

# CHAPEL CARN BREA

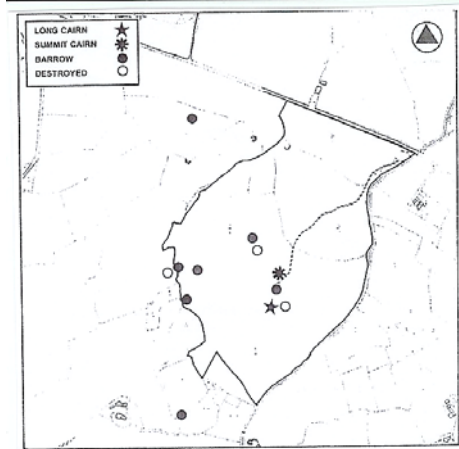
SW 385 280 [OS Maps Explorer 102; Landranger 203]

## LOCATION

Chapel Carn Brea, often described as Britain's 'first and last hill', lies to the south of St. Just, overlooking Sennen and the Atlantic ocean. It is 200m (657ft) high, and is a focal point seen from the countryside and cliffs below.

## ACCESS

The hill is reachable either from St. Just, by taking the B3306 road towards Sennen and shortly after Land's End Airport taking a left hand turn that leads up to the hill (parking area), or from Penzance, by taking the A30 road towards Land's End and at Crows-an-Wra taking a right hand turn that leads up to the hill (parking area). From the parking area there is a short ( $\frac{1}{4}$  mile) walk to the top of the hill. The site is owned by the National Trust.



[c] Paul Bonnington

## DESCRIPTION

There were formerly 11 Barrows on the slopes and summit of the hill, but only 7 now remain, and most of these are in a ruinous condition. There are two that are worth noting: one is a rare early Neolithic **long cairn** (SW 3857 2799) which consists of a 11m (35 $\frac{1}{2}$ ft) linear stone mound built against a natural granite outcrop, situated on a false crest to the west of the summit. The second is the **summit cairn** (SW 3859 2807) [pictured right] which is a Late Neolithic/early Bronze Age entrance grave, (c.2500 BC) covered by a mound that was originally 21m (68ft) in diameter & 5m (16ft) high. The remains of the mound were dug into by W. Copeland Borlase in 1879, who reported finding three concentric walls, the most central of which enclosed two stone-lined chambers or cists, containing pot sherds & bones.



## FOLKLORE & LEGEND

In the 13th century a tiny hermitage chapel of St. Michael of Brea was built on the summit cairn, which subsequently deteriorated and was demolished in 1816. In its heyday it was tended by a succession of hermits who kept a beacon burning for travellers and ships. One of these was the legendary Harry the Hermit, who was supposed to 'raise storms' against fishermen who refused his demands for tithes.

## PURPOSE AND MEANING

The Summit Cairn on Chapel Carn Brea was a distinctive feature, which would have required a huge amount of labour and resources to construct. Although it contained the deposition of pot sherds with cremated bone, the structure clearly is more elaborate (the original entrance grave having been built on with a large mound) than it needs to be from a purely practical purpose. It is thought of nowadays as being a 'cultural statement', a visible cultural presence in the landscape, and a significant ceremonial monument that was visible from many of the other surrounding sites in the area [see page 2 of this leaflet for more details]. It may have been thought of as being the dwelling place of the ancestors of the tribe  
**Go to page 2 for details of other barrows in the area.**

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# OTHER BARROWS IN THE AREA OF CHAPEL CARN BREA

## LOCATION & ACCESS

There are a line of barrows all along the coastal strip from St. Just to Lands End, many of which seem to be deliberately aligned to the hill of Chapel Carn Brea. These can all be conveniently visited by joining the coastal path at Carn Gluze, to the west of St. Just and following the coast path to Sennen and Land's End.

## DESCRIPTION

**Ballowal Barrow (Carn Gluze)** (SW 3555 3124). The most easterly of the group is by far and away the largest of any of the barrows. It lies 1 mile west of St. Just beside a minor road that leads off from the road to Cape Cornwall, and consists of a large unroofed structure, about 11.2m (37ft) in diameter and 3m (10ft) high). On the SW side there is an Entrance Grave built into the structure 3.3m (11ft) long & 0.9m (3ft) high, roofed by two thin stones. This Entrance Grave



faces out over a dramatic seascape. The interior of the mound is much disturbed from the excavations of W.C. Borlase in 1878, but includes two cists next to the walls, which originally contained urns and cremated bones. Chapel Carn Brea can be seen from this site. **Letcha Cairn** (SW 3570 3025) The next barrow reached as you climb the coastal path from Cot Valley (Porth Nanvern) is on the top of the cliff at Letcha. This has a diameter of 8m (26ft) and a kerb surround of 4 remaining upright stones. There is a good view to CCBrea.

**Boscregan** There were formerly three barrows on **Carn Polpry** (sometimes called Carn Leskys), of which one only has discernible remains (SW 3580 2983). This consisted of a bank of earth and stone surrounded by a ring of stones, of which only 1 or 2 remain. Again good views to Chapel Carn Brea.

A short distance to the south on a pair of rocky knolls at Carn Creis lie two more barrows, both quite well preserved. The northern of the two, sometimes called **Middle Cairn** (SW 3577 2969) [pictured right] consists of a cairn originally 5.5m (18ft) in diameter with a kerb of 7 stones remaining. To the E of the centre are the remains of a cist, with what is probably its lid lying beside it. The southern one, sometimes called **Carn Creis** (SW 3576 2966) consists of a cairn similar in size, with 6 stones still in situ. Its most distinctive feature



is that it surrounds a natural granite boulder in the centre of the barrow. This unusual feature shows that the barrow builders had great reverence for natural features in the landscape. Five urns were recovered from this site, which contained a number of items including bright blue faience beads, the base of a leaf-shaped arrowhead and a perforated heart-shaped stone. Good views to Ch. Carn Brea.

**Sennen** Next along, there is a small kerbed cairn on **Escalls Cliff** (SW 3623 2723) overlooking the coastal path, and finally to the west of Sennen on the cliff top at **Mayon** near to the look-out post, there is a well-preserved kerbed cairn at SW 3482 2602.

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