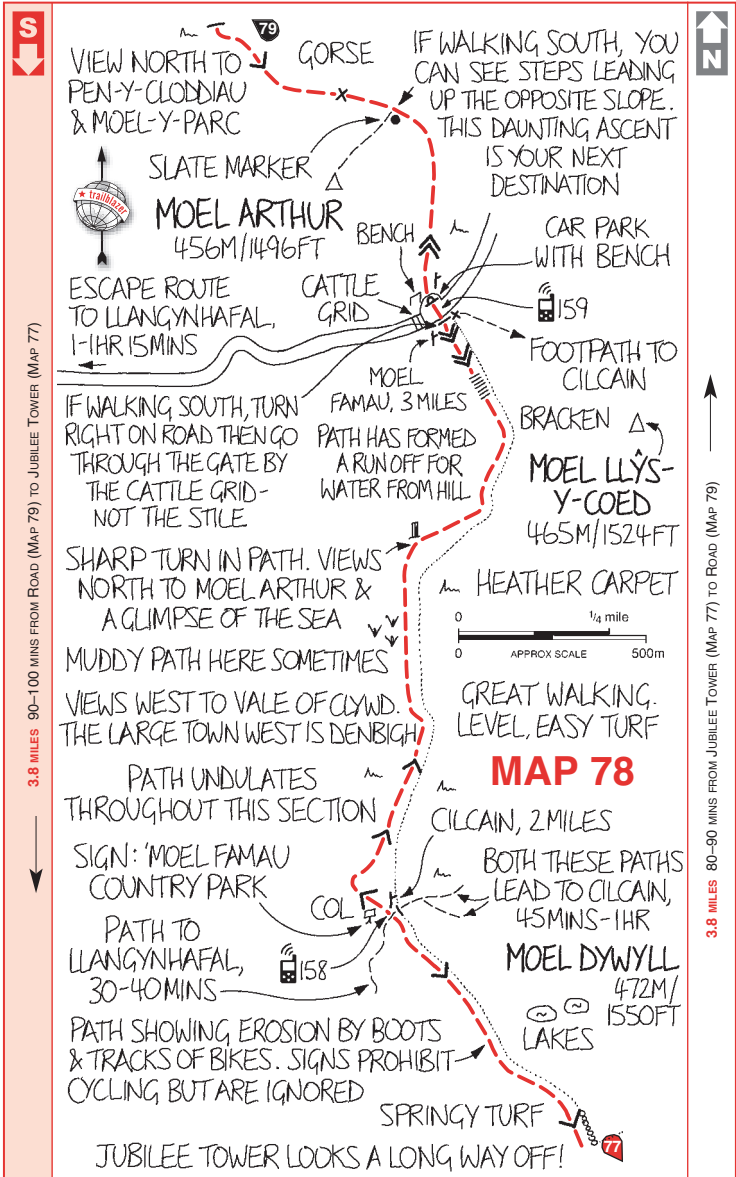
MAPS 1-10

[Route section begins on Map 1, p86] This **16½-mile (27km, 9½-10¼hrs)** 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 be kind to 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.

The path stealthily avoids Chepstow, weaving its way back and forth across the B4228, before arriving at **Wintour's Leap** (Map 2). From here some splendid woodland walking leads you to **Devil's Pulpit** (Map 3), with its magnificent view of Tintern Abbey and the **River Wye**.

Campers, content with what they have already achieved on this first day's trek, should leave the path where it joins the track (WPT 013; Map 4) and go to





ST BEUNO'S

Map 82, p232

The best-known student of this theological college, which is now a centre offering spiritual retreat, was the poet and Jesuit priest Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-89), who studied here as a young man. He loved the natural world and took delight in its infinite variety. It is said that he composed one of his most celebrated poems, *Pied Beauty*, on a walk through open meadows to a nearby chapel, the very surroundings experienced by the Offa's Dyke walker.

You can imagine the poet absorbing the impressions vying for his attention, from sky, clouds, trees and fields to the animals and birds around him. Hopkins learned the

*Glory be to God for dappled things –
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow,
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim:
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls, finches' wings:
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow and plough;
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.*

Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Pied Beauty*

Welsh language and drew from its tonal qualities the inspiration for his own innovative 'sprung rhythm', based on the Welsh *cyng-hanedd*, the 'chiming of consonants'.

RHUALLT

Map 83, p233

Half a mile down the road from the crossroads is the swish **White House** (☎ 01745-530000, 📧 whitehouserhualt.co.uk; 🐾 bar area only; **food** Mon, Thur & Fri noon-2.30pm, Mon-Fri 5-8.30pm, Sat noon-9.30pm, Sun noon-5.30pm). With a pool and spa, this place is a cut above your average walker's watering hole. There are eight rooms (2T/6D; all en suite, ♀; ♂), two of which are superior suites plus three luxury

lodges; **Rooms** cost from £45pp (sgl occ room rate). Booking is recommended if you want to eat here on a Saturday evening.

There is a **campsite** (☎ 01745-530099; 🐾) in Rhualt Country Park but it's mainly for caravans and they only have four tent pitches so booking is recommended. The rate is £20 per pitch and that includes use of toilet and shower facilities.

FROM PRESTATYN

RHUALLT TO BODFARI

MAPS 83-81

[Route section begins on Map 83, p233] From the crossroads in Rhualt the path for this **5-mile (8km, 1¼-2¼hrs)** stretch starts by crossing the footbridge over the busy A55 and then turning right; for the next hour it climbs through a succession of rough grazed fields, each with its obligatory stiles.

This is farming country and you will almost certainly be walking through stock. Leave any cows and sheep alone and they will ignore you. Look back for glimpses of the sea. When the path reaches the road turn left. To the right is St Beuno's (see box above).

You are entering the foothills of the **Clwydian Range** and have plenty of work to do before reaching Bodfari, including a steep but rewarding pull up to **Cefn Du**

(Map 81) before you descend to the scattered hamlet of **Sodom. Bodfari (Map 81, p231)** is 30-40 minutes further on.

