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meyn mamvro

ancient stones and sacred sites in cornuall



SACRED LANDSCAPE ISSUE ● GŪN RITH ●
NANJULIAN BARROWS ● TREVOSE HEAD ●
GODDESS IN THE LAND ● NEWS ● REVIEWS
plus **CORNWALL'S COLOURFUL SITES**

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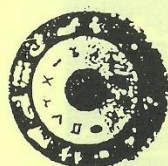
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Meyn Mamvro

STONES OF OUR MOTHERLAND

**EARTH ENERGIES * ANCIENT STONES * SACRED SITES * PAGANISM * LEYPATHS
CORNISH PRE-HISTORY & CULTURE * MEGALITHIC MYSTERIES * LEGENDS & FOLKLORE**

The Cornish Ancient Sites Protection Network continues to meet regularly and beaver away in the background, trying to keep a weather eye on the sites and doing what it can to monitor their use and look after them. It consists of representatives from The National Trust, English Heritage, the Historic Environment Service, Madron Community Forum, Penwith District Council (Sustainable Tourism), *Meyn Mamvro*, The Cornish Earth Mysteries Group, The Pagan Federation, Penwith Pagan Moot, Cornwall Wildlife Trust and the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids; and its minutes go to all the local large Estate Landowners and Cornwall Heritage Trust. With such an array of people and organisations from all sides of the archaeological, historical, environmental and pagan communities, the Group still remains unique in Britain, and in the absence of any Countryside or Conservation Officer posts on Penwith District Council, it performs a much-needed and valuable rôle. If it didn't exist, someone would have to re-invent it!

Although the application for Objective 1 funding for an ASMO (Ancient Sites Management Officer) post proved to be fruitless, the Group has not given up hope! It is at present investigating the possibility of some Funding applications for a Project Development Worker to carry the idea forward to its next stage. Meanwhile, the Group (all consisting of volunteers who do not get paid for their time and work) have managed to achieve some positive results. It has set up regular monthly Site Clearance Days, in conjunction with the local Pagan Moot, and already good work has been done at Bosiliack Barrow, Sancreed well, Madron well and Chûn Castle. It has also been negotiating with landowners to have discreet notices placed on the footpaths leading to the most well-used ancient sites, giving telephone numbers for reporting any damage at the sites, and asking people to take care not to cause accidental damage by lighting fires, digging holes or burying or leaving inappropriate items. "Please respect the land and all its inhabitants" it says, "spirits, animals, plants and stones".

Finally, the Group has now set up a **Friends of Cornwall's Ancient Sites** scheme (FOCAS) to encourage people to take a more positive and active rôle in helping to protect and conserve the sites. For an annual fee of £5/year, or £3/year unwaged, membership of the scheme will ensure that the money is spent directly on helping to protect and clean up the sites. FOCAS members also get an annual Newsletter and a free guided walk around the sites. A flier should be enclosed with this MM, or write to *Meyn Mamvro* with a SAE for a copy. Now everyone can help to look after the precious sites.



news page

The 16th annual season of talks and presentations commenced on Thursday Sept 30th 2004 with a talk by **Steve Patterson**. He was due to speak on "Cornish Witchcraft" but actually talked about the theory and philosophy of connecting with divinity, with liberal quotations from writers and esoterics. It turned out to be a strange and unexpected evening in many ways, with a public altercation between two well-known local personalities (a fall-out from the recent bust-up in the pagan community mentioned in MM55), and a row over hunting which resulted in a walk-out by some local members of the farming community! The evening was one just before the Harmonic Concordance II of 5 planets in a pentagram shape, so perhaps it was the shadow side of that powerful planetary alignment that manifested itself. For those who missed not hearing about Cornish Witchcraft that evening there was a chance to hear **Jason Semmens** talk about "Cornish Witchcraft and the Black Arts" a month later at the Cornwall Centre in Redruth and the Royal Cornwall Museum in Truro. Jason is currently researching the history of Cornish witchcraft and is writing a book that will be published next year, with an article to be published in MM.

Meanwhile, back at the CEMG in October, **Valentia Lithryn** came to talk about "New Energies for the New Millennium". A much smaller audience than usual came, but that made it a more intimate setting in a circle for Valentia's revelations about the spirit entities, such as Isis, Pan, Michael, Kuan Yin, etc, who visited her and told her where to place the channeled energy on to the Michael and Mary lines, in order to integrate the Divine Mother and Divine Father. She invoked some of the Forms with a singing-bowl, and there was some lively and challenging discussion from those there.

November brought **Pamela Gray**, a mathematical psychicist with an interest in healing to talk about "The Science of Healing". This was a fascinating exploration of 'where science and healing meet', as she looked at the scientific underpinning of the whole healing process. She talked about healing as a change of energy within the human body, stimulated by the body's own electrical and magnetic fields, and the interaction between the healer and the healed. She concluded by delving into quantum psychics, and showed how underlying the whole of existence is a huge energy field out of which reality comes and goes - in other words the universe is a one whole living being. This was a most stimulating evening, as was shown by the interest in the discussion afterwards.

Finally, the annual walk to Chûn Quoit on Dec 18th attracted a dozen or so who encircled the Quoit for the Yule blessing and as usual didn't see the sunset over Carn Kenidjack! Afterwards, at Age Concern in St. Just there was food and drink to share and good storytelling from Cornwall and Wales to round off the year's events.

Penwith Pagan Moot



by Kate Bainbridge

Yule was another spectacular and atmospheric event thanks to all those who turned up and those who helped prepare Sancreed village hall. PPM's special effects team 'Rituals R Us' aka Hannah and Dave, came laden with the usual goodies including a dark lamp. Ariels' bedside table also made an incredible altar. The hall was divided in two, a dark side and a light side with a Stargate in the middle decorated with lots of greenery as was the hall itself. The ceremony began on the dark side. Ariel led a powerful and energetic turning of the 'Wheel Of The Year' before we moved through the Stargate into the light. Candle in hand, a gift from Isis, we stepped from darkness into light and were met by Lugh (Sometimes known as Nick from St Ives). Lugh lit our candles and we each in turn placed them on the altar. 30 - 40 candles on brass is a beautiful sight! Each person took libation and gifts from the Goddess from the cauldron.

Sancreed village hall was the venue yet again for **Imbolc**. It was a simple but beautiful and powerful ceremony. Volunteers called the quarters and after the circle was cast we stood for a minute in silence to remember all those who died in the Tsunami disaster. Again volunteers read the invocation to the Goddess and God. Then it was my turn to lead everyone off on a silent nature meditation walk to the well. At the well I blessed each person with the elements of water and fire and back we went to the hall for the candle blessing and the entrance of Mabon and Brigit (Adrian made a perfect young God and Ariel was as stunning as ever)! The libation followed and Raven said the final blessing.

Sacred Site Clearances:

Sancreed holy well and the long path leading up to it received a grooming on Sunday 16th January. Many turned out although it was chilly and the job was quickly and efficiently done. Scores of clouties were removed, greenery cut back and we all had a good chat and enjoyed ourselves. Madron holy well was our next assignment for a clear up on Sunday 13th February. Only three of us turned up but we still got the job done, had fun and a little more libation than usual as there was only the three of us!

