
50 Long Meg and her Daughters

Theme: Heritage and mining

Location

50 Long Meg and her daughters. 1 kilometre north of Little Salkeld. The road to the farm cuts through the stone circle [NY 571 372].

Description

'Next to Stonehenge it is beyond dispute the most notable relic that this or probably any other country contains.' William Wordsworth, 1833.

Quite the accolade for a stone circle that sits in a quiet corner of a distant northern county. But it is a very large and complex monument with an equally enigmatic narrative. 68 Daughters, plus Long Meg, stand around a perimeter almost 113 metres in diameter; and the stones are only part of the archaeology. The name? According to folklore, Long Meg was a witch, and her Daughters her coven; they danced on the Sabbath and were turned to stone. The stone circle is Neolithic and more than 5000 years old. Long Meg herself is a nine tonne block of 280-million-year-old Permian (Penrith) sandstone almost four metres high, which was probably quarried from cliffs beside the nearby River Eden. The majority of her Daughters are volcanic rocks from the Ordovician Borrowdale Volcanic Group of the Lake District, around 555 million years old. Most appear to be made up of angular fragments and blocks; breccias formed by the flow of volcanic lava and debris. In the last 2.6 million years ice sheets transported these very large stones (called erratics) from the Lake District to the Eden Valley. Given their large size it is quite possible the Neolithic community would have had to search for these stones from a wide area.

What the stone circle was for and why it is here are subjects of continuous archaeological debate. Such circles may have been important ritual sites and Long Meg is aligned to the winter solstice. It is probable that the people who erected it had a much greater affinity with the spiritual and material assets of the natural landscape than we do today. 5000 years ago such sites might have been places of celebration or gathering, monumental shrines to ancestors, or for religious ritual and it seems safe to assume that their purpose changed over time.

Photographs

(Photo 50-1) 50 Long Meg and her Daughters.

(Photo 50-2) 50 Long Meg.



(Photo 50-1) Long Meg and her Daughters.



(Photo 50-2) Long Meg.