

THE MAGNIFICENT MONUMENT MOMENT
TWINS AGAIN"

A pair of stone cairns again stand together on the high ridge south of the Yellowstone River. For twenty-four years one has stood forlornly alone while old settlers and passersby mourned the loss of it's sister. Someone on thoughtless impulse had appropriated it's rocky body to be incorporated in some structure of their own. The story of the outrage was published October 8, 1976 in the Agri-News with pictures of Al Keebler, John Bakker and Norman Miller. The origin and duration of this long hilltop vigil is unknown but many theories have found voice. For the Twin Monument Restorers this "Stoneheng of Yellowstone County is our "Plymouth Rock" of the Blue Creek, Cottonwood Creek, Spring Creek, Duck Creek Divide.

THE QUESTIONS.

1. Were these cairns part of the "Old North Trail" whose stone pile markers extended from the Yucatan to the arctic on the East front of the Rocky Mountain Chain? Many are visible today
2. Are the cairns the equivalent to the "INUKSUIT" [things that can take the place of a human being} found in arctic regions of Alaska, Canada and Greenland? Are these talking signboards whose language has been lost.
3. Were they built by the Spaniards using sacred dimensions? Do they point to some distant treasure or mine? Perhaps an expedition sent to intercept the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1805 -6 or one of the several Spanish expeditions marked a trail in the 300 years that Spain had establishments in the present American Southwest.
4. Could this pair just be a more elaborate "Shepherd's Monument"? This was the range leased by Charlie Bair from the Crow Tribe. Hillsides corrugated by the parallel paths hundreds of thousands of sheep are still evident. A "camp tender's supply camp" is reported to have existed in this area.
5. Were they position markers on the old freight wagon road, a branch of the "Meeteetsee Trail" which traversed this ridge after the "old south bridge" was built over the Yellowstone on what is now the dead ended Washington Street of Billings? Prior to 1890 the River was forded at the present Billings water plant [Josephine Park. The longer route down Pryor Creek to the McCormick Hill and then on to the Coburn Hill route to the ferry at Coulson was used earlier. Was Brazwell Summit the same location as the saloon described by Bill Huntington when freighting to the Pryor Gap railroad tunneling project in 1900?

6. Did the Bozeman Trial [Corridor], in one of its earlier versions in 1864-65 pass this way after latter trains learned of the difficulties experienced by the first on the trail in the bluffs west of Bittler Creek. Using the logic of the teamsters, after crossing Blue Creek, they would have followed the watershed high ground to take advantage of dryer and harder road base. This would have brought them over Twin Monument pass to the known Clark's Rork crossing below Selicia. Along this is the route in 1998 the historic two story Nate Cooper house was moved from Blue Creek to Selecia.

7. Could a reconnoitering party from the Col. James A Sawyer's Road Building Expedition of 1865 have erected these as trail markers for future reference. What was the source of the information he had for the recommended rerouting of the Bozeman Trail direct from the Big Horn River via the face of the Pryor Mountains?

8. What is the significance of the "paired cairns"? Is there a connection between the "two stone piles" William Clark found on Pompeys Pillar, the two cairns on the Buffalo Jump Ranch on Big Timber Creek and the pair on the south slope of the Crazy Mountains?

THE REBUILDING STORY

The Twin Monuments stand on ranch land owned by Norman Miller and his parents Joseph and Helen Miller. This family is descended from an early Montana family and Blue Creek homesteaders. This long used trail has been on private unfenced land which has led to abuse. Persons with four-wheel drive vehicles have frequently trespassed and inconsiderate persons have left debris at the monuments. The Millers try to practice good stewardship but the chore of picking up broken bottles and trash has grown annoying.