*As the road climbs
You will pause for breath and the far sea's
Signal will flash, till you turn again
To the steep track, buttressed with cloud.*

RS Thomas *Ninetieth Birthday*

[Next route overview p230]



RHUALLT TO PRESTATYN

MAPS 83-86

[Route section begins on Map 83, p233] And so, the last **8-miles (13km, 3¼-4½hrs)** arrive. Field paths, woodland, enclosed lanes, heathland and deep countryside are all encountered as they have been throughout your journey. This last stage, however, is deceptive; you can see Prestatyn and the Irish Sea to the north throughout much of it, but just as you think you'll be making a bee-line for the beach the trail leads you to the east of **Mynydd y Cwm** (Map 83) and over the top of **Marian Ffrith** (Map 84; 240m; 787ft), before crossing the **Bryn Prestatyn Hillside** (Map 85), a gorse- and bracken-covered escarpment, with fine views to your destination: the sea, and also Snowdonia.

The descent to **Prestatyn (Map 86, p239)** is a long one and once out of the trees and past the Roman helmet sculpture the trail follows suburban onto the High St, over the railway bridge and on to the sea; where the sign tells you that Chepstow is 177 miles away. There's the **original marker stone** and plinth and a little closer to the sea the more impressive **stainless steel sculpture** *Dechrau a Diwedd (Beginning and End)* – otherwise known as the 'Polo Mint' – by Craig and Mary Matthews. At this point, many choose to take off their boots one last time and refresh their feet in the sea with a celebratory paddle – your journey is over. With the sea temperature up to 16°C (September) and the water some of the cleanest on this coastline why not make it a celebratory swim?!

PRESTATYN**Map 86, p239**

Offa's Dyke Path ends, or starts, on the seafront at Prestatyn, where ranks of wind turbines stand to attention out at sea, saluting the departing walkers or welcoming the new arrivals. The town came to prominence in the 19th century with its combined attractions of sea bathing and the supposed abundant sunshine. Today it is home, in common with most of the North Wales coastal resorts, to thousands of caravans, which is fine for enthusiasts but rather detrimental to the landscape.

Transport

[See pp49-53] Prestatyn is a **rail** stop on the London to Holyhead service and for the Manchester to Llandudno service.

Arriva runs the No 11C/11M (Rhyl to Hollywell) **bus services** as well as the Nos 35 & 36 to Rhyl. All buses go to the bus station. Roberts (☎ 01745-888444) is a reliable local **taxi** firm and can be found on the High St near the railway station.

Services

There's no tourist office now but you can get some information from ☒ www.northeastwales.wales. There's a **tourist**

information point in the Nova Centre (☎ 01824-712323, ☒ www.novaprestatyn.co.uk; Mon- Fri 6.15am-9.30pm, Sat & Sun 8.15am-6pm) where there's an Offa's Dyke stamp and book (ask at the reception desk).

Prestatyn's High St contains everything you need. There are numerous ATMs though oddly not at the **banking hub** at the northern end of the High St, where there's also a **post office** (Mon- Fri 9am-5pm) and another post office (same hours plus Sat 9am-noon) at 40 Meliden Rd, opposite Aldi. Other **supermarkets** include a big Tesco (Mon-Sat 7am-11pm, Sun 10am-4pm) at the retail park which also has an M&S. There's a small Spar (daily 7am-10pm) on the High St and on this street you'll also find a Premier cornershop (open until 2am) plus Numark and Allied **pharmacies**.

If you're after a souvenir Offa's Dyke mug or other items they are available from The Twisted Tree on the High St.

Where to stay

The first B&B you come to by the trail as you walk into town also allows **camping** (only 3 small tents) in its back garden. Long-running **Plas Ifan** (☎ 01745-887883, ☎ 07789-992385, ☒ plasifan@hotmail

MAP 84



Where to eat and drink

Locals say the best coffee comes from **Caffeina** (☎ caffeinacoffi.co.uk; **fb**; Mon-Sat 9am-4pm, Sun 10am-4pm), beside Spar on the High St. They also do bagels, sour-dough toast (bacon avo toast), smoothies and light snacks. Nearby, **Tu Mundo** (☎ tu-mundo.co.uk; **fb**; daily 8.30am-5.30pm; ☼) is a coffee shop that also serves beer and wine and has a larger menu.

At the other end of the High St, you can't miss the vibrant pink shopfront of **Cake & Coffee by Cheesecake Creations** (☎ 07502 583342; **fb**; Wed-Sat 10am-4pm), or forget its name. The cheesecake and other creamy pastries and cakes are calorie-packed so eat up if you're just starting your walk or indulge yourself if you're just finishing. Barbie would love it.

The Deli on the Hill (☎ 01745-341219; **fb**; Mon-Sat 9am-5pm), 137 High St, can sell you everything you need to make up a top class picnic or serve you a good light lunch – Scotch eggs or quiche with salad and crisps, or sandwiches.

Beach Hut (☎ beachhutnova.co.uk; **fb**; daily 9.30am-7pm; ☼), in the Nova Centre by the Offa's Dyke path terminus, serves the families by the beach but also does cocktails. There are pizzas, nachos, burgers and chips, plus Welsh cooked breakfasts served until noon.

Next to the railway station and so only a matter of minutes from the North Sea is **Cookhouse Pub & Carvery** (☎ 0333-234 8130, ☎ cookhousepubandcarvery.co.uk/prestatyn; **fb**; ☼; **food** Sun-Thur noon-8pm, Fri & Sat 8.30pm). It's cheap and cheerful but there's seating outside for you to ponder how long the walk is to the sea, be that to the North or South.

Fancy goat stew, rum and reggae? Head to **Back A Yard Jamaican** (☎ 07741 149621; **fb**; Wed-Sat 6-11pm). Upstairs at 151 High St, this quirky place makes an excellent change from pub fare and take-aways with great cocktails, an interesting menu with good veg and vegan choices and as, you'd expect, a nice relaxed vibe.

Italian food is best represented by the intimate **La Ricetta** (☎ 01745-856844, ☎ laricetta.co.uk; Wed-Sat 6-11pm) at the top of High St. La Ricetta Smokies are great

and there are all the usual Italian favourites.

