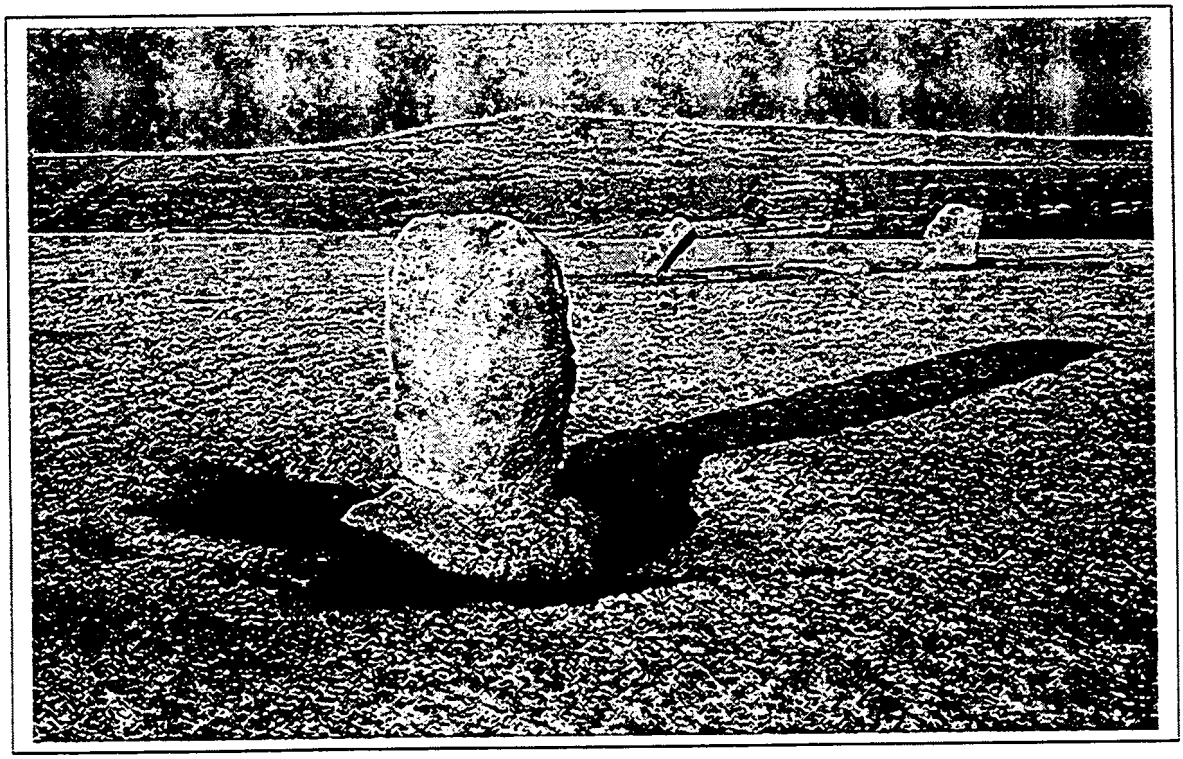
Report No: 2003R080

The Trippets Stones stone circle

Erosion repair



Cornwall Archaeological Unit

The Trippet Stones, Blisland, Cornwall

Erosion repair

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December 2003

Report No: 2003R080

THE "TRIPPET STONES."

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Acknowledgements

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We are grateful to the owners of the circle, Lady Molesworth St Aubyn and Mr Roose, for permission to carry out the work, and also to the Blisland Commoners for their support. David Hazlehurst of English Nature gave consent for the work, because the monument lies within a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

On site, the work was carried out by David Attwell, Ieuan Davies, Nathan Weller, Sally Caudle and Ben Welch.

Within Cornwall Archaeological Unit, Anna Lawson Jones commented on the flint and the report was edited by Peter Rose.

Cover illustration

The Trippets in 2003

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Summary

The Trippet Stones are the remains of an impressive stone circle, standing on the flat, lonely and windswept moorland of Manor Common in Blisland. The monument is a Scheduled Monument, Cornwall number 126 and is number 1928 in Cornwall County Council's Historic Environment Record; it is located at SX 1312 7501. Around the base of each of the stones, with the exception of two which were repaired in 1999, is a very large eroded hole, worn by animals rubbing themselves against the stones. In April 2003, two further stone holes were repaired by infilling with stones and rab and turfing over. Prior to filling, the holes were examined for archaeological features. In one, an unstratified fire-crazed flint engraver was found. In the other, a few small stones were noted, which might have represented the packing of the original stone-socket, but intrusion was kept to a minimum in order to maintain the stability of the upright stones, and no features were investigated.

