

# PREHISTORIC CUP-AND-RING ART AT THE HEART OF HARTHILL MOOR

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## SUMMARY

*An example of cup-and-ring decoration, of the kind generally attributed to the Neolithic or Early Bronze Age, has recently been noticed on a rounded boulder situated in the midst of Harthill Moor, a much-visited tract of gritstone, featuring an array of notable archaeological monuments as well as conspicuous natural outcrops, and lying within the Peak District National Park. Since none of the surrounding monuments can be regarded as reliably dated, it is as yet difficult to picture anything of even the broadly contemporary setting of this rock-art, though it is not the only instance now on record hereabouts.*

## DISCOVERY

The striking outcrop of gritstone now usually known as ‘Robin Hood’s Stride’ stands less than 400m from the imposing group of four orthostats called ‘Nine Stone Close’, two prominent features situated near the east end of the Harthill Moor plateau, in a part of the Moor that is bestrewn with intriguing archaeological monuments. These days, this patch of the Peak, doubtless once remote moorland but lately enclosed and tamed by the plough, draws a fair share of the many who frequent the National Park to enjoy its landscapes, to scale its crags, or to explore their heritage. Moreover, Harthill Moor has attracted much antiquarian and archaeological attention over the last two centuries and more, albeit mostly superficial and often unduly romantic. Yet it is still possible to make fresh archaeological discoveries in such a place, and without turning a sod. And this may seem all the more surprising when it is appreciated that the discovery reported here is situated within 80m of the route of a public path that has been much trod over the centuries, lying immediately beside a detour where many pass nowadays because it offers the most direct route between Stride and Close.

So it was that the writers, in walking that detour in October 2001, happened upon a sandstone boulder bearing several hollows, recognizing them as the artificial cups of an apparent example of prehistoric rock-art, notwithstanding their eroded condition, which was exacerbated that overcast day by the flatness of the light. The record presented here, in a drawing (Fig. 1) and photographs (Pls 1–3), was largely made on a second visit in December 2001, undertaken on a day and at a time chosen with care to benefit from the lighting of the ornamented surface that can be provided by a low sun. Happily, this shone to order, allowing sight to confirm the earlier suspicions of our finger-tips that traces of a grooved ring also survive, wrapped around one of the cups; and it is this that renders the whole composition entirely believable as rock-art in the cup-and-ring tradition, generally assumed to have been executed in the Neolithic or, at latest, in the Early Bronze Age, and therefore at some stage before, say, the middle

of the second millennium BC, by which time it occurred widely across upland Britain, especially from the Peak country northwards (e.g. Bradley 1997, chs 4 and 9; Waddington 1998, 31–3; Beckensall and Frodsham 1998). Strictly speaking, however, the manufacture of neither this nor any other instance known in the Peak upland can yet be dated independently (see recent assessments in Edmonds and Seaborne 2001, 110; Barnatt and Robinson 2003, 15–17).

When, in March 2002, the writers passed that way again, stopping to admire the art once more, it proved necessary to augment the drawing so as to take account of a small extra area of the boulder's surface that had somehow become exposed in the meantime. By November 2005, when a further visit was made for the purpose of checking details prior to finalizing the present account, rather less of the decorated surface remained uncovered because the adjacent ground had become severely poached by grazing beasts (Pl. 7).

The exact location of this boulder need be noticed only tersely at this stage — *viz.*, it lies at National Grid Reference SK 22476253, at approximately 234m above Ordnance Datum, close to the trunk of a sizeable oak at the eastern foot of a drystone field-wall (one of a series outlining enclosures of improved pasture set out at some point in the post-medieval period — Barnatt [1990, 82] deduces 'by the late 18th century'), and at 44m from the junction of walls at the north-western corner of the field. Such details should at least be sufficient to enable others to seek out this rock-art for inspection on the ground. But these bare facts can tell little of the potential significance of its situation, as will be expounded after the boulder and its decoration have been more fully described.

### THE ROCK AND THE ART

The exposed portion of this boulder of coarse sandstone — *i.e.* local gritstone — comprises a single surface, flattish overall but gently undulating, facing approximately due east (magnetic), and inclined at an average of *c.* 30° from horizontal (Fig. 1). In other words, the art upon this surface looks up into the eastern sky.

As should be evident from the illustrations, some part of the boulder lies below turf, so that the rounded upper margin of the decorated face is visible for less than 1m. Some attempt has been made, by probing the turf with a surveyor's arrow, to determine the approximate limits of that face, and this proved moderately successful around the upper edges, with results included in Fig. 1 (though it should be stressed that various parts of the dashed lines there are liable to be imprecise). However, even this much proved impossible to achieve beyond the visible base, because the ground-surface shelves away eastwards at a lesser angle than the face of the boulder, which thus becomes more deeply buried there. So, without excavation, it is not feasible for us to determine either its full extent or, of course, whether additional motifs, perhaps less eroded than those recorded, embellish hidden portions of either this or other faces of the boulder.

The art, or what survives of it above ground, includes just three certain cups, forming a row that slopes gently down to the north, and spaced at intervals of *c.* 290mm and *c.* 190mm centre-to-centre. Each of these cups is roughly circular, measuring 70–90mm across at the ill-defined, weathered lip; and each is now recessed by 15–17mm below the adjacent plane of the inclined surface of the boulder. It is the northern of these (*i.e.* to

the right in Fig. 1) that is partially enclosed by the ring, which is equally weathered, and is now no more than 5mm deep around the lower arc of the cup, petering out around its top. It seems that the ring could once have described a full circle or oval of at least 180–200mm across externally before an overall reduction of the rock's surface was effected by erosion. By the same token, each of these motifs could once have been considerably deeper. Clearly, it is quite possible too that these few motifs are the survivors of a more extensive pattern, having perhaps been pecked more deeply into the surface than any others, at least as witnessed by the exposed part.

