

Location & Access: Avebury is located at SU 102 699. It can be accessed via the A4 from Marlborough (6 miles to the east), the A4361 from Swindon (10 miles to the north east), the A361 from Devizes (8 miles to the south west), and the A4 from Calne (6 miles to the west). There is a National Trust car park at Avebury. Buses runs from Marlborough and Calne (service 42) and from Swindon and Devizes (service 49).

Silbury is located at SU 099 686. It can be accessed via the A4 road, roughly halfway between Marlborough and Calne. There is a car park and viewpoint next to Silbury on the A4.



Avebury South West Quadrant

Key Geography: World Heritage Site containing a prehistoric chalk mound, Neolithic stone barrow, Neolithic henge and stone circle. Sarsen sandstone.

Description: Silbury Hill is part of the sacred landscape of Neolithic and Bronze Age ceremonial sites centred on Avebury. It is the world's largest prehistoric chalk-built mound, constructed between 2450 and 2350 BC. Although it is only 31 metres high, the whole of nearby Stonehenge would fit on the flattened top with plenty of room to spare. A huge ditch surrounds the feature, and digging it provided the soil and chalk to build the mound. Although it is not possible to climb Silbury, it is easily accessible from a nearby car park and viewpoint. However, the best way to approach this unusual historic feature is a two mile stroll along a footpath from Avebury village.

Just a short walk from Silbury is another significant Neolithic site – the West Kennet Long Barrow. This is one of the largest and best preserved examples of a chambered tomb in South England. Believed to have been constructed around 3650 years BC, it is around 100 metres long and inside there are chambers that once housed the bones of 36 individuals. It is possible to enter the first part of the barrow and visit these chambers by passing through giant sandstone pillars that form the entrance. The barrow is constructed from local sarsen stone and limestone, and is topped with chalk dug from two side ditches that have since become silted up.



Silbury Hill

Not far from Silbury Hill is the impressive henge and stone circles of Avebury. The circular earthwork of the henge is around a quarter of a mile in diameter, and consists of a giant bank and ditch. The ditch was originally 2 or 3 times deeper than it is today – as deep as 30 feet – and would have been excavated using just deer antlers

(continued overleaf)

Curiosity Questions:

- # If you look carefully at the two sides of the standing stones at Avebury, you will see they are quite different. Why is this?
- # Why are there holes in the surface of some of the standing stones?
- # Many natural springs and rivers flow around Silbury during the winter months, but are not seen in the summer. Why is this?
- # Avebury and Silbury (along with Stonehenge) form a World Heritage Site. Can you name some others?

Further information:

www.exploringavebury.com

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/avebury

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as tools. Chalk from the ditch was piled up to form the bank which is curiously on the outside of the ditch, rather than the more common position of being inside of the ditch. Perhaps the builders were trying to keep something inside rather than outside of the earthwork?



Avebury Stone Circle

The henge has 4 entrances at each of the cardinal points of the compass – all in their original positions. Inside of the henge is the largest stone circle in Britain – originally consisting of 100 giant monoliths. In turn, there are two smaller stone circles located within the main one. The stone circles at Avebury were constructed and then altered in Neolithic and early Bronze Age times roughly between the years 2800 BC and 2000 BC. The standing stones of the circles survived largely intact until Medieval times when some were toppled and eventually buried. In the early 1700s, many were destroyed when they were felled into pits and heated by fire before being split by pouring on cold water. Few stones remained standing in the 1930s and at this time the owner of

Avebury – Alexander Keiller (who later sold the site to the National Trust, and after whom the Avebury Museum was named) – excavated many of the fallen and buried stones and re-erected them in their original positions. Where stones have been destroyed, their places have been marked with modern concrete pillars.

To explore the stone circles, one should walk clockwise, following the movement of the sun – or ‘sunwise’ – as opposed to anti-clockwise (or ‘widdershins’), which is deemed to be unlucky.

Many of Avebury’s monuments make use of the local sarsen stone – an extremely hard form of sandstone. 40 million years ago, this area was a tropical wetland, and thick sand sediments accumulated in some of the lagoons. As the sand dried out and broke into slabs, it absorbed dissolved silica and became as hard as granite. Large drifts or ‘scatters’ of sarsen stones were once common in the Avebury area, but have since disappeared as they became used as a building material. However, about 3 miles away from the village, the ‘Valley of Stones’ still exists, with a drift of around 2000 sarsen stones.

The present settlement of Avebury stands in the middle of the giant henge, and this is the only place in the world where you will find a pub and a chapel inside a historic stone circle!

From the southern entrance to the Avebury henge runs a double row of standing stones known as the West Kennet Avenue. The stones visible today were restored in the 1930s and extend as a row for around half a mile – although it may originally have continued for several more miles beyond this. This feature is well worth exploring on a short walk from the village.



West Kennet Avenue

Answers to Curiosity Questions:

If you look carefully at the two sides of the standing stones at Avebury, you will see they are quite different. Why is this? (*Before it hardened, the upper side was smoothed and rounded by the weather. The jagged underside forms an impression of the ground surface it formed on*) # Why are there holes in the surface of some of the standing stones? (*The holes were made by plants and trees, growing through the sand when it was still soft*) # Many natural springs and rivers flow around Silbury during the winter months, but are not seen in the summer. Why is this? (*Beneath Avebury is a chalk aquifer that absorbs more water that rises up to ground level in winter*). # Avebury and Silbury (along with Stonehenge) form a World Heritage Site. Can you name some others? (*Grand Canyon, Great Barrier Reef, & the Taj Mahal - plus many more, 1121 in total!*)

