

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the opening of Offa's Dyke Path, we asked LDWA members for their memories of this National Trail. Here are some of their experiences, together with some extracts from past issues of the LDWA's Strider magazine.



Page 2 - Andrew Melling's memories from 1970

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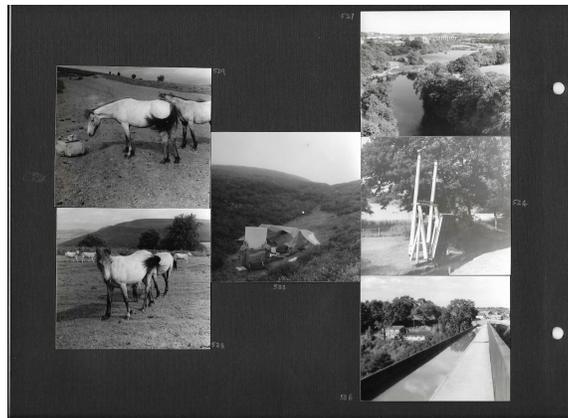
ANDREW MELLING - MEMORIES FROM 1970

I backpacked Offa's Dyke Path in 1970 using The Shell Book by Frank Noble published in 1969 and a whole bunch of OS 2 1/2 inch maps.

After a first night under a bench on Prestatyn beach, I had one night bivouacing on the Clwyddian hills but after that I found nowhere to wild camp and stayed indoors, mainly in pubs, at prices ranging from £1.5s to £1.17s.6d.

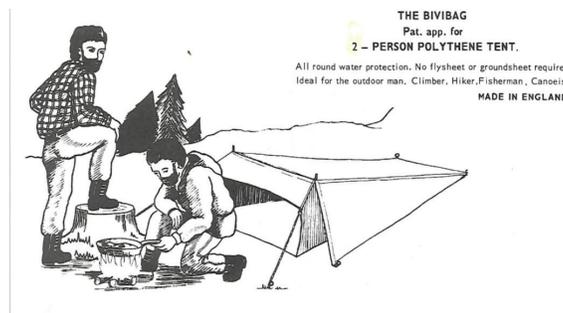
I remember once, maybe on the approach to Welshpool, being accosted by a farmer accusing me of trespass and not accepting the accuracy of the map.

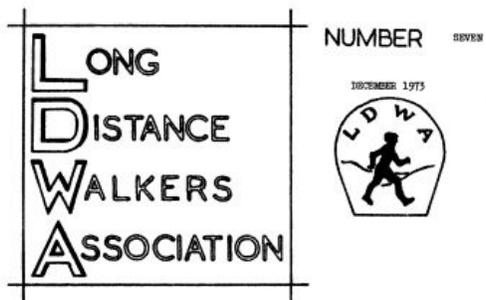
I have copied a page from my photo album:



There are ponies on Hergest Ridge, Kington; my bivouac; the River Dee from PontCysyllte Aqueduct; the path along the aqueduct; and a scene along the Shropshire Union canal.

For anyone interested, here are details of my bivouac. The two persons referred to must be short and slender and very, very good friends.





NEWSLETTER

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In 1971, Offa's Dyke Path became the fourth long-distance path to be 'officially' opened by the Countryside Commission. It is the only one which actually follows an historic feature - that of a ditch and mound - the mound sometimes being as much as 15 ft above the level of the ditch. The Dyke was built in the late 8th Century A.D. by Offa, King of the English Midland Kingdom of Mercia and runs for 168 miles along the Welsh border from Chepstow to Prestatyn. The Path does not follow the Dyke all the time, as the latter enters unsightly coal-mining areas or uses the river instead as an adequate boundary in places. Away from the Dyke, the Path takes to the hills resulting in fine ridge-walking on the Black Mountains and the Clwydian hills.

I walked the entire route in 1969 with a Y.H.A. 'Adventure Holiday', and have led parties and taken part in progress surveys since, in addition to completing the Pennine Way, Cleveland Way and South-West Peninsula Coast Path. I shall be leading another party along Offa's Dyke Path in the summer of 1974 under the auspices of the Y.H.A. We shall be making use of hostels, farmhouses and guest houses and the dates are as follows:

- 1st week: 20th July, starting from Chepstow*
- 2nd week; 27th July, starting from Knighton*

If anyone is interested, please write to me in the first instance so that I can gauge the likely support and the Y.H.A. will be publishing their 'Adventure Holidays' brochure with further details in the new year, to whom final bookings should be sent.

STRIDER - December 1974

LLWYBR CLAWDD OFFA

DECEMBER 1974 NUMBER TEN

Long
Distance
Walkers
Association



Newsletter

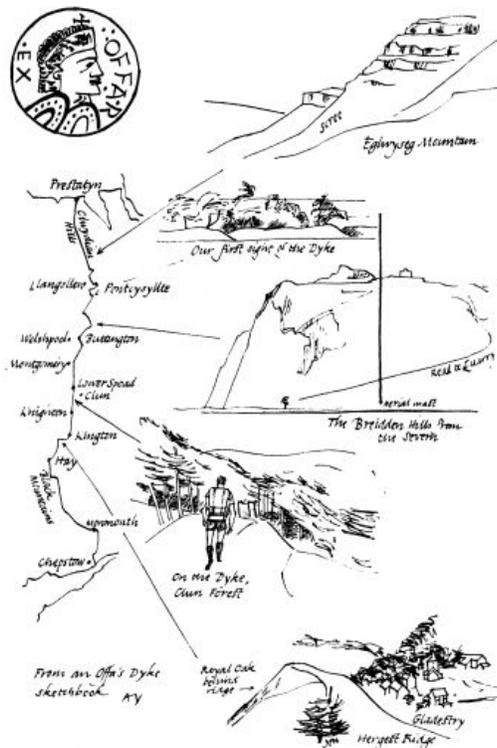
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Each year Percy and I take leave of our wives, don our rucsacs and totter off in search of time past and our lost youth. Last year we failed to find them on the Pennine Way. This year, in July, they eluded us on the Offa's Dyke Path.

Unlike medieval pilgrim routes the modern long distance footpaths go nowhere in particular. Kirk Yetholm is a pleasant place. But it is not the new Jerusalem. And Prestatyn is no Santiago de Compostela; it is a place better to walk from than to. So we decided to defy the Countryside Commission and walk south, down the Offa's Dyke Path. Thus we planned to avoid being swept up in the camaraderie, and competition of the road. Another vain hope.

The path is 168 miles long. For only 60 of the 168 miles does the path follow the great earthwork built by Offa of Mercia in the late eighth century to mark the western boundary of his kingdom. For many of those 60 we wished that it did not. Except for some splendid stretches between Lower Spode and Kington the dyke does not give good walking and for too long we fought through wet bracken and brambles on a switchback to follow the grain of the country. We found the best walking on the sections where the path does not follow the dyke; from Prestatyn over the Clwydian Hills and on to Llangollen and later, on the Black Mountains. There are about 3000 stiles on the route and in Flintshire each is 30ft high; or so it seemed.

The Offa's Dyke Association, Old Primary School, West St, Knighton, Powys whose aim is to "promote the conservation, improvement and better knowledge of the Welsh border region along the Offa's Dyke Path" sells some useful publications. As the path wanders down the edges and across the corners of the Ordnance Survey one inch and 1:50000 maps and as in the farmland stretches the 1:25000 maps showing field boundaries are essential to speedy navigation, the Association's Strip Maps (photo-lithe copies of mainly OS one inch and 1:25000 maps) are invaluable. We took only the strip maps and saved much money and weight. But we wished we had taken a 1:50000 sheet covering the Black Mountains which we climbed from Hay in thick mist. By a slight navigational error which we blamed on the inadequacy of the map (not a copy of the OS but a sketch map for that bit) we found ourselves, when the mist lifted and the sun shone, singing joyfully as we marched with springy steps along a fine track 12° off course and heading for the wrong ridge.

