

Wales

Long-Distance Paths

This chapter covers two of the finest long-distance routes in Wales: Glyndŵr's Way and Offa's Dyke Path. They get their own chapter simply because they don't fit neatly into any particular Welsh region, and it's hard to beat either walk for a ground-level lesson in Welsh history and national pride. Both walks trace their roots to the actions of historic figures (Welsh hero Owain Glyndŵr and King Offa of Mercia); both are important illustrations of the extended, often violent tug-of-war between England and Wales; and both wind through wildly varied but consistently gorgeous landscapes.

Horseshoeing out from the Wales–England border, Glyndŵr's Way takes walkers through historically significant sites from Glyndŵr's life amid the beautiful rolling hills, open moors and small farms characteristic of Mid Wales. It's the easier, and the more conventionally pretty, of the two trails. The areas it passes through are pretty far off the tourist circuit, which means walkers could well be the only visitors in most of the towns and villages along the way. A lot of the locals in this largely rural part of Wales will also give you extra credit for arriving on foot.

Offa's Dyke is tougher and more geographically diverse, following King Offa's 8th-century engineering marvel from coast to coast. The trail hops repeatedly back and forth across the border, exhibiting stark differences in the atmosphere of villages just a few miles apart. Covering just about every landscape on offer in this part of the country, it's a rewarding undertaking.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Catching sight of Machynlleth from the ridge above town, then descending via the **Roman Steps** (p330)
- Overlooking Lake Vyrnwy at sunset from the patio outside the **Lake Vyrnwy Hotel** (p332)
- Admiring the 14th-century **Tintern Abbey** (p336)
- Browsing through the bookish town of **Hay-on-Wye** (p337)

THE GLYNDŴR'S WAY

Duration	9 days
Distance	132 miles (212.5km)
Difficulty	moderate
Start	Knighton (p326)
Finish	Welshpool (p326)
Transport	bus, train
Summary	This relatively little-used national trail cuts a scenic swath through Mid Wales, meandering across working farmland, gently sloping valleys, thick pine forests and bleak, beautiful moorland.

Very much a well-guarded secret, Glyndŵr's Way opened in 2001 as the newest of three national trails in Wales. It's named after Owain Glyndŵr, the early-15th-century Welsh warrior-statesman who led a fierce but eventually suppressed rebellion against English rule (see the boxed text, opposite). The route passes many sites connected with the rebellion, including the town of Machynlleth where Glyndŵr convened Wales' first parliament. The persistence of a strong Welsh identity, clear at every stop along the trail, is one of the unique pleasures of walking the Glyndŵr's Way.

The area crossed by the trail is sandwiched between Snowdonia to the north and the Brecon Beacons to the south. The landscape is predominantly low moorland and farmland, with lakes, gentle hills and beautiful valleys. A particular highlight is the impressive range of bird life, including buzzards, kingfishers, woodpeckers, red kites, peregrine falcons, flycatchers and wrens.

The Glyndŵr's Way has dual waymarks – the national-trail acorn symbol and a white disc with a red Welsh dragon designed for this route.

NOT THE ONLY LONG WALKS...

If you like to get your teeth into a good long walk, the Glyndŵr's Way and the Offa's Dyke Path are by no means your only options in Wales. Other long routes include the **Pembrokeshire Coast Path** (p291) and a possible traverse of Snowdonia National Park (p320). Some other ideas are given on p341.

PLANNING

Accommodation is scarce along the route, so book ahead. On some of the more remote sections you'll need to pack a lunch and carry enough water for the day.

Because the trail is newer and less frequently used than other national trails, there are points when gaps in the waymarking can baffle even experienced walkers, so it's essential to carry a compass and a good set of maps.

Most people take nine days to complete the walk, and we have divided it accordingly as follows:

Day	From	To	Miles/km
1	Knighton	Felindre	15/24
2	Felindre	Abbecymwhir	14/22.5
3	Abbecymwhir	Llanidloes	15.5/25
4	Llanidloes	Dylife	16/25.5
5	Dylife	Machynlleth	14.5/23.5
6	Machynlleth	Llanbrynmair	14/22.5
7	Llanbrynmair	Llanwddyn	17.5/28
8	Llanwddyn	Pontröbert	12/19.5
9	Pontröbert	Welshpool	13.5/21.5

The hilly terrain and difficulty of route-finding, due to a multitude of paths crossing the trail, can make for pretty slow going, so it's wise to allow a little more time than you would for more established trails.

Llanidloes, Machynlleth and Lake Vyrnwy are all worth exploring during rest days, and there's plenty to keep you occupied in Welshpool, so you could conceivably turn this into a leisurely 14-day holiday. If you don't wish to tackle the whole walk, the section from Knighton to Machynlleth has the more spectacular scenery; if from Machynlleth you can catch a train to Shrewsbury (via Welshpool).

When to Walk

The walk can be done any time of year, but the lonelier stretches of moorland in particular can be discouraging in cold weather.

Maps & Books

Your best bet is to pick up the *Glyndŵr's Way* official National Trail Guide by David Perrott. Like others in the series, it features extracts from the relevant Ordnance Survey (OS) 1:25,000 Explorer maps for the length of the trail. Be sure your copy includes the

OWAIN GLYNDŴR

Owain Glyndŵr is a Welsh hero but surprisingly little is known about him. Some of the most detailed, but often highly embellished, stories of his life emerge from the writings of the Welsh bards. Glyndŵr was the son of a wealthy landowner, descended from the royal houses of Powys and Gwynedd, and lived in Wales in the second half of the 14th century.

As was common in those times, Glyndŵr became a squire to English nobility, in particular to Henry of Bolingbroke, who later became King Henry IV. Glyndŵr fought for the English army in mainland Europe and Scotland before settling in Mid Wales with his wife and children. Little may have been subsequently heard of Glyndŵr had his neighbour, Reginald de Grey, Lord of Ruthin, not stolen some land from him.

Glyndŵr decided to fight de Grey in court, but most of the English regarded the Welsh as barbarians, and the case was dismissed, reportedly with the words, 'What care we for barefoot Welsh dogs?' At around the same time Henry IV was engaged in a military campaign in Scotland. Glyndŵr refused to take part and was labelled a traitor by the king. He was forced to flee his home for some time, but on 16 September 1400 Glyndŵr met his brothers and a few close associates at Glyndyfrdwy, on the banks of the River Dee. He was proclaimed the Prince of Wales – a deliberate stand against English rule – and so began a long, drawn-out fight for Welsh independence.

Several skirmishes followed, and by the end of 1403 Glyndŵr controlled most of Wales. He called the first Welsh parliament at Machynlleth. But events turned sour when Prince Henry, son of Henry IV and hero of the Battle of Agincourt, appeared. Henry delivered shattering blows to the Welsh army at Grosmont and Usk. The people of South Wales began to renounce the rebellion, and Glyndŵr's position started to look shaky.

Welsh fortunes declined further in 1406. With Prince Henry wreaking havoc in the south, Glyndŵr was forced to retreat to the north. His hopes for a Wales that was free of English oppressors were crushed, and gradually the English regained control. There was no last glorious stand; around 1406 Glyndŵr went into hiding, and the last anyone heard of him was in 1415, according to the Annals of Owain Glyn Dŵr, where the last entry reads, 'Very many said that he died; the seers maintain he did not'.

Theories have Glyndŵr dying anonymously in battle or spending his last years wandering in the mountains, living quietly among friends. The Welsh bards paint a more romantic picture of him sleeping in a hidden cave with his followers, waiting for the right moment to rise again against the English.

loose page of last-minute route alterations; if not, ask for one at a tourist office or download it from www.nationaltrail.co.uk/GlyndwrsWay.

OS Explorer 1:25,000 maps No 201 *Knighton & Presteigne*, 214 *Llanidloes & Newtown/Y Drenewydd*, 215 *Newtown/Y Drenewydd & Machynlleth*, 216 *Welshpool & Montgomery* and 239 *Lake Vyrnwy, Llyn Efyrrwy & Llanfyllin* cover the entire route, except the last 800m as you enter Machynlleth. For this tiny section you'll be able to get by using the Glyndŵr's Way leaflets (see right).

Note that the route indicated for the Glyndŵr's Way on pre-2005 OS maps is the old route, which differs from the current route in many places. The Explorer series published from May 2005 containing

'access to open countryside' information shows the correct route.

