

MERRY MAIDENS STONE CIRCLE

SW 4327 2451 [OS Maps Explorer 102; Landranger 203]

LOCATION

The Merry Maidens Stone Circle lies beside the B3315 road about 4 miles (6 km) from Penzance. The road goes past the turning to Lamorna valley and then about half a mile further on, the stone circle can be found in a field on the south side of the road.



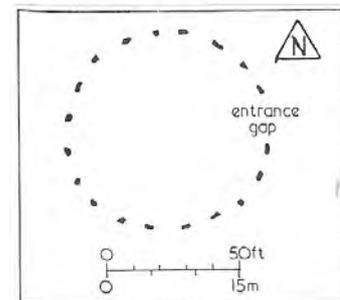
ACCESS

There is a small car parking area at the bottom of the field. Access is then by a public footpath that crosses into the field over a stile. No disabled access.

Alternatively, cars may be left on the grass verge at the top of the field. Access is then through a gate, which could provide disabled access if it is unlocked.

DESCRIPTION

The site dates from the late Neolithic-early Bronze Age (approx. 2500-1500 BC) and consists of a circle of 19 stones, standing slightly below a ridge of the sloping field. First recorded in the 18th Century, with two stones lying down, the site was completely restored by 1879. The stones are equally spaced, except for a gap in the NE side, which was probably the entrance. The stones vary in height between 0.9m & 1.4 m (3-4½ ft) tall, and are graded so that the tallest ones are to the SW and the shortest to the NE.



[c] Craig Weatherhill

FOLKLORE & LEGEND

The Cornish name for the circle was 'Dawns Meyn', which probably meant 'dance of stones' (*dons meyn*) or 'sacred stones' (*zans meyn*). The name of the Merry Maidens refers to the legend that the stones were nineteen maidens from a wedding party who were dancing in the field one Sabbath eve by music from two pipers. As the night turned into the Sunday they continued dancing to the wild music and were turned to stone for their impiety. The pipers were similarly petrified, and they now stand as two standing stones in a nearby field. [see page 2 for more details].

PURPOSE AND MEANING

There are of course no written records from the period when the site was constructed. However, it seems likely that stone circles (of which there are more than 1000 all over Britain and Ireland) were places for ceremony and ritual. There are local variations in the style and construction of stone circles in different places, as though each local tribe or group of people adapted the basic formula for their own use. In West Penwith there are 5 stone circles including this one [*Boscaswen-ûn & Tregeseal are also available as downloadable leaflets*] and all have or had nineteen stones. This may relate to the 18.64 year cycle of the moon, or the 19 year metonic cycle of the moon and the sun. For ancient peoples, observation of the passage of the sun and moon, and celebration of the Earth Mother may have been linked together in ceremony and ritual at places such as this site.

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 MERRY MAIDENS STONE CIRCLE

THE PIPERS STANDING STONES

NE stone at SW 4354 2482, SW stone at 4350 2474

LOCATION & ACCESS In adjoining fields to the north of B3315 road, on opposite side of road from the Merry Maidens. No public right of way - ask for permission at Boleigh Farm nearby.

DESCRIPTION & MEANING The NE Piper is Cornwall's tallest standing stone at 4.6 m (15ft), and the SW Piper is the second tallest at 4.1 m (13½ft). Standing stones (of which there are over 50 in West Penwith) date from the Bronze Age and were probably contemporaneous with the Merry Maidens stone circle, and also connected to it in some way, perhaps marking a ceremonial path to the circle.



The Pipers NE (left) & SW (right)

GŪN RITH STANDING STONE SW 4294 2448

LOCATION & ACCESS This standing stone is visible from the Merry Maidens stone circle. It stands in a hedge near to the corner of the field that lies to the NW of the B3315 road. A public footpath crosses the field in a diagonal direction from the corner opposite to the small parking area at the bottom of the Merry Maidens field.

DESCRIPTION & MEANING This 3.2 m (10½ft) tall stone was excavated in 1871, and a beach pebble found as a foundation offering. It collapsed in 2003 and was subsequently re-erected by the Historic Environment Service. It was found to be standing in very shallow soil, so may have been moved to the hedge from the field at some point in the past. However there is a direct alignment (which may have been a processional path) from this stone to the Merry Maidens, through the entrance gap, on to a standing stone in a hedge, through the site of a lost stone circle (Trenuggo) and ending at a farm called Borah, whose name probably means 'the place of the witch'. This may be a very ancient ritual pathway or significant ceremonial alignment.



TREGIFFIAN ENTRANCE GRAVE SW 4303 2442

LOCATION & ACCESS This entrance grave can be found about 100 yards west of the Merry Maidens car parking area, beside the B3315 road.

Unrestricted access.

DESCRIPTION & MEANING Entrance Graves (or Chambered Tombs as they are sometimes known) date from the Neolithic period (approx 3000-2500 BC), so it was probably constructed before the stone circle. Part of the kerb remains as do some of the roofing stones of the chamber, which is 4.3 m (14ft) long 1.2 m (4ft) wide and 0.9 m (3ft) high. The chamber probably originally contained bones, but not necessarily from only one



individual. These were places where the living came to honour the dead and connect with their spirits. Outside the chamber (originally inside it) stands a cupmarked stone (replica - the original is in the Truro Museum) with 13 cupmarks and 12 ovals, which may have been deliberately carved to represent new and full moons in a solar year.

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