

The Water-Stone Dolmen, Somersetshire.

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About eight miles from Bristol, on the broad back of Broadfield Down, some 560 feet above sea level, is a dolmen hitherto, so far as I know, undescribed. It is, perhaps, most conveniently reached by following the Bridgwater road until a disused cottage is seen on the right, about midway between the seventh and eighth milestones from Bristol. Near the dilapidated building is a pond; skirting this and following for about a third of a mile, the hedge, which runs at right angles to the road, one sees the megalithic remains in the middle of a field belonging to Cornerpool farm.

There can be no question that the stones were carried to the spot where they now lie and erected by the hand of man. Standing near them, one obtains a fair and wide prospect of Mendip rising on the farther side of Wrington Vale.

Originally consisting of three uprights and a cover-stone, the dolmen is now in a ruined condition, one of the uprights having probably been broken when the cover-stone fell. The westerly upright leans to the east at an angle of twenty degrees with the horizon, and is 7 feet in length, 1 foot 4 inches thick, and, in breadth, tapers from 4 feet 2 inches, at the base, to about 9 inches at the apex. The easterly upright also leans in the same direction, at a slightly less angle, and is somewhat longer, being 8 feet 8 inches in length breadth, tapers from 2 feet 6 inches to 1 foot; and, in thickness it is, in part of its length where it consists of two stratified layers still adherent, 1 foot 10 inches, and for the rest, where one of the layers is absent, 1 foot, measured at right angles to the stratification. The third, or southerly upright is probably broken; the larger fragment remaining being 3 feet 7 inches long, 2 feet 3 inches broad, and 11 inches thick. Other smaller fragments were probably part of the original upright.

The cover-stone is large, irregular in shape, and uneven in surface, being deeply hollowed on its upper side. In this hollow, which is probably natural and not the result of human workmanship, water collects during wet weather. Hence, presumably, the name of the field in which the dolmen stands – “Water-stone field.” The irregular mass is 3 feet thick at its westerly side, thinning thence unevenly. Its north and south,

and its east and west dimensions are 10 feet 10 inches, and 9 feet 2 inches respectively. Its bulk is not far short of 100 cubic feet; and its weight is probably between six and seven tons.



WATERSTONE DOLMEN, SOMERSETSHIRE FROM N.W.

The three upright stones are composed of a peculiar local rock, obtainable within a few hundred yards of the spot. Here the Lias rests unconformably on the mountain or Carboniferous limestone, and consists of a greyish-white calcareous deposit, very different from typical Lias. The stones may well have been found lying on the surface of the ground; but they may have been hewn from the bed-rock.

The cover-stone is of a totally different character. It is composed of a silicious breccia, probably of Triassic age, somewhat similar to that found in the megalithic remains at Stanton Drew. I cannot speak with certainty as to its exact source; but I lean to the view that, like the Stanton Drew stones of similar lithological character, it was brought from the Harptree Ridge in Mendip, a distance of more than six miles. I know of no rock at all similar within a radius of two miles; so that, in any case, the

Dolmen folk had to bring it to its present site with labour; probably by means of ropes and rollers, the means now or till recently employed by hill tribes in India. When brought to the spot, it had to be raised to its position as a cover-stone - perhaps by making (as again seen in India) a temporary slope of earth up which it was pulled into position on rollers.

There is no indication on the spot that the whole dolmen was at any time enclosed in a mound of earth, nor is there any record of its use for sepulture having been disclosed by the discovery of burial remains. The hill tribes of India are said to erect stones in memory to propitiation of the spirits of the departed, without actual burial near or beneath them.

Your Secretary, Mr. A. E. Hudd, F.S.A., has suggested, that the narrow lane leading up from the south to the "Water-stone field" may be part of an old British trackway. The megalithic remains suggest, though they afford no means of answering, the question: By whom were they erected? We may probably say, with tolerable confidence, that they were erected either by the Celtic Bronze folk, or by their Iberian Neolithic precursors in Britain - that they are coeval either with the round barrows or with the earlier long barrows. There are, in addition to numerous round barrows on Mendip, the remains of a long barrow, near Butcombe, a couple of miles south-east, and the well preserved chambered tumulus, at Stoney Littleton, near Wellow, a dozen miles further east; while the stone circles of Stanton Drew lie six miles east by south. These circles and the adjoining dolmen (the cove) may well be of different dates - their erection covering a wide range of time. The earlier work may have been Neolithic; the later work that of the Bronze folk following the traditional procedure adopted by their precursors. If tradition gave continuity to the megalithic monuments of the earlier and the later races, it is hard to say by which the water-stone dolmen was erected. But, since the purpose of this communication is descriptive, not controversial, I am content to leave the question open.