1 Introduction

1.1 Project background

The stone circle known as The Trippet Stones is set on the open, flat moorland of Manor Common in Blisland parish (Fig 3). Although as many as twenty-six or twenty-seven stones may once have stood in the ring, only twelve now survive: four recumbent and eight standing, with two of the standing stones leaning at an angle of about 45 degrees to the ground. Of the recumbent stones, one is known to have fallen only twenty years ago.

This report describes work undertaken in April 2003 to repair erosion around the base of two of the stones in the circle.

1.1.1 Condition of the monument

A marked feature of the circle is the erosion around the base of each of the stones: a problem resulting from a combination of two factors: the soft damp peaty ground and stock (cattle, sheep, ponies) rubbing against the stones (Fig 4). The eroded holes are up to 5 metres across and 0.6 metres deep. Their large size undoubtedly explains why two of the stones are leaning and others have fallen. In winter, the hollows become filled with a pool of water; in summer, the water drains and dries out, to leave a muddy, bare hollow.

1.1.2 Recent management work

In 1999, the two leaning stones were stabilised by filling their eroded holes with sand, rab and granite and then earthing and turfing over (Preston-Jones 2000). Three years later, there has been a little erosion to the new turf as animals have continued to rub against the stones (Fig 5) but on the whole, this is minimal compared to the previous damage; while beneath the ground is a robust, well-drained medium rather than soft, easily-eroded turf. Moreover the improvement to the appearance of the monument is enormous.

1.2 Aims

In view of the success of the previous work it was considered worth returning to carry out a further phase of erosion repair to the hollows at the base of two more stones. At the initial stages of planning the work, we had also considered re-erecting one of the fallen stones; but in the event, this was not undertaken. It was decided however, that the work of securing the upright stones should take precedence. Moreover, the project of setting a big upright stone securely into a large void is an undertaking requiring a good deal of careful planning and confidence. This remains an aim for the future, however, and one which we can more positively embrace since Blisland Common has recently gone into a Countryside Stewardship agreement, with the aim of reducing stocking rates on the common and potentially also, erosion around the stone.

2 The conservation work

The conservation work took place on four days in the week following Easter, that is, the 22nd to 25th April 2003. The work was carried out by the North Cornwall District Council's Coast and Countryside Service, under the direction of David Attwell. On this occasion, the eroded holes around stones 5 and 21 were tackled (Fig 2).

2.1 Method of erosion repair

The conservation work followed exactly the same method as that used successfully in 1999, that is:

1. Silt and mud was cleared from the bottom of the hollows, to the firm subsoil, to provide a solid base to build up from.

2. The edges of the hollows were cut back to vertical, to form a solid edge up against which filling materials could be firmly wedged. The collar of uneroded ground around the base of the stones was disturbed as little as possible, in order to maintain stability.

3. A layer of white sand was put in the base of the hollows, to provide an archaeologically distinct layer.

4. A thin layer of light orange-brown, clean rab (growan) was spread over the top of the white sand, to bed the next layer (the stones) in.

5. The hole was then filled with blocks of (mostly) weathered granite, wedged as closely together as possible, jig-saw fashion, generally to within 10 cm of the ground surface. Every effort was made to ensure that these blocks were kept below ground surface level, to prevent them from being exposed too quickly, should the repair work subsequently be worn away.

6. The gaps between the stones were filled with rab (growan), well rammed in.

7. A layer of rab (growan) was spread over the stones, and thoroughly compacted. This was brought up approximately to ground level at the edge of the hole, but a bit higher at the centre, so as to form a slightly domed surface which would drain surface water away from the stone.

8. A 10cm layer of topsoil and horse dung (the latter collected locally) was spread over the rab, the purpose of the dung being to enrich the soil and help the final turf layer to grow.

9. Finally, the whole of the infilled hollow was turfed over, using turves on average 15cm thick. Great care was taken in laying the turves, to ensure a good, solid surface which would 'take' quickly and survive scuffing and kicking by animals and visitors. Turves used were:

   - As large as it was possible to man-handle.
   - Well beaten down to ensure good contact with the surface below.
   - Levelled with earth where necessary, again to ensure good contact and no voids.

