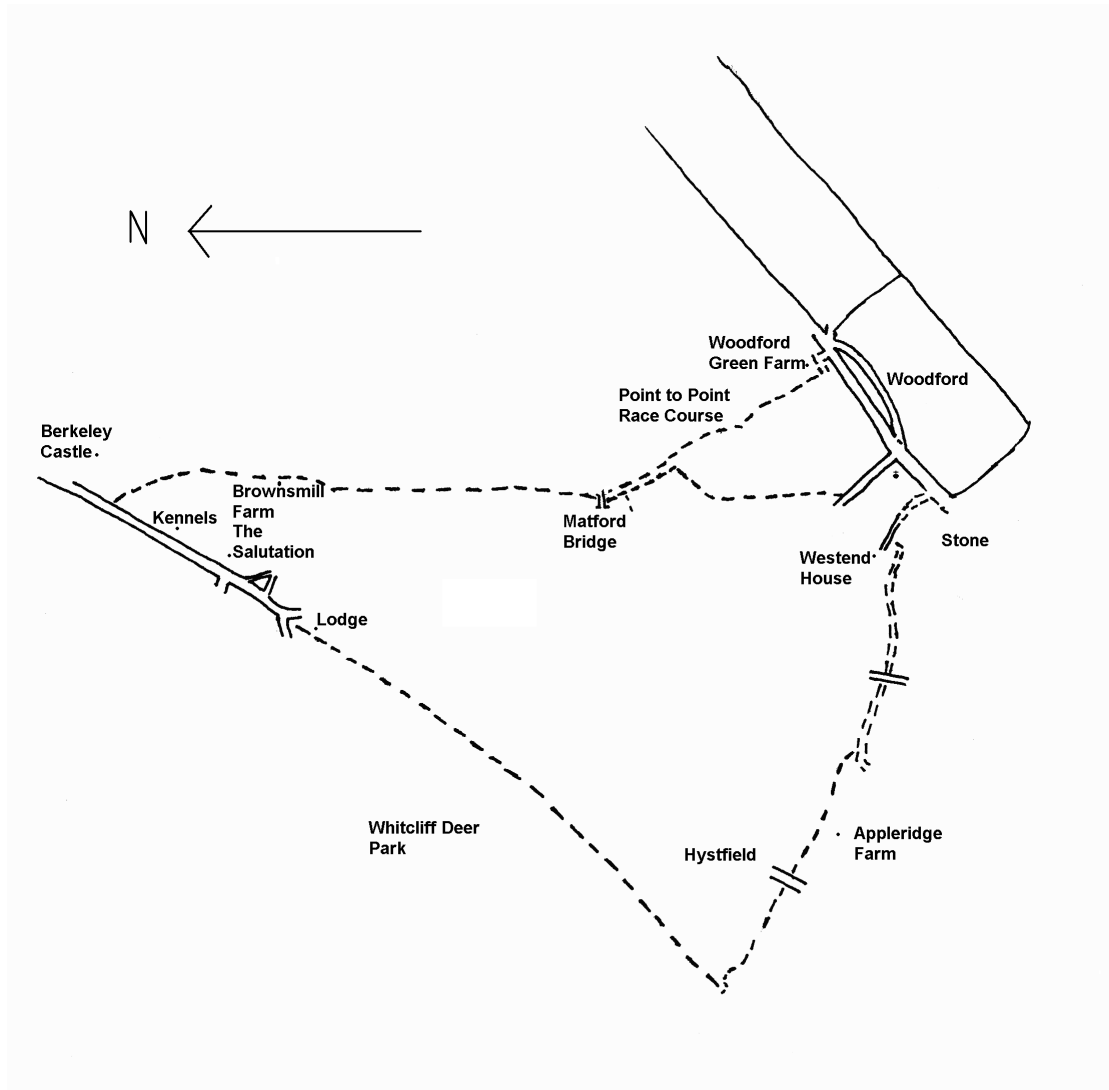


# 5B: THE BATTLE AXE

## OR ASURA-GATI - THE PATH OF CONFLICT FOR THOSE REBORN IN THE ASURA WORLD

From the Salutation at Ham



***An early medieval battle axe is an appropriate symbol of the Asura world, which can be recognised by the presence of cattle, a charming forest and circles of fire revolving in opposite directions. Cattle in the widest sense are represented here by cows, bullocks, horses and deer; Whitcliff Deer Park is a charming forest in the most literal sense; and the two circles of fire hover nearby in the form of the twin nuclear power stations at Berkeley and Oldbury on the banks of the Severn.***