Several slighter dimples, none more than 50mm across, can be seen in addition to the row of three cups, and some or all of these others *may* be the basal remnants of further artificial cups, though all are too shallow for certainty, none exceeding 5mm. An alternative would be to suppose that some may be hollows left, and then enlarged by erosion, where thinly-scattered pebbles in the gritstone have been dislodged; though it is true to say that no pebbles greater than a few millimetres are now evident in this boulder (and our confidence that the three deeper cups are not of such a natural origin should be expressly stated). The five of these additional hollows that seem the most likely to be man-made are indicated by small patches of relatively dense stipple in Fig. 1. The two largest of these make a near-vertical row with the northern of the three larger cups; and, interestingly, their spacing, at *c.*280mm and *c.*200mm, is not much different to those in that deeper row. The three smallest of the extra cups, each much of a size, at 30–40mm across and 2–3mm deep, form a further row, at *c.*80mm centres, almost aligned upon the southern cup of the deeper row, which is centred at *c.*210mm from the nearest of these slighter possible cups. Whether any significance should be read into these seeming relationships between apparent rows of certain and possible cups must forever remain uncertain because the overall impression is of a heavily-weathered boulder, and it bears repeating that other elements of any overall design may now be missing entirely, so that the particulars recounted above count for little in this respect.

### LOCATION AND SURROUNDINGS

From the foregoing, it will be obvious enough that, in itself, the recordable rock-art on this boulder cannot be regarded as of great consequence, but merely as another example to be added to the growing list of those known from other places in the Peak, and evidently preserved with lesser detail than some of them (Barnatt and Reeder 1982; Barnatt and Robinson 2003 — page 25 of the latter includes a brief, preliminary mention of our discovery on Harthill Moor). Rather, as already intimated, it is for its location that this piece of rock-art may seem to take on a value exceeding that of the sum of its surviving parts. Indeed, to an *aficionado* of prehistoric rock-art, there could scarcely be a more intriguing and evocative spot, for a wealth of dramatic topographical and anthropogenic features litter the landscape round about (Fig. 2). Before elaborating upon those surroundings, it will be pertinent to observe that this boulder could well be earthfast (in the sense that it sits where it does through force of nature rather than hand of man), for we would contend that the numerous linear scratches marring the decorated surface (as shown in Fig. 1) are as likely to have been inflicted by the plough where the boulder now lies as 'elsewhere nearby' (*pace ibid.*, 25, fig. 3 — regarding it as 'portable' rather than 'earthfast', though their table 2 implies agreement with

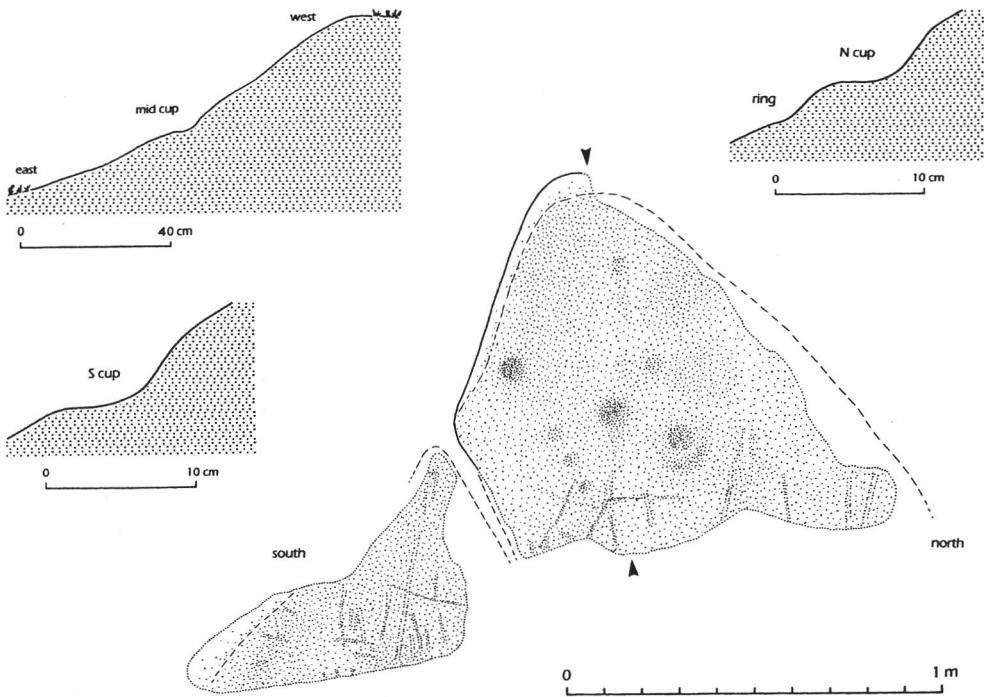


Fig. 1: Harthill Moor: cup-and-ring boulder, with dotted outline indicating the extent of the boulder as visible in 2002, except where this coincides with what is thought also to be the edge of the boulder, when it is drawn unbroken; dashed lines show the approximate maximum determinable extent of the decorated face, partly recorded by probing; double dotted lines mark the most obvious of the scores believed to have been incised by the plough, in places overriding some obvious joints in the sandstone, which, like the art-motifs, are indicated by relatively dense stipple; a full cross profile, passing through the middle cup in the row of three deepest, is shown at top left, its alignment indicated on the view by arrows; the scale provides a horizontal datum for both view and overall profile, at 1:20. Profiles of the southern cup and of the northern cup and ring are at centre left and top right respectively, at scale 1:5.

us). It would take excavation to prove the point, but, if we are correct, it should mean that the current position and aspect of the art are just as in its prehistoric heyday, as too perhaps its exact attitude (though, in its present eroded state, it could not be demonstrated that the latter remains as nature left it rather than a result of splitting or trimming the boulder prior to decoration). There is even a slight possibility that it looks outwards from the eastern foot of a hitherto-unnoticed round barrow, perhaps 10m or more across and now of little height, lying largely in the field to the west and reflected by a gentle rise in the field-wall (but, again, only excavation could be expected to show whether this vague impression has any validity).<sup>1</sup> If so, the boulder might have been shifted to this position, perhaps in constructing the kerb of a prehistoric mound, and it might then have been decorated before or after being so placed. Either way, earthfast or kerbstone, some prehistoric purpose (whatever that may have been, and whether



Plate 1: Harthill Moor: cup-and-ring boulder lit by a low sun in December 2001, with the top of the 30cm scale lying close to the southern of the row of three best-defined cups, and showing the ring around the northern cup — *cf.* Fig. 1.

primary or secondary) would seem likely to have been fulfilled at the very spot where it now resides.

