

# The Stone Age

15,000 BC to 3,350 BC



An informative book



# The Stone Age of Britain



## A Brief History Timeline 4 Million BC to 2,200 BC



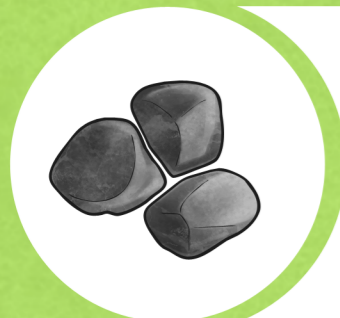
### 4 Million Years Ago

The earliest humans resided in Africa. They stayed there for quite a long time as there was not much reason to move.



### 900,000 Years Ago

According to evidence found in Norfolk and Suffolk, early humans finally reached Britain. They were able to create weapons and tools from stone, wood and bone.



### 450,000 Years Ago

Thick ice covered Britain and it was too cold for humans to survive.



### 400,000 Years Ago

The temperature warmed up and Neanderthals came to live in Britain. Britain was still connected to Europe and they came and went as the climate changed.



### 125,000 Years Ago

The sea rose and Britain became an island. It was warmer than it is today and hippos and lions roamed the land. The Neanderthals were left on the other side of the water.



### 60,000 Years Ago

Sea levels dropped and Britain was covered in grass, linked again to the rest of Europe. Neanderthals returned. 40,000 years ago Homo sapiens arrived in Britain.



### 20,000 Years Ago

Ice covered most of Britain again. Humans disappeared.



### 12,000 Years Ago

Modern humans (homo sapiens) started to live continuously in Britain. They lived in groups, hunted wild animals and traded stone weapons. They lived in simple tents.



### 10,000 Years Ago

End of the Paleolithic or Old Stone Age period.



### 10,000 - 6,000 Years Ago

Mesolithic or middle stone age period. Rising sea levels meant that the British Isles became cut off from the rest of Europe.



### 6,500 Years Ago

The climate was warmer and forests began to grow. People began to settle across the whole of the British Isles. They farmed, domesticated and bred animals.



### 6,000 Years Ago

The Neolithic or Stone Age began.



### 5,800 Years Ago

Stone houses and burial mounds have been found from this period. The Celtic language may have been introduced to Britain at this time.



### 4,900 Years Ago

People made stone or ditched monuments. Some are now famous, such as Stonehenge. Wooden bows and bows were made.



### 4,200 Years Ago, 2,200 BC

People discovered how to make copper and bronze, which was much harder than stone. The Stone Age came to an end.



# A Land of Beasts

The early humans that first arrived in Britain were not direct ancestors of humans today. It had taken a while for them to gradually wander over to Europe from East Africa over 4 million years ago. They came to a land where huge beasts dwelled, such as woolly mammoths and rhino.

Harsh ice ages were still occurring throughout the arrival of humans and this meant that human life in Britain was wiped out each time. During an ice age, everything on land would be covered in huge, thick layers of ice called glaciers. As the glaciers melted and moved they carved out valleys.

Britain has gone through 3-4 ice ages so far, periods of time in which the climate was very cold and large ice sheets formed. During each one, the sea level fell very low and would have been possible to walk from Spain or Denmark to Dublin.

## Surviving

Early humans first lived in Britain around 800,000 years ago. They made stone tools and used them to cut up the meat of the animals they hunted. One of the animals they hunted was the woolly mammoth. A hunt would be carried out by chasing the animal for days until it was exhausted and then finally killing it with stones and spears. To just kill such a large animal straight away would have been impossible, so this was a good method.

Eventually, an ice age drove these early humans out. When it ended, a new people called the Neanderthals emerged. Homo sapiens, a different species of early human, still lived in Africa at this time.

Homo sapiens reached Europe around 200,000 years ago and lived beside the Neanderthal people. 39,000 years ago, the Neanderthals became extinct. It had been thought that Homo sapiens had fought against and overcome the Neanderthals, but recent research has suggested that either there just wasn't enough food to go round, the two species may have interbred, or there was a huge temperature drop where the Neanderthals mainly lived.

After a final ice age that ended around 15,000 years ago, it was only the Homo Sapiens that managed to return.



