

The Process of Building Stonehenge

There are probably hundreds of myths and legends about Stonehenge. Various people have attributed the building of this great megalith to the Danes, Romans, Saxons, Greeks, Atlanteans, Egyptians, Phoenicians Celts, King Aurelius Ambrosious, Merlin, and even Aliens.

One of the most popular beliefs was that Stonehenge was built by the Druids. These high priests of the Celts, constructed it for sacrificial ceremonies. It was John Aubrey, who first linked Stonehenge to the Druids. Additionally, Dr. William Stukeley, another Stonehenge antiquary, also claimed the Druids were Stonehenge's builders. Stukeley studied Stonehenge a century later than Aubrey and became so involved in the study of the Druid religion that he himself became one. Through his work he was very instrumental in popularizing the theory that Stonehenge was built by Druids.

Unfortunately researchers have proven this age-old theory linking Stonehenge's construction to the Druids impossible. Through modern radio carbon dating techniques, scientists have discovered that its builders completed Stonehenge over a thousand years before the Celts ever inhabited this region, eliminating Druids from the possibilities. Usually Druids worshipped in marshes and forests, but it has been verified that they did use Stonehenge occasionally as a temple of worship and sacrifice when they moved into the region. Modern Druids, formally named the Grand Lodge of the Ancient Order of Druids, still congregate at Stonehenge on the midsummer solstice, clad in white robes and hoods. As recently as 1905, the Druids initiated 258 novices inside these stones on midsummer solstice. Today, for fear of its desecration, Stonehenge is usually shut off to public access on midsummer's eve.

Most scientists agree on the modern theory that three tribes built Stonehenge at three separate times. In approximately 3000 B.C., it is believed the first people to work on the site were Neolithic agrarians. Archaeologists named them the Windmill Hill people after one of their earthworks on Windmill Hill, which is near Stonehenge. The Windmill Hill peoples built large circular furrows, or hill-top enclosures, dug around a mound and had collective burials in large stone-encased tombs. Most of their burial mounds point east-west. These people were a blend of the local peoples and Neolithic tribe members from Eastern England. They were one of the first semi-nomadic hunting and gathering groups with an agricultural economy and contained a strong reverence for circles and symmetry. They raised cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, grew wheat and mined flint.

The Beaker people, or Beaker Folk, came from Europe at the end of the Neolithic Period and invaded Salisbury Plain around 2000 B.C. Their name comes from one of their ancient traditions in which they would bury beakers, or pottery drinking cups, with their dead. Instead of burying their dead in mass graves, they showed more reverence for death by placing them in small round graves marked by mounds called tumuli. It is assumed by archaeologists that the Beaker People were more warlike in nature than most tribes of their time because they buried their dead with more weapons, such as daggers and battle axes. The Beaker Folk were highly organized, industrious, used sophisticated mathematical concepts, and managed their society by using a chieftain system. They began using metal implements and living in a more communal fashion. Scientists believe they were sun worshipers who aligned Stonehenge more exactly with certain important sun events, such as mid summer and winter solstices.

The Wessex Peoples are considered the third and final peoples to work on the Stonehenge site. They arrived around 1500 B.C. at the height of the Bronze Age. They were by far one of the most advanced cultures outside the Mediterranean during this period. Since their tribal base were located where ridgeways, or ancient roads, met, they became skillful and well-organized traders, controlling trade routes throughout Southern Britain. These people are thought to have been responsible for the bronze dagger carving found on one of the large sarsen stones within Stonehenge. They were a very smart culture, wealthy, and used greater precision in their calculations and construction. It is felt they used these talents in finalizing Stonehenge into what we see today.