TWO STONE CIRCLES ON DARTMOOR, SWINCOMBE VALLEY, AND WEST DART VALLEY, WITH A NOTE ON THE "GREY WETHERS".

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(Read at Honiton, 22nd June, 1939.)

A STONE CIRCLE, in Western Archaeology, is to be distinguished from the Hut Circle, which is the foundation of a dwelling, and the Retaining Circle, which is an adjunct of the grave, associated with the cairn or barrow, or the wreck of a cairn or barrow.

The purpose of the Hut Circle is fully understood, and the associations of the Retaining Circle are known, but not its ritual intent, if any. The Stone Circle, according to our terminology, is larger than either the Hut or any but a few of the Retaining Circles, unfitted by structure for use as a habitation, unassociated, as far as can be ascertained, with graves. There is some evidence that large fires were lit within the Stone Circles, but no evidence as to the purpose of those fires. To avoid all suggestion of knowledge which is not ours, we have taken the trivial name " Stone Circle ", and applied it as a specific name to those circles of stone which are neither huts, retaining circles, nor pounds.

Characteristic examples are SCORHILL, BUTTERN HILL and BRISWORTHY Circles, all of which have been illustrated and described in our *Transactions* (Vol. lxiv, p. 279 ; Vol. lxiv, p. 282 ; and Vol. xxxv, p. 99, respectively.)

In the present paper the remains of two Stone Circles are described ; both lie near the valley of the SWINCOMBE, one within enclosed land above LITTLE SHERBERTON, on the crest of the hill, and the other on unenclosed land on DOWN RIDGE, south of the FOREST INN, HEXWORTHY, in the valley of the WEST DART.

SHERBERTON CIRCLE.

SHERBERTON CIRCLE occupies a commanding position on the crest of a ridge at an elevation of about 1,100 feet above mean sea level.

There are nine stones still erect and in place, one stone erect but probably slightly displaced, and two fallen stones.

The stones which are still erect and in place are distributed over about one half of the circumference, from somewhat west of north, around by the east to somewhat east of south. Taking all the stones into account about two thirds of the circumference are occupied.

The stones in place are small, two reach a height of 2 feet 3 inches, two are only 1 foot 4 inches in height ; the average of the largest dimensions on plan is approximately 2 feet.

It is obvious that there are many gaps in the circle ; and the needs of the builders of the closely adjoining stone-fences suffice to explain these. Indeed one stone-fence, of early date, cuts off a segment of the circle to the west, and beyond this fence the original circumference is unmarked by any remaining member of the circle. But at " A ", fig. 1, the largest stone still standing, which reaches 4 feet 10 inches in height, and is about 4 feet 6 inches in width, would appear to be a member of the circle which has been slightly displaced to accord with the alignment of the old stone-fence of which it now forms a part (see Plate A, fig. 2, for a view of this stone.)

The two fallen stones are 8 feet 8 inches and 7 feet 4 inches in length respectively.

The diameter of the true circle which most nearly accords to the internal circumference is 97 feet. There is no trace of any barrow or cairn, and it appears to be a wholly isolated monument.

This circle has long been known and is shewn on the first edition of the six inch Ordnance Survey, sheet cvii, S.W., Devon ; lon. $3°-55'-13\frac{1}{2}''$, lat. $50°-32'-31''$.

DOWN RIDGE CIRCLE.

Down Ridge Circle lies on a north slope at an elevation of about 1,225 feet above mean sea level. There are but four stones still erect and in place. There are three fallen stones on the circumference ; and there is one stone which is neither earth-fast nor fallen, but which rests against two of the erect members of the circle, this seems certainly the result of inter-ference in years long subsequent to erection. The whole group, erect and fallen, occupies but a quadrant. Here, as at Sherberton, there has been much loss by robbery, and here too the walls of the adjacent enclosures supply sufficient explanation of the theft.

The stones are relatively large, slab-like and not columnar (Plate B, fig. 5). The four erect stones stand respectively 3 feet 2 inches, 3 feet 9 inches, 3 feet 6 inches, and 5 feet 9 inches in height. The largest measures 9 feet 9 inches in width, 10 inches in thickness, and 5 feet 9 inches in height (Plate B, fig. 5.) On the plan, fig. 4, the stone which leans against its neighbours is marked " B ".

Fig. 1.

