The Oldest Road
An Exploration of the Ridgeway
The Oldest Road
An Exploration of
The Ridgeway
J. R. L. Anderson
Fay Godwin
The Ridgeway

Anthony Burton

87 miles of downland walking from Wiltshire to the Chilterns
THE NATIONAL TRAILS
1. North Downs Way
2. South Downs Way
3. England Coast Path
4. South West Coast Path
5. Thames Path
6. The Ridgeway
7. Peddars Way and Norfolk Coast Path
8. Offa’s Dyke Path
9. Glyndwr’s Path
10. Pembrokeshire Coast Path
11. Pennine Bridleway
12. Pennine Way
13. Cleveland Way
14. Hadrian’s Wall Path
Other guide books from Aurum Press

- The Capital Ring
- The London Loop
- West Highland Way
- The Coast to Coast Walk
- Northumberland Coast Path
- Wales Coast Path
- Somerset Coast Path
- Camino de Santiago
- Skyline London

ISBNs:
- The Capital Ring: 978 1 84513 569 9
- The London Loop: 978 1 84513 387 8
- West Highland Way: 978 1 84513 099 2
- The Coast to Coast Walk: 978 1 84513 362 6
- Northumberland Coast Path: 978 1 78131 542 0
- Wales Coast Path: 978 1 78131 067 0
- Somerset Coast Path: 978 1 78131 181 1
- Camino de Santiago: 978 1 78131 233 0
- Skyline London: 978 1 84513 762 3
New rights – new responsibilities

All National Trails are Rights of Way

There are three types of public right of way:
• If the highway is a footpath it may be used for walking
• If the highway is a bridleway it may be used for riding or leading a horse, as well as for walking. Cycling is also permitted, providing the cyclists give way to riders and pedestrians. Driving a horse-drawn vehicle is not permitted
• A byway open to all traffic (usually called a ‘byway’ is used for walking, riding, leading a horse or cycling. There is also a right to use any kind of wheeled vehicle, including motorcars and horse-drawn vehicles.

Some rights of way are recorded under the old term ‘roads used as public paths’ (RUPPS). The law is not clear about what rights exist over RUPPS and they are now being reclassified as ‘restricted byways’. In the meantime, you have the same rights on a RUPP as you have on a bridleway but there may be uncertainty about whether you can take a vehicle.

On rights of way you can:
• Take a pram, pushchair or wheelchair (including motorised buggies) if practical
• Take a dog (on a lead or under close control)
• Stop for a while – to admire the view, take a photograph, make a sketch, eat a picnic or simply to rest – providing you stay on the path and don’t cause an obstruction

Open Access land

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW), the public can walk freely on mapped areas of mountain, moor, heath, downland and registered common land without having to stick to paths.

People across England now have approximately 865,000 hectares of land across which they can walk, ramble, run, explore, climb and watch wildlife as they are given the freedom to access land, without having to stay on paths.

The new rights, for which people have been campaigning for over 100 years, came into effect across all of England on 31 October 2005.

The new rights cover most recreational activities carried out on foot, including walking, sightseeing, bird watching, climbing and running. On all open access land from 1 March to 31 July dogs must be kept on a short lead (no more than two metres) to protect ground nesting birds. At all times of the year dogs must be kept on a short lead (no more than two metres) in the vicinity of livestock.

The new right of access does not include cycling, horse riding, driving a vehicle or camping but where these activities already take place (e.g. on an existing bridleway) they are unaffected.

Wherever you go in the countryside, always follow the Countryside Code
• Be safe – plan ahead and follow any signs
• Leave gates and property as you find them
• Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home
• Keep dogs under close control
• Consider other people

For more information on the new right of open access and the Countryside Code, visit the website page www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying, email open.access@naturalengland.org.uk or telephone 0845 100 3298
ILLINOIS — 56,650 sq. mi.

ENGLAND / WALES — 58,355 sq. mi.

[England 50,337 sq. mi.]