   Joints between the turves were filled with earth if necessary or had a layer of fine earth sprinkled over, to help the turves to 'knit' together as soon as growth recommenced. The final surface was domed by 20 to 30cm above the level of the surrounding ground, and the edge of the re-turfed area blended smoothly with the surrounding ground .

10. As a final protection, gorse cut from the surrounding down was pegged down, to prevent stock from trampling on the repaired area for as long as possible, and thereby to give the turf a chance to consolidate. The fact that the gorse was blooming at the time gave the stones a wonderfully cheerful and festive appearance.

A number of these stages are depicted in Figs 7 to 10.

2.2 Sourcing of the materials

All the materials used - the sand, stones, rab, and turf - were obtained from Stannon China Clay pit. They were from a similar moorland environment which is part of the same Site of

Special Scientific Interest (the Bodmin Moor North SSSI) and were chosen to be compatible with the ecology of Manor Common.

3 Archaeological recording

3.1 Aims of the archaeological recording

Archaeological recording to accompany the restoration of the two eroded hollows included:

- Measurement of all the eroded hollows around the stones of the circle, to see whether the erosion had increased since the site was surveyed in 1998.
- The recording of any features visible in the eroded hollows after cleaning of silt and mud.
- Making a photographic record of work in progress

3.2 Results of the archaeological recording

3.2.1 Monitoring the erosion

The size of all the eroded hollows was measured along the two horizontal axes of each stone. No significant difference in the size of the hollows was noted from that recorded in the plan of 1998.

3.2.2 Cleaning the eroded hollows

Prior to infilling, all loose material - mud, silt, rooty topsoil, and turf - was cleared from the bottom of the hollows, down to a firmer undisturbed level, and the sides of the hollows were cut vertical. This process was carefully monitored so that any finds or features revealed could be recorded.

In the hollow around stone 21, a small selection of items was discovered in the loose material. These included:

- Part of a leather dog's collar
- A piece of modern glass
- A flint engraver.

The latter is described separately below. No other features of any significance were noted either in the cleaned bottom or cut side of the hollow.

No finds were made when preparing the hollow around stone 5 for filling. However, a few clusters of small stones were noted, bedded into the harder base of the hollow. Of particular note were a number of stones seen bedded in the side of the collar of undisturbed ground around the stone. It is conceivable that these represent the packing of the stone's socket. The others (seen sketched in Fig 6) may represent the top of features cut into the ground around the stone, but they were not investigated any further.

Stone 5 is of interest in its own right. As it stands now, it is vertically laminated and has a distinct ledge on one side, where one of the 'layers' has broken off. The lamination is due to pressure-release jointing of the granite, and indicates that the stone is probably from a horizontal position, on the top of a tor. The fact that part of one of the layers has broken off might be chance or, more speculatively, might even have been done deliberately, to provide a small ledge for offerings.

The flint (Fig 6) was identified by Anna Lawson-Jones. It is an engraver, probably of pebble origin, and likely to be of late Neolithic date, although this is not a diagnostic tool type. It is heavily burnt: a fact which conjures up images of bonfires and rituals at the circle, but which might just be the result of a heath fire in the area at any time in the history of the site!

3.2.3 Photography

A full photographic record was made of the site as a whole and of the two stones while undergoing the conservation work. Black and white, colour slides and colour prints were taken, of the site before and after conservation work, and of work in progress, to record the procedures involved.

4 Discussion

The repair to the base of the two stones has had a considerable impact on their appearance. In restoring the ground around them, and raising it slightly, their perceived height has been greatly reduced. The stones are no longer seen in relation to a deep muddy hole or a pool of reflective water, both of which tended to emphasise their height; now, instead, they appear firmly rooted in solid ground.

As with the work undertaken in 1999, only time will tell whether this work has been successful. However, there is a good chance that erosion will not recur too quickly, for in 2002, the Blisland Commoners, in liaison with the Department of Food and Rural Environment, set up a Countryside Stewardship Agreement for the area. In order to help protect the moorland vegetation in the area, this prescribes a much lower stocking rate than had been the case in the past. This should, in theory, also help to prevent the re-development of erosion around the stones.

5 References

Preston-Jones, A, 2002. *The Trippet Stones Stone Circle, Blisland, Cornwall*, Cornwall Archaeological Unit Report.

