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STONEHENGE FACT SHEET A

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Stonehenge is a very famous prehistoric monument in the South of England, in Wiltshire. It was started in the Stone Age, around 3100-3000BC, and would initially have just been a large earthwork, somewhere for people to bury the dead. Remains found indicate that up to 150 people were buried there from as early as 3000BC. The stones that we see today were added later. During the Stone Age much of Southern England was woodland, but the ground around Stonehenge is chalky and may have



been a very open landscape. This could explain the chosen location for Stonehenge and the many other monuments and earthworks found in the area that date from the Neolithic Stone Age and Bronze Age. The earthwork comprised of a circular ditch dug with antler picks and a bank both inside and out. Bones of oxen and deer were found in the bottom of the ditch, along with flint tools. The central area was about 100m in diameter and there were two entrances. There were 56 pits dug around the circle (called the 'Aubrey holes' after John Aubrey, who was thought to have first identified them in the 17th century) which were 1m wide and 1m deep, with flat bottoms. The purpose of these holes is unclear.

The second stage, when stones were added to the existing earthworks, was thought by different people to have been started anytime from 2600BC to 2150 BC, although a team of archaeologists in 2013 used radiocarbon dating that suggests the site could actually date from 3000BC. The stones that were added at this point came all the way from the Preseli Hills in South Wales. They were called bluestones (because they appear to be slightly blue when broken or wet) and 82 of them, weighing up to 4 tonnes each, were transported an amazing 240 miles over land and water using rollers and rafts. This was way before roads, lorries and cargo ships!! (A less impressive theory is that they were carried on a glacier to much nearer the site). The stones were around 2 metres tall and over 1 m wide.

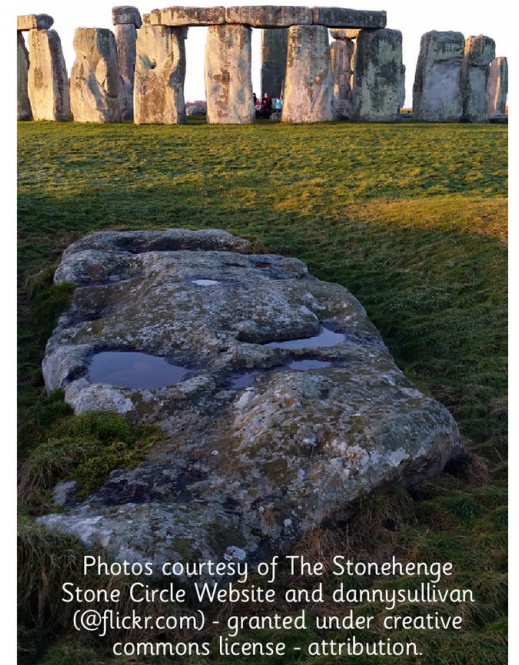
They were set up in a double circle pattern. During this second stage the North East entrance was widened and the largest stone, known as the Heel Stone added. The Avenue was started. This was an earth corridor dug to connect Stonehenge with the River Avon.

The third stage involved the addition of more stones around 2000 BC (although recent radiocarbon dating suggests it could have been between 2600 and 2400BC). These were called Sarsen stones and were probably sourced from the Marlborough Downs, about 25 miles from Stonehenge. The Sarsen stones were enormous, the upright stones being over 4 metres high, 2 metres wide and weighing up to 30 tonnes. An outer circle was created, with stones laid horizontally across the top. Just like the stone laid across the top of a doorway, these are called lintels.



Two vertical stones capped with a horizontal lintel is called a trilithon. Medieval gallows were built like this, which is why the name Stonehenge could be derived from the Old English words for 'stone' and 'hang'.

In the middle, more stones were arranged in a horseshoe shape. At the centre was a stone called the Altar Stone. During the final changes the original bluestones were rearranged in the horseshoe and circle shape that can be seen today.



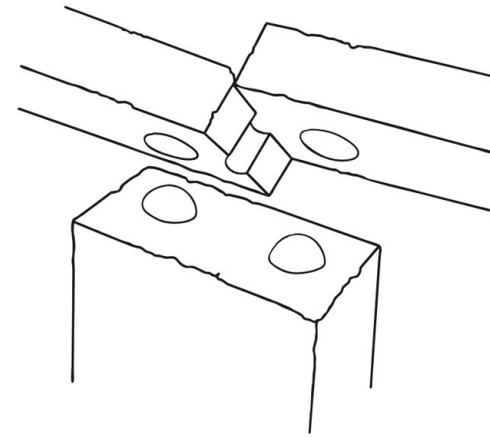
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STONEHENGE FACT SHEET A



The Slaughter Stone used to stand vertically, but fell over and has sunk partly into the ground. Unlike the others stones it is a type of sandstone which, after rain, can appear to have a reddish colour. This is because the iron in the stone reacts with the rainwater. It was called the Slaughter Stone by Victorians who assumed that the red in the stone was blood, and thought that Druids must have practised sacrifices on it.



The workmanship involved is impressive. Techniques usually seen in woodwork were used to fit the stones together. Tongue and groove joints were carved into the lintels to slide them together. Tenons, which are like round lumps, were left on the tops of the standing stones, and round holes called mortise holes carved into the bottom

of the horizontal stones so they would hold in position. It was basically like carving the enormous stones into lego bricks.

It is clear that the arrangement of the stones at Stonehenge was carefully planned. They are aligned in such a way that at midsummer you can watch the sun rise through the North East entrance. At midwinter, the sun sets in the gap between the two tallest trilithons.

It has been estimated that the three phases of construction could have taken more than thirty million hours of labour!!!!

Modern calculations show that it would have taken 500 men using leather ropes to pull one Sarsen stone, with an extra 100 men needed to lay the huge rollers in front of the sledge.

The stones would have been moved and raised using a combination of rollers, ropes, wooden levers, A frames and pulleys, and a massive amount of man power. It is thought that the lintels would be raised to the height of the vertical stones by building up wooden platforms.

Carvings can be seen on four of the vlarge Sarsen bricks, depicting axe-heads and daggers. These were perhaps symbols of power.

We don't know why Stonehenge was built. Suggestions include a special burial ground, a place of healing, an astronomical calendar, or a place of worship.



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