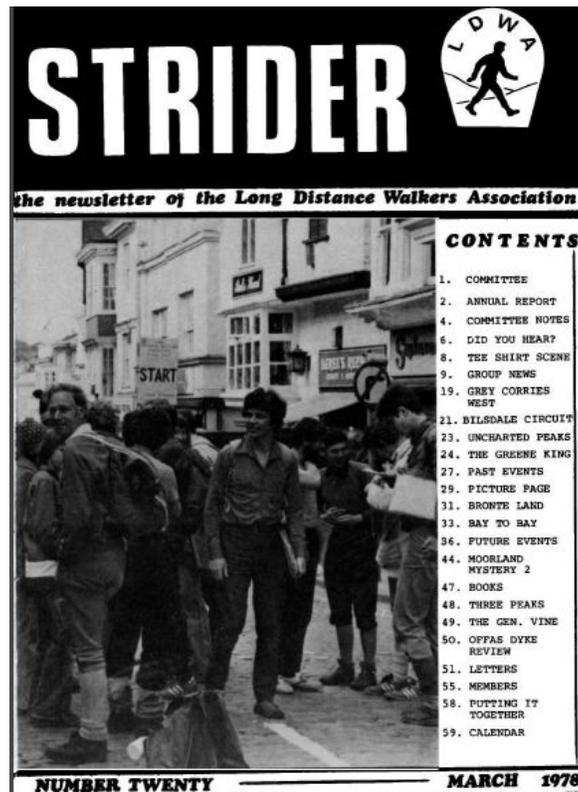


The Association's accommodation list was a great help, leading us to such remarkable people as Mrs Buxton of Buttington, who welcomed us when we were soaked to the skin, washed and dried our clothes, filled our boots with newspaper, fed us and talked to us, while entertaining her friends, helping her husband learning his part for the village play, preparing for her son's wedding, cosseting the two young men who had been rescued from an attempt to camp on the Long Mountain, and watching television. We had no trouble in finding accommodation and meals anywhere and were made welcome everywhere, even on the last night at a motel.

Another useful snippet of information. The Aqueduct Inn at Pontcysyllte does not close until 3pm. Had we known, we would not have sprinted across the aqueduct with no more than a cursory wave at a narrow boat adorned with roses and castles and a crew of girls in bikinis. But we would have missed one of the best overheard conversations of the journey: "Dead, isn't he?" "I hope so; they have buried him, haven't they?". If some skilled member of the LDWA would compile a guide to the opening hours of the public houses of Great Britain he would deserve a specially designed gold lamé badge to sew on his rucsac.

The Offa's Dyke Association sells handsome gilt badges with enamel inlay, based on a coin of Offa Rex; green for members, red for associates, and blue for those who can produce evidence of having walked the Path from coast to coast - usually the Association's "Walker's Card" signed by two ODA members living on the route.

Like Wainwright in 'A Coast to Coast Walk' I am beginning to have second thoughts about long distance footpaths. The acorns begin to pall; the finger posts start to direct rather than guide. And delightful people though walkers are, we did see rather a lot of them last year and this, on what will no doubt soon become known as F1 and F4. Next year, unless someone writes a book about it first, the Harrow Way, the Lunway, the South Hampshire Ridgeway, the Oxdrove and the Great Ridgeway will provide us with a lonely way to Devon and the sea. But we shall have to do without badges.



A LONG DISTANCE FOOTPATH REVIEW
Offa's Dyke Path

A MERCIAN ON THE DYKE (I was born in Wednesbury, a town whose origins go back to the Mercian Kingdom).

I see that not much seems to have been mentioned about the P4 or the Offa's Dyke Path and, considering that is our second longest continuous path, I thought it appropriate that a MERCIAN should give a few guiding remarks about it. Well, may I take this opportunity to dispel (in stile?) you will see why I said that later on, some of the myths regarding this so called National Path.

It would seem most people prefer to walk in a South to North direction, and why not? They do on the Pennine Way. The main flow (or trickle would be appropriate) of walkers is from Chepstow to Prestatyn, but being a Mercian I chose the other way.

According to the Countryside Commission Handbook, it should not be compared with the Pennine Way, and that is true, it cannot at all be compared with the free flowing walking that is typical of the P1. Indeed the very nature of the path 'it's bits and pieces' has produced a second class long distance path.

The concept is good and there can be no construction to equal the size and length of Offa's Dyke that has survived until this day in this Kingdom (that covers England and Wales, two relatively new concepts as far as the Kingdom of Mercia is concerned). However, where the design of the path is concerned it falls down as it was primarily local authorities who undertook to establish the route. Unlike the Pennine Way where it was the Ramblers' Association who fought long and hard to get that task completed, and primarily Tom Stephenson who masterminded it. The Dyke Path is not of this breed, it was born by cold blooded administrators, who it would seem, had little regard for the long distance backpacker.

One of its major disadvantages is the lack of settlements which would add interest greatly if incorporated at the right places. The other is the number of hideous four bar stiles - now you may have guessed why i said 'stile' and not 'style'. Unlike the moorland variety, these ladders have to be climbed and that is no mean task when carrying a 30lb rucksack for 170 miles. It would be no exaggeration to say that there are more stiles along half the Offa's Dyke Path than there are on the whole length of The Staffordshire Way (100)! In between stiles there are several sections of the path that are questionable especially where the dyke is most neglected. Please don't get me wrong, I am not against the path, I enjoyed the Clwyds and the open tops of the Black Mountains are super for free walking, and the character of the Wye is inescapable; but why, I ask myself, does one have to get through a man-made assault course to enjoy the collective delights which should be offered on a Long Distance Footpath?

By the way, don't walk it in late summer with shorts on - you won't survive it! The inhibitious flora won't leave your legs intact, and talking of flora, if you use a backpack) and most Long Distance Walkers do) you are going to have fun at the stiles, a lot of fun and quite often. Hopefully, now with the establishment of the Offa's Dyke Association, things should be a little better as regards the maintenance of the path but something ought to be done to modify the stiles as well.

through the
EDITOR'S LETTERBOX

One must accept the fact that the author of the article in the last is an experienced Long Distance Footpath walker; nevertheless I found his appraisal of Offa's Dyke L.D, Footpath severe and was mildly shocked when he referred to it as 'this so called National Path'. My wife and I are retired and live within one mile of the path and our local summit of Disgwylfa. An article about the Offa's Dyke 15, the cross country run to be held on the path on 18 June contains the following description:

"The section of the 'path' from Hay to Kington is undoubtedly one of the most outstanding from its accessibility and its very great beauty".

Frequently we walk from Gladestry over Hergest to Kington. Looking round on a clear day from Hergest Ridge we can see the Long Mynd, the Wrekin, Clee Hill, the Malverns, the Forest of Dean, May Hill, the Black Mountains, The Brecon Beacons, Caety Traylow and Radnor Forest; here we make time to stand and stare. The Dyke between Knighton and Clun may be crossed by more stiles than were dreamt of by King Offa but this section takes one back in history; it is enchanting!

A Mercian himself, the author considers that the Dyke Path was 'born by cold blooded administrators. When younger, most of our walking took place in Derbyshire and Yorkshire and last September we returned to walk up William's Clough on to Kinder Scout. There we sat and envied young backpackers near the start of their long walk along the Pennine Way. Living now near the Welsh border we are grateful for the work of Frank Noble and others, including the farmers and Local Authorities who were responsible for the establishment of the path through this historic and beautiful country and to the Offa's Dyke Association for monitoring its condition.

