

## LOCATOR MAP



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# 1 | North Wales Borderlands

This area of Wales can easily be overlooked by visitors as they speed westwards, but it is a mistake not to stop and explore the towns, villages and countryside as they are rich in history, heritage and scenic beauty. One of the best ways of seeing the countryside is by bicycle or, for a more testing challenge, by mountain bike. Each of the different areas has its own special character and scenery: the Clwydian Hills, a 22-mile long chain of heather-clad hills and a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; the Dee estuary; the broad, gentle sweep of the Vale of Clwyd with historic towns like Ruthin, St Asaph,

Denbigh and Rhuddlan; Wrexham, the largest town in North Wales, and its surrounds; The Maelor (once a detached portion of Flintshire), where the Cheshire Plains transform into the Welsh Hills; Chirk and the beautiful Ceiriog Valley. The Romans certainly forayed into the area from their major town of Chester and there is also evidence of Celtic settlements.

However, it was during the 13th century that Edward I, after his successful campaign against the Welsh, set about building his ambitious Iron Ring of huge fortresses along the Dee estuary and the North Wales coast.



Each was built a day's march from its neighbours, and the first was begun at Flint in 1277. This was the cutting-edge military technology of its day and, though the great fortresses are now in ruins, the remains of the massive project – the largest seen in Europe – are still very much in evidence.

Plus, this area of Wales teems with wildlife. In fact, the land around the Dee estuary is home to a great number of waders and wildfowl, which feed on the mudflats left by the retreating tides.

Between the estuary and the Clwydian Range lie small, compact villages as well as the market towns of Mold and Holywell, a place of pilgrimage that became known as the Lourdes of Wales. The range, a grassy line of hills above the Vale of Clwyd, offers fabulous views and exhilarating walks; it is one of the eight designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Wales.

Further south lie Llangollen and the Dee Valley. Llangollen is a delightful old town in a picturesque riverside setting, which is not only a charming place to visit, but is also the home of the annual International Music Eisteddfod (not the same as the National Eisteddfod). An eisteddfod was, originally, a meeting of bards where prizes were awarded for poetry reading and singing and, while local events still draw people from all over the country, the event at Llangollen has a true international flavour with such eminent figures as Luciano









Pavarotti having graced its stage. The town is also famous for the Llangollen Railway, a re-opened section of the Barmouth–Ruabon line, which closed in 1960.

Though this northern gateway to the country is not a particularly large area, it boasts all but one of the Seven Wonders of Wales, wonders while not quite as spectacular as the more familiar Seven Wonders of the World are nonetheless all interesting in their own right and well worth a visit. They are listed in the famous 19th century rhyme:

*Pistyll Rhaeadr and Wrexham Steeple,  
Snowdon's Mountain without its people,  
Overton Yew Trees, St Winefride's Well,  
Llangollen Bridge and Gresford Bells.*

The Borderlands offer an impressive variety of attractions, from castles and country houses to churches and museums, country parks and farm parks, lakes and canals, and leisure pursuits from walking, cycling and riding, to birdwatching and golf (more than 20 courses). There is also superb fishing for salmon and trout on the Rivers Dee and Clwyd, sea fishing in the Dee estuary and trout or coarse fishing at numerous lake fisheries. Festivals and other special events are staged throughout the year, and visitors are welcome to attend many rehearsals as well as performances by renowned Welsh choirs – a unique and moving experience that will long be remembered.

## Mold

 St Mary's Parish Church	 Mold Museum
 Bailey Hill	 Loggerheads Country Park
 Daniel Owen	 Richard Wilson
 Clwyd Theatr Cymru	 Mold Carnival

Flintshire was one of the few counties in Britain to have detached portions. The largest was known as Maelor Saesneg, or Flintshire Detached. At one time it was part of Cheshire, but in 1536 was transferred to Wales by Richard II. In 1974 it became part of Wrexham Maelor District, which later became the County Borough of Wrexham. To complicate matters, the burghs of Prestatyn, Rhyl and St Asaph were once in Flintshire as well, and there was another detached portion around Marford and Rossett.

Mold was Flintshire's county town, and is proud to claim the novelist, tailor and Methodist preacher **Daniel Owen** (1836–1895) as one of its own. He is often hailed as Wales' greatest novelist, and, writing only in Welsh, it was his honest accounts of ordinary life that were to make him one of the greatest 19th-century novelists and also to gain him the title the Welsh Dickens. His most famous books were *Rhys Lewis* and *Enoc Huns*. Owen's statue stands outside the town library, which is also the home of **Mold Museum**, where a room is dedicated to Owen's memory.

Though born in Montgomeryshire, Mold claims landscape painter **Richard Wilson** (1713–1782), as its own. After pursuing a career in London, he returned to his

native Wales and settled in Mold to concentrate on the dramatic scenes of mountainous Welsh countryside that became his trademark. He died in Colomendy, and his grave and memorial can be found near the north entrance to **St Mary's Parish Church**. It was one of his descendants, Brian Wilson, who founded the American group The Beach Boys. Dating from the 15th century and built by Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond, to celebrate her son Henry VII's victory at Bosworth in 1485, the church has some interesting stained-glass windows as well as some fine architectural ornamentation. A light and airy building, this church was constructed on the site of an earlier church whose original oak roof, carved with Tudor roses, has been retained in part.

The church stands at the foot of **Bailey Hill**, the site of a Norman motte and bailey fortification that was built at this strategic point overlooking the River Alyn by Robert de Montalt, who may have given the town its English name. First captured by the Welsh in 1157, and then again by Llywelyn the Great in 1199, ownership of the castle passed through many hands and today, not surprisingly, little remains of the fortress, as its site is now



Loggerheads Country Park, Mold