Information Sources

Begin your preparations with a visit to the Glyndŵr's Way official website at www.nationaltrail.co.uk/GlyndwrsWay.

See the walk description for tourist offices along the route, all of which can supply you with the *Glyndŵr's Way Accommodation List* plus a series of 16 leaflets called *Glyndŵr's Way*, which describes the route (both are free). Published by the Powys County Council, the leaflets outline the history of the route and surrounding area and contain some wildlife notes.

The **Glyndŵr's Way National Trail officer** (☎ 01597-827562) can answer queries and provide advice and information.

Baggage Services

Llanidloes-based **P&C Taxis** (☎ 01686-412047; www.llanidloes.com/pctaxis) runs a baggage service along the route. Many B&Bs are also happy to transport your bags on to your next stop if you ask when booking accommodation. The fee is usually £15 to £25 per section.

NEAREST TOWNS

Knighton

pop 3043

Knighton, the Glyndŵr's Way's starting point, is an attractive and friendly little market town near the English border. It has some well-preserved Tudor houses and a surplus of excellent pubs, most of which serve good meals. There are also plenty of accommodation options, a supermarket and shops.

Called Tref-y-clawdd in Welsh (meaning 'town on the dyke'), Knighton is also the halfway point of the Offa's Dyke Path, which explains why the **tourist office** (☎ 01547-529424; West St) is in the Offa's Dyke Centre. There's a lot of helpful information here, as well as some interesting displays on local wildlife, geography and the history of both trails.

Other than preparing for your walk, there isn't much to do in Knighton, so if you arrive early enough it's worth considering an immediate start. There's accommodation near the hamlet of Llangunllo (5 miles along the trail), and this makes for a nice late-afternoon walk.

SLEEPING & EATING

Offa's Dyke House (☎ 01547-529816; 4 High St; s/d £30/44), near the clock tower, is the best option for walkers, with spacious, comfortable rooms, friendly and knowledgeable owners and an even-larger-than-average cooked breakfast.

Other options include the basic **Kinsley** (☎ 01547-520753; Station Rd; r from £25), near the train station; the **Fleece House** (☎ 01547-520168; www.fleecehouse.co.uk; Market St; s/d from £35/50), a charming old coaching inn; and the **George & Dragon** (☎ 01547-528532; www.thegeorgeknighton.co.uk; Broad St; s/d £35/55), a dignified pub with cute, rustic rooms in converted stables.

The George & Dragon also serves good pub food (£4 to £10), as does **Nosebag's Brasserie** (Station Rd; lunch £5-7, dinner mains £7-12),

next to the Horse & Jockey pub. The **Horse & Jockey** and the **Red Lion** (☎ 01547-528231; Broad St) are the liveliest pubs after dark.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The easiest way to get to and from the walk is by train. Knighton is on the **Heart of Wales** (☎ 01597-822053; www.heart-of-wales.co.uk) line between Shrewsbury (one hour) and Swansea (three hours), with four trains a day (one on Sunday). The Knighton Circular bus service runs to Knighton from Newtown (25 minutes, Tuesday and Thursday) and Kington (15 minutes, three per day Monday to Saturday). Knighton is on the A4113 and links with Shrewsbury, Leominster and Hereford by the A49.

Welshpool

pop 5539

Though most people end their walk along Glyndŵr's Way here, making the nickname a little backward, Welshpool is known as the 'Gateway to Wales'. Situated in the Severn Valley, it's separated from England by Long Mountain and the Breidden Hills. Architecturally it's Georgian English but culturally it's Welsh through and through. The **tourist office** (☎ 01938-552043; Church St) has a good supply of books and maps as well as end-of-trail mementos.

SLEEPING & EATING

There's a cluster of places to stay near the attractive St Mary's Church on Salop Rd, of which the pick is the **Westwood Park Hotel** (☎ 01938-553474; r from £25), with its warren of plushly outfitted little rooms above a boisterous pub. If you want a touch more luxury to celebrate the end of your walk, the **Royal Oak** (☎ 01938-552217; www.royaloakhotel.info; s/d £64/94) is right in the centre of town and has just been grandly refurbished.

The Royal Oak offers upscale dining, but there's also an abundance of budget-friendly takeaways in Welshpool. **Andrews Fish Bar** (☎ 01938-552635; 32 High St; mains £2-6; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) has been named best chip shop in Wales, as the mob of locals crowding its store front confirms.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Arriva Trains Wales (☎ 08457 484950; www.arriva trainswales.co.uk) Cambrian train line stops at Welshpool on its daily runs between

Shrewsbury (30 minutes) and Aberystwyth (1½ hours). **National Express** (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) coaches run to Welshpool twice daily from London (five hours) via Birmingham and Shrewsbury. Local bus timetables are available in the *Powys Travel Guide*, available from tourist offices, or through **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2608; www.traveline-cymru.org.uk). Welshpool is on the A458 to Shrewsbury.

THE WALK

Day 1: Knighton to Felindre

6–7 hours, 15 miles (24km)

Today's combination of bracken-covered moors, rolling hills and quiet farmland is a good sampler for the rest of the walk. Be sure to pack lunch, as the lone pub on the route was closed indefinitely at the time of research.

The Glyndŵr's Way officially begins at the clock tower in the town centre. Walk up the crooked slope of 'narrow' (lined with pretty houses dating from Tudor times), through the back streets of Knighton and on to a track that takes you around the northern side of leafy Garth Hill (346m). Already you'll feel a sense of accomplishment as you've ascended quite rapidly for excellent views over the town.

At Little Cwm-gilla a rough track climbs up to pine-skirted Bailey Hill before descending through a series of hedged fields and another couple of miles of pleasant farmland into the village of Llangunllo.

Apart from a 13th-century church, this tiny hamlet's chief attraction until recently was the Greyhound, a broken-down but friendly little pub – sadly, the Greyhound was closed at the time of research, and its future remained uncertain. Sharing space in Llangunllo with the pub is the village **shop**, which opens at irregular hours. Places to

stay in the village include **Craig Fach** (☎ 01547-550605; r from £22).

From Llangunllo, the trail heads north on a road before you venture into farmland again on a path to the left. After crossing a small stream, pass under the railway line and take a path up to Nayadd Fach farm. The track joins a farm road and climbs steadily; behind you are pastoral valley views that will become familiar over the course of the walk but never lose their charm.

For the next few miles, a soft, green track leads you across beautiful heathery moorlands, past Stanky Hill and a few lonely waymarks. As the wide open moors gradually give way to farmland, the path zigzags steeply downhill toward Felindre.

FELINDRE

Book early and plan ahead, as this village is even smaller than Llangunllo. There's a shop with irregular hours, and a friendly pub (no meals). B&B and camping are offered by the comfortable **Trevland** (☎ 01547-510211; sites for 2 £8, s/d £30/55) and the luxurious, faux-rustic **Brandy House** (☎ 01547-510282; www.brandyhouse.u-net.com; sites for 2 £10, r from £30). The latter has no evening meals, but the owners will drive guests to the excellent **Radnorshire Arms** (☎ 01547-510634; Beguildy; mains from £7) if arranged in advance. If you're in Felindre at lunchtime you'll need to bring food with you.