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ON FOX'S TRAIL OF OFFA - take a closer look at the Dark Age earthwork

The first part of a backpacking expedition from north to south along the 'Welsh Coast to Coast' Long Distance Footpath No. 4, 176 miles officially (but these are map miles) leads to the 'V.C. of walking' if one can bear the 'hard bits' - the Clwyds in a lashing wind; Long Mountain in icy fog; the switchbacks of the mountain zone - the Black Mountains - fifteen miles of peaty wilderness in rain sodden cloud. The rest is beautiful and so are those in good weather!

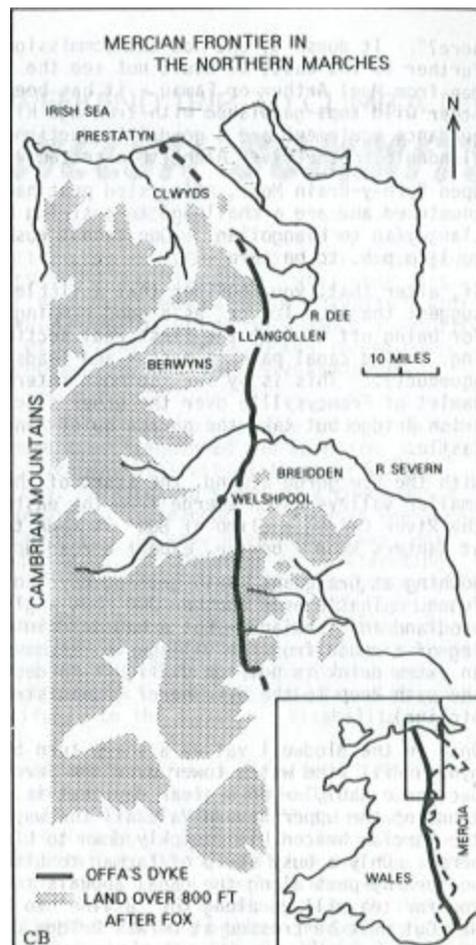
Beating the bounds is an ancient English tradition and anyone who takes to following the Mercian border in the Welsh Marches probably unknowingly is doing the same. The most likely candidate is the follower of footpath No. 4, alias 'Offa's Dyke Path'. But unlike the Roman cousin across Northern England, it does not enjoy the degree of state environmental conservation, nor common popularity. Yet it was the result of the 4th Century imperial design to protect the 'southern lands'.

Yet this 8th Century earthwork along a 150 mile frontier defence is the largest of its type in N.W. Europe. Even so, it wasn't until the 1930s that a serious attempt was made to investigate it thoroughly. Sir Cyril Fox set about a 'complete archaeological survey'. In the event, he submitted his final report in 1955 after doing only a handful of digs. Really he had done a

topographical report giving the state of preservation of the dyke along its course. His complete works did include an historical section based on documents from that time.

References give Prestatyn as the point where the dyke meets the sea but nothing is evident on ground level except on Gop Hill, a little to the south of the old cliff line. At Gop Hill is the first glimpse and the last until Chirk some 43 miles south on Offa's Dyke.

However further E.S.E. are traces and remains of the dyke. Recent field work by Dr David Hill of the Extramural Department of Manchester University has led to the uncovering of parts of the dyke below surface level.



To the walker of the Countryside Commission Path the thought can not but spring to mind when trekking the Clwyds "Why didn't Offa's Dyke follow the highest tops here?". It doesn't, and had the Commission followed the line of the dyke much further to the east, we would not see the views of the Carneddi, Glyders or Snowdon from Moel Arthur or Famau - it has been so sunny in September! These and other wild tops, garnished with Iron Age hill forts, Jubilee memoria and other guidance equipment and a good introduction to the following dozen miles beyond Llandegla on the river Alun (to a suitably named World's End!).

Open Cynr-y-Brain Moor, afforested peat hag and bare limestone scree are all encountered and are a challenge to a tiring backpacker at the end of a day from Llangwyfan to Llangollen. One can not rush along the middle Eglwseg screes - down to 1½ m.p.h. to be safe!

If after that, you consider that a little sun would be appreciated, I would suggest the 'Sun Trevor' as a good camping spot by the Llangollen Canal. Ready for being off to hunt the first real section of 'the Dyke' at Chirk in the morning. The Canal path is easier and leads straight to Telford's Pontcysyllte Aqueduct. This is by far the most interesting feature along with the canal hamlet of Froncysyllte over the other side of the River Dee. No need to trek to Irish Bridge but take the narrow quiet lanes to Fran Isaf and onward to Chirk Castle.

With the Dee gorge behind the start of the first of many tangential crossings of smaller valleys which emerge from the eastern Berwyns begin at Pen-y-Bryn. From the River Ceiriog a climb of 800' is made to reach Crogen Hill via a boggy ravine at Nanter Wood - beware, expect a road detour of 1 mile!

Nothing at Graignant to get psyched about so aim for the inn at Trefonen. That's over another 300' but a glorious variety of open heath semi-woodland and farmland - not a bad lead into a very tidy village. The dog's hind leg of a route from the village to Nantmawr is so off-putting you may find that an extra drink is not too difficult to dissuade oneself from having. Why did not the path keep to the dyke here? (Administrators obviously had a hand in route picking).

Once in the Blodwell valley a sharp turn S.W. is seen 400' above, ahead on Llanymynech Hill (the watch tower over the Severn Vale). What a viewpoint - worth the packhorse haul!! - on a clear day that is. And ahead is the slog of the flat lands of the upper Severn Vale all the way to Welshpool - 65 miles in all. From the Mercian beacon hill quickly down to Llanymynech but little trace of a ditch here. Only a busy strip of tarmac to Llandysillo and Four Crosses, unless the western by-pass along the canal appeals to you. Those wanting to make Buttington for tea will go along the 'B' line to Dyke end and the river embankment path. New Cut must be crossed at Derwas Bridge unless you swim to avoid a large detour.

Haunting you all the way is the huge hump of Breidden Hill. Like a large black figure, it doesn't get noticeably smaller for the two mile winding plod to the locks at Pool Quay. The outcrop of igneous rocks rise 1000' above the river casting a shadow over one as the 'Dragon' is approached. Note; a short cut along the old railway via the Pool Quay can not be made - no bridge! The Montgomeryshire Canal is a welcome change from the riverside but the acquaintance is brief. Alas too, so are the traces of one of the lesser abbeys that was wrecked in 1536. Finally the river crossing is made at Buttington Bridge and tea (to contemplate Long Mountain on tomorrow's journey through the 'Mountain Zone').

1988 - The Never Ending Expedition by Ian Latham, Marches LDWA, (now) older, wiser, better at planning and packing

Part 1

In the Spring of 1988, at the age of 18, I first had the idea to have a crack at the Offa's Dyke Path. I am a farmer's son and home was just 2 miles from the path where it crossed the old Abergavenny to Monmouth road in Llantilio Crossenny and so I was always aware of it but hadn't before considered walking it.

One of the triggers was a Christmas present one year of a beautiful A6 size guide book with brilliant sketch maps in it. I had not long been in the Army and so with basic training under my belt I felt ready for anything.

I don't recall having any particular plan and I have no idea if I meant to do it all in one go or if I had little stages in mind. Anyway, I loaded my rucksack and oh boy was it heavy!? This was my first venture into solo backpacking and it was becoming clear that I had all the gear and no idea. Even through my times in the scouts, cadets, and now the army, there was always a support network with extra food and water and tents but this unsupported thing was a whole new game.