Chûn Castle was a joint day with Cornwall Wildlife Trust in March, and the Treen Entrance Graves were cleared in April. Future Site Clearances planned include: Boswens Menhir (May 15th), Nine Maidens Boskendnan cairns (June/July), Caer Bran and Lesingey Round (Autumn). For full details please ring either of the numbers below.

Moots: Penwith Pagan Moot meets every second Tuesday in the month at Chy Gwella, 53, Morrab Road, Penzance and starts at 7.15pm. We have some excellent talks and a friendly atmosphere. Come along and join in! If you want to find out more call Lynne on 01209 315812 or Sarah on 01736 787522.

ANCIENT SITES & OTHER NEWS

LESCUDJACK HILL FORT SAVED

One of the most important Iron Age settlements in West Penwith, Lescudjack Hill Fort at Pendennis Road, Penzance, was recently put up for auction by its owner, with a guide price of £28,000. An emergency operation was mounted, and Penwith District Council, Penwith Town Council and the Historic Environment Service of Cornwall County Council all came together to secure its future. They obtained some funding and their offer to buy the site was accepted. Hudson Smith, chairman of Penwith's Social, Economic and Environment committee said: "Future generations would never have forgiven us if we had let this important historic site slip through our fingers". The area of land extends to around one hectare, or 2.5 acres, and has breathtaking views over Penzance and Mounts Bay.

ST.PIRAN'S CHURCH TO BE DUG UP

St. Piran's Church, built in the 10thC on Penhale Sands (near to where St. Piran is supposed to have arrived from Ireland on a millstone in the 6thC and built his oratory), and subsequently buried by the sand, is to be excavated this September by the St. Piran Trust and the Historic Environment Service. The church was briefly uncovered in 1835, but was buried again shortly afterwards by the sands. Now, the Trust have been given a Heritage Lottery Grant of £63,000 to remove the 250 tonnes of sand from the church and uncover it once again, for which a large number of volunteers will be needed. The site is symbolically important to Cornish people as St. Piran is Cornwall's patron saint and there is a large procession at the spot every year on March 5th, St. Piran's Day.

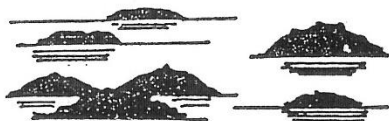
WITCHCRAFT MUSEUM OPENS ITS DOORS

The Witchcraft Museum at Boscastle, severely damaged in the floods of August 2004, re-opened its doors at Easter this year, after owner Graham King and scores of volunteers had worked tirelessly to rid the Museum of hundreds of tons of sewerage, mud and silt. Despite the devastation thousands of irreplaceable objects were salvaged, and the Museum now has new displays and rebuilt areas. Firemen searching the site directly after the flood were horrified to discover a woman's body in the mud. Fortunately it turned out to be the resident waxwork witch, 'Joan'! This unique Museum has received much spiritual and practical help from the pagan community and others.

SOLHEIM MURDER - PARTNER ARRESTED

The Peter Solheim murder case, which became a notorious "occult"-linked media fest, has resulted in the arrest of his long-term partner for the murder. Local media, particularly the Western Morning News and other papers, persisted in playing-up a so-called "occult" link to the murder, because it was known that Solheim had dealings with Eddie Prynne's druid group at St. Merryn, and subsequently left to become involved in so-called "black magic". His body was discovered off the Lizard peninsula and had "unexplained injuries" on it, which the media used to make spurious 'occult' inferences.

VIEW FROM



A new regular column

by Isles of Scilly resident

THE ISLANDS

Tyto Alba

A Trip to Nornour

The washed up buoy stands out from across the sandbank, bright orange plastic against the wrack-encrusted rocks on the shores of Great Ganilly. Goose barnacles punctuate its surface, their stalks frozen in mid-withe, like question marks. From here, you can look across the stones and pools,



the pistachio greens of the sea lettuce, the blind crimson blobs of sleeping anemones, to the settlement of Nornour and its midden. The latter has recently been exposed by an exceptionally high sea, and ironically enough, the evidence that the site carries the weight of years is a yield of limpet shells in the flaky soil, all of them charred. You finger these in your pocket, souvenirs garnered from a stitch in time.

The settlement at Nornour, like all the other ancient sites that cluster around the coasts of Scilly, was once high and dry. The waters where your boat has passed were once meadow, and the field walls are drowned in brine, encrusted with those same limpets, that bladder-wrack, these anemones. Ganilly and Nornour were once hills nipped with cairns; now they are islands, slowly drowning. The sea is asserting her sovereignty, subtly all the time, and sometimes, when the winds reach force nine, with a ferocity that astounds, and fills you with a strange elation, pulsing with dread. In two thousand years, this will all be gone. Perhaps it will not take so long.

There is a human continuity here that suddenly stops. It begins in the Neolithic, when the limpets were piled up in the midden. The houses are Roman, a tentative tip on the tentacle of empire. There is a hearth, a quernstone standing beside a doorway, the lintel long since gone. Then away into the sea there is the boiler of a 19thC paddle-steamer. There is little in-between, and nothing after, save for the stranded plastic and its barnacles. Now you know the question their stalks are asking: *Will the time be short, or even shorter still, until we can colonise the highest cairns of these islands?* It is inexorable. Our interference will only speed it up, or slow it down.

GŪN RITH MENHIR - IS IT UPSIDE DOWN?

In 2003 the Gŭn Rith menhir (near the Merry Maidens Stone Circle at Lamorna) fell over, and was subsequently put back up again by the Historic Environment Service [see MM51 p.3, MM52 p.5 & colour photo in MM53 p.13]. Now a report on the site has been issued by Ann Preston-Jones* of the HES, which makes very interesting reading. Observing that now the stone has been more fully exposed (it formerly stood in a hedge that obscured most of it), Ann comments that its shape is for the first time very obvious. "It is", she says "unmistakeably and simply phallic", adding "Perhaps this reflects its past function: as a place for fertility rites, coupling or marriage ceremonies".

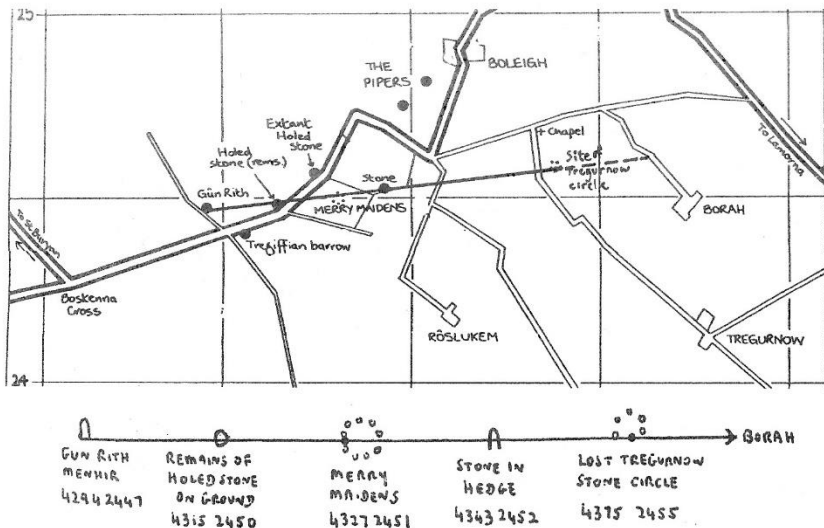


What a fine specimen! The re-erected Gŭn Rith!

