

THE NORTH DOWNS TRACKWAY IN SURREY

A RE-APPRAISAL

BY

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SINCE the beginning of the century a great deal of interest has been shewn in the route taken by this important ancient track. Julia Cartwright¹ and Hilaire Belloc² (following a long tradition) conceived it to be part of a route for pilgrims travelling from Winchester to the shrine of St. Thomas Becket at Canterbury. More recent authorities have cast a good deal of convincing doubt on this theory and in the past twenty-five years the focus of interest has concentrated on discovering the actual path taken by this undoubtedly prehistoric trackway. The late Dr. Edwin Hart published in the *Sy.A.C.*, XLI a most careful survey of the route mostly in Surrey, and in more recent years Mr. I. D. Margary,³ the eminent authority on ancient roads in this country, has shewn the route to have consisted of actually two parallel routes—a ridgeway along the summit and a terrace-way lower down the escarpment, both proceeding from the Kentish ports by the North Downs as far as the western end of the Hog's Back, and thence westward to the chalk plateau of Salisbury Plain, the central habitat of ancient man in this country.

I feel some misgivings in adding my own conclusions to the conclusions of these distinguished authorities, but my study (on foot) of this ancient way during the past fifteen years will I hope justify my setting down a number of points which I fancy have been overlooked.

The route in Surrey falls into six convenient sections. Proceeding west to east we have (1) the Hog's Back, stretching from Whiteways End to Guildford; (2) Guildford to Dorking (Box Hill); (3) Box Hill to Colley Hill, Reigate; (4) Merstham Down to Foster Down, Caterham; (5) Caterham to Titsey, after which the routes enter the county of Kent. (6) The passage from Colley Hill, Reigate to Merstham Down, and the river as well as the valley crossings are complicated and deserve a section on their own.

1. *The Hog's Back.*

One of the points insisted upon by Mr. Belloc, and I think supported by Mr. I. D. Margary, is that where the escarpment is precipitous, the Terrace-way merges into the Ridgeway, i.e. the

¹ *The Pilgrims Way* (1st. Ed.), 1893.

² *The Old Road*, 1904.

³ *Arch. J.*, CIX (1952), 39-53. Brief accounts in his books: *Roman Ways in the Weald*, 1948, *Roman Roads in Britain*, 1955, 7, and in *Sy.A.C.*, LII (1952), 29-31.

Terrace-way as a terrace-way disappears. The Hog's Back is an example in point. However, a careful examination of the terrain on the southern slope of this passage seems to reveal very distinct traces of a terrace-way accompanying the well-known Ridgeway above, and in its usual position near the foot of the escarpment. Admittedly it is not easy to be certain where its eastern limb rejoins the Ridgeway. At its western end it rejoined the Ridgeway at Whiteways End. The chalk stratum here narrows to a very small width, forming a bridge to the chalk area above Farnham. It is possible the Ridgeway originally did not join the Seale-Runfold Road at Whiteways End, but continued directly westwards near Whiteways End House instead of descending to the floor of the valley as it does now. There appear to be remains of a western limb of the Terrace-way from Seale to Whiteways End House running along the 300 foot contour line, which would support this suggestion.

The eastern portion seems to run east from the Guildford by-pass along the 400 foot contour line to rejoin the Ridgeway where it crosses the same contour; or possibly it may have followed the line of the houses in Guildown Avenue to debouch into the Ridgeway somewhere near the New Cemetery. It could possibly have run from the by-pass at a slightly lower level, midway between the 400 foot and 300 foot contour lines.

While this terminus is doubtful, there can be no doubt of the existence of the Terrace-way between Seale and Puttenham where it keeps close to the 300 foot contour line, passing by Newbarn Cottages and Stonyhill, gradually rising to the 400 foot contour line north of Puttenham Heath. Thence past Wancote and Monkshatch the way will be found *in situ* and hardly disturbed till it reaches the by-pass.

