

See the World on

Offa's Dyke Path, on the England/Wales border.



Treks & Trails seeks to provide “hiking adventures of a lifetime,” and represents a dream come true for co-owner Paul Shaw.

By Erica L. Shames

Foot

Paul Shaw is a lifelong hiker. As a scout leader, he led troops on hiking trips to Canada and New Mexico, and for decades he has arranged hikes for Sierra Club members as the outings coordinator for the Otzi-nachson Chapter in Lewisburg. Thirteen years ago, he started organizing trips for friends.

“I’ve always had the travel bug, and figured if there was a way to combine my love of travel with my love of hiking, it would be fantastic,” he recalls.

Todd Lang, Shaw’s business partner, is a professional guide and in 2010 wanted to go into business for himself. “Todd knew I was interested, and approached me about forming our own business,” said Shaw.

We’ve been here before...

Lang and Shaw started out offering trips they had done in the past, for which they had already figured out the logistics. “The Internet has revolutionized travel,” says Shaw. “All the information you need to organize a trip is there—it’s a matter of picking an itinerary, places to stay and transportation groups to work with that will result in a pleasurable experience for our clients. Since we’ve traveled to all these places, we have a good knowledge of the best places to stay, nice restaurants and attractions along the way that people will enjoy.” As new inns and restaurants



Skogafoss Waterfall,
Landmannalaugar
Trail, Iceland

“They’re not for your casual walker, and do require a certain level of fitness. But anyone who enjoys hiking and hikes on a fairly regular basis would have no trouble on one of our trips.”

are found, trips are sometimes tweaked to incorporate even better alternatives.

Either Shaw or Lang—or sometimes both—accompany hikers on all the trips, one characteristic that differentiates the business from others, Shaw says. And the owners look for trips that are off the beaten path. “There’s a lot of outfitters that go to Machu Picchu, New Zealand and other hiking meccas,” said Shaw. “We do Offa’s Dyke, on the border of England and Wales, and Kungsleden in Northern Sweden, where you’ll see a lot of hikers, but no Americans.”

“We have a new trip this summer to Barcelona and to Andorra, one of the smallest countries in the world with excellent hiking very few people know about,” Shaw continued. “Another trip is to the Sierra Norte Mountains in Oaxaca, Mexico—another unknown, fantastic place for hiking.”

To each her own

Each trip is rated easy, moderate or strenuous, based on the fitness level required of participants. “Our trips are geared toward people who really enjoy hiking,” explained Shaw. “They’re not for your casual walker, and do require a certain level of fitness. But anyone who enjoys hiking and hikes on a fairly regular basis would have no trouble on one of our trips.”

The easiest trip is the Amalfi Coast in Italy, and the Barcelona/Andorra trip, rated easy and easy-moderate, respectively. Others in the moderate class are the East Coast Trail in Newfoundland, Offa’s Dyke, and the Highland Way in Scotland. “We also offer some strenuous trips,” said Shaw. “We have one in the Pyrenees called the Carros de Foc—it’s right in the heart of the Spanish Pyrenees. That’s a tough hike—a lot of climbing over boulders and rocks, and you’re at altitude.”

The toughest trip? One to the Dientes Circuit, off the tip of Chile. “It’s the world’s southern-most hiking trail,” said Shaw. “It’s an adventure just getting to the trail head. It’s the last land mass between South America and Antarctica,

and only a few hundred people hike the trail every year. We limit it to experienced backpackers.”