[Wales 8,018 sq. mi.]
“The doming up and south-easterly tilt of Britain may have been caused by a late Cretaceous hot-spot or mantle plume centered under the Irish Sea off North Wales.... Up to 200,000 cubic kilometers of rock have been eroded from the domed up areas since the end of the Cretaceous.”

— P. Toghill, *The Geology of Britain*
So where does all this chalk come from?

The Ridgeway

Beachy Head

Dover Cliffs

Cap Blanc Nez, France
THE GEOLOGY OF NORTH-WEST EUROPE AT THE END OF THE MESOZOIC

- Paleozoic rocks (older than 250 million years)
- Jurassic and Tertiary sediments (250 to 140 million year old)
- Lower Cretaceous sediments
- Upper Cretaceous sediments
- Edge of continental shelf
- Modern Alpine zone
- Modern coastlines
During the Cretaceous period, about 80 million years ago, sea levels rose to such an extent that almost all the continents of the Earth were under water. Shallow seas invaded the continents leaving only small areas remaining as land. The seas ebbed and flooded, and different parts of the land were under water at different times. But it seems that almost every part of the Earth was under water at some stage during the Late Cretaceous period.

Chalk is made up of the bodies of tiny single-celled algae called coccoliths. These are only formed in clear, warm, tranquil water – usually found on continental shelf areas in the tropics. As they die, billions of microscopic coccoliths fall to the sea bed in a continuous rain to form an ooze. This process is now happening in the Caribbean. As more sediment is piled on top the ooze hardens and becomes lithified, forming the pure white rock known as chalk.
2.2 Britain and the Continental Shelf, showing the main topographical features
ILLINOIS — 56,650 sq. mi.

ENGLAND / WALES — 58,355 sq. mi.

[England 50,337 sq. mi.]

[Wales 8,018 sq. mi.]
### Population

- **Total**
  - 12,801,539 (2016 est.)

**Ranking**
- Ranked 5th

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population mid-2016</th>
<th>Share of UK population</th>
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<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>55,268,100</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>3,113,200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>5,404,700</td>
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<td>Northern Ireland</td>
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<td>2.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>65,648,100</td>
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</table>
The English Landscape
with an introduction by Bill Bryson
This book divides England into its local regions, each with its own character, atmosphere, scenery, architecture and vegetation.
CENTAUR, or Sagittarius. Half horse, half man, the centaur was a Greek invention, or projection into imaginable form of stallion-like violence. But the centaur as bowman (Sagittarius), shooting an arrow at lion or dragon, appears in church sculpture as a symbol of Christ mounted on the horse of his vengeance against the Jews and slaying evil or harrowing hell. This centaur bowman is to be seen on MISERICORDS, BOSSES, capitals, FONTS, and TYPANUM (e.g. Kenilworth, Oxfordshire) over the main door into church.

See also HARROWING OF HELL.

CHALK, a limestone (i.e. a rock largely made up of calcium carbonate from the shelled creatures of ancient seas, which can be 'burnt' or calcined into lime, or calcium oxide), varies in degree of softness and in tones of white and grey. The white Upper Chalk is a great scenery builder, or rather has been moulded by time into swelling scenery such as that of the Yorkshire Wolds and the downlands of Wessex and the south. Since it drains quickly and affords a dry living and was anciently covered with scrub rather than forest, chalk country was favoured by early immigrants, the first nomadic stock-raisers and farmers of the neolithic, the Bronze Age peoples who raised round barrows over the remains of their dead, and the Iron Age farmers who retreated into ramparted farmsteads or hill-forts. For some 5,000 years sheep and cattle have nibbled the grass of the rolling chalk hills and kept them characteristically smooth.

Driving through the countryside, it is often possible to tell at a glance where a chalky soil begins and ends from the disappearance or sudden appearance of certain obvious plants and flowers which dislike or like the presence of lime. Broom, foxglove and bracken are lime-haters, ending abruptly with chalk or limestone. Old Man's Beard demands lime and fostoons tree and hedge along chalky or limestone lanes (especially in the south). The blue Meadow Cranesbill in summer beautifully characterizes chalk country, for instance around Salisbury Plain, and in Northern Ireland suddenly becomes abundant with the chalk around Dunluce Castle, Co. Antrim (where it is called the Flower of Dunluce). Chalk from gleaming hillside pits (which like chalk cliffs are always worth searching for fossilized sea-urchins and belemnites) has been quarried for centuries to burn into lime for sweetening acid fields and for making into the now outdated lime mortar. Dene-holes, and small pits, especially on chalk scarps, which appear now as grassy dells and dimples, provided chalk for marling or spreading directly on the land (see MARL-PITS).