This is an interesting idea, but it has certain difficulties, as Ann goes on to discuss. To start with, why is this standing stone so shaped, but not other ones in the locality? Not far away are two more standing stones The Pipers, and a few fields the other way, the Boscawen-Rôs stones, none of which display similar characteristics. The majority of standing stones are designed so that the heaviest part of the stone is at the bottom. This gives the stones more stability, as well as a more elegant appearance, as they taper up towards a pointed apex. This effect can be seen in almost every one of the standing stones in West Penwith and elsewhere. In contrast, as Ann says, Gŭn Rith menhir "has its thickest and heaviest part up in the air, while the lower two-thirds of the shaft is of square section, and tapers down to the narrowest part, which is now (once again) buried in the ground. The heaviest (now top) part is also of irregular shape, as well as distinctly bulging, compared to the remainder of the menhir".

All this suggests that the standing stone is upside down! And the implication of that is that it has been moved at some point and placed in the hedge. This theory is given some credence by the fact that, although some 12ft in total length, the stone was standing in only about 15" of soil, a very shallow amount, compared with the majority of standing stones, that are anything up to a third of the height of the stone buried below the ground. The shallowness of the stone's foundation may indeed have contributed to its recent fall, as it happened after a period of heavy rain that may have loosened it.

* *Gŭn Rith Menhir - Scheduled Monument Cornwall 670. CAU (HES) March 2004.*



If one accepts that originally the stone may have been standing (or fallen) in the field and subsequently moved to the bank where it was put back up in an upside-down position, it does raise certain issues about its alignment. Gûn Rith stands at the beginning of one of the best-attested alignments in West Penwith. As can be seen from the diagram & map above, someone walking in a 'via sacra' from the stone would link hands through a holed stone (the remains of which now lie in the ditch) and then approach the Merry Maidens stone circle. Here they would go straight up through the centre of the circle and out by the eastern gap, and then continuing along the line (which is also a public footpath) would reach a 5½ft standing stone in a corner hedge, go on to the now-lost Tregurnow stone circle, and end up in the lane to Borah, a Cornish name that means "the place of the witch" (*Bos-wrah*). Sir Norman Lockyer also suggested that this line marked the setting of the Pleiades star system in 1960 BCE, which would have been a 'trigger warning' to the people of the approaching season of Beltane (early April/early May).

Even if Gûn Rith menhir had been moved a few yards it would not essentially alter the path of this 'via sacra'. Indeed, if it was originally placed into the ground with the bulbous part at the bottom that might actually re-inforce the idea of the fertility of the Earth, which might very well have been what the people were celebrating at Beltane at these sites. Perhaps our Bronze Age ancestors deliberately placed standing stones into the ground in this way, not merely for aesthetic appearance, but as part of a symbolic ritual to encourage the fertility of the Earth. In any case, it does provide a curious case of the 'phallic' stone that ended up upside down.

THE GODDESS IN THE LAND - GODDESS LANDCAPE FIGURES IN CORNWALL

by **Cheryl Traffon**

To ancient peoples the earth was a living being, and every rock, animal, tree, flower and fruit imbued with the same spirit that flowed through women and men. She was also an aspect of the Goddess, their mother who nurtured and sustained the tribe and as such she was treated with care and reverence. This meant that the people were not only concerned with their immediate homes and ritual monuments: they were also very aware of the shape and form of the land and the relationship of the sites to the land. There is evidence of this from a number of places in Britain and Ireland. The twin peaks of two hills in Co. Kerry in Ireland were known as the Papa of Anu, i.e the breasts of the Earth Goddess Anu, the tutelary Goddess of the Tuath De'Dannan people of ancient Ireland.



Other sites also seem aligned to twin hills in this way. On the island of Jura off the island of Islay in western Scotland, there are two similar breast-shaped hills called the Paps of Jura. Many of the standing stones and sacred sites on Islay seem to be deliberately aligned to these hills.¹



The photograph [left] shows the view of the Paps from Loch Finnigan on Islay, the centre of power for the Inner Hebrides. In front of the Visitor Centre can be seen a standing stone, which when viewed from a natural mound behind the Centre, actually stands in the cleavage of the Paps.

On the Scottish mainland the Paps of Jura are highlighted by the setting midsummer sun when viewed from the standing stones of Ballochray and Kintraw on the mainland opposite.² At these two sites there is a good indication that prehistoric peoples built their megalithic monuments in order to observe the passage of the sun at significant times of the year in relationship to the Earth Mother, the name of which has come through to us as the Paps of Jura.

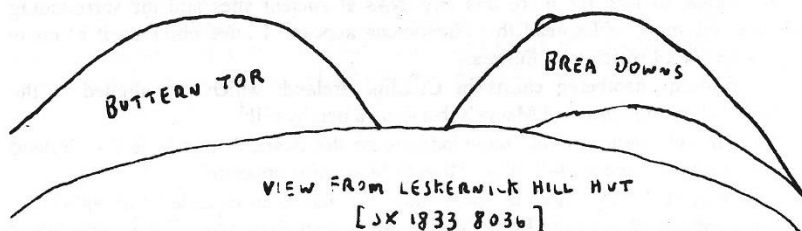
These examples from Ireland and Scotland are relatively well known, but they are not unique. In fact, the more that one looks at ancient sites and the surrounding landscape, the more widespread this phenomena appears. I have observed it at many sites, a selection of which is as follows:-

- Carrowmore chambered cairns in Co.Sligo Ireland, which are aligned to the breast-shaped passage-grave of Maeve's Tomb on a nearby hill³
- the Cailleach Stone (the old hag-Goddess) on the Beara Peninsula in SW Ireland which faces a breast-shaped hill in the Miskish Mountains opposite⁴
- Silbury in Wiltshire where the prehistoric hill has been considered as either the breast or pregnant belly of the Earth Mother when seen from sites in the surrounding landscape, especially West Kennet long barrow⁵
- at Ainthorpe Rigg in Yorkshire where a cairn and standing stone are aligned to Freeborough Hill (the breast-shaped hill of the Goddess Freya) in the distance⁶
- at Pennant Melangell in N.Wales where the church stands on a prehistoric site dedicated to the matron saint of hares (sacred to the Goddess) at the foot of a beautiful breast-shaped hill⁷
- at Branwen's Seat (Branwen was a Goddess-heroine from the Welsh text *The Mabinogi*), a mountain peak in N.Wales with a distinctive nipple-like cairn, when viewed from the Cairn Circle of Moel-ty-Uchar⁸

There are other examples of this from elsewhere - in fact, it is a fascinating experience when visiting an ancient site to look not only at the site, but also at the surrounding landscape features to see if such 'breasts of the Mother Earth' can be seen. When She reveals herself in this way, it becomes an amazing way of being transported back to the people who built the site and seeing the landscape through their eyes.

So, if these features can be found in sites all over Britain, are they visible in Cornwall too? Cornwall does not have the large hills and mountains of Ireland, Scotland and Wales, so its manifestation is more subtle, but it is nevertheless there. The most well-known example are the twin hills of Chapel Carn Brea and Bartinney in West Penwith. Both these hills are 'holy hill' sites. Chapel Carn Brea has a Bronze Age entrance grave near its summit and formerly a chapel was built there, chapels and churches often being constructed on earlier pagan sites. Bartinney is the "hill of fire" where midsummer bonfires were lit, an act of sympathetic magic designed to encourage the sun to continue shining during the waning months of the year. Together, the two hills have the unmistakeable appearance of two gentle undulating breasts, when seen from various places in the West Penwith landscape. For example, from the Merry Maidens stone circle, they appear to the north-west, where the midsummer sun sets.

