



Offa's Dyke National Trail 26th March to 5th April 2023

Long days and hard miles: a solo excursion by Vincent J Simmonds



The author at Sedbury Cliffs, the southernmost extent of Offa's Dyke National Trail.

Introduction:

Offa's Dyke consists of an earth bank, which in places still stands to a height of 12 feet (3.5 metres), fronted by a deep quarry-ditch with a total width of up to 60 feet (18 metres). Excavations have confirmed that a wooden breastwork ran along the top of the bank, and in places this was later rebuilt in stone. The west side of the bank was also revetted with turf to create a near vertical face. It is possible that some sort of palisade or wall might have existed. It is thought that towers may have been erected at intervals, though none have yet been found (English Heritage).

Offa's Dyke Path is a 177 mile (285 Km) long walking trail. It is named after, and often follows, the spectacular earthwork. The Trail, which was opened in the summer of 1971, links Sedbury Cliffs near Chepstow on the banks of the Severn estuary with the coastal town of Prestatyn on the shores of the Irish sea. It passes through no less than eight different counties and crosses the border between England and Wales over 20 times. The Trail explores the tranquil Marches (as the border region is known) and passes through the Brecon Beacons National Park on the spectacular Hatterrall Ridge. In addition, it links no less than three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – the Wye Valley, the Shropshire Hills, and the Clwydian Range / Dee Valley. It passes through many diverse types of landscape. The upland stretches in the Brecon Beacons and Clwydian Range can be hard going in poor weather or visibility. The flattest stretch is the section which follows the River Severn and the Montgomeryshire Canal. Elsewhere it is a case of gentle ups and downs (National Trails).

Walking the trail:

Chepstow to Sedbury Cliffs and fossil beach.

Travelled to Chepstow with Roz to spend the early afternoon exploring Chepstow Castle before walking down to the fossil beach at Sedbury, to an area known as Slimeroad Pill, on the north side of the River Severn. We walked northeast along the foreshore to spend some time exploring a fine fossil beach.

The geological layering is similar to the exposures seen at Aust Cliff on the opposite bank of the River Severn. The highest layer comprises of brown rocks of the Blue Lias formation, which was deposited between the Rhaetian Age (which closed the Triassic Period 201.3 Ma) and the Ages of the Hettangian (201.3 to 199.3 Ma) and Sinemurian (199.3 to 190.8 Ma), the first two ages of the Jurassic Period. The Blue Lias contains limestone, mudstone and siltstone, and this formation comprises the lower boundary of the Lias Group. The lias here can be thicker than at Aust. Lias contains clays that are highly prone to



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expansion and contraction which aid landslip and collapse, therefore helping to facilitating the release of accessible fossils.

The lias lies upon the pale grey Cotham member of the Lilstock Formation, which itself lies on the darker grey Westbury Formation. The Lilstock and Westbury formations, containing shale, limestone, and sandstone, are included in the parent Penarth Group and they were deposited in the Rhaetian Age (208.5 to 201.3 Ma) of the Triassic Period (see Table 1 below). The next layer down is made up of the pale greenish- or bluish-grey mudstones and siltstones of the Blue Anchor Formation which, at the boundary, can share some of the same features with the overlying Westbury rocks. The Blue Anchor rocks lie atop the Branscombe Formation which comprises the substantial reddish-brown mudstone and siltstone with some greenish grey 'reduced' patches similar in appearance to the Blue Anchor rock. The Blue Anchor and Branscombe Formations, both laid down between the Norian (227 to 208.5 Ma) and the Rhaetian ages, are included in the parent Mercia Mudstone Group (deposited from the early Triassic Period to the Rhaetian Age) which underlies much of the area.

	Stage	Ma	Lithostratigraphy
Upper	Rhaetian	209-201	Lilstock Formation Penarth Group { Westbury Formation
	Norian	227-209	Blue Anchor Formation
	Carnian	237-227	
			Mercia Mudstone Group
Middle	Ladinian	242-237	
	Anisian	247-242	
Lower	Induan-	252-247	Sherwood Sandstone Group
	Olenekian		

Table 1. Representative Triassic strata in Britain (data from Ewin, 2018)

In the brief time we spent at the site we found abundant examples including ammonites, gryphea, bivalves, and fish bones. A good spot to come back to with some identification guides and a hand lens.



Ammonite

While we were there it was obvious that recent land slips were still active, several rocks were seen and heard to fall, care is required. We returned along the foreshore to walk up to the cliff top and locate the marker stone that defines the southern start/finish of the Offa's Dyke National Trail. There is a short



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section of the earthwork visible until it disappears in residential development. We returned to Chepstow where I had booked accommodation for the night, Roz returned home.

