

# Speculations surrounding the meaning of the megaliths grouped in stonehenge

[History](#)



Despite much educated speculation and evidence towards the meaning of Stonehenge during Neolithic times, the true purpose of this arrangement of megaliths, or massive stones still remains a mystery to everyone.

Stonehenge is a prehistoric ruin located on the Salisbury plain in Wiltshire, UK. It consists of 17 colossal stones, called Sarsens set vertically in an outer circle, some as heavy as fifty pounds, with smaller bluestones making an inner circle (Stonehenge). Archeologists have conducted numerous excavations both at Stonehenge and another prehistoric site called Durrington Walls, hoping to discover connections between the two sites, but are still not entirely certain as to what the ancient Britons used this majestic monument for. We know nothing about Stonehenge from the writings of people during its time, for the builders did not use their own writing as far as we know (Dan). No Roman historians have had any records mentioning Stonehenge even though their legions traversed roads nearby. William The Conqueror's Domesday Book does not allude to Stonehenge's existence either. It seems like the knowledge of Stonehenge has fallen into obscurity over the years (Balfour-Preface).

Stonehenge gets nearly 750, 000 visitors annually (EBSCO) and the biggest question that arises is: " What did the early people of what is now Great Britain use this henge for?" and archeologists, despite their uncertainty of what the true purpose of Stonehenge is, have numerous theories as to what the answer to this ever present question is. At Stonehenge, there is evidence of 52 cremations, which suggests to archeologists that it may have been a cemetery or a place to honor the dead (Alexander).

At the center of Stonehenge are its largest stones. There are five pairs of vertically oriented Sarsens capped by horizontal lintels called the “Trilithons” that exist in the center of Stonehenge in a horseshoe shape (Falk). This horseshoe’s axis of symmetry lies along a southwest-northeast line that aligns perfectly with the northeastern rise of the sun on the Summer Solstice (Falk). This leads archeologists to believe that the Builders of Stonehenge were sun worshipers where the monument itself was a sun temple (Encyclopedia Britannica). Perhaps the most common theory of Stonehenge’s use is that the Ancient Britons believed that the Bluestones, the fabled vertical rocks that made up the inner circle of Stonehenge, had magical powers, due to the fact that when they become wet, they sparkle magically. Archeologists believe that sick people may have traveled from afar to come and bathe near the rocks to heal themselves (Jones). Evidence that has strongly reinforced this theory was found with the discovery of the Amesbury Archer. In 2002, about 2.5 miles away from Stonehenge, the remains of a 35 to 45-year-old man whose leg had been severely injured were unearthed. After doing a tooth analysis, the archer was said to have come from the Swiss Alps. This discovery was the first evidence that proved people during the Stonehenge Era migrated, and this man was probably coming to heal himself at Stonehenge (Alexander).

Another theory that archaeologists have arrived at has to do with a series of holes outside the outer circle of Sarsens. These 56 little holes, dubbed Aubrey Holes after John Aubrey, dug by the Builders of Stonehenge were said to have been used to keep track of the lunar calendar as well as the seasons (Hawkins P. 140).

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The giant stones that make up Stonehenge had to have come from somewhere, and archeologists believe that the builders of Stonehenge brought in the legendary Bluestones from the Preseli Mountains of Southwestern Wales and the larger Sarsens, some weighing in at almost 50 tons, from the Marlborough Downs. The Marlborough Downs is only 20 miles north of Stonehenge while the Preseli Mountains were nearly 250 miles away (Hamlin). Much like the Ancient Egyptians with the construction of the Great Pyramids of Giza, the ancient peoples of Stonehenge probably put the Bluestones on greased sleds and/or used logs to roll them along. It is certain, though, that, according to Timothy Darvill, a professor of archeology at Bournemouth University, the Neolithic man “ had transportation sorted out”(Alexander).

The shortest route to Stonehenge from the Preseli Mountains was probably the one taken by the Builders of Stonehenge during the transportation of the Bluestones. Traveling southeast down the coast of the Bristol Channel, and taken down the Severn Estuary, the Bluestones were transported by boat (Alexander).

Another theory is that the Neolithic man did not actually transport the Bluestones from 240 miles away, but rather the stones from the Preseli Mountains were deposited by a glacier not more than 6 miles away from Stonehenge. Some archaeologists insist that the waters in the Bristol Channel were much too treacherous to traverse without proper knowledge of the currents (Burl).

The construction of Stonehenge was a monumental feat, and it was not built all at once, rather Neolithic man built it in phases (Encyclopedia Britannica). By definition, a henge is “ a prehistoric monument consisting of a circle of stone or wooden uprights” and the circle is exactly what the primitive Neolithic man ended up making first during the Middle Neolithic period at around 3000 BCE. An earthwork enclosure some 375 feet across was created and the Aubrey holes were dug around the perimeter of the circle also in the first stage. Stonehenge was probably used as a cemetery in these early stages (Alexander). Slightly before 2500 BCE during the Late Neolithic period timber posts were put up in linear patterns, as an early shrine, later to be replaced with large stones. The Bluestones were predicted to have been brought in by 2500 BCE (Alexander). Before the early Bronze Age, Stonehenge was given the shape that we know it by today when the colossal Sarsen stones were brought in. A 16 foot high outer circle was formed with a horseshoe shape in the middle. The Sarsens were topped with horizontally oriented jointed “ lintels” that helped keep the vertical Sarsens together (Alexander). During the Early Bronze Age around 2000 BCE, the Blue stones that had been taken away when the Sarsens were put in, were brought back in to form yet another circle in between the horseshoe and the outer Sarsen circle (Alexander).

There are multiple reasons behind why Stonehenge is so weathered compared to what archaeologists believed it would have looked like in perfect condition. The stones were subjected to weathering over thousands of years (Alexander), and some humans may have carried off the stones. Some scientists even lean towards the possible explanation that Stonehenge

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was, in fact, never completed. It could be that some of the pieces that are missing weren't ever there (Alexander).

The mystery of Stonehenge is still unfolding, even within the last decade. There is more archaeological evidence to be had and more excavating to be done before we truly understand the cryptic secrets of Stonehenge. Within the inner circle of Stonehenge, there probably exists more clues about Stonehenge's misty history that we know so little about.