

Terraced Boulder Site, Oley Hills, Pennsylvania

Halfway between the Central Ridge section of the Oley Hills site and the Row-Linked Boulders site on the south end of the ridge (described in my web article “Stone Rows & Boulders: A Comparative Study”

<http://www.neara.org/Muller/stonerows.htm>) is another site, this one small and consisting of three separate clusters of boulders enhanced with stonework. I call this site the Terraced Boulders Site.

This site was discovered by John Waltz, a good friend and surveyor, in early spring 1998 while on a short reconnaissance to see what else there was on the ridge beside the magnificent cairns at the Central Ridge site. An hour or so later, he returned with glowing words about a site at the very end of the ridge (the Row-Linked boulders site) and the site which is the subject of this essay. At the time we first saw the Terraced Boulder Site, the boulders were covered with vines and briars and were difficult to make out.

I had earlier done considerable research on the Central Ridge site and proved to myself and others that the marvelously constructed stone features had nothing to do with any colonial activity (described in the Introduction to Stockbridge, VT, Cairn Site: <http://www.rock-piles.com/stockbridge>) in the area, and must therefore be American Indian. Similarly, the stonework at the Row-Linked Boulders site was distinctive in a way that connected it with other sites both in New England and in the South. There was no way to conclude that the stonework at the Terraced Boulders Site was the result of colonial farming practices. It was distinctive, and yet stylistically similar to the careful stonework found elsewhere on the ridge. Furthermore, it had everything to do with Indian stone ritualism as I had come to understand it after seeing numerous sites in the Northeast and in Georgia.

I determined who owned the property on which the terraced boulders are found, and I obtained permission from the landowner to study the stonework and to take photographs of it. She had no idea what was literally in her front yard, and she may have thought that I was a bit off kilter for wanting to study an unusual cluster of stones. But she was decent enough, and soon I was heading down the slope and toward the boulders. I had brought with me some pruning clippers, and soon I was attacking the vines that covered the boulders, cutting and pulling them from the rocks, not really looking at what I was pulling off. Less than a week later, my forearms became covered with blisters, and I knew then that some of those tenacious little brown roots that seemingly wrapped around one of the boulders were my nemesis of the plant world, poison ivy. But I had accomplished what I wanted, and that was to see all of the boulders free from encumbrances. It was time to map the site.

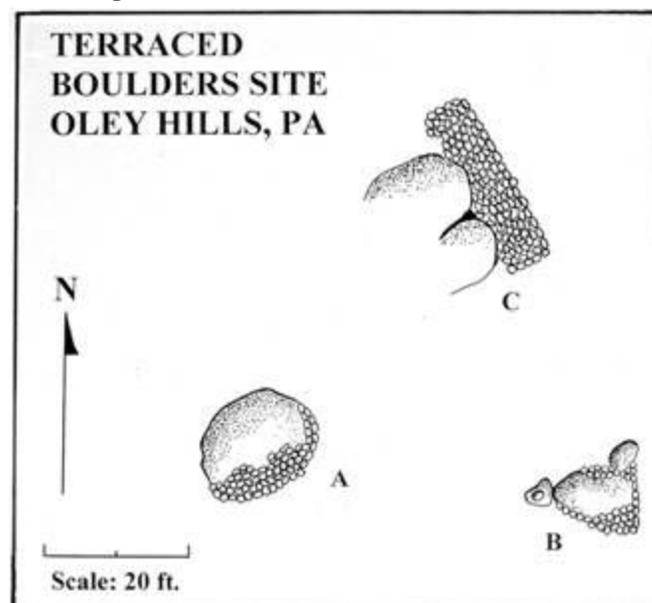


Fig. 1

All three features were within thirty feet of one another (Fig. 1), and we will discuss each of them in sequential order.

