

PROGRAMME 1

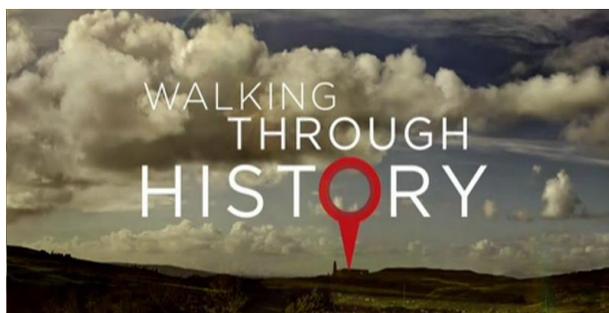
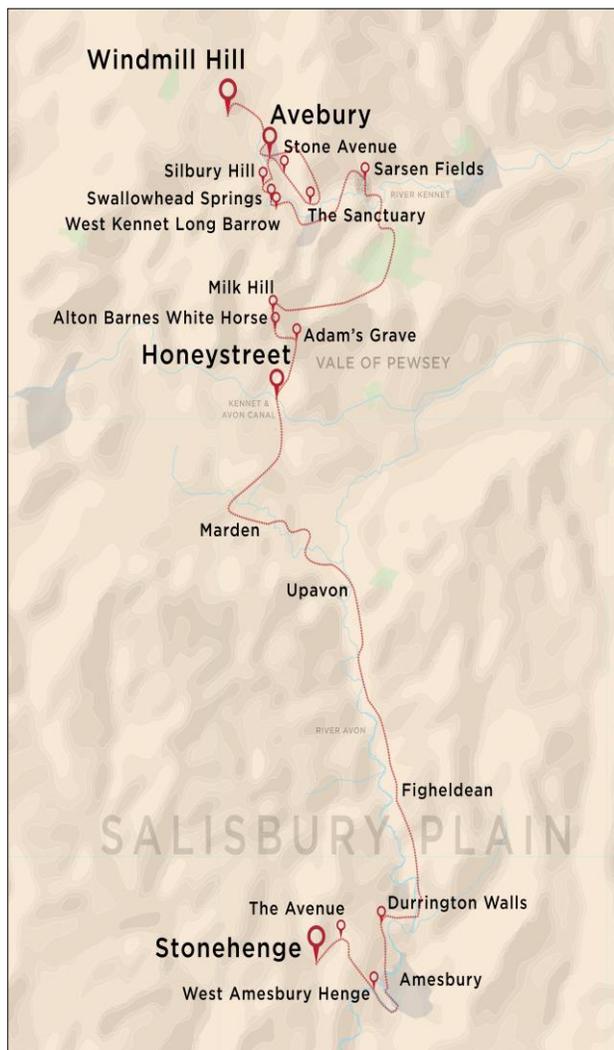
THE PATH TO STONEHENGE

WILTSHIRE

Introduction

In this 3 day walk, we hike through the final centuries of the Stone Age in Wiltshire, home to arguably the greatest concentration of prehistoric monuments in Europe, if not the world! We discover how the famous monuments of the area are connected and what they can tell us about life, and death, in Neolithic Britain. The walk takes us across some of the most beautiful landscape in the south west, as we uncover the actions of our ancestors here between 4000 and 2000BC.

The 45 mile route begins at Windmill Hill before heading south to spend the first day walking amongst the stone circles of Avebury.



Day 1

A gentle first day. There is plenty of time for admiring the monuments encountered.

- ⇒ Windmill Hill to Avebury via Avebury Stone Circle and the Sanctuary
Distance: 6.5 miles

Day 2

We up the pace as we hunt for hard evidence of our elusive ancestors at Silbury Hill and the West Kennet Long Barrow. We skirt the Marlborough Downs and head up and over Milk Hill for some more modern mysteries, like crop circles.

- ⇒ Avebury to Honeystreet, via Silbury Hill, Swallowhead Springs, West Kennet Long Barrow, Field of Sarsen Stones, Milk Hill and the Alton Barnes White Horse, and Adam's Grave.
Distance: 15.5 miles

Day 3

We follow our ancestors down the River Avon to the greatest prehistoric monument of them all - Stonehenge.

- ⇒ Honeystreet to Stonehenge via: Durrington Walls, West Amesbury Henge and the Avenue
Distance: 23.5 miles



Please use OS Explorer Maps 157, 130 (1:25k) or OS Landranger 173, 184 (1:50k). All distances approx.

