

A monument is any structure built in memory of a person or an event. It can be a statue of a king, a general or an explorer, a tower or column with names and words on it, or just an ancient heap of earth grown over with grass. National monuments can include historic buildings and even natural features, such as rocks.



Stone circles often seem to be arranged so that they correspond with ancient annual festivals, such as the Summer Solstice.

Why did ancient peoples build circles of stone?

It was probably for religious reasons. Some structures may have been used as calendars to mark the seasons – it is thought that ancient peoples could use the positions of the stones to help them fix dates by studying the Sun and stars. They could also have been used as giant maps, to show the direction of settlements. People met at these mysterious monuments for important ceremonies.



Where is the Great Serpent Mound?

In the woodland of Ohio, USA. It looks like a giant snake coiled round upon itself, but it is actually a mound of earth. Known as the Great Serpent Mound, it was created more than 2,000 years ago, and there are hundreds of other mounds like it. The mounds were piled up by Native American people across North America. Many were burial places, but the reasons for others remain a mystery. Monk's Mound in the US state of Illinois is 30 m high and covers an area the size of ten soccer pitches! All the work to make it was done by hand.

Ancient monuments

Circles and mounds

Stonehenge	England	Rings of cut stones	Built between 2950 and 1600 BC
Silbury Hill	England	Mound 40 m high	About 2100 BC
Carnac	France	3,000 stones	Dates vary; about 2000 BC
Avebury	England	Stone circles and earth banks	About 2000 BC

Amazing facts

STONEHENGE

Eighty 'bluestones' weighing up to 4 tonnes each were brought to Stonehenge from Wales, a distance of 385 km.

The biggest upright stones are 9 m long and weigh 50 tonnes; they came from 30 km away. Stonehenge may have been a temple, a meeting place or an astronomical observatory.



Which Pacific island has the strangest statues?



① The Easter Island statues are a mystery. Why were they made? And why were so many statues later pushed over?

Why does Stonehenge fascinate people?

Because no one is really certain about how it was built. Over two thousand years ago, people in Britain went to great efforts to construct a circle of stones. Stonehenge is the most famous of these strange circles. It was built in stages, from around 2800 BC, on Salisbury Plain. Using muscle power alone, the building of Stonehenge was an extremely daunting task. The stones are so heavy (some weigh as much as 50 tonnes) that dragging just one would have taken 500 men. The pairs of stones were once topped with cross-beam stones or lintels. Stonehenge was almost certainly built for the purpose of religious ceremonies, and would have been used as part of ancient rituals. The stones are one of England's most famous monuments.

② Local people once thought Stonehenge must have been built by the Devil.

on lonely Easter Island, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, stand more than 10 stone statues. Most look like heads emerging out of the ground. The statues were made between AD 900 and 1600. Some weigh as much as 50 tonnes. Legend tells how the ads were made by people called 'Long Ears' who came in boats from South America.



Stone Age temple?

At Avebury in Wiltshire, England, Stone Age builders dug into the chalk to make an enormous structure. They made a chalk bank 425 m across and 6 m high, and inside arranged a circle of 100 stone pillars (known as 'sarsens'), some weighing 50 tonnes. There were two smaller circles inside the big circle. Prehistoric Avebury may have been a temple and was probably built over 3,000 years ago.



What were barrows?

A barrow was a prehistoric burial mound – a heap of earth covering the grave of a dead person. There are probably at least 40,000 in England alone. They come in different shapes: there are long barrows and round barrows. The round barrows are usually later in date. One Roman barrow, opened in Kent in the 1950s, had a folding iron chair inside.



③ Round barrows usually only contain a single burial.

Where are there strange pictures in a desert?

④ The animal shapes made by the Nazca include a spider and a hummingbird. Some figures are over 120 m long.

In Peru, in South America. Why the Nazca people of Peru scraped lines in the desert to make long straight lines, geometric shapes and outlines of animals and birds is a mystery. The outlines are so big that they can only be seen properly from the air, and yet they were made centuries before people had balloons or aircraft. One theory suggests the Nazca made them over 1,500 years ago to trace the movements of the Sun and stars they saw in the sky above.

