

Native American Ceremonial Site, Ashburnham Massachusetts

By Mary Gage

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Introduction

This site has four enclosures, a Manitou stone with an associated split wedge cairn, at least one cairn group, and several other stone structures. These structures are found in three distinct clusters and can technically be treated as three separate sites. However, the three groups appear to be interrelated and are therefore treated as a single site. The site is located on the upper slopes of the east side of a hill in Ashburnham, Massachusetts. The eastern slope forms a north-south ridge on the west side of a deep valley through which a brook runs.

The summit of the hill has good soils and gentle slopes making it suitable for agriculture. The eastern half of the summit has in the past supported three farms. In contrast, the eastern slope below the summit is very steep and extremely rocky and unsuitable for farming. An 1830 map shows both farm lands as well as forested areas. Aerial photos from 1938 show no significant changes to the boundaries of the farm land and forest shown on the 1830 map. It is reasonable to conclude that the eastern slope has largely remained wooded since the 1830's.

The boulders on the eastern slope proved valuable for quarrying. There are at least two areas where surface boulders were being split into blocks and bars for use in the construction of stone walls and other projects. These quarries appear to represent at least two different quarrying episodes. One quarry used the flat wedge method of splitting stone and the other used the plug & feather method of splitting (i.e. round holes).

For the purposes of describing and analyzing the site, it will be separated into three groups of structures. The first group is composed of all of the structures located north of the east-west running stonewall. The second group is composed of all of the structures located south of the east-west stonewall. The cairns form the third group. (The cairns have not been documented. Nothing is known about them with the exception of their general location.) When looking at the map of the site, the reason for using the east-west stone wall is not immediately obvious. The discovery that the east-west stone wall formed a boundary between a North group and South group came about through a careful analysis of the site.

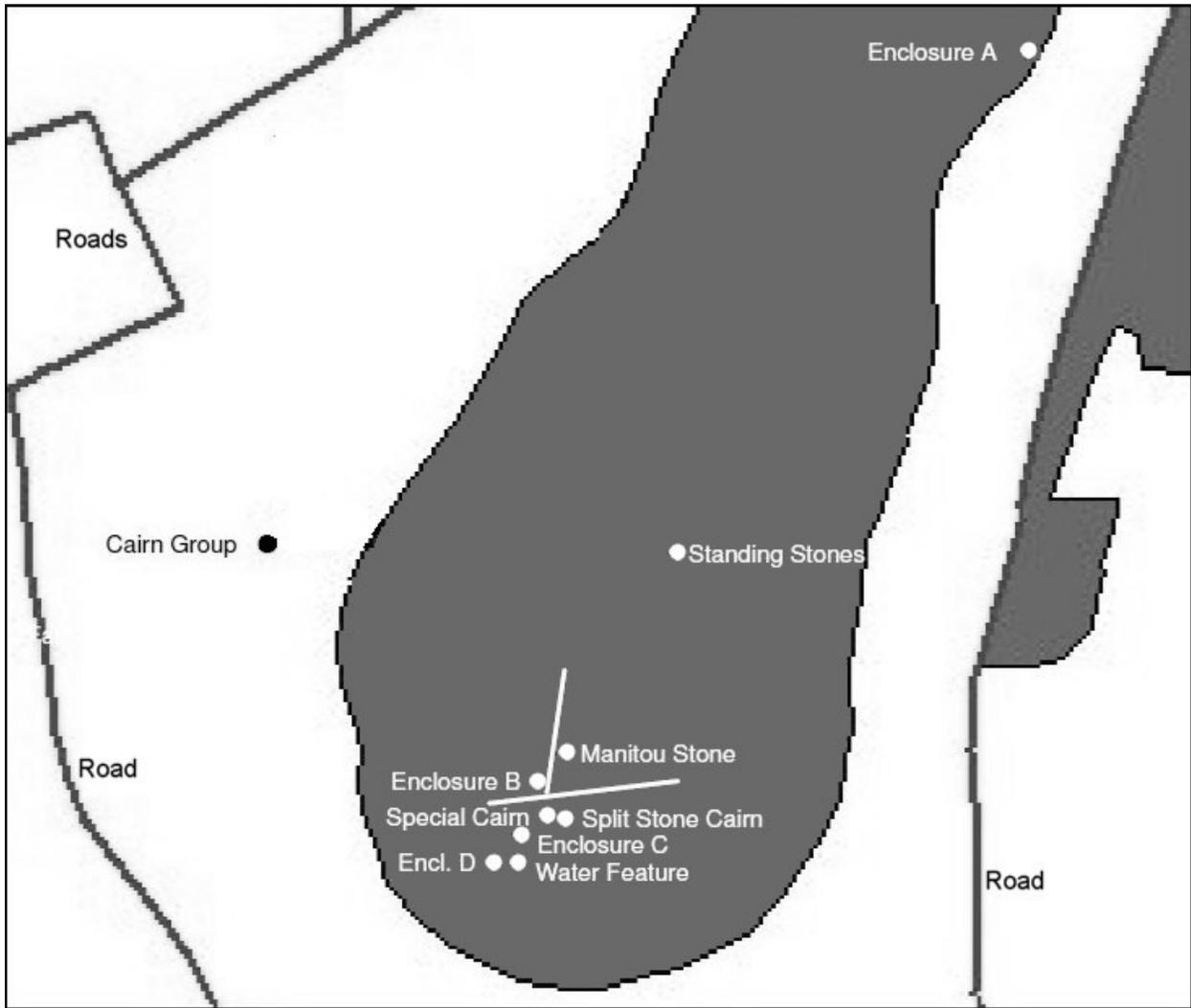
Acknowledgements

This site was discovered by -----. The author and her research partner and son, James Gage, deeply appreciate the time ---- took to give us a tour of the site.

Editor's Note

To protect the location of the site, the name of person who discovered this site was omitted from the public version of this report.