In 1976 someone trucked away the 15 tons of rock contained in monument No. 2. Early in 2000, Vernon Drake told Helen Miller of his interest in the Twin Monuments. A few days later the Millers presented him with a letter from Ralph C. Panian describing theory No. 3 listed above. Stan Wilmoth of the Montana Historical Office did a search of the State land records and found no reference to the twin cairns. Drake then telephoned Kevin Kooster-Manning of the Western Heritage Center who asked him to talk to Billings Gazette reporter Donna Healy who was preparing a story about threatened historic features. That story was published Sunday January 30, 2000 in the Magazine Section. A subtitle read "Architect wants to rebuild rock monument". Photos included were of Drake beside the remaining cairn and one of his uncle and aunt, Victor and Helen Williams standing on top of the same structure in 1926.

A meeting was called at Elmer's Pancake House on Saturday June 3rd for person interested. In the meantime Al Keebler who grew up viewing the monuments from his parents homestead brought a copy of the story printed October 8, 1976 titled "Only one reminder of Pryor Hills' past remains as twin monument succumbs to rock hauling raiders". It was published in the Agri News by Roger Davis's

1. The location of the cairns was carefully selected for high long distance visibility from nearly 360 degrees.
2. The builders had a plan. This is not a rock pile but is of well laid "dry stone" masonry as is found in the Southwest and Mexico as well as throughout Europe and Asia.
3. This is not a camp location due to the absence of convenient water and wood.
4. The construction was that of an organized group of individuals. Rocks weighing two to three hundred pounds required the strength of several men. Ladders, scaffold or a wagon bed must have been utilized to attain the 8'-6" or more height.
5. Lichen dating or some other scientific method could possibly be employed to determine the age. Most rock in the replacement monument are devoid of lichen.

CELEBRATION TIME

The "marvelous monument moment" was held at noon Saturday on October 21, 2000 at the "TWIN MONUMENTS". Over fifty workers, friends and neighbors gather for a chili feed organized by Ethel Clanton Hughes. Bagpiper Bradley Logan was a perfect touch to the festivities on the windy ridge. Don Cooper constructed a Time Capsule. It contains mementos, photos, newspapers and assortment of artifacts including dated coins, a flint scrapper placed by Rich Pitchley from the Chief Plentycoups Musium at Pryor, Indian Tobacco and eagle feathers placed by Crow tribe member Howard Boggess. It will be buried at the site.

Most of those present placed their own selected rock on the monument or had it done for them. A number of rocks were brought to the site from the ancestral homesteads to be a memorial to those who had sacrificed there.

A twelve foot inside diameter circle of rocks with a southeast opening was started. It represents a buffalo wallow or a quest site. People were invited to add rocks on each occasion that they visit the site. It will be when completed in time a low walled windbreak for meditation and viewing the magnificent expanse of the Big Horn, Pryor, Beartooth, Snowey and Bull Mountain ranges and the equally enchanting intervening gullies, coolies and hills.

MEMORIES

Before Christmas in 1917 Verna Williams quit her job as the teacher in the little dirt roofed log homesteader house turned school house located about a half mile east of the twin monuments. She boarded at the Tom Greenough place about a mile farther east. After teaching in the Paradise Valley and Wilsal she had accepted this position to be near her parents, Jacob and Nora Williams Williams, her grandmother Synora Pyle Williams and uncles Frank and Emmett who had homesteaded on Duck Creek. She had first boarded with the Claud Logan family on Cottonwood Creek and started the school near them in an empty homesteader house. Students included Olive and Frank Dixon, Alfred and Walter Kooney, Jeanette Lambole. On January 8, 1918 she married nearby rancher George W. Drake. Her former schoolmate from the Duck Creek School and now next door neighbor Grace Robbins took over the teaching job

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VERNON L. DRAKE, organizer TWIN MONUMENT RESTORERS

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William Clanton knew the area well before he homesteaded on Blue Creek as did Bill Huntington and Nate Cooper. The Keebler family had the Twins in view from their homestead.

Too much could be added to this account of individual memories but time and space limitations force me to close.

VLD

page 5 of 5