

Stonehenge2 essay



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Stonehenge was a stone structure established a long time ago by civilizations before the Druid age. More than 4,000 years ago, the people of the Neolithic period supposedly decided to build a massive monument using earth, timber and eventually, stones. They placed it high on Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire, England about 137 kilometres southwest of London. The purpose to build Stonehenge still remains a mystery. Stonehenge could have been a temple, an astronomical calendar, or a guide to the heavens. Stonehenge acts as a prehistoric timepiece, allowing us to speculate on what it would have been like during the Neolithic Period, and who could have built this megalithic wonder.

Over 25 generations, 3 phases of construction took place. Most of it was the result of human muscle and a system of ropes and wooden levers used to transport the massive stones. The builder of the monument is still unknown. In the seventeenth century, an English antiquarian, John Aubrey, implicated the Druids, a religious group known to worship at modern day Stonehenge. There may not be just one answer. In the book, "Beyond Stonehenge", author and modern-day astronomer Gerald Hawkins suggests that three groups of people took part in the construction. The first may have been the secondary Neolithic people, just after 3000 BC. The second phase would have been the "Beaker People", named after their beaker-shaped drinking cups. The last phase, mainly stonework, may have been carried out by Wessex people. Regardless of who built the stone monument, the design and construction involved thousands of hard workers who would have needed to believe in the project. "These people would need to have been supported and the whole venture would have needed to have been thought

worthwhile”(Andrew Lawson 106.) Also, “ So, you either have somebody who is fairly dictatorial and is capable of forcing people into doing it or it’s somebody of great influence who uses some other power of suggestion to control people”(Andrew Lawson 83.)

Construction of Stonehenge took close to 2, 000 years. To drag the sarsen stones, weighing up to 45 tons, or the weight of six elephants, from Marlborough Downs 30 kilometers to the south of Stonehenge would have been quite a accomplishment. The bluestones, in contrast, were about four tons but are believed to have come from a much farther place like the Preseli Mountains nearly 385 kilometres away from Stonehenge. Popular theory suggests the stones were rolled to the Welsh shore, carried on raft around the coast and into the River Avon, at Bristol. Other prehistorians do not believe they were carried that far. These bluestones came from the same Preseli Mountains, but glaciation brought the bluestones to the area surrounding Stonehenge during the last glacier period in history, the period was called the Plyoscene period, it was 650, 000 years ago. Out of the other 1, 300 stone circle in Britain, Ireland and Brittany, France, most are made of local stone brought no more than seven or eight kilometers. If humans were to have carried these stones all the way from these mountains, they would have only taken the good stones. The bluestones found on Stonehenge are a mix of good, bad, and medium rock. Good bluestones were found in the vicinity of Stonehenge thousands of years before the monument was constructed; suggesting the rock was already in the area. “ All these things add up together to suggest it was not human beings but a glacier that brought them there”(Aubrey Baul 78.)

Stonehenge bears witness to movements in the heavens, observing the rhythm of the moon and, more noticeably, the sun. The first builders, who may have just started farming the near land, might have needed to know when the seasons were about to change. At a later phase in Stonehenge's development, it may have been used as some sort of temple, or it could have been an astronomer's tool, used to judge the movements in the heavens. "The fact that it was built over a long period of time makes it difficult to know if it maintained the same function over the time period or not" (Witcombe 34.) But this does not mean there aren't a number of theories that set out to explain Stonehenge's purpose. Eighteenth century British antiquarian, William Stukeley, was one of the first people to report seeing the event of the sunrise on a special day in June. This led him to believe that Stonehenge was a temple, possibly an ancient cult center for the Druids. Although this theory is not as popular now, the religious aspect attributed to Stonehenge has influenced how it has come to be understood, even today. Others, like 20th century British astronomer, Sir Norman Lockyer, also saw Stonehenge as a temple, but a temple to the sun. For him, its significance lay in celebrations of ancient Celtic festivals. But to see Stonehenge as a temple, or retaining a religious quality may just be an assumption. It is a structure that clearly does not resemble a house or hall or anything else secular, which could indicate that it is sacred, according to Witcombe." These people may have wanted to be buried close to Stonehenge, which could reinforce a spiritual aspect, a concern for life after death" (Hawkins 68.)

In the middle of the 20th century, a new theory was born, one that suggests that Stonehenge could have been used as an astronomical calendar, marking lunar and solar alignments. There are four stones, called “ Station Stones” that may have played an astronomical role. These were placed in a rectangle around the main monument, within the ditch and bank that surrounds the circle of stones. These are believed to point out the moonrise, moonset, sunrise and sunset.

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