

Location & Access: Stonehenge is located in the county of Wiltshire, 2 miles to the west of the town of Amesbury. It can be found at grid reference SU 123 422 (Sat Nav postcode SP4 7DE). Stonehenge is directly accessible by road, via the A303 and then turning off the A360 at Airman's Corner. Parking is available on site, free to English Heritage members and Stonehenge ticket holders. The nearest train station is at Salisbury (9.5 miles away), and the dedicated Stonehenge Tour Bus can be taken from here (and from the coach station) directly to the site. Leave plenty of time to get to Stonehenge at peak summer weekends, when roads into the West Country can be very busy.



Key Geography: World Heritage site, Neolithic archaeology, international tourist 'honey pot', current planning issue of new road scheme.

Description: This monument forms the central and best-known part of the extensive Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site, and is probably the best-known prehistoric site in all of Europe. A modern visitor centre provides a number of additional attractions such as a cluster of recreated Neolithic houses to explore, a 360 degree audio-visual presentation, a museum and also the obligatory shop and café. Audio-visual guides are available for hire in a range of different languages.

The highlight of this site is obviously the stone circle itself. This can be reached using a shuttle bus service from the visitor centre, which transports people directly to the monument in just a 10 minute journey. The bus does stop along the route at the Fargo Plantation (about halfway to the stones), so that it is also possible to walk part of the way. However, it is a much better experience to walk the 20 minutes or so along a footpath and watch the stones gradually come into view as you make your approach. Once you have reached your destination, a walk around the Stone Circle is the centrepiece of the visit to Stonehenge.

Stonehenge is a unique prehistoric monument, and there are many different ideas about who built it, when it was built, and why. Theories about its origin and purpose include a coronation place for Danish kings, a Druid temple, an astronomical computer for predicting eclipses and solar events, a place where ancestors were worshipped, and a cult centre for healing. Today, it is generally accepted that Stonehenge is a prehistoric temple aligned with the movements of the sun. Archaeologists believe it was constructed from 3000 BC to 2000 BC. The surrounding circular earth bank and ditch have been dated to about 3100 BC, and radiocarbon dating suggests that the first bluestones were raised between 2400 and 2200 BC.

Stonehenge consists of a ring of standing stones, with each stone measuring around 13 feet (4.0 m) *(continued overleaf)*

Curiosity Questions:

- # # There is a series of 56 pits within the ring of the ditch and bank at Stonehenge known as the Aubrey Holes. What were they used for?
- # The smaller bluestones at Stonehenge came from the Preseli Hills in south west Wales. How were they transported here?
- # What actually is a 'henge'?

Further information:

<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/stonehenge>
www.stonehenge.co.uk

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high, seven feet (2.1 m) wide and weighing around 25 tons. Two types of stone are used at Stonehenge – the larger sarsens and the smaller ‘bluestones’. Somewhere around 2500 BC, the sarsens were erected in two concentric arrangements – an inner horseshoe and an outer circle. About 200 or 300 years later, the bluestones were then set up between them - originally forming a circle and inner oval, but later altered to form a horseshoe.

Probably at the same time that the stones were being set up in the centre of the monument, the sarsens close to the entrance were raised, together with the four ‘station stones’ on the periphery.



Stonehenge is a masterpiece of engineering, and building it would have taken huge effort from hundreds of well-organised people using only simple tools and technologies. Despite this, the stones were dressed using sophisticated techniques, and were erected using precise interlocking joints – unseen at any other prehistoric monuments. Stonehenge is actually the only surviving lintelled stone circle in the world, and the stones themselves were brought from very long distances – the smaller bluestones (dolerites, rhyolites and volcanic tuffs alien to the chalk geology of the local area) from the Preseli Hills, over 150 miles away in south west Wales, and the larger sarsen stones probably from the Marlborough Downs, 19 miles to the north.

Stonehenge contains more than 350 burial mounds and major prehistoric monuments such as the Stonehenge Avenue, the Cursus, Woodhenge and Durrington Walls. The landscape here is a vast source of information about the ceremonial and funeral practices of Neolithic and Bronze Age people – the earliest stage of the monument is one of the largest cremations cemeteries known in Neolithic Britain.

There is a current proposal to construct a tunnel for the A303 road, to remove much of the existing traffic from the World Heritage site. However, this has caused great controversy amongst interested groups.



Tickets

Adult £19 (concession £17.10)

Children £11.40

Family (2+3) £49.40

Answers to Curiosity Questions:

There is a series of 56 pits within the ring of the ditch and bank at Stonehenge known as the Aubrey Holes. What were they used for? (*They probably held wooden or stone pillars, and cremations were placed within and around them*).

The smaller bluestones at Stonehenge came from the Preseli Hills in south west Wales. How were they transported to Stonehenge? (*It is not really known! One theory is that a glacier was responsible, another suggests they were moved by man*).

What actually is a ‘henge’? (*A Neolithic earthwork enclosure - usually circular – defined by a bank with a ditch inside*).

