

'Missing' tombstones found, ASI struggles to locate graves

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Guwahati: Two important monuments, declared 'missing' in 2013 by a report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India, are making archaeologists at the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)'s Guwahati circle rack their brains. While the missing monuments have been 'found', lack of data and related problems have made ASI's task difficult.

Last year, archeologists had stumbled across beautifully-engraved tombstones belonging to the tombs of two 19th-century British officers — Lieutenant Cresswell and BJ Stow — who are believed to have served in Assam's Goalpara district before World War II. The archaeologists, however, are facing a tough time matching the stones with their tombs.

On a hilltop in Goalpara town, there lie around fifty nameless tombs, all belonging to British officers who died while serving the Raj. The tombs, made of brick and mortar, are in a dilapidated



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condition. While it is certain that the 'rediscovered' tombstones of Cresswell and Stow belong to two tombs on this hilltop, the exact ones have become hard to pinpoint.

"I took the initiative of locating the two tombstones. We found the stones but we can't determine which two tombs they belong to. There are many tombs on the hilltop and they are all in bad shape. The tombstones need to be measured and matched onto

the tombs," said Milan Kumar Chauley, superintending archaeologist, Guwahati circle, ASI.

Making the job more difficult is the lack of adequate information about Lieutenant Cresswell and BJ Stow. Even the decade in which they died is not clear. Neither is it known why their tombs are important enough to be listed as 'missing' monuments.

The search for more accurate historical data could be

undertaken once the tombstones are returned to ASI, said Chauley and added that this, too, poses a problem. While the tombstones are lying in the storeroom of an old house that once housed the Goalpara deputy commissioner's office, the hilltop where the tombs lie is yet to be demarcated and brought under possession of ASI.

"The revenue map is not available and demarcation has not been done. The land has to be returned to ASI for us to conduct a proper search," added Chauley.

Of the other monuments from the northeast that were deemed 'missing' in the CAG report, four have been 'found' in different parts of the state.

The oldest among them are the sculptures of the Chummery compound in Sonitpur district, built between the 8th and 10th centuries. These sculptures were reported 'missing' after the name of the location was changed from Chummery to Chitralekha Park. The Archeological Survey of India 'found' the sculptures in July last.