2. Guildford (Pewley Down) to Dorking (Box Hill)

In this section there seems little new to add to what Dr. Edwin Hart and Mr. I. D. Margary have said. The latter points out the existence of a junction—a chalk linkway—between the Greensand Way, west of St. Martha's and the Terrace-way near the spot where it crosses the main road from Newlands Corner to Shere. There also appears to be a second junction road (not perhaps previously noticed) leading from the top of Pewley Down, past the Echo Chalk Pit, down to the ferry on the Greensand Way at St. Catherine's.

3. Dorking (Box Hill) to Colley Hill

In this section, both Ridgeway and Terrace-way continue their parallel course. The existence of the Terrace-way at the foot of the Buckland Hills, though it was marked in the Ordnance Survey Six-Inch map, was for a long time ignored as an error. This, however, is not so. It runs quite clearly into the main London-Reigate road at the foot of Reigate Hill, crosses it, and proceeds up the hill almost parallel with the main road, till it reaches its entrance into Gattton Park some 200 yards east of the suspension bridge at the top of the hill. (Fig. 1.)

4. *Merstham Down to Foster Down, Caterham.* (Fig. 3.)

Dr. Hart (and perhaps Mr. Margary)⁴ consider that there is no terrace-way in this area. I submit that there is, and a very distinct one.

A large oval-shaped chalk digging, known as Greystone Quarry, opens this passage on the west. Dr. Hart discovered a small remnant of the ancient Terrace-way coming from the direction of Merstham and running up to the western lip of the quarry, where it is broken away by the chalk workings. Dr. Hart figured this piece of road as pointing north-east indicating that it had originally been aligned to a path which leads from the north-east side of the quarry up to the summit of Merstham Down near Tolworth Farm to join the Ridgeway which otherwise seemed to terminate its westward passage at that point.

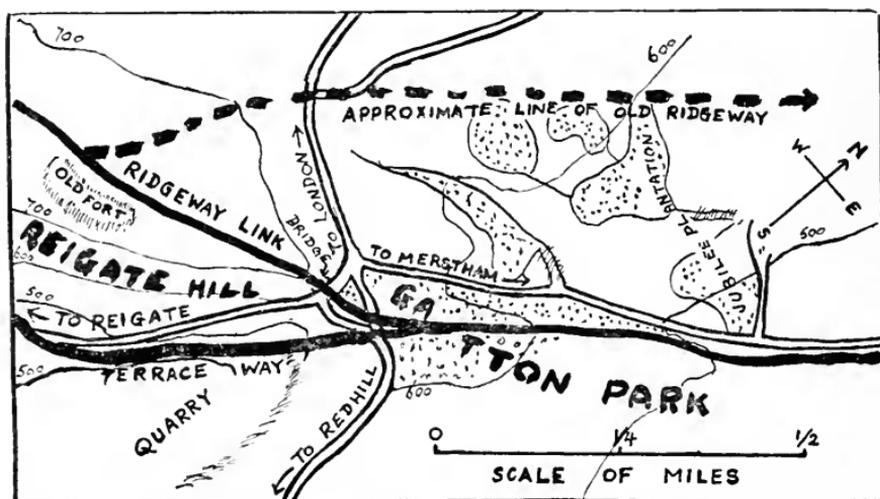


FIG. 1.—THE RIDGWAY AND TERRACE-WAY ON REIGATE HILL.

However, a careful examination of this remnant of road shows that it does not point north-east at all, but directly east across the quarry where it will be found to meet a terrace-way on its own contour level. The quarry workings have broken away the connecting piece of road, but the eastward continuation of the track is there for all to see. Moreover there are no signs at all of the north-east passage which Dr. Hart assumes to have led to the Ridgeway near Tolworth Farm.

Following this terrace-way, we find it leading us eastwards along a well marked passage which after about three-quarters of a mile comes to an open field, then to a gate on the road leading from Rockshaw to Hilltop Farm. The track crosses the road and goes through private grounds along the 500 foot contour line. It

⁴ Cf. *Arch. J.*, CIX (1952), 39-53, and *Sy.A.C.*, LII (1952), 29-31. In the first he allows it. In the second he seems not to accept it.

continues thus through the grounds of Hillside and Quarry Hill where it meets the road leading from Bletchingley up to Arthur's Seat. It continues, still adhering to the 500 foot contour line, to join a road passing between The Hermitage and New Hextalls. Here at the cross roads the track continues along a made road just south of Haseldine, on past and just north of the Roughets, after which it reaches the 600 foot contour line when it proceeds round the bottom of the steep combe just south-west of Gravelly Hill up to its eastern shoulder, where it crosses a patch of scrub under Foster Down, emerging thence to cross a pasture field along its north side. Then again it breaks into a short length of scrub, passing by the mouth of a disused quarry by Freer Mink Farm to join presumably its further eastward continuation across the Caterham-Godstone main road. For some hundred yards west of this main road the track has been lost in the medley of ancient quarries and modern rubbish dumps.