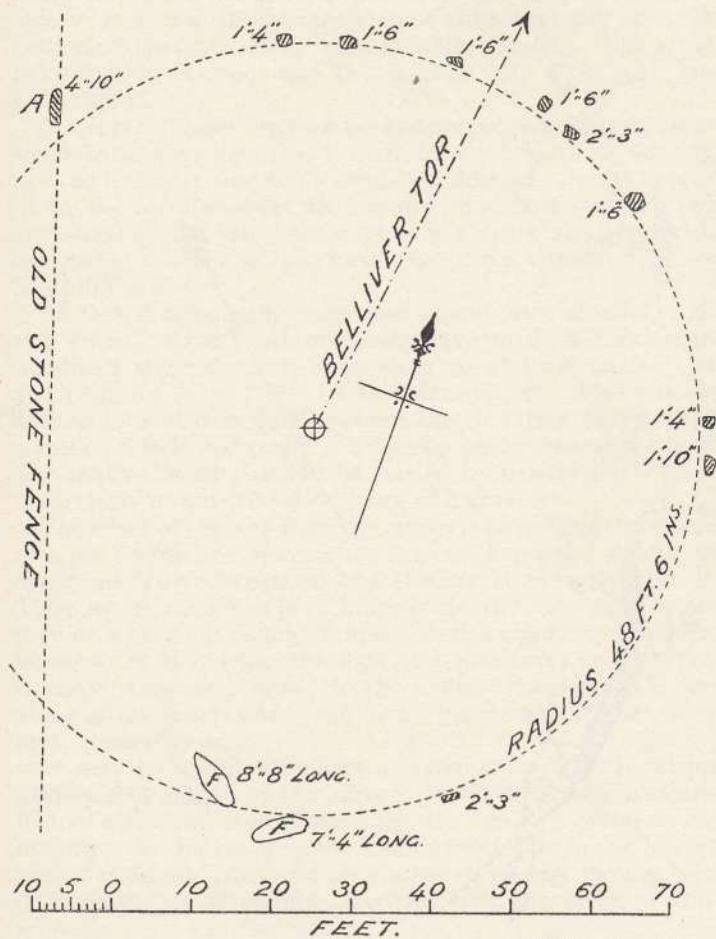DOWN RIDGE.

RADIUS 40′.7″

3″.2″

3″.9″

A

B   3′.6″

5′.9″

F.

F

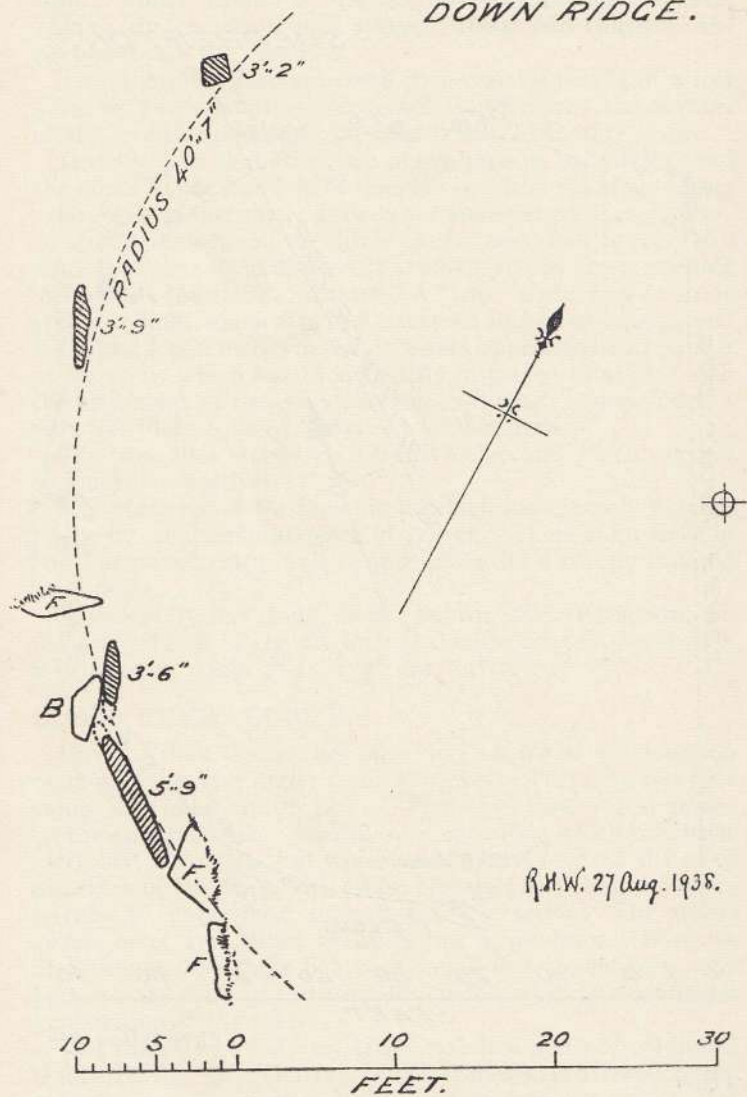R.H.W. 27 Aug. 1938.

