

## THE ANCIENT METROPOLIS OF DARTMOOR.

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(Read at Tiverton, July, 1891).

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If the great hill region of Dartmoor be considered as a whole it will be seen that the Postbridge district holds a fairly central position. This fact at once suggests it as a suitable place for the chief centre of population on the Moor in those bygone days, when in consequence of the steady advance of their Saxon foes, the more independent and warlike spirits among the Britons, or Kymry (by some called Kelts)—those who had escaped death or thralldom—were to be found maintaining themselves in sturdy independence in the various hilly regions of Western Britain. They were of the same race-type as the Belgæ, whom Cæsar found inhabiting north-east Gaul; as the Caledonians, of Tacitus; as the Galatæ or Galatians, of Diodorus Siculus; as the Tuatha de Danans, of the old Irish historians.

These all were above the average height, and were brachycephalic, prognathous, and florid. They were the people of the "Round Barrows," and of the so-called "Bronze Age." In saying this I do not mean to imply that they differed in any important race-characters from the Saxon invaders; for this was not the case. Modern scientists allow this. Thus Professor Huxley says: "The invasion of the Saxons, Jutes, Danes, and Northmen changed the language of Britain, but added no new physical element. Therefore we must not any more talk of Celts and Saxons, for all are one. I never lose an opportunity of rooting up the false idea that the Celts and Saxons are different races."

To return to my point. The centre of the Moor would naturally be the safest place in troublous times; and if plenty of forage for the herds of cattle could be found in a limited area, a large settlement would tend to grow up. That

this was the case in the open valley through which the East Dart flows, just above Postbridge, I shall hope to prove.

The chief evidence of previous dwelling on the Moor is the presence of the basements of former huts—the hut-circles—and of spaces of cleared ground enclosed by banks or ruined breastworks of stone and turf. One finds groups of these hut-circles within many of these enclosures or pounds, all other stones having been, as far as possible, removed. Sometimes no hut-circles exist in the space, but in this case there are usually some close by. Such pounds were doubtless for protection of the cattle only, while those containing huts afforded protection to the animals and their masters also. In more modern times a good deal of land has been fenced in on the Moor, and we find that the more ancient enclosures have, in not a few instances, been utilised as fields by the raising of a dry stone wall or hedge upon, or just within, the old bank. The longer these more recent hedges have existed, the more often they will have needed mending by the addition of stones, and in many cases by banking up with turf as well, taken from the ground near by. And so, in these latter cases especially, there is often very little clear evidence now left of their having been built upon an ancient basis. Fortunately, however, the shape of the area enclosed is often suggestive; for whereas the modern tendency is to make field-enclosures with straight sides and well-defined angles, the ancient folk preferred curved outlines, and adapted themselves to the peculiarities of the ground they were about to enclose. As a general rule, too, they chose a gently sloping surface facing south-east, south, or south-west, though in many cases other considerations caused the selection of quite different aspects.

In most cases, also, we find that a supply of water was near at hand—within a few yards; and, indeed, very often springs rise within the enclosed areas.

When the modern “land-grabbers” have not built upon the old stone banks, they have, in numberless instances, used them as convenient quarries of handy-sized stones for building neighbouring newtake walls; and so we find that the old enclosure-banks have often been sadly mutilated and made so inconspicuous, that no one but a close observer would notice them until they are pointed out.

Close to Postbridge, within an area stretching  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles from north to south and  $\frac{5}{8}$  of a mile from east to west, is a compact group of fourteen of these ancient pounds, occupying sites on both sides of the Dart.

Through the middle of this large settlement—which may fitly be called *the ancient metropolis of the Moor*—runs the “great central trackway,” now known almost certainly to be part of an ancient British road, modified and utilised by the Romans under the name of the Fosse Way.

Only three of the fourteen pounds have, I believe, been described before, viz., Nos. 8, 11, and 13 on the map; and I will now notice them all briefly in turn, beginning with the one nearest the bridge. About one hundred and fifty yards north-west of this is the southern end of an ovoid field (marked 1 on the map), about eighty yards wide and nearly twice as long, encircled with beech trees. It occupies the top of some gently-rising ground, a few feet above the highest flood-level, between the Dart and its affluent, Stanon Brook.