My parents dropped me off at Chepstow and we took the stock photo at Sedbury looking confident (it wasn't long after this that I thought the photo might be useful for identifying my body when it was found after I had died from exhaustion!).

Off I went up the beautiful Wye Valley and day one went really well. I was still fresh, I was on my own, going at my own pace, no-one to bother me. Perfect. Now these were days without GPS watches and online mapping and so I actually have no idea how far I travelled that first day. I do recall getting to early evening and finding a nice little spot in a field that was surrounded by woodland and I just set up my tent.

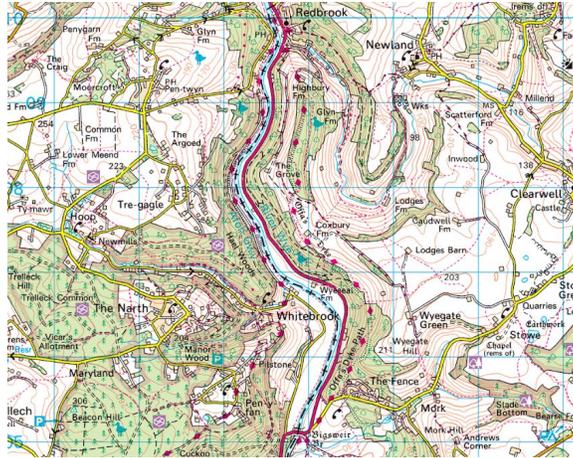
There was a farmhouse nearby and I was bold enough to wander over and ask for water which they kindly obliged. They even gave me some milk. Looking back on it, I must have been somewhere between Bigsweir and Redbrook (a large degree of error I know!).

The only reference I do remember is that early the next morning as I followed the path down to the main road I stumbled across a Little Chef or Happy Eater and had the best breakfast ever. Now considering this was only day 2 of who knows how long on this particular expedition, I felt knackered. My rucksack felt even heavier than the day before, my legs ached, and I realised that I had never actually walked this far with this much kit before.

Up through Monmouth and then East. And so it was in the Kings Wood area that I pulled my hamstring. Oh my, that hurt. So here I was, fairly remote, on my own, no communications and a bloody heavy rucksack.

Considering I had no plan 48 hours previously, a very clear one now formed. I was going to hobble on to Llantilio Crossenny and then, rather than continue on the path, I was turning right on the main road and taking the 2 miles to home.

My parents were quite surprised to see me that evening at the top of the farm yard. As I collapsed in the chair in the kitchen, my mum went to move my rucksack and said "Ooh, your rucksack is a bit heavy".



Part 2

One year passes, I become a bit wiser, and I decide it is time to pick up where I left off. With my guide book and a slightly lighter rucksack I went back to Llantilio Crossenny and resumed my journey North.

Through Pandy and up onto the mountains and you realise how very different now the terrain is from the wooded Wye Valley. Now this mini-expedition did have a better plan and I had decided to do a two day backpack and end up at Hay-on-Wye where my lift home would meet me.

About half way is Llanthony Priory and so near there I dropped down off the ridge to find a suitable campsite. Now I do remember this place very clearly and have looked it up on the map.



Over a little footbridge South of Court Farm and into a little field on the inside of the river meander. Perfect location as it was secluded and the guidebook told me there was a pub just up the road.

Once the campsite is set up I decide to pop up the pub for a relaxing pint. It is over 30 years ago but I remember clearly the warm welcome and sitting up at the bar and ordering a pint. What I remember less clearly is the next few hours during which time I consumed several more pints, a plate of chips and some peanuts.

I only left because the landlord wanted to shut up sometime near midnight. Out I step and the barman points me back down the road where I came from. The door shut behind me and my first thought is "Bloody hell, it's dark." My second is "Bloody hell, where did I set up camp?" Of course it hadn't crossed my mind to take a torch to the pub as I was only going for one pint and then back for a good night's sleep.

It was a long walk back down the road, pinballing from one side to the other, then finding the footbridge and not falling off. I cannot remember the colour of my tent but it was invisible in that field in the dark. I was so relieved when I walked into it.

Next morning I had the mother of all hangovers. My head was pounding and I was struggling to focus. Tell you what though, nothing cures a hangover like tabbing straight uphill from 220m to 550m in the course of just one kilometre.

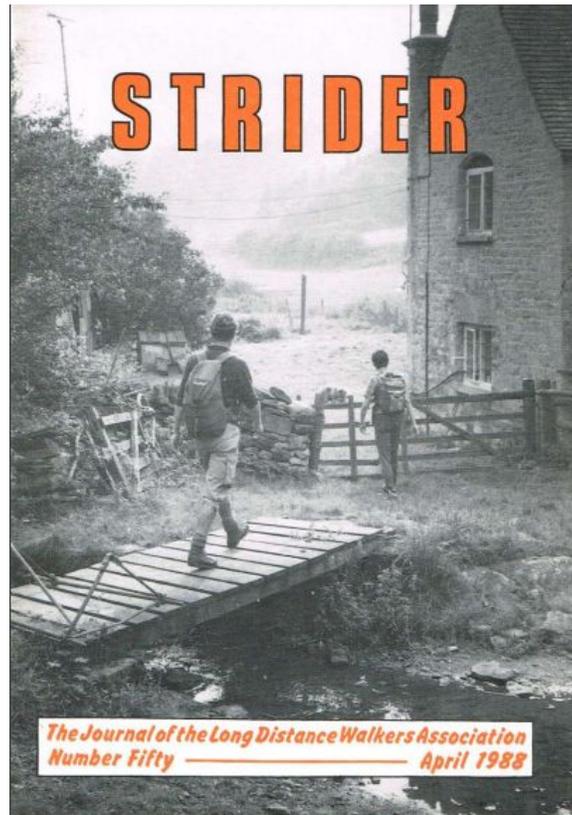
Once back on the ridge, and having a clearer head, the route to Hay was dead easy and very picturesque. No muscle injuries this time and Hay was a brilliant checkpoint with its book shops and cafes.

Part 3

Well this never happened. I was away in exotic locations with the Army (Catterick, Otterburn, Salisbury Plain) and I just never got around to continuing the journey North from Hay. These days I live in Shrewsbury and belong to the Marches LDWA, and as a result I now own an Offa's Dyke Path Passport (won in a Twitter competition) and I have done the section between Newcastle on Clun and Montgomery on our South Shropshire Circular challenge in 2019. Also up around Trefonen on our Special Christmas Offa challenge at Christmas of the same year.

For me, then, the Offas Dyke Path remains the Never Ending Expedition.

STRIDER - APRIL 1988



AUGUST OFFA'S

It was while walking the South Downs Way in June that we decided to backpack the Offa's Dyke long distance path south to north. Planning and preparation were simple; we obtained strip maps and route notes produced by the Offa's Dyke Association, packed what we thought was necessary for a 10-day walk and spent a weekend on the Long Mynd to test our tent, cooker and packs. A few adjustments here and there and we were ready.

