THE DARTMOOR MENHIRS

THERE are on Dartmoor certain standing stones, unwrought, undoubtedly erected by man, and from their position in association with lines or circles of lesser standing stones, or in isolation, presumedly of significance at the time of their erection.

Such stones have been variously called 'Menhirs', 'Longstones', 'Standing Stones' and 'Rock Pillars'. They are by no means peculiar either to Dartmoor or to Devon.

It seems desirable to discriminate between such standing stones, which are marked by their relative dimensions and special position, and those which form the mass of such remains as Stone Rows and Stone Circles. And this although the usage of some authors is to speak of every member of a row or circle as a menhir, whatever its actual size. In practice such discrimination involves no difficulty on Dartmoor, nor any niceties of artificial classification.

Of the various terms available, *Menhir* has the sanction of long usage, and the advantage that we can share it with the French antiquaries, although in France the tendency is to a less restricted use, and a stone row may be described as consisting wholly of menhirs, especially where the size of the stones is such that each may fairly be described as a 'longstone'.

The Dartmoor menhirs may be classified under two headings: (1) the isolated and 'self-sufficient', and (2) those associated with stone rows.

ISOLATED MENHIRS

There are few isolated menhirs on Dartmoor; two certain examples still stand, and two as to which some doubt is possible.

Beardown Man. The words 'Beardown Man' will be found on the 6 inch O.S., sheet xcix, SW., near Devils Tor, but the precise position is not marked; the menhir lies a little to the west of the Tor, at, approximately, lat. 50°-35′-55½″, lon. 3°-59′-3″.

This is a fine stone, remotely placed in wild surroundings, but its isolation is tempered by the presence of a cairn some 270 yds to the south, a further evidence of the former presence of prehistoric man. I cannot find that this cairn has ever previously been mentioned.

The menhir is 11 ft 4 in. in height, and its breadth being three times its thickness, its appearance varies much with the point of view. It may seem, as in Pl. 54, a mere needle of stone; or present itself with all the apparent massiveness due to its width, as in Pl. 55A.

The actual dimensions at ground level are N. 3 ft, W. 1 ft 6 in., S. 2ft 11 in., E. 11½ in. Its greatest width above ground level is 3 ft 3 in., and its greatest thickness above ground level is 1 ft 1½ in. on the one side, and 10½ in. on the other, giving a mean of 1 ft.

Harbourne Head. This menhir is situate about 500 ft west of the head of the Harbourne stream. It is not indicated on the first edition of the 6 inch O.S., sheet cxiv, SW. But a bench-mark is given (1123·7) which is in fact cut on the stone. Lat. 50°-28′-14″, lon. 3°-50′-12″.

In contrast to the Beardown Man, which tapers but slightly toward the top, the profile of this stone is triangular.

The length of the stone above ground is 8 ft 1 in., its width at ground level 3 ft 7 in., and its thickness 13 in. on the one side and 10 in. on the other. Its greatest width a little above ground level is 3 ft 3 in., and its greatest thickness 11 in. The stone leans considerably to the west. Two views are given, Pl. 55 B and C.

The *White Moor Stone* will be found marked on the 6 inch O.S., sheet lxxxix, NW., in lat. 50°-41′-17½″, lon. 3°-56′-5″.

This stone forms the boundary of the parishes of Lydford, South Tawton and Throwleigh, which raises the unfortunate question whether, in its present position, it has not always been a bound-stone; if so it may possibly have been stolen from the stone circle which lies 520 ft. away to the NNW. On the other hand the presence of that circle is favourable to the contrary view, that the stone is in its origin prehistoric, and has been adopted as a boundary by a later race.

I cannot find that I ever noted the measurements of this menhir; Crossing gives the approximate dimensions as 5 ft 6 in. in height, 3 ft in width and somewhat less than 6 in. thick. The largest stone in the circle I measured as 4 ft 7 in. high, 3 ft 4 in. wide and 7 in. thick; so that the dimensions are of the same order. My photograph, in itself far from successful, suggests that Crossing has underestimated the thickness of the White Moor Stone (Pl. 56A).

