



Photo R. H. Worth.

GUIDE-STONE, BETWEEN TAVISTOCK AND ASHBURTON, 466
YARDS NORTH-WEST OF YELLOWMEAD FARM, WALKHAMPTON.

ON SOME GUIDE-STONES STANDING ON THE
COURSE OF THE OLD TRACK FROM
TAVISTOCK TO ASHBURTON.

BY DR. DAVID C. PROWSE AND R. HANSFORD WORTH.

FOREWORD.

IN 1911, or perhaps earlier, my father, the late Col. A. B. Prowse, noted on the slopes of North Hessary Tor a standing stone, not marked on the 6-inch Ordnance Survey of 1904. This is the stone which is now the easternmost of those known to exist on this tor. He also found another post of this series (all of which are inscribed "T" on the one side, and "A" on the other side) acting as a gate-post in the Swincombe Farm enclosures.

In August, 1913, my father, my brother, Dr. A. S. Prowse, and myself were associated in the discovery of four more such stones on the slopes of North Hessary Tor.

In October, 1925, I noticed a gate-post in the Yellowmead enclosures, near Foggintor Quarries, which bore the letters "T-A," and the farmer, Mr. Edward Cole, told my wife and myself that there was another nearer the farm-house. This my wife, Dr. Dorothy E. Prowse, located. Yellowmead Farm was enclosed by Mr. George Cole the father of our informant.

In October, 1925, I found a second stone in the enclosures of Swincombe Farm, also serving as a gate-post.

In August, 1924, the late Mr. George French, of Post-bridge, told my father that he remembered a stone with T and A on opposite sides being found when the old farm-house at Tor Royal was taken down; it had been serving as a lintel.—D.C.P.

Mrs. Eckett Fielden, having been informed by Mr. Samuel Pearse that one of these guide-stones had been taken, many years ago, for use as a gate-post at Lowery Farm, near Dousland, kindly passed the information to me. Mr. Pearse has since kindly answered my enquiries as to this matter. In this manner the information which we now use has come to our hands.—R.H.W.

Prior to 1911 six guide-stones were known, marking out a way from near the east end of the Merrivale stone-rows to a

