

Walker's Britain: Offa's Dyke (Southern Section)

Tour code: WOF

Revised: Nov 06

Once upon a time in the 8th century, there was a ruthless King of Mercia called Offa. Such trouble had he from Welsh marauders nibbling at the toes of his kingdom, that once and for all he decided to define his territory and built a huge earthwork to do so, generally following the high ground with commanding views into the mountains and down into the valleys.

Today the remaining 80 miles of embankment forms Britain's longest archaeological monument and the basis of a famous walk: Crossing the border between England and Wales more than 10 times, the Offa's Dyke National Trail path follows some of the finest scenery in both countries for 177 miles (285 km). Our walk follows the southern half of this trail from Chepstow to Knighton, (about half this walking distance in total). It is a journey packed with interest through patchworks of fields, over windswept ridges, across infant rivers, by ruined castles and into the old border market towns. Traditional farming methods have more or less remained intact and the hedgerows, oak woods and hay meadows form good wildlife habitats, home of buzzards and the rare Red Kite. You might even discover the even rarer Welsh Red Dragon!



General Information

Duration of tour: 8 days (seven nights)

Season: April to October. Not between 25 May – 3 June (Hay on Wye festival).

Starting point: Chepstow (Wales)

End of tour: Knighton (Wales)

Most convenient major city and international airport: Cardiff or Bristol Airports, otherwise London (Heathrow or Gatwick. There are buses from Heathrow airport to Cardiff via Chepstow). National Rail website is www.nationalrail.co.uk if you want to look at the journey involved.

Breakfast: in the UK will generally consist of sausage, bacon, eggs etc, cereals and fruit will also be available. It is important for you to tell us if you have any dietary requirements when you book your holiday so that we can inform everyone that you are staying with.

Baths: it is not normal for your room to have a bath, the main reason being that it takes up a lot of space, some hotels/guesthouses may have a separate room in the house where a bath is available to guests, but in the main it is showers.

Single Supplements: are payable on most of our tours. 1) The single supplement guarantees the privacy of your own room, however, rooms can at times be small and in some places may not enjoy the same facilities as double/twin rooms. 2) You are not just paying a supplement on the room but the luggage transfer costs you are paying in full. The cost of moving 1 bag or 2 bags etc remains the same. On some of our trips it is possible to reduce the cost of the single supplement if you happen to be a 3rd person

travelling, or have chosen a date when other clients are booked. **Luggage:** When staying in hotels, sometimes your luggage will have been taken to your room awaiting your arrival. However don't be surprised if your luggage is waiting for you to take it up to your room.

Grading

Moderate. Some long days and steep climbs and descents. Generally however undulating. Mixed weather can be expected. We would not recommend the route for first time walkers.

Waymarking

National Trail Acorn marks often attached to posts and stiles. But you will have to use map interpretation especially in times of low visibility, so you should be accustomed to using map and compass.

Getting to the Start

Outward journey from London to starting point: By train from London Paddington to Chepstow via Newport. Or coach direct to Cardiff from Heathrow airport or Victoria Coach station stops off at Chepstow enroute.

Inward journey to London at end of tour: From Knighton limited rail service back down to Chepstow via Newport, or on to Shrewsbury to join better transport connections.

Your Accommodation

☐ **Night 1:** In the centre of Chepstow your first hotel was a 16th Century coaching Inn. The rooms have T.V. bathrooms and tea and coffee making facilities. There is an award winning restaurant offering Welsh menus. Bar meals are also available.

There is private parking at the rear of the hotel. It may be possible to leave cars for the duration of the walk on arrangement with the hotelier.

- **Night 2:** In Redbrook we stay at a simple guesthouse in this village. (non ensuite). Mrs. Evans is very friendly. There are two pubs close by for dinner or that real Ale experience.
- **Night 3:** Near Llanvetherine the accommodation is a Welsh working farm (an endangered species?) dating back to the 15th century. A warm welcome will be had from the sheep and cattle there. There is a relaxed atmosphere with good home cooking available. All bedrooms have tea and coffee facilities and there is a T.V and games room. The bedrooms are not ensuite but there are washbasins in each of the rooms.
- **Night 4:** Our accommodation tonight in the Olchon Valley is at a Cottage Farm, which has been carefully converted from a stone barn and once the home of film actor Robert Newton. The Olchon brook borders the fields where the sheep happily wander with free-range chickens and ducks. There is a nice Lounge with an Inglenook fireplace and comfortable bedrooms with beams and either ensuite or with an attached shower room.
- **Night 5:** Once in “Booky” Hay on Wye the guesthouse we use, an 18th century cottage, has ensuite rooms, tea and coffee, T.V etc. Look forward in the morning to a full cooked, Welsh Breakfast. For dinners there are plenty of pubs and restaurants in the town.
- **Night 6:** Our accommodation for tonight is situated in the small market town of Kington. An attractive small hotel with ensuite, bar and restaurant, T.V. hospitality tray and even ironing facilities.
- **Night 7:** Our final night is spent in a 16th Century weather boarded coaching Inn in Knighton. There has been a lot of restoration work to preserve the old beams and there is a magnificent galleried staircase. Try out the King Offa’s restaurant and the bars have traditional ales as well as bar snacks. Bedrooms have private facilities.

