



his open valley, through which the Scarlet Ribbon weaves to Kustan, is sacred to all Kubora. It is one of the least well known, but most impressive, wonders of Harn. Dozens of carefully, but mysteriously, arranged standing stones litter the landscape. Some are confined within ditch or bank enclosures; others form circles or rows or stand, lonely and alone, among the trees. Still others top, or circle, some of the many grass and scrub covered mounds raised across the valley.

The closest Harnic translation of *siolen* is 'shawl' and the Crones of Heneryne liken the monuments to the warm skins wrapped around the shoulders of the place of Kemlar's death. Few southern scholars have seen the Shawls. Those that have listened carefully to the accounts of traders and trappers believe that they are another example of Harn's ancient henge culture. In contrast the Kubora say that the first monument was a stone that erupted from the ground where the tears of Kemlar's wife fell at the moment of his death. Where it appeared the earth rippled away like water to form a pattern of circular ditches and banks. They go on to say that their ancestors emulated the pattern to celebrate important events. This is something that, on a smaller scale, today's tribes continue.

Some of the features decorating the landscape have names others are enigmatically nameless. All are important to the Kubora and outsiders trespass here at their peril.

The Rathiri scatter winter fodder to encourage a large herd of wisent to stay in the valley. While providing a convenient source of meat and skin it is their grazing, and the way it keeps many of the monuments free of the forest, that the Rathiri value. The local map shows an area close to the centre of the valley from where mounds, ditches, banks and standing stones spread out for at least a mile in all directions.

THE LOCAL AREA MAP

[1] The Scarlet Ribbon runs through the middle of *Kustan Siolen*, but almost all the stones of its roadway has been taken up and re-used. Some cobbles and flagstones are scattered among the monuments but most have been used to form the cairns beside the trail. Kubora consider it good luck to add to these when they pass; some bring stones from their home range to do so.

[2] A parallel pair of ditches run up the gentle southern slope from the Scarlet Ribbon before diverging and following the contours for nearly a mile in each direction. Whether they constitute an enclosure around, or an entry to, the monuments to the south is unknown.

[3] The 'Woman' is one of the largest single monuments; if it is a single monument. It sits on a gentle rise overlooking the Scarlet Ribbon and comprises two sinuous ditches winding around one another. Where the observer might expect to see another ditch, a series of stones is to be found. A further ring of eight standing stones [a] sits within one of the loops of ditch. It is screened from an easterly approach but is more obvious when approached from the direction of Kustan. A ninth stone sits within the ring: 'Kemlar's Stone'.

[4] Obscured by trees and scrub is the southern end of a simple enclosure called 'The Wall'. The name may relate to the row of low stones that run from a cluster at this, southern, end to a similar cluster at the northern end, nearly 800 paces off the north east edge of the map. It seems unlikely that

Kemlar's Stone

This is the stone from which, Kubora claim, Kemlar addressed the tribes. Standing on the stone he told them that the land would give them *strength of heart and sinew* in preparation for four great battles: against the land; among themselves; against the Urdu; and with the 'demon spirits'. Then he died and was buried at Kustan.

Today the stone is considered a way to measure of the strength of the tribes. The annual 'Stone Carry' challenges the mightiest Kuboran warriors to lift Kemlar's Stone and carry it as far along the trail to Kustan as possible. Kuboran lore says that when a warrior can carry the stone to the centre of the village their nation will have finally become strong enough to meet Kemlar's expectations.

The Scarlet Ribbon

Kustan Siolen sits within the range of the Rathiri Kubora, the guardians of Kustan and its barrows. There may have always been a trail between their settlement at Kus and the Shawls. That in turn may explain why the Corani legions chose the same approach for the road built to supply Caer Kustan.

Most civilised scholars attribute the endless rebellions of the Kubora to their barbarian nature and fierce pride. While that may be true the regular trespassing of outsiders at such a sacred place might explain much.

Then the Ribbon brought 'scholars' from Coranan intent on excavating the Kuboran soul. They pawed at the Shawls before turning their attention to the barrows surrounding Kustan and triggering the destruction of their foothold in Peran.

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the oval mound and partial ditch beside it are connected to 'The Wall', as similar mounds and unconnected ditches can be found in various places across the valley. They may be monuments that were started and never finished or their incomplete appearance may be misleading and they are part of some larger, as yet unseen, pattern.