6 Project archive

The CAU project number is **PR2002~~040~~** 003

The project's documentary, photographic and drawn archive is housed at the offices of Cornwall Archaeological Unit, Cornwall County Council, Kennall Building, Old County Hall, Station Road, Truro, TR1 3AY. The contents of this archive are as listed below:

1. A project file containing site records and notes, project correspondence and administration. Scheduled Management file 8.9610/2002-3.
2. Black and white photographs archived under the following index numbers: GBP1592, 21 - 29
3. Colour slides archived under the following index numbers: GCS 34359 - 34371
4. This report held in digital form as: G:/CAU/DOCUMENT/SITES/SITES T/TRIPPET.CIR/TRIPPETS REPORT OF 2002-3 WORK.DOC.

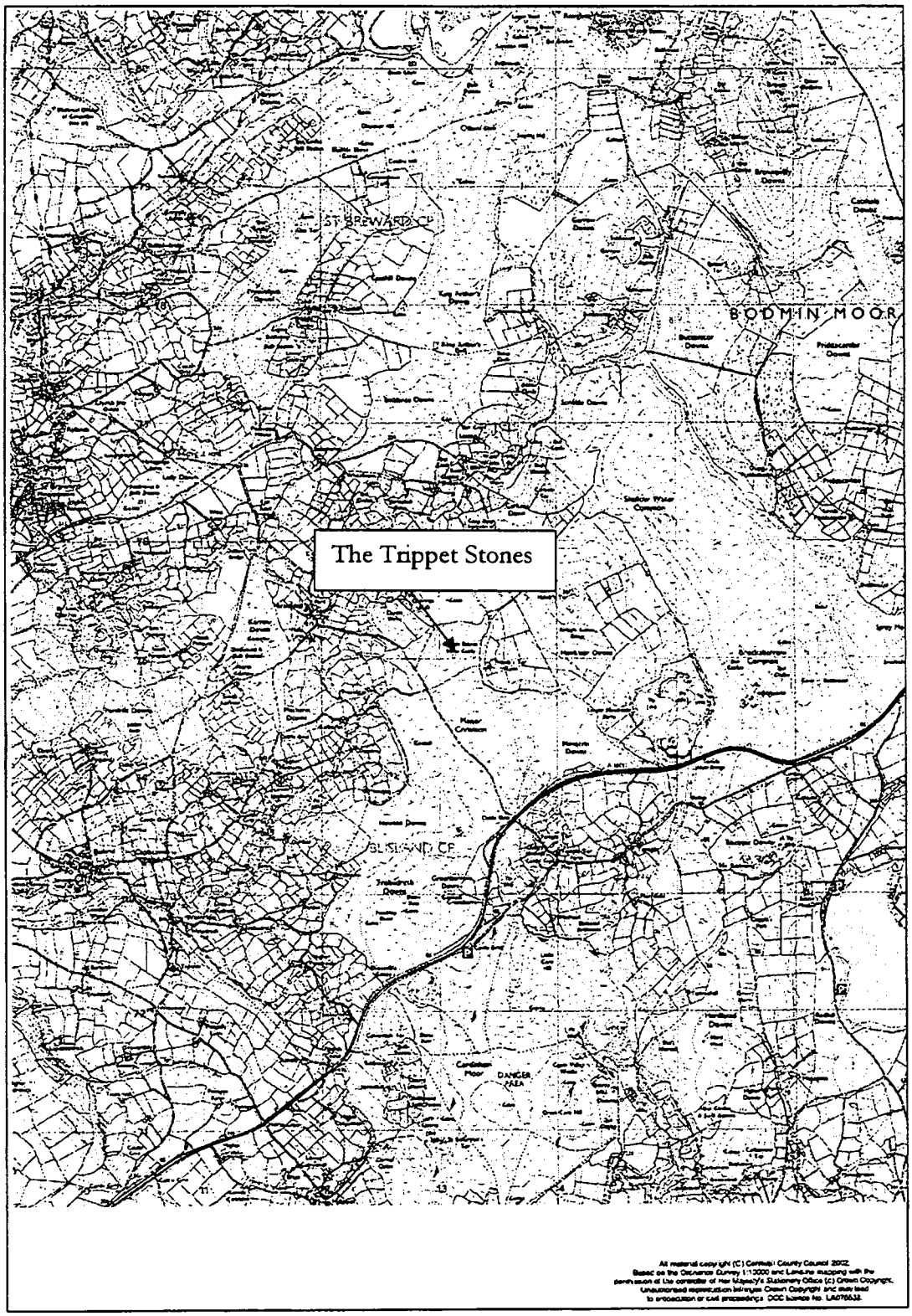


Fig 1. The location of the Trippet Stones Stone Circle

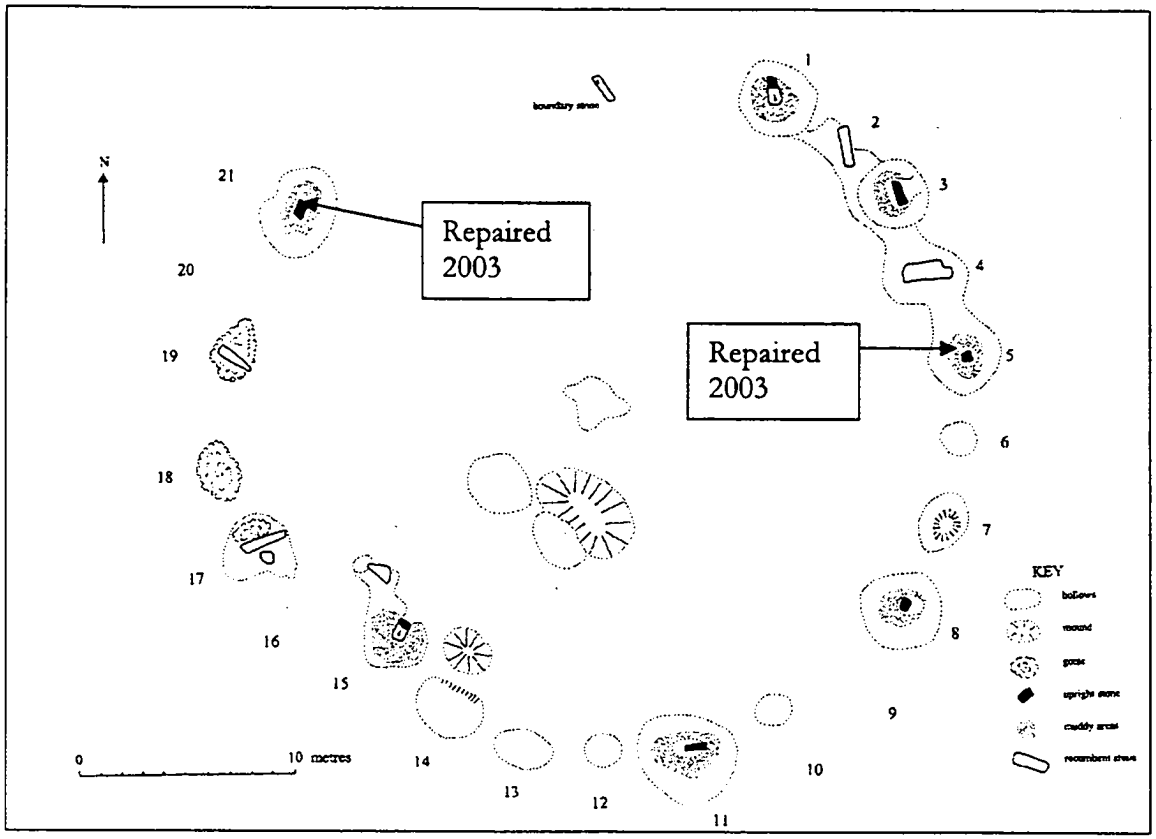


Fig 2. CAU's 1998 plan of the Trippet Stones, showing the erosion holes repaired in 2003