Lee Moor, the *Hanging Stone* or *Leaning Rock*. Not shown on the O.S., it lies within the area included in sheet cxviii, NE., location lat. 50°-27′-21½″, lon. 3°-59′-44″. Seven feet nine inches in length ofth is menhir stand above ground, but the vertical height does not exceed 6 ft 9 in. consequent on the stone being 38° out of the vertical, whence its alternative names.

The stone measures 3 ft 7 in. by 1 ft 10 in. at the base; incised on one face are the letters 'C B', from which it would appear to have been

used as a bound, but I have been unable to ascertain what property it bounds. I believe this to be a genuine menhir of prehistoric date, but doubt has been cast upon this by its use as a bound-stone. It has to be remembered in this connexion that there are undoubted ancient menhirs which have similarly been adopted as boundary marks; for instance the 'Longstone' on Shuggle Down. Crossing curiously overlooks the pronounced lean of the rock and suggests that the name 'Hanging Stone' may imply the former existence of a dolmen. See Pl. 57A.

The *Hanging Stone* stands in an area where there are many remains of prehistoric times; 440 yds from it, to the south-east, is a chambered cairn; and 847 yds a little north of west, lies a stone row; these are the nearest members of a considerable group.

Elsewhere there are other stones, now fallen, which may have been 'isolated menhirs'. Any columnar stone of considerable length, exceeding, say, 9 ft, may be so claimed by the enthusiast; especially where it lies in ground otherwise free from surface stone. But such claims are too speculative for serious consideration.

I will mention perhaps the most hopeful of these doubtful cases. The boundary between the parishes of Harford and Ugborough, in the Erme Valley, is marked by a series of modern boundary stones; alongside one of these, on Piles Hill, lies what appeared to be a fallen menhir. We now have documentary evidence that this is so (see pp. 205 and 269).

Two other possible menhirs are to be found in the same watershed, on Beacon Plain, 500 yds east from Hangershell Rock. The more easterly of these stones is 18 ft 4 in. long, measures 19 in. by something over 26 in. at the base, and 27 in. by something over 19 in. at the centre of its length, while the other end is 15 in. by 11 in. in section.

Fifty-seven yards away, on a bearing 26° south of west, lies another stone, 18 ft in length, 5 ft 6 in. wide at one end, and tapering to a blunt point. The stones are entirely isolated on a grass moor, where there are very few surface stones, and those relatively small. They have none of the appearance of surface boulders. And they are such as might have been brought from the clitter of Hangershell Rock. If they were menhirs, then they were the largest known on Dartmoor. The location of the eastern stone is O.S., cxix. SE., lat. 50°-25′-4¾″, lon. 3°-53′-14″.

MENHIRS DIRECTLY ASSOCIATED WITH OTHER REMAINS

On Dartmoor the only remains with which menhirs are found associated are the stone rows. In Cornwall central menhirs are found in some of the stone circles, but some doubt may be felt as to whether they formed part of the original monument. There is no trace of a central menhir in any Dartmoor stone circle.

Drizzlecombe, otherwise *Thrushelcombe*

At Drizzlecombe, in the valley of the Plym, is the most complete of all the groups of stone rows and barrows which are to be found on Dartmoor. There are three stone rows, not strictly parallel in direction, but having a general trend very near indeed to NE.–SW. At the north-east end of each row is a barrow; and at the south-west end of each a menhir. In the year 1889, when I surveyed this group, all the menhirs lay fallen. In July 1893 they were placed erect as they now stand.

On the plan of this group of remains the menhirs have been marked 'A', 'B' and 'C' respectively, starting from south-west and proceeding north-east. See Fig. 73 (p. 211).

Menhir A was measured as it lay in 1889; its length was 12 ft 6 in., it was 5 ft wide at the wider end, and 1 ft 5 in. wide at the narrower, its thickness approximately 1 ft 6 in. As erected, it stands 10 ft 6 in. in height, and measures at the base 5 ft 10 in. by 1 ft 3 in. It will be noted that at 2 ft from the end the stone is wider than at the end.

Menhir B, measured in 1889, was 9 ft 5 in. in length by 2 ft 9 in. in width. As erected it stands 7 ft 9 in. in height, and measures 2 ft 9 in. by 1 ft 2 in. at ground level.