There are similar twin hills in other parts of Cornwall, most notably on Bodmin Moor. As one approaches Leskernick Hill from Eastmoor the twin hills of Catshole Tor and Coddia Tor form a beautiful view to the SW. And on the very top of Leskernick Hill itself, a prehistoric sacred and ritual centre, the view from the hut there is of the twin hills of Buttern Tor and Brea Downs making a perfect twin-breast shape with the foreground of low-lying land forming the Earth Mother's belly [see drawing below]. This sight would have been most obvious and visible to the people who lived there - the hills are very close - and perhaps explains why the settlement was built where it was.



There are other examples of 'single breast' hills too. For example, from the Nanjulian coastal barrows and courtyard house settlement [SW3614 2891] that lie between St. Just and Sennen, Chapel Carn Brea is particularly prominent, and with its nipple-like cairn on top would have been even more so in Bronze Age times. [see colour photo on p.12 & article/photo by Paul Bonnington on p.19-20]. One of the most notable examples is Trevalgan Hill seen from Trendrine Hill burial chamber [SW4785 3875]. From the barrow, the beautiful breast-shaped hill of Trevalgan is directly visible in a NE direction, that of the midsummer solstice sunrise. Trevalgan Hill is known colloqually as Buttermilk Hill, perhaps a vernacular memory of its nurturing Earth Mother aspect. The rising sun at midsummer, coming up over the breast-shaped hill and entering the chamber, must have been seen as a powerful connection of the world of the living and rebirth with the world of the dead and the ancestors [see colour photo on p12]. Other breast-shaped hills are Brea Hill at Padstow, beautifully seen from St. George's Holy Well [SW918 765], and Brea Downs on Bodmin Moor, mentioned above. 'Brea' is a Cornish word that can mean 'breast', which re-inforces the association.

However, it was not only the breasts of Mother Earth which were seen in the Land by the ancient peoples. Sometimes it was her whole body that was celebrated and worshipped. The finest example of this is the 'Sleeping Woman' mountain on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides. The Paicr hills form the profile of a sleeping Goddess, called in Gaelic 'Cailleach na Mointeach' (the Old Woman of the Moors). When seen from the Callanish stone circle, at the major southern standstill of the moon (every 18.6 years) the moon appears to rise out of her legs, creep low along her body, silhouetting first one part then another, hang low over her breasts, and then disappear behind a nearby hillock, only to reappear inside the circle of stones at the foot of the tallest central one and at the head of a burial cairn. It is pure megalithic magic: a perfect blending of astronomy, ritual, landscape and Goddess.⁹

These 'Goddess in the Land' figures have now begun to be observed in Cornwall too. As long ago as the early 1990s, artist Gabrielle Hawkes saw such a figure in the landscape of West Penwith and painted it. It was reproduced in my book *Pagan Cornwall - land of the Goddess* and is illustrated [right].



Recently, such figures have been seen elsewhere too. When I was doing the research for the St. Agnes area for the article in MM44 [p.14-17], I visited the Iron Age cliff castle of Tubby's Head [SW6980 5050]. From the ground above the site, St. Agnes Beacon (another holy hill top) appears as a very distinctive shape on the horizon, like the body of a sleeping woman or Goddess, a Cornish version of the Isle of Lewis figure. Her head is the Southern Cairn on the Beacon, her body its long north-south slope and her thighs and legs its lower northern slopes. If this were seen by ancient peoples in this way, then the ground above Tubby's Head would have been an ideal viewing platform, and the enclosure itself a ritual area from which the observer would climb up to view the Goddess in the landscape. There is a photo of this in the colour section [p.13], and there will be an opportunity to view it with a CEMG visit to the area in September 2005.

A similar landscape figure has been observed on Bodmin Moor by Tony Blackman, outlined by the shape of Rough Tor, seen from various places, especially Davidstow Moor and King Arthur's Downs, where it is silhouetted on the horizon from King Arthur's Downs circles [see photo section p.13]. And now Howard Balmer has discovered a Trevoze Head Goddess - see article on p.22-23. There may be others to be found - if you see any please let MM know. We are only now beginning to see the landscape through our ancestors' eyes, and to get a sense of how the Goddess/Earth Mother was alive to them in the very land in which they lived.

Bibliography

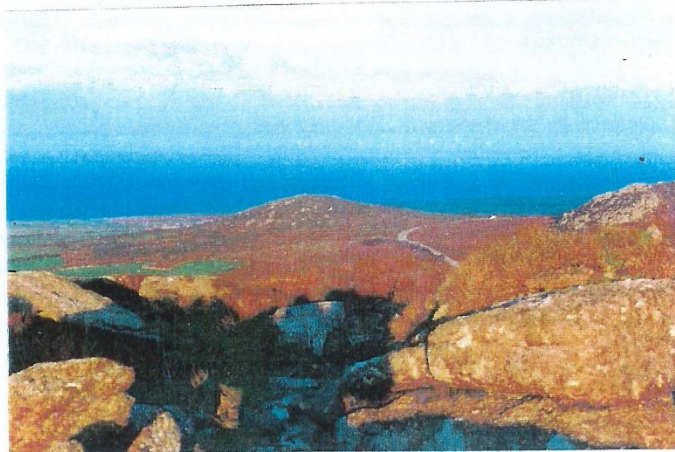
- ¹ "Islay and the Paps of Jura" - Cheryl Straffon *3rd Stone* 41 p.12-16
- ² see "The Earth Goddess" - Cheryl Straffon [Blandford, 1997] p.173-4
- ³ "A ritual landscape in Co.Sligo" - Cheryl Straffon *3rd Stone* 33 p.29-31
- ⁴ "The Cailleach Bheara" - Cheryl Straffon & Cacia March *Goddessing* 16 p.29-30
- ⁵ see "The Earth Goddess" - Cheryl Straffon [Blandford, 1997] p.101-2 & photo section
- ⁶ *ibid.* p.146 & photo section.
- ⁷ *ibid.* p.165-6 & photo section
- ⁸ *ibid.* p.166-7 & photo section
- ⁹ *ibid.* p.182-3

CORNWALL'S COLOURFUL SITES

The colour section this time features THE GODDESS IN THE LAND



The breast-shaped Chapel Carn Brea from Nanjulan settlement



Tevalgan (Buttermilk) Hill seen from Trendrine Chambered Tomb



View of St. Agnes Beacon Goddess figure from above Tubby's Head



*Rough Tor sleeping Goddess figure seen from King Arthur's Downs
stone circle on Bodmin Moor*

All photographs [c] Cheryl Traffon

CHAPEL CARN BREA AND THE NANJULIAN BARROWS

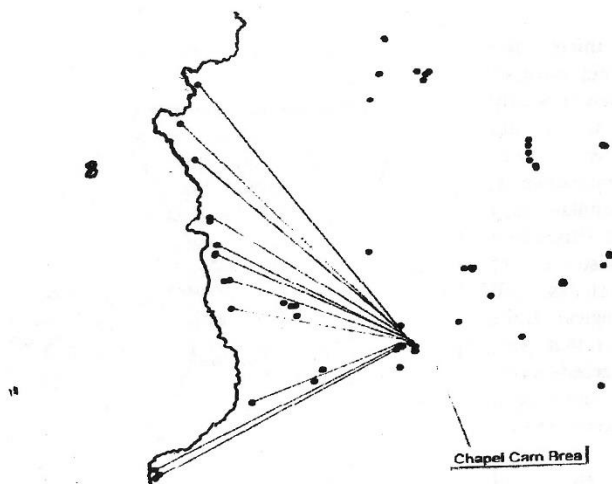
by **Paul Bonnington**

Continuing our theme of the sacred landscape, archaeologist Paul Bonnington looks at the coastal barrows of St. Just area in relationship to the hill top of Chapel Carn Brea.

