

MEGALITHIC CIRCLES ON YELLOWMEAD DOWN, SHEEPSTOR.

RE-ERECTION OF BURIED STONES AT SHEEPSTOR.

A DARTMOOR STONEHENGE.

(BY THE REV. H. H. BRITON.)

The existence of the fine prehistoric stone monument which the megalithic circles on Yellowmead Down, near Sheepstor, form, was unknown until quite recently and is the greatest discovery of recent years on Dartmoor. The honour of the discovery rests with Mr. R. Hansford Worth, whose skilled eye noted the humps formed by the stones which were lying prostrate under the turf, which formed the outer circle, of which only one large stone and one small one were visible, and he expressed the opinion that it was probably a double circle.

That they had escaped detection so long was due in some measure to the fact that they had for many years been covered with a very high growth of heather; this was burnt a year or so before Mr. Worth made his discovery. Owing to the prolonged drought of the summer of 1921, I noticed that there were many patches of whortleberry scrubs and grass, which were burnt up inside the large circle, which indicated the presence of stones buried not far under the surface.

FOUR CONCENTRIC CIRCLES.

Last autumn, on behalf of the Dartmoor Preservation Society, Mr. William Manning, of Yellowmead Farm, close by, and I, with the assistance of others, took in hand the task of unearthing these buried stones and

re-erecting them in their old socket holes. It proved a formidable task, for we found instead of one circle that there were four concentric circles.

Of these four circles *the outer circle* is composed of large stones, many of them slabs about 4 ft. by 4 ft. It is very incomplete, as some of the stones have been taken away and built into the newtake wall of Yellowmead Farm, about 100 yards to the W. The depressions in the ground show that large stones have evidently been removed from the N.E. arc; these have probably been removed to form the small bridge across the streamlet in the gully 200 yds. N.W. of the circle. The three stones which form this bridge have such a strong likeness to the other slabs, which form the outer circle that their origin can hardly be doubted. This outer circle consists now of 24 stones, and has a diameter of 63 ft. Some of the small stones in the W. arc may be only triggers of much larger stones which have been taken away to build the wall. The largest stone in the S.E. arc was 5 ft. 6 in. as it lay on the ground, but now is 4 ft. 3 in. high. It has on its top two depressions which have the appearance of cup markings, but in this case I think they are due only to the weathering of the granite. It bears remarkable resemblance to the largest stone in the Brisworthy Circle; its height is the same, and its girth near the bottom is also of the same measurement.

The second circle consists of 28 stones, and has a diameter of 48 feet. It is composed of smaller stones, which are placed with marked regularity on the E. and S. sides.

The third circle consists of 31 small stones, and has a diameter of 37 feet.

The fourth and innermost circle consists of 21 stones, and has a diameter of 20 feet. It is composed of thick ponderous stones. This enclosed either a kistvaen, of which no trace remains, or a large cairn, of which there are still indications. It encircled the burial place of some King or powerful chief of pre-historic times. The Dartmoor Preservation Society intends to

excavate this inner platform in the hope of finding an urn.

These four concentric circles are, therefore, composed of no less than 104 stones, and the whole monument consists of 118 stones, including the stones referred to below.

THE OUTSTANDING STONES.

On the W. side are 14 stones, which have formed the beginnings of probably as many as eight or nine stone rows running parallel in a westerly direction. These have all been destroyed to build the new-take wall, although on the way they are still traceable. The largest of these stones close to the circle is trigged up by a large natural boulder which is buried underground. About 40 yds. E. of the circle are the remains of a small barrow which has been contained by a small circle of stones, four of which remain, and which has a diameter of 10 ft.

About 80 yds. further E. is a large slab about $5\frac{1}{2}$ ft. square. Connected with it are two or three stones which have formerly stood erect. About 130 yds. N.E. of these circles is a fallen menhir, 6 ft. 3 in. long; connected with it are three stones running in a S.E. direction.

HOW TO REACH THE CIRCLES.

After passing through Sheepstor, turn to the left and go up the lane towards the tor. After passing through the gate on to the open moor follow the road until you come to another gate. Enter this and follow the green lane until you come to the open moor again; here turn to the R. towards the fir trees; the circles are on the E. side of these. As you cross the gully on to the open moor, the three stones spanning the streamlet of which I have spoken will be crossed.

The leat-course which runs along the W. side of the circles discharged itself into the gully about 50 yds. above this bridge for the purpose of turning the water-wheel of a blowing-house which formerly stood there, of which now not a single trace remains, except the leat.