Day 2: Felindre to Abbeycwmhir

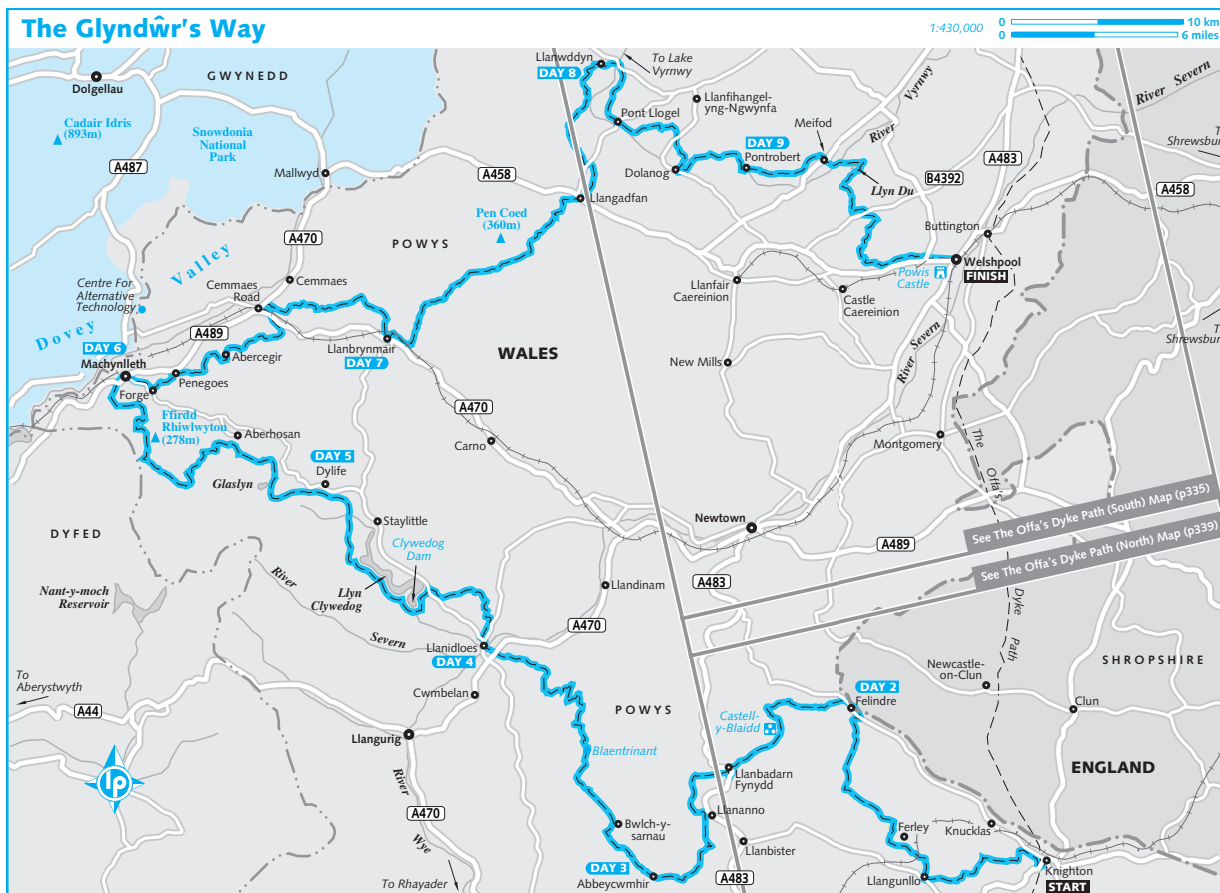
5½–6½ hours, 14 miles (22.5km)

You'll see plenty of sheep on today's relatively easy section of trail, as well as a perfect lunchtime pub stop and a delightful grassy track through high moors and thick forest.

From Felindre the route is well way-marked through gently rising farming country to a short section of road. Where the road turns to the north, you head south

THE BEST-LAID PLANS

Little remains of the Cistercian abbey from which the village of Abbeycwmhir takes its name. It was founded in 1143 but never completed, although its plans would have made it one of the largest in Britain, behind York, Durham and Winchester. In 1282 the headless body of Llewelyn the Great was secretly buried here. The abbey continued to support the Welsh princes, so the English Crown cut off funds, but in 1401, after finding most of the monks to be English, Owain Glyndŵr's army destroyed the abbey. The damage was never repaired. The abbey was finally closed in 1536 during Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries; some of its stones were used to build Dyfaenor, a mansion you'll pass along the trail.



instead, along a byway. The trail takes you steadily uphill, past an old earthwork known as Castell-y-Blaidd (Wolf's Castle), on to a lane and into Llanbadarn Fynydd. Here the **New Inn** (☎ 01597-840378; lanbadarninn@aol.com; r from £20, meals from £5; 🍳 breakfast, lunch & dinner) offers comfortable rooms, beautiful outdoor garden seating and hearty meals throughout the day.

From Llanbadarn Fynydd the trail gently climbs to open moor, skirting woods to reach Bwlch Farm. The final stretch of walking to Abbeycwmhir begins with a fine ridge walk rising to a 450m summit, then drops to a clear track through Neuadd Fach wood and down into the valley of Bachell Brook.

ABBEYCWMHIR

Abbeycwmhir is minuscule but has historical significance that belies its size. Cistercians began a huge abbey here in the 12th century, along with a mill; the ruins are visible from the trail (see the boxed text, p327). The lovely little **St Mary's Church** (1870), which may contain stones from the ruined abbey, is worth a look.

There's a shop and a pub, the **Happy Union** (☎ 01597-851203), though it keeps odd hours. (Even if it's closed, be sure to look at the pub sign – note the leek, a symbol of Wales, peeking out of the goat-rider's hat.)

Mill Cottage (☎ 01597-851935; www.abbeycwmhir.co.uk; r from £25), near Mill Bridge (OS reference 059-711), is a homey B&B 800m east of

the village, with a pretty garden, cosy rooms and evening meals (book in advance).

Day 3: Abbeycwmhir to Llanidloes

6–7 hours, 15.5 miles (25km)
This is a hilly but deeply satisfying day of forests, moorland and grand views. Make sure you carry lunch, as there are no shops on the route.

The walk leaves Abbeycwmhir opposite the Happy Union for a climb along forest roads and farmland. Views grow progressively more spectacular as you ascend. When the forest lane meets a stream, the route climbs the ridge of Upper Esgair Hill. Soon you descend through open moor to the village of Bwlch-y-sarnau. Departing

north via the path by the phone box, you cross a rough field and join a road to enter a quiet forest. The landscape opens up and at Blaentriant, on a clear day, you can see the peak of Cadair Idris (893m) far to the northwest.

Some challenging hills beyond Blaentriant are rewarded with astonishing views across valleys. The route zigzags wildly, and you have to keep one eye on your map and the other scanning for waymarks. But don't allow this to detract from one of the most glorious stretches of the trail. Eventually you join a quiet road that crosses an arched footbridge into Llanidloes.

LLANIDLOES

pop 2807

This pretty town is best known for its attractive 16th-century **market hall**, a low, half-timbered building on stubby legs in the centre of town. There's also the 14th-century **Church of St Idloes** by the river, with its five magnificent arches brought from Abbeycwmhir in the 1540s. The town itself is set gracefully on the River Severn, and has a **tourist office** (☎ 01686-412605) and all the services a visitor might need.

Llanidloes also has a good range of accommodation and several good pubs; if you have time, it's an ideal spot for a rest day. The pick of the B&Bs is **Dyffryn Glyn Guest House** (☎ 01686-412129; www.dyffrynglyn.co.uk; r from £25), a modernised farmhouse 2 miles out of town with gorgeous views, friendly owners and a head start on the next day's walk. Another good choice is **Lloyds Hotel** (☎ 01686-412284; www.lloydshotel.co.uk; r from £38), on the southeast edge of town, where helpful staff dispense key information about local sights and characters.

Many of Llanidloes' pubs offer meals – try the walker-friendly **Angel** (☎ 01686-412381; High St; mains from £6; 🍳 lunch & dinner). On the main street there's a good **takeaway** serving fish and chips, and a **Spar** supermarket open late.

Day 4: Llanidloes to Dylife

6½–7½ hours, 16 miles (25.5km)
After the familiar stiles and fields, today the trail takes you through pine forest, across moorland and alongside a reservoir. Stock up in Llanidloes, as there are no shops until Machynlleth.

The trail leaves Llanidloes by Long Bridge St, crossing the River Severn to link up with the Severn Way path through an attractive forest. The disused Van Mine, which made Llanidloes' fortune until it closed in 1920, is visible from the trail. Rejoining the main road for 800m, climb steeply and then go left at a cattle grid to pass through Bryntail Farm.

The track descends into the Clywedog Valley, where you can gaze up at the 65m-high **Clywedog Dam** and explore the ruins of the 19th-century **Bryntail lead mine**. Crossing a bridge, a steep climb takes you up the other side of the dam to impressive views of the 6.5-mile-long reservoir Llyn Clywedog, with its 45,000 million litres of captured water.

Follow some steep sections of path along the edge of the lake before passing the Clywedog Yacht Club (with a **café** in summer) and climbing to the extreme edge of the gigantic Hafren Forest pine plantation. A rough track gives way to bleak, open marshland and a picnic site beside the Afon Biga.

