

A TRACK FROM BUTSER TO BORDEAN GORGE AND BASING DEAN?

A Statement of Evidence.

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TYPE of soil and the resultant vegetation limited early man's movements, but it seems possible that he would sometimes have left the ridgeways and made short cuts across lower ground if the going were good enough. Traces of such routes are likely to be scanty or completely lacking after many generations of cultivation and any attempt at resurrection must be based very largely on inference from available evidence. This paper is such an attempt: a record of field evidence upon which it seems that one can, not unreasonably, base certain inferences with no attempt at specifying any period of time.

From the ridgeway on Butser, looking north, the temptation must have been great to cut across to the distant hills, to Boredean or even Basing Dean, where dry tracks along these valleys probably existed;¹ and this stretch of country, the watershed between the valleys of Meon and Rother, would for the most part not have been damp or overgrown, at any rate as far as Boredean. I have for some years considered it possible that a track made use of this watershed in early times. It is fitting to seek an ancient lineage for the commencement of such a track and the most likely route off Butser is that to the south-west of the main Butser entrenchment, which branches from the ridgeway here and which runs with a parish boundary along the spur to the south of Rake Bottom. One can, I think, assume this track to be ancient, for the following reasons. South-west of the narrow neck (across which runs a bivallate ditch) uniting Butser with Hillhampton Down (that is, in Hillhampton Bottom) is an inter-lynchet way running with a parish boundary. The former fades out; but the boundary bears slightly towards the north, shortly becomes integral with the main south spur Butser entrenchment and, running its length, turns sharply north at the earthwork's western end where this abuts on to the track under consideration, whence track and boundary run together along the spur south of Rake Bottom. It is probable that the inter-lynchet way originally continued over the ridge as the bivallate ditch, thence leading on into the further valley. But it seems reasonable to assume that even though this covered way traversed the col, the track by Rake Bottom also existed in early times, the former for local cattle transfers, the latter for wider excursions;

1. O.S. 6in. Hants 60 N.E., 60 N.W., 52 S.W., 52 N.W. Geological Survey, Sheet No. 300 (Drift). Williams-Freeman, *Field Archaeology of Hampshire*, p. 288.



FIG. 1.—Froxfield Long Entrenchment ; Southern end, looking N.



FIG. 2.—Froxfield Long Entrenchment ;
S. of Froxfield Village looking W.N.W.



To face p. 185]

Spinney dividing fields A and B in Basing Dean, looking N.W. ; shows
“the fold in the ground,” with the break in the spinney at the left
hand edge of the fold,

for the parish boundary (which we know to have been laid down on the Celtic track and a possibly Neolithic earthwork²) at the entrenchment's western end turns sharply north along our track, for which reason one may assume the track to have been there when the boundary was decided upon. I have unfortunately omitted to make a note as to whether the bivallate ditch or the track is obliterated by the other at intersection, but Stuart Piggott's map³ shows the ditch superimposed on the track: the Ordnance Survey shows the reverse and from memory I believe this to be correct. But even so, the track may be the earlier; for in that case the ditch, having cut the track, might easily in its turn be breached by a continuation of traffic.

This track, then, certainly older and possibly much older than the parish boundary, passes down the spur and leads to Oxenbourne Lythe. Just as it enters sheet 60 N.W. we have the choice of following the parish boundary through the Lythe or of continuing down the track which is now Limekiln Lane. Whichever way we go we reach the south side of Lythe House, the lane skirting its west side and the boundary (making a detour to the east) running to a position, in a lane called Greenway, a quarter of a mile north of the house. From Greenway the boundary passes north, directly towards the barrow on Barrow Hill; but after two hundred and fifty yards skirts the hill at its foot, running west and north-west to Pridham Lane. From Lythe House to Pridham Lane I can find no helpful surface markings, crop or other, nor do air photographs give any clue. Up to this point the evidence from which we might infer a track has been a well-marked and probably old path off Butser, a parish boundary, the near association of a barrow and the fact that we are still on the chalk. Pridham Lane is a well-worn track with high banks, and this and Cellar Lane, which presently branches to the left, look a possible route. There is little to go by here. But these lanes on the chalk (although one cannot definitely assert them earlier than medieval) are obviously old ways, and by passing parallel with the contours along Sir William's Hill above the spring line, where there is a ride among the beeches—now mostly felled—one can make directly for Bordean Gorge (the deeply cut entrance to the dry valley leading west on to the wider body of the chalk.)

Based upon the east side of Bordean gorge is the south end of the Froxfield Long Entrenchment (Fig. 1) with its subsidiary limb. Running a northerly incomplete course (Fig. 2) for about two miles, with a supposed terminal northern portion in Basing Dean,⁴ it is considered locally to be the old boundary between Sussex and Wessex⁵ (further details will be found in "An Earthwork in Basing

2. *Antiquity* XIV (1930), pp. 194-196.

3. *Ibid.*, fig. 1 facing p. 190.

4. Williams-Freeman, *Field Archaeology of Hampshire*, pp. 290-292; pp. 374-375.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 292.

Dean," in this issue). It is possible that the Long Entrenchment may have been sited not only because of the defensive position of its southern end, but upon a pre-existing well-known landmark, such as a traffic route. Dr. Williams-Freeman, in answer to my suggestion to him of the possibility of this track, wrote : " There must of course have been a ridge road from Butser to Bordean following the watershed between the Meon and Rother valleys." And : " The Froxfield Long Entrenchment probably was the track before it was the Long Entrenchment."⁶ Nothing else is available to help us carry the track beyond Bordean. Between here and Basing Dean its route (assuming it to be that of the Long Entrenchment) would be partly on chalk and for about three-quarters of its run on clay-with-flints, but this would have borne a lighter vegetation than would valley clay and the way might not have been impassable.

6. Correspondence, 1938.