

# Your guide to the summer night sky

## Stonehenge Landscape, Wiltshire

Enter a prehistoric ceremonial landscape: hundreds of monuments with physical and visual connections to each other, to the land and to the skies above. All this lies on the edge of Salisbury Plain, a large, sparsely populated area of downland good for star gazing.

**Start:** byway next to Stonehenge car park

**Grid ref:** SU120420 **Maps:** OS Landranger 184 / Explorer 130

### How to get here

**By bike:** Stonehenge can be reached from Salisbury or Avebury on Sustrans route 45.

**By bus & train:** regular daytime bus service runs from Salisbury station (9 miles) to Stonehenge.

**By road:** 2 miles west of Amesbury, near the junction of the A303 and A344. Stonehenge car park closes in the evening, but it is possible to park nearby.

The July and August skies are filled with all manner of interesting objects that can be viewed in dark sky conditions. Arrive before sunset to see the ancient earthworks at their best in slanting evening light. The banks of the 4,000-year-old Stonehenge Avenue can be seen leading north-east, away from the stone circle.

- ★ The return of the Perseid meteor shower is due on the 23 July, picking up the numbers that can be seen each night until the peak of the shower on 12 August, when up to 80 meteors an hour have been recorded in previous years. The moon will be out of the way, so won't spoil the view. Around midnight is the best time but the meteors can be seen at any time when the sky darkens.
- ★ Overhead there is the **summer triangle** starting with **Vega** (a bright white star which is almost overhead, part of the constellation Lyra), **Deneb** to the left in Cygnus (the swan constellation) and **Altair**, south east in Sagitta/Aquila. These stars can be used as pointers to other stars. Go to Vega and look westward to find the bright reddish star Arcturus, part of Bootes the Kite. The pretty group of curved stars to the east of Arcturus is Corona Borealis, a cornet of stars. The Plough/Big Dipper is in the north west sky and becomes the tail and rear end of the Great Bear/ Ursa Major.
- ★ If the sky is dark and clear of any clouds you should be able to make out the Milky Way, a ribbon of millions of stars threading its way across the heavens. If you are using binoculars this really is a stunning sight.



In prehistoric times the night sky would have looked very different. The stars were much clearer and stories about them were likely to have been included in a rich oral history, now lost. Today, light pollution makes it difficult to see all but the brightest stars.

© Tony Evershed



Stonehenge is famously aligned on the Midsummer and Midwinter solstices, but it is also aligned on moonrises and moonsets. Two small Station Stones' remain of the original four. Set slightly away from the main circle, they may be some of the earliest features of Stonehenge.

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Keep an ear out for the Stone Curlew's haunting 'coo-ree' call. Its call is most often heard in autumn as the birds get ready to migrate. Shy, well camouflaged and seldom seen, this extremely rare bird is active at night.

© RSPB

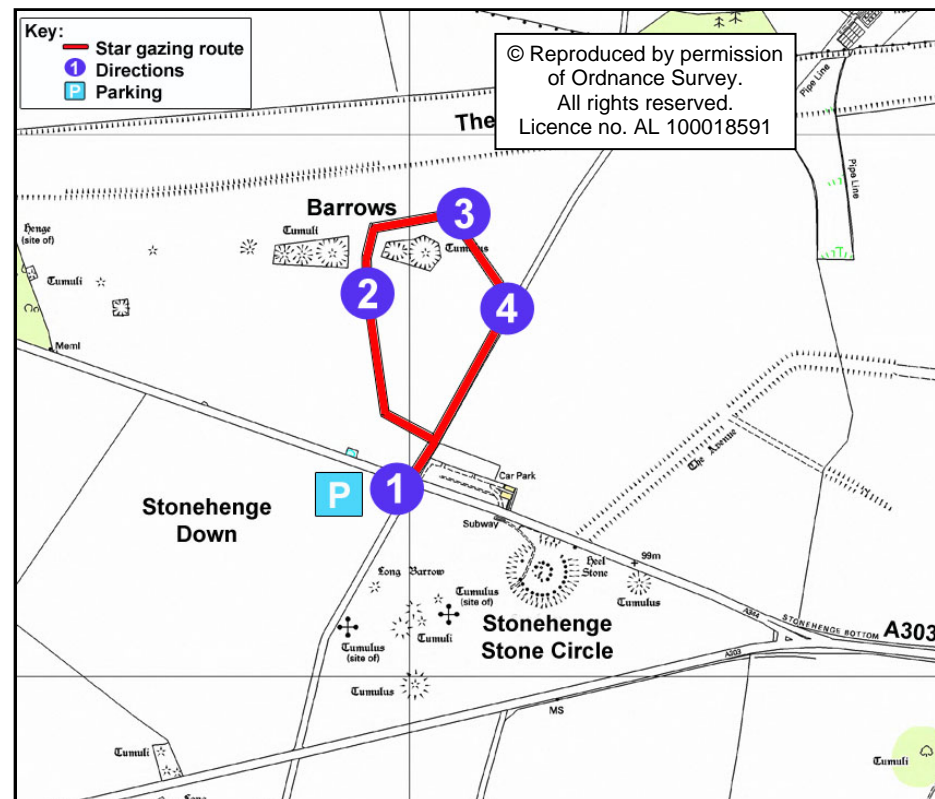
### Distance, terrain & accessibility

0.6 miles / 1km (530yd / 485m to star gazing spot) follows regular routes through fields. Grassy areas are fairly smooth; off the worn route grass can be tall and tussocky. The Cursus Barrows field is grazed by cattle; access is by pedestrian gates. Byway 12 has some large potholes, becoming deep puddles after rain.

*Many thanks to Rita Collins, Salisbury Astronomical Society, for help in putting together this guide.*

### Directions

1. From the byway next to the car park, head through the pedestrian gate signed to the Cursus Barrows. Please be aware of grazing cattle.
2. If the night is not too dark you will see the group of barrows ahead of you, standing on the horizon. These are Bronze Age round barrows, the burial mounds of those who were most important in Bronze Age society. The shelter of the barrows offers a good spot for star gazing.
3. From the barrows, head east to meet the byway once more, accessed through a pedestrian gate.
4. Walk south to return to your starting point, taking care of the undulating track. Stonehenge will be visible, silhouetted against the night sky, ahead and to your left.



### Contact us

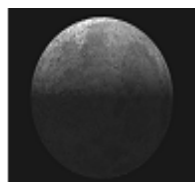
01980 664780 / [stonehenge@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:stonehenge@nationaltrust.org.uk)

Stonehenge Landscape is well worth a visit during the day too. Download our 3½ mile (5.6km) walk at [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/walks](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/walks)

### August Moon Calendar

When the moon orbits the Earth, the surface is lit by sunlight. At different times in the month, a different shape is lit, called a "phase". Phases are repeated every 29.5 days.

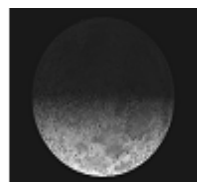
*Thank you to At-Bristol Planetarium for supplying the moon calendar.*



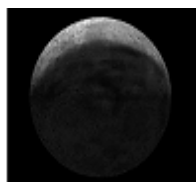
30 July  
Half Moon



6 August  
Full Moon



13 August  
Half Moon



17 August  
Crescent Moon



20 August  
New Moon



24 August  
Crescent Moon



28 August  
Half Moon



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