

Recent History of The Hyllingebjerg Stone

Introduction

The Hyllingebjerg Stone is an 8.5 tons granite monolith, which was left atop Hyllingebjerg, by the receding icecap in Northern Europe about 10 000 years ago. Hyllingebjerg is a 28 meter high earth cliff at the coast of Northern Sjælland in Denmark. The stone was in the Bronze Age, about 3000 years ago, decorated with rock carvings including ships, sun wheels and about 300 bowl shaped carvings.



A Society called “Hyllingebjergstenens Venner” (Friends of The Hyllingebjerg Stone) was formed 12 years ago, the mission of which is to conserve these unique rock carvings for future generations and to display them in the public space, so we can all enjoy the message from the past, which the Bronze Age artist of 3000 years sends us.

History

The stone and its rock carvings were first discovered in **May 1983**, when it was lying on the beach at Hyllingebjerg, where it had

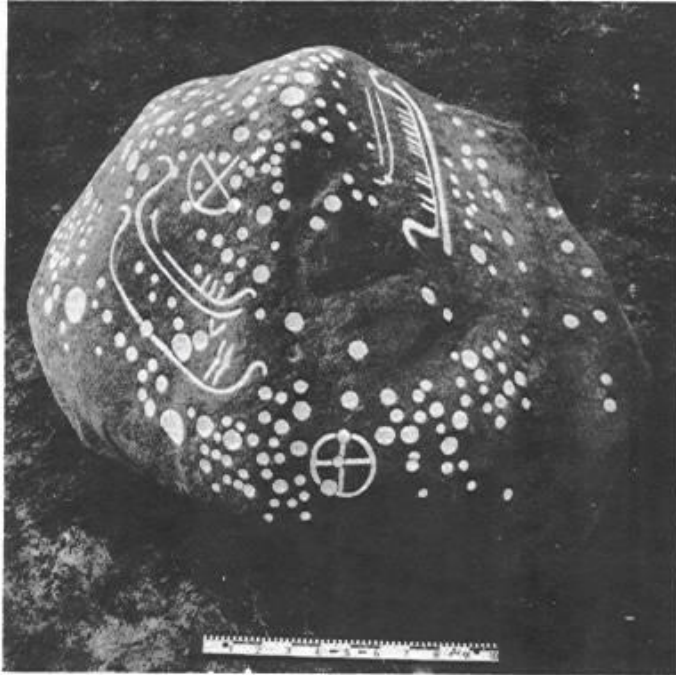
tumbled from the cliff 28 meters above. The stone had lodged at the waters edge half buried in sand after storms had eroded the cliff. The Danish National Museum was alerted, but was not at the time, interested in a conservation project because of lack of funds.

The stone was left at the beach until **February 1991**, at which time the carvings were again photographed. Now the local museum became interested and the stone was in **April 1994** transported from the beach up onto the top of the cliff from where it originally came.





Overst: Stenens tre sider, den ene side kun med 2 skålle tegn.
Nederst: Fotograferet ovenfra så de fleste af de to sider billedtegn ses.



One night in **October 1994** the beautiful rock carvings first came to light, when Scandinavia's foremost expert on this heritage, Gerhardt Milstreu, painted the 3000 years old carvings with white quartz powder and in the darkness took the photos on the left. His documentation was published in **1995** the Danish Heritage Magazine "Skalk". The quartz powder quickly rained of the stone, which at that time was still exposed to the weather. Another 11 years were to pass before the Hyllingebjerg Stone rock carvings were again made easily visible.

Tourists in their ignorance of its value had begun writing their names on the stone. In order to draw viewers attention to the fact, that they were facing a stone of national heritage, and that this would offer some measure of protection against graffiti, a signpost was made, and in **August 1995** placed in front of the stone.



God forklaring til helleristninger

Fint privat initiativ på Hyllingebjerg ved Liseleje

It became very quickly obvious, that if the valuable rock carvings were not to disappear forever the stone had to be protected against the eroding effects of changing weather conditions and modern day air pollution. The stone was therefore in **June 1996** moved to a temporary storage in the middle of the exhibition area of “Gjethuset”, a newly opened cultural facility in the nearby town of Frederiksværk.

However, as the rock carvings were not painted and viewers had to do with a drawing posted on the wall, to really appreciate the extent of the ancient artwork.