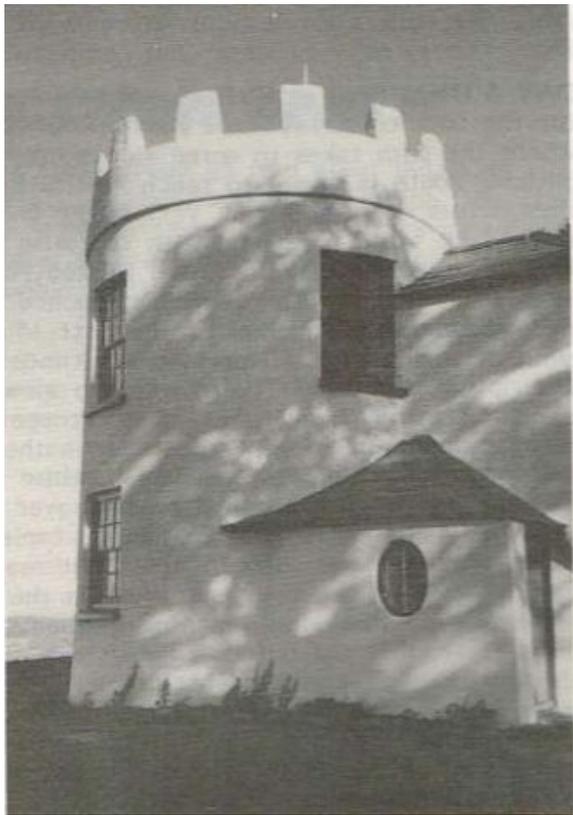
DAY 1 Sedbury Cliffs to Monmouth (River Wye alternative)

By public transport to Beachley, a short walk on the Dyke itself to reach the Offa's Dyke Stone - this bears a plaque to mark the start/finish of the LDP.



OFFA'S DYKE STONE

The obligatory photo and at 12.23 pm we were off. It was not long before we were on the Wye cliffs and following the Dyke we passed through the small villages of Brockweir and Redbrook. There are permissible route alternatives and as it was a warm day we chose to walk beside the Wye, climbing up to Naval Temple and Round House viewpoint before dropping down into Monmouth. A bag of fish and chips and a mile out of Monmouth found us in a potato field - a good place to camp. (17½ miles).



WYE VALLEY and THE ROUND HOUSE

DAY 2 Monmouth to Hatterall Ridge

Not wishing to pack a wet tent - there had been a shower very early in the morning - we waited hopefully for the sun to come up and dry it. Very soon a collection of walkers were passing our night halt. Much conversation - all had time to stop and chat. Many were from Holland and there was a team of sixth-formers doing their Duke of Edinburgh's Award. We were, later. To meet them again en route. The next stretch of the path crossed the plain of Monmouth, fairly flat with the usual hamlets, footbridges, streams and churches associated with country life, ascending to the 13th Century White Castle near Treadam. The south eastern tip of the Black Mountains came into view and we decided to stop just after Pen-Twyn hill fort near Hatterall Ridge and make an early start the next day. (16½ miles).

DAY 3 Hatterall Ridge to Gladestry

A super day! After an early breakfast of chicken curry and hot chocolate, we were, by 7.15 am, on the eastern ridge which is the Anglo-Welsh border, and as the sun came up the whole of the black Mountain range could be seen. For the next 11 miles there was a slight wind, and it was a little wet underfoot but with a clear sky the views were spectacular in all directions. We saw no one until we reached Pen-y-Beacon (Hay Bluff). Although the official route swings right avoiding Hay Bluff it is suggested that all walkers head towards this prominent point on the northern edge. From here there are excellent views to the Wye Valley and Radnorshire (Powys). A wash in a mountain stream, a steep descent and within two hours we had reached Hay-on-Wye where we sampled a Lancashire Hotpot at the Tea Shoppe - good value and very filling. The nourishment increased our vigour and after leaving Hay, walking beside the river for a while, we passed Bettws Chapel (Kilvert's Diary) and various Roman forts before passing through Newchurch. A climb over Diswylfa Hill took us to the Royal Oak at Gladestry, where the licensee welcomes walkers. The lawn at the rear of the pub was soon full of tents. Good substantial meals are served and we had one! (27 miles).

DAY 4 Gladestry to Knighton

A donkey alarm call from 7 am onwards convinced us it was time to move on. Once again the sun came up as we ascended Hergest Ridge, and then descended into Kington. Here we spent a pleasant hour visiting friends before setting out to climb between Rushock and Herrock Hills. At this point the Dyke becomes very prominent and the LDP is either on the Dyke wall or beside the Dyke, making the route easy to follow. So easy that just after Newcastle Hill we turned right at the wrong time and added on one hour and two miles! Eventually reaching Dolley Green a steep climb took us up to Hawthorn Hill. With the path now on the Dyke wall, we passed by an obelisk to Sir Richard Green-Price (who brought the railways to Radnorshire), a 19th Century Offa's Dyke stone and an 8 ft wide original gap in the Dyke to control travellers on the counter-scarp of the ditch, before descending into Knighton, home of the Offa's Dyke Association. We visited the Heritage Centre and decided that the Youth Hostel, next door, with

its showers, deserved our patronage. Be warned - the shops in Knighton close at 5.30 pm - our one hour's 'diversion' nearly caught us out (18 miles).

DAY 5 Knighton to Salt Bridge

For the next 20 miles or so the Dyke forms the path, and the best bits of it are seen. Out of Knighton to a steady climb over Panponton Hill, up Cwm Sanaham Hill to reach the Dyke's highest point on Llanfair Hill at 1408 ft. Then a nice easy pace as we followed the path through the village of Churchtown to encounter the Hergan to Kerry Hill climb (known amongst walkers as 'switchback'). Down to the Montgomery Plain, past Mellington Hall, a Victorian country mansion, giving on the right our first view of Corndon Hill - enjoyed by many on the Long Mynd Hike. A few miles further and we were at Salt Bridge. Looking for a suitable bivi site we continued on the LDP for ¼ mile and enquired at a bungalow as to the owner of an adjoining field. The owner not only owned the adjoining three fields but also a huge back lawn where he kindly invited us to pitch our tent. (19½ miles).

DAY 6 Salt Bridge to Trefonen

A very heavy dew meant we packed a wet tent and made an early start. We made a small diversion from the LDP to the village of Forden to re-supply. Back on the path and soon we were in the landscaped woods of Leighton Estate. A climb up to Beacon Ring, an ancient hill fort with views left to Welshpool and right to Moel y Golfa and the Breiddens, then we dropped down to Buttington, crossing the bridge over the River Severn. Then the flattest section of the path - first by the Shropshire Union Canal and then on an embankment of the Severn for about six miles continuing into Four Crosses, then back on the canal path to Llanymynech. A good climb up Llanymynech Hill just below Asterley Rocks and on to the golf course and we reached the top of Moelydd Hill with superb views in all directions. As we reached farmland near Trefonen, the evening was drawing in, and we met a Dutch family of six who had been walking in the same direction. They had camped for the night and they invited us to join them and we spent a pleasant hour or so discussing the many aspects of a walking holiday. (23½ miles).