From the Middle Ages to the last century chalk for buildings - often known as clunch - was quarried in many counties from the hard, mainly greyish, beds of the Lower Chalk, sawn into blocks, and dried out before the building began. It lasts well (so long as eaves project far enough to keep it clean, more or less, of rain), and was much used with dressings of brick, or on a footing (in Wiltshire) of sarsen stone. But the rather dingy grey-white of such chalk in churches, farmsteads, cottages, turns a dingier grey in damp weather. Two of the better chalk stones are dignified by names, the white Beer stone from underground quarries at Beer, in Devonshire, near Axminster, used far and wide in mediaeval cathedrals and churches, and Totternhoe stone (Totternhoe, on the Chilterns), greyish-green, a rough shelly chalk quarried for many Bedfordshire houses and villages. In Wessex chalk walls often surround a farm garden, the wall for its length carrying a little roof of thatch projecting on either side.

See also LIMEKILNS, LIMESTONES, RED CHALK.

CHANCEL. The holiest and most secret part of the mediaeval church, enshrining the main altar. Here beyond the chancel arch and the rood screen, which excluded the laity, the priest performed the offices. The reformers of the 16th century did not unite NAVE and chancel. They kept the screens and the wooden tympana on which the Last Judgement or DOOM had been painted (these were usually destroyed towards the middle of the 19th century), but they brought the laity into the chancel for the celebration of the Eucharist.

See also ALTARS, COMMUNION RAILS.

CHANTRY CHAPELS. The rich and illustrious who hoped to find a way to heaven would often leave property to establish and endow chapels of a special kind, to be built in churches around their tombs and effigies. They had much to fear after a possibly unworthy life. Prayer might help them to escape the avenging judgement of Doomsday, illustrated in the DOOM PAINTING, it might ease the cleansing journey of their souls through purgatory, which can be so well understood from the purgatorial terrors of the Lykewake Dirge (from the North Riding):
RHEODENDRONS — RIDGEWAY

preferably sandy or peaty), it spreads and becomes dominant, sometimes as the undercrop of a wood, and is exceedingly hard to get rid of. Like the HORSE CHESTNUT, this rhododendron with its purple flowers chimed with the Pre-Raphaelite feeling of the eighteensixties that the English scene needed brilliance of colour — local colour, as in Pre-Raphaelite landscapes and subject-pieces.

RICKS, STACKS, MOWS, into which corn or hay [also peas and beans] are built after harvesting, either in the farmyard or the field, belong to very ancient farming practice. Mow and rick derive from the words the Anglo-Saxon farmer used, stack derives from the word used by the Norse-speaking settlers. But it seems that the varieties of shape, round, oval, rectangular, cannot be precisely traced to particular origins or districts. In Midland and southern counties and elsewhere ricks will often be built round and rectangular on the same farm, though it is true that the small round stacks are commoner in the rainier areas of north and west, and that round 'pikes' (i.e. tall pointed stacks built around a pole, as in other countries) now belong to the north rather than to the south. With their straw finials or dozies and thatched roofs (now superseded by sheets of black plastic) ricks as a rule were given a house shape. The small circular stacks are perhaps perhaps more readily related to the round huts of prehistoric centuries, surviving in the damper and less fertile (and more conservative) areas, where the smaller size and the shape were ruled by the lower yields of hay and corn and were better fitted to the conditions of wind and weather. Even in the good corn and hay counties the landscape was scarcely not very extensively marked by ricks until the 18th century, when yields were increased by larger holdings and better farming until they were too much for the old storage space of the thatched barns. Storage in barns went with the flail, thumping on the threshing floor in the centre of each barn. The wheeled threshing machine of the 19th century driven from the flywheel of a traction engine was more easily fed from ricks.

