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STONEHENGE FACT SHEET B

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Stonehenge is a very famous prehistoric monument in the South of England, in Wiltshire. It was started 5000 years ago during the Stone Age, around 3100-3000BC. Up to 150 people were buried there when it was just an earthwork.

The stones that we see today were added later.

The earthwork was a circular ditch dug using antler picks with 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.

Different people think they could have held timber posts, or stones, or were part of a religious ceremony.

The third stage involved the addition of more stones about 500 years later. These were called Sarsen stones and came 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.



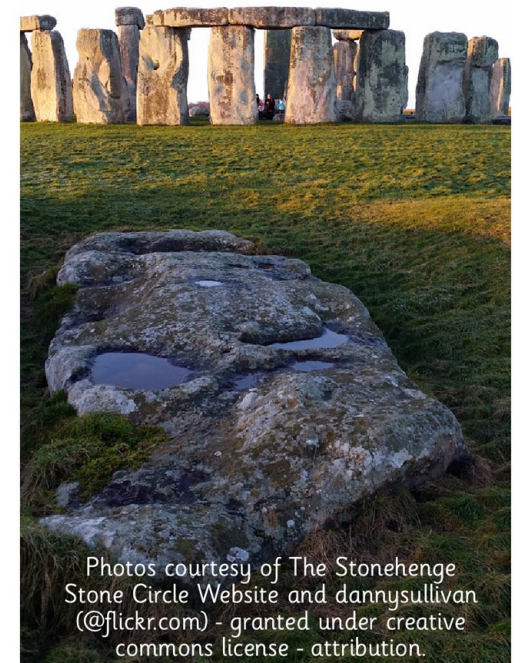
Medieval gallows were built with two vertical stones and a horizontal stone on top, which is why the name Stonehenge could be derived from the Old English words for 'stone' and 'hang'.

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.



It is unclear when the second stage started, it could have been between 4000 and 5000 years ago. 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. This was way before roads and lorries!! (Another theory is that they were brought much closer by a glacier). 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.



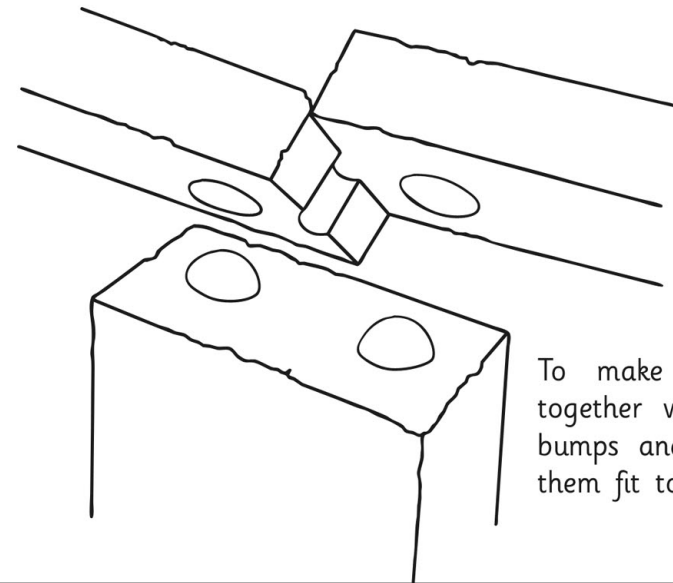
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The Slaughter Stone is a type of sandstone which, after rain, can appear to have a reddish colour. This is because the iron in the stone reacts with the rainwater. It was called the Slaughter Stone by Victorians who assumed that the red in the stone was blood, and thought that Druids must have practised sacrifices on it.



To make the stones fit together well, they carved bumps and holes to make them fit together, a bit like Lego!

The stones are positioned very carefully to align with sunrise at midsummer and sunset at midwinter at opposite ends of the circle.

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 horizontal stones would be raised to the height of the vertical stones by building up wooden platforms.

Carvings of axe-heads and daggers can be seen on some of the Sarsen stones. 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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