

# Stonehenge analysis essay



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Stonehenge is a symbol of mystery, endurance and strength according to Geoffrey Ashe in his Britannia Article ??? Stonehenge???. It is a place that provokes questions. Nowadays a busy motorway and other main roads pass very near and it is in view for a long distance in the flat landscape of Salisbury plain.

It seems to invite us to question. Why is it there? What is it for? Who built it? How did they get those huge stones here? The original purpose has long been forgotten, but there have been many speculations ??? a temple, an astrological observatory, a burial site and so on. In all this uncertainty one thing is certain ??? it was a very important place to its builders. It must have been to justify the effort involved. What we see today is of course only a ruin.

Of the original 30 standing stones only 17 remain. Many of the original stones fell long ago. Some were removed by our ancestors, and used them for their own purposes as they have done at the much larger henge in nearby Avebury, and some of the smaller blue stones, so called from their original coloring when first broken from their mountain, show signs of damage. The larger stones still show their pre-historic carved marks, but naturally these are fainter than they once were.

How was it built? It might seem to the modern mind that it would be almost impossible to create such a construction without modern earth movers, cranes, lorries and so on. The construction was an enormous engineering feat and required communal and well organised labor and a big commitment both in time and effort. It seems likely that this began about 5,000 years

ago, about 3, 000 years after the site was first cleared in the forest that once grew there and an avenue made to reach the local river at Amesbury.

Postholes from that time, that possibly held 'totem' poles, have been found.

These were aligned west - east and could have acted as means of marking the equinox. In 7460 BC it is known that the whole of Britain was flooded waters due to the impact of a comet .

A 1000 years later these two posts were replaced by two more poles only 350 meters away from the first ones , and in the same alignment. It is thought that a ditch was dug with such tools as deer antlers ??? this was before the Iron Age or even the use of bronze tools. The chalk that lies close to the surface of the plain was loosened with picks made from antlers and moved with shovels made from the shoulder blades of cattle. Recent research has proved that tools such as these were perfectly able to do this. The embankment and ditch were made around 3020BC.

The ditch was built outside the bank, not the usual format for a henge. The ditch or moat was 97 meters in diameter: 6 meters wide and varied between 1. 3 to 2. 1 meters in depth..

Two parallel entry stones on the north east of the circle were aligned to the summer solstice sunrise. Just inside the bank a circle of 56 shallow holes known as the 'Aubrey holes', were dug and almost immediately filled in. These were perhaps designed to hold sighting poles that were used to predict eclipses. It seems to the archeologists that the site was in regular use until about 2600 BC when it was abandoned for almost 500 hundred years. The large Sarsen Stones, made for local Marlborough stone, are the most

obvious parts of the henge, but it is the smaller blue stones that are the most mysterious. If we don't know why the place was built, we know even less why these particular stones were chosen.

They do teach us at least that people were not as isolated as we might suppose, nor as unskilled or unknowledgeable. In about 2,000 B.C. a small circle of blue stones was set up, though the work was abandoned for some reason before the completion of the circle. These are not local stones, but have traveled some 240 miles or 386 kilometers from the hills of south Wales.

We call them the smaller stones, but they weigh up to 4 tons each and about 80 were used. One theory is that they were taken on rafts by sea from Milford Haven in South Wales to a point in Somerset, from where they would have been hauled overland, as well as using the network of rivers in the area, the final haul being a comparatively short two miles, but even that would have required tremendous combined effort and expertise. The larger stones are 7 feet tall and weigh some 50 tons each. The outside surfaces of all these stones were smoothed by the beating of hammers with hammers.

Within an outer large ring was erected a horseshoe shaped construction using 10 uprights. 8 of these stones are still in situ. The horseshoe has an open end directly pointing towards the stone known as the slaughter or altar stone and down the older avenue and so are aligned with the summer solstice. The large stones came a short distance of some 20 miles from the north, but this would have included the slope of Redhorn Hill. Ergonomic experts estimate that it would have taken up to 600 men to overcome this

difficulty. Once on site, the stones were prepared to accommodate the stone lintels that would fit along their top surfaces.