Walking Through History



Day 1 – Places of Interest

Windmill Hill to Avebury via: Avebury Stone Circle and the Sanctuary
Distance: 6.5 miles



In the heart of the Wiltshire countryside just over 10 miles west of Marlborough, and a mile northwest of Avebury is the National Trust owned site Windmill Hill.

Car Parking is available in either Avebury or in Winterbourne Monkton. From the Chosen parking spot, we follow one of the market public access routes to make our way to the west side of the Windmill Hill enclosure, where our journey through Neolithic era begins.

Windmill Hill

Towards the end of the Stone Age a seismic change was afoot. Around 4000BC a new era was dawning, our hunter-gatherer ancestors, started to settle and put down roots. They began farming. This period marks the birth of civilization in Britain. It sparked the building of many large scale monuments and it was the first time in our history that man left a lasting mark on the landscape of Wiltshire.



One of the earliest signs of this mammoth change can be found here at Windmill Hill. Potentially the oldest of all the sites we will visit in the prehistoric Wiltshire landscape. It was established 5500 years ago. Dating from around 3500BC, it's far older than Avebury.

Windmill Hill is what is known as a 'Causewayed Enclosure', consisting of three concentric rings of ditches. None of these ditches are continuous; they are broken at intervals by crossing points - hence the term 'causewayed'.

These enclosures are thought to have been meeting places. The first farmers needed somewhere to gather, trade animals, crops and tools. They needed a place to renew friendships, to marry and perform rituals. It was a kind of prehistoric village square!

Today when viewing from ground level the ditches are not clearly defined. In fact the most evident features are not Neolithic at all... they are barrows from the Bronze Age! Standing at Windmill Hill today it's hard to get a sense of what this place would have looked like back in the day, but the Neolithic traveler would have been startled by the sheer size and scale of Windmill Hill. It was a vast 'arena' 350m across. Windmill Hill is not only one of the earliest examples of people enclosing open space, it's also the biggest 'causewayed camp' in the British Isles.



Windmill Hill dates from early Neolithic Britain. But what we're really interested in are the events here in the last centuries of the Stone Age. About a mile from Windmill Hill, and a 1000 years later in history we find the biggest prehistoric stone circle in Europe - Avebury Stone Circle.

Leaving Windmill Hill, we head east along the **White Horse Trail** before turning south into **Avebury** via a footpath that runs parallel to and just **west of the A4361**. This path takes us around the west side of **Avebury Manor** to join the **High Street** that runs through the centre of Avebury.

Avebury Stone Circle

The majority of Avebury village is encircled by a vast Neolithic henge monument. The henge (the bank with an internal ditch) dates from 2600BC. A hundred years later, it is thought the stones were added. Avebury is enormous! At three hundred and forty meters across, three-quarters of a mile around...it's 14 times the size of Stonehenge. It may not be Britain's most well-known stone circle (we'll see that at the end of our walk) but it is undoubtedly the greatest! And Avebury is much more than a stone circle.



Within the hundred or so stones that once made up the outer circle were two inner circles each with their own special features, all enclosed by the gargantuan henge with 4 causewayed entrances; at least 2 of which lead to a long avenue of paired stones.

Avebury is thought to have been an important gathering place, not a place of dwelling, but a place used for ritual purposes - A great Neolithic temple for a people who lived in close harmony with their natural environment. Ceremonies that relate to the seasons and fertility are thought to have been practiced here. Current thinking is that monuments made out of stone are very closely linked to concepts of ancestry. When people die, they become ancestors, and ancestors are the agents that look after the living. If the Neolithic people's well-being is tied into the world of ancestors then they'd want to honor and house those ancestors.

So Avebury is perhaps one of those locations where the ancestral dead were worshipped and housed. The building of Avebury took place over a thousand year period. So it's clearly a very important site to the Neolithic people.



Take time to stroll around the 4 quadrants of **Avebury Stone Circle**, marveling at the ancient stones that surround you. From **Avebury**, the **Herepath** or **Green Street** takes us east. Follow the road which turns into a farm track past **Manor Farm**. Here we take the right-hand fork in the path heading south along an unnamed footpath which leads to a small section of 'The **Ridgeway**' path, before (very carefully) crossing the A4 to **The Sanctuary**.