Feature A

When I first saw this feature, it was covered with briars and ivy. After I had removed all of it, I saw that the large rounded boulder, more than 10 feet long and a good 6 feet high, had rocks stacked against its south side (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2

There was nothing quite like it on the ridge. I had seen small fist-size stones, placed on the back side of a boulder with a rocking stone on top at the Row Linked Boulders site, not much more than a hundred yards away (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3

This image shows the large boulder with the rocking stone on top in the foreground to the right, with some fist-size stones placed on a narrow shelf to the left. On the sloped back of the large boulder to the right and off the image small stones were scattered. They may perhaps have been intended as donations to the spirits residing in this unusual boulder, serving much the same purpose as the larger stones in front. However, it was unclear what made the single large boulder at the Terraced Boulders so important as to have stones placed against it. It reminded me of an article I read about a site in California, where a very unusual looking perched boulder was said to contain the bones of ancestors. To look at the illustration of it, unless one were a native Indian familiar with that site, one would have absolutely no idea that the boulder symbolized the repository of ancestral bones. And this raises an important point: we cannot always get into the mind of the people who made these constructions and understand why they saw and did these things. I believe that in certain instances we can get close to the mindset of these people, accepting that they were

American Indians, but these are very rare occurrences.

There will be those who will conclude that these features were made by colonial farmers. It is true that colonial farmers occupied portions of the ridge, but the Terraced Boulders site was in an isolated location with poor soil, and I knew from some archival research that many of the farmers on the ridge had rented out land in the valley below to plant crops, since their own property was too agriculturally deficient for survival just based on crops. Christian Abendschön, who had initially bought the Central Ridge site property in 1751, had stuck it out for ten years until around 1760, when he simply packed up his belongings and moved to North Carolina, completely abandoning his land and renegeing on his debt to the state. When one of his neighbors in a deed from the 1760s described the Abendschon property as vacant, I didn't quite understand what this meant when I was researching the site. Now I do. The land was vacant: Abendschon had left for good.

Feature B

This is the most interesting feature at the site, not only because of its complexity, consisting of several large boulders each enhanced with small stones, but also because of what it may represent. The map in Fig. 1 gives a bird's-eye view of the feature, and a line drawing (Fig. 4) based on the color image (Fig. 5) makes the shape and configuration easier to discern (Fig. 5).

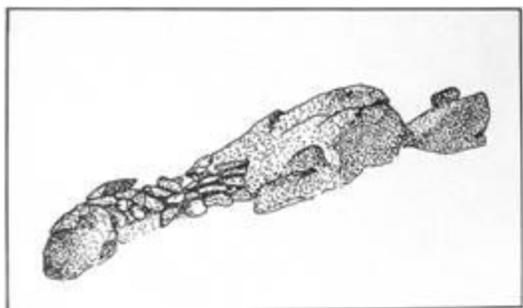


Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Many natural stone features were chosen for enhancement because of some distinctive shape that reminded the Indians (assuming they were the ones responsible for most of the distinctive stonework at the site) of some animal. In this case, I believe the right side of this boulder complex, as seen from this angle, reminded the Indians of an upraised turtle head (Fig. 6), with the boulders to the left representing the carapace. Stones, clouds, configurations of trees, etc., when they appear to look like a known animal are called simulacra (Devereau 2000: 30-32) Sometimes the resemblance is remarkable and unquestioned, such as an obvious turtle effigy at Killingworth, CT (Fig. 7). Another

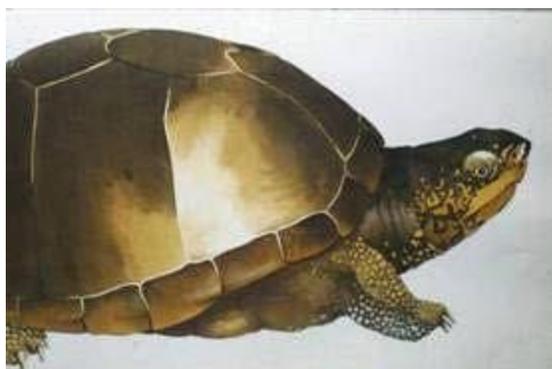


Fig. 6



Fig. 7

boulder that appeared to be a turtle when seen from a specific angle was a glacial erratic in Rochester, VT (Fig. 8), which looked like an upraised turtle head when viewed from the side. On the opposite side, the builders had constructed a tongue-shaped platform of



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

rock at right angle to the axis of the boulder, as if to emphasize the importance this boulder held for the Indians who came to this site. Besides its unusual shape, the boulder consists of banded gneiss with large amounts of quartz inclusions (Fig. 10), which may have made this unusual boulder even more special and powerful.