See also BARNS, STADDLE-STONES.

RIDGEWAY. For an ancient track, is not a word coined by antiquaries looking wistfully but a little mistily back to the past, but a term descending to us from Old English and meaning exactly what it says, a hroyeg weg, a way or road along a ridge; and since ridges — especially long ridges of chalk or limestone and many England from south-west to north-east — were likely to be clear of timber as well as dry and firm, and part of a landscape nibbled down by the sheep and goats and cattle of the early pastoralists, in contrast to the valleys and plains likely to be wet, heavy, and dark with oak forest and thorn scrub, early man travelled by the ridges where possible, and rideways became, and remained, by custom, long or short ways of communication. The best introduction to the exploration and understanding of ancient rideways and tracks will be found in two chapters of C. G. S. Crawford's Archeology in the Field (1953) which begin by defining the track as 'not made or designed' but something which has grown 'in response to the need of going from one place to another', and stating that with a few exceptions all mediaeval roads (other than Roman roads still in mediaeval use) were 'natural tracks, unmetalled and wide'. He gives an account of four main prehistoric trackways or rideways which took the path of forest-free hill belts: (1) The Icknield Way from near the Wash past Stonehenge to the Channel coast. (2) The rideway of the South Downs from the neighbourhood of Beachy Head to Stonehenge and beyond. (3) The North Downs rideway from the Canterbury neighbourhood, part of it the so-called Pilgrims Way, then the Harrow Way to Stonehenge (Pheorg weg, Old English for 'temple way'), then south-west, perhaps skirting Dartmoor and along the spine of Cornwall. (4) The 'Jurassic Way', recognized in modern times as running south and south-west from the Humber, crossing the Cotswolds to Bath and continuing possibly along the Mendips. Partly modern roads or lanes, including GREEN LANES, partly adapted as modern roads, partly discernible as boundary lines of parish or estate, these are to be regarded as ancient trading thoroughfares, much trodden in the Iron Age (passing Iron Age hill-forts), but probably used in the Bronze Age and earlier, Stonehenge being on the route of the first three. The 'Jurassic Way' (a way across the limestone formation) crosses the surface iron deposits of Northamptonshire and north Oxfordshire. The other three skirt known groups of neolithic FLINT MINES.

As well as these and other chief rideways, minor rideways can be traced with tolerable certainty in county after county, many of them still in use, metalled or unmetalled. Ancient Trackways of Wessex (1965) by H. W. Timperley and Edwin Brigg attempts to define the major and minor rideways of Dorset, Wiltshire, Hampshire and Berkshire, including what the authors call the Great Ridgeway (best known from the ridgeway across the Berkshire and Wiltshire downs above the Uffington White Horse and past Wylye's Smithy, which has usually been considered as a loop of the Icknield Way), which they trace from the Thames near Streatley to the Channel coast at the mouth of the Axe.

See also HOLLOW WAYS, PORT WAYS, ROADS, SALT WAYS.
ENGLAND'S THOUSAND BEST CHURCHES

SIMON JENKINS

With photographs from the COUNTRY LIFE Archive
DAVID MILES

THE LAND OF THE WHITE HORSE

VISIONS OF ENGLAND

Thames & Hudson
GUIDES TO THE TRACKWAYS—

- **The Green Roads of England**
  - Romantic and unreliable

- **Ancient Trackways of Wessex**
  - Systematic and thorough

- **Walking Ancient Trackways**
  - Recent and useful
WALKING ANCIENT TRACKWAYS
Michael Dunn

Thousands of miles of ancient trackways – from prehistoric rideways and Roman roads to Saxon heripaths and medieval saltways – survive undisturbed in the British countryside. This book offers thirty-four walks exploring the best that these ancient roads can offer.

