

CHÛN QUOIT

SW 4023 3396 [OS Maps Explorer 102; Landranger 203]

LOCATION

Chûn Quoit (pronounced 'Choon') lies on a high spot on the West Penwith moors near to Pendeen. It can be seen clearly on the horizon from the B3318 road that runs from Portherras Cross at Pendeen to join the A3071 road to Penzance.

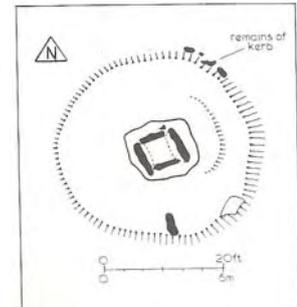


ACCESS

The site can be reached from three directions. One from Keigwin near Pendeen by a public footpath, one from the B3318 road, where there is a small car-parking area and a permissive path that climbs up to the hill, and one from Trehyllys Farm to Chûn Castle [see directions on page 2].

DESCRIPTION

Chûn is the best-preserved example of the class of monuments called variously Quoits, Dolmens or Cromlechs. They are probably the earliest of any of the prehistoric monuments remaining, dating from the early Neolithic period (3500-2500 BC), and were constructed by the early farmers who had recently settled and begun to plant crops and raise cattle. Each group of farmers occupied their own area or territory, and on high ground nearby would construct one of these Quoits. They may originally, or subsequently, have been covered by an earth mound, but the capstone itself may have remained uncovered. At Chûn, part of its kerb remains on the NE side. The remaining monument consists of a closed chamber of four slabs 1.5m (4ft) high which lean inwards and support a convex capstone 3.7m (12ft) square and up to 0.8m (2½ft) thick. The site was dug in 1871 by W.C.Borlase but nothing found.



[c] Craig Weatherhill

FOLKLORE & LEGEND

Chûn is a Cornish word, deriving from 'Chy Woone' which means 'The House on the Downs'. The word Quoit comes from the Cornish legend that the capstones on the Quoits came to be there because they were thrown by the giants enjoying a game of quoits.

PURPOSE AND MEANING

There are a number of quoits (approximately 8 remaining) found usually (though not always) on high ground throughout West Penwith. Interestingly, they are often near, but not on, the tops of hills, and this may relate to the importance for the builders to be able to see the monument from their settlements below. These sites were clearly non-utilitarian, and probably were designed as repositories for the bones of the dead, whose bodies may have been laid out on the capstones for the carrion birds to remove the flesh (a practice known as excarnation). Yet it would be a mistake to think of these monuments simply as 'burial chambers'. The bone evidence from cromlechs in other places indicates that the disarticulated bones of a number of individuals may have been placed inside, and from time to time some bones were removed and were replaced by others. We may perhaps rather think of these sites as places where the tribe (or the shamans of the tribe) would go to consult with the spirits of their dead ancestors in trance journeys and altered states of consciousness.

Go to page 2 for details of Chûn Castle nearby.

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IF YOU FIND ANY DAMAGE OR VANDALISM PLEASE PHONE 01736-787186 OR 787522

CHÛN CASTLE

SW 405 339 [OS Maps Explorer 102; Landranger 203]

LOCATION

Chûn Castle (pronounced 'Choon') lies a few hundred yards east of Chûn Quoit [see *previous page*] on the summit of the hill, with panoramic views in all directions.



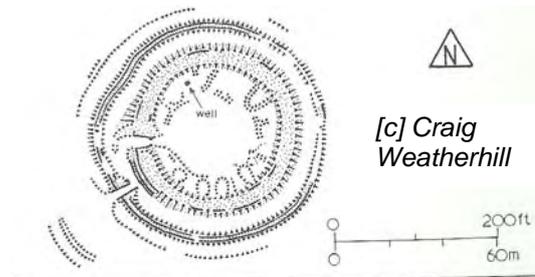
ACCESS

A path leads from Chûn Quoit to the Castle. Alternatively, the site may be reached directly from Trehyllys Farm below. To get to Trehyllys Farm take the minor road that runs between Madron and Morvah, and just past the small car park for the Mên-an-Tol there is a turning to the left that leads to Trehyllys Farm. There is no car park as such, but normally one or two cars may be left in the farmyard area. The path to the Castle is indicated by a whitewashed boulder.

DESCRIPTION

Although Chûn Castle is only a few hundred yards from the Quoit, it comes from a much later period. Built during the Iron Age, during the third century BC, it is over 2000 years later than the Quoit.

Although it is in a ruined state, its size can still be well appreciated. It is 85m (280ft) in diameter, and consists of a central area, surrounded by two concentric granite walls with external ditches. The outer ditch was 6.1m (20ft) wide, and the outer wall now 2.1m (7ft) high, but may originally have been 3.0m (10ft) high. The inner wall (now mostly destroyed) was some 4.6m (15ft) to 6.7m (22ft) thick, and could originally have been some 6.1m (20ft) high. There were originally some Iron Age huts in the inner area, though no trace of these now remain. The site was re-occupied in about the sixth century AD, when 15 or 16 stone houses were built around the inner courtyard, and a furnace for smelting tin was made, just south of the well in the NW quadrant of the inner area. The entrance was also reshaped to make a staggered entry, which would have made attack difficult. The site was plundered during the 18th century of stone to construct the Madron Workhouse and pave some streets in Penzance.



FOLKLORE & LEGEND

According to the old stories, the Castle was built by Jack of the Hammer, or Jack the Tinner, a wandering tin prospector who arrived in West Penwith and killed a local giant. He may be a version of the Irish sun-God Lugh, and his skill with tin a memory of the tin smelting here.

PURPOSE AND MEANING

The Castle was obviously an important site in the Iron Age and early Christian period, perhaps a meeting place for the local tribes or clans for barter, exchange, the sealing of bargains and 'marriages' and ceremonies. It was obviously also a busy place for the production and smelting of tin, which was then traded with other Celtic tribes in Britain, Ireland and on the Continent. An ancient trackway, The Tinnens Way, runs from here towards the Hayle estuary and St. Michael's Mount.

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