Chepstow to Monmouth.

A reasonably comfortable night followed by a good breakfast, all packed and ready to go. Started on my way about 07:45, crossing the River Wye and walked up the little lane to join the Offa's Dyke Path (ODP), the Welsh name 'Llwybr Clawdd Offa.'



The bridge over the River Wye at Chepstow

The route from Chepstow to Tidenham is mostly underwhelming as it passes through mostly residential area with associated dog walkers and traffic noise and an unpleasant, thankfully, short road section. Not much evidence of the earthwork here. There is a section of the dyke at Tidenham although it was not especially photogenic. The earthwork work becomes more prominent further along the route at Devil's Pulpit, where there are good views to Tintern Abbey and Wye Valley below. This part of the path is mostly through woodland following the high ground above the River Wye before descending to Brockweir to follow the river to Bigsweir Bridge.



Bigsweir Bridge over the River Wye

From the river a bit of a slog along a short road section followed by a long climb through woodland with abundant wood anemones in bloom, a short stint across fields before re-entering woodland. Here another section of the earthwork was followed.

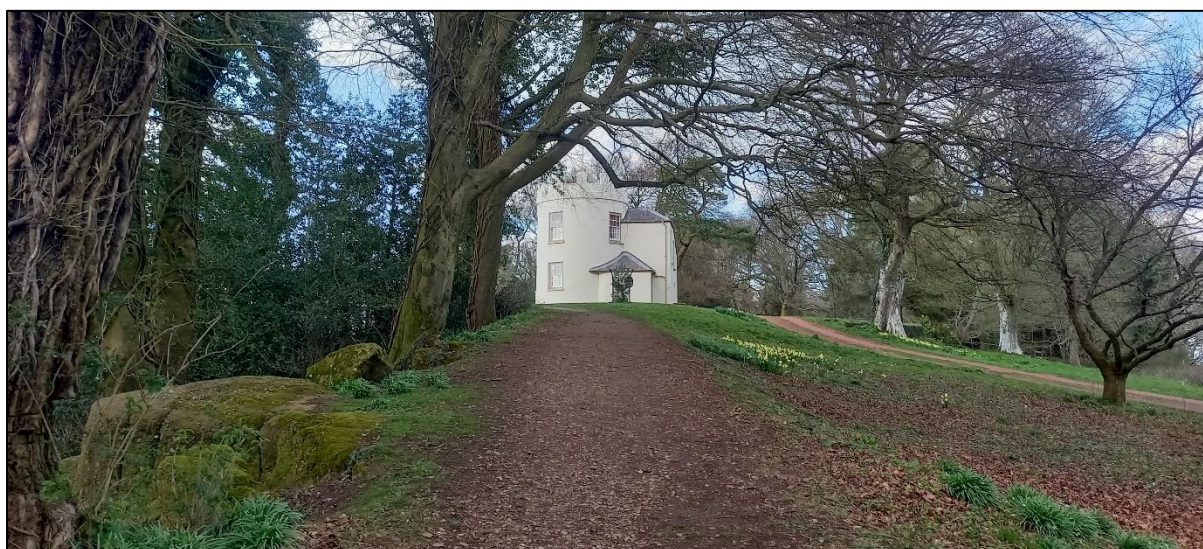


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A section of Offa's Dyke earthworks

From the woodland a steep descent down to Redbrook. A road section is followed until reaching a long steep climb and a bit of a slog up to the Kymin (244m OD), the highest point of the day. From the roundhouse at the summit there are fine panoramic views of Monmouth, the river, and mountains beyond. From here it was downhill all the way to Monmouth where I camped for the night near Monnow Bridge and on the route ready for an easy start tomorrow.



Approaching the roundhouse on the Kymin

Monmouth to Pandy.

Not the best night's rest as the campsite was situated close to the busy A40 and traffic noise was constant. But, in the morning straight onto the ODP. A road section out of the town soon led across fields to enter Hendre woods where a lot of clearance work is being undertaken. It was raining so wet gear was donned. A steep climb through the wood to descend a gravel forest track leading to undulating farmland traversed by the little River Trothy. The ODP passes the former site of the Cistercian Grace Dieu Abbey. This was the last Cistercian Abbey in Wales. It often fell victim to attacks from Welsh raiders and is thought to have been burned to the ground in 1233. It was always poor, failing to generate the wealth of the abbeys at Llanthony and Tintern. It was 'dissolved' as part of Henry VIII's act of Parliament in 1536 (National Trails). Nothing can now be seen of the former abbey.