Menhir C, measured in 1889, was 17 ft 10 in. long, 4 ft wide about 3 ft 6 in. from the wider end, but tapering to that end, and 2 ft 7 in. wide at the narrower end, its thickness about 1 ft 2 in. It now stands 14 ft in height and measures 4 ft 2 in. by 1 ft 2 in. at ground level. At the head of the menhir there is a curious excrescence on one side; this is purely natural, the effect of the jointing of the granite. This is the tallest menhir on Dartmoor.

It will be seen from the plan that A and B fell with their lengths at right angles to the rows with which they were associated, whereas the length of C lay practically in the direction of its row. This, in itself, would indicate that A and B originally stood with their broad sides lying in the direction of the rows, and C with its broad side across the direction of the row. Excavation proved that this had been the fact, the pits formerly occupied by the bases of the stones were clearly defined, and little if at all deformed. No reason can be assigned for this difference of position.

A view of menhir C, as it lay in 1889, is given on Pl. 57B. Pl. 58 A and B afford two aspects of the same menhir after its erection.

Pl. 59A is from a photograph of menhir A, and Pl. 59B presents menhir B. In either instance a part of the associated row is included.

The Drizzlecombe group finds place on sheets cxiii, NW. and SW. of the 6 inch O.S. of Devon, and the adjacent sheet cxii SE. The first edition gives a very incomplete survey, no stone rows or menhirs being shown. But Giant's Basin (Pl. 31), which may be regarded as the principal member of the group, is indicated on all editions of the survey, sheet cxii, SE., lat. 50°-29′-5″, lon. 3°-59′-6″.

Shuggledown, the *Longstone*

Second in importance may be placed the group of stone rows and barrows on Shuggledown, in the parishes of Chagford, Gidleigh and Lydford (pp. 219-222 and Fig. 75).

The Longstone is not far from the centre of a double stone row, 485 ft lying north of the Longstone, and 555 ft south thereof. It is conceivable that it was once the terminal stone of a row[1], which was subsequently extended beyond it, but there is no proof of this. It marks the boundary of the three parishes above mentioned, and is referred to as the 'Langstone' in the 1240 Perambulation of the Forest of Dartmoor. The menhir stands 10 ft 5 in., and measures at the ground level, N. 35½ in., E. 24 in., S. 33 in. and W. 21 in.

6 inch O.S., lxxxix, SE., lat. 50°-39′-17″, lon. 3°-53′-44″. See Pl. 46B, for view of the Longstone.

Piles Hill, the *Longstone*

This is the northern terminal of the Butterdon row. It is fallen. It is 8 ft 5 in. long, and measures 2 ft 3 in. × 1 ft 6 in. at one foot from the base, and 11 in. × 5 in. at the other end. Situated on Piles Hill at an elevation of 1,250 ft (see p. 205).

Merrivale, Long Ash Common, Walkhampton Parish

The well-known group of stone rows (p. 215), cairns, kistvaen, stone circle and menhir or menhirs at Merrivale (Figs. 74, 116) may be given third rank among the Dartmoor groups. But it is to be remembered that this ranking is from our modern viewpoint, and from that alone.

The principal menhir stands not far from the stone circle; there is a smaller menhir near it, and between the two lie the remains of a barrow. There are also a few scattered set stones, the intent of which cannot be ascertained.

The large menhir stands 10 ft 4 in. in height; at the base it measures S. 2 ft 6½ in., W. 1 ft 4 in., N. 2 ft 8 in., E. 1 ft 8 in. It tapers to S. 8 in., W. 11 in. at the top. The south face lies in a plane bearing N. 63° E.

The smaller menhir is distant 35 ft from the larger. Within memory it had never stood erect, prior to its re-erection in 1895; it has since again fallen, which is the less to be regretted where it must be admitted that much about its restoration was problematic. The greatest section of the stone measures 1 ft 3 in. by 9 in., and its length as it lies on the ground is 7 ft 1 in.

The larger stone will be found marked on 6 inch O.S., sheet CVI, NE., lat. 50°-33′-9″, lon. 4°-2′-31½″. See Pl. 60B.

