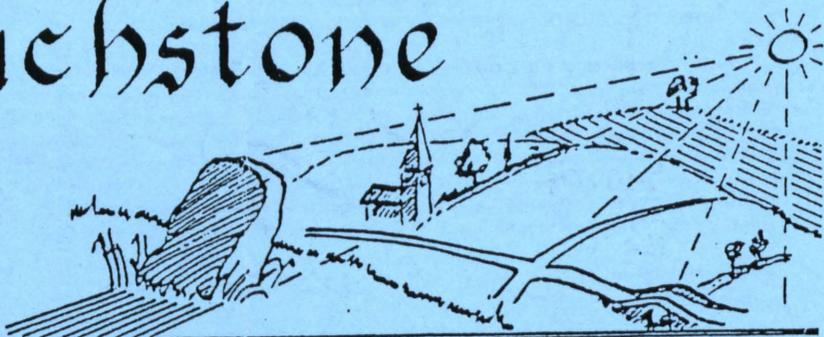


# Touchstone

Surrey  
Earth  
Mysteries



No. 21

April 1989

## COLDRUM FIELD TRIP

Our next field trip, in conjunction with the Northern Earth Mysteries Circle, will be on Saturday, August 12th. We will be looking at some sites in Kent: The White Horse Stone, Kit's Coty House (dolmen), Lower Kit's Coty (the Countless Stones), Coldrum chambered tomb, Trottscliffe Church (megaliths in the foundations), Addington Long Barrow and The Chestnuts burial chamber. Coldrum is on the ley described on television by Paul Devereux. If time permits, we may also travel on to some of the places Tony Wedd described in "Skyways and Landmarks", which are not far away. It is a very rich area which should provide a very interesting, enjoyable and thought-provoking day. London Earth Mysteries Circle are planning several other trips too - see later in this issue.

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## LETTERS

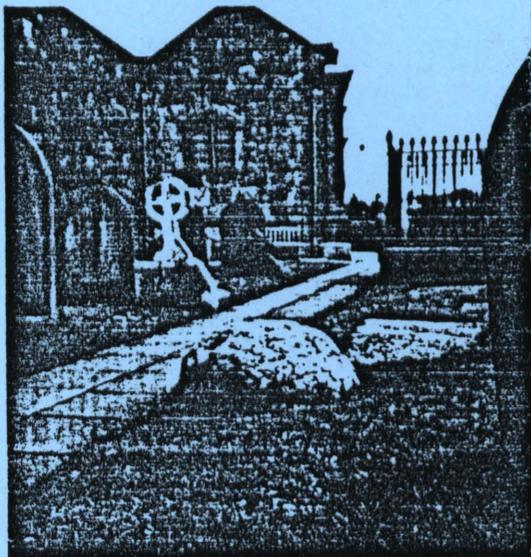
from Richard Colborne, Pershore, Worcestershire:

This Avebury plans business is something that won't easily go away. I'm very intrigued. I would hope that there is an opportunity here for earth mysteries people to solve the puzzle before the Old School archaeologists. It seems very unlikely to me that John Aubrey was working from anything other than his own personal observations, but his plan exhibits the sort of features that could result from a misinterpretation of a layman's description. That is, "a circle inside another" becomes concentrically placed; it is unlikely that a concentric circle would be transferred to one of the quadrants. I have been observing deficiencies in the speech/comprehension of ordinary people for years, and believe me, few use words such as horizontal and vertical, and most cannot explain these when asked. All words referring to juxtaposition cause problems to them. Could

the plan be a pre-personal-visit Aubrey plan?