Personal experience

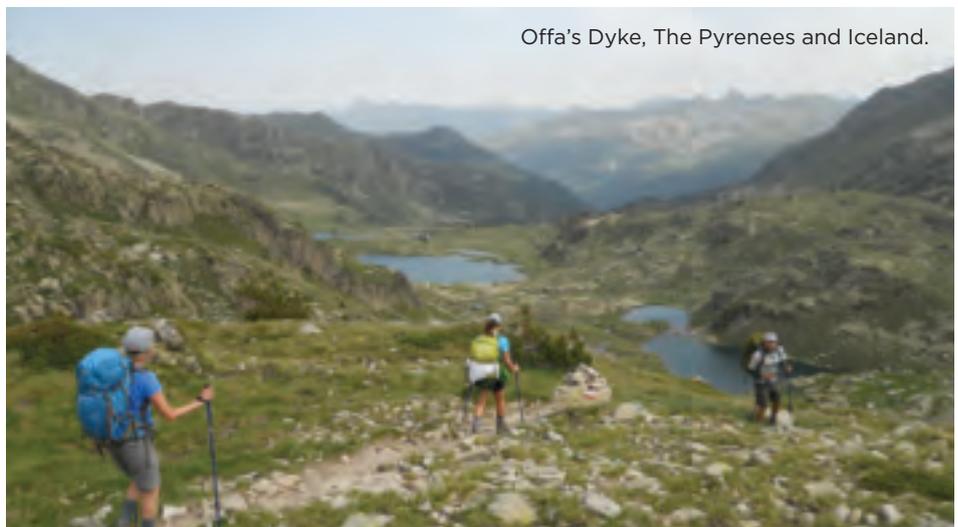
John Stevens, of State College, signed up for the Dingle Way trip to Ireland in September 2012. Although he’s traveled to Ireland many times to visit relatives in County Limerick, and to the Dingle Peninsula twice before, he never had a firm itinerary; doing the trek with Shaw meant he didn’t have to find lodging or places to dine every day. “The best part about trekking the peninsula was the views,” Stevens recalls. “The trail follows the coast line, and we did a bit of beach walking. We met many wonderful people along the way.”

Stevens wouldn’t hesitate to travel with the company again. “I’ve hiked with Paul Shaw before he and Todd started this business,” he said. “Paul’s intelligent, of high character and an avid and very experienced hiker. His [and Todd’s] preparation for these trips is thorough, and every detail is checked out by them in advance.”

In fact, Stevens is considering the Scotland trip in July/August, and the Mexico trip. “I’m interested in the destinations and have complete confidence it will be an enjoyable, hassle-free trip,” he said.

Nancy Ellen and Michael Kiernan, retired faculty from Penn State, traveled with Treks & Trails on the Offa’s Dyke trip last June. Nancy Ellen was lured by the description of the trail, which included lush green pastures with black-faced sheep, the meandering River Wye and the challenge of the daily 12-mile hikes on windswept moors.

“Discovering the Welsh tradition of leaving country church doors open for hikers to enter for tea and biscuits especially set out for them was a hallmark,” said Nancy Ellen. “As was hiking the Hatterall Ridge in the Black Mountains with a vista of pastoral England far below on one side, and Wales on the other. All along the way, we encountered spectacular medieval ruins, castles, tiny



Offa’s Dyke, The Pyrenees and Iceland.





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Paul Shaw at Puerto Williams, Chile, trailhead for the Dientes Circuit, the world’s southernmost hiking trail.

churches, expansive priories and abbeys throughout the Wye Valley, including the magnificent Tintern Abbey, celebrated by the Romantic poet William Wordsworth on a similar hike at the end of the 18th-century. There was a nice balance between the planned stops and the serendipitous adventures along the way.”

What’s the appeal?

When Shaw is asked why hiking appeals to him, he is quick to rattle off the activity’s attributes. “I really love being outside,” he said. “I love the healthful attributes of hiking. It’s one of the best exercises. When you’re hiking up and down mountain ridges right here in Pennsylvania you’re getting a full workout. It’s a great way to keep the weight off. I just read a statistic the other day that even moderate hiking burns over 350 calories an hour for a 150-pound person. But beyond that, hiking is the most enjoyable way to experience other lands, and meet other people.”

For more information, visit *Treks and Trails.com*. And for more photographs, visit *SusquehannaLife.com/WebExtras*. ★



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