Suhail Tandoori (☎ 01745-856829, ☎ thesuhailtandoorirestaurant.com; daily 2.30-10.30pm), on Bastion Rd, has previously won some regional curry house awards and has online ordering. There's competition from nearby Bengali/Bangladesh **Paanshee** (01745-889196; **fb**; daily 5-10pm), a smart place with seating over two floors. **Rozi's Tandoori** (☎ 01745-856310; ☎ llanbiz.com/takeaways; Mon-Thu 5-11pm, Fri-Sun 3.30-11), on Meliden Rd, is a long-established eatery with a good reputation.

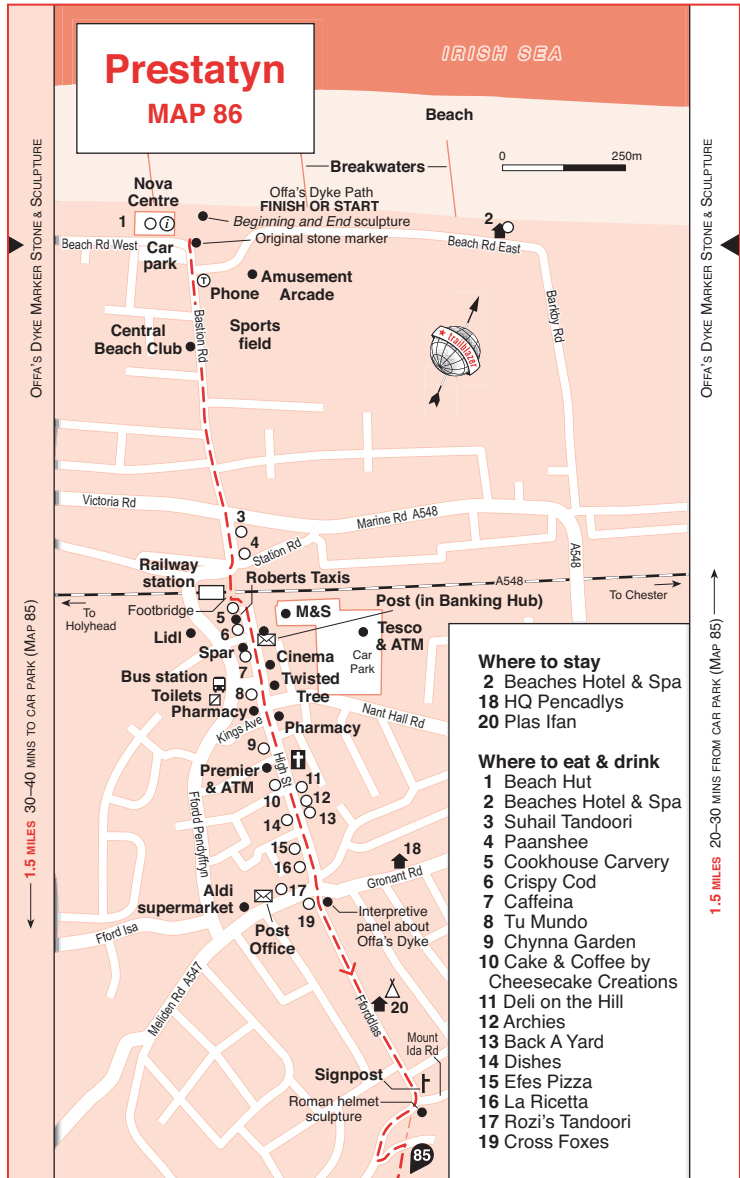
Chynna Garden (☎ 01745-855888, ☎ chynnagarden.co.uk; Fri-Sat 4-10pm, Sun-Thu 4-9.30pm), is at 120 High St. You can sit in or take away. Originally just a Chinese restaurant it's branched out to include Malaysian and Thai cuisines as well.

Other takeaways include **Crispy Cod** (☎ 01745-886663, ☎ lovecrispycod.com; daily 10am-9pm), and the **kebab shop, Efes Pizza**, (☎ efespizza.com; 4.30pm-12.30am, Fri & Sat to 1.30am).

For a beer, sports bar **Archies** (Mon 4pm-midnight, Tue-Thur noon-midnight, Fri & Sat noon-10.30pm; **fb**), is popular with a Cask Marque from CAMRA to go with its hearty and very reasonably priced menu. **Cross Foxes** (☎ 01745-889477; bar Sun-Thur noon-11pm, Fri & Sat to midnight; ☼), has a fine reputation for its beer but is not currently doing food.

For something more swish but less real ale head towards the beach, where The **Beaches Hotel** (see Where to stay), has a restaurant. **Food** is served in their Promenade Bistro and Bar (daily noon-9pm. For £20 you can swim and dine; they have many other spa packages on their website).

The top restaurant and currently the best place for a celebratory dinner is **Dishes** (☎ 01745-771332, ☎ restaurantdishes.co.uk; Wed-Fri 5-8.30pm, Sat noon-3 & 5-8.30pm, Sun noon-5pm), 194 High St, where chef Andrew Sheridan presides, providing 'social and nostalgic small plates dining'. The chef's choice menu for two is £85 or you could order 6 dishes to share between two and try crab doughnut with chilli and lime (£14), crispy pig, chorizo and fennel (£14) or Creedy Carver confit duck leg, plum and black bean (£40).



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 pp83-4.

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.

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]

APPENDIX B: GPS & WHAT3WORDS WAYPOINTS

Each waypoint below was taken on the route at the reference number marked on the maps in the route guide. **GPS coordinates** and **what3words references** that correspond to these waypoints are listed here and may be particularly useful in an emergency (see p81). Gpx files for waypoints can be downloaded from [trailblazer-guides.com/gps-waypoints](https://www.trailblazer-guides.com/gps-waypoints).

