



# Media Centre

[Study at Sheffield](#)
[For Current Students](#)
[For Staff](#)
[Our Research](#)
[Departments & Services](#)
[Useful Links](#)
[News & Events](#)

You are here: [Home](#) / [Departments](#) / [SRAM](#) / [Media Centre](#) / [News Releases 2009](#)

[Media Centre home](#)
[News Releases](#)
[Find an Expert](#)
[Fast Facts](#)
[The University in the Media](#)
[Contact Us](#)

05 October 2009

## Archaeologist at University finds 'Bluestonehenge' site

An archaeologist from the University of Sheffield has discovered a lost stone circle just a mile away from Britain's famous circle of standing stones at Stonehenge.

The exciting new find on the west bank of the River Avon, has been dubbed "Bluestonehenge", after the colour of the 25 Welsh stones of which it was once made up.

Excavations by the Stonehenge Riverside Project, which is made up of a consortium of university teams and directed by Professor Mike Parker Pearson from the University of Sheffield, revealed the new stone circle is 10m (33 ft) in diameter and surrounded by a henge – a ditch with an external bank.

Although the stones at the site of the new discovery were removed thousands of years ago, the sizes of the holes in which they stood indicate that this was a circle of bluestones, brought from the Preseli mountains of Wales, 150 miles away. These standing stones marked the end of the Avenue that leads from the River Avon to Stonehenge, a 1¾-mile long (2.8km) processional route constructed at the end of the Stone Age.

The outer henge around the stones was built around 2400 BC but arrowheads found in the stone circle indicate that the stones were put up as much as 500 years earlier – they were dragged from Wales to Wiltshire 5,000 years ago.

It has also been revealed that the builders of the stone circle used deer antlers as pickaxes and within the next few months, radiocarbon dating of these antler picks will provide more precise dates. These dates will reveal whether the circle was built at the same time that another 56 Welsh bluestones were erected at Stonehenge itself in the decades after 3000 BC.

Experts also believe that when the newly discovered circle's stones were removed by Neolithic people, it is possible that they were dragged along the route of the Avenue to Stonehenge, to be incorporated within its major rebuilding around 2500 BC. Archaeologists know that, after this date, Stonehenge consisted of about 80 Welsh stones and 83 local, sarsen stones. Some of the bluestones that once stood at the riverside probably now stand within the centre of Stonehenge.

Only the radiocarbon dating programme can clarify the sequence of events. In the meantime, the discovery of this unknown stone circle may well be exciting confirmation of the Stonehenge Riverside Project's theory that the River Avon linked a 'domain of the living' – marked by timber circles and houses upstream at the Neolithic village of Durrington Walls discovered by the Project in 2005 – with a 'domain of the dead' marked by Stonehenge and this new stone circle. This is because pottery, animal bones, food residues and flint tools used in domestic life during the Stone Age were absent.

Director of the project, Professor Mike Parker Pearson from the Department of Archaeology at the University of Sheffield, said: "It could be that Bluestonehenge was where the dead began their final journey to Stonehenge.

"Not many people know that Stonehenge was Britain's largest burial ground at that time. Maybe the bluestone circle is where people were cremated before their ashes were buried at Stonehenge itself."

Dr Josh Pollard, co-director from the University of Bristol explained: "This is an incredible discovery. The newly discovered circle and henge should be considered an integral part of Stonehenge rather than a separate monument, and it offers tremendous insight into the history of its famous neighbour. Its landscape location demonstrates once again the importance of the River Avon in Neolithic funerary rites and ceremonies."

Prof. Julian Thomas, co-director, added: "The implications of this discovery are immense. It is compelling evidence that this stretch of the River Avon was central to the religious lives of the people who built Stonehenge. Old theories about Stonehenge that do not explain the evident significance of the river will have to be re-thought."

Notes for Editors: The Stonehenge Riverside Project is run by a consortium of university teams. It is directed by Professor Mike Parker Pearson of the University of Sheffield, with co-directors Dr Josh Pollard from the University of Bristol, Professor Julian Thomas from the University of Manchester, Dr Kate Welham from the University of Bournemouth and Dr Colin Richards from the University of Manchester.

The 2009 excavation was funded by the National Geographic Society, Google, the Society of Antiquaries of London, and the Society of Northern Antiquaries. The overall project is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Royal Archaeological Institute.

For more information, contact project directors at [m.parker-pearson@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:m.parker-pearson@sheffield.ac.uk) [julian.thomas@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:julian.thomas@manchester.ac.uk) and [joshua.pollard@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:joshua.pollard@bristol.ac.uk).

For further information please contact: Shemina Davis, Media Relations Officer, on 0114 2225339 or email [shemina.davis@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:shemina.davis@sheffield.ac.uk)

[« Return to news releases](#)