Minor revisions 12/8/2013



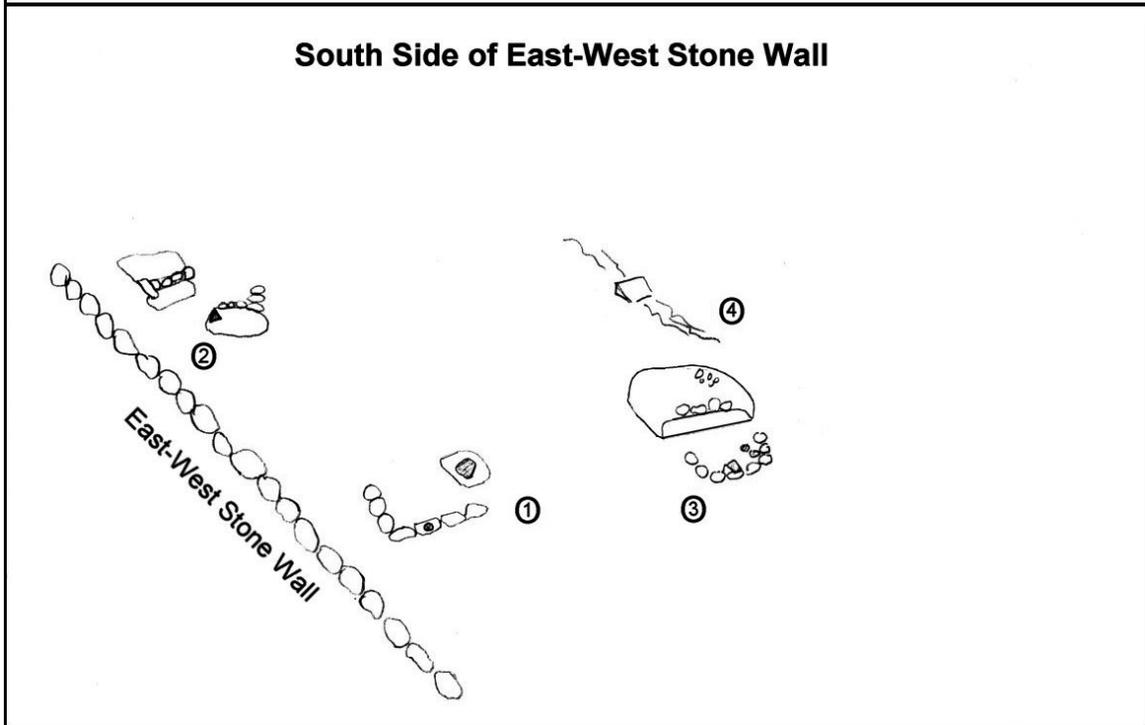
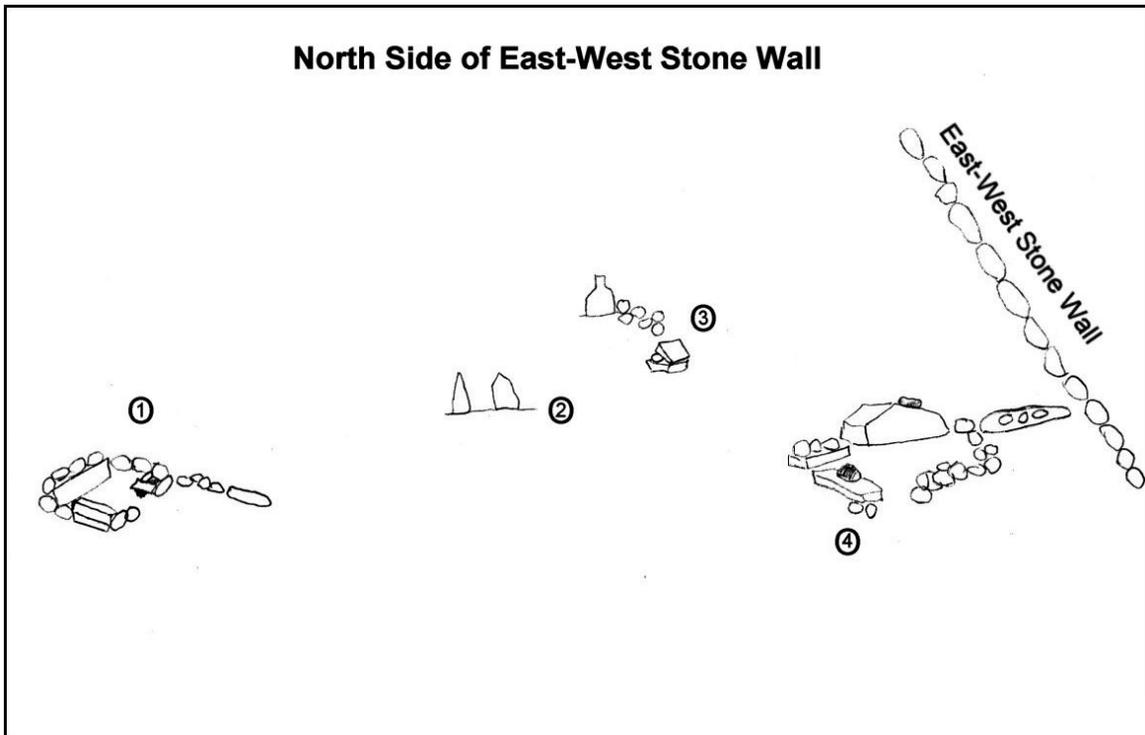
Excerpt from a digitalized version of the 1830 map of Ashburnham, MA. Gray shaded areas indicated forested land. White areas indicate cleared land. White dots indicate locations of structures. The North-South stone wall and the East-West stone wall are shown as white lines (NOTE: not all stone walls in the map area are shown).

With the exception of the cairn group all of the structures are in forested (non-farmed) areas.



Locations of structures (white dots) overlaid on 1938 aerial photo. The North-South stone wall and the East-West stone wall are shown as white lines (NOTE: not all stone walls in the map area are shown).

All of the structures including the cairn group are in forested (non-farmed) areas.



North Side Group

- (1) Low Walled Structure (Enclosure A)
- (2) Pair of Standing Stones
- (3) Manitou Stone and Split Wedge Cairn
- (4) Low Walled Structure (Enclosure B)

South Side Group

- (1) Low Walled Structure (L Shape Enclosure C)
- (2) Specialized Cairn & Split Stone Cairn
- (3) Low Walled Structure (Sunken Enclosure D)
- (4) Stone Slab in Seasonal Stream

North of the East-West Wall

Low Walled Structure (Enclosure A)

This is a rectangular four sided low walled structure dug into a slope. The rear (north wall) has a large quarried stone slab. The slab was quarried using the commercial plug and feather method as evidenced by the half round drill hole marks spaced about six inches apart along the edge of the slab. This method of splitting stone was developed in 1803 and therefore places the construction of this structure after that date.¹ The rear wall extends an additional 12 inches above the stone slab and is composed of small to medium size angular stones. There is a mix of both thin flat stones and roughly rectangular blocks of stone. The south and east walls of the structure are composed of a similar mix of small to medium size stones. The west wall is formed by two long bars of stone, one on top of the other. There are no visible quarry marks on these two bars. The structure was built against an in ground glacial boulder on the west side. The south wall has a short narrow entry into the structure. A stone wall extends from the southeast corner of the structure to an elongated in ground boulder to the south.

Inside the structure, just to right of the entry is a niche-shaft feature built into the corner. This feature has a horizontal niche opening created by a thin flat lintel stone. Behind the lintel stone is a short stone lined shaft which is an intentional vertical opening. Some of the stones forming the shaft have collapsed inward. The bottom or “floor” of the niche is composed of rough uneven tumbled stones. It does not have a flat level floor. The floor area is wet from spring water inside the structure.

Inside the structure is a wet area created by a spring. According to a local resident, the inside of the structure gets quite wet in the springtime. The water drains out of the structure and heads southward. A wet area is noticeable just south the of the structure’s entrance. The water appears to be seeping through the ground near the surface. The water emerges on the surface in a visible stream about 25-30 feet away.

To the north and west of the structure is a field boulder quarry. It was quarried primarily using the flat wedge method. Southeast of the structure are additional quarried boulders. These were quarried using the commercial plug and feather method (round holes).

Interior Measurements: 4’10”W x 6’9”L x 2’0” High

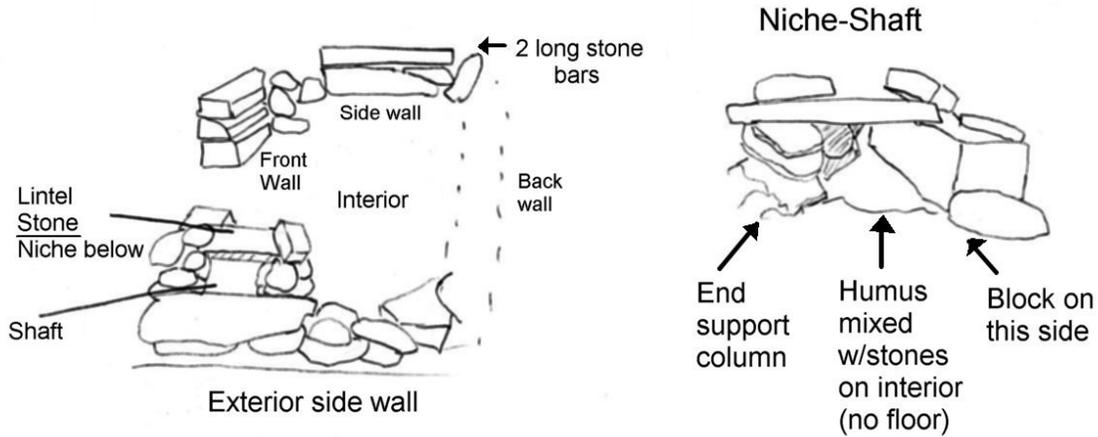
Exterior Measurements 7’0”W x 10’6”L

Stone wall extending from southeast corner of structure to an elongated in ground boulder - 7’10”L

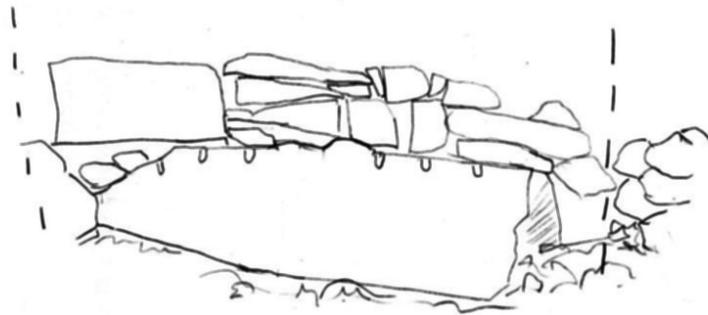
Quarried Slab rear wall – about 6’6”L x 1’0”H

¹ Gage & Gage 2005, 36.

