

Great Archaeological Sites in Rhondda Cynon Taf



4. TARREN DEUSANT



On a low cliff at one side of a narrow wooded valley north of Llantrisant (ST 0520 8720) is a remarkable series of carvings. Either side of a small light-coloured boulder incorporated in the rock is a series of carvings. Some of them are quite clearly meant to be faces, with brows and chins as well as eyes nose and mouth. Others are so abstract that if they were not with the more recognisable faces they would be thought of as circles enclosing a group of dots.

The choice of site must have been significant. Not only does the boulder that forms the centrepiece of the design look phallic, but there is also a spring that wells up from the base of the cliff underneath. Springs have a long history in the spiritual life of Wales. The most familiar aspect of this is the numerous holy wells that were visited for devotion and healing in the Middle Ages and after, some of them to this day. But veneration of places where water come gushing out of the ground goes back into prehistory – think of the Llyn Fawr hoard of prestigious metalwork, placed in a lake at the foot of Rhigos Mountain during the early Iron Age.

But who made the carvings and why? The Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales put them into the Early Medieval volume of the *Glamorgan Inventory*, as a possible pagan hangover of the cult of the head which

goes back to the Iron Age. The more abstract ones are similar to some of the motifs used in Neolithic and Bronze Age rock art in northern Britain, but the carving is too sharp for them to be as old as this. The first mention we have of the carvings is in 1696, as ‘two persons engraved’. It must these ‘two persons’ that gave rise to name, which means ‘two saints rock’. Were they only counting the definite faces and ignoring the others? Or were some of the carvings only added afterwards?



Tarren Deusant is north of Beddau, on the footpath alongside Nant Castellau which runs between Pen-y-coedcae, and Castellau. There is on-road parking at Pen-y-coedcae; to join the footpath take Tonyrefail Road leading north-west out of the village. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 170, Explorer Series sheet 166.

Timeline (the asterisks indicate the possible time-span)



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