

Road from Lox Yeo to Charterhouse

An investigation by ALERT

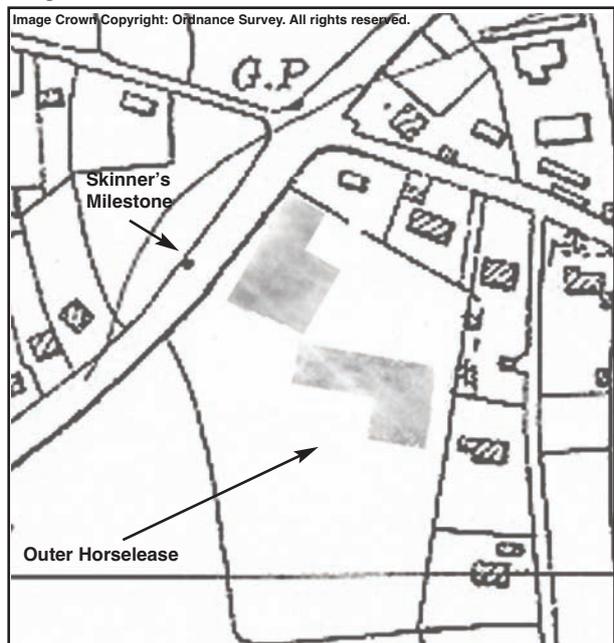
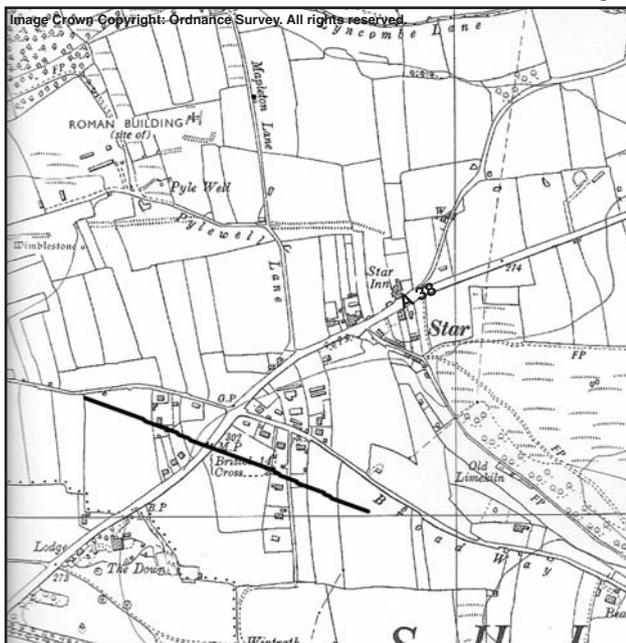
John Matthews

Part A. The location of the Roman road and other roads and trackways at Star ALERT, an archaeological fieldwork group, has been attempting to trace the Roman roads through the Vale of Winscombe and has succeeded in locating several features that could be interpreted as the remains of roads. A Bartington C601 gradiometer and a TR/CIA resistance meter have been used to undertake surveys. At Yarborough Farm near Banwell a stretch of road has previously been described which may have been the course of an early Roman road leading towards Loxton from the east (Matthews, J., 2010). The line of this road can be seen as an agger south of Banwell Hill and a section was uncovered during pipeline work, but confirmation of its continuation beyond this point to the east has been a matter of speculation. The Rev. John Skinner described a Roman road crossing the Bristol Turnpike 'at the 14 mile stone' in his diary for May 1830 (Skinner, J., 1830) (see Figure 1). The milestone can still be seen but in a ruinous state (Somerset Historic Environment Record (HER) PRN 15266). No visible trace of the road exists today, and its precise location until the ALERT survey work had not been established (Tratman, E.K., 1962).

A resistivity survey of part of the field opposite Skinner's milestone, known as Outer Horseleaze on the Shipham tithe map, has revealed parallel ditches about 12metres apart running in precisely the right direction to meet Shipham Lane to the west and the crossroads of Broadway and Shipham Road to the east. Broadway is not actually the line of the road, as it would appear to veer north of the line through Outer Horseleaze, although Lippiatt Lane further to the east is clearly on the correct alignment (see Figure 2). A Lidar image of Outer Horseleaze shows uninterrupted sweeps of ridge and furrow curving across the field, clearly post dating the parallel ditches. The premise that this is line of the Roman road that Skinner described is indisputable (see Figure 3).