WAYPOINT & GRID REFERENCE	DESCRIPTION	WHAT3WORDS REFERENCE
000 51°37.902' -02°38.948'	Sthm end of Offa's Dyke Path	<i>lion.slime.surprises</i>
001 51°38.270' -02°39.910'	Track joins/leaves path near sewage works	<i>rebounded.fully.fall</i>
002 51°38.677' -02°39.902'	Road crosses over A48	<i>shops.quiet.deodorant</i>
003 51°38.774' -02°39.988'	Private road/main road junction	<i>situated.bleaker.mainland</i>
004 51°38.947' -02°40.314'	Steps by main road	<i>shredder.bandaged.removers</i>
005 51°39.479' -02°39.717'	Path rejoins main road briefly	<i>impressed.nowadays.sneezed</i>
006 51°39.777' -02°39.802'	Path crosses main road	<i>polite.press.duos</i>
007 51°39.968' -02°39.589'	Path leaves/joins N'hope Lane	<i>cleanser.flushes.kickbacks</i>
008 51°40.593' -02°38.977'	Leave/join the B4228	<i>consoles.observers.mime</i>
009 51°40.769' -02°39.238'	Sthern end of Tidenham section	<i>tightrope.entire.punters</i>
010 51°41.229' -02°39.959'	90-degree turn in path	<i>blackmail.joins.moral</i>
011 51°41.579' -02°39.819'	Devil's Pulpit	<i>suiting.leaflet.like</i>
012 51°41.815' -02°40.618'	Ruins of Tintern Abbey	<i>saturate.encodes.claw</i>
013 51°42.221' -02°39.553'	Signp where path crosses track	<i>deal.acclaimed.smoker</i>
014 51°42.521' -02°39.506'	Junction of path / stony track	<i>enhanced.typed.sulk</i>
015 51°42.642' -02°39.639'	Cross road	<i>seagulls.walking.pops</i>
016 51°42.963' -02°40.011'	Turn onto/off lane by signpost	<i>bonkers.skid.gracing</i>
017 51°43.436' -02°40.097'	Path/track jctn, stone gate post	<i>warmers.shins.typically</i>
018 51°43.489' -02°40.298'	Well-hidden kissing gate in hedge; path joins/leaves lane	<i>sprinter.requested.dignify</i>
019 51°43.821' -02°40.126'	Lane by St Briavels Common	<i>evaded.command.slung</i>
020 51°44.445' -02°40.082'	Path joins/leaves track after crossing stone bridge	<i>gurgled.foremost.untruth</i>
021 51°44.867' -02°39.679'	Gate near Offa's Mead	<i>presume.slumped.chum</i>
022 51°45.797' -02°40.093'	Guidepost near Coxbury Farm	<i>certified.valuables.managers</i>
023 51°46.390' -02°40.197'	Path/track jctn at very tall old kissing gate, Highbury Wood	<i>exam.sparrows.youngest</i>
024 51°46.768' -02°40.098'	Join/leave track after gate	<i>smoothly.fits.proudest</i>
025 51°47.040' -02°40.301'	Steps (plenty of them); path joins/leaves road	<i>belonged.swerves.prevented</i>
026 51°47.528' -02°40.395'	House on hill, Upper Redbrook	<i>grills.aimlessly.hands</i>
027 51°48.047' -02°40.994'	Track by stables	<i>swanky.modifies.sublet</i>
028 51°48.549' -02°41.193'	The Kymin	<i>affirming.boomer.wires</i>
029 51°48.776' -02°41.612'	Path joins/leaves road by covered reservoir	<i>community.wiser.finishing</i>
030 51°48.682' -02°42.592'	Wye Bridge, Monmouth	<i>going.emulated.reporter</i>
031 51°48.536' -02°43.205'	Monnow Bridge, Monmouth	<i>stable.segmented.surfer</i>
032 51°48.713' -02°43.482'	Minor road/Drybridge St jctn	<i>requires.noun.spokes</i>
033 51°48.832' -02°44.395'	Path leaves/meets track and Watery Lane	<i>artichoke.cheese.faced</i>
034 51°48.751' -02°45.796'	Bench, top of hill, King's Wood	<i>humans.elevated.chainsaw</i>
035 51°48.479' -02°47.165'	Hendre Farm	<i>laying.joyously.darkens</i>
036 51°49.001' -02°47.999'	Path joins/leaves lane at gate before/after Abbey Bridge	<i>reboot.outhouse.spire</i>

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 preventatives** such as Frontline – they are, after all, following in the pawprints of many a dog before them, some of whom may well have left fleas or other parasites on the trail that now lie in wait for their next meal to arrive. **Pet insurance** is also a very good idea; if you've already got insurance, do check that it will cover a trip such as this.

On the subject of looking after your dog's health, perhaps the most important implement you can take with you is a **plastic tick remover**, available from vets for a couple of quid. These removers, while fiddly, help you to remove ticks safely (ie without leaving the head behind buried under the dog's skin).

Being in unfamiliar territory also makes it more likely that you and your dog could become separated. All dogs now have to be microchipped but make sure yours also has a tag with your contact details on it (a mobile phone number would be best if you have one).

When to keep your dog on a lead

- **On ridges, escarpments and cliff tops** It's a sad fact that, every year, a few dogs lose their lives falling over the edge of steep slopes. It usually occurs when they are chasing rabbits (which know where the edge is and are able, unlike your poor pooch, to stop in time).

- **When crossing farmland** This is particularly important in the lambing season (March to May) when your dog can scare the sheep, causing them to lose their young. Farmers are allowed by law to shoot at and kill any dogs that they consider are worrying their sheep. During lambing, most farmers would prefer it if you didn't take your dog at all. The exception is if your dog is being attacked by cows. Some years ago there were three deaths in the UK caused by walkers being trampled as they tried to rescue their dogs from the attentions of cattle. The advice in this instance is to let go of the lead, head speedily to a position of safety (usually the other side of the field gate or stile) and call your dog to you.

- **On National Trust land**, where it is compulsory to keep your dog on a lead.

- **Around ground-nesting birds** It's important to keep your dog under control when crossing an area where certain species of birds nest on the ground. Most dogs love foraging around in the woods but make sure you have permission to do so; some woods are used as 'nurseries' for game birds and dogs are only allowed through them if they are on a lead.

- **By roads etc** For obvious reasons.