After this they were then dragged until the ends were over the opening of the holes that had been pre-prepared for them. Huge levers were inserted under the stones and they would have been elevated until gravity took over and the stones slid into the holes. At this point, the stones would not have been fully upright. Ropes, perhaps made from hide, were attached to the tops and teams of men then pulled from the other side until the stones were vertical.

The stones were then secured by filling the base holes with small, round packing stones. After the lintels were lowered into place and secured vertically by using mortice and tenon joints and were held horizontally by tongue and groove joints. Work seems to have been completed by 1500 B. C. If you ask ??? Who built Stonehenge? Many people would say ??? It was the druids???, a seemingly mistaken idea first put forward about 300 years ago by John Aubrey, the discovery of the shallow Aubrey holes The druids worshipped in woods and forests and so it can be assumed that they had no need of a massive stone construction. Roman writers, including Julius Caesar, told of a Celtic priesthood that flourished at the time of the first Roman invasion in 55BC.

The site was already ancient then and may have been already a ruin. The truth is that we still don't really know who built it and why. The most likely idea is that it was begun by people of the late Neolithic age and then later continued by new migrants into the area, the people known as the

Beaker folk, named for the pottery they made. They may have migrated from mainland Europe, though some historians are doubtful of this and prefer to think that they were local people who tried new methods. Legend gives us another story in that there is a tale of how Merlin brought the stones from Ireland by magic, but as we have seen the stones were local or Welsh. This tale does at least tell us that people acknowledged that it would have been difficult to move such stones, and that some at least were recognized as coming from a distant place.

It perhaps contains some trace of the oral tradition that the stones traveled at least part of their journey on water. In 2000 a group of Welsh volunteers attempted to re-create this ancient journey by moving a three-ton Bluestone block from its source site in the Preseli Hills of south west Wales to Stonehenge. Their plan was to use wooden rollers for the land routes and a raft for the sea route from Milford Haven to Bristol, and then to take it up the block up the River Avon with a final journey overland to the site on Salisbury Plain. Unfortunately the design of the raft failed and the project was abandoned because of lack of funding.

Similar projects had been tried earlier as when, in 1954, Dorset schoolboys attempted a similar feat. They succeeded in moving a four-ton concrete block over a short distance of land and floated it to show that such a thing was possible. Geoffrey Ashe quotes another story from Geoffrey of Monmouth which stated that the stones had been bought to the site by giants from Africa ??? an obvious attempt to explain the mystery of their transportation. There has been speculation that the stones were moved by glaciation, but they bear no evidence of this. Doctor Colin Shearing in his <https://assignbuster.com/stonehenge-analysis-essay/>

article ??? Secrets of the Preseli Bluestones??? tells of the work of modern astronomers regarding the site.

He quotes Arthur C Clarke as having said “ Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic”. Shearing adds the comment ??? Perhaps in this case it should be considered as any sufficiently different technology???. According to the web site Sacred Places, the avenue was extended all the way to the River Avon in 1, 100 which suggests that the site was still important at that time. English astronomer Norman Lockyer, early in the 20th century proved that the north- east axis of Stonehenge was in alignment with the summer solstice sunrise.

This finding caused others to speculate that the creators were simple sun worshippers. In 1963 the American astronomer Gerald Hawkins argued that Stonehenge was a complicated computer for predicting lunar and solar eclipses but his interpretation was severely criticized by the archaeological establishment, who preferred their own ideas that it was simply a place of pagan worship. Shearing also tells us that the so called Bluestones are in fact a mixture of several stones from various sites in the Preseli Hills. The stone usually referred to as the altar stone is in fact made of sandstone studded with garnets.