The decorated boulder lies adjacent to a nascent stream-channel, which rises a little to its west and passes to its south, issuing towards the east and draining the central part of a broad saddle, the midst of which is occupied by the boulder, which thus sits at the very heart of this eastern part of the former moorland plateau.<sup>2</sup> The southern rim of this saddle, and hence the horizon as seen from the boulder, is marked at intervals by a series of landscape-features that have become celebrated locally, including Cratcliff Rocks (at some 300m to the east-south-east), Robin Hood's Stride (whose summit is *c.* 250m to the south — Pl. 2), and the dip-slope of Wattscliff (rising to over 280m OD, at some 600m to the south-west, sadly now in part obscured by quarry-waste). Thence northwards, the horizon drops to follow the crest of a gentle ridge along the western edge of the saddle, where the remains of a barrow (see note 1) would probably still be visible from the boulder were it not that post-medieval walls flanking a modern road now intervene. The northern end of the ridge is occupied by Harthill Moor Farm and, beyond that, Castle Ring (centred at *c.* 525m to the north-west), while an eastern arm of the ridge forms the northern rim of the saddle, upon which stand the orthostats of Nine Stone Close (situated within 130m to the north-north-east of the boulder — Pl. 3). Apart from distant views over Nine Stone Close, extending northwards to higher landmarks beyond the valleys of the Bradford/Lathkill and the Wye, the only open vista lies to the east-north-east, where Stanton Moor forms the horizon some 2km away.

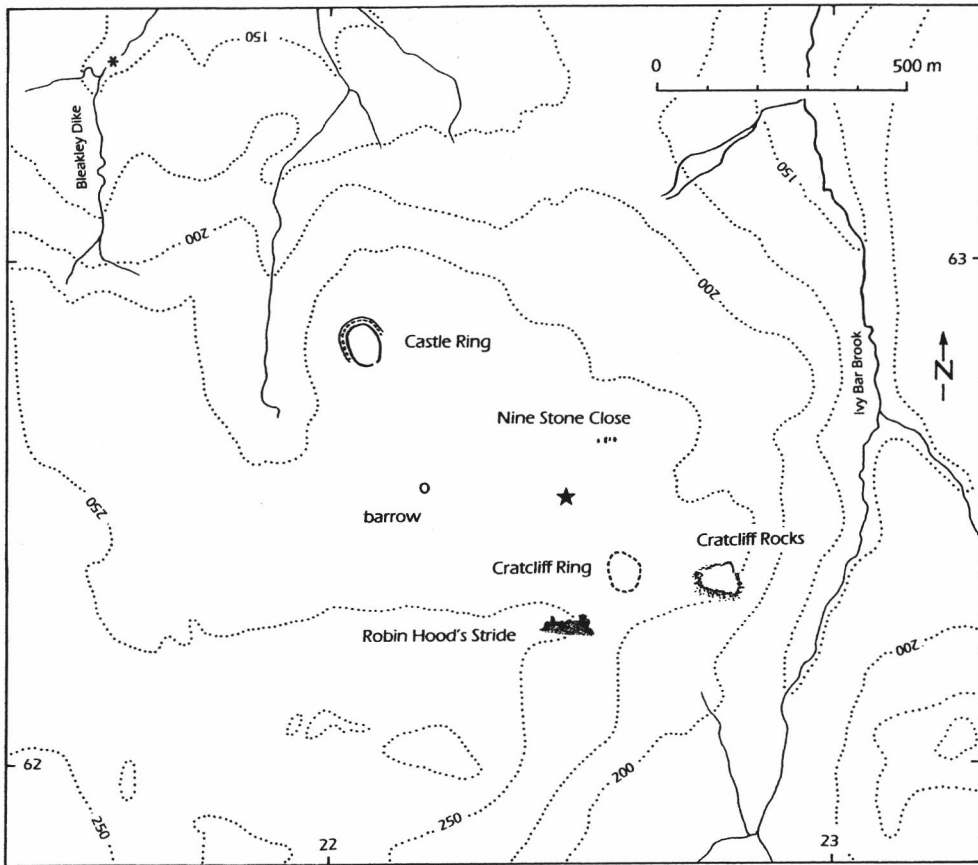


Fig. 2: Harthill Moor, showing the locations of the rock-art discovered in 2001 (star) and in the 1970s in Bleakley Dike (asterisk), amid a range of other man-made and natural features, all of which are far more prominent than the rock-art in this landscape, with contour-lines (dotted) at 25m intervals (numbered in metres above Ordnance Datum), and the National Grid marked around the border. Scale 1:15,000.

Now, it cannot have escaped the notice of those familiar with prehistory in the Peak that many of the names incorporated in this topographical roll-call are regularly applied to features of apparent prehistoric significance, not merely in the immediate vicinity of the decorated boulder but also in the more-distant horizon of Stanton Moor, widely recognized as a significant focus for prehistoric monuments (principal references given below) and, as noted above, close to the orientation of the art on the boulder. Among the neighbouring monuments within this eastern portion of Harthill Moor itself, several are often held to be prehistoric in origin, though, in fact, all remain quite undatable other than through mere opinion and/or, at best, general analogy. These include three ancient enclosures, each of which will next be reviewed briefly.