What to pack

You've probably already got a good idea of what to bring to keep your dog alive and happy, but the following is a checklist:

- **Food/water bowl** Foldable cloth bowls are popular with walkers, being light and taking up little room in a rucksack. You can get also get a water-bottle-and-bowl combination, where the bottle folds into a 'trough' from which the dog can drink.

INDEX

Page references in **red** type refer to maps

- Abbey Bridge **109**
access rights 77-80
accidents, dealing with 81
accommodation 19-22, 84
 booking 19, 20, 26, 44
 B&B-style 20
 costs 20, 30-1
 see also place name
Airbnb 22
alternative routes
 aqueduct route **205**
 historical route 111
 Llangollen 214
 Wye river route **93, 96, 97**
annual events 27
aqueducts **191, 203**, 204
Areas of Outstanding
 Natural Beauty (AONBs,
 now National Landscapes)
 60, 78
Arthur, Moel **227**
ATMs *see* cash machines

Backpackers' Club 44, 45
backpacks *see* rucksacks
baggage transfer 25-6, 39
Baker's Hill **197**, 198
bank holidays 28
banks 25, 28, 42
 see also place name
Beacon Ring hill fort 178,
 179
bed & breakfasts (B&Bs)
 21-2, 30-1
 see also place name
beers 24
Bettws Chapel **138**
Bettws Dingle **138**
Bigsweir/Bigsweir Bridge
 97, 98
birds 70-4
Bishop's Castle 165-6
bivvy bags 41
Black Mountains 7, 60,
 125, **126**
blisters 80
Bodfari 230, **231**
books 45-7
boots 39

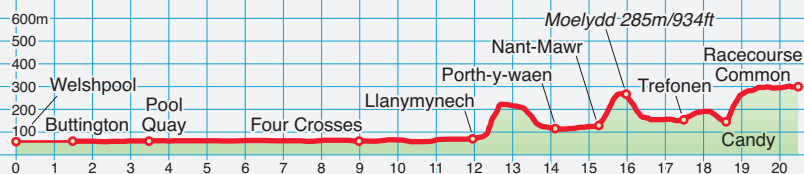
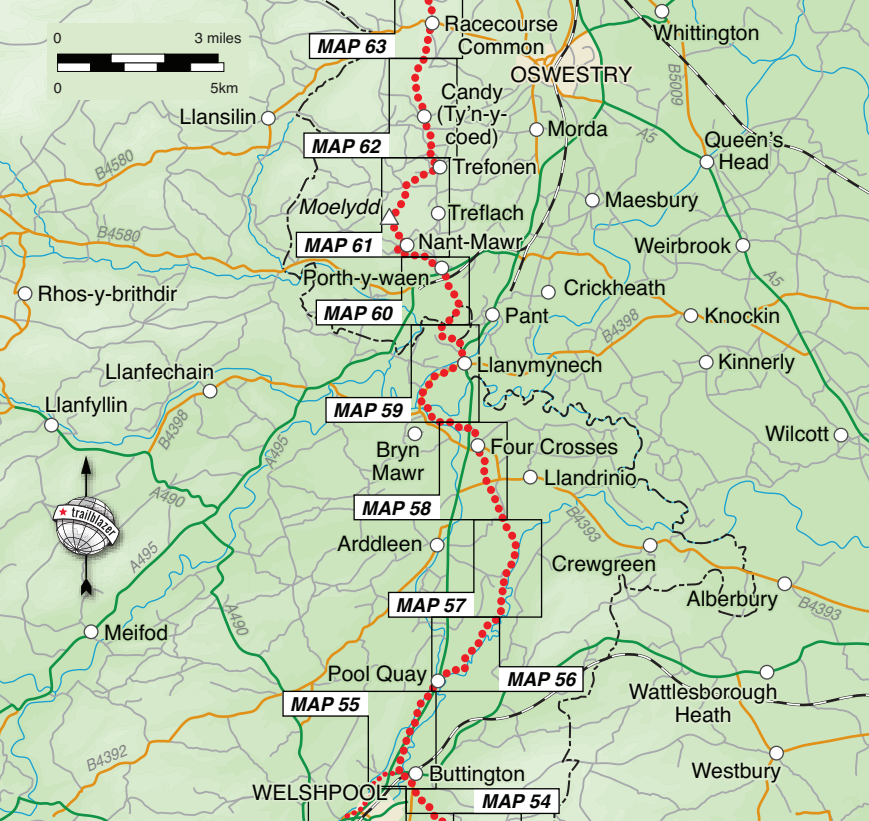
Bradnor Hill **150**
Brecon Beacons National
 Park 60, 125, **126**
Breidden Hills 187, **188**
breweries 24
British Summer Time 29
Brockweir **93**, 98
Brompton Crossroads **170**,
 171
Bron-y-garth **200**, 201
Bryn Prestatyn hillside
 237
budgeting 30-1
building Offa's Dyke
 56-8, 111, 195, 221
bunkhouses 21, 30
 see also place name
bus services 50-1, **52-3**
business hours 28
butterflies 64
Buttington **184**, 185
Buttington Tump **86**
Buttington Wharf 183, **184**
Bwlch Penbarra **224, 226**

Cadora Woods **99**
Cadw: Welsh Historic
 Monuments 61
Caebitra, River **170**
Caer Digoll *see* Beacon
 Ring
Caggle Street **116**
Camlad, River **176**
Campaign for the
 Protection of Rural
 Wales (CPRW) 61
campaigning organisations
 61-2
camping & campsites
 19, 21, 30, 77
 see also place name
camping gear 42
camping supplies 23-4
Candy/Ty'n-y-coed 198, **196**
canals 61-2
 see also Llangollen Canal
 Montgomery Canal
Capel-y-ffyn 123, 127
Carreghofa Locks **191**