The stones contain feldspar, which when polished resembles the sky at night sprinkled with stars. The ancient Egyptians revered lapis lazuli for the same reason. Early Welsh mythology thought that such stones were magical and they had healing attributes assigned to them and they are still sold for this purpose by alternative healing companies. It is possible, according to

Shearing, that all the stones at Stonehenge were once polished and dressed. The legends also tell us that stones like these were used by the magician Merlin to build Arthur's Camelot and that Merlin elected them as a memorial to men slain in battle. There are a number of other stories such as the one that states that the devil bought the stones from an old woman and transported them to the plain.

He then tried to trick local people into guessing how many stones there were. When a local friar outwitted him the devil threw a stone at him. According to the legend the stone bounced off the friar's heel and still bears both the name and the mark of his heel. Another story, akin to many told about Cornish standing stones, is that the stones were giants who for some reason were turned to stone as they danced.

Although the faith of the Stonehenge builders predates that of any known religion, the site has, in recent years, become a place of both pilgrimage and worship for Neopagans who identify themselves with the ancient Druids and other forms of ancient paganism. Every year the site is visited by hundreds of thousands of people, the majority are just tourists and the curious, but for many it is a religious pilgrimage to this mysterious site. This has been likened by modern pagans to the importance of Mecca for Muslims. This is especially so at the time of the summer solstice.

Yet according to a recent article in the Telegraph, by environmental journalist Charles Clover, the modern worshippers are celebrating the wrong solstice. He cites recent archeological evidence that seems to point to celebration at the winter solstice and that in summer the landscape would



have been empty. An analysis of teeth from pigs that were found recently at Durrington Walls, a ceremonial site near Stonehenge on the River Avon, has shown that most of the pigs were less than a year old when slaughtered. An animal bone expert from Sheffield University, Dr Umberto Albarella, where the archaeology department is studying monuments in the area near Stonehenge, said that pigs in the Neolithic period were born in spring and that at that period pigs farrowed only once a year. The existence of large numbers of bones from pigs slaughtered in December or January supports the view that our Neolithic ancestors took part in a winter solstice festival rather than the one in the summer.

A completely different theory has been put forward by a Pennsylvanian professor of physics and astronomy as reported on Space.com in January 2, 000. Sharon Challener, has been studying the site for more than 20 years, and has discovered a pattern connected with lunar eclipses in the horseshoe-shaped row of vertical columns at Stonehenge's center. Challener had previously tested out many celestial cycles as they may have lined up with the stones. Eventually she noticed that eclipses are visible from certain locations on Earth in distinct 47-month cycles.

If the ancients placed a marker on top of a pillar at one end of the horseshoe during a lunar eclipse and moved the rock to the adjacent pillar every full moon, they could predict future eclipses. By moving the marker every lunar month, it would eventually reach the center of the horseshoe after two-and-a-half trips along the row, some 47 months after the original eclipse. The full moon that rose that month would be eclipsed by the earth's shadow. The marker could then be taken down and moved to the beginning of the

horseshoe again. Challener said that :- It makes use of the youngest, most central, most massive features of Stonehenge and it predicts all lunar eclipses occurring at Stonehenge without predicting a lot of eclipses that wouldn't be visible from the site.

Challener however offers no reason for the makers being so interested in the movements of the moon in this way. She doesn't even know whether the method she has worked out so carefully has ever been used and admits to a feeling of frustration that she really isn't any the wiser. A totally different theory was put forward by Professor Timothy Darvil, an archeologist at Bournemouth University, who said in 2006, as reported in the Salisbury Journal, that the place was used as a centre for healing. He speaks of how, as recently as the 18th century, people broke off bits of the stone to use for their supposed healing properties. He cites archeological evidence from burials in the area that show many people with disease, but one has to ask Don't people normally die in poor health? The professor also said that the ancients believed that the stones were at their most powerful at the time of the winter solstice, although he adds the rider whether the monument's healing power actually worked is a matter for further discussion. Lord Byron was aware and mystified by the stones, as so many are.

He asked in his poem of about 1818 ' Don Juan' one of the questions that so many have tried to answer: The Druid's groves are gone - so much the better. Stonehenge is not, but what the devil is it? It has to be said, that despite all the research, the measuring, the experiments the speculation and the legends that we just do not know. Works Cited

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