From here a forest track re-enters the forest. Amble along a flat and wide track, then back into farmland. Just past Dolydd, another new section of path heads due north; scan the skies here for red kites cruising the air currents. A gradual climb on a grassy trail takes you to the edge of attractive moorland, at which point the trail becomes an ancient Roman road with cart tracks carved into its stone bed. Dylife appears below to the right; leave the trail to descend to the pub for the night.

DYLIFE

This hamlet has just one place to stay – the **Star Inn** (☎ 01650-521345; djlwb@hotmail.com; r from £20, dinner mains from £7), where the lively pub and good food make up for the tired rooms.

Day 5: Dylife to Machynlleth

6–7 hours, 14.5 miles (23.5km)

You'll see some of the finest walking on the route today, as the trail passes through glacial valleys, cool forest and rugged hills to spot hidden mountain lakes and unusual bird life.

Leaving the Star Inn, head back up the hill to rejoin the trail where you left it.

Head west through beautiful, windswept moorland, passing close to a dramatic drop into the rugged Afon Clywedog glacial valley. Descending rapidly to cross the Nant Goch tributary, the trail climbs again through boggy but attractive moorland to the edge of the stunning Glaslyn – a lake and water-bird sanctuary, well worth a detour (it's about a one-hour walk around the lake). Behind the lake is the dark and stoic profile of Foel Fadian (564m), which the trail soon skirts.

You are now at the highest point on the Glyndŵr's Way, with stunning green valleys plunging dramatically to your left and Foel Fadian sloping up to the right. The rocky trail – which can be treacherously slick – drops steeply (330m in just under 1.5 miles) to enter a picturesque and partially wooded valley. The suddenly plush green path passes around 800m south of Aberhosan.

After a demanding climb up Cefn Modfedd, leave the old route, with the new trail swinging expansively southwest, through a short wood and past **Talbontdrain** (☎ 01654-702192; www.talbontdrain.co.uk; r from £25), a beautiful and cheery B&B farmstead with an emphasis on excellent food.

A steep hill leads into a splendid walk above Dyfi Valley, before you climb once more through woodland on Ffridd Rhiwlwyfen and then swing to the far side of Machynlleth to enter town via the **'Roman Steps'**, which may or may not actually be Roman but make for a dramatic approach to the city regardless.

MACHYNLLETH

pop 2147

Machynlleth is ideal for a rest day. A vibrant little town with a rich history, fine architecture and traditional pubs alongside organic restaurants and internet cafés, it's a microcosm of the cultural regeneration being enjoyed by modern Wales. For information on accommodation and attractions in the area, drop into the **tourist office** (☎ 01654-702401; Maengwyn St).

The slate **Owain Glyndŵr Parliament House** (☎ 01654-702827; admission £1; ☎ 11am–3pm Mon–Tue & Thu–Sat, 10am–4pm Wed Easter–Sep), in the main street, postdates Glyndŵr's original venue but probably resembles it closely. Displays explain Glyndŵr's fight for Welsh

independence but really the place is rather low key.

Other things to see include the nearby **Centre for Alternative Technology** (☎ 01654-702782; www.cat.org.uk; Pantperthog; adult/child £8/4; ☎ 10am–5.30pm, summer holidays 9.30am–6pm), 1 mile out of town; buses run hourly from the clock tower. The **Museum of Modern Art** (☎ 01654-703355; www.momawales.org.uk; Hoel Penrallt; free admission; ☎ 10am–4pm Mon–Sat) has an interesting collection of work by Welsh artists as well as changing exhibits.

Places to stay include the **White Lion** (☎ 01654-703455; www.whitelionhotel.co.uk; Heol Penrehyd; s with/without bathroom/d £38/28, d with/without bathroom £70/50, f £80), with excellent food and a large family room ideal for backpacking groups; and **Maenllwyd Guesthouse** (☎ 01654-702928; maenllwyd@btinternet.com; Newtown Rd; s/d/t £35/55/70). Both are in the centre of town.

For meals there's a large selection of pubs and restaurants, notably the **Quarries** (☎ 01654-702339; Maengwyn St; mains £5), an organic café serving superbly prepared vegetarian meals.

Day 6: Machynlleth to Llanbrynmar

5½–6½ hours, 14 miles (22.5km)

This is a short, easy day with some excellent views over tiny villages and wide valleys. You'll see imposing mountain peaks in the distance and, on a clear day, get a glimpse of the sea.

From Machynlleth, you head down a quiet minor road southeast to Forge, and from there a laneway leads through farmland, back to the main road for 300m and on to Penegoes. Here, a lane josts off from the main road heading due east between hedgerows. Strike up to the left through some fields and then descend steeply through heavy bracken to the small village of Abercegir.

From Abercegir the route once again climbs onto open moorland. Along these hilltops are lovely views of Cadair Idris. Keep a careful eye on your map, compass and waymarks here, as the distinct track up the hill becomes quite vague toward the summit and on the descent to Cemmaes Road.

Among the little cluster of buildings at Cemmaes Road is a **shop**, post office and quiet but adorable **pub** (hours vary, but if

you knock on the door and the owner's around, it's open).

After an initial steep climb out of Cemmaes Road, the rest of the 6-mile walk to Llanbrynmar is fairly easy going, across rolling hills and through pleasant, scenic valleys. After climbing to the derelict Rhyd-yr-aderyn farm, the route descends towards Llanbrynmar, before a new section heads northeast up a steepish hill, following the fence-line along a boggy path. A pleasant track takes you 800m through a pine forest. Once out of the forest you reach the brow of a hill with astounding views stretching out before you; descend the hill past a large transmitter tower and along a minor road to Llanbrynmar.

LLANBRYNMAIR

There's not much to Llanbrynmar, except a shop and a great pub, the **Wynnstay Arms** (☎ 01650-521431; A470; r from £25), which serves real ale and good pub meals. Next door is the eccentric and charming **Machinations Museum of Mechanical Magic** (☎ 01650-521635; www.machinations.org.uk; Old Village Hall; adult/child £3/free; ☎ 9.30am–5.30pm), a fascinating collection of mechanised 'automata' that's well worth delaying your walk to see.

Day 7: Llanbrynmar to Llanwddyn

7–8 hours, 17.5 miles (28km)

A long and relatively tough day, this section nevertheless features some spectacular hill-top panoramas – and the well-deserved reward of lovely Lake Vyrnwy at the end.

Leave Llanbrynmar northwards, going under a railway line before heading east through fields. The route soon strikes north again, following a disused vehicle track up a long, steep hill, but the climb is worth it; you can enjoy terrific views of the valley below as you contour for 1 mile or so.

Entering a forest, the trail becomes a broad, open vehicle track – not the most exciting section of scenery, though the flat footing may come as a welcome change – before you cross several fields and meet yet another vehicle track to rejoin the old Glyndŵr's Way near Dolau-ceimion Farm.

You soon climb to the edge of Pen Coed (360m) and cross a particularly lonely stretch of bracken-covered moor. The way-marking has improved here but still keep an eye on your map and compass. After about

1 mile, cross a stream and follow a path to the left that zigzags a little confusingly through a host of farms to take you into Llangadfan. This village has a **shop** at the petrol station, and just up the street, the **Cann Office Hotel** (☎ 01938-820202; s/d/t £26/45/60, sandwiches from £2) is a good place for lunch or an overnight stop.

From here, the walk to Llanwddyn is pretty comfortable. The final 7 miles takes you through the huge plantation of Dyfnant forest, where a well-signposted maze of forestry tracks culminates in one enormous hill before descending rather spectacularly toward Lake Vyrnwy. Watch for pheasants.

LLANWDDYN

Essentially a scattering of houses around **Lake Vyrnwy** and its impressive 33-arched dam, Llanwddyn has an unusual history. In 1881, construction began on a dam and 70-mile-long aqueduct to provide Liverpool with a water supply, but there was a minor obstacle: Llanwddyn. So the builders moved the entire village up the hill. The village's original location is now underwater, and the ruins can be seen when the lake's water levels get low.

There is plenty to do here if you have a spare day, from exploring one of the many nature trails to cycling the 12-mile circuit of the lake. There are also three hides for spotting the many species of local birds (the lake is part of a Royal Society for the Protection of Birds' reserve), plus fishing, sailing and canoeing. There are two small **cafés** (☎ 10am-4pm) with tea and snacks. The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 01691-870346), located inside the craft centre, has information on bicycle hire.