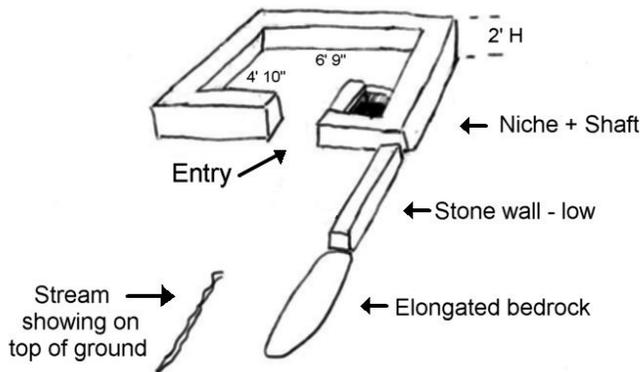
Low Walled Structure (Enclosure A)



Exterior side wall



Back wall
Long, wide stone block
(Quarried - note drill hole
marks along top edge.)



Four sided closed-in front
with narrow entry
Niche + Shaft

- Features:
- (a) Long wide stone block in back wall
 - (b) Low stone wall extending out to elongated bedrock
 - (c) Natural water source inside enclosure

Identification

Is this structure a small building foundation, the lower wall of a building like a quarryman's workshop, a spring house, or a Native American enclosure?

(1) Small Building Foundation

The structure has a "foundation" like appearance and the niche-shaft feature has a "fireplace" like appearance. It is logical to consider the possibility of a small building with a stone foundation. The wooden floor and walls of the building would have been built on top of the stone "foundation" walls. This would create a crawl space underneath the floor which was approximately 2 feet in height. The "fireplace" (niche-shaft feature) is located inside the stone structure which would place it in this crawl space beneath the wooden floor. This is not a practical place for a fireplace. If this feature is not a fireplace, are there any other explanations for this stone feature which would be consistent with a small building? No. Given the lack of a practical explanation for the niche-shaft feature in a crawl space below a building floor, the small building foundation explanation for the structure is problematic.

(2) Small building related to the stone quarrying operation

Some quarry operations had small buildings at the quarry which were used as workshops, tool sheds, and for other purposes. These buildings had walls made from quarried stone or wood and were covered with wooden roofs. The stone walls of this structure are two feet high which means if it was a quarry building the upper half of the wall would have been wood. In other words, the walls of the building would be a combination of stone on the lower section and wood on the upper section. (Although there are no documented examples of this type of combination wall construction for a quarry building, quarrymen used what materials they had on hand and therefore it is a reasonable hypothesis.) The structure has a dirt floor. This is consistent with the fact most work related quarry buildings had dirt floors. The niche-shaft feature located in the corner of the building could be interpreted as a fireplace.

The major objection to this hypothesis is the interior of the structure is wet due to water from the spring in it. This is not conducive to a work and/or storage space. The presence of water was observed in the bottom of the niche-shaft feature would make starting a fire difficult. Even in the absence of the water, the fireplace hypothesis is problematic. The "floor" of the "fireplace" is formed by rough tumbled stones and is not level. Fireplaces inside buildings always have a floor of neatly leveled stone slabs or bricks. There is no evidence the tumbled stones were ever organized into a flat level surface. The quarry building and fireplace interpretation can be rejected for these reasons.

(3) Spring House

A spring house is a small building built around a spring and used to cool milk and sometimes other farm products. The typical spring house has pools or channels filled with spring water in which the milk containers are placed in. There is no evidence for pools or channels inside. Second, springhouses are generally located near the barn or main house of the farm for convenience. The nearest farm complex is over a hundred yards away. The springhouse interpretation can be rejected for these reasons.

(4) Native American Enclosure

The term enclosure is a modern term used to describe a ceremonial structure, whether large or small, whose boundaries are delineated either by an earthen mound, stone walls, the walls of a roofless wood frame structure, or various other materials. For example, many of Native American linear earthworks found in the Ohio Valley form circular and square enclosures.² In the Great Lakes Region, the Native Americans used several different types of ceremonial enclosures. Great Lakes shamans built “shaking tents” for certain ceremonies. These were cylindrical tents large enough for a shaman to fit inside. They were made from poles placed in the ground with the sides covered with skins, bark or blankets. The top of the tent was left open for entrance of spirits.³ The Chipewa-Objibwa built their Mide lodges using a framework of arched poles similar in shape to a Native American longhouse. The lower sections of the walls were covered with cedar boughs. The top was left open. The doors were covered with blankets.⁴ On the north shore of Lake Superior archaeologists documented stone walled enclosures of various shape, sizes, and configurations. Many of these structures were interpreted as Native American “invocation structures,” or in other words they were made for ceremonial purposes.⁵

In New England, stone walled enclosures have been documented at many stone structure sites. Many of these enclosures are found in association with other structures like stone cairns. These enclosures are interpreted as Native American ceremonial structures. (For more information please consult a *Handbook of Stone Structures in Northeastern United States*). There is evidence to indicate that some of these enclosures were made in pre-contact times and evidence to indicate some were built in the historic period.

Native Americans consider natural springs to be important both as a source of safe drinking water and also as sacred natural features. Some springs were thought to be entries or portals to the spiritual Underworld and that the spring water contained an important spirit. Springs have been incorporated into a number of Native American ceremonial stone structure sites throughout the northeast. The presence of a spring inside of this stone walled structure is consistent with Native American ceremonial sites.

The niche-shaft is a rare and distinctly Native American ritual structure. It has been documented at a site in Exeter, RI and three sites in south central Massachusetts. At least one of these examples dates from the 2nd half of the 1800’s. This type of structure consists of a boxed-in niche connected to a roof opening or vertical shaft. It functioned as a combination offering niche and directional spirit portal.

Based on research at the America’s Stonehenge site in North Salem, NH, it is known that some Native Americans groups had a well developed concept of the annual cycle of events in which the Sun Spirit entered the Underworld during the winter months and the Spring Water Spirit traveled to the Upperworld. In either the spring or early summer the Sun Spirit returned to the Upperworld and the Spring Water Spirit returned to the earth in the form of rain and seeps back into the ground (Underworld). This cycle of events had various ceremonies associated with it. One of the ceremonies involved sending the Spring Water Spirit to the Upperworld.⁶ The niche-shaft may have been used for such a ceremony.

² Squire & Davis 1848.

³ Ritzenthaler & Ritzenthaler 1970, 103-4.

⁴ Trigger 1978, 749-750.

⁵ Dawson, 1981.

⁶ Gage 2006.



Enclosure A (looking north) shows back wall with quarried stone and entry in foreground.



Stream coming from the spring inside of enclosure.



Niche-Shaft – Front view showing niche



Niche-Shaft – Top view showing shaft

Pair of Standing Stones

On a small rocky knoll on the upper slopes of the ridge there is a pair of standing stones set two feet apart. The two stones have different shapes and coloration. Stone #1 is 2'7" high. It has a thin point for the upper 1/3 of the stone and widens out for the bottom 2/3's. Geologically speaking the stone is a granite pegmatite with patches of quartz, white feldspar, tourmaline, and is stained with an orange colored mineral. White and orange are the two most noticeable colors on the stone. Standing stone #2 is 2'9" high. The stone is difficult to describe. When viewing the stone, each viewing angle shows a different shape to the stone. From one angle it appears to be a thin stone slab, from another angle it looks more like a tall rectangular stone, and another angle suggests it is thinner at the top and thicker towards the bottom. (The stone may have been chosen for this unusual visual effect.) Most of the stone is a gray color due to weathering and the lichen but some orange rust color is noticeable in some spots.

Abutting the west side of the standing stones is low bedrock approximately 6 inches high. It creates an ideal place for a person to sit between the pair of stones.