A possibility that I prefer as a working hypothesis is that it was remodelled! You yourself have noted a certain topographical/positional relationship between Avebury and the White Horses. I have noted a post-Roman relationship between some ancient works and the Roman boundaries. I think I've mentioned long barrows in that part of our country, which certainly appear to parallel Roman boundaries. I fancy a major "Dark Ages" remodelling of this area. I gave up researching at the time at the time I noticed a relationship between the Roman agrimensorial lines and Avebury. I just haven't been able to get back to it.

from Norman Darwen, Sidcup, Kent:



I have been interested to see mention in former "Touchstones" of smaller stones re-erected in relatively recent times. There is a stone, well known locally, near my home town of Preston in Lancashire which I feel may fall into this category. Known as "The Witch's Stone", it is to be found beside a path in the churchyard to the south-west of the ancient (but "restored") church of Saint Anne in Woodplumpton, a village north-north-west of Preston (SD499344). The local legend is that a witch was buried in the churchyard, and soon afterwards cracks appeared in the earth. It was assumed she was trying to make her way back to the surface, and so the boulder

was laid over the grave. Other versions of the story substitute a nagging wife for the witch.

The witch is traditionally called Meg Shelton, and in 1705 a Margery Hilton was buried by torchlight. She was later reinterred and buried head downwards! This would seem to give a date for the (re)erection of the stone.

From Chris Hall, Fleet, Hampshire:

You might like to consider the following as a late addition to the "Strange Surrey" series Bob Skinner used to contribute:

"On the evening of October 9th, 1889, a remarkably fine lunar rainbow was seen at Reigate. The moon was full at 1.26 on the morning

of the same day. At about 7.20 p.m. the eastern sky was mostly clear, and the moon, not far above the horizon, was shining brilliantly. In the west and south west were some clouds; some light ones, radiating upwards from the horizon in the south west end of the lunar rainbow, and for a few moments mistook it for another light cloud radiating from the same point. No rain was then falling. The rainbow very quickly increased in brightness and extent, until it formed a perfect arch from south west to north east. At about the same time rain began to fall. For about a quarter of an hour the rainbow was very brilliant, and formed a striking object; some of the prismatic colours could be well distinguished, especially the purple and red." James B. Crosfield.

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#### BOOK REVIEWS

The Well of Our Lady, by Robert Smith. 20 pages. Maps and historical illustrations. Published by the Ladywell Village Society, 47, Chudleigh Road, Ladywell Village, Brockley, London, SE4. 1JX. £1.00

Here is a fine example of "how it's done": a fine piece of historical research. Ladywell today is a very urban part of Lewisham in South East London, not an easy terrain to go about tracing the old holy well which led to the name of the early settlement. Yet Robert Smith has achieved just this, by researching old maps and other early documents from a time when Ladywell was still farmland. The research proves the well existed in 1592, probably earlier, and traces its use and development into Victorian times. There has been a happy end to the search, in that not only has the site of the well been relocated, but the Ladywell Village Society have persuaded Lewisham Council to mark the place with a commemorative plaque. This is a sterling piece of research, recommended to all interested in the history of holy wells.

Chris Hall.

Mystery Animals of Britain and Ireland, by Graham J. McEwan. 210 pages. Photographs, line illustrations, bibliography. Published by Robert Hale Ltd., £10.95.

Of most interest to Surrey people for its ten page account of the Surrey Puma episodes, in which an alien big cat was reported on numerous occasions in the western part of the county. This is the best account in print, because Graham McEwan is the only writer on the subject who has studied local press reports instead of recycling the (often erroneous) national press accounts which are quoted in all other mystery animal books I have seen.

There is little here in the way of original speculation and explanation, but the book is a useful compilation of the evidence for alien big cats, black dogs, lake and sea serpents and a weird menagerie of other strange beasts which have been reported in the British Isles. Quite a number of the accounts are collected and published here for the first time, and I am not aware of any other





# British scientists unravel mystery of giant obelisks

BRITISH archaeologists are unravelling the mysteries of a lost African empire which once flourished in and around Ethiopia, and which at its peak was six times the size of Britain.

Run from a vast royal city called Axum, 300 miles north of modern Addis Ababa, this long forgotten empire was ruled by an imperial civil service and by a king who gave refuge to the followers of Mohammed when they fled from pagan Mecca at the very birth of Islam.

Among the ruins a series of giant stone obelisks, the tallest in the world, have long puzzled the archaeological world. Now UK archaeologist Dr Stuart Munro-Hay will soon reveal full details about the mysterious civilisation which built them. After 14 years of excavation and analysis Dr Munro-Hay believes that the obelisks, some up to 100 feet high, are vast tombstones, erected for the greater glory of a series of dead Axumite emperors.