The Sanctuary

The Sanctuary is thought to be a special ritual site. Huge numbers of human bones were found here, accompanied by food remains, suggesting elaborate death rites and ceremonies. The Sanctuary once had two stone circles and was connected to Avebury by an avenue of stones 'West Kennet Avenue'. Originally dating from about 3000BC, The Sanctuary is thought to have been a complex circular arrangement of timber posts. These posts were later replaced by stones. It's been suggested that the wooden post holes, may not all relate to one building. Perhaps they were separate structures built at different times? Perhaps there were sky burials here? Whatever the original significance of the site it seems to have been the centre of some type of mortuary practice. The site was abandoned around 2000BC. Today little remains of the once impressive site, the position of the stones and timber are now marked, a little unromantically by concrete slabs.



From **The Sanctuary** we follow the footpath west, before joining the road to **West Kennett village**. Here we turn right to join the B4003 heading northwest. Leaving the B4003 at the **West Kennet Stone Avenue**, we follow the route of our Neolithic ancestors between **The Sanctuary** and **Avebury Stone Circle** to complete Day 1's walk.

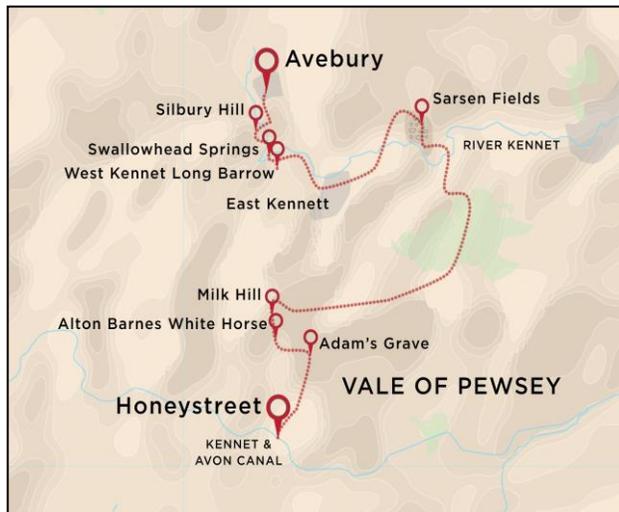
Walking Through History



Day 2 – Places of Interest

Avebury to Honeystreet via: Silbury Hill, Swallowhead Springs, West Kennet Long Barrow, Field of Sarsen Stones, Milk Hill and the Alton Barnes White Horse and Adam's Grave.

Distance: 15.5 miles



Leaving Avebury we take the footpath that heads directly south from **St James Parish Church**, Avebury, past the National Trust main public car park for Avebury and cross the A4361.

We follow the footpath to **Silbury Hill** located directly opposite the entrance to the public car park. After less than half a mile the path splits in two, we take the right-hand fork heading west towards the **Silbury Hill** car park and viewing spot.

Silbury Hill

Silbury Hill is the largest man-made mound in Europe. Thought to have been completed in around 2400 BC, it apparently contains no burial. It's a mysterious site - it was clearly important but its purpose, significance and meaning remain unknown it's one of the most intriguing sites in the area's prehistoric landscape.



It stands at 30 meters high and 160 meters wide. Silbury Hill compares in height and volume to the Egyptian pyramids, to which it is roughly contemporaneous. Its construction is estimated to have involved 4 million man-hours of work and it is thought to be made up of 500,000 tons of material.

It was traditionally believed that the mound at Silbury had been built in three distinct phases, but recent excavations have revealed that in fact it wasn't built by many people over a short time, the structure evolved overtime and was created by far fewer people over about 150 years.

It is now thought that people were coming to Silbury and bringing with them basket loads of material, which they then piled one on top of the other, little-by-little over a long period. It was this process that is thought to have been important to the people that built it, rather than the structure itself.



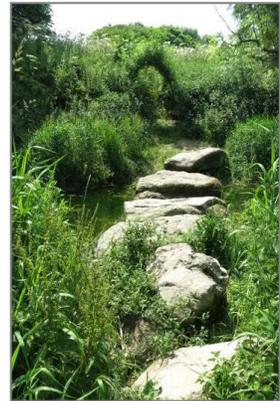
Please note that there is no public access to the top of **Silbury Hill** itself. It should be viewed from the viewing point and the public footpaths surrounding it. From **Silbury Hill** we cross the A4 and follow the footpath along the road heading east, for a short distance before we come across a small metal kissing-gate that leads into a field. Sticking to the right-hand side of the field, we follow the fence line to the far right-hand (southwest) corner of the field. Here climb the wooden stile to find **Swallowhead Springs**.

