

Some initial thoughts on holding a walking festival in Weshpool:

There are many footpaths in and around the area of Welshpool Town Council, some well-used and in good condition, others less so and some very much at risk. Over recent years a number of stiles have been improved or replaced by gates, but there are also some in poor condition. The previous council on which I served (just on the other side of the border) had a footpath officer who noted problems, maintained contact with Ramblers and other groups, and liaised with the (Shropshire) County Council. It would be good to do something similar here, though I do recall that relations between the footpath officer and local landowners were not always cordial.

In terms of the town itself, it would be good to improve the existing town trail, and to have a dedicated leaflet to help visitors make the most of this, ideally with walks starting from the TIC. We do have four long distant paths passing through our area, with one (Glyndwr's Way) starting or finishing here. These are:

Offa's Dyke Path (Chepstow to Prestatyn) - crosses into our area from Buttington/Trewern via the A458 bridge, then crosses fields to the A483, before joining with the Severn Way through Pool Quay, beyond which it diverges to cross the A483 again and follow the river towards Llandrinio.

Severn Way (From the source to Bristol) - follows the course of the Montgomery Canal through our area.

Glyndwr's Way (Welshpool to Knighton, via Machynlleth) - begins / ends by the canal on Severn Road, and follows the road through to Raven Square, then via Llanerchydol to Meifod.

Cross Britain (Macmillan) Path (Boston, Lincs to Barmouth) - enters from Buttington as per the Offa's Dyke Path, but follows the A458 to the Buttington Cross roundabout, where it joins the canal towpath as per the Severn Way to enter the town, then joins Glyndwr's Way through the town and to Llanerchydol and beyond.

A walking festival would be a good way of publicising this wealth of pathways, and perhaps also developing a "Round Welshpool" trail, or series of trails, for those who would want to go further than just walking within the town itself. To do properly this would take time to set up, and to seek funding for e.g. the production of leaflets, waymarkers etc, and we would ideally need the support and co-operation of the local Ramblers group and other interested parties, including landowners, conservation organisations and possible sponsors. It would also be important to learn from the experience of others, and to make use of publications such as "Country Walking" magazine. We would be coming fairly late to this sort of event, which has been run successfully elsewhere, so there should be plenty of experience around.

The intention here is twofold, firstly to set up a single advertised weekend (probably Friday-Monday) event, with some guided walks aimed at locals and visitors alike. This could perhaps be organised in conjunction with neighbouring community councils, in particular Guilsfield, Buttington / Trewern and Forden / Trelystan. To look at a late summer or early autumn date in 2026 would give us a year to prepare and to seek support etc, taking care not to clash with too much else that's happening.

But secondly, there will of course be a legacy benefit, in that routes planned and waymarked would remain available, to continue to be advertised to anyone visiting the area or passing through. Paths are better walked and better looked after when they are joined to make a coherent whole, and well waymarked - the one-off event should provide a benefit beyond the event itself, by attracting funds that might otherwise not have been available and putting Welshpool forward as a walking venue and base.

This is only a fairly superficial and introductory paper, but I would be happy to follow this with some more serious planning and preparation work if the idea meets with approval, with the intention of placing a more considered report before the Committee and Full Council in September or (more probably) October.