A hand held compass reading taken standing between the two stones was 144 degrees. This is the direction of the winter solstice sunrise. The sunrise would occur over the high ridge on the opposite side of the valley.⁷ The setup seems to be an intentional design to properly orient the observer in the correct direction. A local resident, who found the standing stones, has observed that the winter solstice sunrise is visible from this location.

Identification

There are two potential explanations for these standings: property boundary markers, and Native American winter solstice alignment markers.

(1) Boundary Markers

Various types of boundary markers including standing stones have been used to mark the corners and angle changes of a property. Occasionally, a line of boundary markers spaced 30 to 50 feet apart will be found in a straight line along a boundary and is the work of the property owner. Surveyors always use a single marker to mark a corner or angle change. Using two markers would cause confusion. This pair of standing stones was not used for that purpose. The two stones are too close together (3 feet) to have been used to mark a straight line along a boundary. The standing stones are not boundary markers.

(2) Native American winter solstice alignment

James Mavor and Byron Dix in their book *Manitou* make a compelling case for Native Americans setting up alignments to the solstices and equinoxes. They documented a number of alignments which utilized standing stones as part of the alignment setup. A good case can be made for this pair of standing stones being part of a Native American alignment. The pair of standing stones is wide enough for a person to stand or sit between them. The person standing /

⁷ At sea level, the winter solstice rises at 139 degrees on the compass. Because the sunrise occurs over a high ridge on the opposite side of the valley, the winter solstice sunrise would occur several degrees further to the south (i.e. $139 + 3 = 142$ degrees) which is close to the 144 degrees.

sitting between them is properly oriented in the direction of the winter solstice sunrise. The location has a good sightline for observing the sunrise over the ridge line on the opposite site of the valley. This observation has been confirmed in person by a local resident.

144 degrees magnetic (129 degrees true north)
Standing Stone #1 – 2'7" High (north stone)
Standing Stone #2 – 2'9" High (south stone)
2'0" apart



Pair of standing stones (looking to the northwest)



Another view of the pair of standing stones (looking to the east)

Manitou Stone and Split Wedge Cairn

Traversing in a southerly direction from the pair of standing stones going across the upper east side of the hill a north-south oriented stone wall is encountered. Just where it started was not noted. A few feet down slope on the east side of the north-south stone wall there is a Manitou Stone. A Manitou Stone is a specifically shaped standing stone. Starting at the top there is a narrow neck like feature with sloping shoulders and a tall wide bottom section. The appearance is of a neck and torso of a person. The stone is in an upright position.

Extending out from the Manitou Stone is a line of irregularly placed stones. The irregular line of stones goes over to a split wedge cairn. The split wedge cairn is a pair of flat stones with a single stone wedged in between.

The Manitou Stone is on the north end and the split wedge cairn is on the south end. The set up is out of sight of the next enclosure B and people on the upper west side of the north-south stone wall.

Manitou Stone: 2'5" W x 2'6" H x 0'4" Thick
Split Wedge Cairn: Top stone 1'8" L x 0'5" Thick
Bottom stone 1'4" L x 0'4" Thick
Stone wedge 0'6" L x 0'3" Thick



Manitou Stone



Split Wedge Cairn

Low Walled Structure (Enclosure B)

A short distance further south but on the west side of the north-south wall there is a low walled structure. It was integrated into the north-south stone wall. Technically, the north-south wall forms the structure's back wall, but that section of the wall was modified. It is out of character with the rest of the north-south wall. The structure has a rectangular shape, four sides and a narrow entry in its west wall. The back wall is made up of a long, low stone bar with a few stones on top and a large, flat-faced boulder with an angular top. A single small stone was placed on top of this boulder in the back wall. The back wall continues for a few feet with large boulders. The south side wall is made up of boulders and is semi-wide and semi-intact. The front west wall is collapsed with stones on both sides. However, most of the stones fell into the interior as there is a large quantity. The north wall is made up of a few stones on the ground in front of a bar of stone next to the entry. The bar of stone has a single boulder on top. A photograph of the exterior side of the stone bar shows bare ground, no stone scatter. This suggests the single stone on top is original and that there were never any other stones on top of the bar. At the corner there is an intact stack of stones coming up to the full height of the back wall completing the north side wall.

Between the southeast corner of the low walled structure and the east-west stone wall there is a low long exposed bedrock section. On top of the bedrock are a few stones.

Interior Measurements 7'6" W x 11'0" L

Exterior Measurements 9'0" W x 14'9" L

What is the low walled structure? Is a farm related structure? Is a Native American enclosure?

(1) Farm Related Structure

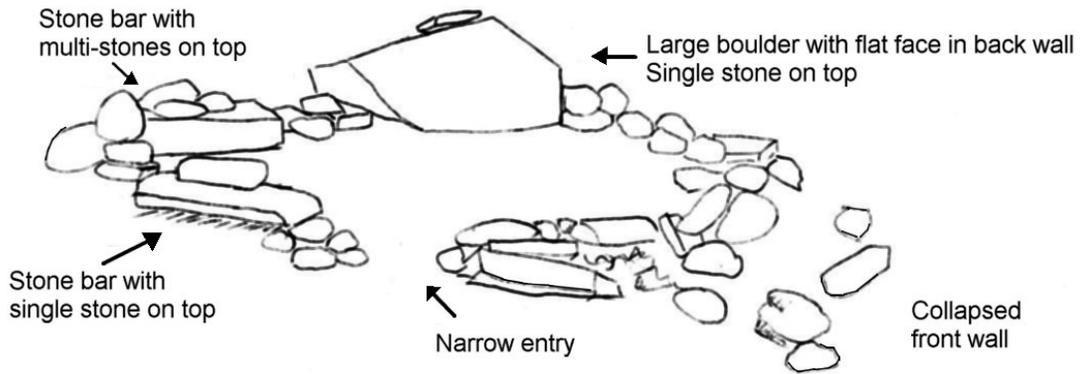
The narrow entry precludes it from being a low walled foundation for a building. The narrow entry could indicate an animal enclosure. The problem is the area it is located in has been wooded from 1830 to 1938 according to survey maps and aerial photos. It is not the type of area where animals were penned up. Plus, it is located a long distance from farm buildings out near the public road. Small animal paddock / holding areas are always located near the other farm buildings. Everything points to this structure as *not* farm related.

(2) Native American Enclosure

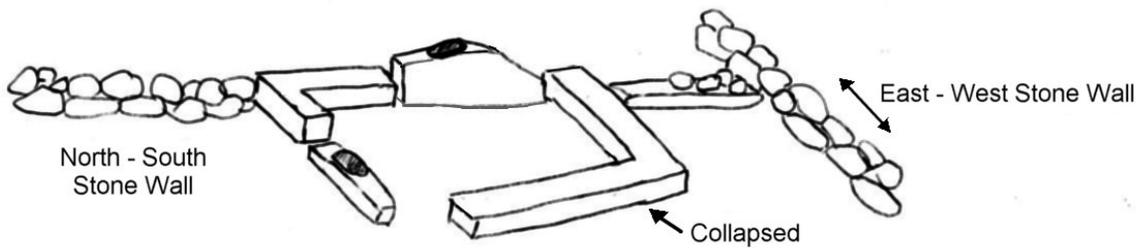
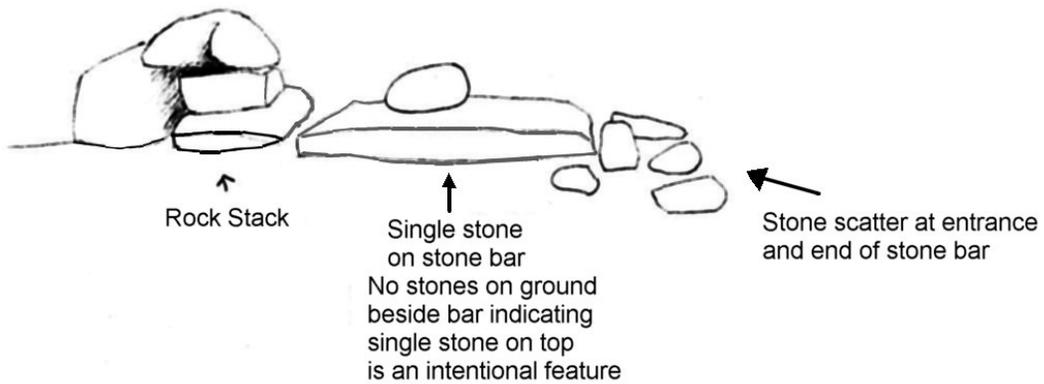
The low walled structure has a wide flat-faced boulder in its back wall. This is out of character with the rest of the stone wall. The large flat boulder stands out making it a feature. The rectangular shape and flat boulder features are similar those in enclosure A. Its size although a little larger than enclosure A is similar. The structure's location is near the Manitou Stone and several cairns and enclosures on the opposite (south) side of the east-west wall which connects to. The low walled structure is a Native American ceremonial enclosure.