Swallowhead Springs

It is believed that people were coming to Silbury Hill's location during the Neolithic era because of water. The source of the River Kennet which flows all the way to the Thames and on to the North Sea can be found here.

The spring is now located a short distance south of the man-made mound, but four and a half thousand years ago the water table would have been between 3-5 metres higher than it is today and the source of the Kennett in the Neolithic period would have been located at Silbury Hill.

So perhaps the mound building in some way was a celebration of the water source? Today Swallowhead Springs is still a sacred site with significance to modern-day pagans. Next to the spring is an old gnarled tree at which it is customary to make offerings. Its twisted outstretched branches are adorned with an array of colorful ribbons, trinkets and messages.



After we've left our own message or tied an extra ribbon to the tree, we head back to the road following it a short distance east before taking the marked footpath south to **West Kennet Long Barrow**.

West Kennet Long Barrow

One of the largest and most impressive Neolithic graves in Britain; it is also one of the most accessible Neolithic chambered tombs. West Kennet Long Barrow was built in around 3600BC, meaning that this site predates Silbury Hill by over a thousand years.

46 bodies or parts of bodies have been found here. It was originally thought that these burials were made over the 1000 year period that the tomb was open, but we now realize that the people whose bones were left here all died within 20-30 years of each other and were entombed at West Kennet Long Barrow towards the very beginning of the Neolithic.



After 1,000 years the barrow is thought to have been ritually sealed off, when three huge Sarsen blocking stones were laid across the entrance.



From **West Kennet Long Barrow** we retrace our steps to where the footpath splits in two. A short way before the footbridge, take the right-hand path heading east along the White Horse Trail. Just west of **East Kennett village** we take the footpath heading through East Kennett village.

Following the footpath as it turns into the main road past the church, we continue on from **East Kennett** following the narrow road to **West Overton**, taking great care of traffic. We then head through the village of **West Overton** passing the church, before taking the road north **over George Bridge** and crossing the A4. The footpath north leads us through North Farm for just less than half a mile before we take the footpath bearing east past **Pickledean Barn** to the **Grey Wethers** or **Sarsen Stones**.

Sarsen Stones

Located close to Pickledean Barn in an area sometimes known as Piggledene, there remains a field that is absolutely littered with huge Sarsen stones - the stones used by our Neolithic ancestors to construct the Stone Age monuments scattered throughout this land.

This is one of the few places that we can see the stones as our ancestors would have found them 6000 years ago. Back then it's thought that much of the landscape of Wiltshire would have been strewn by these vast stones. But over the centuries they have been broken up, moved and used as building material. These almighty rocks were formed 60 million years ago when minerals in the groundwater cemented them together. They're enormously heavy.

These stones were used by our ancient ancestors to build the sites around Avebury and to build Stonehenge. Digging them out of the ground with only primitive tools must have taken serious man power. The Sarsen stones are not only of interest because of their geological and historical importance, they are also of ecological interest for the rare lichens and mosses they support.



From here head south following the path through the field of **Sarsen Stones** until it rejoins the A4. Now follow the A4 east for a short stretch. Taking the first right-hand turning the road leads us through **Fyfield** and **Lockeridge**.

On leaving **Lockeridge** at the T-junction we follow the road to the right heading west, before crossing the road and taking the footpath that heads directly south past **Poultry Farm** and through **West Woods**. Continue south before joining the **Wansdyke Path**, heading west along it for approximately 2 ½ miles. We then leave the **Wansdyke Path** and take the **White Horse Trail** south up and over **Milk Hill** along the ridgeway past the **Alton Barnes White Horse**.

Alton Barnes White Horse

Wiltshire is the county for white horses. There are or were at least twenty-four of these hill figures in Britain, no less than thirteen being in Wiltshire. The chalk downs of central Wiltshire make it an ideal place for such figures.

These fertile chalk soils were not only ideal for Neolithic farming communities; they are also the perfect place for white horses. Many of these horses are prehistoric in origin. But not The Alton Barnes White Horse, it was cut in 1812. But it's a great reminder that the monuments built by Neolithic man in this landscape would have gleamed bright white.