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A panoramic view from the Kymin



The 13th century gatehouse on the Monnow Bridge, Monmouth



The former site of the Cistercian Grace Dieu Abbey



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The ODP continues over farmland. At the little church of St. Michael's of the Fiery Meteor at Llanfihangel-Ystern-Llewern. A sign on the gate states the church is open and there is tea/coffee available for a donation to church funds. It seemed churlish not to oblige and I stopped for a break and a rest from the rain.



St. Michael's of the Fiery Meteor, Llanfihangel-Ystern-Llewern

Medieval church, the external masonry is undatable. The nave wagon roof and windows date from late 15th century. The Victorian restoration of chancel in 1874 was conducted by T H Wyatt, who completely rebuilt the timber belfry, together with the great timber frame on which the belfry stands, which rises at the west end of nave (British Listed Buildings¹).

Leaving the church, the ODP continues over undulating farmland, tracks, and lanes/roads and criss-crossing small rivers and streams. The fields were soggy in places and there were some sticky uphill slogs. A gravel track leads up to the impressive ruins of White Castle (maintained by CADW).



Following the initial conquest of the Welsh kingdom of Gwent by William Fitz Osbern, Lord of Breteuil in Calvados, between 1067-75, the Normans built a triangle of castles at Grosmont, Skenfrith and White Castle to control their newly won lands. These late 11th century defences would have been of earth and timber. At White Castle, the great outer ditch of that ringwork castle still survives, the perimeter of which would originally have been protected by a wooden palisade. The earliest masonry structure at White Castle, built probably in the early 12th



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century, was a small rectangular keep- tower now demolished which stood within the inner ward. In 1244 Waleran built a new hall, buttery, and pantry at White Castle. Shortly afterwards, in 1254, the three castles were granted to Henry III's elder son, later King Edward I. White Castle played an important strategic role during the rising of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, Prince of Gwynedd in 1262. The Welsh conquered many of the English-held castles, but Abergavenny and White Castle, which did not fall, became important frontier fortresses. As a defence against Llywelyn, White Castle was refortified in the military mode of the late 13th century. Great round towers were added at the angles of the curtain wall of the inner ward, and the earlier 12th century keep was demolished and replaced by a new inner gatehouse. At the same time, the outer ward was enclosed by a formidable new curtain wall with massive corner towers and a new outer gateway. These works were conducted sometime after 1263. With the subjugation of Wales by Edward I, the strategic importance of White Castle declined and by the 16th Century the castle had fallen into ruin (British Listed Buildings²).



I stopped to have a brew and to look around the castle remains. Looking over to the hills and mountains to the north the sky was very dark, a strong wind blowing from the south-west. After drinking my tea, I resumed the walk following an undulating route across fields. Some fields were extremely mucky and hard work, overgrazing by livestock and animal movements had turned them into a quagmire.

At the little lime-washed church (St. Cadoc's) in Llangattock Lingoed I came across the only official trail stamp I was to find. I duly stamped my field notebook.

The ODP continued over rolling farmland to descent down to Pandy. At one stage I had planned to continue further but seeing the clouds hanging over the Black Mountains I decided to make my way to the campsite at the Rising Sun and stay there for the night. Of course, I choose a night when food was not available and had to make do with stuff I had with me. The campsite is close to the A465 so not an entirely peaceful night.

Pandy to Hay-on-Wye

On my way at 08:00 on a grey, damp morning and the clouds were low over the mountains beyond. A steep climb towards Hatterrall Ridge along country lanes and a stony, rutted bridlepath opening out onto the moorland. There were many mucky, sheep tracks leading up towards Pentwyn hillfort, here the path became a bit obscure, and visibility was poor. GPS and OS maps app proved to be invaluable here and the ODP was located. Once on it the way was northwards, the strong wind and lashing rain coming from the south-west so as long as it was blowing over my left shoulder I was heading in the right direction. In truth, much of the path is well maintained and not difficult to follow. The flagstone path over the peat hags made the going so much easier. It has to be said that the views were not great



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and at times I had some trouble staying upright in the wind especially as I gained altitude. At c.700m OD, the wind was at its strongest. However, as soon as I crossed onto the leeward side I was sheltered from the wind, and it was almost sunny! But it was still raining, and I decided against stopping and continued down the steep, slippery, sometimes treacherous path leading off the ridge. On reflection, I had made the right call to camp at Pandy anywhere on the higher ground would have been miserable indeed!



Trig. at 552m OD, Hatterrall Ridge



Flagstone path over peat hag, Hatterrall Ridge

Arrived at Hay-on-Wye and decided to camp for the night. Found a campsite, Radnors End, just a short walk over the river from the town and close to the ODP. Site was closed due to some building works, but the owner let me stay free of charge. After pitching the tent, I walked back to the town to find something to eat. Unfortunately, it started to rain again!