Laughtor, Laughtor Newtake, Lydford Parish

Six inch O.S., CVII, NE., lat. 50°-33′-43″, lon. 3°-54′-13″. Not shown on first edition.

[1] And is treated as such in the previous chapter. (ED.)

This menhir stands at the north end of a stone row (p. 229); after long lying fallen it was erected in 1893. The stone was over 12 ft in length, it now stands 8 ft 8 in. above ground, and measures at the base 2 ft 5 in. by 1 ft 3 in. For view see Pl. 56B.

Langstone Moor, Petertavy Parish

This menhir stands at the south end of a stone row, at the north end of which there would appear to have been a barrow. There can be little doubt that the adjacent moorland took its name from this stone. The ordinary modern pronunciation of that name is *Lanson*, but the Ordnance Survey prefers to mark it as *Launceston*. It is to be noted that the original spelling of longstone, everywhere on Dartmoor, was 'langestone'.

Prior to the year 1893 the stone had long lain on the ground; its length is 11 ft 8 in. and its greatest width 2 ft 1 in., its greatest thickness 1 ft 7 in. As re-erected it stands 9 ft 2 in. in height. It differs from all other Dartmoor menhirs in that the stone is not granite, but a block of the igneous rock which occurs on and around Whittor, and which may be described as an epidiorite.

The location is 6 inch O.S., xcviii, SE., lat. 50°-35′-22¾″, lon. 4°-2′-54½″. The stone is not shown on the first edition of the survey.

For a view see Pl. 60A.

EXCEPTIONALLY LARGE STONES IN STONE ROWS

Although I would not extend the definition of 'menhir' to include them, I think it well to refer to the fact that the stones next to the barrows, which frequently occur at one end of the stone rows, are often obviously selected of far greater than the ordinary length of the general assemblage of stones forming the rows. Especially does this appear to be the case where the barrow has a retaining circle. But many rows do not show this feature. Three instances may be cited where such unusually large stones occur.

Assacombe, Lydford Parish

A barrow with a retaining circle lies at the east end of the stone row (p. 224). The stones near to the retaining circle are much larger than the general run of stones in the row, and the largest is next to the circle; it stands 6 ft 2 in. and measures 2 ft 2 in. by 11 in. at the base (Pl. 62). The stone has been re-erected.

Location, 6 inch O.S., xcix, NE., lat. 50°-37′-39″, lon. 3°-53′-35½″. The row is not shown on the first edition of the survey.

Shuggledown, Chagford and Gidleigh Parishes

The fourfold circle lies at the south end of a stone row (p. 220), the two stones in the row next the circle are both fallen and both are un-

usually large. One measures 11 ft 6 in. in length, and the other 7 ft 4 in. (see Pl. 46A and Fig. 65).

Location, 6 inch O.S., lxxxix, SE., lat. 50°-39′-28″, lon. 3°-53′-47½″.

Walkhampton Common, between *Down Tor* and *Coombeshead Tor*

A barrow within a retaining circle lies at the west end of the row (p, 212); the stones for some distance from the barrow are far larger than the general run, decreasing in size with distance from the barrow. The stone next to the retaining circle stands 9 ft 6 in. See Pl. 61.

Location, 6 inch O.S., cxii, NE., lat. 50°-30′-19½″, lon. 3°-59′-34½″.