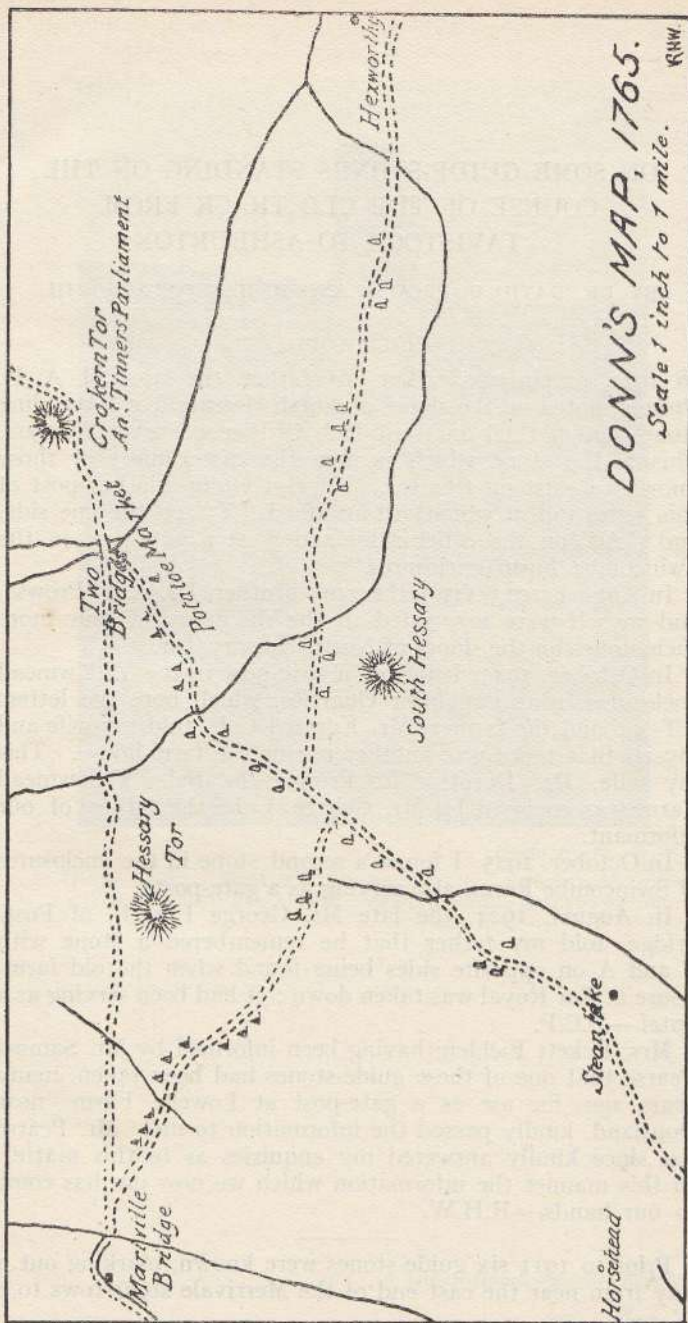


FIG. 1.

point approximately 1,600 feet south-east from Yellowmead Farm. These stones stand some five to seven feet in height, and are, for the more part, some fifteen inches by ten inches at the base. All these six are shown on the Ordnance Survey.

A characteristic common to all the stones is an incised letter "T" on the side towards Tavistock, and a letter "A" on the side towards Ashburton. It is certain that they marked a track. As to their date, they can hardly have been erected since the present main roads across Dartmoor have existed. All the stones, both those formerly known and those discovered in 1924 and since, have been split from parent blocks, and the splitting has been accomplished in the old style by means of slots, and not by the present method of drilled holes.

The method of splitting dates the stones as not later than 1820, probably not later than 1810; at some time between these dates the stonemasons' methods changed.

Reference to Donne's map of Devon, published in 1765, carries us back another 50 years. On that map there is shewn a track starting a little to the east of Merrivale Bridge, and passing along the line still marked out by the stones; extending beyond that line to cross the present Plymouth-Princetown road some distance north of Devil's Bridge, thence passing to the north of South Hessary Tor, crossing the Swincombe, passing to the north of Fox Tor Mire, and so by Hexworthy and Cumsdon Rock to Holne and Ashburton.

For its whole length as far as Hexworthy this track is shown as marked out by guide-stones; and these are more especially formally indicated at the end near Merrivale. From this map it appears that the road from Dousland past Stanlake to the site which Princetown now occupies was also provided with guide-stones, as also its extension to Two-Bridges. Fig. 1 is a reproduction of a part of Donne's map.

It is evident that, prior to 1765, the principal tracks in this neighbourhood, including both the Tavistock-Ashburton and the Plymouth-Ashburton ways, had been marked with guide-stones.

When this marking was done we cannot determine, but it would appear probable that it was in 1699-1700. In that year the Receiver's Book of the Plymouth Corporation contains the following entry:—"Item paid towards defraying the charges of putting vpp Moorestones on Dartmoor in the way leading from Plymouth towards Exon for guidance of Travellers passing that way the sume of £2-0-0."

As we have said, six of the guide-stones have been known as still in being. We now fill an apparent gap by identifying the two stones used in as gate-posts at Yellowmead; and

