

Newport Outdoor Group



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Editors

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The
Outdoor
Habit!**

OFFA'S DYKE (Part 2)

May 2013

By Nigel Bolter

Part 2 of the Offa's Dyke trail started with a pleasant train journey to Craven Arms and a transfer by minibus to the rural and picturesque Clun hostel, which many of the NOGs have frequented in the past. After checking in and an inevitable cup of tea we strolled into the village to eat at the final destination for Part 1 Offa's Dyke: the wonderful White Horse Inn in Clun.

For the second stage of this trail we had the 7 stalwarts from Part 1, namely Brian, Norman, Jackie, Julian, Sally, Mary and myself and were joined by Zena from America. It was brilliant to see Angela who came over from Israel and spent the summer in the UK, attending several NOGs and social events and completing most of the Part 2. Ken from the US joined us for the last four days walking. It was also positive to see Liz and Kevin joining us for some of the walks towards the end of the trail.

This trail covered a lot of areas familiar to NOGs from weekends away: Kington, Baskerville Hall, Llanthony, Monmouth, the Black Mountains and the beautiful Wye valley. We were extremely fortunate with the weather. Most days were warm and sunny right through with just two brief showers on two of the days. The accommodation and transfers were again organised by Brian, with Norman leading the walks.



The first day was a short 7 mile but hilly and picturesque stroll to Knighton with wonderful views over the rolling Shropshire hills. In Knighton we had a look at the fascinating Offa's dyke museum which gave a real insight into the origins of the dyke and the power of Mercia. After a stop at a tea shop by the clock tower we settled into excellent accommodation next to the river, and ate a hearty meal in the extended fireplace alcove of a nearby inn.

The Wednesday walk was a more challenging 14.5 mile route with several significant climbs but rewarded with outstanding views of the Shropshire countryside and our very first glimpses of the Black Mountains in the distance.

The juicy blackberries en-route slowed the pace at times but after a steep ascent and drop into Kington we indulged in a cream tea at the Swan Inn followed by a delicious vegetarian meal and blackberry and apple crumble prepared by Angela, Mary and Zena. Angela also served us apples dipped in honey to celebrate the Jewish New Year; a real treat.

The following day was another long walk to Baskerville hall near Hay on Wye. After an initial climb to the breathtaking views from Hergest Ridge, we stopped for tea and coffee in the local church before ascending again to the South. After many undulations, blackberries and strong sunshine we followed the river through fields of corn. The group were quite weary by now and grateful for the minibus lift from the path to Baskerville hall. Some of the group revived themselves by indulging in the swimming pool facilities despite having sufficient swimwear.

On the Friday we had a short time in Hay on Wye followed by along but easy ascent into the Black mountains near Hay Bluff. For me the views from the ridge were the best of the whole trail and I was so pleased I had padded my heels with Compede and large plasters to prevent the blisters which meant me going up in the summer to repeat one of the walks from week one. After a wonderful walk along the ridge we descended by a zigzag and rather overgrown path to Llanthony. After a beverage at the Abbey refectory we had a great evening at the Full Moon pub. The landlady served delicious local food where the term 'small portion' had no meaning at all.



For Saturday we ascended the ridge by the same path (which was much easier) and followed the undulating ridge with stunning views of the Cats Back to the east and attractive mountain ponies on the ridge itself. We dropped down to Pandy and then made our way through fields and country roads to a little gem. This was the Old Rectory at Llangattock-Lingoed. We were greeted with tea and cakes served with a Portmeirion teaset in their beautiful sun drenched garden with striking views of the Skirrid mountain. The meal in the local pub the Hunters Moon was served with a vast array of wonderfully prepared fresh local vegetables.

Sunday's walk was an easy but very long cross country trek to Monmouth where we walked through the Bulmer's cider orchard and saw the range of produce grown in this prime agricultural area. Before the final ascent through the woodland near Monmouth we were met by Fred and Ted from the rambles who had kindly agreed to help with the luggage transfer. We spent the evening in the Kings Arms in Monmouth; very comfortable accommodation. I entertained the group with a round of the millionaire game from my phone which everyone seems to enjoy. The group failed on the last question and I could hear members of the trek discussing the question as they walked the following day.

