

SUMMER SOLSTICE AT STONEHENGE

It's summer solstice time in the Northern Hemisphere. This solstice occurs at the instant the sun reaches its most northerly point on the celestial sphere, the imaginary sphere of stars surrounding Earth. **In 2016, solstice came on June 20, 2016 at 22:34 UTC.**

At the northern summer solstice the sun's path stops moving northward in the sky. It is the day on which the days stop growing longer and will soon begin to shorten again. For this reason, in festivals and celebrations across this hemisphere of Earth, the summer solstice is a time of celebration.

Stonehenge seems to have been built in three phases between 3,000 B.C. and 1,600 B.C. and its specific purpose remains under study. However, it's known that if you stand in just the right place inside the Stonehenge monument on the day of the northern summer solstice, facing north-east through the entrance towards a rough hewn stone outside the circle – known as the Heel Stone – you will see the sun rise above the Heel Stone, as illustrated in the image at the top.

Stonehenge is tied to the winter solstice, too. On the day of the northern winter solstice (around December 20), people watch as the sun sets in the midst of three great stones – known as the Trilithon – consisting of two large vertical stones supporting a third, horizontal stone across the top.

In the case of Stonehenge, this great Trilithon faces outwards from the centre of the monument, with its smooth flat face turned toward the midwinter sun. In fact, the primary axes of Stonehenge seems to have been carefully aligned on a sight-line pointing to the winter solstice sunset.

Stonehenge is amongst the most famous of the ancient astronomical monuments found around the world.

When Stonehenge was first opened to the public it was possible to walk among the stones – even climb on them. The stones were roped off in 1977 as a result of serious erosion. **Today, visitors to the monument are not permitted to touch the stones**, but, if you go, you will be able to walk around the monument from a short distance away.

Visitors can also make special bookings to access the stones throughout the year

AK with EarthSky Notes



View of the Heel Stone at summer solstice sunrise, as seen from inside the Stonehenge monument



The BBC reported that about 12,000 people attended the neolithic site in Wiltshire to watch the sun rise at on June 20, 2016



The Stonehenge Free Festival was a British free festival from 1974 to 1984 held at Stonehenge in England during the month of June, and culminating on the summer solstice on June 21. The festival was a celebration of various alternative cultures. The Tibetan Ukrainian Mountain Troupe, The Tepee People, Circus Normal, the Peace Convoy, New Age Travellers and the Wallys were notable counterculture attendees