The hills, cliffs and moors of West Penwith have long been considered places of myth and legend, and it is easy to see why when you consider that much of the landscape is not only very ancient, but also amazingly intact. Within it you are constantly reminded of the prehistoric communities who lived here and shaped its character. The most tangible evidence for this, and that which most of us can relate to most easily within the context of our own experience, is the ancient farming landscape. The terraced field systems found throughout West Penwith, sitting in perfect juxtaposition with its spectacular granite formations, have determined the area's settlement patterns and predominant economy since their inception in the Later Bronze and Iron Ages. That they are still maintained and used today makes West Penwith's one of the oldest continually worked landscapes in the world. Beneath this however lies another man-made landscape of much greater antiquity, which is not only far less obvious physically, but is infinitely more abstract when one tries to relate it to the lives of prehistoric people who built it. This earlier landscape was made up of ceremonial monuments which were carefully sited in accordance with one another, and with significant natural features, and it is on an element of the 'ceremonial landscape' in the far west of the West Penwith that this article will focus.

"Each natural granite boss (outcrop) was surmounted by its group of little burying-places, while the cliffs and hilltops above and further inland were studded with lines or groups of larger mounds", was written in 1881 by West Penwith antiquarian William Copeland Borlase on the subject of Early Bronze Age barrows around St Just and Land's End.

In 1997 the National Trust asked myself and a group of students from Exeter and Sheffield Universities to undertake a survey of seventeen such mounds situated on or close to the cliff-edge carns at Mayon, Escalls, Nanjulian, Boscregan, Letcha and Kenidjack in the St Just and Sennen parishes. Eight were already known to be definite Early Bronze Age (EBA: circa 2000-1500 BCE cal) round-cairns, based on previous archaeological investigation, and the others were suspected to be of similar origin. The results of the 1997 survey showed that a further seven mounds were indeed very probable EBA cairns; based on their location, size and apparent morphology. The survey also showed that, in association with a few sites either destroyed or not on Trust land, the cairns collectively formed part of a significant linear coastal barrow group, the layout of which had apparently been designed in accordance with Cornwall's first hill, Chapel Carn Brea.

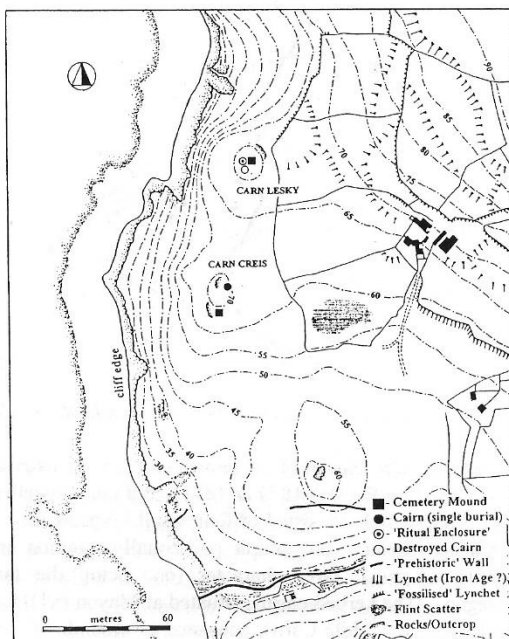


Location of coastal barrows in relation to Chapel Can Brea

THE BARROWS. Seven of the known cairns were excavated during the late 19th C by WC Borlase (see Borlase 1879 & 1881), and taken together they form a fascinating and varied group which consisted of four small kerbed-cairns of a type common in western and northern Britain, one simple and equally common un-kerbed cairn, and two cairn 'variants' of much rarer character (one being the famous Carn Creis barrow at Boscregan). The kerbed-cairns, situated at Mayon (x1), Escalls (x1) and Boscregan (x2, Carn Leskys & Middle Carn), consisted of mounds of 'fist-sized' stones, with external retaining walls or 'kerbs' of larger stones around them, and internal architectural features of the types commonly associated with other kerbed cairns, including stone-lined cists at Mayon (x1), Escalls and Boscregan (x1), and internal walling at Boscregan (x2). In contrast, the un-kerbed cairn, located at Mayon, consisted of a simple stone mound with no kerb or internal architecture.

Of the 'variant cairns', all seem to have been characterised by their lack of mounds, based on Borlase's notes and comparable sites. Apparently, both consisted essentially of 'boundaries' designed to enclose a special space or deposit, at Carn Creis a large natural boulder, and at Carn Leskys a pile of fist-sized beach pebbles. Whilst the former has precedents elsewhere in West Cornwall, e.g. at Wendron (see Borlase 1872), the Carn Leskys monument is very unusual as it was attached to an adjacent kerbed-cairn, forming a figure 8 in plan. Such structures are often called 'enclosure barrows' (see Miles 1975), and this term may also be applied to the eighth known cairn, situated at Kenidjack. This monument was recorded by local antiquarian JT Blight (see Blight 1868) as a moundless kerbed-cairn with an internal cist. The 1997 survey showed however that the kerb actually consisted in part of two closely spaced walls with infill between, suggesting that it may in fact have been a ring-cairn (see Miles 1975).

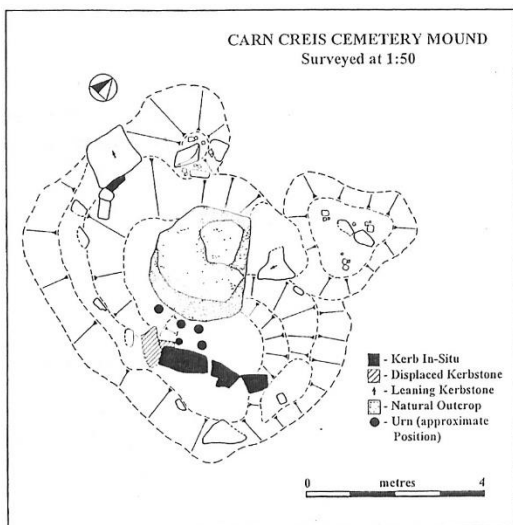
One thing the known cairns did have in common was their relatively small size. All were around 6-7m in diameter, as were four of the 'unexcavated' cairns, at Nanjulian (x2) and Letcha (x2). This, along with the existence of probable kerb-stones and other morphological traits strongly implies that they too are EBA kerbed-cairns. All appear to have been excavated to some extent; almost entirely in the case of one each at Letcha and Nanjulian. Fortunately the other two remain relatively unscathed, with only their centres having been mutilated. It seems likely some or all were investigated by Borlase. We can only assume that he found nothing of interest (to him), as there is no record for these sites of his, or anyone else's, findings.