The last two days were a scenic and undulating walk down the Wye Valley ascending the Kymin, the devils pulpit above Tintern and some stretches along the river itself. The final night was spent in the historical St. Briavels Castle where we had a super three course meal followed by Norman's traditional awards ceremony. This was a fantastic and special place to spend the final night of the trail.

The final stop at the stone monument by Sedbury cliffs seemed in some ways an anti-climax. We threw our pebbles into the sea which we had carried from Prestatyn, took some photographs and trekked back to our waiting minibus.

There was some great comradeship on this trail, good weather, scenic walking and outstanding and varied accommodation. This event would not have been so successful without the hard work and organisation of Brian, the leadership of Norman on the walks, and the positive attitude of the group.



OFFA'S DYKE PATH PART 2 AWARDS

	AWARD	NAME	REASON
1	Arriva Trains Wales safe ticket keeping award	Zena	Spotting Jackie's rail ticket on floor of Cardiff bus before reaching Cardiff station
2	Swiss watches memory loss award	Julian	Spending 30 mins looking for his watch at Clun hostel
3	Karrimor walking poles award	Ken and Sally	Breaking handle on one of his poles near Hay / shortened poles climbing out of Vale Of Ewyas
4	Specsavers poor eyesight award	Jackie	Leaving her sunglasses behind en route to Kington
5	Baskerville Hall swimming award	Sally, Angela, Zena, Jackie	Taking full advantage of swimming facilities with only 3 swimming costumes (no bikini)
6	Karrimor poles memory loss award	Angela	Leaving her poles behind on day one of walk
7	Go Outdoors chiropodist award	Nigel	Daily problems with his feet
8	NOG Rapid Action award	Julian	Breaking record for quickest time getting into the shower at Baskerville Hall
9	Baskerville Hall second swimming award	Julian	Not turning up to swim
10	Mr Bean dry orifices award	Zena	Comments made over tea at rectory Llangattock Lingoed
11	Ken Dodd Ffyfes banana award	Norman	Waking up in middle of night and shouting 'bananas'
12	Offa's Dyke Association chief organiser's award	Brian	Being unshakeable in the face of adversity
13	Dolley Green visitors ornithological award	Nigel	Spotting a dolly bird (red kite) at Dolley Green
14	Local fruit pickers award	All who participated	Gathering apples, blackberries, corn on the cob
15	Offa's Dyke Choral Society Platinum Award	Angela	Keeping a welcome in the hillside
16	I Spy Award	Mary	Observing Brian's cat herding technique particularly in Hay on Wye
17	NOGs Gourmet Award	Mary	Persevering at meal times with good humour and surviving!
18	NOGs Anti Gourmet Pot Noodle Award	Julian	Creating his own culinary delights
19	Offa's Dyke Aristocracy Award	Ken	Refined bedroom facilities at Baskerville Hall and elsewhere
20	LDFC or Long Distance Footpath Charmer Award	Brian	Kissing Ladies along the way!
21	Monmouthshire Podiatrist Foot Stubber Award	Zena	Stubbing her toe at the rectory Llangattock Lingoed
22	Wild Fruit Gourmet Award	Mary	Appreciating different flavours of Blackberry
23	LDWA Sweepers Award	Nigel	Spending most of his time acting as back marker
24	NOGs Long Distance Footpath 2013 Best Behaviour Award	Sally	Receiving Fewer Awards than anyone else!
25	Mon CC Water Diviners Award	Kevin	Making it rain at start of walk from Monmouth
26	ODFNA Offa's Dyke Footpath Navigation Award	Norman	Getting it right most of the time!
27	Wye Valley Association Sock Drying Award	Ken	Leaving his socks on the rail at the Boat Inn Redbrook
28	Offa's Dyke Italian Award	Sally	Being the best Italian student
29	NOG novice drinkers award	Jackie	Putting cider into her wine glass at St Briavels Castle