

Learn English With Photos 13 – Stonehenge

Hello and welcome to episode thirteen of Learn English With Photos. My name is Jeffrey Hill and in this lesson I'm going to be looking at Stonehenge, one of the world's best known historical and cultural sites. In the first part of the lesson, I'll talk about some photos I took during a visit to Stonehenge in June 2012. Then, I'll go over some of the vocabulary, and finally I'll ask you some questions relating to this topic.

Stonehenge is a prehistoric monument in Wiltshire, England, about 8 miles, or 13 kilometres, north of Salisbury. This UNESCO World Heritage site consists of the remains of a ring of standing stones set within earthworks. This area is also home to hundreds of burial mounds, which supports the theory that Stonehenge was a burial ground when it was constructed. Some archaeologists and scientists believe that the burials began in 3000 BC. According to others, the first stone was erected in 2500 BC. Most agree that Stonehenge was last used as a burial site during the Iron Age.

The construction of Stonehenge, as it appears today, took some 1500 years to complete. Some scholars believe that large portions of the original monument were destroyed, giving us a very incomplete picture of how it once looked. Here you can see an artist's impression of the completed circle.

The giant Sarsen Stones, which form the outer circle and weigh as much as 50 tons each, came from the Marlborough Downs, twenty miles North of Stonehenge. It seems hardly conceivable that with very little technology and few materials the builders managed to move them at all.

Despite the fact that relatively little is known about the original structure and the purpose of Stonehenge, it has been established that there is definitely a spiritual element to its existence.

Druids, who are members of an ancient order of Celtic priests, claim that their religion has celebrated the summer solstice at Stonehenge for nearly 800 years. Stonehenge may also have been used to predict important celestial occurrences such as the equinox or eclipses.

From 1972 to 1984, Stonehenge was used as the venue for an annual Free Festival, but a ban was imposed in 1985 at the request of English Heritage, the public body which manages the site. This ban was lifted in 2000 and summer solstice celebrations have been held ever since.

The number of visitors to Stonehenge has gradually increased from 38,000 per year in 1922, to over 900,000 today, and people from all over the world come to see this unique attraction and marvel at its impressive dimensions and age-old history. As you might expect, Stonehenge is very popular with school groups.

I visited Stonehenge in June 2012. After paying my £8 entrance fee, I was given an audio guide device, which provides a running commentary as you go round and greatly enhances the enjoyment and interest of the visit. The guide is available in English and nine other languages: French, Italian, Spanish, German, Japanese, Mandarin, Russian, Dutch and Swedish.

Although the public used to have free access to the site, it was cordoned off in 1977 as a result of severe erosion of the earthworks, and vandalism to the stones. You now have to keep to the path.

The existing facilities for visitors, largely constructed in the 1970s, are now totally inadequate. There's a gift shop selling books, Stonehenge-related souvenirs, jams and alcohol, and a kiosk-style café selling hot and cold snacks. Although there's a small outdoor area with benches for sitting, there's no covered area, so too bad if it rains. The good news is that a new visitor centre is due to open in 2013. Here's an artist's impression of what it will look like.

Of course, people don't go to Stonehenge for the gift shop and café. The real magic is in the stones themselves. It's incredible to think that the site is over 4,000 years old. I wonder what will remain of our civilization 4,000 years from now.

Well, that ends our visit to Stonehenge. I'm now going to go over some of the vocabulary we've seen. I'll say each word twice and you can repeat it after me if you like. I'll also give a definition and make some comments where appropriate.