From the **Alton Barnes White Horse** continue on the **White Horse Trail** to **Adam's Grave**.

Adam's Grave

Adam's Grave is a Neolithic tomb, a chambered Long Barrow very prominently positioned on a hilltop to the north of Alton Barnes on the edge of the Vale of Pewsey. The view from here is breathtaking, so be sure to take in the stunning scenery. And if you walk this route during summer or in early autumn keep your eyes peeled for crop circles. The area is also the world's number one crop circle hot spot. Adam's Grave is a landmark on Duke's Ley Line.

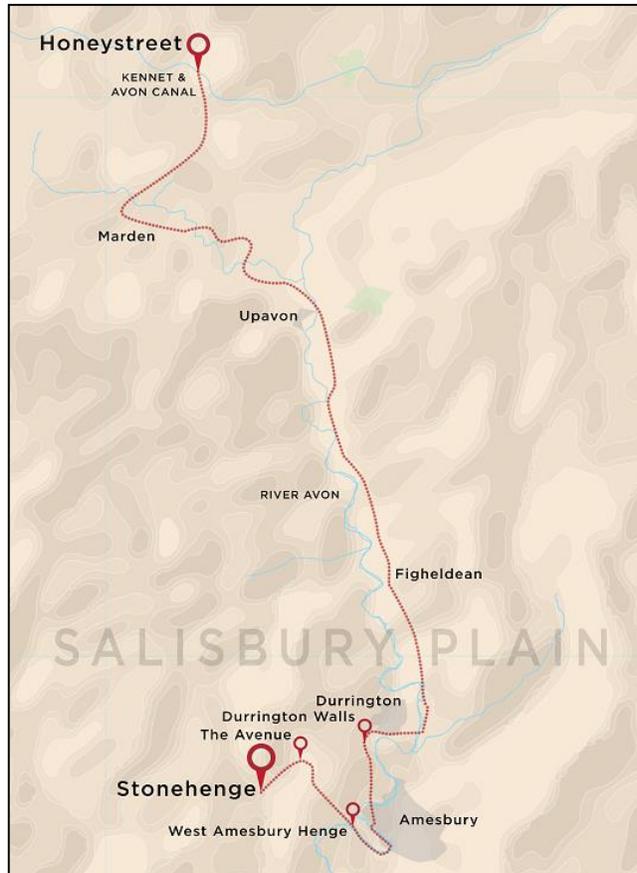
The term ley line was coined by Alfred Watkins, a brewer, hotelier and amateur archaeologist in 1921. Watkins developed the theory that these alignments were created for ease of overland trekking by line-of-sight navigation during Neolithic times. Watkins sought to identify many ancient track-ways in the British landscape. Duke's Ley Line runs from Avebury to Stonehenge, and is thought to connect all the important archaeological sites on our route.



From **Adams Grave** follow the White Horse Trail off the ridgeway and down through **Alton Barnes**. Follow the road south to **Honeystreet** and **The Barge Inn** on the **Kennet and Avon Canal** where Day 2's walk ends.

Day 3 – Places of Interest

Honeystreet to Stonehenge via: Durrington Walls, West Amesbury Henge. Distance: 23.5 miles (approx)



Day 3's walk follows the **Kennet and Avon Canal** for approx ½ mile south, before heading east to rejoin **The Sands** (the road from Honeystreet).

After a further ½ mile, take the road SE through **Hatfield Henge** (a further Neolithic henge) and on towards **Marden**. Passing **Marden Church** and the village hall, the footpath heads SE to **Wilsford**.

Through **Wilsford**, we take the footpath east past **Cuttenham Farm**, before rejoining the **White Horse Trail**, past **Charlton Manor** to the village of **Charlton St Peter**.

The footpath heads SE through **Rushall** and **Upavon**, where we follow the main road east across the river, continuing along the road on the east side of the Avon; through **East Chisenbury**, **Littlecott**, **Haxton**, **Figheldean**, **Ablington** to **Durrington**.

At **Durrington** we pass **Manor Farm** and take the **A3028** east crossing the river. After approx 1 mile, take the 1st exit at the roundabout onto the **A345** to **Durrington Walls**. Approaching the main entrance to **Durrington Walls**, note that you are actually walking through the centre of the vast henge as the **A345** transects the monument.