The Lidar image of the area reveals that Outer Horseleaze was probably much larger, as it appears to extend further to the north and west. This is indicated by the lines of the Medieval field system and present field boundaries. The northern boundary of the field lies on what is almost certainly a pre-historic trackway that can be traced from Rowberrow, passing to the south of the large chambered round barrow (Somerset HER PRN 10763), where it is called Philfare Lane. (An early date for this lane can be postulated as there is a clear 'causeway' connecting the barrow to the lane). The lane can be followed along field boundaries to the north of Star and along a low escarpment to

Figure 1 below left
Star showing the presumed line of the Roman road. Outer Horseleaze is south of the crossroads
Figure 2 below right
Outer Horseleaze with the areas of resistivity survey and the location of Skinner's Milestone



the west to join Shipham Lane. The eastern boundary of Outer Horseleaze was probably Horseleaze Lane, a continuation of the line of Mapleton Lane which passes close to the Roman villa at Star to the north. This suggests that this road was in use in Roman times and would appear to be confirmed by the location of a large coin hoard (Somerset HER PRN 15266) in the angle between the two roads. This road seems to continue south with one deviation following tracks and hedgerows to meet Callow Drove below Callow Hill.

It is obvious that the present crossroads between the line of the A38 and Shipham Lane/Broadway cannot have existed in its present position until after the ridge and furrow was no longer in use, but the crossroads must have been located here at the time the Greenwood map was drawn in 1822. Broadway would seem to be a relatively recent road (post Medieval), so therefore an earlier road must have connected Woodborough and Sandford with Shipham by another route avoiding the field systems. The most likely routes would have been south from Shipham Lane at ST 42605832 (Leg Lane) where it would pass close to Paddington House and Winterhead, or along Hillyfields to Winterhead. The former route passes through a field once called Blunderhedge which has evidence of earthworks. It could be argued that perhaps this is an indication of a small settlement, abandoned in the middle ages, thus leaving the arable land associated with it available for a different road system to develop. The possibility of a settlement here has been commented on (Aston, M., 2010).

An interesting feature was revealed during the survey work in Outer Horseleaze. This was a circular area of high resistance about 35metres in diameter with some indication of a surrounding ditch. It has been tentatively identified as a ploughed-out round barrow as it is on the crest of a ridge with commanding views of the valley to the west. The northern ditch of the Roman road disappears as it cuts this feature. It is suggested that the barrow existed as a low mound at the time the agger of the road was constructed, the northern side of the road cutting across the edge of the barrow.

Part B. The Roman road between Outer Horseleaze and the Roman mining settlement at Charterhouse

