

## THE DISAPPEARING STONE MONUMENTS OF DARTMOOR.

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THE surface of Dartmoor and borderland is studded with numerous prehistoric and historic remains.

The former include camps, stone circles, hut circles, cairns, kistvaens, menhirs, stone rows, reaves, etc.

The latter include stone crosses, blowing houses (*i.e.* tin melting houses), and other remains of a more recent date.

Certain metalled roads of the first, second, and third classes traverse the moorland region in various directions.

Great attention is now paid to the annual up-keep of the first-class roads, and to a lesser extent the second and third class highways.

This means an annual application of broken stone of something like one hundred tons per mile on the first-class roads, and a lesser amount on the others.

Very little of this stone is derived from quarries—the great bulk of it is of surface origin.

Under the old Highway Act, 5 & 6 William IV. c 50, the provisions of which have not yet been repealed by the later Highway Act, and which are now in force under the District Councils, the surveyor may search for and dig and carry away materials for mending the highway in any waste, common, river, or brook in the parish; and if he cannot conveniently procure sufficient materials in the parish, he may go to any other parish, leaving sufficient materials for the repair of the highway in such other parish.

He may also gather stones off any land in the parish, *i.e.* belonging to individuals, paying nothing for same, but making satisfaction for damage done in carrying them away; but he cannot enter into this private land without the consent of the owner, or order of justices.

Under cover of this Act of Parliament much damage has been done to ancient stone monuments on Dartmoor, and this damage is still proceeding.

Some of the contractors who repair the roads do their best to protect these interesting objects, but their workmen are not so discriminating, and are often ignorant of their value. Stone must be had by hook or by crook—the nearer the better—and that which can be most readily obtained is often a hut-circle or a cairn, and these disappear and are often not missed for a long time afterwards.

As surface stones near highways get scarcer, the greater the danger to the stone monuments lying adjacent thereto.

The following monuments are known to have been utterly destroyed recently, mostly for road-mending: A stone-row and hut-circles on Sherberton Common, two cairns on Holne Moor above Saddle Bridge, and a hut-circle near Merrivale Bridge.

Many monuments have been partially destroyed, such as camps, hut-circles, and cairns, and only last year the stone circle at Scorhill was robbed by a farmer and seriously injured in his search for a stone long enough for a gate-post.

For many years past road-mending material has been obtained from the ramparts of the ancient camp known as Cranbrook Castle; thousands of loads of stone have been removed. Now that this source is nearly exhausted, a quarry has been opened out.

On examining the Ancient Monuments Protection Act, the conclusion arrived at is that it would be well-nigh impossible to apply this measure to the numerous and scattered remains on Dartmoor. At the same time one is convinced that efforts should be made to repeal the obnoxious portions of the Highway Act of William IV., and compel road-menders to quarry their stone.

This would not only tend vastly to safeguard the ancient stone monuments, but would prevent the despoiling of the surface of "clatters" or collections of picturesque boulders.

An attempt has recently been made to remove boulders and stones from the bed of one of our beautiful little moorland streams, and to effect this private inclosed land had to be crossed. The owner locked the gates and resisted, with the result that the surveyor will probably apply for an order of justices, and if this is granted the river-bed will be despoiled, notwithstanding the fact that it is at that point entirely within the confines of private property.

Other counties besides Devon complain bitterly of the damage caused by this Act of Parliament, and the time may be considered opportune for initiating an agitation for its repeal or amendment.