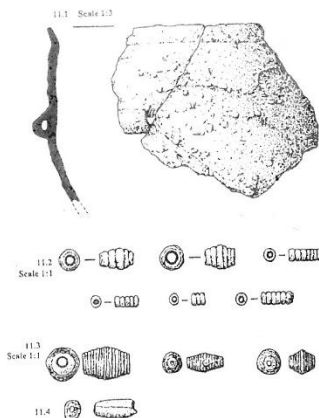
HUMAN REMAINS. Of the seven cairns excavated by Borlase, only three produced definite evidence for human burial: at Mayon (x1) and Boscregan (x2: Carn Creis and Carn Leskys). The Mayon cairn contained a single urned cremation burial, whilst the two at Boscregan contained multiple cremation burials which were most likely inserted contemporaneously: 2-3 at Carn Leskys, at least one being an adult, and 4 at Carn Creis, one of which was a young female or child. In archaeological terms these multiple burial cairns are called 'cemetery mounds', and although it is often held that the single burial rite was 'normal' for the EBA (due to the overuse of Wessex-barrows as the major basis for research), an examination of the archaeological record shows that multiple burial remained the predominant rite for much of Northern and Western Britain (Lynch 1971). This implies that Neolithic traditions remained important for many EBA communities, and although it is impossible to say to what extent the EBA rite followed the original blueprint, we might assume that such cemetery mounds were regarded as very powerful representations of the 'ancestral body' within the landscape.

Like many of his contemporaries, Borlase tended to view each of the barrows he dug as the grave of some 'ancient inhabitant'. Even today, barrows are often perceived as 'ancient graves', even though archaeological evidence from throughout Britain shows that EBA round-mounds of all architectural classes often contained no human remains at all (see Miles 1975). In my previous article for Meyn Mamvro (no. 53) I argued that, where found, human remains acted as a powerful resource in ritual contexts, and that their utilisation was determined by what they symbolised culturally: e.g. the aforementioned 'ancestral body'. I also stated that the absence of human burials in over 45% of the Cornish barrows excavated by modern means may be the reflection either of a lack of access to the resource, or the fact that they were not always deemed necessary for the success of the deposition process. The latter may well apply to the other four cairns excavated by Borlase, as none contained human remains, even though three had cists, and two contained the type of pottery associated with burials in other Cornish barrows.

THE ARTEFACTS: Very few prestigious artefacts have been found in Cornish barrows, and despite some notable exceptions like the Rillaton gold cup, there is little to support Borlase's view that the people interred within these and other barrows were of 'warrior or semi-regal class'. Carn Creis however might be considered as another exception, albeit a more modest one, as it too contained a collection of artefacts which might be termed 'high status', in this case twelve faience beads.



Faience has been described as man's first conscious attempt to produce a synthetic material, and is actually a prototypical form of glass and one of very few truly glazed materials to have existed in prehistoric Britain (see Stone in Clarke et al., 1985). Such beads are very rare in Cornish contexts, though fairly common in Wessex barrows (see Annable & Simpson, 1964), and would no doubt have been highly prized. Significantly, the Carn Creis beads were found with the cremated remains of the young girl/child, and seem originally to have been strung together as a necklace. As such they may actually represent that person's personal property, a somewhat unique phenomena in Cornwall, where few artefacts have been found in such intimate association with a cremation burial.

*Artefacts [left]*

*Pot = example from Carn
Creis*

*Beads (1st 2 rows) = faience
from Carn Creis*

*Beads (3rd & 4th rows) =
Jet examples from Bedd
Branwen on Anglesey*

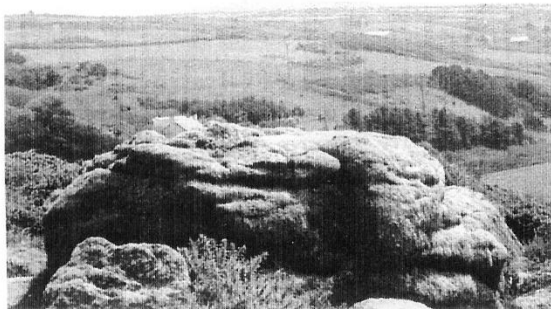
Carn Creis held some other fascinating items as well, including a collection of Beaker sherds, a Later Neolithic V-perforated shale (or similar) button and leaf-shaped flint arrowhead. Whether curated family heirlooms or found objects, they would no doubt have been recognised as 'ancestral artefacts' and thus were probably used to symbolise an 'ancestral presence' within the barrow. The inclusion of such items illustrates a concern with the past which is identically mirrored within many Cornish and British barrows, though not in any of the other sites excavated by Borlase. One further object of interest from Carn Creis assemblage was a piece of 'green glass', which by Borlase's description sounds very similar to a piece of tin slag found within the Caerloggas Barrow near St Austell (see Miles 1975). Though now lost, it is intriguing to think that here we had some tangible evidence for ancient tin-working in West Penwith.

Other items from the cairns as a whole included pottery, perforated stones, flint flakes, charcoal, burnt earth and beach pebbles. Carn Leskys contained at least seven urns, some associated with the 2-3 cremation burials and some separate. All were arranged in neatly spaced deposits around a circular internal wall, and included fine Trevisker Ware and pots of much rougher quality. Carn Creis also contained a mixture of ceramic styles, including one very 'rude' urn which was apparently unfired when used (bone fragments were embedded in the fabric). These pots, as well as some of the other artefacts may have had a personal connection to the cremated individuals, though this would not account for the beach pebbles, pot sherds and other objects found in the empty cairns. As was the case for the other resources, it is likely that these objects and materials were essentially included because of what they symbolised within EBA society. That such media could have played a symbolic role culturally is implied by a wealth of ethnographic evidence: for example, many Australian Aborigines believe that certain natural objects contain the spirits of animals or ancestors, whilst some communities in Africa and elsewhere regard the by-products of metalworking and other industries as highly charged symbolically.

LOCATION AND DISTRIBUTION. As noted, all of the cairns surveyed in 1997 were situated on, or in close association with, the granite outcrops or 'carns' which periodically erupt along the seaward edge of West Penwith's coastal ridge. Of the fifteen cairns surveyed, most incorporated these outcrops within their structure, Carn Creis' central boulder being the most obvious example. We may suspect that this was quite deliberate as these places had been significant to prehistoric communities long before the EBA. For example, at Boscregan and Letcha large flint scatters have been identified, indicating significant levels of activity in both the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods. Such evidence cannot have been overlooked by the EBA communities who utilised them, and such sites would no doubt have become a focus of their oral histories and myths as a result. This ancestral association would no doubt have added great symbolic significance to such locations and the resources they provided, thereby greatly enhancing any monument's perceived power.

As previously stated, the fifteen surveyed barrows formed the larger part of a significant linear group, which also included several small cairns at Nanjizal (including at least one cemetery cairn very similar to Carn Leskys), Ballowall and Cape Cornwall. All were arranged in discreetly clustered groups, which included at Mayon (x2) and Nanjulian (x1) the three remaining undiscussed survey cairns. These consist of small mounds, c. 1m diameter, and may be 'satellite-cairns', a class of small barrow identified within other EBA barrow groups, where in some cases they contained human remains. Significantly, not all of the surveyed cairns were visible to each other, both within each cluster and between the different groups. Some individual cairns were built in visually obvious locations, such as Carn Leskys and Escalls, whilst others like Carn Creis were tucked away, only becoming apparent when approached from certain directions. The use of false crests and other natural features to both enhance and conceal the presence of barrows has been recognised elsewhere, e.g. on Craddock Moor on Bodmin, and it has been suggested that these spatial arrangements were designed to create a series of visual pathways within the ceremonial landscape, so that one's movement within it might be determined and controlled (see Tilley 1995).