Hay-on-Wye to Kington

After a breakfast of porridge and coffee, the tent was packed away (wet!) I was soon on my way. The first part of the ODP is alongside the River Wye over sheep pasture mainly, and included the muckiest field so far encountered. There was lots of standing water and surface run-off following the recent rains. The churned-up fields must contribute greatly to soil erosion, especially in the wet conditions. The path climbs up through a narrow, wooded valley, Bettws Dingle, and then follows a long road section before



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more footpaths over farmland, arriving at the small village of Newchurch. It was time for a tea break at the little church, St. Mary's, another venue offering refreshments to passers-by.



St. Mary's, Newchurch

The church was rebuilt 1856-57. The curate at the time (later Rector) was Revd. David Vaughan, friend of Revd. Francis Kilvert, who was a frequent visitor and who preached in the church on occasion. Nave, small chancel, west tower with broach spire, south porch. Coursed rubble, slate roof, buttresses, and copings. Wide lancet windows. Interior - tall narrow chancel arch, arched tower opening, and choir gallery set over plaster corbelled heads. Similar corbels under feet of slender roof cross-braced trusses. Early monolithic font. 17th century communion table, some 18th century dado panelling. The reason for listing it is included as a simple, unaltered church of mid-19th century date having close historical associations with Rev. Francis Kilvert (British Listed Buildings³).

Leaving Newchurch, the route moderate climb up on sheep grazed turf, soggy in places, and over Disgwylfa Hill (380m OD). A descent following muddy farm tracks and fields to Gladestry before climbing again following a steep, hard-surfaced lane leading onto an equally steep, stony bridlepath before opening onto moorland over Hergest Ridge (420m OD). Took a slight detour to the Whet Stone (417m OD) a glacial erratic composed of gabbro.



The Whet Stone, Hergest Ridge



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From Hergest Ridge the route descends to Kington where I had booked a room at the Burton Hotel for the night, a chance to dry-out stuff. Also, recharge power packs, and freshen up.

Kington to Bryn y Cratch

After a night on the towel rail with the extractor on my kit had dried out nicely and repacked bags ready for the off before going down for breakfast.

It was nice to start the day in dry boots and, so far, the weather was as bad as forecast or expected. There were several showers, but these were quickly blown over by a strong wind. An undulating walk, with some stiff climbs that were, thankfully, not too long. The great thing was that the majority of the route was alongside the Offa's Dyke earthwork. There were sections in good condition but, sadly, others were significantly being eroded by livestock (mostly sheep) movements and animal burrowing (badgers, rabbits).



Offa's Dyke, Rushock Hill



Soil erosion resulting from sheep overgrazing/movements and animal burrowing

The ODP continues an undulating route over hills (up to c.400m OD) and through woodland/forest, with sections of the earthwork until descending steeply into Knighton. Stopped in a café for a pot of tea and a bite to eat before resuming my journey. Unfortunately, the Offa's Dyke Visitor Centre was not open, and it was raining again!



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Signpost outside the visitor centre, Knighton

A still climb up Panponton Hill leads onto a ridge path following the Offa's Dyke earthwork. It was raining heavily, no point in stopping so kept going, and my boots were very wet again. Dropped off the ridge to follow a mucky, gravel byway for quite a distance. It was obviously well used and there was nowhere discreet to wild camp. Kept going. Followed a bridlepath with lots of surface water run-off, crossed a very soggy flood plain with a little river in spate at Bryndinog. Some interesting buildings here but didn't stop to take any photographs as it was getting late, and I needed to find somewhere to stop for the night. Started another steep climb where I got to a spot suitably out of sight but still on the path and I decided that I had gone far enough today and stopped. The rain had abated, and I quickly pitched the tent.



Wild camp at Bryn y Cratch (Offa's Dyke in the background)

According to the guidebook (Kay, et al., 2021), on the climb up to Bryn y Cratch I had passed the halfway mark!

Bryn y Cratch to Buttington Bridge

Not a great nights rest, it was cold, and it was raining. Thankfully, the rain appears to have stopped at present. Looks like the day will start with a stiff climb but, at least the birds are singing and I'm halfway there of course. The climb was followed by a steep and slippery descent and that set the tone for the rest of the morning; steep climb followed long, slippery descent. A brute of a climb up from Churchtown



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but it was dry (in that it was not raining) although still soggy underfoot. Followed more sections of Offa's Dyke earthwork along the way. The route levelled off to cross the river at Brompton Bridge. I was hoping to stop at the local pub here but that seems to have ceased trading. The next section of the route was mainly flat following the valleys of two rivers, the Caebitra and Camlad. Then a stiff little climb up to Nantcribba. There were some fine sections of the Dyke. A short road section passes a tree covered motte and bailey, then another climb through woodland.