Places to stay in the area include the nice, homey **Gorffwysfa B&B** (☎ 01691-870217; www.vyrnwy-accommodation.co.uk; 4 Glyn Dr; r from £25), run by a lovely couple who will make you want to move in permanently. Nearby, and equally attractive, is the **Oaks** (☎ 01691-870250; mdug99@aol.com; d from £30). There's also the fancy **Lake Vyrnwy Hotel** (☎ 01691-870692; www.lakevyrnwy.com; d from £100, pub mains £7-15), which dominates the hillside and contains the area's only pub and restaurant; the food in the pub is excellent value, and you can dine on the outdoor terrace overlooking the lake.

Day 8: Llanwddyn to Pontrobert

4½–5½ hours, 12 miles (19.5km)

This day marks the end of the harder moorland sections. The trail is quite easy from now on, passing through pretty valleys, pleasant river-side paths and gentle farmland.

The route follows forest tracks and minor roads from Llanwddyn; about 2.5 miles along, look for a waymark post to the right, directing you steeply uphill along a rough green track. Turn left at the top to continue along a forest road. In a short while look for another waymark post to the right, directing you to leave the forest road for an overgrown and rather-hard-to-spot trail. From here it's all ups and downs through fields and woodland toward the village of Pont Llogel, where there's a small post office and shop.

The path follows the River Vyrnwy for 800m before going left again to higher ground. This section meanders through farmland, down a new path towards Dolwar Fach farm (which cuts 1 mile off the old route) and eventually into Dolanog.

The next section is comfortable and attractive, with the route shadowing the Vyrnwy as it undulates through woods before climbing slightly away from the river to follow a lane into Pontrobert.

PONTRROBERT

The village of Pontrobert is an attractive place with a terrific pub, the **Royal Oak Inn** (☎ 01938-500243; r from £20, meals from £5), offering B&B and good food. If you're lucky, you may spot kingfishers flashing along the river under the old bridge. If you can't get into the pub, Meifod is only 3 miles or so along the trail.

Day 9: Pontrobert to Welshpool

5½–6½ hours, 13.5 miles (21.5km)

Today is hilly but comfortable, culminating in glorious views over Welshpool as you approach the end of the trail.

Heading east out of Pontrobert, you wander through gentle farmland before crossing the edge of the wooded Gallt yr Ancr (Hill of the Anchorite) and taking a lane into the tidily modern village of Meifod, which has a useful **shop**, plus lovely grounds to relax in at the Church of Saints Dysilio and Mary. The **King's Head** (☎ 01938-500171; s/d £25/50) has B&B and reasonable meals.

POWIS CASTLE

Don't miss visiting **Powis Castle** (☎ 01938-551920; adult/child £10/5; ☎ 1-5pm Thu-Mon Apr, Jun & Sep, 1-4pm Thu-Mon Oct, 1-5pm Tue-Sun Jul & Aug), 1 mile south of Welshpool. Built in the 13th century, it is one of the National Trust's finest properties in Wales, featuring impressive terraced gardens, plus an orangery, aviary and a smattering of niched statues. The castle houses the Clive of India Museum, a collection of artefacts and treasures amassed by the redoubtable Robert Clive during his stint on the sub-continent over 200 years ago. Visit www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wales for garden and restaurant hours.

Leaving Meifod you encounter a steep but pleasant climb through the woods of Broniarth Hill, before looping round Llyn Du (*llyn* means 'lake' in Welsh) and swinging back to the southwest along a minor road. More comfortable farmland walking follows, until you hit the B4392 at Stonehouse Farm. Head south through Fygn Wood and climb uphill to the edge of a golf course for panoramic views and a spectacular feeling of lofty accomplishment. From here, go east through a series of farms to meet the A458, near Welshpool's Raven Sq train station. The main street starts at the nearby roundabout.

A visit to the magnificent **Powis Castle** (see the boxed text, above) will provide a fitting finale to your walk.

THE OFFA'S DYKE PATH

Duration	12 days
Distance	177.5 miles (285km)
Difficulty	demanding
Start	Seabury Cliffs
Finish	Prestatyn (p335)
Nearest Town	Chepstow (p334)
Transport	bus, train
Summary	A popular national trail through varied and historically rich terrain, with a lot of stiles and some testing climbs.

They say good fences make good neighbours, but King Offa may have taken the idea a bit far. The 8th-century Mercian king

dreamed up and built Offa's Dyke, Britain's longest archaeological monument, allegedly to keep the unruly Welsh on their side of the border (although many historians say the independent-minded Welsh princes at the time were just fine with King Offa's idea of 'neighbourly'). A grand and ambitious linear earthwork, usually in the form of a bank next to a ditch, the dyke became pivotal in the history of the Marches (the borderlands between Wales and the ancient kingdom of Mercia). Even today, though only 80 miles of the dyke remains, the modern Wales-England border roughly follows the line it defined.

The Offa's Dyke Path National Trail crisscrosses that border around 30 times in its journey from the Severn Estuary in the south through the beautiful Wye Valley and Shropshire Hills to the coast at Prestatyn in North Wales. The trail itself often strays from the dyke, which is overgrown in some places and built over in others. In doing so it covers an astonishing range of scenery and vegetation, including river flat land, hill country, oak forests, heathland and bracken, conifer forest, green fields, high moors and the mountainous terrain of the Clwydian range in the north.

The region's rich and turbulent history is also reflected in the ruined castles and abbeys, the ancient hillforts and remaining sections of Roman road. One of the trail's most exciting features is that you're never really sure what you'll encounter from day to day.

PLANNING

While the Offa's Dyke Path can be walked in either direction, it's best done south to north; the sun and wind will be mostly on your back.

Most people take 12 days to complete the walk, though it's wise to allow at least two rest days, bringing your venture to an even two weeks. The rest days will also allow you to take in some of the notable sights off the trail, particularly Tintern Abbey and Powis Castle.

Offa's Dyke is generally well waymarked by the familiar white acorn indicating a national trail, but many public paths and bridleways crisscross the route, so keep your eyes peeled and carry a good set of maps and a compass.

Day	From	To	Miles/km
1	Sedbury Cliffs	Monmouth	17.5/28
2	Monmouth	Pandy	17/27.5
3	Pandy	Hay-on-Wye	17.5/28
4	Hay-on-Wye	Kington	15/24
5	Kington	Knighton	13.5/21.5
6	Knighton	Brompton Crossroads	15/24
7	Brompton Crossroads	Buttington	12.5/20
8	Buttington	Llanymynech	10.5/17
9	Llanymynech	Chirk Castle	14/22.5
10	Chirk Castle	Llandegla	16/25.5
11	Llandegla	Bodfari	17/27.5
12	Bodfari	Prestatyn	12/19.5

Maps & Books

The best maps are in the OS Explorer 1:25,000 series, conveniently included in the official National Trail Guide *Offa's Dyke Path*. This is also the best guidebook on offer, covering the walk in two books – Sedbury to Knighton and Knighton to Prestatyn – both by Ernie and Kathy Kay and Mark Richards. The books feature straightforward route notes, a taste of the history, colour maps and suggested circular walks off the dyke.

The route is also covered by OS Landranger 1:50,000 maps No 162 *Gloucester & Forest of Dean*, 161 *Abergavenny & The Black Mountains*, 148 *Presteigne & Hay-on-Wye*, 137 *Ludlow & Wenlock Edge*, 126 *Shrewsbury*, 117 *Chester & Wrexham* and 116 *Denbigh & Colwyn Bay*, but the detail is not as helpful.

Also recommended is *Offa's Dyke Path* by Keith Carter, with thorough text and detailed line maps. However, to get a real sense of the trail's rich heritage, you can't go past *Walking Offa's Dyke Path* by David Hunter.

Information Sources

The tourist office at Knighton is appropriately in the **Offa's Dyke Centre** (☎ 01547-528753, www.offasdyke.demon.co.uk; West St), managed by the Offa's Dyke Association (ODA), and it is the best source of information about the route. Here you'll find helpful booklets and pamphlets, including the ODA's indispensable *Offa's Dyke Path – Where to Stay, How to Get There & Other Useful Information*; the handy *Backpackers' & Camping List*; *South to North Route Notes*; and a set of strip maps. Some of these pamphlets are

also available at tourist offices along the route.