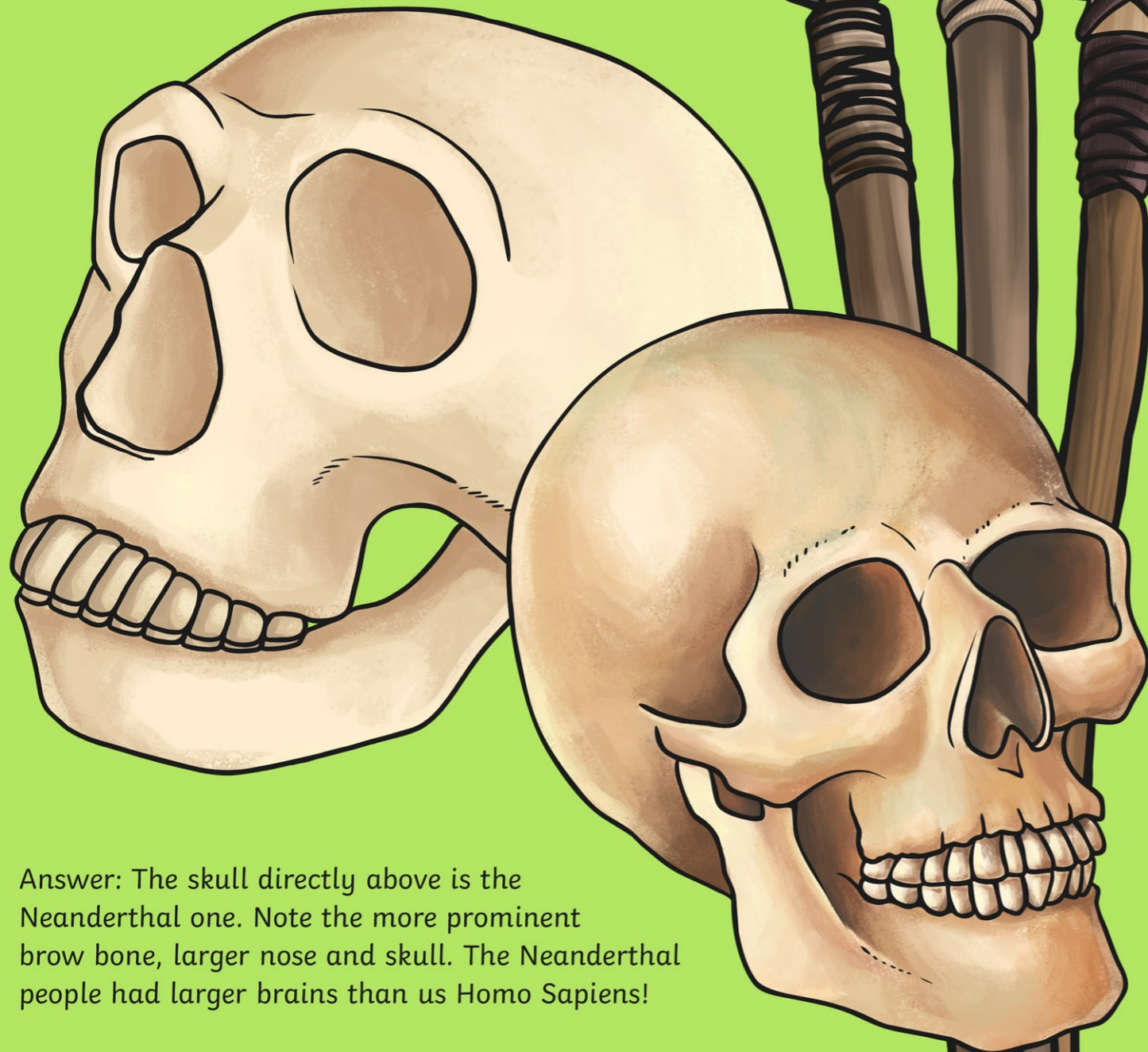


# Neanderthals and Us

So what was the difference between us and the Neanderthals? Though we are not directly related to them, Neanderthals are the closest extinct relatives that we have. The appearance of Neanderthals was quite similar to ours with a few minor differences. They tended to be broader and shorter than us, with very prominent eyebrows, high cheekbones and broad, flat noses. They are sometimes seen as being rather unintelligent, but this is not true. Scientists have found tools and burials made by them, indicating intelligent behaviour.

## Spot the Difference

Can you guess which skull is the Neanderthal skull?



Answer: The skull directly above is the Neanderthal one. Note the more prominent brow bone, larger nose and skull. The Neanderthal people had larger brains than us Homo Sapiens!

# Stone Tools

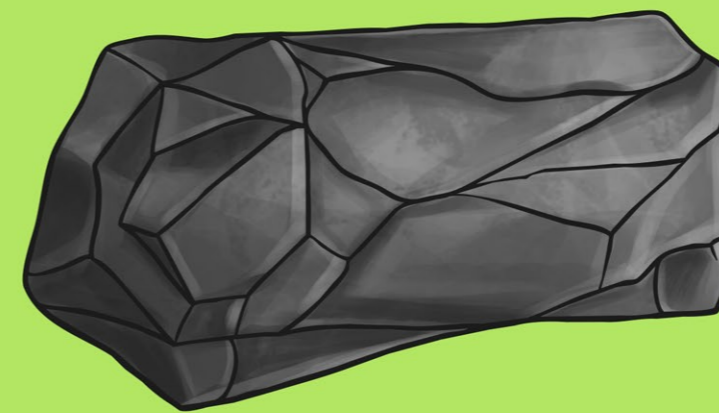
It is thought that the inspiration for Stone Age people making tools comes from the naturally sharp-edged and hard pieces of flint that were found lying about in the chalk hills of Britain. Fist-sized pieces of rock are called nodules.