A fine section of the dyke earthwork

The route continues over hills to reach the high point of the day at Beacon Ring/Caer Digoll hillfort (408m OD) and a long descent down to Buttington Bridge. And it was much brighter, even saw some blue sky.



Beacon Ring/Caer Digoll

Found the Green Dragon Inn and booked in for the night. Pitched the tent and had a shower. My feet are suffering big time in wet boots day in day out. Went to the pub for a very filling evening meal leaving me feeling quite bloated but, I probably needed it. Retired to the tent to sleep it off.



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Buttington Bridge to Craig Forda

A decent night and felt okay in the new morning except my feet are a bit of a mess. The forecast for the next few days is better and I'm hoping the feet will not get too much worse. Applied plenty of Sudocrem. The next section of the route to Llanymynech according to the guidebook (Kay, et al. 2021) was flat.



Buttington Bridge, built 1872

And so it was, in truth, it was rather monotonous. The scenery was okay but didn't change much and, at times, the pervading stench of sheep piss. The terrain followed the River Severn over fields with long, dewy grass and my boots were soon wet again, and there were long sections on the top of flood embankments. Also, a couple of sections along the Montgomery Canal towpath. Arrived lunchtime at Llanymynech and stopped for some food at the Bradford Arms Hotel.



Montgomery Canal

Fully refreshed and ready for the climb ahead and see how far I can get today. A steep road section leading to a track then onto path up onto Llanymynech Hill. There is plenty of evidence of mineral extraction on the hillside and information boards highlight the features visible. The route follows the contours around the hill to a steep descent to Porth y Waen and then undulates along roads and field paths to Nantmawr. Another stiff climb up and over Moelydd Uchaf from the summit are fantastic views



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to the hills and mountains beyond – on a good day Snowdon is visible some 44 miles distant. A descent to Trefonen, another section of the dyke evident, before dropping down to Candy. Climbed up through Candy Wood to reach Craig Forda, where I decided I would stop for the night, another wild camp. Found a suitable location in amongst the trees, scraped away branches, twigs, and leaves, pitched the tent. Today had been a sort of transitional day passing from the southern hills, across a brief flatter central zone to the northern hills. My feet were now very sore. By my calculations about 50 miles to go. Weatherwise, it had been grey through the morning but then the sun had come out in the afternoon, and it had been pleasantly warm.



Wild camp at Craig Forda

Craig Forda to Llandegla Forest

Not a great night, I was cold and uncomfortable, my feet felt like they were on fire. Wet boots plus long days and hard miles were having a bad effect on my feet. During the night I was having negative thoughts, I had reached somewhere dark, a low point. But, as ever a new day dawned, the sun was breaking through the trees in the early morning and the birds were singing. I cast aside the negativity and was feeling more positive. My feet were still very sore, but I'd just have to grin and bear it, keep moving on.



Offa's Dyke, near Craignant



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There was a little bit of uphill to begin the day before the path levelled off a bit and followed the contours along the hill top to Oswestry Old Racecourse. There was frost on the ground. A long moderately sloping descent to Carreg y Big before climbing again over Selattyn Hill followed by a long descent to Castle Mill, Chirk.

From Castle Mill I took the permissive path to Chirk Castle (open 1st April to 30th September). There is a café at the castle, National Trust, and I stopped for tea and pasty before continuing on my journey. It was busier than expected, I had not factored in Easter holidays. There was a cool breeze, but it was dry, and the sun was out. Another permissive path led to a road which followed for a distance with a short section of field path to cut off a bend. The route descends to the Llangollen Canal, crossing the A5 on the way. Followed the canal towpath to cross the very impressive Pontcysyllte Aqueduct spanning the River Dee valley.



Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, l to r: viewed from southeast, Thomas Telford plaque, viewed from northeast.

Information on plaque (in Welsh and English) – Pontcysyllte Aqueduct constructed 1795-1805 as part of the Ellesmere Canal by Thomas Telford (1757-1834). Presented on 9th August by the Institute of Civil Engineers (ICE) – Wales to celebrate the 250th anniversary of his birth.

It was warm enough to stop for a cold drink and an ice cream. The one trouble with stopping was getting going again. There were a lot of road sections to come, and these were not comfortable in wet walking boots and with sore feet. It was a long slog out of Trevor. A climb then follows leading through Trevor Hill Woods to emerge on a long road section with extensive views (Panorama Walk). Here, the view to Dinas Bran dominates with the town of Llangollen on the opposite side of the valley. In the wider panorama hills and mountains, it was a spectacular place. It was warm in the sunshine, and I stopped for a break before hobbling on. Time was getting on, and I was struggling long, hard road section led



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to a narrow, stony path skirting along the bottom of scree slopes from towering limestone crags, but it was a beautiful place to be.



