ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL OF STANDING STONES IN EASTERN OHIO

by

James L. Murphy
Ohio State University Libraries
1858 Neil Avenue Mall
Columbus, OH 43210

Introduction
Standing stones (often referred to as “tea tables”) are prominent erosional features that are most often developed on sandstone bedrock deposits of uneven resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but resistance to erosion. These conspicuous natural features evoke interest from Ohioans today and some Indian rock carvings at one time (Davis 1997), but
intriguing vertical block that stood behind it is no longer there. Examination of the entire surface of the Indian Watch Tower revealed no evidence of prehistoric petroglyphs, and while the steep hillside on which it was partially covered with leaf litter, sufficient ground was exposed to determine that no charcoal, flint chipping, or other indications of prehistoric activity are associated with this standing stone. Despite its name, this is the least impressive of all the standing stones that have been examined.

Guernsey County

An undated (after 1918, based on AZO photographic paper mark) "real photo" postcard (Fig. 8) led to the re-discovery of the Birds Run Standing Rock. This standing stone lies on a narrow, north-south trending ridge between two small tributaries of Wills Creek, about a mile north of the settlement of Birds Run, in the SE \( \frac{1}{4} \) of Section 12, Wheeling Township, Guernsey Co., and is the only one that can be reached by car. It currently provides an impressive view of the valley of Birds Run, but the view has been artificially enhanced by recent strip mining. Comparison with a recent photograph (Fig. 9) shows very little erosion in some eighty years. Examination of the base of the Birds Run Standing Stone revealed no evidence of prehistoric activity. Its prominent ridgeline location along the valley of Birds Run suggests that it may have been a prehistoric guidepost if not trail marker.

Only two and a half miles to the north of the Birds Run Standing Stone, a series of four prominent standing stones lie along a narrow ridge overlooking a small tributary of Wills Creek, in the northwest quarter of Section 1, Wheeling Township. Recent timbering rendered these standing stones highly visible from the adjacent access road and along the base of the Birds Run Standing Stone. No archaeological evidence of prehistoric activity was noted. The ridge is a prominent landmark along the valley of Birds Run, and the standing stones have been used as landmarks along prehistoric trails for a century or more. A series of four 1 meter square shovel test units was excavated along the axis of this level portion of ridgeline, spaced ca. 10 m apart. All of these revealed extremely shallow eroded topsite filled with sandstone chippings. Careful inspection revealed no flint or other indications of prehistoric activity. Inspection of the four Prider Road standing stones revealed no prehistoric petroglyphs, though a crudely pecked '1850' date was noted.

Athens County

Further afield, Peters (1947) has described several standing stones or "tea tables" in Athens Co., Ohio. The most impressive is known as the Mineral Tea Table and lies on a high, narrow ridge overlooking Racoon Creek, just northwest of the village of Mineral (Fig. 14). It has eroded from the massive Lower Freeport sandstone, here more than sixty feet thick, and stands at the end of a steep ridge along the north side of the valley of Racoon Creek. Peters also illustrates a pair of twin standing stones near the village of Beebe, along the south side of the Hocking River in easternmost Athens County. The ground surrounding the base of the Mineral Tea Table is well exposed and careful survey revealed no flint chipping or other indications of prehistoric activity. The top of the ca. 20 foot high tea table was not examined, but a few historic graffiti decorate the adjacent sandstone outcrop.

Conclusions

Careful examination of nine of the better known standing stones remaining in eastern Ohio, including surface survey and some shovel testing, has failed to discover any archaeological evidence of prehistoric activity. In the case of the McConnelsville Tea Table and the Cadiz Stone, examination is not possible, since the sites have been destroyed, although the base of the McConnelsville standing stone still exists and can probably be located and surveyed.

That several of these prominent features did serve as landmarks along prehistoric trails seems certain, as in the case of the Kent Standing Rock (Rusnak 2002) and very likely in the case of the Cadiz Stone and probably the McConnelsville Tea Table, even possibly the Mineral Standing Stone. These four all stood along documented prehistoric trails or major waterways. The question of their visibility from any significant distance during prehistoric times is a real one, but what similar geologic features are deserving of serious archaeological consideration whenever encountered today.

References

Bennett, Emerson

Davis, A.H.
1897 [Petroglyph on Mahoning River, Berlin Township, Mahoning County, Ohio], Antiquarian 1: 305-306.

Harrison, Joseph T.
1922 The Pillars of Harrison County, Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly 31: 120-127.

Hothem, Lar

Murphy, James L.

Peters, W. E.

Rusnak, Michael

Schneider, Norris F.
1966 Morgan County Woman Remembers Crash of Scenic Devil's Tea Table, Zanesville Times Recorder, April 10, 1966.

Stout, Wilber

Swauger, James L.

Vickers, Earnest W.
1910 A List of the Ferns of Mahoning County with Special Reference to Mill Creek Park. The Ohio Naturalist 10(4): 86-89.

Winslow, John D., and George W. White
Figure 3. The Mahoning River Standing Rock as it appears today.

Figure 4. An early postcard view of the Morgan County "Devil's Tea Table."

Figure 5. An early postcard view of the "Standing Rock" near Cadiz, destroyed by strip mining.

Figure 6. The "Scio Stone" as it appears today.

Figure 7. The "Indian Watch Tower" near Nottingham Church, Harrison County. A ca. 1920 postcard view

Figure 8. An early real photo postcard view of the Bird's Run Standing Stone.
If near the Four Prider Road Standing Stones.

Figure 9. The Bird's Run Standing Stone today: Guernsey County.

Figure 10. Distant view of the Prider Road Standing Stones, Guernsey County.

Figure 11-13. Nearer views of the Four Prider Road Standing Stones.

Figure 14. The Mineral Standing Stone, Athens County.