Also useful are the **Offa's Dyke website** (www.offas-dyke.co.uk) and the official **National Trails website** (www.nationaltrail.co.uk/offasdyke).

Baggage Services

Offa's Dyke Baggage Carriers (☎ 01497-821266; Hay-on-Wye) uses local taxis to collect and transport your luggage along the route. The charge varies depending on the length of the day's walk but you're looking at an average of £15 per person. Many B&Bs provide the same service (termed 'luggage' in the ODA booklet), often at substantially cheaper rates. Inquire about these when booking accommodation.

NEAREST TOWNS

Chepstow pop 14,195

An industrial town trading in timber, wine and glass, Chepstow originated as a strategic base guarding access into Wales over the River Wye. Though it grew into a prosperous trading port, its importance diminished as river-borne commerce declined. Today, Chepstow is a typical market town, albeit with an unusually pretty river-side setting.

The main attraction is the stout, chunky **Chepstow Castle** (☎ 01291-624065; admission £3.50; ☎ 9.30am–5pm Apr–Oct, to 4pm Nov–Mar), straddling the cliffs of the River Wye. Begun in 1067, the year after the Battle of Hastings, it was the first stone-built castle in Wales. The **tourist office** (☎ 01291-623772) is directly across from the castle but, perplexingly, doesn't always stock important ODA pamphlets, so ensure you have these before you arrive.

SLEEPING & EATING

There is a good range of places to stay in Chepstow. Near the start of the walk there's **Upper Sedbury House** (☎ 01291-627173; Sedbury Lane; r from £23.50), where you can leave your car while you walk. The **Coach & Horses** (☎ 01291-622626; Welsh St; r from £25) has good food all day.

There are plenty of places to eat along High St and Bridge St, including numerous pubs and the more refined **Afon Gwy** (☎ 01291-620158; 28 Bridge St; 2-course meal £14, B&B s/d £40/60; ☎ dinner).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Chepstow is on the train line between Cardiff (40 minutes) and Gloucester (30 minutes), via Newport, with several trains an hour. **National Express** (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) long-distance coach 201 passes through Chepstow 11 times a day between Swansea (two to three hours) and Gatwick (four to six hours). There's also a twice-daily route via Chepstow from Cardiff (one to two hours) to London (three to five hours).

By car, Chepstow is reached by leaving the M48 immediately after you've crossed the Severn Bridge coming from England. Ask when you book accommodation about parking your car for the duration of the walk.

Prestatyn

If you weren't high on the triumph of having finished such a long walk, you might notice that Prestatyn, especially in summer, is clogged with tourists and has all the trappings of a typical seaside resort. As it is, though, you'll probably just want to enjoy its exuberance or, at any rate, its vast range of easy-access pubs. The official end of the walk is at the **tourist office** (☎ 01745-889092).

SLEEPING & EATING

There are several B&Bs and camp sites in Prestatyn, including **Roughsedge Guest House** (☎ 01745-887359; roughsedge@yukbler.fsnet.co.uk; 26-28 Marine Rd; r with/without bathroom from £25/23).

Pubs where you can slake your thirst and raise a glass to your success include the **Cross Foxes** (☎ 01745-854984; Pendre Sq, 1 Mellden Rd); the gimmicky **Offa's Tavern** (☎ 01745-886046; 2-10 High St); and, across from the railway station, the impressive 1890s Victoria Hotel. For food, try **Suhail Tandoori** (☎ 01745-856829; 12 Bastion Rd) or any of the ubiquitous fish-and-chip, Chinese or pizza takeaway joints.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Prestatyn is on the rail line between Chester (30 minutes) and Bangor (45 minutes), with several trains an hour. **National Express** (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) buses pass through daily on the route from Bangor (1½ hours) to London (via Birmingham), as well as from Pwllheli (3½ hours) to London and Pwllheli to York. Prestatyn is on the A548 between Llandudno and Chester.



THE WALK

Day 1: Sedbury Cliffs to Monmouth

9 hours, 17.5 miles (28km)

This is one of the longest days on the route and is quite demanding, with several testing climbs, although the sheer beauty of the Wye Valley makes it easier to take.

The official start of the Offa's Dyke Path is by a commemorative marker stone by Sedbury Cliffs, about 1 mile east of Chepstow, across the River Wye. Most people walk out to Sedbury Cliffs and back to Chepstow on the day they arrive, and set out from Chepstow the next morning.

From Sedbury Cliffs there are views over the estuary and mud flats of the River Severn – take a good look so you can compare and contrast the scene when you see the river again about 100 miles down the trail. From here the well-marked trail makes its way past a housing estate and along the River Wye to Chepstow Castle, through Chepstow town. It's not a particularly picturesque stretch so, if you arrive on the previous afternoon, you could stroll down and get this bit done, then start your walking the next morning from the bridge by Chepstow Castle – an infinitely more pleasing spot.

From the northern side of the bridge, join the trail and follow it through several small farms and up to Dannel Hill, where you first see visible remains of the dyke. Continue through the forest before dropping down into the town of Brockweir, where the **Country Inn** (☎ 01291-689548; meals from £4) offers lunch and real ale. Before you head down to Brockweir, there's a path just past the limestone pinnacle, known as the Devil's Pulpit, that takes you down to 14th-century **Tintern Abbey** (see the boxed text, below). You can avoid the long slog back up the hill by following the trail along the river to Brockweir.

At Brockweir the trail divides into upper and lower alternatives. The lower route is

an easier and prettier walk along the river but is almost 1 mile longer, while the upper route climbs to follow the line of the dyke through enclosed lanes and minor roads. The routes rejoin at Bigsweir Bridge – if you want to call it a day, there are a few B&B options in St Briavels, 1.5 miles to the east, including a **YHA hostel** (☎ 0870 770 6040; www.yha.org.uk; dm from £18) in an 800-year-old castle.

The trail climbs steeply again to rise and fall through forest and farmland until a descent into Redbrook, where there's a **shop** and several B&Bs. Say goodbye to the dyke now, as you don't see it again until Kington. From Redbrook it's a trudge up another hill and back down to Monmouth.

MONMOUTH

This small, attractive town on the Welsh west bank is at the confluence of the Rivers Wye and Monnow. This strategic position resulted in control of the town changing on a regular basis over the past several hundred years and led the allegiances of war-weary locals to become decidedly local. The town formed its own militia around 1540, a group noted for its propensity to raise arms against both sides whenever caught in the middle of a stoush between powerful neighbours.

Architecturally, Monmouth's main attractions are the beautiful 13th-century stone-gated **bridge** over the River Monnow and the foundations of **Monmouth Castle** – a building that would be far more impressive had generations of local builders not stripped it down for its stone.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01600-713899; Agincourt Sq) is at Shire Hall.

You can camp at **Monnow Bridge Caravan & Camping** (☎ 01600-714004; sites for 2 £8), near the bridge. Most of the 10 or so B&Bs in town charge between £19 and £25; these include the spotless and welcoming **Verdi Bosco** (☎ 01600-714441; Wonastow Rd) and **Burton House**

(☎ 01600-714958; rogerbanfield@aol.com; St James Sq). For food, try the **Green Dragon** (☎ 01600-712561; St Thomas Sq) for tasty and well-priced meals, or the **Gatehouse** (☎ 01600-713890; Old Monnow Bridge), with a great selection of veggie dishes.

Day 2: Monmouth to Pandy

9 hours, 17 miles (27.5km)

This is another long day but the walking's comfortable, through rolling farmland, though you have to cross a lot of stiles.

Route descriptions are pretty superfluous today as the trail is well waymarked. You go through a seemingly endless succession of farms, with hilly and boggy King's Wood, 1 mile out of Monmouth, the only significant respite from the fields. The day's highlight is undoubtedly the 12th-century Norman stronghold, **White Castle** (£2; ☎ 10am-5pm), about two-thirds of the way along.

You also pass through a few villages that feature lovely old churches, including the isolated but beautiful **Llanvihangel-Ystern-Llewern**, the austere **St Teilo** at Llantilio Crossenny and castle-like **St Cadoc** at Llangatock Lingoed.

Toward the end of the day's walk, a long, flat mountain comes into view – this is Hatterall Ridge, which you'll cross tomorrow.