Flint nodules are good for beating meat to tenderise it, but they need to be sharpened to cut things with. The sharpening of flint can be done by knocking another stone against it and gradually chipping pieces off. This was a very effective method and some flint knives have been found to be just as sharp as modern knives! The act of knocking off pieces of flint is called **knapping**.

Scientists know where people have been knapping in the past due to the tiny pieces of useless flint that are left behind on the ground. Knapping would be done by the person being sat down with a piece of animal hide on their lap for protection. After the knapping, the tool would be smoothed off with a grinding stone.

On the left are some examples of Stone Age spears. Below are a selection of tools that were made and used.

Handaxe: This tool was used for cutting and slicing.



Borer: This tool was used for shaping.



Hammerstone: This was used for bashing and hammering.



# Cave Paintings

Caves were important and special places for Stone Age people. There is no evidence of writing from Stone Age times but they recorded their thoughts in the form of drawings on cave walls.

The earliest cave paintings ever found were probably made around 30,000 years ago. The paintings, showing deer, bison and rhinos, were found in the caves of Spain. Britain was still in the midst of an ice age and was uninhabitable at the time.

We know that the cave paintings must have been important to Stone Age people due to the fact that they took quite a lot of skill and effort. People did not necessarily live in the caves, they might have visited the caves especially to make the paintings.

This gives us great insight into the intelligence and skill of the Stone Age people as they were people who appreciated art. Though we do not know exactly what the art was made for, it shows us that they did things they enjoyed as well as needed to.

Sadly, most cave paintings have been lost due to the weathering of the cave wall surfaces, though there are 350 known examples.

# Lighting Issues

Paintings would have been made by the dim light of fire on twigs or burning animal fat. They would never have been able to see them as we do today with powerful torches.

They used pigments crushed from soot (carbon) for the colour black and ground coloured stones to make yellows and reds. The choice of colours they could use was much more limited than that of today. The pigments would then be mixed with animal or plant gum and be applied with their fingers. Other tools used were feathers, animal hairs, sticks and quills.

Opposite page, top: Some beautiful examples of some cave paintings found in the Lascaux Cave of southwestern France. They have been estimated to be over 20,000 years old!





## Daily Life

Near the end of the Stone Age, people were beginning to settle into a more structured and comfortable way of life. They had finally started to farm and grow crops, but this had taken a while.

Before farming, the Stone Age people had a diet of berries, nuts and wild animals. This meant that they mostly ate meat as berries and plants would only be in season for a short while. There had been no domestication of animals at this time, so milk was not consumed. Basically, any foods which had to be obtained through a process, such as bread and cereals, had not been made yet.

## Nomads

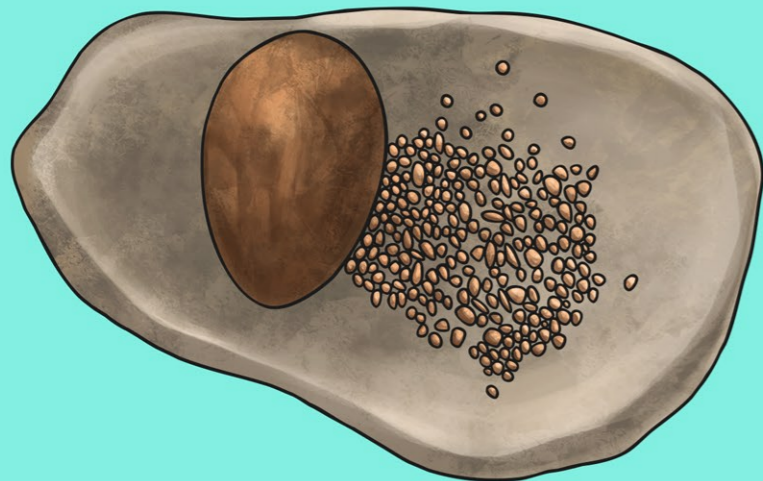
The early Stone Age people were a nomadic community, which meant that they were constantly travelling. Because they never had a permanent residing area, the remains we find of these nomadic people are usually of their tools and not homes.

Simple tents made from branches and animal hide were used for living in as they were easy to pack away and carry.