Though the hedge round it is of considerable age, yet there are very distinct remains in many places outside it of the ancient bank, whose line it closely follows. There is no trace now of hut-circles.

About one hundred and forty yards due north of its northern end, up a gentle slope, is a nearly circular field (see 2), fifty yards across, and also girt by trees. I am not satisfied that there are any undoubted traces of the ancient ring-fence or of hut-circles; but considering its shape, position, and surroundings I have no doubt whatever that its site is that of an ancient pound. The name of the little farmstead close by—Ringhill—was probably suggested by its proximity.

Rather more than three hundred yards north-west of No. 2 we find a field belonging to Hartland Farm, having on its north, east, and south-east sides a curved boundary, from which radiate five or six straight stone fences. In many places there are distinct remains of the ancient bank of stones close to the modern boundary, but since the enclosed area has been ploughed repeatedly there could be now no trace of hut-circles. The west and south-west portions of the bank cannot be traced with certainty, but I have marked on the map (see 3) what appears to me to have been its line. This encloses the greater part of a paddock and a small portion of uncultivated ground. The length is about one hundred yards and the breadth eighty.

One hundred and ninety yards north, and a little west of this, in the middle of a piece of ground sloping gently from Hartland Tor to the south-east, and much overgrown with gorse, is another nearly circular enclosure sixty-five yards across. (See 4.) The boundary is slight, but distinct, nearly

all the way round. Doubtless if the gorse were removed hut-circles would be seen, though in the more open part of the area I could find none.

Twenty-two yards outside the ring, towards the north-east, is a hut-circle nine yards in diameter. Two hundred and thirty yards north by west of this is another hut-circle of the same size, which is inside and near the north-west corner of a somewhat quadrilateral enclosure (see 5), from east to west one hundred and twenty yards, and seventy yards from north to south. The eastern end of this is cut off from the rest by a newtake wall. The northern boundary is formed by an imperfect modern hedge which follows the line of the old bank.

About twenty yards from the north-west corner of No. 5, and bearing north-east from the top of Hartland Tor, is a circle sixteen yards across, which itself contains a hut-circle seven yards in diameter ex-centrally placed towards the north; and touching the west side of the outer ring is another four yards across. Proceeding still in a north-westerly direction for twenty yards we come upon a circular space fifty yards in diameter, which I believe to be a pound which was never finished. The area is nearly free from rocks, and the boundary is an intermittent ring of large stones, which doubtless were rolled away from the centre. There is no continuous bank of smaller stones. Under such circumstances one would not expect to find hut-circles within the space.

Forty yards north by west is a hut-circle seven yards in diameter, a few paces south of a trackline or row of isolated stones running east and west across the ridge behind Hartland Tor. This, about sixty yards to the west, merges into a slight bank, which extends down the slope towards the Dart about two hundred and twenty yards further.

Crossing now to the right bank of the river we find an enclosure somewhat semicircular in shape. (See 7.) It is on the very abrupt eastern slope of Broad Down, and extends upwards for one hundred yards from the Dart, which forms its nearly straight eastern boundary, to just below the Powder-mills leat. The river boundary is one hundred and forty yards long. In the space are nine hut-circles.

Still further up the steep hillside is the well-known oval pound or camp (see 8) spoken of in Rowe's *Perambulation of Dartmoor* (1848, page 174) as being in "Templer's Newtake." It is marked in the new Ordnance map (six inches to one mile) by a broad dotted outline, and within the area four

