

# Free research paper on stonehenge in the neolithic era

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The Neolithic Age, also known as the New Stone Age, was considered as a period when human technology began to develop, including the time when farming became a popular way of living for early inhabitants. It began with the domestication of animals such as sheep, dogs, cattle, pig, and goats, and farming of crops such as wheat, spelt, and millet. In time, the New Stone Age saw the use of pottery in most chores and activities that inhabitants employed. They were skilled in the use of stone tools and implements such as sickle blades, grinding stones, beads, bone implements, and projectile points. In Europe, houses were built from wattle and daub, tombs erected for the dead, and different kinds of henges and long barrows were constructed. Europe is also home to the Stonehenge, located in Britain at Salisbury Plain. The place is known for long and round barrows and attracts viewers from all over the world. As the Stonehenge is the most prominent prehistoric structure in Europe, understanding what it is, including the reasons why, when, how, and for whom it was built is important in order to have a better appreciation of the Stonehenge during the Neolithic era.

A Stonehenge is a prehistoric collection of huge slabs of erect stones made of Sarsen and Bluestones, forming an outer and inner ring arrangement. The Bluestones have also been arranged in a horseshoe-like fashion. The Stonehenge is not the only stone circles in the world, but what makes it unique is that the Sarsen stones had lintels or horizontal support of stones that join each erect slab of stone, to form a connected circle (Wilde). It is also called a megalithic monument, which means large stone slabs (Bradshaw Foundation). During the Neolithic era, construction of stone structures was the most prominent way of self-expression of the people.

Constructed in open grassland, the Stonehenge can be seen even from afar. However, viewing is restricted considering that the beauty and mystery is lost amidst the presence of all other tourists who want a closer view of the structure. Thus, visitors are only allowed up to a certain point as they are no longer allowed to get up close the structure.

Considering the massiveness of the structure, construction of the Stonehenge took about 1500 years to complete, spanning several groups of builders to finish the construction. Over the years, some of the stones were lost, defaced, decayed, and chipped off by builders, by natural means, or the tourists themselves. Studies reveal that construction and completion of the Stonehenge was between 3100 and 2800 BC, using unsophisticated implements such as picks made of deer antlers.

The initial construction of the Stonehenge happened around 3100 BC and spearheaded by the Windmill Hill people. They built a henge, with a ditch about 6-feet deep and 56 holes, called Aubrey holes (after John Aubrey who rediscovered the holes), which were one meter deep and wide (Wilde). This period came to be known as the Windmill Hill culture because some of the stones originated from Windmill Hill and were known for their earthworks on Windmill Hill. This first group built the “ large circular furrows and mounds, [and] had collective burials in large stone-encased tombs” (Bradshaw Foundation). This first group of builders is considered as “ one of the first semi-nomadic hunting and gathering groups with an agricultural economy, maintaining a strong reverence for circles and symmetry” (Bradshaw Foundation).

The second part of the construction was built by the Beaker people, who

were famous for their pottery drinking cups. This period saw the addition of 80 bluestone megaliths, which came from the Welsh Preseli Mountains. They were called “blue stones” because the megaliths appeared blue when wet. The stones were arranged in circular fashion and were “used to rebuild the wooden henge” (Wilde). Studies reveal that the Beaker people originated from Spain, migrated northwards, and colonized the north-west group. They were called the Beaker people because they were known to “bury beakers, or pottery drinking cups, with their dead” (Bradshaw Foundation).

The third and final construction phase occurred somewhere around 2300 BC, or the early Bronze Age, where the remaining megaliths were erected as a new stone circle inside the existing bluestone circles. The stones used during this period were called Sarsen stones, which were joined atop by lintels to make the structure sturdier. The people known to have worked on the structures during this time were the Wessex people, who “were among the most advanced cultures outside the Mediterranean during this period” (Bradshaw Foundation), as they were said to be adept and efficient traders.

There have been many theories that claim to explain the reason for the Stonehenge’s construction. One theory says the Stonehenge was deliberately aligned to the direction where the moon rises, thus, the entrance causeway was constructed in the northeast. This seems to be collaborated upon by the second phase of construction when posts were lined up in the entranceway to give the viewer a more precise observation deck of the astrological alignment (Bradshaw Foundation).

Another theory says it could have been built as a place of healing considering that there were many signs of burials in the area (“

Stonehenge”), or that it could be a place where the builders worshipped their ancestors, which gives credence to other beliefs that the place served as a ritual place for the early inhabitants. This is also collaborated upon by the erection of the Heel Stone nearby (Bradshaw Foundation).

Yet another belief espouses that the purpose of the Stonehenge had something to do with the direction of the sunrise on the solstice, or the longest day of the year. It appears that this belief stuck as the most credible reason for the construction because from the third stage of its building up to contemporary times, opening of the Stonehenge for the public coincides on the morning of the summer solstice (Bradshaw Foundation).

Because there is no one definite answer as to why the Britons continued to develop and construct the place, historians and scholars agree that it is a place of great importance. However, they also agree that Stonehenge was used for other purposes as well, such as “ a ceremonial site, a religious pilgrimage destination, a final resting place for royalty or a memorial erected to honor and perhaps spiritually connect with distant ancestors” (“ Stonehenge”). More than the theories that developed, one thing that comes out as blatantly obvious is how the Stonehenge serves like a clock that told when summer solstice begins, including the occurrence of the sun and lunar eclipses. This is collaborated upon by Gerald Hawkins, who, in the 1960s, “ suggested that the cluster of megalithic stones operated as an astronomical calendar, with different points corresponding to astrological phenomena such as solstices, equinoxes and eclipses (“ Stonehenge”).

The mystery that surrounds the Stonehenge has added to the beauty of the structure. As such, the Stonehenge continues to attract almost a million

tourists a year. These visitors go for various reasons, including religious reasons or simply to appreciate the beauty of the Stonehenge (Wilde). Currently, the Stonehenge is included in UNESCO's register of World Heritage sites. Because of this, efforts to preserve the site through road improvements and constructions of tunnels are being considered to ensure that tourists appreciate the site from a certain distance only, instead of allowing them to go near the actual structure. As the Stonehenge has undergone several renovations already, some of the original megaliths have already been set in concrete to prevent it from caving in. Right now, the Stonehenge is owned by the British and managed by the English Heritage for the government.

More than being a tourist attraction, the Stonehenge represents how men in ancient times have depended mainly on themselves and whatever tools were available then to come up with their humongous contribution to society, culture, and civilization. Not only was the Stonehenge used as a determiner of seasons, but also served as a place for burials, religious ceremonies, astrological predictions, and possibly, trade as well. In addition, as two eras intertwined with one nearing its end (Neolithic era) and the other beginning (Bronze age), the Stonehenge is a product of powerful generations where one began with the use of wood and deer antlers, which were later on eased out and gave way to metal implements. As a structure itself, the Stonehenge will always represent the richness of civilizations past.

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