The interior seems to have an excessive quantity of stones more than would be expected for a collapsed wall. The interior stones may represent a ritual closing whereby stones were brought in and placed inside. At a later date, a tree fell on top collapsing the front wall and causing more stone scatter inside.

Low Walled Structure - Enclosure B



North Side Wall (Exterior)





Enclosure B (looking southeast)



Large boulder in back wall of enclosure with single stone on top.

North Side Discussion

The structures on the north side of the east-west stone wall are spread out over a long distance in a linear line. They have all been confirmed as Native American ceremonial / ritual structures.

There are two enclosures a long distance apart. To see if there was any relationship between them they were compared with each other.

Enclosure A

Four sided, closed front with narrow entry
Entry on south side
Large stone block in back wall
Two lesser long stone bars in side wall
Low stone wall extends from enclosure
to an elongated exposed bedrock
Niche and shaft structure (inside)

Water in the interior, continues outside
Built up against hillside
Interior: 4' 10" W x 6' 9" L, rectangular

Enclosure B

Four sided, closed front with narrow entry
Entry on west side
Large stone block in back wall
Two lesser long bars blocks in walls
Elongated exposed bedrock between
enclosure and east-west stone wall
Single stone on low long stone bar
Single stone on top of large stone bar in
back wall

Dry land
Attached to north-south stone wall
Interior: 7' 6" W x 11' 0" L, rectangular

Each enclosure has the same basic shape: a rectangular shape with four sides, and a closed front with a narrow entry. Both enclosures have a large, long, wide, flat faced stone in the back wall. This is a feature. Both have a low elongated section of bedrock attached to one exterior corner (enclosure A has a low stone wall extending out to the bedrock). The same characteristics that show up in both enclosures indicate the people who built enclosure A had contact with the people who built enclosure B. They maintained the same basic shape and basic features. Although there are similarities there are also differences.

Enclosure A was built surrounding a spring making it wet inside. This enclosure has a built-in structure, the niche and shaft. Enclosure B was built on high dry ground and is plain inside, lacking the additional structure. The differences indicate the two enclosures had different purposes. The similarities indicate the two enclosures were part of a single ceremonial area. They form a pair, functioning independently and at the same in conjunction with each other.

The pair of standing stones is a directional feature. It directs a person's point of view to the winter solstice sunrise on the distant horizon. This is a single feature/structure with two parts.

The Manitou Stone and split wedge cairn is a set of structures arranged to function as a single unit. The two parts are physically linked together by an irregular line of piled-up stones.

It is unknown if the use of two parts was intentional or coincidental. Either way it forms a pattern. There are two enclosures forming a pair, two standing stones forming a pair, and two parts to the Manitou Stone and split wedge cairn set up. The two enclosures although considered to be a pair they are located a long distance apart and therefore were also placed in the category of individual structures. This forms a secondary pattern of four separate structures or units. These are man-made constructions with traits that can be tracked. There are also natural traits that can be tracked. They are the water and sun. Tracking is done on as many levels as a site permits.

It was difficult to come up with one suitable term to express the various aspects. The terms: features, characteristics, traits and patterns were used where it seemed applicable. The purpose for the terms was to be able to see if any of them showed up on the south side. And if they did how were they integrated?

Often times the Native Americans varied how they presented a specific idea when they had to use the idea two or more times at the same site. As will be seen variations of specific ideas found on the north side showed up again on the south side of the east-west stone wall.

South of the East-West Wall

Low Walled Structure - L Shape Enclosure (C)

A short distance south of the east-west stone wall there is an L shaped low walled structure. To reach it you walk up a slight rise to get to this enclosure. It was set up on a slight rise placing it in a “raised” position.

The structure is made up of a back wall and a side wall in the shape of an “L”. It has an open front. The back wall is on the west side and the side wall is on north side. The back wall is well constructed with interlocking stones. On its south end there are a few displaced stones otherwise it is intact. The top was capped off with natural thin stones. In the middle is a single stone on top of a capstone. This is a feature. The north side wall was poorly constructed using large boulders. It is shorter than the back wall. The differences indicate two different builders.

On the south side there is low exposed bedrock with a single large stone on top. The side of the boulder facing the enclosure is flat. The location makes it look like it could be a side wall. However, there are no scattered stones which indicate this is a feature and not a side wall.

The open front faces east and the distant horizon. Is there an alignment? A hand held compass reading taken while sitting inside and looking straight out was 129 degrees magnetic north. This is not within an alignment coordinate. Furthermore, the potential range of view was great as there was nothing to direct to a specific view point.

Interior Measurements 4'2" W x 4'7" L

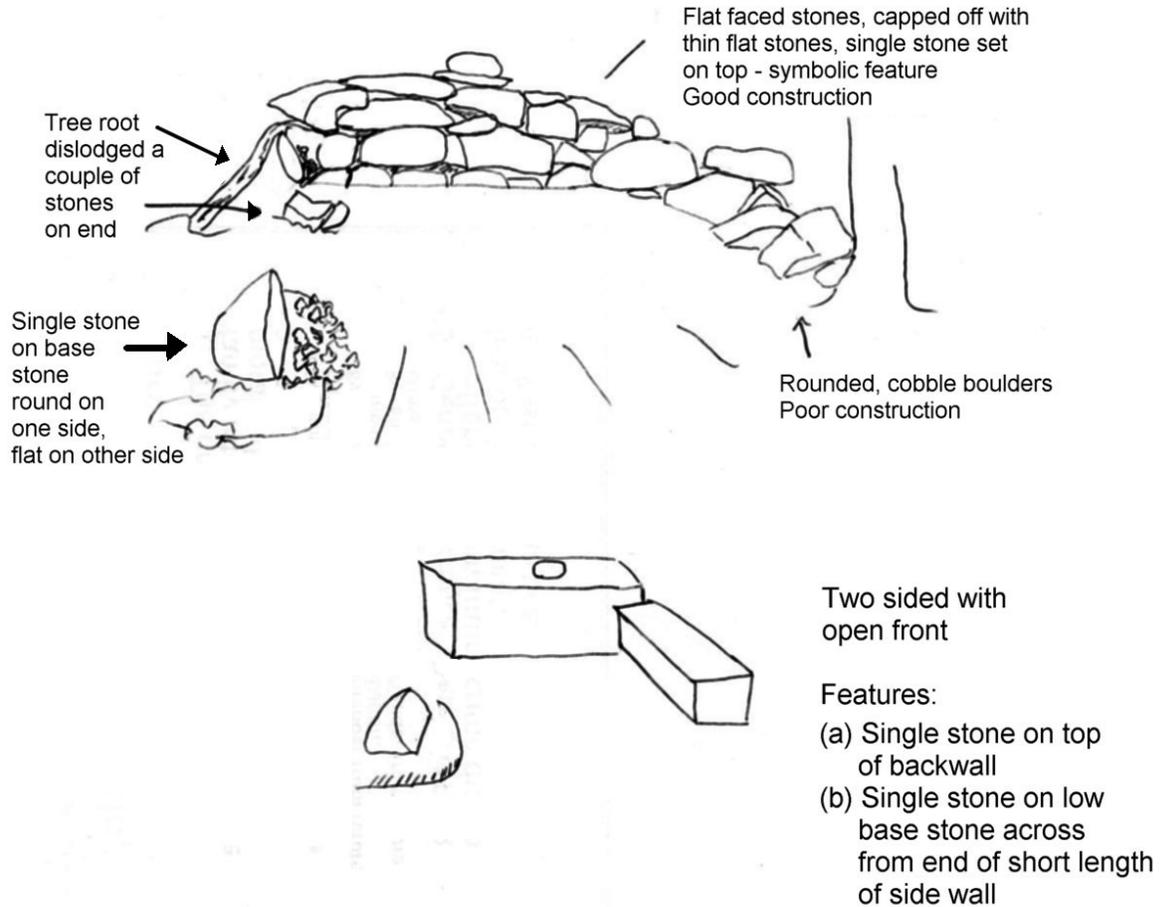
Exterior Measurements 5'8" W x 6'8" L



Low walled structure (L shape enclosure C)

