

Skara Brae:

Found on the Orkney Islands off the north of Scotland, Skara Brae is one of Britain's most fascinating prehistoric villages. Archaeologists estimate it was built and occupied between 3000BCE and 2500BCE, during what's called the 'Neolithic era' or 'New Stone Age'. The village is older than the pyramids and Stonehenge, in fact!

Why is Skara Brae important?

Skara Brae is one of the best preserved Neolithic settlements anywhere in Western Europe – which makes it a super-special find for archaeologists. The amazing artefacts discovered at this incredible site give us an insight into what life was like in Britain during that time. They can teach us how the Neolithic people built their homes, as well as the work they did, the tools they used, the food they ate and much, much more!

Skara brae facts:

If you visit Skara Brae today, you'll see a collection of super-cool prehistoric, circular houses, built from slabs of stone. Supported by 2.4m walls, the houses consist of one single room, and are connected together by covered passageways.

Today, the homes are open to the air, but historians think they would once have had roofs made from turf, thatched seaweed or straw. And the really cool bit? Even the furniture has stood the test of time! Made from sturdy stone, the homes' beds, dressers, shelves and hearths (base of the fireplace) remain to this day. How cool is that?!

The people of Skara Brae:

Tools, crop remains and bones found at Skara Brae show the villagers weren't only skilled hunters and fishermen — they were expert farmers, too! They grew crops such as wheat and barley, and reared sheep, cattle and pigs. They were some of Britain's first ever farmers, in fact. Before the Neolithic period, people only hunted wild animals, and gathered wild fruit and vegetables to eat. Impressive claim to fame, eh?

Since no weapons have been found at Skara Brae, historians believe it was home to a peaceful community. But what archaeologists have discovered is jewellery, needles, buttons, ornaments, well-crafted pottery and dice, suggesting they were creative people who appreciated beauty – and enjoyed playing games, too!

When was Skara Brae rediscovered?

For centuries, Skara Brae was covered by a huge sand dune on the shore of the Bay of Skail on the Orkney Islands. It remained hidden there until a huge storm hit the island in 1850, blowing away the sand, earth and plants, and exposing the village to the outside world once again. Then, in the 1860s, a team of archaeologists led by a man called William Watt, got to digging and uncovered four buildings. Years later in 1926, another storm hit the island, leading to further excavations which revealed more of the village's houses and artefacts.

What happened to Skara Brae?

The settlement of Skara Brae was abandoned around 2500BC – but the reason why still remains a mystery! One theory is that a huge sandstorm hit the village, forcing the inhabitants to flee quickly and leave their belongings behind. But more recent research suggests that the process may well

have been more gradual. It's likely that people decided to relocate to more productive lands, and live on their own independent farms rather than in a communal settlement.

Together with surrounding Neolithic stone monuments, in 1999 Skara Brae was named a World Heritage Site. And whilst people may no longer call this fascinating village "home", it attracts thousands of visitors every year who seek an exciting journey back in time!