

LANYON QUOIT

SW 4298 3369 [OS Maps Explorer 102; Landranger 203]

LOCATION

Lanyon Quoit is located on relatively low-lying land close to Lanyon Farm, beside the Penzance-Madron-Morvah road. The site is owned and maintained by the National Trust.

ACCESS

There is an area beside the road where one or two cars can park. A stile leads across a Cornish hedge, and the Quoit is a few yards further on. There is no disabled access at present, though discussions are underway to see if it can be provided in the future.

DESCRIPTION

Lanyon Quoit is perhaps the best known and most photographed of any of Cornwall's prehistoric monuments - but it also unfortunately one of the least authentic! It originally dated from the early Neolithic period (3500-2500 BC) and consisted a large capstone 5.3m (17½ft) long and 2.7m (9ft) wide on 4 upright support stones, similar to Chûn Quoit on the moors to the west [*available as a downloadable leaflet*]. However, in 1815 it collapsed in a storm and some stones were fractured, so that when it was re-erected in 1824 (at right angles to its original position) the capstone was placed on only 3 uprights which were shortened and squared off. It is thus much lower than before, and does not retain the distinctive rectangular box-like appearance of other Quoits. It originally stood at the northern end of a burial mound 27m (90ft) long and 12m (40ft) broad, the outline of which is still visible. At the southern end is a collection of stones which may originally have formed a small chamber or cist. In the 18th century Dr. Borlase dug at the site and reported that between the support stones, he had found a grave containing 'black earth'.

FOLKLORE & LEGEND

Like many other sites, it was previously thought that treasure was buried under the monument, and digging over the years certainly weakened the foundations and probably contributed to its collapse.

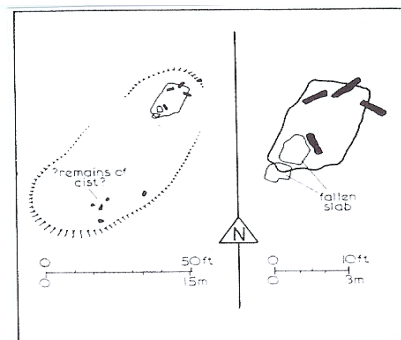
PURPOSE AND MEANING

Lanyon is one of a number of quoits (approximately 8) remaining in West Penwith. These sites were probably 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 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 other ancient sites in the area.

PLEASE TREAT THIS SITE WITH RESPECT & LEAVE NO LITTER OR OFFERINGS.

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



[c] Craig Weatherhill

OTHER SITES NEAR TO LANYON QUOIT

WEST LANYON QUOIT SW 4231 3379

LOCATION & ACCESS This ruined Quoit lies about ½ mile from Lanyon Quoit, in a sloping field to the south of the road. There is no public access to this site and permission to visit it should be sought from Lanyon Farm.

DESCRIPTION & MEANING In 1790 a mound in this field was cleared and the remains of this Quoit were discovered. It consists of a fallen capstone 4.2m (13ft) long by 3.2m (10½ft) wide propped up against one upright stone, with another broken one underneath.

Most other extant Quoits are some distance from each other, as though they were marking tribal boundaries, so the close proximity of these two (Lanyon and West Lanyon) is curious. Large deposits of bones were found when it was discovered, and possibly bronze and copper objects as well (present location unknown).



BOSILIACK BARROW SW 4311 3422

LOCATION & ACCESS This reconstructed barrow lies to the north of Lanyon Quoit. It can be reached either by going along the road NW towards Lanyon Farm, and taking a trackway before the farm which leads up to Ding Dong mine, or by driving back towards Madron and taking a sharp left turn to Bosiliack Farm and then walking up to Ding Dong mine and turning left down the same track to the barrow. The barrow lies a few yards to the S of this track.

DESCRIPTION & MEANING This barrow belongs to a class of monument called Entrance Graves or Chambered Tombs, consisting of a circular kerb of stones with an entrance passage, the whole of which would originally have been covered by a mound of earth and stones. Other examples may be seen at Brane Barrow (near to Sancreed), Tregiffian Barrow (near to the Merry Maidens stone circle), and at Chapel Carn Brea and Ballowal Barrow near St. Just [all available as downloadable leaflets]. They date from the Neolithic period (approx. 3000-2500 BC). Bosiliack Barrow is 4.95m (16½ft) in diameter with a probable original height of 1.5m (5ft). It was excavated in 1984, when a primary deposit in a pot was discovered, as well as topsoil and turf that might have been placed in the chamber as ritual deposits associated with the fertility of the land. The entrance passage was positioned deliberately to face the midwinter solstice sunrise (the same as at Brane Barrow near Sancreed). This phenomenon is known about from other sites, most notably at Newgrange in Ireland, where a large chambered burial mound also has its entrance similarly oriented to the midwinter solstice sunrise. It is thought that this was done in order for ceremonial rites to take place, linking the power of the rebirth of the sun God/dess with the spirits of the dead ancestors.



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