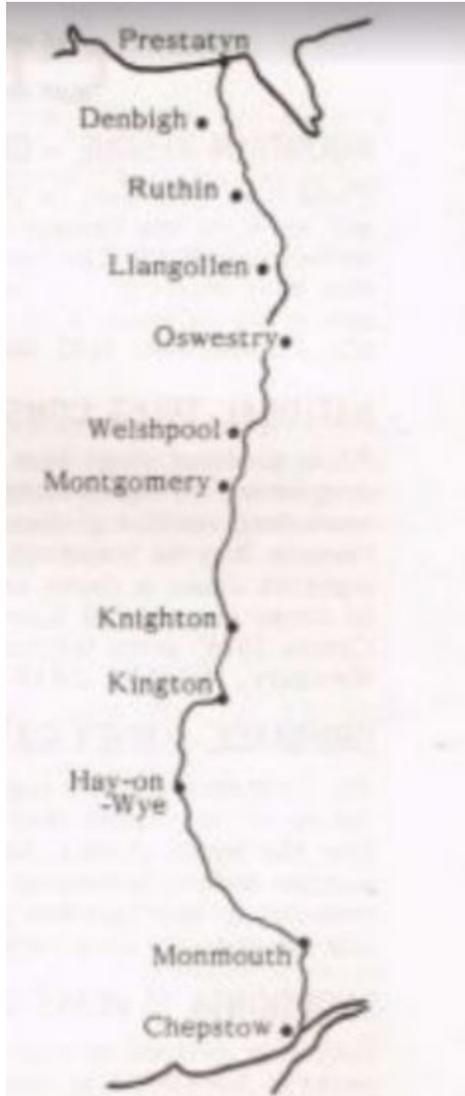
DAY 7 Trefonen to Dinas Bran

Into Trefonen and we broke from the LDP to walk into Oswestry for a re-supply of cash, fuel and food. Back onto the path and a climb up to Craig Forda Woods, past old Oswestry racecourse, over streams and footbridges to reach open moorland, still climbing, to fine views of Chirk Castle and Aqueduct. From here there are two routes: the alternative, through Chirk Castle grounds (open April to September only) and the official route that we took. Eventually we crossed the last good stretch of the Dyke to be seen before rejoining the Shropshire Union Canal towpath over Pontcysyllte Aqueduct - the Canal alternative. (For those with no head for heights, there is a swing bridge / main road route). Through Trevor and into the Glyndwr District - the start of the hardest climbing section of the whole of the LDP. A steep footpath through woods to reach the Panorama/Precipice where we met a Forestry Warden who advised us of bad weather and a night frost on the way, so just after the Castel Dinas Bran turn-off we found a

farm with a lovely barn and asked the farmer if we could stay the night. "As long as you don't burn the barn down" he said. We built a three sides structure of straw bales, erected the tent on top and found this to be very warm and comfortable. (18 miles).

DAY 8 Dinas Bran to Bodfari

We awoke to a dull misty morning - on went cagoules for the first time. A short road walk before turning off to the Eglwyseg Crags where the path takes to scree slopes (as these can be dangerous in bad weather an optional route is given) to reach Worlds End. A climb of a mile on a small road, then across open moorland, very boggy underfoot though the path is very well marked with white posts and with the mist becoming thicker these were a good aid. Forestry roads leading to Hafod Bilston's Hiker Hostel finally took us to Llandegla. The mist lifted slightly as we approached Moel y Gelli, the first of the Clwydian Hills. Ascending and descending for the next 13 miles, up into the mist and down into the sun. It was an eerie experience at times but the path is well trodden and the route description excellent. There were no views from Moel Llanfair, Foel Fenlli or Moel Famau (Jubilee Tower), but as we dropped down the side of Moel-Llys-y-Coed the steep ramparts of Moel Arthur were bathed in brilliant sunshine. To limit the erosion problem, the LDP follows a line of white posts uphill, well to the right of the summit. By the time we reached and crossed over the hill fort at Pen-y-Cloddiau we were feeling a bit tired and a mile further on espied a barn which seemed a good spotting point. However there was something - a gut reaction - that all was not as well as it looked. Eyes closed for about an hour, just in the period before deep sleep, when we heard a noise akin to that of a Japanese 'hornet'. It got louder, then stopped and through the haze of slumber our unfocused eyes saw this giant of 1 ... Biggles? 'Out, out' it shouted (as well as other unprintables). It turned out to be a 4 ft 6 in extremely irate farmer blaming us for: sheep stealing, rubbish on his farm and trying to set fire to his barn. Threatening to return with the police he got on a little two wheeled motor and zzzzd off to other barns nearby. Presumably this was his nightly round. Within 10 minutes we were back on the LDP. It was getting quite dark and as we approached Bodfari we saw the sign 'B&B Mrs Owen, Offa's Dyke Path'. She has been running her cosy little guest house for over 35 years and long may she continue to do so! She told us that she preferred walkers to 'people in cars'. More walkers came in later. Some found the Clywyddians harder to cross due to the deterioration of the weather. As we retired for the second time that night, faintly in the distance could be heard the Japanese hornet going from barn to barn. (23½ miles).

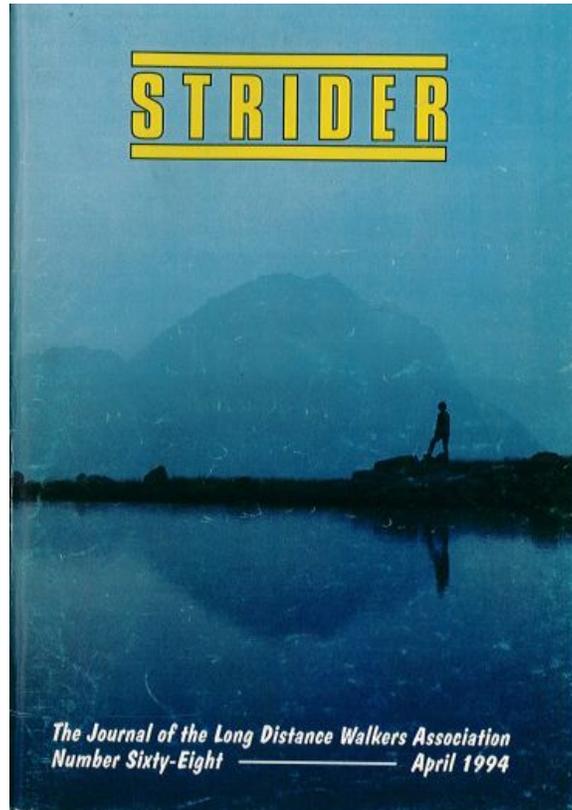


DAY 9 Bodfari to Prestatyn

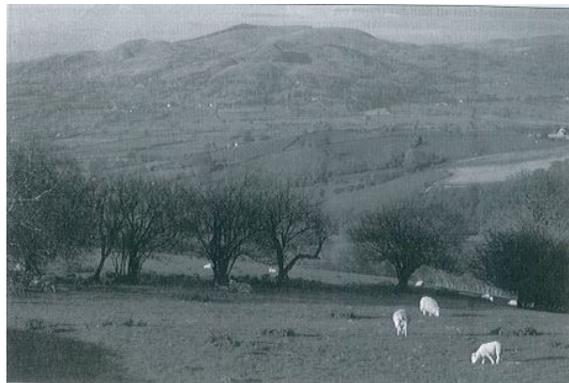
After a good breakfast we started out. It was still misty but promised sun later. A steep climb over Moel y Gaer hill fort, Cefn Du and Moel Maenefa. The mist cleared slightly and we saw the coast! The walk was coming to an end but the closing stages were very deceptive. The stiles in this section are much narrower and taller than any we had come across. Over fields, through farms and woods to climb up on Prestatyn Cliffs. The mist cleared. Two miles of sea views as we ploughed through the gorse, brambles, nettles and the thistles of the cliff path (what a finish!) to reach the High Street and Bastion Road as the sun came out. And so 8 days 25 minutes after leaving Sedbury Cliffs 176 miles and approximately 650 stiles later we reached Offa's Dyke Stone near the beach at Prestatyn. (12 miles).

The total LDP has so much variety and wealth of history on or near the route that it has been called the most exciting of the long distance footpaths. It was a superb walk and a great holiday.

STRIDER - APRIL 1994



Impressions of a Walk Along Offa's Dyke
from Froncysyllte to Sedbury Cliff September 1993



The view from the Kerry Hills on the descent to the Montgomery Plain towards Corndon Hill

Having already walked the northernmost 40 miles before, I had for a long time, wanted to walk the other 137. Mark Richard's 'Through Welsh Border Country' and all the 1:50000 maps were already in my library. There was only a short while between the time when the opportunity to go arose and the time I actually set off. It was just long enough to get two booklets from the Offa's Dyke Association. One was their 1992 'North to South Route Notes' the other their 1993 'Where to Stay List'. The 'List' also contains much useful information about transport and other facilities.