10   5   0   10   20   30

FEET.

Fig. 4.

The diameter of the true circle which most nearly accords to the internal circumference is 81 feet 2 inches ; there is no trace of any barrow or cairn, and it appears to be a wholly isolated monument.

This circle was first noted by BURNARD, and is one of the many additions which he made to our knowledge of Dartmoor. It is not shewn on the first edition of the six inch Ordnance Survey, but appears in later editions. The sheet is cvii, S.W., Devon, and the location lon. 3°-53'-52", lat. 50°-31'-56½".

In general, Stone Circles have the component stones placed some little distance apart, each from each. The spacing may be irregular, and the irregularity does not always appear to be due to subsequent disturbance ; but it is unusual that any stone should touch its neighbour. There are two which come near contact, on the west part of the circumference of Scorhill Circle.

At DOWN RIDGE there are four stones, two standing and two fallen, which must originally have made a continuous length of circumference, amounting to at least 24 feet (at and near the letter " B " on the plan (fig. 4). This portion is so unlike what is usually found that it raises the question whether this is not really a retaining circle around a grave. The matter could possibly be settled by excavation ; there is certainly no superficial evidence of a grave.

The effect of robbery from the circles is to remove the stones of most useful size, leaving on the one hand the smaller as being unworthy of removal, and the largest as being difficult. Thus, where there has been much theft, the remaining stones may be a very misleading sample. In this connection it might be recorded that when the huts and enclosures on SHAPLEY COMMON were swept away to the roads, almost the sole survivor of the group was a hut-circle, the stones of which were most unusually large.

It may be useful to collect a statement of the diameters of the Stone Circles of Dartmoor. In the following list those figures which are starred have not the same precision as the majority, by reason in some instances of the circles having been " restored ", without any adequate survey having been first made. It is certain, however, that no error of consequence occurs in the list.

Grey Wethers, South Circle	.	.	.	.	116½	feet
	North Circle	.	.	.	.	103½	feet
Sherberton	.	.	.	.	.	.	96	feet
Scorhill	.	.	.	.	.	.	88	feet
Buttern Hill	.	.	.	.	.	.	81	feet
Down Ridge	.	.	.	.	.	.	81	feet

Brisworthy	.	.	.	.	.	.	79	feet
Cosdon	.	.	.	.	.	.	66*	feet
Whitemoor	.	.	.	.	.	.	66*	feet
Fernworthy	.	.	.	.	.	.	63	feet
Merrivale	.	.	.	.	.	.	62	feet
Longstone Moor	.	.	.	.	.	.	57*	feet

All the unstarred figures represent internal diameters.

The great number of retaining circles are much smaller than any Stone Circles, but the largest retaining circle, the outer member of the four-fold group on YELLOWMEAD, is larger than the smaller Stone Circles, being 65 feet in internal diameter.

THE GREY WETHERS.

When preparing the table just given, I found the following choice of figures for the diameters of the north and south circles of the Grey Wethers :—

Authority.			North Circle Feet.	South Circle Feet.
BURNARD	.	.	.	100	105
CHUDLEIGH	.	.	.	81 abt.	81 abt.
CROSSING	.	.	.	100	105 abt.
FALCON	.	.	.	100 abt.	over 100
MURRAY	.	.	.	120 abt.	120 abt.
ROWE	.	.	.	.	120 abt.	120 abt.

It is true that the statements were mostly qualified as being approximate, and that CHUDLEIGH's " 27 yards " may have been a misprint for " 37 yards ", although it occurs in both editions of his book ; none the less there was no authentic figure to be derived from the collection.