The Stone Age people travelled in search for the next place where a fresh supply of animals and plants would be. They would follow a herd of grazing deer to hunt as this was much easier than chasing after huge animals. Deer tend to bunch up closely together when threatened and this made them easy prey.

## Farming

The first inklings of farming happened around 23,000 years ago when it spread from the Middle East. The idea of crushing cereals between grindstones called 'querns' finally reached Europe and then to Britain. In the Neolithic period of The Stone Age, farming had begun at last.



**Left:** A Stone Age quern, consisting of a dish shaped stone and a round rubbing stone for grinding cereals.



## Pros and Cons

Though farming was an advancement for mankind, it also created quite a few problems the Stone Age people never encountered before. One of these problems was famine.

Up until the introduction of farming, people relied on hunting and foraging for survival. In the Neolithic period, people relied on the success of their yearly crops and the first famines were experienced due to the failing of harvests.

Farming meant that more people were fed which increased the population. Again, this was good and bad as more food had to be grown and more people starved if the harvest was unsuccessful. More people also meant more pollution and disease.

Fishing was another common way of obtaining more food and the domestication of sheep, cattle and dogs had begun.

## Clothing

Weaving was still an unknown art until the very end of The Stone Age so their clothes would have been made mostly from animal skins and animal bones to pin them together. The very beginnings of weaving began with flax and grass stems being woven together to make cloaks.





# The Oldest Homes

The oldest homes of Northern Europe are found in Britain. They show a great level of sophistication in the way that the Stone Age people lived.



**Above:** The exterior of a Stone Age stone house.

## Skara Brae

People started to settle down rather than roaming from place to place and they began to build houses from stone instead of wood. Houses built from wood have rotted away completely.

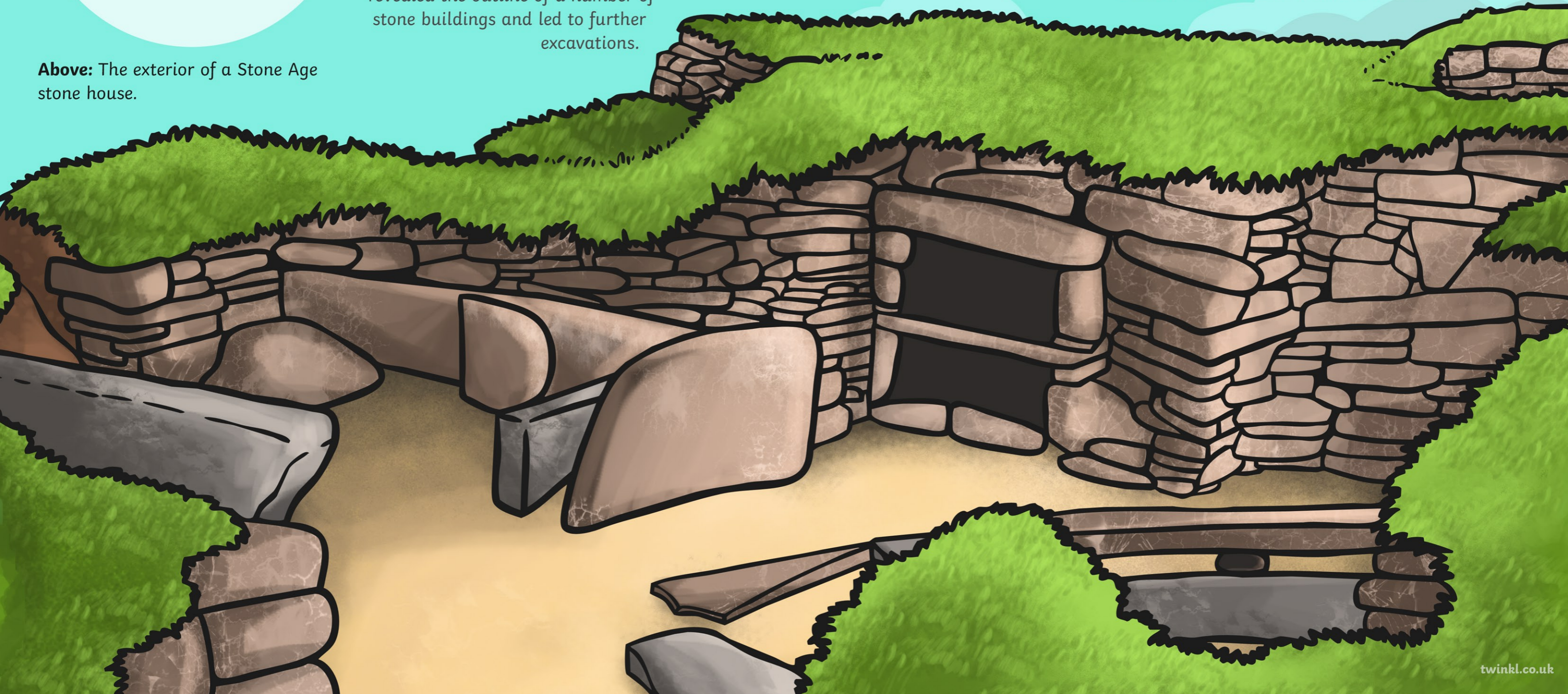
In 1850, Orkney (Northern Scotland), a great storm caused the grass of the top of a mound named 'Skerrabra' to be unearthed. It revealed the outline of a number of stone buildings and led to further excavations.