Cas-Gwent *see* Chepstow
cashback 43
cash machines/cashpoints
 25, 28
Castell Dinas Bran **206**, 212
Castell Gwyn *see* White
 Castle
Castle Mill **200**
cattle/cattle breeds 67
Cefn Du hill **231**
Ceiriog, River **200**
cell phones *see* mobile
 phones
Chepstow 85, **86**, 87-90, **88**
Chepstow Castle 87, **88**
cheques (payment) 25, 43
Chirk 203
Chirk Castle 61, **200**, 201
Churchtown **168**
Cilcaen 225
climate 14-16
clothing 40-1
Clun 164-5, **164**
Clun River **163, 164**
Clwyd Gate **222**
Clwydian Hills/Range 60
 228
Clwyd-Powys
 Archaeological Trust
 (CPAT) 61
Clyro 136
coach services
 to Britain 47
 in Britain 48, 50
compasses 18, 41
conservation 59-62
conservation organisations
 61-2
construction of Offa's Dyke
 56-8, 111, 195, 221
convenience stores *see*
 shops
costs 20, 30-1
Council for the Protection
 of Rural England (CPRE)
 61
Countryside and Rights of
 Way Act (CRoW) 78
Countryside Code 79

- cows 67
 Craignant **199**
 credit cards 25
 currency 28
 Cwmdingle Plantation **179**
 Cwm-Sanaham Hill **161**
 Cym-y-Brain **215**
- day walks 35-6, 38
 daylight hours 16
 debit cards 25, 42-3
 Dee, River **203**, 204, **205**, **206**, **210**
 dehydration 80
 Derwas Bridge **188**
 Devil's Pulpit **92**
 difficulty, of path 11-13
 digital mapping 18, 43
 Dinas Bran Castle **206**, 212
 direction of walk 31, 34
 disabled access 30
 Discoed **152**, 154
 Disgwyflla Hill 74, **140**
 Ditchyeld Bridge **151**
 dogs and walking 29-30, 67, 78, 79, 246-7
 Dolley Green **152**
 dragonflies 64
 driving in Britain 48
 driving to Britain 47
 duration of walk 13-14
 Dywyll, Moel **227**
- earthworks 56, 57, 58, 110, 195
 Edenhope Hill **168**
 Eglwyseg Crags **207**
 Eglwyseg River **208**
 EHICs 28
 Eisteddfod, Llangollen 27
 Eithinen, Moel **222**
 Eliseg's Pillar 56, **208**, 212, 214
 emergency services 29, 42
 emergency signals 81
 English Heritage 61
 environmental impact of walking 75-7
 equipment 38-45
 erosion 76
 European Health Insurance Cards (EHICs) 28
- Evenjobb **151**
 events, annual 27
 Ewyas, Vale of 123
 exchange rates 28
- facilities 32-5
 Famau, Moel **226**
 Felindre-Tirley gas pipeline 130, **130**
 ferry services to Britain 47
 festivals 27
 field guides 45
 fires 79
 first-aid kit 41
 flashlights *see* torches
 flights to Britain 47
 flora and fauna 62-74, 76
 flowers 65-6
 Foel Fenlli **224**
 food 22-4, 41, 82
 food stores *see* shops
 footwear 39-40
 Forden 175, **177**
 Forestry Commission 61, 63
 fortified settlements *see* hill forts
 Four Crosses **189**, 190
 Fronsycyllte **203**, 204
 Furrow Hill **153**
- Garth **205**
 Gladestry **142**, 143
 glamping 21
see also place name
 glossary 247
 Glyndŵr, Owain 160
 Glyndŵr's Way 160
 GPS 18-19, 41, 43
 waypoints 242-5
 Grace Dieu, abbey site **109**
 Graig Hill **167**
 Granner Wood **151**
 Greenwich Mean Time 29
 guesthouses 22, 31
 guidebooks 45
 guided/group walking tours 28-9
 Gwaenysgor **237**
 Gyw, Moel **222**
- Hatterrall Hill **121**
 Hatterrall Ridge 125, **126**, **127**, **128**
 Haven Wood **96**
 Hawthorn Hill **153**
 Hay Bluff **129**
 Hay-on-Wye 27, **131**, **132-5**, **133**
 health 80-1
 heat exhaustion/stroke 81
 Hendre, The 107, **109**
 Henry V 111, 208
 Herbert, George 175
 Hergan **167**
 Hergest Croft Gardens 143, **145**
 Hergest Ridge **142**, **144**
 Herrock Hill **150**
 Highbury Wood NNR **99**, **100**
 highest points
 of the Dyke **162**
 on the path **128**
 hill-forts 56, 175, 195, 219
 historical background
 Offa's Dyke 54-9, 111, 195, 221
 historical guides 45-6
 Historic England 61
 Hopkins, Gerard Manley 234
 Hondur River **126**
 hostels 21, 30
see also place name
 hotels 22, 30-1
see also place name
 Housman, AE 165
 hyperthermia 81
 hypothermia 80-1
- Inland Waterways Association 61-2
 inns *see* pubs
 insurance 28-9
 Irish Bridge **203**, 204
 itineraries 31-8
- Jubilee Tower **226**
- Kerry Ridgeway 166, **169**
 Kilvert, Francis 123, 136
 Kilvert's Diary 143
 King's Wood **108**, **109**

