



The Millennium Stone on Danby High Moor

Peter Woods

Around the middle of 1999, a member of NYMA asked: “What are we planning to do to mark the Millennium? Shouldn’t we build some sort of monument at the highest point in the centre of the Moors?”

The NYMA Council’s reaction was that it would never get planning permission for such a structure, but after further deliberation concluded that if the example of Bronze Age standing stones were to be emulated, then the chances of obtaining permission would be higher. And so it turned out; both the Planning Authority and the landowners (Lord and Lady Downe) gave enthusiastic support for a stone to be erected at a spot just off the road between Ralph Cross and Rosedale Abbey.

The next step was to find a suitable stone. Fortunately, the melting ice sheet, some 10,000 years ago, had deposited its load of suitable sandstone close to a road over Spaunton Moor. Another landowner (George Winn-Darley) was enthusiastic too, and so the project had begun.

A local crane company agreed to join the project and move the stone for free, and on 16th February 2000, on a bright but bitterly cold day, the stone - weighing over seven tons - was lifted onto a strong, tractor-drawn trailer and transported ten miles to the site. A large hole had been excavated and lined with stone slabs for long-term

stability. When the cavalcade arrived, the crane lifted the stone off the trailer and lowered it gently into the hole; it fitted perfectly.

The team then retired to the Lion Inn on Blakey Ridge for a celebration in a nice warm room. Then the snow arrived, turning the new ‘standing stone’ white. A local farmer, bringing his wife back from a shopping expedition, drove past the stone and said to her, “That’s new, isn’t it?” “No,” she replied, “that’s been there as long as we’ve lived here”. When they got home, he turned on the TV and there was the team, raising the new stone. “I got me apology,” the farmer reported later! It showed that the decision to emulate the Bronze Age model had been the right one.

It was agreed that the stone should be simply engraved with the letters ‘AD MM’ divided by a simple quadrant. But when the local stonemason, Mike Weatherill, was asked if he would do the work, he initially declined. A good Methodist, he said: “If I am going to put a cross on the stone, it must be a proper one - are we not celebrating 2000 years since the birth of Jesus Christ?” So that is what is carved on the stone, in perpetuity.

The next step was a dedication ceremony. The much loved and respected local Catholic Priest, Father

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Peter Ryan, a true countryman, agreed to lead the ceremony, on 6th May 2000. People wanting to attend on foot were asked to walk from all the points of the compass; many did so (including Lord and Lady Downe). The longest distance walked (15 miles) was achieved by two individuals.

Father Ryan's dedication address included the following apposite words:

“Even I find myself smiling inwardly at the sound of an Irish voice here on the North York Moors; but all the more privileged, very honoured, to be asked to dedicate this beautiful Millennium Stone. It has borne silent, passive witness to many, many millennia, and for a long time it has lain on Spaunton Moor, unnoticed, unheralded. Now it is to bear a different kind of witness. We hope that this Millennium Megalith will be a ‘Sermon in Stone’ for many generations to come. I hope that it will speak to them,

especially through the sign of the cross, about those things that we greatly prize. The cross is a familiar symbol to those of us who are Christians, but in a sense it has real meaning for everyone, irrespective of religious beliefs. In every life, and in creation itself, and certainly in the natural world, there are many dyings. And our life and its worth are measured by the number of ‘resurrections’ that we can bring about from the many dyings. We hope that this Stone will speak to people about newness of life, about resurrection of life, for many, many generations to come.”

Not long after the stone was erected, a palaeontologist contacted NYMA to report that the mud-filled depressions on the back of the stone were in fact small dinosaur footprints in the original sandy beach from which this hard sandstone layer had evolved over millions of years.



Find out more

Visit the Stone on Danby High Moor, just off the road between
Blakey Ridge and Rosedale Abbey, grid ref. NZ 693013

Steve Estill's 2017 book, 'Stones and Crosses of the North York Moors',
published by Fonthill Media, is an excellent guide to the Millennium Stone and other markers.



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