

Working like a Scientist

What evidence do we have that tells us about food and diet during the building of Stonehenge?

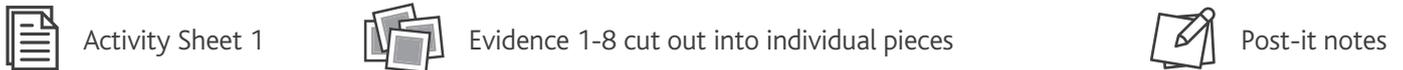
Learning Overview

WHAT: Using straightforward scientific evidence to answer questions or to support their findings (Working Scientifically Lower Key Stage 2).

HOW: By exploring evidence found by scientists and archaeologists at Durrington Walls and other prehistoric feasting sites.

OUTCOME: Pupils will work like a scientist to make suggestions about food and diet at the time of Stonehenge.

Resources



Vocabulary

Stonehenge, Durrington Walls, evidence, middens, prehistoric, sites, analyse, archaeologists.

Setting the Scene: What is evidence?

1. Explain to pupils that evidence (information or clues), such as the remains of houses, tells us that around 2500BC, the people who built and used Stonehenge probably lived about two miles away at a place called Durrington Walls. They will have faced the enormous task of feeding large numbers of people. There would have been a lot of people needed to build Stonehenge over a lengthy period of time and they will all have needed food while they were living there.
2. Ask how might archaeologists of the future know about food we eat today? Think about what evidence would be left behind from your breakfast, lunch and tea? Take children's ideas then discuss how there was no television, radio, cameras, computers, paper and pencils during the Stone Age. How do we still have very good ideas about how people lived during this time? How do we know about what the people who built Stonehenge ate and how they obtained, cooked and served their food? What evidence is there?

Exploring the Evidence

3. Explain that we can find out about how people lived by exploring evidence from massive prehistoric feasting sites and the huge middens (rubbish dumps) they left behind. Other than pottery and food remains at these sites, scientists can also analyse human bones, teeth and ancient fossilised poo.
4. Take a look at some of the discoveries and discuss what they might tell us about food and diet during the building of Stonehenge.

5. Share the evidence sheets with pupils and read about some of the scientific discoveries that have been made. Ask them to think about what each piece of evidence might tell us about food and diet during the building of Stonehenge.

6. Pupils could work in pairs or small groups and discuss their ideas. The teacher should now place the individual pieces of evidence (1-8) on different tables around the room and encourage groups to write their suggestions on Post-it notes and stick these next to each one.

7. A whole class discussion to collate children's ideas would work well in order to discuss all possibilities. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers and that a scientist's job is to consider the evidence and make sensible suggestions. Ideas for discussion might include:

Evidence 1: The people living at Durrington Walls made and used Grooved Ware pottery, which was highly and elaborately decorated. It is often found at important sites and seems to have been made in large quantities with feasting and serving in mind.

It's worth pointing out that often it is parts of pots that are found by archaeologists, rather than whole pots. Ask children to think what their pots and plates would look like if smashed.

Evidence 2: The people living at Durrington Walls seem to have had a meat-heavy diet because so many animal bones have been found. Pork is a good meat for feasts because pigs have large numbers of piglets, can be fattened up quickly and will eat almost anything!

It is an interesting point to note that evidence of some food might have been lost to us entirely. Children should consider all the types of food that might completely disappear over 4,500 years, eg mushrooms, bread, leaves or grains of plants. They can think about what would remain of their lunch after a picnic and if it would still be there after a day, after a week, after a year and so on.

Evidence 3: A large number of animal bones is more evidence that lots of people were gathering here for large feasts and that meat was a popular food choice, with the bones being left behind.

Evidence 4: Animal bones were found in the ground with joints still connecting them together (articulated). This suggests that there was still meat on them when disposed of. Children may need to think about the bones found in meat today. If you want to get every bit of meat off a chicken wing you rip the bones apart. If you only take a bite then throw it away the bones would be found together.

Evidence 5: Cut marks on bones may suggest that meat, such as beef, was cut up into smaller pieces, before it was cooked and eaten.

Evidence 6: Burnt limb and foot bones suggest that pigs were often roasted over open fires.

Evidence 7: Scientists think that people were herding animals over long distances, perhaps even bringing them by boat. People across Britain must have known about Stonehenge and travelled there from afar, whether to help build the monument or to take part in ceremonies and feasts there.

Evidence 8: Poo contains tiny remains that can tell us lots of information about what food the person ate – no matter how long ago!

And finally...

9. Pupils could think about what other evidence might exist that tells us more about the people that built Stonehenge and the food that they ate.



Fantastic Fact

Many suggestions have been put forward about why Stonehenge was built but still nobody knows the exact reason! Scientists and archaeologists are able to use modern equipment and scientific techniques to look for new evidence which might tell us more about the famous ancient monument.



Durrington Walls pit excavation | Credit & permission: Stonehenge Riverside Project