***The Asuras are defined by the noble virtues of honour and martial prowess and the corresponding vices of envy and violence, all of which lead to the characteristic activities of quarrelling and warfare. To the Tibetans, the Asuras lived in the north, a view shared by the Muslim geographer al-Dimishqi, who defined the sixth clime as the most extreme in cold, dryness and distance from the sun, together with a preponderance of dampness too. Among the peoples, whose character was determined by this climate were the Franks (as in France), who were white and like wild beasts, concerned with nothing but wars, fighting and hunting.***

***Two stories, which have come down to us because they affected the Roman Catholic Church, give a flavour of life in an early European version of Asura society.***

***The first, concerning the young Clovis, King of the Franks (481-481 AD), was recorded in the History***

**of the Franks by Bishop Gregory of Tours (circa 539-594 AD). Clovis' army, which 'still held fast to... pagan idolatries' had plundered many churches of their treasure, including 'an ewer of great size and wondrous workmanship', which the bishop of the church in question asked to be returned. Clovis was inclined to demonstrate his generosity (an Asura virtue) to the bishop, but the main purpose of war was to obtain treasure so that the war leader might demonstrate generosity to his henchmen. So, before Clovis could display his generosity, a division of the spoils had to take place at Soissons. Clovis asked that he might have the ewer in addition to his share, so that he could give it to the bishop. Most of Clovis' vassals were inclined to humour him: "Everything in front of us is yours noble king. Do exactly as you wish, for there is none among us who has the power to say you nay." But one man had a more independent cast of mind and an envious disposition. He struck the ewer with his battle axe saying, "You shall have none of this booty except your fair share." Clovis was not yet strong enough to deal with this insult, but was able to recover the damaged ewer and give it to the bishop. Later, when his authority was fully established, he inspected his troops and found fault with the equipment of the man who had struck the ewer. "Your javelin is in shocking condition and so are your sword and your axe!" he exclaimed, throwing the man's axe on the floor. When he bent to pick it up, the young king raised his own battle axe and split the man's skull with it. "That is what you did with my ewer in Soissons," he shouted. Clovis then dismissed his troops, who never forgot the lesson.**

**The second story concerns Ælfheah, or Alphege, Archbishop of Canterbury, who fell into the hands of the Danish army in 1012 AD during the reign of Æthelred the Unready. Ælfheah refused to let himself be ransomed so the raiding-army took against him. The men were also said to be drunk because they had a supply of wine. They pelted him with the bones and horned heads of oxen until he sank to the ground and one man then hit him over the head with the blunt, iron head of an axe. The man who was responsible for this act of impious compassion was called Thrum according to the chronicle of Florence, quoted by Michael Swanton In the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles.**

**St Alphege is not as well known as he once was, but Thomas Becket praised him in his last sermon before he was murdered in his turn by Henry II's knights. The earlier saint was a local boy, born at Weston – now a suburb of Bath,. He was at first a monk at Deerhurst – a few miles north of Gloucester and then abbot of Bath, before becoming bishop of Winchester and then archbishop of Canterbury. He was 'nobly born' as his subsequent career suggests and was politically active. Perhaps his most significant achievement was his part in the conversion of the Viking raider, Olaf Tryggvason, later King of Norway to Christianity. Olaf kept his oath not to raid England again, probably because he had amassed so much treasure by then that he did not have to!**

**Another local "boy" was Sir William de Tracy who held land at Toddington a dozen miles east of Deerhurst. He was one of the four knights who murdered Thomas a Becket. The murderers used swords (another symbol of the Asura World) rather than axes, but the blows struck by William de Tracy had a similar effect, spilling blood and brains on the floor of the Cathedral.**

**What these examples have in common is an attack on the head, making the axe the symbol of the anti-intellectual nature of the Asura World.**

**Christening an Asura has relatively little effect. Thrum, who killed Ælfheah, had been confirmed by him in the Christian faith the previous day. Putting a suffering animal out of its misery counts as a noble virtue in the realm of the Asuras.**

## **FROM HAM TO STONE**

**The route begins at "the Salutation", which is a formal greeting – essential in a realm where all men go armed – a guarantee on good manners!<sup>1</sup>**

From the pub turn right towards Berkeley.

Pass on the right the Berkeley estate office, which manages nearly all the land covered by this route on behalf of the noble family in the castle, and then the kennels of the Berkeley foxhounds.

Cross the bridge over the Little Avon river and look for a stile beside a gate on your right, which leads into a field between the river and Berkeley Castle, known as the Meadow.

**The castle is in an excellent state of repair due to a timely surrender to the Parliamentarians by the Royalist defenders during the English Civil War, which ensured the most minimal slighting of the**

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<sup>1</sup> Although the Salutation on inn signs usually refers to the Salutation of the archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary – ie Hail Mary or Ave Maria – an attempt no doubt to Christianise the consumption of alcohol!

