

when it was dug – begging the question of where they came from. Many excavated features at Stonehenge are undated. The recent earthwork survey (remarkably, the first full survey of Stonehenge ever done) identified several new, barely visible remains, including a low mound among the stones that appears to be natural. A small circular earthwork known as the North Barrow – it is not a burial mound, and would be better named the North Circle – seems most likely to lie under

Right: The Spaces Project investigates bluestone settings at Stonehenge in 2008

Below: The Heelstone at Stonehenge, which may have been taken from a nearby natural hollow



little to the south-east from an older location. But the pit was too large just to hold a standing stone. It's not unlikely that the stone had always been there, and was raised where it lay out of a great natural hollow. The Riverside Project excavated at two similar, smaller sarsens, known as the Cuckoo Stone and the Torstone (named after an archaeologist's dog!), either side of the river Avon near Durrington. Both had apparently been taken from natural hollows on site.

We think of sarsens as great slabs on the Marlborough Downs 20 miles north of Stonehenge. Hundreds were used in the megalithic monuments at Avebury, and many still lie on the hills around. But sarsens also occur naturally on Salisbury Plain. They are found in some of the early neolithic long barrows, and it seems reasonable to think of the Heelstone, the Cuckoo Stone and the Torstone as local (all are rounded and elongated in form, not a common shape further north).

People would almost certainly have had to travel to the Marlborough

Downs for most of the sarsens in the great carved Stonehenge monument (research is underway hoping to test this). But perhaps the half-buried Heelstone was already there, centuries before Stonehenge was created, as a known landmark. And it may have had a partner.

There is only one other buried pit at Stonehenge of comparable size to that by the Heelstone, a great hollow north-west of the tallest megalith, stone 56. No convincing explanation for this pit has yet been put forward, but originally (it was later dug into) it could have held a second great boulder, now lost among the carved sarsens.

If this was the case, it is notable that the two pits with their half-buried stones lay on the solstice axis. The inner pit is near the centre of the Aubrey circle, and the distance between it and the pit by the Heelstone is equivalent to the circle's diameter. The site's basic geometry could have been derived from the natural occurrence of two sarsen boulders. The only obvious candidate for a rounded, elongated sarsen that

the enclosure bank. Not excavated in modern times, the North Circle is a ring ditch with an outer bank, a tiny henge.

There is another significant feature that may predate Stonehenge: the Heelstone. It is one of the largest stones on the site, completely undressed – unlike all the other large sarsens – and irregular in shape. I excavated near it in 1979, and found a pit with a stone impression on the base. Either the Heelstone had once been one of a pair, or it had been moved a

Above: Stone 16 at Stonehenge, an unusually shaped megalith – could it have been a local sarsen once half-buried on site?

Right: Excavation by the SRP beside the Cuckoo Stone, a natural sarsen once erected where found