By repute, the earliest of the enclosures is that upon Cratcliff Rocks, at the eastern extremity of Harthill Moor. This craggy summit, sheer to the south and east but of no



Plate 2: Harthill Moor: cup-and-ring boulder in the foreground, looking south towards Robin Hood's Stride, in 2001.

great elevation above the adjacent land of the undulating plateau to its north and west, has been reinforced with lengths of walling, incorporating orthostatic facings in places and linking massive boulders, to block vulnerable points in the perimeter of what is otherwise naturally a defensible position. This manner of construction has lately led to the deduction that Cratcliff Rocks may be a rare instance of a hilltop-enclosure attributable to the Neolithic period (Makepeace 1999; Barnatt 2000, 62; Barnatt *et al.* 2001, 125–6; Edmonds and Seaborne 2001, 74 — though only the first goes so far as to term it ‘hillfort’); but the apparent similarity of sites in far-off Cornwall must not be regarded as secure dating. The surface details of this interesting construction will remain difficult to appreciate fully until such time as the dense cover of bracken is cleared away, but even in present circumstances it seems inappropriate to discuss Cratcliff Rocks under the heading ‘palisaded enclosures’ (Hart 1981, 77), implying a Late-Bronze-Age/Iron-Age context. In truth, there is no proof of any sort of prehistoric age and, short of extensive excavation inside, outside and underneath the supposedly defensive *enceinte*, it is hard to see how there ever could be acceptable evidence for the construction-date of such a fragmented structure.<sup>3</sup>

Situated between Cratcliff Rocks and the cup-and-ring boulder (within 130m to south-east of the latter), an earthwork surrounds the rim of a flattish shelf in the southern slope of the saddle described above, making an oval enclosure averaging some 90 × 75m overall. This has yet to receive a name — so, for the convenience of distinction, it will here be termed ‘Cratcliff Ring’. Of all the monuments on Harthill Moor, this seems the most suited to detailed topographical survey, for its features are more easily viewed than any other; surprisingly, this remains to be accomplished. In essence, it



Plate 3: Harthill Moor: cup-and-ring boulder in the foreground, looking north towards the orthostats of Nine Stone Close (to right of tree on skyline), in 2001.

presents superficially as a ditch, or a linear quarry-hollow anyway, with intermittent internal and external banks, creating an earthwork of such low relief as to suggest that it could have succeeded in retaining little without the supplement of a stout fence (or possibly a hedge, if only animals were to be kept in, or away), so that there is at least greater logic in classifying this among ‘palisaded enclosures’ (Hart 1981, 77, figs 7:4 and 7:5 — his ‘larger unploughed enclosure’ but what and where is his ‘second site ... oval scooped area?’). Hart’s suggestion that there are ‘surface indications of houses ... buildings appear to be circular though one is of rectangular plan’ inside this enclosure has found favour with others (Makepeace 1999, 16 — ‘two circular dished hollows ... may be house sites’; Edmonds and Seaborne 2001, 191 — ‘traces of one or two building



platforms within its bounds'), and this carries implications of interpretation as a settlement ('a protected homestead' suggests Makepeace, following Hart), though at least one of the round internal features sketched on to Hart's plan appears hollowed like a pond when viewed on the ground. Of course, until there is excavation, there will be no proof of form or function, but it can be observed that Cratcliff Ring is poorly sited to exclude humans, being overlooked by higher ground immediately to the south. Again, it is implicit in his account that Hart feels Cratcliff Ring 'might be of Late Bronze Age — Iron Age date', but this can be no better than guesswork in the present state of knowledge, as is equally true of the suspicions voiced by Makepeace (1999, 15–16) that this enclosure antedates Castle Ring and hence, by his reckoning, 'could be Bronze Age in date'.<sup>4</sup>

The third, and most substantial, of the enclosures is Castle Ring, a bivallate contour-work encompassing less than 0.5ha, sited on a promontory at the northern edge of the Harthill Moor plateau, and commonly taken for a hillfort, or 'fortified homestead', of the Iron Age or final millennium BC (e.g. Preston 1954, 12, 16; Hawke-Smith 1979, 119; Hart 1981, 73–5; Edmonds and Seaborne 2001, 186, 188). This attribution cannot be substantiated, notwithstanding persistent mention of potsherds found in ill-defined circumstances, but seemingly loose association with the 'hillfort', some of them said to be of the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age (Todd 1978, 23; Makepeace 1999, 15–16);<sup>5</sup> and it has even been mooted that this could be an earthwork-castle of the medieval centuries (Hodges 1980, 32 — calling this place 'Castle Hill'). At any rate, the notion that Castle Ring was 'constructed to dominate' a length of the 'Portway' is forever unprovable (Dodd and Dodd 1974, 21); though it is worthy of passing notice that that ancient long-distance trackway, reputedly prehistoric in origin (Cockerton 1932), will have run close to our cup-and-ring boulder (thought to have passed between Robin Hood's Stride and Cratcliff Rocks — Cockerton 1934), for recent theories have sought to demonstrate that the siting of some prehistoric rock-art may be explicable in terms of marking significant points along contemporary routes through the landscape (see especially Bradley 1997) — the juxtaposition of art and trackway now seen on Harthill Moor could seem as grist to that mill.

In the context of our rock-art, seemingly the most pertinent of all the neighbouring monuments is the setting of four orthostats named 'Nine Stone Close' (sometime 'Grey Ladies'), generally regarded as a partially preserved, and partially restored, stone-circle. This has long been singled out among the circles of the Peak as a possible candidate for construction in the Neolithic, rather than Bronze Age, on account of its unusually tall stones (albeit tentatively: Phillips 1933, 20; Barnatt 1990, 14–18, 23, 82, fig. 47; 2000, 62). That said, and in spite of 'a good deal of digging within the circle' at the behest of antiquarians (Bateman 1848, 102–3; Goss 1889, 292 — 'nothing special was turned up'), solid archaeological evidence for its attribution to any point in prehistory is wanting, and even erection as a folly in some age of romance cannot be ruled out (*cf.* Burl 2000, 12). Of particular interest for us is a pair of weathered cup-marks, each 70–90mm in diameter by 17–19mm in depth, lying at 280mm centre-to-centre on the southern face of the southernmost orthostat (Pls 4 and 5; Barnatt and Robinson 2003, 23). Being of much the same dimensions and appearance as the cups forming the principal row of three on the newly located boulder, these seem to us convincing enough as real rock-art, as opposed to 'fortuitous weathering' (*pace ibid.*, 17); but even this cannot authenticate