In the 1930s, radio carbon dating showed that this settlement dated back to between 3200 BC and 2200 BC! The settlement became known as Skara Brae and is now a huge tourist attraction.

The site has been incredibly well preserved because it was covered by sand and it is possible to see the walls, interior fittings and passageways that link a total of ten (there are thought to be more) dwellings together. Each is made up of a 40m square room, a fireplace, a stone dresser and a bed. It is thought that the tops of these houses were made of whale bones to make a pointed roof with thatch or turf to cover the top (image on left page).

For unknown reasons, Skara Brae became abandoned and over time it was covered up by sand. The rubbish tips found near the houses contain animal bones of cattle, sheep and pigs as well as cereals and grains so we know that they were farming at this point.

**Below:** The excavated site, Skara Brae.





# Stone Age Burials

The dead were very well respected and a lot of effort was made to prepare people's bodies for their graves.

## Cave Burials

The oldest burial ever found is in the Paviland Cave of South Wales.

In 1823, Rev. William Buckland thought he had discovered the remains of a Paleolithic female, now known as 'the Red Lady of Paviland' (right picture).

The bones were dyed red with ochre, this indicated that the flesh was removed after death and some periwinkle shells and ivory rods were found next to the skeleton. Important items buried with a body are called grave goods.

After some more research, it turned out the 'lady' wasn't a lady at all. The skeleton actually belonged to a young male and dated to around 33,000 years ago! The name 'Red Lady of Paviland' just happened to stick.



## Passage Graves

Simple, stone coffins had a slab of rock for a roof and it was held up by upright stones. It was then covered up by soil and made into a mound. These were called 'dolmen' (left). Passage graves had a long passage that led to a central stone chamber containing the body. These were made around 6,000 years



ago and the biggest one ever found was made up of a 20m long passage. Passage graves are circular.

## Long Barrows

While passage graves are circular, long barrow graves tend to be rectangular in shape.

An example of a long barrow grave is in West Kennet, Oxfordshire. It is thought to have been constructed in 3600 BC. In 1859 and 1955-56, 46 burials were found within the complex, all ranging from babies to the elderly. Researchers think that the 46 people buried there had died within 20-30 years of each other and that the tomb remained open for 1,000 years.

The barrows were more than just a burial place for the dead. They may have even been 'homes' for the spirits of the dead. This type of belief is not so dissimilar to the spiritual buildings and places we have today, like churches and cemeteries.

So how were they built?



It is thought that the people who built the long barrows would have needed to clear an area of forest before they started. Giant standing stones would then be erected. These stones were thought to separate the living from the dead. Two long ditches were then made beside the barrow and filled with chalk, soil and more stones. These stones were then painted with zig zag or swirly patterns.

The body was carried into the chamber (spirit world) by a priest while others waited outside. A large stone would then be rolled across the entrance of the long barrow to seal it at the end of the ceremony.



## Sacred Stone Circles

It is important to realise that there is a difference between stone circles and henges. This means that we are, in fact, not talking about the famous Stonehenge here (that will be in the next chapter).

Some stone circles were constructed around 5,000 years ago in the Neolithic world. Just as burials were, stone circles were also spiritual places for people to gather and a home for the spirits of the dead. The stones were used to mark the area of land that was reserved for the dead.

