

THE GEO-SAMPLER

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Buzz Aldrin is known for many things, like say, space travel. But last month he revealed just how ahead-of-trend he's been for decades with, wait for it, selfies. That's right. The American icon just released the first selfie, (also known as a photo taken by himself, of himself), shot in space (during the Gemini 12 mission in November 1966), as well as a more recent selfie at Stonehenge. In the contemporary self-portrait, posted to social media on March 16, Mr. Aldrin sends 'a message to the cosmos,' by sporting a tshirt that read: "Get Your Ass to Mars." This got us asking some questions. First, what's up with Buzz Aldrin? And second, since we're so into rocks, what's up with Stonehenge?

STONEHENGE: WHAT'S UP WITH THAT?

Located in Wiltshire, England, Stonehenge is a prehistoric monument that dates back to 3000 or 2000 BC. One of the most famous sites in the world, Stonehenge is comprised of massive stones standing in concentric circles within earthworks. Literally, "henge" are earthworks that feature a flat area of earth in a circular shape that is encircled by a ditch. Lest you think it was the venue of prehistoric horseshoe matches, these are believed to have been monuments for spiritual ritual ceremonies.

For centuries, Stonehenge has fascinated humans. (Except of course for the humans who created it, who unfortunately are no

But, what exactly is Stonehenge? UFO landing site? Merlin's magical stomping ground? A classic track from the movie, *This is Spinal Tap*? Okay, the last is true. But other than that certainty, no one is really sure.

Theories Abound

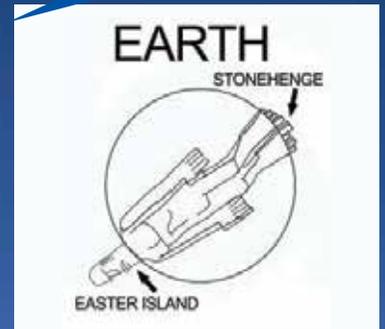
In his 1965 book, "Stonehenge Decoded," astronomer Gerald Hawkins offered the most plausible at-the-time theory. Based on the cluster of stones, constructed in phases from around 3100 BC to 1600 BC, he hypothesized it to be an ancient astronomical calendar. Which makes the cum-

longer around to explain themselves.) The first scientific examination took place in 1666, by a fellow named John Aubrey, who concluded it the work of Druids. His work informed work done a century later, which in turn, influenced future excavations, interpretations, surveys, and even restoration of some of its elements.

bersome Filofax, invented a few centuries later, seem downright diminutive.

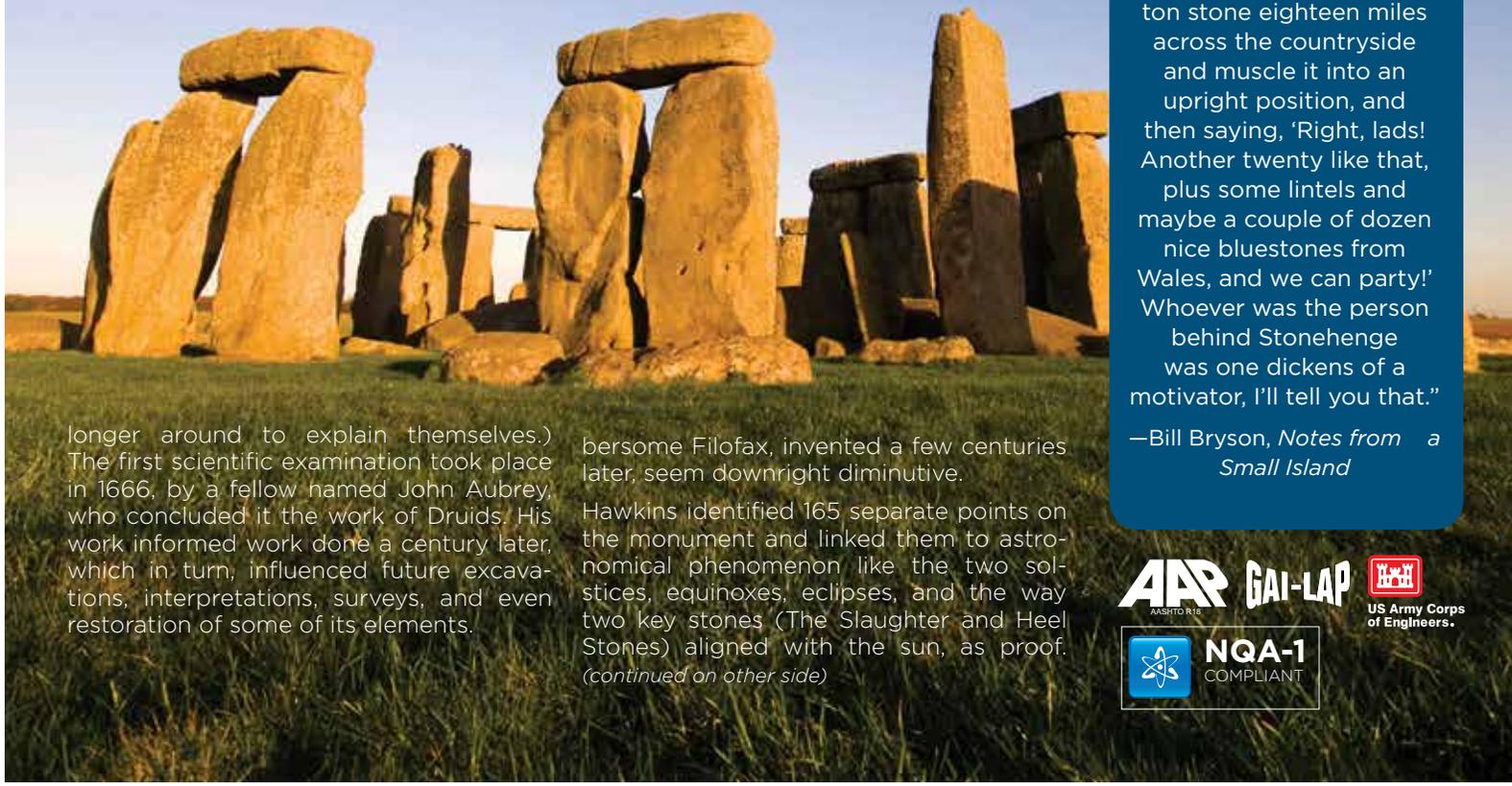
Hawkins identified 165 separate points on the monument and linked them to astronomical phenomenon like the two solstices, equinoxes, eclipses, and the way two key stones (The Slaughter and Heel Stones) aligned with the sun, as proof. (continued on other side)

