Press Notice
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STONEHENGE: GLACIAL TRANSPORT OF BLUESTONES NOW CONFIRMED?

Pont Saeson in North Pembrokeshire -- now confirmed as one of the many sources for the Stonehenge bluestones. (Available for use -- please request a higher definition jpeg if needed)

The theory that the Stonehenge bluestones were transported by glacier ice rather than by Neolithic tribesmen has received a massive boost following recent geological work by scientists in Leicester, Cardiff and Aberystwyth.

Dr Rob Ixer, Dr Richard Bevins and Dr Nick Pearce have just published a paper (1) which confirms earlier suspicions that some of the bluestones at Stonehenge have not come from the Carn Meini area in the Preseli Hills of Pembrokeshire, but from low-lying land to the north, close to the village of Brynberian. This follows a number of other recent

geological publications from Ixer and Bevins which lead inexorably to the conclusion that the bluestones have come from many different sources, some of which are still unknown.

Recent press releases from the University of Leicester (2) and from the National Museum of Wales and Aberystwyth University (3) throw serious doubt on the long-standing theory that the bluestones were quarried from the Carn Meini area and man-handled all the way to Stonehenge as part of a great stone-collecting enterprise. One of the geologists, Dr Rob Ixer, says that there are three key conclusions from the recent work:

1. The huge sandstone Altar Stone does not come from Milford Haven but from somewhere between West Wales and Herefordshire and has nothing to do with the Preseli Hills. This calls into question the proposed transport route for the Stonehenge bluestones.

2. Much of the volcanic and sandstone Stonehenge debris does not match any standing stones. This suggests that the stony detritus in the soil is all that is left of standing stones that have now been lost.

3. Many of the Stonehenge rocks have not come from impressive outcrops high on the hilltops of Preseli, but in less obvious places, including hollows and deep valleys.

These conclusions clearly contradict the idea that the stones were quarried and collected by tribesmen from "sacred" sites where magical or healing stones could be found. On the contrary, they support the idea that the Stonehenge bluestones are glacial erratics, transported from West Wales towards Salisbury Plain by the huge Irish Sea Glacier maybe 450,000 years ago.

Dr Brian John, whose book ***The Bluestone Enigma*** (4) argues the case for glacial transport, says that the new work is timely and that it adds detail to the conclusions of many geologists over many decades -- conclusions that have been marginalized and even ignored by archaeologists who have been intent upon perpetrating "the Stonehenge myth" for a variety of reasons.

"We now know that the erratic or bluestone material at Stonehenge, of all shapes and sizes, has come from at least 30 different sources," he says. "On that basis alone it is entirely logical to assume that the stones have been transported by ice for most -- but not necessarily all -- of their journey to Stonehenge. Another fact that has been conveniently ignored by archaeologists is that the stone sources identified in the recent work are all in a narrow strip of land running approximately NW-SE across north Pembrokeshire. That is precisely the direction followed by the ice of the Irish Sea Glacier as it crossed Pembrokeshire -- and the stones have come from exactly the right locations where one might predict glacial erosion and entrainment of rocks and smaller debris. It is also likely that the Altar Stone is a massive glacial erratic, carried by Welsh ice flowing southwards and then eastwards towards Somerset.

"Following this new research, I do not believe that the human transport theory is still credible. Researchers now need to address two big remaining questions: First, exactly when did this glacial episode occur? And second, exactly where was this assemblage of bluestones and glacial erratics dumped?"

ENDS

Contact:
Dr Brian John
01239-820470
Email: brianjohn4@mac.com

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(1) Stonehenge rhyolitic bluestone sources and the application of zircon chemistry as a new tool for provenancing rhyolitic lithics is published in the Journal of Archaeological Science, Volume 38, Issue 3, March 2011, Pages 605-622.

(2) http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/press/press-releases/2011/february/new-discovery-2018will-rewrite-stonehenge2019s-history2019
New Discovery 'will rewrite Stonehenge's history'
Geologists question 'sacred hills' origins of famous bluestones (25 February 2011)

(3) http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/news/?article_id=642
New Discovery in Stonehenge Bluestone Mystery (22 February 2011)

(4) The Bluestone Enigma. Stonehenge, Preseli and the Ice Age.
by Brian John. Greencroft Books , 2008
£9.95 pp160 pb ISBN 9780905559896.