This passage of the Terrace-way has obviously been for the most part long disused in its western arm. Also it is interesting to note how it here appears to descend to the floor of the valley. In fact it does so, but the floor is very high—500 or 600 feet. There is an obvious reason for this in the very steep slopes of White Hill and Quarry Hanger which will not permit of a pathway along their flanks.

There seems little further to say about this area as regards the Ridgeway (except at its eastern and western extremities which I propose to deal with in a separate section). Its path is well known and has been excellently described by Dr. Hart in his most useful monograph to which I have already referred (*Sy.A.C.*, XLI).

5. *Caterham (Foster Down) to Titsey.* (Fig. 2).

In this section as regards the path of both the Ridgeway and the Terrace-way I think there can be no controversy eastward of Tandridge Hill. Both proceed in well marked formation: the Ridgeway along the line of the summit main road, and the Terrace-way past the foot of the Oxted lime pits, thence across tilled fields through Titsey Park to meet the tarred road outside Titsey Church.

But the section west of Tandridge Hill has I think been wrongly diagnosed. Let us take the Ridgeway first. It has been assumed that its westward passage from Tandridge Hill follows a steep descending lane called Gangers Hill to a point where it joins the Terrace-way above Flinthall Farm, whence both proceed together down past the farm and round the top of a steep combe to the South Lodge of Marden Park, and then on past or through the sawmills at Dial Wood to the crossing of the Caterham-Godstone road. I think this is an error. The Ridgeway, instead of descending Gangers Hill, ought, if it is true to itself, to continue straight on. And indeed it quite obviously does. In quite characteristic fashion it continues along the summit by a very well marked broad avenue to emerge on a downward slope leading out a few yards north of South Lodge, Marden Park. It clearly does not even here desert its summit ways. In a small shaw on the opposite western side of this little valley will

be found clear traces of an old east-west summit track which obviously passed over the summit of this hill (Winders Hill) down into the valley through which runs the Caterham-Godstone road.

As regards the Terrace-way, I have always been suspicious of the path authorities have given it between Laundry Cottage and the Quarry Farm Sawmills near Dialwood. The passage through Hanging Wood is a very steep and wet climb, and it seems to be more of the nature of a connecting link between ridgeway and terrace-way than a characteristic terrace-way. Again, why should

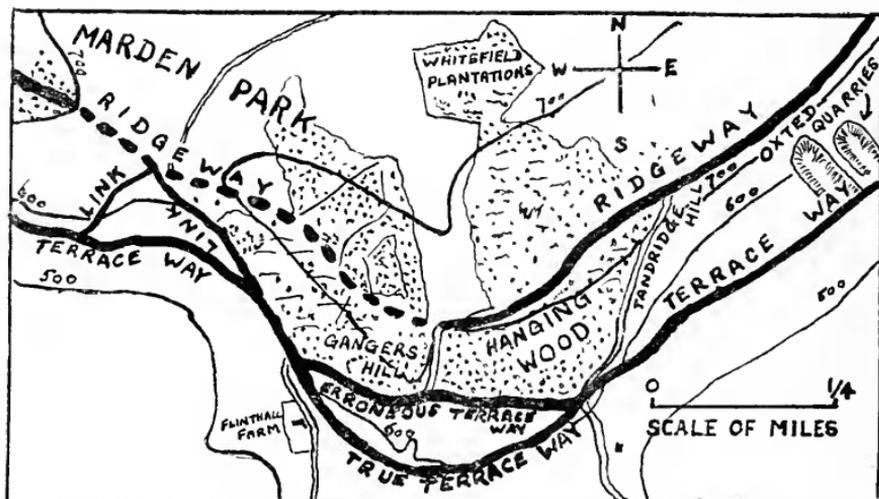


FIG. 2.—THE PASSAGE FROM SOUTH LODGE, MARDEN PARK, TO LAUNDRY COTTAGE.

it ascend from Flint Hall Farm to the South Lodge of Marden Park when there is an obviously characteristic terrace-way passage below it as there is below Hanging Wood too?

