



50 Years on Offa



By **ROB DINGLE**, Offa's Dyke Path National Trail Officer

THE Offa's Dyke Path National Trail is a truly cross border national treasure which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year.

The path was officially opened in Knighton by Lord Hunt (of Everest fame) on July 10 1971. Back in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the work of creating and completing the route involved a pioneering partnership effort by Government agencies, local authorities and the volunteers of the then newly formed Offa's Dyke Association

Today, the care of the path is jointly funded and strategically managed by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Natural England (NE) and their local authority and National Park partners. Practical management and repair is undertaken by the relevant local authorities (Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham, Powys, Shropshire, Herefordshire, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire councils, and Brecon Beacons National Park).

One of the big changes you will find while walking the route, that has happened over the past 50 years, is the reduction in stiles. In the late 60s/early 70s, when the Trail was officially opened, there was rumoured to be more than 900 stiles, with many comments from walkers. Over the past 10 years we have worked really hard to change this and today there are fewer than 250 stiles left. And every year we are working hard to remove more of these and install more gates.

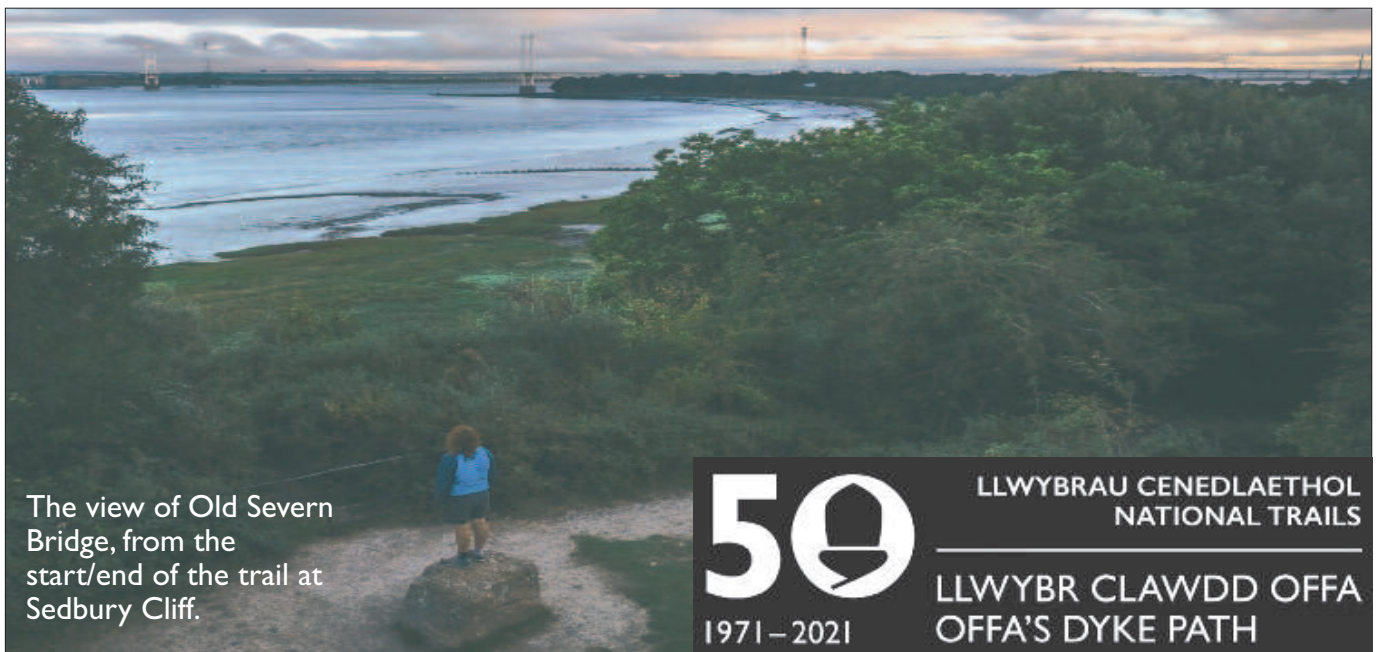
Over the last 50 years, the Offa's Dyke Path has become one of Britain's best loved walking

routes, and an important mainstay of the local tourism economy. During that time, hundreds of thousands of visitors have discovered a unique walking experience which combines spectacular landscapes and wildlife, the extraordinary history of the Welsh Marches (most obviously represented by the ancient bank and ditch of Offa's Dyke itself), and the warm welcome to be found in the market towns, villages and rural communities along the route.

The Trail is a spectacular path which winds itself through the breathtaking borderlands of England and Wales for 177 miles, between Sedbury Cliff on the River Severn to Prestatyn on the North Wales coast. Today many of the towns along the route are *Walkers Are Welcome Towns*, who have welcomed Trail walkers from all over the world for more than 50 years.

On its journey from sea to sea, the Trail passes through three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and a National Park

The Wye Valley AONB offers stunning views of the River Wye and the iconic view of Tintern Abbey from Devil's Pulpit. On the Shropshire Hills AONB, you are in the true heartland of the Trail, following the switchbacks and never far from Offa's Dyke itself. It is also one of the hardest day sections of the route. The Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB section takes you from Chirk Castle to the sea over numerous heather clad hills and stunning views of the Vale of Clwyd.