the stone-circle, for the cups, being on the rounded face of the orthostat rather than that produced when it was split from the outcrop, could conceivably have been made upon the living rock at the source subsequently quarried in constructing the monument, whenever that may have occurred (and, if prehistoric, this is a phenomenon that would itself be a rarity in the Peak — *ibid.*, 17). Similarly, the fluted top of two of the orthostats, caused by prolonged exposure to wind and rain, can do nothing to demonstrate the antiquity of the circle (*pace* Heathcote 1939, 126), for these blocks may have been prised from the summit of some local outcrop that was already eroded in this manner, to be moved to Nine Stone Close in more or less their present condition.<sup>6</sup> This in turn can open the mind to the possibility that even the twin-pinnacled profile of the supposedly natural feature that is Robin Hood's Stride may actually have been significantly modified by man, possibly even before the extensive stone-getting that has left many tell-tale signs scattered over the present summit and may have done much



Plate 4: Nine Stone Close: the re-erected orthostat 1, looking north-east, with 30cm scale held as in Pl.5 (*cf.* excellent photographs in Burl 2000, pl. 57 [with the pair of cup-marks visible on orthostat 1, at left]; Edmonds and Seaborne 2001, 163; both views looking north).

to shape the Stride (Pl. 6, and see below; perhaps giving the lie to latter-day legends related, for example, in Barnatt 1990, 28; Barnatt and Smith 1997, 36; Burl 2000, 299; Edmonds and Seaborne 2001, 165).<sup>7</sup>

Those cup-marks at Nine Stone Close are not the only instances of rock-art known, or claimed, at little distance from the newly-discovered cup-and-ring boulder. The best of them, and the only one that is not open to question, was found in Bleakley Dike, near the northern foot of Harthill Moor and just *c.*1250m to the north-west of our boulder (Fig. 2), being a slab with ‘randomly arranged cups’ on both faces (Barnatt and Reeder 1982, 38, 41, fig. 4; Vine 1982, 410 — calling it ‘Youlgreave’; Beckensall 1999, fig. 67, top left — each of these includes a drawing, each recording a different number of cups [Beckensall’s looks the least accurate, and Vine has perhaps neglected to draw one cup], while Hart’s [1981, 66] remark that it also features a single cup-and-ring mark, not shown in any published illustration, has recently been confirmed by Barnatt and Robinson 2003, 19 — so, the definitive record of the Bleakley Dike stone remains to be made). It was recovered in the 1970s, ‘half buried in the mud of the stream’ (Hart 1981, 66), which may mean that it was not *in situ*; though it seems unreasonable to suppose that a stone measuring around 60cm across (its thickness is unrecorded) could

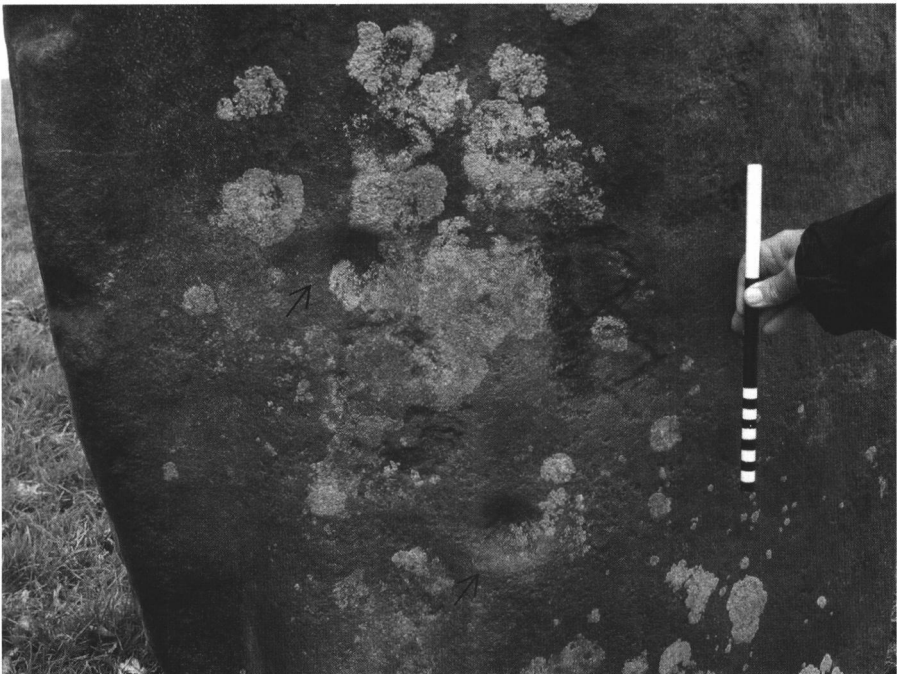


Plate 5: Nine Stone Close: two cup-marks (arrowed) on the southern face of orthostat 1, almost conflicting with crude graffiti (GB) and partly covered by pale lichen, with 30cm scale (*cf.* Pl. 4). (The stone’s number is taken from Heathcote, whose plan (1939, 127) has a north arrow pointing south, whereas Barnatt’s plan (1990, fig. 47) indicates north correctly but gives no numbering for the four surviving stones of the circle.)

have been 'washed downstream', be it 'from a barrow' or not (*pace* Barnatt and Reeder 1982, 41). It is perhaps more likely to have been taken to the find-spot in making or repairing a roughly-paved surface through boggy ground where a footpath crosses Bleakley Dike just at the National Grid Reference cited in *ibid.* (SK 21576340) — if so, it would be impossible ever to know how far it had been moved for such an informal secondary purpose, and it can but be surmised that a stone of this bulk would have been carted no great distance.<sup>8</sup>