PANDY

The **Lancaster Arms** (☎ 01873-890699; A465; s/d £26/50) looks after walkers well and serves filling pub food. Nearby, there's also the comfortable **Park Hotel** (☎ 01873-890271; r from £35) and, on the way into Pandy, the pleasant **Llanerch Farm** (☎ 01873-890432; r per person £25). If Hatterall Ridge looks too daunting, Pandy is on the bus route between Abergavenny and Hereford.

Day 3: Pandy to Hay-on-Wye

9½ hours, 17.5 miles (28km)

This is a very long and difficult day through the Black Mountains – among the highest and most exposed sections of the trail. Be prepared for adverse weather, but on a clear day you'll revel in the wildness and the spectacular views.

The trail begins with a long, steady climb to the first summit of the Black Mountains (464m) then continues with an easy, gradual climb to the highest point (703m). The trail alternates between bracken and peat,

and can become very boggy if it's raining. In places the ridge becomes fairly wide and there are a number of confusing paths, so a map and compass are essential. If visibility is poor or the weather atrocious, strongly consider dropping down west into either Llanthony or Capel-y-ffin. You can either spend the night here and hope for better weather tomorrow or follow minor roads and lanes into Hay-on-Wye.

If you opt to stay the night, Llanthony has the small and friendly **Half Moon Hotel** (☎ 01873-890611; s/d £26/47) and Capel-y-ffin has a **YHA hostel** (☎ 01873-890650; capelyffin@yha.org.uk; dm £11).

From Hay Bluff (Pen-y-Beacon), at the northern end of Hatterall Ridge, there are great views to the east, north and west. Have a rest here before you negotiate the steep descent. While Hay might have looked close from the bluff, it's still 4 miles away, mostly downhill through farmland.

HAY-ON-WYE

pop 1400

Take a break from stretching your legs to exercise your intellect at Hay, a pretty little town famous for its wealth of secondhand bookshops. Spend a well-earned rest day here roaming the bookshelves; there are plenty of eating and sleeping options here as well. The **tourist office** (☎ 01497-820144; Oxford Rd) appropriately has a good selection of books.

The welcoming **Clifton House** (☎ 01497-821618; Belmont Rd; d from £55) is ideal for walkers, while the nearby **Rest for the Tired** (☎ 01497-820550; Broad St; s/d £30/50) has nicer rooms in a cute black-and-white house. **Belmont House** (☎ 01497-820718; Belmont St; s/d from £25/40) has cosy rooms, a kitchen and a pretty sunroom in a quiet annexe off the street.

As befits a popular tourist town, most of Hay's many pubs serve good food, and there are plenty of takeaways.

Day 4: Hay-on-Wye to Kingston

7½ hours, 15 miles (24km)

This an enjoyable day of contrasts that takes you along the river, through a short stretch of forest and up onto a couple of lovely stretches of moor.

Leaving Hay to the west, cross the River Wye and turn right to follow the trail along its banks for several hundred metres, before

TINTERN ABBEY

The tall walls and empty, arched windows of **Tintern Abbey** (☎ 01291-689251; ☎ 9.30am-5pm, to 4pm in winter), a 14th-century Cistercian abbey on the banks of the River Wye, have been painted by Turner and lauded by Wordsworth. It's one of the most beautiful ruins in Britain. As a result, the village of Tintern swarms with visitors in summer. The abbey ruins are awe-inspiring, although best visited toward the end of the day after the crowds have dispersed.

crossing several fields up to the A438. After a short walk along this busy road, head uphill alongside the Bettws Dingle wood – and briefly through its dark and cool heart – to join a minor road and a succession of fields for the next 3 miles into the small village of Newchurch. There's no pub or shop here, but the church offers refreshments to weary ramblers.

Leaving Newchurch, a steep climb takes you up into the undulating moorland of Disgwyfya Hill, where the walking is pleasant and the waymarking clear. Turning left at a clear path, follow the dogleg at Hill House Farm and then negotiate more fields to end up in the village of Gladestry, where there are a couple of B&Bs and the **Royal Oak** pub.

From Gladestry you climb a steep bridleway to the open moors of Hergest Ridge – an enjoyable 3-mile stretch with stunning views that would make your heart race if it wasn't already. The descent starts at a disused racecourse and the trail eventually turns into a minor road to take you into Kington.

KINGTON

Kington gets a bad rap – one local described it as 'looking like it's closed all the time' – but it has the pretty 12th-century St Mary's church, a street or two of attractively rickety black-and-white houses and one exceptional pub.

Accommodation includes the **Royal Oak Inn** (☎ 01544-230484; Church St; s/d £35/55) and, across the road, the **Swan Hotel** (☎ 01544-230510; s/d £40/60). There's also a new **YHA hostel** (☎ 0870 770 6128; www.yha.org.uk; Victoria Rd; dm £14) with enthusiastic, knowledgeable staff and comfy bunks in a former Victorian hospital.

Most of the pubs and inns in Kington serve meals in the £5 to £12 range, with the **Swan** being probably the nicest. There's good Chinese takeaway. Beer geeks should not miss the local treasure that is **Ye Olde Tavern** (Victoria Rd), 10 doors past the hostel, where the house-made ale (try the Early Riser) is worth the 67 miles you've walked to reach it.

Day 5: Kington to Knighton

7–8 hours, 13.5 miles (21.5km)

This stretch is relatively short but very attractive, wandering through rolling hills and

featuring some of the best-preserved examples of the dyke along the whole route.

Head north out of town, taking great care crossing the busy A44 before embarking on the first of this day's many ascents. It takes you up through fields to the highest golf course in England (390m). Continuing through fields to Rushock Hill, you rejoin Offa's Dyke itself, which will now be your faithful companion most of the way to Knighton.

The rest of the day takes you up and down a succession of green hills, with impressive views at almost every turn, punctuated by short stretches of pine forest. Highlights of this section include the historic **Burfa Farm**, a restored medieval farmhouse at the base of Burfa hillfort; and the well-preserved section of dyke at Ffridd, which is the last hill before you descend into Knighton (p326).

Day 6: Knighton to Brompton Crossroads

9–10 hours, 15 miles (24km)

This section of trail is so bleak and challenging that satirical poems have been written about it. The relentless pattern is a steep climb, a relatively level section of ridge and then a steep drop, followed immediately by another brutal climb. Get an early start to allow for plenty of rest stops.

Heading north out of Knighton, there's a steep climb to Panponton Hill, where you rejoin the dyke, which the trail follows almost all day. It's at its most impressive from nearby Llanfair Hill, the dyke's highest point at 429m, with fine views to the ruins of Clun castle.

This section passes 1 mile from the village of Newcastle-on-Clun, where you could split this stage by staying at the **Crown Inn** (☎ 01588-640271; r from £25). Alternatively, about 3.5 miles east of the trail, along the B4368, is the **Clun Mill Youth Hostel** (☎ 01588-640582; dm £12).

Still-more-demanding hills await you between Newcastle and Brompton Crossroads, but the presence of the dyke makes navigation redundant.

BROMPTON CROSSROADS

The hospitable **Drewin Farm** (☎ 01588-620325; r from £22) is right on the path, about 1.5 miles before Brompton Crossroads. A little

further on, the regal **Mellington Hall** (☎ 01588-620456; s/d £50/80) has plush rooms inside a Gothic manor – a real treat, though you might feel self-conscious with mud on your boots.

Day 7: Brompton Crossroads to Buttington

6½–7½ hours, 12.5 miles (20km)

This day is on the short and easy side, with pleasant, flat walking that gradually builds to steep ascents. The path follows the dyke for much of the day.

Leaving the crossroads, the trail follows the dyke straight across the Montgomery plain, passing less than 1 mile from the historic town of **Montgomery**, which is worth a visit if you can spare a couple of hours. After crossing a minor road, you start to steadily rise towards Forden, with today's main obstacle, the Long Mountain, dominating the skyline ahead and to your right.

Following a stretch of road walking, cut through a number of farms before joining a lane, which follows the course of a Roman road. It takes you steeply up and into Green Wood, on the lower slopes of the Long Mountain. From here, zigzag up to the summit, where the trail swings round the edge of Beacon Ring, an Iron Age hillfort.

Keep your eye out for waymarks so that you don't stray on the sharp descent that winds through innumerable fields towards Buttington.