I would mark the true path of the Terrace-way as follows:—Proceeding eastwards from the Sawmills, follow the road towards South Lodge, Marden Park, for a quarter of a mile where there is a fork. Take the right-hand prong, past the electric dynamo and along a well marked passage passing the mouth of two disused pits. (This road passes *below* the steep bluff on which South Lodge stands.) Then the passage dovetails easily into Flower Lane (the rough road leading from South Lodge to Flinthall Farm). It crosses the lane by a small path just near another old chalk pit and just before the junction of Flower Lane with Gangers Hill Road.

This small crossing—about 10 yards long—is clearly the remains of an ancient track leading eastwards, but now severed by the Gangers Hill Road. It continues eastwards into the field north of Flinthall Farm where the marks of the track are plain. They lead round the south side of a bluff, across an ancient path (running north to south) and into the lower part of Hanging Wood—where, though macerated by old disused quarries, the trackway will be seen to lead

on eastwards till it emerges on the road passing Laundry Farm just south of the spot where the hitherto accepted Hanging Wood passage emerges.

This is not only a much more characteristic route for the Terrace-way, but there are actually sufficient remains of it to confirm its correctness. In *Sy.A.C.*, VI, there is a short article by Sir Gilbert Scott who lived nearby some eighty years ago and who suggests from his own experience the existence of this route. The article well repays study.

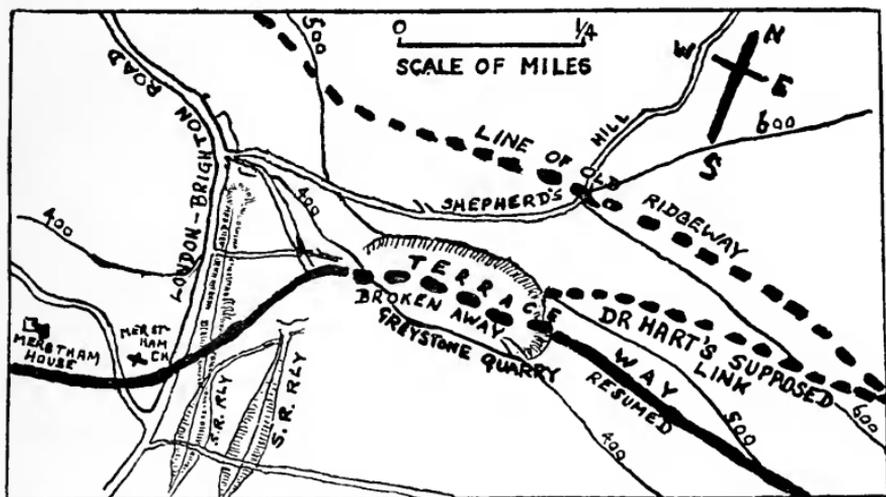


FIG. 3.—THE PASSAGE FROM COLLEY HILL TO MERSTHAM DOWN.

6. (i) *The passage from Colley Hill to Merstham Down.* (Fig. 3.)

It has always been accepted that just east of the suspension bridge at the top of Reigate Hill the Ridgeway and Terrace-way meet to pursue a joint passage through Gatton Park, thence through the grounds of Merstham House and Merstham Rectory, past the Church, over the cemetery and railway cuttings to the point at the western lip of Greystone Quarry already mentioned (Section 4).

But, if we take our stand on Merstham Down and look westwards, we have a terrace-way (now accepted, I hope, as a link with the road broken by Greystone Quarry) and also a ridgeway which seems to have come to a full stop near Tolworth Farm. From this point westwards it was that Dr. Hart wanted a link proceeding downhill from the Ridgeway to join the Terrace-way at Greystone Quarry. But in fact there are clear traces that the Ridgeway actually proceeded straight on its westward path along the summit to cross the road called Shepherd's Way, proceeding past the reservoir and the disused fort, down the slope and across the floor of the valley to remount again somewhere near Harps Oak Farm.

