

## The Anvil Rock near Winnsboro, SC

By Pelham Lyles

As I began writing this story, I found a website called [Strange Carolinas](#) which posted this commentary:

*When we visited Winnsboro, SC several years ago, one of our objectives was to find Anvil Rock. We did not succeed, but it wasn't for the lack of trying. We drove up and down Highway 34 [between Winnsboro and Ridgeway] multiple times, peering into the woods, looking for the giant rock. Nothing.*

*So what is Anvil Rock and why were we so eager to find it? It's not the South Carolina town with the same name. It's not the large rock close to the town of Anvil Rock that was the inspiration for the town's name. The Anvil Rock we were searching for was something a little more magical.*

*According to local legends, the Anvil Rock outside Winnsboro can hear you. Yes, it can hear you. Not only that, if you make too much noise, the rock spins three times on its pedestal. But despite our best efforts, we couldn't see a 10-foot-tall spinning rock through the trees, so we went home dejected and forgot about Anvil Rock until an anonymous source emailed us photos of Anvil Rock taken in 2013.*



*According to a historical map of Fairfield County, Anvil Rock is "10 feet high, length 12 feet, and 6 feet wide with an oval shaft about 3 feet by 6 feet of medium grained light gray granite." The Historical Marker Database states the land Anvil Rock can be found on was owned by Thomas Woodward in the 1700s, and he may have named his plantation after the rock. Woodward's home was burned by General Sherman.*

*But does the rock actually move? According to our source, it does not. Our source has seen the rock multiple times since the 1950s, and has even touched it, but did not experience any strange vibes or feelings from it. Growing up, our source's family would picnic at Anvil Rock. Back then, the rock was in plain view in a field. Trees have since grown up around the rock,*

making it nearly impossible to see from the highway.

Our source does not believe Anvil Rock is a natural occurrence, but rather hand carved by man. If so, it would have had to be carved prior to the 1700s if the historical information is correct. The photos are currently in the hands of an archaeologist who believes the rock is a natural phenomenon.

**Anvil Rock** is a familiar site to natives of Fairfield County, the tales of which many have probably wondered about. The geological oddity has been known historically since the mid-1700s when Thomas Woodward the Regulator built his second home place near the Anvil Rock. During the winter months of 1780-81 British forces were encamped in Winnsboro with Lord Cornwallis, and, as troops made forays in the surrounding countryside for provisions, Woodward's Anvil Rock home of was often mentioned as a roadside marker.

In the 1890s, a controversial congregation of people known as Latter Day Saints had come to Fairfield County and settled around Centerville near Ridgeway. An early Mormon leader Bishop David Branham was said to have preached from the top of the large rock to try to recruit members from the nearby communities.

When I was a child, there was an old tale that the huge rock would turn around on its axis if it heard a rooster crow three times or heard the honk of an automobile horn. My father delighted in pulling off

on the horn to awake the rock for us gullible disappointed that the Daddy always pointed the rock had just not

This curious local tradition deep roots in the old turning stones in England folks who came to undoubtedly brought

them to apply to the natural environment and phenomena.



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### **FOLKLORE ON FRIDAY - THE TURNING OF THE STONE**

Over the past few weeks, we have been examining curious legends about assorted ancient stones, in particular the strange tales that claim many of them possess the magical ability to-

rotate or turn themselves at certain times, usually at midnight or sunrise. So far we discovered that such fanciful stories of revolving rocks often don't appear to have any clear origin, and in many cases seem to be a gloss on to any existing folklore surrounding the site.

However a possible clue to the source of these stories perhaps lies in the fact that many of these stones have previously been assumed to be some surviving monuments created by pre-historic or pagan people, when in fact often they are actually natural features of the landscape or of more recent construction. A typical example is the Cuckoo Stone in Derbyshire [England], a large rock to be found just outside Matlock. This huge stone has often been thought to be a surviving megalith from ancient times, and its jagged, spiky shape is very reminiscent of other standing stones. However despite stories of a lost stone circle in the area, modern scholars tend to think it is just a natural boulder.

However its name has an interesting tale to relate. It is thought that 'Cuckoo' is a corruption of 'cock crow'. For like other ancient stones we have been discussing, this imposing rock is said to turn itself around if it hears a cock crow, presumably at dawn, and upon certain days of the year.

However which days of the year these are, no one is very clear about. And yet other tales add the claim that the Cuckoo Stone also revolves at midnight too. Again we have no clue as to why this stone should gyrate in this fashion other than a long standing association with being a possible site of ancient worship.

Not far away from the Cuckoo Stone, just outside Ashover, is another revolving rock, the Turning Stone. Much like the Cuckoo Stone, the Turning Stone is alleged to revolve at certain days of the year at cock crow. However once again the old local lore doesn't actually specify which days of the year this occurs on. Given there is only around 5 kilometers between the two stones, one can't help wondering if the legends have spread from one to the other. However we should note that both stones' names refer to their alleged usual rotating antics.

Now the exact origins of the Turning Stone are unclear - it could well be a natural formation but largely due to its proximity to what is very likely a man-made megalithic structure called



*Robin Hood's Mark, it has been assumed to be a relic of ancient man. An 18th century antiquarian, Hayman Rooke in an article entitled 'An Account of the Druidical Remains in Derbyshire. In a Letter to the Right Honourable Frederick Montague, FAS. By Hayman Rooke, Esq. FAS.' published in n Archaeologia v12 (1796), has this to say about Robin Hood's Mark -*

*This rocking stone, which, from its extraordinary position, evidently appears not only to have been the work of art, but to have been placed with great ingenuity; the two upper stones (a and b) have been shaped to fit exactly with the two upright stones (c and d) on which they rest; and so artfully contrived, that the lower stone (b) moves with the upper stone (a). It measures about 26 feet in circumference.*

*That this is a Druidical monument formed by art, cannot, I think, be denied; we are assured that the Druids were well skilled in the art of magic, by which the superstitious Britons were led implicitly to believe in the miracles performed by these rocking stones.*

*[And he goes on to mention the nearby Turning Stone –]*

*It stands on the edge of a hill on Ashover common; height nine feet. It was a very ancient practice among the Britons to make three turns round their sacred rocks and fires, according to the course of the sun. Martin, in his account of the Western isles, says, "that in the Isle of Barry there is one stone about seven feet high, and when the inhabitants come near it, they take a religious turn round according to the ancient Druid custom." Hence there is great reason to suppose, that the above-mentioned stone was a rock idol to whom the Druids offered up their devotional rites...However the striking thing here I think is Martin's phrase "a religious turn" to describe the rite of walking around the stone...given the phenomenal print runs of this book, I can't help but wonder if the common folkloric tale of a standing stone turning itself at a certain time or on a certain day of the year actually originates from Martin, with the notion that ancient Druids taking "a religious turn" around the local standing stone becoming quickly corrupted in oral retellings as the stone itself doing the turning. This would at least account for the fuzziness over which days of the year the Turning Stone and Cuckoo Stone are supposed to do their tricks.*

*However I suspect there may be another factor at play here than merely just a historical case of Chinese Whispers. For there is another similarly widespread tradition of stories about standing stones which perhaps provided the fertile ground for the turning misconception to take root in. And that is the legions of stories about stones that walk, which we will explore in the next Folklore on Friday.*

This interesting website is to be found at

<http://hypnogoria.blogspot.com/.../folklore-on-friday.html>