hut-circles are placed. There are, however, distinct traces of eleven or twelve others, many of which are just inside the massive stone boundary. The stones of the west and north-west side have been used largely in building a modern wall which runs close within the line of the old rampart. The size of the space is one hundred and thirty yards by seventy. From the south-west part of this pound the newtake wall runs south-south-west for ninety yards, and joins another which forms the boundary of what Rowe calls "Hamlyn's newtake," in which he says are "several hut-circles." Now the shape of this newtake is peculiar and suggestive; from the east-north-east right round to the west and south-south-west portion the wall sweeps in a gradual curve. I at once suspected it followed an old enclosure-line, and a careful examination verified this idea. (See 9.) The old bank is quite plain, and is for the most part just outside the new wall. This latter, however, on the eastern side cuts across the old curving boundary, and goes straight down the hill to the Broad Down brook near its ending in the Dart. On the south side too the same thing happens with the modern wall; while the old bank follows the direction marked on the map. Its south-east portion is very imperfect, and here the Powdermills leat cuts off a corner. This large pound is on a gentle southerly slope, whence there is a splendid view of moorland over the Dart valley to Yar Tor and Buckland Beacon. The length from north-east to south-west is three hundred and forty yards, and the breadth is two hundred and ninety yards. The superficial extent is more than three times as great as that of Grims-pound.

The new Ordnance map records only seventeen hut-circles in the space, but there are forty, the largest of which is thirteen yards in width.

Looking now in a south-easterly direction one can see, about one-fifth of a mile distant, an irregular-shaped enclosure (see 10) close above the Dart, on the top of a knoll which ends a spur of Chittaford Down. The area is nearly level, and contains four hut-circles close to its boundary, which is a newtake wall built from and upon an old rampart. At the south-west corner a portion, about forty-five yards by thirty yards, is marked off by a low curved bank.

About half a mile south by east of this is a pound of an oval shape, and planted with trees, within Archerton grounds. (See 11.) In Rowe's time (1848) there seem to have been no trees. He says (on page 173), "The remains of a singularly

formed elliptical enclosure can be traced, with an entrance on the south-east, where the oval outline, instead of being continuous, is bent into two circular sweeps, between which apparently was the original entrance to the enclosure. Within are vestiges of tracklines and the ruins of an aboriginal hut, where not only the formation but the remains of the walls are still to be seen." Since then the remains must have become more ruinous; and from what is left I should not have been led to conclude that a special entrance such as he describes had ever existed. Doubtless the accumulation of leaf-mould has hidden to some extent features formerly quite distinct. The area is certainly divided in a curious manner, and I have marked on the map the lines which can be traced. Two of the spaces thus defined are practically circular, and are fifteen and twenty-four yards respectively in diameter. There is also distinct evidence of nine hut-circles within the area, and a large one, ten yards across, close outside on the east.

Distant rather more than one-third of a mile south-south-east on the slope of Lakehead Hill, just above the Moreton and Princetown Road is a group of three enclosures. The smallest and lowest of the three is pyriform in outline. (See 12.) The south and west part of its boundary is fairly plain for two hundred yards, though it is but a slight bank. The rest of the outline is doubtfully traceable. The whole has suffered greatly at the hands of the builders of the stone fences bordering the road. Within the area I could not detect any hut-circles. The length is one hundred and seventy yards, and the medium breadth one hundred and ten.

The next pound is the best marked of the three. It is well known, and locally is called "Krap's Ring." (See 13.) Its shape is broadly ovoid, and its size one hundred and fifty yards by one hundred and thirty-five. The rampart consists of large stones forming a broad and well-marked bank. Within it are fifteen or sixteen hut-circles.

About forty-five yards south of the south-west end of this enclosure is a massive hut-circle nine yards across; and eight yards south-west of the same point is another eight yards across, and less massive. The latter is not marked on the Ordnance map.

About ninety yards north-east from Krap's Ring is the western side of the last of the Lakehead Group. (See 14.) Its boundary can be traced fairly well all round except a portion of the eastern side. When the grass is short, and the light falls in the proper direction, it can be seen from a

Map to illustrate the Paper on  
**THE ANCIENT METROPOLIS OF DARTMOOR,**  
 by Arthur B. Prowse, M.D., F.R.C.S.