Fig 3. The Trippet Stones Stone Circle, in evening sunlight

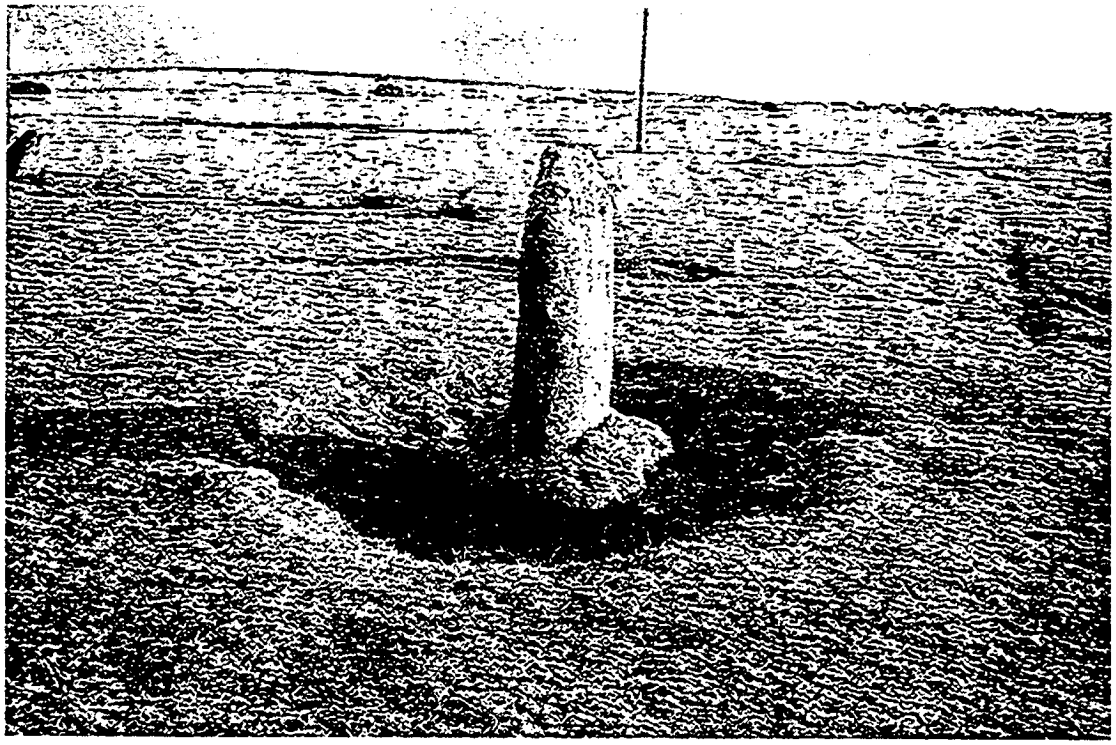


Fig 4. A typical eroded hole around one of the Trippet Stones

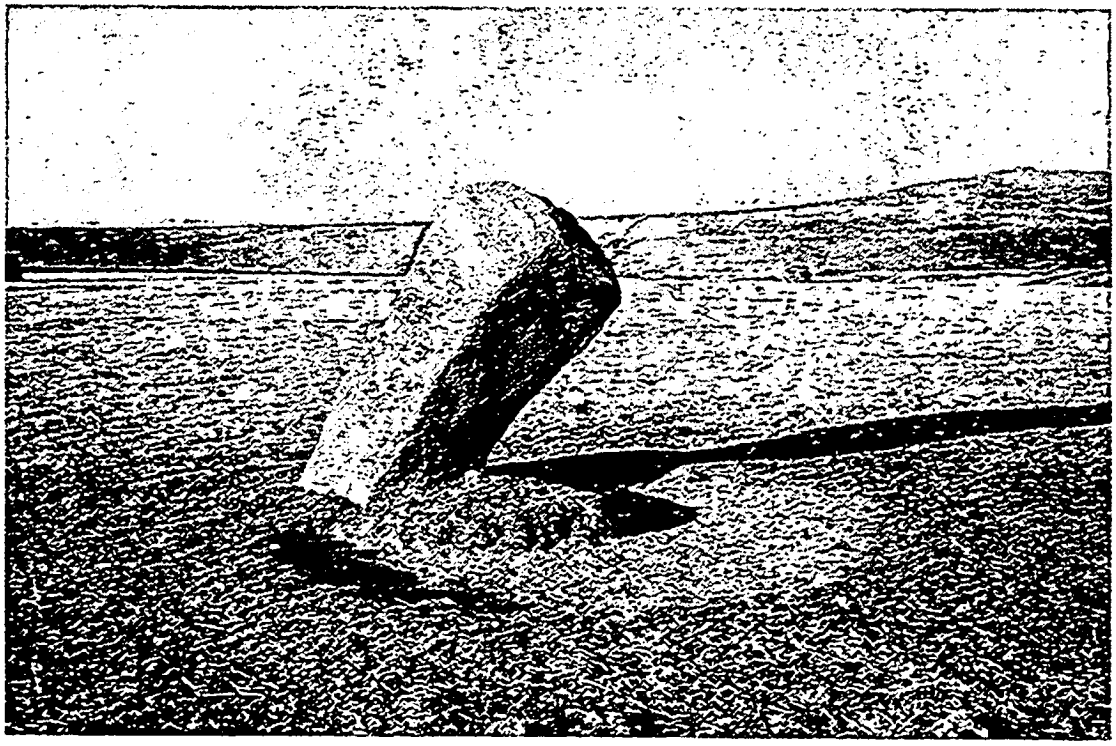
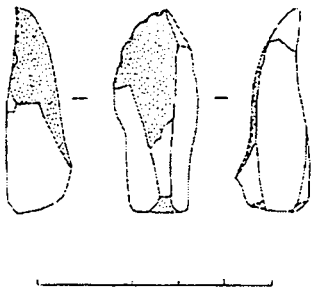