Fig. 10

I believe the small shimmed round stone on top of the boulder at the Terraced Boulder site (Fig. 11) served the same function as the much more elaborate construction against the boulder in Rochester by drawing attention to its unusual shape and association.



Fig. 11

At the east or bottom portion of Feature B (the far left portion of Fig. 4), is a boulder enhanced with stones (Fig. 12), the stones filling a natural V-shaped hollow between



Fig. 12



Fig. 13

the two boulders. My own feeling is that this particular feature was singled out for attention because of the female connotations of this shape. To a certain extent we see it at the Row-Linked Boulders site only a hundred yards or so away, where a gap between two boulders was filled in with stones (Fig. 13). The fill at this feature is more U-shaped than a V, but I believe there was a similar mindset at work in constructing this. At a site in South Newfane, VT, we find a feature nearly identical to the one at the Terraced Boulders site (Fig. 14), in which a V-shaped depression has been filled with stones, again forming a distinctive delta shape.

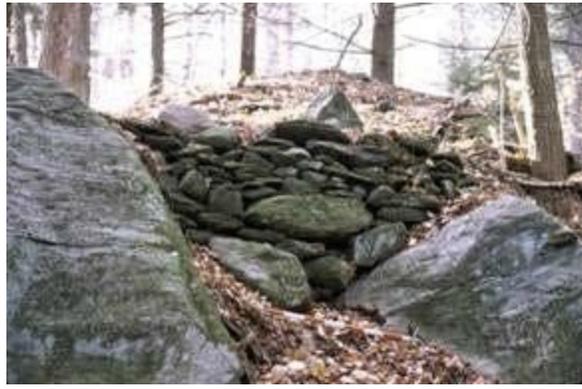


Fig. 14

To the left of this fill depicted in Figure 12, rocks have been carefully stacked in a terrace-like formation that curves around the boulder and toward the boulder shown in Figure 11. Figure 15, shows this extension looking south, and Figure 16 is looking at it from the opposite direction.



Fig. 15



Fig. 16

Feature C

The last feature at this site is labeled C, and it consists of two large boulders with a cave-like gap between them (Fig. 17). In front of this feature we find a wide terrace wall, which seems much like an altar placed before a shrine. John Waltz is shown peering into the wide void between the boulders; his red pack to the right, and a portion of the terrace wall in the foreground. Figure 18 shows a greater portion of the wall on the north side of the feature.



Fig. 17



Fig. 18

It is my view that this feature was singled out because of the cave-like void between the boulders. Splits, caves, and springs were all considered entrances to the underworld, from which unusual and sometimes evil spirits could emerge. Peter Waksman has termed these cracks “spirit doors” (Waksman 2004). At Sally’s Rockshelter in the Mojave Desert in California, David Whitley discovered cracks into which small pieces of quartz had been jammed, apparently to placate the spirits in the stone (Whitley 1999).

South of Feature B, and on the other side of a rocky ridge, is a rounded outcrop with a wide crack through it, and jammed in this crack is a large, rectangular slab of gneiss (Fig. 19). When I first saw this feature early on in my research, I didn’t quite understand what I was looking at. Only much later, after having read extensively, and having visited many more sites, did I understand that this was a common way for Indians of the



Fig. 19

region to either leave an offering at the doorstep, as it were, of the spirit residing in the stone, or else to leave a metaphorical plug to keep the spirit from emerging, assuming that this spirit could cause harm. The piece of quartz that was discovered in a crack at Sally's Rockshelter in the Mojave Desert, was a benign offering. But it also functioned as a transmitter, in that quartz emits energy. Other types of stone, such as the large rectangular slab in Figure 19 could be considered a blocking mechanism and not an offering.

References

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- Waksman, Peter, "Spirit Doors," http://indianrockpiles.weetu.com/articles/Split-Wedged_Rocks.htm, 2004.
- Whitley, David S., Ronald I. Dorn, et.al, "Sally's Rockshelter and the Archaeology of the Vision Quest," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 9:2 (1999), 221-247.

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