The path skirts limestone crags and scree

The path continued past the limestone crags before a sharp descent to World's End. Another road section, with a very steep climb out of the valley up onto the high moorland. It seemed to drag on for ages before reaching the path across the moor to Llandegla Forest. Thankfully, there was another flagstone path across the peat moor gently ascending to the forestry plantation. I got into the tree cover, searched around, found a camp spot (another wild camp), and pitched the tent. I'd had enough and daylight was beginning to fade as the sun set. The temperature was dropping rapidly too. Another long, hard day.

Llandegla Forest to Bodfari

My alarm went off at 06:00 as usual and I started to pack stuff away before getting some breakfast. Emerged from the tent to find it was covered in ice, it had been another cold night, but it wasn't raining.



To the northwest of Llandegla lies an interesting group of landscape features, oriented SW/NE



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And the sun was rising. Another long day ahead to get to Bodfari. It was a steady descent down to the village of Llandegla where I stopped at the community shop and café there for a pot of tea, some cake and a few snacks for the journey, and my water bottles filled. From Llandegla, the route crosses gentle farmland with the meandering River Alyn flowing through it. There are some noticeable landscape features depicted on the OS map and these turned out to be a series of limestone outcrops containing caves. These are known as the Rhos-Ddigre Caves and archaeological excavations were conducted at the site, now scheduled, by William Boyd-Dawkins in the 19th century.



One of the Rhos-Ddigre Caves lies next to the Offa's Dyke Path

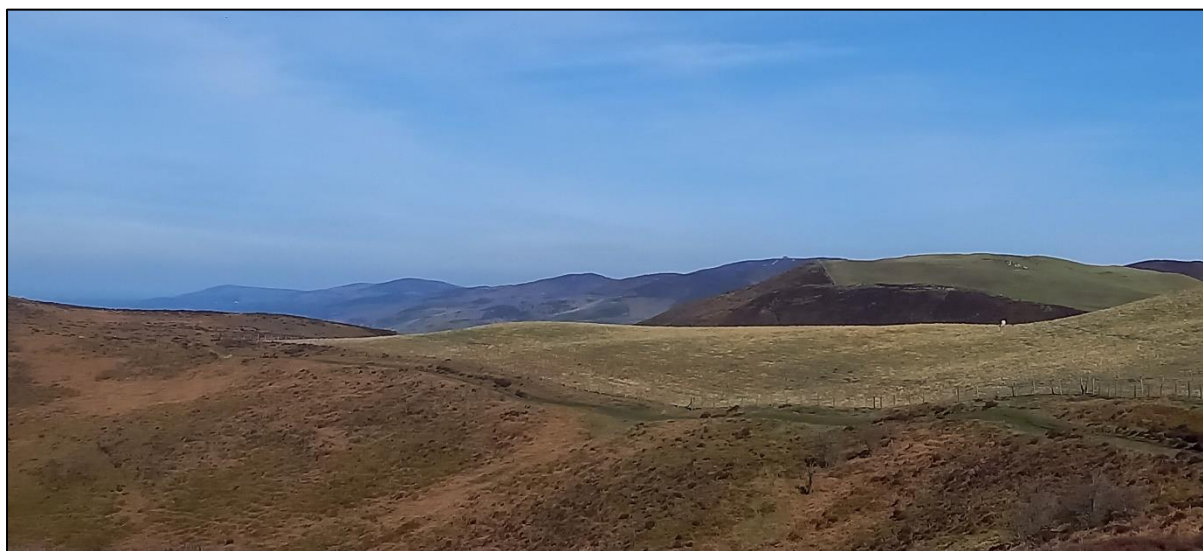
The following provides a general description of the Scheduled Ancient Monument. The monument consists of a cave containing archaeological deposits that can date from as early as the palaeolithic period. A cave may have been used for occupation, storage, burial, refuse, or as a temporary shelter. The scheduled site of Rhos-Ddigre Caves consists of 4 caves located in rock outcrops in semi woodland and pasture. 19th century excavations appear to have discovered human remains, animal bones, charcoal, and a flint flake. The monument is of national importance for its potential to enhance our knowledge of prehistoric settlement, ritual, and funerary practices. It retains significant archaeological potential, with a strong probability of the presence of associated archaeological features and deposits. The scheduled area comprises the remains described and areas around them within which related evidence may be expected to survive (CADW¹).