BUTTINGTON

In Buttington itself is the cheery and welcoming **Green Dragon** (☎ 01938-553076; sites for 2 £4), a pub with meals and camp sites. Otherwise, head north to **Mona Broxton's** (☎ 01938-570225; 1 Plas Cefn; r from £17). Less than an hour's walk away, Welshpool (p326) is a much better prospect, with many facilities, including a good range of places to stay and eat.

Day 8: Buttington to Llanymynech

5–6 hours, 10.5 miles (17km)

Today you get a break from your recent exertions with a day of almost completely flat walking. You can make very good time if you stride out, allowing for a visit to Powis Castle if you stayed in Welshpool.



From Buttington the trail joins the serene Shropshire Union Canal and ambles alongside the canal's still waters under shady trees for a couple of miles. After risking life and limb crossing the A483 at Pool Quay, you enter a 4-mile stretch of equally flat farmland that meanders along the River Severn, with the Breidden peaks looming above to the right.

Around lunchtime you reach the Four Crosses, where the **Golden Lion Hotel** and the **Four Crosses Inn** offer refreshment. From here the trail follows the Montgomery Canal all the way to Llanymynech. Just before you hit town, the canal crosses the River Vyrnwy via a stone aqueduct – an arresting sight but only a taste of greater things to come.

LLANYMYNECH

In this small, hospitable town, look for the welcoming **Lion Hotel** (☎ 01691-830234; r from £25), with B&B in oldish rooms.

Day 9: Llanymynech to Chirk Castle

8 hours, 14 miles (22.5km)

In sharp contrast to yesterday's flat terrain, today is a Robin Hood's delight of winding tracks, hills with fine vantage points and dense green forests.

A climb up Llanymynech Hill takes you through a wood, where you will say goodbye to the dyke for a while. Passing through the villages of Porth-y-waen and Nantmawr, you climb once more to take in the fine views from Moelydd (285m), before rejoining the dyke just before Candy Wood. This is a lovely section atop a steep ridge.

Clear waymarking makes the route straightforward over the next several miles of hills and farmland. You eventually drop steadily, and then more steeply, to reach the valley floor, crossing the River Ceiriog and finishing the day at the Castle Mill entrance to **Chirk Castle** (☎ 01691-777701; admission £7; ☎ noon-5pm Wed-Sun Jul-Oct). If you have made good time, you should consider a visit to the elegant state rooms and manicured gardens of this magnificent 14th-century home.

CHIRK CASTLE

There's camping at Bronygarth, close to Castle Mill, at the friendly **Old School**

(☎ 01691-772546; sites for 2 £6). West, in Llangollen, a popular tourist town and a good place for a rest day, there's a **YHA hostel** (☎ 01978-860330; llangollen@yha.org.uk; Twndwr Hall; dm £12). There are a couple of good places to the north, in Pentre – **Cloud Hill** (☎ 01691-773359; s/d from £20/40) and **Sun Cottage** (☎ 01691-774542; r from £25).

Day 10: Chirk Castle to Llandegla

9 hours, 16 miles (25.5km)

Today offers the most varied scenery of the trail, with added architectural attractions.

From Chirk Castle, take the optional route through the castle's pretty grounds before making your way on minor roads and through fields to the River Dee and the Pontcysyllte aqueduct. Designed and built by engineer Thomas Telford in 1805, the 302m-long arched aqueduct towers 38m over the River Dee and, for those with a head for heights, can be crossed on a narrow walkway.

Next, climb through Trevor Wood and along the Panorama Walk, where a laneway and then a path takes you up the short ascent to the hilltop fort of **Castell Dinas Bran**, which is well worth the 30-minute detour. You end up on a narrow path, traversing a scree slope below Eglwyseg Crags – this is a superb section of walking but it can be slippery in the wet, so be sure to watch your footing.

You next cross a wood, strike across a bracken-covered moor, negotiate a long pine plantation and head into the attractive village of Llandegla.

LLANDEGLA

Llandegla has a good selection of accommodation, including **Hand House** (☎ 01978-790570; s/d £32/54); and **2, The Village** (☎ 01978-790266; camp sites for 2 £6), which has camp sites. The **Willows Restaurant** (☎ 01978-790237; dinner mains £5-£14) offers meals.

Day 11: Llandegla to Bodfari

10 hours, 17 miles (27.5km)

This is one of the longest and most strenuous stages of the walk, with several steep ups and downs offset by the wild beauty of the heather-covered moors along the Clwydian Range.

A few miles of farmland takes you to the base of Moel y Waun, from where you

climb steadily to the tumulus at the top of Moel y Plâs, a first taste of today's testing terrain. The well-marked path continues to climb and fall past several more peaks, before a brief respite of more farmland walking. You're going up again soon enough, past the ramparts of **Foel Fenlli** hillfort to the highest point of the Clwydian Range, Moel Famau (544m).

Traverse two more peaks to reach an intensely unfair descent to the valley floor and an equally steep ascent past the apex of conical Moel Arthur, before another drop and climb to **Penycloddiau** hillfort. From here the trail drops around 300m in less than 3 miles to enter the tiny village of Bodfari.

BODFARI

In Bodfari, try **Fron Haul** (☎ 01745-710301; r from £30), which is through the village and up a steep hill – call from the phone box on the A541 for directions.

Day 12: Bodfari to Prestatyn

7 hours, 12 miles (19.5km)

There are several stiff ascents to tackle on this short day, so try to conserve energy in the face of the alluring coastal vistas.

A steep climb out of Bodfari takes you past Sodom village and along one of the many sections of road today up to Cefn Du peak. More road walking, punctuated by short sections through fields, brings you to the busy village of Rhuallt, where the **Smithy Arms** puts on a good lunch.

From Rhuallt, make your way through farmland, along minor roads and over a couple of small peaks to arrive eventually at a hair-raising section of path above a 200m cliff that overlooks Prestatyn. One final descent takes you into Prestatyn. Follow the sedate Bastion Rd down to the sea and the tourist office, which marks the official end of the walk.

MORE LONG-DISTANCE WALKS

As well as the Glyndŵr's Way and the Offa's Dyke Path, there are many other long-distance walking routes in Wales. Some are in the traditionally popular walking areas

around Snowdonia and the Wye Valley, while for a true cross-country experience there are routes that cross Wales' entirety. This section outlines some of the best.

THE WYE VALLEY WALK

The River Wye forms part of the border between England and Wales, and the Wye Valley is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (partly traversed by the Offa's Dyke Path). Following the river's entire length is the 136-mile (218km) Wye Valley Walk, starting in Chepstow then running up to Monmouth, through Symonds Yat, which is the most spectacular section of the River Wye, where it flows through a winding, deep-sided valley edged with woodland.

The route then goes past the village of Welsh Bicknor (on the opposite bank to English Bicknor, naturally), and on through Ross-on-Wye and Hereford, before crossing the border back into Wales at Hay-on-Wye, where it follows the upper Wye through the remote mountain country of Mid Wales to the market town of Rhayader.

The walk ends on the slopes of Plynlimon, which is also the source of the River Severn, between the towns of Devil's Bridge and Machynlleth. The walk is described in the *Wye Valley Walk Official Route Guide*.

For more details about the walk see www.wyevallywalk.org.

THE CAMBRIAN WAY

Long-distance routes that cross Wales include the Cambrian Way, winding between Cardiff and Conwy, traversing just about every bit of high, wild landscape on the way. It is described in *The Cambrian Way* by Tony Drake, the Way's instigator. For experienced walkers this is an excellent trip, although the 274 miles (441km) make it a longer, and much more difficult walk than the Pennine Way.

For more details about the walk see www.cambrianway.org.uk.

SNOWDONIA TO THE GOWER

As well as the Cambrian Way, another trans-Wales route is Snowdonia to the Gower. It's shorter and more direct than the Cambrian Way, although they overlap in the north. Whereas the Cambrian Way goes to/from Cardiff, this route (as its name suggests) ends on the Gower Peninsula, an

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty further to the west.

Snowdonia to the Gower by John Gillham is an inspirational hardback book with good route descriptions, glossy photos, beautifully

drawn aerial views and maps, and fascinating background information. The same author has since produced *A Welsh Coast to Coast Walk: Snowdonia to the Gower*, an ideal guidebook to carry on the route.