

Shropshire supreme!

JOHN PENN'S second tour takes readers through the plains and hills around the Wrekin



If you have not yet seen Stokesay Castle, then you may easily include it in your route.

IT was interesting to note how, with the de-rationing of petrol, no less than 1,400 motorists per hour set out along the Oxford Road from London to re-acquaint themselves with the beauty of our countryside, which had been denied them for ten long and irksome years.

The above figures were taken on the Saturday following the de-rationing, and were 200 per hour higher than any other road, which shows that the west is our most popular touring country.

Now, allow me to elaborate on this: Via Oxford By-pass, Worcester and Ludlow, some of the most beautiful country in England, if not in the British Isles, is reached. We are in the fair county of Shropshire, justly famous for its magnificent hill scenery. In the midst of these hills we have Shrewsbury and Church Stretton as good hotel centres.

“Western Hills”

Shropshire has been called the County of the Western Hills, and well may it thus be termed, for its south-western bulge takes in a great chunk of typically Welsh countryside, where many of the villages have Welsh names. But, like the volcanic fires of the Wrekin, old feuds and rivalries have died down in men's hearts, and the Shropshire toast for many a century has been “All friends around the Wrekin.”

The fact that this county of Salop is half plain and half hill makes the views far finer and more spacious than if all the county had consisted of hills, and that brings me to one of the most noble views in all England.

Flanking the Church Stretton valley on the west is that great stretch of mountain called the Long Mynd, reaching a height of nearly 1,700 ft. It is almost eight miles

long and over the length of it runs that ancient track known to the Britons and the Romans and called the Portway. From Church Stretton and running due west is another track called the Burway. This crosses the Portway at the highest point and descends the western slopes of the Long Mynd to Wentnor. The Burway has gradients of 1 in 3, has no verge in many places and is very rough. Most motorists, rather than miss the views from the Burway, will park their cars on the steep stretch of tarmac just before the gate on a gradient of 1 in 5. Good brakes are necessary. The more intrepid ones will open the gate and will be faced immediately by a starting test on a very rough gradient of 1 in 3. Once through the gate there is no going back and for about two miles (the gradient easing perceptibly) the views are quite fantastic. Within about three feet of the off-side of the car and apparently right under the front wing may be seen the roofs of the houses in Cardingmill Valley, about seven hundred feet below. A motor-coach appears like a mere pebble, a person walking, no larger than a pin-point. It therefore goes without saying that he who attempts the ascent of the Burway should have a good head for altitude and a car in first-class order. There is also the possibility of having to pass another car descending the hill, possibly in the narrowest place. This was the experience which befell me.

Passing Problem

Busily engaged in taking the photographs which you see on these pages showing the M.G. 1½ litre saloon, which, incidentally, behaved superbly, I found that a Rolls Royce had crept down upon me on the narrowest section. I had to

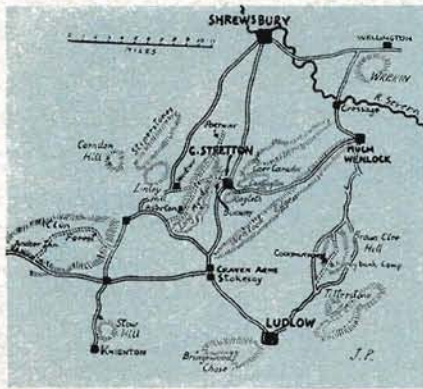
park my off-side wheels almost on the edge, and if the M.G. had been ¼ in. broader, passing at this point would have been impossible.

Near the top of the Burway one of Britain's finest views is displayed. On the other side of the Vale of Church Stretton are the long line of hills which look like a school of porpoises parked on the foreshore of some spacious strand. Caer Caradoc, the Lawley and Lodge Hill appear to reach out far into the West Midland plain where the fine volcanic cone of the Wrekin appears like a sentinel guarding the gateway to this land of hills. On one of the spurs of the Long Mynd is a British Camp known as Bodbury Ring, while Caer Caradoc, with a summit of 1,506 ft., is said to be the fortification of Caractacus, his cave being found at the foot of the hill.

Expert Driving

The tracks over the Long Mynd are very rough and call for expert driving at the lowest speed. On reaching the Portway and turning left along it towards Asterton, the Long Mynd Gliding Club comes into view, a very lonely outpost of civilisation. It is hereabouts that another magnificent panorama comes in sight and this is the glorious tumbling vista of heaving hilltops reaching far into the heart of Wales. The Stiperstones, with summit at 1,647 ft., may be distinguished by the rocky outcrops on their crests. Far beyond rises Corndon Hill (1,684 ft.), but this is in Montgomery. To be here in mid-summer at sundown is to witness an unforgettable scene of the sun setting behind the mountains, where cloud formations may add to the already overpowering grandeur. Plynlimon, Radnor Forest, and the Black Mountains are easily distinguishable if you know where to look for them by diligent map-reading; in fact you may spend quite an appreciable while here poring over maps and picking out landmarks, a truly entrancing pastime.