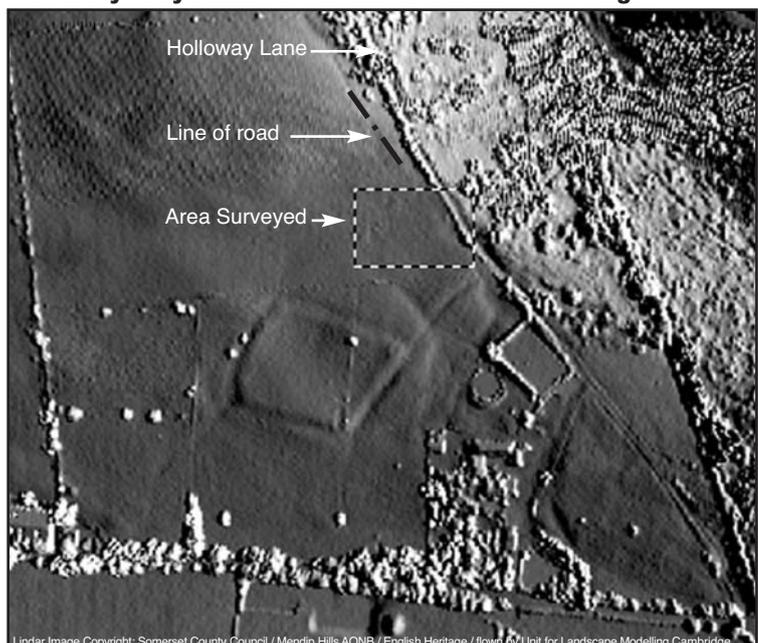
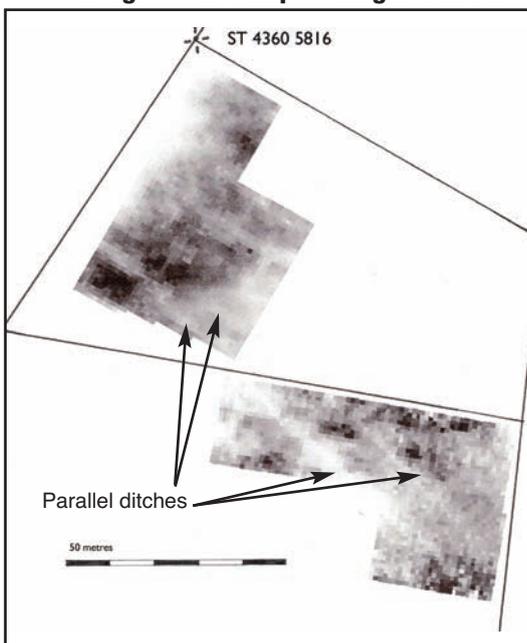
The alignment of the Roman road continues southeast from Outer Horseleaze, and Chris Webster of Somerset HER suggests that it is a continuation of a linear feature described in Somerset HER (PRN 11536) as a 'trackway S of Lippiatt Lane, Shipham' and which can now be identified as part of PRN 29809, 'Roman road W of Charterhouse'. This connection between the two sites means that the line of the road continues to the eastern end of Longbottom Lane where it meets Holloway Lane at ST 45995670 (see Figure 4).

Figure 3 below left

The resistivity survey across the line of the Roman road. Parallel ditches can be seen

Figure 4 below right

Longbottom Camp looking north. The area surveyed by ALERT is shown as a marked rectangle



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In 2006 ALERT conducted a resistivity survey of Longbottom Camp and the field to the north (Foord and Matthews, 2007a). This work was re-examined in the light of these recent findings and, unnoticed before, parallel ditches could be seen on the alignment of the Roman road close to Holloway Lane. The ground has been so heavily disturbed in the past that only a short length of road could be seen, but sufficient to confirm its existence. The position of these ditches can be located at 1 on Figure 6.

From this point the line of the road probably led along the valley to the north of Tynings Farm but Forestry work here has likely removed any possibility of locating the course of the road. In May 2006 ALERT surveyed two areas through which it was presumed the road would pass east of Tynings Farm and north of Charterhouse Lane. The first survey of three grids covering an area 90metres by 20metres identified an area of high resistance at ST 47205660 just over 120metres north of Charterhouse Lane. This was precisely on the suspected line of the road. An area of high resistance was recorded where the survey grids crossed the line of the road, but the results were not precise enough to make a positive identification. The second survey at ST 476654 showed a band of high resistance running from west to east about 75metres north of the lane. Again the high resistance was where the line of the road was predicted. These findings may represent the remains of the foundations of the agger, although no ditches were observed (see Figure 5). This would seem to indicate that the road was a little further south than previously thought. The line would take it to Charterhouse Lane at ST 48135638. Here the lane and the Roman road would seem to be contiguous until it reaches ST 48935606, the point where it crosses the south end of steep sided Snowdrop Valley. This would be an obvious crossing point of the valley (see Figure 6).

Further to the east, when ALERT was making another attempt to identify the line of the road early in 2007, the team inspected a portion of field boundary at ST 49165609 which appeared to be quite different from normal bank and ditch. This was a bank about 20metres long, 1metre wide and standing about 1metre high. The bank had been faced with stone, presumably to prevent erosion. A number of shrubs and small trees were growing on the top (see Figure 7). A resistivity survey showed some indication of ditches leading to either side of this feature. ALERT suggests that this is all that remains of the agger of the road after it had been almost totally removed, but preserved here in a field boundary as a cross-section. This bank is on a direct line between the presumed crossing point of the valley and the settlement in Upper Rains Batch, and there are a number of banks and field boundaries along this line which would suggest that it is the line of the road, but an exhaustive survey of the field to the west of Upper Rains Batch by ALERT in 2006/7 failed to find positive evidence of the road which probably followed the edge of a natural scarp here, and has since been ploughed away (Foord and Matthews, 2007b). This was particularly disappointing because a survey of part of the Roman settlement by ALERT in 2008 showed evidence of the pattern of streets in the town. There was clear indication that a thoroughfare running from east to west seen at the south end of Upper Rains Batch was a continuation of the line road from the west, but no trace of it could be positively identified outside the boundary of the settlement.