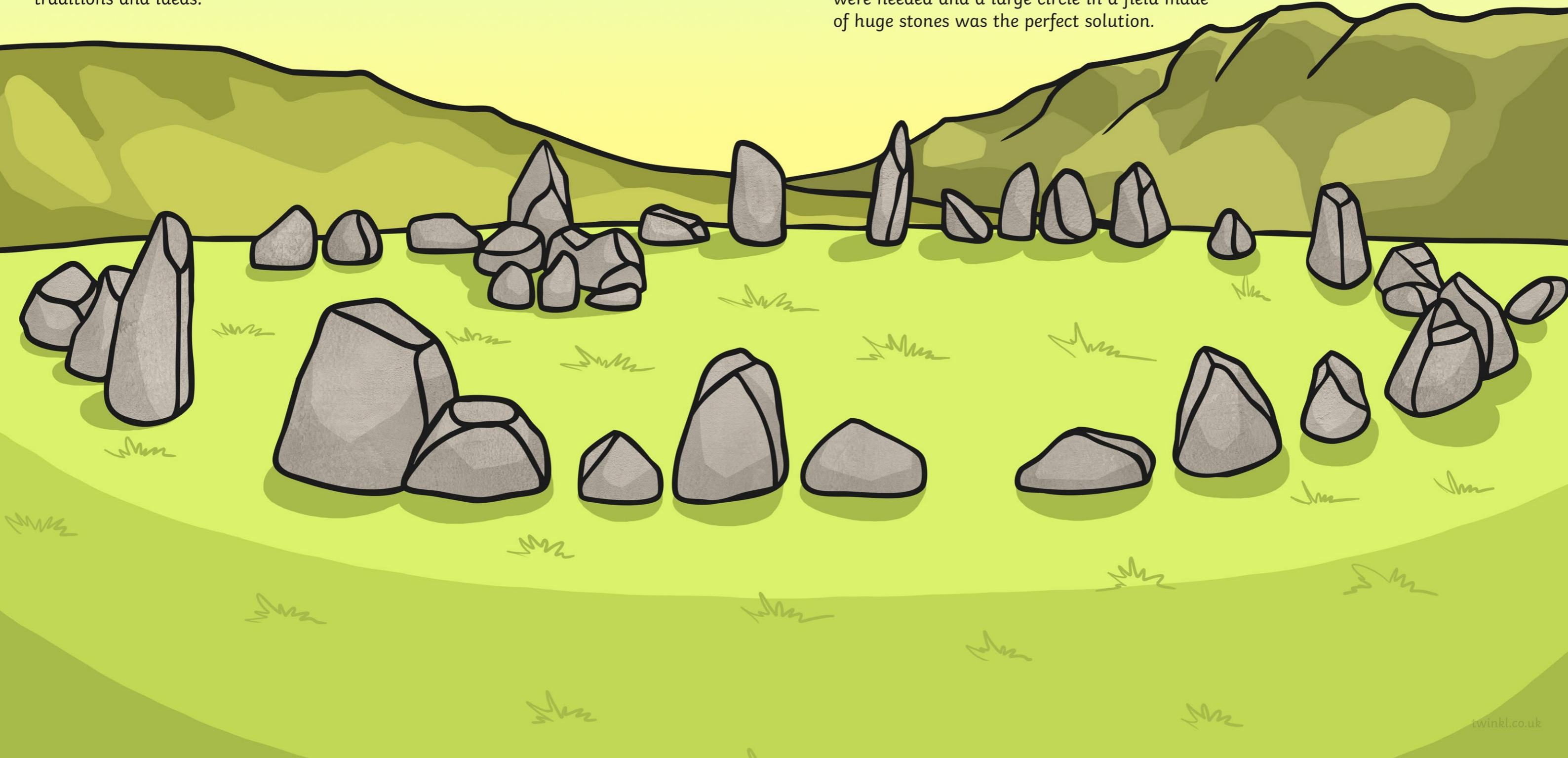
Stone circles have only ever been found in the British Isles, suggesting that the separation of Britain from Europe resulted in the ancient British forming their own traditions and ideas.

## Castlerigg

The oldest stone circle found is the one at Castlerigg, near Keswick of Cumbria. It has been dated to 5,200 years ago and is about 30 metres across. It is made up of 40 huge stones and the heaviest is 16 tonnes! Each huge stone is called a 'megalith' (see picture below). Inside the circle are some burial pits with a smaller, rectangular space marked out by some more stones.

To this day, nobody knows exactly why these circles have been built. Some people think that they resemble the hours on the face of a clock and have tried to make links to the sun and times of the year.

Another suggestion is that, with the population growing, larger areas of spirituality were needed and a large circle in a field made of huge stones was the perfect solution.





# Sacred Stone Henges

So how are stone henges different from stone circles? A henge is made up of a bank, a ditch and several rings of wooden posts as well as stones. On the right is a diagram of the famous Stonehenge. The stone and wooden circles in a henge are often less old than the circular banks or ditches around them.

Small communities would have had no need for an area as big as Stonehenge, so we know that the ancient Britains living 5,000 years ago must have come together for worshipping and ceremonial reasons. This shows that people were well connected. Henges have been found in Scotland and all the way down to southern England which indicates a common belief and custom throughout the country.

There are many henges in Britain and even though Stonehenge contains the biggest stones, it is not the biggest henge. The biggest henge is in Avebury which measures at a colossal 400 m across!

