Introduction

Now is a really exciting time to be starting a community-based project on Offa’s Dyke. The publication of Keith Ray and Ian Bapty’s (2016) long-anticipated book on the monument, the creation of the Collaboratory itself and new initiatives from a revitalised Offa’s Dyke Association (Offa’s Dyke Association) are all combining to raise the profile of the monument.

Public engagement with Offa’s Dyke is diverse and comes from a range of stakeholders. Those charged with legal responsibility for the monument’s conservation and protection, academics, landowners and local businesses, those who use it as a recreational resource all have a vested interest and a voice. In many cases these voices can be heard through statutory channels, local business initiatives or through well-

Community Stewardship of Mercian Monuments (CoSMM)
established lobby groups at regional and national levels. The
channels for the thoughts and opinions of those who live
alongside the dyke, of those community groups who are
concerned with its preservation and recording, are less
readily obvious. The Community Stewardship of Mercian
Monuments (CoSMM) project explores how an online
community-lead archaeology project developed under the
auspices of the Offa’s Dyke Association (ODA) can provide
such a resource, not just for Offa’s Dyke, but also for Wat’s
Dyke and other examples of Early Medieval archaeology in
the Welsh Marches.

Such an initiative is important for a number of reasons. The
latest digital technologies provide heritage professionals with
the opportunity to more effectively record, research and
conserve landscapes than ever before (e.g. The “Stonehenge
Hidden Landscape Project”). Nevertheless, the sheer scale of
Offa’s Dyke as it runs through two countries, multiple local
authority areas and innumerable settlements along its route
continues to render a long-term, comprehensive, top-down
approach a logistical challenge. In contrast, scalable, local
programmes of recording and conservation by committed
groups working to a standard framework and coming
together within a single online portal promise to be both
achievable and sustainable over the long-term.

Crucially, and perhaps most importantly, the project also
provides a voice for the local communities, individually and
collectively, to create a sense of ownership of the monument
and an opportunity to share their perceptions, experiences
and resources.

METHODOLOGY

Whilst such large-scale community-based archaeology
projects can be challenging a number of precedents
demonstrate their value. Soininen’s (2017) account of the
‘Adopt-a-monument’ scheme in Finland provides a valuable
eexample of an extremely successful large-scale community-
lead programme, whilst McDavid’s (2009) frank accounts of
her online projects based in the United States provide details
of both their failures and successes and crucially a conclusion
that such endeavours are ultimately worthwhile.

In the case of CoSMM earliest plans are simple and scalable.
The initial pilot phase is being undertaken on Offa’s Dyke by
the Trefonen Rural Protection Group (TRPG) (Trefonen – Rural
& Heritage) and in the first instance focuses on the
development of a fixed-point photography conservation
programme; the methodology is proven and based on that
deployed by Dave McGlade, the current Chair of the ODA, in
his work as National Trails Officer for Hadrian’s Wall
(McGlade, 2015). The group’s work will be coordinated by
TRPG Committee members, who will take responsibility for
training and day-to-day management on the ground. Local
volunteers will download pro-forma documentation and
upload their photographic and tabular data to the project's intranet site, again, coordinated by the TRPG Committee. Those who are less comfortable with web-based technologies will be able to work with paper forms.

Once the local framework is in place and tested the working practices will be reviewed to establish whether they are effective and sustainable, to identify ‘pinch-points’ and where improvements can be made before more ambitious fieldwork plans are put in place. At all points the archaeologists will be available to provide help, advice and support wherever needed, but the community will own the project. Subsets of the data will be made available on the accompanying public-facing website to promote the project and the monument itself. Following the pilot, as more communities join, the value of combining these local, scalable resources will become apparent for raising the profile of Offa’s and Wat’s Dykes, for contributing to our knowledge and understanding of the monuments and for their long-term preservation.

COMMUNITY

Alongside these conservation and recording activities CoSMM will explore what the monuments mean to the communities living alongside them today and to the people who visit them. That the monuments continue to hold significance is in no doubt. Aside from the most obvious National Trail that bears the name of Offa’s Dyke the countryside of the Anglo-Welsh border is littered with contemporary references to Offa ranging from, for example, a local business park, a brewery and even a distillery! The monument’s role in local mythology, entertainment, tourism and as a tool for local economic vitality is unmistakable. But alongside these tangible references are other more subtle mechanisms through which these monuments are appropriated, transformed and represented in the early twenty-first century and it is these the project is equally concerned with.

In order to explore the significance and meanings attached to the dykes, the volunteers and members of the local communities, both individually and collectively, will be invited to complete an anonymised questionnaire. Attitudes towards the conservation, interpretation and meaning of the monuments will be surveyed, analysed and summarised. It is hoped that this aspect of the project will provide a means by which wider community engagement, most notably through schools, will be encouraged and facilitated. Additionally, the local representatives and volunteers will be invited to events and meetings hosted by the ODA to facilitate face-to-face discussions to supplement those made available through the project’s intranet. Finally, the questionnaires will also be made available in the Offa’s Dyke Centre at Knighton to encourage visitor participation and those willing to take a few minutes to complete the survey will be invited to sign up for regular updates on progress.
CONCLUSION

The Offa’s Dyke Association is the natural home for CoSMM which is only the latest addition to its programmes dedicated to preserving and promoting the monument since its inception by the late Frank Noble in 1969. That the Association is hosting, facilitating and supporting this effort is a measure of the scale of its ambitions in promoting both Offa’s and Wat’s Dykes to locals and visitors alike and we’re very grateful for their support.

Work is only just beginning, but the early signs are encouraging. Of course, we’ll be reporting on progress through the Collaboratory website, the ODA Newsletter and the website when it launches. We’re very much looking forward to seeing where the future takes us.

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Saved by the railways, Offa's Dyke will survive forever!

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For decades in the U.S., there have been isolated incidents of removal of Confederate monuments and memorials, although generally opposed in public opinion polls, and several U.S. States have passed laws over 115 years to hinder or prohibit further removals. In the wake of the Charleston church shooting in June 2015, several municipalities in the United States removed monuments and memorials on public property dedicated to the Confederate States of America. The momentum accelerated in August 2017. Next, go to American President An Online Reference Source. When you open the link to your president, you will pick one of his speeches to hyperlink onto slide 4. Then go to American Presidents Life Portraits and create a hyperlink to a letter that the president wrote. Also on this slide include a copy of your president's signature from Presidents of the United States. Finally, include a quote from your president from American President An Online Reference Source. Slide 5 is where you can let your investigative skills and creativity take over. Create this slide to include information ab America’s Civil War is commemorated by monuments at numerous battlefield sites, including Gettysburg, Manassas, Shiloh and Vicksburg. Americans who died fighting in the two world wars, Korea and Vietnam are commemorated by the Tombs of the Unknowns at Arlington Cemetery. The anonymous bodies represent all those killed in service of their country in those wars and are constantly under guard. Perhaps the most famous war monument is the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C., created by young architect Maya Lin in 1982.