Personally I was hampered by the fact that I had made no survey of these circles before their "restoration ", but, happily, the Rev. W. C. LUKIS, F.S.A., had, in 1879, made such a survey, and the Society of Antiquaries of London has very kindly supplied me with a copy, with permission for its use. It is only by complete survey that the diameters of these circles can be accurately determined. I have checked LUKIS's plotting, and find that the true circles which most nearly accord to the circumferences have the following diameters—for the North Circle $103\frac{1}{2}$ feet, and for the South Circle $116\frac{1}{2}$ feet. The distance between the centres of the circles is 130 feet, less a few inches.

In 1879 the North Circle consisted of nine standing, and six fallen stones, and three holes were traceable, from which stones had been removed. BURNARD, in 1891, gives nine standing, seven fallen, and one almost wholly buried.

GREY
WETHERS

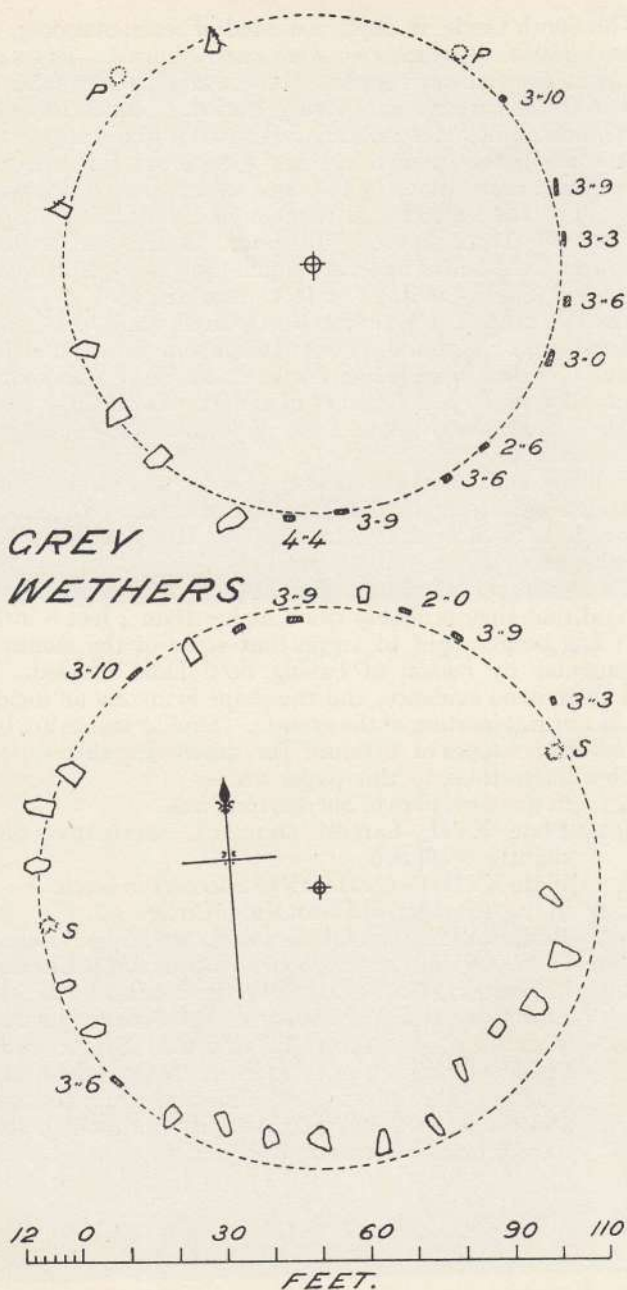12 0   30   60   90   110
FEET.

Fig. 7.

The South Circle, in 1879, consisted of seven standing, and twenty fallen, of which two were nearly buried. BURNARD, in 1891, gives seven standing stones, and twenty fallen, of which three were almost wholly buried. Stones have certainly been removed from both circles, but it would appear that in the north the original spacing was eleven feet centre to centre, and approximately the same in the south ; this would give 29 as the full original number in the north, and 33 in the south. If these were the numbers the precise mean distances from centre to centre would have been, North Circle 11.17 feet, South Circle, 11.06 feet, respectively.

The tallest erect stone in the North Circle was 4 feet 4 inches in length above ground, 2 feet 9 inches in width, and from 1 foot to 1 foot 6 inches in thickness at base ; the shortest erect stone was 2 feet 6 inches in height. Both these stones, as they show above ground are approximately rectangular, with level tops.