[5] The 'Father' is an almost circular, steep-sided, pit 10 foot deep, that is more than 60 paces across. Time has softened the sharpness of its edge but it is clearly not natural. Within it sits a grass covered mound topped by a single stone. The 'Sons' **[b]** are the nine mounds close to its northern edge (three off the edge of the map). Superficially the 'Sons' resemble the barrows that litter the landscape around Kustan. They are, though, not as high and none of them display the patterns cut into the underlying chalk that many barrows boast. They may simply be spoil from the pit that constitutes the 'Father', but their regular distribution suggest not.

[6] Comprised of cobbles and flagstones from the Scarlet Ribbon this is among the largest 'recent' monuments; dating from after the 477 massacre of the Corani defenders of Caer Kustan. Its recent origins may explain why it has yet to earn a name. Unlike the many stones taken from the roadway and scattered across the ground to either side of the trail, or those piled into cairns, these shown signs of having been deliberately and quite carefully laid between two ditches. Whether the ditches were dug at the same time, or predate the laying of the stones is unclear. As with so many questions about the Shawls, the Kubora simply shrug their shoulders if asked.

[7] This feature also lacks a name and is almost entirely screened by trees and banks of bracken. It is quite compact but among the most complex monuments. It is made up of tightly arranged ditches surrounding narrow mounds of differing lengths and heights. Two large standing stones sit within the outer enclosure, one on level ground and the other on a conical mound that makes it the most likely part of the feature to be seen from the trail. The southern faces of both stones boast abstract carvings of unknown meaning. While they may once have been deeply incised into the stone, centuries, perhaps millennia, of erosion have blurred their finer aspects.

[8] 'The Tit' is the less than reverent name for the large conical mound that is easily visible from the Scarlet Ribbon. It is distinguished from all but one other mound (to the south of the mapped area) by its four foot high, steep sided, base. Beneath the disguising layers of grass and moss is a wall of well laid, unmortared, stonework of unknown origin.

[9] 'The Maze' is made up of alternating circular ditches and banks, the latter obstructing lines of sight across it. Breaks in the banks and ditches, guarded by pairs of standing stones, complicate the route to the centre unless the visitor is prepared to clamber over the banks and across the ditches. The centre is dominated by a gently rising mound on which sit eight stones, one of which has toppled, or been toppled. A large number of flagstones, some richly decorated by mosaics or carvings, were placed here after the sack of Caer Kustan, perhaps as a memorial to the Kuboran victory. Arlun sent a stone from every keep he captured to join them.

The southern face of the central mound had a tunnel dug into it during the Corani occupation. There are similar excavations across *Kustan Siolen* dating from that period but erosion has collapsed most and vegetation hidden the rest. The first 10 feet of this tunnel remains supported by the original timbers but whether it ever penetrated deeper is unknown.

The Kuboran Moot

As well as the 'Stone Carry', *Kustan Siolen* is the site of the annual 'Feast Hunt'.

Kubora visiting the Moot bring food with them but cooperate to bring down some of the wisent that graze the Valley of the Shawls. The animals provide meat for the feast that brings the Moot to an end. The warriors bringing down the largest beast are honoured and there is heavy betting on well-known hunters. Herin of the Sangic became a legend a generation ago when he brought down a charging Aurochs that had wandered from its usual range in the Rayesha foothills.

The 'Long Foot Race' starts from the centre of Kus and takes runners to a particular standing stone at the western edge of *Kustan Siolen*, and back again. They can choose any route, but most follow the Scarlet Ribbon; its level surface makes up for its circuitous route. Runners may impede opponents by any means that doesn't draw blood.

Outsiders are restricted to the path of the Ribbon and are not permitted to explore the Shawls. During the Moot the Zurnir Kubora post guards on the trail from Kustan to enforce this ruling. The tales told of the fate of trespassers are enough to deter most visitors from wandering through the valley. Only the brave or foolish would make the trek at other times of the year, when the Kubora do not welcome visitors.

Kemlar's Spirit

The Kubora believe that though Kemlar's spirit hunts in the Great Forest of the Kuboran afterlife, he remains attached to *Kustan Siolen*. This has given the Shawls a reputation as the best place to seek his advice on important decisions. Most often those are about the choice of a wife or ally, or the best hunting range. During the Moot Kubora can be seen wandering among the stones in search of enlightenment. Some report important visions that prompt the decision they had vacillated over.

Kuboran oral history highlights the most momentous decisions made among the Shawls. Arlun came here before urging the tribes to follow him into the south and this year Ryler the Southron may do likewise.

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