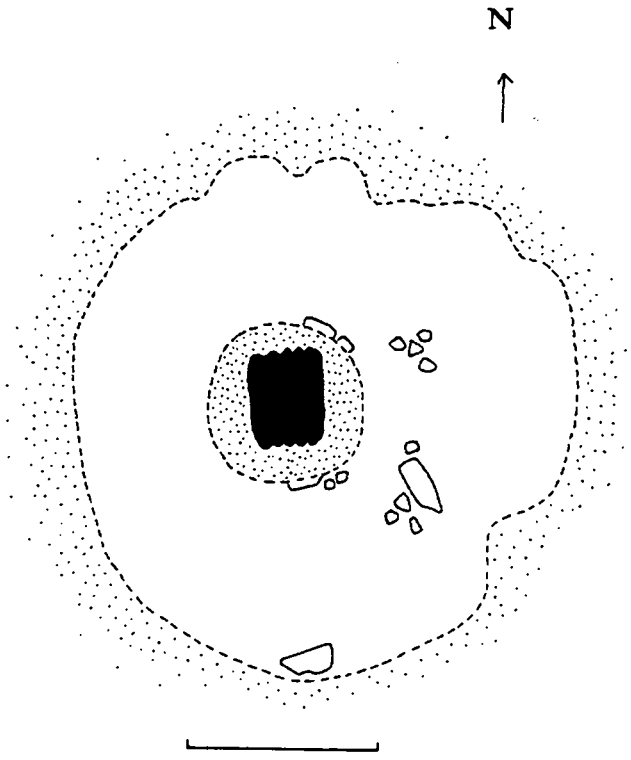


Fig 5. 1999-repaired stone



5 cm



one metre

Fig 6. Stones seen in the base of the eroded hollow around stone 5, and the flint from the hole at the base of stone 21.