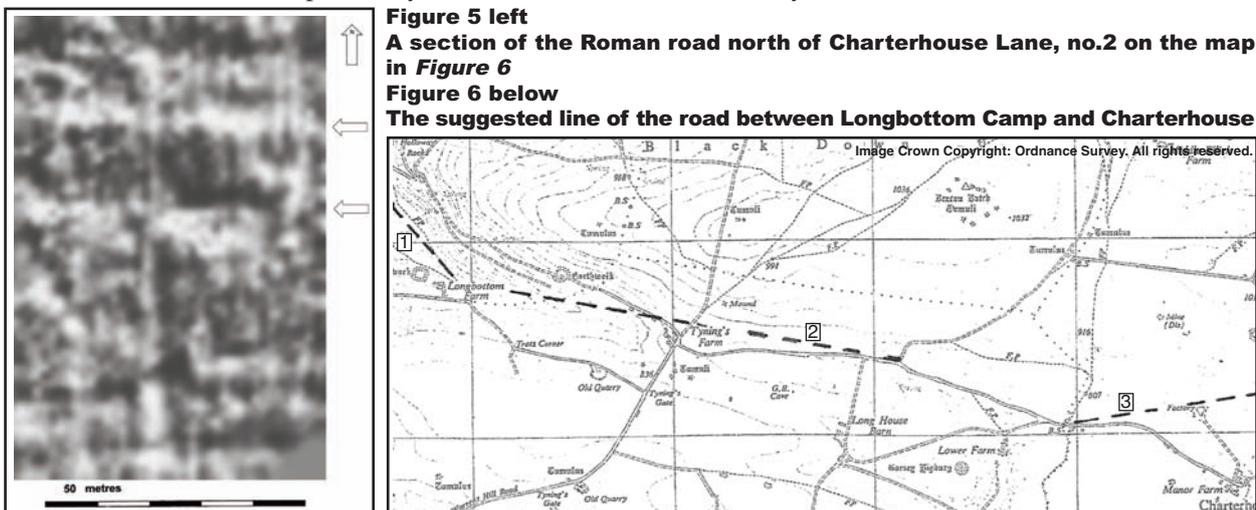




Figure 7
A field boundary (no.3 in Figure 6) which may be the remains of the agger of the road which has been preserved when other evidence has disappeared during ploughing

Discussion

There were undoubtedly many roads and tracks crossing this area of the Mendips from prehistoric times. While there was probably no problem in moving across the higher ground, crossing the steep valleys, particularly Rowberrow Bottom and the western scarp of Blackdown, and the long decline into the Vale of Winscombe would have been difficult for anything other than by foot or packhorse. The route of a road from the Roman settlement at Charterhouse to the coast as suggested would avoid many of the difficulties and allow wheeled traffic access to a harbour for faster transport. The only difficult stretch of the route for the road engineers to overcome would have been the hill above Longbottom Farm. Here the line of the road is steep and probably impassable by cart. However, an examination on the ground and of Lidar images shows the existence of a trackway, the line of a modern footpath, by-passing the steep section to the west by choosing a lesser gradient and then re-joining the line of road at the top of the hill.

It is possible that this may explain the existence of Longbottom Camp which could have been to house and supply oxen for extra pulling power for carts struggling up the hill. Two very much smaller but similar enclosures have been investigated by ALERT close to the line of the Roman road at Yarborough Farm, Banwell. One of these, in Thornbridge, Barton, was surveyed in 2009 (Matthews, J., 2009) a smaller one nearby was surveyed in 2010, (a report is in preparation). From this point the line of the road would make its way through Outer Horseleaze close to the Roman sites of Wintred and Star, on to the west part of Shiphams Lane, to the agger below Banwell Hill and then to Yarborough Farm and possibly Loxton.

There were probably other routes from Tynings Farm, possibly along Rowberrow Bottom and using the line of the present Lippiatt Lane, but mining work and forestry has made positive identification of the line of any road problematic. Future work in this area may eventually resolve this.

Acknowledgements

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