L Shaped Enclosure (C)

Built on raised ground looking down slope
towards 2 cairns lower down.
Faces East



Specialized Cairn on Top of Outcrop (1st)

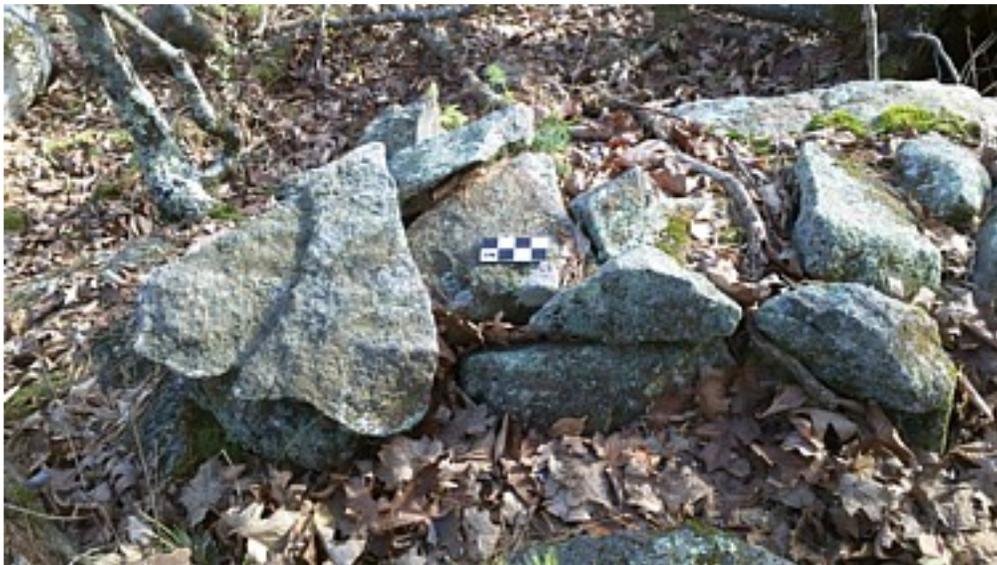
A short distance down slope and to the east there are two cairns. They are in close proximity to each other and form a set of structures. The first is a cairn built on top of an outcrop that looks like a large boulder. The second was built in a split boulder (see next page).

The outcrop has an elongated flatten top. The cairn has an elongated shape. On its south end there is a rock stack, four stones high. Across the top heading north, there is a narrow layer of stones. At the north end, a triangular shaped stone slab was placed flat.

Cairn 7'4" L x 1'2"W x 2'6" H (rock stack)



Three stone high rock stack on south end of cairn.



Triangular shaped stone at north end of cairn (top view).

Split Stone Cairn (2nd)

The second cairn is a split stone cairn. Looking down from the cairn on top of the outcrop the split stone cairn is visible. It is a few feet below. The base stone of this cairn split and opened up creating an open channel. The split was filled with small stones.

Base stone side #1 – 2'9" W x 3'6" L

Base stone side #2 – 1'0" W x 4'6" L (broke in two pieces)

Split – 2'6" W x 3'0" L x 1'2" H

Stone sizes (fill) – 4-6", 7-9"



Split stone cairn with stones inside of the split.

Low Walled Structure (Sunken Enclosure D)

The low walled sunken enclosure is located a short distance south of the L shaped enclosure. Upon approaching this enclosure a section of raised exposed bedrock is encountered. On the west side of the bedrock is the enclosure. It was built on the ground. It faces east and the raised bedrock. The top of the enclosure wall is approximately the same height as the raised bedrock in front of it. This gives it a sunken look.

The enclosure has a half-circle wall with an open front. A small birch tree fell across it midway dislodging a few stones and creating two narrow indentations on either side. In the interior there is a directional feature consisting of parallel stones. On the north side there are two flat stone slabs, one on top of the other. The top stone juts out a little while its other end was integrated into the back wall. It was placed about in the center. On the south side there is a low, line of stones, two stones high that jut out into the interior. The line of stones is near the southeast corner. A close examination of the southeast corner shows the back wall extends beyond the line of stones in the interior thus confirming the interior feature. The line of stones and the flat stones are parallel to each other. The feature positions the person using the enclosure to face in a specific direction, hence the name *directional feature*. Using a handheld compass a reading of 110 degrees was taken. The equinox sunrise is 106 degrees at sea level. The slight variation is due to the higher elevation.

On the bottom flat stone which juts out further than the top flat stone, an artifact was found. The bottom end of a bottle was turned upside down and set on the stone. The bottom section of the green bottle was embossed with "CANDLE CORP OF A[MERICA] MADE IN USA."

Another possible feature was a quartz stone at the rear of the line of stones forming the directional feature.

Exterior Measurements 6'4" W x 8'5" L

Interior Measurements 5'6" W x 5'0" L

Height 2'0"

Directional Feature Interior: 2'0" W 2'5" L 0'6" H

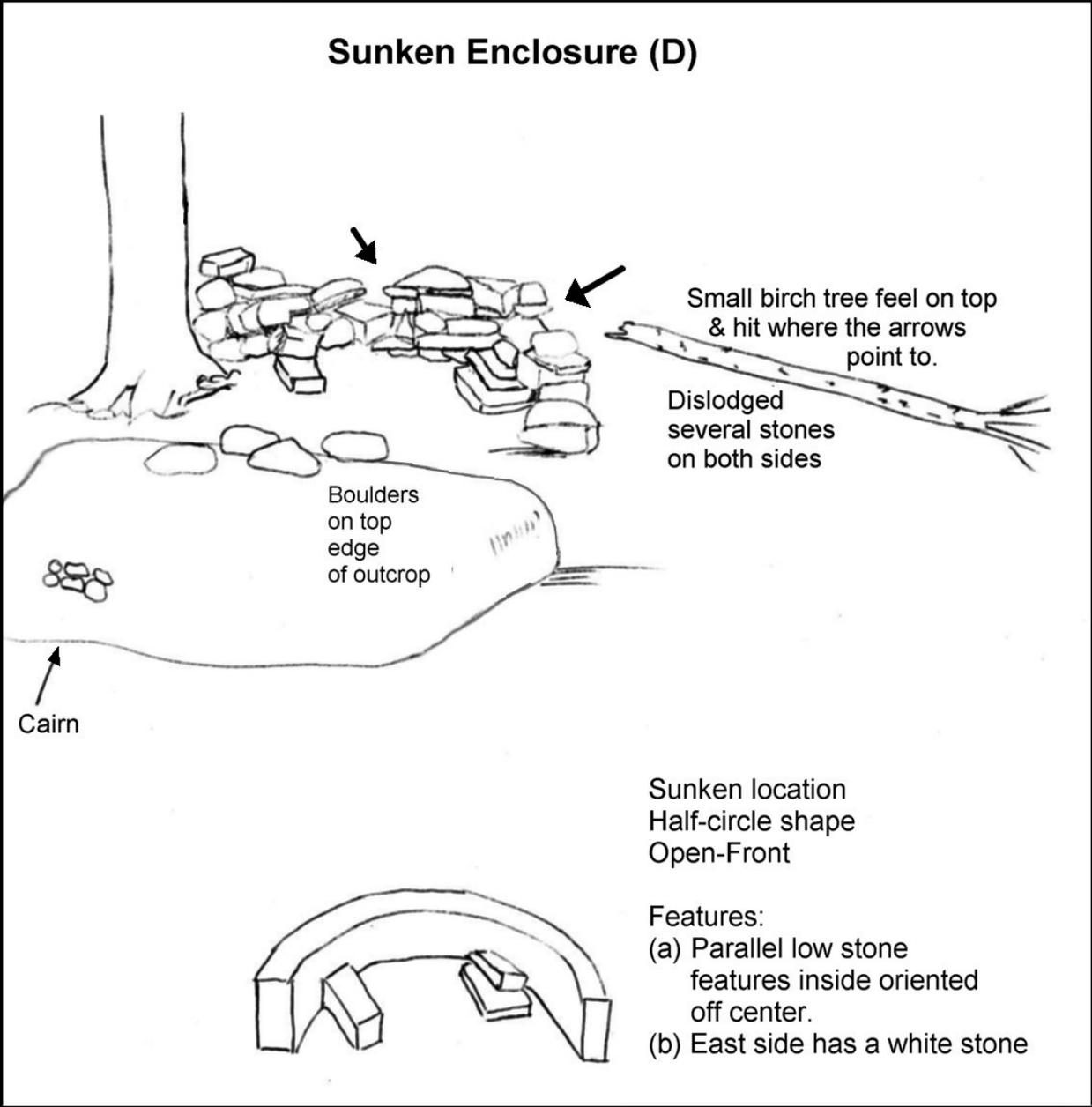
Distance from enclosure to raised bedrock 4'10"

