

NOTES ON THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF WHITE TOR, WEST DARTMOOR.

BY ARTHUR B. PROWSE, M.D. LOND., F.R.C.S. ENG.

(Read at Tavistock, July, 1889.)

ON the New Ordnance Survey Map of Dartmoor (scale, six inches to one mile) are marked many barrows, kistvaens, hut circles, and other records of long bygone generations, which had not previously been mapped or otherwise described. The area of the Moor is, however, so large that it would be strange if the surveyors had not missed many specimens of human handiwork, and of such interesting productions of Nature's "wear and tear" as logan stones and rock basins. In regard to these last, I would remark that, as a result of the examination of a great number of specimens, as well as a due consideration of evidence brought forward in support of very diverse opinions, I cannot agree with those writers who insist that man has had nothing whatever to do with the fashioning of any of these curious hollows. What was perhaps in most cases commenced by a natural disintegration, was in many instances, I am convinced, modified by human art. But as centuries have since rolled by, Nature's power has again become evident in the rounding off of man's more sharply-cut work.

During a short holiday last summer, spent in the neighbourhood of Marytavy, I made a few observations, which led to the writing of the following brief notes.

White Tor is about two and a half miles east of Marytavy. The highest point—a rocky pile on the northern side of its summit—rises to 1532 feet above sea-level. The summit is encircled by a double row of roughly-piled stones, and must have been a strong and important aboriginal fortification.

One-fifth of a mile east by north of the tor, and about eighty yards south of a straight line between it and the highest part of Cock's Hill, is a kistvaen, of which I can find no published record. Its long diameter is north-west by north, and south-east by south. The northern, eastern, and southern stone slabs are erect, and in close apposition; the western has been removed. The massive cover-stone measures 4 ft. 9 in. along its eastern side, and 3 ft. 9 in. along its western side; its width is 3 ft. 6 in. The upper surface is pyramidal in shape, so that the stone at its thickest part measures 1 ft. 10 in. It has been displaced laterally, and now rests against the eastern erect slab in an inclined position, with its lower edge imbedded a few inches in the turf. The cavity of the kistvaen is 2 ft. wide, and 1 ft. 10 in. deep. At the level of the ground the length is 3 ft. 9 in.; but as the end stones lean inwards, the length at the top is 6 in. less. The ground around is nearly level for a long distance, rising slowly in the direction of White Tor, and is in many places covered thickly with those curious rounded mounds, like big ant-hills, so common on the soil covering the greenstone in the neighbourhood of the granite, and which, as far as my experience goes, are not seen where granite is the substratum. For some distance around there are hardly any loose masses of rock to be seen; and it was this fact which first drew my attention, while afar off, to the collection of stones forming the kistvaen, and led me to examine it more closely. There is not much evidence of its having been imbedded in an earthen tumulus; but on the northern side is a small heap of earth and small stones, probably artificial. The turf which forms its floor is on a rather lower level than the surrounding grassy surface, and anything of a sepulchral nature the cavity may have held must have been long since removed.

One mile and a quarter south of White Tor is Rolls (or Roos) Tor, 1510 feet high. The uppermost stone of the south-eastern pile on its summit logs very readily to the pressure of the hand or foot, the extent of vertical movement at the margin being one inch. The stone is irregularly oval in shape, 12 ft. long by 9 ft. wide, and in the centre is about 3 ft. thick; its circumference is 30 ft. On the surface of the supporting rock are two rock-basins. This logan is not indicated upon the New Ordnance Map, nor have I met with any reference to it elsewhere.

Nearly a mile north-north-east of the top of White Tor is the farm of Wapsworth. Passing from it in a south-east