Henges were built over long periods of time, with the banks and ditches made first, before the stone circle was added in the middle. It was common for the stones of a henge or circle to have been moved and rearranged quite a few times.

Left: A structure of two upright stones with one laying across the top is called a 'trilithon', which means '3'.

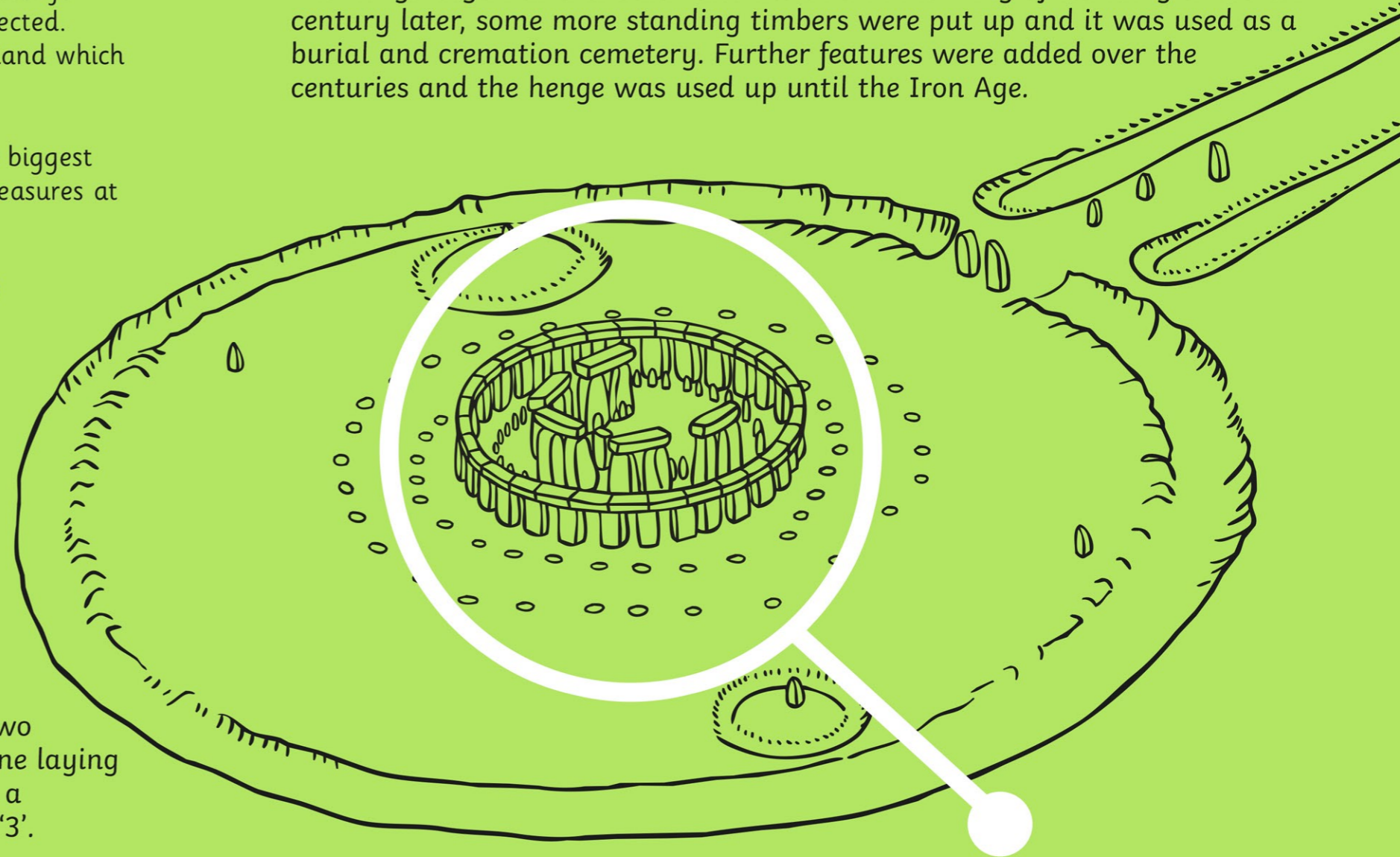
Below: Stonehenge

# The Stonehenge

Stonehenge in Wiltshire, England is one of the most famous prehistoric sites in the world. The circular ditch and bank were probably built around 5,100 years ago and after several makeovers, was completed with a ring of circles around 4,100 years ago.

This means that it could have taken over 1,000 years to complete.

The henge began as a circular ditch with an inner ring of standing timbers. A century later, some more standing timbers were put up and it was used as a burial and cremation cemetery. Further features were added over the centuries and the henge was used up until the Iron Age.



The ring of stones was added at a much later stage.