The stone was placed in the middle of an exhibition area, which was intended for changing exhibitions and was therefore clearly in the way. The stone was therefore in **1997** moved to a corner of the hall behind some temporary walls and left there to its own devices for the next 4 years.





In **August 1999** an attempt was made to have the stone exhibited in a diamond shaped glass cage within a fully controlled atmosphere (Relative Humidity and Temperature) at the top of the Hyllingebjerg cliff, which 3000 years ago was a cultural and religious place. The project was not realised due to lack of funds, so the stone remained hidden away from the public in a dark corner of the “Gjethuset”.

At that time the rock carvings were not drawn up and barely visible. **Sometime during 2001** the stone was then transported to Stone Conservator Leif Vognsen’s facility at Gram in Jutland, Denmark, a journey of 317 kilometres. There is no record of this transport. The stone spent the next 4 years at Leif Vognsen’s shop. Here the stone was cleaned, but it is not known precisely which methods and which agents were used in this process and this needs to be further investigated.

The hundreds of rock carvings on The Hyllingebjerg Stone were in **August 2004** identified by Scandinavia’s foremost authorities on rock carvings, Gerhardt Milstreu, and the Danish National Museum’s Flemming Kaul on a grant from the EU. The carvings were touched up with white paint and the carvings were photographed 2-Dimensionally. The beautiful 3000 years old artwork was now after 11 years again clearly visible. The stone was to remain at Leif Vognsen’s conservation shop for another year.





In **November 2004** “Hyllingebjergstenens Venner” had received a grant, which made it possible to have the rock carvings photographed using a new 3-Dimensional photographic technique. We also had a model of the Egtved Girl from the same Bronze Age pose next to stone so as to give an impression of the size of the stone. The result was posted on the Internet and can be viewed at www.frvhistorie.dk/Hyllingebjergstenen. Here the artwork can be admired from all sides through manipulating the computer mouse.



The stone was **19. September 2005** loaded on to a truck at the conservation facility at Gram and transported to an approved “cold storage” at Hilleroed in Denmark. The weather was reasonably good that day, but to protect the carvings for its 307 km journey, the stone was wrapped in plastic.



Having completed the journey on **19. September 2005** the stone was in its wrapping pushed into the “cold storage” facility at Hilleroed. This storage facility is approved by the Danish archaeological authorities for the storage of historic artefacts. The temperature is year around maintained at 17-18 degrees C. and the relative humidity is around 60-70° RH. The storage room also contains organic material like leather and wood from wagons and furniture. There is no daylight and the room is only lit up artificially, when someone is working there.



The Hyllingebjerg Stone was kept in its plastic wrapping at this storage for about 8 months until **May 2006**. A group of visitors viewed the stone **15. August 2006** and at that time the surface appeared “powdery”.

On **6. March 2007** a group of 6 specialists reviewed the current state of the stone and its Bronze Age rock carvings and issued their findings as follows:

- *“the preservation status of the about 8 ½ tons heavy picture stone requires an absolutely stable indoor climate, (light influence, temperature and relative humidity), as very short term changes of the climatic conditions makes the surface very porous/crumbling (stress effects)”*
- *“that the stone is extremely sensitive to the influence of light as well as changes in temperature and relative humidity – and not least the combination of these factors – was illustrated, when the stone 19. September 2005 was moved from Gram in Jutland to the Folkemuseum’s storage. Only a single day’s transport was enough to make the stone’s surface unstable, and it took the stone more than one year to regain a stable surface”.*

Discussion

- **From the day The Hyllingebjerg Stone was discovered in May 1983 and to the day it left the conservation facility at Gram on 19. September 2005, its surface appears to have been in a perfectly acceptable state, taking into account that it has been out in the open for most of the time, lying on the beach at waters edge, and that it has been moved several times during this 22 years time span.**
- **This raises the first question: Has the cleaning process used contributed to this sudden and unexpected decaying of the surface and its sensitivity to light?**
- **The second question is: Through which process does a granite block regain its stable surface?**
- **And the third question is: Is there a treatment, which can be applied to the surface, that will last for generations and that will bring back the stone into a state, which will permit exhibition in the public space under strictly controlled atmospheric and lighting conditions?**

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