Scale = 6 inches to 1 mile. 880 ft. to 1 in. *10560 of Nature*

BROAD DOWN

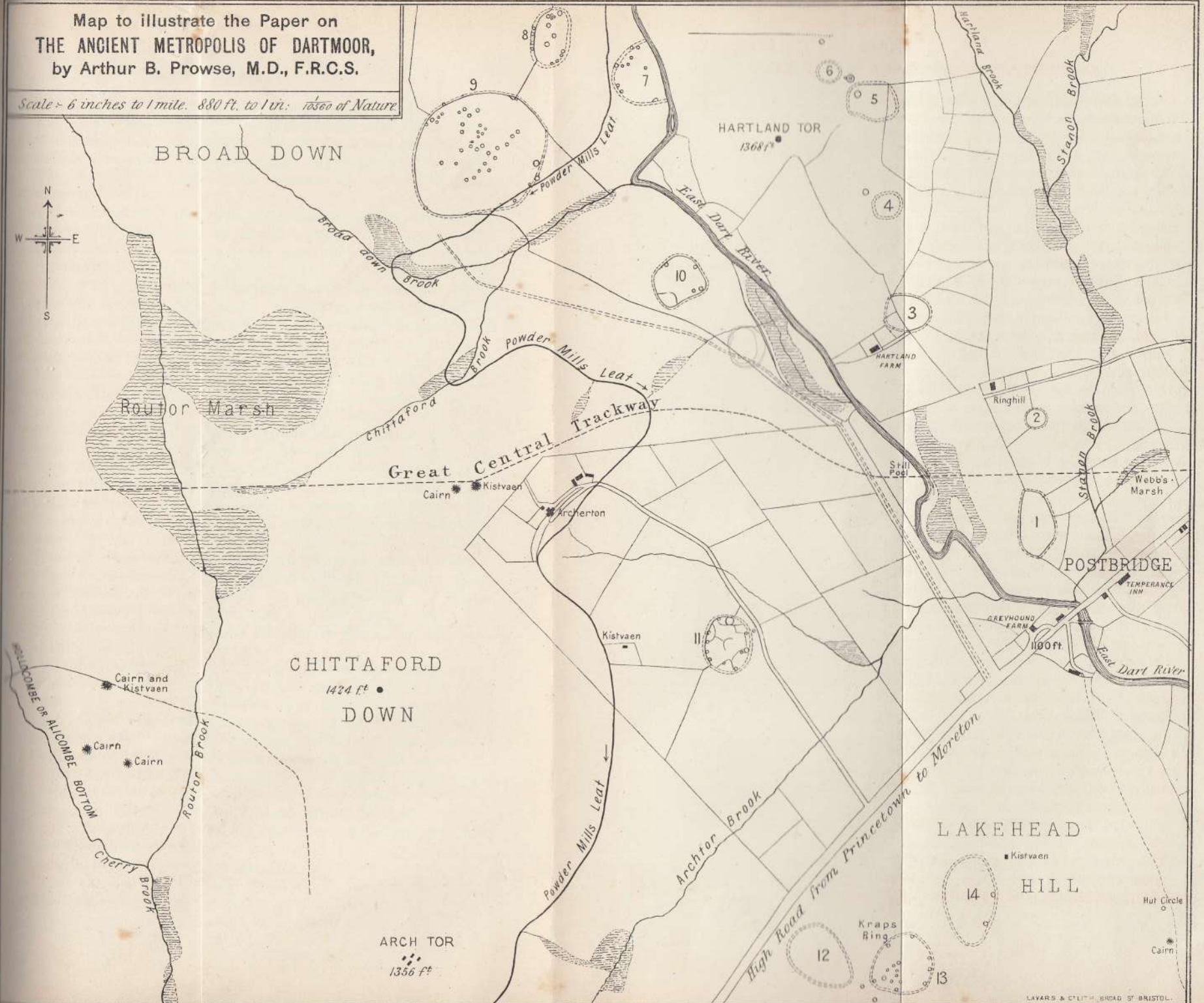
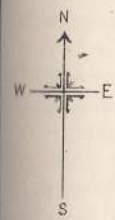
Routon Marsh

CHITTA FORD  
 DOWN

ARCH TOR  
 1356 ft

HARTLAND TOR  
 1368 ft

LAKEHEAD  
 HILL



distance; and Mr. Bennett, of Archerton, told me that from his house, three-quarters of a mile distant, it could be sometimes made out quite well. The length is two hundred and twenty-five yards, and the breadth one hundred and fifteen. Two hut-circles exist on the eastern side, but neither are very plain.