- Racecourse Common **197**
 Racecourse Wood **196**
 rail services to Britain 47
 in Britain 48, 49-50, **52-3**, 209
 rainfall chart 16
 Ramblers 44, 45, 67, 78
 rates of exchange 28
 ravens 72
 real ales 24
 recommended reading 45-7
 red kites 74
 Redbrook **100**, 102
 reptiles 70
 restaurants *see place name*
 Rhôs-y-Meirch **154**
 Rhualt **233**, 234
 rights of way 17, 77-8
 right to roam 78
 rivers *see name of river*
 Rodney's Pillar 187, **188**
 route finding 17-19
 Royal Society for the
 Protection of Birds
 (RSPB) 61, 74
 Royal Welsh Show 27, 132
 rucksacks 39
 Rushock Hill **150**
- safety 82
 school holiday periods 28
 Sedbury/Sedbury Cliffs **86**
 Selattyn Hill **199**
 self-catering 23-4
 self-guided holidays 26-7
 Selley Cross **161**
 Severn, River **86**, **180**, **184**,
 186, **188**
 Severn Way **188**
 sheep breeds 68
 shops 24, 28
 see also place name
 Shropshire Hills AONB 60
 Shropshire Way **167**, **168**,
 197
 Sir Watkins Tower **215**
 Sites of Special Scientific
 Interest (SSSIs) 60
 Skirrid 115
 Skyborry Green **161**
 sleeping bags 42
 smoking regulations 29
 Sodom **231**
 solo walking 82
 St Beuno's **232**, 234
 St Briavels **97**, 98
 Common **96**
 St Mary's Church/Chapel,
 Capel-y-Ffin 123, 127
 Kington 143, **147**
 Newchurch 140, **140**, 143
 St Tecla's church **217**
 Strata Marcella Abbey,
 site of 180, **184**
 sunburn 80
 supermarkets 28
- Tai-Marian **236**
 taxi services 26
 see also place name
 telephones 29, 42
 temperature chart 16
 Tidenham Section **93**
 Tintern **93**, 94-5
 Tintern Abbey, ruins of **93**,
 94, 95
 Tir Gofal **153**
 Tir-y-mynach Embankment
 188
 toilet facilities 76-7
 torches 41, 81
 tourist information 44
 see also place name
 town facilities 32-5
 trail maps, using the 83-4
 trains *see* rail services
 travel insurance 28-9
 trees 62-4
 Tref y Clawdd *see* Knighton
 Trefaldwyn *see* Montgomery
 Treflach Wood **194**
 Trefonen **194**, 195
 Trefor Rocks **206**
 Trefynwy *see* Monmouth
 Trevor 204, **205**
 Trevor Hall Wood **205**
 Trothy, River **109**, **110**,
 112, **116**
 Ty'n-y-coed/Candy **196**
 Ty'n-y-groes **202**
- Upper Redbrook *see*
 Redbrook
 Vale of Ewyas 123
 Valle Crucis Abbey **208**,
 212, 214
 village facilities 32-5
 Vyrnwy River **191**
- Wainwright, A 18
 walkers' organisations 44
 walking alone 82
 walking holiday companies
 25-9
 walking poles or sticks 42
 walking seasons 14-16
 walking times (maps) 83-4
 Warren Wood **200**
 water bottles/pouches 41
 water, drinking 24, 80, 81
 Wat's Dyke 195
 waymarking 17-18
 on Hatterall Ridge 125
 waypoints 18-19, 242-5
 weather 14-16
 weather forecasts 82
 weekend walks 38
 weights and measures 29
 Welsh foods 23
 Welsh Marches *see*
 Marches, The
 Welsh words & phrases 240
 Welshpool 180-1, **182**, 183
 whistles 41, 81
 wi-fi 25
 What3words 19, 81, 242-5
 White Castle 113, **114**
 wild camping 77
 wildlife 76, 78
 Wildlife Trusts 62
 Wintour's Leap **91**
 Woodland Trust 62
 World's End **215**
 Wye, River **86**, **91**, **92**, **93**,
 96, **97**, **99**, **100**, **101**, **103**,
 131, **133**, **138**
 Wye Valley AONB/NL 60
 Wye Valley walk **101**
- Y Gaer, Moel **231**
 Y Parc, Moel **229**
 Y Plas, Moel **220**
 Y-Gelli *see* Hay-on-Wye
 Y Trallwng *see* Welshpool
 Yeld Wood **145**
 Youth Hostels Association
 (YHA) 21
 Ysgyrid Fawr *see* Skirrid