All these cairns were sited so that they were visually tied to one specific location, Chapel Carn Brea. The key role played by this site was the subject of my previous article in Meyn Mamvro, in which I argued that it was the primary foci of the local ceremonial landscape, based on its ancestral associations, the monuments built upon it (including Britain's most western Neolithic long-cairn and Penwith's largest EBA barrow), and the fact that most sites within the surrounding landscape seem to have been built so that they had a visual relationship with it. This was proven for the coastal cairns by the 1997 survey, which demonstrated that in some cases a metre or two either way would have rendered the hill invisible to almost all of them. The significance of this fact illustrates not only Chapel Carn Brea's immense significance as a cultural foci, but also shows that West Penwith's EBA communities designed their ceremonial landscape on a massive and complex scale, in accordance both with their own monuments and significant places, and those of their ancestors.



Chapel Carn Brea viewed from the central boulder of Carn Creis

As we have seen, there is much more to the barrows scattered around the windswept outcrops of West Penwith's coast than one might initially imagine. As a result of where they were, what they contained, and what they ultimately represented, all of the cairns would have been perceived as powerful cultural statements within the landscape. That they were seemingly designed in part to capture the power and essence of their location, and that this power was then enhanced by the media placed within them, illustrates the importance to EBA communities of validating their existence in the world through ritual acts, of which monument building and use is only the most visible to us. Ultimately, this validation process ensured their claim over the wider environment and its resources, whether utilitarian or symbolic, via the creation of ceremonial landscapes such as that which existed in the far west of West Penwith.

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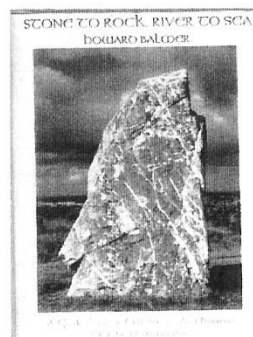
Paul Bonnington will be leading a CEMG walk around these coastal barrows to point out all these features 'in situ' on Sunday June 5th 2005. Meet at Nanjulan (small car park) nr. St. Just at SW3620 2920 at 11am.



BOOK REVIEW

Stone to Rock, River to Sea by Howard Balmer
[Padstow, 2004] £6.00 (inc. p & p) from River View,
Porthcothan, Padstow PL28 8LW

This booklet is in the best tradition of locally-based research of ancient sites by an enthusiastic lover of the monuments. There is no-one better qualified to write about the old stones, barrows and antiquities of the Padstow area than Howard Balmer: he knows the area covered intimately (from St. Breock Downs in the south to Brea Hill in the north, and from the Camel river in the east to the Atlantic ocean in the west), and he has walked and cycled every inch of the ground there.



Mên Gurtha standing stone

This 74pp booklet is packed with invaluable information about the sites and their location, but it is much more than just a gazeteer of the stones. It begins with an overview of 'The Prehistory of Cornwall', which refreshingly also considers that these early communities had "a reverence for the female form and the Cult of the Goddess", reflected in the shape of their ceremonial monuments. He then goes to consider each class of monument in turn, and then moves to a consideration of the whole notion of 'alternative archaeology' - the 'earth energies' and the 'holy hilltops' with the shapes of the Goddess in the hills and headlands. Of Trevoze Head he says: "The potential Goddess symbolism is striking; reclining figure, abundance (natural resources) and death (burial rites)." There is more on this on p.22-23 of this MM, where Howard elaborates his ideas of the Trevoze Goddess.

Whether you agree with this interpretation or not, it certainly makes for thought-provoking reading. And even if you don't, it does not detract from the Guide to the Sites and their descriptions. Here are listed the Barrowfields and other megaliths of the area, with evocative descriptions of the locale, any archaeological information that is known, photographs of the sites, and possible alignments to significant landscape features. He is very aware of the passage of ancient peoples through the landscape from one site to another, and talks about 'ceremonial routes' through the land. He writes with such joy and enthusiasm that is a delight to read; for example, of the coastal barrowfields he says: "Skylarks, peregrine falcons, gulls and kestrels soar overhead while cormorants and oystercatchers brave the Atlantic swells on their rocky perches at the foot of the cliffs. In early summer, thyme, eyebright, betony, buttercups and squill cover the barrows. The place is as pretty as their names. Six of the eight documented barrows remain and four of these are quite wonderful". This book is an absolute pleasure to read and an invaluable resource to own. It should be in the possession of all lovers of Cornish ancient sites everywhere.

THE TREVOSE GODDESS

by **Howard Balmer**

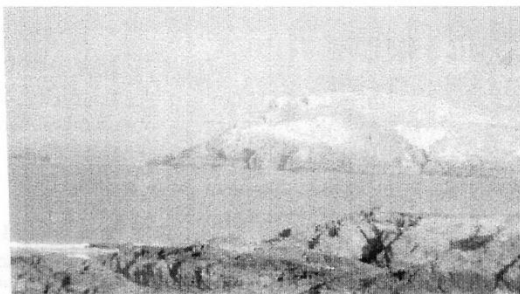
I have written several articles for MM over the last few years, detailing a number of interesting sites in the Padstow area of North Cornwall. I have continued to explore this area and the articles have grown into a little book [reviewed on p.21]. During fieldwork for this book, I have covered a lot of ground, literally cycling hundreds of miles in order to better understand the prehistoric ceremonial landscape of the area. The vast scale of this landscape surprised me. The density of the barrows on the ridge top between Hustyn Downs and High Cove has, until recently, rivalled that of the Ridgeway approaching Avebury in Wiltshire. The remains of this barrowfield are extensive, but sadly many have recently been ploughed away. Of course this important barrowfield could exist in its own right without reference to the surrounding landscape, but I couldn't help but wonder if there was a focus to all this prehistoric effort.

I haven't yet located a vast henge in the neighbourhood, but the natural landscape feature of Trevoise Head appears to have been of incredible importance during prehistory. The headland is a significant feature from the majority of ceremonial sites in the area, appearing unexpectedly on the horizon or framed between slopes. From The Fiddler Stone the midsummer sun sets into Trevoise. While the holy hilltops of Bodmin Moor are also indicated from some sites, Trevoise is the dominant feature. When I first saw the headland, stretching out in to the turquoise waters of the Atlantic, I was struck by its anthromorphic outline. I had first visited the Callanish stones on the Isle of Lewis several years before arriving in this part of Cornwall. From the Callanish complex, a distant hill formation assumes the shape of a woman lying on her back. Megalithic sites appear to have been sited with regard to this, and the whole landscape has been interpreted as a vast lunar observatory. When I finally came to research the Padstow area, the idea that the Trevoise headland was an integral part of the ancient monumental landscape became more tangible.



