
Medieval

Map 8 OFFA'S DYKE

'Another boundary for us to ruminate on, my boy. This one from a different period entirely.'

Up to the left of us was an incredible folded ridge of earth, as if the land had been bunched up like material. In the distance I saw hills rising and falling, the dark line of the dyke tracing the land ahead of us. Aunt Bea had promised we would only walk a couple of miles before turning back. But I didn't entirely trust her not to sneak the entire 177 miles past me as she had already told me it was one of her favourite walks in the whole of the country.

'Clawdd Offa, or Offa's Dyke. Magnificent isn't it. Of course, we could have spent several years, just solidly touring Roman sites in Britain. Over the course of their almost 400 years on this island it was changed forever, and there are so many places to study, from the baths of Bath to Chester's amphitheatre. If you find a long straight road on a map, the odds are that it's based on an old Roman one. Roman Britain came to an end formally in AD 410 when the emperor Honorius famously replied for a request for help with a message effectively saying "sort yourselves out".'

Aunt Bea expounded on how with the Romans out of the way, the following centuries saw waves of invasion by Germanic people, including Jutes from Jutland, which is part of Denmark now, Angles from the south of Denmark and Saxons from Germany, with the formation of separate and warring kingdoms, which comprised Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Essex, Kent, Sussex and Wessex. In the middle of this in AD 595, St Augustine was sent by Pope Gregory to convert the pagan island to Christianity.

'The earthworks we're walking alongside is thought to have acted as a border between Mercia, Offa's Christian, Anglo-Saxon kingdom and the Welsh kingdom of Powys. There would almost certainly have been forts along its length. Offa was a bellicose fellow, who famously had other kings killed, including his son-in-law. His name is well known because of this spectacular construction and he was clearly an impressive leader to have accomplished such a feat of construction as well as conquering many of the neighbouring kingdoms.'

Bees hummed in and out of the blackberry bushes.

'I love this place, I think, because it reminds me of how things that feel so certain at the time can disappear. Our own sense of what it is to be British is so recent. The great kingdom of Mercia, so sure of itself, and its ability to build this astonishing feat of engineering. I am yet to meet a proud Mercian in my lifetime. I think just another couple of miles and then we'll turn back. If I remember rightly there's a splendid old oak tree not too far ahead. We shall sit under it and solve our next lot of clues.'

QUESTIONS

Easy

1. How many times does the word ‘Tumulus’ appear on the map?
2. Where is the highest spring on the map?

Medium

3. Which location is the nearest as the crow flies to the most northerly end of Offa’s Dyke Path on the map?
4. Which of the complete map grid squares shows the flattest terrain?

Tricky

5. Including ‘plantation’, how many different, complete English words printed on the map are directly associated with vegetation?
6. Which location sounds like it might have enjoyed the 1970s?

Challenging

7. In a woodland that surrounds a castle, follow the path north to its terminus. Jump to the nearest well, and follow its footpath to a place of worship. Move to the nearest orange road and head west to a telephone. There is a ground survey point nearby. Jump to another ground survey point that is exactly four metres different in height to the one you are currently at. Which named location is south-west of your position?
8. Make a note of each of the following six numerical values observed from the map:

   a. The second highest survey point
   b. The number of letters in the longest location name
   c. The number of times the word ‘Burfa’ appears
   d. The number of named farms
   e. The lowest height printed on the map
   f. The number of wells shown

   Using each of these six numbers exactly once, performing only the elemental mathematical operations – addition, subtraction, multiplication and division – can you arrive at a total of exactly 300?