Durrington Walls

Durrington Walls is Britain's largest henge, measuring nearly 500 metres in diameter. But perhaps more significant than its size are the recent discoveries made here, which have transformed our understanding of not just Durrington Walls but also of Stonehenge. It might look like any other field today but back in the Neolithic period this site would have thronged with people. Archaeologists have uncovered large numbers of Neolithic houses here, making Durrington Walls the largest prehistoric village in Europe.

At a time when the population of Britain was only in the tens of thousands, Durrington Walls could support up to 5000 people! It is thought that huge numbers of people flocked to Durrington Walls, travelling from the far corners of the UK for a gigantic mid-winter celebration. The central feature for the celebration was the Southern Circle, a wooden henge discovered at the centre of Durrington Walls (now covered by the main road and not to be confused with the site next door called Woodhenge!) The entrance to Southern Circle aligns with mid-winter sunrise.

It is thought that Neolithic people would gather here for a huge once-a-year party and on the morning of the winter solstice they would watch the sunrise at Durrington Walls and then ritually process following the river Avon to Stonehenge. The river is the vital link that connects Durrington Walls with Stonehenge. So it was part of an interconnected complex with Durrington Walls. Stonehenge did not exist in the landscape in isolation.



From **Durrington Walls** head directly south along the A345 for 1 mile crossing a roundabout. Continue South on the A345 into **Amesbury**. Following the main road past the library, the footpath skirts the town heading east to meet the road and cross the **Queens Falls** weir. Then taking the road left, head southwest towards the recreation ground. From here, take the footpath that follows the river around the sewage works as it bends back towards **Ham Hatches**, following the footpath that tracks the south side of the river until it reaches **West Amesbury** where we cross a small footbridge heading into the eastside of **West Amesbury** village.

West Amesbury Henge and The Avenue

Like our Neolithic ancestors we are following the path of the river to Stonehenge and at West Amesbury there was once a huge marker, a signpost to say - this is the point to leave the river and cut inland towards Stonehenge. West Amesbury Henge (sometimes also known as Blue Stonehenge) marks the start of the final approach to Stonehenge. This is where 'The Avenue', an almost two-mile route with a very deliberate line of approach to Stonehenge, begins.



The whole route from Durrington to Stonehenge is thought to mark a passage from life into death. The water represents the transition between Durrington Walls, thought to be the place of the living, to Stonehenge, thought to be the place of the dead. And on their ritual journey, our ancestors were carrying the remains of their dead, as ashes, to be buried at Stonehenge.



Nothing can be seen of **West Amesbury Henge** today. It is on private land on the north side of the river, very close to the footbridge. Having crossed the bridge, take the footpath heading north through **West Amesbury** which tracks the route of the B-road that leads up to the A303.

Take great care crossing this busy road and join a footpath just west of **Stonehenge Cottages**. Now on National Trust land we follow the path north through **New King Barrows**, before taking the path west through a small gate marked with a **National Trust plaque** to walk in the footsteps of our Neolithic ancestors on **The Avenue to Stonehenge**.

Stonehenge

Towards the end of the processional avenue you suddenly lose sight of stones. This final dip is its builders' piece de resistance, allowing the full drama of Stonehenge to make its impact on the final approach to Stonehenge. Like the Neolithic pilgrims before us, we view Stonehenge from the direction it was originally meant to be seen and after three days we're finally at the foot of one of the finest achievements of the New Stone Age. A powerful monument to honor the dead.



For millennia Stonehenge has stood alone on Salisbury Plain - a mysterious legacy of a vanished culture. Today we are just beginning to uncover the mysteries of how the vast numbers of prehistoric monuments in Wiltshire are connected. Since the 70s Stonehenge has been at its busiest in mid-summer when thousands of people gather to celebrate the sunrise on the longest day of the year.

Walking Through History



But archaeologists are now convinced that back in the New Stone Age, Stonehenge's busiest period, rather ironically, would have been in mid-winter. The Neolithic procession would have begun at Durrington Walls at sunrise on winter solstice and would have reached Stonehenge, for the mid-winter sunset to which it is perfectly aligned. Make sure to take time to admire the huge megaliths that dominate the landscape. The size and scale of the construction of Stonehenge is truly breathtaking, and if possible stay for sunset and appreciate the stones as our ancestors would have done over 4000 years ago.



Access to **Stonehenge** is through the **English Heritage** visitor's centre and the charge for entry is £8 for adults and £4.80 for children. **Stonehenge** is where we complete our three-day hike.