Vocabulary

- ❑ **archaeologist** — someone who studies the societies and peoples of the past by examining the remains of their buildings, tools, and other objects
- ❑ **artist's impression** — a drawing showing what a place or a building will look like in the future or looked like in the past
- ❑ **audio guide** — an audio guide provides a recorded spoken commentary, normally through a handheld device, to a visitor attraction such as a museum
- ❑ **ban** — a ban is an official ruling that something must not be done, shown, or used
- ❑ **BC** — before Christ (used in the Christian calendar to show a particular number of years before the year when Christ is believed to have been born)
- ❑ **burial** — the act or ceremony of burying a dead body
- ❑ **celestial** — used to describe things relating to heaven or to the sky
- ❑ **circle** — a circle of objects or people is a group of them arranged in the shape of a circle
- ❑ **civilization** — a civilization is a human society with its own social organization and culture
- ❑ **conceivable** — if something is conceivable, you can imagine it or believe it
- ❑ **construct** — to build or make something such as a road, building or machine
- ❑ **cordon off** — to stop people from getting into an area by surrounding it with a rope
- ❑ **device** — an object or a piece of equipment that has been designed to do a particular job
- ❑ **druid** — a priest of an ancient Celtic religion
- ❑ **earthworks** — a large bank of earth that was built long ago in the past and used as a defence
- ❑ **eclipse** — an occasion when the moon passes between the earth and the sun so that you cannot see all or part of the sun for a time
- ❑ **English Heritage** — public body responsible for managing many historical sites in the UK
- ❑ **enhance** — to increase or further improve the good quality, value or status of something
- ❑ **enjoyment** — the pleasure that you get from something
- ❑ **entrance fee** — an amount of money that you pay for admission to a gallery, museum, park, etc.
- ❑ **equinox** — one of the two times in the year (around 20 March and 22 September) when the sun is above the equator and day and night are of equal length
- ❑ **erect** — if people erect something such as a building, bridge, or barrier, they build it or create it
- ❑ **erosion** — the gradual destruction of the surface of something through the action of wind, rain, etc.
- ❑ **facilities** — buildings, services, equipment, etc. that are provided for a particular purpose
- ❑ **festival** — an organized series of events such as musical concerts or drama productions
- ❑ **giant** — much larger or more important than most others of its kind
- ❑ **gift shop** — a shop/store that sells goods that are suitable for giving as presents
- ❑ **heritage** — the history, traditions and qualities that a country or society has had for many years and that are considered an important part of its character
- ❑ **inadequate** — not good enough
- ❑ **incomplete** — something that is incomplete is not yet finished, or does not have all the parts or details that it needs

- ❑ **incredible** — if you say that something is incredible, you mean that it is very unusual or surprising, and you cannot believe it is really true, although it may be
- ❑ **Iron Age** — the Iron Age was a period of time which began when people started making things from iron about three thousand years ago
- ❑ **jam** — jam is a thick sweet food that is made by cooking fruit with a large amount of sugar, and that is usually spread on bread
- ❑ **magic** — if you refer to the magic of something, you mean that it has a special mysterious quality which makes it seem wonderful and exciting to you and which makes you feel happy
- ❑ **marvel at** — if you marvel at something, you express your great surprise, wonder, or admiration
- ❑ **mile** — a mile is a unit of distance equal to 1760 yards or approximately 1.6 kilometres
- ❑ **monument** — a monument is something such as a castle or bridge which was built a very long time ago and is regarded as an important part of a country's history
- ❑ **mound** — a mound of something is a large rounded pile of it
- ❑ **path** — a long strip of ground which people walk along to get from one place to another
- ❑ **predict** — if you predict an event, you say that it will happen
- ❑ **prehistoric** — prehistoric people and things existed at a time before information was written down
- ❑ **ring** — a group of people or things arranged in a circle can be described as a ring
- ❑ **Sarsen stone** — Sarsen stones are sandstone blocks found in quantity in the south-east of the United Kingdom
- ❑ **scholar** — a scholar is a person who studies an academic subject and knows a lot about it
- ❑ **scientist** — a person who studies one or more of the natural sciences, for example, physics, chemistry or biology
- ❑ **snack** — a snack is a simple meal that is quick to cook and to eat
- ❑ **solstice** — the summer solstice is the day of the year with the most hours of daylight
- ❑ **souvenir** — a souvenir is something which you buy or keep to remind you of a holiday, place, or event
- ❑ **spiritual** — spiritual means relating to people's thoughts and beliefs, rather than to their bodies and physical surroundings.
- ❑ **stone** — a stone is a large piece of stone put somewhere in memory of a person or event, or as a religious symbol
- ❑ **theory** — an opinion or idea that somebody believes is true but that is not proved
- ❑ **ton** — in the United Kingdom the ton is a unit of weight defined as 2,240 pounds (1,016 kg)
- ❑ **UNESCO** — United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- ❑ **unique** — you can use unique to describe things that you admire because they are very unusual and special
- ❑ **vandalism** — vandalism is the deliberate damaging of things, especially public property
- ❑ **venue** — the venue for an event or activity is the place where it will happen
- ❑ **weigh** — if someone or something weighs a particular amount, this amount is how heavy they are

Questions

1. What attracts people to Stonehenge?
2. Would you like visit Stonehenge? Why or why not?
3. What other famous historical monuments have you heard of or visited in Great Britain?
4. What is the most interesting historical monument you have ever visited?
5. If you could visit any historical monument in the world, which one would you choose and why?
6. What monuments would you recommend a visitor to your country should see?
7. What can we learn from studying history?
8. What is the best way to preserve our historical and cultural heritage for future generations?