Leaving the little river valley, the terrain becomes hillier as it climbs into the Clwydian Range. Gaining height steadily and steepening up to Moel y Plâs, the path at c.400m OD, then a descent, to climb again and skirt the flank of Moel Llanfair. The views were spectacular, I could see the sea at times and in the far distance the mountains of Snowdonia. The route continues to Garreg Lŵyd then passing Moel Gyw before a descent to the main road, A494. Following the road northeast for a short distance to a bridlepath leading up to a steep climb to the hillfort on the summit of Foel Fenli, then a steep descent to the roadside car park at Bwlch Crug-glâs. From the car park, a gravel track leads for 1.5 miles to the summit of Moel Famau (554m OD) a popular spot for tourists visiting the Jubilee Tower. I did not stop to look. From here an undulating path over Moel Dywyll to the western flank of Moel Llys-y-coed, the path stays around 400m OD before another steep descent to a roadside car park. Climbing again up to another summit hillfort on Moel Arthur (456m OD). Even had some company for a little while when I stopped to let a faster, unladen walker go by, he decided to stay with me for a chat which was okay as it sort of spurred me on a bit. Then, yet another steep descent to a roadside car park followed by the final steep climb up to Penycloddiau (440m OD) and another hillfort. By now I was struggling thinking to myself



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am I going to make it to Bodfari, time was racing by. Thankfully, the climbing was over (mostly) and there was a long, slow, steady descent off the hills. I could see Bodfari not too far away and I kept plodding on.



The Clwydian Range

It was almost dark when I arrived at Station House campsite. Worryingly, a sign on the gate stated, “pre-booking only” and of course I had not. I knocked on the door, got the proprietor out of the bath and asked I could pitch a tent for the night. She was absolutely fine and showed where to put my tent still in her dressing gown. It had taken me 12.5 hours to get here and a distance about 19 miles walking over the Clwydian Hills on the way, I was exhausted. Pitched the tent, had a shower, made a brew, sat in my tent to phone Roz, make some notes before getting my head down for the night. From Bodfari it's about 12 miles to Prestatyn.



Signpost on Moel Famau

Bodfari to Prestatyn

A bit disappointingly some light rain through the early hours. The socks I had rinsed through last evening and left hanging outside to dry weren't getting any drier. Not to worry. A reasonably good night except that there are a couple of cockerels nearby and they like to crow – a lot! Last leg today and



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reading through the guidebook I can expect some stiff climbing. It was not going to be an easy day by any means. It was grey, overcast, and drizzly.

Whoa! The first few hundred metres were a struggle, yesterday's effort must have taken more out of me than I thought, and my feet were extremely painful. At the current shuffling rate, I would not get to Prestatyn any time soon. However, as soon as the climbing started, I began to get into a rhythm and was moving at an acceptable rate. The climbing was steeper than I had anticipated as the route once again flirted with the Clwydian Range. Not as much height as yesterday the highest summit today, Cefn Du (262m OD). There were a lot of road sections today and I actually appreciated them a bit more because after the rain fields and paths were wet, sticky, and slippery. I neither wanted to go 'arse over tit' nor have wet feet again.



I can see the sea!

Of course, I had no choice as the route went rolling along over fields and along tracks and lanes, crossing the A55 Expressway, to Rhualt and another climb up around Mynydd y Cwm. At Marian Ffrith, limestone outcrops can be seen, these contain caves (as indicated on OS map).



Naturally occurring karstic feature partially backfilled with demolition rubble and other rubbish!



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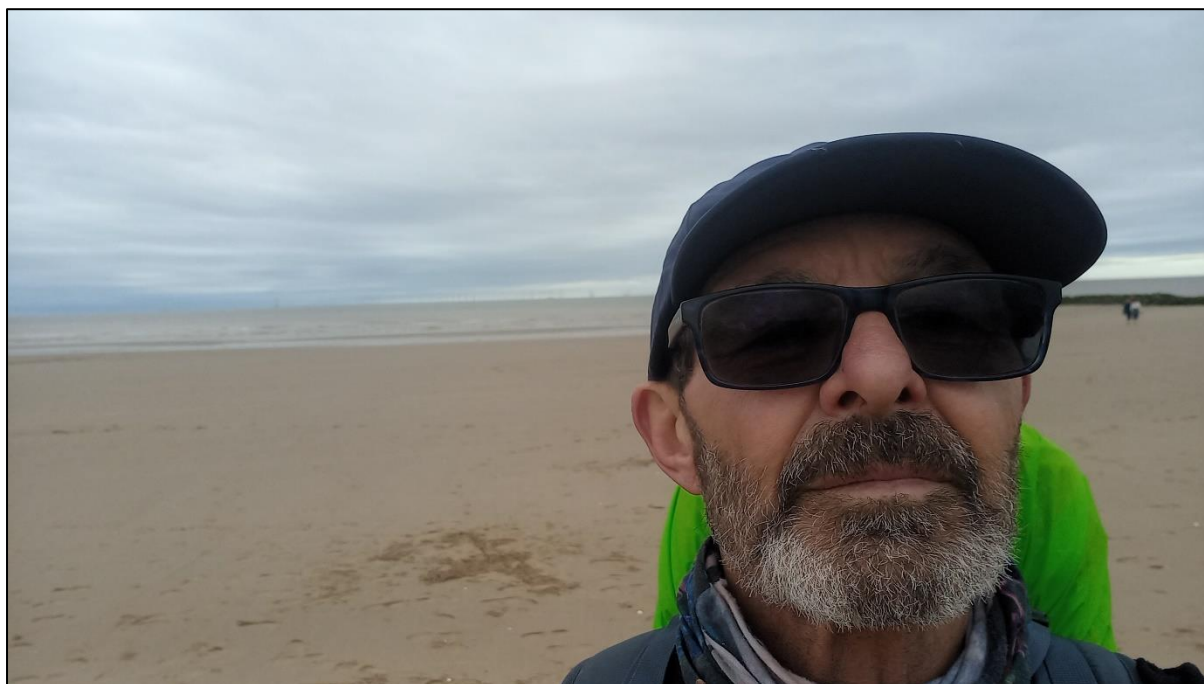
It was depressing to see a naturally occurring karstic feature partially backfilled with demolition rubble and other rubbish.

