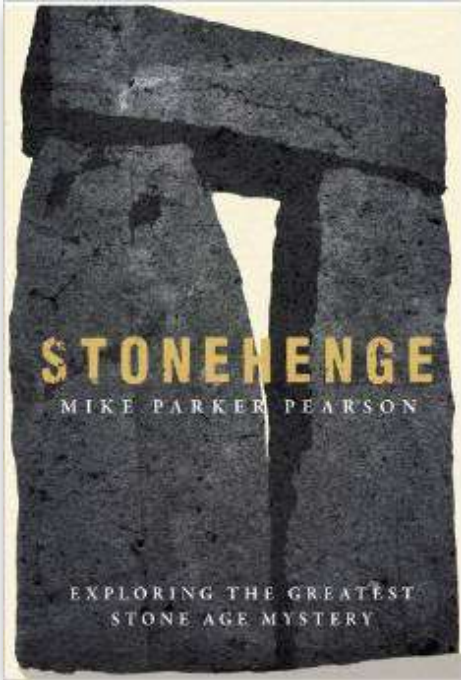


# Reviews



*Stonehenge: Exploring the greatest  
Stone Age mystery*

by **Mike Parker Pearson (London:  
Simon and Shuster 2012.)**

*Reviewed by Pam Armstrong*

The crucial thing to know about Mike Parker Pearson's book 'Stonehenge' is that it not only

discusses the famous megalithic stone circle; it also explores the history of two other circles close by, Woodhenge and Bluestonehenge, as well as exploring the lives of the people who built all three. Professor Parker Pearson's overview of the monument that we think of as Stonehenge is really about the most recent archaeology carried out on the entire hillside leading down from Stonehenge itself, to the newly discovered Neolithic settlement of Durrington Walls close to the River Avon. As Parker Pearson tells it the extensive excavations across this entire hill and riverside reveal new information about the way people lived and buried their dead in what was essentially Europe's largest community 4500 years ago.

Once the settlement by the river was discovered it became clear that the two sites, Stonehenge and Durrington Walls were not separate as everyone had thought, but were in fact two halves of the same complex. In other words, to understand Stonehenge, one has to decode Durrington. And that is precisely what Parker Pearson's book does. His easy to read and well illustrated text details the archaeological excavations which became known as the Riverside Project. This project ran for seven

years from 2003 and counted as one of the world's largest of its time. In all, forty five excavations occurred across the 26.6 square kilometres that we loosely designate 'Stonehenge.'

As Parker Pearson himself points out Stonehenge was not one monument, built at one moment in history, but many monuments built over many centuries. His book covers this evolutionary process, and then broadens in scope to look at the wider social patterns of the time. It explores long-distance mobility and trade, architectural developments and funerary customs all of which provide an essential key to understanding the Neolithic peoples who inhabited this landscape then.

Parker Pearson is bold in his claims that the discoveries of the Riverside Project must now re-shape our view of this unique World Heritage site. He claims for instance that the design of megalithic Stonehenge was not influenced by distant cultures but followed architectural fashions of the time, reflecting local vernacular. In terms of Stonehenge's social function, the discovery of animal bones and lipids within pots at Durrington Walls point he says to midwinter and summertime gatherings. This reinforces the view that the circle's solstitial and lunar alignments were not part of an abstracted calendar, but marked key moments of annual gathering and celebration. Perhaps most importantly the Riverside Project has reassessed

radio carbon dating old and new and so is in a position to argue for a revised chronology of Stonehenge's building phases.

Thus Parker Pearson's 'Stonehenge' anchors this spectacular monument in time and place in a new way and for this alone the book is a most useful reference point for those interested in the continuing debate about Neolithic Europe. Highly recommended.

send responses, reviews and emails to [spica@sophia-project.net](mailto:spica@sophia-project.net)

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2. The paper received a first (an overall mark of 70% or more) OR it was recommended for submission by a tutor.
3. The paper should be corrected according to problems pointed out by the tutors who marked the paper.
4. You should add an Abstract of approximately 150 words at the beginning of the document.
5. Submit the paper as a Word document, without the tutor comments but with a covering email that tells us what mark you got for it and/or who suggested you submit it. We need to know your paper is eligible.

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