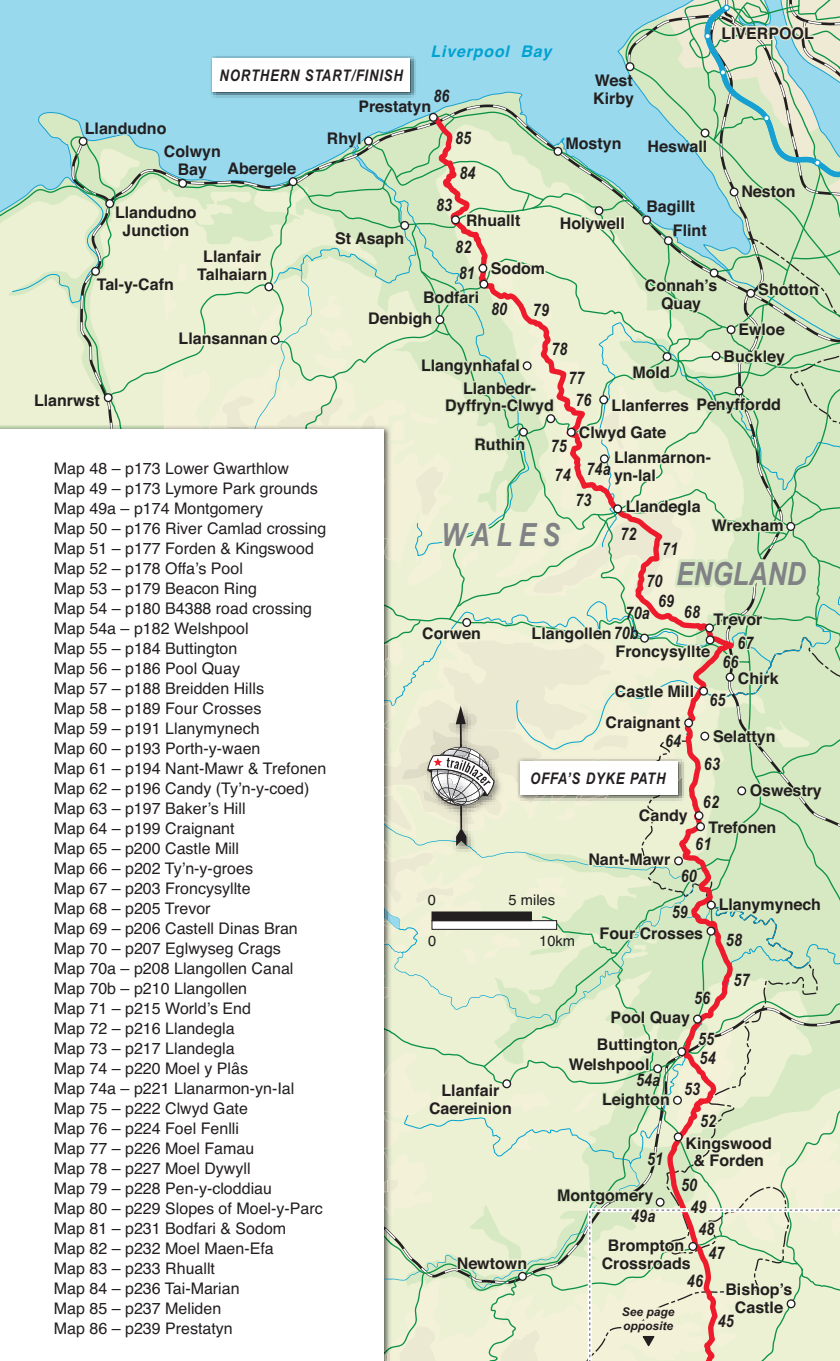


Maps 55-59, Buttington (for Welshpool) to Llanymynech 10½ miles/17km – 4-4¼hrs
Maps 59-63, Llanymynech to Racecourse Common 8½ miles/14km – 4¾-5½hrs

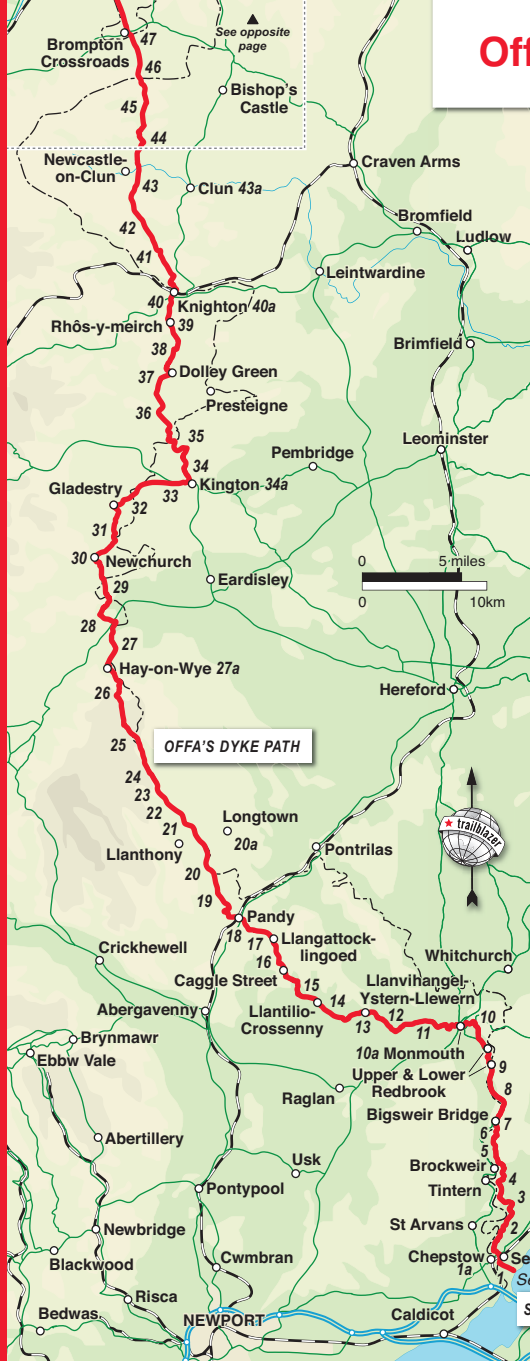


Maps 63-59, Racecourse Common to Llanymynech 8½ miles/14km – 4½-5½hrs
Maps 59-55, Llanymynech to Buttington (for Welshpool) 10½ miles/17km – 4-4¼hrs

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



Offa's Dyke Path



- Map 1 – p86 Sedbury Cliffs
- Map 1a – p88 Chepstow
- Map 2 – p91 Wintour's Leap
- Map 3 – p92 Devil's Pulpit
- Map 4 – p93 Tintern & Brockweir
- Map 5 – p96 Hilgay Cottage
- Map 6 – p96 St Briavels Common
- Map 7 – p97 Bigsweir Bridge
- Map 8 – p99 Highbury Wood
- Map 9 – p100 Redbrook
- Map 10 – p101 Monmouth
- Map 10a – p103 Monmouth
- Map 11 – p108 Watery Lane
- Map 12 – p109 Site of Grace Dieu Abbey
- Map 13 – p110 Sunnybank Farm
- Map 14 – p112 Llantilio-Crossenny
- Map 15 – p114 White Castle
- Map 16 – p116 Caggie Street
- Map 17 – p117 Llangattock-Lingoed
- Map 18 – p118 Pandly
- Map 19 – p121 Hatterrall Hill
- Map 20 – p122 Turn for Longtown
- Map 20a – p123 Longtown
- Map 21 – p124 Llanthony
- Map 22 – p126 Trig point 613m/2010ft
- Map 23 – p127 Undulating path
- Map 24 – p128 Hatterrall Ridge
- Map 25 – p129 Hay Bluff
- Map 26 – p130 Upper Dan-y-fforest
- Map 27 – p131 Hay-on-Wye
- Map 27a – p133 Hay-on-Wye
- Map 28 – p138 A438 road crossing
- Map 29 – p139 Little Mountain
- Map 30 – p140 Newchurch
- Map 31 – p141 Grove Farm
- Map 32 – p142 Gladestry
- Map 33 – p144 Hergest Ridge
- Map 34 – p145 Kington
- Map 34a – p147 Kington
- Map 35 – p150 Rushock Hill
- Map 36 – p151 Evenjobb
- Map 37 – p152 Dolley Green
- Map 38 – p153 Hawthorn Hill
- Map 39 – p154 Rhôs-y-meirch
- Map 40 – p155 Knighton
- Map 40a – p157 Knighton
- Map 41 – p161 Cwm Sanaham Hill
- Map 42 – p162 Llanfair Hill
- Map 43 – p163 Newcastle-on-Clun
- Map 43a – p164 Clun
- Map 44 – p167 Graig Hill
- Map 45 – p168 Churchtown
- Map 46 – p169 Kerry Ridgeway
- Map 47 – p170 Brompton Crossroads

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