

Stonehenge



FACT FILE

- Stonehenge is in Wiltshire, England (about 140 kilometres south-west of London).
- It is about 4,500–5,000 years old.
- The main circle is 30 metres wide.
- Scholars think it must have taken 30 million hours of labour to build it.

Stonehenge is one of the UK's biggest tourist attractions, and one of the world's greatest mysteries. About a million people visit this prehistoric site every year, and numerous scholars have spent their entire lives studying it. But there are two big questions about Stonehenge which still remain unanswered.

The first mystery is its construction. People who visit for the first time often comment on how small the stone circle is. But the individual stones are huge: the largest are about four metres tall and weigh about 50,000 kilos each.

Some of the stones came from the Preseli Hills in Wales – about 300 kilometres away. How did the Stone Age builders move these enormous stones such a distance, before the invention of the wheel? It was a formidable journey for people who had very little technology.



Some people think that they must have used some form of transport, probably tree trunks. They might have rolled the stones across the land on the tree trunks, or they may have made rafts and sailed them across the sea or down rivers.

Why did they choose stones from so far away? It must have taken hundreds of men to move them. Recent excavations show that the stones' original location might have been sacred, so people may have thought they were magical. However, some scientists think they might simply have been transported by a glacier.

The second mystery of Stonehenge is why it was built in the first place. Of course, as with any mystery, there are several theories. One theory is that it was the burial site of a famous leader.

The area around Stonehenge has over 300 smaller burial sites, which contained bones and everyday objects like cups, plates and knives. Other people say that the circle could be a giant ancient calendar or astronomical observatory.

There are even some people who put forward the idea that Stonehenge might have been a navigation aid for aliens arriving from outer space in their UFOs! That seems unlikely, but the secrets that Stonehenge has been keeping for centuries may remain secret forever.