

THE HISTORY OF THE AVEBURY MONUMENTS



ENGLISH HERITAGE

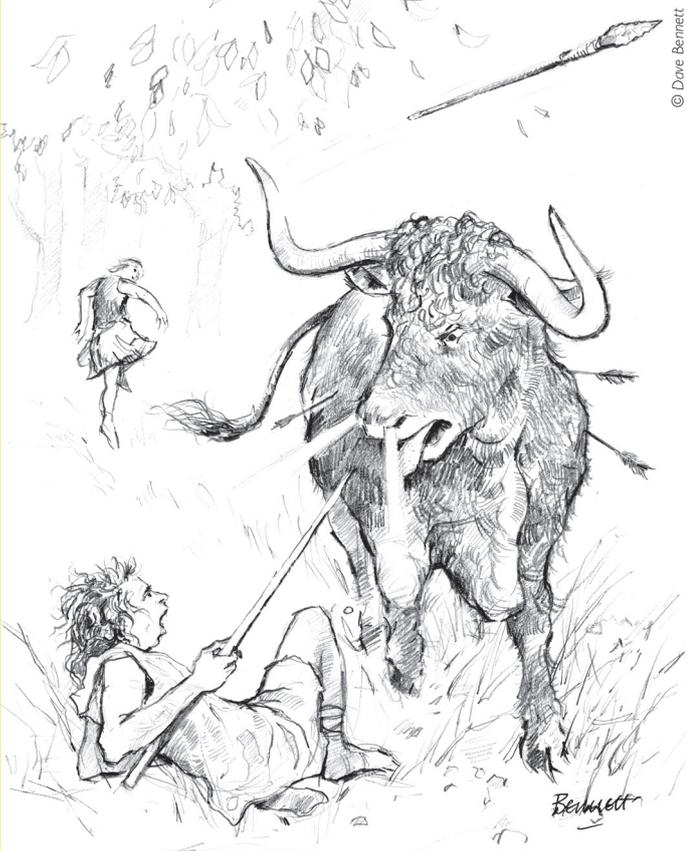


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AVEBURY MONUMENTS AT A GLANCE

MONUMENT	DIMENSIONS	APPROXIMATE DATE	PROBABLE USE
Windmill Hill	Covers an area of approximately 21 acres	3500 BC TO 2500 BC	A tribal meeting place for ceremonies, celebrations or trade
West Kennet Long Barrow	100m long, 20m wide	3600 BC TO 2300 BC	A communal tomb
Avebury Henge	An area of 28 acres with bank and ditch earthworks, an outer circle of some 100 stones and 2 inner circles	3000 BC TO 2000 BC	For ceremonies and celebrations
The Sanctuary	First structure about 5m diameter; second about 22m diameter	2500 BC	Probably the site of a timber structure for social and religious gatherings
Silbury Hill	40m high, 160m diameter	2400 BC	Unknown, possibly a territorial marker
West Kennet Avenue	A stone avenue of paired sarsens stretching almost 2½km	2500 BC TO 2300 BC	Processional route between Avebury Henge and the Sanctuary

HISTORICAL CONTEXT



The aurochs was a type of wild cattle, approximately 2 metres tall at the shoulder

Mesolithic Period (Middle Stone Age) c.8500 – 4000 BC

7,000 years ago the area around Avebury was wooded with elm, oak, alder, hazel and lime. People hunted aurochs, deer, wild cat and wolves in the woodland clearings.

Neolithic Period (New Stone Age) c.4000 – 2200 BC The Landscape

From about 4,000 BC the use of the land began to change. Newcomers from Europe brought with them a knowledge of farming and making pottery. People began to cultivate wheat and barley on pockets of farmland, while clearings in the surrounding woodland provided grazing for cattle, sheep, goats and pigs. Some woods were cut back for coppicing timber; which was used for fencing and building houses. Beyond the clearings wild beasts were hunted and wild food was collected.

Although settlements were well-scattered, communications to and from the Avebury area would have been relatively good, with the prehistoric route called the Ridgeway running all the way from near Avebury to the Thames.

The People

We can probably picture the landscape better than we can imagine the appearance of the people in it. In the early part of the Neolithic period clothes would have been made from leather since wool was probably not woven into cloth at this time. We can only guess at the style of clothes, hair and personal adornment. The average life expectancy was around 40 years.

By around 3700 BC a settled community had grown up in the Avebury area. Enough time could be spared from subsistence farming for people to be able to work together to build the huge monument at Windmill Hill and hold ceremonies there.

Artist's impression of a Neolithic landscape