West-south-west of the Long Mynd is the Clun Forest, another glorious stretch of hill scenery, where the Anchor Inn, close to the Montgomery border, is a rendezvous for those who have forgotten to bring their beer. As in the case of the Long Mynd,



several rough tracks run across Clun at about the same altitude (1,600 ft.). South of Clun is Stow Hill (1,391 ft.), commanding beautiful and extensive views to the east.

Up to now our route has been roughly Shrewsbury, Church Stretton, Burway Hill, Wentnor, Bishops Castle, Clun Forest, Clun, Stow Hill. Buy a half-inch-to-the-mile map with contours on it, such as Bartholomews publish. This is a most useful map and will give you the correct answer when you are in a difficulty about route finding. My sketch map merely gives you a rough idea of what I am talking about.

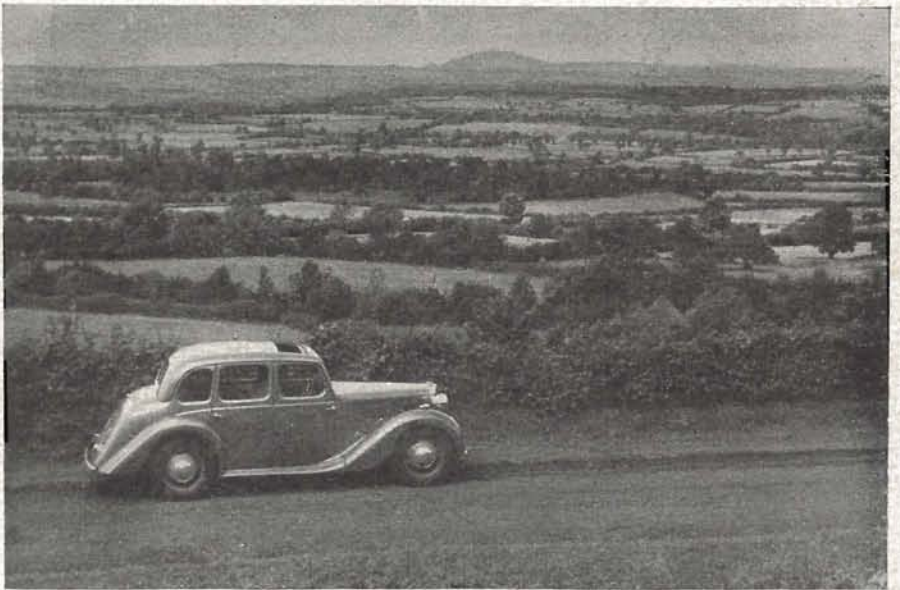
Through Craven Arms (not missing Stokesay Castle, if you have not seen it) I always like to refresh my memory with the glorious views of the Wenlock Edge. It is a great pity that many of the views of ten years ago which I used to marvel at have disappeared owing to the growth of bushes and trees, and I hope the following will not pass unnoticed by members of the County Council of Shropshire.

Here is one of England's finest ridgeways suffering from neglect. Could something be done to cut down the useless bushes on either side and restore its grandeur? Could not the Council send out a polite request to the landowners to open up the views, so encouraging more motorists to visit the district? Could not also something be done to improve the surface of the Burway and make it safer by cutting a few passing places? I think it could, and not at very great expense, and in this case I invoke the good offices of the powers-that-be at Church Stretton for their own good.

Finally, this article would not be complete without mention of Brown Clee Hill and the track which runs towards its summit by Nordybank Camp. You may follow this on the map. As for the neighbouring height of the Titterstone, this is far less pleasant as there are quarries on top. Space scarcely permits me to describe the view from high up on Brown Clee, but the view of Corve Dale and the Wenlock Edge, Bringewood Chase near Ludlow, and distant Forest of Clun make this a venue for a picnic which I assess as one of the finest in the Midlands.



A respite on the Burway high up on the crest of the Long Mynd above Church Stretton, with Hope Boulder Hill (1,396 ft.) rising beyond. Low speeds and expert driving are called for.



The magnificent view from Brown Clee Hill above Ditton Priors, showing the distant Wrekin.



Cardingmill Valley, seen from a point 700 ft. above it on the Burway, near Church Stretton.