I contend that the presence of these fourteen enclosures proves the existence, in ancient days, of a considerable population, even though, as is most probable, the fourteen were not all in use at any one time. In connection with them I have mentioned about one hundred hut-circles, which vary in diameter from three to thirteen yards; and there must formerly have been many more, which have since been destroyed. If, however, we take the existing number, and reckon that on an average each sheltered four people (which is probably quite within the mark) we find that in this small area there was a population of four hundred—verily no mean number for so wild a district, in a day when the population of the whole of Britain was to be counted, not by millions, but by hundreds of thousands only. Even in the time of William I. the whole of England is estimated to have contained only a little over a million of people; at the end of the reign of Richard III. three millions; at the time of the Revolution about five and a half millions (including Wales); while in 1801 the first census revealed about ten millions. Then also one must not forget that near at hand in nearly every direction round this small area there are many other hut-circles and other proofs of man's residence. These antiquities I hope to deal with at some future time, and for the present will mention those only which are included within the limits of the map.

On the eastern side of Lakehead Hill, seven hundred yards south by east of Postbridge, and close to the right side of a footpath going towards Bellever, is a hut-circle seven yards in diameter, which was shown me by the Rev. J. B. Shattock, of Postbridge. Seventy yards south of this is what seems to be the remains of a small cairn, about eight yards across.

Due east of and about seventy yards from the northern end of pound 14 is a ruined kistvaen, also pointed out by the Rev. J. B. Shattock. The western side slab alone remains. It is four and a half feet long, and lies north-west by north, and south-east by south. Around it is a very imperfect tumulus-ring five yards in diameter.

On the west side of the map will be seen three cairns. They are on some gently sloping ground between the Cherry-



book and its affluent, which drains the large Routor Marsh. The most northerly of the three is ten yards across, and about five feet above the ground level. It contains a fine kistvaen, the long diameter of which is north-west and south-east. It has been opened on the south-west by moving the side slab, which measures five feet by two and a half feet. The end stones are erect, and are three feet high. The cover-stone, which is imbedded in the mound, has been displaced laterally, but still rests on two of the slabs, and covers the north end of the space. The length of the cavity at the base is three feet, and at the top two feet eight inches; the width at the bottom is two feet six inches. The tumulus-ring is well marked, about five yards in diameter, and in part consists of a double row of stones, one of which, on the south-east side, is as much as three feet three inches high. This tumulus is in the line of a bank, which is probably an unfinished newtake fence; and it is continuous with a wall which comes down the eastern slope of Higher White Tor to the Cherrybrook. It does not end at the point marked in the new ordnance map, but continues in an east-south-east direction for two hundred and thirty yards to Routor Brook. Beyond this it bends to the south-east for about three hundred yards, and then southwards for some distance further.

One hundred and eighty yards south by east of this tumulus is the second cairn, four feet high and ten yards across, which seems to contain no kist now. Ninety yards west-north-west from this, and one hundred and fifty south-south-west of the first, is the third cairn, ten yards in diameter and three feet high. This also seems now to be devoid of a kist.

On Chittaford Down, just above Archerton, and close to the "great central trackway," just where it bends a little to the north of east, after coming for a mile or more nearly due east from Lower White Tor, are two cairns. The more westerly one, which is six yards in diameter, is about twenty yards south of the trackway. The other is only eight yards from the path, and is five yards across. It contains the remnants of a kistvaen.

The kistvaen which is close to the Archerton lawn-tennis ground is so well known that it need not be described here.