**curtain wall. Berkeley Castle is infamously the site where the deposed king, Edward II was murdered in 1327, in a manner considered appropriate by his honourable murderers, who objected to his ignoble homosexuality. There is no contemporary evidence for this crime, but according to Wikipedia it was reported thus by Thomas More in a History of England:**

*On the night of October 11 while lying in on a bed [the king] was suddenly seized and, while a great mattress... weighed him down and suffocated him, a plumber's iron, heated intensely hot, was introduced through a tube into his secret private parts so that it burned the inner portions beyond the intestines.*

**Thomas More was not only Lord Chancellor of England under Henry VIII, but he was also a martyred saint like St Thomas Becket and St Alphege, so it must be true! The alleged tube is sometimes described as a cow horn, which would be an appropriate instrument in an Asura world, dominated by cattle.**

The Meadow is sometimes used for re-enactments and other shows, which may impede your right to cross the field to the far right corner, where there is a gate close to the bank of the Little Avon.

Continue along the bank until you come to a bridge carrying a track from Brownsmill Farm. There is a small and tempting gate on the side of the river, but that is not where the footpath goes. You need to bear left away from the river, keeping a fence on your right.

The footpath goes through the second field on the right through a stile beside the gate straight ahead.

**There are usually hunt-horses in this field, which can be intimidating to some people, but not, I am sure, to someone who really belongs in the Asura world.**

Your target is a gate on the riverbank at the far end of the field.

Follow the riverbank until you reach Matford Bridge, which is the next bridge over the Little Avon. The footpath goes along the actual bank, but there is a line of gates below the bank, which are often left open. The going there is sometimes easier, but you should be aware that the Berkeley Hunt Point to Point Races take place in these fields on the last Saturday in April, so watch out for horses, furiously ridden, on that day!

At Matford Bridge you have a route choice. You can either continue straight ahead across the point to point course to Woodford; or, if you are in a running race and need to avoid crossing the A38, or the point to point is on, cross the bridge.

## **FOOT-RACE ROUTE**

From Matford Bridge, turn left alongside the Little Avon and cross two field boundaries.

Turn right at a footpath sign and cross the field up the hill to a gate into the next field.

Go diagonally left to a gateway above a steep, little wood.

Go straight ahead to a gate onto the road in the opposite corner of the field.

Turn left and follow the road to the A38.

Turn right and follow the pavement to the gate into All Saints Churchyard.

## **THE POINT-TO-POINT RACE ROUTE**

Follow the riverbank alongside the point-to-point course until the river swings off to the right.

Go straight ahead along a cart track, which leads up the hill where the spectators watch the racing.

Keep straight on to the farm buildings and follow the track to the A38.

Cross over to Damery Lane, and turn right along the old course of the A38 until you pick up the footpath over the Little Avon.

Cross over road to the entrance into the churchyard.

**As we saw earlier, the Asuras have little time for religion. They certainly wont let it interfere with murder or anything else that appeals to them. But they are superstitious, and like to support the church, because it helps to keep the peasants in order, provided it does not cost too much. Patronage of the church is also good way to exercise power.**

***Stone is a curious name for a place. It was originally "The Stone" or "La Stane". The Stone was presumably a stone that attracted superstitious awe because it had pagan connotations. The church will have been placed here to counteract its influence.***

## **FROM STONE TO THE DEER PARK**

Follow the path past the church onto the village green and turn right.

Follow the road straight on toward Westend House, but turn left into a bridle path.

Follow the bridle path for about 600m to road.

Cross over and continue for another 300m along a further section of the bridle path, which has always been waterlogged when I have used it, although these things are of little concern to an Asura!

Turn right over a stile, just before the bridle path bends to the left.

Turn left in the field and go straight ahead to a stile in a hedge.

Continue straight ahead over more field boundaries past Appleridge Farm to emerge on a lane at Hystfield.

Go straight ahead to a stile beside a gate and follow the left hand hedge up the hill.

The route from the next stile is a bit hard to find. Go a little bit right of straight ahead, which takes you through the brambles to the wall of the deer park.

Follow the path around to the left and then to the right alongside the wall to emerge over a stile by a ladder stile over the wall near to a lodge house.

Climb the ladder into the Deer Park.

## **THROUGH THE DEER PARK TO HAM**

***The Deer Park is the epitome of the Asura world. The deer and the little woods that were planted for their shelter were enclosed by a wall to protect them from the general population, and to preserve the deer so that they could be hunted for the lord's pleasure and for his table. Envious? Then you are a true Asura!***

From the ladder stile, follow the track along the top of the ridge.

At the end of the ridge, descend to the left of the lodge to another ladder stile.

Continue diagonally right across the field to a gate onto the road.

Turn left and follow the road back to the pub.