The view of Old Severn Bridge, from the start/end of the trail at Sedbury Cliff.

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1971 – 2021

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OFFA'S DYKE PATH

A drone shot of the River Wye from Brockweir.



In Brecon Beacons National Park, and the 10 mile traverse of Hatterrall Ridge, you encounter the highest point on the Trail and, at a consistent height of around 1700ft, there are more breathtaking views into England and Wales.

For good measure, on a brief detour of the Trail, on an alternative route you also get to experience the miracle of engineering by Thomas Telford that is Pontcysyllte Aqueduct - AKA the 'waterway in the sky', and also a World Heritage Site.

As well as Offa's Dyke itself, after which the Trail gets its name, the route passes through or by countless other heritage sites, such as Chepstow Castle, Tintern Abbey, Monnow Bridge, White Castle, Beacon Ring, Dinas Bran and numerous hillforts in the Clwydian Range, the largest being Penycloddiau.

The whole route is undertaken in about 12 days, as set out in the official guide book, but it can also be enjoyed in short sections or day walks, or incorporated into many circular walks.

You can experience many sections of it by joining in one of the numerous walking festivals – go to

<https://www.walksaroundbritain.co.uk/walkingfestivals.html> - along the route.

To find out what's happening during our 50th anniversary year and how you can get involved, please visit the website

<https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/offas-dyke-path/>, where there will be a special 50th anniversary page.

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The Dyke and Trail at Rushock Hill, Herefordshire, looking west into Wales.



Walkers' comment:

"Offa's Dyke Path in Great Britain ranks as one of the world's most beautiful walks, offering breathtaking views and glimpses into centuries of history."

American walkers Keith and Nancy

"Lonely Planet names Offa's Dyke Path among the world's greatest walks."

Collating Offa's Dyke completions

By **ANDY CLARK**, the LDWA's National Long Distance Paths Officer

TOWARDS the end of last year, we were approached by Rob Dingle, the National Trails Officer for the Offa's Dyke Path in connection with the 50th anniversary in 2021.

As part of the celebrations, they were looking to collect together pictures and comments from walkers who have walked this National Trail over the last 50 years with a view to sharing those walking memories.

As expected, our members came up trumps with several accounts of their experiences from the 1970s and 1980s, together with more recent trips. A trawl through the back issues of *Strider* came up with some more background information.

These experiences include being approached by a farmer who wouldn't accept the accuracy of a map, a late night pub session and the subsequent complication in returning to your tent and various encounters with different animals. However, the most common feeling was the weather and in particular a four letter word beginning with 'R'.

It is fair to say that the Offa's Dyke Path of the 1970s was not particularly to the taste of several of our seasoned long distance walkers but the prospect of the formation of the Offa's Dyke Association did give hope of encouragement for the future and it seems this hope did deliver.

When the LDWA launched its National Trails Register in 2009, it was agreed to accept previous completions towards this scheme. Over the decades, the figures break down as follows:

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

At present, we are finalising the collating of information and the finished article will be published on the LDWA web page for the Offa's Dyke Path.

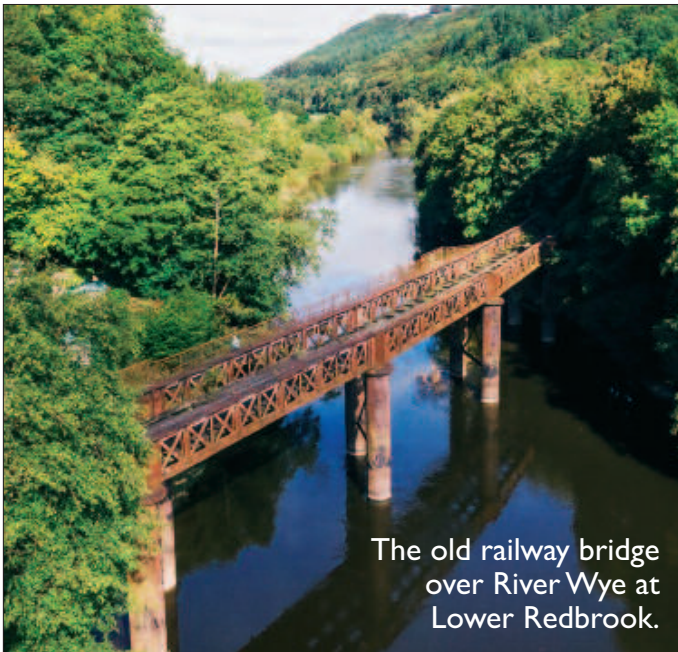
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View of Tintern Abbey from the Devil's Pulpit.



The path leading to Hay Bluff on Hatterrall Ridge.



The old railway bridge over River Wye at Lower Redbrook.



The path across the moors at Cynr y Brain in the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB.



The Eglwyseg escarpment in Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB, just north of Llangollen.



Llanthony Priory.