

Stonehenge: Travel Feature

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

It's amazing how some places become such huge draws for visitors. It's easy to understand why millions of people are drawn to cities like New York, London, and Paris every year, but it's bizarre to think that a huge circle of stones is also one of England's most popular tourist attractions.

Essentially that's what Stonehenge in the southwest of England is. Located around an hour and a half's drive from London, there's been a stone circle on this site for around 5,000 years, although the stone circle you see today probably dates back more like 3,500 years. It's safe to say that there aren't many sites in the world that have survived for such a long period of time and because of that, it's generally regarded as the most important prehistoric site in the United Kingdom.

But why was it constructed? Well, the simple answer is no one really knows, although there are lots of different theories. Perhaps it was built to carry out human sacrifices? A nicer thought is that maybe it had something to do with astronomy, but the truth is we'll never have a definite answer. It's not even certain why this site was chosen to have a stone circle, although there is certainly a feeling about this place, one that you can't quite put your finger on, when you visit.

Work at Stonehenge was undertaken in three main stages, with the first stage being a circle of timbers surrounded by a ditch and a bank. As you can imagine, there's little sign of those left today, but work from the other two phases can be seen.

The site was left as it was for some time - estimated to be something like 600 to 700 years, before it was rebuilt, using bluestones from the mountains of South Wales. Now considering that Stonehenge is not that close to Wales, we're talking more than 200 miles away, you can imagine how much work it must have been to drag that stone down to the sea and then float it along the river to this site. These are the smaller stones on the site.

In the final phase of work, the bluestones were dug up and re-arranged and a new set of bigger sandstones, known as Sarsen stones, were added. As you stand and look at these today, you really can't begin to comprehend how on earth they dragged them here from the nearby Marlborough Downs. Even though that's comparatively nearby, it's still a 20 mile trek! Then of course, there's the issue of how on earth they managed to get the things upright. Like many things about the history

of Stonehenge, it's another case of nobody really knows, but it must have involved an awful lot of muscle and the strength of literally hundreds of men.

As you walk around Stonehenge today, the first thing that strikes you is the enormity of these stones. Then, there's the eerie feeling to the place. Of course, the great British weather often helps with that -- if you go there on a slightly misty day, as we once did, it really adds to the whole mystery of the place.

Unfortunately, today you can't actually get up close to the stones, as sadly this place has become a victim of its own success and the stones were getting damaged by visitors. Even though you can't touch the stones and have to admire them from a distance, it's still a stunning place to visit. If you do want to get into the stone circle itself - and it's something that will live with you forever if you do it - then the best thing to do is to arrange for a Stone Circle Access visit through English Heritage, which looks after the site. There's more information on their web site.

When you visit the site, you will have to pay, as Stonehenge was passed to English Heritage with the provision that a charge should be made to pay for the site's upkeep. However, you will receive an audio guide that will take you on a self-guided tour around the site and you'll learn all about the history of the site and what you're seeing.

It's a fascinating place to visit, but be warned, it's rarely quiet, as it's such a popular place to visit. It's an odd feeling to be walking around somewhere that ideally you'd like to be viewing on your own so that you can take in the atmosphere, only to be surrounded by thousands of people, but don't let that put you off - it's one of the most unique places you'll ever visit in the world.

Stonehenge is open all year round, except for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day and with limited opening hours on December 26 and New Year's Day. Opening times vary throughout the year, although it's usually open from 9am or 9.30am until between 4:00 pm and 7:00 pm, with shorter opening hours in the winter months. Admission costs 6.30 pounds for adults, 3.20 pounds for children and 4.70 pounds for concessions. A family ticket is 15.80 pounds and it's free of charge for English Heritage and National Trust members.

It's worth keeping in mind that Stonehenge is still used at the summer solstice for worship, so if you're planning your visit on the longest day of the year - usually around the third week in June, you may want to double check on opening hours.

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About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

Article last updated: 9/13/2007

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