Another putative example of rock-art lies even closer, being situated near the south-eastern margin of the locally dominating rock-outcrop of Robin Hood's Stride (Barnatt and Reeder 1982, fig. 2.3; and photograph in Edmonds and Seaborne 2001, 115). From the start, however, the finders regarded this broad 'dished area' (nearly 45cm in diameter) encircled by a 'well-defined circular groove' (fully 55–60cm across overall and up to 8cm in depth) as 'of less certain antiquity' than many others in the Peak (Barnatt and Reeder 1982, 36); and Barnatt's subsequent omission of it from his count of 'in-situ rock-art' in this region (1996a, 50, fig. 1) would seem to confirm that he regards it as dubious, so too his most recent designation as a 'possible example' (Barnatt and Robinson 2003, fig. 3 — notwithstanding page 17). Its size would certainly make it exceptional and, to the present writers, it has more the appearance of some kind of artificial basin, maybe unfinished, than of anything that would normally be expected of prehistoric rock-art, while the fact that it appears 'unusually well preserved' (Barnatt and Reeder 1982, 36) might be construed as implying a comparatively recent origin, especially when the eroded shapes of stone-getters' wedge-pits on this outcrop are taken into account (Pl. 6). There are even signs that a chisel may have been employed in forming the groove around the dish.<sup>9</sup> For all that the one published instance of ostensible rock-art on Robin Hood's Stride would seem dashed, it would hardly be surprising if so imposing an outcrop should have been adorned in this fashion during prehistory — indeed, one cannot but feel that the apparent absence there of acceptable rock-art requires some explanation, for it seems as likely a natural place of monumental significance, and hence perhaps liable to attract rock-art, as any in the Peak (as per Bradley 1997; 2000).<sup>10</sup> Alas, the plethora of modern graffiti (*cf.* Barnatt and Reeder 1982, 36), coupled with plentiful evidence of localized quarrying (see above), over much of this outcrop, not to mention millennia of erosion since the Early Bronze Age, will have seriously restricted prospects of identifying any eroding prehistoric motifs there. And this makes it difficult to judge what value should now be placed upon Heathcote's claim to have identified 'numerous large rocks with artificial markings ... consisting of cup marks, concentric circles, gutter channels and socket holes. . . near Robin Hood's Stride' (1934, 34), especially as many deep and steep-sided 'cups' that may well be of natural origin can be seen upon large rocks strewn around the south-eastern foot of the Stride, while others made by rock-climbers plus the shattered-edge dints characteristic of bullet impact-holes are apparent on vertical faces of some to its north. All these factors are bound to mean that it is far too simplistic to argue that rock-art at Robin Hood's Stride was 'hidden behind the main outcrop' and 'avoids the summit altogether' (*pace* Bradley 1997, 133 — making the same misjudgement apropos of Rowtor Rocks, for which see below) — *i.e.* just because none are on record, there can be no knowing whether there were once 'more complex images . . . [or indeed simple ones] . . . on the most spectacular exposures' of rock at the Stride.<sup>11</sup>

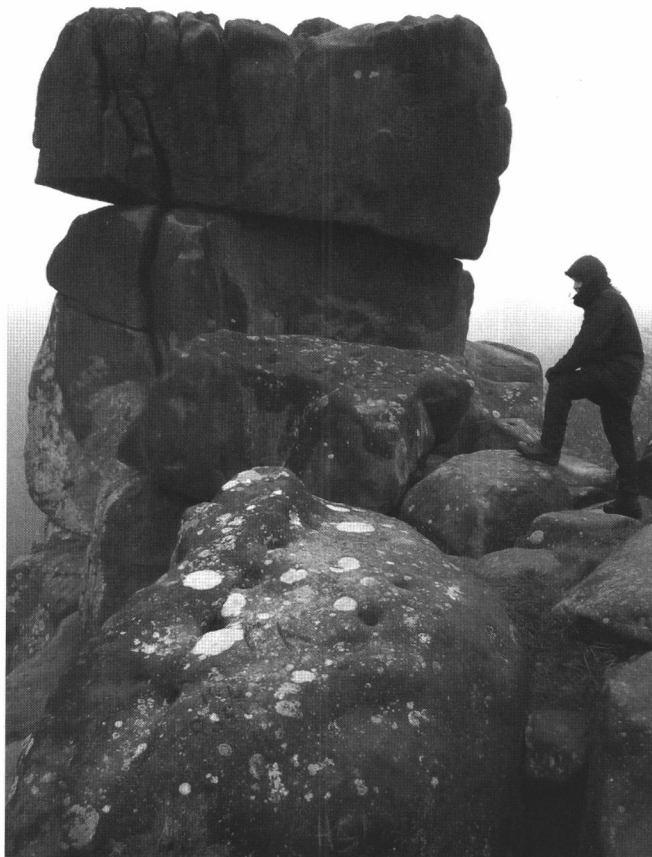


Plate 6: Robin Hood's Stride: numerous small hollows occur among the graffiti atop the outcrop, many being lines of wedge-pits made by the metal tools of quarrymen splitting pieces from the bedrock, their original sharp edges now rounded by weathering — but are there any prehistoric cup-marks lurking among them?

Besides these, the nearest recorded pieces of prehistoric rock-art to Harthill Moor occur on the much-modified gritstone outcrop of Rowtor Rocks, situated little more than 1km to the east. These may have been noticed first by Heathcote (1934, 31), stating that a 'rock has its face all pitted by small holes surrounded by two concentric circles like a target', while others have 'round sockets in the form of a circle', though there is some difficulty in matching these descriptions to the multifarious examples of prehistoric rock-art that have since been documented at Rowtor by Barnatt and Reeder (1982, 33–6, figs 1 and 2, pl. 1 — perhaps they regarded some of Heathcote's marks as no better than possibilities — *ibid.*, 44). Given the extent of historic rock-carving on Rowtor Rocks, it seems reasonable to assume that there was once more prehistoric rock-art on display there. It would be no surprise to learn some day that something

similar has been discovered on nearby tracts of Ashover Grit, portions of the same group of gritstone outliers as Harthill Moor and Rowtor Rocks — thus, perhaps rock-art will be found amid the modern graffiti on Bradley Rocks, or maybe it will at last emerge from among the plentiful prehistoric remains on Stanton Moor, where the apparent lack of it seems otherwise to beg questions, and the more so considering the standing of Stanton Moor not only as one of the most heavily-visited parts of the Peak but also as one of the most frequently surveyed during the decades since field-archaeologists became generally aware of the potential for discoveries of rock-art in such places (e.g. Hart 1985; Barnatt 1986, 73–9; 2000, 62–3; Everson 1989; Ainsworth 2001, 28–33).

