

Newgrange is a Stone Age monument in the Boyne Valley along the Boyne River. It was constructed over 5000 years ago (around 3200 BC) during the Neolithic period, which makes it older than Stonehenge and the Pyramids of Giza.

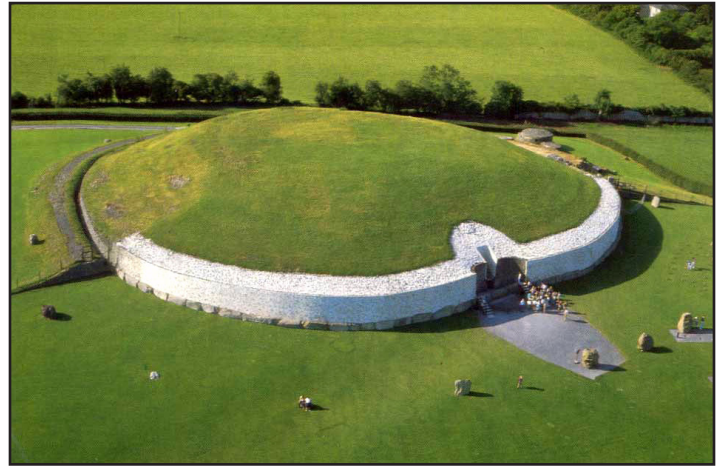
Newgrange consists of a large circular mound with a stone passageway and chambers inside. The mound covers an area of over one acre and is made of alternating layers of earth and stones. The front side is covered by reconstructed white quartz stones. Around the base are 97 kerbstones, some of which are decorated with megalithic art. The mound is surrounded by a circle of standing stone which are believed to have been added centuries after the original monument was built, during the Bronze Age. Inside there is a passage that stretches for 60 feet and leads to the center of the structure. There are three small chambers off of the large central chamber with its high corbelled vault roof. Each of the smaller chambers has a flat stone which was possibly where the bones of the dead were placed.

Newgrange is part of the Brú na Bóinne UNESCO World Heritage Site, along with two other passage tomb mounds at Knowth and Dowth. There are also around 35 smaller passage tombs along the river.

The mound was built by native agriculturalists using tools made of stone, wood, antler or bone. They would have built Newgrange near their settlement where they grew crops and raised livestock. The mound's design suggests that the society was well organized with specialized groups responsible for different aspects of construction.

Archaeologists believe that most of the materials used to build Newgrange were collected from the rocky beach at Clogherhead, about 12 miles to the northeast. Blocks could have been transported to the site by sea or up the river on boats. The stones used for the cairn, which collectively weigh around 200,000 tons, were most likely taken from the river terraces between Newgrange and the Boyne.

Newgrange is considered a passage tomb but there is some debate over this classification. Some archaeologists suggest that, when taken together, the various mound sites display a reverence for the dead and



are religious in nature. Others agree with the idea that they are religious in nature, but show evidence of religious beliefs which were solar-, rather than death-oriented. Still other archaeologists believe that the sites may have had a function relating to astronomy or mythology. One such idea is that the room was designed for a ritual to capture the sun on the shortest day of the year in order to help the days get longer again. Since the nearby mounds are also aligned to capture the sunlight during the winter solstice, some interpret these monuments as calendrical or astronomical devices.

Newgrange continued to have significance into the Iron Age, because pendants made from Roman coins and Roman gold jewelry were found inside. Shortly after this time, however, it was sealed and no longer used, but still remembered in folktales though the location was forgotten. In 1699, the land was owned by a farmer named Charles Campbell who ordered his farmhands to dig up the large mound of earth so that he could collect stone from within. This is when the entrance to the tomb was discovered. A local antiquarian poked around at the time, but it wasn't until the 1970s that the site was fully excavated.

Newgrange is aligned with the winter solstice so that the light from the sun flows in and illuminates the whole passage. This is a very popular event, and visitors interested in exploring the site during the winter solstice have to enter a lottery. Thousands of people enter each year, but only 50 are chosen. But don't worry, as you tour the site your guide will replicate the solstice using the electric lights in the passageway.