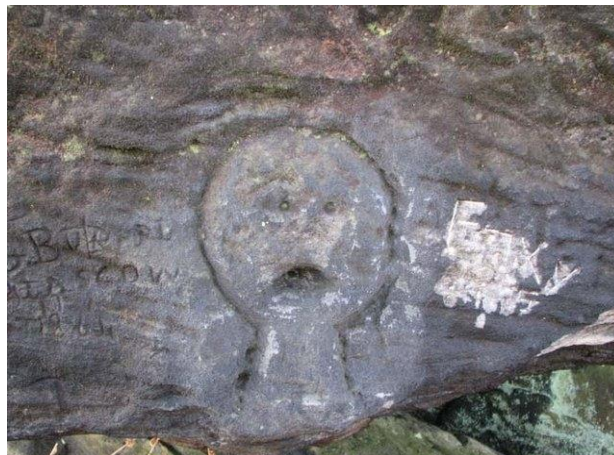


The Auld Wives' Lifts

1. About seven miles north of Glasgow lies the bleak and bare Craigmaddie Muir. For many years archaeologists and historians have been very interested in this area, not just because it has several cairns, a number of chambered tombs and that it has the remains of the castle that was the seat of the famous Galbraith family, but because it is home to a very unusual and remarkable feature: The Auld Wives' Lifts.
2. This stunning sight is made up of three large boulders, two of which lie side by side and, on top of these, lies an even bigger stone. The sheer size of these rocks (the boulder on top is approximately 18ft long, 11ft wide and 7ft deep) has always impressed its visitors and, in 1793, the historian David Ure wrote that the Lifts "strikes with surprise every beholder".
3. Indeed everyone who visits what Ure goes on to describe as "this venerable relic of the utmost antiquity" cannot fail to be thoroughly impressed by this monument and cannot help but think about how these three strange stones came to be standing in the middle of this lonely moor.
4. Although debate surrounds the origins of The Auld Wives' Lifts, they are also full of legends and there are many local tales about how the Lifts were formed. Perhaps the most popular is the story that three old witches decided to have a stone-throwing contest to discover who was the strongest. The first two witches threw their stones side by side and the third witch – who was the winner - tossed hers on top. Another tale, quite like the first one, is that the witches had a competition to see who could carry a stone in her apron the furthest. Obviously all three carried the rocks an equal distance but the one who placed her stone on the top was made the winner.
5. There is another popular local story surrounding the Lifts – but not their origins – which says that any woman who visits the site and does not crawl through the hole created in the middle of the three boulders, will die childless!
6. Leaving legends aside, some more believable stories exist as to how the Lifts came to be. It has been argued that they are a "cromlech" or prehistoric tomb which may have been built to mark and honour the dead of a battle that was fought a long time ago. Others have claimed that they were left there accidentally by the movement of melting ice during the Ice Age.

7. However The Auld Wives' Lifts were formed, it seems that they were in earlier times used as a place of worship by druids. Proof for this can be found in the Lifts' early Gaelic name "Cairt an Bhainnachd" (Cartenvennach) or "Stones of Blessing". This can be proved further when we consider that the name of the nearby village of Baldernock might come from the Gaelic "Baile Druidh Nach" or "Village of the Druids".
8. As Celtic holy men, druids were obviously concerned with worship and one of the main features of their religion was to celebrate and worship the head. Heads held a very important position in Celtic religion similar to that of the cross in Christianity and it was often carved out to keep evil spirits away and to bring good luck. As such, many Celtic objects can be found with heads on them and The Auld Wives' Lifts is no different.
9. Carved on the rocks are eight or nine heads that some say are only graffiti, the rough drawings of men who worked in a quarry that is close by. However, further research shows that these heads are very similar to others found at different Celtic sites throughout Britain. One of the heads cut into the north-east point is very similar to a carved head found at Ovingham in Northumbria, and the Yorkshire Museum in York has a number of heads in its collection, that are very similar indeed to one of the heads incised on the Lifts' east face.
10. Whether these heads are in fact examples of Celtic art might never be proved categorically, but undoubtedly The Auld Wives' Lifts are a fantastic, spectacular sight and well worth a visit. © Gordon Fisher



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The Auld Wives' Lifts

Paragraph 1

1. How does the writer's **word choice** show that Craigmaddie Muir is very barren?
2. The writer uses a technique called **listing** to show how many ancient ruins are on Craigmaddie Muir. What ruins are listed?

Paragraph 2

- 3 How does the writer's **word choice** show how impressive the Lifts are?
- 4 For what **two reasons** does the writer mention the historian David Ure?

Paragraph 3

- 5 What does the word "venerable" mean?
- 6 How does the writer's **word choice** show how old The Auld Wives' Lifts are?

Paragraph 4

- 7 What word suggests that people have argued about how The Auld Wives' Lifts came to be where they are?

Paragraphs 4 & 5

- 8 What three **legends** surround The Auld Wives' Lifts?
- 9 How does the writer create a **tone** of astonishment at the end of paragraph five?

Paragraph 6

- 10 Can you find out five facts about the **Ice Age**?

Paragraphs 8 & 9

11 Who were the **druids**? Find out five facts.

12 Comment on the **heads** that are carved on The Auld Wives' Lifts.

Paragraph 9

13 How can you work out the meaning of the word "**incised**"?

Paragraph 10

14 How does the writer's use of **adjectives** help create a **tone** of wonder?