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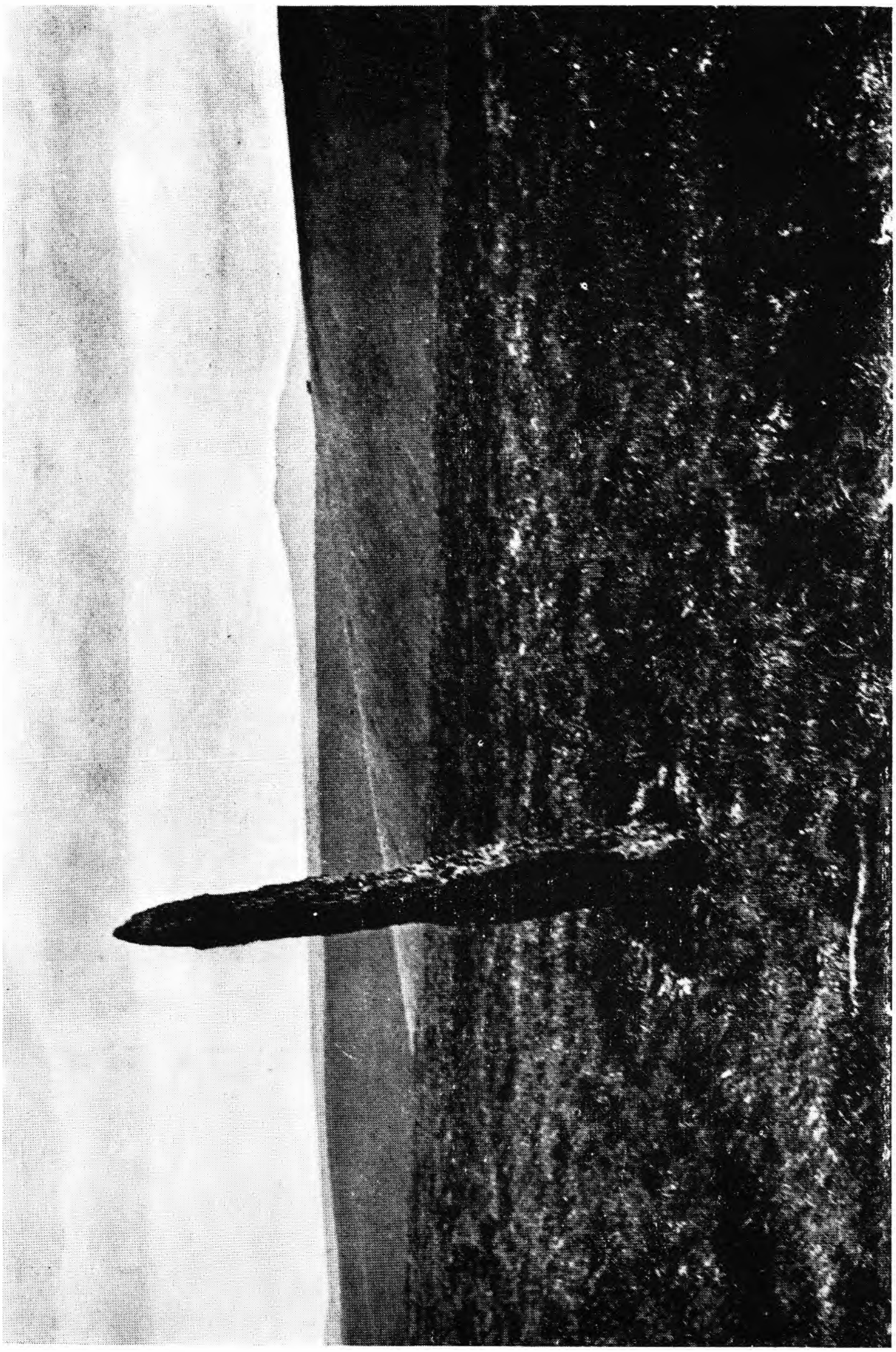
Quintins Man, Lydford Parish

Six inch O.S., lxxxix, SW., lat. 50°-38′-15″, lon. 3°-57′-1″.

This place-name would appear to indicate the former existence of a menhir, but the object to which it is now applied is a cairn. We have no Dartmoor example of a menhir standing on a cairn, and it is not within living memory that any menhir stood either on or near this particular cairn.

Longstone

The word 'Longstone' or 'Langstone' occurs as a place-name on Dartmoor, where no menhirs either now exist or are known to have been. It is sometimes assumed that the name may be taken as good evidence of the former presence of a menhir, but this not a safe assumption. *Lang*, as a surname, is not unknown on Dartmoor, where it is at least as old as the days of Elizabeth; and, with the precedents of 'Proutytown', 'Cudliptown' and 'Cholwichtown' it would be unsafe to deny the possibility of derivation from a personal name. The word certainly suggests inquiry where it occurs.

