

'Blue Stonehenge' discovered

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The artist's impression. Credit Peter Dunn.

(PhysOrg.com) -- Archaeologists have released an artist's impression of what a second stone circle found a mile from Stonehenge might have looked like.

The drawing shows the sensational discovery of "Blue Stonehenge" by a team led by archaeologists from Manchester, Sheffield and Bristol Universities on the West bank of the River Avon last month.

Professor Julian Thomas, from The University of Manchester and a co-director of the Stonehenge Riverside Project, said the monument was a circle of bluestones, dragged from the Welsh Preseli mountains, 150 miles away around 5,000 years ago.

However, the stones, he said, had since been since removed, leaving

behind nine uncovered holes. The team believe they were probably part of a circle of 25 standing stones.

The new stone circle is 10m (33 ft) in diameter and was surrounded by a henge - a ditch with an external bank.

The standing stones marked the end of the Avenue that leads from the River Avon to Stonehenge, a 1¾-mile long (2.8km) processional route constructed at the end of the Stone Age - or the Neolithic period.

The outer henge around the stones was built around 2400 BC, but arrowheads found in the stone circle indicate that the stones were put up as much as 500 years earlier.

When the newly discovered circle's stones were removed by Neolithic tribes, they may, according to the team, have been dragged to Stonehenge, to be incorporated within its major rebuilding around 2500 BC.

[Archaeologists](#) know that after this date, Stonehenge consisted of about 80 Welsh stones and 83 local, sarsen stones. Some of the bluestones that once stood at the riverside probably now stand within the centre of Stonehenge.

The discovery may confirm of the Stonehenge Riverside Project's theory that the River Avon linked a 'domain of the living' - marked by timber circles and houses upstream at the Neolithic village of Durrington Walls (discovered by the Project in 2005) - with a 'domain of the dead' marked by Stonehenge and this new stone circle.

The team hope to radiocarbon date antler picks found on the site - used by the stone circle builders as pickaxes - to provide more precise dates.

The dates will reveal if the circle was built when another 56 Welsh bluestones were erected at Stonehenge itself - in the decades after 3000 BC.

Sheffield University's Professor Mike Parker Pearson, Director of the project, said: "It could be that Blue Stonehenge was where the dead began their final journey to Stonehenge.

"Not many people know that Stonehenge was Britain's largest burial ground at that time. Maybe the bluestone circle is where people were cremated before their ashes were buried at Stonehenge itself."

The University of Manchester's Professor Julian Thomas, co-director, said: "The implications of this discovery are immense.

"It is compelling evidence that this stretch of the River Avon was central to the religious lives of the people who built Stonehenge.

"Old theories about Stonehenge that do not explain the evident significance of the river will have to be re-thought."

He added: "There is no evidence that the circle had a particular orientation or even an entrance.

Soil that fell into the holes when the stones were removed was full of charcoal, showing that plenty of wood was burned here.

"Yet this was not a place where anyone lived: the pottery, animal bones, food residues and flint tools used in domestic life during the Stone Age were absent."

The University of Bristol's Dr Josh Pollard, co-director, explained: "This is an incredible discovery.

“The newly discovered circle and henge should be considered an integral part of Stonehenge rather than a separate monument, and it offers tremendous insight into the history of its famous neighbour.

“Its landscape location demonstrates once again the importance of the River Avon in Neolithic funerary rites and ceremonies.”

Provided by University of Manchester ([news](#) : [web](#))

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