

MÊN-AN-TOL HOLED STONE

SW 4264 3493 [OS Maps Explorer 102; Landranger 203]

LOCATION

The Mên-an-Tol lies beside a pathway that leads from a minor road that runs between Madron near Penzance to Morvah which lies on the north coast between St. Just and St. Ives.



ACCESS

There is a small parking area beside the road, followed by a half mile walk up the lane. The site is signposted on the right of the lane, and is reached by climbing a stile in the hedge, which makes it unsuitable for disabled access.

DESCRIPTION

The Mên-an-Tol (Cornish for 'Stone of the Hole') consists of a holed stone 1.2m (4ft) across with a large round hole 51cm (20 in) in diameter, large enough for a grown person to crawl through. Either side of it are two upright stones, 1.3m (4½ft) high. There is also a fallen stone, and leading away around the edge the visible remains of other stones. What can be seen today are the remains of a stone circle, which probably originally consisted of 19 stones, as do the other circles in West Penwith. This circle, however, had the unique feature of a holed stone included. The precise location and function of this holed stone is unknown. It may have been moved at some time in the past, and indeed may once have faced at right angles to its present position. It may even have been the entrance stone to a burial mound, as it stands next to a raised stony area.

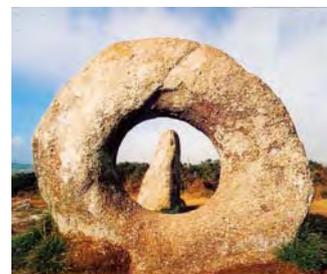


Photo [c] Ian Cooke

FOLKLORE & LEGEND

The holed stone has long been the subject of legends relating to healing and divination. Formerly known as the Crick stone, it was thought that to crawl through the hole nine times widdershins (against the sun or anti-clockwise) was a cure for backache, rickets and scrofula. Children would be passed through three times. Also, if a brass pin was placed on the stone, questions could be answered by the movement of the pin. It is sometimes used nowadays in ceremonies involving rebirth or transformation into other realities.

PURPOSE AND MEANING

The site probably dates from the late Neolithic-early Bronze Age (approx. 2500-1500 BC) as do the other stone circles in West Penwith, and was probably used for ritual and ceremonial purposes. The holed stone was obviously connected to the site in some way. The closeness of holed stones to stone circles is recorded at other places - for example at Trege-seal stone circle in West Penwith [*also available as a downloadable leaflet*], and at the Stone of Odin, a holed stone that formerly stood between two stone circles on Orkney. They may have been used either as entrance stones to a barrow, or to give sightlines to other monuments and/or to the sun and the moon. If the holed stone here had been at right angles to its present position, it could have been used by the megalithic people to view the rising moon at its most northerly extreme (which only occurs every 18.6 years): seen from the centre of the circle, the moon would have been framed perfectly by the hole.

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

OTHER SITES NEAR TO THE MÊN-AN-TOL

THE MÊN SCRYFA STANDING STONE SW 4268 3529

LOCATION & ACCESS Continue up the lane from the Mên-an-Tol, and after about 300 yds (274m) the Mên Scryfa can be seen in a field on the left.

DESCRIPTION & MEANING This 1.8m (6ft) tall standing stone probably dates originally from the Bronze Age, but was re-used in the late Iron Age/Celtic period (5th or 6th century AD) when an inscription was carved along the northern face of the stone. This read RIALOBRANI CVNOVALI FILI, (the FILI is now below ground) which is a Latinised form of Cornish, and means 'Royal Raven, son of the famous leader'. It was thus a memorial stone to the son of a tribal leader of an Iron Age clan or tribe, whose name was taken from Bran, a mythic Celtic God or Chieftan written about in the early Welsh saga *The Mabinogi*. The story of Rialvran is also recorded in fragmentary form, and tells of how a great battle was fought at this spot, as Rialvran tried to recover his father's lands from an interloper who had seized them. Rialvran was defeated but this memorial was erected to him here.

The stone collapsed in the 19th century when someone dug under it hoping to find treasure, but was subsequently replaced in the same spot.



NINE MAIDENS (BOSKEDNAN) STONE CIRCLE SW 4343 3512

LOCATION & ACCESS This site is approachable either by continuing up the lane from the Mên Scryfa, on to the moors and then taking the track straight ahead, or from the other direction by driving from the Madron-Morvah road on to the paved roadway that runs up to Bosiliack Farm and becomes a track to Ding Dong mine.

DESCRIPTION & MEANING This Bronze Age ruined site, much disturbed by mine workings nearby, now has only 11 stones standing or leaning out of a probable original 19. Two stones were recently (2005) re-erected, and now the two portal stones frame the view to the rocky outcrop of Carn Gulva on the horizon. There may originally have been a processional way from the circle to this 'holy hilltop', perhaps thought of the dwelling place of the spirits of the ancestors, or the Gods/Goddesses.

There was also formerly a standing stone as outlier to the circle, 43 paces to the NW, which marked the direction of the midsummer sun set: now only a stump remains.

A dug-out barrow encroaches on to the southern side of the circle, containing the remains of a central cist in which an urn and sherds of pottery were found.

The remains of three more barrows lie to the north of the circle, one of which stands prominently on the summit of a ridge, beside the path that leads to the stone circle from the Mên-an-Tol & Mên Scryfa. This site was cleared of gorse and vegetation in 2005, and one of stones of the retaining kerb was discovered to have a seam of blue-grey crystal in a distinctive ^ shaped notch. This stone was presumably deliberately chosen because of its appearance to mark this burial site.

PLEASE TREAT THESE SITES WITH RESPECT & LEAVE NO LITTER OR OFFERINGS.

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



Photo [c] Sarah Vivian