"Engineers believe that if it ain't broke, it doesn't have enough features yet." — Scott Adams



"I know this goes without saying, but Stonehenge really was the most incredible accomplishment. It took five hundred men just to pull each sarsen, plus a hundred more to dash around positioning the rollers. Just think about it for a minute. Can you imagine trying to talk six hundred people into helping you drag a fifty-ton stone eighteen miles across the countryside and muscle it into an upright position, and then saying, 'Right, lads! Another twenty like that, plus some lintels and maybe a couple of dozen nice bluestones from Wales, and we can party!' Whoever was the person behind Stonehenge was one dickens of a motivator, I'll tell you that."

—Bill Bryson, *Notes from a Small Island*



STONEHENGE (continued from front)

Critics argued that Hawkins was giving the Stone Age builders too much credit. With Fred-Flinstone-like equipment, how could they have built with such precision and sophistication? And after all, it's England! The sun is rarely in view.

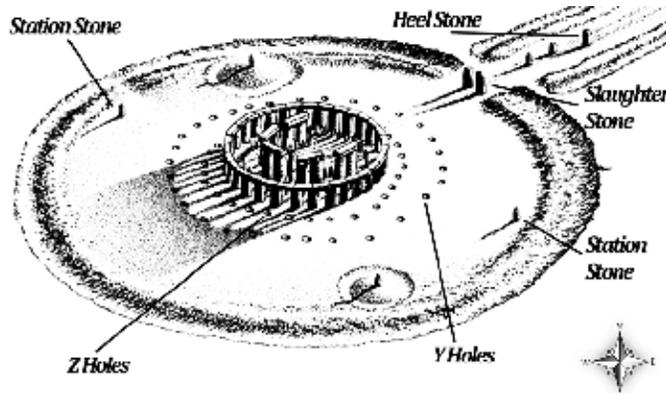
In the 1920's, a Brit named Alfred Watkins attempted to connect Stonehenge with other sites in England, creating a navigational system amongst the dense, and now vanished, ancient forest.

Rocks with 200 mile commute?

Still, there is the nagging fact that the stones themselves hail from different parts of the continent. Some contend they arrived via glaciers rather than human might. (Note that the estimated 20 million man-hours over the multi-phase project means that 10,000 people working on the site for 20 days each year, eight hours a day could have completed it in 12.5 years. That is, if they had a good timesheet system.) And then, of course, there's always the possibility of aliens.

Also revealing are the human remains around the site, indi-

ating that it was indeed a burial ground for centuries. Even more illuminating is evidence that shows illness, trauma and deformity, hinting that it was a place for healing. This led British authorities in 2008 to hypothesize, "It was the magical qualities of these stones which ... transformed the monument and made it a place of pilgrimage for the sick and injured of the Neolithic world."



Sound interesting?

The most recent theory suggests that maybe the guys from *Spinal Tap* were onto something. A 2014 study from the Royal College of Art in London posits the stones themselves actually may make music. The acoustics at the site have always been incredible. But now they've discovered that when striking the stones—that come from the same home in Wales

as the the inner circles—they ring just like a bell. So perhaps these aren't just rings of rocks, but rather rocks that ring?

We here at *The GeoSampler*, and in the lab and the field for that matter, aren't in any position to make any conclusions. Though we're happy to keep testing. How about you? Let us know your Stonehenge theories at Randy@geotechnics.net.



Tim O'Rourke

Tim joined Geotechnics in 1989 as a laboratory technician. He performs classification testing including Atterberg limits, sieves and specific gravity among other tests. Tim is a member of the Plum Bass Masters Club and competes in various tournaments.



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