The route continued across field to Bryniau where a path leads through woodland and bracken and a brutally steep climb up to Coed y Esgob. That was not expected or needed at this stage in the walk! One more steep climb up to Prestatyn Hillside Nature Reserve followed by a long descent, slippery at times, eventually, reaching the outskirts of Prestatyn.



Prestatyn

Then an indeterminably long and tedious walk through the town to reach the beach. Prestatyn does not have much going for it, a run-down seaside town (reminds me of Weston-Super-Mare) full of scousers. Anyway, arrived at the beach about 16:00 hours, there was no fanfare to welcome me, took a couple of obligatory photographs and, hastily, made my way to the train station. Job done, finished, 177 miles done, long days and hard miles! And my feet knew it.



Selfie on Prestatyn Beach (this is the only selfie I have ever taken!)



Offa's Dyke National Trail 26th March to 5th April 2023



The sculpture at Prestatyn marking the northern start/finish of Offa's Dyke National Trail

Then began what turned into a long journey home and it started so well. At the station, quickly sorted out a train ticket leaving Prestatyn at 17:02, arriving at Bristol Temple Meads 21:50, with two changes at Shrewsbury and Newport. The first train duly arrived 17:07 and left for Shrewsbury where I got off, the next train at 18:53 had been cancelled due to a fault, no matter, get on the next one at 19:25. Bit of a wait in the station where I added a layer, it was quite chilly. The train left the station on time, and everything was going along as it should be. That fine until we left Ludlow, and the train came to a halt in a tunnel. There was a lot of milling around but little useful communication. Eventually, the train limped back to Ludlow station where, apparently, we were to await a rescue train coming from Cardiff. Time dragged on, not much was happening, there were rail staff milling around but all they seemed to be doing was talking into their phones. Then taxi's were organised for those people going to local stations and Cardiff Central direct, those who had connecting trains were to stay on board. I wasn't the only passenger trying to get to Bristol, there were other destinations too. So, there we stayed, for hours! Finally, at 01:37, we were on the move and, eventually, we arrived at Newport where a group of us got off the train and were instructed to make our way to the taxi stand where there were vehicles witing for us. Except that there weren't and for a few moments there was a bunch of concerned people feeling abandoned, it was 03:00. Thankfully, taxi's started to appear, and we were on our way, I shared a cab with another guy making his way to Temple Meads. On the way to Bristol, I phoned Roz, and she was going to collect me near Three Lamps Junction which is just outside of the Clean Air Zone. It was a foot weary and painful stumble from the train station to the pick-up point and I was glad to see Roz arrive, even though I had to wait for a while. Got back home just before 05:00, a six-hour delay. Apparently, compensation can be claimed for any delay over 15-minutes, I will be claiming my money back. Roz went back to bed, I made a sandwich (I hadn't eaten since breakfast) and drank a beer (0%), then tended to my feet before, finally, getting into bed.

Later, Roz insisted on weighing my pack – 13kgs; my weight, I was about 70kg before setting off, I now weighed in at 65kg.

On reflection: someone asked me what my favourite part of the walk was, and I have to say it was those sections in which I was following Offa's Dyke earthwork and it was in good order. Even though the weather was not all that it could have been. Apparently, it has been the wettest March for many a year!





Offa's Dyke National Trail 26th March to 5th April 2023

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