Many of the routes were primarily used in one period – the magnificent Roman road, Ackling Dyke, in Dorset, is one example. Many more, however, have seen a succession of travellers through the centuries. Sewestern Lane in eastern Leicestershire is typical, having originated as a prehistoric track but having also been used by the Romans, medieval traders, the Dukes of Rutland on their way to London, and eighteenth-century drovers.

The walks included range from challenging expeditions along the High Street range in the Lake District and over the Corrieyairack Pass in Scotland to gentle strolls along a saltway in the Cotswolds and a Roman road in Kent. Spectacular and well-known walks such as Clennell Street in the Cheviots and the drovers' Hambleton Street in north Yorkshire contrast with less famous but equally rewarding routes following the Kerry Ridgeway to Bishops Castle and tracing packhorse routes in the Peak District.

The route of each trackway is described in some detail, and there are informative notes on the historical background of the route and entertaining comments on points of interest along the way. The text is complemented by superb colour and black-and-white photographs, attractive line illustrations and excellent sketch maps. The result is a marvellous introduction to a series of uniquely satisfying walks through the history of the British landscape.
Figure 2: The prehistoric trackways of central southern England according to Hippsley Cox (1944).
WESSEX

Trackways and Rideways are shown in red

0 5 10
Miles

[Map of Wessex with trackways and rideways marked in red]
WESSEX

Trackways and Ridgeways
are shown in red

0  5  10
Miles
A guide to the Prehistoric and Roman Monuments in England & Wales

A New Edition Revised and with new Illustrations

Jacquetta Hawkes
Time chart showing main trends and changes.
Gathering
Periodic gathering of dispersed communities; collective values enhanced through construction & participation

Deposition
Deposition, renewal & regeneration

Participation
Formation of alliances; settling of disputes; exchange; collective ritual; feasting
Sacrifice, transformation (of people, animals & objects)
Wayland’s Smithy

On the Ridgeway
The henge monument of Avebury on the north Wiltshire chalkland. The great enclosing bank and ditch survive remarkably intact. A number of the standing stones that can be seen were re-erected in the 1930s. The village spreading into the monument dates from the late Saxon period.
Avebury, Neolithic henge, stone circles and avenue

This is one of the most important megalithic sites in Europe and is designated a World Heritage Site. The site is approached by an avenue of stones and features a large circular earthwork some 400 metres wide and an external ditch with a circumference of 1200 metres. Inside are two more stone circles, each of 100 metres in diameter.

Many of the stones were re-erected in the 1930s by Alexander Keiller, and the site museum provides information on this and the archaeological story of Avebury.

(English Heritage, National Trust and Private owner)

Photo: © Crown copyright: English Heritage NMR
FIG 48  Layout of the Avebury ritual landscape, 3500–2500 BC.
FIG 49 Layout of the Avebury ritual landscape, 2500–2000 BC.
12 (Below) Avebury: the Cove, a setting of two (originally three) massive blocks at the centre of the northern inner circle (visible in the background). Recent investigations have shown that the stone on the left continues at least 2 m (6.5 ft) below the surface and weighs an estimated 100 tonnes, making it by far the largest megalithic block at Avebury.
57 (below) The Sanctuary at Avebury during excavation in 1999. The concentric circles of pits (some visible in the excavation) held timber posts. Two stone circles (represented today by concrete blocks) were also erected, probably later than the posts but at the same time as the stones of the West Kennet Avenue.
FIG 49  Layout of the Avebury ritual landscape, 2500–2000 BC.
Original hill is thought to have been built in a spiral fashion.

Silbury Hill
- Height: 130ft
- Diameter at base: 550ft

Avebury

Atkinson tunnel built in 1968
- 18th century vertical shaft

Crater formed in 2000 following heavy rain
- Craters and depressions will be filled
The first construction at Silbury was a low mound of gravel. Later, a series of layers of soil, mud and grass turves were added. Several pits were dug into the mound and it may have been edged by stakes.
Later, construction continued in chalk and clay, which was piled around the mound, sometimes in small banks. The mound was surrounded by a ditch with an internal bank.
North face

chalk block masonry and bulkheads with ballast infills.

phase 2 mound

phase 1 mound

inner ditch

timber reveting ballast packed

outer ditch