For the sake of completeness, it deserves brief notice that other prehistoric artefacts found on Harthill Moor include items that may be relevant to the age of the rock-art: stone axes, axe-hammer, macehead, flintwork, bronze flat axe, and Food Vessels (Bateman 1848, 71–3, 127–8; Howarth 1899, 12, 80, 120, 124; Fowler 1955, 79, 110, 113; Manby 1957, 8–9, 17–18, figs 2 and 3; Vine 1982, 190–1, 300, 304, 355, 356, 362, 371). However, as all were recovered through casual or antiquarian activities (including barrows remarked in note 1), they need not detain us further.

### CONCLUSIONS

Returning to the decorated boulder first recognized in 2001, or at least first recorded then (for who can tell whether it was among Heathcote's finds?), it may be reiterated that its chief interest and potential surely lies in its spatial relation to neighbouring elements in the landscape of Harthill Moor, for this offers the possibility of identifying which of the numerous features, natural and artificial, that are distributed round about might have figured in the contemporary scene (an approach fostered particularly by Bradley — 1997; 2000 — 'not only must we study rock-art in relation to the wider landscape, but each image or group of images must be considered in its local cultural setting'). So it is especially frustrating that such uncertainty should cast a haze over virtually all that is often regarded as 'known' of prehistory on this erstwhile moorland, above all in respect of the poverty of dating-evidence for the variety of monuments.

At any rate, it will be obvious enough that such potential can best be appreciated on location, and therefore only by way of those examples which seem likely to rest where created and/or put to use, which are relatively few in the Peak (Barnatt and Robinson 2003, 15–17). And herein lies a dilemma for prehistorians and conservationists, because, left *in situ* (as it obviously must) and without protection, there seems good cause for concern that the rock-art on Harthill Moor could suffer additional damage, be it mischievous or accidental, whether from environmental factors or, perhaps most likely, from some traumatic event (even the heavy fall of a passing hoof, or of a wall-stone, could hasten its demise — Pl. 7). One option would be to take steps to bury it under soil and turf, perhaps with other rocks arranged to form a protective kerb, especially in the hope of avoiding further assault from the plough or whatever, though it is inevitable that this would remove the cup-and-ring motifs from view and hence from the pleasure of those upon the Moor.<sup>12</sup> In general terms, this is a dilemma that affects other elements of our heritage as much as it does most of the prehistoric rock-art that remains where it belongs in the landscape (e.g. many of the highly-decorated crosses of the pre-Norman period stand open to attack from the atmosphere and from those intent upon



Plate 7: Harthill Moor: heavy poaching of the ground alongside the cup-and-ring boulder, which is arrowed from above; looking north, in 2005 (*cf.* Pl. 3).

mischief) — fortunately, it is an issue that must, or anyway should, be confronted by others than ourselves.

As to the purpose of this and other rock-art, it would, of course, be nice to know, but we must be content to echo others' musings in relation to such matters in the Peak, by declaring that 'its significance is difficult to determine' (Hart 1981, 66), that 'particular meanings are lost...there are many possibilities' (Edmonds and Seaborne 2001, 110–14). The chances of ever understanding it here are, of course, seriously reduced by recognition that the pattern of prehistoric activity on Harthill Moor 'is probably beyond recovery' (Barnatt 2000, 62–3), not least because 'all has been improved'; but there can always remain the prospect that this patch of the Peak will some day be subjected to penetrating archaeological inquiry on the grand scale that it surely deserves and that would undoubtedly be required to make sense at least of those fragments of the bigger picture that still survive to be viewed in the field. Meantime, given the accessibility of the Moor and the extent to which it had already been scrutinized, our find of 2001 can give hope that there is yet scope for additional casual discoveries hereabouts, perhaps even of more rock-art.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Barrows are known to exist, or to have existed, on Harthill Moor, because there have been antiquarian investigations (Bateman 1848, 71–3; Goss 1889, 289–90; Marsden 1977, 42–3; Barnatt 1996b, 262), and not all of them can now be pinpointed on the ground, though one can still be seen at SK 222625, less than 300m west of the cup-and-ring stone found in 2001 (Fig. 2).