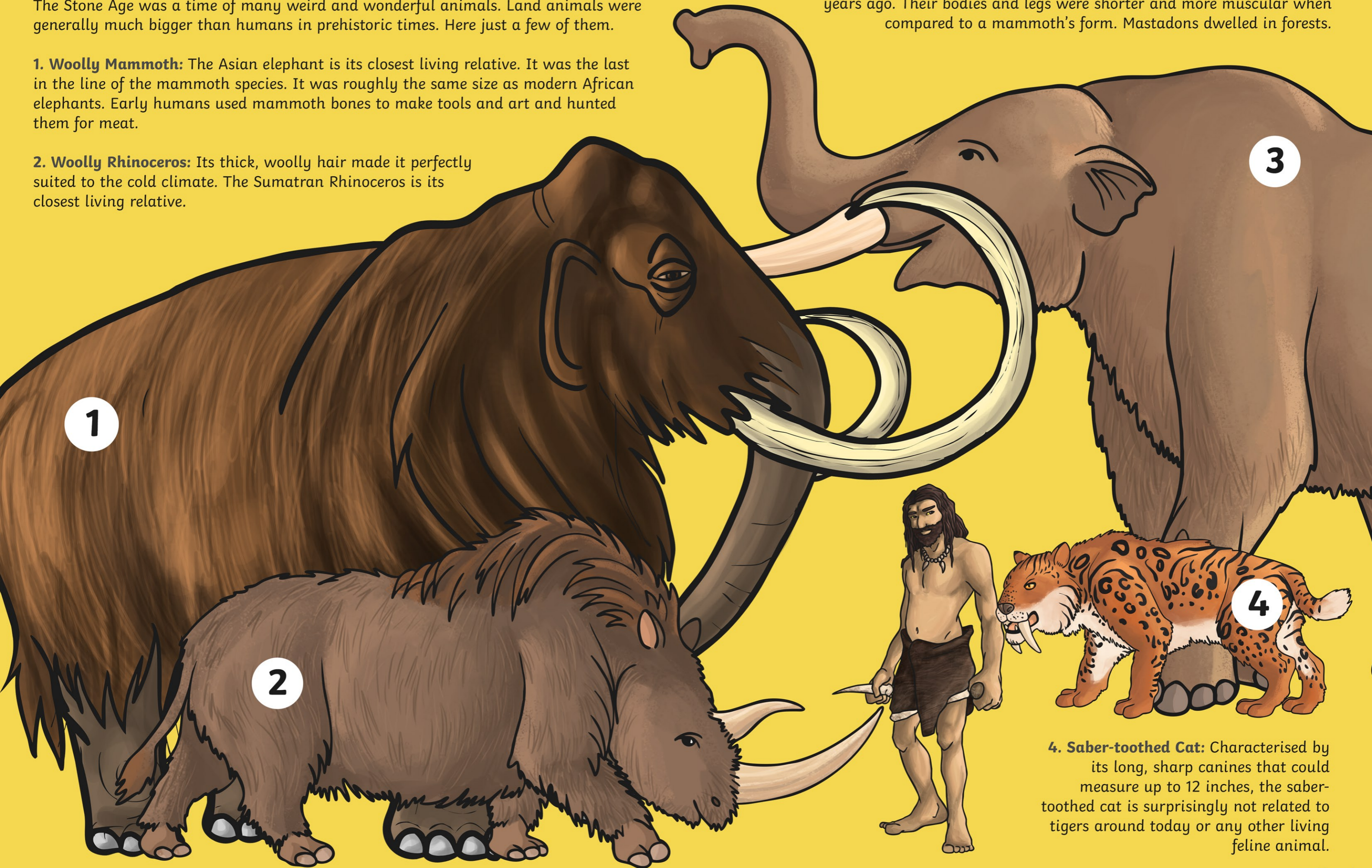
# Stone Age Animals

The Stone Age was a time of many weird and wonderful animals. Land animals were generally much bigger than humans in prehistoric times. Here just a few of them.

**1. Woolly Mammoth:** The Asian elephant is its closest living relative. It was the last in the line of the mammoth species. It was roughly the same size as modern African elephants. Early humans used mammoth bones to make tools and art and hunted them for meat.

**2. Woolly Rhinoceros:** Its thick, woolly hair made it perfectly suited to the cold climate. The Sumatran Rhinoceros is its closest living relative.

**3. Mastadon:** These elephant-like creatures became extinct around 10,000 to 11,000 years ago. Their bodies and legs were shorter and more muscular when compared to a mammoth's form. Mastadons dwelled in forests.



**4. Saber-toothed Cat:** Characterised by its long, sharp canines that could measure up to 12 inches, the saber-toothed cat is surprisingly not related to tigers around today or any other living feline animal.





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