

Callanish Stones

On land | Scotland | about 2900 BCE | Grades 3-5

Name _____

Date _____

The Callanish Stones are older than Stonehenge's big stone circle, and their pattern looks like a giant cross from above.

Read the story

About 5,000 years ago, around 2900 BCE, Neolithic farmers raised the Callanish Stones. The center is a ring of 13 tall stones around a single giant stone almost 5 meters tall. Rows of stones lead away to the north, south, east and west.

Later, a small chambered tomb was built inside the ring. Many people think the stones were connected to the moon. Every 18.6 years, the moon rises very low over the hills to the south and seems to move along the ridge, a rare event the builders may have watched.

Over the centuries, peat, a thick soggy soil, grew around the stones and buried their bottoms. In 1857 the peat was dug away, and people could see how tall they really were.

How it ended

The people who built Callanish changed their ways over time and stopped using the site, perhaps around 1500 to 1000 BCE. Peat slowly covered the stones until it was cleared in 1857.

Key words

- peat: thick, wet soil made from dead plants, found in bogs
- gneiss: a hard, banded type of rock formed deep in the Earth
- alignment: the way things are lined up in a row or direction

Wow facts

- The stones are made of Lewisian gneiss, rock about 3 billion years old.
- Peat buried the stones about 1.5 meters deep until 1857.
- Local legend says the stones were giants turned to stone.

Talk about it

1. Why might people build something to track the moon?

2. How could peat help protect the stones?

Try this

Draw a map of Callanish Stones as it looked at its busiest. Label three things people did there.

Quick quiz

Circle the best answer.

1. **What shape do the Callanish Stones make from above?**
 - A. A cross
 - B. A triangle
 - C. A star
 - D. A spiral
2. **What buried the stones' bottoms for centuries?**
 - A. Peat
 - B. Sand
 - C. Snow
 - D. Lava
3. **Which sky event may the stones be linked to?**
 - A. A rare low moon
 - B. A comet
 - C. A rainbow
 - D. Northern lights only

Go further

Open ruinscape.live/callanish-stones/ 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. A. Rows of stones stretch out from the circle like a cross.
2. A. Peat grew about 1.5 meters deep until 1857.
3. A. Every 18.6 years the moon skims low over the southern hills.