

Jane Marchand

The stone circle and standing stone.

The stone circle at Merrivale, it's one of what we call Dartmoor's freestanding stone circles in that it doesn't have a burial in the middle, it is literally a circle of stones, differing slightly from the stone rows in that they actually do have some more evidence of planning, there's actually regular spacing between the stones. It was excavated in the 1880s, a trench was put through it, we can still see the evidence of the trench, but the excavator found absolutely nothing; but other stone circles on Dartmoor which were excavated in the 1890s revealed huge amounts of charcoal, the excavators record shovelful upon shovelful of charcoal, so it suggests that these stone circles had fires in them. And one of the theories about stone circles is actually they're very much more the monuments of the night, rather than the day, and the association with fire, and you can imagine when you're standing here, if you were here at night with the shadows caused by the fire, the sort of effect that would have, it would heighten the senses, it would heighten the impact of the stone circle and actually slightly divorce it from the landscape all around it.

And the standing stone?

And the standing stone, again possibly they were way markers, territorial markers, nearly always associated with stone circles. I think what we see above the ground isn't all there is to it, excavations of standing stones in Cornwall and actually in southwest Wales have actually revealed a complexity of archaeology beneath the ground, other burials, pits, other structures, so again I think we have to always try and imagine what might actually lie beneath our feet.