Cairns on the Raised Bedrock in Front of the Sunken Enclosure

The edge of the raised bedrock in front of the enclosure has a line of boulders. They are set off center and do not block the view over the bedrock from the enclosure. This is a feature, either a symbolic row or a cairn type structure.

On the low southeast corner of the raised bedrock out of sight of a person inside the enclosure there is a small pile of stones. The pile is compact and shows intentional placement. This is a cairn.

Approximately 2'0" L x 1'0" (?) W

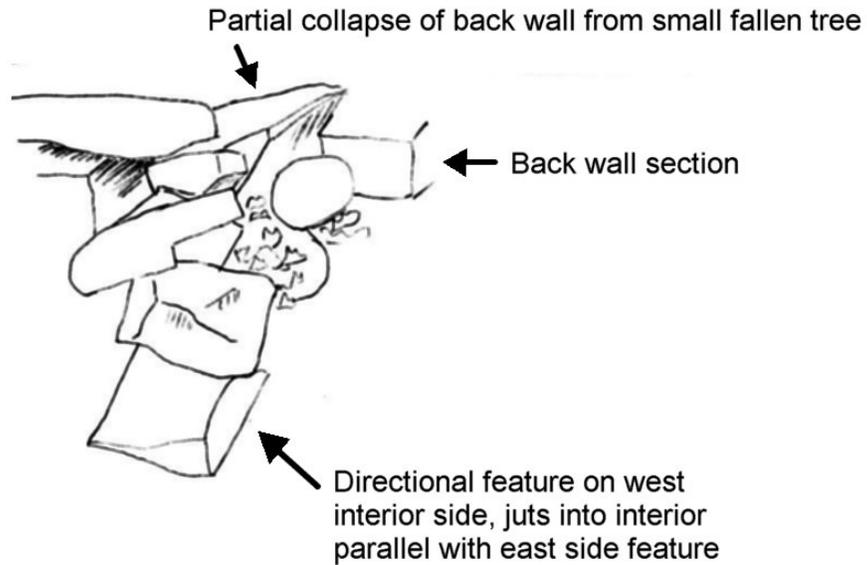


Sunken Enclosure (D) – Overall view with features

Directional Feature Interior Sunken Enclosure (D)

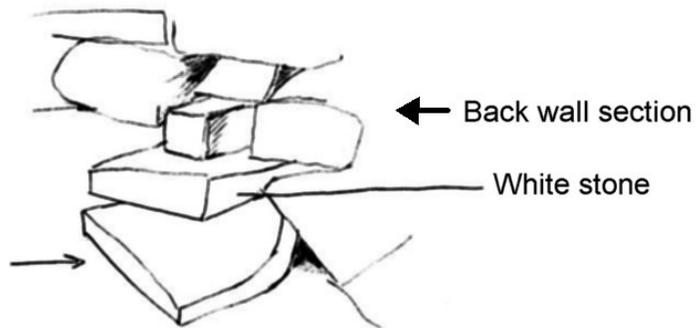


West Side Interior



East Side Interior

Directional feature on east side of interior. Flat base stone juts into interior at floor level, flat stone on top holding it in place is integrated into back wall.

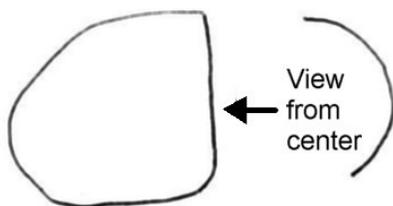


Sunken Enclosure (D) – Details of directional feature

Sunken Enclosure (D)

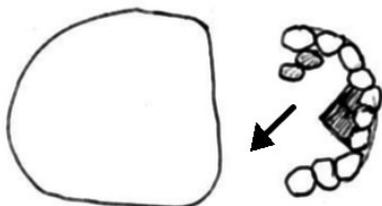


Top of enclosure is level with top of bedrock. Projects a sense / feeling of enclosure being sunken.



View from center

To get the sunken aspect the enclosure had to face the raised bedrock.



View from directional feature oriented to 110 degrees (mn)

Facing the bedrock oriented the enclosure to the incorrect direction forcing the builders to set up an interior "directional feature" to properly orient the viewer.

Sunken Enclosure (D) – Design and orientation of the enclosure and directional feature.



Half circle shape open front enclosure (D)



Directional feature inside the enclosure orients the person towards the spring equinox sunrise.
Arrow points to glass bottle fragment.



Row of boulders on the edge of the raised bedrock in front of the enclosure.



Cairn on southeast side of the exposed bedrock. It can not be seen from the enclosure.

Stone Slab in Seasonal Stream

Down slope and to the east there is a stone slab in a seasonal runoff stream. While there in October the streambed was visible but there was no water. The stone slab was set into the streambed with its uphill side embedded into the ground. Its downhill side has a low opening underneath it. The arrangement forces water flowing downhill over the top of the slab creating a mini waterfall.

The opening on the downhill side is a small niche feature.

1'8" L x 0'10" W x 0'4" Thick



Stone slab in seasonal stream (looking upstream). Water flowing over the edge of the stone would create a mini waterfall feature.

South Side Discussion

The structures on the south side of the east-west stone wall are tightly clustered in a small area. They have all been confirmed as Native American ceremonial / ritual structures.

The two enclosures are the same type of structure and therefore were compared to each other.

L Shaped Enclosure C

Two sided
Open front
Faces east
Single stone on bedrock
beside enclosure
Single stone on top of back wall

Raised on higher ground
On dry land

Sunken Enclosure D

Half-circle
Open front
Faces east
Line of boulders on bedrock
in front of enclosure
Cairn on bedrock in front of enclosure
Directional feature interior of enclosure
Sunken on lower ground
On dry land

Specialized Cairn & Split Stone Cairn

Cairns down slope and east of enclosure

Stone Slab in stream

Stone slab down slope and east of enclosure

The two enclosures share a couple of the same characteristics: an open front, faces east, on dry land and a structure down slope to the east. The enclosures also have differences. One is on high ground giving a raised appearance and the other is on low ground giving a sunken appearance. Enclosure D has a feature in the interior, the directional feature whereas enclosure C has a plain interior. Enclosure C has a single stone placed on top of the back wall and a single large stone on bedrock beside it. Enclosure D has a line of boulders in front on top of bedrock. The single stone on bedrock beside Enclosure C may be comparable to the line of stones on bedrock in front of Enclosure D.

The open-front common to both enclosures indicates a stylistic preference.

The difference between raised and sunken shows symbolic opposites were incorporated into the structures. Symbolic opposites are a characteristic found at America's Stonehenge. An example is the Winter Ceremony where Sun Spirit goes into the Underworld and the Spring Water Spirit goes up to the Upperworld.⁸ Opposites were used to keep the America's Stonehenge ceremonial site in balance.

