

Arg-e Bam

On land | Iran | ancient origins; mostly 1500s-1700s | Grades 3-5

Name _____ Date _____

Arg-e Bam was the largest building in the world made of mud bricks, a whole city inside one wall.

Read the story

Bam sits on an ancient trade route through the desert, where caravans carried silk, spices and cotton. A town may have stood here more than 2,000 years ago, but most of the walls and buildings we know were built between the 1500s and 1700s.

The whole city was surrounded by thick walls and 38 towers. Inside were houses, a market, a mosque, a bathhouse and stables. At the top stood the governor's castle. Farmers grew dates and oranges using underground water channels called qanats, which brought water from the mountains.

In the 1800s, people moved to a newer town outside the walls. Then, in 2003, a terrible earthquake struck. Much of the old citadel crumbled. Since then, workers from Iran and other countries have been carefully rebuilding it using traditional mud bricks.

How it ended

People slowly left the walled city in the 1800s for more space outside. The 2003 earthquake then destroyed much of what was left. Today Bam is being rebuilt brick by brick.

Key words

- citadel: a fortress that protects a town, often on high ground
- caravan: a group of travelers and animals moving together, often traders
- qanat: an underground tunnel that carries water from hills to dry land

Wow facts

- The whole citadel was made of mud bricks, clay and straw.
- Underground water channels called qanats carried water across the desert to the town.
- After the 2003 earthquake, people from many countries helped rebuild it.

Talk about it

1. Why would people build with mud instead of stone in the desert?

2. Should damaged ancient places be rebuilt, or left as they are? Why?

Try this

Draw a map of Arg-e Bam as it looked at its busiest. Label three things people did there.

Quick quiz

Circle the best answer.

1. What is Arg-e Bam made of?

- A. Marble
- B. Mud bricks
- C. Wood
- D. Steel

2. What is a qanat?

- A. An underground water channel
- B. A type of sword
- C. A desert animal
- D. A kind of boat

3. What happened at Bam in 2003?

- A. A flood
- B. A big earthquake
- C. A volcano erupted
- D. A blizzard

Go further

Open ruinscape.live/arg-e-bam/ for photos, the Then and Now picture where there is one, and links to museum collections and research. On the globe, Lyra Kael can fly the class there and answer questions.

Answer key (for teachers)

1. B. It was the largest mud-brick building in the world.
2. A. Qanats bring water underground from the mountains.
3. B. An earthquake destroyed much of the citadel.