So here we have a ridgeway hitherto unnoticed⁵ which appears to

⁵ The late Dr. Grundy in his article on Hants and Wilts trackways, in *Arch. J.*, LXXV (1918), 166, does actually accept it.

proceed not on the Gatton Park Track, but over the chalk ridge and parallel to the way through Gatton Park. So much cultivation has obscured the ground that this ridgeway is difficult to delineate. It apparently climbed from Harps Oak on to the ridge of Ashstead Hill. It crossed the road called Markedge Lane somewhere near Upper Gatton Park's eastern lodge, proceeding thence along the summit by Dell Wood, Park Shaw, Gatton Field Shaw, and then across the modern main road from London to Reigate to link up with the Ridgeway on Colley Hill somewhere near the dismantled fort. Accuracy here is difficult, because of ground modifications imposed by modern changes, but there are distinct traces that such a way must have existed near Upper Gatton Park Lodge and near Gatton Field Shaw. This of course does away with the joint nature of the Gatton Park passage, and renders the accepted ridgeway past and over the suspension bridge from the dismantled fort on Colley Hill to the western entrance of Gatton Park just a connecting link between it and the Terrace-way which here climbs the shoulder of Reigate Hill to proceed through the Park, as noted in Section 3.

There are some who hold that the passage through Gatton Park is not even the original Terrace-way. They consider that this used to run parallel to the Ridgeway as outlined above—more or less in its usual position—to pass over the Old London Road at the disused quarry just west of Merstham (i.e. not south of the Church but north of it) to join the road leading to the lip of Greystone quarry. I feel some doubt about this. Certainly the way through Gatton Park is extremely wet going in bad weather, and it seems to get involved in something approaching gault near Merstham Rectory; but there do seem to be definite signs of some sort of terrace-way just below Gatton Field Shaw. However, tradition is insistent that the way through Gatton Park is very ancient. Perhaps it could be explained as a later date short cut across the valley from Colley Hill to Merstham Down.

(ii) *The River and Valley crossings*

These comprise the crossings of the Wey at Guildford and the Mole at Boxhill; also the valley crossing at Caterham.

The River Crossings:—

(a) As regards the passage across the Wey at Guildford there does not seem much new to say. I follow the accepted conclusions that the trackways both westward and eastward of the ford merged on the west at Mount Street and on the east at Pewley Down: and the spot where the old ford was situated was not very far from where Guildford's main bridge now stands.

(b) As regards the crossing of the Mole at Dorking there are a number of points to consider. First of all the Mole is a peculiar river. In dry seasons it is inclined to diminish its flow to such an extent that it is easy to cross it in many places. Even when the