Enclosure D has a directional feature inside. The feature positions a person so that their view is towards the equinox sunrise alignment. This created a solar alignment like the one found at the pair of standing stones on the north side in the enclosure on the south side.

Down slope and east of enclosure D is a stone slab in a seasonal stream. The stone slab interrupts the flow of water causing a tiny waterfall. Although it appears to be a natural feature, it is a man-made feature. This created another type of water feature. It had a separate location apart from an enclosure on the south side. Note both water features (north side and south side) incorporated a niche.

East and down slope from the L shaped enclosure C is a two part cairn set up. There is a special cairn with a rock stack and a split stone cairn. The two part set up has a split stone cairn

⁸ Gage, 2006.

like its counterpart on the north side with the Manitou Stone and split wedge cairn. On the south side the second feature is a specialized cairn.

Overall, the south side has two enclosures, a solar alignment, a water feature and a two part cairn set up. This mirrors the same on the north side with two enclosures, a solar alignment at the standing stones, a water feature (integrated into an enclosure), and a two part cairn setup (Manitou Stone).

Two Sides of the East – West Stone Wall

Both sides of the east-west stone wall have equivalent structures and features. These can be described as “interchangeable equivalents.” Interchangeable equivalents can take several different forms.

The water features are mismatched, different types of features both associated with water. There is a niche-shaft with water inside, and a stone slab in a stream creating a mini waterfall.

Some structures are matched: the same type of structure but have different characteristics. These show up with the enclosures: north has 4 sided closed front with entry and south has an open-front. At this site, the differences indicate stylistic preferences and different time periods.

Yet within the north and south sides the enclosures are not exact there are differences reflecting different uses (see interpretation).

In addition, there is one other match. Enclosure B on the north side and enclosure C on the south side each have two single stones: one on top of the back wall and one integrated into a side. This is the same pattern. The single stones are symbolic and indicate a carry-over from one area to the other area. They also form a link / connection between the north and south sides.

The north side has its structures spread out over a long distance primarily in a linear pattern X X X X.

The south side has its structures tightly clustered in a boxed pattern.

0 0
0 0

Why the matching? Why the differences? These questions are explored under interpretation.

Interpretation

Interpretation is based on the integration of water, sun, split stone and the Native American’s cultural use of enclosures.

The north side and south side each have a similar set up but a different solar alignment. That indicates two different ceremonies.

North Side

The pair of standing stones has a winter sunrise alignment designating the day and time of year. The solar alignment involved the Sun Spirit. Enclosure A’s water source is an underground spring, containing the Spring Water Spirit. The water feature (niche-shaft) inside the enclosure denotes a water ceremony. The Manitou Stone represents a “spirit” or “Godstone” as the colonial ministers called them. The Manitou Stone is physically linked to a split wedge cairn. The spirit stone linked to the split wedge cairn proves the cairn represents a portal for a

spirit. The portal goes into the earth and therefore into the Underworld. Enclosure B is the only structure without recognizable symbolism. It may have been used for preparation.

The winter alignment designation makes it a winter ceremony. The water's inclusion makes it a Winter Water Ceremony. The type of water, in this case, spring water, is a relevant factor as is the time of year. How did it work? Was there one ceremony or two ceremonies? In the winter, ice forms on top of the water trapping it and the Spring Water Spirit underneath.

To hold a ceremony the people built an enclosure around the spring. To release the Spring Water Spirit, the Native Americans created the niche over the spring water stream in which to place an offering to call the trapped spirit from the water. Integrated into the niche is a shaft to direct the spirit upwards so it would travel to the Upperworld. For this to take place it was necessary to hold a ceremony with songs and other rituals. It was not enough to merely make an offering.⁹ The reason for sending the Spring Water Spirit to the Upperworld was to insure rain in the springtime. That is if the Spring Water Spirit did not go up to the Upperworld for the winter it could not transition into Rain Water Spirit. Rain water in the springtime was necessary to replenish the underground springs, their source of drinking water. The water ceremony was used to enhance the natural cycle and insure the spirit arrived at its destination.

The winter sunrise alignment tells us the day the Winter Water Ceremony was held but it does not reveal if there was also a Winter Sun Ceremony. At America's Stonehenge there is evidence of a Winter Sun Ceremony in which the Sun Spirit leaves the Upperworld and goes into the Underworld. This is the opposite of the Spring Water Spirit's travels. Opposites are sometimes incorporated to achieve balance.

There was one other spirit present. The Manitou Stone linked with the split wedge cairn on dry land indicates the presence of the Master Spirit of the Underworld. Why? There were spirits leaving and entering the Underworld. The Spring Water Spirit needed to leave the Underworld for the winter months. The Sun Spirit needed to enter the Underworld for the winter months. Hence, it was necessary to call forth the Underworld Spirit, who controlled the Underworld.

Most stone structure sites that include a water feature/structure also include a split stone cairn representing the Underworld. The high rate of occurrence of split stone cairns show the Underworld was the primary spiritual world they interacted with in many of their ceremonies held at cairn / stone structure sites.

South Side

The stone slab in the seasonal stream indicates a water ceremony. Enclosure D with the equinox sunrise alignment designates the day but not the time of year. Was it the fall or spring equinox? To figure out the time of year, the water source was looked at. The authors were there in the fall of the year and found the seasonal stream dried up. This shows the seasonal stream is most active in the springtime which indicates a spring equinox. There is a split stone cairn, an Underworld spirit portal.

The stream represents springtime rain water, hence the Rain Water Spirit. The Rain Water Spirit is present in an open stream. It is not contained inside an enclosure. The direction of the water flowage dictates the spirit's travel route. The stone slab feature in the stream creates a tiny waterfall. The waterfall in turn creates sounds. The sound is the voice of the spirit letting the

⁹ Lewis 1990, pp?

people know it is back. The niche under the waterfall was used to make an offering to the Rain Water Spirit. It is a universal custom among Native Americans to give offerings to spirits. The water feature allows free flowage so that the water runs down slope to wetlands where it will return to the underground, the Underworld. In this ceremony, the people assist and insure the Rain Water Spirit has returned from Upperworld and is on its way back to the Underworld where it will transition into Spring Water Spirit. Although this ceremonial area is probably from historic times, it is an old type of ceremony dating back to pre-contact times. It was found at the America's Stonehenge site dating to circa 2000 years ago.¹⁰

The use of water sounds may have also been in use at the winter water ceremonial area. The floor of the niche is made up of irregularly placed stones. Dampness in the area would cause them to have an ice cover early in the winter. Water flowing underneath the frozen stones would create gurgling sounds, the voice of the Water Spirit. So the sounds or noises of water were probably relevant at both ceremonial areas.

Inside the sunken enclosure D is the viewing spot for the alignment. That shows the north and south side each had an enclosure associated with a spirit. It also shows the Sun Spirit was involved and may have had its own ceremony. The equinox was sometimes used as the day the Sun Spirit returned from the Underworld to go back to the Upperworld.¹¹

The split stone cairn is part of a set up with another on boulder cairn. The other on boulder cairn has a stack of stones on its south end and a triangular stone on its north end. The triangular stone blocked out uninvited spirits from entering the area. The symbolism in the stack of stones is unknown. The split stone cairn places the Underworld Spirit within the area on the south side. Its purpose is the same as on the north side.

At this ceremonial area the enclosures were set up to create symbolic opposites. The concept may reflect on the overall site. The Winter Ceremonial area had ceremonies that were the opposite of the Springtime Ceremonial area.

Ashburnham's Site

This is a tiny site and at first glance it appears deceptively simplistic. However, as this analysis has demonstrated, it has a great deal of complexity. Six of its eight structures have readable symbolism. This symbolism interacts in different combinations. The small size of the site makes it ideal for gaining a clearer picture of what these sites are about.

If a researcher takes the time to carefully sort out how the various symbolisms interact at a site, they will generally find important clues as to what type of ceremony(s) took place. It is important to itemize the various features and symbolism at a site. The next step is (a) to evaluate how these features and symbols were used looking for similarities and differences; (b) to evaluate how one feature or symbol is paired or grouped together with other features and symbols. This site offers various examples of how features and symbols interact. These various examples are a good resource for learning how to evaluate other sites.

¹⁰ Gage, 2006.

¹¹ Gage, 2006.

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