His findings will be published next year by the British Institute in Eastern Africa, in association with publisher Thames and Hudson.

Underneath the obelisks the archaeologists, who were led by the late Dr Neville Chittick, the Institute's former director, found a labyrinth of subterranean royal tombs. Many of them contained elaborate burial goods. These included knives with ivory handles, bronze plaques inlaid with glass, intricately-painted terracotta perfume jars, elegant glass goblets and beads of cornelian, silver

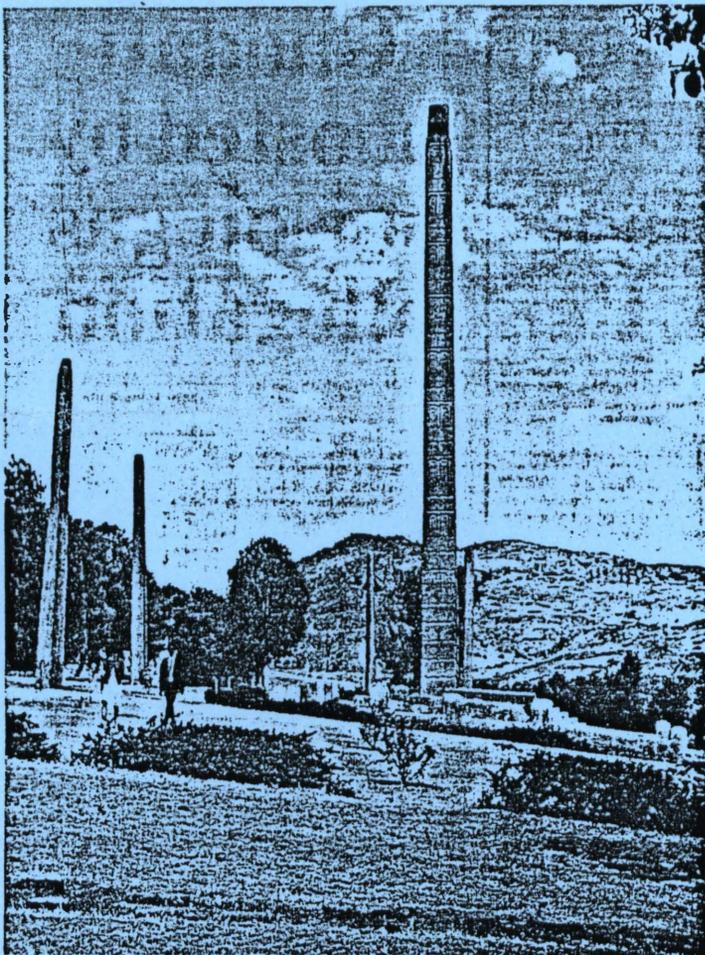
By David Keys  
Archaeology Correspondent

and gold — all presumably intended to ensure that the Axumite emperors lived as sumptuously in the after life as they had done on Earth.

Before Dr Munro-Hay's research it was thought by many scholars that the civilisation of Axum flourished mainly between the fourth and eleventh centuries AD. The new work has proved, however, that it is of substantially greater antiquity, probably dating from the first to the seventh century AD.

At its peak, the Axumite monarchs ruled over a vast empire consisting of the northern half of what is now Ethiopia, together with Yemen and parts of what are now Sudan, Somalia and Saudi Arabia. It was the only ancient sub-Saharan African state to issue its own coins and a recent discovery in South Yemen has confirmed the sophisticated nature of the imperial coinage system. A hoard which included 850 Axumite gold coins in near mint condition was discovered in a pot by a villager 100 miles north-west of Aden.

Axum was a literate society and is important to scholars examining the origin and early history of both Christianity and Islam. It was only the second country in the world (after the kingdom of Armenia) to make Christianity its official religion in 330 — 50 years before the Roman Empire took a similar decision.



Giant obelisks at Axum, Ethiopia, which archaeologists say may be ancient imperial tombstones.