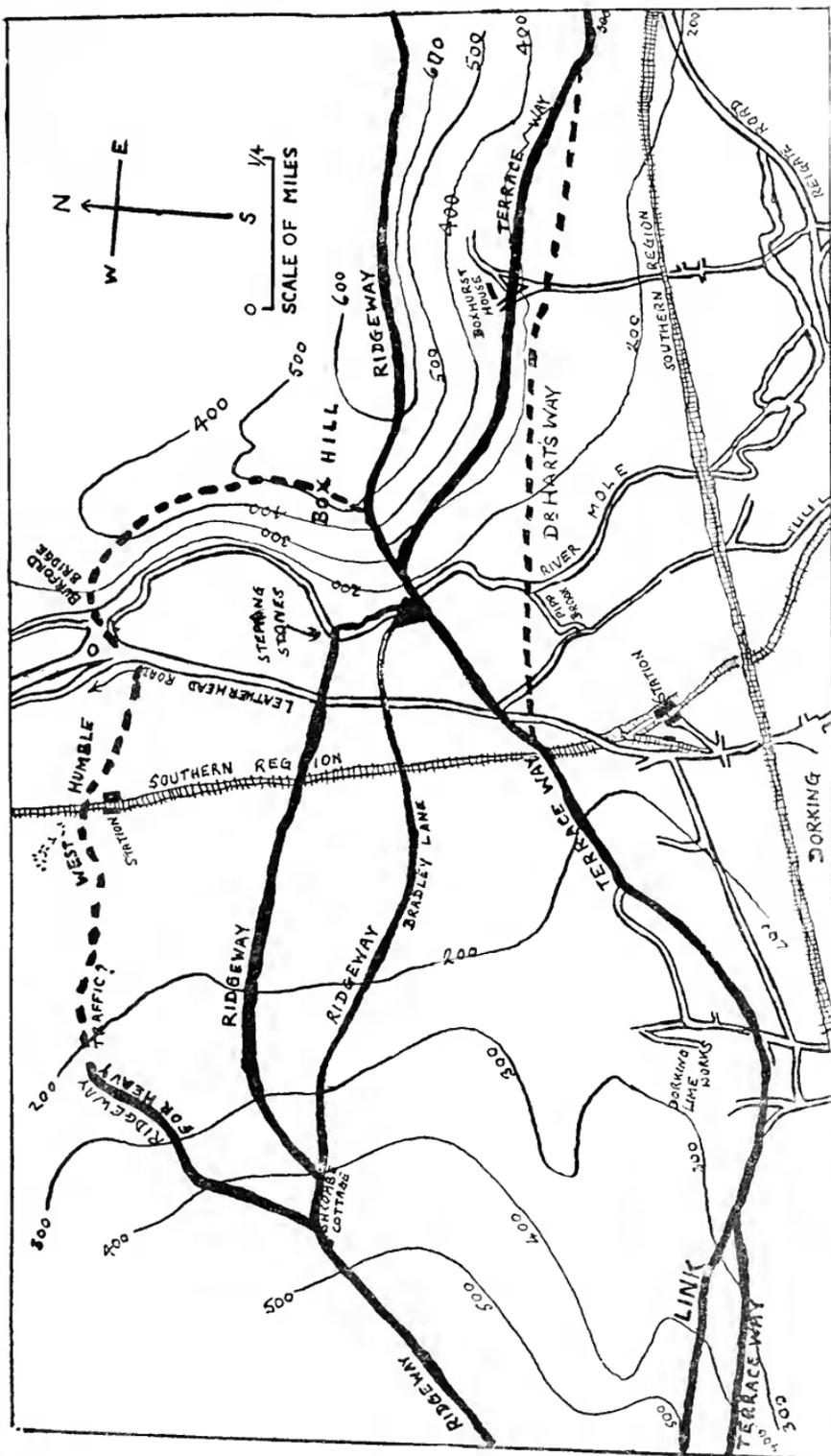


FIG. 4.—CROSSING OF THE RIVER MOLE AT DORKING.

flow of water is normal there seem to be three or four points in its passage from Burford Bridge to Dorking where a shallow crossing can be found without much difficulty, e.g. (1) Pixham Firs near the junction between the Mole and the Pipp brook: (2) at the foot of the path leading down from the shoulder of Box Hill and using the small island: (3) at the Stepping Stones. (4) Presumably there must also have been a crossing where Burford Bridge now stands. (Fig. 4.)

Dr. Hart selected the crossing at Pixham Firs as the spot most convenient to join up the east and west limb of the Terrace-way. I have never liked it for the following reasons. (1) Approaching from the east Dr. Hart presumed that the track proceeded from the point in the field where ploughing has broken it off by a gradual downward descent to the ford at Pixham. This involves a descent through what in rainy weather is very wet ground. Furthermore, it seems to have escaped him that at the point where the way seems to have been ploughed away, the 300 foot contour line takes quite a severe northward curve: and it is much easier to link it up with the obvious remains of a terrace-way just adjacent to Boxhurst House and on the 300 foot contour line than with one lower down which may never have existed. This terrace-way (if it be the true one) leads directly to the shoulder of Box Hill, there to join the Ridgeway in its descent to the very sensible island ford at the foot.

One of the reasons why Dr. Hart accepted Pixham as the Terrace-way ford was because he says there is a plough bank leading thence westwards to the spot on the main London-Dorking road where it crosses to meet the way coming down by the footbridge over the railway from the chalk hump on the western side of the valley.