In the South Circle the tallest erect stone was 3 feet 10 inches in height and 2 feet 7 inches by 1 foot at the base ; the shortest stone stood no more than 2 feet in 1879, BURNARD says 2 feet 7 inches in 1891, which is possible.

There were no fallen stones in either circle of which it could be said that they probably stood higher than 4 feet 8 inches.

It has been sought to argue that some of the stones are rectangular by reason of having been hand dressed. For this there is no evidence, and the shape is merely an incident of the natural jointing of the granite. Similar stones are to be found on the slopes of Sittaford Tor, among the clitter.

The illustrations to this paper are :—

Fig. 1, in the text, Plan of Sherberton Circle.
Fig. 2, Plate XVII, Largest stone of Sherberton Circle, slightly realigned.
Fig. 3, Plate XVII, General view of Sherberton Circle.
Fig. 4, in the text, Plan of Down Ridge Circle.
Fig. 5, Plate XVIII, General View of Down Ridge Circle.
Fig. 6, Plate XVIII, Largest stone of Down Ridge Circle.
Fig. 7, in the text, Plan of Grey Wethers, after a survey by LUKIS, by kind permission of the SOCIETY OF ANTI- QUARIES OF LONDON. In this plan figures entered beside standing stones indicate their height above ground ; the letter " S " indicates sunken stones ; and the letter " P " indicates pits from which stones have probably been removed.
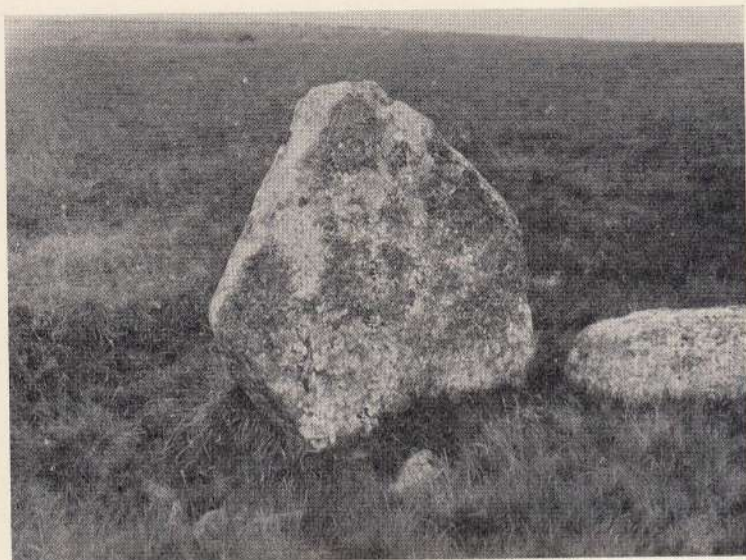
PLATE XVII.

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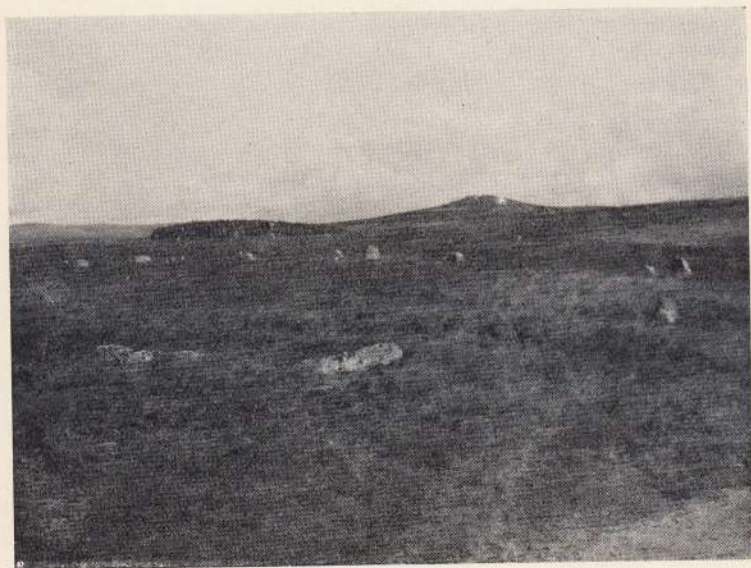Fig. 2. Largest Stone in Sherberton Circle.

R. H. Worth.

Fig. 3. General View, Sherberton Circle.

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