

ARCHAEOLOGICAL NOTES

THE DEER LEAP STONES, EBBOR, MENDIP (ST 5179.4877),

by W. I. STANTON

A brief description of these two standing stones appeared in *Proceedings* some years ago (Tratman, 1968). The author was unaware, apparently, that the stones had been disturbed shortly before his visit.

The locality has been known as Deer Leap for many years. Dr. Claver Morris, a Wells diarist, recorded passing through it several times between 1722 and 1725 (Hobhouse, 1934). A legend of a phenomenal leap by a deer, commemorated and marked on the ground by the stones, is well known to old Mendippers. The stones are 16 metres apart. Mr. C. Hodges of Easton, who farmed the land for several decades, remembers the stones being in their present positions in the 1920's.

Until 1964 each stone stood about 2 metres east of a dry stone wall (field boundary) trending N.N.W., but in that year the wall was dismantled for building stone. On 30.11.1964 the present writer happened to pass by and saw that workmen removing the wall had broken up the southern stone with hammers, and had begun to attack the northern one. Mr. Hodges was at once informed, and he replaced the lost stone by a rather similar one that he dragged behind a tractor from near the old quartzite quarry (ST 519.490) 300 metres north of the stones. This was on 16.12.1964, and on the same day he raised the northern stone from a semi-recumbent to an upright position. To all intents and purposes the stones are in the original places.

The existing stones and the destroyed one consist of quartzite, not Triassic conglomerate as Tratman was advised. The quartzite almost certainly came from the local Millstone Grit strata, which were quarried at several places within 400 metres of the stones.

A quartzite pillar of dimensions very similar to those of the Deer Leap Stones was noted by the present writer built into a dry stone wall 200 metres further north (ST 5171.4893), at the summit of a hill. It was the cornerstone of a bend in the wall, which followed the crestline of an agricultural terrace. Presumably it was emplaced before the wall, perhaps as a boundary stone. This wall was removed about 1968. It seems possible that when the field or enclosure wall was built it was purposefully led past the Deer Leap Stones, instead of incorporating them like the other stone, in which case they may have had some special significance requiring that they should not be lost to view.

Dr. Claver Morris noted in his diary that on 8.2.1723 he passed through "the Enclosures at Deer-Leap" and then became lost in the mist on top of Mendip, which was still largely unenclosed. Thus the stone walls may have been built at or shortly before that time.

The name Deer Leap or Deers Leap appears to derive from Saxon or mediaeval forest laws and customs (Batten, 1896). A deer leap was a low point in the boundary fence of a private estate adjacent to a Royal forest, through which the King's deer could pass into the private land. It was established either by agreement or illegally, sometimes with a ditch on the private side to promote one-way traffic out of the King's land. In another sense, a 'deer's leap' referred to a strip of ground along the outer side of the boundary fence of an estate, within which the estate owner had timber rights. The width of the strip was between 4.5 and 5.5 metres.

It is not known whether the locality gave its name to the stones, or vice-versa, but the former seems more likely.

Shortly after the Second World War the road from Ebbor to Priddy was straightened and widened, and in the course of the work a large roadside outcrop of quartzite about 2 metres high was blasted away. The stump is still visible at ST 5180.4910, 300 metres north of the Deer Leap Stones. This action gave rise to complaints, and even letters to the local press, alleging, mistakenly, that the Deer Leap Stones themselves had been destroyed or moved.

The stones are on farmland with no public right of access, and permission to visit them should be sought at Easton Farm (ST 515.480). They are clearly visible from the public road.

REFERENCES

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| BATTEN, J. | 1896 | Deer Parks in Dorset and Somerset. <i>Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries</i> 5, 83-87. |
| HOBHOUSE, E. | 1934 | <i>The Diary of a West Country Physician A.D. 1694-1726</i> . Simpkin Marshall Ltd. |
| TRATMAN, E.K. | 1968 | The Deer Leap Stones. <i>Proc. Univ. Bristol Spelaeol. Soc.</i> 11 (3), 243-244. |