The 'Notes' are a verbal route description and a useful supplement to the waymarking and hand drawn maps in Mark Richard's book. I didn't need the 1:50000 maps for navigation, though they were useful for general planning.

Waymarking on the route is good. On a high proportion of stretches it could be relied on alone. The excellent waymarking and maintenance represents massive efforts and persistence by everyone concerned and is highly commendable. If, in the face of all of the problems, it isn't perfect everywhere, that is no reason to complain. However it did make it wise to keep an eye on the other aids as well, even on the very best stretches.

I also bought a new waterproof. This proved to be the soundest investment I have ever made!

As I stayed at bed and breakfasts and one youth hostel, I was able to do with very little gear. I thought economy of weight would increase the potential pleasure. It did. As the schools had just restarted, pre-booking was not necessary. I am a YHA member but was out of luck with the hostels. Knighton was closed, awaiting major repairs (and remains so) and I hit the closed days or periods of the others, but I did stay at Monmouth.

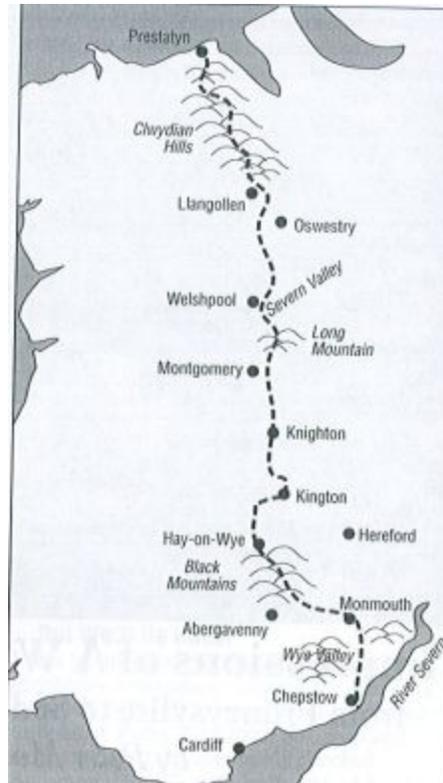
I had only from Monday afternoon until to late Sunday free. Early on Tuesday, a friend who lives in Wrexham, drove me five miles south and dropped me at the north end of the Froncysyllte Aqueduct over the River Dee.

My return was to be on the 5.43pm on Sunday from Chepstow to Sheffield (change at Cheltenham). The May to October railway timetable insisted that all Sunday trains on the Chepstow line were seaside holiday trains from South Wales to the Midlands, on which pre-booking a seat is compulsory, so I bought them in Sheffield before leaving. When it came to it, the train had only two coaches, no reservation tabs and slightly more empty seats than passengers. Presumably the timetable writers overlooked adding a note that pre-booking ceases to be needed once school term has started.

That gave me six full days. I started in principle willing to play it by ear for daily distances and any worthwhile diversions. If necessary, I was prepared to miss out some of the southernmost end and come back to it at some other time. The area south of Monmouth has more towns and indoor facilities. That would increase the chances of successfully disguising my ulterior motives, if or when suggesting it as a suitable area for a family holiday. It always rains when we go on holiday.

In the event, the wind and rain forestalled any dalliance or deliberate detours. Keeping going keeps you warm. If you can't see what you went to see, or it is miserable when you get there, sightseeing is pointless. To be fair, it either blew hard or poured, relenting in one roughly in line with the increase in the other.

20 miles was the ration on four days but it was 25 on Tuesday and Saturday. The amount of up and down was a surprise. Counting contours on the map after returning home suggests between two and three thousand feet every day.





All the walkers I met were going the other way, south to north and always stopped for a chat (or a communal grouse about the wet). Europe, America and the Antipodes were well represented. Any remark that pushing right shouldered into wet south westerly weather is harder than being butted from the rear left, would have fallen on stony ground and was left unsaid.

Froncysyllte Aqueduct, which carries the Llangollen Canal 120 ft above the River Dee, made a spectacular place to start. It is a long, eight foot wide cast iron trough on stone stilts, with a towpath beside it. On the outside of the towpath is a railing on the parapet. The other side of the canal is just three inches of cast iron between water and fresh air. There is no reason for vertigo, but there is an exposed feeling. It is probably worse if crossing by boat.

Quiet midday twilight under a thick woodland canopy.

Rain inside woods, from wind knocking off the trees, while it was dry and breezy outside.

Well washed clumps of green hills.

A view of a deep rainbow away over Corndon Hill framed by white and grey clouds and dripping trees. Just a glimpse then cloud closed over again.

Blue shapes of hills and vales away to the west.

Three mewing quartering buzzards sliding across a brisk wind above a plantation's edge.

The Offa's Dyke ditch and bank marching away switchback often exactly across the grain of the land, sometimes diagonal, at other times with it.

Whilst climbing a slimy and rocky groove in tall bracken, some sixth sense causing a pause just off the path. A mountain bike bounces past fast. A shout that sounded like 'fore' or 'more'. The second guess was the right one. 20 seconds later, two more. It was technically a bridleway. These were the only bikes met, but it wasn't a busy time of the year.

Looking upsun from a river valley: bright gold braid zig zag on the narrow flat between dark hills.

A warm blast of beer, tobacco, cooking and sweat laden air from a hotel bar. Resisting the temptation to go in and dry out, because it was only noon, it had stopped raining and there were many miles to go that day.

Seen to the west, the miniature Radmor Plain shut in by green hills on each side and dark mountain flanks and cloud banks behind.

Getting disorientated in a vast hedgeless field, just north of Kington. A very heavy squall came in and reduced visibility to about 30 yards. It was more vicious than anything earlier in the day.

Having tea and toast reclining in a steaming vast ornate freestanding iron bath, while the wind rattled the sash window.

My gear and I being dried out by an Aga Range. Agreeing with the landlord and landlady that their baby, discovered gumming a nearly dry but unwashed article, was developing good taste!

Cruising along a ridge top on springy turf.

Quietly sitting and admiring the view, beside a traversing track, behind a rock out of the wind. Admirable control of flighty pony. Rider to pony through clenched teeth;"Bloody don't...". I assume .. B.. off downhill into the bracken. They went fast but stayed on the track.

Hardest of all leaving the pub and other delights of Hay-on-Wye. It was far too short of the day's mileage quota to be a place to end the day. I'm glad I did go on, because of the superb views from Hay Bluff later that afternoon, following the renewed wind having lifted the rain.



Near the top of Hay Bluff, looking downwards towards the Wye Valley and Hay-on Wye

Capel-y-ffin in its shadowed cwm, in the sudden calm of evening. The quiet rush of the river. Flashing gems from the sun glinting in hanging dewdrops, the following morning.

The eastern wall of the Black Mountains. The top of the world, with a good track. Distant views all around. Nearer to, on the left, a fresh coloured patchwork of fields.

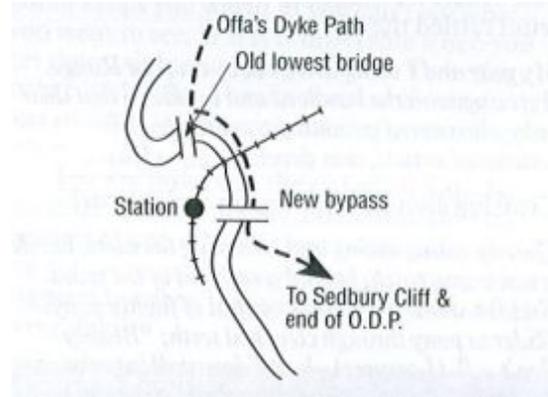
The twisted dark crag of Ysgyrd Fawr presiding over the lumpy country that lies to the east of Abergavenny.

