

Buried at Stonehenge: boy with the amber necklace

Stonehenge was attracting sightseeing families thousands of years ago, archaeologists believe after discovering the Bronze Age remains of a Mediterranean boy near the monument.



Fallen snow rests on Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain Photo: REUTERS

By Richard Alleyne, Science Correspondent

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The teenager is believed to have been part of a wealthy group that travelled 1,600 miles from southern Europe to Britain, taking in the stone circle along the way.

His find is thought to be important because it is likely he was too young to travel on his own and was probably part of a large family group.

He is the third ancient foreigner to be found near the World Heritage Site in the last few years but the other two were grown men thought to be tradesman or warriors.

His discovery further suggests that the stone circle would have been a place of pilgrimage or sightseeing akin to a medieval cathedral as long as 4,000 years ago.

"They may have come to Britain for different reasons but Stonehenge would have been well known across Europe – rather like a medieval cathedral," said Dr Andrew Fitzpatrick, part of Wessex Archaeology who made the find.

"They may have come to trade but visited Stonehenge a long the way. It would have been an awesome

sight. It would have been one of the greatest temples of its time."

The boy – aged 14 or 15 – had travelled to Britain from Spain, Italy, Greece or France, crossing the English Channel in a primitive wooden boat or canoe around 1550BC.

Unfortunately he died – probably from illness – and was buried in a primitive grave around two miles away still wearing what would have been an expensive amber necklace.

Dubbed the Boy with the Amber Necklace he is the third long distance traveller to be found near the monument since digging started at nearby Boscombe Down Airbase.

Archaeologists have previously showed that the Amesbury Archer – a man buried with a treasure trove of copper and gold and discovered in 2002 – was born in the German Alps.

They also believe that the Boscombe Bowmen – a group of seven men, women and children found the following year – originated from Wales or Brittany.

All three – found buried along with dozens of locals – are thought to have been members of the elite of society as they all had valuable possessions.

The origins of the three travellers was discovered thanks to chemical analysis of their teeth which can pinpoint the climate and terrain of where they lived when they were growing up.

Professor Jane Evans, of the British Geological Survey, who carried out the research, said that she believed that the monument would have been as awe-inspiring as Westminster Abbey or the launch of a Space Shuttle.

"It must have been an incredible structure when it was built," she said. "They would have come to stare in amazement."

Mike Pitts, editor of British Archaeology, said that families and tradesmen travelling to Britain would have taken time to see Stonehenge.

"They would have made a detour to see what would have been a wonder of its time."

The boy's virtually intact skeleton was discovered at Boscombe Down, a mile from Stonehenge, by Wessex Archaeology during a housing development.

The remains were radiocarbon dated to around 1550BC – a time when the monument was already more than 1500 years old.

Prof Evans used a slither of tooth enamel – the size of a nail clipping – to trace his origins. By analysing the ratio of two different forms or 'isotopes' of oxygen, Prof Evans found that the boy came from a warmer climate.

And an isotopic comparison of the mineral strontium, which is absorbed by the body from plants, revealed that he came from the Mediterranean or Iberia.



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