direction for about one-third of a mile up the gradually-rising ground, which is thickly strewn with masses of stone, is a broad trackway, varying in width from 9 ft. to 13 ft., carefully cleared of obstructive rocks, and in many places roughly paved with flattish stones. It certainly is not an ordinary cart-track of modern origin, and appears to me to partake of the characters of the *ancient* trackways which are met with in other parts of the Moor. It ceases to be traceable at a point about half a mile due north of the summit of the tor, but, from its direction there, appears to have passed up the hillside in an east-south-east direction, obliquely across several large "new takes," which extend up the western slope of Cock's Hill. Near the upper boundary of these "new takes," about two-thirds of a mile east by north of White Tor, we meet with a cart-track, which on the Ordnance Map seems to be a direct continuation of the "Lich Way" which comes westward from the neighbourhood of Postbridge, past Devil's Tor and Conies Down, crossing the upper waters of the West Dart, Cowsic, and Walkham. It seems to me probable that this Wapworthy trackway was the direct continuation of the track marked as the "Lich Way," which almost certainly followed the course of one of the ancient trackways leading to the inner recesses of the Moor. The entrenchment on the summit of White Tor would then be an important stronghold, by reason of its commanding this entrance to the Moor from the Lydford side, and affording protection to the Keltic inhabitants in their moorland homes. The remains of one of their settlements, consisting of about twenty-five hut circles, may be seen on the north bank of the Walkham, one mile east-south-east of the tor. Two miles eastwards was another smaller village below Conies Down Tor, on the banks of the Cowsic, and quite close to the trackway, or Lich-path. The fortified hill must have borne a Keltic name in those days, the present title (White Tor) being evidently of much more recent date.

Now I believe we have this Keltic name preserved to us in the Perambulation of 1240, where the forest boundary is described as passing from "Mystor" (or "Mistmore") to "*Mewyburghe*." This word is apparently derived from the Keltic "*mwy bur*," meaning the *greater entrenchment* or camp—greater probably by comparison with some less important enclosure not far distant. In the Perambulation of 1609 we find the word spelt "*Meuborough*," but strangely enough the perambulators conclude that it refers to a site

they call "Dedlakehead;" *i.e.* the ground around the springs of some little feeder of the Walkham river. This guess of theirs does not commend itself to me.

Doubtless even in those days the venville tenants were as jealous of their rights, or what they considered to be their rights, as they have shown themselves in more recent times; doubtless also the Duchy authorities were not so strict as they have since become. So that when the Perambulation was ordered by King James, and it was found that many of the ancient bounds could not be certainly recognised, because the older names had become locally obsolete, the jurors (or perambulators), alluding to this fact, say "that the bounds of the florest of Dartmoore, as they, the said jurors, do fynde, partlie by the coppies of auncient recordes, p^{tho} upon the evidence of other p^{sons}, and partlie upon their owne knowledge, but *especiallie as the boundes have beene and are used and accustomed, to be these as follows,*" &c., and they then proceed to trace them as well as they can. I have no doubt whatever that interested persons were only too ready in any case of doubt to assign, as bounds of the forest, localities further from their own holdings than the original bounds were.

The same tendency to contraction of the forest boundary seems to have been at work in more recent years. In proof of this, it is only necessary to compare the bounds, as set forth in the 1609 document, with the limits now marked upon the New Ordnance Maps.

The next bound, north of Mewyburghe, in the earlier records is termed "*Lullingesfote*,"¹ or "Hullingssete," or "Lullingesete;" but the 1609 jurors, oblivious of the fact that "*fote*" (*i.e.* foot) could hardly refer to a relatively high situation, concluded that it was the hill known to them as Luntesorowe, now called Lints Tor. The termination "*fote*" occurs several times in the Perambulation, describing the place at which a brook ends in a larger stream. Thus the next forest bound, in a northerly direction, is called "*Rakernesbrokysfote*;" *i.e.* the *foot* or ending of the *brook* of the *long ridge*, for I believe the first half of the word is derived from the Keltic "*rhych*" (or "*rhac*") = ridge, and "*hir*" = long. The *long ridge* being, of course, Amicombe Hill, by the side of which the Rattlebrook, as it is now called, courses for about three miles. This huge ridge is in relation on all sides with a number of deep coombes or valleys; and to this fact I am inclined to assign the

¹ See *Rowe*, p. 266.

origin of its name—Amicombe = *Aml cwm*; i.e. the hill of *many valleys*.

From a careful consideration of the 1240 Perambulation, and of the locality, I conclude that the forest boundary passed from Great Mistor for one and half miles north-west to White Tor; then in a north-north-east direction past Baggator at the foot of South Lints Tor, and so on over the east side of Stanon Hill to where the Rattlebrook joins the Tavy. If this were so, a considerably greater area must have been included in the west quarter of the royal forest at the middle of the thirteenth century than is commonly believed.