PLEASE NOTE: It is generally normal practice when staying in hotels that you check-in on or after 2pm and checkout by 10am the following morning. Guesthouses/bed & breakfast establishments are normally check-in on or after 4pm and checkout by 10am.

Outline Itinerary

- **Day 1 Chepstow:** Travel to start point. Reasonable connections from London via coach or train, around 2.5-3 hours. Or slightly slower ones from the midlands via Shrewsbury. If you arrive early enough you could start the walk (which actually starts at Sedbury Cliffs to the south of Chepstow) and save yourself 2 miles tomorrow.
- **Day 2 Chepstow to Redbrook** (14 miles / 22.5 km) The route starts from the mud flats of the River Severn at Sedbury. Join the Wye valley with great views of Chepstow with its Norman Castle. The way climbs high above the Wye Valley with views then down to Tintern Abbey. You can really marvel at the meandering river, the cliffs and the little settlements. Eventually descend to Redbrook, a 19th century industrial village with three pubs all with four letter names, all beginning with the letter “B”.

- **Day 3 Redbrook to Llanvetherine** (16 miles / 26 km) climb up to “naval temple” for one of the best views of the entire route. Head down to Monmouth for a mid morning pint or a coffee, crossing the 13th Century gate house bridge. Next climb through boggy King’s Wood and then cross the Trothy River. The countryside becoming quite domesticated. The views to the north are dominated by the shapes of Skirrid and Sugfarloaf Hills. Another pause and a pint might be worthwhile in Llantillo Crosseny village with its fine 13th Century church. The village pub has features dating from the 15th Century. The next stop is White Castle a 12th Century Norman Castle built to protect the route from Monmouth into Wales. It is in a picturebook setting with intact walls and a little moat around it. Another mile brings you into Llanvetherine.

- **Day 4 Llanvetherine to Longtown** (11 miles / 17 km) The trail continues via Llangattock-Lingoed and Pandy where we at last leave the lowland farms and rivers and climb up onto the Hatterrall Ridge and into the Black Mountains. The ridge in the main follows the border of England and Wales and the edge of the Brecon Beacons National Park. Spectacular views all around in good weather. After a few miles along the ridge you will need to drop down to your nice farm accommodation in the Olchon Valley.

- **Day 5 Olchon Cottage (Long town) to Hay on Wye** (11.5 miles / 18.50 kms. Morning steep ascent to regain the Hatterrall Ridge, and then over the Cats Back and up to the highest point to the path near Red Darren at 2306 feet (703m). The ridge ends at Hay Bluff, a great northerly viewpoint towards Hay and the Wye Valley, the Hills of Radnorshire and also the Black mountains to the west and parts of the Brecon Beacons. Next drop off the ridge stroll via a set of five kissing gates into Hay on Wye, the capital of the second hand book trade. The town with its 12th Century Keep was the site of the Anglo – Welsh power struggles in the 13th Century.

- **Day 6 Hay on Wye to Kington** (14.5 miles / 23.5 kms) Crossing the River Wye, today’s walk rises into the Radnorshire Hills. The walking undulates past sites of Roman encampments until you reach Glades try maybe for a lunchtime pub break. Don’t drink too much though, for the last few miles today you have to climb up and walk along the Hergest Ridge amongst Thyme, gorse and Welsh Ponies. Eventually drop down to Kington, actually situated in Herefordshire with 13th Century Church and the parallel lanes and long back gardens that may preserve the pattern of the strips in the former open field system.

- **Day 7 Kington to Knighton** (13.5 miles / 22 kms) Some say this is the finest day’s walk of the whole path, with Offa’s Dyke as your constant Companion. First pass the highest Golf course in England on Bradnor Hill. The trail then undulates spectacularly, but is never too steep. Beautiful westward panoramas open up across the Radnor Valley. On a clear day you get views of 30 miles in each direction, over both the Brecon Beacons and The Malverns. The route finally climbs over a hill called Ffridd, before descending very steeply to Knighton (town of the horsemen) or Tref y Clawdd in Welsh (Town on the Dyke) as the town is on The Shropshire / Powys border. It is a very busy little Market town. The market place has mainly 17th century shops, and enough general entertainment to keep you amused for an evening

Day 8: End of tour! After breakfast, head off perhaps on the delightful Border Railway.

What's Included

Bed and breakfast with mostly en-suite facilities. (2 nights however without). A mixture of hotels, guesthouses and farmhouses are used. Luggage transfers from Inn to Inn. Trail Book (containing maps) and basic notes on the accommodations are provided in your package.

Extending your stay

Extra nights:

Available at Chepstow & Hay on Wye
call Outdoor Travel for details