

Who Built Stonehenge?

By History.com, adapted by Newsela staff on 08.22.17

Word Count **649**

Level **830L**



Stonehenge is one of the most famous places in the world. How it got there and what it was used for remain mysteries. Photo by: Pixabay

Historians and archaeologists have wondered about Stonehenge for hundreds of years. It took builders an estimated 1,500 years to create. Located in southern England, it is made of roughly 100 giant stones placed in a circle. Nearly 1 million people visit Stonehenge every year.

Many modern scholars now agree that Stonehenge was once a grave. They still do not know, however, what other purposes it served or how people without modern technology built it. Also, scientists have traced the bluestones that make up its inner ring all the way to Wales, 200 miles from Stonehenge.

Archaeologists believe England's most famous ancient ruin was built in several stages. The earliest stage began 5,000 or more years ago. This was during a period known as the Neolithic, or Stone Age. It was before humans began using metal tools. First, the builders dug a big hole. Then, they likely put wooden posts in the ground.

Arranging the rings

Several hundred years later, Stonehenge's builders lifted about 80 bluestones into standing positions. There are 43 of these remaining today. The third stage of construction took place around 4,000 years ago. Sandstone slabs were arranged into an outer ring. About 50 sandstones are still there, but it may once have contained many more. Work continued at Stonehenge until about 3,600 years ago. The bluestones have been moved several times.

Not long after Stonehenge was complete, humans began using metal tools. This marked the start of an era called the Bronze Age.

Stonehenge's sandstones likely came from 25 miles north. They may even have already been scattered in the area when construction began. The largest weighs more than 40 tons and is 24 feet tall. The smaller bluestones have been traced all the way to Wales, some 200 miles away. These boulders weigh up to 4 tons. How did builders haul them so far?

Stonehenge's builders may have rolled the bluestones on tree trunks. They might have then transferred the boulders onto rafts and floated them along the coast and down a river. They also may have towed the stones with boats.

Stones moved by Merlin's magic

The 12th century English writer Geoffrey of Monmouth said Stonehenge is the work of the wizard Merlin. The story says Merlin used his magic to move the stones from Ireland.

Other early ideas said it was built by the Saxons, Danes, Romans, Greeks or Egyptians. In the 17th century, one scientist said Stonehenge was the work of people known as the Druids. Even today, people who identify as modern Druids gather at Stonehenge every summer. However, Stonehenge stood more than 1,000 years before these people lived there. It could not have been them.

Many now agree that several different groups helped to build Stonehenge over the years. Builders in the first stage were likely early farmers. Later, groups with advanced tools worked on it. Many scientists think they were natives descended from the original builders.

A place of healing

Many believe Stonehenge was used as a grave, at least for part of its history. Most scholars believe it served other purposes as well.

In the 1960s, a scientist suggested that the cluster of giant stones worked as a calendar. Critics say that Stonehenge's builders probably lacked the knowledge necessary to make this work, though. More recently, signs of illness and injury were found in the human remains unearthed at Stonehenge. This led a group of British scientists to think that it was considered a place of healing. They may have thought the bluestones had special powers.

Stonehenge draws more than 800,000 tourists a year. It is one of the most famous places in the world. Stonehenge has been repaired several times over the years. Some of its boulders have been set in concrete to keep them from falling. Meanwhile, the attention it gets has turned up other important sites nearby, including other mystery stone circles.

Quiz

1 Read the paragraph from the section "Stones moved by Merlin's magic."

Many now agree that several different groups helped to build Stonehenge over the years. Builders in the first stage were likely early farmers. Later, groups with advanced tools worked on it. Many scientists think they were natives descended from the original builders.

What is the MOST accurate explanation of this paragraph?

- (A) It is likely that many different groups of people built Stonehenge over a long period of time. The first people did not have many tools, but later groups had more advanced ways to build.
- (B) Stonehenge's construction was definitely done by many different groups over time. The first group of people were farmers and the later groups had different jobs and probably did not know the farmers.
- (C) It is likely that Stonehenge was built by many people using many different kinds of tools. Farmers used farming equipment, and later groups used whatever tools they had.
- (D) Stonehenge's construction was done by many different groups in many different stages. Each group had their own reasons to build Stonehenge and so had to use different tools.

2 Read the section "Arranging the rings."

Which sentence from the section explains WHY builders needed to use different methods to transport the bluestones?

- (A) Several hundred years later, Stonehenge's builders lifted about 80 bluestones into standing positions.
- (B) The bluestones have been moved several times.
- (C) The smaller bluestones have been traced all the way to Wales, some 200 miles away.
- (D) Stonehenge's builders may have rolled the bluestones on tree trunks.

3 Read the introduction [paragraphs 1-3] and the final section, "A place of healing."

What is the connection between these two sections?

- (A) The introduction gives important information about Stonehenge, and the final section explains why that information is no longer true.
- (B) The introduction details important historical facts about Stonehenge, and the final section lists Stonehenge's historical purposes.
- (C) The introduction explains what the Stone Age is and why it is important, and the final section contrasts historical and modern Stonehenge.
- (D) The introduction provides historical information about Stonehenge, and the final section explains Stonehenge's modern importance.

4 How does the introduction [paragraphs 1-3] introduce the topic of Stonehenge?

- (A) by discussing the importance of Stonehenge
- (B) by suggesting that much about Stonehenge is still a mystery
- (C) by providing evidence to explain why Stonehenge was built
- (D) by stating that hundreds of artifacts have been found at Stonehenge