

# Heathery livrocky land

## Rethinking the stones of Neolithic Pembrokeshire



In a major new volume on the archaeology of Pembrokeshire, Tim Darvill argues that monument typologies do not help us understand how people viewed rocks and the landscape in the past. We need to think less like archaeologists and start asking questions about the meaning of stone and what these monuments might have signified to the people who built them. **Chris Catling** takes up the challenge.

**T**im Darvill and Geoff Wainwright have been working on their SPACES project, mapping prehistoric monuments in the Strumble to Preseli landscapes of North Pembrokeshire, since 2001. Their recent joint paper in the newly published *Pembrokeshire County History* volume (see the 'Further reading' box on p.41) provides an up-to-date account of their latest thinking about such sites, covering a county that is now known, thanks to their work, to be well endowed with megalithic monuments, including dolmens and standing stones.

While presenting their overview at the 2016 Pembrokeshire Archaeology Day, Tim Darvill broke off from his prepared presentation to issue a wake-up call to archaeologists wedded to taxonomy. 'We have reached the limit of what we can learn by forcing these sites into monument typologies based on formal characteristics, and we must now try to make a leap of imagination and understand what these monuments might have meant to the people who built them', he said, adding: 'I come not to praise monument typologies but to bury them', or words to that effect. This was archaeological heresy (even

**ABOVE** What is cultural, what is natural? On encountering the landscapes of upland Wales for the first time, early settlers could be forgiven for thinking that the hills were marked by the mounds and monuments of earlier inhabitants – perhaps a race of gods or giants.

more shocking from the author of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Archaeology*, which is full of formal typological definitions and descriptions), but the audience at Pembrokeshire College in Haverfordwest loved it.

Tim went on to argue that nobody in the past said: 'OK, folks, let's build a portal dolmen'. Monuments were not built to a strict template; there was

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