I have seen no sign of the plough bank he mentions. Moreover, both on the map and on foot, the obvious eastern direction the way is taking from the railway footbridge is not Pixham at all, but along the private road leading from the junction of Pixham Lane and the main Dorking-London road straight in the direction of the island crossing at the shoulder-foot below Box Hill.

As regards the Ridgeway, there can be little doubt that it comes from the east to the top of Box Hill and then descends very precipitously—joined on its descent by the Terrace-way—to the ford below. The ford used at the present day is one a little to the north at the Stepping Stones, which corresponds neatly with a ridgeway track coming eastwards from the north end of the elevation upon which Denbies House used to stand, at its southern end. It is to be noticed that no evidence of this track can be found in early maps such as Rocque's (1754). Probably it existed, but this cartographer gives as the path to the ford from the west one that still is in existence, parallel but slightly south of this passage, leading to the river by Bradley Farm. This undoubtedly came out near the lower ford, the island ford mentioned above.

The Ridgeway climbing the western face of Box Hill is very precipitous, and I think so steep for baggage animals that even prehistoric man would have preferred to climb by the very sensible path leading from the northern slope of Box Hill from Burford

Bridge. There is a convenient trackway still remaining which connects the Burford Bridge Crossing with the ridge at Denbies, lying just north of the other two ridgeway tracks I have mentioned.

The Valley Crossings

I have already dealt with the difficult passage from Colley Hill to Merstham Down. The conclusions of Dr. Hart regarding the brief crossings at Cole Kitchen Combe, near Shere, and that at Pebblecombe I accept. There remains the valley crossing over the Caterham-Godstone road from Foster Down to Winders Hill.

If the conclusions I have drawn in Sections 4 and 5 be accepted, we have here both on east and west sides of the main road two strands of Ridgeway and Terrace-way to unite with two corresponding strands on the opposite sides of the valley.

To take the Terrace-way first, Dr. Hart presumed there was only one track which he figured as coming on the east from South Lodge, Marden Park, to the sawmills; then after taking a turn to the north, crossing westwards the area between the Old Roman Road and the new road by a gate on the floor of the valley which he considers linked up with the track coming eastwards round the brow of the hill at Foster Down, through the present rubbish heaps and down to the Caterham-Godstone main road.

I think Dr. Hart was wrong here. Even allowing for his confusing the two distinct tracks of ridge and terrace, his path through Dial Wood is quite out of character with the habits of the way, which never turns a sharp corner unless the hill itself does so. The obvious line for the terrace way is to cross Dial Wood at the sawmills and proceed by the remains of a road directly in its line, now hidden by thick scrub, but marked by Dr. Hart himself on his own Ordnance Survey Six-Inch map (to be seen at Castle Arch, Guildford) as having been closed when the new Caterham-Godstone road was made. This road crosses from the Old Roman Road by a large and presumably prehistoric tumulus and comes out just on the alignment where the Terrace-way (already described in Section 4) must have come to meet it.

Having disentangled the Terrace-way from its spurious ridgeway characteristics, it is fairly simple to see how the Ridgeway ran. From the east, crossing over Winders Hill (as described in Section 5), there are still traces of it descending to the floor of the valley, passing Ockley Wood on its southern side. Here it crossed the present main road (possibly on the site where a gate now stands), proceeding by the spot marked as a 'bus stop straight up the field on the west, taking the southern slope of the hill coming to meet it, passing with a southerly course by a disused quarry over the modern road by Tupwood and by a small track 20 yards long, traces of which still remain, and joining the bridle road which leads round the brow of Foster Down.

I am inclined to think that the bridlepath just alluded to is not the original track. Sir Gilbert Scott in his sensible article already referred to says that local tradition holds that the road before The

Moyle House was built, passed straight westwards over the summit where the 700 foot contour holds two very serviceable niches on both its eastern and western side making this passage easy and shorter as well as likely. Thence it emerged by a path still in use southward to join the road leading either over or round Gravelly Hill, on its westward passage through the prehistoric camp at Cardinal's Cap.