The extended anthromorphic form of the Trevoise Goddess

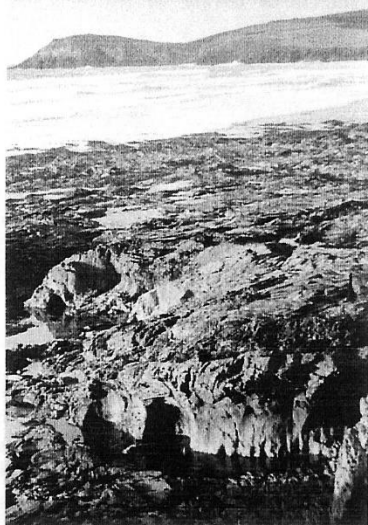
I found that the Trevose area was one of the important sources of Stone Age flints in Cornwall. Flint-like chert is believed to have washed in from undersea chalk deposits.



The Trevose 'face' seen from the Treyarnon area

There are a remarkable number of flint scatters around the headland, representing the numerous sites of Mesolithic activity. This natural abundance, combined with the anthropomorphic shape, must have made Trevose an incredibly important feature to the pre-monumental culture in this part of Cornwall. This culture acknowledged a Goddess whose body was the earth. They may have seen Trevose as a benevolent manifestation of their deity.

During the Neolithic and Bronze Age, a quarry on the eastern side of the headland was worked to produce beautiful axe heads that have been found across southern England. It is possible that the incredible golden lunulae found at Harlyn may have arrived here from Ireland as a result of the trade inspired by this harvest of stone. It was this megalithic culture that raised the monuments from which Trevose is such a significant feature. This suggests that the headland remained hugely important throughout the Neolithic and Bronze Age.



View from the south, showing the barrow

The Goddess figure is considered to have been central to the great mysteries of birth, death and rebirth from Paleolithic times through to the Neolithic. The large numbers of burial sites that appear to be associated with the headland suggests that Trevose continued to preside over death during the Bronze Age. The headland itself is a place of dramatic elemental beauty. Two Bronze Age barrows once graced its slopes. One has been quarried away, but on approaching the headland from the south, the small surviving barrow appears as an eye in the figure's head. Eye motifs associated with Goddess worship have been found in Britain, France & Spain. Trevose was indeed an integral part of the prehistoric ceremonial landscape.

THE PIPERS TUNE

The new volume of *Cornish Archaeology* (no. 39-40, 2000-1) is now out with some articles that would be of interest to MM readers. These include a 'reconsideration' of Roman Nornour by Sarnia Butcher and others, looking at the finds and the figurines, which actually re-inforces the notion of the site as a cult shrine to a maritime Goddess; a (somewhat belated) report by Andrew Young on the Time Team excavation at Boleigh fogou in 1995; and a fascinating article by Peter Rose on 'Shadows in the imagination: encounters with caves in Cornwall'. In this piece he looks at all the uses to which caves have been put in Cornwall from prehistoric times to the present day, together with a full gazetteer of the caves and their locations. Holywell Cave at Newquay and Merlin's Cave at Tintagel of course get a good mention, but there are also some other interesting sites listed which have yielded evidence of prehistoric use. These include:-

- Crane Carrick Crag above the raised beach at Lowland Point near Coverack on the Lizard (SW7959 1960), where Neolithic Grooved Ware pottery (in 1918) & flints (in 1933) were found.
- A rock outcrop at Garrow near St.Breward on Bodmin Moor (SX1417 7753) where flints & sherds of pottery were found in 1953 and which may have been a cult or burial site.

Refreshingly, Peter Rose is quite open to consideration of caves as "portals to the other world" and entrances into the womb of Mother Earth. For example, he suggests that St.Agnes Chapel & well may have been "established at an older, pagan cult site involving the water, the cave and a nearby stone". Altogether, this article and the whole volume is a fine example of good archaeological research.

The recent Channel 4 series of *Extreme Archaeology*, that was recently repeated on the satellite Discovery channel, featured Tintagel Headland as one of its locations. Professor Charles Thomas revealed that only 6% of the 11 acre site has been excavated, and the team then looked at three specific locations. The first one was on the north side of the headland, 150ft above the beach, with a 35° slope above a sheer drop to the sea. Here the team found about 60 fragments of high-status pottery dating from the 6thC CE, which were probably amphorae from the Greek Islands, reinforcing the interpretation of the site as "a royal residence, and a citadel for the kings of south-west Britain". The second site was the base of the site, with rock cut steps leading to a cave. Here the team were looking for evidence of the jetty that would have been the safe haven for importation of the 6thC goods, but they found only links to the 19thC slate mining in the area. The third site was on the south terrace of the headland. A resistivity survey was undertaken and the foundations of some buildings were identified. Pottery was also found that consisted of Cornish ware from the 5thC and imported Mediterranean ware from the 6thC. Charles Thomas declared himself satisfied that the investigation had shown the richness of imported ware at the site and reinforced his interpretation of the site as a major stronghold during the early Christian period.

FAIR EXCHANGE

MM Editor Cheryl Traffon has now started a regular column in "Cornish Pagan Wheel" magazine called "Earth Mysteries and Sacred Landscape". Full details of the magazine on inside back page [opp].

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Sun May 1st - Pagan Moot Celebrations. Details: 01736-787522

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Summer activities and events:-

Sun June 5th Coastal Barrows & Settlements at Nanjulian with Paul Bonnington. Meet at Nanjulian (small car park) nr. St. Just at 11am.

Sun July 3rd Sacred Sites on Bodmin Moor with Cheryl Straffon. Meet at De Lank water works (road from St. Breward) at 11am.

Sun Aug 7th St. Michael Way walk to Trencrom Hill passing several ancient sites. Meet Carbis Bay beach car park at 11am.

Sun Sept 3rd St. Agnes Head & Beacon with Geraldine McCarthy. Meet at Harmony Pottery, Wheal Rose, Scorrier at 11am.

For more details tel: Andy 01209-831519 or Cheryl 01736-787186.

Website: www.meynmamvro.co.uk/earth.htm

SUMMER CELEBRATIONS

Thurs June 23rd Midsummer Eve bonfires on hilltops. Contact local Old Cornwall Societies.

Sat June 25th Mazey Day in Penzance Serpent Dance & Penglaze 4.45 pm.

EARTH, HEALTH & MYSTIC

FAYRES *Sat-Sun Apr 30th-May 1st*

Sat-Sun Aug 6th-7th St. John's Hall, Penzance 10am onwards

Tel: Karen 01736-330201

Web site: www.mysticfayre.co.uk

MIND, BODY & SPIRIT EVENTS

Sat-Sun May 28th-29th

Sat-Sun Aug 26th-27th at St. Ives

Tel: 01736-757625

Web site:

www.lightbody-promotions.co.uk

PAGAN MOOTS

Penzance - meets 2nd Tues each month 7.15pm at 53 Morrab Rd. Tel: Sarah 01736-787522

Earth Moot - Penzance meets last Weds each month 7.15pm at Stella Maris Centre at Healing Star. Tel: Rod 01736-731548 or Healing Star 01736-330669

Redruth/Camborne - meets 3rd Tues each month Upstairs @ Fandangles in Redruth. Tel: Blew 01209-210999

Bodmin - meets first Weds each month in Bodmin. Tel: Athena 01208-264060

St. Columb Newquay & St. Austell. Meets 2nd Weds each month. Tel: Peter 07841 848786

Tintagel For details & venue Tel: Samantha 01840-770169

Bude - meets last Thurs each month 7.30pm at Brendon Arms. Tel: Lorraine 01288-359463

Web site: www.cornishwitchcraft.co.uk