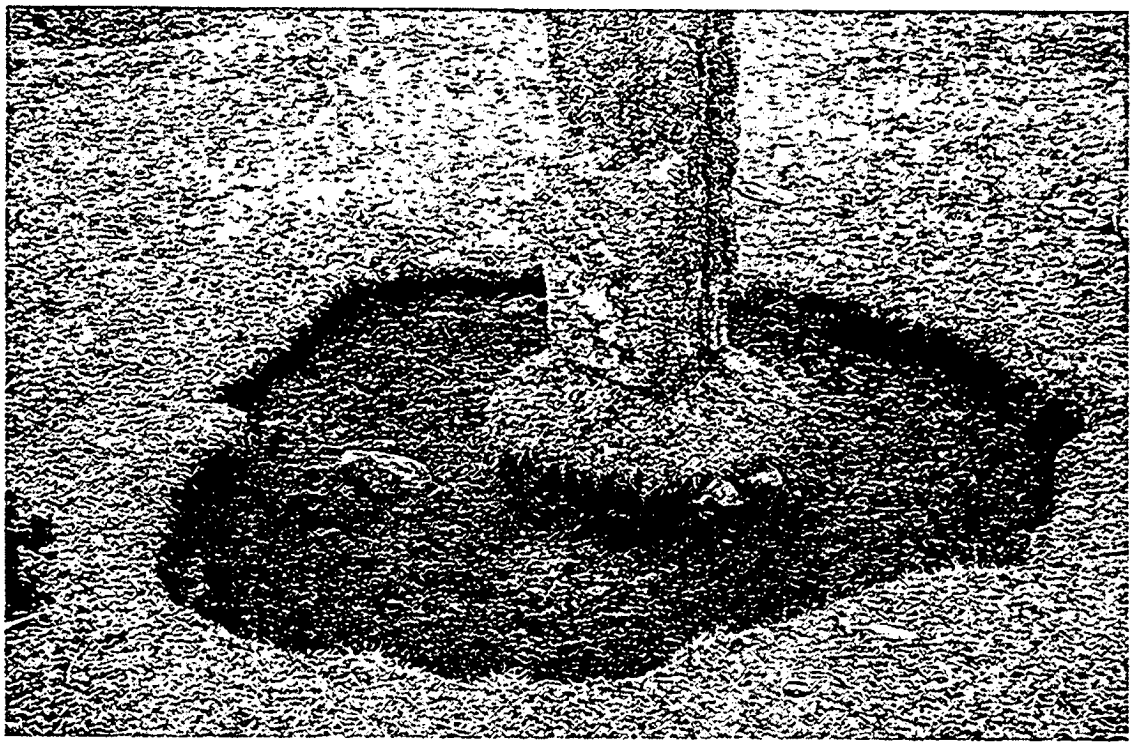


Fig 7. Eroded hole cleared of mud and silt, the edges cut straight, and ready for filling

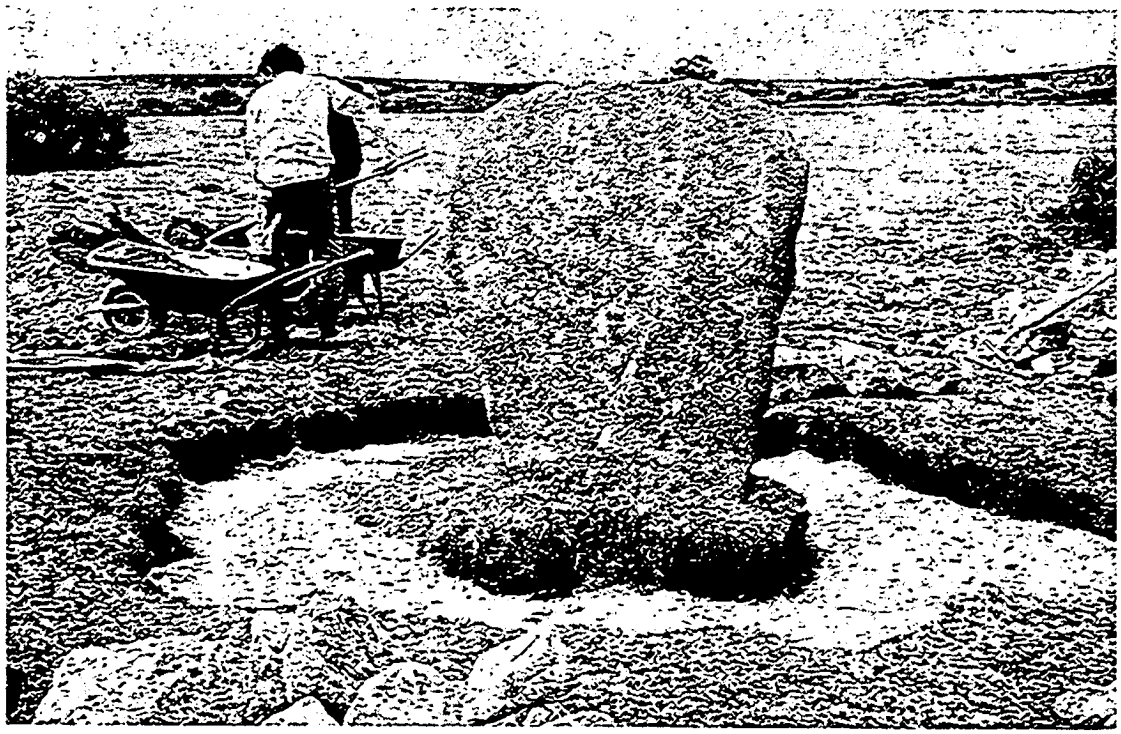


Fig 8. Eroded hole with a layer of white sand in the base

Fig 9. Eroded hole part-filled with stones and rab

Fig 10. The eroded hole filled and turfed over