

A HUT CLUSTER ON DARTMOOR.

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ALL who have paid even the most casual attention to the antiquities of Dartmoor must be more or less familiar with the rings of stones which mark the foundations of early habitations, and which are familiarly known as "hut-circles." The superstructures raised on these foundations were no doubt either formed of turf or rough wattle, and have perished. Another class of building, less common, but still to be found in different parts of the Moor, is the "beehive" hut, in which the superstructure is formed of stones piled on each other in gradually narrowing circles, until they shape the rude dome from which this type of structure takes its name. Buildings of this kind occur not only in Devon, but in Cornwall, in Scotland, and other parts of the British Isles; and in all probability they were far more common on Dartmoor than has been thought. There are frequent instances of hut-circles, with so large a quantity of stones inside them as to suggest at once that these must be the remains of a ruined dome. And perhaps after all the wonder is not that so few are intact as that any remain.

"Hut-circles" and "beehives" have been considered to exhaust the relics of ancient habitation on the Moor; and no trace has hitherto been recorded of such hut-clusters as are found in Cornwall, and of which the choicest example is at Chysoister, near Penzance, where several chambers are combined in one heaped edifice. For my own part I had long searched for such in vain, until one day, in 1888, I examined a large heap of stones in the valley below Shell Top towards Lee Moor, and found that I had accidentally lit upon what I had unavailingly sought—my immediate object then being

geological. At the time I was under the impression that this antiquity had never been noticed, but I have since found it mentioned by Mr. Spence Bate as a chambered cairn, which it certainly is not. Since then it has been carefully surveyed and photographed by my son, Mr. Hansford Worth, C.E., and the details of this presumably unique structure can therefore be accurately set forth.

Externally it is an oval pile of small stones—none larger than a man can easily lift, some eighty feet by sixty—the highest point between six and seven feet above the surface of the ground—and containing at the least seven or eight hundred cartloads of material. The construction was, therefore, a work of time and labour. There is no evidence that on the outside there was any mural character, or that it ever looked much other than a mere stone heap, save at the entrance. Internally a series of chambers were formed by dry walling, portions of which remain intact to the height of five and a half feet. The builders seem to have piled up these walls, and then filled in the spaces between with loose stones. There is no trace of the manner in which the structure was roofed, but brushwood, or wattle, or perhaps rods and turves, are indicated by the analogy of the hut-circles. Were we dealing with a chambered cairn, as Mr. Spence Bate suggested, we must have found remains of a more definite and enduring covering—in the shape of larger stones. And these would have had to be of great size, and of greater weight than the rude walls could support, seeing that the larger chambers exceeded ten feet in diameter. Of the chambers there are five more or less intact, with traces of two others; and a ruinous area which would afford room for at least three more.

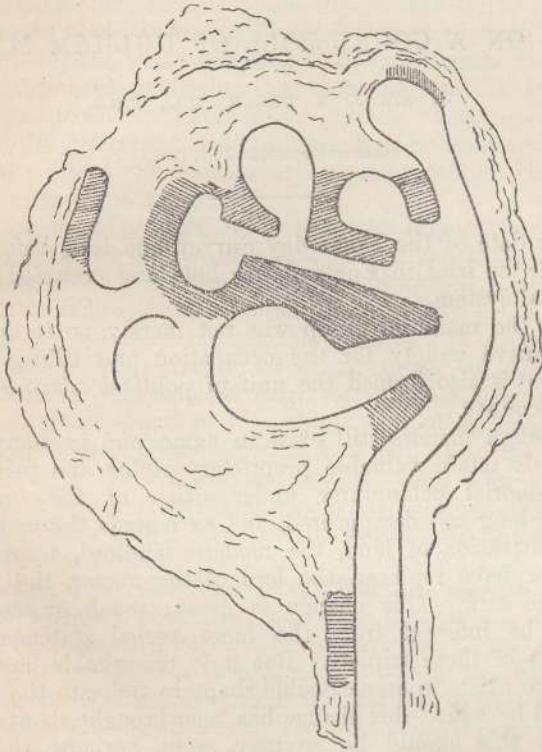
The annexed drawing will give a better idea of the place than any mere description, the scale being twenty feet to an inch.

The entrance was by a passage apparently about five feet wide, opening in a kind of horn projecting lengthwise on the south-east of the longer diameter. As at present traceable this passage continued in a straight line some five and twenty feet, and then took a curve to the right, finally enlarging into a small rounded chamber at a distance of seventy feet from the entrance, and about ten feet from the further side of the heap.

From the curved part of this passage four chambers open, all to the left—the first in order being at once the largest and the least perfect. It is narrower at the entrance than within, extending into an oval apparently twelve feet in diameter;

while its entire length from the entrance, which is four feet wide to the back wall, is about five and twenty.

Beyond this a passage, about three feet in width, and one side of which was continuous for over twenty feet, goes off at an angle from the main avenue. This leads to two smaller chambers, that on the left hand being the most perfect of the series. It is an irregular oval, about ten feet by eight feet; and its less perfect companion was rather smaller. The



fourth chamber is smaller still, and opens from the main passage where it is enlarged by the forking of the secondary one.

There is no trace of the way in which access was obtained to the other chambers indicated, but it was certainly not through those described; and the probability is that there was another side passage to the left, not far within the entrance. The pile here, however, is too ruinous to allow of this point being definitely solved.