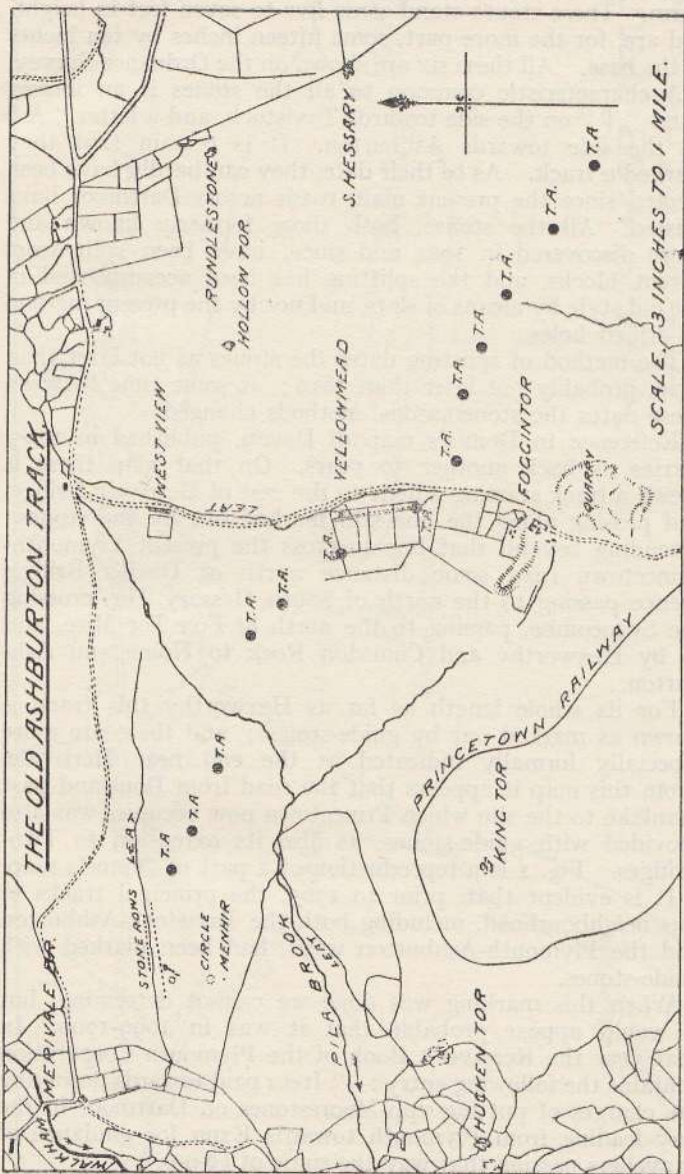


FIG. 2.

we add five other stones, carrying the line about one thousand yards E.S.E. from its former apparent terminus.

Of these five stones all but the easternmost have fallen. That stands 5ft. 6ins. above ground, and measures 15ins. by 11ins. at the base. The plan inserted (Fig. 2) gives the positions of all that can certainly be identified. There is one fallen stone about 200 yards eastward of the last shown, which is in doubt, but excavation will determine the question as to whether it is a member of the series.

The stone which was removed to Lowery can still be seen functioning as a gate-post hard by Lowery Crossing; it stands immediately inside the north hedge of the road, and fifty yards east from the Crossing-keeper's cottage.

Mr. Samuel Pearse, of Broomhill, Harford, tells us that this stone was, he understands, brought back to Lowery by his great-uncle, on his return with an empty cart from Princetown, where he had been delivering farm-produce to the Prison, then occupied by French and American prisoners of war. As Mr. Pearse believes, it was taken from some point between the end of the range of stones as we have now planned it, and the present site of the Princetown Railway.

We think it probable that here and there yet remain some of these guide-stones which are as yet unknown to us; some, perhaps fallen and thus hidden, others pressed into service as gate-posts, or otherwise used on farms and in buildings.

The idea of such posts was an elaboration of the earlier use of crosses as marking tracks. This very track from Merrivale would lead, not only to the way north of Fox Tor Mire, but also to another route south of the Mire. A route which starts at that Clapham Junction of our moorland tracks—Siwards or Nuns Cross—and is marked out by a cross on the southern verge of the mire, within the present newtake, by Child's Tomb, another cross at Mount Misery in the angle of the abandoned Fox Tor Farm, crosses on Ter Hill, and Down Ridge, and Horns Cross on Holne Moor, and so on to Holne. The guide-stones were, however, set at much closer intervals than the crosses, on the average, perhaps, at every two hundred yards.

We cannot be said to have been hurried in our publication of these facts, but it was the probable connection of Plymouth with the matter which led us to present a paper at a Plymouth meeting. The stones found acting as gate-posts at Swincombe, and the stone which was used as a lintel at Tor Royal, are the only known survivors of those which marked the eastern part of the track. If Donne's map is reliable in detail, there were far fewer stones to the mile at this part.

The idea of indicating direction by initial letters cut in

guide-stones is by no means confined to the series which we have described. On the road from Holne to Ashburton, at a junction near Gallantry Bower, there is a much more formally shapen stone with the letter "A" to indicate the direction to be followed for Ashburton; and, on the road from Moreton to North Bovey, at a crossing about half a mile north of North Bovey, an old cross has been similarly inscribed on its faces, and this serves as a guide-post. These are by no means exceptional.

Plate (XV) is a view of one of the guide-stones between Merrivale and Yellowmead, and Plate (XVI), is a view of the stone now used as a gate-post at Lowery.



Photo R. H. Worth.

GUIDE-STONE REMOVED FROM TRACK TO LOWERY FARM.