



TREGESEAL STONE CIRCLE: REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS

by N. Russell, Asst, Inspector of Ancient Monuments: released 13 December 2011.

Comments & Observations by C. Weatherhill

Photograph 2005

An English Heritage report was issued several months after a site meeting at the circle during 2011 has never been responded to by EH, nor has any action taken place on site since then, with the exception of a swathe of Western gorse/heath being cleared just north of the circle and without anyone being given prior notice of it.

**TREGESAL STONE CIRCLE: REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS by N. Russell, Asst,
Inspector of Ancient Monuments: released 13 December 2011.**

COMMENTS & OBSERVATIONS BY C. WEATHERHILL

Please note that in his covering letter to Toby Meyjes of *The Cornishman* newspaper, Mr Russell states that: *‘English’ Heritage and Natural ‘England’ are completely separate organisations and that Natural ‘England’ have had no input into the report.* However, it should also be borne in mind that Natural ‘England’ and ‘English’ Heritage became full partners in the HEATH Project long before any fencing or grazing were introduced.

1. Summary

Mr Russell’s statement that the Tregesal stone circle is of national importance is very true, and must be borne in mind throughout.

The report states that: *“the current management regime appears to be the most sustainable way of managing that site.”* On what basis does Mr Russell make this assumption when the moor has effectively managed itself

for at least 130 years? At one point, the circle did indeed suffer from overgrowth, but it was human hand-management, not cattle, that cleared it and managed it ever since.

2. Designation & Ownership

The monument is in private ownership. Indeed it is, but whose? The c.1840 Tithe Apportionment map shows it as part of the Tregeseal holding on which Hailglower Farm stands, separate from Truthwall Common which was under separate ownership. When was it legally absorbed into Truthwall Common if, indeed, it ever was?

3. Background & Issues

Much is made throughout the report of the fact that the circle has been fairly heavily restored, with several stones re-erected, and the impression is given that this fact somehow devalues the worth of the site. This discrimination is not applied to Stonehenge or Avebury where visitors are not told that certain stones of each site are lack importance because they have been re-erected, so why is this an apparent issue here? A Scheduled site is just that: the conditions of Scheduling do not apply any such discrimination.

The hand-management by CASPN and BTCV is continued by CASPN. Grazing has not affected growth of bracken by even the smallest degree.

“Locals report that another stone fell and was uprighted at the same time”. Which locals made this report, and is it available for inspection?

The fractured stone is mentioned by Mr Russell, who offers the opinion that the crack is “*clearly historic in nature and has been in existence for some time, probably over a century*”. On what evidence does he make this statement? I did not observe Mr Russell examining this stone, or the fracture, at the August 5th site meeting, even though it was mentioned to him. On the other hand, I have studied the archaeology of this area for over 4 decades and am intimately familiar with all of it.

Longhorn cattle are a breed rarely used for ‘conservation grazing’ and even the farmer himself is on record as questioning their suitability. One wonders how a heritage officer can assess their temperament etc., without NE input.

“*At Tregeseal the introduction of grazing....serves to supplement the work of CASPN*”. There is not the slightest evidence to support this statement. The cattle graze only the grass, and have had no effect upon any other vegetation. Grass has remained short within and around the stone circle for many years prior to the introduction of cattle because it has been regularly grazed by rabbits.

“*Whilst cattle will eat bracken and gorse*”. I assume this to be a typing mistake for “will NOT eat”, because they eat neither. Moreover, bracken is known to be carcinogenic.

“*It is their trampling, and subsequent weakening, of bracken which is often of most benefit to bracken control*”. There is not the slightest evidence to substantiate this claim. Regular observation has shown that the longhorn cattle have not trampled any bracken and, in general, they do not enter areas of bracken. Not long after grazing was introduced to this moor in 2009, a large area of bracken around the stone circle was cleared by hand. It has now fully re-established itself despite the fact that the circle is frequently visited by the longhorn cattle and, therefore, this statement in the report simply does not stand up.

The further one goes into this report, the more it reads like a justification statement on behalf of Natural 'England's' regime of grazing and fencing.

Causes of Recent Instability of the Stones



“Cattle are not the only cause of instability”. Quite apart from a recent EH admission that cattle have been the cause, this is an incredible statement. Mr Russell mentions an uprooted stone in 1984, and a so far unsubstantiated report of a stone falling and being righted (by whom). No other reports of damage or deterioration to the circle have been forthcoming prior to the introduction of grazing in 2009. Since then, and as Mr Russell confirms, there have been 12 such incidents relating to seven of the stones.

Detailed knowledge of the site, over a period of decades, shows that there is no appreciable shrinkage of soil in dry periods. It was unusually dry in spring and early summer of 2011, and yet no shrinkage of soil around the soils could be observed (see below for explanation of observations). No instabilities of the circle's stones were recorded during the long dry summer of 1976.

“A lack of a wider area of cleared vegetation around the stones is a contributory factor to the cattle being drawn to Tregeseal stone circle.” This statement is groundless. A very wide area was cleared (by PAROW?) after grazing was introduced, and made not the slightest difference to the cattle's pattern of movement. The reason for this is obvious: the cleared area was devoid of grass for the cattle to graze. It neither attracted them, nor did it serve to spread their concentrated grouping.

“Visitors lean against, run around and climb on...stones”. This can only be hearsay evidence. I have never observed anyone running around or climbing on these stones, and my own experience of the site dates back to 1959. Some do sit on the ground with their backs against the stones: indeed both farmers did so during the August 5th meeting, observed but unremarked by the professional archaeologists also present. However, any pressure from this, applied low down the stones, does not have anything like the intensity of leverage exerted by pressure against the tops of the stones, particularly by heavy breeds of cattle.