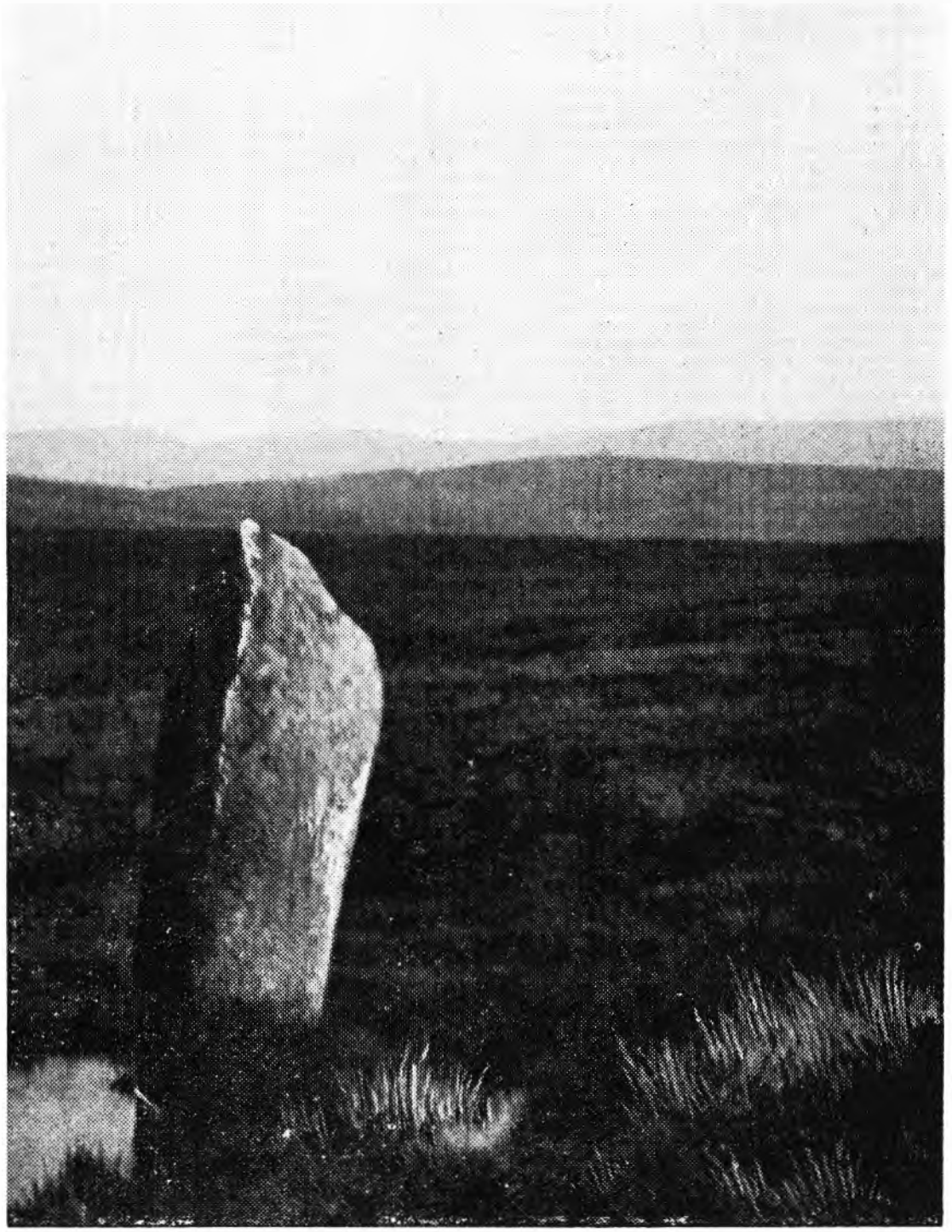


Beardown Man.