- <sup>2</sup> This unnamed stream is too slight to appear in Ordnance Survey maps, though its course is reflected in the contour-lines at 1:25000. However, its flow is sufficient to feed an artificial pond situated little more than 100m to the east-north-east. These details are omitted from Fig. 2 as consistency would demand that others similar be mapped throughout its area.
- <sup>3</sup> There seems a possibility that the Cratcliff Rocks enclosure had been noticed centuries before any of the published mentions adduced by others recently, for Bray (1783, 130, note s) cites Stukeley as 'slightly mentioning, without ascertaining the place. . . a hermitage by a great rock, called *Ratcliffe*, on the back of which stones are set up two and two, forming a celtic avenue' (the hermit's cave having long been a well-known feature of Cratcliff Rocks — e.g. Rooke 1782, 112, pl. XIV.6 — there called 'Carcliffe'; Heathcote 1934, 35; Cockerton 1934, 47; Pevsner and Williamson 1978, 363); and it is evident, from his third itinerary, that William Stukeley did get 'into the very Peak', there visiting a 'hermit's cell' complete with 'crucifix and a little niche' like those still to be seen in the hermitage at Cratcliff (1724, 51). Alternatively, in the document seen by Bray, Stukeley may have been writing of Nine Stone Close, for the earliest published illustration of that 'Druid temple', admittedly some decades after he would have witnessed it, could easily be taken to show three pairs of stones aligned, rather as in a stone-row (Rooke 1782, 113, pl. XV.8). Strangely, Bray assumed that Stukeley referred to '*Routar-Stones*' (i.e. Rowtor Rocks), while Bray himself mentions '*Cratcliff*' merely as an impressive feature of the local landscape — 'lofty perpendicular front of stones, wonderfully large' — though, ironically, he did draw attention to 'a small cave in the rock. [at Cratcliff]. which was formerly the habitation of a hermit' (1783, 135).
- <sup>4</sup> To be fair, Makepeace did also refer to what is here called Cratcliff Ring as 'an undated ditched and banked enclosure' (1999, 12); while others writing recently have, quite rightly, been non-committal, this being the 'undated enclosure' of Barnatt 2000, 62, and the 'undated earthen enclosure' of Edmonds and Seaborne 2001, 74 (though their page 191 does seem to imply a context late in prehistory). It is of some interest that this enclosure was marked on the first edition of the Ordnance Survey map at scale 1 inch to 1 mile, and depicted in a similar fashion to Castle Ring, making it seem reasonable at least to infer that Cratcliff Ring had become recognized as an earthwork of some antiquity by the mid-19th century.
- <sup>5</sup> The example of Mam Tor, where excavation has amassed a considerable collection of potsherds that may not be greatly different in age to some picked up at Castle Ring but where the relation of the pottery to the development of the hillfort yet remains uncertain, should be sufficient to remind us all why it is that pieces garnered casually can tell little of developments at Castle Ring. Those potsherds have even led to the suggestion that Castle Ring 'has similar characteristics' to Staple Howe, situated on the Yorkshire Wolds and widely recognized as one of the classic settlement-sites of the early years of the Iron Age; but, as matters stand, this comparison is unhelpful for the simple reason that Staple Howe lacks the perimeter-earthworks which remain the defining characteristic of Castle Ring (pace Makepeace 1999, 16).
- <sup>6</sup> For photographs showing these vertical grooves of erosion on stones 2 and 3 at Nine Stone Close to good effect, see Burl 2000, pl. 57; Edmonds and Seaborne 2001, 163.
- <sup>7</sup> Portions of each of the nearby outcrops have been similarly sculpted by the elements, giving them a fluted appearance like that of orthostats 2 and 3 at Nine Stone Close (see Pl. 6 for the western pinnacle of Robin Hood's Stride, and see Edmonds and Seaborne 2001, 115 for a photograph of the even more dramatic eastern pinnacle). On the face of it, however, the rock of the Nine Stone Close orthostats seems more comparable to that of Cratcliff Rocks, and smaller outcrops even nearer to the Close, than to that of Robin Hood's Stride; but confirmation of this would need expert geological analysis.
- <sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, even the supposition of a reasonably local provenance for the Bleakley Dike cup-and-ring-marked stone must assume that its penultimate movement (for it has since been taken to Sheffield Museum) preceded the advent of modern farming machinery, the power of



which induces far greater corruption of archaeological distribution-patterns than was ever likely in earlier centuries, making ‘portable’ much rock-art that had never been intended as such.

- <sup>9</sup> It may be pertinent to note that Rooke claimed to have seen rock-basins on Cratcliff — his ‘*Carcliff* or *Crackcliff*’ — which ‘appear to have been the work of art, and have in many places the marks of the tool’ (1782, 111–12), while another on ‘*Graned Tor*’ (see note 10) ‘appears to be cut with a tool’ (1796, 47), clearly implying that they might have been made, or at least enlarged, by man (however, acceptance of those observations must be tempered with a little caution, as Rooke often seems to have approached such matters with greater zeal than objectivity, driven by a belief that these and similar places were ‘much frequented by the Druids’ — cf. Bateman 1848, 126–7). What is more, at least one practical purpose for cutting rock-basins even since Rooke’s day is well documented (Radley 1962; 1964), though it is doubtful whether ‘the raising of grouse’ would be an appropriate usage for a basin perched halfway up Robin Hood’s Stride!
- <sup>10</sup> The looming presence of Robin Hood’s Stride will doubtless have been fabled down the ages, as reflected in its various names — besides Robin Hood’s Stride, it has often, more evocatively, been called ‘Mock Beggar Hall’ or the like, for reasons that have often been told (e.g. Bray 1783, 136; Rhodes 1824, 240; Heathcote 1934, 33), and sometimes ‘Graned Tor’ or ‘Grained Tor’ (e.g. Rooke 1796, 46–9; Rhodes 1824, 241), which may have a more mundane topographical basis, taken by Heathcote (1934, 33) to be ‘owing to the deep grooves which the rain has washed out of the gritstone’, though perhaps equally likely to have been inspired by its resemblance in profile to the rugged granite, or ‘grained’, tors capping the moors of South-West England.
- <sup>11</sup> Such a mistake seems sure to have arisen from passing comment without becoming sufficiently familiar with the evidence on the ground and without heeding the caveats of the published source, and this will merely be compounded if others seek to develop Bradley’s argument, as by postulating, almost incomprehensibly, that ‘the location of carved surfaces, such as those at Rowter Rocks (Derbyshire). . .Robin Hood’s Stride (Northumberland — *sic*). . .adjacent to highly visible outcrops, suggests paradoxical relationships of advertisement and concealment’ because not atop the ‘conspicuous topographical features’ (Evans 2004, 15).
- <sup>12</sup> This is much as the present writers have done in respect of a more recent discovery in a part of the Peak that lies outwith the National Park, in Staffordshire (Guilbert *et al.* 2003); and much as has been done in more-elaborate fashion to the best example of rock-art yet located in the Peak, on Gardom’s Edge (Walster 1999; Barnatt and Robinson 2003, 19), where considerable resources have been devoted to ensuring that at least a cast of the original can still be viewed on location (though cost will doubtless prevent application of such an approach to many of the other instances that might be thought to merit it).

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