The commanding all round view in sombre ominous light from White Castle (near Llantilio Crosseny).

Monmouth's long market street gently rising from the Monnow bridge to the square at the top. The young animated buzz of conversation in the overspill crowd of the three pubs round the square. It was Saturday evening and seemed very good natured, but the better of the two chip shops shuts at 9pm. There was, to my relief, another at the very bottom by the bridge.

The view from Wintour's Leap over a loop in the Wye. The cliffs' massive beds of light coloured rock. A smooth top slab of dark green tidal water.

Sunday, the last day, was the wettest of all. It was touch and go whether there would be time to finish at Sedbury Cliff and get back to Chepstow Station to catch the train. When I got to the crux it resolved itself. My map was out of date. It didn't show a new bypass bridging the Wye estuary further south than before. There was even a separate walkway. The distance from the end of Offa's Dyke to the station was nearly two miles less than I thought it would be.



Elation at reaching the Commemorative Stone at the end of the dyke at Sedbury Cliff top. Unrelated to the rain having stopped for a while. View of the Severn estuary and motorway bridge.

Disappointment at Chepstow Station. Nothing except an area where the platform canopy hadn't been dismantled. Fortunately, a newish train, on time, with a wheelchair accessible toilet, so enough elbow room to change into dry (yes packed into double supermarket carrier bags) clothes. Also effective heating, no chilly draughts and audible advanced announcement of stations. I was envious of my ticket, which had survived the whole journey, without having even got wet once. It was in my wallet, which I had kept in two (previously unused) sandwich bags.

The whole Offa's Dyke Path is highly recommended - and even more strongly if you can organise reasonable weather.

NATIONAL TRAILS REGISTER - 2009

In 2009, the LDWA launched its National Trails Register where the LDWA agreed to compile and maintain a Register of those walkers who have completed a substantial number of the National Trails in Britain.

There would be four levels of the Register: Bronze, Silver, Gold and Diamond, each level representing more National Trails completed than the previous level.

It was agreed that retrospective claims would be accepted upon confirmation that the National Trail had been satisfactorily completed at a time before the scheme had been implemented.

According to current records the particular figures of completions for the Offa's Dyke Path, broken down by decade, are as follows:

Decade	ODP completions
1970s	12
1980s	28
1990s	45
2000s	87
2010s	108

LAURIE WILSON 2016 - Hay-on-Wye to Montgomery

In 2016 I set out to walk the remaining 140 miles of the Offa's Dyke Path from Hay-on-Wye to Prestatyn. The previous September I had to abandon my attempt to walk the whole of the National Trail but had to stop at Hay-on-Wye due to a painful leg, which turned out to be a stress fracture.

Having stayed in Hereford on the Saturday night, I caught the Hay Ho bus which took me 15 miles and through the pretty countryside of the Golden Valley. Arriving at Hay-on-Wye at 11.30, the first day of walking involved a ten mile section to Gladestry.

The weather was good for walking and this section was mostly farmland, with lots of sheep, and also moorland higher up reaching 1200 feet. There were great views across the horizon of the Black Mountains and other hills.

Half way along the route I reached the church at Newchurch, where there were tea, coffee and biscuits at the back for a donation. I spent my lunchtime there and lost all sense of time, stopping for an hour.

Despite it being a Sunday, I met very few people along the way. Even at Gladestry where I had booked in for bed and breakfast, I had the pub to myself.

I woke the next morning to the sound of falling rain and that was all I could hear. What I mean by that is - no trains, no cars, no neighbours arguing, totally different from living in a city or a town. Bliss really

By the time I had enjoyed an excellent cooked breakfast, the rain had stopped and I set off from Gladestry, past the school (first day back) then up, up and up to 1200 feet on Hergest Ridge, made famous by Mike Oldfield - I bought the album in the 1970s.

The moorland was shrouded in low cloud and all I could see were ponies, pooping and peeing sheep and the occasional dog walker.

After four miles, the path descended into the country town of Kington. Nobody seems to know which king founded Kington but it seemed a pretty busy place, with different independent shops. I had lunch here and spent my time people watching and wondering if I could enjoy living here.

After leaving Kington I began to climb again and. Whilst catching my breath, I looked back from where I had been and a wonderful vista of the Black Mountains opened up. That afternoon climb was tough and I was drenched in perspiration; flies constantly buzzed me, thinking that I was a sheep.

Eventually I reached the top and was greeted by a golf course, the highest 18 hole course in the country. Later I reached part of the walk that followed part of the actual Offa's Dyke; now just a low embankment and riddled with rabbit holes.

My stop for the night was at the Old Vicarage in the village of Evenjobb. This bed and breakfast establishment was a mile off the path in a valley and the first part of the day's walk involved a steep climb but when I got to the top there were some marvellous views.

The rest of the day was literally full of ups and downs as I crossed valleys and hills on the way to Knighton. I arrived here quite early so I had plenty of time to look around. Again lots of small shops and the Offa's Dyke Centre where souvenirs were available to purchase. Knighton is lucky that it still has a railway station, although there are only five trains a day.

Leaving Knighton the next morning, the path was constantly up and down, some of it a bit tiring and dispiriting. But I was constantly being rewarded with fantastic views of the countryside from 1000 feet up and more and again, very peaceful.

Having arrived at Newcastle-upon-Clun, I booked into my accommodation at The Crown. After dinner I went for a walk in the dusk and the only noises I heard were crows cawing, owls hooting and bats batting.

Tomorrow there will be more ups and downs, in fact eight hills to walk up and down in the first five miles (known as the 'switchbacks') and a total length of 11 miles until I reach the town of Montgomery.

Halfway up the first hill of the day, I met a sign saying I was half way through the Offa's Dyke Path walk. But my pace today was incredibly slow and it wasn't until 2pm that I arrived at the Kerry Ridgeway, not in Ireland but an ancient trackway for sheep.

After seven hours, I reached the Dragon Hotel in Montgomery, a small town but one with a film set of old buildings in the main square. I half expected to bump into Inspector Barnaby and Troy as I spent an hour walking around the town before dinner.

The next day involved 13 miles from Montgomery to Welshpool. It was a lot flatter terrain with only one 1300 feet high hill and I spent the day passing between England and Wales.

In summary, why am I doing this walk? I was a keen walker before my life was turned upside down by cancer two years ago but I have recovered and am walking as good as ever. Amongst other things, the chance to see history and visit some areas of countryside and towns which I wouldn't have an excuse to go to. Keeping fit, wildlife, geography and excellent vistas are some of the other reasons.

Along Offa's Dyke Path, I have seen mountains, hills, moorland, rivers, canals, fields, woods, the sea, country towns, villages, churches, castles bridges, railway lines and stations, pubs,

ruined monasteries, farms cottages, wild horses, cows, lots of sheep, chickens, ducks, geese, lots of birds, bats, trees, hedges, plants, stiles, kissing gates and signposts.

2018 - Peter 'Pendle' Smith

In June 2018, I walked the Offa's Dyke Path solo, staying in bed and breakfast accommodation along the way. I was fortunate to have nice weather which always helps! This trail has a lot of interest, varied scenery, loads of history and excellent accommodation options. Here are some of my photos:



Iron Work at Chepstow Castle.



River Wye at Wintour's Leap.



Maintenance Volunteers for the Offa's Dyke Path



Llanthony Priory Bar.



Pendle Pete at Windy Hay Bluff.



Llanthony Priory.



Montgomery Canal Aqueduct over the River Severn.



Pontcysyllte Aqueduct over the River Dee.



The Dee Valley.



Above Ruthin from the Clwydian Hills.



Modern Sculpture at the end of the Trail.