A. Beardown Man, from S. 58° W.

B. Harbourne Head Menhir, from S. 56° E.

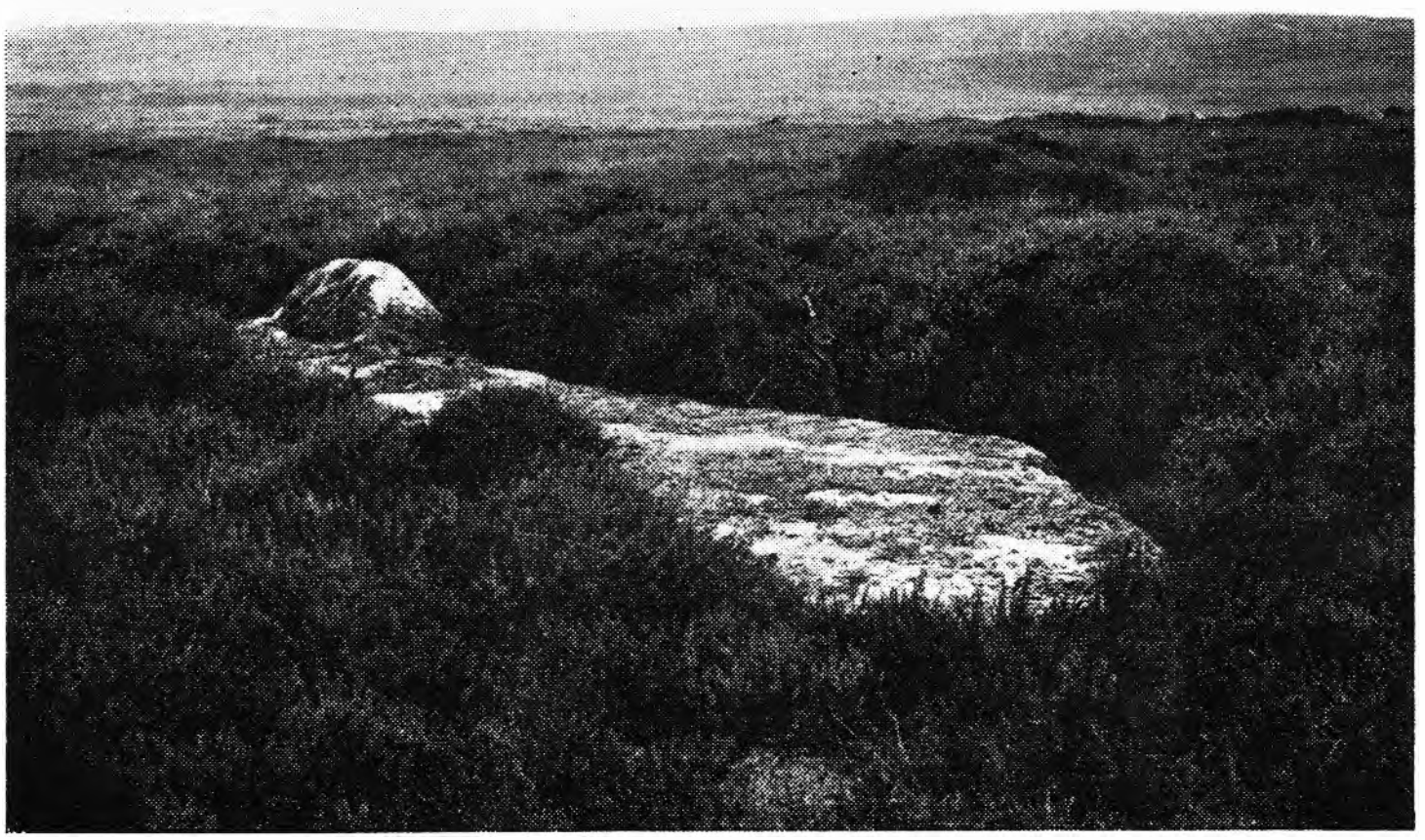
C. Harbourne Head Menhir, from N. 39° E.



A. White Moor Stone.

B. Laughtor Newtake Menhir.

A. Hanging Stone, Lee Moor.



B. Drizzlecombe C, fallen.

A

B

Drizzlecombe C, after erection: (A). looking westward, (B). looking eastward.

