

A 'NEW' STONE ROW ON MADACOMBE, EXMOOR

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In the course of fieldwork associated with a survey of Exmoor's standing stone monuments (Fowler, 1988), a 'new' stone row was discovered on Madacombe in the parish of Exmoor. Designated EXMOOR 11 in the survey, the site is located at SS 831425 on open moorland that gently slopes from the south-east to the north-west.

When discovered in 1984, the site was found to comprise a single row of 10 stones orientated approximately NW-SE and extending over some 200 m (Fig. 1, stones 1-10). Approximately 100 m to the east of stone 1 was a fallen stone slab, and between stones 8 and 9 the course of the abortive Exmoor and Porlock mineral railway (Orwin & Sellick 1970) could be seen to traverse the row. The majority of the stones in the row were found to be loosely set and rather small, being less than 0.2 m high. The largest stone, no. 10, was more firmly set and some 0.5 m high. In

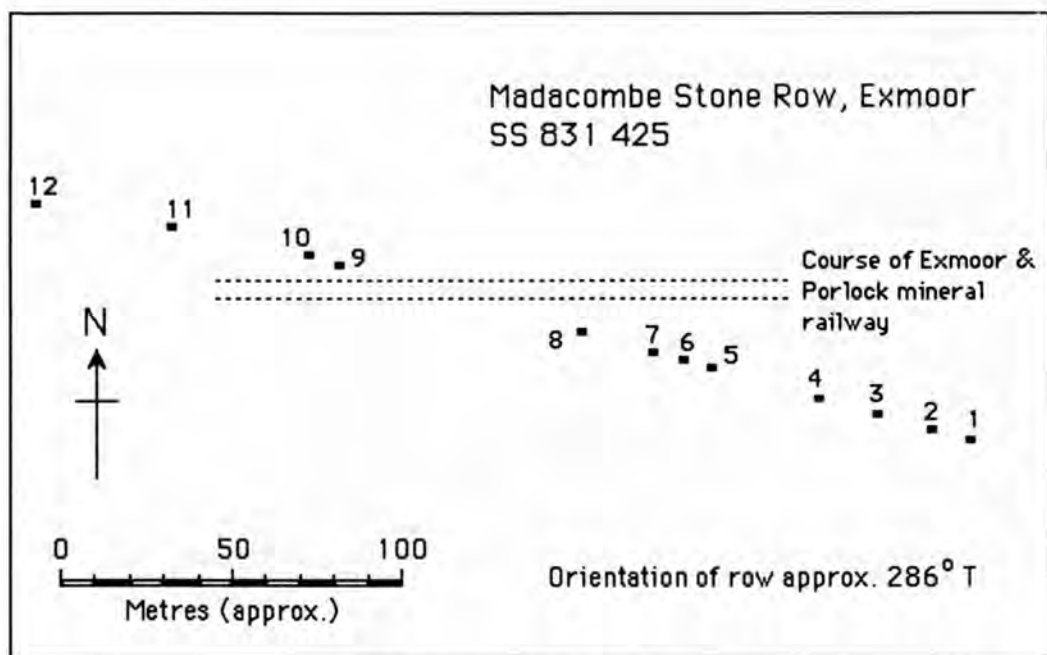


Fig. 1 Madacombe Stone Row, Exmoor.

Table 1
Exmoor stone rows

<i>Site & NGR</i>	<i>Number of stones</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Orientation</i>	<i>Notes & references</i>
Madacombe SS 831 425	12	300	NW/SE	Single row.
Codsend Moors SS 883 411	6+	200	NW/SE	Group of 6 standing stones with several smaller stones just visible above the ground. Fowler (1988), 3.
White Ladder SS 732 372	165+	400	NW/SE	Double row. Eardley-Wilmot (1983), 24-25.
Culbone Hill SS 833 474	21	370	E/W	Double row. Resurvey by RCHM(E) revealed a further stone at the eastern end in addition to those previously described. Burrow <i>et al.</i> (1981), 96; Mold (1983); NVQ <i>pers commun.</i>
Exe Head SS 749 417	14	50	NE/SW	Possible remains of a triple row. Chanter & Worth (1906), 554.
Wilmerham Common SS 856 420	29	60	NE/SW	Possible double or triple row at NE terminus. Corney (1967).
Porlock Common SS 846 447	11	30	NW/SE	Possible double row. Located close to the Porlock Common stone circle. Fowler (1988), 11.
Yelland SS 491 329	9	35	E/W	Double row. Rogers (1946).
Thornworthy Little Common SS 713 437	16	55	E/W	Mold (1985).
Mattocks Down SS 600 439	23	50	E/W	Site of what may once have been a row of 23 standing stones possibly associated with a stone circle. A single large standing stone is all that now remains of this site. Chanter & Worth (1905), 382-386.
Porlock Common SS 846 461	11	?	?	Row of 11 recumbent stones reported to SMR in 1973. Fowler (1988), 10.
West Middleton SS 648 459	20 & 17	35 & 30	approx. NW/SE	Two double stone rows. Possible late Medieval or Early Modern rickyard. Whybrow (1966).
Honeycombe Hill SS 859 422	5	180	N/S	Nearby earthworks suggest that the stones may be associated with some aspect of land division. Corney (1968); Burrow <i>et al.</i> (1980), 116.

1989, a further two stones were discovered by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England whilst conducting a survey on behalf of the Exmoor National Park Authority (N.V. Quinnell, *pers. commun.*). The stones, nos 11 and 12 in Fig. 1, extend the length of the row to some 300 m. Some 100 m to the west of stone 12 are the remains of two round barrows (EXMOOR 12 and 13 in the catalogue of Grinsell 1969). It would appear that the Madacombe row is approximately aligned on this pair of barrows, and in this respect the row has some similarity with many of the stone rows that are to be found on Dartmoor which are aligned on cairns or associated funerary features (Emmett 1979).

The Madacombe row brings the number of stone rows that have been described so far on Exmoor to thirteen (Table 1). An additional site located on Holdstone Down was briefly described by Grinsell (1970, 189) but has been excluded from this table on the grounds of its questionable significance. The majority of the rows are to be found in the eastern part of the moor and can be roughly divided according to their length with *long rows* being defined as extending over 200 m in length and *short rows* being 30–60 m in length. It is, of course, possible that a short row may represent all that now remains of what was once a long row. Three of the four long rows are orientated in approximately the same direction, namely NW–SE. The significance of this observation is unclear, although it has been suggested that the NW–SE orientation of the White Ladder may be aligned on the midwinter sunrise of the second millennium BC (Eardley-Wilmot 1983, 25).

Of the thirteen stone rows on Exmoor, only that at Yelland has been the subject of archaeological excavation (Rogers 1946). The stones at this site appear to have been embedded into a land surface that contained Mesolithic flint implements and which had subsequently been covered prior to the erection of the row. A barbed-and-tanged arrowhead was found during the excavation but not in a datable context. Thus, the true age of these monuments remains uncertain, although it is traditionally believed that they are prehistoric in origin and probably date from the Bronze Age (Grinsell 1970, 42–6). However, care should be taken in assuming that *all* stone rows on Exmoor are prehistoric in origin or of intentional construction, since the two parallel rows of stones at West Middleton are believed to represent the remains of a late medieval or early modern rickyard (Whybrow 1966), and the row of five stones on Honeycombe Hill may be associated with some aspect of land division (Burrow *et al.* 1980, 116). Further study is clearly required before the origins and functions of this enigmatic group of sites can be better understood.

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