“Visitor numbers can be heavy...with 47 counted during a two-hour period on the 5th August 2011.”

I **knew** this would be included, and I have predicted as much to colleagues several times since the 5th August meeting. When we were walking to the site prior to the meeting, I mentioned to the Celtic League members that the fencing and grazing had severely diminished the number of visitors, adding that it was a fair bet that we would somehow see a great many on this particular day. I won that bet, with

more people in sight that morning than any of us had seen in total all year! We are in no doubt that this situation was deliberately contrived and pre-arranged.

Who did such precise counting? Certainly Mr Russell did not, as he was participating in the meeting's discussion and could have had any chance to count. I did not count them for the same reason, and I am certain that the other participants could not have counted them, either. 47 people did not visit the circle during our 2-hour meeting, most of those visible remaining out on the moor. I now hear that the figure was supplied to Mr Russell by one of the graziers, and, as both spent much of the meeting with their backs to the moor where the people actually were, it is difficult to fathom how he could have managed such precise numbering. Only a mere handful of people, under 5 in number, actually approached the stone circle during the course of the meeting. My own rough estimate of the number of walkers visible during the time of the meeting is under half of the 47 that is claimed.

“Well-intentioned and ad-hoc, looseness testing”. This assumption is, at best, patronising and, at worst, insulting to those of us who have decades of archaeological experience at this and other sites in the district: one would venture to suggest that some of us have vastly more experience and detailed knowledge of these sites than any of the professional archaeologists present at the meeting. That a stone has become unstable can be ascertained by closely inspecting the ground at the foot of the stone, where signs of stress will be apparent. This statement is based purely upon a short video in which the obvious looseness of a destabilised stone is demonstrated purely for the purposes of record.

Solutions

I am in agreement with tamping a rab/lime packing around stones to reinforce their settings. This at least is a benevolent solution. Setting particularly unstable stones in a granite base may be necessary, as

long as the height of the stone above ground is not diminished, and that the base is concealed below ground level. I would not wish for a repeat of the absurd recent “restoration” of the SW holed stone to the NE of the circle, where the stone has been re-set at a ridiculous angle that does not accord with photographic evidence (Cooke 1982), on a modern granite base that protrudes well above ground level.

However, any use of concrete will be unacceptable and totally inappropriate. I have never forgiven ‘English’ Heritage for their appalling application of massed concrete to the round chamber at the Carn Euny fogou in 1989.

Hand-management remains the best option to ensure that bracken does not encroach upon the circle: cattle are of no use at all in this respect. Grass within the circle remains short because of grazing by rabbits and, therefore, grazing by cattle is of no benefit. Indeed, their dung merely encourages a thicker growth.

Clearing an area to the north of the circle of “scrub” is also unacceptable. This area consists of the remarkable mosaic of dwarf western gorse (*ulex galli*) and heathers that covers much of Carnyorth, Truthwall and Botallack Commons. Such areas are uncommon and, as a result, valuable. The extent of this must not be diminished for any reason. In any case, it is highly unlikely that clearing this area will result in the growth of grass without artificial aid. Lack of grass will not attract cattle to the cleared area, and can only be harmful. Similarly, alternative rubbing posts are unlikely to be effective in relieving cattle pressure on the stone circle unless cattle are attracted to the area around them by grazeable vegetation such as grass. This would require an unnatural and detrimental change to the natural and valuable vegetation of the moor.

I am in agreement with Mr Russell that the circle should not be fenced off. He states that it would not be acceptable on landscape grounds (and the existing new fencing is?), but incredibly does not state that it is equally unacceptable on archaeological grounds. Does he not understand that the circle is a component part of a much wider prehistoric landscape and that fencing would only have the effect of divorcing the site from that wider context?

“Natural ‘England’ is reluctant to withdraw grazing from the whole of Carnyorth Common because of the relative small area of the stones”. How does Mr Russell know this without the input from Natural ‘England’ which he denies? In all honesty, this is an incredible statement! Mr Russell is surely aware that the stone circle is far from being the only archaeological feature at risk from the grazing regime on this moor. He is aware of damage to the holed stones but proposes nothing to protect them. He is also aware that around 50% of the moorland singled out for this grazing regime is a blanket area of Scheduled Ancient Monument containing a good many archaeological features. These include extensive, but fragile remains of a prehistoric field system. Mr Russell has been made aware of tractors, trailers and quad-bikes being driven across these fragile remains, but has been dismissive of our concerns. Only the presence of grazing has necessitated the activity of these vehicles.

Why is Natural ‘England’ reluctant to consider stewardship of this moor without grazing, which has proven to be ineffective? The moor was in outstanding condition before grazing, through self-management for 130 years; problem areas of vegetation only consisting of patches of bracken growth. Treatment of these, and the clearance and maintenance of footpaths (including some much needed repairs to several damaged by the illegal use of trials bikes) is all this moor requires. Natural ‘England’s’ own head office has confirmed that grazing is not a prerequisite of stewardship schemes such as this, and

the area in question is one of just four target areas from which we are asking that grazing be excluded – a tiny proportion of the whole.

The bottom line is, and should be, that if any Scheduled Ancient Monument is placed at risk, there is one solution, and one only - Remove the risk. The risk in this case has been proven to any reasonable observer to be the imposed introduction of grazing by an external agency.

Craig Weatherhill
Newbridge

December 13th, 2011.

Edited October 2015