A. Drizzlecombe A.

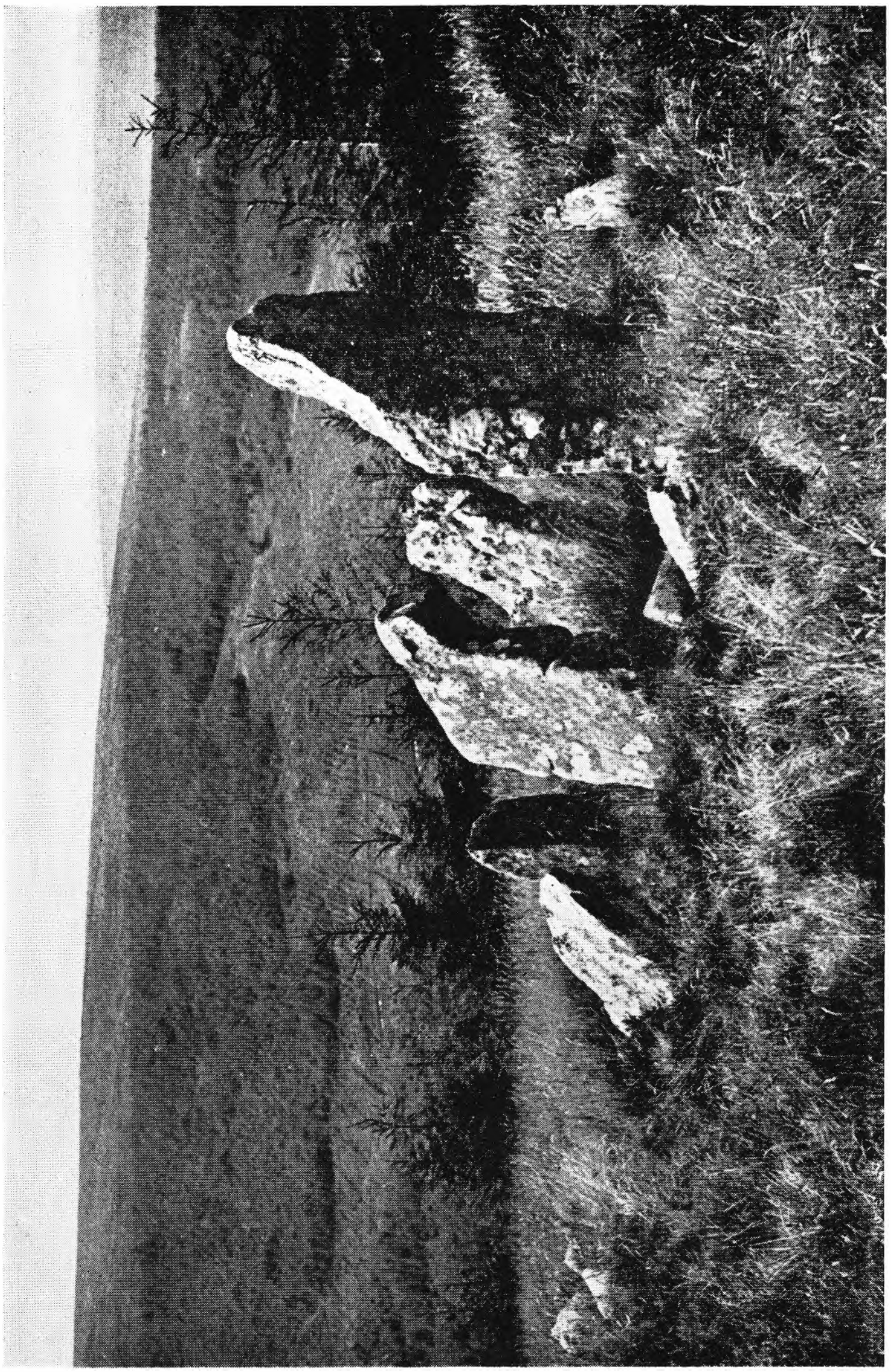
B. Drizzlecombe B (C in distance).

A. Menhir on Langstone Moor.

B. Merrivale Menhirs.

Photo: *D. P. Wilson*

Down Tor, Retaining Circle and Row. Note the exceptionally large stone in the row adjacent to the circle.



Assacombe, large stones at end of row adjacent to retaining circle.